

A FLEETING ANIMAL

An Opera from
JUDEVINE

Libretto

by

David Buddbill

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Literary and Theatrical Agent:
Susan Schulman
Susan Schulman Literary Agency
454 West 44th Street
New York, NY 10036
phone: (212) 713-1633
fax: (212) 581-8830
email: schulman@aol.com

Characters:

Tommy, a Vietnam vet, in his twenties

Grace, a single mother

Antoine, a French Canadian woodworker

Doug, an anglo woodworker

Bobbie, Doug's wife

Edith, The Town Wag

The Angel of Depression, a woman

William, a black Army friend of Tommy's from Vietnam

James, a black Army friend of Tommy's from Vietnam

A Friend, another soldier in Vietnam, out of the Chorus

The Chorus: eight to twelve singers

The Unnamed: eight to twelve singers

We who labor in the arts, we who are singers,
we who are actors, we who are artists,
we must remember that we come from The People,
our strength comes from The People,
and we must serve The People.

Paul Robeson

* * *

The vaulting sky and ancient earth
Each someday will reach an end,
But sorrow such as theirs
Will never fade away.

Po Chü-i

* * *

This libretto is dedicated to
the memory of John Hodgdon
and to all the other men and women
who suffered and died during and after
The War in Vietnam
and to those who "only" suffered
during and after The War in Vietnam

A FLEETING ANIMAL:

ACT I:

PRELUDE

Perhaps Antoine, Edith, Tommy, Grace, William, James, Bobbie, Doug and Edith all begin from different parts of the audience. The Chorus is on stage.

Antoine

Shitacatsass! Freeze like a turd!
Bull an' jam here outin da snow!

Edith

They're up there in that trailer all day long,
naked and drinkin' beer and smokin' dope!

Chorus

We are always here . . .

Edith

There's children involved here!
I'm thinkin' 'bout the children.

Antoine

By Christ an' Saint Teresa, Edit', you be
t'inkin' 'bout yourself, like you always do!

Chorus

and always leaving. . . .

Tommy

What's the matter with you people?
You can't let him suffer that way.

Grace

She's my baby, ain't she? She came out of me.

William
You got a nice place here, Tommy.
You got a nice life.

Chorus
... We are water ...

Grace
What's the point in even talkin'?

Tommy
I made a little poem for you. You wanna hear it?

Grace
I got a new boy friend now.
It's workin' out too. Workin' out good.

William
You better hang on to this.
You better stay right here.

James
I could get into this.
I'd like a place like this.

William
You got no people here.

James
I could get into this.
I'd like a place like this.

William
You got no people here.

Chorus
... like the river ...

Bobbie
Grace, Grace, Grace. That's all you guys
ever talk about. It's pretty obvious
what's goin' on.

Doug
What are you talkin' about?

Bobbie
You know what I'm talkin' about!

Chorus
... just passing through.

*All lines from here to the end of the scene are sung
simultaneously.*

Grace
You think I wouldn't like that?
To have someone to lie up next to, to hold on to.
By Jesus, Edith, you are a fool!

Edith
That boy's a stick of dynamite just waitin'
to go off in somebody's face. You heard
what he did with that deer up in the woods.
I think it's disgustin'. Just wait. You'll see.

Bobbie
There's children involved here.
I'm thinkin' 'bout the kids.
Grace, Grace, Grace.
And I don't like all that dirty talk either.
You can find your own way home.

Tommy
I don't know. I'm afraid. I don't know.

James
You deserve this, Tommy. Yes, you do.
You got this comin'. You deserve this, Tommy.
Yes, you do.

William
Hang on to this, Tommy. You better stay right here.
Hang on to this, Tommy. You better stay right here.

Antoine

I know dat boy. He be a good fadder.
He love dem kids.

Doug
Snip, snip, snip. All the time, Edith. Snip, snip, snip.
Why don't you leave them two alone? It's all you
ever do, Edith. Snip, snip, snip. Jesus H. Christ, Edith.
Snip, snip, snip, snip, snip, snip. Come on, Bobbie,
let's go home.

SCENE 1: WHERE AND WHO AND SPRING

Chorus
North to ancient, rounded mountains
softened green by forest.
Mountains and hill farms,
valleys and villages.

Antoine
Hey, Tommy, I ain't see you
in a long time. How you be?

Tommy
Not too good, Antoine.
I'm out of work again.

Chorus
One village of the many--
call it Judevine--
squeezed between sharp-rising hills . . .
and through the valley flows the river.

Tommy
I want to go to college.

Antoine
Why don' you?

Chorus
We are always here and always leaving.

We are water, like the river,
just passing through.

Tommy
I'm not sure what to do.

Antoine
Dere mus' be some way.

Chorus, Solo:
For two-hundred years we've been coming here,
not in a steady stream, but in waves--
like all migrations, conquerings,

Tommy
I don't know.

Antoine
You should do it, Tommy.

Chorus, Solo:
So who's native? Don't talk to me native.

Solo:
Because you got here early makes you more?

Duet:
Witch grass, zucchini, tomatoes, you and me--
all immigrants is what I'm talking.

Antoine
Don' give up Tommy.
You got to try.

Tommy
I'm afraid.

Antoine
Don' give up.

Chorus, Solo:
Native is dirt and stones, mountains.
What else? We, love, are water.

Tutti:
Just passing through.

Tommy
I'm afraid I'm going to lose it all.

Antoine
Hey, you still be lookin' for some work
after deer season come and go, you
call me up. Doug and me we gonna
log da old Mead place dis winner,
maybe we could use anudder han'.

Tommy
I don't know.

Chorus
No matter who lives, who dies, the seasons never rest.
Creatures take their turns, and the year turns and turns.

And we endure, year after year, season after season. . .
waiting out the winter, waiting always for the spring.

Ah! Spring!

Solos:
Light hovers longer in the southern sky.
Brooks uncover themselves.
Earth softens to the touch.
Buds stand up like nipples.

Tutti:
The geese return.
Their long vees plow the fields of cloud.
The trees loud again with birds.

Lilacs in the dooryard bloom.
The air is sweet as honied tea.
The orchards hum.

Seeds break ground,
stretch up, stretch down.

SPRING! AH!

Now each morning, each warm morning,
sunlight on the dew-wet grass, sunlight
on the garden.

Then suddenly the quick and momentary
summer tumbles down its long fall
toward dark.

Air thin and clear as cellophane.
Red leaves turn white bellies to the wind.

Starshine. Cold October night.

November again. Gray. Dark. Return. The sky
steals light from both ends of the day.

Antoine
So, Tommy, you gonna work wid us?

Tommy
I'd like to, if you'll have me.

Antoine
It will be our pleasure.

Tommy
Only, well, deer season's comin' up and . . .

Antoine
Yas, Yas, we know we ain't see you till
you get done haunt dem hardwood rabbits.

Tommy
Well, you know I can't get through the fall
without doin' that.

Antoine
Yas, I know.

Antoine exits.

SCENE 2: TOMMY STAMES

Musical interlude with gunfire both M-16 and automatic weapons, in snare drum, elsewhere, and the following mime:

Tommy, James, William and friend in Vietnam. James in the center, wounded, on the ground, the friend mortally wounded, Tommy and William stage right firing toward the Viet Cong offstage left. Tommy and William are trying to get to their wounded comrades.

William
Oh, shit. His guts are hangin' out.

Friend
William, Tommy, kill me please.
Save James and kill me. Please.

Tommy hesitates, then shoots friend. Tommy fires at Viet Cong while William crawls to James and drags him back to where Tommy is and then William and Tommy drag James off.

Tommy
I couldn't let him suffer like that.
I couldn't let him suffer.

William
You did right.

Several of The Unnamed
Tommy Stames spent 18 months in Vietnam,
Pleiku, Danang, Hue. Names, strange,
not at all like Judevine.

Now Tommy is in Vermont and hunting deer.

Other Chorus Members, Solos:
Folks here didn't talk much
about his being in the war. Some said
he was nervous, he had changed. Or
maybe it was they who moved around

him circling at a distance like dogs
around a bear wondering
what it was was in their midst.

Deer season came and Tommy got his deer.

One shot dropped his buck, as always and as always
he dressed his deer in the accustomed way,
opening the belly from sternum to vent,
his knife slipping cleanly through the hide
and flesh.

Then a new maneuver. His knife rung
the genitals, extracting penis and testicles
and a tab of belly skin.

Tommy
You son-of-a-bitch. You yellow bastard.

Chorus, **Tutti:**
He hung them by the fleshy ribbon in
a tree just as he had done in Vietnam.

Women in the Chorus
When the people heard of it,

Men in the Chorus
the men snickered and said
they'd have to try that next year,

Chorus
and the circle widened and we moved at a distance
like dogs around a bear, wondering what it was
was in our midst.

The Angel appears near Tommy.

Tommy (*to Angel*)
Those yellow bastards, they . . .

*The Angel approaches Tommy, takes him by the arm, speaks quietly to
him and leads him off.*

Angel
This world is hurt and cruel
and nothing, no nothing,
naive and loving and unashamed
can possibly survive.

SCENE 3: GRACE

Chorus Member
Grace lives in a trailer on the edge of town,
down along the river. She's got three kids.
She had a husband, but he split.

Chorus Member
I saw a questionnaire once that she'd
filled out asking parents if they'd volunteer
at school. All she said was, "I'd like to,
but I got no time."

Grace
Well, we got up at half past five,
my husband and myself I mean and he's
out the door by 6:15. Then I
got up the kids and them and me we
all left together a little after seven.
I took Doreen to school, then dropped the other
two to Mrs. Fairchild's and then I
went to work myself. When I got done
I picked up the kids to Fairchild's and we
got home by six. My husband, he got home
about an hour later. By the time we got
our supper there's no time left for nothin'.
We lived like this six days a week, even
Saturdays. And on Sundays, we tried to work
around the place, you know, get in the wood
or fix the goddamned car.

Chorus Member
Since her husband left she's given up
her full-time job and everything for Grace
and for the kids has gone down hill which

is no doubt why she got in so much trouble.

Grace
How would you know?

Edith (*to someone in the Chorus*)
She had to go to court, you know.
She had to go to court.

Grace
What's the point in even talkin'?
Everybody here already knows
what they think of me. You all think
I'm a beast or somethin'. You think
I'm not sorry for that time. Well,
maybe I'm not. Maybe I'm not sorry.
How about that!

I didn't mean to hurt her! She's my baby,
ain't she? She came out of me! All I wanted
was some quiet. What's so wrong with that?
She was screamin', I mean screamin'. She'd
been doin' it for days. You can only stand
so much of that. I stood as much as I
could stand and then I hit her. I hit her.
I hit her and I hit her! I wanted to . . .

Huh. You don't understand. None of you.
How could you? You people are always in control,
you always got yourselves together. No.
You could never understand.

I love my baby. I love her and I wanted to
break her face. Both. Both! Both those things,
not just one. Goddamnit, not just one!
That's what I told the judge, but he's just like
all the rest of you.

Edith
She'll get no sympathy from me.
She's a slut and everybody knows it.

Grace (*to Edith*)

Is that right? How could you
know what my life is like?

Edith

Everybody knows you sleep around.

Grace

How could I? When? When do I have the time!
When, Edith, when? I would if I could, if I
ever got the chance. Why not? You think
I'm made of stone or somethin'? You think
I wouldn't like to have somebody I
could be with, share all my troubles with,
do chores and keep this place together with?
You think I wouldn't like that? To have
someone to sleep up next to, to hold on to? . . .

You're goddamned right, Sister, because it's
comfort! It's warm and good, I mean, sometimes
it can be. Fun is what I mean. Some fun!

We could stay at home all day someday in
the middle of the week, just him and me,
and lounge around all morning, have lunch together,
take a bath, make love, and stay in bed together,
naked, and watch TV all afternoon until the kids
come home from school.

You don't think I'd like that? By Jesus, Edith,
you are a fool! I hate you. I hate all of you.
And I hate this place!

I'd get out of here tomorrow if I could.
I'd go someplace if there was someplace I could go.
I'd take the kids and I would go. I mean it.
I don't care what any of you say,
to hell with you, and this place too. Vermont!
Vermont. Fuck Vermont. Fuck all of you.

*Tommy has been watching Grace during her solo. As Grace exits
Tommy makes some kind of gesture of sympathy and
understanding which stops Grace's exit, but in the end she
rejects his reaching out to her and continues her exit.*

SCENE 4: GOSSIP AT THE RINK

The whole chorus at the roller-rink, plus Antoine, Edith, Doug and Bobbie, Tommy and Grace. All skate.

Chorus

Well! We've got a new roller rink
down in Morrisville now and it turns out
Doug's the best one there.

Six foot, 250 pounds, the biggest pot
you've ever seen, but he moves
across the floor so light it seems
he isn't even touching. He can
skate backwards, do a spin.

You can hear his squeaky laugh
rise above the noise of
skate wheels and organ.

He spreads his arms and legs apart.
He floats across the floor smooth
as cream, his body open, leaning
on the air.

As the skaters come off the floor and converge on the benches and begin taking off their skates . . .

Antoine

Way to go, Dougie, way to go.
Shitagoddamn, you skate good.

Doug

You ain't so bad yourself, Antoine.

Antoine

Wall, I can skate, but I can' twirl like you can.

Doug

You should practice.

Antoine
Speakin' of twirls, here comes Edit'.
Say, Edit', how you doin'?

Edith
No better.

Antoine
Dat be da Bible troot'.

Edith
I guess you could see how Grace was hangin'
all over Tommy Stames here this afternoon.

Antoine
I be glad . . .

Edith
Slobberin' all over each other, right now,
out there in the parkin' lot.

Antoine
I be glad to see dem two togedder.

Edith
Robbin' the cradle is what I'd say.
Ain't that child molestin' or somethin'?

Doug
God, Edith. Why don't you leave . . .

Edith
Shouldn't she get arrested, again,
for doin' that? I think it's disgustin'.

Doug
You think everything's disgustin', Edith.

Edith
Make all the fun you want, Doug . . .

Doug

Why, thank you, Edith, I think I will.

Edith
but I heard they're shackin' up together.

Antoine
Naw!

Doug
They been livin' together 'bout a month now, Edith.
By Jesus, Antoine, Edith here is slippin'.
She ain't keepin' her ear tight to the ground.

Antoine
Yas, dat's right! Edit', you got to keep
dat t'ing press tight if you gonna
keep up wid da news!

Edith
Go ahead you two, but you would think
she'd have a little shame or modesty
or something after that awful trial and . . .

Doug
It was a hearin', Edith, not a trial'
it was a hearin' and it was a long time ago.

Edith
Well, I think the two of them hitchin' up
together is gonna be nothin' but
T. R. O. U. B. L. E.

After thinking about it for a while...

Both
Trouble.

Antoine
Why is dat, Edit'?

Edith
You know very well why. Vietnam
did something to that boy's inside brain.

You heard what he did with that deer
up in the woods.

Doug
What'd he do, Edith? What'd he do?
I want to hear you spell it. What'd he do?

Edith
It's no use with you two. There's children
involved here. I'm thinkin' 'bout the children.

Doug
Gawd!

Antoine
By Christ an' Saint Teresa, Edit',
you be t'inkin' 'bout yourself,
like you always do.

Edith
That boy is a potential madman.

Antoine
He's not!

Doug
He's a good man.

Edith
He's a sick boy. He's a stick of dynamite
ready to go off in somebody's face.

*Etc. etc. such as: "He's a time bomb just waitin' to go off. It's Agent
Orange. His inside brain." for Edith continuing until Antoine gets to
" . . . calm yourself!" All three talking at once here.*

Antoine
Calm yourself, Edit', calm yourself!

Why, you be off da handle!

I know dat boy. I see him wid dem kids.
He be a good fadder. He loves dem kids
like dey be his.

Edith

There are lives at stake here, children's lives!
Why, you know what they do. They lie
around all day in that trailer naked
and drink beer and smoke dope.

Doug
Aow! It sounds like heaven to me!

Edith
You know they're doin' that.

Doug
Antoine, they're doin' that!

Antoine
What dey doin', Dougie?

Doug
They're doin' that!

Antoine
Dey be doin' dat?

Doug
Oh, my God, they're doin' that!

Antoine
Saints in da trees! Ah wish ah be doin' dat!

Edith
I am thinking about this community.
I am just standing up for what is right.

Antoine
Why, sure you be. And you aut'ority
on what is right too, ain't you, Edit'?
Of course you be, 'cause you watch
dat Bill Donahue Show!

Edith
It is not Bill. It is Phil.

Antoine

Bill. Phil. What's da . . .

Edith
What's the matter, Antoine,
you got trouble with your inside brain?

Antoine
Hey! We ain't got cable.

Edith
That's not all you ain't got.

Doug
Edith, why don't you leave them two alone?
Probably they got troubles of their own.
Why don't you figure out somethin' else
to do with all your extra spare time?

Antoine
Yas, Edit', why don' you . . .
learn ta skate, Edit', learn ta skate.
Save us all an' learn ta skate.

Edith
Bobbie, I'm surprised at you. Why don't
you speak up? This is a terrible thing
that is happening here.

Doug
Come on, Bobbie, let's go home.

Bobbie
I agree with you.

Doug
What?

Bobbie
I agree with her!

Doug
You would.

Bobbie
All you guys ever think about
is Grace. I'm thinking about the kids!

Edith
That's right.

Doug
Jesus. Two of a kind.

Bobbie
And I don't like all that dirty talk
either.

Doug
Gawd! for awhile there I thought we were
havin' fun. Let's go home.

Snip, snip, snip, all the time, Edith.
Fer God's sake! Snip, snip, snip.
Snip, snip. Jesus H. Christ, Edith.
Snip, snip, snip.

Bobbie
It's not Edith, Doug. It's you!

Doug
What?

Bobbie
You and all the other guys.
Grace, Grace, Grace.

Doug
Jesus!

Bobbie
That's all you ever talk about.

Doug
Oh, yeah.

Bobbie

It's pretty obvious what's goin' on.

Doug
What are you talkin' about?

Bobbie
You know what I'm talkin' about.

Doug
What?

Bobbie
Don't play dumb with me, Doug!

I got the keys and you can find
your own way home!

Bobbie exits.

Doug
Damn it!

Doug turns to Antoine.

Antoine
Yas, I'll take you home . . .
if you wanna go.

SCENE 5: AT THE TRAILER

In or near Tommy and Grace's trailer.

Tommy (*nervously*)
I made a little poem for you.
You . . . ah . . . you want to hear it?

Grace
Sure.

Tommy
It's called "A Fleeting Animal."

When you abandon everything
and give yourself to me . . .

Grace
Tommy.

Tommy
when I abandon everything
and give myself to you,

Grace
Tommy. Tommy, stop. Tommy.

Tommy
We make a fleeting animal of such . . .

Grace
Not like that. Slowly. Like this.

Grace takes the paper.

Grace
When you abandon everything
and give yourself to me . . .

Tommy
when you abandon everything
and give yourself to me . . .

Grace
When I abandon everything
and give myself to you . . .

Tommy and Grace Together
we make a fleeting animal
of such beauty, passion, nakedness and grace
that I am glad it slips away when we are done
because this world is hurt and cruel and nothing
that naive and loving and unashamed
could possibly survive.

Lighting change. William and James enter and approach Tommy and Grace's trailer. William leads the way.

James
You nervous?

William
About what?

James
About being . . . you know . . . up here.

William (*teasing James*)
What you mean, up here?

James
Come on, man, you know what I mean.

William
Oh! you mean, about being
up here in . . . Honky Heaven?

James
Yeah, that's exactly what I mean.
Are you nervous?

William
Not yet!

William knocks on the door. Tommy greets them, introduces them to Grace.

Grace
Any friends of Tommy's is
friends of mine. Welcome to
our lovely trailer.

James
No need to apologize to me,
I feel right at home in a place like this.
We come from hunger too, you know.

William

You got a nice place here, Tommy.
You got a nice life here.

James
I could get into this.
I'd like a place like this.
A dog, the river flowing through,
blue sky, and all these trees and space
and quiet. I'd like a place like this.

William (*aside to James*)
Right now you would,
but what about when they
drive by and shoot out
all your windows?

James
All white people aren't that way.

William
It only takes a few!

James
I could cut my own firewood.

William
You got no people here.

James
I could go fishin' every day.

William
You got no people here.

James
I could get into this.
I'd like a place like this.

William
Not me.
I need the city.
The lights and noise.
I need that energy.

James
I'd like a place like this.

William
You got no people here.

Tommy
I'm afraid. I'm afraid
I'm going to lose all this.
I'm out of place. These
aren't my people anymore.

Tommy, William and James begin singing simultaneously.

William
These *are* your people, Tommy.
Where else is there for you to go?
Hang on to this.
You better stay right here.

Tommy
I want to. But I'm afraid.
I want to. You know I want to stay,
but I'm afraid.
I don't feel right here anymore.

James
You got this comin'.
You deserve this, Tommy.
Yes, you do. You better stay right here.

Tommy, William and James end singing simultaneously.

Grace
Tommy's not the only one
who'd like to go. There's
nothin' here for me. Besides,
I don't feel right with
these friends of Tommy's;
I thought I would, but

*Grace, James, William and Tommy all sing simultaneously to the
end of the scene.*

I don't know. Something
has changed. I don't feel right
here anymore.

James
I could get into this.
I'd like a place like this.
You got this comin'.
You deserve this, Tommy.
You better stay right here.

William
Not me. I need the city.
You got no people here.
Hang onto this, Tommy.
You better stay right here.

Tommy
I don't belong here now.
I'm afraid I'm going to lose it all.
I don't feel right here anymore.

Grace
I don't know. There's nothing
here for me but Tommy.
I don't feel right here anymore.

*Fade out or segue to: Townspeople break in with sounds from offstage, all
go over to look over the side of the road into the ditch.*

SCENE 6: INCIDENT WITH THE BEAR

Chorus (*all lines sung simultaneously*)
Oh, my God.

Somebody hit a bear.

There's blood everywhere.

I saw it. It was crossing the road.

He's in so much pain.

I never heard such a moan.

Tommy, Grace, William and James move toward crowd.

Grace
Is that blood? What are you doing?
Don't go over there. No, Tommy,
don't. Please!

Tommy
Leave me alone.

Tommy goes to crowd who turn to shout:

Chorus
Look in the road at the blood everywhere.
Oh, my God, he's in so much pain.
Hear him moan.

He looks, runs back into the trailer, gets his gun, returns.

Grace
Tommy! Tommy!
What are you going to do?

Tommy
Get away.

Grace
No, Tommy! Don't!

Tommy
I SAID, LEAVE ME ALONE!

*Tommy returns to the crowd. The crowd backs away. Tommy takes aim
and fires into the bear, then turns to Townspeople.*

Tommy
What's the matter with you people!

You can't just let him suffer! You can't let him suffer like that. Were you just going to stand there and watch him bleed! You can't let him suffer that way! Why didn't someone help him! What's the matter with you people!

As Tommy returns to Grace

Chorus, Solos:

That guy is crazy!

Somebody had to do something!

He's crazy.

William

He did right.

Chorus member (*a white man*)

He's crazy.

William

I said, he did right!

Same Chorus member

And I said, he's crazy.

James comes over separates the two, calms both of them down.

Edith

Well, I've already said what I've got to say, and I'll stick to it too.

Tommy returns to Grace

Grace

Tommy, are you all right?

Tommy

Don't talk to me.

Grace
Tommy, Tommy, say something.

Tommy
Leave me alone.

Grace
Tommy, Tommy, please . . .

Tommy
Get away.

Grace
Tommy, what's the matter?

Tommy
Don't talk to me.

Grace
I just want to know if you're okay!

Tommy seizes Grace violently and shakes her.

Tommy
I SAID, DON'T TALK TO ME!

Tommy exits. William and James move away from the others with Grace; the crowd disperses. Grace wants to follow Tommy; William and James keep her from doing so.

INTERMISSION

ENTR'ACTE

ACT II

SCENE 1: AT THE LANDING

The landing of a logging operation on the Mead place. Late December, early morning, the sun is about to rise. Antoine is warming himself by a fire. To himself, then to the audience.

Antoine

Shitacatsass! Freeze like a turd!
Bull an' jam here outin da snow,
so cold touch hole fall right out!

An' dese pants ain't wuth two cents,
so ain't this discount jacket an' dese
boots got cracks from last year. May
as well be out here dressed in mah bikini.
Freeze like a turd.

to the audience

Oh, it ain't no use. Ah never get ahead.
Da friggin' politicians tax da pants
right off mah wimens. Ah got nauthin!
Ah never had nauthin! My Poppa, *he*
never had nauthin! Why, by Jesus, I'm
so poor I can't afford to cast a shadow!

I tell dat to dem Washin'tonians
dey say, "That's okay. We take it!"

T'ieves, all of 'em, 'ceptin' you
can't tell it 'cause dey wear a suit!

Ah, what's dah use? It never be no diff'erent
'an it be right now. It never wass.
It never be. No use. Piss and moan
is all I ever do, 'cause it's all dere is
for da likes a me. At least it make me feel
a little better some. Preach at dis pile
a wood.

50, 80 dollar a week, an' a
hernia every day! Shit. Basterds.
Crooks. Two cylinders. No use.

Bull and jam. Freeze like a turd.

Doug enters.

By Jesus, where ya been? It's da middle
of da afternoon.

Doug
Couldn't drag myself outta bed.
My back is killin' me. That goddamn crawler
is about to do me in. Pinched a nerve
or somethin'. Hurts like hell.
And this weather don't help neither.

Too goddamn cold too soon! Why,
this morning when I stepped outside to blink
my eyeball froze right open and my feet
froze to my shoes!

Antoine
Ah, Dougie.

Doug
It don't make it easy.

Antoine
Dat be da Bible troot!

Doug
Well, there's only one thing worse than all
this crazy weather and that's what's called
the holy state of matrimony. Holy, hell!
It's like livin' with the devil!

Christ, if I'da known I'd never done it!
It's a terrible price to pay for rollin' 'round
the bed.

Jesus! how I wish I'd been smart
like Tommy. Stay away from all
that marryin' stuff. That kid is free! He
ain't locked inside a hen house every night.

Hell, it's too late for me. By Jesus, I'm a slave for life.

to the audience.

Listen boys out there, stay away
from church! Don't be like me and spend
your life wishin' you were someplace else
and cryin' to yourself 'bout how you didn't
know how it would be. Take it from me, boys,
she can catch you in a minute, then she'll
be done, but you will have that chain around
your chicken leg for all your days!

Don't do it boys! Don't you get caught!
By Jesus Christ, I wish to hell
I'd run until I'd lost her.

Antoine
Shitagoddamn! Soun' like you climb onto
Canadian t'istle. A burr in yer ass dis mornin'.
I always taut your little wimens be
gentle as a doe. What happen to you?

Doug
Ah, things ain't workin' out just right.

Antoine
Wall, I be here ta listen if you
wanna talk.

Doug
It'll all blow over . . . maybe.

Where the hell is Tommy! Damn near
seven o'clock. If he'd work that dink
a little less and run the chain saw more
maybe we'd get somethin' done.

Antoine
Caum on now, Doug. You take it easy on
dat boy. He be good worker and you know
he be. You wass a kid once too.

Caum on, we warm our han's before

we go ta work.

Tommy enters.

Tommy
Sorry I'm late. Hard to get up. Christ,
it's cold! That bed is better than this place.

Doug
Oh, sure it is, 'cause Grace kept sayin',
"Don't go! Don't go! I want some more!"
You sharpen them saws?

Tommy
I sharpened 'em.

Doug
Where's yours?

Tommy
Down to the woods. It didn't need it.
Only needed touchin' up.

Doug
That's no surprise.
It don't dull if it don't cut!

Tommy
Leeme alone, Doug.

Antoine
Tommy, he have bad night.
His back is sore.

Doug
That ain't it! We're losin' money with this
equipment standin' here. We got to get goin'!
And this kid better make up his mind
if he wants to cut pulp or screw around.
He's been late all week! I ain't out here
for my health you know.

Tommy

I told you I was sorry about bein' late.

Doug
Yer always sorry and yer always late!

Antoine
You boys stop dat now!

Dere be plenty time ta cut da tree.
Dey be here hunnert years, mus' be
dey be here least till noon! Dey ain't
gonna raun away. You both sit down,
warm up by dis fire, den we all go ta work.

Tommy
Either one of you got anything
to eat? I ain't had my breakfast yet.

Doug
You hain't ettin' yet?
Well, ain't that a shame! You're supposed
to eat before you come! Shit, boy,
this ain't a picnic!

Tommy
You're leanin' on me hard, man.
You'd better lighten up.

Doug
Oh, yeah? Is that right?

Tommy
Yeah. That's right.

Doug
I seen those Darkies you got hangin'
around your place.

Tommy
What are you talkin' about?

Doug
I'm talkin' about those Junglebunnies

you got visitin' you.

Tommy
What about 'em?

Doug
Them your . . .
soul brothers from Vietnam?

Antoine
Caum on, you two. Stop it naow.

Tommy
Yeah, they are. That's exactly what
they are.

Doug
Well, we don't like Niggers around here,
and we don't like Nigger Lovers neither.

Tommy
Is that right? You and who else?

Doug
Me and that's enough!

Antoine
Stop it, Doug!

Doug
Shut up, Frog!

Why don't you and your Nigger friends
go somewhere else? Why don't
all of you just get out of here!

Tommy
Oh, Jesus! why can't you wake up!
We're all in this together! We're all
gettin' worked over in the same way!
Can't you see that?

Doug

What?

Tommy

How come you never finished school?
How come you don't teach math somewhere
like you wanted to? How come?
[Don't you ever think about it?]

Doug

What are you talkin' about?

Tommy

I'm talkin' about this: you got more in common
with those so-called "Nigger" friends of mine than you do
with all those white folks you're always workin' for.

Doug

Are you sayin' I ain't white?

Tommy

Doug! People like you and me and my friends . . .
All of us are in this thing together!
The Man is after your ass too.

Doug

You sayin' I'm not white? You are crazy, man.
Edith's right. You're crazy.
I'm white, Mister Man. I am white!

Tommy

Yes. Yes. That's right.

Doug

No Black man is my friend
and is never gonna be.

Tommy

Yes, that's right. You're right.

Doug

I ain't no Nigger and I ain't no Gook.
I am white!

Tommy
That's right. You *are* white.

Doug turns away from Tommy.

Doug (to Antoine)
He's crazy.

Antoine
It's you!

Doug moves off.

Let it go, Tommy. Let it go.
He knows you're right, but he's
too scared to say it's true. Caum on.

Hey, how be your little wimens?

Tommy
Good.

Antoine
You babies ever t'ink baout
maybe you get married?

Tommy
We're talkin' on it. But, Antoine, it's
a scary thing, especially for . . . well
you know . . . for Grace and me.

Antoine
Yas, I know, but if you don' try
to start again . . . why be alive?

Tommy
We been talkin' on it
and pretty serious, too.

Antoine
Good. Dat be da t'ing: get married.
Betterin livin' by yourself, Tommy.
It's no good to be alone.

Tommy
Jesus, don't I know.

Antoine
We were meant to go two by two.

Tommy
Well, I better get to work.

*Tommy starts his exit toward the woods.
Doug has been watching from a distance.*

Doug
Tommy. What I said . . . That weren't right.
I'm . . . I'm sorry, Tommy. It's just . . . it's
just . . . we're earnin' nothing out here
but our deaths!

Antoine and Doug turn away from each other and exit.

SCENE 2: DREAM SEQUENCE

*Tommy begins walking across the stage. He hears the Angel (vocalise),
stops, looks around, then moves to a place to sit to write a poem.*

Tommy
The angel of depression
came today
and took my soul away,

*The Angel comes to Tommy. The two of them act out the
following.*

Angel
and left his body
lying on this bed
curled in upon itself as if
he had not yet
been born.

Grace enters.

Grace
The angel of depression
came today
and left him motionless,
lying still as death.

Angel goes to Grace.

Angel
Then I brought my
brighter sister. . .

Grace
That's the one who looks like me

Angel & Grace
And we took him in our arms
and gently raised him up
and breathed back into him
his life.

Tommy rises, sits up, something. Lighting change?

Tommy
How can it be?
Just a year ago
I didn't even know
your name, I
had never seen
your face.

Tommy & Grace
What or who
let us know each other
in this way?
What or who
has blessed us,
given us
this peace?

Tommy

Lover, stranger, friend,
this nakedness I have with you--

Grace
Lover, stranger, friend,
this nakedness I have with you--

Tommy & Grace
it is a balm, it is a gift
to soothe
my wounded life,
my loneliness.

Exit all or lighting change.

SCENE 3: BETWEEN HILLS BRIEFLY GREEN

*Softball field. Softball practice. Entire ensemble on stage,
warming up.*

Tommy
If you want me, you know where to come.
Any Tuesday night or Sunday afternoon,
I'll be there pounding on my glove and waiting
for that sizzler from the lady with the harp
and wings--the one to whom I say and sing,

Comeon, Baby, Comeon
put it down here if you dare.
I got fast hands, soft hands too.
I can take your shots, yes I can.
You ain't got much can make it
past me into right,

'cause I'm a softballer, Baby, and
I know how to play the game.
I said, I am a soft baller, Baby,
and I do know how to play the game.

Woman Chorus Member

Oh, Jesus, I bet he is too!

Tommy
Why don't you come some night and watch me, Honey,
I just know you'll be awful glad you came.
(I said, I know you will be glad you came.)

Woman Chorus Member
Ow! I know I would be!

Chorus repeats blues

Women Chorus Members
Come on, Gracie, Is he?
Is he a soft baller, Gracie?
Come on, tell us, Gracie!

*Grace turns away from the other women. She and Tommy move away
from the others so they can visit with each other.*

Chorus
You got to understand: here
winter stays six months a year--
Mean, mean winters and too long.
Ninety days is what we get . . .

Chorus Member
Ninety days is all we get.
Ninety days of frost free weather.
(I know you don't believe it but . . .)
Ninety days is all we get.
Ninety days of frost free weather.
And in that lousy, puny, crummy, stinkin', measly ninety days
we just got to get outside and get together!

Chorus Member
Now I said, Ninety days is all we get.
Just Ninety days of frost free weather
(Believe it, honey, 'cause it's true)
Ninety days is all we get
Just ninety days of summer weather
So you can see how we just got to, we just got to

get outside and get together.

Chorus Member

I said, OUTSIDE! OUTSIDE!
We got to get OUTSIDE!
and get together.

*Stop time chorus, many individuals doing stanzas or breaking
stanzas up into a line for each individual or both.*

And in those ninety days we got to:
grow tomatoes, beans, potatoes,
 corn, squash, cucumbers and thyme.
have barbecues, a day out on a mountain
 we can climb.

we got to:
build a shed, raise some flowers and some pigs
 and mow the lawn,
pick blueberries and mushrooms and go
 skinny dippin' in the pond.

got to:
go to the fair, have sex with warm feet (All: Yea! Awright!)
 put up a thousand thousand tons of hay,
go to some dances out of doors
 and cop some rays!

Chorus, Tutti:

Ow!
Ninety days is all we get.
 Just ninety days of frost free weather.
And in that lousy, puny, crummy, stinkin', measly ninety days
 we just got to get outside and get together!

Instrumental break.

And then at night
 after we been skinny dippin' in the pond
we got to make a campfire
 and have a cookout on the lawn.

we got to eat some chicken,

lie around the fire and drink some wine,
then watch the night sky let
a billion, billion stars come out to shine.

I said, OUTSIDE! OUTSIDE!
We got to get OUTSIDE!
and get together.
(repeat)

*Grace, Tommy, William and James move away from softballers
and over to the lawn outside Tommy and Grace's trailer.*

SCENE 4: PASTORAL INTERLUDE

Outside at Tommy and Grace's trailer.

Grace, Tommy, William, James
The garden is free of weeds.
The vegetables blossom
and grow large.

All but Grace
This woman is beautiful
and gentle. Her children
are loving and kind.

Tommy & Grace
Our friends are here.

Grace, Tommy, William, James
In the cool of the evening
we visit with each other.
The kids and the dogs
romp and clown on the lawn.
And then, the night birds sing.

*James, William, Tommy and Grace all sing simultaneously until
chorus entrance.*

James
I could get into this.

I'd like a place like this.
A dog, the river flowing through,
blue sky.

William
Not me. I need the city.
Man, I thought I knew you.
You got no people here.

Tommy
I want to hold onto this. I want to,
but I'm out of place here now.
These aren't my people anymore.

Grace
I don't feel right with these friends
of Tommy's; I thought I would,
but . . . I don't know.

James
I could cut my own firewood.
Oh, yeah, I could get into this.
You know all white people
aren't like that. Look at Tommy.

William
What happens when they drive by
and shoot out all your windows?
What then?
These are your people, Tommy.

Tommy
I want to hang onto this.
I want to but I'm afraid.

Grace
Something has changed.

James
Hey, man, you deserve this.
You got this comin' to you, Tommy.
Yes, you do. You better . . .

William

Where else is there for you to go?
Hang onto this, Tommy.
You got a good life here. You better . . .

Grace

There's nothing but Tommy to keep me here.
What if he went away? Why should I . . .
Maybe I'll . . .

Tommy

I don't know what will happen.
What if I . . . I'd like to . . .

Grace, Tommy, William, James
stay right here.

Chorus

In the cool of the evening
we visit with each other
and then the night birds sing,

All

and then, and then the night birds sing.

Chorus

So we pass the summer and
when the air cools and when
you can stand at home plate and
see across the valley on the hills
the Popple and Red Maple turning . . .
when it's time to pick the apples . . .

SCENE 5: TOMMY'S DEATH

*Tommy speaks to the softballers thinking they are the towns-
people in Incident with the Bear which of course, they are.*

Tommy
What's the matter with you people?

Townsperson from Chorus
He's crazy.

Tommy
You can't let him suffer like that.
I couldn't let him suffer.

Townsperson
He's crazy.

William
He did right!

Tommy moves towards woods, sits down, begins to write. Angel approaches Tommy. Grace enters opposite. Tommy gives poem to Angel. Tommy begins preparations for his death.

Tommy
The angel of depression came today
and this time took both my body and
my soul away.

She told me to leave this note for you
to tell you that her brighter sister,

Tommy & Angel
that's the one who looks like you,

Tommy
will not be allowed to save me.

Grace & Tommy
She says this time no one
will be allowed to save me.

Grace and The Angel
The angel of depression came today . . .

The Unnamed
Tommy went up to his favorite place,

that little clearing in the woods.

He had a little camp up there, a fireplace,
a little lean-to made of spruce poles
and hemlock boughs.

It was a little clearing in the forest.

The Angel & Tommy
. . . and this time she/he didn't only
take my/his soul away, this time
I went with her/him.

The Unnamed
You go up through the woods and then
you cross a little stream. You come
to this clearing in the forest
where the light comes in.

Grace & Tommy
The angel of depression came today . . .

The Unnamed
He made a circle out of stones
he'd gathered from the stream
and in the circle there were bits of bark
and twigs, little signs or symbols,
something.

The Angel & Tommy
She/he told me to leave this note for you . . .

The Unnamed
He put himself in the middle of that circle.
He was sitting down.
He took his army carbine . . .

Grace & Tommy
She said this time no one
will be allowed to save me.

The Unnamed
And on his shirt he had pinned

a little piece of paper
and on it he had written:

Tommy
Grace and Peace be with me.

Tommy shoots himself. Falls backward inside the circle.

Doug and Antoine enter, approach Tommy. Grace enters.

Doug (*to Grace*)
You could tell he didn't suffer.
He looked so peaceful, like he felt good . . .
like he . . . finally felt good.

Antoine
In da forest where da light come in.

The Unnamed
"Grace and Peace be with Me."

All turn to Grace.

Grace
NO!

Antoine and Doug approach Tommy's body.

James and William enter.

Doug and William confront each other over Tommy's body and in some way reconcile.

The four men bear Tommy's body away. The Angel follows.

Grace and The Unnamed Exit.

SCENE 6: FINALE

Chorus
We are always here and always leaving.

We are water, like the river,
just passing through.

No matter who lives, who dies,
the seasons never rest. Creatures
take their turns, and the year turns
and turns.

November again. The earth is dank
and chill as an old deserted cellar.
The bare trees, their skinny fingers
darkened by the rain, stretch
against the sky.

The sky steals light from both ends
of the day. Dark. Dark. Darker still.
And winter coming on.

And winter coming on.

Grace and Edith enter separately.

Grace
Oh, hi, Edith, hi. I got a new boy friend now.
Yeah, it's workin' out, workin' out good.

Edith
What?

Grace
Yeah, he's good to me, and good to the kids too.
He always brings us presents, the kids and me, I mean.

Edith
What are you talking about?

Chorus
Midnight. Outside the car it is 15 below.
A foot of new snow.
The village is deserted, dark--

Grace
He's got an apartment in New York City,

up on the upper East Side. It looks out over
the East River, 34th floor. And I mean, big too.

Edith
You're crazy.

Grace
With big, wide, floor-to-ceiling windows
that look out onto the river and across
to Queens and Brooklyn.

Of course, he won't let us come
while the kids are doin' school.

Edith
She's crazy.

Grace
But when they're out, he sends
his plane right up here to Burlington
and we fly down to LaGuardia.

Edith
I told you she was crazy.

Grace
His chauffeur and his limo
picks us up and takes us right up
to his front door.

Edith
You are crazy.

Grace
It's nice, Edith. I mean, it gives me a chance
to get out of here.

Chorus
The smell of woodsmoke seeps into the car.
Judevine, ugliest town in northern Vermont.

Grace

He says my kids have got to get an education
so they don't end up like me and have to spend
their whole lives workin' by the hour
down to Stowe. He is big on education.

Edith (*to someone in the Chorus*)
I told you. Didn't I tell you?

Chorus
disheveled, wretched Judevine--
is beautiful in the night.

Grace
Oh, Jesus! Look what time it's got to be!
Every evening about this time, he
calls me on the telephone. No matter
where he is, he calls me.
He always wants me home to get his call.
I got to go.

*Grace begins her exit. She meets James and William; in mime,
they greet Grace familiarly. The Angel is nearby.*

Grace
You two fellas new here?

William
Grace, it's us. William . . .

James
and James. You remember us. Don't you?

Grace
I got a new boyfriend now.
It's workin' out too.
Working out good.

The Angel, William & James
This world is hurt and cruel and nothing
that naive and loving and unashamed
could possibly survive.

Chorus

It is beautiful because
its couple hundred souls
have given up their fears,
their poverty and worry . . .

and for a few hours now
they know only the oblivion of sleep,
and the town lies quiet in their ease.

William and James exit.

Grace

I got a new boyfriend now.
It's workin' out too.
Workin' . . . workin' ou' . . .

Lights fade to black.

THE END