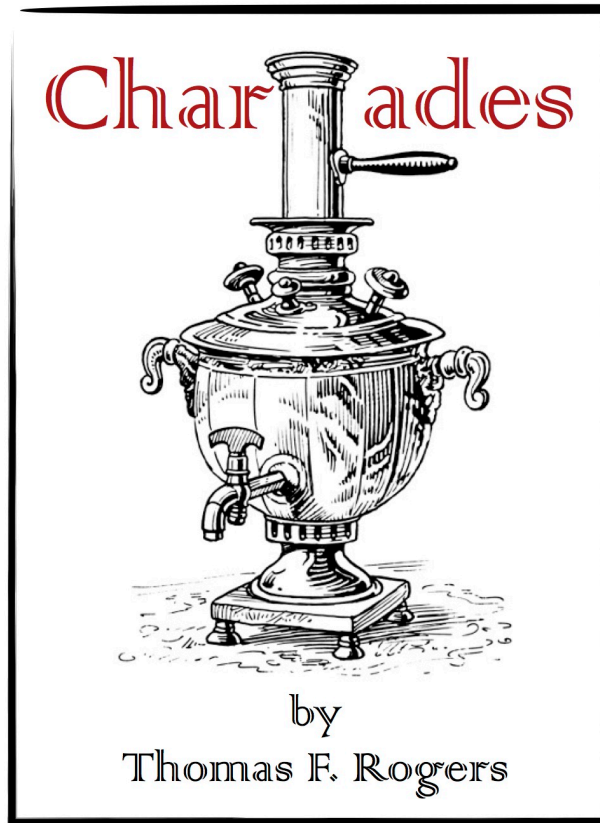


# PERUSAL SCRIPT



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Newport, Maine

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## **CHARADES**

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# Charades

Cast of 4M 2W

Characters (in order of appearance)

**Danny**, Burt's son, and Gladys' father, a former broker, in his fifties

**Gladys**, Burt's granddaughter, in her twenties

**Burt**, a recluse, in his mid-eighties

**Flo**, Burt's sister, in her seventies

**Jackson**, a gardener and retired professor, in his fifties

**Stranger**, a young man with an Eastern European accent, in his late teens

**Russian Official**

**Nadezhda Nikolaevna**

**Young Danny**

**Young Burt**

**Agent**

**Aunt Agnes**

**Uncle Milt**

**Sam Harris**

**Harv**

**Ben**

**Larry**

**Officer**

**Genady**

**Doubling of roles, if used, should be as follows:**

**ACTOR ONE** plays

"Danny" and "Larry"

**ACTOR TWO** plays

"Official", "Burt", "Officer", "Uncle Milt" and "Sam Harris"

**ACTOR THREE** plays

"Jackson", "Genady", "Young Burt", "Jesus," and "Harv"

**ACTOR FOUR** plays

"Young Danny", "Stranger", "Gas Man" and "Ben"

**ACTRESS ONE** plays

"Flo" and "Agnes"

**ACTRESS TWO** plays

"Nadezhda Nikolaevna", "Young Flo" and "Gladys"

NOTE: THIS SCRIPT IS ALSO AVAILABLE IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE. CONTACT THE PUBLISHER.

**CHARADES** by Thomas F. Rogers.

4M 2W. One Exterior. 2 hrs.

A one-time stock broker, the middle-aged Danny, boasts about his mercenary adventures in Rhodesia, Nicaragua and more recently Afghanistan. He also claims to have an adopted son there, a defector from the Red Army. In Danny's absence a younger man shows up, claiming to be a Soviet Defector and Danny's actual son. We later learn that he is bent on killing Danny for ostensibly betraying his mother to the KGB. Meanwhile, Danny's one certain offspring, the pregnant Gladys, accuses her father of sending her husband to Afghanistan. To absolve himself, Danny must admit his military exploits are an illusion. In doing so, however, he will betray the possibility that Gladys never had a husband. He leaves the choice to her. The other characters' histories equally come into question: whether Danny's father was ever insane; whether his father's dog is still alive; whether Danny's aunt once had an affair with a Spaniard names Jesus; and whether the young Russian is really Danny's son. Each must wrestle with the prospect that the authenticity of our dreams is less important than how they affect our relationship with others. This play contains adult language and situations. **ORDER #3056**

**Thomas F. Rogers --**

A former director of the BYU Honors Program, Thomas F. Rogers was a professor of Russian language and literature at Brigham Young University, now retired, and the author of more than a dozen plays, many on Mormon subjects. Four of these have been published in *God's Fools* (Signature Books, 1983), which also received the Association of Mormon Letters Drama Prize that same year. Those titles are **HUEBENER**, **GOD'S FOOLS** (or **JOURNEY TO GOLGOTHA**), **FIRE IN THE BONES**, and **REUNION**. Other titles include: **THE SECOND PRIEST**, **THE SEAGULL** (Adapted from the Chekov play), **GENTLE BARBARIAN**, **FRERE LAWRENCE**, **CHARADES**, were published in a second anthology entitled *'Huebener' and Other Plays by Thomas F. Rogers*, in 1992. Then **THE ANOINTED**. He has also penned stage adaptations of Dostoevsky's novels, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*. The former received a BYU production, directed by Tad Danielewski, in which Tom played the role of Marmeladov. In 1995–1996 *God's Fools* was produced (in translation) by a professional repertory theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. (While Tom was serving as an LDS mission president. He also played the role of the American double spy, Cooper in that production. Later on that mission he directed a Russian language version of *Huebener* in St. Petersburg.

He directed the premiere productions of Robert Vincek's *For the Lions to Win*, Thom Duncan's *Matters of the Heart* and Eric Samuselsen's *Accommodations* as well as States-side productions of *Huebener*. He's also directed Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* (in German) for Deutsches Teater Salt Lake City and Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, Pirandello's *It Is So If You Think So* and Pinter's *The Caretaker* for the BYU Department of Theatre.

Cited by Eugene England as "undoubtedly the father of modern Mormon drama," he received the Mormon Arts Festival's Distinguished Achievement Award in 1998 and in 2002 a Lifetime Service Award from the Association of Mormon Letters.

His latest published stories appeared in the Summer 1991 issue of *Dialogue* (receiving an annual *Dialogue* fiction award) and in the collection *Christmas for the World*. Rogers was once the editor of *Encyclia*, journal of the Utah Academy, and author of a critical monograph, *Myth and Symbol in Soviet Fiction* (The Edwin Mellen Press). He studied at the Yale School of Drama and holds degrees from the University of Utah, Yale, and Georgetown. He has also studied theater in Poland and Russian at Moscow State University and taught at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the University of Utah. Rogers' theatrical activity includes acting and directing in addition to writing plays. He has traveled extensively in Russia, Eastern Europe, and India. He and his wife Merriam are the parents of seven children, thirty-eight grandchildren and, so far, three great-grandchildren. They reside in Bountiful, Utah.

## **InterConnections**

One of life's most important purposes and functions—its greatest source of fulfillment, at least for me—is to commune, to “connect,” with others at ever deeper levels of understanding, mutual acceptance, sharing, identification by merging into one another's lives. And yet, how we tend to stifle our inclination, our need to do so, therewith missing the satisfaction and joy—the very nourishment to our souls—that alone derive from such communion, such connection. We do this largely, I think, from fear—fear of rejection. It is easily the most tragic tendency in human affairs and leads not only to emptiness and depression, but to resentment, hostility, and vengeful scapegoating. It lies at the root of the psychology that engenders and exacerbates all conflict and war, whether public or domestic, at every interpersonal level. If the devil inspires anything in us, it is our fear and subsequent disregard of each other, hence of ourselves. There are doubtless practical reasons—limits of attention and energy and time and availability—which preclude our attaching ourselves to or demonstrating our affinity for other than a certain number. But this should never serve—as it mostly does—as a pretext for our not universally caring for and about everyone of whom we become aware or who sooner or later enters our presence.

## **From the INTRODUCTION of “The Collected Plays of Thomas F. Rogers, Volume 1: Perestroika and Glasnost. (Available from Leicester Bay Theatricals)**

"The selections in this first volume of Tom Rogers's collected plays appear under the collective sub-title “Perestroika and Glasnost.” The Russian word perestroika means “restructuring,” and glasnost means “openness.” Those terms refer to Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's 1985-91 radical changes to Soviet economic structure, internal policy, and foreign relations. He led a major change in the leadership of the Communist Party, and decentralized economic planning in favor of market forces. He also reduced central Party control of the mass media, religious groups, and Soviet citizens whose views may have differed from those of their leaders. The results of this massive new “restructuring” and “openness” were felt across the Soviet Bloc. Communist governments collapsed, and the USSR dissolved into multiple independent republics.

The five plays in this volume suggest that on the personal level, too, “restructuring” and “openness” can cause similarly significant change. And a natural hoped-for result of pursuing such personal perestroika and glasnost is the communion which Tom Rogers wants for everyone, in all our relationships—the communion to which he has devoted his entire professional life, accompanied by all the interpersonal and even religious connotations “communion” implies.

Tom Rogers is unabashedly idealistic and ambitious. He wants to change us, and thereby to change the world. These five Perestroika and Glasnost plays by Tom Rogers cry to us in our wilderness, urging us to help prepare the world for better things, whatever the cost. These plays are bold and uncompromising theatrical explorations of the most profound and vexing social dilemmas." —**Bob Nelson, Professor of Theatre at the University of Utah**

(in this book you can peruse CHARADES, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, GOD'S FOOLS, THE IDIOT, and THE SECOND PRIEST)

# CHARADES

by Thomas F. Rogers

## ACT ONE

*Soviet era Moscow during the late Twentieth Century. At an angle to the audience, YOUNG DANNY and his interpreter NADEZHDA NIKOLAEVNA sit stiffly together on an elegant bench. He wears a fifties' style men's suit and tie. She—a plain upswept hairdo and a conservative blouse and dark skirt that nevertheless becomingly show off her svelte figure. He is in his late teens, she in her late teens or early twenties. Tchaikovsky's "Francesca da Rimini" is heard in the background.*

**NADEZHDA:** *(speaking in a thick but seductive Russian accent)* You were really wonderful, Mr. Daniel! I think you may win the prize after all. Just one more contestant—the one who's conducting right now. Then we'll know for sure.

**YOUNG DANNY:** This is all so unreal. I still can't believe it. Whisked away by Soviet agents. Right on my school grounds. Now here in Moscow. Conducting in the Bolshoi Theatre—one of the world's greatest orchestras. And...most unbelievable of all...

*(Instinctively reaching for her hand)*

...finding you.

**NADEZHDA:** Oh, Mr. Daniel.

**YOUNG DANNY:** Please call me "Danny." Since last night—

**NADEZHDA:** *(impulsively taking his hand)* You believe me, don't you—that you were the very first?

**YOUNG DANNY:** Of course I do. And you must know that, for me, it never happened with anyone else. I guess I was really never in love...till now.

*(They embrace.)*

I didn't know what it was like...what I was missing. I'm glad it didn't happen till...I met you.

*(They kiss.)*

**NADEZHDA:** But how will we manage to see each other again after you leave?

**YOUNG DANNY:** You said they sometimes let Soviet wives leave with their foreign husbands. It's easy enough to get married here, isn't it? You just walk into some office and put down a few rubles for a license.

**NADEZHDA:** Yes, but—

**YOUNG DANNY:** Then that's what we'll do. As soon as this competition ends. This afternoon.

**NADEZHDA:** But if you win, there will be interviews with the press. And a big reception in the evening.

**YOUNG DANNY:** You'll be with me, won't you? You'll still be my interpreter?

**NADEZHDA:** Yes, I'm assigned to you for the entire week—until they take you back to the plane and you...

*(collapsing in his arms)*

...you leave me forever!

**YOUNG DANNY:** That won't happen. I promise! I'll stay. I'll renounce my citizenship if they don't guarantee that you can come with me. And this afternoon after we meet the press, I'll excuse myself. Say I have a

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headache. Then you'll rejoin me at the hotel, and we'll rush off to the marriage bureau.

**NADEZHDA:** You don't know our bureaucracy. The paperwork for emigration takes longer than that.

**YOUNG DANNY:** It's going to be all right. No one can keep us apart for very long. If they try, I'll come back.

**NADEZHDA:** (*hugging him tightly*) Oh, Danny!

**YOUNG DANNY:** You do want to be my wife, don't you?

**NADEZHDA:** Of course, I do. *Golubchik moj*. My pigeon. My little pigeon.

**YOUNG DANNY:** My darling!

(*nibbling her ear*)

And you know what I want?

**NADEZHDA:** What, *golubchik*? Tell me.

**YOUNG DANNY:** I want to give you a child someday.

**NADEZHDA:** And I want to give you one...someday.

**YOUNG DANNY:** If it's a boy...

**NADEZHDA:** Yes?

**YOUNG DANNY:** We must call him "Kelly."

**NADEZHDA:** "Kelly"? Why "Kelly"?

**YOUNG DANNY:** Because of a clown, a very sad-happy clown who makes all the children in America smile when they hear his name.

(*The music ends.*)

**NADEZHDA:** (*suddenly pulling back and moving away from him, sitting stiffly*) The music has stopped.

Somebody will come soon and tell us. Oh, Danny, I know you're going to win!

(*DANNY reaches for her hand, which she rejects.*)

No. Someone comes.

(*The actor who later plays BURT appears in a dark East European suit as the OFFICIAL. He speaks with a thick Russian accent.*)

**OFFICIAL:** Mr. Daniel. It give me great pleasure to inform you that, by unanimous decision of judges, you are winner of first international USSR Tchaikovsky competition for young and promising future conductors.

(*DANNY stands, dumbfounded. GLADYS tries to suppress her delight.*)

Please come this way to be acknowledged and take bow.

**YOUNG DANNY:** (*starting to follow the other man, then turning again to GLADYS, who still sits on the bench*) What about her?

**OFFICIAL:** You will not need interpreter till after public has chance to greet you and give you deserved ovation. Then you will come back and rejoin her in my office for interview with press.

**NADEZHDA:** (*encouraging*) Go on, Mr. Daniel. Please go with him. They are waiting.

(*DANNY hesitates, then turns and follows the OFFICIAL to another part of the stage, now directly facing the real audience. Rising, NADEZHDA stares expectantly after them. The OFFICIAL moves forward into a spotlight. DANNY disappears in the shadows.*)

**OFFICIAL:** (*addressing the audience*) *Tovarishchi. Eto moja bol'shaja chest', Vam predstavit' vyigravshevo pervyj priz na nashem mezhdunarodnom sorevnovanii—grazhdanina Soedinjonykh Shtatov Ameriki, Mistera Daniila—*

(*Before the OFFICIAL can announce DANNY's surname, a roaring applause, which*

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*continues unabated, as, visibly overwhelmed, NADEZHDA still stands watching. The lights gradually dim, then focus on FLO, in her seventies, and DANNY, now in his fifties and wearing army fatigues, but wiry, all muscle, and with the bearing of a Wall Street executive. The setting is a garden, with weathered wooden lawn furniture. Fruit trees in the background. To one side the steep entrance to a dugout cellar and, above it, the porch of a vintage frame house. A screen door gives access to the house's interior. An old straw broom stands against the house, near the door. The whistle of a distant train. The nearby yelping of an unseen dog, coming from upstage. Shears in hand, JACKSON, also in his fifties, attentively clips imaginary tufts of grass along the edge of the garden. This he does throughout the play, sometimes disappearing behind the house, particularly when he is spoken of, then reappearing, always oblivious to those about him unless addressed by one of them. FLO, in her seventies, wiry, energetic, wipes down the lawn furniture with a cloth. Addressing her, DANNY waves a folded newspaper.)*

**DANNY:** Flo, it's downright embarrassing!

**FLO:** *(taking the newspaper)* Let's see.  
*(Reading further)*

"I didn't know what to think. But everyone believed him. No one ever contradicted him. And it was in all the papers. So it must have been true."

**DANNY:** You know that never happened! He's used that story to embarrass me for I don't know how many years now. When he couldn't get them to lock me up like they had him, then he started in with stories like this—

**FLO:** But, Danny, it was in the papers back then too.

**DANNY:** It wasn't!!

**FLO:** I don't say it ever really happened. I just know what I read back then and that you didn't deny it either. Not at the time. You even spoke at public gatherings that next year—churches and service clubs. Everyone wanted to hear about it. And have your autograph. FBI too. These men would show up in three piece suits, taking notes and sometimes your picture. Surely you remember.

**DANNY:** *(extremely upset)* I don't remember a thing. And I wish you'd all quit pushing it at me—that tall tale. I wish people would believe me once in a while instead—about the things I've really done in this life. Like being in Ghan last month. One of the few Americans who've gone there to fight for those folks' freedom. And going back too—soon as I can raise the funds. What will I do this time? Just wait and see. You'll be amazed. I'm going to attach myself to these Tadzhiks, see. They're the fiercest of all the Afghani tribes. And they've got cousins just over the border—yes, that's the border I'm talking about: the Soviet border. Well, we're going to cross it this time. Disguised as shepherds. We'll take a good sized flock of sheep with us—to live off of and for disguise. And after we get there, in the USSR itself, we'll shoot 'em up. Blow up their power stations, their reservoirs. Give 'em Holy Hell! Believe me, it'll be the ultimate "high," the unexcelled joy ride! But that's not all. We're going to change the face of the map, see? The common people will notice what's happening, and they'll revolt. The Commies will go under. It will be like the good, safe days again. Peace will return to the Earth. Peace for all of us and for all our kids—their kids too. But he wouldn't know about any of that, would he? Wouldn't listen, if I told him. Certainly wouldn't believe it.

**FLO:** It's alright, Danny.



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**DANNY:** No, it isn't....

*(indicating the newspaper)*

And I'm going to let him know about this latest cheap shot of his.

**FLO:** Going to break your vow, are you? Finally going to speak to him—after how many years?

*(DANNY looks away, defeated.)*

You know it would only make him erupt again like Mount Saint Helens. Wouldn't change him at all. And you wouldn't feel like coming around for another year or two.

**DANNY:** That would be all right with me.

**FLO:** *(gesturing toward the cellar)* But what about your target practice? You train down there every day. Hours on end.

*(DANNY says nothing and, while still looking away, returns the newspaper.)*

So keep this to yourself and hurry on down there before he sees the glint in your eye and says something out of turn.

**DANNY:** Yeah, he's hopeless. They should never have let him out of that place.

**FLO:** *(suddenly humming, then singing with the ecstasy of a gospel singer)* "What a friend we have in Jesus..."

How are you this morning, Jackson? Warm enough?

**JACKSON:** Take no thought for whited sepulchres.

**FLO:** At least there's no frost yet.

*(Solicitously)*

Don't wear yourself out, Jackson.

**JACKSON:** Not my will, but thine—

*(DANNY moves toward the cellar; then, noticing JACKSON, goes to him instead.*

*Meanwhile FLO has resumed wiping down the furniture, but stops to listen as DANNY speaks to JACKSON.)*

**DANNY:** You know something, Jackson? There's one Russian I do admire. Just so you don't think I'm prejudiced or something. In fact, I look upon him like my own son. I do. We first met when we were both trying out for the Afghani chiefs. His real name's Genady, but in Ghan they call him Rahmatullah.

*(JACKSON mimes picking up a rifle, kneeling on one leg and holding the rifle across the other. He faces downstage and peers into the distance, as if waiting for a signal.)*

**JACKSON:** *(as Genady)* You sure you aren't Russian?

**DANNY:** My accent isn't very Russian, is it?

**JACKSON:** You may be faking. Counterspy. Kill me when I turn my back.

**DANNY:** The Soviets really do a job on you guys, don't they? Injecting you with all that suspicion and paranoia.

**JACKSON:** We cannot afford trusting.

**DANNY:** Not even your own?

**JACKSON:** 'Specially not our own. I wish you were Afghani. With darker skin.

**DANNY:** Sorry to disappoint you, Genady. But I'm an American. Just a plain old American. Here for the same reason you are, I figure. So—for better or worse—they've "buddied" us up. And we'd better make the best of it. Or the chiefs won't send us on that three week raid to the Khyber Pass. We won't even be drawing breath so they could.

**JACKSON:** Khyber Pass. I want go there bad. Going there we find many Soviet regiment. Give them much trouble.

**DANNY:** (*meanwhile sighting through a pair of binoculars*) Then we'd better keep those enemy snipers from getting anywhere near camp. Prove we can do it.

**JACKSON:** We have only one rifle. Old fashioned. They have Kalashnikov. I no longer have Kalashnikov.

**DANNY:** Kill the right one. And you'll have it back. Kill another. And I'll have one too.

**JACKSON:** If you American, please explain me, Mister, why American want coming here anyway?

**DANNY:** Call me "Danny," okay?

**JACKSON:** All right. Danny. But please explain.

**DANNY:** For the same reason you defected—to put an end to all this and send the Red Army back where it belongs.... What I have trouble believing about you is that you'll really have the guts to shoot another Russian. Just a few days ago some of them were your very own buddies.

**JACKSON:** Will end their misery sooner. What have they for living back home? Bad job. Bad pay. Lies from government. Probably end up alcoholic before thirty. Half our infantry already using drugs.

**DANNY:** *Their* infantry.

**JACKSON:** (*sadly*) *Da*. *Their* infantry.

**DANNY:** At least you don't have to worry about going back.

**JACKSON:** That right. They not ship body if found on other side.

**DANNY:** (*picking up a picture which has fallen from JACKSON's pocket*) What's this?

**JACKSON:** My family.

**DANNY:** That your mother?

**JACKSON:** *Da*.

**DANNY:** Looks like you've got two sisters.

**JACKSON:** *Da*.

**DANNY:** You the oldest?

**JACKSON:** *Da*.

**DANNY:** The guy in uniform must be your father.

**JACKSON:** *Da*.

**DANNY:** Hey...your dad's a Soviet Marshal!

**JACKSON:** *Da*. Marshal.

**DANNY:** Tell me, Genady. Why would the son of a Soviet Marshal volunteer for a hellhole like Afghanistan? You could have had your pick of assignments—Berlin, Warsaw—where there's real culture and hardly any danger.

**JACKSON:** I want action...Danny.

**DANNY:** I understand that, Genady.

**JACKSON:** I want show father what I can do—without he always helping.

**DANNY:** I understand that too.

**JACKSON:** So I ask coming to Ghan for front-line duty. But at time I not plan defecting to Afghanis.

**DANNY:** What gave you the idea?

**JACKSON:** Because...because of how we—how Soviets—torture and kill innocent civilian. With germ warfare and booby trap toy. How they take hostage old men and women who never raise weapon and run over them

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with our—with *their*—tank or burn in gasoline.

**DANNY:** So you decided to join all those defenseless kids and old people and become a victim too?

**JACKSON:** At least their eyes stay open—alive or dead. Who you think they tell me I fight before we come here? American like you. You first I see—probably last. American and many Chinese. More lies!!

**DANNY:** Think your father knows better?

**JACKSON:** Of course. My father Soviet Marshal.

**DANNY:** How's that make you feel—about your father?

**JACKSON:** No matter. We never close. He always too busy....

**DANNY:** The lookout's signaling. Someone's coming!

*(again sighting through his binoculars)*

This way!! It's our turn to show our stuff, Genady. Let's not "blow" it.

**JACKSON:** *(taking position and sighting his rifle)* How many?

**DANNY:** I can't tell yet.... Oh!

**JACKSON:** What you see?

**DANNY:** Over there. Six of them. Each with a Kalashnikov...and high-powered sights.

**JACKSON:** How we kill them before they kill us?

**DANNY:** By never letting them see us. That's how. By staying under cover after each shot. We have that much advantage—we saw them first.

**JACKSON:** Our *only* advantage.

**DANNY:** Then let's use it. I'll sight them each time with these binoculars and tell you when it's safe to try another.

**JACKSON:** We not make it, Danny. Odds—too high.

**DANNY:** You want to go to the Khyber Pass, don't you, Genady?

**JACKSON:** *Da. Da*, Danny.

**DANNY:** How bad?

**JACKSON:** Bad. Very bad.

**DANNY:** *(staring JACKSON down, commandingly)* Then we're going to get those six Red soldiers before they get us. Understand?

**JACKSON:** I...understand...Danny.

**DANNY:** All right. Now get ready.... There. There's the first one. To the right of that outcropping. They still have no idea we're anywhere around. Go ahead. Get him.... What's the matter?

**JACKSON:** *(drawing a bead, but hesitating)* He...he Russian.

**DANNY:** That's right. Then am I a Russian agent?

**JACKSON:** No. If spy, you not tell me kill Russian.

**DANNY:** Then how's it going to be, kid? Who's in the right? And who's going to do something about it? Or was all that just a lot of hot air you were spouting?

**JACKSON:** *(taking more careful aim)* I...I get him.

**DANNY:** Don't forget. It will make you an outlaw—forever. With your own. But you'll be a hero for all Mankind. The great Rahmatullah!

*(A rifle discharges. JACKSON recoils.)*

**JACKSON:** For human freedom.

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**DANNY:** *(still sighting)* You got him, Genady! You got him! The others just noticed. They're looking everywhere. Now they're running for cover. We'll just wait. As long as it takes. We'll just wait till they come out again. I'll sight the next one and tell you when to get him.

*(Noticing JACKSON)*

How you feeling?

**JACKSON:** *(pensive, nearly in tears)* I...don't know, Danny....

**DANNY:** *(putting his arm around JACKSON's shoulder)* You'll get used to it, Genady. After a while. It's Hell, I know. But that's what makes it so noble. So heroic—risking your life like this and not minding if you have to take someone else's. Just keep remembering what it's all for. It'll be easier the next time. Believe me, it will. And remember where we're heading—the Khyber Pass.

**JACKSON:** *Da, Danny...Khyber Pass.*

**DANNY:** *(again to JACKSON, who has meanwhile returned to his pruning, oblivious, as before)* After that Genady and I hit it off just fine.

*(suddenly close to tears himself)*

Even calls me "Dad" sometimes, because I, well, I treat him like he was my son.... You see now, don't you, why I need to get back there?

**FLO:** Danny! Hurry up! I think he's coming!

*(DANNY returns to the cellar entrance, opens its door, and descends, closing the door after him. Shortly after, muffled rifle shots are heard. These continue at intervals until the STRANGER's arrival. FLO proceeds to tidy the furniture when BURT enters, carrying a bucketful of apples. He is in his eighties, with locks of unkempt gray hair down to his shoulders and a long, tobacco-stained beard.)*

**FLO:** How's picking, Burt?

**BURT:** Same as ever. Not enough help. Gotta rest a spell.

*(BURT sits on one of the chairs.)*

**FLO:** Not on that one, Burt!

**BURT:** *(bristling)* Why not, dammit?

**FLO:** It's still wet with dew. I wish you'd have let me dry it first. It's no longer summer, you know. Nippy out. You could catch pneumonia.

**BURT:** Sooner the better.

**FLO:** You don't mean that. You've got years ahead of you. You're still able bodied.

**BURT:** So was Podie, till he up an' keeled over.

**FLO:** I miss Podie too.

**BURT:** Never forget how he thought he was a bird an' used to lie in the coop with the chickens. How he'd stir up all that dust, raisin' his front paws an' flappin' 'em like they was wings. Used to have to keep him off their nests too. Wanted t' hatch a egg, if he could. Dreamt about him this mornin' agin. Kinda went to sleep, I guess, while I was on that ladder out there.

**FLO:** Take your pill yet?

**BURT:** Don't see what good them pills do me.

**FLO:** They've brought the swelling down. You can wear your shoes again now, can't you? They thin the blood too, I mean to tell you. Prevent stroke.

Charades by *Thomas F. Rogers*

**BURT:** Why don't you then?

**FLO:** What?

**BURT:** Tell me?

**FLO:** What?

**BURT:** What you mean to tell me.

**FLO:** I already did.

**BURT:** Did what?

**FLO:** Told you.

**BURT:** Oh.... Went to a doctor years back—in Oklahoma. I'd skinned myself bad on some barbed wire.

**FLO:** Oh?

**BURT:** It was a ulcer.

**FLO:** Uh-huh.

**BURT:** Wouldn't heal.

**FLO:** Oh?

**BURT:** He had this here root from China, ground up in sulphur molasses.

**FLO:** Yes?

**BURT:** Said it would cure me, an' it did.

**FLO:** Uh-huh.

**BURT:** What in the Hell, Flo!!

**FLO:** What, Burt?

**BURT:** What's all these "uh-huh"s' an' "oh's" an' "yes's" for anyway?

**FLO:** Why, because I'm interested, Burt. Interested in what you're saying.

**BURT:** You're sure?

**FLO:** Of course.

**BURT:** Well, then.... What I couldn't believe was all them bottles he had on his shelf. An' whadaya think they had in them?

**FLO:** More medicine?

**BURT:** Flo!! Dammit, no! Why d'yuh always have t' say things yuh don't know?

**FLO:** But you asked me.

**BURT:** An' yuh di'n't know, did yuh?

**FLO:** Well, of course, I didn't.

**BURT:** So what should you have said?

**FLO:** Guess I shouldn't have said anything.

**BURT:** That's right. Always spoilin' someone's tale.

**FLO:** I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. Now go on with it.

**BURT:** No.

**FLO:** Why not?

**BURT:** You really ain't intrestid.

**FLO:** I am too.

**BURT:** No you ain't, or you wouldn't intrupt me like that.

**FLO:** Burt, for Heaven's —now please tell me.

Charades by Thomas F. Rogers

**BURT:** Why should I?

**FLO:** Burt, please, I'm standing here—your sister. Why would I be here if I weren't interested?

**BURT:** Because you're my sister. An' there's no place else fer yuh t' go.

**FLO:** I can't help that, Burt.

**BURT:** So yuh wish yuh wasn't my sister an' di'n't have t' do fer me.

**FLO:** I didn't say that.

**BURT:** But you was thinkin' it.

**FLO:** How can you say that?

**BURT:** I kin tell.

**FLO:** *(sitting on one of the chairs and quietly weeping from exasperation)* Oh, Burt, why are you always this way?

**BURT:** What way?

**FLO:** Always picking. Always finding fault.

**BURT:** Look who's pickin'. You're the one's callin' me names.

**FLO:** Like what?

**BURT:** Like bein' a fault finder.

**FLO:** Shouldn't have said anything. I knew better.

**BURT:** So why did you?

**FLO:** Because I'm not perfect, I guess.

**BURT:** Never said you was.

**FLO:** I'm not perfect, and sometimes I'm a sinful creature like everyone else. And if you're Christian, you'll forgive me.

**BURT:** Who said I was a Christian?

**FLO:** Nobody, Burt. Though I wish you would be.

**BURT:** There you go now with yer hard sell religious hooey!

**FLO:** All right. I'll stop.

*(patting his shoulder)*

You stop too. All right? A truce?

**BURT:** *(worn out with his own fury)* All right. It ain't worth it.

**FLO:** That's right. So tell me what was in those bottles.

**BURT:** What bottles?

**FLO:** In that doctor's office in Oklahoma....

**BURT:** Oh, that. You really wanna know?

**FLO:** Really.

**BURT:** An' you won't make fun?

**FLO:** I won't make fun.

**BURT:** Well, it was stones mostly.

**FLO:** Stones?

**BURT:** Gall stones, kidney stones...an' a lotta babies that never got born.

*(FLO gasps.)*

**BURT:** Yeah, lots of 'em. An' tapeworms too. Row after row. Line upon line of 'em. I never seen such long

Charades by Thomas F. Rogers

tapeworms. All come out with that medicine. All them folks cured by that same remedy—Chinese root in sulphur molasses.

**FLO:** Wasn't much cure for those poor babes.

**BURT:** Put 'em outa their mis'ry 'head of the rest of us. That's what it did fer 'em. Did 'em a big favor....

Anyway this Okie doctor made barrels of it each month fer the Queen of England.

**FLO:** Goodness! So the Queen herself had a tapeworm.

**BURT:** No, she di'n't, Miss Know-It-All. Why don't yuh ever listen? It was fer her soldiers in India.

**FLO:** Oh.... Did you take your pill yet?

**BURT:** Thins the blood, does it? Don't remind me. Makes me think of Agnes. How she suffered after her stroke—ling'rin' on all them years. Never sayin' a solitary word. Never recognized me. Not once.

**FLO:** I know.

**BURT:** That's what aged me so.

**FLO:** And that's why you need the Savior in your life—His Glad News.

**BURT:** What "glad news"?

**FLO:** His Eternal Kingdom—for the saved.

**BURT:** Like you?

**FLO:** That's my great hope.

**BURT:** If yuh save enough others.

**FLO:** Maybe.

**BURT:** That why yuh don't want me t' die yet—so's yuh kin save me first?

**FLO:** I'd be very lonely without you to care for, Burt.

**BURT:** It's too late for caring.

**FLO:** You're only as young as your thoughts—your dreams.

**BURT:** I take pride that in my later years I did not, like some...

*(looking toward the cellar)*

become again an a-do-le-scent, if some ever grew up in the first place.

**FLO:** We must become "as a little child."

**BURT:** That so?

*(The STRANGER, in his thirties, enters the yard downstage. His dress is shabby and East European.)*

**STRANGER:** *(addressing JACKSON, in a slavic accent)* I pray you, Sir...here live Mr. Daniel?

**JACKSON:** *(indicating FLO and BURT)* "Ask in faith, nothing wavering."

**BURT:** And who might you be?

**STRANGER:** You are...my father?

**BURT:** Huh?

**STRANGER:** You...Mr. Daniel?

**BURT:** Wha'd he say, Flo?

**FLO:** He asked, were you his father.

**BURT:** I hate attorneys. I never wanted anythin' to do with 'em. But maybe, Flo, we need one of them lawyers right now—afore anythin' more is said. Afore he tries to do us in an' gets us locked up instead a him.

**FLO:** Burt, he couldn't be your boy. He's too young.

Charades by Thomas F. Rogers

**BURT:** I'm too old fer foolin' 'round. That yer meanin'?

**FLO:** It's just that there wasn't...anyone since...well, since Agnes.... Was there?

**BURT:** (*concentrating, very serious*) I'm tryin' t' remember. I honestly would like t' know. Was there anyone after Agnes took sick? Hell!

**FLO:** Burt, what's the matter?

**BURT:** There weren't! There ain't been no one in all them years. Wish there was. How long's it been?

**FLO:** Agnes had her stroke when Danny was just seventeen. Now Danny's nearly sixty himself.

**BURT:** Forty some years then. An' I ain't had no one in all that time. So how could I be his father?

**FLO:** You couldn't. Besides he asked about someone named Daniel.

(*to the STRANGER*)

Is Daniel his first or his last name—the same as his father's?

**STRANGER:** I not know his father name.

**FLO:** It must be a first name—like Danny's.

**BURT:** In that case, I ain't the Daniel you're lookin' fer. If it's any of yer business, he's my son.

**STRANGER:** Where Mr. Daniel?

**BURT:** He's—

**FLO:** Burt!

(*She cautions him with a quick glance toward the cellar.*)

**BURT:** (*heeding her*) He ain't here right now, not fer you anyhow.

**FLO:** We can't disturb him.

**STRANGER:** (*very insistent*) Where Mr. Daniel?

**BURT:** (*To FLO*) So that's it. It's Danny was cuttin' up back then, not me! Don't say a thing. Don't share. Don't give anyone else half a chance.

**FLO:** Burt!

**BURT:** Must have been on one of them trips of his. Sometime after the war.

**STRANGER:** When I can see Mr. Daniel?

**BURT:** Where you from?

**STRANGER:** I want please see Mr. Daniel.

**BURT:** (*To FLO*) Don't he sound a little like a...like a Rooshin maybe?

**FLO:** I wouldn't know. I never met a Russian.

**BURT:** Well, I did once. Czecho-Slovaks anyway. Down in Texas. They're almost the same.... Well, am I right? You from Commie land?

**STRANGER:** I from USSR.

**BURT:** Like I thought. How'd you get out? You ain't some Jew, are yuh?

**STRANGER:** I join navy. Ship come to Alaska. At night I dive into water. Almost drown.

**BURT:** Well, now. I di'n't read about any o' that in the papers.

**STRANGER:** Not in papers because I get away before anyone find out. You first I tell.

**BURT:** That so? You took a big chance, I'd say. They'd of killed you or worse if you got caught. Ain't that so?

**STRANGER:** *Da.*

**FLO:** You must have been very desperate.

**BURT:** You're a pretty brave fellow then, ain't yuh? What made yuh decide to jump ship?



**STRANGER:** Mr. Daniel.

**BURT:** Just then, I mean. An' not sometime earlier?

**STRANGER:** I no like Soviets.

**BURT:** Why, if you're one of 'em?

**STRANGER:** I with other sailors one night. Where we sleep.

**BURT:** On the ship?

**STRANGER:** *Nyet.* On shore. We still training.

**BURT:** At some camp?

**STRANGER:** *Da.* Yes.

**BURT:** In the barracks?

**STRANGER:** *Da.*

**BURT:** Other sailors give yuh a bad time?

*(The STRANGER looks away, confused.)*

Somethin' sexual maybe?

**FLO:** *(as if herself under attack)* Burt, please!

**STRANGER:** With me? No.

**BURT:** Who with then?

**FLO:** *(still more agitated)* Burt, you shouldn't!

**STRANGER:** *Devushka,* girl who work there, scrub floor.

**BURT:** *(very interested)* What they do to her?

**FLO:** Burt, don't ask such questions!!

*(The STRANGER moves elsewhere on the stage. BURT follows.)*

**STRANGER:** *(to BURT, pointing offstage)* Comrade, Sir. Some men take her in there. Earlier we come back, she all alone—still scrubbing floor. Other men take her to far corner. She still fight them.

**BURT:** *(in a commanding voice, with Russian accent)* How many?

**STRANGER:** Six. Maybe seven. She lucky I find you. But hurry, please, Comrade Sir....

*(BURT does not move.)*

Please, you hurry. *(peering offstage)* They have her on bunk already.

*(The STRANGER starts to lead the way. BURT stands in front of him and blocks him with an outstretched arm.)*

But Comrade, Sir!

**BURT:** Do not you crave woman once in while?

**STRANGER:** Yes, but—

**BURT:** Do not you see what fine service she perform right now? Such service worth much more than shiny floor.

**STRANGER:** Service?

**BURT:** Relieve comrades' stress. Provide recreation after long day's drill.

**STRANGER:** But Comrade, Sir!

**BURT:** Do not interrupt! This is how we keep troops content. Or did you not know? And what about you? How you think we keep you happy?

**STRANGER:** Me?

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**BURT:** Now you go too. Take turn. Then feel better. Have no complaint.

**STRANGER:** But Comrade, Sir! I never—

**BURT:** No more talking back, you hear?! Now go join others.

**STRANGER:** I cannot! I will not!!

**BURT:** You will, sailor. This is order. You must fulfill order of commanding officer!

*(He gives the STRANGER a shove.)*

**STRANGER:** I only watch.

**BURT:** *(pushing the STRANGER farther offstage)* You more than watch. Or I put you in solitary. This your duty. For Motherland and for sacred cause of Party. Understand?

*(BURT and the STRANGER return to FLO. As Burt again)*

All but you, huh?

**STRANGER:** How you know?

**BURT:** Them officers was pigs too, was they? Prob'ly took their share first.

**STRANGER:** I not know. No like Soviets.

**FLO:** You poor child.

**BURT:** Yeah. It's tough when you're so young. But it'll make a man of you maybe—day you join in too.

**FLO:** Burt!

**BURT:** Put hair on yer chest. That's what women 're for, don't yuh know?

**FLO:** Burt, please!

**BURT:** Besides, I don't believe yer tale. If it happened like you say, you'd of took yer turn like any other.

**STRANGER:** No!!

**BURT:** Anyone at least twelve years old—that's how he reacts if he's halfway normal. An' you look normal enough.... But, like I say, I don't believe any of it. Still you sound like some Rushin. That's it, Flo! It woulda been 'bout the time Danny pulled his tall tale on everyone—when he said they'd spirited him away to Russia itself.

**STRANGER:** When please I can speak Mr. Daniel?

**BURT:** But that would make it really true, wouldn't it? Young fellah. Yuh cain't be Danny's boy—not with that accent.

**STRANGER:** Please! You must believe!!

**BURT:** *(ignoring him)* So go some place else an' play yer games on someone who's a bigger sucker than any of us. You hear me? I said, get outa here. Get off'n my property right now or I'll be callin' the law on yuh. You're probably a thief or robber or someone that makes trouble just fer the fun of it. I seen yer kind in my day—plenty of times. An' jist 'cause I'm old don't mean I cain't still tussle with yuh if you're willin' t' have a fair fight.

**FLO:** Please don't upset him, young man. You'd best go.

**STRANGER:** Go?

**FLO:** Or there'll be trouble.

**STRANGER:** *(still hesitant, then agreeing)* All right, I go.

**BURT:** An' call yerself by some other name, yuh hear?

**STRANGER:** I go. But come back.

*(He stares at them, then slowly turns and exits.)*

**BURT:** A big waste, ain't it, Flo? Intruders like that interferin' with a man's day?

*(picking up the empty bucket and moving upstage)*

I'm goin' to pick more apples. How many kin you use today?

**FLO:** I put up a half bushel yesterday. I can't possibly put up more.

**BURT:** *(with a dirty look)* It's depressin'. All this good fruit goin' to waste. An' nobody to take it off my hands.

**FLO:** But, Burt, every one of your apples has a worm in it.

**BURT:** *(flaring up)* A what?

**FLO:** A...nothing, Burt.

**BURT:** If it's nothin', then don't say it.

**FLO:** Yes, Burt.

*(BURT exits upstage. FLO again tidys the furniture, once more singing with the ecstasy of a gospel singer)*

“What a friend we have in Jesus....”

*(Abruptly breaking off and moving toward JACKSON, then assuming the posture of a Flamenco dancer and, while rhythmically snapping her fingers and clapping her hands, stamping her feet, twisting at sharp angles, and seductively arching her back)*

Ay-ay-ay-ay-ay!!

*(After the foregoing display, she again assumes her original, sedate posture.)*

**JACKSON:** Whom do you seek?

**FLO:** *(with great warmth)* The Gardener.

**JACKSON:** *(with kind familiarity)* Florence.

**FLO:** *(breaking into a smile)* Jackson.... He is our Friend, Jackson, don't forget. He's our Friend and Brother.

And He's also the Bridegroom, our Lover.... It seems just yesterday, but it was really a number of years ago. It had to be because, obviously, you still hadn't been conceived. Not quite. And if I first met him in Seville at that night spot near the central square, just down the street from that soaring cathedral, it was later in Granada that we had our first assignation. When I least expected.

*(As FLO continues to reminisce, the actress who played NADEZHDA and later plays GLADYS appears across the stage playing YOUNG FLO and mimes the action FLO describes, generally walking about her area of the stage and focusing in various directions in alternating states of bewilderment and awe.)*

Because there I was, all by myself, a young college girl and tourist, walking through the labyrinth of the Alhambra itself—nothing Christian about it and in broad daylight. I'd turned a corner in one of the courtyards. The other tourists had apparently gone in the opposite direction because, all of a sudden, I was completely alone. I next passed through one of its most ornate carved arches— filigreed like a bride's lace—and came upon a small formal garden with several tiers of hedges, all symmetrically laid out and boughs bent down with the most pungent red fruit. Persimmons maybe. Or kumquats. In the plump peak of ripeness, so soft you could dent and bruise them, it seemed, if you stared too hard at them, the nectar already oozing here and there through their taut, stretched skins. And in the middle, a fountain with spray jetting high into the sky. I couldn't seem to find my way out, and I became frightened. Terrified. But just then the sun came out again, illuminating the fountain, its rays caressing my body and playing across my face. And there He was....

Charades by Thomas F. Rogers

*(JACKSON, as JESÚS, stands silently in the shadows. He wears high leather boots, tight trousers, a billowing long-sleeved silk shirt, and a broad brimmed felt hat.)*

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** Oh, it's you. You were my guide, weren't you? The other day? Back in Seville? What was your name?

**JACKSON/JESUS:** *(pronounced "hay-soos")* Jesús.

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** Jesús....Are you the "Jesús"?

**JACKSON/JESUS:** Who else?

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** How did you...find me?

**JACKSON/JESUS:** You found me.

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** Here, I mean.

**JACKSON/JESUS:** Where else?

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** What...do you want of me?

**JACKSON/JESUS:** What you want, Flo.

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** You...know my name.

**JACKSON/JESUS:** Of course.

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** You...seem so familiar. Like I've always known you.

**JACKSON/JESUS:** Of course.

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** Shall I...come nearer?

**JACKSON/JESUS:** Come.

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** Then I shall...if you want me to.

**JACKSON/JESUS:** It's what you want, Flo.

**GLADYS/Y. FLO:** I know.

**JACKSON/JESUS:** Then come....

*(GLADYS/Y. FLO does so, walking slowly but steadily until, the light dimming where he stands, she is caught in JACKSON/JESUS's embrace. The tableau then quickly fades in shadow.)*

**FLO:** He took me right there. And I didn't hesitate. I didn't fear.

*(Close to tears)*

It was so right. So wondrous. With the sun so warm upon us and the fountain still jetting and splashing us with its wonderfully refreshing spray. It seems like just yesterday, even if—how old are you now, Jackson? Fifty-three?

**JACKSON:** *(minus the Spanish garb, resuming his trimming)* Two score ten and three, Ma'am. A score beyond the rightful age.

**FLO:** Then it has to be that long ago, doesn't it?

**JACKSON:** Is is as is. You are who you are. I am that I am. *Tat tvam assi.*

**FLO:** It reminded me—the setting, with the light streaming through the trees and on all that red fruit and the fountain—of a cathedral, with stained glass windows and its font of holy water. But it wasn't really a cathedral. It wasn't even a mosque. He could have still come there, couldn't he, Jackson?

**JACKSON:** To the pure all things are pure.

**FLO:** *(resuming her singing)* "What a friend we have in Jesus...."

*(She turns to the chair BURT previously sat in, wiping it down. The sound of brakes and*

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*a car door slamming. She looks offstage. After several beats GLADYS appears—slim, svelte, but now very pregnant. She carries a telegram.)*

**GLADYS:** You're doing a good job there, Jackson.

**JACKSON:** The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold.

**GLADYS:** How you doing anyway?

**JACKSON:** He shall beg in harvest, and have nothing.

**GLADYS:** *(amused, waiting for a response but knowing better)* Well, whatever.... Hi, Aunt Flo. How's Grampa?

**FLO:** Ornery as ever. Can't get rid of his wormy apples.

**GLADYS:** Well, really. What does he expect?...How do you stand it?

**FLO:** His soul's as precious as yours or mine.

**GLADYS:** But I thought only 144,000 would be saved.

**FLO:** We don't know which 144,000, so we have to work on everyone.

**GLADYS:** Myself, I prefer the mysteries of the East. The mysteries are far more reasonable. They give everyone another chance from one lifetime to the next.

**FLO:** I know.

**GLADYS:** But you don't approve.

**FLO:** Why not? God has said that He's the Truth. I think He allows us all the other "truths" each of us claims for himself and considers so sacred—which are only ours and really not God's—so that we have things to wrestle with and someday give up when we finally see beyond them, know God for the first time, and fully accept Him...in us...

**GLADYS:** Way out, Flo. Way out. Then how about this one? It's my favorite...about the Buddha and a man who must have been a holy terror—a ferocious bandit.

*(Shots from the cellar. GLADYS turns to take them in.)*

A giant and a kind of mercenary. Something had happened in his childhood to set him off, some injustice.

*(Meanwhile, unobserved by GLADYS, BURT has returned, upstage, his pail again filled with apples.)*

Anyway, they called him Angulimal—which means "Garland of Fingers." He'd cut off his victims' fingers and string them on a garland around his neck.

**BURT:** *(to himself)* I like that story!

**GLADYS:** One day the Buddha went in his saffron robe to the forest where Angulimal lived, with no weapon or shield. Suddenly he heard this loud, frightening command from somewhere ahead of him.

**BURT:** *(coming downstage and looking at JACKSON, who now calmly stands and faces him)* Stop! Go no farther!

**GLADYS:** But he didn't stop for long and kept walking in the same direction until suddenly there in front of him stood the terrible Angulimal, layered with garlands of shriveled and blood-caked human fingers.

**BURT:** *(again to himself)* Fine story!

**GLADYS:** But Angulimal was even more surprised than the Buddha because no one had ever dared approach him that way, completely weaponless and unarmed.

**BURT:** *(to JACKSON)* Why don't you stop when I tell you to?

**GLADYS:** Then the Buddha looked up at the giant Angulimal. He smiled and asked, ever so gently, ever so

calmly—

**JACKSON:** (to BURT, with a serene but firm voice) When will you stop, Angulimal?

(A long pause, as BURT and JACKSON stand motionless and stare at each other; then abruptly break off and resume their previous roles.)

**FLO:** Well, and what happened next?

**BURT:** (returning upstage, still to himself) Yeah. Who killed who?

**FLO:** I know. He was undone—that giant. And he became a disciple of the Buddha after that.

**GLADYS:** For the rest of his life.

**BURT:** How could you know that, Flo?

**GLADYS:** (noticing BURT) Grampa!

**BURT:** (brightening and embracing her) How are you, angel?

**GLADYS:** How are you today, Grampa?

**BURT:** Managed to pick you these here apples.

**GLADYS:** They're beauts! We can sure use them.

**BURT:** (pointing to GLADYS' stomach) You an' Ned, Jr.?

**GLADYS:** That's right.

**BURT:** I can't wait to meet him—my first great grandkid.

**GLADYS:** He feels the same about you, Grampa.

**BURT:** Now how can you know that?

**GLADYS:** Every time I get near you he moves inside me.

**BURT:** That's excitin'.

**GLADYS:** How've you been, Grampa?

**BURT:** Well, when I dozed a little this mornin'—jist had t' take a nap—

(FLO gives him a consternated look.)

—had this here dream: I was somewhere I'd never been. Some foreign country, I giss, cuz I couldn't understand all these sick people. There was some kind of epidemic. They was standin' all aroun' me an' droppin' in their tracks. But I was just fine. An' I'll tell you why: I knew what was causin' it—their cul-i-nary water that was comin' from a river that ran through their town. An' you know why they was all a dyin'? There was a body in it. Body of a naked woman. Full of germs an' maggots. Decomposin'. An' they was drinkin' them maggots an' germs. But I wasn't.

**GLADYS:** You must have drunk something, Grampa.

**BURT:** Fact is, I was drinkin' the same water they was—'cept they was downstream of that woman's body an' I above it.

**GLADYS:** I wonder what it all could mean.

**BURT:** Has no meanin'. That's just how it was.

**GLADYS:** Well, that's a very interesting dream, Grampa.

**FLO:** An awful dream, I'd say.

**BURT:** Now why you say that, Flo? I was doin' all right, weren't I?

**FLO:** Yes, Burt, you were.

**BURT:** Well, then.... Take these here apples.

(He dumps them on a metal table.)

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I'm goin' fer more.

**GLADYS:** I'll come back at noon, Grampa. Need any groceries?

**FLO:** A loaf of bread will do.

**BURT:** Make it white.

**GLADYS:** Any dog food?

*(BURT freezes, without turning back, then proceeds to exit in the same direction, upstage, as before.)*

**FLO:** Podie's dead.

**GLADYS:** Dead? When did he go?

**FLO:** A week ago.

**GLADYS:** How's Grampa taking it?

**FLO:** Doesn't let on.

**GLADYS:** Keeping it all in? That's no good.

**FLO:** Podie was old though—almost twenty. That's at least a 100 for a dog.

**GLADYS:** It must remind Grampa how old he is and what's up ahead.

**FLO:** I suppose. But he won't let on.

**GLADYS:** No more Alpo then? That'll seem strange. Maybe he'll be kinder to Jackson now. Let him sleep somewhere besides the toolshed.

**FLO:** Maybe.

**GLADYS:** Flo, why did Jackson ever leave the university to be Grampa's gardener?

**FLO:** Gardening was more agreeable.

**GLADYS:** That's hard to imagine. How long ago was that?

**FLO:** Before you were born—too long ago to remember.

**GLADYS:** What did he teach?

**FLO:** He was a professor of languages. And a very good one...

*(Pointing to GLADYS' stomach)*

How's the baby?

**GLADYS:** Just fine, the doctor says. Any day now.

**FLO:** Heard anything from Ned?

**GLADYS:** *(suddenly pensive)* Not yet.

**FLO:** It's been...how long?

**GLADYS:** A month tomorrow.

**FLO:** And still no idea where he went?

**GLADYS:** None.

**FLO:** Or why he disappeared like that? So suddenly?

**GLADYS:** No.

**FLO:** You don't suppose that's where he is now?

**GLADYS:** Where?

**FLO:** One of those places your father was at? In Africa? Or somewhere south of the border?

**GLADYS:** I...wouldn't think so.

**FLO:** Well, I sincerely hope he comes back before you have that child.

**GLADYS:** Flo, do you think my father knows where Ned is?

**FLO:** I think he may.

**GLADYS:** Have you asked him?

**FLO:** Not in so many words.

**GLADYS:** Why is it so hard, Flo, for some people's children to get a little fatherly attention?

**FLO:** He cares, Gladys. He really does, deep down. He's just, how do you say it, "short-circuited." Trying so hard to prove or be something to someone else—to Burt, maybe. And Burt in his own separate world—reliving the past. We all do that, I guess, the older we become.

**GLADYS:** Well, I'm going to ask him about Ned. When I come back at noon. I only stopped to give him this.

*(She hands FLO the telegram.)*

It was delivered this morning after he left the house. I've got to get to my shift now before the terminals go down. I'll come back later. Don't forget to give it to him, will you?

**FLO:** *(pocketing the telegram)* All right....

*(GLADYS leaves, waving after her.)*

Goodbye.

*(A car motor starts up, then fades in the distance. DANNY emerges from the cellar.)*

**FLO:** Had enough?

**DANNY:** For now. Forty-seven direct hits. Forty-seven Commie gooks. I'd have had more, but I went to sleep down there. Had this dream—had it before. I have a pet mouse or a baby rat, and for some reason I'm drawn to it. Me drawn to a rat, can you figure that? After all the rats I've had to fight off in swamps and ditches. But I notice—I've noticed before—that it sometimes loses a patch of its fur or hide, and then...

*(unconsciously caressing his left arm)*

...the pink tissue underneath looks sore and tender, but after a while the hair always grows in again. Except this time its entire hide slips off its back. First I try to cover it over with my handkerchief, but maybe because it's too defective or to put it out of its misery, I suddenly take a fork and jab the thing in the head, scraping out its brains.

**FLO:** Danny, how awful!

**DANNY:** After that I have no choice but to remove it and dispose of the corpse, which I start to do when I wake up....

**FLO:** You men have such violent dreams. That one even made me think of things...I shouldn't.

**DANNY:** What things?

**FLO:** Never mind.

**DANNY:** Well, I at least got forty-seven today. Forty-seven dead center bulls— forty-seven more gooks. That's what it would be, if I was some other places right now—

**FLO:** Danny, have you really...killed that many people?

**DANNY:** *(continuing his thought)* Like the time we crossed the Khyber Pass.

**FLO:** "Khyber Pass"? Danny, are you sure?

**DANNY:** See this gash...?

*(DANNY bares his left arm, showing her a large red scar.)*

**FLO:** *(shuddering)* So sore. So...tender.

**DANNY:** *(fiercely)* So do you believe me now? Didn't matter. Didn't stop me. We forged ahead, took the



enemy by surprise. Got my forty-seven then too.

**FLO:** You killed forty-seven men?

**DANNY:** That time. They weren't all men either.

**FLO:** How could you?

**DANNY:** It was either them or us.

**FLO:** But you deliberately went there. You could have stayed away.

**DANNY:** And let them take over? This year—Afghanistan. Next year Iran or the Sub-Continent.

**FLO:** Were they real Russians?

**DANNY:** Worse—Afghani traitors.

**FLO:** Danny, why do you enjoy it so much?

**DANNY:** Enjoy it?

**FLO:** Taking life.

**DANNY:** (*momentarily taken back*) You don't understand, Flo. I don't go there just to kill. What really excites me is not getting killed myself—facing desperate odds and outwitting them.

**FLO:** Like some sport, you mean?

**DANNY:** Yeah. Maybe. Like some sport.

*(An explosion. JACKSON, again as GENADY, rejoins DANNY. During their dialogue the nearby sound of detonating mortars recurs at regular intervals. DANNY appears to dismount from a horse, then peers downstage toward the floor.)*

Quick! Dismount.

*(JACKSON also mimes a dismount.)*

They've seen our shadows against the mountain—our heads magnified twenty or more times, but still pinpoint to them.... Now tie up the horses back there. They'll be plenty safe.

*(JACKSON walks a brief distance upstage, as if pulling the reins on two horses, then stops and appears to hitch and secure the reins to a stationary object.)*

**JACKSON/GENADY:** (*returning*) But, Danny, what can you and I do against a tank armed with mortars?

**DANNY:** Just have a little fun. Make them spend their rounds for nothing.

*(A mortar's whine.)*

**JACKSON/GENADY:** Duck!

*(They both duck. Another explosion.)*

**DANNY:** The ridge we're on is just fine. They'll hit this rock wall every time. It's high enough for us to hide behind and narrow enough they can't drop anything on us. If it was one of their Katjusha rocket launchers I wouldn't chance it. But, just for fun, let's move back and forth down the line. And each time show our heads again. After they load another and re-sight, one of us will draw another round.

**JACKSON/GENADY:** Okay, Danny.

*(They run, crouching, parallel to the stage but in opposite directions.)*

**DANNY:** That's good enough. Now show yourself.

*(They both rise up.)*

Give them time to see you and get ready.

**JACKSON/GENADY:** How I know when time to duck?

**DANNY:** Wait for the whistle.

**JACKSON/GENADY:** But how long?

**DANNY:** Well, let's see, how far down is it?

**JACKSON/GENADY:** At least six hundred meter.

**DANNY:** Just think—take one more step, and we'd be on top of that tank. Probably even dent it with the impact. That would give them a scare, wouldn't it?

**JACKSON/GENADY:** How long we wait?

**DANNY:** First time, at least five seconds. Then count how many more before the explosion.

**JACKSON/GENADY:** Okay, Danny....

*(Another whistle.)*

**DANNY:** Ready, one...two...three...four...five. Now duck!

*(Both lie flat against the ground. Another two beats and another explosion, even louder.)*

That's great! You okay?

**JACKSON/GENADY:** Okay, Danny.

**DANNY:** Now run somewhere else. And stand up again.

*(As before, both crouch and run along the same line, parallel to the stage, then stand up, once more facing downstage and gazing at the floor, then yelling.)*

Hey, you sissies! You pantywaists! Come and get us, why don't you? We're waiting!!

**JACKSON/GENADY:** *(also yelling)* Yeah, you chicken Commie sons of bitches! Come and get us!!

**DANNY:** *(surprised)* Hey, Genady. Where'd you learn that kind of language? Thought you were a cultured Russian.

**JACKSON/GENADY:** *(smiling)* I learn from you.

**DANNY:** *(laughing)* Then that's one on me.

*(Another whistle.)*

Good. They're still taking the bait. Hold on now. Wait an extra second this time. Four...five...six. Now duck!

*(DANNY hugs the ground, then looks toward JACKSON/GENADY, who is still standing.)*

**DANNY:** *(screaming)* Didn't you hear me? Duck, dammit!!!

*(JACKSON/GENADY barely ducks his head before another explosion, which throws him hard to the ground.)*

Genady!! Genady!! Oh, please, dear God! Are you all right...?

*(JACKSON/GENADY lies, motionless for a few more suspenseful seconds, then rouses and slowly sits up.)*

**JACKSON/GENADY:** *(smiling)* I okay, Danny!

*(DANNY stares angrily at JACKSON/GENADY, then suddenly starts to giggle.)*

*JACKSON/GENADY hesitates, then joins in.)*

**DANNY:** Having fun?

**JACKSON/GENADY:** *(with a sudden sober look, then an even bigger smile)* Da.... Fun!

*(Falling back on the ground, DANNY suddenly rocks and writhes with hysterical, loud laughter. Then, still at a distance, JACKSON/GENADY follows suit, as the lights dim on their part of the stage. JACKSON resumes his trimming, and DANNY rejoins FLO.)*

**DANNY:** It was like a dance, like we were making music together, we and those Russians. No one got hurt either. If our timing had been a little bit off, it would have only been us. Some fun, huh? There've been other

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fun times too—in Zimbabwe and Belize, Kampuchea and Nicaragua.

**FLO:** You've been to all those places?

**DANNY:** Yeah. But not just for "fun" either. It's also to help people stay free. And this next time, out of Ghan, don't you see, we're going to make a direct hit on the Commies and, if we're lucky, start the revolution to end all revolutions!

**FLO:** You and who else, Danny?

**BURT:** (*meanwhile returning from upstage, his pail again filled with apples*) Before long I'll be too arthritic, an' you or someone else'll have t' pick this fruit for me.

**DANNY:** What did he say, Flo?

**FLO:** Danny, you heard him as plain as I.

**DANNY:** Ask him, "Who for?"

**BURT:** Fer all them people in Asia an' Africa. It's a damn shame. Apples rottin' an' people starvin'.

**DANNY:** Tell him nobody wants his apples because they're all wormy.

**BURT:** What he say, Flo?

**FLO:** Nothing, Burt. He didn't say a thing.

**BURT:** It's the fault of all them corrupt churches an' politicians. They's in it together, yuh know. Why, look at what a apple's worth nowadays—an' a dollar ain't. In my time 'twas twenty cent a bushel. Yes, you could buy five bushel fer a single greenback. But now a dollar's not worth pickin' up. Why, a smart aleck Boy Scout come by here th' other day with a printed sheet. "Local Church News," says he. "How much?" I ask, since I don't subscribe. "It's free," says he. "Everyone gets one." "It cain't be!" says I. "How much is the newsprint? How much th' ink?" "I don't know," says he. "Well, yuh oughta know," I tell him.

**DANNY:** Yelled it, I'll bet. Bet he scared the crap out of the poor kid.

**BURT:** (*wheeling on DANNY*) How old 're them kids anyway?

**FLO:** Which kids, Burt?

**BURT:** Them kids they send out on the front lines? In them places he just named?

**DANNY:** Tell him, "Some are as young as twelve or thirteen."

**BURT:** A lot of 'em in fact, am I right?

**DANNY:** Tell him, "Yes, quite a few."

**BURT:** Why, they's just so many Boy Scouts too, ain't they? But I don't kill 'em, like you. At least I ain't no kid killer. That's what you are—a kid killer! A big bully who oughta know better or else take on someone his own size.

**DANNY:** (*devastated, almost in tears, forgetting to go through FLO*) You've never honored me in anything I ever did.

**BURT:** Honored? You? Lemme see. Says sumpin' 'bout that in th' Ol' Book, don't it? One with all them c'mand-ments? Best I kin remember, it's the pappy's s'posed to get the honor. Not the son.

**DANNY:** You never did...you never gave me anything to honor!!

**BURT:** Don't matter. You still owe me—way the Ol' Book reads.

**DANNY:** Well, it shouldn't. It shouldn't read that way!

**FLO:** Danny!

**DANNY:** When in Hell did you ever care about anything I ever did—except to put me down?

**BURT:** I got my reasons. Truth is, I ain't really interested. An' you wanna know why? 'Cause it ain't true. None

of it. That's why.

**DANNY:** What do you mean, it's not true?

**BURT:** It none of it ever took place. None of yer tall tales. I always seen through every one a them. So why should I ask about 'em? Why should I care to have you make a fool of me like you do everybody else? Besides, I've had my share of the real thing. I been around. I've lived too, you know. I seen people die. Plenty.... Seen a man killed once when I was real young. Couldn'ta been more than seventeen. 'Twas somewhere in the Dakotas. This man—he was quite short—was comin' home from work the way he'd been comin' home for years, I imagine. But he wasn't supposed to. There was a strike on. An' he'd crossed the picket line earlier that mornin'. It was dusk, an' most people was already inside. It was by a bridge, headin' outa town. I just happened to be there. I was workin' fer a farmer at the time. Well, two men, a lot bigger, was waitin' there when this short man gets off the bridge. One of 'em has a big plank, an', without sayin' a word, brings it straight down on the little man's head. I hear a crack, an' then he falls to the ground. I'm close enough to see how it'd smashed in his skull—like some eggshell. You could even see his brains.

**FLO:** More “brains.”

**BURT:** Then th' other two men see me standin' there an' come up to me. I'm thinkin' I'll be next. “Did yuh see anythin', kid?” “No,” says I. “I di'n't see a thing.” An' they let me go, or I woul'n't be here to tell about it, would I?

**FLO:** Oh, how sad, Burt. How sad.

**DANNY:** It was sad maybe the *first* time he told it.

**FLO:** (*warning*) Danny.

**BURT:** Anyway, I'd thank people not to clutter my stoop an' mailbox with whatever it is. An' that goes fer all them ad-ver-tise-mints I never asked fer. There oughta be some law.

**DANNY:** (*still to FLO*) The law says anyone can mail you anything they want if they put a stamp on it.

**BURT:** Folks has no right messin' up my life that way. I have more important things to tend to.

**DANNY:** Oh, he's so harassed. He's so important. So many people depend on him.

**FLO:** (*cautioning*) Danny.

**DANNY:** He has so many pressing appointments with so many other important people. Pardon me, with his rotten apples.

**FLO:** Danny, please. Don't cross him like that!

**DANNY:** When was the last time he went anywhere to see or help anybody besides himself? When did he ever actually donate any of his fruit to any starving people? I can't remember!

**BURT:** Listen to that—givin' himself all them airs. You remember, don't yuh, Flo, the time—right after the war—when he was goin' to be such a great musician, standin' fer hours in front of a mirror while a record played on the phonograph, pretendin' he was Toscanini, an' then—how he managed this one I'll never know—showin' up one day, comin' off a airplane in a big red cape. Big prize winner. An' the greatest conductor they ever seen. That's at least what he told them reporters—the Rooshins shoutin', “Danny! Danny!” an' wavin' big banners with his name on 'em—even carryin' him on their shoulders.

**DANNY:** We know! We know all about that, don't we? We just read about it in this morning's paper, didn't we? What hard-up reporter did he get to print that one—for the umpteenth time?

**FLO:** Danny, please. Please don't make any more of it!

**BURT:** You remember back then, don't yuh, Flo?

**FLO:** That much is true, Danny. I saw the articles. I clipped them all. I just don't remember anymore where I put them.

**DANNY:** *(visibly upset)* That's because it never happened! You're both imagining the whole thing!!

**BURT:** *(delighting in DANNY's discomfort)* That much happened! Not the story itself, but yer tellin' it everywhere. An' don't try to weasel out of it. That would be another lie an' all too true to form. But I won't let you get by with any more. I got a good enough memory. So has Flo. Why, you was the talk of the town for at least a year after. Folks back then knew so little 'bout that Russia place, they believed whatever anyone had to say—even a wet-eared kid still not outa high school. They coul'n't believe someone that young would make up such a pre-pos-tris lie, so them reporters believed you, an' fer a long time even the FBI. Folks still do. Still makes a great story, don't it? That's why it come so fast to my mind when th' other day that lady reporter asked me 'bout my family. Believe you me, I told her lotsa other things.

**DANNY:** I can imagine!

**BURT:** 'Bout my younger days an' all the things I seen an' heard back then. I was real frank an' open. She was here all afternoon.

**DANNY:** Talked her arm off, didn't he?

**FLO:** Please, Danny.

**BURT:** Surprised me she went fer yer story an' not fer more of mine. Jist goes t' show what a big whopper that one was—best you ever pulled on folks. But you're right about one thing. It never really happened. I knew better. From the very start. I knew what you was really like. I'd seen you standin' in fronta that mirror hours on end, gettin' carried away with yerself—Toscanini! So that's why I had you committed, if you'd like to know—so they'd knock a little sense into yer silly lyin' head.

**DANNY:** That's not why he put me in that place and ruined my future with that psychiatric record that follows me everywhere now—so I didn't qualify for a scholarship and hardly got to college, and then a very poor one. So I couldn't fight in Vietnam either—and he knows it!

**BURT:** Of course that's why.

**DANNY:** To knock some sense into me? As little as they managed to knock into his head those sixteen years he spent there himself? From the time I was one year old till just before he got me there—doing to me, his only offspring, what they'd done to him—in order to be free of me after Momma died—faithful Momma, who'd waited for him all those years he was in the asylum—to marry that woman he stayed with for only three months, who took him for a ride and squandered the inheritance Mother had meant for me, not for him, and certainly not for her? Why they ever released him I don't know.

**BURT:** *(a deep nerve exposed, nearly apoplectic with rage)* They should never have put me there in the first place!!!

*(FLO and BURT deliver the following lines with increasing pace and overlap, each seemingly unaware of the other's words.)*

**FLO:** *(defending BURT, extremely solicitous and equally traumatized)* He ran away from home when he was very young, Danny.

**BURT:** Seventh grade.

**FLO:** Because our father beat him when he displeased him in the slightest way.

**BURT:** Flo here was singin' in the local church choir back then. They gave concerts here an' there an' she'd just come back from one, brimmin' over with the pleasure it give her an' singin' to herself—I kin even

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remember the words:

*(Imitating FLO's singing)*

"We are all enlisted..."

*(FLO joins in.)*

**BURT AND FLO:** ...till the conflict is o'er. Happy are we. Happy are we."

**DANNY:** I don't understand.

**BURT:** That's when our heartless daddy all at once jist slapped her face an' kicked her in the shins.

**FLO:** Burt, please.

**BURT:** An' that's when I decided next time he told me to go out an' cut a green switch so he could beat me, I'd cut two. Besides, what he was punishin' me fer weren't any more fair an' just than his hurtin' Flo fer feelin' happy. This time I was goin' to pay him back if he so much as touched me. I was tall as him by then too. But at the last moment the thought come to me instead: "What's the use?" An' I just walked out an' never come back till he was dead in his grave.

**DANNY:** *(To FLO)* How old was he then?

**FLO:** Just twelve.

**DANNY:** Why didn't you rebel too?

**FLO:** Because Jesus says otherwise.

**BURT:** Yeah. Jesus. That was always her great weakness.

**FLO:** My strength.

*(to DANNY)*

So when he came back during the Depression, already in his thirties—just a drifter and common laborer—he felt he was way behind the rest of us.

**BURT:** They had no right—plantin' that meter reader in the house.

**DANNY:** What meter reader?

**BURT:** They had no right. My very own brothers-in-law.

**FLO:** He'd married your mother the year before. You were just a few months old at the time.

**BURT:** How could I know that man was from the gas company or why he was there?

**FLO:** Our brothers-in-law had just helped elect a friend of theirs, who later became the country's senior United States Senator. In gratitude the Senator made your Uncle Milt state party chairman and after the war got your Uncle Clifford that high medical post in Washington.

*(Playing the young BURT, JACKSON confronts the STRANGER as the GAS MAN on another part of the stage. FLO and BURT meanwhile stand on the other side of JACKSON, playing, respectively, AGNES and BURT's brother-in-law, MILT.)*

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** *(to the STRANGER/GAS MAN)* Who are yuh?

**BURT/MILT:** *(to FLO/AGNES, in a well educated, debonair tone of voice)* Listen, Agnes. Something's happened. We need your help.

**FLO/AGNES:** What is it, Milt?

**BURT/MILT:** Burt's done something he shouldn't have.

**FLO/AGNES:** Like what, Milt?

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** I said, Who are yuh?

**BURT/MILT:** Well, you know how we asked him to help with the campaign? Get that blue collar crowd to vote

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for the Senator?

**FLO/AGNES:** Of course, Milt. He worked hard for the Senator. Won him a lot of votes.

**BURT/MILT:** I know that. And the Senator was very grateful.

**STRANGER/GAS MAN:** (to JACKSON/Y. BURT) I'm the gas man.

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** "Gas man"? Why di'n't yuh knock then before yuh come inside? Where's yer 'dentification?

**BURT/MILT:** But Burt was, you might say, a little too conscientious. He did more than he was asked to.

**STRANGER/GAS MAN:** I don't have any...identification. Not on me.

**FLO/AGNES:** What do you mean, Milt?

**BURT/MILT:** The union made a special assessment. Along with the regular dues. Well, somehow that money got diverted to the Senator's campaign. But it was still the best investment any of those working men ever made.

**FLO/AGNES:** So?

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** So you got no ID?

**STRANGER/GAS MAN:** They didn't issue any.

**BURT/MILT:** Only thing is—Burt got wind of it and started snooping around. You know how bullheaded he can be. Kept saying it wasn't right and he had to do something about it.

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** Don't sound right. Where was you headin' jist now anyway? Inta the nursery, wasn't it?

**STRANGER/GAS MAN:** Nursery? How would I know about any nursery?

**BURT/MILT:** Said it was a matter of principle. "Principle!" Hell!! What did he think the Senator was working his butt off for back in Washington—if not for safer working conditions, a decent wage—

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** You're after my kid, ain't yuh? Tryin' to steal him away from me?

**FLO/AGNES:** So what did Burt do that was so awful?

**BURT/MILT:** Well, the Senator came back last week for a short in-state visit. And, while he was here, Burt paid a call on him. Went right to the Senator's home, unannounced, and told him what he thought of it all.

**FLO/AGNES:** Well?

**BURT/MILT:** Well, that was bad enough. But then, Agnes, he threatened to expose him. Imagine that! Burt trying to expose the Senator!!

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** So you're a kidnapper, ain't yuh?

**BURT/MILT:** Our very own brother-in-law. Well, you can imagine how awkward that made it for Cliff and me.

**STRANGER/AGENT:** No. I'm no kidnapper!

**BURT/MILT:** Cliff and I've already talked to Burt. We've told him what the Senator had to say.

**FLO/AGNES:** What was that, Milt?

**BURT/MILT:** The Senator wants Burt to leave the state.

**FLO/AGNES:** What?

**BURT/MILT:** So Burt won't accidentally talk to the wrong people. Well, it makes a lot of sense when you think about it.

**JACKSON/Y. BURT:** Come 'ere. I'm gonna show yuh what happens t' people that tries to steal a son of mine.

**FLO/AGNES:** Burt will never do that. If there's one thing he isn't, it's a coward.

**STRANGER/GAS MAN:** (as JACKSON/Y. BURT advances on him) Now wait a minute, Mister. You got the wrong guy!

**BURT/MILT:** (*studying her*) You think not, huh...?

(*JACKSON/Y. BURT gives the STRANGER/AGENT a shove, then keeps pushing him till they are offstage.*)

All right, Agnes. We'll just have to wait and see what comes of it, won't we?

**FLO/AGNES:** Yes, Milt, I guess we will.

**BURT:** (*abruptly turning his back to her and returning to his position in the previous scene*) Good day, Agnes.

(*To DANNY, as before*)

So, all I could think was this meter man wanted to kidnap you—yes, you. So I fought him. Bloodied him up. Broke his nose, an' jaw, they tell me. An' who d'yuh think I done it fer? *Fer you! Fer To-sca-ni-ni!!* An' just fer that—fer tryin' t' protect my flesh-an'-blood—them snakes-in-the-grass who married my flesh-an'-blood sisters got Agnes to put me in that place.

**FLO:** (*addressing DANNY as she did earlier*) That persuaded them. Whether they plotted that meter reader trick or not, I can't say, but it helped your uncles persuade your mother to put him in the asylum. Besides, one was a doctor, the other a lawyer. Back then that was all it took, even if they were your own kin. Later, the authorities even took Burt's word when he got *you* there.

**BURT:** Was that right, was that just, was that so holier-than-thou on her part?

**DANNY:** Don't you say anything against my mother or her good name!!

**BURT:** *Fer you! It was all fer you!!* Would yer mother have done any more? I did it all fer you. Why I don't know. So's you'd become what? Toscanini? Or some blood-thirsty Commie kid killer?!!

(*BURT goes up the porch and inside, slamming the door behind him.*)

**DANNY:** (*rushing after him*) Yes, well there's just one thing wrong with all that. You never, not till now in all these years, till this very moment, ever bothered to tell me!!!

(*To FLO*)

Did he really beat up that gas man?

**FLO:** He did.

**DANNY:** To keep him from stealing me?

**FLO:** That's at least what he thought.

**DANNY:** Hey, that was all right. Why didn't he ever tell me before?

**FLO:** I guess everything that happened later was all so unpleasant that he just put it out of his mind. Or he didn't want to brag at you.... Just think, Danny, sixteen years locked up—during his entire young manhood, his very best years. That's what was wasted. Forever down the drain. And did he even need to be there? Now he lives in—what do they call it?—one great big “time warp.”

**DANNY:** You know who his real son has been all this time, don't you? And still is?

**FLO:** You. Who else?

**DANNY:** That mangy black dog that's lying out there now under a carpet of rotten apples—Podie. He'd grieve more for Podie any day than he would for—

**FLO:** (*noticing her pocket*) Oh. I forgot....

(*retrieving the telegram and handing it to him*)

Gladys brought this for you.

**DANNY:** A telegram?

(*excited*)



**Charades** by *Thomas F. Rogers*

They want me somewhere—to join some expedition.

*(DANNY opens the envelope, reads its contents, then stares, stunned, finally handing it back to her. He is suddenly extremely agitated)*

I have to go now. Fast. Lock the doors and all the windows! Stay inside! Don't answer the phone!!

**FLO:** What for?

**DANNY:** I'll be back when it's safe!

**FLO:** When will that be?

**DANNY:** After he's come—and gone.

*(He exits.)*

**FLO:** *(reading the telegram)* "Dear Father. Arriving noon. Expect visit. Kelly."

*(to JACKSON, solicitously)*

You must be hungry, child. I'll fix you some lunch.

*(again examining the telegram)*

Who's "Kelly"?

*(The lights dim.)*

**19 pages in Act Two**