

STARLESS  
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Eric Rice

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WHEN: Now.

WHERE: Edmonton, Alberta.

CAST LIST: Ethnicities and ages are flexible.

RALPH: A homeless man, 60 in the play.

MARY: A homeless woman, Ralph's love.

PAUL: A boy in his early teens.

AMANDA: A young woman, a reporter for an online newspaper.

The following characters can be doubled-up and played by the same actors.

LANDLORD: A self-made man.

CONST: A municipal police officer.

PRIEST: A man.

VENDOR: An artist.

ACT 1  
SCENE ONE

SETTING: *A public park, as indicated by a tree, and off to one side, a bench. Under the tree is a homeless "camp". A few blankets, some boxes, some bags, some clothes strewn about.*

AT RISE: *Ralph, a homeless man, is sleeping in the blankets. Const enters and approaches.*

CONST Ralph! Ralphio! *(He pushes Ralph gently with his foot.)* Time to rise and shine my friend. People are gonna' be out and about soon.

*(Ralph grunts and rolls over. Behind them Amanda enters, watches, and takes photos.)*

CONST Come on old boy! The sun is rising, the market people are already here and setting up. They've got some carnival thing today. Gonna' be bouncy castles and families. You won't like it at all.

*(Ralph shakes and grunts and rolls over again. The Const pushes him harder with his foot.)*

CONST Listen you old reprobate. Get up and clear up your camp or I'll have to call the van on you. Then you'll end up all the way on the other side of the river.

RALPH Whereizzit?

CONST This is the park my friend, and in about an hour it's going to be full of people, and you have to be gone.

RALPH Whoizzit?

CONST It's me buddy. Constable Dolphin. Hey big nose. Remember me? I'm your regular wake up call. Look me in the eye there will you? Let me see that you're awake. Sheesh! Your hygiene is seriously lacking my friend. I'd throw you in the river but I'd get arrested for pollution. Come on now. Pack up your camp and put it away will you? Lost your tongue? Lost your will? I'll tell you what I will, old man. I will you to get your stuff picked up. And I mean now. There's gonna' be politicians and everything

here today. They don't want to see you hanging around. It will remind them that not everybody is prosperous. Now hurry up!

*(Const shakes Ralph. Amanda snaps more pictures and leaves. Ralph slowly gets to his feet.)*

CONST Are you with me Ralph? Are you here?

RALPH There's no here.

CONST Yes there is, because we're both part of it. Now come on. Show me you're alive, will ya?

*(Ralph slowly pats his clothes and shuffles around. He winces, stops, puts his hands on his side and leans over.)*

RALPH I hurt. No Mary.

CONST That's right! You've got your wits about you don't you buddy?

RALPH She was here.

CONST Then she must be gone with the morning light. Poof! Like a spirit.

RALPH Like a spirit.

CONST Yeah, like a spirit. Now, are you going to get your stuff picked up or am I going to have to toss everything into the big dumpster behind the church?

*(Ralph begins to gather up his things as the Constable watches him. Ralph finds a glove in the pile and holds it up for the Constable to see.)*

RALPH Not a spirit. See? This is hers.

CONST Yes, that's hers. Good find. Now, will you hurry up?

*(Ralph's arms are full, and he turns to move off stage with his camp. The Constable picks up the last couple things gingerly and follows him off.)*

CONST Jesus Ralph. You're really gonna' have to book an appointment to wash some clothes. This stuff is fucking disgusting.

*(In a moment or two Ralph returns, and sits on the bench. A Vendor enters, carrying a table and art supplies and starts to set up a booth. Ralph watches him. The Vendor stops, and regards him.)*

VENDOR How's it going? You look pretty rough. I'm sorry. I don't have any change this morning. (*Ralph does not respond.*) What are you doing around here?

RALPH I sleep here.

VENDOR Where? You don't sleep in the tree, do you?

RALPH I had to move my things. Bouncy castles.

VENDOR Oh. It's a popular place isn't it?

RALPH People. Flesh-bags.

VENDOR The crowds are good for you aren't they? You must make a lot off panhandling.

RALPH Not allowed.

VENDOR Oh. I really love this place on Saturdays. Lots of life. Lots of different people. What do you do with yourself anyway?

RALPH Nothing.

VENDOR I mean when you get kicked out of here. What do you do? Do you go to a shelter or drop-in centre?

RALPH Mary takes care of me.

VENDOR Is she your nurse? Social worker?

RALPH She is my heart.

VENDOR Oh. Where is she?

RALPH She is gone. Like a spirit. She has to come back.

VENDOR Can't you call her or something?

RALPH Stupid man.

VENDOR Why is that stupid?

RALPH No phones. No homes. No nothing. We're nothing! Can't you see? You don't understand anything.

VENDOR I can relate to you. I can. I've been down and out before too. It's not fun. When I was going to art school I stayed in a one room apartment with three other people. God we had fights. Nobody wanted to clean anything. It was a pig sty. We were artists, man, barely ate. Rough times.

*(Ralph gets up, and moves toward one edge of the stage, looks, stops, comes back. He moves to the other side of the stage, looks, stops, comes back.)*

RALPH Rough times. Alone.

VENDOR It was all worth it though. I never would have gotten to where I am today without that experience. It taught me things. How to struggle. How to survive. How to look into the black soul of the abyss and not quail at the sight.

RALPH Chaos. Chaos and bars.

VENDOR Exactly man. Chaos and bars. Wild nights on the town. Drinking until the morning and painting all day.

RALPH No. Bars. Bars in cages. Chaos through the bars.

VENDOR Chaos through the bars. I don't get it.

RALPH Chaos is all there is. Bars. We try to build cages to keep us in. But it's just bars. Bars in the chaos. You don't understand. Where is Mary?

VENDOR I don't know man. Listen, don't you have any idea where she might be? You guys must go places during the day. Soup kitchens. Something.

RALPH We go places. She shouldn't be going places without me.

*(Ralph circles slowly in one spot, wringing his hands.)*

VENDOR Don't get upset. It will be okay.

RALPH No it won't.

VENDOR Sure. I bet you two have been separated before.

RALPH No. Not for ever. Not since the first died. *(After a pause.)* Ten years.

VENDOR Since the first did what?

RALPH She died. The bastards. She was mine and then she died. Bastards! Killers. She died. Eyes like the empty window. Skin cold like the sidewalk.

VENDOR So you had a tragedy. I can understand that. And it sent you for a spin, I bet. I can imagine if my wife died I'd be pretty broken up. Of course I've got my painting and that would help me through but if I couldn't do that...Christ. That would be hard. I can see how that would affect a man. We're all this close to death all the time, aren't we? But still, that was a tragedy. A tragedy is not an excuse to give up. Look at me. If I had given up when things were tough I never would have gotten to where I am today. A successful artist. Paintings in galleries around town.

RALPH No success. Never had success.

VENDOR What did you used to do before you became, who you are. Did you used to work?

RALPH Had a job. Gone too. Everything's gone. Mary's gone. Dead? What if?

VENDOR Look. Just calm down, okay? Look around you. It's a beautiful day.

RALPH What if?

VENDOR She's not dead, okay? There were no ambulances when I came here. No bodies. Nothing. It's going to be fine.

RALPH Nothing. Nothing. There is nothing.

*(Ralphs sits on the bench, clutching his stomach.)*

VENDOR You poor bugger. When was the last time you had something to eat?

RALPH Don't know.

VENDOR *(Digging some food out of his pack and handing it to Ralph.)* Here. You need this more than me.

*(Ralph takes the food and eats, and it seems to focus him.)*

RALPH She is beautiful, like the sun in the morning when it warms your face. Like the moon at night when it cools you.

VENDOR That's beautiful.

RALPH I paint.

VENDOR You paint? With what?

RALPH I paint. Pictures for Mary. She tells me where to go, and we walk. And I paint the world for her so she can see it. With words. She can't see. Not much. How could she go away? How could she go without me? She could be lost.

VENDOR You paint with words. The medium of the poets. Do you want to see what I do? I paint with acrylic. *(With great love he pulls a painting out of its carry-case and shows it to Ralph. It is an abstract that looks vaguely like a night sky.)*

VENDOR I call it "Van Gogh Loses His Palette". Do you get it? It's Starry Night without colour.

RALPH Stars. Those aren't stars.

VENDOR That's art.

RALPH Lies.

VENDOR Art is the lie that shows us the truth. That's what Picasso said.

RALPH Art decorates the cage. *(gesturing)* We live in cages. Can't see them. Can't feel them. They're everywhere.

VENDOR I know what you mean. So many old rules to overthrow before we're free. We think we know what reality is but we're just looking through the bars of a cage – they may not be real but they sure hold us back. What's art? What's reality? What's in between? Those cages of thought. We've got to dissipate them. Chase them away. Scare them like the ghosts that they are and they go "Poof" and disappear.

RALPH Cages are real. Bars are real. Chaos is real.

*(The Constable enters.)*

CONST You still here Ralph? I thought I told you to take a walk. Vamoose. Scram-a-lam-a-ding-dong. Is this man bothering you?

VENDOR No. We were just, talking.

RALPH He doesn't understand. He doesn't know about...

CONST About what my friend?

RALPH About anything.

CONST Here's what I know Ralph. If you aren't moved along out of here in about two minutes you're gonna' get a ride downtown. And then you'll have to hoof your way all the way back here and your shoes aren't in very good shape. So split.

RALPH Mary's gone. I don't know where to find her. She was here. She was here last night. And now she's gone. She's never gone.

CONST Then she'll be back. Don't worry about it. Find your way back here tonight and she'll come find you. You're like two peas in a pod. Two stars in a constellation.

RALPH Stars. Can't see the stars.

CONST Seriously Ralph. If you don't move. Now. You're not going to see stars for a long time because I'm going to lock you up. Now move!

VENDOR What does she look like?

RALPH Her hair is silver, like clouds that reflect the city lights. Her eyes are blue like the river in summer. Her dress is like poplar leaves in the autumn. She's beautiful.

VENDOR There was a lady at the Second Cup this morning. Long gray hair. That kind of sounds like her.

CONST You see Ralph! Your lady love's only a few blocks away. Go find her. Run!

RALPH Only a few blocks?

VENDOR Here. I feel like I'm kicking you out of your space for the day. Take some money, and buy yourself a coffee.

*(The Vendor digs into his wallet and offers him a bill, but the Constable puts his hand out to stop him.)*

CONST Don't give him too much cash. It just makes him a target. Some of his street friends would rob him.

VENDOR How about some coins, is that okay?

CONST Sure.



*(The Vendor offers Ralph some coins. After a long moment Ralph takes the coins and looks at them. Clutching them in his hand he walks slowly off.)*

CONST Sorry about that.

VENDOR No problem really. What's his story? He seems like quite the guy.

CONST What I heard was that he was once a very prominent businessman in Edmonton. Owned a chain of lube shops, or fitness centres...something. And then he just lost it. Started drinking. Lost everything. Wound up here. You heard that bit about the river in summer? He talks like that sometimes. Like poetry. And he swears that his lady friend is beautiful. She's not really. *(He shakes his head.)* I can never figure it out, you know? Why some people end up on the street and others are just fine.

VENDOR Go figure.

CONST Go figure. You have a good day.

VENDOR Thanks. You too.

*(The Constable exits.)*

END OF SCENE ONE

## SCENE TWO

SETTING: *A sidewalk outside a coffee shop, as indicated by a few small tables with chairs.*

AT RISE: *The sidewalk is bare. Ralph enters, walking very slowly. He is clutching the money in his hand. As he walks coins fall from his grasp. Paul enters, watches him. He picks up the coins.*

PAUL Hey mister? You dropped your money.

RALPH Mary's not here.

PAUL Do you want your money?

RALPH Her hair shines like this silver. And her voice is like...like the sound of chimes. She smiles, like the sun. She's not here. Have you seen her?

PAUL No. Sorry.

*(Ralph starts to cough, and has trouble stopping.)*

PAUL You better sit down. *(Helping him.)* Here, I'll get some water. You stay there for a minute.

*(Paul exits into the coffee shop, and returns a moment later with a glass of water and a muffin.)*

PAUL Here. The guy inside gave me a muffin for you. No charge. They said it was an offering for the King. King Ralph.

RALPH Mary is the Queen. Everybody calls her the Queen. Because she's so beautiful. We used to lay at night and watch stories in the folds of the constellations. The Broken Dove. The Shattered Heart. The Lost One. King Ralph and the Queen of Love.

PAUL Stories?

RALPH That story was about us. About Mary. And her love for me. She loved me and made me into a man. Before I was the mud. I was ground glass. I was dog shit. I was nothing. And she made me with her love. And we were happy.

*(Ralph starts to cry and wipes his nose.)*

PAUL I've never heard of those constellations.

RALPH We had a different sky. But the lights took over. Streetlamp and house and coffee shop. And we didn't have any place to go, so we stayed. Where the stars are shut out. And now she's gone.

PAUL Maybe she decided to go get some food.

RALPH She wouldn't leave me for food.

PAUL Maybe she had to go visit somebody.

RALPH No! You don't understand. You don't know anything.

*(As they are talking Amanda approaches and sits at another table.)*

PAUL I know a lot of stuff.

RALPH Bad things. Crazy things. You don't know those.

PAUL I've seen some things too.

RALPH Nothing. Nothingness. Don't know the scream of men when they finally give up. Realize their god is no man's. Don't know the shivers or the shakes. Don't know a dead woman's eyes in the morning.

PAUL Is that...Mary? Is she dead?

RALPH No. That was my first wife. Dead and gone. And now my Mary's gone too. Damn them. Damn them whoever took her.

PAUL Can't you go find her?

RALPH Don't know where to go. Somebody said they saw her here. Bastards. Liars. Cheats!

*(Pause.)*

PAUL Are you crazy?

RALPH Cage talk, crazy. The world is crazy. I'm not.

PAUL My grampa used to say that a sane man living in an insane world would look like he was crazy to everybody else.

RALPH Smart grampa.

PAUL           He died.

RALPH         Was he, your heart?

PAUL           Yes.

RALPH         You do know then.

PAUL           Wait here a minute, okay?

*(Paul gets up and goes inside the coffee shop. Returns a moment later.)*

PAUL           They said that they saw Mary earlier but they don't know where she went.

RALPH         She could be that way?

PAUL           Yeah. Or that way I guess.

RALPH         I can't walk far.

PAUL           Why not?

RALPH         I don't know. My stomach. My insides. Mary's worried.

PAUL           Are you going to be all right?

RALPH         Yes.

PAUL           My grampa was sick, before he died. My mom and me were taking care of him. But they took him away in an ambulance. They took him to the hospital even though he didn't want to go. He died there. He used to tell me stories. Like the ones you were talking about.

RALPH         Hospitals. Graves. Breathers live there.

PAUL           Breathers?

RALPH         That's all they do. Is breathe. And people think they're alive. I was there once. In hospital. I ran away. And then I found Mary. And now she's gone. And now there's nothing.

PAUL           Do you want to go look for her?

RALPH         I can't walk far. She always stayed close by. She can't see very well. I don't understand.

PAUL She's got silver hair, right? And she's old kind of like you?

RALPH No. She's not as old as me.

PAUL I'm going to go look around the neighbourhood a little bit to see if I can find her for you then, okay? I'll come back as soon as I can. You stay put.

RALPH Here?

PAUL Yes, here.

*(Paul exits. After a moment Amanda approaches.)*

AMANDA Hi. My name is Amanda. How are you? I work with the CAN, Citizen Action News. Have you heard of it? Do you mind if I sit down?

RALPH News. Word vomit. Cage fixers.

AMANDA I agree. Most news is word vomit, as you put it. Garbage about garbage. We're different. No corporate managers tell us what to do. We're about the news. About the truth.

RALPH No truth here. No news here.

AMANDA I disagree. You are the news. Poverty. Homelessness. Marginalized people in a rich society. The most important issues. I was wondering if I could interview you for the paper. I've seen you around before, and your wife. Is she your wife?

RALPH Mary. You've seen Mary?

AMANDA Of course. She's a very interesting woman.

RALPH She's beautiful. Have you seen her today?

AMANDA I haven't. But I've watched you both. I know you.

RALPH Bastards. She's gone. I found this.

*(Ralph pulls the ratty glove out of his pocket and shows her.)*

RALPH It's all I could find. Someone has taken her away.

AMANDA If that's true Ralph don't worry. We'll find her for you, okay? We'll raise hell until we do.

*(She pulls a small audio recorder out of her bag and puts it on the table.)*

- AMANDA It's just an audio recorder. I'm not good at notes. Do you mind? This will make sure that I don't miss anything you say.
- RALPH Progress. Machinery. Controls the words.
- AMANDA What do you mean?
- RALPH This will let you repeat things. Find your theme. Shape your points.
- AMANDA Well yes. Isn't that what writers do?
- RALPH It's what we all do.
- AMANDA I suppose that's true. Earlier this morning I saw that policeman kicking you in the park. Do you want to talk about that?
- RALPH Shaking. Pushing. Kicking. It doesn't matter.
- AMANDA Did he hurt you?
- RALPH I just hurt, that's all.
- AMANDA So do you feel that the police assaulting you is kind of accepted, that it's standard practice for them to treat the homeless and vulnerable that way?
- RALPH I didn't say that. Twister. You're a word twister.
- AMANDA I'm not trying to twist things. I'm trying to understand.
- RALPH Tricky. Tricky. I'm just a body. Soon to rot and die. Don't twist me.
- AMANDA Putting events into a larger context is not necessarily twisting them. There's thousands of homeless in this city that suffer like you do.
- RALPH But I'm only me. No suffering. No fate. No crime. Just me.
- AMANDA Do you agree with what I said? You didn't object at all when he shook you. It's like you don't even notice it any more.
- RALPH I don't. I need to go find Mary.
- AMANDA Didn't that boy that was with you say that he was going to search for her? You don't want to be gone when he comes back, do you? What if he finds

her? I really want to tell your story. I've watched you. I know how you live. Please talk to me.

RALPH       What for?

AMANDA      Because people need to know about you, about the homeless. They're stupid Ralph. They work and they buy things and they walk past you and they don't have a fucking clue who you are or that you have your own story. They need to hear it. They're flesh-bags. Idiots.

RALPH       I'll wait...for Mary.

AMANDA      Good. Thank you. Where were you born?

RALPH       A city. A hospital. A manger.

AMANDA      Do you remember what your parents did?

RALPH       Two-headed. Torturers.

AMANDA      Two-headed?

RALPH       Every parent has two heads. One for their children. One for the world.

AMANDA      All right, I see. Torturers?

RALPH       What do parents do? They take away your thinking. Make you Hindu, or Muslim, or Christian. Put you in a culture. Culture is a cage. Everything is in the cage. Your parents do that.

AMANDA      Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

RALPH       I grew up. It was cold in the winter and hot in the summer. We played in the snow and the water. They taught us in schools, how to read and write and think. We fought, rebelled.

AMANDA      In Edmonton? Or Calgary?

RALPH       Doesn't matter.

AMANDA      It does to my readers. They want specifics. It makes a better story.

RALPH       Cage talk. Bullshit.

AMANDA      Okay then. What happened next?

RALPH I was a writer.

AMANDA What kind of writer? Books, journalism?

RALPH Journalism.

AMANDA For a newspaper, or radio, or tv?

RALPH I can't remember.

AMANDA You can't remember?

RALPH No.

AMANDA Then what?

*(Pause.)*

RALPH Then something bad happened.

AMANDA What happened?

RALPH I don't want to say. That's all you need to know.

AMANDA All I need to know? You've given me nothing so far! You were born somewhere, grew up somewhere, were a writer somewhere and then something bad happened. I can't base a story on that.

RALPH Pick some dates, pick some names, pick some lies. Born on some date, to parents who were something ...overprotective, drunks, druids. Went to school at something or other...

AMANDA Something memorable had to happen while you were growing up. Come on, give me something to go on.

RALPH No! Ran away, had success, was happy, found tragedy, collapsed, fell, disappeared. There's no other story.

AMANDA There's thousands.

RALPH Bullshit.

AMANDA You said you were a writer. You were probably able to support yourself. How do you compare being homeless to being independent?



RALPH I don't. We are all homeless. Every one is the same. Wake up. Piss. Eat. Spend time. And how we do it doesn't matter. That's the truth. Liars write books, make laws, tell you different. Cage builders. Cage fixers. Go lock yourself in a cage if you want to. Lock yourself in like a dog, and wallow in your own spit. Are we done now?

AMANDA So you see no hope for the future?

RALPH Hope is nothing. Hope crap. Cage crap. No difference if you sleep in a bed or a park. You'll rot. I'll rot. Which one rots first is luck, and that's all.

AMANDA So there is nothing worthwhile? What about Mary? What about your wife?

RALPH She is my heart.

AMANDA So you love someone. What about love? How do you reconcile something like love with a life where we all just die and rot?

RALPH I don't. It's a miracle.

AMANDA You believe in miracles and you don't believe in dignity, respect or life itself? How do you define a miracle?

RALPH Beyond words. Beyond the cage. Through the bars. Like sunlight. Like warmth. Like magic. Not of this world. There is nothing in this world.

AMANDA There is nothing in this world? Is social justice so far away that you are prepared to give up and die?

RALPH Do you know what magic is?

AMANDA No.

RALPH Magic is like "poof", and people disappear. (*Gesturing toward her.*) Now. Poof! POOF!! Go and die.

AMANDA I'm very sad for you.

RALPH Same story. Same ending. Happy rotting.

AMANDA I'll see you around. (*Amanda starts to leave, but pauses, and turns back.*) I will write a story about you. And the policeman and how he treated you. Some stories should be told.

RALPH        Fuck off.

*(Amanda turns on her heel and leaves. Ralph gestures to Paul.)*

RALPH        Did you find Mary?

PAUL         No. But I found where she went after this.

RALPH        Where?

PAUL         To the church. To the soup kitchen.

*(Ralph gets up and begins walking. Paul walks with him.)*

PAUL         I used to go with my grampa for walks, near the end. He couldn't go very far.

RALPH        What was his name?

PAUL         George.

RALPH        Oh. I've never known a George.

PAUL         He was really old. Eighty-five. How old are you?

RALPH        Not that old.

PAUL         You look about as old as he was.

RALPH        I'm only 60.

*(Ralph stops.)*

PAUL         What are we stopping for?

RALPH        My stomach hurts.

PAUL         What's wrong with you?

RALPH        I chew on the truth. It's poison.

*(They stand for a moment.)*

PAUL         Where do you live?

RALPH        In the park.

PAUL           That's cool. I like the park.

RALPH         It's not free. Not even the park. The sky is caged. Grass is caged. Nowhere left.

PAUL           The good things of the earth have been stolen by liars and cheats. That's what he used to say.

RALPH         George?

PAUL           Yeah.

*(They walk, and come to the outside of a church.)*

RALPH         The sky. The stars. God. All caged. All stolen.

PAUL           Mom's a big believer. Grampa and her used to fight all the time about it.

RALPH         Do you go here?

PAUL           For mom. *(shrugs)* The priest's okay. He doesn't try to convert me like the one did back home. He said he wants to talk to you.

RALPH         Souls for sandwiches.

PAUL           Are you coming in?

RALPH         No. Won't go in.

*(The door opens, and the Priest steps out.)*

RALPH         Big man. God speaker. Where's Mary?

PRIEST         How are you today Ralph?

RALPH         Saved. Heavenly. What did you do with her?

PRIEST         One of the volunteers took her downtown. She had some errands. She said to tell you that you were sleeping and she didn't want to wake you and that everything would be okay. She said that you haven't been feeling well lately. Is that true?

RALPH         I'm fine.

PRIEST         She was quite worried about you.

RALPH       Liar! She's never left me before. Taking her away. Bastards. Cheats.

PRIEST       I'm not trying to take her away from you. You know that she has to go to the eye doctor now. She's gone with Mrs. O'Neill. You know her. She's the same lady that Mary went with last time.

RALPH       Where is she now? Which way.

PRIEST       I'm not supposed to tell you that.

*(The priest approaches Ralph. Ralph backs away.)*

PRIEST       How can I convince you that I'm not here to hurt you Ralph?

RALPH       Can't.

PRIEST       Nobody wants to hurt you. We just want to help you. God wants to help you.

RALPH       Bullshit. Soul robber. Did you take Mary's soul?

PRIEST       No Ralph, I didn't.

RALPH       You took her from me. You're hiding her.

PRIEST       Come, sit for a minute. Let your body and your spirit rest. You're wounded. Come have something to eat.

RALPH       I had a muffin. Offering to the King.

PRIEST       *(Taking his arm and trying to guide him into the church.)* Come. Take some rest.

*(Ralph pulls violently against him.)*

RALPH       Have to pee.

PRIEST       Come in then, and use the bathroom.

RALPH       No. God house. Big cage.

*(Ralph shuffles over to the corner of the church, unzips and starts to pee.)*

PAUL        He did have a muffin father.

PRIEST       I hate it when he pisses on the church.

PAUL        I'll get him someplace to rest.

PRIEST It's good that you're helping. Mary tries so hard to take care of him. Poor woman has enough of a burden already.

PAUL What's wrong with her?

PRIEST Glaucoma. She's losing her sight.

PAUL Does he know?

PRIEST I don't know what he knows. Or is willing to acknowledge.

PAUL We have to tell him.

PRIEST I've tried. I don't know if he understands. And she won't leave him. You've got a good heart Paul. Make sure you don't waste it on someone who can't appreciate it.

PAUL I won't.

*(Ralph has finished peeing. He wrings his hands, and looks in different directions. The Priest moves back into the church. Ralph stops him.)*

RALPH Which way? Where did she go?

PRIEST I can't tell you. And I wouldn't tell you. She asked me not to.

RALPH Lying bastard. Tell me!

PRIEST I can't. *(He exits back into the church.)*

RALPH Fuck you! God man. God house. Taking things and locking them away. You can't have it. Can't have it all. Can't have my soul. *(He turns to Paul, who has been watching him.)* What do we do? Mary used to tell me.

PAUL I think we should keep looking.

RALPH Where?

PAUL Let's go this way. My place is close. If we don't find her we can rest there.

*(They move off together.)*

PAUL The father told me something, about Mary. He said she was losing her eyesight. Is that true?

RALPH She can't see. I am her eyes. I paint the world for her.

PAUL            You have to let her go get help.

RALPH           I know. I know. God-men and women. Always sticking their nose in. I know! I know Mary has to get help. They should tell me though. Not just take her.

*( They come to a back-alley fence, with some garbage.)*

PAUL            Here we are.

RALPH           Where?

PAUL            I live here. It's not much. But you should come in, and rest.

RALPH           Don't want to go in. Maybe never come out. We can stop here?

PAUL            Yes.

*(Ralph sits down and arranges himself leaning against some garbage bags.)*

RALPH           I'll just sit.

PAUL            Okay.

*(Paul sits beside him on the ground. Ralph starts to nod off, closes his eyes, but starts suddenly, awake.)*

RALPH           You should talk. Tell me things.

PAUL            Like what?

RALPH           Stories. Tell me stories.

PAUL            I don't have very many stories.

RALPH           Tell me things. Keep me from closing my eyes.

BOY              My grampa used to tell me stories about where he was born up north.

RALPH           Stars. You could see stars up north.

PAUL            Yeah. He used to talk about the stars, and about the northern lights, and how they would stream across the sky. He said it was like seeing the insides of the universe. Like being part of the beauty that created

everything. Even though it was so big and we were so small. It was like that was okay. Because that kind of beauty existed.

RALPH Mary is beautiful.

PAUL He told me one time when he was little they were driving from one town to another in the middle of winter, and something happened to the car. It was stuck by this highway in the middle of nowhere and only him and his mom. No phones. No traffic. So his mom bundled him up and set up a candle in the car to help keep it warm, and took off walking to get some help. And little by little the candle went down, and grampa got sleepier and sleepier, and he was about to fall asleep, and he asked for a favour from God. Because he really wanted to live to see his mom again. And suddenly, he said, it was like the whole sky lit on fire, and the northern lights twisted and shook and exploded and he laid there for hours watching the sky dance just for him. And when his mother got back with help the car was as cold as ice but he was still there, still awake, still watching the sky. And he said then that he knew there was something that was bigger than him. And he knew that you couldn't explain it, or understand it, you just had to search for it, and ask for it. He said that when he told his mother about the lights she sent him to the priest. And the priest gave him a long lecture about how god works and how he was arrogant and foolish to think that god had answered his prayer and made the lights dance for him. So then he knew that people didn't really know anything either. They just pretended they did. And they got mad at anyone who said anything different. That's why he said most of the world were cheats and bastards and liars. Because they thought they knew things they didn't.

RALPH Your grampa was right.

PAUL You're not really much like a king, are you? Kings stand up for themselves. They fight to protect their kingdoms.

RALPH No fighting. No hurting. Best thing to do is nothing.

PAUL That's not what my grampa would have said. He would have said we have to fight all the time just to stay alive.

RALPH Was he poor too?

PAUL No! And we're not poor either. Mom has two jobs. Sometimes she sends money to gramma to help her.

RALPH She's not home?

PAUL No. I don't see her much. She works a lot.

RALPH No family?

PAUL No. Just me. Mom.

RALPH Dead grampa.

PAUL Yeah. He drank, and he smoked. And he told everybody they were idiots.

RALPH A good man.

PAUL He was. Why do they take them away? If people are going to die why do they have to take them away? Can't they just let them die at home? That's what grampa wanted to do. Mom and the doctors wouldn't let him.

RALPH They're scared.

PAUL Scared of what?

RALPH Of the end.

*(The Landlord enters.)*

LANDLORD What the hell is this? What are you doing with this guy?

PAUL He just needed some help. He needs to rest.

LANDLORD He can rest somewhere else. I've got a potential buyer coming around.

RALPH Buyer. Seller. Money. Whore. Poor people out on the street.

LANDLORD Listen buddy, I care about poor people as much as the next guy. I've kept this housing unit together for years. I've helped a lot of poor people.

PAUL Are they going to kick us out?

LANDLORD That's up to the new owner, if he buys it.

RALPH It always starts with you. Looking for rent. Kicking people out if they don't pay.

LANDLORD I'm not a charity. I have to feed my family too, and I do, and my mother. That's caring buddy. Looking after yourself and the people close to you. That's the choice you make. You do your best, or not. That's your choice.

RALPH Choices. Bullshit.



PAUL           When will we know?

LANDLORD I wouldn't worry about it kid. He'll probably keep it this way for a while anyway. That's usually the way it works.

RALPH         Choices. Does he have choices? Bullshit.

LANDLORD Everybody has choices. He could be working at a part time job instead of hanging out with bums like you.

PAUL           I've tried.

LANDLORD Not hard enough. Do you want a job?

PAUL           Sure.

LANDLORD I'll give you 20 bucks if you clear all this stuff out of here and take it to the dumpster.

PAUL           Can I wait until he's had a chance to rest?

LANDLORD No. The guy is coming any time.

PAUL           Then no.

LANDLORD See? Choices.

RALPH         Bastard.

LANDLORD Watch your mouth.

RALPH         You're going to get old and die.

LANDLORD So what? We're all going to get old and die.

RALPH         Your cheeks will look like sacks of shit. Your skin is gonna' wrinkle like your balls. You're gonna' get sick and live in pain.

LANDLORD I don't have time for this, okay? I'm not doing anything wrong. You are on my property.

RALPH         It's an alley. Public place.

LANDLORD I can call the cops.

RALPH They won't come.

LANDLORD It doesn't matter to them?

RALPH No.

LANDLORD So they won't care if I throw you out of here?

RALPH No.

LANDLORD Well then. I might just do that.

RALPH Do anything you want. Kill me if you want. Time will do it anyway.

LANDLORD Sick. You're just sick.

RALPH Big man. Money man. Stupid fuck.

LANDLORD I don't care how poor you are you don't talk to me that way.

*(The Landlord steps forward to pick up Ralph but Paul jumps up and stands in between them.)*

PAUL You don't touch him! Leave him alone.

LANDLORD Now you listen. You stay out of my way or I'm going to have to think about whether or not I want you and your mom in the building. Think you're going to find a cheaper place around here?

PAUL All he wants to do is rest.

LANDLORD He can rest somewhere else. Now get out of my way.

PAUL I'll do it.

*(Paul leans over to help Ralph to his feet.)*

RALPH No. Not moving.

PAUL Come on. He's serious. He wants us out of here.

RALPH Not moving again. Not for the landlord. He started it all.

PAUL Ralph, come on!

RALPH Fuck him. My garbage. My kingdom.

PAUL        Ralph, please.

RALPH        I ask a favour of the god.

LANDLORD Is he moving, or not?

PAUL        He's really sick. He can't move.

LANDLORD Right. I've heard that one before. Get out of the way.

*(He leans over Ralph, with his hands on his knees.)*

LANDLORD So, how's this going to go? Are you going to get up and move or am I going to move you?

RALPH        Bastard. Can't hurt me.

LANDLORD Enough with the names.

RALPH        This is my kingdom. Mine! My garbage. My home. I don't have to go anywhere.

LANDLORD Oh yes you do.

*(He grabs Ralph under the armpits and drags him away from the garbage. Ralph struggles and screams at the top of his lungs.)*

RALPH        Leave me alone! Leave me alone!

PAUL        You're hurting him!

LANDLORD No I'm not.

RALPH        *(Starting to cry.)* Bastard. Bastard! Damn you. Damn you! Let me go! Let me go!

*(The Landlord lays him down.)*

LANDLORD There. That wasn't too hard, was it? What's the matter? Not so tough anymore, are you?

RALPH        *(Continues to cry.)*

PAUL        You hurt him.

LANDLORD Baloney. Listen. Don't feed him or encourage him to come around, okay? He's a bumb, a transient. He'll just keep coming by as long as you feed him and are nice to him. Like a stray dog.

PAUL He needs help.

LANDLORD His kind doesn't need help son. He needs a good kick in the ass to get moving and do something for himself.

*(The Landlord gathers up the bags of garbage.)*

LANDLORD I want you out of here, okay? No messing around.

*(The Landlord exits. Ralph stays, collapsed in a puddle on the ground.)*

PAUL Are you okay?

RALPH Damn. Damn my mother for birthing me. Damn my father for seeding me. Damn them. Damn them all.

PAUL Can you walk? Ralph. It's okay. Come on. We should get out of here before he comes back.

RALPH It was my place. My kingdom. They won't even let me keep the garbage.

PAUL He was a bastard. My grampa would have hated him. He's one of those guys that takes everything away.

RALPH A bastard.

PAUL Are you okay? Can you walk?

RALPH I don't know. *(He gets up, and walks a few steps.)* Oh. It hurts!

PAUL Where? *(Ralph slumps onto the ground.)* What can I do? Should I call 911?

RALPH No. No! No hospitals.

PAUL What can I do? Tell me what to do!

RALPH Mary, Mary will know. She always knows. Take me to Mary.

PAUL Can you get up? Can you walk?

RALPH No. The devil is inside me, holding me down.

PAUL I've got something. *(He runs off, and returns a moment later with a red wagon.)* Can you get into this? I haven't used it for a long time.

RALPH I can't fit into that.

PAUL It will fit most of you.

RALPH Help.

*(Paul lifts Ralph onto the wagon so that he's sitting on it backwards and his feet trail behind. Ralph stays doubled over.)*

RALPH Oh glorious fucking god it hurts!

BOY Don't swear so much. Are you ready?

RALPH Oh, god the knife is in me. It's starting. Damn my mother. Damn the world. Damn them. Damn them all.

PAUL Do you want me to go back to the park?

RALPH I don't know. Just find her.

PAUL We'll try.

*(Paul pulls the cart off the stage.)*

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO  
SCENE ONE

SETTING: The public park, later the same day.

AT RISE: The VENDOR from Act One is packing up. MARY is sitting on the bench.

VENDOR Hi. I'm sorry. I don't have anything to give.

MARY Did I ask for anything?

VENDOR No.

*(The Vendor looks at her again.)*

VENDOR Is your name Mary by any chance?

MARY Yes.

VENDOR I met your partner this morning, Ralph.

MARY Do you know where he is?

VENDOR No. He got moved along. He came back looking for you twice this afternoon but I haven't seen him in a couple hours.

MARY *(Rising.)* I'd better go find him, while there is still light.

VENDOR He said to tell you to stay if you came back. He said he'd come back here to find you.

MARY I hope he's all right.

VENDOR I'm sure he's able to take care of himself.

MARY He gets into fights with people. He gets into trouble. Did you kick him out or did the cops?

VENDOR The police. The cops.

MARY But you didn't try to stop them, did you?

VENDOR No.

MARY Didn't think so.

VENDOR I don't get in the way of a cop doing their job.

*(He pulls a cloth off a large abstract painting on the easel.)*

MARY What's that?

VENDOR It's the piece I did today.

MARY What's it supposed to be?

VENDOR Bars. Bars and chaos.

MARY What does it mean?

VENDOR I don't know. I started painting it after talking with Ralph. I thought this morning that it was about bars and cages and meaning. Like, we're surrounded by chaos, but we build cages to protect us, and we use bars of meaning, bars of words, to build those cages, and protect us. But, as I painted I saw that it didn't really work. Bars are bars, and cages are cages. But there's cracks. And chaos is everywhere. So even if we build bars of words or meaning, and put those bars together into a cage, we're not really keeping out the chaos, because chaos just whirls around and through the bars. We're part of it. Part of the chaos. And no matter what we do or build we're still part of it. It is part of us. So I don't know what it means. I think it means that we're kind of lost. No matter what we do. When you look at this. I mean, really look. What do you see?

MARY I'm sorry. Nothing. I don't see anything.

VENDOR That's what I was afraid of. *(He covers the painting again.)* Why do you live on the street?

MARY It's not really a choice sometimes.

VENDOR I think I understand. *(He hugs her, and then lets her go and starts to pack up his things.)*

MARY You understand?

VENDOR Yes, I think I do.

MARY What were you doing here today?

VENDOR Selling my work. Painting.

MARY How did it go?

VENDOR Good. Very good. It was a good day. I was working on this. It was like a magnet. People would stop and talk, and end up buying.

MARY You probably didn't mind Ralph getting the boot did you? I bet you sold a lot more paintings without him hanging around, huh?

VENDOR Yes, I suppose I did.

MARY Are you selling again tomorrow?

VENDOR Yes.

MARY And we'll have to leave again.

*(She sighs and curls in on herself on the bench.)*

VENDOR Listen, it's not my fault you guys get moved out of here. The police would do it even if I wasn't here.

MARY But you're the one that makes money. You kick a sick old man out of his park so you could sell your paintings to people with homes and lots of money in their pockets. We don't get anything.

VENDOR What can I do? Do you want some food or something?

MARY We need money.

VENDOR The policeman told me not to give you money. He said that other street people would steal it.

MARY Not if you know how to take care of yourself. We need money. To get a place.

VENDOR A place to live?

MARY Yes.

*(He takes out his wallet, and pulls out a bill.)*

VENDOR Is that enough?



MARY           How much could you sell that painting for? The one that Ralph gave you the idea for.

VENDOR        I don't know. I don't think I'm going to sell it.

MARY           As much as you can spare.

*(The Vendor peels a couple more bills off and hands them to her.)*

VENDOR        And this is going to be used to get him, and you, some help, right?

MARY           Yes. Thank you.

*(He gives her another bill, and picks up his things.)*

VENDOR        Are you going to be all right?

MARY           Yes.

VENDOR        I'm sorry.

*(The Vendor exits. Mary goes off. The evening is coming on. Some street sounds can be heard quietly in the background. She returns with the pile of blankets and a bag, and sits on the bench. She looks around, and then pulls a wad of money out of one pocket, and carefully wraps the bills from the Vendor around them. The Constable has entered quietly. She puts the money away.)*

CONST         That's quite a bit of cash you've got there.

MARY           Constable Dolphin. How are you tonight?

CONST         I've been better. Things just aren't rolling along the way I'd like them to.

MARY           That's too bad.

CONST         You should be careful with a bankroll like that. You know how people are.

MARY           I can take care of myself.

CONST         I know you can Mary. Have you seen Ralph? I need to talk to him.

MARY           He's not here. As you can see. I understand you moved him along this morning. I don't know where he is. What do you want him for?

CONST Well, I'll tell you what's happening. There's a story out on the net about Ralph and how hard his life is. And whoever wrote it, some little bitch with no newspaper experience obviously, because she didn't come to me to get my side of the story, has taken pictures to go along with it, and it looks like I'm kicking him.

MARY Were you kicking him?

CONST A little bit. You know how it is. He was slow getting up. I got impatient. He can be a real pain in the ass sometimes.

MARY Did you hurt him? How much did you kick him?

CONST Not a lot. I just nudged him a little bit. Just a gentle prod with the toe. He was able to walk away with no problem.

MARY You're so mean to him sometimes. You don't understand how weak he is.

CONST Do you know where he is?

MARY No. I don't. You know I don't leave him alone. But I had to go somewhere this morning. He wouldn't have wanted me to. So I snuck away while he was still sleeping.

CONST Where did you go?

*(Mary just shakes her head.)*

CONST Now Mary, you and I go back a long ways, don't we?

MARY I suppose.

CONST Back probably two or three years since I've been on this beat.

MARY Yes.

CONST And I've been pretty good to you, haven't I? I need you to do a big favour for me.

MARY What?

CONST I need you to get Ralph to talk to the reporter for me.

MARY What for?

CONST Those pictures just make me look horrible. It looks like I'm kicking the shit out of him.

MARY What's Ralph supposed to do about it?

CONST He can ask her to retract the story. Take it all back. Say that it was all made up or something.

MARY Why don't you ask her?

CONST No. It has to be Ralph. He's the one who gave the interview.

MARY What did he say?

CONST He talked a lot about you. And how you were the only thing in life that was worthwhile. He really loves you Mary.

MARY I know.

CONST *(sighs)* And he said that it's standard practice for police to kick and shake him and that life is meaningless and that we're all going to rot.

MARY That sounds like him.

CONST Yup. That's why I need him to talk to the reporter Mary. Retract his statements, whatever.

MARY Will that do any good?

CONST I don't know. But it would be worth a try. These things sometimes have a life of their own. They get picked up by one media and then reported on by another and every time the issue gets a bit bigger. If we can shut it down now, before it spreads, it might be okay. If not, it could get ugly. I don't want that Mary. I don't want ugly.

MARY I went and looked at an apartment today. It's subsidized. But it's still expensive.

CONST Good for you Mary.

MARY That's what the money's for. And that's why I left Ralph this morning. He wouldn't understand.

CONST He's damn lucky to have you. Damn lucky.

MARY I don't have enough for the damage deposit and the first month's rent though.

CONST I see. How much do you need?

MARY Three hundred dollars.

CONST That's a lot of money.

MARY I know. It's not easy. Can you help us?

CONST I spend every day helping people Mary. If I gave three hundred bucks to everyone who needed it I'd be broke.

MARY I can try to get Ralph to talk to the reporter.

CONST That would be helpful. The Citizen Action News. It's an online blog. Her name is Amanda Smith. Have you got that or do you want me to write it down?

MARY I'll remember. I'll try.

CONST My job might be on the line, and without a job I can't help you, can I?

MARY I need three hundred.

CONST I can't give you anything until that story gets retracted.

MARY All right.

CONST I'm glad we had the chance to talk. We can't usually do that with Ralph around, can we?

MARY No.

CONST You better give me that bankroll for safekeeping.

MARY I can hang on to it.

CONST You don't want it stolen now before you need it. I'll keep it safe for you.

*(He stands over her, and holds out his hand.)*

CONST Give it here.

*(She reluctantly digs into her pocket and holds it out to him. He smiles and takes it.)*

CONST That's a good choice. Now don't worry about a thing. You just get Ralph to retract his story and everything will be just fine.

*(The Const exits. Mary watches him go and fights back tears. She sits alone for a moment.)*

MARY Damn it! Damn it! Stupid girl.

*(From off stage we hear the sound of Ralph's voice. )*

RALPH *(off)* Flesh bags! Fuckers!

*(Paul and Ralph enter. They have exchanged the little red wagon for a shopping cart. The front has been kicked out of it. The cart has been filled with odds and ends of clothes and fabric. Ralph sits, cushioned by the material, with his legs sticking out the front. He looks semi-regal and sits up with a grimace on his face. Paul has found a hat, and wears it sideways on his head. Mary looks at them.)*

MARY What are you doing?

RALPH Shouting. Bastards. Bastards all. Trying to hurt me.

PAUL Some kids from the youth co-op were throwing garbage at him. We chased them away.

MARY Poor Ralph.

RALPH We won. They ran. Where were you Mary? Where were you?

MARY I had to do some things.

RALPH You never leave me. Never.

MARY I had to do some things.

RALPH Things. Cage things. Cage crap.

MARY I know. What happened to you today?

RALPH Was looking for you.

MARY You're home now. Come on. Come sit.

*(Mary puts her arm around him and helps him up. Ralph cries out.)*

PAUL He's been hurting quite a bit.

MARY What happened!?

RALPH Bastards. Landlords. Cops.

PAUL My landlord dragged him off the property. He didn't want to move.

RALPH Stomach burns.

MARY Have you had anything to eat?

PAUL Yeah. Some guy gave us some pizza. Another one gave us a hotdog.

*(Mary has helped Ralph onto the bench, and searches through the bag, pulling out an antacid. She shakes it, fills the cap, and holds it for him.)*

MARY Is it your stomach? Here.

RALPH *(Drinking.)* Hurts.

MARY That should make you feel better.

RALPH It hurts here. *(He points to his side. Mary lifts up his shirt and looks.)*

MARY You've got a bruise. Did the landlord do that to you? Or did the police?

RALPH Don't know.

PAUL Is he going to be okay?

MARY I don't know.

RALPH Mary's here. I'm perfect.

PAUL I tried to take him to a medical clinic. He started screaming.

MARY Don't worry. He does that when I try to take him to the doctor too.

PAUL We've been all over the neighbourhood looking for you. We went to the bottle depot, and the dumpsters behind the Greek restaurant, and the public washrooms.

MARY           And you've been pushing him around?

PAUL           Yeah. We had a wagon at first but the wheel fell off.

MARY           That's very nice of you.

PAUL           He knows a lot about life. About living on the street.

MARY           It's not easy.

PAUL           No. I've learned that.

MARY           So you've been with him all day?

PAUL           Yeah. Since this morning.

MARY           Did he talk to a reporter?

RALPH          Word twister.

PAUL           This morning he did for a bit.

MARY           Did you hear what he said?

PAUL           Not really.

RALPH          I told her the truth. That's all.

PAUL           She was kind of mad when she left.

MARY           Do you have any place that you need to go? Home? See your family?

PAUL           No. Mom's working. There's nobody home.

MARY           I see. Does she know you're at the park with us?

PAUL           No. She doesn't.

MARY           Does...she care?

PAUL           Yes. Of course she cares. She knows that I can take care of myself.

MARY           Good. I'm sure you can.

RALPH          Home. Good to be home.

MARY Shhhhhh. Just do what I say. Okay? You had a rough day today, did you?

RALPH Yes. Bastards. Liars. Cheats.

MARY You need to listen to me now, okay? It's important. Do you remember talking to the reporter this morning?

RALPH Reporter. Bitch. Didn't understand.

MARY Of course not. They never do. Do you remember what you told her about Constable Dodd? About him kicking you?

RALPH Shaking. Kicking. Doesn't matter.

MARY But it does matter Ralph. He shouldn't have kicked you. Did he hurt you?

RALPH Yes.

MARY That bastard. We've got to forgive him honey. We've got to help him.

RALPH Not helping him.

MARY We need to talk to that reporter, and get her to change some things.

RALPH I chased her away. Told her to fuck off. I don't want to talk about her.

MARY We have to.

RALPH Why?

MARY Because she wrote something about you and him and now it's all messed up.

RALPH Words?

MARY Yes. Words.

RALPH Dangerous things.

PAUL What's going to happen?

MARY I don't know. But it's not good.

PAUL What paper is it?



MARY It's on the internet...something called Citizen Action News. Do you know about it?

PAUL No. But I bet I could find it.

MARY How?

PAUL I can search the net at the library. I do that lots.

MARY The name of the reporter was Amanda. Amanda Smith. Can you find her, how to contact her?

PAUL You bet. All these online blogs have contact information. I'll find her.

MARY Thank you. I appreciate it.

RALPH Good boy. Light boy.

PAUL Is he going to be okay?

MARY I don't know. I hope so.

PAUL Okay.

*(He exits, leaving Mary and Ralph on the bench.)*

MARY You stay with me okay? We'll get things all straightened out.

RALPH Doesn't matter. You're here.

MARY I'm here. I'll never go away again. You just relax now, okay?

RALPH In the arms of an angel.

MARY I am your angel. I'm trying to be.

RALPH You are.

MARY I went today to look at an apartment.

RALPH Cage. Cage crap.

MARY We need it. I need it.

RALPH Into the cage.

PRIEST No. Into a home. Where you can sleep on a bed. Eat healthy food. Maybe feel a bit better. You used to have one. Do you remember?

RALPH No.

MARY And you didn't used to feel sick all the time. Do you remember that?

RALPH No.

PRIEST What do you remember?

RALPH I remember a hospital. And doctors. And dead eyes in the morning. Breathers. Walls. And dead eyes. And that's all there is.

*(The Priest enters.)*

PRIEST Good evening.

RALPH Fuck off.

PRIEST You had a rough day, didn't you? You lost your Mary, but now you've found her again. I heard you yelling in the back alley earlier. What was happening?

RALPH They were robbers. Thieves. They wanted to hurt me.

PRIEST The ones I saw didn't want to hurt you. They were just walking down the street when you and Paul met them and you started swearing at them. Did he push you around all day in that cart?

RALPH Found the bumpiest roads. I swore at him too.

PRIEST And yet he stayed with you.

RALPH He's good.

PRIEST Yes, he is. And so is Mary. She has stuck by you for years, while you've driven everyone else away. Do you see how much you're blessed Ralph? Do you see how much God has given you?

RALPH God. Mumbo jumbo. Crap.

PRIEST I use the word because it means something to me. What word would you use to describe how lucky you are to have someone love you and take care of you the way Mary does?

RALPH Love. Beyond the bars. Beyond the cage. Beyond words.

PRIEST Funny. You've just used the very words I use to describe God. Trust me Ralph. We're not that far apart.

RALPH Trust me. Trust me, he says. I've heard that before you know. Trust me, he said. Preacher man. Reacher man. Reached out to her and told her that God would help. God didn't help. God made her promises. She thought they were real. She thought that heaven was real. So she went. She tried to go. And she didn't make it.

PRIEST Ralph, I'm not sure what you're talking about.

RALPH Priest man. Liar. Coming around. I used to sit by her side. And the priest man would hover. Whispering things. Shaking things over her head. He was helping her he said. Liar. No helping. No heaven.

MARY There was a priest at her bed Ralph?

RALPH Yes. Day after day. He wanted her. Wanted her soul. He said the only way to heaven was through Jesus. Through him. He killed her. Told her things.

PRIEST I don't understand.

MARY He killed her! Filled her head with heaven stuff. She didn't know. She thought she could go. So she tried.

PRIEST I think I see.

RALPH No you don't. Don't see anything. Priest man. God man. Nothing there for us. No. No place there for us.

PRIEST I don't believe that's true. I think there is a place for you there.

RALPH See? Just the same. Promises of heaven. Sucking up our souls. God isn't anywhere. God is in the cage.

PRIEST No. These bones, this flesh, this...time. These are the cage. God is everything else. God is love.

RALPH Bullshit. Words. Don't trick me with words!

PRIEST You're right. We shouldn't argue about words. Let's talk about people. You know, don't you? That you're getting older. Mary is getting older.

Living out here is hard. It's hard on you. Hard on Mary. She needs help too.

RALPH I know.

PRIEST Do you Ralph? Do you really understand? I'd like to hear you say that you listened to me Ralph. I'd like to hear you say that you heard me.

RALPH I heard music.

PRIEST Music?

RALPH Choirs, singing. Hallelujah. God be praised.

PRIEST You're mocking me.

RALPH God almighty. All powerful big man. Tremble.

PRIEST I do tremble. You'd be wise to tremble a bit too.

RALPH Bullshit hot air. Strike me.

PRIEST If there is a heaven then there is a hell, and even Mary's love won't protect you there.

RALPH Soul sucker. God seller.

RALPH Thunderbolt hit me. If I'm wrong. Hit me! See? Nothing. No big man. No god. Go away.

MARY I'm sorry. Can you help us? Can you recommend us for a place?

PRIEST Yes. I'll recommend you.

*(The Priest leaves. Mary gets up, and starts to lay out the camp, arranging the blankets and bags.)*

RALPH What are you doing?

MARY Setting up our home.

RALPH Do you really want inside?

MARY Yes. Yes I do.

RALPH No stars.

MARY I don't give a shit about the stars! I want us to be safe. And together.

RALPH I do remember inside. I remember walls. I remember safe.

MARY You do Ralph?

RALPH Inside. What about bosses? What about work? What about giving up today for tomorrow? Income tax. Budgets. Bars. Chains. Giving up.

MARY What about us Ralph? What about the stars, and the days we could spend together. What about living without pain every day?

RALPH Lies.

MARY Lies? Us?

RALPH No. Not us. But inside it would be. Inside you wouldn't be my heart.

MARY Why do you think that Ralph, why? I'll always be your heart. No matter where we are.

RALPH Inside things change. People change.

MARY I'm never going to change. I'll always be your heart.

RALPH It's happened before. I remember the crazy. Remember pills, and vomit. Remember the doctors, and the ambulance. Remember every day watching her.

MARY That was her Ralph. She was crazy. I'm not crazy.

RALPH Remember the people coming taking things away one by one. Stealing. Leaving me nothing.

MARY That won't happen. I'll find us a place. A nice place. A place where you can sleep. A place where you can eat food instead of garbage. A place where you can be healthy. A safe place.

RALPH Safe. Safe is lies. Safe is lies!

MARY It's a lie out here too.

RALPH You can't promise things. Good things don't happen. Just bad things.

MARY Good things do happen. You just have to make them happen. You have to have faith.

RALPH Faith. God speak. Bullshit.

MARY It's not just god speak. It's human speak too. You have to have faith in people too. You've got to have faith in me.

RALPH My heart is...

MARY Your heart is what?

RALPH Dangerous. Gives me hope.

MARY That's good Ralph.

RALPH No. No hope. No heart. No tomorrow. I don't want it!

MARY Then we can have now Ralph. If we get a place together we can have now, forever. We can be together forever.

RALPH Forever?

MARY Forever.

RALPH With you?

MARY Yes.

RALPH Forever. With you.

MARY And I've just about got enough money. We just need a little bit more and I can get us into a place. The Constable is going to help us. But only if we can get this reporter to take back her story. Will you help me with that? Will you?

RALPH Forever.

MARY Will you?

RALPH Yes.

*(Paul enters.)*

PAUL What's going on?

MARY Nothing. Did you find her?

PAUL Yes. I e-mailed her. She said she's coming.

MARY Good. Good. Thank you.

PAUL *(To Ralph.)* How are you?

RALPH Saved. Preacher saved my soul.

PAUL You're kidding, right?

RALPH Yes.

MARY Thank you for everything you've done. Should you be getting home?

PAUL No. Mom won't be home for an hour. Can I stay around?

RALPH Yes.

MARY Yes. Ralph, you come lie down and rest.

*(She helps Ralph up off the bench and lies him down on the blankets. She sits behind him against the tree. The evening light is long and golden. She starts to stroke him, his hair, his arm, his legs. Over and over. Slowly. Lovingly.)*

RALPH Now I know God. The hands of an angel. Do you remember the stars Mary? The stories they used to tell us.

MARY Yes.

RALPH Tell me one of those stories.

MARY I don't know Ralph. There's people here.

RALPH He told me stories when I needed it. Tell.

PAUL I'd like to hear it.

MARY Once upon a time there was a king and a queen, and they lived under a sky as brilliant as could be. It didn't have the same old stars in it, the ones that everybody had named and made up stories about. No. It had stars that changed every night, and every night there would be a whole new world that opened up before their eyes as they lay on the ground. A world of freedom. They didn't have to be what other people wanted them to be.

They could be anyone. So they chose to be a king and a queen, because that's the kind of people they wanted to be. And the stars every night would be different, and tell them new stories about the world.

PAUL           What were the stories? What did they say?

RALPH          Be patient.

MARY           And the Queen was named Mary, and the King was named Ralph. And all they had was each other. They didn't have anything else. Mary had found Ralph on the ground, he had been broken up like little pieces of glass, scattered on the sidewalk. She could see that there were sparkles in the glass, but it was all mixed up with the dirt and the blood. And she didn't know how to fix him. But he said, "Just love me and I will be free." So she loved him, and the little pieces of broken glass that was his heart and his body started to stand up.

RALPH          And you loved me. And made me a man.

MARY           Yes. And we lived happily ever after.

RALPH          Happily ever after.

MARY           And that's the end of the story.

PAUL           That's the end of the story?

RALPH          Yes.

PAUL           You said that there were other stories. The Broken Dove. The Shattered Heart. The Lost One. What were they?

MARY           We don't talk about those stories. The story of King Ralph and the Queen of Love is the only one that matters. It is the only story we tell. And we lived happily ever after.

RALPH          That's right.

PAUL           I want to hear real stories.

RALPH          That's the only story there is!

MARY           You have to choose in this life, what's important and what's not. The other ones aren't important. They were just about things that happened and then were gone. They didn't stay.



PAUL I think I understand.

MARY You're a smart boy.

RALPH The best. Tell Mary about your grampa. And the lights.

PAUL That's okay. I just want to sit.

MARY Us too. It's beautiful here, isn't it?

PAUL Yes.

RALPH You're beautiful.

MARY Thank you love. For some reason when you say it I believe you. I never believed anybody else.

*(Amanda has entered. She takes a quick photo of the scene.)*

AMANDA I never thought a homeless camp could look this appealing.

MARY *(Rising and approaching her.)* I'm Mary.

AMANDA Amanda. Nice to meet you. *(She pulls out her recorder.)* Do you mind please saying and spelling out your first and last name?

MARY What's that?

AMANDA Just a recorder, so I don't have to take notes.

RALPH Cages. Keeps your voice forever.

MARY What do you need my name for?

AMANDA So I make sure I get it correctly in the story.

MARY What story?

AMANDA The one I'm going to write. I thought you had some additional information.

MARY I do but...it's about the story you already wrote.

AMANDA You want me to change something?

MARY We want you to retract it.

AMANDA Why? It got you some attention. Did you know it got re-posted to both the Journal and the Sun websites?

MARY The big newspapers have it in them?

AMANDA On their websites, yes. Pictures do it. Pictures and words. "Hope is nothing. Hope crap. Cage crap."

RALPH Word twister.

AMANDA I didn't change anything. I used your words exactly.

RALPH No context.

AMANDA Would you like a chance to change things? Say whatever you want. I'll use your words verbatim in a follow up story.

MARY We might want to do that.

PAUL She just wants more glory.

AMANDA You were there this morning too. What are you, his protégé?

PAUL Just a friend.

AMANDA Your name please, for the record?

PAUL Fuck off.

RALPH Ha!

MARY Please. We have a problem with your story.

AMANDA Some information you want to clarify?

MARY Yes. The pictures you took, of the officer kicking Ralph. Those weren't really kicks.

AMANDA No? It sure looked like it to me.

MARY That's how he wakes us up in the mornings. He just pushes us, with his feet. He doesn't really kick us.

AMANDA Is there any real difference? I mean between kicking you and pushing you around? They both show a complete lack of consideration.

MARY It does. It does make a difference. If he doesn't hurt us he's not doing anything wrong.

AMANDA So the additional information you wanted to give me is that the cop wasn't doing anything wrong by kicking Ralph awake?

MARY He wasn't kicking him! We need you to clarify that part of your story.

AMANDA I don't see how that makes a difference.

MARY It makes a huge difference!

AMANDA What's the big deal? So he gets talked to by his boss a little bit. Nothing is going to happen.

MARY Yes it will.

AMANDA I can't change it now. That story has made it into other websites. It's gone viral. I can't change it. I'd look like an idiot.

MARY But we told you the truth. Can't you report that?

AMANDA Are you telling me the truth? You seem very anxious to have this changed.

MARY Why would we lie?

AMANDA That's what has me wondering as well. Why would you be so anxious? It makes no sense.

RALPH She won't listen. Her world is dirt. That's all she sees.

AMANDA Why do you want it retracted. Did he threaten to harm you?

MARY He didn't threaten anything.

AMANDA Or bribe you?

MARY No.

AMANDA Do you have any other information that you'd like to share?

MARY No.

AMANDA I'm sorry. My story stands. I've got pictures. I've got the interview. I'm not changing a thing.

MARY Don't you care about what you're doing to us?

AMANDA No. Because I'm not doing it. It's that cop, or whoever has you jumping through hoops.

MARY I'm not jumping through anything.

AMANDA You have a chance to expose something horrible. You have a chance to help every vulnerable person that cop has ever kicked, or hit or pushed.

MARY We have a chance to get out of here. Don't you understand? He'll help us. Get a place. Get out of here. Get Ralph better. Get inside.

AMANDA *(pause)* I understand now.

MARY Don't write that down. Don't you dare write that down. We'll never get to stay...

AMANDA You said it. I...I have to report this. It's a crime.

PAUL You have a choice.

AMANDA Sometimes you don't. I have to report this.

PAUL Then help them! Take back the story. Let them get a place. Isn't that more important than your stories?

RALPH Word bitch. Whore. Doesn't care about anything.

AMANDA But I do care. I care about everything.

PAUL What's worth more? Your story or them?

AMANDA Maybe the story will give them enough profile that it will help them get a place.

PAUL You make me sick.

MARY But you have to help us. *(She grabs Amanda by the arm.)*

AMANDA Hey! Hands off!

MARY You have to take it back!

AMANDA *(Pushing Mary away.)* Let me go.

*(Paul stands, and behind them Ralph slowly struggles to his feet and advances.)*

PAUL You don't touch her!

RALPH Always coming around. Pushing people. Asking questions.

PAUL Ralph. You should sit down.

RALPH No. This witch. This word whore. She needs to understand.

*(He advances on her. She retreats. They circle slowly around the stage.)*

AMANDA I don't have any quarrel with you Ralph. I'm trying to help you.

RALPH I'm trying to help you. Words. Words, you said, had power. Do you want to know words for me?

AMANDA No. Tell me.

RALPH Abandoned. Banished. Outcast. Beaten. Bested. Conquered.

AMANDA So you're down and out. That doesn't change anything. In fact it makes it even more important that your story gets told.

RALPH Words. Words for you. Compassion. Caring. Pity. You should pity me.

AMANDA I do. I do Ralph. You don't know how much.

RALPH Hope. Hope is a word. Not crap. It is a real word.

AMANDA What do you want me to do Ralph? What are you trying to say?

RALPH You can't change me. Can't change anything. Always has to be someone at the bottom of the ladder. That's me. Can't change. Let us go. Let your story go. I take everything back. There was no kicking. No hurt.

AMANDA I'm sorry Ralph. I don't believe you.

RALPH Don't care about believing. Just do. Just do it.

AMANDA I can't Ralph. I can't.

RALPH        You don't understand.

MARY         Ralph. Sit down, please. Be careful.  
*(Paul tries to stop Ralph.)*

PAUL         Stop it. You'll hurt yourself.  
*(Pushing him away.)*

RALPH        Not going to hurt myself. She has to listen. To words.

AMANDA      Why don't you tell me your real story? What happened to you? Why are you here, like this?  
*(Ralph stops, panting, holding his hand to his chest.)*

RALPH        I was a journalist. I killed with words.

MARY         Ralph, please. Come sit down. Let her go. It's hopeless.

RALPH        Forever Mary. Forever.

AMANDA      I have enough for now. I'm sorry. I have to write this story. It makes me sick that a policemen would bribe you like this.

RALPH        Take it back! Please. You don't understand.  
*(He pulls in a deep breath, clutches his chest.)*

RALPH        Poof.  
*(Ralph collapses to the ground. Mary and Paul run to his side.)*

AMANDA      What's happening? What's going on?

PAUL         Do you have a phone? Phone an ambulance. Call 911.

AMANDA      *(Doing so. As she talks she becomes progressively more agitated.)* Yes. I need an ambulance. *(beat)* In the gazebo park at the corner of 83 Ave. and Calgary Trail. *(beat)* A man collapsed on the ground. *(beat)* I don't know if he's still breathing.

PAUL         He's not.

AMANDA No, he's not breathing. *(beat)* No, there is no AED close by. *(beat)* I don't know how to give CPR.

*(Mary is sitting beside Ralph, lovingly stroking his head, his chest, his legs. Paul is holding Ralph's hand.)*

PAUL I do. I learned it in school.

AMANDA There's someone here who does. *(beat)* I'll stay on the phone.

*(She bends down and kneels on the ground.)*

PAUL *(Talking to Mary.)* You have to help me, okay? I can't push down hard enough. *(He places his hands on Ralph's chest, and Mary covers them.)* You push when I push, okay? *(They push down 30 times.)* Okay, now put your hand behind his neck and tilt his head back. *(beat)* Pinch his nose. *(beat)* Cover his mouth with yours...

*(Mary puts her lips to Ralph and sobs into his mouth. Paul keeps pushing.)*

PAUL He's not here anymore.

MARY I know.

PAUL He smells.

*(Mary wails once, a high pitched scream, and then starts to keel, barely audible.)*

PAUL Where did he go? He was just here.

AMANDA Keep pumping. Aren't you supposed to keep pumping?

PAUL There's no use.

AMANDA Keep going! Here. *(She pushes him aside and keeps pushing on Ralph's chest.)*

MARY It's no use.

AMANDA We've got to keep going until the ambulance gets here.

PAUL You killed him. He was fine. He was resting. And then you came. You made him upset. You made him chase you.

AMANDA I didn't do anything that should have killed him.

*(The Priest enters. Stops.)*

PRIEST Mary! I heard the scream. What has happened? Paul?

PAUL He's dead.

PRIEST *(Going to Mary, and kneeling by her, he checks Ralph's pulse.)* Mary. I'm so sorry. *(To Amanda.)* You can stop now. *(He leans forward and closes Ralph's eyes.)*

AMANDA I thought you were supposed to keep going.

PRIEST *(Putting his hands on Amanda's.)* Peace. He's gone.

*(Amanda stops.)*

MARY He didn't want to go into an apartment. We shouldn't have tried to make him.

PRIEST We were doing what we thought best.

MARY He didn't want to.

AMANDA You had plans to get him help? A place?

PRIEST Yes.

AMANDA Oh my God, I'm sorry. I thought...

PRIEST What?

AMANDA Nothing.

PRIEST Mary, come away. There's nothing we can do.

MARY Leave me be. Let me be!

*(Amanda takes her camera and snaps a picture, and starts to move around the scene, taking more.)*

PAUL Stop it!

PRIEST What are you doing?



PAUL She's a reporter. She just wants more stories.

PRIEST *(Standing.)* Have you no respect for this man? For this woman?

AMANDA Yes, I do. Don't you understand? People need to know.

*(The Constable enters in plain clothes. Stops.)*

CONST Need to know what? What's going on here? What happened?

PRIEST Ralph, is gone.

CONST Shit. Poor Ralphio. Is that what all the yelling was about?

PRIEST Is there anything we can do? Can we cover him, or something? Nobody deserves to die like that, lying in a pool of their own feces and urine.

CONST Everybody dies like that. The bowels and the bladder release when you die. It just happens.

AMANDA I suppose you've seen a few people die?

CONST I've seen a few. Who are you?

AMANDA My name is Amanda. I write for Citizen Action News.

CONST I know who you write for. What are you doing here? And what role did you have to play in this?

AMANDA Nothing, I was here to...

PAUL She killed him. Ralph was asking her for a favour. And she wouldn't do it.

AMANDA He died of a heart attack. It wasn't my fault.

CONST Mary. Mary? *(Mary looks up.)* What happened?

MARY She wouldn't take it back. She wouldn't. Bitch. I tried.

CONST I see. And what happened to Ralph.

MARY She killed him.

AMANDA He was chasing me. I was just trying to keep away from him.

CONST You didn't try too hard did you? You're still here.

AMANDA I didn't have to run, he was barely moving.

CONST And yet you didn't leave, did you? You just kept the poor old bastard on his feet, moving around until he croaked.

AMANDA I didn't know...

CONST Quite the piece of work aren't you?

*(A siren approaches, stops. Two paramedics rush on with a stretcher. They move Mary gently aside, check Ralph over, move him on to the stretcher, and cover him. They lift him.)*

MARY Where are you going? Where are you taking him?

*(They do not answer, and walk off. Mary starts to follow. The Priest puts his arm around her shoulder.)*

PRIEST Mary, please. Let him go.

CONST I'll make sure he gets looked after.

MARY What do you mean? Where are they taking him?

PRIEST They're taking him to the morgue.

*(Mary shakes herself free of the Priest and follows the body. The Priest follows her.)*

CONST Well, I guess that's just about it.

AMANDA What happens now.

CONST They take him to the morgue, check him out. If there's no request for an investigation they just get him ready for cremation.

AMANDA Then, that's it?

CONST Yeeup. End of story.

AMANDA Except that he was being blackmailed, by you.

CONST Is that so? And who do you know that's going to back up that story for you?

AMANDA I don't need a back-up. I've got the interview, on tape.

CONST Anybody can make a voice on a recorder. That doesn't count for evidence.

AMANDA Do I need evidence?

CONST If you're going to be writing stories like that you'd better have some. Listen, he was just an old man. He lived a miserable life and ended up dead. Who knows why? Could have been bad food. Could have been booze. Could have been something else. It's sad but it's not a crime. There's nothing special to get peoples' lives messed up about.

AMANDA What was his story? His real story?

CONST Just an old man. No fuss. No bother.

PAUL That's not true.

CONST Listen, son. You stay out of this, okay? This is something that we have to figure out as grown-ups.

PAUL He wasn't just an old man. He wasn't just a bumb. Do you want a story? The real story? Turn on your recorder. Turn it on!

AMANDA Okay. I'm turning it on.

*(Mary and the Priest have re-entered, and listen.)*

PAUL Is it running? Ralph was a King who lived in a beautiful kingdom with his Queen. And they didn't have anything, but it didn't matter. And everybody hated him and pushed him around and were mean to him because he didn't care about what they thought. And the police kicked him. And the newspapers wrote lies about him and wouldn't listen. And nobody gave a damn. And there will never be anybody else like him. And you will never know anything about him, because he was really a King. A King who didn't hurt anybody.

*(Pause. Amanda stares at him. She looks at her recorder, and turns it off.)*

PRIEST Paul, you know I didn't really hate him. You know I tried to help him, don't you?

*(Constable goes to Amanda, and takes her by the arm.)*

CONST No more articles?

AMANDA I suppose not.

CONST Good. Nice chatting with you.

*(She exits.)*

CONST Good night. Don't you worry, Mary, everything's going to be just fine.

*(He nods to the group, and exits.)*

PRIEST Paul, you should be getting home.

*(He takes Mary by the shoulders, and tries to lead her off. She resists, and sits on the blankets under the tree. She pats them, strokes them, like she did with Ralph. The Priest takes Paul, and they exit.)*

MARY They're all gone now. We've got our kingdom all to ourselves. Ralph? They wouldn't let me go with you. They wouldn't let me go in the ambulance with your body. But I know you're not really gone. I can feel it.

*(She shivers, and wraps a blanket around her shoulders, then gazes up at the sky.)*

MARY Paul told a very good story about you. You would have liked it. I hope you'll be my star. I hope you'll come back and guide me. *(She starts to cry quietly as the lights go down.)*

THE END