

**PLEASE BE AWARE THAT
THIS PLAY IS FULLY PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT**

All plays, books, music and other materials published by Heartland Plays, Inc. are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries which the United States has reciprocal relations including, but not limited to all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, The Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention. All rights to the plays and materials on our website are strictly reserved including, and without limitation, professional and amateur performance rights; motion pictures; public reading; radio and television broadcasting; audio and video recording and reproduction of any type known or yet to be invented; information storage and retrieval systems of any type known or yet to be invented; and the rights of translation into any and all languages. No individual or organization whether amateur or stock may perform this or any play published by Heartland Plays, Inc. without first obtaining advance permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. and paying the appropriate fees including Royalties and Single-Use Copyright fees. Heartland Plays, Inc. collects royalties on behalf of the Playwrights whose plays it publishes. Unauthorized copying, transcribing or reproduction of this or any play or excerpt, or storage or transmittal in any form and by any means whether known or yet to be invented, is strictly forbidden except as provided by Agreement with Heartland Plays, Inc. Any unauthorized use is a violation of copyright laws and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

FIVE SIMPLE RULES TO REMEMBER

1. DO take advantage of the free online perusal of our plays to help you make the best choice for your particular needs or production.
2. DO enjoy the convenience of our online purchase application for performance rights and single-use copyright.
3. DO understand that this play and all plays and materials on our website are controlled by Heartland Plays, Inc. and fully protected by copyright.
4. DO NOT attempt in any way to copy, transcribe or reproduce this play by any means or perform this play or use any play or material from our website without first receiving permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. Any attempt to use this or any other work without first obtaining permission is a violation of copyright and punishable by law.
5. DO NOT rob this Author or any of the Authors we represent of their right to be paid for the use of their property. **It is a crime and it is wrong!**

Product Code A0546-FC

Road Souls

A dark comedy by

Gary Britson

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

REPRODUCTION WITHOUT SPECIFIC WRITTEN PERMISSION PROHIBITED

**Performance Rights Available Exclusively through
Heartland Plays, Inc. at heartlandplays.com
playsnow@heartlandplays.com
customer service: 406-431-7680**

Copyright © 2016 by Gary Britson

Road Souls

by Gary Britson

CHARACTERS

ELDER: *Late middle-aged, a bit overweight and not particularly attractive.*

KRIKOR MIGRAINIAN: *A myopic, hirsute man in his late twenties*

NORMAN: *In his thirties; a well-dressed man, but for some reason he still looks like he just got out of bed.*

IRVING PNDARVIS (PEN): *Age 30-40. He talks a lot, but never pays any attention to anyone and is usually in a lather about something or other.*

FRANZ FOLTER: *45, once neatly dressed and businesslike, he now has the aura of a man enduring hard times. His cuffs are frayed, the shoes not shiny. He hopes someone will give him a drink.*

ELIZA: *Wide and mean. She is 40-50, well-dressed, a businesswoman. She does not merely enter a room. She occupies it.*

SETTING

The living room in Elder's house; a house about to be sold by his soon-to-be ex-wife, Eliza

ROAD SOULS

by Gary Britson

ACT ONE

SETTING: *A living room, sparsely furnished. Cardboard boxes are scattered throughout.*

AT RISE: *ELDER is sitting at a card table in the middle of the room. He is late middle-ages, a bit overweight, and not particularly attractive. He has been reading a thick manuscript, much of which he has dropped onto the floor. Sitting next to him is KRIKOR MIGRAINIAN, a myopic, hirsute man in his late twenties. He is listening closely to ELDER.*

ELDER

What are “rippling breasts”?

MIGRAINIAN

I...don’t know.

ELDER

You wrote it. Right here on page three-thirty-five of your manuscript. “Renaldo was dazzled by her flaming auburn tresses, as the tender spring breeze caressed her rippling breasts in the wind-tossed moonlight.”

MIGRAINIAN

Breasts can ripple.

ELDER

You saw this happen?

MIGRAINIAN

What?

ELDER

You speak from experience?

MIGRAINIAN

I...well...

ELDER

Ever seen a female breast? (*No reply*) Take it from me. They don't ripple. They're very passive. They don't do anything.

MIGRAINIAN

They give milk.

ELDER

Not in romance novels, they don't.

MIGRAINIAN

It's poetic license.

ELDER

It's not poetic license. It's ignorance. There's a big difference. A key difference. And, by the way, moonlight doesn't get tossed.

MIGRAINIAN

I thought it did.

ELDER

Listen to me. Poetic license: good. Ignorance: bad. When writing a gothic romance, you must convince the reader that you've been there. That you've done it. It's called verisimilitude.

MIGRAINIAN

Been where?

ELDER

In a situation where you'd know if a woman's breast ripples. Which we know they don't, so you haven't been.

MIGRAINIAN

It's my first novel.

ELDER

Hey, don't get me wrong. There's some good stuff here. I especially like the title: *Wayward Bondage*. Very good.

MIGRAINIAN

I spent a lot of time on it.

ELDER

I'm sure you did, Krikor. And it shows. I only read the first three hundred and fifty pages, but I think I can safely say that if the other five hundred pages are half as good, you'll have a hit on your hands. Now all that remains is to find a knock-out cover illustrator, a great pen name, and a publisher, and you're in business.

MIGRAINIAN

Pen name?

ELDER

Sure. “Krikor Migrainian” would be a great name on an aspirin bottle, but it won’t sell no romance. For that, you gotta go and get yourself a nom de plume. Something like Priscilla Providence. Or Alice Atlantis. Something that sells. Felicia Fellatio. Something like that.

MIGRAINIAN

I’d kind of like to use my own name.

ELDER

Trust me, kid. When a woman pops for a romance novel, she wants romance as seen by her half of the species. If she wanted a man’s take on things, she’d read Popular Mechanics.

*NORMAN enters. He is in his thirties.
He is well dressed, but for some reason
he still looks like he just got out of bed.*

ELDER

Hey, Norman. How’d the interview go?

NORMAN

(As he feverishly removes his necktie and coat) I was witty and charming, just like you said.

ELDER

Good.

NORMAN

I was austere, yet engaging.

ELDER

‘Atta boy.

NORMAN

Reticent, yet profound.

ELDER

My man!

NORMAN

I didn’t get the job.

ELDER

Damn.

NORMAN

“You’re not quite what we’re looking for,” she said.

ELDER

“She”?

NORMAN

She.

ELDER

You were interviewed by a broad?

NORMAN

Her name was Shannon.

ELDER

I could have told you. Give a woman a name like Shannon, she thinks she owns the world.

NORMAN

She don’t own the world. Today, however, she did own my white ass.

ELDER

This is getting serious.

NORMAN

No, it *was* serious. The first five or six hundred unsuccessful job interviews were serious. Seven hundred and fourteen unsuccessful job interviews are the beginning of a new career.

ELDER

What are you going to fail at this time?

NORMAN

I am going to rob a bank. And I won’t fail.

ELDER

There’s no need to turn to crime. I could lend you some money.

NORMAN

You’re as broke as I am.

MIGRAINIAN

I’m going to get a big advance on my novel.

NORMAN

No one’s going to give you any money for that thing. “*Wayward Bondage*,” my dying ass.

ELDER

It's a great title.

NORMAN

It's a terrible title, and the book is even worse.

MIGRAINIAN

You read it?

NORMAN

It's a little hard to miss. You leave chapters of the damn thing all over the house. I trip over it. I found a chapter in the refrigerator the other night.

MIGRAINIAN

Creative people are always a little eccentric.

NORMAN

You're not creative. And you're not eccentric. You're just a nice, normal unemployed guy who can't write. You're a terrible novelist. You're like the rest of us. I can't cut it as a salesman, Elder here can't cut it as a lawyer, you couldn't cut it as a schoolteacher or a novelist. It's time we quit kidding ourselves.

ELDER

Who said I couldn't cut it as a lawyer?

NORMAN

Four or five law firms, the Attorney General, the state Supreme Court, and—what's that other place that fired you?

ELDER

Christian Citizen's Legal Aid. And they didn't really fire me.

NORMAN

Then why ain't you at work?

ELDER

They asked me not to come back.

NORMAN

There you go.

ELDER

But that's not the same as getting fired.

NORMAN

What's the difference?

ELDER

When they fire you, they say, “We don’t like you. Go away.” The Christians didn’t do that. They said, “You’re a great guy with many sterling qualities.” Then they threw in some horseshit about “skill set.” Then they said, “This isn’t a good fit.”

NORMAN

That should tell you something right there. You don’t “fit” with a bunch of left-wing do-gooders who are probably all communists and fairies. Am I right? Don’t that tell you something?

ELDER

I don’t think you can be a fairy and a Christian at the same time.

MIGRAINIAN

I disapprove of your language. It’s prejudiced.

NORMAN

I am prejudiced. I’m prejudiced against incompetence. I’m prejudiced against failure. I’m prejudiced against skinny little broads named Shannon. I’m prejudiced against poverty and homelessness.

ELDER

You ain’t homeless. Long as I got a home, you got a home.

MIGRAINIAN

That’s not the kind of prejudice I meant.

NORMAN

Nobody cares what you “meant.” Who the hell are you, Pope Krikor? You “disapprove.” Tell me something. Where has all your high-toned, holier-than-thou politically correct morality gotten you? Nothing, that’s what. You’re so pure. All you do is sit around and judge people. You think you’re better than the rest of us, and yet you’re just as broke as we are.

MIGRAINIAN

I must object, I—

NORMAN

Nobody gives a rat’s ass about your objections. You’re so full of delusions, so full of shit. You can’t even see what you really are: A loser. Just like the rest of us. At least I know what I’m talking about. When I call a guy a commie, it’s because he’s a commie. When I call a man a son-of-a-bitch, by God, you can bet your bottom dollar that’s what he is. You, you call yourself this grand high wizard of morality and truth. You wouldn’t know the truth if it took a big bite out of your shiny white Armenian ass.

ELDER

Go easy on the little guy.

MIGRAINIAN

What have you got against Armenians?

NORMAN

They're fuck-ups, losers and assholes.

ELDER

Thanks for clearing that up, Norm. You want something to eat?

NORMAN

I can't eat. I'm too upset.

ELDER

I got some nice ribs in the fridge. We'll have barbecue tonight.

NORMAN

Where you get all this food, Elder? We got steaks, chops, roast chicken, now it's ribs. You haven't worked in years, where you get the money?

ELDER

Who says I don't work? You don't know work. I still got clients. They pay me.

NORMAN

They pay you in ribs?

ELDER

Whatever I specify. I always get the choicest cuts. I got contacts.

NORMAN

I never see you work. All I see, you sit here at this Salvation Army card table and you try to get jobs for me and Danielle Steele here. And I appreciate it. But you weren't no lawyer and you ain't no employment counselor and I'm going to rob a bank. At least it'll give me back some self-respect.

ELDER

Norman, do you remember how you met me?

NORMAN

Yeah. The Heaven's Gate Employment Agency.

ELDER

And what did I do there?

NORMAN

The first thing you said was... *(Clears his throat, very formally)* "My job is to find you a job."

ELDER

And what happened?

NORMAN

You found me a job.

ELDER

Yes. And a lot of other people too.

NORMAN

And then I got fired after three days, so you got me another lead, and the next week I got one of those horrible T.Y.S.G.L. letters.

ELDER

At least they were nice enough to write.

MIGRAINIAN

What'd the letter say?

NORMAN

Thank-You-Sorry-Good-Luck. It doesn't even make any sense. First off, they're thanking you, but for what? You didn't do them any favors. You asked them for a job and they told you to get lost. What's to thank? Then they say they're sorry. If they were sorry, they'd write and say they'd give you the job after all. And what's this about good luck? If they'd wanted you to have good luck, they'd hire you. If I burned all the TYSGL letters I've had, I could heat this town for a month.

IRVING PENDARVIS enters. He is a nervous wreck. He is in the 30-40 age range. He is wearing a slightly out-of-date suit and tie. He talks a lot, but never pays any attention to anyone and is usually in a lather about something or other.

ELDER

Hi, Irving. What's happening?

PENDARVIS

Why do squirrels try to commit suicide?

ELDER

That's an interesting question.

PENDARVIS

It's not interesting. It's a curse. I'm driving down the street, minding my own business, and these squirrels jump out in front of my car. They're trying to commit suicide.

ELDER

Most people just run them over and forget about 'em.

PENDARVIS

I refuse to let anyone commit suicide on my dime, especially rodents. These little bastards will be eating acorns about ten feet from the curb. Soon as they see me comin', they start edging toward the street. (*Demonstrates as he describes*) Stop and go, stop and go, trying to fake me out.

ELDER

What did they do this time?

PENDARVIS

The dogs are even worse. There should be a law.

MIGRAINIAN

I don't like negative talk.

PENDARVIS

I don't like it either. It's not my fault the squirrels in this neighborhood are so fed up with their lives that they try to get themselves run over – at my expense, mind you – and it's not my fault people don't know how to take care of their dogs.

ELDER

Squirrels and dogs got the same right to live as anybody else.

PENDARVIS

Right, rights. Everybody's worried about rights. I also have a right to drive down the street without some dog trying to eat my car.

ELDER

This I never heard of.

PENDARVIS

You're living in a dream world. You never get out of the house. I worked and slaved to pay for that car. Ate nothing but popcorn and celery sticks for a year to save money. That's why I'm underweight.

ELDER

You don't look underweight to me. Fact is, I was thinking you could lose a few pounds.

PENDARVIS

Sure, now. I'm blowing up. It's the drugs.

ELDER

You're doing drugs now, Pen?

PENDARVIS

Damn straight.

ELDER

What kind of dope are you on?

PENDARVIS

I don't know. I can't keep 'em straight. All's I know is I go over to College Avenue, I roll down my window, I give some kid with a skin condition some money, he hands me some pills, I swallow them. For a few minutes I have the illusion of serenity.

ELDER

And then...?

PENDARVIS

And then I realize I just paid twenty bucks for some aspirin the kid painted blue. What the hell. At least I'm contributing to the local economy. I don't know if I'm coming or going.

ELDER

Here, you'll feel better after you read a few pages of Krikor's novel. It's going to make him rich.

PENDARVIS

Not that thing again. *Wayward Bondage*? I've seen computer manuals with more personality.

ELDER

There's some good stuff in here.

PENDARVIS

There's some good stuff in the Ring Cycle, too. That doesn't mean I'm going to sit there for seventeen hours looking for it.

ELDER

Take a look at chapter twenty-two here.

PENDARVIS

I looked already. (*Using an exaggerated theatrical tone*) "Give me a chance, Renaldo," Charlotte whispered, her eyes shimmering in the radiant moonlight. "I can dissolve these earthly debts which crush you with guilt, and free you from worldly sorrow." I couldn't tell if she wanted to lend him money or screw his brains out.

MIGRAINIAN

I'll admit it will need a good editor.

PENDARVIS

That thing doesn't need an editor. It needs an exterminator. I went to brush my teeth this morning, chapter thirty-two fell right out of the medicine cabinet and into the sink. Not being fully awake, I rescued it. I shoulda let it drown.

ELDER

Yeah, Krikor. I've been meaning to tell you. You gotta keep the whole novel in one spot. This is common sense.

PENDARVIS

And by the way, Krik, eyes don't shimmer. You got a real problem with verbs. Adjectives too, now that I think about it. And what's this about Renaldo and earthly debts and worldly sorrow? The guy's loaded, he's got more women than he knows what to do with, he owns half of England, and whenever he doesn't like someone he runs them through with a sword. I'd love to trade places with that guy.

MIGRAINIAN

He worked hard to get where he is.

PENDARVIS

This is great. We're talking about the employment history of a mythical stud. Pray tell, Krik. How did this guy – who doesn't, by the way, exist – work so hard to “get where he is”?

ELDER

What Pen here is asking, Krikor, is what's Rodrigo's back story.

MIGRAINIAN

Oh, back story, sure. Uh, he's, like, the lord of the manor. He, like, does stuff.

PENDARVIS

And this “stuff” that he “does.” What the hell is it?

MIGRAINIAN

Guys in legends don't necessarily “do” anything.

PENDARVIS

“Guys in legends”? This is a legend?

MIGRAINIAN

Sure. You know, it's mythical, it's...

PENDARVIS

The only mythical thing here is your future as a novelist. Forget it. Go back to the car wash. At least when you worked there, you came home smelling all soapy and clean. Long as you were washing cars, the place smelled great.

MIGRAINIAN

I'm not going back there.

ELDER

Pen has a point here, Krikor. You were washing cars by day and writing by night. Hemingway did that.

PENDARVIS

Hemingway never washed a car in his life.

ELDER

I mean, lots of writers got their start with day jobs and then wrote at night. It worked pretty well for you for a couple of months. Why'd you quit?

MIGRAINIAN

They weren't very nice to me down there.

PENDARVIS

Of course they weren't very nice. They're losers who wash cars all day. What'd you expect it would be, a staff meeting at the Harvard Divinity School?

MIGRAINIAN

You want to know the truth...

ELDER

Sure we do.

PENDARVIS

Yeah, hit me with the truth, Krik. The truth is always good for a laugh.

MIGRAINIAN

Well...it was the Mexicans.

NORMAN

Krikor, do I detect the odor of racial discrimination?

MIGRAINIAN

No, it was nothing like that. I respect the Mexican people. Their country has a rich cultural tradition.

NORMAN

Did you tell your fellow car-washers that you respect their "rich cultural tradition"?

MIGRAINIAN

They threw sponges at me. Called me names.

NORMAN

What names?

MIGRAINIAN

I couldn't tell. They were in Mexican.

ELDER

I think you mean Spanish, Krikor.

NORMAN

How do you know they were insults? Maybe they were thanking you for respecting their rich cultural tradition.

MIGRAINIAN

No, they were insults.

ELDER'S phone rings.

ELDER

Elder. Hello, Franz. It hasn't been that long. I check in with you every week, just like we agreed. I'm not really an employment agency. No, I don't have a license. Who needs a license to help people find jobs? No, I'm not registered with the state. I'm not incorporated. I'm just trying to use my skills, and maybe a few contacts, to help my friends find work. Yes, I got canned from the employment agency. All they said was they were cutting back. They probably were just sick of looking at me. I'm doing this on a volunteer basis. Out of friendship. To the clients I had at the agency...I don't charge them anything. I guess they like dealing with me better than with the bureaucracy. I'll be expecting you. It'll be the house with manuscript pages all over the lawn...just kidding.

PENDARVIS

Who's that?

ELDER

Franz Folter. My probation officer.

NORMAN

Is he coming over?

ELDER

Said he was.

PENDARVIS

Why'd he call you?

ELDER

Said my name was on a bulletin board at the diner.

NORMAN

You're in great company there, Elder. You and the garage sales and the used lawnmowers for sale and the beat-up motorcycles. I've seen that bulletin board. It's a graveyard. Your name turns up there, it's the end.

ELDER

I didn't put it there. I'm thinking maybe it was you, Norm. Your idea of a joke.

NORMAN

Not me, fella. Not to you. That thing is the island of lost souls.

ELDER

Then who did? Not that I mind that much, it's no big deal. Still, if I wanted to advertise—

PENDARVIS

Maybe the little woman did it.

ELDER

No chance. Eliza doesn't think like that. She's more subtle. Malicious and crazy, but subtle.

NORMAN

She didn't sound so subtle in that divorce petition you showed me. Holy crap. She wants everything but your immortal soul.

ELDER

She was always acquisitive.

NORMAN

No. The Vikings were acquisitive. This woman is a dragon. No offense, Elder. I know you still love Eliza. I always liked her. Except for the times she's thrown me out of the house and called me an alcoholic scumbag.

ELDER

The lady likes to speak her mind.

PENDARVIS

You get along with this Franz?

ELDER

Yes. He is every bit as screwed up as you guys, but enough of this witty banter. We got to get to work. I'm gonna find jobs for you guys, and then I'm gonna retire.

NORMAN

You don't gotta find me a job. I already told you.

ELDER

Sure. You're robbing a bank. Tell me another one.

NORMAN

I'm serious.

ELDER

So were the Vikings. Where are they now? Believe me, Norm. Bank robbery isn't for you. (*Picks up some scraps of paper from his desk*) Now let's get serious about this thing. You've had plenty of sales experience.

NORMAN

I am serious. I'm going downtown to the First Metropolitan State, I'm going behind the counter, I'm gonna stuff this with cash (*Brandishes a gym bag that has seen better days*) and I'm coming back here, settle up with you for my rent and my tab and everything, and then I'm going to Milwaukee

ELDER

You know somebody out there?

NORMAN

You got a suitcase full of money, everybody knows you.

ELDER

Sure, Norm. Don't get irate. I'm just asking.

NORMAN

I got a cousin, manages a brewery there. He's giving me a job.

ELDER

I don't know, Norm. The cops'll find you in a brewery right away.

NORMAN

Not in that one, they won't. The "Rib-Ticklin' Beer" Company.

ELDER

Never heard of it.

NORMAN

That's because you never read the Journal of the American Medical Association. They practically devoted an entire issue to the place.

ELDER

They're going to protect you?

NORMAN

The sign on the building will protect me: "Rib-Ticklin' Beer." The point being, Elder my friend, is that beer is supposed to do several things to a man, but it ain't supposed to tickle no ribs. I'll be safe. Nobody goes in there that doesn't have to.

ELDER

Doesn't sound very profitable.

NORMAN

Are you kidding? They sell at least ten or fifteen cases a week.

ELDER

That ain't much.

NORMAN

No, that's just what they sell to me. Lots of other losers like it too.

ELDER

(Picks up some papers, shuffles through them) Wouldn't you like me to find you a nice, safe sales job? There are a couple of places I haven't checked.

NORMAN crosses to ELDER, takes the papers from him and tears them up.

NORMAN

That answer your question? *(Goes to the door)* One hour from now, I'll be a new man. I'm gonna give you your fair share, and then I'm off to the land of cold beer and eternal anonymity. I'll never see any of you losers again, you'll never see me, and we'll all live happily ever after! Later! *(Exits)*

ELDER

(Shakes his head, continues going through papers) After I got shit-canned at the employment office, I thought, since you guys had been clients of mine for a couple of years, I'd stick with you and help you find jobs. But that didn't include preparing you for lives of crime. When Norman calls asking me to post bond for him, just hang up. I got no time for crooks.

There is a long pause. ELDER looks at the notes on his desk. MIGRAINIAN is busy with his manuscript. PENDARVIS sits staring into space.

PENDARVIS

You ever wonder about mosquitos?

ELDER

(Looks up from his notes, gives him a long cold stare) No. You?

PENDARVIS

You figure, it's summer, right? You sit outside for five minutes, you come in covered with mosquito bites, right? Sometimes you can see the little bastards, but you don't see the ones at your ankles. They bite right through your socks. Those are the ones that drive me crazy in the middle of the night. You can't swat those, 'cause you never see them. There are billions of mosquitos out there. And they don't live long, right? But how many dead mosquitos do you see lying around? And yet they're dying all around us, all the time. But what happens to them? How long do they live? Where do their corpses go?

ELDER

(Very long pause; then) Milwaukee?

MIGRAINIAN

That's something I can use in my novel.

ELDER

All the people in your novel are other-worldly and beautiful. You can't have them getting bit by mosquitos. Destroys the romantic spirit.

MIGRAINIAN

I read that if you have your characters brushing their teeth and driving to work and swatting mosquitos, it makes it more real for the readers.

PENDARVIS

Not to put too fine a point on it, Krik, but your novel is set in some mysterious never-never land where all people do is worry about love and kill each other with swords. You put stuff like toothbrushes and mosquitos in there, poof, you lose your audience.

MIGRAINIAN

A serious artist paints a complete picture. All aspects of life, the pleasant and the mundane. John Steinbeck, for instance. He figured out all the details of his characters. They were victims of the Depression, and he studied their lives and portrayed them in minute detail. You have to mix the gritty and the ideal.

PENDARVIS

No offense, Krik. You're a nice enough guy. I've always admired your table manners. You have interesting hair. But you ain't no artist. John Steinbeck was a serious artist. You're just another jerk camping out here at Elder's until you find a place of your own. Or until Elder's old lady kicks us all out. Which, judging from that divorce petition she filed, could be any day now.

ELDER

We're negotiating, Pen. Nobody's going to be homeless.

PENDARVIS

That's what you think. Did you see who her lawyer is?

ELDER

His name is John A. Smith.

PENDARVIS

Yeah? That tell you something?

ELDER

Maybe his people came over on the Mayflower. Those pilgrims, they had a lot of Smiths.

PENDARVIS

He says his name is John A. Smith. It's obviously fake. Nobody, especially no lawyer, goes around calling himself John A. Smith unless he's got something serious to hide.

ELDER

What do you think this guy's hiding?

PENDARVIS

A rap sheet as long as my arm. A penchant for rapacity, mercilessness and boundless greed. I never met a John Smith I could trust.

ELDER

And why would that be, Pen?

MIGRAINIAN

Yeah. What are you saying?

PENDARVIS

Don't try backing me into a corner. I'm just saying that your lawyer wants you to think he's just an aw-shucks fella with cow shit on his boots. He eats up guys like you for breakfast and swallows the bones, whole.

ELDER

I'm not worried. What the hell can he do to me that life hasn't already done? Make me homely? My Creator already did that. Wreck my career? A dozen guys a hell of a lot tougher than John A. Smith already took care of that. Garnish my bank account? What bank account? Eliza and me have been married sixteen years and the only thing we ever accumulated was this house and a salad shooter. And even with that For Sale sign she keeps sticking in the front yard—

PENDARVIS

—and which you have Norman remove every day—

ELDER

Even with that sign, I don't see people lining up to tour the place.

PENDARVIS

If you could move that Studebaker out of the front yard, the place might seem more attractive to the serious buyer.

MIGRAINIAN

I kind of like that old crate. Gives the place some of that vers, whatever it is.

ELDER

Verisimilitude.

PENDARVIS

It might give the place verisimilitude, but it gives the prospective buyer the creeps. They want cars in the front yard, they'll move to Iowa.

ELDER

(Obviously anxious to change the subject) All this talk isn't getting you a job, Pen. Sit down. *(Picks up a file with PENDARVIS'S name on it)* Now, your resume isn't that bad. You've had a lot of jobs. True, you got fired from all of them, but we don't want to dwell on the negative. Employers aren't going to worry about the jobs you screwed up, just as long as they think you can do something for them. Now, I have here a list of openings for school teachers, grades seven through twelve. You taught most of those, didn't you?

PENDARVIS

Sure. And it isn't quite true I got fired every time.

ELDER

No? You voluntarily quit?

PENDARVIS

No, I voluntarily ran away. As fast as I could, to keep the kids from beating the living shit out of me.

ELDER

Well, we could look for an opening in a nicer part of town.

PENDARVIS

No more teaching jobs. Schools have gotten too tough.

ELDER

What kind of job do you want, Pen?

PENDARVIS

I listed them on the resume there, about halfway down the page.

ELDER

(Studies the resume) Oh yeah. Here we go. Professional goals... You know, Pen, I don't want to discourage you, but there aren't many openings for minstrels.

PENDARVIS

I can play the mandolin.

ELDER

Can you play *Born in the U.S.A.*?

PENDARVIS

Not really.

ELDER

Then nobody cares. (*Studies page*) What's this? You want to be a shepherd?

PENDARVIS

I like fresh air.

ELDER

From what I hear, a lot of those pastures aren't so fresh.

PENDARVIS

The point is: I want a job where I won't get beaten up, where I can be outdoors in the fresh air, and that has insurance.

ELDER

You could be a prison guard.

PENDARVIS

I'm not mean enough.

ELDER

They'll teach you. You stand on top of a tower with a rifle. Anybody pisses you off, you shoot 'em. Plus, they got a good union. You've shot people, haven't you?

PENDARVIS

Just that once.

ELDER

Hey, I was kidding.

PENDARVIS

I wasn't. (*Pause*) I'd like a job where nobody has a gun.

ELDER

Have you thought about moving to Finland?

PENDARVIS

I'd also like a job where they don't care if you got hair down to your knees.

ELDER

What is it? You don't have hair—

PENDARVIS

It's practically down to my knees.

ELDER

Your hair is short. Maybe a little trim here and there.

PENDARVIS
But I can't get in.

ELDER
Can't get in? Where?

PENDARVIS
Debbie.

ELDER
Can't get in Debbie?

PENDARVIS
No, no. Can't get in to see her.

ELDER
This is your girlfriend? (*PEN shakes his head*) Your barber?

PENDARVIS
Oh, no. Don't say that word.

ELDER
What word?

PENDARVIS
Barber. No: It's "hair stylist."

ELDER
What's the difference?

PENDARVIS
The difference is attitude.

ELDER
The difference is price.

PENDARVIS
No.

ELDER
You go into a place down the street. Guy named Don cuts your hair for seven-fifty. That's a barber. Hair stylist named Debbie, you go in there, no way you're getting out for less than forty dollars.

PENDARVIS
And worth every penny.

ELDER

I was exaggerating.

PENDARVIS

What.

ELDER

I didn't mean, seriously, that you would actually pay forty dollars for a haircut.

PENDARVIS

And I always leave a nice tip.

ELDER

Maybe, and this is just a suggestion, don't take it personal, maybe, if you spent a little less on tips for Debbie and a little more on your wardrobe, you might have more success at job interviews.

PENDARVIS

No, I don't want any more.

ELDER

Any more what?

PENDARVIS

Interviews. Life's humiliating enough, what with the suicidal squirrels and the dogs biting my car. I don't need some kid telling me I don't have a "skill set." You know me, Elder. I got a thick hide. You can call me names, I don't give a rat's ass. But don't tell me about skill sets. It's a, what do you call it, one of those things, an abstraction, it means saying something that means something else.

ELDER

Like, "financial adviser"?

PENDARVIS

No, no. You know—eurogasm.

ELDER

It's a eurogasm? Somebody thinks you don't fit the job description is a eurogasm?

PENDARVIS

Yeah, something like that.

ELDER

(Long pause) Sure you don't mean, "euphemism"?

PENDARVIS

That's it. And another thing. It's "Good Luck." I can't deal with it any more.

ELDER

You don't like 'good luck'.

PENDARVIS

In the highly unlikely event that I ever have any good luck, I'm sure I'll enjoy it. What I mean is, the next time somebody says to me, "Good Luck," I am not responsible for my actions.

ELDER

That's interesting.

PENDARVIS

"Good Luck" is the new "Fuck You." Ever notice that?

ELDER

No. But then, I don't get out much.

PENDARVIS

Last ten years or so, there's been a decline in "Fuck You," and a definite uptick in "Good Luck." It's because, say, a guy says, "Fuck You," it's okay to punch him in the mouth. But if the same guy says "Good Luck," everything changes. You can't hit him. Because when the cop says, "Why'd you punch him in the mouth?" you can't very well say, "Officer, he said 'Good Luck.'" It wouldn't work.

ELDER

For once, I'm speechless.

PENDARVIS

Every interview I've ever had, the girl says to me, "Good Luck." She's thinking, "Fuck You." But she's saying, "Good Luck." The whole society's like that now. Everyone's thinking "Fuck You" but they're saying, "Good Luck." It's sick. I long for the good old days when people used to look you right in the eye and say, "Fuck You." People were honest then.

There is a knock on the door.

PENDARVIS

(Loudly) Whoever it is, Good Luck!

Enter FRANZ FOLTER. He is 45. He was once neatly dressed and businesslike, but now he has the aura of a man enduring hard times. His cuffs are frayed, the shoes not shiny. He hopes someone will give him a drink.

ELDER

Hi, Franz.

FOLTER

We got to talk.

ELDER

I am your model client.

FOLTER

You're not registered! You're running a business and you didn't tell your probation officer. As said officer, I must remind you that you signed a probation agreement stating that you would inform your probation officer of any changes in employment.

ELDER

This isn't "employment," Franz. I'm helping my friends. That's all. By the way, Pen, this is Franz Folter, my probation officer.

PENDARVIS

Pleased to meet you, I'm sure.

FOLTER

I could have your probation revoked for that. *(Pause, then laughs)* Oh, relax. I'm not going to have you revoked. To do that, we'd all have to go to court. I wouldn't subject my worst enemy to that place. Come on, Elder, I was just having a little fun with you. I really called because I'd forgotten where you live. Got anything to drink? Look at me. *(Holds out his hand; it's shaking)* I want you to find me a job.

PENDARVIS fixes a drink.

ELDER

Franz, you been my probation officer three years. You got a job.

FOLTER

I want a new job. One where I don't gotta deal with guys like you. *(Accepts the drink from PEN)* Thank you.

ELDER

I thought we always got along okay, aside from the fact that your job is to revoke my probation and send me to prison.

FOLTER

I got a quota.

ELDER

I'm a perfect client.

FOLTER

They just built a new prison. I hear it's real nice.

ELDER

Is it going to be filled with pissed-off black kids who are there on trumped-up narcotics charges?

FOLTER

Wouldn't be prison without 'em, bless their hearts.

ELDER

You don't got grounds to revoke me.

FOLTER

I'll make a deal. Help me find a new job, one that doesn't make me crazy. I'll see you're a free man, rest of your life.

PENDARVIS

Pardon me, Elder. But if I'd known you're on probation, I'd have been treating you with more respect.

ELDER

Thanks.

FOLTER

(*To PEN*) He's in the law school textbooks, you know.

ELDER

He's not interested, Franz.

PENDARVIS

Sure I'm interested. I'm a teacher. Textbooks are my children.

ELDER

Yet another argument for mass sterilization.

FOLTER

A very famous case.

PENDARVIS

I'm all ears.

ELDER

Pen, why don't you go in the kitchen. Take the ribs out of the fridge. Put the sauce on them. Slather 'em up real good. And don't touch the broiler. I'll do that.

FOLTER

"The Egg-Shell Skull Case." Thirty years this business, I never saw such a thing.

PENDARVIS pulls up a chair next to FOLTER.

FOLTER

It seems Elder was a lawyer at the time.

ELDER

I still am a lawyer. My license is temporarily in abeyance, pending successful completion of my probation, which, by the way, is going fine. I haven't missed an appointment and my record in the interim has been spotless.

FOLTER

Elder belonged to a large, prestigious firm—

ELDER

Fuckin'-A right. Wilbury, Collins, Seeger and McGuire. Very solid outfit.

FOLTER

Ol' George Wilbury had started that firm about the time Washington was crossing the Delaware.

PENDARVIS

What'd he do that for?

FOLTER

How the hell should I know? Am I a historian? My point is, it was a long time ago.

PENDARVIS

I always done real good in history.

FOLTER

How'd you do in grammar?

PENDARVIS

Not so good.

ELDER

Can we skip the history lesson, Folter? If you want me to find you a job, I can try, but your bringing up this ancient history – which nobody, by the way, cares about any more – is dampening my enthusiasm.

PENDARVIS

I want to hear about it.

ELDER

Nobody cares what you want. Go to the kitchen and start slathering.

FOLTER

It all began with a stolen car. By the way, did the cops ever find your car?

ELDER

We've been over this before.

PENDARVIS

I haven't.

FOLTER

Elder, when your probation officer starts talking, it behooves you to listen.

ELDER

(Rising and leaving) I'll slather the ribs myself.

FOLTER

As I was saying: Elder had just recently got to town a few years ago. He had joined this prestigious law firm, and was expecting to do very well. He had paid his dues in private practice with a couple of rinky-dink firms where they make you do a lot of pro bono work and the secretaries are all Quakers named Mildred. Now he was ready to prosper. He left the office late one night after one of those sixteen-hour days they like to make new guys work. He was unfamiliar with the town and its legends.

PENDARVIS

This town? I didn't know it had legends.

FOLTER

It has—had—one. Therein lay the problem. Elder was tired, hungry, and perhaps a little concerned about what he'd gotten himself into. He was not feeling cheerful. The brotherhood of man did not, at that moment, hold him in its warm embrace. And then he couldn't find his car.

PENDARVIS

He doesn't have one now. Unless you count that Studebaker out front.

FOLTER

Doesn't count. There he stood – lost and forlorn in a city where he had yet to make friends – on the cold sidewalk, beside the very spot where that morning he had parked his new Camaro. At that moment, the spot was occupied by naught but the chilling wind of a hostile city.

PENDARVIS

You didn't, perchance, take some comp. lit. courses over at the Community College, did you?

FOLTER

(A bit addled) No. That is, not much. Not exactly. Sort of.

PENDARVIS

I knew it.

FOLTER

What did you know?

PENDARVIS

Scratch a Department of Corrections employee and find a failed literature student who flunked out because he couldn't hack William Butler Yeats.

FOLTER

I didn't flunk out. I quit. Life's too short.

PENDARVIS

Don't worry. Lotsa guys can't cut those quasi-mystical Irish bastards. What they don't tell you in school is that you can't understand Yeats unless you've been drinking cheap whiskey for two or three days. And of course they don't let drunks into the college classrooms, so even if you do have a revelation, with whom can you share it? And by the time you've sobered up, you've lost the aesthetic thread.

FOLTER

I had a little trouble with Wallace Stevens.

PENDARVIS

Who doesn't? Trying to understand the ravings of a man in the insurance business would drive anyone crazy. How'd you do with William Blake?

FOLTER

Total whack-job.

PENDARVIS

(Dreamily) "A dog starved at his master's gate/Predicts the ruin of the State." You gotta love a guy like that.

FOLTER

The brains of a cheese ball.

PENDARVIS

You were saying. About poor Elder and his stolen car.

FOLTER

Yes, thank you. There he was. Abandoned. Carless. Far from his modest abode, in a neighborhood where it's not safe to take long walks after dark.

PENDARVIS

I know the feeling. It's late, you're alone, and suddenly, out of nowhere an Armenian comes at you with a ten-pound novel.

FOLTER

He weighed his options. Of which there were few. And then it happened. And it wasn't an Armenian, and it wasn't a book.

PENDARVIS

Actually, this isn't a book, either. More like a maze in a nightmare. It goes round, and round, and it never ends, and—

FOLTER

It was Minnesota Ed.

PENDARVIS

Do I know him?

FOLTER

Who didn't know him? While he lived, almost everyone in town was panhandled by him sooner or later. Little, wizened guy. The kind, he could have been forty or he could have been a hundred. He was all wrinkled up. And he always had his hand out, like this. (*Demonstrates*) And he never said anything. Maybe groaned a little. He could have been a mute, no one knew. The point was, he was said to be from Minnesota. He could have been from anywhere. Every couple of years at Christmas the newspapers would do a story on him. For years and years, to everyone he was Minnesota Ed. And he had this wallet—

PENDARVIS

Wouldn't have been much of a panhandler without one. Probably went home to his house in the suburbs every night, counted his money, kissed the wife good night and dreamed a dreamless sleep. With a six-figure nest egg.

FOLTER

No, no, I saw this wallet. It was just a worn-out piece of fake leather folded in half. And there was nothing in it but pictures.

PENDARVIS

It's perfect. Wallet full of pics of the wife and kids. Guy probably drove a Maserati.

ELDER

No. Dogs.

PENDARVIS

What kind of dogs?

FOLTER

Four-legged dogs. Canines. Woof, woof. Must have had a couple dozen pictures of dogs. There was a big Dalmatian, couple of Chihuahua, a real nice Golden. They were great. He looked like shit but the dogs were beautiful.

PENDARVIS

You saw them?

FOLTER

Everyone ever went downtown saw them. You'd be walking down the street, and up would pop Minnesota Ed, out of nowhere. One hand sticking out for spare change, the other wavin' these pictures in your face. If you were in a good mood, you gave him a quarter and spent half a minute telling Ed how nice his pooches were. I did that lots of times. If you weren't in a good mood, you called him a bum and kept walking. I usually stopped. The thing about it—lots of people at work, they're always going to be waving pictures of their offspring, their grandkids, snotty little bastards, in your face. And you know what I think? Of course, I don't say this to them, but I'm thinking, in thirty years, maybe less, these smelly little incubators of every communicable disease in the book will be sitting behind a desk, firing people like me. I been fired from lots of jobs, and for better or worse, it's how I look at people now. Guy introduces me to his young daughter or son with their fresh college degrees, and I know what they're thinking: They're thinking, I can't wait to get behind my desk and start firing the shit out of this guy.

PENDARVIS

I think you're taking this kind of personal.

FOLTER

Listen, kid: There's nothing more personal than taking a man's job from him. Nothing is that low, nothing is worse.

PENDARVIS

There's always another job.

FOLTER

You looked for one lately?

PENDARVIS

Well...yeah...

FOLTER

(Rises and looks out the window) Imagine that. I'm looking up the street and I'm looking down the street, and I don't see anyone lining up to offer you an executive position.

*PENDARVIS rises to protest, but
FOLTER holds up his hand like a traffic
cop and PENDARVIS resumes his seat.*

FOLTER, *Continues*

Wait. I'm talking about Minnesota Ed. He was ugly, he was distasteful, and he needed a bath and a shave. But these dogs. In a sea of smelly urchins whose final purpose in life will be giving older guys like me hell, Minnesota Ed and his dogs were a desert island of, if not beauty, at least a little heart. I had to love him for that. As much as you can love a guy who's always hitting you up for money.

PENDARVIS

I thought we were talking about Elder?

FOLTER

Elder and Minnesota Ed met that night, for the first and, alas, last time. There was Elder, tired after a long day, finds his car is stolen, he's in a strange town, he looks around for some beam of hope, something to tide him over until his fatigue and anger subside and he can summon the strength to hail a cab, which are very few in this town, and what is he confronted with? Who is the ambassador of welcome, who is his reception committee, his Welcome Wagon? Minnesota Ed. Poor, broke, sorry, brainless, toothless old Minnesota Ed and his dog pictures. He breathed his mustard gas breath into Elder's face. And Elder, never a violent man, took one whiff of old Ed and did what his reflexes told him to do. He raised his hand, like this (*Raises his hand so that his fingers resemble a claw*) took Minnesota Ed's face in his grip, and gave him a good hard push.

PENDARVIS

Probably wasn't the first time that happened to Minnesota Ed.

FOLTER

It was. Many men had doubtless wanted to shove the old con-artist, but nobody had bothered, probably because Elder was the only son-of-a-bitch who'd ever allowed him to get that close. Ed did most of his pan-handling during the day, and people just walked by him. You see a con-artist coming, you got to accelerate. Elder didn't do that. He had nowhere to accelerate to. It was dark. He was temporarily lost, a little angry at the loss of his car, and not in the mood for mustard gas and the leering of an old man who hadn't bathed in a year or two. He grabbed Ed's face and put him on the pavement. And Ed's head cracked like an egg-shell. Which, in fact, it was. It's in the criminal law casebooks. Look in the index under "Egg Shell Skull." You could look it up. Ed's skull was the thickness of an egg shell. And when his head hit the sidewalk he died on the spot. Of course, when Elder stood trial for murder, he told the truth. He just gave the guy a little shove. No one believed there was intent to kill. People shove each other all the time and nobody dies. But this one died. And the jury didn't convict Elder of murder. They gave him what's called a "lesser included offense." They found Elder guilty of manslaughter. The judge gave him ten years and suspended the sentence. Elder lost his license to practice law for a couple of years. He never tried to get it back. I was appointed to be his probation officer and Elder has been a model client. Never misses a meeting, never had so much as a traffic ticket since. (*Shakes his head and allows himself a rueful laugh*) He appealed of course. And lost. You know what the Court said? They said, and I think this is an exact quote, "You must take your victim as you find him." Which was the Court's way of saying that before you slug a guy, you better ask him how thick his skull is. Next case!

PENDARVIS

He ever get his car back?

FOLTER

I just told you a long and tragic story about how a man's life was ruined, and that's the only question you have?

PENDARVIS

This is the kind of thing I worry about. I'm a practical guy.

FOLTER

You're a real man of the world, aren't you?

PENDARVIS

Damn straight.

FOLTER

But which world? None that I ever visited. Anyway, the jury was out about twenty minutes, just enough time for them to stretch their legs and have some coffee. Guilty. Then, a few weeks later, everyone comes back for the sentencing. You should have seen it. The Courtroom was packed with the Friends of Minnesota Ed Committee. You never saw such a committee. Guys who looked like Minnesota Ed. And ladies in fur coats. A couple of professors in their tweedy jackets. A real cross-section of society's do-gooders, the unemployed, the never-was-employed, aging hippies. The prosecution put a bunch of them on the stand to talk about what a saint Ed was. They made him sound like some cross between Saint Francis and Johnny Appleseed. With a little Abe Lincoln thrown in. The place smelled like a locker room, a saloon, with a little expensive perfume on the side. They wept. They mourned the death of this wonderful guy. And the judge bought it all. Gave Elder ten years, suspended the sentence, put him on probation. You should have heard the outrage when the judge said "probation." They wanted Elder strung up in the Courthouse Square on the fourth of July. I was appointed his probation officer. An easy job, since Elder is a nice guy. I'm used to dope addicts, derelicts, pimps, whores, investment counselors.

*There is a loud knock at the door.
PENDARVIS yells "Enter!" ELIZA
enters. She is wide and mean. She is 40-
50, well-dressed, a businesswoman. She
does not merely enter a room. She
occupies it. She eyes the two men
carefully, up and down. She folds her
arms and shakes her head.*

PENDARVIS

You here to see Elder about a job?

ELIZA

I got a job. If I didn't, he'd be the last guy I'd want to see.

FOLTER

How do you do? Very pleased to make your acquaintance. I am—

ELIZA

I know who you are. Scummy little state employee who keeps trying to put my husband in prison.

FOLTER

That's not really fair.

ELIZA

Listen, jerk-off, if anybody's gonna put that clown in prison, it'll be me. You got that?

FOLTER

I stand corrected.

ELIZA

Where is he? Why aren't these boxes out of here? I got people coming to look at the house. Who took the sign down?

PENDARVIS

Elder's in the kitchen slathering ribs, the boxes are here because we're too lazy to move them and got no place to move them to, and sometimes Elder takes the sign down, sometimes I do it. Nice seeing you, Liz.

ELIZA

Nobody calls me Liz, scum-bucket.

PENDARVIS

Liz Scumbucket. Sounds like a great name for a country-western band.

ELIZA crosses to PENDARVIS, grabs him by the shirt front and appears to be ready to give him a good sound beating.

ELIZA

You better watch your mouth, you little bastard, you know what's good for you.

PENDARVIS

Lady, if I knew what's good for me, I'd have thrown myself off a bridge a long time ago.

ELIZA

If he's in the kitchen, I'll wait out here. I'm not going into that rat's nest.

PENDARVIS

Relax. Since you took the microwave and the blender, the old place hasn't seen much action.

ELIZA

(Sits; lights a cigarette) He's slathering ribs, you say?

PENDARVIS

And doing a superlative job of it too, I might add.

ELIZA

I have to admit: the guy makes a beautiful barbecue sauce.

PENDARVIS

The key ingredient is brown sugar. (*Conspiratorially*) And a dash of rum.

ELIZA

No, pal, the key ingredient to great sauce is the key ingredient to everything else. Which is: Don't be a fool. (*Pause*) You better stick to peanut butter and jelly. (*To FOLTER*) Has my husband given you any idea where he's going?

FOLTER

We don't discuss practical things very much. On the one hand, he's never violated his probation. On the other hand, I have a quota to fill.

ELIZA

Don't lock him up until he moves these boxes. Don't you have anyone else to pester?

FOLTER

I have plenty of clients.

ELIZA

So go bother them.

MIGRAINIAN wanders in. He is reading a thick slab of manuscript. He doesn't pay any attention to anyone and no one notices him.

FOLTER

Are you kidding? I wouldn't go near them. They scare me to death.

ELIZA

How bad can they be, compared to this crowd?

FOLTER

They're criminals! They spend all their time working out. They have forearms like fence posts. Plus, they've got guns, entire arsenals of the latest weapons—

MIGRAINIAN

As is their constitutional right, pursuant to the second amendment.

FOLTER

(*Looks at MIGRAINIAN with pity and disgust*) Second amendment, huh? Tell me, what other constitutional amendments do you like?

MIGRAINIAN

(*Not prepared for this*) Uh. Gee... I... Are there others?

FOLTER

Since there is a second, I think we can logically deduce that there is at least one other.

MIGRAINIAN

Oh, yeah. I knew that. Sure. There's a third, maybe a fourth?

FOLTER

What about the first?

MIGRAINIAN

Oh, well sure, I mean, come on, that goes without saying. The first. That's always been one of my favorites.

FOLTER

And what, dear boy, does the first amendment do?

MIGRAINIAN

Well. It does a lot of things. It, uh. They're too numerous to mention. It, uh, you know, it says, uh, if you're an American, you can pretty much do whatever you want to do.

FOLTER

As cogent a description of the Bill of Rights as I've ever heard. My favorite has always been the fourth. Which, as I am sure you already know, protects us from unreasonable searches and seizures. Cops hate it. I love it, because it guarantees me an almost unlimited supply of what I, in my salad days, called grass. I don't know what they call it now, and I'm too stoned to care.

ELIZA

Do you gentlemen mind if I interrupt Face the Nation for half a sec? *(They nod)*
Good. *(Shouting while facing the kitchen)* What the hell are these boxes doing out here, and when are you gonna move?

ELDER enters from the kitchen, carrying a ladle. He is wearing an apron.

ELDER

(With no enthusiasm at all) Hi, Liz.

ELIZA

I have people coming to look at the house tomorrow afternoon. We agreed, as much as we ever agree on anything, that you'd have your junk moved out of here and that you'd tell your friends that the little salon you've been conducting is over.

ELDER

We agreed that I'd be out by the first of next month. That's ten days from now.

ELIZA

I don't care if it's ten seconds. I want this shit out of here! *(Kicks a box or two)*

ELDER

You know as well as I do, Liz, I haven't made any money in a long time. My unemployment expired. At my age, and with everything that's happened, it's tough finding a job.

ELIZA

"Everything that's happened"? You mean killing old men in the middle of the street? That didn't "happen." You *did* it. You killed that old man. And I'm supposed to feel sorry for you?

ELDER

It was an accident.

ELIZA

This whole place is an accident. These derelicts, these urchins, these orphans of the storm, what the hell are they doing here?

ELDER

They happen to be clients of mine.

ELIZA

Clients? No, pal, real lawyers – which you ain't and never were – real lawyers have clients. What you have here is a menagerie. It's an asylum. It's a halfway house minus the personality. (*Faces PENDARVIS*) You the guy those third-graders down at Central Elementary used to beat up all the time?

PENDARVIS

Not all the time. I got federal holidays off.

ELIZA

Didn't they steal a bunch of lumber one time and build a cross, and weren't they about to nail you to it just as the vice-principal stopped them?

PENDARVIS

It was almost Easter. Kids eat those chocolate eggs and all that sugar makes them a little jumpy.

ELIZA

You'll have to seek asylum somewhere else, fella. 'Cause I'm gonna sell this house (*Pointing a finger at ELDER*) with or without your help.

ELDER

I need a little more time. I haven't found a place yet. Apartments in this town cost a fortune. And I've got to find a decent one. I don't want to wake up at three in the morning because someone down the hall is having an Aerosmith retrospective.

ELIZA

That's not my problem. You've had plenty of time.

ELDER

I don't even have money for a deposit.

ELIZA

Don't break my heart. Nobody has any money any more. But I'm going to—

NORMAN enters without knocking. He strides purposefully to ELDER, opens the gym bag, and dumps a large quantity of cash onto the floor. He immediately exits. Everyone looks at the money.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

SETTING: *A few days later. The scene looks the same, except that there are more boxes, and the only furniture in the room is ELDER's desk and two chairs. Most of the money is still on the floor.*

AT RISE: *ELDER and MIGRAINIAN sit at the desk. ELDER is again studying the manuscript. There is a sword propped against the desk, next to MIGRAINIAN.*

ELDER

What does "forsooth" mean?

MIGRAINIAN

Maybe...kind of...like a long time ago?

ELDER

I know it's an old word. I'm asking what it means.

MIGRAINIAN

It's, um...a figure of speech.

ELDER

It's not a figure of speech. I'd look it up for you, but as you can see, Eliza has pretty much ransacked the place, including taking my dictionary. I'm surprised the desk and chairs are still here.

MIGRAINIAN

They wouldn't fit.

ELDER

What wouldn't fit where?

MIGRAINIAN

The desk and chairs. There wasn't room in the van.

ELDER

What van? How do you know all this?

MIGRAINIAN

Your wife brought a van over this morning. I helped her load some of the stuff. But there wasn't room for everything.

ELDER

You helped her?

MIGRAINIAN

She was all by herself. I felt sorry for her. I've always had a chivalrous streak.

ELDER

No you haven't. You're just as self-centered as everyone else, and you helped haul away my furniture? And I know I'm supposed to ask where you got the sword, but I'm not going to bite.

MIGRAINIAN

There wasn't much left to move.

ELDER

That's not the point. The point is that you helped my wife steal my furniture.

MIGRAINIAN

She said that since she's sold the house, everything has to go.

ELDER

Why did you have to take the dictionary?

MIGRAINIAN

Well, it didn't take up much space.

ELDER

Krikor, did it occur to you that I might want to use that dictionary?

MIGRAINIAN

I never saw you use it.

ELDER

You never saw me flossing my teeth, either, but that doesn't mean you— (*Looks through several desk drawers*) Where's my floss?

MIGRAINIAN

She had some poppy seeds stuck in her teeth. She brought over some delicious rolls. We had a nice breakfast.

ELDER

She gave you breakfast. (*MIGRAINIAN nods happily*) Did you happen to save a bite of something for me?

MIGRAINIAN

Well, you've never been much of a breakfast eater. Besides, you were asleep. We didn't want to bother you.

ELDER

You and Eliza do nothing but bother me.

MIGRAINIAN

She seems real nice.

ELDER

So did Ted Bundy. Did it occur to you that when she says she wants the house empty, that includes you?

MIGRAINIAN

She has a pretty smile.

ELDER

I wouldn't know. I was married to her for a very long time. Never saw it once. (*Pause*) I take that back. I did see her smile once. I had such a terrible hangover, I said, "I think I'm gonna die." She smiled then.

MIGRAINIAN

She says when I sell my novel, I'll be able to buy any house in town.

ELDER

What does Liz know about your book?

MIGRAINIAN

I gave her the first couple chapters to read. She liked it.

ELDER

What did she like about it?

MIGRAINIAN

Uh...She said something about the...narrative...the ebb and flow?

ELDER

Your novel has lots of ebb. No flow whatsoever.

MIGRAINIAN pauses to processes this.

MIGRAINIAN

She liked the way I describe trees.

ELDER

Eliza's first reaction to a tree is to cut it down so her idiot brother can build a new parking lot. And I don't remember any trees in the first three or four hundred pages. I did notice a lot of clumsy and unconvincing phallic symbols. Are those supposed to be trees?

MIGRAINIAN

(Very uncomfortable.) Um...fall...fallic...um...

ELDER

You do know what a phallic symbol is, don't you?

MIGRAINIAN

(Clears his throat, adjusts his glasses, dries his palms on his pant legs) Um...I think it...has to do with...a certain...um...

ELDER

I didn't mean to make you nervous. Your lady readers will understand.

This conversation makes MIGRAINIAN so nervous that he writhes, and gradually almost twists his body into the shape of a pretzel.

MIGRAINIAN

Eliza...if I may call her that...said that my book was one of the best she'd read.

ELDER

She never read a book in her life. And you can be damn sure she doesn't know what forsooth means any more than you do. Anyway. Let's get back to work. *(Studies manuscript)* "Forsooth, Renaldo, I wouldst fain perforce swoon with ecstasy shouldst thou forswear that vexatious virago. Desire roars like a starving tiger in the heart of my breast." Have you ever considered writing a novel where the characters talk like real people?

MIGRAINIAN

That's how they, you know, talk, in the mists of time.

ELDER

Well, if anyone knows how they talk out there in the mist, I'm sure it would be you. And what's this about a roaring breast? Haven't we been over this before? About breasts? Since when do they make jungle sounds?

MIGRAINIAN

It's ...metaphysics.

ELDER

I think you mean metaphor. I also don't think that any woman whose breasts make a lot of noise is going to be very attractive to our half of the species.

MIGRAINIAN

(Squirming still) Some females...there are certain images...certain literary allowances...techniques...you know...

ELDER

(Putting down the manuscript and becoming a bit confrontational) Krikor, I gotta ask you something. Have you ever been out on a date?

MIGRAINIAN

(Peering at ELDER as though trying to decipher a major question) I...been...you...

ELDER

You know. You see a girl you like, you call her up, you say, "Hi, this is Krikor, would you like to go to the movie Friday night? And if she says yes, you put on a clean shirt, vacuum your car, pick her up at eight and have a nice time. If she says no, you get drunk and pass out in the gutter and awaken at dawn in a pool of your own filth. It's a tradition. So. Ever done it?

MIGRAINIAN is so overwhelmed that he is almost comatose, except for the squirming. He falls to the floor and writhes.

ELDER

Apparently not.

MIGRAINIAN groans.

ELDER, *Continues*

Wait, it gets better. Let's say she says okay. She's so bored she's losing her will to live. And let's face it, guy, no broad who has anything better to do on a Friday night except watch wrestling with her brothers is going to be seen in public with you. So she says, sure, and you pick her up. Now, here's where it gets tricky... You take her to the movie. Then you go out for a bite to eat. You talk, et cetera, et cetera. Now: You have two alternatives. One: You take her home. In your case, there is a one hundred percent chance of her insisting on going home. Being in your presence for several hours will drive her into the arms of the first prison escapee or truck driver she can find.

MIGRAINIAN is so depressed he can't move.

ELDER, *Continues*

And, Two: Never mind. It would just scare you.

ELDER tries to help MIGRAINIAN stand up, but it doesn't work and he gives up.

ELDER

Easy, little guy. You're only twenty-nine years old. There's plenty of time to develop a social life. You don't have to start with a date. You can strike up a conversation with a girl at the grocery store. Coffee shops, bowling alleys, monster car rallies, these are all great places to meet girls. And what have you got to lose?

PENDARVIS

(Enters, rubbing the back of his head) This place is getting dangerous.

ELDER

Did you trip over Kirkor's book again?

PENDARVIS

No. I was fast asleep. Some big guy came into my room, threw me out of bed, called me a scumbucket, and dragged my bed away. Have you seen it?

ELDER

Wherever it is, it's got my dictionary. And it wasn't a big guy, it was my little woman.

PENDARVIS

What's John Steinbeck doing on the floor?

ELDER

Contemplating his social future vis-à-vis his relationships with broads. I don't think he's had one.

PENDARVIS

Well, then he's come to the right place. Between your umpteen years of marriage to the Wicked Witch and my vast experience in affairs of the heart, we should be able to give the little guy all the information he needs.

ELDER

So they took your bed?

PENDARVIS

That's a terrible thing to do to a man. Where I come from— *(Notices that there are no unoccupied chairs)* Where are the chairs?

ELDER

In a van, under my dictionary.

PENDARVIS

She can't do this. Where I come from, you come into a man's house, throw him to the floor, take away his bed...

ELDER

Yes?

PENDARVIS

(Still in pain, rubbing the back of his head) What?

ELDER

Back where you come from, what happens?

PENDARVIS

Oh, I couldn't describe it. Terrible things. You don't want to know.

ELDER

I need to know.

PENDARVIS

Remember that time you let Krik use the vacuum cleaner?

ELDER

Don't remind me. A disaster.

PENDARVIS

It's worse. They'd stuff you into a clothes dryer, maybe put you in a garbage barrel and roll it down the hill. And if you were wearing a nice rug, they'd vacuum it right off your head.

ELDER

These guys sound pretty serious

PENDARVIS

You don't know the half of it

ELDER

These serious guys you used to know from your old neighborhood. They, uh, do anything else for, you know...?

PENDARVIS

What? Worse than the thing with the garbage barrel?

ELDER

Yeah. Worse. Real worse. They have any, you know, remedies for injustice?

PENDARVIS

Lemme think. I'm not sure. What are we talking here?

ELDER

I don't know. Nothing in particular. I was just thinking. You know, sometimes, how your mind wanders?

PENDARVIS

Do I!

ELDER

My wife, the fair Eliza, not only sold the house out from under me, I haven't seen a dime of the proceeds, and I'm about to be thrown out on the street.

PENDARVIS

Looks like I'll be bunking under the bridge for awhile.

ELDER

There's no need for that.

PENDARVIS

There is if you're a career loser and it's raining. Or I could try the Mission.

ELDER

The Mission. You're going to a Mission? Guys there haven't been sober in twenty years. They try fondling you at night, place smells like a pig sty.

PENDARVIS

I been in pig sties smell a lot better than the Mission. At least under the bridge, you get fresh air, the river's right there so you can wash up any time you like. I've had many illuminating literary discussions under the bridge.

ELDER

I'm sure you have, Pen, I'm sure you have.

PENDARVIS

I don't mean to stick my nose in someone else's business—

ELDER

You do it all the time.

PENDARVIS

I think we should discuss this money on the floor.

ELDER

All I know is, it ain't mine. I want nothing to do with contraband.

ELDER inspects the money, walks carefully around it, as if he's afraid it will bite him.

PENDARVIS

It looks like plain ordinary money to me.

ELDER

It's plain ordinary money that was stolen from a bank. I wouldn't touch it if I were you.

PENDARVIS

When you start sending me out on job interviews again, I'm going to need some new clothes. Can I, like, take a couple hundred?

ELDER

What you do, Pen, is between you and your conscience.

PENDARVIS

I can tell you who's going to win that discussion right now.

MIGRAINIAN

I took a little of it.

ELDER

I'll admit you could use a new suit, Krikor.

MIGRAINIAN

I didn't mean for a suit. I want to buy a helmet, to go with the sword.

ELDER

A helmet. I suppose this all ties in with that war between—what's that thing Renaldo keeps talking about?

MIGRAINIAN

The War Between Good and Evil.

ELDER

Sure, how could I forget. So, is there a wide selection of helmet shops to choose from in this town?

MIGRAINIAN

I haven't been able to find one yet.

ELDER

This helmet, which exists only in your fertile if somewhat vacant little mind: What does it look like?

MIGRAINIAN

Well, it's kind of...round.

ELDER

Who wants a square helmet?

MIGRAINIAN

Probably made of...I don't know...metal?

ELDER

Not a lot of plastic in the mists of time.

MIGRAINIAN

It's got a little space open for your eyes.

ELDER

You've given this a lot of thought.

MIGRAINIAN

And a plume.

ELDER

What kind of helmet would it be without a plume? Next time I see a peacock I'll pluck out a real nice one for you. Tell me, Krikor, where do you intend to find this helmet?

MIGRAINIAN

Garage sales?

ELDER

I didn't know they had garage sales in the "mists of time"? Or plumes, for that matter. Hey, I know. There's a pawn shop downtown. Guy named Morty runs the place. Morty's got enough guns to supply a minor revolution, but I'm sure he's got no helmets. Or plumes. Got a lot of stolen cameras and computers that don't work.

MIGRAINIAN

It is to be a special helmet. Only to be worn in the—

ELDER

—war between Good and Evil. I know. Are they still fighting that one?

MIGRAINIAN

And a shield. If I had experience with a sword and shield, it would give *Wayward Bondage* more millirisitude.

ELDER

Verisimilitude. Krikor, I don't want you swinging that sword around my house.

MIGRAINIAN

No offense, but it isn't really your house any more. Your wife said she sold it.

ELDER

I take time out from my main job, which is getting Pen a job, to help you make sense of this manuscript, and this is the thanks I get?

MIGRAINIAN

I'm sorry.

ELDER

(Hands the manuscript back to MIGRAINIAN) Go through the last two or three hundred pages very carefully. And re-type these pages here, the ones with sticky stuff all over them. What is it?

MIGRAINIAN

Maple syrup.

ELDER

I'm afraid to ask, but I will: Why is there maple syrup on your manuscript?

MIGRAINIAN

Eliza brought French toast sticks. I got a little carried away.

ELDER

I don't know any literary agents who handle gothic romances, but I think it's safe to say that when they spot syrup on a manuscript, it doesn't get prime consideration. Pen, sit down, we've got to work on your resume. And, by the way, that other thing you were talking. Your old stomping grounds. You were talking about, you know, methods of what you might call, you know, comeuppance.

PENDARVIS

We didn't call it anything. We just did it.

ELDER

So you, uh, have some experience in this, shall we say, line of work?

PENDARVIS

I watched Shorty Groggins wrap up his old lady's car once. It was great. She had her car parked outside her paramour's house. Shorty got himself a maximum roll of Saran Wrap and wrapped it all round the car. It was beautiful.

ELDER

And this accomplished what, aside from keeping the contents of the car from spoiling overnight?

PENDARVIS

Try opening a car door that's encased in plastic wrap. Or putting the key in the door, or getting the trunk open. We sat across the street and watched when she came out. Took her awhile to figure out what had happened. I never laughed so hard.

ELDER

Old Shorty got his revenge.

PENDARVIS

Sure did. *(Sighs with pleasure at the memory)* Of course, she shot him two hours later.

ELDER

I'm thinking of something a little less theatrical.

PENDARVIS

You don't like theater?

ELDER

Can't get enough. But I'm thinking of something more old-fashioned.

PENDARVIS

To do what?

ELDER

(Long pause) You know. Whatever it was that made Shorty want to do what he did.

PENDARVIS

His old lady was stepping out on him.

ELDER

Right.

PENDARVIS

Eliza's not stepping out on you, is she?

ELDER

Unfortunately, no. If she were dating some big mean son-of-a-bitch, it would take her mind off real estate. She's about to evict me.

PENDARVIS

That isn't good.

ELDER stares at PENDARVIS. This makes PENDARVIS nervous.

PENDARVIS, *Continued*

So it's not a matter of stepping out. *(Pause)* She's leaping. *(Pause)* Right over the edge there. *(Pantomimes, with his hands, a leap; ELDER is not amused)* 'Bye-bye, Eliza. *(Pause)* Hello, riverbank. Or maybe I'll try the mission. *(Pause)* You know, the food isn't bad there. *(Pause)* I wouldn't recommend the meat dishes. But the salads are okay. I always fill up on salad. *(Pause)* You could come with me. *(Pause)* The more the merrier. *(Long, uncomfortable pause)* So, how's the literary world treating you? You could take some of that

PENDARVIS, *Continued*

cash there and bribe a literary agent, but I doubt if there is enough money in the world to talk anyone into taking that thing.

ELDER

So you're planning on eating salad at the mission. That thought pleases you, does it?

PENDARVIS

You might meet a lot of interesting people there.

ELDER

Pen, my friend, you're way too old to be meeting interesting people. Meeting interesting people is for kids taking the grand tour of Europe. Meeting interesting people is for college students who are trying to get laid. You've been meeting interesting people all your life, and so have I. And where did it get us? I don't have a dictionary. You're going to eat lettuce with winos and pederasts. This is where meeting people has gotten us. Every time I've met people, suddenly my wallet is missing.

PENDARVIS

There's always a chance.

ELDER

A chance that what? That we'll meet someone out there who is even more misanthropic and cruel than everyone else? That we'll meet someone who can fire us in new and exciting ways? That we'll meet someone who is even more ingenious at making us homeless than all the douchebags and sadists we've met so far?

PENDARVIS

(Pause) Would you like a back rub?

ELDER

You touch my back and I'll break your arm.

PENDARVIS

The guys at the mission aren't that bad.

ELDER

Yes they are.

PENDARVIS

They're outcasts. Just like us.

ELDER

You, maybe. But I refuse. And you are going to help me. Now, you said something about putting guys in barrels—

PENDARVIS

One guy, one barrel.

ELDER

Now, what else did your friends do, under like circumstances?

PENDARVIS

Like, if they wanted to get somebody's attention?

ELDER

Something along those lines, yes.

PENDARVIS

Like, if they wanted to, say, ruffle somebody's feathers a little?

ELDER

Ruffling, sure, we're getting there.

PENDARVIS

Like, if somebody was crowding you a little—

ELDER

I think you're getting the picture.

PENDARVIS

Wait. Correct me if I'm wrong. You were wondering if I could—

ELDER

See that money on the floor?

PENDARVIS

It's a little hard to miss.

ELDER

It could all be yours.

MIGRAINIAN

Not all of it. I took a hundred and twenty dollars. For the helmet.

ELDER

You owe the pot a hundred and twenty. That was never your money.

MIGRAINIAN

I was wondering if I could have a little more. For a shield. And maybe a steed.

MIGRAINIAN picks up the sword and raises it high, then drops it and cries out in pain.

ELDER

I knew you were gonna hurt yourself with that damn thing. You pull a muscle or something?

MIGRAINIAN

Ow! My shoulder!

ELDER

Looks like Round One goes to Evil.

PENDARVIS

Which side would you have been on?

ELDER

The smart money's always been on Evil. Krikor, take your manuscript and your sword and your dreams of glory and go to your room. Pardon me. Into the mists of time. Pen and I have a little business to discuss. Oh, and don't go calling up any girls. You're not ready yet.

MIGRAINIAN

(Holding his sore shoulder in one hand and the sword in the other) What'd you say that guy's name was?

ELDER

What guy?

MIGRAINIAN

At the pawn shop.

ELDER

Morty. And he doesn't have shields or horses. He could fix you up with a nice AK-47.

MIGRAINIAN exits.

ELDER, *Continues*

Now, say your old friends had a job to do and they didn't have a barrel.

PENDARVIS

They'd steal one.

ELDER

What if they chose not to use a barrel?

PENDARVIS

That's a tough one. If you want to roll a guy down a hill, you'd almost have to have a barrel.

ELDER

Forget the rolling and the hills. Think of another method.

PENDARVIS

Of what?

ELDER

Of problem solving.

PENDARVIS

Oh. Well. There was this guy in Colorado they used to call once in a while. Colorado Phil. I think he lived in the mountains. That's why they called him Colorado Phil. 'Cause he lived—

ELDER

—in Colorado, yes, I got that. Why'd they call him?

PENDARVIS

I didn't know him personally. But apparently he drove over here once or twice a year. At somebody's request. To...do...stuff.

ELDER

Yes.

PENDARVIS

He was said to be very reliable.

ELDER

At what?

PENDARVIS

I'm a little uncomfortable.

ELDER

Why? We're old friends here.

PENDARVIS

I don't want to be involved in, you know, marital discord.

ELDER

There's no discord. There's just a job I want you to help me with. Do you have Colorado Phil's phone number?

PENDARVIS

Oh, no, you see, it was disconnected.

ELDER

Why?

PENDARVIS

He failed to pay his bill.

ELDER

And why would a successful guy who can afford to live in Colorado fail to pay his phone bill?

PENDARVIS

Well, he...died.

ELDER

He's dead, why did you bring up his name? I'm looking for a little help here.

PENDARVIS

It was one of those skiing accidents.

ELDER

Who cares?

PENDARVIS

Someone rolled him down a ski slope.

ELDER

Let me guess. Without—

PENDARVIS

Without a barrel, right.

ELIZA enters, without knocking. She is dressed expensively and looks very professional. As usual, she is seething.

ELDER

How come I don't get any French toast sticks?

ELIZA

How come you're still here?

ELDER

If you sold the house out from under me, where's my share of the proceeds?

ELIZA folds her arms and silently stares at ELDER.

PENDARVIS

Something tells me your proceeds are in the mists of time.

ELDER

And what about my dictionary?

ELIZA

Knowing how you never get around to doing anything, I forged your signature on all the papers. Here's your share. *(Takes a check from her purse; hands it to ELDER)* If you've got a problem with that, take it up with John A. Smith. But don't call him now. He's at the rifle range, and then he's got his martial arts class to teach.

ELDER

(Examines check) This isn't much.

ELIZA

Certain fees and costs were and unforeseen expenses were deducted. You're lucky I let you have anything. And by the way, your dictionary is in the river.

ELDER

Yes, I know how you feel about books. But that one, I'd had it since college.

ELIZA

You should thank me.

ELDER

I'll never forget the time you took all my books off the shelves and bought that fake book front.

ELIZA

I'll never forget how you burned it.

ELDER

I had a thousand real books and you go and put up this fake front.

ELIZA

Your books were ugly.

ELDER

I'll admit they were worn, but they were real books.

ELIZA

I didn't want the neighbors to see a bunch of ugly old paperbacks on our living room shelves.

ELDER

Our neighbors couldn't have cared less. They never came over, anyway. They didn't like us.

ELIZA

They didn't like *you*. I can get along with anybody.

ELDER

So can I.

ELIZA

Tell that to Minnesota Ed.

ELDER

I paid my dues on that one. It was a fluke anyway. People beat the hell out of each other in this town every day and nobody gets killed.

ELIZA

You should have gone to prison.

ELDER

Thanks for the moral support. Being on probation is no picnic, let me tell you. My probation officer is itching to revoke me. He's got a quota to fill.

ELIZA

I've never been so embarrassed. I'll never live it down.

ELDER

What's to live down? I'm the one can't work anymore.

ELIZA

If you'd quit trying to find jobs for nitwits, you could work. Look at me. I don't have a high school diploma and I'm selling real estate.

ELDER

You told me you'd been to college.

ELIZA

I told you a lot of things. You don't have to believe everything you hear.

PENDARVIS

(Rising and starting to leave) I'll let you lovebirds hash this out.

ELDER

Don't forget about that thing we were talking about.

PENDARVIS

I've got to make a call. Goodbye, Eliza. It was nice seeing you.

ELIZA

You've got to quit letting people like me scare the bejesus out of you, Pen.

PENDARVIS

Oh, it's okay. I like being scared. It's what I do best. (*Exits*)

ELIZA

Where's the sad little guy?

ELDER

You're looking at him.

ELIZA

No. You're pathetic, but not really sad. Where's Krikor?

ELDER

He's either putting his arm in a sling or he's lost in the mists of time.

ELIZA digs around in her purse, finds a key, and extends it to ELDER.

ELIZA

Give him this, will you?

ELDER

What is it?

ELIZA

What's it look like? A key. Give it to him.

ELDER

Unless it's the key to a magical kingdom, I don't think he'll be interested.

ELIZA

Yes he will. (*Pause*) It's a key to my apartment.

ELDER

If you're hiring him as a housekeeper, forget it. He's a bigger slob than I am.

ELIZA

He's moving in with me.

There is a very long pause. Slowly, ELDER segues from stunned amazement to laughter.

ELDER

Why am I surprised? Of course. It makes perfect sense. A middle-aged money-obsessed woman who insists on a tidy environment wants to live with a slovenly, half-blind, unemployed slob whose sense of reality lies somewhere between Camelot and the Marquis de Sade, without the laughs. It's too perfect.

ELIZA

You can laugh. You always do. But Krikor now has a home, and this time tomorrow, you won't.

ELDER

This time tomorrow, you'll be begging me to take him back. You know what this guy's idea of dinner is? Turning on the oven as hot as it will go and trying to cook a frozen pizza while it's still in the box.

ELIZA

You're making this up.

ELDER

Why do you think I keep an industrial-strength fire extinguisher in the kitchen? His idea of high-tech is trying to figure out how to use a can opener. He keeps spraining his wrists. He puts wet laundry in the microwave.

ELIZA

I think he's sweet.

ELDER

I've heard him called many things. Never that.

ELIZA

He needs a little affection and understanding. Which he doesn't get around here. We had a very nice conversation. He wants to be a novelist.

ELDER

Like my grandma used to say, "Wantin' ain't gettin'."

ELIZA

He's misunderstood.

ELDER

I understand him perfectly. He's an idiot.

ELIZA

I could learn to love him.

ELDER

That guy is perilously close to thirty and has never been laid once in his life. He has no idea what goes where, in the kitchen or in the sack.

ELIZA

I happen to think he's an excellent writer.

ELDER

He writes like I tap-dance.

ELIZA

I have some literary contacts. I'm going to help him get his book published.

ELDER

Your "literary contacts" consist of the guy who sells newspapers at the hotel.

ELIZA

You hate everything and everybody. This is why I divorced you.

ELDER

You divorced me because every time some little thing doesn't suit you, you panic.

ELIZA

Every little thing? You killed a man.

ELDER

It was an accident, and so what if I did kill somebody? He was a bum and a panhandler, for Christ's sake.

ELIZA

Everyone's got a right to live.

ELDER

You won't be saying that in two days, after that little bastard destroys your kitchen.

ELIZA

Kitchens. Houses. These material things. Let him destroy them. He's a good man.

ELDER

Your taste in roommates is just as bad as your taste in literature. Take him off my hands. You're doing me a favor.

ELIZA

And I want you to promise me you'll move out by noon tomorrow. You can't live here anymore.

ELDER

You "want", you "want." I stopped caring about what you "want" the day you moved out.

ELIZA

Tomorrow.

ELDER

I've had enough of you. Excuse me while I go...into the mists of time...

ELDER exits to upstairs. MIGRAINIAN enters from kitchen.

MIGRAINIAN

Forsooth?

*ELIZA embraces MIGRAINIAN.
PENDARVIS enters from upstairs; looks
worried.*

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes