

Pilgrimage

A Play in Three Scenes

By Michael Richey

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Setting: *Pilgrimage* takes place under an old oak near the Faulkner family gravesite, St. Peter's Church Cemetery, Oxford, Mississippi.

Scene One- Early Autumn, 1998

Scene Two- Late Autumn, 1998

Scene Three- Early Spring, 1968

Characters: GAIL in Scene One is a lovely but nervous woman in her early fifties, who seems to be living on the edge of a blade. She wears uncomfortably tight clothes and high heeled shoes. Weight she has gained since her youth is exaggerated in her own mind.

GAIL in Scene Three is a beautiful and slender twenty year old version of her older self.

MITCH in Scenes One and Two is a rail thin Vietnam Vet in his early fifties with weathered skin and a bad haircut; he wears old, but clean clothes.

MITCH in Scene Three is a more confident and robust version of his older self; like the younger GAIL, he is twenty.

KEN is a nervous and guarded young man of thirty.

"History is not was, it is."

William Faulkner

Scene One

GAIL waits near William Faulkner's grave in deep thought.

MITCH
(Off Stage, as he approaches)

Hello there!

She glances toward him, then ignores him determinedly. As he enters, MITCH tries again.

Hello.

GAIL
(after a beat)

Excuse me?

MITCH

No, won't do that.

They stare at each other for a moment. He throws his head back and laughs with delight.

I'll be damned.

GAIL

Mitch? Is that you?

MITCH

Do I look so different?

GAIL

I'm not sure I'd have known you. How are you?

MITCH

Been thirty years—you want the long answer or the short?

GAIL

Short for now . . . is fine. I really don't have much time.

They take each other in. She offers her hand,
He shakes it.

You wouldn't have known who I was either, if I hadn't been the only person in this graveyard at three o'clock in the afternoon, standin' right here where you told me to meet you.

But I did. Know you. MITCH

You did? GAIL

Right off. MITCH

Faulkner's grave looks so different—wasn't it higher when we were in college? GAIL

I think you're right. MITCH

Did it sink? GAIL

I imagine it's settled quite a bit, an' a few too many college students'av partied on it over the years. Thanks for meetin' me— it's the only special place that came to mind. MITCH

(pause)
Didn't we say goodbye here . . . or somethin' ?

There's an awkward moment; he cannot suppress a laugh, which she ignores.

(lying)
I don't remember. It's hot out here—is it hot ? GAIL

Not especially. MITCH

GAIL

Did you say you live in Oxford now?

MITCH

No. You need to breathe.

GAIL

(takes a breath quickly, and presses on.)

You know, I can't stay long. I need to be back no later than six. Did you tell me how you got my telephone number?

MITCH

I can't keep up with you. No, I--

GAIL

Atlanta! I remember now you said you live in Atlanta--I have a cousin who lives in Germantown--no wait, that's Memphis, well anyway, Atlanta's a big place an' I'm sure you'd have never met my cousin even if he lived there anyway--he's a dentist, the only one of his family to amount to a hill a'beans--

MITCH

Good grief.

GAIL

What?

MITCH

Is this what you drove up from Jackson to do?—Chat about your cousin? Gail, if you can't stay long, let's not waste precious time with small talk.

GAIL

(attempts a laugh)

We haven't seen each other in thirty years—it's too soon for big talk.

There is a long silence. They search each other for something familiar. She laughs uncomfortably, then:

Did you ever marry, Mitch?

MITCH

No.

GAIL

Well, I did. I mean I still am . . . married. We have four children, two girls and

two boys.

MITCH

You mentioned that when I phoned. That's nice.

There is an awkward silence which
embarrasses them both.

GAIL

Your phone call, out of the blue like that! I was so surprised. I guess I could have invited you to our home in Jackson, but I . . . HA! I imagined we'd see each other from a distance an' we'd run to meet an' . . . an' . . . ridiculous . . .

MITCH

Sounds like a movie—

GAIL

(wanting to take the previous statement back)

I said, it was silly—an' that didn't come out right.

MITCH

I was agreein' with you. I think.

GAIL

(thinks about it, gets a good breath, then:)

I don't know why I expected you to look the same, I certainly do not.

(laughs, then mocks herself)

"Run . . . to meet each other," . . . good grief!

MITCH

What?

GAIL

Let's just get it out'a the way. I am much too out of shape, as you must have noticed, to run anywhere these days. There, it's out in the open an' neither one of us has to be . . . oh . . . I swear I think I gained every pound you lost.

MITCH

(humoring the exaggeration)

An' then some.

She does not find his comment amusing.

Are you alright?

GAIL

Oh, sure. Why wouldn't I be? I'm just a little dizzy an' thirsty an'
(under her breath)
out of my mind.

MITCH

You gotta' breathe.

GAIL

Yes, I know about that—I learn fast.

MITCH

Then breathe.

GAIL

You don't have to tell me to do that again. I know perfectly well aware that I AM
breathin'. Now.

MITCH

Do you want to fuss?

GAIL

No. Are we arguin'?

MITCH

I can't tell.

She takes a deep breath; their conversation
stalls for a bit.

MITCH

You may not be twenty anymore, but you are . . . lovely. I mean it.

GAIL

I'm gunna assume you meant that in a sweet way, Mitch.
(pause)

You're thin. Very thin. How could you be so inconsiderate?

His smile lands solidly; she is knocked
off her plate for a moment.

Goodness, I hadn't been back up to Oxford in . . . well, not once since
graduation. Was that really thirty years ago? I hardly recognized the place when
I drove in. I had to ask for directions to St. Peter's Church.

MITCH

Everything changes. The Square's pretty much the same, though. In shape.

GAIL

Still square.

They enjoy this.

(feigned enthusiasm)

Did you drive through the campus?

MITCH

Did I drive through campus?

(pause. "Christ, more small talk;" he relents.)

This morning. You?

GAIL

No, came straight here. Well, sort'a straight here—got lost, like I said. Not really lost, but . . . So you drove in this morning?

MITCH

("OK, we'll do this for a while.")

Yep. From Atlanta.

GAIL

Atlanta, yes, I remember.

MITCH

You won't recognize campus--

GAIL

Don't tell me. I think I'll just remember it the way it used to be.

(pause)

Truth is, as I drove up here to Oxford, I kept wondering why you'd want me to meet you after so many years, an' why at William Faulkner's grave . . . of all places.

(laughs to break the awkwardness of what she must say.)

I also wondered why on earth I agreed to do it!

(finally looking him straight in the eye)

What do you expect of me?

He is about to tell her, then:

You look like you might be down on your luck. If it's money you need, I'm not sure how much I can help you.

Whoa!

MITCH

Sorry--

GAIL

I look that rough, do I?

MITCH

I've offended you—

GAIL

--you have at that—

MITCH

--I just need for us both to understand . . . boundaries.

GAIL

MITCH

Gail, you're havin' a really bad time here. I sure as all hell don't have much, but I did not ask you to drive from Jackson to write me a check!

GAIL

Then what is it you want, Mitch?

MITCH

Why don't you sit down, an' try to relax. Relax an' talk with me. Come on, sit down here --you're killing the grass with those heels.

He dusts off a corner of William Faulkner's slab.

GAIL

You're not serious—

MITCH

Come on, get off your feet—

GAIL

I will not. It's looks uncomfortable—

MITCH

It's cool.

GAIL
It's disrespectful.

MITCH
You didn't always feel that way--

GAIL
We weren't right *on* the grave, we were over there
(catches herself)
Anyway, we are not goin' to talk about that.

MITCH
(A little charm)
About what, Gail?

GAIL
Should I get back into my car and go home this very minute?
(to herself)
Yes, I should.

MITCH
You're safe. It's still daylight, an' besides, I'm not gunna let you take advantage of me this time.

GAIL
(smiling in spite of herself)
Hush!
(contemplates getting off her feet)
I never did any such thing—

MITCH
--You knew very well I was helpless under your spell when you sang that song.

GAIL
What song?

MITCH
What song?!

GAIL
I have no idea of what you're talkin' about.

MITCH
Bull hockey.

GAIL

I remember "bull hockey" well enough—that you said it and you were full of it most of the time.

MITCH

(He sings these words to "BILL BAILEY.")

Won't you come home Bill Baby? Won't you come home? We know we done you wrong--

GAIL

Oh, my Lord, I had completely forgotten that!

MITCH

It's one of my best memories. How in all hell could you forget?

GAIL

Blocked it out of my mind, I guess.

MITCH

You sang that song off an' on for hours that night—

GAIL

You're exaggeratin', we weren't out here *that* long—

MITCH

--You were sittin' right here. There'd be a lull in conversation, and you'd belt it out again. I can still see you, sittin' there, singin' with all your might, lookin' upwards to the sky, like you were bayin' at the moon. I'd never seen anything so crazy. I couldn't stop laughin'. I laughed 'til I couldn't sit up.

GAIL

Now that's bull hockey. I wasn't all that funny—you just wanted to lie down. Are those street lamps new? I don't remember them--

MITCH

I laid back to get my breath. That's when you did it.

GAIL

Did it?

MITCH

I was intoxicated by the wine an' the night an' completely captivated by you . . . and that's when you certainly did do it—

GAIL

Did what!?

MITCH

Oh, yes, and how you did it . . . You kissed me. My very first *real* kiss--do you still sing?

GAIL

(completely thrown)

What? Yes, I sing. In church.

MITCH

Baptist?

GAIL

Of course. Why are we here?

MITCH

Do you work?

GAIL

You used to do this.

MITCH

What?

GAIL

Change the subject-- I have a job, yes, if that's what you mean—

MITCH

--what do you do--

GAIL

--I'm a secretary—WHY did you ask me to do this insane thing right out of the blue after all this time?

MITCH

Why'd you come?

(pause)

A major in Music and you're a secretary?

GAIL

I asked you a question—What's wrong with bein' a--

MITCH

--I warned you about the Baptists, didn't I? They've turned you.

GAIL

You're soundin' more familiar now. But, don't start in on my faith. I won't tolerate what I put up with when we were kids.

MITCH

Would you be referrin' to the un-Baptismal?

GAIL

Oh, that! I should have put an end to that before it started, but I was just too. . . what? Young?

MITCH

Drunk

GAIL

--Young *an'* drunk to stop you.

MITCH

I worked so hard diggin' that big hole behind the Sigma Nu house.

GAIL

That mud hole! Your "Un-Baptismal."

MITCH

I see you smilin'!

GAIL

Am not. I had to go back to the dorm covered in mud, tracked it in all over the place! An' slipped an' fell right in front of my dorm mother! I still regret all the lies I told that woman. You never told me how you managed to fill that big hole up with water.

MITCH

Stole hoses from the Beta's, Pikes and the Sig Eps an' ran water from the faucet at the Sigma Chi house! We were covered in mud by the time those Snakes ran us off. If I'd had just a little more time with you in that hole, I'd have had you un-Baptized but good.

She begins to laugh. He joins her. Then,
without humor:

GAIL

Is this what our meetin' is all about? Stirrin' up memories of stupid things we did as kids? I don't want to do that.

MITCH

Another boundary? Hmm? No handouts, no memories . . . that was a special time in our lives. I hoped for a better reunion.

GAIL

You don't have the right to hope for anything at all, in my opinion,

(uncomfortable now)

I have a case of the regrets. Lyin' to my husband an' my boss AN' my kids an' drivin' up here is the first really crazy thing I have done since I last saw you. Not a peep for thirty years—I thought you were dead, then the phone rings an' suddenly you're not dead an' here I am--

MITCH

Why didn't you tell your family where you were going?

GAIL

I really do need to get back, Mitch. It was good seein' you.

He stops her by flourishing a flask.

MITCH

Remember this?

GAIL

Oh, My God, yes!

MITCH

It is still the best birthday present I have ever got.

(He drinks)

GAIL

Is this county still dry?

MITCH

Hope not. Want some? Help you relax.

GAIL

I don't want to relax—

MITCH

You need to sit down here with Mitch an' relax. I need to ask you something--

She is so caught up in her own dilemma that she fails to see that he is struggling with one of his own.

GAIL

If I leave now I can just make it. No I can't. Dear Lord in Heaven, I should be runnin' as fast as I can to my car, so why am I not? Because I can't run an' I wore these very uncomfortable shoes—for you, a man I don't know anymore. As you have so accurately observed, I haven't been able to draw a complete breath into my body since I told you, "sure I can get away!" Get away? I have never gotten away with anything in my whole life!

(She cries.)

MITCH

You cryin'?

GAIL

Is that a rhetorical question!?

MITCH

Yeah, I guess—

GAIL

I have risked my husband's trust—risked everything I have, frankly, comin' here today to see you! I drove recklessly fast, too. I could'a got a ticket! An' how'd I ever explain that!? Drove like a bat out'a hell, wantin' to turn back, tellin' myself to turn around, knowin' I should go back home . . . an' I feel really ridiculous in these stupid shoes!

(removes them; pause)

I'm sorry. I know this cannot be what you had in mind when you phoned me, so you really won't object if I leave now. Hand me my purse please--I can make it by six-thirty maybe if the traffic-- I am sometimes late when I been typin' minutes from a--where are my keys? Please God, don't lett'm be locked in the--Oh! Here they are. . . . oh my goodness,

MITCH

You still have the painting?

GAIL

(stops, after a moment)

The Bridge to Eternity is hangin' in my house. I told my husband I bought it at a student art show my senior year. I've looked at it every day for thirty years. Please let me go.

MITCH

I've wondered about that painting—if I saw it now, would I think it's any good? I haven't painted . . . in a long time.

GAIL

Oh, Mitch, you should. You ever finish your Art major?

MITCH

No.

(pause)

Gail? Did you ever miss me?

GAIL

You can't ask me that. I don't want you to be sentimental about us, OK? I am married to a good man, a man who really loves me an' who has never left me and never will.

MITCH

Ouch.

GAIL

I had no right to say that to you.

MITCH

I didn't leave you. I was drafted.

GAIL

Have you been in the Army all this time?

MITCH

It's a long story.

GAIL

I know one version of that long story all too well. I loved a boy named Mitch who left me a lifetime ago. I shouldn't be here. This is wrong.

MITCH

I'm not courtin' you.

GAIL

What did you say?

MITCH

I didn't ask you to meet me so I could court you, if that's what you think.
(He cannot read her reaction)

Is that what you want?

GAIL

What I want?!

MITCH

Damned if I can tell what you want. Is it possible you still have feelin's for me?

GAIL

(tossing the shoes away)

Yes I do. Very strong feelin's. When you left for duty, it never occurred to me that I wouldn't ever *hear* from you again. Ever. I checked my mailbox in the student union three, four times a day. Nothin'. I just knew there had been some horrible mistake. After a while I thought you must'a been dead—that the boy I was goin' to spend my life with was dead somewhere. An'then sometimes I wondered if you'd just forgotten about me. I don't know which was worse. You broke my heart. You broke it over and over. And every once in a while I'd catch a glimpse of what I thought was the back of you; I'd run you down, turn you around and embarrass myself speechless with a total stranger, an' it would t be like someone put a fist right through my heart. And dreams! God help me, the dreams of you—night after night—even after I married . . . for years, Mitch.

(pause)

You broke my heart. Do you have any idea what that's like?

MITCH

That war broke your heart.

GAIL

The war . . . ?

MITCH

. . . and mine. Please hear me out. The Army had us on our bellies in the jungle before we had time to trim the cables off our uniforms. An' dammit, I did write you. A few times. I don't know why you didn't get my letters, but that sort of thing just happened.

GAIL

There's always two sides to every story. Let's just let it go, ok?--

MITCH

--Everything seemed t' happen so damned fast.

(He drifts in thought)

So, damned fast . . .

GAIL

Were you wounded over there?

MITCH

Yes. Nothin' too serious. I was lucky in that respect. In other ways, I wasn't so lucky. My parents tried to help me when I got home, an' they might have too, but . . . Mama and Daddy were killed in a car wreck comin' up to visit me at the VA Hospital in Memphis. I was there for *another* "psychological evaluation." You want to know how fucked up I was? When the doctor told me about my folks, I was relieved that they were gone, 'cause I would never again have t'see fear on my Mama's face an' disappointment in my Daddy's eyes.

GAIL

I'm so sorry, Mitch.

MITCH

If I look indigent, it's because I've had a lot of practice. I've been homeless . . . spent time doin' time; I've been in and out of clinics an' halfway houses-- I've lost years in a haze of prescription meds an' other drugs—hell, every damn drug you ever heard of. I've been one of those lost, hollow lookin' men you see goin' nowhere in particular, so far from home they can't remember ever havin' one.

(pause)

From the time I left Nam 'til not so very long ago--I was somebody I don't even know, driftin' in the dark . . .

(silence)

The sun came out for me on a sidewalk in St. Pete, in the heat of summer, about six years ago. Without any warning, I came back to myself. I tell you, it was like somebody just turned the lights on, an' I woke up.

So . . . why during all that time, didn't I contact you? I don't know. I do know that a lot of the time I thought you were with me. I thought you were right there beside me.

She moves to him. He tries to lighten the mood.

I think calling you yesterday is the bravest thing I ever did— I threw up before I phoned you.

GAIL

Is that true?

MITCH

Almost.

(pause)

I wanted to see you, to explain, an' to ask you about somthin'.

GAIL

I think I *will* try to relax a little.

He gives her the flask; She drinks.

So, how did you find me?

MITCH

(after a moment)

Remember Anne Towers?

This is significant to both of them.

Life is crazy—it can take everything away with no warnin', and then, bang, start things up again when you least expect it—somethin' as simple as a familiar name can change everything.

GAIL

Anne an' I still exchange Christmas cards.

(Pause)

I lived with her off campus the last quarter I was in school. I watched her little boy when she worked late on her art projects in the basement of Bryant Hall . . . Anne was a big help to me too.

MITCH

(gently, an admission)

I know. She told me.

She cries softly.

I had you on my mind the day I was in a hardware store in Marietta. The guy who was helpin' me—I noticed his nametag. Bruce Towers. I told him I once knew a kid named Bruce Towers whose Mom'd come back to school after her husband was killed in Nam . . . it was him. I called Anne the next day.

She holds his hand.

She told me about the baby. You didn't keep'im?

GAIL

I wanted to . . . but, no. Of course my family never knew—they don't know to this day. I didn't even tell my sisters.

(pause)

He was just like you, a little pink you. I named him Mitchell. I had him for four

days, and I fell in love with him, too. Oh, God, how I missed that little fellow. And what made it all so much worse was that you didn't even know he existed.

(She collects herself.)

For a long time I've prayed he might look me up. I could look for him, but I don't think I have that right.

MITCH

Do you have a picture of him?

GAIL

No.

They sit quietly for a while. MITCH drinks; he offers her another sip.

It'll be gettin' dark soon.

MITCH

I know.

GAIL

(sings softly)

Won't you come home Bill Baby? Won't you come home . . . My family'll be worried.

MITCH

Better be goin' on home then.

GAIL

I know I done you wrong. That was a terrible time for both of us . . . things went wrong that can't be put right. I want to believe that God has a hand in everything, but what kind of God could have played such an ugly trick on us?

MITCH

Hang on to your faith. It may be bullshit, but it's somethin'.

She hits him gently.

GAIL

There's supposed to be good in everything.

MITCH

No way that could be true. There's bad, an' then there's good. It's easy to see God in the good, but in a war, well . . . "war is hell," and God does not reside there.

(pause)

I'd accepted as fact that when I died, there'd be no evidence that I'd ever been here on ol' planet earth. It's a feelin' of profound failure realizin' you have no life's work, no book in the library, no painting in a museum—I didn't even die in the war, so my name wouldn't be etched on any monument. I felt like air--air that would just blow away one day unnoticed. There was no proof of me. My worthlessness was a hard pill to swallow, an' I was choking on it. Then I walk into a hardware store in Marietta, Georgia. I make a phone call an' find out that there's a young man somewhere, an' he's my son. Suddenly there's more to my life than the war and the waste . . . I have a son—a boy you named for me. I don't even know him, but I'm proud as hell of him. Maybe there isn't good in everything, but there's good in this. An' I'll bet if you asked our boy, he'd say we did something very good when we gave him life. My God, knowing I have a son changes everything.

GAIL

(She rises slowly.)

I am sincerely happy for you that you can find some good in this. I can't. I WON'T. Where's the good in all the heartache, all the waste! All those lost years . . . you have some kind of romantic idea of a son. I wish I had that! But I held him! He's real to me! I remember his sounds. I remember the smell of him—everything! But the truth is, he wouldn't know either one of us if he ran smack into us. And we wouldn't know him either. His parents gave him a new name. He was Mitchell for four days. We don't know if he's even alive. You and I . . . we just had really rotten luck. Yes, it's a hard pill to swallow, but swallow it on down—I have.

(pause)

It's good that you know—you finally know. I am going to tell my husband about all this when I get home.

MITCH

You don't have to do that.

GAIL

Oh, yes I do. All these years with him, so much of me is still a stranger to him. I'm gonna' fix that. I'm leavin' all this behind me, leavin' it all right here at Mr. Faulkner's grave where it started. I have loved you. You. All these years. I had to see you to know for sure that the boy I loved is dead. He's not.

(She breaks)

But the girl I was is. I am goin' to get down on my knees an' beg my husband's forgiveness for never lovin' him. I am goin' to make it up to him. An' I do not want you to phone me ever again. Is that clear?

MITCH

I'm goin' to look for him.

GAIL

Promise me you won't call or write—even if you find him. Promise me.

MITCH

If that's what you want.

GAIL

That damned war is finally over for me. It's over, an' I'm goin' home.

GAIL exits. MITCH sits on the slab and sings quietly to himself.

Scene Two

It's a chilly afternoon. MITCH and KEN stand a few feet apart at the foot of Faulkner's grave. MITCH awaits a reply, KEN moves about as though he's trying to stay warm, but he's actually agitated.

KEN

So you knew my Mother—my birth Mother?

MITCH

Yep.

KEN

Why didn't she come herself? Did she ask you to look me up?

MITCH

Didn't say that.

Pause. KEN looks at his watch. He is clearly conflicted.

KEN

Look, ah—

MITCH

Mitch.

KEN

Mitch. Look, I have a lot to do. Like I told you on the phone, I'm in a hurry. I'm on my way from Little Rock to Monroe. I need to be there before dinner time. So?

(waits for an answer)

Did my birth Mother ask you to locate me?

MITCH

Long way out of your way.

KEN

Yeah, long way--So, did she?

(waits)

This is getting tiresome, Mitch.

There is no response.

Why don't you answer my question?

MITCH

It's not exactly like she t knows

KEN

(sensing MITCH's difficulty, he attempts to help)

. . . about . . . this meeting?

(pause)

Look, you asked me to meet you. I am here. What's going on?

MITCH

(He starts to speak, but all he can muster is:)

No.

KEN

No?

MITCH

No, she doesn't know I found you. I mean she knows I might, but--

KEN

And, who are you to her?

MITCH

An old friend.

KEN

(He turns away to think. He may go at any moment)

What the fuck!?

MITCH

What?

KEN

This is William Faulkner's grave?

MITCH

Didn't know?

KEN

Had no idea. Wow. William Faulkner. Why are we meeting here?

MITCH

Your Mother an' I used to meet here.

KEN

In the grave yard?

MITCH

It was a college thing. Look, Ken, I'm just checkin' up on you for'er. That's all. Just checkin'.

KEN

(stepping away, refocusing)

That doesn't make sense—how could you be checking up on me for her, when she doesn't even know you're doing it? Besides, you could do a "check up" over the phone.

(no response)

I'm almost thirty--she gave me up at birth. Why check up on me for her now? Why not when I was seven? Or fifteen?

(pause; exasperated)

I'm sorry but this is--this is getting weird.

MITCH

How so?

KEN

An "old friend" of my birth Mother asks me to meet him in Mississippi in a graveyard to "check on me?" That doesn't seem strange to you?

MITCH

(enjoying the irony)

No stranger than you agreein' to do it.

KEN

Enough. Enough of this bull shit. Look, Mitch, I know you're my biological father. I know that, OK?

MITCH attempts to respond, but again cannot find the words.

You found out I was looking for my birth parents. Right?

MITCH

Right. You traced yourself back to Anne Towers. She told me you'd been in touch with her a while ago. You know who your birth mother is.

KEN

Yeah.

MITCH

You know where she is, too.

KEN

Yeah.

MITCH

So?

KEN

So . . . what?

MITCH

Why haven't you contacted her?

KEN

What's the hurry? I'm just curious--who wouldn't be? I was curious about my birth father too. That's the main reason I came today. To meet you. Were you ever going to tell me? Huh? I phoned Ms. Towers again after you invited me here. She told me who you are. I assumed you wanted to meet me. Now I'm not sure what you want.

MITCH

I want you to meet your Mother.

KEN

I think I may have met all the parents I want to meet for a while.

MITCH

Gail never went one day without thinkin' about you. She's wanted to find you since the day she let you go, but she decided to leave the findin' to you. She knows you have a life of your own and parents and she respects that.

KEN

Oh, now that's funny.

MITCH

Why funny?

KEN

Hell, she knows less about me than I know about her--which isn't much.

Conversation comes to a halt. Neither man seems to know what to say or do next. Finally:

I should be on my way--

MITCH

What's in Monroe?

KEN
(taken aback by MITCH's abruptness)

A friend.

MITCH

A girl?

KEN almost says something. Checks Himself; decides to permit the evasion

KEN

My buddy I work with--his parents live there. It's nothing really, but I told him yes when he asked me to visit like a month ago, so now it's an obligation. I'm meeting his parents—his family. We're all going out to dinner or something. He wants me to meet his sister, who is probably a dog if she looks anything like him.

MITCH

You don't have a girl friend?

KEN

Not at the moment. I don't have time for that—besides I never had much luck with girls.

MITCH

Don't know why that would be true—you're a good lookin' fella.

KEN

Oh yeah, you think so?

I sure do. MITCH

You wanna be my girl friend? KEN

Not today. MITCH

The men share a smile.

Do I look like her? KEN

I'd say you resemble her. MITCH

I sure as hell don't look like you. KEN

I don't even look like me. MITCH

They look at each other for a beat. Something is unspoken.

OK. What kind of name is Cabel? English?

KEN
(correcting MITCH'S pronunciation)
Cabel—rhymes with “the bell” not “table.” Cuban.

MITCH
Cuban! My god. Adopted by Cubans.

KEN
You make it sound like I was abducted by aliens. My Dad was-- is Cuban.

MITCH
I was in Miami for a while. Met a lot of Cubans. Good people.

KEN
Oh, yeah? Some of your best friends, huh?

MITCH

No. But, I really like the Cuban food.

KEN

What's not to like about Cuban food? My best childhood memories are all about Cuban food, and all the crazy cousins on my Dad's side of the family. My Mom's a typical American mix, but she learned to cook Cuban, and when all the cousins and uncles and aunts would gather, everything happened in the kitchen—drinking, laughing, fighting, cooking. Great smells and sounds.

He catches himself speaking freely, puts the brakes on. He moves close to MITCH, as if inspecting him; MITCH becomes a bit uneasy.)

You really don't give a crap about Cuban food, do you?

MITCH

I said I like it.

(pause)

Tell me some things about you.

KEN

I just did.

(checks watch)

Shit.

MITCH

Stay just a little longer. Please.

KEN

I need to go.

MITCH

Just a few more questions. Religion?

KEN

What do you mean? Do I practice a religion? No.

MITCH

Good. I mean, that's good? Right?

KEN

Not good or bad—just is.

Sports? MITCH

Sports? Sports . . . I watch sports on TV. Sometimes. KEN

Never played? Not even in high school? MITCH

What is that a rule? All boys are required to play sports?
(pause) KEN
Always thought I could play tennis. If I'd had a racket.

Tennis. Hmm. I'll have to look into that. Sing? MITCH

Sing? You mean do I sing? KEN
(finds this funny)

Yeah, do ya'sing? MITCH

Try using sentences. You mean, do I sing, like in public or something? KEN

Sing—*can* you sing? MITCH

I don't know. I carry a tune. KEN

Me too. I'm a shower singer. Your Mother sings-- MITCH

I sing in the shower too. Sometimes. KEN

When you're a little drunk? Sing then? MITCH

Yeah. *I guess.* KEN

MITCH
(imitating him)
Yeah? Go to college?

KEN
Oh, fuck, man why didn't you just send a questionnaire?

MITCH
Sore subject, huh?

KEN
No.

MITCH
So? College?

KEN
Started Jr. College after high school, but what with work—I had to start working full-time the week after I graduated high school. I just couldn't do the college thing.

MITCH
Should'a gone to college. It's not too late to go.

KEN
You gunna'pay for it?

MITCH
(after a pause)
Your adopted parents couldn't put you through college?

KEN
My Dad left when I was five. Saw him once after that when he came for the lawn mower. Mom got cancer, finally died when I was fourteen. She was sick a long time.

(He smiles as he see's MITCH's reaction)
Not what you expected, huh?

MITCH
Christ. No. I'm sorry--

KEN
--I just had no luck in the family department.

MITCH

Extended family?

KEN

The Cuban grandparents never accepted me. Poppy Cabel called me “the little bastard.” He didn’t speak much English, but he sure as hell could say “little bastard.” We lost contact with all of them after the break-up. I never knew my Mom’s family. I know she had an aunt, but--no, when Mom died, it was just me. Sounds like a fucking soap opera, huh? Well, you are so wrong--it was a sitcom, a laugh a minute. OK, that’s my life story. I’m tired of standing out here in the cold. You have something to tell me?

MITCH

You’ve got family who’d be happy to meet you.

KEN

Don’t want any more family for a while—There’s a lot of risk in that. I’ve lost enough family for a life time, thank you very much.

MITCH

Who you tryin’to convince, me or you?

(pause)

Who took care of you when your Mom died?

KEN

Arkansas.

MITCH is speechless.

Boy’s ranch then a foster home with, oh, maybe seven other’s like me—it varied from month to month. You want a full report!?

(speaking quickly, attaching little importance to what he says:)

Went to public school like a regular kid. Worked in a garage after school. Learned a trade. Let’s see. . . I work in a car repair shop. . . save my money . . . live in West Memphis now--

MITCH

What were the foster parents like?

KEN

(abruptly)

I don’t want to talkl about that anymore.

MITCH

(after a pause)

So what do you do? What's your job?

KEN

Mechanic.

MITCH

Oh, yeah. Of course—you said you were a mechanic--

KEN

Yeah. Stay with me pops. See, mechanic's hands. Never can get all the grease off. It's always in the creases of my hands, around my nails—always there to remind me.

MITCH

Of what?

KEN

That I am a mechanic.

MITCH

It's an honest trade.

KEN

Can be. Should be. I sure don't want to do it forever. Probably will though. What do you do?

MITCH

What would you do if you could do anything—anything at all?

KEN

I can't do anything—anything at all, so what's the point? What do you do?!

MITCH

Retired!

(pause)

If you don't plan to work on cars for the rest of your life, what is it you want to do?

KEN

I . . . I don't know!

MITCH

You must have given it some thought. Don't you ever dream?

KEN

No.

MITCH

Bullshit, everyone dreams of bein' or doin' somethin'—hell, even I do that. A man's dreams define who he is, or who he could be. What are your dreams?

KEN

I dream of being in Monroe!

(becoming extremely agitated)

I dream of never coming here! I dream of--Man you . . . just shut up and let me go, OK!?

MITCH

I'm not holdin' you here.

KEN has become very agitated; he
Moves about and gasps for air.

Hey, relax—

KEN

Stay over there! Leave me alone.

(turning a frustrated circle)

I'm leaving now!

(he does not move)

I am late! Late!

(after a moment, he sinks to his knees and speaks in a
whisper)

Christ. What am I doing? I gotta get out of here.

MITCH

If you want to go, you just do it. I'm sorry I asked so many questions—you do whatever you want--

KEN

--Shut up! I can't think! Just shut the fuck up.

He starts to rise, but sits with his back to
MITCH; after a silence:

MITCH

You gonna' be all right?

KEN

(turns)

I'm good. I'm good, thanks. I'm . . . look, I don't know why I snapped at you like that. I'm sorry. But, really . . . "what are my dreams?" Christ.

(He laughs)

What are yours old man? What do you want out of life other than grilling me and guilt-tripping me into driving to Jackson? Huh?

MITCH

I had all kinds of hopes an' dreams for my life. Some things got in the way. I'm not young anymore an' my expectations've changed considerably. I'd hate to see a young fella' like you go down that same road.

KEN

I took an art history course in high school—Fine Arts elective. I ate it up. When it ended, the class went with the teacher and a few parents on a trip. Big trip. France, Spain, Italy and England. A tour of Europe's museums and galleries . . . first six weeks of the summer—sort of a geek's senior trip sort'a thing, only they got some college credit. I didn't go.

MITCH

Why not?

KEN

Way, way too expensive. I would have given my left nut to go with them. I worked my ass off to save up the money, but . . . three thousand bucks . . .

MITCH

You were what, eighteen?

KEN

Yeah. And stupid. I blamed everybody, my teachers, other kids in the class, my boss—all of them. I just knew there had been some kind of conspiracy to steal my life from me. My attitude sucked. My foster parents finally had enough and kicked me out. I was eighteen by then and it was time to go anyway. I lost a job—two jobs actually. Got into fights.

(pause)

This is sorta' like pulling your pants down in front of a stranger. Finally, I grew up a little and started trying to accept my lot, and get on with . . . reality. Accepting what . . . there is, and not dreaming of something else. You see, dreaming of something else got to be a habit with me. Dreaming took me down a rough road to fuckin' nowhere at all. For example, I used to imagine I had a magic lantern, and I'd ask the genie in it to let me have a different life—the one I was supposed to have—MY LIFE. Started imagining that when my Dad left. It got out of hand. I still have that fantasy sometimes, and I imagine by now I'm out of grad school, I

studied art history—I mean seriously, the mechanic with grease under his nails dreams of being an art historian and traveling and actually seeing the paintings and sculptures I've seen slides of. Silly, silly shit . . . I try so hard to block it out, but it still

(becoming passionate)

I go to every art museum I can around here in the Southeast, and I buy books on art—I'm most interested in the Impressionists—not just the paintings themselves but why those guys painted like that. How they turned reality into . . . a new reality. Whenever I look at really amazing art, well pictures of art, I don't know how to say it, I just feel as though I belong to something. That's what kept me going through my Mom's death and all the crap that followed—I had a sense--I still do sometimes, have a sense of something else . . . like I have a place in the world . . . but can't seem to find it.

(snaps out of it)

OK, that's unhealthy bullshit, and it's gunna stop right now.

MITCH

No, that's a good dream.

KEN

A whole hell of a lot of good it does to dream, too. Get's you nowhere.

(checks is watch.)

I, uh-- do you know how long it takes to drive to Monroe from here? I guess I could take 55 to Jackson and hit 20? But, Greenwood to Vicksburg looked to be the shorter route on the map—

MITCH

What time are you expected in Louisiana?

KEN

Between six and seven.

MITCH

It's almost four-thirty now. It's more than two hours to Jackson and then at least another two, maybe three to Monroe.

KEN

If I go Greenwood to Vicksburg—

MITCH

--may take even longer—all those little towns—

KEN

Damn!

MITCH
You're not gunna' make it.

KEN
Fuck! Now what do I do?

MITCH
Call your friend and tell him.

KEN
Tell him what? That I blew the day talking to my birth father at William Faulkner's grave?!

MITCH
Just say you're not going to make it.

KEN
I'll say I'll be late, that's what I'll say.
(leaving)
Hell, I can't believe I drove all the way over here.

MITCH
(desperately trying to bring him back)
You did drive all the way over here, and you want to know why you did? You need to know your family.

KEN
I had a fuckin' family.

MITCH
You said you might want to meet your birth mother—

KEN
Changed my mind.

MITCH
You could drive to Jackson this afternoon and meet your Mother tomorrow.

KEN
That's not going to happen, Sir.

MITCH
You're afraid!? You don't have the balls to meet your family?

KEN

You are one to accuse me of not having balls.

(long pause)

I thought I'd walk up to you today and you'd shake my hand and say something like, hello son, I'm your Dad. And aren't you a fine strappin' lad, or something . . . like that . . . I know my birth Mother needs to see me—you have made that abundantly clear, but what about you? You want something else from me—what is it?

MITCH

I want to help you, if you'll let me.

KEN

I won't. And, I can't help you . . . with your . . . guilt, or whatever it is, Mitch. Listen, I needed family after Mom died because I was a kid, I'm not a kid anymore. You don't owe me. Hell the only thing we have in common is one orgasm.

MITCH

You're a cynical bastard—

KEN

Oh, that's nice!--

MITCH

--damned shame to be so cynical at such a young age!

(pause)

I found out about you just a couple of months ago. I've thought about it—meetin' my son, every wakin' minute since. I didn't know how you'd react. When I saw your Mother after all these years, she thought I was a vagrant. I didn't want you to feel any . . . well, I didn't want you to be ashamed that I was the guy who had that orgasm. Please, son. Please give me a chance. I haven't always been like this. I was a fine strappin'lad once too. My hair was the color of your hair.

He extends his hand to KEN, who does not take it.

You've got my hands.

KEN

(under his breath, pacing)

Jesus fucking Christ!

(Looking at his Father now)

Listen, Mitch, I can stand here and look at you and say, "this man is my Father," and I don't feel anything. Got it? Nothing. I don't feel pride. I don't feel shame,

obligation . . . I don't feel anything. But, I sense a great need from you—it's like a magnet, pulling at me. I felt that from the moment I came here. You want something from me, and I have nothing for you. Nothing. Hell, I'd love to have a parent—I mean it would be so great to know there's somebody still around who knows me really well and would love me , no matter how I might screw up. In that way, sure I want family. I want grandparents for my kids if I'm ever stupid enough to have them. I want a lot of things! But, I had a Mom who loved me. I won't forget that. Ever. I'd like to feel something other than curiosity about my birth Mother, about you, but curiosity is all I can come up with! Christ! . . . fucking, fucking Christ, don't wait until I have my life almost together and then come at with, with "what are your dreams?" and "your Mother needs you." It's not right for you to need anything from me! You should have used a rubber!

MITCH goes to him and attempts to comfort him; KEN breaks away, cursing under his breath.

MITCH

(after a pause)

What are you curious about?

KEN

What's your profession?

MITCH

Reformed drug addict, handy man.

KEN

What did you aspire to?

MITCH

I studied art. I was a painter.

KEN

(wiping tears from his face)

A painter? A painter?

MITCH

Don't have a stroke.

KEN

What have you done with your life?

MITCH

Survived.

That's it? KEN

I have a son. MITCH

Who was an accident—not an accomplishment. Any genetic diseases? KEN

None that I know of. MITCH

War injuries? KEN

A few. MITCH

Lose any organs? KEN

Still have two lungs, two kidneys, and a heart. You're welcome to all if you need'um. MITCH

Thanks. KEN

There's diabetes in your Mother's family. MITCH

Great. Anything else? KEN

She studied Music. She was a vocal performance major—the voice of a angel. She named you Mitch an' fell in love with you. MITCH

I don't want to hear that crap! KEN

She loved me. Really loved me. We lost our virginity together right here beside MITCH

Mr. Faulkner's slab. This is where you began. Two young an' stupid kids made you right here. Your Mother sings; I do not. I'm no good with mechanical things. Your mother may be, I doubt it. You have half-brothers and sisters in Jackson. The woman who bore you, loved you, an' gave you away has mourned for you every day of your life. The woman is in Jackson, just two and a half hours away. She has a big ole hole in her heart, son. You wouldn't pass a stranger on the road in that condition without stoppin' to help. You need to meet her. Let her see you, let her know who you are.

KEN

Who am I?

MITCH

A fella' who's been through shit, just like his biological parents, a kid who's shared their misery an' survived just like them, a kid who's brave enough to drive to a grave to meet his father, a kid any man would give his life to have as a son.

KEN

Christ.

MITCH

Hell, you're smart and handsome, an' full of fight, an' I wouldn't have a son any other way.

KEN

I'm not your son!

MITCH

You are my son, I'm just not your father! I hoped you'd like me—I fucked up not tellin' you right off—I was scared just like you are. Damn. Damn. Damn! But you're wrong. I don't expect anything from you for myself. I have everything I need now. I see that I do have a son. An unhappy one, but one I am proud of—

KEN

You don't have the right to be proud of me--

MITCH

(finally letting go)

--proud of you whether you like it or not!--An' I am sick an' tired of you an' your Mother always talkin' about what we do an' do not have the right to do an' feel an' want, God damn it!

KEN

(knocked off his plate for a moment)

What?

MITCH

You'll be what you aspire to be. You have the stuff to do that. An' I'll help you if you let me. I know Gail will too. We'll get you in school—

KEN

(almost breaking down; moving to exit)

Stop it! Please, please stop it.

MITCH

NO! I know we can't make up for what you've had to live through, but we can help you have the life you want! Hell, boy, you may've had a bad turn'a luck, but you sure as hell didn't see your life shot down by a war. You're still young an' there's a lot 'a life ahead of you! You can be an' do anything you want if you're not afraid to reach for it.

KEN

That's a dream. It's not real. What's real is I have a job and I pay my bills and I take one day at a time. What's real is that strangers want a piece of my life, and I am uncomfortable with that. I don't want to owe you anything, got that?!

MITCH

You wouldn't owe us—

KEN

Like hell I wouldn't. I didn't ask for this—I didn't ask to be born. I am sorry as all hell you and your girlfriend got knocked up and the war happened and all, but I didn't do it to you. I'm never going to love you people—

(determined to kill the snake)

I'm not even sure I'd have lunch with you. A fucking drug addict! Great! I finally find my Father and he's a complete loser.

Pause; the men are unable to look at each other now.

So. OK, I have your number and I'll look you up if I need a kidney. Don't call me anymore.

(KEN crosses out, speaking as he goes)

I'm going to be so fucking late.

MITCH

(sits on the grave and speaks as lights fade)

So much like his Mother.

He is alone.

Scene Three

GAIL sits under a blanket on Faulkner's grave; she is crying. MITCH sits nearby; he waits for the crying to stop, much the way one would wait out a rain storm. And then, finally:

GAIL
Why don't you say something?

He looks at her incredulously

GAIL
Well?

MITCH
I didn't want to disturb you.

GAIL
What?

MITCH
I wouldn't want to get in the way of . . . whatever's goin' on here.

GAIL
I was cryin'.

MITCH
Is that what that was?

GAIL
That's not funny.

MITCH
You're tellin' me.

GAIL
I can't believe you're bein' so mean. After . . . after . . . what I let you do.

MITCH
Let me? I thought we did that together. We were havin' such a good time, an' it just happened, naturally, just like my Mama said it was supposed to when two

people really love each other. It's the greatest moment of my whole life an' I don't understand why you're cryin' about it.

GAIL

Mitch, I lost my virginity.

MITCH

(checking under the blanket)

No, it's not here. Have you looked in your purse? Maybe you left your virginity back at the dorm!

(hollers to world at large)

Hey, If anybody finds Gail's virginity--

GAIL

(hitting him)

Are you crazy? I just lost my virginity!

(whispers)

An' I am not married!

MITCH

Why are you whisperin'—there's nobody here but us,

(looks around)

an' that guy behind that tree!

GAIL

Idgit.

MITCH

I lost my virginity too, an' I'm not married. I'm not cryin'! Hell, I feel great. Gail, don't you know how special that was?

GAIL

(warming)

Special how?

MITCH

Well, for one thing, it wasn't over before it got started like it is with half the guys I know, and you liked it.

GAIL

Don't make me out to be a big ole slut! I most certainly did not "like" it!

MITCH

I swear, if you don't take that back, I'm enlistin' tomorrow!

GAIL

Right now I wouldn't mind it if you WERE in Vietnam!

(he is silent)

I didn't mean that.

MITCH

I think you did.

(gets up)

You know, I was really afraid of having sex—I used to worry about it all the time. Almost twenty-one and still a virgin! I wanted it so bad, but I didn't know what to do an' didn't have anybody to do it to. . . I mean, I didn't love anybody, except my parents, an' well—that didn't come out right. . . well, hell you know what I mean. There's been plenty of chances for me to have sex, but I wanted to love the girl I . . . I wanted her to love me. . . an'then tonight . . . holy shit—

GAIL

Please watch your language—

MITCH

(doesn't miss a beat)

--OK, OK, an' then tonight . . . I know I love you now. I must love you. I melted right into you an' I wasn't afraid at all.

GAIL

(embarrassed)

Hush.

MITCH

You made me feel as beautiful as you are, an' now you're spittin' on it. I will enlist if you don't retract that thoughtless statement, I will, an' I hope I die over there so I don't have t' feel like this anymore.

GAIL

You don't mean a word you're sayin'.

(no response)

Mitch?

He turns away; and then shamefully:

I did like it.

(no response)

I enjoyed it.

(no response)

I loved it. I love you, Mitch. Look at me, honey. Try to forgive me for bein' so

silly? Please?

MITCH

(embracing her)

It was so beautiful. An' we did it. We two ignorant virgins—we did it, an' we did it right. We're lovers, Gail.

She withdraws

You and me—we're lovers now, aren't we?

GAIL

I hope you don't think we're doin' it again? Not before we're married, anyway. No, we're not lovers—we can't be. You're my boyfriend an' we made a mistake, just this once.

MITCH

(after a pause)

Gail, where did you learn to kiss like that?

GAIL

How do you mean?

MITCH

I've been kissed a few times but never like that. Your kisses are a miracle.

GAIL

Thank you.

MITCH

So soft , wet an' silky an'--

GAIL

Hush. You make it sound nasty.

MITCH

Where did you learn to kiss? Who taught you?

She begins to laugh. MITCH is clearly unhappy.

GAIL

You're not gonna like this.

MITCH
Who? What's his name?

GAIL
(enjoying the innuendo)
It wasn't a boy.

MITCH
What? What are you sayin'? A man?

GAIL
My sister!

MITCH
You are shittin' me!

GAIL
Why can't you just say "you're kiddin' me!?" Why do you have to turn a perfectly good phrase into something nasty?!—

MITCH
You kissed your sister like that?! Gail, that's horrible.

GAIL
Sisters teach each other a lot'a things. You can't be lesbians with your sister.

MITCH
Where do you sisters draw the line? Your sister, my God! --

GAIL
--The line is drawn at kissin'. When I was thirteen an' she was seventeen, Christa taught me to kiss. I love my big sister.

MITCH
I guess you do. Bein' an only child, I suppose I just don't understand these things. Tell Christa thank you for me.

GAIL
(after a pause)
I love my little sister too, an' Mama and Daddy an'—

MITCH
Christ.

GAIL

Mitch, it hurts me when you talk like that. You promised me you were gonna' work on your foul language—

MITCH

I know. I will! Sorry.

GAIL

(after a pause)

Do you think anybody saw us?

MITCH

Probably.

(She hits him)

You keep hittin' me like that an I'm gunna hit'ya back.

(He snuggles her)

No. I doubt anybody could see us at this time of night—not one car drove by, an' the people in those houses across the street are old and blind and must'a gone to bed hours ago. But I reckon half of Oxford could hear you.

She hits him again, and he pins to the ground with a kiss. She melts.

GAIL

(gives him a smack)

Is that how you hit back?

MITCH

Careful, I may just have to give you a lickin'!

He proceeds to kiss her all over including under the blanket; she screams with delight.

SHHHH.

(He listens for anything nearby for a moment, then solemnly:)

Gail, I have somethin' to say. We're startin' our lives together now, an' we gotta tend to it like it was a new born baby. I'm bein' serious now.

GAIL

You are so . . . wonderful an' serious. How could you be more wonderfully serious? Where is it?

MITCH

Hmm? What?

MITCH

Christ. Sorry.

GAIL

Can you borrow a car tomorrow an' drive me to Batesville? Do you think they'd have 'um in Batesville?

MITCH

A douche store in Batesville . . . ?

GAIL

(hitting him)

A drug store—is there a drug store?

MITCH

If there're sluts in Batesville, I guess they'd sell douche's there too. Somewhere. Don't married women use 'um? My Mother has one an' she's no slut.

GAIL

Mitch darlin', please promise me you won't think I'm a slut. I mean when you wake up tomorrow—when you've had a chance to really think about it—promise me. I know girls who've slipped an' their boyfriends never call 'um again.

MITCH

I promise.

He accepts a kiss.

You need to relax, honey. Take a deep breath. That's it. Now, sing to me again.

GAIL

Better not.

(she giggles a bit.)

Don't want to wake the old blind people, an' I think the singin' may have gotten me in trouble the first place.

(she starts to speak, but goes silent)

MITCH

What?

GAIL

We just lost our virginity in a grave yard. Is that significant, do you think?

MITCH

Faulkner's grave is here. It's that holy place where you wanted to come an' drink

wine and make out.

GAIL

It is a holy place, according to Dr. Harrington, my American Literature professor.

MITCH

If it wasn't holy before, it sure as all hell is now. I reckon ole Bill Baby enjoyed every minute of . . . us.

GAIL

I'm so glad we had it to ourselves this once. I guess a lot of girls have lost their virginity here.

MITCH

That's what I hear.

GAIL

That makes what we did common as all git-ou!!

MITCH

But, we made love, didn't we?

GAIL

Yes. We made love.

MITCH

That's different.

GAIL

I think you're right. There's nothin' common about love is there?

MITCH

Not in the least bit.

GAIL

I don't want you to breathe a word about this to anyone--

MITCH

Good Lord, I can't believe—

GAIL

I know how you tell all your family secrets, and I don't want you talkin' about—

MITCH

--MY GOD! Sorry. I just told you how sacred this is to me. It hurts like hell your not trustin' me. You take that back or I'll announce the loss of your virginity over the cafeteria intercom!

GAIL

I'm sorry.

MITCH

Should be.

GAIL

I've never been . . . well, not a virgin before an' I don't know quite how to act now.

MITCH

What's the opposite of a virgin?

GAIL

(thinks hard for a moment, cries)

A slut?

MITCH

That's not the answer I was lookin' for.

GAIL

A whore!?

MITCH

A woman! You're a woman, now, Gail, and sluts just do it out'a lust, an' whore's do it for money, an' we did it out'a love. And it's personal an' special an' I'd never brag about.

GAIL

I am sorry I doubted you.

MITCH

Gail, you are a handful. Is there any of that Mogan David left?

GAIL

A little! I can't believe we drank so much of it. Where'd you say you got this?

MITCH

Travis gave it to me when he left. Poor bastard. Drove over the county line with some Sig Eps—they had a case of beer an' three bottles of Wild Turkey an' the Sherriff stopped'um for speedin' an' found it all except this one bottle of wine—he

hid it in the motor!

GAIL

I can't believe he let you have it after all that.

MITCH

He was savin' it for something special, an' I guess nothin' special happened before he had to report.

GAIL

Have'ya heard from him?

MITCH

Nope. He's probably over there scared shitless this very minute. I can tell you somethin' now. Travis hugged me the day he moved out of the dorm. Hugged onto me an' I thought he was gonna cry.

GAIL

Awe, that's so sweet.

MITCH

It felt kinda' queer, but I didn't let on, seein' how he'd been drafted an all. He said, "Mitch, what if I die without ever knowing what it's like to git some pussy?"

GAIL

He said that? You are makin' that up.

MITCH

I swear. That's what he said, then he picked up his last box an' left. He meant it.

GAIL

Oh, good grief.

MITCH

Well, if I'm drafted, that's one thing I won't have to worry about.

He tickles her; they kiss.

Gosh, Gail, there's so much poor dumb Travis doesn't know. There's a lot more important things than just gittin' some tail. I have a whole life to look forward to with you. An', I have my work. God, Gail, I have paintings in my head I've never painted—not even sketched out. I mean, they're in me, and I feel'um wantin' to squeeze out. I feel that tonight more than ever before. An' it's not just me either. There's a world of stages for you to sing on, an' I'll be there with you. If I got drafted tomorrow, I'd hug onto you an' I'd definitely cry, an' I say, "What if I die

an' miss out on my life!"

GAIL

That's not gonna happen. Look me in the eye, Mitch. That is not goin' to happen to us. Promise me. Promise me!

MITCH

I promise.

She holds him tightly. They are silent for a while.

GAIL

I like your dream—your dreams are so grand, like when you told me you wanted to have a show in Paris an' have the art world at your "bare Mississippi feet." But that part about my singin' on the "world's stages." That's ridiculous.

MITCH

Why ridiculous! You are gifted. You have a rare talent. When you sang those Mozart songs—

GAIL

(laughing)

"Mozart songs?"

MITCH

--at you junior recital, five hundred people gave you—

GAIL

--a hundred and twenty—

MITCH

--a thunderous applause an' they stood up, all at once. They stood up for you. A painter never knows that kind of reaction to his work, you've had that, and you can't ignore it.

GAIL

You'd be so stuck up if you had even an inklin' of what people say about that painting you gave me.

MITCH

(with great pride)

Bridge to Eternity

GAIL

Bridge to Eternity. Girls I don't even know knock on my door an' want'a see it. They say, what is it, and I tell them it's a bridge to Eternity, and they just stand there in awe. The house mother from the Gamma house tried to get me to sell it to her. Your painting is very popular. If we put it on the Fulton Chapel stage an' filled the auditorium with people, I just know they'd give it a standin' ovation.

MITCH

How much did she offer, the lady from Delta Gamma?

GAIL

First she said fifteen dollars an' then she went up to twenty-five—

MITCH

My God! Twenty-five!?

GAIL

I promise! I assured her that no amount of money would ever be enough. I love it so much. I'll ask my Daddy to have it framed for my birthday.

He kisses her; she plays with his hair.

I love to sing, but I want to marry an' have a family an' support my husband—that's my passion. That's my dream.

MITCH

An' who will this husband be?

GAIL

After tonight, it'ad better be you.

MITCH

You do love me, Gail. You will marry me won't you?

GAIL

Yes. I will marry you an' love you an' pose for you an' mix your paints for'ya an' clean up after you, an' starve with you if I have to. . . I'll give you beautiful children too, an' I'll always love you.

MITCH

All that? I am a lucky, lucky man.

They kiss; the kiss leads to passion; she withdraws.

GAIL

(the most important realization of her life)

So, we're engaged?

MITCH

We're engaged! I gotta' get you a ring! Do you want to pick it out? Is that how it works?

GAIL

Hmm . . . no, I want it to be surprise. I don't want to know what it looks like 'til I see it on my finger, an' don't want to know when, 'til it happens.

(up on her knees abruptly)

I think I'll wait til I have the ring to tell my parents.

MITCH

Why?

GAIL

I just think I should, Mother'll want to start planning a big weddin' an' I'd like to get through my senior recital before she starts drivin' me crazy. My sister's weddin' almost killed the whole family. You didn't want to actually get married before we graduate, did you?

MITCH

I hadn't thought. Do you want a big wedding?

GAIL

Why? Don't you?

MITCH

I don't think I do. When I think of marrying you, I just think of you and me, an' not a lot of other people.

GAIL

Other people? You mean like--like my family? You met my family at Home Comin' last year. You didn't like 'um? You said my little sister was cute. I thought you liked her. Please tell me you don't hate my family. I don't think I could marry an' not be close to my family any more.

MITCH

Would I be marryin' you or your family?!

GAIL

You'd be marryin' me.

(pause)

Mitch, I've never met your parents.

MITCH

They'll love you.

GAIL

I'll make them love me. You'll just have to make an effort to like my family, even if you don't want to. I think I'll have to insist on that. Oh, but my Daddy'd shoot you if he knew about . . . tonight.

MITCH

Seriously?

GAIL

Seriously.

(snuggles)

He'll never know, I promise.

(pause)

A weddin's a big deal in my family . . . we'll have ta'think about it . . . very carefully. We'll need some time to plan everything anyway. We'll get married in First Baptist in Jackson, of course. Christa had twelve bride's maids. . . that's too many. Well, maybe not--it's a huge church. Have you ever been there? Mama made Christa wear her old weddin' dress an' it was awful—I have to figure a way around that.

MITCH

Whoa! I wanna finish grad school before we get married. I mean, don't you think that's a good idea? 'Course I haven't been accepted yet, an' besides, if I get drafted, it'll change everything. I feel like I don't have much control over my life right now. I guess we do need t'wait an' see what happens. I think we'll have to wait at least three years anyway.

GAIL

Three! You think it'll have to be that long off? We'll be virgins all over again by then.

(pause)

You're worried about gettin' drafted aren't you? You're an only son. Doesn't that mean they--

MITCH

--wait 'til everybody else is dead before they take me? I know two only sons who've been drafted this month alone. Why does there have to be a war right now?!

(pause)

I wish tonight, right now, this second, time would stop. Here we'd be forever snuggled up under this blanket with only Mr. Faulkner an' his loved ones to keep us company. We'd be frozen in time, safe an' in love, always young an' hopeful

an' together . . . always in the afterglow of our first time . . . See that star up there?

GAIL

Which one? The sky is full of stars tonight.

MITCH

That really bright one just over that big oak. See it?

GAIL

I see it.

MITCH

Make a wish.

GAIL

I don't wish on stars, I talk directly to their maker.

MITCH

Oh, Lord, don't start in religion tonight, please.

GAIL

You go right ahead an' wish upon a star. I'm gunna to pray for what I want. What will you wish for exactly?

MITCH

You can hear my wish if I can hear your prayer.

GAIL

OK. You first.

MITCH

Star bright, star light, brightest star I see tonight, wish I may an' wish I might be happy with Gail always as I am tonight.

MITCH kisses her. She snuggles close.

GAIL

Dear Lord, please forgive us for slippin' tonight, an' please let the War end before Mitch gets drafted, an' bless us an' give us a life of happiness together, an' . . . Please God, be patient with Mitch and show me how to

MITCH

I wish for many more perfect nights of blissful love makin', an' I wish for Gail to sing on great stages all over the world, An' . . .
Oh, I wish to get a Masters in Art

help him find faith in you, an' . . .

please bless that I won't get
caught sneakin' back in the dorm
tonight.

An' bless that it won't be three years
before we--
Shhhh. An' please forgive Mitch for
Sayin' that while I'm prayin'!

In the name of your son,
Jesus, Amen.

and visit the Louvre, an' I wish to be not
just famous, but celebrated as a fine
painter
like Degas or Monet.

I wish the War were over an'
poor dumb Travis were gittin'
some pussy.

Sorry.

Finally, what I wish for most of all is for
Gail t'sin with me again tonight before
she sneaks back into the dorm!

During the overlapping dialogue, Older
MITCH and GAIL have entered; they
stand, barely lit, behind their younger
selves. KEN follows them in, and stands
between them. Lights fade as the young lovers
laugh and wrestle playfully under a blanket, on
the grave of William Faulkner.

END

