

VESTA

(Hands him cash from her bosom.)
So for \$100, I want you to teach her a little red lesson. Beat her up like a school bully... and let her know I sentcha. She's just left to catch the evening train north; don't miss her now.

OFCR. HATLESS

... Whatever you say, boss.
(Heads to the front door.)

VESTA

But I want proof.

(Alone.)

THERE'S A TRAIN A-COMIN'
GOTTA SLOW IT FAST.
THE TENDER WILL GO POPPIN',
BLOWIN', GROWIN' GASSED.
A BLAST! A BLAST!
AS FOR ME, I'LL WORRY SOME.
TILL I'M SURVIVIN',
I'M SURVIVIN' THAT TRAIN TO COME.

(The MEN stampede downstairs.)

QUIMBY

Them fair guns is kid guns! 'Course she won the 100 bucks!

VESTA

Where you drunk skunks off to so late?

QUIMBY

This sombitch is tryin' me so we're goin' out back to shoot bottles.

VESTA

Shootin' bottles!? It's much too late to be shootin' at bottles! The neighbors'll call!

OFCR. WILKINS

Hope they don't call the cops on us!
(Laughter, hiccough.)

VESTA

All right, well boys, let's have a nice piece of blackberry pie the Mrs. made to soak up some of that liquor, all right.

QUIMBY

Fine, but - shootin' after.

VESTA

(Caught by something out front.)
 Maybe. Hey, you boys hear that?

The streets, where JOHN BRASS leading a mob of marchers.

BRASS
 HAVOC, YOU SAY TONIGHT
 THIS IS NOT MERELY
 ANOTHER DISTRICT ELECTION.
 AS THE COUNTY SEAT, YOU SAY
 JOHN BRASS

IS THE ONLY MAN
 ABLE TO BRING THIS COUNTY
 BACK TO ORDER!

MARCHERS
 JOHN BRASS
 IS ABLE TO
 BRING US
 BACK!

BRASS (CONT.)
 THERE'S A TRAIN A-COMIN'
 GONNA QUAKE THE GROUND.

THE ENGINE'S BURNIN' UP NOW,
 SHAKIN', BREAKIN' TOWN.
 BEAR DOWN! BEAR DOWN!

HAVOC, NOW YOU BEAT YOUR DRUM!
 NO ONE'S DRIVIN' - !

VESTA
(Watching out the window.)
 THERE'S A TRAIN A-COMIN',
 GOTTA SLOW IT FAST.
 TENDER WILL GO POPPIN',
 SHAKIN', BREAKIN' TOWN
 DOWN! BEAR DOWN!

MARCHERS
 OOH,
 SHAKIN', BREAKIN'
 BEAR DOWN! BEAR DOWN!

WILLA
 MY TRAIN TO COME!
 MY TRAIN'S A-COMIN' ...

In the backwood, 100 yards from the Quimby estate.

(WILLA slogs with her sack. She hears something. At least, she thinks. She considers routes.)

OFCR. HATLESS (O.S.)
 Sssssssssssssss

WILLA
 Whatchu want.

OFCR. HATLESS (O.S.)
 Sssssssss ssssssalutations, Ms. Willa.

(HATLESS emerges from the dark.)

WILLA
 Whatchu want.

OFCR. HATLESS
 Teach ya a lesson.

WILLA

Mrs. set y'up? Can't get a hundred yards from her before she's after me again.

OFCR. HATLESS

Naw, she just wants I should send y'off. Payin' me 100 big ones to give you a message: "One for one, for the Governor's Wife." She really wants ya taught.

WILLA

My smarts are all street.

(Reveals a butcher's knife.)

So I'm gonna go. That way n' straight on to the freight train that rolls by here every night. And don't think about following me, I got an army man comin' with.

OFCR. HATLESS

GOOD-LOOKIN' GIRL,
BE WARNED AND BE WARY.
'CUZ, GOOD-LOOKIN' GIRL
YOU'VE CAUGHT SHERIFF'S EYE.
HE'S GONNA MAKE YOU HIS,
THAT LAZY, CRAZY BASTARD IS.
HE WAS CALM LIKE A COW,
BUT HE'S CHANGIN', AND HOW,
COME ON, GOOD-LOOKIN' GIRL, YOU TAKE CARE.

(A train whistle blares in the distance, approaching.)

WILLA

Thanks for the warnin'.
BUT THAT'S MY TRAIN.

(OFCR. HATLESS pulls a pistol.)

OFCR. HATLESS

Ms. Willa. I wouldn't like to use this but I will if I gotta. I only need a few drops of blood on a tear of your top clothes, and we're done here.

WILLA

The only blood spillin' tonight is yours,
Little Dick.

OFCR. HATLESS

Let's be partners!

(Points the gun at her, cocking it.)

(They stand off as the train comes closer. GUNSHOT. Yet it's from off - what the hell? WILLA blitzes OFCR. HATLESS and they wrestle to the floor. The train thunders, underscoring the battle growing vicious.)

OFCR. HATLESS

Let's be done, girl!

(Another GUNSHOT from off – it hits a tree.)

OFCR. HATLESS (CONT.)
Who the hell is shootin'!?

(WILLA grabs her knife and stabs HATLESS in the thigh. Red.)

OFCR. HATLESS (CONT.)
B, bitch –

(OFCR. HATLESS falls as WILLA grabs her sack and sprints off.)

Various locations.

(QUIMBY is firing shots into the back wood.)

VESTA
J.! That's enough damn shooting!

(WILLA finds EUGENE at the red maple tree.)

EUGENE
Willa, you're covered in blood!

WILLA
One of the Sheriff's boys ... no time
explainin', we'll miss the freighter!

EUGENE
Where's the bastard?!

WILLA
I think I killed him. Now come on!

EUGENE
Willa. Oh god, Willa!?

(WILLA pulls EUGENE, chasing tracks; BRASS and MARCHERS rally.)

COMPANY
THERE'S A TRAIN A-COMIN',
NOW THE SMOKE PILES HIGH.
IT CUTS THE ROAD IN TWO
WITH A CHOKIN', BROKEN CRY.
GOODBYE, GOODBYE
TO THE WORLD THAT MUST SUCCUMB;

NOW IT'S NEARIN',
ONLY THING WE'RE HEARIN',
IS THE TRAIN TO COME,
TRAIN TO COME,
TRAIN TO COME,
TRAIN TO COME!

(Blackout.)

SCENE THIRTEEN: TWO KITCHENS / THE BACKWOODS – FOLLOWING

(LORAMAE, panicked, phones SADIE, sleepy. Evening robes.)

LORAMAE

Sadie –

SADIE

Loramae it's two in the morning –

LORAMAE

There's police from Everett out in front of Vesta's place! Somethin's up!

SADIE

Police from Everett? Why not call J. and his boys? Why they got the boys from the town over involved?

LORAMAE

Exactly. Maybe something's happened with J.? You hear all the shooting?

SADIE

John Brass called 'em in I'm sure. He led that march right through town, got everyone real riled up!

LORAMAE

Sadie, you can see V.'s kitchen from your window. Look and see what's goin' on!

SADIE

What? Ugh, well – oh foot.

LORAMAE

Tell me what you see?!

SADIE

I'm lookin'! Nothin'! The lights are all off. It is two in the morning.

LORAMAE

Boooooooo. The boys from Everett are gettin' in their car. Drivin' off.

SADIE

You know Vesta, she's always takin' care of things.

LORAMAE

Guess so. All right, go to sleep –

SADIE

Jesus Christ she just came out the back door, she's lookin' this way

LORAMAE

*Hang up the phone hang up the phone hang
up the phone -*

SADIE

This call never happened -!

In the backwoods.

*(HATLESS, barely alive, pulls himself through the brush, gun in
hand. VESTA appears with a mug of coffee.)*

VESTA

Dear ol' Dick, what have you done?

OFCR. HATLESS

Some fool was shootin' through the trees!

VESTA

That was the Sheriff, shootin' bottles.

OFCR. HATLESS

He is a stupid man!

VESTA

Now, we got a rich man's son bleedin' out
on our property. Try holdin' an Orphan's
Banquet after *that* headline!

OFCR. HATLESS

Need some medical help, V.

VESTA

(Takes a long swig of coffee.)
Course you do. My girl get away?

OFCR. HATLESS

Went off with some soldier man.

VESTA

With Willa gone, folks'll start to worry
... oughtta pull some attention back from
Brass and his march.

OFCR. HATLESS

You got a knack for makin' things - turn
out like you design 'em ...

(Sits up, setting the gun aside.)

VESTA

That's true.

OFCR. HATLESS

Think she cut a vein ... Oof'm sleepy ...

VESTA

We'll get this mess all covered up, don't you worry. We'll just say you and Willa were hot on each other tonight and decided to take a stroll. And someone, some kid was doin' target practice. And he shot you.

OFCR. HATLESS

I got stabbed.

(VESTA takes the gun and shoots him in the back. HATLESS dies.)

VESTA

Nope. You got shot.

(VESTA drags him off.)

SCENE FOURTEEN: A JUNK CAR — THURSDAY DAWN
MUS. NO.: "TRAIN CAR #1"

(WILLA, EUGENE, and TWO OTHER TRAMPS are crammed atop stacked boxes of canned vegetables. Everyone is asleep but for a restless EUGENE. Already scrawled on the wall is "Thurs.")

EUGENE

Willa, I can't sleep. ... Hey?

GOOD-LOOKING GIRL,
YOU'RE SLEEPING TOO PEACEFUL.
GOOD-LOOKING GIRL ...
OH, COULD YOU BE MINE?
I'M NOT BRIGHT,
BUT I WOULD SURELY LOVE YOU RIGHT.
GOT MY BRAIN IN A STEW
OF A DREAM TO MAKE TRUE
WITH THE GOOD-LOOKING GIRL FROM THE FAIR ...

(EUGENE's about to photograph her when WILLA has a night terror.)

WILLA

... got no reason no more, Dick Hatless
... Let me go, let me go ...

EUGENE

Willa, wake up, wake up.

(WILLA does, but recoils from EUGENE, confused.)

EUGENE (CONT.)

We're on a train, headin' north. You had a nightmare.

WILLA

I think I killed that man.

EUGENE

Don't think of that right now.

WILLA

It's all I can think about!

EUGENE

Think of the future, how good it'll be now.

WILLA

Eugene, there ain't no future, not for me. There's days ahead, sure, years even. But I ain't got no plan, ain't got no money, ain't got —

(EUGENE takes her hand, holds it a moment. WILLA pulls it away.)

WILLA (CONT.)

And what I have got might get taken away any moment.

EUGENE

Not if you don't want it to. See, I've been getting ideas.

WILLA

What sort of ideas.

LISTEN: MUS. NO.: "CITY OF ANGELS"

EUGENE

About where I wanna go! And what I wanna do, opening a studio with my camera.
(Scoots closer to WILLA, real cute.)

I GOT THIS PICTURE IN MY HEAD
OF A PHOTO STUDIO,
CALIFORN-I-AY, CALIFORN-I-AY.
I'LL HAVE TO SAVE UP LOTS O' BREAD,
BUT SOON I'LL DOUBLE BACK MY DOUGH
AND ON THAT DAY, ON THAT DAY

I'LL WATCH MY SHOTS DEVELOP
AND I'LL SEE DREAMS TAKING SHAPE.
IT'S TIME MY LUCK WAS CHANGIN', WILLA —
DAY'S COME FOR AN ESCAPE
TO THE CITY OF ANGELS.

WILLA

Los Angeles?

EUGENE

Yeah! But it gets even better!

AND STILL THAT PICTURE IN MY HEAD
HAS A LADY WELL IN VIEW —
KEEPS A CAP ON STRAIGHT, MY CAP ON STRAIGHT.
AND SHE CAN HELP, OR ELSE INSTEAD

WELL, I DON'T CARE WHAT SHE'LL PURSUE,
LONG AS IT'S GREAT. AND I CAN'T WAIT,

TO WATCH A LIFE DEVELOP,
AND TO SEE DREAMS TAKING FORM.
IT'S TIME YOUR LUCK WAS CHANGIN' WILLA
DAY'S COME FOR SOMEWHERE WARM,
LIKE THE CITY OF ANGELS.

LOOK, AN ANGEL!

(EUGENE takes her picture. WILLA hates / loves it.)

EUGENE (CONT.)

LOOK! AN ANGEL!
I'LL BRING AN ANGEL, MY OWN ANGEL,
THE BRIGHTEST ANGEL THEY'VE EVER SEEN!

AND WE'LL WATCH OUR WORLD DEVELOP,
AND WE'LL SEE DREAMS COME TO FRAME.
TODAY OUR LUCK GETS CHANGIN', WILLA
NO MORE SORROW, NO MORE SHAME,
MY ANGEL. BE MY ANGEL?
AND YOU WON'T EVER HAVE TO ROAM.
SO MY ANGEL, OH MY ANGEL,
LET ME BRING YOU HOME.

WILLA

Eugene. You think you know me 'cuz you
knew George. But if you did you'd know
folks like us don't put down roots.

EUGENE

But you need roots, and a man like me -

WILLA

I don't need no man. I need a friend.

EUGENE

I'm sorry. All I'm saying is, you keep
goin' everywhere, you'll end up nowhere.

WILLA

Maybe Nowheresville is where I wanna be.

EUGENE

If that's so. Then let me go nowhere
with you.

MUS. NO.: "TRAIN #2"

(One of the TRAMPS wakes; sees WILLA.)

JACK K.

(Lighting a joint.)

HEY PRETTY HOBO-GAL, I KNOW YOUR FACE.

WILLA

Mr. K.!

JACK K.

HOT DOG, MY WILLA!
GOD IS FRIGHTFUL WITH GRACE.
TRAMP LIFE AIN'T MUCH RELIEF ...
(*Re: her bloody clothes.*)
LOOKS LIKE YA HAD YOUR SHARE O' GRIEF.

WILLA

Eugene, this is Mr. K. When George left,
he was my Guardian Angel. Still is.

JACK K.

Hey Skeet – put away that damn radio! We
got Willa Franks, here!

SKEET, THE OTHER HOBO

All right.

WILLA

You still writing, Mr. K.?

JACK K.

Always writin'! You and your rube
lookin' for a jungle?

EUGENE

A jungle? Rube!?

WILLA

Yeah, we sure are!

JACK K.

All right then little miss.

WE'LL FILL YOUR GUT TIP-TOP, AND –

(*An officer barges in. TRAMPS we couldn't see before leap up.*)

JACK K. (CONT.)

WELL, LOOKS LIKE HERE'S OUR STOP!

(*They slide the car door open and leap out.*)

SCENE FIFTEEN: QUIMBY ESTATE, CELLAR QUARTERS – WEDNESDAY NOON
MUS. NO.: "AMBERGRIS AGAIN"

(*JACK K. draws "Wed" on the stairs, goes. QUIMBY drags HATLESS's
corpse to a floor closet and VESTA kneels close by.*)

QUIMBY

(*Roaring.*)
Ain't comin' back?!

VESTA

(Pushes Hatless into the hole.)

I figured one step at a time! J., think straight! Think of what you've done, how you *killed poor Dick Hatless*, shootin' bottles like a fool! Ugh, he reeks!

QUIMBY

It was an accident!

VESTA

(Pours perfume bottles into the trap.)

No one will believe that, dear. It's already far-fetched that I found him *nightwalking!*

QUIMBY

Yeah, that *is* far-fetched. What were you *really doing out there?*

VESTA

Focus, J.! Willa bein' gone is a good, good thing. I put off those police from Ev'rett for now, but everybody's getting black eyes for us! Look at me! We got *enemies.*

QUIMBY

No no we *got to find her*, is what!

VESTA

You fool, that girl was on her way out the day she climbed those front steps! Can't you see with her gone, things can go back to normal?

QUIMBY

Normal? Normal!? You think anything about this is *normal?* It's all lost V.! It's lost. I just wanna go away again ...

VESTA

J., look, I made you a grilled cheese. And see, whiskey! Ooh ...

(Dips the sandwich into a tumbler.)

Don't that look good?

QUIMBY

While I was haulin' in a dead body, you were flippin' a *grilled cheese!?*

VESTA

What else is a wife for!? Husband, you're right, town's lost. We've done all we can for these small-town fuckheads. But think of what we could do for a whole *state* of fuckheads?

QUIMBY

What?

VESTA

Yes, we got the governor's wife comin' back to see the house at sun-up. That's when we get *the governor* to come, too. And when they get their hat and coat, J. Quimby, we are gonna go with 'em, right back to Jefferson!

QUIMBY

(Ate the sandwich like an animal, downed the whiskey.)

No. Gawd no ...

I'M TIRED O' PLAYIN' PUPPET.
AIN'T NO HOPE FOR THIS CAMPAIGN.
NO HOPE AND NO DESIRE
TO SUFFER FOR YOUR GAIN.

THERE'S ONE THING I WANT, AND SHE'S THE ONE.
SO I'LL GO HIGH AND LOW,
AND FIND OUT WHERE SHE'S RUN.
YOU SEE?
CUZ THOUGH I ONCE FOUND YOU BEAUTIFUL,
SHE'S ALL THE BEAUTY NOW, FOR ME.

That's right, V. The only thing keepin' me from pulling my eyes outta their sockets walked out the back door. You've been poisoning me all these years, turnin' me dark-sided and cruel, like you. But Willa could bring me back to good. Now step aside, devil!

(Throws the flask, brushing past.)

LISTEN: MUS. NO.: "RUINATION"

VESTA

BUT IF YOU GO NOW,
YOU'D DO ME WRONG.
AND DEAR YOU KNOW HOW
I'M NOT VERY STRONG ...
YES, YOU COULD RUIN ME IF YOU WISH,
YOU COULD RUIN ME.

IF YOU DIVORCE ME, THOUGH,
YOU'D NEVER LAST.
AND DEAR YOU'D FORCE ME, OH,
(Gestures to Hatless's corpse.)
TO DIG UP THE PAST.
SEE, I COULD RUIN YOU IF I CHOOSE,
I COULD RUIN YOU IF I CHOOSE.
YET IF I RUIN YOU, WE BOTH LOSE.
I'D HATE TO RUIN YOU.
DON'T MAKE ME RUIN YOU.

(QUIMBY turns away down the stairs, and VESTA follows after.)

OUR ILK TIES THE TETHER,
NEVER MEANT TO SUFFER PAINS.
IN SILK OR IN LEATHER,
WE'RE THE ONES WHO LOCK THE CHAINS.
YOU WANT THE GIRL
AND I WANT YOUR STATION.
LET US NOT SPEAK OF THIS BLEAK "A" OR "B."
YOU WANT THE GIRL,
SO I'LL FIND HER LOCATION.
LET ME PROPOSE OPTION "C."

JUST LET ME FIND HER AND TAKE HER,
NO ONE WILL CARE.
THEN WE CAN BIND HER AND BREAK HER,
AND LOCK HER 'NEATH THE STAIR.

THEN! YOU CAN RUIN HER EV'RY NIGHT.
YOU CAN RUIN HER EV'RY NIGHT.
YES, YOU CAN RUIN HER, ALL RIGHT?

YES, YOU CAN RUIN HER DEAR, ALL RIGHT?
WE CAN RUIN HER, DEAR, ALL RIGHT?
WE CAN RUIN HER, DEAR, ALL RIGHT?
WE CAN RUIN HER. ALL RIGHT?

ALL OF THE ECSTASY FOLKS LIKE US CAN AFFORD.
NO RUINATION,
JUST REWARD.

(VESTA wraps her arms around QUIMBY, who is violently shaking.)

QUIMBY

I - I don't want to hurt her -

VESTA

Shhhh, I know. Come on #1, let's us just
be one big happy family ... forever?

(Blackout.)

SCENE SIXTEEN: HOBO JUNGLE - THAT NIGHT

(In the dark, the tramp SKEET listens to the radio.)

RADIO

An alert to the counties of Madison,
Iron, Jefferson and St. Francois:
Missouri deputies are searching for the
daughter of Sheriff-Coroner James Harris
Quimby, allegedly kidnapped from her home
by a sex-crazed soldier-gone-mad. The
two are likely traveling by train and may
be camping out. A reward is being
offered to anyone who can help ...

(SKEET eyes WILLA and EUGENE as the radio fades off. TRAMPS hole up before an old school bus, years unused; one arrives with stew. A fire has been set as JACK K. sings a cappella.)

MUS. NO.: "MY LORD, THEY'LL BURY ME DOWN RALEIGH WAY"

JACK K.
MY LORD, THEY'LL BURY ME DOWN RALEIGH WAY.
OR IN A BARN O' BRICK, 'NEATH BALES O' HAY.
BUT WHEN THAT BRASS BELL BLOW,
TO JESUS I WILL GO,

ALL TRAMPS
GO.

(JACK K. sits beside WILLA and EUGENE, eating and passing a flask.)

JACK K.
It ain't dining at the ritz but you can't
tell me the grunt rations was any better.

EUGENE
How'd you know I fought?

JACK K.
Your eyes. You got the look. I was in
the marines once. Couldn't stand it
eight days before I got on the sick list.
Think the army's like school: for fish!

WILLA
Sometimes I wish I had more schoolin'.

JACK K.
Willa, you oughtta know they said on the
radio two kids matchin' your description
were on the loose and they was offerin' a
reward for your return.

WILLA
Well we can trust you, can't we Mr. K.?

JACK K.
Of course, we're family, Willa. But the
code ain't what it used to be ... plenty
of drifters don't follow it at all. You
be careful now.

A TRAMP
Jack, I'm takin' my radio into town; you
betta sing them a song.

JACK K.
Pardon me, I am *summoned to entertain!*
(Goes to them.)

EUGENE

(Removing a red book from his bag.)
Willa, I wanna show you something.
George gave me this red book, said in the
darkest dark, it would be a light for me.

WILLA

I can't read.

EUGENE

Then maybe you'll learn.

WILLA

(Takes the book.)
Thank you.

EUGENE

That Mr. K.'s a real crack-up.

WILLA

Reminds me of my daddy.

EUGENE

George always talked nice and bright
about your pop. But wouldn't say too
much about your ma. How'd she pass?

WILLA

Um. She -. She had -.
(It's hard.)

MUS. NO.: "SALLOW'S SONG"

EUGENE

Never mind.

WILLA

The day my mama died ...
She'd got sick after she lost
my sister ...
So papa took her to the clinic
in town.

JACK K.

ALL YOUR DAYS,
WAITIN' FOR SALVATION.

SAY, "AN ANGEL GON' COME."

THERE AT THE END,

IN COMFORT AND GRIEF,
YOU FIND A FRIEND.

(OOH)

WILLA (CONT.)

It was just a little flu but the doctors
wouldn't give my daddy no medicine 'cuz
we had no money? If we'd just been
richer, if we'd just been -

The day she left she said,

WILLA'S MOTHER

(Appears in fireglow.)

"Bye Willa."

Sos I just said, "Bye mama," 'cuz I
didn't know? Next time I saw her I was
puttin' dirt on 'er.

(She looks into his eyes.)
AND THAT WAS THAT.

I'm so broken. I could never be as kind
and as good as you. As you are to me.

SEE, MY HEART
LEFT FOR WAR.
AND I'M ALL TO BLAME.
COLD, MY HEART,
WAITING FOR
ONE TO HEAL THIS SHAME?
AND THEN YOU CAME.

EUGENE
I been scared my whole life. Scared o'
people. Scared o' time. Hell I cried
like a pussycat when I heard I'd been
drafted. But you've shown me something
to find courage I never knew I had.

A MAP OF SCARS LED ME HERE,
DAY BY DAY BY DAY.
MY MAP OF SCARS ENDS IN YOU.
ASK ME. I WILL STAY.

(WILLA kisses him.)

WILLA, EUGENE, JACK K.
THE MAP OF SCARS STARTS TO HEAL,
THIS LOVE CAN MAKE IT SO.

WITH THE TRAMPS
THE MAP OF SCARS WILL REVEAL
HOW ONE LOVE CAN GROW.
NOW, ONE LOVE WILL GROW.

MUS. NO.: "DAMNED RADIO"

WILLA
I wanna go with you to L.A.

EUGENE
You don't need a man, Willa.

WILLA
No. But I need you.

EUGENE
(Kisses her.)
IT'S TIME OUR LUCK WAS CHANGIN', WILLA WILLA

NO MORE SORROW, NO MORE SHAME!

AND ALL MY SORROW DONE!

(Gunshots, and the TRAMPS scatter. QUIMBY and OFCR. WILKINS appear, grabbing EUGENE and cuffing him.)

EUGENE

You can't take her!

(OFCR. WILKINS knocks EUGENE unconscious. VESTA walks on in a coat and hat, removes her gloves.)

WILLA

Eugene!

VESTA

So much for "your people." A good-for-nothin' tramp sold you out!

JACK K.

Skeet and his damned radio!

VESTA

Willa, you're invited to attend a party tomorrow. In fact, your presence is firmly requested as the guest of honor.

WILLA

I ain't goin' nowhere with you!

QUIMBY

Please. Please.

VESTA

Well, soldier-boy is goin' back to town with us. So, I guess you can ... scamper off and we'll chase you - after we dump his body of course - or you can just get in the car? Which you like better?

SCENE SEVENTEEN: VARIOUS LOCATIONS - FRIDAY AFTERNOON

DOTTIE

(Appearing with a Tupperware.)

I just wanted to say how sorry I am about what's happened to Willa. To go through an experience like that, and then to lose your mind. Well, it's just good you're keeping her safe inside. See you tomorrow night for the banquet.

Quimby Estate - The cellar.

(WILLA is chained to the furnace pipe. Cold, she reaches to light the pyre, blowing ashes of George's letters into the room.)

WILLA

AND WE'LL WATCH OUR WORLD DEVELOP,
AND WE'LL SEE DREAMS COME TO FRAME.
TODAY OUR LUCK GETS CHANGIN' ... WILLA ...

(Amidst the ashes appears GEORGE's spirit. WILLA feels his presense without looking at him.)

WILLA (CONT.)

George.

GEORGE

Yeah, Willa.

WILLA

What happens when we die.

GEORGE

We die.

WILLA

... How is it?

GEORGE

Not s' bad. Livin's just more fun.

WILLA

She's so strong, George. She's got power in places folks can't even see. And she's so smart. Me, I'm just a dumbshit hillbilly. No. Worse, I'm just a dog.

GEORGE

Ev'ry dog in a house gets put down some time or other. So you gonna get put down?

WILLA

No, George, but -

GEORGE

Then you got some changin' to do.

WILLA

But how can I fight her?!

GEORGE

You *don't* fight her. Fight between a dog and a crocodile ain't no more fair than a one between a dog and a rat. So now's a time to get *clever*. To get *smart*. To get *away*. 'Cuz it's better to be a fox in a hole, than a dog in a house. Now are we dogs or are we foxes?

(The door opens and it's VESTA with soup. GEORGE fades away.)

VESTA

Afternoon, et cetera.

WILLA

Did you kill Eugene?

VESTA

Now, we are law-abidin' folks, Willa. He got ornery, so he's black and blue, but – I think he'll walk. My, it's real tough luck lovin' you, isn't it? Seems like everyone you get close to ... ends up in a real bad way. Your family, your poor brother, your soldier boy – why, even Dick Hatless over there.

WILLA

I was protecting myself.

VESTA

Well don't worry; Sheriff and I took care of the body.

WILLA

Once this party tonight is done, you'll have me dead.

VESTA

You've got it all wrong. See, you've been quite a resource of late now ev'ryone thinks my poor little daughter has gone crazy? Broken to loony little pieces over bein' kidnapped 'n all?

WILLA

Gee that's funny, 'cuz I never been more right-minded.

VESTA

Willa you listen. *Things've changed.* Mrs. Slaughter has convinced her husband to attend tonight's party.

WILLA

The Governor? How'd you manage that? Oh, why even ask.

VESTA

You managed it. Only thing better than you gettin' lost was you gettin' found. It's a "Welcome Back Willa" party now. News was crawlin' out of the state, and everyone got *real interested*. It's a big deal and now this could be my chance!

WILLA

What's in the other hand, Mrs.

(AGATHA QUIMBY appears, curious. WILLA watches her.)

VESTA

You just gotta play your part, be my little crazy, and guess what? We'll be gone. No more Sheriff, no more this, hell you and your beau can even make a go, everybody wins! All you have to do is play a little part.

WILLA

You want me to be crazy.

VESTA

This wood wasn't grown for tough bitches like us, Willa. Us girls gotta stick together, and get the hell out. Okay?

WILLA

... All right.

VESTA

Good. I'll come back for you at first-dark. Oh — and in case you think of trying something funny ...

(Pulls a bottle from her bosom.)

This here is pure nicotine. One drop will make you real sick. Three drops, that'll kill ya, and no one will know a thing. If I were you, I'd keep myself real indispensable.

(VESTA's gone, and she locks the door behind her. WILLA stares at the door, as AGATHA remains by, excitement in her eyes.)

LISTEN: MUS. NO.: "THE MAD DOG"

WILLA

Y' BEAT ME DOWN WHEN I WAS BROKEN.
YOU SPIT OUT LIES WHEN LOVE WAS SPOKEN.
AND THEN YOU TOOK THE ONLY TOKEN
I HELD NEAR.

(Thump! from the below the floor. WILLA and AGATHA turn to the mattress. Thump! As WILLA goes to it, pushing it aside —)

WILLA (CONT.)

BUT AIN'T THAT YOU? YOU'RE JUST A BULLY.
NOW, I SEE TRUE, 'N KNOW YA FULLY,
YA GOT TO STOP,
AND I'M THE ONLY ONE, THAT'S CLEAR ...

(WILLA finds the trapdoor and opens it; flies, and the stench of a fresh corpse, waft upward. WILLA reaches in, finding Hatless.)

WILLA (CONT.)

THE MAD DOG KICKS ASLEEP.

THE MAD DOG TICKS ASLEEP.
 SHE ACHES. SHE ACHES.
 THE MAD DOG RUNS IN PLACE.
 THE MAD DOG DREAMS A RACE –
 SHE WAKES. SHE WAKES –

Get clever. Get smart.

GET AWAY. AH!

(The hand stirs, and out slogs HATLESS, a bullet in his back.)

WILLA (CONT.)

NOW THATCHA USED MY LIFE T' SCATTER,
 AIN'T GOT A THING FOR YOU TO SHATTER.
 YOU WANT ME MADDER THAN A HATTER?
 SO I'LL BE.

AGATHA
 SO YOU'LL BE.

I'LL PLAY MY PART,
 I'LL BE YOUR FREAK SHOW.
 I'VE LEARNED THE ART,
 YOUR LITTLE MEEK SHOW.
 AN ACT MISSOURI'S BOUND TO CALL A
 SIGHT TO SEE.

LITTLE MEEK SHOW.

MANY UNSEEN VOICES
 WE SEE.

WILLA
 THE MAD DOG GROANS AT DARK.
 HER BRAIN, IT SPOILS.

AGATHA
 GROANS AT DARK...
 THE MAD DOG MOANS HER BARK.
 HER BRAIN, IT SPOILS.

SHE FOAMS 'N UNDERNEATH,

HATLESS
 THE MAD DOG GNASHES TEETH,

HER CHAIN

AGATHA & HATLESS
 HER CHAIN,
 THE MAD DOG,
 THE MAD DOG.
 UNCOILS,
 THE MAD DOG.
 THE MAD DOG.

UNCOILS.

(VESTA re-enters, descending the steps, unaware of the SPIRITS.)

WILLA
 MY BREATH IS QUICK, AND GETTING QUICKER.
 MY HAIR IS COARSE, AND GETTING THICKER.
 IS THIS A CHANGE, OR JUST A FLICKER
 OF THE LIGHT?

VESTA
 Why you so quiet?

WILLA
 I'M OVERWHELMED BY ALL MY SENSES ...

VESTA

Answer me, girl!

WILLA
CAN'T HEAR MY THOUGHTS, 'N MY PRETENSES
FADE TO FIGHT OR FLIGHT.

VESTA
(Hands her the dress.)
Silent treatment, I see.

(WILLA shows her chained hand, as numerous VICTIMS appear.)

VESTA (CONT.)
Guess ya can't put yourself together with
your leash on.
(Unlocks the chain.)

WILLA & V.'S VICTIMS
NOW I'M CHANGING SHAPE BELOW AN EMPTY MOON.

VESTA
Be ready in half-an-hour.
(Goes.)

WILLA
NOW I'M CHANGING,
YET IT WILL BE OVER SOON.
IT WILL ALL BE OVER SOON.
WHEN

THE MAD DOG STRIKES AT LAST
SHE LEAPS, THE POUNCE TOO FAST.
HER PREY,

A FEAST.

THE MAD DOG TEARS APART
SHE'S LOST HER MIND AND HEART —
A BEAST.

A BEAST.

WILLA (CONT.)
(Considers the dress.)
BUT NOW THE DOG GROWS STILL.
THE MAD DOG STAYS HER WILL,
SHE CRIES. CRIES.
THE MAD DOG LIES IN WAIT.
SHE LIES,
LIES.

VESTA'S VICTIMS
(HUM.)

V.'S VICTIMS
NOW I'M CHANGING,
YET IT WILL BE OVER SOON.

THE MAD DOG STRIKES AT LAST
SHE LEAPS, THE POUNCE TOO FAST.
HER PREY,

THE MAD DOG,
THE MAD DOG.

A FEAST,
THE MAD DOG.
THE MAD DOG.

THE MAD DOG TEARS APART
SHE'S LOST HER MIND AND HEART —

THE MAD DOG,
THE MAD DOG.

THE MAD DOG.
THE MAD DOG.

(Quick transition to -)

SCENE EIGHTEEN: THE ORPHAN'S BANQUET
QUIMBY ESTATE, VARIOUS LOCATIONS – THE NIGHT OF THE FIRE

On the rear patio.

(The party in full swing. LORAMAE, SADIE and DOTTIE sing on a makeshift stage. Dancing!)

MUS. NO.: "BANQUET PART 1 – GONNA GITCHA BACK"

LORAMAE, SADIE, & DOTTIE

(À la the Andrews Sisters.)

L: I'M GONNA GITCHA BACK!

THERE AIN'T NO "ME" WITHOUT "YOU."

S: I'M GONNA GITCHA BACK,

IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO!

D: YOU BROKE ME APART,

MAN, YOU SPLIT ME IN HALF!

YOU LEFT MY PIECES ON THE FLOOR

ALL: WITH A TWISTED LITTLE LAUGH.

'N SO, I GOTTA GITCHA BACK,

I RECKON THIS TIME YOU'LL STAY.

NOW, I'VE PLANNED MY ATTACK –

OH, WON'T OUR LIFE BE GRAND

ONCE I'VE GOT YOU BY THE HAND.

I'M GONNA GITCHA!

I'M GONNA GITCHA BACK!

(VESTA emerges and beelines for MRS. SLAUGHTER. The unamused GOV. SLAUGHTER stands with an empty cocktail glass.)

VESTA

<<Bon soir!>> Do you like the tiki torches?

I thought they were a nice touch!

V.'S FRIENDS
DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO
(cont. under)

MRS. SLAUGHTER

I adore the tiki torches! And already
we've raised nearly six thousand dollars!
That's quite a lot.

GOV. SLAUGHTER

Eh. It's a sidewalk.

(GOV. SLAUGHTER snags a cocktail from a passing waiter.)

MRS. SLAUGHTER

Bruce, tonight's a "no-drinking" night.

VESTA

Perhaps I could fix the Governor my
famous Ruby Fizz, gin-free!

GOV. SLAUGHTER

Throw a coupla aspirin in there, would
you, bitch of a headache.

MRS. SLAUGHTER

Now, Vesta – you’re sure our Guest of
Honor is ... all right?

GOV. SLAUGHTER

Yeah, how crazy *is* she exactly?

VESTA

Crazy, ha ha ha, no, she’s fine. In fact
– I’ll go fetch her!
(*Goes.*)

LORAMAE, SADIE, & DOTTIE

’N SO, I’M GONNA GITCHA BACK,
I RECKON THIS TIME YOU WILL STAY.
NOW, I’VE PLANNED MY ATTACK –
I’M PLANNIN’ MY ATTACK!
OH, WON’T OUR LIFE BE NICE
AFTER YOU HAVE PAID THE PRICE?
I’M GONNA GITCHA, GITCHA, GITCHA,
GONNA GITCHA BACK!

MUS. NO.: “BANQUET PART 2 – SLOW DANCE”

(*VESTA presents WILLA, crazy. The party quiets, focusing.*)

MRS. SLAUGHTER

Willa, we’re so glad you could come to
the party.

VESTA

Music, please!

(*VESTA seats Willa with MRS. SLAUGHTER, then to QUIMBY.*)

VESTA (CONT.)

Keep those eyes bright, #1.

QUIMBY

Willa looks sad.

VESTA

No, she’s excited. Ain’t you excited?

QUIMBY

Willa.

JOHN BRASS

Sheriff, Mrs. Quimby! It’s a week of
congratulations to you both.

VESTA

Oh John, so much could happen!

JOHN BRASS

I know, I'm counting on it.

(WILLA and MRS. SLAUGHTER sit.)

MRS. SLAUGHTER

I bet you hope the party ends soon, huh?

WILLA

Soon?

(Stares off.)

Soon.

(The band plays romantic. WILLA sees QUIMBY staring, locks eyes.)

MRS. SLAUGHTER

Aw Sheriff, the way you look at your girl! Wouldn't you like a little father-daughter dance?

(QUIMBY balks, ashamed, but WILLA stands, walking into his arms.)

WILLA

I've been waiting for this.

(MRS. SLAUGHTER watches, pleased. VESTA and GOV. SLAUGHTER.)

GOV. SLAUGHTER

This "Ruby Fizz" is all gin.

VESTA

Two shots. And I caught you stealing a three-four from your breast pocket flask – and once you're done with that, we'll get ya a five-six-seven-eight.

GOV. SLAUGHTER

Ha, you sound like you wanna dance.

(THEY do.)

VESTA

Oh, Governor Slaughter, I heard you were a marvelous dancer! In fact, two of your mistresses – Marlene Evans and a Gertrude Rosenbloom – said they learned the mambo from you! Oh, don't stop ...

GOV. SLAUGHTER

What do you want? If it's an endorsement, John Brass has already got my ear.

VESTA

Give it all to Brass. The Quimbys are looking to move on. I'm sure you could find some nothing position for the

Sheriff in Jefferson, and perhaps even I could be near to fill your cup from time to time. Whaddya say, Chief?

(WILLA rests her head on QUIMBY's chest as they dance. MRS. SLAUGHTER returns to her husband.)

GOV. SLAUGHTER
Becky! Your friend Vesta and I were just chatting about her husband's future.

MRS. SLAUGHTER
Ooh, I love the future!

VESTA
Yes, your husband mentioned a cabinet position soon to come available.

GOV. SLAUGHTER
Cabinet?

VESTA
Gertrude?

MRS. SLAUGHTER
I'm sorry?

GOV. SLAUGHTER
Yes, a cabinet position.

VESTA
And an assistant spot for me! To start.

MRS. SLAUGHTER
Assistant? Oh, of course, someone to manage all of his affairs!

VESTA
Exactly.

(GOV. SLAUGHTER downs his drink. The clock chimes eight. VESTA picks up a glass and clinks it.)

VESTA (CONT.)
Attention, attention, everyone!

MRS. SLAUGHTER
Thank you Vesta. And what a lovely home, and even lovelier party you and the Sheriff have thrown for us.

(EVERYONE applauds. The following events occur simultaneously.)

MUS. NO.: "BANQUET PART 3 – VISIONS"

MRS. SLAUGHTER (CONT.)

(WILLA is spontaneously startled by something in the distance.

She sits up right suddenly, pushes her chair back, stands.

Clutches the tea cup.

She begins to move toward what is quickly becoming clear as an hallucination.

She gasps, whimpers.

Drops the tea cup.

Shudders.)

"Tonight, as we do every year, we come together to consider those who are not as fortunate as we to be blessed with a life's worth of a mother and a father. No matter the cause or circumstance of orphanhood, our Lord has selected these brave young soldiers to shoulder the burden of those above them. For we must see that our joys are their miseries. And how can it be so, in this, a new era of freedom and of international liberty? How can the orphan remain underfoot when, they above all deserve reparations?" ... Willa?

VESTA

Darling, let's sit down.
(To the crowd, calming.)
 She's all right!

WILLA

(Suddenly direct to VESTA.)
 DEAR MRS. QUIMBY.
 I HEARD TELL YOU'RE ILL?

VESTA

Ill?

SO I'VE BROUGHT TEA FROM THE TAP
 OF THE CHITTERWILL.

Chitterwill? My
 goodness, her fever!

MY TEA WORKS WONDERS,
 SHE LOVED EACH NOON I'D CALL.

J., darling –
 Get involved?

SOON SHE SEEMED SENSELESS,
 HER EYES GLASSED LIKE A DOLL.

We're going inside
 now!

UNTIL AT LAST AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS
 SHE HAD HERSELF A FALL!

Agatha Quimby! I see you, you poor
 fool!

*(MRS. SLAUGHTER starts for
 Willa, but VESTA seizes
 WILLA by the arm and drags
 her away.)*

(Screams, then, pointing at VESTA.)
 OH, THAT FANG-TOOTHED CROCODILE – !
 THAT POOR FOX – !

GOV. SLAUGHTER
 What's she going on
 about? Agatha?

Vesta and Willa, in the cellar.

VESTA

I dunno what you're at but it's the last
 thing you'll do, I promise you!

SADIE
 It's the Sheriff's first
 wife.

*(WILLA lunges at VESTA, and they wrestle, WILLA clawing at her
 hair like an animal. It's over fast.)*

VESTA (CONT.)

You stop this!! No, not here and not now
– not while there's a party still goin'!
(Matting her tousled hair into place.)
Where's the pin? Oh, I've got apologies
to make. I'll come down tonight and you
and I will settle this right.
(Touches her face scratch.)
You think that'll scar?

(Nothing. VESTA rushes up, locking behind her. WILLA reveals
from her mouth VESTA's silver bobby pin, and from her hand, the
bottle of Nicotine.)

WILLA

Woof.

(WILLA pockets the bottle and twists the hairpin. She shoves the
mattress over, pulls up the trapdoor.)

On the rear patio.

SADIE

Did Willa just say that Vesta –

LORAMAE

No, Vesta is not a murderer. She's just
eccentric.

(Suddenly –)

Though sometimes, when I'm around Vesta,
I feel a little as though, I dunno –

SADIE

– Your thoughts are not your own – ?

LORAMAE

– Like everything you do is
predetermined?

SADIE AND LORAMAE

... I thought it was just me!

(OFCR. WILKINS joins the party, rushing to QUIMBY.)

DOTTIE

Officer Wilk –

QUIMBY

Why aren't you at the station?

WILKINS

'Cuz J. – he's gone, boy's gone!

QUIMBY

How the shit did that happen?

WILKINS

See I, I, was guardin' him, and, oh, he lit his damned clothes afire! Was gonna set the whole place up, so, so's I had to open up, and – he got out!

QUIMBY

(Hits them with his hat.)

Idiot! I reckon he's on his way to have some shrimp cocktail and champagne. You shoot him on sight! The perimeter, now.

(WILKINS moves off to the back wood. VESTA re-enters.)

VESTA

Becky, she's *much* calmer now, thanks to your quick thinking! People must be –

MRS. SLAUGHTER

Vesta, stop. You and I did seem very alike. But now I see that we are in fact, very different.

VESTA

We are?

MRS. SLAUGHTER

I may seem all feathers, but that's because, unlike you, my bullshit is harder to see through. And whatever these skeletons are in your closet – I don't want to know!

QUIMBY

V.

VESTA

Not now, dear. Becky, your husband –

MRS. SLAUGHTER

Vesta, deal with your family, *Jesus!*

QUIMBY

That soldier boy got loose; need my gun.

VESTA

It's in the shed. But check the bullets 'cuz you may have used 'em all up shootin' at bottles the other night!

(QUIMBY goes. Variousy, VESTA is hounded by GUESTS.)

LORAMAE

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

DOTTIE

VESTA!

GUEST #1

MRS. QUIMBY, A WORD?

VESTA
 Yes, I'm fine.

Yes, it's time for pie.

(To Dottie.) Go get the pie.

The pie!

(The SLAUGHTERS emerge with coats.)

VESTA (CONT.)
 (Exploding.)
 No one is leaving until they have a piece
 of my delicious fucking pie!!!!!!

(SADIE screams from inside the house. GUESTS part to reveal
 WILLA in the kitchen doorway, caked in blood and dirt.)

WILLA
 Mother. I found Mr. Hatless.

SADIE
 There's a dead man on the kitchen floor!!

MUS. NO.: "BANQUET PART 4 - CHAOS"

GUESTS

SADIE
 WE'RE OUT OF GIN?

GUEST #1
 MRS. QUIMBY!

SADIE
 WE'RE OUT OF GIN!

LORAMAE
 VESTA, THE GOVERNOR?

GUEST #2
 V.?

GUEST #3
 V.?

DOTTIE
 V.?

GUEST #4
 VESTA?

MANY
 VESTA.

GUEST #2
 MRS. QUIMBY?

GUEST #4
 DOTTIE

MRS. QUIMBY?
 PARDON ME, VESTA.

GUEST #1
 LORAMAE

MRS. Q!
 DARLING, IT'S URGENT.

SADIE
 WE'RE OUT OF GIN!

GUEST #2
 VESTA, MY DEAR.

SADIE
 VESTA, THE GIN!

THE SLAUGHTERS
 MRS. QUIMBY, GOODBYE!

DOTTIE
 GUESTS

VESTA.
 GOODBYE!

LORAMAE & SADIE
 MALE GUESTS

VESTA!
 VESTA! VESTA!

(Horror.)

AH! AH!

(Chaos. The welter of GUESTS explode into the backwoods, like small forest creatures running for their lives. VESTA and WILLA lock eyes, calm. QUIMBY comes from the shed, passing VESTA.)

QUIMBY

What's the parade?!

(VESTA grabs the pie knife. She moves toward WILLA.)

VESTA

It's done now! It's all off! Your girl,
dragged up ole Hatless and -

(Stars to cry.)

Ruined my party!!

(Suddenly focused.)

She's gonna see us ruined, can't you see
that now?

WILLA

Sheriff! What I've done ... I've done
for you. Don't you know the Mrs. sent me
away, then employed Mr. Hatless after, to
kill me, SO'S YOU C'N BE HERS ALONE!

QUIMBY

What!?

WILLA

She told me I killed him, but he had a
bullet in his back and she done the deed.

QUIMBY

V. you told me... I -

VESTA

J.! SHE WANTS TO RUIN US,
CAN'T YOU SEE?
SHE MEANS TO RUIN US -

QUIMBY

Quiet!

(WILLA reveals the bottle of Nicotine.)

WILLA (CONT.)

THAT WOMAN'S PLANS ARE UGLY.
SHE'D POISON YOU WITH THIS?
Nicotine.

VESTA

Don't listen to her, fool man!

WILLA

IT MAKES YOUR INSIDES UGLY,

AND IT KILLS QUICK AS A KISS.

VESTA

Lies.

WILLA

She was gonna use it on you this very night, but I stole it to save you.

(QUIMBY takes the perfume bottle of Nicotine. He opens the cap, smells it.)

QUIMBY

Funny. This *perfume* ain't got no *scent*.

VESTA

It's a tonic. For headaches. Don't you see she's usin' you, and while you and I are quarrelin' she's gonna get loose?

(QUIMBY looks to WILLA and pulls a set of cuffs.)

QUIMBY

THE LADY'S GOT A POINT.

WILLA

I'm here, as long as you'll protect me.

QUIMBY

YOU SURE YOU AIN'T FOOLIN' ME?

WILLA

NEVER, SHERIFF.

(WILLA cuffs herself to the door.)

VESTA

Good, now we can talk like married -

QUIMBY

Tonic, you say. You know what, dear? Heh. I've got me a headache. I'll just - have a swig n' ... feel better 'n no time. How long you think it'll take?

VESTA

Oh. Real fast, J.

(QUIMBY brings the bottle to his lips. Stops. HE splashes it at VESTA, who brings her arms up covering her eyes.)

QUIMBY

Tonic, you say?

(Splashes her again.)

Tonic?

(Again.)

Why you coverin' your eyes?

VESTA

You're gettin' it all over my dress is all!

QUIMBY

That true? 'Bout Dick Hatless?

VESTA

Who cares!?! Sure, it's true! But focus, this is about us! I'm your #2, remember?

QUIMBY

Ya know what, V., it's awful hard to tell when you're bein' SIN-cere and when yer just bein' YERSELF.

VESTA

Enough, old man! What do you want? I can give it to you, I can make it —

QUIMBY

(Thrusts the bottle forward.)
Want you to have a swig, dear.

VESTA

J. You turnin' on your wife?

QUIMBY

You ain't been a wife to me since the night we hitched. Now drink up, dear.
(Firmly.)
Drink it!

VESTA

I ain't got a headache!

(QUIMBY whips his pistol out, points it at her head.)

QUIMBY

Well, you're about to!!!

VESTA

(Tosses the knife.)
It's poison.

QUIMBY

So you were gonna let me drink it?

VESTA

No.

QUIMBY

But you were, see.

VESTA

It was for Willa, damnit!!

QUIMBY

(Pushing it close to her.)

THERE'S A TRAIN A-COMIN',
AND IT'S LONG PAST DUE.
THIS UGLY LIFE IS OVER,
NOW I START MY LIFE BRAND NEW.
GOODBYE, V., GOODBYE.
BACK TO HELL, WHERE YOU CAME FROM —

(Cocks the gun.)

Now you mutt bitch. Drink it.

VESTA

You won't shoot me.

QUIMBY

But I would.

(QUIMBY pulls the trigger — and the gun is empty.)

VESTA

I told you to put more bullets in the gun
you lazy son-of-a-bitch.

(With a beastly cry, VESTA plugs her thumbnails into QUIMBY's eyes. QUIMBY drops the gun, strangling her. QUIMBY and VESTA wrestle across the patio floor, until VESTA finds the pie knife. She stabs QUIMBY, who relaxes atop her, dead. EUGENE rushes on, limping badly, his face black and swollen.)

WILLA

Eugene, you blessed fool!

EUGENE

Came as soon as I could!

MUS. NO.: "BANQUET PART 5 — FIRESTARTER"

VESTA

LIKE STRAW TO GOLD ...
WATER TO WINE ...

I saved you ... and you ruined me ...

(She takes the Sheriff's gun, opens the chamber and finds a bullet.)

Not so empty.

WILLA

Mrs., let's leave it here.

STOP THIS, AND WE'LL TEAR OUT.
'N YOU C'N BLAME THIS ALL ON ME,
SAY I KILLED THEM ONE AND ALL.
EV'RYBODY, ONE AND ALL.
LET US GET RUNNIN' ...

VESTA

And me? Vesta Quimby, the widow? No, no
... black just ain't my color.

(Drawing the gun again, quick.)

Oh, Willa, we're just animals fighting
for bones!

WILLA

No, not animals.

EUGENE

Animals ain't evil.

WILLA

Not evil neither. And not good. Just
human.

VESTA

No. That ain't how this is gonna go.

WILLA

Mrs., you got eyes on the side of your
head, and you're not seein' straight!
You're all covered in that nicotine. And
even a dumbshit hillbilly knows nicotine
is a real firecatcher.

EUGENE

(Lighting a match.)

Dozen more where this came from. You
shoot her, and you'll blow brighter than
the fourth of July.

(Blows the match out.)

*(The Tiki torches extinguish – darkness. Cold blue light
illuminates AGATHA QUIMBY and VESTA'S VICTIMS around Vesta in
ritual.)*

VESTA'S VICTIMS

HAH ...

VESTA

(Sees Agatha. Some new clarity.)

Oh, Agatha, you comin' to reap?

(AGATHA advances slowly around VESTA, who panics about.)

VESTA (CONT.)

You stay back!

VESTA'S VICTIMS

NOW I'M CHANGING SHAPE BELOW AN EMPTY MOON

VESTA

Not me, Agatha; you couldn't take me then
and you won't take me now.

EUGENE

Willa, what's happenin'?

VESTA'S VICTIMS

NOW I'M CHANGING, YET IT WILL BE OVER SOON

AGATHA

IT WILL ALL BE OVER SOON

VESTA

Oh Jesus!

(AGATHA and VESTA stand off across stage as QUIMBY appears.)

QUIMBY

V. Ain't you tired yet?

VESTA

Stay back! I will count to, to three!

WILLA

Mrs.!

QUIMBY

It's warm here, like a summer that never ends. There ain't no whiskey, or pies, or Governors, and everyone's heart is so quiet.

VESTA

One!

QUIMBY

So bright here, bright and hot.

VESTA

Two, godammit, two!!

WILLA

Let us go, Mrs.!

VESTA

Three!!!!

(VESTA fires, the bullet hitting EUGENE, as AGATHA reaches out a hand towards a Tiki torch, which reignites. With a flick of her wrist, it falls over, setting ablaze a line of fire straight at Vesta. VESTA QUIMBY howls, engulfed in flames. The Quimby Estate lights up.)

SCENE NINETEEN: THE BEGINNING

MUS. NO.: "CLEARING"

(JACK K. and THE TRAMPS watch as the train from the top of the play roars off. JACK K. finishes his flask.)

JACK K.

THE REAPER'S PLAN NEVER CAN BE CHANGED.
BUT REAPER MAN SEES IT REARRANGED.

1ST TRAMP

Jack, what happened to Willa?

JACK K.

A body ought to figure she burned up in
that house, along with her soldier boy.

1ST TRAMP

To think, those Quimbys'll have a right
burial in Jefferson, like heroes.

2ND TRAMP

Life ain't *just*, Jack.

JACK K.

(Lights a cigarette.)

It don't seem that way. But if not here
... then in the After, we get what our
story's earned. And our Willa ... she'll
get what she deserves. As for us, we'll
only get half for the shit job we did
nailing those lids tight.

1ST TRAMP

Jack K., the Quimbys ain't in those
coffins, are they?

JACK K.

They sure ain't. Farewell, my Willa -
you'll be my greatest tale.

*(JACK K. puts the cigarette out as VESTA'S VICTIMS exit past,
free of their imprisonment in the Quimby house ...)*

JACK K.

(Steps forward, away.)

SO REAPER REAP, WHEN COMES MY DAY.
BUT NOW, REAPER SLEEP -

VESTA'S VICTIMS

AND KEEP AWAY ...

SCENE TWENTY: NOWHERESVILLE - EPILOGUE

LISTEN: MUS. NO.: "WE FOXES"

*(Light rises. Something stirs from within one of the coffins and
with the squeal of bending nails, WILLA emerges. She pulls over
to the other coffin and opens it: EUGENE with his arm in a sling.
They are black with soot, hardly recognizable as human.)*

WILLA

THE DOG HAD RUN AWAY,
FADING HER TEETH ON CHAIN 'N ROPE.
FIGHTING LIFE FOR EV'RY DAY,

LIVING BY THE HAIR OF HOPE.

THE DOG FOUND FREEDOM HARD.
FAMINE 'N PAIN. THE CHASE, THE FEAR.
COMFORT NOW WAS NEWLY BARRED,
THE WAY AHEAD WAS NEVER CLEAR.

YET INSIDE SHE SAID, "IT'S RIGHT."
SHE CAUGHT THE SUN AND CHEERED THE LIGHT,
HER DOGHEAD LAUGHED AND HER MOUTH TURNED SLIGHT —

(WILLA gasps, slight. Behind WILLA, her MOTHER softly illuminates, singing to her.)

WILLA'S MOTHER & WILLA (CONT.)

WAKE, MY HEART,
REST NO MORE.
BEAT YOUR BEAT, AGAIN.

EUGENE

Willa? Don't cry.

WILLA

She's dead.

EUGENE

It had to be.

WILLA

No. My mama. She's dead.

EUGENE

Willa girl.

(As WILLA speaks, the apparitions of GEORGE, WILLA'S FATHER, and her TWO YOUNG BROTHERS join her MOTHER.)

WILLA

(Takes his hand.)

Oh, just. I miss her. And I miss my
daddy. And my little brothers ...

(Kisses his hand.)

And I miss ol' George. But. That's just
what is.

EUGENE

Don't be sad, Willa.

WILLA

No, no. I'm not sad. Happy.

EUGENE

Why?

WILLA

'Cuz I can hear it.

WILLA'S FAMILY

(HUM) ...

(HUM) ...

BEAT YOUR BEAT ...

BEAT YOUR BEAT ...
(cont.)

EUGENE

What?

WILLA

I can hear it. I can hear my heart.

(Gradually the junk car becomes a passenger car. EUGENE and WILLA are cleaned and their clothes changed.)

WILLA & EUGENE (CONT.)

THE DOG NO MORE A DOG,
NO MORE TO TOIL BY HUMAN CLOCKS.
NOW THE BEAST WHO CRAWLED THROUGH FOG
HAD COME OUT LOOKING MORE A FOX.

"YES," SHE SAID, "NOW I BEGIN.
THE PAST IS DEAD, ABSOLVED THE SIN,
THE HEAVENS SMILE, WE FOXES GRIN —"

WAKE, MY HEART!

BEAT YOUR BEAT AGAIN,
BEAT YOUR BEAT, AHH.

COMPANY
WAKE, MY HEART!
REST NO MORE.
BEAT YOUR BEAT AGAIN.

Transition to: Nowheresville.

(The train stops. WILLA and EUGENE step off into a crowd, the former reading the red book. A YOUNG TRAMP follows them.)

WILLA

Eugene — what's this word?

EUGENE

"Sjazda." It's Polish, so it's spelled funny.

YOUNG TRAMP

Ms.! You dropped your pocket book!

WILLA

Oh. Why thank you. Here, take this.
(Offering a \$5 bill.)

YOUNG TRAMP

Five dollars!? I can't take that.

WILLA

One for one.

(The TRAMP BOY reluctantly takes the bill. WILLA and EUGENE blend into the crowd and it is harder to find them.)

EUGENE

Come along now, Mrs. Harvey.

WILLA

Mr. Harvey.

WILLA & EUGENE
 THE FOX LIVES ON THE RUN,
 LIVING A LIFE IN HALLOWED HOLES.
 FOXES HEAR THEIR STORY SPUN,
 AND IN OUR MOUTHS WE CLUTCH OUR SOULS.

ALL COMPANY
 WAKE UP, HEART

REST NO MORE.
 BEAT YOUR BEAT, AGAIN.
 WAKE UP, HEART

REST NO MORE.
 BEAT YOUR BEAT, AGAIN.

WILLA & EUGENE
 IN OUR MOUTHS
 WE CLUTCH OUR SOULS.

IN OUR MOUTHS
 WE CLUTCH OUR SOULS.

(As WILLA and EUGENE disperse into the crowd, many SOULS intermingle with the living, unnoticed. Somewhere in the darkness, we hear VESTA'S voice, at last freed of herself.)

ALL COMPANY
 WAKE UP, HEART,
 REST NO MORE.
 BEAT YOUR BEAT AGAIN.
 WAKE UP, HEART,
 REST NO MORE.
 BEAT YOUR BEAT AGAIN.
 HOO, HOO, HOO, HOO, HOO, HOO,
 HOO, HOO, HOO, HOO, HOO, HOO
 ... (etc.)

WILLA & VESTA (CPT.)
 OH MY, OH MY SOUL.
 OH MY, OH MY SOUL.
 OH MY, OH MY SOUL ...
 OH MY, OH MY SOUL ...
 OH MY, OH MY ...
 OH MY, OH MY ...

(WILLA and EUGENE have disappeared. The light grows intense and bright. Then black.)

END OF ACT TWO

END OF PLAY