

SEEDS OF DOUBT

By Michael Buss

CHARACTERS

<i>TIM FOSTER</i>	-	<i>A Baptist pastor in his mid-forties</i>
<i>JEAN FOSTER</i>	-	<i>His wife; a little younger</i>
<i>BECKY FOSTER</i>	-	<i>Seventeen year old daughter</i>
<i>VINCE KRAMER</i>	-	<i>A young man, 19 or 20</i>
<i>DAVE HARMAN</i>	-	<i>A new deacon</i>
<i>MARJORIE HARMAN</i>	-	<i>His wife</i>
<i>KATHY MARTIN</i>	-	<i>An attractive young church member</i>
<i>AARON STEINBERG</i>	-	<i>Kathy's father</i>
<i>NURSE</i>	-	<i>Doubled with VINCE.</i>

TIME: The present, Fall. The action takes place over a span of about 6 weeks.

PLACE: A small town in Pennsylvania, PA.

THE STAGE: The stage is the essence of simplicity. Different levels and areas, suitably dressed, suggest the various locations of the play. A raised area doubles as the interior of both AARON's home, and that of the HARMANs.

Slightly higher and to the back an area indicates the PASTOR's home. The pastor's office may be played center stage, and all areas center and front may be used for the park scenes.

The nightmare scenes may be played in the triangle from upstage center to the width of the front of the stage.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

AARON's home. A suggestion of comfort and books. TIM stands alone thumbing through a book when AARON enters carrying a tray on which is a bottle of liqueur and two liqueur glasses.

TIM

You have a lot of books. I like houses with books.

AARON

And I'm very fond of my books. Now - I want you to try some of this. It's my last bottle.

TIM

No, really you shouldn't.

AARON

Do you know what it is?

TIM

No, actually. But I only drink occasionally and it does look kind of alcoholic.

AARON

This'll do you good. It's too expensive to become habit-forming - unless you're very rich. But as a man of the cloth I assume you're not rich at all. And it keeps the old Carthusian monks in a living.

TIM

Then you certainly shouldn't open it for me. Besides, I hardly know you.

AARON

Nonsense. I have few enough visitors these days and few days left in which to enjoy the delights of a splendid Chartreuse. Have you had it before?

TIM

Er - no. Please - only a small glass. And much as I'd like to get roaring drunk I have to drive. The little old lady will not be impressed if I park the car on her lawn and run over her cat.

AARON

You ministers are too concerned about being seen, or found in some situation which would not be proper for a man of your station. Like being drunk, or caught with your pants down.

TIM

That's not likely to happen to me and you know it.

AARON

My dear Timothy - I may call you Timothy?

TIM

Tim. I prefer Tim.

AARON

My dear Tim, no man is so secure that he cannot fall. Faith is not faith without honest doubt and morality is easy when there's no pressure to break the rules.

TIM

For a professed atheist you seem to have very clear ideas about Christian morality.

AARON

But don't think I haven't been there - nosing around on the churchy side of the fence. I have.

TIM

And?

AARON

I didn't like it. Too oppressive and guilt-ridden.

TIM

It's actually about freedom and forgiveness.

AARON

Yes - well that was not my observation. And I feel both free and contented without your faith. Now - let's see what you think of the monks' potion. Cheers!

TIM

(Raising his glass, then sipping cautiously)

Cheers! Hmmm - it's good.

A pause in which both watch each other, drink, but say nothing.

TIM (cont'd)

Your books. I was admiring your them. Books seem to say so much about the people who live with them.

AARON

And - what do mine say about me? I think most of them would be rather foreign to you. Not at all like your library.

TIM

You like to think, to discuss.

AARON

Argue would be better.

TIM

Argument has undertones of fixed positions - people who won't budge. I'm not like that.

AARON

I think you are. You're a man of religion. Your mind is locked to a book. You can't change your position because that would be to contradict your faith. You must believe it at all costs, whatever else reason might tell you.

TIM

I - I don't think so. I'm always open to the truth.

AARON

And so am I. That's why I nosed around in Christianity, and I concluded that your Bible was a fiction; merely a record of what some ancient people once believed - not what is true for all time.

TIM

And there we must differ.

AARON

(A long pause.)

So why did you come to see me? To convert me? You must have known that was very improbable.

TIM

Because - Kathy asked me to.

AARON

Why should she get you to visit an old atheist like me?

TIM

You're her father.

AARON

Yes, I'm her father and she wants to convert me to Jesus. Are you good at converting people?

TIM

I would love to save your soul - through the power of God in me. That's one thing you've never known.

AARON

Tcha! Nonsense! The ability to convert people is a function of personality. Some people are just good salesmen; like you, by all accounts.

TIM

Well now I wonder why I bothered. You don't make it easy.

AARON

I didn't ask you to come. It might have been easier if you hadn't - for you, that is. But me? I love an argument - particularly with ministers. They get so deliciously uncomfortable - especially when they're drinking my Chartreuse.

TIM

I can take the argument.

AARON

Very well. Then let me press the point. Why does it matter to Kathy that I get converted to her - your - faith?

TIM

(Hesitating)

Because what we decide in this life affects what happens in the next.

AARON

Oyvai. A delicate little answer!

TIM

It's true.

AARON

So you believe. May I paraphrase?

TIM

By all means.

AARON

But first a digression. Over the years we - Kathy and I - we haven't really connected. I didn't like it when she got into your religion, but that was her choice. I didn't like the man she chose to marry. Yet these things are at the heart of what matters to her. So we have our differences. But behind all that I know she ... thinks a lot of her old dad. And, as you might guess, she is the only woman in my life that has ever really mattered to me.

TIM

You have difficulty talking about personal relationships, don't you? She simply loves you.

AARON

Ah! An astute observation.

TIM

But you haven't made your point. You're still digressing.

AARON

(Chuckling)

Touché! Very well. Based on what you both believe, if I don't get converted, to use your language - I will go to a place called hell. And since my time here is now short, there is some urgency to get me to change my mind.

TIM

That's a very blunt way of putting it.

AARON

Blunt or not - that's what you think.

TIM

Yes.

AARON

How can you live with that belief when all around you thousands, millions, of people are headed the same way? They are like people whose houses are on fire, and you don't tell them.

TIM

I do. I mean - we try to.

AARON

No - you say you do. But you don't face the burden of it, because the logic is too awful. I don't know that you really believe it at all.

TIM rises and replaces the book he had pulled from the self. Aaron does not look.

AARON (cont' d)

Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason. Go on, take it. Keep it.

TIM

I'd rather discuss your need of faith.

AARON

Did the Chartreuse put your brain in neutral? You're dodging the argument.

TIM

I've given it thought, before.

AARON

And? Go on.

TIM

I'd rather not. Maybe another time.

AARON

Man, you're refusing to think. Face the challenge! Come out of your intellectual cocoon.

TIM

I'm not in one.

AARON

I think you are. And you wish you could escape and be free - like me.

TIM

I'm not in a cocoon, as you put it.

AARON

No. All right. You're not. We'll see. If I make it too hard you won't come back. And I'd like that ... for you to come back. I'm not all bad you know. A bad man could hardly raise such a lovely daughter, now could he?

TIM

She's certainly very sweet. And she does love you very much.

AARON

Which she could tell me herself. But she's sent in the marines.

TIM

Yeah. Look - I should be going.

AARON

You're not going to try and convert me - before I die?

TIM

It might be nice - but you'd fight me tooth and nail.

AARON

More calls to make? More liqueur? I'm so glad I can just stay here and enjoy the garden. I'll think of you rushing busily all over your parish.

TIM

Baptists don't have parishes. That's the Catholics - or the Anglicans.

AARON

So you're a ..

TIM

Baptist. Yes. Not tied up with all that old tradition and ceremony.

AARON

(getting up he pull Thomas Paine back off the shelf)

Well you have me there. You can tell me all about them ... the Baptists ... next time.

(He hands the book out to Tim.)

Here - take it! It might open a few doors for you.

He suddenly lurches forward, dropping the book and clutching at his head with gasps at the intense pain. His knees begin to buckle.

TIM

What is it? What's the matter?

AARON

(In deep agony)

My head. The pain ...

TIM

Oh my God. Here, let me ... It's all right. I've got you.

TIM catches Aaron and lowers him to the floor.

TIM (cont' d)

Aaron, what happening? Can you hear me? Aaron?

They are together on the floor. TIM acts swiftly to check the heart and make sure there is no obstruction in AARON's mouth.

TIM (cont' d)

Come on. Hang on in there. I'll get a doctor.

Reaches for the phone and punches in a number. A pause.

TIM (cont' d)

Kathy? It's me - Tim. No - listen. Your dad has just been taken ill. A seizure, I think. Yes - he is alive. But it doesn't look good. Listen to me!

(MORE)

TIM (cont' d)
You should get over here now. I have to call 911. I know. We can talk when you get here. I have to make the call ... bye.

He punches another number.

TIM (cont' d)
I need an ambulance - really quick.

Fade to black.

SCENE 2

TIM and BECKY early on Sunday. Morning. The scene is the kitchen-diner. BECKY is sitting at one end of the table. There is a Bible and notes in front of her. The other end of the table is laid for breakfast. BECKY is still dressed in nightdress and gown. She drinks from a mug of coffee.

BECKY
(Calling offstage)
Hey, Dad! How much longer you gonna be?
(Listens for response)
Did you hear me?

TIM
(From offstage)
There's another one upstairs if you're that desperate!

We hear the sound of a toilet flushing.

BECKY
Nah. I can wait. I'm too lazy.

TIM
Well I'm done now.

BECKY
(Mimicking)
Don't forget to wash your hands. Why is it that men always take so long? Us women - we go, do what we have to do, and come out. But men? Men! Read magazines, think, put the world to rights ...

TIM
(Entering)
Okay, it's all yours.

BECKY
What are you doing?

TIM
I thought you wanted the bathroom.

BECKY
I'm not desperate. I'll go in a minute.

TIM
Did you want something?

BECKY
Are you busy?

TIM
I'm getting ready for the morning service.

BECKY
I thought you'd have that done last night.

TIM
Sometimes it's not easy.

BECKY
It's not easy being a minister's daughter.

TIM
And what does that mean?

BECKY
Oh - nothing. You know.

TIM
Well I would if you told me.

BECKY
Where's Mom?

TIM
Probably putting her face on. You do, when you get older.

BECKY
Hey, I'm not old and I use makeup.

TIM
Look - why don't you fix some breakfast. Maybe make some toast for both of us. Your mother will be down in a minute.

BECKY
Okay. But -

TIM
What?

Bathroom first!

BECKY

Exit BECKY. TIM briefly tries to settle to his work then cups his chin in hand and gazes uneasily with a sigh. Enter JEAN looking as though she is doing twelve things at once. During the following she makes toast and puts it before TIM as he tries to work.

JEAN

Oh, there you are. Did you have any cereal? Or don't you have time for breakfast? Looks like you're immersed in work. Right?

TIM

Yes. This one's a struggle. I need the coffee most.

JEAN

What time did you come to bed last night?

TIM

Oh - about one thirty.

JEAN

You can't go on like this. You'll wear yourself out.

TIM

Well we just had our vacation so I guess that's not an option.

(Tasting the coffee.)

Anyone coming for lunch today?

JEAN

There were. The Harmans. But I put them off until another week.

TIM

Why?

JEAN

Because I knew you needed a break from Sunday visitors. It's enough that you preach to that crowd every week and then have them all in line to talk to you afterwards, let alone they trail home to eat lunch here as well.

TIM

Thanks. I appreciate that. But I do need to see them some time. Dave is one of our newest deacons.

JEAN

(A touch of irony)

And you have to break him in gently.

TIM

I could do with him on my side.

JEAN

He probably already is. New deacons tend to start off liking the pastor. It's later they get the knives out.

TIM

You sound as cynical as I sometimes feel.

JEAN

I've been at this a long time.

TIM

Nothing new under the sun.

JEAN

But they do like you. All of them.

TIM

Most, not all.

JEAN

There's always a lunatic fringe in any church.

TIM

I think God sends them just to keep us humble.

JEAN

Like the ones who wrote that letter.

TIM

About Becky?

JEAN

What are you going to do about it?

TIM

She's my daughter ...

JEAN

Our daughter!

TIM

Yes. Our daughter. And right now she's having a tough time just growing up.

JEAN

But she was in that bar - where the drugs are.

TIM
So the story goes.

JEAN
Don't you believe it?

TIM
I don't know. I don't go in bars.

BECKY enters dressed in very casual clothes. She steals a slice of toast from TIM's plate.

TIM (cont'd)
Hey - that's my toast!

BECKY
I'll get you some more. What are you talking about?

TIM
You're inquisitive this morning.

JEAN
(To Becky, tartly)
Are you coming to church dressed like that?

BECKY
No.

TIM
Well that's a relief.

BECKY
I'm not coming to church this morning.

TIM
Where are you going?

BECKY
Out. With friends. Probably the park.

JEAN
Wouldn't you like to go there after church? Are the others also cutting the service?

BECKY
They're not church friends, Mom. I do have a life outside of church, you know. There are nice people who are not Christians.

TIM
You could bring them home sometime - then we could meet them

BECKY

Excuse me - but whenever were you interested in meeting my friends?

JEAN

Becky, don't speak to your father like that.

BECKY

Why? Because he's the minister?

JEAN

No, because he's your father.

BECKY

Yes, he is. But I don't know which he is most. All my other friends just have fathers who are dads. But not mine. He's also the Reverend Timothy Foster. Everybody in town knows him. So they all know me. There's nowhere I can go to be just me. That's why I'm not coming to church this morning.

JEAN

I think you'd better go to your room young lady.

BECKY

(Moving to exit)

I'm going out, Mom. I've made arrangements. So please don't treat me like a little girl any more.

TIM

Becky, will you sit down for a moment. I need to say something to you.

BECKY

Do I get a lecture now?

TIM

No. Well - not really.

BECKY

What is it?

TIM

Please sit down. Just for a moment.

BECKY

Are you going to stop me going out?

TIM

I can't run your life for you.

JEAN

We should get ready to go.

TIM
No - I want to deal with it now.

BECKY
Oh, yes! Deal with what? Am I being picked on again?

TIM
Could be. But I won't let it happen.

BECKY
Can I stand here while you tell me?

BECKY moves forward but does not sit down.

TIM
I had a letter.

JEAN
There isn't time for this.

TIM
This won't take long.

BECKY
I'm listening!

JEAN
Well I'm going to get ready to leave.

TIM
I'd prefer you heard.

JEAN and BECKY both stand waiting.

TIM (cont' d)
(Waving the letter)
I had a letter from someone telling me they saw you two nights ago in Mulligans - that bar down the main street.

BECKY
I know where it is.

TIM
Evidently.

BECKY
What if I was?

TIM
You're under age to be drinking.

BECKY

And I'm the pastor's daughter!

TIM

That place has a reputation for, for ...

BECKY

For what? Reputation for what? What am I supposed to have done? Got drunk? Taken drugs? Got picked up by some sleaze ball? I can't believe this.

TIM

Well you seem to know all about the place.

BECKY

I haven't said I was there. But I do know about it. All the kids do.

TIM

(Inhaling deeply)

As I said, I had a letter.

BECKY

So?

TIM

This person saw you there, in the bar, on Friday night.

BECKY

And who was our clever little spy?

TIM

That's exactly the point.

BECKY

What point?

TIM

I don't know. The letter wasn't signed.

BECKY

Oh great! So now I have anonymous spies reporting my every movement to my famous father. When can I have my own life? When?

JEAN

I said this was a bad moment to bring this up.

BECKY

No. It's fine by me. Let's have it all out. You know, I've almost had it, right up to here (*she indicates*). Let's deal with it now.

TIM

Sure. And here's how.

(He tears the letter in half.)

BECKY

What are you doing?

TIM

You are my daughter, and tough though that is for you - and for me at times - I still love you. I care about what you do and where you go. I don't want you in that bar. You know that. But when some sanctimonious do-gooder writes a letter to me about my daughter's behaviour and doesn't have the courage to sign it other than "Concerned" I don't care to know anything else.

BECKY

(After a long pause)

Is that it?

TIM

Yes. That's it.

BECKY

No lecture?

TIM

No lecture.

BECKY

Do I get to go now?

TIM

Where, to the park?

BECKY

Uh-huh!

TIM

I can't force you to come and hear me preach.

JEAN

You're letting her go?

TIM

Just one thing.

BECKY

What?

TIM

Don't let any anonymous people see you!

BECKY
(breaks into a smile)
I'm not going into Mulligans.

TIM
You know what I mean.

BECKY
Thanks Dad. I'll come tonight, if that's all right.

The phone suddenly rings. JEAN answers it.

JEAN
This is Mrs. Foster.

TIM
Yes. That's fine.

JEAN
Oh, hi Kathy! Any news from the hospital?

TIM
Will you be in for lunch?

BECKY
We'll probably have chilli and fries in the park.

TIM
Then there's all the more for me!

JEAN
Oh dear. I'm so sorry. When did they call?

TIM
Sounds like trouble again!

JEAN
Do you want to speak with him now? All right ... I'll tell him. Maybe he can get over this afternoon. No. There's no-one coming for lunch. Not today.

TIM
What's happening?

JEAN
We'll be praying for him

TIM and BECKY are now both focussed on JEAN.

JEAN (cont' d)
All right, Kathy. Bye. God bless!

TIM

What is it?

JEAN

It's Kathy's father. He's had another stroke. The hospital called. She's on her way now. It sounds pretty serious.

BECKY

Kathy's dad! Is he going to die?

JEAN

We don't know. It's in God's hands.

TIM

I'd better go and see him after lunch.

JEAN

Yes - after lunch. Or the only person here to eat it will be me.

BECKY

I gotta go!

BECKY dashes out.

JEAN

If it's not one thing it's another.

TIM

You know something? The park sounds like a good idea!

JEAN

Come on - we're actually getting late. Are you ready - after all that?

JEAN exits. TIM moves to center and the lights narrow around him to a pool. There is no break as the next scene continues.

SCENE 3

First nightmare scene. During the following the various characters walk close to TIM as they speak, then move away until they speak again. There is a general tone of taunting.

Lights change to suggest the mood.

TIM

Big day today. Well, every Sunday's a big day really. It's a big responsibility.

JEAN

(Re-entering)

You seem unusually edgy this morning. Will you be all right?

TIM

As well as I can be. It's never easy.

JEAN

I'll have a nice lunch ready for you when it's over. God bless!

TIM

Preaching the gospel is never easy.

Enter DAVE

DAVE

The church is completely packed pastor. The TV lounges are filling up rapidly. Do you need anything?

TIM

Just fresh water in the pulpit.

DAVE

It's already there. The Lord be with you.

TIM

The text. It's the text today, you see.

JEAN

There's been a call from the hospital. Do you want the message now?

TIM

Yes. I mean - no. It'll have to wait. I need to focus.

NURSE

There's not much time. You may go in to see him now.

TIM

Mark 16, verses 15 and 16. Wonderful, terrible words.

MARJORIE

Our pastor's a wonderful preacher.

NURSE

Pastor.

TIM

Yes!

NURSE

You said you wanted to pray with him

TIM

I'll be right there.

KATHY

My dad needs you pastor. But I don't know if he'll recognize you now.

TIM

God knows what he's doing. Trust me.

KATHY

And I need you, Pastor. Please ...

JEAN

Everyone needs my husband. Everyone has a claim more urgent than the person before.

DAVE

It's time to go.

NURSE

Sir, just step this way. He's on life support. The machine is a little noisy.

JEAN

I need him, too. But there's never time. Never time. Of course, we live in the same house, but there's never time.

DAVE

Is everything all right, Pastor?

KATHY

Please pray for him. He's not there yet. He needs the Lord, pastor. He needs the Lord.

DAVE

There are many unbelievers here this morning. They need the Lord, pastor.

JEAN

(As a prayer)

Lord, I need my husband, but I can't get close.

TIM

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

KATHY

My dad needs the good news Pastor.

NURSE

It's not very good news, I'm afraid.

KATHY

I'm afraid too.

TIM

"Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved."

DAVE

The Lord will save people today. I'm sure of it. But you need to go into the pulpit now. The people are waiting

NURSE

Sir - there's little time left.

MARJORIE

He looks so handsome up there. Good job he's married. We'd all be chasing after him

JEAN

The people love him. And so do I - I suppose.

KATHY

Pastor, do you think God will answer our prayers?

TIM

"Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved."

KATHY

But if he believes and then dies before he can be baptised - will he still be saved?

TIM

There was a dying thief, on a cross, who believed. Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in ..."

KATHY

I want my dad to go to heaven. God will answer prayer for those we love, won't he?

DAVE

Is your message ready?

JEAN

Do you actually have anything to say?

MARJORIE

He always says the right thing.

NURSE

Are you in any state to visit the sick - Sir?

TIM

I have a message! You hear? "Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved .."

NURSE

Go on ..

JEAN

Go on - say it.

DAVE

Give them the full text, pastor. Tell them what God says.

KATHY

This good news is so hard to bear. It's like a sword with two edges.

DAVE

Take the sword of the gospel to unbelief. God will honor his word.

JEAN

God will honor you if you preach his word

NURSE

Do you have a message at all?

DAVE

Say it pastor. Say it. "Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe ...

TIM

"But whoever does not believe ..."

JEAN

Does not believe what, Tim?

TIM

The good news. They must believe the good news.

DAVE

Or what? What then?

KATHY

My dad has not yet confessed faith in Christ, Pastor, please!

DAVE

Finish the text pastor. The people need to hear the full gospel.

KATHY

He needs the gospel.

JEAN

The people need to be saved.

DAVE
So what will you tell them, Pastor?

TIM
“But whoever does not believe ...”

DAVE
Say it!

JEAN
Go on!

NURSE
He's dying!

TIM
(shouting)
“... will be condemned!”

DAVE
Praise the Lord. Tell them pastor.

TIM
If you don't believe you'll be condemned.

JEAN
That's hard.

DAVE
It needs to be hard. No judgement no grace.

JEAN
No danger, no salvation.

NURSE
No time. No life!

KATHY
He just died.

A pause

TIM
God says it, not me. I didn't invent this. It's in the Book.
“Whoever does not believe will be condemned!”

KATHY
My father is dead and he never believed.

DAVE
It will be their own fault. Not yours, not God's. They will have refused.

KATHY
Where has he gone?

TIM
“Will be condemned!”

KATHY
He never made it. He died in unbelief.

DAVE
Jesus died to save people from hell.

JEAN
So many people will be in heaven because of you.

KATHY
Where has he gone? Pastor! Where has he gone?

NURSE
It's all over now. You were going to pray. What happened?

DAVE
Pastor - If you can't preach - I can tell the people you're sick. Someone else can take over. Just say the word.

JEAN
I know he's sick. Has been for months. But he'll never admit it.

KATHY
Did he go to hell, Pastor?

NURSE
He just died. It was his time.

JEAN
I could look after him at home.

TIM
I have a message for the people. They must believe!

DAVE
But maybe someone else should tell them.

TIM
It's my responsibility. My big day. I'm the preacher.

MARJORIE
We're praying for you, pastor.

JEAN
So what will you tell them, Tim?

NURSE

What would you have said if he'd lived sir?

KATHY

I - I don't know what to say ... what to believe. Please tell me. Will he go to hell?

DAVE

Whoever does not believe will be condemned.

JEAN

It's in the Bible. Preach the Bible, Tim.

KATHY

Is the Bible really true, Pastor?

DAVE

You have to warn them. You do a man in a burning house no favors by not raising the alarm.

TIM

I'm the messenger. You hear? The preacher! Okay?

MARJORIE

Praise the Lord! Amen!

DAVE

Then give the message.

JEAN

Say the word.

KATHY

Tell me something to hang on to.

TIM

"Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe ..."

JEAN

You can do it.

DAVE

Yes!

TIM

.. will find ...

DAVE

Go on!

TIM

There is no hell!

*All characters turn and stare at TIM A
long pause ...*

That's it?
NURSE

THERE IS NO HELL!
TIM

He's overwrought!
JEAN

That's heresy.
DAVE

There is no hell!
TIM

You don't believe in hell?
KATHY

What did he say?
MARJORIE

"Will be condemned!"
DAVE

TIM
I can't believe it. I can't believe it any more. There is no
hell. No hell! Okay? I'm done with hell. You preach it if you
want but leave me out of it.

*All the characters recede except JEAN
who stands behind him, to one side, and
KATHY who leans towards him from the
other side.*

KATHY
Thank you, Pastor. That's all I needed to know.

*She kisses him, then exits into the
shadows.*

JEAN
I'll call a doctor. You need a break.

*She kisses him and exits into the
shadows.*

TIM
There is no hell? But sure as hell, I'm in it!

He still stands, center. The lights change. Re-enter JEAN.

JEAN

Tim Tim!

TIM

(Realizing she is there)

I was just ... um ... Just ... er , thinking.

JEAN

You really must get to bed earlier. Come on. It's time to go to church. Everybody will be waiting for you. Are you ready to go?

TIM

Uh-huh!

JEAN

(Realizing)

You're not well.

TIM

I get these ... these nightmare scenes in my head. They're horrible. But ... it's gone now. I'll be okay.

JEAN

Sure?

TIM

Yes.

JEAN

Good. I'll go start the car. We mustn't be late.

Lights fade to black.

SCENE 4

The park. Sunday afternoon a week later. There are trees, a park bench. It is fall. Enter KATHY and BECKY together dressed against the afternoon chill. They talk as they enter.

KATHY

But he did it very nicely. Everyone said so. My family - what's left of them - found it very comforting. Me, I was just - empty.

BECKY

Kathy, how can you have a nice funeral? I mean, I hate the whole idea of dying. And then all going to watch a dead body be burned ...

KATHY

Cremated.

BECKY

Cremated .. it gives me the creeps.

KATHY

I guess you've never had to face it yet. Your grandparents still alive?

BECKY

Yes.

KATHY

Lucky you. All I have now is an elderly mother and a husband who's interested in nothing I do or believe. Just work and sport.

BECKY

So why d'you stay with him?

KATHY

'Cos I guess he needs me.

BECKY

Don't you love him?

KATHY

I don't know. Not any more.

BECKY

Well my Dad always says that Jesus still loves you. And that's what matters most.

KATHY

I thought you didn't believe that.

BECKY

I .. I probably don't. Well I did when I was little, but now I seem to have grown out of it.

KATHY

You can grow back in.

BECKY

But you believe that .. that Jesus loves you?

KATHY

I try to. It's very hard when so many things seem to go wrong. Look can we sit down?

BECKY

(As they sit)

Like your marriage?

KATHY

And Dad. He never decided for Christ. I know it. Your dad did a neat job of saying *(mimicking)* 'who knows what happens between a man and God in the last moments of life?'

BECKY

But you don't know.

KATHY

I was there Becky. I held his hand and prayed as he was dying. He could hear me. I could feel him stiffen in rejection when I prayed. And when I stopped, he relaxed. His breathing was a deep, horrible rattle. Then he said it again - if there is a God he blames him for the cancer and he's having it out with him as soon as he's dead. No - he was defiant to the end. I know.

BECKY

I'm so sorry. I love you, Kathy. You mean so much to me.

BECKY hugs KATHY and for a while they just hold each other.

You coming by tonight?

KATHY

I might. If he's staying in I probably will. I don't like staying home with him alone at the moment. Your folks are fun. They make me laugh.

BECKY

D'you want to hear something?

KATHY

What, gossip?

BECKY

No. It's definitely NOT gossiping. It's a secret.

KATHY

Secrets make the best gossip.

BECKY

They do if it's about somebody else, but this is about me.

KATHY

Then I'm all ears and my mouth is closed.

BECKY

Swear never to tell or be consigned forever to a dungeon full of rats.

KATHY

If it's the dungeon of rats, you've got my silence. I swear!

BECKY

Okay!

KATHY

(Pause)
Well? What is it?

BECKY

It's not an it. I mean, it's a he.

KATHY

A boy?

BECKY

I'm not having a baby!

KATHY

Well I would hope not!

BECKY

Oh stop it. You know what I mean. A boy friend.

KATHY

You mean you've got one? A secret one - that nobody knows about?

BECKY

(Beaming with delight)
Well I might have.

KATHY

How can you 'might have' a boy friend?

BECKY

Because I think he's very interested in me. But we haven't yet been out together.

KATHY

So what's the secret?

BECKY

Because he sort of asked me things like 'where do I like to go?' And he was kinda looking at me a lot and we did a lot of smiling at each other.

KATHY

O-oh! The dreaded love bug!

BECKY

D'you know who I mean?

KATHY

I haven't the slightest idea. Does he go to church? Did you meet him there?

BECKY

No - I met him here. In the park. Last Sunday.

KATHY

After that argument with your parents?

BECKY

That's why they mustn't know.

KATHY

Why?

BECKY

Because they'll kill me if I go out with some boy who doesn't go to church. They assume that all boys who haven't been 'saved' have only one thing on their minds.

KATHY

(Feigning innocence)

Like what?

BECKY

The Big S. Sex!

KATHY

So, according to your Mom and dad, Christian boys don't think about sex?

BECKY

No. He thinks they can control themselves better. So they're safer.

KATHY

Really? And what do you think?

BECKY

(Giggling)

I think they're all the same. At least, I hope so.

KATHY
(They laugh at this)
What's his name?

BECKY
You promise not to tell?

KATHY
Hey - I hate rats, okay.

BECKY
It's Vince. Vincent Thomas. Like the bridge.

KATHY
No kidding. And what does he do? Is he still at school?

BECKY
I, I don't know yet.

KATHY
Do you know where he lives? Have you met his parents?

BECKY
Course not! We've hardly passed two words yet. How would I know?

KATHY
How will you know?

BECKY
Because ... Because. Look this is a dead secret, right?

KATHY
Right!

BECKY
Because we have a date, this afternoon. We're meeting down by the lake in about thirty minutes. Our first date! So I'll have to go soon. I need a pee really bad.

KATHY
How exciting!

BECKY
Then I'll be able to tell ... Oh!

Enter VINCE. The meeting is very unexpected.

KATHY
What's the matter?

VINCE stops when he sees the characters on the park bench.

VINCE

Oh. Hi! I, er, I wasn't expecting to see you yet.

BECKY

(Rising)
Me neither. This is my friend, Kathy?

VINCE

Not your mother?

KATHY

Hey, do you mind?

VINCE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude.

KATHY

And you must be ... ?

BECKY

Yes. Kathy, this is Vince.

VINCE and KATHY shake hands with embarrassed Hi's.

VINCE

Look - I can just be going; and see you - where we arranged - when you're ready. I'm early. Is it still on? The date?

KATHY

Time for me to go and leave you two together. And I will keep your secret.

VINCE

Secret?

KATHY

I have to live in a dungeon of rats if I tell anyone I saw you together.

VINCE

Oh. Nice! Well - not nice really. Not if you don't like rats.

BECKY

Vince - it's girl talk. I'll explain it later.

VINCE

Well - if you wouldn't mind, would it be all right if we didn't actually start the date until we meet in *(checks his watch)* twenty minutes time? I have to go somewhere first?

KATHY
(With huge impish grin)
For a pee?

VINCE
(Deeply embarrassed)
Er - yes. How did you know?

KATHY
That makes two of you!

BECKY
Kathy!

Fade to black.

SCENE 5

*Later on Sunday afternoon. Enter TIM
his hands plunged deep into the pockets
of his raincoat. He is walking
aimlessly and looks agitated. A few
moments and AARON enters*

TIM
You're not meant to be here. You're dead.

AARON
Are you reading the book?

TIM
Which book?

AARON
Mine. *The Age of Reason*, by Paine. You can keep it now.

TIM
I'm reading it.

AARON
Impressive?

TIM
It would be nice to agree with him. But that would be the end
of my profession. Then what would I do?

AARON
An exquisite dilemma for a man of faith.

TIM
Get out of my mind.

AARON

Hey - you keep me here. I'm the only person you can confide in because you can't tell your church your mind is changing. By the way, - I enjoyed your sermon.

TIM

Which one?

AARON

The big text. "... whoever does not believe will be condemned!"

TIM

I said what I had to say.

AARON

But did you believe it?

TIM

I did while I was preaching it.

AARON

Hah! But now. Now it's over. Where does that leave me?

TIM

Go away!

AARON

Where does that leave me? Am I in hell? I died without believing. Kathy will tell you.

TIM

I don't know where you are.

AARON

But I didn't believe. So you must know.

TIM

Then you went to hell. You should've known better.

AARON

... unlike most of the human race. They never had a chance to hear your Good News and no option to believe it. And even if they did why would they break away from their own cherished belief systems and launch into the great unknown of a religion that has slain as many people as it ever saved?

TIM

That's putting it far too strongly, and you know it.

AARON

All right, let me put it another way.

TIM
Leave me alone to sort this out.

AARON
(Ignoring the plea)
You know what nationality I am, with a name like Aaron?

TIM
You're a Jew.

AARON
But not a religious Jew. Only by birth. Now for a question?
Ready?

TIM
You're not going.

AARON
As a Christian minister and theologian do you suppose that the Jews are more guilty before God than most other people - like Muslims or Aborigines, for instance?

TIM
I - I'm not sure.

AARON
Good! This is a big problem for Christians to sort out. So would you agree with me that the Jewish Holocaust was an unspeakable humanitarian tragedy?

TIM
Yes.

AARON
That it was a vile atrocity devised by a regime of callous, if not sadistically inspired, people?

TIM
Yes. I would have to.

AARON
Do you think it would actually be a great relief for many of those Jewish people when the moment of death finally came - because it marked the end of their suffering?

TIM
I don't like the way you put it.

AARON

All right, then. Let's try it another way. If those Jews suffered so horribly at the hands of Hitler, wasn't their death at least a happy release? So, Mr Theologian, what happened to them after they died?

TIM

It depends whether they accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

AARON

Do we have any reason to believe that as the six million died they were all getting converted to Jesus in their final throes?

TIM

No.

AARON

So where did they go next?

TIM

That's a very tough question. How do I know?

AARON

You know what the Bible says. Would they go to heaven?

TIM

Probably not. After the final day of judgment they probably would not.

AARON

So?

TIM

So what?

AARON

Where is there else to go?

TIM

You know the answer to that.

AARON

Indeed I do. At least I know what it's meant to be. I know what the Bible says. I know what Christians are meant to believe.

TIM

What do you mean?

AARON

I mean this. The holocaust was an appalling atrocity devised and executed by evil men.

(MORE)

AARON (cont' d)

I mean that those who died in it had no real escape. For according to Christian belief, they then went to hell; a place far worse in its torments, from which there's no escape, a place devised and created by God!

TIM

What are you trying to say?

AARON

I'm saying ... I'm saying that the Christian doctrine of hell, which you say is logically necessary and explicitly taught in Scripture, is also a hideous, appalling doctrine. Hell is worse than Dachau. And that makes God worse than Hitler.

TIM

I figured that out, okay! Stop ramming it home. But if we take hell away - there's no need for salvation, no Christ, no cross. Do you know what that does? It make my ministry a fiction. I am at one and the same time, intellectually honest and yet a public hypocrite. I am becoming what they call a liberal, a heretic. And I don't know what to do!

AARON

Aha! I see a split in the cocoon.

TIM

GET OUT OF MY MIND!!

AARON

Okay, Okay. I'm going. For now.

TIM watches AARON exit then turns and leaves decisively.

SCENE 6

The park - a few moments later. Voices off, then VINCE enters briskly followed by BECKY a few moments later. He is clearly agitated.

VINCE

(Calling back over his shoulder)

I don't think that's right. Not on the first date. And NOT here in the park. Who knows what might happen?

BECKY

You're just chicken-shit, that's all.

VINCE

Look - we've only just met. And what would your father say if he knew his little girl was now into pot.

BECKY

I don't give a damn what he thinks. I've got my own life, too, you know. And anyway - who would tell him?

VINCE

Parents have ways of finding out.

BECKY

Only if they go looking. And they don't go in Mulligans.

VINCE

Where we met! And they found out.

BECKY

Yeah. Where we met. But he refused to make anything of it because some hypocritical snitch wrote an anonymous letter. He hates anonymous letters.

VINCE

You had a lucky break there.

BECKY

(Pause)

I thought you liked me?

VINCE

I do. I think you're gorgeous.

BECKY

Do you want to make out again?

VINCE

Yes.

BECKY

(Beginning to snuggle up to him)

C'mon then.

VINCE

This is public.

BECKY

There's no-one coming.

VINCE

They could. Any moment.

BECKY

(Drawing him into a kiss)

Then we'll stop. Everyone does it.

(They embrace again.)

I can feel you all hard.

VINCE
You know what? You are bad; real bad.

BECKY
And you love it!

Lights fade to black.

SCENE 7

TIM s home later on Sunday evening.

Enter JEAN with MARJORIE.

JEAN
I'm so glad you could come by for a bite to eat. We needed to get together.

MARJORIE
I love your house. So warm and comfortable. A real little haven for the both of you.

JEAN
We like it.

MARJORIE
Dave is so pleased to be a deacon now. He admires your husband so much. Thank you for having us over. Now we mustn't keep you up any longer.

JEAN
I think the men are just coming.

Enter TIM and DAVE talking.

MARJORIE
I didn't see Becky. Is she here?

DAVE
Ready to go Marjorie?

JEAN
I think she's upstairs - in her room. Probably getting ready for bed. School in the morning, you know.

MARJORIE
Yes. Just putting my coat on.

DAVE
Now where are my keys? Do you have my keys darling?

JEAN

(Picking them up from near the door)

Here they are. You left them there on the way in.

DAVE

Ah, yes. So I don't forget them. Always leave them by the door. Then you know where they are.

MARJORIE

Precisely.

DAVE

And thank you again, Pastor, for that sermon last week. I never heard such a brilliant exposition of the fate of those who die without Jesus. Makes you think, doesn't it? I mean - people dying around us all the time and we never seem to make any effort to save them. So busy with our own little lives.

TIM

Well - it made me think too. Not an easy subject.

MARJORIE

Oh come on Dave, you'll get started all over again.

JEAN

And that would never do.

There is a round of good-byes with calls of Mind how you go, Drive safely, See you soon, etc. The door finally shuts. TIM turns to leave.

JEAN (cont' d)

Before you go and shut yourself in the bathroom, how was it?

TIM

How was what?

JEAN

The supper. Was it good enough for your new deacon and his precious wife?

TIM

It was a good supper.

JEAN

Yes - I put on the usual display for you. Exquisite little snacks, delicately arranged.

TIM

The Harmans were impressed.

JEAN
But the atmosphere was like ice.

TIM
I thought it went well.

JEAN
You may have thought that but I felt humiliated.

TIM
Just because I made a joke about the mousse?

JEAN
You always joke about the food. Never an approving word.

TIM
I'll make it up to you tonight.

JEAN
No you won't.

TIM
What d'you mean?

JEAN
I mean what I say. If you can't treat me better during the day why should I treat you nicely at night.

TIM
You don't normally complain that I treat you badly.

JEAN
No.

TIM
So how come it hardly ever happens?

JEAN
I have reasons.

TIM
Like what? You never tell me.

JEAN
It's not something I care to talk about.

Aaron enters and listens.

TIM
No, we never talk about it. I counsel everybody else about how important it is to be open and talk about even the most difficult problems, but we can never do it.

JEAN

You know - sometimes I think I'm the last person you are ever interested in. You always brighten up when other people are around. Especially Kathy! Is she coming by tonight? Again?

TIM

That is totally cheap!

AARON

No it isn't old man.

TIM

And yes, she is coming by. Is that a problem? You like her. You get on very well.

JEAN

Well, please yourself.

AARON

You probably should - as usual.

JEAN

I'm going to watch television. I hope she doesn't stay too long.

TIM

It's called pastoral support. This is a bad time for her.

JEAN

I'm sure you will be a great help to her.

She exits.

TIM

(Calling after her)

Well I'm going for a quick shower.

AARON

And that's not all if you ask me.

TIM

I'm not asking you. And anyway, what is a man meant to do when he doesn't get it from his wife?

AARON

Use your imagination.

TIM

(with bitterness)

I do. All the time.

Exit TIM A pause, and then the door opens slowly round which KATHY pops her head and then comes in.

KATHY

All quiet on the pastoral front. Hmm. Wonder for how long?

She sits at the table and loosens her sport's clothing. She has been working out. She fiddles with things on the table.

KATHY (cont' d)

(Checks her watch)

Maybe this is not a good time. God, it's nearly ten.

She gets up and tiptoes over to the inner house door to listen for sounds. Suddenly TIM enters, dressed in a bathrobe. She starts back.

TIM

God you startled me?

KATHY

You startled me - creeping around your own house like that!

TIM

I'm glad you came. I was worried about you.

KATHY

That's nice.

TIM

So how was it?

KATHY

My trainer says I did really well.

TIM

Is he dishy?

KATHY

Yeah. A bit. But not quite my favourite man.

TIM

Maybe I won't ask who that is.

KATHY

And maybe I wouldn't tell you anyway.

TIM

I expect he's waiting for you back home.

Maybe. Maybe not. KATHY

Enter JEAN

Oh, Kathy! I didn't hear you arrive. JEAN

I snook in quietly. KATHY

Like a church mouse. TIM

It's a bit late. JEAN

Sorry! KATHY

Since you're here - I was wondering if you saw Becky this afternoon? JEAN

Yes. In the park. KATHY

Well I'm getting worried. It's getting late; time she was home. Was she okay when you saw her? JEAN

Sure. She was with a crowd of kids down by the bandstand. KATHY

What were they doing? JEAN

Just fun things like kids do. Drinking sodas, fooling around with ice-cream, joking. That sort of stuff. KATHY

I'm sure she's okay. TIM

Maybe I'll get the car out and drive around. She might have gone to that dreadful bar again. JEAN

I don't think she'd do that. TIM

KATHY

Look, maybe I should be going. I need a shower before I go to bed. If you like I can drive around rather than go straight home. Save you having to go out, Jean. Then I can call you from home.

JEAN

Well, I'm not sure.

KATHY

I'll call you anyway, when I get home - to see if she's back.

TIM

See you again on Sunday?

KATHY

Sure. If you're good. I'm off, then.

Goes to hug JEAN - who is not overly receptive.

KATHY (cont' d)

Don't worry, Jean. She'll be fine.

JEAN

G'night Kathy. Thanks.

KATHY

Bye Tim

She flounces over to him to give him a goodbye kiss. He makes to respond by kissing her cheek, but KATHY manoeuvres so that the kiss ends up right on his lips, and lingers very slightly.

KATHY (cont' d)

Be good, Timmy.

TIM

I'm paid to be good.

KATHY

Well I'm not. I'm good for nothing!

Exit KATHY. JEAN stares at TIM reproachfully.

JEAN

That just about says it all!

TIM

It was a joke. Just her sense of humour.

JEAN
Well I didn't find it very funny.

TIM
And you have become decidedly boring!

*There is the sound of voices offstage.
TIM darts to the door and looks out
into the hallway.*

TIM (cont'd)
Oh my God! What happened? Quickly, Jean!

JEAN
What is it?

TIM
It's Becky! What happened?

*KATHY enters assisting BECKY who is
barely able to walk unsupported. She is
dazed, bleeding from the head and her
clothes are torn.*

KATHY
I don't know. I found her like this outside.

TIM
Quick, sit her down so we can see.

JEAN
Oh my God, this is dreadful.

TIM
What happened?

JEAN
You keep saying that. Don't you know any more words?
Becky, are you all right?

TIM
Of course she's not all right!

JEAN
We should call the doctor. Tim, call the doctor.

TIM
Let's see how she is first.

KATHY
Steady now. Take it easy. You look very sore.

JEAN
My God, she could have been ...

TIM
No! Not that. Will you just be quiet.

BECKY
Yes - just be quiet. Fuck off, will you! Both of you!

JEAN
Becky!

TIM
Hurt or not hurt, you mind your mouth young lady.

BECKY
She was saying I'd been ...

TIM
No she didn't.

BECKY
She did. I know what she was going to say.

TIM
She didn't mean it. Mom's just worried. Like we all are.
Maybe you can just tell us.

KATHY
*(Being practical about getting
Becky sat down)*
There, is that better? Take your time. Just get comfortable.

BECKY
I'm all right. I just fell over. Okay?

TIM
It looks like more than falling over.

JEAN
Where have you been darling?

KATHY
I'll get some hot water and a wash cloth.

*KATHY exits to the kitchen. JEAN sits
close to BECKY and puts her arms round
her.*

JEAN
Do you feel you need a doctor?

TIM
So what did happen?

BECKY
*(Trying to free herself from
JEAN)*
I don't want a doctor. I want you to leave me alone. I'll be all right in the morning.

TIM
That may be fine but we have a right to know what's happened to you. You're our daughter.

BECKY
Like I didn't know?

TIM
Becky!

BECKY
Can I have a drink?

JEAN
Yes, what would you like?

BECKY
Just milk, please.

KATHY returns with a tray of items.

JEAN
Here, let me do that. Could you get her some milk, Kathy?

KATHY
I already did.

JEAN
Oh!

BECKY gets up and takes the milk.

BECKY
I'm going to bed. I don't want to talk about this.

She goes to exit. KATHY follows her to the door.

KATHY
(Tugging BECKY's sleeve)
Becky! Did this have anything to do with - this afternoon? You know. Hi m!

BECKY

I don't want to talk about it. And don't tell. You promised. Right?

Exit BECKY.

JEAN

And what was that about - if you don't mind?

KATHY

Er - nothing. Nothing.

JEAN

Nothing? It didn't sound like nothing?

KATHY does not reply. There is an ugly pause.

JEAN (cont'd)

I think you'd better go now. Please. That would be best.

TIM

Yes! We can talk about it tomorrow. When we've all had a good night's sleep.

Icy stares all round. The lights fade to half. JEAN turns and exits leaving TIM alone. He walks forward dropping his head into his hands.

TIM (cont'd)

Oh God! This is getting too much. It's not meant to be like this. Do you hear me God? It's not meant to be like this. Where are you when I need you?

Enter AARON, who quietly stands upstage of TIM

AARON

He is never there.

TIM

And I guess you would know?

AARON

He was not then, and he is not now.

TIM

Do you have any idea what I'm going through? In fact - don't even answer. How could you? You've never been in my position. Even my deacons have no idea what a pastor goes through.

AARON

I know what it's like to be desolate.

TIM

I'm not desolate.

AARON

So where is your comfort? Come on, tell me?

TIM does not reply.

AARON (cont'd)

"I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from?"

TIM

Very good! I'm impressed.

AARON

"My help comes from the Lord - Maker of Heaven and earth?"
Psalm 121 - Right?

TIM

Wrong. WRONG! The help never seems to come.

AARON

Oh - I know that! But then I never expected it.

Characters begin to enter as they speak, moving and intermingling as they speak.

DAVE

The pastor was such a help to me.

MARJORIE

He is a man of God. If anyone's close to the Lord, he is.

AARON

He didn't come when I was dying.

TIM

I had to go to church!

DAVE

Wonderful sermon about hell. Best I ever heard.

AARON

There is no hell.

TIM

I know it. There is no hell. And with nothing from which to be saved ...

BECKY

I will never get to heaven. I'm not sure that there is one anyway.

AARON

Believe me, there isn't. I know.

TIM

You may be lying!

MARJORIE

Jean is so sweet. We will get on well together. Is she a comfort to you Pastor?

JEAN

He's not touching me. He revolts me when he's naked.

KATHY

She doesn't like you naked, Tim

TIM

I hate her when she's naked. She smells like stale cabbage.

BECKY

My parent's bedroom smells.

KATHY

Her breasts?

TIM

They droop. Sallow, sagging pouches.

DAVE

Do Pastor's do it? Do Pastors have sex?

TIM

Pastors who have sex go to hell!

DAVE

Even people on their way to heaven have sex.

AARON

My help comes from the Lord!

MARJORIE

His help comes from the Lord.

JEAN

God help him, because I'm tired of trying. I've tried. My God, I've tried. Nobody knows how much I've tried.

BECKY

They hold hands in public but never in private

KATHY

She didn't try the right way, Tim

TIM

You're meant to be grieving your father's death.

MARJORIE

No one helps us like the Pastor.

KATHY

No one helps me like you. You take my grief away.

BECKY

I don't want my dad to help me. Nor my mother. I'll figure it out my way.

TIM

I can help you, Becky.

BECKY

Hear me Dad. No. No you can't. Just Vince. Vince and pot. Vince and pot and booze!

TIM

Come to me Becky!

JEAN

She will never trust you, Tim. She knows what you're like.

Exit BECKY, slowly.

TIM

(To JEAN)

Get out of here, bitch!

KATHY

Yes, out of here bitch!

AARON

You talk about bitch?

KATHY

He needs me.

JEAN

Well he doesn't need me.

Exit JEAN, slowly.

DAVE

Let me know if there's anything I can do?

TIM

Take off the blindfold, man. Take off the blindfold.

AARON

The light is painful. It's easier not to look.

TIM

He thinks he can see. He has a Bible. So he knows it all now.

DAVE

Prayer moves mountains. I'm going to pray for our pastor.

Exit DAVE, slowly. MARJORIE follows him

TIM

(Shouting after him)

Give it twenty-five years, Dave, twenty-five years of intense, hungry total dependence! And tell me then. You hear me? Dave? You hear me?

AARON

He has earplugs as well as a blindfold.

KATHY

I hear how you hurt.

AARON

She hears how you hurt. Her husband doesn't care. Like Jean.

TIM

You know?

AARON

Have done for years. She needs someone who knows how to hurt, how to be empty, how to be washed up and useless.

TIM

I'm not washed up.

KATHY

You're all washed up. I know. I see it in your eyes. I see my reflection in your eyes. Your eyes are dark.

TIM

My eyes are full of pain.

AARON

But at least they can see. More clearly than ever.

TIM

I can see. At last. But now I don't know who I am. I don't know which way to go. I don't know where to go next.

AARON
One step at a time.

TIM
But which way, dammit? Which way?

KATHY
You could come to me.

AARON
You could do worse.

TIM
I did do worse.

AARON
Hey - what do I know?

KATHY
Shall we go?

TIM
Where are we going?

KATHY
I'll show you. I'll show you places you've never been; sights you've never seen.

TIM
This can't be right.

AARON
What's right any more, when the law-giver has disappeared?
Hey - what do I know? I'm supposed to be dead. And Jews don't go to Jesus.

KATHY
He's right, you know.

KATHY comes close to comfort TIM, but he feebly repels her as he sinks to his knees.

TIM
I - I just don't know anything, anymore. It's dark - yet I can see. More clearly than ever before. A huge immensity of total nothingness where the stars spin in my head like fireballs.

AARON and KATHY back off from TIM in opposite directions, watching him as they exit.

TIM (cont' d)
I've never seen such brilliant darkness - ever.

His head drops forward.

Lights fade to black.

SCENE 8

Enter DAVE and MARJORIE. JEAN is with them

DAVE
He's not well. We knew it then.

MARJORIE
He just needs a rest. And, my dear, so do you. So for a while just take a break. Like the deacons said. Get away and have a rest.

JEAN
You're very kind. It's been a hard year. One of the worst since we came here.

MARJORIE
We can look after Becky. She could come and stay with us.

DAVE
Perhaps she'd be better with Kathy. They seem to get on ...

JEAN
No. No - You're right. It would be far better if she stayed with you.

MARJORIE
Will you actually go away? You must have somewhere you could go off together.

JEAN
Yes. There are places we could go. We haven't arranged anything yet. Maybe we'll just stay at home, rest up a bit and maybe take some trips out together. See the countryside, or something.

MARJORIE
Well, I'm sure you'll know best on that one. Pastor is so lucky to have a wife like you at a time like this.

JEAN
I like to think so too, Marjorie. Thank you.

Lights fade to black

SCENE 9

BECKY is on the phone with Vince. It is evening.

BECKY

So what was your day like?

VINCE

It was okay. My boss was a dick today - as usual! Would've been better if I could've seen you tonight.

BECKY

I have homework to do.

VINCE

(Pause)

How are the bruises?

BECKY

Nearly gone. It's been two weeks. I can't believe it. People are still asking about it. Mrs. Struthers - she teaches art - had the nerve to ask me if I'd been fighting. I said, No, Mrs. Struthers. Worse! I got very drunk, walked into a lamp post and then fell over. And it was wonderful. The stars were like fireworks.

VINCE

You told her that?

BECKY

No, silly. But my parents watch me like hawks now. They still think you had something to do with it. I try to tell them you're a nice guy, but as far as they're concerned no guy is a nice guy right now.

VINCE

Are they still arguing?

BECKY

Like cats. My Dad really lost it yesterday. I could hear him shouting while I was up in my room. But I tried not to hear the words. Vince -

VINCE

Yeah.

BECKY

I'm frightened.

VINCE

Why?

BECKY

It's like my parents are breaking up. But I can't believe it would happen to them - not to my parents.

VINCE

It can happen to anyone.

BECKY

Yes, but, not to Look, I don't wanna talk about this right now.

VINCE

It would be better if I could just hold you.

BECKY

You and your smooching. Your hands get everywhere.

VINCE

And you were the one that started it. On our first date!

BECKY

(Giggling)

I know. But we have to be careful. I've got enough stress right now.

VINCE

I try to help.

BECKY

And you do. You're great. No - I really mean it. Even coming to church with me. You don't have to do that.

VINCE

It's kinda fun. You're Dad sounds really cool when he's up there.

BECKY

Yeah. That's why I'm so worried. But I think it'll pass. Everyone can have bad times.

VINCE

And what about your Mom?

Enter JEAN briskly.

BECKY

Just a minute ...

JEAN

Have you finished your homework yet? You haven't time to be chatting on the phone all night. Who is it anyway?

BECKY
I've done it. Well just about.

JEAN
And who's on the phone.

BECKY
(To Vince)
I gotta go. Bye! *(Puts the phone down.)* Satisfied?

JEAN
It was that Vince again. I know.

BECKY
He's okay you know. He's not like you think he is. He even came to church last week.

JEAN
(Long pause)
Look, Becky. This isn't an easy time for us. I don't really want to talk ...

BECKY
It's all right Mom. You don't have to explain. Whatever it is - it'll sort out. Things always sort out.

JEAN
(Is about to say more, but changes her mind.)
I - I think I'll just go out for a while.

BECKY
Why?

JEAN
Well - your father is out at some meeting again. And I just ... need some fresh air. That's all.

BECKY
You gonna walk? I could come with you.

JEAN
No. Thank you. It's okay. I'll just get the car out and drive down to the store. There's a few things I need. Save me going out in the morning.

BECKY
You sure you're okay?

JEAN
Don't worry about me, darling. Us housewives can be tough as old boots.

They laugh as though in a moment of understanding.

BECKY
I'm going to watch TV in bed.

JEAN
All right. I won't be long.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 10

TIM and KATHY in his office at the church. Papers from the desk lie scattered on the floor. TIM sits on the edge of the desk. KATHY is facing him, his hands are on her hips as she buttons up her blouse. TIM wears shirt, underpants and socks but no pants.

KATHY
I always had a fantasy about doing it here. Right here, on the desk, where you write your sermons.

TIM
You're the most beautiful lover.

KATHY
So are you.

TIM
How come we're doing this all over again?

KATHY
I guess the orchestra never stopped playing and the director never said cut.

TIM
And it doesn't feel wrong. It's wonderful.

KATHY
(Gentle teasing)
And how will you ever preach on lasciviousness again, Mr. Spiritual Giant?

TIM
I can do that. The only thing lasciviousness and love have in common is the first letter. I love you, Kathy.

KATHY
What about the seventh commandment - adultery?

TIM
(Flippantly)
I'll reduce the commandments to nine.

KATHY
They may notice!

TIM
(Seriously again)
I don't see how I can ever break this off.

KATHY
We've got to do something. It'll get out.

TIM
(Pauses and thinks)
So will you marry me?

KATHY
Darling, I can't. Think about it.

TIM
But if I resign and divorce Jean?

KATHY
You'll never do that.

TIM
I will have to.

KATHY
Why?

TIM
Because I'm not such a hypocrite that I imagine I can do this AND be a pastor. I have to resign, even if none of them ever knows why. I do have some conscience left, you know. And on top of all that I no longer believe half of what I'm preaching. And that book of your dad's - I read it a lot. It's kind of liberating, but all it does is water the seeds of doubt.

KATHY
I'm sorry about that.

TIM
I say what they like to hear. And they say Amen! But it's killing me, Kathy. I have to quit and let them get another man - one who believes what he preaches.

KATHY
Then what will you do?

TIM

Marry you.

KATHY

You want me to divorce Carl?

TIM

You don't love him. He treats you like dirt.

KATHY

Maybe that's what I deserve.

TIM

No, you don't. Look, if we can keep this quiet we can at least avoid the front page of the tabloids.

KATHY

"Pastor runs off with Church member"! ... Does it matter?

TIM

Yes it does. Because they're good people and I love them. It'll hurt them enough when I go, but I don't want to inflict the ignominy of scandal on them. And anyway, I'm a coward. I don't want it either.

KATHY

So you resign, we carry on seeing each other in secret, each gets divorced and tells all the world it was because we couldn't get on with our partners. And then, lo and behold, we suddenly appear in public together - married.

TIM

Do you think it'll work?

KATHY

We can dream ...

TIM

Only dream?

KATHY

It's not real, darling. You can never be sure a plan like that will ever work.

TIM

So what would you do?

KATHY

Just go, now. Take me with you. Let the reporters have their day. Let's just go. Fly off to Cancun. And when the fire dies down, we'll come back.

TIM

But what about Becky? I love my little girl. I'll lose her, completely.

KATHY

Darling, we're in the most stupid, dangerous game of all. How do you suppose someone is not going to get hurt, somewhere? Think about it.

TIM

Do you still love me?

KATHY

Yes, I do. I always will. Whatever happens, you'll always be the greatest love of my life. And, if we can find a way through all the impossibilities ahead I will--I will marry you.

He pulls her close and they embrace with great tenderness. There is a sudden KNOCKING on the door. The door handle gets turned, but the door is locked.

TIM

God, who is that?

KATHY

Shh! Keep quiet.

TIM

It's the janitor. He's seen the light on.

KATHY

What do we do?

TIM

He's got a key. He might come in.

KATHY

And he might not. He might just go.

More knocking.

JEAN

(From off-stage)

Tim, will you open this door, I know you're in there!

TIM

(In whispered voice)

Oh my God!

KATHY

We've had it now. We're now in deep, deep shit.

TIM

Keep absolutely quiet. She can't know we are in here.

JEAN

(Knocking)

Tim, I know you're there. And I know who is with you!

TIM

This is my worst nightmare.

KATHY

It's over, Tim. It's over.

TIM

What are we going to do?

KATHY

Well, get dressed again for starters!

TIM

Oh God, yes! Where are my pants?

They hastily scramble around for their clothes and try to get dressed.

Look at the office. It's a complete mess.

KATHY

It was good sex!

TIM

Well, tidy it up.

KATHY

What's the point. You've been caught with your pants down. Finito!

TIM

She can't be sure we're here. She's bluffing. If we just keep quiet, in the end she'll go away. She'll have to.

Long pause, during which KATHY stands still but TIM is frantic to restore some semblance of order. More knocking.

JEAN

I can wait here a long time. All night if necessary. I'm not going away.

TIM

She will. She will have to.

KATHY
But she'll still know. We're cornered. There's no escape.

TIM
If I let her in what do I tell her?

KATHY
I don't think it matters.

TIM
We were praying together?

KATHY
And now we are getting dressed. Good!

JEAN
(Knocking again)
I'm waiting.

TIM
Oh God. This is dreadful.

KATHY
Well let her in.

TIM
No!

KATHY
Why not? We might as well face it. At least we can face it together.

TIM
She won't know what we've been doing.

KATHY
Puh-lease. The place reeks of sex. She will know.

TIM
It does not reek.

KATHY
Much.

TIM
So what will I say?

KATHY
I said, I don't think it matters. Not now.

JEAN
*(Turns the door handle and
knocks)*
Shall I get the janitor to let me in? He has a key.

TIM
We've had it.

JEAN
And I can actually hear you whispering.

TIM
(Puts fingers to lips.)
Not a word!

JEAN
(Shouted)
FOR CHRIST'S SAKE TIM OPEN THIS DOOR AND STOP BEING SO
DAMNED STUPID. I'M NOT GOING AWAY, SO YOU MIGHT AS WELL LET
ME IN!

*At this TIM walks slowly over to the
door, shaking, and unlocks the door. He
opens it and walks back into the room*

TIM
Satisfied?

*JEAN slowly enters the room and looks
at the guilty pair, taking in every
detail.*

JEAN
I knew in my bones it had come to this. Under my very eyes,
in my own home. I knew it as I came here - hoping against
hope that I was still wrong. Look at you. You disgraceful
man, with your trollop!

KATHY
Jean ...

JEAN
Don't say one word. You cheap whore! You inveigle your way
into my husband's affections - correction - lusts, and bring
shame and contempt upon this church. No. I'm wrong. You, Tim,
you have done this. You have.

KATHY now remains silent and hard.

TIM
I don't think you quite understand ...

JEAN

Don't I? Are you going to tell me this is not exactly what it looks like? The minister fucking with a church member in his office, the place where he is believed to be in prayer or counseling the needy? Well what sort of counseling is this?

TIM

We had things to talk about. This was just a good opportunity to ... talk quietly ... when no-one was around.

JEAN, stoops down to pick up a sports bra from the side of the desk. It had been overlooked in the panic.

JEAN

Don't lie to me Tim

TIM

(Pause)

So what now?

JEAN

What now? I don't know 'what now'. All I know is that you are a ruined man. That you have ruined me and my children and this church.

TIM

But no-one knows.

JEAN

(Laughs in derision)

Yes they do. They suspected. And they suspected right when I was foolish enough to believe they were wrong. But now they will know. Because you can't expect me to walk away from here and behave as though nothing has happened. No. It's out. I don't think you have any idea what you've done!

TIM

I'll, we'll, clear up and get on home ...

JEAN

You don't have a home any more. And I don't suppose you'll go back to her house to face Carl. No - you now don't belong anywhere.

Exit JEAN. TIM and KATHY turn to face each other. They draw near to each other, TIM taking her hands between his, looking into her eyes.

KATHY

(Full of gentleness and regret)

Be sure your sins will find you out.

The action freezes. A beat, then lights slowly fade to black.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

The morning after. JEAN is going through Tim's things from a box she has found, throwing them out. Photos. Letters. Gifts. The phone rings.

JEAN

Yes! This is Jean Foster. Oh, Marjorie. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound so sharp. Yes - yes it has. A very difficult week. No, I'm sorry. I'm in the middle of clearing up the breakfast and tidying the kitchen cupboards - yes - all at the same time. I'd rather not leave it all in a mess. Got so much stuff. Well thank you for the offer. But not today. All right ... look - if you wouldn't mind could you call me again tomorrow? I'll be done by then. No. This is just not a good time. Bye.

She sits down in despair. Picks up more items and empties them in the trash. Enter TIM looking very dishevelled. He wears a raincoat.

JEAN (cont'd)

Well look what the cat brought in.

TIM

(Surveying the scene)

What are you doing?

JEAN

I might ask where you have been?

TIM

Those are my things. What right have you to go through those?

JEAN

What right? What right? I'm your wife - or I thought I was until last night. And this is your secret stash of tart memorabilia.

TIM

(Making a grab for his box.)

Leave it alone.

JEAN

(Shielding it.)

No, you leave it; your little store of guilty secrets.

TIM

It's not yours. Now give it here.

JEAN

No! You have no right to have this in my house while you're married to me. It's trash and it belongs in the trash.

There is a brief tussle in which TIM tries to gather up his belongings and JEAN tries to stop him. In rising anger TIM is about to strike JEAN.

JEAN (cont' d)

Oh! So you're going to hit me now. Just add injury to insult. You coward, you.

TIM

(Struggling to re-gain composure)

All right. Cool it. Let's just cool it.

JEAN

Cool it? You expect me to cool it? You've been out all night - God knows where - probably shackled up in some seedy hotel with your piece of strumpet. I wonder you have the gall even to come back.

TIM

That's enough!

JEAN

No it's not. I haven't even started. Don't think you can have some little fling with one of your church members and then expect me to shut up after two sentences - like some pathetic mouse of a wife.

TIM

I was not with her.

JEAN

Oh, not with her? Not with who, Tim? Doesn't she have a name? Who weren't you with?

TIM

You know who I mean?

JEAN

Oh yes. Her. Kathy. Dear Kathy. Poor bereaved Kathy who needs so much pastoral support. The Kathy you would have me welcome like a member of the family. I know that Kathy. Kathy the slut. Tell me this: do you counsel all your women church members with their bras off?

TIM

That doesn't even deserve a reply.

JEAN
(*Contemptuous pause*)
Hmmm! So where were you?

TIM
I've not been with her.

JEAN
It was cold last night. You must have been somewhere.

TIM
I walked. I spent the night walking and thinking. I haven't slept at all.

JEAN
What do you want? Sympathy? Am I meant to make you hot chocolate and tuck you up in bed?

TIM
I don't want your sympathy.

JEAN
And you won't get it. Never again.

TIM
I seldom ever did. That was part of the problem.

JEAN
Yes! You think that's a true statement? Some feeble excuse to make it my fault?

TIM
Our relationship has been bad for a long time.

JEAN
Do you love her? Sorry! I mean - do you think you love her?

TIM
I don't wish to discuss that.

JEAN
Is she good in the sack? Does she do it how you like it?

TIM
She does it a damn sight better than you ever did!

JEAN
My God! And what is that supposed to mean? Just because you didn't always get your way you choose to wreck your family and tear up your career?

TIM
It means that I reached breaking point.

JEAN
Meaning...?

TIM
Meaning that our ... intimate life ..

JEAN
Sex life!

TIM
Yes, sex life, almost wasn't. For eighteen years - once a month if I was lucky! Once a month, when you might just feel randy. But touch you below the waist? Oh no. Have you enjoy touching my ... ?

JEAN
Stop it! Stop that, you hear? You're just being crude.

TIM
And that's the point. For you, sex - even within marriage - is just crude. Dirty. You know what? The best part of my life has gone by, when I have been at my most virile and potent, and instead of you being a partner and companion in intimacy, the bed has been a battle field and sex a no-go area. And I couldn't take that any longer. For eighteen years!

JEAN
There's more to marriage than sex.

TIM
Oh yes, but that's a part of it. An important part. And even so-called spiritual men need it.

JEAN
Yes - well your needs have been different from mine.

TIM
Evidently!

JEAN
And your slut met them. You disgust me.

TIM
She is not a slut. And she knows more about giving and loving than you ever did.

JEAN
Oh - you don't say. And has she spent as many years as I have, raising your family, keeping your house, defending you from the snide attacks of your church members - attacks you barely ever knew about because I warded them off? And all the time being the obedient, perfect wife in front of your admirers?

The door opens and in walks BECKY.

BECKY

Hi Mom! Hi Dad! I'm glad you're both here.

JEAN

Your father and I are talking.

BECKY

Oh - that can wait. Guess who I've brought to see you?

JEAN and TIM look bewildered.

BECKY (cont'd)

It's Vince. My new boy friend. I've brought him to meet you - just like you suggested.

TIM

This is not a good time ...

BECKY

Come on in, Vince. They're both here!

Enter VINCE, looking very shy. He stands just inside the door.

BECKY (cont'd)

This is Vince. My Mom, my Dad.

TIM

Hi Vince. Come on in. I've been waiting to meet you.

VINCE

(Acknowledging both parents)

Hello!

JEAN

Becky, if you'll excuse me, I need to make a call.

JEAN exits.

BECKY

But the phone's in here.

TIM

I think she means the call of nature.

VINCE

Funny. That's how we met. Well, on our first date.

TIM

Er - yes?

BECKY

Vince. Shut it!

VINCE

Yea - we were obeying the call of nature as well.

BECKY

What he means is that ...

TIM

I think I get it! No need to explain.

VINCE

This must be about the worst opening conversation I ever had. I'm, I'm sorry, Sir.

TIM

Don't worry son. It's a lot more fun that the one I was just having.

BECKY

What was it about, Dad?

TIM

I think that'll have to wait for another time. Hey - sit down Vince. Tell me where you're from.

BECKY

You don't need to interrogate him Dad.

TIM

I wasn't going to.

JEAN re-enters, having wiped her eyes and quickly brushed her hair. After a few moments she begins to clear up Tim's things back into the box. He can do nothing about it.

BECKY

You just say Hi! when you meet people. You don't have to say much.

TIM

Have you ever known me not say much?

VINCE

I think you were terrific last Sunday, Sir.

TIM

Terri fi c?

VINCE
Yes - up there in the pulpit. Becky brought me to church.

BECKY
We sat at the back.

VINCE
The first time I ever went to church.

TIM
And how was it?

VINCE
Most of it was kinda strange - since I'm not used to it. I liked the singing, but I didn't know the songs. And your talk was fantastic. I never heard anyone explain things like you do.

BECKY
My dad's the best!

TIM
All the time?

BECKY
Well, not ALL the time. You know.

TIM
(Laughs)
Oh yes. I know. I'm not the best all the time, am I Jean?

JEAN
Whatever you say. Look, do you two have plans for today?

BECKY
No - we were just going to have coffee and hang out and meet some of the gang. Might go to a movie later.

JEAN
Well don't forget you have homework. Are you still at school, Vince?

VINCE
Er - no. I have a job. At the supermarket.

JEAN
On the checkout? Or stacking shelves?

BECKY
Mom, later. I'll tell you later. He has a car. So you don't have to worry about me getting home.

JEAN

I'm sure I don't have to worry about any of you getting home.

BECKY

Thanks, Mom. Bye. C'mon Vince. Let's be off.

VINCE

Okay. See ya later.

TIM

Bye!

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2

DAVE and MARJORIE are at home looking very tense. DAVE paces the room

MARJORIE

She said she'd be here at six. She's always punctual. Just stop pacing around.

DAVE

I don't know how to tell her.

MARJORIE

The Lord will give you the words. You'll see.

A knock at the door.

MARJORIE (cont'd)

That'll be her. Try not to be too overbearing. She's still grieving the loss of her father.

DAVE

(Opening the door. KATHY steps in.)

Hello, Kathy. Please come in.

MARJORIE

Yes, thank you for coming by to see us.

KATHY

No probs. I always wondered what your home would be like.

MARJORIE

Won't you sit down. We can have some coffee soon.

DAVE

Shall I take your coat? Er - yes. Please do sit down.

KATHY

All sounds terribly mysterious! I hope everything's all right.

DAVE

We would like to think that, too. But we don't know.

MARJORIE

That's why we invited you round.

KATHY

Oh! I see.

MARJORIE

We want you to know that you are with friends.

KATHY

I, I know that.

MARJORIE

We are your friends.

KATHY

What is this about?

DAVE

Kathy, this is not easy for us; for Marjorie and me.

MARJORIE

We're the only ones who know.

KATHY

Know what?

MARJORIE

You'd better tell her David.

KATHY

I guess I'm ready.

DAVE

We - er, had a phone call early this morning.

KATHY

Yes?

DAVE

It was from Carl.

MARJORIE

Your husband.

KATHY

I do know that bit.

DAVE

He sounded in deep trouble. Like he had a terrible shock.

KATHY

Oh dear.

DAVE

You know?

KATHY

I didn't know he'd called you. But we have had a dreadful fight.

DAVE

Do you want to tell me about it?

KATHY

I don't think it's any of your business.

DAVE

If what he tells me is true, then it is my business. It's the business of the whole church.

KATHY

What did he tell you?

DAVE

That you came home very late last night and appeared to be quite upset. And in the middle of the night he got up and with some sort of impulse or instinct apparently looked in your purse.

KATHY

Husbands do that.

DAVE

Yes - and found some correspondence that had passed between you and the pastor.

Silence from KATHY.

DAVE (cont' d)

Is this true?

KATHY

(Pause. Then very quietly)

Yes.

DAVE

It was no ordinary correspondence. Not the sort that normally passes between a pastor and ...

KATHY

I know what it was like, better than you. Have you read it?

DAVE

No. Carl just told me ..

KATHY

That's what we call hearsay. You don't know what the letters said.

DAVE

Kathy - this is pointless stalling. By all accounts there is something of an affair going on between you and Mr. Foster. Is it true that you've slept together?

KATHY

We have never slept together. He lives at home with his wife.

DAVE

You're being very silly. You know what I meant. You've had sex with Mr. Foster.

KATHY

(Her mouth begins to pucker)
And what if I have?

DAVE

Then - then we have a problem. A very big problem.

KATHY

Why can't it just be between him and me?

DAVE

Because he's meant to be a man of God, not an adulterer. He holds the trust of the whole church. Well - did. He has forfeited that now. He, and you have, defiled your commitment to Christ and brought contempt upon this fellowship.

KATHY

But who knows? If nobody knows ...?

DAVE

Kathy, I may be new at my job of deacon, but let me tell you what's going to happen.

DAVE (cont' d)

Unless there is quick and deep repentance from you and the pastor, and an assurance that this is totally and utterly over, you'll both get disciplined by the church.

(MORE)

DAVE (cont' d)

For you, that may not be very much - except probably more public exposure and pressure than you could bear. But you will forever be the hussy who contributed to the downfall of our pastor. At least you can go back to your job and maybe, with luck, your husband. But for him this means the end of his time here as pastor. It means a career tarnished, if not wrecked. It means the newspapers will have a field day spreading every last detail they can get across the front pages. There is then nowhere he can go. No other church will have him - at least not until he has served out a long and humiliating time away from the gaze of public scrutiny. And last, but not least, this sort of thing brings contempt upon the church from an unbelieving world that never did have a very high opinion of ministers nor the things they teach.

MARJORIE

David, take it easy.

KATHY

No - I understand. Did you know that Tim - the Pastor - spent some time with my Dad trying to bring him to the Lord?

DAVE

And did he succeed?

KATHY

(Very broken)

No. Not that I know of. No ..

DAVE

You need to repent, Kathy. You need to turn back to the Lord. You will have to shake this man out of your heart and out of your life.

KATHY begins to cry. MARJORIE watches with pained helplessness.

DAVE (cont' d)

How long has it been going on?

KATHY

A month. Four or five weeks - that's all.

DAVE

How many times have you - slept ..

MARJORIE

Oh for Pete's sake!

KATHY

About five times. That's all.

DAVE

Where?

KATHY
What?

DAVE
Where did you do it?

MARJORIE
Why do you need to know that?

DAVE
I need to know. Where did you do it? At your house - at his -
in some hotel?

MARJORIE
I can't see that this is our business.

KATHY
(With some defiance)
I'll tell you where we did it!

KATHY (cont' d)
At my home, in the park at night. And in the church - okay? -
in his office, on the floor by his desk. But please, leave
him alone. He's a good man. Nobody knows just how much he's
had to go through. He needed me.

DAVE
Oh, please!

KATHY
You make me feel so cheap.

DAVE
It was sin. Sin before God, and man and this church. It is
sin that you need to repent of. And before this hour is
through we need to hear that contrition from you or I dread
to think how this will escalate when it has to be dealt with
by the whole church membership.

KATHY
(Very scared)
You wouldn't tell the whole church? Would you?

DAVE
(More gently now)
If your heart changes, and you come to realize, truly, how
sinful and wicked you've been it may not - I only say may -
not come to that. But if not - they're all going to know. And
they will discipline you. It can be very ugly.

KATHY
You - you - surely you can't do that to me.

MARJORIE

Kathy my dear, you've done it to yourself.

KATHY

(Now crying)

I wish my dad was here. He'd understand. He'd understand ...

Fade to black.

SCENE 3

There is a single pool of light, back center.

Slowly all characters except TIM begin to enter from the sides, silhouetted. They mix, mingle, chat in lowered tones, and slowly assemble into two blocks, downstage, but facing upstage. They are ready for the preaker. One of them begins to clap, slowly. The others pick up the slow rhythm, getting louder until eventually TIM enters, upstage, into the pool of light. He is dressed in a business suit and tie, carries a Bible and a sheet of notes. He wears no pants. The clapping subsides.

TIM

(He feels very awkward)

Good morning everyone. It seems like months since I was last here in this pulpit. But here I am - back once more - as your pastor. So - let's make a start. We will worship together as we sing ...

He looks at his notes and sees a blank sheet.

The following text contains many overlapping speeches where much of the effect is in the overlap of rhythmic sound rather than the words. An upwards arrow-head indicates the point at which the next speech starts.

TIM is still searching hastily for the list of hymns but is intimidated by the swelling noise.

MARJORIE

(Softly)

We're going to sing, ^sing, sing ...

BECKY

We're going to sing ^a hymn, hymn, hymn ...

VINCE

I like the hymns to sing the hymns, ^to sing the hymns ...

MARJORIE

I know we sinned, sinned, sinned ^I know we sinned, sinned, sinned,

VINCE

Sing the hymns, sing the hymns, ^sing the hymns, sing the hymns, I like the hymns to sing the hymns

BECKY

Sing, sing, sing about the sin, sin, sin, ^we like to sing about the sin

JEAN

We like the hymns about the sins, we like to ^sing about our sins

BECKY

Sing, sing, ^si ng

MARJORIE

(A hiss which she sustains)

Sssssss

VINCE

(Drifting into a hiss)

Sin, sin, ssssss.....

ALL

(Very softly hiss)

Sssss

DAVE

(Calling out above the hiss)

Did you choose the hymns?

Total silence

TIM

Er - yes. Wait a minute. I know I had some. I remember. They must be here somewhere. I - er. No. Maybe I forgot.

DAVE

We need the music for the hymns. He hasn't chosen the hymns.
We have no music.....

KATHY

(as an echo)

Have no music

AARON

(another echo)

Have no music for the hymns.

TIM

Well, that's fine because, although we could sing anyway -
without music - I do have an address ready. Yes. Maybe we can
get straight to that.

DAVE

Hypocrite!

MARJORIE

We usually pray before you preach.

KATHY

We always pray ^ pastor.

JEAN

Yes - lead us in prayer.

MARJORIE

Lead us to the throne of grace

JEAN

Before the face of God

MARJORIE

Where we erase our sins.

JEAN

Before the face of God.

BECKY

Yes! Teach us ^how to pray.

VINCE

Teach us how to pray. I don't yet know how to pray.
(A beat)

TIM

That's it. We don't know how to pray. You're quite right. We
all assume it's so easy to get in touch with God.

(MORE)

TIM (cont' d)
But really ... we don't know how to pray. None of us do. Like
it says in, um. Like Paul says in, er,

*Begins hunting through his Bible. A
beat.*

JEAN
Does anyone know what this man did?

TIM
Corinthians - Is that one or two?

More frantic hunting

AARON
Are you sure it's in the Bible?

TIM
Oh, yes. I'm quite sure. "We do not know how to pray as we
ought." I'll find it - just a moment.

DAVE
Romans 8:26. You should know that!

TIM
Yes. Of course. I do. Well that's why we're not going ^ to
pray.

JEAN
I said, does anyone know what he did?

KATHY
I know what he did. He did it in love.

JEAN

*All look sharply at Kathy for a moment.
Then a crescendo of voices ...*

DAVE
He did it in scorn.

MARJORIE
He did it in lust.

JEAN
He did it in depression.

BECKY
He did it with my friend.

DAVE
(shouting)
He did it in defiance of his sacred trust!

TIM
Stop! Just stop it will you. Everybody did it. So what's new?
King Solomon did it - a lot. And David! Dear David - the
sweet psalmist of Israel. He did it. And he prayed.

DAVE
And repented! Unlike YOU!

MARJORIE
(A beat)
You don't pray, do you? You can't pray.

TIM
Well, that's the thing. You see, there may not be anyone
there to pray to.

JEAN
(Pause)
This is a church. We pray in church.

AARON
How long is it since you prayed, Tim?

TIM
I - don't pray ... these days. Not any longer.

AARON
And you want to be their pastor?

TIM
They asked me back. They know what happened. They love me.

KATHY
You think they still love you?

TIM
Yes - they do. I am their pastor.

JEAN
And you are my husband but I'm not sure if I love you any
more.

TIM
No, but that's because ..

MARJORIE
(Spitting out the words)
Because what - Pastor?

TIM
Because ... er. Well, look, that doesn't matter right now.
Let me, yes let me just get to my sermon. I do have a sermon.
(MORE)

TIM (cont' d)
I've been thinking a lot recently and I have some important things to share with you.

He opens his notes. The page is blank.

TIM (cont' d)
The, er, my notes are ... It seems like the words have fallen off the page.

AARON
I don't think you have anything to say to these people. Not any longer. You don't belong here.

VINCE
Do you have a message from God, Pastor?

DAVE
He has no sermon. The man is an empty, dried up husk.

MARJORIE
A shell.

TIM
I do. I have lots to say. It's all become clear to me. It's just I can't recall ..

KATHY
He's losing it.

DAVE
He's lost it.

JEAN
He lost it a long time ago.

KATHY
Have you lost it, Tim?

TIM
No - I haven't. It's just that ..

He starts scrambling through pages of the Bible again.

TIM (cont' d)
I have a text, here, somewhere -

DAVE
This man fucked someone else's wife!

All react. They then see TIM as he is - exposed. They point in horror at his unclothed parts.

DAVE (cont' d)

He's out of here. He's a disgrace. He has to go. Now!

DAVE begins to advance on TIM as others speak. He rips a sleeve from Tim's jacket and moves away. As the others speak they all approach him, slowly at first, and then faster, ripping at his clothes. Only KATHY does not move. She is downstage, center, facing up.

JEAN

He'll have to go. Everyone knows.

TIM

You folks don't understand. You could be free from all this.

MARJORIE

We are free. If the truth shall set you free you shall be free indeed. You are a slave to your lusts.

BECKY

Yes - we're free. You're the one who should be in jail.

DAVE

Christ sets people free. But you will need more than repentance.

TIM

No, he doesn't. He just lays down rules, more rules than ever before.

BECKY

Like the rules at home! Rules he made, but rules he never kept himself.

TIM

And every rule broken is another sin to be repented of. You folks are never free of repenting. You are always repenting ...

DAVE

Hypocrite! Liar!

TIM

.. never fully believing; scared to death to be not sure.

KATHY

Repentance is the way to life. You said it.

AARON

Not for me, Baby. Not for me.

TIM

You have never found your own inner maturity. Something that's NOT defined by the Bible, or the expectations of others.

AARON

You tell'em Tim

MARJORIE

Apostate! Deviant
from the truth!

TIM (cont' d)

Listen to me. Listen!

JEAN

He has to go!

VINCE

Take him away!

TIM (cont' d)

You can't imagine that people can actually be fulfilled, and have purpose and peace without faith in Christ.

AARON

Hey - you caught on.

KATHY

My husband says he'll kill him. When you least expect it, he will kill him

DAVE

He'll be doing us a favor!

JEAN

Strip him!

VINCE

Break him!

MARJORIE

Leave him naked!

VINCE

Hang him out for all to see.

DAVE

He's no pastor.

BECKY

He's no father.

KATHY

My husband says he'll do it. Says he'll kill the cheating bastard.

TIM

Don't listen to his ravings. The police will detain him. But I'm your friend as a man; not some exalted pulpit-shaped unreal, unreachable, saint. I'm an ordinary guy, like you.

TIM is now stripped of all except underpants. They all begin to shrink away from him, slowly circling him as he moves forward. KATHY has still not moved.

VINCE

You're not like us. You're exposed. Naked. Contemptible.

TIM

Yes, I am. A broken guy, a failure. And big enough to be able to admit it. Hey, Dave - It's just me, Tim.

Extends his hand. It is refused.

DAVE

(Turning away)

You're not like us any more. You're worse than the ordinary sinner. You've returned like a swine to the mire.

DAVE slowly exits.

TIM

(To MARJORIE)

Marjorie, you used to love me.

MARJORIE

I loved a man I once knew called Tim Foster. He was my pastor. I don't know him any more.

MARJORIE slowly exits.

JEAN

It seems like we are the ones who changed, not you. Have you looked in a mirror recently?

TIM

Jean. Still my wife?

JEAN

No. Not any more.

Exit JEAN, slowly.

TIM

(To VINCE)

Vince, you admired me so much just a few weeks ago.

(MORE)

TIM (cont' d)
I want to spare you this, this unreal, blinkered faith
existence which actually doesn't work.

VINCE
(Shrinking back)
You're not the man Becky told me about; the man who was
helping me out of my pointless, miserable, teenage years. He
must be somewhere else.

EXIT VINCE.

TIM
Becky, where's Becky? BECKY? Where are you Becky?

BECKY
(Coming forward)
I'm here.

TIM
Becky, you still know and love your old Dad, don't you?

BECKY
He left our family. Mom said he got a floosie. He went away.
I don't know where he went.

EXIT BECKY.

TIM
(Seeing Kathy - and going to her)
Oh Kathy - you're still here. You're all I have left.

*KATHY goes up to TIM He takes her hand
and they embrace. AARON watches from a
distance.*

TIM (cont' d)
God - how much I love you. You're the only thing left to me.

KATHY
I might be. But I don't know if you want me any more.

TIM
What do you mean? I'll always love you and want you.

KATHY
I know. I want you too. But I'm not the same. You don't know
what they did to me.

TIM
Yes I do. I know what they do in the name of love and
discipline. It's ugly and cruel.

KATHY

They broke me and crushed me to pieces. I really don't think you will want me when you know what they did.

TIM

(Still embracing her)

I will love you forever whatever they did.

KATHY backs off from him and makes him see her in clear light. TIM reacts with slow horror and then revulsion. Slowly KATHY turns front before making her exit. She wears a horrible disfiguring mask.

KATHY

Good bye, Tim

TIM

(An anguished cry)

Kathy!

EXIT KATHY.

AARON

(Long pause)

So where is your flock?

TIM

They all forsook me and fled.

AARON

Just like the disciples of Jesus before the crucifixion.

TIM

And they've crucified me.

AARON

You'll get over it. Give it three days. You'll see.

TIM

No. From this hell there is no resurrection.

Blackout.

SCENE 4

VINCE and BECKY in the park. They have sodas.

VINCE

So you saw Kathy?

BECKY
Yes. At the gym

VINCE
What happened? I mean, what did she say?

BECKY
Not much. Just Hi!

VINCE
Didn't you talk to her?

BECKY
No way. I hate her now. She brought my dad down. She was fucking with my father!

VINCE
Well my father also did it with someone else.

BECKY
And did it cause major social havoc in the largest church in town? I don't think so!

VINCE
It wasn't just her fault. Don't you blame him as well?

BECKY
Yes, I do. But he's my dad. I can't trade him in very easily. Like it or not, I'm stuck with him. But Kathy? Tcha! She's expendable. I can find more friends better than her.

VINCE
(Pause)
I liked your dad.

BECKY
You got any cigarettes?

VINCE
I'm trying to stop.

BECKY
Oh for Christ's sake. You could carry them for me.

VINCE
What? And encourage you?

BECKY drinks her soda.

VINCE (cont' d)
(Pause)
Did he have to resign?

This makes BECKY splutter slightly.

BECKY

Now look what you've done!

VINCE

Sorry. Well did he?

BECKY

Yes! I told you. If he hadn't they would've thrown him out. That church meeting was bad enough anyway.

VINCE

You weren't there?

BECKY

No - course not. But I know they dragged out all the gory details.

VINCE

Do you think it was just about sex?

BECKY

I don't know. Nobody will really tell me. Mom goes all quiet when I ask her Why? She says maybe one day I'll understand.

VINCE

Not very helpful.

BECKY

Well I'm not a kid.

VINCE

You're not old enough to drink in a bar.

BECKY

That never stopped me. I told you, I'm not a kid!

Another pause. VINCE drinks his soda

BECKY (cont' d)

Vince - do you think we're ready to get married?

VINCE splutters explosively. BECKY breaks into peals of laughter.

BECKY (cont' d)

I caught you then.

VINCE

You pig!

BLACKOUT

SCENE 5

The HARMAN's home, six weeks later. It is morning.

MARJORIE

Well all I can say is thank God it didn't hit the press. They would've had a field day.

JEAN

Thanks for being such a tower of strength. I don't know what I'd have done without you.

MARJORIE

So you're going to collect him up from the station this afternoon?

JEAN

Yes. I'm a bit apprehensive about it. He sounded okay on the phone, but he's always been good at putting on a brave face.

MARJORIE

Until lately!

JEAN

All right. That was the exception. It was a nasty breakdown. The doctors said he was quite suicidal when they found him wandering in the town.

MARJORIE

Just got him in the nick of time.

JEAN

I think God was watching over him, even in the very worst of it.

MARJORIE

I'm sure of it. He never forsakes his own, you know.

JEAN

I hope you're right.

MARJORIE

Do you have any idea what state of mind he's in now?

JEAN

We'll have to wait and see.

MARJORIE

But what about you two - as a couple? You're not going to leave him are you?

JEAN

I could. I could do with a fresh start. But I married him for life - for better for worse. So I guess I'll just hang on in there.

MARJORIE

But where will you go? I mean what will you do now?

JEAN

I can get a job. Probably some book-keeping for a small business; or secretarial work. But I don't know what he'll do. I mean - what can he do? He doesn't know anything else. You don't see preaching jobs advertised at the Job Center.

MARJORIE

But he's so capable. There's lots he could do.

JEAN

Theoretically. But as he said to me on the phone, what's on his resumé? Who wants to take on a man who's only job was to be a Baptist minister for eighteen years? And a failed one at that?

MARJORIE

He was good until the end.

JEAN

And that qualifies him for what? No - I don't know what he's going to do next. I don't even know where we're going to live. We've had offers of places to stay. But somewhere we need the space to try and re-build our lives.

She begins to get weepy.

MARJORIE

My dear, I'm so sorry.

JEAN

(Through her tears)

And Becky. What will become of Becky? She was always sparring with her father. Now she just seems to reject him. She smokes. I just don't know what she does with that boy Vince. She cuts school more than I think we know. Her grades are poor. All I see is her becoming a teenage mother living off welfare. I'm at the end of knowing what to do with her.

MARJORIE

It'll be all right. Kids work through it you know. You just have to be patient.

JEAN

I don't know if I have the patience any more.

Lights fade to black.

SCENE 6

Saturday afternoon. TIM is pacing up and down in the park. Then he sees someone coming and goes over to greet DAVE as he enters.

TIM
(*Extends a hand*)
Good to see you Dave.

DAVE
I have known better occasions.

TIM
Yeah - I know. But time moves on. How's Marjorie?

DAVE
Fine. Just fine. She spends a lot of time with Jean, trying to help.

TIM
Yes - so I believe. Very good of her.

DAVE
Look, I don't want to beat around the bush but ...

TIM
If you'll forgive the pun - you seem to have done quite a lot of that!

He laughs at his own joke and Dave's discomfort.

DAVE
That was very crude.

TIM
Isn't that what you now expect from me?

DAVE
I have a very simple mission. I need to know whether there's any repentance in your heart--for all you've done.

TIM
And what will you do with the information when you have it?

DAVE
Report it to the deacons. We still feel a responsibility for your soul.

TIM

Very kind of you - but I resigned.

DAVE

Yes, but that doesn't quite excuse you from the sanctions of the church.

TIM

Well I'm sure that's what you think. But now there's a thousand miles between me and the church. And I'm discovering that the world out there is a wonderful place.

DAVE

You've lost your faith. I'm so sorry.

TIM

But I didn't lose my faith. I stopped believing. That's quite different.

DAVE

Being clever with words again?

TIM

The things I once believed are no longer believable. I no longer think they're true.

DAVE

That's just self-deception; a psychological convenience to mask the sin of your adultery.

TIM

On the contrary. I know what I did. And I deeply regret the pain it's caused you and Marjorie - indeed the whole church. And I regret the pain to Jean and Becky. Especially Becky.

DAVE

Regret is not the same as repentance. Are you repentant before God? Have you sought forgiveness from the Savior?

TIM

Listen - you need to get this. And I'm sorry if I sound testy about it - but I still get agitated quite easily.

DAVE

Go on.

TIM

If, and I stress, if; IF, I thought that the God I used to believe in was actually real, that people really do go to hell, for not believing in Jesus, then I would be a candidate for the repentance you speak of. But you know what? My eyes have opened. I have been dis-illuminated. I've shed the illusions I had when I was your pastor.

(MORE)

TIM (cont' d)

The apostle Paul said, 'When I was a child I talked like a child, thought like a child, reasoned like a child. But now I have put aside childish things.'

DAVE

That's not how Paul meant it!

TIM

I know that. But this is how I care to quote him. I have become a man. And I'm so relieved that I no longer have to compartmentalize ordinary, decent people into sinners and saints. I no longer have the arrogance to believe that Christians are the only ones who are right. It is totally liberating! I don't know where it all goes to - but I'm going to have such fun finding out!

DAVE

This doesn't sound like a fallen believer returning to the fold.

TIM

Right. It doesn't. I'm sorry to deprive you of the tears of joy you would wish to weep when I come crawling back. But now I'm moving on.

DAVE

Very well. I understand. I shall make my report.

TIM

Fine. But I doubt you understand.

DAVE

And one last thing.

TIM

Yes?

DAVE

You know my number. If ever you want to talk, one month, one year, ten years down the line, I'll be there. Waiting.

TIM

(Taking Dave's hand)

Now that, I believe, is true. That was your heart speaking! Goodbye. And thank you.

DAVE

Goodbye, Tim

*He turns and leaves. As he does so
AARON steps out from behind a tree.*

AARON

Very good. Looks like you made it.

TIM

(Not appearing to see him)
Yes I did. But you were wrong about the days.

AARON

The days?

TIM

You said three days to my resurrection. Well it's been just over six weeks.

AARON

It was a metaphor.

TIM

And the scars have not healed.

AARON

They'll be there for life. Deep inside. The pain will never totally go.

TIM

You can go now.

AARON

Probably. Tell me - did you ever finish Thomas Paine?

TIM

(Chuckles)
Yes, I did. But not until after my resignation - when I went down to that morbid clinic with all those other psychos!

AARON

And?

TIM

The seeds of doubt had been there long before. You have helped me shake free from the burden of an unworkable faith.

AARON

And not your little fling with Kathy?

TIM

(Laughs)
I'll tell you this. Without the crisis that precipitated I might still be back there, like many another pastor, preaching what I only half believe, with no idea how to get out or where to go next.

AARON

Between us we forced your hand!

TIM
Looks like it. I can't thank you enough for that.

AARON
Hey - I'm only that other part of yourself whom you always refused to recognize. I am you.

TIM
(Pause)
Would you mind going now?

AARON
I would - but you're the one who keeps me alive in your mind.

This makes TIM laugh.

AARON (cont'd)
But your wife is coming, so I'll leave you to it.

AARON disappears as swiftly as he came.

Enter JEAN

TIM
Hello.

JEAN
This is a strange way to meet ... in the park.

TIM
Well, we didn't talk much last night when I got home.

JEAN
And I didn't sleep much either.

TIM
I'm sorry. My feelings are still very numb. That's why I had to sleep in the guest room.

JEAN
So why the park? There are warmer places to talk. A coffee shop, perhaps?

TIM
I feel more free out here. This is where people just hang out.

JEAN
Now you sound like Becky.

TIM
Where is she?

JEAN

Actually, only just round the corner. She wanted to come too.

TIM

I don't want to talk about things with her.

JEAN

I agree with you on that. She's gone through enough for now. Vince is with her. They're getting popcorn, or something.

TIM

I love it. Popcorn in the park. Doesn't that sound like total relaxation and freedom? Hey - there they are! *(He waves)* Hey - Becky! Vince! We're over here.

JEAN

You may be overdoing it. She's not yet ready for your usual bonhomie.

TIM

If I want to be happy with my little girl I will.

Enter BECKY and VINCE at a brisk pace.

BECKY

Hi Dad.

TIM

Gimme a hug will you?

She goes to him, but her hug is not as enthusiastic as his.

TIM (cont'd)

It's great to see you again. Where've you been staying?

BECKY

Vince is here, too.

TIM

(Extends a hand)

Hi, Vince. Long time since we talked.

VINCE

Yes sir. A lot has happened since then.

BECKY

Vince don't stir it again.

VINCE

(Stammering a little)

I'm sorry! I - I didn't mean that. What I meant was that Becky and me -

TIM
(*In mock surprise*)
You're not getting married!

JEAN
Oh for goodness sake, Tim! Have some sense!

BECKY
No, Dad! Not that! Listen to him

VINCE
No sir. I mean that Becky and me - well we've been talking a lot about Christianity, and all that.

TIM
Yes - well I have a few things to say about that, too.

BECKY
Dad. Please will you listen. This is important.

TIM
Okay. I'm listening.

BECKY
Well I've stopped smoking. And I don't go to Mulligans any more.

TIM
That's good.

BECKY
Vince helped me. He's helped me lot.

TIM
Good. Good.

BECKY
And he wants to tell you the next bit himself.

TIM
All right!

VINCE
Okay. It's like this. I know you've gone through a really bad time, an' all. And I, Becky and me, we don't know much about all that. But just before you left I started coming to church.

TIM
Yes. I remember.

VINCE
Well - what you were preaching, about Jesus and sin and all that. About needing to be forgiven or we'd go to hell - ?

TIM

(About to interrupt)

Yes, but, I think,

JEAN

Let the boy finish!

VINCE

Yes. Let the boy finish! Thank you Mrs. Foster. See, we've been talking a lot about that and it now makes a lot of sense to me. So I've talked with the youth pastor and I'm going to be baptized - as a believer. I've been born again!

TIM

I - I'm speechless.

BECKY

That makes a change Dad. Aren't you pleased? We're so happy. All this horrible stuff has brought us closer together and I've started to pray and read my Bible again. And, ta-daa, no more smoking.

TIM

I really don't know what to say.
(He starts to cry)
Come here you crazy kids!

*He pulls them into a threesome embrace.
JEAN watches with discomfort.*

TIM (cont'd)

You know - this gives me some difficulty. But I've learnt that you just have to do what you have to do. And if this is right for you now, like when I was your age, then I'm glad.

BECKY

You will come and watch when they dunk him - ?

TIM

Dunk?

VINCE

Baptize.

TIM

That's very hard to know. The people might lynch me.

BECKY

No they won't. A few of the deacons might - but they're old fuddy-duddies. Most of the people love you and miss you.

JEAN

Hey Becky, your father and I need to talk.

BECKY

You want us to go?

JEAN

Just for while. What say we all have dinner at seven? Vince. You come too.

VINCE

Oh, great.

BECKY

C' mon then Vince. Race you to the boats.

VINCE

You're on. Bye Mr. Foster.

They race off stage.

JEAN

So what do you think about that?

TIM

I prefer not to say just now.

JEAN

Took your breath away?

TIM

I'll say.

JEAN

Look - I know you want to try and talk. And so do I. But I have to ask you one thing first. I need to know where things stand with - Kathy.

TIM

It's over.

JEAN

Completely?

TIM

Yes. I called her last week -

JEAN

You did what?!

TIM

Will you wait while I finish. I called her - admittedly for not very good reasons.

JEAN

You still love her.

TIM

It was not a complete flash in the pan. I can't help it. Now let me finish. She wouldn't talk to me.

JEAN

Well that's good. I expect Carl was there.

TIM

No he wasn't. All I know is ... they're going to try and get it together again. And she wants me to leave ... she wants everyone to leave them alone ... to get on with it.

JEAN

So Carl is not going to kill you after all?

TIM

I wouldn't put it past him to hurt Kathy if anything else ever happened.

JEAN

Well that's their sordid little problem. Now let's see where we are with ours.

TIM

You don't make this easy.

JEAN

No I don't. This is the hardest problem to fix and it'll have to be done properly.

TIM

Do you want to fix it?

JEAN

Yes - actually I do.

TIM

I see.

JEAN

I can see that you - no, never mind. That can wait.

TIM

It's okay. Say whatever you have to say.

JEAN

It would be nice if I could just hear the word Sorry.

TIM

I know. I can say it. But it goes far deeper than that.

JEAN

(Finding it hard to speak)

You've hurt us all so much. And ... before ... you launch into a tirade ... I know how much I have hurt you. I am truly so sorry for all those years of ... neglect. I .. just didn't realize what you needed. What it was doing to you.

TIM

It made me very bitter. So bitter I didn't care any longer.

JEAN

(Tearfully)

Yes, I think I know that. There have been some good people who've helped me to see that. I'm so very, very sorry.

TIM

(Quite affected)

Well, it's all water under the bridge now. We can't quite turn the clock back.

JEAN

We have to look ahead.

TIM

It's the future that counts.

JEAN

Do we have a future? I mean - what are we going to do? How will we survive? Have you thought about how we'll keep body and soul together?

TIM

We don't have much money. It's almost impossible to save for the future on a minister's salary.

JEAN

I can get a job.

TIM

I want you to try to understand that this started a long time ago.

JEAN

I know that.

TIM

No, not just the personal thing - between us. The belief thing. I've not been fully convinced about what I was preaching for about two years. I see the sham everywhere.

JEAN

Does that matter now?

TIM

Yes - it matters to me. As long as I can remember I've been shaped and defined by what I believed. My whole value as a man was derived from the belief that I was a sinner saved by Christ. Then I've been shaped and defined by the expectations of the public who see me up there as some godly figurehead who's undoubtedly closer to God than they will ever be.

JEAN

So?

TIM

So I had to fit the role. But now I have to start all over, discovering who I am. What am I really like now the structure's been taken away? Where will I go? What will I become? Do you understand?

JEAN

I think so.

TIM

It's the scariness of being totally free. A whole new adventure in life.

JEAN

Yes - very scary.

TIM

That's why so many people are more comfortable inside the snug security of a belief system - whether it's true or not. Like the Harmans; and now, it seems, Vince.

JEAN

Do we have to get into that again?

TIM

No. We don't. And I'm getting hungry.

JEAN

There's dinner at seven.

TIM

I know.

JEAN

So - you'd better start your big adventure. I happen not to share what you now believe - or don't believe in - as it seems. Over the years I learnt my faith from you. And I've always respected that - whatever else went wrong. You're the best teacher I have ever known. And whatever else has passed between us, you've always been, and still are, as dear to me as my own heart.

TIM
You didn't need to say that.

JEAN
Yes I did. Because, whatever has happened to us, and wherever you want to go now - into that big scary unknown freedom - I will come with you, if you want me to, that is.

TIM
(Moving forwards)
Thank you.

JEAN
Tim - it's very frightening. I can get a job and support us while you find your way. We'll manage somehow. We always do. I'll do it with you.

TIM does not see JEAN silently mouth the words "I love you".

TIM
I, I'm... having difficulty with all my words today. I know it cost a lot for you to say that. Maybe I'm not ready yet to respond.

He moves away from JEAN, forward, looking out into the distance.

TIM (cont' d)
But as I gaze at the fallen leaves, the smoke of autumn and the oncoming darkness of winter, something in my bones tells me that this is a journey I have to take - alone.

The action freezes. A beat, then lights slowly fade to black.

END OF PLAY.