

An Unforgiving Storm

A Play By

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## An Unforgiving Storm

### A Play Without Acts

THE LIGHTS COME UP on the common room in a turn of the century farmhouse. The back wall has two doors, a woodstove sitting between them. Through one door lies a simple barren kitchen. Through the other door is a bedroom. A cast iron bed with a quilt, a trunk, a baby's crib and a mirror are all that adorn it. The windows in both rooms are frosted over with ice.

The common room is larger; the Franklin stove the visual centerpiece. It sits out into the room, the long chimney pipe running back to the wall before climbing toward the ceiling. Two chairs are arranged around it, a low table between them. The walls, and the photos that hang on them are faded. Throughout the rest of the room is the accumulated debris of two families lives from before the turn of the century until the mid 1930's.

A winter storm rages outside, the wind blasting against the side of the old house, the wooden beams creaking and threatening to cave in.

It is 1934.

RACHEL, a lean women age thirty-eight, steps into the room from the kitchen. She goes to the stove and stokes the fire.

RACHEL

I don't remember my mother. Not really. I remember little things. Her hair was long. Dark. And straight like mine. I don't remember her face. I think she had brown eyes. I remember her hands. Worn and rough. Cracked from the sun and weather. Fingernails all worn down to the meat. And thin. Like bones. Kinda like mine. And her dress. I remember a dress, with faded flowers. Frayed at the bottom. But that's all. She died before I was five and my father died when I was six. I remember him. His shaggy face. The smell of whisky on his breath. Smackin' me around. Funny,

## RACHEL (CONT'D)

the things you remember. I always seem to save the things I'd rather throw away and forget the things I ought to hold onto. Like some confused miner throwin' rocks in the bin and tossin' the coal to the side. I remember nearly every day from the time my daddy died until right this minute, but I can't remember the first time I met my Tom. It's just a blank. Like a fog settled on that day and left all the other days sunny. Not that they was too pretty. They were dark days before I met Tom. Not a single day to make me smile. That I remember. The first time I remember smilin'. When Tom brought me home to the farm after the pastor hitched us in town. He helped me down out of the truck and pointed out at the house and the barn and the fields and he said "It ain't much, but whatever I got is yours." Nobody'd ever given me nothin'. He may have his faults, but he's a generous man. I been with a lot of men, some cause I wanted to, some cause I had to, some cause it was work and some just cause it seemed like the only thing to do, but Tom was the first real man I ever been with. First one who could really see me. First one who ever made me happy. Maybe 'cause he was the first one who ever wanted to. And I've tried to make him happy. I didn't know nothin' about farmin'. I'd been workin' in factories my whole life. Even when I made it out of the city I ended up in a barren minnin' town where you couldn'ta grown a potato if yer life depended on it. Course it did sometimes. But I learned. I learned all he could show me about farmin'. Plantin', tendin', harvestin', raisin' animals. Even learned to read. Tom's big on everybody readin' the Bible. Every last one of God's children ought to be able to read God's words, he says. So, every night after supper was done we'd sit by the lamp and he'd teach me to read. I didn't see much point in it. I'd made it through thirty years without known how to read and it seemed to me I'd make it just fine for whatever years I had left. But I learned, 'cause it made him happy. There was only one thing I couldn't do to make him happy. I couldn't bear him a child. My insides were messed up. Had been since I was a girl. Since I ran away from the city. We tried, but it didn't do no good. He minded, but he never said so. Said it wasn't my fault and there wasn't nothin' could be done about it. It was God's will. He's big on God's will. I never gave God much thought 'til I met my Tom. I never really believed in God. I believe in him now. I don't trust him, but I believe in him. God's will don't make no sense. None at all. After eight years of being married to Tom, I finally had a child. A girl. Amy. Sweetest little thing. Tom had wanted a boy, but he didn't care none once he saw her. Tom said she was God's gift. For all I'd been through and for all our years of waitin'. She was the only gift God's ever gonna give me though. Doctor said birthin' the baby messed my up insides even more than I already was. Said I was lucky my little girl didn't kill

## RACHEL (CONT'D)

me. Don't see how though. She was so frail. So small and skinny. I always thought babies was supposed to be plump and round. She was just this bony little thing with wide eyes and a head too big for her body. I was scared to hold her. I remember the months while she was growin' in my belly how I kept thinkin' she was so big, cause my belly was stickin' out further and further and gettin' all round and heavy. But when Doc Larson handed her to me she seemed so tiny. No bigger than a puppy. But beautiful. I kissed her and I swear she smiled. Still tasted salty. I couldn't taste nothin' salty for months with out thinkin' of that moment. I gave her my breast to suck on and she was so hungry. Her first meal. And this wave just went through me, and I was all flush and warm and full of life and I laughed and held her close and Tom bent down and kissed her forehead and held my hand and I don't think I've even been happier than right at that moment with my daughter at my breast and my man sittin' there beside me all smiles and kisses and tellin' me how much he loved me and how much he loved our new baby girl and I hope I don't ever forget that.

Rachel remains seated down stage as the kitchen door opens and two people enter. A young woman barely twenty and a man the same age. They are PAULINE and RICHARD.

It is now 1973.

She is wearing a well-worn overcoat with a green dress underneath while he is in jeans and a thick canvas jacket. Neither are dressed to be walking through the cold. Wedding rings can be seen on their fingers. They shake the snow from their clothes in small flurries as they stamp their feet.

RICHARD

Damn, it's cold!

PAULINE

Close the door.

Richard closes the door.

RICHARD

It's not any warmer in here.

Pauline steps through the kitchen and into the common room.

PAULINE  
At least we're out of the wind. We can build a fire.

RICHARD  
There's no wood.

PAULINE  
There's some out by the barn.

RICHARD  
I didn't see any.

PAULINE  
Under the big snowdrift.

RICHARD  
Everything's under a snow drift.

PAULINE  
On the front side of the barn nearest the house.

RICHARD  
I didn't see any wood.

PAULINE  
It's there. It's been there since I was a kid. I used to ride my bike out here to hide from my parents.

RICHARD  
That's how you knew where this was.

PAULINE  
It's been abandoned for years.

RICHARD  
Lucky for us we found it when we did.

PAULINE  
Do you have matches?

RICHARD  
I have a few.

PAULINE  
We should get a fire started.

RICHARD  
I'll go get the wood.

PAULINE  
I'll help you.

RICHARD

No. Stay here. You only have that thin coat. You're sure we can't walk?

PAULINE

It's too far. Miles yet. And there's nothing between here and town.

RICHARD

I could go and bring someone back.

PAULINE

You don't know the way. It'd be just my luck the one time we go to my parents for Christmas and you freeze to death in a snowdrift.

Richard considers this and then walks to the door.

RICHARD

I'll be back in a minute.

Richard pulls up his collar and walks through door to the outside, closing it quickly behind himself.

Pauline wanders around the room looking at the old knickknacks here and there. She examines the photos on the wall, picking up the bible that sits on the desk and blowing the dust off it. She flips through it and a faded old newspaper clipping falls out on to the floor. She bends over and picks it up. Pauline puts the bible down and holds up the clipping for closer examination. Picking the bible up again she turns to the front, examining the births and deaths register. Rachel walks toward Pauline.

RACHEL

Little Amy would have been eight months old come tomorrow mornin'. I had such dreams for her. All the dreams I never had for myself. All the things I'd never known to hope for when I was a girl. Pretty new dresses and shinny black shoes. Little ribbons for her hair. And flowers for her tiny hat. And toys on Christmas mornin'. And a cake for her birthday. And all those little things that children are suppose to have. Not that we were likely to afford any of it now anyway. Not since the crash. Not since this last year. Not since this storm started. All the animals sold

RACHEL (CONT'D)

off or dead. All our savings gone. Not a scrap of food to eat for seven days and no sign of when God might see fit to let up his blizzard and let folks live.

Richard comes through the kitchen door with an armful of snow covered wood.

PAULINE

Strange.

RICHARD

What's strange?

Richard carries the wood into the common room and sits it by the woodstove. As he does so, Rachel walks into the bedroom, disappearing from sight.

PAULINE

I never knew they had a child.

Richard begins building a fire in the stove, using bits and scraps of paper lying about.

RICHARD

Who?

PAULINE

The people who lived here.

RICHARD

Why is that strange?

PAULINE

I spent so much time here I would have thought....

RICHARD

You probably spent all your time daydreaming.

PAULINE

Probably. I'd come here in the summer and write stories in my journal.

Pauline puts the bible down.

RICHARD

What kind of stories?

PAULINE

What kind of stories are there?

RICHARD  
Like the ones you write now?

PAULINE  
Yes. Not that you'd know.

RICHARD  
Do we need to start that again?

PAULINE  
You brought it up.

RICHARD  
I was trying to be polite.

PAULINE  
Then why don't you read my stories sometime?

RICHARD  
I don't have the time and you know it.

PAULINE  
They don't take much time to read, Richard. That's why they call them short stories.

RICHARD  
I'm workin' two jobs and night school. What do you want from me?

PAULINE  
Some interest in something that's important to me.

RICHARD  
I am interested. That's why I asked. I just don't have the time to...Shit!

PAULINE  
What?

RICHARD  
That's the last match. Lucky it started.

As Richard closes the door to the woodstove the fire begins to smoke.

PAULINE  
You have to open the flew.

RICHARD  
The what?



Pauline walks over and opens the flew on the chimney pipe. She smiles at Richard and then kisses him.

PAULINE

I'm sorry I picked a fight.

RICHARD

It's all right. You're just cold.

PAULINE

Thank you for building the fire.

Richard breaks away from Pauline.

RICHARD

All those years camping with the old man finally paid off. You know, your family will be worried when we don't show up.

PAULINE

They'll worry, but all they can do is wait. We can dig ourselves out when the storm stops.

RICHARD

Whenever that is. Could be hours.

Richard looks out the window at the storm.

PAULINE

What do you want to do while we wait?

He turns back to Pauline.

RICHARD

We could play cards.

PAULINE

You have a deck of cards?

RICHARD

Solitaire and Christmas are inseparable in my family. My mom and dad and I all played on TV trays in front of the Christmas tree.

PAULINE

I only know crazy eights.

RICHARD

I remember that one.

They sit in the chairs and pull the small table between them and begin to play cards.

PAULINE  
What'd you get me for Christmas?

RICHARD  
I can't tell you that.

PAULINE  
We might be trapped in this storm all night. We might miss opening the presents.

RICHARD  
Your folks won't open the presents without us.

PAULINE  
Wouldn't hurt to tell me.

RICHARD  
Takes the surprise out of it.

PAULINE  
You know I hate surprises.

RICHARD  
You hate being surprised by presents you don't like. You'll like this one.

PAULINE  
So it's one present?

RICHARD  
You wanted two?

PAULINE  
I'll tell you what I got you.

RICHARD  
Go right ahead. You know I hate Christmas.

PAULINE  
You said you and your parents played cards together on Christmas.

RICHARD  
Because we couldn't afford to do anything else. And then after they died, there was no Christmas.

PAULINE  
None of your relatives had you over for Christmas?

RICHARD

I was sixteen. Old enough to be on my own. And none of them cared much. Which is fine. I didn't care much about them either.

PAULINE

I always wanted Christmas to be something special, but it never really was. Or is. You know what dad's like. Always drunk before the turkey is finished. Trying to redecorate the tree.

RICHARD

Makes you wonder why we bother with Christmas at all.

Richard places his last card down.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I win.

PAULINE

Damn.

Richard reaches in his jacket pocket for a pack of cigarettes, but as he pulls it out a small silver flask falls on the floor.

RICHARD

Just lucky.

PAULINE

What's that?

Richard hastily picks up the flask and stuffs it back in his pocket.

RICHARD

You know damn well what it is.

PAULINE

What are you doing with it in your jacket?

RICHARD

Just leave it.

PAULINE

If you can't leave it why should I?.

RICHARD

It's just a little somethin' to keep me warm.

PAULINE

Did you see me bringing whiskey to stay warm?

RICHARD

You're welcome to have a swig if you want.

PAULINE

I thought we had an agreement?

RICHARD

We do. This doesn't count as drinkin'.

PAULINE

A flask in your jacket doesn't count as drinking? How do you figure that?

RICHARD

It's just a little sip now and then.

PAULINE

Little sips of whiskey all day long is drinkin'. No whiskey is not drinkin'.

RICHARD

Like there isn't going to be alcohol at your parent's house.

PAULINE

My father drinks beer, my mother drinks schnapps. You hate beer and schnapps.

RICHARD

It's just a little sip now and then to take the edge off.

PAULINE

Take the edge off of what?

RICHARD

Off of you.

PAULINE

So, I'm the reason you're an alcoholic. Is that what you mean?

RICHARD

No, that's not what I mean.

PAULINE

Then just what do you mean?

RICHARD

I'm under a lot of stress. What with work and trying to finish mechanics school. I just need something to help me relax every now and again.

PAULINE

And I make it hard for you to relax?

RICHARD

Yes... I mean no. I mean I always feel like your judgin' me.

PAULINE

I'm not judging you.

RICHARD

Oh yes you are. I can feel it on my back when I'm not even looking at you. It's like a thick coat of oil covering everything you say.

PAULINE

You deserve judgment, but it won't be me that lays it on you.

RICHARD

See. That's what I mean.

PAULINE

You said you were going to stop drinking.

RICHARD

I haven't been drunk since that day.

PAULINE

But you're still drinking.

RICHARD

It helps me cope.

PAULINE

You don't see me sneaking little sips from a dented flask all day and I still cope.

RICHARD

Do you? Do you really?

PAULINE

No thanks to you.

RICHARD

I'm trying. To make it up to you.

PAULINE

By breaking your promise.

RICHARD

There's nothing I can do to change what happened. I would if I could.

PAULINE

You can't even change yourself, how could you change the past.

RICHARD  
You're the one who's changed.

PAULINE  
How could you expect me not to?

RICHARD  
The woman I married would have forgiven me.

PAULINE  
I did forgive you.

RICHARD  
You said the words alright. But not where they count. Not in your heart.

PAULINE  
You break your promises and you expect forgiveness?

RICHARD  
For Christ sake, he was my son too. Would have been my son.

PAULINE  
I wasn't the one who was driving.

RICHARD  
You think I don't know it was my fault?

PAULINE  
I wasn't the one who was drunk.

RICHARD  
I know. I know. But I can't change that.

PAULINE  
You don't even try.

Richard pulls the flask from his pocket and throws it against the door.

RICHARD  
I won't touch it again.

PAULINE  
I can't trust you.

RICHARD  
I said I won't touch it again. I won't. Not a drop.

PAULINE  
How can I trust you again?

RICHARD

I give you my word. I won't touch it again.

PAULINE

How can I trust you with our child again.

RICHARD

Look, I'm sorry. I was wrong. You were right. I should have stopped. But we can't change the past. We can't bring him back. We have to think about the future. Together.

PAULINE

I'm thinking about the future. The future in my belly.

Silence.

RICHARD

That's not possible.

PAULINE

It's possible. I'm pregnant Richard.

RICHARD

Oh God.

Pauline turns away from him in disgust. The kitchen door opens and THOMAS steps in from the storm. He closes the door behind himself and steps into the doorway to the common room. He pauses a moment. In his hand is a shovel. He leans it against the wall, out of sight. A man of forty-five, he is tired.

THOMAS

I always dreamed about bein' a parent. My folks always preached the blessin's of havin' children. It's all I wanted.

Pauline walks into the bedroom out of sight as Thomas steps into the room.

Richard pauses a moment and steps into the kitchen, out of sight.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

And when Amy was born everything seemed like it would be fine. The farm was failin', but I figured that was just God's way of balancin' my life out. Takin' with one hand while givin' with the other. Now everything seems out of balance. Nothin' seems to make sense anymore. A man works the fields all day, dawn to dusk, day after day, and what does he have to show for it.

## THOMAS (CONT'D)

A handful of grain and some half-starved cattle. Used to be you could get ahead, then before you knew it you was strugglin' to stay on an even keel, and now you have to scrape and claw for every little crumb. Even then it ain't enough. And there's nowhere to turn. No hand to reach out for. It's like a dog chasin' it's tail. It don't make no sense. It's like God done fell asleep. I ain't one to blaspheme, but that's the only thing I can think of. When this much evil falls on people workin' this hard, there ain't no other way to explain it. And evil has surely fallen on this house. Maybe it's a punishment for things I done. Or for what I didn't do. But it still don't make no sense. We found this dog once. It was lame in one leg and I was gonna shoot it. Didn't seem to be anything else to do for it 'cept put it out of its misery. I grabbed my shotgun and took the dog outside. Rachel must have seen me through the kitchen window, 'cause she come runnin' out of the house, screamin' at me to put the shotgun down. She ran right over to the dog, wrapped her arms around it, picked it up and carried it into the house all the while yellin' about what a cruel, mean hearted man I was for thinkin' of shootin' a poor defenseless dog what couldn't even try to run away. I tried to explain how that was the whole point, but she wouldn't have none of it. She made a bed for it by the stove and nursed it for five weeks. She never took her eye off that dog. Tended to his leg with a poultice three time a day, brought it scraps from the dinner table and fed 'em to him by hand. The dog got better and I swear he never left her side after that. He died a few years later and we buried him in the back yard. She would take and put flowers on the grave every spring. Now a woman like that don't come along every day. That takes a lot of love. It just don't make no sense to me.

Richard sighs, and walks into the kitchen where he can't be seen as Rachel appears in the doorway to the bedroom.

RACHEL

Is it done?

THOMAS

Yes.

RACHEL

You were gone a long time.

Rachel goes to the woodstove and stokes the fire.



THOMAS  
Snow's deep and the ground is frozen. It's like diggin'  
through rock.

RACHEL  
But it's done?

THOMAS  
Yes.

RACHEL  
Come warm yourself.

Thomas shrugs his coat off and steps  
over to the stove, stretching his hands  
out to it as he sits in a chair.

THOMAS  
Not much wood left.

RACHEL  
There's the chairs and table.

THOMAS  
Storm can't last forever.

RACHEL  
Even if it don't, there's no matches, no flint. The fire  
goes out---- that's it.

THOMAS  
Fire won't go out.

RACHEL  
Won't last as long as the storm.

THOMAS  
We can burn the floorboards if we have to.

RACHEL  
May have to burn the whole house.

THOMAS  
Storm'll let up soon.

RACHEL  
Been prayin' for it?

THOMAS  
I said a prayer or two.

RACHEL  
Workin' miracles so far.

THOMAS  
Maybe if you had a little more faith.

RACHEL  
I got plenty of faith.

THOMAS  
Actions speak louder than words.

RACHEL  
That's right. And I believe what I seen.

THOMAS  
Storm'll end soon.

RACHEL  
Won't matter. We can't dig our way to town. Come spring they'll find us sittin' in our chairs, meltin' like two blocks of ice.

THOMAS  
I don't believe that.

RACHEL  
I do.

THOMAS  
You've given up hope.

RACHEL  
I never had hope.

THOMAS  
That's not true.

RACHEL  
No. It's not. You gave me hope. When you married me is the first time I had hope.

THOMAS  
Then how'd you lose it?

RACHEL  
I don't know. The storm just swept it away. Buried it.

THOMAS  
You shoulda come to me.

RACHEL  
What for? You'd just tell me about God's will.

THOMAS  
God has a plan for all of us.

RACHEL  
Well, I think he plans on freezin' us solid.

THOMAS  
It's not for us to know God's will.

RACHEL  
It's just for us to suffer.

THOMAS  
Sometimes.

RACHEL  
Even the children.

THOMAS  
The innocent are rewarded in heaven.

RACHEL  
Maybe heaven's too late.

Thomas stands up.

THOMAS  
I can't talk to you.

RACHEL  
Ain't nobody else to talk to.

THOMAS  
You ain't the same no more.

RACHEL  
I'm the same woman you married. I'm the same woman I always  
been. You're just seein' a different side of me is all.

THOMAS  
Well, I can't stand to look at you.

RACHEL  
Want me to wear a flour sack on my head?

THOMAS  
I don't know what I want.

RACHEL  
It was a joke.

THOMAS  
This ain't the time for jokes.

RACHEL  
I ain't happy either.

THOMAS  
I know.

Silence.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
I don't know what to do.

RACHEL  
Ain't nothin' to do. 'Cept wait for the storm to stop. Or  
us to.

THOMAS  
I prayed to God for guidance, but he ain't give me none.

RACHEL  
Only ever answered my prayers once and that was just a cruel  
joke.

THOMAS  
No. No it wasn't. You're the one who turned it cruel.

RACHEL  
I just stole the punch line is all.

THOMAS  
You never did have faith.

RACHEL  
The only thing I ever had faith in was you, Thomas.

THOMAS  
And I had faith in you.

RACHEL  
Well, you shouldn't of. I don't deserve nobody's faith.

THOMAS  
Amy had faith in you too.

RACHEL  
Your turn to be cruel now?

THOMAS  
I'm just saying the truth.

RACHEL  
The truth ain't always what matters.

THOMAS  
The truth is all that matters.

RACHEL  
Your truth. Or your version of it. God's truth.

THOMAS  
The truth is seen through God.

RACHEL  
Well, I saw the truth.

THOMAS  
You saw a lie.

RACHEL  
You saw it too but you couldn't accept it.

THOMAS  
I still don't accept it.

RACHEL  
Doesn't matter now, does it?

THOMAS  
Yes, it does matter. It matters for you. For you and God.

RACHEL  
I ain't got nothin' to do with God.

THOMAS  
But God still has everything to do with you. Can't you see that?

RACHEL  
God closed his eyes on me a long time ago.

THOMAS  
No he didn't. God never forsakes his children.

RACHEL  
Yes he does.

THOMAS  
No. No he doesn't. He sent you to me when I was alone. When my parents died and I was so alone I couldn't step foot in the house for all the memories and all the loneliness, he sent you to me. And he sent me to you.

RACHEL  
What about all the years before you?

THOMAS  
God was there. He was there with you every day. Givin' you the strength to go on.

RACHEL

I ain't never felt God with me. Not except that one day when Amy was born. That's the only time I ever felt God with me.

THOMAS

You have to let him into your heart Rachel. You have to ask him in.

RACHEL

I don't want him.

THOMAS

You have to want him.

RACHEL

I don't. I don't want nothin' to do with him. He ain't brought me nothin' but misery.

THOMAS

You brought the misery on yourself. On yourself and me and this whole house.

RACHEL

I didn't bring nothin' that wasn't already there. I opened my eyes to it is all.

THOMAS

You're eyes aren't open. You're blind. You can't see the love that God has for you.

RACHEL

I don't want his love.

THOMAS

Don't say that.

RACHEL

It's true.

THOMAS

What about mine? Do you want my love?

RACHEL

You don't love me.

THOMAS

You don't know what's in my heart.

RACHEL

You hate me. You said so yourself.

THOMAS

I do hate you. I can't help but hate you. But I love you as well. And God loves you. You have to ask for his forgiveness.

RACHEL

I don't want his forgiveness.

THOMAS

You have to ask for his forgiveness, because I don't know that I can forgive you.

RACHEL

I ain't askin' you to.

THOMAS

Don't you have no remorse?

RACHEL

I got nothin' but remorse. I'm so filled with it I'm surprised it don't bleed from my eyes.

THOMAS

Then ask for God's forgiveness.

RACHEL

I can't.

THOMAS

Why not? We all fall from grace at one time or another.

RACHEL

'Cause I knew what I was doin' when I did it. And I knew what it meant. And I did it 'cause I thought it was right. And I still think it was right. And you can't ask for forgiveness for what you think is right. It don't work that way. I ain't sorry I did it. I'm sorry I had to do it.

THOMAS

You didn't have to do it.

RACHEL

There weren't no other way.

THOMAS

You coulda waited.

RACHEL

For what? The storm to end? The fire to die? Us to freeze to death?

THOMAS

You shoulda waited, Rachel. You shouldn'ta done it.

RACHEL

Waited for what? We ain't got no food. Ain't had no real food for weeks. I ain't got no more milk in my breasts, Thomas. The baby was starvin'. We're starvin'. All she did was cry and cry and I couldn't do anything for her. You couldn't do nothin'. Even if the storm stops, we can't dig our way out. Ain't no help gonna come. If we don't die here it's only 'cause God wants to punish me more.

THOMAS

It wasn't your right to do it.

RACHEL

No. It was my duty. A mother's duty.

THOMAS

You're wrong. Only God can make that decision.

RACHEL

That decision's made every day. All over the world. God ain't the only one.

THOMAS

God's the only one that don't go to hell for it.

RACHEL

I don't care if I go to hell. It can't be no worse than this.

THOMAS

It's worse than anything you can imagine.

RACHEL

It can't be worse than squeezin' the air out of your own baby girl's lungs. It can't be worse than that.

Thomas is silent. He turns away.  
Rachel turns from him as well. They  
are trapped with each other.

RACHEL(CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry I hurt you. But it was you or her and I couldn't watch her suffer no more.

THOMAS

I suppose I can expect the same kindness when the time comes.

RACHEL

No. No, you ain't helpless like she was. You'll have to do it yourself if you want it done.

THOMAS

What about you?



RACHEL

I ain't goin' nowhere.

THOMAS

Neither of us is goin' nowhere in this storm.

Thomas picks up the Bible from the desk and holds it in both hands. Rachel and Thomas stand at opposite sides of the room as Pauline steps from the bedroom and goes to the stove, stoking the fire. Richard appears and sits at the kitchen table.

PAULINE

I've lost track of where my life is going. Where I've been. There had been a storm the night before I left and it was still snowing that day. I was going to get rid of it. That was my first reaction. My first instinct. I didn't want to tell Richard. I knew what he'd say. And I agreed with him. And I didn't want to worry him. I thought it was my problem and I should deal with it. It was my decision. I didn't tell anyone. So I saved my money. I didn't know what it would cost, but I knew I didn't have the money right off. So I saved. And I sold some of my books and a dress or two. I didn't know who to talk to. Who I could trust to ask for advice. So I didn't ask anyone. I bought a bus ticket. I told Richard and everyone else I was going home to see my parents. It was a three-hour bus ride. When I got off the bus I went straight to the nearest hospital and asked to see the head nurse. She was very understanding. She didn't ask questions. She told me where to go. So I walked across town. It was further than I thought it would be or I would have taken another bus. It was at the edge of the city. Away from everything. I walked along side the road, the wind whipping at my knees. It was icy cold and my hands were numb, but it was beautiful. The sun was shining. It was too cold for the snow to melt so all the trees were painted white. And as I walked further out from the city I could see the clinic up ahead. To my side a field opened up and in the middle of the field there stood this lone tree. Large, with wide draping branches weighted down by the snow. I remember thinkin' how perfect it was. How perfect nature was to create such a beautiful landscape out of just snow and a tree.

Rachel walks to the bedroom and Thomas to the kitchen. As Thomas steps into the kitchen, Richard steps into the room.

RICHARD  
Did you stoke the fire?

PAULINE  
Yes.

RICHARD  
It's still cold in here.

PAULINE  
Stand closer to the stove.

RICHARD  
The walls don't have any insulation.

PAULINE  
The house is too old.

RICHARD  
And storm is getting worse.

PAULINE  
The storm can't last much longer.

RICHARD  
As long as the fire doesn't go out. I don't have any more matches.

PAULINE  
We can always try the car again.

RICHARD  
No. It's dead. And buried by now.

PAULINE  
Maybe someone will see the smoke from the chimney.

RICHARD  
Not in this weather.

PAULINE  
What's your point, Richard?

RICHARD  
Just makin' conversation.

PAULINE  
What makes you think I want conversation?

Silence.

RICHARD  
Are you sure?

Silence.

PAULINE

Yes. I'm sure.

RICHARD

Could there be a mistake?

PAULINE

There was a mistake alright.

RICHARD

Are you certain about being pregnant?

PAULINE

No mistake there.

RICHARD

You know what this means?

PAULINE

It means I'm going to have a baby.

RICHARD

Pauline.

PAULINE

Maybe it'll be a girl this time.

RICHARD

Pauline.

PAULINE

But a boy wouldn't be bad.

RICHARD.

Pauline, listen to me.

PAULINE

Maybe a boy.

RICHARD

Pauline. Look at me.

Pauline turns to Richard.

PAULINE

Don't say it.

RICHARD

Pauline.

PAULINE

Don't say it. Don't you dare say it.

RICHARD

You can't have the child.

PAULINE

I'm having the child, Richard.

RICHARD

You know what the doctors said.

PAULINE

I was right there same as you. Maybe a little more bruised up.

RICHARD

They said it would kill you.

PAULINE

Doctors say a lot of things.

RICHARD

It will kill you Pauline.

PAULINE

Might kill me. They said might kill me.

RICHARD

They sounded pretty certain.

PAULINE

Doctors are wrong every day.

RICHARD

Why didn't you get the operation?

PAULINE

Why didn't you put the rubber on when I told you to?

RICHARD

I can't talk to you.

PAULINE

It takes two to make a baby.

RICHARD

This is not my fault.

PAULINE

It's as much your fault as mine.

RICHARD

If you'd just have had the operation like the doctors told you to.

PAULINE

It was my decision.

RICHARD

You're real good at making decisions.

PAULINE

I married you didn't I.

RICHARD

This isn't funny anymore, Pauline. You know you can't have the child.

PAULINE

I can, and I will.

RICHARD

And what if you die?

PAULINE

I won't die.

RICHARD

How can you know that?

PAULINE

I just know.

RICHARD

And what if you're wrong?

PAULINE

I won't be.

RICHARD

I don't want to raise a child without you.

PAULINE

I don't trust you to.

RICHARD

And what if the child dies too. What if both of you die?

PAULINE

Then you don't have anything to worry about.

RICHARD

And you wonder why I drink. When you say things like that.

PAULINE

Why can't you support me? Why can't you see that this is important to me?

RICHARD

Because it'll kill you.

PAULINE

You don't know that.

RICHARD

I don't want to risk it. I almost lost you once and I don't want to risk losing you again.

PAULINE

You almost killed me once, you mean.

RICHARD

Yes, I almost killed you. And I killed our unborn son. But I don't want to lose you to another child.

PAULINE

I don't believe you.

RICHARD

I love you Pauline. I don't want to be without you.

PAULINE

If you love me then you'll support me in this.

RICHARD

This is crazy Pauline.

PAULINE

You never wanted children. You said so.

RICHARD

If it's children you want, we'll adopt some. Two, three, ten, I don't care.

PAULINE

It's not about other children. It's about this child.

RICHARD

There are millions of kids we can adopt.

PAULINE

It has to be this child.

RICHARD

You're not making sense Pauline.

PAULINE

Neither are you.

RICHARD

Is it a religious thing? Is that it?

PAULINE

Yes. No. Not in that way, but yes.

RICHARD

If there is a God, he doesn't want you to die trying to have this child, Pauline.

PAULINE

How would you know what God wants?

RICHARD

I know what I want. I want you alive.

PAULINE

You don't understand.

RICHARD

No I don't. Won't you at least think about it? Agree to think about it.

PAULINE

I already did. I've made my decision.

RICHARD

Just think about it over the holidays. You don't have to make this decision right now. But I tell you, Pauline, the more you think about it the more you're going to see that the doctors were right, that it isn't worth the risk, that you can't have this baby.

Pauline turns away.

PAULINE

I went to a clinic, but I couldn't go through with it.

Richard goes to her.

RICHARD

Why not? What happened?

PAULINE

Nothing happened. You wouldn't understand. I don't know if I understand.

RICHARD

Try me.

Pauline considers this challenge in silence.

PAULINE

Fine. It won't makes sense to you, but fine. I went out of town to do it. A little place in the middle of nowhere. It was snowing and I walked there from the bus station. And I stepped inside and warmed myself by an iron register in the lobby. When I could feel my fingers again, I walked up to the front desk and asked to see the doctor. The receptionist asked me what it was regarding, and I didn't know what to say. I wasn't sure. How do you just say it in plain English? How do you tell some stranger behind a desk that you want to get rid of the baby you're carrying inside you? She could see that I didn't know what to say, and I assume she guessed the reason. She probably met a lot of women like me. In town for one day. On urgent business. Needing to see a doctor who specialized in women's problems. She just smiled and asked me to wait. The doctor would be with me momentarily. So I waited. There was a magazine on the table. Life. I picked it up and paged through it. Couldn't read the words, just looking at the photos, not really able to think. I looked up and for the first time noticed that there were other women there. Three of them. Also waiting. I don't know why I hadn't noticed them before, but now they seemed to be all I could think about. I stared at each one in turn. They didn't notice. They were tryin' not to be noticed. They didn't want to make eye contact. The third one did. By accident. She looked up while I was staring at her. Just for a moment our eyes locked and we both knew. We knew each other and why we were there and what we were both feeling and what we feared and what we were thinkin'. And we smiled, almost, just slightly, like we were sharing some private secret between ourselves. Silently. And then she looked down at her magazine again and I wondered if the other women were here for the same reason and how many women came here each day for this reason how many a month and how many a year and then I heard my name being called. The doctor would see me. The doctor's hands were very clammy. Very cold. That's what I remember most about him. His cold clammy hand shakin' mine. He asked me my name and offered me a seat. I sat down. I told him my first name, but I made up a last name. And he asked me if I was there for an abortion. Just like that. Like I was asking for something over the counter at the drug store. A bottle of aspirin, please. I don't remember what I said. I don't really remember speaking at all. Maybe I nodded my head. A boyfriend he asked. I nodded. Was I sure, he asked? A nod again. Had I thought about other options? I nodded. I was sure. This was the best thing. There was paper work to fill out. Questions that needed to be answered. For my safety. And waivers to be signed. In case. In case of what? Well, accidents happen. He left the room. A nurse brought in a form and a pen.



PAULINE (CONT'D)

And a gown. I filled the form out as truthfully as I could and slowly took my clothes off. Modestly, like someone might be watching. As I put the gown on I realized that I was still wearing my watch. Like it would somehow protect me. I slipped it off my wrist and waited. Finally, after what seemed like ages of me freezing in that tiny white room, goose bumps crawling all over me, the nurse opened the door and asked me to follow her. I stood up. My knees a bit weak. I steadied myself against the wall with one hand and took a step forward and then another and before I knew it I had walked across the room, through the door, down the hall and into another, whiter, cleaner room. The doctor was there. A large green gown and a mask on. And another nurse. Dressed the same. And a cart with instruments I didn't even want to think about. And in the center of the room, the table. Stirrups and posts attached to the end. They must have asked me to lie down. I don't remember hearing anything, but they must have because the doctor gestured and the nurse at my side took my arm and pulled me forward. But I had frozen. I wasn't moving. I wasn't getting on the table. I wasn't going through with it. I don't know how I knew that. It wasn't a decision. It wasn't some conclusion I reach after days of thinking. It was just something I knew. I knew I was going to have the baby. My whole body was telling me that. I just turned and walked out. I don't know what I said to them. I assume I apologized as I put my clothes on and ran out the door. I don't know. I don't care. I didn't feel rude. I ran all the way back to the station and took the next bus back to town. It left at night. I tried to sleep, but I couldn't. I couldn't stop thinking. Or not thinking. I wasn't really thinking. I didn't know what I would tell you or my parents. I didn't think about what anyone would say. I didn't care. It didn't matter. All I was thinking was that I was having a baby. That was all that mattered. It's still all that matters. No matter what happens.

Richard is silent a long time. He goes to the window and looks out at the storm.

RICHARD

You're going to have the baby based on feeling? On instinct?

PAULINE

I knew you wouldn't understand.

RICHARD

You're not thinkin' it through.

PAULINE

I didn't need to think about it anymore.

RICHARD

Alright, let's say you live. Let's say the doctors are wrong and the baby doesn't kill you. Then what? We weren't ready to have a baby the last time.

PAULINE

So you're happy we lost the last baby?

RICHARD

No. But we're getting our lives together now. You're almost done with beauty school and I'll get my certificate about the same time you finish. Then I can work in Jeb's shop. Another year and we start to build a life.

PAULINE

We can build a life with a baby.

RICHARD

With all the bills? All the expense? How will we pay for it? It's already taking all our money to pay for classes.

PAULINE

We'll find a way.

RICHARD

Sure we'll find a way. Dropping out and getting another job that's how we'll find a way.

PAULINE

We'll find the money.

RICHARD

How? Who's going to give us money? Your folks? They barely pay the rent as it is. And banks don't loan you money to have kids.

PAULINE

People find ways every day. All over the world.

RICHARD

And they raised their kids poor. And their kids end up poor. I lived poor. I don't want to be poor anymore. I want to make something of myself.

PAULINE

Fixing cars is making something of yourself?

RICHARD

It's a good job. It pays well. And it's a damn sight better than anyone in my family ever did. Hell, who are you to talk. You're the only one in your family to graduate high school.

PAULINE

We'll get jobs, Richard. It'll be okay.

RICHARD

No it won't. That's the best case. Us raising the kid dirt poor is the best case. You being dead is the other case.

PAULINE

I'll be fine.

RICHARD

What if your not. What if I end up raising the kid by myself. Can you image in that?

PAULINE

Long as you stop drinkin'.

RICHARD

You can't want this.

PAULINE

We both want things that are hard to understand,

RICHARD

All I want is your forgiveness. That's not had to understand.

PAULINE

You want my forgiveness. I want your help with this baby.

RICHARD

I don't want your forgiveness bad enough to lose you.

PAULINE

You'll lose me if you don't.

RICHARD

Sounds like I lost you already.

PAULINE

Why can't you see it?

RICHARD

See what?

PAULINE

How much it means to me.

RICHARD

Because it doesn't make sense.

PAULINE

It does.

RICHARD

You could die. How can that make sense?

PAULINE

Because, I don't want to live without this baby.

Pauline turns away and walks into the kitchen. As she leaves, Rachel enters from the bedroom and goes to sit near the stove.

RACHEL

It wasn't something I ever thought about. Don't know why I would have. It's not the kind of thing a mother thinks about. I didn't really even think when I did it. It's not something you can think about while doin'. You just can't. If you thought about it you'd never do it. You have to follow something else. Instinct maybe. Like animals. Like a bitch with her pups. Nobody knows why animals kill their young. Don't seem to make no sense to us. 'Cept sometimes it does make sense. The storm had been on for days and days. We hadn't had no food really since Christmas. The crops were so bad this year and the prices so low we were lucky to raise enough to pay the mortgage. The summer was so dry we barely brought in three bushel an acre. We didn't even have nothin' left for seed come spring. Don't know what we'll plant in April. 'Course I doubt we'll make it that long. Maybe. If we can get some help from the government. If we can get to town. If the storm don't bury us in forever. I was in the bedroom, lookin' out the window at the storm. Just white. Swirlin' white. The wind bangin' against the side of the house like the hand of God knockin'. Amy was in her crib. Cryin'. That's all she'd been doin'. Cryin'. We ain't had no food in seven days. Just melted snow. Nothin' for the baby. No milk. The cows we'd had to sell off. Like everything else. Either sold off or dead and eatin' for dinner long ago. Tom was in the other room, readin' the Bible or prayin'. And Amy just kept cryin'. Don't know where she got the strength to cry. I barely had the strength to pick her up and hold her. She was all pale and lookin' thinner than when she was born. I held her close and she clung to me with her weak little hands. Searchin' out my breast. Lookin' for a meal. I pulled my dress open and gave her a nipple to suck. I knew it wouldn't do no good. I ain't had no milk for nearly five days. But I thought it might calm her. Soothe her for a while. And me too. Might make me feel like a mother who could provide for her young'un, 'stead of what I felt like. But it didn't. Just made it worse. Knowin' I was dry and had nothing to give her. And then she know'd it too and she took to cryin' again. Louder. Like she'd been tricked. Like the plate was put in front of her and then snatched away.

As Rachel finishes speaking. Rachel is alone on stage for a moment before Thomas steps into the room from the kitchen. He stokes the fire and adds a piece of wood. He stands up, very aware of the distance between he and Rachel. He goes to the desk.

THOMAS

I was thinkin' about spring.

RACHEL

And?

THOMAS

Thinkin' about the crops. What we should plant.

RACHEL

Daydreamin'.

THOMAS

I was thinkin' to plant mostly corn this year. Not so much wheat as last year.

RACHEL

We ain't got no seed.

THOMAS

We'll buy some.

RACHEL

With what?

THOMAS

A loan.

RACHEL

Won't no bank give us a loan.

THOMAS

Times is hard. The government will guarantee loans for farms.

RACHEL

Just one more payment to be late with.

THOMAS

We can make the payments.

RACHEL

We can't make the payments we got now.

THOMAS

We'll manage.

RACHEL

Might as well give the bank the house now and save the trouble.

THOMAS

The bank ain't taken my house.

RACHEL

We could sell the land.

THOMAS

Without the land we got no crops. You need land for a farm.

RACHEL

This ain't a farm. This is a wasteland. The whole damn state is a wasteland. Come this time next year won't be any farms left.

THOMAS

This farm'll stand.

RACHEL

Won't matter if it does.

THOMAS

This was my daddy's farm and I won't let it fall under.

RACHEL

You'll be lucky to be there to watch it fall under.

THOMAS

Is that a threat?

RACHEL

It ain't a threat I'm makin'. The storm's what's threatenin' you.

THOMAS

Storm'll be over soon enough.

RACHEL

Storm ain't never gone end. Not for us. We're trapped in it forever.

THOMAS

What the hell kind of nonsense talk is that?

RACHEL

Just plain talk.

THOMAS

I swear to God you gone crazy on me.

RACHEL

Look out the window. Listen to the storm. Listen to the wind bangin' on the door. Do you hear what it's saying?

THOMAS

It's just the wind.

RACHEL

It ain't just the wind. It's the storm talkin'.

THOMAS

You have gone crazy on me.

RACHEL

Do you know what it's saying?

THOMAS

Stark raving crazy.

RACHEL

It's telling you this our tomb.

THOMAS

Will you stop that talk.

RACHEL

This house is our grave. It's buryin' us right up.

THOMAS

It's just a storm. It'll pass.

RACHEL

It'll pass, but not for us. We're here forever.

THOMAS

I don't know how to talk to you anymore.

RACHEL

You spend too much time talkin' to God.

THOMAS

Maybe you should talk to God.

RACHEL

Maybe I have. Maybe I talk to him all the time.

THOMAS

You never talk to God.

RACHEL  
Maybe I just listen to him.

THOMAS  
God doesn't talk to you.

RACHEL  
How would you know? Does God talk to you?

THOMAS  
He talks to me, yes.

RACHEL  
And what does he say? What does God say when you talk to him?

THOMAS  
That's between God and me.

RACHEL  
You can't hear the voice of God.

THOMAS  
Now what would you know about the voice of God?

RACHEL  
I been listen to it for the past five days. Poundin' on the door. Smackin' against the windows. Thumpin' on the walls. Howlin' in the night. The storm is the voice of God, and he's tellin' me we ain't never leavin' this house.

THOMAS  
It's a storm. That's all it is.

RACHEL  
You believe that if you want.

THOMAS  
Why would God want us to die in the storm?

RACHEL  
Because he's cruel.

THOMAS  
God is not cruel.

RACHEL  
Maybe he wants to punish us.

THOMAS  
Punish you, you mean.



RACHEL

I'm sure God wants to punish me. He's made a run of it so far.

THOMAS

You tellin' me livin' here was a punishment?

RACHEL

No. No, I think I slipped out from his sight when you married me. I think he forgot about me. Got sloppy. Now he's come to set things straight again.

THOMAS

Don't you think you deserve God's punishment for what you done?

RACHEL

I think God deserves punishment.

THOMAS

God can't be punished.

RACHEL

Maybe ain't nobody tried yet.

THOMAS

What can you punish God for? God doesn't sin. You're the sinner.

RACHEL

I may have sinned in God's eyes, and I know I sinned in your eyes, but I don't see it that way. I just did what I had to do.

THOMAS

You had to smother our daughter to death?

RACHEL

Yes.

THOMAS

I don't believe that. You didn't have to.

RACHEL

Then why would I do it?

THOMAS

I don't know.

RACHEL

You think I'm crazy?

THOMAS

I don't know. I can't see no other reason.

RACHEL

You ever known me to be crazy?

THOMAS

No.

RACHEL

You ever known me to be cruel?

THOMAS

No. No, I ain't.

RACHEL

Then why else would I do it?

THOMAS

I think maybe it was the devil.

RACHEL

I ain't the devil.

THOMAS

No. I think the devil tricked you. Clouded you mind. Made you think you had to.

RACHEL

The devil didn't have nothin' to do with it.

THOMAS

You may not think so, but the devil is always present when evil is done.

RACHEL

It wasn't evil.

THOMAS

It was. Can't you see that. Our baby girl is dead by your own hands. How can you say that wasn't evil?

RACHEL

'Cause it was necessary.

THOMAS

That's what the devil wants you to think.

RACHEL

Then the devil's right.

Thomas throws his hands up in frustration and turns away.

THOMAS

You never been like this before. It's like I'm talkin' to another woman. Like somehow the spirit just crawled right out of ya. Like you was cold and dead already.

RACHEL

I am. Inside, I am.

THOMAS

But there was always a light in you. Always. I don't know why, 'cause I ain't known anybody what had as rough a life as you did. But you always had a life in you. A fire in your eyes. That's why I didn't care. First time I saw you I knew I wanted to marry you. Met you on the street and I just knew. It was somethin' about the way you looked at me. Remember? I was crossin' the street lookin' at my feet, feelin' sorry for myself cause I'd just put my pappy in the ground and I was all alone. And I couldn't think of nothin' 'cept how God was testin' my faith somethin' fierce. So, there I was, crossin' the street, starin' at my boots when I ran smack into you. And when I looked up and saw your eyes, I knew you was the one, 'cause all I could think about was those eyes. No more self pity. Just your eyes. I said excuse me and you smiled and I tipped my hat and smiled back. I was about to continue on my way, finish my business in town and head back for the farm when I suddenly found my feet turnin' me around and walkin' in the opposite direction. Followed you to work and then waited for you so I could ask you out. Remember? There was nothin' I wanted to do but be next to that fire. I didn't care none what you'd done, or what you'd had to do. You told me straight up when I asked to marry me, but I didn't care. A lotta men woulda turned tail and run. But I was hooked. And I thought I made you happy. I tried. I tried to make you smile and laugh whenever I could. Even when it seemed like havin' a child wasn't for us, I still tried to make you happy, cause you made me happy. I don't understand how you could have done what you did. How you could have got so sad and sick inside.

Rachel is quiet a moment. She runs her hands through her long black hair.

RACHEL

You did make me happy, Tom. I ain't unhappy 'cause of you. I'm unhappy 'cause of what I done. What I had to do.

THOMAS

But, don't you see, you didn't have to do it.

RACHEL

I did.

THOMAS

That's not true.

RACHEL

It is true, Tom. You have to look truth in the face. Stare at it head on. And accept it.

THOMAS

You've twisted everything around, Rachel, but you can't twist the truth.

RACHEL

The truth is our baby was starvin'. We're starvin'. The storm ain't endin' and the baby was gone die. She could either die sufferin' or quick and painless. That's the truth.

THOMAS

That ain't the truth.

RACHEL

The truth is you sold off all the livestock and didn't save even seed stock. Not even a grain of corn we could eat. The truth is you didn't save enough for us to eat, Thomas.

THOMAS

The crops weren't big enough. There wasn't nothin' to save.

RACHEL

What were you plannin' we eat all winter.

THOMAS

I wasn't plannin' the animals would die one month into winter. I was plannin' we'd have more stocked up.

RACHEL

Well that ain't the way it worked out.

THOMAS

I know that.

RACHEL

Then you oughta know the truth then.

THOMAS

I did the best I could.

RACHEL

But the truth is, we're still starvin' to death. Our baby was starvin' to death.

THOMAS

This is not my fault.

RACHEL

You can't say it don't rest on your shoulders too.

THOMAS

I am not responsible for what you did. You can't blame me for your sin. You can't use me as your scapegoat.

RACHEL

I ain't blamin' you. I got God for that. But you want the truth and the truth says you had a hand in it.

THOMAS

My hands have no blood on them. I didn't do nothin'.

RACHEL

That's right. Your hands have no blood on them because you never raised your hands. You'd of sat back and waited for God to do all the dirty work for you. Make it seem like you ain't responsible. Well, I am responsible. That baby was my responsibility. I was the one to care for it. So were you, but you'd of let her die starvin'. You didn't have the courage to do it.

THOMAS

You are wicked.

RACHEL

Maybe. Maybe I am. But you don't know what I been through. You don't know what it's like to take your own baby girl's life. You won't have to carry that with you to your grave. But I got it here in my heart, weighin' on me like a house.

Rachel moves away from Thomas and stands alone.

RACHEL(CONT'D)

I was in the bedroom. Rockin' her in my arms. Holdin' her close, singin' too her, old hymns. All the hymns I learned to sing in church. Strokin' the fine black sheen of hair she'd was born with. And I kissed her and looked out the window into the storm and I could hear you in the other room, readin' and prayin' and I thought to myself that it was a cruel heartless God that would leave such a beautiful innocent baby like Amy starvin' in her mother's arms. He wasn't a kind God. Not a loving God. No shepherd herdin' his flock would stand by and watch a lamb cryin' as it starved to death. No decent human being would. So why would God? He could save her. Wouldn't take no miracle. Just stoppin' the storm long enough for you to get to town and borrow some food. Some milk. But the storm wasn't stoppin'. It was gettin' worse. The storm wasn't stoppin' 'cause God didn't want it to stop. 'Cause he didn't care. Just one more baby starvin'. Like I'd starved as a child.

## RACHEL (CONT'D)

Like all the babies and little children I'd seen starve and die workin' themselves to death in some factory or in some black pit of a coal mine. God didn't care. He was gonna watch as my baby starved to death in my arms. I don't know where the thought came from or why. It was like a voice in my head. But it didn't speak in words. It was almost like a dream. Where people speak and you don't really hear what they say, but you know what they mean. It was like that. Like a picture in my head. Like that photo of you and Amy and me. Like that. Like that photo, I saw myself. Holdin' Amy. Holdin' her tight. So tight she was almost a part of me. And I knew then what I had to do. Not what I wanted to do. Not what I could do if it came to that, but what I had to do, right then and there. What I had to do because I was her mother and it was my job to do it just like it was my job give birth to her. It was what I had to do because she was sufferin', 'cause she was gonna die, and no mother should ever let her baby suffer no matter how cruel God might be. No matter what the punishment might be. I held her close. So close and so tight I almost thought I'd crack her little bones. I kissed her head as I pressed her face into me, coverin' her mouth and nose. She tried to keep cryin', but she couldn't. I held her so tight there was no way to breathe. I could hardly breathe. My tears runnin' down my cheeks, fallin' on her little head as she stopped crying. I kissed her salty-wet hair and cried as I told her I loved her, so she'd know why I was doin' this. So she wouldn't hate me for it. And I looked up and saw the storm outside the window. Through my tears everything looked white and flat. And the wind banged against the side of the house, and the storm suddenly seemed like God. The storm was God. And he was laughin' at me. Tauntin' me. Askin' me how I liked his joke. Did I think it was funny. I screamed. But no sound came out. It was a silent scream. I had no life for a scream. But I screamed anyway. I screamed how much I hated God. How I'd hate him every day until I died. How I'd always hate him. And then everything was quiet. 'Cept the storm. It was still raging. But I was quiet. And Amy was quiet. I stood there a long time. Holdin' her. Whispering to her. Kissin' her head for the last time. Thinkin' 'bout how she always used to smile when she'd see me. How every mornin' I'd wake up and she'd just be sittin' in her crib. Smilin'. Waiting for me. All patient. Like an angel. And then it'd been silent so long, you wondered what had happened. Why the baby had stopped cryin'. And you stepped into the room and you saw me holdin' Amy, and her still and silent, and the tears still runnin' down my cheeks and I could see in your face you knew. In your eyes. All I could see was your eyes. All I could see was the hatred in your eyes.

Thomas crosses the room to her.

THOMAS

What do you expect from me?

RACHEL

I don't know. I guess I shouldn't expect nothin'.

Thomas turns away.

THOMAS

You're crazy. You tell me I'm a coward because I didn't kill my own daughter. I'm a fool for trustin' in God. And you're the one I should feel sorry for and not our dead baby. You're like some trapped animal, chewin' your own leg off to save yourself.

RACHEL

Maybe I'm better off without the leg.

THOMAS

Maybe you'd be happier if I walked out the door into that storm and never came back.

RACHEL

If anybody walks out that door it'll be me.

THOMAS

No. You ain't goin' no where. You're stayin' here until the storm ends.

RACHEL

I told you. We're stayin' here forever. Both of us.

THOMAS

No. When the storm ends, I'm gonna fetch the Sheriff.

RACHEL

Gone have me locked up?

THOMAS

You won't repent.

RACHEL

I got nothin' to repent for.

THOMAS

The sin of killin' needs to be punished.

Rachel turns away, exasperated.

RACHEL

The killin' was the punishment.

THOMAS

That kinda crazy talk ain't gonna get you nowhere with the law.

RACHEL

The law can't do nothin' to me that ain't already been done.

THOMAS

We'll see about that.

RACHEL

Now who's makin' threats?

THOMAS

That ain't a threat, Woman, that's a promise.

RACHEL

It's an empty threat, Thomas. There ain't no justice to be had here.

THOMAS

Yes, there is, and I'll have it.

RACHEL

If there was any justice in the world, the damned storm would have stopped and Amy would still be alive.

THOMAS

That's exactly what I'm, sayin'. She should be alive. But she ain't and that deserves justice. I deserve justice.

RACHEL

If anybody deserves justice it's me, not you Thomas.

THOMAS

How can you say that? How can you say you deserve justice. You're the one who took the only thing I ever wanted from me and you think you deserve the justice? All I ever wanted was to have a family. To have a wife and child and raise it up and you've taken my child and left me with a murderer for a wife. That ain't no family. How can you say you deserve justice?

RACHEL

You're right. I don't deserve it. But neither do you. I thought I did, 'cause of what God made me do, but it ain't neither of us what deserves justice, it's Amy what deserves it. She's the one whose momma kill't her. She's the one who's daddy didn't save enough to feed her with. And she's the one what God abandoned and left to die in this damn storm.



THOMAS

I hope you die in this storm.

RACHEL

You ain't the only one.

THOMAS

No, I mean it. I hope you die in this storm, so's I don't have to kill you myself.

Thomas marches into the kitchen in a rage, standing near the table. Richard walks from the kitchen and sits by the stove. As he speaks, Pauline walks from the bedroom and sits at the desk, while Rachel returns to the bedroom and sits on the bed. Richard speaks as though to himself, though it seems Pauline is listening.

RICHARD

First time I went hunting with my old man. First time I ever killed somethin'. Hunting was a big thing with him. A right of passage. Like we were plains Indians and he was explaining the world to me. Walking through the woods for hours and hours and him talking in this hushed whisper, telling how it was. Not that what he had to say made much sense after the second bottle of that homemade hooch he used to drink. Hell, he could barely walk straight. And me, ten years old and wanting' to believe it all, dragging this rifle nearly as tall as I was through the under-brush, and smacking myself with it every time a branch that was too low came along. Finally, after hours of the old man's woodsman philosophy we came to the edge of a field. I don't remember whose field it was. We probably weren't even supposed to be there, but dad never paid any more attention to 'no huntin'' signs than he did to getting a huntin' license. The wild animals didn't belong to anyone, he always said. Which I guess is why he felt it was okay to shoot them. So, we come to the edge of this field and there in the middle, standing in the wheat like they were part of some painting was a large doe and her fawn. I didn't ask. And he didn't think I'd ever do anything without asking. I was standing behind him and when I saw the doe I figured this was my chance. I could show him I was just as much a man as him or anyone else. So I raised the rifle, and leaned it against the branch of a tree to steady it. Then I looked down the barrel, like he'd taught me, bringing the sights together. And swung them over just slightly until they were lined up on the doe's chest. I held my breath. Because this was the moment. This was it. A cloud passed over. Like a curtain being drawn, the shadow of the cloud covered the field. The deer both looked up.

## RICHARD (CONT'D)

My father turned around, and just as he started to speak, I exhaled, not wanting the spell to be broken, not wanting him to say anything, not wanting any words of advice, wanting to do this on my own, to show him that I could. I squeezed the trigger. The rifle exploded and slammed into my shoulder. It knocked me off my feet and fell on top of me. It jarred me. It was like waking up from a dream. That cloudy haze of your dreams as they fade when you first open your eyes. And then my father was hovering over me. Screaming. Yelling in my face. And I didn't understand him. My ears were still ringing from the rifle blast. Then he grabbed me off my feet and smacked me across the face. I was stunned. I didn't know what to do or what I'd done and I started to cry. I felt betrayed. Like I had been tricked. My hearing slowly came back and he was pointing at the field and I began to understand what he was saying. He was saying that it was wrong to shoot a doe. A mother deer. That the fawn would have no mother. No one to raise it. Teach it. And as he pointed I looked out over the field. Right where she had stood, the doe was lying in the wheat. Standing there, afraid to flee, licking at it's mother's wounds and crying in this strange animal cry, was the fawn. My father slammed the rifle into my hands. The fawn he said. The fawn would have to killed as well. And I had to do it. I started to say somethin', but he smacked me again. The sting across my face brought more tears to my eyes, but my hands held the rifle firm. I turned away from my father and leaned the rifle against the tree. I held my breath again, this time to keep my tears from shaking the rifle. Again I brought the two sights together and lined them up with the young deer's chest. I could hear my father telling me to hurry. To be quick about it before it bolted. As I exhaled, as I pulled the trigger, it occurred to me that the fawn wasn't the only thing I was killing; that there was a part of me that would fall down dead as the bullet ripped through the young deer's chest and like the fawn; that once it was dead, there would be no resurrection. Death would be final. And then I was lying on the ground again, the hot barrel of the rifle falling against my cheek, burning, bringing me back to the world. A world where my father was silent. Where he would stay silent for hours, for days and eventually for years. I sat up and searched the field for the fawn, vainly hoping that it had dashed for the woods at the last moment. But it hadn't. It lay on the ground, wriggling with the last spasms of death. Then it was still. And I stood up. My father and I walked out into the field. We dragged the deer to the woods, tied them up, gutted them, bled them, and carried them back to the car. And then we drove home. In silence. I hoped, like a child hopes, that even in his shame, my father would mention, even off handedly, what a good shot I was. What skill it took for a ten year old to shoot two deer at that distance with one bullet each. He never did of course.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

He never mentioned that day unless it was to use it as an example. An example of how I failed at something. Regardless of my intentions. That's all I could think of that day. Sitting there in the hospital bed, waiting for them to tell me if you were going to be okay. If the baby was going to be okay. And when the doctor told me, I didn't hear his voice. But I heard my father's voice. And I don't want to hear it again. Not ever.

Pauline steps away from the desk.

PAULINE

Your father's dead, Richard. He can't touch you now.

RICHARD

I'm not worried about him. I'm worried about you.

PAULINE

I'm not going to die.

Pauline turns away. Thomas walks into the room and checks the woodstove. As he does so, Rachel steps into the room.

THOMAS

Fire's dead.

Rachel sighs and steps forward.

RACHEL

Well that's it.

Pauline steps over to the woodstove.

PAULINE

You let the fire go out.

Richard looks up, defensively.

RICHARD

You were here too.

PAULINE

And the storm is getting worse.

Rachel steps forward and closes the door to the woodstove.

RACHEL

Storm's gettin' worse. We'll be buried up before sunrise.

THOMAS

We'll think of somethin'.

RACHEL

Nothin' to think of. No matches. No flint.

PAULINE

Do you have more matches?

RICHARD

No.

PAULINE

Maybe there are some around the house.

RICHARD

I already looked. We'll have to wait 'til the storm lets up.

RACHEL

Ain't nothin' to do but wait.

THOMAS

There's got to be some way.

RACHEL

You can always try prayin' for a match.

THOMAS

You never let up.

RACHEL

I'll let up when the storm does.

PAULINE

I don't think the storm is going to let up.

RICHARD

It has to eventually.

PAULINE

We could freeze to death by then.

RICHARD

We could try walkin'.

PAULINE

It's too far.

RICHARD

Then we have to wait. There's nothing else we can do.

RACHEL

What are you gonna do?



THOMAS  
These ain't our last hours.

RACHEL  
But you still hate me.

THOMAS  
Yes, I hate you.

RACHEL  
I can't stand to have you hate me. Not now.

THOMAS  
Maybe you shoulda thought of that.

RACHEL  
I did.

THOMAS  
But it didn't stop you.

RACHEL  
I couldn'ta stopped if I'da wanted to.

THOMAS  
You set your course and you followed it and now I've set mine.

RACHEL  
Your course ain't taken you nowhere. You ain't gonna take me to the Sheriff, 'cause the sun is goin' down and it's gettin' colder. You might as well kill me now. Before we freeze to death.

PAULINE  
It's freezing in here.

THOMAS  
We'll make it 'til sunrise.

RICHARD  
It'll be dark soon.

PAULINE  
We'll make it.

RICHARD  
It's cold. The storm's heavy.

PAULINE  
It's only one night.

RICHARD  
Maybe it'll smother us.

PAULINE  
We'll be fine come sunrise.

RICHARD  
Maybe.

PAULINE  
It doesn't help to talk about it.

RICHARD  
What else is there to talk about? You've made up your mind.

PAULINE  
Yes. I have.

RICHARD  
Regardless of the cost.

PAULINE  
It won't cost you anything.

RICHARD  
To see you put in the ground? That'll cost me more than I  
have to give.

PAULINE  
You can walk away.

RICHARD  
No. I can't.

PAULINE  
Then I'll walk away.

RICHARD  
I won't let you.

PAULINE  
You can't stop me.

RICHARD  
Don't be stupid. How are you going to manage on your own?

PAULINE  
I don't need you.

RICHARD  
It's not that you don't need me. You don't love me.

PAULINE

And you're going to pretend you love me.

RICHARD

Why do you think I stayed after the accident?

PAULINE

Guilt.

RICHARD

No.

PAULINE

Pity.

RICHARD

Love.

THOMAS

Do you love me, Rachel?

RICHARD

But you don't love me, do you?

RACHEL

You know I do.

PAULINE

I did. I want to. I don't know if I can.

THOMAS

Then why won't you ask for forgiveness. For my sake.

RACHEL

I told you.

THOMAS

But why can't you do it for me? Out of love for me.

RACHEL

You don't know what you're askin'.

THOMAS

I ain't askin' nearly as much of you as you're askin' of me.

RACHEL

You're askin' me to believe what I did was wrong and I can't do that.

THOMAS

Do you believe in heaven and hell?



RACHEL

Yes.

THOMAS

Then you know you're goin' to hell for what you done.

RACHEL

If I have to.

THOMAS

What about little Amy? Do you love her?

RACHEL

You know I do.

THOMAS

And little Amy's in heaven, ain't she? You gonna leave her there by herself with you in hell?

RACHEL

She'll have you with her.

THOMAS

Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe I'm goin' to hell just the same as you.

RACHEL

How could you go to hell?

THOMAS

'Cause I love you. I hate you and I can condemn you, but I can't stop lovin' you.

RACHEL

But you can't forgive me.

THOMAS

Only God can forgive you and you have to ask for his forgiveness.

RACHEL

I can't.

PAULINE

You want my forgiveness, but you can't forgive yourself.

THOMAS

You can. You just have to try. With your heart.

RICHARD

I don't want to.

RACHEL

You can't ask forgiveness of somebody you hate.

PAULINE

How can I forgive you if you can't forgive yourself?

RICHARD

How can I forgive myself if you won't?

PAULINE

You want me to hate you?

RICHARD

No. But I feel like I deserve it.

PAULINE

You're not the only one who feels like they deserve it.

RICHARD

What do you mean?

PAULINE

I coulda told you to stop drinkin'. I didn't have to get that car.

RICHARD

It's not your fault. It's mine.

PAULINE

Maybe I can't forgive you because I can forgive myself.

RICHARD

You got nothin' to be forgiven for.

RACHEL

I don't want God's forgiveness. I want yours.

PAULINE

If I can't have forgiveness, maybe I can find redemption

THOMAS

You can't have mine. I can't forgive that. No matter what.

RICHARD

I'm the one who needs redemption not you. And neither us can find it by havin' a child.

THOMAS

After all those years of waitin' for God to give us a child, and finally to have one and then to take it's life yourself. I can't forgive that.

RACHEL  
I gave you the child, not God.

THOMAS  
God is the source.

RACHEL  
I bore that child and nearly died.

THOMAS  
And who do you think saved you?

RACHEL  
You did.

THOMAS  
God saved you.

RACHEL  
God wasn't the one who stopped the bleedin'. That was you.  
Doc Larson didn't stop it. God didn't stop it. That was  
you, Thomas.

THOMAS  
I was just the instrument for God.

RACHEL  
And you was the one that put the seed in me. It was you me  
that made that baby. Not God.

THOMAS  
But only God can forgive you. You have to submit to God for  
his forgiveness.

RACHEL  
I can't. I won't. But I'll submit to you. Whatever  
punishment you want to bring on me I'll submit to that 'cause  
it's your forgiveness I need not God's. Whatever you want to  
do to me I'll take it 'cause I love you Thomas and I need you  
to forgive me before I die.

THOMAS  
You ain't gonna die.

RACHEL  
I am. I know I am. We both are.

THOMAS  
We are not dying in this storm.

RACHEL  
You have to punish me now. Before it's too late.

THOMAS  
I can't punish you.

RACHEL  
You have to.

THOMAS  
I can't.

RACHEL  
You can't forgive me unless you do.

THOMAS  
I don't want to forgive you.

RACHEL  
Don't say that.

THOMAS  
I don't ever want to forgive you.

RACHEL  
You have to.

THOMAS  
I won't.

RACHEL  
I can't go to hell without knowin' you forgive me. You're the only thing I ever cared about 'til Amy was born and now your the only thing I got left to care about. The only person who ever cared about me. I can't lose that. I can't lose that forever. Once we're dead you can't forgive me. Not once we're dead. Then it's forever.

THOMAS  
We're not dying. And I can't forgive you.

PAULINE  
I want to forgive you.

Rachel stands up. She looks at Thomas and the walks to the door.

RICHARD  
But you can't.

THOMAS  
Where you goin'?

PAULINE  
We have to finish this.

RACHEL  
To finish it.

THOMAS  
Finish what?

RICHARD  
How?

RACHEL  
If you can't forgive me, I might as well finish what I started.

PAULINE  
With faith.

RACHEL  
Goodbye, Thomas.

Rachel opens the door and steps out into the storm, closing the door behind herself, the wind and snow briefly whipping into the small room as she leaves. Thomas stares at the door.

PAULINE  
I can forgive you with faith.

RICHARD  
Faith?

PAULINE  
The thing that's broken between us is my faith in you.

RICHARD  
You shouldn't have faith in people.

PAULINE  
People are the only things you really can have faith in. Really believe in.

RICHARD  
Faith is a hard thing to come by.

PAULINE  
It's people that can fail you. That can disappoint you. Fail you in every way. And that's why you need to have faith in them.

RICHARD  
Faith is for God.

PAULINE

Faith is risk. You risk your own heart, your own self with faith. If there's no possibility of tragedy, there's no possibility for faith.

Thomas is still staring at the door. He stands slowly and walks to the door. He opens it and walks out into the storm, swinging the door shut behind himself.

RICHARD

Faith can't save you.

PAULINE

But it can sustain you. I have faith in you, Richard. And this child gives me faith in myself.

Pauline stands up and walks toward the door.

RICHARD

Where are you going?

PAULINE

Home.

RICHARD

There's a blizzard outside.

PAULINE

I noticed.

RICHARD

You'll freeze to death.

PAULINE

But I have faith that I won't.

RICHARD

You can't be serious.

PAULINE

Maybe you need to have more faith in yourself.

Pauline opens the door just as Thomas comes in carrying an unconscious Rachel.

RICHARD

Do you expect me to come after you if you walk out that door?

PAULINE

That's why I'm walking through it. To find out. To see if you have faith in us.

Pauline steps through the doorway and closed the door behind herself.

Thomas places Rachel in a chair and kneels at her feet.

Richard starts toward the door and stops halfway.

Rachel opens her eyes and takes hold of Thomas's hand.

RACHEL

You're a good man Thomas.

Richard sees the Bible on the small table where Pauline left it. He picks it up.

Thomas kisses Rachel's hand.

THOMAS

God forgive me.

Richard opens the Bible and a small newspaper clipping falls out. Richard picks it up.

RICHARD

"Thomas Carpenter, forty-five, wife Rachel, thirty-eight, and newborn daughter Amy were all found frozen to death in their home last night. Services will be held..."

Richard goes to the door and opens it. He turns to place the Bible on a shelf, then thinks twice, and slides it into his jacket. As he begins to close the door he catches sight of the silver flask. He hesitates a moment. Then picks it up and stuffs it in his pocket as he closes the door behind himself.

Thomas strokes Rachel's hair, as she slips back into unconsciousness. Standing, He carries her to the bedroom.

After a moment, Richard reenters the stage from opposite the door and stands down stage center. He is wearing a long black overcoat. He holds two roses and the Bible.

The lights fade to a pool of light near where Richard stands.

Richard places the two roses into the pool of light. Standing, he opens the Bible.

RICHARD

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope." [Psalms 130:1-5]

Richard slides the Bible into his coat and pulls out the silver flask.

He opens the lid.

Pauses. Looks at it. Wants it.

Turns it upside down.

And empties it beside the flowers.

He puts the cap back on the flask.

Turns.

And walks off the stage.

As the LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

THE END