AN APPEAL FOR SHORTER DOORS

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Shorter Doors

original

MAGIC THEATRE
BUILDING D FORT MASON, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123 (415) 441-8001
JOHN LION GENERAL DIRECTOR MARTIN ESSLIN DRAMATURG

THIS IS THE
ONE +
ONLY
COPY OF
THIS PLAY

LIFE IS WHAT IT IS

Sincerely, Elaine Black, Literary Manager

MAGIC THEATRE
BUILDING D FORT MASON, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94123 (415) 441-8001
JOHN LION *GENERAL DIRECTOR* MARTIN ESSLIN *DRAMATURG*

March 7, 1985

Richard Mansfield
1405 Clement St.
San Francisco, CA. 94118

Dear Mr. Mansfield:

I spoke with you briefly on the phone in January about Appeal for Shorter Doors as well as, I believe, one or two additional plays which you had sent even earlier than last March. As I told you in January, John Lion has put aside all three of (or all two) your plays on his desk, because he is interested in all of them. I read An Appeal for Shorter Doors last March or April and put it aside for him, and he likes that play best of all. He liked it so much, he included the play in the FDG/CBS competition, even though we did not start collecting plays for that contest until July. Mr, Lion is still considering your play for our regular season, along with many others. You did not win a finalist position in the CBS contest, but I would advise you to keep on writing, and if you are patient with regard to Shorter Doors, we may still have a possibility of doing it, although all play selections are a joint consideration of Mr. Lion and our dramaturge, Mr. Esslin. Mr. Esslin has been in London until very recently, and next season's play selections are not settled at all.

If, however, you need your manuscript back immediately, I will retrieve it and send it back to you. Please let me know what you would like to do.

Elaine Black

Sincerely, Elaine Black, Literary Manager

The Foundation of The Dramatists Guild, Inc.
234 WEST 44TH STREET • NEW YORK, NY 10036 • TELEPHONE (212) 398-9366

December 1, 1984

Dear Mr. Mansfield:

Congratulations! You have been selected as a semi-finalist in the FDG/CBS New Plays Program. Your script has been selected from over 7000 submissions and is one of 100 remaining candidates for award. The five spring productions will be chosen from this group.

ELAINE BLACK SAID 17,000

In order that finalist selection can proceed, please inform us if your script is no longer available for production as part of this program, or if it is not eligible for production under contest rules (the play must be unproduced, original and by an American dramatist).

If there is a problem, we need the information as soon as possible. Please call Richard Wolcott or Andy Foster at the Foundation of the Dramatists Guild, 800-223-2310 between the hours of 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. This is a toll-free call.

If your script is still available and eligible, there is no need to call. The selection process will continue through the end of the year. If your script is selected for production or you have been selected to receive an Honorable Mention award, you will be notified by January 1st. If your script is not chosen, you will receive a letter identifying award recipients in early January. At that time you will also receive a letter from the theatre which selected you as a semi-finalist. Thank you for your patience.

To future productions of your script,

Sincerely,

Peggy C. Hansen
Peggy C. Hansen
Administrator

Andy Foster
Project Coordinator

AN APPEAL FOR SHORTER DOORS

by: R. Mansfield

R. MANSFIELD
1405 Clement
San Francisco, CA 94118

note: Most of the characters in this play are winos. When one of them speaks; he looks at his hands or the top of his shoes or straight ahead. The times that he does look his listener in the eye; it is a long searching look. Sometimes, this look can even make other winos nervous.

I would like the scenes in this play to roll by like a loaded wagon on cobblestone. There is no hurry to get anywhere, yet there is a constant forward movement. Even at THE END, the feeling should be that- given the proper impetus- it could start rolling again.

Scene

(It's summer in a small city park. There are two benches lined up end to end. Behind them- a hedge. In front of them- a statue of a war hero. A wino sits on one of the benches. He holds a bottle in a paper bag, between his legs. He holds it with both hands as if it might escape. On the other bench sits a white boy, college kid. He's catching some sun while his clothes are in the wash across the street. His name is Charlie. The wino is Slim.)

Slim- (to himself, judgemental) Look at all those fine people. They all so DARN sure SOMETHING is goina happen.

Charlie- (thinking he's speaking to him) Huh?

S- Did I say something? (passing bus sound)

C- Pardon me?

S- (surprized almost) I said something.

C- I'm sorry I didn't hear you.

S- No need. Might just as well be happy. I got nothin to say. (silence)

C- (little nervous maybe) I'm just waiting for my wash to get done. Over there- you know- in the laudramat.

S- Wash. Why here? Nothin goina happen here- even if you do look like Jack Nickerson. (pause) That won't help. You should know that. (Charlie nods- being agreeable) Glad to see your education is doing you <u>some</u> good.

C- You mean.. (?)

S- (explosive anger) Course I mean! (then quietly) Everbody else expectin somethin to happen. (buddys) Not me an' not you. YOU- you educated. Know better. Just waitin to shove

(Slim continued) your clothes in a pillow case and trudge on home. (he looks very briefly at Charlie) Isn't that right?

C- Well, yes.

S- (conclusive) PERFECT! (pause) But just look at THEM. Oh, THEY JUST KNOW something is happening. They don't want to miss it either. (he laughs to himself) They think they got a better chance in their cars. Drivin all over.

C- I guess I'm out of it then. I don't even own a car.

S- Better. Wasn't accusin' you anyway. (pause) It's always happening in the nex block. (pause) Or the other side of town. You can't catch it. Don't want to... (he blanks) uh- sick of watchin it on TV, I figure. Forget about it. Elusive. (pause) Good education. (silence) What you studying anyway?

C- Art. Painting. Print making.

S- (sitting up properly suddenly) You don't say!?

C- (laughing) I guess it won't do me much good- you know- out there.

S- (thinking on that) Reckon not without a car. (pause) THEY got that all wrapped up anyway. Without car- you are nothing. (pause) Part of the plan. Better- no- ONLY chance you got- on wheels. Big racetrack. Cover the whole map: nor- sou-ease-wes. Start all over. (pause, he thinks, salutes, stands, wavers, sits) Stick to it. Be CONSCIENTIOUS- you won't miss a thing. THAT'S WHAT THEY THINK! HA!! (he covers his ears) I don't want to hear it anymore.

C- (rising) Well. I gotta go put my stuff in the dryer.

S- Sit down. Relax. This is gonna take a while.

C- No, I gotta. See you later.

S- (total dismissal) Go on then. Ignore me. It was only hypo-

(Slim continued) thetical anyway.

C- Pardon me?

S- (mocking) Pardon me? You're too anxious to join 'em. So go join 'em. It's stuck in your heredity. I don't want to see YOU later. Don't want to see you ever again. Go get your clothes- MR. Education. (C leaves in the middle of this. Slim sits, shaking his head) Free advice. Don't even want none. (he sits, drinks from the bag)

lights

Scene

(Charlie returns with a pair of pants draped over one arm. Slim sees him coming and slides to the center of the bench and turns his back to him. Charlie takes a seat on the edge of the same bench however)

C- Everythings in the dryer now- gotta kill 30 minutes. Might as well sit in the sun.

S- (turning to face the boy) Oh?! (he fiddles with the bag for awhile, considers) You're not the victim anyway.

C- I'm not the what?

S- (sadly) The victim. You're not the victim. Neither the cause nor the cure. (offers the bag) Want some?

C- No thanks. I gotta go get my wash in a little while.

S- Those pants part of it?

C- Yes. (Slim nods, ponders, drinks from the bag)

S- It don't make any sense. (he shakes his head) I'm outside today, can't seem to get anything done. The people stop to talk. Yes. They all want to talk to me alright.

(Slim continued) "Hey Slim", they say. (he pauses, takes a drink) The time just goes by that way. (he grins)

C- I know what you mean.

S- (vicious, sudden) No you don't. (pause, kindly now) Want some?

C- No thanks.

S- (sudden secret) Look down that way and see if you see any cops. (Charlie looks, Slim quickly takes a drink)

C- Don't see any.

S- (takes a short drink) Keep lookin. (Charlie looks and for the whole length of time Slim continues to drink. Then he puts it under his coat suddenly) See that car pass?

C- The Chevy?

S- Right on schedule. (he nods yes) Yessir, right on schedule.

C- They pass here..?

SOMETIMES IT'S ANOTHER CAR.

S- Or the other direction maybe. Always a big hurry. On their way to nothin in particular. (he shakes his head and stares down at the bottle. He removes it from the bag, lifts it above his head to see what's left, puts it back in the bag) You ever seen a wino do that before?

BUT BUSY ILLEGAL AND OVER ON US.

C- What?

S- Lift the bottle like that?

C- No.

S- (seriously) Never see it again either. (he drinks from the bottle) Want some?

C- No thanks. I have to go over and get my stuff pretty soon. (He stands up as if to go. Slim stands with him) Listen, I think I'd better go see how it's doing.

S- Can't get along without ya? (SLIM STANDS)

(Slim puts his arm around the kid's shoulder and pokes at his belt buckle with a finger nail.)

S- (confidentially) Hey, let me tell you somethin. A lot of people don't like you college kids because they think you're kiddin. (pause) But I like you (pause) cause I know you're kiddin. (he smiles) Anybody ever tell you you look like that mafia-actor guy. Horse's head. Al Pacino? Anybody ever?

C- No, but...

S- You do.

C- Well I gotta go. (he turns to walk away) Take it easy-ok?

S- (sitting back down, shaking his head, snarling) YOU think it's <u>easy</u> huh? After all I just taught you? You still think it's easy? (he looks down at the empty bottle) For someone that doesn't drink, he sure managed to make me drink his share.

lights

Scene

(It's raining. Slim is sitting on the bench, alone, wet. Charlie comes up quickly carrying an umbrella)

C- What are you doing out here in the rain?

S- (somber) Sittin.

C- But it's raining out- don't you have any place you can go?

S- (looking up, critical) Is that what they teach you in school?

C- Let me sit down.

S- (making room but knocking the umbrella away with his hand) Git that.. (Charlie tries to put it up over both of them again) Git that (Slim strikes violently at the thing) OUT. Out of here with that thing. Don't want it.

C- But it'll keep us dry.

S- Is that what they teach you in that school?

(Charlie tries again to lift the umbrella over their heads. Slim just gets up and walks over to the other bench and sits)

C- (loudly- through the rain) I just thought you'd like to get in out of the rain. (no response) It's only an umbrella.

S- How old are you?

C- What? I can't hear you in this rain.

S- (pointing at the umbrella with a shaking hatred) It's that thing. Tin roof. (pause) You want to hear me bad enough, you know what to do.

(Charlie thinks about it, folds the umbrella, walks over and sits beside Slim. Adjusts his collar, slides closer)

ARE YOU COLD?

C- What are you doing out here in the rain anyway?

S- (coldly) Do you think this is a proper place to conjugate?

C- (laughing at the diction) What?

S- (looking at the kid for a long time) Simple terms. (slowly) I- that's me- want to be alone. I didn't know anyone was dumb enough- that's you- to come out here in the rain just to bother me.

C- I saw you from my window. I live up there.(pointing) Over the laundramat.

S- Well go back then. Over the laundramat. I don't want none right now.

(long silence)

C- Ok. (standing up) If that's the way you want it. I just thought that..

S- (cutting him short) You didn't think at all. That's the problem with you.

(Charlie pops his umbrella open and leaves. Slim sits in the rain, stares straight ahead. It comes down for 12 seconds)

Scene

(Slim is very drunk, stumbling around near the benches. Charlie is passing through on his way to class)

S- Hey! Hello there, Buddy. (pointing) Rudyar Kipling, right? Look jus like him. Good ol Rudyar. (shakes his head confused) Kiplinger- I mean. Henry. 's-who you look lack.

C- (trying to walk right by but not trying to hurt the man) How you doin?

S- Listen, though. (he chases after Charlie and takes his elbow) I wanted to tell you somethin.

C- Well, I'm on my way to class right now.

S- That's ok. This is the real world. You... come on, let's go sit in the park. Got me a bench reserved for us. Real world. Me and you.

C- (trying to explain) Well, I'd really like to talk to you but I have this class right now.

S- Yes you do. Yes you do. You do. (he puts his arm around the kid and guides him gently toward the bench) And I'm the teacher. (he sits, dragging the kid with him) Sit down.

C- I gotta be going pretty soon though.

S- Suit yourself. (pause) I'm just a stiff but I can tell a good joe when I see one and I'm seein one right now. (he looks long and hard at Charlie) You did me right the other day. Can you listen?

C- Go ahead. But I have to be going pretty soon, ok ?

S- (sits, stares, rubs his face) I ain't belly up. AND I ain't building no pyramids for no pharoah kings. THAT'S the point. (he looks searchingly into Charlies face) I jus wanned to tell you that. Ok?

C- Ok.

S- Ok then. (pause) It's just... you need somebody bigger than yourself sometimes. Ok?

C- Ok.

S- You need a woman. You need God. Somebody BIG. (Charlie starts to rise) Sit. Sit down. Wait. It get's better. (he sits, Slim stares) You know what I mean ?

C- (sitting) I know what you mean.

S- (sadly) No you don't. You don't know. (he points at the statue) You're jus lack that guy. Metal skin, birdshit hair-doo. That's you, Sonny boy.

C- (getting up) I.. S- I nothing. You say you know when you don't. You don't even got a chance. Sit down. I mean it. (he sits) I get drunk sometimes. Sometimes I cry. You seen it. (pause) I cry. It's hard to find the truth. You have to hurt. You have to throw up. (he looks for a long time at Charlie) On occassion.. (he loses it) You have to hurt till it rips your throat out trying to get out. (he ponders that) That's it. Nothin but. (he raises his right hand) Swear.

(Charlie starts to rise again. Slim puts his hand out to stop

him)

S- Wait. Wait. Sit down. Have a drink. You got any wine with you?

C- No. I don't drink.

S- It's a shame then. (pause) Sometimes everything is too slick. (Tapping his forehead) I know that that's not real. Other people don't see it that way though. They like it shiny. Not me boy! Ok?

C- Ok, but I better be going.

S- Bes education you can have- right here. This very damned spot. (he points with both hands to the ground directly in front of them) Looking up at that hollow guy. Look at him! Learn a thing. (they both look at the statue while Slim describes what he sees) Nice young man. Sent off to fight. Look at that rump will you? (pause) Nice uniform. Gun in hand. What'd he get? (looks at Charlie) They don't even know his name. We coulda been pals. DON'T YOU KNOW HIS NAME

C- I think the name's on the plaque in front. If you want me to..

S- So what?! So what?

C- Well. Then we could know his name.

S- Who is he? That's what I want to know.

C- Who is he?

S- Who is that hollow guy?

C- Some hero I guess.

S- Some hero. Some BIG hero. Some big DEAD hero. Always got his back to me. Up there on that pedestal of his. He thinks he's better'n me because he's dead. I thihk I'm better'n him cause I'm alive. They oughta build doors shorter.

C- Doors shorter?

S- I concluded that a long time ago.

C- (after a short pause) I'm not following you.

S- Stick close then. (pause) Everyone would have to bow to get in. Everyone would have to watch that they don't stand up TOO tall when they leave you. (long pause while he stares into Charlie's eyes to see if he got it) That's all I gotta say. (he gets up and stumbles off. Charlie sits for a few beats then collects his books, gets up and walks off in the other direction)

Scene

(the next day. Slim is sitting on the bench next to Beale when Charlie comes up)

S- (seeing his friend approach) Hey. Hey! Chucky. Boy. Come on over here. (he slaps the bench beside him)

C- Hi Slim, how you doin?

S- At least as fine as you. At least. Want you to meet a friend here. This is my friend- Randy.

B- My name is Beale, Slim.

S- Ok- Beale. (to Charlie as if in secret) His name is Randy but he likes the name Beale. Saw it on a book somewhere I guess.

B- (mild protest) It came to me, Slim. It was a gift. The angels- they told it to me.

S- Anyway. This (nodding toward Charlie) educated young man, Randy, is my friend- Charles. He goes to that art school. You may call him Mister Charles or Charley-roo.

B- I'll call him, um... (thinking) Charles. It's formal.

S- Perfect. The formal approach. ALWAYS NICE

C- You can call me Charlie if you'd like.

S- But keep in mind, Randy, he's a college kid. Smot. Knows the ropes, so don't try to pull anything over on him. I know how tricky you can be.

B- I did once want to be a magician, Slim.

S- What'd I say?! Sleight of hand, raz-a-ma-taz. You better keep a close eye on Randy here, Charles. He's slippery.

B- Naw. He's just kidding with you, Charles. I'M NOT REALLY.

C- I know he is, Beale.

S- No I'm not. But what do you think, Randy- I'm trying to get the kid to quit before he gets all tangled up in 'em.

B- In what, Slim?

S- The ropes he thinks he knows so much about. Tryin to get him to quit while he still looks like a young Paul Newman. Don't you think he looks like Paul Newman, Randy?

B- Who is it?

S- (standing up and turning in a rapid spinning circle) Paul Newman?! You never seen him? You never been to the Bio-graph 99¢ show?

B- I did once but I had to leave. The puppy I brung was yapping outside, ~~tangled up around the stop sign~~.

S- Just a glimmer of what's to come for Charlie here. But maybe. You plannin on stayin around this time, Charlie or do you have to run off and slap paint on dress material again.

C- I'm sittin, ain't I.

S- Perfect. Let's listen to Randy talk. Go ahead, Randy.

B- I don't know what to say, Slim.

S- Talk about anything, Randy. This fella here is giving up the opportunity to wrestle with a slab of clay just to hear you ramble.

B- My name is Beale, Slim.

S- (thinking about it) Beale then. Talk.

B- Good. (he sits in silence)

S- (nudging Charlie) Listen to him, now.

B- What am I supposed to say?

S- Tell him about being an artist. Charlie here is an artist too. He'll want to hear what you have to say about it.

B- Ok. (pause) I always was an artus. My momma told me that I always was an artus since I growed from small. That's one. Pencils was my medium- from the crib. That's two. I still draw with them. That's three. (he smiles) Do you prefer pencils too, Charles, or charcoal perhaps?

C- I use all kinds of materials. Mostly paint though.

B- I used the paint many times myself. But mostly it's the pencils that I prefer. It's best for the pictures that I draw.

C- What kind of stuff do you draw, Beale?

B- I draw hospital pictures. Me with the shock. Me with the needle. The syrup they give us. Have you ever had the syrup, Charles?

C- (looking to Slim for help) No, I guess I never have.

S- Hey! Wait. Either of you want some potion? I have a bottle right here. (he shows a bottle) Imagine that.

C- No thanks, Slim. (to Beale) Tell me about the syrup.

B- They give it to you in a tiny white little paper cup, then you calm down.

C- Oh.

(Slim unscrews the cap from the bottle, takes a swig then places the bottle in his side pocket)

S- This tiny little paper cup come in a green bottle, Randy?

B- (ignoring Slim) If they don't give it to you then you might get angry or hurt. But they DO give it to you and then you DO calm down. It's urgent. But Ernie- he holds it under his tongue then spits it out on the floor. Ernie- is the best. I drink it but Ernie never takes the syrup.

C- Is Ernie a friend of yours?

B- My friend? No. But I COULD be friends with Ernie. I could, I THINK I WILL trade him my radio. I have a AM-FM-Shortwave. It's BIG. It has silver on it. It's just like a suitcase. I could probably trade it and then Ernie could be my friend. But he won't trade.

C- Oh.

S- Wait up. Don't you talk down to him, Chucker.

C- (astonished at the accusation) I wasn't!

S- Yes you were. Don't do it. (he fumbles in his pocket for the bottle) Just let him talk. (he unscrews the cap) You might learn something. (he drinks, places the bottle back)

B- (after a silence) Have you ever been in the hospital, Charles?

C- No, I never have.

B- Boy, I sure have. They don't like a artus to express it too real. They think I need to be calmed down and they give me the syrup.

C- Then what?

B- I don't see things too sharp. It can hurt your eyes, you know. (he sits, waits) Does it hurt your eyes when you see everything?

C- I can't say that it ever has.

B- I think it prolly did hurt Vincent though.

C- Is Vincent a friend of yours?

B- Yes. VINCENT IS THE BEST.

C- In the hospital?

B- No. Vincent is dead. Didn't you read about it?

C- Oh. I guess I didn't see it.

B- He must have hurt his eyes on nature. Did you ever see ~~it~~ HIS ART?

C- I don't think I ever saw his work, Beale.

B-He's my favorite. He uses paint too. <u>All</u> kinds.

C- Oh.

B- What kind of paint do you use?

C- I use a latex- acrylic, mostly.

B- No. I mean what kind? What KIND? Red for example; do you use it?

C- Red? Do I use red?

B- Do you?

C- Well, yes.

B- Do you ever use blue too?

C- I use quite a few colors actually, Beale.

B- I just use pencil. I don't want to hurt the eyes of the looker. That's one. I want them to see the lines. That's two. If I use red, they miss the lines. That's three. Vincent wanted the looker to forget all the lines, I think. Do you think that's true, Slim?

S- I don't know, Randy. Most of what I see is pretty clear without outlines.

B- Ernie likes my art. (pause) I wish he would trade me his friendship for my radio. How can I get him to do that I wonder?

C- Listen, Beale. You can't trade your radio for friendship. It doesn't work that way.

B- Yes. It must.

S- He's telling you that you can't buy friendship, Randy. What do you think of that?

C- You can't buy it, Beale.

B- You have to. That's what Ernie does. (he stands up in protest) Ernie drives a sportscar. One. Ernie owns a house. Two. Ernie wears good clothes. Three. PEOPLE LOOK AT HIM!

C- But what about your other friend- the painter? What about him?

B- He did not care for friendship. He traded life for colors though.

C- But you can't buy friendship, Beale. It's a gift. It's free.

B- Never! It never has been. It isn't the truth- what you're saying. CHORUS.

C- I have no reason to lie to you about this.

B- Oh yeah! You go to school, don't you?

C- What does that have to do with it?

B- You learn the stuff there. One. You trade art for cash. Two. You buy life with your cash. Three. I am glad to meet you through Slim but don't lie to me, ok? I must go. (he turns and hurries away)

(Charlie sits in stunned silence for a few beats then turns to Slim)

S- He's got you there, Mister.

C- But what was that all about?

S- I knew he could teach us something today. (shaking his head and laughing) Boy that Randy! He's impossible to understand but he sure ~~makes a lot of sense~~. (he drinks) DRIVES HOME THE POINT.

lights

Scene

(Slim is sitting slumped over on the bench in the park. Charlie is sitting close beside him. There is a paper bag beside Charlie.)

C- Can you eat?

S- (weak but defiant) Maybe. I don't want to spend my money on that stuff.

C- No, no, I bought you some. A hotdog. I got it over at Harold's Diner.

S- I bet that fat woman sliced them dogs down the middle and dumped 'em in the deep fryer.

C- How did you know? (no response) That's exactly what she did. I couldn't believe it. I never saw anyone do that before

S- She always does that. Done it for thirty years. (looking up at Charlie with a weak smile) Say- you know who you looked like just now?

C- No. Who?

S- Chang uh, no. Mao, what's his name.

C- (laughing) Who!!?

S- Only kiddin with you, kid. (he pats him on the knee) One of them movie fellas. Different one though. NOT MAD.

C- Really. Which one this time?

S- Climpt Eastwerd- cowboy fella. Hits people in the face with fryin pans and so forth. You know 'im- the one?

C- I know him but nobody ever told me I looked like him before.

S- You do. Look just like him. Seen him down at the Biograph. Squints and whispers. Shoots people.

C- (taking a carton of milk out of the bag) Can you drink this?

S- I'll try. But I want to get me some real juice later (pause) if my stomach can take this stuff. I'm in a lot of pain

C- Try it though. You may like it.

S- Not a calf. I never liked it. Never did. Never will. (he fumbles with the carton trying to get it open but his hands are shaking so much it's useless)

C- (taking the carton) Here let me get that for you. (he opens it)

S- (drinking it down in one long gulp, spilling it all over his chin and coat. Holding the empty carton in his lap with both hands) Still don't either.

C- Eat the hotdog, ok?

S- I don't think I can do it. (pause) I've had enough til my stomach settles down.

C- I'm gonna have one. You sure you don't want the other one?

S- How old are you?

C- 21.

S- Think that's old enough to listen to me when I talk?

C- Ok. I'll eat them both then. I just thought you might want one. I know sometimes you're hungry.

S- Sometimes.

(they sit in silence while Charlie takes a couple bites of the hotdog)

C- Did you sit out here in the rain long? The other night.

S- Long enough.

C- I was up about 2:30 and you were still out here. I could see you from the balcony.

S- (after a pause) Don't do it. And don't ever come out here in the rain again.

C- I won't.

S- Don't ever. Or I'll stop teachin you stuff.

C- Ok. I promise.

S- Don't promise. Just do it.

(they sit while Charlie finishes the hot dog)

S- Mind if I talk.

C- That's what I'm here for.

(Slim studies his face for a long time then he gets up and walks away)

C- (face full of hotdog) See you later, ok??

(Slim just waves him off without turning around- a gesture of disgust)

Scene

(Beale is sitting on the bench alone when he spots Charlie coming up. He get's very excited, bouncing up and down on the bench and laughing)

B- Hey, Charlie! Good-good. CHARLIE! (he pats the bench beside himself) SIT HERE, CHARLIE.

C- (arriving, standing, smiling) Hi, Beale. How are you?

B- I'm fine. Did you come to the park alone?

C- (looking around himself jokingly) I seem to have, Beale.

B- Good. I thought so. Did you seen Slim around here today?

C- I just got up- haven't seen anyone yet.

B- I saw <u>you</u> though.

C- I guess you did. (he sits on the other bench) Quite a day we got here.

B- Yes.

C- Clear and crisp and clean.

B- Yes.

C- Bright. (no response. Silence for a short time)

B- Did you ever know Mozart?

C- I've heard of him but I don't think I've heard much of his work. He was a composer.

B- I never heard him.

C- Why did you ask?

B- Someone said Mozart. In line. Someone said it and I tried to remember it til I seen someone to ask about it.

C- Oh. So that's why you were so anxious to see me.

I WAS AFRAID I'D FORGET. (PAUSE)

B- I bet it's nice. (pause) The person who said it was a girl.

C- Oh.

B- She had a nice smile in her eyes. And hair with wrinkles. Kinda crinklely. (pause) Braids too! Earrings too. Like a mouse, I think ~~it~~ SHE was.

C- She sounds nice.

B- She was. I could of drewn her. She was all lines. (pause) I bet if you seen her it would be all colors.

C- (to himself) Large flat planes of unbroken color.

B- Yes. (they sit)

C- So. What have you been up to?

B- I was trying to think of the opposite of if.

C- The opposite of if?

B- I bet it's something good. Slim told me it probably was. But Ernie- he told me the opposite of if was watching television.

C- What did he mean by that?

B- I don't know. I think Ernie is sick some times. He is bitter to the sweetness that swims around in our air.

C- I like that image.

B- It's not a image. I can see it in our air. Artus can. (pause) I thought you were an artus, Charles.

C- Well I am Beale. I can see it myself if I'm stoned enough.

B- It's not funny though, Charles.

C- Oh. Well, I was just joking, Beale.

B- I'm sick to my stomach again.

C- Right now?

B- This morning I was. (pause) I'm bleeding inside, Charles. I'm not going to tell my mother.

C- What makes you think you're bleeding inside, Beale?

B- My pee is black.

C- Oh.

B- But I'm not going to tell anyone. I'm gonna sit here and smoke cigarettes and bleed inside.

C- I didn't know you smoked.

B- Ernie smokes. Slim- he smokes. Howard smokes too. I was just planning on how to get started. It would be a project.

C- I don't think that's such a good idea though, Beale. I think you should forget about smoking and see a doctor about your stomach.

B- Can't. All they do is tape my wrists and tear my shirt open at the back. Sometimes they pull my hair and yank my head back and say stuff in my ear.

C- Who does that?

B- It scares me when they tape my wrists.

C- I bet it does but who does this to you?

B-The doctors. They laugh at me when I start to fear them. Not Ernie though. Ernie screams right in their faces. Ernie just screams real loud right in their big pink faces. (they both sit in silence) I think about never going in again. But I can't. Ernie- he just stays there. He could excape if he wanted to. But he likes it there. Ernie don't care.

C- That sounds pretty terrible.

B- No. It's not. At nights, I just ~~cry and~~ talk with some angels. If I spit up blood, Ernie worries about me. "Are you alright?", he asks. ERNIE'S TWO BOYS

C- How long has this been going on? Maybe you should tell someone.

B- They would only give me the syrup. I don't like the syrup. It's too sweet and I can't draw lines right.

C- But how long has this been going on? I really think you should let ~~your doctor~~ someone know about it.

B- No. They would just think I was lost again.

C- You were lost?

By THE WHOLE MOVE

B- Yes. My mother was embarrassed. I was lost. (pause) I don't want that to happen again. Grey hairs can come out.

C- I REALLY think you should say something. Isn't there anyone that you can talk to?

B- I am talking to you, Charles.

C- I know but I mean- someone at the hospital.

B- Ernie. He turns the light on and comes over and puts his hand on my shoulder. His hand is strong with long black fingers. "Are you alright?" he asks. (pause) I like Ernie, Charles.

C- I can tell you do.

B- Maybe I will trade him my radio and we could be friends in the daytime some day.

C- Maybe you could.

B- I hope for that.

C- Well so do I, Beale.

lights

Scene

(Very late at night, in the park. There is almost total darkness. Two figures sit silhouetted against a distant street lamp. They speak quietly- almost in reverence of the lateness of the hour. They sit in silence before Slim speaks)

S- Mind if I talk ?

C- No....Go ahead.

S- (taking a drink from a bottle) Want some?

C- Uh, no thanks.

S- Tempted?

C- No.

S- Scared?

C- No.

S- (after a long silence) I'm not drunk. (he sits and shakes his head) I'm not. You believe me?

C- (after thought) No.

S- Didn't think you would. (pause) I spose I should just admit it. (pause) I might cry. (he looks long and hard into the kid's eyes)

C- That's ok. It's ok to cry.

S- Grown man.

C- Ok.

S- But I'm not drunk. (he offers the bottle) Want some?

C- No thanks.

S- Just want someone to share ....

C- I know you do.

S- Look at that old moon will you? Solid as a rock.

C- There it is.

S- There she is. (long silence) I left my wife in Carolina. (pause) That was sixteen years ago. (he waits, shakes his head) August 11th. I guess it's all for the best. (pause) I had to leave her. You know that don't you?

C- I guess.

S- I did. Had to leave her. (pause) I'm not drunk- you know that don't you?

C- Sure.

S- I'm not. I had to leave her. (long silence)

C- Which Carolina?

S- (looking long and hard at the boy) Oh shut up.

C- Sorry.

S- You should be. Is that the best you can come up with ? Which Carolina?! (pause) What difference does it make?

C- I'm sorry.

S- (pauses before he speaks) I tried to write. (he shakes his head, starts to cry, rubs his face on his sleeve) I just stood there- outside the door and listened to her cry. I couldn't speak. I couldn't move. Then I just left.

C- (as if trying to stop him) Slim..

S- (looking at him startled) This is the stuff that hurts. I don't want you to understand any of it.

C- I'd like to.

S- You can't. There is no way. (pause) Don't you have any answers though? They teach you anything about such in that school?

C- No. I don't have any answers for you.

S- (taking a drink) Me neither. (long pause) Her name was Phyllis. (they sit in silence for 12 beats)

Scene

(Early evening in the park. Howard is standing in front of the benches. He moves around like a general in front of his troops which consist of Charlie and Amos sitting each on their own bench. Slim is in the bushes, lying down unseen)

Howard- (brash, abrasive) So why do you do that ~~slappin~~ paint on canvas crap? Sounds like a waste of time to me.

C- That's a good question. I never really thought about it.

H- (sarcastic) He never really thought about it.? SOUNDS LIKE THAT'S ALL YOU SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT.

A- Why do you do what YOU do, Howard?

H- What do I do?

A- Nothin. That's the point.

H- Yes I do, Amos. I'll tell you what I do. I'll tell you what I do.

(They wait)

A- Well, just what is it?

H- (shrugging, sheepish) Hell all I do is sleep and eat and fuck and fart.

A- (softly) And drink. You musta have forgotten to mention that one somehow, Howard.

H- Musta. (pause) Well, yep, sure. I do a little drinkin from now and again. Smoke a little dope. Pills. You know.

A- But mostly it's the women with you. Ain't it so, Howard?

H- Well, yep, I guess. I play around and I get around.

A- I used to be thet way myself, in the good old used to. Called me Mister Sting (he laughs).

H- Now they call you mister limp. (he starts to laugh)

A- Laugh if you want. I'm 84 years old.

H- Well, when I'm 84 I'm gonna be 50 years in the ground.

A- At the rate you're goin.

H- That's right. (looking around) Who went off with the bottle this time?

A- I think Slim took it with him when he went to sleep.

H- Oh, yeah?! (he kneels on the bench facing the bushes) Slim- you got that bottle in there with you sleepin?

S- Pipe down!

A- (turning to Charlie) If it ain't one thing... (he laughs)

H- No, but I'm sayin- do you got that bottle in there?

S- Pipe down! Can't a man get no sleep no more?

H- (pushing up his sleeves) I know he's got it.

A- He's got it. But you gonna haveta wrestle it from his grip.

H- I'll go in there and come back with his scalp. (hollering into the bushes) Slim. If I come in there to get that bottle it better be half full or mostly.

S- Charlie got it. I left it with him.

A-(To Howard) He don't drink. He ain't got it. (to Charlie) You got it?

C- Nah.

A- (to Howard quietly) He ain't got it. The kid don't drink.

H- (to Slim) He ain't got it, Slim. Onliest one could have such a thing is you in them bushes.

S- I'm sleepin. So leave me be. That's a warning.

H- (to Amos) I'm goin in there for it. (he gets up and stands on the top back rail of the bench, balances there, makes ready to dive into the bushes)

A- You messin with a tiger, Howard. Slim'll tear your throat out, you go in there.

H- Watch this. Double axis flipflop with 16 revolutions.

A- Belly wopper.

H- Wop old Slim up side the head if he drunk all that bottle.

C- (rising suddenly) Hey, Howard. Don't jump. I'll go get a new bottle. I'll go buy another bottle, ok?

H- I want the one that's warmed up. (he holds his nose and prepares to dive)

A- Let the boy get us another bottle, Howard. No reason to start a fight over wine- every corner store full of the stuff.

C- Yeah. I'll go down to Harrison and get a bottle. I'll be right back. Just don't jump in there til I get back. (heading a few steps away) What kind do you like?

H- (still standing on the rail but now facing Charlie) I don't care as long as it comes in a green bottle.

A- Get us some port or sautern. Either one.

C-(Starting to walk away quickly) Port or Sautern.

A- Either one!

H- (calling after him) Hey, Kid. As long as it's in a green bottle it should be about ready for drinkin.

A- (a bit angry) Port, I told him, Howard. Now don't go getting the kid confused with too many options.

H- (sitting on the top rail with his feet on the seat) Oh, old man. You becomin a cheap drunk in your old age.

A- (laughing good naturedly) I guess I am, Howard. Heh-heh. I sure guess I am!

Scene

(later in the same evening. Light change- stars begin to appear in the sky. Howard is stretched out on the bench, asleep. Amos is sitting looking at the stars, when the kid returns carrying a large grocery bag. Crickets)

C- I didn't know which to get...

A- That's alright then. Hey! You see that bat?

H- (sitting up quickly) Where? (looking around) What you got in the bag- potatoe chips?

C- Well, I didn't know which to get, so I got both.

H- (disgusted) You what?!

A- Shhhhhhh!! Howard. You gonna wake up Slim. Let him rest.

H- Show it to us. I don't believe you.

C- (setting it down on the bench, he withdraws two magnum-sized bottles) See?

A- Seein's believin' .

H- Crap, man. How we gonna drink that?!

A- Now just calm down, Howard. We think of somethin.

H- (sitting with his hands on his jaw) Hey! Why don't we pour it into another bottle? The other one.

A- Slim has it and if you wake him, he's gonna be mean. I suggest we try to drink it out of these here bottles. (to Charlie) I didn't know they made them that big. Where did you get this stuff, Son?

C- I went to the Safeway. All they had was..small bottles at the corner place.

H- Crap! I knew it! Table wine.

A- Mr. Uppity-uppity. Give me some of that table wine anytime. And thank you, Charles. Mighty kind of you. (he struggles to lift one of the bottles to his lap)

H- You can't even lift it, old man. (he gets up and leaves)

C- Where's he going?

A- He'll be back. (pause) Goin to get smaller bottles. We can't sit here and drink out of these. They too big for an old man like me.

C- Where is he gonna get bottles?

A- Out the trashcan, of course.

C- Of course.

A- Natural place to find such and such.

C- Sounds wonderful.

A- Well, let me tell you. Ifn you don't like it, then don't end up this way. That's all there is to it. It's a simple matter. You got your choice. (he pauses, looks the kid in the eye) But that doesn't mean you can't be our friend, meantime. Sit down. Look at that old moon up there.

Scene

(Same night, much later. The street lights seem brighter in the park now. The talk is quieter- almost secret.)

H- Yessir, I play around and I lay around. Do nothin in the sunshine all day, then turn around and do more nothing in the light of the moon.

C- You mind if I light up a reefer?

A- No. I didn't know you was a musician though, Charlie.

C- (searching) If I can find one. (to Amos) Musician? Me? No. I just paint.

A- Oh, thet's right.

H- Where's the weed?

C- I must have dropped it or left it at my place.

H- Well then it's a perfect chance for you to have some of this fine wine then. You bought it.

C- I... uh...

A- He don't drink now Howard. Let him be. He don't want to turn out like some of everybody else.

IF HE DON'T WANT TO SOCIALIZE

H-(attacking) Something wrong with us? Why don't HE just go on home then?

A- Shut up you rascally-devil. Drink that wine and shut that mouth. You just lookin for trouble where there is none. (Howard drinks sullenly and they all sit in silence for a while)

H- I waste a lot of time trying to fit something into a little something else. Sometimes I do. Sometimes I don't. (he drinks) I don't cry about it though. LIKE SOME COMMENTATOR.

A- What you reminiscing about, Howard?

H- I ain't remu.. (pause) I'm talking about sex. It's just my poetical manner that throws you.

A- Ha! You talkin about pre-marital sex. That's all you talkin about.

H- Only kind I ever have.

A- Me too and I'm 84 years old.

(they all sit and reflect on this)

H- (sudden inspiration, to Amos) I ever tell you about that dishwasher job I had?

A- Only about twice a day I guess.

H- How about you?

C- No, I never heard you tell it.

A- That's your que, Howard.

H- (gets up and starts to pace around as on stage. The bottle hangs from one hand throughout and he uses it- to drink from- for punctuation) Welp, yessir. (drinks) I was a dishwasher, down on Lombard. (drinks) COULDN'T HAVE BEEN PADUCCI.

A- That the Greek's place?

H- No- don't think it was. Cross the street, if I recollect.

A- It WAS the Greek's place last time you told it.

H- I think it was, now that you mention it.

A- But it might have been across the street, hunh?

H- (he drinks, gives the matter thought) You're right about that, Amos. Now that I think about it, it might have occurred exactly as you say. It WAS the Greek's. But they done moved it across Lombard street.

A- Well how long did you work there, Howard?

H- Hell, I musta worked there three years or so.

A- You worked there THREE YEARS? With that Greek standing over your shoulder?

H- Maybe it was just a short while. Maybe it was a month, I worked there. BUT I WAS THERE EVERY DAY.

A- It was almost six months the way I heard it from someone else.

H- Who was it?

A- Could have been that tall, trim fella with the red base-ball cap. You know the one- always readin from those space-ship novels.

H- Oh. Well, he might know more about it than me.

A- Was the name of that place Faris' or Nick's.

H- You know... I can't remember right now but last night I was leaning toward Nick's. Sometimes I lean toward Faris' though. THE PLACE WITH THE MONEY SANDWICHES.

A- Well did you like workin there?

H- Oh, well, I guess I liked it as much as I had to. I stayed around long enough, didn't I?

A- You sure did. And what was your goal?

H- Did I have one?

A- I know it wasn't the dirty dishes that was callin you.

H- You're right. It was a waitress.

A- (nudging Charlie) Watch him get all dreamy-eyed now.

H- She was long and pretty. Dark old eyes. Big and dark. She had those pokey little breasts. Fine, big head of soft brown hair that would sway when she walked by. (he drinks) And a big smile that would make you think it was just for you. She used to glide on that floor. GLIDE. Melt my heart.

A- This part he's sure of.

C- I noticed.

H- Her name was Elinor. (he drinks, dreams)

A- Not a word out of place.

H- I was the dishwasher. She was like some goddess. (he thinks back) I'll be damned fellas if I'm not about to tell you the truth. I would just stand there and stare at her and blush. The hairs on the back of my neck would tingle when she'd come up behind me. TO DUMP STUFF IN THE SINK.

A- (laughing) You musta liked that one.

H- I liked her better'an any woman I ever laid or laid eyes on.

A- But.

H- But she was too good for me. It drove me crazy! I never said a word to her as long as I worked there. Just stood around red as a beet, 'till I hadta finally EITHER quit or ask her to marry me.

A- I bet that ruined your plans.

H- You know- it did. I DID RUIN MY PLANS I had me some BIG PLANS too. I was all ready to move to the big city- become a big city dish- MARRY ELINOR, NEVER DRINK AGAIN. washer with rhinestones on my apron. But I never could face another dish after that. (he starts to laugh and the others join him) A- 's funny how life works itself out.

Scene

(morning in the park)

H- Hey. Get up, old man. (shaking Amos who is laying stretched out on the bench) Morning. I think we should go find Slim. Get up a game of cards or somethin.

A- Leave me be, Howard. Too tired. Carrying on like jackasses all night, now you want to get started all over.

H- We could go down an..

A-I wanta find a nice warm place to stay in out of the wind. I wanta get me some rest.

H- We could go down and eat some food.

A- That would be different but I'm tired.

H- I want some excitement. How bout you, Charlie?

C- Yeah. Let's go steal a car and drive out into the country.

(this is met with a cold silence. After a brief time, Amos explains)

A- We walk.

H- Or crawl.

A- Or limp.

H- Or the cops carry us like royalty.

C- I was just trying to.

A- We know. It's ok.

H- (sudden enlightenment) Hey I know! I just remembered. I know what we can do.

A- I see that crazy look in your eye, Howard.

H- What crazy look.

A- (pointing right at Howard's face) That one.

H- So what? I just had an idea, that's all.

A- Think I'll go find me a place to camp out.

H- No wait. I wanta surprize Slim and you gotta be part of it.

A- You rascal. You drunk already.

H- Slim told me that he had a dream where we all killed ourselves.

C- Suicide?

H - MASSIVE SUICIDE!

A- Ooooooo, man. That's a mean dream.

H- He dreamed it not me. But he told me all about it. We ripped our guts out with knives.

A- Kinda knives we use? Kitchen?

H- No. BIG knives. Huntin knives, some such.

C- Horrible idea if you ask me.

H- Yeah, well nobody was askin.

A- I don't like to hear it myself.

H- But that's the point! It would really freak Slim out if we did it!

A- Give me that bottle, Howard. You had enough.

H- (dancing around like a madman on one leg) Haha. It would be a joke. Maybe we could fake it. It would drive Slim crazy!

A- Joke for you maybe, you fool. I got dogs to attend to. Who gonna care fo my dogs while I'm jokin on Slim? You think I'm gonna go cuttin myself just to put the worry on that man?

H- (calming down suddenly) I guess you're right, Amos. I didn't think of the poor doggies.

C- Gotta think of those doggies!

A- That's right.

H- I just wasn't thinkin clearly.

A- No you weren't.

H (BRIGHTENING) WE COULD KILL ALL THE DOGS TOO!

(LONG SILENCE FROM AMOS)

H- Thought it would be different.

C- That's for sure.

A- Howard- you gonna have to slow down your mind.

C- Does anyone know what time it is?

H/A (simultaneously) Daytime.

A- Now I gotta go get me a polite place to lay down my bones.

(he leaves)

Scene

(Charlie is sitting on the bench in the sun, reading a book when Beale approaches. He has his hand wrapped in surgical gauze and a big smile on his face.)

C- (watching him as he arrives) What happened to your hand, Beale?

B- I broke all my fingers today.

C- All of them? How did you manage to do that?

B- I took a hammer and found some wood. I build a platform from it. And I wasted only three nails, Charles!

C- You were building a platform and you got your hand caught somehow?

B- No! I was building it so I COULD smash my fingers. I used a cinder block.

C- (standing up in shock) What? You did it on purpose? I don't believe you. Are you kidding me?

B- Honest. (he sits down and holds the hand toward Charlie) I want ~~to tell you~~ how I did it. It was a project. And I did it <u>myself</u>.

DO YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU —— ?

C- I don't understand. Are you telling me that you built some kind of platform just so you could break your fingers? Is that what you're saying?

B- Yes. WHAT AM I TO TELL YOU HOW?

C- You built this thing. So you could break your fingers?

B- Yes. (shouting) It was a PROJECT!

C- It was a project.

B- YES! (they look at each other for a long time) I built it so the cinder block would drop on my hand when I pulled the rope. WITH MY TEETH (pause) I discussed it with my friend.

C- Ernie?

B- Yes. Ernie told me that I could take it on as a project. And now I did it. By myself. Wait till Ernie sees my hand. I think he'll be proud of it.

C- Oh- I don't know, Beale. I think Ernie must have been joking with you. There must have been a misunderstanding somewhere. I don't think Ernie would have wanted you to hurt your hand that way.

B- (standing up) Oh yes he did! I showed him the drawing and he said it looked pretty sharp. I did it. (he sits down and looks fondly at his bandaged hand) It was not painful as I thought it would be. There was no blood either. My mother didn't even know how I did it. Cept for the nail ~~holes~~ in the carpet. (pause) It was in the livingroom.

C- (very upset) Whew. I think you'd better... I think you'd better think these things out. I think you'd better think about something like this before you do it, Beale.

B- I did think about it, I planned it. It was a project!! My hands are all blue now. YOU CAN SEE THE HURT

C- This is crazy.

B- No. It's not. I bet Ernie will really like it.

C- I think you have the wrong idea. I'm sure that Ernie will be sorry to see that you've done this to yourself.

B- Oh yeah?! You don't know Ernie. He'll like it. I know he will. (he stands, turns, skips off)

Scene

(later on in the same day. Charlie is sitting sketching in a pad when Slim comes up.)

S- (sitting right next to him on the bench) I heard you two up all last night. Don't you go to school any more?

C- Sure I do. This is the weekend- no school.

S- It better be. I find out you been skippin school to hang around with a bunch of winos, I can get pretty mean.

C- (moving away a bit) Sure Slim.

S- (moving right up to him) I mean it.

C- (without looking at him) Ok.

S- Look at me. (Charlie looks at him. Slim stares hard at Charlie) I don't like it.

C- What?

S- What you see.

C- When?

S- When you look at me. (pause) Look at this nose. (he looks as Slim touches his own nose) The young ones- they think this nose is a thing of beauty- that you have to work for it.

C- It's not so bad, Slim. I seen worse.

S- Not the point. I hear young ones- just startin out- sayin they WANT to be winos. They think they're smot.

C- I don't even drink, Slim.

S- That bottle can't teach you anything.

C- Well I don't drink. All I do is smoke a little dope.

S- I know. I heard you two fools last night.

C- We were just telling stories.

S- I heard your stories before.

C- It was harmless.

S- No it's not.

C- Yes it is, Slim. Me and Howard were just foolin around. We didn't mean anything by it.

S- If you didn't mean anything by it you should have remained quiet.

C- We were stoned, Slim.

S- Then you shoulda been in some club playin jazz-music stidda hangin around with that no-account Howard. (pause) I'm an old fashion wino I guess. But I don't like it.

C- What was it we said that got you so upset, anyway?

S- Girls. Women! You two fools out here in the public moonlight talking like that. Pitch black and rainy would have been better for you two.

C- We were just talking. It was just talk. That's all.

S- There is no such thing! (pause) I don't understand you kids. Used to be- with the girls- you get a glimpse- the excitement was there- that was enough. They didn't want you to see it. (pause) Now- they don't care- running around like that. The excitement's gone. They don't care if you see it or not. (he sighs. Thinks) It's not that pornogery I'm strugglin with. Anybody that's got 3 bucks can git it. It's been around as long as we been here. ITS THE WHORIN'

C- Howard was just telling me about a place..

S- (he just looks at the boy to stop him in mid-sentence) It's not that. (pause) It's beauty I can't get my hands on. I tried. I wasted half my life tryin. But you have to work and sweat and claw and scrape. I'm too old and tired. It's gotten outa reach. (long pause) AN NOW YOU THINK SUCH IS A JOKE.

C- (trying to explain) We were just screwing around, Slim. It didn't mean anything.

S- Well, for something that didn't mean anything you sure are anxious to apologize for it. (no response) Ain't you? (no response) Think about it. (he gets up and walks away)

Scene

(Slim and Howard. Howard is sitting on the top rail of one of the benches, drinking from a bag. Slim is behind the bench talking to Howard's back)

S- I don't want you hangin around with that college kid.

H- (defiant) Don't tell me what to do, Slim. Besides, he was hangin around me. I didn't want him here anymore than I want you here now.

S- You shared your dope with him.

H- So what? I'm a nice fella. (pause) Who is it you don't want around, him or ME?

S- I don't want either one of you around if you're gonna talk about women like they're all whores.

H- The women we were talking about were whores, Slim. That is exactly what we were talking about- whores. THAT WAS THE ~~TOPIC~~ SUBJECT OF OUR PRIVATE CONVERSATION.

S- Then keep it under your ribs. I don't want to hear it.

H- Then get up and leave. You make me laugh you old wino!

S- Then laugh.

H- I am. I'm laughin. (pause) Why don't you go guzzle some draino?

S- Perfect. I should have known.

H- Bullshit, Slim. YOU DON'T KNOW NOTHIN'

S-You like your own ugliness too much, Howard. You're like a mirror hangin over a latrine-pit.

H- Go ahead. Tell me about my ugliness, Slim. The first time you been sober in months and you talk to me about ugly. Hell, you can't even stand up sometimes. Sleep in your own ~~slobber~~ piss. (no response) So what do you say, Wino?

S- (defensive/little boy) The birds keep chirping.

H- Yeah I hear them. They also crap all over your heroes.

S- The sun comes up. Every day, the sun comes up.

H- We have bombs that can blow the whole firey mess out of the sky.

S- It always comes up. We can't stop it with bombs.

H- Our eyes will be burned out of our heads. We won't know the difference.

S- Shut up, Howard!

H- (turning around slowly to face the older man) YOU shut up. This is the truth I'm telling you, Wino. We can set off one of those bombs and a curtain of dust and debris will cover us so thick, you won't see the sun for a week.

S- Even if. Even if. I had my good life- wife and so.

H-(Standing up) Phyllis?! Phyllis left you 20 years ago. SHE COULDN'T STAND YOU ANYMORE THEN EVE CAN AND You know it.

S- I could find her.

H- You can't even find your way out of a bottle, old man.

S- There is always God.

H- (sitting back down on the top rail of the bench with his back to Slim) Yes. That's right, Slim. There is ALWAYS God. (turning to face him) And God would be totally ashamed of what we've done.

S- I don't want to hear it.

H- (turning his back to the man) Yeah. I didn't think so. (he drinks from the bag)

Scene

(Amos and Charlie are stretched out on the grass in front of the benches.)

A- Boy Slim sure is angered with you, Charlie. You been hangin out with that Howard too much.

C- We got stoned and I guess we said something Slim didn't want to hear. That's all it was.

A- Is that all you think of Slim, son?

C- No, but I don't think he should write me off because of something Howard said.

A- What was the topic of this high-flown conversation?

C- Girls I guess.

A- Well see, Slim- he's touchy about girls.

C- I know.

A- My advice. Ignore what Howard say. Take up on Slim.

C- We were just telling stories. Howard was telling me about some of the whorehouses he's been in. I was just interested.

A- You never been?

C- No.

A- Ever fall into a liquid manure pit? (no response) Same thang. Don't bother. You'll never get clean.

C- All we were doing is talking. He must hear worse than what we were saying. Hell he's 60 years old or so.

A- He's heard it. I've heard it too. But Ol Slim- he likes you like a son, Boy. (no response) You know that?

C- Yes.

A- First step. (pause) Let me tell you about talk. Used to be- when people still had something sacred- they would talk and ~~talk~~ trying to decipher if you knew the secret too. They wanted to know if you had the other half or was just out to steal theirs. You follow?

C- I guess.

A- That may be the best you have right now. (he sits and chews on a blade of grass for awhile) Course, most of that is gone now. Talk- real talk- is obsolete. It's just a bad habit with most folks. You follow?

C- Yes. I guess I do.

A- Good. (pause) Now Slim- talk is sacred. He still thinks it means somethin. He's got his own bead on the whole thang. But it's elusive. Like a rabbit in the briars. And Slim- he's getting a little old- can't get his paws on it. All he can do is look at it. It ain't even there for him most the time. He has to try an remember what it looks like. You follow?

C- Yes.

A- (reaching out and shaking the kid's knee) Good. I knew you could. (he slowly gets up from the ground and starts to wander off)

C- Where are you going Amos?

A- Got me dogs to feed. You can come if you want. (Charlie gets up and runs after the old man)

Scene

(Charlie is passing through the park with books under his arm. Howard jumps out of the bushes in his path.)

H-(Bitter, attacking) Look at you carrying those books like the average white boy.

C- That's me. Just a middle-class white boy.

H- Six foot tall and studying to do what? Doctor, lawyer? Ain't that right?

C- You know I'm studying art, Howard.

H- (spitting) Worse.

C- I guess so but..

H- But! Don't give me no but! (pause) You want somethin to drink or not? (he takes a bottle from his pocket)

C- You sure are in a beligerent mood, Howard.

H- (moving close to him and looking him in the eye while he pushes the bottle into Charlie's chest) Mood to kick your ass if I have to. Now drink it.

(Charlie starts to touch the bottle to his lips and Howard grabs him and forces him to drink down a big gulp)

C- (pulling away and spilling his books all over the ground) What'd you do that for?!

H- Let me tell you something. Who do you think you're fooling? What is all this jazz you're playing with? You're no better than the rest of us!

C- What jazz? (he starts to pick up his books)

H- Carrying books around. Going to COLLEGE. Big deal. It's just sellin. That's all it is.

C- It's what?

H- Sellin. Sellin. Salesmanship, Scooter. Damn! You deaf or blind or what?

C- I just didn't hear you.

H- Well you gonna have to start listening to hear! You get me? I'M SICK OF LISTENIN' TO YOUR VOICE + SICK OF SEEIN' YOU AROUND HERE

C- Ok. I get you. Why don't you just calm down?

H- Don't tell me to calm down, Scooter!

C- Fine. Stop calling me Scooter.

H- I'll call you any damned thing I want.

(at this point Amos comes along with a big black dog)

A- Afternoon, gents. What you boys been talkin about?

H- We ain't been talkin about anything!

A- Well Howard, you know Slim don't want you two congregatin around here.

H- I don't care what Slim wants.

A- Me neither, Howard. But my dog, Rufus, here, he likes Slim a good deal and he might get angered with you if you bad mouth Slim.

H- Ok, Wino. I need me a drink anyway and I don't want the slime from your lips on my bottle. (he leaves)

Scene

NIGHT.

(Slim and Charlie and Amos are together in the park. None of them are aware of the fact that Howard is standing behind them, partially hidden, listening to their conversation.)

A- Take the sample of television. Force to bring everyone together.

C- Unite the world.

S- One big...happy family.

A- That's it!

S- Bes chance we had yet. Better'n the Catholic church I bet. (they all laugh)

A- Go an do what though?

C- Game shows, soap operas- garbage.

S- Worser.

A- They sell tampons. (Charlie laughs at the choice of words)

A- You go ahead and laugh. You the one they gonna sell those thangs to.

C- Not me.

S- Yep. By the truckload. Either sellin or buyin 'em.

A- I can see your big face up there on the screen.

C- Not me. S- I can see it at the Bio-graph. Larger'n life itself. Anybody ever tell you you look like... what's that guys's name?

C- Al Pacino?

S- No, no. Has a mustache.

C- I don't know. S- Dreyfus. Richie Dreyfus. Look just like him. (he laughs) Look at him, Amos. Don't he look just like that sad-eyed Richie Dreyfus? In this light anyway.

A- Never seen the fella, Slim. Only go to the show to get in out of the rain from time to time.

S- Looks just like him.

C- Nobody ever told me THAT before.

S- 'strue. Precisely.

C- You said I looked like Clint Eastwood before.

H- (~~speaking~~ PLODDING from behind the bushes) Bullshit.

A-(turning along with the rest of them) Go on out of here, Howard.

H- I'm goin. (he comes through the bushes toward them) You (he points) rotten.....

A- Go on outa here, I said.

H- YOU!! (he points at Charlie)

S- Spit it out. You got somethin- spit it out.

H- Wait. I. It had direction. (he stands confused) It was heading somewhere.

A- Spit it out then.

H- I'm after it!

S- Let's hear it. (Charlie starts to laugh but stifles it)

H- I was in pursuit. It was a thought. (he staggers) It went up over the hills in my mind. (pause) When I got to the top (he laughs) Sharp turn. Ducked into the bushes.

S- Well go look for it then but get out of here.

H- I'm gittin. (he swivels to leave, pointing at Charlie as some mysterious force drags him off the stage) You!

(THEY ALL WATCH AS HE GOES)

A- I'm all wore out. Did he have somethin or not?

S- It must have been a parallel to something vicious.

C- It sure was. That guy scares the hell out of me.

A- Don't let him scare you. He's his own problem.

S- Who-what was it- we were talkin about?

A- Some actor-fella.

C- Yeah. You were telling me..no, no, I was telling YOU that before- you were telling ME that I used to look like Clint Eastwood.

S- Prolly did. That was before. People change.

(they all sit looking at each other's faces for a while)

A- It's progress. We racing forward just to get back to from where we came.

S- Perfect.

A- That is to say that all this going forward is going to arrive us at our destination which is behind us. (C+S LOOK BEHIND THEMSELVES)

S- Perfect. I bet Randy would jump right in on this one.

C- I missed something.

A- Old Randy. I bet he would climb in up to his knees.

C- I guess I missed something then.

S- Something?! You missed the whole damned carnival, ~~Skipper~~.

A- Waste things. 'sall I'm sayin.

S- Sayin it well too.

A- Til we got nothin left to waste. Then what?

C- I don't know I guess we'll be in trouble.

S- The biggest.

A- The best, AS RANDY WOULD SAY.

S- (suddenly inspired) Oh, but then... (he stands up)

A- Yes we will.

S- Oh but then... (he staggers around) But THEN...

A- But then we gonna see the light. If..we lucky.

S- Zackly. (he points at Amos. Sits)

A- Blindin light. On-coming locomotive.

S- Light our way into the future.

A- Right on back into the caves.

S- They'll be waiting for us. Like we never left. Stagalites and lagtites.

C- The sabre-toothed cat?

S- Zackly.

A- Listen, Charlie. We're going through this thang like running through a museum. We tossed it out the window. It's like reading the first sentence of that book, then droppin it in the trash barrel. (pause) We need to take stock.

S- Look up at that sky. There it is. Like good longhand.

A- See what it's worth. Inventory.

S- They gonna have you sellin tampons, ~~Skip~~.

C- I'm trying to learn.

A- (kindly) Don't you try too hard. It's a pretty big ball game we're talking about.

S- Look up at that moon. That'll give you some idea. Put things in perspective.

C- (looking up) Sure is bright tonight, hunh?

A- And that's only the reflection. Can't look at the real thing. Who done looked truth square in the eye? No one.

S- Not built for it. Sunglasses? Nope. Not enough. (pause) Not built for it.

A- No sir. We sure ain't. (he starts to laugh)

Scene

(Slim is standing with a suitcase in his hands as he talks to Charlie)

S- I guess I'll be heading down to Florida. I got a sister there.

C- You look good, Slim.

S- Welp, they treat you good in the veteran's hospital.

C- I didn't know you were a veteran, Slim.

S- We all were. Whole generation. Big flock- brainless sheep. (pause) None of us were what you would call deep thinkers. Those that were, were also called communists.

C- I get called that a lot.

S- It goes on. (pause) How did you think I knew so much about that hollow guy? Me and him were buddies.

C- You knew him?

S- Nah. But that coulda been my statue. Stead, I got this rasberry for a nose. That's my medal.

C- I don't think it looks so bad on you.

S- (saddened) I wear it in shame sometimes. (snapping back) But hell- I earned it. (he sets down the suitcase and sits on it) You don't want to end up like this, son. Course, you don't want to end up like that either (he points to the statue). Proud guy- birdshit hat. It's a tightrope all the way.

C- I know what you mean.

S- I'm afraid you probably do.

C- I do.

S- Well good. I can tell you something else too.

C- What's that, Slim?

S- There is no truth in the bottom of that bottle. Don't waste your time looking for it there. I already tried it. It's a goose chase for sure.

C- I don't drink, Slim.

S- Good. Don't start. (pause) I told that Howard to stay away from you but who knows what he'll do. It's up to you.

C- I know.

S- I beleive you do. (he sits and stares at Charlie for a long spell) Ignore what people say, keep your own eyes open. Paint your pictures. You know what's good and what's not. They'll try to tell you that what you're up to is silly. They're all jealous. (he stands up) Look at that moon up there, when you can. It's as solid as a rock. (pause) Latch onto something like that. I seen you waltzing by here with a girl the other day. [Q ABOUT THAT HERE] Grab hold of her. Don't ever do anything to cross her. It doesn't matter what she looks like- don't let her go. There's more value in that than anything else on this globe. (pause while he picks up the suitcase) How you like my new haircut?

C- Looks good.

S- Compliments of the government. All it cost me was my innocence. The nose came with the deal. No charge. Goes well with the suit- don't you think? (S ALL I NEED'S A CASKET + A BOUTONIERE)

C- I hardly recognized you. You looked like you just stepped out of the pages of Gentlemen's Quarterly. (AT FIRST)

S- Your tax dollars at work. (pause) Only way my sister will know me is the nose. (pause) I hear, you'll be heading up to Pennsylvania?

C- Christmas vacation. Visit the folks. You know.

S- Looks like we're heading in different directions. (pause) I sure hope so. (he winks) I like you a whole lot, son. (Charlie stands and they hug) But. I gotta be down to the Greyhound. Don't want them to hold the bus for me. (Charlie starts to speak but Slim cuts him off with a look) You- sit back down. Enjoy the sun. (laughing) Look at this bag will you? Not a thing in it. Part of the act though. (he looks Charlie in the eyes for a long time, then leaves without a word)

C- (shouting after him) Thanks, Slim.

S- (from twenty paces) That's what we're here for, Kid.

~~It ain't poetic but it's true.~~

C- It ain't poetic but it's true.

Scene

(Cold. Amos sitting in the park with his coat pulled around him tightly. He's shivering and watching his dogs run around in the distance when Charlie arrives.)

A- Howdy. (nods)

C- Howdy, Amos.

A- Cold, ain't it?

C- Yes. It sure is.

A- Where you been?

C- I've been TRYING to study for a couple tests. I'll be heading back to Pennsylvania at the end of the week.

A- Cold up there.

C- Sure is. My folks tell me it's the coldest it's ever been.

A- You can have my share.

C- They got four feet of snow on the ground.

A- Wooooo-ee. Dogs would like it though. (he points off into the distance where the dogs are playing) LOOK AT 'EM.

C- Those all your dogs, Amos?

A- My dogs? Nobody's dogs. Dog belongs to itself! What's wrong with you? (SOFTENING) I feed em sure.

C- That's all I meant.

A- (apologetic) I'm just cantankerous, Charlie. I knew what. (he pats him on the knee) Got me a rough time today. Somebody called me a drunk.

C- I don't know why people do stuff like that, but they do. People call me a communist all the time. It's the same thing. (pause) Why did they call you a drunk?

A- Well- take a look. I'm old and black and I'm missing a few teeth.

C- Well?

A- Same as being a drunk in this world. (he laughs)

C- I guess so.

A- You- young and pretty and healthy and free- same as being a communist. (he laughs)

C- I'm sorry that happened to you though.

A- Don't be, boy. It's part of the scenery. All that whining and moaning is only filler. Keeps me from collapsing inward.

C- Implosion.

A- That's it.

C- Tvs do that if you kick in the picture tube.

A- Or if you toss an empty bottle at Dave Garraway. I know, I done it once. Boy was she mad! Threw me right out the house.

C- Who is Dave Garraway?

A- Oh- some fella with a bowtie I reckon. (pause) Don't mean to complain so much though. People get the wrong idea. Let me tell you- I've had my fun with it. All that naggin is just to assure myself I'm still here. I don't get to look in a mirror much.

(They sit in silence and watch the dogs playing)

C- Boy the dogs sure look like they're having fun.

A- Don't they? I whistle up the alley and they come trottin. They won't bite though.

C- Good looking bunch of dogs too.

A- Yes. Yes they are. They won't bite though. (pause) My lungs hurt in this cold. Yours?

C- (standing up) You need another sweater or something, Amos? I have some extra ones. I'll be glad to give you one.

A- (laughing kindly) No. NO. I managed all these years without your kindness. Don't be offended though.

C- But I have plenty.

A- Me too, Son. I got me more than plenty. There's Howard now.

(Howard appears)

H- Hey Ame. Lo, white boy. (he passes right by them)

A- Howard. C- Howard.

H- Alright. (standing wobbly in front of them while he speaks) I'm just going down here. Try to get around this corner. It stretches. (he stares at them for a moment, then continues on his way off stage)

A- Don't know what he meant by that but he sure was in the process. (he laughs)

C- I think Howard is a little strange at times, Amos.

A- He strange alright, son. But we all strange. I know I am. And lookin at you I can see you got some strange hidden in there, mixed up with your angelic.

C- I don't pretend not to.

A- Good for you then. (they sit and watch the dogs) One of them dogs got only one eye.

C- (standing up to get a better look) I can't see... which one?

A- Happened yesterday. Somethin got him. To look at you now, he has to look at someone else.

C- (finally getting a view of the animal) My GOD, Amos! Half of his face is missing!

A- Something got him. You think I was talkin in my hat?

C- Well don't you think you'd better take him to a vet or something?

A- Don't want to take him to no vet. Take him to a vet and he look at that face and tell me- Hey, man, that dog of yours needs to be put to sleep. He don't need sleep. He's got plenty of life left in him.

C- But don't you think he needs attention.

A- We all do. Listen here. EVERYBODY got somethin. No one owns a dog to put him to sleep and no dog is special than the other. Look at 'em.

C- They all look pretty happy- running around...

A- Which one of them dogs got one eye?

C- I can't tell from here, Amos, they're too far away.

A- Can't tell for lookin, can you? (he laughs, gets up slowly) Listen here. Don't be concerned but I can talk

(Amos continued)

on both sides of you. You understand what I'm sayin?

C- (nodding) Sure.

A- Okay (he laughs kindly, pats the kid on the shoulder) Take over. (he starts to wander off. Charlie sits and watches him go. After a few moments we can hear Amos whistle and the dogs, barking as they chase after the old man)

THE END