

ABSTRACT

IMAGERY AND ACTION IN SAM SHEPARD AND #18

by Joseph Edward Barnett

This paper includes the full-length play, #18, and a review of Sam Shepard's plays. #18 follows two generations of a dysfunctional family. Short scenes bring the reader from one generation to the next as each story builds toward its respective climax. The play is an experiment in "superrealism": actors transform characters on stage, the action of the play often moves off of the stage and into the audience through the actors who physically move into the audience or simply deliver their lines directly to them, and the play often refers to itself as being a play through its words and actions. #18 was written under the influence of Shepard's work and creative process. Before #18, a review of Shepard's body of work and a detailed comparison of #18 and this body will help guide the reader through an understanding of #18 and the creative process that developed it.

IMAGERY AND ACTION IN SAM SHEPARD AND #18

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Table of Contents	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: A Review of Sam Shepard's Work	5
Chapter Two: <u>#18</u> and Shepard	12
Chapter Three: The Rewrites	16
Chapter Four: <u>#18</u> , A Play	22
Works Cited	98

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INTRODUCTION

The Shepard Influence

Sam Shepard was a huge influence throughout the conception and development of #18. When I began my master's degree program, I had only heard of Sam Shepard the actor (Days of Heaven was then and now a favorite movie of mine). Professor Mike Griffith during the first semester of that program did not just introduce me to Shepard the writer; he filled me with the entire works and life of the 1960s/70s rough-around-the-edges country-boy/experimental playwright in the big city. From his carefree scribbles that he tossed to New York City's underground scene to his more focused intentions that culminated in his instantly classic "family trilogy," our class voraciously stuffed ourselves and digested Sam Shepard. I was affected by this class like I had never been affected since Professor Howard Blanning first exposed me to playwriting only a year earlier.

Shepard affected me most profoundly when I realized how similar his subjects and style were to what I had just recently stumbled upon in my own writing. I had already written a play, Billy Kills the Kid, and it suddenly looked remarkably like a Shepard play--a bad one, but a Shepard play nonetheless. Billy resembles a Shepard play not only because its lead character sports a cowboy hat and lifestyle in the city while facing his several demons/selves manifested through the other characters--which are indeed Shepard elements--but moreover because the entire piece attempts to display the naked psyche of the individual. Ron Mottram based his entire Shepard biography--Inner Landscapes, The Theater of Sam Shepard--on this quality:

They (Shepard's images) are like X rays of an inner landscape, lacking in shading and color but giving the sharp outlines of a consciousness that examines and reexamines everything and that perpetually puts itself in perspective. The real subject of the plays, therefore, is Shepard's own consciousness, and the outside realities exist only as they have been transformed by consciousness. (14)

Billy and The Kid represent the dueling sides of me at that time. The textual and physical dialogue that develops out of this conflict is a discourse on and about my own "inner landscape." What made the play fail to achieve a higher quality was its lack of focus. My execution of the style was poor. Shepard's work, however, showed me my own style, the mystic exploration of the "inner landscape," only executed with a focused precision.

I determined to strive for this mastery of image-oriented writing and jumped head first into Shepard's process. It was difficult to find information on how the elusive playwright works; however, in 1975 he did write a small article, "Language, Visualization and the Inner Library," in which he spells out a process, an experimental process, "a search for new forms."

In my experience the character is visualized, he appears out of nowhere in three dimensions and speaks . . . visualization--right here is where the experiment starts. With the very first impulse to see something happen on stage.

(next) . . . the picture is moving in the mind and being allowed to move more and more freely as you follow it. The following of it is the writing part.

(for instance) . . . I see an old man by a broken car in the middle of nowhere and those simple elements right away set up associations and yearnings to pursue what he's doing there.

(throughout the process) . . . I write fast because that's the way it happens with me. Sometimes long stretches happen in between where I don't write for weeks.

But when I start, I don't stop. (Shepard, "Language . . ." 50-51)

Following this method, #18 began "where the experiment starts," with "visualization." I was very cautious about approaching this initial imagery. I did not want to contrive it. And I definitely did not want to pluck images directly from Shepard's archetypal library. I wanted to be sure that it was a process through only my "inner landscape." So I waited for the next truly powerful image to arrive. Whether it was from a dream, a *deja vu* or a shadow creature, the next image that came to me with force would be followed. This does not mean just a passing face through my mind's eye but as Peter Brook says an image that "burns" into the consciousness (136). I would wait for a vision that fully and aggressively demanded my attention. The burn came from a young actor Shannan Shepard (no relation to Sam). She was playing, improvising, crouching in the corner of my apartment (#18) and whispering through the wall to my neighbor: "Number nineteen. Number nineteen. Can ya hear me? Can ya?" That was all she said and the image blazed: I saw her as an older woman, a mother, sitting in a bathtub and holding a bucket of chicken. This was the image that asserted itself; and its odd elements "right away," as Shepard described, "set up associations and yearnings to pursue" this character's purpose (Shepard, "Language . . ." 50). Modifiers started to build on top of the elements: the desperate

whisper through the wall, the isolation of the bath tub, and the gluttonous bucket of greasy fried chicken. The elements were modifying in their pursuit which sent the picture in my mind's eye into movement and I followed ("the writing part"). I wrote the entire first draft of the play by waiting for images to arrive and dutifully following.

Before #18 I was already in the practice of writing fast as Shepard describes of his method. I wrote in the surrealist fashion of automatic writing where one writes just quick enough to not be able to think more than a word or two ahead, thus pulling a stream of words directly from the subconscious. However, Shepard's quick flow of writing includes the "following" of an original image and subsequently the following of the images that spawn from the original and so on. To follow a mental image in a fluid stream of consciousness is to maintain the image; that is, one must continue to return to that image. It is the difference between Freudian association where one jumps from one thought to the next with no central focus and what Jung called active imagination where a central focus is maintained through a discourse with the central image. Edward Edinger, a student of Jung, describes active imagination in clear, simple terms: "This is a process in which the imagination and the images it throws up are experienced as something separate from the ego--an 'other'--to which the ego can relate, and with which the ego can have a dialogue" (78). I disciplined myself to continually realign my ego (the playwright) with the image (the inspiration). This transferred into my characters as an urgent introspection or--to repeat Mottram--"a consciousness that examines and reexamines everything and that perpetually puts itself in perspective" (14). The incessant questioning in #18 shows these internal examinations. The recently born characters demand to know their world:

"Why is the phone out of the wall?" (39)

"Why do you have to be that way?" (34)

"What is that smell?!!!" (26)

Each of these questions and more are concerned with preexisting conditions that neither I nor my characters understood at the time. The questions are not only directed at their immediate surroundings; the characters' investigations go inward. Toby Zinman speaks of this in Shepard's work: "It is this need to 'playwrite' oneself into temporary existence that burdens Shepard's dramatic creatures" (511). In this same way #18 begs to understand itself. The

answers may rarely if ever come, but a wild and awesome tapestry of imagery is left behind from the questioning.

The amusing part of the process was that my attempt to avoid stealing the imagery of Shepard only led me to grand theft bathtub--the central image of my first vision and of Shepard's Chicago. This is not the only item taken straight from a Shepard play. To name a few: There is the telephone violently ripped from the wall to show a communication breakdown between inner and outer worlds found in La Turista and True West; there is the replacement of emotions and sexuality with food found in several Shepard plays; and of course there is the decay of the nuclear family found in nearly all of Shepard's plays. Shepard's influence continued to directly flow into my work, not only because I was using his process but because I continued to read and absorb his writing. Even though these were unintentional robberies, I often saw them as they happened. To maintain a true flow, I allowed the robberies to exist, and kept them throughout the rewriting process with full recognition that I was developing a play through my own psyche but in the full spirit of Sam Shepard. This brings me to how I will guide the reader through an understanding of #18:

- First, I will review Shepard's work through the recurring imagery and action that most clearly express his writing method.
- Second, I will discuss how #18's imagery and action--created with Shepard's method--correlate and contradict with the imagery and action in Shepard's work.
- Third, I will touch on how Shepard influenced the revisions of #18.

CHAPTER ONE

A Review of Sam Shepard's Work

Shepard's plays show a distinct separation between the "early works" up to Angel City and the "later works" beginning with Curse of the Starving Class, both written in 1976. Much could and has been said about the differences and similarities between these periods. For the purpose of this thesis, it will suffice to briefly discuss the thread between the early works--pronounced with overt symbolism--and the later works--a kind of psychological realism.

In 1974 Shepard commented on his "whole different way of writing now, which is very stark and not so flashy . . . Well, it could be called realism, but not the kind of realism where husbands and wives squabble and that kind of stuff" (Chubb 208). It is a different kind of realism, because the intensity of the symbolism remains just below the surface of the "real," and often spills over in an overabundance and an over saturation of "real" artifacts. In Curse of the Starving Class, a dead lamb in the middle of the stage (Shepard, Seven Plays 198); in True West a multitude of shiny toasters toast bread and send the aroma out into the audience (Shepard, Seven Plays 42); in Buried Child, husks are peeled from corn and piled onto Dodge (Shepard, Seven Plays 81), and later Tilden carries a dead infant, the "real" buried child, across the stage (Shepard, Seven Plays 132). The power of this "super-realism" is in the same aggressive realm as the hard hitting disjointed imagery of Shepard's earlier plays. For the sake of focus, this chapter will mostly discuss the early works, which most represent the freestyle writing that Shepard did in his younger days, and will reference the later works as it seems appropriate.

To review any of Shepard's plays is to face a string of vivid imagery. For a deeper look into the image-oriented style, we can again look to Peter Brook:

When emotion and argument are harnessed to a wish from the audience to see more clearly into itself--then something in the mind burns. The event scorches on to the memory an outline, a taste, a trace, a smell, a picture. It is the play's central image that remains, its silhouette, and if the elements are rightly blended this silhouette will be its meaning, this shape will be the essence of what it has to say.
(136)

Shepard's work aligns with Brook's words literally in the closing moments of La Turista, a two-act play, when Kent bursts through the upstage wall, "leaving a cut-out silhouette of his body in

the wall” as a testament to escapism, the play’s central image/theme (Shepard, Seven Plays 298). The power of the central image is predominate throughout all of Shepard's work. In the very beginning of La Turista, the two main characters, sun burnt Americans brand-named Kent and Salem, sit in a Mexican motel and read Time and Life next to luggage overstuffed with money. The play has just raised its curtains and the imagery pours forth: corporate American tourists oblivious to the world outside their room; consumers consumed with themselves and the discourse of Time and Life while "real" time and life continue outside of their self-imposed confinement. With Shepard's style there is not merely a single central image. Like splitting cells, new images are born from earlier images. When the play's action does begin, images spawn multiple images and the flow of Shepard's pen can be seen as the manifested associations confront their originators in a whirlpool of active imagination.

Kent and Salem are caricatures. They are sketches of Americana at its worst. They carry suitcases full of money which they throw about freely while arrogantly butchering the Spanish language. As Kent describes how to peel a sunburn down to the last layer of burning flesh, Boy enters. Boy mysteriously enters from the outside, from underneath the skin of the tourists to counter and confront the "ugly American" image. He is an impoverished Mexican youth whose father was killed by ruthless ranchers and whose siblings were taken into slave labor. He confronts Kent and Salem with his hand outstretched and his blank stare. Eventually the kid even spits on Kent, an aggressive manifestation of active imagination that affects the development of the rest of the act. Kent becomes ill and almost immediately a witch doctor and his son arrive to confront Kent's exiting soul. Decked in their full cartoon-like regalia and props from sacrificial chickens to incense and firecrackers, these two clearly come from the tourists' cultural prejudice. What is not so clear is whether the Doctor is attempting to revive Kent or send him to death with ritual. The curtain of act one goes down on Kent's lifeless body.

Act two offers a parallel universe to act one. As the stage directions clarify, "The set is organized exactly the same as Act One except the impression this time is that of an American motel room" (Shepard, Seven Plays 277). The American setting produces a country doctor and son from Civil War times in place of the Mexican witch doctors. The two roles are played by the same actors. As a matter of fact, the entire action of act two parallels and plays off of act one down to the last scene where Kent breaks through the upstage wall (Shepard, Seven Plays 278). Act two chronologically happens before act one--Salem repeatedly mentions that they are on

their way to Mexico. So this escape returns the audience to the end of act one where Kent is left immobilized, making the silhouette a testament not only to escapism but to Kent's inability to escape his own fate, soon to be found in the Mexican motel's parallel world. The silhouette itself is a dualistic symbol. It suggests both presence and absence simultaneously. The dark shape creates a visible fact; this visible fact appears to be a void. Furthermore, silhouettes do not exist without a field to penetrate. In this way, the silhouette pushes the paradox further by suggesting the motion of penetration while highlighting the upstage wall's static two-dimensional surface.

Such paradoxical dualism is present in most of Shepard's plays where characters often take on the traits of other characters. In The Holy Ghostly, two generations lock horns: father and son, Pop and Ice, confront each other's opposing culture until they each literally become the other: "Pop sings. During the song he becomes like a little boy. Ice becomes like his father" (Shepard, Unseen 215). Ice then tells his father a story about an ice planet and a super sun that collide. "Ever since then," Ice concludes, "the earth has been carrying on a constant struggle between fire and ice" (Shepard, Unseen 216). The fire and ice represent father and son, forever struggling. However, they are inextricably linked. Ice has come to help his father deal with the Chindi—a ghost coming to take Pop to his death—and Pop truly believes that Ice is the only person he can trust. The Chindi is the principal device linking father to son. Pop describes the ghost as having "more arms and legs than the two of us put together" (Shepard, Unseen 203). This remark identifies the Chindi with both of them. Ice also suggests this link when he proposes his strategy for beating the Chindi: "If we split up, one of us behind, me behind and you in front. We'd get him in the middle" (Shepard, Unseen 204). By placing the Chindi between the two, Shepard shows the direct link that brings father and son, fire and ice, together as one.

This duality in a reluctant father and son link becomes a reluctant grandfather and son link in Buried Child, one of Shepard's later plays. After several years of separation, Vince returns home only to find a family who does not or will not recognize him. It is only after disappearing for the night and violently returning drunk the next morning that the family not only acknowledges him but accepts him. Dodge even delivers a verbal will in which he names "Grandson, Vincent" as his heir (Shepard, Seven Plays 129). This recognition comes as Vince takes on the role of the drunk and abusive men from the generations before him. When Vince begins to account for his whereabouts on the previous night he even sounds like Dodge:

I drove all night. . . . I could see myself in the windshield. . . . I studied my face. Studied everything about it. As though I was looking at another man. As though I could see his whole race behind him. . . . I saw him dead and alive at the same time. . . . And then his face changed. His face became his father's face. Same bones. Same eyes. Same nose. Same breath. And his father's face changed to his Grandfather's face. And it went on like that. . . . Clear back to faces I'd never seen before but still recognized. . . . Straight back as far as they'd take me. Then it all dissolved. Everything dissolved. (Shepard, Seven Plays 130)

Vince here sounds very similar to Dodge who also comments on the family line: "A long line of corpses! There's not a living soul behind me. Not a one. Who's holding me in their memory? Who gives a damn about bones in the ground?" (Shepard, Seven Plays 112). Vince and Dodge's words expose a curse that passes from generation to generation, a curse that brings the men together while alienating them from each other at the same time. With much more subtlety than the father-son reversal in The Holy Ghostly, Vince ultimately replaces his newly dead grandfather, Dodge, by taking the corpse's physical posture and listening as his mother--off stage and thinking she's speaking to a living Dodge--delivers the play's final monologue (Shepard, Seven Plays 131).

Returning to the year just before Shepard split into his new realism, Angel City carries every bit of the fire found in the rest of the early works where Shepard makes consciousness very visible, less implied. Its main character is Wheeler, a Hollywood man, dealing for disaster and his corruption becomes fully manifested in his appearance: He becomes "slimy green" with "fangs and extra-long fingernails," literally turning into the monster he wants to create (Shepard, Fool 91). The set of Angel City replaces La Turista's human silhouette with a back-lit scrim: "a large suspended blue neon rectangle with an empty space in the middle" (Shepard, Fool 63). Again this "empty space"--this silhouette of a movie screen--symbolizes escapism. Miss Scoons, hoping to escape her self, falls into a hypnotic state as she stares into the rectangle void. "I look at the screen and I am the screen. I'm not me. I don't know who I am . . . I look and I hate my life not being a movie" (Shepard, Fool 75). But again the escape is only into stasis. As Rabbi tells Wheeler at the end: "You're on the silver screen buddy. You've been captured on celluloid and you'll never get out" (Shepard, Fool 109). The characters visually become trapped in Angel City. A raised and narrow platform is directly behind the scrim. "When the actors enter

on this platform, they become framed by the rectangle" (Shepard, Fool 63). This stage upon a stage reveals an even deeper level of the play's active imagination: Angel City, like all of Shepard's plays, is theater about theater--a histrionic exploration of histrionics. Where La Turista smacks its audience with a revelation of the upstage wall's artificiality, Angel City presents a stage at the upstage wall for actors to perform obvious transformations. Shepard wrote "Notes to the Actors" at the beginning of Angel City concerning the transformative quality in the character work:

The term "character" could be thought of in a different way when working on this play. Instead of the idea of a "whole character" with logical motives behind his behavior which the actor submerges himself into, he should consider instead a fractured whole with bits and pieces of character flying off the central theme. In other words, more in terms of collage construction or jazz improvisation. . . . If there needs to be a "motivation" for some of the abrupt changes which occur in the play they can be taken as full-blown manifestations of a passing thought or fantasy, having as much significance or "meaning" as they do in our ordinary lives. (Shepard, Fool 61-62)

Here we see Shepard's further anti-illusionary intentions as he requests for the actors to recognize and reveal themselves as the vessels of characters. The audience is to see the actor for what he is: a performer of characters on a stage on the stage.

Shepard's anti-illusionism bursts not only through the upstage wall but also through the illusionary wall separating the audience from the stage. Just before bursting through La Turista's upstage wall--"the first wall"--Kent tears down "the fourth wall" by leaping off the stage and amongst the audience all the while fictionalizing himself by speaking of himself--in the third person--as an evolving monster:

He clings to the floor and slithers along. . . . He becomes a mouse and changes into a cobra and then back on the floor. Then onto the roof. . . . Then jumping from roof to roof with his paper hair flying behind and his lips curling back from the wind and tasting the juice that's pouring down from his nose and his ears. (Shepard, Seven Plays 292-293)

Shepard here again exposes the theatrics of the play by exposing the actor through a presentation of character fragments. Although Shepard opens the fourth wall and pours the

drama into the audience, his aim is not to force the play abusively onto them. This fine line became a rift between Shepard and Richard Schechner after Schechner's production of The Tooth of Crime in which the spectators were "physically sloshed into something," according to Shepard (Oumano 98). Shepard seems to feel the audience should be allowed to maintain the perspective of a passive observer while being brought into the middle of its imagery and action. Shepard shows this sentiment not only in his anger at directorial misinterpretations, but in his characters that reach beyond the fourth wall not by physically crossing through it but by speaking and gesturing through it and into the audience. The Boy of La Turista breaks through the fourth wall long before Kent leaps through it. As Kent and Salem try to chase the Boy away he looks beyond them and "makes different monster faces at the audience, from sticking his tongue out to giving them the finger" (Shepard, Seven Plays 261).

Shepard's characters also speak through the fourth wall in a less direct way using extended speeches. Often characters go into lengthy narratives that extend out of its immediate context and straight to the audience like an opera's aria. In The Tooth of Crime, Hoss and Crow use their verbal extensions to compete for the possession of a fictional audience on one level, while the actors playing the roles use the "arias" to possess the present audience. This technique is one that extends throughout Shepard's full career; but the later plays use the extended speeches with more subtlety. Wesley, in Curse of the Starving Class, delivers a two page long narration on being awakened the previous night by his father's drunk and violent return home (Shepard, Seven Plays 137-138). He initially delivers the speech to his mother but the sheer length of the narrative extends beyond a discourse and evolves into a separated prose. His mother confirms this separation when she does not respond to Wesley but stares at frying bacon and speaks to her daughter--who has not even entered the stage yet--about her first period (Shepard, Seven Plays 138-139). In Buried Child, Vince delivers a lengthy speech about looking into a mirror and seeing through his own face and into several generations of his family, into his ancestry (Shepard, Seven Plays 130). This speech is initially a response to Shelley but Shepard's stage directions have him deliver the speech away from her and into the audience. The earlier plays use a more unabashed approach. The most direct address to Shepard's audience is in Chicago where the actors throw fishing lines into the audience before they "sit simultaneously and look at the audience while holding their poles" (Shepard, Unseen 68). All

the while, Stu delivers a long visualization of the ocean at night that leads to a direct address to the audience, even guiding them into a breathing exercise.

A collection of Shepard's early works, Five Plays, includes introductory notes by directors who, for the most part, found Shepard's scripts and attitude complicated. Sydney Schubert Walter writes that in his staging of Fourteen Hundred Thousand in 1966, he made the opening scenes more realistic and dynamic, and the later scenes, when the characters approached stasis, more expressionistic. He recalls Shepard calling this production "unacceptable" (Shepard, Five Plays 62). Michael Smith: "When I read (Icarus's Mother) I couldn't tell the characters apart--and Sam said he doesn't think about characters. . . . It's always hard to tell what, if anything, Sam's plays are 'about'" (Shepard, Five Plays 26). I believe the source of these directors' frustrations is that the early plays are emptied of the basic conventions inherent in a psychologically driven or even an emotionally driven play. Shepard's swift writing style strips a theater piece to its bare bones, in turn revealing and investigating the nature of theatrics. Icarus's Mother is a great example of this bare bones technique. The play's characters consist of three men--Bill, Howard and Frank--and two women--Jill and Pat. Characters are given only common first names and their relationships to each other are never revealed. At the open of Icarus's Mother, the generic characters are outdoors waiting for a fireworks display. They are simply waiting with no stimulus other than random belching. Then a jet appears. This imagery is enough to explode the characters into active personalities: Howard and Bill react aggressively and try to chase the plane away; the women giggle and sexually beckon it to come down. The plane responds to the girls by skywriting "E equals MC squared" (Shepard, Unseen 88). Howard and Bill return with smoke signals and soon lie to the women telling them the plane has fallen and exploded. The women run to the beach to see the carnage just in time to witness the "actual" plane crash. Shepard never offers any information as to why Howard and Bill are so aggressive or why they would lie to the women or why Frank shies away from all of them; they are like all of Shepard's early characters: the bare bones of characters that act and react amongst themselves in a series of power plays reaching apocalyptic proportions and reflecting a naked psychological experience--Shepard's own I presume.

CHAPTER TWO

#18 and Shepard

In many ways #18 resembles the psychological realism of Shepard's later works. The play revolves around a Midwestern family and their stark framework of a home including a real stove, bathtub, dining table and couch. The "real" comes out of the stark framework, and soon from there an over saturation of the "real" occurs: Mom repeatedly enters and exits with overflowing bucket after overflowing bucket of chicken:

. . . some of which often drops to the floor which she frantically picks up while swinging the bucket from arm to arm, often dropping more, some of which may drop out near the audience where it will stay through the end of the show. The aroma should be fresh and potent. (32)

However, this super realistic quality is not the whole of #18. The play goes into the same overt symbolism found in La Turista's silhouette and Angel City's movie screen--paradoxical portals of escape/immobility. These portals are doubled in #18. The first grows out of the kitchen: "Behind the stove, a darkness grows and leads into a narrow tunnel of plastic sheets that vary in thickness in such a way as to make the characters appear to sink deeper into obscurity as they move deeper into The Void" (22). The Void is an image derived from Mom's aggressive drive to make chicken to replace an entire adulthood of sexual repression. To reach the necessary fetishistic depths, she goes beyond the stove and into the obscure depths behind the "real."

However, the depths are not really that deep. Mom regularly comes in and out of The Void with the chicken. Pop, in the generation before, sinks into The Void only to return within a couple of minutes with his replacement for emotion, a whiskey bottle. Krank violently pulls Lovely into "the deepest part of The Void," but her "lifeless drop" can still be clearly heard (94). The shallowness of this portal of inward departure leads to another portal, one of external departure, one used to escape the internal escape's quagmire. Across the house from The Void is a less abstract portal: The living room window has been stuck "open like a wound" since Krank ran away from home (40). Canary (Krank's mother in the generation before) also escapes through the window after her mother, Daisy, commands her to "fly" (56). However, like her future child Krank, Canary soon walks heavily back to her home--her emotional prison. Even at

Krank's final exit through the window, he only escapes the house, not the emotional torment manifested in the Furies who continue their eternal pursuit.

(Seeing his father through the window, Krank pushes Mom aside and moves toward The Void. Looking into The Void, he sees the Furies who have finally caught up. He drops to the floor in fear and begins to move back toward the window as he stares into his vision.)

KRANK. It's them! Even here! Women! See them? Snakes swimmin' all over their bodies. More and more. Lord, their eyes . . . their eyes are dripping with blood and . . . I know you can't see 'em, but . . . I gotta go. (96)

These are Krank's last words before his final "escape." The words paraphrase Aeschylus's Orestes in The Choephoroi when he first sees the Furies after killing Clytemnestra:

Ah, ah! Look, women, see them, there! Like, Gorgons, with grey cloaks, and snakes coiled swarming round their bodies! . . . O Lord Apollo! More and more of them! Look there! And see--their dreadful eyes dripping with bloody pus! . . . I know you do not see these beings; but I see them. I am lashed and driven! I can't bear it! I must escape! (143-144).

#18's use of the Furies--ancient Greece's mythical female gang of judges/jurors of the primordial conscience--links it to the archetypal dualistic dilemma used by Shepard but reaching back to Aeschylus, the earliest known playwright.

Dualism is in the basic structure of #18. The play plays with time much like La Turista. Only where La Turista simply places the act of the later action before the act of the earlier action, #18 presents seven shorter scenes which are basically two separate acts of continuous action--"2nd generation" and "1st generation"--chopped up and intercut between the "near future" and the "near past" to create a single dynamic flow that builds momentum through a continual reflection upon itself (22). As each time period works toward its respective violent climax through the individual scenes, the actions of the opposing generations play off of each other. The strongest example of this is at the end of scene five where Krank drags Lovely into The Void and scene six where Pop (Krank's future grandfather, played by the same actor who plays Krank) demands that Forrest (Krank's future father) formally take over the household before killing Pop; all the while, Daisy (Pop's wife played by the same actor playing Lovely who is killed by Krank) laughs. If these doubled characters are seen as one entity,

Daisy/Lovely's laugh is clearly out of an ironic sense of justice; she enjoys a vicarious revenge upon Krank/Pop through Forrest/Dad (Pop/Krank's future son-in-law/father).

The doubling is heavy throughout #18 in this way; however, the one character that does not double is the Cleaner. Cleaner is the only character who “does not age or change character from one generation to the next” (22). Only the extent of his job changes: In the earlier generation, when he is not inhaling the fumes from his cleaning solution, Cleaner sprays the chemicals into the cracks of the house to exterminate an unspecified bug problem. The “nasty no-goods” is as specific as he gets when he speaks to Canary of his target (42). His childlike language likens Cleaner to Canary, who maintains a childlike language when she becomes Mom in the later generation. In this generation, Cleaner returns as the same man only using gasoline, a wire brush, and plenty of violence to not just clean but to attack neighboring families who may not be keeping their homes or their physical bodies as clean as the rest of the neighborhood: “we’ll give him a little reminder to keep the area smellin’ nice in the future. (*between teeth*) Pigly wigly” (67). Again, Cleaner speaks childlike reiterating both his agelessness and his job’s evolution into a wild aggression. Thus, the unchanging presence of Cleaner serves to contrast and further highlight the play’s dualities including the duality of his job as a cleaner and a thug.

The play never attempts to explain the mysterious nature of the Cleaner. He could be a piece of Canary’s imagination brought to life; he could be a creation of the collective unconscious; he could be the son of the previous generation’s Cleaner. This is not known; what is known and emphasized is his function as a theatrical tool to highlight the play’s dualism and to bring the audience further into the immediacy of the play by directly engaging the audience: Cleaner “changes his focus (from Mom) to the audience” while delivering his final monologue (95).

The Cleaner is the only character who speaks directly to the audience through the fourth wall; but the fourth wall is violated with more than words. Krank, Forrest, Dad, and Canary all exit and enter the stage through the audience. Further, once they have left the performance space and pass through the fourth wall, they become creatures that represent their character: Krank slides like a reptile; Forrest and Dad creep on all fours like a cat; Canary exits flitting lightly away but returns disillusioned with heavy human steps. Playing these creatures, the actors move amongst the audience bringing them into the action and bringing the focus to the actors

themselves and their performance of transformation. The actors are vessels for their shifting characters and their performance becomes the play; and their theatrics expose the nature of theater. This happens throughout the play; and if the transformative roles, fourth-wall violations and paraphrasing of Aeschylus are not enough to impress this concept of theater on theater, Krank more blatantly exemplifies this when he jumps on top of the stove “as if it were a stage” and describes the same creative process that gave birth to #18.

I allow this flow to pass through. I open to it and wait. (long pause) And wait.
For the right moment--for that something. Then when it's there, when I got it, I hold . . . (long pause) . . . soft, ya know. Then I sink my teeth in. And sometimes, something beautiful will happen. Something that burns. (placing his finger at the center of his forehead) Right there. (75)

Here Krank reveals not only the nature of the present performance by transforming the stove into a stage on the stage; he also speaks of the process out of which he and the rest of the performance were designed. This, of course, may not be understood by an audience unfamiliar with the writer and his methods. But what is clear is that Krank's theatrical actions are affected by his theatrical words. The reverse of this could also be argued--his theatrical gestures seem to bring out his “new, almost overly dramatic tone” (75). The important thing to note here and throughout #18 is how the cycle of theatrics exposing the performance as being a performance not only pushes the play forward, but also stokes the flames of its intensity by encouraging the actor to put his entire physical and spiritual being into the performance. In the words of Jerzy Grotowski:

We found that it was consummately theatrical for the actor to transform from type to type, character to character, silhouette to silhouette—while the audience watched—in a poor manner, using only his own body and craft. . . . By his controlled use of gesture the actor transforms the floor into a sea, a table into a confessional, a piece of iron into an intimate partner, etc. . . . The acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art-form. (20-21)

In the end, every attempt to reveal the theatrics in #18, is an attempt to strip the production to its essentials and encourage the actor to open themselves to these “deep riches.”

CHAPTER THREE

The Rewrites

In the introduction, I discussed a surrealist method where one writes swiftly and without interrupting the self by thinking, let alone by editing. Shepard wrote in this way throughout his early years; however, this began to evolve with La Turista. Shepard had written this play while stuck in a Mexican motel with dysentery.

In that state any writing I could manage seemed valid, no matter how incoherent it might seem to an outside eye. Once it hit the stage in rehearsals and I was back to a fairly healthy physical condition, the whole thing seemed filled with an overriding self-pity. (Shepard, “Language” 218)

He rewrote the entire second act and for the first time began “regarding theatre as an ongoing process” (Shepard, “Language” 218). He continued with his quick flowing method; but this time he was fully conscious of the first act. He had seen it beginning to live in rehearsals. Thus, the entire first act became the focus point for the second act’s flow. By the end of the sixties while he was still in the heart of his early works, Shepard spoke of refining his work further. When an interviewer suggested that Shepard had put more emphasis on craftsmanship with The Tooth of Crime than he had in anything previous, Shepard responded, “You can play for the high stakes or the low stakes . . . what makes a play is how true it is to the stakes that you defined at the beginning” (Chubb 199). This quote is certainly ambiguous but it responds to a need to craft, to refine, to edit.

The first rewrite for #18 happened much like Shepard’s first revision with La Turista. The original #18 was an extended one-act which revolved around only Krank, Lovely, Mom and Dad. This first piece retained every word that was written within the surrealist flow. It went through many readings including two staged readings--one in 12 Presser Hall for Miami University’s “Scripts Outa Hand” program, the other at the American College Theater Festival in Indianapolis where it was a finalist in the festival’s one-act play competition. Due to its complete lack of self-reflection, the one-act version was a powerful burst of energy but left the audience with little to grasp or care about. Everything about the characters recklessly spilled onto the page. The little bit of mystery that existed to possibly draw the audience was overwhelmed by the show’s emotional gush. And as Shepard said of his first La Turista, “an overriding self-pity”

was the result. Like La Turista, #18 needed an entirely new chunk of writing. The flowing process began again with a great awareness of the original act. The “1st generation” developed from here; and the two eras worked off of each other. This self-reflective process created new levels of depth and new mysteries that are more open to the audience’s imagination, instead of being closed to all but the author’s emotions.

I directed every performance of #18, from its first staged reading to its first full production at Miami University and its continuation in Cincinnati. Each of my actors was incredibly gifted. I worked with these students to deliver the written word effectively, but recognized when shortcomings were the fault of the text, or more specifically the fault of the relationship between the text and the individual actor. When it seemed appropriate, I would adjust the words to the individual. This did not happen often, and when it did, it was usually minor. The most major and striking adjustment in this way happened to the beginning of the play’s first scene. Until two weeks before the opening night of the Miami University production, scene one began with Krank soon after his return sitting on the couch in contemplation with a cup of hot chocolate in his hand; Mom is in the bathtub talking to her imaginary lover about her sensual chicken when Krank throws his cup of hot chocolate; this draws Mom out to clean and serve more which sends Krank into a tirade on the misery of growing up with her as a mother.

Neal Gartland played the role of Krank and Pop. One of Gartland’s greatest strengths as an actor is his ability to use silence. With the slightest tilt of his head, squint in his eyes or a multitude of other physical nuances in his arsenal of body language, he brings vital energy to the moments between lines. He can also bravely hold a long pause to its edge and then easily slide back into the rhythm of his lines. Gartland first revealed this silent talent through Pop--a character with long quiet moments and a slow steady voice. Krank is more urgently intense; his quiet moments are rare. As an experiment, I gave Krank a long quiet moment at the very beginning of the first scene. Gartland worked it beautifully. Krank’s return now begins the first scene. He slides into the window as Mom speaks her delusions in the tub. She now enters the room at the sound of his return. When they see each other, they both “freeze.”

Krank stands up tall and steady. They hold each other still with their eyes for several seconds. He then takes a small step forward; she steps back. They freeze. She steps toward him; he steps back. They freeze. They make the smallest moves

in synchronicity and silence until she breaks the trance, runs through the kitchen and into The Void. (26-27)

In The Void, she fetches the first cup of hot chocolate. This new beginning offers a much more enticing invitation for the audience by setting up a mystery. Who are these people? What is this strange and uncomfortable dance? These questions begin the interest.

Once I finished the productions of #18, I put it behind me for three years as I moved on to writing and directing things new to me. With that distance, a whole new perspective revealed that a few more rewrites were necessary. This editing was mostly the removal of minor and unnecessary wordiness. However, there was one major change that I made to the end of the last scene. Originally and throughout the productions of #18, Krank would end the play by killing Lovely, cutting Mom, telling her to “be a victim” and then escaping through the window. I had always justified this aggression toward the women as being an exposure of the senseless emotional and physical violence that still very much exists everywhere, but especially in the rural Midwestern communities.

Shepard’s writing is often such an exposure; and many have accused him of misogyny, of celebrating the abuses and marginalization of women and embracing an assumed patriarchal power. Bonnie Marranca writes:

One of the most problematic aspects of the plays is Shepard’s consistent refusal or inability, whichever the case may be, to create female characters whose imaginative range matches that of the males. Women are the background of the plays: they hang out and make themselves useful for chores while the men make the decisions, take risks, face challenges, experience existential crises. Women are frequently abused, and always treated as subservient to men, their potential for growth and change restricted. (30)

Such opinions understandably exist. The plays are coming from a male perspective, Shepard’s perspective. Also, remember Shepard works swiftly through his own “inner library” of experience; so, it should not be surprising that the work delivers a masculine perspective. However, these opinions are highly debatable when they assume that Shepard’s work by nature celebrates this male-dominated hierarchy.

Florence Falk goes as far as to compare Shepard’s fascination of the cowboy, “the reigning male,” with Hitler and Stalin’s love of the cowboy image (91). The colossal difference

between Shepard's obsession with this image and these mass murderers' obsession with the cowboy is that Shepard's fascination leads to a satire of the "reigning male." Marranca herself recognizes: "The heroism and strength of the cowboy is revered by Shepard but in actuality the men he creates are ineffectual, fearful, and emotionally immature. They show no strength or character or will, yet they are allowed to dominate because it is their due as men" (30). This is exactly Shepard's goal: to expose the patriarchy's weakness. Whether or not he keeps his play's females subservient to the males is debatable from play to play.

For instance, the Maid in Red Cross is maybe marginalized because of her job. And Jim does begin to dominate her by leading her into an imaginary game where he gives her swimming lesson on the bed. She falls into this trance at first, but soon takes over the game by going to the floor and pretending to drown. This is clearly troubling for Jim as he begs her to get off of the floor and come back to his game where he is in control. But she continues to mock him and eventually delivers her monologue on stasis:

And the family in town forgets where you went and the swimming coach forgets who you are and you forget all about the swimming lessons and just swim without knowing how and before you know it the winter has come and the lake has frozen and you sit on the bank staring at the ice. You don't move at all. (Shepard, Unseen 155)

This story hits Jim hard; because he is actually the "frozen" one unable to leave his motel and unable to release from the imaginary games. And as Jim writhes the Maid calmly separates herself from the game and exits. And in Fool for Love, it is Eddie who finally breaks away from the chronic love/hate relationship, and rides off into the sunset leaving May behind. However, he will forever be tormented by and subservient to the escalated love/hate cycle as he chases and runs away from the Mistress.

These scenes certainly do not celebrate male domination but pull the rug out from under the patriarchal archetype. However, Shepard always seems to ride a fine line with this; and sometimes he has certainly fallen into paths that could be called sexist. Operation Sidewinder may be the strongest evidence of this. Honey is one of the first characters to enter. She is "a very sexy chick with long blond hair and tight pants, high heels, etc." (Shepard, Unseen 226). She seems to have no purpose other than to be "sexy" and to be attacked by a six-foot long rattlesnake. The snake is immediately referred to as a phallus in Honey's first words in the play:

“Boy what a monster! I’ve never seen one so huge” (Shepard, Unseen 226). Soon after, the snake attacks Honey and coils itself around her. Two scenes later when Honey and the sidewinder are again center stage, Honey appears to be enjoying her restriction by the phallic beast: “Honey makes a low groaning sound and starts to undulate with the sidewinder. She seems to get more and more turned on . . .” (Shepard, Unseen 233). Later she is saved from the snake by Young Man who eventually attacks her and forces himself on her. Honey resists the rape at first but again starts enjoying the abusive male domination, even becoming intensely aroused by it.

A less blatant example is Joy in Chicago. Her struggle is very similar to the Maid’s struggle in Red Cross. She is marginalized into the role of girlfriend and biscuit maker. The reigning male Stu, like Jim, plays imaginary games and demands to be in control. When Joy joins Stu in the bathtub--the imaginary playground--Stu becomes belligerent and chases her away refusing to allow her to take any control of the visualization. Joy gets fed up, packs her bags and rolls them off in a wagon. However, unlike the Maid, Joy returns like a zombie, pacing back and forth across the stage with her wagon while Stu reaches his control out into the audience as he guides them into a breathing exercise. Thus, her attempt at breaking from the archetypal patriarchy proves futile. The audience is left with the image of her wandering lost without male guidance. The males in these pieces are just as “ineffectual, fearful and emotionally immature” as the previous males discussed; but here they continue to dominate. Frighteningly, Shepard here appears not only to celebrate the “reigning male,” but also to celebrate the “ineffectual, fearful and emotionally immature” male.

Writing in such a vigorous way--on the border of conscious and unconscious and with the focus on an exposure of the ugly truth--one can often lose sight and become the ugliness. This appears to have happened in the writing of Chicago, Operation Sidewinder and the earlier drafts of #18. Looking at the play after three years, I realized that it does not merely expose the patriarchal beast but celebrates him in the way that Falk and Marranca accuse Shepard. The final scene allows Krank to escape the wrath of the Furies by actually abusing and killing women. This mistake was corrected by making Krank in the end subservient to his mother’s coddling, embarrassed when his dying father sees him, and horrified when he sees the Furies on his trail (96-97). All of these changes are very much in line with the character of Krank who is justly humbled by the female anger represented in the Furies and the ever-loving matriarchy represented in Mom.

And I am justly humbled. With the distance, a wall of ego finally crumbled, and I could see that my own intentions were becoming the ugliness I sought to expose. It is a fine line, indeed, and when one falls to the wrong side, consciousness is always available to help the lost get back on track. This was the greatest lesson learned throughout the entire process.

CHAPTER FOUR

#18, A Play

Characters: 2nd Generation

KRANK: Young man. Baby face. Security guard at an art gallery

MOM: KRANK's mother. A housewife.

DAD: KRANK's father. A handyman.

LOVELY: KRANK's secret lover, his boss's wife. Hard, intense face.

CLEANER: A strong man. Childlike.

Characters: 1st Generation

POP: Farmer. Honky tonker. Paranoid and delusional. CANARY's father. Played by same actor playing KRANK.

CANARY: 2nd Generation's MOM as a young girl. Played by actor also playing MOM.

FORREST: 2nd Generation's DAD as a boy. Played by actor also playing DAD.

DAISY: POP's wife, CANARY's mother. Played by same actor playing LOVELY.

CLEANER: Does not age or change character from one generation to the next.

Time:

2nd Generation: Near future. 1st Generation: Near past.

Setting:

A suggestion of a home.

The living room--a couch, a window that is stuck open, a computer, the front door.

The bath room--a bathtub.

The kitchen/dining room--shelves, on top of which sits a box labeled "memories," a dining table, a stove, behind the stove a darkness grows and leads into a narrow tunnel of plastic sheets that vary in thickness in such a way as to make the characters appear to sink deeper into obscurity as they move deeper into The Void.

The design should promote a sense of claustrophobia. I suggest placing the elements in a circle with the audience surrounding the stage.

PROLOGUE

(Clearly lit, actors walk on stage and face audience. CLEANER pulls five scripts out of the stove and hands one to each actor. The entire prologue is read from the scripts and delivered directly to the audience, with the CLEANER reading everything in parentheses.)

(PROLOGUE)

(Generation one.)

(Sounds of spoons scraping in bowls. Lights creating shadows of POP, DAISY and young CANARY having dinner.)

POP

(POP to DAISY)

Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm. Mmmmm.

You know I love it. You made it cause I love it. Best broth in the county. In the country! You made it cause I love it.

(pause)

Didn't ya?

CANARY

Yes.

(pause)

POP

What's that little one? Little Canary? What's that?

(long pause)

DAISY

She's been helping. Gonna be real good some day.

POP

Gonna be a good mamma like her mamma.

(Generation two.)

(Silhouetted actors change: POP to KRANK,
FORREST to DAD, DAISY to LOVELY,
CANARY to MOM. DAD, MOM and KRANK
having dinner. Sounds of teeth cutting into
crispy chicken.)

DAD

Great choice, honey: chicken's great.

MOM

Oh.

(pause)

Well... I was hoping.

DAD

It's great. Really something.

MOM

Oh.

(she smiles)

(long pause)

DAD

(DAD: jovial)

D'you tell your mom, Kranky?

KRANK

What's that?

DAD

D'you tell your mom what you think? The meal. What a great job she did.

(long pause)

MOM

Well--

KRANK

It's great.

MOM

D'you want some more, baby?

(silence)

(CLEANER stops reading stage directions.

Lights lower. CLEANER collects scripts. All

exit except for MOM who goes into the

bathroom, gets into the tub and begins scrubbing

the tub with steel wool.

SCENE ONE

(MOM is in the bathtub, scrubbing it with steel wool. KRANK slithers along the floor like a lizard; he is off stage and near the audience, but maintaining a separation from them. He works his way to the window and begins to crawl inside. MOM stops scrubbing leans against the wall and speaks in a half whisper.)

MOM

Number 19. Number 19. Did'ya get it? Did ya?

(smelling the air)

You did. I know you did, I can always tell.

(KRANK slides like a reptile through the window and drops hard to his knees. MOM hears this and runs into the living room as KRANK stands and gains his composure.)

MOM

Kyle?

KRANK

Krank.

(KRANK stands tall and steady. They hold each other still with their eyes for several seconds. He then takes a small step forward; she steps back. They freeze. She steps toward him; he steps back. They freeze. They make the smallest

moves in synchronicity and silence until she breaks the trance, runs through the kitchen and into The Void. She soon returns with a cup of hot chocolate.)

MOM

(Handing him the mug.)

Krankie, my little Krankie.

(The cup burns KRANK's hand. He lets it drop and break on the floor. MOM rushes back into The Void to get another mug.)

MOM

Maybe a little cool whip will--

KRANK

(To MOM who sinks into The Void.)

I don't need cocoa. I'm only here to be here. To think. I'm on the run. A girl's gonna meet me here.

(MOM returns with hot chocolate topped with whipped cream.)

I'm on the run. I just need to think.

MOM

(Handing him the mug.)

Cocoa helps you think.

(She drops to the floor with her special rag to clean up the spilt hot chocolate. Krank sips from mug, burns his tongue and tosses it aside again.)

KRANK

No. No it doesn't. Cocoa has never helped me think. In the fifteen years I lived here, getting cocoa poured down my throat, I never thought, I never had a thought. Nothing beyond cocoa has ever crossed my mind.

MOM

(Moving to clean the second mess.)

I could bake you up some--

KRANK

Whipped cream, baby marshmallows or one big Stay-Puff melting into a stick glob.

(beat)

That's as far away from cocoa I ever drifted.

(beat)

Besides, it's too hot. If it burns my tongue, I can't taste so what would the point be.

MOM

Honey, it's just we haven't seen your shining little face for so long. We just wanna--

KRANK

Mom, please. I won't be here long.

MOM

Why come at all then!

KRANK

I have nowhere else to go in this state. After this meeting, I'll be gone. But first I gotta think.

You gotta let me...

What is that smell? It's coming in waves.

MOM

(Bringing the rag and broken cups into The Void.)

Smells are different in the country, honey. Have you already forgotten that? Dad and I probably wouldn't like all the smokey smellies in that big city of yours.

KRANK

There is no country any more. You've got houses jammed right up next to you. And that smell. That's not manure, it's...

(moving toward window)

Is it coming from next door?

MOM

(From The Void.)

Everybody's home has a different smell now, honey. Especially country homes. Just because somebody's home doesn't smell like yours...

KRANK

This is not my home.

(trying to close the window)

Maybe if you'd close the window.

MOM

(Rushing back into the living room with a bucket overflowing with fried chicken.)

It's stuck! How 'bout some dinner? I'm sure your dad won't mind if you sneak a piece before--

KRANK

I thought he worked late.

MOM

Well, this is pretty late for us these days.

(KRANK accepts a chicken leg without thinking about it.)

KRANK

It's four.

(KRANK bites chicken then spits it out and tosses leg to the floor. MOM wets her special rag with her tongue and starts to wipe KRANK's mouth with it. KRANK accepts without thinking about it.)

MOM

We like to be in bed by six.

KRANK

I don't want any trouble with him.

(KRANK abruptly moves away from MOM's coddling. MOM pretends not to feel the rejection and picks up the chicken on the floor with one hand while holding the bucket in the other arm.)

MOM

We usually sleep till two or three. Then lie there till he needs breakfast at ten.

KRANK

I just need to meet this person, decide my next move. It won't even take--

MOM

(From deep inside The Void.)

It's sorta like being asleep only not so troublesome. We can just lay there and deal with things. It makes the days a little weanie easier.

KRANK

It makes your days a few hours long.

MOM

(lingering at the beginning of The Void)

Oh, you'll understand someday. When you get our age, you... you have to deal with things.

KRANK

I know about dealing with things!

(calmer)

That's why I just need you and dad to give me a few minutes alone with this person.

MOM

Honey, we'll do anything we can for you. You know that.

KRANK

Yeah, I know.

(pause)

Handyman's not gonna be a problem, right?

MOM

That is your father's job. You call him daddy or I won't be able to hear you, okay?

KRANK

So, he's definitely not gonna be any trouble.

(MOM reenters the living room with renewed energy. She again carries the bucket of chicken some of which often drops to the floor which she frantically picks up while swinging the bucket from arm to arm, often dropping more, some of which may drop out near the audience where it will stay throughout the show. The aroma should be fresh and potent.)

MOM

You know your father only acts like he does cause he loves you. It's because of how he was raised. His father used to...

KRANK

Mom, please, just... let me think.

MOM

That's what your dad used to say to gran'pa: "Just let me think, Pop." I remember your daddy rebuilding the engine in my little truck. It was art to him, just as much as your art is to you at that... gallery place you ran off to.

KRANK

I work security there.

MOM

Well, you get whatever art stuff you do from your daddy. Isn't nature pretty neat? Not to mention pretty.

KRANK

(avoiding MOM's eyes)

Nature's as pretty as you can pretend.

MOM

See! That's the kind of artsy talk your daddy would say. Like when he was working on that little truck. It wasn't good enough for it to purr like a kitty or zoomy zoom down the road, it all had to fit. If the car was a clunkity hank he's make the engine scream and throw you around like a roller coaster. If he's workin' on a slick smoothie, well, the ride would have to be just as pretty as a...

KRANK

(on "well, the ride...")

Yeah, that's something. Look all I ask--

MOM

(screams)

"Let me think!!!!!"

(pause, then resumes normal tone)

That's what he said. He was tryin' to listen to my engine when grandpa was tellin' him to take grandma to the beauty parlor. Your pappy grabbed the tire iron and pinned your dad's head down on the running engine. That's all I saw. The heat and smoke digging in his eyes. I ran home.

KRANK

Great.

MOM

But we had the best sex ever that night. Well, the first sex ever. Your old enough. I can tell you that stuff I think.

KRANK

No, I don't think that's a good idea.

MOM

(laughing)

Oh, one more little story. It's really pretty funny. I was still a good girl then. Such a good little girl, I didn't even know I was one. Your daddy had to show me how to lay down right.

KRANK

Please stop.

MOM

Never ever been touched before.

KRANK

Mom--

MOM

(demanding)

Never! I swear never. I was such a good little girl. Your daddy didn't know I was either. And goodness gracious, how I bled and bled. Everywhere. The sheets, our clothes. Our hair even.

(laughter peters out)

He just figured it was cause of his big ole tally whacker. I guess he still thinks that. Because he hasn't really touched me like that since. He's so afraid of hurting me is all.

KRANK

He better keep his distance from me.

MOM

I'm just telling you these stories so you can see. Your daddy's got pride. I'm just saying think about where your daddy's coming from next time he takes hold of you. He just loves you.

(DAD quietly enters and moves toward
KRANK.)

KRANK

All I need is to be here. Not love.

MOM
(To DAD.)

Honey, look it's Karl.

(KRANK spins quickly around to face DAD.)

KRANK

Krank.

MOM

Honey, look it's Krank.

(DAD is so excited to see KRANK, he can
barely contain himself. As they speak, they stare
aggressively at each other and mirror each
other's moves in a kind of Mexican stand-off.)

DAD

Yes! Yes. Yes, I see. This is Krank. My boy. My one and only boy.

MOM

Why do you say that Forrest?

DAD

(Continuing to stare into KRANK's eyes but talking to MOM.)

Oh, I'm sorry babe. I forgot to include the...

(pause)

...others. How many others were there before lil Krank here?

(DAD takes a quick step toward KRANK. KRANK jumps back.)

KRANK

Back off man. I'm only here for...

MOM

(To DAD.)

Five. And you know that now.

DAD

Yes. I suppose I do, don't I?

KRANK

Chrissakes man, why do you guys do this?

(Hit by a wave of stink.)

Jesus, it smells in here!

MOM

(on "do this.")

Just because they weren't like Krankie doesn't mean...

(DAD tries to grab KRANK. KRANK dodges him and moves behind MOM. DAD and KRANK begin to circle around MOM.)

MOM

Sometimes it takes a few eggs before you get to the good ones, that's all.

DAD

Oh, but I sure as hell busted a good one when we got to lil Krank, huh?

MOM

Yes. Yes, you did but the other kids are just as--

DAD

The other kids. Right. What were their names again?

KRANK

Why do you have to--

MOM

(on "have to")

Why do you have to be that way?

DAD

(to KRANK, on "that way")

Why do I have to be that way?

(Continue overlapping)

MOM

I hear you every night dreaming about Calvin and Collin and...

DAD

Collin! That's the one that peed his bed till he was 12, right?

MOM

...and Kelly and...

DAD

Little shit would bite like a...

MOM

...and Karl of course...

DAD

Tried to touch his mamma's special spot...

MOM

My God that's not true!!

(KRANK is thrown off balance by this remark.

DAD lunges, grabs KRANK and begins hugging and kissing his face. MOM is stuck between the two.)

DAD

There's my boy! The only boy I need! My boy!

(KRANK escapes DAD's arms. They all domino to the floor. The chicken spills across the floor. All stay on the floor quietly for several seconds. MOM then slowly begins picking up the chicken and dropping it into the bucket. KRANK and DAD stare through each other's eyes as they slowly stand up at the same time.)

DAD

You know what?

(pause)

It does smell in here goddamnit!

MOM

(leaving the bucket on the floor and running back into The Void)

I'll get dinner.

DAD

(moving toward window)

I hear that neighbor's one of those fat sonofabitches that can't leave their house anymore.

(yelling out of the window)

I hear he just orders pizzas with his welfare checks and shits himself!!

KRANK

It's coming from the window.

DAD

(still yelling out of the window)

Close your goddamn window!!

MOM

(Returning from The Void with a fresh bucket of chicken.)

Forrest!

(pause)

Have some chicken.

(She places the bucket on the floor.)

KRANK

If you'd fix your window...

DAD

Son. My little boy.

MOM

We can eat it right here on the floor like we used to for the Charlie Brown specials.

DAD

That window's stuck. Tighter'n a fossil in concrete, wedged open like a wound ever since you left. So, we went ahead and put that on your list. When you sped outa here in that lil Charger that I rebuilt for you. That chore is yours.

KRANK

If you think I'm staying in this putrid house long enough to--

DAD

(To MOM.)

Call the Cleaner. Me and Krank are sick of it.

MOM

Now darling, I don't know if we wanna...

DAD

(between his teeth)

Call it in sweetie. Krank can not stand it.

MOM

Why don't we eat dinner first, since it's ready?

DAD

I ate already. Call it in.

MOM

You... Again... At that same deli?

DAD

Yes. At that deli. On the way home. I was starved.

MOM

(hurt)

You must like the way they serve their--

DAD

Call The Cleaner! My love. My sweet, sweet love!

MOM

I can't.

DAD

You can't?

(pause)

And why can't you?

MOM

The phone's out of the wall.

DAD

And why is the phone out of the wall? Why would the phone just happen to be out of the wall?

MOM

I don't know! Nobody knows why you tore the phone out of the wall. Nobody knows.

DAD

Oh. Well. I must have forgotten myself.

(DAD abruptly turns away from MOM and moves to computer.)

DAD

I'll just e-mail him. It's faster anyway.

(MOM steals away into the bathroom, sits in the tub and strokes the bathroom wall. When she speaks, she seems to be speaking to herself at first and then turns it toward the neighbor, her imaginary lover.)

MOM

Don't listen to him, don't listen to him, don't listen to him, don't listen to him, don't listen to him, don't listen to him, don't listen, don't listen, don't listen. Stay open for me. Don't shut your window. I wanna know your there. I wanna smell you there. I'll sneak some more over soon. Stay open for me. It'll be extra crispy. I'll bet you like that. I'll bet you think of me. I'll bet you're holding me in your head. When your teeth cut through that crispy, when you sink deep inside of that soft, white meat, I'll bet you're touching me. In your head.

(Generation 2 characters become Generation 1 characters.)

SCENE TWO

(DAISY sleeps in front of the stove. CANARY sits on the floor looking through a box labeled “memories.” CLEANER sprays for bugs in the cracks in the bathroom. DAISY squirms as if beginning to wake up, revealing her wrist handcuffed to the stove. CANARY runs into the bathroom, startles herself and CLEANER, and quietly steps into the tub. CLEANER stares at her for several seconds.)

CLEANER

I remember you.

(looking down to return to work)

I mean... I’m saying... I will. I’d guess I’m gonna remember.

CANARY

I don’t remember you.

CLEANER

And you won’t. Why would you. My job.

CANARY

What’s your job?

CLEANER

The nasties. Taking care of the nasty no-goods. The little um... any little...

crawling creepy...

Cleaning, deoderizing.

Why remember that? I enjoy it though, so . . .

CANARY

Why?

CLEANER

Things need to be clean. And well, see. See, well... sorta... music, like that... it takes... sends me... the fumes even from the spray, I breathe like...

(pause, looks back at work)

Seems the more I enjoy life, the less I can... All of it. If I can't explain it, you know I like it.

CANARY

So, maybe if you stopped talking all together, you'd love life.

(She laughs and CLEANER soon begins laughing.)

CLEANER

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I see, yeah. Like um... that's... the whole flip flop thing, yeah.

(abruptly stops laughing)

Maybe.

(back to work)

CANARY

How do you remember what hasn't happened?

CLEANER

I can't listen to a bunch a questions, kid. Are you one of those kinda kids?

CANARY

I don't know but I think I do that.

CLEANER

What's that?

CANARY

Remember things.

CLEANER

That's great, kid.

CANARY

That haven't happened, I mean.

CLEANER

Look, you're only thinking that cause you got nothing else to think. You'll get into a... find your... You'll get a job. It'll be different.

CANARY

You said you remember--

CLEANER

I know cleaning. Been everywhere cleaning, that's why, what and how I know and remember.

CANARY

Where've you been?

CLEANER

Everywhere, I said!

(pause)

The last house. At the last place, across the field. It was... What's your house number? It's one less, I think than your number, one less... or more.

CANARY

I'm not sure.

CLEANER

What?

CANARY

My house number.

CLEANER

It'll be important one day. Where you're at.

DAISY

(Calling out in her sleep.)

Baby. Baby!

CLEANER

Your mama's waking. Better get yourself in the other room.

CANARY

She's just dreaming. Remembering. She dreams and remembers what's already happened and I go the other way. I always thought I was weird so...

CLEANER

You know what just hit me?

CANARY

No.

CLEANER

Maybe you're a prophet. Like a Greek guy.

CANARY

My dream says something about that!

CLEANER

You have a lot of them?

CANARY

Alota what?

CLEANER

Dreams.

CANARY

Is there more than one?

CLEANER

One...?

How when you...? In your...

Does it...

Does it say anything about me?

CANARY

I don't remember you.

CLEANER

I knew you wouldn't. My job.

CANARY

You think you're part of my dream?

DAISY

Baby!!!

CLEANER

What's she remembering?!

CANARY

When I was choking. I was a baby. My food got all... She had to give me the back blows.

CLEANER

Then she'll be waking.

CANARY

She does it still while she's awake too. I only choked the once. But she still ends up back blowing me before I can finish a full meal. Just in case, I guess.

CLEANER

Yeah, well, yeah, get going... well, maybe I should be the one. Maybe I should go.

CANARY

Why?

CLEANER

She might think I'm touching you.

CANARY

Why would she?

DAISY

BABY!!

CLEANER

She'd see it in my eyes.

(CLEANER exits bathroom, enters living room.
CANARY quietly follows him. FORREST, who
had been creeping like a cat through the
audience and up to the window, now leans
against the window and stares inside.
CLEANER jumps when he sees him.)

CLEANER

(To FORREST.)

Just remember, I'm doing you a favor, cleaning those bugs, the nasty. Just like you asked.

FORREST

I don't live here.

CLEANER

Not yet... But see... My existence... My... that's the... Watch those eyes of yours! They're
talking up a storm. Misbehavin'. You're the one asked me to... I mean you will... And when you
do, I'll remember. Those goddamn eyes like they're the only ones, like there ain't no other eyes
around, like there ain't eyes on the inside. Just remember I'm in here from out there and doing
you a favor.

(CLEANER exits.)

FORREST

What did he say?

CANARY

You saw him?

FORREST

He was right in front of me. Talking nuts.

CANARY

Thought I was having a new dream.

FORREST

You're awake.

CANARY

Oh.

FORREST

Who was he?

CANARY

Cleaner. He remembers me.

FORREST

From where?

CANARY

Somewhere else, from some different time, I guess.

FORREST

Nuts. Give me some tongue real quick.

CANARY

My ma's waking up soon.

(She sees POP on his combine in the distance.)

Get down! Low!

(He does.)

FORREST

What's he doing?

CANARY

Circlin'.

FORREST

He's always circlin'. On that combine, never planting, just circlin', rippin' up the ground and circlin'.

CANARY

He's keeping the government out.

FORREST

What government?

CANARY

People in the suits and sunglasses. They'll take your farm, house, even the family if you let 'em, I guess.

FORREST

I don't know, I think it's weird.

CANARY

(suddenly angry)

He's just protecting us!

FORREST

Okay, already. Take it easy. I'm just here for some tonguin'. Come on. Just real quick and I'm gone.

CANARY

Fine. Close your eyes first.

(He closes his eyes and opens his mouth.

CANARY approaches with her tongue out. But steps back when she sees the hammer in his hand behind his back.)

CANARY

What's that for?

FORREST

Hammering. Building with nails and...

CANARY

There's fur on. Orange fur.

FORREST

Just hammering...

CANARY

Leave the kitties alone.

FORREST

Strays are just...

CANARY

Strays're better to me than the regulars. I had that stray loved me more'n anything. Found its head, wide open and pourin brains in the milk I left.

FORREST

Was the bowl broken?

CANARY

No.

FORREST

Then it wasn't a hammer that smashed your kitty. It musta been a gun. The Brock boys or Jimmy Sparks, maybe. I don't use a gun.

CANARY

Don't matter. You do like them and you're them. It's all one thing.

FORREST

Fine. Here.

(offers to give her the hammer)

CANARY

Eeew.

(pause)

FORREST

Sorry.

(pause)

Can I get just a little tongue?

CANARY

Don't be them.

FORREST

I'm not. I won't.

(CANARY moves toward Forrest with her tongue extended. DAISY wakes and sees the "memories" box opened and on the floor.)

DAISY

(coldly, quietly)

Baby.

(Forrest runs away like a cat through the audience and out.)

DAISY

Why is this out?

CANARY

It was... I just wanted to clean shelves and...

DAISY

You can't be in there. You can't... I told you not to do bad things. I told you that... When you do bad things you go away from my head. You're not mine, you fly away. What're you looking for? What could you be looking for?

CANARY

It's not looking. It's wonderin' is all.

DAISY

Wonderin'! Now suddenly you're wonderin'. Suddenly our quiet little canary, finds a tune and starts wonderin'. Next you'll be wonderin' and wanderin' and get all confused and mystified.

(laughs)

CANARY

(Looking at handcuffs.)

How long this time?

(Silence.)

DAISY

I got mystified once. That's where it starts. My granny's granny got mystified once. You're great great great granny. She's the first one. Rest before, no one did. But she did. Now great granny's dad was a doctor. Or maybe he knew one. He tried to put a stop to it. Wrote her up some medicine. Hopin' to stop the evil. Perscription's in the box there. See for yourself. Didn't stop the evil. We all got a little. That's natural. Ever since it started--your great granny's granny--completely natural. What's important is to get it out, but we can't. So the really important is to be where... Our bodies anyhow... need to be where... they need be. Sometimes they need a little help.

(beat)

Guess I should simmer up some dinner.

(DAISY starts trying to get pans out of the stove's cabinet. Handcuffs make it difficult.

CANARY begins digging through "memories" again.)

DAISY

Your granny's daddy wrote it out!! You find that yet?! You see the generations we're crossing here?!

DAISY

(beat)

Do you see how far back we're going?

(CANARY shakes her head "no.")

DAISY

No?

(pause)

Then fly, why don't you? If that's how it is then fly.

(pause, then tenderly)

Little Canary, please just fly.

CANARY

How?

DAISY

You just do it. Step out that window and go. That's all. Canaries don't think about it they just start goin' up.

CANARY

I'd fall.

DAISY

Not if you just keep goin' up.

(POP enters through the front door with his cowboy hat hanging over his eyes. DAISY and CANARY look to the floor and freeze as POP walks by them and into The Void.)

DAISY

(whispering)

I said it's time to fly.

(POP returns from The Void with a bottle of whiskey and begins to exit the same way he entered. As he passes the women he dryly speaks.)

POP

How's my little angels?

(POP exits.)

(CANARY stares at DAISY as she backs away and toward the window. When she reaches the window, she climbs outside and flits away like a little bird.)

DAISY

(quietly, coldly)

You leave now, young lady, don't you dare come back.

(Generation 1 becomes Generation 2.)

SCENE THREE

(DAD is pounding on the computer with his fist,
KRANK is across the living room from him.
MOM is in the bathtub.)

DAD

How do I send?

KRANK

(visibly frightened of his father, but holding his cool)

Do you realize what I do for a living?

DAD

(slaming his fist on the keyboard as he bellows)

F1! F2! F3!

I know it's a goddamn F-thing!

KRANK

I could end you... With just a...

DAD

(Toward bathroom.)

Hear what he's saying?! End me!

(To KRANK.)

Is that what you said baby-boy?

KRANK

(Turning from DAD, to self.)

I gotta figure my shit out. I gotta face it and... do the job.

KRANK

(To DAD.)

Do the job! That's what you said. Remember! "That's all a man is..."

DAD

(Toward bathroom/MOM.)

Who's that sound like to you? You know who I think that sounds like?!

MOM

(From bathroom.)

NO! He's not Conway. Conway is long, long gone.

KRANK

You want me to show you who I am?

MOM

He's one of your boys Forrest! He's your boy and he's come for our help!

(DAD moves toward KRANK at the word
"help." Stand off begins again.)

DAD

My help! Well, hell yes, he came for my help! Where's a boy to go for help if not his old man. A boy needs his father. You're lucky, you got a father who's--

KRANK

Who's had his head pinned to a running truck engine, I know.

DAD

Goddamn right to a truck engine! My eyes bled that night. Ever see a man with bleeding eyes. After that you know how to raise a boy. Know how to keep his head out of the engine. Outa anywhere near an engine of any kind, goddamnit. You'll stay right here, you'll finish your chores and then you can get to those finger paintings you started just before you slipped outa here. I know you love your work, you can love it with us.

KRANK

I'm not an artist! I work security.

DAD

Whatever you were workin', no more sweat, son. You and me, we'll start a little art store. Yeah? We'll call it Krank's. Krank's Hardware and Art Supplies. We'll have a big staff to care of it and we'll just sit in the back with the boxes of extra pieces and parts and sip black coffee and laugh at the Farside comics. Remember that one we laughed at with the fat lady sittin' on the chicken? Or that mighta been a Chihuahua.

KRANK

We never laughed. And I gotta job. Runnin's all part of it. You really wanna help?

DAD

This is your flesh here. Whadda ya think, I'm gonna not help?

KRANK

Then help yourself. Relax and stay outa my way. Smoke a cigarette, jerk off, do some yoga, something. Just relax.

DAD

I've tried. Yanked my pecker till it bled. Doesn't make me worry any less about my boy.

KRANK

Let me have the house for fifteen minutes and I'll be on my way.

DAD

Boy, once you take the house, it's not for five minutes. It's forever.

KRANK

I'm not safe. You're not safe with me. And the more you try, the more dangerous it is. Don't you get it?

DAD

Hey, I get it. You don't. Don't you get it?

(DAD grabs KRANK again.)

KRANK

They're coming! They'll figure me out. They'll burst through. From the shadows, they're in the darkest part of the shadows and they'll burst through, finish us all off and you won't see it comin'.

(They fall to the floor and KRANK escapes.)

You won't see it, cause your looking right.

DAD

(Going into The Void.)

You wanna see who's lookin'. I'll show you lookin'.

(reentering, with a bundle of different sizes of cables, wires and lights)

I'm wiring that door. Anyone comes through it, I'll know it through these wires. I'll set it so there's noise and lights a flashin' and...

(pulling his hammer from his belt like a gunslinger)

...and be right on my way. In the mean time, I'll be circling the perimeter, watching for those artsy boys that are after ya.

(Lovely knocks at the door.)

DAD

Stay right there, boy.

(As soon as DAD reaches the door, LOVELY steps in, grabs DAD's hand that holds the hammer with her one hand and puts a knife to his throat with here other hand. LOVELY brings him near KRANK.)

KRANK

This is the friend I've been waiting for.

DAD

Well, how very nice that is. Your little girlfriend. Pretty.

LOVELY

(pushing the knife closer)

Lovely.

DAD

Mmmm?

LOVELY

Name's Lovely. Not Pretty.

DAD

How Lovely.

DAD

(To KRANK although he is still held by
LOVELY's knife and eyes.)

Just let your little friend know about the door. She best stick around for a while now that she's here, now that she's family. And I'm making this family decree, here and now: anyone trips the wires, comin' or goin'...

KRANK

If you think you can trap us here, you're--

DAD

Wrong?! Is that what I am?

KRANK

Very wrong.

DAD

Very goddamn wrong!

(Lovely pushes him to the ground, where he
stays.)

(pause)

You're goddamn right. Count on it. That's the one thing I tried to teach ya, outa all the things I tried to teach ya that's the one thing that meant a goddamn practical thing. It's the only thing that keeps us together. As a family!

(slowly starting to stand, Lovely watching like a hawk)

Sometimes after a hard day's work and I come home to see my pathetic life and wife, there's nothing to do but fuckin'...

(DAD attempts to lunge at KRANK. KRANK
moves back, frightened. LOVELY steps in and
holds DAD the way she did when she first

arrived only this time DAD looks past
LOVELY and holds KRANK's eyes.)

DAD

No, no, no. No, see, you don't have to do that. You don't have to be afraid of nothin' baby boy. See, when we choose the wrong paths... When instead of smacking her in the head, I just sit my ass on the couch and turn on Full House. Hell, those little twins'll light me up sometimes so much that I'll give your mamma a nice sloppy kiss on the jaw.

(KRANK takes LOVELY's arm. She releases
DAD, and the two move into The Void. DAD
finishes his monologue alone.)

How many boys your age can say their parents still live together, let alone live together peacefully. Everything'll be... When I choose to do the not natural... It'll be...

(pause)

Count on the wrong path. The wrong flip of the coin.

(pause)

And you won't be caught off guard when your heads turns out to be tails! Get it?! The flip of the coin!

(CLEANER has quietly entered, DAD turns
around to find CLEANER in his face.)

DAD

Yes?

CLEANER

You called for a cleaner?

DAD

You guys are quick. I guess e-mail these days--

CLEANER

Yes that's right. You've got that... You've got that one right on the... You know what the hell you're... It's quick. Only a couple seconds after your fist finds that goddamn F key your message jams right up my ass!

(pause)

I prefer a phone call. A voice, to know who... to feel, I mean hear... I suppose we don't need to see eye to eye on modern communication in order for me to do my job.

(MOM enters from bathroom and silently and fearfully watches CLEANER.)

DAD

I suppose not.

CLEANER

Fantastic then there. By the way I got it: flip of the coin,

(laughing)

heads turns out to be tails, it's like "Heeeey how'd my ass get on my shoulders."

(abruptly stops laughing as he walks by the window)

Wooooooooooooo! Hoo! It appears I got a job ahead of me.

DAD

Bet your ass. We need something done about--

MOM

The smell. A good deoderizing. You could spray something. In the air. That'd do it, I guess.

CLEANER

(recognizing MOM)

Well, well, well, well, well, well, well, well, well... Well, yes, yes, I could do that. I could do that, yes. See we've got two packages. With the first one--I call it package A--I'd spray a little something, make everything smell like... like um... like something that smells like... But let's face it: Within three days the smell from Nineteen over there's just gonna creep right back in here. I suggest the package I call package "other."

(CLEANER laughs wildly at his own joke.)

See, I only have two packages so I call the second one "other."

DAD

You call things what they are.

CLEANER

(still laughing)

Yeah it'n that a fucker!

DAD

No.

CLEANER

(stops laughing)

Oh. Well, anyway. The "other" package is a bit expensive. I ain't gonna lie to you. But with it we get to the source of the problem: We kick in the smelly-ass neighbors door and just start fumigating the place. We don't even mess with the wretched family at first--unless they try something. But we don't let 'em leave either. Cause once we're done with the house. We scrub the entire family.

DAD

There's only one big fat guy in there. One of them freaks that eat themselves into being stuck.

CLEANER

Fine, fine. Regardless, the most odorous germs inhabit the human body. So after fumigating, we'll scrub the fat bastard with gasoline and a wire brush. And then we'll give him a little reminder to keep the area smellin' nice in the future.

(between teeth)

Pigly wigly.

MOM

Why don't we just...! I think all we need is the first package. Really, I don't think it'll be necessary to...

(MOM silences when DAD begins massaging her shoulders.)

DAD

(To CLEANER.)

Our son. Our newest child, Krank, would like for his home to be nice again. To smell like a home again.

(CLEANER exits to begin job. MOM breaks from DAD's grip and moves into the tub. DAD begins setting up the lights for his door alarm; he continues this action through some of the next scene and afterwards begins circling the perimeter, around the audience, like a cat until it is time for him to approach the window as Forrest. With clothes on, MOM washes herself-- this can be mimed but preferable actualized.)

(Generation 2 becomes Generation 1.)

SCENE FOUR

(CANARY returns soaking wet, moss dangles from her clothes. She walks through the audience with heavy human feet. DAISY is still cuffed to the stove. She is stirring a large pot of broth. CANARY comes back inside through the window. DAISY and CANARY stare at each other for several seconds.)

Come here. Come here.

(pause)

Come here.

(pause)

Come here! Come here!! Come here!!!

(long pause)

Come here, baby and help with the broth.

(CANARY moves slowly to DAISY. DAISY pins her to the wall.)

DAISY

Where have you been?!! Where?!

CANARY

You told me to fly.

DAISY

I was making an example. Saying somethin' that meant something else.

CANARY

I know. And I did that somethin' else. I went to see Rosie Red. She's still in the creek.

(long pause)

My little sister's still in the creek.

DAISY

Who?

CANARY

Poppy's favorite angel.

DAISY

Poppy's favorite...?

CANARY

The one poppy'd rub to sleep. Rubbed her all night and hum his honky tonk. I'd fall asleep to his hummin'. And he'd rub her all night. Remember Rosie Red?

DAISY

Sure.

(long pause)

She's still in the creek?

CANARY

Where we got baptized. Remember getting us baptized?

DAISY

Sure.

(pause)

We took you and...

CANARY

Rosie Red.

DAISY

Sure.

(POP, faceless, walks in. CANARY and DAISY look to the floor and freeze.)

POP

How's my little angels?

(POP walks toward The Void. Moving like a cat, FORREST creeps through the audience and to the window. DAISY and CANARY remain frozen. POP walks out of The Void with his whiskey. CANARY brings her head up and takes a step toward him as he begins to exit. He stops. She stops. He continues to exit.)

CANARY

I never have slept good since getting baptized. Poppy stopped hummin'. That's why I don't get what you mean sometimes: flyin', stirrin' broth. I'm starting though. I don't sleep good. But I'm starting to get what you mean.

DAISY

I need to finish this broth. You go on. I need to finish this.

(CANARY sees FORREST creeping like a cat toward the window as she walks into the living room. She goes to the window.)

FORREST

I watched this pussy-cat. It killed a little bird. Saw it all. Tore one of its wings off first. Then it just watched for a while. All crouched and ready.

(pause)

I watched it watch the little bird floppin' around until it stopped, dead.

I thought about you. What you were sayin'. I don't gotta kill nothin'. Nature does it for us. So see now I know. I can just watch. Like the cat... crouched, ready, but nothin'. Just sittin' still, ya know?

CANARY

The cat didn't just watch. It ripped the bird's wing off first, then watched it bleed to death. I don't blame her though, and I wouldn't blame you no more either, if you woulda killed that kitty good, I wouldn't blame you. It's nature.

FORREST

Now what are you talking about. Who's been teaching you this nature stuff.

CANARY

I was talking to my dead sister in the creek.

FORREST

What sister?

CANARY

Rosie Red.

FORREST

You say she's dead?

CANARY

That's the strange part, I know. But it happens. Like when you pray.

FORREST

There'd be two of you. I don't remember two of you.

CANARY

She's my sister. She's dead. In the creek. We had a talk.

FORREST

What do you talk about?

CANARY

About when it's right. To be gone. Sometimes it's better for people like her.

FORREST

To be gone?

CANARY

And it's nature, to help nature. Your kitty was helping. Doing what it did. Like when you use your hammer.

FORREST

I'm not gonna anymore, though. You don't want me to no more, right?

CANARY

Unless, you're helping.

FORREST

Helping nature?

CANARY

Like your kitty helped the little bird?

FORREST

Who should I help?

CANARY

(between teeth)

Pop.

(Generation 1 becomes Generation 2.)

SCENE FIVE

(KRANK and LOVELY in the kitchen. MOM in the bathtub. Like a cat, DAD creeps slowly around off-stage and around the outskirts of the audience; he is protecting the perimeter and watching for the alarm to be tripped.)

LOVELY

Kind of a pussy around that maintenance man.

KRANK

My dad.

LOVELY

Fuck it, huh. You did it! Baby you hit like no one can hit! Even if you are a pussy around your folks.

KRANK

(pulling away from her)

Yeah, thanks but...

LOVELY

Don't thank me baby. You. You, you, you, you, you. You take out Charlie K., the number one cock sucking curator. Outa the picture, outa this life. Our last obstacle, outa the fuckin' way. Thank you. You.

KRANK

(again brushing off her attempts to seduce)

We gotta talk.

LOVELY

Talk. Here's the talk: No finger prints. No weapon. No evidence period. Just the Charlie K., the last stick-in-our-ass, laying spread eagle in a pool of blood and MISSING A TONGUE! I love it when you do that. The way you just mutilate.

KRANK

(avoiding her arms)

I never just mutilate. I'm not a thug, you know.

LOVELY

Hey, I'm not bashing your style. Just the opposite.

KRANK

I give it a lotta...

It's a creative thing, it's a...

(KRANK jumps on top of the stove as if it were a stage. He takes on a new, almost overly dramatic tone.)

KRANK

I allow this flow to pass through. I open to it and wait.

(long pause)

And wait. For the right moment--for that something. Then when it's there, when I got it, I hold...

(long pause)

...soft, ya know. Then I sink my teeth in. And sometimes, something beautiful will happen.

Something that burns.

(placing his finger at the center of his forehead)

Right there.

LOVELY

Yeah, you bit his tongue off right. I knew he wanted to fuck ya. You started tongue kissing and fuck yeah. You got me floored, babe.

(KRANK drops from the stove and drops his dramatic tone.)

KRANK

Yeah, well, I don't have long, I should be makin' a move and we need to--

LOVELY

No. No. See. They've got nothing. You can bust out there. Laugh in their dead faces. It's clean. It's all--

KRANK

No! Nothing is clean. It's on my ass. It's breathing down my neck.

LOVELY

Who do you think is coming after--

KRANK

Karma.

LOVELY

Karma? When did you get religion?

KRANK

You don't have to be religious to know that your shit comes after you. You don't even have to read anything to know that.

LOVELY

Don't talk to me like I'm dumb. I went to college.

KRANK

Yeah? Well, remember that Greek guy, Oracle or--

LOVELY

Orestes. He kills Oedipuscumplex.

KRANK

No. This guy kills his mom and as soon as he does, he looks up... sees Karma comin' at him. What can he do? I'll tell you: He runs to a temple, faces it when it catches up and then hits the road again.

LOVELY

Wait. Is this the guy with those ugly bitches chasing him?

KRANK

Karma!

LOVELY

And you saw the Karma bitches?

KRANK

You can smell them. Sounds weird but I could smell them with everything. In my nose, between my eyes, in my belly.

LOVELY

This is your temple or something?

KRANK

This is the source, man. The origin of my shit. That's what the temple is: the source where you can step right up to the shit. You gotta face it, look it square in the...

You gotta face it and split. But right now... right now I couldn't smell it if it was swallowing me, cause of the neighbor. But I swear it has a smell. It's a prophetic sort of smell.

LOVELY

I only smell chicken. Your mamma's quite a cook, I bet.

Fuck this. Come on baby let's celebrate...

KRANK

Look, we got shit to face ourselves.

LOVELY

(forcing herself on him)

No. Bull shit. We are gonna celebrate. We are getting naked and celebrating.

(KRANK pushes her off of him.)

We're in charge! This whole thing is about dominance and we are it. I have dealt with your limp anxiety for too long. Now we're on top.

KRANK

Sid's still calling the shots.

LOVELY

Sid calls whatever shots I want him to.

KRANK

Like the call on Charlie.

(LOVELY's eyes affirm.)

How?

LOVELY

I told him Charlie got drunk and stuck his tongue in my ear.

KRANK

Did he?

LOVELY

That pussy? Jesus, no.

KRANK

Why not just take out Sid. You got the opportunities. You got the grit. Besides, he might have you hit, he figures your shit out.

LOVELY

Don't you get it? We're playing him. We manipulate and dominate. We run the fucking operation through the jealousy of that so-called man of mine. Now come here. Put your hands in my panties, warm me up.

KRANK

Goddamnit! We're manipulating and dominating ourselves! This is exactly what we need to look past, just for a moment. It might be our last chance.

LOVELY

What're you talking about? Our last chance?

KRANK

For what is beyond fucking.

LOVELY

Coming. Now your talking.

KRANK

No. Before that, before that and right after. The truth behind the fuck. This morning, when we were chewing on each other, remember?

LOVELY

We do get into that don't we?

KRANK

Right after that. In the middle of it all you grabbed a hand full of hair. Cocked my head back. Remember that?

LOVELY

So you excite me. I thought you liked it when I get rough.

KRANK

Right then. You looked me right in the eyes, right through me. You looked--

LOVELY

(avoiding KRANK's arms)

Why now? Why does this particular tongueless piece of shit have to be the stiff that curses you?

KRANK

Cause I was close to him. Charlie and me were tight.

LOVELY

I know babe but when you got a job--

KRANK

No. We were really tight. In ways that--

LOVELY

But you got a job--

KRANK

The job, yes! The job! "A man is his job." I know the credo, well. It's part of me. My nature. I'll finish my hits. But first we need to talk, we need to open--

LOVELY

You have more hits?

KRANK

Yeah, and I'll finish it tonight, but that don't change the shit heading for me.

LOVELY

Vincent, right?

(KRANK turns away. LOVELY takes his reaction as an affirmation and laughs.)

Ho! Shit! I only told Sid that I caught him checking my ass. He must be more unstable than I thought. Fuck Vince, what are you scared of? He'll be easy pickings.

KRANK

You know what really scares me?

LOVELY

Besides the Karma Bitches?

KRANK

I can taste you.

(Silence.)

LOVELY

You what?

KRANK

What I'm saying is... I stood up to my shit, so now I gotta bust out unless I want more shit on my tail. It's our last chance to... We gotta rip our hearts out and--

LOVELY

Our hearts?!! Listen to how you're talking! Why don't you just go write me a love song or something.

KRANK

Taste you. I taste you. I don't mean like a poetry kind of thing. I mean you're on my tongue. You're all over me, in me.

(They look into each other's eyes. LOVELY then snaps out of the trance.)

LOVELY

What is this? Whaddaya want from me here?

KRANK

Are you telling me when you look in my eyes that way, when you look inside me like you do...? I know you can taste me.

LOVELY

Should I break down... start licking your knees or something? Remember the plan? Cool. Play it fucking cool!!

(She knees him in the groin and he falls to his knees.)

Should I just open up now?! Surrender my soul?!

(KRANK rips open her hose, and begins licking her knees.)

LOVELY

What are you . . . Oh my god.

(LOVELY grabs him by his hair, cocks his head back and looks straight into his eyes for a couple moments, then throws him aside.)

KRANK

They're just words. I just need to hear it. I just need to...

LOVELY

I can't just... What if... What if I fucking...

KRANK

What if you what?

LOVELY

What if I say it and--

KRANK

Say what?

LOVELY

What if I say it and--

KRANK

And what?

LOVELY

And do!

KRANK

Do what?

(LOVELY knees KRANK in the face.)

LOVELY

You're not running from me!

KRANK

What's the difference? I'm sure you'll find someone who likes it rough.

LOVELY

You think I just give that to anyone.

KRANK

Sid.

LOVELY

Sid hasn't been laid in months.

KRANK

Since we first--

LOVELY

How do you think I got him calling hits on people that even look at my ass?

KRANK

So then it's only--

LOVELY

It's only, yes, it's only only a couple wanna-be post-modern pussies like Vince left to cut down.
It's here. It's over. We're fucking it.

KRANK

It's only that. That's all it only is?

LOVELY

That's all it only is.

KRANK

Fuck it. Obviously, things are not what I thought. I'm out.

(KRANK starts to exit. LOVELY grabs him
from behind, puts her knife to his throat.)

LOVELY

No! You can't go... You can't... We're doing this thing! We're gonna own that gallery. Together!
Me and you!

KRANK

Why? I just wanna hear why you need me.

LOVELY

(pushing the knife closer to his throat)

Because I do love you!

(Silence. LOVELY buries her head in
KRANK's back.)

Holy fuck...

LOVELY

You said it.

KRANK

I said it. I did.

LOVELY

You do.

KRANK

I did. Yes.

LOVELY

You do.

KRANK

I do.

LOVELY

Yes?

KRANK

Yes.

LOVELY

(LOVELY slides down KRANK.)

Tell me.

KRANK

LOVELY

I love you.

(KRANK bends to LOVELY and brings her to her feet with a sensual, loving kiss. MOM is stroking the wall between her and #19. As MOM speaks KRANK and LOVELY's kiss becomes heavier.)

MOM

Don't let it hurt. Whatever he does, whatever. Don't let it... Just shut down. Block it out. It'll be over soon. You don't have a choice, don't fight. Try to relax, try to go numb.

(KRANK's kiss turns violent. LOVELY raises her blade, KRANK catches her arm as he continues to bite into her tongue. He leads her into the deepest part of The Void.)

(Generation 2 becomes Generation 1, except for MOM who remains in the tub.)

SCENE SIX

(DAISY, still cuffed, sleeps again. FORREST sneaks into the window and draws hammer, moves toward DAISY. POP strolls in, FORREST moves into The Void to hide.)

POP

How's my little angels?

(DAISY wakes. POP goes into The Void. Silence for a few moments. POP walks out with FORREST, one hand holds back FORREST's hammer, the other holds a gun to FORREST's head. They circle to the living room/kitchen area. DAISY silently watches throughout.)

POP

I'll be damned if I didn't know you'd be back. Think you can just walk up with just the one of ya and walk away with my land.

FORREST

I'm not here to take--

POP

"Buy," then! I'll use your language. Buy my life, cause you say it's a done and sealed deal without askin'. Now what? Want the house, too? I been waitin' for that. Trainin' for it.

FORREST

I'm not from the government.

POP

That so? What're you here for then?

FORREST

Your wife.

POP

My Daisy? Well that's another story.

(POP makes FORREST drop hammer, throws him into frisking position, puts his gun where FORREST can see it and begins frisking. Eventually he gets to FORREST's testicles where he lingers. And lingers... Forrest tries to pull away but stays in frisking position.)

POP

Take it easy, son, just checkin' the balls.

(He lingers and lingers, FORREST tries to pull away, POP stays with him this time.)

Take it easy, son, gotta check the balls. Take it easy, son! Gotta... check...

(FORREST pulls away, pushing POP to the ground. FORREST grabs the gun and aims.)

POP

Easy there now. Just had to check if you were man enough for my Daisy.

FORREST

How's this for man enough?

POP

(Here and throughout this scene, POP taunts FORREST, moving freely throughout the stage space as FORREST follows him with his aim.)

Well, it's not a cock, son. It's a gun. It's not even a good representation. Maybe the hammer is better for ya. More your shape.

FORREST

Shut up!

Get yourself ready. You're gonna die soon now.

POP

Makes it alot easier when you're trained to kill. You know I'm trained to kill?

FORREST

How could I? What do I care?

POP

You know now, why deny! I asked the question, then ya knew.

And you care because I know how to kill.

FORREST

You ain't killing today.

POP

Never killed. Not a man. Just trained. Poppin' a stray cat now and then. Trained myself out there on my combine. Circlin'. Probably thought I's crazy. But I's gettin' ready. Ready for the men in the suits. Reckon I wasn't expecting you though. Lookin' the wrong way. Makes sense now though. Reckon my job's over and done, now you got yours.

FORREST

All I'm doing is ending you. Ain't no job to it.

POP

Ending me?! Family man's a bigger job than just that.

FORREST

You shoulda been doin' it.

POP

I told you my job, it's done. Now you get on with yours daddy.

FORREST

Ain't no job. It ain't like that.

POP

Not yet, but it comes. It does. Like summer does winter does summer. With some stuff between.

FORREST

Shut up. Get yerself ready!

POP

You'll have a kid. Maybe a boy. That's the curse I got for ya. You'll have a boy and he'll have my eyes. He'll learn to be a man and he'll see what I'm seein' now. And he'll get ya, like your gettin' me. That's how the family thing works. No curse necessary really.

FORREST

Not if I do it right. Not if I keep ‘em close.

POP

Yeah.

(pause)

Yeah, you keep ‘em close. Guess you got it figured, so go ahead, ask me for the house.

FORREST

What?

POP

Here’s what I wanna hear: “Let me have the house.” Say it.

FORREST

You’re nowhere to demand.

POP

I can make this real easy or not.

FORREST

I’m just shootin’ ya. Endin’ ya. Nothin’s easier.

POP

Well, you ain’t done it yet. I could help ya. I could turn my head so you won’t be got by the eyes.

(pause)

“Let me have the house.”

Or I jump up: Eyes to eyes. Eyes’ll get ya.

FORREST

I’m doing it my way.

POP

(POP rushes toward FORREST, taking off his hat to reveal his eyes.)

“Let me have the house”!

(FORREST tries to fire. The gun will not. POP walks until the gun is pressed against his forehead. His eyes burn into FORREST’s.)

POP

Safety’s on the side.

Other side.

(long pause)

Now...

FORREST

(lowers gun in defeat)

Let me have the house.

POP

Sure, son.

(POP drops keys on the floor and turns his back to FORREST and walks into The Void.

FORREST drops the gun, picks up his hammer and moves into The Void to end POP. DAISY laughs.)

(Generation 1 becomes Generation 2.)

SCENE SEVEN

(MOM in the tub.)

MOM

Extra crispy. Extra, extra soft and juicy in the middle. Soon. Possum's can do it. And so can you. It's a little switch. A little shut-down trigger. In you head. And then there'll be a new recipe waiting. My new little secret recipe will be waiting. For you.

(The sound of LOVELY's lifeless drop to the floor in The Void.)

MOM

(looking toward kitchen)

Konway?

(KRANK enters from The Void. He has blood dripping from his lips and he's mumbling.)

KRANK

A man is his job. A man is his job. A man is his job. A man is his job. A man is his job. A job's nature...

A man is his job. A man is his nature. Nature is...

A man's nature is his job.

A man is his job. A man--

MOM

(Entering kitchen.)

Conway?

KRANK

And Krank, and Kelly, Kollin, Karl, Kevin, Calvin, all of them. We're all here. All at once.

MOM

What? What are you...?

CLEANER

(Jumps in through the door, the alarm lights begin flashing and continue throughout.)

It's done!!!

(He begins delivering the following lines to MOM then abruptly changes his focus to the audience.)

It was easy as... um... no harder than... Didn't have to... He was dead. Been dead, rotting and smelling for a while, I guess. Ate himself to death, apparently. Probably choked or busted an intestine or somethin'.

(long pause)

Chicken! He had buckets and buckets of it everywhere. Twenty buckets alone were piled up by the window.

So, what's with the flashing lights?

KRANK

My dad. He'll kill you.

MOM

Chicken?

CLEANER

Yeah, yeah and get this: He's laying there. Propped up against the wall, like he was listening through it. One hand squeezing his pecker, the other squeezing a wing. Choking the chicken you could say!

(CLEANER laughs wildly at his own joke. With a bundle of cable, DAD stealthily sneaks up on CLEANER from behind. KRANK sees this and walks up to CLEANER, takes his hand and places the knife in his hand. DAD wraps the cable around CLEANER's throat and pulls him off-stage. Once off-stage, CLEANER breaks from DAD as DAD becomes cat-like. DAD and CLEANER slowly circle each other and around audience. Meanwhile, MOM pulls out her special rag and begins to wipe KRANK's mouth. KRANK begins sucking on the rag like a starving calf on its mother's tit, MOM holds him close. CLEANER gives DAD a slight cut and so is able get behind DAD and bind his arms. He pushes DAD's face to the window. DAD sees KRANK intensely sucking on the rag and pushing his body into his mother. DAD stops fighting and CLEANER sticks the knife in his back. CLEANER runs away. Seeing his father through the window, KRANK is ashamed, pushes MOM aside and moves toward The Void. Looking into The Void, he sees the Furies who have finally caught up. He drops to the floor in fear and begins to move back toward the window as he stares forward into his vision.)

KRANK

It's them! Even here! Women! See them? Snakes swimmin' all over their bodies. More and more. Lord, their eyes . . . their eyes are dripping with blood and . . . I know you can't see 'em, but . . . I gotta go.

(KRANK exits through the window. DAD drops to the ground as KRANK brushes by him. KRANK slithers off through the audience and away. MOM walks like a zombie into The Void. She drags LOVELY's limp body into the living room. LOVELY has blood streaming from her mouth. MOM begins to wipe that blood and LOVELY, half dead, begins to gently suck on the rag, like a sleepy infant.)

DAD

Baby? Babe? I'm bleeding out here. I'm... I'm...

MOM

We're bleeding in here.

MOM

We're bleeding in here.

DAD

I'm bleeding out here.

(Lights out.)

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