

# Lock and Dam

by Dennis Fisher

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## **CAST**

THOMPSON                                      late forties                                      male

Grizzled WWII navy veteran, boat owner, and long time river rat. Blowhard. Loudmouth. Insecure. Troubled.

JODY    twenties    male

Thompson's deck hand. Upbeat. Unschooled. Romantic.

KHARON    mid thirties    female

Thompson's ex wife. Smart. Opportunistic. Mystical. A reader.

## **LIST OF SCENES**

Scene 1- The leading cause of death

Scene 2 - Kharon waves the flag

Scene 3 - The Onan is christened

Scene 4 - Heron's have the answer

Scene 5 - It tastes like gold

Scene 6 - The carnival doctor

Scene 7 - Listen

Scene 8 - A boat that can go any direction

Scene 9 - Lock and dam

Scene 10 - His brain got soft

Scene 11 - To forgive is divine

Scene 12 - That's why they call it Faith

Scene 13 - The sound of the messenger

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". -  
Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews (11.1)

"When we have stopped along the melancholy shore of Acheron, then all  
these matters will be plain to you." - Dante's Inferno (3.76)

"Tut, tut, child!" said the Duchess. "Everything's got a moral, if only you can find  
it." - Alice in Wonderland

## SCENE ONE.

Summer 1976. A dock on quiet Illinois River waterfront. Early morning. A rust colored boat is tied to the dock. It has a roof and open sides and a small rear deck. Shelves like you would see in a shop line inside of the compact cabin. Boat has American flag on bow. Two lawn chairs are on dock next to boat with an improvised sun shade and table. THOMPSON works on fittings on a large wooden box on the dock beside the boat. JODY approaches, whistling.

THOMPSON

(Fighting to suppress a smile) Hey Jody. Do you know what the leadin' cause of death is?

JODY

Huh?

THOMPSON

Birth. (he chuckles)

JODY

Birth what?

THOMPSON

The leadin' cause of death is birth.

JODY

I thought it was heart attacks.

THOMPSON

I'm makin' a joke dumb ass. I heard it at the bar.

JODY

I don't get it.

THOMPSON

It's ironic for God's sake. It's commentary.

JODY

If you say so Thompson. Commentary on what?

THOMPSON

On the absurdity of life fuck head. Never mind.

JODY

Death *does* have a funny side.

THOMPSON

(Looks quizzically at JODY) OK. I'll bite, Mr. Philosopher.

JODY

I mean, well, we're born, and a lot of people spend their whole live's sufferin', then they die. That's kind of funny.

THOMPSON

Wow. Hilarious Jody. You're funny. Like slammin' your dick in a car door funny. You're late. Where the hell have you been?

JODY

Sorry boss. I was in Springfield today at the disability office and I had to wait forever, then I stopped for some lottery tickets on the way over.

THOMPSON

What were you doing at a disability office?

JODY

I'm trying to get on disability.

THOMPSON

I see. You *are* funny. Some people are born, and they *pretend* they're sufferin' so they can get on disability. That's a fucked up kind of funny don't you think?

JODY

(big grin) I think I'm makin' progress. I gave 'em some papers I got from a doctor. I'm so close I can taste it.

THOMPSON

And what's a lie that big taste like?

JODY

Like gold.

THOMPSON

And how are you gonna work for me if you're on disability?

JODY

As long as you keep payin' me in cash there won't be no way they can tell I'm workin' for you.

THOMPSON

Listen, I don't want to know any more about this. I got enough problems without the state crawlin' up my ass for payin' a guy on disability to work.

JODY

It's the greatest scam in the world. Gettin' paid to not work. I need money.

THOMPSON

That's it. I don't want to know no more. Give me a hand with the engine cover will ya?

They lift the large box and set it on rear of boat -  
THOMPSON locks it down.

THOMPSON

You're pretty handy for a guy with 100% disability.

JODY

(laughs) It comes and goes boss. It comes and goes.

THOMPSON

Sure. You wouldn't last a day on the barges you big pussy.

JODY

But you quit the barges. Does that make you a pussy?

THOMPSON

(Glares at JODY) Kharon wanted me to. She didn't like me bein' gone for a month at a time.

JODY

Come on, I'm just messin' with ya.

THOMPSON

It wasn't my brightest day when I hired a goofball like you.

Deep, mournful sound of foghorn comes from the river.

THOMPSON

Damn. Here comes a tow. Get your ass on the boat. Now! Those deckhands haven't been off the barge in a month and they got jism backed up to their adenoids. I wanna retire someday, goddammit. Get the ropes! We got junk food and titty magazines to sell!

JODY hops aboard boat and starts the motor, which quickly roars to life. THOMPSON releases ropes securing boat to dock. THOMPSON shouts over motor.

THOMPSON

I'll be back at 8 in the mornin' for my shift! And I don't wanna see that damn woman!

THOMPSON Crosses himself. JODY gives 3 quick blasts on his foghorn, swings the wheel.

THOMPSON

Geronimo!

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE TWO.

At dock on Illinois River waterfront. Early morning. Flag is missing from bow of boat. THOMPSON walks from offstage along dock to boat. Looks at bow of boat and cocks his head.

THOMPSON

Goddammit! (Climbs on bow of boat and and looks around bow in water)  
Sonofabitch!

JODY sticks head out of cabin, rubbing his eyes.

JODY

Hey. What's with all the noise?

THOMPSON

Some asshole stole my bicentennial flag. What kind of rat bastard would steal a goddamn American flag?!

JODY

Calm down. I got it. It's in the cabin.

THOMPSON

Why the fuck would you put it in the cabin you imbecile? Get it back up here where it belongs.

KHARON

(Voice from cabin) I'm usin' it as wrap Thompson. It's chilly in here.

THOMPSON

(his eyes get big) Kharon! No. No. No.

KHARON

Do you want me to bring it out for you? Don't look though. It don't cover much.

THOMPSON

Don't come out of there until you're decent.

KHARON

How come? You've seen me naked more than once.

THOMPSON

(to JODY) You fuckin' idiot.

JODY

Sorry man. It just happened.

THOMPSON

Nothin' just happens with her. She's about 5 moves ahead of you, you doomed bastard.

JODY

I don't think so.

KHARON comes into view, wearing nothing but a long man's t-shirt and a flag draped around her shoulders. She climbs out of boat on to deck, holding shoes and jeans in one hand. She removes flag from her shoulders and hands it to THOMPSON.

KHARON

This what you're lookin' for Tommy? Jody and I decided to have a bicentennial celebration last night. Well it was bi somethin'. A little fantasy action spices life up don't it Jody? (JODY smiles)

THOMPSON

(To JODY) So you can't get a boner without defilin' an American flag?

JODY

We was just havin' fun.

KHARON kisses JODY on the cheek.

KHARON

I was waving the flag and leadin' the charge (giggles).

THOMPSON

How can you people use an American flag like that? It's the bicentennial! It's disgustin'.

KHARON puts on jeans as she talks.

KHARON

If you weren't such an ass it could've been you wavin' the flag last night Tommy. And I'm disgustin'? You make money sellin' dirty magazines to deckhands, then you read the bible all day. That ain't just disgustin', that's creepy.

THOMPSON

The bible has all life's answers. When I reach the end I want salvation. I'm studyin' salvation. The end is coming. And you wanted me to buy the boat and get off the barge so I wouldn't be gone all the time.

KHARON

No, you mainly bought the boat to get off the barge because you freaked out seein' a man get the top of his head cut off, you big pussy. And you sure look like a guy with all the answers (laughs).

THOMPSON

I gotta hear this shit from my deckhand *and* my ex-wife? This is bullshit. You wanted me to buy the boat. It's named after you for god's sake. Now you're screwin' a guy who could be your baby brother while you're wrapped in an American flag. You can't make this shit up. You were easier to get along with when you were guzzlin' cough syrup. You're just doin' this to torment me. I get it.

KHARON

And we looked at a bunch of your dirty magazines while we were doin' it, didn't we Jody? (JODY looks away from THOMPSON)

THOMPSON

You've got to be shittin' me. How can we sell magazines that are all wrinkled up and covered in crap? You gotta pay for any I can't sell.

KHARON begins to walk away from dock.

KHARON

Send me a bill. See you tonight Jody. I'll bring you your lottery tickets.

She salutes the flag.

KHARON

God bless America (laughs).

The men watch her strut away.

THOMPSON

Over three billion women in the world to choose from and you end up screwin' my ex-wife on the boat I named after her. Hell of an accomplishment Jody, hell of an accomplishment.

JODY

I'm sorry as shit Thompson. I told her you don't want her comin' around no more but she stopped by the dock between runs anyway, and we started talkin', and one thing led to another.

THOMPSON

Three billion *men* in the world and she chooses you to screw? She's gotta be fuckin' with me. The only thing I haven't dealt with since she came out of the mist is frogs falling out of the sky. Now this. You're a twenty five year old without a pot to piss in, a shit payin' job, just barely a high school graduate whose entire ambition in life is to scam his way on to a state disability pension, provided he don't win the lottery first. (laughs) Sure, she would choose you out of those three billion guys wouldn't she Jody?

JODY

Well she chose you once.

THOMPSON

I was makin' good money on the barge.

JODY

But you quit.

THOMPSON

She said we should own our own boat. She had a thing about going down through the locks. Who can understand a woman? I can promise you that you ain't the only goof she's screwin' buddy.

JODY

No. She likes me. She says I make her laugh. She reads me poetry. We just seem to click, you know what I mean? She understands me, I understand her.

THOMPSON

She's doin' the poetry thing to ya huh? I know that one. Worked pretty good reelin' me in too. She chooses 'em for effect.

JODY

No. She writes 'em just for me.

THOMPSON

Bullshit. Did you just fall off the goddamn turnip truck? Listen. Men are all fucked up and crazy in the same ways. They're easy to understand. Women's craziness is like snowflakes - each and every woman is one of a kind fuckin' nutty. Thinkin' you understand a woman is the first goddamn step to destruction. Remember this shit head - you can take naps in the cabin on the night shift but it ain't a friggin' hotel. From eight at night until eight in the mornin' your focus is sellin' shavin' cream and candy bars and fuck magazines to barges that pass by on the river. Your focus ain't gonna be on screwin' any women, much less my nutty ex wife. Got it?

JODY

Yes.

THOMPSON

She didn't smoke in there did she?

JODY

Uhh.

THOMPSON

Goddamn. Now the magazines and everything else in there will stink of tobacco. You think deckhands want their titty magazines to smell like cheap fuckin' tobacco! Shit!

THOMPSON smells the flag which he still holds in hand.

THOMPSON

The flag smells like cigarettes. Goddamn. That just ain't right.

JODY

I'll spray some of that deodorizer the deckhands buy to cover up pot smell in their cabins.

THOMPSON

(As he puts flag back on front of bow) Only if you pay for it first. Now get me a can of paint and a brush out of the locker. Lucky for you I can't blame ya. Dick gets hard, brain gets soft. Right now you got the softest brain in Cass County. Gimme the brush. I should of done this long ago.

JODY grabs paint can and brush and gives it to THOMPSON.

THOMPSON

Is this the only color we got?

JODY

That and black.

THOMPSON

Get the black too.

He opens can, dips in brush and begins to paint over first four letters of name KHARON on bow of boat.

JODY

I heard somewhere it's bad luck to change the name of a boat.

THOMPSON

Like my luck could get any worse. (Keeps painting) Now get the hell out of here before I change my mind and kick your ass.

JODY walks away, shaking his head, as  
THOMPSON begins to paint new letters while  
muttering to himself.

Brain gets soft. Goddamn.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE THREE.

Eight in the evening. Boat tied to dock. The K-H-A-R in KHARON is painted over. In black the letters A-N have been added behind O-N. The ONAN. THOMPSON is sitting in lawn chair reading a book. JODY approaches for his night shift.

JODY

I'm really sorry about this mornin' Thompson.

THOMPSON

I can't tell you what to do with your life but I can tell you not to use my boat as a stabbin' cabin.

JODY

Thanks for not firin' me.

THOMPSON

I need you to run the boat at night. I have a basic life rule that I never screw myself because somebody else is an asshole.

JODY

(laughs) That's good. What part are you readin' this time?

THOMPSON

Any part that has people disobeyin' God. It inspires me. I try my damndest to obey God. I get comfort out of this book. It's what I use to make sense of things. Like my friend and employee screwin' my ex wife.

JODY

OK. Uh. (points at new name) Well now that the boat ain't named after Kharon no more, just who is it named after?

THOMPSON

He was a man that spoke to God.

JODY

That's interestin'.

THOMPSON

And he didn't follow God's directions so God killed him. That's how the world works. You don't pay attention, you get crushed.

JODY

(cringing) That's kind of a grim name for a boat then, don't you think? Dang. Uh, what did he disobey?

THOMPSON

Don't matter. People get the bible wrong. All those rules come from man. Rules don't mean nothin'. When God speaks directly to people they gotta listen. You don't listen, God smites you. Dead. No nonsense, like the mafia. With this name on the boat I'll be reminded every day to listen for God. God forgives what you say and do. He don't forgive disobedience.

JODY

Wow. That's some heavy stuff boss.

THOMPSON

Listen. Here's heavy. Try finding your dad after he hung himself. He messed up. It twisted his head off his body. Try cleaning up your shipmates brains after a kamikazee tore their heads off. Try findin' your best buddy with his head partly missin' from a snapped cable.

JODY

(softly) My dad.

THOMPSON

Yeh. Your dad. I'll never forgot how his brains just spilled on the deck.

JODY

Boss. Stop. I ain't ready for that.

THOMPSON

I'm a fuckin' mess Jody. I've seen awful shit. The only way to make sense of God's plan for me is to study this book to find an explanation. The answer is in here somewhere.

JODY

I'm not so sure about that boss.

THOMPSON

That's why you're a dumb ass. There's only one answer and it's in this book. You might want to start thinkin' about your soul instead of your dick. The answer is here! (he pounds the bible.)

JODY

Ok. Ok. Don't get excited. You goin' to the carnival?

THOMPSON

Why the hell would I go to the carnival?

JODY

I don't know. It's the bicentennial. It's the only time they're ever gonna have fireworks every night. Tonight they're gonna have an Elvis impersonator.

THOMPSON

Why would you pay to see a fake Elvis when the real Elvis is still alive?

JODY

The real Elvis ain't comin' to this town. He's in Hollywood. Or Memphis. Hey. I'm gonna buy some chances on the car the Lion's Club is rafflin' You want one?

THOMPSON

What kind of car is it?

JODY

A Chevy Chevette.

THOMPSON

That's the only car on the road that repels pussy. (laughs)

JODY

Come on. Kharon bought some chances.

THOMPSON

Kharon's thing is easy money. Or just bein' easy.

JODY

(upset) Boss. Stop talkin' bad about Kharon. She's my girl now.

THOMPSON

Your girl is gonna pilot you to hell.

JODY gets in THOMPSON'S face. Angry. Clinches fists. Speaks with purpose.

JODY

You're my boss and my friend. Kid me all you want. But you say something like that again about Kharon and I will knock you on your ass.

THOMPSON

Aww. What time's that Elvis impersonator?

Mournful sound of barge foghorn. THOMPSON motions to JODY. JODY unties lines holding boat to dock, jumps on boat, blasts horn three times, fires engine and swings wheel.

THOMPSON

(Softly, to himself) Geronimo.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE FOUR.

Eight in the morning at dock. THOMPSON in chair reading bible. Ropes he has been splicing litter the dock. JODY is working on boat motor. We hear the faint sound of herons in distance.

THOMPSON

Hey. Stop for a second. (Looks around) Man, sound carries on the river. Look over there. (JODY looks up as THOMPSON points off in distance) White herons. One of the prettiest birds on the river. What I'd give to be a heron.

JODY

That'd be boring.

THOMPSON

Goddamn you're an idiot.

JODY

They're just birds. They fly, they eat, they screw.

THOMPSON

Exactly Einstein. They got it made. No bills, no creditors, no imbecile employees. Fly, eat, fuck. No thinkin'. Simple. Stress fuckin' free.

JODY

They can't read the bible.

THOMPSON

(Looks at JODY and shakes his head) I'll be damned. (He laughs) You got a point there. They can't know the answer.

JODY

You got the answer yet?

THOMPSON

Nope. But it's comin'. I'll get it. It's in this book. The answer to everything. Those heron's ain't gonna get it. For once you're right.

JODY

Or maybe they already got it. Maybe not knowin' you don't know nothin' is the answer.

THOMPSON

Then *you* got the answer don't you, you knucklehead?

JODY

Maybe I do.

THOMPSON

Unlikely. You'd be a damn site better off if you tried readin' the Good News instead of chasin' tail you goofball. I get comfort out of this book. It's what I use to make sense of things. Like my best friend and employee screwin' my ex wife on the boat I named after her.

JODY

Let go of it boss. I'm sorry.

THOMPSON

Aw, I can't hold it against ya. Your brain just got soft. I been there myself. Hey. Look at that big log just on the other side of the herons, out in the channel.

JODY

Damn. That's a big one. Lot's of dead fall in the river since that last storm.

THOMPSON

Keep an eye out on your shift. The last thing we want is to hit one of those logs and tear a hole in the ONAN.

JODY

That's a creepy name, boss. I told you I heard it's bad luck to change the name of a boat. Why don't you change it back to the KHARON?

THOMPSON

You'd like that wouldn't you you nitwit? She's got your nuts in a vise already, you pitiful bastard. (JODY doesn't respond. He is looking down into water near bow of boat in a spot blocked from audiences view) Hey. I just insulted the piss out of your new girlfriend. (He laughs) You not gonna defend her, you pussy? (JODY jumps down to dock and peers into water)

JODY

Oh no.

THOMPSON

What?

JODY

(He looks away from the water) Oh no.

THOMPSON

Oh no what for fuck's sake?

JODY

There's somebody in the water.

THOMPSON jumps up and looks into the water, staggers backwards.

THOMPSON

Oh god. Oh shit.

JODY

Should we get him out?

THOMPSON looks down again and then averts his gaze.

THOMPSON

That ain't a him. That's a *it*. Dead. I don't need to see this shit again. Not again god dammit!

THOMPSON and JODY stand next to each other staring, then both look away.

JODY

We gotta get him out don't we?

THOMPSON

I don't think so.

JODY

What's wrong with the top of his head? Is that brains?

THOMPSON

What the hell do you think is wrong with it? The crown of his head ain't there. Of course it's brains! He probably got hit with a snapped cable on a tow. How did we not hear about a barge losin' somebody? They gotta be lookin' for him don't they?

JODY

How can a cable take a chunk of skull off?

THOMPSON

You dumb ass. You watch barges everyday. Your own dad got killed by a cable. Not now. I gotta see this shit again? As if I ain't screwed up enough.

JODY

How weird is it that his eyes and his mouth are open?

THOMPSON

(THOMPSON shivers) Jesus.

JODY Leans down closer in the gap between the boat and dock.

JODY

Damn.

THOMPSON

(Trying to avoid looking at body) Damn what?

JODY

There's somethin' in his mouth.

THOMPSON looks down.

THOMPSON

You're fuckin' nuts. Shit. You're right. What's that?

JODY reaches toward body.

THOMPSON

You ain't gonna touch it are you? Stop.

JODY

Hold on.

JODY reaches down as THOMPSON cringes. He seems to take a moment to fish through the dead man's mouth.

THOMPSON

Goddamn man, what are you doin'?

JODY stands and holds up his find, triumphant.

JODY

Wow. It's a gold coin.

THOMPSON

Put it back in his mouth.

JODY

No way. I'm keepin' it.

THOMPSON

Put it back in his goddamn mouth!

JODY

If you want it back you're gonna have to do it. I ain't touchin' him again.

THOMPSON

(Frantic) I'll be damned if I'm touchin' him. Why was that in his mouth? Who is this guy? Hey - go wash your hands.

JODY

I'm goin' to get the cops. They'll know what to do.

JODY pockets the coin and dashes down the dock offstage. THOMPSON is incredulous as he watches.

THOMPSON

(Shouts after Jody) You gonna tell 'em about the coin? Go wash your hands!

THOMPSON picks up bible, looks at the sky.

THOMPSON

What are you tellin' me? What the hell are you tellin' me?!

Shakes his fist at the sky.

THOMPSON

Findin' bodies with fucked up heads? That's the plan for me? I'm listenin' God. I will obey you. I'm listenin' but I got no idea what you're sayin'.

Sound of foghorn - he looks upriver. We hear the sound of herons in distance.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE FIVE

Early morning. Fog blankets the dock.  
THOMPSON sits in chair frantically turning pages in the bible. JODY is in other chair working with an awl, trying to drill a hole through the gold coin.

JODY

Dang it. I thought gold was soft. It's a bear gettin' a hole in this thing. So what are you lookin' for in that book today boss?

THOMPSON

(speaks with a strained voice) I'm trying to find something about people finding dead bodies. There has to be a message, some meanin'. I keep runnin' across dead bodies. God's tryin' to tell me somethin'. I gotta figure it out.

JODY

We just run across one dead body.

THOMPSON

Goddamn you got the brain of a tree stump. My dad. My war buddies. Your own dad, and now that guy yesterday. I keep dealing with dead bodies with messed up heads. Who the fuck was that guy?

JODY punches hole through the coin.

JODY

Hell yes!

THOMPSON

What are you doin'?

JODY

I'm making a necklace.

JODY threads chain through hole in coin and holds it up as THOMPSON watches, amazed.

THOMPSON

You are not putting a coin from a dead man's mouth around your neck.

JODY

The heck I ain't. It'll be good luck.

THOMPSON

You're fuckin' with me, right?

JODY

No boss. This is gold. It's worth a lot of money. It's like having a savings plan around your neck.

THOMPSON

(Rolls his eyes) Did it occur to you that drilling a hole in the coin might decrease it's value?

JODY

(Pauses) Shoot. Didn't think of that.

THOMPSON

Did it occur to you that it didn't seem to bring much luck to the guy who you got it from?

JODY

Uhh.

THOMPSON

I seem to recall the last guy with that coin had the top of his head lopped off. What kind of luck would we call losing the top of your head? Good luck? Although in your case that might be an improvement you moron.

JODY

Kharon told me it would be good luck.

THOMPSON

Aha. Taking advice from Kharon. There's a self improvement plan. For a fuckin' idiot!

JODY

I told you to not say bad stuff about Kharon. We're fallin' in . . . you know.

THOMPSON

I'm gonna find the answer to life's meaning in this book, I know it. It's the word of God. But I'll guarantee you this. I ain't gonna find the answer for why you're such a dumb fuck. Even God ain't that smart. She's gonna screw you Jody. And I don't mean literally, I mean figuratively.

JODY

How do you always know big words like that?

THOMPSON

There's a whole lotta time for readin' on the river. You should try it.

JODY

Are you insultin' Kharon?

THOMPSON

Get a dictionary.

JODY

You don't know her.

THOMPSON

Don't know her! I was married to her. I know what her taint smells like!

JODY

(gets in THOMPSON'S face. Through gritted teeth) You don't know her. Don't talk bad about Kharon. You had your chance. She's mine now.

THOMPSON

No. You're hers. Don't forget that.

JODY puts on necklace, glares at THOMPSON.

JODY

Kharon's friend from the carnival loaned her a truck to move some stuff and now we're gonna help at the carnival runnin' the bumper cars. I'm gettin paid for it. Kharon loves me. She's helpin' me. So there.

JODY walks away.

THOMPSON

I'm sorry kid. I told you, I'm a mess. I just worry about you.

JODY

(looks back) I worry about you. You're too dang mad all the time boss. It's a crap way to go through life. Try readin' parts of that book that are about love and forgivin' instead of God killin' people why don't ya. Aw, I'll be back in time for my shift.

JODY steps on a board on dock, the board swings up like stepping on a rake. The board hits him in crotch. He grunts in pain.

JODY

Ooof.

THOMPSON

(concerned) You OK?

JODY

(In obvious pain) Fix that dang thing will ya?

JODY walks gingerly into fog.

THOMPSON

See you tonight. You'll be back won't you?.

THOMPSON thinks for a moment, turns pages in bible and continues reading.

THOMPSON

I just worry.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE SIX

Evening. THOMPSON on dock, paces in front of boat, looking at watch. KHARON and JODY approach. JODY with cane, foot wrapped in elastic bandage. KHARON helps him walk.

THOMPSON

What the hell is this? You're way goddamn late.

JODY

Sorry boss. I was helpin' with the bumper cars at the carnival, gettin' kids out of their seats and one little kid went nuts and hit me when I wasn't lookin'

THOMPSON

Is it broken?

JODY

I don't think so. The carnival doctor said it ain't.

THOMPSON

The carnival doctor? I'm sure he graduated at the top of his class. If a carnival doctor says you're OK you're gonna live to be a hundred.

KHARON

She. The carnival doctor is a she. I think. Give Jody a break Thompson, he was helpin' out my cousin. If you paid him more he wouldn't have to work other places you cheap ass.

THOMPSON

(Sarcastically) Is this doctor a he or a she?

KHARON

Does it matter?

THOMPSON

Accordin' to the bible it does. How can you not know if someone is a he or a she? Weird. And ungodly. (looks to Jody) Can you work?

JODY

Of course. I'm fine. (he stumbles)

THOMPSON

Kharon, why don't you move along. You've done enough good for the day, thank you.

KHARON

I tried doing good for years. It didn't work out.

THOMPSON

Huh?

KHARON

I'm trying a different approach Thompson. I didn't think big enough when I was married to you. I'm thinkin' big now. (turns to JODY) I'll see you later Jody. I'm gonna go see a lawyer about that death trap at the carnival. It might be financially beneficial.

JODY

You're the best.

KHARON

I read in a magazine at the library that rich people look at heartache and don't see heartache, they see opportunity. I liked the sound of that. The rich don't even see death as a barrier to wealth. Their thinkin' about money goes beyond this life. That's a way of lookin' at the journey I can benefit from. You want me to bring you any lottery tickets Jody?

JODY

That would be so sweet of you honey chiclet.

THOMPSON raises eyebrow - KHARON struts away.

THOMPSON

Honey chiclet?

JODY

So?

THOMPSON

What the fuck is a honey chiclet?

JODY

It's just a pet name.

THOMPSON

Yeh, I get it. But what is a honey chiclet?

JODY

I don't know. It just sounded good.

THOMPSON

There is no such thing as a honey chiclet. Chiclet is peppermint gum. There is no honey gum.

JODY

It don't matter boss. She's sweet to me.

THOMPSON

No. She's torturing me. (pauses) I've made an important decision tonight.

JODY

What's that?

THOMPSON

We still ain't heard who the guy was with the top of his head lopped off. Somebody somewhere should be reported missin'. It's like he ain't of this earth.

JODY

Ok.

THOMPSON

I was readin' the bible. I've been investigatin' the Book of Revelations. I shoulda done that long ago. It's where the action is. I was readin' and it came to me.

JODY

What came to you?

THOMPSON

I've been waiting for God to send me a message, to let me know what the point of all this is. I figured I'd hear a voice, like in the movies.

JODY

Did you hear a voice?

THOMPSON

Nope. But I made a mistake. I realize now that God don't have to speak English. He probably speaks some other language, an old one. But he don't need to talk at all. God works with symbols. He sends signs. That guy that floated up to the boat with a goddamn coin in his mouth was a sign.

JODY

A sign for what?

THOMPSON

A sign that money won't keep you alive.

JODY

Money kind of keeps you alive.

THOMPSON

Bullshit.

JODY

You got to have money.

THOMPSON

I'm not gonna sell titty magazines anymore.

JODY

Hold on boss. That's where almost all our money comes from. The mark up on those things is crazy.

THOMPSON

I'm gonna have a bonfire. Tonight.

JODY

I don't know boss. I need the money. I'm datin' Kharon now.

THOMPSON

I been kiddin' myself for too long sellin' that shit. I put money ahead of righteousness. 144,000 people get into heaven. It's right there in Revelations Jody. I want to be one of 'em. The train's comin'. I ain't gonna be able to get on board if I'm selling jack off magazines. Let's take 'em out and set 'em on the river bank and let God know we heard his message.

JODY

Boss I didn't hear a message. The message I'm hearin' now is that I'm gonna be broke.

THOMPSON

It's my boat and we're gonna burn the magazines.

JODY

How are we gonna make any money?

THOMPSON

God will provide.

JODY

Aw boss, come on.

Sound of barge foghorn. JODY clumsily goes to boat, starts to untie lines holding boat to dock.

THOMPSON

Stop. We're gonna miss this one. We gotta get rid of the magazines first.

JODY

Boss, I never let on about your views on the bible but this can't happen. Your talkin' crazy. God ain't tellin' you how to make a livin'. Please boss, we'll go broke. Please.

THOMPSON

Get away from the lines and help me get the magazines to the river bank. We're gonna have a bonfire. And don't get any ideas. Now that your foot is broke I can kick your ass. God has spoken.

JODY

No. You're nuts boss.

THOMPSON

I'm gonna let that pass. If you won't help me I'll do it myself. If you don't listen to God you end up like the guy in the river.

THOMPSON starts to unload magazines. JODY grimaces and joins in, unsteady on his feet. They build a pile at edge of stage.

JODY

I hope God tells you what we're gonna sell to make up the difference.

THOMPSON

I got an idea what we're gonna sell, but first I'm going to the library to make copies of what the bible says about God punishing Onan. We're gonna hand them out with every purchase by the deckhands. We're gonna spread the word to listen to God.

JODY

I gotta talk to Kharon. She's so smart. She'll know what to do to keep making money.

THOMPSON

Sure. Kharon has all the answers. For a pussy whipped idiot like you.

JODY screams and lunges at THOMPSON, who side steps him and JODY falls to ground. Jody gets up holding his hand.

JODY

Aww. No. I think I broke my hand.

THOMPSON

That coin has been really good luck for you hasn't it Jody?

JODY hobbles away using cane and holding hand up.

JODY

(In pain) I'll be back later. I gotta to think.

## THOMPSON

Don't think Jody. Listen. God don't care about thinkin'. You gotta take better care of yourself boy. You gotta listen. (whispers) Don't think. Listen. It's time to create an inferno.

THOMPSON continues piling up dirty magazines as JODY stumbles away. THOMPSON gets a gas can from boat and pours it on magazines. Pulls out some matches, lights a match, and as he throws it on to the pile of magazines, lights brightly flash, then go black.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE SEVEN

Next evening. JODY and KHARON walk onto dock to a smoldering pile of magazines, the American flag is replaced by a white flag with the word LISTEN written on it. Ropes are lying around the dock, spiraled or lying loose. A stack of papers with bible quotations are on make shift table next to lawn chairs. JODY's arm is in a sling, his foot in a walking cast, he uses a cane. He has a patch over one eye.

JODY

Damn. What's he up to?

KHARON

It would take a team of scientists to figure that out.

JODY

I guess so.

KHARON

Jody, I been thinkin'.

JODY

About what?

KHARON

I spent my life tryin' to hook up with a man to take care of me. I think my thinkin' has been faulty.

JODY

I'll take care of you honey chiclet.

KHARON

Jody, you're sweet, but you've make less than minimum wage sellin' dirty magazines in a shitty little town. That pile of ashes smolderin' over there is your life's equity. In the cold light of day, yours ain't the best profile I've ever run across.

It occurs to me I need an entirely new game plan for my life or at least a guy with some prospects. You spend more time babyin' Thompson than makin' money.

JODY

Kharon, sometimes you pull me in and sometimes you push me away. It's confusin' honey chiclet. I gotta help Thompson's cause he's really messed up. Finding that dead body really worked him over bad. Did you know he found his dad after he hung himself?

KHARON

His dad's head popped off it's neck. He told me when we were married. A thousand times.

JODY

He promised my dad he'd look after me if anything happened to him. Which did.

KHARON

You waste too much time lookin' after your idiot caretaker. You should be in charge here.

THOMPSON climbs out of boat cabin and startles KHARON and JODY.

THOMPSON

What the hell are you doing here?

KHARON

(composing herself) Shit Thompson. I'm gonna help Jody go out to the barges. He's had a tough couple of days.

THOMPSON

Like hell you are. (Looks at JODY) What happened to your eye?

JODY

Aww, we was playin' that dart game at the carnival and I stumbled in front of the Kharon's throw. The carnival doctor said it's just a hematoma. She says I'll probably get my sight back. In a month or two.

KHARON

He's gonna be fine.

THOMPSON

I thought I was a mess. Fuckin' carnival doctor. You figured out if the doctor is a he or a she yet? You people are a goddamn freak show. Does the carnival have a freak show you can work in?

KHARON

Screw you.

JODY

Come on boss. (Points to flag on bow) What happened to your bicentennial flag? You love that flag.

THOMPSON

That's it. I painted it white and now I'm usin' it for the glory of God. I'm tellin' people to listen to God.

JODY

You can't paint an American flag. It's, it's. Well, it's probably against the law.

THOMPSON

I only care about one law. God's law. I had a vision last night - probably about the time your eye got gouged out. That's godly irony wouldn't you say? (raises voice) The flag is a false idol! It makes people worship America instead of God! I fixed it.

KHARON

Jesus Thompson. It's the bicentennial and you're paintin' over American flags. You've lost the thread. Listen to yourself.

THOMPSON

I don't listen to myself anymore. I listen to God. I knew everything good about life, everything I loved, by the time I was ten - and the rest of my life people been takin' the good away - bit by bit. That's what happens when you listen to people. Smell that smell? That's the smell of silt and oil and rotting fish, the smell of the Illinois River. I love that smell. God made that smell. My sense of smell is gettin' better with God's help.

KHARON

God makes you smell better. That makes sense. In nutcase world!

THOMPSON

(ignores her) I don't just smell the basic smell of the river now, I can smell the trash that the barges dump in the river, all their filthy oil filters and garbage. I can smell Chicago's shit that goes down the Illinois since they reversed the Chicago River. I can smell the radioactive crap from the Dresden nuke plant that leaks into the river. God can speak with smells too. Did you know that if you fall off the barge into the river up around Joliet you have to be taken to the hospital for observation? It's poison! I swam and skied and fished in the river since I was a kid. It's my garden of Eden. It's biblical! The river is the only holy thing in my life and America poisoned it. So I painted the flag. Fuck 'em. Men are destroyin' the river for money. For money! A rich man'll get into heaven when camels fly through a needle and out my ass! All the river's really good for now is washing dead bodies up to shore. It's the end times. It's the end. I'm gonna be ready.

KHARON

Well it ain't ended yet Thompson. You think your life is shit now, If you don't let me help Jody you're gonna have to do all the work here. Are you gonna work 24 hours a day or are you gonna let me help Jody? Jody needs the money Thompson. We've got needs.

THOMPSON

Aww hell. Like I said, I don't punish myself because somebody else is an asshole. You can help him. But I ain't givin' any extra money to you. Hand out these papers to everybody that buys somethin'.

THOMPSON points to papers on table.

THOMPSON

And check this out.

THOMPSON leans over into cabin and pulls out a box.

THOMPSON

I got crucifixes to replace the dirty magazines. Two bucks for the little ones, five bucks for the big ones. Fifty percent mark up.

KHARON

You've got it all figured out for sure. How could I have ever doubted you Thompson? You and Jody'll be retired in no time. After several weeks of not seeing a woman, every deckhand will be thinkin' hey - my balls wouldn't hurt so much if I just had crucifix to look at every shift.

THOMPSON

Enough. I don't listen to people no more. I've been listenin' to God and this is what I heard. The end is near. We got to do what God tells us. There's a train comin' and all of us ain't gonna get a spot on that sucker.

Foghorn sounds from barge.

KHARON

No Thompson. There's a barge a comin' and there's gonna be some pissed off deckhands when Jody tries to sell them crucifixes instead of dirty magazines. Sellin' dirty magazines to horny deckhands was the one good idea you had your whole life and now you've screwed it up. I hope the deckhands need a lot of razors and shaving cream and candy bars or you ain't even gonna be able to pay for the gas we use. Maybe the end is comin' though. For you. Let's go Jody.

THOMPSON

Listen.

KHARON

Just because you believe in somethin' doesn't make it real Thompson.

THOMPSON

If you have Faith anything is possible.

KHARON

Power makes anything possible. I'm studyin' power and building connections. I'm making alliances. I been readin' books. You ever heard of anything scarier than a woman with books?

THOMPSON

But ...

KHARON

Listen! I been up at the library studyin' the Greeks and the Romans. They created the world we live in. They created Gods Thompson. Not God. Gods. That's power.

THOMPSON

I got the power of God.

KHARON

You got the power of odd. Which ain't no power at all.

THOMPSON glares at her as she unties line from boat, JODY clumsily climbs aboard, followed by KHARON. JODY blows horn 3 times, swings the wheel.

THOMPSON

(softly) Geronimo.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE EIGHT

At dock on Illinois River waterfront. Early morning. KHARON and JODY sit in chairs on dock. JODY has an eye patch, a cast on hand, crutches by his side with foot in an orthopedic boot.

KHARON

Crucifixes.

JODY

Crucifixes.

KHARON

How many did we sell?

JODY

You know we didn't sell any.

KHARON

Makin' a point.

JODY

Point made.

KHARON

Look at that.

KHARON points to river.

JODY

Wow. That's one of the biggest cabin cruisers I ever seen on the river.

KHARON

Those folks got it made. They coulda come from New Orleans in that boat. They been places. They're goin' upriver through the locks, all the way to Lake Michigan. Livin' in this shit hole we can go up or down the river, mainly down. On Lake Michigan you can go any direction you want. Rich bastards.

JODY

I ain't never been through the locks. I wanna do it.

KHARON

I got a thing about the locks too. Maybe we'll go through 'em together.

JODY

Thompson said he'll take me some day. Dang. I'd kill to have a big boat like that.

KHARON

Do you mean that?

JODY

What?

KHARON

Would you kill someone to have a boat like that?

JODY

Course not. But it don't matter. Killin' somebody ain't gonna get me a big boat.

KHARON

I've always lived on the river Jody and I ain't never had a boat of my own. It's my destiny. People in Chicago live on boats like that. Livin' and dyin' on the lakeshore. They got a view of skyscrapers on their journey. We got a view of a sewer. They don't have to follow the path of the river. They go where they want on the lake. We could do that Jody.

JODY

We didn't sell anything last night, I didn't win the Chevette, I didn't get paid after the bumper car hit me, I still ain't heard from the disability office, and I can't see or walk good enough to look for another job. I don't see us buying a big boat.

KHARON

We can.

JODY

I don't get it.

KHARON

Do you love me?

JODY

Of course I love you. I love you more than anything in the universe.

KHARON

Thompson constantly insults me.

JODY

I told him to stop.

KHARON

Aside from that and breakin' your own hand goin' after him have you actually done anything about it?

JODY

(pause) Not really.

KHARON

When me and Thompson got married I bought him a life insurance policy. A big one. I didn't cancel it. That's why they call it insurance.

JODY

Thompson's head is slippin' but he's healthy as a horse.

KHARON

Accidents can happen. Especially on the river.

JODY

(Thinks for a moment) Oh no. I think I see what you're sayin'.

KHARON

Do you really love me?

JODY

You know I do. But I can't do nothin' to Thompson. He's looked after me since mom left and my dad got killed. He's my only family.

KHARON

And he treats you like shit.

JODY

He does.

KHARON

And he treats the woman you love worse than shit.

JODY

(sighs) He does.

KHARON

Don't you want to go through the locks and see what's on the other side of the lock and dam?

JODY

I always have.

KHARON

Don't you want to go through the locks all the way to Lake Michigan and sleep in a nice cabin on a big boat and see the skyscrapers?

JODY

I sure do.

KHARON

I want to live on the lake in a big boat that can go any direction and I don't want to work at shit jobs anymore. I'm ready to fulfill my destiny. Do you want to keep workin' at shit jobs for nothin'?

JODY

I don't.

KHARON

I'm sick of this town and seeing the same boring people do the same boring shit day after day until the end of time. They don't live with any joy whatsoever. They don't even die with any pizzaz. All we gotta do is make an accident happen and the boat is yours, which means it's ours. We can live the way we want to live in a place where things happen. Nothin' ever happens here!

JODY

I gotta think about this.

KHARON

Thinking ain't gonna solve this problem. We've done enough thinkin'. Listen. Doin' is gonna solve this.

JODY

God.

KHARON

Jody you're physically fallin' apart, You let your best friend mock your woman, and you're broke. I'm leavin'. Maybe for good. I might have to find someone else to share my good fortune. Your assessed valuation is droppin' like a rock.

KHARON walks away.

JODY

No!

JODY stands up on crutches.

JODY

I love you honey chiclet!

JODY has stunned look on face - stares after her. A few moments later THOMPSON arrives, carrying an eight foot tall wooden cross on his shoulder, dragging it along the dock.

THOMPSON

(Points toward KHARON). Thank god I missed havin' to talk to that miserable bitch.

JODY

(Screams) I told you to stop talkin about her that way!

JODY swings crutch at THOMPSON'S head.

JODY

You sonofabitch!

JODY stumbles on his bad leg, THOMPSON grabs him from behind and hold him in place as JODY struggles to get free.

THOMPSON

Damn Jody. Get a grip. I'm sorry.

JODY struggles to get away. He is in tears.

JODY

You ain't sorry! You never stop. You think you're all Godly but you're just an asshole. If you would've treated her right she wouldn't have left you. You make me puke!

THOMPSON

No. Shit. I am really sorry Jody. I'm an idiot.

JODY

You're just a mean miserable asshole.

JODY leans over, coughs, grimances.

JODY

I think you broke my ribs.

THOMPSON

Aw shit. Sit down.

JODY

No. No. No. I'm leavin'. I ain't comin' back. (coughs)

THOMPSON

Come on kid. Look, I got a letter for you from the post office. It's from the disability office. I bet you got approved.

THOMPSON pulls envelope from pocket and hands it to JODY - who tries to open it but his cast prevents him from getting it open.

JODY

Can you help me out?

THOMPSON opens the envelope and hands JODY the letter. JODY reads the letter while moving his lips.

JODY

(In shock) They turned me down. I can't get disability. They turned me down.  
(he begins to sob)

THOMPSON

Kharon had the idea to get on disability didn't she?

JODY nods.

THOMPSON

It was that piss ant carnival doctor that gave you the paperwork to try to get on disability wasn't it?

JODY doesn't respond. He stumbles away on crutches without speaking, barely able to walk. Coughs repeatedly. THOMPSON watches him walk away.

THOMPSON

I'm gonna take this cross up the river! That'll fix everything.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE NINE

Next day, on dock, early evening. THOMPSON in chair with bible. JODY approaches, on crutches, arm in cast, eye patched over. THOMPSON jumps out of chair.

THOMPSON

Jody! Aw man, it's great to see you. You ok?

JODY

(grimly) I been better . . . we gotta talk.

THOMPSON

Sure, sure.

JODY

I can still help you on the boat. But I can't listen to bad talk about Kharon. You do that, I leave and never come back.

THOMPSON

Of course. No problem. I just want you to come back.

JODY

One other thing. I always wanted to go through the lock. You gotta take me. You told me some day you would. I been on this river a long time and we just go back and forth in front of the town. I want to see more of the river. I got no idea what's on the other side.

THOMPSON

Going through the lock and dam is a big deal. It takes a long time. Barges got priority.

JODY

It's important. You done it. I ain't. I wanna see what it's like. I wanna know what's on the other side. I *gotta* know what's on the other side.

THOMPSON

I can tell you about it. It ain't real safe in a boat this small.

JODY  
Good talkin to ya.

JODY turns and begins to hobble away.

THOMPSON  
Ok, we'll do it.

JODY  
That's better. Let's go.

THOMPSON  
You mean now?

JODY  
Yup.

THOMPSON  
That's kind of quick ain't it?

JODY  
You want me to work on the boat?

THOMPSON  
Of course.

JODY  
Then let's do it now.

THOMPSON  
Ok. I guess. Why the rush?

JODY  
Now.

With his good hand JODY undoes a rope holding boat to dock, clumsily climbs aboard. THOMPSON reluctantly follows. THOMPSON fires the motor, puts it in gear, swings the wheel.

THOMPSON

(softly) Geronimo.

Lighting creates illusion of scenery changes behind boat. We see a representation of a forest. THOMPSON is at wheel, intent on scanning the river. JODY is taking in the landscape and river. At first men are silent, then Thompson speaks.

THOMPSON

This is as exciting as hell, ain't it? (JODY does not respond)

I been kind of focused on my own life and I see I was a little selfish. I can't believe you ain't never been through the lock. (JODY just stares at scenery) It's been a long time since I been through it. Since I quit the barge. . . I tell ya, your asshole is gonna tighten up when you get in that thing. I know mine will. .

THOMPSON continues to scan river for logs, sandbars.

THOMPSON

I feel good about this. A dream fulfilled and I'm helpin'. Damn. . . It's an amazin' process Jody. The upper gates'll open, we'll go in, and hundreds of thousands of gallons of water get pulled down by gravity. We'll just sink in the lock, down, down, down. It's wild. In a few minutes the lower gates'll open, you're in darkness down there, and when the gates open you get this blast of light and it's like you're in another world. That's the lower pool. It's all part of God's glorious work. Amazin'. Careful though. You fall in, you probably get pulled through the outtakes and they find your body miles down river.

THOMPSON smiles and waves his hand - lighting creates illusion of background change to a concrete seawall. He throttles down boat.

THOMPSON

Here goes. We'll just wait here until we get a signal to go in. It might take awhile. But that's ok. We can just hang out by the intakes and small talk. Here. Help me tie the cables to the sea wall 'til the gates open.

With his good hand JODY helps THOMPSON attach cables to cleats on seawall.

THOMPSON

Make sure and use a release knot so we can let 'em go quick if they get too tight.

JODY doesn't respond, but attaches cable to cleats

THOMPSON

Whaddya think of all this?

JODY still doesn't respond. He looks at THOMPSON, raises his cane and pushes THOMPSON to edge of boat.

THOMPSON

What the fuck?

JODY pushes harder.

THOMPSON

Stop fartin' around Jody! Jesus!

JODY grunts and lunges at THOMPSON, trying to push him into water. THOMPSON sidesteps, JODY stumbles, trips, and, with a scream, goes overboard, out of sight of audience. THOMPSON is in shock. He grabs a pole and sticks it out to JODY.

THOMPSON

Grab the pole! Grab the pole dammit! Quick, before the intake gets you!

JODY

(muffled) I can't hold on! My arm!

THOMPSON looks around in panic, opens a box on deck, pulls out a rope with a hangman's knot, unloosens it and throws it over the side.

THOMPSON

Put it around you! Put it around you goddammit!

THOMPSON paces as we hear a struggle in the water. He pulls on rope with great effort and JODY appears at gunnel of the boat. With difficulty THOMPSON pulls him up and over side of boat, hangman's noose around his waist. Both are soaked and out of breath. They lay on the boat, panting for a few moments.

THOMPSON

Are you ok?

JODY

I screwed up.

THOMPSON

I guess so.

JODY

I screwed up!

THOMPSON

Why the fuck did you try to push me in?

JODY

Why do you have a hangman's noose in the boat?

THOMPSON

You tried to kill me.

JODY

You saved me.

THOMPSON

Why did you try to kill me?

JODY

I'm goin' to hell.

THOMPSON

We're family. Why would you do that?

JODY

(pleading) Please forgive me.

THOMPSON

It's like your own son trying to kill you. That happens all the time in the bible. People don't listen to God and next thing you know they're trying to kill their dad.

JODY

(cries) I listened to Kharon.

THOMPSON

What?

JODY

She told me she had an insurance policy on you. She said we could buy a big cabin cruiser and go to Lake Michigan and go any direction we wanted and be together forever. I shoulda never listened to her. She talked me into it. You're right, I shoulda listened to God. I'm goin' to hell.

THOMPSON

You're a good kid Jody. You ain't goin' to hell. I might be, but you ain't.

JODY

I just tried to kill you! I'm evil.

THOMPSON

You didn't kill me. You ain't evil. We'll go back to the dock. It's safe there. We'll go through the lock and dam another time. I promise.

THOMPSON gets a ragged blanket from a locker, wraps it around JODY. He goes to wheel, revs the motor, spins the wheel.

THOMPSON

(Softly) Geronimo.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE TEN

Back at dock. THOMPSON and JODY climb out of boat. JODY is wrapped in a ragged blanket. He uses his cane to hobble and stand upright.

## THOMPSON

Get a hold of Kharon and tell her to come to the dock. Then go put on some dry clothes and get some rest. And stay the fuck away from that carnival doctor.

## JODY

Don't hurt Kharon boss. I still love her even though she pretty much destroyed my whole life.

## THOMPSON

I ain't gonna hurt her. I just hope to get her to listen to God before her spirit is beyond redemption.

## JODY

I'll be back to help boss. You're the best man that ever lived.

## THOMPSON

Jody . . . You're brain just got soft. A soft brain ain't good for listenin' to God. That's all.

JODY stumbles away. THOMPSON looks after him, shakes his head, and begins to cry. He begins to pace back and forth on the dock frantically, reflecting a battle within him.

He stops, then sits in chair and stares straight ahead for several beats.

He picks the bible off of table next to chair and thumbs through the pages looking for a passage. He finds it and silently reads, moving his lips as he does so. He looks up from bible and stares straight ahead for a beat.

He stands up and wearily climbs aboard boat. Looks up at cross. Removes book mark from bible.

## THOMPSON

Job 7:15 "So that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones. I loathe my life; I would not live forever. (pauses - turns pages) Romans 10:13 "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Fireworks begin to explode over the river casting a surreal light on the scene. THOMPSON takes out hangman's rope and throws it over the cross. Ties a knot that holds rope tight to the cross. Put's it around his neck, stands on engine cover, tightens noose, adjusts it's length then ties a final knot. Picks up the Bible and reads passage aloud again.

## THOMPSON

"So that I would choose strangling and death rather than my bones. I loathe my life; I would not live forever.

THOMPSON takes a deep breath, looks at the heavens, and speaks.

## THOMPSON

God, she's got my only family tryin' to kill me. I've lost Jody. I'm gonna die someday God and she's gonna get that insurance money. I can't let that woman get rich off my bones. Insurance don't pay out for people doin' what I'm about to do. That's that. Ever since dad did what he did I kind of figured this was how it would end . . . This way Jody'll get the ONAN and have a chance at life. - - - I'm callin' on you God. I listened to you, and your words say it's OK to do what I'm doin' and keep my immortal soul. It took me a long time God, but I learned to listen to you. I hope that counts for somethin'. (he pauses and looks around) Could you just say somethin' in English so I know I'm on the right track? (he waits, hears nothing) That's OK. I can smell the river. It's beautiful. I know you speak through smells God. It's nice that my last smell is the river that you made in all your glory. (He closes his eyes and jumps off of box) Geronimo!

The cross breaks in two. THOMPSON drops in a heap to the deck of the boat. He lies in stunned silence for a few moments. He eventually raises his head, rubs his neck, and looks at the cross.

THOMPSON

I even screwed this up.

KHARON approaches the boat and sees THOMPSON laying on the deck with the hangman's noose around his neck.

KHARON

That's a really ugly necklace you got there Thompson.

THOMPSON

I was hopin' you'd find my dead body. Just my shitty attempt to keep you from gettin' insurance money.

KHARON

What are you talkin' about?

THOMPSON stands up unsteadily, noose still around neck.

THOMPSON

If I kill myself you don't get the insurance money. Insurance don't pay out for suicides.

Shakes his head as if getting rid of cobwebs.

THOMPSON

I guess I'll have to try again.

KHARON

They don't pay out for suicides in the first two years you goof ball. The policy is five years old.

Fireworks burst over river.

THOMPSON

(Rubs neck) What? ... Shit. (he is utterly deflated)

KHARON

Thompson, I had a bit of affection for you at one point, but the verdict is in. You ain't real bright. Don't you know God says it's a sin to kill yourself?

THOMPSON

God says it's OK under the right circumstances. I found it in the bible.

KHARON

Sure. This was almost the best financial day of my life. If you weren't so incompetent you would have just made me a prosperous woman. I'd be glad to help you try again.

THOMPSON

You're the devil.

KHARON

Close, but no cigar.

THOMPSON

Goddamn you're a cipher. (groans) My neck is killin' me.

KHARON

You just tried to hang yourself. Of course it's gonna hurt you dumb ass.

THOMPSON

Rotten wood. Made it outa broken pieces of dock.

KHARON

(shakes her head) I just saw JODY stumblin' down the street lookin like a mess. He sent me this way. I'm runnin' out of patience Thompson. I knew you two were goofballs but I couldn't've imagined just how effed up your little tag team is. I gotta put some thought into this.

THOMPSON

Stop the thinkin' and start listenin' to God before it's too late Kharon.

KHARON

I'm listenin' all right. To a guy who is too stupid to hang himself without screwin' it up. I think I'll get my lessons on life from somebody a little higher up the evolutionary ladder.

Fireworks explode over river.

THOMPSON

Go to hell.

KHARON

I'm in no rush. Unlike present company. You've got an open offer of help if you try to hang yourself again. Just yell. I live to serve others.

KHARON turns to walk away.

THOMPSON

Stay away from Jody. You've hurt that boy enough.

KHARON

I think we'll let Jody make that call. He has some assets you don't have. He knows that women have orgasm's too.

THOMPSON

Aww . . .

KHARON

Jody's just a waypoint in my life but he's pickin' up a buck here and there keepin' me in lottery tickets. He's a good kid. Then there's that lawsuit I'm workin' on for the bumper car accident and the dart thing. Studyin' the rich is workin' out. They make deals without considering their souls. How's that obsession with your soul workin' out? (laughs) Hey, that rope burn on your neck is a good look for you.

She walks away. THOMPSON lies down on the dock and rubs his neck and groans as fireworks come to a crescendo in the river valley sky.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE ELEVEN

At dock. THOMPSON in chair staring into space. He has a neck brace on. JODY clumsily approaches using cane with foot and hand in casts, eye patch. He is looking at the ground.

JODY

Please forgive me.

THOMPSON

No. Please forgive me.

JODY

No. Forgive me.

THOMPSON

No, me.

JODY

No, me.

THOMPSON

No, it's me that needs to be forgiven.

JODY

I tried to kill you.

THOMPSON

I tried to kill me.

JODY

Huh?

THOMPSON

It'll give you a headache. I forgive you. Please forgive me for being such an asshole.

JODY

I forgive you.

THOMPSON

We are two fucked up dudes.

JODY

What's wrong with your neck?

THOMPSON

Oh, I tried to solve a problem on the boat. Didn't work. I talked to Kharon. That's a hard woman Jody. She don't listen.

JODY

I love Kharon but I let her talk me into the worst thing I ever done.

THOMPSON

Jody, the woman is gonna be the end of us. You're fallin' apart since you started in with her. Hell, dead bodies started showin' up when you started hangin' around with her.

JODY

I saw the sheriff on the way over here. They know who the dead guy is. His wife turned up. They released the body to her.

THOMPSON

Damn. Who was she?

JODY

He couldn't tell me her name because of privacy stuff. But the guy's from up by Peoria. He was workin' on a barge on the Ohio river. He got hit by a cable and fell in the water around Cairo.

THOMPSON

How the hell did he get from Cairo to here? That's upstream with forks at the Mississippi and at the Illinois. That's impossible. Bodies don't float upstream hundreds of miles.

JODY

They can't figure it out.

THOMPSON

Well, at least he ain't a ghost or a demon. Goddamn that was workin' on my head. How does a body float upstream from Cairo to western Illinois? Coulda got snagged on the tow I guess. Nah. *Goddamn*. That's one mobile corpse.

JODY

Sure is.

THOMPSON

Jody. I been thinkin' ever since you left. Hard thoughts. Thoughts guided by God of course. I mean, she had you try to kill me. That's a given. That's part of the record. Now don't get upset here, but I think she might have plans for you too.

JODY

(Jody sobs) I know boss. I know. I thought that too.

THOMPSON

I almost started the next life twice the past couple of days. I decided I can wait for that adventure. I decided you and me got a lot of good years left. God's got a plan for us.

JODY

(Choking back tears) I hope so boss.

THOMPSON

Have you noticed that her eyes are feverish sometimes? Her eyes gives me the chills. It's like she's from the underworld. As long as Kharon is around, we're gonna wonder what she's schemin' to do to us.

JODY

I know. I know.

THOMPSON

Do you have any idea where she came from? I was married to her and I don't know where she's from.

JODY

I asked her where she was from and she laughed and said somewhere up river. Peoria maybe? What are we gonna do boss?

THOMPSON

The bible is always there for guidance. I found words that says if somebody is tryin' to kill you, there is stuff you can do and still listen to God. (Opens bible and reads) This from Psalms: "God knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will be destroyed." It's clear that God thinks the wicked gotta go. This is from Exodus. "But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life," Don't you think she's been harmin' us?

JODY

She has. She had me try to kill you.

THOMPSON

Then I think we can do somethin' about it and still have our souls in one piece. It ain't bad if the bible can justify it. It just means you're listenin' to the world of God. Right?

JODY

That sounds right.

THOMPSON

I think it passes the smell test. Here's what you need to do. Go to Kharon. Tell her you still love her. Tell her you been talkin' to me. Tell her I've agreed to take you through the lock cause it's so important to you. Tell her I've agreed to let the her go along in spite of what's happened between us. Tell her I'm offerin' a truce between us so you can fulfill your dream.

Then tell her what you really want to do once were all on the boat is to push me in the lock and then you two can live together forever on that big boat in Chicago. Same plan as she had before but this time she'll be on the boat. Understand so far?

JODY

Yes.

THOMPSON

Then when we get into the lock, while she's waitin' for you and her to push me in the water, you and me can push her in and send her through the outtake pipes, down river and into the next life, where maybe she'll learn to listen to God. She'll wash up down in Calhoun County in a month or two.

JODY

I get it. We gotta get her before she gets us.

THOMPSON

Exactly. But don't let her talk you into anything stupid. I know how goddamn persuasive that woman can be. Can you do this? Look me in the eyes, er eye Jody.

JODY

For you boss. Sure.

THOMPSON

Not just for me Jody. For me and God.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE TWELVE

At dock. THOMPSON in chair. Has neck brace on. JODY clumsily approaches with foot and hand in casts, eye patch, hobbling on cane. THOMPSON, holding bible, stands, agitated.

THOMPSON

Did you talk to her?

JODY

I did.

THOMPSON

Did she go for the truce?

JODY

She said she'd do it for me.

THOMPSON

We're all set?

JODY

Yeh.

THOMPSON

She don't suspect nothin'?

JODY

Nope.

THOMPSON

So we're gonna do it? The plan's in motion?

JODY

That's what I just said. Damn boss.

THOMPSON

(Pause) Sit down (They both sit in lawn chairs) Man. You look like your puppy just died. I ain't happy about this either Jody, but it's got to be done. It's her or us. We're all set to push her in? She's comin' right?

JODY

She'll be here in a bit.

THOMPSON

Good. It's time to do this.

JODY

Can I ask you a question boss?

THOMPSON

Sure Jody. Of course.

JODY

I been nervous to know the particulars of what happened the day my dad died. It really messed us both up. Then I almost lost you. Now I gotta know.

THOMPSON

Well, frankly Jody, you didn't almost lose me. You tried to kill me. It's a distinction worth notin'.

JODY

(Softly) Noted . . .

THOMPSON

You listened to that woman.

JODY

I made a mistake.

THOMPSON

Just so we know the lay of the land.

JODY

Sure.

THOMPSON

The geography of this is unsettlin'.

JODY

Ok! (Screams) Kharon says you killed my dad!

THOMPSON

What? That's bullshit! She knows that ain't true.

JODY

It ain't?

THOMPSON

That woman is possessed Jody. She's tryin' to get between us. As God as my witness your dad got killed by a cable that snapped.

JODY

It was just a cable?

THOMPSON

(Takes a deep breath) It was a cable.

JODY

You swear?

THOMPSON

I swear.

JODY

On the bible?

THOMPSON

(Holds up bible) I swear on this bible, to my God, that it was a snapped cable, not me, that killed your dad. She wants us to not trust each other.

JODY

She's causin' me to lose my head. OK. How did the cable kill dad?

THOMPSON

Sandbars are always movin' from the river current. You don't know where they're at on a given day. It's like they got brains or somethin'. If a barge hits a sandbar, it pushes the load up, stretches the cables, they snap, and bad shit happens. They say that the crack you hear when they snap is the cable breakin' the sound barrier. Imagine that. It's the last sound you ever hear.

You get too much tension on those cables they turn into God's messengers. The message ain't good. You don't want to hear that sound.

JODY

(deep breath) Did he suffer?

THOMPSON

No... Not in the least. Not even a little bit. One second he was talkin' like we are right now and the next second the top of his head was gone. He tilted, his brains spilled out, and he was dead before he hit the water. If you gotta go, it was a damn fine way to go.

JODY

And he's in heaven now?

THOMPSON

Of course.

JODY

How are ya sure?

THOMPSON

I just am. That's why they call it Faith. I'm as sure of that as anything. That's part of God's deal with those that listen. Heaven is as real and solid as this table.

THOMPSON taps table next to his lawn chair with his knuckles. The table collapses to the ground with a clatter. They look at each other - THOMPSON looks puzzled.

THOMPSON

Uh. See? ... It's real.

JODY

(frowns) Heaven is real. That's good to know. I need to know that.

THOMPSON

We all do.

JODY

What was the last thing he said? Do you remember?

THOMPSON

For some reason that's burned in my brain.

JODY

Was it somethin' about me?

THOMPSON

No. You didn't come up. He said his ass itched. Said it was galded. Then the cable broke and his head got lopped off. What a sound it made.

JODY

He was gonna die and the last thing he said was that his butt itched?

THOMPSON

To be precise he said his ass *hole* itched. Hey, life ain't like poetry. It's like, ah, well, I don't know what it's like. God works in mysterious ways.

JODY

He said his ass hole itched and then he was dead. Good God.

THOMPSON

God *is* good. We don't always get to choose the circumstances of when we go. I tried to choose my own way and it didn't go well. We just go. Some things aren't for man to know. But I do know this: God killed a lot of people, and He told people like Abraham to kill their kids just for the hell of it and all kinds of stuff like that. Love is the word, and the word is God, and God is love. So if He killed a lot of people and tells us sometimes we got to kill people, it must be because of love. Well, that and salvation. And maybe retribution. It's hard to understand sometimes. You just got to listen and believe. So we got to get Kharon before she gets us. It's pretty simple once you realize you got God's blessing. It ain't algebra.

JODY

But it *is* hard to understand.

THOMPSON

Algebra?

JODY

No. Why God wants us to kill Kharon.

THOMPSON

Yup. That's a hard one. But I got it from the bible and the bible is the word of God and God ain't never wrong so we're good to go. I don't have no more time to waste on small talk. I gotta build another cross for the boat and I gotta do some more bible readin' before Kharon gets here. I can't believe the woman told you I killed your dad. Well, I guess I *can* believe that - after all she had you try to kill me. Jody, I know this is tough for you. I was a little nutty about that woman once too, but you know we have to do this. There ain't no other way and we got God's blessing.

JODY

(sighs) God says to kill for His love.

THOMPSON

Jody - you said a mouthful.

JODY

A mouthful of what?

THOMPSON

Truth Jody. Righteous, Godly truth. You been listenin'.

FADE TO BLACK

## SCENE THIRTEEN

Background lighting gives impression of forest in background and appears that the ONAN is going down river. KHARON, THOMPSON, and JODY are aboard. All are quiet, as if deep in thought. JODY quickly crosses himself - THOMPSON notices and looks puzzled. A second cross is now on the boat, taller than the first. The original cross hangs askew. The American flag painted over with the word "Listen" written on it waves in the breeze. THOMPSON has neck brace, JODY has cast on foot, wrap on wrist, eye patch, holds cane.

KHARON

Let me have the wheel.

THOMPSON

I don't think so.

KHARON

I just want the feel of gettin' us across the river. I want to be a part of Jody realizin' his dream. I want to be a pilot. Then we'll all be involved. Have a heart Thompson.

THOMPSON

Aw, you always knew how to push my buttons .But I'm takin' us into the lock. That's dangerous.

KHARON

Gotcha.

KHARON takes the wheel and steers down river.

THOMPSON

You ain't half bad at steerin' the boat.

KHARON

I've taken a boat across the river a few times.

Lighting changes to suggest a wall of concrete representing the entrance to the lock.

THOMPSON

We got lucky. The lock gates are open. We won't have to wait for a barge to go through first. (winks at JODY) Nothing personal Kharon but I was afraid we was gonna have to small talk.

KHARON

That's the only kind of talk you're capable of Thompson.

THOMPSON

I can't imagine why our marriage didn't stand up to the test of time.

KHARON

Time wasn't the only thing with you that didn't stand up.

THOMPSON

That ain't true godammit!

KHARON

There's two big crosses on this boat Thompson. Do you really need to take the Lord's name in vain every other sentence that comes out of your mouth?

THOMPSON

God don't care about language, He cares that you listen.

KHARON

Listen to this. You keep invoking God. Watch out. The Gods might answer.

THOMPSON

That's blasphemy. There's only one God.

KHARON

That's not what my sources say.

Shakes his head then looks up as if he sees something.

THOMPSON

Hey. There's our signal to go in. I'll take the wheel.

We hear whirring of lock machinery, and THOMPSON appears to guide the boat into the lock. There is a metallic clang as the gates close. It gets a little darker on stage once they are in the lock. We see a ladder embedded in wall that leads up to top of lock. THOMPSON begins to attach cables to cleats on lock wall to keep boat from drifting away from wall.

KHARON

Let me help with the lines.

THOMPSON

I got it.

KHARON

I said I'm gonna help you privileged ass!

KHARON grabs cables and attaches them to the cleats as THOMPSON stands aside.

THOMPSON

Give 'em some slack so we can release 'em quick if we need to.

KHARON

I know what I'm doin' you big control freak. I been married to three barge hands. Hush.

THOMPSON

Three?

KHARON finishes attaching cables to cleats.

KHARON

There. Got it. What now?

THOMPSON

OK. They're gonna start lowerin' the water level in a minute. Kharon, you drive me bat shit crazy but it was damn thoughtful of you to come along and share in Jody's big adventure. Thank you for accepting my truce. I know it means a lot to the boy that you're here. (he winks at Jody)

KHARON

He ain't a boy (she looks at JODY and winks) but it's my pleasure to be a part of a big moment in his life. I accepted the truce for him. And for me too. I like new stuff. I'm a life long learner. What can you tell me I don't already know? What's about to happen here?

THOMPSON

(Smiles broadly at JODY, who looks away) Stuff is gonna happen, that's sure. Yes. Well, gravity's about to pull the water in the lock down to the lower pool. We'll go down about 25 feet or so, then they open the gates and away we go. Prepare yourself though. It gets really dark at the bottom of the lock. On a small boat it gets really spooky. And for God's sake be careful. If you fall in they'll find your body in Alton in the spring (Looks at JODY and chuckles).

KHARON

(She looks at JODY and attracts his gaze. She smiles) We sure wouldn't want that to happen.

Lighting effects give illusion of boat moving down inside the lock. It gets darker. Cables attached to wall get tighter as boat lowers. THOMPSON looks nervously at cables. Everyone is quiet, watching the wall as the boat goes down. It gets darker as the boat descends. We hear cables strain. At it's darkest, THOMPSON takes a deep breath.

THOMPSON

Now Jody!

THOMPSON lunges at KHARON. JODY just stands there. KHARON sidesteps THOMPSON and grabs the coin necklace from JODY's neck, then swings it at THOMPSON'S face, smacking him in the nose, He screams and blood gushes from his nose in a great spurt.

THOMPSON

(Yells, holding nose) What the hell are you doin'!?

KHARON

Accepting payment for services rendered. I got expenses.

THOMPSON

What!?

KHARON

Jody, hand me your lottery tickets. You won't be needin' them.

JODY submissively hands her the lottery tickets from his pocket.

THOMPSON holds nose as blood pours out.

THOMPSON

Jody! Why aren't you helpin' me?!

JODY is frozen in place. We hear cables creaking with tension. THOMPSON reaches for KHARON - she picks up an oar and swings it at THOMPSON, hitting him in the neck brace. He screams in pain. She speaks with the oar resting on her shoulder.

KHARON

Boys, this is the end of the line. Literally and figuratively. (a chuckle)

JODY

Kharon.

THOMPSON

(Grimacing) Listen . . .

KHARON

Done with that.

JODY

(pleading) Honeychicket.

KHARON

Jody, I'm sorry - there ain't no such thing as a honeychiclet. Chiclets are peppermint gum. But for what it's worth, I mostly enjoyed your company.

More sound of cables straining. KHARON climbs back to rear of boat and stands by wheel. She continues to brandish oar like a weapon.

THOMPSON

(Grimacing in pain) What just happened here? Your brain got soft again?

JODY

(Sobs) I'm sorry boss. We got married this mornin' . . .

KHARON blasts horn on boat three times. Suddenly a body wrapped in a tarp plummets from the concrete wall above and hits the deck with a boom. Both men jump in the air, startled out of their wits. KHARON looks upward and shouts.

KHARON

Thanks for the help Doc! See you in a bit!

THOMPSON

Doc? Was that the carnival doctor?

KHARON

Thompson, we made pacts under different jurisdictions but they both are about servin' others. The Doctor and me are gonna help you finish your journey.

THOMPSON

Does that bag have what I think is in it?

KHARON

That's what's left of my dumbass second husband. Out of heartache comes opportunity. Put this back in his mouth.

KHARON throws coin to THOMPSON. He hesitates. KHARON steps forward with a wild eyed look and waves the oar.

KHARON

Now!

THOMPSON obeys by unzipping bag and putting coin in the mouth of the corpse, cringing as he does so.

KHARON

I've never felt like you listened to me Thompson. You made me a lesser version of myself. My life changed when I became a reader. Books connected me to the river of life. I tied into ideas, traditions, rituals. They prepared me for the good doctor. Put these in your own mouths. To the side. I don't want you swallowin' them.

KHARON throws coins to each of them and they fearfully put them in their mouths.

KHARON

I've started runnin' with a crowd with more promise boys. I saw the doctor with his shoes off and the future was laid out before me. He's alerted me to a historical thread we're all a part of and I've signed on. I think I finally found a man with some long term prospects.

THOMPSON

(Meekly) I thought he was a she.

KHARON

There's somethin' satisfyin' about bein' a part of somethin' bigger than yourself. Thompson, you were always obsessed with the next life. It's your lucky day. This is where you abandon all hope.

THOMPSON and JODY hold each other upright. They are in shock as they stand by the bag with the body. We hear the gates of the lock open and the gushing of water. They look towards the opening and a blinding sliver of light appears, gradually getting wider. They shade their eyes for protection as they cling to each other. KHARON stands behind them, hand on wheel and stares ahead with a look of joy and anticipation, her eyes ablaze.

The cables attached from boat to cleats above are completely taut. They creak with tension. When the gates (which are offstage) are completely open the men hood their eyes with their hands and can see something offstage that obviously overwhelms them.

JODY

(Coin in side of mouth) Oh God.

THOMPSON

(Coin in side of mouth) I'll. Be. Damned.

LIGHTS GO BLACK

We hear the sound of cables snapping, the sound of cables sizzling through the air, and an explosive crack. Silence. We hear the sound of herons. The sound gradually diminishes as play ends.

END OF PLAY