

# A FLEETING ANIMAL

## An Opera from JUDEVINE

### **Libretto**

by

**David Buddbill**

copyright © 2000 by David Buddbill

All Rights Reserved. Any reproduction of this libretto or production of this opera without the written permission of the author and composer is illegal and punishable by law.

Contact the author's agent for information about rights and royalties.

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](mailto: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