

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

I started writing this play ten years ago after re-reading a childhood book which includes an account of Oberammergau in the early 1900s. In this old fashioned narrative, the man who played Christ was actually so holy as to have become His living embodiment. The woman who played Mary was, in real life, just as pure as the Virgin. I started thinking, how would it shape or misshape a life to play a biblical role year after year? How are we scripted? Where is the line between authentic identity and performance? And is there, in fact, such a line?

I set the first act in 1575 in England, when Queen Elizabeth was about to shut down the Passion Plays in order to control religious representation. Not many towns still performed the Passion in 1575; the village of PART 1 is, then, itself something of an anachronism, oddly suspended between the middle ages and the Renaissance. In 1575, Queen Elizabeth banned religious plays altogether; up until then, over one hundred towns in the British Isles performed the Passion. Meanwhile Elizabeth, excommunicated by the Pope in 1571, increased measures in the 1570s to cleanse England of Papal trappings, including Jesuits. Ordinary Catholics often housed priests in order to maintain Catholic rites.

The second PART moves to Oberammergau, Germany—a town where the Passion Play, begun in the middle ages, even now continues to be played every ten years. Many narratives describe

Oberammergau as a living picture of the New Testament, ignoring the fact that, in 1934, the director of the Passion was already a member of the Nazi party. The actor who played Christ and the actress who played the Virgin Mary were also early party members. By 1947, every actor in the play had at one time been a Nazi, with the exception of the men who played, ironically, Judas and Pontius Pilate. (The play takes liberties with these historical facts.) As late as 1946, the village of Oberammergau denied knowing anything about concentration camps, although Dachau (where Oberammergau's one Jew was sent during the war) was only seventy-five miles away.

The Passion Play, which often incited pogroms during Easter when performed in medieval Germany, became a kind of historical perversion during the war, seen with our contemporary lens. In 1934, Hitler saw the Passion and was greeted with open arms. He came a second time on August 13, 1934—six weeks after "Night of the Long Knives", when Hitler purged his leadership of known homosexuals, Communists, and Jews. PART 2 of PASSION PLAY quotes the 19th century Oberammergau script (famous for its anti-Semitism) as well as quoting a speech Hitler made at a dinner, expressing his admiration for the Oberammergau Passion in 1942. Everything else in the play is an invention. I am indebted to Saul Friedman and James Shapiro for their careful research.

It should be said that, since the war, Oberammergau has made many attempts to reform their Passion Play; has invited Jewish scholars and has revised their text in order to reflect a more ecumenical world view. Many Passion Plays have enlisted the anti-defamation league to get it right, or at least, *more* right. And yet, even today, we are plunged into the same kind of moral/aesthetic debates when Mel Gibson took up the mantle

of the Passion, which had one of the biggest viewerships, ironically, in the Arab world. But more people talked about "Passion-dollars"—the surprise commercial success of the movie—than they did about the dangers of focusing the Gospel story on violent scape-goating.

Ten years after beginning *PASSION PLAY, PARTS 1 and 2* (which I began with the encouragement of Paula Vogel when I was an undergraduate at Brown University) I returned to the cycle. I discovered that there is now a *Passion Play* in Spearfish, South Dakota, started by an actor from Germany in the 1940s. I felt that I had to continue the story. Serendipitously, Arena Stage in Washington DC asked me to write a play about America. A daunting task. Until I realized that little is more American than the nexus of religious rhetoric, politics, and theatricality. Especially at the present moment, when it seems as if we are in the midst of an unacknowledged holy war, conducted by a man who feels himself to be appointed by God (he must have been appointed by someone, he wasn't appointed by the popular vote in 2000). Never have the medieval world and the digital age seemed so oddly conjoined. I'm interested in how leaders use, mis-use and legislate religion for their own political aims, and how leaders turn themselves into theatrical icons. Queen Elizabeth, wearing layers and layers of make-up, "married" herself to England; Hitler took photographs of himself gesticulating until he got it right; Ronald Reagan, who paved the way for our current administration, had miraculous and natural powers as an actor. But what is the difference between acting as performance and acting as moral action? It is no accident that we refer to *theaters of war*.

More and more, it seems to me that the separation between church and state is coming into question in

our country. We are a divided nation. And the more divided we are, the less we talk about what divides us. The left is perceived of as anti-religious ideological secularists; the right as religious zealots. But whatever happened to the founding father's rationale for separating church and state? More devotion was possible, and more kinds of devotion would be possible, the less the state controlled religious rhetoric. More devotion, and more *conversion* about devotion, would be possible with that freedom. I miss that conversation, and I think theater is a good place for it. To my mind, devotion is like a quality of light—how is it possible to legislate the quality of light? It would be like legislating the invisible moments that happen in a theater. And ultimately, this play is about those moments—about how actors wring moments out of their private lives in order bear witness in the community.

Ideally, *PASSION PLAY* (PARTS 1, 2, and 3) would be performed all together in one evening or else in rotating repertory. Together, the three parts form a cycle play—alone, they do something different, but they can technically stand alone. If in repertory, I suggest doing PARTS 1 and 2 on one night, and PART 3 on the next. If the resources of one theater are too limited to produce the entire cycle, I can imagine two theaters in one city collaborating to put the cycle up together. In the original guild productions of the Passion, the carpenters in the village would handle the crucifixion scene and the bakers would handle the Last Supper. Perhaps our theatrical communities could borrow from the primitive guild model.

I wrote the first draft of *PASSION PLAY, PART 3* before the 2004 election, with a great sense of urgency. Now it's 2005. It's easy to feel powerless as the great political wheels turn, financed by enormous wealth.

But then you get to thinking about what starts every grass-roots revolution—people organizing in one room. Luckily that very special right is protected by our Constitution. And as ill-suited as some theater artists are to some meanings of the word organization—there is one thing all of us tend to do well, and that is to organize people to come to one room. It is not that the play you are about to read is a political treatise—not at all—but it does provide us with another occasion to be in one room together as we continue to meditate on the relationship of community to political icons. And to meditate on what we can do to affect change in very solemn times indeed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN FOR THE ENTIRE CYCLE

The full play requires eleven actors. Each actor retains a semblance of his or her role when the play jumps in time and space. For example, PONTIUS THE FISH-GUTTER becomes a FOOT SOLDIER in PART 2, and a Vietnam vet named "P" in PART 3. There is some flexibility in how the carpenters and machinist are reincarnated in PART 3. The play is an ensemble piece, and all the players, particularly the CARPENTERS, help to create the world of the play within the play. I hope this helps:

PART 1: A village in Northern England, spring, 1575

PART 2: Oberammergau, Bavaria, 1934

PART 3: Spearfish, South Dakota. 1970, 1984, and the present

1. PONTIUS THE FISH-GUTTER, FOOT SOLDIER, & P (plays PILATE throughout)
2. JOHN THE FISHERMAN, ERIC, & J (plays JESUS throughout)
3. MARY 1, ELISA, & MARY 1 (plays VIRGIN MARY throughout)
4. MARY 2, MARY 2, & MARY 2 (plays MARY MAGDALEN throughout)
5. VILLAGE IDIOT, VIOLET, & VIOLET
6. QUEEN ELIZABETH, HITLER, & REAGAN, QUEEN ELIZABETH, NIXON, HITLER
7. VISITING FRIAR, VISITING ENGLISHMAN, & VA 1
8. DIRECTOR, DIRECTOR, & DIRECTOR
9. MACHINIST, GERMAN OFFICER, & YOUNG DIRECTOR (and ensemble)
10. CARPENTER 1, CARPENTER 1, & VA 2 (and ensemble)
11. CARPENTER 2, CARPENTER 2, & VA 3 (and ensemble)

The personages in this play are all fictional. Any
resemblance to real people or real towns is accidental.

This play is for Paula Vogel.

PART 1

A village in Northern England, spring, 1575

CHARACTERS & SETTING

JOHN THE FISHERMAN, *plays* JESUS and ADAM

CARPENTER 1 (SAM) *plays* the angel GABRIEL.

CARPENTER 2 (SIMON), *plays* JOSEPH

FISH GUTTER, *plays* PONTIUS and SATAN

VISITING FRIAR

MARY 1, *plays* the VIRGIN MARY and EVE

MARY 2, *plays* MARY MAGDALEN and an angel

DIRECTOR

VILLAGE IDIOT

MACHINIST *plays* an emperor

QUEEN ELIZABETH, *preferably* a man in drag

*The suggestion of the sea.
A playing space.*

PROLOGUE

CHORUS: We make our play in England
In the north

By the sea

in the open air of England.

Here is the sea—

A sound in your ear—

(The sound of the sea)

And here is the North—

the Northernmost star—

not so far from us, but far—

(The light of a candle comes on).

The Virgin Queen is on her throne

The Catholics are mostly done.

Take pity on our simple play—

We've no fancy lights,

Only the bare light of day.

The Good Lord tells us,

To be most simple is to be most good—

So here is the building of the rood—

(The sound of sawing)

We ask you, dear audience,

To use your eyes, ears, your most inward sight.

For here is day *(A painted sun is raised)*

And here is night *(A painted moon is raised)*—

And now, the play.

**Scene One:
Building the Rood**

*(A man on a cross. The sound of sawing
At first we are not sure whether or not this is a real
crucifixion.)*

CARPENTER 1 measures JOHN THE FISHERMAN from head
to toe.)

CARPENTER 1: (SAM): You have g—grown.

JOHN: I'm afraid so. I wish my bones would not make
such work for you year after year.

CARPENTER 1: You cannot stop your bones from
gr-gr—growing.

JOHN: My cousin's bones stopped growing three years
ago, and his bones have troubled no seamstress with
new stitches since. Perhaps he should play my part

CARPENTER 2: (SIMON) Oh, but he's a limp wee little
thing. His back's as crooked as the road to hell!

JOHN: Now you mustn't make fun of poor Pontius.

CARPENTER 2: Better to put new stitches in the wool,
new nails in the wood year after year after year.

CARPENTER 1: What mumum mighty arms you have!
You could swing many a fi fi fine lady on those
br-brawny arms.

JOHN: You could knock me down easily, Sam!

CARPENTER 1: Nnno. I would never hhhurt my John
boy.

CARPENTER 2: Now me and him may be twins,
but we're as different as two peas in different pods.
He likes his ale light, I like it dark. He likes Sundays, I

detest 'em. I like blondes, and he likes his brunettes,
don't you there, Sam?

(SAM blushes and busies himself with his work.)

CARPENTER 2: Well, I can tell you that he does, though
Sam would never brag about such things, I've heard
more brunettes hollering in the field than I can count.

CARPENTER 1: Simon!

CARPENTER 2: Well, I have, and I'll say it too, even if
you blush and squirm like a flower pushing its way out
of the mud, I've heard what I've heard and know what
I know.

(The sky turns red.)

JOHN: Why there's that red light again!

CARPENTER 2: So it is! What the devil...

CARPENTER 1: It's been a' creeping and a cr-cr-crawling
into the cracks in the windows! It makes me affraid.

*(They stand, transfixed. The light disperses and becomes
natural.)*

CARPENTER 2: Oh well, I suppose the sun must be angry
about something. Only one more little nail. *(He pounds
in a nail.)*

CARPENTER 2: There. Your measurements, my good
man, have been taken.

(He helps JOHN off the cross.)

Exit SAM and JOHN.

SIMON stays behind to tell the audience.)

CARPENTER 2: I have blisters and splinters and all for
the glory of God. My father's father was a carpenter.
My father's father's father was a carpenter. We all have
blisters and splinters in our fingers and all for the glory
of God.

**Scene Two:
A traveling friar**

(To the audience)

PONTIUS: All my life I've wanted to play Christ...if only, I thought, they put me on a cross, I would feel holy, I would walk upright. And every year my cousin plays the Savior.

I want to kill my cousin. No—I want—when he is on the cross—and if I left him on just the slightest bit too long—and if the pretend nails were real...then they would nail me to the cross, and I would follow him to glory.

My cousin is a good man—ah, the tingling in my head again—something pulling—like a string at the top—a puppet up down up down, string.

Today the sky turned red, the sky turned red, and we should kneel down and take notice but everyone's too busy eating their bloody porridge!

(On the other side of the stage, a VISITING FRIAR appears. He is in disguise.)

VISITING FRIAR: *(Addressing audience)* Today I walked far and far until I noticed that the shrubbery had changed and I was out of my province. And then—the sky turned red! At two in the afternoon! If shivers didn't crawl up and down my spine like worms...

PONTIUS: *(To audience)* My cousin is nothing but a bastard!

VISITING FRIAR: *(To audience)* I will conceal myself behind a tree and observe this young man.

PONTIUS: *(To audience)* He is a thorn in my side that must be plucked out. If I were a woman I could bake this malice into my bread, but as it is, I am a man and

I must make this malice a knife. I will store my acorns of malice, I will guard them and I will harvest them in the spring.

(PONTIUS notices the VISITING FRIAR and changes his face.)

PONTIUS: Hello, traveler! What brings you to our little town? New faces are seldom seen here.

VISITING FRIAR: I come from a neighboring village but am tired and require water.

I stopped and the sky did the strangest thing! As sure as the baldness on my head, I saw the sky become beet red!

PONTIUS: Perhaps you took a small sleep and dreamed it. *(He winks at the audience.)*

VISITING FRIAR: Perhaps. Are you not the famed village that plays the Passion, scattering tales of its holiness across the land?

PONTIUS: We are that very village, sir.

VISITING FRIAR: Not many towns dare in these dark days to play the Passion in England.

PONTIUS: Aye. This town is slow to change.

VISITING FRIAR: Are you then the same town famed for a most beautiful and graceful young man who plays the part of Christ?

PONTIUS: He is, in point of fact—my cousin.

VISITING FRIAR: Your family must be proud of such a relation.

PONTIUS: My family is very proud of my cousin, I'm sure. *(A grimace to the audience. A smile to the VISITING FRIAR.)*

VISITING FRIAR: And you? What do you play?

PONTIUS: Pontius Pilate—the hangman.

VISITING FRIAR: Ah! To be sure!

(*Another grimace to the audience. A smile to the VISITING FRIAR.*)

PONTIUS: Would you like to take a drink of water at my home?

VISITING FRIAR: I would be most grateful. Perhaps I can meet the famed cousin of yours.

PONTIUS: By all means! (*To the audience*) Between gritted teeth, between bloody gritted teeth!

Scene Three: John's kitchen. Day

VISITING FRIAR: You're just as comely and upright as they say.

JOHN: Thank you.

VISITING FRIAR: With the same dimple in the chin.

JOHN: You must be hungry. Can I make you some eggs, sir?

VISITING FRIAR: Thank you. (*Checking the door, in low tones*) Young man, can I trust you're a Catholic?

JOHN: We are all Catholic in our private hearts though we have no public house of worship left. The stage is our house of worship.

(*The VISITING FRIAR takes off his disguise, revealing a priest's cowl.*)

JOHN *knels down and kisses the hand of the VISITING FRIAR.*)

JOHN: God save you! Is it not dangerous for you to stay here? Are they not catching priests and putting them into prison?

VISITING FRIAR: Aye. We're hidden in closets and priest-holes all over England.

JOHN: And are you now in need of a hiding place?

VISITING FRIAR: Aye. But I would not dream of putting you in danger.

JOHN: Stay with us.

VISITING FRIAR: I know now why they tell tales of your Christ across the land. You have His spirit.

JOHN: You really mustn't believe such things, good Friar. Perhaps you'd like to come to our rehearsal today. You could see the scaffolds that lift men up, the machinery that brings men down. You'll see that I'm no better than the tattered costume that I wear.

VISITING FRIAR: I would be honored to see the famed village rehearsal.

Scene Four The Village Idiot

(*Day. The heavenly choir rehearses.*)

Some of them sing well. Some—not so well.

The DIRECTOR conducts, and arranges their halos.

The visiting VISITING FRIAR watches.

The VILLAGE IDIOT sits cross-legged in the town square, playing with a jack-in-the-box.

The sound of a musical jack in the box cranks.)

VILLAGE IDIOT: In a time, in a time, in a time

without... words—oh—pop—pop goes the weasel!

(*Laughs*) You have a strange ugly face, surprising to pop out at me.... (*Winds the box again*) Bird of a heart, heart of a giant, heart of a lion. Big beast in the mouth of hell—pop! pop! Why do you pop out at me? Do you like me, scary big-nose? (*Laughs again*)

DIRECTOR: Shut your mouth, village idiot!

VILLAGE IDIOT: (*To the Jack-in-the-box*) Well, Jack, Big Director Man told us to shut our mouths—I shut your mouth (*Stuffs him back in box, then winds the box*). Now I want you out again to play with. Pop! Jack! You again—darling Jack, I thought I'd never see you again, (*Kisses him*) I'm sorry I put you in your box, dear Jack...

DIRECTOR: (*Overlapping slightly*) I said, shut your mouth, village idiot! The heavenly choir rehearses!

VILLAGE IDIOT: The heavenly choir rehearses, oh, oh, the heavenly choir rehearses...no part for Jack or me, oh no. You just pop out of a box, don't you Jack? And I just wind you because things need to be wound—clocks—tick tick—hearts—tick tick—oh! Beautiful, beautiful Jack with your heart in a box.

(*The DIRECTOR marches over and ties the VILLAGE IDIOT to a stump, putting the Jack-in-the-Box a distance away.*)

VILLAGE IDIOT: Ahhh! Ahhh! JACK! SAVE ME! I'm lost, tied...it is dark and I am in the box...I'll close my eyes and make the sky turn red...now...now...

(*The sky turns red. The heavenly choir stops singing. The heavenly choir looks up.*)

VILLAGE IDIOT: See that, Jack! Did you see?

Scene Five Mary and Mary

(*The DIRECTOR and the half-naked figure of JOHN practice the crucifixion scene. The VISITING FRIAR looks on in disguise.*)

MARY 1 and MARY 2 sit on the other side of the stage under a tree. MARY 1 wears a halo.)

MARY 2: Mary Magdalen was a whore because she pretended and that's like me—I'm a whore because I pretend things.

MARY 1: How do you know Mary Magdalen pretended things?

MARY 2: I don't know. I just know.

MARY 1: Oh, his acting is divine! Oh! Oh! His loincloth is slipping!

MARY 2: It is easy and fun to seduce men—you can pretend things, and it's fun to pretend—but then you have to bed them, and that is the boring part—you can hardly pretend anything interesting with your legs apart.

MARY 1: Boring! Why, Mary, your brain is addled. Milking cows is boring. Needlework is boring.

MARY 2: It's all one! At least with needlework, I work the needle and stitch where I please instead of lying like a tapestry only to be pricked. At least with cow-milking I squeeze the teet instead of standing swollen and mooring.

MARY 1: No, no, Mary. You can't possibly think milking cows and needlework and men-bedding are all one. Perhaps you've not found the right man.

MARY 2: Perhaps.

MARY 1: John, the Fisherman, for instance, he's handsome and true. And seeing him so oft in his rehearsal loincloth—it makes me pound and pound.

MARY 2: I've known John the Fisherman too long to fancy him in a loincloth. I like to stick to my books. There's a heap more amusement in one book than in a score of beddings all alike.

MARY 1: And his muscles like a lion's, and golden too!

MARY 2: Hmmp.

(MARY 2 turns to audience. MARY 1 freezes, ogling JOHN)

MARY 2: When I was a child I noticed one day that all the girls turned into strange flapping birds when the boys walked by. Their eyes got huge and acquired wings, as though cursed, wings for eyelashes to flutter and flap. I thought the wings on their eyes might fly them to a different land altogether. I didn't turn into a bird around anyone—I stayed quiet and very still.

MARY 1: Oh! Oh! His loincloth is slipping!

MARY 2: It's sinful to covet your own son, Mary. It's a sin, a sin against God.

MARY 1: I didn't ask to play his mother.

MARY 2: I'm sure it's not right, Mary.

Perhaps we should switch roles.

I think my part has more scenes with John the Fisherman.

MARY 1: I'll run find the director and ask.

MARY 2: (Looking after MARY 1) Yes, much better to play the Virgin Mary—to have a baby—yes—I do like babies—and a husband—yes, I do like men—I do—but not to bed the one to get the other! No wonder she smiled so tenderly in all the paintings. The happiest and best of women.

(Enter the DIRECTOR and MARY 1.)

DIRECTOR: I'm sorry, ladies, but you've signed your contracts. And besides, you look like a saint (To MARY 1) and you look like a whore (Points to MARY 2). There's no getting around it. (To MARY 2) Look at that beauty mark and that gap between the teeth. And you've got a bit of a deformity in the chin—it just wouldn't do for the Virgin Mary to have a bit of deformity in the chin. (To MARY 1) And her smile. A smile like that would

melt the devil's heart. But not mine. Now finish memorizing your parts, ladies. There's no time for all of this driving anarchy.

(Enter the VISITING FRIAR, in disguise.)

VISITING FRIAR: Would anyone here like to confess their sins?

MARY 2: I would.

VISITING FRIAR: Meet me around the corner after dark.

Scene Six: At the confessional

MARY 2: Forgive me Father, for I have sinned. I have dreams of women embracing me and kissing me full on the lips.

VISITING FRIAR: That is indeed a sin.

Are the women—undressed in your dreams?

MARY 2: Why, Father?

VISITING FRIAR: I am merely trying to measure the degree of sin.

MARY 2: They're in partial dress.

VISITING FRIAR: Oh. I want you to say twenty Hail Mary's, Thirty-two our Fathers, and hang a crucifix above your bed.

MARY 2: But there is a crucifix above my bed, Father. And I find that I rather enjoy the dreams, though I try not to have them.

VISITING FRIAR: It addles a young girl's brain to play the role of a whore from a young age. I want you to say your penances, Mary, and change parts with the shepherdess.

MARY 2: Oh, but she's not half so good as me, Father. I'll be good, so good! I'm good at pretending!

VISITING FRIAR: Now, Mary, I am looking after the salvation of your soul.

MARY 2: Yes, Father. *(Pause)* Father, why is it wrong to dream of women kissing you full on the lips?

VISITING FRIAR: Ask God, Mary. Only God can explain, only God—the Father.

(The sky turns red.)

MARY 2: Oh the sky, the sky, again the sky!

Scene Seven: The First Day of Spring

(Spring Song. Everyone in a circle, dancing around a may-pole.)

PONTIUS looks longingly at MARY 1.

MARY 2 looks longingly at MARY 1.

MARY 1 looks longingly at JOHN.

(JOHN looks happily towards God as reflected in nature.)

MARY 1: Lucky the woman with a sea in her shell, lucky the one to drink it.

CARPENTER 1: Lu-lucky the man with well-hung fruit lucky the wo-woman to eat it.

PONTIUS: *(Aside)* The prettiest walk is the walk towards death.

It is so slow and deliberate.

MARY 2: *(Sings dismally)* Lucky the woman with heat On her stove, lucky the man to light it.

CARPENTER 2: Lucky the man with mead in his cup Lucky the woman to sip it.

PONTIUS: *(Sings dismally)* And happy the skin of a frog.

MARY 2: *(Sings dismally)* Oh and happy the skin of a frog.

EVERYONE: *(Happily)*

Dong ding dong ding dong ding ding.

This morning is light,

this first morning of spring.

Scene Eight: Night

(PONTIUS sits on a stoop, cleaning his shoes.)

PONTIUS: Last night the moon threw its head back, laughing at me—a white wedge—a laughing pitchfork—and tonight the moon sank down on his haunches—his face turned full at me—he looked bewildered and afraid. Had the fat white face of a dunce. You think I'm a bloody fool to speak of the moon, but who else will be a witness to my grief?

The doctor who birthed me, see, he didn't sew up my belly properly. Most people have got some skin between their guts and the air of the world, not me, not me. You can stick your finger way into my belly button, and when you pull it out it smells like gangrene, like fish.

I gut the fish. My cousin—he catches 'em. He don't have to see their innards. He don't have to talk to dead fish all day. He can talk to the sea. Me—I close my nose and I smell the stench of dead fish. I close my eyes and see dead fish coming at me in a parade.

(He closes his eyes and huge puppet fish walk towards him as if in a parade. They surround him and undress him. They leave to the beating of drums. The sound of the sea gurgles.)

Scene Nine:
Night

(MARY 1 kneels by her bed.)

MARY 1: Hail Mary, full of grace... (*To the audience*)
I hate to sleep alone. My feet get cold. (*Putting her socks on*) It's unnatural, cold and unnatural, this solitary sleeping. The sheep sleep together, all woolly and warm. I get too lonesome to sleep alone. I slept with my parents 'til I got too old. One time they locked me out—I could hear why—strange sounds coming from the bed. When I got old enough I found men to sleep with—men with hair on their legs and bellies to keep me warm at night. I go out walking sometimes to find them. (*She climbs down a rope and out of her window.*) I've never been with child. Don't know why. Better not to ask God.

(JOHN out walking in a shaft of light)

JOHN: Sometimes—tonight—a feeling of grace comes and I feel peaceful and easy and ready to die but still aware of the moon's beauty, like silver fish scales shedding. Skin covers the world—luminous moonskin—and I must step softly and slowly on it—the cobbled streets have fish-skin, the trees have human skin—and it is not fearsome, only slow and lovely and soft, but I must be careful not to prick you and make you bleed.

MARY 1: (*Walking towards him, carrying a jug*) Good evening.

JOHN: Good evening, Mary. What brings you into the night air by yourself?

MARY 1: Uuum... My mother—she's sick—doctor told me to trap the night air in a jar and bring it back to her.

JOHN: May I help?

(MARY 1 looks down, embarrassed.)

MARY 1: Umm—

JOHN: I'd do anything to help you and your good mother, Mary.

MARY 1: Could you climb up that wagon, John, and trap that particular spot of air?

(*She hands him a jar and he climbs the wagon.*)

JOHN: This spot?

(*She scrutinizes him from behind.*)

MARY 1: Perhaps a little to the left.
And to the right. And up. Yes, that bit there.

JOHN: (*Handing her the jar*) I hope this will do, Mary.

(*She smiles at him.*)

JOHN: Your mother...is she very sick?

MARY 1: My mother?...oh yes...her belly...she swallowed something...

JOHN: I'm sorry, Mary. You know I would drink your sorrow if I could.

(JOHN escorts MARY 1 off stage.)

PONTIUS appears from behind a bush.)

PONTIUS: Always, always, always him! I can cry

only out of one eye.

Only the left

and the right stays dry.

Dry as a bone

dry as a cunt

who's left alone.

Oh, God let me cry!

Out of both eyes, please God,
please God let me cry!

(*Same scene. Night.*)

MARY 1 *climbs back into her bedroom window.*

MARY 1: It will be a cold bed for me again tonight.
He's chaste as a clam.

Scene Ten: The Fall of Man—A Rehearsal

(MARY 1, the DIRECTOR, PONTIUS and an apple)

DIRECTOR: In this scene, Mary, you are tempted by a delicious, ripe fruit. Your mouth should water. Now. Go.

SATAN/PONTIUS: Evel Evel

EVE/MARY 1: Who is there?

SATAN/PONTIUS: I, a friend. And for thy good is the coming. Bite on boldly, be not abashed.

DIRECTOR: Don't be afraid, Pontius. Slink your skinny arm around her waist. There, there. Dangle the apple in front of her lips.

EVE/MARY 1: Then will I to thy teaching trust, And fang this fruit unto our food. (*She bites timidly into the apple.*)

DIRECTOR: Bite harder! The juice must dribble down your chin! Again!

EVE/MARY 1: Then will I to thy teaching trust, And fang this fruit unto our food. (*She bites the apple, hard, a large section of apple in her mouth.*)

PONTIUS: Oh!

DIRECTOR: Good.

Scene Eleven: Night

(PONTIUS sits on a wagon, looking at stars.)

PONTIUS: (*To the audience*) I gutted a fish today—I thought it was dead—I slit open its belly—and five live fishes squirmed out. They stunk of death. They wriggled and wraggled in the guts of their mother and they died one by one. The last one to go was a real wriggler. He watched everyone go before him—he swam around in their fishy guts—then I slammed the knife down on his back. I couldn't stand to see one so alone and so alive, so I killed the poor devil to put it out of its misery. (*He sees someone off-stage.*) Hush—Mary walks. The smell of the moon follows her. And her eyes follow my cousin. Would she kiss a poor fish-monger? Would she wrap her arms around the stench?

(MARY 1 appears, holding a jar.)

PONTIUS: Miss Mary, why are you out walking at this time of night?

MARY 1: You startled me.

PONTIUS: I didn't mean to frighten you, Mary.

MARY 1: There is little light from the moon tonight. The trees cast their shadows on your face.

PONTIUS: I can see you fine. I can smell the moon on you. I smelled you coming.

MARY 1: (*Overlap*) You frighten me.

PONTIUS: I can see you because I have studied your face in the dark of my bed before sleeping.

MARY 1: I am a Christian woman.

PONTIUS: Why are you out walking tonight?

(He comes closer to her.)

MARY 1: You smell of fish.

PONTIUS: I slit open their bellies all day. Why are you out walking tonight?

MARY 1: I could sell you some rose-water. You could sprinkle it over your hands.

PONTIUS: Oh, would you Miss Mary?

MARY 1: Well...yes. Goodnight. *(She turns to go.)*

PONTIUS: Don't go. *(To the audience)* She is a deer wrapped in brown velvet. She is the air breathing inside the body of a violin. *(To her)* Don't go.

MARY 1: It's late.

PONTIUS: According to who? The sun? The moon? It's early for the sun—he hasn't even woken from his nap. And it's only mid-afternoon for the moon, she's just barely risen. And you out walking... Owls don't fly out of their dens for no reason.

MARY 1: You play tricks with words.

PONTIUS: Do you play tricks, Mary?

MARY 1: Certainly not.

(They look at each other. He seizes her. They kiss. She drops the jar.)

MARY 1: The night air. You've spilled it.

(PONTIUS gets on the wagon and traps the same bit of air that JOHN has trapped. He gives it to her. She pities him. Kisses him)

MARY 1: You don't taste like other men.

PONTIUS: I know.

(She kisses him again.)

MARY 1: They would take away my part or worse if they knew.

PONTIUS: I will be silent as a dead fish, silent as a closed box under water.

(They kiss.)

Strange watery noises)

Scene Twelve

(The VILLAGE IDIOT wakes up from a dream, frightened.)

VILLAGE IDIOT: Jack! I thought I had me a dream of the Queen. Why, she was standing up in heaven, and she was naked and pregnant—full pregnant, swollen like a melon. Her belly was dangling over her private parts which were flaming red. They say the privates are the same color as the eyebrows but you never can say with certainty until you've given 'em a thorough look. My eyebrows, for instance, are yellow, but my private parts are the color of bark. But I blushed, I did, to see the Queen's privates—they're always covered up with drapes and curtains like a stage. So the Queen, she looks at me, with a real cold glimmer in her eyes like jewels, and she says, "I have come to stop the Passion." And she points her bony little finger at me, and I wake up, breathing heavy and scared-like.

Scene Thirteen: In the Forest

(MARY 1 and MARY 2. The shadows of trees on their faces)

MARY 2: How long?

MARY 1: Too long.

MARY 2: Big?

MARY 1: A little.

MARY 2: In your costume?

MARY 1: Not yet.

MARY 2: Christ.

MARY 1: Yes.

MARY 2: You could be killed,

MARY 1: Don't.

MARY 2: Vomit?

MARY 1: Yes.

MARY 2: Breasts?

MARY 1: Yes. I think so.

MARY 2: Holy mother of God.

MARY 1: Please.

MARY 2: You have to leave.

MARY 1: NO!

MARY 2: What, then?

MARY 1: I want my part.

MARY 2: There's a woman in a neighboring village...

MARY 1: No!

MARY 2: What then, what?

MARY 1: I don't know.

MARY 2: In one month...

MARY 1: I know. But I want my part.

MARY 2: I know you do, Mary.

MARY 1: Please.
Don't tell.

MARY 2: Yes, of course.

MARY 1: The woman in the neighboring village... does she?

MARY 2: Yes.

MARY 1: I'll wait. Two weeks.

MARY 2: I'd like to kill him.

MARY 1: I fear, Mary, sometimes I fear....

MARY 2: What is it?

MARY 1: I dream, night after night, that I give birth to a fish...a huge, ugly, dead fish with a gaping mouth.

Scene Fourteen: The Flying Machine

(MACHINIST, DIRECTOR, MARY 1, MARY 2, CARPENTER 1 and 2. CARPENTER 1 plays the angel GABRIEL)

MACHINIST: Our profession is closer to God than any. What is the one power denied to man by God? God gave us fire, God gave us water. We can talk, walk, swim, screw until we're blue in the face. But who wants to swim in the bloody cold water, shivering and stinking like pondscum when you could fly through the tree-tops? But who among us can fly? Huh? Tell me!

And who among us doesn't want to fly? Who among you has never dreamed of flying, of skimming the honey-stalks with your noses? Of flying like water-bugs over ponds and taking in the stench?

But who among us has flown? None! None! And who among us knows how to make a man fly? (Pause) Me! I watched birds. As a child, I cut off their wings and studied their bones. I jumped off things. But one day, God told me how—see—he whispered a little secret into my ear. So shut your bloody traps and listen to me! I'm going to rig you up by the seat of your pants, and

do you know what you're going to do? You are going to fly like a bird like an insect with golden wings like an angel! I've worked with the best of them—I've worked with Simon Daybell, with Martinus Lily, with SEBASTIAN MONK—and none of them—*none*—has ever rigged an angel the way I rig 'em. Now strap this on.

(CARPENTER 1 straps on a harness.)

THE VILLAGE IDIOT: (*Eyes closed, holding her jack-in-the-box tightly to her chest*) And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

(CARPENTER 1 shouts as he's rigged up the machine.)

MACHINIST: Shut your mouth, will you? Do angels scream when they fly? No, by Christ, they like flying! They bloody love it!

(CARPENTER 1 dangles. MARY 1, meanwhile, looks ill.)

DIRECTOR: There. Now say the bloody line. And you, (*Points to CARPENTER 2, who is dressed as JOSEPH*) Kneel down. Look surprised.

(*He looks surprised.*)

DIRECTOR: Not surprised like you've wet yourself. Surprised as in amazed. Surprised holy-like. Surprised like your wife's bosom has grown big as two pumpkins, all at once.

(*He opens his mouth wide.*)

DIRECTOR: There. Continue.

CARPENTER 1: (*Simultaneous*) VILLAGE IDIOT:

Hail, thou that art highly f-favored, the Lord is with thee, Mary, bb-lesed art thou among women.	Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee, JACK, blesed art thou among women.
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DIRECTOR: (*To MARY 1*) What's wrong with you? Look surprised. Look happy. Look radiant.

MARY 1: Yes, sir.

DIRECTOR: Joseph—let's have your line.

CARPENTER 2: She is with child, I know not how. Who could trust any woman now?

Hail, Mary!

MARY 1: By God's will, Joseph, must it be.

For certainly save God and ye

I know no other man

Nor in flesh have been defiled.

God knows all my doing.

CARPENTER 1: (*As Gabriel*) VILLAGE IDIOT:

Behold, M-Mary, thou shalt Behold, Jack, thou shalt

b-bring forth a son bring forth a son

and shalt call his name and shalt call his name

I-Jesus. JACK.

(*The sky turns red.*)

CARPENTER 1: Oh, the sky!

(CARPENTER 1's harness falls and he comes crushing down. He screams. Lights out.)

Scene Fifteen:

Mary visits Pontius at work

(PONTIUS stands at a counter and guts fish. Sees MARY 1. Drops his work)

PONTIUS: You.

MARY 1: I need to speak with you.

PONTIUS: I wrote you letters. I scented them with rose-water.

MARY 1: Where there are no ears.

PONTIUS: What of my letters? Did you get them? Your eyes hard like flint, Mary—

MARY 1: I said I need to speak with you.

PONTIUS: Come to tell me I smell of fish? We rolled into the earth, Mary. Come to tell me you forgot?

MARY 1: I'm pregnant.

PONTIUS: Oh, God.

MARY 1: And don't take the Lord's name in vain, neither.

PONTIUS: Run away with me, Mary. We'll be a Trinity. You, me, the baby. You can nail me to a cross, Mary, I'm yours, yours forever. You can scourge me every night and still I'm yours forever.

(*She doesn't speak.*)

PONTIUS: Can I touch?

(*She nods. PONTIUS puts his hand on her belly, reverent.*)

PONTIUS: My life in your belly! Oh, it's ticking, Mary! I can hear it!

Mary me. Mary everything—the fish-guts, the bile—I'll become clean for you, Mary.

MARY 1: No.

(*He takes his hand off her stomach.*)

PONTIUS: You love him, don't you? That it?

MARY 1: I want to keep my part.

PONTIUS: Curse the part, Mary! Curse the part! Play's aren't real. Your knee on my chest, Mary, that's real. Mary me!

MARY 1: Ever since I was little I've wanted to play the Virgin Mary.

PONTIUS: You can pretend you're the Virgin Mary in my bed! You can scream ten Hail Mary's in the ecstasies of love. Do you remember how you shuddered?

MARY 1: Christ won't love me.

PONTIUS: Which one, Mary? My cousin or the one from the good book?

MARY 1: Just Christ, Christ himself...

PONTIUS: By Christ Himself, then, let's run off together—you can have your baby in a manger, the softest hay, your face—honeysuckle—eyes milky, I'll comb your hair with straw... Kiss me, Mary.

MARY 1: No.

PONTIUS: Leave my sight or I swear... I won't be accountable.

(*She turns to leave. Turns back.*)

MARY 1: My wedding dress would turn red.

PONTIUS: What?

MARY 1: Dresses—they know things—you think they don't—they hang so quietly, but they know things the way you know things and I know things and they tell—oh, yes.

(*She looks at him, turns and leaves.*)

PONTIUS *slams his knife down into the table.*

Scene Sixteen: Mary and Mary

MARY 2: I have an idea.

MARY 1: Tell me.

(*MARY 2 whispers into MARY 1's ear.*)

Scene Seventeen:
At the confessional

MARY 1: There's been a miracle, Father, I wanted to tell you first. God has impregnated me that I can better play the Virgin Mary.

VISITING FRIAR: Child...

MARY 1: I had a vision, Father. Angels—beautiful angels—calling me, saying, blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

VISITING FRIAR: Sweet Jesus.

MARY 1: I was sleeping, but they called to me from the window.... There was one angel, dressed all in blue, with stars in her hair...I felt my belly, and it's become round like a melon since yesterday....

VISITING FRIAR: You're quite sure, Mary?

MARY 1: Yes.

VISITING FRIAR: Glory be to God. A miracle.
(*He crosses himself.*)

MARY 1: I feel very honored, of course.

VISITING FRIAR: Never, Mary, never have you...

MARY 1: No, Father, of course not.

VISITING FRIAR: Are you sure, Mary? Blessedly sure?

MARY 1: Yes.

Scene Eighteen:
A Rehearsal—The Death of Pontius Pilate

(PONTIUS, DIRECTOR, MACHINIST, MARY 2, CARPENTER 2)

MACHINIST: (*Playing the role of EMPEROR*):
(*Loud*) Out on thee, thou rascally fellow!

Thou hast killed Jesus,
My dear Lord.

DIRECTOR: Remember—you are an emperor. Do you know what that means? Being the emperor means someone else chews your very food for you. No need to shout. Peasants bend forward to hear you whisper. Carry on.

MACHINIST: (*Whispering*) Put this fellow in a dungeon to rot,
That he may see no light at all;
he is a sorcerer.

DIRECTOR: You are beginning to sound dignified. Go ahead, Pontius. Now—you are very distressed in this scene.

PONTIUS: I well know I shall die:
Great is my anxiety (*Pronounced to rhyme*)
Distressed am I.

DIRECTOR: Use this knife.

(*DIRECTOR gives PONTIUS a knife.*)

PONTIUS: So that no man in the world may
Give me a cruel death;
My own heart

With my knife I will pierce—
Oh! alas and welaway—

(*He stabs himself with a stage knife. He dies a long, painful*

stage death, groaning. He punctures his eyes, slits open his belly...)

DIRECTOR: Good, Pontius. You're improving nicely.

(VISITING FRIAR enters.)

VISITING FRIAR: There's been a miracle. Mary is with child.

(PONTIUS gives VISITING FRIAR a wild look. A tableau.)

Scene Nineteen: Mary is visited by Jesus

(MARY 1 lies in bed. JOHN enters, kneels at her bedside.)

JOHN: Bless you, Mary.

MARY 1: No, John, no.

JOHN: A miracle sleeps in your belly.

MARY 1: If anything were to happen to me, would you raise the child? Be its father?

JOHN: Anything for you and the child, Mary.

MARY 1: You believe me, don't you?

JOHN: I would never doubt your word, Mary, or the word of the Lord. You're beautiful. You're radiant with the sweat of the Lord on your brow.

MARY 1: I feel it kicking. God's child.

(A pause)

JOHN: Marry me. Be my wife. We'll raise the child together as Mary and Joseph did before us. I'll be a good husband, Mary. I'll never touch you, if that's what you want. I'll fish all day—I'll feed us with fruit from the sea.

MARY 1: Oh, God, that I could, John.

JOHN: I understand, Mary, if you don't fancy me. I'm not worthy of you...you have God in your belly.

MARY 1: It's not that... It's only that...I'm God's bride now.

JOHN: I see...It's better that way. It's—a miracle.

Scene Twenty: A Rehearsal—The Scourging.

(MARY 2, the CARPENTERS, and PONTIUS)

CARPENTER 2: I see where her eye wanders.... She's a pretty little thing, too pretty if you ask me.

CARPENTER 1: St-stop. G-god wouldn't like you to speak that way of Ma-mary.

CARPENTER 2: She's been hankering after John the Fisherman all month and perhaps she's finally gotten what she wanted out of him.

MARY 2: (To SIMON) I've seen your lecherous eyes.... You wish you could lay a hand on Mary and now she's God's bride you're jealous.

CARPENTER 2: True enough, I'd like to take Miss Mary to a field somewhere, but what does that have to do with the price of eggs and butter? So would every other young lad in this town, and that's *exactly* what I'm saying.

PONTIUS: I'll bloody your face, Simon, if you don't shut your gob!

CARPENTER 2: I never believed the tale in the Good Book anyhow. Mary was probably some young wench knocked up by another bloke, couldn't stand to tell her husband to be—afraid he'd beat her pulpy.

CARPENTER 1: Dd-on't say, th-that, Simon, I'm wa-warring you.

CARPENTER 2: That's why we should all bow our heads low to the Virgin Mary—any girl who can persuade the multitudes that God's the father of her bastard child...

(CARPENTER 1 punches CARPENTER 2 in the face. They start brawling.)

Enter JOHN, in a loin cloth.)

JOHN: What's this! Ho! Hey! Stop the fighting between brothers. Stop! Haven't you heard the news? A miracle in our little town...you should bow your heads and be grateful.

(They look down, ashamed.)

JOHN: A new Christ is to be born, as the Good Book prophesizes. No longer will I have to play the part of Christ. Mary is with child.

CARPENTER 2: We've heard.

JOHN: Then why all the brawling? Blood trickles down your chin, good brother.

(No one speaks. Enter the DIRECTOR.)

DIRECTOR: What's all this? Take up your whips. We've only one week left of rehearsal—where's Mary?

JOHN: I left her home, sick with women's sickness.

A glorious sickness to bear for the new Christ.

DIRECTOR: Hmmp. She'll be fined two shillings for missing rehearsal.

JOHN: You cannot fine a woman for bearing the Messiah, with all due respect sir.

DIRECTOR: Very well. Perhaps under the circumstances. Everyone to their places. Mary, you read both parts. Pontius, let's have your speech.

PONTIUS: That I am innocent of this bloode shall ye see; Both my hands shall weshen be.

DIRECTOR: Start whipping.

(The CHORUS pretends to whip JOHN.)

DIRECTOR: Lamentation! Lamentation!

MARY 2: Why? Why is my son slain?

(A tableau.)

Scene Twenty-one: John and Pontius

(After rehearsal)

PONTIUS: You think she's God's bride, do you?

JOHN: I see God in her eyes, yes.

(MARY appears in a window.)

PONTIUS: When the baby comes out, I'll wager it'll look less like God and more like me.

JOHN: What?

PONTIUS: You heard me. I was deep inside Mary, deep as ever the Lord penetrated the heart of sinners. And it felt—like—heaven. A dark, warm heaven, with dark, warm clouds.

(JOHN looks at PONTIUS.
A tableau)

Scene Twenty-two:
Mary and Mary

(The forest)

MARY 1: I hear them whispering underground, in the trees—I hear them calling me a whore...

MARY 2: Don't listen. I love you, Mary. Let's run off together. I'll protect you. We'll raise the child together as Mary and Joseph did before us. I'll dress as a man... I look enough like a man...we'll go far away from here.

MARY 1: You don't look a bit like a man, Mary.

MARY 2: What does it matter? Then I won't dress as a man. I'll dress as myself, but we'll go far, far away.

MARY 1: I have to leave alone, and where I'm going, no one can follow me.

MARY 2: Mary.

MARY 1: I'm a whore, Mary.

MARY 2: I would follow you anywhere, Mary.

MARY 1: No, dear. Please.

Good-bye.

(MARY 1 turns to leave, but before she goes, kisses MARY 2.

MARY 1 leaves.

The sky turns red.)

MARY 2: Oh, the sky!

Scene Twenty-three:
The Town Square

VILLAGE IDIOT: *(To the Jack-in-the-Box)*

Mary not in her costume

Mary not at home.

Mary not in the lamb white days

Mary, Mary gone.

VISITING FRIAR: God has spoken with me. And God wants you to stop the Passion.

DIRECTOR: But Father, months of work...

VISITING FRIAR: It cannot be right, with Mary nowhere to be found. There's something strange, foreboding, in the whole business.

DIRECTOR: Which is precisely why the play must go on! We made a pact with God, when the plague had eaten the very stomach out of our village, when the stench of the dead was louder than the sweat of the living, that we would play the Passion and all for the glory of God. If we refuse, I believe that something horrible will visit our town...already, the sky is red.

VISITING FRIAR: But who's to play Mary?

(They both look at the VILLAGE IDIOT.)

DIRECTOR: What do you say, dearie, would you like to take part in the play?

VILLAGE IDIOT: *(Laughs. To the Jack-in-the-Box)* Jack, would I like to take part in the play? What, Jack? I can't hear you. *(She listens to Jack. To the DIRECTOR, very serious.)* Yes, I would like to take part in the play.

Scene Twenty-four:
The Passion

(A bell rings.)

JOHN kneels in a pool of light.

PONTIUS watches, in the shadows.)

JOHN: Please, God, let me play the Christ well. Dear Lord, bless Mary. Please let her find her way home.
(Crosses himself) Amen.

PONTIUS: So help me God I'll kill him. I'll drive the nails in deep.

Scene Twenty-five:
The Play

EVERYONE: Please lift up your hearts to behold the Holy Passion Play.

(Trumpets. A tableau of The Garden of Eden is revealed.)

JOHN plays ADAM and the VILLAGE IDIOT plays EVE.

PONTIUS plays the snake.)

ADAM: Ah! Eve! Thou art to blame!

On my knees I do here sink!

Against you I do exclaim

For I am naked as I think!

EVE: Alas, Adam, right naked so am I.

Ah, wicked worm!

(The VILLAGE IDIOT borus. No one else does.)

ADAM

So that God will not see
our privates and stare
We shall cover ourselves
with fig-leaves

EVE:

So that God will not see
our privates and stare
We shall cover ourselves
with fig-leaves

For we are naked and bare. For we are naked and all bare—oh!

(ADAM and EVE cover themselves with fig-leaves.

Suddenly, the arrival of QUEEN ELIZABETH's COURTIERs.

Trumpets. Fanfare

A murmur goes through the audience.

COURTIERs: (Played by the carpenters) The Queen has blessed your little town with her presence.

(A louder murmur goes through the audience.

QUEEN ELIZABETH walks onto the stage, waving.

The players bow their heads low to the ground.)

QUEEN ELIZABETH: My loving people.

Do you know, when they place me in my golden coffer, what they will find? They will scrape at my face with a jeweled pen-knife, and they will discover layer upon layer of white paint. A wall of paint as thick as this joint, in my thumb. They will be surprised. They will open their eyes wide. They do not know that Queens do not wash, and that Queens are obliged to paint their faces so that Queens do not appear to become old or ugly.

I do not want the gravediggers to scrape white paint off the dead faces of my subjects. I want my subjects to remain clean. I do not want my subjects to impersonate the holy figure of Christ.

Did Christ paint his face?

No! If any man or woman in England is seen with a painted face, assuming the person of a holy figure on a stage, I will have them beheaded. Immediately.

COURTIERs: (Played by the CARPENTERS) The Queen has spoken.

(She turns to go. The players raise their heads slightly to watch her go. QUEEN ELIZABETH moves to exit. She appears to smell something. She stops in her tracks.)

QUEEN ELIZABETH: Is any house in this village concealing a priest?

My subjects should feel free to confess all of their sins to me.

(No one speaks.)

She walks among her people, slowing as she walks past the
VISITING FRIAR.)

QUEEN ELIZABETH: HAS ANYONE IN THIS VILLAGE ANYTHING TO CONFESS?

(No one speaks.)

QUEEN ELIZABETH: Good. I'll have my courtiers search your houses. Just to be certain.

(QUEEN ELIZABETH exits with her entourage to loud fanfare. The players are silent. They slowly exit, collecting their props, one by one.)

Scene Twenty Six: John the Fisherman's Kitchen

JOHN: Where will you go?

VISITING FRIAR: To France. Until it is safe for priests in England—when a bastard head of state is severed from its body.

JOHN: I don't understand you, Good Friar.

VISITING FRIAR: Good. When they come, asking questions, you can say truly: I've no idea. I only made the man some eggs.

JOHN: God be with you.

VISITING FRIAR: And with you.

Scene Twenty-seven: The Town Square

(The DIRECTOR, CARPENTERS, PONTIUS, MARY 2, the MACHINIST, and the VILLAGE IDIOT, last in line with her Virgin Mary costume and Jack.

One by one, the players hand in their costumes to the
DIRECTOR. *They are sad, even CARPENTER 2. CARPENTER 2 hands in his Joseph costume.)*

DIRECTOR: We can get two shillings for this.

(The MACHINIST hands in his costume.)

DIRECTOR: Five for this. No, seven—that's fine material, good stitching.

(CARPENTER 1 hands in his costume, angel wings.)

DIRECTOR: This one's damaged.

CARPENTER 1: From flying.

DIRECTOR: Throw it out.

(MARY 2 hands in her costume.)

DIRECTOR: Eight for this.

(MARY 2 holds MARY 1's halo.)

MARY 2: May I keep this?

DIRECTOR: I'll wager the professional acting companies in London have no need for halos. Keep it. Only hide it.

(Suddenly, JOHN enters with the body of MARY 1. She is dripping wet. Water pours out of her mouth onto the stage. Water continues to pour out of her and off of her. Everyone turns to look in horror.)

JOHN: I fished her out of the sea—

(JOHN lays the body down.
A tableau.)

*Lights down on the tableau.
Lights up on the VILLAGE IDIOT, as they carry MARY 1's
body off stage.)*

VILLAGE IDIOT: Drowned herself in the sea, Jack. Poor Mary. All for the loss of a costume. Did you know, Jack, that a woman's long hair is the last thing to sink in the water—it floats, Jack, dry like a lily pad, until in one great rush, it goes under. Whoosh. Oh, and the fish they wept, Jack—I knew something was wrong—they cried all night and the sea bulged over the earth...

Scene Twenty-eight: The Death of Pontius

(The sky is red.)

PONTIUS holds a knife.

JOHN is fishing on the other side of the stage, as if in a dream.)

PONTIUS: No more bloody play, Mary. You needn't have drowned yourself, dear.

My cousin is beside himself. He's out in the boat fishing. The fish drink up his salty tears.

The moon is cradled by the night—the curved white slipper of the moon, reclining, rocked back into the night, will rock me to sleep. Mary, the doctor who birthed me, see, he didn't sew up my belly properly. My belly is an open wound and the air—she smites it. There is nothing left for me, Mary, but to find you. I will swim to you, arms outstretched.

So that no man in the world may
Give me a cruel death;
My own heart

With my knife I will pierce—
Oh, alas, and welaway—

(He stabs himself with a knife. He closes his eyes. Drums. Big beautiful fish puppets surround him, lift him up, and carry him off stage. The sky turns blue.)

END OF PART 1

PART 2
Oberammergau, Bavaria. 1934

CHARACTERS & SETTING

ERIC, *played by JOHN THE FISHERMAN*

MARY 2, *plays MARY MAGDALEN, played by MARY 2*

THE VISITING ENGLISHMAN, *played by the VISITING FRIAR*

VIOLET, *played by the VILLAGE IDIOT. She is dressed as a normal girl.*

CARPENTER 1 or JOHANN, *played by CARPENTER 1. Also plays choral roles.*

CARPENTER 2 or LUDWIG, *played by CARPENTER 2. Also plays choral roles*

FOOTSOLDIER, *played by PONTIUS THE FISHGUTTER*

DIRECTOR, *played by DIRECTOR*

ELSA, *plays the VIRGIN MARY, played by MARY 1*

GERMAN OFFICER, *played by the MACHINIST*

HITLER, *played by QUEEN ELIZABETH*

*The suggestion of a forest.
A playing space.*

Scene One: Prologue

CHORUS: Oberammergau, 1934!

The Passion Play's three hundred year anniversary.
The cost to tourists will be greatly reduced for this gala event!

Special Passion Play trains—
One-third the usual cost!

Visit the Oberammergau Carving Shop.
Crucifixes of every style. Made to Order.
Cheapest Prices. Good Service.

Visit our biggest hotel. Exceptionally hygienic.
Near the woods and free from dust.
Price, out of Passion season, four marks.
Price, during Passion season, twelve marks.

(The sound of a train whistle)

Scene Two

(The VISITING ENGLISHMAN is writing a letter.

The VILLAGE IDIOT sits nearby, playing with a white ribbon, which is attached to a Jack in the Box doll with no box.)

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Second of April, 1934.

Dearest Harriet,

Oberammergau is certainly quaint. A more friendly and peaceful place could hardly be found in Europe. There is, of course, quite a lot of Catholic superstition here—they certainly do not have a very complex

understanding of the relation between art and life. Today, as I wandered through the town square, I saw the most remarkable little girl crying slow, medieval tears.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

(*The VISITING ENGLISHMAN leaves off his letter writing to enact the scene.*)

VIOLET: I haven't a part. A part in the play. I would so love to be in the play. But only the natives of Oberammergau have parts.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: That doesn't seem fair.

VIOLET: Fair's fair. I am an outsider and haven't the look of an Oberammergauer.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: And what is the look of the Oberammergauer?

VIOLET: To be jolly and fat.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: And you are not so very jolly.

VIOLET: No.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: And what's your name, dearie?

VIOLET: They call me the village idiot.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Surely that's not your name?

VIOLET: No. My name means Violet in another language. The children here can't pronounce it. So they call me the village idiot.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Don't your parents get very upset when nasty children call you names?

VIOLET: My parents are gone.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Ah, I see. Well. I shall call you Violet. So, tell me, Violet, why do you play with that little white ribbon?

VIOLET: It is pretty, I suppose, and naughty too.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Why naughty?

VIOLET: Like the white drool of a snake.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Mmm, yes, quite.

VIOLET: Why do you say yes when you don't know what you mean. You don't know about the white drool of a snake. I made it up. I'm going to take the white ribbon with me.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Are you running away, dearie?

VIOLET: I might.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Whatever for?

VIOLET: The people here give me a funny feeling. I've been making the sky turn red but no one notices.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Perhaps the sun makes the sky turn red.

VIOLET: At two in the afternoon?

Will you tell me a story?

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: I'm afraid I don't know many stories.

VIOLET: Too bad. I like stories. There's always two ways to tell one story. You could say: once upon a time there was a good man and he had to die because God said so and his mother was very sad but he saved the world so everyone was happy. Or you could say: a group of plotting murderers wanted to kill a good man and the king said no but the horrible people shouted: crucify him, crucify him! So they killed him and they have blood on their hands forever. Which story do you like better?

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Well, the second one has more dramatic conflict, doesn't it?

VIOLET: Dramatic conflict?

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: It all goes back to Aristotle, my dear. Have you ever heard of Aristotle?

(*She shakes her head.*)

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Medieval drama goes in a circle, and Aristotelian drama goes in an arc—(*He makes big gestures with his hand—circle, arc.*) I'm writing a book about it, actually.

VIOLET: I know what a circle is. Will lots of people read your book?

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Probably not.

VIOLET: Then why are you writing it?

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: You ask a lot of questions, my dear.

VIOLET: Yes. It gets me into trouble.

Scene Three

(*ERIC is on the cross. The CARPENTERS measure him.*)

CARPENTER 2: Steady, now, hands out, that's right. Never understood how a man could stomach playing Jesus. Couldn't have any fun. No rolls in the hay, huh?

ERIC: No.

CARPENTER 2: Couldn't even fart in church. I'd be shy of farting in my own home, come to think of it, were I playing the Christus.

CARPENTER 1: Hard to imagine you shy of fa-farting in your own home, Ludwig.

CARPENTER 2: Well, and you too, you randy old bastard.

CARPENTER 1: Th-that's enough, Ludwig.

CARPENTER 2: No one lets me have fun anymore.

Not even my own brother. Big Director Man's getting a puffed up serious head like a ripe tomato. A new Germany and all that. Playing your part, however small. Once upon a time we played jokes—there was the year we made big wooden testicles and shoved them between the legs of old Fritz when he played the Christ. (*He laughs for ten seconds.*) Those were the days—the days when a man laughed at a good joke. Now everyone's a poker-faced pansy trying to make a buck and look holier than the next guy. (*To ERIC*) What's wrong? Cat got your tongue?

ERIC: I'm sorry—I'm trying to memorize my lines.

CARPENTER 2: Still don't have 'em down, after watching your father do the Christus for twenty years?

ERIC: I never thought I'd have the role, to be honest.

CARPENTER 1: The Ch-Christus must stay in the f-family.

CARPENTER 2: How'd your father take the news?

ERIC: He's ill.

CARPENTER 1: B-best man that ever b-breathed.

ERIC: Yes.

CARPENTER 2: He couldn't do it forever. A white-haired, Christus, can't stay on the cross for five hours, rehearsing. D'you know what happened to the real Christ when they put him on that cross? First the wrists rip under the weight of the nails, then the shoulders and elbows dislocate, and the arms stretch about six inches longer than their original length. The diaphragm is swamped by the weight of His body, and He can't hardly breathe. The lungs go kaput, the organs dry out, and it's a miracle He can talk at all. Probably died of a heart attack. Bet you didn't know that, didja?

ERIC: No.

CARPENTER 2: You're big on the one syllable words today, huh?

ERIC: I'm sorry—I'm trying to memorize my lines.

CARPENTER 2: Don't worry, I'm done talking. Your measurements, my good man, have been taken.

Scene Four:
The visiting Englishman interviews sister and brother

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: Is it true that your father plays the role of Christ in the Passion?

MARY 2: Not this year. Father is too old, so they gave the part to my brother, which is, of course, a great honor. Isn't it? *(To ERIC)*

ERIC: Yes.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: Do you mind if I take notes?

ERIC: Please.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: So how did you feel, as children, watching your father play the Christus? Was it difficult to watch him being crucified?

MARY 2: Oh, yes. I hated to see his side pierced and the blood running out. I wanted with all my heart to run on stage and fight the Jews. I could not understand why all the people watching did nothing.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: I see. And you?

ERIC: To me, as a child, my father was like a God.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: Your father has quite a reputation as a holy man.

MARY 2: Yes. Father had many offers from America to come play parts in New York City. But he preferred to stay here.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: I'm afraid your father's genius would be lost on Americans. The only art Americans understand is the big red painting that matches the big red rug on their living room floor. *(He laughs.)*

MARY 2: I don't know—I'm afraid I've never been to America. If you'll excuse me, I should give Father his supper.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: Of course.
(She exits.)

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: So.

ERIC: So.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: What's the greatest challenge you face, playing the Christus?

ERIC: To tell you the truth, I don't really enjoy being watched.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: Watched?

ERIC: By the audience.

VISTING ENGLISHMAN: An actor who doesn't enjoy being watched! How marvelous! You'll have thousands of people watching you in ten days.

ERIC: Yes. I know.

Scene Five:
A rehearsal

(The VISTING ENGLISHMAN takes pictures.)

DIRECTOR: CHRIST TEARS DOWN THE TEMPLE!
Begin!

ERIC: What—what see I here? Is this God's house?
Or is it naught but—naught to you but—

DIRECTOR: (*To ERIC, giving lines*) Or is it naught to you but a market-place?

ERIC: Or is it naught to you but a market-place? You dishonor the abode of my Father. You—money-changers—

(*VIOLET enacts her own play to compete with the other play, which she doesn't like.*)

VIOLET: Once upon a time there were children named Hansel and Gretel.

DIRECTOR: Shut up, village idiot. Jewish chorus, your lines!

JEWISH CHORUS: My gold, ah, my gold! Who will restore this loss to me?

DIRECTOR: (*To ERIC*) Push the vessel this time! Again!

(*ERIC pushes over a vessel of money and the JEWISH CHORUS picks up the gold coins.*)

VIOLET: Hansel and Gretel ate delicious candies off an old witch's house.

JEWISH CHORUS: My gold, ah, my gold!

DIRECTOR: Doves!

(*ERIC opens a bird cage and two doves fly out.*)

JEWISH CHORUS: My doves!

VIOLET: The birds ate up their breadcrumbs.

When you are in Germany and people are chasing you through the forest, Don't rely on breadcrumbs.

ERIC: Away from here, Servants of Mammon! I bid you go! Take what is yours, and leave this holy place!

JEWISH CHORUS 1: (*Played by CARPENTER 1*) What b-boastful insolent talk!

DIRECTOR: Again. Try not to stutter this time.

JEWISH CHORUS 1: What b-boastful insolent talk.

DIRECTOR: Again.

JEWISH CHORUS 1: What b-boastful insolent talk.

DIRECTOR: See me privately after rehearsal, Johann. We need to discuss the renewal of your contract.

CARPENTER 1: Yes, sir.

VIOLET: Then the old witch wanted to starve Hansel—Hansel was smart to put a

little bone outside of his cage to look like a finger.

That's what you should do if people are trying to starve you and exterminate you.

DIRECTOR: I said, shut your mouth village idiot! Continue!

ERIC: I can't remember my lines...

MARY 2: You were supposed to practice them this afternoon!

VIOLET: One day, the witch got hungry and said, Hansel, I'm going to cook you in the oven!

DIRECTOR: Your lines! Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again!

VIOLET: (*To ERIC*) Hansel was scared. Wouldn't you be scared?

If someone wanted to push you in an oven?

ERIC: Destroy this temple, and I will, I will—

VIOLET: But then Hansel pushed the *witch* into the oven.

He said, with your fat bottom, you'd make a better dinner!

DIRECTOR: I said, shut your mouth, village idiot!

VIOLET: And the witch screamed from inside the oven, like this, AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

DIRECTOR: I said, shut your mouth village idiot! The only people who should be speaking in this rehearsal are the people with parts in the play. Do you have a part in this play?

(*He goes to her.*)

VIOLET: No, sir.

DIRECTOR: Then I suggest you practice being silent. Do you know how to be silent?

(*VIOLET opens her mouth to speak.*)

DIRECTOR: Don't answer me—only nod.

(*VIOLET nods.*)

DIRECTOR: Good. Because if children do not learn how to be silent, the world will teach them. Do you understand? Don't answer me—only nod.

(*She nods.*)

DIRECTOR: Let's move on to the High Council, scene three. Caiaphas, you stand here. Take it from—"All moves excellently well, worthy Fathers."

CAIAPHAS: (*Played by CARPENTER 2*) All moves excellently well, worthy Fathers. Now let us consider

the leading question: what shall we do with this Jesus of Nazareth, once He is delivered into our hands?

RABBI: (*Played by CARPENTER 1*) Let Him be thrown into the deepest, darkest dungeon, and kept there! Let Him go through a living death!

DIRECTOR: Very good, Johann.

CAIAPHAS: Who among you can guarantee that His friends would not provoke a riot and set Him free? It is better that one man die than a whole nation go to ruin. He must die! Until He dies there is no peace in Israel, no safety for the Law of Moses!

DIRECTOR: Try your lower register for the first line, and work your way up to the end of the speech.

CAIAPHAS: (*This should be good acting*) Who among you can guarantee that His friends would not provoke a riot and set Him free? It is better that one man die than a whole nation go to ruin. He must die! Until He dies there is no peace in Israel, no safety for the Law of Moses!

DIRECTOR: Yes—I think that'll work.

Scene Six

(*MARY 1 alone in her dressing room.*)

Enter the GERMAN OFFICER. Her face changes.)

GERMAN OFFICER: You were a very pretty picture at rehearsal. Were those real tears?

ELSA: An actress doesn't give away her secrets.

GERMAN OFFICER: You are very cruel. Would you wash my feet, Elsa, the way Mary Magdalen washes the feet of Christ?

ELSA: Your feet might smell from being stuck in those big black boots all day.

GERMAN OFFICER: You're like a sphinx, Elsa. You should be in the moving pictures.

ELSA: Please, sir.

GERMAN OFFICER: I have a very pretty house, in a very pretty forest, with very pretty pewter mugs. I have a lampshade from the Kaiser himself. I fly small, fast planes all over the world. But upon my return, there is no one to sit at my table and smile sweetly.

ELSA: Lampshades don't make for very good company.

GERMAN OFFICER: They say that the Marys of Oberammergau do not marry because they want to keep their parts. I hope you are not one of the foolish ones, Elsa.

ELSA: Do I look foolish?

GERMAN OFFICER: No.

ELSA: I have now refused three men all for the dream of playing Mary. All of them now settled into clean little homes with clean little wives, not half so pretty as I am.

There is an old saying about a woman who goes searching for sticks in the forest. She passes by many sticks because she wants to find the straightest one. By the time she reaches the edge of the forest, only crooked sticks are left. Do you understand me?

GERMAN OFFICER: A smile like that would make any man want to *misunderstand* you.

(*He moves in to kiss her. She stops him.*)

ELSA: A man who has the milk for free will not buy the cow, sir.

GERMAN OFFICER: You speak of sticks and cows. I am a blunt man, Elsa. Will you ever marry?

ELSA: Is that a proposal, sir?

GERMAN OFFICER: Is that a yes?

ELSA: I wish to play Mary one last time. For the gala anniversary. And after—

GERMAN OFFICER: After?

ELSA: Perhaps—

GERMAN OFFICER: A man cannot live on perhaps.

ELSA: But there are many kinds of perhaps—perhaps you can live on perhaps—

GERMAN OFFICER: Perhaps like this?

(*He slides his hand up her dress.*)

ELSA: Perhaps—

(*He slides his hand further. She smiles.*)

ELSA: But no one must know—

GERMAN OFFICER: Oh, Elsa.

Scene Seven

(MARY 2 and ERIC at home. ERIC is reading a book.)

MARY 2: What are you reading?

ERIC: Nothing.

(*She snatches his book—a volume of Rilke.*)

MARY 2: Oooh—poetry! Since when do you like poetry? Rose, oh pure contradiction, joy of being...

ERIC: Don't! Put it down.

(*She puts the book down.*)

MARY 2: Sorry. Who gave it to you? The foot-soldier?

ERIC: None of your business.

MARY 2: Well, I've never understood poetry.

ERIC: Your loss.

MARY 2: I often think that people who write poetry are stupid, solitary people. They make books into friends, but they don't write books to befriend lonely children—no—out of their bitterness they write books to make men lonely.

ERIC: I want to leave, Mary.

MARY 2: What?

ERIC: I want to leave...I want to join something...bigger than myself...bigger than this town...I always thought I wanted to play the Christus. Well, I'm not sure I believe in plays anymore. The soldier's boot, that's real. The life of the soldier, there's something.

MARY 2: Father is dying, all for the loss of the Christus, and you spouting this!

ERIC: I want to see the world.

MARY 2: This isn't the world?

ERIC: No, this isn't the world!
Things are happening, Mary. Exciting things. They're building a new Germany—there's hope for the future and jobs for everyone—

MARY 2: You have a job.

ERIC: Carving crucifixes for tourists all day? That's not a job for a man. Herr Hitler says—

MARY 2: Father never wants to hear that man's name

MARY 2:
in this house!

ERIC: (*Overlapping*)
Father's never heard
him speak!

Have you?

He says that Germany will
be reborn, strong again.
He says with half the
country thinking one thing
and the other half believing
the exact opposite, we need
a strong leader to unite it.

I'll believe it when I see it.

How could Father disagree
with that? Peace is within
our reach, we only need to
fight!

MARY 2: Fight for what? *Peace*? What did father fight for? Nothing! He came back to a dead country with lots of other hungry people. You're starting to sound like the rest of this town! You sound like a damn Nazi!

ERIC: So what if I stand for—for strength—
And for the future—he's for the workers!

MARY 2: For the workers—hah—he's for himself—
Heil—it makes me want to vomit, There's only one
Father, God the Father—you're playing Christ!

ERIC: Let's not fight, Mary.

(*A silence*)

MARY 2: Do you remember when we were little—
you stayed home sick from school one day. You were
supposed to feed my bird. I said, no matter what,
don't let my bird fly outside. You played with the bird.
It flew like crazy around the kitchen. You were afraid
the bird would fly into the garden so you slammed the
kitchen door as the bird was flying out and you killed
it. I came home from school and you had the strangest
look on your face. What's wrong? I said. Nothing,
you said. Then you started crying. I killed your bird,
you said. And now no one will ever love me.

ERIC: I remember.

MARY 2: (*With compassion*) How could a boy like that join the army?

Scene Eight:
Eric and the foot-soldier, day

ERIC: When will you leave? Do they tell you?

FOOT SOLDIER: Soon.

ERIC: Won't you be homesick?

FOOT SOLDIER: I'll have the whole world to entertain me.

ERIC: And you'll leave even if it means not playing Pontius Pilate?

FOOT SOLDIER: Plays aren't real. The soldier's boot—that's real.

ERIC: I should like to come with you.

FOOT SOLDIER: The Christus cannot come with the soldier. The Christus must stay behind.

ERIC: I'm tired of crucifixions.

FOOT SOLDIER: You are?

ERIC: My arms are tired. I was on the cross for four hours yesterday, rehearsing. I tried to raise a cup of water to my mouth and couldn't, I was shaking so badly.

FOOT SOLDIER: I could rub them.

ERIC: All right.

(*The FOOT SOLDIER rubs ERIC's arms.*)

FOOT SOLDIER: Would you rather be a just beggar or an unjust king?

ERIC: A just beggar. The pangs of conscience are worse than the pangs of hunger.

FOOT SOLDIER: I should have known you were one of those.

ERIC: Well, what would you rather?

FOOT SOLDIER: An unjust king, of course. The pangs of conscience are barely audible when the stomach is growling. Would you rather be a dwarf or a hermaphrodite?

ERIC: A dwarf, I suppose.

FOOT SOLDIER: For all the world to see your shame? Would you rather have a virtuous plain wife or a beautiful lover who stole apples from the poor?

ERIC: That's difficult. Is my ugly wife intelligent?

FOOT SOLDIER: Yes.

ERIC: An ugly wife, I suppose. My turn. Would you rather be a mediocre composer whose name was remembered for centuries, or a glorious composer lost to obscurity?

FOOT SOLDIER: A glorious composer lost to obscurity, of course. You?

ERIC: The same! Would you rather be Christ or Pontius Pilate?

FOOT SOLDIER: Pontius Pilate.

ERIC: Why?

FOOT SOLDIER: Very unpleasant, the nails, the whipping, the blood... No one actually wants to be Christ, they only want to admire him from a distance.

ERIC: That's not a very nice thing to say.

FOOT SOLDIER: But it's true. My turn. Would you rather be me or you?

ERIC: That's a strange question.

FOOT SOLDIER: Go on.

ERIC: Let's see...if I were you I would take everything as a joke—I would get drunk to forget my troubles and I would have the most interesting, intelligent eyes. No one would know me but everyone would like me. If I were me, I would be—timid. I would take little bites of food and fall in love with the wrong people.

FOOT SOLDIER: You still haven't answered the question.

ERIC: I would rather be you in the evening and I would rather be me in the morning.

FOOT SOLDIER: Why?

ERIC: I could soak myself with pleasure in the evening and not remember in the morning. And you—would you rather be me or you?

FOOT SOLDIER: I would rather be me in war-time and you in peace-time.

ERIC: Why is that?

FOOT SOLDIER: I couldn't carry a gun properly if I had your little hands.

ERIC: Little! I don't have little hands—

(*He holds his hands up to the FOOT SOLDIER's hands.*)

FOOT SOLDIER: You know what they say about the size of a man's hands.

ERIC: No.

FOOT SOLDIER: Think about it. If you have big hands, maybe other things will be big.

(*ERIC takes his hand away.*)

ERIC: Gloves?

FOOT SOLDIER: Don't act stupid. You know what I'm talking about.

ERIC: You have a perverse imagination.

FOOT SOLDIER: We could compare. It's important to know these things.

ERIC: I have rehearsal.

FOOT SOLDIER: Not for another hour.

ERIC: I don't know my lines.

FOOT SOLDIER: All right, all right, I'll stop bothering you. You want a cigarette?

ERIC: Okay.

(*The FOOT SOLDIER gives ERIC a cigarette. ERIC puffs on it without sophistication.*)

FOOT SOLDIER: Here—hold it like this—that's better. That's how they hold cigarettes in Berlin.

ERIC: How would you know?

FOOT SOLDIER: I've seen pictures.

ERIC: I have to memorize my lines.

FOOT SOLDIER: Should I test you?

ERIC: Okay.

FOOT SOLDIER: Art thou the King of the Jews?

(*Pause. ERIC doesn't remember his line.*)

FOOT SOLDIER: Art thou the King of the Jews?

ERIC: Ahh...Dost thou say this of your own accord—or—or—

FOOT SOLDIER: (*Giving him the line*) Or—have—others...

ERIC: said it of me?

FOOT SOLDIER: Good. (*Performing*) Am I a Jew? Thine own people handed thee over to me. They say that thou would makest thyself King of the Jews.

ERIC: My kingdom is of—

FOOT SOLDIER: Not—

ERIC: My kingdom is *not* of this world.

FOOT SOLDIER: Thou art a king then!

ERIC: Thou sayest so.

FOOT SOLDIER: What is the truth?

(*Pause*)

ERIC: I'm sorry. I can't concentrate. Every time I say my lines I think of my father watching me and my mind goes blank.

FOOT SOLDIER: You have to make your Christ different from your father's, maybe.

ERIC: What?

FOOT SOLDIER: Your father was an old man playing the Christ. You're a young man. You need to play *that* Christ—a young man, full of life, strong—a leader of men—a leader of nations—

ERIC: I'd rather play Judas. To be hated, that's easy. To be loved—that's hard.

FOOT SOLDIER: You need to relax. Have more fun. We'll go mushroom hunting this afternoon.

ERIC: I should sit with my father—he's been getting worse.

FOOT SOLDIER: Come on. A nice tender mushroom... picked with your own hands...

ERIC: Well—all right. I shouldn't let you go all by yourself. You're a horrible judge of mushrooms.

Scene Nine: The Visiting Englishman and the Director

DIRECTOR: Good afternoon.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Why, good afternoon, you quite crept up on me.

DIRECTOR: I don't know you.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: I don't suppose we've been introduced, then, have we?

DIRECTOR: No.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Simon Lily.

DIRECTOR: Otto Beckenbauer.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Ah! The director of the Passion. Delighted.

(*The VISITING ENGLISHMAN extends his hand. The DIRECTOR shakes it, firmly.*)

DIRECTOR: What brings you to our town?

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Well, actually, I'm writing a book on the theater.

DIRECTOR: Really. A whole book!

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Why yes.

DIRECTOR: Maybe you should ask me some questions. An interview. For the book. You know.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: What a marvelous idea.

DIRECTOR: So. Ask. I answer.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Well, let's see. I'm quite unprepared, you know. Ummm...right. Will anything be different in this year's production?

DIRECTOR: There have been technological developments that will enable us to make the crucifixion scene look even more authentic. The blood will look like real blood.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: I see—interesting—and do you enjoy directing the Passion, then?

DIRECTOR: Yes. I enjoy.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Right. Good. Umm... Why do you enjoy directing the Passion?

DIRECTOR: I will confess something to you. There are times in every man's life—in his personal life even—when he needs a director. His eyes are muddy. Maybe he has a sty. Maybe his hands are tied. Whatever it is—he can't see—he can't think. He needs someone with vision—me—someone stronger—me—to tell him what to do.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Ah, I see. How marvelous.

DIRECTOR: Why don't you write down?

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Oh, how stupid of me, really. Do you mind repeating yourself?

DIRECTOR: No. I don't mind. There are times in every man's life—in his personal life even—when he needs a director. His eyes are muddy. Maybe he has a sty. Maybe his hands are tied. Whatever it is—he can't see—he can't think. He needs someone with vision—me—someone stronger—me—to tell him what to do.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: To tell him what to do...there. I believe I've got the whole speech down, Herr Beckenbauer. Thank you very much indeed.

DIRECTOR: Not at all. I like to help.

Scene Ten: The Last Supper. A Rehearsal

(VIOLET hides under the Last Supper table. The cast moves into the Last Supper tableau. ERIC rushes into place, late.)

DIRECTOR: Places, places for the Last Supper! (To ERIC) You're late!

MARY 2: (Whispering) Where were you?

ERIC: Picking mushrooms.

MARY 2: Honestly!

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: (To ERIC) May I take your photograph?

ERIC: I'd better not—they sell them at the tourist bureau—

(The bulb flashes.)

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Oops!

DIRECTOR: (To ERIC) Your lines!

ERIC: (Whispering urgently to MARY 2) Mary, I can't remember my lines...

MARY 2: What's wrong with you?

VIOLET: (Whispering to him from under the table) I have longed to share this Passover with you before I suffer.

(The DIRECTOR busies himself fixing the tableau.)

ERIC: (Loud and performative) I have longed to share this Passover with you before I suffer. (Whispering to the village idiot) Thank you! Do you know the next bit?

VIOLET: Verily, verily, I say unto you, one of you at this table will betray me.

ERIC: (*To the VIOLET*) Yes—that's it! Clever girl!
Verily, verily, I say unto you, one of you at this table
will betray me.

DISCIPLES: What! A betrayer amongst us? Impossible!

(*ERIC turns to VIOLET to see if she knows the next line*)

VIOLET: (*Echoed by*) ERIC:
I *will* forgive sinners I *will* forgive sinners
but it's probably best not to but it's probably best not to
sin in the first place. sin in the first place.

You have to admit, some You have to admit, some
pretty strange things will pretty strange things will
be done in my name. be done in my name.

In time, In time,
you will crawl around like you will crawl around like
pigs snorting in the mud pigs snorting in the mud
looking for the answer to looking for the answer to
this fundamental question: this fundamental question:
is there a God? is there a God?

(*ERIC works himself up into a performative lather.*)

And if you decide that And if you decide that
there is no God, will you there is no God, will you
need someone with vision, need someone with vision
someone stronger, someone stronger,
to tell you what to do? to tell you what to do?
Resist, Resist,
I say unto you! I say unto you!

ERIC: VIOLET:
(*Becoming almost simultaneous*)
And finally, I want And finally, I want
everyone at this table, everyone at this table,
eating my blood and my eating my blood and my
body, to remember that body, to remember that

I am a Jew. I am a Jew.
Wait. This is not—

DIRECTOR: What is that voice?

GERMAN OFFICER: The Village Idiot.

(*The DIRECTOR pulls her out from under the table.*)

DIRECTOR: I propose that the village idiot be put in
this box with no food for one week as punishment for
mocking the voice of Christ. All in favor say aye.

ALL: (*With the exception of the VISITING ENGLISHMAN*)
AYE.

(*The VISITING ENGLISHMAN flashes a picture.*
The DIRECTOR puts VIOLET in the empty bird-cage prop
from Scene Five—the one the doves fly out of.)

VIOLET: If you lock me up, I'll make the sky turn red.
Now, now! (*She closes her eyes. Nothing happens.*)
Did you see that? Did you see?

(*No one sees.*)

Scene Eleven

(*MARY 2 and ERIC*)

MARY 2: How could you forget your lines?

ERIC: I was confused.

MARY 2: You were more than confused! You were
stupid. Father says you should pray more. He says if
you feel the grace of God, you'll remember the right
words.

ERIC: Father says this, father says that. Why don't you
find yourself a husband to boss around.
I'm sorry.

MARY 2: What is *wrong* with you lately?

ERIC: Mary. I've been thinking. When father played his part, he got this—funny glow on his face, do you remember? Sort of like this... (*He demonstrates.*) I've been trying to get a glow on my face when I say my part.

MARY 2: Most of the people in the audience will see you from a distance. They will not be able to tell if your face is glowing.

ERIC: I know—but—

MARY 2: And the people in the front row—they paid a lot of *money* to see your face glow—so they will *imagine* that your face is glowing, even if it's not. The important thing is to remember your lines. And to say them. Word for word.

ERIC: But, there's a difference, isn't there? When you do—a thing—and feel—a thing—at the same time?

MARY 2: I don't understand.

ERIC: I mean—when you're playing your part—or other times—have you ever felt the grace of God pour into you—like a fever? So you don't have to—decide—I think this or I think that—suddenly you're bigger than yourself—and you're looking at the clouds— isn't that how it's supposed to feel?

MARY 2: How *what's* supposed to feel?

ERIC: Anything—big—love—or—or—art—or—

MARY 2: Are you in love?

ERIC: No!

(*A pause*)

ERIC: Wait. Did you hear that?

(*There was no sound.*)

MARY 2: What is it?

ERIC: Go—look in his room—

MARY 2: You.

ERIC: You.

MARY 2: You.

ERIC: No.

MARY 2: Why?

ERIC: I'm afraid.

MARY 2: There's nothing to be afraid of.

ERIC: Then hurry.

(*She looks in the next room.*)

ERIC: Is he breathing?

MARY 2: I don't think so.

ERIC: My God.

We have to call a doctor.

MARY 2: What for?

ERIC: But his body...

MARY 2: (*With compassion*) Go see. It's nothing to be frightened of. It's a body. That's all.

Scene Twelve: Violet's box

(*VIOLET in her box.*)

VIOLET: A cross is like someone is cross with you so he folds his arms across his chest. A cross is like you cross the bridge to get to the other side. A cross is like I cross my heart and hope to die—is like telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. A cross is like I'm cross-eyed so I can't see.

(ERIC enters. He removes his shoes. He goes to the stage, walking through his blocking, gesturing. Kneeling, getting up, turning towards the sleeping disciples. She watches him.)

VIOLET: Hello.

ERIC: You startled me.

VIOLET: You look sad.

ERIC: I—never mind.

VIOLET: What are you doing?

ERIC: Rehearsing.

VIOLET: In the middle of the night? Which part?

ERIC: It's called The Mount of Olives.

VIOLET: Oh. What happens in that part?

ERIC: I ask my disciples to watch with me for an hour. But they fall asleep.

VIOLET: Why?

ERIC: They're tired.

VIOLET: Oh. That sounds like a nice part. I get tired of the bloody parts. I wish there were more miracle parts—making five hundred fish out of one fish. Or walking on water.

ERIC: I suppose it's hard to put on stage—walking on water.

VIOLET: No, they could do it. People just like the bloody parts better.

ERIC: Yes, I suppose they do. (Pause) You tricked me at rehearsal, didn't you?

VIOLET: I only meant to help.

ERIC: Did you?

VIOLET: Yes.

ERIC: Do you want to get out of that box?

VIOLET: Yes.

(ERIC lets her of the box.)

VIOLET: Thank you.

ERIC: Just run along and don't tell anyone. Find a good hiding place. Go on now. Good-night.

(She runs off stage.

He remains, in the night.

The FOOT SOLDIER enters.)

Scene Thirteen

(A large orange moon appears in the sky. ERIC looks at the moon.

The GERMAN OFFICER looks on, unobserved.

The FOOT SOLDIER comes behind ERIC, putting his hands over ERIC's eyes.)

FOOT SOLDIER: What do you see?

ERIC: The moon is huge—orange and bloody—a laughing judge—presiding over an orange trial.

(The FOOT SOLDIER takes his hands away.)

FOOT SOLDIER: Now look. The moon is gold.

ERIC: I'm afraid.

FOOT SOLDIER: What are you afraid of, little Christ?

ERIC: Everything.

FOOT SOLDIER: Everything?

ERIC: I want to play my part well, for the sake of my father.

FOOT SOLDIER: Perhaps we should switch roles. I don't want to put you to death.

ERIC: But you have to.

FOOT SOLDIER: What if I refused? What if I saved you from the mob—took you home with me, bathed your wounds with warm water?

ERIC: Impossible.

FOOT SOLDIER: Why impossible? You see only the mountain, you must learn to see the sky on the other side.

ERIC: The footsoldier is a dreamer.

FOOT SOLDIER: The Christus has no faith.

(They embrace.)

The GERMAN OFFICER looks on, unobserved.)

Scene Fourteen

(Day. Backstage. The GERMAN OFFICER, ELSA, and the FOOT SOLDIER, who are putting the finishing touches to their costumes. ELSA arranges her halo in an imaginary mirror.)

GERMAN OFFICER: Oh, Elsa, you look exquisite. *(He touches her. To the FOOT SOLDIER)* Doesn't she? What do you say, soldier? Cat got your tongue?

FOOT SOLDIER: Yes, sir.

GERMAN OFFICER: The foot soldier does not appreciate women as I do. Soldier, come here!

FOOT SOLDIER: Yes, sir.

GERMAN OFFICER: Place your hand on the Virgin's behind.

FOOT SOLDIER: I'd rather not, sir.

GERMAN OFFICER: It's an order.

(The FOOT SOLDIER places his hand on ELSA's behind.)

GERMAN OFFICER: This, soldier, in your hands, is womanly flesh. It feels something like a melon, or a ripe squash. Ripe, deliciously ripe, almost falling from the branch, but not quite fallen. That's what makes it so tantalizing. Understand?

FOOT SOLDIER: Yes, sir.

GERMAN OFFICER: I want you to remember. Repeat after me. This is a woman's flesh.

FOOT SOLDIER: This is a woman's flesh.

GERMAN OFFICER: It feels something like a melon, or a ripe squash.

FOOT SOLDIER: It feels something like a melon, or a ripe squash.

GERMAN OFFICER: How I love womanly flesh.

FOOT SOLDIER: How I love womanly flesh.

GERMAN OFFICER: Soldier, do you know what happens to men in the German army who do not appreciate women the way a man should?

FOOT SOLDIER: I don't know what you mean, sir.

GERMAN OFFICER: Oh, I think you do.

(Enter the VISITING ENGLISHMAN.)

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Knock, knock... Am I interrupting something?

GERMAN OFFICER: No.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Well, I suppose everyone's nervous about opening night—got the jitters as they say. I must say, I'm bursting with excitement. You're looking lovely, Elsa.

ELSA: Thank you.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Well. I suppose you have to put on your make-up and what-not?

ELSA: We don't wear make-up, Mister Lily.

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Really! I could have sworn you had rouge on your cheeks.

ELSA: Here—come see if you like.

(The VISITING ENGLISHMAN goes to her. He tries to rub the rouge off her cheeks. There is none.)

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Remarkable.

ELSA: You see, in Oberammergau, everything is as it appears to be.

(A bell rings, ushering the audience into the theater.)

Scene Fifteen

(ERIC prays in a pool of light.)

ERIC: Dear God, let me play Christ well for the sake of my father. I know I am unworthy of the part. Please forgive my sins—I won't name them—you know them all.

(Enter the DIRECTOR.)

DIRECTOR: Get up. Places.

ERIC: Yes, sir.

DIRECTOR: Don't forget your lines today.

ERIC: I won't, sir.

DIRECTOR: Because, if you do, you'll disgrace not only me, but your father, your faith, your village, and the fatherland. Do you understand me?

ERIC: Yes.

DIRECTOR: Good.

(The DIRECTOR leaves. ERIC rehearses to himself, softly.)

ERIC: Many shall come in my name, saying "I am Christ" and shall deceive the multitudes... For false Christs and false prophets shall rise. The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light... Take heed. Watch and pray; lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And this is what I say unto all: watch.

Scene Sixteen

(Curtains are pulled back to reveal PONTIUS and an angry crowd.)

(They strike a tableau for a moment.)

PILATE: Listen, men of Judea! Behold these two—one with gentle countenance, the other a convicted robber and murderer—

CROWD: Free Barabas!

PILATE: I appeal to your human sympathy. Here is Jesus of Nazareth—of worthy bearing—

CROWD: Crucify him! Crucify him!

PILATE: No! I cannot condemn this Man, for I find in Him no guilt. I cannot, I dare not, condemn the innocent!

CROWD: Crucify him! Crucify him! Death to the false Messiah!

PILATE: Bring me water! You compel me by your violence. Take Him away and crucify Him! But know! I wash my hands of it. I am innocent of this blood.

CROWD: We take it upon ourselves. His blood be upon us and our children!

PILATE: Therefore I, Pontius Pilate, at the demand of the High Priests, pronounce this sentence of death on Jesus of Nazareth. Now, take Him away and crucify Him!

(Enter the GERMAN OFFICER, dressed in uniform, along with HITLER.)

GERMAN OFFICER: If you please, terminate the Passion temporarily in order to welcome our guest and honored friend.

(Time stops.

A spotlight on HITLER.)

HITLER: (To the audience, a private moment) Do you know who I am? You will think, perhaps, years later, that you know me from black and white colors. But black and white are not colors, although they are useful things. I have a strong desire to tell you about the colors—I was once a painter, you see—how one of my eyes has flecks of gold swimming in the brown...the people, they fell in love with my voice, but the women, they fell in love with my eyes—The dark protects us. Our eyes are the same color in the dark. Well.

In my bedroom, as a child, I had a doll, given to me by a dear grandmother. But I did not like to play with toys, no. I liked to place them carefully where I could watch them from a distance. She was a very still doll in a gray silk suit with a slice of burgundy ribbon at the throat, the color burgundy and the color gray being important.

I do so love public speaking.

Let me tell you about this village. The old man who played Christ was in his sick bed; a new Christ has stepped forward. (He looks at ERIC, with approval.) The old must make way for the young, see. Plants and animals know this—people, stupid and crass—they cling to the vine.

I have come to a chorus of glad cheers. The people are always very glad to see me.

EVERYONE: (But for the VILLAGE IDIOT and the VISITING ENGLISHMAN, who abstain): Heil!

(He turns towards them. They fall silent. HITLER addresses them. He works himself up into a public rage. The following text is a quotation from HITLER's remarks.)

HITLER: One of our most important tasks will be to save future generations and to remain forever watchful in the knowledge of the menace of the Jews. For this reason alone it is vital that the Passion Play be continued at Oberammergau; for never has the menace of the Jews been so convincingly portrayed as in this presentation of what happened in the times of the Romans. There one sees in Pontius Pilate a Roman racially and intellectually superior, there he stands out like a firm, clean rock in the middle of the whole muck and mire of the Jews.

Now, continue with your holy play. How I love the theater.

(The VISITING ENGLISHMAN snaps a picture. A bulb flashes. On with the play.

ERIC on the cross.

Heavenly choir music from PART 1

ERIC looks up, sanctified. He has a glow upon his face.

PONTIUS turns his head away.

MARY 1 and MARY 2 at the foot of the cross, lament.

HITLER watches.)

Scene Seventeen

VISITING ENGLISHMAN: Dearest Harriet,

I am writing you by train. Forgive me if my penmanship suffers. The Passion was glorious.

The young man who played the Christ glowed with some invisible spirit. I daresay it almost made me a convert. Don't worry, dearest, almost is the operative

word. I am Anglican to my bones.

They had an odd little visitor to the play. Herr Hitler. Made me quite jumpy. Terrible haircut. If it ever came to blows, the English would simply crush him with good manners and good sense.

I long to see you, dear. Ah, the English countryside at the height of summer, when the light appears to last forever—and one can read out of doors until eleven o'clock! Why hunger for more than that?

(The sound of a train speeding across the tracks)

Scene Eighteen

(The FOOT SOLDIER and ERIC in the forest.)

FOOT SOLDIER: I got my orders to leave.

ERIC: So soon?

(The FOOT SOLDIER nods.)

ERIC: Where are you going, exactly? Do they tell you?

FOOT SOLDIER: To Austria, to Poland, to Belgium, to France, to Russia. *(Pause)* Good-bye, little Christ.

(They kiss.)

ERIC: And one for Belgium. *(He kisses him on the neck.)*
And this one for Poland. *(He kisses him on the ear.)*
This for Austria. *(He kisses him on the hand.)*
And this for France. *(He kisses him on the mouth once more.)*

FOOT SOLDIER: That was most definitely France.

ERIC: And for Russia. *(He kisses him on the forehead.)*
Come back safely.

(The sounds of war)

Scene Nineteen

(VIOLET sits in the forest. She is now a young woman. The sky is red.)

VIOLET: The sky is red all night, and red in the middle of the day—towns far off—bombs—red, red, sky.

(A bird puppet enters. Or is it CARPENTER 1, dressed in his angel wings.)

VIOLET: Hello! Are you a talking bird or a silent bird?

(The bird is silent.)

VIOLET: Will you fly me out of the forest, bird? Poor bird. Your body is too big to fly.

(The bird blinks.)

VIOLET: Maybe you're hungry. I have a few breadcrumbs. Do you want them? You do. All right then. Peck the crumbs out of my hand. I'll remember my way home. I have to sleep now, bird. Will you watch over me while I sleep? Thank you.

(She goes to sleep. The bird puppet leaves.)

ERIC enters wearing a Nazi uniform. He sits beside her for a moment. She wakes up.)

VIOLET: Oh—you startled me. You've got a new costume.

ERIC: Yes.

VIOLET: It's ugly.

ERIC: I have to take you with me.

VIOLET: Where?

ERIC: I don't know.

VIOLET: Do you remember when you were in the play? How you let me out of a box?

ERIC: That was a long time ago.

VIOLET: Well, you're a man now. Why are they taking me away?

ERIC: You're not a native Oberammergau.

VIOLET: I lived in the village my whole life.

ERIC: It's different.

VIOLET: Different how?

ERIC: You have different blood.

VIOLET: Jesus was a Jew.

ERIC: Kind of. But not really.

VIOLET: Do you remember your lines from the play? "Many shall come in my name, saying 'I am Christ' and shall deceive the multitudes... For false Christs and false prophets shall rise. The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light... Take heed. Watch and pray; lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping."

ERIC: You have a good memory.

VIOLET: Yes. I do.

ERIC: I'm sorry. We need to go.

VIOLET: Let's play a game. It's called would you rather. Would you rather kill a dog or kick a baby?

ERIC: How hard would I have to kick the baby?

VIOLET: So hard that her head was dented.

ERIC: Kill a dog, I guess.

VIOLET: Would you rather be deaf or poke someone in the ear-drum with a needle so that they became deaf? It's a hard one, isn't it?

(ERIC nods.)

ERIC: Poke someone in the ear-drum, I suppose. It would be terrible to be deaf. I love music. Come on, now. We don't have time for games.

VIOLET: I always liked you. You don't have a jolly fat face like the others—you always looked a little bit sad.

ERIC: (If the struggle against evil could be contained in one commonplace phrase, "thank you" is the only one he is allowed for the moment.) Thank you.

(A pause)

He extends his hand to take her away.)

VIOLET: Wait. Right now—it's not like being in a play—no one's watching—you could do something different.

ERIC: They watch all the time.

VIOLET: Even so—even if they watch you every second of the day—even if they give you a costume and boots and a hat—even then you're not in a play! You're a man. And a man must decide for himself what he wants to do!

ERIC: Look—I can't talk to you. They're waiting. Let's go.

Now, take my hand.

VIOLET: No.

ERIC: I'll have to carry you then.

VIOLET: Please don't. I'd rather walk.

(They are still, facing out.)

Scene Twenty:
Epilogue

(The rest of the cast enters the stage.

They look at VIOLET and ERIC.

They look at the audience.

The lights change from red to grey.)

END OF PART 2

PART 3

Spearfish, South Dakota. 1969, 1970, 1984,
and the present

CHARACTERS & SETTING

P, the man who plays PONTIUS PILATE in the play. He's not crazy. More like fanciful. And pissed off

J, P's brother. The man who plays JESUS in the play. He loves to act. He is beautiful.

MARY 1, the woman who plays the VIRGIN MARY in the play. Salt of the earth

MARY 2, MARY 1's sister. Plays MARY MAGDALEN in the play. A pure belief system.

PRESIDENT REAGAN/QUEEN ELIZABETH/HITLER/NIXON ON T V, one actor should play all three roles. This actor must have virtuosity, the ability to transform vocally, the ability to inject rhetoric with terrifying charisma.

DIRECTOR, the original director of the Passion. As the director, he is an icon of small town likeability. Played by the DIRECTOR from PARTS 1 and 2

THE YOUNG DIRECTOR, the new director of the Passion. Clified, and a bit facile. Played by the MACHINIST or one of the CARPENTERS

V A 1, a psychiatrist at the V A hospital. Wears a white coat. Played by the VISITING ENGLISHMAN

V A 2, a psychiatrist at the V A hospital. Wears a white coat. Played by a CARPENTER or the MACHINIST

VIOLET, MARY 1's child. Ranges from age five-twelve. Should be played by an adult with the soul of a child. Should

not be played by an adult imitating the outward manifestations of a child. Played by the VILLAGE IDIOT

A note on Ensemble: In a local Passion Play, there is usually a cast of extras or supernumeraries, from the town, who are not professional actors. One might think about using supernumeraries for crowd scenes here. However, the effect of ensemble can also be achieved with the above cast.

A note on double casting: If you're doing PART 3 as a free standing play, and are looking to stream-line, you can double cast the older DIRECTOR with V A 2, and the YOUNG DIRECTOR with V A 1 and V A 3, making for a total of eight actors.

Open space.

The suggestion of a toll-booth.

And of a stage.

Projections may be used to indicate the date.

"1970: Spiritual need as there never was before. The turning away from God and modern man's flight before the world to come have in this world led to perplexity, helplessness, and resignation, to a fight of all against all...Man wanting to be like God and to redeem himself by his own strength has failed deplorably. Is this the reason why scores of people flock to Oberammergau?"
Dr Karl Ipser, *Das Passions Spiel Oberammergau*, official illustrated catalogue, 1970.

PROLOGUE

(RONALD REAGAN appears.)

RONALD REAGAN: It's morning in America. A simple time. People help each other, up and down the block. They borrow eggs or sugar to bake. I was a life-guard on the Rock River, you know. In a small town, like this one. Saved seventy-seven lives. If you plunge into the river and the tide is too much for you I will save you. Armageddon is coming—with metal horses and tanks and a red sky.

I intend to stop it. God has a plan for me.

There are great forces of history moving. The winds of change. All the world needs is a likable man, a man to sit down with people like Mister—Gorbachev—and talk face to face. Gorbachev is a good man. They put me up in his son's room in Moscow and his son's goldfish died. I replaced it. You think history is conducted by great wheels set in motion. Well, it is. But it's also conducted by small acts of generosity. I replaced a little boy's goldfish and a wall came crumbling down.

Mister Gorbachev, tear down that wall! How's that sound?

It's the second election. No jobs. I came to little towns like this one, campaigning. They're putting on a play here—greatest story ever told. I wanted to tell the people: I will never lose faith in what this great country can do.

(A beam of light on President REAGAN. A close up shot)

REAGAN: I always liked the light from the camera. The wall of light gave me privacy, made me feel

comfortable. A light would go on and I would relax. All I saw was the light. (*He relaxes.*) You know what my first job was? A radio announcer for baseball games in Chicago. And you know what? I never even saw the ball games! They telegraphed the plays to me down in Davenport, Iowa. I would tell the story of the game, make it exciting, make people feel like they were there! That's what a leader does. You don't even need to be at the game.

one

(*The present day*
A clinical feeling
At the V A hospital. Washington, DC
P's left hand is limp at his side.)

VA 1: Why are you here?

P: I don't know why I'm here. I just want to get myself back to South Dakota.

VA 1: What day is it?

P: Today.

VA 1: Where do you live?

P: At home.

VA 1: Where's home?

P: All over.

VA 1: I spoke to your wife on the phone today.

P: Ex.

VA 1: Okay. Ex. She told me you wanted to kill the president. Is that true?

P: No. He's a good president. He gave me a raise. Three hundred dollars. Spent it on cigarettes.

VA 1: Okay. So you don't want to kill the president.

P: No.
 Just want to talk to him.

VA 1: Okay. When's the last time you talked to your ex-wife?

P: Probably talked to her today. This morning.

VA 1: She said she hasn't talked to you in a year.

P: She doesn't talk to me but I talk to her.

VA 1: What's wrong with your hand?

P: Doesn't work.

VA 1: Did you ever see any combat?

P: Yeah.

VA 1: Do you want to talk about it?

P: No.

VA 1: What war was it?

P: There was a lot of dust. The dust war.

VA 1: Can you be more specific?

P: Yeah.

I was in the Peloponnesian wars—went on *forever*—then the one with the Spanish Armada, big boats—big storm—

we massacred the Huegenots in response to the Protestant insurrection—

then there was the second war against the Persians, that was bloody,

those long curvy knives...

let's see...the battle of Britain, *vrtrr...*

(*Makes airplane noises and gestures with wings*)
 oh yeah, and Vietnam.

VA 1: Vietnam.

P: Yeah.

VA 1: Tell me about Vietnam.

P: I was a pilot. There was a boat. And a fishing village. And the wind. I'm in charge of all that.

VA 1: In charge of what?

P: I control the wind.

So I have to be very careful. There are three hundred ships waiting, off the coast, and I have to make sure they get in all right.

VA 1: How do you know that you control the wind?

P: The Lord told me so. (*He smiles.*) Just kidding.

VA 1: Does the Lord speak to you?

P: Only my lines.

VA 1: What do you mean?

P: From the play.

VA 1: What play?

P: You don't recognize me?

VA 1: No.

P: Pontius Pilate.

VA 1: You're Pontius Pilate.

P: No, I play the *role* of Pontius Pilate. Everyone knows who I am.

VA 1: Everyone?

P: Well, everyone in Spearfish, South Dakota.

two

ENSEMBLE: Spearfish, South Dakota.

Picture red earth

dead tribes

knick knacks, ghost towns

big signs for miles

telling you,

something's comin'—

the corn palace—

a real palace made entirely out of corn,

that's right, corn—

Ever been to the badlands?

You could go crazy

one stretch of rock looks

just like another stretch of rock

like a lunar punishment.

In French the badlands means something like

this land is not so good for living in

but not many people speak French out here anymore.

Keep going, keep driving—

You'll pass the Battle of Wounded Knee

wasn't really a battle, more like a massacre

it snowed a lot that day—the blood got covered up.

Drive past the Harley convention,

real hot, summer,

people riding with their beards

flapping in the wind.

Keep going, keep driving—

you're smack dab in the middle of this country—

the Black Hills all around—

then you'll hit exit twelve:

the Passion Play of South Dakota.

three

(A backstage tour, the present)

MARY 1: I grew up here in this town. Can you guess what part I played? The Virgin Mary. That's right. Here's a picture of my mother and father. My mother played the Virgin and my father played Christ. My father came here from Germany. He started the Passion Play in America—he didn't like how things were going in Germany. Questions?

(Questions from the backstage tour ensemble)

ENSEMBLE: Did they play their parts the whole time they were married?

MARY 1: Yes, they played Christ and the Virgin Mary the whole time.

ENSEMBLE: Was that weird?

MARY 1: No, it wasn't weird. It was just how it was.

ENSEMBLE: Do they still come to the play?

MARY 1: They've passed away now. Any other questions?

ENSEMBLE: Have you acted anywhere else?

MARY 1: No. I don't like the city. I like being in a place where you can see the horizon. I like to see what's coming at me. Even if it's bad.

four

(1969)

Backstage at the Passion Play after a performance. J, who plays JESUS, and P, who plays PONTIUS. They're brothers. They're taking off their costumes and their make-up and drinking cold sodas. It's hot out.)

J: So this was it, huh? The last one?

P: 'Till I come back.

J: That's what I meant.

P: I know. You'll look after Mary when I'm gone, won't you?

J: Course I will.

P: I wanted to give you something before I left. (He gets out a reel to reel.)

J: What is it?

Music?

P: No, I recorded the wind. On top of the mountain. I liked the sound.

J: You're always doing something funny.

P: I thought maybe you could use it, you know, to concentrate. Help you study.

J: Thanks. Really.

P: So, what are they teaching you—up there at the university?

J: Philosophy.

P: Who you at now?

J: Saint Augustine.

P: Aw, Saint Augustine. Good stuff. Gotten to the part where he goes to the hooker?

J: I'm behind.

P: Well, he goes to a hooker.

J: But he's a saint.

P: I know. But he repents. That's the whole thing—he repents.

J: I bet they have hookers overseas.

P: I'll be thinking about Mary.

J: I know. Just kidding. Look—thanks for the wind thing. I mean it.

I'll miss you.

P: Don't talk like that.

(A crowd enters, all dressed in Biblical costume.)

CROWD: Surprise!

For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny!

P: You didn't have to do this!

(MARY 1 enters in her MARY costume. She carries in a cake with candles.)

MARY 1: Make a wish.

P: It's not my birthday.

MARY 1: But your birthday'll be over there. We're celebrating early.

P: Okay.

(He blows the candles out.

P and MARY 1 kiss.)

P: Wanna know what I wished for?

MARY 1: It's against the rules!

P: Okay, I won't tell you. I'll show you. *(He gets down on his knees.)* Will you?

MARY 1: Did you plan this?

P: Got the ring right here! *(He takes the ring out of his Pontius uniform.)*

P: Will you marry me?

MARY 1: You know I will!

(He puts the ring on her finger. Cheering from the Biblical crowd. He picks her up.)

P: Take that thing off!

(She takes off her Virgin Mary veil.

Celebration, commotion

QUEEN ELIZABETH enters, slow, silent. She watches the proceedings.

The commotion continues.

PONTIUS notices QUEEN ELIZABETH. *No one else does. She nods to him. He nods back.)*

QUEEN ELIZABETH: My loving people.

I am resolved to live or die amongst you all, to lay down, for my God, and for my kingdom, my honor and my blood. For I am married to England! We shall shortly have a famous victory over the enemies of my God!

(P kneels at QUEEN ELIZABETH's feet. She places her hand on his head.)

QUEEN ELIZABETH ELIZABETH: Go forth into battle, and go with God!

(P turns back to the commotion slowly.)

EVERYONE: *(Sings)* For he's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny!

(QUEEN ELIZABETH slowly processes across the stage, waving to the crowd. She exits. No one notices.)

five

(A backstage tour, the present)

MARY 2: (To the audience) That was the day everyone remembered. The day Pontius Pilate proposed to the Virgin Mary. Here's a polaroid I snapped—see, Pontius Pilate is kneeling down...proposing to my sister back stage.

I play Mary Magdalen. I'm not much of an actor, not like my brother-in-law's brother—yeah, it's a small town. I do the play because I believe in the message. It's a message of love. Questions?

(Questions from the backstage tour ENSEMBLE)

ENSEMBLE: Do you have a day-job?

MARY 2: When I'm not in the play I work at the toll-booth out on highway sixteen. The night shift. It's not the most glamorous job in the world. But there's not a lot of jobs out here, not right now.

ENSEMBLE: Isn't that dangerous?

MARY 2: Oh, nah...I like to think of myself as a beacon of light on a dark night. Funny, huh? Sometimes I press a quarter into a stranger's hand in the middle of the night and think it's kind of like communion. Who knows if they get it. They just drive off, into the night.

six

(PONTIUS and MARY 1 say good-bye. PONTIUS in his army uniform.)

PONTIUS: When your alarm clock goes off in the morning, imagine it's me telling you I love you. Beep beep beep I love you.

MARY 1: Okay. Be good.

PONTIUS: You be good too.

MARY 1: I brought you this to keep in your pocket. (A small icon of the Virgin Mary)

PONTIUS: The Virgin Mary.

MARY 1: Yeah.

PONTIUS: So I can keep you in my pocket. (He kisses the Virgin Mary icon. He puts the icon in his pocket.)

MARY 1: Yeah. Me and her.

(They kiss. He leaves.

She waves good-bye until he is out of sight.)

seven

(MARY 1 and MARY 2, in bath-robés, helping each other put on make-up for the show.)

MARY 2: Hold still. You got a smudge.

MARY 1: Thanks.

MARY 2: He's gonna be fine.

MARY 1: I know.

MARY 2: So buck up.

MARY 1: I got a bad feeling.

MARY 2: You gotta put yourself in God's hands.

MARY 1: (*As in scary big*) He must have big hands.

MARY 2: He does.

MARY 1: I hate to sleep alone. My feet get cold.

MARY 2: Maybe you should get a dog.

MARY 1: I'm allergic.

MARY 2: Oh, yeah. I think allergies are so weird, don't you? Some people are allergic to their own skin. Why would God create allergies? I can't figure it out.

MARY 1: Maybe God didn't create allergies. Maybe they just happened.

(MARY 2 shrugs. *She makes a final touch in MARY 1's make-up.*)

MARY 2: God created everything. Even bad things. Right?

eight

(MARY 1 and J, at MARY 1 and P's house. MARY 1 in a bathrobe.)

MARY 1: Thanks for coming. I got scared. I called my sister but she's out at the tollbooth. The wind's so loud. Banging around—sounds like other things. I saw a snake today out back.

J: What kind?

MARY 1: I don't know.

J: Did it have a triangle head or a square head?

MARY 1: Didn't get that close to it.

J: I'm sure it was harmless.

MARY 1: Didn't look harmless.

J: You want me to just sit here while you sleep?

MARY 1: Okay. Only I can't sleep.

I made some hot chocolate. Want some?

J: Sure.

(MARY 1 goes off stage to grab the hot chocolate.)

MARY 1: (*From off*) How's school?

J: Pretty good.

I'm taking some acting classes, actually.

MARY 1: (*From off*) They have acting classes? At the university?

J: Yeah.

MARY 1: (*From off*) Why would you study acting out of books?

J: We get on our feet too. Today we imagined we were smelling lemons. It was amazing. I actually smelled a lemon and there was no lemon there to smell.

(MARY 1 returns with two mugs.)

MARY 1: Huh.

Well, I don't see why you'd study acting at a college. You already know how to act.

J: Kind of. What we do is community theater, Mary. We all have other jobs.

MARY 1: You want to have acting be your job?

J: Yeah.

MARY 1: New York?

J: Or Los Angeles.

MARY 1: On television?

J: Sure. What?

MARY 1: I just don't picture you on television. That's all.

J: Why not?

MARY 1: Because I know you. You're not supposed to know people on television.

J: Someone has to know them.

MARY 1: I guess.

J: You want some fancy cigarettes? Might help you sleep better.

MARY 1: I don't smoke that stuff.

J: You mind if I have a little?

MARY 1: No. You smoke that a lot?

J: Not very often. Just in the afternoon, mostly.

MARY 1: Hope you don't do it before the play.

J: I think Jesus would appreciate really good marijuana.

MARY 1: Oh, God.

J: He was a peaceful man.

MARY 1: Shut up.

(*He takes out a joint and begins smoking it. She drinks hot chocolate.*)

J: Any letters?

MARY 1: Every day.

J: What's he say?

MARY 1: Nothing about the war. Only these crazy made-up stories he likes to tell. You know the kind.

J: Read one.

MARY 1: I don't know if he'd want me to—

J: I'm his brother!

MARY: Well. Okay. (*She takes out a letter.*)

MARY 1: Dear Mary,

Oh, I—I'll skip over that part. Um—
Once upon a time there was an iron who fell in love with a wrinkle.

It was a tragedy. The end.

Once upon a time there was a lightbulb who fell in love with the darkness.

MARY 1:

It was a tragedy. The end. J: It was a tragedy. The end.

J: He's crazy, my brother.

MARY 1: Don't say that.

J: In a good way. (*He exhales.*)

MARY 1: Smells interesting.

J: Sure you don't want some? You're all wound up. You'll be up all night.

MARY 1: Maybe I'll try one little bit. Can't hurt. Don't tell your brother.

J: I won't.

(*She takes a drag.*)

J: Here—like this.

MARY 1: How would you know?

J: I've seen pictures.

(*He shows her how.*)

MARY 1: So.

J: So.

MARY 1: When I was in the backyard today I saw a snake.

J: Yeah, that's the reason I came over.

MARY 1: Oh, yeah. I forgot. How bout that. (*She laughs.*) The weird thing is that while I was looking at it, it was pretty, not scary at all. It was only *after* I saw it I was scared. What's scary about a snake is not the Bible stuff—I think it's that a snake doesn't have legs and arms and still it can kill you. I'm not afraid of bears because you can *wrestle* with a bear, you understand how it thinks, how it wants to hit you cause it's angry. But how can you understand something with no arms and no legs that wants to kill you—no holding each other, no struggle—just one bite and it's gone. Your whole life.

J: You're stoned.

MARY 1: No, I'm not. Must be the hot chocolate.

J: Right.

MARY 1: I was watching television today. The news.

J: Yeah?

MARY 1: People are so unpatriotic. I mean, what have these people ever done for anyone. Nothing. They don't know the meaning of sacrifice. They're stupid, so stupid, it makes me crazy.

J: I don't know.

MARY 1: What do you mean you don't know, your brother's out there.

J: I know.

MARY 1: If you weren't in college—

J: Believe me, I know.

MARY 1: It just makes me really mad. Sometimes I get so mad I don't know what to do.

J: You get mad at the country?

MARY 1: Yeah.

J: How can you get mad at a country? It's—like—a thing. You can't touch it. There's nothing there. How can you get mad at it.

MARY 1: Well, I get mad at the people then.

J: You want to punch them or something?

MARY 1: I guess I do.

J: Punch me instead.

MARY 1: I'm not mad at you.

J: But you have all this anger in you—it's all stored up. Punch me.

(*She punches him.*)

J: Harder.

MARY 1: I don't want to hurt you.

(*I takes a pillow and covers his belly.*)

J: Here—now try.

(*She punches him. She punches him.*)

J: Harder, harder. I'm one of those long-haired faggots who doesn't support the troops! Peace now! Freedom now!

(*She punches him harder.*)

J: Peace now! Freedom now!

(*She punches him harder and harder. She laughs.*)

MARY 1: I'm sweating. (*She collapses down into the couch.*)

J: You still mad?

MARY 1: I feel better.

J: Here, lie down, I'll truck you in.

MARY 1: Okay.

(J puts a blanket on MARY1.)

J: Don't you have that wind tape? Supposed to help you sleep?

MARY 1: I don't like the wind. It makes me afraid.

J: What are you afraid of, d'you think?

MARY 1: The wind makes me feel lonely.

J: I think I'm stoned.

MARY 1: Oh.

J: You're stoned too.

MARY 1: I'm not stoned, I'm loney. (Sic)

J: You're not loney, you're stoned.

MARY 1: I'm not loney, I'm stones.

J: That's right, you're stones, loney.

(They kiss.)

MARY 1: Wait. Who are you?

J: I'm just the guy who came over to stop the wind.

(They kiss some more.

The sound of a gun-shot)

nine

(P, in his uniform, drags a huge, bloody fish across the stage, holding a smoking gun. A smear of blood across the stage. He stops.)

P: (To the audience, in a great rush of words) The second time I died I was ah—what's the word—you're dead and then you live again—resurrected. And I'm lying, there and some Chinese guy what's his name Mao—Mao Zedong—is standing over me reading a manual—the Sears Roebuck manual—and he's reading it over me

to bring me back to life. And there are all these insects, you know. And I stand up and—the sky is red—shot through with red—and the insects are eating me all up, you know, to resurrect me, and then—

(A bright light—)

P: My head! (He collapses.

QUEEN ELIZABETH enters.)

QUEEN ELIZABETH: I cannot fathom why any subject would be willing to die for any leader other than a monarch. What man would die for a leader who was not rushing to the battle-field with him—their blood soaking into the dust together. On the battle-field the monarch and the nation's blood are one! (She touches P.) Are you wounded, soldier?

P: I—I—I killed a fish.

QUEEN ELIZABETH: May God keep you.

Carry him off the battle-field!

Now!

(Big beautiful fish puppets enter. They carry P off-stage. QUEEN ELIZABETH drags the dead fish off stage, with dignity.

ten

(MARY 2 in her toll booth, alone.

Night. Cars on the other side of the highway pass by, their headlights across her face.

She sings a song to herself. She sings to the tune of Away in a Manger.)

MARY 2: Away in a tollbooth

No room for his bed

No cars for an hour

To rest his sweet head—

I look for an angel—
I look for a—car
But no one comes by me
For hour upon hour.

(The tollbooth. Night)

MARY 2 *alone.*

MARY 1 *enters, scaring MARY 2.*

MARY 2: What are you doing here this time of night?

MARY 1: You busy?

MARY 2: Naw. No cars for an hour.

MARY 1: I had to talk to you.

MARY 2: Shoot.

MARY 1: If you thought you were—and you didn't want to be—what would you do? Would you get a—? What would you do?

MARY 2: But you're married. So it doesn't matter if you're—

MARY 1: I know, but just say I didn't want to be—

MARY 2: Mary, that's—

MARY 1: What?

MARY 2: A sin. It's worse than murder, and lying, and I don't know what else. Are you—?

MARY 1: I don't know.

MARY 2: Well, you're married. So—

MARY 1: I know.

But if I—would you forgive me—if I—?

(MARY 2 nods.)

MARY 2: You're my sister.

MARY 1: And you won't tell?

MARY 2: That I forgave you for something I don't know about?

MARY 1: Yeah.

MARY 2: No—I won't tell.

MARY 1: You ever drove so fast at night that you're driving faster than how much light is in front of you? And you're just a half-step in front of the light, and it's dark, and you can't see what's coming?

MARY 2: Nah.

MARY 1: I drove that fast here, tonight.

(The beams from a car approach.)

MARY 2: Car coming. Duck down.

(MARY 1 kneels down, making the toll-booth look almost like a confessional.)

A car approaches. We see neither the car nor the passenger, only light.)

MARY 2: Here's your change, sir. Have a good night.

(The car drives off.)

MARY 2: I hate when they don't say good-night. No one's got any manners these days.

eleven

(J and MARY 1 at rehearsal, the next day. J on the cross.)

MARY 1 *kneeling down by it.*

J: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!

MARY 1: Why, why is my son slain!

DIRECTOR: Stop. There needs to be more—um—anguish from both of you.

J: I just—I don't know if I can do this moment out of context. Without the arc of the whole play, you know, to get me there.

DIRECTOR: The arc of the play.

J: Yeah. I'm serious. You have to go through the whole play to get there.

DIRECTOR: We can't run the whole show right now.

J: I know.

DIRECTOR: Then what are you suggesting?

J: Sometimes Stanislavsky would, with his actors, he would have them read a scene and he would cover up each line as you went, with a piece of paper—so each line would be—totally—you know, fresh. And me—I've known these lines forever. And now I just can't feel it.

DIRECTOR: You can't feel it.

J: No. I can't feel it. And I'm sorry, but I don't feel like you're really giving me any direction.

DIRECTOR: This play isn't about acting. This play is about something else.

J: Well, I'm an actor. I'm not Jesus Christ. So I'm going to need some direction.

DIRECTOR: Is this what happens when you go to college? You turn into a prick.

J: I just want the play to be good.

DIRECTOR: Well. Me too.

J: So how do you want me to play this moment.

DIRECTOR: (*He turns to MARY 1.*) Can you speak his language?

MARY 1: (*To J.*) You want it to feel real, right?

J: Yeah.

MARY 1: Well, have you ever been betrayed?

J: No.

MARY 1: That's too bad. Do you know anyone who's been betrayed?

J: Yes.

MARY 1: Then why don't you use that.

DIRECTOR: Okay. That's fine. Use it. Let's go.

J: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*

No. It wasn't right. I wasn't feeling it.

DIRECTOR: It was better.

MARY 1: No! It wasn't better! You're still acting! My father—he never acted—he just told the story. There was no—effort. There was no—acting.

DIRECTOR: It's not really appropriate for one actor to give another actor notes. If any direction needs to be given, I will give it. Now, let's try that again.

J: I don't want to rehearse this moment, okay? I'll get it right, in performance, when it happens.

DIRECTOR: Fine. Let's move on. Mary, let's have your line.

MARY 1: (*No emotion*) Why? Why is my son slain?

DIRECTOR: Why don't you try rocking back and forth on that line. Hold your arms to your chest.

MARY 1: (*With no emotion, rocking back and forth*) Why? Why is my son slain?

DIRECTOR: (*To MARY 1*) What's wrong with you?

MARY 1: He's not even saying his lines!

DIRECTOR: If we can't get along in a theater when the world is falling apart then how can you expect anyone

to get along in this world? There's a war on. Why don't you do it again. And think about *that*.

MARY 1: I don't want to think about—

DIRECTOR: Take a breath—

MARY 1: But it's—

DIRECTOR: Then go.

(*They take a breath.*)

J: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*

MARY 1: Why, why is my son slain?

DIRECTOR: Again.

J: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*

MARY 1: Why, why is my son slain?

DIRECTOR: Again.

J: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*

MARY 1: Why, why is my son slain? (*She weeps.*)

DIRECTOR: Again.

J: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!*

MARY 1: Why, why is my son slain?

DIRECTOR: Okay.

(*To J*) You can get down now.

(*J gets off the cross.*)

DIRECTOR: Can you repeat that in front of an audience?

J: Yeah.

(*MARY 1 nods.*)

DIRECTOR: Good. It's going to be a long day. Take five minutes. I have to talk to the lighting designer. We have to tech the ascension. (*He exits.*)

J: Look, I'm sorry, okay. That never happened.

MARY 1: What never happened?

J: The other night.

MARY 1: Don't talk to me.

DIRECTOR: (*From off-stage*) Lights up! Get on the platform!

(*J gets on the ascension platform.*)

DIRECTOR: Everyone in the tableau!

(*The ensemble enters to make the ascension tableau.*)

DIRECTOR: Can we hear the music?

(*Music swells. A reprise of the heavenly choir music from PART 1.*)

DIRECTOR: Now, slowly move your arms up towards Jesus! In time to the music! Look up at Him! That's right! Now everyone freeze! And—black-out.

(*Black-out*)

twelve

(1973

J and MARY 1 and a child—VIOLET—sitting on a couch watching television. The child watches television, very still.)

PRESIDENT NIXON: (*From the T V*) Good evening. I have asked for this radio and television time tonight for the purpose of announcing that we today have concluded an agreement to end the war and bring peace with honor in Vietnam.

(*J and MARY 1 embrace, not with passion, as sister and brother.*)

MARY 1: He's coming home.

NIXON: There will be the fullest possible accounting for all of those who are missing in action.

VIOLET: What is missing in action.

MARY 1: Nothing, honey.
Can you believe it? My God.
He's coming home.

J: I'll get out of town. Just for a while. Let him get settled. The two of you need some time, you know, to catch up. You don't need any third parties around.

MARY 1: Don't leave.

VIOLET: What is a third party? There is no party.

MARY 1: We'll have a great big party for Daddy.

J: A third party is someone who shouldn't be invited to the party, honey.

MARY 1: You're not a third party, for God's sake.

VIOLET: You're not a party. You're an uncle.

NIXON: The people of South Vietnam have been guaranteed the right to determine their own future, without outside interference.

VIOLET: What is interference?

J: It's when a third party gets mixed up in other people's business.

NIXON: A cease-fire, internationally supervised, will begin at 7 P M, Washington time.

MARY 1: Oh, my God, he's coming home!
Do I look the same?
I have wrinkles—don't I? *(She touches her face and her neck, feeling for wrinkles.)*

J: You look beautiful.

MARY 1: Really?

J: Yeah.

thirteen

(MARY and P and VIOLET. P, in uniform.)

P: *(To VIOLET)* The pictures of you were pretty. But not half so pretty as you.

VIOLET: I drew you a picture of a bird.

P: It's right here. *(He takes it out of his pocket. He shows it to her.)*

VIOLET: I drew that a year ago.
I could draw a better bird now.

MARY 1: Why don't you go to your room and draw Daddy another bird?

VIOLET: Now?

MARY 1: Yeah.

*(VIOLET exits.
A silence
P and MARY 1 face each other.)*

P: Can't believe it's you.
Let me just—
(He traces her cheek.)
Is it you?

MARY 1: It's me, honey.

P: You've been good, right?

MARY 1: Course I've been good.
(She traces his cheek. He winces.)

P: Oh—

MARY 1: What did I—?

P: Don't touch me yet, okay.

MARY 1: Okay. Why don't you touch me?

(*He touches her hands.*)

P: (*To the audience*) She is a deer wrapped in brown velvet.

She is the air breathing inside the body of a violin.

MARY 1: What?

P: Nothing.

(*She kisses his hands. He pulls away.*)

P: I'm sorry.

I'm being—

I'm not being myself, am I?

How do I usually act?

MARY 1: Honey.

P: You know that funny phrase—what is it—remember me to your mother. I need you to remember me—to myself. Can you do that?

MARY 1: I think so. Here we go. I'm remembering you to yourself. (*She kisses him on the forehead.*) Do you remember?

P: Think so.

MARY 1: Why don't we go to bed, hon.

P: You know—I think I might just sleep outside tonight.

MARY 1: What?

P: So I can hear.

MARY 1: Hear what?

P: If anyone's coming.

MARY 1: No one's coming.

P: Not right now. But when we're sleeping. When you sleep outside you can hear the leaves if anyone's coming. I want to protect you. And Violet.

MARY 1: I know, honey. But it's safe here. It's South Dakota. Remember?

P: God, I missed you.

I'm going to see you tomorrow morning and the next morning and the next. And the next and the next and the next and the next. What's tomorrow?

MARY 1: Monday.

P: And what are we doing on Monday? Doesn't that sound good? So normal! People say-what is it—he's perfectly normal. Now I get it. Because normal is perfect, perfectly normal. What are we doing on Monday? Doesn't it sound wonderful!

(*He spins her around.*)

MARY 1: Yeah, it sounds good.

P: So what are we doing on Monday?

MARY 1: Going to the theater. A big party. Everyone's excited to see you. To have you back in the play.

P: Oh, the play.

I don't want to be in the play anymore.

MARY 1: What?

P: I don't believe in God anymore.

I didn't want to tell you that in a letter. I'm sorry.

MARY 1: Lots of people don't believe in God these days. It's okay.

P: Not in this town.

In this town, people should believe in God.

Or they're fucking hypocrites!

MARY 1: (*Overlapping*)

P:

You're not a hypocrite, are you, Mary?

MARY 1: No, no—

P: You still believe in God?

MARY 1: Yeah, of course I believe in God.

P: Tell me you're the same, Mary...

MARY 1: I'm the same...I'm the same....

(He kisses her.)

MARY 1: You've got to be in the play, honey.

P: Why?

MARY 1: Because—the whole town wants you back in the play.

P: What do they care?

MARY 1: You know what? I want you back in the play.

P: You do?

MARY 1: Yeah. I miss seeing you in your cute little Pontius Pilate uniform. A woman likes a man in uniform.

(She touches him. He winces.)

P: If you want me to be in the play, I'll be in the play.

(VIOLET enters.)

VIOLET: Here's another bird, Daddy.

P: That's the best bird I ever saw. It's so good I bet it even flies.

(He flies the bird picture around the room. He picks up VIOLET and flies her around the room.)

VIOLET: *(Laughing)* Put me down!

(P flies crazier.)

VIOLET: Put me down! I'm scared!

MARY 1: You're scaring her, honey.

(P puts her down.)

P: I didn't scare you, honey, did I? We're just playing bird.

VIOLET: I know.

MARY 1: Why don't we all go to sleep. It's been a long day.

P: I'll sleep right here, just outside the door. You two call me if you need anything.

VIOLET: Why is Daddy sleeping outside?

MARY 1: To keep us safe.

VIOLET: From what?

P: From bad people.

VIOLET: Are there bad people tonight?

P: There are always bad people.

(MARY 1 gives P a blanket.)

P: Goodnight.

Sleep with the angels, Violet.

VIOLET: What's that mean?

P: It means: sweet dreams.

(MARY 1 and VIOLET exit.)

PONTIUS curls up in his blanket. He looks at the sky. He sits up.)

PONTIUS: *(To the audience)* They're coming through the fog to the shore, the tall ships, and I'm making sure they get here safe...real safe...I feel a gale of wind coming from the north but I counter it with a gale from the south...I pour wind into their sails, and the sky is red, blood red, and it's important they get here by morning....

(The CHORUS enters with wind machines, and surprising fans. The CHORUS brings in miniature Elizabethan ships that can blow in the wind.)

PONTIUS watches them.

VIOLET enters in her pajamas. She sees the ships.)

VIOLET: Watcha doing?

PONTIUS: Just watching the boats, honey.

VIOLET: They're beautiful.

PONTIUS: Daddy's making sure the wind blows just right, so the boats come in real safe to shore. See—when I was in the war, I was the pilot of a ship.

VIOLET: When I was in the war, I was not a pilot.

(The boats and wind machines gradually disappear.)

PONTIUS: What do you mean, honey? What war?

VIOLET: The war before.

PONTIUS: Before what?

VIOLET: There is always a war before, and a war after.

PONTIUS: Before this war you were safe, safe in your mother's stomach.

VIOLET: Nope. There was a war before. I died.

PONTIUS: You shouldn't be thinking about wars. You're a little girl, huh? Get those wars out of your head.

VIOLET: You get the wars out of *your* head.

PONTIUS: Maybe you can pluck the wars out of my head.

VIOLET: With what.

PONTIUS: With your fingers.

(VIOLET reaches towards P's head and pretends to pluck the war out.)

VIOLET: There. Now you.

(P reaches towards VIOLET's head and pretends to pluck a war out.)

P: There they are, two wars side by side.

VIOLET: Now we smush them.

P: With what?

VIOLET: Our feet.

(They hold hands and they step on the imaginary wars.)

P: Are they gone?

VIOLET: Almost.

Jump on it.

(They jump. Blackout)

fourteen

(J and P. In the dressing room, getting ready for rehearsal, putting on costumes.)

J: You look good.

P: You look good too. You need a hair-cut.

J: It's for the play.

P: Oh, yeah. What ever happened to wigs?

J: I wanted it to look real.

P: Well, it looks like—real hair. So.

J: So.

P: How's school?

J: I'm sort of finished. There are a couple of courses that I—you know—I didn't quite get past them.

P: How many?

J: A couple. I'm sort of quitting, you know. To act. Professionally.

P: You should finish school first. Don't fuck up your life. Wait—what am I doing ordering you around? I just got home!

J: Welcome home!

(*They embrace.*)

P: Listen, thanks for taking care of Mary and Violet while I was gone.

J: I didn't do much.

P: No, I know you did a lot.

J: Really, I didn't.

P: You're not gonna let me thank you?

J: I did what anyone would have done.

P: Well, I don't know anyone named anyone. When I find him I'll write him a thank you letter, and I'll address it to anywhere.

J: You haven't changed one bit. You're still nuts.

(*A quick moment of silent anger
Then P relaxes.*)

P: That a compliment?

J: Yeah.

P: I hear you been acting all over the place—summer stock yards, what do they call it?

J: Summer stock.

P: Good parts?

J: Pretty good. People think it's kind of funny, me playing Christ. They get a kick out of it, actually.

P: So it's—kind of like a gimmick?

J: I didn't say that.

P: Well what is it then?

J: It's just a—nothing. Look—there have been some changes, you know, in the play, since you've been gone. Mary write to you about it?

P: She wrote me about other things.

J: Well, there's a new director. A young guy. And it's more professional. There are more Equity actors.

P: Equity?

J: It's a guild. And a real stage manager—not Hank from the garage. There's a new sound system. It sounds pretty good, actually.

P: Actually. Since when do you say actually all the time—it makes it sound like you think everyone else is a moron.

Sorry.

J: It's okay. Really, it's okay.

P: Wonder if I still know my lines.

J: My kingdom is not of this world.

P: Thou art a king then.

J: You still got it.

fifteen:
A rehearsal

(P and J in costume. MARY 1 and MARY 2 in costume. VIOLET is dressed as a shepherdess.)

PONTIUS: I cannot condemn him. What has this man done?

ENSEMBLE: Crucify him! Crucify him!

PONTIUS: I will do as you say. But look—I wash my hands! (*He washes his hands. He sees blood everywhere.*) Oh, there's so much blood...

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Hold on. What's the matter?

PONTIUS: Is this fake blood or real blood?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: It's water.

J: You okay?

PONTIUS: It looks like blood.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Maybe the water's rusty. Can we go on?

PONTIUS: I, Pontius Pilate, at the desire of the whole Jewish people—condemn this man to death. Now, take him and crucify him.

(HITLER appears. PONTIUS sees him. *No one else does.*)

HITLER: Do you know who I am?

PONTIUS: (*To HITLER*) You'd better get out of here.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Who are you talking to?

PONTIUS: No one.

What was I doing—washing the blood? But Christ was

killed on a cross. My hands aren't bloody. It doesn't make sense.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: It's just a gesture. To show that you're innocent.

PONTIUS: Are you being condescending to me?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: No.

PONTIUS: Okay. That's good. Because if you were—

YOUNG DIRECTOR: What?

PONTIUS: Nothing.

MARY 1: Calm down.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Can we move on now?

PONTIUS: Yes, let's move on. Move on, move on, that's all. Who cares about anything as long as we move on.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Are you all right?

PONTIUS: Yes, I'm fine.

Excuse me.

(*To HITLER*) Get out.

(HITLER stands there.)

PONTIUS: Fine.

I, Pontius Pilate, at the desire of the whole Jewish people, condemn—Wait. The Jews are saying: kill Jesus! But they're religious men, right? And I'm a bad guy. How come they want to kill him and I'm this bad guy being all heroic—like—no, no, I can't kill him?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: The Jews want to kill Jesus because He's too powerful.

That's how it's written in the Bible.

Isn't it?

MARY 2: Kind of.

MARY 1: We're just telling the story, honey, the story from the Bible.

PONTIUS: Just telling the story, bullshit! Why do we keep telling it and telling it? Either the Jews killed Jesus and that was bad or else they're innocent! You can't kill someone half-way! If a guy is in the mud half-dead you shoot him to make him fully dead because that, THAT, is an act of compassion. But you wouldn't know that, would you?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: No. Look, we've had the anti-defamation league here, haven't we?

CARPENTER 2: (*To the YOUNG DIRECTOR*) Oh, yeah they came, about six years ago, and gave us some feed-back. Used to be we had horns on the costumes of the high priests but we took them off a long time ago—um—six years ago. So the anti-defamation league—now they really—um—like our play.

P: I don't care about a *league*, I'm talking about a man, a real man—and who is taking the blame for what you might call the biggest murder in the last two thousand years.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: It's only a play.

MARY 2: (*To the DIRECTOR*) It's not just a play! It's the word of God!

PONTIUS: It's a story. It's a play. It's the word of God. Bullshit. It's a sacrifice. One person dies for many people. But the many don't know the one. Like going to war. You feel the pain in one country but not in another country. That's why there are so many fucking oceans! So we can't feel all the pain.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: I'm sorry. I really am.

PONTIUS: (*Overlap*)
I don't want your pity.
I want to know what's going on in this fucking scene!

PONTIUS: (*To HITLER*) GO AWAY!

(*HITLER walks off-stage.*)

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Are you all right?

PONTIUS: Yeah, yeah, I'm all right.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Okay. Let's just take it from there. Okay? From, I, Pontius Pilate, condemn this man to death.

PONTIUS: Okay. But I want to change it. Because you know what? Jesus got the death penalty. I'm gonna say: I, Pontius Pilate, an agent of the State, condemn this man to death. Not the Jews, not history. I will take responsibility. Now take him and crucify him.

MARY 2: That's not what the Bible says.

PONTIUS: The Bible says lots of things.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Do you want to go outside?

PONTIUS: I don't want to hit you.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Then don't hit me.

(*A silent moment between P and the YOUNG DIRECTOR*)

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Let's take it from your line.

PONTIUS: I, Pontius Pilate, an agent of the state, condemn this man to death. I will take responsibility. Now take him and crucify him.

ENSEMBLE: Oh, happy day for the people of Israel! Long live our Governor, Pontius Pilate!

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Thank you. Now exit stage left. Double-time, soldier.

(*P moves to exit. He passes by the YOUNG DIRECTOR. P clocks the YOUNG DIRECTOR. A brief tableau*)

sixteen

(*Mary 1 and the YOUNG DIRECTOR, with an ice pack on his cheek.*)

YOUNG DIRECTOR: I'm going to have to fire your husband.

MARY 1: Look—give him another chance. He just got home. He's not himself.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: I'm trying to put on a *professional* production—

MARY 1: of the Gospel. You know how it'd look—in this town—if you fired a soldier?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: How?

MARY 1: Bad. Specially you having been in Canada.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: I'll give him one more chance. One.

MARY 1: His understudy's out in Oklahoma anyway.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: He's in *Oklahoma!*, he's not in Oklahoma.

MARY 1: What?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Forget it.

seventeen

(*MARY 2 praying at the toll booth.*)

MARY 2: Dear God.

Please help the men coming back from the war.
Please help them to forget the violence they have
seen and to remember the patient goodness in your
heart that is waiting for them.

Dear God.

Please help me to play Mary Magdalen. I know she was Jesus' favorite disciple. Let me not be proud or vain of that favoritism. Let me walk in His shining light as I speak the word of God on His holy stage.
Dear God.

Please forgive my sister. I don't know what she did but I'm starting to think it was bad—the more Violet grows up the more she looks like her uncle. Mary Magdalen was a whore and she was your favorite, Lord.
Amen.

eighteen

(*VIOLET making paper boats.*)

MARY 1 *snapping green beans.*

I walks in.

MARY 1 *thinks she sees his ghost. She drops all the green beans. She picks them up.*)

MARY 1: You startled me.

J: Sorry.

Thought I'd come for a visit. See how he's doing.

MARY 1: He's not here. He's—up in the hills.

J: Must be—good to have him home.

MARY 1: Yeah.

J: Hi, Violet.

VIOLET: Hi.

J: Wathca doing?

VIOLET: Making boats.

Daddy's going to use them later.

MARY 1: For what?

VIOLET: Daddy can make the wind blow.

J: What?

MARY 1: It's just one of his stories.

VIOLET: It's not a story. Daddy says he's in charge of the wind.

J: You sure they're stories?

MARY 1: (To J) What else?

J: Mary. How are you—for real?

(J goes to MARY 1, away from VIOLET.)

MARY 1: Violet, go outside and play.

VIOLET: No.

MARY 1: I said go outside and play.

VIOLET: And I said no.

MARY 1: Then you can't play with your boats.

VIOLET: Fine. I don't want to play with them.

MARY 1: What are you going to do then?

VIOLET: Watch you.

MARY 1: What did you say, young lady?

VIOLET: You heard what I said.

I'm going to watch you.

You and him.

Starting now.

One, two, three, four,
still watching.

(She watches them.)

nineteen

(The sky is red.

PONTIUS, alone, assembling jars full of wind. He stacks them.)

PONTIUS: Red sky, at night, sailor's delight.
Red sky at morning, sailors take warning.

(He takes a jar, traps some air, screws the lid on.
MARY 1 appears. He gives her the jar.)

PONTIUS: Here, for you.

MARY 1: What is it?

PONTIUS: The night air.

MARY 1: What's it for?

PONTIUS: It's like—night perfume.

(He takes some night air from the jar and puts it on her wrist.
He kisses her wrist.)

MARY 1: Thanks.

Now what's this about you controlling the wind?

PONTIUS: Why?

MARY 1: Violet told me. Some kind of story before bed?

PONTIUS: Yeah.
Look how red the sky is.

MARY 1: It's probably just the—nuclear reactor—
next town over.

PONTIUS: Maybe.
Or something bigger.

(They look at the horizon, holding hands.)

P: Mary?

MARY 1: What is it?

P: I killed someone.

MARY 1: What?

P: You ready for this?

MARY 1: Yeah.

P: We—we were on a fast boat. There was this wind. This enormous, unbelievable wind. The kind of wind that makes you want to give the wind a name, like how they name hurricanes, and monsoons. I was steering—and you never knew what was around the next bend—and—I had a bad feeling—and all of a sudden—there was this noise—and then I couldn't hear anything—I saw red mixed in with the water—and everyone was down—everyone but me—and this one guy—one of my guys—he was struggling like a fish on deck—sort of flipping over and over like a fish—and gasping—so I shot him. There's no reason for me to be alive, Mary—except maybe this. *(He pulls the Virgin Mary icon out from his pocket.)*

MARY 1: It wasn't your fault.

PONTIUS: Right. Sure. Must have been the wind.

twenty

(A rehearsal. The whole company. VIOLET is dressed as a shepherdess. The acting style is broad, gestural.)

P: Art thou the King of the Jews?

J: Thou sayest so.

P: Hearst thou not how many accusations they hurl at thee? Why art thou silent?

J: My kingdom is not of this world. Wait, can we stop?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: Okay.

J: I was thinking about this scene. And I thought it would be better if we toned it down. Just—real. Two men talking.

YOUNG DIRECTOR: In an amphitheater for six thousand people.

J: Could you mike us?

YOUNG DIRECTOR: We can hardly see your faces. Look—we need the physical *gesture*.

J: Well, I don't want to do it this way, this grand gesture stuff. It's fake. I want to do it for real.

PONTIUS: For real.

J: Yeah, for real.

PONTIUS: What do you mean real? It's not real.

J: I want people to feel the *humanity* of it.

PONTIUS: Are you saying how I'm acting isn't human enough?

J: I'm not saying anything about your acting.

PONTIUS: Sure you are. You're saying I'm not real enough.

J: I'm not—

PONTIUS: You don't need to pussy foot around me, for fuck's sake, just say you don't like the way I'm doing the scene.

(A moment of danger)

J: Yeah, I don't like the way you're doing the scene. Actually.

PONTIUS: What the fuck do you know about real? You want real?

J: Yeah.

PONTIUS: You want real?

J: Yeah.

(PONTIUS finds a nail on stage, and a hammer, by the cross.)

PONTIUS: This nail is real.

J: Stop it.

PONTIUS: This wood is real.

MARY 1: Calm down honey.

PONTIUS: And my hand is real.

You want to know about real sacrifice?

It's in the body.

(PONTIUS puts his left hand on the cross, palm up. He holds

a nail with his left fingers and points it towards his palm.

With his right hand, he hammers the nail into the palm of

his hand.

The world goes into slow motion.

The women scream.

MARY 1 turns VIOLET's head away.

PONTIUS doesn't scream.

Blackout)

twenty-one

(1984

A clinical feeling

P and a psychiatrist at the V A. Washington DC.

PONTIUS' left hand is limp, crushed, at his side.)

V A 2: What year is it?

P: October.

V A 2: What year is it?

P: November.

V A 2: It's 1984.

P: Oh.

V A 2: Who's president?

P: The actor.

V A 2: That's right. Ronald Reagan. Good.

How'd you get here?

P: Greyhound.

V A 2: From where?

P: All over. I've been taking in the sights—the amputees pissing into bottles, the heads of presidents carved into mountains—look, I just talked to a doctor. Why am I still talking to a doctor.

V A 2: Why don't you tell me what happened to your hand.

P: Some asshole did that. I'd be embarrassed to know him.

V A 2: I see in your records that you had a suicide attempt in 1974, that you were hospitalized for a month in a South Dakota V A.

P: It wasn't a suicide attempt.

V A 2: No?

P: No. I crucified Pontius Pilate. Everyone's always crucifying Jesus. Why not crucify the bad guy for once. You know?

V A 2: You're the bad guy?

P: No, I played the role of a bad guy.

V A 2: It says in your records that you were given medicines for delusions. Are you still on medication?

P: Ran out.

V A 2: And are you still having these delusions about Pontius Pilate?

P: They're not delusions. It's a metaphor.

V A 2: A metaphor. Okay. It says in your records that you've been in ten different cities at ten different V A's over the past ten years. You seem to travel a lot. Why'd you leave home?

P: I like to sleep outside.

V A 2: Why'd you come to Washington?

P: I need to talk to the President.

V A 2: About what?

P: It's personal.

twenty-two

(1984. Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Dedication ceremony

Members of the ensemble, dressed as soldiers, guarding the tomb)

REAGAN: The Unknown Soldier who is returned to us today and whom we lay to rest is symbolic of all our missing sons. He saw the horrors of war but bravely faced them, certain his own cause and his country's cause was a noble one; that he was fighting for human dignity.

Let us, if we must, debate the lessons learned at some other time. Today, we simply say with pride, "Thank you, dear son. May God cradle you in His loving arms."

(*He places a wreath on the grave.*

P approaches REAGAN. They look at the grave together.)

REAGAN: What is it, son.

P: I want to trade places.

I don't want to be—a known soldier.
I want to be the unknown soldier.

REAGAN: All right, son. Lie down.

(*P lies down on the grave of the unknown soldier.*)

REAGAN: How's it feel?

P: It's cold.

(*REAGAN drapes his jacket over P.*)

P: What comes after the cold war?

REAGAN: After the cold war there will be no more wars.

P: No. After the cold war will come the hot war. Then the room temperature war. No end. Just—different kinds of thermometers.

REAGAN: No, son. We will build our weapons up in order to lay them down. As I walk into the sunset of my life, I know there will be eternal dawn for America.

P: No, Mister President. You just say the word and I'll set the wind in motion.

(*He takes a folded paper out of his back pocket. When it unfolds it is a surprisingly large blue-print reminiscent of Da Vinci's inventions.*)

I'm making a machine—out of wind. If there is a war to end all wars, the machine will push the bad air with a great wind out of the atmosphere—undetectable.

It's the greatest war machine ever. No one dies. Because it's all—wind.

(*REAGAN examines the blueprints.*)

REAGAN: Very good.

When the time is right I'll say the word.

P: Then I'll wait for your communication, Mister President.

(P gets up. P salutes REAGAN. REAGAN salutes P.)

P: You're good at that.

REAGAN: I made training films for soldiers. I learned to salute. It was one of the happiest times in my life.

(REAGAN salutes P. P salutes REAGAN. REAGAN pulls P into a fatherly embrace.)

REAGAN: Son. It's time for you to go home.

twenty-three

(1984

P pressed up against MARY 1, kissing her.)

P: (Almost incomprehensible) MARY 1:

Kiss me harder, into my heart... Don't, don't!

(He kisses her.)

MARY: I'm your ex-wife, goddamit, wake up—

P: You can't be ex—no exes there... no exes in your eyes, your hair...

P: MARY:

only O's, your mouth an O, You've been drinking. your eyes, two O's—

MARY: I just need somewhere to sleep, honey. I need a shower—

MARY 1: My God! You can't just pop in every couple of years and take a shower here! How do you think that is for Violet? You gotta find another place. You could go to the church—

P: I don't need a church. I need soap. And a razor.

MARY 1: What for?

P: I'm going to rehearsal.

P: (Overlapping)

Gotta get cleaned up.

MARY 1:

You're not—

MARY 1: Pontius Pilate didn't have a beard. He was a Roman. He was clean-shaven.

MARY 1: (Overlapping) P:

There's no rehearsal honey—I'm going to talk to the there's no Pontius Pilate—director—get my part back—You can't stay here.

Where the hell have you been?

I killed people—for you—for that man—and no one wants to give me a fucking bar of soap!

MARY 1: What man?

P: The President, who else.

MARY 1: Oh, right. It's the President's fault you're drunk.

P: Yeah. It is.

MARY: There's another President in the White House now, honey.

P: Doesn't matter which one. They're all the same. A likeable man becomes a tyrant just like any other man. In a democracy—likability is tantamount to tyranny!

MARY 1: Tantamount?

P: Tantamount.

MARY: You're drunk.

P: No—I'm not drunk! In a democracy, it is a likeable man who gets elected. It is a likeable man who sends you to your death. What's the difference.

MARY 1: There's a difference between a—a—likeable man and an evil man.

P: I can tell you, you don't *feel* the difference, when you're up to your ankles in blood, and your friend, his brains are suddenly on your shirt, and they send him back in a body bag, and no one says anything about it, they just say "ZIP!" And they zip up the body bag and send him home. I wanted to come back all zipped up so I wouldn't have to feel anything—because if I had a whole—fucking—Olympic swimming pool of feelings—it wouldn't be enough to feel the things I should of felt there. Because—when your friend—his brains are on your shirt, there's no difference between a nice guy who sent you out to kill and an evil guy who sent you out to kill—one of them is *photogenic*—the other one isn't—they both take you and they go ZIP.

MARY 1: I'm sorry for the bad things that have happened to you.

P: I don't want your pity.

MARY 1: Then what do you want?

P: A shower.

MARY 1: One night.

P: I won't touch you, honey.

MARY: Don't call me honey!

P: Because when I call you honey you remember another time. Feels bad, doesn't it. You can feel the *memory* of softness here (*Points to his head*) and you feel the hardness here (*Points to his heart*) and the difference between the two, is terrible.

MARY 1: Who left who? Huh?

You want to stay or don't you?

P: Yes, please.

And could I please borrow a toothbrush?

(*She leaves the room. She throws a pillow and blanket into the room. She throws a toothbrush into the room. She throws*

toothpaste into the room. She shuts her door.

VIOLET enters.)

P: What are you doing here, button?

VIOLET: I crawled out the back to see you.

You got my pictures in the mail?

P: Yeah. You're getting real good with the bird pictures.

VIOLET: I've been learning about the architecture of feathers. The way they're put together—layer upon layer. From the time of dinosaurs and angels. There is no homologue for feathers, that is to say there is no biological structure that resembles feathers. They came of themselves to the world because the birds needed them. But no one really knows what came first, the bird, or the feather, or flight.

P: What grade are you in now?

VIOLET: Sixth.

P: There must be a God.

VIOLET: Why are you home?

P: I want my part back.

VIOLET: Someone else has it now.

P: I know.

VIOLET: Then why'd you come?

P: I missed you.

VIOLET: Then why'd you leave?

P: I had to.

VIOLET: I know.

P: Then why'd you ask?

VIOLET: Can I see your hand?

(P holds out his hand to her. She plays with it. Drops it up and down, limp. She kisses her own hand and puts the kiss on his dead hand.)

J enters.)

P: What are you doing here?

J: What are you doing here?

P: I'm on a visit.

J: I'm on a visit too.

P: Kind of late in the evening for a visit.

J: Yeah. Violet, you should be in bed.

VIOLET: Don't tell me what to do.

(A stand-off between VIOLET and J.)

P: (To J, an observation) You know, Violet looks more and more like you every day. Something about her upper lip, when she gets mad.

VIOLET: I don't think I look like him. I hate him.

P: Thought you were in New York, L A, something like that.

J: I was.

P: So what are you doing here.

J: They wanted me back for a benefit performance of the Play. The President's here, campaigning. He's going to watch it.

P: Really. You're doing the play for the President of the United States.

J: Yeah.

P: Pretty fancy.

J: Yeah.

P: I've been wanting to talk to the President. Guess I came home on the right day.

So where you sleeping? They put you up at a hotel?

J: Yeah. But I'm sick of hotels. Thought I'd see if the couch was available.

P: I reserved the couch. Mary went to bed.

You want me to wake her up so you can say hello?

J: No.

I'm gonna head back to the hotel.

P: No. Stick around. Tell me about your life.

You married? Have kids?

J: No.

P: Why not?

J: Never found anyone who stuck.

P: Bet you have a lot of dates though. Famous actor, good-looking...

J: Not really.

P: You like the work?

J: I don't always get great parts, you know—when you grow up here, playing the role of Christ-

P: It's hard to top.

J: Yeah. Look, where the hell have you been, you could have called, told someone where the hell you landed.

P: No one wants to read letters from me.

I'm crazy, didn't they tell you?

J: You could have called.

P: Well, I've been busy.

J: Doing what?

P: You wouldn't understand.

J: Try me.

P: You ever heard of solar sails? They're these huge sails—the size of a football field—up in space—they borrow photons from the sun to move faster than a rocket. No, I'm serious. You can read all about it in Scientific American. My wind machine uses similar physics—if there is a nuclear war, the wind machine will push the bad air into the atmosphere—poof.

VIOLET: Good idea. If you measure the circumference of a hurricane and times it by the square root of the wind, you can approximate the distance to a place where people don't kill each other. Did you know that human beings are the only species besides orca whales who kill each other for fun? Did you know that, Dad?

J: No.

P: (To J) What?

J: I—I didn't know that about orca whales.

MARY 1: (*Calling from her bedroom*) Hello? Who's out there?

P: It's only the wind. Go back to sleep.

(*A silent face-off between J and P.*)

P: (To J) Good-night.

VIOLET: (To J) Good-night.

(*J turns and goes.*)

J: Good-night.

twenty-four

(*At the theater*)

The tail end of the Star Spangled Banner

REAGAN gets up, waves.

Cheering from the crowd, perhaps: "Ronnie, Ronnie!"

REAGAN settles the crowd. He gives a public speech.)

REAGAN: Prayer has sustained our people in crisis, strengthened us in times of challenge, and guided us through our daily lives since the first settlers came to this continent. Our forbearers came not for gold, but mainly in search of God and the freedom to worship in their own way. In my second term, I intend to strengthen the American way. Some folks, a course, just aren't really suited for the American way—homosexuals, single mothers, homeless people—who are homeless, you might say, by choice. (*He smiles, cheerful.*) I signed a bill—I forget what it was—there was mist all over the ranch—covered everything. I was the first president to sign a bill in blue jeans.

(*He waves. People cheer.*)

A private speech. A close up shot.

REAGAN: I was once an actor, you know. I've never lost that child-like excitement when the curtain goes up. Some people say I wear a little rouge on my cheeks. It's not true. When I am laid to rest my cheeks will be rosy still.

People are afraid of actors. They're afraid we're good at lying. I'll let you in on a little secret. We're really just extra good at telling the truth.

I'm very moved to be here, and to see this American depiction of the greatest story ever told. (*He winks. A bell rings. The play begins. The play has become much more naturalistic. Very professional.*)

MARY 1: My son! I must see you before you go away.

J: Mother, I am on my way to Jerusalem. The hour has come when I must offer myself. I am ready to do what the Father asks of me.

MARY 1: Oh, my fears are terrible—

MARY 2: Mother of mothers, we weep for you!

J: My hour has come.

MARY 1: I will go with you, even to death! *(She is acting better than she ever has in her life.)*

J: Be comforted. I will rise again.

MARY 1: Ah, God, give me strength that my heart does not break!

(REAGAN watches. He wipes tears from his eyes.)

MARY 1 and J embrace, full of love.
P watches.)

P: Mary! MARY!

(MARY 1 and J turn to face P for a moment.

*The scene suspends.
Time stops.)*

P: *(To the audience)* Ever get the feeling that you want to run on stage?

You want to move,
but you can't,
your legs like iron girders,
your chest bearing down?

REAGAN: *(To the audience)* I began to think of baseball.
Making it feel real for the crowds.

On the radio.

PONTIUS: *(To the audience)* This big stage
the stage of history,
this little block of wood
that separates you from your most terrible fantasies—

it's important, this piece of wood, this stage, between you and it—

REAGAN: Bottom of the ninth. The wind is gusting at Wrigley Field. And the crowd is absolutely silent. And now, the wind up. And the pitch. Batter swings—he swings—and it's a long fly ball to left field—

(The crowd goes wild.)

PONTIUS: I could see that deep down in his shallow heart

My brother loved my wife—

And my wife loved my brother—

REAGAN: And he's got it—he's got it—yes—
three outs—folks, THE GAME IS OVER!

*(P pulls a gun out.
Blackout)*

twenty-five: epilogue

*(The present
Lights up on P)*

P: *(To the audience)* You might think, at the very end, that I'd kill my brother. Kill myself. Kill my ex-wife. Make it complete. Make it bloody. Big love triangle, bang bang. An American Passion Play.

But what I came to tell you is: that's not how the story ends. I left the theater that day. Every month I take a bus to a different city. I sleep outside. That way I can hear the wind.

I'm one of those people you avert your eyes from. You think: should I give him money? Is he a drunk? Am I a Christian? And by the time you've thought those three questions you've walked right by me. I have a P O box. Violet sends me pictures of birds.

Every year since she was a kid they looked more and more like real birds. Then she went to college, became a painter, and since then, every year, they started looking less and less like real birds. She looks like my brother but she's crazy like me, so who knows.

I started to believe in God again lately. Something about the light at night on a Greyhound bus going by a toll booth. I think God is a toll booth worker. Only he doesn't give exact change. You hand him a dollar, he gives you a fish. Go figure.

I don't know if this country needs more religion or less of it. Seems to me everyone needs a good night's sleep. Maybe that way they'd wake up for real in the morning instead of half-dead. It's good to be awake. When you're awake, you can stand up to tyrants in your own little corner of the world. I think we have some in our own little corner of the world, you know? Well.

The more I talk the less you sleep.
I'll summon the wind for you, so you can sleep better.
They got rid of most of my delusions but I like to keep one or two around.

Now: wind. *(He conducts the wind.)*
From the south. To the west. There.
Good night. Sweet dreams.
Sleep with the angels, Violet.

(The wind machines

The boats

Big, beautiful fish puppets

The sky turns white

PONTIUS gets on an enormous boat and sails off into the distance.)

END OF PLAY