The Woolgatherer

A Play in Two Acts

by William Mastrosimone

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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THE WOOLGATHERER by William Mastrosimone was first performed by the Rutgers Theatre Company, New Brunswick, N.J. in July, 1979. The play was directed by John Bettenbender, Set by Joseph Miklojcik, Costumes by Vicki Rita McLaughlin, Stage Managed by Carol Hawk.

CLIFF ..... *Ray Baker*

ROSE ..... *Mary Beth Fisher*

The second professional production was presented at the Circle Rep, New York City in May, 1980. The play was directed by John Bettenbender, Set by Karl Egstei, and Lights by Dennis Parichy, Costumes by Joan E. Weiss, Stage Managed by Jody Boese, with the following cast:

CLIFF ..... *Peter Weller*

ROSE ..... *Patricia Wettig*

DEDICATION

To Carole Brigantine Shambora, I think

TIME: Now

PLACE: South Philadelphia

SET: Efficiency apartment.
A single bed, neatly made.
A small table.
A chair.
An orange crate.
A door leading to a hallway.
A closet.
A boarded-up window hidden by cheap curtains.

CAST

ROSE

CLIFF

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THE WOOLGATHERER
ACT ONE

Darkness. Footfalls in the hallway. Inaudible talking. Lights up slowly. Keys fumbling in the doorlock. Enter ROSE followed by CLIFF swinging a sixpack in a paper-bag.

ROSE. And there was this girl ... She was a poet ... And she lived here ... In this room ... Before, you know, I moved in ... And she committed, you know, suicide, right here in this room.

CLIFF. Did she die?

ROSE. Of course she died.

CLIFF. How'd she do it?

ROSE. Rope.

CLIFF. Overdose of rope?

ROSE. No. She, you know, hung herself.

CLIFF. Just kidding.

ROSE. That's not funny.

CLIFF. So why'd she do it?

ROSE. Nobody knows. It's a big mystery.

CLIFF. Big mystery. Didn't she leave a note?

ROSE. No. She left a poem.

CLIFF. Lucky she was a poet.

ROSE. Why's that?

CLIFF. Suppose she was a novelist.

ROSE. This is it. The poem she left. It's called "Death is my lover."

CLIFF. Beautiful.

ROSE. Want to hear it?

CLIFF. Yeah. Just what I need. Something to lift my spirits.

ROSE.

"Death is my lover,
You say it's not right,
But his love's forever
Day and night, day and night.
We've gone to elope,
Away from the light
In his cozy house,
Day and night, day and night.
So I go with equanimity—"

CLIFF. Go with who?

ROSE.

"So I go with equanimity,
Without a fight,
To be in his arms—"

CLIFF. Hey, hey, whoa, whoa. Look, kid, I had a rough day and I don't want to hear about no weirdo's suicide note.

ROSE. O, you don't like poetry?

CLIFF. Hey, I'm nuts about it.

ROSE. Really?

CLIFF. Hey.

ROSE. Do you write poetry?

CLIFF. Hey, everyday.

ROSE. Really?

CLIFF. Hey.

ROSE. I'd like to read some.

CLIFF. I don't write it down. I talk it. Here ya go:

ROSES ARE RED
VIOLETS ARE BLUE
I DIG SHOTS AND BEERS
DO YOU LIKE ICE HOCKEY?

ROSE. That's it?

CLIFF. Like it?

ROSE. It's very . . . very interesting.

CLIFF. It's about my mother who was run over by a garbage truck.

ROSE. O. I'm sorry.

CLIFF. What can I say?

ROSE. Did she suffer?

CLIFF. Hey.

ROSE. I'm really sorry.

CLIFF. Me too, being that I pushed her under the wheels. Rose, that's a joke. You know, ha-ha?

ROSE. I don't joke around about that kind of stuff because it was very tragical the way that poor girl kicked the chair out from under herself and then changed her mind.

CLIFF. How do you know that?

ROSE. The police said. And the papers.

CLIFF. How could they know that unless they was here?

ROSE. They said she kicked the chair out from under but changed her mind and reached up for the rope and tried to save herself and they found rope fibers in her palms but her arms got tired and she, you know . . .

CLIFF. She must've been hung up about something.

ROSE. I don't think that's funny.

CLIFF. Well I don't think it's a good subject to make conversation with.

ROSE. Well it's true.

CLIFF. Alotta things are true, but you shouldn't talk about 'em.

ROSE. Why not?

CLIFF. Because no cops and no paper and no poem can give you the bottom line on what's going on in some weirdo's brain when she puts on the rope and leaps into the great ever-after. Even when you got all the facts in your hands, they don't add up to the leap. There's something missing. Maybe she just didn't fit.

She added up the pluses and minuses and figured life ain't worth the hurt. So she turned in her scruples and checked out. And you and the cops and the papers want to know something? She had guts. And I respect that. Alotta people come up with the same figures but they buy insurance. So who knows? Maybe she did the right thing. Maybe she's happy now. Ever think of that?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. Well you should.

ROSE. I was telling you about the room.

CLIFF. Well I don't want to hear about it.

ROSE. Then drop the subject.

CLIFF. Who brought it up?

ROSE. Me.

CLIFF. Then you drop it. Talk about something nice.

ROSE. Like what?

CLIFF. Like anything.

ROSE. I can't think of something nice.

CLIFF. I can.

ROSE. What?

CLIFF. I can think of something real nice.

ROSE. What?

CLIFF. I can think of something fantastically nice.

ROSE. What?

CLIFF. You.

ROSE. What're you doing?

CLIFF. Taking your poncho.

ROSE. O.

CLIFF. What'd you think?

ROSE. O, I just didn't know why you snuck up on me.

CLIFF. I didn't sneak up.

ROSE. I can take it off.

CLIFF. I know you can.

ROSE. Thank you just the same.

CLIFF. Hang it in the closet?

ROSE. NO!

CLIFF. Sorry.

ROSE. Just lay it on the bed.

CLIFF. How come you whisper?

ROSE. The old lady next door, Mrs. Mancuso. She listens on the wall with a glass.

CLIFF. (*Indicating a spot on the wall.*) Here? (ROSE *shakes her head yes.* CLIFF *punches the wall.*)

ROSE. NO! Don't! She'll hear us!

CLIFF. (*To the wall.*) I don't care if she hears me.

ROSE. I do! She'll tell the landlord and I'll get evicted.

CLIFF. For talking?

ROSE. We're not allowed to have visitors.

CLIFF. How do you know she listens on the walls?

ROSE. I can hear her move the glass.

CLIFF. Beautiful.

CLIFF. How come the window's all boarded up like that?

ROSE. That girl did it. The one who, you know, the rope? My landlord said he would take it down.

CLIFF. Why didn't he?

ROSE. You'll get mad if I tell you.

CLIFF. No I won't.

ROSE. Yes you will.

CLIFF. Why should I get mad?

ROSE. It's not something nice.

CLIFF. C'mon, tell me.

ROSE. You sure?

CLIFF. Yeah.

ROSE. He died.

CLIFF. Don't tell me. Rope?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. Aspirins?

ROSE. No. He was old.

CLIFF. He died of old age?

ROSE. Yes.

CLIFF. Well, that's alright to die of old age. How old a man was he?

ROSE. O, I don't know. Old.

CLIFF. How old?

ROSE. He was up there.

CLIFF. Give me a rough idea.

ROSE. Over forty.

CLIFF. He must've took good care of himself.

ROSE. I only met him once. He never came around because he couldn't get up stairs so good.

CLIFF. I know. Once you hit forty, stairs are a big problem. So what's the story? You don't have a landlord now?

ROSE. His daughter took over.

CLIFF. So is she gonna take the boards off? Don't tell me! On the way here she was gored by a rhino!

ROSE. No! She said if she hires somebody to take it down, she has to raise the rent, and since I can't afford more rent, I told her leave it up.

CLIFF. I'll take it down.

ROSE. That's alright. I'm used to it.

CLIFF. But you don't have a window. You're missing out on all that wonderful scenery out there.

ROSE. There's nothing but an air shaft.

CLIFF. But you could at least get some fresh air up here.

ROSE. I go for alot of walks.

CLIFF. But you know that smell in this building?

ROSE. I don't smell nothing.

CLIFF. That's mildew.

ROSE. I'm used to it.

CLIFF. It's bad for you. If the window was open it would go away.

ROSE. It's too much trouble.

CLIFF. What trouble? Acouple eight penny nails. I could rip them boards off with bare hands.

ROSE. NO! I'm sorry. It's alright.

CLIFF. I won't hurt your curtains.

ROSE. I'm used to it.

CLIFF. Rose, it's a fire hazard.

ROSE. How can it cause a fire?

CLIFF. It can't cause a fire. But if a fire broke out, how you gonna split?

ROSE. The door.

CLIFF. Suppose the stairs catch fire?

ROSE. They're cement.

CLIFF. It's against the law to board up a window. The landlord has to take it down by law. Not only that, he has to build a fire escape when there's only one means of egress. Not only that, he can't raise the rent because of it. I know the law. Let me take it down in case of fire.

ROSE. What good's that? I'd have to jump five stories.

CLIFF. Hey, would you rather have two broken legs or look like a meatloaf?

ROSE. I don't want to talk about this.

CLIFF. You want to talk about some weirdo who lynched herself but you don't want to talk about saving your life.

ROSE. So you think they're gonna fix your truck today?

CLIFF. Speaking of fire, are they gonna fix your truck. Depends.

ROSE. On what?

CLIFF. Whether the mechanic had a fight with his wife this morning.

ROSE. I don't understand.

CLIFF. Neither do I. And speaking of mechanics, I hate to break the news, but this weed's had it. (*Crumbling a dry, brittle leaf from an obviously dead plant in a flowerpot.*)

ROSE. Nothing grows up here.

CLIFF. No sun.

ROSE. Even the cactus shrivelled up, and they guaranteed it could live anywhere.

CLIFF. Why don't you just throw 'em in the garbage?

ROSE. Well, you never know. They might come alive again.

CLIFF. Come alive again? Never happen.

ROSE. Maybe. I always wanted alot of plants in my room. You know, long ivy vines curling around things and growing up the wall.

CLIFF. Never happen. No sun.

ROSE. You never know. Did you ever hear of Our Lady of Fatima?

CLIFF. Ever hear of Forget About It? No sun, no plants. Now if I took the boards off . . .

ROSE. No sun ever came in the air shaft anyways.

CLIFF. How would you know if the boards were up when you moved in?

ROSE. So what happened to your truck?

CLIFF. Speaking of plants, I dropped reverse gear.

ROSE. Plants?

CLIFF. Gears?

ROSE. Huh?

CLIFF. Reverse?

ROSE. I don't understand.

CLIFF. No reverse, can't back up to the loading dock to unload. Bananas. Very delicate, bananas. Too cold, too hot, or standing too long, they develop a rot inside. Then you can't give 'em away. You even have to pay to dump 'em. And speaking of bananas, want a beer?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. What's wrong?

ROSE. Nothing.

CLIFF. Mind if I have one?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. I do something wrong?

ROSE. You drink alot?

CLIFF. What's alot?

ROSE. You get drunk?

CLIFF. Nawwwww.

ROSE. O, good.

CLIFF. Have one with me.

ROSE. No, thank you. I'll have tea.

CLIFF. You don't like beer?

ROSE. One beer wipes me out.

CLIFF. No kidding? C'mon, just one.

ROSE. No, thank you.

CLIFF. It makes you smart.

ROSE. Beer does?

CLIFF. Hey, it made Bud wiser.

ROSE. You like to joke around, huh?

CLIFF. Hey, it's nice to get alittle buzz on now and again. C'mon.

ROSE. Nah.

CLIFF. C'mon, just half.

ROSE. OK. But just half.

CLIFF. And look, if you change your mind about the window, I got a crowbar in my truck.

ROSE. Crowbar?

CLIFF. Yeah.

ROSE. What's that for?

CLIFF. Kill crows.

ROSE. What?

CLIFF. Sure. Alotta people don't realize that in certain remote parts of this country there's what they call the Killer Crow.

ROSE. Never heard of it.

CLIFF. Course not. Washington gave the word to the papers and T.V., play down the Killer Crow. Otherwise you'd have panic in the streets.

ROSE. Really?

CLIFF. Hey, ask any Joe who ever trucked through Arkansas, or worse yet, the Dakota Badlands. Killer Crows as big as doberman pincers with a wing span as wide as this room.

ROSE. Really honest to God?

CLIFF. Hey.

ROSE. Do they attack people?

CLIFF. Attack? Hey, that's all they do. Anything that moves. You don't have to believe me. Go ask the farmers out there. They sit on a cow's head and peck the eyes out.

ROSE. Eughhhhhhh,

CLIFF. That's why they equip us with what they call in the business—a crowbar. When it lands on the hood of the truck and tries to peck your eyes out through the windshield, you grab the crowbar and whack it on the beak—BAM! And it shrieks . . . (*Imitating the crow shriek.*) And flies off.

ROSE. Don't you get ascared?

CLIFF. Hey, I keep a change of underwear in the glove-compartment. But very rarely do you kill one because they got skulls as thick as—pizza crust.

ROSE. Mrs. Mancuso says she sees the landlord's ghost walk through the building the first night of every month.

CLIFF. Here we go.

ROSE. Because he was dead almost two weeks before they found his body and his ghost wandered out his body and that's why they have to bury people right away. Do you think that's true for animals too?

CLIFF. Don't know. It's alittle outside my neighborhood.

ROSE. You believe in ESP?

CLIFF. No, I believe in STP.

ROSE. What's that?

CLIFF. Forget it. Turn on the radio.

ROSE. Don't have one.

CLIFF. What's that? tapes? records?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. You don't dig music?

ROSE. I hate that music. Hate it. Would you like a glass for your beer?

CLIFF. Hey. Thanks. Where's your glass?

ROSE. I only have one glass.

CLIFF. You entertain much?

ROSE. Beg your pardon?

CLIFF. Forget it. Use the glass.

ROSE. No, you.

CLIFF. (*Putting the glass on her side of the table.*) Now Rose, don't make a big deal. (*Sitting in the chair.*) Sit down. (*Noticing she has no seat.*) What do you do for another chair?

ROSE. The crate. I'll use the crate, you the chair.

CLIFF. No, you the chair, me the crate.

ROSE. No, me the crate, you the chair.

CLIFF. No, you Jane, me Tarzan.

ROSE. You make a joke out of everything, huh?

CLIFF. Hey. (*Pause, to the wall.*) Hey, Mrs. Mafusco, can we borrow your glass?

ROSE. STOP IT!

CLIFF. I was just asking her . . .

ROSE. I'm sorry I ever told you that!

CLIFF. She bugs me that woman.

ROSE. Don't talk then.

CLIFF. She don't bug you?

ROSE. She can't help it. She's on Social Security.

CLIFF. (*Pause. He crinkles the cellophane of his cigarette pack, to wall.*) FIRE!

ROSE. You want me to get evicted?

CLIFF. Naw, I wouldn't want you to lose a place like this.

ROSE. Well?

CLIFF. Well, it's getting late.

ROSE. Guess where I got that chair?

CLIFF. In a chair store.

ROSE. No. C'mon.

CLIFF. Where you work at the Five and Dime.

ROSE. We don't sell chairs. Guess.

CLIFF. Box of crackerjacks?

ROSE. No, cmmon.

CLIFF. Rubbed up against your leg and followed you home.

ROSE. No, c'mon.

CLIFF. The weirdo with the rope left it in her will.

ROSE. That's not funny.

CLIFF. Sorry. Where'd you get it?

ROSE. I don't want to tell you now.

CLIFF. Why not?

ROSE. I just don't. You ruined it all when you said that.

CLIFF. Look, I'm really sorry.

ROSE. Some things aren't funny.

CLIFF. Yeah, I'm gettin the hang of it. So tell me where you got this wonderful chair of yours.

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. Please?

ROSE. Sometimes you joke around too much.

CLIFF. May God strike somebody dead if I should ever do it again. Now c'mon, where'd you get it?

ROSE. I was on my way to the Salvation Army to buy a chair and I saw these people putting garbage on the curb and this old man put this chair on the curb and I asked him if I could have it and he was retired and had diabetes and was cleaning his cellar out and I took the chair home.

CLIFF. Big deal.

ROSE. What?

CLIFF. Big deal.

ROSE. Don't you see? Like it was meant to be.

CLIFF. Meant to be. Hey, tomorrow I'm supposed to see a man about another job. Easier. More bread. More benefits. Closer to home. Dah dah dah dah dah. But my rig broke down and I can't be there, so he'll give the job to somebody else. Now was that meant to be?

ROSE. You can't tell till later.

CLIFF. Hey, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon, meant to be. This morning I'm on the turnpike doin the limit plus to make up for lost time. I get in back of a chicken truck in the passing lane. Big truck with wooden cages tied on the back filled with chickens. That's why they call it a chicken truck. You know, big chickens, little chickens, white chickens, brown chickens, gray chickens. Alotta chickens. And feathers streaming out the back hitting my windshield. Well the driver pulls over so I can pass, but something catches my eye. There's this chicken trying to squeeze between the bars. It has its wings spread full and trying to slip between the bars of the cage. Now I could've passed the chicken truck, but I wanted to see the chicken escape. Don't know why. Just a crazy urge. So I hang back. Sometimes you get so cooped up in the cab you do crazy things. So I start rooting for the chicken. Hey! C'mon! Jump! You chicken punk! Jump!

ROSE. Shhh!

CLIFF. Jump!

ROSE. The old lady!

CLIFF. Hell with the old lady! So I said Jump, baby, jump!

ROSE. Shhhh!

CLIFF. (*To wall.*) Hey, Rosie, I can't find my underwear.

ROSE. Stop it!

CLIFF. Give the old lady a thrill.

ROSE. That's disgusting.

CLIFF. I was just kidding around.

ROSE. I hate that.

CLIFF. Take it easy.

ROSE. She thinks I'm nice.

CLIFF. I think you're nice too.

ROSE. Well you can go if you want to talk dirty. (*Pause.*) So what happened to the chicken?

CLIFF. The story ends right there.

ROSE. Did it get out?

CLIFF. Yeah.

ROSE. O, good.

CLIFF. Hit the road in front of my wheels. I swerved but it got caught in the back wheels inbetween the double tires. In the rearview all I saw was this feather ball spinning red and white, red and white, feathers spinning off the wheels red and white.

ROSE. (*Pause.*) Did it die?

CLIFF. Very likely with 36,000 pounds rolling over it.

ROSE. Did it suffer?

CLIFF. Nah. Was quick.

ROSE. Did you, you know, go back?

CLIFF. For what?

ROSE. To, you know, pick it up.

CLIFF. No, I left it flat. Pick it up? What am I? a scavenger?

ROSE. No, you know, to bury it.

CLIFF. It was only a chicken.

ROSE. You should of gone back.

CLIFF. Go back shit. I was doin 75 M.P.H. What's amatter?

ROSE. Nothin.

CLIFF. Itchy sweater?

ROSE. Hives.

CLIFF. What from?

ROSE. I just get 'em.

CLIFF. So sudden?

ROSE. YEAH.

CLIFF. Let me scratch.

ROSE. No, it's alright.

CLIFF. Hey, I'm an expert.

ROSE. NO! I'm alright. Thank you just the same.

CLIFF. You scratch like you're tearing off flesh.

ROSE. I hate this.

CLIFF. Maybe you're allergic to wool.

ROSE. It's mohair.

CLIFF. You got mohair than me.

ROSE. It was longer. I just got it cut.

CLIFF. Did your man give you his sweater?

ROSE. What man?

CLIFF. That's a man's sweater you're wearing.

ROSE. No it's not. How do you know? So what if it is?

CLIFF. No big deal.

ROSE. No. Why'd you say that?

CLIFF I was just curious.

ROSE. About what?

CLIFF. Why a girl wears a man's sweater.

ROSE. Alot of girls wear men's sweaters.

CLIFF. You don't have to get so touchy.

ROSE. I'm not touchy.

CLIFF. Alright, drop it.

ROSE. You brought it up.

CLIFF. Well suppose I had on a girl's sweater. Wouldn't you ask why?

ROSE. No. It would be none of my business.

CLIFF. Excuse me. I must be abnormal.

ROSE. Everybody always asks personal questions.

CLIFF. I'm not everybody. I'm Cliff. How ya doin? Nice to meet you. So forget the sweater.

ROSE. Good.

CLIFF. You see, where I come from, men wear men's sweaters and girls . . .

ROSE. I got it from Brenda.

CLIFF. Ahhh, Brenda. Now I understand.

ROSE. I used to live with this girl Brenda.

CLIFF. And was this girl Brenda a man?

ROSE. No. Some guy gave it to her to remember him by.

CLIFF. So why'd she give it to you? Or is that too personal?

ROSE. She didn't give it to me. One night she went down the corner for a pack of cigarettes and never came back no more.

CLIFF. What happened?

ROSE. Nobody knows.

CLIFF. Another mystery. Did you call the police?

ROSE. Of course.

CLIFF. And what'd they say?

ROSE. They put her on the missing persons list.

CLIFF. Good idea. So if she reads the list she'll know she's missing.

ROSE. How she going to see the list if she's missing?

CLIFF. That's the problem. If somebody could find her and give her the list, then she'd know.

ROSE. Know what?

CLIFF. She's missing.

ROSE. I don't think you understand.

CLIFF. Hey, Rose, Rose, Rosie, don't make a big deal. Relax.

ROSE. I can't tell when you kid around because your face is so serious. (*Pause.*) Do you want to have kids?

CLIFF. We got time?

ROSE. Me, I wouldn't want to have kids today, the world being what it is.

CLIFF. What is it?

ROSE. Messed up. Really messed up. I feel sorry for mankind.

CLIFF. Mankind?

ROSE. How it suffers.

CLIFF. Jesus. How come you ask me if I want kids?

ROSE. I don't know. *(Pause.)* Where you from?

CLIFF. Ever hear of Elizabeth?

ROSE. Yeah.

CLIFF. I don't live nowhere near it.

ROSE. C'mon, where?

CLIFF. Trenton.

ROSE. I know Trenton! I went through Trenton once on the train. Trenton has that bridge with that big red neon sign: TRENTON MAKES, THE WORLD TAKES.

CLIFF. They changed it.

ROSE. To what?

CLIFF. WHAT THE WORLD SECRETES, TRENTON EATS.

ROSE. They did not! I saw this farm from the train window. Just outside Trenton. Someday I want a farm. I want to raise rabbits. Not in cages. Just, you know, free. Running around wherever they want. And a little house with red and white curtains and a coop where the rabbits go when it's cold.

CLIFF. Rabbits.

ROSE. They don't have claws, and they can't run that fast, but they zig-zag, and that's what saves them when they're chased.

CLIFF. I bag afew every year in gunning season. They make good stew.

ROSE. I wouldn't sell them for that.

CLIFF. How the hell you gonna make a living? They ain't good for much else except good luck charms to keep keys on.

ROSE. Don't talk about that. Do you ever have dreams like that about a farm or something?

CLIFF. I don't waste my time. I dream of getting from one minute to the next. Beer?

ROSE. Alittle.

CLIFF. So how you gonna latch onto a farm?

ROSE. I don't know.

CLIFF. You think the deed to a farm comes in the morning mail?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. "Congratulations. You are the happy owner of a sixty acre farm."

ROSE. I don't think that.

CLIFF. You think you could wish it to happen?

ROSE. I was just saying.

CLIFF. It takes scratch, honey. And by the time you earn it you'll forget you ever wanted it. And if you get it, how you gonna make the mortgage payments? the taxes? the upkeep? water, gas, electric? How you gonna feed yourself? And you think it's easy working a farm?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. It's hard ass-bustin labor and you're in no shape to do it. Rabbits. How you gonna feed 'em?

ROSE. I was just saying. I know I'll never get it. But I can dream if I want.

CLIFF. You can but you can't. It catches up with you. You love something that ain't there and then you start hating what is there, and that's hell.

ROSE. What's your Zodiac sign?

CLIFF. You believe in that crap?

ROSE. It's not . . .

CLIFF. Not what?

ROSE. What you said.

CLIFF. Crap?

ROSE. They proved it's true.

CLIFF. Who proved it?

ROSE. Scientists. When were you born?

CLIFF. Soon after my mother had contractions, and tell you the truth I don't want to hear no bartalk zodiacs with a rising Scorpion on the cusp of diddlydo. Just a bunch of crap some lazyass cooked up to sell a book.

ROSE. You want to go the museum and see a dinosaur? It's about, O, I don't know, fifty or forty feet high. Tyranosaurus.

CLIFF. Do they let you feed it?

ROSE. No! It's dead.

CLIFF. Rope!

ROSE. No! It's all bones. Bones this thick all wired together. I made friends with the curator and he took me in the cellar and showed me how they wire the bones.

CLIFF. In the cellar, eh?

ROSE. Of the museum.

CLIFF. And did he show you his bone?

ROSE. No. The bones belong to the museum.

CLIFF. O, I see.

ROSE. He told me the dinosaurs disappeared off the face of the earth very suddenly.

CLIFF. How come?

ROSE. Nobody knows.

CLIFF. Mysterious.

ROSE. They think it was the temperature.

CLIFF. They died of fever?

ROSE. No. The climate changed and the dinosaurs couldn't get used to it. It was called The Great Ice Age.

CLIFF. Why didn't they go to Florida?

ROSE. You want to hear this? This is a serious subject.

CLIFF. I know. Never know when you might come across a dinosaur.

ROSE. And guess what? They just found a wooly mammoth in Siberia, or Algeria, or, I don't know, someplace far. And it was froze in ice in perfect condition! like it was in a refrigerator for ten thousand years! C'mon. We still have a chance before the museum closes.

CLIFF. That's romantic as hell. Go look at bones.

ROSE. People who can't appreciate culture are just ignorant.

CLIFF. I must be people.

ROSE. Mankind does not understand its past.

CLIFF. That what the museum guy says? Tell him if he wants to know about mankind, tell him stop playing with his bone down in the cellar there and go in a city where you don't know anybody and have your truck breakdown and try and get somebody give you ahand! Don't tell me about bones.

ROSE. It's interesting.

CLIFF. Yeah, so are rock fights. Look, Rose, I'm not too big on culture, see. Now I can get all hepped up over a t-bone or prime rib, but that's about it for bones.

ROSE. I don't think you understand.

CLIFF. Hey, look, sweetheart, I understand. I got afew hours to kill in Philly and I'm not gonna spend it looking at bones. Hey, why don't we hoof it to a joint, lay out some frogskin, do a pizza with the works to go, jump on some vino, bring it here, chow down, talk about the moon, acouple laughs, sing, dance, waterski, la la la, whatever.

ROSE. I have food here.

CLIFF. I don't want to use your food.

ROSE. I have alot of food.

CLIFF. C'mon, what do you want to do—it's up to me.

ROSE. I'd rather stay here.

CLIFF. Terrific. What do you got?

ROSE. This.

CLIFF. Boneless sardines.

ROSE. Magic mountain herb tea. And this.

CLIFF. Cranberry sauce. Dusseldorff mustard.

ROSE. Bouillon cubes. Cinnamon sticks. And this!

CLIFF. My favorite! Sea-weed soup!

ROSE. I got that in a health store.

CLIFF. I thought maybe a pet shop.

ROSE. Dried fruits and nuts. Corn niblets. Artichokes hearts. Asparagus. Jerkins.

CLIFF. Jerkins? (*Opening the refrigerator, coming up with a limp celery stalk.* ROSE *grabs it out of his hand and tosses it in the garbage.*) Hey! Don't!

ROSE. It's wilted.

CLIFF. (*Picking it out of the garbage.*) Never know. It might come alive again. (ROSE *throws it back in the garbage.*) You live on this stuff?

ROSE. I get fruits and vegetables on Ninth Street when they close.

CLIFF. What, steal it?

ROSE. No, you should see the good stuff they throw away.

CLIFF. Garbage?

ROSE. I wash it off. They throw away lettuce leaves just because it has a brown edge. Or if a peach has a bruise, I cut it out. And stick bread this long. A day old. But I don't eat it all. I break it up and feed the pigeons on the roof.

CLIFF. Get your poncho. I'll take you out for a steak.

ROSE. I thought you wanted to make something here?

CLIFF. Out of this shit? I'd have to be a goddamn magician.

ROSE. You don't have to curse.

CLIFF. What'd I say?

ROSE. You cursed.

CLIFF. No shit.

ROSE. If you want to curse, you can do it somewheres else.

CLIFF. You don't curse?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. Bull shit.

ROSE. I don't. And don't say I do.

CLIFF. You never cursed?

ROSE. Never. Not once.

CLIFF. No shit? Why not?

ROSE. Because.

CLIFF. Why because?

ROSE. Because I don't. That's all.

CLIFF. What do you say when you stub your toe? O chocolate kisses?

ROSE. I say ouch. And I don't like people who curse.

CLIFF. So you don't like me.

ROSE. Not when you curse like that.

CLIFF. So what are you, a nun?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. Eh, Sister Rose?

ROSE. If you don't like it ...

CLIFF. Stick it?

ROSE. No.

CLIFF. Sit on it?

ROSE. No!

CLIFF. Shove it?

ROSE. No!

CLIFF. Fry it up with onions? what? if I don't like it what? Eh, Sister Rose?

ROSE. If you don't like it you can go.

CLIFF. For cursing?

ROSE. Yes.

CLIFF. Why?

ROSE. It's ugly.

CLIFF. I didn't invent it.

ROSE. You use it.

CLIFF. It's part of the language.

ROSE. Not my language.

CLIFF. Hey, sorry. I meant to say all shucks and golly gee.

ROSE. Don't make fun of me.

CLIFF. I'm not.

ROSE. I hate when they make fun of me.

CLIFF. You make a big deal out of every fuckin thing.

ROSE. STOP IT! I hate that!

CLIFF. I'm sorry.

ROSE. No you're not! I hate when they curse. Like them kids at the zoo. I hate it.

CLIFF. Here we go.

ROSE. Their radios up against their ears and that wild ugly music and cursing! I hate that!

CLIFF. What kids?

ROSE. I hate that.

CLIFF. What kids at the zoo?

ROSE. Nothing.

CLIFF. They cursed at you?

ROSE. No. At those birds.

CLIFF. O, they cursed at those birds, eh?

ROSE. I forget their names.

CLIFF. O, so you're on a first-name basis with those birds, eh, Rose?

ROSE. Those tall birds with the long thin legs.

CLIFF. Ah, yes. The tall thin-legged bird of North America.

ROSE. Derricks!

CLIFF. Derricks?

ROSE. No. Cranes. Some kind of cranes.

CLIFF. And what did the derricks say, Rose?

ROSE. Stop making fun of me.

CLIFF. Did the derricks ask you if you needed a lift?

ROSE. You may think it's funny but I was the last one to see them alive last summer. There was only seven of them in the world and the zoo had four of them. I used to walk there every night just to watch them stand so still in the water. And they walked so graceful, in slow motion. And they have legs as skinny as my little finger. Long legs. And there was only seven in the world because they killed them off for feathers for ladies hats or something. And one night a gang of boys came by with radios to their ears and cursing real bad, you know, F, and everything. And I was, you know, ascared. And they started saying things to me, you know, dirty things, and laughing at the birds. And one kid threw a stone to see how close he could splash the birds, and then another kid tried to see how close he could splash the birds, and then they all started throwing stones to splash the birds, and then they started throwing stones *at* the birds, and I started screaming STOP IT! and a stone hit a bird's leg and it bended like a straw and the birds keeled over in the water, flapping wings in the water, and the kids kept laughing and throwing stones and I kept screaming STOP IT! STOP IT! but they couldn't hear me through that ugly music on the radios and kept laughing and cursing and throwing stones, and I ran and got the zoo guard and he got his club and we ran to the place of the birds but the kids were gone. And there was white feathers on the water. And the water was real still. And there was big swirls of blood. And the birds were real still. Their beaks alittle open. Legs broke. Toes curled. Still. Like the world stopped. And the guard said something to me but I couldn't hear him. I just saw his mouth moving. And I started screaming. And the cops came and took me the hospital and they

gave me a needle to make me stop screaming. And they never caught the gang. But even if they did, what good's that? They can't make the birds come alive again.

CLIFF. (*Long pause.*) Yeah, well. I'm really sorry to hear about it. But the fact of the matter is . . . it's a rough-tough world out there, and like everything else, if the birds can't hack the jive, maybe it's better they're not around gettin in the way because if you want to survive you got to be rough and tough right back.

ROSE. But they don't have a way to be rough and tough.

CLIFF. Then maybe it was meant to be for 'em to bite the dust.

ROSE. That's mean.

CLIFF. That's life.

ROSE. That's not life.

CLIFF. That's the way Niagra Falls.

ROSE. You're just as bad as them.

CLIFF. I'm not them. I'm me.

ROSE. You stick up for them, you mise well be them!

CLIFF. Hey, did I kill the birds? Did I?

ROSE. You mise well if you stick up for them!

CLIFF. But did I kill the fuckin birds?

ROSE. NO! (*Pause. Apologetic for screaming.*) No. (*Pause.*) I think you should go.

CLIFF. Yeah, me too. Afterall, you don't want it to get around you hang out with bird killers. Well, kid, it was nice.

ROSE. You think they fixed your truck?

CLIFF. No. Wasn't meant to be.

ROSE. I hope you get the new job.

CLIFF. As they say when you can't stop your rig—them's the breaks.

ROSE. What kind of job is it?

CLIFF. Testing parachutes.

ROSE. What kind of job is that?

CLIFF. Fifty bucks an hour plus they let you keep the chutes that don't open.

ROSE. What would you do with a parachute?

CLIFF. Make handkerchiefs. Big ones. (*Pause. They face each other.* CLIFF *offers a handshake. She slowly accepts.*) Cold hands.

ROSE. I'm anemic.

CLIFF. Know what's good for that?

ROSE. What?

CLIFF. Boneless sardines. Hey, Rosie-posey, mind if I smoke?

ROSE. No, but don't call me that.

CLIFF. Why not?

ROSE. You're making fun.

CLIFF. No I'm not. Honest. I just can't believe somebody like you exists.

ROSE. What do you mean somebody like me?

CLIFF. I mean you're beautiful.

ROSE. Don't say that kind of stuff to me. I know I'm not beautiful. You're making fun.

CLIFF. I'm afraid to talk. Everything I say hurts you. Maybe I don't use the right words. Hey, I'm gonna watch myself from now on. Wanna do some stuff?

ROSE. Beg your pardon?

CLIFF. You dig the weed?

ROSE. What weed?

CLIFF. C'mon, you're joshin me now.

ROSE. I don't understand.

CLIFF. Wanna do a joint?

ROSE. I don't understand.

CLIFF. Would you like a cigarette?

ROSE. I don't smoke, thank you. What's that?

CLIFF. Paper.

ROSE. What for?

CLIFF. Make cigarettes.

ROSE. Like the cowboys?