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Product Code A0510-F

A House Full of Dust



by

Bella Poynton

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A House Full of Dust

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CHARACTERS

RAMSEY CLEVES: *About 50; a Blacksmith*

GRETТА CLEVES: *45 years old; a gentle and loving wife*

RACHEL CLEVES: *20 years old; their daughter, a tomboy*

RJ CLEVES: *25 years old; a seminarian*

JACK MULLEN: *20 years old; Ramsey's blacksmithing apprentice*

CHRISTINE *24 years old; a ghost (This fact should not appear in the program)*

DAVID *mid 20's; a ghost (This fact should not appear in the program)*

TIME AND PLACE

KANSAS, 1905

This setting is never specifically discussed in the play, but serves to ground the story in a realistic time and place—even though the story is far from realistic.

NOTES

All scenes take place in the Cleves Kitchen/living room, Ramsey and Gretta's bedroom, or outside the house (for the Jack and Rachel scenes). The stage and walls should be black. On one side of the stage is the bed for the bedroom. On the other side is a table and four upright chairs. The bed, table and chairs are should all be dark colors: black or grey. On the table stands a small red bottle which provides the only splash of color on the set.

Both Christine and David should be dressed only in dark clothing. The process of the audience discovering that Christine is a ghost is a gradual one. In program notes she and David should be simply referred to by their ages. Although they do not speak in every scene, Christine and David should always be on stage, in the space; seldom taking away from the interaction between other characters, but always watching in the background, as if they were part of the house.

This play is written in Eye Dialect. The misspellings are intentional to further capture the world of the play.

EARLY PRODUCTION HISTORY

Before publishing, *A House Full of Dust* was produced at the Boston University TheaterLab through the Boston University School of Theater in December, 2007 then later at the Wings Theater Company in New York City in August, 2010.

A House Full of Dust
by Bella Poynton

ACT 1: SCENE 1

(A SPOTLIGHT on CHRISTINE who speaks to the Audience.)

CHRISTINE

I don't know much, but I do know that some things are real, and some things aint. I know that there's no such thing as forever. Cuz if forever was so, how could I be talking to ya right now? There'd a been a forever before me, and I'd a never gotten here, and neither would you. I don't know much, but I do know that I am real. That I'm as lonely as the moon, and as sad as the creaking wood under living feet. I don't know what I'm made of, or what I'm supposed to do here; I don't know why I can do things others can't, and I don't remember how I found I could do them to begin with... but I know I'm real, and I know I've been here a mighty long time. And above all other things, I know this house is mine...

(AT RISE: The bedroom of an old rustic-looking house. GRETТА and RAMSEY are in bed. Although in her forties, GRETТА is small-framed and appears younger. RAMSEY, in his fifties, is a large, strong man. GRETТА is awake.)

GRETТА

RAMSEY, you awake? I got somethin tuh ask you...

RAMSEY

What about?

GRETТА

I've been wonderin...

RAMSEY

Wonderin? Good God woman, it's too early for wonderin!

GRETТА

I wanna go down into town today and pick something up. Would you let me do that? Nuthin fancy.

RAMSEY

What reason you got for going down there?

GRETТА

Well see, I need to buy something—

RAMSEY

Buy something? That aint no reason. We got a system, remember? You write down everything you need on a little sheet of paper, you give it to Rachel; she goes out and gets it for ya. What's the problem?

GRETТА

No problem, Ramsey.

RAMSEY

She not been doing her job?

GRETТА

No, she's been doing her job just fine—

RAMSEY

If there's a problem, I'll be talkin to her. Sure as hell.

GRETТА

No, Ramsey, you don't gotta go talkin tuh her! I just wanna go and pick something up... special.

RAMSEY

Special, huh? Special... You meetin someone down there?

GRETТА

Lord, no!

RAMSEY

Someone I know maybe? You got plans with a friend?

GRETТА

Course not! I aint planning nothing. I aint stupid.

RAMSEY

What the hell is all this 'bout then?

GRETТА

It's just that RJ's birthday is coming up. You remember, dontcha?

RAMSEY

Oh, sweet Jesus...

(RAMSEY moves away from GRETТА.)

GRETTA

Now I know I could write somethin down for Rachel to pick up for him, but I'd enjoy it, I really would—going down into town, and looking for something, and picking it out myself and all. So I'm asking you real nicely if you'd please let me go?

RAMSEY

How could I forget... your son's comin to visit...

GRETTA

He's your boy too, you know.

RAMSEY

Dontchu start with me, Gretta Cleves—I won't have no priest for a son, how many times I gotta say it? He aint a man in my book, and that's final.

GRETTA

Just because he's a priest, he aint a man?

RAMSEY

Well, he can't marry, can he?

GRETTA

Of course not, but that don't mean—

RAMSEY

—It's reason enough! Way I was raised, you get married, you make babies, and that's the way a the world! That's all I wanted. One boy, but you gave me a priest, and a crazy ass gangly girl.

GRETTA

You don't gotta go with me. It probably won't take anymore'n an hour or so and I promise I'll come right back—

RAMSEY

—That's enough a this talk now! *(Pause)* No, ya can't go. I dun wantchu out wanderin the streets alone. I'll worry too much. You can hardly be left here while I'm off at work.

GRETTA

What if I went with Rachel?

RAMSEY

Don't push me, Gretta. You know I aint one to be pushed. *(Starts to exit then turns back)* Now hurry up and get downstairs. I'm hungry. *(Again starts to leave, then moved by his harshness, stops)* Where's yer medicine?

GRETTA

I took it last night, I swear.

RAMSEY

You better have. Show me. I wanna see the bottle.

GRETTA

(Hands him the bottle) See? There. What... you think I'm lyin'?

RAMSEY

...Maybe you could make him a peach cobbler? RJ I mean—you know, for his birthday? Aint they his favorite?

(RAMSEY exits.)

GRETTA

RJ's favorite is blueberry. He hates peaches.

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

ACT 1: SCENE 2

(AT RISE: RACHEL and JACK outside the house. RACHEL, about 19, is Gretta and Ramsey's daughter. JACK, also about 19, works for RAMSEY and is smitten with RACHEL who rebukes his attention.)

RACHEL

Would you stop touchin me, damnit. I don't like bein touched.

JACK

If ya dun like me, why'd ya let me come around here so much?

RACHEL

I don't letcha. You just come. I tell you to leave, butcha never listen.

JACK

You aint told me to leave today.

RACHEL

Leave!

JACK

Aww, c'mon. You don't really want me to leave.

RACHEL

Jacky, I warned ya 'bout me from the beginnin. I'm a mean nasty thing, and you know it!

JACK

I like em mean!

(JACK grabs RACHEL around her waist.)

RACHEL

Get yer paws offa me!

JACK

So when we getting married, Rach?

RACHEL

When pigs fly.

JACK

Aw, c'mon Rach, it's gotta be sooner'n that! I'm gonna talk tuh yer daddy 'bout it real soon, and we'll see what he has tuh say.

RACHEL

You know, my poppa's crazy hiring you as his journeyman. Yer as dumb as a nail.

JACK

Sure, sure. People been telling me I'm dumb all my life. But you know what? I'm good at smithin. Aint no one ever argued with that. Plus, I like it, workin at yer poppa's shop. Pays real good, and he likes me. Says I'm a real man!

RACHEL

Shows how much he knows.

JACK

Hey now, dontchu sell yer poppa short. He's an upright man! And I am too... But you won't let me show ya— *(Goes at her again)*

(RACHEL cocks her gun and points it at JACK'S crotch.)

RACHEL

I'm warning you, Jack Mullen! You keep it over there, or I'll—I'll blow it off!

(Instead of shooting, RACHEL lets the gun fall to the ground and punches JACK in the stomach instead.)

JACK

Ugh! *(Holds his stomach; recovering)* You know, someday—someday real soon, I won't let you win!

RACHEL

Oh, so you *let* me win, is that it?

JACK

Course I do! It's only right.

RACHEL

Uh-huh. Sure ya do. The only problem there is that men who let their women win don't double over in pain after bein punched in the gut.

JACK

I'm actin'!

RACHEL

My foot.

JACK

Damnit, Rach, dontchu got a gentle bone in yer body? I'm bein real nice and sweet, here. Least you could do is stop acting all weird like you've been doin lately. We didn't used tuh fight like this—

RACHEL

You never used to try at putting yer hands in my clothes.

JACK

Yeah. That's true. But fer some reason, I've wanted to fer a while now. Never had the courage til lately.

RACHEL

A damn shame ya got the courage to begin with! And dontchu go talking to my daddy 'bout any a this!

JACK

But that's what I'm s'posed tuh do! And, hell, I'm gonna do it the right way! You can't go against yer old man's word. If he says I can marry ya then I'm gonna marry the shit outta you—

RACHEL

Don't you tell me what I'm gonna do, Jack Mullen, I'll do what a-wanna!

JACK

But it'd be fun tuh marry me, honest! We'll buy a place, set up a nice smithin shop, go over to the flea market on Saturdays...

RACHEL

(Pretends to enjoy this) Oh really? It's just the way I always wanted life tuh be! The flea market on Saturdays! And then I can come home and scrub the kitchen floor! *(Hits the back of his head)* Don't get to comfy with the idea, Mullen. I got other plans. Friends in high places.

JACK

Oh yeah, who?

RACHEL

My big brother's a priest, 'member? That's a pretty high place, aint it? I mean, 'cording tuh him and all. God and all that stuff.

(Suddenly the door slowly opens. DAVID is standing on the other side but RACHEL and JACK cannot see him. JACK looks at the door.)

JACK

Rach... that door just opened on its own. You see it?

RACHEL

Yeah, it does that. Don't pay no attention. *(JACK continues to stare at the door)* Jack? Jacky? Hey, you? Hello? You listenin?

(JACK crosses towards the door. DAVID moves away. JACK stands looking out the door.)

RACHEL, *Continued*

What are you starin at? I told you it was nuthin!

JACK

It's almost like someone was there...almost...

RACHEL

No one was there.

JACK

I know! I know no one was there, but it sure felt like it!

RACHEL

Don't think too much, Jacky. You'll hurt yerself.

JACK

Yer brother's comin to visit soon, aint he?

RACHEL

How'd you know that?

JACK

Cuz weird shit happens when yer brother visits.

RACHEL

What kinda weird shit? He aint visited in years.

JACK

I remember last time he came, I saw something crazy in your upstairs hallway.

RACHEL

That hallway's always been funny.

JACK

How come yer mamma aint allowed outta the house?

RACHEL

Why you askin'?

JACK

Well I've noticed she don't ever leave. I never see her, really, unless we go inside...but see lately I've seen her at the windows. On the porch sweepin, or watchin the path from town see'n if anyone's walking on it. She don't usually do that unless RJ's coming.

RACHEL

She gets a little crazy when he visits.

JACK

How come she don't ever leave tuh begin with?

RACHEL

I can't tell you! I aint supposed to tell nobody!

JACK

(Sweetly) Awww, you can tell me!

RACHEL

I'd tell anyone before you, Mullen. You'd go right back and tell all your friends in town.

JACK

I aint got no friends in town, Rachel. They all think I'm crazy liking you. You with yer books and yer short hair.

RACHEL

Well then maybe you should stop hangin around here and go and make some!

JACK

Don't want no friends, Rach! I like just bein here and talkin with you.

RACHEL

Well ya can't stay now cause my daddy's comin up the drive, and if he sees yer here with me instead a workin in the shop they'll be hell to pay! Go on, go! Get out! Get the hell outta here now!

(RACHEL forces JACK out while RAMSEY starts up towards the house. It is too late to avoid crossing paths with RAMSEY.)

JACK

(As he passes RAMSEY) Uhhh... I was... I was uh... I was just... I'm goin back tuh work now, Mr. Cleves...

(JACK exits. RAMSEY watches him for a moment and then turns to RACHEL who is now reading a book.)

RAMSEY

What ya reading 'bout today, girl?

RACHEL

War.

RAMSEY

War, well, there's a mighty fine subject for a young lady.

RACHEL

I aint no lady, daddy, you said it yourself lots a times. 'Rachel!' you say, 'You aint no young lady with them crazy books and that short hair!'

RAMSEY

Don't know who'd argue with that.

RACHEL

Momma says it's good I read so much. So there.

RAMSEY

Yeah, well, you're momma's one tuh talk. Crazy herself most-a-the time. She's been seein crazy things, again. Catch her in the kitchen talking tuh no one. Doctors all say so.

RACHEL

There's only one doctor, Poppa.

RAMSEY

Don't be smart.

RACHEL

I aint bein smart. I'm just sayin. There's only one doctor and Lord knows he don't know his ass from a hole in the ground.

RAMSEY

(Grabs RACHEL by the shirt collar) You watch your mouth, Rachel Cleves! Dontchu go talkin that way in fronta me! You forget I'm your old man? That I feed you, and put them boys' clothes on your back? You better learn some God damn respect or I'll be sure tuh teach ya some—Ya unnatural, ungrateful little...

RACHEL

Little what?

RAMSEY

...Girl.

RACHEL

Damnit! Why'd ya gotta go and call me that, huh? I aint a girl no more! Look! I'm a boy now. Cantcha see me?

RAMSEY

Stop it, Rachel! I see you, but dontchu go askin me ta think crazy shit like that.

RACHEL

It aint crazy shit. It's who I am.

RAMSEY

I'm telling you it aint. Listen to yer old man fer once.

RACHEL

Why should I!?

RAMSEY

(Shaking his head) How'd I know you'd say that?

RACHEL

Fine then! You don't like it? Then listen here; I'll grow my hair long again if you do me a favor.

RAMSEY

A favor? You haven't spoken tuh me in a month, and now yer askin fer favors?

RACHEL

Get Jack Mullen tuh leave me alone.

RAMSEY

Jack Mullen, from the shop?

RACHEL

No, Jack Mullen from China. Course Jack Mullen from the shop! You get him tuh leave me alone, and I'll start wearin skirts and knittin socks!

RAMSEY

So Mullen likes ya, huh? Strange boy.

RACHEL

Yeah. Strange boy. Tell him tuh stay away.

RAMSEY

Why? What for? Maybe he'll knock some sense into you.

RACHEL

He'd knock more than that if you let him! He aint got no right harassin me like he does. Sneakin intuh the shed at all hours of the night. This is my shed, damnit!

RAMSEY

How old are you now anyway, girl?

RACHEL

19.

RAMSEY

19!—It's high time fer you. Yer mother already had a baby at 19, been married two years. And you... someone like you gotta take what she can get. Mullen's a good boy. I hope he does knock you silly bout dressing in boys clothes, and keeping yer hair all crazy short like that. Hopefully some other things too...

RACHEL

But that aint fair poppa, I don't like him! It aint the same if I don't like him! Momma loved you before you were married.

RAMSEY

Yea, she did, didn't she? Like mad she did. *(Pause)* But look now, huh? She aint doin all that well now, seein crazy shit like she is. So maybe it aint the best idea. And anyway, I don't mind Mullen coming down her tuh talk to ya! You should be talking to boys yer own age! I aint stupid, I knew where he wanders off to when I'm on my breaks. Tough luck, girl. I aint saying nothing. Not a damn word.

(RAMSEY exits into the house. RACHEL remains alone. Enter GRETTA who stands inside the house shouting out to RACHEL from the front door.)

GRETTA

Girl! You're covered in dirt! Come on in here right now and clean yourself up. (*RACHEL stares at her mother for a moment.*) What? Are you just gonna stand there starin at me, or are you gonna do as I say?

RACHEL

C'mon Momma. Don't pretend like you came out here tuh see where I was. You came out here to see if RJ was comin up the road.

(*RACHEL turns and walks away.*)

GRETTA

Rachel! Dontchu walk away from me when I'm speakin to you!

RACHEL

All right, all right, momma. I'll be there in a few minutes. Just a few minutes more...

(*GRETTA turns and walks back into the kitchen. CHRISTINE is sitting at one of the kitchen chairs.*)

GRETTA

He shoulda been here at 4:00. Dear God I hope he's all right. He's gonna give me a heart attack bein late like this. I start thinking the train crashed, or he got into some trouble walking here from the station. I start thinkin about that poor young body layin somewhere in a tunnel or in some ditch somewhere and I get all... light headed and dizzy. I start feelin like I'm just gonna faint. Where *is* my Rosary? Maybe someone should go down and pick him up from the station? But RAMSEY aint back yet and I can't leave. What time is it now?

CHRISTINE

Almost 6:00. (*Seeing the pie*) Ooooooh! Is that a blueberry pie? (*Goes to stick her finger in the pie*)

GRETTA

Don't you touch it! It's for RJ. You can have a piece but only after he has the first one.

CHRISTINE

Calm yourself down. I was just looking. You know I can't eat pie anyway.

GRETTA

(*Turns towards the door to see if RACHEL is coming in*) I shouldn't be talkin to you out in the open like this. Anyone could come by.

CHRISTINE

If that happens then you just stop talkin. I'll understand.

GRETTA

They've caught me before. They all think things...

CHRISTINE

Things! Things! They all think things! (*Facetiously*) Good Lord, Gretta, what'll we do?

GRETTA

Quiet down! Don't be causin any little disturbances, huh? I like my life just fine, thank you. I dun wanna be sent away to no crazy house.

CHRISTINE

There you go again, sayin how they're gonna lock you away if you talk about me.

GRETTA

Let's not fight now. It's 'sposed to be a happy day. RJ's comin home, and you aint gonna ruin it, ya hear?

CHRISTINE

RJ don't like me.

GRETTA

RJ don't know 'bout you.

CHRISTINE

Like hell he don't! He's been givin me the boot since he was 12 years old and I swear, this time I'm gonna make him—

GRETTA

My goodness, would you leave that boy alone? He aint even here yet and yer harassin him already. Why don't you put yerself tuh some good use, huh? Sweep up?

CHRISTINE

Ya already swept three times.

GRETTA

It's still dusty.

CHRISTINE

Gretta, you aint never gonna get away from the dust and the heat. Anyway, RJ don't care about the house bein clean.

GRETTA

Well, he might not care, but I sure feel all the better for it. I want it to look nice. I'm trying to promote peaceful family conversation...

CHRISTINE

Ooooh sure! (*Sarcastically*) Ramsey and RJ have always gotten along swimmingly!

GRETTA

I know they've have had their moments, but don't all fathers and sons? Look now, Rachel picked up his favorite dinner, I made the pie, and we got a real sharp lookin suede jacket to give him tomorrow on his birthday.

CHRISTINE

What's a priest gonna do with a suede jacket?

GRETTA

Well he aint at mass all the time.

(*Enter RACHEL who sees her mother talking to what appears to be no one.*)

GRETTA, *Continued*

And anyway, how'd you know what RJ cares for and doesn't?

RACHEL

Momma—who's that yer talkin to?

CHRISTINE

Cuz you talk about him so damn much...

GRETTA

(*Turning slowly away from CHRISTINE to RACHEL*) Nobody baby, just myself.

RACHEL

But I heard ya Momma... and you was definitely talking *to* someone—

GRETTA

Was I? Well... can't a lonely lady talk to herself from time tuh time? I been cooped up in this kitchen all day, whatcha expect?

RACHEL

But Papa says—

GRETTA

You're father aint got no right talking 'bout those kindsa things with you, you hear? It aint none a yer business. (*Pause*) Now, why don't you go upstairs and put on a nice dress fer dinner?

RACHEL

A dress? What world you been livin in fer the past six months, huh? I aint got any dresses no more.

GRETTA

Well you gotta have something nice looking, dontcha?

RACHEL

Tell me this, momma, how come it is you get all bent outta shape 'bout RJ comin home like he was some kinda royalty? (*Sees the pie*) Ooh, can I have a piece a that pie?

GRETTA

Not til your brother gets here and has the first one!

RACHEL

Why'd you treat him better than the rest of us, huh?

GRETTA

I don't know what yer talkin 'bout, girl. I'm just excited because we don't get to see RJ very often now do we? I wantcha on yer best behavior.

RACHEL

Why? He aint bringing the Pope! ...Is he?

GRETTA

Not that I'm aware of. Please Rachel, for me?

RACHEL

Yeah, yeah, I will. Call me in when he gets here. I don't wanna miss any of the royal treatment!

(At this point, CHRISTINE comes up and blows in RACHEL'S face.)

RACHEL, *Continued*

—Holy hell! You feel that? Temperature just dropped about 20 degrees in this room!

GRETTA

I didn't feel nuthin, but I'll heat the stove up if ya like?

(CHRISTINE blows in RACHEL'S face again.)

RACHEL

That! That there! Don't tell me you didn't feel that, momma?

(CHRISTINE laughs to herself.)

GRETTA

I'm sorry, but I didn't.

RACHEL

You know what it is? It's them damn ghosts again!

GRETTA

(Slams the kitchen utensil in her hand onto the table and looks up) Rachel Cleves. There aint no ghosts in this house. We've been through this!

RACHEL

Well I aint imaginin things! It's freezing in here!

GRETTA

Well go on then and get yourself a sweater then. And you stop talkin crazy, you hear me? Go on—get outta here. Skat! Shoo! *(RACHEL exits.)* Yer goin crazy from all that book reading!

(Once RACHEL is gone and GRETTA is sure the coast is clear, she turns to CHRISTINE.)

GRETT, *Continued*

You gotta stop doin that.

CHRISTINE

Doin what?

GRETTA

You know exactly what. My kitchen's freezing.

CHRISTINE

I didn't notice really... but you know, I'm always cold.

GRETTA

Christine!

CHRISTINE

I was just havin fun!

GRETTA

Well no more. It makes me nervous.

CHRISTINE

Seems yer not the only one. *(Looking after RACHEL)* She still at them war books?

GRETTA

Like a worm. Cut her hair real short like that a couple months back. Wanders around all by herself with that damn rifle. I don't like it.

CHRISTINE

She's lonely.

GRETTA

But that Jack's a nice boy. He don't seem bothered by her... her... what's the word?

CHRISTINE

Eccentricities?

GRETTA

Right. Ramsey and I aint gonna be around forever and she can't just be gallivanting around with books and boys clothes for the rest of her life, so...

ACT 1: SCENE 3

(CONTINUOUS ACTION: There is a knock at the door. GRETTA and CHRISTINE look at each other. There is a short pause and then another knock.)

GRETTA, *Continued*

Oh Holy Virgin. He's here, Christine! What do I do?

CHRISTINE

You open the door, and you say hello to him is what you do!

(There is a third knock at the door. GRETTA can't seem to answer it.)

CHRISTINE, *Continued*

What are you doing? Gretta! Don't just stand there! Answer the door! *(Calls out to DAVID who has been watching from somewhere nearby)* You stay where you are, hear me? Don't go making a mess just yet. *(To GRETTA)* Gretta, answer the damn door!

(GRETTA finally opens the door. RJ and GRETTA stand for a moment staring at one another and then embrace.)

R.J.

Momma?

GRETTA

Baby!

CHRISTINE

RJ...

R.J.

Did ya miss me, Momma? Did ya? Cuz I sure missed you.

(RJ turns his head towards CHRISTINE just for a moment when she says his name. He then turns back to his mother. They talk with each other silently as she carries in his bags. CHRISTINE walks around them but now, is only heard by DAVID when she speaks.)

CHRISTINE

(To DAVID) He Looks good, don't he?

DAVID

He's grown.

CHRISTINE

That happens when yer alive.

DAVID

We'd be about the same age now, wouldn't we? *(Smiles)*

CHRISTINE

Almost to the day. Glad to see yer keepin track. Well, are you gonna say hello? Or not? Like all the other times?

DAVID

Don't ever know what tuh say...

CHRISTINE

Thought so...

(GRETТА begins setting the table. CHRISTINE turns and speaks directly to RJ.)

CHRISTINE, *Continued*

RJ? RJ it's me! RJ!!!

(RJ responds very quietly.)

R.J.

(Aside so not to be noticed by his mother) Not Now?

(Enter RACHEL and RAMSEY.)

GRETТА

(To RAMSEY) Well, say hello.

RAMSEY

Hello. Yer two hours late.

R.J.

I'm sorry. The train—

RAMSEY

I don't care 'bout no trains, boy. Wash yer hands and sit down. I'm hungry.

(RAMSEY sits at the table. GRETTA exits to get the food. RJ turns to RACHEL.)

R.J.

Rach! You... you—you cut off all your—

RACHEL

Hair?

R.J.

But why? It was so—

RACHEL

It was hair. Just hair.

(RJ moves to hug RACHEL but she spits copiously into her right hand and extends it to him to shake. He is perplexed.)

R.J.

God bless you?

(Enter GRETTA with food. RJ crosses to a chair at the table and sits down.)

GRETTA

Rachel, I asked you to change!

RACHEL

Sorry. I forgot.

(RACHEL crosses to the table and whispers in RJ's ear.)

RACHEL, *Continued*

Yer sittin in my seat.

(RJ moves over to the next chair. RACHEL sits and immediately puts her foot up on the table. GRETTA pushes it off and sets a large serving dish in its place.)

R.J.

(To RACHEL) What is all this?

RACHEL

Well, you *are* the favorite, RJ, so good cookin's implied with yer visit. Why else you think I'd be home fer dinner?

GRETTA

Rachel, yer home fer dinner every night and you know it.

RACHEL

Momma, why you gotta blow a man's cover like that?

GRETTA

What man?

RACHEL

(To RJ) What I mean is, momma only cooks like this when yer home.

R.J.

No, I didn't mean dinner—I meant you.

RACHEL

Don't go asking questions you don't wanna know the answers to. This is how I am now.

RAMSEY

Could we maybe eat before the damn sun rises?

GRETTA

That's enough now, Rachel. Special things for special occasions, huh? RJ, why don't you say grace?

R.J.

Course, I will. *(Makes the sign of the cross)* In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Bless us our Lord, *(RAMSEY is eating prematurely.)* For these our gifts, which we are about to receive. From thy bounty—*(RACHEL also starts eating.)*—Through Christ, our Lord, AMEN.

GRETTA

AMEN.

(There is an awkward silence as GRETTA and RJ begin to eat.)

GRETTA, *Continued*

Well...

R.J.

Well... Why don't ya'll tell me 'bout sumthin new 'round here?

GRETTA

Mm! Sure, RAMSEY, why don't you tell R.J. about the new municipal building?

RAMSEY

(Pauses and stares at her while chewing his food; speaking with mouth full) Brand new. Nice lookin.

GRETTA

But you were so excited about it earlier this year. Brought in all that work fer you.

RAMSEY

Uhm-hmm.

GRETTA

And what about the new welding machine the town got for you?

RAMSEY

Old one broke.

GRETTA

And?

RAMSEY

And what? This aint good dinner conversation, Gretta.

R.J.

But, I'd like to hear.

RAMSEY

You would? Well, aint that just swell. Convenient for you, huh? Unfortunately, I happen to be hungry, and tired. I worked all day... what did you do, huh? Sat on a train, sippin tea, I'm sure. So too bad 'bout you wantin tuh hear cuz I dun like bein forced to talk. Now eat yer food, boy, because God knows your mother only cooks this well when yer around. So eat it and enjoy it while you can before you're back in yer little monastery eatin cold watery soup.

R.J.

I don't live in a monastery, Poppa. It's a seminar—

RAMSEY

You think I give a damn about the specifics? You think the terms mean anything to me? How old are you now?

R.J.

26 today.

RAMSEY

You should be married by now, and your wife should be round with my grandchild, but you don't give a damn about this family line. Got somethin against the lot of us, dontcha?

R.J.

No. I don't. I think it's you who's got somethin 'gainst me, but that's all right...
(Smiling) ...that's all right...

RAMSEY

Yeah, maybe I do, and I'll tell ya what! Yer my son. I raised ya. You were 'sposed tuh mind what I said! But no, you were too damn selfish.

R.J.

Me? Selfish?

RAMSEY

Look at what's sittin next to you, huh? Look, damnit! And then tell me you aint selfish. Look!

(RJ looks at RACHEL.)

RACHEL

What? Why's everyone lookin at me? I didn't do nothing!

R.J.

What's any of this have to do with Rachel?

RAMSEY

She's all sick in the head now!

R.J.

She is not sick in the head!

RACHEL

I am not sick in the head!

R.J.

She's just... confused.

RACHEL

I'm not confused either! I aint never been confused in my life!

RAMSEY

Well either way, all I know is that you got one gangly sister—

RACHEL

I aint gangly!

RAMSEY

—and my name will die with her, and you go off and become a goddamn priest. Ungrateful boy.

RACHEL

I aint gangly.

RAMSEY

Enough, Rachel—

GRETТА

—Ramsey, you stop it! (*Pause*)

RAMSEY

See now, your making your mother all upset. And look at all she's done for you. (*PAUSE*) So just eat yer food and stop your complainin.

RACHEL

(*Whispering*) I aint gangly...

RAMSEY

(*Sensing again he has been too harsh*) And uh... happy birthday.

(*THERE IS ANOTHER LONG PAUSE.*)

R.J.

Momma—I—I gotta ask if um... if... you—and Rach—are comin up tuh see my ordination?

GRETТА

Sure we are!

RACHEL

Can't. I got plans.

(*GRETТА kicks RACHEL under the table.*)

RACHEL, *Continued*

Jeeesus Christ, that hurt!

(*RJ MAKES THE SIGN OF THE CROSS.*)

GRETTA

We'll be there for sure. Rachel's going down to buy the train tickets next weekend.

RACHEL

Either that or I lose my shins, 'parently.

R.J.

I don't suppose you'll be coming, poppa?

RAMSEY

You suppose right. I don't think any of em'll be coming, truly. I don't trust yer momma all alone out there travellin for two days.

R.J.

But this is my—This is my—I've been away fer nine years! Nine whole years a work! What do ya mean?

RAMSEY

Work? Work! Ha! You come down into the shop and I'll show you a hard day's work, boy!

R.J.

Either way! Nine years a training! Please, I want someone to be there for me.

RAMSEY

I'm done talking 'bout it now.

R.J.

But it'll be the most important day of my—

RAMSEY

I said I was done talking 'bout it now!

(EVERYONE is quiet after RAMSEY raises his voice. He stands and goes to his chair in the middle of the room. GRETTA starts clearing the dishes while RACHEL puts her foot on the table and starts picking her teeth with a tooth pick. RJ gets up and starts helping his mother clear the table.)

GRETTA

Oh, no, no, no boy, not you. You're gonna go and talk to your father right now and get this whole thing straightened out. God knows I can't do it for ya no more.

R.J.

But I'd rather—

GRETTA

I don't much care what you'd rather. Now I'm serious as a cat in a bathtub. Go on. *(To RACHEL)* And Rachel Cleves? You get off your behind and help me clean this dinner mess. And get your damn foot off the table!

(GRETTA pushes RACHEL'S foot off the table again. RACHEL reluctantly picks up plates and follows GRETTA off. RJ crosses to RAMSEY. They stare at one another in silence.)

R.J.

Poppa?

RAMSEY

...Father.

R.J.

Oh, please, Poppa, don't do that.

RAMSEY

Just callin you by your proper title.

R.J.

I aint a priest yet, not til next month.

RAMSEY

It's all the damn same. I'm too old to be thinking about yer feelings, boy. I'll die soon and you'll be off praisin the Lord instead of fillin up some girl with my grandsons. Now I know you don't care 'bout me so much, but My God, what it's done to your mother!

R.J.

But I spoke to momma about it before I left, and she said it was all alright. She said she was proud.

RAMSEY

Oh you think she'd ever tell you not to do somethin that made you happy? She'd cut off her left hand tell you it felt fine doin it if she knew you'd smile! Stupid boy you are! Yer momma's little love affair with religion rubbed off on you, but it's pretty damn ironic, aint it, cuz while your off at seminary school, she's quite the little vixen you know?

R.J.

All right now! I don't need to know those things...

RAMSEY

What? You think you were conceived by the Holy Ghost? Huh? *(Pause)* How long you staying?

R.J.

Two weeks. And I was wondering... if you needed any help down at the shop while I'm here?

RAMSEY

I been managing. Jack Mullen from uptown helps me out nowadays. Anyway, I think yer mother wants ya for the two weeks she's gotcha. She's all twinkles and giggles when you're around. *(There is an urgent knock at the door.)* Well, you gonna get it? Cuz I'm sure as hell too tired to.

(RJ pauses and while he does, JACK bursts into the house. He doesn't see or pay attention to RJ and runs straight to RAMSEY.)

JACK

Mr. Cleves? Mr. Cleves! I'm sorry but the door wasn't locked and I gotta talk to ya, I just gotta talk to—

RAMSEY

Speak of the devil, Mullen, what the hell is it? You just come barging into my house at all hours of the night?

JACK

I'm sorry, sir, but see—

RAMSEY

What is it you want? It's almost 8:00. Go to bed. You gotta be up before 6.

JACK

May I speak to Rachel?

RAMSEY

I said it's almost 8:00. You come back tomorrow after work.

JACK

All right... All right. I can do that... I can— *(Pauses)* No wait! Sir! Mr. Cleves, if I don't do it now I won't be able to do it, at all! I'm all worked up now! See, I aint come to see her. I came to see you. See, sir I'd like to talk to you—about Rachel.

RAMSEY

Oh sweet Jesus. I'll need a drink for this. Give me a minute, Mullen.

(Exit RAMSEY; JACK watches him go.)

R.J.

Hello Jack.

(JACK spins around and sees RJ for the first time.)

JACK

R.J. Cleves! Well I'll be damned. Rachel told me you was comin home tuh visit, but I didn't think it'd be so soon. I haven't seen you in a... a...

R.J.

Probably three years or so. How's things working for my father?

JACK

Fine, fine. Keeps me honest. How's...your a... the...

R.J.

Seminary.

JACK

...Yeah... that.

R.J.

Fine. Doing fine. Not long tuh go now.

JACK

Here to see your mother then? Rachel tells me yer close.

R.J.

Always been.

JACK

Must be nice. I've never met her really. She don't come out much.

R.J.

Well, she's a bit of a homebody, but the best are content with simple things. She's a saint, she is. Pure and kind.

JACK

Heh... my mother never really liked me much.

R.J.

Oh, that's not true. All mothers love their children.

JACK

Ya never met mine.

R.J.

Well there's always the Virgin Mary to look to if ya feel that way.

JACK

The Virgin Mary?

R.J.

Course. She is all good and all loving, and deserving of all our love.

JACK

Some lady I don't know deserves all my love?

R.J.

Course. She's immaculate.

(RAMSEY enters with a drink.)

RAMSEY

So you wanna marry my daughter, is that it, Mullen? The crazy one with the short hair?

JACK

You only got one daughter sir, far as I know.

RAMSEY

As far as we both know.

R.J.

Poppa dontchu think Jack and Rachel are too young to—

RAMSEY

She's 19 years old and she's startin tuh drive me outta my mind in this house. So no. I don't.

JACK

See sir, Rachel and I... we uh... we...

RAMSEY

Spit it out, Mullen.

JACK

Well I mean. I don't know if... I mean, yes! I am! I do! Want. To marry. Rachel. But see sir what I'm trying to say is that I don't know if Rachel wants to... marry me back.

RAMSEY

But *you* wanna marry Rachel?

JACK

Yes sir, I do, I think Rachel's a fine girl and all but I wanna make sure that she wants—

RAMSEY

Good, good. You can marry her beginning of the month.

JACK

Beginning of the month?

R.J.

Next month?

RAMSEY

Did I stutter, boy? Maybe you'll finally knock some sense into her.

JACK

Knock some what?

RAMSEY

I'm lucky anyone's asking at all with all her crazy quirks.

R.J.

Why would you say that? Rachel's a lovely girl!

RAMSEY

Yea but she aint much of a lady. And we gotta sell while we can. Now get the hell outta here, Jack. I'm too tired to say anymore.

JACK

But Mr. Cleves I don't know if this is gonna work out! See, Rachel's been acting real funny lately about all a this and—

RAMSEY

Get outta here, Mullen.

JACK

Mr. Cleves dontcha think this is a bit sudden? Next month?

RAMSEY

Your job, Mullen... hangs by a thin thread... I'm a very tired man, and if you don't get outta here by the time I—

JACK

All right, all right! I'm goin! I'm gone! G'night Mr. Cleves! G'night! G'night!

(JACK exits. There is a moment's pause between RJ and RAMSEY.)

R.J.

Does she know?

RAMSEY

Well considerin it just happened, I'd venture tuh say not yet.

R.J.

But he didn't even really *ask*.

RAMSEY

Yes he did, as far as I'm concerned. And you aint telling anyone otherwise, got it? Don't be such a romantic. I know what's best fer my own daughter. Stop meddlin so damn much. *(Pause)* By the way... where you sleepin?

R.J.

I guess, down here. On the floor.

RAMSEY

Heh ...Good.

(Enter GRETTA with blankets and pillows. She sets them down and begins making a bed for R.J.)

GRETTA

Here you go, baby.

R.J.

It's fine, momma. I can do it. It's just some blankets.

GRETTA

I'da had you sleep back in Rachel's room, like when you two were little, but ya aint little no more, are ya? You understand. *(R.J. starts to make up his bed while GRETTA speaks.)* Now, stop your helping! *(Takes blankets from R.J.)* You came home to be comfortable and I wanna make sure you are, at least while yer here I mean—

RAMSEY

Would you two stop killing each other with kindness!

(GRETTA abruptly stops making the bed.)

GRETTA

Well he might get cold.

RAMSEY

He's right next to the goddamn fire, woman, he's gonna sweat tuh death! *(Grabs GRETTA; pulls her up to standing next to him)* It's 8:00, Gretta. You take your medicine yet?

R.J.

Yer medicine, momma?

GRETTA

Oh, I don't need it tonight, I feel fine.

RAMSEY

You'll go take it right now.

GRETTA

(Quietly) But it makes my stomach feel awful.

R.J.

What's wrong, momma? What's it for?

RAMSEY

Quiet boy, this aint got nothin to do with you.

R.J.

I want to know what the medicine's for.

GRETTA

Couldn't we ask the doctor for a different kind?

RAMSEY

I'm not gonna say it again! Now I can deal with you bein saucy tuh me, but not with matters dealin with yer health. So if I were you, I'd get over there—

GRETTA

All right, all right! I'll take it.

(GRETTA goes to get the bottle and uncorks the top)

GRETTA, *Continued*

(Turns to RJ) It's nothing really baby. It's just—

RAMSEY

Fer dizziness.

GRETTA

That's exactly right. For dizziness.

R.J.

Dizziness?

RAMSEY

Yer momma's been getting real dizzy lately.

R.J.

Well does it help?

GRETTA

(Pause) Why dontchu go get washed up fer bed, baby? And then I'll bring ya out a nice warm piece a pie, all right?

R.J.

(To RAMSEY) Fer dizziness? Sure it is...

(RJ exits. GRETTA turns to RAMSEY.)

GRETTA

He's just visitin, Ramsey, he's not stayin.

RAMSEY

Dontchu ac the fool, Gretta.

GRETTA

Let me have my time. Try not to think about it.

RAMSEY

Try not to think about *what*?

GRETTA

(Shrinks away; covers face) Christ, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that!

RAMSEY

(Grabs her roughly) Dontchu talk about it to my face, you hear me? Can't ya see he's different? That he's plannin something. *(Lets her go)*

GRETTA

Yer imaginin things.

RAMSEY

Me? *I'm* imaginin things? Nah, girl, I leave all that up to you. He's got something up his sleeve. I can smell it.

GRETTA

(Sarcastically) Sure he does Ramsey. And I'm the holy virgin.

(LIGHTS OUT.)

ACT 1: SCENE 4

(AT RISE: The next day; outside the house. JACK attempts to sneak up on RACHEL but she notices him and his plan is ruined.)

RACHEL

Oh! Lookie who it is. You come looking for me, huh? Course ya did, who else would ya be looking fer?

JACK

Listen, Rach, we gotta talk.

RACHEL

I already know. I heard my poppa talking 'bout it last night. I aint deaf. I can hear from up in my room.

JACK

I mean—I didn't ask, but I wanted to, but I chickened, but I would have! But then all of a sudden, I didn't have tuh ask no more! Yer poppa says beginning a next month we're gonna be married.

RACHEL

No, Jack. We been through this.

JACK

But it's all settled!

RACHEL

You shouldn't be marryin me anyway, you know. I'm crazy. And I really mean it. Like in the clinical sense? You know what that means?

JACK

No...

RACHEL

Well it means real. Real crazy. All the signs are there. I dress funny, I act funny, I carry a gun, nobody in town likes me, and apparently, I'm a witch. Yep! Today, Justine Glover?—Well, she saw me out practicing with my rifle, and she said that only crazy girls played with rifles, and that a looked like a boy, and that I'll be an old maid, and then she called me a witch! A real witch with spells and everything! Now you don't want to marry a witch, do ya?

JACK

Justine says a lot of things 'bout a lot of people. Why'd you think that is?

RACHEL

I don't know. Cuz she's mad, and bored, and her husband's a bad fuck.

JACK

I aint.

RACHEL

What?

JACK

I aint a bad fuck. I'll show you.

(JACK starts to unbuckle his pants.)

RACHEL

Jesus Christ! No thanks, Mullen!

JACK

Suit yerself. But whenever you change yer mind... *(Buckles his pants)* So that aint true, is it? What she said about yer bein a witch?

RACHEL

No.

JACK

Good, cuz I don't know nothing 'bout witches. And I'd have tuh do all kindsa research before we got married.

RACHEL

Research!?

JACK

Well I would want to know more 'bout you!

RACHEL

My God, you're as dull as a butter knife.

JACK

C'mon Rachel, you can make fun of me later. Let's put that on hold a little and just kiss a while? You gotta say yes. We're gonna be married soon.

RACHEL

Well we aint married yet.

JACK

Well, let's pretend we are then?

RACHEL

Get the hell outta here, Mullen! Go ask Wendy Burge to marry you. She will.

JACK

But I don't like the way Wendy Burge talks.

RACHEL

What do you mean you don't like how she talks? What does she talk like?

JACK

Like a pigeon.

RACHEL

How do you talk like a pigeon?

JACK

I don't know, but she does.

RACHEL

Well what do I talk like?

JACK

Nothing. Like a Rachel, I guess. What do I talk like?

RACHEL

A goat.

JACK

I do not! You made that up.

RACHEL

I did not. You talk like a goat! Listen to yourself sometime!

(RACHEL makes noises like a goat.)

JACK

Damnit, Rachel, where you come off makin fun of me? I can make fun of you just as well! You've got a crazy momma, ya know? She's out of her tree! She talks to people who aren't there! Everyone in town says so— *(RACHEL walks away; JACK immediately thinks this is because he has hurt her feelings.)* Oh God! Rachel, I'm so sorry! Gosh, I didn't mean it! I thought we was playing! I like your momma, I do! She's real nice! I don't care who she talks too!

RACHEL

No. It's all right. I aint mad. I was just thinking. I bet you my momma is crazy. Fer real. No joking. Maybe *she's* the witch.

JACK

Ooo—you really think so?

RACHEL

Ha! There's no such thing as witches, ya boob.

JACK

No really, what if yer momma's some kind of sorceress who talks to spirits!?

RACHEL

She aint.

JACK

But didn't you just say—

RACHEL

See here! If my momma's a witch that means I must have some a the same magic powers, cuz I'm her daughter, right? Well I aint noticed any magic powers yet... although sometimes I do hear funny things in the house. Maybe I'll work on it more? Yeah! I gotta work on it! It aint just gonna come for nothing! See! That means I *am* a witch after all. And you don't wanna marry no witch now do ya?

JACK

But Rach, just a minute ago you said there was no such things as witches.

RACHEL

Yeah, so?

JACK

Well do you believe in em or not?

RACHEL

Believe in what?

JACK

Damn it Rachel, yer confusin me!

RACHEL

Well get used to it! If we do wind up getting married, that's probably how I'll amuse myself. By confusing you.

JACK

I think Justine was right. You are crazy.

RACHEL

Go on then, go tell Justine the good news!

JACK

I never said it bothered me. I kinda like it. Can we kiss now? Just once?

RACHEL

Dammit all, Mullen, you just don't give up do you?

JACK

Not likely.

RACHEL

Fine... all right fine! But just once...

(LIGHTS OUT.)

ACT 1: SCENE 5

(AT RISE: Interior house; RJ sitting on the blankets his mother set up for him. He is trying to read but CHRISTINE is sitting on the other side of the room, preventing all focus or concentration.)

CHRISTINE

RJ... RJ Cleves? RJ... RJ! RJ, RJ, RJ, RJ! RJ, I'm talkin tuh you! RJ Cleves! RJ, dontchu ignore me! Ramsey Cleves, Jr.!

R.J.

Would you *please* go away!? I'm trying to read.

CHRISTINE

Well nice to see you too, old friend! *(RJ doesn't respond.)* Oh? Fine then, I guess I'll just have to go down and talk to yer momma fer company.

R.J.

Wait!

CHRISTINE

What for?

R.J.

Why you been talkin to my momma so damn much? You need tuh just leave her alone.

CHRISTINE

Really, RJ. She's my only friend now that you're gone. You dun know what that's like, having no friends.

R.J.

First, we can't be friends, and second, you don't even deserve tuh have friends.

CHRISTINE

Oh RJ, please, do we hafta go through this again?

R.J.

No, we don't. Yer a lost soul and that's the end of it! Good people in life don't wind up lost souls. You killed somebody.

CHRISTINE

Yeah? So? Damn right I killed him. He was evil incarnate.

R.J.

I know, I know! Ya been telling me the story since I was 12 years old.

(But that doesn't stop CHRISTINE from telling it again. She knows RJ knows the story and so she makes the re-telling as comical and dramatic as possible.)

CHRISTINE

He was a crazy doctor—

R.J.

—I know.

CHRISTINE

A mad scientist!—

R.J.

—I know!

CHRISTINE

Poisonin me! Slowly!

R.J.

—Christine!

CHRISTINE

With experiments and elixirs and tonics and—

R.J.

(Finishing her sentence) —chemicals...I know. That don't change yer bein a murderer.

CHRISTINE

Well. Don't be too forgivin or nuthin, Father.

R.J.

When I was little you didn't talk tuh my momma, only me. Now all of a sudden—

CHRISTINE

You went away, boy. I was lonely. Now yer momma thinks she's the only one. You Cleves people and yer self absorption!

R.J.

Christine, momma shouldn't be talkin to the likes a you, it's dangerous and you know it.

CHRISTINE

Why not? I aint the jaggedy devil himself. And yer momma aint as innocent as you think she is. Ya think I'm bad—

R.J.

Well she is tuh me, damnit, and I'm gettin her outta here as soon as I can. That's why I came home. Since when do I come home for a birthday?

CHRISTINE

You shouldn't of gone in the first place! Why couldn't ya just a stayed? Remember last time you visited? When you tried to exorcise me outta here with that St. Benedict's cross? (*Laughing so hard she can hardly breathe*) And I just stood there and just stared at you like you had lobsters comin outta yer ears! My Lord, I haven't had so much fun in my whole existence... and anyway, you like me when it all comes down to it—

R.J.

I do not!

CHRISTINE

You've liked me since you were little, don't lie!

R.J.

I never did!

CHRISTINE

I was the only one who'd talk tuh ya at night when ya weren't tired!

R.J.

Stop it!

CHRISTINE

Or when you was afraid?

R.J.

I was afraid because a you!

CHRISTINE

Bull shit! Why you lyin, RJ Cleves?

R.J.

I'm tryin tuh make things holy and peaceful 'round here!

CHRISTINE

Holy and peaceful? Then you better leave yer momma alone. She's happy livin here. And anyway, your poppa'll beat you bloody and raw if you do anything stupid.

R.J.

Nobody in their right mind would be happy livin here like she does. She belongs somewhere with other people as good-hearted as she is, and you can't change my mind 'bout that.

CHRISTINE

I guess little old me can't change your mind. But I think I know something that might...

R.J.

What's that?

CHRISTINE

Why should I tell you? What do you care 'bout family secrets? Yer the one ran away on us.

R.J.

Us? You aint one of us!

CHRISTINE

I've been here longer than you! This was my house once, you know.

R.J.

Well it's mine now, aint it? So go on, get out! I don't gotta prove nothing tuh you.

CHRISTINE

Why you hate us so much, huh?

R.J.

US! Stop saying us! You aint one of us! And I hate *you* because you won't leave me alone! You say yer protectin me, but half the time, I'm seein things outta the corners of my eyes, my spine's tinglin somthin awful, and I got this feeling of dread like—

CHRISTINE

Boy, you got it all wrong! It aint me sendin chills up yer spine! You think that's me in the hallway or on the stairs? Or in the kitchen at night when yer gettin a glass a water? It aint. When I talk to ya, I come right out and talk. Like this. Aint no mysteries with me.

R.J.

Then... who is it watchin me all the damn time? Dontchu tell me nobody, I can feel it! There more than one a ya or sumthin?

CHRISTINE

Course. Can't believe it took you so long tuh ask.

R.J.

How many?

CHRISTINE

Just one.

R.J.

Who? How come you never told me?

CHRISTINE

You were just saying how much you hated me and now you want me tuh tell you secrets? I don't think so; but I will tell you this. There is another ghost in this house, you can be damn sure about that. But I wouldn't talk about it with yer momma if I were you. Sore subject fer her.

R.J.

What a lie! I aint never seen her. I'd a seen her if she was here. You said I got the sense for it!

CHRISTINE

Him. It's a him. And sure, you got the sense for it, but you aint ever seen him cuz he don't wantcha to. That's how it works. He aint never shown himself cuz he don't know what tuh say or how to say it.

R.J.

Say what? What's he tryin tuh say? Have you lost your mind? What the hell are you talking about?

CHRISTINE

I'm talkin as much sense as I ever have! If you don't believe me, then go ask yer immaculate mother!

R.J.

Ask her what, Ghost?

CHRISTINE

And don't you call me Ghost, RJ. It's rude. You know damn well my name's Christine.

(Exit CHRISTINE.)

R.J.

All right, damnit! I will ask! I will then!

(Exit RJ. CROSSFADE to GRETTA and RAMSEY arguing in their bedroom.)

GRETTA

—I don't need to see no doctor tomorrow!

RAMSEY

Well you aint getting no better, so he might as well stop by.

GRETTA

I'm telling you there aint nothing wrong with me. I don't need it.

RAMSEY

Aw, common Gretta, just the other day you were in the kitchen talkin to someone who wasn't there!

GRETTA

I musta been talkin to myself. People do that, you know.

RAMSEY

Sure maybe sometimes, but you do it all the time. *(Knock at door)* What? Who the hell is it?

R.J.

Poppa! Open up!

RAMSEY

RJ? What the hell is going on? It's the middle of the goddamn night. How old are you, four?

R.J.

Open up, I gotta talk to mamma! I want this out on the table now!

RAMSEY

Absolutely not! It'll wait til tomorrow morning whatever it is—

(RJ bursts into the room.)

RAMSEY, *Continued*

Who the hell you think you are, boy?

R.J.

(Rushing in) Momma, we're gonna talk about the ghosts in this house right now!

RAMSEY

Oh sweet Jesus, not with the goddamn ghosts again!

GRETTA

You know I don't like you or Rachel talkin about no ghosts, RJ. We've been through this.

R.J.

Look, Momma, I know about her.

GRETTA

RJ, it aint the time!

R.J.

She was talkin tuh me long before she was talkin tuh you! She's short and she's got long dark hair—she's real pretty but not too pretty! She only started with you cuz I went away!

GRETTA

RJ, there are no ghosts in this house.

R.J.

Yer lyin Momma! Yer flat out lyin tuh me!

GRETTA

Why you doin this now, huh baby? Can't it wait til... *(Looks at RAMSEY)* Another time?

R.J.

No, it can't wait. Christine's drivin me out of my mind, damnit! *(GRETTA shushes him.)* She's got this idea that there's some other ghost in this house.

RAMSEY

Who the hell is Christine? Gretta, I told you it was no good havin a priest in this house! Bad luck! We'll all die a sleep deprivation! Sheer Goddamn sleep deprivation!

(Enter RACHEL.)

RAMSEY, *Continued*

Now, hell, what you want. Can't a man sleep without havin tuh dress middle a the night?

(RAMSEY exits the room to get dressed.)

RACHEL

What in the name of Christ is going on?

R.J.

Would everyone stop takin the Lord's name in vain?

RACHEL

Well a man needs his rest after a long day's work!

R.J. AND RAMSEY

Shutup, Rachel!

GRETTA

Yer brother is making a scene.

RACHEL

Yeah. He does that well, don't he? (*Yawns*) Well, g'night.

R.J.

Wait! Rach! You tell her Rach! You know about the ghosts. You've seen em, huh?
(*RACHEL remains silent.*) Rachel, tell her!

RACHEL

(*Aside*) What are you stupid er sumthin? I aint seen shit! I aint crazy like you! And anyway, I aint sayin nuthin with poppa around! (*Calling out to RAMSEY*) I don't know shit 'bout no ghosts, poppa! I aint never seen a damn thing!

R.J.

Lies! All Lies! Yer all lyin straight tuh each other's faces!

GRETTA

RJ, I know this house can be eerie sometimes. You musta gotten scared by something. A nightmare maybe?

R.J.

Damn right I'm havin a nightmare! Why the hell am I not supposed to talk 'bout this other ghost, huh?

(*GRETTA crosses to RJ and grabs his face harshly.*)

GRETTA

RJ Cleves, what in God's name are you trying tuh do, tear this family apart at the seams? Now I don't care what you've seen and what you haven't, you better learn tuh shut yer mouth right now, do you hear me? Dontchu bring it up ever again! Never another word about it as long as you live, or as God as my witness I will slap your mouth right off your face! (*Pushes him away*)

(RAMSEY returns just as RJ and GRETTA let go of each other.)

RAMSEY

This is why I don't like it when you come home, boy. You do crazy shit like this, like yer on some kind a goddamn crusade. Now ya heard it from yer mother, there aint no ghosts in this house.

R.J.

You know she sees things.

RAMSEY

Yer momma is on medication for that.

R.J.

I thought it was for dizziness?

RAMSEY

I lied.

R.J.

Course you did, but the real problem is that she don't need no medication for seeing things, because the things are real!

RAMSEY

Since when are you a doctor?

R.J.

I aint. I've seen em too.

RAMSEY

Well the doctor's comin tomorrow, I'll have him look at you while he's at it! I don't believe in any of this crazy cock swap! Either yer both crazy er—

R.J.

Or we're both right! You ever think a that? You aint never heard or seen somethin strange in this house Poppa?

RAMSEY

I don't believe it!

R.J.

Nothing never? In the shop maybe?

RAMSEY

RJ, you stop draggin yer crazy ideas into this house!

R.J.

Like someone was watchin you? You have! I know you have—

RAMSEY

RJ, I'm warnin you!

R.J.

It ever get real cold on you all of a sudden?

RAMSEY

(Grabs RJ) RJ Cleves you shut your mouth! Now you stop this nonsense. It's all in yer goddamn head! *(Pauses then lets him go)* Now you get outta here and get some sleep. And I don't want to hear no more about these ghosts. Both of ya.

GRETTA

RJ why don't you stay in Rachel's room tonight?

(RJ doesn't move.)

RAMSEY

Boy, did you hear me, or do I gotta pop you in the mouth?

GRETTA

Just let him stay with you, Rachel?

RAMSEY

Why'd we ever even have children, Gretta? For all my toilin—I get a catholic priest, and a gender confused social misfit. Thank God I can do as I like now, and don't have tuh worry about what fruity little mistake's gonna come from it.

R.J.

Do...Do... as you like? My God, you disgust me. Why can't you just control yourself, and leave her alone fer once, you horny old beast!

(R.J. goes at RAMSEY but RAMSEY punches him in the mouth before RJ is able to do anything. RJ falls to the floor.)

RAMSEY

Now maybe you'll watch yer mouth, boy, and mind to whom yer speakin. Dontchu be forgettin where you came from. How do you think yer sorry ass came into this world? On one of my off days fer sure. Don't you ever be talkin about such things in the presence of yer mother again, or these little visits home to yer mother'll become much less frequent.

R.J.

If they were any less frequent, I'd be dead.

RAMSEY

Get him out of here Rachel! Get him out now!

(RAMSEY ushers RACHEL almost violently to drag her brother out of the room. RJ pushes RACHEL away and insists on leaving on his own. RJ and RACHEL exit. The LIGHTS CROSSFADE to the room where RJ sleeps as RJ enters the room.)

CHRISTINE

RJ...

R.J.

Not now.

CHRISTINE

RJ I didn't think you'd really go—

R.J.

Christine, I said not now!

CHRISTINE

But I wanted tuh tell ya—

R.J.

Damnit, Christine, you'd drive a priest to suicide if he didn't think you'd be waitin for him on the other side!

CHRISTINE

It wasn't true, you know... What Ramsey said? If you were dead, you'd be with me... And you'd get to visit yer mamma every day...

(CHRISTINE beams. There is a pause.)

R.J.

...What are you doing to me, Christine?

CHRISTINE

Doin to you? Nuthin. I'm all the way over here. Yer mouth is bleedin.

R.J.

You set this all up.

CHRISTINE

I didn't! I want to fix things. I told everything... so maybe you'd like me better?

R.J.

I can't like you, Christine.

CHRISTINE

How come?

R.J.

Because yer dead.

CHRISTINE

But that don't mean I aint here. That don't mean I don't cry dry tears every time you go.

R.J.

I gotta live, Christine. It's my time tuh live.

CHRISTINE

Livin? That what yer doin? Livin? What is livin, really? Is it livin if you feel more alive when yer with me? Does that count as livin?

(CHRISTINE exits.)

R.J.

I don't know no more. I just don't know...

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT 1: SCENE 6

(AT RISE: GRETTA alone in her bedroom. She is singing.)

GRETTA, *Singing*

Oh, Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn.
Oh, Mary, don't you weep, don't you mourn.
Didn't Pharaoh's army get drowned?
Oh, Mary, don't you weep.
When I get to heaven gonna put on my shoes
Run about town and spread the news
Didn't Pharaoh's army get drowned?
Oh, Mary, don't you weep
Well, Satan got mad cuz he knows I'm glad.
Missed that soul that he thought he had.
Didn't Pharaoh's army get drowned?
Oh, Mary, don't you weep.

(Enter RAMSEY.)

RAMSEY

There aint no different kind. We'll just have tuh make do.

GRETTA

Well, I won't take the old kind anymore.

RAMSEY

You aint gonna get better.

GRETTA

I can't "get better", Ramsey! It aint a "getting better" kinda thing.

RAMSEY

Yer startin tuh sound like RJ. You aint gonna start believin all his stories, are ya?

GRETTA

We got a weird house, Ramsey, and I just want you to start toyin with the idea that, maybe, what I got here might not be anythin medicine can help.

RAMSEY

Maybe not, but you can't jump from there to sayin we got ghosts runnin around!

GRETTA

Maybe not runnin around, Ramsey, but they sure are doin sumthin—Could you maybe... get me... a glass a water?... my mouth is dry... he always takes so much damn blood...

(GRETTA collapses into a chair.)

RAMSEY

Woman, you gotta tell me when yer feelin sick.

GRETTA

I been telling ya fer weeks now...

RAMSEY

Here— *(Sits on bed)* —Don't move. Just... don't go nowhere!

(Exit RAMSEY. As soon as he has exited, CHRISTINE enters with DAVID following.)

CHRISTINE

God damn him! He's tryin tuh kill ya, that's what he's doin!

GRETTA

Oh don't be ridiculous. You know he's only trying to do what's best for me. Ramsey's done some mighty good things in his time. Dontchu forget he's the one who wouldn't let em put me in the crazy house, huh? Now I know he aint no saint, he just shows his love in a different way. He's stubborn, but I love him. I love him awful.

CHRISTINE

Aint it always the way? We love the things that aint no good fer us. The things that don't make no sense to love.

GRETТА

...Christine? Why'd you have to go telling R.J. about all those things I told you not tuh talk about? About David?

CHRISTINE

Because we been ignoring him a mighty long time, don't you think?

GRETТА

What's wrong with that? Seems to be working pretty well.

CHRISTINE

Does it? People deserve to be forgiven if they're truly sorry. You want this whole mess straightened out, or not?

GRETТА

I gave up on that a long time ago. I pay my penance for what I did, everyday.

CHRISTINE

You ever think you might be done payin? (*Enter RAMSEY, who notices GRETТА is "talking to herself." He pauses at the door and listens.*) Haventcha ever just asked Ramsey real nice if he'd just stop?

(CHRISTINE gestures to the GRETТА'S bruises.)

GRETТА

No. I aint never asked, and I aint ever gonna.

(RAMSEY steps into the room.)

RAMSEY

Who you talkin to Gretta? (

(CHRISTINE and GRETТА turn to see him.)

CHRISTINE

Oh Shit! (*Slinks into the shadows*) I'm sorry, Gretta... I'm so, so sorry.

GRETТА

No one. Nothin. To myself.

RAMSEY

I heard you talkin loud-n-clear. And you were talkin *to* someone. So who ya talkin to?

GRETTA

I don't know whatcha mean.

RAMSEY

You lyin tuh me?

GRETTA

No! No lies. I aint lyin!

RAMSEY

Ghosts—you talk to ghosts?

GRETTA

Ramsey, I never said that!

RAMSEY

But that's what you *believe*. Is that why you wanted me tuh take ya off the medicine? Hm? So you could keep talkin to em?

GRETTA

Well maybe if I had some friends! Or someone else to talk to once in a while!—(Realizes her error) Wait, no, Ramsey! That's not what I meant! I didn't mean it like that!

(RAMSEY backhands her across the face. GRETTA falls back onto the bed.)

RAMSEY

Do you know what would happen if someone found out that you believe yer talkin tuh ghosts again? My business would be ruined! You want the men down at the hospital tuh come back up here for ya? We both know that place aint really a hospital, is it? Next time I aint gonna be able tuh stop em! *(Hits her again)* What then? I don't want no more talk about going off that medicine, and I don't want no more talk 'bout these ghosts neither. I don't believe it—none of it! Do you hear me?

GRETTA

(With resilience) Yes. I hear you. I been hearin you fer years. And just this once, I wanna know sumthin! Why *don't* you believe it? Because I do. All of it! I know it's true! It's right there in front of you, and you just refuse to see it! That's why you got so spooked when RJ started talkin about being watched. You've seen strange things in that shop; you've felt the fires go out and the rooms go cold, so why is it you can't fathom fer a moment that it might just be true.

RAMSEY

Because it can't be! There's no such thing as seein ghosts!

GRETTA

Yer wrong, RAMSEY. I'm tellin you, yer wrong, and I aint gonna say different fer fear a you no more! You gonna hit me then? Go on! I aint afraid no more! Go on then and do it! Sure, what I did was wrong, but ya just won't let it go, will ya? Go, go on! Do it!

DAVID

Don't you hit her again Ramsey. Or I'll break both your wrists with a wisp a my breath.

(RAMSEY turns around and sees DAVID. This moment should be one of deep fear at seeing a supernatural being for the first time. DAVID has control over both RAMSEY and GRETTA in a mystical sense in this moment. They are paralyzed by his energy and influence.)

DAVID, *Continued*

After years and years of waiting fer the right moment tuh show ya... I'm sick and tired of you sayin it aint true.

(BLACKOUT: END OF ACT 1.)

ACT 2: SCENE 1

(SPOTLIGHT on CHRISTINE who speaks to the Audience.)

CHRISTINE

There aint nothing hard 'bout dying. It's the after part that's just one big misunderstandin. 'Specially if you aint ready, and you get all caught 'tween one place and another without knowing where yer coming from, and no map to find where yer going to. Time helps tuh make things easier. Human beings are amazing things, really—even the dead ones. Our bodies don't heal, but our hearts and minds do. Time makes it so you can't quite recall. You forget the things that hurt too bad tuh remember. They fade away, like a fever dream you once had, slowly receding into the dark unused hallways of memory. Thank God, if he's up there somewhere, for that.

(AT RISE: GRETTA is sitting in her bedroom, gazing at herself in a mirror. DAVID is standing near CHRISTINE, although unseen by the Audience until this moment.)

DAVID

Why'd you bring me here?

CHRISTINE

Why do you think? Look.

DAVID

At what?

CHRISTINE
Look!

DAVID
I don't wanna look.

CHRISTINE
Damn it! Do as I say!

(GRETTA looks into the mirror, gently touching the bruise on her face; her lip bleeding.)

DAVID
I didn't do it.

CHRISTINE
I know that.

DAVID
So why do I gotta look at it?

CHRISTINE
You know why. If it wasn't fer you, he wouldn'ta done it.

DAVID
It aint right you blaming me for all Ramsey's done wrong. I aint the one hurtin her, he is.

CHRISTINE
This time...

DAVID
How many times I gotta say I'm sorry! You gonna harp on it forever?

CHRISTINE
Please! You aint seen two hairs a forever!

DAVID
(Looking at GRETTA) It's pretty bad.

CHRISTINE
The worst.

DAVID
She aint even crying.

CHRISTINE
She never does no more.

(GRETTA turns and looks around.)

GRETTA

That you, Christine?

(CHRISTINE and DAVID pull away from her.)

CHRISTINE

Shh!

DAVID

Yer the one making the noise! *(PAUSE)* I try tuh to talk to her, but she don't ever say nothing back.

CHRISTINE

Well, you aint her favorite person in the world.

DAVID

And Ramsey is? Where's the justice in that?

CHRISTINE

Unconditional love is a funny thing, aint it?

DAVID

I'll make her listen!

CHRISTINE

You can't *make* her do anything. That's what gotcha in trouble in the first place, and it aint gonna clean up this mess.

DAVID

Clean up the mess? You say it like I can do something 'bout it! You've forgotten one thing, Christine...we're dead.

CHRISTINE

If we let something as little as that stop us, then what's the point of this lonely, endless existence?

DAVID

...There aint no point. When you gonna realize?

CHRISTINE

That aint sumthin I wanna realize, thanks. I told you it would take a long time.

DAVID

You said a lot of things that never came true. You said we'd go wanderin, that someday we'd be free, that this house would be ours!

CHRISTINE

Mine. I said it was mine. I never said ours. I got more claim over this here house than any Cleves ever had!

DAVID

You also said ventually, my eyes would adjust, but they haven't! Even after all these years... I still see funny.

CHRISTINE

Takes time. Fifty years or so to see well again.

DAVID

Fifty years!

CHRISTINE

And it hasn't been that long for you! Has it? No! No, not nearly. You haven't even started to forget life yet!

DAVID

That aint true!—I *am* starting to forget things! I just can't remember what they are to tell you about em!

CHRISTINE

You still remember dyin'?

DAVID

Yea sure. I still remember that, clear as day.

CHRISTINE

Well see, I *don't* remember dyin' no more. Not one bit of it; only crying and crying afterwards... and no tears coming. Dying is one of the last things you forget, so if you still remember that, I wouldn't worry. Besides, you still remember yer family! I'd say you've got at least 100 years tuh go.

DAVID

What'll it be like when all my memories of life are gone? Will I still be me? Will I still be David Cleves?

CHRISTINE

I'm still Christine—well... I don't remember my last name no more, but I'm still Christine, huh? Death aint no different than life. When you're 50, you don't remember being three, do ya? Somehow along the way, all the living folk get this idea in their heads

CHRISTINE, *Continued*

that death is gonna be so much different than life, but aint. I'll forget as time passes. It'll help me through...

DAVID

You love the boy dontcha?

CHRISTINE

He aint a boy no more.

DAVID

He's a priest instead.

CHRISTINE

Things like that don't matter tuh ghosts.

DAVID

Does he love you?

CHRISTINE

I don't know.

DAVID

Why do ya do this to yerself, Christine? You know he's just gonna go back.

CHRISTINE

He may. But I gotta believe I can change things. I can if I try hard enough. Like with you, I did! Gretta needed help and it just so happened I knew 'bout poisonin men first hand. Looked at my husband's notes onet. I was real subtle, of course, droppin those hints in her lap...

DAVID

What right did you have tellin her how tuh kill me?

CHRISTINE

Because you hurt her, David. You hurt her real bad.

DAVID

Oh I only did what any red blooded man woulda done! She told me herself I reminded her a Ramsey.

CHRISTINE

And then she toldja to go on home, but I guess you don't remember that part.

DAVID

Sure I do. You haven't let me forget it. And now here I am livin year in and year out with my own killer.

CHRISTINE

Aint nothing you don't deserve. Besides, I aint so bad.

DAVID

Twenty five years it's been, Christine! You know I'm sorry. Let me go now, please?

CHRISTINE

I can't.

DAVID

You can't, or you won't?

CHRISTINE

Neither. I've... I've forgotten how. Or maybe... something won't let me? I'm different than I was when I first died. I don't understand what's happening to me.

(There is a long silence as they stare into space.)

DAVID

What the hell are you, Christine?

CHRISTINE

I don't know... I used to! I used to be the spirit in this house! The one who got lost in all those little cracks of time, but I aint just that no more. I'm something else now. I'm... I'm the master of ceremonies maybe? Or just Christine. Yes, don'tchu mind what I been sayin. I'm just Christine.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT 2: SCENE 2

(AT RISE: The next day; RJ in the living room packing up his things. CHRISTINE enters but RJ doesn't see her yet. There is a stack of his books sitting on RAMSEY'S chair. CHRISTINE approaches. She takes a moment, concentrates and then pushes his books off the chair. For her, this takes a great deal of effort.)

R.J.

(Notices the books falling) Damnit all! My books again, Christine? Someday you gotta explain to me why all this book knockin!

(RJ can now see CHRISTINE.)

CHRISTINE

I just like to. As a reminder.

R.J.

A reminder of what?

CHRISTINE

Just a reminder. To myself. Or to anyone listening, that I'm here. That I exist. That I'm still me.

R.J.

Well, you don't gotta remind me. I know you're here. I know you're Christine.

(RJ moves to leave.)

CHRISTINE

Where you going?

R.J.

I'm getting more ice for my jaw. Still hurts from yesterday. Thanks to you, I'm not sure if it's on its proper hinge no more.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry he hit you. Why'd you go in there?

R.J.

You told me to!

CHRISTINE

Since when do you listen to me? That's the first time for sure.

R.J.

(Massaging his jaw) Must be nice bein' made a mist. Never feel no pain?

CHRISTINE

I feel pain, RJ. It's just a different kind. *(Pause)* Here, I can help you with that.

(CHRISTINE blows in his direction. RJ shivers and instantaneously feels as if his jaw has been iced.)

CHRISTINE, *Continued*

There you go. All nice and cold now.

R.J.

How you do that, huh?

CHRISTINE

Don't know really. Works though, don't it? (*Approaches RJ*) Does this mean we're friends again then? Like when you were little? Will you stay?

R.J.

You know I can't.

CHRISTINE

Course you can. All you gotta do is not get on the train. Don't you miss me when you're away?

R.J.

Yes, I do.

CHRISTINE

If you come back, I won't talk to Gretta no more. Like you've wanted. It'll just be you and me again!

R.J.

Yer talking to momma is getting her in trouble with Ramsey. You know that.

CHRISTINE

You can't blame me. It aint fair.

R.J.

Do you know why he's giving her medicine?

CHRISTINE

I know it's cuz a me, but I can fix it. I have a plan.

RJ

Fix it? What can you do? You're fake!

CHRISTINE

I am not fake...

R.J.

You see this? That's blood! You aint got none!

CHRISTINE

I was alive once, you know! I don't remember much of it now, but I was!

R.J.

Do you remember what a spider web is?

CHRISTINE

What does that have to do with anything?

R.J.

Do ya?

CHRISTINE

Yes, I think.

R.J.

Well my momma's a little bug in a spiders web, and you're the breeze coming along blowing by, and she likes it, she thinks it's real nice, it makes her forget there's a big spider waiting to come and eat her up! *(Pause)* Can I ask you a question and you answer me honest? Do you love my momma? Do you remember what love is? Can you still do that?

CHRISTINE

Yes RJ. Love is one of the things I do remember. One of the only things. I love her, and...yes. I do.

R.J.

Then I gotta take her back with me, Christine. There aint no way around it.

CHRISTINE

Give me just a little more time?

R.J.

Why don'tchu come with us, huh? Can you do that? Can you leave here? You'll be my pet ghost.

CHRISTINE

Excuse me?

R.J.

Sure, a pet ghost! You don't eat much do ya?

CHRISTINE

That's enough!

R.J.

Aw, don't get mad now! What's wrong?

CHRISTINE

You know damn well what's wrong. You apologize for calling me a pet ghost. Right now! Go on, say yer sorry!

R.J.

Shh. You hear it?

CHRISTINE

Hear what?

R.J.

I already said it. In my head!

CHRISTINE

Oh Lord. I am *not* coming to be your pet ghost. There aint no such thing as pet ghosts. We don't answer to nobody!

R.J.

Do you remember what salt tastes like?

CHRISTINE

What's gotten intuh you, askin me all these crazy things? Salt?

R.J.

Or the breeze on your fingertips? Or on your face? I know you can make us feel it, but can you?

CHRISTINE

Yes and no. Mostly no. It aint the same fer the dead.

R.J.

What were you like when you were livin'?

CHRISTINE

I was—I was more—I never— *(Pause)* I was like this, I guess.

R.J.

You get lots of callers at yer door?

CHRISTINE

I don't remember things like that.

R.J.

I bet you had em. Lining up outside. Putting letters in yer window!

CHRISTINE

Sure. And I picked a good one, right? The best one of em all! He was a gem, wasn't he?

R.J.

I'm sorry. That was awful. I forgot.

CHRISTINE

(Smiles) There you go. You just apologized to a ghost. How's it feel?

R.J.

Just short a right.

CHRISTINE

Well what's it like for you? The salt, and the breeze, and being able to touch things... you know, since I don't remember no more'n all.

R.J.

Well it all depends on what's in yer hands. *(Pulls his wallet from his pocket)* This here is old leather. It feels smooth and warm from the heat.

CHRISTINE

And... your shirt? What's it like feeling your shirt up against you?

R.J.

Well... I haven't ever really thought about that. I guess I don't notice it anymore. I'm always wearing shirts.

CHRISTINE

What about when yer reading? Those pages in your fingers?

R.J.

Thin and grainy like a... *(Pauses)* Hey, thought you didn't care no more 'bout human things?

CHRISTINE

If I didn't care 'bout human things I wouldn't be here talkin to ya, would I?

R.J.

Can you touch my hand?

CHRISTINE

Course not.

R.J.

But you can *choose* to make me hear and see ya, right? Touching my hand's just another sense. I'm sure you could... if you tried? ... Will you try? ...

(There is a moment; CHRISTINE and RJ approach one another. RJ extends his hand. CHRISTINE extends hers as well. As they get closer, it appears to becoming harder and harder for CHRISTINE. Right before they touch, CHRISTINE pulls away. RJ pauses.)

R.J.

I shouldn't have asked. I'm sorry.

CHRISTINE

I'm not.

R.J.

Then why'd you stop?

CHRISTINE

Because I can't do it. I'm fake. You were right.

R.J.

Yer more real than most livin folk I know.

CHRISTINE

That's nice tuh say and all, but where's it get me? Nowhere but here. Somewhere in the in-between.

R.J.

It's that in-between that momma likes, Christine. You can help me. Tell momma tuh talk tuh me 'bout the other ghost, huh?

CHRISTINE

RJ, if I help, I might have tuh leave.

R.J.

What do you mean, leave?

CHRISTINE

If I help you right, I might have to go away from here. You know... to... wherever I'm s'posed tuh go. (*Looks up*)

R.J.

Well, that would be wonderful, wouldn't it?

CHRISTINE

Nah. It wouldn't really.

R.J.

Well, I know it's a nice house and all, but I promise, heaven is better.

CHRISTINE

It aint that. I'm sure heaven's real nice. But I'd rather stay here, and look forward to visits from you.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT 2: SCENE 3

(AT RISE: RAMSEY standing by the door leading into the bedroom. GRETTA is no longer in the room.)

DAVID

Why'd ya make her leave, huh? She mighta had something tuh say. *(Silence)* RAMSEY? You hear me? I know you do. You aint gonna talk then? ... You never were real talkative, were ya?

(RAMSEY spits on the ground in DAVID'S direction.)

DAVID

Still using primitive forms of communication I see?

RAMSEY

My mind is playing tricks. That's all you are. I'm waitin til you disappear.

DAVID

You'll be waiting a mighty long time then.

RAMSEY

I aint gonna be caught talkin tuh no figments of my 'magination! It's bad enough that Gretta does it.

DAVID

Aw, common brother, you've always thought somewhere in the back a yer mind that maybe I was here. That maybe I was watchin.

RAMSEY

David Cleves I've never thought about you again after the day you died. Now get out, or I'll call RJ in here, and he knows how to exercise the devil!

DAVID

(Laughs) The devil? If I were the devil, Ramsey, I wouldn't be wasting my time with you. Yer already pretty damned.

RAMSEY

Damned er not. This house is still mine, and you aint welcome. You aint no more than a memory tuh me, and one I try tuh forget every day.

DAVID

Then let me help ya forget faster. Yer ruining yer life. What Gretta's got ain't no disease. She just got a well tuned 6th sense is all. She sees ghosts real easy. Lots a livin people see ghosts; they just don't like tuh talk about it.

RAMSEY

You don't know anything 'bout what she's got. We've got a doctor!

DAVID

She ain't got nothing! And that doctor? He's as stumped as you. That medicine is what's killin her. That's why she's been tired and sick. Too much a something she don't need. You gotta make her stop takin it.

RAMSEY

Why you tryin tuh help me? You aint never tried tuh help me before. You want her fer yourself!

DAVID

Ramsey... I'm dead. I got a different agenda now, and it sure don't include competition with you no more. If she keeps takin that shit, she will die, and then you'll really have nuthin.

RAMSEY

Why should I believe you?

DAVID

Don't believe me! Believe her! She's been telling you that medicine's been makin her worse for months now. Have you ever tried it? Have you? You try to swallow it. If you don't puke it up within two minutes, ya got a pretty strong stomach. *(Pause)* What? you've seen her pukin it up, haven't ya?

RAMSEY

Why'd you do it?

DAVID

I don't know.

RAMSEY

I'll be damned if you don't!

DAVID

It aint important.

RAMSEY

The hell it isn't!

DAVID

I got carried away! *(Pause)* You'd been gone fer a mighty long time, and I didn't see the point in letting sumthin so sweet go tuh waste.

RAMSEY

You bastard. It wasn't yours for the takin! She's my wife, and no one in the world loves her like I do.

DAVID

Is that so? Her poor face would say different. Are you sure you love her? Cuz you sure don't love our son a damn bit. *(Silence)*

RAMSEY

Fuck you.

DAVID

When did you know?

RAMSEY

I said fuck you.

DAVID

When did you know for sure?

RAMSEY

That's enough.

DAVID

Oh you can ask questions but I can't?

RAMSEY

I've known since the moment he was born! I aint stupid. I've always known.

DAVID

But he don't.

RAMSEY

And he never will.

DAVID

Why not? You treat him like a dog anyway, so telling him the truth shouldn't be too hard.

RAMSEY

Truth? What truth? He aint your son. I raised him, and that alone makes him mine. I aint telling him nothing.

DAVID

But you hate him. I thought you'd be happy tuh get him off yer back!

RAMSEY

I never hated him, til he went off ta become a God damn priest! *(Beat)* And what the hell do you know? You don't know him. You don't understand how much knowin this is gonna fuck him up!

DAVID

Well either you tell him or I do. But the later might be pretty traumatic, so I suggest it be you.

RAMSEY

What the hell's the difference if he knows or not?

DAVID

You aint never wanted him tuh be a priest, Ramsey. If you agree to my conditions, he stays. I'll leave

RAMSEY

How can you make such a promise? Nothing on the face of the earth could make that boy stay here.

DAVID

Don't deal in absolutes, Ramsey. They're dangerous. Do as I say, and I'll go.

RAMSEY

And if I don't?

DAVID

Then I guess I'll just have tuh stay here forever. And you know, I can make it so you'll see me all the time. You'll be talkin tuh Gretta, you'll look over her shoulder and there I'll be, just sittin there, starin atcha—

RAMSEY

Fine! All right! I promise! If you'll just go? Haven'tcha already made my life hell enough?

DAVID

—You don't know nothing 'bout hell, Ramsey! I pay my penance for what I did, everyday, so don't you talk tuh me 'bout hell. *(Turns to leave; turns back)* Ramsey? ...Aint you ever wonder how I died?

RAMSEY

Food poisoning wasn't it?

DAVID

Sure. Sure it was. But I bet you'd love to know who it was did the poisoning...

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT 2: SCENE 3

(AT RISE: Exterior house; JACK and RACHEL feverishly kissing. JACK is unbuttoning RACHEL'S shirt but stops when he sees that her breasts are bound.)

JACK

What the hell? *(RACHEL pulls away and quickly begins buttoning her shirt.)* Rachel, wait! No, don't! Aww, what'ja do that for? We just started!

RACHEL

I didn't like it.

JACK

Didn't like it? What the hell is wrong with you?

RACHEL

Nothing—I just don't like—it makes me feel... funny. Just go home, huh?

JACK

Are you... afraid a me?

RACHEL

I aint no such thing Jack Mullen! I've never been afraid of nothing in my whole life. Not even ghosts!

JACK

Like the one I saw in yer hallway?

RACHEL

Yeah, I seen em, and I'm not afraid of em, either!

JACK

How many you got up there?

RACHEL

Don't know. A Few. I think I'm gonna hunt em for my livin maybe.

JACK

Wow. ...That's really weird.

RACHEL

See! Another weird thing about me, Jack. Whatcha friends gonna think when they find out yer wife's a ghost hunter?

JACK

Then it's settled then! I'll have a ghost huntin wife!

RACHEL

God dammit Jack, that aint what I meant! Aint there anything about me that makes you mad?

JACK

Don't think so, no.

RACHEL

(Stomps on his foot with her boot) There, how about that?

JACK

Ugh!

(JACK reaches over and pulls RACHEL'S hair. She retaliates by twisting his nipple. They both squeal in pain then let go of each other at the same moment.)

JACK

Serves you right. That hurt awful!

RACHEL

You aint seen nothing yet, Mullen.

JACK

I bet even them ghosts are nicer'n you!

RACHEL

It's a possibility.

JACK

How often you see em?

RACHEL

I don't really see em. I more hear em and feel em. Why you askin so many questions, Mullen, aintchu scared?

JACK

Well I used to be, I guess. But now yer telling me I shouldn't be.

RACHEL

I never said that! I wantcha tuh be scared! There're all different kindsa ghosts, you know? Good ghosts and bad ghosts and sweet ghosts and evil ghosts and momma ghosts and poppa ghosts and baby ghosts and ugly ghosts and pretty ghosts and short ghosts and fat ghosts and tall ghosts—

JACK

All right, all right, I get the idea. Any blacksmith ghosts?

RACHEL

No. Never.

JACK

Aww, why not?

RACHEL

I'm just kiddin, ya boob.

JACK

Hey Rach! Let's go ghost hunting together? Will you take me?

RACHEL

No! No, no! Yer not 'sposed to be excited, Jack! Dammit, Yer 'sposed tuh be spooked!

JACK

But I'm not! What could a ghost do to me, really? I could probably stick my hand right through him, right?

(JACK sticks his hand between her arm and body and pulls her towards him.)

JACK, *Continued*

What's wrong, Rach? Huh? Can't we kiss again? It was awfully nice...

RACHEL

No dammit, I don't feel like it today.

JACK

All right fine. The let's talk instead. *(Sits; pats spot next to him; RACHEL sits.)* Well... Well I... I uh... dun know what tuh say.

RACHEL

It was your idea, pea-brain!

JACK

Well, hmmm, hey! Justine's sister Amy got married yesterday! Aint that happy news, Rach? Don't it just make ya wanna get hitched?

RACHEL

Like Hell.

JACK

Right, right. But, if you don't get married, what *are* ya gonna do?

RACHEL

I don't know. Open a gun shop.

JACK

But you was just talkin 'bout how you wanted tuh hunt ghosts fer a livin'?

RACHEL

I'm very indecisive. I could do both, you know? It'll take me a while to find my operative form of self-expression.

JACK

Opera-what?

RACHEL

Nevermind. You know, it's you causin all the trouble here Jack. Three years ago it wasn't like this. We'd just race through town and wrestle and climb trees, and then all of a sudden, you got all mushy. Now, I've been contemplatin whether or not tuh do this. But really you've left me no choice. (*Takes a deep breath*) I've decided that if ya keep all this up... I'm gonna have tuh kill ya.

JACK

... *What?*

RACHEL

I said I'm gonna have tuh kill ya.

JACK

But... but why? I aint done no criminal harm!

RACHEL

No. But I'm warnin ya now, if ya don't leave me alone, I'll have tuh do it. I know where you live. Two miles down that road to the left. You'll be all snug-n-tight in yer little bed and then... wham!!! Deader-n-a-doornail.

JACK

But ya wouldn't! Ya like me!

RACHEL

Not that much.

JACK

Oh Rach! Don't kill me! If you do, then you'll go to prison forever! Or they'll hang ya! And then you really won't be able to open yer gun shop, or hunt ghosts, or do whatever crazy thing it is you wanna do!

RACHEL

Only if they catch me. But they aint gonna. Cuz I aint gonna do it.

JACK

Heh, I knew you was jokin!

RACHEL

No goddamn it! I mean it's gonna happen, it just won't be me doin it!

JACK

Well what if they catch *him*? And he tells the police that *you* told him to do it?

RACHEL

Well what if the person who does it is uncatchable?

JACK

Aint no such thing.

RACHEL

Yes such thing!

JACK

Rachel, yer lyin. Yer makin up stories! Yer good at all that storytellin. It's just a trick tuh get me tuh leave ya alone, and I aint fallin for it!

RACHEL

All right then. Don't believe me! Keep coming 'round. Suit yerself! But I warned ya... Dontchu dare say I didn't warn ya!

(RACHEL exits. LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

ACT 2: SCENE 4

(AT RISE: GRETTA and CHRISTINE alone inside the kitchen.)

GRETTA

He's been upstairs too long...

CHRISTINE

They're done now. He'll be coming back soon.

GRETTA

Maybe I should hide?

CHRISTINE

Where ya gonna go? *(Pause)* It won't be as bad as ya think...

GRETTA

I don't know. I can think up somthin pretty bad. You know, I never thought this day would come? It's almost like dying, Christine. You know it's gonna happen, sure, but there's that little child inside, the innocent disbelieving one who laughs and says "No, that won't never happen! There just aint no such thing!"

CHRISTINE

Footsteps on the stairs, Gretta. I'll be watchin!

(Exit CHRISTINE and enter RAMSEY. RAMSEY and GRETTA stare at each other for a moment.)

RAMSEY

Where's the medicine?

GRETTA

Ramsey, I took it today, I swear!

RAMSEY

Tell me where it is!

GRETTA

Ramsey, please don't—

RAMSEY

Where you hiding it?

(GRETTA grabs it from her pocket and thrusts it at him. He takes a swig of it and chokes, but forces himself to swallow. A moment later he throws it up in the floor. RAMSEY composes himself and looks up at GRETTA.)

RAMSEY, *Continued*

Why'd I gotta be this way? I work til my fingers bleed, and still I aint got no sense! Why couldn't you have been imaginin things? Why'd it have tuh be real?

GRETTA

I told you it was true from the beginnin.

RAMSEY

It's my brother you been talkin to.

GRETTA

No, course not! You must not think much a me, Ramsey. After what he did? No. I don't talk tuh David. Only Christine.

RAMSEY

Christine? Who the fuck is this Christine? Is that the other one's name? Weird shit, Gretta, ghosts with names.

GRETTA

People have names, why shouldn't ghosts?

RAMSEY

Because! They're ghosts! They should be dead'n gone!

GRETTA

Well they aint gone. So what could I do 'bout it, huh? Ghosts got a way of not givin ya a choice! All of a sudden they're there, and they don't go away til you listen.

RAMSEY

Sure don't.

GRETTA

What'd he want?

RAMSEY

Fer me tuh stop being such a coward. And for you to tell yer boy the truth.

GRETTA

But we 'greed we never would!

RAMSEY

Well we gotta. That's what he says. What do ya think I was doin up there, takin a nap?

GRETTA

But he'll hate us.

RAMSEY

As if he don't already!

GRETTA

You speak for yourself! My son loves me like no other but the good Lord above! It's you he don't like, and that's no one's fault but yer own!

RAMSEY

We all done terrible things we aint proud of, that's for sure. Things that people rot in hell for. See, I aint treated that boy right. And David roughed you up real good while I wasn't lookin. And you? *(Pause)* Phenobarbatol he said you used. Musta been a lot.

GRETTA

I used the whole bottle. He was a big man. You aint mad at me?

RAMSEY

I guess I aint. I'd know by now if I was gonna get mad, wouldn't I? Must be because I love you. It aint no perfect kinda love, but don't you doubt it. *(Pause)* Shops still open downstairs. I've conceded on a lot today, but I aint quite ready fer ghosts waitin on my customers too.

(RAMSEY exits. CHRISTINE sneaks over to GRETTA.)

CHRISTINE

Well... of all the possible ways that could have gone...

GRETTA

You know, Christine, every day I wake up and think "My God, Gretta Cleves, you killed a man." Some days I still dun believe it...

CHRISTINE

Awww, you weren't so bad! You did it quick! See, me. I picked arsenic. No sleeping pills fer me, so sir, after what I went through, that man deserved his three hours of agony—

GRETTA

Christine, I know the story by heart. I could tell it to myself if I wanted.

CHRISTINE

By heart huh? I guess you won't be needin my company no more.

GRETTA

Well, I didn't say that. Go on and tell it, if it makes ya feel better.

CHRISTINE

Nah, but it's true, you don't really need me.

GRETTA

Dontchu tell me what I need and don't! I do so need you! Yer my only friend.

CHRISTINE

Oh that's horseradish! I've stayed past my welcome.

GRETTA

Ya sound like yer goin somewhere...

CHRISTINE

Believe me, I don't want to...

GRETTA

Christine, what are you talkin about? You can't leave. You can't just up and leave me!

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry, Gretta! It won't be so bad, I promise, you got yer whole family here.

GRETTA

My family? RJ will be gone in a few days! He'll probably be assigned to some parish a million miles away! Rachel and I don't have any more in common than a spider and a kangaroo! And Ramsey aint my friend, he's my husband. Yer all I got, Tine.

CHRISTINE

I don't belong here no more.

GRETTA

That's a lie! This has been yer home far longer than it's been mine!

CHRISTINE

And I'll sure miss it awful, but see, we got two worlds in this house, and they aint supposed tuh clash as much as they have. Sumthin somewhere got all jumbled up, and now nuthin's like it's supposed tuh be!

(As CHRISTINE is speaking, RACHEL enters and runs up to GRETTA. She does not see CHRISTINE.)

RACHEL

Momma! I need yer help!

CHRISTINE

I guess I'll go pack...

GRETTA

(TO RACHEL) Ya don't say?

CHRISTINE

I just got so much tuh take with me...

(CHRISTINE exits off for the first time.)

RACHEL

Momma, I aint marryin Jack Mullen and that's that! Now it's getting down tuh the damn wire here, and I got other plans!

GRETТА

Oh yeah? What other plans you got?

RACHEL

I Uhh... I—I got em!

GRETТА

Uh-huh. Just what I thought! You listen here, child; all young girls get married. You can't be running around all yer life with books and boys clothes!

RACHEL

Why the hell not?

GRETТА

Because it aint ladylike.

RACHEL

"It aint ladylike" Everyone keeps sayin that! "It aint ladylike!" Well, I aint no lady! I aint no god damn lady!

GRETТА

Well then it works out fine, because Jack Mullen aint the most gentlemanly person I ever met.

RACHEL

You better stop talkin 'bout him like that, unless you want him tuh hear ya, cuz he's comin up the drive right now!

GRETТА

Now why in God's name would he be comin up here?

RACHEL

Because I'm gonna get yer ghosts tuh help me.

GRETТА

My ghosts? Oh Jesus, not you too, Rachel. Fer what?

RACHEL

Momma, listen, I better use what I got right? And we got ghosts in this house, no doubt! So I'm gonna use em. I think they can help me get Jack to go away.

GRETTA

Have you lost your mind? How?

RACHEL

They can scare him! See I told him I was gonna kill him, right? But I aint *really* gonna kill him, I like him too much for that! I'm just gonna have the ghosts spook him, til he thinks they might *try* tuh kill him. Til he's so damn frightened, he won't ever come back! (*Calls out to the GHOSTS*) Did ya hear that, ghosts? Jack Mullen's comin up, and yer gonna help me spook him outta his tree!

GRETTA

Rachel, it don't work like that. What are they gonna do, come outta the closet and scream boo?

RACHEL

Well then, how does it work, Momma? You know more 'bout it than I do! So just... do whatever it is that you do!

GRETTA

And why should I? Jack Mullen don't deserve to have his wits scared outta him. What he ever do tuh deserve that?

(RJ enters from the kitchen.)

R.J.

Did you know that Jack Mullen is standing out there on the porch?

RACHEL

RJ then! RJ'll do it!

R.J.

What? What'll I do?

RACHEL

Help me spook Jack Mullen.

R.J.

What'ya mean spook him? He could probly kill me!

RACHEL

I mean with them ghosts! Not with yerself, you over educated peon!

R.J.

Please, Rachel, I'm tryin to rid this house of spirits, not encourage em!

RACHEL

Oh you and yer exorcisms! You aint no priest yet, RJ Cleves. You can do this fer me!

R.J.

I can't go asken em for favors, Rachel. I've been trying to exercise them ghosts outta here fer years. It'd be a little strange for me to say "Hey... ugh... before I send ya off into the great hereafter— could ya maybe do sumthin fer my sister?"

RACHEL

Really? It is so damn hard to do this one thing fer me? Aint that what you priests are s'posed tuh do? Help people? I'm trying to take control a my life here!

R.J.

Your putting on an act is what yer doin! You've been playing this game so long, you don't even know what's real and what's part of the show no more!

RACHEL

You shut your mouth RJ, no one asked you what you thought!

R.J.

Maybe not, but you sure need tuh hear it. I know yer angry 'bout Papa. That's when all of this started. The books first, then the guns and the clothes, and finally the short hair!

RACHEL

RJ, I swear, you're asking for it!

R.J.

You wanted tuh show him you could be a boy just as good as anybody.

RACHEL

Shut yer damn mouth or ill shut it for you!

(RACHEL attacks RJ and tries to hit him but RJ restrains her. They struggle.)

RACHEL, *Continued*

I'll knock ya from here tuh Sabbath next if ya keep it up!

(As RJ finally pins RACHEL, JACK knocks on the door. RJ releases RACHEL.)

JACK

(From outside the door) Rachel? ... Ugh... this is kinda weird, Rach, waitin out here on the porch so long. You in there?

RACHEL

Shit, Momma! He's out there! Ya aint just gonna leave me hangin like this, are ya?

(RJ crosses to the door and lets JACK in while RACHEL tries to summon the GHOSTS herself.)

RACHEL, *Continued*

Common, now! Come out here right now! I know yer here hidin in here somewhere! I aint stupid! Goddamn it, come out Ghosts, come out here! I aint fuckin around!

GRETTA

Rachel Cleves, watch your mouth!

JACK

(To RJ) I knew she was into ghost huntin... but I didn't think it was gonna be nuthin like this. Afternoon by the way, Mrs. Cleves.

R.J.

You aint got this real planned out, do ya, Rach?

JACK

Whatcha doin, Rach? I thought we was goin fer a walk?

RACHEL

Oh quiet, Jacky! Nobody asked ya! And dontchu make fun a me, RJ, at least I'm trying tuh solve my problems, 'stead a just running away from em like you!

GRETTA

Rachel, this is the most ridiculous, spoiled, childish display I have seen in my entire life!

RACHEL

Well if anybody in this family'd just listen tuh me fer once! Momma, how dare you treat me like you've done! Yer all nuthin but liars! Each and every one a ya!

JACK

Damnit Rachel Cleves, you stop this crazy fit, *right now!* *(RACHEL falls silent, looks at JACK.)* It aint right, especially in fronta yer momma. Now I know yer all hell bent on doin everything yerself and getting me tuh go away... so I'm here tuh tell ya— fine. You win. The engagement's off. Now I wantcha tuh know that I love ya, and I tried, really I did. But I aint all that stupid, and I know you dun want me 'round. I just thought maybe after some time ya mighta warmed up tuh me. See, I think I'm a pretty funny guy. Nice'n all. I woulda been real good to ya, Rach, and it woulda been nice tuh have someone 'round like you who could help me smithin, at least with the business part of it cuz you know I can't do no math or nuthin like that. But more as a friend, cuz I like just sitting and talkin to ya most. *(To GRETTA)* I feel real bad goin back on our engagement, Mrs. Cleves. I know it aint a real manly thing tuh do, but see, Rachel aint happy. And that's the most important thing. I'm real sorry, but I guess Rachel just aint the marryin type. So I'll be leavin ya now. Don't bother showin me out.

(Exit JACK.)

GRETTA

I should slap you. You just did the stupidest thing you've ever done in your whole life. How many times I gotta tell ya that all young girls get married, and that yer Poppa don't like you tryin tuh be a boy? We liked ya the way you were!

RACHEL

Ya did, huh? You sure about that? You aint paid any real attention to me in years! I just thought if I was a boy, you might love me like you love RJ. It aint never been about Poppa, really. But I guess I was wrong; I guess it don't matter what I do, I'll never mean as much to ya as he does.

GRETTA

Is that what you think? Is it? Because if it was you who'd left us, I'd act the same way when you came home. You aint the cuddliest kid in the world, Rach. We didn't think you wanted us too close.

RACHEL

Well no, I don't wantcha *too* close er nuthin—don't get the wrong idea there...

GRETTA

Rachel... you sure you want him gone? *(Points to door where JACK exited)* Now, I aint sayin ya gotta marry him... but he sure aint hard tuh look at...

(RACHEL is silent for a moment then looks from her mother to the door. After a few moments, she opens the door and follows after JACK.)

RACHEL

(Exiting)... Hey, Jacky! Jacky, you wait up!

GRETTA

...Good Lord RJ, Why do I feel so strange? When am I ever gonna get any rest?

R.J.

Why dontcha go on and lie down now?

GRETTA

Nah, Not yet. I only got a few more hours with ya. I can't believe yer goin back tomorrow already. Time flies.

R.J.

Don't think that way. Even if you can't come see me take orders, it's only six months.

GRETTA

You gonna miss me?

R.J.

Course I will. Aint nowhere else I'd rather be. But you know I gotta go. *(Pause)* What time is it?

GRETTA

Almost 2, why?

R.J.

Hey, Momma, do you love me?

GRETTA

Well that's a silly question. Course I do.

R.J.

Good. I love you too.

GRETTA

Why you actin so strange, baby?

R.J.

I aint acting strange.

GRETTA

That's a lie if I ever heard one. Are you anxious 'bout goin back? You aint sure 'bout this no more?

R.J.

What'dya mean? Arentcha proud of me? Aint this what you wanted?

GRETTA

Sure I'm proud. But you know your poppa don't much like the idea of you bein a priest. He always wanted you to get married, have children of yer own...

R.J.

You want me tuh marry some strange woman? Some woman I dun't know? How could you say sumthin like that?

GRETTA

What do you mean, "sumthin like that?" I didn't say nothin strange. You don't marry no stranger, RJ, you meet a girl and you get to know her, and then ya marry her. Only takes a year or so. That's what men do. And yer 26 now. Yer a man.

R.J.

I'm a priest! Not a man. Least I used to think so...

GRETTA

She misses you when yer gone.

R.J.

I know. It's like she aint a ghost to me no more.

GRETTA

She aint been a ghost to me for years now. She scare you when you were little?

R.J.

Nah. Maybe the first time. But I've loved her since I can remember.

GRETTA

So have I.

R.J.

Then why lie? If you really loved her? Even when poppa couldn't hear us, why swear up and down that there were no ghosts in this house?

GRETTA

I had to lie. I had a good reason.

R.J.

What could be reason enough tuh lie? (*Pauses; notices the time*) Whatever it is it's gonna have to wait. It's time to go.

(RJ pulls GRETTA up out of her chair.)

GRETTA

Go where? You aint leavin til tomorrow.

R.J.

No. Me and you, we're leaving tonight.

GRETTA

And where do you think we're goin'?

(GRETTA tries to free herself from his grasp.)

R.J.

Back to the seminary. I'll get my own assignment to a parish soon and you can stay with the sisters.

GRETTA

Boy, you gotta be outta yer mind! I can't leave yer father and sister!

R.J.

Why not? Rachel's getting married soon and Poppa... well I'd do anythin to gettcha away from him. You think I don't know what goes on in this house? (*Gestures to her face*) Well I do, and I aint havin it no more! And this place, momma... yeah sure I miss Christine, but how's that gonna end? No more of this house. No more of these ghosts.

GRETTA

But RJ I'm happy here. I love your father. You keep forgettin that part.

R.J.

Well it's too late, dammit. I already invited some brothers from the seminary, and it's almost 2 o'clock.

GRETTA

Ooh good God RJ Cleves. When they get here, your poppa is gonna absolutely lose his—

(*RAMSEY bursts through the door with RACHEL'S rifle.*)

RAMSEY

What the hell is going on in this house? I got two faggot fathers at my door pushin their way into my kitchen! Who the hell do they think they are?

(*RAMSEY cocks the gun and points it out the window.*)

RAMSEY, *Continued*

Get the Fuck off my property!

R.J.

...I think they're here now, momma.

RAMSEY

(*Turning to RJ*) You knew 'bout this, boy?

R.J.

Damn right, I did.

RAMSEY

You better start explainin if you value your life.

R.J.

Momma's comin with me now. How's that for explainin?

GRETTA

I didn't know nothing about it Ramsey, and I don't wanna know! If you two are gonna tear each other apart, I don't wanna be here tuh see it! I won't watch it no more! You do what it is you gotta, and find me when yer through.

(GRETTA exits.)

RAMSEY

Now you listen here—they priests can't just come up here and take my wife outta my house fer no good reason!

R.J.

Yes they can. They can once they see the marks, they can.

RAMSEY

I promised I wouldn't do it no more.

R.J.

To who? It sure wasn't to me!

RAMSEY

It don't matter to who, it only matters that I did. I aint the kindest man in the world, but I keep my promises, boy, even you know that. I swear tuh Jesus Christ, and I wouldn't say that to you unless I meant it. I aint standing here proud of all the times I marked up yer momma's face, and I aint gonna place blame or plead innocent, but I will ask fer yer mercy. So don't take a man's whole life away from him just yet.

R.J.

After everything you've done, you want my mercy?

RAMSEY

Well, you been trainin fer nine years on how tuh give it, haventcha? I aint got no excuses. I aint got no pretty ways of coverin up the mess I made. In the end, it was all just cuz I wanted so bad fer ya tuh be my own.

R.J.

Whatya mean, yer own? Yer own what? You wanted me tuh live my life by yer word, that's whatcha mean, and I wouldn't do it!

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes