



Ronald Tavel with two actresses in the American Place Theater's production of *BOY ON THE STRAIGHT-BACK CHAIR*, 1969 (Katherine Squire as Stella on the right).

Boy on the Straight-Back Chair

Ronald Tavel

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Boy on the Straight-Back Chair was first performed on February 14, 1969, at The American Place Theatre, New York. It was directed by John Hancock, and the cast included:

TOBY	<i>Kevin O'Connor</i>
STELLA	<i>Katherine Squire</i>
DELLA	<i>Doris Roberts</i>
SINGER	<i>Christopher Stoeber</i>
STRIPPER	<i>Gloria LeRoy</i>
MARY	<i>Martha Whitehead</i>
ROMEO	<i>Clark Burckhalter</i>
MAY	<i>Nancy McCormick</i>
RAY	<i>Ernestine Mercer</i>
MAUDE	<i>Jacque Lynn Colton</i>
LYNN	<i>Lori Shelle</i>
BAD BUTCH	<i>Norman Thomas Marshall</i>
MUSICIAN	<i>Richard Vos</i>
THE SOUND MAN	<i>John Lefkowitz</i>

Sets/Costumes: Robert Lavigne

Music: Christopher Stoeber

Lighting: Dennis Parichy

Act I

SCENE: *A semi-circle of chairs, its ends curved toward downstage. Several chairs scattered upstage with dummies in them. An enormous disc, painted as a vortex, is behind the centermost chair in the semi-circle. A girder runs from the base back of this chair to up and over the vortex disc. A platform is at its highest point. A second girder runs diagonally across the stage, from downstage right to upstage left, criss-crossing the platform of the first girder. Sun and moon move along this diagonal. The floor may be inlaid with mirrors, sand mounds and cactii scattered here and there.*

TOBY stands on the centermost chair of the semi-circle. DELLA sits to his left, STELLA to his right.

A BALLADEER with guitar emerges from the dark downstage right and begins to sing a country-blues song. As he sings he strolls diagonally upstage directly under the path of the girder. A spot follows him.

BALLADEER:

WELL, I AIN'T GONNA SING MY HONEY NO MORE MASTERPIECES

I'M GONNA WAIL TILL I PREVAIL WITH NOTHIN' GREAT;

BLUES WHAT LET 'EM KNOW WHERE IT'S REALLY ACHIN'.

TELL ALL THE REASONS WHY YA KNEES IS SHAKIN'.

GET YA LITTLE LOVIN' AN' A AWFUL LOTTA HATE.

I'LL SING MY HONEY NO MORE MASTERPIECES

CAUSE THAT JIST AIN'T WHAT MY HONEY WANTS TO HEAR:

SOME BALLAD SHORT 'N SWEET

AND ON THE REAL EMOTIONS CHEAT —

WELL THAT OUGHTA WIN THE LOST LOVE OF MY DEAR.

MY HONEY WANTS TO DANCE TO EVERY COUNTRY SONG

CRY ABOUT THEIR SERMONS ON WHAT'S RIGHT 'N WRONG,
 HOW THE SUN GO DOWN IF THE MOON COME UP
 AN' THE WHOLE WORLD'S TASTED FROM THE TINIEST CUP:
 BUT THE BIG, BIG THING WHAT'S BREAKIN' UP INSIDE
 AN' GONNA GET DRAGGED OUT IN THE NEXT FLOOD TIDE
 NEVER HAD A LINE FOR MY HONEY ALL ALONG,
 IT NEVER HAD A LINE MY HONEY'S HEARD ALL ALONG.

SHE'S GOT A HEART, I'M TOLD, 'N A WILLIN' EAR
 BUT SOMETHIN' DEEP DOWN IN HER JIST DON'T CARE
 AND THOUGH A LOT GOTTA HAPPEN FORE THE HURTIN' CEASES
 YET I'LL SING MY HONEY NO MORE MASTERPIECES
 CAUSE THAT JIST AIN'T WHAT MY HONEY WANTS TO HEAR.

(The BALLADEER reaches the other MUSICIANS upstage left. A light has brightened on DELLA, surprising her at her knitting; she is humming the melody.)

DELLA: Oh! You fellas finished? It was real short tonight. *(To audience.)*
 Sorry, but I never know when them boys is gonna be done. Sometimes they like to tack a extra sentiment or two onto the end of that ballad. I been rushin' here to get done with this sweater; it's fer ma little girl, name's Rita. I expect her along any minute.

(A light brightens on STELLA, finding her in an agreeable mood.)

STELLA: *(Standing, going to the footlights.)* We got lots a little girls.

DELLA: Stella!

STELLA: Kids, dogs, mothers with baby carriages 'n whatnot crossin' back 'n forth on route 30 runs right up the middle a town so when ya come through our town, 35 miles a hour please.

DELLA: 'N ya might pass it up if ya go any faster.

STELLA: *(Ignoring her.)* Our town's fabulous far west affair. We got quite a strip.

DELLA: Beg ya pardon.

STELLA: Della! This here's a clean place to live 'n raise up yer kids. People are doin' it all the time. Nice clean western affair. Boys got crew cuts, school girls wear skirts in this here town they do, not like over in Vegas. But we got a strip like Vegas even if it ain't but route 30. Plumb full of gas stations 'n hamberg joints, chop suey parlors, wash 'n dry, electric neon, general motors, used car lots the Cocktail Rendezvous and general provisions notions 'n sundries, everything provided at 35 miles a hour. Nice clean all-American town bring yer kids up right straight around these here parts ya can. *(Darkly.)* What's more, people round the route thinks pretty much alike 'n we sticks together too case yer thinkin' 'bout makin' any trouble, folks.

TOBY: *(Till now with his back to the audience, pivoting about fiercely on the chair.)* My face is my own creation. Most folks are born with faces. Cow

folks, sheep folks, town folks, squares; squares settle for their faces. Not me. I made my face. Spend four minutes a day, religiously, under a high-powered electric sun lamp. Capped my teeth, nervously moisten my lips and embroider them with the consummation of a large, well-placed mole. But my beautiful sea-blue eyes are my own, all my own, as is the wine-dark anger vein that throbs like a unicorn horn in my high and handsome brow. I keep lookin' for the action!

DELLA: Wonder what kinda action he means. Always gotta be one maverick in the crowd, don't there, Toby?

TOBY: Don't always gotta be.

STELLA: Now that there boy worries me. He's short. Toby Short. We like our men-folk big, big, ya know what I mean? But Toby's short, *he keeps lookin' fer the action!*

(The BALLADEER and MUSICIANS strike up a blast of western acid rock that borders on uncontrolled madness.)

BALLADEER:

ACTION! ACTION!

TOBY'S LOOKIN' FOR THE ACTION!

HE DON'T 'LLOW NO DUMB DISTRACTION

QUICKLY MULTIPLY SUBTRACTION

IN THE MANHUNT FOR THE ACTION!

ACTION! ACTION!

TOBY'S SHORT, SHORT, SHORT!

AIN'T NO WAY HE CAN CONTORT,

AIN'T NO CAP OR SHOE SUPPORT

GONNA MAKE HIM LOOK LESS SHORT —

SHORT! SHORT! SHORT!

TOBY: I have burnt my motto into a semi-circle over my heart. It reads: "Born To Raise Hell." I bare my mottoed chest to only the most intimate of my guests — for surely it is a sign of the selected few to be born, as I, to raise hell!

DELLA: Wonder what kinda "hell" he means.

BALLADEER:

TOBY'S SHORT, SHORT, SHORT!

AIN'T NO WAY HE CAN DEPORT,

MUSCLE BUILD OR BOAST HIS FORTE

GOIN' IN ANY WAY DISTORT

FACT THAT HE IS JIST PLAIN SHORT —

SHORT! SHORT! SHORT!

TOBY'S LOOKIN' FOR THE ACTION! ACTION! ACTION ...

STELLA: In school, Toby's an indifferent scholar and a different ath-e-lete. By which I mean to say, he can play ball but he's dumb.

TOBY: Wadda ya mean dumb?? I am famous fer ma highfalutin' lingo. I

have read 'n reread the Gospel Accordin' To St. John, committed it to heart, I tore it to tatters 'n swallowed it. It has filtered down to the squeeze in ma lower intestine 'n from there been osmosed everywhere. Ma frame is racked with the Word that was God and the same in the beginnin' racked God. Therefore, ma speech is peppered *par force* with the piety 'n intellect of a poet's apostle ask any chick in our town.

DELLA: It's boring in our town.

TOBY: I'm bored.

DELLA: Toby's bored. I think he has cancer.

STELLA: Must have somethin'.

TOBY: (*Crying.*) Probably, probably . . .

DELLA: Don't cry, Toby, your mole will run. We all feel sorry for you.

TOBY: (*Consoled.*) I'm glad fer that — cause even though I'm a hero figure, and I am nothin' if not a hero figure, still I thrive on feelin' sorry fer myself. Ma pa was a skid row habitué in gin-mill Denver 'n ma ma a Vegas stripper, so ya all can feel plenty sorry fer me if ya want to.

STELLA: Ya ma's a *Vegas* stripper?

TOBY: Stella, do ya feel sorry fer me?

STELLA: Yeah.

(*A STRIPPER appears singing and dancing to a ballad with a burlesque beat.*)

STRIPPER:

NEVER MARRY A BLONDE, BOY,
NEVER GET FOND OF A BLONDE, BOY,
NEVER ABSCOND WITH A BLONDE, BOY,
NEVER MARRY A BLONDE, BOY!

WHEN YOU GET TO BED WITH A BLONDE, BOY,
'NOUGH SAID, 'NOUGH SAID, 'NOUGH SAID!

BLONDES'LL EAT YA — LOTS O' HEAD!
NIBBLE ON YOUR GINGERBREAD,
STUFF YOUR SHORTS WITH THOUGHTS O' BED,
MAKE YA HUNGER TO BE WED: —
BUT THEY'LL MILK YA, SORE-MISLED,
AT AN ALTAR NEVER RED: —
SON! THEIR CHERRY'S LONG SINCE DEAD!
AND HOW THEY'LL CHEAT YA, UNDERFED,
TO A BANQUET OVER-SPREAD!
AND HOW THEY'LL CHEAT YA — AIN'TCHA READ? —
AT A BANQUET OVER-SPREAD!

NEVER MARRY A BLONDE, BOY,
NEVER GET FOND OF A BLONDE, BOY,
NEVER ABSCOND WITH A BLONDE, BOY,
NEVER MARRY A BLONDE!

SO DON'T YA NEVER MARRY A BLONDE, BOY.

LESSON, TAKE A LESSON FROM A BLONDE, BOY!

STELLA: Like I said, nice respectable town. Wanna bring yer kids up here, ya do. Don't ya, Della?

DELLA: I ain't married.

STRIPPER: Never marry a blonde boy.

DELLA: There goes yer ma, Toby.

TOBY: So long, ma.

STRIPPER: (*Exiting.*) So long, son:

STELLA: What ya do last night, Toby?

TOBY: (*Swinging a yo-yo, slowly, ominously.*) I looked fer the action.

DELLA: What ya find, Toby?

TOBY: Nothin' much. Jist ma cat. Tied a string around his tail 'n swung him up against the wall a couple a times.

STELLA: I feel compassion.

TOBY: You feel compassion — why?

STELLA: It's a warm, sweet feelin'! (*To audience.*) Hard to have a good come-back to questions like that. Yes sir, a warm, sweet feelin'. Soft, furry, warm.

DELLA: (*Lifting up her knitting-work and putting it aside for the moment; we see that it is a great fine spread of blue, much more like a cloak than a sweater.*) Our kids say Sir and Madam, play stick ball, eat strawberries and cream, they cream, they stick, they go to bed at ten out here in the great West, that's how the West was won, that's how it often was goin' west, they're good to their folks, have nice table manners, good leanin's, fine learnerments, got respect, they are flowers all of them, cactus flowers. Toby, would ya stop swingin' that yo-yo! Ya gimme the chills. What's a nice boy like you goin' 'n wantin' to swing that yo-yo fer?

TOBY: (*Ominous.*) Gettin' nervous, Della?

DELLA: What me nervous? Never been nervous a day in mah life! What's there to be nervous about in a nice western town like this, eh Stella?

STELLA: (*Her sense of stage-competition renewed.*) Good, clean dry Utah air. Best air in the country. Folks with asthma come out here to die. Got them stock piles here, too.

DELLA: Whatcha say about piles, Stella?

STELLA: Ranch-type houses, green-sprayed concrete lawns, sprawling supermarkets, fresh fish frozen and powdered, shiny chrome, home sweet home, yes sir, this is the land of the big rock candy mountain, the land of powdered milk and honey, the promised land, get along little doggie, yip-pie aie eh! aie eh!

DELLA: Now _____ . . . (*Using the actor's real name.*) I asked you to stop swingin' that there yo-yo! You deaf or somethin'?

TOBY: (*Furious.*) Better close yer trap, old girl, better close it up like yer eyes 'n yer ears, if ya know what's good fer ya!

DELLA: Old girl!

TOBY: Missed yer appointment at the beauty saloon this week, didn't ya, _____? (*Using the actress' real name.*) It shows.

DELLA: But you didn't miss yers, did ya? Notice ya got that there streak a white dyed real bright right up the middle of yer black head.

TOBY: A crescent of white sets off the night of black same's a perfect quarter-moon.

DELLA: That right? Guess I jist don't cotton to two-faced hair. Specially on scene-stealers.

TOBY: (*Struggling to remain in character.*) Shows what taste ya got. What do you know anyway? All yer good fer is doin' — *our town's* dirty laundry.

DELLA: (*Feeling nervously for the cloak.*) Nice town, nice clean town, got nice clean laundry. — Acourse, the dressin' room could use a little airin' out.

STELLA: (*Trying to make peace.*) Why don't ya get yerself a different job, _____ . . . (*Using the actor's real name.*) . . . 'n stop swingin' that yo-yo like Della tells ya? She tells ya good, Toby Short.

TOBY: What job? Ain't no jobs fer us kids: the coast-come semi-retired asthmatics pick up all the part-time work at minimum wages. Chicken feed. The old gizzards are crowdin' us out. There's too many ancients around, not to mention you two old birds, 'nough to open up a museum specialize in fossils.

STELLA: Ya hear!

DELLA: Who listéns?

TOBY: There's a school a course, the schools out here are strickly boss, up ta date, up ta daisy-pushin', streamlined, shiny home-chrome mod-Mormon architecture — but *small*, ya dig, small!!!!

DELLA: Short.

TOBY: Us kids are on split-level session, we're on the loose 'n in the noose from noon on, some from four till noon next day. Lots 'n lots a time. Idle hands are Edgar Allan Poe's workshop. He wrote somethin' about a swingin' cat once, didn't he, Stella?

STELLA: Poe was never really my favorite.

TOBY: I get a lot of ideas from what I read —

DELLA: University studies show that even the most salacious readin' matter has no adverse effect on innocent —

TOBY: I'm a salacious, voracious reader. A voracious reader and the leader — the leader of the high school set.

DELLA: But yer forty-two years old.

TOBY: And I know how to *hump* a hundred different ways.

STELLA: Get that in school in them new courses on marriage, did ya?

TOBY: Get it on ma own, ma own experimentin', ladies —

DELLA: Knit, one, pearl two; my weddin' girl's gonna wear jist blue.

TOBY: Yer weddin' girl's gonna wear jist plain ol' quotidian white same's the rest a them dumb-dumbs gits hitched up round the route. And, speakin' a the quotidian:

(ROMEO, a very tall, painfully awkward and diseased-scarred young hood, emerges jauntily from the upstage entrance, over-prepared and over-anxious

to do his thing.)

ROMEO: At Motel Mama's, "M" over "M" in electric neon light, ya can dog, monkey, hamilton, swim, or jerk the night away. Me 'n Motel Mama prefer the snake shake or the moribun'-Mormon knee-high paten' after the adobe dizzy rain dance. Makes ya dizzy . . . At the malted milk drive-ins 'n round the pizzerina parlors our cars endlessly circulate, suped-up cylinders, mufflers rumbling, we check each other out. We check each other out. We are out of work, out of line, out of combat, out of pity, and bored. Man, we're bored. Nothin' to do in this here town. Less to do in life.

TOBY: Lookin' fer somethin' to do, Romeo?

ROMEO: Lookin' fer the action. A-lookin' fer the action. No action in this town. Less in life. (*Quickly deflated, taking a seat.*)

TOBY: No action, eh? What say we bring out —

DELLA: Rita! (*Singing.*)

NOTHIN' COULD BE SWEETA

THAN TO SEE

MY PRETTY RITA —

(*Standing, looking back with expectation.*)

TOBY: (*Slamming hard.*) Mary!! What say we bring out Mary?!

(MARY, a high school girl with hard facade, appears from the darkness upstage. It is difficult to make her out at first and DELLA peers into the darkness with the cloak in hand.)

DELLA: Rita? That you, Rita? Pretty girl, that you? No, that ain't Rita: that's Mary, Stella's girl . . .

STELLA: Hi, hon.

TOBY: (*Triumphant, sneering DELLA back into her chair.*) Mary! Mary!

Quite Contrary, how does yer garden?

MARY: Needs some rakin', rake.

TOBY: What wit.

MARY: Shit.

TOBY: Come here, Mary, 'n give us a kiss.

MARY: (*Strutting up to his chair, her head on a level with his crotch; she stares at it blankly.*) Where?

TOBY: Wise guy, huh? I could flatten yer Nevertitti bee-hive head into a flunky Nubian's brillo from here.

MARY: Lotta pretty tall talk fer a greasy fried shrimp. Talk, Toby, talk, and no action.

TOBY: But lots a soul, eh, Mary?

MARY: I can soul-kiss.

TOBY: That's an upstart — I mean, it's makin' a move anyway.

(TOBY bends down and they soul-kiss, long and sexy, in this peculiar position. MARY keeps smoothing down her beehive hair-do. The others half watch, stirring uncomfortably.)

STELLA: Fine, right, up-standin' kids.
DELLA: Up-standin' kiss. Tongue-kiss. Della-catessen.
ROMEO: Up-standin' kicks. Tongue-kicks: — Words; no action.
TOBY: Yer quite a gal, Mary, too bad yer so short.
MARY: Well, I ain't growed up yet. So.
DELLA: (*Trying to change the subject, trying to get involved.*) Where ya been, Mary Lamb, sista to Charlie Lamb?
MARY: Jist come from a boondock, Dell. Rode out in Charlie's damn one-cylinder cramped jalopy. Five 'n fifty kids layin' around in the damp sand. Five 'n fifty kids swillin' beer out in the desert. Kids' stuff.
TOBY: Lookin' fer some growed-up fun, eh, Mary?
MARY: Lookin' fer anything, Toby, anything, I'm hair to heel bored.
TOBY: Jist about anything, eh? Try Pickup-Palace?
MARY: Yeah, it's a come-down. Hey, why don't ya come down?
DELLA: Down . . .
STELLA: Down . . .
TOBY: Oh, no, not me, I'm always high, on a par with the star the angels set upon. Try the pizzeria parlors?
STELLA: Try the open air the-a-ters?
DELLA: Try the malted milk drive-ins?
ROMEO: (*Sudden enthusiasm.*) The birds pulls up to us in the malted milk drive-ins, they checks out our car, they check to see who's out every evening.
MARY: If the boys look bitchin', we pull up next to them in our cramped ramshackle jalopy, roll down the window 'n yell: "Hey you studs got a dollar for gas?"
ROMEO: Then we slip the birds a bill. Nothin' to do.
MARY: So the studs slips us a buck; and we let 'em take us to Cookie's for a Coke.
ROMEO: . . . Some of us kids got problems. Sad problems.
TOBY: Sad, deep, intricate, unravelable problems. The mirrors of my eyes. These are my people.
STELLA: The steeples of our churches are . . . lovely, lonely things.
DELLA: Oh yeah. I think churches are . . . beautiful. Specially when yer first walkin' into them.
TOBY: (*On a sudden upbeat.*) But me, myself, Toby High, I'm in the chips! I got bread — bagloads a bread from my folks the jokes. I got a car, right? — a groovey car. And a wardrobe would turn Elvis green with envy. And I'm willin', jist killin', to spend my greens, spend rolled-up wads of it —
MARY: On anyone that'll listen to him.
ROMEO: Jist so long as ya listen to Toby.
TOBY: Y'all better be listening to me. My words could move masses — turn, like Joseph Smith, the tide of Western history.
DELLA: Yup, that's how the West got won.
TOBY: The Mormon West. Someday, babies, someday soon I'm gonna be heard.
STELLA: He's a bird, he's a high bird, he's a bird dog.

DELLA: Oh, yes, real town fer pets this is: birds, dogs, black cats . . .

TOBY: 'N I got a pad all my own . . .

STELLA: Furnished Hollywood style . . .

DELLA: Potted palms 'n zebra rugs . . .

ROMEO: Iron decanters 'n Arabian veils . . .

MARY: Throws parties at his pad, Toby does. Interminable parties.

TOBY: Like to party, Mary?

ROMEO: Like to party, Mary?

MARY: Toby's got impeccable manners.

ROMEO: Does swashbuckler things.

MARY: Bows, kisses yer hand as well as yer tongue. He's always anxious to help out a friend, do in a foe.

STELLA: Went up to the hospital to see her when she had the chicken pox.

MARY: Dribbled all over the sheets, he did.

TOBY: Cute nurses in the hospital. Nurses know a lot about life, about death.

ROMEO: 'Bout life, 'bout death. Gee, nothin' to do in this town. Bored, baby, bored, anxious.

TOBY: Notice somethin' funny about people, funny-peculiar: everybody ya meet seems a wee bitty bit nervous, a little afraid, jist a little afraid . . .

STELLA: Little afraid, everybody's jist a little afraid.

DELLA: Nervous. Anxious, ya might say.

ROMEO: Yeah, ya might say anxious.

TOBY: My people.

MARY: Toby's more mature than most of our set. Got hair on his back.

STELLA: He's also older than you kids. He's in his twenties.

TOBY: I'm twenty-five years old, look twenty-six, and feel forty.

MARY: He *feels* like a man pushing forty.

DELLA: Pushing!

ROMEO: And if he wears make-up — well, Dell, at least he's different.

MARY: Yeah, Toby's different. Ya couldn't get more different. I mean, start-in' with jist his git-up. 'N the way he gits it up. I'll go to Cookie's fer a Coke with anybody jist so long, as long as he's different.

TOBY: You'll go further than Cookie's.

MARY: Yeah, I'll go far.

DELLA: I think Toby's a creep.

MARY: He is a creep. But to us kids, bored, lonely 'n lost, he's a kind of hero. A hero creep. To the ne'er-do, Dell, the good time Charlie Lamb, the delinquent, the dropout, the drop in, the dead, the chick with the Mary Antoinette hair-do . . .

ROMEO: . . . the cats with acne and long, awkward, lanky legs . . .

MARY: . . . he's a creep hero.

TOBY: A hero sandwich to you, babe, you swallow it!

DELLA: Anxious, everybody's anxious. 'N a little overwrought, Tob.

TOBY: Creep?? That's what people say about somebody who's more stagey, who's more dramatic, who's more Byronic, who's more intriguing than they are.

DELLA: Trash, well done.

TOBY: Yeah, trash well done. People always say that about something they love, and can't understand their love for.

STELLA: *I'm* bored now.

DELLA: Ditto. And annoyed. Gettin' restless jist sittin' here. (*To TOBY.*) Plain to hear you ain't got nothin' new to say tonight.

STELLA: Don't wanna mis ma show now, favorite TV show of all, jist about ma favorite. "Dorian Grey, or the Psychological Face Lift." On every weekday night jist about now . . .

ROMEO: (*To TOBY.*) Hey! Loud mouth, doncha ever get bored sayin' the same ol' brainless things every night? The same ol' lies? Have a heart.

TOBY: Nothin' new to say tonight?! brainless things?! same ol' lies?!

ROMEO: Aw, Toby, have a heart.

TOBY: Heartless to those who are small of heart; brainless to those who have no brains; a lie to them who've never heard a truth — 'n jist the same ol' things to —

ROMEO: It's the same ol' things to us _____. (*Using the actor's real name.*) After all . . .

TOBY: Listen, Romeo, do me a favor, will you? 'n hand me that rock like a good rock.

ROMEO: (*Going back and picking up a huge rock.*) Rock of ages . . . (*Carrying it with some difficulty to TOBY's chair.*) What a weight to bear. Rock of ages . . .

TOBY: (*Taking the rock, weighing it, seeming to find it serviceable.*) Stock of piles. Hero Creep.

ROMEO: Wanna stand on it, do ya, Toby? So's ya won't feel so low down 'n out at the heels?

TOBY: (*Calmly.*) Not exactly, Romeo, not exactly . . . Wanna do me a favor encore? Bring Mary over here.

ROMEO: We gonna party, maybe the three of us, huh, Boss?

DELLA: We're gonna have a cast party after the show. For all of us.

ROMEO: Oh, Mary, wanna come with me fer a space, like a sweet bird, like a sweet little winged thing.

MARY: Got a buck for gas?

ROMEO: Er, sure, anything, Mary.

MARY: My achin' back you do!

TOBY: My achin' foot. My bow-legs. My itchin' fingers. My weighted palms . . .

MARY: Well, er, first I gotta ask my mama if it's O.K.

STELLA: It's O.K., Mary, you can go with Romeo.

MARY: (*Anxious.*) Ya sure, ma, ya sure I can go with Romeo?

STELLA: Of course, I'm sure, dear. Why wouldn't I —

MARY: But ma —

STELLA: Don't be botherin' me now — m' show's on. Go with the boy.

MARY: But mama, I'm afraid! What time should I be back?

STELLA: Silly, child, what's there to be afraid of? I can't pay no tension if

you keep botherin' me like this. Mary —

MARY: Mama, please! please!

STELLA: Hush, child, hush . . . go with the boy.

ROMEO: Come on, Mary.

STELLA: Good-bye, Mary . . . Such a nice quiet town. Very quiet. Little too quiet at night . . . bye, Mary.

TOBY: Mary Lamb.

MARY: Lamb? — Ya like my Mary Antoinette hair-do?

ROMEO: Will do.

TOBY: Engineer her over here, Romeo, where I can reach . . . Hold her hands behind her back, will you . . .

ROMEO: Like this?

TOBY: Will do. Er, move her over a little inch more. Fine.

(ROMEO holds MARY's arms helplessly behind her back, imprisoning her directly under TOBY. TOBY lifts the rock and brings it down cruelly on her head. Again and again. The women are looking the other way, staring into the tube of the audience; neither notices a thing, each is as blank as the dummies. MARY drops lifeless to the floor.)

TOBY: *(Calmly.)* Wanna get a shovel, Romeo, 'n bury the broad behind my chair, like a nice boy?

ROMEO: Yer kinda extreme, ain't ya, Toby?

TOBY: Romeo act good like a sidekick should.

ROMEO: What kinda kicks is this? I was with ya when —

TOBY: Are you with me?? You are with me. Yer as much a part of this as I am. Yer as much a part of this as Mary's mother.

STELLA: Quiet town. Real quiet town. Been real quiet since Mary run away . . .

(ROMEO drags the body behind TOBY's chair and we can hear the evil sound of shoveling.)

Sometimes, now and again, I think of my little girl, my little girl who run away . . . wonder where she is, Mary, where are you, little girl, late at night, middle of the night, Mary, Mary? — Is that you? Is that you, Mary? Keep, thinkin' I hear Mary comin' up the front steps, keep thinkin' keep thinkin' . . . guess I jist think too much these days, think too much at night, but, ah, the night is lonely since my little girl run away. I had such plans for her. You shoulda seen the graduation dress I had picked out for my little girl, pretty thing it was, with flower . . . with a bright little flower emblem, you know the kind, a flower paisley design, a green center with a thin red border running around in a . . . in a . . . yes . . . You know the kind . . . had nice buttons, simple buttons, sham pearl they was I think . . . in a . . . I used to love pearl when I was a kid . . . always dreamt of having a graduation dress with pearl buttons when I was a kid . . . Course, we couldn't afford real pearl buttons for Mary, wouldn't have been practical anyhow, you know how kids are, always pullin' a but-

ton, gettin' it caught in somethin' and then before ya know it, pop, and it's lost, gone, gone forever, lost, jist like that . . . nothin' easier, nothin' easier than losin' a button on a dress, pearl button or what have ya . . . pearl buttons get lost easy as plain ones, sure they do, ask anyone, anyone knows that, why any fool knows that . . . Quiet town, real quiet around here. Don't hear a sound. Not a sound. Nary a sound. Hard to hear. Hard to hear things around here, hard to hear a sound. Course, I'd be complainin' if there *was* noise, somebody'd be complainin' if there was noise, still, ya know, it's not bad to hear a, a little sound once and again, now and then, keeps, gets lonely . . . sorta lonely without even a little, little . . . little? . . . small? . . . my baby . . . hmmmmmmmm . . . Mary? That you, Mary?

(RITA, a dark-haired beauty, emerges from the shadows upstage and crosses very slowly toward the vortex behind TOBY. DELLA rises with the cloak in hand and moves toward her.)

DELLA: Rita? Is that you, Rita?

(RITA crosses behind the vortex and MAY emerges from its other side, a tall blonde carrying books. ROMEO stares at her, enthralled; TOBY has returned to swinging the yo-yo like a slow, ominous pendulum.)

STELLA: No, that ain't Mary: that's the neighbor's girl, May.

MAY: I have a premonition that when I come back, and am justly reincarnated, it'll be as a cat.

DELLA: Honey, I coulda sworn ya *was* reincarnated, but as May, not a cat.

ROMEO: Ya smell good, May, ya wearin' perfume?

MAY: No, silly, it's just me. I don't fool with perfume.

TOBY: Romeo's a lover boy. Didn't think we call him Romeo fer nothin', did ya?

MAY: Tomorrow's a big day for me. Big exam tomorrow morning, important. Gotta be up a step ahead of dawn.

DELLA: May's a better than average student. She takes school seriously. Sweet girl. Everybody likes her.

ROMEO: I like her.

TOBY: I had her.

ROMEO: Don't say that, Toby, don't say that if ya don't mean it.

TOBY: How do ya know I don't mean it? How do ya know I didn't have her? Sure, I had her.

MAY: Sure I have a good time in school. Why not? I plan on goin' ahead to college as well. They say that archaeologists are just underpaid publicity agents for dead royalty, but I'd like to be an archaeologist anyhow, I'd enjoy that.

TOBY: I enjoyed her.

MAY: I dig around a lot in the desert outside of town —

TOBY: Hope she doesn't dig around too close to me.

MAY: It's absorbing. Fossils, tyrant-osaurus, ferns 'n all. I want to work in a

museum like Margaret made, a block-long "C" shaped museum like the ones they got in New York.

DELLA: (*To audience.*) New York's quite a place, babies! all seven nights of the week.

MAY: Once I visited New York with my parents during Easter recess it was fantastic. The whole Easter week, fantastic week!

ROMEO: Ya smell sweet, May, yer like a sunflower what counteth the steps a the sun.

MAY: I'm sensitive, too: I can handle a lot of romantic novels: — Dumas, Bronte, the Brontes, Charles Lamb, and Sir Walter Scott, Hot Shot, and Walpole 'n them.

TOBY: And "My Secret Life" and "Fanny Hill" and "The Child's Traveller's Companion."

MARY: And Ladies' Home Colonel, Woman's Night, and the diary of chambermaids.

STELLA: And chamber music, I love chamber music, what do you think about chamber music — Romeo, I'm talkin' to you!

ROMEO: (*Absorbed in MAY, dancing.*)

WHILE WALKING THROUGH THE PARK ONE DAY
IN THE MERRY, MERRY MONTH A MAY —

STELLA: I loved them novels when I was a girl, used to sit up all night in bed a-readin' them. Nothin' like a good book late at night . . . May nights, too . . .

MAY: And I take scary walks through the park of the Utah desert at night, the May night . . . Most marvelous month of the week, er, year, May is.

TOBY: Didn't think we call her May fer nothin', did ya?

DELLA: (*To audience.*) Lemme save ya time, folks, she could go on like this about herself all night: — May suffers from melancholia —

MAY: They call it adolescent melancholia —

DELLA: She thinks about death, suicide, outer space, empty desert air and the stairway to the stars, and hopes to die real soon and be reincarnated as a cat.

MAY: People around here don't seem to know what I mean when I express that premonition. Cats are — And desert cats. Man, desert cats! Mountain lions. — There's a lot to be said for them.

TOBY: Sure there is, May, lots to say fer cats — swingin' 'em. Original. I want to be original.

ROMEO: You *are* the original, Toby. You sure are the original.

DELLA: No, he ain't, Romeo.

STELLA: Nearly, but not quite.

TOBY: Not quite, no. But that's what I'm workin' fer. To be original, Toby Original . . .

DELLA: . . . first . . .

STELLA: . . . the starter . . .

TOBY: . . . the coxswain, fogleman, the cocksman — preferable one of a kind!

DELLA: Our kids is ambitious.

STELLA: Because us elders sets the good example.

TOBY: That is true. We abide by the example our elders sets.

MAY: *I* tried to teach my parents the Monkey. I tried relating to them.

ROMEO: She is related to them. What was it like when you had her, Toby?

TOBY: Same as any other crevice, same as any other burrow.

MAY: Indeed!

ROMEO: Gee, she's intelligent. So pure. 'N sensitive. — Everyone says she's sensitive.

MAY: Everyone says I'm sensitive.

TOBY: Yeah, she *is* sensitive. She bathes herself at night, slipping her alabaster body into the sunflower oil of her oil bath — the hot water turns her sensitive skin a slightly painful pink. And she washes her hair, her long, straight, yella hair . . .

ROMEO: What do you think about Toby, May?

MAY: He's a creep; he makes me feel itchy; but he can be gentle — I mean — I —

ROMEO: What do you think about me?

MAY: Who thinks about you.

ROMEO: Aw, come one. Tell me. Please?

MAY: You're weird, Romeo, everybody knows that. Every single body in town. They say you had some kinda affliction when you were little that scabbed up yer whole body, scabbed it up like a Grunewald paintin' a Christ 'n turned ya into a Quasimodo a least, a half-way thing between human 'n animal, between heaven 'n earth, 'n that to stop ya from scratchin' the accursed pocks the doctor had to tie mittens to yer hands, mittens tied to yer hands the livelong day 'n at night they had to tie you to yer bed or else ya would had scratched yerself till ya bled to death in yer tormented sleep. Eech!

ROMEO: Don't that make ya feel sorry fer me?

MAY: You nuts? Why, that's like being a leper. Should *I* love a leper?

TOBY: Ya oughta, May.

MAY: Why oughta I? I can't even figger out what the symbol of his scabs is supposed to be.

STELLA: I think they're in the real life story that they based this here play on.

DELLA: That's right. It's foolish to look fer symbols.

MAY: (*Unenthused.*) Really?

ROMEO: (*Sitting beside MAY.*) Please, Maytime, date me. Jist once. Huh? We could go to the pizzerina.

MAY: (*Sudden enthusiasm.*) Which one? (*Suddenly turned off.*) Oh, besides, ya gimme the crawls. They say yer so conditioned that even now ya have to put on them mittens 'n be tied to yer bed in order to sleep each night. Think I'd be caught dead with someone like that? What if ya got sleepy? I'd have to tie ya up.

ROMEO: Don't make fun a me, May. Bein' tied up by you would be a pleasure, it would be a dream-fulfitment.

MAY: I'll bet. Beat it, buster, you bug me. They say you beat it in yer mitten.

I'm sensitive.

ROMEO: That's what I thought them mittens was for.

TOBY: (*Laughing.*) You scratch her the wrong way, Rom. You lack grace — the state of Grace.

ROMEO: Maytime, how come ya think so much about suicide? 'N about killin' yarself?

MAY: Gets me attention. Talk like that snaps people to attention.

STELLA: 'Nough tension around here to keep a cat "asleepen all the nyght with open eye."

ROMEO: But don'tcha wanna live a long time to grow up 'n work in that there museum with all them dinahshores?

MAY: Ya ever think about Mary Lamb, Rom, sista to Charlie Lamb? She killed her mother. Knifed her. Knifed her in the night. What a way to relate to your parents.

TOBY: Got results.

MAY: Yeah, they locked her up. In the upstairs bedroom I think, all her life. Charlie took care of her. Got results. — How would ya like to lock me up in my bedroom, Romeo? 'N would ya like to tie me up, tie me up to my bed at night?

ROMEO: Why? ya got them scabs too?

MAY: What a dud! What a insensitive well-behaved dud! Must be somethin' wrong with his kidney or liver to make him so well-behaved. — I mean, *you* are right, Rom. Maybe yer totem's in the wrong place.

ROMEO: Meanin', May, you may need me one day, huh?

MAY: (*Exhausted.*) I may. I may . . .

TOBY: Aye, May. You may. One day. But I rather think not.

ROMEO: Why would you rather not think that, Rom, er, Toby?

TOBY: Cause May's stuck on me. I kin levitate durin' a lay, big bull, treat a chick to that jist once 'n she's spoiled, anythin' less ain't gonna satisfy.

ROMEO: (*Standing, angry.*) How do you mean?

TOBY: I mean I kin straddle a gal —

ROMEO: Straddle a gal, huh? I bet you could you bow-legged, black-headed woodpecker! Why, a pig could run between yo' legs without touchin' the sides 'n —

TOBY: Guys bigga bully you and you bully guys littler: that's dated, man, scram, I mean outta mah May afore I stamp on yo' head 'n leave mah imprint fer archaeologists t' come!

ROMEO: Don't threaten, Toby, remember what I got on you!

TOBY: What, buster scab, what? Who'd believe it? Who'd care? Who'd dare to care?

ROMEO: That's a dumb thing to say!

TOBY: Is it? Nobody cares, man, nobody downstage cares what the hell anybody upstage does. You could do Gog 'n Magog's business up here against the vortex and the whole home-bound audience would be bound to go home all the same. The same. The same. The same. Nobody looks to listen, nobody keeps the watch, nobody patrols the soul, and ain't

nobody, nobody double cares. I'd do anything to get a rise, to goose the squatter rights to attention at my wrong. I've already done it — everything. The worst. The absolute worst, right? And who cares? And who wing semicircle over to wing cares? Who knows? Who looks? Who books me at the station for my action?

ROMEO: (*Carried away.*) Speak to yer people, Toby!

TOBY: (*Shouting to STELLA, DELLA, MAY, THE MUSICIANS, etc.*) Listen, you people out there!!!! I killed somebody! I killed a girl! I killed Mary! — That's Mary! Mary! I killed her!! Listen to me, look at me, turn around and look at me, won't you! Won't somebody? (*Screaming.*) Hey, hey, help!!!! Oh! Take stock in what I say!

(*No one turns. STELLA files her nails, DELLA reaches for her knitting, MAY flips through her books.*)

DELLA: There's that talk about them stock piles again, keep bringin' up them stock piles all the time. (*Picking up her knitting.*) Won't be long now afore I finish this here sweater. Gonna have it jist the right fit fer ma weddin' girl. Cause she's the sweater girl. Name's Rita . . . or Lana? Lana.

MAY: Yes, her name is Rita. Exotic dark-haired girl. But is she your daughter, Della . . . (*With blatant malice.*) . . . or jist one a yer relative slips? I thought —

DELLA: Stella, didja know my brother was one a them pilots that flew over Hero-shoe-ma and Nugisaki, Teriyaki, whatever ya call them places, I forget names easy now . . . 'n dropped . . . they dropped . . . he . . . a, he was one a them what dropped . . .

STELLA: Yer brother was shot down over Japan wasn't he, Della?

DELLA: Yeah. He took off his shoes as soon as he knew the plane was goin' to crash. The floors of heaven are made of sandal wood. They who would walk there must go so on their soles.

STELLA: We was all right fond a yer brother. A good boy.

DELLA: Never went to them meetin's to vote on how much to put up fer his memory . . .

STELLA: The stone's right pretty, real work a art it is. 'N them wreaths every August — don't ya —

DELLA: I don't give a damn to see what it looks like. I never did see it. Never want to, not that there stone, not anythin' around it, not anythin' near it, not anythin' . . . not anythin' . . .

MAY: I wish they woulda cut out some of her long speeches, ya know?

DELLA: Ya know ya got a pretty big mouth for a bitch who can't even field a line, girlie.

MAY: Young enough to still learn, though, which is more than I can say for some sentimental old bitties I know.

DELLA: Sentimentality is protesting the putting of a monkey into a rocket shot to the moons of our misbehavior, honey, don't you ever forget that, and with the same breath yeasaying the annihilation of Injins, Amerinds,

Blacks, Wetbacks, Yellow —

MAY: (*Taking out a cigarette; using actress' real name.*) Miss _____,
ya got a match?

DELLA: (*Icy pause.*) Yes. My husband.

TOBY: Husbandry 'n hope have held me in the chorus you all comprise for
long enough! Why should I account for any of yer lives who have cut me
out of that collective understanding keeps you sitting in yer seats?

BALLADEER: (*Interrupting TOBY, with a hill-billy type ballad.*)

"WHY DON'T YOU SING US THE REST OF YOUR SONG?"

THE SINGER COMPLAINED TO HIS HEART.

HIS HOT HEART REPLIED: "I COULD EASY HAVE LIED

AND SUNG ON WELL AFTER MY START,

"BUT THE SIMPLE TRUTH IS MY SONG'S FIRST NOTE

FINDS LISTENERS THEN OR NEVER

AND WHO HASN'T HEARD MY SONG'S FIRST WORD

TO MY WHOLE SONG'S DEAF FOREVER.

"SO LOOK TO TRANSCEND FROM YOUR URGE TO DEPEND.

O SINGER, LOOK TO TRANSCEND:

FOR HAVING MADE LISTENERS ONCE YOUR NEED

EXPECT SINGING FOREVER TO END.

"EXPECT SINGING FOREVER TO END

OR, SINGER, LOOK TO TRANSCEND . . . "

TOBY: Hate to get carried away that way. Inexcusable outbursts from a guy
what kin look to transcend.

DELLA: Wonder what kinda transcendin' he means?

STELLA: Some folks always gotta be lookin' around to change things. Oughta
let hell be.

MAY: (*Her bid for exclusive audience attention having finally exhausted it-
self, examining and taking in fully her fellow actors for the first time.*) Ya
know, things are pretty weird around here, you people are jumpier than a
cat, and that's exactly what makes me feel like I'm coming back as a cat.

TOBY: Good thing ya got plans to come back, May.

ROMEO: Whatcha mean, Toby?

TOBY: You thick or something? Whatcha think Ah mean by sayin' good
thing she's comin' back? Obviously, because she's goin' first. May got
plans fer comin' back 'n Ah got plans fer May's goin' away.

DELLA: How pinpointed his eyes is when he says that!

TOBY: Wonder how she sees that, facin' so squarely downstage as she is. Hey,
Dell —

STELLA: Pinpoint eyes, piercin' eyes, looks right through ya. Seems to be
seein', seems to be searchin' through the secrets of yer cookie jar.
Beautiful eyes. Deep set they are, very blue. Ocean blue. Wish I was by
the ocean, wish this town was by the ocean, seems things wouldn't seem so
bad then, not so bad at all if we was by the ocean. Miama maybe.

ROMEO: (*His overwhelming boredom giving vent to song.*)

THE MOON OVER MIAMA BEACH

AIN'T BRIGHT ENOUGH TO REALLY REACH;

WHAT WISDOM IT COULD HAVE TO TEACH

IF THE MOON WERE NOT THE EARTH'S LIGHT LEECH!

MAY: And he sings too!

DELLA: What a bargain.

TOBY: Lightless waves crashin' the beach, spittle ridin' the brackish breakers 'n sprayin' the landy shore. More 'n more. Washes everythin' clean, white-washes. Not like here in the desert, Dell, Stell: things preserve here in the desert, don't budge, stay stuck up right where ya bury them; don't even have to bury merry them: —nobody'll be to see—be by to see, *be* to see . . . no one stare to care, even care to stare for a second . . . second girl . . .

STELLA: Really pushes, don't he? 'n fer nothin'.

DELLA: Guess he's jist conscientious.

MAY: (*Stirring.*) I sense a strange conspiracy in the desert air—a room for doom in all things called, a calling, it's my calling in life . . .

TOBY: (*Reaching for the rock; singing.*)

"WHEN I'M CALLING YOU-OO-OO-OO, OO-OO-OO

TANGOING TAKES TWO-OO-OO-OO, OO-OO-OO..."

MAY: The windy whisper of the saguaro and cholla slipping over the stated line into Colorado as ever woman for her demon-lover wailed . . .

(MAY begins to wander toward the desert upstage. She moves voluptuously beneath the line of the girder, comes dangerously close to TOBY. TOBY raises the heavy rock in his hands as MAY slips about him. The others tense up with a horror they are unable to feel or hear accurately and, therefore, express themselves. They become riveted to their chairs with ever-mounting inarticulate anxiety and guilt.)

ROMEO: May, hey, May, May hey, where ya goin'?

TOBY: Here, I'm here, my moving backward demented beauty . . .

STELLA: What's she wanderin' around out there on the desert fer?

DELLA: She must have wanderlust, wanderlust I call it . . .

ROMEO: May, ya wanna sausage sandwich, fried onions 'n peppas, let's get somethin' to eat, May, May, hey . . .

TOBY: My wife your life . . .

STELLA: May is maddening in the Utah desert: other places, other Mays have rigorous riots of violets to boast, this state has only the steady, hiatusless evergreen of the neurotically water-hoarding cactii to—

DELLA: Time was a body could detect the difference in the seasons here. But now I get confused, it's much on a May-December affair, time rushes and returns, autumn miscengenates with spring and winter abbreviates the vaguely sprawling limits of the central summer mon—

STELLA: Where is Ray, where the hell is that woman? Doesn't she give a hoot in the dell about her daughter? Shoot! Ray, Ray, ya shoppin' on Main,

shootin' fer jackrabbits, a-gamblin' at cards? Deal yerself out this dealin', Ray! ah, Ray!!

MAY: Wonder what blocks the nothing of night?—like a giant opuntia spanning the stretch twixt heaven 'n earth—*(She is standing directly under TOBY, touching him and trying to reach around him and beyond him into the space being drawn up into the vortex.)* O blissful dawning!

TOBY: One gambol more my cat, paw me now and leap to heights!

MAY: *(Taking a step back.)* What is it seems to alter now I'm near, alter form as the I of cat to something other, something not—

ROMEO: *(Grabbing a large bouquet of sunflowers.)* May, I got a present for ya—wanna see it? Wanna? Here! Here, I got—

MAY: Romeo?

ROMEO: *(Rushing across the stage at her.)* I got some—

MAY: Whatcha got?*(Stiffening into a near paralysis as ROMEO shoves the bouquet up into her face.)* Sunflowers?!!

TOBY: *(Hysterical.)* Romeo, you scum!!!

(ROMEO grabs MAY; she struggles with him as the rock hovers back and forth over her head, crying out in fear and confusion and pulling on ROMEO's "fashionable" suspenders. The suspenders snap and ROMEO's trousers fall to the floor.)

MAY: *(Starting back.)* What's that??

(TOBY smashes the rock down into the empty space.)

ROMEO: *(Hesitantly; humiliated.)* A present? . . .

MAY: Idiot! Let me go! I'll tell my moth—

(As both turn to look down at the rock, MAY'S mother, RAY, suddenly appears in the dark upstage.)

RAY: May, child, where are you? I told you never to go out!

(ROMEO lunges at MAY, pulling her to the ground; he tries to cover her, awkwardly entangled, as he is, in his trousers.)

ROMEO: Be still will ya, don't make a sound.

MAY: Get yer scabbed paws off me—

STRIPPER: *(Entering behind RAY.)* Toby, child, where are you?

ROMEO: Lay still! Ya jist can't go runnin' around gettin' guys all horny 'n all 'n think nothin's gonna hap—ya awmost got killed by—

(ROMEO and MAY freeze as the STRIPPER comes slowly downstage.)

TOBY: I eat mostly outta cans, ma, when yer away. Don't even bother to heat 'em up eat everythin' cold, chili 'n soup 'n such.

STRIPPER: That's bad, Toby, growin' boy oughta get somethin' warm in his tummy. That cold stuffs ain't a-gonna do ya much good.

TOBY: *(Filling in his anger vein with a purple crayon.)* Bothers ya, does it, ma, that the level a ma eatin's hit rock bottom?

STRIPPER: Sure it does, son. Bothers me a whole lot. Whatcha wanna go 'n give extra care to yer workin' ma fer?

TOBY: Git booked for any action in Denver lately?

STRIPPER: Had one or two dates up there. Why?

TOBY: See paw?

STRIPPER: Now, son, I don't play that side a town. Class stuff, club dates, that's what I get.

TOBY: See paw?

STRIPPER: I don't —

TOBY: See paw? see paw?? see paw???!

STRIPPER: Now you go ahead 'n keep that kinda questionin' up 'n I ain't gonna come about here no more.

TOBY: What makes mah paw come about?

STRIPPER: Paws jist don't come about. They're what we makes 'em.

TOBY: But maws is different, right?

STRIPPER: That's right, son. Maws makes.

TOBY: Ya make a lotta men on the road, ma, between yer club dates, that is? Y'all fool around a lot?

STRIPPER: My, but you was a teeny stranger in the manger when you come. Never did see a wee crumb like that afore. Ya come afore yer time, a whole month, maybe two. Hard time I had Caesarean. Doc thought ya wouldn't make it thru that night, let alone that whole long cold winter. Winter's no much fun in Denver fer them what's layin' in. It's a pretty city, though, the downtown's like the downtown nowhere else, all neat 'n compact 'n clean. 'N the residential part, oh most a Denver *is* residential, runs out in straight avenues away from that downtown which I say is very perfect, a very model kinda place itself. Why, it's all as pretty as any pitcher ya seen a Washington! — Didja know I'm a little far sighted? That's right. Always was. Even in school. See real far into most anythin' happens down in our town. So I kin see real far down them avenues runnin' away from the downtown . . .

TOBY: Spend a lotta time on them avenues, huh? Them streets?

STRIPPER: I'm your mother, Toby. You can't hide anything from a mother.

TOBY: Why don't ya jist keep walkin', huh, ma, jist keep walkin'.

STRIPPER: Never had no beat-up customer ever seemed quite so defeated as —

TOBY: Hit the road!!

MAY: (*Breaking the freeze.*) Let me go now! Help! Help! Ma!

STELLA: (*Startled.*) Oh! God, where are our daughters?

DELLA: (*Rushing downstage.*) Give to "Save The Children Fund"! Save Rita!

Oh, poor Rita, how is she? This is "Save Our Younger Souls Week"! Give, give, good people!!

TOBY: (*Singing a hymn that grows to Bible-belt fervor.*)

GIVE, GOOD PEOPLE

WHAT THEY THINK THEY WANT:

PERCHED UPON THE STEEPLE

WAITS OBLIVION!

GIVE, GIVE GOOD PEOPLE,
NOW OR NEVER GIVE
TO THOSE NEAR THE STEEPLE
STILL GOT HOPES TO LIVE.

GATHERED 'NEATH THE STEEPLE
EVERY FEARFUL SOUL,
GIVE, GIVE GOOD PEOPLE
SAVE THEM FROM THE TROLL!

RAY: (*Rushing downstage to MAY.*) I'll give you hell! May, a-comin' out here
all alone without yer ma! Why, they got them mountain lions out here!

MAY: (*Yanked up by RAY, pulling away.*) I ain't afraid of cats, ma, I'm a cat,
a cat, a cat!!!

RAY: You ain't alone neither! That freak is with you!

ROMEO: (*Pulling up his trousers.*) Now wait a minute, Mrs. Mixer, I ain't no
freak.

RAY: Fiend! Freak-face! Double trouble! Triple trollop pocked-faced acne
covered sex maniac! Child molester! Assault! Battery! Bombast! Billygoat!
Belligerence! Bellicose!

DELLA: Bad, plain bad!

STELLA: Bad! Buxom! Blossom! Bloom! Boom! Doom! Death!

ROMEO: Yis is got me wrong—yis is a mixin' me up with old toad stool—why,
if it wasn't fer me, May would be—

TOBY: (*Singing to a Country rhythm.*)

IF IT WASN'T FER ME
MAY WOULD BE
DUE IN JUNE—
CROON, GARDNER, CROON!
YA'D RUN AROUND DOUBLE
TO BUST MAY'S BUBBLE.
FIND A SUCKER TO PAY
HER ABORTION TROUBLE!

AH'M A TOP A MAH STOOL
BIGGEST TOAD IN THE POOL,
GONNA WAIT IT OUT COOL,
JIST A-SET IN MAH STOOL.
O, LITTLE POOL WITH A BIG TOAD!
LITTLE POOL, YER DONE NEAR OUTGROWED:
AH REPRESENTS QUITE A AWESOME LOAD
FER A LITTLE POOL WITH A BIG TOAD!

(*The STRIPPER steps down wildly discarding her housecoat and adding new
disorder to the scene; singing, dancing.*)

STRIPPER:

DOES YER ENGINE NEED A BATTERY?

YER ACCELERATOR ACTIVITY?
DOES YER CARBURETOR RUN ON GAS?
AND SLOW YA DOWN AT HYMAN PASS?

IF I JACK YER FENDER UP FOR FREE,
WILL YA SCREW THE RUBBER ON FOR ME?
EASE THE BRAKE, WAX THE BRASS,
SLOW DOWN DRIVIN', SAVE MY—

RAY: I know your type, Romeo Rancor, and you don't have to fib with me!
I'm calling the police. The trouble around here is that too many folks let
trash like you run around on the loose and have their way.

ROMEO: What way?

TOBY: This is the Way.

RAY: This is your way to waylay innocent girls who don't know the facts of
life out here on the prairie!

STELLA: It's pretty scary, it's scary, scary!

STRIPPER: (*Resuming her singing after the rude interruption.*)

YEAH! THE FACTS OF LIFE
ARE MANY AS THE DAYS IN MAY,
MERRY MAY! YEAH! MERRY MAY!
MERRY MAY YOU MAKE YOUR LIFE!

NOW A HUSBAND MAY BE HARD TO HOLD,
A GAL WITH A GUY GOT MORE THAN GOLD:
BUT SOME OUT THERE AIN'T GOT NO WIFE,
AND SO I'LL LIST THE FACTS OF LIFE
IN A STARTLING EXPOSE
IN THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY!

THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY!

THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY, etc., etc.

MAY: (*As the music suddenly aborts.*) Oh, ma, stop embarrassing me. Of
course I know the facts of life. I'm fifteen. 15, 14, 36. 'N 98 pounds. 'N 98
on every exam this semester.

ROMEO: Yer daughter needs protection from that—

RAY: You in the shakedown business too, sonny?

STELLA: (*Motivated merely by ROMEO's movement.*) Grab him, grab the
pervert, the childless molester, don't let him bound outta sight quick as a
quarter moon drops from the night!

TOBY: (*Indicating his dyed streak of hair.*) Hear that, Dell? —quarter
moon's minded yet, never quite outta eye shot!

RAY: Hot shot! Let's go, Tonto!

ROMEO: Now jist a second! —hold yer horses.

STELLA: (*Rising to the occasion.*) Make our town safe for democracy!

RAY: Let's war to end all war!

DELLA: Keep the home fire burning! fire up, ladies, fire up!

RAY: Seize the scrubby tumbleweed!

(STELLA, DELLA and RAY rush at ROMEO and a chase and struggle ensue; they beat him with their pocketbooks, jab him with their knitting needles, pull his hair, tear at his shirt and kick and punch and pinch him. ROMEO tries to elude them but never strikes back. The STRIPPER strips and sings during this capture scene, her song being simple enough: she keeps presenting various aspects of her body to the audience and declaiming, "This is the first fact of life! This is the second fact of life!" etc., etc. (she also points out and underlines the injustice of the action), until she reaches the "twentieth fact" at the time that the three women are preparing to drag ROMEO upstage "outta sight a the younguns.")

RAY: (*Ramming her rifle into him.*) Take the jut of my butt!

ROMEO: But—

DELLA: Stick, prick, knit up his ravelled sleeve!

STELLA: Shake, shake, shake! Shake him up, shake him down!

RAY: Deal the dingo double trouble!

DELLA: Douse the dullard duely round!

STELLA: Sound the cry to curfew caution; meet the monster, match for scratch.

DELLA: Have fun, be done, the fun's begun!

ROMEO: I'm done fer!

STELLA: Make more of futile Mormons mum,

DELLA: By hacking to his parts his sum,

RAY: And pasting the pieces back with aplomb!

DELLA: Kill, crush, mix, mush!

RAY: Squeeze, tease, please yerself!

STELLA: Fix with tricks, confuse, abuse! Lust and dust, strike, hike the rents, rent his shirt!

ROMEO: Wait, wait! Leave us not get carried away now.

RAY: Carry him away upstage—outta sight a the younguns!

(*The music stops. The STRIPPER is pointing to the savage group with her line "This is the thirtieth fact of life!" The women pause in their violence and stare icily at her.*)

TOBY: Stella, Della, Ray, let Romeo go!

STELLA: Never! We're sick a his Mormon immorality!!!

STRIPPER: *This* is the thirty-first fact of life!!

TOBY: But he is innocent. I am the cul—

DELLA: Whadda ya mean innocent? He was caught in flagrant delecto!

STRIPPER: Toby, child, come down from that chai—

TOBY: —Della, let me see your daughter!

DELLA: Wha—

TOBY: Let me see her *now*!!

DELLA: But she ain't come by yet, Tob. You askin' the impossible.

TOBY: Let me see Rita now!!

STRIPPER: Toby, child, come down from that chair!

(The BALLADEER suddenly emerges into the midst of the crowd, singing a furiously paced hill-billy romp addressed directly to TOBY.)

BALLADEER:

RITA'S A PRETTY GAL 'N SHE'S A-COMIN' SOON,
NOW WE'RE IN THE MONTH A MAY BUT THAT'LL MAKE IT JUNE:
FLOWERS ARE GONNA GROW, THEY GOT BUT NINETY DAYS—
RITA'S A-COMIN' SOON, HALLELUJAH! PRAISE!

TOBY: Let me see Rita *now*!!

(The BALLADEER turns his tune to a southern gospel of highly refined melody. The crowd responds with a chorus that seems to argue liturgically with the BALLADEER, but they finally are won over and all join him for the final stanza.)

BALLADEER:

WAKE THE PREACHER, TOLL THE BELLS
RITA'S COMIN' FOR TO WED:
LIKE SWEET LAUGHTER SHE DISPELS
IMAGINED DREAD.

ALL:

CHOOSE 'N LOSE,
CHOOSE 'N LOSE,
IF LIFE IS HIS,
DEATH IS WHOSE?
CHOOSE 'N LOSE!

BALLADEER:

CALL THE PEOPLE TO THE TEMPLES,
LEAVE THE SHEAVES TO BIND THEMSELVES,
RITA WILL REPLACE OUR SANDALS
LIKE GRACE-FULL ELVES.

ALL:

CHOOSE 'N LOSE,
CHOOSE 'N LOSE,
IF LIFE IS HIS,
DEATH IS WHOSE?
CHOOSE 'N LOSE!

BALLADEER:

DRESS AS FOR THE FINAL FAIR
WHERE WE'LL BRING OUR STOCK TO TEST,
ROUSED TO STAND BY TRUMPETS' BLARE
BEFORE THE REST.

ALL:

CHOOSE 'N LOSE,
CHOOSE 'N LOSE,
IF LIFE IS HIS,
DEATH IS WHOSE?

CHOOSE 'N LOSE!

(Leaving the stage through various exits, except for TOBY.)

LOOK AWAY TO WHERE THAT BRIDGE
LEAPS ACROSS A LIFE'S RAVINE
TO AN OTHER, OTHER-WORLDLY RIDGE
WHERE RITA'S SEEN.

Act II

When Act II opens TOBY, standing on his chair, begins to sing to a Country semi-sacred sound. STELLA, DELLA, and RAY are back upstage with ROMEO, tying him to the chair. In their midst and helping them to tie up ROMEO is ACE, a personable young man with a typewriter strapped to his back. MAY is in the CROWD watching the whole procedure with great fascination. Several MUSICIANS are on stage.

TOBY:

I AM DEATH IN LIFE,
I AM DEATH, SO GRIM!
WHEN I TAKE A WIFE
HER CHANCES ARE THIN!

WHEN I CHOOSE A GAL IN THE GRAVE TO BURY,
AFTER LEARNING MY CHOICE SHE BECOMES QUITE MERRY!
YES, I AM THE KILLER OF EVERY GIRL DEAD --
WANNA COUNT THE NUMBER OF DAUGHTERS YA BRED?

ALL:

TOBY'S DEATH IN LIFE,
TOBY'S DEATH, SO GRIM!
WHEN HE PICKS A WIFE
HER CHANCES ARE SLIM!

TOBY:

BUT I AM THE GOOD, AND THE PARENTS THE BAD
SINCE CHILDREN BROUGHT UP HAVE REALLY BEEN HAD: --
HENCE I'M SALVATION WHEN EVERY GIRL'S DEAD --
WANNA STILL HAVE CHILDREN AMID SUCH DREAD?

ACE: *(Almost pontificating.)* Who slurs his song slurs trash. It's a sometime thing, nothing. But he who slurs his act's intent slurs what intends to

make this town a unity—and cannot quit until it does.
STELLA: (*To ACE.*) Lemme have that rope, will ya?
ACE: Oh, er, certainly.
RAY: Ain't a one a these brats is up to behavin' like the good St. Theresa Genoaheese instructs. I tell ya, ain't a one a them's different!
ROMEO: But yer wrong, you ladies got me all wrong. I am different. I tell ya, I am different!
TOBY: No, no, *I'm* different!
MAY: I'm sensitive.
RAY: What does it matter? — They's all the same when their pants is hot.
ACE: She speaks fer the house.
STRIPPER: What house? Never worked in a house. Never even had a house.
STELLA: Ladies, ya wanna clean up them Vegas strippers around here.
ACE: Could go harder on yer beds if ya do.
RAY: Don't get cute. We'll attend to the morals problem in good time.
DELLA: Yes, we shall look into these strippers.
TOBY: 'N have a good time doin' i —
ROMEO: Please, hear me out! May is in danger! Grave danger!
STELLA: Not any more now that yer tied up!
ROMEO: Yer mistook! I love her: why should *I* hurt her?
RAY: A course you love her: that's why you attacked her: you love her and you wanted to make love to her! It's love we gotta watch out fer, girls, love that waylays our daughters 'n drags them off inta clumps a sage 'n tumbleweed fer a tumble!
DELLA: The lie of the land.
ACE: How powerfully she grasps that pithy substitute of land for lingo.
STELLA: Della's learned.
RAY: Was brung up in a convent, oughta be.
DELLA: Yeah, I oughta be.
TOBY: Oughta be run outta town with the rest a you guardians a public decency.
STELLA: We done our duty re Romeo as we seen it, right, Ray?
RAY: We are always right, Stella. What do you think, Della?
STRIPPER: Stella, Della, Ray.
DELLA: Let's notify the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Stella.
RAY: Let's notify a nationally syndicated newspaper, Della. Pleasure or Kiss — or one a them.
STELLA: Let's notify the community bulletin board, Ray. Put it on the air, wake the town and scare the people.
RAY: Yeah, we'll spread it around. We'll spread it around.
TOBY: Mary, May, Maude. Stella, Della, Rayburn.
STRIPPER: And the thirty-second fact of life is that strippers get looked into . . .
ACE: Better beat it fer now, Miss.
RAY: We'll look inta this matter a the strippas 'n she don't!
TOBY: Wait, ma, when'll I see ya?

STRIPPER: Soon, sonny, soon. I'm booked fer a night in our town. (*To ACE.*)

Be worth yer while to be here then. Ya come around here often?

ACE: Well, probably more often from now on.

STRIPPER: (*To MUSICIANS.*) See you boys over in Vegas. Gotta attend to dates in that vicinity. Bye, Toby, my boy. Nothin' comes easy.

TOBY: That it does.

(STELLA, DELLA, RAY, and MAY take their seats as the STRIPPER exits. ACE takes a seat right in the middle of the women, removes his typewriter from his back, places it on his lap, puts paper into it, and prepares to type. RAY hangs onto her rifle and DELLA takes up her knitting. STELLA is restless, she can't seem to sleep. MAY reads Playboy, Screw, Kiss, etc.)

DELLA: Wonder if Lana's in bed now. Poor Lana, had some kinda paralysis when she was little.

ACE: Poor Rita.

DELLA: Wonder if Rita's in bed now . . .

STELLA: Had some kinda paralysis when she was little, didn't she, Dell?

MAY: What did ya tie Romeo up that way for, ma?

ACE: Why, May, child, we done it fer Romeo's own good. You know Romeo can't sleep unless he's tied up spread-eagle to his bed on account a he is conditioned that way since he was a child and had leprosy and had to be tied up and restrained from scratchin' hisself durin' the bydee-by hours a the night, scratchin' all them awful sores, unsightly sores, and we did want him to catch a bit a bydee-by, he's had a long preventful day, Romeo has.

RAY: (*To ACE*) Who the hell are you?

ACE: Who the hell am I? Ain't no mere morbid curiosity seeker, I kin tell ya that much, madam!

DELLA: (*Automatically, without looking at ACE*) He's my son-in-law . . . or future son-in-law?

ACE: Future son-in-law.

STELLA: Elaborate.

MAY: (*Bored to the point of suicide.*) Ooooooooooooo . . .!

ACE: Name's Andrew Ace, reporter, came out here to do a story on that lethal gas leak in the stock piles. Six thousand sheep croaked, notice they never say nothin' 'bout how many people? That was to be my job.

RAY: How absorbing.

ACE: Anyhow, met Rita when I come out here, fell quickly in love, and I will marry her.

STELLA: Ya really a reporter?

ACE: Is the pope Catlick?

RAY: That's enough about him, now me.

DELLA: Whatcha bag today, Ray?

RAY: (*Standing and lifting up a heavy burlap sack.*) Side from Romeo, git me this real big she-lion. Right between the—but, ssh, I don't want May to hear.

TOBY: Hear that, May, yer ol' bag bagged a big cat today. Didja drag it across to the viaduct—(*Pointing to the diagonal girder.*)

RAY: Yup, 'n tossed it on over into the Red River right side a Romeo—(*She heaves the burlap sack over the girder; it clears the height and comes crashing down on ROMEO.*) Wake the hell up! Look at that—a-sleepin' on the job!!

ROMEO: (*Bombarded into wakefulness.*) "Maytime, Maytime, Maytime . . ."

MAY: (*Pulling on RAY's sleeve, almost fighting to bring RAY back to her chair, fighting to ensure the immobility that will allow the murders to proceed.*) Sssssssh, set ye down, mine lover earned his sleep! Sleep did come on him a just reward much as the Maytime thaw pours on the penitent wintry scrub in patient wait within the plain below.

TOBY: Bellow. Listen to him bellow.

DELLA: Romeo bellows in his sleep for his lady love.

RAY: (*Giving up, sitting down.*) And quiet steals upon the town . . . (*Mumbling to herself.*) need some action around here . . .

STELLA: Toby steals, too. Or so I heard tell. Steals his opportunities from the jaws of stiff competition . . .

RAY: Steals personal keepsakes, tips from barroom counters . . .

MAY: Steals girls' hearts with his deep, meaningful eyes . . .

RAY: Hush, child, do not speak of amorous matter.

TOBY: (*Toying with the hair curler and paper clamp that he has been using to pinch his anger vein.*) Stella, Della, Ray. Mary, May, Maude. Oh, "M 'n M" over "M," I know how to make love a hundred different ways. Mom, I *have* made love a hundred different ways. Everything I do is an act of love, each inch I grow a testimony to my arch triumph. Look, this blackish beauty: —it is huge this purpleblack and beautiful anger vein, isn't it? Why would a man raise such a vein upon his pisser if not for love, in the libel of love, as the label of love, because of it, his wanting it, and this black vein of anger is it, is *love*, furious, unicorn and phallic. The people know it, too. Ah, yes, everyone in and on the edge of town knows it. People on the edge of a town. Verging. Precisely why they claim I'm too short, ill-founded claim, unripe, still verging, that claims I can't tip-toe up enough to bend me down a bunch of grapes of grafted love. Sweet grapes of grafted love. Because the labor in matching my reach, in reaching up to reach my reach is not a labor of love for them. Everything seems easier to them—the jump to conclusions, the sealing of the holy books, manhunts, murder trials, death in a family . . . But I shan't be caught by that, caught short by that, hunted, murdered, tried to a man and put to death. Were I caught short by such as that I had not ever have reached the height I have. And I have reached a height above the groveling mass, the black beauty mass of which I am the solitary priest. So say I my said say and, having said, know everybody knows it.

MAY: Knows what?

TOBY: Knows how a self-made man thru painful thought knows how love

may be made in a hundred different ways. Slaying, fer inst —

MAY: The hell! Yer the original Mormon monk. You probably levitate in yer cell you've got so much repressed.

TOBY: Ain't you sweet.

ACE: Sweets to the sweeties, farewell.

STELLA: Farewell, my Mary, farewell.

MAY: He said to the *sweeties*—call Mary a sweetie?

STELLA: Oh, you stir my blood!

ACE: As spring stirs frozen lakes. What an Easter downpour penetrates our unprepared young prairie. Stella, Della, Ray.

MAY: But I get bored even at Toby's pad—

ACE: (*Typing.*) True. She's sick a all that sweet talk—

DELLA: 'n flippin' thru *Playboy*—they call it adolescent melancholia—

MAY: sick a flippin', sick a the flip sides those same ol' Enis Penis records, sick a sippin' beer, beer brewed with clear mountain valley water.

RAY: She oughta be sick considerin' all that sick litracha she devours like it was candy or somethin'. Readin' rots the brain. Specially that chamber-maid crap.

MAY: Oh, ma.

TOBY: I read this novel once, "Hair Today, Gone to Merkin."

ACE: (*Typing.*) 'Bout a chick gets a bright idea 'n commits suicide over this guy.

TOBY: I always dreamt a havin' a chick git the idea 'n commit suicide over me—that would be absolute, that would be proof!

DELLA: Well, gals are slow to that kinda romanticism these days, Toby, sometimes they have to be helped along.

TOBY: I'll help them along. Specially blondes like Maude the frump. That fat frump's my trump card.

MAY: (*Vicious.*) Toby *died* Maude's hair blonde. Also dyed Maude's kid sister, Lynn's, hair blonde. Went out 'n got engaged to both a them on the same day.

TOBY: I bought them both diamond engagement rings, fer five bucks each. 'N courted 'em with songs would break any gal's heart. (*Taking the mike, singing to Country sacred music:*)

IF I FOUND A GAL I COULD CALL A REAL GAL,
COULD BE MY DISCIPLE, MY WIFE, 'N MY PAL,
I'D GO OUT IN THE DESERT ON BARE BLISTERED FEET
AND THERE GATHER MANNA FER MY GAL TO EAT.

I'D RAIN HOLY BREAD FROM THE HEAVENS FOR HER
LIGHT AS THE HOAR FROST UNDER THE FIR,
RARE AS THE CORIAND, PRICE BEYOND MONEY,
WITH A TASTE LIKE WAFERS, MEAD, 'N BEES' HONEY.

IF I KNEW A GAL, JIST ONE PERFECT GAL,
COULD MATCH WHAT I FEEL, 'N LOVE WHAT I SHALL,
I'D GO OUT IN THE DESERT ON TORN, BLEEDING FEET

AND THERE GATHER MANNA FER MY GAL TO EAT.

I'D RAIN HOLY BREAD FROM THE HEAVENS FOR HER
LIGHT AS THE HOAR FROST UNDER THE FIR,
RARE AS THE CORIAND, PRICE BEYOND MONEY,
WITH A TASTE LIKE WAFERS, MEAD, 'N BEES' HONEY.

IF I HAD A GAL, A MADONNA-LIKE GAL,
COULD DRESS IN MY CLOTHES 'N NURSE MY MORALE,
I'D FILL UP AN OMER OF MANNA FOR HER
AND GENERATIONS THAT IN HER STOMACH SHALL STIR.

(MAUDE, a high school tramp, enters, followed by LYNN, her pre-adolescent sister. Both have badly dyed blonde hair.)

MAUDE: (*Flaunting her ring.*) I think girls are dumb fools who go out with fellas 'n don't git paid for it.

TOBY: Hi ya, Maude. That there's Maude. I'd like to kill her.

LYNN: (*As everyone laughs.*) My big sister Maude once showed at a formal with a bunch a guys all dressed up like beatniks. That's guts. Maude's dreamy. She cuts classes 'n got recommended fer Psychiatric help.

TOBY: Hi ya, Lynn.

LYNN: Hello up there, fiancé. Didja set the date yet?

TOBY: Today, little Lynn, today I think. — I'd dig killin' her, too. Her youth 'n all, it'd have shock value. But I need help, the same in the beginning was with God, the *Word* was with God, and *I*, also, need a particeps criminis: I can't reach them sistas from a Way up here.

MAUDE: You still dribblin' off at the mouth, shrimp?

TOBY: Are you my gal, Maude?

MAUDE: Natch, Toby, we're engaged, ain't we?

TOBY: Who ya goin' with now, Maude?

MAUDE: Bad Butch.

(BAD BUTCH, a huge hell's angel type with a lion's head sewn to the back of his jacket, comes bounding in.)

BUTCH: Mah label's Bad Butch, Big Bad Butch, very big on the strip 'n with the babes. It's mah get-up gets 'em. They's impressed with the motif — this here fierce a face King a the Beasts. Grrroooooowlllllll! Heh, heh, heh, heh! Ah am more than a small town figger 'n figger that makes this more 'n a small town. Ah am a symptom a what this country's comin' to. 'N ah think it's comin' to this small town.

ACE: (*Getting up and going to BUTCH with a pencil and writing pad in hand.*) Lo, there, son. I really dig yer bikecap 'n maltese cross 'n them holsters with knives stead a pistols.

DELLA: I'm really crazy 'bout them jab-em-in-the-flanks hundred per cent silva spurs on his loafers, m'self.

ACE: Son, I'm tryin' to locate Toby Short. Think ya kin help me out?

BUTCH: Why, Ah'm surprised at you, buckeroo! Would *Ah* know the lo-ca-

shun a a unsavory type like Toby Short?

RAY: Would *he* know the lo-ca-shun a a unsavory type like Toby Short?

ACE: Well, would you?

BUTCH: Is a matter a fact Ah would, Ah sure would, Sir Dick.

ACE: Yes?

BUTCH: Folla that there girder what counteth the steps a the sun, git off afore the vortex 'n then carry ya inquisitive self right round under it. After that, he's straight ahead, ya can't miss him.

ACE: (*Exiting.*) Thanks, fella.

TOBY: Thanks, Butch.

RAY: Hey, that there's the way to the dressin' rooms. Toby's out here!

BUTCH: No kiddin'? Ya'd never believe it from the way you ladies behave. Ah coulda sworn he was down in them dressin' rooms. (*Dropping a coin in a wall phone on the girder.*) Hello, operator? Put me in to the Attorney General.

TOBY: What fer?

BUTCH: What fer? Ah got some dope on a creep round here been doin' gals in. Figger thar's quite a reward. No sense lettin' some outsider git it. (*As TOBY, with minimum effort, cuts the phone wires.*) Name's—hello, operator? operator??

TOBY: So ya goin' with Bad Butch, eh Maude? Now he could be a help steada a—

MAUDE: Whatcha mean a help? Ain'tcha jealous? Listen here, I don't want ya allowin' me to go out with other goons before or after we're married neither, I want ya to ring me up 'n bring me up records 'n chocolates stuffed with stale jam. I can't stand it when ya ferget 'n I don't take after yer always bein' busy neither. I'm suspicious of you.

TOBY: (*Calculating, both staring at BUTCH wrestling with the phone.*) That's groovey, Maude . . . Seen yer shrink lately?

MAUDE: Ain't nobody kin shrink me down to yer size.

STELLA: Toby and Maude were made fer each other.

MAY: He'd have made that maid if maid there was to have made.

MAUDE: Hi, May. Where's Romeo?

MAY: He's tied up at the moment.

DELLA: Is that supposed to be clever?

MAY: Oh, why don't you go back to county-fair chorus lines—or can't you kick anymore?

MAUDE: That there's May. I'd as soon see her dead as anything. Why not?

ROMEO: (*Groaning in his sleep.*) May! May! May's in bad trouble, she's . . . girls gits into . . . trouble . . .

TOBY: True. Maude's a harlot. I suspect she got venereal disease.

STELLA: (*Shocked.*) Why, Toby, I'm shocked! — What makes you think so?

TOBY: Well, is it cancer makes yer zippo look like a Grunewald? Anyhow, I wrote a letter to the Department a Health 'n informed them that Maude was contaminated 'n spreadin' it all around town.

DELLA: Ya done yer duty, son, above 'n beyond the call a a fascist state.

RAY: In his way, Toby *does* set an example.

STELLA: Sure, there *is* some kinda contamination in this town even if it's only syph 'n someone must be a-spreadin' it.

MAUDE: I'd give him syph. I'd give him anything. Why not? He's my man.

TOBY: Maude, kin ya reach Big Butch fer me?

MAUDE: I ain't no messenger service. Reach fer him yerself. Why don'tcha git off that there chair so ya kin reach him yerself?

TOBY: (*Deeply hurt.*) Thanks, Maude. Hey, Lynn —

ROMEO: (*In his sleep.*) May, poor May, look out!

TOBY: Wanna help me out?

LYNN: (*Sympathetic.*) Awww, right a way, romantic Toby. I'll reach Butchy-boy for you. Stay put.

TOBY: Mercies, Lynn, yer a real trooper. And I shall reward you for this.

(LYNN *skips over to BAD BUTCH, completely entangled in the phone.*)

BUTCH: (*Lecherous.*) Ya old enough to date now, Lynn?

LYNN: Sure, but I'm a-spoke fer by Toby. 'N he's a-waitin' on ya.

BUTCH: Kin Ah gitcha somethin', Sir Tob?

TOBY: A rope'd go good.

ROMEO: Wanna git me a glass a water, May? Like Esmeralda? 'N while yer at it some suave fer me sores?

BUTCH: (*Attracted by ROMEO's moans.*) One rope a-comin' up!

LYNN: (*As BUTCH unties a rope binding ROMEO's hand.*) It's a goof to go out with other guys while yer engaged. Specially if they're older. 'N big!

BUTCH: Is this hemp to order, Tob? If in knot, I'll —

TOBY: Great, Butch, that'll more'n do. Give it here, will ya?

BUTCH: (*Withholding the rope.*) Straightaway. Whatcha got in mind?

TOBY: I'll ask the questions, babe. Yer ma inferior 'n while ya are I'm still runnin' this outfit 'n this here town, too. Git it?

BUTCH: Little bit too well; but you don't; not the rope at any rate. Ah don't take no stiff uppa lip offa anyone, Tob, not even stiff-on-the-brain you. Tob. Here, Lynn, Ah'm givin' ya 'nougha the rope to — (*Giving the rope to LYNN.*)

TOBY: You don't seem to git the hang of i —

STELLA: (*Agitated, getting up and coming down to the edge of the stage.*) I hired private dicks on this case. No one lays much by it, but the way I've got it figgered out ma little girl has come to foul play, even as you have — come to a foul play. Strickly Inge-fringe. Foul because it breaks your trust, bigots your openness, and on point after point loses its patience with you; is seldom humble and almost never willing to accept its position as the most humiliating feat a group of people could be part of and hope to profit from: placing themselves before an unsuspecting public that is right to have every right not to be lectured to. The implicit assumption in pieces like this is that "our town" is always and necessarily wrong. Well, it jist ain't necessarily so. There's a rightness to things as all things go, and only the small of heart, like certain immature and impotent plays say no.

RAY: Some crust, huh? Anyhow, Stella's privately-hired dicks've been hangin' out around Toby's Hollywood-style furnished pad a-lookin' fer a lead. Once a beer can come flyin' out the window 'n hit one a them in the head. That made 'em suspicious.

BUTCH: While Ah don't know much on it, yer a bit a boilin' oil, Sir Tob, some powerful strange tough guys been upta yer place. They seems to be suspicious.

TOBY: They *are* suspicious. But then why hang out around my place? I'm here.

STELLA: Them dicks'll find somethin', I know they will, they'll find out what happened to ma little girl 'n if she was assaulted first afore it happened. Sheriff claims she jist run away, but I know fer sure that's not sure. The truth lays somewhere else. I have a premonition. I have supper on now. (*Taking her seat.*)

DELLA: Stell's got a premonition 'n she's got every right to it: — makes it more proper to claim her high school aged daughter come by foul play than to admit she jist up 'n run away. And we women in this here town is nothin' if we ain't respectable.

RAY: Well we other women ain't so sure about you. Y'all hallucinate a lot, ya know?

TOBY: Wanna do me a favor, Butch, 'n —

BUTCH: Not if Ah kin do ya dirt with as little Hell's Angel effort!

TOBY: Son of a butch! ya couldn't. Hold old Lynn upta me. That's the minimum effort I kin imagine ya makin'.

BUTCH: Well, why didn't ya behest such request before? Nothin' could give more a a cheap thrill — her tiny jist-breakin' nubile bubs in the champagne cups a mah callused palms —

LYNN: Except hold me lower. My knees!

(*BUTCH sweeps LYNN off her feet and, holding her high, offers her to TOBY. LYNN has the rope in her hand. The WOMEN watch the scene with approval. MAY is drinking beer.*)

LYNN: Weeeee . . . what a ride! I kin fly like a angel.

TOBY: Hello, angel.

LYNN: Hi ya, Toby, didn't know you was a angel, too. I always wondered what the air was like up in the clouds around you'short fellas.

TOBY: And what, Angelica, do you discover it to be analogous to now that you've finally made the flight?

LYNN: Oh, it ain't much different from the air everybody else down in town breathes.

TOBY: (*Reaching, unsuccessfully, for her, BUTCH pulling slightly away.*) That's what I want to hear.

LYNN: Ya know, Toby, you ain't so special, even if I did accept yer proposal . . .

TOBY: (*Taking the rope from her hand.*) I know that, Lynn-chin.

RAY: Will ya look at that: — the creep's got a heart a gold.

DELLA: Takes time out to play rope with the little girl from down the street.

STELLA: Plays real nice he does, has a real way with the ladies don't matter what their age.

RAY: Has a good heart that creep. Little girl's no bigger'n he is.

BUTCH: Ah tried to contact the Attorney General 'bout yer idiomsyncratic activities, Tob.

TOBY: (*Fixing the rope around LYNN's neck.*) You would, Butch, it's jist like you, babe.

BUTCH: They hung up the phone on me though, Tob.

TOBY: They would, Butch, it's jist like them, babe.

ROMEO: (*Tossing wildly.*) May! Beat it! Beat it outta town! Make yer getaway good!

BUTCH: (*Frightened.*) Ol' Rom! him 'n his idiomsyncratic sleepin' habits: he don't let no one turn in once he's been turned in.

TOBY: (*Garrotting LYNN.*) Lynn-chin gonna have a hung chin.

RAY: (*Still watching.*) There'll be a hung jury over this.

MAY: (*Getting high.*) How's the family, Maude?

MAUDE: (*Eating chocolates.*) Home hangs me up, ya know that, Maude.

MAY: I'm hip, May.

TOBY: (*Conjugating, funereally.*) Mary, May, Maudlin. Stella, Della, Rayburn. From cloud to clod in half the time; no grease, no grime . . . (*TOBY slowly releases LYNN, letting her limp body lie in BUTCH's arms. The suddenness of her death leaves BUTCH incredulous.*)

MAY: I'd look back in hanger if I was you, Maude. I'd turn around 'n look back after my fiancé if I was you. Never could tell but when he'd be flyin' high with other birds. Birds baby-faced, younger, not yet broke in, not yet broke down. Down. Down . . .

MAUDE: Don't need all a yer experience, sista, jist to know howda hang onta a guy.

(*ACE, wearing a reporter's fedora and scratching his head with incomprehension, comes wandering back around the vortex.*)

ACE: Hey, hang on there, you kids — mind if I shoot some questions at ya?

MAUDE: Who're you?

ACE: Andrew Ace, reporter, a outta space reporter, from —

MAUDE: Why don'tcha fly back to outta space! We git any cash fer gittin' grilled?

ACE: It's worth more'n one pizza to ya. Know anythin' about a kid named Toby said to have a black anger vein he developed by standin' on his hands till it showed, then pinchin' it fer several hours a day with a tin curler or clipboard clamp?

RAY: Sure. Toby's anger vein's plain as the fed fedora on yer head. Why, even Toby kin probably spot that there fed fedora ya sport. — Stell, lay ya five to ten Toby can.

STELLA: I ain't the sportin' type.

TOBY: But *I* am: — listen here: (*Singing a hill-billy tune.*)

I'M GONNA PAY FER CRIMES I OUGHT'VE DONE,
GONNA FRY FER WHAT I DIDN'T DO!
YOU FORCE ME,
YOU FOLKS ALL FORCE ME!
IF I STOP NOW YOU FOLKS KIN SHUN
ALL THE WORK THAT I'VE BEGUN –
I'VE JIST BEGUN,
I'M A DREAMER TOO.

ALL:

OL' SALT A SALT LAKE CITY
HE GITS DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY
HE DON'T WASTE A TEAR A PITY
EVEN IF THE GAL IS PRETTY:
NO SALTY TEAR –
SALT A SALT LAKE CITY!

TOBY:

I'M GONNA PAY FER CRIMES I OUGHT'VE DONE,
GONNA FRY DON'T MATTER WHAT I DO:
YOU'LL FRY ME,
O YES, YOU'LL FRY ME!
IF WHAT I WANT'S NOT EASY WON,
ALL THE MORE IT'S GONNA STUN –
I'VE JIST BEGUN,
I'M A DREAMER TOO.

ALL:

OL' SALT A SALT LAKE CITY
HE GITS DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY
HE DON'T WASTE A TEAR A PITY
EVEN IF THE GAL IS PRETTY:
NO SALTY TEAR –
SALT A SALT LAKE CITY!

BUTCH: Greetin's, Sir Andrew *Report-tage*, you has the look a the Inevitable
on yer newspaper puss. How goes it with that mass medium up in Big
Town, U.S.A.?

ACE: Takes all of a mass medium to deal with a mass murderer, a murderer
fer the masses, a chocolate fer their sweet tooth.

MAY: (*Quite high.*) Toby's gonna turn *our* town into Big Town!

STELLA: Turn the eyes 'n ears a the nation on us.

ACE: All you folks is knee-deep in hot water lemme tell ya that right now!
Willful withholdin' is called criminal neglect, ya know.

BUTCH: We know, 'n it's yer yella-daily what puts us there.

ACE: I know, 'n it's yer blatant confessional no-holes-barred song what's put
me *here*.

TOBY: Put Lynn down.

BUTCH: We're trapped by the Word! Done in afore we even gits a start by a
lotta language, Tob!

TOBY: I'm hip.

BUTCH: (*Threatening.*) So don't write nothin' ya hear? Not if ya wanna git outta Utah with yer fed fedora on whatcha'd still wanna call a head!

ACE: Such a thing as freedom a the press, bully, I'll exploit what I want when —

BUTCH: Ah'll folla ya, Ah'll smoke ya out wherever ya go, Sir Andrew, 'n Ah'll cripple yer scribblin' hand sure as Ah'm wearin' Luftwaffe wings!

ACE: Relax! take it easy, no harm intended.

STELLA: Graveyard's cluttered with corpses come there no harm intended.

DELLA: (*Deeply distressed.*) My poor brother, his last letter afore he was shot —

RAY: (*Fed up.*) She gonna start up agin!

ACE: (*To MAUDE.*) Kin I stand ya to a pizza, girlie?

RAY: You been standin' enough! (*Removing ACE's fedora and slamming him on the head with her rifle; he falls into a chair.*) Try sittin' a little. Got a rope, Stell?

STELLA: (*Pulling the rope off LYNN's neck and helping RAY to tie ACE to the chair.*) This one a them outside agitaters, eh, Ray?

RAY: Yup! Sheriff'll run him outta town in the mornin'. Upta us to keep him static as the resta us till then.

BUTCH: (*Looking with amazement at the devastation the townswomen are capable of bringing so quickly about.*) Poor agitaters, they really don't do nothin' except use a lotta language.

TOBY: Ya wanna live up to a lotta language used in your behalf . . . somehow ya do . . .

DELLA: Or half of it. And the changes it makes in you. I feel blue.

(*As they all retake their seats the focus comes to rest for a strange moment on BUTCH with the body of LYNN still in his large arms. After a while he mutters to himself.*)

BUTCH: Ya was such a wee li'l new 'n nubile thing. Nobody'd even laid ya yet.

TOBY: Put her on the floor, Bleedin' Heart. Right here.

BUTCH: (*Placing the body at the foot of TOBY's chair*) Whatcha gonna do with her?

TOBY: Nothin'. Jist leave her here, will ya. It looks like she's sleepin'.

BUTCH: Seems like somethin' oughta be done. So young.

TOBY: What fer? Lotta wasted initiative. Got better things to do.

BUTCH: Yeah?

TOBY: Walk her sister over here.

BUTCH: Oh, no, not me! Not me again! Ya can't fool me twice!

TOBY: I'm *squarin'* with ya same as I am with everyone else! Now take that fat frump —

BUTCH: Never!

TOBY: I really don't need ya that much, Butch. She'll come by herself if it comes to that.

MAUDE: I kin come by myself if it comes to that . . .

TOBY: So ya might as well bring her. It'll give ya a sense a accomplishment.

BUTCH: Watcha mean ya don't need me? I'm yer sidekick, yer side-line in life, yer by-line in the papers, yer doin' all this jist to impress me counta Ah'm the only one kin be aware a it. Then ya kin read yer own sense a accomplishment in Hell's mirror!

TOBY: It is in the nature a the sense a accomplishment to have to read it somewhere. Please, take Maude's hand 'n strollin' her arm 'n arm —

BUTCH: Ah ain't no gigolo!

TOBY: I didn't think ya were. You shouldn't think ya are, either. Ya oughta think a yerself as a escort or a companion a destiny.

DELLA: You oughta think of yourself.

MAY: I think I'd attend to my fiancé if I was —

MAUDE: But you ain't! — Er, think I'll see what my Toby's up to.

RAY: Everybody's thinkin.

BUTCH: (*As MAUDE crosses by him.*) Hey, Maude, fancy runnin' inta you!

DELLA: Huh! He was expectin' ya.

MAUDE: What fer?

TOBY: Kinda hard to explain.

BUTCH: (*Taking her arm in arm.*) Yeah, ya wouldn't undastand.

TOBY: Oh, she'll under-stand. Jist might not appreciate it, that's all. Too unsophisticated. Takes some body really on top of it to appreciate the senseless.

DELLA: Oh, I think it makes a lotta sense.

MAUDE: Who ya callin' senseless?

TOBY: Nobody whose thickness I couldn't knock a little sense inta. Come on, I'll knock ya up here.

MAUDE: (*Stepping over her sister's corpse, TOBY pulling her up on his chair with a single jolt.*) What wit.

(ROMEO snaps out of his sleep and discovers his unbound hand. He begins to unite the remaining ropes in wild agitation.)

ROMEO: May, blonde May! Toby's stranglin' her!! Hey, look, the ropes is loose, jist like in a serial.

TOBY: How are ya, sweetie? Yer my favorite, know that don't ya?

MAUDE: Feel kinda even, Toby, even with ya, with a lotta names flashin' thru my head, names you know, a series of names like during a orgasm.

TOBY: I know. A series of names. A string of words. Jist a string of — now, easy, Maude, take it easy 'n this won't take long — (*He presses his thumb on her windpipe.*)

MAUDE: Take yer time; I got all my life nothin' much else to do in this here town anyway . . .

MAY: I'll say — lessen ya wanna jist keep makin' out.

RAY: Y'all mean like them two? Ya oughta know better'n that, May.

STELLA: Thank heavens I didn't bring up my Mary so's she'd carry on like that there proxide blonde.

DELLA: They sure go at it kinda rough, don't they? Kids!

MAY: Oh, you parents talk the dullest tripe! Yer conversation really smells.

BUTCH: (*Sniffing.*) Lynn's stiff is beginnin' to stink.

TOBY: It is human to smell; when we're dead we smell more; that means that when we're dead we're more human; that's why I don't have no compunc-tions about killin' people: that's why I'd like to be dead myself.

BUTCH: That's jist great but what are ya goin' to do with Lynn's stiff? Ah'm tellin' ya, it really stinks.

TOBY: We'll dump it in the trunk a my car. My *groovey* car. We'll dump Maude's stiff in there too soon as I'm finished stranglin' her. That's the most obvious cache I kin think of 'n I want them in the most obvious cache of all cause I jist don't care any more. I kin always ditch the car, groovey though it is, 'n wipe the chrome clean.

MAY: Ditch the bitches.

TOBY: O moment that exquisites!

(MAUDE screams — a blood-curdling shriek that shakes the stage. ROMEO breaks into the semi-circle of chairs. He flies from one confused person to the next. Each is weakly wavering between ignoring the crime and turning slightly toward it.)

ROMEO: Help police! posie! sheriff! help! Toby's — Tob — Roby's murderin' May!

RAY: (*Taut.*) Don't be silly, Bad Butch, May's a-settin' here.

ROMEO: It's me — Romeo!

MAY: It's me, May!

RAY: It's thee, Romeo: — wherefor wert thou?

ROMEO: Asleep! 'N tied up to ma sleep like all the citizens in our town.

STELLA: Don't you be a-goin' around makin' them trashy irresponsible accu-sations. We's all quite awake 'n tryin' to do our duty as citizens, do the most dutiful accordin' to our duty accordin' to how we sees it.

ROMEO: Well, see it! See it! Yer duty's to open yer eyes 'n hearin' ears 'n dis-criminate what's a-happenin'!

RAY: Discriminate?

ROMEO: Oh, look! Look up there!

DELLA: Look at what? At _____ (*Using the ACTOR's real name.*) We seen him before, seen him at damn near every rehearsal.

ROMEO: Look what he's doing!!

STELLA: What's he doing? Does that damn near every night 'bout this point.

RAY: Yeah, why should we look? What's in it fer us 'cept concedin' the scene to him?

MAY: (*Her sense of stage-hogging reignited.*) Ma's right. What's the profit?

ROMEO: Toby's killin' a girl!!!

STELLA: Maybe.

ROMEO: (*Shrieking.*) BUT HE'S KILLING HER!!!

(MAUDE is dead. TOBY begins to calmly lower her corpse. The crowd freezes

completely, stares dead ahead into the audience.)

STELLA: Feel frozen here. How very much a working day of life this is to sit so still while rodeos of America Hysterica ben-hur around our head.

DELLA: Stiff-heck, *that's* what it is . . . never had such a bad 'n stiff stiff-neck like this afore . . . must've caught a cross-ventilation draft in the drive-in the-a-ter the other nigh . . .

MAY: Downed a draught in the beer parlor the other night. Was hard to balance on the chair once the beer got hold a my brain. Was jist the other night . . . Last night, maybe it was. :The thirty-first of May.

TOBY: That was your last night, May. *Your* month's run out. Goodbye.

MAY: (*In a trance.*) Goodbye, Toby. Goodbye, ma. Goodbye, Romeo. It's June now.

ROMEO: (*Frantic.*) But May —

MAY: (*Emphatic.*) I said, It is June now.

(As in a sudden dispersal of clouds, the lights go up on the top of the girder that rises from TOBY's chair and bends over the circumference of the vortex. There, at the pinnacle, stands RITA. She has an absolutely other-wordly appearance. DELLA is brushed by the strange light and turns her face slowly toward RITA, reaching for the blue cloak as she does so.)

DELLA: Wanna get over one day soon 'n see that there monument they erected for . . . my brother . . .

RAY: Erected, huh?

DELLA: (*Standing and moving toward RITA as RITA begins to descend the girder.*) 'N I'll take Rita along with me I will. Hello Rita. I've got yer cloak.

RAY: Her brain's decayed. I'm tellin' ya, her brain's really decayed.

ROMEO: (*Weeping with rage.*) What's goin' on around here? Don'tcha all hear me? Do something for God's sake!!!

TOBY: Is there something for God's sake, or will God punish me no matter?

DELLA: (*Fixing the long cloak around RITA's shoulders.*) God punishes you, Toby, when ya try to hide from Him like Cain. Gotta stand up 'n out in the light where He kin see ya 'n judge ya at yer doin's 'n at the intent of yer supplications. Oughta supplicate to Him all the time: — Now I lay me —

RITA: Down to doom, down to drown in the salt lake.

With sea salt and tears are mine eyes crusted o'er.

Closed as the muscles that barnacle the shore.

TOBY and RITA: (*Together.*)

Down from the straight-back chair on the stairway to God,

My heart is in the Heavens but my sandals are in the sod.

Mighty Moses might mount high, there listen and call,

Yet could write nothing but his own word, then turn round and fall.

STELLA: (*Seeing RITA.*) An angel caught round with sashes of gilt drops from the sky, descends our only steeple needle, comes down directly counterpoint to our steeple's ever narrowin' point.

DELLA: We're a-narrowin' down to the point.

ROMEO: (*Seeing RITA; transfixed.*) Look, look at her above that Dali chair that on the desert thrives. She is the angel he makes of all thy daughters' lives!

RAY: (*Seeing nothing.*) His infatuation for my daughter hath caused him wax poetic. License like that, Romeo, malicious speculation, kin ruin innocent people's lives.

RITA: Yet we are all, all of us innocent, the guilty along with the mad.

TOBY: For we know not what we do, neither her selves nor my self.

RITA: Neither for our names' sake, our mothers', nor the Lord's.

BUTCH: (*Fastidiously arranging the bodies of the sisters at the base of TOBY's chair.*) Sorta hard to git 'em really even-steven, Sir Tob, seein' as how one is so much shorter in measure from the other. The virgin's not nearly as long as the frump.

(*This scene of tensely confused attentions is suddenly splintered by the appearance of the STRIPPER, dressed in modest street clothes. She bursts into shattering song:*)

STRIPPER:

I'M GONNA TAKE IT OFF,

I'M GONNA DOFF

MY GARB,

I'M GONNA SHOW YIS WHAT I GOT

LIKE IT OR NOT!

HEY! HEY! HEY!

LOOK, IF YIS CAN --

LOOK! LOOK! LOOK!

LOOK! IF YER A MAN!

(*Standing above, and pointing to, the bodies of the sisters. The crowd pulls away from her.*)

I'M GONNA PULL OFF THE MASK --

THAT'S MY TASK,

THEN I'M DONE.

I'M GONNA SHOW YA TWO BODIES

MY OWN 'N MY SON'S!

HEY! HEY! HEY!

LOOK, IF YIS CAN --

LOOK! LOOK! LOOK!

LOOK, IF YER A MAN!

STELLA: Oh, how disgusting — I can't look!

(*The stripping music suddenly aborts. RITA has reascended the girder above TOBY's chair and is standing on the platform that joins the two girders. She begins to sing a sad and melodic Country ballad. The MUSICIANS accompany her, very softly at first. As she sings, RITA slowly strides the diagonal girder,*

reaching its end downstage right as she finishes her song. The movement of the blue cloak over her arms gives the uncanny impression of the wings of an angel wounded by man. The crowd is transfixed in holy awe.)

RITA:

THERE'S A LAND OF NO ONE DYING,
A LAND THAT DEATH FORGOT,
THOUGH SO MANY THERE ARE LYING
IN A SPACE WHERE BREATH IS NOT.

THOUGH THE ELDER BRANCH IS GROWING
AND THE ELM ON ELM ROW SPREADS
TOP OF EVERGREEN O'ERFLOWING
FROM THEIR CEMETERY BEDS

AND A MAN'S NOT SPOKE FOR SURELY
VERY LONG UPON THIS EARTH
WHETHER HE'S THE FIEND'S WORK PURELY
OR A PERFECT SAINT IN WORTH.

STILL A LAND ALL DEATH DENYING
ON THIS CONTINENT I KNOW:
IT'S A PLACE OF NO ONE DYING
THOUGH THE LORD LAYS ALL MEN LOW.

THER'S A LAND OF NO ONE DYING,
A LAND THAT DEATH FORGOT,
THOUGH SO MANY THERE ARE LYING
IN A SPACE WHERE BREATH IS NOT.

WELL, IT'S PRETTY MYSTIFYING
HOW THE DEAD ARE MADE TO LIE
IN A GRAVE WITHOUT FIRST DYING
UNDER SIGHT OF HIM ON HIGH.

CAN IT BE THEY'RE JUSTIFYING
WHAT THE PREACHER-MAN HAS SAID:
THAT ALL HARDSHIP AND ALL CRYING
IS REVERSED WHEN YOU SEEM DEAD?

(Speaking this stanza.)

OR HAS SOME TRUTH COME O'ER THIS NATION
WHERE THE FOLKS CAN NEVER DIE,
HOLDS THEM TO THE SEPARATION
THAT MAKES THEIR LIVES A LIE?

STILL I FIND IT TERRIFYING
TO HAVE SEVERED EVERY BOND
IN A LAND WHERE NO ONE'S DYING
WHO IS TRYING TO RESPOND.

OTHER LANDS MAY BE PRETENDING
 THAT THE TEAR-STAINED STONE IS BAD,
 THAT A MAN'S APPROACHED HIS ENDING
 SHOULD BE SOLEMN, SHOULD BE SAD.

BUT I SENSE SOME MODIFYING
 TO OUR LIVES AND TO OUR NEEDS:
 FOR A LAND WHERE NO ONE'S DYING,
 SAMEWISE NO ONE'S SOWING SEEDS.

YES, IT'S TRULY TERRIFYING
 LOVING EYES THAT HIDE NO TEARS.
 HOLDING HANDS WITHOUT ALLYING —
 HANDS HAVE FEELING, HANDS HAVE FEARS.

GOD! OH GOD! IT'S TERRIFYING
 HAVING HITCHED FROM COAST TO COAST
 IN A LAND OF NO ONE DYING,
 NOT A LIVING SOUL TO BOAST.

(The STRIPPER confronts the crowd as the ballad ends, wildly tearing off her street clothes to savage stripping drums and throwing the various articles directly into the faces of STELLA, DELLA, and RAY. Darkness clouds over RITA and she seems to etherealize in her position high on the girder. An article of the STRIPPER's clothing hits ACE in the head and he wakes up.)

STELLA: That Vegas woman — oh, she's jist too obscene for American words! I can't look her in the eye.

RAY: She's the queen of the obscene. Really revoltin'. We must protect our children from such a fright, a, sight!

ROMEO: Strippas do make a guy uneasy: it's you'n breasts all alone together. The three a ya.

BUTCH: So vulga. Oh, my, soooooo vulga.

MAY: What a debased unabashed ol' bag. Why, she's all beat up. Completely over the hill. Couldn't hook near a mile from Main in that condition.

DELLA: Common, pronographic, appealin' to libidinous interests, the vested interests, illicit, prurient, salacious, delicious, spaghetti sauce, what cheek, what sauce —

STELLA: Not up to community standards.

RAY: Tart, smart tart, hussey, ruth, rue the day we ev —

(The crowd, unable to withstand the STRIPPER's attack, is forced to turn their faces from her: in doing so they are all confronted with the bodies of MAUDE and LYNN. The dummies rise en masse, bloated with air, to stare down at the corpses. The music ends abruptly. BUTCH, hands clasped, is smiling wryly. TOBY sits on his chair.)

STELLA: Will ya look at that: laid out. The two of 'em!

RAY: What a sight — makes yer stomach do slow turns . . .

BUTCH: Y'all makin' a reference to me, Madame Mixer?

RAY: Don't get smart, Nazi.

DELLA: Never a dull moment in our town, eh?

MAY: My school mates — dead! DEAD! Gee . . .

BUTCH: Wonder if they notices anythin' unusual . . .

ROMEO: See there, now you see — both sistas murdered!

RAY: But you said Toby was out to do in mah May.

ROMEO: Well, it's jist another crevice, jist another burrow.

DELLA: Matter a fact, two crevices, two burrows.

ROMEO: No matter, mah point is made. There they be plain as the pose on yer face. Both of 'em, homicides.

RAY: They're dead fer certain — deader'n a skunk run down on route 30. 'N stink as much. But that they is homicides is jumpin' to conclusions.

ROMEO: Sure they's homicides — girls don't git to look like that from adolescent heart-attacks. They was real done in 'n Toby's what done the doin' in.

TOBY: (*Pulling the clipboard clamp off his anger vein.*) Thanks, Romeo.

STELLA: Now listen here, Butch, don't —

ROMEO: But *I* ain't Butch —

STELLA: Don't start in if ya jist tryin' to even up a score with Toby count of a gal or other he beat ya out of.

DELLA: (*Pensive.*) Murder's a pretty serious accusal.

BUTCH: They's laid out sorta pretty. Like in a funeral home.

MAY: Gosh, don't they look *ugly*.

BUTCH: Well . . . on such short notice . . .

MAY: Dirty 'n mangled 'n all. The frump looks worst.

ROMEO: What? — Are yis all crazy? I don't think I'm hearin' right!

STELLA: Now don't hear us wrong: — a course, Toby mighta killed 'em. But so might any a us here. Or somebody not here. After all, there's a lotta strange dicks in town.

ACE: What crust!

RAY: Maybe you done it, Romeo. Ya know a awful lot about it.

STELLA: Yeah . . . maybe you done it, Romeo, 'n yer jist tryin' to throw us off the track.

MAY: (*Aggressive, rushing down to tell the audience.*) Sure: after all, Toby's a righteous fella, his fingers feel out situations with infallable sensitivity. And nativity. Yes, that's the word, that's finally the right word. He may practice a kinda Byronic barbarism,

TOBY: — jist ouside a town, where haybelly cows graze God's grass while a whole lost language rots around yer tongue like so much mulch 'n peat.

MAY: — but that alone's no reason to be prejudiced for him. People who are jist a little more glamorous than the vast majority of folks are always made the scapegoat.

TOBY: Could ya come a little closer when ya express such so solid principals, May?

ACE: You folks oughta proceed with the order a the day. Ray?

RAY: Ace's right. Why don't we *ask* Toby if he done it?

ROMEO: Yeah, why don't ya? I will. — Toby, you killed these young girls, didn't you?

TOBY: Hi ya, Rom, how ya doin? Have a restful sleep? Or was it fraught with fearful trailers of a nightmare yet to come? Sorry, Romeo, but I ain't sayin' nothin' till I see my lawyer.

STELLA: Good! that's a good boy. Toby knows his rights.

MAY: You could be arrested fer slander, Romeo, ya know that? Willful slander of a poet 'n prophet. A man who draws more'n draws offa girls. You could go to jail fer that. I hope you do.

ROMEO: I don't care, May, I don't care what you say jist as long as yer safe.

MAY: Bull — pure Taurus bull. What a snow job.

ROMEO: Ain't no snow job! I'll fight this thing. I'll fight it all the way up to the Supreme Court of America!

MAY: Stop pawing me! First you scratch yer sores and then you put yer hands all over —

DELLA: (*Taking the initiative.*) Why *are* you so keen on seein' to Toby's bein' tossed in the clink?

ROMEO: Cause in the clink he can't git at May. He's countin' on murderin' May next, jist give him half the chance. I saved her once already when y'all hadda go 'n tie me up!

STELLA: That's as fulla holes as everythin' else you've annotated.

MAY: Holes ya dug with yer nails ya scratch yerself so muc —

ACE: True, but apparently there *has* been a crime around her, and until you're certain there wasn't, it's your duty to make arrests.

STELLA: Very true. But then, who should we arrest?

DELLA: (*Taking over.*) Considerin' the ambiguous climate a the case, we should arrest *two* suspects — Romeo *and* Toby — 'n proceed to thoroughly investigate both a them. 'N we could search 'em too.

RAY: We'd have every right to.

DELLA: (*Untying ACE.*) Mind doin' yer prospective ma-in-law a favor, Ace? I'm a settin' ya free so's ya kin make the arrests. Kin I trust ya?

ACE: Sooner or later ya gotta trust someone.

DELLA: I entrust my daughter to ya.

STRIPPER: And I my son.

ACE: (*Rubbing his stiff wrists.*) Thanks, madame.

BUTCH: (*Situated near the STRIPPER.*) Hey, madame, wanna keep time with somethin' sizeable? Ah'm real *good*.

STRIPPER: How much ya good fer?

BUTCH: Fer nothin'! Ya oughta pay me yer so damn old.

STRIPPER: I don't take care a no one fer nothin'.

TOBY: She don't take care a no one.

ACE: (*Jealous.*) Hey, what about Bad Butch? Maybe he had somethin' to do with this — ummm — affair.

STELLA: Nah, Bad Butch couldn't a had nothin' to do with it. He ain't the type. Them what got the reputation fer bein' bad like Bad Butch, never does nothin' bad actually.

MAY: (*To the audience, unable to bear the attention now focusing on TOBY.*) I'm glad they're arrestin' him. It'll gimme a chance to see exactly jist how short the poet is.

ACE: (*Helping TOBY up out of his sitting position.*) Now come along calm 'n ain't nobody gonna git hurt.

TOBY: May you always believe that.

MAY: Ha! Why, he's no higher'n my bubbies!

TOBY: Grounded at last. On an equal level with everybody else. What more could a fella ask for?

ACE: (*Taking ROMEO.*) Let's hustle, you two.

ROMEO: What a fix, what a goddamn fix to be in! . . .

TOBY: Now you 'n me's on equal footin'. Feels great, don't it?

ROMEO: Don't see why. Feels 'bout the same as every other day.

TOBY: Alas! It *is* about the same as every other day.

ACE: 'N after all you done!

TOBY: Yeah. But I kin change that, Ace.

ACE: Yeah?

TOBY: Did ya know the other day old Rom got into some upstage business could set ya right straight who the criminal is?

ROMEO: It's a frame! A shame 'n a frame! — What kinda business?

TOBY: Ya wanna all look behind ma chair to uncover the answer to that query. Ya see that mounda dirt behind ma chair? Ya wanna dig in 'n uncover that dirt!

ROMEO: Oh, boy, I plumb fergot all about that . . .

(*The crowd, except for TOBY and ROMEO, rushes up to the mound behind TOBY's chair. TOBY crosses to BUTCH who is now trying to carry the STRIPPER off into the wings.*)

TOBY: Break fer it now, Romeo, while they's up there practicin' a bit a amateur archeology! — 'N as fer you, Butch, lay off my ma!

BUTCH: Ah was jist gonna lay yer m —

STRIPPER: Oh! . . .

TOBY: (*Pulling two knives out from the gun holsters on BUTCH's hips, and holding their edges outward in his trembling fists.*) Yer too slow, Nazi, to lay anythin' got ma tag on it! Now: — step lively!!

ROMEO: I better step lively 'n beat it while they's all on that desert expedition. (*He turns about frantically and rushes up the vortex girder and on to the diagonal girder.*)

BUTCH: Now, Tob, ya make everythin' too serious —

DELLA: Why, look at that: it's a *corpis delectis*!

STRIPPER: Son, please —

STELLA: No it ain't. It's a gal's corpse. A young gal.

RAY: Ever see a town so big on gals' corpses?

MAY: Look! Look, everybody! Romeo the pocked-marked murderer is ex-caping over the viaduct!

ALL: Git him! Git him! Don't let him excape! Lynch him! Swing him high!

etc., etc., etc.

(The crowd, with murder on its mind, tears across the stage. Some pick up the discarded ropes, others the tangled telephone wires, and they scamper up the girders after the distraught ROMEO. The second he is captured, the noose is put around his neck. MAY rushes down centerstage, cheering the mob on and urging them to hang ROMEO from the girder. TOBY, having thoroughly cowed BUTCH and the STRIPPER, turns the knives toward MAY. Having secured the noose, the mob kicks ROMEO to his death. There is more than madness in MAY's eyes. She draws TOBY to her.)

MAY: Swing the Grunewald from the viaduct! Let him blow in the breeze!
This shall make a epic! A epic for all time! It inspires me to the very heights!! Heaven its —

TOBY: Let my work be forever finished!

(TOBY faces MAY directly and thrusts both knives into her diaphragm. Her shriek carries over the cries of the crowd. They all stop short and turn to look down at her. She staggers for a moment with her blood-drenched hands over her wounds and then falls dead. The mob is stunned for several long moments. Then it gathers silently together and moves en masse down onto the stage. RITA, draped in the long blue cloak, appears on the platform above the vortex girder and begins silently to descend. TOBY walks at the head of the crowd and leads it to the semi-circle of chairs. As TOBY sits in his chair, RITA raises her arms like wings above him and places a steel head-cap, encrusted with jewels like a crown, over his black hair. Except for the STRIPPER, all the others file along quietly and take seats within the semi-circle. They sit without motion for some time; the swaying body grows motionless. All stare directly ahead into the audience. Finally, TOBY speaks, stretching out his arms to either flank of chairs; as he does so, the townspeople turn and fix their gaze on him. RITA is behind his chair, raised a step or two on the girder, with her face and hands lifted upward.)

TOBY and RITA: *(Together, slowly.)* Let us close this circle of chairs. Rest your eyes on me.

(The lights grow imperceptibly dimmer except for a reddish glow about TOBY which suggests his electric execution. The STRIPPER wanders in a soft spot downstage, tottering wearily and bewildered. She sings a Country ballad and makes a half-hearted attempt at a simple dance. Her spotlight gradually dims.)

STRIPPER:

WELL MAH DADDY KEPT HIS CHAIR. CHAIR, WARM FOR ME.
WELL MAH LONESOME DADDY WAITED AND HE HAD TO BE
MAH DADDY CAUSE HE KEPT HIS CHAIR WARM FOR ME.
SO WARM THRU THE CHILLY THAW. THE MAYTIME PLEA.

AND I'D LOVE TO BE COZY ON THAT CHAIR WITH HIM
STEAD A SITTIN' ALL ALONE ON THE EDGE OF THE RIM

WHERE A LONELINESS PREVAILS NOT ASSAILED BY A HYMN:
WELL AT LEAST HE KEPT THAT CHAIR, WARM, WARM,
I'M GONNA SING AND DANCE ME UP A STORM!
I'M GONNA SING AND DANCE ME UP A STORM!

WELL MAH DADDY KEPT HIS CHAIR, CHAIR, WARM FOR ME,
WELL MAH LONESOME DADDY WAITED AND HE HAD TO BE
MAH DADDY CAUSE HE KEPT HIS CHAIR WARM FOR ME,
SO WARM THRU THE CHILLY THAW, THE MAYTIME PLEA.

O HOW LONG I MUST WONDER WILL THIS EARTH STILL SPIN
WHERE MY BODY SEEMS TO FEEL THAT IT NEVER HAS BEEN
AND MY HEART'S NO ANSWER, DAD, FOR A KIND HEART AKIN:
WELL AT LEAST HE KEPT THAT CHAIR, WARM, WARM,
I'M GONNA SING AND DANCE ME UP A STORM!
I'M GONNA SING AND DANCE ME UP A STORM!
