

PLAYS ON PRINCIPLE

Ten 10-Minute Plays

by

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ENOUGH!

By Pat Montley

Question: Should we give until it hurts?

SYNOPSIS

Using various methods of persuasion and intimidation, the destitute ZERO insists that the well-off RAY share his/her wealth and power.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Zero: any age, race, sex; a homeless person; intelligent, well-read, frustrated, desperate, clever

Ray: any age, race, sex; a business executive; wealthy, accustomed to power, smug

SETTING

A surrealistic crossroads in a distant place of metaphor/nightmare
Or...a street corner in the U.S...or another country

The Present (or Past...or Future)

ENOUGH!

SCENE: *Street corner. A bench. ZERO'S stuff: a beat-up backpack, an open McDonald's bag, a small hand drum.*

AT LIGHTS UP: *ZERO, unkempt, barefoot, wearing shabby clothing, beats the drum...or the bench.*

ZERO

(Singing to the tune of "Jingle Bells.")

Beat the drum, beat the drum,
beat it loud and clear.
If you do not share the wealth,
the end is surely near...ear!

Some have much, some have less,
some have none at all.
Now's the time to equalize,
so hear your conscience call.

(RAY enters, dressed in a suit, working an iPhone or its futuristic equivalent. Looks out, as though waiting for someone. ZERO stares at RAY, who is oblivious.)

ZERO (Cont.)

(Singing.)

Now's the time to equalize,
so hear your conscience call.

(Continues to beat drum.)

(RAY now notices ZERO's stare and tries to ignore it, but grows increasingly uncomfortable, until finally...)

RAY

What?

(ZERO stops playing, continues to stare.)

What?!

ZERO

I suffer.

RAY

I see.

ZERO

Will you help?

RAY

(Unnerved.)

Well...I guess...yes...of course. Not to help would be selfish, wouldn't it?

(Extracts a dollar bill from wallet, drops it into ZERO's McDonald's bag. Waits for "thank you." Then, sarcastically.)

Don't bother to thank me. It's my...moral obligation.

ZERO

Yes, that's true.

RAY

You're welcome.

(Beat.)

ZERO

I need more.

RAY

More?

ZERO

I still suffer.

RAY

Well, *do* something about it.

ZERO

What?

RAY

Pick yourself up by your own—

ZERO

I have no boots.

RAY

Is that my problem?

ZERO

Yes.

RAY

Why?

ZERO

Because you have many.

RAY

Which I worked very hard to get.

ZERO

No harder than I.

RAY

Then why don't you have—?

ZERO

Poor soil. Drought. Flood. Famine. War. Uneven playing field. Unemployment.
Bad government.

RAY

Get rid of it.

ZERO

I tried.

RAY

Look, I sympathize...

ZERO

Show me.

RAY

Oh, all right.

(Putting another bill in ZERO's bag.)

Here's a ten.

(ZERO does not look at it.)

Now will you leave me alone?

ZERO

You are the one free to leave.

RAY

I'm meeting someone here.

ZERO

I see.

RAY

Look, I've been more than generous.

You have given from your excess.	ZERO
What do you expect?	RAY
More.	ZERO
Why?	RAY
The same sun shines on me that shines on you.	ZERO
So what? What gives you the right to—	RAY
To live?	ZERO
To live off me?	RAY
No one should have more than enough...while others have less than they need.	ZERO
Says who?	RAY
The moral philosophers.	ZERO
Bunk!	RAY
It is written.	ZERO
Where?	RAY
In the hearts of the just. <i>(Beat.)</i>	ZERO

RAY

Oh all right!

(Counts two bills into ZERO's bag.)

Twenty, forty.

(ZERO does not look at them, but continues to stare at RAY, who grows exasperated with ZERO's ingratitude.)

Just how much do you want?

ZERO

As much as I'm entitled to.

RAY

And what would that be?

ZERO

Give until you reach the level of "marginal utility."

RAY

The what?

ZERO

The level at which, to give more would cause as much suffering to you as would be relieved in me.

RAY

Where did you get that wacko idea?

ZERO

John Stuart Mill.

RAY

Well, he's mad. And so are you.

ZERO

(Stands, with controlled anger.)

I have reason to be mad. I am hungry and cold and sick while you are warm and healthy and...*smug*.

RAY

Are you seriously suggesting that I empty my wallet into your bag until the amounts in each are the same?

ZERO

And your bank accounts. And your stock portfolios.

RAY

What do you take me for—a lunatic saint!

ZERO

It's your...what did you call it?...your "moral obligation."

RAY

(Sarcastic.)

Right. Anyway, why should I believe you would stop at half?

ZERO

I wouldn't need more.

RAY

But you'd want more.

ZERO

Only if I were as deluded as you.

RAY

It's human nature to be—

ZERO

Compassionate.

RAY

(Sarcastic.)

Sure. So—if the shoe were on the other foot?

ZERO

My feet would be warm.

RAY

Enough! You're starting to piss me off.

ZERO

(Stands.)

"Smug" cannot last forever.

RAY

Neither can "naïve"—which is what you are. Apart from greedy.

ZERO

I'm not the one with the excess.

RAY

Don't you understand? My stocks multiply. And if I don't have enough of them multiplying, I can't have *this*—

(Whipping bank card out of wallet.)

and...I can't afford to give you anything.

ZERO

(Grabbing card.)

What do you buy with this?

RAY

(Tries to grab it back but ZERO pulls it out of reach.

RAY sits, with attempted dignity.)

Stuff.

ZERO

What kind of stuff.

RAY

Stuff that I deserve.

ZERO

(Circling RAY menacingly, waving card.)

Designer stuff? Frivolous odoriferous stuff? Super-sized, motorized stuff? Obscenely ridiculous conspicuous stuff? Moronic, electronic stuff? Extra-deluxe, big-bucks stuff...

(Puts card in pocket.)

RAY

What are you doing?

ZERO

Equalizing. You don't need all that stuff. None of you do. Get rid of it. Stop buying and selling it.

RAY

That won't work. I got my money by selling stuff. If nobody buys the stuff I sell, I won't have any money to share with you.

ZERO

Then sell something else. Or make something. Or grow something. Something essential. Food. Blankets. Medicine. Art.

RAY

But that wouldn't keep everybody here...employed.

ZERO

So? Work less. Enjoy your family.

RAY

If I work less, I'll have less.

ZERO

True.

RAY

Which means you'd have half of less.

ZERO

Which is a lot more than I have now.

RAY

Then what if somebody else came along with nothing—would I have to give that person half of my remaining half?

ZERO

Of course.

RAY

And you?

ZERO

(Taking card from pocket, offering it to the hypothetical person.)

Would do the same.

RAY

Sure, sure. This is ridiculous. How would it end?

ZERO

In the...equalizing of power. In justice!

RAY

Ha! The line of paupers would go on forever.

ZERO

(Waving card.)

On the contrary. It's the only way to eliminate poverty.

RAY

(Reaches for card, but ZERO pulls it back out of reach. Frustrated.)

This is unreal.

ZERO

What?

RAY

This situation. This conversation. It can't be happening. I must be dreaming this. It's a...nightmare!

ZERO

Let's hope it ends in a wake-up call.

RAY

Is that a threat?

ZERO

That depends.

RAY

On what?

ZERO

On whether you're listening.

RAY

I don't like what I hear.

ZERO

Then *do* something about it.

RAY

What you propose I do will cost too much.

ZERO

Not as much as not doing it.

RAY

I don't like your attitude.

ZERO

Well...you could try walking in my shoes...if I had any.

RAY

Equal distribution of wealth? It's a preposterous idea. It can't be done. I mean people just don't behave that way—sharing everything they have. It's unnatural.

ZERO

Greed is unnatural.

(Tosses card back to RAY, who catches it, then regains composure.)

RAY

I think you should leave now.

ZERO

Without my share?

RAY

Without *my* share.

(RAY takes out iPhone. ZERO circles RAY, who perceives this as a threat of violence. RAY aims the iPhone at ZERO like a weapon. ZERO raises hands, backs off, then advances cautiously, picks up drum and back-pack, starts to walk away, turns back, looks at RAY.)

ZERO

I'll be back.

(RAY looks out. Lights fade.)

End of scene.

LIFE / CHOICE

by Pat Montley

Question: How can we disagree without being disagreeable?

SYNOPSIS

An older pro-life supporter and a younger pro-choice supporter confront each other at a rally.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Carol: 43, woman of any race; pro-life

Jessie: 25, woman of any race; pro-choice

SETTING

A political rally on the National Mall in Washington, DC.
The present

LIFE / CHOICE

SCENE: *A bench.*

AT LIGHTS UP: *We hear noise of a crowd of people. For a few seconds, sounds of two sets of many voices repeating simultaneous chants: "It's a child, not a choice!" And "Keep Abortion Legal!"*

CAROL *(Offstage, calling to a companion.)*

No, you go ahead.

(Enters, one shoe untied, carrying sign reading "It's a Child, not a Choice." Calls again to her offstage companion.)

Go on! I'll catch up. Just be a minute.

(Puts the sign down, takes off her backpack, sits, ties her shoe, her head bent over the shoe. Sound fades out.)

JESSIE *(Offstage, calling to a companion.)*

Yes, I'll meet you there!

(Enters, backing in, carrying a sign reading "Keep Abortion Legal." Facing offstage, calls.)

They can't all be unreasonable. Humor me.

(Points over her shoulder at CAROL.)

Just want to try a little one-on-one!

(Turns, crosses to CAROL, checks out CAROL's poster.)

Good morning.

(CAROL looks up.)

Oh!

CAROL

Not the "one" you were hoping to go one-on-one with?

JESSIE

(Flabbergasted.)

I...wow...I don't know what...how could...what are you...?

CAROL

Doing here? Same thing as you. Exercising my right to free speech.

JESSIE

But...you volunteer at Planned Parenthood.

CAROL

Because I want to make sure women have access to contraceptives.

JESSIE

And you...you're a...

CAROL

Socialist, progressive, feminist—

JESSIE

(Finishing her sentence.)

—left-wing liberal! So how can you...?

CAROL

Come on. You know better than that. Liberals don't all think alike.

JESSIE

Yeah. But...on this issue?

CAROL

Why should this one be exempt?

JESSIE

Well, because...because it's...

CAROL

Because you're on the other side?

JESSIE

But how did that happen? I mean that you're on the other side? And...I didn't know it.

CAROL

We've lived half a country apart since you went off to college.

JESSIE

But it's not like we don't visit, phone, text.

CAROL

We've been going to different rallies. Until this one.

JESSIE

Yeah, but I told you about mine. How come you never...?

CAROL

Because I know how you feel...what you believe. What all your friends—as well as most of mine—believe. I guess I.... Sometimes liberals are just so darn...narrow-minded! I didn't think telling you would make a difference.

JESSIE

How could it not?!

CAROL

Anyway, you have a right to your opinion. And to act on it.

JESSIE

Yes. That was one of the most memorable lessons of my childhood.

CAROL

Good. Music to every Sunday-School teacher's ears.

JESSIE

(Meaning "It's more than that.")

Come on.

CAROL

So you're acting on your right to voice your political opinion. And I'm acting on mine.

JESSIE

But...but I thought you believe that women's lives matter.

CAROL

I do believe it.

JESSIE

That laws which impose motherhood on women are totalitarian.

CAROL

They are.

JESSIE

That children should be wanted.

CAROL

They should.

JESSIE

That my life—my woman's life—is worth something!

CAROL

It certainly is.

JESSIE

Then why?... How can you... I mean, if you agree with everything I've—

CAROL

Women's lives do matter—even when they are just starting out as fetuses.

JESSIE

But what about—?

CAROL

And children should be wanted. That's why we have adoption.

JESSIE

That's still imposing biological motherhood on—

CAROL

Motherhood might not feel like an imposition if children were wanted and cherished by the whole community, if we had universal free childcare, if women weren't pressured into abortion by shame or poverty.

JESSIE

But we don't have universal child care and—

CAROL

And your life—oh, yes, your precious life—is most definitely worth a great deal of something.

JESSIE

(Beat. Taken aback.)

Are you being...sarcastic?

CAROL

Surely you know I mean it with all my heart.

JESSIE

Then...what?

CAROL

Maybe I'm just afraid of...our disposable culture? What effect will normalizing abortion have on us...on our collective psyche? If we approve early- and mid-term abortions, how soon before we're approving late-term ones? If it's allowable right up to birth, then...well, what about after?

JESSIE

Come on! Birth is a clear and obvious line of demarcation.

CAROL

While it may remain illegal to kill a newborn...it may no longer be unthinkable—at least not for those who are less scrupulous and more desperate.

JESSIE

Really? Next you're going to say it paves the way for euthanizing old people.

CAROL

It had occurred to me. ...Now that I'm on my way to becoming an old person.

(They both smile. A momentary break in the tension. Beat.)

We've lost it, haven't we? In our enlightened, secular society, we've lost the sense that human life is sacred.

JESSIE

I don't think so. The death penalty is mostly going the way of child labor and insane asylums.

CAROL

But—

JESSIE

The issue is not whether human life is sacred. The issue is when it begins.

CAROL

Exactly. Scientists can't tell us for certain when it begins. And isn't it ironic that our country's carefully wrought, challenged-and-defended legal system is built on giving the benefit of the doubt. Presumed innocent till proven guilty. Beyond a reasonable doubt. When there is doubt, we choose life.

JESSIE

Yes, but whose life?

CAROL

Both lives.

JESSIE

And when one life jeopardizes the other?

CAROL

When it's a clear medical alternative—yes, okay—choose the mother's life. But that's like one percent of abortions, compared to the millions performed because the pregnancy is inconvenient.

JESSIE

“Inconvenient”? Are pregnancies resulting from rape or incest “inconvenient”? Those of women who already have several children they are desperately trying to take care of “inconvenient”? Those of teenagers who were careless or just plain stupid—

CAROL

All right, all right, I hear you.

JESSIE:

(Deep breath.)

So.

CAROL

So.

JESSIE

Now what?

CAROL

(Shrugging.)

A hypothetical?

JESSIE

Of course.

CAROL

Consider this case. Small midwestern town in red state. The girl is...just out of high school...unmarried... living at home with—so of course dependent on—her religiously conservative and strict parents. She discovers she is pregnant by her boyfriend who had two months earlier enlisted in the army and is now serving in the most dangerous arena of the current war. What would you advise?

JESSIE

Whoa! Loading the dice, aren't we? Why don't you maximize her vulnerability to a dangerous pregnancy: give her cancer, diabetes, and AIDS?

CAROL

No need for snarky. Just tell me what you'd advise.

JESSIE

OK. Well...I'd say her future is looking...grim. Let's see. Little education, so low-paying—if any—job. No husband, so no spousal support. Disapproving parents so possible rejection. What do you think?

CAROL

I'd have to concede your prognosis is reasonable. So what would you advise?

JESSIE

Well, I wouldn't advise anything. It's her decision. Her options. But I sure would like abortion to be one of them.

CAROL

And if they were your options?

JESSIE

I think you know what I would choose. And until today, I thought I knew what you would choose.

(CAROL shrugs.)

Is this...hypothetical case anyone I know?

CAROL

Yes.

JESSIE

Who?

CAROL

(Beat.)

Me.

JESSIE

What?!

CAROL

I was that frightened teenager with the grim future. And you, my darling daughter, were that unborn child.

JESSIE

Mom!

(Collapses emotionally.)

I... I never— Why...why didn't you tell me?

CAROL

Your grandmother made me promise I wouldn't as long as she...

JESSIE

And when she died last year?

CAROL

Your father and I didn't see any reason to. The little adjustment we had made in our anniversary date had just become...part of family history.

JESSIE

Then...why now?

CAROL

Because every time I see a desperate young woman about to choose abortion, I think...what if her child could grow up to be...you.

JESSIE

I... ohmygod, Mom... It hurts to think about how you must have paid. And paid. Grandma would have crucified you. It must have been...

CAROL

Grim? Yes. For a while. A long, scary while. But eventually they came around...your father came back from the war...you started school...and I went back to school.

JESSIE

I...I don't know what to say. I mean, I...

CAROL

(Beat.)

How about...? Just a thought... "Thank you"?

JESSIE

Thank you? Thank you? Yes, all right. Because things turned out OK for you, Mom, I'll say "thank you." But what if they hadn't? What if your life had been one of shame and poverty and sacrifice—like so many other women in those circumstances? Then I might now be asking myself if my life has been worth that price. My life—my happiness is not more valuable than yours. And the fact that you ask for thanks suggests, rightly, that my life was your gift. Not something you owed me, not some moral responsibility, but a gift. A gift every woman should be free to choose if and when to give.

CAROL

But if I had aborted you—

JESSIE

(Interrupting.)

If you had aborted that first fetus, there is every reason to believe the child you and Dad would have had a few years later when you were in more stable circumstances would have provided you—and the world—the same rewards you credit me with providing.

CAROL

I cannot imagine my life without you.

JESSIE

But what was good and right for you is not necessarily good and right for every woman. Why not let each choose?

CAROL

How can I sit back and let women choose abortion when I believe with all my heart that the life created at conception—no matter what its circumstances—is sacred?

JESSIE

So you admit—it's just a belief. Not a scientifically verifiable fact. A belief for you to act on.

JESSIE (*Cont.*)

But other people who believe differently must be allowed to make a different choice.

CAROL

Must they? There was a time in this country when employers could choose to require workers—and their children—to put in twelve-hour days, when parents could choose to beat their children. Men could choose to rape their wives. White people could choose to discriminate against non-whites. But some people believed that these “choices” were morally wrong—not just for themselves but for everybody. So they spoke out. Minds were changed. Policies were reversed. Laws were made.

JESSIE

But those choosers were abusing other people—not just eliminating a collection of cells. And forbidding the choices of those abusive people did not put their own bodies and futures on the line.

CAROL

What I’m saying is “choice” isn’t always a defensible right.

JESSIE

And what I’m saying is that it sometimes is. The choice to practice a specific religion—or none, to speak freely and critically of the government, to gather at rallies like this one—all these choices are guaranteed to us as American citizens. And so should the right to terminate a pregnancy be.

CAROL

I don’t see them as comparable.

JESSIE

And that’s why you’re here? To—

CAROL

(Interrupting.)

To make my voice heard, yes. Isn’t that why you’re here...marching? To make your voice heard by lawmakers and judges and journalists...and even by people carrying signs like mine.

JESSIE

Mom...I...I don’t like being on opposite sides. It...it hurts.

CAROL

(Beat.)

I know, Honey. It hurts me too.

JESSIE

What do we do?

CAROL

We just have to...

JESSIE

Give up? Live in mutual disapproval?

CAROL

More.

JESSIE

What?

CAROL

Accept.... Respect....

(Lights down.)

End of scene.

JUST DESERTS

by Pat Montley

Question: Which is more important—justice or mercy?

SYNOPSIS

Two high school thespians run lines for their production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Penny has a hard time getting into character for Portia's "quality-of-mercy" speech so Derrick plays devil's advocate, arguing that justice is more important than mercy—in order to arouse her passion for the quality of mercy...and maybe for him.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Derrick: any race, high school senior, has been cast as the Duke in *The Merchant of Venice*

Penny: any race, high school senior, has been cast as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*

SETTING

A rehearsal room—bare, except for two chairs
The present

JUST DESERTS

SCENE: *A rehearsal room, bare, except for two seats*

AT LIGHTS UP: *DERRICK and PENNY, both carrying scripts of The Merchant of Venice, enter to run lines. DERRICK sits with his script open. PENNY closes hers, remains standing.*

PENNY

How long do we have?

DERRICK

Mr. Donaldson said about ten minutes. He's just re-blocking the scene where Antonio makes the deal with Shylock. Then you'll need to get back for Portia's scene with Nerissa. So come on, let's have it.

PENNY

(Takes a deep breath, concentrates, recites matter-of-factly.)

The quality of mercy is not strained.

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath;

(She forgets what comes next, makes a face. DERRICK holds up two fingers.)

It is twice blest;

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:

(She strains to remember. He makes a show-off-the-biceps gesture.)

'Tis mightiest of the mightiest—

DERRICK

(Interrupting.)

“In.”

PENNY

'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes

The thronèd monarch better than his crown;

(She forgets, makes a face. He gestures holding a scepter.)

His scepter shows the force of temporal power,

The attribute to awe and majesty,

Wherein doth sit the fear—

DERRICK

“dread and fear”

PENNY

dread and fear of kings;

(Revs up, then on a roll, rushes to the finish line.)

But mercy is above this sceptered sway;

It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,

It is an attribute to God himself;

And earthly power doth then show like God's

When mercy seasons justice.

DERRICK

(Trying to be supportive rather than critical.)

Well, Penny...you got the lines anyway.... Almost.

PENNY

(Disgusted with herself for forgetting.)

Yeah. As long as you're there to cue me.

DERRICK

I will be there. I'm in that scene. It's my one scene. Too bad we didn't have a little more "justice" in casting. I really wanted Bassanio, and instead I got the Duke—a walk-on.

PENNY

He's not a walk on, Derrick. He's the Big Man in Venice.

DERRICK

Nevertheless, he's only in Act Four, Scene One. Fifty-seven lousy lines. I got a walk on and Lanny Myers got Bassanio. Is that fair? Is that "just"?

PENNY

You've got a great costume.

DERRICK

What if The Don had given Portia to Cylene, and Nerissa to you? Would you think that was fair?

PENNY

I'd trust his judgement.

DERRICK

Really? When we all know you're a much better actor.

PENNY

This is high school, not Broadway. Teachers make choices for, like, our educational benefit or whatever.

DERRICK

If that's true, what's the point of auditions?

PENNY

To give us the experience. To challenge us.

DERRICK

So if someone rises to the challenge and does the best audition, shouldn't they get the lead they deserve?

PENNY

All other things being equal, yes.

DERRICK

What other things?

PENNY

Well, the teacher might feel it's, like, more fair to give a lot students the chance to play major roles than to have the same kids play the leads all the time.

DERRICK

But would that be fair to the more talented students—like you?

PENNY

Doesn't the same thing happen in sports? Coaches try to make sure everybody plays.

DERRICK

Yeah, but they only send in the second string when the score is, like, so lopsided it doesn't matter.

PENNY

Anyway, you wanting to play Bassanio only proves how undeserving you are. If you were a true actor, you'd want to play Shylock. He's the real lead.

DERRICK

But I—

PENNY

Obviously, The Don was right to give you a walk-on.

DERRICK

But I wanted to play Bassanio so I could ...
(Stops himself.)

PENNY

Could what?

DERRICK

Could get the chance to.... Never mind.

(Getting back to the subject at hand.)

Do you really believe it? That mercy is more important than justice?

PENNY

Of course. Don't you?

DERRICK

I don't know. Justice is pretty important. I mean, like everybody deserves equal treatment, don't they? If we don't have that, we have, well, chaos. Even Portia admits that if the Duke doesn't let Shylock take Antonio's pound of flesh—like he's entitled to according to the bond they signed—then, well, that lapse will set a precedent, and then the law itself in Venice will be in jeopardy.

PENNY

I thought you were asking about the real world—not Shakespeare's made-up world.

DERRICK

Shakespeare's is the real world. Real...passions.

PENNY

OK, let's take an example from our real world. You have siblings?

DERRICK

A younger sister and a baby brother—

(Teasing.)

who look to me, of course, as a perfect role model.

PENNY

(Dismisses this last with an eye-roll.)

Do your parents treat you all equally?

DERRICK

Sure.

PENNY

Really? If your brother's sick, doesn't he get more bedtime reading? Or if your sister's like, having trouble with math, doesn't she get more homework help? Does "fair" treatment always mean "equal" treatment? Or...is showing compassion sometimes more important than treating everyone the same?

DERRICK

But the three of us each get our "compassion" at different times—when we need it. So it all works out to be fair in the long run. Anyway, the rules don't apply the same with families.

PENNY

So what do you think of the rules set by Portia's father? Just? Or compassionate?

DERRICK

You mean the casket test?

PENNY

Yeah.

DERRICK

We're supposed to think her father sets up the casket choice for suitors in order to make sure that after he's dead, Portia—and her fortune—won't fall into the hands of guys who are just, like, looking to get her money.

PENNY

(Sarcastic.)

So thoughtful of him.

DERRICK

Well, it is, when you think about it, isn't it? He puts her picture in the leaden casket, instead of in the gold or silver one, because he believes only True Love would resist being dazzled by "outward show." Only True Love would pick the one that says; "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." The dad loves her, so he wants to make sure she gets the right guy. He feels for her in a tough situation. That's compassion, right?

PENNY

But is it "just" that he takes this choice away from her? Wouldn't it be more fair if he let her choose her own husband and control her own fortune?

DERRICK

Sure, to us now that seems obvious. But the play was centuries ago.

PENNY

(Sarcastic.)

The good old days.

DERRICK

Think of it as the dad making the best of a bad situation. The law says that women have to be under some man's control, and he wants to make sure she at least gets a good one—that the most qualified applicant gets the job.

PENNY

Do you always give the job to the "most qualified" applicant? Or is it OK to give it to the most deserving?

DERRICK

The “most qualified” is the “most deserving.”

PENNY

Really? Let’s say two kids want to make money mowing neighbors’ lawns—your lawn. They both charge the same. One kid is a couple years older, is fast and thorough. The other kid is younger, new at it, a little slower, so maybe doesn’t always do as good a job. But—

DERRICK

So I hire the one that does the better job.

PENNY

But...the other one really needs the money. You happen to know—since they’re neighbors—that his father is unemployed. This kid will actually use the money to help pay for groceries.

DERRICK

Not my business how other people spend their money. Only my business how I spend mine. And I want the biggest bang for my buck. Kid Number Two is doing a half-assed job.

PENNY

But only until he gets a little more experience.

DERRICK

So let him get experience on his own lawn.

PENNY

Weren’t you ever Kid Number Two?

DERRICK

Would you hire me if I were?

PENNY

I...well...yes, I would. Because I’ve been worse than Kid Number Two. He’s only inexperienced. I was guilty. I blamed my sister when I put a dent in Dad’s car—my second one. She took the punishment, didn’t tell on me...and even forgave me.

DERRICK

Wow. So, OK, you’re saying there are things that make it “fair” to be unfair?

PENNY

I’m saying sometimes mercy should “season” justice.

DERRICK

“Season”? Make it taste better?

PENNY

Or—in the case of punishment—make it taste...less bitter...by reducing the penalty.

DERRICK

But doesn't that take the teeth out of the rules? If I know I'm gonna get away with stuff because my mother or my teacher or my boss is gonna be sloppy sweet and "merciful," then where's the motivation to do the right thing? Society depends on justice. That's why we have law in the first place.

PENNY

I agree that without the law, there'd be chaos. But there's something even more important.

DERRICK

What?

PENNY

Our understanding that nobody's perfect, that we all fail sometimes, that we absolutely depend on one another to forgive us. It's the thing Portia tries to convince Shylock of:

(Delivering with passion.)

...In the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

DERRICK

(Absolutely satisfied.)

Ah! There it is!

PENNY

What?

DERRICK

The passion you need for your speech.

(Smug.)

I knew it would only take ten minutes.

PENNY

(Realizing.)

You mean all this time you were just...

(He smiles at her. Then...)

DERRICK

What if...what if—instead of being stuck with Daddy's plan—Portia had to make her own choice. She's rich and beautiful so guys come outta the woodwork to throw themselves at her.

(Tentatively.)

DERRICK
(Cont.)

You should know how that feels.

(She is taken aback.)

How does she make a “fair” choice.

PENNY

Well...“fair” means “equitable.” So maybe I—she—would pick someone who...is her equal.

DERRICK

Someone just as smart? just as rich? just as popular?

PENNY

(Meaning Derrick.)

Or...someone just as loyal, just as kind.

DERRICK

So...where does “mercy” come in?

PENNY

Maybe it’s just...another name for love?

(Beat. They look at each other.)

DERRICK

Penny...

PENNY

Yeah?

DERRICK

Remember I said before...

PENNY

What?

DERRICK

that I wanted to play Bassanio.

PENNY

Yeah.

DERRICK

It wasn’t because I didn’t know Shylock is the lead.

PENNY

Then...why?

DERRICK

Well, I knew you'd get Portia. And I wanted to play Bassanio so I...so I could say his lines...to you.

PENNY

His lines?

DERRICK

All that...passionate poetry.

PENNY

(Looks at him with new eyes.)

Really?

(He nods sheepishly.)

So... do it.

DERRICK

(Deep breath. Nervously.)

Madam, you have bereft me of all words,
Only my blood speaks to you in my veins.

(She smiles. Lights down.)

End of Scene.

SUCKLED BY WOLVES

by Pat Montley

Question: Who deserves forgiveness?

SYNOPSIS

Two men who were once best friends prepare—with varying motivations and degrees of resolve—to confront their former abuser, now a bishop, with an ultimatum.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Steve: 40's, any race, once Rick's best friend. Man with a conscience and a mission. A realist.

Rick: 40's, any race, once Steve's best friend. Sensitive. A romantic.

SETTING

Parlor in the Bishop's Residence
(OR...bare stage with two chairs)

The present

SUCKLED BY WOLVES

SCENE: *The parlor of the bishop's residence. Two chairs.*

AT LIGHTS UP: *STEVE and RICK stand, waiting.*

What's taking him so long?
STEVE

RICK
He was never very...punctual, Steve. Don't you remember?

STEVE
No.
(Beat.)
I try not to.

RICK
I thought you went through years of remembering.

STEVE
That was a long time ago.

RICK
Right after?

STEVE
Not right.

RICK
Later, then.

STEVE
Much later. You?

RICK
Right after.

STEVE
Oh.

RICK

My parents.

STEVE

Of course.

(Beat.)

Rick, we do have an appointment, don't we? I mean you called and talked to him.

RICK

Well, not to *him*. But we have an appointment.

(Beat.)

How's Sharon?

STEVE

Fine. Up for tenure at St. Mary's this year.

RICK

A shoo-in.

STEVE

We hope.

RICK

And the Vunderkind?

STEVE

Good. Great.

RICK

Show me.

STEVE

(Taking out iPhone.)

Prepare to be dazzled.

(Shows picture.)

RICK

Wow! Cap and gown time already.

STEVE

Only grade school.

RICK

What're you saying—that we're not *that* old?

STEVE

What about your twins?

RICK

(Getting out iPhone and showing.)

Child prodigies, both. I think they actually look like Mike, don't you?

STEVE

(Looking.)

Wow—you're right. Amazing resemblance. Considering.

(Taking phone for closer look.)

A mighty pair.

RICK

Regular Romulus and Remus.

(Taking phone back.)

STEVE

Don't.

RICK

I was only...

STEVE

I hated when he called us that.

RICK

Sorry.

(Referring to photo as he puts phone away.)

They're just a few years younger than we were when...

(He trails off. STEVE pats his arm. Beat.)

Do you...can you ever forgive him?

STEVE

For starters, he'd have to repent.

RICK

You think he hasn't?

STEVE

In the confessional, where it's easy and anonymous, sure.

RICK

He has publicly apologized.

STEVE

For the sins of

(Imitating the bishop's tone.)

“all those priests in my dioceses who have committed such heinous crimes.” But not for his own

STEVE *(Cont.)*

sins. And not to us.

RICK

Perhaps he will...tonight.

STEVE

And what about restitution? What about the obligation to restore what was stolen.

RICK

How can he give us back our innocence?

STEVE

He stole our sense of worth and dignity. And now he has to give them back.

RICK

But you have those things.

STEVE

You don't—not in the eyes of the church.

RICK

Is that his fault?

STEVE

His church's fault!

(Beat.)

RICK

What time is it?

STEVE

Quarter after.

RICK

What if he says no?

STEVE

(A determined reminder.)

Like we decided on the phone after I saw the article...we go to the paper.

RICK

Are you sure you're ready to do that?

STEVE

If we have to.

RICK

It won't be pretty. Aren't you concerned about...what about Sharon's job?

STEVE

We've talked it through.

RICK

I can't tell you how much it means to me, Steve, that you're willing to put everything on the line like this.

STEVE

Aren't you?

RICK

Yeah, but I have more to gain.

STEVE

No. You don't. Not really. Not in the grand scheme of things.

RICK

How did he used to put it...? "*In lux aeternitatis.*" All moral decisions should be made "in the light of eternity." Sounds grand, doesn't it?

STEVE

Maybe that was the problem. It was *too* grand. Maybe something less ambitious would have worked. Like the Native American idea of considering the effects of your actions on seven generations.

RICK

Seven's a good number.... Seven sacraments...seven last words of Jesus...

STEVE

Seven sorrows of Mary...seven gifts of the Holy Spirit...

RICK

Seven deadly sins.

STEVE

I would've settled for one.

RICK

Sin?

Generation. STEVE

Was it a sin? RICK

For us? STEVE

For him. RICK

Are you kidding? How much did our families spend on therapy? STEVE

I know, I know. But maybe...if things had been different...I mean if people...if the Church hadn't...if the culture didn't... RICK

What are you saying...that it could have been possible for him to do what he did without fucking up our lives? STEVE

I'm just saying...I'm saying that he loved me. All right? RICK

Yeah, right. *(Sarcastic.)* STEVE

He did! I know he did! RICK

Okay, okay. He loved you. Short-term love. Not seven-generation love. Because it's clear he doesn't love you *now*. Or he wouldn't have said what he said in the pulpit and in the media, and we wouldn't be here now insisting that he take it back. STEVE

Do you think he will? RICK

I think he'll say he's duty-bound as a bishop to uphold the teaching of the church, that homosexuality is a threat to the family, that the bible says yadda, yadda, yadda, and anything else he needs to say to get his cardinal's hat. STEVE

RICK

Whooo...How'd you get to be such a cynic?

STEVE

Life.

RICK

Well, here's what I think. I think when I show him the picture of my boys and explain what good parents Mike and I try to be, and what hopes we have for our sons and what we're doing to make those hopes a reality, he'll understand that we're just like any other family and need the same—

STEVE

(Interrupting.)

No, Rick. He won't. He won't let himself understand and he won't change his story. You need to be prepared for that.

RICK

But when he sees me...when he sees that I'm no threat to anybody...

STEVE

Don't you think he's seen hundreds of you? Don't you think he has sat in the confessional—and probably in this very room—listening to Catholic homosexuals spill their guilty little guts in paroxysms of despair. And what do you imagine he has said to comfort them—or to ease the shame of their heart-broken parents? Do you really imagine he has told them that tolerance is the only solution, that love is the only answer?

RICK

The point is that—

STEVE

(Interrupting.)

The point is that we can't let him see us as “no threat to anybody.” He has to see us as a threat *to him!*

RICK

This is so...not-me. I don't do ultimatums. It's not the way I deal with people.

STEVE

Don't think of him as a person. Think of him as an institution. An institution that has raped you—stripped you of dignity, honesty, respect, the right to a happy life—and must not be allowed to keep doing it.

RICK

It wasn't rape. I told you he loved me.

And you're here to...?

STEVE

Remind him of that.

RICK

(STEVE shakes his head in amazed disbelief.)
What's the matter? Isn't that why you're here too? Didn't he love you?

So he said...

STEVE

But?

RICK

But I didn't love him back. That's the difference between us.

STEVE

Oh.

RICK

So I...

STEVE

You what?

RICK

(Deep breath.)
I gave him you.

STEVE

You *what?!*

RICK

I...I didn't like what he was doing to me, so I...I introduced him to you.

STEVE

Because...

RICK

I thought...I thought you might like it.

STEVE

(RICK looks away.)
Did you?

RICK

I told you: I loved him. But...

STEVE

But?

RICK

But the confusion and guilt were...

STEVE

Horrifying. Yes. I remember.

RICK

(Beat.)

How did you know...about me?

STEVE

I just...guessed.

RICK

How?

STEVE

By the way you.... You were in love with me, weren't you?

RICK

(Beat. Nods.)

My first "falling." But...you didn't love me back.

STEVE

You were my best friend...

RICK

Your best friend who understood "No, thank you" when I saw it.

STEVE

Which is more than he did.

RICK

Did you tell him "No, thank you."

STEVE

In a hundred ways. But he ignored it. What did you tell him?

RICK

That I was afraid. But he said he would take care of it. That if I just didn't say anything, it

would be okay...that God would understand.

STEVE

Do you think he believed that?

RICK

Yes.

STEVE

Then why doesn't he still believe it—that God understands?

(RICK shrugs. Beat)

Rick...can you...can you forgive me?

RICK

For not wanting me or for giving me away?

STEVE

Both.

RICK

No.

(STEVE looks away.)

If I didn't have Mike and the boys...if I didn't have my family, my life with them...the answer might be "no." But...in the "light of eternity," I suppose...what you did is forgivable.

STEVE

Then why can't I forgive myself?

RICK

Is that why you're here?

STEVE

Yeah...I guess so. But I like to think I'm also here for the same reason you are—because I want a saner, kinder world for *all* our children to grow up in.

RICK

And you think he can single-handedly give us that?

STEVE

Let's just say his vote goes a long way. That's why we have to...do whatever we need to get it.

RICK

Threaten? Intimidate? Blackmail? Be as cruel as he was?

STEVE

His victims were innocent. Ours is not.

RICK

So our revenge is justified?

STEVE

It's not revenge to punish a hypocrite.

RICK

Then punish me too...if I betray someone I love.

STEVE

Still?

RICK

He doesn't mean to hurt me, Steve. I know he doesn't.

STEVE

Then why does he say the things he—?

RICK

He just doesn't understand. But after tonight he will. He has to. You wait. When he really sees, *really* sees...he'll understand. He'll change.

STEVE

You're dreaming, Rick.

RICK

(Beat.)

Dreaming in the light of eternity.

(Lights down.)

End of Scene.

MARCH!

by Pat Montley

Question: Is it ever OK to compromise our values? What happens when we do?

SYNOPSIS

African-American journalist and activist Ida B. Wells challenges Suffragist Alice Paul on her plans for the Women's March of 1913.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Ida B. Wells-Barnett: 51, an imposing presence; African-American talented journalist and courageous anti-Jim-Crow activist

Alice Paul: 28, chair of the Congressional Committee of the American Women Suffrage Association; determined, intense, idealistic, a born activist with a talent for organizing

SETTING

March 1, 1913, three days before the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson

Washington DC, The office of Alice Paul

MARCH!

SCENE: *The office of Alice Paul.*

AT LIGHTS UP: *PAUL sits at her desk. WELLS-BARNETT storms in.*

WELLS-BARNETT

I expected this—from anybody but Alice Paul!

PAUL

What makes you think you know me?

WELLS-BARNETT

I know you're a Quaker and that Quakers were leaders in the movement to abolish slavery and—

PAUL

True. But—

WELLS-BARNETT

—and that they provided many stations in the Underground Railroad.

PAUL

I'm always impressed by someone who does her homework.

WELLS-BARNETT

I'm a journalist. Doing homework is my job.

PAUL

Which you do with passion and power. I've read many of your stories on the horrendous lynchings you're bringing to light.

WELLS-BARNETT

I've taken time out from that campaign to come to Washington and march for women suffrage.

PAUL

I appreciate that, but—

WELLS-BARNETT

And I've brought sixty other black women from the Alpha Suffrage Club in Chicago to march with me in the Illinois delegation.

PAUL

Mrs. Wells-Barnett, you are correct: my family has always defended the rights of the Negro. But who do you think will be the spectators at tomorrow's women's march?

WELLS-BARNETT

I suspect most of the District will turn out. And folks flooding in from all over the country for Tuesday's inauguration of Woodrow Wilson.

PAUL

Most of whom will be traveling north, singing "Dixie," ecstatic that we've elected the first Southerner in sixty-four years—one who has vowed to *re-segregate* the Federal Government, eliminating all the racial progress made since the Civil War, making it almost impossible for your people to get Federal jobs and work side by side with whites. We will be marching through a crowd unlikely to be sympathetic to—

WELLS-BARNETT

I've been in far more dangerous situations.

PAUL

That is not my point.

WELLS-BARNETT

Then what is?

PAUL

To keep the parade about suffrage and not about race.

WELLS-BARNETT

How can the parade be about race when only—? Tell me: how many white folks will be marching?

PAUL

I'm not quite certain of—

WELLS-BARNETT

Yes, you are. No organizing detail escapes you.

PAUL

(Conceding.)

About...eight thousand.

WELLS-BARNETT

What else is in the parade?

PAUL

(Taking a deep breath.)

Twenty-six floats, ten marching bands, four mounted brigades, three heralds, and six chariots.

WELLS-BARNETT

Who will lead it?

PAUL

A wingèd goddess in a white cape riding a white horse, carrying a banner that reads:
“Forward Out of Error, Leave Behind the Night,
Forward through the Darkness, Forward into light.”

WELLS-BARNETT

How will the parade end?

PAUL

On the steps of the Treasury Department...with a spectacular allegorical pageant. The figure of Columbia will be summoned forth to the strains of the “Star Spangled Banner” while dancing women in white will portray American ideals of liberty, charity, justice, peace, and hope.

WELLS-BARNETT

So. Bands and brigades, floats and chariots, Isadora Duncan wrapped in the flag, Lady Godiva and eight thousand white faces marching by, and you’re afraid our sixty black ones are going to ruin your parade?

PAUL

There’re more than sixty. Colored contingents from other states have arrived. And even a sorority from Howard University—

WELLS-BARNETT

And you’re going to tell those idealistic young college women that their faces aren’t welcome, that their voices don’t count, that it doesn’t matter if they don’t get the vote.

PAUL

No! I’m going to tell them—as I’m telling you—that in a society where women and Negroes are both looked down on, all of us women will never get the vote if our campaign is seen as some kind of collusion to undermine the power of white men.

WELLS-BARNETT

But we do want to undermine the power of white men!

PAUL

Of course we do! But we won’t achieve that by rubbing their faces in it.

WELLS-BARNETT

So the solution is to keep our black faces out of it.

PAUL

Well...yes.

WELLS-BARNETT

What else?

PAUL

What?

WELLS-BARNETT

There's got to be more to it than that.

PAUL

All right. I'll be honest.

WELLS-BARNETT

Good.

PAUL

We have worked very hard to get Southern women onboard. It's been a challenge, given all the specious arguments about the "weaker" sex being unable to understand politics and intended by God to rely on their husbands for protection. We have met with...modest success. The post-war South—as you of all people must know—is far from progressive. So...

WELLS-BARNETT

So your Southern-belle suffragists are as racist as their men.

PAUL

(Nodding.)

And, sadly, some Northern belles as well.

WELLS-BARNETT

And they don't want us marching with them.

PAUL

Worse.

WELLS-BARNETT

What?

PAUL

They have refused to participate if colored women in any number are included.

WELLS-BARNETT

And you? You're all right with this ultimatum?

PAUL

No. I am not. That's why I countered with a compromise. Black women march...as a unit...in the rear.

WELLS-BARNETT

Back of the streetcar.

PAUL

What does it matter where anybody marches? If our campaign succeeds, we all get the vote.

WELLS-BARNETT

How can we count on that? I don't trust those "powerful white men" of yours not to placate you with a compromise that gives the vote only to you white women.

PAUL

That won't happen.

WELLS-BARNETT

Are you sure? We both know there are plenty of white men—especially in the South—who favor women suffrage just because it's a way to counteract the black male vote. They'd be happy with such a compromise.

PAUL

I tell you it won't happen. No half a loaf. We won't accept a compromise.

WELLS-BARNETT

And yet you're asking me to accept one.

PAUL

Yes. I'm sorry.

WELLS-BARNETT

Not sorry enough.

PAUL

Please...be patient.

WELLS-BARNETT

(Laughs sardonically.)

Listen to you! Are you white women patient? You and Carrie Catt and Anna Shaw? When the white men with the power tell you to "Be patient," you insist you've been waiting long enough, waiting sixty-five years—three whole generations—since Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony began the fight for women suffrage. Don't preach what you don't practice.

PAUL

I don't have a choice.

WELLS-BARNETT

Is that why you offer little encouragement to black women to join your National Women's Party?

PAUL

That's not true!

WELLS-BARNETT

So it's just a coincidence that the Party is mostly well-connected white women, an elitist club for the well-educated and wealthy?

PAUL

Those are the women with time and money. They give large sums to the Party. They're able to volunteer the work that's needed, without expecting a salary. If we had to pay staff, we couldn't survive.

WELLS-BARNETT

And poor women have nothing to offer?

PAUL

Poor women need an income.
(*Beat.*)

WELLS-BARNETT

Have you ever been poor?

PAUL

Not really. For a year when I was studying at the London School of Economics, my mother didn't send tuition money. So I worked in a rubber factory—on my feet all day for piecework wages. But I have seen poverty up close. As a social worker on New York's Lower East Side.

WELLS-BARNETT

Oh? Why did you give that up?

PAUL

Well, for one thing, it was depressing. I was only helping one person at a time. I felt like I was spending my life fixing immediate problems without being able to do anything about the causes of those problems. So...ineffective.

WELLS-BARNETT

And...for another thing?

PAUL

You'll say it's snobbish.

WELLS-BARNETT

Maybe.

PAUL

It wasn't intellectually challenging.

WELLS-BARNETT

So you decided to come here and apply your intellect to the challenge of getting the vote for women.

PAUL

I'm good at strategy.

WELLS-BARNETT

Well, here's what I think, Alice Paul: your strategy is cowardly. But I'm not going to rain on this parade by having my sixty black sisters scare your bevy of Southern belles back to their weed-infested plantations. They'll march in the back. But *I* will march—proudly—with the rest of the Illinois delegation!

(PAUL smiles. Lights down)

End of Scene.

VOTING YOUR CONSCIENCE

by Pat Montley

Question: Does the end ever justify the means?

SYNOPSIS

One Chief Poll Judge tries to persuade the other to change election results.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Bobbie: any age (21 or over), any race, any sex

Darnell: any age (21 or over), any race, any sex

SETTING

A polling place in the USA
The evening of a past or future election day.

VOTING YOUR CONSCIENCE

SCENE:

A folding table, a folding chair. On the table: a large canvas bag with a zipper and lock, marked with large letters: "Provisional Ballots." On the chair: a large loose-leaf binder marked "Chief Election Judge Manual." Leaning against a table leg: an upside-down sign: "No Electioneering Beyond This Point."

AT LIGHTS UP:

Noise of tables and chairs being folded up and stacked in next room. BOBBIE is sitting at the table, filling out a form. DARNELL enters backwards, with a large bin marked "Voted Ballots." Sound Effects: storm

DARNELL

(Calling offstage while entering.)

You all can leave when you're finished stacking those tables and chairs. Use the back door by the parking lot. It locks automatically. Bobbie and I will wait for the pick-up.

(To BOBBIE, teasing.)

The price we pay for power, eh?

(Parks the bin.)

This is the first one. There are a dozen more—and they're heavy. Whose idea was it to return to paper ballots?

BOBBIE

Certainly not the wanna-be hackers.

DARNELL

Did you call Central?

BOBBIE

Yeah. Said they'll be an hour.

DARNELL

(Looking at watch.)

The weather, I guess. It's a mess out there.

BOBBIE

(Gesturing to bin.)

Oh well, that gives us plenty of time to lock up the ballots.

(Holds up bag.)

Here, I've got the provisional ones.

(Holds up sheet of paper and pen.)

If you just sign next to mine, we can zip up and lock.

DARNELL

(Signing.)

You know, I was surprised to find out you were...the “other” chief judge. I didn’t know you were...I mean...I never saw any election signs in your yard or...

BOBBIE

Come on, Darnell! Never imagined that the neighbor who mowed your lawn while you were recovering from surgery could possibly be a Republican?

DARNELL

No! That’s not— I just don’t...I guess I can’t imagine how such a decent person as you—how any Republican—can want...him for president.

BOBBIE

Some of us aren’t voting for “him.” We’re voting for conservative policies.

DARNELL

But how can you want such a dangerous man in the White House? Aren’t you afraid?

BOBBIE

A lot of people are counting on his coming around to being advised by—

DARNELL

(Interrupting.)

As if he would take advice.

BOBBIE

(Ignoring the interruption.)

—by people with more sense and experience.

DARNELL

“More sense and experience”? The Cabinet he appoints? The judges he nominates? The Congressional reps that ride into power on his coattails? Really?

BOBBIE

OK, OK.

(Indicating the Provisional Ballots bag.)

Hold this bag while I do the lock, will you?

(They zip and lock the bag.)

There. Now we just have to sign and lock all the ballot bins and we’re good to go.

DARNELL

Doesn’t feel “good” to me. Most of these votes are probably for him.

BOBBIE

(Teasing the “losing” opponent.)

Cheer up—we’re only one district.

DARNELL

Yeah, but the largest and heavily Republican district in the state.

BOBBIE

Just one state.

DARNELL

A very critical swing state. It could make all the difference.

BOBBIE

Come on. Really?

DARNELL

Really. These votes could decide the election.

BOBBIE

Wow.

DARNELL

But you probably see that as “good.”

BOBBIE

Well...if you want to know the truth...

(Looks around, checking for privacy.)

I’m actually not a Republican.

DARNELL

What?!

BOBBIE

I just switched parties last year so I could vote Republican in the primary and try to get somebody else—anybody else—as the Republican candidate.

DARNELL

So you’re a...

BOBBIE

Democrat. Right.

DARNELL

But you signed up to be a Republican poll judge.

BOBBIE

I didn't plan it. But they asked me—the woman at the Board of Elections—Shawna. They were desperate. Can never find enough Republicans to be poll judges—even in this district. I guess they're all too indispensable at their high-paying jobs to take the day off.

DARNELL

But you're a *Chief Judge*. There's supposed to be one from each party so there's no...
(They look at bin of ballots.)

BOBBIE

So there's no...

(They look at each other.)

BOBBIE & DARNELL *(Together.)*

...tampering.

(They look back at the bin. Beat.)

DARNELL

You're not really thinking...?

BOBBIE

Oh, but I am. I am thinking. And so should you.

DARNELL

Omygod.

BOBBIE

Never mind god. We don't have time for prayer.

DARNELL

Are you serious?

BOBBIE

We've got one hour...one hour to change the course of history.

DARNELL

You really think you have the right to do that?

BOBBIE

I think we have the responsibility to do that.

DARNELL

But these are people's votes. What about...the principles of democracy.

BOBBIE

There won't be any democracy when he takes us into corporatocracy. We're already halfway there with Citizens United. And the SCOTUS appointments.

DARNELL

So you're saying we need to violate the very basis of democracy in order to save it?

BOBBIE

How many times have we gone to war in order to save the peace?

DARNELL

Yeah. And look how that turned out. Anyway, what if we're caught? Think of the damage. The credibility of free elections would be forever questioned.

BOBBIE

We don't have "free elections." We have a Winner-Take-All political system with voter repression, Gerrymandered districts, obscenely expensive mudslinging campaigns controlled by media access, and sabotaged by fake news outlets, and an Electoral College system that contradicts the popular vote. The election is already fixed. Think of what we're doing as just...evening-up the fixing.

DARNELL

But that's—all of that's wrong. We need to correct that, not practice it. If both sides play dirty, we're lost.

BOBBIE

And if only one side plays dirty, we're lost.

DARNELL

Cheating doesn't cure cheating.

BOBBIE

So what's your solution?

DARNELL

Education. Democracy can only work if people really understand the issues. Then they wouldn't vote against their own best interests.

BOBBIE

Show me a coal miner who could be "educated" to care more about global warming than feeding his family.

DARNELL

He could be—if he were retrained for a job.

BOBBIE

And what solar panel company is going to move its operation to the mountains of coal country?

DARNELL

That's narrow thinking. I still say education is the answer. Most people hear the promise of "tax cuts for all" and don't understand how disproportionately that will benefit the rich. People hear "America First" and don't realize how easily that can lead to wars that their children will have to fight. They need to understand.

BOBBIE

But the issues are so complex—it's almost too much for regular folks to take in.

DARNELL

Exactly why too many turn to fake news outlets for interpretation.

BOBBIE

And we know how that goes.

DARNELL

They should be turning to the real journalists for the facts—and then do their own interpreting. But they need to be trained how to do that.

BOBBIE

How can education be the answer when so many right-wing conservative politicians went to college? There's got to be more to it. People have to do more than comprehend; they've got to care. How do you teach that?

DARNELL

You're right. We've got to get past making
(Strikes her/his chest with thumb.)

Number One...
(Raises an index finger.)

our Number One priority.

BOBBIE

And that's never going to happen
(Gesturing to bin.)
under this president.

(Beat. DARNELL circles the bin.)

DARNELL

Could you really live with yourself after...doing this?

BOBBIE

After saving the country from autocracy and racial hatred? saving the world from nuclear war? saving the planet from extinction? I think so. The question is: can I live with myself if I don't do it? So. What do you say?

DARNELL

(Beat. Then it dawns...)

You planned this all along, didn't you?

BOBBIE

No!

DARNELL

Come on.

BOBBIE

OK, OK, I admit I...fantasized about it. But I never imagined we'd have the chance to actually do it.

DARNELL

So the sudden storm is a sign of Mother Nature's approval?

BOBBIE

A gift from the Universe.

DARNELL

We'll go to hell for this.

BOBBIE

You know you don't believe in hell.

DARNELL

I believe in the hell of a guilty conscience. And so do you.

BOBBIE

Who's sitting on your shoulder? Your mother?

DARNELL

Not really. Circumstances made her...a pragmatist.

BOBBIE

Who then?

DARNELL

Will Aiken.

(BOBBIE gestures “Who’s that?”)

DARNELL *(Cont.)*

My college philosophy professor. Explained why it’s unethical to cheat on our income tax even though it would make only a tiny difference in the national budget.

BOBBIE:

Which is?

DARNELL

Because if you do that, you have to “grant” everyone else the right to do it. And if everyone does it, it makes a devastating difference in the national budget.

BOBBIE

Everyone does do it—especially corporations. That’s why we have a huge national debt.

DARNELL

My point is: we shouldn’t break any law we don’t acknowledge everyone else has the right to break.

BOBBIE

What if I do acknowledge that anyone in our position does have the right to break it?

DARNELL

So...two Republican Chief Judges who wanted to sway the election the other way would have the ethical right to mess with the ballots?

BOBBIE

Well, they would probably think so...but—

DARNELL

But you don’t think they have it? Yet you do have it? Because you’re right and they’re wrong? Apart from the untrammelled egotism of that attitude, that’s not how democracy works. Right doesn’t rule. Majority rules. And sometimes the majority is wrong. And the people who are right have to live with that.

BOBBIE

What about conscientious objectors? Gandhi? Martin Luther King? Nelson Mandela? The Berrigan Brothers? Those guys were heroes.

DARNELL

Only because they were willing to pay the price. Their civil disobedience was public. They didn’t sneak around Election Board back rooms. And they didn’t run away when it was time to go to jail.

BOBBIE

OK. They personally paid...as individuals. But they got results: Indians got their independence. South Africans got integration. African Americans got civil rights.

DARNELL

Sort of.

BOBBIE

(Acknowledging this only-partial victory.)

OK, sort of.

(Pointing to the ballot bin.)

And you think he won't set even that partial victory back a hundred years?

DARNELL

Are you willing to pay the price?

BOBBIE

That's not an option here. This is not something we can do...as a public act of civil disobedience.

DARNELL

That's not what I mean. It's a serious offense. Are you willing to pay the price...if our tampering is discovered?

BOBBIE

Are you?

DARNELL

(Beat.)

We took an oath.

(Picks up manual, flips through to find page, then hands it to BOBBIE.)

Here—it's right in the manual. Read it.

BOBBIE

(Reading.)

"I solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States; that I will faithfully discharge all the duties of the office of Chief Election Judge and perform my duties in a fair and impartial manner and not attempt to create an advantage for my party or for any candidate.

DARNELL

(Not a question.)

So.

BOBBIE

So.

(Pause. BOBBIE takes the lid off the bin.)

DARNELL

How would we do it?

BOBBIE

(Pulling an eraser out of pocket and holding it up.)

Erase! There were only pencils—not pens—at all the booths.

DARNELL

Some people used their own pens.

BOBBIE

We can't do anything about those. But there weren't that many.

DARNELL

The electronic counters will reject any ballots with erasures. Says right in the manual the voter is supposed to ask for another ballot if they make a mistake. Shawna made a big deal of it at the training—don't you remember?

BOBBIE

Yeah, yeah. But if we're real thorough...

DARNELL

It won't work. And it would take too long. We're running out of time. If only we could just...pull the ballots cast for him, put them in the trunk of the car and then toss them in the river.

BOBBIE

Great idea! Why can't we?

DARNELL

Think! What have you been doing all day? Logging voters into the registration book. The number of ballots has to match the number of voters that checked in.

BOBBIE

And if they don't?

DARNELL

Then the Election Board knows they've been messed with. And we...we...

BOBBIE

We go to jail.

DARNELL

We go to jail.

BOBBIE

But he still loses those votes, right? I mean you can't count ballots at the bottom of the river.

DARNELL

Guess not.

BOBBIE

And we don't even need the river. Just put the damn things outside—they'll be a soggy mess in ten minutes.

DARNELL

Right.

(Beat.)

So...this is it then.

BOBBIE

Decision time.

DARNELL

Zero hour.

BOBBIE

Are you ready to join our heroes?

DARNELL

Would you really do it?

BOBBIE

Would you?

*(They turn towards the audience and look out.
Lights down.)*

End of Scene.

FOXHOLES

by Pat Montley

Question: What gives meaning to life?

SYNOPSIS

Two soldiers facing death try to find meaning in life.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Devon, 20's, a soldier, male, any race

Jamie, 20's, a soldier, any sex, any race

Note: For purposes of pronoun efficiency, in this version of the script, Jamie is referred to as "she," but can be played by a person of any sex.

SETTING

A foxhole in a war-torn country. The present.

FOXHOLES

SCENE: *Ear-splitting sounds of battle: bombs dropping, helicopters hovering, machine guns firing, soldiers shouting.*

AT LIGHTS UP: *Two soldiers—DEVON and JAMIE—fire in the direction of the enemy. While continuing to fire, DEVON sings.*

DEVON

(Singing loudly, defiantly.)

AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND,
THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME....

(The battle noise subsides. The SOLDIERS take a breath. DEVON remains facing the direction of the enemy with gun poised.)

JAMIE

Do you think you're a wretch?

DEVON

Say what?

JAMIE

"That saved a wretch like me."

DEVON

Well now, that wouldn't reflect a very healthy self-image, would it?

JAMIE

So why are you singing it, Devon dear?

DEVON

'Cause if I sing loud enough, Jamie darlin', I can't hear the...racket.

(Gesturing towards enemy line.)

Besides, my singing's so bad and loud and foreign, it's gotta scare the shit outta them, right?

JAMIE

What makes you think that?

DEVON

One time I was walking home after my night shift, and this guy comes outta nowhere with a knife and says, “Gimme your wallet and you won’t get hurt.” Now I don’t believe him, and I am not gonna hand over my wallet. So I just channel my choir-boy training, point my four fingers at

DEVON (*Cont.*)

his eyes, and start screaming: *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus, tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus!* Before I could even get to “Pray for us sinners,” his ass was gone.

(*Delivering “the lesson.”*)

People—

(*Gesturing to the enemy.*)

even people with weapons—are afraid of “Crazy.”

JAMIE

Or maybe it was the power of prayer.

DEVON

Yeah, right. And what about here? Don’t you think the other side’s praying too?

JAMIE

Sure. But maybe they don’t have Right on their side.

DEVON

Like six million Jews, a gazillion Native Americans, millions of African slaves and twenty Sandy Hook first-graders didn’t have Right on their side?

JAMIE

So...you don’t think it’s worth praying?

DEVON

I just don’t believe there’s anybody listening.

JAMIE

But what if there is?

DEVON

I’m not a “what-if” kinda guy. If somebody’s making nice with me “just in case” I might be a generous god, I’m not giving ’em what they want...even if they need it.

JAMIE

So you...you’re an atheist because you’re too damn selfish to be an agnostic?

DEVON

Shit, you ask a lotta questions.

JAMIE

You sing. I ask questions. Whatever works.

DEVON

And is it working for you, Jamie? Is it taking you mind off our...“situation”? Cause it sure as hell ain’t working for me.

JAMIE

What would work for you, Devon? What would...distract you?

DEVON

We can’t afford to be distracted—don’t you forget it. But I’ll tell you what could make me happy, even right here and now. A pair of clean, dry socks.

JAMIE

Happy, huh? Who cares? Maybe none of it matters. Happiness...Misery. Life...Death. Money...Poverty. The Buddhists believe that, you know. My sister’s dating a Buddhist. “All illusion.” That’s what he keeps saying. “Illusion.” Like that’s some magical explanation that makes all the suffering shit OK. Like if we just don’t care, it won’t hurt. Like if we ignore the bad things, they’ll go away. And if we don’t get “attached” to the good things, we won’t miss them when they go away. Well, it’s not. It’s not OK! Suffering is not OK!

(Shouting in the direction of the enemy.)

Do you hear me?!

(Suddenly stands and shouts.)

SUFFERING IS NOT OK!

(JAMIE fires her machine gun at the enemy. DEVON grabs JAMIE, pulls her down.)

DEVON

Get down! You fuckin’ crazy? Why don’t you just pin a target to your chest?

JAMIE

Sometimes I want to. Just to get it over.

DEVON

You don’t mean that.

JAMIE

Yeah, I do.

DEVON

Snap out of it, Soldier! You can’t be thinking like that. I need you to have my back—just like I got yours. I don’t want to hear that suicide shit.

JAMIE

OK, OK, you’re right. Dying is some kinda luxury we can’t afford just now.

DEVON

A luxury?

JAMIE

Compared to living in this damn hole.... Especially if there's a heaven.

DEVON

You believe that crap?

JAMIE

Stranger things turn out to be possible.

DEVON

Like what?

JAMIE

(Shrugs.)

The earth being round. Electricity. Heart transplants. Love. Artificial intelligence.

DEVON

Come on—a robot that vacuums your floor ain't exactly a miracle.

JAMIE

Some robots are a lot smarter than that.

DEVON

Yeah, well, too bad they didn't come along sooner—so they could've been fighting this friggin war instead of us.

JAMIE

Tell the truth—would you rather be sharing this foxhole with a robot?

DEVON

At least I could hide behind the bot when the bullets start coming.

JAMIE

(Teasing.)

But what would you do for...conversation?

DEVON

Are you kidding? The bot would be teaching me to play chess...and beating my boots off in Go.

JAMIE

What about the...camaraderie? Robots don't have emotions.

DEVON

Better off without them out here.

JAMIE

Really? Without courage? Without trust?

DEVON

Without fear. Without despair.

JAMIE

...without...love?

(Sudden machine gun fire, a bomb goes off. DEVON and JAMIE fire their weapons. A barrage of gunfire, then silence. JAMIE turns abruptly away from facing the enemy, slides down, removes helmet, rubs where a bullet has grazed it.)

JAMIE (Cont.)

Jesus Fucking Christ!

DEVON

They get you?

JAMIE

Damn near.

(DEVON looks out over the battlefield.)

DEVON

Put it back on! Now!

(JAMIE puts the helmet on, takes a couple deep breaths.)

JAMIE

Whew! I really need a cigarette. You got one?

DEVON

Nah. I gave 'em up for Lent.

JAMIE

(Dumbfounded.)

What?

DEVON

Figured it was time to make a sacrifice.

JAMIE

Are you craz—?

(Realizing.)

You're putting me on, you ass-hole.

(DEVON laughs and tosses JAMIE a pack of cigarettes and matches. JAMIE lights up, takes a drag.)

JAMIE *(Cont.)*

Shit, man. how long we gonna be out here? I'm so fucking sick of this whole stupid mess.

DEVON

I guess they're just going to leave us out here till...

JAMIE

Till what?!

DEVON

(Teasing.)

Till we get good at it.

(Beat.)

JAMIE

You think this is it?

DEVON

What?

JAMIE

All there is?

DEVON

Hell no, somewhere there's clean socks?

JAMIE

You know what I mean. Is there more? ...More life.

DEVON

There'll be plenty of life when we get home.

JAMIE

But...what if we don't get home? Is there...more?

DEVON

You mean like...an afterlife?

JAMIE

People all over the world have believed it since...since there were people. I mean think about the Egyptians?

DEVON

That doesn't make it true.

JAMIE

But it makes it...possible. Doesn't it?

DEVON

Where's the evidence?

JAMIE

Some people come back.

DEVON

What people?

JAMIE

Some people come back...after they seen...their loved ones.

DEVON

That's in their heads.

JAMIE

Sometimes a guy'll come back on the operating table. That Nurse from the field hospital—she told me. This soldier died on the table. He was dead. I mean...dead. Then he sat straight up and screamed: "I seen her. I seen my mother in heaven!"

DEVON

Then what happened.

JAMIE

He died again.

DEVON

Right.

JAMIE

Otherwise it ain't fair.

DEVON

Everybody lives. Everybody dies. What's not fair?

JAMIE

But some people live longer than others.

DEVON

Well, if you want to live forever, then you gotta leave your mark. Shakespeare. Einstein. Oprah. They're gonna live forever. The rest of us just have to...settle.

JAMIE

That's what's not fair. I mean is it Oprah's fault that she's gonna live forever?

DEVON

Well, yeah—I think she might have something to do with it.

JAMIE

I didn't mean...Hey, look, I love Oprah. Who doesn't? But she's had all those years to...leave her mark. And that kid on the table that died twice—he didn't.

DEVON

Maybe it didn't matter to him. In the end, he had his mother.

JAMIE

Do you...do you think he did?

DEVON

He thought so. That's what counts.

JAMIE

And what about babies and little kids that die. They don't even get a shot at it. How's that fair?

DEVON

Maybe in the long run, it doesn't matter.

JAMIE

What does that mean?! How can it not matter? Every single tiny life—however short—has to matter! Or else...

DEVON

Or else, what're we doing here?

(Beat. JAMIE reaches in her backpack, pulls out a pair of socks, tosses them to DEVON, who kisses them and "throws" the kiss to JAMIE.)

JAMIE

My sister's boyfriend says Buddhists don't believe in heaven. They believe in something called Near-Vanna. You stop wanting anything for your own self because you're part of something bigger.

DEVON

*(Preoccupied with untying his laces in preparation
for putting on the clean socks.)*

Like us? Like the army?

JAMIE

Hmm...maybe. Maybe we're part of all the armies in the world and all the different people the armies fight for.

(Entranced by her own thoughts, she slowly stands up.)

And all the animals...and trees...and mountains...

(She gestures to the sky.)

and galaxies.

DEVON

(Not a question.)

Wouldn't that be something.

(A single bullet shatters the silence and strikes JAMIE.

She falls to the ground. DEVON crawls quickly to JAMIE.)

DEVON *(Cont.)*

(Shouting.)

Medic! Sergeant! Somebody! We need help here! Jamie, hold on. Listen to me, I'm gonna get you fixed up here. Forget about heaven! You hear me.

(Shouting.)

We need a medic! Somebody get the hell over here!

(He feels for a pulse in JAMIE's neck.)

They'll be here. You just gotta hold on. You hear me, Jamie? Please!

(But it's no use. He takes her hand.)

Listen. Listen to me, Jamie. You did it. You did it. You left your mark.

(Puts the hand that's holding JAMIE's on his own heart.)

You left it here.

(Lights down.)

End of Scene.

MADRIGAL IN BLACK AND WHITE

by **Pat Montley**

Question: How can we move beyond racial stereotypes?

SYNOPSIS

A chance encounter between two young women—one black, one white—escalates into the beginning of a relationship, despite their own awkwardness and the warnings of their uncensored alter-egos bearing the burden of social history.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>Liz:</u>	mid-to-late 20's, white
<u>Shadow Liz:</u>	Liz's uncensored, wise-cracking alter-ego; older, white
<u>Cleo:</u>	mid-to-late 20's, African American
<u>Shadow Cleo:</u>	Cleo's uncensored, wise-cracking alter-ego; older, African-American

SETTING

The street in front of Liz's suburban house. (Bare stage)
The present

PRODUCTION NOTES

Liz and Cleo can be played realistically. But the performances of the Shadows should be stylized. They are less the ominous Jungian “evil twin” than they are the sometimes humorous, always embarrassing Turret's-twin, urging the warnings of an earlier generation. Non-realistic costumes and stylized movement might serve them best. The Shadows generally talk to their respective Persons, but the Persons—although they hear these comments—speak only to each other. The “car” can be represented by a two-dimensional cut-out frame, or simply by chairs or black boxes.

MADRIGAL IN BLACK AND WHITE

SCENE: Street in front of suburban house.

AT LIGHTS UP: Bright sunlight. Sound effect: lawn mower. LIZ is (miming) mowing the lawn. CLEO is sitting in the driver's seat of a car whose headlights are on. SHADOW-CLEO is in the car with CLEO. SHADOW-LIZ accompanies LIZ. LIZ stops mowing, crosses slowly towards the car, squinting into the sun, but within a few feet of it, stops abruptly.

LIZ

Oh! Sorry. I didn't see anyone in the car. I, um...

SHADOW-LIZ

You didn't see her because she's black.

LIZ

The sun! The sun was in my eyes.

SHADOW-CLEO

(To CLEO.)

You're invisible.

CLEO

The sun?

(Turns to look out the back window.)

Oh. The sun was...in your eyes.

LIZ

(Finishing sentence with her.)

In my eyes. Yes.

(Self-consciously pointing and squinting.)

West.

(Gesturing to the "lawnmower" she left behind.)

I was, uh, mowing the lawn and I...saw the car sitting here.

SHADOW-LIZ

A car you didn't recognize, in your *cul de sac*—

LIZ

And I wondered—

SHADOW-LIZ

What it was doing in front of the Johnson's driveway.

LIZ

—why the lights were on.

CLEO

Oh. I didn't realize they were....
(*Turns lights off.*)

Thanks.

SHADOW-CLEO

Neighborhood Watch at work. They'll all sleep safer tonight.

LIZ

I was going to turn them off. I mean if no one was in the car. So the battery wouldn't...

SHADOW-CLEO

She was going to rifle the glove compartment for crack, then call the cops.

CLEO

Tricky business.

LIZ

(*Misunderstanding.*)

What? No, really. I was only thinking that the battery would—

CLEO

No, I didn't mean—I meant you always feel...a *person* always feels—

SHADOW CLEO

A *black* person always feels—

CLEO

You always feel funny about doing that to another person's car.

SHADOW-LIZ

Doing what?

CLEO

Reaching in the window.

LIZ

Right! Or opening the door to turn off—

CLEO

Yeah. So you make a big deal of it. Or look around the parking lot for an accomplice so you can say: “Should we try to turn the lights out in that car before the battery—”

LIZ

Exactly! And you think the cops are going to pull up just as you put your hand on the switch.
(LIZ and CLEO laugh.)

SHADOW-CLEO

(To LIZ.)

They wouldn't arrest *your* white ass, Sweetheart.

SHADOW-LIZ

So ask her what she's doing here.

SHADOW-CLEO

Better tell her what you're doing here.

CLEO

I'm waiting for my brother.

(Gestures to the house next to LIZ's.)

He's in there.

LIZ

Oh.

SHADOW-LIZ

Didn't know the Johnson's were having any work done.

SHADOW-CLEO

She thinks he's robbing the place.

CLEO

His car's in the shop.

SHADOW-CLEO

Tell her he's a financial adviser. American Express.

SHADOW-LIZ

Wait. They did talk about getting a new roof. Remember they asked us about recommending—

CLEO

So I'm giving him a lift.

SHADOW-LIZ

In the getaway car.

LIZ

Who says siblings can't be nice?

SHADOW-LIZ

She's probably got twenty of them—raised by a single mother who worked herself to an early grave cleaning white women's houses with carcinogenic chemicals.

SHADOW-CLEO

Tell her he's a doctor making a house call.

(Realizing no one would believe it.)

Nah. Forget that.

CLEO

I was just admiring...your house.

SHADOW-LIZ

Lock up the silver.

SHADOW-CLEO

Good move. Now she'll go right in and lock up the silver.

LIZ

Did you want to come up on the porch while you wait. Maybe have a cold drink.

SHADOW-CLEO

Your big break, Girlfriend! Sit on the plantation veranda, sippin' mint juleps and watchin' the darkies pick cotton.

LIZ

I was just ready for one myself.

SHADOW-LIZ

Calm down, Sister. Next you'll be telling her your grandmother marched in Selma.

CLEO

I...I brought some work to do.

(Lifts papers on her lap.)

But thanks. Thanks anyway.

SHADOW-CLEO

Now you've gone and hurt Miz Scarlett's feelin's.

LIZ

(Disappointed.)

Oh. Sure.

SHADOW-LIZ

Don't look so disappointed. It's embarrassing.

CLEO

I think I would like to stretch my legs though.

(Gets out of car.)

SHADOW-LIZ

(To LIZ.)

Nice legs, eh? We need to spend more time in the sun, you know. Promise me.

LIZ

(Noticing parking sticker on windshield.)

Ah. University sticker. You a student there?

SHADOW-CLEO

O, Sweet Sojourner! This is my favorite part!

CLEO

I'm a teacher.

SHADOW-LIZ

Whoooooa! Great White Liberal puts foot in mouth.

LIZ

Hey! Me too. What do you teach?

SHADOW-CLEO

Ease her conscience. Tell her we teach remedial reading to the phonetically challenged.

CLEO

Shakespeare.

LIZ

Wow!

SHADOW-LIZ

Don't act so surprised.

LIZ

I'm...impressed.

SHADOW-CLEO

I wonder why.

CLEO

In the English Department.

SHADOW-CLEO

And all this time she thought Shakespeare was physics.

CLEO

What do you teach?

LIZ

Music.

CLEO

Really?

SHADOW-LIZ

Tell her it's gospel and she'll have a drink with you.

LIZ

I'm at the City High School for the Arts.

(Thrusts her hand out.)

Liz Trotter.

CLEO

(Shakes hands.)

Cleo Harris.

LIZ

For Cleopatra?

SHADOW-CLEO

Here we go.

CLEO

My mother was a fan.

LIZ

Of Shakespeare?

CLEO

Of Cleopatra Jones.

(THEY laugh.)

What kind of music?

LIZ

Choral. I conduct the concert choir. And the madrigal group.

CLEO

That's great.

LIZ

Do you sing?

SHADOW-LIZ

Why not ask her if she does the Watusi?

CLEO

No. But I did my dissertation on Shakespeare's love songs.

LIZ

What!?

SHADOW-LIZ

Uh-oh—bombs bursting in air.

CLEO

The songs in Shakespeare's plays. You know... "O Mistress Mine"... "How Should I Your True Love Know"... "Where the Bee Sucks, There Suck I"....

SHADOW-CLEO

Stop it!

SHADOW-LIZ

She's making this up.

LIZ

So...you're an authority on—

SHADOW-CLEO

Sucking.

LIZ

—Shakespeare's songs. That's...terrific.

SHADOW-CLEO

You should be ashamed—flirting with this white trash.

(Imitating outraged Southern black preacher.)

What are our fine Negrah women tah do in the face of this desertion by our best and brightest?

LIZ

You know, I...I've been thinking it might be fun to have the madrigal group do some songs from Shakespeare.

SHADOW-LIZ

Oh yeah. How long you been thinking that?

LIZ

I mean using the music that would actually have been used in the Globe. It would be a great history lesson for the kids.

SHADOW-LIZ

Going for Selfless-Teacher-of-the-Year Award?

SHADOW-CLEO

(To CLEO.)

Say "No" before you get into trouble.

LIZ

I wonder if you would be willing to help me find...

SHADOW-LIZ

Stop! What are you getting into here?

SHADOW-CLEO

Tell her to check the *Shakespeare Variorum*. It's got to be in their school library. Probably on the damn Internet by now. Or let her download the stupid songs from MP3. She doesn't need your help.

CLEO

Well...I could suggest a few places to look...

SHADOW-CLEO

Don't do this!

LIZ

Maybe we could meet for...

SHADOW-LIZ

(Seeing the handwriting. Going for the lesser of two evils.)

Coffee. Just coffee.

LIZ

For coffee...at...

(Starts to gesture towards her house behind her.)

SHADOW-LIZ

At Barnes & Noble's.

LIZ

For cappuccino at Barnes & Noble's. I could bring my list of the songs I'd like the group to sing, and we could put our heads together and...

SHADOW-CLEO

And then our knees...

SHADOW-LIZ

And then our hands...

SHADOW-CLEO

Eyes...

SHADOW-LIZ

Lips...

SHADOW-LIZ & SHADOW-CLEO

THIS IS A BAD IDEA!!

CLEO

Sounds like plan.

SHADOW-CLEO

A plan for disaster!

SHADOW-LIZ

Look, this doesn't work out, and we'll be the ones accused of racism.

SHADOW-CLEO

(To CLEO, accusing.)

You think you have enough in common because you're both teachers?

SHADOW-LIZ

(To LIZ.)

You're worlds apart. Solar systems. Galaxies.

SHADOW-CLEO

Hasn't your family stretched to its limit already with the lesbian thing?

SHADOW-LIZ

You think your liberal friends are ready for this? They'll smile and make nice—

SHADOW-CLEO

And wait—without even knowing it—

SHADOW-LIZ & SHADOW-CLEO

for her to screw up.

LIZ

So...

SHADOW-LIZ & SHADOW-CLEO

And so will *you*.

LIZ

So...should we...set a time?

CLEO

Um. Sure.

(Beat.)

Or I could just...

LIZ

Just what?

CLEO

Just...send you the list of sources.

LIZ

Yeah. I guess we could...we could do it that way...if we want.

CLEO

Might be...easier.

LIZ

Right.

CLEO

Or...

LIZ

Or...

CLEO

Or...

LIZ

Or you could come to my house for dinner Saturday night.

CLEO

I could?

LIZ

I mean...

(Gesturing behind her to the house.)

you know the address.

CLEO

That's true. Yes. Well, then. What can I bring?

LIZ

It's not a potluck. I'll cook dinner. What's your favorite?

CLEO

Roasted quail with mead-and-chestnut dressing.

LIZ

Piece of cake.

CLEO

(Correcting her.)

Trifle.

LIZ

Of course.

CLEO

OK, I'll bring the candles.

LIZ

And the music. Don't forget the Songs....

CLEO

"How should I...

LIZ

"...your true love know."

LIZ and CLEO

Right.

(THEY smile. SHADOWS moan. Lights down.)

End of Scene.

THE CUTTING

by Pat Montley

Question: Who gets to say which human life has worth?

SYNOPSIS

An interminably ill man tries to persuade his daughter-caretaker to help him die. The request is complicated by the ambivalent nature of their past and present relationship.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Father, 70's-80's, any race, infirm

Daughter, 40's-50's, any race, his caretaker

SETTING

A room in their home
The present

THE CUTTING

SCENE: A chair or stool, next to it a walker with a tray containing a collection of pills.

AT LIGHTS UP: FATHER is sitting on stool, deals with wave of nausea.

Call Kevorkian!

FATHER

He's...not available.

DAUGHTER (*Offstage.*)

Did you put me on the waiting list?

FATHER

Sure.

DAUGHTER (*Offstage.*)

(*DAUGHTER enters with a barber's cape and scissors.*)
Have you ever considered maybe I don't want you dead.

Because of the money?

FATHER

What?

DAUGHTER

My pension check.

FATHER

DAUGHTER
(*Hands him scissors to hold while she puts cape around his shoulders.*)

I was paying the mortgage before you moved in.

Then why?

FATHER

Maybe we're not finished.

DAUGHTER

Not finished what?

FATHER

DAUGHTER

(Starts tying cape at neck.)

I don't know.

FATHER

(Pulling cape away.)

No more haircuts! What's the point? I don't care what I look like. I just want to—

DAUGHTER

(Putting cape back on.)

Well, I'm the one who has to look at you.

(She reaches for scissors, but he won't let them go.)

FATHER

I should've had the operation.

DAUGHTER

With a ninety per cent chance of ending up dead?

FATHER

It would be better than this.

DAUGHTER

I know you're depressed, but—

FATHER

It can't go on like this.

DAUGHTER

Dad...

FATHER

Feeling so nauseated all the time.

DAUGHTER

But then you have some good days too.

FATHER

And now...last night...

DAUGHTER

Everybody's entitled to wet the bed once in a while. I've done it myself.

FATHER

I knew I had to go. I just couldn't get up. I mean the walker was right there. But I didn't have the strength—I was too slow. And by the time I...it was too late.

DAUGHTER

It'll be better now, with the commode in your room. Don't fret about it. That's the first time since you've been here.

FATHER

But not the last.

(Beat. She reaches for the scissors again. He releases them.)

It's going to get worse, you know.

DAUGHTER

(Beat.)

I know.

(Starts cutting his hair.)

FATHER

Then what? A nursing home? With some underpaid foreigner desperate for work cleaning up my shit. Nobody should have to do that. It ain't...fair, ain't...right. I don't want that.

DAUGHTER

Me either.

(She cuts in silence.)

FATHER

How big is it?

DAUGHTER

(Feeling a spot on his head.)

Same as before. You know that from last week's CAT scan.

FATHER

Then why am I getting weaker and weaker if it's not growing.

DAUGHTER

Because you haven't had any real exercise in three years. Because the cells around the tumor are dead or damaged. Because you're exhausted from having seizures.

FATHER

And I don't understand that either. This Dilantin stuff is supposed to stop the seizures.

DAUGHTER

Only if you take the full dosage.

FATHER

But the more I take...it makes me sick to my stomach. And dizzy. I stagger around like some...can't get my words out right.

DAUGHTER

(Leaning over his shoulder.)

I know. It's a tough choice.

FATHER

I want out, Janie.

DAUGHTER

Out?

FATHER

You know what I mean.

DAUGHTER

(Straightening up. She knows.)

What?

FATHER

I want you to help me.

DAUGHTER

Me? I notice you don't ask Jerry.

FATHER

He's got your mother's soft heart.

DAUGHTER

Oh. And I've got your murderous one!?

FATHER

It wouldn't be murder.

DAUGHTER

Are you sure a jury would see it that way?

FATHER

I'll leave a note.

DAUGHTER

Good.

(She pretends to start to leave.)

I'll go get a Notary Public.

FATHER

I'm serious.

DAUGHTER
People don't kill their fathers.
(Resumes cutting.)
Except in classical tragedies.

FATHER
In what?

DAUGHTER
In old Greek plays.

FATHER
People kill their fathers?

DAUGHTER
Mothers too. And some kill their children.

FATHER
Why?

DAUGHTER
Oh, lots of reasons. For the gods. For honor...hatred...revenge.

FATHER
This one can be by accident.

DAUGHTER
You don't think revenge would work?
(She inadvertently pricks his ear.)

FATHER
Ouch!
(Pulls head away.)

DAUGHTER
Sorry.

FATHER
Anyway people *do* kill their fathers—it's in the newspaper all the time.

DAUGHTER
Not the way I was hoping to get famous.
(The cutting continues in silence for a moment.)

What did you mean about revenge?
FATHER

Just teasing.
(Another silence.)
DAUGHTER

Did you hate me?
FATHER

(Stops cutting.)
You know I don't.
DAUGHTER

But did you hate me then?
FATHER

When?
DAUGHTER

You know when.
FATHER

(Rests her hand on his shoulder. Tentatively.)
You mean...the first twenty years?
DAUGHTER

Yeah.
FATHER

(Beat.)
I was hurt. I didn't understand...why you kept choosing the bottle over us.
DAUGHTER

I didn't understand either.
FATHER

But then you stopped. Why?
DAUGHTER

I finally just...got disgusted—tired of waking up in my own piss....
FATHER

That's the reason?
DAUGHTER

FATHER

(Beat.)

Your mother got disgusted too. She left me.

DAUGHTER

What?!

FATHER

You was away at college—your year overseas. She didn't want to worry you with...

DAUGHTER

But I...ohmygod.... What happened then?

FATHER

Drank myself into the hospital with cirrhosis. Scared me shitless. So I gave it up, did three months of rehab, and begged her to come back.

DAUGHTER

I always...wanted to ask. But we were none of us very good at talking about...anything.

FATHER

(Beat.)

Too late for you.

DAUGHTER

But not for Jerry. You were a good father to him.

FATHER

But not to you.

DAUGHTER

Not in those years. No. But after.

FATHER

Too late.

DAUGHTER

You turned your life around. Became somebody I could admire...even like. And I could see you were trying...you tried to make it up to me...to all of us.

FATHER

But before...when you was growing up...did you hate me?

DAUGHTER

Why do you keep asking me that?

FATHER

Because...because I gotta know if...if it's my fault—the way you...your...

DAUGHTER

The way I turned out? My failed marriages?

FATHER

Well....

DAUGHTER

We make our own mistakes. It doesn't help to blame someone else.

FATHER

Sure it does. Did you hate me?

DAUGHTER

I wish you wouldn't—

FATHER

Did you hate me?

DAUGHTER

(Takes a few steps away from him.)

Listen, I don't think it's a good idea to—

FATHER

DID YOU HATE ME?

DAUGHTER

Stop it!

FATHER

(Turns to her and screams.)

DID YOU HATE ME?

DAUGHTER

(Faces him.)

YES! All right, I hated you! I hated you coming home late every night, slurring your words at dinner. I hated you staggering into the furniture. I hated you swerving around the road when you picked me up from my friends' houses, I hated the looks on their faces when you came to school smelling of booze, I hated hearing you and Mom screaming at each other, I hated when she cried and I couldn't do anything about it!

(FATHER looks away. Pause.)

Didn't you hate *your* father?

FATHER

He wasn't around to hate.

DAUGHTER

I know. But didn't you hate him for that—for running off and leaving you?

FATHER

I was only two years old. I couldn't understand—

DAUGHTER

Didn't you hate him?

FATHER

YES! Yes, I hated the bastard!

(Beat. Starts to cry.)

And then I grew up to be just like him.

DAUGHTER

No. You didn't.

(Crosses to him, kneels.)

You came back.

FATHER

(Cries--softly.)

Too late.... I'm sorry, Honey....

DAUGHTER

Dad—I...It was a long time ago. I forgive you.

FATHER

No...not possible. Nobody forgives...a father who abandons...

(Cries with increasing emotion until he is heaving. This upheaval begins to develop into a seizure. He shakes all over.)

DAUGHTER

Dad!

(She holds him as he shakes.)

Dad! Don't die on me—not this time. Not now.

(The seizure goes on.)

Please—Dad—hold on!

(The seizure goes on.)

It's OK—I've got you.

(Gradually, FATHER stops shaking until he is limp, exhausted.)

Janie...this ain't no way to live.

FATHER

I know, I know...it's a terrible way to live. But...what can we do?

DAUGHTER

What would *you* do?

FATHER

What?

DAUGHTER

If it was you? If you was in my condition?

FATHER

I...I guess it would depend.

DAUGHTER

On what?

FATHER

On whether the times between the nausea and the seizures and the anxiety were...long enough...or rich enough....

DAUGHTER

And if they wasn't?

FATHER

I...I don't know.

DAUGHTER

Come on, come on...truth.

FATHER

Well, I...might be tempted to end it.

DAUGHTER

How? How would you end it?

FATHER

I...I don't know.

DAUGHTER

Would you stop taking the medicine?

FATHER

DAUGHTER

(Getting up.)

Dad—don't even think about that. Without the Dilantin, the seizures would...

FATHER

Kill me?

DAUGHTER

Or turn you into a vegetable.

FATHER

Then I wouldn't have no pain, would I?

DAUGHTER

I would!

FATHER

A vegetable's gotta be on a machine to live. I don't want that—and I got the legal paper that says so. Just don't call nobody.

DAUGHTER

What?

FATHER

Not the doctor, not the ambulance—nobody.

DAUGHTER

What? I should...just watch you have one seizure after another and do nothing about it—call no one—until you have enough of them to kill you.

FATHER

If that's what it takes.

DAUGHTER

What do you think I'm made of?

FATHER

Janie—if I thought you was capable of murder, I'd ask you to put those scissors in my hand and stick 'em right into my heart.

DAUGHTER

Isn't it the same thing?

FATHER

No. It ain't. I'm asking you...to just let nature...take its course.

DAUGHTER

Nature?

FATHER

(Holding up bottle of pills.)

Without these pills, that's what'll happen. Just don't do anything. *Please...Don't. Do. Anything.*

(Beat. They look at each other. Lights down.)

End of Scene.

RACHEL CARSON
BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

by **Pat Montley**

Question: What would you sacrifice to save the earth?

SYNOPSIS

Rachel Carson, a respected writer of books about the sea, is dying of cancer and not quite finished the work that will become the harbinger of the ecological movement: *Silent Spring*. She is living in her cottage on the Maine coast with her aged mother and fractious young nephew whom she has adopted. One day, as she revels in her discoveries of microscopic life at the edge of the sea, a visitor emerges from it to tempt her with fame, power, pleasure. She demands more...and almost strikes a bargain, but the price proves too high.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>Rachel:</u>	51, failing health, but happily at home at the edge of the sea; as a mother, patient, but not indulgent; as a temptee, intense, quick-witted, controlled but vulnerable
<u>Boy:</u>	6, a handful
<u>Man:</u>	Ageless, with just a hint of the sinister; a man of the world who enjoys an intellectual challenge

SETTING

A rocky coast at low tide
Summer, 1960

RACHEL CARSON BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

SCENE:

The edge of the sea along a rocky coast at low tide.

AT LIGHTS UP:

Sea sounds for a moment. RACHEL is sitting on a “rock,” studying with her hand lens the periwinkles attached to the side of an adjacent rock. An aluminum pail on the ground. She sits up, puts down the glass and rubs her neck—as one who has been at it for a good while. She slowly stands, lightly shaking out the stiffness in her body, closes her eyes and begins a “wakame” exercise—pre-tending her limp body is seaweed being gently moved about by the sea. Then music. The image of a mermaid swimming is projected onto her and onto the backdrop behind her. She is taken up into this reverie. After a few moments, a BOY of six enters. He wears swimming trunks, and goggles pushed up on his head like horns. He throws [imaginary] stones at the ground around RACHEL’s feet.

RACHEL

(Opening her eyes—which cues the mermaid and her music to disappear abruptly. Not looking at him.)

You don’t have to throw stones at me to get my attention.

BOY

Aunt Rachel, I want some ice cream. I’m hot.

RACHEL

Go for a swim in the big tide pool.

BOY

I don’t like swimming.

RACHEL

You do.

(Sits back down on her “rock.”)

BOY

I don’t like swimming as much as eating.

RACHEL

(Resumes studying the periwinkles.)

In a little while, I’ll come in and fix you and Gran some lunch.

I want some ice cream.

BOY

After lunch.

RACHEL

Gran wants ice cream too.

BOY

(Turns to him.)
Did she say that?

RACHEL

(Turns away, throws a stone in the other direction, then turns back.)
What are you doing?

BOY

Watching the periwinkles. Come look.

RACHEL

(Crossing to her.)
It's boring. They don't DO anything.

BOY

(Crossing to her.)
It's boring. They don't DO anything.

RACHEL

It's boring.

BOY

Or...they get washed out to sea and eaten by little crabs, who get eaten by little fish, who get eaten by big fish, who get eaten by little boys who get—

RACHEL

(Interrupting.)
I don't like this story.

BOY

Get Gran to read you one you like better.

RACHEL

Which?	BOY
Hansel and Gretel.	RACHEL
It's dumb.	BOY
Why?	RACHEL
There's no such thing as witches.	BOY
Ah...the woods are full of them!	RACHEL
You're just saying that to scare me.	BOY
Are you scared?	RACHEL
No.	BOY
The Little Mermaid, then.	RACHEL
I don't believe in mermaids.	BOY
The sea is full of them.	RACHEL
Well, I don't see them.	BOY
Do you see fish?	RACHEL
Everybody sees fish.	BOY

RACHEL

Then ask Gran to read you the Fisherman's Three Wishes.

BOY

You just want to get rid of me.

(No response.)

Well, if I had a wish, I'd wish...I'd wish I was with my *real* mother...I'd wish I was dead.

(He storms off. RACHEL looks after him, distressed, then resumes her study. Sound of water—someone swimming to shore. MAN in black approaches through audience.)

MAN

Well...do *you* wish he were dead?

RACHEL

(Looking up.)

I wish he were...more curious.

MAN

That's one.

RACHEL

I...I wasn't expecting you so soon.

MAN

You thought you'd have more time?

RACHEL

A little.

MAN

You could, you know. A lot.

RACHEL

How?

MAN

Wish for it.

RACHEL

You think I'd waste my second wish on that?

MAN

What then? No—don't. Let me guess.

(Considers for a moment.)

Your research acclaimed! Your theories vindicated! Your book *Silent Spring* a wild success—the beginning of an ecological movement!

RACHEL

You think I need you for that?

MAN

Something more up my alley then? To see the producers of DDT suffer like the innocent little birds they've killed...

(Demonstrating with comic exaggeration.)

bills gaping wide...claws splayed and stiff, drawn up to their breasts in agony.

RACHEL

Oh, you underestimate me.

MAN

You imagine you're above vengeance only because you don't think vengeance is possible. But I can make it happen.

RACHEL

(Incensed.)

I am not a sadist.

MAN

All right, don't get overheated—you'll steam your winkles.

(Trying a new tact.)

A more orthodox pleasure, then.

(Brightly.)

So who do you want?

RACHEL

I beg your pardon?

MAN

Come on—name your man.

(She gives him a look.)

Your woman?

(She gives him another look.)

Hey—the flesh was good enough for Faust.

RACHEL

Too late for that.

MAN

Doesn't have to be. I can give you the health to enjoy it.

RACHEL

The cancer...?

MAN

Eliminated—

(Snaps fingers.)

like that.

RACHEL

(Interested.)

Just how much disease can you eliminate—

(Snaps fingers.)

like that?

MAN

Make your wish.

RACHEL

(Thinking. Then.)

That the earth be healed of all the damage done by human beings.

MAN

You strike a hard bargain.

RACHEL

I told you: you underestimate me.

MAN

It's a deal. Provided, of course, you agree to hand over your soul.

RACHEL

What will you do with it?

MAN

Bury it under the sea, down, down in the deepest fiery core of the earth, watch it burn, then eat the ashes. You'll be part of me forever.

RACHEL

Part of...you?

MAN

Your searing intellect, your clever insights, your passions...all at my disposal, to use as I wish, to do whatever I—

Stop! It's not fair.

RACHEL

Exactly.

MAN

To let you use me like that...would be a betrayal of...all I hold sacred.

RACHEL

All you hold sacred. Yes. That's the way it works when you ask for so much.
(Beat.)

MAN

And if I...ask for less?

RACHEL

Ah—finally! What might that “less” be?

MAN

That the earth be—

RACHEL

Noooo! I told you: the cosmic will cost you too much. Try something...personal.

MAN

Personal?

RACHEL

You can do it. Come on!

MAN

But none of the things you offered were—

RACHEL

Of course not. They were mine. Find your own. Search your...soul.

MAN

To be free. Spontaneous. To be not so...not so responsible....To live in the sea...to feel the pull of the moon and the pulse of the currents...to sing the music of the spheres...to be...to be a mermaid.

RACHEL

(Goes into “wakame” for a moment. Then.)

MAN
Hmm.... For how long?

RACHEL
Forever!

MAN
Come on! What's in that for me?

RACHEL
Not forever then.

MAN
For how long?

RACHEL
For as many years as the sea swirls around us.

MAN
For as many years as you'd have left as a human.

RACHEL
How many's that?

MAN
Oh no you don't.
(Pause.)

RACHEL
All right then.

MAN
It's yours.

RACHEL
Really?

MAN
And truly.

RACHEL
And the cost?

MAN
Termination.

RACHEL

What?

MAN

You will—at the end of your free, spontaneous, musical life as a mermaid—cease to exist.

RACHEL

But that's no cost. Everybody dies.

MAN

Not die. Cease to exist. No part of you will continue. You will not die in the sea and decompose into film on a rock that feeds the periwinkles that feed the crabs that feed the fish that feed the fishers who love the sea. You will not be buried in the earth and eaten by worms that enrich the soil that nurtures the plants that are eaten by children who grow in the sun. You will simply: stop being.

(Pause.)

RACHEL

Oh...

(Beat.)

MAN

Well?

RACHEL

Stop being a part of the cycle of life?

MAN

You won't miss it.

RACHEL

Give up my connection to all that was and is and shall be?

MAN

For the freedom to be more than human...

RACHEL

...less than eternal.

MAN

You think the dirt you're made of is eternal? You think this sea is eternal? You think this pathetic earth is eternal? Why it won't last even another century at the rate—

RACHEL

At the rate we're poisoning it? You're right about that. That's why I have to—

MAN

Finish your book? It won't make a difference.

RACHEL

I think I have to try.

MAN

(Solicitous.)

Oh, Rachel, aren't you tired?

RACHEL

Yes...yes. So tired.

MAN

(Coaxing.)

Forget eternal. Choose now.

RACHEL

But it...may not be enough.

(Sound of mermaids singing.)

MAN

The mermaids are singing for you, Rachel.

RACHEL

They're lovely.

MAN

They're calling. Listen!

(The mermaid's music and image return. RACHEL, doing "wakame," moves in time with her. The mermaid seems to be a magnet for RACHEL, who is drawn more and more out of herself, out of the present, towards an alluring freedom. The music crescendos and climaxes. RACHEL struggles with the temptation, and finally, with the utmost difficulty, breaks out of "wakame," opens her eyes and stops moving; the music and image abruptly disappear.)

RACHEL

(Crying out.)

No!

(Beat.)

I cannot do it.

MAN

Are you sure?

RACHEL

(Beat.)

Now I am.

MAN

(Wistfully.)

You were almost there. You could have been so...free.

RACHEL

Maybe.

MAN

You won't get another chance, you know. It's too close to the end.

RACHEL

I know.

MAN

Well then...as you...wish.

(He slowly exits. Sounds of sea come up. RACHEL watches him disappear. The BOY reappears.)

BOY

A little while is up. It's time for lunch. I want to have sausages like the fisherman's wife—so I can wish one gets stuck to your nose!

(He runs off. RACHEL smiles, picks up her pail and hand lens and slowly goes off after him.)

(Lights down.)

End of Scene.