

FATHER UXBRIDGE WANTS TO MARRY

a play

by

FRANK GAGLIANO

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CHARACTERS\*

Mrs. Bethnal-Green  
Morden  
Father Uxbridge  
Angel

The Mother\*  
Stepney Green\*  
Debden\*  
Father Ongar\*

(\*Played by one actress)

TIME1968

PLACE: An elevator, a Rectory, and various limbo areas

An old-fashioned elevator.

Discovered: Morden, the elevator operator, and Mrs. Bethnal Green.

Mrs. Bethnal-Green is chewing on a large candy bar. At her feet, a nylon-net shopping bag filled with candy.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Well, Mr. Morden, and how do you like being replaced by an automatic elevator?

(Choir of angels sings one chord)

MORDEN

What? What was that, Mrs. Bethnal-Green?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

I said, how do you like being replaced by an automatic elevator?

(Choir of angels sings one chord)

MORDEN

I don't understand, Mrs. Bethnal-Green.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Well, I'm not going to repeat myself again, Mr. Morden. If you can't grasp a simple -  
(pause)

Mr. Morden, you did receive my letter.

MORDEN

Letter?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Stating that Mr. Whitechapel, Realtor for this--and a host of other buildings of similar stature, has declared —through me—that you are to be let go.

MORDEN

Fired? I'm to be fired?

(Choir of angels sings one chord)

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Replaced.

(Choir of angels sing one chord)

By an automatic elevator.

(Choir of angels sings one chord)

MORDEN

No. I didn't receive any letter.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Oh! It's galling. It really is. You want so to do a right thing right. Well, I did send that letter. Special delivery. And certified. four dollars and ninety cents extra, Mr. Morden! What a waste! And you know how I hate waste, Mr. Morden.

MORDEN

And you mean there's nothing to be done?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Nothing to be done.

MORDEN

What if I talked to Mr. Whitechapel?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

You? Personally talk? . . . That's a funny thought, Mr. Morden. Droll, even. Nobody talks to Mr. Whitechapel. Don't you understand? He sent a letter. Bone fide. Signed. Well, not signed *by* him,

(Impressed)

but by someone *for* him!

(Quick shift!)

--No, Mr. Morden, it's over. You are being replaced by an automatic elevator. I hope you understand that. I hope you accept it deep down. Because it's irrevocable.

MORDEN

But there's always a --

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Irreversible.

MORDEN

I could at least --

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Unalterable.

MORDEN

Can't I just--

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

DEFINITE, Mr. Morden!

MORDEN

(After a pause)

Well. I've been replaced before, Mrs. Bethnal-Green. . . . never by something mechanical, though. But I guess I'll survive.

(Choir of angels sings one chord)

MRS. BETHNAL GREEN

You're a lucky man. I sometimes wonder if I shall. Survive. I just came from the doctor, Mr. Morden. "Don't do this." "Don't eat that." He even told me to give up sweets.

(She bites into the candy bar)

MORDEN

It's easier now; since I don't have an invalid mother at home to take care of. Still, whenever I visit the nursing home, the nurses expect a little something.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Yes, you healthy people have it all over us. I mean, what good is having money when you have to give up sweets? What's life all about if you have to give up what has most meaning for you? I mean, here I am, Manager of this fine building and still --

MORDEN

Actually, I'm never in the tip-toppest of condition, Mrs. Bethnal-Green. There was a time when I had to sell my blood a lot. I think that tended to weaken me.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Sell your blood!? Really, Mr. Morden! Mr. Whitechapel is giving you a month's severance pay! I hope you know that's above and beyond —!

MORDEN

That is, indeed, a nice settlement, Mrs. Bethnal-Green.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Well, I should say. Why, we're one big family to Mr. Whitechapel. He said just that many times in those wonderful inter-house memos of his. No. He's not about to let one of his children go out without some financial cushion. So you see, we have tried to be fair. And I hardly expected you to be so morbid, Mr. Morden. I mean, I don't see why you feel you must talk about "selling blood!" A month is sufficient time to find another position.

MORDEN

For some people. Maybe.

MORDEN'S VOICE

(Off. Echoing)

And where are you now, Father Uxbridge, with your jobs?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

A man who has something to offer will always be considered; and quickly, I think.

MORDEN

Well, I don't have much to offer, you see. But I'm still a religious man, and if it's God's will—

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

(Amused)

You think it's God who wants an automatic elevator, Mr. Morden?

MORDEN

I'm sure a simple man like myself wouldn't know, Mrs. Bethnal-Green. But I'll try to get up the courage to ask him when I finally smash through the roof.

(Choir of Angels sings one chord)

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Smash through the—what?—Mr. Morden?

MORDEN

Just my manner of speaking, Mrs. Bethnal-Green.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

You mean dying, don't you. If you mean dying, say dying! On second thought, don't. I don't want to hear about dying.

(ELEVATOR suddenly STOPS. Morden and Mrs. Bethnal-Green count to ten in a kind of stage whisper. As soon as they get to "ten'," the elevator starts again)

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

You really want to know who wants an automatic elevator, Mr. Morden? I'll tell you who wants an automatic elevator. *I* want an automatic elevator. And that's one of the reasons why; that stopping to the count of ten, I mean.

(Elevator suddenly STOPS. Morden and Mrs. Bethnal-Green count to ten in a kind of stage whisper. As soon as they get to "ten',' the elevator starts again)

MRS. BETHNAL GREEN

You see? You just can't have an elevator that stops and starts whenever *IT* pleases. Not in this day and age, Mr. Morden. Oh, it's not so bad when there are others in here, too. But with you alone—well, you must admit you're no Johnny Carson, Mr. Morden. Not that you have to be. But neither should I have to waste ten counts out of my life; counts that seem to go on for an eternity.

(The Choir of angels sings one chord)

So it's a spanking new Otis for us.

(She waits for reaction from Morden. Gets none)

You are familiar with Otis.

(No response)

Otis makes elevators. Otis makes just about the best elevators in the world, that's all.

(No response)

There's an Otis in the Vatican!

(The Choir of angels sings a very religious chord)

MORDEN

Will the new one have music?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Of course. Completely up to date.

MORDEN

I like music. Religious music, especially. Could never make the choir, though. Had to read music and I couldn't. So I became an altar boy, just to hear more of it.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Are you a murderer then, Mr. Morden?

MORDEN

What?

MORDEN'S VOICE

(Off, echoing)

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Murderers — especially the ones who commit the most ghastly crimes — are often altar boys. Ergo—

MORDEN

—Music will make it all very comfortable.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Not only music. Indirect lighting. And gorgeous, soft, pastel paneling. Plastic, of course, for easy cleaning. And Otis will rise and fall swiftly, smoothly, and silently.

MORDEN

As if the walls in the elevator shaft had been greased up.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

What?

MORDEN

As if a great mouth was at the bottom of the shaft. And it was blowing this cage with such force, that it took no effort at all to smash me right on through the roof.

(The Choir of angels sings one chord)

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Mr. Morden, you're talking about death again, aren't you? You're being spooky and I won't have it! It's bad enough the doctor tries to scare me if I don't "behave." Well, he's a spook, too! And I won't cut out chocolates or anything else! In fact — look — now I'm going to cram this whole box of chocolate crunchy bits into my mouth. I was going to save some for watching the television later, but I'll just send out for more—lots more.

MRS BETHNAL-GREEN

(Continued)

That's the advantage of having money, Mr. Morden. You can send out at all hours for all the chocolates and candies you want!

(Stuffs her mouth)

Peanuts. Creamy fillings. Caramelos. Fruit and nut. Coconut and almond centers. More crunchies. Jelly bars. Jelly tarts. Jelly beans. Jelly rolls. Chocolate-covered orange rinds and halvah. Peanut butter cups. Sour balls. Snow caps. Raisinettes. M and M's. Melon-flavored liquorish. Ju-Jus. Praline and maple clusters. Goobers, malt balls, Mars Bars. SNICKERS! The lot of 'em! I'll show all you spooks! You just keep your dying to yourselves!

(Suddenly she clutches her throat,  
drops her candy bars and slumps to the floor)

MORDEN

What is it, Mrs. Bethnal-Green?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Can't breathe . . . Hurry...

(The Choir of angels sings one chord,  
which is sustained and held under)

MORDEN'S VOICE

(Echoing, off)

Bang! Bang! Bang!

(The Voice continues under the  
following:)

MORDEN

It takes its own time. You know I can't.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Oh please, please—

MORDEN

I would like to hurry, but—

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Don't — don't do this to me.

MORDEN

There's nothing I can —

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Please ... Mr. Morden...I wasn't the only one. All the tenants voted for... Otis!

MORDEN

(Turning on her)

You run the goddamned building! Why couldn't you just fix this one? I wanted one that would fly! I would have been content to stay in this cage forever, if it could just fly!

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

. . .economical. Economics —

(The elevator STOPS. All sounds out.  
Even in her pain, Mrs. Bethnal-Green counts in a stage whisper to "ten" with Morden. But the elevator doesn't start.)

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Why doesn't it ... start?

MORDEN

(Frantically trying to get the elevator started)

I don't know. It never—

(He suddenly becomes excited)

Yes! Yes, it did once!

(In the distance, a soprano starts singing Bach's, "Gott Versorget Alles Leben." Her singing comes closer during the following)

It stopped for a longer than ten-count and stayed stopped for a while. And when it started again, it went crazy. Shot up and down! Went wild, I remember! Picked up so much speed, you'd think it was going to fly right on through the—

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Noooooooooooooooooo! Don't say it, Mr. Morden! help! Help!

MORDEN

What? . . . Oh, yes. My God, yes. Help! Help! Mrs. Bethnal-Green, the Manager of this renovated building, who is replacing me with an Otis automatic, is very ill! Help! Help!

(The elevator and Mrs. Bethnal-Green  
fade off as Father Uxbridge materializes in)

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Yes, my son, I will help you, but first you must calm down.

MORDEN

But I wanted to kill her, Father Uxbridge.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Kill whom?

MORDEN

Debden; my lady friend.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Why?

MORDEN

There's someone else. I know it.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

How do you know it?

MORDEN

She goes out. A lot more. Won't tell me where. Even though she knows I'm beside myself with jealousy.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

She goes out to work?

MORDEN

She works at home. In the apartment. Does typing. You see? There's no reason for her to go out that much. Then there's her eyes. She's cheating, cheating, I know it.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Calma, Morden. Calma. One step at a time. You have agreed to go into this with me in some depth away from the sacred confessional. That's good. But we can only see things as they really are -- only begin to get at the root of the problem -- with less emotion. Then I'll help you. And you, Morden, will help me. First, come sit here

(claps hands. Morden obeys)

and let us take a second or so -- collect ourselves --by listening to the choir singer. An angelic voice. And singing divine music, Morden. Bach, Morden, Bach.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

(Continued. Singing comes up,  
then quickly down)

That's one change I'm grateful for. Bach, the Protestant. You weren't allowed to play him in the church at one time.

MORDEN

(Totally out of the Debden beat now, as the joyous  
reminiscence of another time drops in)

I'd sit on the stairs and listen to the organist play Bach after the choir left.

(Now a panic episode of  
that past time he's totally reliving drops in)

One night the Pastor came back. Made a terrible scene about the music. "How dare you play that heathen music here!" Fired the organist right on the spot. The organist saw me after the Pastor left. Yelled at me like it was my fault that he got fired. "You'll allow Bach'. You'll see!" He kept yelling at me." Bach's said it all! Bach will have the last word!"

FATHER UXBRIDGE

The words say that God provides for all the living.

MORDEN

(Simply, quickly, as  
the present drops back in)

That's not what the music says.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

(Amused)

Oh? And what does the music say about the living, Morden?

MORDEN

(simply, just a fact)

That they all suffer.

(Singing comes up, then down)

FATHER UXBRIDGE

(Interested now)

And what else does the music say?

MORDEN

(Simply, just a fact, smiling as he happily  
starts to get lost in the beauty of the singing)

That it's sorry about it all.

(Singing comes up. Uxbridge now  
listens to the music more  
intently. Music quickly brought down)

It is nice. And so is she.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Yes.

(Double take)

Who?

MORDEN

The enamel girl.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Enamel girl, Morden? What enamel girl?

(SINGING: OUT)

MORDEN

We had a statue -- a figurine, my mother called it -- of a white angel. I said it was enamel because it felt good, like the white enamel woodwork in the toilet. That was the one room where they'd let me be when I was a kid. So I'd sit there with my head resting against the white enamel woodwork. That figurine was really porcelain, but I always called it enamel.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Morden, that's part of the trouble here. You see things in a strange way. And perhaps you're distorting this whole business with your lady friend.

MORDEN

(In a sudden murderous rage  
as the Debden beat drops back in)

No! No! I'm not. Debden is cheating and I wanted to kill her and thinking of murder is a mortal sin.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

And you'll continue "thinking" of it as long as you continue this adulterous relationship with that woman.

MORDEN

Adulterous? But Debden's a widow.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

But you're married.

MORDEN

I keep forgetting. But Stepney ran out on me such a long time ago.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Still -- in the eyes of the Church...

MORDEN

But what could I do? Divorce is a sin, too.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

There are ways of getting around that problem. But until we do, there's only one course for you. Be chaste.

MORDEN

(After a beat)

Chaste? Me? Well, you know, Father, I'm only a simple human being. I don't have the will power. I mean, I'm not endowed with that splendid light of God that gives you priests the strength to give it up. Not that there were many women before Debden. That's one of the reasons I need her so much. She's so--*used to be* so giving. But even before -- even alone sitting on the toilet in the enamel room -- I mean, they used to say that that made you go crazy. But that didn't stop me then, and wouldn't now. Do you see what I mean?

FATHER UXBRIDGE

"Chaste" was not the right word. I didn't mean you should lead a life of chastity, like a priest. No one would expect that of you. Indeed, the whole question of clerical chastity is now being debated, as you undoubtedly know. In fact, Morden, as Public Relations priest for this Parish, I'll be taping a television panel, probing just this subject. At the moment, I take a middle-of-the-road view of the matter. But one can see some justification for —

MORDEN

Priests? DOING IT? But that's disgusting! Sinful!

FATHER UXBRIDGE

You're absolutely right. When I say I take the middle-of-the-road view, I mean, as PR for this Parish I must be somewhat neutral. But I think I can confide in you that I veer toward the traditional view and —

MORDEN

I mean, if priests start doing it ... Well, I don't know.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

The proponents, of course, play down fornication. Emphasize the marriage state.

MORDEN

Still—

FATHER UXBRIDGE

And the sacrament of marriage is what we're talking about re your problem. By chaste, I mean faithful to one spouse. I'll be vulgar. I mean — "doing "it" with the blessings of the Church. That's the only way for you. Now, under certain circumstances you can divorce or get an annulment and remarry with our blessing. We would have to investigate thoroughly, but your case would seem to warrant such dispensation. Now, assuming this were possible, you would marry your lady friend.

MORDEN

No.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Why not?

MORDEN

She wouldn't accept me.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Why not?

MORDEN

She had a bad marriage. She's afraid to make it binding again.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Then you must find someone else.

MORDEN

I couldn't.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Why not?

MORDEN

Because . . . finding someone else . . . is

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Yes?

MORDEN

—exhausting.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

So what? If this is important enoug—

MORDEN

But women don't . . .

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Don't what?

MORDEN

. . . find me. . .

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Yes?

MORDEN

Good looking.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Debden obviously found you attractive. Others will, too.

MORDEN

It was different with her. She was in an accident. A crack up. I saw it. Her husband was driving. Only Debden and the child survived. I took care of them. Had some money then.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Do you mean to say that your entire relationship has been built on her gratitude to you? And on your helping in a monetary way when you can afford it? Morden, aside from the problem of sin, you must bring it to a conclusion.

MORDEN

She came to care. She cares. And I love the little girl.

(There is a cry of a little girl, off)

Angel!

(Angel rushes in)

Angel, what's the matter.

(She holds up a finger)

You cut it.

(He sucks her finger and bandages it with his handkerchief)

I told you to be careful with those scissors.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Why did you allow the child to have the scissors? Why did you bring her here with you at all? And why doesn't she talk? Has the cat got your tongue?

MORDEN

She doesn't have a tongue. I mean, in a manner of speaking. The accident. It did something to her vocal cords. But she can hear. You should have seen her sitting still as a stick, listening with me to the enamel girl.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

There you go again with that enamel girl, Morden.

MORDEN

Anyway, there was no one home to leave her with. Debden went out.

(Whispers to FATHER UXBRIDGE)

Do you see what I mean?

(In his normal voice)

I had to take Angel with me. Besides, I wanted to.

(Angel makes a gesture of cutting with a scissors)

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Does that mean she wants to use the scissors again?

MORDEN

Yes.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

You're not going to allow it!?

MORDEN

Oh, I can't deny Angel anything. Anyway, besides listening to music, her cutouts are the only things that relax her. She loves to paste animal heads on pictures of people.

(He kisses her on the head)

Go on back to your cutouts. But be careful.

(ANGEL runs off.

He smiles and says the next simply, while still smiling)

I love Angel. She's even more helpless than I am.

(Pause)

FATHER UXBRIDGE

You're out of work now, eh?

MORDEN

Yes.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

I know of a job that's available.

MORDEN

I have few skills. That's one of my problems.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

A parishioner of mine manages an apartment building. At the moment she needs someone to run her elevator. You'd be able to run an elevator, eh, Morden?

MORDEN

I don't know. I'm not very mechanical. And I have funny reflexes.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

"Funny" reflexes?

MORDEN

I mean, I get tics. Like spasms in my muscles.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Buttons, Morden. You just push buttons. Or manipulate one of those levers. Either/or-. Push or manipulate, Morden. Push or manipulate.

MORDEN

And I'd have to meet people.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Not meet, really. Just make sure they step on and off.

MORDEN

But you see, I'm bound to have to look them in the eye at some point. I mean, those doors open and there they'll stand, staring before they enter.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

For a second, perhaps.

MORDEN

Oh, that's plenty of time. They'll stare as if they're blaming me.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

For what?

MORDEN

I don't know. But people always seem to be blaming somebody, and if I'm around, it's always me.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Now, Morden --

MORDEN

The thought of it gives me the cramps, Father.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

The cramps?

MORDEN

Just thinking about a job always gives me the cramps. And during the first few weeks on the job I always have the diarrhea. But mostly --

FATHER UXBRIDGE

I'll donate two weeks supply of Kaopectate!!!

MORDEN

But mostly--I'm afraid of elevators.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Afraid of what? Closed-in spaces?

MORDEN

No. That the bottom will drop out.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

MORDEN, I WANT YOU TO TAKE THAT JOB, DO YOU HEAR? And I'll tell you why.

(He switches on a cassette  
tape recorder, presses the record  
button and speaks into a mike)

Because I'm interested in the murderous soul, Morden. And I want to use you to illuminate a theory I have about it; the murderous soul. What I want to do is to eliminate all your superficial murder motives, Morden; bulldoze them out of your way and see what happens when you -- simple, naive, basic you -- are left alone on the clear road to yourself. I suspect—hope—that murder will still stay stuck in your soul. For I have always seen the soul as made of cotton candy, for some strange reason; and in the shape of a mushroom cloud. And why that image, Morden? Because it is symbolic, of course. For what, after all, characterizes our time, Morden? . . . Violence. It seems to be the common denominator and may very well be at the heart of our age's soul.

(He switches off the machine)

That's rather a nice phrase, eh, Morden?

MORDEN

(Sings)

They've taken my Laddie away, O! They've-taken my Laddie away —

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Morden! Do I hear right? You're singing! I'm talking away and you're singing!

MORDEN

Oh. It just came to mind, Father. Part of a song my mother used to sing. I don't know why it came to me. I'm sorry.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

And indeed you should be! Now, are you going to pay attention or not?

MORDEN

Go on. Go on. Please, Father Uxbridge. I'm sorry. I really am.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

I lost my train of thought.

(He rewinds the tape.

His voice, on tape, speaks)

"...characterizes our time, Morden? Violence. It seems to be the common denominator and may very well be at the heart of our age's soul."

(He switches it off and clicks  
to record. Speaks into mike)

Violence. Oh, I suppose you would have said sex was the common denominator. On the surface, Morden. On the surface. Why, if you had heard what I have heard, you'd realize, too, that that today is violence, really. And you must believe me, Morden; I'm not against sex. It's a sacred gift from God. So sacred that it infuriates me to know that at any given moment on this planet—within the sacrament of marriage — a million dildoes are in use—not to mention the palsied hand! —But that's another sermon. Violence. And what's the logical extension of violence, Morden? Murder, Morden. Do you think you're the only one grappling with murder? Oh, Morden, you have no idea what murderous thoughts are strained through that sieve, separating confessor and confessed. But, in this year of nineteen, six and eight, they all have — what shall I call it? — reasonable emotional excuses. Yes, they do. Even those just a few notches above your station, Morden. They have an excuse. They're being paid for less and less work and don't know what to do with their leisure. Ergo: Dissatisfaction and boredom. Ergo: The pursuit of thrills — which means violence. Ergo: Again, murder, Morden.

MORDEN

(Sings)

They've taken my Laddie to string him up, 0—

FATHER UXBRIDGE

(Clicking off machine)

Morden! You're doing it again!

MORDEN

Sorry, Father! It's hard for me to concentrate long on anything. Especially when something intrudes like

FATHER UXBRIDGE

--that tune! Well, you will push that morbid song to the back of your fuzzy mind or by God, I'll... I'll EXCOMMUNICATE you! Now, listen!

(He rewinds the tape a bit.

His voice, on tape, speaks)

"...paid for less and less work and don't know what to do with their leisure. Ergo: Dissatisfaction and boredom. Ergo: The pursuit of thrills -- which means violence.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

(CONTINUED)

Ergo: Again, murder, Morden."

(He switches it off. Then he switches to record. He speaks into the mike)

But you, Morden—you're not even a member of a union that can get you a fantastic salary for not working. The most you'll ever reach, I would suspect, will be to live on the government dole. This would hardly lead to an affluence that could, as with the rest, lead to the boredom and dissatisfaction and so to the kind of violence I'm talking about. Yes, you'll always have the financial struggle and that struggle will ward off the boredom. You won't have that excuse. But we might still find that, at base, once you're free of the Debden problem and you have the elevator job, you'll still feel enraged, embittered, betrayed, and there will still be murder in your soul. At base. At base.

(TOGETHER)

UXBRIDGE

There's the key, Morden.  
To wrench out-- scientifically  
—the basics from a basic.  
That's you, Morden. A primitive  
who will help us get down  
to essentials--and fast. Yes,  
we must strip away all your --

MORDEN

A Guinea pig? Is that what you  
want to use me for, Father?  
Some kind of guinea pig?  
No.  
No.  
No.  
I'm through with all that!

(UXBRIDGE stops talking)

## MORDEN

(Continued)

—I mean, I'm tired of it; all my life a guinea pig. The kids on the block, in school. —Even in the army. You know what they did once—my "buddies?" . . . There was this big lunk of a guy in our barracks who stank; stank like strong cheese. And they all wanted to scrub him. They had these big horse-hair brushes and strong brown soap and when a guy stank they'd just scrub the skin off him. But this particular guy who stank like cheese was strong as a tank, you see, and no one would take him on. So I'm taking a shower one day, filthy from having cleaned the grease pit and, on the garbage truck, from having been up to my ankles in thrown-out string beans and shit-on-a-shingle, when this gorilla grabs me in the shower and says, "So you're going to scrub me?" Then he throws me up against the wall, brushes my skin until I bleed and beats me up to boot. Breaks two ribs and gives me a kidney condition. What happened was, my "buddies" told him that I would do it. Why? Some of them took bets on how fast he could take me. But all of them hoped the gorilla would hurt me real bad so that he'd be thrown out of the barracks. Well, that's just what happened. While I was in the hospital, he was transferred and . . . Oh, God, I'm sorry, Father, I didn't mean to say shit-on-a — I mean that army word for "chipped-beef-on-toast." But that's what happens when you talk guinea pig. I mean, that's pretty cruel if that's what you think I am. Because I'm not. Not anymore. I'm no guinea pig.

(Pause)

## FATHER UXBRIDGE

Forgive me, Morden. I didn't mean to be cruel. Or did I? That is, after all, the fashion, isn't it? You see, things are changing. Did you know, Morden, that jazz has been allowed into the Mass? And a Catholic priest recently addressed the Masons? Why, if this keeps up, one of these days I may even have to address the Jesuits.

(Crosses himself)

God forbid.

(Tired laugh)

Change. . . . Change? Upheaval. And in this upheaval, others— younger ones are moving in. Why, there's even a rumor that I may be replaced here. A certain Father Ongar . . . is . . . creating . . . favorable static in upper clerical circles.

(Mysterious musical chord held under as  
Father Ongar materializes. Father Ongar glides to  
the tape recorder, takes it and exits. Chord  
resolves)

So, Morden, one tries to hold on. To survive. How? By having a "thing"—a schtick, our Hebrew brethren would call it. And I may quote them freely now. Indeed, must, in this

FATHER UXBRIDGE

—Ecumenical Era. The murderous soul. That's my schtick. And I really believe that you —especially you—can help me.

MORDEN

But can you help me? That's what I'm here for. I mean, I see you're hot on this murder thing -- I don't understand it -- but, okay!. But what about me, and Debden, and Angel —?

FATHER UXBRIDGE

In the process, Morden -- in the process, we can get you squared away. Everything is connected, Morden. But we've got to dig, reach out in many directions to find—

(Long pause)

The simple fact is. . .I'm losing it. Something is slipping away, Morden. And I'm frightened. Morden, please work with me. That's right. We'll work together. Probe together. And together pray to God that we do find that the soul is at base a murderous one. Something that negative would really delight them all.

MORDEN

(After a pause)

And what will I have to do?

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Just talk, Morden. To me. Oh, sometimes, perhaps, I'll use you as illustration during one of my talks. But I'll make that painless. I'm a very good lecturer, Morden. Also — yes — I don't see why I can't manage to scrape up some petty cash for you — for your contribution. Now, how does that sound?

MORDEN

And what about my invalid mother?

FATHER UXBRIDGE

What about your invalid mother?

MORDEN

I'm not free of her.

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Hm. . .Well. We can place her— in a good Catholic nursing home for our Senior Souls.

MORDEN

Charity?

FATHER UXBRIDGE

Christian charity, Morden. Nothing to be ashamed of.

(Father Ongar wheels on Morden's Mother, who is in a wheelchair. Father Ongar places the wheelchair so that the Mother faces Morden.)

MORDEN

I don't know. Is it right?

FATHER UXBRIDGE

If it's an unreasonable burden on you, it is.

(Father Ongar hands the wheelchair over to Father Uxbridge)

Why, the handing over of mothers is a common occurrence today.

MOTHER

Bed sores.

MORDEN

What about bed sores?

FATHER UXBRIDGE

What about bed sores?

(Father Uxbridge hands the wheelchair back to Father Ongar. Father Ongar keeps the Mother facing Morden)

MORDEN

She used to say:

MOTHER

You'll see, my son. Someday, when I'm used up, you'll put me in a hospital or a home. And they won't bother with me there. They'll let me get bed sores and I'll just rot away. And that'll be my thanks for bringing you up alone when your father ran out on me.

MORDEN

She used to call it "running out on her." His dying. The poor bastard got all mangled up in a machine. Funny she never blamed God.

## FATHER UXBRIDGE

God, Morden? You mean the Angel of Death. At any rate, we'll make sure she finds herself in a friendly home, professionally looked after.

## MORDEN

She used to say:

## MOTHER

You'll put me in a nursing home and you'll agonize about it, but you'll do it anyway. Because, for one thing, it won't be pretty. Don't I know? Didn't I take care of my vegetable mother? And didn't I hand her over to the State? Vegetable mothers run in our family, Morden; I must tell you that. But then there's the other—deeper—reason for pushing vegetable mother out. By then you'll reach the point where you'll want to get even for being cheated, and I'll be convenient to get even on. Oh, yes. In a rage, you'll push me out. I know you will. . . but I hope you won't. And I tell you this now in the hope that at that moment, when you're ready to push me out, you'll remember what I'm saying and maybe you'll show compassion and keep me with you. . . Morden, I think I did my best by you. But sometimes there are forces that . . . But, listen: Remember when you were little and laid up in the clinic with rheumatic fever? I'd put the alcohol-soaked rag on your forehead and I'd sing you the lullaby you loved. When you go to push me out, think of this:

(Sings)

Go to sleep, my baby,  
the sun will not peep through.  
Dark, dark, dark all night;  
dark all day, too.

(Father Ongar moves away from  
the wheelchair, stands in the shadows.  
Morden goes to the wheelchair)

## MORDEN

No. No. It's out of the question, Father.

(He begins wheeling  
the wheelchair around)

I mean—a son's duty. It's the least I can do after all the pain she went through for me. I mean, so what if I have to change her soiled diaper. Didn't she change mine when I was a kid? Oh, sure, kid-soiled is cute while grown-up soiled gets you sick, but that's a small price to pay for all she sacrificed. . . And so what if her moans—they're the only sounds she makes, you know—so what if those moans become stuck in your head and you carry them around like bees in your ears all day? So what if Debden turns cold on you because she can't stand the sight and smell of rotting mother?

## MORDEN

(Continued.)

He's wheeling faster.

Mother now begins to a low moan  
and low-moans throughout)

No. Not bees. It's more like a car idling, those moans. Idling. All day long. Low hum, all day long, with never the hope of acceleration. Well, so what if you never have the voom Voom VOOM of acceleration? Where are you going? Where's there to go to? Why does it have to be voom Voom VOOM? So what if the care you're giving makes no sense because God —I mean the Angel of Death—is going to take her anyway, bed sores or no—even though it might take years? And so what if it's like looking into the mirror of death every time I look at her and I know that that low moan idling hum is going to buzz on until I go off my head? Huh? So what? No. No. I can't push her out.

(He has aimed the wheelchair  
at the audience and given the wheelchair a shove.  
Just as the wheelchair gets to the apron,  
Father Uxbridge steps out and stops it)

## FATHER UXBRIDGE,

Yes. It's the only way. The best way for her.

(He wheels the wheelchair  
off, while Morden stands looking  
out over the audience)

And you, Morden, when you start to work, and when you deal with the Debden problem, you'll be free to be yourself. Then we'll see about the murder in your soul, Morden. Deal with Debden, Morden. Deal with Debden.

(He's gone. Pause)

## MORDEN

(Suddenly aware he's alone)

Angel! Angel! ANGEL I need you!

(Father Ongar pushes her out  
and disappears back into the shadows.  
Morden rushes to her and hugs  
her violently)

You're still here! You'll never leave me Angel. I won't let you.

MORDEN

(Continued  
Angel, frightened at the  
way Morden is behaving, cries)

What's the matter? Oh, I frightened you. That's from love, Angel. Do you understand?  
My love frightened you. --Here . . . a song; would you like to hear a song? I remember it  
now.

(SINGS)

They've taken my Laddie away, O.  
They've taken my Laddie away.  
They've taken my Laddie to string him up, O.  
He's going to Great Fall Hill.  
Scream, my Laddie,  
kick on the wind,  
no one will listen but me.  
Oh, as they drag you up Great Fall Hill,  
no one will listen but me.

(Angel tries to get him to leave,  
but he is lost in the song.  
Father Ongar enters and makes a scissors  
sign. Angel runs to him. They exit)

MORDEN

(Continues Singing)

They've taken my Laddie away, O.  
They've taken my Laddie away.  
They've taken my Laddie to string him up, O.  
He's going to Great Fall Hill.

(Off: Mrs. Bethnal-Green moans)

Father Uxbridge; Mother's gone; but the moans stay.

(Mrs. Bethnal-Green and the  
elevator materialize)

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Mr. Morden . . .

(Morden enters the elevator  
as the soprano sings  
Bach's "Hort ihr Augen, auf zu weinen."

Weaker than ever)

Mr. Morden...

(The singing is down very low)

MORDEN

Shh. Shh! The enamel girl next door. She's practicing again. Drives Stepney crazy when the enamel girl stops and starts.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Enamel girl— . . . Stepney. Dear God. . . he's gone crazy.

MORDEN

If we're lucky, she'll sing right through, Mrs. Bethnal-Green. Then -- "Green!" Isn't that strange. That was Stepney's maiden name. Stepney Green, my wife who ran out on me.

FATHER ONGAR

(From above)

Morden! Mrs. Bethnal Green;

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

(weakly)

Oh . . . help—

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

Do you hear me?

MORDEN

(Whispering to Mrs. Bethnal-Green)

Shh. I know the voice.

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

Can you hear me?

MORDEN

It's the anti-Christ and fornicator.

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

It's Father Ongar!

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

(With all her strength)

Oh, help! Help!

MORDEN

Shh!

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

I hear you, Mrs. Bethnal-Green! —Are you all right?

MORDEN

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?! HOW DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS?

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

Just administered last rites. Someone's dying.

MORDEN

A woman, I'll bet! Did you fornicate her?

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

Morden, I'm coming down.

MORDEN

How?

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

The cable.

MORDEN

(To Mrs. Bethnal-Green)

Showing off his strength. That's for your benefit.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Don't care. I want him. I want him.

MORDEN

Do you hear that, Father Ongar? Mrs. Bethnal-Green wants you! Does that mean you're going to do it to her right here in front of me? Like you did to my Debden?

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Oh, dear God —

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

Morden, I'm coming down!

MORDEN

Save your strength, Father Ongar! All we can do is wait it out until it makes up its mind to soar! Maybe smash right on through the roof!

FATHER ONGAR

(Off)

Morden, I said I'm coming down!

MORDEN

Then I won't let you through the trap!

(He stands on tip toes, reaches up,  
and holds down the handle of the trap.

The Soprano starts singing again)

MORDEN

Oh, she's starting again. If she starts and stops now, Stepney will hit the roof!

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

(Beginning, with the elevator, to dematerialize)

Morden. . . I'll give you money . . . two month's severance pay . . . three . . .

(The Soprano stops singing)

MORDEN

She stopped.

(The Soprano starts again)

She's starting again. Now there'll be hell to pay.

(From this point until indicated,  
the Soprano starts and stops singing,  
as if practicing the piece.)

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

(Almost completely de-materialized)

Morden ... please ... please

(Stepney Green quickly materializes)

STEPNEY

I can't stand this!

MORDEN

(From the shadows)

Stepney!

STEPNEY

Stop it! Stop that singing! Stop iiiiiiiit! . . . Morden, she won't stop. Now, you go right downstairs and force her to stop!

MORDEN

(From the shadows)

Stepney, I can't. My ugly hands. My psoriasis.

STEPNEY

You're wearing gloves. She won't know.

MORDEN

But I know. I know.

STEPNEY

Your psoriasis! Your arthritis! Your foot fungus! Keep you from jobs. They fire you because of all that. Well, I don't care. I keep my job. Christ! Even your mother keeps

## STEPNEY

(Continued)

her's. Sorry now I threw the nag out. She at least would have talked that croaking bitch to death right through the walls. —MORDEN, WILL YOU LISTEN TO THAT! —I work hard all day, I tell you. And I don't want to hear that screeching when I come home. All I want is to watch my television. And I don't want to watch it through THAT! . . . Morden, It's your job. Stop her. Because if I go next door I'll cut her vocal chords; choke her by stuffing all her music down her throat! Bang her metronome through her skull like a spike! I'll do something mean, I mean it. Meeeeeaaan it!

(The singing stops)

Thank you, Miss Screech.

(She walks into-the shadows)

Now I'll just switch on the television good and loud.

(She wheels in a television set and switches it on.

Soon, there's a little explosive sound in the set.

She begins switching dials frantically.

She puts her head to the set as if listening for a heart beat.)

Morden, it's dead. I told you the tube was weak. I told you to take it in. God, you're worthless. Why --why did I ever marry you? Why did you ever marry me? Oh, what's the difference? It's broken. Stopped dead. Is — not — work — ing. Will — not — utt — er — sound. Won't — make — pic — ture. Do you understand that, Morden?

(She pushes the set into the shadows)

Do you know what that means? It's Saturday night. You won't get anyone until Monday. If you're lucky.

(The horror of the situation  
now fully begins to sink in)

I might be without a television until Tuesday. Or Wednesday! Four whole nights with . . . nothing. NOTHING! Do you hear, you —you itchy fungus, you! It's dead! DEAD! Now what?

(The singing begins again.

Stepney screams and runs off.

DEBDEN materializes from the shadows,

wheeling in a small table-on-casters with a suitcase on it.

Debden recites as she packs)

DEBDEN

"Sometimes there's a terrible scream inside."

MORDEN

(From the shadows)

Debden.

DEBDEN

"Why couldn't God make me the type to get that scream out?"

MORDEN

(From the shadows)

Debden.

DEBDEN

"It would be such a satisfying scream. Long. Sustained. Full of rocks and sand and broken glass. Ripping. Burning. Forcing me to spit up blood, perhaps. But that couldn't stop it. Even if my throat was being ripped out by that scream, that scream couldn't stop."

MORDEN

(From the shadows)

Debden.

DEBDEN

"A monumental scream! A scream to end all screams! And it would yank out — drag out — wriggling, like tin cans and obscenities — my heart, liver, uterus, bones and breath. Finally cleaning me out. Leaving me a limp, wrinkly skin; some huge, punctured, mustard-colored balloon, shriveled in the dirt."

(Picks up a sheet of paper)

That was from a play I wrote, Morden. Self-indulgent. All monologue, as I recall. Still, I won a prize for that play in my undergraduate days. I was considered quite a writer. With a brilliant future.

(She rips up the paper)

Curtain.

(She lets the pieces  
flutter to the floor)

MORDEN

(From the shadows).

Debden.

DEBDEN

(Picking up a hand mirror)

How is it possible for a woman my age to have acne.

MORDEN

(Entering from the shadows)

Debden, don't leave me.

DEBDEN

My period has never been regular. My mother had beautiful skin; I guess her's was.

MORDEN

Debden, your face has a scar and you limp.

DEBDEN

No!

(She limps away, then moves about)

MORDEN

You were in an accident that left you with a scar and a limp. I took care of you. If you leave me, no one else will.

DEBDEN

Don't be cruel, Morden. Please. I'm trying to face reality. But don't make me face it all at once. I'm not strong enough for that. Not yet.

MORDEN

I don't want to be cruel. But what about me? What will I do if you leave me?

DEBDEN

You'll do what you always do — exist! — Oh, Morden. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that— Well, I mean I did mean that, but I didn't mean it to sound so bitter. I'll try it another way: You'll do what you always do . . .

(with compassion)

exist.

(She embraces him)

MORDEN

(While still in the embrace)

There's got to be someone.

DEBDEN

(Letting him go)

Morden, there were people who believed in me. I've got to get involved with my own kind again. I've set here feeling sorry for myself, allowing you to take care of me —

MORDEN

—And Angel. I've taken care of her, too. Don't forget that. Or have you even thought about her? What about her? . . .

(A terror possibility drops in)

You're not taking her? . . .

(Dawning on him)

You *are* taking her.

DEBDEN

(Calls)

Angel!

(To Morden)

She's mine. Of course I'm taking her.

(Calls)

Angel!

(To Morden)

I'll provide for her.

(Calls)

Angel, put those scissors away and come help Mommy pack.

MORDEN

Provide?

(Father Ongar ushers Angel in)

Oh, I see. Once away from me, you'll be free to go about your "business. "

DEBDEN

Oh, no ... not that again.

MORDEN

Bring your customers right to the house.

DEBDEN

Angel, come here! Don't listen!

(Father Ongar rushes Angel over to Debden.  
Debden covers Angel's ears with Angel's own hands.  
Father Ongar exits)

MORDEN

Haven't I seen it? Haven't I visited such filthy bitches? Haven't I been taken on right under the same roof with the bitch's kid? And sooner or later the kid becomes useful— Mommy's little helper —

DEBDEN

(Showing her wrists.

They are bandaged)

MORDEN, I TRIED TO KILL MYSELF! ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE ME DO IT AGAIN?

(Second's freeze. Then, realizing what she's done, and ashamed, Debden tries to pull back her wrists. But Morden rushes to her, falls to his knees and kisses one bandaged wrist)

MORDEN

Mommy's hurt, Angel. You, too. You kiss the hurt.

(Angel kneels to kiss Debden's other bandaged wrist. But before she can, Debden pulls both Angel and Morden to her)

DEBDEN

Morden. Morden. Let us go.

MORDEN

Why? Why did you do this, Debden? Why?

DEBDEN

(After a pause. Drained. Quiet.)

I'm a witch, Morden. I can make people die by wanting it badly enough. Just before the car accident, I knew I wanted my husband to die. And he did. And I never stopped blaming myself. Now. . .lately. . .I've been feeling the same about you. And I despaired.

(A beat)

MORDEN

Jesus, Debden, that's a terrible sin. I mean, no matter how bad it all is, you should never try to kill yourself.

(Rising)

MORDEN

(Continued)

No no no. You're staying.

(Helps Angel to rise.

Takes Angel with him as he  
moves away from Debden)

Angel, you and me — we'll take care of Mommy because Mommy isn't strong enough to go.

DEBDEN

Not strong? I wasn't when I tried this.

(Shows wrists again)

But I've since had some expert guidance. Now I know that I have a right to live, Morden. No matter how hurt you are, I have a right to leave, if I choose. And I do choose. I'm going, Morden.

(Begins to move toward Angel)

MORDEN

(Protecting Angel. Stepping back)

What expert guidance? No, you can't. I won't — Angel, you agree with me. Right? And you want to stay here with me. Don't you?

(Beat. Angel nods)

You see, Debden. She wants to stay with me.

DEBDEN

(After a beat)

Angel. You want to be with mommy wherever she goes. Don't you?

(Angel looks back and forth  
between the two people she really loves.

Hesitates.

Angel runs to her mother)

All right, dear. Go play until we're ready to leave.

(Angel goes off into the shadows.  
Pause. Then Debden resumes packing)

MORDEN

Don't take Angel away from me. I know she's not really my child, but she's become mine. And—I don't know how I know this, but—I'll never have a child of my own.

(Pause)

Things are good now. My mother's gone. My old marriage has been annulled and I'm working. There — there — that's the main thing. I've got a steady job and I can provide.

DEBDEN

Not for long.

MORDEN

What?

DEBDEN

They're replacing you with an automatic elevator.

MORDEN

How do you know? I don't know that. Where did you hear that? Huh?

DEBDEN

At the rectory.

MORDEN

Father Uxbridge. But you only met him once. With me.

DEBDEN

I've been back.

MORDEN

(Moving in on her)

Why? You didn't even like him.

DEBDEN

(Uncomfortable)

That's right. But there was no one else and I had to talk to someone.

MORDEN

What did he tell you?

DEBDEN

Nothing.

MORDEN

WHAT DID HE TELL YOU?!?!

DEBDEN

(Moves away from the suitcase)

Nothing! I only saw him once. When I went back the next time, he was giving a lecture. I looked in.

(With great distaste)

Saw you sitting on a stool.

MORDEN

I got money for that. Anyway, I don't go anymore. But you went back. Why?

DEBDEN

I had to talk to someone. I called Father Uxbridge again. But he was leaving. They were sending him on a lecture tour. Something about the "new clergy."

MORDEN

New. Yes. New's right. You knew then and you know now.

DEBDEN

What?

MORDEN

That Father Uxbridge wants to marry.

DEBDEN

No.

MORDEN

You must have. Everyone knew. That's why I stopped seeing him. Disgusting.

DEBDEN

He advocates marriage for priests. So what? A lot do now.

MORDEN

I don't care what a lot of 'em "advocate." *He* wants to marry. That's the upsetting thing. There was an article—in a magazine. By a Father X. Well, it didn't take some of the ladies in the Parish long to figure out who Father X was. Mrs. Bethnal-Green herself — yes, my employer! High up in the Church because of her donations! Herself, reached

MORDEN

(Continued)

that conclusion. Uxbridge. Even the first time I talked to him, he talked about it. Then he had no opinion, he said. Then, he said, he took the middle road. The middle road — sure! Right to a lady's middle. I'll bet he was after yours.

DEBDEN

I only saw him once. And Father Ongar —

MORDEN

Who?

MORDEN'S VOICE

(over)

Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang. Bang.

(The bangs crescendo  
under the following)

DEBDEN

The priest I've been seeing.

MORDEN

Ongar? I know that name. What about him?

DEBDEN

My counselor. . .he replaced Father Uxbridge.

MORDEN

And this Father Ongar — he wants to get at your middle.

DEBDEN

Nobody wants to get at my middle!

MORDEN

I do! I do! What about that? I need it. What will I do without it?

DEBDEN

There are others. There are always others.

MORDEN

No. There won't be. Anyway, I want you.

DEBDEN

But . . . but I don't . . . want you.

MORDEN

Suddenly! Suddenly!

DEBDEN

No. YES! What's the difference? Now I know!

MORDEN

What? WHAT?!?!

DEBDEN

THAT YOU'RE BENEATH ME!

(The "Bangs" are brought down very low. Then the bangs crescendo again, under the following.)

Father Ongar materializes. He moves in front of Debden and faces Morden. Debden turns so that she's standing back to back with Father Ongar.)

DEBDEN

(Continued)

I know it's cruel. But sometimes you've got to be cruel. It's over, Morden. We're through. I've found others who aren't beneath me; whom I can look up to, stretch my mind up to. Morden, my brain has atrophied with you.

(Father Ongar quickly moves aside and Debden turns to face Morden)

MORDEN

You scarred cripple. Who told you to think that? This new one? This Father Ongar? I could kill you. KILL YOU! God, isn't it right to kill that cruelty? I'll bet there's something in The Book that gives you that okay. You're smart, Debden. Quote me something from The Book.

DEBDEN

Please. Morden.

MORDEN

There must be something. When they nailed him to the cross. No! That part forgives. Some part that gives me the right to—

DEBDEN

Morden! Don't do anything to me! Please.

(The "bangs" get quiet. Ongar moves back to the edge of the shadows)

MORDEN

No. I won't do anything to you. Because this is how it's going to be. You're going to stay here. And you can have all the customers you want. HERE! Right in this house. You can diddle away here for the rest of your life. I don't care. Just as long as you diddle me once in awhile. And I don't even care anymore if you keep on laying stiff as a stick under me. But I'll take care of Angel. I'll give her all my love. I'll be her father and mother. Because no slut should be. Agreed?

(The "bangs" crescendo again)

DEBDEN

No!

(Shouts off)

Angel!

(To Morden)

NO!

(Father Ongar reaches into the shadows and pulls on Angel. Ongar then quickly moves off into the shadows)

DEBDEN

(To Angel)

Come on, darling. We're going now.

(Morden grabs Angel)

MORDEN

You're not taking her anywhere!

(Father Ongar returns with the scissors and places them in Morden's hand. He raises Morden's hand)

DEBDEN

Morden!

MORDEN

She's mine! I love her so much I'll kill her rather than let her go!

(Father Ongar gestures.  
The "bangs" come up very loud)

DEBDEN

Don't, Morden!

(She screams.  
Morden lets Angel go.)

MORDEN

How can I kill her with so much noise? And it's getting worse.

(Father Ongar takes the scissors  
from Morden. He dematerializes.  
Morden covers his ears.)

The thing is — it had stopped. That noise! The bangs! All the while I was sure of you, they stopped! Now. . . —wait! A movie! Once I saw this movie! . . .they had a scene -- I think it was a movie. Maybe I dreamed it? . . . Anyway, in it, they were nailing Him to the cross.

(The "bangs" stop)

And the thing about it, you see, is that the men doing the nailing are simple fellows, you know. Carpenters, I guess. That sort. And they're chatting like you do when you work together with someone all the time. You know? And I remember that one of them keeps a large —very large — nail in his teeth, all the while he's talking. And at the same time he's talking —with that nail in his teeth? — he's arranging the arm, you see. Straightening it out on the cross; forcing open the hand. Palm up. . . .And that's something in itself. You can't see his face — the one who's being nailed, I mean. But he's putting up a struggle. You can tell that by the way those two fellows are having trouble keeping his arm straight and the palm open, face up. In fact — yes — one of them has put his knee on the arm to keep it down. And you figure, that's strange. Because he knows there's nothing he can do about it — the one who's being nailed, I mean. In fact, he's known it all along. Even before he was born. Right? In fact, that's what he was born for. But that doesn't seem to matter. I mean, from the struggle he's

## MORDEN

(Continued)

making, you can see that he doesn't want to die. Imagine. . . . Anyway, the one with the nail between his teeth takes it out. Looks at it. It's a shiny, new nail. He looks around, puts the shiny one in his pocket and takes out an old, rusty one. "Sure. What the hell," the other one — his friend — says. Why waste a new one?" Then he looks at the palm — face up—and he places the old, rusty nail right smack in the center of that face-up palm and the beam right underneath that palm — just with his eye. And bang! One fast shot and the nail is through. But it's messy. I mean, blood spurting out all over. And that's a shock, too. In all the pictures where you saw the hole in the palm, I remembered it was always clean. Neat. Just a little round shaft from front to back. Oh, maybe a little blood just around the rim. But neat. Dried and neat. But here — well, when you stop to figure it, the nail has to smash through veins and little bones and arteries before it catches in the wood. I mean, in true life where there's pain, it does. . . . Anyway, there's this funny little part where fingers on the face-up palm jerk in. You know, like a reflex to cover the hurt, as soon as the nail tears through. And the carpenter gets annoyed. And so he makes a face — a funny face, the carpenter does, as if to say, "Dear God, all I want to do is my job and look at this! There's no cooperation." So what he does is, he pries back the fingers and begins to hammer down the rusty nail in the center of that face-up palm, into the wooden beam and— . . . And that's when it happened to me! . . . RIGHT! . . . Throughout the whole thing, I was pretty much out of it. I mean — oh — it was terrible and all, but I really couldn't side with any of them. You never saw his face, the one who was being nailed, I mean. And the carpenters— . . . well, I guess they were too skilled for me to really feel any kinship with. But I was there somewhere. I knew that. . . . And you know where? . . . You know what I was in that scene? . . . I was the bangs!

(The sound of "bang, bang, bang"  
begins again, held under)

I suddenly recognized the sound. Those bangs. My voice. Those bangs were my voice. My voice was those bangs. And you know how they do in movies. They turn up the sound. Bang, bang, bang! My voice banging away at that rotten nail into the face-up palm! I thought they'd all recognize me, those people sitting in the movie house. And the one thing I wanted more than ever at that moment was to be an invisible giant; go up to the screen with a giant knife; stab it at the top and hack down. Then stab it at the side and slash across. Then rip those flapping sections right out of that mouth, forever opened and black; and I looked down into it after slashing out that silver membrane, and got dizzy, dizzy. The invisible giant was about to fall into . . . nothing!  
DEBDEN!

(The "bangs" stop)

MORDEN

Debden? . . .Angel?

(He frantically looks around)

Debden! . . . Debden. . .

(Beat. Debden and Angel are gone.  
That fact sinks in.

(Pause)

Debden. You used to like it when I dipped my fingers in the ice cube tray and touched your burning scar.

(Pause)

Father Ongar. Ongar! I'll kill him!

(FATHER ONGAR materializes)

FATHER ONGAR

Before we start, I wonder if you'd mind assisting me in a little demonstration, Mord?

MORDEN

My name is Morden, Father Ongar.

ONGAR

Right. Now, if you'll just stand . . . there.

MORDEN

Well, I don't know. Will it ... ?

ONGAR

It won't hurt you. It's designed to hurt them. First — arms at your side. . . . Now, cross your right hand over the bend in your left arm. . . .Left arm! Left arm! Right to left. . . . That's correct. Now, raise your left arm from the elbow and cover your left eye with the palm of your left hand. . . .No no. Palm against your left eye. LeftLEFT! . . . Keep your left elbow against your left rib cage. . . .Now bend your knees a bit and look like you're in the midst of a cramp. Not bad. That look sort of comes natural to you, doesn't it? But not good enough. Tell you what: Think of something terrible — really terrible for you. C'mon. C'mon.

(“Bang,bangs” heard)

Good!

("Bangs" out)

ONGAR

(Continued)

You've lost it. What happened?

MORDEN

It was . . . too painful thinking of that.

ONGAR

Well. Then think of something else. Out loud. Say it out loud and that will make it easier.

(pause)

MORDEN

I'm ashamed to admit it, Father, but I've never gotten over being afraid of the dark. I mean — in the dark — I get the feeling. . .the floor will. . .end. And there'll be a long . . . drop. . . .So I have to stand frozen in one spot if I'm alone. Because if I move, I — may . . . Sometimes I get on my hands and knees. Inch along the floor to the lamp, feeling in front of me.

ONGAR

The abyss. You fear the abyss. I understand.

(He gestures and the lights change, dim; with a hotter spot on Ongar and a light that seems to fragment Morden's palm-to-eye, crouching position, freezing him in a stained-glass effect)

It's dark now, Morden, and you dasn't move else—

(imitates a falling scream)

heeeeeeeeeeeelp! . . . Now, while you stand there terrified, I'll practice my sermon.

—Don't move, I said!

(He gestures again and the electronic music begins)

My brethren, Michelangelo Buonarotti, that clever wop fairy, painted a vision of the last judgment in which some of humanity, surprised — but not too put out for, after all, they had it made — are allowing themselves to be hoisted up to a glorious heaven in the arms of muscular angels. While others, frightened as only those who glimpse an eternity of suffering can be frightened, are reluctantly being dragged down to the piss hole of

## ONGAR

(Continued)

hell. . . .To me, the center of that stormy scene is the figure called, "the condemned sinner."

(He points to Morden.

Morden's light intensifies)

In this tableau, we see a rendering of this unfortunate man. What are missing here, of course, are the demons and serpents gleefully dragging him down. There's one serpent — a real charmer — with its jaw clamped to the thigh, ready to chomp. You must imagine, too, the victim without his clothes. Now, why do I say that this figure is really the center of this turbulent scene? Because the rest is cheap theatrics: The apocalypse as seen by Cecil B. DeMille and Francis Ford Coppola. But in this one figure, the amazed, frightened, hurt, verge-of-hysteria look is something profoundly recognizable. What, I wonder?

(Pause);

Why, it's none other than our soul itself, my brethren — made concrete, peeking at its moment-before-conscious damnation. . . .Why does he peek? Some have amusingly suggested that he only has one eye, that there is just an empty socket there; — or just skin. Others have said that in place of eyeball or socket is a hideous boil that the artist, after he had painted it, was too squeamish to have us see; — or that some Pope forced the artist to hide. There are all sorts of interpretations, none of which makes sense to me. . . . Why does he peek? Weeell, he can't look because it's too horrible. So he covers one eye. But he must look because he can't believe it. For, certainly in that look is the pained, eternal, "why?" "Why?" the one-eye is saying to God, are you punishing me, when you've made the course compulsory?" . . .There's something else in that look, of course: The shock of recognition. The recognition that God is cruel and the New Testament a phony, devised by some pansy historians with no balls. Sugar-coating PR men who put us on, their descendants continuing to do so. The truth being that we are made in God's image; ergo—God is venal, spiteful, and craves revenge; must get even. As must we all. And there he stands,

(Meaning Morden)

victim of God's revenge; the God who made him and steered him to damnation.

(He gestures. Music out)

That's as far as I've gotten. I'll develop this theme of the need for getting even and build to the conclusion that God is really cruel and so, to understand and love Him, we must be cruel as well.

(Delicious thought drops in)

ONGAR

(Continued)

And I have a fancy notion to put a period on it all by substituting angel dust in lieu of incense. Yes. And from my censer dispenser, I'll dust my flock with the mystic mist and cause — you'll pardon the pun — a "mass" rush. Yes. Yes!. And the whole church will be a Chagall world. Oh yes!!! I'll put red, red velvet on all the walls, and everyone, in their Sunday froufrou, will float fapitzt in a blue-green haze. Watch it, Mord! You'll collide with my organ!

(Morden, who has slowly been collapsing,  
folds to the floor)

And then, when I've tuned up their nervous systems to a pitch that only dogs can hear; and when their selfishness — that is, their need for instant gratification has been developed to an exquisite degree, they'll be ready for my master plan: I'll reintroduce sacrifices into the ritual. Butterflies first. Chickens next. Followed by dogs and so on, up to . . .

(He looks hard and long at Morden)

All right, up, up. That's all for the time being. Now, why do you want to kill me? C'mon. I don't have all day. Why do you want to kill me?

MORDEN

Oh. . . .Because . . . huh? . . . Debden. I remember. You did something to Debden.

ONGAR

What?

MORDEN

I don't know.

ONGAR

I did what you don't know? That doesn't quite make sense, Mord.

MORDEN

My name is Morden.

ONGAR

You keep insisting on that. Far be it from me to tell you who you are. But I prefer Mord. For one thing you look more like a Mord. For another, Mord rhymes with Lord and that's nice.

MORDEN

I don't know what you did. But I know the results. Debden ran out.

ONGAR

In fact, Morden doesn't rhyme with anything much, does it? On the other hand, it is better than Merde, say. You wouldn't want to be called Mr. Merde, eh, Mr. Morden?

(He gestures. Electronic Music UP)

ONGAR

What's the matter?

MORDEN

That music--

ONGAR

Like it, eh? I'm using it next Sunday. The first electronic Mass. Hereabouts, anyway. The jazz, the modern dance, the happenings . . . all passè. I think this should goose the congregation, don't you? Although I really wonder. I sometimes think that even if Christ himself came down the aisles, frugging —wearing naught but a jock strap — or naught itself—Where are you going, Merde?

MORDEN

To look in there.

ONGAR

Don't.

MORDEN

Is Debden there?

ONGAR

No.

MORDEN

I don't believe you.

ONGAR

What? You don't believe your priest?

MORDEN

You're not my priest.

ONGAR

What? Speak up! I can't hear you, Mord.

MORDEN

YOU'RE NOT MY PRIEST!

ONGAR

Stop, I said! Don't go in there.

(Pause)

Not your priest? If you say so. Perhaps I'm not a priest at all. Perhaps I'm Beelzebub disguised as a caretaker who, at the moment, is disguised as a priest in order to — what? Be your tormentor? . . .Of course I'm your priest. If not me, who then? Father Uxbridge?

MORDEN

No. He used me.

ONGAR

Of course. He's desperately trying to find his place in today's clerical scheme of things. He won't make it, of course. Too much tradition in the blood. No natural instinct for the contemporary. However, it was shocking that vicious rumor started against old Ux. You know, the celibacy article. Oh, Morden, there's cruelty afoot all over the thin crust of God's earth. . . .So, he used you. Well, aren't you using me? For your inadequacies with Debden?

MORDEN

What?

ONGAR

Do you use God this way, Morden?

MORDEN

What are you talking about?

ONGAR

Do you blame him for your situation in life? I'll bet you do. "Free Will" Morden. You heard of free will, haven't you? That means you're a free agent; free to choose right from wrong, good from evil . Oh, it is quite true that it doesn't matter in the long run —

ONGAR

(Continued)

that your finger prints are frozen right from the start, no matter what. Still, one can still move one's fingers and point one's hand in a variety of directions. N'est ce pas, Mord?

MORDEN

I don't know what you're talking about. And don't call me Mord. I've had enough of your sermons and wise talk. I'm not here for that. And CAN'T YOU TURN THAT MUSIC OFF?

(Ongar gestures. Electronic music Out)

ONGAR

You have no sense of humor. And you certainly have no musical taste. And you're not going in there.

MORDEN

Get out of my way.

ONGAR

No.

MORDEN

I'm prepared to kill you.

(Ongar takes Morden's hands and places them around his, Ongar's, own throat. Pause)

MORDEN

I can't do it. Priests represent God himself. I was brought up to believe that.

ONGAR

Morden, Morden, listen to me. Forget your microscopic problems. Go on out and get yourself involved. Find yourself an issue. Something you can be against. It doesn't matter what. You don't even have to feel it deeply. Just find it. Finding it is all that matters. There's got to be something. . . . Political hypocrisy? . . . Crime in the streets? . . . Air pollution? . . . Low wages? Too high wages. Inadequate garbage collection? Inadequate garbage. . . . Ah — corruption and extortion. Graft, Morden Graft!. . . The rape of the land. Of the sea. Of the home of the brave? The traffic in the sky. High cost

ONGAR

(Continued)

of living. Higher cost of dying —of education — of truffles! I tell you there are fights, Morden. Enough to occupy a man for two lifetimes. Consider —

MORDEN

No. I don't want to consider...

ONGAR

The curse of canker sores.

MORDEN

. . . any of this

ONGAR

Cancer and hemorrhoids.

MORDEN

. . .anymore.

ONGAR

The rise of troilism — and sodomy; not to mention coprologia.

MORDEN

Will you stop!

ONGAR

The inundation of noise—

MORDEN

Please—

ONGAR

The inhalation of cigarettes. Pot. Bus exhaust.

MORDEN

Please . . . please leave me alone.

ONGAR

Emphysema, Morden. Muscular dystrophy, Morden.

MORDEN

I'm here for something else.

ONGAR

Cystic fibrosis, Morden. Mental psychosis, Morden.

MORDEN

Stop it—stop, stop, stopstopstopstop

(Continues saying "stopstopstop.")

ONGAR

(Overriding)

Materialistic dehumanization, Morden. Opulence. Influence. Affluence. Wife swapping, Morden. Not to mention the heartless practice of clerical chastity.

(Choir of angels sings one chord)

MORDEN

There! There! That's what you really are. Not a priest. You're the anti-Christ and a fornicator.

ONGAR

I am not a fornicator.

MORDEN

Oh, yes, that's what it's all about. All this. . .all you want is to

MORDEN

(Continued. lowers voice)

screw.

ONGAR

What? Speak up!

MORDEN

SCREW! It's disgusting!

(pause)

Morden  
(Continued)

All my life I've been miserable. All right. If my cross was to be miserable, I could at least look over at the Church and feel better when I saw my priest was carrying the cross of celibacy. For me. That's right. Being pure. Suffering. For me. FOR ME! . . . What'll I have if you can screw, too? You have already, for all I know. With my Debden.

ONGAR  
Others may have, Morden. But not I.

MORDEN  
Who? What others?

ONGAR  
Forget her, Morden. She was unfulfilled with you. She had this great sense of loss, Morden. Loss. Do you understand loss, Morden? It was agony for her, the whole thing. She hated to hurt you, but she couldn't stand you anymore. She gave herself to —

MORDEN  
—To who? She's scarred, crippled! Who would want her?

ONGAR  
There are those turned on by scars and limps. But that just disgusted her; filled her with self-loathing. She tried to kill herself. Did you know that?

MORDEN  
Yes.

ONGAR  
You would have had a corpse on your hands. She had to leave you. What was the alternative?

(Pause)

MORDEN  
I don't know, Father. But you see. . . through it all. . . my whole life . . . there's at least been someone with me. I said before I was afraid of the dark. But with Debden, you see. . . Debden used to hold me.

ONGAR

Nonono, Morden; you're trying to break my heart, aren't you; and if this goes on this way you might succeed. But God is cruel, so I must be cruel--and I will not have compassion be an obstacle to that cruelty; and the cruel truth is this: Debden can't and won't hold you anymore. There. That's the cruel long and short of it.

MORDEN

(Moving in on ONGAR)

Maybe if I talk to her.

ONGAR

(Side stepping MORDEN)

You already have.

MORDEN

(Moving in on Ongar)

I mean with someone else around.

ONGAR

(Side stepping Morden)

Me?

MORDEN

(Moving in on Ongar)

Yes.

ONGAR

(Side stepping MODERN)

Waste of time.

MORDEN

(Moving in on Ongar)

Maybe not.

ONGAR

(Side stepping Morden)

You have nothing to offer.

MORDEN

(Moving in on Ongar)

I was good to her.

ONGAR  
(Ditto)  
Goodness is irrelevant.

MORDEN  
(Ditto)  
I loved the child.

ONGAR  
(Ditto)  
Loving is irrelevant.

MORDEN  
(Ditto)  
I'll protect them.

ONGAR  
(Ditto)  
From whom?

MORDEN  
(Ditto)  
The rest.

ONGAR  
(Ditto)  
How?

MORDEN  
(Ditto)  
Don't you understand? I need them.

ONGAR  
(Ditto)  
Needing is irrelevant.

MORDEN  
(Ditto)  
And I know they need me.

ONGAR

—YOU ARE IRRELEVANT! . . . Now, Morden, it's time to be cruel. To make you see yourself as you really are. We are all nothing in the eyes of God. But there is an aristocracy of nothingness and *you* are the lowest caste of us all.

MORDEN

. . .No. . .I am not nothing. . .

ONGAR

. . .Well, *some* thing, perhaps. . . .A cavity in the foul mouth of the world. The irritation that begins the cancer. An aborted fetus. A condom floating in the river with the rest of the garbage. A discarded prepuce. A crab in God's pubic hair. —Yes, these are indeed something and you may be some or all of them, but I don't care. I'm putting a close to all this. Goodbye, Morden. You've served your purpose; helped me with my sermon. Now, if you'd care to continue demonstrating for me at some future date — fine. You'll have to be completely naked, of course. And at some point we'll get beyond just acting and you'll have to actually suffer. Maybe we'll do a Saint Sebastian. Have the congregation shoot arrows into you and — Morden! Where are you?

MORDEN

Here.

ONGAR

Morden?

MORDEN

Right here.

ONGAR

Why, he's left! Perhaps that's best.

MORDEN

I haven't left and you know it.

ONGAR

He might have kept trying to see what was in the other room.

MORDEN

I will see what's in there.

(From now until the end of the scene  
Morden tries to get past Ongar,  
who never lets him)

ONGAR

He was frightened of the abyss in the dark in his own room—

MORDEN

I know Debden is in there—

ONGAR

—Imagine his fright if he were to actually get into that room; see that abyss—

MORDEN

Let me pass. Let me pass. She'll listen if she sees me.

ONGAR

Well, to get back to work. I'll finish the grand sermon...

MORDEN

She's got to!

ONGAR

There's time, but not too much time.

MORDEN

(Shouting over Ongar's shoulders)

Debden—please come back! You know what it's like to be alone!

(The singer is heard singing  
Bach's "Seufzer, Tranen, Kummer, Not,")

ONGAR

(Pummeling Morden, who sinks  
to his knees)

Damn! Damn! Damn! They're rehearsing that damned Bach. All right. If I can't annihilate Bach yet, I can at least drown him out!

(He gestures. Electronic music comes up  
very loud for a short while. Ongar turns and  
disappears. Electronic music stops.  
The singer continues singing as a low hum —  
which will crescendo — can now be heard.

The elevator and Mrs. Bethnal-Green  
begin to materialize in)

MORDEN

Alone.

(Listens)

Wait ... wait ... Oh, yes...

(He runs to the elevator and resumes his position  
holding down trap to keep Father Ongar from climbing  
down. Mrs. Bethnal-Green is weaker than ever)

Hear that hum, Father Ongar?

ONGAR

I'm coming down, Morden.

MRS. BETHNAL-GREEN

Yes. help! help!

MORDEN

That's the motor revving up, Father Ongar. Maybe it's going to start. And you know what that means. That means it may go up and and crush us against the roof. Or it may fall and keep you hanging from the cable.

ONGAR

I'm coming down, Morden!

MORDEN

Then again, if that hum hits a certain pitch, a certain loud, high pitch that I'm familiar with,

(hum begins to ascend the  
scale and crescendo)

then it may start going crazy. Start fast. Stop suddenly. Then start, up, up. The last time it happened, I pushed the stop button and it stopped. But if I let it go ...

ONGAR

All right, Morden--!

MORDEN

It's "Mord," Father! Remember? Rhymes with Lord!

ONGAR

I'm at the trap door! Please let go!

MORDEN

Ooooooooooooooh, it's approaching that pitch all right! God, the piper! Sounds like a violin! Hear it?

(The sound does, in fact, become  
a violin playing a sustained high note.  
Morden hums the note)

MORDEN

Lovely. I wish I could identify it. I have a good ear, I always did. I could have been a tuner, I'll bet; but they never gave me lessons.

ONGAR

Morden!

MORDEN

There it is. There's the pitch. Now I'll smash on right through the roof!

(He sings the pitch as loud as he can.

A loud snapping sound and a twang. Morden is thrown against the rear wall and Mrs. Bethnal-Green rolls along the floor against the wall. Father Ongar falls into the elevator. They're all thrown against the other all. Mrs. Bethnal-Green screams)

ONGAR

The stop button--!

(He lunges for it)

MORDEN

No!

(He tries to stop Father Ongar from reaching the stop button. They're thrown against another wall. Then Morden moves in front, blocking the buttons)

## ONGAR

Yes!

(Ongar flings himself toward Morden, yanks him aside, and pushes a button. The sound of screeching and grinding and little explosions. The three in the elevator move and shake as if the! elevator were shuddering.

The lights go out briefly and come up fast.

Mrs. Bethnal-Green is moaning.  
Father Ongar is standing over Morden)

## MORDEN

(Coming around very slowly)

Did. . . I . . . smash . . . through?

The singer finishes singing  
as the lights fade out)