

# **FOLLOW THE DRINKIN' GOURD**

**By Jerold London**

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## **FOLLOW THE DRINKIN' GOURD**

### **PLACE AND TIME**

**Center stage:** A room with a number on the door and quieting colors and soothing art on the walls. Chairs face a single chair (its back to the audience).

**Stage right** is a park by a river. A path in it. **Stage left** is Carole's apartment.

Time is the present.

## CHARACTERS

SAM, female, a leader of a few words.

PERCY, male friend of Sam.

ANNE, female.

BLAKE, female.

CAROLE, female.

DAWN, female.

ERIC, male.

HEATHER, female, Blake's partner.

MALE VOICE (Scene 8).

## SCENE 1

### Darkness at the rise.

#### PERCY

I'm sorry: You'll have to do better than this, Sam,  
'cause it just doesn't fly like it is. It only pisses me off.  
You have actresses, playing the parts of abused women, telling you their stories,  
*and you just sit there?*

#### SAM

I *listen*. Ninety percent listen. One hundred percent believe *and show them I do*.  
Because they're telling true stories that others, maybe even you won't believe.

#### PERCY

Oh, I believe them all right. But what the Hell good does just believing do?

#### SAM

There are four corners, Percy, and no one can do all four at once. It doesn't work  
that way. The first step is to listen, and believe, and begin a healing process.

#### PERCY

And what about the perverts? What about getting them off the streets?

#### SAM

You don't get it, do you? Someone has to be there to help the victims first.  
Punishing criminals is not everyone's job. It's not mine. And it's not the first.

**PERCY**

The *first job* is to stop the sex-fiends in the first place.  
And their sick pornography.

**SAM**

I'm not saying ... and my play's not saying there isn't a time for that.  
Simply that it's a matter of triage:  
You treat the damage first, as soon as you can, the best you can.  
Save sanity from the cesspit. Then do the rest. It only makes sense.

**PERCY**

Letting degenerates get off the hook makes *no* sense.

**SAM**

I get mad, too. More than I say. But that's not my place.  
My place is to support *their* feelings, not my own.... Don't you understand?

**PERCY**

I get that *you're a wimp*.  
Against carnal violation, rage is the only surgery. Cut their balls off!!  
We're supposed to protect women and children. That's what *my play* would do.

**SAM**

And that heals what, Percy?

**PERCY**

[*pause*] If you could have a fake I.D., Sam,  
and go anywhere you wanted in people's minds, where would you go?

**SAM**

Where would I go? I'd go into minds that can be healed, and help heal them.

**PERCY**

And what crimes does that stop? What victims does that protect?... Tell me.

**SAM**

Women need healing.

**PERCY**

And men need *action*.  
I'll tell you where I'd go: I'd go into every fucker's mind on the internet.  
Weed out the rapists, and castrate them. Yes, *castrate* them. Like steers.  
Hang their balls for every would-be rapist and pedophile to see.  
Loud and clear. *That* would stop it.  
What you do is words, and words, and air, and nothing that does any good at all.

**SAM**

What *I* do is listen and understand. I'll leave castration to you.

**In the darkness PERCY exits.**

**As the light rises SAM is alone in the room, seated in the single chair.**

**ANNE enters, and SAM stands to greet her.**

**SAM**

[*affirmatively*] Hello!

**ANNE**

[*hesitantly*] Hello.

**SAM**

I don't talk much.

My purpose, for the most part, is to be quiet and listen. Have a seat.

**ANNE picks a middle seat in the row.**

**SAM sits back down in her chair.**

**SAM**

My name is Sam.

**ANNE**

I'm Anne. Am I in the right place?

**SAM**

I believe so, Anne.

What would you like to do?

**ANNE**

Honestly?... Kill the son-of-a-bitch.

**SAM**

Tell me.

**ANNE**

I woke up this morning, and finally ... finally ... *finally* cried.

Listening to Bruce Springsteen. His River. On the radio.

I love that song so much I hate it.

I can't help it. It always kills me.

**SAM**

Me, too.

It makes me think of the play I'm writing which I'm planning on calling "River."

**ANNE**

It makes *me* think of everything I've lost.

And it's not fair. I didn't *do* anything.

Without even a chance for Bruce Springsteen's river in my life.

Or love. Or a boyfriend.

It just isn't fair. Life isn't fair.

[*pause*] He sings how they'd go down to the river

And into the river they'd dive

Down to the river they'd ride, and splash, and make love.

Before she gets pregnant. Which I'll never do.

[*beat*] Their dreams vanished in midair when she got pregnant.

My dreams vanished because I was cursed.

She gets pregnant. What happened to me was worse.

[*beat*] I can't stand it much longer.

Trying to keep the thoughts under water in my mind. Do you know?

I can't stand a man's touch. Not even his breath on me.

Have you ever felt like that?

**SAM**

What do you remember?

**ANNE**

[*pause*] I'm never completely for sure.

*Can you believe that?*

Not even how old I was exactly....

Probably seventeen....

Not eighteen, when I went off to college. Younger than that.

Or the month. Except it was in the Spring. I'm sure of that.

The Spring when it was cold.... I always get sick then, in the Spring.

You see, I left my body and started floating in air.

A voice inside I heard saying:

"This isn't happening. This can't be happening. This never happened."

I froze. It was my granddad....

**SAM**

[*pause*] I understand.

**ANNE**

I didn't tell because, for so long, it never really happened, you see.  
Can people think like that? Jam their brains like that?  
In my mind it never happened. It couldn't have. I must be crazy.  
He never said a thing. Only breathed on me.  
It's only his breath I remember now. Everything else is walled away.

**SAM**

Yes.

**ANNE**

I became a workaholic. Stupid. Insane. Hiding away, alone. Ugly and hateful.  
Paranoid about feeling a man's breath on my skin. Or in my ears....  
[pause] What did I do to make granddad do such a thing to me?  
What kind of person am I? I must have done something, didn't I?  
And I wish I could kill him ... sometimes ... or my ... myself....  
[pause] I'm so ashamed of myself. I never do anything right anymore.

**SAM**

You came here.

**ANNE**

I threw up before I came. Like all my memories puking on me.

**SAM**

You came here.

**ANNE**

I don't want to keep going on like this. It's not who I was.  
But I don't know what to do.  
I think I'd rather die first. *Can you understand that?*

**SAM**

Yes. I can. But, right now, I'd better listen.  
The most important thing to do right now is listen, and believe. Which I do.  
I believe you, Anne. Completely.

**ANNE**

I don't know whom I can trust.  
Whom can you trust when your own granddad did that to you?  
And who would ever believe you? The wind?  
The day it happened there was a chill wind.  
I do remember that....



**Pause.**

**Then BLAKE enters the room.**

**SAM stands to greet her.**

**SAM**

Welcome. I'm Sam. This is Anne.  
Won't you take a seat?

**BLAKE sits at the end of the row.**

**SAM sits back down in her chair.**

**SAM**

We were just talking. Mostly, me listening like I do.  
What's your name?

**BLAKE**

Blake.

**SAM**

Hello, Blake. Nice to meet you.  
Is there anything you'd like to share with us?

**BLAKE**

You won't possibly believe this. Not people like you.

**ANNE**

I will.

**BLAKE**

[*beat*] I was five when he first fucked me. Five.  
My brother. He used to take me out of bed in the middle of the night.  
Down in the basement, and did it there.  
He was fourteen, and told me he would kill me, no matter where I was,  
if I ever told.  
He shook me so hard I thought I would choke to death right there.  
I guess I just zoned out.  
I was afraid of him; and I zoned out. Most people were.  
He told me I was nothing but a whore. All his friends did it to whores.  
And whores always let boys do whatever they wanted to do to them.  
Do you understand?...  
[*pause*] He died when I was nine. Shot dead. On the street.  
And I wasn't un ... unglad, if you know what I mean.

**ANNE**

*I* get it.

**BLAKE**

Later, when I was a teen, I started having sex all over the place, on my own.  
I couldn't control myself.  
I was a biker chick for a while, and had sex with all of them and never felt a thing.  
And others, too, when they told me to.

A year ago, when I needed money, I began dancing.  
You know the kind.  
It was there I found out how other girls got attacked, too. Not just me.  
Maybe half the women. At least a quarter. Did you know that?  
And I started to get it. Why I did what I did. And why I was like the way I was.  
And then, a few weeks ago, a friend told me about this place.  
I found the door, the number outside, and here I am.  
And what am I supposed to do? the person I am?

**SAM**

I'm better at listening, Blake, but how does this sound?...

**BLAKE**

[*beat*] What?... I'm listening.

**SAM**

Just, in general: Work.  
At a job that doesn't focus you in front of men.  
Take a vacation from men for a while.  
Make some good friends. *Girl* friends.  
And get some professional counseling.... Does that make any sense?

**BLAKE**

It won't get me back at my brother....  
[*beat*] But what else can I do? The bastard's dead, isn't he?  
He wasn't my brother anyway.  
Someone dumped the shit at our front door. A Satanic angel, when he was a baby.  
Satan's baby.  
What makes men like that?... What can I do?

**ANNE**

Maybe you can just try.

**BLAKE**

All that crap she said?

**Another pause.**

**CAROLE enters the room.**

**SAM stands to greet her.**

**SAM**

Welcome. I'm Sam. This is Anne. And this is Blake.  
Won't you take a seat?

**CAROLE sits next to BLAKE.**

**SAM sits back down in her chair.**

**SAM**

We were talking. Mostly, I just listen.  
What's your name?

**CAROLE**

Carole.

**SAM**

Hello, Carole. We're glad you're here.  
Is there anything you'd like to share with us?

**CAROLE**

Do you tell?

**SAM**

We listen. And believe. And don't tell.  
That's one of our basic rules.

**CAROLE**

Tell me then, what's a butterfly?

**ANNE**

[*beat*] You mean, where do butterflies come from?

**CAROLE**

Exactly.

**ANNE**

From caterpillars, out of cocoons.

**CAROLE**

That's me.

**BLAKE**

In a cocoon?

**CAROLE**

Can I trust you? I'm so afraid I can't. Can I?

**SAM**

Absolutely.

**CAROLE**

All of you?

**ANNE**

Yes.

**BLAKE**

Me, too, of course.

**CAROLE**

I got attacked. Torn up. My clothes ripped off. And I've never told.  
Everyone says it can happen to any woman, but I never thought ... to *me*?  
Because I thought I was safe, God-fearing.  
And I'm scared to death of it happening again.

At church, when I was a teenager, I met a boy, and we dated for a while.  
He seemed nice, and nothing happened, and we sort of went our separate ways.  
Actually, he dumped me cold, and I went off to college the next year.  
Then I lost my parents.... Six months apart. And some of my faith.  
How is God supposed to be there, protecting you and your family, when He's not?  
And He doesn't?

There are some great lies in the Bible.  
I've known that since I started reading Matthew as a teenager.  
Like dead bodies rising suddenly from their graves and walking willy-nilly  
through Jerusalem where people recognized them.  
Not Jesus. *Other* buried people.  
But I always believed God would protect me and my family.  
I always believed that part of the Bible, if you have faith.  
But you lose them anyway.  
Maybe faith isn't enough. The Bible says:  
What good does it do if a person has all the faith in the world, and has not works?  
Can faith save them alone? It didn't save me.  
I don't seem to have any place I can trust anymore.  
So many people and stained-glass voices selling you something.

**CAROLE**

A year or so after I graduated we happened to meet again, by accident.  
And I suggested he could come over, on a Sunday, for coffee and old times.  
He'd gotten married, and I hadn't, and I trusted him. Like a Christian.  
But when he came into my apartment, we didn't have coffee. Or talk.  
He grabbed me as soon as the door was closed, and tore at my clothes.  
My body didn't feel like it belonged to me. I screamed, I think.  
And then he hit me. Hard.  
And choked me. And told me I better shut the fuck up.  
After that, and the suddenness of the fright, I didn't fight back, or say no.  
I just wondered where the buttons had gone.  
When he tore my blouse open, and they hit the floor.  
I remember hearing them bounce. Three of them.  
He forced me into the bedroom.  
There were scissors by the bed, but I felt totally helpless.  
I was naked as a caterpillar, and afraid he was going to destroy my cocoon.  
I was so afraid. I'm *still* afraid.... Does that make any sense?

**ANNE**

Yes, it does.

**BLAKE**

They think they can get away with anything, if we're afraid enough.

**CAROLE**

He hit me. And bit me. And called me a slut. But I didn't feel it in my cocoon.  
Then, I guess, I passed out, and when I came to, he was gone.  
I never told the police, or anybody, thinking that might make him come back....  
[pause] I've thought maybe I might kill myself, to get safe.

**BLAKE**

Where's your family in all this?

**CAROLE**

I have no family. My parents died when I was in college.  
There's nobody. Nothing. Not even a hobby to live for. Or a bicycle. Or faith.  
Not even a dog.

**SAM**

I've lost my parents, too.

**BLAKE**

Get a dog, Carole.

**A disturbed pause.**

**DAWN enters the room.**

**SAM stands to greet her.**

**SAM**

Welcome. I'm Sam. This is Anne. This is Carole. And this is Blake.  
Won't you take a seat?

**DAWN sits at the other end of the row.**

**SAM sits back down in her chair.**

**SAM**

We were just talking. What's *your* name?

**DAWN**

[*silence*]

**SAM**

I'm sorry. You're not required to talk here. Only listen, if you want.  
And never repeat what you hear. But you have to tell us at least your first name.

**DAWN**

[*beat*] Dawn.

**SAM**

Hello, Dawn. We're glad you're here. What would you like to say to us?

**Silence.**

**ERIC enters. An air of hostility among  
the women circulates about the room.**

**SAM stands.**

**SAM**

I'm sorry. But men aren't allowed when we're in here. Sorry.

**ERIC**

I'm Eric. I'll just stand over here for a second, to say what I have to say.  
Because I'm here for the same reason you are: To protect you. And help.  
With all of my heart. I'm so much on your side.

**SAM**

You have to leave, Sir.... *Now!*

**ERIC**

It'll just take a moment. I promise. And then I'll leave.

**SAM**

You have one minute. Then you must get out.

**SAM sits back down in her chair.**

**ERIC**

I'm Eric, like I said, and the girl I love, more than all the world, killed herself.  
Trying to get here.

She wanted to come, but her father wouldn't let her.

Because he molested her, I'm sure of it, for years.

Who else could have done?

And I have to tell you about it. For her. Something I wrote.

Or get a gun and track the bloody wolf down.

[*reads*] All the ornaments of innocent things  
And all the dreams that love had planned  
Are crushed like birds, and feathers, and wings  
In the clutch of a bastard's senseless hand.

Where *is* there for a person to flee  
From shame, and rage, and misery

**ERIC takes a step toward the others, and  
there are gasps.**

**ERIC**

[*continuing to read*] When they're the victim of no heart, no soul,  
no ounce of humanity?

**SAM**

[*in a raised voice*] Get out of here!!

**ERIC drops the paper and turns to exits.**

**Anne stands.**

**ANNE**

[*to ERIC*] Wait.

**ANNE walks to the door, picks up the  
paper.**

**ANNE and ERIC exit together.**

**DAWN**

[*sings*] The river bank will make a mighty good road  
Dead trees will show you the way  
Left foot, right foot, travelin' on  
Follow the drinkin' gourd.

For the old man is a-waitin' for to carry you to freedom  
Follow the drinkin' gourd.

**DAWN stands, and exits.**

**BLAKE**

[*beat*] What's a drinkin' gourd?

**SAM**

Seven stars, in the sky. The tip two pointing to the North Star.  
For slaves to follow. Out of the South.  
Running North.



## SCENE 2

**Darkness again.**

**SAM**

She walks in beauty, like the night.  
I sit and listen, hope and pray for her. For all of them..

I pray for endings that cut the chains of slavery.  
That end the bottomless misery and unrelenting sorrow.

O what a butcher does to a person's life!  
A synthetic death for those surviving.

[*beat*] Upon my head they placed a bridal veil,  
and then a mother's scepter in my hand,  
to thief my peace of mind: My child is lost,  
my husband gone, this dreadful chisel 'gainst my brain.  
Oh whither goes the broken vessel of my heart?

Sadness is an empty truth: Pure blue eyes and flaxen curls will never be again.  
She was all I cared for in my life. All I had.  
It seems at times to my small mind that there can never be a peaceful resolution  
to heinous crime.

**Light.**

**Stage right. ERIC and ANNE are sitting  
on a bench in a park by a river.**

**ERIC**

Are you Christian, Anne?

**ANNE**

Me?... My grandfather said he was.  
A loud mouth Christian. Important man in his church.

**ERIC**

Not that kind.  
I mean, are you a Christian of the heart?

**ANNE**

I'm not sure what a "Christian" means today, or if I ever did.

**ERIC**

What Christ was.

**ANNE**

Says who?  
Christ was no "Christian."  
How could he have been?

**ERIC**

You mean Christ didn't die to forgive his sins.

**ANNE**

Christ didn't worship himself.  
Or wooden crosses.  
Or death.  
In fact, he begged his heart out to God not to die then.  
And why would he do that if he knew in thirty-six hours or so he'd be back on his feet again?

**ERIC**

Because his spirit never did die, and he foresaw the pain his death would spread.

**ANNE**

I wish none of our spirits would ever die. Not so very soon, at least.  
But I don't wish to share eternity anywhere near my grandfather.

**ERIC**

In heaven?

**ANNE**

Anywhere.

**ERIC**

What if he repented to God for all of his sins?

**ANNE**

Then let him go to his own eternal heaven.  
But not mine.  
My heaven is mine alone.  
Because, when I attain *my* heaven, it's the heaven I'll want to stay in.  
And that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me.

**ERIC**

Then would you forgive him,  
if you never had to be with him?

**ANNE**

You mean, am I that much of a "Christian"?

**ERIC**

I mean, if you could forgive him, or at least forget him,  
a new flower might grow in place of the one that was plucked.  
[pause] I don't give a damn what kind of cross your grandfather has to hang on.  
He deserves it.  
I only care about you.

**ANNE**

You *do*, don't you?

**ERIC**

Yes, I do.

**ANNE**

Then what?  
What do you propose?

**ERIC**

I can't offer you a proposal.  
Only an observation, to take it or leave it:  
What he did to you was ....  
I'm sorry: I have no word for it, but you know what I'm saying.  
And that awfulness to you is your remembrance of him and family.  
It's destroyed everything else of goodness between you in your life.  
Between you and men in general. And love.

**ANNE**

You could say that.

**ERIC**

What a singularly deep wound his crime has made to your spirit.  
Far more than that old man warranted.  
A singularly deep, black cut in your heart.

**ANNE**

So?...

**ERIC**

You're not alone.  
My heart's been cut as well.  
And others, too.  
By incest and molestation. And murder,  
if we let it murder the goodness we were meant to bring into the world.

**ANNE**

What exactly is your point?

**ERIC**

Just this:

It's only sex.

Which is important.

Don't get me wrong.

But compared to living or dying, it's only physical.

**ANNE**

I'm only physical.

My body's physical.

My memories are physical.

**ERIC**

Half of you is God's half.

And God's half is free.

Your spiritual half is free.

You've been suffering long enough.

In chains long enough.

You're free.

**ANNE**

How can you say that?

How can you know that?

How can you have any idea who I am, or what I've been through?

**ERIC**

Because I'm human, too.

And I've lost someone who was the most important person in my life.

And I don't want to go on the rest of my life watching more joy and beauty being stifled from life.

**ANNE**

You're selfish.

**ERIC**

I'm selfish, yes.

Because I care.

**ANNE**

You're no older than I am.

What's makes you think you care?

**ERIC**

I'm old enough to see you're not free.

**ANNE**

Free to do what?

**ERIC**

Free to live freely. To enjoy life.

The little things. The big things.

Free to fall in love.

Free to create a child, and fall in love with her, and raise her.

**ANNE**

You don't create a child without sex.

I love children. That's about all I do love.

And I could fall in love with a child's innocence.

But I don't see any kind of conception for me.

I couldn't bear the thought of the sex act.

**ERIC**

The sex act you mean is not the touchstone of a good life.

It's the touchstone of a modern life wanting to consume itself in passion.

Sex has power. Admittedly. I can't deny that. But no lasting power over love.

Just like love has no lasting power over sex.

They coexist, almost as ships passing in the night.

Forget that kind of sex. Choose love. That's your way out.

**ANNE**

How do you want me to do that?

**ERIC**

Get new. Molt the old feelings your grandfather covered you over with.

Blow the ripe dandelion's albino hairs into the air.

**ANNE**

[*beat*] And then what?

**ERIC**

Protect yourself. You're here to protect yourself.

Because you are all woman, and should.

And I want to protect you, too. If I can.

**ANNE**

You want something else.

**ERIC**

Yes. I want to stand in your way, on your path to self-destruction.

**ANNE**

And what else?...

You want to get in my way, and what else?

**ERIC**

I want to ask you a question.

You and me both the same question.

**ANNE**

What's that?

**ERIC**

Wouldn't we be happier if we could get above the gravity of our feelings?

It's pointless to say: Forget it ever happened.

That can't be done.

But isn't life too short to be spent nursing pain, and shame, and self-pity forever?

**ANNE**

*Self-pity?!*

[beat] I've known you too long, Eric.

And you've gotten to know too much about me.

You're too presumptuous.

And you're getting on my nerves. Big time.

**ERIC**

Hold on, just a minute.

You can be pissed at me.

I accept I do that to people at times.

But everyone's burdened with some injury.

We'd be freaks of nature if we weren't.

It's nature's natural evil eye on all animals, body, limbs, hearts, and eyes.

Everyone, from the paralyzed to the Pope.

Must we wait till heaven comes and Judgment Day to release our injuries?

### SCENE 3

**Stage left. CAROLE is sitting at a desk in her apartment in front of a laptop. A towel is on the table – something wrapped in it. She is looking at the screen and then writing things down on a pad of paper.**

**A large German Shepherd is resting at her feet.**

**CAROLE looks at the towel, and then unwraps from it a large handgun.**

SCENE 4

**ERIC and ANNE are still sitting on the bench by the river.**

**ANNE**

Forgive him, you mean? Or shoot him?

**ERIC**

Downsize the memory and the hurts and helplessness that go with it.  
Demote him to some phallic piece of junk.  
A car with a blowout,  
or a busted toilet with no sense, overflowing onto the floor,  
or Alexa with a sudden speech impediment.  
Junk. Nuisance.

**ANNE**

**Laughs.**

That “Christian,” huh?

**ERIC**

You could say that.

**ANNE**

And then what?

**ERIC**

I could easily have gotten a gun and blown that old man’s brains out.  
And for what?  
Bullet wounds in his body wouldn’t come close to the mortification he needs.  
And me? My life blown away with his?...  
I’m sorry for your suffering.  
But in a way it has helped me to face mine.  
Because if you hadn’t left the room with me that day ....  
My God, it seems ages ago now, doesn’t it?

**ANNE**

And then what?

**ERIC**

Christians can forgive ... in church and out ...  
if they believe someone else is watching out for them.

**ANNE**

To do what?



**ERIC**

To punish the wicked and the dead.  
And to protect the innocent.

**ANNE**

And then what?

**ERIC**

We forgive a demon for himself being victimized earlier in life.

**ANNE**

And we “love” them? The way the Bible says?

**ERIC**

Can you believe an animal like him ever loved you?

**ANNE**

I thought he did.

**ERIC**

God!

**ANNE**

Good God! you mean.

**ERIC**

Amen.  
That’s why it hurts the way it does.

**ANNE**

Good guess, Sherlock.

**ERIC**

And makes it like an addiction.

**ANNE**

An addiction? did you say?

**ERIC**

Some of us know how we came to our addiction.  
And some of us don’t.  
But we wear it all the same.

**ANNE**

You’re an asshole. Do you know that?

SCENE 5

**Stage right. BLAKE and HEATHER enter and walk along the path in the park.**

**BLAKE**

I love you, Heather.

**HEATHER**

And I ditto you, too, Blake.

**BLAKE**

You know, I used to wonder why I was ever born....

**HEATHER**

And?

**BLAKE**

And now I know.

**HEATHER**

[*beat*] Me, too.

**BLAKE**

[*walking pause*] It's not easy. Life's not a walk in the park....  
Do you know what, Heather?

**HEATHER**

What?

**BLAKE**

This is the most impossible thing I've ever done.

**HEATHER**

What is?

**BLAKE**

Trying to tell you how I feel about you.  
I've never felt anything like it.  
Like I've never, ever seen the sky before.

**HEATHER**

The sky??

**BLAKE**

The night sky. The starry sky. I think I always looked away from it. Looked down.

**HEATHER**

It's daytime.

**BLAKE**

*I know that.*

I mean at night, when things change, and I used to feel so ashamed.  
But now, when everything comes to rest in your arms ....

**HEATHER**

A honeymoon.

**BLAKE**

I can show every curve of my body to you without judgment or embarrassment.  
[*walking pause*] Do you like it with me, Heather?

**HEATHER**

Yes. Completely.  
Like what?

**BLAKE**

Sex.

**HEATHER**

Oh ... sex.

**BLAKE**

Because I'm never sure I'm doing it right.

**HEATHER**

You do just fine.

**BLAKE**

Really? Truly?

**HEATHER**

It's courage to courage. Besides, I love you even better than sex.

**BLAKE**

It's the same thing.

**HEATHER**

Not at all.  
Sex is what brings bodies together.  
Love brings spirits together.  
And spirits are better than bodies.

**BLAKE**

What makes you think so?

**HEATHER**

You think too much.

**BLAKE**

But ....

How do I know you haven't felt I'm doing it the wrong way?

**HEATHER**

[*beat*] Blake, I've been married two times. To men.  
And sex was hardly ever the "right way" with them.  
More often heavy duty than desire.

**BLAKE**

Men make things difficult, I know.

**HEATHER**

Too difficult.

**BLAKE**

Why is that, do you think?  
Are they just born wrong?

**HEATHER**

Time....  
And sense.

**BLAKE**

Time? And sense?

**HEATHER**

They don't take the time to learn a woman.  
And they don't have the sense to.

**BLAKE**

Their fathers didn't teach them?

**HEATHER**

I suspect it was more their mothers didn't.

**Pause**

**HEATHER**

Blake, you're better for me than any man will ever be.

**BLAKE**

I don't know about that.

**HEATHER**

Believe me, you are.

Have you ever had sex with a man who doesn't pay attention,  
and slams your head against the headboard, and doesn't notice?

**BLAKE**

By accident?

**HEATHER**

Whatever.

**BLAKE**

I don't think I ever got even that much out of a man.

**HEATHER**

Men are forever in a contest for women.

And they are their own worst enemies.

**BLAKE**

Someone told me once to get alone with myself for a while,  
with no men in my life, to see who I am.

**HEATHER**

Good advice....

Who told you that?

**BLAKE**

Her name was Sam.

She had a room women could go to, a number on the door outside,  
where we could just talk. About things that had been done to us by men.

But I don't think she was Lesbian....

You know, I don't think I ever figured out what she was.

Except, I could tell she was very, very sad inside.

**HEATHER**

Sad?

**BLAKE**

One of those sorrows that won't relent.

**HEATHER**

For a man?

**BLAKE**

I don't think so.  
I don't think it was a man.  
But maybe...  
[beat] Heather ...?

**HEATHER**

Yes?

**BLAKE**

Have you ever lain in your bed at night,  
your teeth clenched so tight to keep you from screaming out loud?

**HEATHER**

[beat] Because of somebody you miss?

**BLAKE**

Because no one ever looked at you to love you and protect you, like you do.

**HEATHER**

You've had a hard life.

**BLAKE**

I don't tell you this to make you feel sorry for me.  
Only, just ....

**HEATHER**

Just what?

**BLAKE**

Before I met you I must have been twenty different ways at the same time.

**HEATHER**

I was close to that.

**BLAKE**

And now there's just one.

**HEATHER**

Oh?

**BLAKE**

Half of one, actually.

**HEATHER**

Half?

**BLAKE**

Your half and my half.

[*walking pause*] There is no happiness like being loved....

Heather, you wouldn't give me your love just to take it back again, would you?

**HEATHER**

Time will tell.

But nothing soon, I promise you.

**BLAKE**

[*beat*] Do you know what I dream?

**HEATHER**

No. What?

**BLAKE**

That we leave this place and live up to your name.

**HEATHER**

Where's that?

**BLAKE**

In Scotland.

A summertime of pink and purple heather on the heath.

**HEATHER**

You like Scotland?

**BLAKE**

What I've read about it....

Scotland is a spirit of its own that holds spirits in the air that surround people and care for them.

**HEATHER**

The country?

**BLAKE**

The countryside. And the heath. And the heather.

It's a dream of mine.

**HEATHER**

An escape.

**BLAKE**

Brigadoon.

**HEATHER**

I've had dreams of Scotland, too.  
And the moors there.

**BLAKE**

[*walking pause*] Heather ...?

**HEATHER**

Yes?

**BLAKE**

Would you ever consider having a baby?

**HEATHER**

*A baby?!*

**BLAKE**

To love and raise together?

**HEATHER**

Now where is *that* coming from?

**BLAKE**

In my dream you and I were walking through the heath, near a rookery.  
And we saw a crow coming toward us, flying low.  
We stood perfectly still.  
And it didn't see us at first.  
And it came so close we could hear his wings creak their feathers.

**HEATHER**

It frightened you?

**BLAKE**

No.... No.  
It made me think of heaven.

**HEATHER**

Heaven?

**BLAKE**

What freaks me out about heaven ....  
I guess, about the Christian heaven we hear about,  
is that we'll all wind up lilies of the field. And I'd rather be more like a crow.  
Or have my spirit stay right here on this planet, anchored by your love.



**HEATHER**

Why would God make you a lily in heaven?... *Or* a crow?

**BLAKE**

Because He isn't interested in raising tens of billions of children in heaven;  
and flowers would be easier.

No arguments.

No dirty dancing.

No firearms.

**HEATHER**

What is He interested in doing then?

**BLAKE**

Waiting for his son to return to Earth.

**HEATHER**

That's crazy.

**BLAKE**

What's crazy? Our having a child?

**HEATHER**

No. The other thing. About heaven.

**BLAKE**

So ... what about a child?

**HEATHER**

What? To help anchor your spirit here, on this planet?...

I might be talked into it. *Might be.*

By the right person.

At the right time.

But now is not the time.

**BLAKE**

I'm so thankful I found you.

**HEATHER**

We may never have it this good again

**BLAKE and HEATHER embrace, kiss,  
and then exit the stage hand-in-hand.**

SCENE 6

**ERIC and ANNE on the park bench.**

**ERIC**

Let's walk.

**ANNE**

Together?  
Why?

**ERIC**

Because when I was a teenager, and had a problem on my mind,  
I had to move.  
I couldn't sit still.  
I had to walk.  
Sometimes miles.  
Just to think and get my thoughts straight.

**ANNE**

I'm not pleased with you, you know.  
At the moment.

**ERIC**

Let's walk.  
To jump start the motion in our hearts, and breathe better again.

**ERIC and ANNE stand and exit the stage together.**

## SCENE 7

**Brief darkness.**

**Light. Center stage. SAM is sitting with her back to the audience, her hands over her face to catch and dry away the tears. PERCY is sitting across from her.**

**Stage right: DAWN is in a large trash bag in the park. As the scene progresses she pulls her way out of the bag, stands, and then exits. She is covered with filth and her clothing is torn and burned.**

**SAM**

I had so much to do in my life.  
We did.  
So many places to go and go's to complete....

**PERCY**

[*beat*] What's happened?

**SAM**

What's my great goal now that my work is gone?

**PERCY**

Tell me what's happened?

**SAM**

You don't know me, Percy. You just don't know me *at all*.  
Why are you here?

**PERCY**

You called me. Remember?

**SAM**

The wheels of life are life's expectations.  
And every time a wheel falls off I think of what I can't stand to think of.

**PERCY**

Stop a moment, and get yourself together, Sam.  
What's happened?

**SAM**

This is my room, where women come to talk.  
I can stand hearing about abuse, though it drives me crazy sometimes.  
But I can't bear beauty dying young. I just can't take it.

**PERCY**

Has somebody died?  
Who's died?

**SAM**

I cry for John Denver, when I think of him.  
And for Freddie Mercury, when I think of him.  
And for Janis Joplin. For beauty that dies young in this world. It melts me.

**PERCY**

We're not talking John Denver, or Freddie Mercury, or Janis Joplin here.  
Who is it who's died?

**SAM**

I'm shot.  
My lifelines are broken.  
My resistance is gone.  
I'm a mess.  
I can't help it.  
I can't keep it up any longer.  
I'm no good at what I do, because I'm no good at *doing* anything.

**PERCY**

You're good at listening.  
Now talk to me.

**SAM**

Help me, Percy.

**PERCY**

I will if you just let me.

**SAM**

[*pause*] I had a person who came here to talk.  
Who didn't talk much at first.  
Not for a while.  
Her name was Dawn.  
But it isn't Dawn.  
But, of course, it is.

**PERCY**

And you got to know her?  
And you became friends?

**SAM**

Yes.

**PERCY**

And what happened?

**SAM**

She was a dancer.

And a singer.

A teenage singer in a chorus, singing mostly gospel, she said.

I believe her. For the most part.

Of course I believe her. I always believe.

Then one night she and a friend went to a private home where they were told there was going to be a party, and gospel singing, and boys. Their kind of boys.

But when they got there, there were only boys. Teenage boys.

White boys, and no singing.

One thing led to another, and Dawn's friend left.

The boys wanted them to dance and strip, and they refused.

After her friend left several of the boys took her into a bedroom with some sex toys and molested her.

That's what she remembered.

Then they burned holes in her clothes with cigarettes.

Smearred her with filth. Stuffed her into a bag. And dumped her in a park.

By a grade school.

Where children ....

**PERCY**

[*pause*] And then?

[*pause*] What happened then?

**SAM**

[*pause*] After she got free, the police came.

No burns were found on her body.

And forensic tests showed no evidence of sexual assault.

It marked her.

Too much didn't made sense.

But it happened.

Just not that way.

Oh, she was raped all right.

Just not that way.

**PERCY**

How? How was she raped?

**SAM**

Years before.  
She forgot things. Like I do.  
Until they came back.  
Until memories were pulled back to her.  
Done by others that she'd buried and then put on the white boys....  
  
I often wonder how memory works how it does. Crazy.  
  
And, I guess, she did the rest of the stuff to herself.  
It's a mystery why.  
But it marked her.

**PERCY**

She did all that shit to herself?

**SAM**

I think I'm going to puke....

**PERCY**

**Moves a waste basket to her, and returns to his seat.**

Here, if you do.

**SAM**

*[ironically]* Thanks.

**PERCY**

No problem.

**SAM**

*[pause]* Why?

**PERCY**

To get attention?

**SAM**

Maybe to get back to her family  
They'd kicked her out.

**PERCY**

For doing what? Dancing? Singing off key?

**SAM**

How crude and immature!  
I don't know why I ever talk to you.

**PERCY**

Because I understand you.

**SAM**

No one understands me.  
Not even me.  
Why I keep on doing this.  
And torturing myself.  
I should just get out.

**PERCY**

You keep talking like that and you might force me to do something drastic.

**SAM**

What?

**PERCY**

Like coming to live with you....  
[pause] Until you get better....  
[pause] You aren't well, are you?

**SAM**

No, Percy, I'm not.  
I'm definitely not.

**PERCY**

You're burning out.  
Isn't that right?

**SAM**

I don't know what's right.  
I just know what I say isn't.  
And it isn't this line of work.  
It's my line of life.

**PERCY**

What?  
Caring about strangers?

**SAM**

Matthew 25.  
And the Good Samaritan, and all....  
Dawn was raped when she was a boy.  
And again when she was a girl.

**PERCY**

What?!

**SAM**

And she never found a home.  
A real one.  
Or a safe place out there.  
Or fired a gun.

**PERCY**

She was trans?

**SAM**

She loved music.  
Lived for music.  
And for ballroom.  
She loved to walk.  
And to vogue....

[*pause*] What are you looking at?  
Strike a pose.

**PERCY**

What?  
What did you say?

**SAM**

Look: Everywhere you turn around there's heartache and old age.

**PERCY**

I've lost the thread.  
What are you talking about?

**SAM**

I know a place where you can get away and ball.  
Come on, Percy, vogue.

**PERCY**

You're talking another language.

**SAM**

Let your body move to the music.  
Let your body go with the flow. You know you can do it.  
It makes no difference, black or white, you know you can do it.  
It makes no difference, boy or girl. Vogue.



**PERCY**

Oh! Ballroom.

**SAM**

Beauty's where you find it.

Greta Garbo and Monroe  
Dietrich and DiMaggio  
Marlon Brando, Jimmy Dean  
On the cover of a magazine.

Grace Kelly, Harlow, Jean  
Picture of a beauty queen  
Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire  
Ginger Rogers, dance on air.

**PERCY**

You're pretty good.

**SAM**

She loved to walk.  
Pure joy.  
There wasn't a mean bone in her body.  
But they kicked her out anyway.  
Neighbors.  
Love thy neighbor.  
And what they think.  
And what they preach.  
"Who is my father?" she asked.  
"Who is my mother?"

**PERCY**

She had no one?

**SAM**

Like too many of us.  
No.  
A Double O Seven.  
On her own.  
Never found a House that was hers.  
There's a world of hurt out there for the Dawns of this world.  
To walk as a woman when your genitals secretly tell a different story.  
It's dangerous.  
Illegal in some places.

**PERCY**

Why do it then?

**SAM**

Give me liberty or give me death....

I heard she committed suicide.

**PERCY**

How terrible!

**SAM**

But it wasn't true. I knew it wasn't true.

**PERCY**

It wasn't?

**SAM**

Some people would rather risk death, walking North along a river bank,  
than to live in slavery.

**PERCY**

I'm not following you again.

**SAM**

Dawn was the first who sang me "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd."  
And she was my friend. More than just a lasting friend.

Because she was hated for who she was.

And understood why I hated myself.

**PERCY**

You're talking like Dawn was somebody's slave or something.

**SAM**

It is a slave to be no stranger to violence.

No stranger to discrimination. Or bigotry.

Because slavery is not being trans.

Slavery is in the eyes and attitudes of the beholder.

She wrote me the old feelings were coming back.

She saw her father in a dream, and he was the Devil in disguise.

Her father gave her nightmares. And his friends.

What could I do?...

And it's finally happened: Dawn was beaten to death last night for being trans.

And I can hardly stand it.

What can I do?

**PERCY**

Why?

I don't understand.

Why is somebody beaten to death because they're trans?

**SAM**

Because too many people like me aren't willing to get out there and stand up for them.

And abolition.

**PERCY**

But people are always getting killed.

Even when we march for their safety.

Even children.

**SAM suddenly gets to her feet and kicks  
the waste basket across the room.**

**SAM**

*[furious] Get out!*

*Get out!*

**Get the fuck out of my room!**

**Darkness.**

SCENE 8

**In darkness.**

**MALE VOICE**

Carole! What are you doing?!  
Are you insane?

**A gun shot.**

**MALE VOICE**

O my God! You've ....

**His body hits the ground.**

**CAROLE**

I won't kill you if you won't rape me, Bastard.

**A second shot.**

**CAROLE**

Cavemen like you do damage.  
And shame.

And women survive.

Like what do I know about cavemen?  
Or women?

## SCENE 9

**Light. Center stage: SAM is sitting alone, her back to the audience. She rises, turns to face the fourth wall, knocks, opens an imaginary door in it, steps through, and walks downstage to face the audience.**

**SAM**

[*pause*] The scent's gone cold.  
I chased it into the darkness of my pillow.  
Until I see a school.  
Any school, driving by.  
Or any other memory of her.  
And I want to scream,  
and curl up in a hole,  
and let the worms take what they can use of me.  
My heart is a hole.  
An earthen hole left from where she was.

O! my little one. My precious little beastie.  
Can't you see I died as well?

It doesn't take a lot to let your young child go.  
It takes everything.  
And more.  
It knocks you down, wishing. And praying.  
Praying you can find a way to trade what's left of your life for hers.  
I'd so easily trade this life for hers.  
But what single mother wouldn't?  
Except ... *my sorrow won't heal*. It's of a kind that does not relent.  
It narrows everything I see in life.  
It narrows everything I do in life.  
It defines my life.

Some say, turn to the Bible. And I have no quarrel with them. It's their way.  
Mine was written by the Brontë sisters, who talk to me at night.  
They want me to know the world is surrounded by spirits who protect us.  
Me, and my daughter in her grave.

You would think, after going through one death I wouldn't have to do it again.  
Not what Dawn suffered through. Dear God!  
Because how can you be prepared for that? Again.  
Like you're never prepared to see a school. Much less *her* school.  
How in Heaven's name could you ever let that happen?

## SAM

Someone else was driving.  
Unexpected pictures flood your mind.  
Flood your mind with carefree childhood laughter.  
The joy on her face, singing along,  
watching Donny Osmond singing Andrew Lloyd Webber's Joseph.  
Her very favorite.  
Dissolving your eyes. Impossible to bear.  
Because you can't tear down every school where there's a shooting.  
And you ask yourself:  
How have I survived?  
She was so much my everything. She is my only thing. My angel.  
My only friend, in the end.  
I'm a fraud, you see. And bitterness begins its rewrite of my memories.

But you'd think schools would be a safe place for a seven-year-old, wouldn't you?  
Not *too* noisy.  
She was so sensitive to loud noise it could make her cry.  
She cries now.  
Her soul looking down on me.

How can a mother live with the blame?  
And the pain?  
Without a friend.  
I'm so much an introvert to pain.  
In an empty bathtub.

Life is so short. But a moment it seems.  
Real life seems.  
And then what?  
Acres of memories to be lost in.  
To be lost.  
Losing the most precious moments of beauty.  
There is beauty in innocence beyond possession I always believed.

I'm a leader of few words for confirmed introverts.  
But why?  
Why me?  
Because at the core of my silence lies every arrow of outrageous fortune.  
Taken from me at school!  
Vomiting up all kinds of unnatural substances.  
Computerized puke to assault rifles.

## SAM

I've suffered my share and not talked.  
I tell people the most powerful tool for healing, when the sky falls on them,  
is to tell the right story about the wounds.  
What have I told?  
Nothing!  
I've listened.  
I've turned my pain into a well for others to weep.  
Because I believe that one who can help others heal is more valuable than one  
who cannot.  
And in my case helping others works better than helping myself.

Does that make any sense?  
To do what's best for others if they're not doing what's best for me in return?  
Am I that low?

No, of course not.  
They're doing the best they can right now.  
And their remembering informs my remembering,  
even if their pain is painted in different colors.  
The shame.  
The anguish.  
The anger.  
The feelings of helplessness and loss.  
The loss of trust.  
They all are reflected in a way that reflects mine.  
The enormous waves of pain.  
Seeing them survive.  
Everyone who finds an answer to what happened to them  
gives hope to me why it happened to me.  
Because tragedy in this life is unequally distributed.  
Like poverty and wealth.  
Some people by force are stronger than other people.  
And when evil joins forces with power, people suffer.  
I'm not the only one.  
Nor will I be the last.

Is a woman at fault if she accepts autumn leaves where they fall?  
And finds a way to go on living.  
Is a dream a lie if it doesn't come true?  
Or is it something worse?

**SAM**

Life is as complicated to understand as poetry.  
The epic and the tragedy.  
The soft dropping of a fountain.  
Water unto water.  
Knowledge unto knowledge.  
Gently, without end.  
Like a Gregorian chant.  
You can live without it, but you can't die without it.  
I can't die without it.

**A young girl walks across the stage  
behind SAM, who does not notice her.**

**SAM**

But why do I tell you?  
You can see it all.  
And know it all:  
Healing is a transformation which washes over us like water.  
Like the forgiveness of time.  
Or it's a never ending river which rolls over us into insanity.  
  
For the perpetrator the violation lasts a matter of minutes.  
Think of it: A matter of minutes.  
But for victims it's a lifetime of sporadic meltdowns.  
  
Like this.

**SAM returns to her room and sits, her  
back to the audience.**

**END**