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Outward Signs. [Original writing]

Supin, Charles Robert, M.F.A.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1993

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OUTWARD SIGNS

by

Charles R. Supin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Playwriting

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May, 1993
(C)

1993

by

Charles R. Supin

6545 Edna Avenue
Las Vegas, Nevada 90102
(702) 871-3307
The Thesis of Charles R. Supin for the degree of MASTER OF FINE ARTS in PLAYWRITING is approved.

Jeffrey Koep, Ph.D.,
Chairperson

Jerry L. Crawford, Ph.D.,
Advisor, Examining Committee Member

Davey Marlin-Jones, B.A.,
Examining Committee Member

A. Wilber Stevens, Ph.D.,
Examining Committee Member

Robert Burgan, MFA,
Examining Committee Member

Ronald Smith, Ph.D,
Dean of the Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May, 1993
ABSTRACT

Outward Signs is a full-length play produced as required for the Master of Fine Arts in Playwriting. It consists of seven (7) characters and was performed by UNLV undergraduate acting students in the Black Box Theatre in November, 1991.
CAST OF CHARACTERS:

(In the order of appearance)

STEPHEN BRADSHAW  An Episcopal Priest
ROGER KLEIN         Organist, choirmaster
WHITLEY HANNERFORD  Church Senior Warden
MARTHA DREW         Church member
ROLLIE              A homeless
ELIZABETH SLOAN     Former member, homeless
JULIET              Homeless, teens.

SCENES:

Act One:

1. Monday after Palm Sunday
2. Tuesday
3. Wednesday

ACT Two:

1. Maunday Thursday
2. Good Friday
3. Easter Eve
TIME: The six days, Monday through Saturday, in what is recognized in the Episcopal Church as Holy Week, a time of passion, death and re-birth; this year.

PLACE: There are two playing areas. One is the Chancel of Holy Saints' Church, and the other is the Rector's Study adjacent to the Chancel. The nave of the church is out into the audience.

While fictional. All Saints' is typical of churches built in the late 19th and early 20th century which once enjoyed a productive ministry to its generous and mostly upscale congregations. It is modified Gothic in design with rich woods, tapestries, altar appointments and stained glass windows.

Note: Words and music of the Episcopal Church liturgy are from the Prayer Book and Hymnal, The Church Hymnal Corp., New York, 1986.
A SACRAMENT

is the outward and visible
sign of an inward and
spiritual grace

From the Catechism of
The Episcopal Church in the United States
of America.

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OUTWARD SIGNS

SCENE ONE: MONDAY

AT RISE: Late afternoon on the Monday after Palm Sunday. Much of the interior light in the Chancel area comes through the stained glass windows. The altar linens and frontal, like the palms, are left from Sunday's worship.

Packing cartons are stacked here and there.

STEPHEN
(Enters the Chancel, carrying two travel bags. He wears a black clerical suit, black shirt and clerical collar. He puts the bags down and gets a renewed sense of place.)

Hey...anyone here?  
(He plays with the sound of this special word.)

Hey...hey...!  
(He is tired, restless, and now from what he sees, newly exasperated.)

Dear God.  
(He reverences the altar cross, takes out a worn Book of Common Prayer, places it on the altar, exits into the Study.)

(The organ is played by ROGER, unseen. The sounds from the organ, old and in need of repair, are both music and squeaks. He attempts to play Hymn 293.)
ROGER (O.S.)
(Slapping the keyboard.)
Oy vey!
(The music plays on.)

MARTHA
(Enters from Parish Hall, carrying a tray of tea sandwiches, left from yesterday. She is dressed simply and expensively. She means to please:)

Very nice.
(STEPHEN enters from the Study.)

Oh my...Stephen? You're here.

STEPHEN
(Shaking her hand.)
Martha. Martha Drew. After all these years. How wonderful to see you. Inspite of the circumstances.

WHITLEY
(Enters, carrying a pair of pliers. He is conservatively dressed.)
Roger? Roger, I need your help.
(Sees STEPHEN.)
Hello. Ah, is that you, Stephen? We really didn't expect you for a few days.

STEPHEN
Mister Hannerford. Sir, how good to see you again.
(They shake hands.)

WHITLEY
When you called, we were so suprised. Pleased, of course, but quite surprised. We even announced your arrival yesterday. At our Palm Sunday service.

MARTHA
(Moving in and out.)
Ten years...when you sat right...

STEPHEN
(Finishing for her.)
There. And there, too.

WHITLEY
As you can see, much has happened.
STEPHEN
Yes, sir. I came here as soon as I heard about the closing. I dropped everything to be here.

WHITLEY
(His attention will be on removing the ornamental bronze from around the stain glass windows.)

But, your students. I'm sure your seminary is very busy during Holy Week.

STEPHEN
This, sir, is where I must be. I rushed back, because Holy Saints' Church must not close.

WHITLEY
I fear that decision has been made. Reluctantly, yet decidedly.

STEPHEN
But the people. The parishioners.

WHITLEY
We are the remnant. Less than twenty supporting families.

MARTHA
Less than fifty in church yesterday...strangers.

WHITLEY
And that was Palm Sunday. Usually we get less than a dozen. It's quite different from when you were growing up here. Quite different.

STEPHEN
But something must be done. The diocese--

WHITLEY
The Standing Committee has given its approval.

STEPHEN
But surely the Bishop--

WHITLEY
He's approved, with great sadness, of course.

STEPHEN
The endowment. There was always such a huge endowment.
WHITLEY
That was years ago. The remainder, such as it is, will be redirected for special projects.

STEPHEN
There must be something that we can do.

WHITLEY
Yes. Remove its furnishings, and these windows, with the utmost care.

STEPHEN
Rest assured, sir, I'll do what has to be done.

ROGER
(Enters.)
God, I'd sell my soul for an organ that didn't stick...the story of my life...whoops. I'm Roger. Roger Klein, and I can crawl into someone's pocket and die.

WHITLEY
Mister Klein is our organist, and choirmaster, for...

ROGER
Two years, six months and only one week to go.
(Looks heavenward.)
You taking notes?
(STEPHEN shakes hands.)
Hello. You taking applications?

WHITLEY
The Reverend Stephen Bradshaw. Grew up here, and became ordained. A professor at one of our leading seminaries.

ROGER
How they fixed for an organist? I can also do laundry. You don't think I'm being pushie?

STEPHEN
I am here now, to serve all of you.

ROGER
(Spotting MARTHA's tray.)
Speaking of which.
(For WHITLEY'S benefit.)
You never know when the next pay check is coming.

STEPHEN
(As the others work.)
I'm sure there's something I can do. For you. For us.
A job would be nice. (About the sandwiches.)
I think I'll take some home for dinner.

The cucumbers...they curled.

Maybe I'll pick up a pizza.

I suppose the movers will be careful with these windows.

If they survived the city's rumblings for all these years, you shouldn't worry.

I'm glad you'll be here. We're getting depressed.

Yes, I'll be here. Until Saturday, and beyond.

(To STEPHEN.)
I'll need to clue you in about leftovers. May I?

(Takes the pliers from WHITLEY.)
Just for a minute. The organ. A little mercy killing.

(Exits.)

It's very strange. No Easter worship here. The first time in...?

Ninety-eight years.

Dear God.

Rest assured. We will be celebrating Easter. At St. John's. You remember it. Across town, on Park Avenue. One of their clergy was here at worship yesterday. To invite us, indeed encourage us, to become members there. Very similar church. They'll make us very welcome. With a reception on Saturday. The best of circumstances, really.
STEPHEN
Whitley, sir, I know there's a chance that I'm too late, but...this place of such importance. Of such a rich ministry.

WHITLEY
We looked at many options. I am as sorry as anyone about all this.

STEPHEN
Yes, of course, especially you. And for what your family has done. But surely there's--

WHITLEY
Stephen, we have considered the options. We really have.

STEPHEN
Yes. (A beat.) Then I can at least shepherd the household from here to St. John's. And I can make sure you settle into your new church home. I can do that. At least that.

WHITLEY
That's very generous of you. But, everything is taken care of.

STEPHEN
I am needed here. I grew up here. Don't you see, I found...everything here. This is where I need to be.

WHITLEY
Well, then, sir, we'd be delighted to have you be with us. If you can spare the week.

MARTHA
Oh my...this week...

WHITLEY
Good. Then we'll call it an afternoon, shall we? By the way, did someone let you in? I was certain I had locked the doors.

STEPHEN
No trouble getting in here. I remembered a special way of opening the latch. Back when we were kids. An old friend and I discovered it a long time ago.

MARTHA
We haven't seen her...a long time.
STEPHEN

This has to be far from pleasant, for all of us. But, if I can...if there's a way, then we will see this as an adventure into...whatever comes as renewal. In ministry. Yes, I will make this a holy adventure.

WHITLEY

Until tomorrow then.

STEPHEN

You go. I'll let myself out. Please.

(WHITLEY exits.)

MARTHA

(Sees his prayer book, touches it as if it were a relic.)

...oh...given to you...so many years...you made us...so certain.

STEPHEN

I'll do whatever is necessary. Holy Saints' Church can't just end this way. It has meant too much. I'm back now. I have to find a way.

MARTHA

I always thought...you...here. And you and she...

STEPHEN

There is so much history.

MARTHA

Then...when all of us...

(Exits.)

(STEPHEN, alone, searches for a sense of his place of many memories.)

STEPHEN

Hey...? Hey...hey. Dear God, what?

(Takes his prayer book, opens it, kneels and reads:)

"Dear God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom..."
(Unseen by him, ROLLIE enters. He is a simple man who dresses in complex layers of clothing. He sees the sandwiches, picks them up and eats.)

STEPHEN (Con't.)
...Protect us, thy humble servants, in all assaults of our...

(Hears ROLLIE, turns. A startled ROLLIE drops the tray, scoops up sandwiches, then grabs a travel bag and runs for the exit.)

...damn you...stop!

(Runs after ROLLIE.)

ELIZABETH
(Enters.)
Rollie...!

(ELIZABETH has a veil hiding her face, and STEPHEN does not recognize her. She disguises her voice.)

ROLLIE
I was hungry.

STEPHEN
Even you'd know there's no food in that.

ELIZABETH
Rollie...?

ROLLIE
But you said what I got was mine. Oh, okay.
(He gives STEPHEN his travel bag.)

ELIZABETH
Not this time. Go downstairs. Through there. Wait for me. You'll find a room. With choir robes. Just stay there, alright? The others will be here soon. You'll be alright. Rollie...?

(ROLLIE exits.)
(ELIZABETH picks up his dropped prayer book, cleans it from dust by "kissing it up to heaven." He takes it.)

STEPHEN
Thank you. They'll let anyone in these days...
(In view of her clothing, he stops.)
I'm the Rector here. May I help? Do I...are you a member of this household?

ELIZABETH
Hey, isn't that quaint? Household. Makes you think of shutters and doilies. Brings back memories.
(She moves, playfully, around furniture.)

STEPHEN
Now look, have we met before?

ELIZABETH
Maybe. Could it have been...a Sunday School play? The flood story? So boring that we got balloons and we filled them with water, and you put them in the pocket of Noah's costume. And just before he went on you took this hat pin--

STEPHEN
--and created a real flood. The hat pin from...your...mother. My God, Elizabeth...after all these...Elizabeth Sloan...?
(She bows with a flourish. My God, you look...just fine. (A few beats.) I had assumed that you moved away a long time ago.

ELIZABETH
Can't. Have you tried getting across town these days? Hi, Stevie.

STEPHEN
I don't understand.

ELIZABETH
And you, the PhD in...?

STEPHEN
Systematic theology.
ELIZABETH
Well, that explains it.

STEPHEN
I didn't expect to find you here...dressed like that.

ELIZABETH
It's the fashion. Been on Fifth Avenue lately?

STEPHEN
It's been a very long time.

ELIZABETH
So, where have you been? It's been --what?-- ten million years?

STEPHEN
Ten years. After I left here, I don't know. College. Graduate school. Assisting in churches. Then back to seminary, where I've been teaching. Or trying to.

ELIZABETH
This isn't going to take long, is it? It's getting late, and I have a guest waiting downstairs.

STEPHEN
I'll make it quick. Your ten million years. You took care of your mother, of course, but then what?

ELIZABETH
Oh, this and that. It takes so much out of one. Just having to cope with life's little moments.

STEPHEN
Not you. Come on. Miss Elizabeth Efficiency? Junior League secretary? President, Choir Guild? If anyone was going to organize, and keep track of everything...then it would be our girl...whom we voted most...likely...to succeed.

ELIZABETH
Never slam titles on young people, I always say.

STEPHEN
God...Elizabeth--

ELIZABETH
Hey, wait, Stevie Boy. Make up your mind. Your God or me. We girls need to know where we stand.
STEPPHEN
I've been too busy to notice. Teaching doesn't always keep you in touch.

ELIZABETH
So, look, I have been doing my own church work. Gathering a few friends. I was here yesterday morning.
(Pulls out palms.)
No one noticed me. As usual. There's something about me that no one wants to recognize these days. Must be the hat. Hardly anyone wears one in church these days.

ELIZABETH
Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH
Right, where was I? Oh, they announced that you'd been coming back, to help or something "during this week of great trial" or something. So, I said, terrific, he can help me.

STEPHEN
If I can. You can be sure of that.

ELIZABETH
Oh? Good. I have some friends who are in need of a place to live, you know what I mean? It hasn't been easy for them, and, hey, this is a big place. So, I'll introduce one in-crowd to another in-crowd. Okay?

STEPHEN
Sadly, it looks as if Holy Saints' Church will close. Unless. I have a few ideas, but, who knows what I can do.

ELIZABETH
But in the meantime, lots of people just stranded.

STEPHEN
I feel that way about the members, who have been here for so many years. It should not be closed.

ELIZABETH
There you go.

STEPHEN
What have you done to keep it open? And active?

ELIZABETH
I showed up on Sunday, didn't I?
STEPHEN
I'm sure you're not serious. Even with that wild get-up. You've never been one to complain then do nothing. (A beat.) So, I presume you're still living in your mother's apartment.

ELIZABETH
No, that went...for trips to lots of schools, I think. Know how many colleges I started? I have more freshman banners than...anyone I know.

STEPHEN
But you're here. We are both back here. And, after all these years.

ELIZABETH
Sure. (After a few beats.)
So, look, what about...what about dear sweet ole man Whitley Hannerford's key to the poor box...

STEPHEN
Yes, but--

ELIZABETH
...in the shape of an endowment fund. I haven't forgotten everything about religion.

STEPHEN
Wait a minute, Elizabeth. Let me try to explain. Please. Wait. I listened to you, you return the favor. Alright? The proceeds of the sale of this property are not ours. Along with the endowment, all monies revert back to the diocesan general fund.

ELIZABETH
Come on, let's make the endowment available to my people. And, hey, we're all God's children again.

STEPHEN
I want it to keep this household together. But I don't have all the facts. Besides, handouts are no solution.

ELIZABETH
So, it's ask and you shall not receive.

STEPHEN
Cute. In some cases, perhaps.
ELIZABETH
Oh, perhaps. I don't remember "perhaps" being mentioned in all those lessons. Golly gee, had I known life was going to be different after Sunday School. Gee whiz.

STEPHEN
Elizabeth, I'm sure I can help you, and your friends.

ELIZABETH
Oh, good.

(She starts to hug him, stops, waits for his move. He's deep in thought.)

STEPHEN
But a real gesture. One that will mean something of substance. Give our people purpose. In the meantime, let me see about getting some shelter for the night.

ELIZABETH
How about: you get money and we'll get our own shelter. Right, you got it. I'm on the streets, too.

STEPHEN
Sure, and I'm a bishop. Look, I can't promise anything.

ELIZABETH
Damn, there goes your chances for being a Messiah.

Hey, look--

STEPHEN
Hey, Stevie boy,

ELIZABETH
Hey...!

(They will recall the special word, "hey."
A remembering.)

STEPHEN
I have some people to take care of.

ELIZABETH
Elizabeth. It's so good to see you again. So good.

And me without getting to the beauty parlour.
STEPHEN

Elizabeth, look--

ELIZABETH

Wait...just wait. After ten million years there he is, in all his black on black, feeling good to see me again. Big deal. After ten years. Who the hell do you think you are?

STEPHEN

I didn't know you were hurting so much.

ELIZABETH

You didn't even know if I was alive.

STEPHEN

There's a lot I didn't know. Or don't know. But I'm here. God knows why, but I'm here. To see people. The same, yet totally different. All the while I was coming here, I was hoping...praying that everything would be the same. The same people, the lights and the music and the liturgy. All that I grew up with. But what is this place? Packing cases. Oh no, no. And then...to see you, after all these years. Like this. Us. Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

(Polite yet distant.)

It's so good to be with you again. We'll meet tomorrow, I'm sure.

STEPHEN

Now just you wait one minute.

ELIZABETH

Now that I know you're working on a plan, no sense leaving.

(Starts to exit where ROLLIE had gone.)

Oh, be so kind to lock the door on the way out. In this city you never can be too careful.

(She exits.)

STEPHEN

Elizabeth...wait. Elizabeth. Hey...!

(Alone, he starts to follow her, stops. He is very alone.)

THE END OF SCENE ONE
AT RISE: Late afternoon in the Chancel, and the altar candles are lit.

STEPHEN is standing on a ledge in front of the reredos: the carvings and windows above and behind the altar. With the aide of a screwdriver he is unlodging a brass fixture. He accidentally pushes the ladder which he used to get up there and it falls to the floor.

STEPHEN
(Startled, stressed.)
Damn you...damn you to hell...!
(Unsteady, he glings to moldings. He eases his way to a better position but his footing is precarious.)

Why...? Why...

ELIZABETH
(Enters from within the church.)
Hey, how should I know? You're the one up there, not me. (A beat.) Seems to me you got a plan, Stevie boy.

I don't know.

I could use your help.

ELIZABETH
I don't come cheap.

STEPHEN
I don't know why I came up here in the first place. To take a break from my telephoning, I guess.

ELIZABETH
You look good, being up and above it all.
I've never been up here before. As a boy, sitting there, right next to you in the choir. I'd look up here and wonder: is God really looking down on me? I used to duck --"now you see me, now you don't." If I could just get up here. For a closer look. And then I could descend, like an angel, with huge wings, and to land right there. I would be able to scoop up, and save, everyone in sight.

ELIZABETH
The burdens you saints carry around.

STEPHEN
When you were a kid in that pew I bet you didn't think you'd be back here trying to help the homeless.

ELIZABETH
Better than thinking I could fly. Is there something in your church training that you haven't mentioned?

STEPHEN
(He might sing the words from this Anglican anthem.)

"Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove...
(She joins him.)
Far away, far away would I roam..."

(A few beats as they consider how close they are while being at such a distance.)

ELIZABETH
If you fly you'd better watch out for the buses.

STEPHEN
You remember. Of course you do. On Fifth Avenue. We were playing ball after church.

ELIZABETH
In our Sunday best.

STEPHEN
And a ball was thrown to me.

ELIZABETH
And you stepped out to make the catch of the year.
STEPHEN
And you...you grabbed my shirt...and pulled me out of
the way of the bus.

ELIZABETH
Saving you for sainthood.

STEPHEN
I owe you.

ELIZABETH
I had nothing better going that day.

STEPHEN
So much to remember. Hey...? As in...?

ELIZABETH
Hayloft. I remember.

STEPHEN
I think it was the first word I said when I got here
yesterday. Up there, hey....! That Sunday School trip.
To the farm? And that wondrous barn. That we found.
Just the two of us.

ELIZABETH
Just us kids against the world...I remember.

STEPHEN
We climbed the beams, and there in front of us. An
ocean of hay. And we dove...here we go...!

ELIZABETH
I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but there's
no hay down here.

STEPHEN
You are the last person I expected to see...still here.
I'll help your friends, somehow. But I don't want to
wear funny clothes to do it.

ELIZABETH
I guess you haven't looked in the mirror lately.

STEPHEN
(About the ladder.)
Elizabeth...I need your help.

ELIZABETH
Always thought you did.
(She stands ladder up, and holds it for him.)

STEPHEN
I tried. All morning I called people I know in the diocese. I'm not having much luck even getting people to listen to ideas. Ideas are on hold in this city.

ELIZABETH
Figures. You coming down or what?

STEPHEN
I could use some of your ideas. Your goals. Dreams.

(There is a noise, she runs into one of the interior places. He remains on the ledge.)

STEPHEN
Hey...see ya.

MARTHA
(Enters, carrying cardboard boxes.)
"Tremble...!"

ROGER
(Enters carrying a carton. With great dramatic flair.)
No, no, it's "tremble" as in "fear and trembling."

MARTHA
(Entering.)
"Tremble...and..."

ROGER
This is the mighty Fourth Psalm. Not a note to your maid about the laundry. Oh, Rector, there you are. There you are, indeed. Listen, if we're intruding...

STEPHEN
That's alright. Just a bit of angel training.

ROGER
With all the liturgical changes these days, who's to question?
MARTHA
Perhaps we might...

ROGER
No, we rehearse those lines right now.

MARTHA
And then I'd...

ROGER
Not on your life.

(To STEPHEN.)
I've de-coded her. Martha's helping me put together, maybe a little worship thing for Wednesday night. A little choral reading, with, God help us, organ music. Just in case, you know, when we get to the new church across town, we can show off our gifts. Are you sure you want to stay up there all night?

STEPHEN
No. But there are worse places.

ROGER
Sure. One minute. Come on, Martha, just once more. (Taps out a drum beat.) With the judge on high.

MARTHA
But...we've...he's...

ROGER
He'll love it. A captive audience. Come on.

MARTHA
"When I call...upon the Lord...he will...hear me."

STEPHEN
We hear ya, we hear ya. Hurray for the psalms.

ROGER
A little bit here and a little bit there. Bits and pieces. God, it sounds like I'm making a dress. After Wednesday I'll hand out my resume. For a modeling job in Vogue. Do you think I talk too much?

MARTHA
Stephen...what...to do?
ROGER
Learning how to finish a sentence would help...dearie.

MARTHA
"Tremble..."

ROGER
Good. But why do I feel palpitations? Martha, once more --and forgive the expression-- with feeling.

MARTHA
"Tremble, then, and...and, er, do not...sin."

ROGER
(With even greater vibrato and drama.)

"And do not sin."

STEPHEN
"Oh, that we might see better times! Lift up the countenance upon us, Oh Lord." I hope you have a part for me.

ROGER
With the usual lack of volunteer, how are you at doing voices?

STEPHEN
There once was a time we had waiting lists for every organization here.

MARTHA
So many...the scheduling.

STEPHEN
You know, I might be able to get you some volunteers. Not who you'd expect, but I'll get them.

ROGER
Just like I'll get the organ of my choice. As it were.

WHITLEY
(Enters.)
Ah, Rector, good. I was hoping to find you, er, here. That's quite a fine window, isn't it?

STEPHEN
Yes, one of your family's memorials. Lovely.

(ROGER helps him down using the ladder.)
WHITLEY
Thank you, but the movers will take care of it.

ROGER
So, you'll be taking one to eight parts. Good.

STEPHEN
Yes, but it might not be necessary. If I get others.

MARTHA
Oh my. It's so good...just like...

(She exits with ROGER.)

STEPHEN
She is not the Martha I remember.

WHITLEY
The closing of the church. She seems lost. Her husband's no help. Stewart Drew still chairs International Metals. But he should have retired five years ago. All work. We never see him, expect at Christmas. The rest of the year this is her activity. He still gives us a check once a year. The same time he writes out checks for those at his various clubs.

STEPHEN
Oh, yes. I remember Doctor Clark telling me about him. "I never make a church pledge. You see, my dear Doctor Clark, I never buy anything on credit."

WHITLEY
I believe Dr. Clark was referring to my father.

STEPHEN
Oh. (A beat.) I put a call in to the diocese this morning. I was hoping to speak to the Standing Committee about some details of the closing. I want to explore some options. Just in case it's not too late to close up everything. If you have time today, we might--

WHITLEY
I wish I did. I know about your calls. The president of the committee called me at the office. I'm sorry you had to waste your time calling the committee. Everything has been worked out. With considerable thought given to every option. With considerable time and hard work, I might add.
STEPHEN
Too bad it's more complicated to close a church than to start a new one.

WHITLEY
I'm glad you haven't been here for the last ten years. To watch it die week after week.

STEPHEN
A solid witness for almost one hundred years...serving the needs of --what?-- hundreds of thousands.

WHITLEY
Through a war, then a depression...and wars upon wars. But recoveries, too. All kinds of recoveries. Even some that lasted longer than a fiscal quarter.

STEPHEN
They told me with the sale of this property, the endowment will more than triple. To make it valuable as an investment means to make it in-operable as a church.

WHITLEY
We were draining principle at an alarming rate. Decreased membership versus increased expenses. The numbers tell the story.

STEPHEN
I don't know much about these kinds of numbers. It's not a requisite for teaching theology at a seminary.

WHITLEY
You are fortunate, Rector. You need only concern yourself with one task: shepherding our small flock across town to the other congregation.

STEPHEN
But there might be greater opportunities. So many. I feel it. We need to speak more about it.

WHITLEY
(Checking his watch.) But it will have to wait, I'm afraid. I'm off to the airport. Just a brief trip. My wife wants me to look at some property down at Hilton Head. Pretty little place, I'm told. I should return Wednesday.

STEPHEN
Who knows what might be done by then.
WHITLEY
Very little I trust. You will pray to hold up my plane?

STEPHEN
(Smiles, folding his hands as in prayer.)

What else?

WHITLEY
Thank you for your understanding. We tried everything. We really did.

Oh, I forgot.

(Takes out a telegram, and hands it to STEPHEN.)

This came for you. From your seminary.

(STARTS TO LEAVE, STOPS.)

(WHITLEY exits. STEPHEN exits into the Study.)

STEPHEN
(In the Study, he looks at the books, then he reads the telegram.)

My God. Dear God...!

(Flabbergasted, and pre-occupied, he looks at the books.)

ELIZABETH
(Entering the Study. She is dressed more plainly but it's still odd.)

And I bet you read all of them.

STEPHEN
What? Oh, some twice.

ELIZABETH
(Blowing dust from a book.)

But not recently.

STEPHEN
(Upset, testy.)

Why did you run off? What's with you? It was just Martha and Whitley. You've known them all your life.

ELIZABETH
I need a better reason?
Come on, Elizabeth. They were once very important parts of your life. Our parents grew old with them. As we grew up with them.

Oh, of course, that's what we did.

Elizabeth, why did you come back here?

To help my friends. You have yours. I have mine.

No, why did you really come back? It's important for me to know.

Oh?

For me, it's...I'm not sure. If nothing else, here is where I got my calling to the ministry. Whatever that is.

Why, it's your spiritual wake-up call.

(Sings.)

When I'm calling youuuuuuuu.

Elizabeth, why all this anger?

Because...it's questions, always questions asked in such a way that...and you wonder why no one comes to church any longer. Questions. Inane answers. Empty pews.

(His tension grows.)

Lighten up a little. (A beat.) I still feel it. A mysterious, up-sweeping majesty of this place. All strength. And permanent. A thing that never ends. Profound yet foolishly simple. There's a reaching up and out...yet always inward. I wanted so much to get back here. I needed to feel this place again.

So you can jump on top of altars in a single bound.
STEPHEN
I'm trying to be serious.

EIZABETH
I never would have guessed.

STEPHEN
A place of such rich sounds. They need to be felt again. Then...then maybe I'll be able to feel the new silences. All its members will feel the silence.

ELIZABETH
As in hollow.

STEPHEN
No, no, there is silence, yet out of what you would call its hollowness...you can hear. It. Them. Yourself. You are always conscious of the air...right here...its filling sounds. When you listen closely, whatever it is, it swirls around you, softly, yet with the voices of everyone who has been here before you.

ELIZABETH
You're right. (A beat.) But crowds make me nervous.

STEPHEN
Cut it out. Take a chance. Listen. So many voices, and not to hear. You and I, it's a shame...not hearing. No wonder at all why we return to such a place.

ELIZABETH
Ah, the simple life.

STEPHEN
Coming back. And going. Journies that must be taken.

ELIZABETH
If we did, you know, travel together, I'd have to get a few more outfits.

STEPHEN
The meaning of mission. (A beat.) Oh, your clothes.

ELIZABETH
You can never have too many.

(Business about her layers of clothing.)

I've been learning from Rollie, my friend out there. Where fashion is everything.
STEPHEN
I don't understand what's made you become friends with such people. Admirable, but it's so unlike you.

ELIZABETH
Family is family.

STEPHEN
You have a family. Us. Right here. All of us.
(She is not impressed.
A few beats. He opens
his prayer book.)

I've been thinking about you. And not only you. Me, too. How I might relate to those people. I surely don't know their kind, but here...listen:
(Finds his place and starts to read then he recites.)

"O God, who healist those who are broken in heart, remember in pity such as are this day distitute, homeless, or forgotten of their fellow men. Bless the congregation of the poor--"

ELIZABETH
Hey, look--

STEPHEN
Please. Just hear me out. "Uplift those who are cast down. Cheer with hope all discouraged and unhappy people..." And just a little more.

ELIZABETH
I was afraid of that.

STEPHEN
"...By thy heavenly grace preserve from falling all those whose penury tempeth them to sin. Though they be troubled on every side, suffer them not to be distressed though they be perplexed, save them from despair. Grant this, O..."

ELIZABETH
O...O...Okay, I got it. And you wonder why the churches are empty? "...whose penury tempeth them to sin...suffer them not to be distressed..."?

STEPHEN
I can not improve on those words.
ELIZABETH
I can. How's this: Dear Santa...!

STEPHEN
Dear God... what have you become?

ELIZABETH
Oh, great, I think I know what you're going to say. I really think I know. It's cliche time, folks.

STEPHEN
Wait!

ELIZABETH
There's no waiting. I can hear you in front of the confirmation class: Now kiddies, you are in a state of becoming. From this cocoon you will open up to become a butterfly. Isn't that becoming."

STEPHEN
You don't understand.

ELIZABETH
I understand all too well, Stevie boy. The old routines never die. Listen: "Once changed, and all grown up, the butterfly flutters, ever so beautifully"...for about thirty seconds...not one minute. Thirty seconds. Before becoming no more.

STEPHEN
I don't know what you want.

ELIZABETH
Good. I don't know what you can give.

STEPHEN
Look, I need--

ELIZABETH
What you need is to break out of your pius shackles.

STEPHEN
Did it occur to you once, just once, that I might be able to help?

ELIZABETH
Sure. Of course I have. Why the hell did you think I came back? Why? Because you were going to be here. (A few beats.)

Hey... how you fixed for wine?
STEPHEN
I can't help you there.

ELIZABETH
Well, that shoots another evening.

STEPHEN
Damn you...!

ELIZABETH
Hey, Stevie, had I known you were going to speak to me that way--

STEPHEN
(Taking her by the shoulders.)
I offer...the hand of God's grace.

ELIZABETH
Holy shit, father, I've been blessed again.
(Breaking away.)

STEPHEN
How dare you!

ELIZABETH
No, how dare you? Offering God's grace. What the hell is that? Prayers you have to read from a book? I'm not like your little seminarians. All snug on their knees in the chapel. That's not the world where I am. And it's not where I need to be.

STEPHEN
My God, look at you. Look!

ELIZABETH
(She goes for humor but he does not.)
Don't rush me, I'm looking. Perhaps it needs a little more crinoline right about here. I suppose you don't have a sewing kit on you. I didn't think so.

STEPHEN
What are you doing?

ELIZABETH
Making myself more presentable. Isn't that what you want?
STEPHEN
Clothing is not what I want to speak about.

ELIZABETH
It seems you do. Hey, I made a joke. Seems, as in...forget it. I haven't made a joke in years. Maybe you're good for me after all. You were going to tell me why you came back. Running all the way to here from your safe seminary. Of course I know why. To be in the place with all your hypocrites?

STEPHEN
Sure, we're all hypocrites. So why not join us. We can always use one more.

ELIZABETH
Wow, that's good. Lifted from one of your sermons?

STEPHEN
Elizabeth, we need to talk. Please.

ELIZABETH
Oh, then I'll shut up. But, then again, here's church:

(Demonstrates hand trick as she might make her way above to STEPHEN'S ledge.)

Here is the steeple. Open the doors and..." Whoops not many people. No matter. The message is simple: Whatever you do today, remember, above everything else...joum the church of the holy cliche. Son of a bitch, Stevie, boy, think I'd make a good bishop?

STEPHEN
Your arrogance!

ELIZABETH
My freedom!

STEPHEN
Your emptiness! All about you, and in you. Look at you. Just look at yourself. Look! Standing there. Everything about you. You...you are hollow. Emptied out. You have nothing. You've become nothing but emptiness.

ELIZABETH
Hey, I'm glad I'm not sensitive. It must be my breeding.
STEPHEN

There's no time to go easy.  
(Takes out telegram.)
I've been asked --told-- not to come back to my teaching job. An extended leave of absence. I'm not attentive enough, or caring enough for my students. You're not supposed to leave them, especially during Holy Week. I don't know...where...it's my life...my work. I don't know. I came back because...these people need me more than the students need me. But I...

ELIZABETH
Stevie boy--

STEPHEN
Don't you dare call me that. We are no longer children.

ELIZABETH
Listen, Stevie boy, who the hell do you think you are? You're not a saint. You don't find salvation that easy. But you are righteous. I should have been around more, to kick you in the butt. Wow. What a missionary I would have been. Gee, finally, a life with purpose. Wow. Wowee.

STEPHEN
Stop...!

ELIZABETH
Not now. Gee whiz, I'm hitting my stride.

STEPHEN
Stop. Please, just stop...!

ELIZABETH
Okay, okay.

STEPHEN
There's love for you in this household. You don't have to be alone, or angry. I see you as standing in the middle of nothing. Everything, alive around you. There's everything necessary for a productive life. Alive. Swirling --dizzily-- all around you. God, to be in the middle of it, yet having no part in it. The horror of being without the love of...of those who care, really care. The terror of having nothing in everything.

ELIZABETH
You talking about me or you?
(A few beats.)

ROLLIE
(Enters. Frightened.)
Enter, I'm glad you're here. They got me scared again.

STEPHEN
You're safe here.

ROLLIE
Everyone's so busy out there. Doing things, always.

ELIZABETH
Rollie, it's okay. Everything's fine here. Maybe.

ROLLIE
I liked it when we stayed, you know, under the bridge.

ELIZABETH
I told the others to meet me here.

CLIFF
No one would come. I tried. And I think I got one. You know, maybe. Except.

ELIZABETH
What's wrong? Tell me.

STEPHEN
Is there something I can do?

ELIZABETH
I'm handling this. Rollie?

ROLLIE
She's pretty. Real pretty. I seen her when I was workin' Seventh and Fifty-First. Where you said it was good. Just passin' the hat. Then I try a little of the balancin' stuff. With the soda cans. It's goin' good and everythin'. Then I seen her. She's workin' with other guys. They don't smile or nothin'. She looks scared. But she does what they says. She tries to push herself against a couple of people. Then one guy starts to take the lady's pocketbook. But this girl, faints or somethin' and the couple see what the guy's doin. They scream. The guy smacks the girl, and he runs off.
STEPHEN
Can we find this young lady? Bring her back here?

ROLLIE
She starts laughin' and cryin' and she tells the people they can have her baby. That she's gonna have. She says they can have it if they want it. So I says, she can bring it to you. I figured that's okay, okay?

STEPHEN
I can help.

ELIZABETH
Oh, good. Here comes more "whose penury tempeth them to sin."

STEPHEN
Let me come with you. I know the area around here.

ELIZABETH
Sure, from what you can see out of a taxi window.

STEPHEN
We have a person to help.

ROLLIE
I know where she's hangin' out.

STEPHEN
She might not have a place for the night.

ELIZABETH
(Picks up a cardboard carton and throws it at STEPHEN.)
Give her this. The latest in home design.

STEPHEN
Damn your sarcasm. Rollie, take me to her.

ELIZABETH
I said I'll take care of this. (To STEPHEN.)
Can't you see I don't need your help?
She starts to exit.

STEPHEN
No. You need me. What you can get from an endowment.
ELIZABETH
   (A few beats. She stops
   ROLLIE from leaving.)
Roll out that happy salvation.

STEPHEN
I can do this...I will do something. But I need your help. And Rollie's. And his friend, and all the other friends you can bring. You know these people. So bring as many as you can. Many people. Tomorrow evening. It's something planned for Wednesday evening. Meet me here tomorrow night. Here. I'm asking...for your trust. Will you trust me? What do you have to lose?

ELIZABETH
Oh? Maybe, what do you have to lose?

STEPHEN
God only knows. Please. Trust me.

   (ELIZABETH and ROLLIE
   exit.)

   (Alone, STEPHEN opens his
   prayerbook. He thumbs
   through pages, rapidly,
   chaotically.)

   (The telegram falls
   out. He rips it up,
   and puts it in the
   book. He shuts it. With
   anger and frustration,
   he flings the prayerbook
   at the altar.)

THE END OF SCENE TWO
SCENE THREE: WEDNESDAY

AT RISE: It is evening.

In the Study, STEPHEN is at the desk, making notations on a pad as he dials a phone number.

STEPHEN
Good evening, Mister Palmer? This is the Reverend Stephen Bradshaw. Holy Saints' Church...We spoke this morning. About tonight's special worship. Yes...Oh...I know you gave it a great deal of thought...I was wondering, Do you think the committee would consider...Oh...yes, I'll put a proposal in writing. Thank you. Good evening.

(He hangs up, makes a notation on a pad, and dials another number.)

Sure, I'll give him a proposal. If I ever find one.

(In the Chancel, MARTHA enters, carrying candles which she puts in the altar candlesticks, and otherwise prepare the church for worship. She notices his prayer book, and, hearing him on the phone, enters the Study.)

STEPHEN
(On the phone, motions for her to come in.)

Yes, it is last minute, but, as I said this morning... Thank you...And a blessed Easter season to you.

MARTHA
We always had the best candles. And this was.  
(Hands him his prayer book.)

STEPHEN
Thank you.

MARTHA
We were so proud...your ordination.
STEPHEN
Ten years ago. Here's where you signed. Doctor Clark. Whitley. Elizabeth. A bit shop worn. It's only been out of my possession... once.

MARTHA
Elizabeth... and you. Such lovely...

STEPHEN
My first girlfriend. My only one, really.

MARTHA
I've seen her... in church. Often. In the back. But when I went near...

STEPHEN
(Wanders with her into the Chancel.)
Martha, so much has happened. To all of us. And so much more can happen. Will happen. I feel it. I know it. Elizabeth might be on to something very important. Bringing in new people. Dealing with what you have. I was hoping to get people from the diocese here tonight. So they could see new people in the pews. A great idea. I don't think it's working.

MARTHA
Ten minutes. Late arrivals...

STEPHEN
I can't convince anyone in the diocese that there's still time to do something. Anything. A chance to do something good, with purpose, with design. I just have to find a hook. Hello something. Hello anything.

ROGER
(Enters the Chancel, carrying an armful of hymnals. He sets them on the organ, patting it)
Now, we're going to make nice with one another tonight, right?

(To the others.)
I thought we were going to have a congregation tonight. But I once thought I was going to be asked to record all of Bach's Fugues. And they make it into a MTV.

STEPHEN
Roger, we might need to be prepared, in case some of Elizabeth's people can't read.
ROGER
It's all a lot of "tremble." We can get them to shake.

STEPHEN
May I take a look?

(ROGER hands him the outline.)

MARTHA
(Exits, rehearsing.)
"Trem-ble...when I call...upon the Lord...he...he..."

ROGER
Very good. Keep it up, dearie.

(To STEPHEN.)
That's the worst "tremble" I've ever heard.

STEPHEN
Martha's not her old self these days.

ROGER
She and I used to talk for hours. Like having carload of friends. Having one friend saves you...you know, from buying all those little telephone books. And going through them for this one or that one's number. Especially on weekends...when everyone you think you know is not there. Out...you know, with others. Or not there anymore. Having Martha is protection in a way: keeping you from looking around for those you can't see any more. Rector, who do you talk to?

(Looking to heaven.)

You know, besides...

STEPHEN
All of you. What's left of all of you.

ROGER
You schmooze with your students, I guess. And your faculty friends.

STEPHEN
Not as easy to do as you might think. There's so much class preparation, plus one's own private study. It's easy to become at one...

(Snickers.)

...sometimes only with yourself.

ROGER
I know the feeling. Can be lousy.
STEPHEN
No, actually, I've always liked it that way.

ROGER
Oh.

STEPHEN
Elizabeth said she'd bring her people, tonight. This service you've put together might work to help make them welcome. If we're a new congregation in the making, perhaps, just perhaps, we might be able to witness to something here.

ROGER
(Looks heavenward.)
You shouldn't call it a night.
(Takes STEPHEN'S finished copies.)
I'll sort them out. And I'll see if I can get squeaky Bruce pumped up. And to think I was getting depressed about not having a job...
(As he moves into the Chancel, and behind the organ.)
...and not knowing how I'd pay the rent or how I'd find an excuse not to take the pipe and...
(There will be organ music, with cliches.)

MARTHA
(Coming and going.)
That's lovely. Roger.

STEPHEN
(In the Study, he dials the phone, speaks:)
Oh, good evening. This is the Reverend Stephen Bradshaw. All Saints' Church? I had spoken with you earlier...about the possibility of your attending a service here tonight...oh...any other members of the Standing Committee...oh...well, my kindest regards...yes.
(He will make another call or two.)
(In the Chancel ROLLIE enters, trying to balance a can on his head. A choir robe is now added.)
(MARTHA will not notice him or JULIET, whom ROLLIE motions to enter. JULIET dressed not unlike a ballerina, in a thin dress. She is cold, and four months pregnant.)

ROLLIE
See...? Elizabeth said it was gonna be okay. See...?
(ROLLIE tries to balance the can on his head but it always slips JULIET does not want to be in this place.)

Watch. Elizabeth says this will work good for us.

ROLLIE
Juliet, it's okay. Warmer than outside, too. Isn't it?

JULIET
Lets go.

ROLLIE
She said for me to bring lots of people. I didn't do too good. Watch!
(Tries to balance the can, and it drops making a loud sound.)

ROGER (O.S.)
Bruce, now what did you lose?

STEPHEN
(Entering from Study.)
Hello. You've been expected. And we're expecting many more. I'm the Reverend Stephen Bradshaw. The Third, I'm afraid. Stephen. Please call me Stephen. And you...?

ROLLIE
She's Juliet. I don't know what else. She just told me Juliet.
(She's not telling. The church interior both frightens and fascinates her.)

ROLLIE
I'm Rollie. The first. Maybe.
STEPHEN
Welcome --officially-- to Holy Saints' Church. Where everyone tries to be one. A saint. Yes, indeed. And when I find out why, you'll be the first to know.

ROLLIE
I think Elizabeth might get here. But maybe not.

JULIET
You said she'd get us something to eat.

ROLLIE
Elizabeth knows the streets. And about food.

STEPHEN
Martha has prepared a snack. As only she can. After our brief service. Of worship. Worship is the work of the church. Work-ship as fellow-ship. Let me explain-

ROLLIE
At the street cans is best. Eating. We do good. Near the hot dog stands. If the others don't beat ya to it.

STEPHEN
You're right. Talking about food is better.

ROLLIE
See, Juliet? I told you this would be okay. Just like Elizabeth said. That he wasn't a...stuffed jacket.

STEPHEN
Shirt. She probably said shirt.

ROLLIE
No. I think she likes your shirts. She taught me this.
(Still with the cans.)
Juliet, I'm gonna teach her. Then she and me will work it out there. And everything will be okay.
(The can drops.)

STEPHEN
Let me try.
(He tries to balance the cans. JULIET might be coaxed to join in. He has trouble. MARTHA maneuvers around them as she prepares the altar for worship.)
(During this, ROLLIE will feed himself and JULIET communion wafers left in a silver paten that MARTHA placed on the altar.)

ROLLIE
Elizabeth told us you can do everything.

STEPHEN
As you can see, almost.

ROLLIE
You and her were kids together.

STEPHEN
Yes. We grew up right here.

JULIET
(She will engage in gentle dance movements.)
All these carvings and cushions. How soft. Maybe.
(The windows.)
With the colors. So many colors.

STEPHEN
Ah, you feel its mystery.

JULIET
(Said with her mystery.)
Like blood, as it rolls into the gutter. From a vein on the leg, crushed and the head that got in the way and was sliced, which we once all saw rolling in the gutter in the rain. Making shadows. Purple shadows.

ROLLIE
I stay out of shadows.

STEPHEN
(Not realizing it, he will move more freely in JULIET's style.)
I also. Stay out of shadows. No matter how colorful.

ROGER
Uh oh, I think we're headed for voodoo-land.

JULIET
My child will not be in shadows. If I keep her.
STEPHEN
You will, and we'll assist you in every way.

ROLLIE
Good. Elizabeth said you could be okay sometimes.

STEPHEN
Especially when I can feel...the sorrow in those shadows. But beyond the sorrow into those lights, too. Bright. Daring to be bright through the darkness. There. And there. They dance, too. With us.

ROLLIE
She said you was her boyfriend. Until you went away.

STEPHEN
(He relates to them through the gentleness of free movement.)

It's not always wise to go away.

I did.

JULIET
I didn't have nowhere.

ROLLIE
And I found clouds what were silky white.

JULIET
And I found clouds what were silky white.

STEPHEN
So did I.

ROLLIE
And we're all here. Because it's always safe.

STEPHEN
Yes, of course, and, of course, no.

(By now the three of them are moving together.)

ROLLIE
What things did you play with Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH
(Entering.)

Mostly hide and seek. (She will get between STEPHEN and JULIET.)
ROLLIE
Look who I brought: Juliet. She's hungry.

STEPHEN
We were getting acquainted. Where are the others?

ELIZABETH
They couldn't find taxis at this hour. How do I know? I told them they were invited to church, because the minister was going to take good care of them, and they laughed...some just wanted to throw rocks. I didn't stick around.

STEPHEN
I didn't have much luck, either. But our friend Rollie managed to bring Juliet.

ELIZABETH
Just like a cosy little family.

ROLLIE
With a sister, who's not really a sister. You know.

JULIET
I think they told me once that I had a sister.

ELIZABETH
And now we all have a minister, who has plans.

STEPHEN
Not yet. We're just trying to get to know one another. Rollie, how long have you been...a homeless person?

ELIZABETH
Gee, I didn't know you were so good at this.

STEPHEN
You should see my homemade brownies. (Food noticed by ROLLIE.) I'll make some. Somehow, somewhere.

ROLLIE
I was inside that place. Where...we were all together. At dinner. And breakfast, too. Long tables. We all dressed the same. Keys on the doors. To keep us safe.

JULIET
It sounds like you were in jail. Like my step-father. After he did...some things
STEPHEN
No, but it sounds like a kind of shelter.

ELIZABETH
Gee, I hope we can organize a tour.

ROLLIE
I had a crib there. Then I had a big bed. All to myself. Most of the time. Until they...one day they said "goodbye." I wanted to stay. I knew some people. By name. "No, no, no" they said. They put me out.

ELIZABETH
Gee, you guys have a lot in common. He'll explain.

(STEPHEN will explore sharing some of ROLLIE'S clothing.)

ROLLIE
We got Elizabeth. She has other friends, sometimes, when we don't go near their food. And now, here.

You have us.

ROLLIE
Yeah, I have Juliet, don't I? Like you used to have Elizabeth. Like she said.

ELIZABETH
Where have all the secrets gone?

I have a baby...

JULIET
We know.

STEPHEN
...floating inside.

JULIET
And your new family is so pleased.

ROLLIE
You was gonna give it away.

JULIET
It's a girl. I know. She can float...up and then away.
JULIET pirouettes, gets dizzy and ELIZABETH pushes others aside to help JULIET, who rejects her help.

STEPHEN
Juliet, you are among friends. And we need to get you the proper care, right away. For you and the child.

JULIET
Children are always taken away. If they don't move away.

ELIZABETH
Leave her alone. I can do what it necessary.

STEPHEN
(His impatience grows.) We help, each other, because we are called to help.

ELIZABETH
So long as it's before Saturday of this so-called holy week. You haven't mentioned anything about all your plans. But, of course, you have been too busy dancing.

STEPHEN
I will find a way. For us all.

ELIZABETH
Good, then it's time to open the poor box.

JULIET
She's getting very hungry.   (ELIZABETH give her food)

STEPHEN
I need to get you to a hospital.

ELIZABETH
I can smell it: lots of promises.

STEPHEN
Relax, Elizabeth. We have more than a few coins from a poor box. Why, we might even offer...   (Makes funny smile.) ...because, it's better than my brownies.   (He gets ROLLIE and then JULIET to join him in making funny faces.)
MARTHA
(Enters with STEPHEN'S cotta and stole.)
Oh my.

ROGER
(Enters with hymnals.)
Oy, people. See? "If one's hopes have goodness, the rewards are...good." I read it in the Times. Or a fortune cookie. Where are the others?

STEPHEN
The others can't make it. So, gang, when two or three or four church people are gathered together...

ROGER
There's always a fifth. I know, it's as old as I am. But, it's hard to resist them.

STEPHEN
So, My friends, here are two very special people I want you to meet. Our friends Martha and Roger.

ROGER
I play around. And talk too much. Hi, kids.

STEPHEN
Martha. Martha Drew. Head of every guild in the church for decades. No one worked as hard as she. Except, of course, Elizabeth's mother, and Elizabeth herself.

JULIET
It must be strange to be a child here.

ELIZABETH
You have to start somewhere.

STEPHEN
Those candlesticks. Given in memory of Elizabeth's mother.

ROGER
It was back when they had the biggest choir in the city. Just my luck to be born in the wrong era. (He will hand out sheets of paper, and quietly explains the contents.) Should I? (STEPHEN nods, and he hands out papers.)
STEPHEN
You never know. What was, could be again. Friends, you should know. Elizabeth took care of her mother for many years. Did everything for her.

ELIZABETH
Hey, just one of your saints. Remember that when you get new candlesticks. After Martha, of course.

STEPHEN
(Directed to ELIZABETH as the others look at papers they are given.)

No one worked harder than she. Always giving of herself. To the exclusion of many other, possible relationships.

ELIZABETH
Of course, had there been other, possible relationships, she probably would not have devoted all that time to washing soiled nightgowns and changing bed pans? But that's probably only speculation.

ROGER
We ready to give it a try? Maybe?

(To ROLLIE and JULIET.)

You come in right there, and then again right there.

STEPHEN
(Seeing that ROLLIE can't read.)

I'll explain it all. Now?

ELIZABETH
(To STEPHEN.)

Just in case you forgot, these are my people, and--

STEPHEN
Ours. Ours, if we are going to do them any good.

ELIZABETH
Oh? Then you need a few lessons.

(She has no trouble balancing the can. ELIZABETH holds out the palm of her hand. STEPHEN places money in her hand. She bows, and her can stays put. It is held in place with black string. ROLLIE feels cheated.)

You do what is necessary.
ROLLIE
She was usin' string all along. She used string.

JULIET
You made Rollie look stupid.

ELIZABETH
It's called survival. For the good of the household, right, Reverend?

STEPHEN
Each of us --how shall I say this?-- each of us brings his or her own baggage to this household, called church.

ELIZABETH
Uh oh, here we go again.

STEPHEN
As someone said, this is "a sinners anonymous more than a hotel for saints."

ROLLIE
I never went in a hotel.

ROGER
In this town the prices will kill you.

JULIET
Once my mother said her church was Macy's.

ROLLIE
Can she take us there?

JULIET
I think she moved.

STEPHEN
May I have your attention?

ELIZABETH
Hold your breath, here it comes.

(Hands out more cookies.)

ROLLIE
You said you'd tell us how get that stuff, okay?
STEPHEN
Let me start by telling you...why I am here. Not just today, but why I'm a member of this church. Alright? I was drawn to the church as a boy by the music and the pageantry. Only after many years did I come to understand its teachings. In other words, you start...wherever you can start.

ROLLIE
I start with cookies, because that's all there is.

STEPHEN
Martha, has been a member here for forty years. It might be easier for her to tell us why it's been so important for her.

MARTHA
The ladies... (Arranges real or make-believe altar linens.) ...they need, and...who else...would take the...every Sunday. You see, we always...then...you see...here I...

ROGER (Mostly to himself.)
This isn't going well.

STEPHEN
And you, Roger?

ROGER
Oh. I got a lot out of Bible school. As a boy. Of course I also got a lot out of playing doctor. Until I became the nurse. Look, I'm really not a member. But I surely intend to become one. Someday. Perhaps. I move from organ to organ...where the jobs are. Music is everything, because there's nothing else. And I love it. Don't you just love the way I love everything? Is it someone else's turn?

STEPHEN
What about you Elizabeth? Care to say what church means to you?

ELIZABETH (Dispensing junk food to ROLLIE and JULIET.)
You do this for a living. You tell us.
Because...I need to walk on hallowed space, where God is for me. I become aware. And God is aware even when I struggle to be aware. Hey, it's probably all corny and simplistic and subject to ridicule...

(ELIZABETH snickers.)

...but it is where I can touch, and be touched.

(He motions for the others to form a circle.)

Place. Presence. Be still...because you are on holy ground. God is here and there and everywhere. No matter what the reason, or motive. We are here, here in this place...yet we are part of...beyond place. Eternity. If...if we allow ourselves to...to...take hold.

(MARTHA, ROLLIE then JULIET will take the risk to hold hands.)

Wow, this is good.

ELIZABETH

If you ever want to work the streets we have more cans.

STEPHEN

(Taking her bait.)

Sure, why not. The balancing act must go on! Games. I loved them. I was good at them. Who knows? I might still be. Come on, keep holding one another's hand.

ELIZABETH

(Does not hold any hand.)

You have any idea what you're doing?

STEPHEN

Not in the least.

(A few beats.)

I ask you to feel the presence.

JULIET

I feel like flying.

ROLLIE

I feel hungry.

STEPHEN

Perhaps more of those leftover sandwiches?
STEPHEN
Here we...offer ourselves. Maybe we...dare to give of ourselves.

ELIZABETH
Oh, go on, you're all talk.

STEPHEN
But what if...

...we were to ascend to newer levels of understanding. Roger, I'm definitely getting better at all this.

JULIET
Someday I'm going to fly.

ROLLIE
I'd like to learn how to swim. Swim in the air.

ELIZABETH
Watch out, kiddies, he'll get you up there, and then ask for pledge cards. Beware of those cards!

ROLLIE
Like baseball cards.

ELIZABETH
More costly.

ROLLIE
I had one, once. But I traded it for gum.

STEPHEN
Here is freedom. The freedom to give of youself.

(ELIZABETH extinguishes the light and throws the candlestick to him which he catches.)

ROGER
Uh, oh, here we go kiddies.
STEPHEN
Come on, gang. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven."

(JULIET gets ROLLIE and even ROGER to move to the feelings of freedom.)

ELIZABETH
(Angrily, she rips the altar frontal off and flings it at JULIET.)
Here...twirl yourself in that. You've been playing Mary, so do it right.

(About STEPHEN.)
He's playing God...or Joseph. But watch out about those guys.

(JULIET wraps the fabric around her.)

(MARTHA enters carrying a tray of sandwiches.)
ELIZABETH
Here...

(She throws ROGER'S papers up in the air.)
...dance under that!

(MARTHA exits with tray. ROLLIE starts to follow her out, but plays under the papers instead.)

ROGER
(Retrieving papers.)
It's not quite what I had in mind.

(To STEPHEN.)
Is there an encore?

STEPHEN
(Now his most loose.)
Who knows? Who cares? Let it go...!

(ROLLIE throws items joyously.)
STEPHEN does his best to catch ROLLIE's offering, slips and slides off via the altar. He dives to catch a sandwich in mid-air, when...

WHITLEY
(Enters.)
What in God's name is happening here?
(Item hits WHITLEY.)

STEPHEN
Trying to serve a new church.

(ELIZABETH forces ROLLIE and JULIET to exit with her.)

STEPHEN
No. Wait...! Please...! I will find a way for us. I will...!

But how?

WHITLEY
(Exits.)

I will. I will...!

ELIZABETH
But why?
(Exits the way the others went.)

STEPHEN
I will find a way...I will...!

THE END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: THURSDAY

AT RISE: The windows are partially boarded for moving. The window behind the altar has been removed and the opening, with wood and plastic covering, allows the city's noises and sights to be more evident.

In the Study, STEPHEN and WHITLEY are in the middle of a discussion. STEPHEN is not as serious as WHITLEY would like. They will both move into the Chancel.

MARTHA, with her chores, will come and go.

STEPHEN
I haven't got the slightest idea, but they are calling out to us. Hello out there...!

WHITLEY
That's not my point. I just can't see why you would allow this to take place. Of all weeks.

STEPHEN
I truly believe I am on to something.

MARTHA
Fresh flowers for Saturday. That would be nice.

WHITLEY
Rector, I don't know what you were thinking about.

STEPHEN
A ministry. A giving to others.

WHITLEY
But not necessarily a ministry to us. To those of us who at least accept you for your efforts.
STEPHEN
Last night there was confusion and anger, of course. But there was also a need.

WHITLEY
There were needs alright. To destroy.

STEPHEN
No, perhaps it was as simple as a need for strangers to come together for a silly laugh.

WHITLEY
Elizabeth's disgraceful behavior was not intended for anyone's laughter. Of all people.

STEPHEN
She's probably hurting the most of anyone here.

WHITLEY
Stephen, I have no doubt that you mean well, but there will always be those kinds of people. No matter what you or I choose to do about it.

MARTHA
I attended a workshop. On this...one day through lunch...even dinner...reports.

STEPHEN
Yes, I have reviewed the literature, the surveys and research.

WHITLEY
Then you understand.

MARTHA
But I still...the simple arrangements. Lilies.

STEPHEN
No, I don't. I understand that you get buses, even taxis, and bring them in on a Sunday morning. You hope they will enjoy the worship. And if not that, right away, then the social hour. Perhaps even the Sunday School for the children. And the food.

MARTHA
Hobo stew...? I heard it called...everything in a pot.

STEPHEN
Everyone wants a place to rest. And to be safe.
WHITLEY
There is nothing but problems. No matter how good one's intentions. My friends in other churches tell me, well, quite frankly, horror stories.

STEPHEN
Mothers using the altar to change their babies. Pews used for beds.

WHITLEY
Candles burning all night...items stolen. You should hear my friends in the insurance industry. A need for constant surveillance.

STEPHEN
Yes, there is the disorder...and the odors.

MARTHA
Wisteria would be nice.

STEPHEN
How do you you learn to love someone you can't stand to be near?

MARTHA
Forsythia, too.

WHITLEY
Rector, one learns to accept the distances. The limitations. There is just so much one can do. Sir, as harsh as this sounds, I am not a lacking generosity.

I know that.

WHITLEY
It's just that, well, we have people right here. It's Thursday. We have only until Saturday. To take care of...our dear Martha, and other members.

MARTHA
(About the vases.)
I should...polish.

WHITLEY
So many families have worked to make this...an important church home. Your family. Elizabeth's. For decades we stood tall on this street. With dignity. With decency and order. A mighty presence in this city. "A spiritual home..."
...a haven of happiness and of love." Yes, I remember that being said every Sunday: "Make this spiritual home a haven of happiness and of love." Which is my point. It has a function.

MARTHA

Yes...forsythia.

STEPHEN

"Come unto me all who are heavy laden and I will refresh you," says thre Lord...with tongue in cheek.

WHITLEY

I beg your pardon?

STEPHEN

Last night those people made me laugh...

WHITLEY

But!

STEPHEN

...and it wasn't because they were funny. Far from it. It was just that I realized I've became ridiculous.

MARTHA

Oh my.

WHITLEY

(After a beat.)

We are to serve our present community.

STEPHEN

A community which has changed.

WHITLEY

The community might have changed, but we have not.

STEPHEN

Because we will not?

WHITLEY

Because, sir, we can not. We are who we are. You are who and what you are.

STEPHEN

Yes...but, God help us, what is that?
WHITLEY
It's late. Tomorrow I'll have the final papers. For the
dissolution of this as a parish church. It requires
only my signature as Senior Warden. And yours as our
temporary Rector. Mere formality. Good night.

(WHITLEY exits. MARTHA
looks for more items
to pack.)

MARTHA
Stephen...I'd like to say. They are...she is. It
is...important...very important...to help.

STEPHEN
Yes. No matter what the cost.

(STEPHEN exits into the
Study. MARTHA goes in
and out of the Study.)

(ELIZABETH enters, and
goes to the altar. She
avoids being seen by
MARTHA. She goes to the
altar, looks closely at
the candlesticks. She
takes one and starts
to exit when MARTHA
enters.)

MARTHA
Oh...Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH
In memory of my mother. She would have liked them. So
properly understated.

MARTHA
You took such good care of her...so many years.

ELIZABETH
(Not meant to be cruel.)

But she died anyway.

MARTHA
You used to...all those bake sales. And...Christmas
ornaments. You used to make...

ELIZABETH
...a mess.
MARTHA
Then...you just stopped... You're missed.

ELIZABETH
I don't believe that for one moment. But thanks anyway.

MARTHA
You were...loved here.

ELIZABETH
I thought I just got...stalled here.

ROGER
(Enters, with scripts, and a hymnal.)
Martha, ole gal, did you see my tuning forks, oh.

ELIZABETH
Just leaving.

MARTHA
Elizabeth used to sing. The choir. We thought...there is Wisteria...sad...so thin.
(Exits carrying a full carton.)

ROGER
So, you knew Stephen a long time?

ELIZABETH
(Remembering a place.)
What? Sure, our parents knew each other. We were Baptised here. Grew up here. Buddies. My bosom pal. My friend. My hero. (A beat.) Yes, even sang in the choir.
(STEPHEN enters, carrying books to box.)
Sang pretty well, too.

STEPHEN
(Vocalizes.)
Once we made a big sound here.

ELIZABETH
We had lots of friends here. I can't think of a one, but we had them.

STEPHEN
Yes we did. What's your name again?
(She laughs very briefly,)
ROGER
I don't have many friends. Especially these days. After I lost my friend, I moved into the city. So I could rub shoulders with packs of people. God-damn, forgive the language. There were packs of them, alright. Listen, if this isn't the time...

STEPHEN
Please.

ROGER
I'm not a member of this church, but I was never good enough to be a cantor. And the Baptists are so loud they drown out the organ. Have you ever heard such shouting? Then I heard that the Episcopalians were like Republicans at prayer. That sounded quiet enough for me, so I applied for a job here. Holy Saints.

STEPHEN
Ha, and find one and you get a prize.

ELIZABETH
Like we're all finding one in our friend Stephen.

STEPHEN
Roger, this has been an important place for you.

ROGER
(MARTHA will be in to hear this.)
For friends. A friend. Martha, she's been like a mother and...like an aunt and sister, too. A bargain family. She...just likes me. The way I am. She lets me kid her, and things. She's...a friend. It's important to have a friend. We need friends. Don't we?
(Exits, carrying a box. MARTHA also exits.)

STEPHEN
There's so much to do. A new community, to fly...!
(Sings.)
"Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove...
(He motions for her to join in. Instead, she takes out a pint of whiskey and drinks.)

ELIZABETH
Hey, what can I say?
STEPHEN
I don't know. You tell me.

ELIZABETH
Well, you and Whitley. We getting the money?

STEPHEN
It doesn't look promising.

ELIZABETH
Hey, are you always going to be a disappointment? Stevie boy, you're no fun.
(She will rediscover old hiding, and play areas. She drinks.)

STEPHEN
This was once our playground.
(He will experiment with sheer play.)

ELIZABETH
When you were a teen-ager I never stopped looking at you. You know that? Because. Maybe...I never knew what you were going to do next.

STEPHEN
Yes, there was thew soda in the coffee pot. Hiding Doctor Clark's hymnals. The Sunday bulletins. There were so many places to hide things.

(Her offer of the flask is now taken, and he will join her in drinking.)

ELIZABETH
And, for the Christmas Eve candlelight service for the Sunday School, you turned the candles upside down, and nobody could get them lit.

STEPHEN
I presented the darkest holiday on record.

ELIZABETH
Then the glue on the kneeling cushions.

STEPHEN
Yes. That might have been my finest hour.
(There is a freedom in their play, so long as he stays out of touch.)

STEPHEN
(Much animation.)
You and I were sitting here...no, right there. She was at the altar rail taking communion. Finally she got up...and so did the cushion. Right on her knees. Walking back to her pew, like this. The next day she wrote a letter to Doctor Clark: "If you do not find, and punish, the perpetrator of this Godless act, I will henceforth withdraw my support. And, furthermore, I shall become a member of St. Bartholemew's where such behavior is not tolerated."

ELIZABETH
They asked, but I never snitched on you.

STEPHEN
I know. That's why I always confided in you.

ELIZABETH
Hey.

STEPHEN
Hey.

(They embrace, then become self-conscious, especially that collar. She moves away. They both take another drink his smaller than hers.)

ELIZABETH
When mother died, I needed to get away. I became good at it. At least, making plans. Travel magazines. Agencies. I'd buy the tickets. Be all packed, sometimes even driving to the airport or to the ship...only to turn away at the gate. I always wanted to get away. I'll have to do it someday.

(More drinking. He takes her hand. She does not resist. He gently pulls her to him. She moves away.)

So, I guess you get close to your students.
STEPHEN  
I had all the texts memorized. Solutions all committed to a syllabus. Elizabeth, I'd dazzle them. Example: "I have in my mind" --this is a real quotation, so pay attention now-- "I have in my mind the idea of the most perfect being conceivable. The most perfect being conceivable must have the attribute of necessary existence." Now it gets tricky. "One whose existence was contingent would not be the most perfect conceivable. An absolute, perfect being, therefore, actually exists, and he is God."

ELIZABETH  
Rah, rah! More...more!

STEPHEN  
Simply put: "it is that which really exists, as opposed to that which only appears to exist."

ELIZABETH  
Ugh...no more, no more.

STEPHEN  
And did those students clamor for more. Why...they couldn't wait for more. Sure. I was a hit, a winner...in my own mind.

ELIZABETH  
Uh oh, I see trouble.

STEPHEN  
More than I saw, I'm afraid. When your Dean suggests that you stay away for a while, if not ever. Dear God, there's no place to go. Talk about needing a friend.

ELIZABETH  
I thought we were to make this play time.  
(She offers him another drink, which he refuses. She drinks.)

STEPHEN  
That wondrous barn. Where we'd go off into the air, flying and falling and tumbling and rolling and laughing. On Monday, I came here hoping...to fly. That moment was ours, wasn't it? Hey. Hey...! So many years ago.
ELIZABETH
So many lives ago.

(Almost finishes the bottle.)
Here. Go on. For the best journey. Come on...let's fly. Now...!

STEPHEN
(Rejects the bottle, casually.)

No, not like this.

ELIZABETH
What's the matter, Stevie boy? It's child's play. You were once so good a play.

STEPHEN
(As she pushes he becomes more more adamant.)
No, I don't want to. Please. I can't. That's too easy. I know the temptations. No...no....! No...no! (A beat.) Besides, we haven't found what it is to celebrate.

ELIZABETH
Hey, who knows? How about: All the children are outside. We have the day off. We don't have to take care of anyone...for at least a few hours.

STEPHEN
It seems to me no one wants us to take care of anyone.

ELIZABETH
We need another drink.

STEPHEN
(Pushes bottle away.)
Please...I don't mean any harm. I really don't. I envy what you try to do for others. Don't laugh. I tried. The parish ministry. I did that for a couple of years. After seminary. A large congregation. I had it made. I was an assistant. With no worries about paying the heat and light bills. Or, which family is leaving or staying. I had the freedom of...a safe distance.

ELIZABETH
I'm all for distance.
STEPHEN
When I was at the altar doing the church's liturgy - usually, by the way, with my back to the people-- it was fine. I led the prayers, introduced the hymnas, told them when to stand and when to kneel.

ELIZABETH
Three cheers for the providers!

STEPHEN
I'm God in a safe place! A safe word! "Come to holy communion. Come unto me...and I will do for you. God so love the world that he gave...leave your pain and suffering there...and God will...give you..."
(Reduced to silence.)

ELIZABETH
You saints can get a person depressed.

STEPHEN
(Tries ebullience.) Feeling sorry for oneself is an art. I'm a master.
(Reality hits.) Elizabeth...I never once let any of those people get close to me. I knew about their personal horrors-

ELIZABETH
Wait a minute, your holiness. What the hell do you know about horrors? Been on Third Avenue lately? With no friends? Under the 59th Street bridge after midnight?

STEPHEN
I knew their pain. Their hurt. But I knew...
(His head.)
...only up here.

ELIZABETH
Sure, well...

STEPHEN
So, I'd --what?-- hide behind the altar? The pulpit? This collar? Is it because...what the hell is wrong? All of a sudden I'm whining...I'm not laughing out loud? It's as if...it's as if...my God. Elizabeth, I can't feel anything for anyone. I can't feel anyone else's pain!

(She stands. He moves to her. He takes out a full pint of liquor.)
ELIZABETH
Want to know how not to feel the pain?
(Takes a drink.
STEPHEN starts to take her in his arms. She moves away, a child at play.)
Not here. What will the people say? Or those students?

STEPHEN
(Takes her by the arm, preventing her to move. Then he releases her.)
Elizabeth, two weeks ago my students gave me a present. All wrapped up in a box. Tied with a ribbon. There was a card: "In overwhelming response to your lectures." I opened the box, pulled back the paper inside, and...it was dried manure. After years of teaching, and providing...
(Seeing the humor.)
...I have to tell you, I would have done the same thing.
(He takes her in his arms. He moves to kiss her on the lips, but, at the last minute, she moves away from him.)

ELIZABETH
Our hay loft. It could be fun...again. But...
(She stops. After a few beats.)
...I always hung around this place because...I came back here, because I heard you'd be here, and we had lots of unfinished business. Lots of it. Now you want...and I...can't.

STEPHEN
What I want is to find you and me, and a little bit of salvation, too. All possible. Maybe, maybe, maybe!

ELIZABETH
(Glib.)
Gee whiz, I don't know. Gee.
(Not glib at all.)
Dear God, if that could only be true.
(After a few beats, they begin to move closer.)
MARTHA (O.S.)
(Singing the hymn.)
"Abide with me..."

(ELIZABETH exits into a church area. MARTHA enters, carrying a bunch of forsythia. She hands them to STEPHEN.)

(STEPHEN'S mind and eyes are on ELIZABETH'S exiting place. MARTHA holds the vase for him, and STEPHEN, missing the mark, lets the flowers fall and scatter on the floor.)

THE END OF SCENE ONE
SCENE TWO: GOOD FRIDAY

AT RISE: It is minutes before midnight, and the Chancel is dimly lit by candles and side lights. The altar cross is veiled in black.

STEPHEN, dressed in a cassock, prays aloud.

STEPHEN
"O Lord...my God...I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; yet...you have called your servant to come into your house. To you and your service I...make me an instrument of your salvation for the...for the people entrusted to my care. I ask this in the name of God. Amen."

(There is a glitched note from the organ.)

ROGER
(Enters from behind organ)
Sorry about that. I figured I'd give it one more chance. You going to do the prayer vigil all by yourself?

STEPHEN
No, Whitley's expected to take the next hour. Something must have detained him.

ROGER
So listen. This is going to sound silly or not grown up or dipsy or perhaps even odd or, then again--

STEPHEN
Roger?

ROGER
I'm scared. I've never been out of work before. How many organists and choirmasters are there? Saloon singers are not the only dying breed. Oh sure, so few of us, what could the competition be? I used to say that, thinking it would be alright. But it isn't alright.
STEPHEN

No. No, it isn't.

ROGER

You people can't go closing these churches. And leaving us stranded. That was one of the first Austin organs ever built. Those electrical things, no match. I might never get to play one again, which, of course, might be a weird blessing.

STEPHEN

Roger, there's not enough people or money to keep this building open. On Saturday I sign my name to a document that ends all of this. Then we all march across town. Roger, I don't know. Saint John's has a full staff of clergy. But only one organist. So, look, you manuever whoever it is up to the bell tower, you or I sneak to the rope, pull it a few times. Bong...bong...! His ears go, he retires early and you just happen to be in the right time at the right place, with music, too. and...perhaps I can be your page-turner.

ROGER

Good. Thanks. But, just my luck, it will be one of those electric jobies.

STEPHEN

Of course, we could dismantle this one and bring it. We'd roll it across town. You'd play something, and I'd sit on top of it, singing hymns, and, "hello there," gathering a choir along the way. It has possibilities.

ROGER

Thanks. You've a great help. (A beat.) You have.

STEPHEN

Thank you very much.

(ROGER exits and he returns to the altar for silent prayer.)

(ROLLIE and JULIET enter, eating from a bag that ROLLIE carries.)

JULIET

There's nothing wrong with me.

ROLLIE

Oh? Then why you pukin' all the time?
JULIET
Rollie, you're able to eat stale bread and drink day old soda. No one else can do that.
(Sees STEPHEN.)
Except him.

STEPHEN
Good evening...morning.

JULIET
I heard they make you suffer. Eating those little cardboard breads. Wearing the same clothes. And things.

STEPHEN
And such sadness into... (Into joyousness.)

JULIET
And, that you didn't like girls, and stuff.

STEPHEN
It can be safe to say that I don't like stale bread.

ROLLIE
Just soak it under water for a couple of seconds.

JULIET
Elizabeth told us you don't have any place to go.

STEPHEN
I'll just have to join the two of you in dance.

JULIET
I went to dancing school. Once. My stepfather... he liked to see me in tights. I showed him. I just ran.
(JULIET, and perhaps the two others, will dance; still one more way for STEPHEN to relate.)

STEPHEN
If it were different, really different, would you like to go again? Dancing school?

JULIET
(Not with cruelty.)
And the child might dance someday, too. If I keep it.

STEPHEN
I'm going to help you with the child. With all of you.
JULIET
Do you have an oatmeal box?

ROLLIE
Oh good.

JULIET
I once made a cradle for a little baby. Out of a round oatmeal box. I could rock it back and forth.

ROLLIE
You mean, after we eat the oatmeal. Wow, and I'll make the cradle.

(He envisions such a chore.)

I never made nothin.

JULIET
I can teach you. You can help us?

STEPHEN
Somehow. Yes. If I remember...pencils for an axle, buttons for wheels...a string right about here. Then, we'll pull it. This way. Together. We can.

JULIET
I need to lie down. She needs rest, I feel her.

ROLLIE
(He gives her a cookie.)

From Elizabeth. I'll make you a big cradle.

(As they exit:)

I'll make you a real house, too. I will, you'll see.

(STEPHEN plays "a cart." WHITLEY enters.)

WHITLEY
Rector?

STEPHEN
Ah, you made it. I believe you have the next hour.

WHITLEY
I thought it best to come here to tell you. Rector, I can't do it. Taking a prayer watch like this is not easy. You see, I've never done it.

STEPHEN
I had planned it, because I thought you were keeping the tradition. And you...
WHITLEY
We have. It's just that I...in all my years as a member, it was never...required of me.

STEPHEN
Sir, we seek, and find, our own ministry. You have surely had one at Holy Saints'.

WHITLEY
Mine was to protect the endowment.

STEPHEN
No one could have done it better.

STEPHEN
I was called upon to...you know what I mean, Rector.

Yes.

WHITLEY
And knowing that I would have to be here tonight, alone. Those windows. I never enjoyed them at night. (Refers to windows.)
My father's memorial. See, there? He was this church's first treasurer. No nonsense when it came to his duties. He safely brought this church through the Depression. And grand-mother, who almost single-handedly built All Saints. And...for Timothy, our son. He never got a chance to come home from Korea. Never to start his own family. Or to have his children baptised here. When my wife and I are here on Sunday, there are other people around us, and...these windows do not stand out as they do at night. This is not easy for me, Rector. I don't know private prayers as you do.

STEPHEN
You never really learn. Never fully. It is a part of giving...of one's self.

WHITLEY
It seems to come easier for you.

STEPHEN
No...only the words. I keep at it...as a way of...discovering the mind of God.

WHITLEY
The older I get, the more I'd like to know.
STEPHEN
Will you pray with me now?

WHITLEY
Thank you...but I need to get home. It's late. I'll be here in the morning with transportation. I'll be able to take whomever wishes to go across town to St. John's. Its members are planning a brunch. As a welcome.

STEPHEN
That's very kind of them.

WHITLEY
I'm just sorry that, well, praying is not easy for me.

STEPHEN
Nor for me, sir. I've always been too careful of what I pray for.

WHITLEY
Oh...?

STEPHEN
Because, I can never seem to afford the cost.

Good night, Rector.

WHITLEY
Good night, sir.

(A few beats. STEPHEN searches for a sense of place: the textures, the smells, the sounds.)

STEPHEN
(Prays:)
"O God...you are the author of peace...in knowledge of whom...in whose service...is perfect--"

ELIZABETH
(From off stage.)
Hey...!

(Enters, wearing an outfit that is less odd and more attractive. She is sober yet giddy.)

Oh, you're the one who puts a little Good into Good Friday.
I'm glad you came back.

I was in the neighborhood. Which, I must say, always changes. Every day it changes...but, hey.

You look different.

Oh, it was just a little something I...

...thanks. So, Stevie...Rector, this is the day the church celebrates death. But they still call it Good Friday.

Through the passage of death, through its passion, we are thrust into life. The black veil of this night is replaced by the white veil of Easter: of rebirth of-

All right, all right, where do I sign up? Still using quills?

Come on, just drop the sarcasm. There's no time for it. Tomorrow all this closes for good. And the great hero as failed to bring anyone together.

I keep coming back. That should say something.

Yes.

You never know when someone is going to give you a handout.

There has to be something more than that.

Oh? Why does there have to be something more than that?

You're serious, aren't you?
ELIZABETH

Serious? Desperate.

(He reaches for her. She does not pull away even though his collar is an interference. He embraces her, and she does not resist.)

STEPHEN

Elizabeth... I haven't held anyone like this in a long time.

ELIZABETH

Hey, what would mother have said, if--

STEPHEN

God, you talk too much.

ELIZABETH

Oh yeah...?

(Standing very alone.)

You'd be surprised how little talking I do anywhere. People don't talk much to me, either. I wonder if it's my clothing?

STEPHEN

I wonder if it's mine, too. Either people want too much from me, or they run from me. Young lady, I have a feeling we have something in common, after all.

ELIZABETH

That would be one helluva disappointment.

STEPHEN

Over these last few years...it's not easy, merely to have a date. If I shy away from women, they get me, if I show interest, they get me. "Well, you know about those people, don't you...?" A simple date? For dinner? "If he touches me we get married or I call the bishop. Or my lawyer. I know Episcopal clergy can get married, but: Do you really think he wears that collar to bed? Or that cross around his neck? Will he bust out in prayer at that, well, moment...?" You gotta have that ole sense of humor.

ELIZABETH

That leaves you out. Me too.
STEPHEN
After yesterday, and Wednesday, I didn't think you'd come back. You look lovely.

ELIZABETH
Oh, you men are always saying...being willing...to...

STEPHEN
To learn a mystery. Of giving and receiving. (He kisses her lightly.)
I'm sorry I ever left you. (A few beats.) We did have a childhood. And a growing up. Right here. (Sitting, looking up.)
And in that barn when we took the risk to move out of our childhood. Together. (On his back.)
Here, take a look. At the beams from this angle. Please.

(STEPHEN motions for her to join him on her back. She does, maintaining a distance.)

ELIZABETH
I won't get my dress wrinkled, will I?

STEPHEN
Our special world. We share so many lives together. Especially in all our journeys. Running so far...only to come back...right here. Where's the hayloft...? Oh, God, dear God, to be free. Freedom to play. Again. But no longer as children. To take the chance. So soft...? So lovely...? To live. To love —once again, with you. Hey...!

(He takes her in his arms. She responds to his gentleness. They kiss with the great release of passion.)

THE END OF SCENE TWO
SCENE THREE: EASTER EVE

AT RISE: It is dawn of a clear and mild Saturday. The morning light comes through the windows and open space behind the altar. The sounds of the city will become increasingly more evident, as will the day's light.

STEPHEN and ELIZABETH are asleep in each other's arms. STEPHEN moves his arm from under her. The arm is asleep and painful. She wakes.

STEPHEN
It's asleep.

ELIZABETH
Aren't we all. I guess you know where we are.

STEPHEN
Yes.

(They adjust to place.)
Remember old Doctor Clark saying: "If you can't do it at the foot of the altar, don't do it." Elizabeth, you and I have pushed the point to its limits. Good morning.

ELIZABETH
Good morning.

STEPHEN
I love you. As I think I've always loved you.

ELIZABETH
We're no longer teen-agers in some country barn.

STEPHEN
Oh.

(He puts his collar back on.)
ELIZABETH
Does my hair look alright?

STEPHEN
It looks as bad as it has all week.

ELIZABETH
Well, this is a come-as-you-are party.

STEPHEN
So, we have a few decisions to make.

ELIZABETH
About my hair. Oh, you mean about us. You and me. What really is.  
(A few beats.)
I think I've always loved you.

STEPHEN
You are the only woman I ever made love to.  
(They will touch each other, searching.)
There is much for us.

ELIZABETH
I bet you think it could work. Us.

Yes.

STEPHEN
It can be nasty out there.

ELIZABETH
It can be musty in here.

STEPHEN
Let's get away. Far away.

ELIZABETH
Let's not. We'll take our stand right here. I'll put a halt to the movers. I'll find a way to use this place. I'll need lots of your street friends.  
(About the missing windows. Ironically:)
Just a few household chores.

ELIZABETH
I don't know., You're too organized for me.
STEPHEN
You couldn't be more wrong.

ELIZABETH
I don't like this. One minute, when you're holding me tight I feel...it might make sense. And then the next minute. I need...I don't need this.

Then what we need is:

(He creates dance moves as JULIET and ROLLIE might do.)

This place does it to you. This wondrous place, whose closing takes two signatures. Our place.

(He moves to take her in his arms and MARTHA enters, carrying last minute parcels.)

MARTHA
Oh...my.

STEPHEN
Good morning. It's the new liturgies. Of course, to keep it going, we might even have to take in laundry to make ends meet. That opening right there: a mighty challenge. Spreading burlap over it might work, with a sign. Let's think. Something provocative. Come on...

(The ladies think.)

A little Easter uprising in the making.

MARTHA
Elizabeth can...yes.

ELIZABETH
Good ole Elizabeth will figure it out. She always could, always will.

STEPHEN
We have a chance. We really do.

ROLLIE
(Enters, agitated.)

Elizabeth, she's gone. Or they got her. Or somethin. I don't know.

STEPHEN
Can I help?
ELIZABETH
No! Rollie, tell me, slowly.

ROLLIE
She was in the supermarket, and doin like you taught her. She said, if she's gonna be with me, she don't want to rely on you no more for food and stuff.

ELIZABETH
Where? Which supermarket?

ROLLIE
That one on Lexington Avenue. Where you was gonna learn us, you know.

STEPHEN
Rollie, take me there. I'll--

ELIZABETH
Rollie, you stay here with them. (STEPHEN starts out with her.)

No...this is my work.

STEPHEN
Elizabeth, remember, this is your chance. You can do us a lot of good if you bring back as many others as possible. Sure I can't help? (She exits alone.)

MARTHA
(After a few beats.) There's some kitchen, that we should....

STEPHEN
Let me help you.

ROLLIE
You think, Juliet, I'm gonna lose her?

STEPHEN
You stay right here. Elizabeth will come through.

ROLLIE
Juliet's nice. She said she'd stay with me. But now, I don't know.

MARTHA
We'll find...to help.
(STEPHEN exits with MARTHA.)

(ROLLIE, alone, looks closely at the cross. He tries to slip it in his clothes, but it's too big. He folds his hands in prayer, but he doesn't know what to do. So he makes gestures with his hands, which are quite imaginative.)

(ROGER enters, puts a pile of hymnals down, and attempts to be a gesture-partner.)

ROLLIE

Like Juliet does.

ROGER

Where there's a Juliet there's a Romeo. I can't believe I said that.

ROLLIE

Say what?

ROGER

What you're doing, it's the new rage, I guess. Replacing those disgusting guitars. Here, let's. (Tries a tricky move. More moves together with ROGER running out of steam, if not ideas, first.)

ROGER

So, you're a member of the new congregation, eh? Why not. Maybe they'll use you and me at Saint John's. We can go there together. Suddenly I'm developing teams..

ROLLIE

A team? Playing what?

ROGER

A game that appeals. To the heavenly masses. I don't believe I'm even thinking about saying these things.
ROLLIE
Oh? Yeah. In what?

ROGER
Look, you have a place to stay?

ROLLIE
Sure...I don't know.

ROGER
I have room. In my apartment.

ROLLIE
I used to have a room. Almost.

ROGER
I'm inviting you to come live with me. We can be friends. Or dancing partners. (Looking heavenward.)

God knows I can use one.

WHITLEY (Enters.)
Ah, Roger. Oh, you. Martha? Stephen?

ROGER
They're downstairs. Some last minute packing.

WHITLEY
I trust they won't forget these candlesticks. (STEPHEN and MARTHA enter.)

Good. The ladies at St. John's have prepared a small luncheon for us. I have a limousine waiting. I didn't think we'd want to be late.

(WHITLEY puts the candlesticks in a carton, ignoring ROLLIE'S help.)

ROGER
I was wondering: could you give a couple of us a lift? We have a couple of ideas, and--

WHITLEY (Not unkindly.)
I'm afraid, you see, there's room for the Rector and Martha, of course. And a few of the smaller cartons. Oh.
(Hands STEPHEN the dissolution documents.)

ROGER

That's alright.

WITLEY

What? Oh, yes. Stephen, just in the three places. Marked with an X.

STEPHEN

We need a delay.

WITLEY

The limos double parked.

ROLLIE

And there's Juliet.

STEPHEN

Elizabeth will be back any minute. I want her to join me in what I wish to say. It's about our staying right here. I believe I can demonstrate a need for creating a new, and very special mission, right here.

WITLEY

Your not signing will only delay the process. I'm sure you realize that.

STEPHEN

I'm asking that you wait until Elizabeth gets back.

WITLEY

I fail to see--

STEPHEN

She is a member of our new household. She and many others. We must wait for her.

WITLEY

(After a beat.) I won't be staying with you at St. John's. My wife and I have decided to relocate. Permanently. In Hilton Head. There's a pleasant little church there, and they can use stained glass windows. I've made arrangements. Martha, perhaps you and I should go ahead, so as not to disappoint them. Here, let me carry that.

MARTHA

Yes...no! I mean...no!
WHITLEY

Martha?

MARTHA

We...there's a need...as Stephen says...We should wait for Elizabeth. Her people, friends...have their ways. And we ours. So, together, we will arrive at St. John's. Together. Who knows what we'll develop together. It will not be easy. Nothing is easy. And, and if I can learn "tremble" we all can. There'll be new people trying it. I might not like any of them. They might not like me. But...Mister Drew will help, I'll see to it that he does. And he'll get others to do what we can. Whitley, we need to find out...with or without an organ that's not worth a damn.

(ROGER embraces her.)

STEPHEN

Thank you. Thank you very much. Whitley, you'll see, in just a--

ELIZABETH

(Enters with JULIET and she has been drinking.)

That's why. They would have arrested you. I know the ways out there. You have to listen to what I tell you.

ROLLIE

Hi. Wait until you hear--

JULIET

I would have been fine. I know what to do.

ELIZABETH

You don't. The way you walk into a supermarket is the key to everything else.

JULIET

I know.

ELIZABETH

No you don't!

STEPHEN

I'm glad you're back. Were you able to bring the others?
ELIZABETH
Sure. Hundreds. There are no others.

(Back to JULIET.)
You have to make them believe you come to the store on a regular basis. That you know your way around. You look messy, because you've been...busy all morning...helping the decorators re-do your living room.

ROLLIE
Juliet? He has enough room and stuff. Roger.

JULIET
What?

ELIZABETH
Stop saying what and listen to me.

ROLLIE
Us two? And, you know, your new one?

ROGER
What is that you said?

JULIET
(About her baby.)
Only until I decide what to do with it.

ROLLIE
Okay...!

(To ROGER.)
We'll live in your apartment. Thanks.

ROGER
I've become a den mother. Oy gevalt... (With WHITLEY in mind.) ...whatever that means.

WHITLEY
I believe there's no time.

STEPHEN
I need to explain.

ELIZABETH
No, I need to explain. They still don't get it. When you work the supermarket, you head for the cookies first. Why? Because you can break a bag open and eat while you move down the aisles picking small items, like tuna fish. (Produces a can of tuna.)
STEPHEN
Elizabeth...!

ELIZABETH
Then make sure you pack the basket with dried beans, rice. Make sure it's brown. And oregano. Upscale shoppers always buy brown rice and beans.

(Takes out food, and a half empty pint of whiskey.)

The object is...stuff as much in your clothes as possible. And, remember, continue nibling on those cookies.

ROLLIE
The ones with the fruit in the center.

ELIZABETH
See that? See...he knows.

ROLLIE
Oh. He knows what?

ELIZABETH
Pay attention. You won't be forgiven on the streets if you don't pay attention! There's no forgiving anyone out there. The store clerk, he spots you, and he's not sure who you are or what you're doing. You messed up.

STEPHEN
Elizabeth! This is nothing but stealing.

ELIZABETH
Of course, Stevie Boy. How else do you survive? The clerk, he sees you. You see him. You're always seeing each other. All the time...it's him and you. There's no place to go. Always the same, even if...in the supermarket, the clerk, right. You look distraut. Or, if he's cute, you look right at his crotch. Then you say: "have you seen her? My little Tommy? He was just here." He thinks you've lost your child, see? You are frantic. Because...you don't know ...what to do. "Where is he? Dear God, did someone take him?" You search that aisle, and I'll look here! He goes one way, and you head the other way. You know the way. You have to know the way. Before he knows what's happened...you are safely...back out on the street.

(STEPHEN captures ELIZABETH in his arms.
She breaks away.)
STEPHEN
Elizabeth, I can't let you do this.

ELIZABETH
On the streets. Where you meet all kinds of strangers. Who are you? You want me? Maybe in a hayloft. But not until...

(ELIZABETH swings madly at everyone with her whiskey bottle.)

STEPHEN
Elizabeth...!

(He pushes some out of harm's way and, avoiding being hit, he slaps her. ELIZABETH goes down, and STEPHEN, holding her for dear life, cries, taking her pain into himself.)

WHITLEY
(After a few beats. Not unkindly.)
Rector, I have a limousine waiting.
(STEPHEN signs the dissolution documents.)
We are late. Please get ito the limousine.

STEPHEN
(They look for his cue.)
Go with Whitley. Please. I'll catch up.

(With WHITNEY taking charge and with each carrying small cartons, including the candlesticks, all exit except STEPHEN and ELIZABETH.)

ELIZABETH
What? We going to take a taxi.

STEPHEN
No taxis.
ELIZABETH
Some date you've turned out to be.

STEPHEN
I love you.

ELIZABETH
Sure, you say that now. (A beat.) I've always loved you. So, where we going?

STEPHEN
Somewhere. I don't know. But, you and I...we can't go together. Not yet. If ever.

ELIZABETH
That rhymes! Together...ever. (A beat.) Something, eh?

STEPHEN
I love you. But I'm not able to help you. Wait. I shouldn't be in need of helping you. Sharing, yes, but helping? I'd give help. I'm big at giving help. But, with you, it would be the wrong kind. Too much of the wrong kind.

ELIZABETH
Oh swell. Then no one's going to help me. This was our barn.

STEPHEN
Our place of wonder.

ELIZABETH
And to think I just came back because I knew you'd be here.

STEPHEN
And to think I came back perhaps hoping you'd be here. May I kiss you?

(She hesitates, then lets him kiss her. And then he releases her.)

You have all that it takes.

ELIZABETH
(Grabs the whiskey bottle, takes a drink.)

You bet your ass I am...Rector.

(Starts to exit.)
STEPHEN

Hey...!

(She stops, turns.)

I never really understood until now. It was all abstract theology...abstract liturgy...abstract prayers...even an abstract city and its ministry...until now. Until you, again. Full circle. Finally, a sign...this time, an inward sign. Elizabeth, thank you.

(He hands her his favorite prayer book. A few beats and she kisses it, then returns it to him.)

(She exits a way other than the others. A few beats. He removes his collar, which has become too restrictive. He places it on the altar, which he reverences.)

Well, God...there is a struggle to be made in very real traffic.

(Says his goodbyes to place. Then hevenward:)

Hey, you keep notes, now.

(With prayer book in hand, he exits a third and new way.)

(The sounds of the city increase. Another stained glass window is removed, letting in more day light.)

THE END OF THE PLAY