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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Anatomy of Gray

by Jim Leonard

SAMUEL FRENCH

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CHARACTERS

GALEN GRAY
JUNE MULDOON, 15
REBEKAH MULDOON, her mother
PASTOR PHINEAS WINGFIELD
TINY WINGFIELD, his sister
CRUTCH COLLINS, blacksmith
BELVA COLLINS, his wife
MAGGIE, tavern owner
HOMER, 17, a farmer

PLACE

The play takes place in Gray, Indiana in the 1800's. You can stage this play with nine good actors, one bench, one stool, and a chair.

DEDICATION

Plays come from mysterious places – at least for me. Here's how this one came to be: First, I learned that my dear friend John Geter, for whom I'd written the role of Buddy in a play of mine called THE DIVINERS, had a disease called AIDS. Like me, John grew up in a small town in Indiana. Some in his childhood community did not react well to the news of John's illness. The dying they could deal with. The truly frightening part was John being gay. Gay equaled damnation: therefore AIDS, therefore death. The irony is that John left acting to become a minister and baptized my sons. But that's how folks thought in the early 90's.

At the same time this illness was happening to John, Dr. Henry I. Schvey came to New York's Circle Repertory Theatre seeking to commission a play to celebrate the centennial of Washington University's medical school. I needed the money. I deposited his check and proceeded to panic, having no idea what to write about. Then I had a thought: "What would happen if it was only the Christians who got AIDS?" I love Jesus, but that's where I started: The godly get ill, complications ensue. It's easy to judge the righteous – it's hard to tell a good story.

For the next two-and-a-half years, I wrote and rewrote ANATOMY OF GRAY (which I called GRAY'S ANATOMY for awhile). Dr. Schvey bravely staged the premiere with a cast of talented students. I rewrote. Rob Bundy mounted a beautiful and simple production in Circle Rep's Laboratory Theatre. I rewrote. I staged it in Arizona. It was staged San Francisco. I rewrote. My friend Steven Deitz directed a stunning production at A Contemporary Theatre in Seattle. The audience seemed happy, but I knew something was profoundly wrong with the story, and I didn't know how to fix it. So I put it away.

For ten years.

Now. Time passes, but time heals nothing – it just lets us grow numb to loss. Years after John's ashes were spread on the water, I was in a very dark place. I was depressed, I was angry, and I didn't even know I was grieving. Then one night, I had a dream about John…and when I woke up, I knew how to tell the story.

This is the truth: Craig Slaight called from A.C.T. in San Francisco a week later; I told him about my dream; he dared me to write it; and then he staged it. This time, the play was the river and I was the raft. I combined and complicated characters, and I put a young woman at the center. Her father had died, and she wouldn't shut up about loss and love and grief and sex and longing and landscape and weather. I didn't find the story, the story found me.

—Jim Leonard

ACT I

(We hear an acoustic version of "The Water is Wide," simply, beautifully felt. LIGHTS RISE ON JUNE who speaks directly to the audience. The TOWNSPEOPLE ENTER on or just before their lines, or else they are on stage from the beginning. Most of this section is told right to the audience.)

JUNE. Once upon a time there was a girl who looked remarkably like me. You know how much weather there is? Well that's how many feelings she had. It's like there was one sky outside her, and a sky just as huge on the inside. She was one of the more interesting people you'd ever want to meet. But nobody knew it. Because she lived in Gray, Indiana. A town which was primarily notable for bein the most boring place in the world.

REBEKAH. June. Put a lid on it.

JUNE. Mother, there's nothin to do here but live here.

CRUTCH. Oh, hell, we got everything right here in Gray a body could need.

BELVA. Mr. Collins, there's no need to curse.

CRUTCH. We got folks to farm —

HOMER. That would be me.

CRUTCH. — and folks to fix thrashers and grub plows and broken-down wagons and such —

HOMER. That would be you.

CRUTCH. — and plenty of folks to fix meals:

MAGGIE. That would be me —

BELVA. And me —

TINY. And me —

REBEKAH. And me —

JUNE. I mainly get stuck with the dishes.

TINY. Breakfast, dinner, and supper, every blessed day, three times a day, 'til the end of foreseeable time.

BELVA. Tiny, you don't have but one soul to cook for.

TINY. I cook for my brother, I cook for myself —

BELVA. What I mean is you don't have a husband, dear.

TINY. Bless you for pointin that out, Belva.

CRUTCH. And we've got us a soul-fixer!

(PHINEAS wears wire-rimmed spectacles — one lens is clear, and the other is darkly tinted.)

PHINEAS. Phineas Wingfield, brother to Tiny, and Pastor-at-large.

HOMER. That man would baptize a dog.

PHINEAS. I always loved water.

MAGGIE. One time, he got so hepped up with the Spirit, he tried dunkin a cat. That didn't work out too well.

PHINEAS. Hold it! Just rein it in, wouldja?! *(To the audience.)* The reason I dunked every creature in sight, includin the aforementioned feline, is this: I can't picture heaven without 'em. If heaven ain't much like Indiana, well Lord God forgive me, I don't want to go. But I'm plannin to go! And I'm plannin to take this town with me — lock, stock, and cat.

MAGGIE. But Puff wasn't much for the water, you see; she scratched out the preacher's eye.

TINY. Oh, it was awful. She lashed out and gutted it clean from the socket, that cat.

HOMER. I heard tell she ate the eye, too.

TINY. Gobbled it right down, sat there and smiled.

JUNE. You see there? That's just what I'm talkin about. That right there — that eyeball eatin cat is the most interesting thing that ever happened around here. *(Beat, smile.)* At least til my story begins. Anatomy of Gray.

TOWNSPEOPLE. Chapter One:

(Lights isolate JUNE.)

JUNE. In the beginnin, we had folks to shod horses and folks to fix houses, folks to fix meals and thrashers and folks to save souls — but the one thing we lacked in our town was a person to fix other people. For Gray at the time was a town with no healer...*(Beat)* And that's where the death of my father fits in.

(REBEKAH has appeared behind June, touched her shoulder, and now they embrace in quiet grief as lights bring us to a funeral, and the TOWNSPEOPLE SING:)

TOWNSPEOPLE.

"Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See on the portals, He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me.
Come home, come home: ye who are weary come home;
Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling: Oh, sinner, come home."

(They REPEAT THE CHORUS IN HARMONY as BELVA and CRUTCH tell us the story, so the singing ends up on a lovely "Amen" just as the narration ends:)

BELVA. June lost her pa; Rebekah was widowed; and we lost a good neighbor and friend.

CRUTCH. *(Hat in hand.)* Oh, there wasn't nothin that man could not grow. His alfalfa used to come in so pretty that grown men would stand before his fields and weep.

BELVA. And then one day, out of nowhere, his heart just gave out.

CRUTCH. It was Juney who found him, still tethered to his plow.

BELVA. Her father's face was dark blue under the white hot noon sun, and the dust of his fields floated around him.

CRUTCH. And so all of us gathered together, like leaves of an autumm together, to turn that man back to the earth.

TOWNSPEOPLE.
(Singing)
"A-MEN."

PHINEAS. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.

TOWNSPEOPLE. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

PHINEAS.
"Ashes to ashes —"

REBEKAH & JUNE.
(Kneeling)
"Ashes to ashes..."

PHINEAS.
"And dust unto dust —"

REBEKAH & JUNE.
"Dust unto dust..."

BELVA. *(To the audience.)* It was a beautiful service.

(The MEN put their hats on. People give their condolences to REBEKAH and JUNE. REBEKAH slowly stands to accept their sympathies, but JUNE remains alone on her knees before her father's "grave.")

TINY. He's gonna be sorely missed, Becky.

TOWNSPEOPLE. *(Before exiting, quietly.)* —My sympathies. —Condolences, ma'am. —You're in our prayers.

PHINEAS. *(Kindly)* Your Pa's gone to a better world, June. Don't ever forget that, you hear?

(Everyone exits but JUNE and Rebekah. LIGHTS ISOLATE JUNE.)

JUNE. *(To the theater.)* Throughout the funeral and the well-meaning whispers which followed, I kept chokin back the urge to just stand up and scream: It ain't right —it ain't fair that my father is gone, and my mother is weepin alone in her room, I can't even breathe without cryin, and nothin is ever gonna feel the same to me, ever! And I cannot believe my Pa won't see the sun rise again, or be here to give me away when I marry someday, and I would trade every feelin of happiness I've ever known just to see him again! People say Time heals everything — but Time didn't heal my father; and neither did God.

REBEKAH. So that night June put pen to paper and wrote herself a business-like letter.

JUNE. "Dearest Almighty: I don't want anyone I care about to die again ever. Including, but not limited to me. So, please! Would you send us a doctor?"

REBEKAH. She wrote —

JUNE. And make him a good-lookin doctor.

REBEKAH. June thought.

JUNE. Because I'm almost sixteen, and I don't think I'm vain, but I know I'm not ugly, and most of the boys around here are just...boys around here.

(SOUND OF DISTANT THUNDER as JUNE EXITS and CRUTCH ENTERS.)

CRUTCH. The day that the healer arrived was precipitous, friends, in a number of ways.

(MORE THUNDER, WIND SOUNDS sneak in. HOMER ENTERS to watch the coming storm.)

HOMER. Would you look at those thunderheads.

CRUTCH. Rollin in blacker than sin on a Sunday.

HOMER. *(Hopeful)* Well. Maybe she'll blow right on by us.

CRUTCH. I doubt it, Homer.

HOMER. I don't mind rain, but I hate that durn thunder.

CRUTCH. Aw, it's just the Good Lord up there blowin His nose.

(THUNDER closer now, louder. WIND SOUNDS are rising.)

HOMER. I've seen some hellers in my day, but this takes the cake.

(JUNE runs on, worried.)

JUNE. Mr. Collins, have you seen my dog?
CRUTCH. Nope.
HOMER. If that dog of yours has any smarts, it's hidin out, Juney.
JUNE. Ma claims she spotted a funnel cloud yonder!
HOMER. A twister?!
CRUTCH. It's weather for twisters, no question there.
JUNE. I gotta find my dog!

(JUNE runs off calling for "Lady." We hear her continuing to call from off-stage as the STORM sounds grow even more intense.)

CRUTCH. You best get yourself down to the storm cellar, June!
HOMER. It's fixin to break any minute!
CRUTCH. *(Exiting)* I'm gonna head for shelter myself.
HOMER. *(Exiting)* I tell you, it's blowin in fast!

(The STORM BREAKS WIDE OPEN. THUNDER and LIGHTNING ECHO THROUGH THE THEATER. A TRAP DOOR pops open and REBEKAH pokes her head out. Note: if your stage has no trap, just enter.)

REBEKAH. June!! Come on, honey!
JUNE. *(Entering, upset.)* I can't find my dog!
REBEKAH. Don't you have enough sense to get out of the weather?!

(JUNE sees something in the sky — she's awe-struck by the sight.)

JUNE. What in the world is that thing?
REBEKAH. It's a tornado, June! What do you think it is?!
JUNE. *(Points out over the audience.)* Just look at it, Ma!
REBEKAH. *(Sees "it" now.)* Oh, my heavenly days.

(JUNE raps at another "storm cellar" as REBEKAH stares at the heavens.)

JUNE. Preacher? Hey, Reverend?! Come look at this, will you?

(The stage begins filling with PEOPLE, faces all turned to the downstage sky. What they see is an off-stage "balloonist" caught in the storm — and nobody has ever seen anything like this before.)

REBEKAH. What in creation is that?
PHINEAS. Good God Almighty!
JUNE. I think it's a man up there!
TINY. Sweet Jesus!
REBEKAH. It is a man!
JUNE. It's him, Ma! It's him!
CRUTCH. He's blowin right for us!
TOWNSPEOPLE. —What's all the commotion about? —It's right over yonder!—He's comin!—What's comin?!

("The BALLOON," unseen by the audience, is blowing right for them. THEY all turn as one body, to follow "it.")

HOMER & PHINEAS. —Good God! —It's fixin to —

BALLOONIST'S VOICE. *(Live, shouted from above:)* Look out below!!

TOWNSPEOPLE. —He's— —He's— —He's— —Oh, my God! — Take cover, ladies!

(A BOOT FALLS FROM THE SKY! The TOWNSPEOPLE gather around it.)

BALLOONIST'S VOICE. *(Blowing "past" them:)* Hellllllooooo down theeeeeereee!!!

TINY. It's Jesus! He's Jesus!

BELVA. He dropped his boot.

CRUTCH & HOMER. Look out for the trees!

TINY. He's headin right for the river!

PHINEAS. The river?!

(JUNE runs off up left, shouting:)

JUNE. I got him! I got him!

(The TOWN watches as off-stage JUNE grabs an off-stage rope and is "lifted" high into the sky.)

REBEKAH. Juney! Come down from there!!

JUNE. Ahhhhhh!!!

WOMEN. Ahhhhhhhhhh!!!!

HOMER. Hang on, Juney!

(JUNE and the BALLOONIST both fall into the off-stage "river," up left. Everyone runs off to help except TINY, who's holding the boot from above.)

MAGGIE. Oh, my God!
HOMER. *(Exiting)* Juney!!
REBEKAH. Swim, baby, swim!!
TINY. Somebody save him!
TOWNSPEOPLE. *(Exiting, and off-stage voices:)*—I'll get her!—Gangway now!—Juney?—Keep hold of my arm!—Grab him!—He's got him!—Juney?!
TINY. *(Exiting)* Don't lose him!

(The stage is empty.)

TOWNSPEOPLE.—Hold on! —We got him!—Jesus in Heaven! —Look out folks! —Make way!!

(The BALLOONIST stumbles on as if thrust onto stage. We assume he's soaking wet, but no real water or damp clothes are necessary. He falls to the floor, gasping for breath. The TOWNSPEOPLE rush back on and gather around him. Note: the worst of the storm has passed, but there's still plenty of WIND and RAIN.)

TINY. Is he alright?
CRUTCH. Don't crowd him now —
PHINEAS. Give him air, people!
BALLOONIST. *(Gasping)* Where am I?
BELVA. You're in Gray, stranger!
BALLOONIST. Gray?
TINY. You want your boot back?

(Commotion upstage as REBEKAH and HOMER enter— HOMER carries a lifeless-looking JUNE in his arms. The attention shifts to JUNE.)

REBEKAH. Oh, my Lord! Oh, God!
HOMER. Pastor, come look at her!
PHINEAS. Juney?
HOMER. I don't think she's breathin.

(EVERYONE except the BALLOONIST is gathered around JUNE now.)

REBEKAH. Somebody help her!
PHINEAS. *(Patting JUNE'S hand, frantically.)* Juney, come to...!
HOMER. Breathe, Juney.
REBEKAH. *(Crying)* Oh, my God, baby.
BELVA. She's fixin to die!
BALLOONIST. *(Alone)* Is her heart beating?
REBEKAH. What?
BALLOONIST. Does she have a pulse?
REBEKAH. *(Panicked)* I don't know—I just—
CRUTCH. Give him room, people— let the man through.
REBEKAH. Juney?
BALLOONIST. Ma'am, stand back — I'll do what I can.
PHINEAS. Lord God, we ask you to heal and bless her.

(CRUTCH speaks to the audience, as the action continues:)

CRUTCH. This stranger among us — this man from the sky — knelt down beside her and took that girl's face in his hands — and then, an amazing thing happened:
TINY. Sweet Jesus...
CRUTCH. He held to that child and blew his own breath in her body. And I mean to tell you, the very same moment she opened her eyes, the wind ceased to howlin and the rain stopped to fallin like that.

(CRUTCH snaps his fingers once — the rain and wind instantly stop! JUNE coughs.)

BALLOONIST. She's breathing...

TOWNSPEOPLE. —She's breathin.—She's breathin! —Praise God, she's alive!

HOMER. Was he kissin her?

CRUTCH. Oh, for the love of God, Homer.

BELVA. Say, what's your name, Mister?

BALLOONIST. Ma'am, I don't know as I quite comprehend it myself, but the fact is my name's Gray.

BELVA. Gray, you say?

TOWNSPEOPLE. —Gray? —G-R-A-Y??? —He says his name's Gray!

GRAY. *(The Balloonist.)* Galen P. Gray, Ma'am. The pleasure's all mine.

PHINEAS. If that's not the darndest thing I ever heard!

TOWNSPEOPLE. —Where do you hail from? —I mean to shake that man's hand. —It's a genuine honor. —Isn't that somethin?

CRUTCH. I tell you, he plain resurrected that child!

GRAY. Sir, let's not overstate the case, please. Resurrection and resuscitation are two entirely different kettles of fish. Now: having been somewhat involved in the past with various anatomical endeavors, I'm sure you'll understand why I'm loathe to have the term "resurrectionist" attached to my person, if not my reputation per se.

CRUTCH. No offense intended.

GRAY. None taken.

PHINEAS. What in the world was that flyin contraption?

GRAY. It's called a balloon, Mister —?

PHINEAS. Wingfield. Pastor Phineas Wingfield.

GRAY. Pastor, it holds a voluminous amount of heated, and hence, pressurized gaseous matter —

HOMER. What?

MAGGIE. A load of hot air, Homer.

GRAY. Precisely. It's technically known as an aerostat, Ma'am. They're really quite common in France.

(REBEKAH has been tending to JUNE, who's half-sitting-up now on the far side of the stage.)

REBEKAH. Mr. Gray, I don't know how to thank you.

HOMER. Are you alright, June?

JUNE. *(Staring at GRAY.)* I feel a little lightheaded.

GRAY. *(He examines her eyes.)* You go home and get some rest, June. Everything's gonna be fine. *(To REBEKAH.)* You might give her a dosage of hot tea and sorghum to ward off any chance of the croup, Ma'am.

(REBEKAH and TINY help JUNE off.)

REBEKAH. Hot tea you say?

GRAY. Hot tea's the ticket.

HOMER. Just take her one step at a time.

GRAY. *(Turns to the men.)* Well. I don't know about you, but I could sure do with a stiff drink.

CRUTCH. If you're drinkin, Mister, I'm buyin.

(The MEN exit toward town.)

PHINEAS. *(As he exits the other direction.)* Hard drink is the downfall of civilized man.

(MAGGIE speaks to the theater.)

MAGGIE. I don't cotton to whiskey and I can't abide smoke — but unlike a lot of good Christians, I'm willin to tolerate both in the name of commerce. And so, Mr. Galen P. Gray made his way down to the Corner Cafe.

(As HOMER and CRUTCH join the narration, they enter with a stool, a chair, and empty glasses, etc. There's no need for either liquids or a table.)

CRUTCH. Which ain't quite a cafe, but more of a tavern.

HOMER. It ain't even on the durn corner.

(GRAY enters during the speech below and turns his chair around backwards, so he straddles it, facing the MEN.)

GRAY. Now diet —

MAGGIE. He said —

GRAY. — holds the key to constitutional fortitude, friends. It just stands to reason that what you put into your system is what will eventually work its way forth.

MAGGIE. The privy's out back, if that's what you're hintin at.

GRAY. I think my gastrointestinal tract is holding up fine for the time being, Ma'am. What are your specials this evening?

MAGGIE. Meat and potatoes.

GRAY. I'll try the beef.

MAGGIE. How do you want your beef cooked?

GRAY. Well-done, please.

MAGGIE. I like it rare myself.

GRAY. Lot of folks do.

MAGGIE. Meat doesn't taste right if there's not just a little blood runnin.

GRAY. Blacken it, please.

MAGGIE. You want that seared on the outside, pink in the middle then?

GRAY. Ma'am, would you please cook the steak through and through?

MAGGIE. If that's how you want it —

GRAY. That's how I prefer it, Ma'am. Thank you.

MAGGIE. *(Exiting)* Perfect waste of a good piece of meat...

CRUTCH. Thank God they don't have the vote.

(The MEN clink glasses.)

HOMER. Doc, why do you take your steak black?

GRAY. It kills all the bacterial matter.

HOMER. Bacterial matter?

GRAY. Parasites, germs, and amoebas, that's right. Germs are like dust, see? They're everywhere.They carry diseases around like a puppy totes slippers.

CRUTCH. I don't see nary a one.

GRAY. They're microscopically small, Mr. Collins, but they are tenacious.

HOMER. There's germs in the Corner Cafe?

GRAY. From the looks of it, I'd say a few million have set up housekeeping in this very room.

CRUTCH. Good God Almighty!

GRAY. No call to panic. Whiskey's a fine way to keep them at bay. Serves to sterilize the system, you understand.

HOMER. What about soda pop?

GRAY. Carbonated beverages, consumed in moderation, have actually proven to benefit the metabolism, son.

HOMER. That doesn't surprise me.

(MAGGIE enters with an empty red platter, a fork and a knife.)

MAGGIE. I hope you brought your appetite with you.

HOMER. Good Lord, if that don't smell tasty, I don't know what does.

MAGGIE. I cooked it up beautiful for him.

GRAY. Madam, I told you —

MAGGIE. Oh, now — it's barely pink, Doctor. Here. Cut it.

GRAY. I've seen cows hurt worse than this get better.

MAGGIE. It's not bloody — it's juicy. It's tasty — just taste it.

(GRAY looks like he's going to be ill.)

CRUTCH. Doctor Gray?

GRAY. If you'll excuse me, I have some rather pressing business I need to attend to...

(GRAY exits off with all the dignity he can. Beat.)

MAGGIE. Well. Good Lord.

HOMER. It don't look too germy to me.

(HOMER follows the plate off as MAGGIE exits. TOWNSPEOPLE might sing a few lines of "There is Power in the Blood" to serve as a transition. Then JUNE steps into a "narrative" LIGHT.)

JUNE. Now Galen P. Gray might have been a mite squeamish

— but havin a bonafide healer in town was a new thing for people, and I don't mind tellin you, we couldn't wait to get sick.

(TINY enters from one side, and GRAY from the other. The scene becomes GRAY'S "office." He doctors in street clothes — no stethoscope, nothing.)

GRAY. What seems to ail you, Miss Wingfield?

TINY. I'm just a tad on the peaked side, Doctor.

GRAY. Peaked, you say?

TINY. Yes, sir, I've got no more pep than a dog in the sun.

GRAY. Maybe you've picked up a bit of a bug.

TINY. You know what the funny thing is? No matter how worn out I get, I can't seem to sleep. I toss, turn, up, down, pacin the floorboards all night. I guess I'm just naturally nervy. I always have been.

GRAY. Stick out your tongue and say "ahh" for me, please.

TINY. Ah.

GRAY. Ahhhhh...

TINY. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh...

GRAY. Tonsils look normal.

TINY. I've never been to a doctor before. I want you to know I'm enjoyin it.

GRAY. Good.

TINY. I can't help but notice you don't have a ring on your finger. I take it you must be a widower, Doc?

GRAY. Never known the privilege of marriage.

TINY. Guess what? We have somethin in common. I never been married myself.

(GRAY hands TINY a small glass jar.)

GRAY. Miss Wingfield, I want you to take this jar out to the privy, and relieve yourself in it.

TINY. *(Doesn't move.)* You want to trot that thought by me again?

GRAY. I need to examine your urine, Ma'am.

TINY. What kind of animal are you?!

GRAY. I am merely trying to ascertain the root cause of your chronic insomnia.

TINY. Oh, my God! I have insomnia?!

(BELVA, CRUTCH, and MAGGIE instantly enter as GRAY exits.)

BELVA. Tell me about it.

TINY. I've suspicioned for years I had somethin drastically wrong with me, Belva — I just didn't know what it was.

MAGGIE. Guess what I have? I have migraines.

TINY. Oh, you poor thing, you.

CRUTCH. What do you do for it?

MAGGIE. Hot compress.

BELVA. Migraines ain't nothin. Mr. Collins has — what do you call it, dear?

CRUTCH. It's a dyspeptic ulcer — dear.

BELVA. I have arthritis. It's right here in my hand.

TINY. Oh, my dear God!

BELVA. *(Dry)* It's incurable

(More TOWNSPEOPLE enter, forming sort of a chorus-line of ailments.)

TINY. Insomnia.

MAGGIE. Migraines.

BELVA. Arthritis.
CRUTCH. Ulcers.
HOMER. Rheumatism.
JUNE. Menstruation.
REBEKAH. Indigestion.
TINY. Etcetera.
JUNE. From all across the county they came —
HOMER. The lame —

(REBEKAH, CRUTCH, TINY and BELVA each exit after their lines:)

REBEKAH. The infirm —
CRUTCH. The sickly —
TINY. The peaked —
BELVA. The down in the mouth —
JUNE. People flocked to the healer like birds flock to crumbs! There was somethin wrong with you if you didn't have somethin wrong with you.
PHINEAS. *(Entering)* I tell you, I wouldn't set foot near that man!

(LIGHTS change as JUNE, MAGGIE, and HOMER cross to PHINEAS. The scene might be the pastor's front porch.)

JUNE. Why not?
PHINEAS. Cause he's nothing but trouble, that's why. I may not be able to read, but I have committed the bible chapter and verse to my heart. Now you've got your leprosy—you've got your demon possession — and you've got your plagues by the score, but there isn't one single germ in the bible.

HOMER. Folks felt a lot better before that man came to town, Pastor. It's true.

PHINEAS. I wish he'd float to whence he came, Homer.

MAGGIE. Have you got somethin personal against him, or is it just biblical?

PHINEAS. Well. I hate to talk, Margaret.

MAGGIE. I know you do, Pastor — I hate to talk, too.

PHINEAS. But Tiny told me — my own sister told me he told her to disrobe herself! And right there in front of him, too.

JUNE. Did she do it?

PHINEAS. I'm not at liberty to say. But what kind of scoundrel'd ask a fine woman, a good Christian flower to do such a thing?! I tell you, it stinks to the core.

JUNE. Personally, I'm all in favor of nudity.

MAGGIE. June.

JUNE. When I went to see him, I took all my clothes off — every last stitch — he stripped right down to his birthday suit, too. Then we danced around a fire and sacrificed small animals and house pets till the sun came up.

PHINEAS. Juney: don't josh.

HOMER. If I had a wife or a sister or a girlfriend or...something, I sure as heck wouldn't let her go near him.

JUNE. I best be heading for home, Pastor.

PHINEAS. Mind yourself, Juney.

HOMER. Bye, June. I'll see you at church, I hope.

JUNE. *(Homer is boring.)* Bye, Homer.

(HOMER calls after her:)

HOMER. I'll buy you a soda pop sometime.

MAGGIE. Pastor, where's Tiny been keepin herself? She wasn't to service on Sunday nor choir practice on Wednesday.

PHINEAS. That durn doctor told her to sleep in the daytime and stay up all night.

MAGGIE. Well I never heard such a thing.

PHINEAS. Tiny told me she saw him late last night — and just take a guess where he was. *(Dramatic beat.)* Graveyard.

MAGGIE. The graveyard?

HOMER. What in the world was Doc doin out there?

MAGGIE. Did he have a shovel?

PHINEAS. Oh, he's some kind of secretive Free-Thinker, Maggie — there's no tellin what he could do! Dig up dead people — desecrate bodies — just for curiosity's sake.

HOMER. He wasn't diggin up dead people, is he?

PHINEAS. I don't think we've sunk to that yet. But I know a preacher who knows of a fella who talked to somebody who lives in the city —

MAGGIE. And?

PHINEAS. Apparently, there was a doctor he knew, kept a whole jar of gizzards — and I'm talkin human-type gizzards — pickled right there on his desk!

HOMER. Pickled 'em?

PHINEAS. Pickled 'em, that's what he did! Just like a Godblessit cucumber, Homer! I tell you, it gives a man pause.

MAGGIE. *(Exiting:)* I don't know what this world's comin to.

(TINY enters with a length of rope as PHINEAS and MAGGIE exit.)

TINY. *(To us:)* Shhhh. In reality, I'm sound asleep right now. But for purposes of telling this story: I am a tree.

HOMER. *(To us:)* I'm a tree with a swing in me.

TINY. This is a clothesline.

HOMER. And this is June's yard. And in case you ain't

guessed it by now, I am one tree with a real bad crush on the prettiest girl in the county.

(They stretch the "clothesline" between them as REBEKAH and JUNE enter with a basket of laundry to hang on the line. Note: we don't need too many articles of clothing to get the point across.)

JUNE. Mama?

REBEKAH. Yes, June?

JUNE. Do you think you'll ever get married again?

REBEKAH. I doubt it.

JUNE. Why not?

REBEKAH. Because I'm still in love with your father, that's why. I imagine I always will be.

JUNE. But, Ma, just supposin you met somebody you liked a lot, and he liked you back, and he asked you to marry him? What do you think you'd do then?

REBEKAH. Honey, that's not gonna happen.

JUNE. But what if it did?

REBEKAH. It won't.

JUNE. I ain't sayin it will, but it's possible, ain't it?

REBEKAH. June. What's your point?

JUNE. I think we should ask Doctor Gray over for dinner.

REBEKAH. No.

JUNE. Why not?

REBEKAH. Because I have no interest in courtin that man. None whatsoever.

JUNE. Well what if I do?

REBEKAH. Oh, Lord, June.

JUNE. I like him. I really do, Ma. I mean I really, really like him.

REBEKAH. Juney, he's too old for you.

JUNE. You were in love at my age.

REBEKAH. Yes, but your Pa was no older than me.

JUNE. I'm old enough to know how I feel.

REBEKAH. Honey, you don't even know Doctor Gray.

JUNE. Then why don't we ask him to dinner and rectify that?

REBEKAH. No, June.

JUNE. But, Ma —

REBEKAH. I said no, honey.

JUNE. *(After a moment.)* Maybe he could just make a house call or somethin.

REBEKAH. You're not sick.

JUNE. Well you are.

REBEKAH. I am not ill in the least.

JUNE. Then how come you keep throwin up in the mornin? *(Off her mother's look:)* Are you havin a baby?

REBEKAH. *(After a moment.)* I don't know.

JUNE. What do you mean you don't know?

REBEKAH. I mean I don't know if am or not yet.

JUNE. Maybe you should ask Doctor Gray.

REBEKAH. We've already spoken about it. At length.

JUNE. What did he say?

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

JUNE. You sure act like you're havin a baby.

REBEKAH. Honey, look at me. *(JUNE does.)* We don't need another mouth to feed. Right now, it's all I can do to look after you and take care of myself, honey. Do you understand what I'm tellin you?

JUNE. No.

REBEKAH. *(After a moment.)* I'll explain it sometime when you're older.

(REBEKAH exits. JUNE turns to us:)

JUNE. The first thing I'm plannin to do when I'm older is move to the city, and set up housekeepin with Galen P. Gray. He'll teach me to nurse. I'll help him with patients. And we'll live in a real nice house with a nice little office downstairs. I'll cook him nice meals, he'll buy me nice clothes, and we'll have lots of lots of children — which means we'll need to spend an inordinate amount of time in the bedroom. And that's just the way it's gonna be.

(HOMER turns to us as JUNE exits:)

HOMER. If oak trees could talk, I'd be cryin.

(Night. BELVA and CRUTCH rush on stage. BELVA carries a lantern. CRUTCH has a red rag wrapped around his hand, signifying that he's cut himself. BELVA knocks, or we hear the sound of her knocking, as:)

BELVA. Doctor Gray? Doctor, wake up!

CRUTCH. You know it's the funniest thing, Bel — it really don't hurt at'all.

BELVA. *(Knocks again.)* Doc? Are you decent?

GRAY. *(O.S.)* Be right with you, people!

CRUTCH. Sorry to wake you.

(GRAY enters, barefooted and buttoning his shirt. He's just woken up.)

GRAY. What's wrong, Mrs. Collins? You taking ill?

BELVA. It ain't me, it's him, Doc. He's cut his hand bad.

GRAY. Oh, no...

CRUTCH. I was tryin to sharpen a plow.

BELVA. I went to bed early; I went to sleep directly —

CRUTCH. I's intendin to plant by the light of the moon.

BELVA. Next thing I knew, Mr. Collins is standin there bleedin all over my clean sheets.

GRAY. *(Avoids looking at it.)* How bad is it?

CRUTCH. Well. It's a gash, Doc, there's no question there.

GRAY. How deep is it?

CRUTCH. Well look at it. Isn't that somethin? You see all them — what do you call em? — them innard things?

BELVA. Tendons, I reckon.

(GRAY passes out. Beat.)

CRUTCH. Doc?

BELVA. Good Lord, he's fell back to sleep.

CRUTCH. Honey, I don't believe he's sleepin. I think the man fainted flat out.

BELVA. I'll fetch some water — we'll bring him around.

(BELVA exits.)

CRUTCH. *(Privately)* Hey, Galen — snap to now — let's sober up, buddy.

GRAY. *(Groggy*) What...?

CRUTCH. *(Calls)* He's comin around, Belva!

(BELVA enters with a BUCKET.)

BELVA. Just hold on — I'll give him a dowsin.

GRAY. What?...ho—ho—whoa!—hold it a second! Just let

me clear my mind, will you? *(Pulling himself together.)* Mr. Collins, if you'll dip your hand in that bucket and clean it off for me, I can't tell you how much that would aid my examination...

CRUTCH. Sure, I can swush it around.

GRAY. You got a knife on you?

CRUTCH. Bel, fish it out of my pocket here for me.

BELVA. You feelin alright, Doc?

CRUTCH. *(Her hand is in his pocket.)* Watch it there, Belva.

GRAY. I'm gonna be fine, Ma'am.

(She gives him the pocket knife. GRAY cuts a strip or two off of his button-down white shirt, as they talk.)

CRUTCH. Good Lord, this water is gettin dark fast.

BELVA. Doc, how to manage to —?

GRAY. Operate, Madam? I don't. I can't do it. That's all there is to it.

BELVA. What kind of doctor can't cut on nobody?

GRAY. Dead folks I don't have much trouble with, but live ones just take the starch out of my system in two seconds flat.

BELVA. Must make it difficult for you.

GRAY. It curses me, Ma'am. It's a terrible failing, it truly is.

CRUTCH. Doc, if you want, I'll just go home and let'er stop bleedin alone.

GRAY. *(It's tempting, but...)* No. No, you might get infected, I'd hate to have that. Just hold it out here and I'll try to bind it up properly. *(To BELVA.)* Take his arm for me, please. *(GRAY can hardly bear to look at the "gash". CRUTCH'S HAND shakes a little.)* If you could steady it, Ma'am...I'm trying to put myself in a mind of cadavers.

(GRAY binds CRUTCH'S hand, as:)

CRUTCH. It's a wonder to me it don't hurt anymore than it does.

GRAY. It might be you sliced a nerve open. You feel numb?

CRUTCH. No.

GRAY. Wiggle your fingers around for me. *(CRUTCH does.)* I think you're gonna be fine. Main thing's to keep the skin grafting together.

BELVA. Doc, what is this mark on his arm? *(The mark is invisible to us.)*

GRAY. Could be a mole or a birthmark.

CRUTCH. I never noticed that, Belva.

GRAY. You got any others?

CRUTCH. Not that I know of.

BELVA. Look! There's a mark on me, too.

CRUTCH. I'll be dog gone.

GRAY. Could be some type of eczema, I suppose. Does it itch?

BELVA. No.

GRAY. Let me know if it changes shape any or gets any bigger.

CRUTCH. You tie a right handsome knot, Doc.

GRAY. Keep it dry. Keep it clean. Don't try to plow, for God's sake. You show infection the crack of a door, it barges right in like a Mormon. Good night all.

CRUTCH. I thank you again, sir. Sleep tight.

(GRAY exits.)

BELVA. I'm too young for age spots.

CRUTCH. I'd call it a beauty mark, Belva.

BELVA. A beauty mark?

CRUTCH. What do you say you and me take the long way home, honey?

BELVA. Mr. Collins, are you spoonin me?

CRUTCH. This much excitement at this time of night, just puts a man of a mood.

BELVA. I think you should hurt yourself more often.

(MUSIC. LIGHTS rise on REBEKAH, who speaks to the theater. MUSIC supports her thoughts, her speech.)

REBEKAH. In the long days that followed the death of my husband, I dreamt about him near every night. In my dreams, my husband rose up from the earth; the dust fell from his eyes; and his voice was so familiar and lonesome, it scared me. Sometimes I could feel his breath through the window. I could feel his touch in my sleep. *(Then)* And so, when I found myself dreaming in tears, and I woke up alone, I went to the graveyard to see him.

(GRAY enters the graveyard, late at NIGHT. We barely see him...more shadow than presence. He takes a yarmulke out of his pocket, puts it on, and softly begins to say Kaddish:)

GRAY. *(Half-whispering.)*"Yis-gad-dalv'yis-kad-dash sh'meh rab-bo, b'ol-mo di'v-ro kir'-u-seh v'yam-lich mal-chu-seh, b'cha-ye-chon u-'yo-me-chon u-v'cha-yeh d'chol bes yis-ro-el —"

REBEKAH. What are you sayin?

(She's startled him. He takes his yarmulke off.)

GRAY. Mrs. Muldoon...! Fancy meeting you here.

REBEKAH. What are you doin?
GRAY. I'm saying Kaddish, Ma'am.
REBEKAH. Say what?
GRAY. It's a kind of a prayer for the dead.
REBEKAH. It's a foreign language, ain't it?
GRAY. To some folks it is.
REBEKAH. It sounds beautiful. Who are you prayin for?

(GRAY crouches near the old "grave," which lies flat to the earth.)

GRAY. You see this old stone here? The name's worn away, but I noticed a star on it.
REBEKAH. Oh, nobody knows who that is. We all figured he must of passed on at Christmas. On account of the star.
GRAY. No, Ma'am, that's the Star of David. I figure whoever this is, he must be one of my people.
REBEKA. You don't mean he's kin to you?
GRAY. Not by blood.
REBEKAH. *(Softly)* Would you pray that prayer for my husband? For me?
GRAY. I'd be honored to, Mrs. Muldoon.

(They cross to where her husband was buried.)

GRAY. It's a right pretty stone, Ma'am. You've done him proud.
REBEKAH. Thank you...
GRAY. This prayer for the dead is all about life. It speaks to the glory of God, but it's said for the living, you see? It's kind of a prayer for us. You understand?
REBEKAH. You're talkin about what I asked you before.

GRAY. I'm talking about your so-called "indigestion", that's right.

REBEKAH. Dr. Gray, I haven't changed my mind any. *(Near tears, but strong.)* I loved my husband more than I know how to say, but I can't have this child without him. I just can't.

GRAY. Sometimes decisions we make in a moment of grief are decisions we come to regret. Grief does terrible things to a person's mind, Ma'am, believe me, I know.

REBEKAH. I know there's certain things you can do for a woman who wants to be rid of a baby.

GRAY. I think you should give this a little more thought and a little more time.

REBEKAH. The last thing I want to give this is time! Don't you understand that? I'm only a few months along. If you don't want to help me, I'll do it myself.

GRAY. I beg you not to do that.

REBEKAH. I've heard tell of roots and of —

GRAY. Poisons is what they are! Do you want to kill yourself right along with it? Is that what you want? To lie in some field and bleed to death?

REBEKAH. No, sir, I don't. But I need to be shed of this baby. Why won't you help me?

GRAY. *(A near-whisper.)* Because I don't know if it's right.

REBEKAH. *(Meets his eye.)* Then you take it to God in prayer, sir. And you pray for the souls of us all.

(She kneels at the grave and closes her eyes. GRAY looks at her for a moment, puts his yarmulke on, looks up, and then begins to pray, letting us feel the loss in this language...slowly at first, and then more rhythmically, until the prayer becomes like a song.)

GRAY. "Yis-gad-dal v'yis-kad-dash sh'meh rab-bo, b'ol-mo di'v-ro kir'u-seh v'yam-lich mal-chu-seh, b'cha-ye-chon u-'yo-me-chon u-v'cha-yeh d'chol bes yis-ro- el, ba-a-go-lo u-viz-man ko-riv, v'im-ru O-Men. Y'heh sh'meh rab-bo m'vo-rach, l'o-lam ul'ol'meh ol-ma-ya: Yis-bo-rcah v'yish-tab-bach v'yis-po-ar, v'yis-ro-mam, v'yis-nas-seh, v'yis-had-or, v'yis-al-leh, v'yis-hal-lol O-men..."

(GRAY takes a breath at the end of this phrase, and REBEKAH, assuming he's done because it feels like he is, says:)

REBEKAH. Amen. *(He looks at her.)* I thank you.

GRAY. Mrs. Muldoon, I think that someday somebody's gonna come along, Ma'am, and see you for the good person you are. And he'll love this child, whoever he is, because it's a part of you. *(He puts his hand first on her heart, then on her womb, and then on the grave...using a line for each:)* Life is here. Life is here. Life is here.

REBEKAH. I just asked you to pray, not to preach.

GRAY. Point taken.

(They both stand.)

GRAY. Would it be too terribly forward of me to ask to escort you home, Ma'am?

REBEKAH. I don't think that'd be too awfully terrible, no.

(She takes his arm and they exit. MUSIC might be nice under the following NARRATION:)

MAGGIE. The weather report is as follows:

CRUTCH. Spring turns to Summer and Summer to Fall.

MAGGIE. There's more leaves upon the earth now than stars in the sky.

CRUTCH. And harvest is in the works.

HOMER. Sunrise'll find half the countryside out in the fields.

CRUTCH. They're shellin up corn now —

HOMER. Thrashin the wheat like a misbehaved child.

MAGGIE. But here at the preacher's house, nobody's tendin the fields this day.

CRUTCH. For here at the preacher's house, sickness has found a home.

(PHINEAS enters, sinks to a chair, and groans softly in pain as TINY lets GRAY in the "door".)

PHINEAS. Ohhhhhhhhh, my Lord...

GRAY. Morning, Miss Wingfield.

TINY. Come right in, Doctor.

PHINEAS. What is he doin here?

TINY. I sent for him, brother.

PHINEAS. *(Still doubled half-over in pain.)* Well, send him away. I don't need no doctorin.

GRAY. Pastor, you're red as a beet.

PHINEAS. *(Masking his pain.)* I'm fine — I'll be fine, thank you very much. Prayer is the answer.

TINY. Phineas, whatever this is, you can't pray it away.

PHINEAS. It passes in time every time. I appreciate your concern, sir — now why don't you show him the door?

GRAY. Why don't you tell me what's ailing you, Pastor?

TINY. Pain is what's ailin him.

GRAY. Pain in the abdomen?

PHINEAS. *(Groans, sounds like "lower")* Looooord...

GRAY. Lower abdomen?

TINY. *(In confidence.)* Doctor, it's lower than lower.

GRAY. Miss Tiny, could we have a moment of privacy, please?

TINY. But, Doc —

GRAY. *(Walks her out of the room.)* You just wait out in the hall. He'll be fine. You sleeping alright, are you?

TINY. I love the night.

GRAY. Good!

TINY. I'll pray for you, brother.

(TINY exits. GRAY turns back and matter-of-factly announces:)

GRAY. Alright, Mr. Wingfield — drop your drawers, please.

PHINEAS. Never.

GRAY. Come on now. Get out of those trousers.

PHINEAS. Get out of your own trousers!

GRAY. Let's try to be reasonable, shall we?

PHINEAS. I'm not about to slip down to my skivvies in front of the likes of you.

GRAY. Pastor —

PHINEAS. I'm not even kin to you!

GRAY. I can no more examine a patient who's fully clothed, than you'd read the bible blindfolded.

PHINEAS. I know my scriptures.

GRAY. *(Stares at him, then.)* Alright, to heck with you.

(GRAY drops his own trousers.)

PHINEAS. What are you doin?

GRAY. If I can do it, you can do it. Come on, sir. Drop your pants.

PHINEAS. *(Averts his eyes.)* "Blessed is he that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of the scornful—"

(GRAY joins in — he knows the psalm, too. PHINEAS looks up, amazed. After a moment, the preacher drops his own trousers as they recite the psalm together. Both men end up with their pants around their ankles.)

GRAY. *(Overlapping.)* "—But his delight is the law of the Lord. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season—"

PHINEAS. *(Overlapping.)* "—But his delight is the law of the Lord. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season"

GRAY. Etcetera, etcetera, and so on.

PHINEAS. Amen.

GRAY. Now: let's see if we can get to the bottom of this, so to speak.

PHINEAS. Don't touch me.

GRAY. I know you're tender.

PHINEAS. Just keep your paws to yourself!

(GRAY and PHINEAS mirror each other, so that GRAY examines his own body.)

GRAY. *(Touching his own belly.)* Would you say the pain is localized about here?

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