

JUNKIE
(a drama in one act.)

by
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CHARACTERS

CAL- a man in his mid-thirties.

During the course of the play, Cal is never without his plastic water-bottle, either carrying it or having it somewhere close by, on the floor, the dresser; some place he can easily reach it when needed. He uses this water-bottle in place of the cigarettes he is not allowed to smoke, tossing it back and forth between his hands, playing with the stopper, anything to keep himself busy. Though indicated in the script, the use of the water bottle should be constant, and used even when not indicated.

The action of the play takes place now, in a state-run, drug rehabilitation center, during Cal's thirty day program.

SCENE ONE

Day one.

(Light comes up low on a chair, down center. The chair's arms are worn, from years of people nervously running their hands back and forth over the veneer, stripping it of its shine. The seat's padded leather cushion is also worn, and a tear has been taped over. The light remains low for a few moments. CAL enters. He crosses to chair and sits, and like many before him, is nervous, running his hands along the arms of the chair, crossing and uncrossing his legs, unsure what to do with himself. He clears his throat and speaks, as light comes up full.)

CAL

The image most people have is of a guy crouched in an alley somewhere, or in a decrepit apartment, crumblin' walls, roaches, the sounds of a Hispanic couple fightin' down the hall, one end of a leather belt or rubber tube tied around his upper arm, the other end in his mouth as he tugs like a dog playin' with a rope, usin' his free hand to shoot himself full of heroin. Then his body droops, he relaxes into it, the drugs soarin' through his veins, a smile on his face, as his eyes begin to close.

(CAL laughs.)

At least that's how the movies portray it, and on TV. But it's not like that, at least not for me. I mean, I do have an apartment, a simple apartment, no roaches, no crumblin' walls, no spics...sorry...with a table and a clean table cloth. A bright kitchen light overhead, the radio playin'. My wife...

(he stops, catching his breath. When he continues, it is slower, a lower voice.)

My wife sittin' across the table, smokin' a cigarette, watchin' me cook the heroin, waitin' patiently, laughin', singin' along to some old song on the radio.

She always let me go first. I used to think it was nice of her, you know, waitin' while I got my fix.

She'd help me tie my arm. Make sure the needle was flat against my skin.

My hands are really shaky.

And she would help me guide the needle in so it didn't come out the other side of my vein.

Believe it or not, I never liked needles, still don't. I mean, I have to look away when I get a blood test.

(he smiles sheepishly, looking out.)

I'm negative.

(he continues, very matter-of-factly.)

And when it was over, I would smile, like in the movies, but my body didn't go limp, I wasn't transported immediately to some la-la land. I was just...comfortable, content, less jittery, high, but coherent.

Well, at least I thought I was. I mean, I could talk and Theresa and I would have conversations.

Jesus, imagine hearin' those conversations now.

And I'd sit and watch her, her small foot up on the table.

Her nails were always beautifully painted. Sometimes I'd try to paint them for her but, like I said, my hands are too shaky, always were, even before I started usin'.

And she would separate her toes and slowly inject between them.

Delicate.

She started findin' other places to use after Elizabeth was born. Didn't want the other mothers to see her arms when she picked up Elizabeth after school.

She had beautiful arms...

(CAL stands, addressing the audience.)

My name is Cal, and I'm a junkie.

(CAL laughs and paces across downstage as he speaks.)

I'm sorry, I can't always sit still, get too...and I have to move.

(CAL stops pacing and looks out.)

I have this friend, Dennis.

Had, before he got all wacky on me.

We went to school together, I mean all through school, like startin' in second grade. When he started goin' to AA, I used to go to meetin's with him, and of course, he'd have to stand up there and admit that he was an alcoholic.

I never understood that kind of humiliation, havin' to stand up and admit your sins to a room full of strangers, before you're allowed to talk. We know why we are where we are. I mean come on, I know I'm a junkie, you know I'm a junkie, everyone here in rehab knows I'm a junkie...why should I have to make a public announcement?

Might as well take out a friggin' ad.

(CAL drinks from his water bottle, which he does whenever he needs to think or wants to change the subject.)

My name is Cal...

(CAL shakes his head and laughs to himself. After a moment, he continues.)

Dennis used to love to talk about his first drink of the day. Oh, he looked forward to that. You could see him practically salivate when he talked about it.

Bourbon. He loved bourbon.

Me, I could never drink the stuff, whiskey, I mean. Strictly beer for me.

But he loved bourbon and would talk about that first sip, not even the first drink, but the first sip. He talked about that warmth, startin' in his stomach and he would wait, feelin' the warmth travel through his body, down his legs, up into his chest, along the length of his arms, and he would just *enjoy* the sensation before takin' his next sip. It was his favorite part of the day, and no matter how much he drank after that, he was never gonna feel that surge of warmth again.

I never understood that. If that was it, that one time, why drink? If that's what you're lookin' for and can't get it, why do it?

Me, every time is like the first time. I feel that warmth, I feel my body relax, I feel my mind let go...Every time that needle goes in, I know what I'm gonna

feel, need to feel. It's never just chasin' the feelin', it's re-livin' the feelin' again and again and it never disappoints.

(CAL closes his eyes and allows himself to be lost in the memory of that feeling. He shakes his head, breathes deeply, trying to push the longing away. He speaks, almost to himself.)

Never disappoints.

(CAL is becoming more distraught as he tries to recompose himself. He drinks from his water bottle and walks back to the chair. He sits. He rubs his arms, as if he's cold.)

It's hard. Like I don't even know how to act anymore. Don't know what to do with myself. Like startin' over, like all those years were somebody else's, like I was asleep. Just...gone. All those years.

(CAL jumps up, not ready to sit still.)

No, no...I had some good times, we had some good times. A lot of good times. I just wish I could remember them.

(he looks out.)

That was supposed to be a joke.

(he smiles weakly.)

I have to laugh at it all, otherwise I'll lose my fuckin' mind.

(he stops. He walks to the chair and sits, letting himself ease into a comfortable position. When he is settled, he speaks, calmly, quietly.)

Right now, that scares me more than anything else, losin' control. I've lost a lot of things in my life but I never lost control. And I don't feel like I'm in control anymore. Not bein' high, I feel myself goin' in twenty different directions and don't know how to stop it.

We used to have a joke when we got high. Theresa would always ask me, "Are you sure you're not there?" And if I answered, "Yes, I'm sure," it was a good high.

We were in control then, knew how much to take, how much to save. I always believed od'in' was done on purpose.

Suicide.

(CAL stands, turning his back.)

I don't want to talk about this right now.

(lights begin to fade.)

SCENE TWO

Day seven.

(Light rises on a room divider, a stark white, metal panel. Though we can't see CAL, we can hear him, speaking from behind the divider.)

CAL

Just a waste of time. I mean if I really wanted to get somethin', believe me, I could. What's this gonna prove?

(CAL comes from behind the divider, wearing a different tee shirt than the one he wore in the previous scene. He is holding a clear, plastic cup filled with liquid. He speaks as he crosses to a small, white, metal table.)

I mean, what if I was usin' ...

(CAL picks up a marker and starts writing on the cup.)

What?

(CAL picks up a small brown, paper bag and puts the cup inside it.)

Gonna throw me out after only one week?

(CAL places the bag on the small table as light fades.)

SCENE THREE

Day Seven. Later.

(Light rises on chair. Cal sits. He is very "up," speaking very quickly, trying to sound casual, but obviously uneasy, scratching himself, involuntarily twitching, fidgeting. He becomes less focused as he speaks, more jittery, nervous, looking around, paranoid.)

CAL

You have no idea how easy it is to get somethin', anything you want, even in here. Know how many times Theresa got me stuff when I was away? Just walked right in, past security, bag checks...gettin' drugs is one of the easiest things in the world to get.

Gettin' the money to get the drugs, well, that's another story.

I can walk down this hall and tell you exactly who's usin', who's holdin'...even on the street. I can stand there and pinpoint every fuckin' junkie who walks by, and believe me, it's not always the greasy, skinny kid with bad teeth and tight black jeans, beggin' for change. I'm probly not always right, but you can tell, almost like you can smell it.

Same with the drunks. I spent enough time in bars with Dennis to spot the tell tale signs. I'm not talkin' about the bums sleepin' on subway grates, but the day to day heavy drinkers, the "*functional*" alcoholics, they guys who work 9-5, the mothers rasin' their kids. You can spot them a mile away, bags under the eyes, puffy faces, sometimes you can see the gin blossoms just startin' to peek out from the crevices around the nose. They're easy to see.

That's why bars are dark.

Ever see a drunk in the light? The real drunks, ugly, used, wrinkled. Old. Even the young ones, just startin' out, already look a little rough around the edges.

Men...beer bellies, no ass.

I always wondered how the hell they kept their pants up, those big fuckin' bellies hangin' over. I mean, where the fuck do they buckle their belts, under their balls?

And the women...they look even worse...beer bellies, no ass, saggin' tits.

Don't even want to think about the saggin' parts of the men...what you can't see...

But in the darkness of a bar, they soften, wrinkles disappear. Even voices, you know the ones I mean, husky from too many cigarettes, sound almost distinguished, becoming kind of sexy.

But in the light, they can be seen clearly, already decomposin'. They recognize each other on the street, even if they don't know each other's names. Duckin' into the next bar, tryin' to hide behind the veil of smoke.

That's right, can't smoke in bars anymore.

We don't get that that luxury, junkies, I mean. We're out there, no place to hide, no "legal," haven for us to get our fix. No raspy, sexy voices in the noise of a crowded bar.

We're all over the place. Restless, jittery, sweatin' when it's not hot, shiverin' when it's not cold...you can see us, if you know what to look for.

Desperate and paranoid.

(CAL takes a deep breath, relaxes, crosses to the chair and sits. When he is ready, he speaks, slower, trying to remain on an even keel.)

You know, heroin doesn't rot your teeth. That's what everyone thinks, 'cause that's what they always show in the movies. Just your typical, bad dental hygiene does that.

But we still scare people. They know we want somethin' from them, so they hurry past us as soon as they can, afraid we might ask for change or steal their pocketbooks, eat their young, I don't know...just that look we all have.

Even "recreational," junkies, the ones who say they don't need it, but want to do it, you know maybe once in the morning, then again at night, who say they only use on weekends.

Theresa used to be like that, so she said.

Even they begin to look like the street junkies, the things the movies do get right. Skin hangin' from sunken cheeks. Sores on the forehead and arms, sometimes

bleedin' or scabbed over from scratchin', always scratchin'. That itchy skin when you can't get any. The tired eyes. Not tired from lack of sleep, but tired from livin', from always fightin' for somethin' more.

And I don't mean just drugs, though drugs are the only thing in life we feel we can succeed at.

The voices, not husky, not sexy. Low, strained, because once you're addicted, you're never fully conscious again, even when you're not usin'. The nervous twitches, chewin' on your fingernails. We see each other, but we don't try to hide, we look for each other, know each other.

How many junkies does it take to change a light bulb?

I'm kiddin', but really, put three junkies in a room.

Now this is not a joke, I'm serious.

Put three non-usin' junkies in a room of one hundred strangers and within minutes they'll have found each other. I'm tellin' you, it's true, we sniff each other out, always lookin' for signs in everyone we meet, because let's face it, everyone you meet might be a connection. Sad really, you can't have any real relationship outside of, "what might I be able to get from this person."

Guess that's why they call it addicted...you can't get away from it.

Even when you're not usin', either because you have no money or you want to "clean up," you're still always lookin'. Somewhere in the back of your head, you're still keepin' an eye out. Can't do anything else, can't think of anything else. But you still have to keep goin'.

Then when you can't get somethin', those "hangovers." Chemical hangovers, that's what Theresa used to call them. Painful, sickenin'. But, like any hangover, you push through them.

Dennis used to talk about his hangovers all the time, almost like he was proud of how sick he was that mornin' or how much his stomach hurt. A lot of them, not just the drunks, junkies too, do that, like they're gonna prove that they're better at their addiction than you are at yours, or that somehow you're not a real junkie.

I never understood that.

Why would I want anyone to know I was sufferin'? I mean, just one more reason for people to look down on us. Really, who's gonna feel bad for a sick junkie? It's our own fault, we could stop if we really wanted to. That's what they think. Even the workers in the clinics...

The clinics, you know where I mean, the methodone. That shit's worse than the heroin.

(CAL stands and begins pacing, he is becoming agitated.)

Methodone, everyone thought it was the answer. People on it, they're still usin'. Only now they're addicted to both heroin and methodone. You can't get off that shit, like a trap. Give up one addiction for another. It's not a cure.

Maybe there is no cure.

Methodone, I don't want that. If I'm gonna use, I'm gonna use the real stuff. It's like somethin' they hold over your head...be a good boy and you can have this instead. But they don't tell you that...they don't tell you withdrawals from methodone are worse than gettin' off heroin, that it actually takes longer to kick that habit. I don't want that.

We never wanted that.

Theresa hated the methodone clinics. All the questions and testin'. Urine, blood. If there was anything in your system, they wouldn't give you your "legal" fix, so you go back out there, beggin', stealin', tryin' to get enough money to get you through the day...

(CAL is angry, frightened. When he recomposes himself, he crosses to the chair, his hands on the chair's back, looks out and speaks.)

I only have three more weeks here. Three weeks. I don't know if I'll be ready. You can't let me leave like this. Please, I'll go right back to usin'. I only got approved for thirty days. They won't give me any more time. I talk big, act like none of this really bothers me...I hate it, and everything it's done to me. And I want you to tell me, that you know for a fact, that I can leave here and never use again. If you can tell me that, then I won't worry.

(there is a pause, then light begin to slowly fade, as CAL sits. He continues.)

But you can't, and I'm not sure I can do it on my own. Please, don't let me go if you don't think I'm ready at the end of all this. I can't go back to that. I don't want it. I can't live like that anymore.

For the first time in my life, I'm afraid, and I have no place left to hide.

(stage goes black.)

SCENE FOUR

Day twelve.

(Light rises on a single bed and a small dresser. CAL is pacing in front of the bed, back and forth, holding his stomach. He sits and rocks himself, crying softly as light fades to black.)

SCENE FIVE

Day thirteen.

(Light comes up on the chair. CAL is pacing behind it.)

CAL

I can't even fuckin' sleep. I've been here two fuckin' weeks, and don't think I closed my eyes once.

I mean these beds are shit.

What the fuck am I even doin' here? This never works. Soon as I leave, I'll probly go right back to usin' anyway. This is bullshit, I should just check myself out.

I mean, what the fuck am I gonna do, when I leave here, huh?

Get a job?

Right.

I'm not nineteen years old anymore. I'm not twenty-five. Shit, I'm not even thirty. I'm thirty-four, fuckin' years old. Thirty-four years old and just found out the party ended a long time ago.

I never had a job for more than two weeks in my life.

Who the hell's gonna hire me?

What the fuck do I even know how to do? I don't know what the fuck I even want to do, never did. Bein' a junkie is all I ever knew. I should just check myself out and go back to doin' what I do best.

(he sits.)

You keep tellin' yourself you do want to stop. Keep promisin' after the next high you will.

I tried to check myself into rehab once, when I was straight. They wouldn't let me, said I had to be usin' to be admitted. So, what did I do? I went out and shot up. But then I didn't want to stop. Hell, nobody wants to stop when they're high.

I've been in and out of rehab so many times. Never because I wanted to straighten up. Sometimes I'd go because I did somethin' to someone, you know stole money or took off with drugs I was buyin' for someone else and needed a place to hide for a while, or if Theresa kicked me out and I had no where else to go. And sometimes I just wanted a rest, you know clean up a bit, pull myself together before goin' back to the streets. But I never wanted to stop, not really. And when the courts make you go, let me tell you, what a joke that is. You always hear that you can only stop for yourself, only if you really want to. You think because some judge sends someone to rehab, they're gonna clean up? What a fuckin' joke, not to mention a waste of taxpayer's money.

But the one time I did want to stop, made a rational decision about it, I was told no. Kind of makes you wonder whose runnin' things.

(CAL drinks from the water bottle.)

I don't have my wife anymore, don't see my daughter. Nothin' to show for all these years of livin'.

Guess I have no one to blame but myself, I mean, counselors and people who work in rehab centers mean well, but I never wanted their help.

I don't know if you call it regret exactly, I mean, I've done a lot of things over the years, bad things. I can't say I regret them, but I can say I wish they never happened.

Guess that's sayin' the same thing, isn't it?

I was doin' what I had to, what I thought I had to do at the time.

Theresa knew some things...didn't know. Didn't want to admit other things. Things that are too painful, that I didn't have to think about when I was high, could justify when I finally scored. I'm not talkin' about the simple stuff, like stealin' food stamps from my mother, writin' checks against my father's bank account, or about the pieces of jewelry I picked up in a friend's house to sell. I'm talkin' about other things, that happen in the dark. And Theresa never asked where I was or where the money suddenly came from. And I couldn't tell her, could hardly admit it to myself.

I mean, it wasn't like I ripped off my grandmother, which I have...not that I'm proud of it, but, it's a fact. I think I ripped off just about everyone I've ever known.

My mother used to keep one eye on her pocketbook and one eye on me when I would visit. This was after my father died...when I could visit without there bein' some big fight. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not blamin' him or anything, it's just the way he was and it was easier to just...stay out of his way.

(CAL stands and crosses to a "window," he stands, looking out this "window," and speaks, not turning back into the room.)

It's nice here. You can see the river. Peaceful, quiet. I like the quiet. Bein' high is quiet, like everything is happenin' in slow motion, through a haze and noises are muffled, like when it's cold out. Most people don't know this, but cold has a sound.

(CAL turns back into the room, and slowly crosses to the chair as he speaks.)

Think about it, in the winter, you can hear everything. The branches of the bare trees tappin' against each other. That almost silent hum of the cars as they glide over new snow. It's different in summer, summer is noisy, people laughin', radios playin' from open windows...that's not sound, that's noise, one sound indistinguishable from the next, but in winter it's different. Everything has its own sound.

(CAL sits.)

We didn't always have heat in the house. When it got really cold, we used to stand around the stove with the oven door open to get warm. One particular night, it was so cold, we couldn't sleep, couldn't get warm, even under the covers. So we were all huddled around the stove in the kitchen, me, my brother and sister. My mother was asleep on the couch, where she pretty much spent all her time.

Who could blame her? He wasn't givin' her anything. Sittin' there, drunk, tellin' her she was worthless and that he was gonna cut her throat some night, or that he was gonna burn the house down while we all slept. Made goin' to bed a real pleasure...I'm tellin' you, there were no visions of Sugar Plums dancin' in my head...

Anyway, we were standin' around the stove, eatin' the peanut butter sandwiches my father made for us. It was like ten o'clock at night and there we were, freezin', eatin' peanut butter sandwiches.

We always had peanut butter sandwiches, you could get tubs of peanut butter free from welfare, that and those big blocks of orange cheese.

So there we were, eatin' the sandwiches...

I don't know, maybe he thought the protein would help keep us warm or somethin'.

And there was a "pop," a loud poppin' sound comin' from the back hall that was off the kitchen. At first we didn't think much of it, until it happened again. My father went to see what it was and came back with one of the soda cans that were kept out there. He said it exploded in the cold, and showed us this can, split right down the middle, still with frozen soda inside it. We didn't believe him that the cold could do somethin' like that and he started tellin' us about ice and how when you freeze things, they expand. He tried to explain it by describin' how the river cracks on a cold night.

(CAL shakes his head, trying to remember, trying to understand.)

We didn't believe him, I mean, we were just little kids for Christ's sake, and we learned not to ask too many questions. I mean this was the kind of crazy shit we got used to hearin' from him, so we listened quietly, noddin' our heads as he told us about how the river cracks, and that if we wanted to, we could go and hear it for ourselves.

What the hell did we know, we were too scared to say, "No," to him.

(CAL stands, and as he talks, he walks over a few feet from the chair, as the memory comes back in full detail, as if CAL is, in fact, back in that kitchen.)

We...we got clothes on, pullin' them over our pajamas, and got our coats from the back hall. Hats, gloves...all of it, and we went out to the car.

Talk about cold, sittin' out there waitin' for the car to warm up...But once he got it started, he drove away and took us to the river.

It was bright. Clear, clear sky, but cold. Cold like you never felt. And the river was wide, wider than I had ever seen it, covered in ice, shinin' in the moonlight. We actually stood on the banks of the river and waited. Just stood there, nobody talkin'. Couldn't hear a thing. Nothin'.

We thought this was just another one of his crazy episodes, wonderin' what he was gonna do next. Was he gonna leave us there, throw us in the river, I wasn't thinkin' that it was frozen. I just couldn't understand why we were there, in what seemed like the middle of the night, freezin'.

All of a sudden there was a groan, I don't know how else to describe it, a low groan that grew and got louder, surroundin' us, fillin' the air with this eerie sound.

Then it happened.

A small squeak followed by a loud crack, like thunder, only the thunder wasn't overhead, it was at our feet. A loud crack followed by that deathly silence. The water, he said, deep down, was freezin', expandin', pushin' at the ice on top, causin' it to crack.

That was it. We heard the river crack, he explained it to us, and we silently followed him back to the car. Nobody spoke on the way home, we just sat, lookin' out the window at the empty streets and dark houses.

When we got home, he let us out. We walked up the stairs to go in and he drove away. Just drove away. Probly off to some nice warm bar, while we went back to the freezin' house.

We had no heat, but there was always money for him to drink with, right?

But the strangest, maybe the saddest part, is that this was normal to us. This, comin' from him, did not seem out of place or unusual, odd as it might have been to someone passin' by who saw us standin' there on the river's frozen banks. To us, it was just how things were with him. You never knew where you stood or what was gonna happen next.

(CAL sits, somewhat taken aback by the memory. He smiles and looks out.)

Actions speak louder than words. He never really spoke to us, never said one good, one kind or lovin' thing. When he talked, he talked to us like we were strangers, small talk, like he probly made to the people he met in the bars. But we loved it, because he was talkin' and it almost made him human, and when that happened, I convinced myself, every time, that there was a chance he could change, would change. Over and over again I waited for somethin', I don't know, more, from him, and it never came.

(shaken from his reverie, somewhat dazed, CAL smiles.)

But that night he spoke to us, and I learned all about how the river cracks.

(light fades.)

SCENE SIX

Day seventeen.

(Light rises on the bedroom. CAL crosses to the dresser, takes a tee shirt out of a drawer and changes his shirt. He stuffs the dirty tee shirt into a duffel bag on the floor at the foot of the bed. He sits on the bed. After a moment, he reaches under the bed and pulls out a photo album. Lying down, he opens the photo album and begins looking through it, laughing, smiling. Going through the pages, slowly running his finger over an image or two. He closes his eyes, the book falls onto his chest as light fades on CAL.)

SCENE SEVEN

Day nineteen.

(Light rises on CAL, standing off to the side. He is drinking from the water bottle, greedily, as if there is no satisfying a non-existent thirst. When he is finished, he snaps the stopper back in place, and looks out.)

CAL

It would be a lot easier if we could smoke in here. I mean, who ever heard of rehab without cigarettes. Think about it, if it wasn't for smokin', AA never would have succeeded.

(CAL crosses and stands behind the chair. He takes a sip from the water bottle, then runs his hand along the chair's back. He is calmer, quieter.)

Some days I feel almost fine, awake. But others...

It's been almost three weeks and I'm only startin' to feel like I can get up in the mornin', or go to sleep without feelin' sick.

"If you didn't do drugs, you wouldn't feel sick."

That's what Dennis used to say. Started gettin' all preachy when he got sober, wanted everyone to follow suit. Shit, let's face it, you're not thinkin' about bein' sick when you start usin', not like you say, "Hey, I'm gonna become a junkie today so I can feel sick tomorrow."

Assholes. Once they're clean, they seem to forget what it was like, and actually put other junkies down. Like they made the choice to stop, why couldn't everyone?

(CAL sits.)

That's what most people think anyway, that it's a choice. Shit, if it was a choice, I'd be an MBA, make a shitload of money, not standin' around on fuckin' street corners, in the rain or freezin' cold waitin' for my dealer. If it was a choice, I'd be

the fuckin' dealer. But I wasn't that smart. Never was. Never did anything on my own. Even when I was a kid, I did what everyone else did. Never said what I wanted, just went along, even when I knew it was wrong.

Just easier that way.

(CAL takes a deep breath, looks around for nothing in particular, runs his fingers through his hair. He sits up straight, his hands behind his head, leaning back in his chair. He thinks for a moment and speaks.)

We didn't eat dinner in my neighborhood. Not the classic idea of dinner, with cloth napkins and matchin' china and silverware. Maybe under a chandelier, or with candles on the table. We never had that. We ate supper, and in my house, that meant mismatched plates, all chipped and faded. We never got anything new. Nothin'. Everything we had came from someone else. Christmas presents from Catholic Charities, and generous aunts. Clothes from cousins and friends.

(CAL stands.)

So fuckin' embarrassin', goin' to school with your friends, wearin' their old clothes, clothes their parents didn't think were good enough for them anymore, while they had new sneakers and jackets. Never once did we get somethin' new, in style.

Even our plates came from relatives who could afford new ones, cups and glasses found in someone's attic or basement. And there were no cloth napkins. We had paper napkins, in the middle of the table, tucked inside a carved, wooden rooster. Somethin' my older brother made in wood workin' in eight grade. Our "silverware," certainly wasn't silver, but had faded plastic handles and all the forks were bent.

I always hated those fuckin' forks.

(CAL laughs. He continues.)

If you haven't guessed by now, there wasn't a lot of structure in my house, and I got away with a lot. First it was little things, like not goin' home for supper. I must have been about twelve when I started doin' that. Not really old enough to start breakin' curfew, but I could get away with skippin' supper.

But not Dennis. His mother was tough, and he never got to skip supper, though he tried like hell.

For me it was different. Suppertime wasn't that important in my family, I mean shit, my parents were probly glad not to have to feed us all the time. Save a buck. Besides, they had more important things to do, than take care of us.

(CAL sits. He leans forward, sitting on the edge of the chair, laced fingers, elbows on his knees.)

You know, memory's a funny thing. Sometimes, it comes on so strong, so vivid, you can't believe it happened years ago, and not last week or even yesterday. Of course these memories are either the terrible things that happened and won't go away or the really special times you wish you could recapture. But there's one thing that sticks in my mind, and, dependin' on your outlook, it's either a rare, special moment or self-realization or a terrible reminder of weakness.

I like to think of it as a reminder of weakness, I would hate to think that I missed an opportunity of self-realization.

(a pause.)

It was the night before Easter. Easter must have been late that year because it was warm and it was still light out. I know it was after five o'clock 'cause I was sittin' on the curb waitin' for Dennis to finish his supper. He knew better than to skip it and I wouldn't lie for him when he told his mother he ate at my house. His mother liked me and I wanted to keep it that way.

It was nice, she didn't like a lot of our friends but she liked me.

If she knew I was sittin' out there, she would have asked me to eat over, but that would have meant her callin' my mother to make sure it was all right. And that meant my mother might ask her to tell me to come home and I definitely did not want to go home.

So, I sat, and waited, just lookin' up and down the street, not really thinkin' about anything in particular. I knew every house, could tell you who was home and exactly what they were doin'.

Across the street, was Mary-Allen's house. We used to make out under her porch. She lived behind a parkin' lot, and there were these trees that grew up like giant weeds along the fence. The trees had this...*smell*...I don't know what, but even now, when I smell it, I can picture bein' under Mary-Allen's porch, smokin', makin' out...I think Mary-Allen was everyone's first tit, we all got our start under her porch.

Nothin' ever changed in my neighborhood.

Even then I knew change was a bad thing.

So, I sat there waitin' for Dennis, and heard these voices, loud, laughin'. It struck me as funny because it was suppertime, and everyone should have been inside eatin'. So I looked to see who it was, you know, who was breakin' the rules.

It was the Godettess.

They lived a few doors down from Dennis's house and the porch was filled with them. There didn't seem to be any men in the Godette family. There was a mother, three daughters and always some visitin' aunts or female cousins, but no men. Lookin' back, I wonder how the family got to be so big consistin' of only females. But then again, we were told Christ was conceived by a virgin so why couldn't the Godettess go forth and be fruitful without men?

(CAL looks out, laughing. Now getting into his story, CAL is more animated, using natural hand motions and gestures, rather than relying on nervous tics.)

The Godettess, mother and three daughters, lived at one end of Dennis's block.

They looked just alike. Dennis used to say that if you shaved all their heads, you'd never be able to tell them apart.

On the other end of the block, was Ida, the Godette grandmother.

She never went out, the Godettes went to her.

I watched them, and listened to their voices. Couldn't hear what they were sayin' 'cause they were all talkin' at once. Then one of them started walkin' towards me, I guess on her way to Ida's. This girl was probly about my age, maybe a year or two younger. She was limp'in', not limp'in' like she broke her leg, but lopin' to one side, shufflin', as if she really didn't know how to use her legs. She was holdin' a box in her hand and starin' at it with this...grin on her face. Just kind of a strange look, you know, somethin' about it was weird. When she got closer, I realized she was retarded. She was...she was shufflin' down the street, starin' at this Easter egg she was holdin', like she had never seen one before.

(embarrassed, CAL drinks.)

Then I hear Dennis yell, from inside, tellin' me he was gonna be right out.

That's when I panicked, hopin' he wouldn't come out. I looked up at his front door, and prayed that he wouldn't be out, not yet, even though I'd been waitin' there for like an hour. Because I knew that if Dennis came out then, we would have started right in teasin' the retarded Godette girl. I knew this, it wasn't a question of maybe, we would have. Not because she was retarded, we would have done it to anyone walkin' by...well, anyone we thought we could get away with it on. And seein' how the Godettes had no big brothers or a father to kick

our asses, they were a perfect target. Let them tell our mothers, nothin' would have been done about it anyway.

Oh, sure, in front of them, my mother would have said I'd be punished and she was gonna take care of it, but when all was said and done, I would have been back out in ten minutes, no punishment, nothin'. It was the way the neighborhood was, kids bothered kids and if you didn't like it, too bad, 'cause, "that's what kids do."

We did all kinds of things, breakin' windows, flattenin' tires, stealin' stuff, bikes, chairs out of people's yards, raidin' gardens in the summer then bombin' the person's house with their own tomatoes. And all we got was, "that's what kids do." So teasin' the retarded Godette girl, callin' her names, takin' her Easter egg from her until we brought her to tears, would have meant nothin'. Just one more "prank," in a long line of them. The only reason we would have bothered this poor girl, was because we could. And if Dennis came out then, we would have and I knew that I didn't want to. I would have had to, and yet I knew I couldn't.

The funny thing is, Dennis was like the leader, whatever he said, we did, yet he was the only one of us who would have gotten into trouble. Like I said, his mother was tough. She would have grounded him, locked up his bike, gave him extra chores...

I really liked his mother.

(CAL looks out, and speaks softly.)

I'm rambling, I'm sorry. I'm not sure what all this has to do with anything, but it's been on my mind. Lots of things I hadn't thought about in years have been on my mind lately. Just have too much time to think. That was one of the benefits of bein' high, you never had to think.

(CAL chuckles and continues.)

That girl was so happy, but all I could think about was Dennis.

Why doesn't she move faster I thought and wanted to yell, "Run you fuckin' retard, get out of here."

(pause, as CAL recollects himself, trying to stop the flood of emotion from pouring out.)

Then I remembered the funny way her legs worked. Even had she known what we were gonna do if Dennis came out, I wondered if she would have been able to move any faster.

(CAL drinks, blinking back tears.)

It was just an Easter egg, I told myself. It was just an Easter egg. So what if we took it, stepped on it, ate it or kicked it around. It was a stupid, fuckin' Easter egg. And why the fuck was I worryin' about some retarded Godette girl I didn't even know?

That was probly the first time I realized I had the power to cause someone pain, to willfully hurt another person, and yet, I didn't have the power not to. I would have hurt that girl because Dennis wanted to and I was too afraid to say, "No." I might have been laughed at. Maybe he would have found a way to hurt me instead, I don't know, but I knew what I would have done. There was one rule in my neighborhood growin' up, and that was, don't try to be different.

(CAL tries to force a smile, a weak laugh.)

She made it past before Dennis came out and I felt so relieved. Not for the Godette girl, but for myself. I made it through that time because Dennis's mother was strict. But I couldn't help wonderin' about the next time, when my friends and I were all together and there were things they wanted to do that I didn't feel right about. Would I be able to stand up for myself? I mean, it wasn't like I wanted to hurt her.

(CAL plays with the stopper on his water bottle, stands and looks out.)

I guess nobody ever means to hurt someone else, we just do.

(light fades.)

SCENE EIGHT

Day twenty-three.

(In the darkness, the sounds of buttons being pushed on a phone can be heard. Then a ringing telephone, as light rises on CAL on a payphone attached to a wall. The ringing stops. CAL speaks into the phone.)

CAL

Carol, Phil. It's Cal. Anyone home? Pick up if you're there. I just want to say, "Hi," to Elizabeth. Anybody? Okay, I'll try again later. Hi Elizabeth, love you. Bye.

(light fades as CAL hangs up the phone.)

SCENE NINE

Day twenty-three. Later.

(Light rises on CAL, standing, looking out the "window,")

CAL

Guess I can't really blame them for not lettin' her talk to me. I know they lie sometimes and say she's not home, that she's at a friend's house or gymnastics, but I can tell they're lyin'.

No matter what I've done...I mean, she is my daughter and I have the right. They don't even have custody, not real custody, just temporary.

I'll get her back.

I just really have to stop this time, but it scares me. It's been such a part of my life for so long...

It was everywhere growin' up.

This one time I was in rehab, well, one of the many...actually, it was a detox, mostly alcoholics. I don't know why they put me there, I mean, drinkin' was never one of my problems. Must have been no beds anywhere else, but I met this woman, started talkin' and realized we were from the same city. Not the same neighborhood, but close. There were bigger houses on her side, with yards. So we started talkin', you know, name droppin', see if we had any mutual friends, and when I told her I was from Magoun Square, she laughed.

"Oh," she said, "heroin heaven."

I stopped, surprised, I mean who the hell was she, some fuckin' drunk, puttin' my neighborhood down? I thought every neighborhood was like that, what the fuck did I know, not like I'm a world traveler or nothin'. I mean, I haven't really ever been anywhere else.

Maybe Maine a couple times.

Theresa's family had a house there, has, I guess, I don't really keep in touch with them, never did, even before.

But, I'm talkin' way up in Maine, like where people sleep with their sisters when the sheep are busy. We were out one night, me and Theresa, and we were at this bar. I swear, not one person there had a full set of teeth. Theresa called them "summer teeth," you know...

(CAL turns, looking out, and speaks in a thick, hill-billy accent.)

"Some-er missin'."

(CAL laughs, as he crosses to chair, but doesn't sit.)

Sorry, but it was true.

I mean it was like some bad movie.

So, we're sittin' there, drinkin', laughin' and started talkin' to some guy sittin' beside us. Next thing you know, we're in his truck, yes, a pick-up truck, on the way to meet some friend of his. Now, I'm thinkin' this is it, right, they're gonna find our heads six months later in someone's refridgerator...but we went, I mean, he said he could hook us up.

I told you, it's like we can sniff each other out.

So we go to this trailer in the woods, I'm not lyin', that's how these people lived...and we ended up stayin' there for two days. I mean, talk about stupid. We didn't know these people, didn't know where the hell we were, but it was worth the risk. When you want to get high, there is no risk too great.

(CAL stops short. He starts again, slowly.)

What was I talkin' about?

Oh yeah, heroin heaven.

So, when the woman in the detox called Magoun Square heroin heaven, I realized she was right, and I felt, I don't know, almost proud, if you can believe that. Nice to be known for somethin'. There were a lot of addicts in my neighborhood. I'm not sayin' that's why I'm a junkie but, it was easy to get.

(CAL thinks for a moment, then continues, as he walks around a bit, not quite pacing, just moving, as he puts the pieces of the story together.)

I was about seventeen when I started usin'.

Kind of late in my neighborhood. Some kids were usin' as early as fourteen. Theresa didn't start until later, after we started seein' each other, but it wasn't my fault, she wanted to.

I knew her since we were in kindergarten, but we didn't date as teenagers, kind of lost track of each other in junior high, you know, she found new friends, I found new friends.

I knew even then I was gonna quit school. Legally, all I had to do was wait until I was sixteen, then nobody could say anything about it. When I did quit, all my father said was, "Get a job."

That didn't happen, but I did quit.

Nothin' we did really mattered anymore. My mother almost never got off the couch by then, sleepin' there for days, her face turned into the cushions. Sometimes I try to remember what she was like before that, but I can't. I mean, I look at pictures and see her, on the beach, smilin', or at someone's weddin' or somethin' like that, but I don't remember what she was like. I don't remember her ever cookin', or cleanin', but she must have, 'cause the house was always clean...but I do remember her laughin'. I remember that, 'cause she didn't do it a lot...but when she did. That was nice. Even now, when I do talk to her, which isn't often, I don't know who she is, don't know what to say aside from the simple stuff; how are you, what's goin' on...you know, the way people talk to mothers.

I wonder if she was ever really happy.

But I remember him...my father...in and out...half the time I wasn't sure whether or not he even lived there anymore. Wouldn't see him for days, sometimes weeks.

But we'd see his car.

He had this big, light blue Buick and we'd see it parked on different corners near the house, never on our street, but near the house, like he wanted us to see it, though we never saw him. It was kind of scary, like he was hidin' out, watchin' us. Then he'd show up, bangin' on the door at three in the mornin', or we'd come down for breakfast and he'd be sittin' at the table like he never left, big bottle of vodka in front of him. It was...freaky, but you get used to it, it becomes normal.

You live in shit long enough, you start to call it home.

He'd try to act like Ward Cleaver all of a sudden, tellin' us to clean the yard or go to school.

He's the one told me I could quit.

I think he thought we were gonna suddenly start listenin' to him. Then he'd disappear again.

Shit, what kid's gonna go to school under those circumstances...talk about freedom. Come and go as I pleased. My mother had no idea what was goin' on, just stayed on that damned couch. And my brother...the things that went on upstairs in our bedroom. The junkies in and out all night. My brother was nineteen and had been usin' for a few years. And there I was, sayin' good night to everyone and goin' to sleep, like the fuckin' Waltons, "Night John-Boy," as they continued gettin' high. My brother and his girlfriends, ha, girlfriends. Bunch of fuckin' skanks, blow anyone for a fix. God, what that room must have been crawlin' with.

And my mother down there, sleepin', people comin' in and out all night long, not a care in the world. The only time I ever saw her get up was to make a cup of tea.

But none of it scared me, and that should have scared me most of all. But it didn't, I mean, they seemed to be havin' a ball. You know, join the party. And the more my father tried to stop things, tried to tell us what to do, the more we wanted to say fuck him. What gave him the right, all those years, not talkin', scarin everybody, to think he could tell us what to do? He and my brother would go at it, fist-fightin' in the hall, screamin', yellin'. I started sleepin with my clothes on, shoes and everything, so I could make a quick getaway out the back door when they started. Not that I was afraid of them, I just didn't want to be the one tellin' the cops what happened when one of them finally killed the other.

(CAL sits.)

And I sure as hell wasn't bringin' Elizabeth up like that. She never even knew my father. She was six when he died and had never met him, never knew she had another grandfather. I couldn't have her around that crazy shit. You never knew when he was gonna explode. I remember once, he was standin' in the middle of the kitchen, screamin', just standin' there, screamin', pullin' his hair. And my first thought was, "I hope the windows aren't open." I didn't care if he was all right or what he might do next, I only cared what somebody outside might think if they heard him.

(CAL stands and crosses to the "window.")

I walk around and see these houses, the curtains open. Can look right in and see what's goin' on. Watch people eat, or talk or just sittin', watchin' TV. Like they have nothin' to hide. I could never live like that, everyone seein', everyone knowin'.

(he turns back, looking out.)

Growin' up, I always felt like everyone knew. That they could somehow see him through me and I hated it, hated feelin' guilty for the way he was. Wanted to crawl into a hole and hide every time he came home, or passed out in the hall, or pissed himself on the sidewalk. I don't know why it bothered me, everyone's father was an asshole.

(CAL drinks from the water bottle, and continues, crossing to the chair. He sits.)

When I was younger, though, we always had great Christmases. That was the one thing he did do right.

I used to wish life could always be like that.

I guess every kid does.

He'd decorate the house, and I don't just mean some cardboard cut outs, there were lights everywhere, tinsel. Every year we'd drag up the Christmas decorations from the basement, and he'd spend two days just hangin' it all. There was a place for everything. It was always the same.

Huge, plastic candy canes hung, criss-cross, over the sofa. Silver garland and a string of colored lights on the stairs. The window lights, orange and white bulbs, alternatin', never red, never any other color, always orange and white. The manger on top of the TV surrounded by ceramic animals, cows, sheep, a chipped donkey and cotton on the roof.

Guess it was snowin' in Bethlehem that night.

We couldn't put the baby Jesus in until midnight on Christmas Eve.

We used to love to try and stay up for that.

One of my favorite things was lookin' at the pages of newspapers the decorations were wrapped in. Some of them were ten years old, older even. I used to like to look at the movie listin's.

God, those movies seemed ancient to me then, now ten years is nothin'.

And a pile of Christmas records, Mitch Miller, Doris Day, Perry Como, Brenda Lee...Mormon Tabernacle Choir, which we hated. That was so borin', they never sang good songs like "Jingle Bell Rock." We even had the Chipmunks. And my father would sing. Loud. He knew every word to those songs, even songs like "Good King Wenceslas," you know, that old shit nobody really knows.

(CAL laughs.)

I know that song though, through years of hearin' him sing it. But don't worry, I'm not gonna sing.

(he takes a deep breath before continuing.)

He had a big, boomin' voice.

Christmas was the only time the sound of his voice didn't scare me. Then, the presents would start showin' up under the tree. An aunt or uncle would drop by, leavin' gifts for us. At first it was just one or two, then there would be more, until the floor around the tree was littered with them. I could never keep away from them, shakin' things, tryin' to rip a bit of the wrappin' paper to see what they were. I hated not knowin'. I still do it, Theresa always yells at me...

(CAL smiles, then continues, excited by the thoughts and memories.)

You knew Christmas was gettin' close 'cause you'd see the stuffed celery on a platter in the fridge covered in Saran wrap and you just knew it was comin' fast. Boxes of chocolates piled up on the counter in the pantry, cans of soda and bottles of beer in the back hall to keep it cold. And a big bowl of fruit on the kitchen table, tangerines, grapes, bananas, oranges...it's what we lived on while they prepared for the party.

Then before you knew it, Christmas Eve.

My aunt always got us new pajamas on Christmas Eve.

And all our aunts and uncles would come over.

Me, my brother and sister, we'd have friends over, they liked bein' at our house more than their own at Christmas. The house was alive, and for one week out of the year, it was magical. All those people comin' and goin', the days blandin' one into another. I don't think I changed out of my Christmas pajamas for two or three days. There was no reason to, I wasn't goin' anywhere, didn't want to be anywhere else, not at that time of year.

And the lights were never turned off.

Somebody was always awake, laughin', talkin', drinkin'. Sittin' around the kitchen table all night long it seemed.

Me, I sat at the top of the stairs, where I later sat to listen to my father threaten my mother. But on Christmas it was different. I was hearin' jokes I wasn't supposed to hear.

Two female dogs were standin' on the corner...A priest, a rabbi and a hooker are on an elevator...These three travelin' salesmen show up at a farm...

I never quite got the jokes then, but I loved listenin' to them.

And I could hear my mother and father laughin', actually in the same room havin' a good time together. It seemed as if we had just opened our Christmas presents, there were still boxes and a few unopened presents under the tree, you know, the borin' stuff, like socks, tee shirts.

Suddenly, it was New Year's Eve.

Then everything came crashin' down.

Drunken fights as midnight neared, broken glasses, arguments.

The party had just gone on too long.

The next day, the lights were turned off, taken down, the tree put out in the front yard, the boxes and wrappin' paper whisked away, until there were no reminders left.

And silence.

Silence you didn't want to break because once it was broken, there was no lettin' up. Shoutin' and threats back and forth between them, as we carefully wrapped the decorations in yellowed newspaper, not carin' about old headlines and bygone movies anymore. And it all went back the way it was, almost as if Christmas had been nothin' more than a dream.

When we got older, the Christmases just...stopped. The aunts and uncles slowly drifted away, didn't visit anymore...some divorced, some dead from drunk drivin' accidents or prescription overdoses. And some were just...never talked about again, I don't know why, but they just disappeared after some drunken party...and their names were never mentioned again.

There just wasn't anything left to celebrate, couldn't even pretend anymore.

And all we had were the memories.

Funny thing is, my father died on Christmas, two years ago this past Christmas. Took even that joy away from us.

(CAL leans forward and speaks directly, seriously.)

And I'll be damned if anyone is ever gonna take Christams away from Elizabeth.
I want her to see the lights all year.

(CAL fiddles with his bottle, concentrating on "it" rather than on himself or what he had just said, as light fades.)

SCENE TEN

Day twenty-five.

(Light comes up on some exercise equipment, not much, not state of the art. Some weights, a jump rope on the wall, an old stationary bike. CAL enters, and puts his water bottle on the floor. He is shirtless. He looks around nervously, as if he is going to be caught doing something he is not supposed to be doing. He stretches, does some deep breathing and begins with the hand weights. After a short routine, he picks up the jump rope and attempts that. Winded, he tries the bike. Out of breath, tired, he squats, trying to catch his breath. He stands, takes a tee shirt from a hook on the wall, and puts it on. He picks up his water bottle and starts off as light fades.)

SCENE ELEVEN

Day twenty-six.

(Light comes up on CAL, seated on the chair, drinking.)

CAL

I actually tried exercisin' yesterday. Practically fuckin' killed me. God, if I could put all the energy I put into gettin' high into exercise, imagine the shape I'd be in.

(he leans forward and speaks sarcastically.)

By the way, nice fuckin' gym you got here.

(CAL laughs, then becomes serious.)

Since I've been here, I feel like I've done nothin' but blame everyone else for my mistakes. So many ifs...if my father didn't drink, if my mother got off the couch, if I was made to go to school...so many people to blame. Smokers can sue the tobacco companies, gamblers can sue the casinos...who do I sue, the dealers? I have nobody to blame but myself.

When things started fallin' apart, I won't say goin' bad for us, because lookin' back now, it never was good, but when we realized things were really fallin' apart, even before Elizabeth was taken from us, Theresa and I talked about movin'. A new start somewhere, where nobody knew us, where DSS wasn't involved, new friends we could trust...maybe somewhere in the country, the mountains, even California...just some place different...we thought we could change everything, turn our lives around. We knew it was a dream, but it was nice to dream, we didn't get much chance to dream.

But people don't want you to succeed. They like to see you fail, to stay down, that way they can feel better about themselves, you know. It becomes a game of, "That Guy."

Dennis used to do that, lots of drunks and druggies do it. They're always tryin' to justify whatever it is they do, whether it's drinkin', shootin' up, even eatin' too

much, by findin' someone they can point to and say, "at least I don't do it as much as that guy." And I bet if you asked, "that guy," he'd be able to point to someone else and say the same thing. I always wondered how much you have to do before there's no one left to point to, nobody who can be "that guy" for you. That's the guy I want to meet, buy him a beer and thank him for makin' it so easy for the rest of us. But the thing is, nobody wants to become, "that guy," and that's why they don't want to see you pull ahead in any way. If you succeed, you're suspect. Then everyone thinks you think you're better than them. Like those mothers at the school Theresa was so afraid of. She thought they were judgin' her, that's why she starting shootin' up in her toes. She didn't want to be "that guy," at the school.

Not like they didn't already know.

Sometimes I'd go and pick up Elizabeth, usually when Theresa was "hungover." Theresa liked to be the one pickin' her up, made her feel normal, I guess, like one of those TV mothers.

I don't know why she cared, the other mothers were nothin' to brag about. What a fuckin' scene. Every afternoon, the same thing. Like a bunch of buffalo at a waterin' hole. As the time got closer for the kids to get out, they huddled closer together, growin' in numbers.

An army of them.

You should see them. I mean, most of them are inter-changeable. Sweat pants. Hair cut short, or pulled back in an impossibly tight ponytail, to make gettin' ready easier, I guess. Cigarettes danglin' from their lips, or droopin' from between their fingers, like an extra digit, used for emphasis when they talk. Laughin' at a joke or gossipin'...

Nasty bitches.

And when they laughed, you could hear their lungs rattle, and their laughter would become a cough, comin' from deep inside, way down where the cancer is formin'.

(CAL laughs, as he drinks.)

I should talk, right? First thing I'll probly do when I leave here, is smoke a carton of cigarettes.

(he sips, then continues, picking up where he left off.)

And when the bell rang, they move forward, all together, a mass of bodies flowin' toward the doors. Well trained after years of repetition.

Havin' all those kids so they can stay on welfare, while their husbands or boyfriends work under the table. Nice life they make for themselves.

Then the kids come out, bangin' through those heavy, metal, green doors. Like prison doors.

Noisy. Wild. Miniature replicas of the adults. The kids run, like prisoners on a weekend furlough. You can hear them, laughin', playin', yellin' to each other. Every now and then, you hear a "bad word," from one or another of them. Suddenly, from within the cloud of smoke, a cigarette points and one of those raspy voices can be heard, "If I ever hear you say that again," it says, "you're in big trouble when we get home."

Doin' the right thing by their children, teachin' them manners.

The kids don't care, they ignore the mothers, all they want to do is move onto the next thing, whatever it might be. The parents are in no rush either, I mean, where the hell do they have to go? They continue talkin', ignorin' the kids in return.

This one day, I actually heard one of the mothers say to another one, "A nigger? I don't believe it."

No lie.

So, of course now I have to listen, right? "Yes," her friend says, "datin' a nigger, like it's okay." And there are the kids, crowded around, waitin', listenin'...gatherin' all the important information they need from their parents. All those wonderful life lessons of manners and civility.

And these are supposed to be the good mothers, the ones who make and carry out the rules the rest of us are supposed to follow? These are the people who want us to stay beneath them, who want us to be "that guy?" Fuck that. Elizabeth never heard us talk like that, never saw us usin'...

(CAL stops. He does not want to become angry. When he calms himself down, he continues.)

I'm not sayin' how we lived didn't hurt her in some way. We fought, Theresa and I, when there was no money, blamin' each other for bein' a junkie...and I'd leave, come home, find Theresa locked me out...All our fights were always over money, and Elizabeth suffered that way, I mean, there were things she had to do without.

Funny, I said that we didn't always have heat in the house growin' up but my father always had money to drink with. It makes you selfish, bein' addicted.

That's why Theresa always let me go first when we were shootin' up. She wasn't bein' "nice." It was so she could do as much as she wanted when I was out of it. I know that now.

But growin' up, I was never...made to give, never shown how to.

By the time I quit school, the house had become a flop house. It did. That's what it felt like during that time. We had a lot of people stayin' with us.

Nobody in charge to enforce any rules.

There was always somebody movin' in or out. Some for a day or two, some for weeks. Friends who had no place to stay because their parents kicked them out or because they had no money to rent their own place.

But there was one girl who stayed. She was my sister's friend. Before my sister moved out to live with her boyfriend.

She was eighteen when she moved out, had just quit school herself. But she was only about sixteen at the time I'm talkin' about.

A lot of that time is a blur. Imagine that.

My sister's friend's name was Anna.

She was a big dyke, I mean everyone knew it and she never tried to hide the fact. How could she? She had really short hair and wore corduroy pants and a jean jacket with the sleeves pushed up past her elbows, not rolled up, pushed up. And she was big...just big, not fat...big, no other way to describe her.

Everyone called her Manna, used to talk about her "man-gina."

Sorry.

Her mother kicked her out. Why? Because she was a lesbian. Didn't matter her sister was a fuckin' slut, slept with anyone and anything, had two kids with different fathers, but Manna was kicked out.

Imagine kickin' out your own kid?

So, Manna stayed with us for a while. I was done with school, not workin', startin to get into the drug scene. I thought I was so cool. But Manna was still goin' to school. No place to live and she was goin' to school. Not only that, she worked, had a part time job at a donut shop. I'm not kiddin'. I know it sounds like a joke, the big girl at the donut shop, but it's true. Everyday she'd get up and

get herself to school, and every weekend she worked. Like I said, there were a lot of people in and out of that house...but Manna was different.

I remember sittin' in the parlor, doin' nothin', complainin' that there was no food.

There never seemed to be food in that house.

And Manna comes back from work. She walks in, says, "hi," and goes to the kitchen. I followed her into the kitchen, you know, someone to talk to, and I notice she put a dozen donuts and a gallon of milk on the table. She put the milk in the fridge and went about her business, like everything was fine. All those people usin' my house to live in and not one of them ever gave anything back, and there's Manna, one step from the gutter and she's bringin' home milk, while I'm sittin' around complainin'.

Manna bought us milk.

I don't remember how long Manna stayed with us, or what happened to her later on, but despite it all, she finished school. Graduated. Theresa graduated, Dennis graduated...that's how I ran into Theresa again. Dennis had a graduation party and I went, to laugh at all the losers who wasted their time stayin' in school, while I was out, "doin' what I wanted."

Theresa was at that party.

Dennis could drink. Even then, my God that boy could drink.

It was after that party that Theresa and I started hangin' out together again. She was only smokin' pot then.

I never liked pot, some drinkin', not much.

But they all graduated, Manna, Dennis and Theresa. Nobody in my family graduated, not one of us. But there they were, one accomplishment behind them, and there I was, nothin' to brag about, no job, not even enough money to buy a gallon of milk with...and if I did have the money, I'm not sure I would have. But Manna did.

(light fades on CAL as he speaks.)

I hope Manna's okay.

SCENE TWELVE

Day twenty-eight.

(There is the sound of buttons on a phone being pushed, then a ringing telephone as light rises on CAL at the pay phone. The ringing stops, CAL speaks.)

CAL

Hi Ma, it's me...I'm okay, oh, thanks for the cigarettes and the money...I'm good, really, I'm fine...I'm gettin' out in a couple days...Yeah, thirty days...It didn't seem so fast in here...Tired, I guess, beds aren't the best, but what can you do...Have you talked to anyone...Oh yeah? How's she doin'...Did you tell her I'm gettin' out soon, or Nicky...No, no, that's okay, I'll give them a call when I get home...No, I'm not goin' back to the apartment...I don't know, I was thinkin' the Y, if I can't find somewhere else...No, I know, I wasn't askin'...It'll be fine, I can stay at the Y until I get a job, then rent a studio or one bedroom somewhere, until I can afford a bigger place for me and Elizabeth...She's great, I talk to her all the time...Yeah, she's really excited about me comin' home. She can't wait...I will...I will...Okay, I'll see you soon...Love you too. Bye.

(CAL hangs up as light fades.)

SCENE THIRTEEN

Day twenty-eight. Later.

(Light rises on the chair. CAL is sitting. He is very relaxed. He holds his water bottle, but is not fidgeting with it, not endlessly drinking from it, but uses it instead for emphasis, as a pointer of sorts.)

CAL

I never knew much in this world, but I know things now. I know where I can't go when I leave here.

Not that it matters. I really didn't want to have to go back home anyway, but it beats stayin' at the Y. Know who stays there? Fuckin' bums who can scrape enough together to afford it.

You know, you're not supposed to drink or anything there, but when I looked at rooms before, when I knew I couldn't keep the apartment, there were empty beer cans in the stairs and in the hall. The bathroom smelled like piss.

But I don't want to be too far from Elizabeth, you know. I have only one chance to make it right.

And I don't want her brought up on welfare. She's had enough of that.

We used the system. Took advantage. That's why I can't go back to the apartment, not that I'd want to anyway, but it was under Theresa's name. I was never supposed to be livin' there.

Section eight for housin', food stamps to eat with, State Health for insurance, free lunch at school, SSI for livin' expenses. We had it all. Theresa was considered disabled, a junkie with a kid, and as long as she saw her therapist regularly, went to the clinics on time, her benefits would never be taken away.

So we lied, us and a million other people, said she was alone. It was great. When the money ran out and we couldn't get cash anywhere else, we could sell the food stamps.

Half price.

Fifty dollars worth of food for twenty-five dollars cash. Everyone we knew was poor, who's gonna turn that down? Even the people who hated us, who looked down on us, they'd buy them from us. God forbid they give us a fuckin' dime when we're sick, but, wave a deal in their faces and they're all over it. Fuck our habits, they were gettin' somethn' too, and that made it all right, like they won the fuckin' lottery.

But we also had social workers and DSS and school counselors checkin' on us constantly. If Elizabeth was late for school, the phone would ring...if she was sick and had to stay home, we might get a visit. Mandatory testin' for Theresa.

That's how we found out she was positive.

She didn't want to know.

We didn't want to know.

Made her get on methodone, sent her to job fairs, classes in computer trainin' or some other useful skill that was supposed to magically change her life.

Never once askin', what she wanted or needed. They had all the answers for her.

For us.

Yeah, we were livin' the high life all right, as long as we jumped through the hoops.

(CAL stands. He turns away. When he is ready, he turns to face out, though keeping his body rigid, his arms crossed tightly over his chest.)

She got really...depressed, I guess, after we found out. Started usin' all the time. Didn't care anymore.

I got home...one afternoon. I don't remember where I was, though I could probly guess. And, Carol was sittin' there. Theresa's mother. She said Theresa was in the hospital, that she od'd.

Nobody picked Elizabeth up after school. They called the house, got no answer.

Finally they had no choice but to call Carol. She was the emergency contact. We would have used my mother, but when she got on one of her epic couch-a-thons, she didn't move, not even to answer the phone.

Carol...took Elizabeth to her house and called Theresa. When she got no answer, she went over there.

She told me Theresa was...sittin' on the stairs, but not really sittin', slumped over. Her legs were open and her head was...she was leanin' forward, her head was between her knees.

Carol thought she was dead. She tried to wake Theresa up, but she wouldn't move.

Carol went to call an ambulance, but couldn't find the phone.

Theresa had it.

Carol didn't see it at first and had to use the page thing, you know, you hit it and the phone beeps so you can find it.

Theresa was still holdin' it, passed out tryin' to make a phone call.

Give you one guess who she was tryin' to get, and it wasn't me.

She was fine when I left. I didn't even know she had anything. Hell, if I knew she was holdin', I certainly wouldn't have gone out.

She must have been tryin' to get more and just...passed out.

Carol called the ambulance. Jesus, all the neighbors standin' out there, seein' that.

Carol told me she would keep Elizabeth if I wanted to go to the hospital.

When I got there, Theresa's social worker and fuckin' psychiatrist, whatever the fuck she is, were there. Shovin' papers in my face, askin' me questions.

I couldn't understand a fuckin' word they were sayin'. I just wanted to see Theresa.

She was still in the emergency room.

Not enough beds on the upper floors, the psych ward.

And there was this guy sittin' in the room with her. When I went in, he stood up, you know, to shake my hand.

He was so fuckin' tall, and black. Shiny black, like...black, not brown. And he had a great smile. He was really nice to me. He was quiet and told me everything would be all right. He didn't condescend or talk down to me.

And he didn't blame me. I knew that, he didn't say anything, but I knew he didn't blame me. I liked him.

He was there 'cause she was on a suicide watch. In case it was intentional.

Intentional? She was on the fuckin' phone tryin' to get more, that doesn't sound like a suicide to me.

I called Carol's house to ask how Elizabeth was. God only knows what Carol told her.

What she told me was that Elizabeth was gonna be stayin' there, that she had custody.

I knew what she was sayin', could hear the words, but really didn't undersand what it all meant. I mean, my wife was lyin' there, maybe dyin', I had these fuckin' social workers and doctors askin' me all kinds of questions...

But deep down, I knew I couldn't fight it. I mean, I had no job, technically I had no place to live, only Theresa's name was on the apartment. What could I do? I just kept signin' all these papers and forms they were handin' me.

(CAL sits, exhausted from reliving the experience. He looks directly out and speaks, slowly and clearly.)

Then they asked me why she might want to kill herself. Did I think it was a suicide attempt? I kept tryin' to answer their questions but I wasn't givin' them the answers they wanted.

I couldn't give them the answers they wanted, because I didn't know myself.

Still don't.

God I miss her.

(stage goes black.)

SCENE FOURTEEN

Day twenty-eight. Later that night.

(Light comes up low on the bed. CAL is there, under the sheet. He is masturbating. Slowly at first, then faster, almost frenzied, until his release. His body convulses, but he doesn't make any sound. When his heavy breathing begins to subside, he lies there, staring up at the ceiling, emotionless. Light fades.)

SCENE FIFTEEN

Day twenty-nine.

(Light rises on CAL. He is standing, looking out the "window." The water bottle sits on the floor by the chair, un-noticed, un-touched.)

CAL

I'm actually lookin' forward to doin' things I used to do. Normal things, that regular people do. Goin' to the movies. Takin' a walk for no other reason than to walk. Maybe get an ice cream. And maybe someday even make love again.

(he turns into the room.)

Gonna be different for me out there. There's nobody left. Can't go back home. Don't have any friends, I mean I can't hang with the other junkies, or my brother.

That's a given.

The non-users don't trust me. I either ripped them off one too many times or got into fights with them when I was high.

God, those mornin's wakin' up, afraid to answer the phone 'cause you can't remember what you said, or what you might have done to somebody.

I burned a lot of bridges, fucked over a lot of people.

Can't go to my sister.

(CAL laughs.)

She likes to pretend everything was fine in our house, actually seemed surprised when I mentioned my father's drinkin'.

I forget what we were talkin' about, but I said somethn' like, you know, uh...he could really put it away...somethin' stupid, and she looked at me, stunned and said, "He didn't drink that much."

Can you believe that shit?

Shouldn't surprise me. I don't think she's ever even admitted that me and my brother are junkies. Nice, little quiet life, her and her second husband. There's really no talkin' to her, not about anything real, so, I just don't.

And Theresa.

What am I gonna do without her?

We were always so careful...with our needles, not shootin' up with too many other people. When we found out she was positive, I got mad at her, not because it happened, but because I knew she had been usin' with someone else, like she was cheatin' on me.

I think I was really mad that she was shootin' up and I wasn't. I told you, the shit makes you selfish.

(CAL sits.)

It should have been me.

I told you I did a lot of bad things to get money, and believe me, it scared me and I always thought I'd be the one to "get sick," you know? Worryin' every time I got a cough, only to find out it was a simple cold. Constantly watchin' a small cut or scrape, thinkin' it was takin' too long to heal.

And every time they tested me, in rehab or at a clinic...

Waitin' for the inevitable answer, knowin' for sure it was gonna be me. But it always came back negative.

That's why I was so surprised when Theresa was diagnosed. I knew what I had been doin'.

I know what a whore must feel like every time she turns a new trick.

That's what I felt like, a whore...guess that's what I was.

(CAL stands and turns his back. After a moment, he faces out again.)

It was easy when I was younger, I mean, I really didn't think anything of it, you know? If I needed money, I knew where I could go. The old bus station used to be one spot.

It's not there anymore.

But I would go there, hang out for a while until I caught some guy lookin' at me. After a few minutes, to be sure we both understood what was goin' on, I'd get in his car, he'd drive somewhere dark, tell me to put the seat back, or get out and stand against a wall. He would get what he wanted. Me, I'd just close my eyes and pretend it was someone else, you know, maybe Mary-Ellen and I was back under her porch...

It was almost like I wasn't even involved in the whole thing, besides, it was an easy twenty, twenty-five bucks.

Don't get me wrong, I didn't do it all the time, but I knew I could whenever I needed too. It was like money in the bank.

There were other guys hangin' around doin' the same thing. Not all of them were gay, we all just needed the money.

And they'd talk about bars you could go to...what to look for, I mean some of these guys had been doin' it for years. It was harder in the bars, but in the winter it certainly was warmer.

But one night, this guy did pick me up, bought me a beer. We talked for a few minutes...like with junkies, you can spot each other. We both knew what I was up to. I followed him out of the bar, walked around behind some building, to an alley. You know, it's funny, you get used to it, don't even think about it anymore, I mean, it wasn't like I was really doin' anything with them. It was no big deal. I mean, I was still in my twenties...late twenties, but still in my twenties. What can I say, the guys liked the way I looked.

Like I said, it was almost like I wasn't even involved, not really there.

(CAL stops, afraid to go on, but continues.)

So, I followed this guy out behind some buildin'. I leaned against the wall, closed my eyes and started to unzip.

That's when I felt his hands on my shoulders. He was pushin' on them, pushin' me down, and I knew what he wanted me to do.

I panicked...this wasn't the way it was supposed to be. I didn't know what to do. I was scared, I knew I didn't want to do what he wanted me to...I had never done that before, never even thought it might happen.

I didn't know how to get out of there. Should I run, just say no and walk away? Was he gonna hurt me if I tried? I didn't know, all I knew was that I didn't want to do *that*.

(CAL tries to laugh.)

And Dennis's mother wasn't there to save me this time.

(he continues in a somber tone.)

Besides, I needed the money.

So, I got down on my knees...

(CAL drops to his knees and closes his eyes.)

I closed my eyes so I didn't have to see...I heard him unbuckle his belt, heard the zipper when he pulled it down...felt his hand on the back of my head, pullin' my face towards him...I started cryin', but I didn't want him to know that, so I kept quiet...

It was easy holdin' back the tears, been doin' it all my life.

Then he was in my mouth...

(CAL begins to cry.)

He was in my mouth...and there was nothin' I could do...

(CAL stands, crosses to "window," and looks out. When he is finished crying, he continues, not quite turning into the room.)

I don't know how long it took, but I remember him zippin' up. He laughed, paid me and said he would like to see me again some time.

I tried to smile and said, "Sure, that'd be great."

Then he patted my cheek.

And I thanked him. I thanked him for what he had just done to me.

When I got home, I got as high as I could so I didn't have to think about it, about any of it...what he had done to me, or the fact that I had become desperate, and looked it.

(CAL crosses to chair and sits. He wipes his eyes, recomposes himself as much as he can and looks out.)

It happened again after that. Sometimes there was no place else to get money.

There was nobody I could borrow from.

A lot of people, the smart ones, stopped takin' my calls.

There was no one I could steal from.

I wasn't exactly allowed in the houses of most of my friends.

Food stamps were gone, couldn't sell those.

But that was somethin' I could always do, had too. I wasn't the one callin' the shots anymore. It didn't happen a lot, but enough for me to think that I'd eventually be the one. I just never expected it to be her...

(CAL tries to laugh, as light begins to fade.)

I finally lost control. I was now officially a junkie.

No risk too great.

(light fades.)

SCENE SIXTEEN

The last day.

(Light rises on CAL, in his room. The duffel bag is on the bed, open, filled with clothes. CAL takes a tee shirt from the small bureau, and changes into it. He drops the shirt he had been wearing into the duffel bag. CAL goes through the rest of the drawers. He takes the photo album from under the bed and places that in the duffel bag as well. He looks around and zips the duffel bag as light fades.)

SCENE SEVENTEEN

The last day. Later.

(Light comes up on chair. CAL is standing off to the side, almost in shadow. He steps closer to the chair, but doesn't sit. He slowly runs his hand across the back of the chair, as if caressing it. He turns and speaks.)

CAL

I'm gonna miss it here.

(CAL laughs.)

If anyone ever heard me say that...

(CAL sits.)

I'm takin' Elizabeth out this weekend. I get her Saturday afternoon.

I'm still tryin' to figure out what I'm gonna tell her, about Theresa. Maybe some day she can understand.

You know, Theresa stopped usin' when she found out she was pregnant. A lot of women do. No drugs, no cigarettes, even gave up caffeine.

But as soon as she got home. Didn't take long.

Maybe if I quit then too...but I didn't have to.

I don't know what Elizabeth must have gone through, what she's been told. To lose her mother, then me.

I hope she doesn't blame me, I know everyone else does. And maybe I am to blame.

(CAL stands and crosses to the "window.")

I don't even know how long she'd been gone.

I fell asleep in a chair in the kitchen. I always sat there in the summer, it was the shady side of the house and always seemed cooler there. It was so hot. I don't remember it ever bein' that hot. Maybe it was the drugs, maybe not...I didn't know anymore what was real, what was hallucination, perception.

The five months before that, were...painful. Everything changed when Theresa got the news.

Carol had Elizabeth.

We had nothin' left, not even each other. We didn't make love...nothin'. All we had were the drugs.

We had to be so careful with our needles, even that intimacy was taken from us. I know that sounds sick, but, I don't know how to explain it, we were close when we got high together. It was nice.

I was in the chair. Sweat was drippin' into my eyes, so I closed them to maybe stop them from stingin'. I didn't plan on sleepin', I'm not sure I was asleep. I mean I could hear sounds.

Familiar sounds, but distant, like they were far away, though they were really just outside my window.

The thud of runnin' feet. The spray of a garden hose. The slam of a car door, somewhere on the next block. And there was that wonderful, I don't know, "hum," of inactivity in my own house. Somewhere, energy was bein' used, but not where I was. It was too hot for movement, to hot to even think, so I just sat there, lettin' the afternoon slip by.

An uneventful blur.

I have to tell you, bein' high is a wonderful feelin'. Not bein' high is what hurts. Not bein' high, you see everything as it is, hard, cold...scary. But when you're high...

(CAL smiles and closes his eyes, as he reminisces about the experience.)

Like a fog rolls in, slowin' everything down. Peaceful. Can't see any of the imperfections. I imagine that's how the drunks must feel in the bars.

Safe.

Everything as it should be, was meant to be.

(CAL turns and looks out.)

Well, how I'd like things to be, I guess.

(CAL walks back into the room, down by the chair.)

When I opened my eyes, the sun was just startin' to go down. I don't know how long I'd been there, I mean it was still light, but the sun was startin' to set.

There was somethin' ...somethin' woke me up. I sat there and listened to try and remember what it was. I couldn't hear Theresa movin' around, and first thought maybe she had gone out...

Then I heard it again. A buzzin'. A low, monotonous buzzin, playin' over and over in my mind.

It was ruinin' my high.

So I just...stood there in the kitchen, listenin', you know, try to see where the sound was comin' from, and realized it was comin' from the bedroom. When I got closer, the buzzin' had become louder, deafenin'. I swear, I could feel the structure of the house practically vibratin'...it just wouldn't stop.

I went in the room. Our room, Elizabeth's was down the hall.

There was Theresa, lyin' on the bed. She was on her stomach.

Obviously the heroin had done more for her than it had for me...I mean, she was still sleepin'.

I stood there, lookin' at her. Her legs were slightly apart, her robe was pulled up, almost around her waist, kind of twisted.

And then, the strangest thing happened. I never felt anything like it before. An image so strong, from somewhere deep in my subconscious, hit me with such force, I think I actually staggered a bit.

It was Theresa.

Lyin' on her stomach.

She was six years old.

(he sits, slowly, losing himself in the memory.)

I was reminded of a summer long ago, when we were kids, lyin' in the back yard, a blanket spread across the hot tar.

Nobody in my neighborhood had gardens or dirt in their yards, except the Italians, everyone else did black top. And I'll tell you, those surfaces got hot.

I was beside her. We were lyin' on this old, faded, blue blanket. It had...sailboats, and these...embroidered waves. Theresa's yellow sun suit was bunched up around her waist. We were on opposite sides of the blanket, and I could see the polka-dotted hem of her skirt. I knew I shouldn't have, but I let my eyes look up under her skirt...I could see her underpants.

(CAL laughs.)

It was so excitin', but I was scared too. I mean, what if someone had seen me lookin'? One part of me wished I hadn't looked, 'cause I thought I might get in trouble.

But there was another part of me...I mean, it was all new, it wasn't just seein' her underwear, it was somethin' else...excitement...the thrill of knowin' that I had gotten away with somethin' I wasn't supposed to be doin'.

Like the first time I tried heroin.

I never told Theresa, even after all those years. It was my secret and I loved havin' it. And seein' her again like that, on the bed, with her robe around her waist, was just as excitin' as when I was six years old and saw her underpants.

I wanted so badly to go in and touch her, but I also didn't want to let go of the moment. It wasn't sex exactly, it was the excitement of catchin' her so...unguarded, and knowin' that this time I wasn't gonna get in trouble for lookin'.

She was beautiful. Unspoiled by self-conscious movement, unembarrassed by the "purity," of her body.

Theresa refused to wear shorts, no matter how hot it got. I don't know why, she had beautiful legs. Her thighs were white, almost glowin'.

I just stood there, and let my eyes wander over her.

(CAL leans back and runs his fingers through his hair.)

And then I heard it. Mother fucker...that buzzin'. I was so wrapped up in lookin' at Theresa, I had forgotten about it.

I looked over at the window. The shade was down and I could see the shadow of a fly, beatin' its tired body between the shade and the screen, tryin' to escape. I don't know how long the poor thing was trapped like that, so I walked over, lifted the shade and he flew away. I don't know what their life span is, but he probly only had like an hour left to live anyway, but at least he didn't have to live it like that.

I looked back at Theresa. Her hair was lyin' across her face. I could smell her sweat and perfume, kind of mingled together.

I quietly got into bed beside her, brushed the hair from her cheek, let my fingers lightly trace the outline of her lips. I didn't want to disturb her, you know.

I got up on one elbow and leaned way over, to look into her face, her profile against the pillow.

I kissed her lightly on the cheek.

She tasted like salt.

Her eyes were open. She seemed to be lookin' right at me, through me almost.

She was already dead.

I turned her head, to look in her face. I don't know why, I mean, not like I could have done CPR or anything...I just wanted to see her. The spit around her mouth had dried, her cheek stuck to the pillow. Her eyes didn't move, her neck was stiff, hard to bend.

I let her go, I think I may have even screamed, but I can't be sure. The force of my pushin' her away, forced her eyes up into her head.

At least that's how I remember it.

And I cried.

Not so much because she was dead, but because she had chosen her escape.

Her escape, not mine.

And she finished the last of the heroin.

It wasn't an accident.

When she got the news, she used to say she was gonna kill herself because she didn't want to get me sick too. She knew that if I was desperate enough, I'd

eventually use the same needle...lots of junkies used infected needles when there's no other choice.

I told you, no risk too great.

And then I got mad. She finished it all, left nothin' for me. Those were good drugs, that I could have used. It was too late for her, she was dead, but there I was, left high and dry...no money for another bag, nobody I could cuff from. Fuck her, I thought. If she had let me know, had hinted somehow about what she was gonna do, I might have been able to stop her, but to leave me empty handed, to leave everything up to me...

No. No. I knew I couldn't hold it against her. Not really. Hell, had I known what she meant to do, I might even have joined her.

I was bein' selfish...Theresa would have understood.

I lay down next to her, held her in my arms. Her skin was cool, even in that heat. I looked out the window and saw that the sun still hadn't completely set. Christ, I thought, is this fuckin' day ever gonna end?

Then I thought maybe none of it was happenin', maybe I was still in the chair by the kitchen window, and this was all a dream.

The sun was still goin' down, and I could hear the sounds of summer outside.

Familiar. Distant. Maybe it was a dream.

I must have fallen asleep again, 'cause when I woke up, it was dark. I got out of bed and remembered what happened.

When the cops got there, lookin' at me, not believin' a word I said. Like I had done it to her. Then havin' to call Carol. And I went through the motions, answered everyone's questions...but none of it really hit me until after she was buried.

That was when Carol told me I'd never see Elizabeth again.

Dennis was at the funeral. I hadn't seen him since I told him to fuck off and mind his own business one night, maybe a year ago now, it's hard to remember what happened when. I was sick, couldn't get anything and he was tellin' me to get into a rehab...

Everything and everyone was gone.

Almost three months have passed since the funeral, and I haven't even mourned Theresa yet, not really.

I loved Theresa. I really did, and I hope I have the chance to love Elizabeth like that, and if I can make this work, maybe it's not too late to make somethin' in my life worthwhile.

Somethin' in her life.

I have a lot of people I have to apologize to. Some are dead now and I can't. Some don't speak to me and I might not be able to. But I have to try.

Dennis was right, you have to look beyond yourself.

(CAL wipes tears from his eyes and tries to laugh, as light begins to fade.)

Took me almost twenty years to get to this point and it's all over in thirty days.

Hope that's enough time.

(stage goes black.)

SCENE EIGHTEEN

The last day. Later still.

(Light comes up on the pay phone. CAL is standing in front of it. He picks up the receiver, thinks for a second and hangs up. He does it again and hangs up. He squats, takes a deep breath, picks up the phone, drops some coins in and dials. After a moment, he speaks.)

CAL

Hey, it's me...How are you...I'm good...Yeah, how'd you know...Guess everyone knows, not like it's a secret, never could keep a secret in that neighborhood...Get out today...Yeah, thirty days...I don't know, I was thinkin' maybe the Y, but I need a place for tonight, maybe a couple nights. My mother won't let me stay there...Really...You will...About an hour...Thanks Dennis...

(light begins to fade.)

How's you mother these days?

(stage goes black.)

SCENE NINETEEN

The last hour. Check out.

(Light comes up on the bed. Cal is sitting on the bed, staring straight ahead at nothing in particular. The duffel bag is at his side, he has his arm over it, holding it tightly against his side, as if fiercely protecting it. He begins to hum softly, then sings, low, almost a whisper.)

CAL

Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the "Feast of Stephen"
When the snow lay 'round about
Deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night
'Tho' the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gath'ring winter fuel.

(CAL stands. He picks up the duffel bag, walks to the edge of stage, looks back at the bed, hits a light switch and the stage goes black, as light very faintly comes up on chair.)

END OF PLAY