

Act I: Plaid Awnings

The stage is built in a fashion to recall to mind the memorial crystallized in Kerouac's voice. The factories line the canal and the willows give shelter to the bums that graze in cigarette butts and broken bottles. The Lowell Sun is to the right and the wool to the left. The smell of diners and pork pie. The lights come up (because it is morning) and two boys (young men) sit center. There are cardboard boxes filled with building materials, fabric, junk that sits scattered about. The two hold the coffee that burns their tongues and they smoke.

James
What should we do today?

Joe
Fall in love.

James
I read my horoscope at the counter.

Joe
What'd it say?

James
Money on the eleventh, love on the twelfth.

Joe
Disappointing—waiting.

James
I read his poems last night.

Joe
How was it?

James
Better, clearer. Now that another day's passed.

Joe
I missed the commuter today.

James
Won't catch it tomorrow.

Joe
It's a long ride. We're at the end of the line.

James
I think I'm always at the last stop--no matter.

Joe
With everyone getting on and off.

James
I just watch.

Joe
Funny how you never have the nerve to say hello, or hi, or anything. They're right there and you think they could be something—if you just asked.

Joe begins to toil with hammer and nails that he scavenges out from the boxes. The conversations throughout the act ensue around his constructing to an end only he knows.

Joe
How's the coffee, James?

James
Hot. Watch yourself.

Joe
What time is it?

James
Got five minutes.

Joe
What'll we do on holidays?

James
Avoid the wind. It's always windy on holidays.

Joe
I mean--will you still watch with me when they're all at home?

James
I have before.

Have we? I don't remember. Joe

Once. James

Once can be a long time ago—if you don't watch out. It's Thursday. Joe

Paul's coming back. James

Or should be. Joe

He will. James

Do you think he had fun? Joe

Usually does. James

Found more people? Joe

He always finds more people. He's a shepard of the road. James

We flocked to him. Joe

How couldn't you? James

I think I hear him coming. Joe

It's goin' rain tomorrow. James

It's been too hot anyway. Joe

James
I only notice a couple times during the day.

Joe
Some people notice all the time.

James
Nothing better to talk about.

Joe
There is.

James
They don't.

Joe
Hold this board.

James
When will you tell me?

Joe
(smiling) When it's time.

Held pause.

Joe
Baglady is on the other side today.

James
Riley?

Joe
Yep, they're still avoiding each other.

James
They'll never quit.

Joe
You'd think a decade of bickering would end at some point.

James
Or they'd just get tired of walking across town every day.

Joe
You know they pass each other.

James

Serious?

Joe

Yeah, they go through all this trouble to avoid the other and every day when they cross Merrimack Street they pass and for about two minutes all they can do is pretend they don't notice.

James

But they do.

Joe

And they think about what they would say.

James

But they can't say anything, can they? What would you say.

Joe

If they did say something neither of them would ever have anything to say the rest of the day.

James

When he gets here, we shouldn't tell him about Ruth.

Joe

Black paint?

James

You're out. When the hell are you going to be done?

Joe

Saturday. She'll tell him. I woke up at six this morning.

James

Why the hell did you do that?

Joe

Couldn't sleep.

James

You never could.

Joe

It was worse last night.

I slept a little late. James

What time did you go to bed? Joe

Late. James

Very late? Joe

Very late. James

There is the sound of an old mill clock. The stage dims and the sound of a crowd passing, trolley horns, and cars fills the stage. When the lights come up the two are accompanied by another man. He is clad in a white t-shirt with coffee and sweat stains, broken khakis, and sore work-boots. He dashes and passes, smokes, and tosses rocks. He feels the earth and the rest of us feel his eyes.

What's the word? Paul

He greets nowhere short of exuberant enthusiasm.

How were the travels? Joe

You have to go! Paul

Where? Joe

Paul

Everywhere! Everywhere I've been is beyond belief. It just blows your mind and leaves you—leaves you inside out praying for each moment—you know—each moment just stays.

James

The West?

Paul

The South man, the South.

Joe

Hot down there?

Paul

Shit! The South—home cooking and tan faces. Met a girl at a truck stop right outside of this crazy Civil War memorial. They were having a fair, or something, and this girl has come in to get a glass of sweet tea. I swear when I saw her my heart skipped six times over.

Joe

So you were with her.

Paul

Day and night. Each second either stroking her hair or feeling her lips, or just staring, you know, staring so hard I thought I would break her. And when it just got so intense she'd just smile and go make eggs or bacon or cracklin' bread, anything greasy and satisfying.

James

Ate a lot of grease, huh?

Paul

So much it should have been illegal. And toast! Even her toast was perfect and greasy and satisfying. And her name—her name was like lilacs.

James

You don't even remember her name.

Paul

No! It was sweet as lilacs. Her name was Mary-belle.

James

You're shitting me.

Paul

Isn't that out of control! It's got such class—such culture. I could have said it all day and all night. I did say it all day and night. She was stamped with this world: it was painted all over her. In her voice, her clothes. I just wanted to bite that world, just taste it, just keep it inside of me and pray that I didn't shit it out.

Joe

And then?

James

Then he comes back.

Paul

I dig the north you know. Got my footprints.

Joe

Sounds like paradise you gave up.

James

Always sounds like paradise he's giving up.

Paul

Home's paradise. Paradise is home.

James

Sure.

Paul

You boys need to taste it.

Joe

Maybe I will.

James

You can't even get sixty miles down the track.

Paul

I can dig that scene too.

Joe

Why'd you leave?

Paul

Reasons.

Such as? James

Stupid shit. It was over a guy and his dog. Paul

This is a new one. James

Guy thought I cut his dog. Paul

And killed it? Joe

Stupid shit, man! Stupid shit. Why'd I want to kill some guys dog? Paul

Maybe you had some kind of vendetta against him? James

The dog? Paul

The guy. James

Hell no, man! I loved that guy. He worked the land. He did it all, man. Had his own little shack and a few acres that he nursed. Nursed bone dry. The corn—God—corn like you've never seen. I loved that guy. I helped him in the fields, threw dirt and shit and still felt pure. Dog used to run around with us, chase away the rabbits and whatnot. Imagine the angry rabbits stalking the garden—just waitin' to raid. It was insane. I've never felt such animosity against such a cute fuckin' creature. The guy and his dog, man. He needed that dog—I knew how much he needed that dog. Anyway, I go outside with this cat one mornin' to do all that pure country work and the dog's dead. Paul

Just lying there? Joe

I wish. We're talkin' pieces of this dog scattered all around the lawn. Looked like someone took an axe to it about fifty times. My hunch— Paul

James

This should be good.

Paul

Is that the bunnies did it.

James starts rolling with laughter as Paul rears into explanation of his theory.

Paul

I shit you not. Think about it: you're hunted every day by the same beast, lost huge chunks of your family to the motherfucker, you call up your extended family and you take the bitch down.

Joe

But—bunnies?

Paul

Anyway—guy starts crying and yelping and swinging at me. Kept screaming that “those damn Yankees could never be trusted,” that he should have known. He goes and calls out his troops and I had to high tail it man, didn't even get a chance to kiss Mary-belle farewell.

Joe

That's a shame.

James

Maybe you should bring her up here, rescue her from the grip of the eccentric farmhands.

Paul

Hell, no. This isn't her world. (pause) What have you boys been up to?

James

Nothing.

Joe

Usual.

James

Are you working today?

Paul

I'll probably go help my uncle later when I go say hello to my family. Why aren't you guys at work?

Joe

Bookstores going under, Lane had to lay me off—he felt guilty, but he needs the money for the kids.

James

No painting in the area.

Paul

Something always needs painting.

James

They must be fine with the way everything is now. Don't mind the cracks. I painted the outside of a house the other week.

Paul

How much you make?

James

No one lived there.

Paul

I can feel it.

Joe

How long you staying?

Paul

'Til I get my fill of Chinese Pie. Miss it a helluva a lot when I'm gone. No one's even heard of it in the South. What'd ya' boys think of my predicament.

James

Which one?

Paul

Ruth and all. (pause) Love is based on passion, right? Drive?

Joe

You should marry her.

Paul

I know what you think. What about you?

James

Sure.

Sure what? Paul

Gotta be passion. James

And it's full man—isn't it always full, like your tanks on full and you could drive the whole night with that one person. Paul

Makes sense to me. James

Tanks always run out at some point. Then what? Joe

See, that's what I don't know. What then? Paul

It probably wouldn't—if you love the person and all. James

Yeah. Paul

Hormones. Joe

What? Paul

It's all hormones. Joe

Passion, man! Passion. Paul

Sterile. It'd just be sterile. James

Huh? Joe

Hospital ward sterile. James

Comfortable. Joe

Like plaid. Paul

Like plaid in the morning. Joe

Ruth. Paul

What? James

Ruth's multiple plaids in multiple mornings and the plaid makes up the bed and you just dig in deeper. Paul

And you mind? Joe

Of course I don't mind—I just don't know. I don't know. Riley been around lately? Paul

Where would he go? He'll be here soon. James

Riley will know. Paul

Why'd you say that? Joe

That guy's had a life. When he talks it's all real. Honest, man. 'Cause it's all from him. Paul

Well, we'll ask him when he gets here. It's still morning so he should still be able to talk semi-coherently. James

It's always coherent. I can hear him. Joe

Paul
Almost more coherent.

James
I don't think I'd go that far.

Paul
You boys been praying?

Joe
I've been. James is slacking in the Sunday morning waking.

James
I go. Father Roy keeps getting on my ass at the diner, though.

Paul
Seen my parents there?

Joe
They're there with your sister every week. Always the third pew.

Paul
That's where they met. That pew.

James
Church?

Paul
Yeah. Their parents would bring them every week and my parents would be bored silly--like every little guy is by the church. Their dads worked the mills together so they'd set the two youngings up with some dry cereal and paper and pen so the two of them could just munch and play hangman. Granddad on my father's side said if they didn't set the two of them up together they would just beat their feet on the pews together and make such a racket trying to disrupt the place so that they could go play by the river. It was in those games of hangman that they fell in love. That's what all the relatives say.

Joe
That is pure.

James
His parents aren't happy. They never even talk to each other.

Joe
I bet they're happy.

I couldn't even break this tie. Paul

Well, we see them more than you do. James

True. Shit! Ha, ha, good ole Riley! Paul

Riley stumbles in wearing coarse brown and a weather-beaten chapeau. He moves slowly yet has no visible ailment that perpetuates his determined steps. Paul bounds toward him.

I caught your eye earlier. Paul

Give it back. Riley

You couldn't even say hello to an old friend. Paul

I was enjoying my eggs and you're quite disagreeable early in the morning. Riley

I'm always excited to greet the new day. Paul

Exactly. Riley

Festivals in two days Riley. James

So. Riley

That's your day. James

I know where I'm supposed to be. Riley

James
But she'll be on this side for the festival too.

Riley
Who?

Paul
Only the one woman who could cause this old man—

Riley
I'm not old.

Paul
To cross town every day to avoid her.

Riley
I told you before and it seems as though I will be forced to drill it into your thick skulls one more time—my crossing town is simply routine. Change of scenery.

Joe
Why don't you talk to her?

Riley
Who?

Paul
The mysterious woman in black.

James
The woman who sleeps on the street.

Joe
Religious baglady.

Riley
Oh, the woman with the rosaries and satchels—don't know her.

James
Every time! This is why I say passion. Everything else deludes the brain with illusion and lies.

Paul
Exactly! It wasn't just passion. Was it Riley? You would have called whatever it was between the two of you something other than passion.

Riley

Why is that little boy always hanging off the canal wall? Son! Son get back from there is you don't want to fall in! Stupid kid.

Joe

That boys a regular down here. I think his family lives in the tenement next to the Paradise.

Riley

I don't give a damn where he lives, he's goin' fall in.

Paul

Stop avoiding it. You've told us before.

Riley

Must've been drunk. Don't listen to me when I've been drinkin'.

James

Then when are we suppose to listen to you?

Riley

Smart ass.

Paul

Riley, give me the flat out truth 'cause I got this thing.

Riley

That's a shame—you've got a thing. Here's my advice: if it's broken, throw it away. If it's in fine condition—throw it away.

Paul

Stop being smart.

Riley

Can't help it. Learned too much.

Paul

It's about Ruth.

Riley

Oh, yeah. The pretty girl every guy knows is pretty, but refuses to tell that they think they're pretty.

Joe

Yes. Shouldn't he tell her?

Riley

I don't give a shit what ya' do kid.

Paul

Did you love her? Did she love you?

Riley

Not telling. Don't even know what you're talkin' about.

Riley pulls his knitting out of his bag and begins working.

Joe

What would it tell you?

Paul

It would tell me something. What are you making?

Riley

A bag to bury my body in. Kid, if you've got a lack of voices in your head—take one of mine.

Joe

I already gave you mine.

Paul

That's what I'm asking for Riley—give me a voice here.

James

You should at least see her. She pins your letters. Every one.

Paul

Of course I'll see her. Every damn little note I send?

James

I went over to the house a while ago to do some painting for her family and in her room is a wall with every letter you sent. She reads over them every morning and begins the dishes or her brothers' and sisters' laundry or whatever comes next for her.

Paul

She isn't free. See. That's the problem. Look at me.

Riley

Son! I said go play under the trees or something.

Joe

'Cause running away is so good for the soul.

James

That's not really a bag to put your body in. Is it?

Riley

I don't look that far ahead, kid. It's a scarf for the winter.

Paul

I mean I know I'll find her today and she'll be in her clothes that are faded and stiched back together and look so great on her because she could wear just about anything and look together—you know—ready for what's next even if it's shit. And it's usually shit. The world keeps shitting on her and she's got her kitchen and her mom and dad go to work all day and she makes sure the days keep going. And faded red! She wears faded red and goes down to the meat market smiling. She hums in this beautiful little voice that rings miracle! Shit.

Joe

Bring her petals,

James

So she can speed away.

Joe

And rub them through her fingers,

James

So you can speed away.

Joe

And then a ring. Put a ring over the rose. Spin her and have a church with bells and a dog without a name and take her burden with her.

Paul is dashing about the concrete structure, hiding and gliding and believing—in something gold.

Paul

Look, kid, that isn't me in the kitchen and that isn't my dog and I never even played with a dog like I did 'til this fall. You see me, you guys always asking me for stories and whatnot and you laugh so hard and you hear me tellin' you 'bout things you'll never see and what if I went blind? Bet you wouldn't even listen to me anymore. Bet no one would.

Riley
Most of us don't have a choice.

James
Lock and key and it won't be marked.

Joe
Is no one listening?

Paul
I live after hours in whiskey and games of rummy pulling a few pennies home with the sun rising.

Joe
Where's your plaid?

Paul
Where's your decision? So many answers—where's your question, Joe?

James
Goin' to lunch?

Paul
Maybe I should take a nap. Sort it out in my sleep.

Paul goes to lay his head in Riley's lap. Riley jerks back as Paul begins to laugh and shrug off his dilemmas.

Paul
Can't I be your grandkid, Riley?

Riley
Get your greasy French-Canadian head away from lap. I would never claim you as my blood even if you were.

Paul
Oh, come on.

Riley
Get now, kid. You'll mess up my stitchin'.

Paul grabs the work. Riley starts hitting him with a stick. As the two commence

“play”, a bell rings. They
fade into the back as Joe and
James fade forward.

Joe
First smoke break of the day.

James
Already had one.

Joe
Suppose you didn't.

James
What's to suppose.

Joe
Suppose you hold this board.

James
Can't you hold it yourself?

Joe
Suppose—

James
Bet you tomorrow's coffee I can get this stone into the cup from here.

Joe
Shoot.

The rock falls into place.

Joe
I'm buying.

James
You didn't think I'd miss?

Joe
Hoped you wouldn't. You like folk?

James
An old man and his guitar—what could be better?

Joe
There's a concert during the festival in the basement of that church across from the school.

James
Maybe I'll see you there.

Joe
Suppose, suppose maybe.

A girl clad in faded red enters from stage left. She wears pins in her hair and it falls simply about her eyes. She moves slowly carrying the bags filled with food for the family that she loves. She stops and quietly looks for hope. Paul, lost in the background, notices her and hides behind one of the granite blocks peering. Riley snatches his work back.

Ruth
Hello.

James
Hey, Ruth.

Joe
How're you doing?

Ruth
Kinda tired. Got some relatives coming into town for the festival.

Joe
That'll be nice.

Ruth
Always is. (pause) You don't know if he's gotten back yet, do you?

Joe
Well,

James

We haven't seen him.

Ruth

Wish he'd at least write again. He's probably found another gir—place. Don't you think? Found another place on the way back up.

James

Wouldn't know. He never sends us any word. Just ends up back here when he gets in. When you going to ask him to stay?

Ruth

I couldn't do that. Since we were kids, he always talked about the bigness of things. I didn't even think about it to tell you the truth. I never much cared for anything big. I don't even like crowds. That's why I stay away from the city. And then cars just scare me. Seems to be too many of them for the road. And I always get burnt when I go to the beach—so it's better I just stick to the town. (pause) It's better this way.

James

How'd you like to come to the Paradise with us for lunch?

Ruth

Oh, I couldn't. But thank you. Gotta get the fish home before it spoils.

Joe

I'm sure he'll come to find you as soon as he gets into town.

Ruth

Do you think? I guess he always ends up coming by at some point. My parents could hardly get him out of the house when we were kids, now they say they can hardly remember what he looks like. They have to look at the picture of us all dressed up for our first communion just to get a faint image of him. But they're probably just joking around—they being half asleep all the time anyway I can hardly tell.

James

What about tonight? Why don't you come out with us tonight? We'll grab some pasta or something and go out by the river.

Ruth

That would be nice—but I really do have a lot to do before my family gets to town.

Joe

Well, you know where to find us.

Ruth

I went by the store today to see if there were any new books in. Thought I might see you there.

Joe

Won't be running into me there any longer. Decided it was best for Lane to keep the money for his family.

Ruth

Sad how the chain stores are putting the others out. Main strip isn't quite the same. My parents always tell me stories about the way it used to be. Dirtier but had something more.

James

Didn't have us.

Joe

Would have had others. Well,

Ruth

I should go get dinner ready and if you see him,

Joe

I'll send him your way.

Ruth

If he gets in tonight tell him I'll be back by here tomorrow. Maybe I'll run into him.

Joe

I'm sure he'd like that.

Ruth exits.

James

So sure of everything.

Paul runs out from behind the stone.

Joe

Could have said something.

Paul

Didn't know what to say. But I could smell her from where I was.

Like plaid? Joe

Just like plaid. Paul

When you gonna go over there? James

I'll come by tomorrow. Need a night out. I'll see you boys later. Paul

Bar's too heavy with smoke for you to see anything much. Joe

Paul, as he exits.

I'll make sure to catch something. Paul

Now there is a kid with a few spark-plugs in overdrive. Riley

So—what do you think, Riley? James

I think I need to go find some more yarn. Come here, kid. Riley

Riley beckons Joe to him and hands him one end of yarn from his bag.

Hold this. Riley

Riley makes his way across the stage unwinding the yarn that falls from a worn briefcase held together by safety-pins and paperclips.

I don't just buy this out of some general store shop window. I collect it from the street. Got better things to do with the little money I got. Gotta eat. No way to get around that one. Riley

Joe and James examine as the
yarn stretches out in rainbow
fragments somehow attached
by callused hands and time
from stoop to curb.

Riley

People seem to be losing their clothes wherever I go: sweaters shedding green and mittens streaming orange. I walk with my eyes down so I don't miss them. They're buried in candy wrappers, leaves, junk mail, you name it it's down in those run-offs. So I pick 'em out and spend my days melding them together. When that's through I starting knitting whatever it is I think that I need or, sometimes, something I just have a hankering to have. Keeps me busy. I never learned how to play an instrument but I sure as hell love keeping my hands moving.

Joe

Have you ever knitted something for someone else?

Riley

Can't remember.

James

So that's why you spend so much time just searching in the gutter.

Riley

Not all of us can be young.

James

You could sell what you make.

Riley

Who the hell would wanna do a thing like that?

James

Just trying to be helpful.

Riley

Well, you're not. Guess I should get moving. Seems I've been here a while. Those eggs I ate this morning didn't seem to fill me up.

Joe

Should go get some shepard's pie.

Riley starts winding the
thread. Joe pauses before
letting go.

Joe

You lonely, Riley?

Riley

Boy, you see me once every two days. I'd I'm just passing. Why'd you ask him if he's lonely. No reason if I am or if I'm not. Know I'm hungry—that's about that.

Riley packs his bag and leaves. Joe turns to the words scrawled in granite tracing the "a"s.

Joe

You don't believe.

Pause.

James

It's going to rain tomorrow.

Joe

I know. It will be cloudy and cold but it will only be drizzling-- people won't even put on their windshield wipers.

James

It will get colder. I'll remember just how much I hate the winter.

Joe

And you'll say the same things.

James

You don't think that the festival will be canceled if it's raining?

Joe

No. But it won't be. I heard the forecast on the radio when I was making coffee last night.

James

Maybe I'll stay in tomorrow.

Joe

I'll sit in the rain. (pause) You have a beautiful face.

James

Nothing's running late today.

Joe

The bell will ring soon for lunch and they'll set out the plates. I see images behind your eyes. You won't tell me about them. Will you?

James

Do you want to eat at the diner?

Joe

Your eyes. I think they're brown and bold.

James

We should go soon. You're having lunch with me—right?

Joe

I suppose that would be the question I would ask. Are you hungry? I know a place where we can chat and be out of the cold. Eat cheese fries and coffee. Maybe laugh. The waitresses will wear aprons. They're plaid.

James

That kids still over there. You better get down before Riley gets back, kid!

Joe

I'll go to lunch with you because there is nothing else I'd rather do. Would you? Maybe you'd prefer something else, but we won't talk about that. (pause) Riley says he never loved her.

James

It's a shame. Have to give the guy a bottle to get him to talk about anything in his life.

Joe

He did love her.

James

Yeah.

Joe

Will you go to church on Sunday?

James

Maybe.

Joe

This is little.

James

You think too much.

Joe

Do you ever ask yourself for more?

James

When I was younger, I would collect these dime store green army men, cowboys, any little plastic figurine they had that week. I'd build huge fleets and worlds for them to live in. The worlds were sofa cushions, cardboard, pots, pans, Mom's pink Tupperware. I'd make up little dialogues for them. They talked all about the things I thought made people go round. All them fighting and talking about finding the good—beating the bad. For hours they would trample around with my small hands guiding their fate. Sometimes, the cushions would fall while the people were standing on top and I'd set the others around in a circle--to mourn. For about six years I was more.

Joe

I always like your stories.

James

Did you ask me to lunch?

Joe

I think I did. I also think I asked for more.

James

We should get there before the noon rush. You know what-- maybe I will see more. Maybe I'll see more in the old women who light quarter candles and talk about all the people that aren't there. Course the people are dead and all they've got is Memorial Day and ribbons and flowers and little gold purses. And they'll give me peace and shake my hand.

He pauses.

Joe

“and don't you know that God is Pooh-Bear?”

A bell rings, the stage darkens, and a crowd is heard passing.

Act II: The Drizzle

The light comes up on Joe working hard on his construction. It seems as though he is building frames around the structures that already stand. The stage is darker than the day before because today it is raining. It is the afternoon and nothing quite captures the loneliness of a fall afternoon clouded and quiet. He hammers and listens. Nothing comes. The faint sound of jingling and a cracked voice comes from stage left. He pause and waits lighting a cigarette. The Religious Baglady enters with trinkets and satchels streaming from her ragged tan clothes.

Religious Baglady

Diction. Diction in lips formed by God. Diction in the streets and me in the sky and heaven is pitch purple and loose.

Joe

Hi.

Religious Baglady

Where's your time when you put it down by your shoes and someone takes it? What time is it? What time did you go to bed last night?

Joe

I don't really know. It's after lunch. Before the end of the day. And I didn't really sleep. Did you?

Religious Baglady

Boy, how many times do I have to tell you that I don't sleep.

Joe

Sorry.

Religious Baglady

Also told you to stop saying you're sorry. And when you gonna learn to say no?

Joe

Never had a reason to say no.

Religious Baglady

Agh. Always a reason to say no. Just don't be frightened by saying it 'cause your lips were formed by God.

Joe

Pay you for a story.

Religious Baglady

Don't want your money. Put it in the basket on Sunday. You'll get a good story.

Joe

Will you tell me a story? I won't tell anyone that you did.

Religious Baglady

What'd you want a story about? Holy renewal, faith of the crippled, lies behind manicured eyes, tales of sewers, what's your preference?

Joe

What about a nice love story.

Religious Baglady

I'll tell you of the Passion.

Joe

I know that story. I mean, between two people. Love. Freedom. You know—love.

Religious Baglady

Can't say I know much about it but maybe I could make something up.

Joe

It'd make the rain okay.

Religious Baglady

Who said it wasn't.

Joe

Just today—I'm not really in the mood for it.

Religious Baglady

He doesn't care if you're in the mood for it or not. Cares about whether the earth is in the mood for it.

Joe

You in the mood for it?

Religious Baglady

Now that's a stupid question. What do I care either way?

Joe

Going to the festival tomorrow?

Religious Baglady

Here I was thinking you wanted a story, instead you just want someone to ramble at.

Joe

No, not at all. I just thought you might need some time to get the story together in your mind.

Religious Baglady

It's either gonna come out or it isn't. Giving it time is just giving it time to get messed up and rethought. Ever think about that?

Joe

Yeah.

Religious Baglady

Well, I suppose there was a door. There's always a door, ya' know.

Joe

A door?

Religious Baglady

An in and an out. A door. Got a handle and you push or pull. A door.

Joe

Yeah.

Religious Baglady

Knocking. There is knocking. I think it's coming.

Joe

Is it your story?

Religious Baglady

(gazes at the boy) Ha. No. This is very far from my story.

Joe

Please tell me.

Religious Baglady becoming entranced by imagination keeps Joe close at hand.

Religious Baglady

There once was door. A heavy door with brass handles that pounded in time. In time with a boy, a boy and his heart. The boy lived in a small house that was lost in the woods. A small house that only knew the pounding. The boy's hands were unheld and he waited as a stoic captain—eyes wide open and hand to brow unheld. One day, there was a knock. The boy dropped his hand from his brow and moved from the space where he was collecting dust. He walked to the pounding door that now sounded a knock not

from the brass handle, but from a small hand. On the other side of the door there stood a little lamb. His smile broke so hard that the boy could hardly blink—‘cause the lamb smelled of country and wore a warm coat. Behind the lamb came a doe. The boy gazed in wonder at his visitors who had found him so lost in the woods. The joy was soon gone when the three learned that they did not speak the same language. They didn’t know any of the same words except for “momma,” but this is communal. With this they learned of the others woes and sat on porches in the evening, just so they wouldn’t be sitting alone. They stayed outside as long as possible with the door open, so that the pounding remained on the inside. And they never need more tea when there was just enough. But the boy could not feel his holes filling or his hands unheld so his smile broke and all he could do was blink. One day when the three sat with no words, another boy approached from the woods. He stood before the porch and knocked. The boy from the porch was so glad to see another boy that spoke his language that he dove from the porch and answered the knock. Never hearing the pounding drowned out from the in.

Joe

Well,

Religious Baglady

(smiling) Why don’t you let your mind expand in the shower tonight. Feel your bookshelf from when you were eight. It needs to be dusted. Do that. Maybe now you will sleep.

Joe

Maybe.

Religious Baglady

What’re you building?

Joe

Stuff.

Religious Baglady

So I can give you a story and you can’t even do the same for me. Typical.

Joe

Not much to tell. Did the person really meet him along the way? Just there—knocking?

Religious Baglady

Where else would they have met? The only way is on the way and the iron that may have come is cooling off.

Joe

Heat it up again.

Religious Baglady

Not quite as simple as that.

Joe

Won't you tell me more?

Religious Baglady

Never quit. I do, though. Got tired and picked up the bags and quit. He will never quit. He holds us all and tells us stories all the time. See—I don't even need your story. I don't need anyone's story. I have his.

Joe

When he answered the knock—what did they say?

Religious Baglady

This was a chance to speak without words and both had forgotten how to talk.

Pause. She begins twirling a rosary around her finger and silently begins to pray.

Joe

Why don't you and Riley talk?

Religious Baglady

Hail Mary.

Joe

Passing just to ignore each other. You pass each other and don't even speak. Ruth says she sees it every day out the kitchen window. You on one side, him on the other and—

Religious Baglady

Nothing in between. I don't know him, boy. He's a drunk from the gutter and everyone just thinks that all those who live in the streets know each other.

Joe

You could say hi.

Religious Baglady

He been telling you things?

Joe

Not lately.

Religious Baglady

Probably hasn't had the money for any alcohol. Begging's been kinda hard. Them tryin' to "clean up the city" and all. Who ever said it was dirty?

Joe

Our parents.

Religious Baglady

What'd ya' parents know?

Joe

I've got some home-fries from the diner over there if you want some.

Religious Baglady

Ah, thank you anyway. I steer clear of that fried food. Does wonders to an old digestive system. But diction. Diction in cluttered eyes. Tell me something.

Joe

Ruth loves Paul.

Religious Baglady

Sad that the kids still believe in that stuff. What is that boy doing? Out in the rain without as much as a little jacket on hanging off into the canal. (shouting) You going get away from that canal or am I going to have to pull you away myself? Always gets there attention. Don't want me too close.

Joe

You coming to the festival tomorrow?

Religious Baglady

Haven't missed it yet. It's good to have some loudness in your life once in a while. Know what I mean? Something so loud I won't mind my corners so much after it.

Joe

Yeah.

Religious Baglady

She wants to marry him, huh?

Joe

Yeah.

Religious Baglady

She's a nice girl.

Joe

Yeah.

Religious Baglady

Where's your head, boy? Diction and you shouldn't be frightened. I won't tell.

Joe

I guess I'm occupied.

Religious Baglady

Occupy yourself? I only got so much time before I have to go try to collect for dinner.

Joe

Okay. It's hard to speak today.

Religious Baglady

Are you blaming the rain again?

Joe

No. Maybe.

Religious Baglady

How many times do I have to tell you that's its never His fault. He's only doing what's necessary. You can't tell Him to stop the rain.

Joe

You weren't in church on Sunday.

Religious Baglady

Blasphemy! I was in one on the other side.

Joe

I thought you always came back to ours.

Religious Baglady

I was tired. And diction won't allow...(she trails into her rosaries).

Joe

I prayed for something today when I woke. I prayed for something more.

Religious Baglady

He still mentions me?

Joe

Occasionally.

Religious Baglady
He never knew me.

Joe
I think he did.

Religious Baglady
So did he. He knocked so lightly.

Joe
And you opened the door.

Religious Baglady
And I opened the door.

Joe
And he walked out? Without even closing it.

Religious Baglady
This is my story! Hands off.

Joe
Sorry.

Religious Baglady
He walked into it and had the sun shining on his back and time ahead. He thought it never ran out. He walked with the confidence of a thousand soldiers.

Joe
That doesn't even seem possible. Seeing him now and all.

Religious Baglady
You only see the now. Never the all.

Joe
So you did love him?

Religious Baglady
Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with thee...

Joe
Why don't you talk?

Religious Baglady
He had all these plans for the road and the way it curved. He curved with the road and didn't even have to change his feet and the way they worked. I doubt he saw the curves.

I doubt...Hail Mary... and diction and speaking out loud. Speaking out loud! I'm talking to myself again.

She gathers her bags and begins to leave.

Joe

Did he marry you?

Religious Baglady laughs and braid the rosaries into her hair.

Joe

I wonder if you spoke,

Religious Baglady

I take you into my veins, and my arms, and my hair. And my hair. He touched my hair when he left to make something more for us. I caught his eye in the street one day and he touched my hair.

Ruth enters carrying bags and burden and smiles for she still believes.

Ruth

Hey, Joe. Hello, ma'am.

Religious Baglady

Has he touched your hair? Or your face? Has he used the diction of the lips? Have you noticed him in the sheets when you're all alone?

Ruth

I, ah, I, have, oh...

Joe

I don't know if she—

Religious Baglady

You've heard me speak before, girl. I know your name—do you mine?

Ruth

I'm sorry, I don't, I mean...

Religious Baglady

I always smile. Is that what you were about to say. That you thought I only spoke to myself in a whisper and smiled back while you were here.

Ruth

I've heard you speak. I just never got your name.

Religious Baglady

I see your brothers and sisters in the streets and you in the window. Making sure that they aren't bruised. I see you here, passing and looking for someone who makes your eyes swell.

Ruth becomes even more uncomfortable and looks to Joe for solace or meaning—quiet and answers.

Religious Baglady

I know you.

Ruth

I was just passing by. I thought maybe Joe would be here.

Joe

I don't seem to be too hard to find.

Religious Baglady

But he is, young lady. Isn't he? Have you opened your door?

Ruth

Joe?

Ruth is scared, but not from the woman's presence. It is her speech.

Joe

I think Ruth was just passing by.

Religious Baglady

So was I. But I think I want to hear her speak. Wouldn't you, Joe? Wouldn't you like to hear her speak?

Ruth

I can speak just fine, thank you ma'am.

Religious Baglady

Then ask what you came to ask.

Ruth

I was just wondering if Joe had seen Paul.

Joe

No.

Religious Baglady

The door is open. Ha, ha, ha. The door is open. Do you hear this Mary? Another door has opened and you still cry for the son you lost.

Ruth

I don't know what to say.

Religious Baglady

What's to say when you already opened the door?

Joe

It's okay Ruth. I'm sure he'll come find you tonight.

Ruth

He is in town.

Religious Baglady

I saw him just last night. He was stumbling in the street and reeking of whiskey.

Ruth

I know. I knew. I just thought maybe he would come find me soon. We could go to the festival tomorrow and he'd tell me all about it. All about where's he's been and how he's happy to be back.

Religious Baglady

Do you really want to know where he's been?

Joe

What can you tell us about Riley? What can you tell us that would make us understand why you carry your life in your bags?

Religious Baglady

I can only tell you that the strong of heart and not always the strong of soul. He, ha, ha, he. Hail Mary, full of grace...

Ruth

The strong of heart-

Religious Baglady

Miss the little while you see more! It's true of people—little faith. I'd rather cry a little right now, if you don't mind. Time is my sculptor. Can you find my creases? Trace. Trace and build.

Ruth

I don't cry about that. About time. I know that one day is as good as any other.

Religious Baglady

And all the same when they're all so brief. A glaze: a light glaze to cover your cake. The rain is beginning to give me a chill. I should make way to some shelter. Don't you think, boy?

Joe

Why won't you tell us? You and Riley.

Ruth

Did he run? Was he always running? Was he always seeing the world through his eyes and never even looking into yours?

Religious Baglady

What color are his eyes?

Ruth

Riley's?

Religious Baglady

Your boy's.

Ruth

Green, brown around the edges.

Religious Baglady

What did you do today?

Ruth

Cooking, dishes, laundry. Gave my little brother a band-aid and a kiss when he tripped on his shoelaces.

Religious Baglady

And all was green with brown around the edges.

Ruth

But I could never leave.

Religious Baglady

Why?

Ruth

Because I would be disappointing so many people. Because someone has to do it.

Religious Baglady

I know.

Ruth

Then why are you asking me all these questions?

Religious Baglady

Because I am tired and have to go to sleep.

She begins to leave.

Joe

But I thought you didn't sleep.

Religious Baglady

Boy, I told you to stop forgetting the lies you tell if they're to be the truth.

Religious Baglady gathers
her rosaries and her satchels.
As she packs, she softly sings
Hail Marys to herself. She
moves stage right slowly.

Religious Baglady

Ruth.

Ruth

Yes.

Religious Baglady

He knows you. He'll protect you. Just keep saying your prayers.

She leaves.

Joe

Sorry 'bout that. She gets a little carried away some times.

Ruth

You've been talking to her long?

Joe

For a little while.

Ruth

I thought she never really talked to anyone.

Joe

I think that's what she wants everyone to think. It's easier on her that way.

The work bell rings, the stage dims, and, as in the other scenes, the sounds of traffic, people (their hard feet and soft voices) are heard on stage. The lights rise and Joe is still working as Ruth sits wrapping gifts.

Ruth

I thought I should get them something. I haven't seen my aunts and uncles in a while.

Joe

How far away do they live?

Ruth

Not far, but everyone's always so busy with work.

Joe

What did you get them?

Ruth

I made them collages from old photos my parents had. There all these great shots of them down here when they were kids and the mills were still going. They're all black and white and look coffee stained, even though they've been in boxes for decades.

Joe

When did you have time to do that?

Ruth

Before I go to bed. When my parents have gone to bed and I've already read the kids their bedtime stories. It's my favorite time of day. I usually draw myself a bath and listen to some music. Really softly so not to wake anyone. And I just sit there and do something happy. Waste my time.

Joe

Sounds nice.

Ruth

It is. I look forward to it all day. And by that time there's not much traffic. Sometimes it gets loud with all the people that go into the bars. Sometimes there are fights going on in the streets. Couples get mad at each other—stuff like that. But I'm happy upstairs and I try not to hear it. Then I go to bed and sleep through 'til morning.

Joe

Yeah? I never sleep through 'til morning. My dreams always wake me up at some point.

Ruth

That's horrible, Joe. Do you have lots of nightmares?

Joe

No. I don't think so at least. I don't think I really know the difference, though.

Ruth

What do you mean? How could you not know?

Joe

All of them are kinda scary.

Ruth

What do you dream about?

Joe

I don't know. I guess about the future.

Ruth

Why are they so scary?

Joe

It's not that they're that scary as much as they are just, hmm, unsettling. Yeah, I never feel refreshed.

Ruth

I wish I could do something to help you. Maybe I could come over and make you some warm milk before you go to bed.

Joe

(Softly laughing) And take away some of that time that you like so much. Thanks, Ruth, but that's okay. I don't think milk would help all that much.

Ruth

It might.

Joe

Maybe.

Ruth

But, if you ever want to try—you should call me. I really don't get a chance to go out much.

Joe

I've invited you out before.

Ruth

I feel kinda bad just going out. So if there was something that you needed help with, that would make me feel better.

Joe

Well, that makes me feel better to.

Ruth

I actually never see anyone except my family most of the time. That's why I liked school so much. I got to see other people. But, Paul. Paul used to always be dragging me away to do something. Even when I protested, he'd just get me to start laughing and drag me out. Then school ended and I stayed home and he just—goes.

Joe

You can catch him.

Ruth

(Soft laugh) So he can sit around the kitchen with me. I'm not sure he'd really like that. He'd just get bored.

Joe

I think he just doesn't know he'd like it.

Ruth

Maybe. What about you?

Joe

What about me?

Ruth

You may not be in a kitchen, but don't you want someone to just sit with?

Joe

One day.

Soon I bet. Ruth

Maybe. Joe

Life always happen when you aren't looking. Ruth

It hard not to stare. Joe

Was Ms. Noon still teaching Sunday school when you were there? Ruth

Yeah. Joe

Well, she always used to say, (imitating an old woman with a thick Boston accent) "Ruthie, each morning is a chance to look for nothing and find everything." Ruth

She was so great. She used to wear gold shoes. Joe

And big earrings. Ruth

And purple gloves. Joe

She's in a retirement home now. I brought her cherry ice-cream for a while. I should start again. I'm sure she'd appreciate. Ruth

Does she still wear gold shoes? Joe

No she wears hospital slippers. Ruth

That's too bad. Joe

But she paints them gold—with her fingernail polish. Ruth

The two laugh.

Ruth
Don't worry Joe, you'll find a great guy.

Joe
Or just a nice boy. And you'll marry Paul.

Ruth
We'll cook them Shepard's pie.

Joe
And take the dogs on walks.

Ruth
And I'll sell collages.

Joe
And I'll own a bookstore.

Ruth
With a coffee-counter! And I'll make coffee.

Joe and Ruth are laughing and tossing bows back and forth sometimes attaching the bows to the granite.

Joe
And all the doors will be open.

Ruth
Huh?

Joe
And it won't be cold.

Ruth and Joe calm their game and begin to settle. Ruth begins collecting her gifts.

Ruth
That's what you need. Too bad you still can't sleep.

Joe
Well, maybe one day.

Ruth

Yeah. One day. One day the going won't go.

Joe

And there'll be someone to stay. (pause) Even if you've never met them.

Ruth

I should go home. My parents will be getting in soon.

Joe

Ruth, I always noticed you when you were coming out of Sunday school

Ruth

You did?

Joe

You always smiled. Even when it was raining.

Ruth

Really. I didn't notice.

Joe

I did.

Ruth

I think I remember seeing you.

Joe

You probably didn't. But that's okay.

Ruth

Good luck with whatever it is you're building.

Joe

Thanks.

Ruth

I'll see you tomorrow at the festival?

Joe

I'll see you.

She exits. Her step is still tired. But it always was. And she only notices a couple times a day. The

lights darken the stage and a few noises are heard. Perhaps those of night approaching and everyone going home.

The lights have dimmed further as it becomes night. Ominous, provocative, stimulating. Joe attaches clip lights so that he may continue with his construction. He smokes. He listens. He may even begin to weep. He picks up the hammer and nails and looks to something (the stars, Orion, the lights of the highway that he knows are there). It is silent. As he raises himself to begin again, a voice is heard. James enters from stage right.

James
A little late for you to still be out.

Joe
Wanna finish by tomorrow. For the festival.

James
You've got some dedication.

Joe
Or a lot of time.

James
Sorry I didn't come by today but it was raining.

Joe
I noticed.

James
The rain?

Joe
That you weren't here.

James
Well, you know I have other things I need to be doing.

Joe
Yeah.

James
Talk to anyone today?

Joe
No.

James
Thought maybe Ruth would come by to see if Paul was around?

Joe
She stopped to wrap some presents.

James
She really should just give up on him. It's not like he is going to settle down any time soon.

Joe
You never know.

James
Hell, you know with Paul. I know with Paul. Just because you think that the two of them were meant to be doesn't mean that it is going to happen. That's probably the reason it won't happen.

Joe
I'm not saying that I know what should happen.

James
Hell you're not! You're always hinting at what people should do.

Joe
I just talk about what I see.

James
Everyone sees different things, Joe. You can't trust yourself to know something just because what you see on the street.

Joe
Why don't you just leave me to my work.

James

Because you don't want me to. You know I'll pass by here at some point in the day. Isn't that why you started sitting out here? You knew that I'd pass.

Joe

No.

James

Yes. Just admit it.

Joe

I thought you couldn't always interpret people by what they're doing in the street—because they aren't you.

James

You sit out here and wait and get pissed off if I'm not out here with you.

Joe

Do I seem upset?

James

Yes.

Joe

My work. I've been out here working.

James

When you weren't, months ago, you were out here waiting.

Joe

What was I waiting for?

James

I don't know.

Joe

But I do.

James

So I'll see it tomorrow?

Joe

Yep.

James

Going to be impressive?

Joe

You never spoke to me when you passed.

James

You spent a helluva a lot of time on it. That's for sure.

Joe

I knew that you noticed me. That you always did. But I never spoke to you.

James

Look, I'm sorry. I guess I just get curious about people's motives for things.

Joe

What about people?

James

Everyone's after different things.

Joe

Do you get curious about people? And who's to say that they are all after different things?

James

I see you in church too. So it's not like you are a complete stranger.

Joe

Church. You did see me in church. Before you stopped coming.

James

I don't think that I minded that you caught my eyes. And I don't know—I don't know about the eyes. How they would catch mine. I just don't know, Joe. Were you waiting for me to say something?

Joe

You didn't say anything. (pause) I was reading a book last night. It wasn't about anything like going to work one day and how you got there. It was about not going to work or going to work and not noticing why or how you got there because it wasn't about roads, it was about what was going on inside. It was all fragments. Pieces of the whole without the flesh. It wasn't about taking this road that led to this little church where you gained something more. It was about leading anywhere with some simple solution. It was a mosaic. There was a front cover with a little boy. I think he was blind and he had one hand in his other.

Joe demonstrates how the boy looked.

Joe

There was a back cover too. And inside was the consciousness of one person. That person was seeing out of two eyes. That was the story.

James

It's starting to rain harder.

Joe

It's only drizzling.

James

I could tell you about what I did today.

Joe

What did you do today?

James

Today I went for a walk. Just a short one to get the blood pumping. I went for a short walk and then I read junk mail. Just because, because, I really don't know why. It was in the mailbox and had my name on it. So I read this junk mail and it must have been noon. Or around there that I read it. Then, I saw that it was starting to rain so I went to sleep. I have this huge quilt that I bring out to the couch and sleep with when I sleep in the afternoon. I like naps in the afternoon when I don't have anything else to do. So I took a nap and couldn't sleep. So I went to the kitchen and made eggs. Yeah, the eggs were scrambled. They were fluffy and had little white specks. I also had wheat toast and hot coffee. And the butter melted right through the toast. It reminded me of my dad. I ate eggs because I forgot to eat breakfast. Did I tell you that already?

Joe

No.

James

It must have been around four in the afternoon. Then I read some and realized I didn't care. About the story. I thought it was boring and I don't think I felt like reading at all. My eyes were tired or something. It started to get cold and I wasn't ready to deal with it. Not yet. I think I sat and just stared. My eyes were tired, I was bored, it was cold, and it was raining. I think that's what I did.

Joe

I think I would have liked that day.

James

It was a pretty pathetic day.

Why do you think that? Joe

I didn't even leave the house until now. James

That's okay. Joe

What did you do today? James

Nothing. Joe

You must have done something. James

I worked out here for most of the day. I forgot to eat. But I haven't been hungry lately anyway. Joe

Could be worse. James

Could be better. Joe

The two sit and start smoking.

I'll buy coffee tomorrow. James

I'll be here. Joe

Why do you always sit out here? James

I don't mind the rain. I also like your eyes. Even if it's only for a moment. Joe

That's enough. James

Joe
For now it is.

James
Will you ever stop sitting out here.

Joe
Maybe. Each morning is a chance to look for nothing and find everything, you know.

James
I like to think of it as the beginning of another day in the countdown.

Joe
To what?

James
I don't think I even know.

Joe
Don't worry about the coffee tomorrow.

James
Why not?

Joe
'Cause it's the festival. I won't need an excuse.

James
Do you want to hear about the book I was reading?

Joe
Sure.

James
Well, hold on a sec, I need to remember how it starts.

Joe
And your eyes are brown and diction is formed in the lips by God.

Lights down. The sound of
rain stopping.

Act III: Silent Festivals

The stage is quiet and very dark. The curtains rise as our play begins to roll to a somber end. It is before daybreak. There is a soft putter of life in some distant corner. The monument stands with Joe's construction built about it. There is material covering his work. A light breaks backstage right. Laughter is heard. Paul stumbles out apparently inebriated.

Paul

Calling! Calling, "Ruth," "Ruth," Ruth!" (laughs) "Paul? Is that you?" "Yes, Ruth, it's me. It's me. Paul." "Paul, what are you doing here? It's so early." He steps up defiantly. "So late you mean. It's so late, Ruth. The sun's about to come up." (laughs) "I'm blind. Ah. Ruth, the sun! I'm blind." He laughs. (pause) Where's that kid that's always out here? What the hell is this anyway?

Paul goes to examine what is underneath the cloth.
Clanking of Religious
Baglady startles Paul back.

Religious Baglady

Hail Mary, full of grace.

Paul

Hey, old woman. What's the scene? It morning yet or you just like the night?

Religious Baglady

Hail Mary! Full of grace.

Paul

Seen anyone around? Festivals starting soon ya' know. Gotta be someone around. Seen Ruth? Ah, you don't know who Ruth is. (raises his voice) Seen a young lady in red with a little handkerchief tied around her head? Seen her?

Religious Baglady

Hail Mary,

Paul

You don't talk. Do you? Won't talk to me. Won't talk to anyone but your God. But I've seen you around before. You seen me? Well, I'm looking for this girl. Pretty sure I know where she is. She should be here soon. Right?

Religious Baglady

I'm trying to pray here.

Paul

I think the crowds will be here soon and she'll be with 'em. It shouldn't be too hard to find her here. What does that kid have hidden under this cloth here? Never talking to anyone. Just working. Must be kinda lonely.

Paul goes to look underneath the cloth. Religious Baglady approaches. He moves away.

Religious Baglady

That isn't yours.

Paul

You talking to me? Hey now. Just thought I'd take a peak. Isn't yours. Is it? It's that kids.

Paul goes to the center of the monument. He holds time in breath and sees the air begin to turn cold.

Paul

I hate when it starts to get cold and your breath surprises you. Must be for the festival. Kid's got some dedication. Don't you think? Dedication out ways. Out ways and that-a-ways. (laughs) Off on my own some days waiting for the clock to chime my time and I head on out. You're not even listening, are you? You don't hear any of this. Well, I'll tell you anyway. I went South and I had the time of my life running out in those fields. Just kicking crap and watching it soar out into nothing. Shouting so the sky echoed off the reservoir. God calling back. Here that? I did hear God calling back. I listened too. Listened 'til the ducks came out the next morning. Me, sitting there, empty beer bottles on the dock. Feet hanging off the pier. Little splinters piercing my jeans. Sweat pouring out four in the morning. Sky so clear that I couldn't count the stars in a square inch even if I wanted too. Didn't even try. Sat on that dock. Know what I thought about? These canals. Right back here. These damn dirty canals kept flashing through my mind. Thought about how I used to hang over 'em like I did when I was a kid. Tossing coins in, waiting for a prayer, praying. The sun came up down there in the South. The stalks would glisten and melted right away into nothing 'cause it was already searing out. Even in the early summer. Hard for me to believe—but I was seeing it. Ya' know?

Religious Baglady

Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The two sit in silence as Paul drums beats that meet the mumbling of beads as

Religious Baglady counts once more. Lights go down.

The lights begin to rise slowly and then the stage abruptly darkens with the sound of crowds, traffic, and the ominous clock chiming as it has so many times before. For it is morning and the chance for her to revel in the noise. On stage is seen the faded red pacing.

Where is he? Paul?
Ruth

Riley enters.

Excuse me. Sir? Excuse me.
Ruth

What you want?
Riley

Have you seen a boy today? He—
Ruth

I seen lots of boys today, couple of men. What you thinking?
Riley

No, well, I'm sorry. Nevermind. He wears these jeans and this white t-shirt that he loves.
Ruth

Pants and shirts. Could be just about anyone.
Riley

Oh. I know. I know. He talks a lot. That might help.
Ruth

I don't know. Does it?
Riley

Nevermind. (she sits) You wouldn't know him.
Ruth

What're you asking me for? Riley

You were there. Ruth

Riley takes a sweet seat
monitoring himself.

Going play any games at the festival? Listen to some music. Riley

I don't know. I have to meet my family and go around with them soon. I promised them that I would, but I do hope to see some dancing. Maybe some singing too. Ruth

Usually go well together. Riley

Maybe I'll see if I can find some of that homemade jewelry. The stuff with the little beads. Ruth

I've lost quite a few beads from my jewelry. Riley

Did you get them at the festival? Ruth

Nah. Made 'em myself. Riley

Oh. Ruth

What'd you say your name was? Riley

Ruth. Ruth

Pretty. Riley

It's a family name. Ruth

No. You. You're quite pretty. Riley

Thank you. Ruth

Saint Ruth waiting for her boy. Well, not many people have gotten here yet. They'll be here when it's a little warmer. Riley

Yeah. Ruth

You know what's underneath all this? Riley

No. I've seen a boy working on it. He's out here almost every day. Ruth

Stays busy. Riley

Wonder what it is. Ruth

My hunch is it is for the festival. Riley

Yeah. Ruth

What if he doesn't come? Riley

Ah, I'll just go around with my family. Ruth

You ever read Emerson? Riley

The philosopher? Ruth

Riley
Guess you could call him that.

Ruth
I read an essay in high school. I don't remember it though.

Riley
I don't remember it either.

Ruth
Why?

Riley
Guess I'm old.

Ruth
No. Why do you bring it up?

Riley
Oh, I don't know. I just figure people talk about stuff like that. Just trying to make conversation really.

Ruth
Oh, well. I know about those beads. A little bit, that is. We could talk about that.

Riley
I hate 'em—

Ruth
Sorry.

Riley
Didn't let me finish. You're kinda jumpy lassy.

Ruth
Sorry.

Riley
Anyway, I hate 'em, the big beads that is. There just way to clunky for me. I like the smaller ones.

Ruth
Me too! You know what I hate?

Riley
What's that?

Ruth

When I make a beaded bracelet and I think that I put just enough beads to make it tight then I put it on and there's this extra string so the beads just rattle back and forth.

Riley

Me too!

Ruth

But I haven't made a bracelet for myself in a long time.

Riley

Not me. Make another one every time it breaks. Happens often. Told you like I doing it, but can't for the life of me do it right.

Ruth

That's funny.

Riley

I don't think it's funny. Seems any eight year old can do it better than I can.

Ruth

No! It's funny that you make them.

Riley

You see me laughing?

Ruth

Kinda.

Riley

You really think it's funny. Never really asked myself if it was.

Ruth

Well, yes sir, I do. I guess it's just unusual for an old man to—

Riley

I would really like to know what being old means 'cause I sure don't feel old.

Ruth

Older man making jewelry.

Riley

Knit too.

Me too!

Ruth

Thought you might.

Riley

Don't have time to make it for myself though.

Ruth

Whatever you say.

Riley

Excuse me?

Ruth

Nothing lassy.

Riley

Are you Irish?

Ruth

No. What'd give you that idea?

Riley

Sorry. I don't know.

Ruth

Catholic though.

Riley

Me too. Where do you go?

Ruth

Hopefully to Heaven.

Riley

I never knew you were so funny.

Ruth

What's with all this funny talk? Who said I was funny? I'm just being accused all over the place of things I'm not. And you never even knew me to know any differently.

Riley

Well, I have seen you before. You sort of stand out.

Ruth

Riley

So do you.

Ruth

No I don't. If anything, I'm that girl in the corner that no one takes notice of twice.

Riley

Exactly.

The stage. A crowd is heard.
Today there is no bell: the
chime is of the child's cry of
hope that the festival brings.
Childhood is the age of
eternity. Riley sits knitting
among the noise. Paul enters.

Riley

Ho hum, diddly dum...

Paul

Excuse me.

Riley

Huh?

Paul

That girl, the one that was just talking to you.

Riley

Which one? There's Veronica (motions to nothing) look at her. Spitting image of her mother. And Tammy, a little frumpy but nice.

Paul

What?

Riley

Just, ah, forget it. Trying to be funny. I think she just went to get some cotton candy.

Paul

Down there?

Riley

Yeah. Along with the other thousand people that believe that inflated sugar on a stick is a novel concept.

Paul
Didn't mean to bother you. I tried to catch her.

Paul sits. Riley gives a look
of disinterest.

Paul
I tried to catch her but all these people kept getting in my way.

Riley
Sure. (looks him over) Paul?

Paul
Huh?

Riley
She mentioned you. I'm pretty sure she will be right back if you wait a minute.

Paul
Me? Does she know you or something?

Riley
Nah.

Paul
Well, what'd she say about me. Was she looking for me? She was. Shit. She was
waiting for me. You know what?

Riley
Hum.

Paul
It's not all bad. Me. Not all that bad. I didn't do anything wrong did I? I'm throwing
myself into usefulness. That's what I'm doing. I'm finding out about what I think.
Aren't I? Isn't that better for her in the end? I eat whatever is in the terrain and I go
where I please and I'm taking it all in for the both of us. She doesn't know that though.
Or maybe, maybe I'm not. Maybe it is for me. Is that so wrong? Isn't that what she
should be doing.

Religious Baglady enters
hands outstretched.

Religious Baglady
Handmade rosaries only a dollar.

Paul

No thanks.

Religious Baglady

Suit yourself. Maybe your parents would like one though. Makes a great birthday gift. How about you?

Riley

Look like I got money?

Religious Baglady

I know you don't have any money. Would you like to have one? It doesn't seem as though anyone is interested in them.

Paul

Go sell down by the church. I heard there was a concert going on down there this afternoon.

Religious Baglady

Already tried. People just go to the gift shop.

Riley

That's stupid.

Religious Baglady

What's your name? You look familiar.

Riley

Me?

She nods.

Riley

I don't suppose you know me. But I've seen you around.

Religious Baglady

I must be mistaken but you look like someone I used to know quite well. Long, long ago. Are you sure we've never known each other.

Riley

What can I say? I've known a few in my day. Maybe that's what these kids keep calling me old.

Religious Baglady

Well, the festival's nice. Isn't it?

Paul

Great.

Religious Baglady

Well, that seemed insincere. Anything wrong?

Paul

No. Nothing.

Religious Baglady

There are answers at hand.

Paul

No thanks.

Religious Baglady

Shame.

Paul

Agh!

Religious Baglady

Just scream it out. There now. Do you feel better?

Paul

Sure.

Riley

You kids have got some cowardness in you.

Paul

I'm not afraid.

Riley

Could have fooled me.

Religious Baglady

What's he afraid of?

Riley

Probably just some stuff that we were scared of at his age.

Religious Baglady

Well, he'll learn.

Riley

Yes he will.

Paul is about to leave. There are not enough cigarettes or enough simple air that could calm these nervous feet.

Paul

Sorry to bother the two of you. I'll be on my way. You said she was right down there fella?

Riley

You'll walk right by her if you leave now.

Religious Baglady

I once had a gray scarf that look very close to that one you are knitting now.

Riley

Scarf's not gray. There's about a hundred colors in here.

Religious Baglady

Well, you could have fooled me.

Riley

Doubt I'd get it passed.

Paul begins to leave.

Religious Baglady

The festivals happening up here too. Whatever you'll looking for will surely pass by.

Paul

Maybe not.

Paul pulls at his shoestring. It breaks.

Paul

Shit.

He tosses the shoestring back and it lands in front of Religious Baglady. He straps his shoe together pell-mell and hurries off. The Religious Baglady picks up

the string and examines it softly.

Religious Baglady

Would you like this?

Riley

Think it just might come in handy.

Riley takes the string. She begins on her way. Riley watches after her. As she leaves her chant is heard.

Religious Baglady

Handmade rosaries for sale.
One dollar release your nail.

He opens his hand only to find a rosary attached to the string.

Riley

How about that. Old girl's still got some tricks up her sleeves.

He continues to knit as Joe enters. Unbeknownst to Riley, Joe comes from stage right carrying a box. It is filled with unknowns. He hurries behind the monument and here he will stay, that is, until he is prepared to stay no more.

James enters. He sits at a corner opposite from Riley tends to his reading and his smoking. He never acknowledges the others that share the space. Perhaps he is too engulfed in the pages (dog-eared the places of importance). Ruth enters holding a snow-cone and a small box.

I found you something.	Ruth	
		She hands the box gently to Riley.
Beads. (smiles) Thank you.	Riley	
Small ones.	Ruth	
He went looking for you.	Riley	
I know.	Ruth	
Did he miss you?	Riley	
One day he won't.	Ruth	
I know.	Riley	
I have to go meet my family.	Ruth	
Youth lasts only...	Riley	
(laughs) And you're not even old.	Ruth	
You were named well, Ruth. Saint Ruth.	Riley	
(smiles) I'm no saint.	Ruth	
Only the picture of piety and patience	Riley	

Ruth

(laughs, a small tear)

The stage darkens quickly and a scream is heard. The movement rapid, the bells unceasing, and a clear cry,

The Scream

A boy has fallen in!

The bells continue and the rush grows to a clamor. As all situations of fear, the sightlines are as dark as the reddening cries. After a somber moment of silence as the bells fade and the shouting subsides a very different cry reverberates—that of joy. He was saved. As the lights come up, James lights another cigarette. Joe enters from behind the monument.

Joe

You were at the concert, weren't you? The one at the church.

James

Yeah.

Joe clears his throat and approaches.

Joe

My name's Joe.

James

James.

Joe

You used to come into the bookstore I worked at. Didn't you? I feel as though I remember you always buying Kerouac's books.

James

Yeah. That was me. I remember you too. You always suggested which one I should read next. It took me a while to get into some of them. You still work there?

Joe

No. I lost my job, well, I kinda gave it up.

James

Me too. My last one. But I just got a job cooking at a diner. The Paradise.

Joe

Sounds fun.

James

Ah, can be.

Joe

So you like folk?

James

I was there with my dad. He coaxes me into things a lot by trying to convince me that he'll be dead in another year.

Joe

I'm sorry. Is he ill?

James

Hell no. Man's healthier than ever. He's just a hypochondriac.

Joe

So you don't like folk?

James

I'm actually beginning to acquire a taste for it. It's taken a while. I think I'm just being stubborn though. I really believe I've always liked it, I just didn't want to admit it.

Joe

Stubborn against folk.

James

Well, my family's been into it for generations, so I guess it just one of those stupid things you do growing up—try to avoid anything that has to do with your family.

Joe

I think I may have done that, not on purpose, though, it was more like there was no other way for me to be. I just got tired.

James

Huh. Yeah, I've seen you out here too. I think I passed you before.

Joe

Yeah. I've got people that stop by.

James

Really. What're they like?

Joe

Well, they weren't really getting along too well—until they all met. I think it will help.

James

Huh?

Joe

Nothing. So which one's your favorite?

James

Which book?

Joe

Yeah.

James

I like all the Visions of...

Joe

Me too.

James

Visions of Gerard, Visions of Duluoz, Visions of Cody. Maybe that's just because those are the latest three I've read. Still working on that last one. (laughs) Kinda a slow reader, plus the prints really small. I think it hurts my eyes. What are you building?

Joe

Hhhuh. I remember when he would come to me. There were ribbons of road, people who swore, smelled horrible, or maybe it was beauty in sweat from losing routine and memorizing movement that was inconsequential. I bit every word and I'd see him out of the corners of my eyes. He was everywhere telling me to jump that fence and stand below the shifting chords of the clouds and ask without wanting to know the answer. He helped me build a playground for all my scars. He gave me a people to belong to.

