

Sliding in All Directions

Story by Marianne Ackerman
with texts from John Mighton,
Norbert Ruebsaat, Judith Thompson,
Donald Molnar and
The Old Testament

C. M. Ackerman, shared with other authors.

Music by Karen Young

Directed by Guy Sprung

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Sliding in All Directions

OUTLINE

Sc. 1	Song of Songs	The Quest
Sc. 2	John Mighton	Our Way of Life
Sc. 3	Norbert Ruebsaat	Marching
Sc. 4	Song of Songs	Soldier's Torchsong
Sc. 5	Judith Thompson	Girl
Sc. 6	Song of Songs	Angel Sings the Blues
Sc. 7	Donald Molnar	Telephone Call
Sc. 8	Song of Songs	Reunion

The Myth

Scene one and two

The war has lasted forever. The soldier's body aches. His bones are as tired as an old mule but the sound of gunfire no longer batters his ears. In this new silence he begins to remember another life, a voice like a flute on clear water. He resolves to follow that memory to its source: his Beloved. This sudden twitch of hope in one of her soldiers greatly impresses the old goddess Athena, and in a rare moment of humility, she changes herself into a white rat to help him on his journey. (Goddesses are always old at the end of the century, waiting to be reborn. That's her in the small cage he carries.)

At dawn, the city roars with anguish and ambition but the pilgrims are outside the brawl, unnoticed, unafraid, surrounded by forests. A woman, running, catches a whiff of pine needles and stops. Maybe the old soldier reminds her of somebody else, for, oblivious to the smell of blood on his clothes, the wreck of his physique, the nibbling rat, she invites him in to meet her friends and spend an evening.

How clean and calm and beautiful these people are! If they notice his decay, they don't show it. If he's Ann's friend, they are prepared to stay mum. At first the soldier is enchanted. He imagines his Beloved living among them and is hungrier than ever to find her. Ann's hair smells like apples and everybody's teeth are blazing white. They seem so interested but do not pry. They smile but do not bite. They take the trouble to make conversation and the soldier is grateful. But conversation, once made, begins to move like an independent bullet, racing from one idea to the next until it arrives at an obstacle and the soldier is called upon to dislodge silence. The ground beneath him trembles. He doesn't want to break the tie or raise his hand and is sinking fast into the hidden meaning of their words. Conversation darts into new dark corners. He begins to hear an awful rumble in the distance. Or is it in his stomach? He smells the rancid vapor, flesh rotting behind clean, white shirts as voices rise, higher and higher, demanding some kind of resolution. It all

hangs on him. He thinks of his Beloved, trapped here. Athena is frantic so he obeys and raises his hand and suddenly they are engulfed in gunfire and darkness. The clean, white shirts fall like ordinary victims.

The soldier and the goddess lie quietly, listening to the far-off rumble. She wanted him to know what menace lies behind the phoney smell of apples, and now he knows. The war is never over, or very far away. It's always there, among us, in the empty smiles of clean, calm, beautiful people.

Scene three

As the smoke settles around them, the soldier longs for an echo of his Beloved but the horizon of memory is crowded by an old man and his son, both children in the fields of recollection. The son swims in moonlight and the father sits in ashes. It's the old man's boots the soldier notices first, sturdy, steel-toed marching boots made for thick socks and all weathers. Boots broken in but still many miles to go. Dry boots with new laces. Leather boots made from slaughtered beasts. Hard soles and soft insoles. The soldier's aching feet crave a moment inside and the sound of boots clapping so firmly and confidently on the pavement is music to the soldier's tender ears. As the father talks, the soldier does not, cannot, remember why, should he resist the sound of firm, confident - resist following the clap clap clap of steel leather firm soles, boots from beasts, breathing hard on the sidewalk, following the father's words, steps, following the father, making boot music.

Soon everybody's wearing the boots and the ache in the soldier's old bones is completely gone. The mule in his body is fresh and obedient. Even the boy in the moonlight is keeping time, everyone breathing together in time. Until suddenly they all feel it. A short, cool whisper, like the letter o, in their ear. A draft between the steps. Someone sneezes, and the rhythm falls apart. Boots begin to slide and stumble. Someone giggles. Someone hops. The father's iron memory calls them into step, but it's too late, the shrill sound of his lament has no power and the cool

flute on clear water is on everyone's lips. The line shatters into a dozen directions. "They fall as if a whiteness filled their magic garments when they mimic the dew."

The soldier looks into the son's eyes and sees his Beloved. He is deeply ashamed at his craving to be inside those boots. The forest around him splinters, the city sounds crash against his ears like shrapnel and finally he remembers. The memory tears through him. The names and numbers of everyone who ever died under a pair of boots, up from the earth like lightening ripping through his body, a fried tree, and out everywhere, his brain, his mouth, sound in reverse through his ears. He can only whisper the figures. The others, even the father, hear him from inside. By the time this memory is on their lips, they are all together, in the same melody, a sad song to the barefoot dead.

The soldier is outside their song, outside himself, cleansed of his craving but bitterly wise.

Scene four, five and six

At the edge of the battlefield, somewhere in the trenches, abandoned Athena twitches her hard pink tail. The soldier hears the scrape of tail on cage, and remembers, oh-my-god-ess. Her cold, red eyes accuse him. He falls to his knees in shame. Like Adam and all Adams since Adam, awakened from their dreams, he is sorry, so sorry, so grateful to be on his knees, begging for forgiveness and absolution and whatever else she deigns to spare. The words pour out like sweet water and now it is all so clear: Athena, his Beloved, she is the voice, his muse and he, the slaughtered barefoot beast, rises to the occasion with an ode to her beauty. Everyone who hears this ode believes fully and instantly in her beauty. Well, not quite everyone.

A young girl named Cora hears his words backwards, in the mirror of her memory, and every sweet word is a drop of poison, until finally her ears are full and bursting and she explodes: YOU - a cannon blast, wide, old fashioned, low tech, aiming at everybody, hitting no one. But the rat-tat-tat of each succeeding word is a laser beam of thought and experience that can be ignored by no one who listens and who can stop listening? All men who are caught on their knees worshipping with poetry and flowers, all men lean over their genitals as Cora's story gallops toward them. All women who stand over them, hands outstretched, robes unbuttoned, take a step back and listen. Cora has covered herself with scraps of truth and the result is a crusty shield. Swordsmen and women of all sexes fall in behind her.

This time, the ancient sound of boots on the pavement is not there to organize a march. This time, rage rises from the womb of earth, an uncontrollable urge with no generals, no headquarters, no coloured maps or plans of attack. Every new soldier declares war at a moment of his or her own choosing and they all descend on the old soldier, united in vengeance. They beat him on behalf of all injustice everywhere, once and again and again for now and for all times.

He feels nothing. His war is over. Somewhere else, deep in the clefts of rock, his Beloved bears the pain, bleeds, a song of love and sorrow.

Scene seven

The soldier lies in a damp ditch, hugging Athena, farther from his Beloved than ever. He cannot move but in the air around him, two voices connect, a warm woman's words and the nervous high-pitched trill of a boy alone. They are thousands of mile apart but her hot voice is in his

hand and the connection crackles along a telephone wire stretched between the frozen soldier and the sky. In return for the boy's money the woman is opening herself for business. The boy steps gingerly into the imaginary darkness of her arms. She is about to do with clean safe words what millions of women have done before with their eyes and hearts closed, but this exchange will never touch the earth. It is perhaps the final exchange before the jungle is closed forever, sex over the phone, all in the mind. As the soldier listens he is appalled, then aroused, and doubly appalled.

The woman knows her way but for this boy, it's too easy. His innocence is powerful and he wants more, to take her clothes off, know who she is, so he reaches into the telephone and carefully, gently, takes off her blouse, looks at the scars on her breasts. For the first time in a long time she is seen. Then he reaches out thousands of miles and touches her wounds. She howls and the soldier winces. Caught once again, this time he is Adam and Eve, naked and ashamed. But this time he does not cower, recovers his resolve, snatches Athena from the ditch and resolves to return to the front where the battlelines are clear and there is no salty hope to sting the inevitable gunshot wounds. But Athena is gone. Her cage door swings open in the wind. The soldier is alone. He feels his Beloved so near, she is whispering in his ear.

Scene eight

She is near but she is nowhere. Now it's the soldier who is in a cage, suddenly surrounded once more by the city and the noise of these mad people whom he has sadly come to know on his journey. They are everywhere around him, caught in their own worlds. He tries to speak but his mouth is empty. Their frenzy circles him like a storm. Amid the roar he hears snatches of a voice, his Beloved is among them, urgently singing for him. He bangs against the cage walls until the frenzied chorus pays attention and he can hear her voice clearly. She is so close. Where is she?

He knocks. She answers and he can almost taste her warm breath on his ear and the chorus can taste it too. They are with him now and eager for the sight of the soul behind that voice. But she does not appear. The soldier is impatient. Finally, her light, she is listening. The soldier rejoices and invites them all to feast.

When the Beloved speaks the assembled multitudes are amazed by her words. In a voice they had until now only heard as an echo in the darkness, she praises her Beloved, paints him in magnificent colours as a king and a god, a garden and a castle, an empire that will endure forever. Her song builds a monument from the strongest, most exquisite words and the multitudes are in awe. The soldier lowers his eyes and rests his tired gaze on the remnant of flesh and bone he has dragged home from the war. As her words soar into the air, he feels his grey skin sag into the earth. He is deeply ashamed of the old mule he has become. Fearing her disappointment more than death in the dark, he turns and walks away. With every step he takes, the light and warmth drains from her voice. When she opens the door, there is no one.

In the cold dawn following disappointment, Athena is a quiet white cat, asleep in the Beloved's arms. A goddess who has never been at ease in a cage, an angel who has waited forever. They are not at home to Despair. Athena, in the Beloved's arms, carries her away, to higher ground, where they can both get a wider view of this crazy world.

The chorus, however, interpret this absence of despair as a sign of hope. Once invited to the feast, they are determined there will be one. So they resolve to find the old, deaf, idiot soldier, drag him back, bathe him, dress him, teach him the part, begin again the eternal story and weave new marching orders from the remnants of their own dead skin. So, they play the tape backwards, eyes and ears open. Once again they will be the clean, beautiful people waiting for Ann, and her friend.

Of course, it isn't that simple. Old soldiers fall asleep and may not dance on cue. But it's up to them now, to examine the words anew, squeeze out

the subtext and give old themes a new gloss. As they work together on this dance, it gradually becomes clear to these citizens of a small room that they've always had all they needed, everything but the spirit and a common cause. And now that they have a common cause it's laughably simple: Just look each other in the eyes and dance for the sun overhead. Finally, yes! There they are, there, on the horizon: The old soldier trudging forward, leaning on his Beloved. At last, after all that ta-do and tears, finally, two people find each other and the planet can rejoice that at least once, common sense and simplicity have triumphed.

As they stand there together, caught in the light of a feast to come, swimming in the spirit of success, a powerful wind and a fierce light flatten the multitude's gaze. Athena has swallowed her lovers.

END

Sliding in All Directions

At the end of the 20th Century, the social institutions which created industrialized society are falling apart. Religion and romantic love, the ideological pillars of our civilization, have been discredited. While new forms, new deals, and a deeper understanding of the human psyche may well be the fruits of this decay, and are even now enjoyed by quite a few individuals, as a society we are paralyzed by forlorn despair, face to face with a huge black hole once occupied by a complex network of spiritual and emotional beliefs.

The four sketches by Mighton, Ruebsaat, Thompson and Molnar open doors on that black hole. A chorus of real people, full of anger, violence, sadness, fear and aggression, they are us, trapped in our time and place.

The *Song of Songs* is an echo of what we have lost. The gods and love. A hymn to the eternal journey of Eros and Psyche.

The action of the play is to juxtapose these two worlds, and for a brief moment, connect the chorus to the lovers' quest.

Our deepest memory of what has been lost is rekindled.

For love is strong as Death
The flash of love is a flash of fire,
A flame of god alone.

SCENE ONE : the quest

1

Darkness. Intemporal setting. Lights tight around the angel who sings.

ANGEL: Upon my bed at night I sought my soul's love
 I sought my soul's love and found him not.
 Rise now rise now
 Through the streets of the city I will seek him seek him seek him seek him
 The love of my soul
 Rise now , rise now ...
 I will look for him. The love of my soul. Oh ...
 Love of my soul... Rise now ...
 He is the love of my soul.
 He is the love of my soul ...
 Seek him seek him ... love of love of my soul.
 Through the streets and the squares.
 I will look for him, for him the love of my soul.

As the music fades, lights up on a city street. The singer is a mad woman in rags who plays a harmonica madly.

Around her, the chorus, in character. Four modern characters. These are the poor in spirit, their movements demonstrating great inner turmoil: frenzied walking, fast but no purpose, oblivious of the musicians and sometimes bumping into or walking over them. The sum of their frustrations combines with rising of city noise, which rises to a crescendo. The angel is forced to flee: there is no place for holy fools in middle of a busy city street. No protection.

When she has disappeared, enter the soldier, slowly. A powerful presence, oblivious to the chorus. In contrast to the angel's invisibility, his presence has a great calming impact on the chorus and atmosphere. They swallow their turmoil. City noise fades; he brings the forest, silence, a sedative. The soldier claims the stage.

SOLDIER: Lo, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone.
 A season of glad songs has come
 My love, hiding in the clefts of rock,
 Show me your face,
 Let me hear your voice. ...

A whisper, on tape, coming from all corners of the theatre? On a reverb?

Let me hear your voice let me hear let me hear your voice voice voice.

High above the city, the street musician's flute, first a note, then two. ... With the following lines, the soldier entices the flute music with his words, each line waits for a musical response. The flute-poetry duet becomes a contest, the soldier's conviction grows; he enjoys the game of seduction, it revives him, gives him hope, energy and a quest. The chorus may back him up by repeating lines ...

SOLDIER: My love is a fast horse
 Her eyes are birds.

My love is a drop of myrrh
 Carried between my teeth.

The walls of our house are cedar
 The floor is cypress
 How green is our bed.

My love is an orchard
 Let me sleep in your shade.

Feed me with raisin cakes
 Restore me with apples.
 For I am sick with love.

*The flute melody, firmly established, stops. Pause. ... No angel voice ...
As he is about to go back to his cave ... sarcastic...*

SOLDIER: My love is a lily
 In a garden of thistles !

Suddenly, the angel's voice. Maybe the word "lily" is the magic word in her irrational game of seduction. She sings out to him ... first a few notes, then words, and the complete melody with instruments.

ANGEL: My beloved feasts upon the lilies
 Let me kiss him kiss him with the kisses of his mouth.
 Draw me in your footsteps
 Draw me in your footsteps and let us run run run run run run ...

 My beloved feasts upon the lilies
 Let me kiss him kiss him with the kisses of his mouth.
 Draw me in your footsteps, draw me in your footsteps and let us run

 Run run run run run ...
 Run run run run run ...
 Run run run run run ...

The mutual seduction has worked. The soldier takes a deep breath and resolves once more to walk into the fire of the 20th century, in search of her. The chorus has heard the song, and pick up on the invitation to run. Running incorporated with frenzy.

The soldier, calm in the middle of this frenzied running, opens up his suitcase and takes out a necktie and wraps it around his neck. Then he takes a comb and starts at his hair. This apparently insane action catches the attention of the chorus. An up-beat musical background ... The chorus catches the mood. The journey has begun, the soldier has taken a decision to enter their world. They become themselves, ourselves, as we see each other.

SCENE TWO: our way of life

4

As if the chorus's mood has been altered by the soldier's decision to seek his Beloved not in the clefts of rock but in the 5 à 7 circuit. ...

CORA: What are we doing tonight?

BILL: There's a new show at the art gallery ...

ERIC: We'll have to wait for Ann. ... She's bringing David.

BILL: He's here?

ERIC: He escaped last week. We'll have to be very patient with him. He's still getting adjusted to our way of life.

BILL: Oh, of course.

CORA: Here they are now!

Eric, Bill and Cora turn to look at Ann and David.

ANN: Everybody - I'd like you to meet David.

Applause.

ERIC & CORA: Hurrah!

DAVID: Thank you! Thank you!

ANN: David has been looking forward to meeting you all.

DAVID: Yes. I have to thank you for all your letters. This is very exciting. I never thought I'd escape.

ERIC: How do you like the country so far?

DAVID: Oh, it's wonderful! I'm still getting adjusted, though. So many decisions! I'm not used to it. You see - I've always been told what to do and believe.

BILL: You'll find it very different here.

As if on cue, all four take out a comb and fix their hair, or some other common action to indicate the tyranny of consumer ego ...

DAVID: Oh yes! Where I come from there was no freedom. Teachers were always trying to improve people. If you were selfish or hoarded too much property you were sent to be re-educated. Spies were always following people around arguing with them. They'd say "Why do you need so much money? Does it make you feel better about yourself to own five houses when half the world is starving and illiterate?" They never let us think for ourselves.

BILL: Here we let people decide what's best.

DAVID: Yes!

BILL: We were thinking about going out for the evening. Would you like to join us?

DAVID: Yes. I would.

BILL: We thought we might go to the art gallery. There's a new show.

An ancient war seeps up through the crack of a simple suggestion.

ANN: (SHARP) I'd prefer a movie.

BILL: (MEEK) Oh.

ANN: (SHARP) Does anyone else have a preference?

ERIC: (DEFENSIVE) No.

CORA: This is terrible!

ERIC: ... Why?

CORA: There doesn't seem to be any way of resolving this difficulty.

ANN: We'll have to vote.

DAVID: Vote?

BILL: Yes.

DAVID: I've never voted before.

ANN: Well, you can vote with us.

DAVID: Oh, no. I couldn't. I'm too ignorant.

ERIC: Nonsense!

DAVID: It must take years to learn.

ANN: No. It's easy. We'll show you how.

DAVID: Now?

CORA: Yes!

ANN: First I'm going to list the various things we could do and when you hear something you'd like to do you hold up your hand - like this.

His voting hand is bloody and covered in a dirty bandage. Reluctantly, he uses the other hand to raise it, as if expecting to be shot.

DAVID: Like this?

ERIC: Yes. That's it. Very good!

ANN: Excellent.

David raises his hand several more times. Cora is annoyed ... Bill notices.

BILL: I should add that you can only vote once.

ERIC: Yes, once.

DAVID: Oh.

ERIC: When it's over we count the votes.

CORA: And do whatever the majority wants.

DAVID: I see.

ANN: Have you thought about what you want to do, David?

DAVID: Yes. But I'm not sure I understand this process completely. This is all very strange. Please go slowly.

ANN: It's really not that difficult. Is everybody ready?

BILL: Yes.

ANN: Who wants to go to the movies?

Ann and Cora vote for the movies. Each vote sounds an earthshaking gong for womanhood.

CORA: One ... I'm counting the votes ... two ... that's two.

DAVID: Do you always count out loud?

ANN: No. You can count in your head ... if you want.

DAVID: Really? It makes no difference?

CORA: No.

ANN: Who wants to go to the art gallery?

Bill and Eric vote for the art gallery.

CORA: One. Two.

DAVID: That's two again!

ERIC: Yes. Your catching on.

BILL: Looks like you're the tie breaker, David.

CORA: ... You can vote any time you want.

ANN: ... Do you have another preference, David?

DAVID: No.

ANN: Why didn't you vote?

DAVID: I'm sorry - I'm a fool!

ERIC: We can try again.

DAVID: It's very difficult.

BILL: It's not, really.

DAVID: I'm just learning.

ANN: That's alright. We'll vote again. Who wants to go to the art gallery?

Bill and Eric raise their hands.

CORA: One. Two.

ANN: Who wants to go to a movie?

Ann and Cora raise their hands.

CORA: One. Two.

PAUSE. David still doesn't raise his hand.

ERIC: The gallery closes at nine.

DAVID: Please bear with me. It's very hard. I'm not a genius. You can hardly expect me to learn the basis of your political system in one evening.

ERIC: Maybe we should just stay in.

DAVID: No. No. I think I'm beginning to understand. You said I should vote for what I want.

ANN: Yes.

DAVID: For my immediate desire or for something that will benefit others in the long run?

CORA: Whatever you want.

BILL: Most people vote for their immediate desire.

DAVID: How can I be sure it will make me happy? Particularly if I'm not an expert or haven't given the problem a great deal of thought.

ERIC: You can't.

DAVID: What if I make the wrong decision? It might be a bad show. We might argue and go home and mistreat our loved ones.

BILL: You'll just have to take that chance.

DAVID: I see...

ANN: Alright, is everyone ready to vote?

BILL: Yes.

DAVID: And why is my happiness more important than the general good?

BILL: It just works out better if you assume it is.

DAVID: Perhaps I could vote tomorrow.

ERIC: You're the tie breaker.

DAVID: What if the gallery closes because we go to a movie instead? It's a terrible responsibility.

BILL: If you believe in democracy you'll trust the outcome.

CORA: I remember the first time I voted. I was only eighteen. But I wasn't afraid. They wanted to know if the fetus was a human being.

ANN: If a painting was a work of art.

BILL: If we should build another stadium.

ERIC: If we should go to war.

BILL: What's there to be afraid of?

CORA: You're free now.

ERIC: No one's going to put you in jail for your opinions.

ANNE: We haven't got all night.

BILL: So -

CORA: vote!

ERIC: We have to get on with our lives!

ALL: You just have to raise your hand.

David slowly raises his hand. A blast. He takes it in the stomach.

Gunfire from all directions, the outbreak of war.

Everyone is hit, the bodies scatter .

SCENE THREE

12

The scene is a battlefield at night. In the distance, the wail of the gaeda, angel's lament. Smoke and distant gunfire. The soldier surveys the carnage.

SOLDIERr: What's that coming up from the desert?
 Pillars of smoke breathing of myrrh and flesh.

From a distance, the lament is overtaken by a chorus of voices humming a German lullaby. The angel joins the chorus, singling softly in German. Somewhere during the following, the Soldier is associated with the gun ...

SON : The moon lay in the fields last night,
 light, smoothing down the grass,
 as if the grass were a crying child.
 I knew it was only the mist, lying close to the ground,
 lit up white, a haze or a fog,
 but I thought of it as moonlight,
 coming down in the fields to rest for the night.
 My father singing, softly, the Man in the Moon,
 words spilling from your mouth, like moonlight.

FATHER: We used to always sing. Lullabies were the first ones I can remember from my father coming in to the room and singing to us.

I was very small, in the first house we had, about four or five years old, and he used to sing songs for me for Christmas. ... It was such a magical time. I can still see the whole scene. It's one of my earliest memories.

SON: *(overlapping)* One of my earliest memories ...

FATHER: I remember people we called unmusikalisch - amusical - they were almost shunned. They were oddities. You wouldn't keep company with them because they were boring. Whenever there were family gatherings there would always be somebody playing an instrument and everyone would gather around and sing.

FATHER: There were songs for getting up in the morning, songs for breakfast, lunch songs and dinner songs and songs for going to bed at night. I can't remember any fun times without singing.

And I remember songs that we sang when we went hiking.

SON: In the Kootenay Mountains?

Lullaby stops.

FATHER: No! In the Youth Movement!

It was practically mandatory - but it was done gladly - to learn two new songs a week. At least. We had a nucleus of people in the Jungvolk, learning the songs and teaching each other. It was a really exciting time, I must say. I just loved to learn a new song and get the whole spirit of it.

The soldier cacks the gun.? An aggressive sound which is heard by the chorus.?

FATHER: That's one of the reasons the song tradition is so strong in the youth and military movement : To walk in step. Keep the beat. Instead of going hup two three four they would sing. Much more fun. Some of the songs were really catchy marching tunes.

This was quite a natural thing, even so today. As soon as you have a bunch of people walking together and somebody starts humming or singing a song ...

The Father begins to march, alone. The soldier's eyes follow him. Maybe this is his old commander. The soldier is seduced by the Father's memories.

In the army, songs were the instrument of making march music as you went. You were not with a band, you made your own music. Mouth music, as it was known. You remember that one? Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss?

SOLDIER: Zackig!

FATHER: Ja! Strong. Smart. Really impressing the girls as we marched through the city.
And the citizens would look.

The songleader was usually a sergeant or corporal or someone like that who was particularly keen on doing this sort of thing. Sometimes a lieutenant would teach us these songs and make sure they were really clip clip clip so when we march we would make a good impression.

SON : So he would decide what to sing when?

FATHER: (*Defensive*) No.
We would decide on the march.
Somebody would say, a song !

SOLDIER: Ein lied!

FATHER: And then, Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss ...

CORA: Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss!

ANN: Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss!

SOLDIER: (*enthusiastic*) Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss !!!!

FATHER: ... and so on down the line.
And then the guy at the end would yell out -

SOLDIER: Durch !

FATHER: Ja! Meaning, through! And then somebody would give a note...

SON : Daaa...

CHORUS: Daaa...

FATHER: Daa, yes, a note, sort of, or a chord. And then, three, four -
Schwarzbraun ist die Haselnuss.

Chorus, soldier, march and sing, drawn into the trance of the music/march. As they march, sing, breathe in unison, they face the audience, march slowly and encourage the audience to breath with the same rhythm. When the entire room is breathing together:

FATHER: It was mouth music. You just use your own body. You don't need any instruments, you see.

From high above, the angel begins to sing out an opposing rhythm, first with breath amplified, then notes and sounds ... This inspires the son to tell his own version of the story. Gradually during the following, the chorus is distracted by the angel's subversive rhythm, and they move to her beat. The soldier continues to march, by himself, as if in a trance.

SON: When I was growing up, my father was the first man, the hero of all the epics and tales. He was the founder of the family, the nation, the race.

FATHER: It's very difficult to explain to someone who wasn't there then -

SON: I studied my father as I did no other individual: his face, his hands, his gestures;

FATHER: Forty, fifty years ago, what it does for you.

SON: I observed his gait, the outlines of his body, the shape of his chin, his hairline, his brow.

FATHER: I can tell the old enthusiasm is still there when I meet with my old friends who know all these songs. So difficult to explain. Impossible!

*The father retreats to the world of his youth , whispers in German, ignoring the son.
The chorus is into an upbeat rhythm. The son pulls back, for him this is serious. Despite his connection to the poetry/music of the angel, he is not willing to sink into the emotion of music. He wants desperately to explain what he feels and why. There is something of the Father's old intensity in his voice...*

SON: I listened carefully to the sound of his voice, its texture, its very grain. It was a physical thing: I was trying to find out how it was to be a man. My father's voice an ambience. I grew up inside his songs and stories. I pictured myself in the roles they described. I imagined myself inside the skin of the singer, being the song. The songs coax the stories into being. With their melodies and rhythms they seduce the words lure them away from the world of objects into the world of human beings. The songs are riddles at the centre of my father's story.

The son's lucidity brings the father back to a more recent time, and he too wants desperately to explain. And to be understood by his son, by humanity.

FATHER: You remember when we were scouting in B.C. , when you were a boy, and I was trying to get the boys to march in step, and they could never get around to it. Why wouldn't they march in step when there was a song to sing?!

The soldier, marching perfectly beside the father, feeding his frustration. The soldier is the perfect son for this father ... Maybe he tells this to the Soldier.

FATHER: I had a terrible time getting the scouts to march in step and to sing a song to get them from point A to point B successfully and to have fun doing it. In my day, a boy would just naturally fall into step and enjoy the march as another activity. Not just to get from A to B, but the march itself was an experience. It's almost like a dancing experience, if you like.

As the father's voice rises, Ann and Cora split up ... Ann continues silently with the jazz beat, Cora joins the soldier ...

It was much easier in those days to rouse youth behind a political banner or movement than it would be here. They couldn't even take a simple beat and march in step - make it a pleasant experience! People tap when they listen to music. And to me it was somewhat of a puzzle that the... ability to step out together was not there, or was unpopular.

Cora and the soldier march; Ann dances beside the son, the angel provides her music. The son speaks, inspired by them.

SON : They fall as if a
 whiteness filled their
 magic garments
 when they mimic the dew.

Cora and the soldier insist on marching together. Ann and the son dance together. The father is in turmoil, caught between this battle.

FATHER: I found it hard to understand why some of the boys were trying to sing the song but not going in step to the rhythm of the song. It sort of annoyed me. It's just like when I see somebody on the dance floor. The other day, we went to a dance concert ...

The angel's jazz rhythm begins to overpower the marching. Soldier, Ann, Cora, & Son dance, reminding the Father of ...

FATHER: It was a jazz band. Everybody had their own way of dealing with the rhythm. But there's some people who just don't have the foggiest idea ... these darlings on their long stilts. Just walking around like zombies, ignoring the rhythm of the dance. It bothers me just as much. Oh, it was absolutely annoying.

Everybody freeze. Silence.

SON : You don't think there's a connection between marching and militarism?

Pause.

FATHER: It was annoying to me because I had to move the boys from one place to another, and I had to do it snappily ... and smartly and have fun on the way!!

Sounds of the wailing gaeda from far above, as the story begins ascent to the mythical.

SON: These angels know
 Carry their sleep spirits
 Down from the distance they step
 Releasing the earth's hold on you.

The father retreats inside the shame of his memories, but the son speaks clearly and directly to the audience, imploring them to find compassion for the father, and for all who are guilty. ie, for all.

SON: I was in those ranks of boys he was trying to teach to march in the Kootenay Mountains. I sensed the hopelessness of his cause, and the pain it must have caused him. Having to repeat, so far from its source, the gesture he performed so often as a child.

FATHER: It had nothing to do with militarism.

SON: I imagined the disruption this must have caused inside his body.
 I felt it inside myself.

FATHER: It just goes against my natural feeling of rhythm that a person would sing one rhythm and march or step another!!!

SON: I knew those boys - we - weren't going to march, because we knew instinctively that to do so would lead us away from ourselves.

FATHER: When I sing these songs today, when I hear the words, my goodness ...
The significance of so many words only came to me years later.
Sometimes you wonder, did you really sing those words and ...
believe those words?

SON: The brave children
who dare to sleep
in the presence of angels

FATHER: Some of them we did believe, and some of them were just
words that fit into a song.

SON: The moon did not come down to soothe the children.

The gaeda and angel's mournful wail ... The soldier has gone back to polishing his gun. Angel's voice fades, gaeda, wind ... A sense of shame, which he shares with the Father ...

SOLDIER: Behold the Sons of Solomon
Threescore valiant men.
They all hold swords, being experts at war
Because they are afraid of the dark.

From the wind, evolve into flute, another rhythm, the angel's fluttering voice. He moves closer to centrestage in order to hear her.

CORA:

YOU ... Smarten up, you had better smarten right up lady, or you are gonna find yourself on the floor of the ravine gettin' plugged by a gang of Portuguese and blacks and you'll deserve it, too, looking like that, oh you say you don't like to wear bras , they hurt your back, well go to the bra BAR honey, find the right size, you say you wear shorts cause it's cool, take a look at the Moroccans in the travel section just LOOK what they wear, in heat over forty nine degrees!

YOU can't fool me, I've seen you before, oh yes I have, at the rape crisis centre, at all the pro-abortion protests screeching your head off about owning your body well you ain't gonna own it for long baby if you don't cover it up. Oh yeah. You get on the radio and t.v and you try to make girls like me feel bad for such hygiene as shaving our underarms shaving our legs, such kindness as gettin' our men supper and puttin' the little's to bed so our man can read his paper you make us feel like whores if marry a rich man, dress up for him spend money on silk undies stead of givin' it to some halfway house for battered girls, --- -- battered my butt I know the scene, I had fellow, made him hit me every night, I'd nag and nag at him "why don't you wear better clothes, I'm so embarrassed to go out with ya when ya wear those shoes" Yak Yak Yak no wonder he hit me. I coulda gone crying to some hostel, but I know my unkind words hurt one hell of a lot more than his punches. A man does not hit without a reason.

I'll tell you something. I'll tell you something you been needin' to hear for a long time. MEN ARE BETTER. Shocking to hear the truth, isn't it? But it is! History proves again and again, listen up baby hear the true truth NAME one female inventor, chicky, name one, every inventor was male if it was left to us, we'd still be livin' in caves that's true, name one arena, in fact, where girls have surpassed the men ... science: girls can't do it, never could, so we had one, madame Curie, she killed herself doin' it, ARTS: all the great painters are male, every one, you seen some of the feminist art these days, don't talk, film makers, all the great movies, male, sports it don't bear mentioning, you tell me. You TELL me where women--even cookin!! Cheffin', ALL the great chefs of Europe are males every one male.

I used to be mad. Just like you, a radical feminist, oh yeah, believe it, I was ragin. Let me tell you right after the attack if a man so much as looked at me I wanted to rip his thing out and choke him with it, oh yes indeed hated every man that walked the earth!! I was even madder that the fellow only got only three years, after winkin at me and that all through court, laughin' through his nose, like I made it up; oh yeah, that burned me so I walked around burnin' up for a whole year, bitchy as hell you believe it, then one Easter Sunday, I was sittin in church with my family, lookin at all those altar boys with their sweet faces, and the kindly old priest, and thinkin, you know? thinkin' hard, and just like the sun comin up, I saw, I saw the attack was indeed my fault ya see SATAN tempts others to sin, SATAN tempts OTHERS to SIN I deserved everything I damn well got. I knew, ya see, I knew the effect my appearance had on the male of the species, I knew, and did I flaunt it?? I wore see through blouses, fish net stockings, RED high heels, ANYTHING to set their crotch on fire and I did, oh YEAH I broke acres of hearts, oh yeah, I was cruel to the guys that didn't cut it, I'd tell em, straight out, not good enough honey, I'm aimin for the top, I amm NOT gonna settle for anything less than sixty thou per a.

This ... person ... he worked in the building that building... sweeping floor, janitorial ... he came in to work, you see, just as I was goin out, well I would wiggle my little behind knowing he was watchin, LOVED the power, LOVED it knew it was drivin him mad AND I knew that he knew that I was way out of his league. But one day he did work up his nerve, we were both in the revolvin door, me goin out him goin in well he followed me out he said "Hey , excuse me"

I flashed a smile "Yes" "I was wondering " he said, "If you were thinkin of goin to the show" I looked him straight in the eye and I said "Not with you".

I just wanted to be honest, you know how some of these types are, you give them any encouragement they follow you around like a dog with a stiff; well he nodded and smiled, said "Didn't think so" quite gently, and I said "Goodbye".

Well should I have been surprised when that poor fellow followed me in his car and grabbed me right off the street and hit me in the head with a tire iron?

Should I have been outraged that he had intimate relations with me, front and back and that he tried to strangle me so I wouldn't live to tell about it? I AM STILL SO MAD AT MYSELF and all the damn feminist dykes for trying to tell me it is not my fault.

IT IS MY FAULT, when a child torments a dog and the dog bites it is the child's fault!! And what happens? The dear dog is put down!! No, no, this is a crazy world . Actually , I ought to thank poor Charles. Before the attack, I wandered around, like most other people feelin guilty, guilty for bein pretty, bein well fed, well loved, not starvin in Ethiopia not murdered in Auschwitz.

NOW I don't have to feel guilty, cause I got MINE, get it? And I had it comin; and when you get yours, and you will, the way you're dressed, sooner than you think. You'll have it comin... too!!

Chorus beats up the soldier.

The persistant sound of a phone ringin interrupts the fun. Finally, Ann gets it.

Music fades as phone ringing rises. Ann gets it.

ANN: Hello. *Pause.* Mmmm, I know you're there, you can't hide from me. *Pause.* Don't be scared.

CALLER: (*Embarrassed.*) Hi.

ANN: See, that's not so hard, is it? ... Have you got a credit card?

CALLER: Yeah. Yeah, it's Master-card.

ANN: Master-card, mmm, I thought so Doggy-man. Can I have the number? ... I bet it's a big number.

CALLER: Uh, yeah, there's a lot of them.

ANN: Give them to me.

CALLER: Four-nine-one-three-and sixty-eight.

ANN: Let me ask my little machine here if your credit's any good. And while I'm doing that why don't you just take it out of your pants for me.

Sound of woman punching the Master Card number into her computer to check up on his credit.

CALLER: You know, I've never done this before. I mean, I've had girls before, and all that, but, I never ever called any porno-line before, and, I guess, I don't know what I should do.

ANN: A gold card, Doggy-man, your credit is exceptional. ... Before I get down on all fours for you Doggy-man, I'm going to suck, and suck, your ...

CALLER: No! ... I mean, please. Don't say it like that, okay? ... And ... Doggy-man ... I don't like that very much. Don't call me that, okay?

ANN: All right. ... Tell me what you want.

CALLER: Can you be, I don't know, just a little more, like ... ? (*gentle*)

ANN: That's good. I see you're the kind of lover who likes to take his time.

CALLER: Yeah. I mean, I guess so.

ANN: Are you sitting up or laying down?

CALLER: Sitting.

ANN: I've just come in the door, but you don't hear me, as I glide across the room right behind you. I haven't said a word. My warm body is inches away from your back. You can feel me there, you know you can, even though I haven't touched you yet. It's like a warm quilt wrapped around your naked body. Mmm, I can feel the heat shiver around my breasts. Can you feel it too?

CALLER: Yes, yes I can.

ANN: *She breaths gently and audibly into the telephone. Her breathing fills the room.* My tongue wisps across your inner ear, for that first intimate touch. A shiver, delicate, delicious, trembles through your body, along every nerve and settles, like restless electricity ... down there. Mmmm, how's that?

CALLER: Yeah, neat.

ANN: My hands come from the shadows behind, under your arms, gently, ever so gently on little cat-feet, to crouch on your chest. I pull you toward my breasts, slowly, from behind, and you're so warm. Mmmmm, so warm.
My hand circles and strokes your stomach, like a cat stalking a little bird, hidden in its nest. I see the little bird, its neck, rising just a little out of its nest, in the thicket, down there. Still, ever so slow, the cat creeps forward, its warm belly caressing the moist earth and tufts of grass, around your navel, until her claws are in the thicket, dug into the brambles, ready to pounce. ...

ANN: The little bird is looking over the edge of his nest, so curious, and now so tall and big. The little bird wants to know what's there, hidden in the thicket.
(*A throaty groan.*) Oh. Oh, can you feel my hand on it? Is it hard?

CALLER: (*pleading*) No. ... No don't, don't touch me.

ANN: Hey come on, what is this anyway? Look, this is the best I can do, okay. ...
What's the matter? You don't like cats? ...

CALLER: I'm sorry. Really, I am. ...

ANN: Look, if you don't want me to touch you, why did you call? ...

CALLER: I needed to talk to someone. I'm sorry. I guess I should go.

ANN: No, no, you don't have to go. ... How old are you anyway?

CALLER: How come you want to know?

ANN: (*Softly.*) Look, with me, you know, you don't have to say anything you don't want to, and, as soon as you hang up, I disappear forever. ... How old?

CALLER: ... fifteen.

ANN: Thought so. ... The card belongs to your dad doesn't it?

CALLER: Oh, he'll pay, don't worry.

ANN: I'm sure he will and you'll probably get thumped for swiping it.

CALLER: No way. That old bastard'll never find me, never again. I hate his guts. I mean it
you know.

ANN: Does that mean you ran away from home?

CALLER: Yeah.

ANN: That's not always such a good idea, you know. Where are you staying?

CALLER: Um, around, I guess. I made twenty bucks so I got a room tonight. I don't know if I told you, but I'm calling from Canada so it starts gettin' kind a cold at night, especially this time a year. I suppose I'm lucky to be where I am. For tonight. I mean, it's kind a funny, you know. I got this gold card and I can buy anythin' I want with it, any where in the whole world, like a car, or a trip to Australia, or somethin', but I can't buy anything right here, not even a pizza. ... How come no-one can believe a guy like me has a gold card unless they're a million miles away on a phone? ... I don't get it.

ANN: Down here, it's not so warm either. Especially if you have to sleep on the streets ...
(CALLER Sobs) Hey, are you all right?

CALLER: Yeah ... (Still crying.)

ANN: Take a deep breath. (He does.) Good, good. Now another. (He does.)
How's that?

CALLER: Yeah, yeah.

ANN: You want to talk about it?

CALLER: Can I? I mean, you probably got other guys you got to talk to, an' -

ANN: Don't worry about that. I won't hang up until you do. It's company policy.

CALLER: You won't hang up till I do?

ANN: I promise.

CALLER: That's cool. ... You know, I believe you.

ANN: I don't mind listening. I like you.

CALLER: Yeah?

ANN: Yeah.

CALLER: Cool. *Pause. Silence.*

ANN: Do you ... want to talk about it?

CALLER: ... Yeah.

ANN: Go ahead.

CALLER: It hasn't been real good for me lately. I took off from home about a week ago.

Pause.

Holy cow, it's only been a week and already so much's been going on. *Pause.*

I've been sleeping outside you know. *Pause.*

ANN: It's okay.

CALLER: Yeah, well. It's kind a hard to talk about, you know, especially when it's all kind a new in your head.

ANN: I know.

CALLER: That's why I'm sittin' here in the dark. I'm scared to turn on the light. ... Pretty weird huh?

ANN: I don't think so.

Pause.

CALLER: I met this guy. Eric. He ran away too, except he's been livin' on the street a lot longer than me. It was real good at first 'cause he showed me where to get free food and stuff. You know, churches aren't so bad. I always figured they were places where, if you turned around to see what was behind you, you got your head smacked or somethin'. I didn't know you can eat there Mondays and Thursdays. But it ain't never enough though. Just like Eric says: You got to have money.

ANN: I can understand that.

CALLER: Yeah, see, you got to do what ever you can to get a few bucks. And the weird thing is, is that you need lots, now, 'cause you can't wait.

ANN: What do you mean?

CALLER: I mean, if you work at MacDonald's, they don't pay you right away, after you finish for the day, but, that's when you need it, right there, at the end of the day. When you live in the street I mean. ...
So Eric, well, he showed me how he makes money. He hangs out on Younge street and old guys come around in a car and pick him up.

Pause. He sniffles a little bit.

Yeah. He told me not to ask for less than fifty bucks. He said it was real easy, once you get used to it. ... But it ain't you know. I only did it once ...

He takes a deep breath. Pause.

Are you still there?

ANN: ... Yes, I'm here. I'm here, don't worry. Take your time.

CALLER: Thanks. ... He talked to me like you did.

ANN: What?

CALLER: Yeah, you know. ... Suck ... and, and, other stuff like that.

ANN: I didn't know ... I'm sorry.

CALLER: When he, you know, finished, he said I was the shits and only worth twenty bucks. Then he chucked me out a his car and threw this magazine at me. That's how I got your number.

ANN: Oh.

CALLER: Yeah. An' he said I should look in there and call up someone who could teach me how to do it right.

ANN: (*Disgust.*) Aw. ... Are you okay?

CALLER: Yeah, I'm a little better. ... Why'd you call me Doggy-man before? I mean, what's that?

ANN: Oh, don't listen to that.

CALLER: I want to know.

ANN: Okay. The adds in the magazine are pretty specific. It's kind of like a market, where there's guys who like breasts, or legs, or some kind of position, and, they call here if they like it a certain way. That's all.

CALLER: Oh, I see. Kind a like the guy who picked me up.

ANN: Yeah, exactly like that. ... We've got a lot in common you know.

CALLER: Yeah?

ANN: I suppose so. I mean, I create fantasies for dirty old men who call. ... It's not so bad and it pays real well.

CALLER: Are you pretty?

ANN: *(laughs)* No, not very.

CALLER: It doesn't matter, I like you.

ANN: I'm sorry about what happened to you, but, just so you know, you're not alone. I think it's real important that you know that.

CALLER: Yeah? What do you mean?

ANN: Oh, I mean what I mean. ... Me too.

CALLER: Huh?

ANN: Me too, I was hurt pretty bad once.

CALLER: Oh yeah? What happened?

ANN: It was a long time ago.

Long pause.

I still don't feel good about it and it's been three years now.

CALLER: Does that mean I'm going to hurt for along time too?

ANN: I don't know. ...

CALLER: You know, I feel better now, now that I could talk to someone about it. It's kind a weird, you know, but I think that it was easier to talk to you 'cause, I don't know ... I don't know you. I don't know why, but I really trust you. That's weird, I mean, I don't know you, but I do, now, I think. ... Do yuh think, may be, I could help you too?

ANN: For someone who's only fifteen, I think you're real wise. Really, really wise.

CALLER: Gee, that's neat. No-one's ever said that to me before. ... What happened?

ANN: I won a track scholarship to U of W in Seattle.

CALLER: Huh?

ANN: Don't worry, it's all connected, you'll see. ... I was a long distance runner. That's what my scholarship was for. I just made it too, by the skin of my teeth. I was always worried that the coach would drop me from the team. And my scholarship, being set up the way it was, that'd mean I couldn't afford to stay. I had to run.

CALLER: Yeah?

ANN: I liked running and all, but it was film that I really liked. And if I could run fast enough, I'd get to be a film-maker.

CALLER: That's makin' movies, right?

ANN: Mmm hmm.

CALLER: Wow, I like movies.

ANN: Yeah, me too, or, I did.

CALLER: What do you mean?

ANN: The competition's pretty tough and you got to be real talented and work hard. ... I was a good runner but not a great one, you know. It didn't come easy, like it did for Julie Mathews, so I had to work hard. Real hard. I wouldn't allow myself to go to bed until I ran at least an hour after supper. If I missed a night, well, I felt so guilty about it, and, I'd worry about losing my place on the team, which was stupid, because the coach said I was doing just fine. ...

CALLER: Yeah?

ANN: I guess you've never been to Seattle huh?

CALLER: Nope.

ANN: It's pretty green. The city was built right in the middle of a real thick forest, so there's lots of woods around, especially right near the campus.

CALLER: Yeah?

ANN: I don't know what hit me, but, as I was running alone a man jumped out from behind and knocked me on my face. Then he dragged me into the bush. You know, we weren't more that ten feet away from the side-walk when he hurt me. All the while I was there I could hear the people walking by. They were that close.

CALLER: You didn't scream?

ANN: I was too scared.

CALLER: Then what happened?

ANN: I quit the track team and had to drop out. *Pause.*

CALLER: But, what happened in the bush?

ANN: He had me pinned to the ground with his body.

CALLER: Were you on your back?

ANN: No, I was on my stomach and he was behind me. I can still smell the dead leaves.

CALLER: Behind.

ANN: He had a knife to my throat with one hand, and with the other, *Pause*.
he tore away my shorts and my panties. That's when my mind left my body.

CALLER: Huh?

ANN: I just went away, somewhere else, and let him have my body. I went away and I
prayed.

CALLER: What did it feel like?

ANN: Strange. I'd never felt anything so strange in my life. It's an amazing thing when
your spirit can leave your body, all alone, to suffer all the pain.

CALLER: No. I mean, what did it feel like? *Pause*.

ANN: I, don't, ... what do you mean?

CALLER: Were you wet or dry?

ANN: Pardon me? I, I ... what?

CALLER: Well? Did he rub it on your butt a bit before he shoved it in?

Very long pause.

I know what you're thinking.
Don't hang up on me you slut. I'm paying a fortune for this call. Don't you fuckin'
hang up. ...
You promised me, you bitch, that you wouldn't hang up until I did.
Long pause.
So, did he?

ANN: *A tremble in her voice.* What?

CALLER: Rub it

Ann hangs up quickly. She begins to cry softly.

Sound of caller masturbating.

The mood is extremely sombre. The rest of the chorus and the soldier have simply been listening. All four chorus members fall into a deep sleep, despair. The soldier sits above them, on a step, maybe smoking a cigarette as silence falls over the battlefield. He remembers now clearly where he has been, the hideous environment of the trenches. He is awake, watchful, contemplating his next move.

SCENE SEVEN

35

Time passes. Maybe the sound of a cricket. The angel appears in half-light, as in the top of scene one. She sings:

ANGEL: I am asleep but my soul's awake
For I adjure thee oh Sons of David
I opened to my Beloved, oh Daughters of Jerusalem
I opened to my Beloved, oh I adjure thee, oh Sons of David
But my Beloved, he was gone, oh Daughters of Jerusalem
But my Beloved, he was gone, oh I adjure thee, oh Sons of David
I called him but he answered not
Oh Daughters of Jerusalem
I called him but he answered not
Oh I adjure thee oh Sons of David
The watchmen came and they beat me, oh Daughters of Jerusalem
The watchmen came and they beat me, oh I adjure thee oh sons of David
And they tore away my veil, oh Daughters of Jerusalem
An apple tree in the forest is my love
Like unto you, Oh Sons of David
As a lily among thorns am I
Like unto you, Oh daughters of Jerusalem
With raisin cakes please nourish me
For I adjure you, Oh sons of David
And with apples be restored, Oh daughters of Jerusalem
If you should find my Beloved
Oh I adjure thee, Oh sons of David
Tell him I am sick, so sick with love
Oh Daughters of Jerusalem ...

As the lights come up, the angel is gone - retreated to the clefts of rock, but her presence is felt. Maybe she has left a white lily on the street corner where she sang ...

The chorus has registered her plea in their subconscious, but the conscious mind will have to be brought along.

From high above, in the clefts of rock, the angel begins to sing a new version of the above, this one with a mid-eastern influence ... The rhythm of the music acts like a drug on the chorus. In the half light, they begin to move, and slowly shed their modern costumes. In the dim lights everybody changes. A complete rejection of the 20th Century. This should be a sensuous, choreographed transition during the following ...

ANGEL: I sleep, but my soul is awake.
 I called to him but he answered not.
 Do not stir, my love
 Do not rise, my love
 Until it please you to be.
 Do not stir my love, do not rise my love
 Until it please you to be.
 My beloved, return to me my Beloved,
 And be with me.
 Be my Beloved, return to me my Beloved and be here with me.

 Before the dawn wind rises,
 Before the shadows flee
 Do not stir my love, do not rise my love
 Until it please you to be.
 Do not stir my love, do not rise my love
 Until it please you to be.
 My beloved, return to me my Beloved,
 And be with me.
 Be my Beloved, return to me my Beloved and be here with me.

The chorus is ready for the reunion. The soldier who has been mysterious and passive, possibly out of sight, suddenly speaks. His words are a strong command which fills the theatre and probably surprises the chorus, who may have expected a tune.

SOLDIER: Awake, north wind ...
 Come wind of the south ! ...
 Breathe over my garden ...
 Spread this sweet smell around ...

*At each line, the soldier pauses, the angel replies with melody.
Both are in their separate chambers , preparing for the reunion...*

ANGEL: Awake, north wind,
 Come wind of the south !
 Breathe over my garden
 Spread this sweet smell around.

Drums ...

Let my Beloved come into his garden now,
Let us go to the vineyard ...
Let him taste its rarest fruits
Let the tender grapes.
My Beloved. I will give thee my love.

Knocking ... Flute and strings tension ... The soldier comes down to the dangerous street-corner, as in Scene One, centre-stage, waiting for her to appear. She waits in the clefts of rock for him to enter ... tension ... The chorus running ... Wind, voices, whispers ...

SOLDIER: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.
 My head is covered with dew
 My hair is dripping with night.

The chorus catches his anticipation. The angel's light grows more intense. But nothing happens. They freeze. The soldier is anxious.

SOLDIER: I have taken off my tunic,
 Am I to put it on again?

 I have washed my feet
 Should I dirty them?

*Suddenly, the angel appears at his other side. He does not see her, but he feels her presence .
An invisible door separates them.*

SOLDIER: Yes! My promised bride.
 I gather my myrrh and balsam,
 Eat my honey, drink my wine and milk
 Eat, friends, drink deep, fellow lovers
 Come with me.

The chorus begins to move , sing ... More knocking. He repeats himself, with familiar sarcasm.

SOLDIER: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.
 My head is covered with dew
 My hair is dripping with night.

An awkward pause. The chorus, desperately hoping for the reunion, is filled with dread at the rumble of warfare which threatens the reunion. Ann and the Son decide to do something ...

Ann and the Son sing a round:

What makes your beloved -
 Better than
 The other lovers?

As the angel is delighted with this opportunity to showcase her feelings. As she describes her Beloved, her light grows intense, blocking out all else onstage, and the chorus back her up. But the soldier will have no part of this fantasy. He does not recognize himself in her description ,and does not want to get tangled up in a huge misunderstanding.

ANGEL: My Beloved is fresh and ruddy,
 to be known among ten thousand.
 his head is golden, purest gold,
 his locks are black as the raven.
 His eyes are doves at a pool of water,
 bathed in milk, at rest.

(more)

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ANGEL: His cheeks are spices, his lips are lilies
His hands are golden, rounded, set with jewels.
His belly a block of ivory, legs, like cedars.
His conversation is sweetness itself.
He is altogether lovable.
Such is my Beloved, such is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

*He "turns his back on her" - or in some way signals that he wants no part of this ...
Perhaps from the darkness, an amplified whisper ...*

SOLDIER: You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love.
Fair as Jerusalem.
Turn your eyes away,
For they hold me captive.

*She obeys. As she "turns her eyes away", he disappears into the clefts of rock, taking his
warmth and light with him. The chorus is disappointed, devastated, angry, mad! A variety of
emotions depending on who we watch. Panic. The angel does what she always does, sings,
and through the song, walks away, taking the rest of the light and warmth with her.*

ANGEL: I opened to my Beloved
Myrrh ran off my hands,
Pure myrrh ran off my fingers
On the handle of the door.

I opened to my Beloved
But he turned and was gone.
I looked, but he was not there
I called, but he did not hear.

I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine.

Oh, daughters of Jerusalem,
 If you should find him,
 Tell him I am sick with love ...

My Beloved has gone to his garden
 To the garden of lilies, he is lost among the lilies,
 I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine.
 I am my Beloved's, my Beloved is mine. I am my Beloved's, my Beloved is
 mine.

I am my Beloved's, my Beloved is mine. I am my Beloved's, my Beloved is
 mine.

The angel's sad lament has unified their response to the failed reunion so that they are now thoroughly depressed and filled with despair. Cora decides to do something. She sings out to the angel, and the others eagerly await her answer.

CORA: Where did your Beloved go
 That we may look for him?
 Help you
 Look for him?

ANGEL: My Beloved went down to his garden,
 to the bed of spices
 to pasture his flock in the gardens and gather lilies.
 He pastures his flock among the lilies.

I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine.

Alright. Thank you Cora! There's a hint. The chorus cheers up, and decides to find the Beloved and bring him back.

Wind, rain, thunder. A frightening outburst from the elements, but surely proof that the soldier is alive and well and practicing his godly powers. The odd burst of a wordless shriek from the angel, clearly not happy deities, but still with us.

The chorus musters their courage, and decides to try and roll back their film to the first time they saw the soldier. These mortal individuals have been re-invented as spirits with a mission, a new sense of purpose - to find the Beloved and bring him back to the angel. They are filled with her plea at the beginning of Scene Seven. A totally new mood, full of anticipation. They decide to go back to the moment where they got off track. Bill leads the action, and the others pick up their cue. (Spoken in round:)

BILL: What are we doing tonight?

CORA: There's a new show at the art gallery

ERIC: We'll have to wait for Anne.

BILL: She's bringing David.

CORA: He escaped last week.

BILL: He's still getting adjusted.

CORA: To our way of life.

ERIC: Of course.

BILL: Here they are now.

Pause. Silence. There is no one.

As if they want desperately to roll back the film to that opening scene, when they had the god in their midst, and sneered at him. For a moment they imagine that they can simply appoint a god from their midst and carry on with a new pantheon ... They are a little drunk with fear and philosophical fatigue ...

ANN: What are we doing tonight?

ERIC: There's a new show at the art gallery

CORA: We'll have to wait.

ERIC: She's bringing David.

CORA: Here they are now.

Pause.

ANN: David!

CORA: David!

ERIC: David!

ALL THREE: Hurrah!

BILL: I never thought I'd awake.

ERIC: I never thought -

BILL: I'd awake

CORA: Escape

ANN: Awake

ERIC: Escape.

ANN: How do you like the country so far?

CORA: Wonderful

BILL: I'm still getting adjusted.

Pause. Bill feels a bit of what the soldier felt when subjected to the angel's torchsong... In fact, none of the others quite buy this moment... A forlorn pause. ...

Suddenly, in the distance, knocking from the clefts of rock. The chorus faces the audience, afraid to turn around, although there is a great deal of noise and commotion behind them. Flames begin to shoot up from the upstage doors. Light and sound movement, the chorus aware of something awesome happening ...

The soldier and the angel emerge from the wings, stand facing the flaming doors, as if it is a firing squad. They are naked in the half-light, frozen. Sound of heartbeat, drums from the well, growing more intense. The chorus is terrified ... listening ... Expecting the worst. Trapped in the scene that started it all, they Their words are heavy with the deepest meaning.

ANN: What are we doing tonight?

Pause

BILL: What's there to be afraid of?

ERIC: You'll just have to trust the outcome.

CORA: We'll have to be patient.

ANN: What are we doing tonight ?!

Pause

ERIC: Most people vote for their immediate desire.

CORA: How can I be sure -

BILL: You can't.

ANN: What if I make the wrong decision?

ERIC: You'll just have to take that chance.

CORA: It's a terrible responsibility.

BILL: It's very difficult.

ERIC: We can try again.

ANN: Alright

BILL: alright

CORA: alright

ERIC: is everybody ready ?

As in the Scene Two, chorus members raise their hands, voting for what, we, they, do not know. But they have decided to cast their individual lots with the group, and give the benefit of the doubt to collective action. As they raise their hands, the angel and the soldier walk toward the flames of fire that leap through the clefts of rock.

The soldier and angel are consumed. (Note, they take separate doors . This is not a sexual reunion, an embrace or orgasm. It is an act of selfless courage. ...)

As the flames begin to die down through the black doors, a fierce light grows behind the audience, blinding the chorus as they stare into it..

ANN: Who is that -
 ERIC: coming up from the desert?
 BILL: Who is that ?
 CORA: Leaning on her Beloved?

The chorus receives a vision ... they repeat the lines as a chant, whispered repetitions (by the angel and soldier) on reverb around the theatre ...

BILL: He found her -
 ANN: asleep -
 BILL: under the apple tree -
 ERIC: Where your mother conceived -
 CORA: and gave birth.

This is the moment when the chorus , having acted bravely together, is rewarded by a blessing, the wisdom of the gods who have been reunited .

Angel and Soldier unseen. Soldier speaks. After his voice is established, the angel sings his lines , and the verse/song is unified, repeated , until the end. This idea will be worked on ...

SOLDIER: Set me like a seal upon your soul
 ANGEL: Set me like a seal upon your soul,
 SOLDIER: Like a hand upon your arm.
 ANGEL: Like a hand upon your arm.

SOLDIER: For love is strong as Death

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ANGEL: For love is strong as Death

SOLDIER: The flash of love is a flash of fire,

ANGEL: The flash of love is a flash of fire,

SOLDIER: A flame of god alone.

ANGEL: A flame of god alone.

SOLDIER: No flood can quench, no torrents drown.

ANGEL: No flood can quench, no torrents drown.

SOLDIER: For love is strong as Death.

ANGEL: For love is strong as Death.

As the song finishes, the chorus members are in tableau, each reflecting the state to which they have arrived as a result of this journey. (Possibly Cora, pregnant, others, t.b.a.)

Perhaps one small rumble of thunder, as the lights fade on this rare moment of happiness in the cycle of existence, but we won't dwell on the future ...

THE END

1. General NOTES

Sliding in All Directions

The premise underlying this work:

At the end of the 20th Century, psychological & personal drama seems empty; poetry and music are doors to our subconscious wisdom and yearnings. *Sliding in All Directions* is mythic theatre. Old Testament poetry, new texts and music are combined to explore the ancient classical premise that we mere mortals (the chorus) are victims of the gods, their games, passions and outrages. The setting is a familiar but unnamed street corner, where two realms exist simultaneously: EARTH (the chorus) and ATMOSPHERE (the gods).

By treating EARTH and ATMOSPHERE literally, as separate worlds, the gods and chorus as independent species, this work attempts to say something about life at the end of the 20th Century, by going beneath the surface reality of daily existence. The gods are humankind's creation, projections of our extremes, desires and fears, reckless beings with the courage to love and suffer more deeply than we every could. This is an attempt at a metaphorical theatre, but one in which the point is expressed through characters in a clear story.

As mere mortals, we know that we will die and enter into eternal blackness. This knowledge lights our lives, tempers our passions, makes us afraid, but also makes us moral beings. We make choices; we live in time. The gods are doomed to immortality. For the gods, death leads to rebirth, an endless cyclical journey which feeds their extremes and drives them through tremendous obstacles, to unimagined heights and depths of pain and pleasure. Trapped in the shadowy void of mortality, we are inspired by passion of the gods, and sobered by their relentless existence. We need them to calm our inner chaos and strengthen our resolve to create better lives out of the finite reality of our life on earth.

The title of the play was inspired by Leonard Cohen's song, *The Future ...*

Things are going to slide in all directions
 Won't be nothing
 Nothing you can measure anymore
 The blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold
 and it has overturned the order of the soul.

Sliding in All Directions describes the state of our world. People are no longer sure of anything and have no solid footing. The simplest things are hopelessly complex. It seems impossible to find reliable patterns, figure out the how and why of human actions, other people ... or ourselves!

As myths usually do, this one blames the gods. As the story opens, they have been in a crisis, which is causing immense chaos on earth. ... Let's say they have been spending too much time in the human world, gone their separate ways and lost touch with their godliness. Somehow, they must leave the earth behind, reunite the split psyche and become once again a powerful being. Reunion, transformation, death, departure ...

At first, the earthly mortals resist this pull towards reunion, because we are so used to the roar of chaos caused by the split. Our whole "way of life" is constructed on duality: man versus woman, youth versus age, body versus spirit, mind versus heart. Eventually, the chorus will be transformed by the quest, and even participate in the reunion. Then they will be open to the power of the group, and ready to let up on their fierce individualism. See Leonard Cohen's great song, about *Democracy*.

It's coming through a hole in the air,/ from those nights in Tiananmen Square./ It's coming from the feel/
 that it ain't exactly real, or it's real, but it ain't exactly there. From the wars against disorder,/ from the
 sirens night and day,/ from the fires of the homeless,/ from the ashes of the gay;/ It's coming through a
 crack in the wall;/ on a visionary flood of alcohol;/ from the staggering account/of the Sermon on the
 Mount/ which I don't pretend to understand at all,/ It's coming from the sorrow on the street,/ from the
 holy places where the races meet;/ from the homicidal bitchin'/ that goes down in every kitchen/ to
 determine who will serve and who will eat./ From the wells of disappointment/ where the women kneel to
 pray/ for the grace of gd in the desert here/ and the desert far away;/It's coming like the tidal flood/
 beneath the lunar sway/ imperial, mysterious,/ in amorous array./

Sail on, sail on, O mighty Ship of State! To the Shores of Need/ Past the Reefs of Greed/ Through the
 Squalls of Hate/ Said on, sail on, sail on...

Who are the gods?

He is a broken down soldier, who has fought every war. He is exhausted, more than anything he wants to sleep, forever, pass into the dark void of human death. The chorus will at first, resist his transformation into a complete god. For centuries, the warrior spirits of the world (men and women) have lined up behind him. They want to keep him as their leader, and prevent him from being reborn as a god. They need his energy, drive, machismo, courage and single-mindedness. If he becomes a god again, he will become a poet, he will soar above the world with a birds' eye view of their mortal lives. Through his poetry, he will have the power to grapple with complexity in a way which warrior spirits never can allow themselves to imagine.

She is mad woman, an angel, a bird, water, air. She is the queen of the lunatics with immense power to stir up trouble wherever she goes, play every instrument. She is the goddess of music, incredibly powerful because she can manipulate the mood of any person or any scene by underlaying it with music. She shuns words except the airy poetic lyrics which embroider her songs. She is less tied to the earth than the soldier. She is also in love with her power of flight, and will be a hard one to seduce or tame ...

The reunion of the gods began with a simultaneous intuitive thought, maybe a dream. He lay in the trenches and imagined he heard her voice. She woke up in the silent dark and missed him. They made their way to a streetcorner. She got there a little early, but the chorus frightened her away. He arrived when her perfume still lingered in the air, and called out to her. The rest of the play is the story of their struggle to close that three minute gap in time and space.

OUTLINE What happens?

Part one: the descent

The gods appear in the form of a man and a woman who have just woken up and desperately want to be together. The angel tells her story in the first ballad. Then she flees. The soldier arrives looking for her. He knows she has just been there, and calls out, entices her into responding, but she slips away, urges him to follow.

We can imagine the beginning of the play is a familiar, playful power struggle. She says, come with me. He says, I'll play your game, but look for you - my way. He enters into society, tries to play along and find her in a crowded room. He gets his hands burned as the party scene ends in violence. This scene is about the violence inherent in any system of social organization - the tyranny of the majority. The angel is silent and absent. She'll have nothing to do with the end of the 20th Century.

Gunfire reminds the soldier of the trenches. Suddenly he is back there again. The sounds of war. The smell of war brings great memories, the camaraderie, an old officer, old songs. Suddenly he is inside the Father, totally in tune with the Father's memories and perspective.

The world of this father and son seduces the angel out of her clefts of rock. She sees the scene from the son's perspective; she is on his side, his muse. Like a flashback, the angel and the soldier live out their centuries of estrangement though this sketch. The earthly world is divided into angels and soldiers, and in this sketch we see their essences personified.

(please see footnote below)

Meanwhile, the audience gets a look deep inside two chorus members. But the sketch is dramatic, in that by the end, the father has bared his soul and faced his guilt. His intense vulnerability moves the soldier to remember finally why he fled the wars, why all that nostalgia has to be buried, resisted.

The honesty, vulnerability and gentleness of the Father reminds the soldier of his higher purpose, and by the end, he is back on his quest. His long poem in scene four is his attempt to use words as music to entice the angel out of her hiding place.

Still, he is calling out to her from the earth. His words of love are poison to Cora, and she explodes. The passion of the gods has no hope of existence in Cora's world.

Charged by her monologue, the chorus goes nuts and takes a big step towards being a real chorus, i.e. a unified rhythm. They plunge into the kicking music and go at it. Although this is an angry, violent, abusive response, it is nevertheless a kind of catharsis. After this "number" the chorus is more united than in the voting scene ...

Phone rings, interrupting the beating. Ann gets it.

A silent, horrifying scene. ... We listen. At the end of that scene, the chorus is horrified. The soldier has had a good, hard look at this earthly world, and resolves, finally, to get out, find his strength, find the fire ...

Part two - The Ascent

The mood at the end of part one is dark, despair, a longing for the silent void of human death. This is a major turning point in the rhythm of the play. The despair of the chorus for our time is intense, but they are tied by invisible strings to the gods, and the gods never die. The gods need help in order to effect this last difficult part of their journey. So, the Angel calls the chorus to the quest. For the first time since the opening ballad, she appears again on earth. First she sings from the clefts of rocks, a mournful ballad summarizing her despair at ever getting back to the soldier, and begging the chorus to help. She leaves, but the chorus sheds their earthly skin and are transformed into the Sons of David, Daughters of Jerusalem, ready to attend the reunion.

However, the long-awaited reunion misfires. The door between them never swings open. The soldier turns and leaves. The angel is devastated. The chorus is exasperated, disappointed, resolved not to let the whole long saga end in an all-too-familiar-earthly-type misunderstanding.

Perhaps the gods can teach mere mortals a lesson about rising above pettiness and obscurity. Anyway, the gods hereby abandon hope of a reunion on earth. There is no way now but through the fiery gates. Offstage, they face this fact. Sacrifice, purification, a complete letting go of earth and self will be required.

Now, the chorus is fully open to the mystery and fierce magic of the moment. It could be judgment day, it could be apocalypse. The actions of this scene will have to be invented in rehearsal, but the audience must be completely surrounded, transported, into ATMOSPHERE. At the same moment when the chorus discovers the spirit of agreeing to act together, the angel and the soldier summon the strength to walk through the fire ... This was what they had been working hard to learn since the first scene. The blessing which befalls them is a final testament - song of wisdom - from the gods, and a state of mind/heart which makes them totally capable of believing the song.

FOOTNOTE ...

It is very important to distinguish between cliché and archetype.

Think of the soldier and the angel as archetypes who have taken human forms in order to live out their drama, in this play, the form of lovers, a man and a woman.

Try not to think of the angel as womankind, the soldier as man. (Men, try to identify with the angel. Imagine the part of yourself which is (wisely) terrified and flees from this world of verbal land mines, static and misunderstanding, the part of yourself which desperately wants to hide out in a cave, longs for the irresponsibility of madness. Swallow her and watch the play from her eyes.)

The soldier is a man, but not all men. (Women, think of your gladiator selves, your will power, the side of you which abhors stereotypic female behaviour, and the confusion which this anima power can cause.) The soldier is a person on the way to becoming something higher than his role as soldier would ever permit. The transformation will be incredibly painful, because it means shedding an old skin, letting go of a lot of familiar patterns, joys, habits, memories. This old skin has to be burned off.

- Marianne Ackerman

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