



FRANK VENTO

The Deer Kill

A Play in Three Acts

by Murray Mednick

The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.
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Previous books by the author:

THE HAWK *co-authored with Tony Barsha*
THE HUNTER

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THEATRE GENESIS

presents

The Deer Kill

BY MURRAY MEDNICK

DIRECTED BY RALPH COOK

PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS

BY FRANK VENTO

SET AND LIGHTING BY DONALD BROOKS

CAST—IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

LUKERalph Lee
JOHNWalter Hadler
PETERBob Gladini
THOMASFred Forrest
MARTHAJudith Kercheval
ELLIOTNorman Jacob
DOLORESJacqueline Segal
GAME WARDENMaxton Latham
DEPUTY SHERIFFBeeson Carroll
MR. JONESLeroy Logan
MRS. JONESJean Granirer
Understudy for Ralph LeeMichael Winsett

* * *

ASSISTANT DIRECTORBob Gladini
STAGE MANAGERCarl Blackman
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERMichael Winsett
SOUND TECHNICIANArt O'Reilly
PRODUCTION ASSISTANTSKathleen Cramer, Greg Riesner
Dick Briggs, Harvy Yerkes

THE CHARACTERS

THOMAS DINWIDDIE, *about 30, a folk musician
from the South*

MARTHA DINWIDDIE, *about 25, his wife, a middle class
New Yorker*

LUKE }
JOHN } *ex-Motherfuckers, a tribe of
PETER } *psychedelic bandit freaks**

ELLIOT, *a young black man*

DOLORES, *his wife, white*

A GAME WARDEN, *in his late forties*

A DEPUTY SHERIFF, *much younger*

AN OLD MAN (*Bucky Jones*)

AN OLD WOMAN, *his wife*

STELLA, *a large mongrel bitch*

NOTE

For lack of a dog so well trained that she could fulfill the requirements of the play, an imaginary critter will be more than adequate, but the dog sound cues then should be doubly real, doubly ferocious.

The remainder of the sound cues, along with the lighting, should not aim for naturalistic truth but be employed self-consciously as theatrical devices.

There should be a kind of forestage, extreme down center, jutting out into the audience slightly below the stage proper. Numbers 1. (*The Prologue*), 3. (LUKE'S flashback), 11., 15., and PETER'S speech concluding ACT III are played there, as indicated.

The Set—the house—should appear to rise up out of the ground in open space, and be constructed to allow for rear projection on its second story. The screen is necessary for the montage in number 15., but images may be projected on it before the play, as the audience is being seated, of scenes showing the characters doing things outside the play proper, accompanied by the music of THOMAS and MARTHA and their friends. This will help to create the desired mood and give additional information.

The montage itself might be composed with film, slides, or video tape, but I think the best solution would be live television in living color on a big screen. In any case, the dialogue is live and miked from inside the house.

A premise throughout is that the house has a spiritual life of its own and goes through changes. For Act II simply remove the front wall of the ground floor.

The song "You Got to Do What the Lady Says" in Act III is by Mr. Eddie Hicks and is used with his generous permission.

An 8 by 10 photograph of THOMAS is on his front door.

Prologue

1.

LUKE and JOHN are sitting cross-legged in the small, empty playing area below the stage proper. PETER is lying down a little behind them, his arm over his eyes, asleep.

LUKE

In remembrance of everything we have gone through together, especially our comradery as Motherfuckers.

JOHN

Honoring the creatures in the air, on the ground, and in the water; those with and without brains; those that walk and them that crawls.

LUKE

To the creatures who eat other creatures and to the plants which just grow in the earth and don't eat.

JOHN

Appreciatin' the weird monsters of the deep; and with due respect to the grotesques above.

LUKE

Confessing to all that we have lied, cheated, and spoken badly of others.

JOHN

With full knowledge of our sexual responsibilities as psychedelic bandit freaks.

LUKE

(Kicking PETER) In solemn oath before Peter, who is our witness and who knows us.

JOHN
Oh, fuck this, man.

LUKE
What?

JOHN
We ought to get it on, Luke.

LUKE
(*To PETER*) Wake up, Peter. Shit! (*PETER stirs.*)

JOHN
We oughta join up with the Panthers and get it on once and for all, Luke.

LUKE
That's no good.

JOHN
Why not?

LUKE
I'm sick and tired of violence, John.

JOHN
You better go to sleep for a long time, then, Luke.

LUKE
I thought we were taking an oath. I thought we were blood brothers.

JOHN
We are.

LUKE
Okay. (*To PETER*) Come on, Peter. We're ready to move.

JOHN
(*Kicking him*) Get up, will ya?

PETER
(*Struggling awake*) All right. Take it easy. I'm up. . . . To that son-of-a-bitch on Avenue D who was ready to kill me for my half load. To that stylish dandy cocksucker with the ivory cane who sold me dummy shit. May they rot on Riker's Island. To all the junkie sucking vultures in all the dope-sick doorways and alleys of this world—

LUKE
Okay, okay. Let's do it, John.

JOHN
Let's do it.

PETER
—May they die of strychnine in their veins. (*They all stand. JOHN takes out a large hunting knife from a sheath at his belt.*)

LUKE
Anything else you wanna say, Peter?

PETER
Eternal are the heavens and the earth; old people are worse off than we are. Do not be afraid.

LUKE
Groovy.

JOHN
They wouldn't dig us anyway, because we're white.

PETER
Who wouldn't?

JOHN
The Black Panthers.

LUKE
That's right. The best thing we can do is fan out around the country and be our own selves.

PETER
I'm gonna stay here for a while.

LUKE
You are?

PETER
Yeah.

JOHN
What are you gonna do that for?

PETER
I don't know. That's what I want to do.

LUKE
This place is a hellhole.

JOHN
Don't you want to get healthy?

PETER
I am healthy.

LUKE
WHAT?

JOHN
Jesus.

PETER
(Laughs and starts coughing.) I like it here.

JOHN
We've got to get it together. We've got to fight.

LUKE
I just want some peace and quiet. I'm going up to the farm.

JOHN
There's going to be a revolution in this country.

PETER
I don't think so.

JOHN
Get a gun, Peter. That's what you oughta do, get a gun.

PETER
Maybe I will.

LUKE
Forget all that shit now, John—let's make the oath. *(LUKE takes the knife from JOHN and cuts a big gash in the meaty part of his palm, as JOHN shakes his tambourine and gives out with a war whoop.)*
(To JOHN) Here.

JOHN
(Takes the knife.) Brothers. *(JOHN makes a gash in his right hand. They each stare at their own blood for a moment, then shake hands, mixing their blood.)*

LUKE
I swear to look out for my brother John, to come to his aid when he's in trouble, and to get there in a hurry no matter what.

JOHN
I swear to look out for my brother Luke, to come to his aid if he gets into trouble of any kind, and to get there

quick whatever the sacrifice, wherever I might be, however I can. *(LUKE and JOHN embrace.)*

PETER
Hallelujah.

JOHN
Well, I guess I'll go. I guess I'll head west.

LUKE
All right.

JOHN
So long, Peter. *(They clasp hands—PETER uses his left hand to JOHN's right—and embrace.)*

PETER
So long, John. Take care of yourself. *(He looks at JOHN's blood on his hand.)*

JOHN
I will. Good-bye, Luke. *(He and LUKE embrace again.)*

LUKE
Bye, John. *(JOHN leaves the scene. A pause.)* I wish you'd get out of the city, Peter. You could come up to the farm with me.

PETER
Nah, I don't like it there. That Thomas really makes me nervous.

LUKE
Yeah.

PETER
You go ahead, maybe I'll drop up and see ya sometime.

LUKE
Okay. I'll see ya, Peter. *(They shake hands and embrace. Now PETER has blood on both hands.)*

PETER
Take care. *(LUKE moves toward the exit, left.)* Give my regards!

LUKE
I will. *(LUKE exits. PETER looks at his hands.)*

Act One

2.

The front porch of a large, typical American farmhouse, painted white with green shutters. In front of the house is a sizeable driveway; to the right, a bench, a tree, a toy wagon; to the left a dirt road goes off into woods. Dusk. THOMAS sits in a rocker on the porch, picking on his guitar. He begins trying to sing a song, quietly, for his own pleasure. Then LUKE appears stage left. He seems frail and emaciated, as if he hadn't eaten for several days; a down but mystical glimmer in his eye. THOMAS stops singing and watches LUKE walk past him and into the house. A silence. THOMAS listens anxiously a moment, then resumes picking softly on his guitar. The mood is broken sharply by MARTHA, inside, screaming at LUKE. THOMAS stops playing and listens.

MARTHA

GET OUT! I WANT YOU OUT OF HERE! LUKE! DO YOU HEAR ME! I WANT YOU TO LEAVE! THIS MINUTE! GET OUT, LUKE! (A loud banging noise.)

LUKE

I am. I'm leaving. I'll be gone soon, Martha.

MARTHA

(*Shrill*) What? Are you kidding me? What do you mean? Are you trying to aggravate me, Luke?

LUKE

No, Martha. I'm just not eating. I'm just not eating.

MARTHA

Are you STARVING yourself to death? Do you think I believe that crap? Do you think I need this aggravation, Luke?

LUKE

No, no. I'm not hungry.

MARTHA

GET OUT!

LUKE

I'm going, Martha. I'm going. You don't have to yell.

MARTHA

(Screaming) THEN WHY AREN'T YOU EATING!

LUKE

You don't have to yell.

MARTHA

GET OUT!

LUKE

I'm not hungry.

MARTHA

Why are you hanging around here? What are you waiting for? I want you to pack. I want you to pack your things and go away.

LUKE

I will. I'm going away.

MARTHA

OOOOH! THOMAS!

THOMAS

(On the porch) What?

MARTHA

(Inside, to LUKE) GET YOUR THINGS OUT OF THE BARN AND GO AWAY FROM HERE! THOMAS!

THOMAS

What?

MARTHA

What are you DOING?

THOMAS

I'm sitting here looking at the sun go down.

MARTHA

OOOH! (She screams.) AAAAHHHH! (A loud crash.) YOU'RE BOTH FUCKING CREEPS! YOU'RE BOTH A COUPLE OF FUCKING CREEPS! (The back door slams.)

THOMAS

(To himself) Shit. (A pause. LUKE comes back outside on the porch. The two stare out over the audience for a moment.)

LUKE

(Self-pityingly) I guess I'll be leaving soon, Tom.

THOMAS

Luke, Luke. What are you up to, Luke?

LUKE

Nothing. (Giggles.) I feel good.

THOMAS

You do.

LUKE

Yeah, I do. (Giggles again.) I'm in a pretty good place now. I'm starting to see spots and things. Yellow spots.

THOMAS

I guess that's one way to get at it.

LUKE

It is. You know, I'm fasting. I'm in a good place.

THOMAS

Seems like you're acting like a baby.

LUKE

I'm fasting. I don't feel hungry anymore.

THOMAS

Seems like you're trying to get some attention. It aggravates her.

LUKE

After a while, you don't feel hungry.

THOMAS

It aggravates her. She's got enough problems dealing with the kids.

LUKE

I'm just not eating, that's all.

THOMAS

When you gonna start eating again?

LUKE

I don't know. Maybe never. Maybe I'll just die.

THOMAS

Are you doing it all for our benefit?

LUKE

No, I'm not doing it for your benefit. I'm doing it for my own sake.

THOMAS

Then how come you don't go off and die by yourself?

LUKE

I am. I'm leaving. But not right now. (*He blows on his harmonica.*)

THOMAS

I'm not meaning to be so hard on ya, Luke.

LUKE

I need a little more time.

THOMAS

Where will you go to?

LUKE

I'm not sure yet. There's plenty of places. There's a lot of places around.

THOMAS

I know there is.

LUKE

We got places in Maine, New Mexico, Texas and Pennsylvania. The New York thing is too heavy!

THOMAS

The city?

LUKE

It's very heavy. We got to take care of our own people, and all the runaways, and the people who are busted on the street, and we got to hassle the political thing there too.

THOMAS

That place could burn to the ground for all I care. It's beyond hope.

LUKE

So what we want to do is rotate the people doing the city thing now, so people don't crack up from the city thing.

THOMAS

Makes sense to me.

LUKE

You do the city thing for a while, then you go around to the other places in the country. We got places in New York, Arizona, Texas, and Pennsylvania.

THOMAS

I know.

LUKE

Only we had some trouble in Texas.

THOMAS

What happened in Texas?

LUKE

Some of our people got offed for armed robbery. They were into an armed robbery thing. It was John. You know John.

THOMAS

Yes, I think I do.

LUKE

They got into an armed robbery thing in Texas. Carrying guns.

THOMAS

Carryin' guns, huh?

LUKE

Yeah, it was John. John got caught with a gun on him. You know John.

THOMAS

Yes, I think so. Ain't he that skinny cat with a scar on his face wears a Cherokee headband?

LUKE

That's him. John. John was the one.

THOMAS

You hear from him lately?

LUKE

No, we ain't in touch exactly. But I hear things. And me

and John, we can feel it. We can feel when something's happening to us, one or the other.

THOMAS

Yeah, that's the best way I know how to do things. You got to go by your feelings.

LUKE

You remember, Thomas. How it was. She came to me, Thomas. She came over to me in the barn.

THOMAS

I remember.

LUKE

Yeah, I told her all about money. Why I didn't have no money, and how come I didn't want no money.

THOMAS

You got to understand how people change, Luke.

3.

LUKE

I know what money is; I made some money, I made a living. I had plenty of money when I was a dealer—you remember, you used to cop from me. Hundreds of kilos of grass have passed through these hands, Tom, and most of it was very good grass, right? You know that, grade A, first-class, high quality weed, damn right—but it's weird to be a dealer—be a dealer—a dealer—because it's such a hassle, it's a way of life—(*Turning away from THOMAS now and beginning to move slowly off the porch and downstage*)—it takes up all your time, being a dealer—the phone is always ringing and the count gets smaller and you like yourself less and less and the smaller the count the less you like yourself, you can't help it—the harder you work the less grass goes into the count, but I told myself how it was a useful function I was performing being the supplier to my people of spiritual joy and psychological relief, so I felt responsible and like I had a certain obligation—what bullshit—and my people had a kind of respect for me because I was their dealer which has a certain mystique—they liked me because I would stay and talk to them for a

while and so I got to know a lot of people and their problems. But it's such a hassle being a dealer, the phone is ringing and you're making phone calls and deliveries all the time in a state of progressive paranoia which could at any moment be terminal, so the count gets smaller and you like yourself less and less, and my connection was a capitalist/criminal/pervert/pig, Jack H. Klein, who lived in a fantastic loft which he had converted into a luxurious duplex full of contemporary fine art extorted from moneyless artists in exchange for drugs—(*As he progresses toward the forestage extreme downstage center, the lights come up there and dim out upstage.*) a place so spotless, so immaculate I had to be careful with my cigarette and I had to push the button which said "Jack H. Klein Esq." three times and I had to wait and act polite like I thought he was a nice guy doing me a favor with his piggy eyes and phony mouth and his disgust and contempt for mankind, and I was turning into a pig myself as the count got smaller and every time I saw a cop I squealed inside—(*A pause. He is now in the forestage and the stage proper is dark.*)—I had to get away to clean out my head and feel like a man again. I had to feel close to the trees and the stars. And sometimes now when I walk in the woods I can see the Indians, the Iroquois, walking proudly through the woods, and this is what I have got to do, I've got to stay here now in the barn and live simply and learn and purify myself and speak quietly with the Indians who lived here once in a state of grace, in a state of grace—

MARTHA'S VOICE

(*As if from the past*) Hello? Luke. Luke?

LUKE

Come in.

MARTHA'S VOICE

What you been doing?

LUKE

Oh, just fixing the place up a little.

MARTHA'S VOICE

You've done a beautiful job.

LUKE

Thank you.

MARTHA'S VOICE

It's really lovely—and you have a view and everything.

LUKE

Yeah, I dig it okay. . . . How about you?

MARTHA'S VOICE

Well, I got the kids to sleep finally. And I went for a walk—and I thought I'd drop in for a visit.

LUKE

That's nice. I'm glad you did.

MARTHA'S VOICE

Me too.

LUKE

Sit down.

MARTHA'S VOICE

Thank you.

LUKE

Would you like a smoke?

MARTHA'S VOICE

Uh, no . . . all right, yes I will.

LUKE

Okay. (*A pause while he fills an imaginary hashish pipe, lights it, takes a deep drag, passes it.*)

MARTHA'S VOICE

Where are you from?

LUKE

The city.

MARTHA'S VOICE

No, I mean before that.

LUKE

The mountains, the Adirondacks.

MARTHA'S VOICE

Oh, I'll bet it's nice up there. I've never been there.

LUKE

Yeah, it's all right. Some pretty country. (*A pause. He shifts position.*) . . . I was turning over all that acid and suddenly I had a lot of money in my pocket. I thought I'd go back up to the village and show everybody what a suc-

cess I was. I wanted the shopkeepers and my relatives and all those other assholes up there to feel ashamed and show respect. I bought a fantastic green and orange Afghan coat, you know, with black fur inside—something really . . . resplendent!

MARTHA'S VOICE

Oh, I know, they're beautiful coats!

LUKE

And I took all the loot I had and turned it into a roll of hundred-dollar bills and I drove up there in a rented white Cadillac. I cruised around the town stopping at the gas stations and luncheonettes and dry goods stores and all and there wasn't one place could change a hundred-dollar bill.

MARTHA'S VOICE

Oh, Luke, that's fantastic!

LUKE

Only trouble was, nobody recognized me. And I had to change one of those hundred-dollar bills so I could lay some of that bread on my old lady and a brother of mine, and a sister living on welfare. I started to get desperate—it wasn't coming off like in my fantasy. People thought I was some kind of idiot freak trying to beat them with phony hundreds.

MARTHA'S VOICE

Oh, Luke!

LUKE

So finally I go into the Gerson Brothers Wholesale and Retail Fruit and Vegetable Store and I stand there, the wandering hippie prince.

MARTHA'S VOICE

Oh, I can just imagine it.

LUKE

"Listen," I say, "can you change a hundred-dollar bill please? I just got to change it so I can give some money to my mother, and there ain't no place in town can change a hundred-dollar bill." (*A pause.*) I sure felt ashamed. I don't know . . . I don't have nothing to do with money anymore. . . . I've learned to live without it. . . . And I gave that coat away to a pretty girl from Florida. (*A pause. He shifts position.*) How long you and Thomas been married?

MARTHA'S VOICE

Gee, it's over four years now. We're very good friends.

LUKE

He's a beautiful cat.

MARTHA'S VOICE

Yes, I know. I'm very attached to him.

LUKE

How long's he been playing the guitar?

MARTHA'S VOICE

Oh, about five years, I guess.

LUKE

Is that all?

MARTHA'S VOICE

Yeah. (*She giggles seductively. A pause. The lights now are very dim. A moan.*) Oh, Luke, we shouldn't. (*He is about to make love to "her" as the lights dim out on the forestage and start to come back up on the stage proper, where THOMAS is as before.*)

LUKE

(*Approaching THOMAS*) I just don't have nothing to do with money no more.

THOMAS

You got to understand how people change, Luke.

LUKE

Wow. (*Blows on his harmonica.*)

THOMAS

People get their feelings mixed up and then they can't think straight. (*Noise and lights of a car driving up.*) Well, look who's here. (*Car doors slamming.*) I believe it's Elliot, by God.

4.

ELLIOT

(*Entering*) Hello, hello, hello.

DOLORES

(*Behind him*) Hiya, Thomas.

THOMAS

(*Calling into the house*) Hey, Martha!

MARTHA

(*From somewhere*) WHAT?

THOMAS

Elliot and Dolores are here! (*LUKE sits down, withdraws, blows on his harmonica once in a while.*)

ELLIOT

How are you, Luke?

LUKE

Hi, Elliot, I'm fine. I feel good. Hello, Dolores.

THOMAS

Luke here's been fasting the last few days.

ELLIOT

Is that right?

DOLORES

Oh? Any special reason?

LUKE

(*Sullen*) It cleans ya out. (*Mumbles something.*)

ELLIOT

Well, we come to get the offspring off your hands.

THOMAS

No, no problem. Glad to have her. No problem at all.

MARTHA

(*Entering briskly from inside with a big smile*) Hi, Elliot! Hi, Dolores! (*Greetings and pleasantries exchanged.*)

THOMAS

What you been doin', Elliot?

DOLORES

(*To MARTHA*) So, how's my darling daughter today? Did she drive you up the wall?

ELLIOT

(*To THOMAS*) Working. Working, Tom. Working hard.

MARTHA

(*To DOLORES*) Oh, no, not at all. It's a pleasure to have her. It really is.

THOMAS

(*To ELLIOT*) Oh, yeah? What are ya into?

DOLORES

You know I can't tell you how much I appreciate your taking her for the day.

THOMAS

(*To DOLORES, interrupting ELLIOT, who has started to answer him*) Don't think nothin' about it. We enjoyed having her. Wha'd you start to say, Elliot?

MARTHA

(*To DOLORES*) As a matter of fact, they're all three sound asleep already.

ELLIOT

(*To THOMAS*) I say I got to get this program set up by the twenty-first.

DOLORES

(*To MARTHA*) Really? I can't believe it. (*LUKE gets up, leaves the porch, and walks quietly off, left.*)

THOMAS

What kind of program is that, Elliot?

ELLIOT

(*Watching as LUKE leaves*) Well . . .

DOLORES

Is he really on a diet?

THOMAS

He's fasting.

MARTHA

(*Showing annoyance*) He hasn't been eating lately.

ELLIOT

That's something. That's something to do. Lots of people fast. They got to have a purpose. Mahatma Gandhi didn't hardly eat at all.

DOLORES

He looks like he just got out of a concentration camp.

ELLIOT

Maybe he's got a purpose for doing it.

MARTHA

I believe he isn't eating for the purpose of aggravation.

DOLORES

That's what it is, eh? (*MARTHA shows disgust and womanly resignation.*)

THOMAS

Ol' Luke just needs some attention is all. He feels deprived.

MARTHA

(*Vaguely hinting, flash of anger at THOMAS*) I don't have any attention to spare.

THOMAS

Don't look at me when you say that, Martha.

DOLORES

People are funny.

ELLIOT

Fasting is good for people.

DOLORES

(*Sarcastic*) Yes, I know. They get religious and skinny.

MARTHA

I really think he'll eat something before he dies. (*A knowing look at DOLORES.*)

DOLORES

Is he starving himself to death?

MARTHA

(*Amazement laced with pride*) Can you believe it?

DOLORES

Unbelievable.

THOMAS

He isn't, actually . . . What program is that, Elliot?

MARTHA

(*To DOLORES*) Come up and see the children. It's so charming the way they huddle up, like a bunch of puppies. It'd be a shame to move them now.

DOLORES

(*As she and MARTHA go inside*) What did you do, dope them all up?

MARTHA

Oh, Dolores! (*They disappear inside.*)

ELLIOT

Uh, it's a program in self-defense, Tom. I got to have a program written out for the party by the twenty-first of the month. It's nothin', ha!—it's nothin', Tom. (*He chuckles.*)

THOMAS

Self-defense, huh?

ELLIOT

Yup, we aim to be prepared, son. Ha!

THOMAS

You got to.

ELLIOT

I know we do. We'll be together. We'll be ready.

THOMAS

What do you think is gonna happen, Elliot?

ELLIOT

I don't know. Beats me. Anything could happen. Could happen any which way.

THOMAS

So what you do is, you plan out the program for them and then they take care of it from there.

ELLIOT

That's right. What I'll do is, I'll outline a program for them and then they'll try to implement it however they can.

THOMAS

I see . . . I guess you got to be prepared.

ELLIOT

We got to be, Jim! Got to. What the hell? You think we want to lay down and die? Ha!

DOLORES

(*Inside*) You know, Gandhi fasted all the time.

MARTHA

(*Inside*) I know, but it isn't the same thing. (*A door slams, their voices fade.*)

ELLIOT

(*Working himself up*) You act like you don't know what I'm talking about! We got to deal with the man! We got to deal with that shifty motherfucker in the White House, Jim!

THOMAS

What do you mean?

ELLIOT

I mean that vicious motherfucking Nixon is trying to destroy us, that's what I mean!

THOMAS

(*Trying to calm him down*) You think they might try and kill you all off? (*A heavy pause; the women can be heard chattering inside.*)

ELLIOT

What the hell's the matter with you, man? They're going around the country trying to kill us off!

THOMAS

I understand that . . . I guess I'm a nonviolent man. I'm a peaceful man, Elliot.

ELLIOT

You're talking like a damn fool, Thomas.

THOMAS

Well, now, I'll have to think on that, whether or not I'm acting the fool.

ELLIOT

And we got more to worry about than just the damn government.

THOMAS

I know it. There's those going around with Old Glory on their automobiles saying fuck the niggers and the hippies, they ought to love it or leave it.

ELLIOT

We're not having any, Jim. Ha! We're gonna be ready.

THOMAS

Well, that's good.

ELLIOT

Well, I don't see why it should make you so damn sad.

THOMAS

I ain't sad.

ELLIOT

Well, you ain't glad.

THOMAS

No, I ain't glad, either.

ELLIOT

Hell, man, we're trying to make it better. We're trying to make it better for everybody.

THOMAS

(Skeptically) You know what you're doin'.

ELLIOT

We'll do what's necessary to be done. We'll do whatever we have to do.

THOMAS

Listen, I'd rob a goddamn bank if I had to, and I couldn't think of any other way to feed the family.

ELLIOT

There you go.

THOMAS

I just can't help thinking you might go off and push the wrong button and get yourselves exterminated.

ELLIOT

Look, what they're doing is, they're picking off the leaders. They're killing 'em or locking 'em up or scaring 'em out of the country . . . *(Exploding)* Fuck that motherfucking man! We will kill Richard Nixon; we will kill any mother-fucker that stands in the way of our freedom!

THOMAS

I believe you would, and maybe that'd be best, but I can't help thinking it'd be stupid.

ELLIOT

We'd rather start all over than go on like it is.

THOMAS

Listen, I know the kind of people you're talking about. I grew up with them. And they're ignorant, just plain ignorant. They don't know what kind of animal they are. They act like they been told to.

ELLIOT

That don't satisfy me. We got to take care of our own.

THOMAS

That's how they feel. They don't know any better. People

know less than the animals in the field about how to live. Man's the only one that gets fucked up in the head, the only one that kills its brothers. It ain't natural.

ELLIOT

It's a fact. It's a fact we got to live with.

THOMAS

Shit, I'd rather be an animal. *(He barks like a dog and howls at the moon.)*

MARTHA

(From inside) Thomas!

THOMAS

What!

MARTHA

You'll wake the children!

DOLORES

(From inside) Leave him alone, it's good therapy. *(THOMAS laughs.)*

MARTHA

He's crazy!

ELLIOT

Oh, no, he ain't. He's smart. He's real smart. *(The women can be heard laughing at some kind of "in" joke.)*

ELLIOT

All right, Dolores! We got to be goin'!

THOMAS

Yeah, I'm a nonviolent man myself; I'm a peaceful man.

ELLIOT

Things'll happen the way they want to.

THOMAS

Ha! Ain't that the truth! Nothin' we can do about it.

DOLORES

(Coming outside with MARTHA) The best thing is the ten-day rice diet; it flushes you right out.

MARTHA

I know. Thomas, they're going to leave Nina here for the night. She's sound asleep. I think it would be cruel to wake her up now.

THOMAS

It's fine with me.

DOLORES

You're sure it's no trouble?

THOMAS

No trouble at all. Three people sleeping in a bed is as good as two.

MARTHA

I don't mind at all.

DOLORES

(*To MARTHA*) You know, you'd be amazed at the black and wormy shit that comes out of you—

THOMAS

I believe it.

DOLORES

It's absolutely incredible how the system is poisoning our bodies. (*To MARTHA*) You really should try it. It's only the first ten days or so that's hard. You'd be a completely new person, Martha.

MARTHA

(*Bitterly*) That's what I need all right, a new life.

DOLORES

Your headaches would go away, and most of your anxieties. You'd get rid of all that crap. If people didn't eat all the crap that they eat they'd live better lives.

MARTHA

I know. It's just that I . . .

DOLORES

Certain things you don't eat—no meat, NOTHING artificial—rice is your base. Your body will tell you what it wants and what it doesn't want. And your body knows best. You'll be a little on the thin side, maybe, but you'll feel fine.

MARTHA

Well, if it wasn't for the children . . . (*The sound of dogs making a vicious racket somewhere nearby.*)

THOMAS

Sounds like them dogs got themselves something cornered out there.

ELLIOT

Dolores, let's go now. I got some work to do.

DOLORES

All right. Maybe you'll give it a try, Martha.

MARTHA

Well, we'll see.

DOLORES

You don't have to do the whole bit. You can cheat a little here and there. (*THOMAS laughs.*)

THOMAS

Well, I guess if you're gonna do something you may as well go all the way with it. Ain't that right, Elliot?

ELLIOT

That's right, Tom.

DOLORES

I guess so.

MARTHA

(*To THOMAS*) You never do.

THOMAS

(*To MARTHA*) What you talkin' about?

ELLIOT

You all take care now, and we'll come back for the child in the morning.

THOMAS

That's fine with us, and good luck with what you're into.

ELLIOT

Thank you. See you tomorrow.

DOLORES

Good night, good people. (*Car doors slamming.*)

MARTHA

'Bye, Dolores! 'Bye, Elliot! (*They start to drive off.*)

THOMAS

(*Shouting after them*) Don't run into no polecats! (*ELLIOT blows the horn in response. Perfect silence, then the crickets, then the dogs.*)

(*Speaking of the dogs*) Wonder what's going on up there.

MARTHA

It's such a dark night.

THOMAS

Sounds like Stella is in on it, whatever it is.

MARTHA

Oh, I hope the children don't wake up.

THOMAS

She's getting real wild, that dog.

MARTHA

God, I feel so tired, Thomas.

THOMAS

Hardly no stars at all. Smells like rain.

MARTHA

Winter's coming, Thomas. It's coming fast.

THOMAS

We still got time. We got some good weeks left.

MARTHA

What are we going to do about the oil bill?

THOMAS

I'm not sure. Something will happen.

MARTHA

(Exasperated) Oh, Thomas.

THOMAS

Now don't go getting upset. I promise you I'll do something. *(Pause.)* I thought I heard one of the children. *(A silence.)* No. *(Sigh of relief.)*

MARTHA

Thank God. *(Noise of the dogs again.)*

THOMAS

Goddamn! Those dogs must have them a bear.

MARTHA

(Frightened) Oh! Thomas!

THOMAS

What? What is it?

MARTHA

I saw somebody! Somebody was standing right over there. *(Indicating woods across the road, right.)*

THOMAS

I don't see anything.

MARTHA

He was standing right there, Thomas. Do you think I'm crazy?

THOMAS

All right, I'll go look.

MARTHA

Hurry, Thomas.

THOMAS

Be right back. *(He goes off into the "woods," right. A silence; MARTHA shivers from the chill. We hear LUKE playing the harmonica nearby. MARTHA looks, apprehensively. The music ceases, then LUKE appears, left.)*

5.

LUKE

(Softly) Martha?

MARTHA

(Resigned) Oh, LUKE.

LUKE

Can we talk for a minute, Martha?

MARTHA

There's nothing to say, Luke.

LUKE

Nothing? Nothing to say.

MARTHA

No. *(Pitying him)* It's just no good anymore. I can't go on. It's become an impossible situation and you have to leave. *(A silence.)*

LUKE

Good-bye. *(He remains where he is.)*

MARTHA

Luke, oh Luke. It's no use. It's too hard. I've tried. You know, I thought it was possible . . .

LUKE

It was a beautiful thing.

MARTHA

But it's over now. It doesn't work. There's too much pain. I've got Thomas, and the family, and they have to come first. (THOMAS reenters, right.)

THOMAS

I didn't see nobody. (A delicate silence.) I left my last good pick somewhere in the house. Guess I'll go look for it. (Goes inside.)

MARTHA

Do you understand, Luke?

LUKE

I understand.

MARTHA

The whole thing has gotten too emotional, too . . . sticky, you know, and I've been selfish. (Bitterly) You have to sacrifice something in this world just to have a place to stand in, have a home. Maybe it will be different for the children. I really hope so.

LUKE

May it be beautiful before me.
May it be beautiful behind me.
May it be beautiful below me.
May it be beautiful above me.
May it be beautiful all around me.
In beauty it is finished.

(He turns to exit, then stops, extreme left.) A Navajo Indian said that. (He leaves.)

MARTHA

(On the verge) Oh, God! (THOMAS comes back outside.)

THOMAS

I found it.

MARTHA

(Into his arms, sobbing, in tears) Thomas! Thomas!

THOMAS

Don't fret over it, Martha. He'll make out okay. Ol' Luke's got a few things goin' for himself.

MARTHA

It's such a shitty world, Thomas.

THOMAS

I know it, babe. These are hard times for people.

MARTHA

It's a chilly night. I'm going in the house. You come inside soon, too. (She goes.)

THOMAS

I'll be in in a bit. (He whistles a tune for himself. The dogs flare up for a moment, then die down.) I guess she's killed it, whatever it was. (He turns to go back up on the porch.)

6.

JOHN'S VOICE

(Whispered; off right) Thomas. Thomas.

THOMAS

(Turning, startled) What? Who's there?

JOHN

(Off) It's me, John. I'm a friend of Luke's.

THOMAS

Well, come on out where I can see you.

JOHN

(Still whispering) I don't want anyone to know I'm here.

THOMAS

I won't tell nobody.

JOHN

How about your wife?

THOMAS

I won't tell her either.

JOHN

(Whispering) Okay. (A pause, then JOHN walks slowly on, right, his clothes worn and dirty. He wears a top hat, with feather, Indian-style, and a beat-up tambourine round his shoulder. He looks as though he'd been running for days.)

THOMAS

How you doing, John?

JOHN

(*Frantic*) Wow, I'm sure glad you remembered me.

THOMAS

Yeah, sure I remember you. Luke and I were just talking about you earlier. And now here you come walking up the road.

JOHN

(*Still whispering*) Yeah, it's weird. (*A pause as they stare at each other.*) I went and did it, man.

THOMAS

Huh?

JOHN

I did it. I killed a cop. I crossed over.

THOMAS

What?

JOHN

I killed a cop. I killed him, man.

THOMAS

(*Slightly alarmed*) Where was this, John? In Texas?

JOHN

No, no, not Texas. I was never in Texas in my entire life.

THOMAS

Oh, well, Luke said you was doin' armed robbery in Texas.

JOHN

No, Delaware. It was Delaware. I killed a cop in Delaware.

THOMAS

What were you doing in Delaware?

JOHN

That's where I was. In a hardware store, in Delaware, looking at a wick.

THOMAS

Holy Jesus. I never thought anything was happening in Delaware.

JOHN

I was standing in a hardware store looking at a wick. It was a wick for a kerosene stove. I was a little stoned. I must

have been staring at that wick for a long time. Hardware stores are amazing places, man. My mind is expanded in hardware stores. A hardware store is full of real, functional objects. Beautiful tools and all manner of lovely machines, interesting and useful devices, sports equipment, household appliances, nails, nuts and bolts, screwdrivers, damn! It's a place!

THOMAS

I like hardware stores.

JOHN

There I was, staring at this wick. It was a wick I fully intended to buy. At any moment I was going to request the wick from the man behind the counter wearing glasses, and conclude my business there.

THOMAS

What happened?

JOHN

This cop comes in. (*A noise inside.*) What's that?

THOMAS

It's nothing. Go on ahead.

JOHN

This cop comes in. He's a local. He walks in and he cruises me and he has some words with the proprietor and then he starts out, and I'm still standing there staring at that wick. And that's when it happened. It all began right there in that moment.

THOMAS

How's that, John?

JOHN

It was the vibration, Tom. It was all in the vibration. I could've picked up that wick and bought that wick and gone about my affairs just as cool as you please, but I'd had it, Tom. I'm standing there staring at that wick and feeling that cop going by me and I'm saying to myself, "Fuck this, man, don't be afraid of this cop, you stare at that wick for as long as you damn well want to. I'm tired of being scared to stand in a hardware store stoned and stare at a wick. Fuck you, cop." And just as I'm through saying to myself, "Fuck you, cop!" the cop stops dead in his tracks just like

he heard me. And he stands there, just a few feet away from me, giving me the "are you challenging me, you dirty motherfucker" vibration. So there you are, Tom—him looking me over, and me still digging that kerosene wick. Five minutes must have gone by like that, me thinking, "Now you just ignore that cop, John. Fuck that cop. You ain't doin' nothing wrong." And then, "Hey, you," he says, like that. "Hey, you." Wow. And I look up finally into those shaded Texas Ranger eyes, black stones in a blue mist, and "What," I say. "What? What do you want, why are you disturbing my peace like this, why don't you fuck off?" Only I didn't say all that, I just thought it, but thinking it was enough, 'cause he heard anyway, and now it was a thing with us, me taking my stand and him having to make his move. Now there's no way out for either of us; win or lose, we're on. All because of those waves I was putting out, Tom.

THOMAS

I know what you mean. . . . Them dogs have stopped. Be coming around here soon. . . . Go on with your story, John.

JOHN

"Hey you," he says, "what you doin' hanging around in here?" I say, "I'm looking at this here wick." He says, "Let me see your I.D." I show him my driver's license. "That ain't enough," he says, "let's see your draft card." I tell him I left my draft card home. "It ain't exactly a draft card, it's a I-Y," I says, "meaning anxiety-neurotic. And, besides, draft cards is Federal business." "Don't give me no back talk," he says. "How much money you got?" "Five dollars," I says, "enough for this wick, a gallon of kerosene, a package of cigarettes, and a mallo cup." "Better come with me," he says, "I'm running ya out of town." "What for?" "Vagrancy and loitering in a public place." "I ain't loitering, I'm inspecting the merchandise." "I run you out of town, or I run ya in, what'll it be?" "I want to talk to a lawyer." "And not only that," he says, "we'll have to give ya a haircut." "I'm a free citizen of the United States, and I ain't getting no haircut." "Now you're disturbing the peace." "Things was pretty peaceful around here until you came along." "You better move, boy, move." And he whips out his long-barreled .38.

MARTHA

(*From inside*) Thomas!

THOMAS

What?

MARTHA

Who's out there with you? Is that Luke?

THOMAS

No, it's nobody. I'm singin' to myself to keep the worries off me.

MARTHA

Well, could you come in here a second?

THOMAS

All right, I'm comin'. (*To JOHN*) Hold up a minute. (*He goes into the house.*)

JOHN

(*Going on as if THOMAS were still there*) We get into his patrol car and drive out of town. All the time he's telling me how he hates hippies. He hates 'em so bad he wants to kill 'em. He can hardly stand it. "They're dirty and all they do is lay around and take dope and fuck and suck with niggers. I'd like to just go out and get me fifteen of 'em, just go out and kill me fifteen of 'em. And then I'd feel better. And I'd go to Australia, where a man can still lead a decent life. . . ."

MARTHA

(*Inside, screaming*) The hot water, Thomas. We're out of hot water!

THOMAS

Well, I told you it'd happen sooner or later.

MARTHA

So why don't you do something about it?

THOMAS

Heat some up on the stove for the meantime.

MARTHA

(*Screaming*) Well, what are you going to do? When are you going to do something? (*A silence, then crashing sounds of pots flying, dishes breaking.*) Do something! Do something! I can't stand to live this way, Thomas! (*Another silence, then a strange wail in the air.*)

JOHN

Christ. What was that? (THOMAS comes back out, sighing.) Hey, Tom, did you hear that? What was that?

THOMAS

Oh, I don't know. Sounds a lot like an owl grabbing a rabbit.

JOHN

Wow. I thought it was some kind of Boy Scout ambulance up in the woods or something.

THOMAS

A rabbit 'll do that, a rabbit 'll scream, and an owl's got the strangest cry you ever heard when he jumps down on something.

JOHN

Scared me half to death.

THOMAS

Yeah, they'll do that to ya.

JOHN

Let me finish telling you, Tom. Let me tell you what happened.

THOMAS

I'm listening, John.

JOHN

See, he slipped, Tom. He slipped. He was going to work me over a little and he slipped. We're out on the road and he's going to rap me one for being grim and uncooperative, and he slips on a pebble and I grab the billy club from him and I start hitting him. "THIS IS IT, COP, THIS IS IT, THIS IS THE LAST TIME, I'M CROSSING OVER, COP." "Oh, no, no," he says, "no, I'm just a country boy, John, don't do it, I'm just like you, growin' up to hear crickets and the barking of dogs and lonely signs creaking in the wind." "I AM GOING OVER, COP, I AM GOING OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE." Then he goes for his gun, Tom, but it's stuck in his holster and he can't get it out, so I smash his hand with a rock and kick him in the head and I get that gun for myself. "I'M KILLIN' YOU, COP, THE OLD JOHN IS DEAD, I'M MAKING THE BIG MOVE, COP." "Don't do it," he says. "Me and you

are the same, we're brothers; I got a mother in Wheeling, West Virginia and a cousin in the army." "OH NO, COP, THIS IS IT, COP, THIS IS IT. (He pulls a .38 out of his pants.) NO WAY BACK FOR YOU AND ME, BANG! BANG! BANG!" I blew his brains out, Tom, with this here gun. It was like a hundred squashed caterpillars crawling out of his eyes. OH WOW, MAN. I KILLED A COP. I KILLED A COP. I GOT TO ROLL HIM DOWN THE EMBANKMENT AND COVER UP HIS BODY. AND THEN I GOT TO RIP THE RADIO OUT OF HIS PATROL CAR AND THEN I GOT TO DRIVE THE CAR UP TO THE QUARRY AND DROWN THE CAR IN A HUNDRED FEET OF WATER. NO, I GOT TO PUT THE COP INTO THE TRUNK OF THE CAR AND DRIVE THE WHOLE THING INTO THE POOL OF WATER AT THE QUARRY. AND THEN I GOT TO START RUNNING. YEAH, THAT'S IT, THAT'S WHAT I'LL DO. (A pause; he is breathing heavily, having re-enacted the whole thing.) I did it, Tom. I crossed over to the other side. No way back; I killed him. This here is the gun. I got two bullets left.

THOMAS

Fuck, man, you're in trouble. They're gonna hunt your ass down and kill you.

JOHN

I know it, Tom, and it's all right. I crossed over. They'll never take me alive. I'm on the other side now.

THOMAS

Man, your head must be someplace I can't even imagine.

JOHN

Everything's absolutely pure and clear and simple, Tom. It's the OTHER SIDE, Tom, you know what I mean? THE OTHER SIDE. (He sees STELLA, the dog, offstage, covered with blood.) AAAHHHHH!

THOMAS

Oh, shit, will you look at that dog!

MARTHA

(At the screen door) What happened?

THOMAS

Oh, it's only Stella, darling. She scared ol' John here right out of his boots.

JOHN

Sure did, ma'am.

MARTHA

(*Coming out to see*) That's not Luke, is it?

THOMAS

No, this is John, a friend of Luke's.

MARTHA

Hello, John, I'm Martha.

JOHN

Hi.

MARTHA

(*Seeing the dog*) AAAHHH! THOMAS! LOOK! SHE'S COVERED WITH BLOOD!

THOMAS

I know she is. She's been eating. (*JOHN goes as if to befriend the dog. She growls. JOHN retreats.*) Better leave her alone, John. She ain't too sociable with strangers.

MARTHA

Thomas, you've got to get that blood off!

THOMAS

I know it. I'll see if I can't throw her in the lake. (*He goes off with the struggling, whining dog. Then silence, followed by the sound of crickets.*)

MARTHA

Well, where'd you come from, John?

JOHN

Massachusetts. There's plenty happening in Massachusetts. We got people up there. And they're ready. They're ready to move.

MARTHA

Uh, huh. You're a friend of Luke's, aren't you?

JOHN

Sure am. Is he around?

MARTHA

Yeah, he's around here someplace, but he better not be too close.

JOHN

You two having a fight?

MARTHA

You could say that.

JOHN

Yeah, you're pretty. Luke said you was real pretty.

MARTHA

Oh, why thank you, John.

JOHN

I bet you was the most popular girl in your class and captain of the cheerleaders.

MARTHA

(*Playfully*) I was.

JOHN

And I bet you had your first good sexy romantic affair when you were sixteen and I bet you had a dynamite body.

MARTHA

(*Flattered, then frustrated*) I did. I really did.

JOHN

And you feel sad because you think having kids and hard times has ruined your good looks and spoiled your possibilities in life.

MARTHA

How come you know so much? Did that goddamn Luke tell you all that?

JOHN

Oh, no, ma'am. It's just that I can see through things. I can see perfectly clearly. I can see clear through to the other side. There ain't a bullshit idea left in my head.

MARTHA

Good for you. (*A car approaching.*)

JOHN

Uh, oh. (*He runs off, left.*)

MARTHA

Thomas! (*Car pulls up, lights go off, doors slam.*) There's some people here!

THOMAS

(*Reappearing*) All right, Martha, you go on inside.

VOICE OF GAME WARDEN

Mr. Dinwiddie!

THOMAS

Hello!

MARTHA

Who is it?

THOMAS

Go on inside the house.

MARTHA

(*Going*) More trouble.

THOMAS

That you, Earl?

WARDEN

(*Entering with the DEPUTY SHERIFF*) Yes, Tom. And this here is Deputy Sheriff Thurmond. We've come by for a word with ya.

THOMAS

(*Holding them off the porch*) What can I do for you boys?
(*STELLA growls nearby.*)

DEPUTY

(*Inspecting*) Looks like the one, Earl.

WARDEN

Yes, she does. Some trouble about a wild dog running loose, Tom.

THOMAS

(*Relieved*) Well, come on in and sit down then.

DEPUTY

She's the one.

WARDEN

(*Going inside after THOMAS*) Yes, I can see that, Jim. (*To THOMAS*) Thank you.

DEPUTY

Thank you. (*They disappear into the house.*)

END ACT ONE