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## The Spirit of the Spitfire: Creating the Role of Nancy Shedman in Romulus Linney's "Holy Ghosts"

Caleigh M. Keith  
*University of New Orleans*, [cquirin@uno.edu](mailto:cquirin@uno.edu)

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The Spirit of the Spitfire:  
Creating the Role of Nancy Shedman in  
Romulus Linney's Holy Ghosts

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Film, Theatre & Communication Arts  
Theatre Performance: Acting

by

Caleigh Keith

B. A. Bluefield College, 2009

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*“I intend for this journal to be a valid record of what I regard as essentially a pilgrimage, a simple geographical pilgrimage, yes, but also a pilgrimage back through time, a pilgrimage to a simpler era, back--dare I hope it--to the very roots of consciousness and belief. I make this pilgrimage fully aware of the august company I hereby join: all those pilgrims of yore who have sought, through their travels, a system of belief--who have, at the final destination, found also themselves. I seek no less.”*

--Richard Burlage in Oral History by Lee Smith

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I've always had a story to tell and, thankfully, I've always had an attentive audience. I extend gratitude to those who helped shape me into the actor I am as I receive this degree.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explains the acting method used by Caleigh Keith while portraying the role of Nancy Shedman in Romulus Linney's *Holy Ghosts*. Included are chapters of historical research, character analysis, and a production report, which includes a scored script, rehearsal and performance journal, and a self-evaluation of the actor's work. *Holy Ghosts* was produced by Theater UNO at the University of New Orleans in the Robert E. Nims Thrust Theater of the Performing Arts Center. It opened Tuesday, February seventh, and ran through Sunday, February twelfth, two thousand and twelve. Evening performances were at seven-thirty and Sunday's matinee was at two o'clock in the afternoon.

Keywords: Caleigh Keith, The University of New Orleans, UNO, Nancy Shedman, Holy Ghosts, Romulus Linney, Appalachia, Acting Method, Rehearsal Process, Religion, Snake-Handling, Pentecostal Religion

## Introduction

Entering the University of New Orleans was the start of a major journey for Caleigh Keith as an actor and as a person. Moving to the cultural hotspot of New Orleans from Roanoke, Virginia, Keith experienced a culture shock that would redefine her notions of society, art, and life as an artist. In the city of food, festivals, and a growing film industry, Keith found the possibility of turning her craft into a livelihood. Entering graduate school a mere eight months after graduating college early is an intimidating feat. Other grad students are more experienced, more confident, and more knowledgeable of the method taught at UNO. However Keith was determined to advance her acting technique.

Caleigh performed in a variety of shows with a wide range of roles such as Judith in *Hayfever*, Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* and an original role for the performance art piece, *Category 4: A Shit Storm*. Along with the shows in which she performed, Caleigh worked hard in classes that taught her about building a story, understanding the essence of character development, breaking down and analyzing Shakespearean works, and applying technique through acting scenes. Monumental in her career at UNO and for her performance in *Holy Ghosts* was Janet Shea's voice class, which reiterated to Caleigh the importance of relaxation and breathing during performance that she had first learned at Bluefield College under instructor Rebecca McCoy-Reese. Keith used many of the exercises taught in Shea's class during rehearsals and performances, which created a vocally strong Nancy Shedman.

When Keith accepted the role of Nancy Shedman, she was agreeing to return to her Appalachian roots. Having been away from the mountains and the lush nature of Virginia for two years, Keith was anxious to explore parts of her childhood with the cast, many of



whom were from the New Orleans area. There is a deep connection between the rustic mountains and religion Appalachia, which Keith knows well. In accepting the role of Nancy, she would portray for the first time the essence of her homeland. Caleigh was filled with excitement but also reverence for the task at hand. There is an honor in representing one's region in an area that may be unfamiliar to the culture. Romulus Linney portrays the country life so sincerely in *Holy Ghosts* that there is an established respect for the people of Appalachia. Thankful for the opportunity to return to her roots for the role, Caleigh has given much of herself to the characterization and realization of Nancy Shedman. This is her account.

## **Romulus Linney and *Holy Ghosts*, The Production**

Romulus Linney was born on September 21, 1930 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was raised in Appalachian Tennessee and uses much of his experience in the mountains to inform his plays. He went to the Yale School of Drama for a Master of Fine Arts before moving to New York to live (Baylor University, Film Reference). He was a successful, award-winning playwright whose work affected many. He is honored with a theater in his name at the Signature Theatre on West 42<sup>nd</sup> St. in New York, New York. With a nod to Linney's work, "The Linney" theatre is a "191-seat flexible" theatre, which "offers our playwrights complete freedom to explore the relationship between audiences and performers" (Signature Theatre Company). In its description of the contemporary space, The Signature Theatre explains that Romulus Linney was "Signature's founding Playwright-in-Residence" (Signature Theatre Company). In honoring Linney during the Horton Foote American Playwrights Festival, Baylor University describes Linney's accomplishments: "He has taught at many universities including Columbia, Princeton, the Universities of North Carolina and Pennsylvania, and the Actors Studio Drama School at New School University. He has received honorary Doctorates from Oberlin College, Appalachian State University and Wake Forest University" (Baylor University).

*Holy Ghosts* was published in 1971 when it was first produced at East Carolina University. It was published again by Harcourt after the 1977 production at the Cubiculo Theatre (Linney, Film Reference). The cast presented in the script of *Holy Ghosts* is one that performed at the Alley Theatre in 1983. Romulus Linney directed this production of *Holy Ghosts* and the stage direction is what the playwright intended (Linney). Nancy Shedman

was played by Cynthia Lammel who was a resident actor with the Alley Theatre (California State University). Currently, Lammel “teaches beginning, intermediate and advanced levels of acting, voice for performance and introduction to the theatre” (California State University). Linney expresses in the text of the play that the use of snakes should not be permitted. Rather, the snakes should “be mimed by the actors, with sounds of rattles” (Linney). Productions that use live snakes in the show run the risk of alerting the audience to the danger of the situation, thus pulling them out of the dramatic experience. The goal is to display the desperation of the characters who resort to putting themselves in dangerous situations in the name of the Lord in order to feel powerful.

### **Religion in Appalachia**

In order to understand Linney’s *Holy Ghosts*, one must also understand the Appalachian region. Most fictional depictions of the area consist of uneducated people who are dirty, hardworking, and who rely on a higher power than themselves. In Suzanne Collins’ *Hunger Games* series, District 12 is set in the Appalachian region. Those living in District 12 rely on the coal industry and they live off the lush nature surrounding them. Katniss Everdeen hunts for her food with a bow and arrow and she sells scraps in the local market. There is a sense of community in the Appalachian region that is strongly based on survival. People must stick together in order to secure a future in the harsh conditions of the land. In Lee Smith’s book *Saving Grace*, the Appalachian heroine comes of age through the religious influences of her snake-handling father and his evangelistic pursuits. Conrad Ostwalt writes a literary critique on the book and much of his observations apply to Linney’s Appalachian play. Ostwalt notes “Appalachia has a sense of otherness about it, an exotic element in all facets of its culture including religion” (Ostwalt). This “otherness” is

clearly present throughout *Holy Ghosts* in the absurdity of Carl's monologues about his dog and in the looming presence of the rattlesnakes in the crates during the worship service among other things. The audience waits with a sense of dread as characters get close to the crates, anticipating the use of the snakes.

Scientists have sought to methodically explain why religion has prevailed so strongly in Appalachia whereas other regions move toward social and economical advancement. In 1977, the time during which *Holy Ghosts* occurs, Dr. John D. Photiadis and Dr. John F. Schnabel test men in West Virginia to see why religion is a persistent force in Appalachia during times of socioeconomic change. The hypothesis is that in a changing world, people living in Appalachia seek refuge in the unchanging doctrine of religion and that more emotional services were developed in order that those undergoing intense change would be free to express themselves in a healthy atmosphere.

As a result of recent [pressures] to become more closely integrated into the larger society, Appalachians have experienced severe social, economic and psychological dislocations and consequent modifications in needs (Ford, 1962; Weller, 1965; Simpkins, 1972). [...] This new trend was characterized by the strengthening of emotional religion in a way that made it increasingly independent of the mainstream of American culture and society [...] (Photiadis, Schnabel).

During their study, Photiadis and Schnabel were surprised to find that as opposed to the rest of the nation, the citizens of Appalachia sought religion even further once social adjustments were made. This rings true for the members of the church in *Holy Ghosts*. Each character reveals that they have undergone a major change in their lifestyle as of the

top of the play. They somehow find themselves at the altar of the church in search of clarity and meaning. Linney understands the need of the Appalachian people to seek a “buffer” for their life struggles (Photiadis, Schnabel). Nancy Shedman is a pioneer of her Appalachian town, serving as the outlier in the church’s case study. She primarily seeks religion in order to cope with her change of lifestyle. However, at the end of the play, she joins the majority of the American people who abandon religion in pursuit of a new socioeconomic life.

In other words, religion offers a buffer against alienation from self for those who are of low socioeconomic status or who are “rising,” while it offers status recognition for those who are of higher socioeconomic status (Photiadis, Schnabel).

This dual purpose is seen in Linney’s *Holy Ghosts* in the different characters. Muriel and Billy Boggs come to church after recently having their first child. They “got in trouble” in their pregnancy and continue to come to church despite their economic torment. Billy reveals his feelings late in the worship service, saying, “I’m trapped! I can’t stand it! Sometimes I hate her!” (Linney, 53) It is clear in the Boggs’ situation, they cling to religion as “a buffer against alienation from self” (Photiadis, Schnabel). Buckhorn, however, is financially stable and enjoys a comfortable life. Having no responsibility to his grown children, and those taken care of by his ex-wives, Buckhorn uses religion as “status recognition”--a way for him to enjoy the admiration and respect of his church members (Photiadis, Schnabel).

A further notion about the play is what Nancy comes to disagree with at the end of the show. What is unbelievable to her is that the church accepts Coleman’s salvation so easily at the end of the play when throughout his entire time with the church he

demonstrated lewd behavior, crass language and total disrespect for the members of the church as well as their religion itself. Smith clarifies the freedom of salvation as it pertains to many Appalachian religions in *Saving Grace*.

A further word about salvation: it has to do only with one's emotional sense of "being saved." It has nothing to do, apparently, with any notion of living a "good life," as I was brought up to believe a Christian ought to do: hence, all the apparent contradictions. The most evil man imaginable could, theoretically, be "saved" on his deathbed. What one does in this world "don't hold a candle to Jesus's blood" as Autry Lily put it in one of his stranger images. Only occasionally does the concept of salvation have anything to do with the reality of daily life [...]" (Smith, 139).

The doctrine of salvation is usually seen as a merciful gift for repentant humans seeking forgiveness. Nancy, however, sees the injustice of such a pardon. When Nancy discovers that Buckhorn has lied about his previous marriages, Nancy's faith wavers. When Coleman is converted because of the emotional torment he experiences, her faith cracks and is no longer able to provide her with the solution to her problem. Although the notion of salvation is a common one in Appalachian religion, Nancy doesn't understand the scope of forgiveness until she sees the wickedness of those who have been forgiven. It is not until she sees the promise of salvation come to fruition that she discovers the fault in the logic of a universal forgiveness.

Linney's *Holy Ghosts* relies strongly on the Appalachian roots of the characters. Without it, the stakes of the play would be menial and unentertaining. The desperation of the characters to find community in one another and to pursue a religious life is what

causes them to meet at the church every week. They find a safe haven where they can be the most extreme version of themselves, they flirt with death, and they celebrate their lives. This need is not as desperate in other parts of the country. The expectation of women, men and married couples is engrained in the Appalachian people from a very early age. To stray from these expectations is a risky choice to make and most people don't do it. Nancy's country roots make her decision to leave her husband and the church the most monumental of her life and possibly of anyone else's life in the town.

## Analyzing Nancy

The character of Nancy Shedman seems simple and straightforward. She is a small-town girl who has run away from an abusive husband to the solace of the church. What could be seen as a story of freedom suddenly takes a turn for the complex and reveals Nancy Shedman to be deeper, more complex, and a symbol of religious freedom. In studying the character of Nancy, it is easy for one to interpret her lines on the surface level. However, when one explores the depth of the character, the lines reveal a significant character who is used as a tool by the playwright to turn the audience's ideas on their heads. Through studying the script and employing character development methods from Lajos Egri and Uta Hagen, the character of Nancy Shedman is revealed.

In his book, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, Lajos Egri explains that a shallow interpretation of a character is simply not enough to truly understand them.

It is not enough, in your study of a man, to know if he is rude, polite, religious, atheistic, moral, degenerate. You must know why. We want to know why man is as he is, why his character is constantly changing, and why it must change whether he wishes it or no. (34)

Through studying the physical and social aspects of a character, one can learn the psychological attributes of a character. This is important as an actor especially when creating actions for a character to play. If an action does not match the psychological intention of a character, it will not reveal a well-rounded character, but rather it will diminish the reality of the character and play altogether. For the purpose of portraying Nancy on stage, the actor must decide for herself because the background of the character is not clearly stated in the text of the play. This is done by analyzing choices the character



has made along with studying what the character says as well as what is said about the character by other characters.

Nancy's physical life must be based essentially on the actor portraying her. Therefore, Nancy is five feet and four inches tall weighing in at one hundred and twenty pounds. She has long, brown, wavy hair, pale skin, and brown eyes. She leaves her hair naturally wavy most of the time and when she wants it out of her face, she either holds it back with a headband or she braids it up. She was never taught fancy ways to wear her hair and she doesn't much care about how it looks and yet she was blessed with naturally pretty hair. She is also naturally pretty. Without trying, Nancy is fairly attractive and, although she doesn't see it herself, she's heard enough compliments to know she is pretty. She has very bad posture, due to poor training at home, which also affects her manners and ladylike qualities. Even though, as a young lady, she was taught how to be polite and courteous, she was also taught how to be sassy and stubborn and she uses this knowledge often with Coleman, freely telling him that he's "dumb," "coarse," "the fool of creation," and that he "won't listen, as always" (Linney, 7-8). She is as tidy around the house as she needs to be to get by. Cleanliness is not the most important thing to her, but as a housewife, she understands her duty. As far as her clothing goes, she is not fashionable at all, but she likes nice things when they come to her. In most respects, Nancy is a girl's girl; however, she has been denied many of life's niceties due to poverty and lack of resources. She is unaware of another life, having only heard fairytales of New York and Los Angeles, and she is content making her life in Appalachia.

Nancy's family is lower class. She mentions she has "brothers and sisters," meaning there are at least five children in the house, if not more (Linney, 50). The script says

nothing of the income of Nancy's family, but because they live in a small town in Appalachia, it is likely the family income is from the coal industry or farming industry. Nancy was taught that women stay home and raise the babies while men work for the money. She knows the life of a working man well, but only from the perspective of a woman waiting at home, perceiving the effects of hard work and not fully understanding some of the tension that goes along with the lifestyle. For example, a man like Coleman may experience some ups and downs in the Fish Farm industry including decrease in demand, drought, or competition. He comes home feeling the stress and agony of work, but doesn't want to spend the time to explain to Nancy exactly why he is in a bad mood. Nancy's father and brothers treated her the same way. Therefore, Nancy equates a blue-collar working life to misery or undefined anger. This explains the appeal of the Buckhorn family, who work in retail and put more value in their recreation time and faith than in their work.

Nancy went to a small public school in town. Her favorite subjects were home economics and history for the stories. She didn't have a great education due to the lack of funding in the public schools and the ignorance of the teaching staff. She left school early in order to help her mother raise her siblings. She loves taking care of babies and she understands childcare is all a woman really needs in life for fulfillment. She was happy at home with her family and didn't miss having an education until the end of the play, when she realizes her naïveté.

In order to perform Nancy, the actor understand that she is the oldest daughter of her parents. She has two older brothers, one of whom proudly joined the army while the other works in the coal industry with his father. As the oldest girl in the family, Nancy had

many responsibilities growing up including helping her mother with meals, cleaning up, and taking care of her younger siblings. Nancy also does not have a womanly example to live by other than her mother, who is a stay-at-home mother. As a child, Nancy knew she wanted to be a mother as well, and she accepted her role in society as a non-working woman. She has friends who have branched out and made different choices with their lives including moving out of town or entering the work force. It is due to fear and unwillingness to leave the comfort of what she knows that Nancy pursues a life of housewifery.

Growing up in rural Appalachia, Nancy hasn't experienced much diversity in her community. She is not exposed to people who are different from her in respect to race, class, or education level. When she meets men who love one another, Nancy doesn't understand the attraction, but she is quick to accept this new reality. Her naïveté protects her from bigotry or discrimination because she trusts those around her quickly and accepts their behavior as normal. She is unaffected by politics except that, when she sees the mayor in town, it is something of a celebrity sighting. Politics is equal to fame in Nancy's mind, and while she has strong feelings about the way people ought to behave toward one another, she doesn't much care what people do beyond that. Nancy is polite to strangers and somewhat of a socialite in her community. She hosts dinners with friends and knows how to work a room. At the top of the show, Nancy is seen preparing the room for the service--something she took to quickly, despite being a part of the church for only a week. Then, as members of the church enter the room, Nancy has upbeat banter with everyone. She offers tea to Mr. Canfield, Coleman, and Virgil; she greets Mrs. Wall; and she enthusiastically welcomes Muriel's baby. Although Nancy doesn't know these people very

well, she has become very close to them. This shows Nancy's desire to entertain as well as immerse herself in the church community. She probably has only met Muriel once before and she already plays with and dotes on her baby. The fact that the church is so open to a stranger becoming part of the family reveals its need for new life and attention from the outside. The mutual dependency of Nancy and the church is what makes this unlikely relationship possible.

It is very clear what Nancy and Coleman's sex life is like. Nancy gives a detailed description of the married couple's last night together. She describes Coleman's foreplay as "hauling [her] down on the sofa like a sack of potatoes" (13). Coleman also describes the same night, noting he "took Nancy tenderly in [his] arms, and tried to tell her how much [he] cared" (12). The obvious difference in perception reveals a severe lack of communication between the couple and a deep dissatisfaction in Nancy. From the way the two speak to one another, it is clear there is a back-and-forth that could be seen as lively and exciting banter, and it's easy to see how the two could have fallen in love. Especially when Coleman levels with Nancy to win her back, his tone takes an endearing, sweet tone and Nancy remembers when Coleman courted her and the appealing things he would say to her. Nancy is attracted to a man who works for a living and is able to bring home money for the family. It isn't until later that Nancy seeks respite in a man who is more learned and white collar.

Morality isn't something Nancy has spent a lot of time dwelling on in her life, but she is strong-willed about people treating each other respectfully. Her ideas are skewed by selfish desires that hinder her morality from being foolproof, but she tries to treat people fairly. When Coleman essentially attacks her at the top of the play and curses at her, Nancy

doesn't curse back. While she keeps her tongue at bay by not releasing any of the proscribed "bad words," Nancy lets it rip with the insults, calling Coleman a "horse-faced rat and rodent" "frog," and "dog" (13-15). The inciting incident of the play is a faulty moral expectation on Nancy's part. Nancy leaves Coleman for Oby and the church, and she takes many of Coleman's possessions with her. Then, she is surprised and questions him when he wants a divorce. This not only shows Nancy's twisted morality, it also demonstrates her ignorance. She hadn't thought through the process of leaving Coleman for Buckhorn and does not seem to realize that it would eventually have to include a divorce.

Nancy's chief disappointment in life at the top of the play is that she didn't further her schooling. She has, however, already decided to make up for this flaw by creating the perfect family. Nancy has become the master of disguising her lack of intelligence. She has enough common sense to get by in her daily activities, and she is willing to learn from anyone. Buckhorn's knowledge and book-sense is appealing to Nancy and his willingness to give her children makes him the perfect remedy to her first marital mistake. Her attitude toward life is generally positive: she looks forward to the simple things in life that are guaranteed. Her favorite thing is to sit on her rocking chair and drink tea in the mornings. She works on craft projects every now and then, but she rarely ever finishes a project. Her inability to maintain focus keeps her from finishing a task. This frustrates her because she sees it as a weakness in herself.

Although Nancy tries to be polite and friendly, and to speak kindly, she very often gets angry and out of control. If something doesn't go her way, Nancy usually either runs from the situation or throws a temper tantrum until she gets her way. She and Coleman constantly fought because Coleman wasn't used to doting on a woman and Nancy wasn't

used to not being doted upon. She always received positive encouragement from her mother and sisters, who used to tell her she would be an excellent mother one day and she could have any boy in town. Now that Nancy has a husband and is ready to have children, she is no longer the center of attention and she has difficulty dealing with the new role she must play. Her inability to adapt to her new situation releases itself in manic bouts of yelling, arguing, pouting, and shutting Coleman out. As the oldest daughter with many younger siblings, Nancy easily behaves immaturely, especially in times of crisis. When she fights with Coleman, she resorts to name-calling, pushing, the silent treatment, and pulling pranks. An outsider would consider Nancy to be choleric and immature. In moments of lucidity, Nancy is embarrassed by the way she behaves and is sure to overcompensate by being charming, sweet, and hospitable. This juxtaposition is seen clearly when Mrs. Wall enters the room just as Nancy finishes her story for Coleman.

NANCY. So we loaded everything I wanted over your head, out the door, and put it in your filthy old truck, and drove off. To here. Where I stand now, defying you, Coleman, you dog. By the way, I sold your truck. *(A large woman named Mrs. Wall walks impressively in. She waves to Nancy.)* Hidy.

[...]

COLEMAN. Now who for god's sake is that?

NANCY. Mrs. Wall.

COLEMAN. Mrs. who? [...]

NANCY. She's a sweet Christian companion and friend. Never you mind about her name (15-16).

Nancy makes a distinct shift in her manner of speaking once Mrs. Wall comes into the room. It is as if Nancy doesn't want Mrs. Wall to see the way she speaks to Coleman. Although Nancy understands it is wrong to communicate so poorly with her husband, it seems as though she is unable to help herself. Coleman's lack of empathy and disregard for Nancy's situation drives Nancy to the edge of her wits, forcing her to use more than her words to express how she's feeling. Unlike an educated adult, Nancy doesn't understand why she feels angry and hurt around Coleman, so she acts out by arguing with him and ultimately by leaving him and taking his possessions.

Nancy's ignorance and low intelligence allow for the unrealistic elements of the play to be achieved. Because of her poor schooling, Nancy hasn't been taught the art of deduction, the skill of logic and the practice of inquiry. How can a woman meet a preacher who is forty years older than her, and a week later be engaged to him without knowing how many children he has? How can a woman leave her husband and not expect him to search for her? How can a woman join a religion so fervently without questioning the implications of their practices? Nancy is a woman who is driven to these circumstances by desperation, depression, and fear. She struggles to find what she is looking for at Amalgamation Holiness Church of God and in Reverend Buckhorn without truly understanding what she seeks cannot be found outside herself. It isn't until the end of the play that Nancy realizes what her search is truly about.

In *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, characters undergo a study known as Character Development. During the course of the play, Nancy experiences a dynamic change within herself. With each new beat of the play, Nancy's character develops a little until finally, she has the opposite characteristics as her former self. This process can begin before the start

of the play, as it does in *Holy Ghosts*. The inciting incident for Nancy's journey is when Nancy meets Oby and leaves Coleman. Before that incident, Nancy was depressed. She had left her home to marry a young manager of a fish farm. Her husband didn't invest time and affection in her, he spent too much time at work, and he mistreated her in bed. Her expectations, as she describes, were shattered.

I thought I would just walk out of my Momma and Daddy's house and into my husband's house, and have his babies, and it would all be like it was again.

[...] But what a dream. [...] my husband was a man with his dreams, too, full of thorns, and so different from mine. So I cried (50).

As Nancy deals with the sudden changes in her life marriage brings, her husband is no consolation. Nancy mentions that Coleman hit her at least once. The physical abuse, mixed with emotional and psychological turmoil of her marriage to Coleman instills fear in Nancy. She fears failing her family and community by not being a good wife; she fears raising a family in a tumultuous environment; and most pressing, she fears her husband coming home angry and beating her. Fear is where Nancy's journey begins, and it is from this point the reader analyzes her character growth. In the midst of Nancy's fear, her husband comes home drunk and forces intercourse. Coleman abuses Nancy, throwing her on the couch "like a sack of potatoes" (Linney, 13). When her drunk husband finally--and literally--crashes on the floor in a stupor, Nancy is alone and worried and she falls into a deep depression. "It was such a mess, I wanted to die," she exclaims to the lawyer, Canfield (Linney, 14). In Nancy's depression, she is met by Oby, who invites her to his campfire. Nancy finds refuge in Oby's kind words because they are filled with hope and love. It is at



this point, that Nancy's fear turned to hopefulness. She finds the courage to run away with Oby to his father's house.

At Buckhorn's home, Nancy is accepted and invited in. Removed from her past and hopeful about her future, she devotes her time and energy to her "new life." The people of the church welcome her as well, and for possibly the first time, Nancy is important to an entire group of people. Nancy has been at Reverend Buckhorn's house for only a week, but already, she is engaged to the man, and the church immediately accepts the new relationship. They provide the new recruit with false security. Finding fulfillment in their kindness and encouragement, Nancy does not realize that she substitutes their emotional support for the need she has for a true recovery from her traumatic relationship with Coleman. Unable to discern this mistake, Nancy's state of being turns from false security to dependence on her new family. It is at this stage the play begins.

When the audience first sees Nancy, she is reading the Bible, specifically the passage in the Bible that justifies the practices of Amalgamation Holiness Church of God. Nancy is increasingly dependent on her new family; she is convincing herself it is the place where God wants her to be. When Coleman enters, he questions Nancy, the church, her new friends, and her new suitor. This puts Nancy on the defensive. She now must defend this life on which she has become dependent. For the first half of the play, Nancy is in the defensive stage. At every turn, Nancy defends her choices, each member of the church, and the religion itself. The battle rages on with Nancy as she continually defends and justifies her new life. It isn't until the second Act when Nancy moves from defensiveness to false empathy. As the congregation sings for Buckhorn after his meltdown, Nancy approaches Coleman in a gesture of kindness and gentleness. She has watched other members of the

church reach out to Coleman, and now she seeks to empathize with Coleman as a good Christian would. "See, Coleman! You ain't the only one who gets mad. You ain't the only one who has troubles" (Linney, 33). After reaching out to Coleman, Nancy worships as other members of the church find refuge. At this point, Nancy has accepted Coleman's presence in the church and seeks to justify the situation through her religion. Her empathy, however, is simply a tool used with the hope of looking good to the church and forcing Coleman to leave. Therefore, this stage is considered false empathy.

As Nancy tries to handle the situation with grace and love, Coleman reveals a painful truth about Nancy's new beau--Buckhorn has already been married six times. He has a number of children and grandchildren, and he has not told Nancy this information until now. Nancy immediately moves from false empathy to hurt. How can this man take advantage of her innocence? How can he agree to marry her without disclosing all information to her? Why did it take a coarse man like Coleman to extract the honest-to-God truth? With all these questions swirling in Nancy's mind, the pain of betrayal is overwhelming. She shuts down and doesn't speak as she processes her situation. When Carl gives his testimony, Nancy sees herself reflected in his innocence. She pleads with Coleman, "don't you see, Coleman? Don't you see?" To which Coleman replies, "Yes, I see. And I ask you all, calm and sensible. Is that man crazy or is he not?" (Linney, 42). When Coleman takes Carl's innocence and sweet nature and laughs at it, Nancy is outraged. She sees Coleman laughing at her, and Buckhorn taking advantage of her, and she is no longer hurt, but angry. She may see herself in Carl, but she is not helpless like Carl. Whereas Carl cannot see the mean spirit of the people around him, Nancy can, and she refuses to be the butt of everyone's joke.

Even after Coleman is hurt and Nancy worries for him, she is still angry. Her anger is evident in her conversation with Coleman, as she confronts him with his abuse.

COLEMAN. When did you decide to leave me? (*He moves close to her. She moves back.*) I won't touch you.

NANCY. I decided lots of times. One night, you hit me.

COLEMAN. I'll never do it again.

NANCY. That's what you said then. And you stuck a little snapshot of me in the frame of that big picture of your momma and daddy and said, see, I love you.

COLEMAN. Well, I did.

NANCY. But I can't live in no picture frame of your momma and daddy! If I'm going to be put in a coffin like that, I want my own children to do it! (Linney, 48)

For the first time, Nancy clearly states her frustrations with Coleman. She does not want him to tie her down or force her into anything. In her following monologue, Nancy talks about her expectations of marriage and the failure of her marriage. As opposed to her earlier accounts of her relationship to Coleman, which were out of defense, this monologue is a sober account of shattered dreams. She is angry at herself for creating unobtainable ideals, for leaving Coleman, and for trusting again too soon. "I've learned a lot, I think," she says as she considers her choices. Coleman responds with promise of a new life for him and Nancy--suggesting they even go to church together. She is rejuvenated by false hope, until Coleman angrily slaps her across the face in the church. For a brief moment, Nancy wraps herself in false hope, and then plummets into hopelessness. She has written off

Buckhorn as a husband, and now Coleman is no longer an option either. Nancy shuts herself off into a corner, weighing what few options she has left.

The church service picks back up with little to no consideration of Nancy's hopeless state. The option that is left for Nancy is her newfound religion and church--the people whose support and kindness revitalized her. She watches them as they embrace Coleman, supporting and encouraging him as they once did her. The family that adopted her now nurtures the man who just beat her in front of them. She is betrayed by her saviors and watches the worship and handling of snakes with open eyes--outside of the emotion. When the church encourages Coleman to handle the snakes, Nancy realizes that the people on whom she depended were not dependable. They didn't care about her as a person, but wanted only to gain a new believer to join them in worship. During this stage of realization, Nancy sees each member of the church is desperate for justification of his or her own life choices. Although they mean well, Nancy realizes their love and support weren't for her, but for themselves. No matter how much time she spent with them, she would never feel fully satisfied and would forever remain in a purgatory of guilt, shame, and self-doubt. With all options of outside help no longer available to her, Nancy understands healing must be found in herself. As Coleman joins the church to seek recovery, Nancy decides to leave the church to find recovery in herself, which is symbolized by her solo walk offstage. The absence of her presence onstage marks the beginning of a new era for Nancy--independence.

### **Nancy as a Battered Woman**

Although *Holy Ghosts* is not a play about domestic violence, such violence is a major part of Nancy's character and must be studied and understood by the actor. The violence

that occurs between Nancy and Colman defines much of their relationship, and it serves as a plot shift in the play. The pivotal moment when Coleman slaps Nancy out of anger at the church, drives her eventually to leave him. The fact Coleman that abuses Nancy informs the reader about the characters, their relationship with one another, and their individual struggles.

Nancy's life with Coleman is not the life a young woman would hope for with her new husband. She is mistreated emotionally and physically. Nancy mentions "one night, [Coleman] hit me" (Linney, 48). This enters Nancy into a demographic of women who represent one-third to one-half of women in a long-term relationship (Winkelmann, 18). The night Nancy is hit by Coleman, she decides to leave him, but doesn't do so right away. Nancy doesn't mention having friends during her relationship with Coleman, so it is likely she has no one to turn to in the event of abuse. In Carol Lea Winkelmann's book *The Language of Battered Women: A Rhetorical Analysis of Personal Theologies*, Winkelmann mentions that abused women are likely to not report incidents of abuse and that women living in rural areas have fewer resources available to them and therefore will go for long periods of time before seeking help (Winkelmann, 19-21). Sana Loue's book, *Intimate Partner Violence: Societal, Medical, Legal and Individual Responses*, describes a study of women in intimate relationships in Kentucky that found that "less than 10% of violent incidents between the partners had been reported to the police" (Loue, 136).

During Nancy's childhood, she helped her mother raise her brothers and sisters. Modeling herself on a strong maternal figure, Nancy adopts the view of strength in maternal womanhood. Her mother takes care of herself and an entire family for years, and she has the strength to maintain her relationship with her husband. Nancy sees a goal set

for herself in her mother, and strives to fulfill that goal by marrying Coleman. Once Coleman abuses her, Nancy's strength wavers. She is riddled with feelings of doubt and failure as she struggles to maintain the matronly position in her relationship. She can't help but feel as though she is letting down her mother as well as women as a whole by being unhappy in her seemingly perfect relationship. The expectation of women in Appalachia is maternal and hard working. This reflects in the study done in Winkelmann's book, *Language of Battered Women*. She explains, "When rural folks, such as the Appalachian women in this study, come to the city [to seek refuge from abuse], they bring such notions of silence, shame, and self-sufficiency with them" (Winkelmann, 21). In Nancy's case at least, these feelings are due to the high level of expectations forced on her as a girl. She is expected to maintain a household, take care of a husband and raise a family without complaint. As a girl, Nancy watches her mother and welcomes this future. However, with the introduction of Coleman's abuse, Nancy's dreams are shattered. The stigma of failing as a wife and, therefore, woman paralyzes Nancy in her relationship.

Battered women do not typically seek help easily. According to Loue's book, *Intimate Partner Violence*, leaving an abusive partner takes time: "It has been found that the average battered woman leaves her partner eight times before she leaves permanently" (Loue, 131). The hesitation is mostly due to lack of resources--an issue Nancy and many women in Appalachia have to deal with. It is not until Oby seeks her out that she finds the means to leave. Not only does Nancy find refuge in Oby, she also gains courage through his emotional support. "I told Oby everything. He understood. Then he told me things [...]" (Linney, 14). In many battered women's shelters, residents participate in group therapy, wherein they discuss their abusive situations and find comfort and relief in sharing.

Many women in abusive relationships turn to religion as a coping mechanism. In her book, Winkelmann studies the development of battered women who seek refuge at The Women's House, "a shelter for battered women in an urban area of a midsized city in the upper South" (Winkelmann, 2). She notes that many women become religious or continue their faith as they recover, leaning on God as a higher form of justice. Placing God as the highest authority in their lives supersedes the notion that the husband or men in general hold the power in relationships. Winkelmann views this positively: "In a sense, the commitment to God is a form of resistance to social control by males" (Winkelmann, 126). Nancy begins this process very clearly as she immerses herself into the Amalgamation Holiness Church of God. It seems as if she replaces Coleman with Buckhorn as a dominant male figure, when in actuality, she equates Buckhorn with God. Buckhorn is an older man who devotes his life to Christ. His unwavering faith, leadership over the church, and relationship to God are enough for Nancy to conflate the physical man, Buckhorn, with the spiritual entity, God. This, in turn, creates the ultimate redeemer and healer for Nancy as she copes with her abusive marriage. Buckhorn is older, wiser, and more powerful than Coleman, and Nancy uses her relationship with Buckhorn to override Coleman's power over her.

As a victim of abuse, Nancy experiences personality shifts and a breaking down of inter-personal relating. In their article "Dialectical Behavior Therapy for Women Victims of Domestic Abuse," Katherine Iverson, Chad Shenk, and Alan Fruzzetti note "difficulties in regulating or managing emotion have increasingly received attention as central components of a variety of psychological problems" (Iverson, Shenk, Fruzzetti). This is evident as Nancy struggles with the introduction of Coleman into the church at the top of

the play. She uses heightened language to express her feelings toward Coleman, in an attempt to exaggerate his effect on her. "I can't help the mistake I made marrying this clod, who blackens every sweet thing he sees with his dirty, dusty mind" (Linney, 7). Nancy compares the beautiful relationship she has found with Buckhorn--"sweet thing"--to Coleman's bastardization of what she has found. Then, Oby enters the room and she immediately perks up. Throughout the first scene, Nancy's struggle to maintain emotion is evident as the people in the room pull her from anger to joy to civility.

Nancy's presence at the church and willingness to become so involved so soon is also a symptom of being involved in a traumatic relationship. As Jeanne Segal and Melinda Smith mention in their article, "Help for Battered Women," the recovery process is key for victims of domestic violence to live a healthy life. Because abused women are deficient in affection, support, and intimacy in their relationships, it is common for them to "feel eager to jump into a new relationship and finally get the intimacy and support [they've] been missing" (Segal, Smith). Nancy's eagerness is evident in *Holy Ghosts* because, although she has only been with Oby, Buckhorn, and the church for one week, she has already fully invited herself into the culture of the environment. At the top of the play, Nancy's task is to sweep the sanctuary and prepare it for worship. She also prepares the tea and coffee as refreshments for churchgoers. These tasks are usually left to the care of a hospitality team member or someone who has been to the church enough times to welcome others. Nancy's self-appointment in this role is evidence of her need to be needed by others. Nancy feels that the church members appreciate what she does for the church and she feels justified.

It isn't until the end of the show when Nancy understands that her recovery process must involve more than the substitution of a "better" man. Segal and Smith urge women to



take the recovery process slowly because rushing it could be dangerous. “Without taking the time to heal and learn from the experience, [victims are] at risk of falling back into abuse” (Segal, Smith). When Coleman slaps Nancy in front of the congregation, she realizes she is blinded by her emotions and needs further recovery. Although Nancy doesn’t know what her recovery looks like after she leaves Amalgamation Holiness Church of God, she understands her need for internal support and self-sufficiency. Nancy continues her journey into recovery after coming face-to-face with false security through Buckhorn and his church.

## ***Holy Ghosts, the Production***

During the acting process, it is important to document one's experience. This includes the script analysis of the actor as well as first person documentation of the rehearsal process. A written account of the experience is invaluable because one can recall moments wherein an acting choice worked well in rehearsal and was thus made during the performances. This particular process is an academic approach to creating and portraying a character onstage. Through the scored script, rehearsal journal, and performance analysis, the reader can analyze whether or not the actor has succeeded in her goal of accurately portraying the character of Nancy Shedman in *Holy Ghosts*. The following account of the University of New Orleans's production of Romulus Linney's play includes a scored script, rehearsal journal, and performance analysis. The scored script is a copy of the script used by the actor, which contains actions and analysis for every line said by the actor. The rehearsal journal, which is a first-person account of every day of rehearsal, includes rehearsal preparation by the actor, acting choices during rehearsal and evaluation by the actor as to whether the choices made in rehearsal were in line with the character and play. The performance analysis is an evaluation of the actor's method and behavior during rehearsal as well as a judgment of the actor's performance onstage as Nancy by the actor herself.



# HOLY GHOSTS

BY ROMULUS LINNEY



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



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For Edgar and Amanda Loewin

HOLY GHOSTS was first produced in 1971 at East Carolina University, directed by Edgar Loewin, and in 1973 at the Garrick Theatre in New York, produced by Beth Grant. In 1976, after a production at the Culeculo Theatre, it was published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and subsequently staged by theatres large and small across the United States, including the Alley Theatre, The Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Birmingham Festival Theatre, the Detroit Repertory Theatre, and the San Diego Repertory, whose production was brought to New York for the 1987 Joyce Theatre Festival. With the following cast, directed by the author, it opened at the Alley Theatre on April 29, 1985.

NANCY SHEDMAN	Cynthia Lammell
COLEMAN SHEDMAN	Brandon Smith
ROGERS CANFIELD	Timothy Arrington
OBEDIAH BUCKHORN, JR.	Blue Deekert
VIRGIL TIDES	David Radford
ORIN HART	John Woodson
HOWARD RUTLEDGE	James Belcher
LORENA COSBURG	Laurel White
MRS. WALL	Jo Marks
MURIEL BOGGS	Dede Lowe
BILLY BOGGS	William Johnson
OBEDIAH BUCKHORN, SR.	Bob Burrus
CARL SPECTER	Michael Lafine
BONNIE BRIDGE	Robin Mosley
CANCER MAN	Richard Hill

Directed by Romulus Linney  
Setting by Keith Hein  
Costumes by Ainslie G. Brangan  
Lighting by Sean Murphy  
Sound by Tony Johnson  
Production Stage Manager, Richard Earl Lester

**CHARACTERS**

NANCY SHEEDMAN

COLEMAN SHEEDMAN

ROGERS CANFIELD

OBEDIAH BUCKHORN, JUNIOR

VIRGIL THIES

ORIN HART

HOWARD RUDD

LORENA COSBURG

MRS. WALL

MURIEL BOGGS

BILLY BOGGS

REVEREND OBEDIAH BUCKHORN, SENIOR

CARL SPECTER

BONNIE BRIDGE

FANNERMAN

**PLACE**

A one-room wooden building in the rural South.

**TIME**

The present; an evening in early summer.

"The Power of Need will find its way out"  
-David Hoover

Nancy's need: to be loved  
Nancy's way out: being around people who seem to love her. (Oby, Buckhorn)

## HOLY GHOSTS

### ACT I

*The interior of a one-room clapboard house located off a highway in the modern south. Some battered folding chairs are stacked against one wall. Other furniture, including an old piano, is covered by sheets and canvas.*

*On one bench, a young woman, Nancy Shedman, sits reading the Bible. A broom leans against the bench. She is reading aloud, devoutly.*

NANCY <sup>①</sup> So then — after the Lord has spoken to them — he was received up into heaven — and he sat on the right hand of God — And they went forth and preached everywhere — the Lord working with them — and confirming the word — with signs following. Amen. *(She stares at the Bible. She shakes her head, undecided about something.)* I want to stay here. With him. Don't I? Yes, Lord! Thank you, Lord! *(She closes the Bible and suddenly perceives a form over her forehead. Then, quickly, she puts it down, picks up her broom, and goes back to work. She does not see a young man come quietly into the house. He watches her work. When she does see him, she lets out a cry, frightened.)*

COLEMAN: Hello, Nancy.

NANCY: Coleman! <sup>②</sup>

\*NOTE: separate being scared at interruption & recognizing it's him.

① Searching

② affirming

③ to play "normal" ("nothing's going on here...")

\*NOTE: Keep the play between  
rushing in & backing off.  
The difference of anger and fear.

- ① Easing  
② Threatening  
③ Warning  
④ Baiting  
⑤ Clarifying  
⑥ Pacifying
- COLEMAN: Oh, you Jezebel! Where's the man?  
NANCY: He's not here, Coleman. But he will be! *(Backs away.)*  
He will be!  
COLEMAN: *(Calling outside.)* Come on in, Canfield! We got her!  
NANCY: Coleman, you can't come in here now.  
COLEMAN: I'll do anything I want, Jezebel, after what you done to me! Canfield!  
NANCY: *(To par.)* Oh, what did I do to you, Coleman? *(Enter Canfield, and old man, continuously.)*  
COLEMAN: You know damn well. *(He moves toward her.)* I ought to knock your head off!  
CANFIELD: No violence, son! That was the understanding! I have my heart condition. *(COLEMAN checks himself.)*  
COLEMAN: All right, All right. *(Breathes deeply.)* I promised.  
NANCY: Coleman, who's this man?  
COLEMAN: My lawyer.  
NANCY: Your what?  
COLEMAN: My lawyer, god damn it! Who's going to defend me against you, oh, your deceit, and your treachery, and your god-damned female bitchery!  
CANFIELD: Son, that kind of language won't help.  
COLEMAN: It'll help me, by God Almighty! Now lawyer, we've tracked her down. You heard her admit there's another man. Am I that enough for a divorce?  
NANCY: Divorce?  
COLEMAN: What else, you flaming bitch?  
CANFIELD: Well, not quite, son. It's just a little more complicated. *(To Nancy, with shaky charm.)* Madam, allow me to ask, are you Nancy Shedman, wife to Coleman Shedman?  
NANCY: Yes I am.  
CANFIELD: Then let me say first, I regret the distress this meeting must cause you. Yet I feel certain we will all conduct ourselves here in a manner that can do credit to married ladies and gentlemen in an orderly and lawful civilization.  
COLEMAN: Oh, fuck that, Canfield! Get down to business.

honest question -  
it takes Nancy  
by surprise \*



\*Nancy avoids saying "carnal intercourse"

NANCY. Oh, you are so coarse! <sup>①</sup> Coarse, and just downright repulsive! <sup>②</sup>

① To belittle  
② To badger

COLEMAN. Coarse, am I? Repulsive, am I? Didn't you run out of our house with a man you never saw before? Tell the truth, Nancy! You been having carnal intercourse with the son of a bitch or not?

③ To chastise

NANCY. I have not, Coleman, been doing <sup>\*</sup>what you say to no man! It is your ugly eyes looking out of your ugly face that sees ugly things I did and a friend I have entered into a tender human relationship. <sup>④</sup> <sup>⑤</sup>

④ To pacify  
⑤ To justify

COLEMAN. She's fucking him, Canfield. It's an open confession. <sup>⑥</sup>

⑥ To defend

NANCY. It is not! It's the laying down of an unbearable burden. <sup>⑦</sup> *(To Canfield.)* I can't help the mistake I made marrying this clod, who blunders every sweet thing he sees with his dirty, dusty mind.

⑦ To tear down

COLEMAN. You hear how she talks to me? You hear how my wife talks to me?

CANFIELD. Yes, yes, Mrs. Shedman, would you consider discussing this other gentleman who has — ah — befriended you?

COLEMAN. That's it, Canfield! What's his name, Nancy?

NANCY. <sup>⑧</sup> I'm not ashamed to tell you that, since he has asked me to marry him. His name is Obediah Blackburn. He is a great preacher.

⑧ To condescend

COLEMAN. I never heard of him.

NANCY. *(Angry.)* <sup>⑨</sup> Oh, Coleman, you are so dumb! You can't help it, and God have mercy on you, Coleman, but you are as dumb as a ditch! You are *the* fool of creation! <sup>⑩</sup> <sup>⑪</sup>

⑨ To tear down

⑩ To apologize

⑪ Justifying

COLEMAN. Hear that? The fool of creation. Well, let me tell you this, Nancy. That preacher you ran off with, he ain't going to think I'm a fool, when I get my hands on him. I'm going to break his god-damned neck. *(Enter Oby. He is a huge young man, with enormous muscles. He is handsome, cheerful, and self-confident.)*

OBY. Good evening, God bless everyone here.

NANCY. <sup>⑫</sup> Oby! *(She runs to him, throws herself into his arms. He puts one arm around her, and holds her protectively.)*

⑫ To place on a pedestal

\*NOTE: Now that Oby has entered, Nancy must switch between her manner as Coleman's sassy wife and Oby's sweet new friend.

① clarifying

\*sit on bench.  
justification: to brace  
herself for what  
she knows Coleman  
is going to do:  
embarrass her.

- ② to pacify
- ③ defending (oby), threatening (coleman)
- ④ to dismiss

COLEMAN: See what I mean, Canfield? and me not even married to her a year. I'll be damned.

OBY: I hope not, Christian. I know you're Nancy's husband. You're angry now. I don't blame you for that.

COLEMAN: Wait a minute. How do you know I'm her husband? I never saw you before.

OBY: No, but I saw you Christian. That's why she's here, with us.

COLEMAN: He? ①

NANCY: I been trying to tell you, Coleman. You won't listen, is always. There's more people *involved*? I am not going—

COLEMAN: Whoever's in on it? When I get through with you—

CANFIELD: No violence, son!

OBY: There won't be. I'm not a violent man, thank God. I don't like to fight, Christian.

COLEMAN: Maybe not, Christian, but you sure like to run off with other men's wives. And don't call me no Christian. I'm not one. Ain't Nancy told you what I think of that?

OBY: She has. I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt.

COLEMAN: Oh, you are? Well, all right, then, Christian! I beg everybody's pardon. I'm sorry to act up. No excuse for it. This man stole my wife, my furniture, my family heirlooms, and my Dodge pick-up truck. So praise God, Christian, what have I got to complain about?

OBY: *(To her)* Steal? Steal? *(To Nancy)* Steal?

NANCY: ② We didn't, Oby.

COLEMAN: Steal, steal, steal, he's a putrot. He must be some stud, Nancy, to make up for it. Right?

NANCY: ③ Coleman, you are the disgust of this world. Low down meaner than worms, you vile man. ④ will not talk to you further.

COLEMAN: That's why I got a lawyer, Canfield!

CANFIELD: Sensible young people. Let's sit down, and talk. Save everybody's time and money, and avoid going to court. Where I haven't been in so long anyway. I could make a lot of mistakes.

①  
 NANCY. Oby, do we have time for this now? It'll just get more confused.  
 OBY. Whether we have time or not, I don't want anybody thinking I stole anything.  
 NANCY. ② All right, Coleman, your lawyer is trying to be civilized. I will do the same and serve coffee or tea. Which do you prefer, Mr. Canfield?  
 CANFIELD. Why, tea, Mrs. Shedman. I thank you.  
 NANCY. Not at all, Oby?  
 OBY. Tea, please.  
 NANCY. Coleman?  
 COLEMAN. God damn.  
 NANCY. That'll be three teas then. I got it right here.  
 COLEMAN. Aw, never mind no god damn tea party—  
 OBY. *(Firmly.)* Sit down.  
 CANFIELD. Do that, son. Just do that. *(Coleman sits or drops. Nancy fixes tea. Canfield takes out a pint bottle of whiskey.)* And I'll need a little of this to go with it, I'm afraid. I'm getting tired. Next thing, I'll have chest pains.  
 COLEMAN. Just a little now!  
 CANFIELD. Son, if I'm to maintain my legal efficiency, not to mention my mortal life, I got to have it. It keeps the big arteries loose and clear. Now, you want a lawyer, or not?  
 COLEMAN. All right, all right. *(Canfield takes a terrific swig of whiskey.)* Canfield! You can't knock back straight whiskey like that! You're too damn old. I don't want a lawyer dying on me!  
 OBY. You need to drink whiskey, my friend?  
 CANFIELD. I do. And God bless it. It loosens my heart.  
 OBY. Sorry to hear you say that. My Daddy would be, too. A man with heart trouble needs religion and healthy food, not whiskey. I eat soy beans and wheat protein. And look at me. *(Enter a young boy, Virgil Tides. He carries a wooden box. It is marked SHELLS.)*  
 NANCY. Hello, Virgil.  
 VIRGIL. Hidy, I got them.  
 OBY. Set them down over there, Virgil. Out of the way.

① To intervene

② To dissolve

\*Note: Nancy plays hostess here—a role which makes her feel needed and appreciated, no matter the circumstance. She takes every ounce of relief from this small respite.

① To dissolve

② To correct

③ To enliven

④ To threaten

⑤ To mollify

⑥ To challenge

⑦ To pacify

⑧ To scold

NANCY <sup>①</sup> Want some tea?

VIRGIL No, ma'am. *(He sets the box very carefully against one wall and goes out.)*

COLEMAN What the hell kind of strange kid was that?

NANCY <sup>②</sup> A dear friend, Coleman. Not some kid. Here's breakfast for everybody. And sugar. And sugar spoons. <sup>③</sup>

COLEMAN My great-grandmother's silver sugar spoons? Nancy, you stole every single thing of value right out of our house!

NANCY Nobody stole nothing, Coleman!

CANFIELD Now, young married people—

COLEMAN That was just plain wrong!

CANFIELD You see, the way we do this—

NANCY It was a fair division of property!

COLEMAN The hell it was!

CANFIELD If you'll just listen in an orderly—

NANCY And I earned every stick of it twenty times over!

COLEMAN And I'm getting every stick of it back!

CANFIELD There has to be some kind—

NANCY <sup>④</sup> Not one spoon! Not one shred of nothing, Coleman!

COLEMAN All of it, Nancy! All of it!

CANFIELD Hold it, youth! Just hold it! *(They die.)* Whew. There's a better way to do this. Believe me. *(To Coleman.)* Would you really want a divorce?

COLEMAN I do.

CANFIELD Mrs. Shedman, do you want a divorce?

NANCY <sup>⑤</sup> If he does <sup>⑥</sup> that I'm not giving him back—

COLEMAN Oh, yes, you are!

CANFIELD That comes later! Whew. First, we got to sort out the grounds for this action. Who did what to who and how, and so on.

COLEMAN You sure you know what you're doing?

CANFIELD Just trust me, son. Now, Mrs. Shedman—

NANCY <sup>⑦</sup> Call me Nancy.

CANFIELD Now, Nancy—

COLEMAN Canfield, whose side you on here, anyhow?

NANCY <sup>⑧</sup> Stop fighting with your own lawyer!

COLEMAN. I'm not! I'm just making damn sure you don't—  
CANFIELD. Listen, youth! Just listen. We have to sort it out.  
Like this, now. *(He gets up. He takes a deep breath.)* My name is  
Rogers Canfield.  
COLEMAN. I know that!  
NANCY. Hush! ①  
CANFIELD. Attorney at Law. In retirement, for my health. I am  
a widower.  
COLEMAN. What the hell does that have to do—  
NANCY. Just listen, Coleman!  
CANFIELD. Procedure, son. Calm procedure. Thank you.  
Nancy. ②  
NANCY. Don't mention it.  
CANFIELD. I live with my daughter, who never married. In a  
little house. See, I've established these facts. Now, this  
morning, I was sitting on the porch, with nothing to do, looking  
at the road. Young Shedman came to see me. Clear so far?  
NANCY. Yes, indeed.  
COLEMAN. Yes, yes!  
CANFIELD. He asked me if I knew a lawyer who could help him  
in his marital distress. I said I might. See how the facts can fall?  
Gently, and one at a time?  
NANCY. I understand perfectly.  
COLEMAN. So do I. So do I.  
CANFIELD. Good. We're making progress. Mr. Shedman told  
me he didn't have much in the way of a fee. About that time, my  
daughter came out of the house, mad at me over something or  
other, said so, and went back in. I said, Mr. Shedman, get me off  
this porch today, and I'm yours. We made a deal. I'm out of legal  
retirement to serve him faithfully. That understood?  
NANCY. Absolutely.  
COLEMAN. Of course! Of course!  
CANFIELD. Then you see how easy and gentle it can go. It's so  
simple. Just try it my way, young married people.  
COLEMAN. OK. Fair enough. You first, Nancy.  
NANCY. No, you first, Coleman.

① To scold

② To impress

\*NOTE: During  
this scene, Nancy  
plays on Canfield's  
interests by being  
overly cooperative—  
showing herself in  
a better light than  
Coleman.

① To remind

② To soothe

\*NOTE: During Coleman's monologue, Nancy becomes increasingly hostile. She tries to debase Coleman's story by shaking her head and visibly denying the account.

③ To bait.

COLEMAN: Nancy—

NANCY ① You started this action, Coleman!

CANFIELD: She has a point, son.

COLEMAN: Fine. I'll do it. I mean to be fair, Nancy, and right and honorable, and speak the truth.

CANFIELD: And that's a point for you.

NANCY ② in listening.

CANFIELD: You see, we're doing all right. *Soul? (Coleman gets up. He imitates Canfield.)*

COLEMAN: My name is Coleman Hannibal Shedman, Jr. I own and manage — *(Enter Virgil with another box. Coleman stares at him. He sets it carefully next to the first one, and exits.)*

NANCY: He'll be in and out, Coleman. Don't worry about him.

COLEMAN: I own and manage the Shedman Fish Farm, left me by my father when he died. I breed the finest lake stock in the South. It was a good life until one year ago, when like a fool, I wanted to get married. I met this woman, who said she loved me. But she didn't love me, not even from the very beginning! *(As Coleman talks, Nancy shows signs of acute distress. It is difficult for her to listen without breaking in.)* Because, on our honeymoon, which I planned and planned to the last detail to please her, I took her all the way to Virginia! To camp there at beautiful Hungry Mother State Park! I thought it a brand new tent, planning for us to swim in the beautiful lake, and fish together, and I'd show her how to cook out, and then watch the sunset with my loving wife. But wrong again, Coleman. Because all she could say was, Hungry Mother is a stupid name for a State Park, and a miserable place for a Christian honeymoon, picking my plans all to pieces bit by bit, until there wasn't nothing left of what I tried to do for us but the inside of that tent, as black as blackest night. And it was more of the same almost for one whole year, until one week ago.

NANCY ③ All right, all right now!

COLEMAN: I come home that night. I was emotional, upset, full of misguided love. I took Nancy tenderly in my arms, and tried to tell her how much I cared.

NANCY <sup>①</sup> Oh, my God!

COLEMAN. But I was tired! Working and slaving to support my wife at the fish farm. I fell asleep. And when I woke up the next morning, wife, furniture, family heirlooms, and my Dodge pick-up truck, gone. Gone! In their place, a little note: "Dear Coleman. Last night I met a real man. Yours truly, Nancy." Well, all right. But god damn it, I want all my family furniture, and my family heirlooms, and my pick-up truck, and a divorce! My wife and Mr. Soy Bean can have each other, I'll live with Daddy's folk! They treat me better than she ever did! *(He sits down. NANCY jumps up.)*

NANCY. Oh boy, Coleman! Oh boy, Coleman! <sup>②</sup>

CANFIELD. Gently, now! Sensible married people. Gently.

NANCY. My name may be Nancy Shedman, but I'm not yours no more, Coleman, you frog. Not in no way, shape or form!

COLEMAN. Is that a god damn promise?

NANCY. It certainly is, and has been, since that same night you have described out of the folly of your twisted mouth.

COLEMAN. Hear that? Twisted mouth. <sup>③</sup>

NANCY. Because a lot more happened that night than you'll admit, Coleman, you horse-faced rat and rodent, you.

COLEMAN. Horse-faced rat and rodent. Hear that?

CANFIELD. Now, gently, sensible young—

NANCY <sup>④</sup> You come home, all right. Looking like you always do, puffed up mad at the world, and me in it. You're full of my guided love, you were full of beer and whiskey. <sup>⑤</sup> You wouldn't <sup>⑥</sup> say a word. Just mope around, and mope around, and then boom! <sup>⑦</sup> A sudden grabbing me. Hauling me down on the sofa, like a sack of potatoes. Starting in on me until I myself, in spite of myself, was swept with carnal desire. When I finally managed to get my clothes decently off, you pawing and clutching, and finally got my desires because I want a baby, Coleman, a baby, and said so! <sup>⑧</sup> Then you climbing on top of me on that old sofa and just hanging there. Then passing out! Out, just plain out, boom! Like that. <sup>⑨</sup> Me rolling, humiliated out from under you, and letting you flop, boom! your big <sup>⑩</sup> stuffed head going down like a rock, hitting the coffee table, boom!

① To debase

② To threaten

③ To challenge

④ To correct

⑤ To make fun of

⑥ To accuse

⑦ To justify

⑧ To disgrace

⑨ To blame

⑩ To make fun of

\*NOTE: Nancy's use of "boom" to emphasize actions comes from her reliving the experience as she tells the story. Although the purpose of telling the story is to justify her actions, the experience still haunts her.

- ① to confess
- ② to chastise
- ③ to plead
- ④ to justify
- ⑤ to paint the picture

like that, splintering your lip, and me wishing you'd split your brains and broke your neck! Oh, Coleman, Oh Coleman! You don't know what it's like, to be a mortified wife. I felt so bad. Dear Jesus, I prayed, give me a sign. And about that time, you snored, and rolled over on your back on the floor, *flap!* like that, with your pants down and that thing of yours sleeping just like you, *flap!* *(Listening to this, Coleman has been going crazy. Now he sees a large, rough looking man, Obie Hart, enter. Hart is looking anxiously for someone he mistook on the way. Obie would be there and isn't. Disappointed, he sits alone on a bench.)*

- ⑥ to scold
- ⑦ to confirm
- ⑧ to blame
- ⑨ Nancy relives the story in this moment - the moment of her salvation.

COLEMAN. Who's that man?  
NANCY. Oh, hush! There I was, baked in my own living room, with my husband passed out on the floor. Again, because that's what always happens, since that campfire honeymoon of his. Instead of decent married relations, it's him get drunk, me want a baby, *Awant!* and *Boo!* was such a mess. I wanted to die. I hadn't even noticed he'd left the front door open. Somebody was there. I turned around, crying. It was Obie.

- ⑩ to scold
- ⑪ to justify
- ⑫ to put Obie on a pedestal
- ⑬ to put Coleman in his place
- ⑭ to explain a simple truth
- ⑮ to teach
- ⑯ to inspire
- ⑰ Nancy gets lost in the moment again.
- ⑱ As she snaps into reality again, Nancy demonstrates the stark difference between Obie & Coleman

COLEMAN. Doing what, preacher? Whackin' off?  
OBY. Now, hold on—  
NANCY. Asking me politely, Coleman, if I had a kitchen match, so he could light his campfire down by the river. So understanding and polite about the fact I didn't have my clothes on, so gentle and kindly faced.  
COLEMAN. He ain't kindly faced. He ain't nothin' faced. He's so god damned dumb nothin' registers there at all.  
NANCY. registers there! Your wife registers there, and likes it a lot. *(To Confield.)* Obie waited while I put on my clothes. I got his match. And I went with him to his campfire. And it was so different. A different campfire from any of yours, Coleman. I told Obie everything. He understood. And he told me things, about life, and Jesus and Lord, and the Bible, things I saw never heard before any-where. And he took me in his manly arms, and said a prayer in my ear, and kissed me. And there, sit, that a difference, between *(Pointing at Obie.)* day and *(Pointing to Coleman.)* night. *(Another tough looking man, Howard Rauld, enters. He is not as big as Hart, but*



Nancy sits to regain her composure—  
maybe she comes to terms with her feelings for  
Oby, maybe she is ashamed of her recent choices.  
When Nancy notices Coleman listening to Hart &  
Rudd's conversation, she knows she'll have

to intervene  
or else Coleman  
will lash out at  
the men.

he is just as rough.)  
OBY. (To Rudd.) Sit down anywhere. We'll be through in no  
time.

RUDD. (Distracted.) Is Oby here? (Hart sees Rudd and Rudd sees  
Hart. They rush to each other, and embrace.)

HART. I thought you wasn't coming!

RUDD. I waited half an hour at the pool room!

HART. Pool room? I thought you said meet here!

RUDD. No, no, we were supposed to meet there and come  
here later!

HART. Who said that?

RUDD. You did.

HART. No, I didn't! What I said was— (Rudd grabs Hart.)

RUDD. Well, never mind! I'm sorry if I messed up.

HART. No, I did. Just so you're here.

RUDD. I am.

HART. It's all right, then. Everything's all right. (They kiss. A pale,  
drab, very worried little middle aged lady, Lorena Cashbury, enters  
timidly.)

LORENA. Oh, I'm sorry! I thought there was a church service  
here. I don't mean to intrude. (She turns to go.)

OBY. You're not intruding, ma'am. Come right in and sit down.  
It'll begin shortly.

COLEMAN. Wait a minute. Two men are hugging and kissing  
each other back there.

NANCY. Just let me finish. I came back to the house with Oby,  
happy for the first time in my woman's life, and you still passed out  
on the floor. I said, "Listen, Oby, I have earned freedom, a fair divi-  
sion of furniture, and transportation, too." I've loaded everything  
I wanted over your head, out the door, and put it in your filthy old  
truck, and drove off. To here. Where I stand now, defying you,  
Coleman, you dog. In the way, I sold your truck. (A large woman  
named Mrs. Wall walks impressively in. She waves to Nancy.)  
Hi, Nancy.

MRS. WALL. Hello, Nancy. You sweet thing. Praise the  
Lord.

- ① to mollify
- ② to blame
- ③ to level with
- ④ to intimidate
- ⑤ to dismiss

- ① to put Mrs. Wall on a pedestal
- ② to chastise
- ③ to appease

When church members arrive, Nancy seamlessly switches into the role of welcoming committee. Her spite is replaced by a smile.

- ④ to dote on Muriel

As Oby begins his story, Nancy joins the circle to support him & to be there in case she has to justify any of Oby's claims.

COLEMAN. Now, who for god's sake is that?  
 NANCY. Mrs. Wall. ①  
 COLEMAN. Mrs. what?  
 MRS. WALL. Wall! Wall!  
 COLEMAN. Two men hugging each other, and a woman named Wall. *(Mrs. Wall removes a shawl, revealing a battered upright piano. She settles herself there.)*  
 NANCY. She's a sweet Christian companion and friend. ② Never you mind about her name. ③ Mr. Canfield, that is my story. Do you understand everything now?  
 CANFIELD. I fear I am beginning to, yes.  
 COLEMAN. *(To Oby.)* All right, Soy Bean. Your turn.  
 OBY. Me?  
 COLEMAN. We get to hear your story of what happened on that fateful night. *(Looks at the people.)* All fifty of us, or however (he hell many people we got in here now. O my god! *(A young man, Billy Huggs, with a guitar, enters. With him is his young wife, Muriel, with a baby in her arms.)*  
 MURIEL. Hey, Nancy.  
 NANCY. ④ Muriel! You brought the baby!  
 MURIEL. I sure did!  
 NANCY. *(To the baby.)* Why, he's just the sweetest thing! Hey, there! Hey, honey! Who's-hoo! Baha-baha-hoo! Oh, Lord, Muriel, he's nice.  
 MURIEL. Yes, he is. *(Billy hits a note on Mrs. Wall's piano, and bows one string of his guitar. Mrs. Wall joins Nancy and Muriel, looking at the baby.)*  
 BILLY. *(To Coleman.)* Hi. *(He moves away, tuning his guitar.)*  
 COLEMAN. Elvis Presley. My god. Hey, Soy Bean! *(Smiling at Oby, Oby goes to Canfield.)*  
 OBY. You want to hear my story, here it is, cuss my heart and hope to die. *(To Canfield.)* It started when I got laid off my full-time job at the Skyrocket Bowling Alley. Couldn't get along with the manager. I went up in the mountains to think about it, and fish, and pray. I was camping by Caesar's Creek, just above Stone Mountain River. I went to cook my trout. I'd run out of matches. I'd seen this

little house up by the road. I went and looked, and there was a light on inside. The front door was open. I looked in. There, without any clothes on, was a fine young lady. *(Oby smiles, and spreads his hands. He appreciates the absurdity of the occasion.)* I said, "Ah, hebbu. You got a match?" And she said maybe she did. When I told her what I wanted it for, she said if I could wait until she put some clothes on, she'd not only give me a box of matches, she'd come down and cook my trout for me. And she did. *(To Coleman)* And told me about you.

COLEMAN. What about me, Soy Bein?

OBY. Enough. You want to know why she takes my carapine better than yours? Because I know that God Himself is always the other person around any fire. Any fire. She understands that now, too. *(To Canfield again.)* She asked me what to do about her husband. I said, "Go ask my Daddy. He preaches about men and women all the time. He knows more than I do." She said that sounded like a good idea. She had a pick-up truck and some furniture she wanted to take with her. Fine. Well, Daddy liked her right off. So much, he offered her the back room over the kitchen in our house, for as long as she wants it. Folks often stay with us from time to time. Ask around, lawyer. You will find we are respected Christian people. Nothing wrong has been done. And, since then, I've been looking for a steady job. Today, I got one. I can't wait to tell my Daddy about it. *(Smiling with anticipation, he sits down.)*

COLEMAN. How about it, Canfield? Read between the lines. If that ain't enough for a divorce, what is? *(Sounds of guitar, piano chords. The people chat with each other, moving about, friendly but not gushing. They are at ease but it is evident they are all here for a serious purpose.)*

CANFIELD. My goodness. Just look at these people.

COLEMAN. Listen, Oby. Are you trying to tell me that instead of having carnal relations with my wife, when she was wide open, if you can pardon the expression, you took her instead to see your Daddy?

OBY. That's right.

COLEMAN. Then what the hell are you doing, jumping in

Although Nancy is bashful about the situation, she is thankful that her story matches up to Oby's.

Her internal monologue is one that agrees with the points that Oby is making as well as acknowledges that Oby is discrediting Coleman's claims - a double win for Nancy.

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DAVID W. HOOVER

- ① to scold
- ② to correct
- ③ to warn
- ④ to shut Coleman up
- ⑤ to belittle
- ⑥ to teach
- ⑦ to encourage
- ⑧ to glorify Buckhorn
- ⑨ to conspire

your Daddy? ①  
 NANCY, Coleman—  
 COLEMAN. And what kind of grown-up man lives with his Daddy, anyhow? Great God Almighty, if my old man and me lived in the same house one day after I hit sixteen, they'd a buried the both of us.  
 NANCY, Coleman— ②  
 COLEMAN. *(To Oby.)* But not you. You live with Daddy.  
 NANCY, Coleman— ③  
 COLEMAN. *(To Nancy.)* And so do you, now? When you marry him, you still gonna live with Daddy?  
 NANCY, Coleman— ④  
 COLEMAN. Well, what is it, Nancy? Speak up!  
 NANCY, Coleman— ⑤ You are the one who's insisted all this time I am going to marry Oby.  
 COLEMAN. Huh?  
 NANCY. I'm not.  
 COLEMAN. Huh?  
 NANCY. ⑥ He is my dear friend and brother in the Lord, but he is not my happiness. He brought me to it, but he is not the thing itself.  
 COLEMAN. Wait a minute. You said you was going to marry Obediah Buckhorn.  
 NANCY. Yes, Obediah Buckhorn, Senior.  
 OBY. *(Smiling.)* Daddy.  
 COLEMAN. *Daddy?* You marrying his *Daddy*?  
 NANCY. ⑦ Yes! Finally, Coleman, *whew!* That's it!  
 COLEMAN. Well, god-a-odd-damn! *Daddy,* eh? *Canfield,* my fine young wife left me for Daddy. Well, where is he? Let's all have a look at Daddy. *Daddy!* *Yoo-hoo!* *Daddy?* Where in hell is he, anyhow?  
 BUCKHORN. Right here. God bless you, son. *(He has just entered.)*  
 COLEMAN. Him?  
 NANCY. ⑧ Him. *(She goes to the Reverend Buckhorn, and stands beside him.)* At last you got here. It's my husband. *(To Coleman.)* The

⑨

① Reverend Buckhorn will take care of everything now, Coleman.

COLEMAN. You going to marry this old man? *(To Buckhorn.)* Daddy, I can put your ass in jail. For it seems you and your idiot son here have stole my wife.

BUCKHORN. I can see you mean to test me, son.

COLEMAN. And fucking how. This is my lawyer, and we got you dead to rights.

BUCKHORN. I understand how you must feel. Life is hard.

COLEMAN. You hear that son of a bitch use to me? I'm gonna—

CANFIELD. Son! No violence!

BUCKHORN. But your wife came to us of her own free will. And suffering, because of you. *(To Nancy.)* And her own ignorance.

NANCY. *(Head bowed.)* Yes, Lord.

BUCKHORN. All your questions, Mr. Sedman, will be answered. But we have a service to the Lord God to celebrate here tonight, and every thing else must wait upon that. You will know everything you want to know. *After the worship. Excuse me. (He brushes past Coleman and kisses Oby fondly, and then Nancy affectionately but with a gleam in his eye, too. Then he moves away, welcoming the others, who are all waiting to greet him.)*

COLEMAN. Lawyer! What are we going to do about it?

CANFIELD. Well— *(Enter Carl Spector. He is a very strange, size-homed country man. He sees Coleman, someone new, and goes to him, talking.)*

CARL. She come into my life from nowhere, don't you see? I found her in the city dump, dying in a shoebox, with all her dead little brothers and sisters around her. But she was still alive. I took her home. I fed her cornbread and milk. And she lived. *(He nods at Coleman, having said something tremendous.)* She lived! *(He turns to others, who nod protectively. Coleman shakes his head.)*

COLEMAN. What was he talking about?

NANCY. About his phantom setter. That's Carl Spector, talking about his phantom setter.

① to pacify  
When Coleman threatens Buckhorn, Nancy finds solace at Buckhorn's side. She is safe with Buckhorn's pious logic to defend her.

Nancy continues with her duties in the church, greeting those who enter. When Carl begins talking to Coleman, Nancy must intervene in order to keep the peace in the church.

② to pacify

- ① to placate
- ② to pressure
- ③ to illuminate
- ④ as if my younger sibling just ruined the kitchen in an attempt to cook.
- ⑤ to bait
- ⑥ to apologize
- ⑦ to snap back to reality
- ⑧ At first, it seems as though Nancy will get her way - a clean break & justification for taking the property. However, admitting desertion would mean paying Coleman back for the goods & it is morally loomed down upon.
- ⑨ to dispute
- ⑩ to bargain

Nancy buys time to think about the consequences of admitting desertion by speaking slowly. \*

COLEMAN. His what?  
 NANCY ① A bird dog, Coleman, who died. He's a man haunted by his dog. ② Can't you understand that?  
 COLEMAN. Well, of course, Nancy. Sure. Hell, yes.  
 NANCY ③ Coleman, since I left you, and came to live with Reverend Buckhorn, I see how limited you really are. You can't tolerate nothing in the slightest human way unusual. ④ I've got a lot to learn. *(Enter Bonnie Bridge. In her early forties, she is very attractive. On the surface she is practical, efficient and cheerful.)*  
 BONNIE. How are you, Nancy?  
 NANCY ⑤ Fine, Bonnie. How're you?  
 BONNIE. Doing all right, praise the Lord. *(To Coleman and Canfield.)* Hello. Welcome to our church. If you could give me your names, I'll see that you're properly introduced to everyone before we begin. *(To Coleman.)* What's your name, young man? Don't be shy.  
 COLEMAN. God damn it, Nancy.  
 BONNIE. *(Unobtrusively.)* Oh, Nancy, it's your husband.  
 NANCY ⑥ I'm afraid so.  
 BONNIE. I should have known. *(To Coleman.)* You're not here for church, then.  
 COLEMAN. I'm here for a divorce. That's my lawyer. *(Canfield quickly extends his hand.)*  
 CANFIELD. My name is Rogers Canfield. Very pleased to meet you.  
 BONNIE. Mine is Bonnie Bridge. God bless you, sir.  
 CANFIELD. Thank you, God bless you, too. *(She smiles at Canfield, and moves away to other people. Canfield stares after her.)*  
 COLEMAN. Canfield!  
 NANCY ⑦ Hi, Canfield, can we finish, please?  
 CANFIELD. Well. *(To Coleman.)* I doubt if you could prove adultery, now. *(To Nancy.)* But if the wife admits desertion, the husband does have grounds for divorce, and is entitled to all his property.  
 NANCY ⑧ Wait a minute! ⑨ Who admits desertion? I left this man by the right of suffering. I had to find some decent joy and beauty in

my life. Every woman has a right to that. I don't owe this foola thing more than what he owes me: one wasted year of our lives! I'm not giving him back nothing!

COLEMAN: That's what you think, Nancy.

NANCY: That's what I know, Coleman. Now you just get out of her!

BUCKHORN: I think we're ready, now. Have you finished your talk?

OBY: Yes, sir.

NANCY: Yes, sir.

BUCKHORN: Good. Is Cancer Man here yet?

OBY: No, sir.

BUCKHORN: We'll wait then, a few minutes. I wouldn't want to start without him. *(He moves away again.)*

COLEMAN: Cancer Man?

NANCY: Yes, Coleman.

COLEMAN: *Cancer Man?*

NANCY: Yes, yes! Can't you understand English? A man who has cancer. He comes here because it helps him. He don't have no place else to go.

COLEMAN: If he has cancer, why doesn't he go to a hospital?

NANCY: Coleman, you don't know what you're talking about.

COLEMAN: Oh? *(Hurt.)* Didn't my Mama die of it when I was a boy? And didn't I take my Daddy to the hospital with it not two years ago?

NANCY: Yes, I forgot. I'm sorry.

COLEMAN: Didn't I see them waste away to nothing? Didn't I watch Daddy die, not even know who I was? His own son? *(Enter Cancer Man. He is a sick man in late middle age. The sight of him reminds Coleman of his father, and it frightens him.)*

CANCER MAN: Hidy.

BUCKHORN: Hello, Cancer Man. We been waiting for you.

CANCER MAN: Have you? Waiting for me? God bless you for that. What would we do, if we couldn't come to church? *(He sees Coleman. He holds out a hand to him.)* Hello, son.

COLEMAN: *(Hushed.)* You got cancer?

- ① to rally (the women of the church)
- ② to put (Coleman) in his place
- ③ to dismiss
- ④ to appeal
- ⑤ to quiet
- ⑥ to scold
- ⑦ to belittle
- ⑧ this line is earnest. to apologize

When Cancer Man enters, Nancy watches Coleman carefully to judge whether Cancer Man has had a positive effect on him.

As Nancy sets up the church, she tries to get into the spirit of worship and she must avoid Coleman's attempts to get her attention.

CANCER MAN. *(Simply.)* Yes. *(Coleman turns away from him, abruptly.)*

BUCKHORN. Now, friends. Let's start the worship. Begin. *(The people move now, quickly. Mrs. Wood plays "Amazing Grace," and they sing it heartily, as they change the room about. A table is brought to the middle of the room. It becomes an altar. On it is placed a rough wooden cross. A mason jar of clouded liquid is placed very carefully by the cross. The wooden boxes are put before the altar. A large sign goes up:*

AMALGAMATION
HOLINESS
CHURCH OF GOD
WITH SIGNS
FOLLOWING

*While this is happening, Coleman follows Nancy, who helps with the setting up of the church.)*

COLEMAN. Wait a minute, Nancy? What about the divorce? What about my property? What about this old man you're going to marry? You lost your mind? Bunch of lunatics in here. Two truck-drivers hugging and kissing each other? Another man talking to a dead dog? Another man dancing around saying he's got cancer? What kind of religion is this, anyhow? Nancy, what's happened to you? Nancy? *(Nobody pays him any attention. They are all cheerfully singing "Amazing Grace," and getting ready for church.)*

ALL. *(Singing.)*

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me,  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

Two grace that taught my heart to fear,



And grace my fears relieved,  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come,  
Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise,  
Than when we first began.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me,  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

*(They settle. Cruise lights have been turned on. There is no formal arrangement of the congregation. They sit scattered informally about the room. In front of the altar, however, a space is left open.)*

BUCKHORN. Now, folks. Before any other thing, it is I myself must declare myself here to you! I would hold nothing back!

CONGREGATION. Amen, brother.

COLEMAN. A-fucking men, and how, brother.

BUCKHORN. *(Pause — deep breath.)* You all do know the sunshine that has come into my life. This young and tender maiden—

COLEMAN. Maiden? Hoo!

BUCKHORN. *(Pause — deep breath.)* Who came to me lost and forlorn, ravaged by the brutality and the squalor of godless wedlock, her lovely womanly—

COLEMAN. Wedlock is tight, brother. Wait 'til it swaps on you.

BUCKHORN. *(Pause — deep breath.)* Her lovely womanly spirit crushed, her gentle nature defiled, her trusting heart broken—

\*NOTE: being new to this church, Nancy doesn't know the hymns. However, she knows some verses of Amazing Grace because of her time in Sunday School as a child.

There is a lot of stimulation for Nancy at this point. She is flattered and shy at what Buckhorn says about her & she is mortified and embarrassed by Coleman's outbursts.

① to testify

COLEMAN. And pissed off, in the bargain.

BUCKHORN. Came here to me, and to our church, and asked us for help, for guidance, for love and faith—and you gave, and I gave—

COLEMAN. And she gave—

BUCKHORN. And she was healed! Made whole! Sound! Radiant with the spirit of the Lord! Is this any kind of lie? Speak, little Nancy! Speak the truth!

NANCY. *(Simply, severely.)* I was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see. You have given me back my life.

BUCKHORN. Thank you for that. *(To Congregation.)* And it is no secret here, that my feelings for this girl have become, in the way of mortal men, matrimonial. Her youth and sunshine for me, her strength and experience for her.

COLEMAN. God damn.

BUCKHORN. Here is her husband, come cursing amongst us. You see the man. With rage, tight as a tick. Now, Mr. Shudman. You may not believe this, but everybody here comprehends your extreme married misery. Including me. Nobody belittles it. Including me. As soon as I can, when service is over, I will have everything out with you. But best things come first. 'Til church is over, you are our friend and guest. We beg you stay, and be welcome! *(To Canfield.)* And you are welcome, too. *(To the congregation.)* Isn't that right?

ALL. Why, yes! It certainly is! Yes, indeed. Welcome, friends.

CANFIELD. That's very decent of you. Much obliged. *(To Coleman.)* Have a seat, son.

COLEMAN. What, listen to this?

CANFIELD. You have to. Don't you want your settlement? Your property back?

COLEMAN. Oh, yeah. Damn right I do, OK. *(Music. Chords on the piano, from the electric guitar. Perhaps a harmonica, a tambourine, whatever they would play. Led by Billy and Mrs. Wall, they supply their own music very well.)*

CANFIELD. Just be patient.

COLEMAN. Oh, sure. *(He slips the whiskey bottle from Canfield's*

*pocket, and takes a quick drink.)* Want some?  
 CANFIELD. No, thanks.  
 COLEMAN. Huh?  
 CANFIELD. Put that away, son. We're in church.  
 COLEMAN. What about your heart condition?  
 CANFIELD. I'll chance it. Now, hush up. *(They are seated to one side. Buckhorn is now walking about, listening to the music.)*  
 BUCKHORN. *(Easily.)* Well, what is real religion? One thing I know, it don't have no beginning, and it don't have no end. It is happening all the time, and t'might I hope it will happen to us. *(He leans, and smiles.)* That sounds good, Billy. Mrs. Wall, I hope we have good music tonight, to the glory of God. I think we will. Mr. Hart. Mrs. Rudd. *(Jar.)* God bless all of you, my friends. *(He turns to Bonnie.)* Miss Bridget.  
 BONNIE. Friends, the Kiley Haines family were burned out of their house last night. They weren't hurt, but their clothes went up with everything else. *(Holding a piece of paper.)* I have the children's sizes here. If you'll look at them later on, and bring in what you can, I'll see they get it. *(People respond: they will.)* We have three new faces with us tonight. First of all — where are you? *(Looks.)* Oh, there you are. Come on out. A new friend, Mrs. Lorena Corbury. *(Lorena steps shyly forward.)*  
 ALL. Welcome, Hidy!  
 LORENA. Hello. *(She moves back quickly.)*  
 BONNIE. This gentleman is Mr. Coleman Shedden. He is Nancy's husband.  
 ALL. Welcome, Hidy!  
 COLEMAN. *(A mock bow.)* Oh, how do you do?  
 BONNIE. And last, but certainly not least, a distinguished lawyer, Mr. Rogers Canfield.  
 ALL. Welcome, Hidy!  
 CANFIELD. *(Very pleased.)* I'm happy to be here. *(He smiles at Bonnie, who smiles back.)*  
 BONNIE. And I have the latest about Gilbert Letty. He's out of the hospital. He's home now, with Martha. He's still in pain, but not in agony like he was. He'd welcome visits from comforting

Nancy personally walks to Lorena to greet her & welcome her to the church. This also allows her to watch the church as they welcome Coleman — a kind gesture to such a coarse man. She sets her mind to try and accept Coleman.

- ① to plead
- ② to confess
- ③ to vent
- ④ to justify
- ⑤ to charge
- ⑥ to excuse

friends. And Reverend Buckhorn, may I say this?

BUCKHORN. Of course.

BONNIE. You all know what happened to me here. How sick I was over it for so long. Let me tell you, I appreciated your visits and your prayers. I know now how the sick and the needy feel. And — oh, Lord — now I want to pray!

BUCKHORN. Then do. *(She prays aloud, fervently.)*

BONNIE. Oh, Lord Jesus, I was so sick! I wanted to die so many times, and you heard my prayers and brought my friends to help me, and so, Lord, I pray now that you will send health and mercy to Gilbert Letty and his wife and children! And to all the sick and needy people in this world! *(Others join her, each with his own prayer. In a moment, the whole congregation is praying aloud and with real passion for the afflicted. Many are on their knees. With a look at Coleman, Nancy falls to her knees and prays for him.)*

NANCY. Oh, Lord! Let me pray to you right now, for my husband, Coleman! Forgive all evil thoughts against him, I know I can't stand him anymore, and he is a terrible mess, and maybe he can't help that, Lord, and pray that you will come into his life and do him some good and show him the way! Amen, Lord Jesus! *(With another look, she gets up and walks away to Oby Coleman, staring at them all, throws up his hands. The prayers, a few at a time, end. When they are all quite finished, Buckhorn speaks again.)*

BUCKHORN. Now folks, I see Muriel and Billy Boggs there with some good news. Billy? *(Billy, the young man who plays the electric guitar, gets up, a little reluctantly.)*

BILLY. Well, we had the baby, as you know. She's got it with her, Muriel? *(His pretty young wife stands up, happy. She holds her baby, who has been nursing at her breast.)*

MURIEL. He's only three weeks old. I wanted to bring him here quick as I could. Edward William Boggs. Billy has nicknamed him Wrinkle. That's because the first day we had him home, Billy didn't see him where I had him under a bedsheet, and almost sat on him. He said he looked like just another wrinkle in the sheets. And that's what he was. You all know we never meant to have him this fast. But we're happy about it, anyhow. Ain't we, Billy?

BILLY. Yeah.

MURIEL. He already has a godmother. Elrita Moss, who won't come here, I'm sorry to say. But he needs a godfather, for the years ahead. *(She goes to Cancer Man.)* Will you do that for us? I believe you will get well and live for many years. He might need somebody like you, who is good and wise.

CANCER MAN. You people here. You are the best things in the world to me. *(Muriel, he holds up his hands to take the baby, but very shyly.)*

MURIEL. Here. Don't be afraid to hold him. You won't scare him. He'll know you love him. *(Cancer Man takes the baby in his arms.)*

CANCER MAN. I thank you, Lord Jesus. Little boy, I will stand by you, as long as I live. Bless you, child. All the days of your sweet young life.

BUCKHORN. What a fine thing. You know, Jesus was a baby like this once. How we love that. Baby Jesus. Mrs. Wall, play us some Baby Jesus music. Billy, you proud Daddy. Sing, friends. *(Mrs. Wall plays "Fairest Lord Jesus." The people gather around Muriel and sing it to the baby, and to her. Coleman stares at them, shaking his head.)*

COLEMAN. Canfield, there is something wrong about these people. I just feel it.

ALL. *(Singing gently.)*

Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,

O Thou of God and man the son,

Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,

Thou my soul's glory, joy, and crown.

COLEMAN. I mean, they're not all right in the head. *(Looks around.)* And this place. I mean, what kind of church is this?

ALL. *(Singing.)*

Fair is the sunshine, Fairer still the moonlight;

And all the twinkling, starry host,

Jesus is fairest, Jesus is purer,

Than all the angels heaven can boast.

COLEMAN. What are they doing up there, pretending that

This exchange of brotherhood and friendship is exactly the kind of relationship Nancy wants and needs.

damn baby is Jesus! I tell you, something is dead wrong about this whole thing. *(The song ends. Cancer Man approaches Coleman.)*

CANCER MAN. Son?

COLEMAN. Oh, my god!

CANCER MAN. Don't you want to see the baby?

COLEMAN. No, I don't.

CANCER MAN. Why not? Pretty child. Don't you like children?

COLEMAN. What business is that of yours? What do you care if I like children or not?

CANCER MAN. I like you. I want to be your friend.

COLEMAN. Well, thank you, but I'm not interested. Look, it's too bad you're sick.

CANCER MAN. Don't worry about it. I don't.

COLEMAN. Of course not. Will you just please leave me alone?

CANCER MAN. All right. I am sorry I have troubled you. *(Cancer Man goes back to the others. Coleman sees Canfield looking at him with disapproval.)*

COLEMAN. What are you looking at?

CANFIELD. Nothing, son.

COLEMAN. By God, I don't see why everybody had to call me son around here. *(He steps to the center of the room.)* And I've had about enough of this! Nancy, there ain't nothing more happening in here until we get through! You can sing hymns or hell freezes over. I don't care! You can marry Obie, Daddy, or the milkman. I don't care! *(He looks about, sees the boxes on front of the table, marches over and sits on them.)* But I ain't waiting no longer. I'm here to get what's coming to me, and if I die I'm gonna so right here and yell about it! Come on, Nancy! My furniture, my family heirlooms, and a new pick-up truck! Until that's settled, here I sit!

NANCY. Well, I wouldn't sit on them boxes, Coleman, if I were you.

COLEMAN. Oh, you wouldn't, would you? *(He sits there. He kicks them.)*

NANCY. And I wouldn't kick them like that, neither.

① to warn  
② to chastise

COLEMAN. Oh, yeah? Well, who's going to stop me? *(He kicks the boxes, hard.)*

NANCY **1** Keep on kicking. You'll find out. *(Coleman kicks the boxes and bounces up and down on them, in a tantrum. Suddenly, from inside the boxes comes an unmistakable sound: the electrifying thrashing crackle, the sound of a rattlesnake. Coleman rockets up off the boxes. He looks through a crack in the side of one.)*

COLEMAN. Snakes! Jesus Christ! *(He looks again. The people watch him in a great silence.)* There's rattlesnakes in these boxes! Diamond god damned bucked rattlesnakes! And copperheads! Deadly serpents! They're poison! They'll kill you! *(The people all stare at Coleman, and his discovery, saying not a word.)* What are they doing in — *(Pause. Silence. Realization.)* My god. You're Pentecostal Church Snakehandlers. *(Coleman stares at the worshippers of Amalgamation Church. The worshippers stare at Coleman.)*

BUCKHORN. Amen, son.

CONGREGATION. Amen.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

**1** to dare

It is exhilarating for Nancy to prove that she is a part of something special to Coleman. With everyone around her of the same mind, she feels a sense of community. It is the same rush of excitement and belonging as a person joining a protest for the first time. What you fight for brings you together.

① to shut him up  
② to instruct

## ACT II

*As before.*

COLEMAN. Pentecostal Church of God Snakehandlers. Maniacs, Canfield. *(To Reverend Buekhorn.)* You pick up them snakes! Hold them in your hands!

BUCKHORN. That has been known to happen.

COLEMAN. And you jump all around, and praise Jesus with rattlesnakes!

NANCY. ① Coleman, you're getting it wrong, as usual!

COLEMAN. Well, what's the trick? There's got to be one. You drag them snakes? Or you milk them first? Or what?

NANCY. ② Coleman, they are the way God made them. Full of speed, fangs, and poison death. But that ain't the point.

COLEMAN. Oh, don't tell me those — *(Pause.)* Wait a minute. I did read something about a man just last —

BONNIE. Gilbert Lerry. He almost died.

CANFIELD. And before that. Haven't some people — its born in the papers —

BUCKHORN. *(Sobriety.)* That has been known to happen. We don't deny it.

BONNIE. They think they have faith. When the text comes, they don't.

COLEMAN. Why, you're breaking the law. There's a state law against using snakes in church! Daddy, you're just breaking the law every way you turn.

BUCKHORN. State law is not the last word, young Mr. Shedman.



The freedom of our religion is not something state governments care to trifle with. We are left alone, most of the time.

COLEMAN. But it is against the law? People have died?

BUCKHORN. *(Nods.)* Yes. *(CARL SPECTER, troubled by COLEMAN, tries to explain.)*

CARL. You're confused. You don't understand. When something is real, then something is real. *(Pause.)* Like her. See, she was smart as a whip. She was swift as the wind. Always sad when I left her, and happy to see me home again. When she'd hurt, and lose sight of me in heavy brush, she'd jump! jump! as she ran, jump! as she ran, like that. She always found me, too! What does the law have to do with it?

COLEMAN. I'm confused?

BUCKHORN. *(Softly.)* Bonnie. *(Bonnie touches Carl gently on the arm. Docile, he turns to her. She leads him away from Coleman.)*

BONNIE. Not now, Carl. Come sit with me.

BUCKHORN. But you are right in this, Mr. Shedman. Many question us. Write articles in newspapers. But the truth is, we only do what God plainly told us to do. It is right here in the Bible, in the words of the Lord. Yet other churches say it isn't. Why they can't read, I don't know. But we can read. We know what we need, and what we want!

COLEMAN. Yes, and so do I. Here it comes, Ganfield, right about now.

BUCKHORN. What's that?

COLEMAN. I know what you really want, preacher. And you'll use snakes, elephants, anything that moves, to get it. It is now time, friends, for the holy offering! That's what you want! Gimme, gimme!

NANCY. <sup>①</sup> Oh, Coleman! Don't!

BUCKHORN. Are you saying what I think you are saying?

COLEMAN. I sure am. You ain't getting a thin dime out of me, Daddy!

BUCKHORN. See that bucket?

COLEMAN. What bucket?

BUCKHORN. Way back there against that wall. See it?

① to appeal (request)

COLEMAN: What about it?

BUCKHORN: That's our offering plate, in this church. We leave it back there. Nobody even has to look at it, much less put money in it, if they don't want to. We'd rather have no church at all than one built on money.

ALL: Yes, that's right. Yes.

BUCKHORN: *(To everyone)* Go out into the churches of this world! Whose high and mighty preachers say we are crazy. Why, they have people carrying money-plates stuffed with dollar bills and pledges and silver, and they stick it right up into God's face, and sing a hymn. It is enough to make you vomit on the cross! *(To Coleman, mad.)* Now, you put your thin dime in that bucket, or don't. In your own kind of talk, we don't give a flying fuck what you do with your money! *(Furious, Buckhorn checks himself.)* I swore at this man. Not his fault. I lost my temper, curse of my life. Help me, friends. Don't let me sink in the swamps of anger! *(He lets out a tremendous, hate-raving scream.)* OOOOOOOOOOOOOO  
HHHHHHHHHHHHH! GOD! OOOOOOOHHHHH GOD!!!  
*(He falls to his knees, at the altar. Oby jumps to his side.)*

OBY: You all right, Daddy? *(Buckhorn reaches up for his son's hand. Oby grips it hard, and steadies his father.)*

BUCKHORN: Help me, son!

OBY: I'm here, Daddy.

BUCKHORN: Help me, friends! I'm lost! Lost in anger! *(He holds out his arms to them, abandoning his service and role of preacher completely. They rush to him, grab his hands, press them hard.)* Mrs. Wall! Sing something! Help me! *(Mrs. Wall plays "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling." They all move to the piano and sing, while Nancy goes at Coleman.)*

ALL: *(Singing)*

Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling,

Calling for you, and for me,

See on the portals He's waiting and watching,

Watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home, you who are weary, come home,

In his moment of weakness, Buckhorn is a sweet, sensitive, humble man. Nancy stares in wonder - she has never seen a man cry to God for help. She instantly takes pity on him & sees him as a role model for Coleman.

Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling.

Calling, O sinner, come home!

NANCY <sup>①</sup> See, Coleman! You ain't the only one who gets mad.  
You ain't the only one who has troubles.

① to implore

② to bash

COLEMAN. Nancy, listen. Come on with me. I'll get you out of  
this craziness. I want a divorce, but I don't want to leave you in no  
insane asylum.

NANCY. *(In sudden rage. ②'s you who's in the insane asylum!  
(She moves away, hiding her feelings.)*

ALL. *(Singing.)*

O for the wonderful love He has promised,

Promised for you and for me,

Though we have sinned, He has mercy and pardon,

Pardon for you and for me.

*(As they sing, the congregation falls at Buckhorn's and calls him  
home.)*

COME HOME, COME HOME, you who are weary, come home,

Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,

Calling, O sinner, come home!

*(Buckhorn, restored, now takes over his service again. We can see now  
under his calm, he is a fractured man, who must struggle against  
violent passions.)*

BUCKHORN. Thank you, friends, and praise God. When we ask  
him together, He takes away our hate. Don't we know, you can't  
get rid of it by yourself. It just grows. *(To Coleman.)* God bless you.  
If I anger you calling you son, you anger me calling me Daddy.

COLEMAN. I won't do it again.

BUCKHORN. Then, brother, let's put it this way. We are both  
equal creatures of God. You may not like that, and I don't reckon I  
do, neither, but that's the way God made us. *(He looks at Coleman  
differently now, seeing something new in him.)* It may seem strange to  
you, but I've seen you before. Yes, I can see my own eyes, years  
ago, looking out of your face. But never mind that now. *(To his con-  
gregation.)* What do we know about the mysterious ways of God?  
Nothing. We only seek Him, and we won't get scared by what  
we find.

This is the first time Nancy hears Mrs. Wall's story. She is surprised & uplifted that Mrs. Wall also came to the church after fleeing a bad situation.

ALL. No, we won't. We won't be afraid. Praise the Lord!  
BUCKHORN. Now, glory to God! Praise his holy name. So the spirit can move! *Glory to God!* (Mrs. Wall starts the chord of a hymn, then stops.)

MRS. WALL. Young man! You, young man!

COLEMAN. You talking to me?

MRS. WALL. Yes I am, Reverend Buckhorn!

BUCKHORN. Go right ahead, Mrs. Wall. Friendly, when you have something to say in this church, you say it.

MRS. WALL. You're just the kind of young person that caused me — well, I'm just — oh! (She bangs a discordant chord on the piano. Virgil moves to her, and sits on the piano bench next her.)

VIRGIL. Can I get you a glass of water?

MRS. WALL. No, Virgil. Thank you. (To Coleman.) Shady Lane Methodist Church gave me a Times watch and said goodbye. After thirty-one years, I couldn't teach Sunday School anymore. A young preacher who looks something like you did it. He got a girl from the Teacher's College. She plays the flute, and makes beads, and talks about children re-lating to each other, and that's religion now. I was just let loose. I thought I'd die. The only good thing I've ever done in my life was with the Bible. Teaching miracles to children. Virgil here was in my class, when he was a little boy.

VIRGIL. Yes, ma'am. I sure was.

MRS. WALL. But everybody knows better now. Young man, I got desperate. I couldn't find my religion anywhere. I went to a baseball stadium, to hear about the Lord. But it was religion I wanted, not baseball preaching. All empty smiles, and no power. So then one day, I met Virgil again. He brought me here. To these people you don't think much of. Well, let me tell you they can keep their powerhouse preachers and baseball religion. Let them play at Sunday School, with flutes and beads and the silly talk of college girls. Because I don't need to teach children miracles anymore. I found the miracles here. I always believed them, and I was right. (She plays a chord again, feeling better.) So you look down your nose all you want to. You bothered me for a minute, but you don't anymore. I'm free of people like you. *Glory be to God.* (While she talks and

*plays. Lorena Cosburg moves timidly toward the piano.)*

LORENA. Mrs. Wall. That was a thrilling statement.

MRS. WALL. Thank you.

LORENA. I do so enjoy singing with you, and everyone —  
I—

MRS. WALL. Thank you kindly. *(She plays firmly "I Love To Tell The Story" indicating for Lorena to join her. After the first verses, she does. Singing.)*

I love to tell the story  
Of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and his glory,  
Of Jesus and his love.

I love to tell the story,  
Because I know 'tis true,  
It satisfies my longings,  
As nothing else can do.

*(Lorena joins her in a duet.)*

MRS. WALL & LORENA.

I love to tell the story,  
For those who know it best,  
Seem hungering and thirsting  
To hear it like the rest.

And when, in scenes of glory,  
I sing the new, new song,  
Twill be the old, old story,  
That I have loved so long.

*(Mrs. Wall, Lorena, and now Virgil sing the refrain.)*

MRS. WALL, LORENA & VIRGIL.

I love to tell the story,  
Twill be my song in glory,  
To tell the old, old story,  
Of Jesus and his love.

*(When they are finished, Lorena stands looking at everyone, very moved.)*

Nancy especially relates to Lorena's story and as she listens, she convinces herself that she, too, left her family in search of God. Inspired, Nancy finds a new reason to love this church.

- ① to warn
- ② to renounce
- ③ to prove obedience
- ④ to silence him

LORENA. Oh, I did — I want you to know — I don't know how—  
BUCKHORN. *(Gently.)* Speak, Mrs. Cosburg. We'll listen.  
LORENA. Oh, I can't.  
BUCKHORN. In your own good time, then.  
LORENA. But I want to! *(Pause.)* They don't know I'm here tonight. My husband, Frank. Or my children. They'll be here. They don't understand, like this young man. They look down on people like you. They make fun of you. I've driven past this church, alone, many times. I never had the courage to come in. I just parked, in the dark, and heard you singing. *(Pause.)* My husband tells me what to do. My children tell me what to do. Delivers boys and clerks at the five and ten tell me what to do. The only time I ever crossed anybody in my life was coming here tonight. I want to know what you believe. Because in my life — in my own life — *(Weighed, she's unable to go on.)*  
BUCKHORN. Gather your forces, Sister Cosburg. Your life is all right. We're not afraid of it, if you're not. Speak when you please. *(She nods, grateful, and sits down. Buckhorn smiles at her.)* You see, we observe no strict order of worship here. Worship don't have much order to it, not if it's real. No preacher can schedule the Holy Ghost, surely not me. He will come. Sister Cosburg, all the same. The answer to that, is wait, and be ready. *(He looks at Nancy.)* As I am ready. For the Holy Ghost. For my little bride, and the joy of our union! As I have waited!  
COLEMAN. Hold it. Waited how long? You got a growned up son. Reverend Daddy. Well, sort of a growned up son.  
NANCY. ① Coleman—  
COLEMAN. How did you come by him? Santy Claus? Somebody knit him for you one day?  
NANCY. ② Oh, my awful husband! I'm so sorry.  
BUCKHORN. It's all right.  
NANCY. ③ No, sir. It's not.  
COLEMAN. Sir? Sir, Nancy? You gonna call him or when you get it the way you like it, and grab him by the—  
NANCY. ④ Throw him out! Just throw him out!

BUCKHORN. Now, hush!! *(Pause.)* Throw him out! Young man out? Well, I'd like to. He attacks my church, and flaunts his carnal knowledge of my young bride in my face. I must confess, I am tempted. But friend, in forty-three years of Christian ministry, no human soul has ever been cast out of a church by me. *(To Coleman, boiling.)* Of course, there is a first time for everything!

CANFIELD. Come here, son, and sit down, for goodness sake. Nice people and good friends, you see how my client here, he has his problems.

HART. He just don't know what they are.

RUDD. Orin, ain't it the truth?

HART. Yep.

MRS. WALL. He likes playing bad boy in Sunday School. That's all.

CANCER MAN. He's a good boy. Strong, and good, inside. I can see that.

CARL. *(To Coleman.)* If you could have seen her just once, you'd know what I mean. Thinking about her, you wouldn't get so mad all the time. She was so beautiful, I see her now, all the time, and I don't get so mad anymore. Don't you understand?

BONNIE. Carl. *(She moves him away from Coleman, gently.)*

OBY. Daddy?

BUCKHORN. Yes, son?

OBY. I need to testify. It's about my new job.

BUCKHORN. Do you have to, right now?

OBY. I'd like to, yes, sir.

BUCKHORN. Well, all right. Make it start.

OBY. Friends, I want to tell you something about the religious nature of bowling. I don't know if you've ever seen the quality of hardwood they have now in a first class bowling alley. It's beautiful. That clear, pure wood, with just the balls rolling down, rolling down. And a clean strike, well, it's heaven. I got a steady job today. *Manager:* now of the sixteen lane Bowl-O-Rama Bowling Parlour, off Highway 43, just out of Gardensburg. It's good Christian recreation, for the Glory of God and the health of your bodies, and you can get there easy from here. I hope you'll all come, and enjoy it.

Buckhorn's unwillingness to throw Coleman out of church makes Nancy frustrated with him for the first time. In her honest anger, she views his mercy as weakness.

like I do. Praise God. Thank you, Daddy. *(He sits.)*

BUCKHORN. Did you say manager?

OBY. Yes, sir!

BUCKHORN. Well, congratulations. But how can you be in church twice a week, too?

OBY. The owners agreed to that. I don't know how to explain it, but they just go together. Jesus and bowling.

COLEMAN. *(Shaking her head.)* I told you somebody knitted him one day. And that is the man stole my wife for his Daddy. You ain't got a Momma around for me anywhere, have you?

OBY. Now, don't you talk about my Momma!

COLEMAN. Why not? She can't talk for herself, evidently. What happened to her?

OBY. She died.

COLEMAN. Of confusion?

OBY. Of disempowerment? When I was the littlest boy. After the other one, and before—

BUCKHORN. Son!

OBY. Sir?

BUCKHORN. No need to go into all that.

COLEMAN. Whoa! After the other one? Other what?

OBY. Wife, of course. Daddy's first. Before my Momma.

BUCKHORN. Son—

COLEMAN. And when she died, what? How many more?

BUCKHORN. There is no need at this time to go into — uh — these details!

COLEMAN. Oh, no? Just how many wives you had, Reverend Daddy?

BUCKHORN. That is none of your business!

COLEMAN. How many, Nancy? Do you know?

NANCY. *(Shaken.)* I thought I did.

COLEMAN. Well, let's see. One before Oby's Ma, plus Oby's Ma, that's two. One after that, that's three. Three? *(No answer.)*

Four? *(No answer, Coleman beams.)* Five? *(Coleman raises his arms.)*

Glory to God. Six?

BUCKHORN. *(With dignity.)* Taken by the Lord.

to guilt  
(Buckhorn)



OBY. Except the fifth. She ran off, taken by Satan!  
 BUCKHORN. Hush!  
 NANCY. *(Weakly)* Six ①  
 COLEMAN. Didn't he tell you that?  
 NANCY. ② Only about — two.  
 BUCKHORN. I would have, little bride. You know that.  
 COLEMAN. Sure. In the kitchen, after the wedding, while she's chopping wood, cooking hot bread, and washing babies.  
*(Pause.)* Babies.  
 OBY. *(Grinning.)* Been plenty of them.  
 BUCKHORN. Son!  
 COLEMAN. How many is plenty? How many children you got, Daddy?  
 BUCKHORN. My offspring number seventeen children, thirty-one grandchildren, and — a number of great-grandchildren.  
 COLEMAN. And six mommas in the cemetery, all wore out.  
 Nancy, I know you wanted babies, but are you ready for this?  
 BUCKHORN. Little bride, you know I will treat you gently.  
 NANCY. *(Stunned.)* ③ Six? I'm number seven?  
 BONNIE. Nancy, never you mind that. He is a good man. Life is hard for women, sometimes, yes. But it is better to marry. It is always better to marry. ④  
 NANCY. *(Hushed.)* But you never did.  
 BONNIE. Oh, yes, I did. But it took me too long, you see, to sort out my — carnal nature. I didn't know what I was doing. *(She looks at the rest, and testifies.)* I had it all mixed up with everything else. You see, there was always my sister, Joann. She was the real beauty. Not me. Now, Joann never liked going to church. She said it was dull. So I did, I went to church all the time. And if any good Christian boy asked for it, up went my skirts for him every time. I did enjoy it. I always liked an enthusiastic Christian boy. And when Joann would say, "Isn't church dull?" I'd say, "Yes, Joann. Of course, Joann." *(She smiles, and remembers her sister.)* Yes, Joann. Of course, Joann. But then, Joann got married, to a boy going to be a doctor, and moved away, and there I was, still in church, still giving it out.

- ① to beg for an answer
- ② to blame
- ③ to threaten
- ④ to blame

When Bonnie enters the conversation, Nancy spits her line as a defense mechanism. Realizing that she has let the "spitfire" out, Nancy tries to correct her behavior but soon realizes the futility of keeping herself at bay. Tired and confused, Nancy sits in order to listen to what Bonnie has to say.

and giving it out, until nobody wanted it. The boys became men, and there I was, still in church, dressed like a little girl, ready to do anything anybody wanted. But the men got tired of me. So I found me another church, and another, and sooner or later, every church I joined, I had to leave. Everybody lost their enthusiasm with me, even the plumber husband I finally got, wherever he is now. And Joann married, her children growing up, telling me not to be such a churchmouse. *(Pause.)* Yes, Joann. Of course, Joann. *(Smiles.)* Well, I won't tell a lie. I'll still give it away, to a good enthusiastic boy. But I found something better than that, finally. A real church. Stranger than anything. That's what I wanted to tell Joann. What happens here. *(To Nancy.)* You're still so young, Mary. *(She turns away. Canfield jumps up.)*

CANFIELD. That was deeply moving. I have a daughter I wish had half your sense.

BONNIE. Thank you. What's your daughter's name?

CANFIELD. Hester.

BONNIE. That's a pretty name. Is she a pretty girl?

CANFIELD. She used to be. I used to be a smart looker myself.

BONNIE. I bet you did.

CANFIELD. Then I got my heart condition. Stopped shaving every day, and shining my shoes, after that. *One thing led to another. Now I look like this.*

BONNIE. You look all right now. You just need sprucing up a little bit. Somebody to wash a shirt for you now and then. Having a heart condition don't mean you can't use it anymore. You can still praise God, and have good times, with new friends.

CANFIELD. I think you're right! Come sit by me. *(She does.)*

COLEMAN. Canfield, don't forget about my divorce!

CANFIELD. Later. We're in church.

COLEMAN. Church, hell. It's a sideshow! *(To Buckhorn.)* When are you going to pull out them stakes?

BUCKHORN. That's not for us to say.

COLEMAN. Well, who, then?

BUCKHORN. The Holy Ghost, Mr. Shedman. *(Battered. Oris*

*Hart gets up and goes to Coleman.)*

HART. I want to tell this boy. Sonny, what you think you are, you ain't. I was that. Ain't that right, Howard?

RUDD. Yep.

HART. And if it hadn't been for this man, and these people, I would have — and I still get like that, when I see some young — ah, yet if I couldn't come here, I'd — ah, Howard! *(He turns to Rudd, who grips him firmly by the shoulders. They embrace.)*

RUDD. It's all right, Orin. It ain't going to happen. *(He comforts him. Everybody is respectfully silent, except Coleman.)*

COLEMAN. Fags by god. Queers.

CANFIELD. Well, son, so what?

COLEMAN. But what are they doing in church? Why ain't they in a bus station somewheres?

CANFIELD. *(To Bonnie.)* What he don't know would fill a book.

BONNIE. Amen.

CANFIELD. Lots of men love another man, somewhere along the line. I did, once. It didn't hurt nobody.

COLEMAN. Canfield? You?

CANFIELD. Praise God, son. Shut up and listen. *(Carl Spetter who has been watching Coleman and trying to explain something to him, now erupts.)*

CARL. Yes, praise God! Praise God! *(He stands shaking, staring at Coleman.)*

BONNIE. *(Softly.)* Oh, Carl.

BUCKHORN. *(Quietly.)* Let him be. *(Carl has his way. Billy perhaps picks out simple chords on his guitar, for awhile.)*

CARL. I tell you again, she come into my life so easy, just like the sun shining down through some cloudy day, making this world bright, that was always dark, for me. From nowhere, out of that City Dump where I found her there in the shoe box with all her dead brothers and sisters around her, and I took her home, and fed her the milk with a hospital glass straw, and she lived. I brought her up. I come to believe there was great blood in her. I trained her. I entered her in the County Puppy Stakes, and she won. Then, in a

Nancy no longer gets angry at Coleman for lashing out in church. She is embarrassed but too tired to stop him.

year, the State Wide Field Trial. Oh, god, could she hunt. They braced her with a lemon-eyed pointer. Right off, he found a covey. But the quail commenced to walk on him. He didn't know what to do. Like a flash, she run the absolute otherway. *What kind of bird dog is that, Carl?* all the rich hunters said, big sportsmen, in their jackets and shiny boots. But I had faith. In just a minute, back she came a-running, having circled them birds in the joy of her smart mind. She boxed them quail in between her and that pointer. The judges said, *She has it, Carl,* and I flushed the quail and shot, and got one, and she retrieved it so dainty, set it in my hand with not one feather missing. Looking up into my eyes, saying, *Well, Carl, I guess we showed them this time,* me saying, *Yes, my honey bee, I think we did.* Off she run to the hunt again, and she won first place, the blue ribbon and the silver cup, and they poisoned her that night. *(Billy stops playing.)* Fed her ground-up glass in hamburger meat. All night long, she couldn't even lie down. I was on my knees with her, every time she heaved and coughed. My baby. And she died. Why did they do that? We never done them hunters no harm, I didn't think there could be anything else for me, but her. *(He nods at Coleman.)* I filled up with hate. Like you. Orin Hurt brought me here. Nothing happened the first time, or the second, or the third. But then, I don't remember just when, I saw her again. She come right in that door, looking for me. And when we pray to Jesus, and the serpents are taken up, she's here. And so I live again, in the blood of Jesus, who conquers hateful men, and gave me back my darling in this church. I praise his name forever. Glory to him, for his goodness to me. *(Carl stands nodding at Coleman. There is a pause. Nobody speaks.)* Now I got to go outside, in the bathroom. Excuse me. *(He exits.)*

NANCY. Don't you see, Coleman? Don't you see?  
 COLEMAN. Yes, I see. And I ask you all, calm and sensible. Is that man crazy, or is he not?  
 NANCY. Not, Coleman, not!  
 CANFIELD. Depends, son. Depends.  
 COLEMAN. He's a lunatic. And you all know it.  
 CANGER MAN. Son, say you were him. Your dog you loved like

Just when Nancy sees no hope for the good in mankind, Carl's sweet, simple conviction reminds her that man can be good. She regains her hope not in Buckhorn or even religion, but in the kindness of mankind found in certain individuals.

① to plead  
 ② to condemn

that, died like that. What would you do?

COLEMAN. I wouldn't go to Jesus. I'd find out who poisoned my dog and my Daddy and I, we'd break his neck.

CANCER MAN. I thought you said your father was dead, son.

COLEMAN. Yes, he is. I mean, *I'd find out and I'd break his neck.*

CANCER MAN. Would that help anything?

COLEMAN. Sure. Me.

CANCER MAN. You just can't get it, can you?

CANFIELD. Maybe *I can.* *(To Buckhorn.)* May I?

BUCKHORN. Yes.

CANFIELD. Client, the man didn't do what you'd want to do. Does that mean he's crazy?

COLEMAN. No.

CANFIELD. He came to church instead. Does that mean he's crazy?

COLEMAN. No.

CANFIELD. He believes he found his dog again.

COLEMAN. *That means he's crazy!*

CANFIELD. It also means there is maybe one man less in the world with a broken neck! Who's crazy?

COLEMAN. You are, lawyer, if you think—

CANFIELD. Depends, depends! *(Orin Hart moves in on Coleman, trembling with the rage that is always with him.)*

HART. Broken necks, is it? That what you want?

COLEMAN. Look, don't you mess with me.

BUCKHORN. Go ahead, Mr. Hart. Mess with him. What the hell.

HART. *(Pointing at Budd.)* See that man? We met fourteen years ago, working the state roads. Mean, both of us. Hungover every morning, standing around the fires, trying to get warm. First time I saw him, I said, "Listen, mister, you going to hog all that fire, or am I going to put you in it?"

RUDD. I said, "Just try it, mister. They'll put us both out."

HART. We didn't fight each other. We got drunk that night.  
RUDD. And took on four paratroopers.  
HART. Howard was already married. I was too, soon after that.  
RUDD. Orin had trouble with May, right off. He wasn't drinking for fun no more. I'd get him home to her.  
HART. And I did the same for Howard. One time Estna left him, and took their little girl Jean with her. Howard clamped a razor blade in a pair of pliers, and tried to cut his throat.  
RUDD. No, let's stop that, Orin.  
HART. Razor in one hand, goodbye letter in the other. But he was drunk and crying. All he did was make a mess of his throat. See the scars?  
RUDD. Orin, I said shut up about this!  
HART. No, Howard, I'm going to tell him. And you ain't going to stop me. Because without me, you'd have died.  
RUDD. (Sighs.) Yeah.  
HART. I was the one who found him, wanting to die, but couldn't. Suicide. I got him to the hospital. I was cool and calm. But in other times, in my domestic torments, sonny boy, it was Howard come to get me, me screaming, wanting to break to pieces any man come near me, and Howard cool and calm, the only man alive could take me home.  
RUDD. Bad ass fighting men. Kill the world.  
HART. Fighting all the time, since I was a boy. When I had my family around me, and Howard to hold me back, I managed. Then infernal things happened to me.  
RUDD. His boy Wayne William got sick and died. His wife couldn't stop drinking no more than he could. He was under the wheel.  
HART. There was a man at the plant, named Jackson. He crossed me. I couldn't stop thinking about him. I knowed I was going to kill him.  
RUDD. I knew it, too.  
HART. I took to bounding the man.  
RUDD. I said, "Orin, don't do it."

HART. I said, "You try to stop me, I'll kill you, too." You see, bad ass? What we are from the beginning, it grows in us. It was growing in me. What I wanted all my life. A dead man. I commenced carrying the gun.

RUDD. I couldn't help him! I didn't know what to do!

HART. I showed Jackson the gun. He said, "Why are you doing this to me?" I said, "I don't know. I'm just going to kill you."

RUDD. I had to do something. I got him drunk that night, and stole his gun. I said, "All right. If it's dead men you want, you'll have two of them. Me and you. Because I can't live without you, Orin."

HART. I said, "Why, you fool?"

RUDD. I said, "Move. I heard about a place where crazy people play with death, and rattlesnakes. If that's what you want, we'll do it there."

HART. He matched me in this room under my own gun, hidden in his pocket. I thought no other man could yell and scream like me. But when the serpents appeared, I'd never seen nothing like it. And the worship, I remembered my wife and children still alive. I thought about all the men I wanted to kill. And I said, "Oh, this torment will end, or I will!" In the music and the singing, I said, "Give it to me! Jesus Christ, you know my evil heart. Give me that snake, you know I want it!" And I took one up. I held my death here, in these hands. And of all the people in the world that night, the Lord anointed Orin Hart.

RUDD. And Howard Rudd. You see, bad ass? *(They stare at Coleman, who stares back, unmoved.)*

COLEMAN. Sure. I see Orin Hart and Howard Rudd. Ain't they pretty?

RUDD. What the hell you mean?

COLEMAN. I'll tell you. Fruits ain't always like girls. They can look like truck drivers, and be queer, my Daddy always said. I don't care about your damn story. You're fags, using a church to fuck each other. It wasn't no Holy Ghost that anointed you, it was—

HART. *(Enraged.)* Son, if you want to get yourself cold cocked, that man or me, either one—

① toward  
② to demand

When Oby refuses to help Coleman, in her mind it becomes Nancy of Coleman against the church.

③ to rescue  
④ to soothe

COLEMAN. (*Furious.*) One at a time, or both together! Come on!

NANCY. Coleman, don't stop him!

BUCKHORN. Let them alone. (*Hart moves slowly towards Coleman. Coleman faces Hart. He shoves him.*)

COLEMAN. Come on, queer! I'll bust open your god-damned— (*Hart seizes him swiftly, spins him around, holds him up in the air, arms crashing his chest. Coleman is a baby in his arms. Hart lays him on the floor, and holds him down.*)

HART. Don't mock the Holy Ghost, bad ass!

RUDD. Bad ass, when we come in here, we felt the power! Not no foolishness with lead pipes and guns, not no beating and drinking and murder and vice, but the power! I tell you, I seen that roof up there split apart! My mouth dried up. My heart stopped. Down from heaven come the Holy Ghost and I mean he *moved* on us! That was the power! And we loved each other, freely, and said we didn't want to die. Because for the first time in all our miserable lives, we knewed what a victory was!

HART. Saved! SAVED! Understand, bad ass? (*They get up, leaving Coleman on the floor.*) We had something new to think about.

RUDD. Glory to God. (*They each stamp a boot by Coleman's head. Nancy rushes to Coleman.*)

NANCY. Are you all right? Did they hurt you?

COLEMAN. (*Hurt.*) I'm all right. (*He gets up. Nancy tries to help him.*)

NANCY. Do you need—

COLEMAN. (*Shakes her off.*) I'm all right! (*He stands facing them all. Re-enter Carl.*) So beat me up, I still say this is a sideshow. And I want my legal rights. (*Shaken.*) I won't be put off by lunatics in a circus!

BUCKHORN. Friend, we've all lost our tempers with you tonight. We won't do it again. But after what you've heard, how can you call this a circus?

COLEMAN. (*Almost crying.*) Because you're takes. My Daddy would know. What you do with them snakes is a lie. Unless you want somebody to get bit, and die. You drug them, or something.



And then you go crazy in here.

BONNIE. *(Terribly upset.)* Want somebody to die? Did you say—

BUCKHORN. Just a minute. *(He slowly takes out a faded newspaper clipping from his pocket. He opens it and smooths it reverently, and shows it to Coleman.)* The white haired man on the floor was named George Hensley. In nineteen hundred and nine, on White Oak Mountain, he was the first to read in the Bible, "They shall take up serpents," and then go out and do it. He founded the Dolly Pond Church of God, With Signs Following, in Tennessee. He founded this church, in nineteen forty-eight. Yes, people have died. Laws were passed. And we are still here.

BONNIE. Oh, god! Don't I know that!

BUCKHORN. Tell him, Bonnie, if you want to!

BONNIE. Joann's happiness didn't last. My sister got desperate, no, just like the rest of us. I brought her here. I told her not to move without the power. But she did. She cried out and grabbed a snake and he bit her. She stood right here, his fangs in her arm, hanging from her. She said she'd never go to a hospital. Her faith in Jesus Christ would save her life. She would trust in Him. We prayed with her. She commenced to swell. Her color changed. We made her go to the hospital. But that night, Jesus took her. *(She weeps.)* She's with Him now, in heaven. Awful things were said about me. My own family tried to have me arrested. But I'm still here. I still worship in this church! *(She weeps.)* Some people say I killed my own sister! It's not so! I brought her to God! I brought her to God! *(She is touched by Canfield, and held and comforted by him.)*

BUCKHORN. We are persecuted. We are against man's law, George Hensley, who led us to his church finally died, and of snakebite. But he'd been bit and lived over four hundred times! *(Passionately.)* You don't believe it? All right, don't! Lots of people like you say we're crazy, to need this worship this strong this bad! But we do! That is our nature! The Lord Jesus understood us, and in his own sacred word, he told us what to do. *(He points to the altar.)* You see that jar? On the altar, by the cross. That is strychnine poison. If your faith in Jesus Christ is strong enough, you can drink

During the following monologues, Nancy realizes that the church members are sad, lost people looking for a way out. They are just as desperate and hopeless as she is. The people she thought could be her salvation are using her as salvation as well. Nancy pities Bonnie & Buckhorn. This revitalizes her to rethink her situation.

that, and live. That's what the Bible says. You can walk through fire, and not be harmed. That's what the Bible says. You can take up serpents, and not be harmed. That's what the Bible says, and that's what we believe, whether you do or not! Stay here, if you want. But don't let me hear you say anything more about a circus! *(Ruckhorn maps his brow.)* Mrs. Wall, Give us a hymn, in the name of the Lord. Something quiet. To calm us down. And prepare us for the worship, which I am not holding up no longer. Little bride, I can see you wavering in the faith. Your husband has touched you hard, and filled you with doubt. I never said life with a servant of God is easy. I said it is life. You make up your mind about me and about your husband, and do it now. *(He turns his back on her and Coleman and Obi. The congregation gathers around Ruckhorn and Mrs. Wall. They chat quietly, and then sing a gentle hymn.)*

OBJ. *(To Nancy.)* You're still worried by your husband, aren't you?

NANCY. *(Miserable.)* Yes.

OBJ. Well, talk to him. Maybe you best think again. *(He moves away, to the others. Coleman and Nancy are left alone.)*

COLEMAN. It wasn't just that night, or that man.

NANCY. No.

COLEMAN. When did you decide to leave me? *(He moves close to her. She moves back.)* I won't touch you.

NANCY. I decided lots of times. One night, you hit me.

COLEMAN. I'll never do it again.

NANCY. That's what you said then. And you stuck a little snapshot of me in the frame of that big picture of your mamma and daddy and said, see, I love you.

COLEMAN. Well, I did.

NANCY. But I can't live in no picture frame of your mamma and daddy! If I'm going to be put in a coffin like that, I want my own children to do it!

COLEMAN. I never said we wouldn't have children.

NANCY. You didn't have to. It was plain enough. *(The congregation sings softly. They sing hymns like "What a Friend We Have In*

- ① to confess
- ② to placate
- ③ to confess
- ④ to blame
- ⑤ to mock
- ⑥ to plead
- ⑦ to give up

*Jews" and "In The Garden," hymns old, familiar and quietly passionate, while Coleman and Nancy have it out.)*

COLEMAN. I can see why you left me. I can see why you're here. But this crazy religion is a lie, Nancy. It just ain't true.

NANCY. How can you tell? ①

COLEMAN. Because I won't lie to myself! With everything else wrong about him, my Daddy taught me to see life as it is! And it is mostly god-awful hard! That's the truth. Never mind angels and Jesus. We just have to grow up, and grow our teeth, and live it!

NANCY. ② Without nothing? No love, no children, nothing?

COLEMAN. We could have that, woman, if you'd just shut up about it! ③

④ NANCY. And that your Daddy taught you! Shut up, woman! When are you going to learn something for yourself?

COLEMAN. All right. Here I am. There they are. What is wrong about me, without something just as wrong about them?

NANCY. ⑤ You drink whiskey and beer.

COLEMAN. Yes. But I don't see dead dogs or roofs splitting open.

NANCY. You curse all the time.

COLEMAN. Yes. But I don't whine, or cry, or beg help from Jesus, like a coward.

NANCY. You hate me.

COLEMAN. No, I don't!

NANCY. ⑥ And hate yourself!

COLEMAN. All right. Sometimes. And I work and slave at that miserable fish farm my Daddy left me, that I'm scared to leave. I admit that! ⑦

NANCY. And it's work, drink, fish, drink, come home, drink, hit me, drink, and try to make love. That's what you call facing life?

COLEMAN. It's honest! *(Sings.)* Life is hard!

NANCY. ⑧ Poo hard for me, with you. It's not that I didn't come to care for you. I did. ⑨

COLEMAN. Do you now?

① to challenge

② to beg

③ to guilt

④ to berate

⑤ to blame

⑥ to accuse

⑦ to mock

⑧ to level with

⑨ to ease

- ① to dismiss
- ② to justify
- ③ to paint the picture
- ④ to guilt
- ⑤ to flirt
- ⑥ to level with
- ⑦ to confess
- ⑧ to inspire
- ⑨ to confess
- ⑩ to confide
- ⑪ to challenge
- ⑫ to bait
- ⑬ to level with
- ⑭ to inspire

NANCY. *(A great sigh.)* Oh, I don't know. I thought I'd just walk out of my Momma and Daddy's house and into my husband's house, and have his babies, and it would all be like it was again. And instead of my sisters and brothers and Momma and Daddy, there would be my children and my husband, all around the fire, saying, "We love you, Momma. Welcome home." *(She smiles wistfully at him.)* So I picked my husband — you are right about that Sunday School picnic, Coleman — it was a trap I laid for you with my perfume and lace. You walked in it just like a rabbit, and I locked it shut. But then, my husband was a man with his dreams, too, full of thorns, and so different from mine. So I cried. *(A big angel appeared named Oby, and he led me to Reverend Buckhorn, who made me feel safe at home again, with him, and the church, and the serpents. So I trusted again. Most of the time.)* *(Pause.)* Six wives? *(Pause, Doubtfully.)* I've learned a lot, I think.

COLEMAN. Nancy, I got you into this. I'll get you out. You can't marry that old man. You know what he is now. How many times you seen an old bizzard like that, wearing out his wives? He'll work you to death. I can't let that happen to you. Come home.

NANCY. What?

COLEMAN. We'll talk. I promise I'll never hit you again. Never.

NANCY. What about your divorce?

COLEMAN. We'll talk about it first. Sort it out, like Carfield says. I'll listen to everything you have to say.

NANCY. Coleman, you won't.

COLEMAN. Everything you say. I'll treat you kindly, and gentle. I'll be a good husband. I won't drink. I won't swear. I'll try to quit the fish farm, and get another job. What else? I might even take you to church.

NANCY. What? *(Behind them, the congregation has stopped singing and has been listening to them.)*

COLEMAN. Some decent church. Near home. Hear that? I will! I'll even pray with you. See what I'll do for you? Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord! Help us poor sinners, O Lord! See, I can do that.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

CONGREGATION. Amen! Amen, brother! Praise the Lord!  
*(Coleman wheels about. He sees they have all been listening to him.)*

COLEMAN. *(Enraged.)* What the hell do you mean, listening in on us? I ain't praying in this place! I'm trying to talk to my god damn stupid wife! *(And he hits her. Nancy sprawls onto the floor, and Coleman leaps after her.)* Ah, Nancy! *(Nancy holds up her hand, keeping both Coleman and the people away from her.)*

NANCY. <sup>1</sup>See, honey? What would be different? *(She gets up by herself.)* <sup>2</sup>You can have the furniture. <sup>3</sup>I owe you a pick-up truck. Goodbye, Coleman. *(She moves away. Coleman stands shaking. Carl approaches him.)*

CARL. Hit me. Make you feel better.

COLEMAN. *(Choking.)* I don't hit lunatics.

CARL. Just your wife. You think I'm crazy. But I heard you talking about your Daddy. I understand.

COLEMAN. *(Bitterly.)* Oh, yes? Who was yours?

CARL. God is my father. Everybody's here, but yours. He is Jesus's father, too, and His right arm is the Holy Ghost. You're still praying to your mortal father, who's dead. That's bad. *(He holds open his arms.)* I'm crazy. Hit me. *(The people call Carl back. Canfield approaches Coleman.)*

CANFIELD. Your lawyer can't help you. He's converted. To find friends like this at my time of life and in the condition of my heart is not something I'm going to hesitate about. *(He turns to Bonnie.)* I'm leaving you, client. You can prove desertion now, try your wife and your lawyer. I wish — well, good luck. *(Canfield approaches Coleman.)*

CANCER MAN. They cut me to pieces. I'll be dead, soon, like your daddy. That's all right. You don't have to worry about that. *(Coleman breaks. He sobb, grabs a box or a chair, and sobbing, at the same time filled with black rage, smashes it. He cries out and sobb: "Mama! Daddy!" It is useless. He kneels amid his little ruin, trembling and weeping.)*

BUCKHORN. Yes. We wish we could tell you what to do. We can't. We're in this trouble, too, and have to do for ourselves the

When the congregation enters their conversation, Nancy knows Coleman is not happy. The slap is unexpected but sadly, not surprising. In an instant, Nancy's dream of returning to Coleman is shattered. In this moment, she can only give up the fight.

① to guilt

② to relinquish

③ to apologize

During the church service, Nancy stands away from the congregation. She watches as Coleman makes his conversion, proving that the church is not the way out. In Coleman's swift conversion, Nancy sees herself. She understands how superficial and impulsive her commitment to the church is. Her weaknesses are illuminated during the worship service as Lorena becomes a member and Nancy watches the church members envelope her in warmth and welcome just as they had done with her.

best we can. *(He turns to the congregation.)* Preachers talk. What can a preacher tell a soul suffering like that? What can they tell any of us? Nothing. We know it is hopeless. *(He begins his service.)* All we can do is worship. All we can do is turn to the Lord. Who understood us. Because when He rose up into heaven, He spoke to them who believed in Him, to them He left behind. We turn to those words! What are they, friends? Read me the words of Jesus Christ! *(Virgil/Tides goes to the lectern. He reads from a Bible.)*

VIRGIL. The Book of Mark, Chapter 16, verses 17 and 18. "And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils."

ALL. *(Softly.)* Amen.

VIRGIL. "They shall speak with new tongues —"

ALL. *(Stronger.)* Amen!

VIRGIL. "They shall take up serpents —"

ALL. Amen! Glory to God!

VIRGIL. "And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them —"

ALL. Not Never! Amen!

VIRGIL. "They shall lay hands upon the sick —"

ALL. Amen! Praise God!

VIRGIL. "And they shall recover!"

ALL. Praise God! Amen! Glory to God! Praise the Lord! *(From reading the Bible, Virgil in a furious rapture begins to speak in tongues. The strange syllables are pure emotion, erupting from him with great force, creating his body.)*

VIRGIL. Ah! Ah! Sha — gow — du — lah! Sha — gow — du — lah! Ma — shill — a hon — du — lah! Gos — la! Gos — la!

*(Possessed, Virgil speaks in tongues. He goes to the boxes of rattlesnakes and opens one of them. We hear the snakes rattling. Virgil takes one out and holds it up. [The snakes should be mimed, not real.] He stares at it, crying out in tongues.)* Ah — gall — a sonda! Ah — gall — a sonda! Eec — ma — noma! Eec — ma — noma! La — gall — la — sal! La — gall — la sal! *(He puts the snake back in the box. He collapses exhausted at Buckhorn's feet.)*

BUCKHORN. I remember! I thought I would die. But the

heavens came open, and wave after wave of God's love broke over me! I held the serpent, and I spoke in tongues! *(They embrace.)* God bless you, Virgil! God bless you, son! *(Cancer Man is at the boxes. He takes out a serpent. He holds it up high, and approaches Coleman.)*

CANCER MAN. You see! I'm still alive! They said my life was over! But I feel the power of the Lord. I hold the serpent! I defeat him! God gives me this victory! I feel wonderful! *(He holds the snake out to Coleman.)* And see. The snake is calm. *(He turns, puts it back in the box. Nancy moves away from everyone. The people begin to sing. "Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus.")*

ALL. *(Singing.)*  
Stand up, Stand up for Jesus  
Ye soldiers of the cross,  
Lift high His royal banner,  
It must not suffer loss!

From victory unto victory,  
In this His glorious day,  
You that are men now serve—

*(Billy Hoggis rips out a discordant chord on his guitar, and cries out. The singing stops. Billy goes to Coleman. He stares at him hard.)*

BILLY. I didn't start out this way! You ain't the only one! I don't want my wife! I don't want my baby! That's the truth! You beat that, Muriel?

MURIEL. Yes, I do.

BILLY. All I meant to do was work in town during the day and play my guitar here at night. That's why I come. Then I met Muriel here. We got in trouble. I did what I thought was right. We got married. But it's not right now! *(He shakes with rage.)* I'm trapped! I can't stand it! Sometimes I hate her! Sometimes I hate — ah, how can I do that! I wouldn't hurt my own child!!! *(The people move aside for him. He approaches the boxes.)* Oh, god, they scare me.

BUCKHORN. Billy, you don't reach in every time. You wait for the Lord.

BILLY. I can be free. Lord Jesus, anoint me. Give me the power

*(He takes a deep breath.)* I believe, I'm not afraid. *(A hideous rattle. He takes out a huge rattlesnake. He holds it directly in front of his face.)*  
Strike. Kill me, if you can. *(He holds the snake, shuddering with terror.)*

ALL. Praise God! Glory to God, Billy!

BILLY. There! There! Oh, Holy Ghost! *(He puts the snake back in the box, and turns to his wife.)*

MURIEL. God bless you, Billy. *(They move aside together, with the baby. Coleman gets up.)*

COLEMAN. Get out of my way! Get out of my way!

NANCY. No, Coleman! No!

BUCKHORN. There's death in that box!

HART. You'll risk your life!

RUDD. You'll put it on the line!

CANCER MAN. If you believe, you'll live!

BUCKHORN. But if you don't, you can die! Right here. *(At the boxes, Coleman spreads wide his arms.)*

COLEMAN. Then I'll die! Right here! *(He reaches down into the boxes. He pulls out two rattlesnakes, and holds them up. They rattle, loudly. He steps forward, staring at them in stark terror. He turns about, holding them. Convulsions rack him. But when he turns to us again, his face is amazed. He looks up, past the snakes. Coleman cries out. He is converted.)*

BUCKHORN. Praise the Lord! He made us! We are His! *(The people now begin to erupt within themselves. Some are seized by spasms, some shaken by convulsions, some sing, some dance.)* People say we're crazy! People say Jesus never meant us to do what he said! And we say, what do you know about Jesus and his ways? Nothing! Nothing! *(Mrs. Wall has a snake in her hands. She and Bonnie face the terrified, but thrilled, Lorena.)*

MRS. WALL. Sister!

LORENA. Yes, sister?

MRS. WALL. *(To Bonnie.)* Tell her! Tell her!

BONNIE. The first time I seen the snakes, I nearly died. I couldn't run. I couldn't move. I stood there, praying. Then the Holy Ghost gave me the power!



LORENA. What's it like? I want to know!  
 BONNIE. Your hands get numb.  
 LORENA. Yes?  
 BONNIE. Then they get cold.  
 LORENA. Yes?  
 BONNIE. Then they begin to itch!  
 LORENA. Oh, *wo!* I never felt like this before!  
 MRS. WALL. Do your hands itch now, *snice?*  
 LORENA. They do!  
 BONNIE. Then, if you have the power, grab him!  
 MRS. WALL. It's the best feeling you'll ever have!  
 LORENA. Give it to me! Give it — *(They hand her a huge rattlesnake. All three hold it. They scream with pleasure.)*  
 LORENA, BONNIE & MRS. WALL. Ah! Ah! AHHH!!! O God in heaven! O, God in heaven!!! *(Everyone noise, except Nancy, handles serpents. She sits to one side, silent amid the singing and the shouting. The service strikes its climax. People move about, stamping and shaking the church. Some cry. Some laugh. Some scream and beat the floor. Some dance. Some sway. Some hold up the jar of poison. Some play with fire. They all release to their Lord the tensions and the sorrows of their lives, moving about as if in some tremendous storm. Then they stop. A light shines down on the threadbare altar cloth. A different music is heard: an organ, or perhaps some strange cosmic sound. They all simply look up, stilled, and for a moment, their great God himself comes into their church and into them. For an instant, they are blessed and delivered. Then the music becomes again what it was and they revert slowly back to their dancing and singing. Slowly, it subsides. Slowly, the snakes are put back in the boxes. The sobbing, the convulsions, the laughter, the singing and the music stop. They are all exhausted. Silence. Long pause. In a corner, by himself, Cancer Man sags and kneels. Coleman kneels by Cancer Man. He grips his hand, hard.)*  
 COLEMAN. It's eating on you, ain't it? And them drugs? *(Cancer Man nods.)* I can tell. Hang on to me. *(Cancer Man nods.)* You ever fish? *(Cancer Man nods again, surprised.)* Want to again. With me? I know where to find them. *(Cancer Man nods.)* Then we'll go Together. *(Coleman stands. He, Nancy and Buckhorn look at each*

During the light shift described in the Script, Nancy is directed to move through the congregation, seeing the worship with open eyes. She is horrified and ashamed of the dangerous, vulnerable nature of the worship. She also sees that this church is not her salvation. She has sought refuge in Buckhorn, Coleman, and the church, and now all three options have become unavailable.

*other.*

BUCKHORN Well, young man?

COLEMAN I want to join the church. Please take me. Don't send me away. *(He sinks to his knees before Buckhorn.)*

BUCKHORN Well, little bride?

NANCY ① I'm leaving. ② I don't want to be a child no more. And my babies will just have to wait a while. *(She kisses Buckhorn on the cheek.)*

③ I do thank you. *(She looks at the congregation.)* All of you, I'll come to church again, some day. *(She looks at Coleman, on his knees. She touches him, gently.)*

④ Good luck, Coleman. *(Exit Nancy. Buckhorn stares after her; then at Coleman. He shakes his head.)*

BUCKHORN She goes. You stay. *(Night.)* Blessed be the name of the Lord. *(Coleman weeps quietly. All the people watch. Muriel, sitting with her baby, begins to sing, alone.)*

MURIEL, *(Singing.)*

There is a wideness to God's mercy

Like the wideness of the sea,

There is a strangeness to God's blessing

Like the thrill of ecstasy.

Jesus defend us, O sweet mercy send us,

O angels attend us with unchanging love.

Jesus defend us and sweet mercy send us,

And angels attends us from heaven above.

CURTAIN

- ① to stop (Buckhorn) in his tracks
- ② to justify
- ③ to appease
- ④ to forgive

As she leaves, Nancy seeks salvation in herself, exiting into the unknown.

## PROPERTY PLOT

Bible for Nancy  
Pint bottle cheap whiskey for Canfield  
Teacups, teapot, small kerosene stove  
Wooden boxes, very sturdy  
Guitar for Billy  
Baby wrapped in blankets for Muriel  
Bucket for collection plate  
Metal pipe for Oby  
Small wooden cross for altar  
Mason jar of whitish liquid for altar  
Faded newspaper clipping for Backhorn Sr.  
Rubber snakes  
Hymnals, piano, fans, for the church  
Various musical instruments for those who play them

## COSTUMES

The plain clothes of Southern rural people.

## MUSIC

The hymns used in the play may be found in any standard hymnal, with the exception of the last, which was put together by the playwright to end the play. It should be sung to the music for the Welsh hymn melody, *Alleluia! Sing to Jesus*.

## **Rehearsal and Performance Journals: Expectations and Experimentations**

**Saturday, January 14, 2012**

On Friday, Jan. 13, David told me that UNO's production of *Holy Ghosts* would be used as my thesis project. I am relieved and happy that I will study such a great show as my thesis, but I have several concerns. I imagined I would enter the rehearsals of my thesis with much of it already written, complete with a full character analysis of Nancy, the Pentecostal religion, and the Appalachian area before introducing myself to the other cast members. Instead, my thesis project has started under-prepared. After feeling overwhelmed and frustrated, I decided to begin journaling what has happened before and during the first week of rehearsals. I plan to create a very detailed outline of what I hoped to accomplish in each rehearsal according to a method of my choice.

The first item on my to-do list was to memorize the script. It didn't take long because the show is so well written, and, being from Appalachia, I understand the dialect very well. The first read-through went well and I felt as though the play was going to come alive on the stage. The first blocking rehearsal was great, too. Coleman and Nancy have some nice moments at the top of the show that I know will play out beautifully. P. J. McKinnie, the actor playing Coleman, spoke with me after rehearsal. We agreed that we each forgot whom the other was and believed in the moment that we were our characters. The second blocking rehearsal added some more characters and again, I was filled with excitement about the show. Buckhorn isn't exactly how I imagined the character and I might need to work with Paxton McCaghren, the actor playing Buckhorn, to develop our relationship a little bit. My interactions with the other characters are exactly what I expected, if not even better. The third rehearsal, the stage got crowded. I anticipated this happening because the stage is raked, with about a third of it in darkness. It also,

by the second act, is filled with furniture, an altar, a piano, and fifteen people. I'm sure the picture is absolutely striking and beautiful, but it is an actor's nightmare. The nice thing about the third rehearsal, however, is I was able to immerse myself in the church service that happens in the play. During the blocking rehearsal, I actually lost myself in my character. It was spectacular.

P. J. and I have talked a lot about the relationship between Nancy and Coleman and how it is based on fear. Now that Nancy has finally left Coleman, she has gained a little bit of confidence and has found security in the church. However, seeing him again reminds her of all the times he came home angry and hit her. Her fear is tangible. The two never get in close proximity because of that fear. The stage is so small, though, it is very difficult for Nancy and Coleman to have a scene away from the congregation while still maintaining the desired level of fear. The small, cramped playing space limits a lot of action in the show. For the first time as an actor, I don't actually know--and cannot predict--how the rest of the show is going to be blocked.

Some of my expectations are different from the actual show. This is seen most in Nancy's relationship with Bonnie. I read the show thinking that Nancy didn't really like Bonnie. She goes over-the-top about Muriel and the baby, but is very short with Bonnie. David has blocked Bonnie and me to be seated together and constantly touching each other. It works for how he wants the movement of the show to go, but I honestly think the script is clear that, if given the choice, Nancy wouldn't speak to Bonnie.

### **Monday, January 16, 2012**

Today I am learning the hymns the congregation sings during the show. I am simply familiarizing myself with them. The show doesn't say how many times Nancy has been to Amalgamation Holiness Church of God, but I don't think it has been very many and she is

probably not very familiar with a lot of the hymns. She will rely on a hymnal, which she can't read very well. Our rehearsal today was solely to learn the music. I wanted to use this rehearsal to get to know my ensemble better. I would like to become better friends with Muriel, Mrs. Wall, and Bonnie--especially now that Bonnie and I are blocked to sit together--a sign of friendship. Some conversation was made, but the real work will happen as we work the show.

I planned to use Uta Hagen's method on this show. I want to work through one of her books I read for my comprehensive exams, Challenge to the Actor. This book focuses more on the character than on the actions she is playing. Of course I will create a handbook for Nancy, but I like the idea of delving into what type of person Nancy is. I thought of this when I noticed I have been taking very good care of my nails lately and when I thought about it, Nancy would not care at all what her nails look like. This made me sad because I'll probably be cutting or biting my nails off to become Nancy. However, I like thinking of intricate oddities about a character; it helps me get into her head. My official meeting with David is tomorrow, but if he asks me--Uta, it is!

### **Tuesday, January 17, 2012**

Expectations: I'm meeting with David today and we're blocking Act II, pp. 38--on. In this scene I find out about Buckhorn's previous wives. I haven't really planned out Nancy's reaction. I want this moment to be as organic as possible. Will she be angry? Will she make light of it? Will she internalize her emotions? I don't think this is the moment she decides to leave, but it is a major plot point. I hope to develop some good work with Paxton.

Results: I didn't meet with David today. We're meeting tomorrow. Blocking tonight was a lot of fun. I reacted organically to hearing about Buckhorn's six wives and ended up using aforementioned methods. Coleman played some nice actions that got me thinking differently

about what Nancy's reaction might be. P. J. is very good at getting different reactions out of me. I'm finding it hard to "play" with Paxton and our relationship is suffering because of it. There's not nearly as much affection between Nancy and Buckhorn as there is with his son, Oby. I guess that could paint an interesting picture, but I would like it to be feasible that Nancy would want to be with this man.

Blocking became an issue tonight when David and I disagreed on one point. Nancy was blocked to stand and plead with Coleman, saying "Don't you see, Coleman? Don't you see?" I feel as though after Nancy hears the truth about her betrothed, she is defeated. It would take the inspiration of Carl's dog story to get her on her feet again. I don't agree that Nancy should stand to plead with Coleman. Other than that, the blocking that I couldn't predict worked out just fine. Each character does seem to follow a pattern, however, of standing and crossing to the center to say anything. I wonder if the audience will catch on. Organically, however, Nancy is coming along quite nicely.

### **Wednesday, January 18, 2012**

Expectations: I'm hoping to fix a little blocking mistake that was made last night. After looking at the script and thinking about the relationship with Coleman, Nancy needed to have crossed away from him rather than to him after she helps him up from his beating. This helps everything make sense, from Oby's line "You're still thinking about your husband, aren't you?" to Coleman's line "I won't touch you." Also, the end of the show is going to be blocked tonight. I need to work on taking my time with my discoveries. It helps that Nancy is undereducated because I can get away with her discoveries being late. All discoveries should be made as late as possible in order to heighten the drama onstage. Anyway, I want to think of every excuse to keep Nancy in that church tonight.

Results: The blocking cleared up right away and all votes were for the change. After Nancy loses her faith in Buckhorn and Coleman, I (Nancy) took every grain of hope I could from the people at church. Even though I'm beginning to detest the idea of marrying Buckhorn, I still care about Carl's story. I care about Bonnie's struggle and I see there is a need among these people. I (Nancy) love watching Cancer Man encourage those around him and Oby's innocent nature is perfect and pure. These motivate Nancy to stay at church. They are the side of the argument that fights against Coleman's ever-improving argument that they mean harm. As an actor, I saw the other actors were investing in their roles, so it made me want to stay with them. Then the glorious moment happened: David directed the cast to move upstage. The stage cleared and Nancy and Coleman were on a bare stage again. It was beautiful. Even though we didn't move that much, I was able to make use of the newly afforded space in an organic and powerful way. Our scene was electrifying. I can't wait to get off book for it because it will be thrilling. This is Coleman's change and the precursor to Nancy's change--a very powerful moment. Earth-shattering, really. And in true, dramatic fashion, the earth literally shattered tonight. After some great, raw, emotional work from P. J. and I, the stage buckled and collapsed. Three actors were slightly injured, suffering from minor scrapes or scratches and we were all traumatized so we called it a night. It's funny because it was our shortest rehearsal and yet it is the rehearsal that has gotten me the most excited about this show.

#### **Thursday, January 19, 2012**

Tonight we re-built what was torn down last night. The stage was somehow put together and re-enforced to above standards and we blocked the end of the show. It was a delight. The timing of the end of the show will speed up a great deal, but there is still a lot happening as Nancy makes her final decision. If it were up to me, Nancy would leave after she says "Goodbye



Coleman.” She would say goodbye to the rest of the church and walk out. But Coleman’s conversion experience makes her decision not only about him but about the church, the religion, and her need to find an “out.” It certainly is much more powerful, but it just means Nancy will have to pace herself in order to make the discovery as late as possible. I thought during rehearsal about maybe a physical change in Nancy. Coleman goes from very sure of himself to broken and needy. Nancy goes from dependent on the church to independent and self-sustaining. She rises from naïveté to knowledge. Maybe her physicality can simply become more confident in her decision to leave. In my personal life, when I have made big decisions, I had to gather my forces and be prepared to discuss with the parties involved what my reasons were, etc. There was a level of force and finality in my voice, eye contact and demeanor. That is what Nancy needs at the end--a moment completely to herself, after the slow-motion observance of the other characters, wherein she makes her decision. Then, when she approaches Buckhorn and Coleman, there is a level of confidence that has not before been seen.

During my first read of the show as Nancy, I suggested in my notes Nancy’s reason for change is because she has lost her “fresh meat” appeal. She’s no longer the apple of the church’s eye and has been replaced by Coleman and Lorena. This is too petty a reason to change. I think her faded glory is what motivates her to action at the very beginning. She doesn’t like that every time she gets the limelight as the “fair young maiden” it is ruined by her abrasive husband. Now he’s becoming the child of the church. However, it goes much deeper than that. She realizes after hearing about Buckhorn’s past that he is not what she wants or needs. Coleman provides a brief alternative by creating a simple, sweet option for her and then he ruins it by hitting her again. At this point, Nancy doesn’t know where to turn. She tries turning back to the Lord, but realizes there’s no substance in that relationship. Those people aren’t who she wants to be

around and their worship is not what she needs. I can put better words to why she can't rely on the church at a later date. Her decision is about her living her own life and not being a child anymore. She wants to make her own decisions and not take her cues from everyone else. She wants to decide for herself what's good for her. That is what prompts her decision. She doesn't want to be told what to do anymore. Her decision is empowering and inspiring and in the end, she wins because her "out" is in herself. She can take her inspiration and motivation from herself.

Anyway, in rehearsal, I had time to bounce these ideas around in my head. Coleman makes it so easy for Nancy to be moved in powerful ways. The playful relationship makes it feasible that the two could have courted and fallen in love and the anger makes it impossible for them to be together. If I could only get off-book for our scene, it would make it much better. Some things I discussed in directing class today got me thinking in rehearsal. The comment was made that actors think too much. I agree with that because I have always had trouble getting "out of my head." I try to color my words or my expression with what I feel is appropriate for the character. Well, tonight, I tried to say my monologue to Coleman as simply as possible, using my actions. I leveled with him, cheered him up, joked with him, made him understand, confessed to him and Coleman opened up and listened back and it was so simple and easy.

Nancy and Buckhorn have a bit of a problem. At the end, there is supposed to be a very sweet and tender moment when Nancy thanks Buckhorn. The problem is they haven't been affectionate at all up until that point. If the moment is going to work at all, there has to be affection earlier in the show. Now I love the moment when Buckhorn comes and chastises Nancy for wavering in her faith. It's perfect. But I feel as though that is the only relationship between the two that the audience sees. I imagined Nancy and Buckhorn to have a great sexual

tension coupled with and contrasted by a father/daughter tenderness and respect but as of tonight, it is a cold relationship. He must be charming in order for Nancy to stay with and speak lovingly about Buckhorn to Coleman. We still have over two weeks, so that is going to be one of my major focuses.

### **Friday, January 20, 2012**

Tonight was our first run-through of the entire show. It actually went very well. There were a few times when blocking got mixed up and it threw me off and I couldn't concentrate on my role as well. One of the issues of working with an ensemble cast that consists of undergraduate actors is they don't take the process as seriously, and when they take their own liberties with their characters, it doesn't contribute to the show in a positive way. Therefore, I--the actor--notice these oddities and it makes me think more about the show than about what my character would do in that particular situation. Their inexperience makes me lose my focus. Here's an example: There are plenty of times when one character has a monologue and other characters are, as David puts it, "peas-and-carroting" upstage. They are supposed to act as background. They have begun, however, to strike up funny conversations amongst themselves and make broad movements so they pull focus away from a very serious and plot-driving monologue. Frankly, it's rude. However, I understand it is not my job as an actor to worry about what other actors are doing. That is the problem with loving the play so much: I want to hold onto it so tightly. I have to be content focusing on my work and nothing else.

Because tonight was a rough run, I was concerned more about getting the technical aspects down rather than losing myself in my character. This helps me be aware of what the show needs and what the other actors need. I do keep in mind what my character would and would not do, which allows me to fix any blocking that is out of character. This technical

rehearsal also cleans up my mistakes from taking a note incorrectly. Because I didn't remember the note I was given previously, I changed blocking around and then got worked up because it didn't work for my character. All along, if I had made the correct move in the first place, everything would have worked itself out. Those are moments during which I take a slice of humble pie.

Tonight, Buckhorn was a lot tenderer toward Nancy at the beginning. He was charming, which would make Nancy want to stay with him. This was a welcome change. It began to be too much when he put his arm around me during a song--this gesture implies a young sweetheart kind of relationship, which I don't think fits the two characters but at least the tenderness is becoming apparent.

I want to devote an entire journal to my personal connections to the religious nature of this show. It makes a huge difference. I won't say much now, but I will say this: You have to have been to a Pentecostal Church to know how to handle the service and to not make fun of it. I can honestly say I am not mimicking what I have seen on a documentary. I am truthfully living through Nancy's circumstances and applying what I have known and felt in my personal life to Nancy's situation. It is exhilarating.

### **Sunday, January 22, 2012**

I had my costume fitting the other day. As I was reading Uta Hagen's A Challenge for the Actor, I came across an exercise I will enjoy very much doing. She writes, "The sensorially suggestive aspect of a garment is what most often instigates the role-play, that is to say, how you consequently imagine yourself" (163). What she means is that putting on clothes affects the way humans behave. During my costume fitting, I imagined what Nancy would have thought as she picked out her outfit for the day. After talking with the costumer, it became clear Nancy was

getting dressed not only for church, but to see her betrothed. She dresses up for Buckhorn, but respects the modesty of the occasion. She wears a skirt, a light floral shirt and a cardigan. Personally, I feel as though the costume makes Nancy look too matronly, but as an actor I must justify the choices of the designers. Publicity photos are going to be taken in costume tomorrow. I want to use Uta Hagen's exercise to explore Nancy as she dresses for church to see her love.

Another technique Hagen uses is transference. This is when the actor substitutes him or herself into the character's life in order to become the character. I have thought much about this with Nancy because our lives are very similar and circumstances can easily be substituted in order to obtain an understanding of Nancy's situation. The reason I was cast is because the director wants to see what I bring to this character. Anyway, after transference comes "particularization" (66). Hagen uses the example of Blanche Dubois to illustrate the notion that an actor must connect the history and personality of a character to the event during which the play occurs. In my own study of this, and in order to become more like Nancy, I have grown my eyebrows out to be more unkempt and have decided to stop manicuring my nails--both are very difficult pills for me to swallow. This exercise will also help me during the play. Moments like sweeping the floor, forgetting the pile and picking it up later, clearing the tea service, taking Mr. Canfield's hat can all be colored by my characterization of Nancy. How does she *feel* about each instance, what memory of hers is linked to those actions? This is great stuff to think about. As I continue to score my script, I will delve into those particularities.

### **Monday, January 23, 2012**

Before rehearsal, we had a publicity photo shoot with Nancy, Coleman, and Buckhorn. As I said yesterday, I tried to take the opportunity to get a feel for how Nancy would dress herself for church. The exercise worked to a point. I like the lace and silk camisole she wears

underneath her shirt, I like the light, flowery blouse, I even like the little girl socks and faded oxford shoes. I am having an issue with the skirt chosen. It's a high-waist pencil skirt. I like the color and even the fact that it's wool, but I can't understand why such a "young maiden" would wear such a matronly skirt. It's also restricting around the knees and might be a problem for me to move in. Honestly, I feel bad because the costumer, Lindy, has already hemmed the skirt and the costume has been approved. This is an ethical issue for actors because it's so easy to quickly become a "diva" and to make demands that the skirt changes. I have always wanted to be a humble, hard-working, fun-loving actor and I always hate encroaching on another artist's work. I talked to David about the issue after rehearsal, saying the costume is not what I imagined Nancy's personality to be. He reassured me it looked great and it matched what I discussed Nancy's character to be. Maybe this is another chance for me to swallow some humble pie, or maybe once I start working in it, I will have to have another conversation with David.

During rehearsal, David gave me a note that really made me think about Nancy's character. I was having trouble with one particular cross that I make as I express hateful feelings toward Coleman. I was blocked to cross to Coleman, bypassing Oby and then storm upstage. I like making the cross, but as I thought about the fear Nancy has possessed of Coleman, it didn't make sense for her to cross up to him to defy him. It seemed too aggressive for how I wanted to play her. When I asked David about it, he made the astute observation that Coleman had just offended Oby, not me. Throughout the play, Nancy is extremely defensive of the members of the church and it's obvious she has profound feelings for them. When Coleman insults her, she responds by ignoring him or qualifying what he says. However, she is always ready to defend her new friends. Also, David threw in that "Nancy is a spitfire." This totally makes sense for Nancy because she has so many great lines to attack Coleman and she swings from hot to cold

often. I guess I was focusing too much on Nancy's fear, intimidation, and naiveté because the "spitfire" quality comes naturally to me. Hearing Nancy is a spitfire made me think that I had focused too much on the meek qualities and didn't hone the outrageous qualities of her as well. As an actor, I tend to go too far with my actions so the result is that my characters all look crazy. I am working really hard to make sure Nancy is not crazy, but that she has outbursts of anger and frustration.

I've decided I'm going to work on this portion of Nancy's character. It's definitely supported by the script, but now I'm worried I've rehearsed her as too meek. She takes her cues from other members of the church, but maybe that's because she understands her tendency to fly off the handle. I have been very sincere in my love for the church and how worship affects me, but maybe I can play with the idea that the "tenderloving kindness" is a bit difficult for her to manage. It's been fairly easy until her husband shows up. This is an interesting turn to Nancy's character and I'm excited to see where it takes her.

#### **Thursday, January 26, 2012**

Tonight's practice was a good run of Act II. A lot of issues were fixed and I was lost in Nancy several times. The moment that has been the most difficult for me in Act II is after Coleman gets beat up by Hart and Rudd and before the scene between Coleman and Nancy. Buckhorn speaks and Bonnie has an entire monologue and while I know where Nancy's heart is, I just really want to talk to Coleman. This feeling in me has informed Nancy's feeling as well. She is itching to talk to Coleman and she always sneaks glances his way. Maybe they can somehow get alone and talk. No, she'll just have to wait until a break in the service or after church. How does she feel about what Bonnie's saying? Like I said earlier, Nancy still understands the people and their need for this place and she doesn't have bad feelings toward

anyone but Buckhorn, who lied to her. She just needs to see if Coleman is alright and how he is feeling. The people of Amalgamation Holiness Church of God have obviously affected him. If he is capable of human tenderness and loving kindness, there could be hope for them as a couple. These thoughts ran through my head tonight as the tough moment came on. I put an inner monologue to use as I scanned the crowd and decided in each case I loved them still and I understood their need. Also, the tenderness toward Coleman helped make me more open to him as our scene started.

The slap at the end of our scene went well tonight and David gave it a good note. I have always felt the safest doing stage combat with P. J. He is very careful and thoughtful of his partner.

Nancy's fiery nature came into question again tonight. At the top of the act, I was very subdued and almost preachy to Coleman whilst justifying the snake-handling practice. I caught myself being another person during this and began to think about Nancy's character again. Romulus Linney does not help me in that Nancy doesn't have many lines at the top of the act to reveal what she's thinking. I guess that'll be my job. I've decided to use the note David gave me on Monday and take offense that Coleman is insulting my new church and snap at him and then pull myself back for the sake of loving kindness. New things to think about.

### **Friday, January 27, 2012**

I said earlier I would discuss Nancy's religious journey later on and tonight might be a good time to do that because I thought about some new things for Nancy as far as religion goes. First of all, it should be said that my personal religious affiliation as I was growing up has a lot of similarities to the Amalgamation Holiness Church of God. I was excited to delve into the religion with which Nancy finds herself associated. I studied the snake-handling churches a little



bit and dove right into the religious ceremony of the play. However, tonight I realized Nancy has only been at this church for a week. She wouldn't be aware of all the ins and outs of snake handling. It's a confusing time period because Nancy knows each character well enough to have a personal connection, and yet, she hasn't been there long enough to hear all about her new fiancé. I decided tonight Nancy will not be so familiar with the religious ceremony of the church.

Nancy came to Amalgamation Holiness to seek refuge from her husband. I don't think Nancy cares one way or the other about God, Christ, or snakes. I decided she's never felt at ease with the snakes in the church, but she also doesn't judge anyone either. Nancy is a lost soul who wants to belong somewhere. She's willing to play the part of avid churchgoer in order to feel at home in this church. Kindness, patience, and love are all traits that Nancy wants to possess and tries very hard to, but she is more inclined to anger, envy, and distrust.

### **Saturday, January 18, 2012**

Today we had a costume parade and run through. I have decided to be content with my costume and chalk it up to the fact that my skirt was the only clean thing in my closet. Another less sassy justification is Nancy knows Buckhorn is so much older than her and she wants to appear as womanly as possible for him. I like that reasoning much better.

Part of the frustration of working with an ensemble is the rambunctious behavior that happens at the beginning of the show when everyone is backstage with nothing to do and Nancy is performing a sweet and tender moment at the top of the show. Yes, that happened today. Instead of stopping, correcting the issue and starting with a clean slate, I kept going, getting angrier and angrier the more time went on with no remedy to the noise backstage. Then I felt bad for getting so angry and was frustrated with myself for thinking too much about it when I'm

supposed to be lost in Nancy's character. However, this put me in a great spot for my opening scene with Coleman because I was instinctively on a short fuse. This helped me apply David's "whipper snapper" note because the sass was flying out of me. When Canfield tried to talk sensibly to me, I took that moment to literally calm myself down. Then Coleman set me off again. I carried this energy through a lot more of the show and it made the character feel more alive. I always have trouble finding anger or rage in a character because I'm so quick to stifle that emotion in myself. I was happy to have that pissy attitude available to me.

It also gave me a proper sense of embarrassment when other church members would come in. Mrs. Wall entered and I thought about how much she had seen and how I would have to overcompensate for the possibility of her seeing me in anger or saying malicious things. This justifies my eager cross to Mrs. Wall.

Jon Jory, in *Ideas: Tips for the Actor*, talks about preparing yourself before a show and reminding yourself where you are coming from and what you are doing. It might help me to think about how incredibly rude my cast was to me to get my energy, nerves and anger properly prepped before the show. Thanks, cast!

Coleman and Nancy did get the note our scene started off indicating where it was going to go. I took my cue from Coleman, who is somewhat broken at this point. I need to remember to keep my guard up at the beginning of the scene. The goal is to make discoveries as late as possible and this idea can apply to other characters as well. Maybe Nancy doesn't realize how much this experience has affected Coleman until he talks straight with her. I think she is affected by the day and hurt and confused and tired, but she hasn't released her anger and frustration with Coleman yet. Maybe she can drive that last monologue with confusion rather than desperation. That way, her desperation can come later and so can her horror, disgust, pity, maturity and

independence. It's a long process for Nancy and there's a huge gap that Romulus Linney gives her to fester. The more urgent, the better.

### **Monday, January 19, 2012**

I felt like rehearsal went really well tonight. I took David's note about Nancy being a "spitfire" to its logical conclusion and what ensued was a great play with the character. The arc happened so naturally that it seemed like the way I played Nancy was exactly how she was supposed to be played.

The snappiness affected the final scene the most, I think. I started off the scene coming at Coleman with frustration and confusion rather than desperation and it gave the scene a new energy. It was great! My monologue had some urgency to it and when I started to cry, I was frustrated with myself for being so vulnerable in front of Coleman. When he turned and began telling me things he would do for us, I reluctantly gave into him and then was surprised with how excited I got at his promises. I laughed with him when he prayed with me--a joyous, "I can't believe this moment" kind of laugh. Then, when Coleman slaps Nancy, she is horrified that she let her guard down. She told herself not to and when she did, Coleman proved her instincts to be right. Shame on her for believing a fairytale. Allowing the audience to see this progression before their eyes is exactly the moment I want to create at this point. It also set-up the ending beautifully because she is immensely disappointed in Buckhorn and her husband. When she finally views the religious ceremony with open eyes, she finds it disappoints her as well. This spurs her decision to leave. Tonight, I said my last line as if it surprised me to come to that conclusion. I made the discovery as I said each word. It was urgent, fresh, and lovely. Saying "Good luck, Coleman" was natural as well, because I waited until I approached him to discover he never needed me in the first place. Writing this makes me want to give the line a slightly

different reading than what I did tonight. I think rather than genuinely wishing Coleman good luck, try it as if I'm saying, "You win, Coleman." Boom.

During reflection after rehearsal, it seemed as if I was making fun of the play when I pray for Coleman in the first Act. Such is not my intention at all, so I will work toward making this moment honest and supple. Her prayer comes from desperation. She wants Coleman to know how she feels and the church to see her anguish and hard work. She also wants God to fulfill her wishes for her husband. It is difficult because some of the words in the line are funny but Nancy is in no way trying to make fun of anything. Maybe if I am more timid to approach the altar, or if I am slower or softer in my delivery it will be more sincere.

### **Tuesday, January 31, 2012**

I had to take it easy on myself tonight because of medical reasons. It was frustrating after such a great night of discoveries to back off my character so much I hardly raised my voice. I was able to think of some things while I was subdued in my character. In the very end of the show, when Nancy has no lines but has the arduous task of completely changing her mind on everything she knew at the beginning of the show, I was relaxed--a simple observer. I really liked this approach. Most acting methods agree on the notion of relaxation of the actor while on the stage. Kristin Linklater, in her book Freeing the Natural Voice, walks the actor through breathing exercises in order to relax the body to be present in mind and body. This notion of relaxation is practiced originally in the Eastern doctrine of Zen. Eugen Herrigel explains breathing practices in his book Zen in the Art of Archery.

Care has only to be taken that the body is relaxed whether standing, sitting, or lying, and if one then concentrates on breathing one soon feels oneself shut in by impermeable layers of silence. [...] This state, in which nothing definite is

thought, planned, striven for, desired or expected, which aims in no particular direction and yet knows itself capable alike of the possible and the impossible, so unswerving is its power--this state, which is at the bottom purposeless and egoless, was called by the Master truly "spiritual" (Herrigel 18-19).

I realized tonight I all-too-often stand in a pose while I observe. Tonight my muscles were relaxed and I was able to honestly observe and react. The scene literally gave me chills and I believe it was because I was honestly observing with no strings attached.

Letting go of my character for a night allowed me to add simplicity to what I was doing. I have made many discoveries as Nancy, but sometimes it's easy for me to bog myself down trying to remember the things I liked about different rehearsals, readings, etc. Tonight, I emoted the bare minimum to keep the play afloat for the other actors. It was a nice break, but I'm looking forward to jumping back into the energetic, sassy, spitfire that is Nancy Shedman.

### **Wednesday, February 1, 2012**

Tonight, the run through was just not what I wanted it to be. I felt so much better than last night and I was ready and excited to try some new things but something went wrong, somehow. The first Act was fine enough, but for some reason I couldn't get into my character. I know part of it was Caleigh The Actor was thinking too hard about what the other actors were doing and how they could be better. This is, as Buckhorn puts it, the "curse of my life." I have to let go of what my expectations are and let others be. I know I am not a director, nor do I want to be one. I would be a great acting coach, however, and sometimes I long to coach the other actors onstage. I am well aware this is neither my job nor my responsibility and this desire is actually counterproductive as was displayed tonight. I failed to do my individual work tonight because I was thinking about the work of others.

I do have an acting tip to give in reference to this type of night. If emotion is not coming to you, *do not force or try to manifest it*. There have been nights of beautiful discovery when emotion would purge out of the character living inside of me. I was connected, lost in Nancy and I found stunning moments of true desperation, confusion, frustration, pain. Tonight, I was not feeling those same emotions. Therefore, my performance was altered. I gave it truthfully and I played actions to Coleman, my partner and I did have true moment-to-moment reality, but I could not tell a lie and force crocodile tears. I take responsibility for “phoning in” tonight’s rehearsal, but I am also proud of the fact I gave honest responses to what I was feeling. I see other actors fake crying because they cried once in rehearsal and liked it. It is not the job of the actor to reproduce what is found in rehearsal. Actors do their homework, analyze the play, figure out appropriate actions and play those actions. Rehearsals explore which actions and tactics work and which ones don’t. If emotion comes, it comes. If it doesn’t, *do not manifest it!*

I got a note about the last line of the show. Although I understand the last line and I know what actions I am playing, it does still seem to drag and come out of nowhere. Part of this is the blocking. I literally come up out of nowhere and say my line. Part of it is the script. My character says nothing for eight pages and then the last line comes out of nowhere. Part of it may also be her shift has happened silently in a corner and maybe my vocal delivery is too stark a difference. I’m going to try to keep a little sass until the very end. You can take the girl from the country, but you can’t take the country from the girl.

#### **Thursday, February 2, 2012**

Now that’s what I’m talking about! Tonight’s rehearsal went really well. I had so much fun playing Nancy tonight that I earned a great note: David said he has enjoyed watching me. The one hiccup of the night: I missed the knap of the slap so as P. J.’s hand came to my face, the

sound of the slap was a moment later. I was frustrated because of it and my line “See honey, what would be different?” was so angry and hurtful it didn’t move the play in the correct direction. I felt badly about that choice later because I realized that Coleman needs Nancy to be defeated and to pity him in order to help further his transformation. If she gets mad at him, he’ll just get mad right back. Maybe seeing Coleman rush to Nancy’s aid can provoke her tenderness. After all, this is probably the first sign of him caring for her.

David mentioned everyone is finding nice moments within the show to showcase his or her individual characters and I would have to agree. It’s lovely to see the ensemble envelope themselves in the moment and react accordingly. Also, working with P. J. was great tonight. We played with things we hadn’t before and it was organic and fun.

Part of what is helping so much with this show is the fact that I have voice class every Tuesday and Thursday with Janet Shea. Being in educational theatre allows an actor to apply exercises learned in classes directly to the current show. My pre-rehearsal warm-up (which I have always assumed that every actor does) is now colored with the vocal regimen we are taught in Ms. Shea’s class. I even used some of the techniques during the run tonight when I had to yawn during another actor’s monologue. Of course it would be terribly rude to yawn as I am supposed to be enraptured by a character’s story, but it wasn’t out of boredom, it was due to not enough air getting to my lungs. When I realized I had to yawn, I performed a little exercise wherein one fills their lungs from the bottom to the top by imagining air flowing first into the abdomen, then into the diaphragm and finally into the ribs. This way, I was able to fill my lungs and not have to yawn. Thanks, Janet!

As far as my last line is concerned, I didn't get a note on it tonight, but I still felt it was weak. I went faster and made connections quicker, but it still seemed to lack something. I might have to have a conversation with David about this...

### **Saturday, February 4, 2012**

How to act during a Q2Q: Pay attention. Don't talk, mingle, linger, play, etc. Be polite to the tech crew--they have been polite while they watched the show night after night. Don't complain about things moving slowly. No one has any idea how frantically things are happening in the booth. Don't make jokes or comments about the sound or light. It's rude and childish and not productive. Listen to the director and go where he says to go and stop when he says to stop. Don't continue on with the lines--it wastes time. Don't cut off the lines early--that's presumptuous and also wastes time.

I try to be as simple and helpful as possible during tech days and today is no exception. I jotted these rules right before rehearsal to remind myself what my goals are for the day. It worked nicely and ended up being a professional, productive Q2Q. The lighting designer, Diane Baas, has created a beautiful lighting design--very clean and precise. I have no doubt the show will be visually moving. I haven't said anything about the stage management so far. Jenny Billot has been our fearless leader. She is so organized and trustworthy. We have a stellar technical crew. Even during the worst nights, i.e. when the stage collapsed and the power went out, Jenny was calm and knew just what to do. I have never felt unsafe or unappreciated thanks to her management. She also did a great job running the tech rehearsal today. She didn't waste any time, was clear in her expectations and was positive and motivational the whole time. Our assistant stage managers are great, too. Kit Sternberger works so hard and jumps up the moment she sees something that needs to be done. It is inspiring. Today I needed part of the stage glow



taped. I walked downstage to discuss the blocking of the curtain call and when I turned around, everything was already taped. I was so grateful and impressed! I'm sure that Kit was only doing her job as assistant stage manager, but her efficiency and prowess really impressed me.

After the Q2Q, we had a tech run of the show. Act I is just so much fun and I know the audience will want to see the second Act. Our sound designer, Tim O'Neal, told us after he watched the show for the first time that he was excited to see the second half of the show because the first half was so intriguing. I have to agree with him. The second Act, however, was abysmal. I'll tell you why. Today's rehearsal was pretty low-key and we had a good time hanging out while the Q2Q was about to start. Then, we had about an hour before the tech run. The actors hung out, joked around, and got to know each other better. I love when this kind of thing happens. But what happened during the tech run is why I don't normally do it. During the tech run, actors were making fun of the play and taking liberties that didn't fall within the scope of the playwright's intentions. This kind of playing around was fun to me in high school but now I want to be as professional as possible. The light-hearted run actually ruined my hopes for what seems to me as a very emotional and deeply moving show. I couldn't even properly perform my scene with P. J. because we were both so clearly frustrated with the lack of respect of the cast. I understand now, as I write this, the show is a university production and it is not professional. There are plenty of professional things that happen in the show--such as the quiet and efficient move off and on-stage in between acts--that I should just count my losses when some college behavior creeps into rehearsal. I talked to David after the rehearsal and notes about how distressing it was to not be able to focus because of the rowdiness of the ensemble. He understood and just talking to him made me feel better.

**Sunday, February 5, 2012**

What a difference a day makes! Today was our first dress rehearsal and it was a swimming show. I made a conscious effort to do my own work and not bother myself with what the other actors are doing. I did have a little time to joke and gossip with the girls in the dressing room before rehearsal because my makeup is so minimal for this show.

On that note, I want to stress the importance of the actor's work on their hair and makeup. I know plenty of actors--the majority, actually--who wear their personal "street" makeup onstage during performances. I submit that just because your character is a normal person does not mean that they get to wear normal makeup. The reason why stage makeup exists is because the stage lighting is drastically different from normal lighting. I feel as though it is a slap in the face of theatre artists not to use the makeup produced for the craft. This opinion applies also to men. If the lighting designer were simply using 40-watt bulbs to illuminate the stage, your personal makeup would be fine to use. However, the circumstances onstage call for professional makeup. As I look at each character I play, I use Uta Hagen's method of considering what the character is getting ready for, what her expectations would be and what grooming choices she would make. Nancy is a country bumpkin who has been living in a guest bedroom over the kitchen at Reverend Buckhorn's house. She is looking forward to seeing her lover and friends at church, but she has little money and certainly no makeup. I have already mentioned I have cut my nails and have grown my eyebrows out to a startling bushiness. She would not wear any makeup, but I still require some for the stage. Therefore, my makeup and hair routine for Nancy is a simple, face-highlighting makeup design, with darkened eyebrows and natural lip color for definition. My hair is naturally curly so I blow it dry to keep it curly and put a small, beaded, brown headband to hold it back. (See Appendix) Lindy, the costume

designer, gave me the perfect finishing touch to my wardrobe: a simple gold chain with a small cross pendant. It's so quaint and understated. This shows her true modesty and desire to be accepted and appealing to the church members and to Buckhorn. I have grown to love my costume and with a quick ironing job, it will be perfect. I think the yellow, lacy socks make the whole ensemble look exactly like something Nancy would wear to church. After staring at it in the mirror for several hours, I have decided it is the perfect combination of sexually frustrated wife and awkward, innocent maiden. It works nicely for Nancy.

During the run, I focused mostly on Coleman and how Nancy feels toward him. Putting one's energy in one's partner changes the play for the better. I felt much more alive in the opening scene and the last scene with Coleman was delightful. My monologue came out of justifying my feelings toward Coleman. It was no longer an introspective description of my marital expectations. As Nancy, I sought to level with Coleman and for the first time in our marriage he listened to me. I took this opportunity to explain how I felt in whole. It was a sort of retelling of my first monologue but it comes from a stronger, deeper place. I was finally real with Coleman and myself. And the emotion came right out of that. In the moment of the monologue, I knew what I did to Coleman was selfish and not right. I was justifying it to myself, but I knew it was wrong. When Coleman gave me grace tonight, I was humbled and then elated to see his efforts. As an actor, I truly saw and understood the meaning of give-and-take during our last scene tonight. It made the slap moment unbearable. Everything was very real and organic for me tonight. I feel like because I was finally in the right place within myself, I was able to react to the other characters as Nancy, not just as some frustrated actor. It was so much more rewarding.

This work reflected in the notes as well, as I didn't receive any. I hope I do this character justice. One more dress rehearsal and then we have an audience. I'm very excited.

### **Monday, February 6, 2012**

Tonight was the last dress rehearsal. The lights and sound all make the show phenomenal. There were a few hiccups with both, but superstition tells us that a bumpy final dress means a smooth opening. There is now a haze machine hooked up and at the beginning of each act and after the "anointing" scene there is a cloud of smoke that fills the stage. I'm positive this achieves a very eerie ambiance but it dries out my eyes pretty badly. I have to remember to bring contact solution with me from here on out. Maybe Buckhorn will think Nancy is flirting with him as she bats her eyes in response to the fog.

P. J. performed Coleman a very different way tonight. I always enjoy this aspect of P.J.'s acting style--he changes things up to keep the show fresh. Coleman was terrifying. He pushed every limit he could find and he forced me to change a lot of my actions. Rather than chastise, I had to plead, for example. It changed the show completely for me. Even in the last scene when Nancy sees a change in Coleman, I was much more hesitant to even speak to him. She certainly wouldn't want to give him the time of day if he threatened her that much. It made the ending less sympathetic, but it was nice exercise. I always love when actors give me things that make me think about a relationship or an action I'm playing. Coleman's tenderness toward Nancy allows for the possibility that the two characters had fallen in love. It is a necessary aspect of their relationship.

Tomorrow is opening night. Some things I would like to think about are Nancy's opening moment--I want to make everything crystal clear in the way I'm portraying that moment. I also want to focus on how I feel about each character's monologue. The hardest one

for me is Bonnie's "lift up my skirts" monologue. I think Nancy does not find this monologue very lady-like at all and it begins to worry her. However, when she discusses the importance of church over carnal relations, Nancy is won again. Also, in regards to Orin Hart and Howard Rudd, Nancy does not speak to them at all in the show, so how does she feel about their scene? I don't think she likes how rough they are--they remind her too much of her husband. She does empathize with them when they discuss how broken and in need of Jesus they are.

Time for tea and rest--this weather is trying to get the best of me.

### **Tuesday, February 7, 2012--OPENING NIGHT**

What a show. The audience certainly brought a new energy to the show. I believe they enjoyed it. We had their attention the whole time, that's for sure. I enjoy finding the moments they think are funny and the moments during which the air is sucked out of the room. David made a clever and unfortunately true observation before we went on. He said that often times in shows like this one, actors tend to make it either funnier or more dramatic. He suggested that we keep the cleanness of the show intact tonight even with an audience. Well, the show got very dramatic. Actually, a lot of the show changed because actors took more time filling lines with tear-filled drama. In the last scene, I had to jump on my cues because I knew at least five minutes were added to the show. I chose to consider the audience on this one.

I reminded myself during intermission to play my actions. In the first Act, I began thinking about the audience way too much. I had to constantly refocus on Coleman or Oby. Act II was much better in terms of focus, but I then began to notice the emotional state of the other actors onstage. Many of them were out-and-out crying by the time Bonnie starts talking about her sister. Phil Karnell, a professor at UNO, says that in rehearsal you change your performance constantly and then you find what works. Then, in performances, you keep 90% the exact same

and you change 10% to keep it fresh. Tonight I would guess that probably 20% of the show had changed because actors got very worked up very early on in the show. This affected me because I had to pick up my cues in order to make up time and I was very reluctant to cry simply because I felt it was old hat by the time I had my moment. What happened worked nicely, though. I did feel emotion and I acted on it but then I pulled it back as much as I could. I was clearly trying to stifle my emotions in order to think clearly during this monumental decision in my life. I think it worked well for my character and for the show. Tea and rest again--my throat feels terrible.

### **Wednesday, February 8, 2012**

Tonight's show was a lot tighter than last night's. A lot of the drama had been omitted and I was able to focus a lot more on my character. I felt a strong connection to Coleman especially and also focused a lot on how Nancy feels about the rest of the cast. I've been reading Jon Jory's *Tips: Ideas for the Actor* before the show and at intermission to remind myself of techniques. Tonight, the tip that helped me the most was about preparing for the character to go onstage. There's a lot of preparation that needs to happen before I go on. I've been getting into character as I put my costume on, but I also stretch and do vocal warm-ups and tongue twisters that I've learned in Ms. Shea's class. Right before "places," I go backstage and release all of my tension, breathing into my tailbone as I stand doubled over at the hips. Then, I think a serene thought--something peaceful. This usually translates into visions of ribbons of soft fabric floating mid-air with soft classical music playing. Abstract, I know, but it's very helpful. Nancy is in Utopia at the top of the show so it's important I get there mentally before I go onstage. The other actors help me by not bothering me while I do this ritual. My relaxation also helps me get scared by Coleman's obtrusive voice at the top.

I always think it's so interesting to hear what type of audience comes to the show each night and what they do to the performance. Tonight, the audience was extremely vocal and quite obtrusive. One particular woman shuffled and whispered to her date the entire first Act. She was sitting right in front of the house, so the actors could see and hear her plainly. At the same time as they were obtrusive, the audience was helpful to the show. They brought a lot of energy to the first Act and they thankfully were respectful during the second Act. I thought overall the audience helped me feel energized and try to convey a clear message. If the audience can't see my actions, my partner certainly can't either.

#### **Thursday, February 9, 2012**

David made a curtain speech tonight before the show. It's sad because having no noise at all before the curtain music preserved the ambience of the show. I really liked that the audience wasn't listening to little country tunes before the show, it created the simple, reflective atmosphere that the show needed. However, because of the excessive behavior of the audience--we even had pictures and recording taken--drastic steps were needed. It worked well, I think. The audience was much more shy than last night's but they still provided good input by laughing and gasping at appropriate moments.

One of the characters has changed his performance drastically and it is affecting the way Nancy makes her decision. Jon Jory had a great tip about emotional restraint in performance. He says that working too hard is a downfall in actors. We must choose very specific times when to shout, flail, cry, etc. There is a line in which Nancy is given an ultimatum: Buckhorn or Coleman. At this point, with the amount of emotional purgation, the choice would be easy and the line becomes comical. Maybe I can put it as not that Nancy still has eggs in Buckhorn's basket, but that Coleman seems like her only other option and she doesn't know if a life with him

would work. I have to say that the moment Nancy finally goes with Coleman and daydreams about their life together is truly wonderful. I feel a pure hope within me that comes from a very deep need in Nancy. This tenderness *must* be achieved in order to get the heartbreaking juxtaposition when Coleman slaps her.

**Friday, February 10, 2012**

Another vocal audience tonight. The curtain speech was given by the young house manager, who seemed to encourage audience participation rather than discourage it. This made for a rowdy crowd. Some jokes were talked over and emotional moments were ruined by laughter and discussion. I was so upset, I considered gesturing to the offending member during the show. Thankfully, my restraint kicked in. I had to truly focus on the other characters in the show and make adjustments for the amount of responsive noise. I found some nice moments in spite of the audience--or perhaps because of them. The actors were given a note to pick up the pace--we added two minutes to the show last night. When P. J. and I started working on the speed of the first Act, it was so energetic and left little room for actor liberties as well as audience interruption. It was clean and tight. I really appreciated that about the note given. The most moving part about tonight was the slow-motion scene for me. I let terror overcome me and drive the slow-motion. When Coleman's anointing happens, Nancy's world is crashing around her. It's not a miracle, it's a horrific lie. Coleman has been swept in misguided love, displaced emotion and he's calling it salvation. Nancy sees that now. Her eyes are open to the kind of people of which the church is composed; who would risk their lives in order to feel better and to turn away from their problems. This doesn't just anger Nancy, this terrifies her--she was almost victim to this torture! The terror pushed me through the slow-motion scene and changed the ending for me completely, and wonderfully. I will do it this way from now on. I can't



believe I didn't explore this option before. Fear was always a part of that section of the play, but it was never the driving force. I felt very justified and finally had a hold on my last line because of it.

### **Saturday, February 11, 2012**

With as vocal as the past audiences have been, tonight's audience was just as quiet. They were in tuned with the show, though and I appreciated their politeness. It allowed me to focus on the show and really find nice moments in it. The terror during the slow motion worked wonders again tonight and I feel like it drove my final line yet again.

I always feel like I'm more focused during performances as opposed to rehearsals because I no longer feel like I have to pay attention to the other actors--just the other characters. The performances are purely for the audience. We become storytellers whose job it is to convey a message to a society rather than analyze and work on it. I can let go of all the analysis I have done previously and rely on my actions to pull me through the show. My job, as Sanford Meisner teaches actors, is to live truthfully under the imaginary circumstances. If another actor goofs up or snake noises go off before Buckhorn even gets onstage (as happened tonight), it becomes a part of the circumstances; it is no longer a mistake. Nancy must react to each circumstance as if it is really happening to her. This became very real to me tonight in that some characters changed significant aspects of their performances. I don't have to worry about that, though. I just have to react.

There is one moment that I have tried--as my character--to fix. The line immediately before Nancy's scene with Coleman is Buckhorn's. He crosses downstage to Nancy and says "I see your husband has touched you...Make up your mind between your husband and me and you do it now." It has taken the actor playing Buckhorn longer and longer to cross down and say that line

to me. Also, as I mentioned before, it has become more and more emotional. Of course, I can't force this actor to do anything, nor is it ethical to give him notes, but as Nancy, I have been trying to force him to say his line quicker by starting to cross to Coleman during the hymn. This is completely justified. Once Buckhorn calls for the hymn, it is the first time Nancy has the opportunity to speak privately to Coleman. As she makes her way over to him, she sees Buckhorn on his way down to her. She backs up and tries to show her piety as much as possible to her father figure. This reaction seems as if it would prompt a response from Buckhorn, but it never did. I still liked the intention of wanting to speak to Coleman and check on him again, but it didn't fix the issue with Buckhorn's line.

After the show, we had a photo call and took pictures of important moments of the show starting from the end and going to the top of the show. This type of event should be treated the exact same way as the tech rehearsal. Actors should be quiet, patient and efficient as the photographer takes pictures. Well, we had some gigglers. I can't say I didn't welcome some relief after such a long run of such an emotionally draining show. It also is a silly thing to work up emotion in an instant and hold an emotionally charged pose for two minutes as the photographer moves around. It's just silly. The giggles, however unprofessional, were contagious.

### **Sunday, February 12, 2012**

Today was closing day. What a sad and delightful thing. The show was great today, especially during Act II, when the actors realized we were all low energy. If last night's audience was quiet, today's was sleeping or dead. It affected all of us. Also, matinee shows are always a strange energy as most actors see one o'clock only once during a twenty-four hour period and there's usually no daylight involved. I am not one of those actors, but I felt the lack

of “umph” in the show early on and tried to pick up the pace as much as possible. During intermission, though, we all agreed to amp up the energy for the final show.

I felt a great deal of emotion during my final scene with Coleman. Maybe it was because I knew it was the last time I would perform this scene I loved so much or maybe it was because Coleman was so incredibly tender early on that I couldn’t hold in my emotion. The important part, according to John Barton, author of Playing Shakespeare, is to control it. As I said in an earlier journal entry, Nancy wouldn’t allow herself to be so vulnerable as to cry in front of Coleman, so when she does, she immediately jokes with him. “So I picked my husband. You were right about that Sunday School picnic, Coleman. That was a trap I laid for you with my perfume and lace. And you walked in it just like a rabbit and I kicked it shut.” It is the idea that Nancy may never have children that makes her so upset. She controls it by poking fun at her methods of finding a husband. I also cried when Coleman promises to be a better husband and take me to church. Hopeful tears of relief made me laugh and cry at the same time. It was beautiful. When he slaps me and I retreat to my corner, I hastily wipe those stupid tears off my face. How dare I let my guard down? This process has happened every night, but today I felt as though I needed a lot more control to keep a tight rein on the emotion. I make sure NEVER to cry during Coleman’s anointing or my decision to leave. Everyone in the show is already crying at that point and I don’t want to add to the madness. It would diminish the importance of Coleman’s change as well as Nancy’s decision.

## Performance Evaluation

As an actor, I strive to create a completely different take on each character. This is particularly hard to do when playing iconic roles such as Anne Frank, Helen Keller, or Laura Wingfield. Luckily for this actor, *Holy Ghosts* is not a play many have ever seen and the role of Nancy has not made an impression on modern society. Beginning this process, I felt as though I had been given a clean slate to work with, which is a gift for an actor. As I began working through the script and rehearsals, it became apparent that Nancy was a complex character at the most crucial point in her life. Not only must the actor create a character that is a living human being and is capable of functioning in every day life, he or she must also create a character that is capable of the outstanding actions called for in the script. The character must be believable in a normal situation as well as the most trying situation of that character's life. Understanding Nancy in everyday life was easy, but understanding her at her worst points or when she is pushed to the edge was difficult.

I was excited to work on this show because it is set in the part of the world where I grew up. Appalachia has always been my home. The banter of the characters in *Holy Ghosts*, their rate of speech and sentence structure is very familiar to me and I am immediately reminded of my childhood when reading the script. I can relate to Nancy because I understand the pressure young girls endure to get married and raise families in Appalachia. The dependence of community in that region is crucial due to the lack of resources and the harsh conditions of mountain life. Family is sacred in the country and those who oppose the familial duty are shunned, scorned and often cast out. Nancy's turmoil is not just a lover's quarrel; it is detrimental to her entire well-being. These facts stood out to me as I read the play and I focused on heightening the rural Appalachian feel of the show.

The religious ceremony in *Holy Ghosts* is one I am somewhat familiar with, as I have attended a church that featured speaking in tongues. In present day West Virginia, the conviction with which churchgoers speak in tongues is as real and fervent as is displayed in Linney's play. Although speaking in tongues is uncommon even for Appalachia in the 1970's, the faith practiced is another cornerstone of rural living. I grew up in a non-denominational church that encouraged freedom and meditation during the service and I was excited to read how Linney had captured so truthfully those moments of worship. This became an issue with Nancy because she is a newcomer to the church. My familiarity with the unusual service actually hindered me from truthful responses of a newcomer. I had to make substitutions as an actor to help me achieve the appropriate responses that Nancy would have.

To unite my life with Nancy's life, I used the method of "Transference" as explained by Uta Hagen in her book, *A Challenge for the Actor*.

Based on a study of the play, after examining everything our character says and does, as well as everything that others say about us, we will go on a hunt for new roots; we will give ourselves a new date and place of birth, new parents and relatives, playmates, and friends, a new childhood and upbringing, schooling and religion, a different adolescence and early adulthood, whenever necessary *transferring* our own landscape or a comparable, familiar one, our personal experiences and relationships to the ones of the character, until the elements that substantiate this new life become believable to us and can be identified with (Hagen 258).

In utilizing this technique, I was able to draw conclusions about Nancy in a way that made her "playable" by me. Although my own father was a loving youth pastor, I knew my friends'

fathers and could remember interactions with them that helped me create a distant relationship between Nancy and her own father--one that would fulfill Nancy's desire for male approval and companionship. Nancy's childhood friendships also became a necessary relationship to discover while creating the character because it informs the way Nancy creates friends within the church, especially with Muriel and Lorena, who are closer to Nancy's age. The friend relationships I created in my mind were with four other girls with whom Nancy went to high school. She was not the leader of the group, nor was she unwanted in the group. It was an easy, comfortable circle of friends who never challenged one another further than urging one to flirt with a boy. After Nancy left high school, she never kept in touch with the girls again. This relationship allowed Nancy to covet the friendliness and urgency the church possessed. By accessing parts of my life and transferring them into Nancy's life--or vice versa--Nancy became a real person who I got to know as the rehearsal process went on. Once I knew her life as a human, I could imagine how she would behave under the circumstances of the play.

Putting a fully realized character into the circumstances of the play became harder for me in rehearsals than expected. As I mention in my journals, I tried to play Nancy as meek and mild, shy and sweet for a while before David Hoover, the director, mentioned that Nancy was a "spitfire." This made complete sense within the lines and I was embarrassed I hadn't seen it before. Nancy knew how to be a lady, but she also knew how to get under her husband's skin. To be honest, I still don't think I tapped into the anger Nancy possessed even into the performances. I was worried that as a person who doesn't get angry (I just get sad and cry) I would indicate anger and it may come across as comical. I am ashamed to say that even in rehearsals, I never allowed myself to experiment with just how angry Nancy can get. With a husband as verbally and physically abusive as Coleman, it would be safe to assume that Nancy is

capable of just as much torrential anger, if only to match her husband in an argument. Some audience members remarked that Nancy's anger didn't seem real or genuine. I know I failed the character in that sense because of my own inhibitions as an actor.

I also feel as though I didn't pay enough attention to the psychological turmoil Nancy faces as she navigates through the plot of the play. It seems hasty to immerse oneself so completely into an environment after only a week, but Nancy's past of domestic abuse in her relationship with Coleman justifies her need to fill the void in her life. She needs to feel accepted, encouraged and supported and she seeks this from the moment that Oby asks her for a match before the play begins. In my portrayal of Nancy, the emotional roller coaster ride is somewhat lost. There is an evident ping pong match between Nancy's behavior with her husband and her behavior with the church members, but the flip-flop could have been more highlighted in order to accentuate her emotional state. This dramatic change in demeanor, attitude, and action would emphasize the whirlwind in which Nancy finds herself, making her stillness toward the end of the play more dynamic. As an actor, I always seek to find the inconsistencies of a character in order to understand their struggle. With Nancy, the inconsistencies reveal a tumultuous psychological state. While I do feel there was a level of Nancy trying to manage herself between the mild-mannered lady and the "spitfire", there were even more levels than that: vulnerability versus confidence, dependence versus independence, sincerity versus insincerity. These dramatic swings would have helped the audience understand Nancy's situation more than they did during this production of *Holy Ghosts*.

*Holy Ghosts* director and thesis committee chair David Hoover discussed the evolution of my process as an actor in an interview. He noticed that during the rehearsal process, I applied technique rather than relied on instinct. The rehearsals, he noted, were more intentional.

Personally, I felt as though my process for the show allowed me to work more efficiently as an actor developing a character. When issues would arise wherein I was unsure of which action to play, I would focus on what felt natural and why it worked for the play. For example, in preparing for rehearsal, I was unsure of how Nancy would react to discovering that Buckhorn had six wives before her. Would she be mad? Upset? Would she cry? Would she accuse Buckhorn immediately? That night in rehearsal, I decided to allow myself to react naturally to the situation. When the moment came and Buckhorn revealed that he had six wives, I remember looking to each character--Buckhorn, Coleman, Oby, even Bonnie and Muriel to see how they were reacting to this news. I couldn't believe it was happening. Then, I sincerely asked the question, "six wives?" As I looked to Coleman, who always had an "I told you so" expression, I became angry and demanded an answer with the line "six? I'm number seven?" Therefore, all my pre-rehearsal questions were answered with a "yes". Because I was aware of the issue, I took note of everything that happened in that moment to inform the correct response for Nancy. It was an organic process, mixed with intentional research and preparation. I felt as though this method worked well for the most part.

My in-depth study of Nancy did become an issue during rehearsal when David gave direction, which I considered to be contrary to my characterization of Nancy. After Carl's monologue, Nancy asks Coleman "don't you see, Coleman? Don't you see?" (Linney 42) In my process, I had predetermined--a word shunned by all actors--that Nancy would be torn down from the news of Buckhorn's wives and the pity and despair of Carl's monologue that she would say these lines seated. When directed to stand on the line, I fought the notion. In reflecting on the moment, Hoover notes "any person at any moment at any given time is capable of anything if their buttons are pushed in the right way" (Hoover Interview). I was closed minded to think that



Nancy wouldn't stand up in that moment. As an actor, it is my job to motivate all crosses given by the director. Hoover also mentions that "motivation is an actor's problem" (Hoover Interview). Actors must trust that the director is simply making the show look clean, and working it so that it conveys the clearest message to the audience. It is our job to create reality within the scopes of the direction and circumstances of the play. In rehearsal that night, I forgot my duty as an actor. However, David did note that as an actor, I accomplished what he as the director expected of me.

I think you did what a director wants an actor to do. I had a framework and you fleshed it out and made it better. [...] What you hope is that somebody comes in and takes your framework and they're going to run with it and they're going to make it better (Hoover Interview).

What allowed me to recognize my flaws in dealing with the etiquette of the rehearsal process was reading Jon Jory's book, Tips; Ideas for Actors. I especially liked the chapter on "Rehearsal Manners". I found I was guilty of a few: "Questions are better than statements," "Take the notes you are given; don't explain why you didn't do them previously" (Jory, 142). Saying "I don't think Nancy would do that" was not a healthy way to discuss with David my issue with his blocking. Jory quickly put me in my place and I was able to work out a solution with David when I became more malleable. Another issue I had during the process was what Jory calls "Oversteering".

There comes a time, if you are a serious, prepared actor, when you are probably micromanaging your performance. Too "heady," as they say. It has been true since the beginning that *you don't "play" your analysis* [...] If you have prepared

well, it will become the raw material for a spontaneous performance of remarkable clarity and complexity. Time to let go now (Jory 151).

This passage doesn't specifically mention what "oversteering" does within the ensemble, but in my experience with *Holy Ghosts*, micromanaging the role of Nancy became detrimental to my offstage relationships with other actors in the cast. I saw that they weren't "pulling their weight" in analyzing their character and I felt as though it was hurting my performance. I began to disrespect the actor rather than allowing theatre to be a community process.

Reading Jory's passage on "oversteering" allowed me to take a step back and let go of these prejudices. In fact, the anger I experienced toward another actor actually enhanced my performance one night in rehearsal. At the top of the show as I was preparing for the lights to come up, I heard so much noise offstage. I couldn't help fuming at the disrespect of my fellow actors and I was enraged as Coleman entered the stage. Although P. J., the actor playing Coleman, was not at fault, I took my anger out on his character. It actually energized the scene and added a new dynamic to the relationship. Using my anger toward other actors never worked for me again, however, because I decided to respect their way of creating their roles. In the end, I believe each character came to life onstage and the ensemble work within the show was outstanding. Thanks to Jory, I was able to let go of my pious attitude toward the rest of the cast. Once I released the micromanagement, I was able to have a lot more fun in the show.

My favorite part of the show's process was the rehearsal aspect. As an actor, the amount of discovery involved during rehearsal is overwhelming. Because I researched Nancy and studied her character, the rehearsal was meant to either test my hypotheses or to reveal truth in action. If I was unsure of what Nancy would do, I put her character to the test in rehearsal and saw what she did, in fact, do. Knowing who she was allowed me to be surprised by what she did

through me in rehearsal. If I had determined what Nancy would do ahead of rehearsal time, I could see if my assumption was correct and if it worked with the other actors onstage. Sometimes it didn't. For example, I imagined the relationship between Buckhorn and Nancy to be sexually driven. Because of Paxton McCaghren's characterization of Buckhorn, the relationship took on a father/daughter dynamic. Although this wasn't what I had expected or decided upon, it was the best relationship dynamic for Paxton and me. These subtle nuances found in rehearsal surprise me, excite me, and enlighten me to the truths of the play. With the new relationship between Buckhorn and Nancy, I was free to have a sexual preference for Oby. Nancy understood the man she needed as a husband was the supportive Buckhorn, but she couldn't help touching Oby any chance she could get. James Vitale, the actor playing Oby, was quick to understand this dynamic and he innocently provided me the means to fulfill my physical needs as Nancy. A touch on the arm from Oby is as satisfying to Nancy as a kiss on the lips from Buckhorn. Not only are these experiments fun, but they also allow me to tell the story of this church family in a different way, while maintaining the playwright's desires.

Once the audience came into the process, I felt it was more of a gift for the actors and the audience. We finally get to share our work with others and hope they give us something new to experience as well. The audience surprised me because moments I thought would be funny did not receive laughter and moments I thought would be moving received laughs. A live audience allows the actors onstage to experience their show with fresh eyes. The story became different, more real, more touching, and more important. David gave the note on opening night that in a show like *Holy Ghosts*, it is easy for the actor to make things funnier or to make things more dramatic. Although that did occur once the performances happened, I strove to be as sincere as possible. Especially in a show that deals with such touchy subjects such as religion, abuse,

mental illness, and animal cruelty, it is the responsibility of the actor to maintain a level of respect. In “hamming up” parts of the show or in gorging oneself emotionally, it makes the play less honest and therefore, less powerful. In our first rehearsal, David noted the show needed complete sincerity. I kept this in mind throughout the entire performance process. Without a director to give notes during performances, it is easy to take the show in a different direction. I felt as though the product our cast accomplished in dress rehearsals was the perfected product and we didn’t need to change it for an audience. Hopefully, I maintained the respect for the show throughout.

I am incredibly proud of my process during the show. I learned the importance of working with an ensemble. I learned how to roll with whatever punches my director threw at me. Lastly, I learned intimate details and remarkable truths about another human being--Nancy Shedman. Her life story, her strengths, her vulnerabilities, what she likes about herself and what she wishes she could change, her regrets, her joys, her mistakes, and what embarrasses her are all subtleties I had the pleasure of discovering. I studied and knew intimately a battered woman at the most crucial moment in her life and I walked her through the process of self-discovery. She and I fought and lost the battle against her husband, Buckhorn, and the church. We won the battle within ourselves to find what we truly want in life. We sought safety, comfort and love and instead found uncertainty and truth. Together, Nancy Shedman and I came to know one another so intimately that we were one in the same for a little over a month. This above all is the greatest gift a show can give an actor. I hope I told her story well.

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# Holy Ghosts

by Romulus Linney

Directed by David W. Hoover

*"...in forty-three years of  
Christian ministry, no  
human soul has ever been  
cast out of a church by me.  
Of course, there is a  
first time for everything."*

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## Holy Ghosts

Nancy Shedman..... Caleigh Keith†  
 Coleman Shedman ..... P. J. McKinnie†  
 Rogers Canfield ..... Peter Gabb  
 Obediah Buckhorn, Jr. .... James Vitale  
 Virgil Tides ..... Bill Mader  
 Orin Hart ..... Justin Bupp  
 Howard Rudd ..... Robert Facio  
 Lorena Cosburg ..... Sarah Chatelain  
 Mrs. Wall ..... Jan Schluter  
 Muriel Boggs ..... Kayln Hepting  
 Billy Boggs ..... Zach Rogers  
 Obediah Buckhorn, Sr. .... Paxton H. McCaghren\*  
 Carl Specter ..... Matthew Rigdon  
 Bonnie Bridge ..... Brittany Nicole Garlepied  
 Cancer Man ..... Mason Joiner

THERE WILL BE ONE TWELVE MINUTE INTERMISSION

### MEET THE CAST

**Caleigh Keith** (Nancy) is excited to be working on UNO's stage again with such a fun cast and crew! Caleigh is a candidate for an MFA in Theatrical Performance and she misses her home in the mountains of Virginia. Caleigh's recent credits include: Cassie in *Rumors* at Rivertown Repertory Theatre, Judith in *Hayfever* at UNO, and Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* at Le Petit.

**P. J. McKinnie** (Coleman) is a third-year MFA acting candidate at UNO. Recent credits: *About Time* (Dr. B) at UNO; *The Glass Menagerie* (Jim) at Le Petit; *Goodnight Moon* (Bunny) at JPAS; *An Experiment with an Air Pump* (Fenwick/Tom) at UNO; *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (Rosencrantz) at UNO; *Wine Lovers* (Brian) at Le Petit; *The Music Man* (Tommy Djilas) at Tulane Summer Lyric; *Our Town* (Stage Manager) at UNO, *Altar Boyz* (Luke) at Harrahs Casino, Southern Rep, and Le Petit; *Footloose* (Ren) at JPAS; and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Leaf Conebear) at Le Petit. Look for P.J. next as Jonathan in *Tick, Tick...BOOM!* at Café Istanbul in March. Thank you to David for this wonderful opportunity, Jenny B, and to CMK for being the best scene partner, ever.

†In partial fulfillment for an MFA in Theatre Performance  
 \*Appears Courtesy of Actors' Equity Association

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## Holy Ghosts

**Peter Gabb (Canfield)** has been active in local theater as well as TV and film shot in this area for over forty years in such varied roles as Morrie in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, and Erronius in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. He is currently featured on a website, [www.theatre1540.com](http://www.theatre1540.com), as Kid Tough, a punch-drunk ex-boxer. Peter is a graduate of UNO.

**James Vitale (Obediah)** is a senior, double majoring at UNO in Business Administration and Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts. James was last seen on the UNO stage as Oliver in *About Time*. He is thrilled to be back on stage with such a great cast. James wants to thank his family for all their support and especially Shelby for all her love! This will be James' last performance as a UNO student. "The past three years were terrific, and Always Dream Big!"

**Bill Mader (Virgil)** is thrilled to be appearing in his first show at UNO! He is a transfer student from Delgado Community College where he was recently seen as Melchior in *Spring Awakening*, and the title roles in *Bat Boy: The Musical* and *Candide*.

**Justin Bupp (Orin)** is a second-year MFA student from York, PA. He most recently appeared in *An Autobiography About My Brother* and *Outside Sitka* at UNO, *Fellatio: An Oral Discussion* as part of the 2011 New Orleans Fringe Festival, *What The Bellhop Saw* at the Millbrook Playhouse in Mill Hall, PA, and *The Curse of the Starving Class* at Lock Haven University (PA).

**Robert Facio (Howard)** is a second-year MFA student. Recently he could be seen on stage as Alan in *The Boys in the Band*, in last-year's Tennessee Williams Festival one-act contest winner *An Autobiography About My Brother* as Brian, and in the upcoming Sundance Film Festival movie *Passed Out*. Robert would like to thank his family, friends, and Hikō for their love and support.

**Sarah Chatelain (Lorena)** is very excited to be on stage and acting for the first time. She has been assistant stage manager for UNO's productions of *Our Town* and *An Experiment With An Airpump*. She has stage managed UNO's productions of *Outside Sitka* and *About Time*. She is thrilled to be working with the cast and crew of *Holy Ghosts* and is looking forward to this new experience. She would like to thank her friends and family for support.

**Jan Schluter (Mrs. Wall)** is thrilled to be in *Holy Ghosts*, as it is her first non-musical play! She spent thirty years as a chorus girl at Tulane Summer Lyric Theatre, Rivertown Repertory Theatre, and with the Jefferson Performing Arts Society. Her favorite role of late was as Ethel Toffelmeier, the piano player in TSLT's *The Music Man*, because she got to have David Hoover as a romantic interest and dance partner. Jan is the director of music at Munholland United Methodist Church, and is also a Kindermusik Educator. She thanks her hubby Steve for being Mr. Mom so she can indulge her love of performing.

## Holy Ghosts

**Kayn Hep ting (Murkel)** is so excited to be in her first UNO play! She has been working behind the scenes for many years, working in almost every aspect of "technical" theatre, but to actually be on stage again is such an honor. She is also eager to work with such a gifted set of individuals. Kayn would like to give a big hug and thank you to the FTCA department, who has taken her in and treated her like family. She also thanks her family and friends for their endless love and support.

**Zach Rogers (Billy)** is an FTCA major in his final semester at UNO. He has enjoyed his journey, and now looks forward to what the future has in store. Previous credits: *Our Town* (Charles Webb) at UNO; *Zombie Town* (Dave Wirfrey) at Le Chat Noir; *The Four of Us* (David) at Le Chat Noir; *An Experiment with an Air Pump* (Roget) at UNO; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Lysander) with the NOLA Project; *Is He Dead?* (Bastien Andre) at UNO; *Romeo and Juliet* (Paris) with the NOLA Project.

**Paxton H. McCaghen (Obediah, Sr.)** is an MFA student and is thrilled to be in his third UNO production this year and to be working with such a talented group of people. His professional credits include: *Eloi in Auto Da' Re*, Mr. Frank in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*, Onin in *Little Shop of Horrors*, Ricky Jim in *Blue Plate Special*, Corbin in *Catch Me if You Can* and others.

**Matthew Rigdon (Carl)** is a fourth-year Theatre student at UNO. His most recent performance was *A Suicide in the Key of Infomercial*. The play was performed as a staged reading at the KCACTF regional festival in Lake Charles, and for which he received an Irene Ryan nomination for acting. Some of his early UNO productions include *Indifferent Blue*, *Our Town*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Is He Dead*, and *About Time*. He would like to take this time to thank his family and friends for all their love and support.

**Britany Nicole Garlepied (Bonnie)** could not be more excited to be appearing on the University of New Orleans stage again. She was last seen as Kate in Adam Falik's *About Time*. She has enjoyed working with such a wonderful cast, crew, and director. She would also like to thank her family for their love and support.

**Mason Joiner (Cancer Man)** is a second-year film student at the University of New Orleans. This is his second production with Theatre UNO, following the 2011 Tennessee Williams Festival One-Act Winner, *An Autobiography About My Brother*. Many thanks to my family, friends, and the FTCA Department.

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## Holy Ghosts

### MEET THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Director ..... David W. Hoover  
Stage Manager ..... Jennifer Billot  
Scenic Design ..... Kevin Griffith  
Lighting Design ..... Diane K. Baas  
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Kit Sternberger  
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Mark Griffin  
Properties Master ..... Anthonyka Ferdinand  
Sound Design ..... Timothy O'Neal  
Light Board Operator ..... Aria Arthur  
Sound Board Operator ..... Rosa Yancich  
Run Crew ..... Jeff McCormick  
Poster Design ..... Mike Harkins  
Music Advisor ..... Jan Schluter  
Sound Recording ..... Clayton Hunt

**David W. Hoover (Director)** David is the chair of the department of Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts at the University of New Orleans. For the Tennessee William's Literary Festival he has directed Alec Baldwin, Elizabeth Ashley, John Goodman, Stephanie Zimbalist, Eli Wallach, and Anne Jackson. In New Orleans his acting/directing work has been seen at Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carré, Tulane Summer Shakespeare Festival, Rivertown Rep, Le Chat Noir, Southern Rep, and Tulane Summer Lyric. He has worked at several other prestigious theatres that include The Guthrie, the Dallas Theatre Center, American Southwest Theatre Company, Shakespeare Festival of Dallas, and The Lyceum. David is the recipient of the Big Easy, Marquee, Ambie, and Storer Boone Awards. Internationally he has been an adjudicator in London, lectured at the Université de Sorbonne in Paris and has taught extensively in Italy and Mexico. David received an Artist Fellowship award from the Louisiana Division of the Arts and is the recipient of UNO's coveted Career Achievement Award for Excellence in Research presented by the Alumni Association. As an actor, he was last seen in Theatre 13 and JPAS's acclaimed production of *The Drowsy Chaperone*.

**Jennifer Billot (Stage Manager)** Some of her credits include UNO's *On the Verge*, *The Laramie Project*, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, & *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. She is currently the resident Stage manager at The Elm Theatre and has returned to UNO for an MFA. In 2003 she received a regional ACTF award for excellence in stage management. She thanks her amazing cast, crew, and David.

## Holy Ghosts PRODUCTION TEAM

**Kevin Griffith (Scenic Design)** is an Associate Professor with UNO's FTCA department. He has a BFA in Theatre with emphasis in Design from Arkansas State University and an MFA in Design and Theatre Technology from the University of Southern Mississippi. Kevin has designed professionally for regional theatre, dance, and opera. Recent design work includes scenery for *The Glass Menagerie*, *Katrina's Path*, *Metamorphoses*, *Verses from Jordan*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Weird*, and *The Night of the Iguana*.

**Diane K. Baas (Lighting Design)** is in her first year on the faculty at UNO as Technical Director and Lighting Designer. She holds a BFA in Lighting and Scenic Design and a BA in Art History and Painting from Tulane University. In 2008, she received her MFA in Lighting Design from the University of Washington in Seattle. Some recent designs include *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Petite Rouge*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Opus* in New Orleans and *Emma*, *Ghost-Writer*, and *The Clean House* in her hometown of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.

**Lindy Bruns (Costume Design)** is a second year graduate student in the Costume Design program at UNO. Her recent costume design work at UNO, includes *About Time*, *Outside Sitka*, and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. She would like to thank the cast and crew for making this show such an enjoyable experience. She would also like to thank her friends and family for all of their support.

**Kit Sternberger (Assistant Stage Manager)** is in her second year as a theatre major. Recently she has stage managed *Fellatio: An Oral Discussion* for New Orleans Fringe Festival, and *An Autobiography About My Brother* (initially at UNO's New Play Festival), which, in the spring, will be her second time working at the Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival (the first having been last year's *The Glass Menagerie*). She looks forward to stage managing *A Man of No Importance* next!

**Mark Griffin (Assistant Stage Manager)** is a sophomore FTCA student. He last worked as the assistant stage manager for *An Autobiography About My Brother*. He is incredibly excited for audience members to see all the hard work the cast and crew have been putting into *Holy Ghosts*. Mark would like to thank his fellow crew and cast members for creating an enjoyable work environment and his family and friends for believing in him.

## Holy Ghosts Production Team

**Anthonyka Ferdinand (Properties Master)** is a UNO student pursuing a degree in theatre design. Previously a student of Southeastern Louisiana, Anthonyka has found an interest in theatre design. She is currently working as a shop assistant in UNO's scene shop. She hopes to gain insight into the different aspects of scene design by being a part of *Holy Ghosts* and looks forward to working with the cast and crew.

**Timothy O'Neal (Sound Design)** is pleased to be working sound on his first production at UNO. His sound credits include Andrew Lipka's *The Wild Party* at OnStage Atlanta and *Schoolhouse Rock Live!* at Southern Arena Theatre. He most recently directed *About Time* for UNO's New Play Festival and appeared onstage as Clara in *Hay Fever* last fall.

### Special Thanks to

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**Transcription: Interview with Director David Hoover**

CALEIGH: First of all, what were your primary thoughts on Caleigh's performance?

DAVID: I thought she was fantastic. I think it was challenging and not challenging. I think it was excellent casting so I felt like the character was right in her wheelhouse. So in that sense I guess my expectation was very high. And I felt it was met.

CALEIGH: That was my next question. As the director, did the performance fulfill the needs of the show in your opinion?

DAVID: Yes.

CALEIGH: Okay. What do you think were the needs of Nancy?

DAVID: Well, I think some of what you say in the prospectus about developing credible relationships with the husband but then also the idea we have to believe she's either naïve enough or in need enough to seek out a relationship with this senior pastor. And I thought that was all credible. And I thought the arc was well realized--where she starts and where she ends.

CALEIGH: So, about the relationship between Nancy and Coleman--what do you think, was it believable they were at one time in love? What would you say made them fall in love and what made them so distant from each other?

DAVID: Well, I think the reason they fell in love with each other has a lot to do with their socio-economic status. In other words, they're of a world where the female would be expected to marry and procreate at a certain time and have a family. Not in any sense of an arranged marriage but just the expectation of marriage and having babies. She is projecting that kind of life. At the same time on Coleman's side of the equation, he has been handed down a business, he brings in the income, the next step would be to get married. So, I certainly wouldn't call the marriage one of convenience, but certainly of expectation, for its time and place.

CALEIGH: And then, you just think they came into it at different places and they realized those different places, which tore them apart?

DAVID: Yeah, I think the expectations on both their parts were naïve. And I think in a weird way, where I think we feel sorry for Nancy or where we have empathy for Nancy is that she tried to make this work whereas you sort of sense that Coleman fell into sort of a male dominant existence that led to abusiveness.

CALEIGH: So at the top of the play, when Coleman and Nancy first meet, do you think that dynamic was achieved between PJ and I?

DAVID: Um, the dynamic of the relationship?

CALEIGH: Yeah, the idea we were just in it for convenience--

DAVID: Well, I don't think they were in it for convenience, only there's that expectation but I also think part of it was they were in love with each other. Love is a part of the expectation, too.

CALEIGH: Do you think that was portrayed?

DAVID: I think it was. I think there's a natural sense of not understanding how hard you have to work at that dynamic, some of that is natural. It should all be natural and of course it's not. I think it was. I think in that opening my only frustration was Coleman needed to drive the energy and pace faster. But I wasn't unhappy. From the point of view of the audience, it got us where we should be at the beginning, which was "okay, what is going on? What is the relationship of these two people?" I thought it unfolded for the audience in a good way. So I mean, though I always felt the energy of the first scene needed to drive faster, I may be wrong. From an audience's point of view, it might have been what we needed to understand where the characters were.

CALEIGH: So about the religion of the play, what do you think-- as portrayed by me-- because this is a tough topic in this play, what do you think Nancy's relationship to religion is at the top of the play?

DAVID: Well, I think -- and I don't want to sound like an atheist or something -- no, I think the idea is that it's a combination of things. The need that religious people have, the need to think there's something bigger than ourselves coupled with her upbringing, which dictates there's something bigger than yourself. So, I guess I'll answer it backwards. When she walks out at the end, I'm not sure she's leaving religion. And in my personal mind, I don't think she has. She has just a different understanding of it maybe. But that there's a little bit of a question mark I think is okay. You can take that exit however you want and I think that's okay.

CALEIGH: So then, when I'm reading the Bible at the top of the play, what did you see Nancy needed?

DAVID: Well, I think she's looking for guidance from something other than a parent figure. Here's where the socioeconomic comes in: any guidance she would get from a parent would be "you need to get back to that house and make it right with your man." I'm just guessing. Something like that. She's looking for higher guidance.

CALEIGH: Dad tells you no, go ask mom.

DAVID: Well there is a little bit of that too, which we do as humans. If we don't get the answer we want, we keep seeking. I know that seems weird, but I don't think it is weird.

CALEIGH: That was a big issue when studying Nancy and asking the question, before Nancy came to the church, how religious was she? What made her cling to this religion and by the end of the play, what is her religion? So, then if she's not leaving religion in the play, why do you think she did leave?



DAVID: Because she realized she was using the church as a safe harbor rather than a means to answer her questions.

CALEIGH: At what point did you see that change in Nancy in the performance?

DAVID: Well, I think unlike Coleman's progression, which has a steady chipping away, I think her revelation is a little more sudden and it starts with "six wives." And then the slap becomes a punctuation of that.

CALEIGH: And even after the slap, there's four pages before you get to the slow motion, which directorially, is a very clear mark of change.

DAVID: Well, I don't think it was a mark of change; I think it was me trying to isolate us seeing you specifically.

CALEIGH: Would you say the slow motion would be when she's making her decision as to what she's going to do?

DAVID: Yes. The thing is if you come in and you believe something and someone questions it, you're not going to immediately accept it. I'm out, done. It's going to be a process and then there's usually one thing that does it.

CALEIGH: Okay, moving away from the play itself and moving toward working in the rehearsal process, would you say my method was clear?

DAVID: Yes.

CALEIGH: What did you notice about the method I was choosing?

DAVID: Well, I think in your process, what excited me this time around was that I watched you applying technique as opposed to relying on instinct. And I think it's a weird balance. I remember when I went back to my undergraduate school and I was talking to my mentor, Mark Medoff. He said, "How's graduate school?" and I said "I'm loving it. I'm putting a name to these

instinctual, subconscious things I've thought or known." And he said, "Be careful. I sent an actor to graduate school and they taught him how to act and now he's no damn good." I think there's a process of graduate school--and I think you're representative of this in a way. You come in, and you've relied on your home-grown, natural, instinctual being, then you learn and begin to apply technique. Now you've got to be careful that you don't just rely on technique. Eventually there's a balance of living in the moment. Actors are often unbending if someone gives them something they haven't planned for and they're unbending in how they react to something new. So, it's like "I'm on this dime and I'm not going to move from here unless you give me the reason that I need to move." And I think sometimes that's when you move past your technique and live in the moment. How will you bob and weave with what you're getting?

What I'm saying is that you've applied technique, which I think has served you well. Now I'm putting it out there as a warning for you to not lose your sense of being able to bob and weave.

CALEIGH: Which is especially hard in this show being an ensemble show. It's also hard because when you do so much work and study--and you probably know this more than anyone as the director. You do so much work and then someone's butchering what you think is the right way for the play. My question coming from this is was there any choice I made as Nancy that was different than what you had in your mind for the show?

DAVID: No. I think you did what a director wants an actor to do. I had a framework and you fleshed it out and made it better. I always feel like as a director I want to know how to play every character. If I had to step in and play someone I want to know a base level of how each character could be played so when somebody's not even in the ballpark, I can keep serving up things to get them to the base level. What you hope is that somebody comes in and takes your framework and they're going to run with it and they're going to make it better.

CALEIGH: And it was monumental for me when you said “No, Nancy’s a spitfire” and I thought *yes, she is!* In my mind I wanted to play her very meek and victimized and I would have a really hard time with these fireball lines. It didn’t work. I tried hard to go one way with the character, and you knowing the baseline of the character really helped me fix that problem.

DAVID: Well, look at the choices she’s made up to this point. It would take a strong person to make those choices. But I think you’re right. I can see the trap of “Oh, I’m saved by Oby” but no, to actually go with somebody like that is pretty strong-willed.

CALEIGH: And to take your husband’s furniture is pretty sassy.

DAVID: Right. And I think in a weird way, it becomes part of the attraction for Buckhorn. I think that’s why this one is different. I think maybe he’s been with the meek and mild.

CALEIGH: I do think she tries to be sweet and mild especially with the other characters.

DAVID: But I also think that she does genuinely care for them; that’s why it becomes hard because you do care for these people. Romulus Linney cares for these people and that’s why he doesn’t just let them be crazy buffoons, which would be easy.

CALEIGH: So maybe rather than putting on airs of mildness, maybe she’s embarrassed when the spitfire comes out because it’s not appropriate for church.

DAVID: Well, one of my favorite moments in the play was when you prayed, “Oh please, you know my husband’s a mess.” First of all, it cracked me up because I thought it was funny. But what I also loved was how it was so Nancy, the idea of “I’m going to get myself there. I’m going to force myself into this prayer. I want to be this person.” It was as much about that energy as it was about the prayer.

CALEIGH: I felt that as well.

DAVID: That made it funny, but it was also credible for that reason, too.

CALEIGH: So, what was it like working alongside me in rehearsals? Pleasant? Unpleasant?

DAVID: It was lovely until the day I had you stand up or sit down or something and I wanted to say to you: “Are you sassing me? It’s a stand up; I’m not asking you to wear a bonnet!”

CALEIGH: You are right. It’s like what we were saying. I’ve done my research, I feel like I know her, and what she would do and it is not stand up.

DAVID: And it is *not* stand up.

CALEIGH: It changed because I was still trying to play the meek, hurt Nancy. It was the duality of what is appropriate in church and what I’m going to do in this moment because I’m so pissed off.

DAVID: And I always motivation is an actor’s problem. A director has more jobs than just creating pretty pictures, but “picturization” and composition are a major part of my function. An actor can motivate things fifty different ways, they just have to pick one.

CALEIGH: Yeah, I was totally guilty of unbending on that.

DAVID: I always love when actors say, “I don’t think my character would do that” because it’s like what Jeffrey Dahmer’s neighbors would say. “He’s such a nice boy, I didn’t think he would be a serial killer” It’s like what do you mean you don’t think your character would do that? Any person at any moment at any given time is capable of anything if their buttons are pushed in the right way. But sometimes I’m even aware of weird crosses or something but I just need to get you over here. And I think that happened in the show and I say “I’m aware and I know it’s a funky cross or a funky moment.” But again, you made it look great and natural and that’s my expectation of a good actor.

CALEIGH: Did you feel the dynamic of the ensemble was good in this show? And what made it good or bad?

DAVID: I think two things were really instrumental: Short rehearsal period because I kind of forced everybody to be there all the time fairly early on which I think was helpful. I wouldn't have done that with a longer rehearsal period. I would have broken it up so people didn't have to be there all the time. I think that helped. And you have people onstage the whole time. I call it the 1776 complex. You've got continental congress sitting there the whole time. It's incredibly difficult to stay in the moment on stage all the time when you're not talking. It's really hard. So, I was really happy with it because it was a great exercise for our students to have that. Being an ensemble doesn't mean everyone has to like each other, but we all have to work together with the same energy. I think it was successful in that way. I could see the surprise when I would call students out because they don't think I can see them and read they're not in. That's important to understand. Nobody ever tried to argue with me so it was clear: I called them out.

CALEIGH: Do you think I did my best work on *Holy Ghosts*?

DAVID: I do. I mean I'm obviously totally biased. You did your best work under my guidance.

CALEIGH: Well, since shows like *Air Pump* and *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Hay Fever*, would you say you could see development since my work in those shows?

DAVID: I can definitely see development; mostly in rehearsal because this is where the natural talent comes out. It's not outed in performance; it's outed in rehearsal. I really like your rehearsal investment. To me, that's what I love about theatre is rehearsal performances. The fun of acting or directing is in rehearsal because it's about discovery. Especially when I act I like rehearsal because there's no bad choice, but performance implies you've found all the right choices and I don't like that pressure.

CALEIGH: Would you say that before I would rely on instincts and therefore be more lax in the work? But this time you could see the work?

DAVID: Yeah, looking at *The Glass Menagerie*-- doesn't that seem like a hundred years ago?

CALEIGH: Yes!

DAVID: There seemed to be more laissez faire in *The Glass Menagerie* than there was in *Holy Ghosts* and maybe that's a time thing and a benefit to having short rehearsal but in *The Glass Menagerie* it was like "the lines are going to come"; it was a sense of "I'm going to be good, don't worry." However, for *Holy Ghosts*, there was an energy of "we have a short rehearsal period, and I want to get after this as quickly as I can and really try to get into the juice of it and the meat of it."

## **Vita**

Caleigh Keith was born and raised in the Appalachian Mountains of Roanoke, Virginia to Kip Keith and Margaret Palmer. She graduated as a valedictorian of William Byrd High School in 2007. She graduated Suma Cum Laude and received her Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from Bluefield College in December of 2009. After moving to New Orleans, Caleigh began her graduate school career at The University of New Orleans with a graduate assistantship in the Office of New Student Orientation. She currently lives in Metairie, Louisiana.