

## Macabre: Playbill Introduction

Reverend Doctor Michael Bulkington is a popular evangelical preacher in New Orleans on the night Hurricane Katrina is coming ashore. He has just discovered an affair between his dear wife, Jeannie, and best friend and employee, Jake. As he seeks to exact his revenge and preserve his marriage, time after time, his evil deeds are nearly uncovered. What ensues is a silly, chaotic cover-up that never quite settles down. In the end, what Michael will do to see his plan through sets the stage for a portrait of the truly macabre.

Pre show assistants (ticket sellers, ushers) are all dressed in funeral garb with pasty death makeup. All behave in a creepy, ghoulish fashion generally. Zombies optional. Music plays in background such as Mozart's *Requiem*, Chopin's Piano Sonata Opus 35 #2, ending with Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor. When this last song ends, go immediately to Prologue.

Macabre: Prologue

Drop House lights. Black stage with black curtain at back. Curtain is painted with the word "MACABRE" in invisible UV reactive paint. Enter narrator dressed like a pall bearer, pasty death make-up under single spot light.

Narrator: Welcome to our little show, and welcome to our stage.

Welcome to a portrait of our evil modern age.  
 Come and sit and ponder how the story you will view  
 Echoes of the strategies still representing you.  
 Sit and watch and wonder at the truth no one escapes,  
 Our common self, the attributes our acquiescence shapes.  
 Not one here among you lives unnumbered in his years,  
 Not a one among you can predict the end he fears.  
 What is yours, and what is mine? Well, no one ever knows,  
 What end awaits him at the end, what way he lastly goes.  
 And looking left or looking right, you cannot tell by looks  
 What end awaits each other, whether hooks or whether crooks?  
 One only knows if one has taken life into their hands,  
 If yours or theirs, and then to follow through on final plans.  
 How will that be, your final hour? How will your ending go?  
 If told to choose, could you decide? And would you want to know?  
 And when you have departed, dearies, how will others tell  
 The scene of your departure, when from life you finally fell?  
 Now how would you prefer your final scene to be detailed?  
 An epitaph like 'quiet' or 'serene' would well avail.  
 With words of nature, harmony, and peace we want it told,  
 And best of all is if it comes well after we are old.  
 And how would you prefer the news should not describe the scene?  
 With words like 'tragic', 'sad', or 'sudden', 'shocking', or 'obscene'?  
 The less desired, the most upsetting make the best to tell,  
 And those who work with words have many ways to tell it well.  
 It seems morose how many words describe our sad dismay,  
 To make it easy, though, I'll start with those that start with 'A'.  
 I wouldn't want my death to be 'atrocious' when I'm found,  
 'Alarming' isn't good and 'awful' has an awful sound.  
 And worse than these are words that start with 'D' to tell the plot,  
 'Disturbing' or 'distressing' leave my mind a bit distraught.  
 I wouldn't want it 'dreadful,' and 'disquieting' is bad.

They mean that an unhappy end is what the dying had.  
 Then lower down the scale of words you'd have describe your fate  
 Are words that start with 'H' to tell the world why you are 'late'.  
 Now 'horrible', 'horrific', and 'horrendous' seem the same,  
 But 'hideous' is something new and 'heinous' is a shame.  
 Then the words that start with 'G' describe it even worse  
 Because they start to blend the sad with something more perverse.  
 Who would want their death described as 'ghastly', or as 'grim'?  
 Who would choose a 'ghoulish' scene to be the end of him?  
 How much worse than these would be a 'grisly' kind of end?  
 What events could lead there when to that end we should wend?  
 Finally, there is one more category of these words,  
 One worse kind of verbiage of our end can be conferred  
 But not in English, only French has words that can convey  
 The depth of man's dépravation and ombreux débauche.  
 English has so many words that spell a solemn state,  
 But God forbid the news should use some French to tell your fate.  
 The second worst would be 'grotesque' which means a step beyond,  
 Outside what 'chilling', 'eerie', or 'unnerving' correspond.  
 'Grotesque' means inconceivable, far past the twisted mind,  
 That's built upon perversion, something foul and all unkind.  
 But worst of all, the most distressing word that they can use  
 That tells of sick and twisted pleasure, then the word they choose,  
 For madness and malicious minds, for putrid vulgar joy,  
 For cruelty and contempt, the only word that they employ,  
 To tell the highest state of lowness, then the word they say  
 Serves also as the title for the show we have today.  
 Our story here reveals the hidden darkness and intent  
 That hides within the hearts of those upon destruction bent.  
 Inside those ugly truths and those deceptions it reveals  
 The twists and turns that burn behind the hopes that men conceal.  
 And it is sick, and it is foul, and borders on surreal,  
 The topic of our story that reflects the all-too-real.

Allow the narrator to ring the last word and then drop all lights suddenly to total blackness and sounds of thunder. A woman screams backstage and then, using the black light, the hidden word "MACABRE" is revealed on the black curtain. Time Bach's Fugue in G minor BWV578 with the black light. During this brief musical piece, prepare for scene 1 and usher in any late arrivals.

## Macabre: Scene 1: Fighting Emotion

Stage opens with Jake digging in 'grave' and Michael above him holding a pistol. The grave is to be implied by a six foot tall black box, atop which Michael stands. A single light shines upon them both. All else is black. The scene opens with lightning and thunder. Then Jake stops and speaks.

Both with heavy southern (New Orleans) accents. Storm sounds in background.

Jake: It's an emotion, man. You can choose to let it go. You can fight it.

Mich: Is that what you think? Is that what you really believe? Emotions are not the sort of thing you can fight. You can resist an emotion. You can deny an emotion. You can feel it or you can suffer it. You may be able to forget it, but you cannot fight an emotion. Take you and me for example. We can fight man to man. Because there is will, because there is decision, we can fight. Or we can fight an animal, or a society in a war. We can fight against ourselves, perhaps; perhaps even the will fighting against itself. But there is no will behind an emotion. How can you fight something that has no will?

Jake: Can you not fight against nature? If you can fight against yourself, then can you not fight against your own nature?

Mich: Can I? Of course one can fight to survive nature, but then, aren't you really only fighting against the willingness to surrender to it? Can you ever hope to defeat nature? So why should your own nature be any different, unless nature itself has a will? Then you are pitting your intellectual will against the will of your nature. And again, what does that have to do with emotion?

Jake: Will you not even make a secret of it then? Will you have me dig my own grave, only then to lie down and occupy it?

Mich: Who told you that is your grave I'm having you dig?

Jake: (raising the shovel as a weapon) You monster!

Mich: (Laughing) No, Jake. I don't intend to put *her* here. If I were leaving you two together, I'd simply leave and let you live on. But you? (aiming the pistol) Always the fighter, aren't you my old friend? Even now, standing six feet deep in your own grave, you search for a way to resurrect yourself. This may yet be *my* tragic scene. If it were any other man, I'd feel pity, but with you I do believe you may –

Jake: May I? You call me old friend, but here I am in the grave, persuaded here by your pistol. I know you too well, old friend. Over these many years I've come to know you don't

commit yourself to anything unless you're sure that you can succeed. And while I have no doubt that you can succeed with this, and with the next thing, and who knows how many moves you have planned in advance, are you really certain before you strike that what you're doing is right?

Mich: (laughs) Always the consummate chess player, aren't you? How sadly I will miss our many games. How many days do you suppose we spent the late afternoon and early evening leaning over a chess board together? I could never beat you in a fair game, Jake. You were too smart, too intuitive. Your concentration was too deep to overcome.

Jake: I can recall many times when you won. How can you tell me now that you could never win?

Mich: I didn't say I could never win. I said I could never beat you in a fair game.

Jake: The pieces are the same. You get one move at a time. How could it be anything other than fair?

Mich: Because I could never beat you with the pieces on the board. I always had to move a second time off of the board. (he laughs robustly) Every time I moved a piece on the board, I tried to move again some other way. Maybe it was a distraction like the many newspapers I would lay beside the table. You may not remember, but once I laid a magazine with an almost naked beautiful woman right beside you so that you would lose your focus on the board. I let the dog in to nag at you or instructed one of the hands to come and call on you. I did everything I could to break your concentration, your amazing concentration, even if only for one critical move so that I could get something essential by you. (laughing) I could *never* beat you with only the pieces on the board!

Jake: (more solemnly) Well, you seem to be winning now. I'd say you have the game wrapped up very nicely.

Mich: But the pieces aren't all even here. (Waves the pistol) I have the one piece that tips the table. You may have my queen, but I may yet outmaneuver you. Even still, in this particular game there are no winners. Even now, my heart is breaking whether you believe it or not.

Jake: And you? You say that your heart is breaking, but I fear that when your check becomes mate, it will be me that's broken.

Mich: Mate? Mate, do you say? (he reasserts his aim) What of that? Does it not imply finality? Does it not imply permanence? But what can we say about it now? I've never known a

sadder fate. Nothing is forever whether it is spoken, implied or performed and all things, whether by their own will or by another's, come undone or go on to become something different than what they once were. You talk about a mate? But have you not made my mate your own already? Maybe tonight you may yet turn this table as well.

Jake: I never meant to take anything of yours. All these years, anything I received from you was from what I made for you.

Mich: I know that. We have been best friends for too long for me to deny it. While I was up in the pulpit, you were conducting from the pew. I knew when I had overstepped by the reaction on your face. And when we played our wonderful games, you were the one who not only understood the sermon, but you were the one who perfected it.

Jake: You'll never know how inspiring your sermons were to me, Michael. Though you bellowed, to me it was a blessing. And when you raged, to me it was as a song. For all these years you lifted me up week after week, to do what was right, and to be what was best.

Mich: And when I was done you would open my eyes to whatever truths lay beyond my own message or whatever I had missed along the way.

Jake: You were the scholar.

Mich: And you were the genius. And what I couldn't find in my many books you managed to see with that wonderful gift of vision. We were unbeatable.

Jake: We were inseparable.

Mich: Until now.

Jake: Yes. (grows quieter) That's true. But I never meant to. I didn't want to. I really tried...

Mich: To fight it? I know. But you couldn't. It was simply a reality that you couldn't deny and you couldn't turn back. Like a storm. (Lightning strikes, followed by thunder) Afar off, it's been building for some time. I saw it, maybe before either of you. (He lowers the pistol) (Actor may even choose to sit) And neither can I blame you. I'm actually surprised that you resisted it this long. But it was nature. You don't meet special people every day and when two of you come together, what can one expect?

Jake: She was alone.

Mich: Yes, I know. I've known it for some time. I left her alone to do my work, and as I said, I couldn't really expect a woman like her to go unknown. It would be like a DaVinci going

unviewed or a fruit of the tree of Eden gone untasted. Though forbidden, the greater sin would be to allow it to rot there. Yet, the fact that it's forbidden ensures that it will only be tasted when the taster grows sufficiently bold to appreciate its bouquet.

Jake: And consequences.

Mich: It isn't my place to judge, because that is for God alone. Even now, I cannot judge.

Jake: Then you don't hate me?

Mich: I cannot hate you. Though you might destroy the world, I could never hate you, because it is in your nature to do what is right, as it was right this time.

Jake: Then for God's sake, lend me your hand! (He motions to climb up)

Mich: (If sitting, stands up) (raising the pistol) God has nothing to do with this.

Jake: It's all true. Everything you say. I can't try to evade your omniscience in this.

Mich: (aiming the pistol) Don't insult me with false flattery, Jake. You're growing desperate now, but I doubt my emotions have overwhelmed me to that extent.

Jake: Then you *can* fight them. Michael, you are justified. But if you don't hate me, don't stain your own innocent hands with even justified blood. Let me go, and I'll be gone away. Forever! We can say that I was swept off by the storm!

Mich: No, Jake. *We* won't say anything. I do not deceive myself with false justifications, for murder is murder, whether we justify it or not by the ridiculous assertion that another was capable or even planning to do harm. I do not fight my emotions. I merely choose not to contend them. What manner of things *are* emotions, if not a fight in themselves? We cannot accept a reality, and so we feel it should be different and we call that internal resistance emotion. We want a certain thing to happen, and so we feel a certain way about the future. Even when we are happy about an outcome, we have trouble accepting the good fortune that seems so unlikely in this world, and we resist the wonder of it all. And again we call resistance emotion. How can we fight that resistance?

Jake: And yet you and I both accept that what I have done is wrong.

Mich: But with me there is no resistance because I can see how it was right. Therefore there is no emotion and therefore nothing to fight, because emotion itself is a fight against reality. It is an internal dissonance or resistance to accept the way that things really are. To recognize causality and to perceive order is to accept, and in this logic emotion does

not occur. All emotion is a fight and to try to fight emotion is merely the perpetuation of it.

Jake: Then accept the reality and reestablish the order. You had every right to protect your home. But don't bring further chaos down on your house by spilling guilty blood onto innocent hands. The bible says you've been justified because a strong man will stay up late to keep a robber from his house.

Mich: Once again, Jake, you flank me and you rank me. And you are right. It does say that a strong man will stay up late to keep a robber from his house. However, I can never be justified because it does not say that the strong man is right in killing the robber because he may yet try to enter the home.

Jake: Then let me go man!

Mich: (lowering the pistol a bit) A man attacks with a stick, what can you do? The bible says to turn the other cheek.

Jake: Michael, I swear to you, you won't regret it. Let me go and I will walk the earth and never return here. I will make amends for my sins all the remaining days of my life. And I will never forget your mercy even unto the judgment. You know I am a Christian man.

Mich: Clausewitz says to strike the attacker before he can strike you. Cunning says you may take the stick away from the attacker before he may use it. So, I can forgive, destroy, or disarm.

Jake: (with a comedic flair) But start with the first! Start by turning the other cheek!

Mich: But I am uncertain, so I shall do all three.

Jake: You have never been uncertain. Which will you do today?

Mich: And you have never been coarse or deceptive. Today I shall forgive you both, and strike you alone. By doing so, I will remove from both of you the ability to strike me again. Today we become things that we are not, and so that which we were must end as both today and yesterday cannot co-abide.

Jake: But you have already done what you set out to do. You have established a new policy. You brought up Clausewitz. As I recall, Clausewitz says war is a last resort to terrorize a people to accept your intended policy. Well, you've terrified me Michael. I'm in terror. Why, you might say my terror level is elevated! I'll accept your policy so why not let me out?

Mich: Because my old friend, between you and me this isn't a war. This isn't about getting you to accept my policy. That doesn't interest me in any way. My war is with her. I eliminate you to take away her options, to terrorize her into accepting my policy. Yes, you remember your Clausewitz well. War is always an application of terror in order to impose our preferred policies onto those inclined to reject them. We make the policy they would otherwise reject more desirable than the continuation of the terror. It is indeed a political ploy of last resort and so you see it is her posture I hope to influence through your exclusion. Between her and me it may be a war. Between you and me it is at best revenge, at worst collateral damage, and at least murder.

Jake: And you intend to just leave me here to this sudden fate? Is this the way you have chosen for me to die?

Mich: What other way would you prefer, old friend?

Jake: (Comedic again) How about old age?

(Michael raises and aims his gun)

Jake: Forgive me as well! My friend! My guide! My mentor! You loved me once!

Mich: (coldly) As I do now. As I love her and always will. But as yesterday is destroyed by today, so too does tomorrow approach and consume them both. (lightning and thunder) Although you will not be afforded the opportunity to prove whether you really would rob me of what I hold most precious, the fact that you might strike me, in this case, is enough to force my hand. (Cocks the hammer of the pistol) I know only the way of nature. I offer no resistance to the reality, and I intend to abide it.

End lightning and thunder. Light goes out. Four shots blaze in the dark.

-End Scene-

Macabre: Scene 2: Bad Doctorin'

Set: The scene is an upscale, but not ornate living room. There is a door on the right that is the home's front door. Also right stage is a wet bar towards the back wall and a couple of chairs and coffee table towards the front. There is a doorway left stage that leads into the interior of the house, and a couch in front of it. At center stage at the back wall is an armoire of some kind. There are windows along the back wall, and if possible, they should be sprayed with water to simulate rain. There is occasional thunder and a strobe light back stage for lightning. Some kind of dreary nighttime scenery might be visible outside of the windows.

(Enter Michael through front door stage right. His boots are muddy and he is wet and panting. Another man (Scott, a dapper kind of man with a polite demeanor) is seated in one of the chairs, reading a newspaper, but shifting and glancing about nervously.)

Scott: At last! What have you been out doing in this rain? I would have thought you'd be packed and ready to go by now. The water's rising by the minute!

Mich: I was just out in the southern field. I have some last minute things to take care of before the surge hits. If I don't do everything I can I will only have myself to blame when everything's been wiped away. You look rather relaxed yourself, reading your paper at a time like this.

Scott: I'm waiting for my sister, and rather anxiously if you don't mind. Of course, I expect you're both packed and ready to go.

Mich: She may be packed, but I have some other things to attend to first.

Scott: What is this? You, Michael, given to swagger at a time like this? That is shocking. By the looks of the radar images, you won't be able to enjoy much of anything when the surge hits. Besides, I doubt if anything is going to be left at all. You need to get yourselves together and come away with me before it's too late. (Michael is removing his muddy boots and putting on house shoes). I've never known you to be so cavalier! Where have you been anyway? You have enough mud on your boots to fill a grave.

Mich: (freezes momentarily) I was out in the fields.

Scott: With Jake? Where is that scoundrel? Has he already moved out? Or is he putting everything right with you?

Mich: He's simply buried in his work, as always. (glances smiling at the crowd). He's attending to something before he goes.

(enter Jeannie wringing a towel in her hands looking rather agitated).

Jean: (nervous, nearly trembling) The wind is howling so! I'm afraid the house is just going to fly away with all of us in it.

Mich: Yes, dear. Would be a shame to see one's home fly away and then to be left all alone in the rain.

Jean: Why Scott! Whatever are you doing here? You ought to be headed for Houston by now. The roads will be impassible soon.

Scott: I was wondering the same about you. (rises and embraces her, folding the newspaper but not dropping it). The police told me at the bridge you hadn't crossed yet, and I came here to get you. Now let's get going! It's so strange to find you both standing about fretting when we ought to be going.

Mich: Why I'm sure Jeannie is all packed and ready to go aren't you dear? In fact, I believe I saw your bags packed as early as last night, didn't I? Why wait around when you're clearly in such a hurry to leave our home?

(Jeannie walks briskly to the window and gazes out into the dark).

Jean: Oh it just looks awful out there!

Mich: Oh Jeannie dear, I didn't notice whether you'd packed my bags yet or not. Are you really ready to leave now?

Jean: (continues looking out into the night) Oh this is all so awful. We simply can't wait much longer.

Mich: But why don't you and Scott just leave and I'll be along to meet you in a little while. Why don't you just leave me here all alone? You don't have anything holding you back now, do you?

Jean: (turning to Scott) And whatever are you doing here?

Scott: Why, I've already told you. I've come by to get you, to get the two of you. Now come along, we have to hurry.

Mich: Scott came by to read our paper before he heads away to Houston, dear. You know how he does love the *Times Picayune*. He'll miss it over in Texas, you know. What did you find so interesting in that paper, Scott, that isn't beating down our door presently anyway?

Scott: What? (he looks around as if he's forgotten having the paper) The most obscene thing, actually. (He unfolds the newspaper and holds it so the audience can see two headlines: "Still no WMD found in Iraq" and "Bush Doctrine Justifies By Possibility Of Harm.") There's a story in here about a doctor who made a most egregious mistake.

Mich: Oh? Please tell us all about it. Everyone loves egregious mistakes. (eggs on the audience with hand)

Scott: Well it says here that apparently there was a doctor who was supposed to remove a cancerous lung from a patient, and as it turned out, they got the x-ray backwards and he ended up removing the wrong lung. He removed the lung from which the cancer had already been removed. And then, of course, he couldn't remove the diseased lung because he had removed the lung he thought had the cancer, but didn't.

Mich: And what are they going to do with the not-so-good doctor? Will he be tried for murder?

Scott: (sets the paper down on the bar) Well, the man's not actually dead yet. Besides, I'm sure he didn't mean to take the wrong lung out. In the worst of scenarios I suppose he might be tried for manslaughter, after the patient dies, of course.

Mich: Why wait? A tree that has been cut across is killed regardless of whether it has actually fallen over yet. A heart that's been cut out is dead regardless of whether it's still beating. Is the heart not broken the moment it's torn from the chest of its owner? Besides, how do you know the doctor didn't take the wrong lung out on purpose? He may have been involved with the patient's wife and wanted to get rid of him. Or else, maybe the patient was involved with the doctor's wife and he had discovered them. (Jeannie looks back over her shoulder at them with a worried expression and then looks back out the window.) At any rate, the entire medical staff should have been put up on murder charges.

Scott: The entire staff? Are you suggesting they all wanted him dead?

Mich: (picking up the paper with the headlines towards the audience.) Why not? Any one of them could have pointed out the mistake. Any one of them could have spoken up at any time. They all could have wanted to kill him. They should all be executed.

Scott: Executed? Simply wanting to kill someone doesn't warrant arrest and execution! You're joking with me now. Besides, there was no indication that they wanted to kill him in the first place.

Mich: Then they should be brought up on charges because they *could* have wanted to kill him, or because they had the *means* to kill him. Clearly they cleverly devised a way to attack him, perhaps because they were afraid that *he* wanted to attack *them*, or because they were afraid he *could* have attacked them.

Scott: Attacking someone because they *want* to attack you, or because they *could* attack you, is madness.

Mich: Hardly madness. It's doctrine.

Scott: What kind of doctrine is that?

Mich: (He looks directly at the audience over the newspaper) It's the kind of doctorin' where a doctor takes out the wrong lung. Jeannie, what do you make of that doctorin'?

(Jeannie makes no response).

Mich: (Lays the newspaper over a chair, folding it to show "Bush Doctrine Justifies By Possibility Of Harm," and to reveal a new headline, "Winning the War on Terror.") (be certain this paper remains throughout the rest of the play). Well, why didn't he just put the good lung back in?

Scott: You mean the doctor?

Mich: I should hope so! I don't imagine the patient could put it back in himself. Why didn't he just put the good lung back in and take the bad one out?

Scott: Put it back in? You can't very well just disassemble a man and reassemble him when the purpose serves, now can you?

Mich: Why not? You've already reduced the man to parts haven't you? (turns back to Jeannie) Jeannie, my dear, really now, what do you think about it? If you can tear someone's heart out, shouldn't you just as easily be able to replace it? Shouldn't you consider that before you start taking a man to pieces? If a man is positioned to take something precious from me, like a lung, for instance, or let's just say any flesh of my flesh, I should do what I have to do to eliminate the threat, shouldn't I? A person takes a stand, or...

Jean: (Turns and glares at Michael) Must you be so atrocious? (then runs out in despair)

Scott: Oh. Well now what's the matter with her?

Mich: I suppose it must be something I said. There's nothing more alarming in this world than bad doctrine.

Scott: Of course, she's right! It's madness for us to be standing around talking like this. Now is not the time for this nonsense. She's gone to finish the packing. I – I - I'll go and help her. (Scott moves to follow her, but just then there is a knock at the door) Now whoever can that be?

Mich: Well, let's just see. (He goes to the door and opens it. There is a man in a rain coat and boots, visibly concerned.) Barnez! Come in, right away. You're nearly soaked through.

Barn: (Barnez is a large, imposing man. He looks gravely concerned. He removes his rain cap and addresses Michael.) Michael, it certainly is strange to see you both standing around right now. What's going on here?

Mich: I was just about to ask you the same thing. What are *you* still doing here? I told you to go to Houston and wait for me. So then, what's keeping you?

Barn: Something very strange. Jake is missing.

Mich: Well, there's nothing strange about that. He's probably gone off to Houston, just like you should too.

Barn: The police say they haven't seen him cross the bridge, so I went out to look for him in the southern field and found something very disturbing. I think you ought to come out there and take a look right away.

Scott: Barnez! You're as mad as everyone else! We all have to leave. Jake is surely gone by now.

Mich: Yes, I made sure of it. That is to say, I'm sure of it.

Scott: Whatever are you doing out in that field tonight, really? You ought to be leaving for Houston right now. The water will be cresting in no time!

Barn: (to Michael) You told me you sent Jake out to the southern field to put the combine in the barn before he left, but no one's seen him in town. He's missing. I went out to the field to see if he was there, and that's when I found it.

Mich: Then he didn't put the combine away? It's not important. You need to leave town right now.

Barn: No, no. Not the combine. I mean, it's still there too. But I found a pit. I think you should come and take a look at it.

Mich: Well, Ok. We'll go together. And you'll just have to show me where it is.

Scott: What? This really is distressing. Y'all can't really be going out into the fields to look at a pit in the ground at a time like this!

Mich: Scott, now you help Jeannie finish packing. I'm going out to see what's got Barnez so upset, and to take care of this new situation. I'll be right back. (he puts on his muddy boots and heads out with Barnez stage right).

Scott: (very worried) Jake is certainly gone to Houston just as we should be. This is all complete foolishness! Time is running out for us all!! (exit Scott stage left)

- End scene-

Macabre: Scene 3: Original Sin

(Open scene on living room. Allow some time to pass with only the sound of wind and thunder. The lights occasionally flicker a little here and there but for one spot light that shines directly onto the newspaper which now hangs over one of the chairs. It is (still) open to a page which reads, "Winning the War on Terror." A knock at the door. Time passes. More knocking eventually building to pounding at the door. Enter Scott from stage left. Opens the door and finds a police man).

Scott: I'm terribly sorry. I was back in the bedroom and we couldn't hear you over the storm.

Dep: I could see your lights on from the road. Why haven't you all moved out yet? Everyone in this area needs to leave immediately! The levees are about to fold!

Scott: Yes, I know. We were packing.

Dep: You're the owner of the house?

Scott: No. My sister is. She's back in the bedroom and her husband is out in the fields.

Dep: Well what the hell is he doing out in the fields? You people need to leave here right away!

Scott: Apparently one of the workers is missing and they've gone to look for him. They're out in the southern field and I'm sure they could use your help.

Dep: I don't have time to be looking around in a field right now. Everybody needs to get out of here. The engineers believe that the levees will be folding any minute. Your worker is probably gone to higher ground. It's time to leave and we can't be wasting time talking about it.

(Enter Michael through the door stage right carrying an axe which he sets down inside the door. He appears to be startled to find the police officer in his home).

Mich: Is there a problem?

Dep: You're damn right there's a problem! This whole area is about to be under at least ten feet of water. Are you the owner of this house?

Mich: Of course I am. You wouldn't expect me to just walk into someone else's home would you? (He begins to remove his boots again. Jeannie enters stage left and listens very intently).

- Dep: I don't really care right now to be honest with you. This gentleman here tells me that you have someone missing out in the fields.
- Mich: We don't know where he's gone to. Maybe he's in St. Louis. I found some train tickets to St. Louis yesterday. (Jeannie sits down suddenly and begins to cry).
- Dep: What's wrong with her?
- Mich: Why she's afraid! You should be too! You can drown just as well as we can!
- Dep: I'm aware of that. You people need to leave now! I don't have time to waste here. I'm going to file a report that you were still here and not leaving. That way when they find your bodies they'll know I tried. That is, if they find your bodies. When the water comes over that levee, there won't be anything left. I'm not wasting any more time with you. You need to get out now! (exit deputy stage right)
- Scott: He's right, you know. There's no time to spare! We need to leave now! Forget the bags. Let's go!
- Mich: You take Jeannie and I'll wait for Barnez to come back in. I can't leave without Barnez. Just get Jeannie out of here and we can all meet up and start over.
- Scott: Fine. We'll go. Jeannie, let's go, right now.
- Jean: I'm not leaving.
- Scott: What do you mean? Of course you are. You heard the officer. We have to leave right away!
- Jean: I'm not leaving. (to Michael) I don't care. I'm not just going to leave him. I won't do it. It's too late now and you can't stop it.
- Scott: What do you mean? He's coming right behind us.
- Mich: She doesn't mean me, Scott. She's talking about Barnez. (he grows deadly still and moves in on her). Isn't that right my dear? Tell Scott you were talking about Barnez and we can meet up and start over.
- Jean: You know damn well who I'm talking about! (Pushes him away) He deserves better than this! After all these years!
- Mich: Why, my dear, he's already been paid for what he's done! Why don't you go along with your brother now?

Scott: Yes, yes! Let's go! Let's leave! You can pay everyone when we get to Houston.

Jean: You're awful! I'm not going anywhere without him. (exit Jeannie stage left)

Scott: What is this? Have you all lost your minds? This is entirely dreadful! Don't you understand what's about to happen? I'm not going to stay. I'm leaving!

Mich: You should. Go to Houston and find a place. We'll follow you right away. She'll recognize the futility in it all and she'll come along soon enough.

Scott: Ok then. I'm going. I'll wait in Houston for you. (he hesitates, gazes down the hall stage left a moment where Jeannie is, and then exits stage right.)

Mich: Good. Go then Scott while you still can. Get out while you still can.

(thunder and lightning. Lights flicker on and off for a moment.)

Mich: Erica! Erica! Are you listening? Erica, can you come here a moment?

(enter Erica, a young pretty, busty maid with a low cut bustier top, stage left)

Erica: Is it time? Are we going? We have to be going!

Mich: Erica, good. It's almost time to leave. I need you to help Jeannie finish packing our things and get your bags as well. We need to leave as soon as possible.

(She turns to leave, but stops)

Mich: What is it?

Erica: I'm scared! It's so stormy outside!

Mich: (approaches her and places his hands on her arms) You don't need to be scared. We'll be gone soon and you won't have to worry. Just please do what I ask you and everything will be fine.

(Erica steps back, turns and exits stage left.)

(Michael proceeds to the bar. He proceeds to mix himself a drink, slowly and casually. He then turns to look out the window and the lights fail. There is lightning and thunder and his silhouette fills the window. A moment he stands in the dark with the lightning outside backlighting him periodically. Then the lights go up and Jeannie enters the room stage left. Her face is filled with scorn and stoic determination).

Jean: I told you. I'm not going anywhere without him.

Mich: (Angry, approaching her) Well, one way or another, if you remain here you will certainly join him!

Jean: How could you? You of all men!

Mich: But I am still just a man.

Jean: Not any more you aren't. You're a villain now. You're a caricature of the man you once were. (she begins to close in on him slowly and by degrees, angling in closer and closer) You were a man of morals. You were a virtuous leader of the community! And now you're a murderer? I watched you up on that pulpit and thought you were a man of God! I thought you were with God! That you were the voice of God! The way you rang the words, the way you gazed and shook! Pounded your fists and the people would swoon! God, how you moved them! And now... you make me sick! You wretched monster! (Moves to strike him).

Mich: (Catches her attack and holds her close, almost kissing). What an interesting choice of words, my dear. And what have you become? You were my most beloved. You were my most cherished!

Jean: (Pushes him off) I was your trophy! What have I become? I'll tell you what I've become. Old! I've become old and dusty sitting up on your virtuous shelf for all these years, waiting and hoping for the day you'd set a little time aside for me! While you were worried about your legacy and your estate...

Mich: Our estate! I was building a legacy for you, for us!

Jean: For you! You... you... monster! (she strikes him). I never wanted any of this! I wanted a life together with my husband! I wanted a family and something simple! You were the one who had to build your congregation! While you were in the pulpit I waited patiently in the pew! (Points out the window) Well where is your pulpit now, Ecclesiastes? It's floating away on a wall of water and everything we built is gone. But the most important thing we built of all is the greatest loss and it didn't have to go! We had a true friend! Night after night when you were out with the congregation I was the one in purgatory! (she turns away) All of those years, I thought it was so funny the way you preached your family values but completely forgot about your own family. And then it was politics and business and this damned estate! (Turns back toward him and stares defiantly in his face). The only good that ever came out of it for me was knowing him! We tried to ignore it, but we couldn't. We tried for years to deny it but so much time went by and it didn't go away.

Mich: (Softly) I know. He called me... I mean told me the very same thing. And I told him the same thing I'm going to tell you now. I can take the blame. I can accept the blame for all of it. I could have sent him away but I knew I couldn't accomplish any of this without him. I could have paid you more attention. God knows any other man couldn't have turned his attention away from you. (she softens). But don't you see? (tries to embrace her) I did it all for you!

Jean: (recoils) You liar!

Mich: (withdrawing) It doesn't matter now. (lightning grows more intense) I accept all the guilt and all the sin. I have turned it upon myself and have become sin altogether and so I am innocent again! I understand it all now. (Lights begin to flicker again) Sin and love, hate and life, they are all one and the same to me now!

Jean: You're mad!

Mich: Then you have driven me to it! You took it all away! (he paces about looking at his home) All of this! My own little Eden! My own little paradise! You and Jake ate of the forbidden fruit and I was forever cast out! Such are the fruits of the tree of knowledge and the tree of death!

(lights flicker and thunder and lightning)

Jean: (Softer) God forgive you. You can't undo this now.

Mich: It isn't God's forgiveness I need, but neither is He going to forgive me any sooner than you will. Besides, innocence is the greatest sin, and sin is the greatest innocence and I no longer need God's forgiveness because I no longer want it.

Jean: Then you really are mad.

Mich: (going back to his drink) No. Because you see, I have finally put together the biggest mystery that ever bothered me. (Picks up a bible from the coffee table and holds it aloft) I have solved the mystery of Eden!

Jean: (She grows frightened) Now what are you talking about?

Mich: Adam and Eve. Jeannie and Jake, it's all the same. Innocents in a garden of temptation. It used to really bother me, you know, original sin. Because there is no single sin, but there are acts of sin that flow from the sin within.

Jean: I'm not going to listen to this madness anymore! (exits stage left).

Mich: (faces audience, speaking with soft, menacing words. Staring murderously. All lights drop but for background [outdoor] lightning, a spot light [hot, maybe red] on Michael, and a small spot on the newspaper). Who is guilty of the greater sin? He who commits suicide by the sword or the one who knew he would commit the act, and yet handed him the sword anyway? (Holds out the bible) Such a Pindarus is the God over Eden. An omniscient God certainly knew the innocents would succumb to temptation even before he created them from the clay. He allowed the serpent to tempt them, for who can act outside the permission of an all knowing and all powerful God? It was at once their destiny, while at the same time it was their choice. So it is with us. Fate and choice walk hand in hand, and mortal man cannot discern one from the other.

(Building) It is our perversions of love that make us commit acts of sin. I love my wife too much and so out of my sin of envy I commit the act of murder. She loved old Jake too much, so out of her sin of lust, she commits acts of adultery. I love my power too much, so out of my sins of greed and ambition I commit acts of negligence. Yes, failure to do what is right is also a sin and comes at the cost of innocence!

(Increasingly assumes his old preacher role and begins working the crowd).

Out of what sin did Adam and Eve commit the act of tasting forbidden fruit? Assuredly, it was out of the sin of innocence that they were able to be tricked by that old serpent. That old devil! Call him what you will, be it Satan, or Beelzebub, (building) or Typhon (shouts and shakes) or Ahrimon!!!! (Regroups, then softly) It is this sin that we are all born with as babes: the original sin of innocence that enables all other sins, as all babes are innocent, and all original sinners. (Building again) He is a serpent who consumes his own tail, because the act that is committed out of innocence kills the innocence that precludes it. (Playing the crowd with deadly seriousness) And you, my conscientious parishoners, what traps before you are hidden from your innocent eyes? (Building again) What cost of innocence will those snares exact? What cost of failing to do what is right in the face or in the name of Sin? What monstrous acts may be committed on your behalf? Allowed by your own innocence? (Holds up bible, shouting and shaking again) And what doctrines will you support? (Two words at a time, shouting) In innocence and guilt, the results (one word at a time and holding the bible high over his head) are the same! (Coming back down) Even this very night the pitfalls of sin, the perversions of love, the misappropriations in the name of love, lie in waiting for your careless step!

(Turns to leave, but hesitates and face the audience again.)

Cast it off, I say! Forsake all innocence and forbear all sin! For through our sin we find the truth! And through the truth (deadly cold and quiet) comes terror.

(Exit Michael stage right. Drop all lights but for one small spot on the newspaper. Thunder, rain and lightning....)

- end scene -

Macabre: Scene 4: Terror!

(Living room. There are two pairs of muddy boots/ shoes now. The new muddy shoes are the ones Michael was wearing in the house earlier. Enter Scott stage right in terror).

Scott: (Screaming) Terror! (He falls through the door to the floor sobbing uncontrollably)  
Horrible! Terrible! Awful! How awful it is!

(enter Jeannie and Erica stage left briskly, followed by Michael, more slowly)

Jean: What? What is it? What has happened? (Scott is sobbing bitterly and Jeannie and Erica drop to console him.)

Scott: (between sobs) Oh, it is awful! What I found in the field!

Jean: What? What have you found in the field?

Mich: (softly) Yes, brother Scott, what do you find so disquieting? And why aren't you gone to Houston?

Scott: It's Barnez! It's what's left of him, poor fellow! Scraps of him all about the field! It was awful! He must have gone through the combine!

Jean: How horrible!

Erica: It's horrific!

Mich: Horrendous.

Jean: How do you know? How can this be?

Scott: Legs and arms and hands! His head! Everywhere! Scraps of his yellow raincoat like confetti scattered ..... everywhere! (Sobs in Jeannie's bosom in horror).

(Jeannie looks at Michael in horror.)

Mich: (Aside) Scott, you don't know how sorry I am to hear this. (to Jeannie) Take him to our room and lay him in the bed.

Scott: I can't! I can't move! I can't go anywhere. I'm sick. It's terrible!

Mich: (More forcefully) Erica, take Scott to our room and lay him on the bed.

Erica: You heard him! He can't move. How can I take him there?

Mich: (Approaching menacingly) Jeannie will help you. Won't you Jeannie? When people are paralyzed by terror, when they are frightened and don't know what to do, the strong must do the thinking for them. Unable to choose, we give up our choices to fear, and those who do not fear become our masters. You will be his legs. You will have to be his mind.

(they coax him to rise and walk towards the bedroom, exiting stage left. A moment later, Jeannie reenters)

Jean: You! I never thought you could become this kind of a fiend!

Mich: I had nothing to do with it. He must have been trying to move the combine and it got stuck in the mud. I don't know. Maybe he tried to free it while he wa- while it was running.

(she turns and exits stage left)

Mich: (turns to the audience, smiling.) In the words of John Milton, "Evil, be thou my good. Good, be thou my evil."

(There is a knock at the door. Michael opens it to find another officer.)

Mich: Sheriff Montgomery! What are you doing here tonight?

Sher: (enters) Reverend, I'm here to ask you the same thing. My deputy told me you were still here and you wouldn't leave. He said you were looking for a lost worker. Then I lost contact with him.

Scott: (howling off stage) Terror!

Sher: What was that now?

Mich: Yes, that. Well, we may have found our missing man. My brother in law, Scott, claims there was some kind of an accident with the combine.

(enter Erica stage left. She runs to the bar and tries to wet a towel but the water isn't working so she takes a bottle of water from the bar and wets the towel with it, emptying it.)

Sher: Who are you now?

Erica: I'm Erica.

Mich: You see he only just found the man. He claims the scene is rather heinous.

Sher: I'd better call an ambulance out here.

Mich: No, I'm afraid it's too late for that.

Sher: Too late? But the towel...

Mich: No. That's for the man who found him, my brother in law. He says he found our man out in the field and he just fell all to pieces.

Sher: I better talk to him. Can you bring him out here?

Mich: Erica... (she is exiting, but pauses) The sheriff needs to ask Scott about the accident he saw. Please get him to come out here. Get Jeannie to help, too, if you must.

Erica: (pausing) But Michael, we have to go! We have to go now!

Mich: Erica, I told you before, everything will be fine. We'll all be going very soon.

(Michael goes to the bar as Erica exits. On her way out, Erica stops and addresses the audience)

Erica: (to the audience) Sure. That's easy for him to say. He's a main character. *You* know what happens to bit part characters like *me* in horror stories. Even Scott said he came back for *both* of *them*. Who's going to come back for me? I'm lucky to even have lines in this play. What do you suppose the writer has in store for a flat character like me?

Mich: (to Erica) Erica, *You* don't look like a *flat* character to me. Now move along! (Michael begins moving items behind and atop the bar) Sheriff, I've just made some hot tea. Would you like some? It's getting pretty wet out there.

(while the sheriff is looking towards the bedroom stage left Michael is pouring some tea. He lifts a container clearly marked RAT POISON from behind the bar and, grinning broadly towards the audience, proceeds to spoon it into the tea cup. At the moment the sheriff turns around, Michael quickly hides it away).

Sher: Some tea, yes, that sounds good. I have to say I'm pretty much soaked through. I'm curious, Reverend. (Michael hands him the tea cup smiling and the sheriff walks to look at some pictures on the wall stage right. Michael is watching anxiously as the sheriff raises the cup)

Mich: Yes, go ahead. What about?

Sher: Well, you don't seem to believe this story about your worker. You say "he claims" and "he says" as if you think none of it were actually so.

Mich: To be honest, Sheriff, I have my doubts. Scott claims to have seen the body of my worker Barnez, but Barnez left here more than two days ago. He got out before they

started conducting traffic at the bridges. I saw Scott in here earlier talking to no one and using my worker's name. I'm frankly beginning to believe he has completely lost his mind in this merciless storm.

(The sheriff is about to drink when Scott enters the room. Then he sets the cup back on the bar to Michael's expression of disappointment).

Scott: (immediately upon entering) It's just awful. Sheriff. Thank God you're here. We've all got to leave. There's nothing more we can do now.

Sher: Just a minute. Tell me what you saw out there.

Scott: It was horrible. Barnez has passed through the combine! There are parts strewn about everywhere!

Sher: Barnez, you say? He's the man who was missing earlier?

Scott: No, no. That was Jake. Jake was missing earlier.

Sher: And now Barnez is dead? Reverend, why didn't you say all of this sooner?

Mich: Well, Jake was missing, which is to say he was nowhere to be found. However, I instructed him to leave for Houston after he put away the combine, so he really shouldn't be here anyways. Now Scott says that something ghastly has happened out in the southern field with the combine. Really, Sheriff, I have... reservations... about the whole matter (glances at Scott) I.....was aware they'd been arguing a few days ago. Jake's been acting very strangely (again motions towards Scott) lately but I highly doubt he would be capable of doing anything like this!

Scott: You mean to say you think that Jake....?

Mich: (Michael walks behind Scott's back and makes gestures about insanity behind him. This will be more effective if Scott continues to tremble and cower). I'm sure there must be another explanation for all of this. Sheriff, Jake is a quality man. He's the best man I've ever had working for me. I can't imagine he could ever be capable of doing anything like Scott is suggesting! I suppose it's possible he might have forgotten to reattach the safety on the combine. There's just no way anything like Scott is describing could have happened with that particular piece of equipment if the safety guard were properly reattached. But I have to admit I did see them arguing over something to do with the linkage and perhaps in the turmoil, Jake may have forgotten to reattach the guard.

Sher: Exactly what did you hear them arguing about? Could you make out the words?

Mich: No, but it was rather heated. I just assumed it must have something to do with the combine. They kept saying things like, "You just don't know her like I know her," so I naturally assumed they were talking about the machine.

Sher: Well, maybe I'd better go out and investigate the area myself. You say it was out in the fields.

Scott: Yes. I was on my way to Houston and I thought about what Barnez was saying, about how he had found something unusual in the field. It was out in the southern field. I thought if I could find out what Barnez was talking about, or if I could find Barnez, then Jeannie would come to Houston with me and we'd be safe. So I turned the car around and...

Sher: Just a moment. (he pulls out a note book) I need to get this all down. Now from the beginning if you would Mr...

Scott: Notscot.

Sher: Not Scott? I thought the Reverend here said your name was Scott.

Scott: He did, because it is.

Sher: Then it is Scott.

Scott: Yes.

Sher: Then why did you tell me your name wasn't Scott?

Scott: I never told you that.

Sher: Yes, you did. You just told me your name was not Scott.

Scott: It is.

Sher: It is or it is not?

Scott: It absolutely is.

Sher: So then what you're telling me is that your name IS Scott?

Scott: It is, Scott. That's my name.

Sher: You're sure then?

Scott: Yes, of course.

Sher: Ok. Good. And your last name?

Scott: Notscot.

Sher: Of course not. That's your first name.

Scott: No, it isn't.

Sher: You just told me it was.

Scott: No, I didn't.

Sher: Yes you did. You told me your name was not Scott.

Scott: That's right.

Sher: What's right.

Scott: My name is Notscot.

Sher: (raising his voice) I thought it was Scott.

Scott: (raising back) It is!

Sher: (pausing in frustration) Look here. It's a simple question. Is your name Scott or is it not Scott?

Scott: Yes.

Sher: Yes, what?

Scott: Yes, that's my name! (satisfied) And you may use either one.

Sher: (Rubbing his head.) Let's try going about this another way. May I see your identification please?

Scott: Yes, of course. (he pulls his wallet from his pants pocket and removes the identification, handing it to sheriff) Here you are.

Sher: (looking at the ID.) Your last name is Notscot.

Scott: Yes, that's what I've been trying to tell you.

Sher: Your name is Scott O. Notscot.

Scott: That's correct.

Sher: And what does the O stand for?

Scott: Orr, it's a family name.

Sher: Alright Scott Orr Notscot (looks frustrated at the crowd) you say you were on your way to Houston.

Mich: Yes, he said he was on his way to Houston.

Sher: Actually Reverend, do you suppose it would be possible for me to ask Mr. Notscot these questions without you present? It makes the testimony more reliable. But don't go far. I may want to ask you some questions next.

Mich: Oh, of course, Sheriff. I have some things to look after outside. I'll just step out for a moment while you two talk. (he goes to the door and puts his muddy shoes back on and leaves).

Sher: Good. Now where were we? That's right, you were headed to Houston when you decided to turn around.

Scott: That's right. I was on my way to Houston, but I just couldn't leave Jeannie behind. She's my sister, you see.

Sher: She's the lady of the house here.

Scott: Yes. But she was saying that she wouldn't leave without Barnez. Naturally I thought the whole thing was preposterous, but she was insistent. So, I decided that if I could find Barnez and get him to return to the house with me, Jeannie would be satisfied and she'd come away to safety with me.

Sher: So your sister, Jeannie, wouldn't evacuate until Barnez came back.

Scott: That's correct. And Barnez told us he would be out in the southern field looking at something he thought was suspicious.

Sher: What was that?

Scott: Some kind of a pit. He wanted very badly for Michael to go out and look at it with him.

Sher: So the Reverend was there? Where was this? What were you doing?

Scott: Michael and Jeannie and I were right here, in this room, and we were discussing doctrine, bad doctrine really. That's when Barnez came to the door and insisted that

Michael go out to the southern field with him to look into a pit of some sort. Apparently he thought it might have something to do with Jake.

Sher: He's the worker who's been missing?

Scott: Yes, he was supposed to go to Houston, but he's nowhere to be found. Barnez was supposed to go to Houston too, but now he's dead. (begins breaking down again) Oh sheriff, it's just awful.

Sher: Right. So you say you found Barnez in the field. After you came back to look for him.

Scott: Yes. What's left of him. He's scattered about the field in little pieces. He must have gone through the combine.

Sher: How grim. Did you see anyone else out there? This worker here, Jake, did you see him anywhere around there?

Scott: No, but perhaps your deputy has found him by now.

Sher: Why do you say that?

Scott: I saw his car out there in the field. He must have been searching the area, but I didn't see him anywhere. Didn't he tell you?

Sher: I haven't heard from him, and I'm growing increasingly concerned. That will be all for now Mr. Notscot. Please don't go very far. I might want to ask you more questions in a moment.

Scott: But sheriff. The storm. Shouldn't we all be getting out of here right away?

Sher: Yes, you're right. You'd better go, but I might want to see you after this storm blows over.

Scott: Well, I can't leave without my sister, especially not under these circumstances.

Sher: Ok then. I'll make it brief. (calls down the hall) Mrs. Bulkington! Come out here for a moment!

(enter Jeannie stage left)

Jean: What is it Sheriff?

Sher: (to Scott) I'll have to ask you to leave too. This won't take long and then you two should get out of here. (turning to Jeannie) Now, according to your brother you were in this room earlier with him and your husband, is that true?

Jean: Yes, that's true.

Sher: And what were you all doing at that time?

Jean: Michael and Scott were having a conversation about some doctor. I was waiting for...

Sher: Yes, go on.

Jean: I was waiting to leave.

Sher: Then you weren't refusing to leave? You weren't waiting on anyone?

Jean: No... I... I was worried about the weather. I wasn't really listening to them.

Sher: Then did anyone else arrive and join you?

Jean: No, it was just the three of us.

Sher: You never saw a worker by the name of Barnez?

Jean: No, I never saw him. My brother told me he was here.

Sher: Let's just stick to the facts you know and not what anyone else told you. You are very certain Mr. Barnez never entered the house and joined the conversation?

Jean: Yes, I'm certain I never saw him, but Scott related to me...

Sher: That's fine Mrs. Bulkington. I think you should leave here now, right away. We can sort this out later, after the storm. I suspect you may be in grave danger here.

Jean: But I can't leave.

Sher: I thought you said you wanted to leave. You aren't waiting on anyone, are you?

Jean: Yes, of course. I can't leave without my husband. I can't leave him behind.

(enter Michael, who immediately removes his muddy shoes)

Mich: Well, Sheriff. Have you got the answers you wanted?

Sher: I'm not sure. (to Jeannie) Mrs. Bulkington, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask your husband some questions... alone.

(Jeannie glares at Michael and walks out stage left)

Mich: (Lifting the tea cup as Jeannie exits.) Why Sheriff, you haven't even touched your tea. Perhaps you'd like me to warm it up for you.

Sher: No thank you, Reverend. I just have some quick questions and then I have to go look for my deputy. Now, regarding this Barnez fellow, you say he was here with you and Scott and Jeannie in the house here.

Mich: Oh yes, he's been here many times with us in the house.

Sher: No, I meant today.

Mich: No, Sheriff. If you'll recall, I said that Scott was talking to himself and using Barnez's name. I don't believe Barnez was anywhere around here whatsoever. He should have gone a long time ago as I instructed him and Jake to do.

Sher: And your wife, Mrs. Bulkington, did she mention to you that she had spoken to Barnez today?

Mich: No, she didn't mention anything like that.

Sher: Did Mr. Notscot say anything about seeing Mr. Barnez?

Mich: Why, he insisted that Barnez was in here trying to get me to go with him to the southern field. He said Barnez had some kind of a pit he wanted me to look at. In fact, he was very insistent that I should go out to the southern field right away.

Sher: And Mr. Barnez, you never actually saw him?

Mich: Not since I instructed him to leave, no. I told you Sheriff, I highly doubt Barnez was actually here as Scott says he was. No, I haven't seen him.

Sher: So you think Mr. Notscot is making it all up.

Mich: No, I don't. I think his mind is making it all up. I think he completely believes that he was talking to Barnez earlier tonight. I'm afraid he's quite delusional.

Sher: And did you follow his suggestion and go out to the southern field tonight?

Mich: No, of course not! I don't have time on a night like this to go out in the field to look for people who were supposed to leave long ago! We all need to leave here!

Sher: I completely agree. But I'm not convinced your brother-in-law is so delusional as you think he is.

Mich: What do you mean?

Sher: I mean that if you had gone out into that field I'm afraid something ghoulish might have happened to you. Maybe this Barnez fellow was out there waiting or maybe that's just

another trick your brother was using to get you to go out there. Or maybe your worker Jake is still around somewhere. Something is definitely foul here. You say that you heard Jake and Barnez arguing over the combine earlier?

Mich: Jake would just never be capable of anything like that. Why, it's about as likely as if our next president were to have a name like Hussein, or to have a black president or one from Hawaii or a community organizer, for goodness sake! It simply is not possible!

(they both stand around and Sheriff murmurs ["yes, well that's true," and "good point," etc. and nod in agreement])

Sher: (abruptly) Yes, well, I understand that we can agree that all of those things would be utterly impossible! (quietly agree again) but that doesn't mean Jake isn't capable of killing your worker, Barnez. Or that Mr. Notscot isn't trying to get you to go out to some foul demise in the southern field. Or that Mr. Barnez isn't trying to do you some ill. On a night like this, there won't likely be any good evidence left of any foul play. Is it possible your worker Jake really didn't head for Houston earlier?

Mich: As I explained to your deputy, he could have headed off to St. Louis. I noticed a train ticket with his name on it. I have it right here behind the bar.

(the sheriff begins to move towards the bar, but Michael distracts him).

Mich: Really, Sheriff! You ought to have a bit of tea to warm you up. Here (handing him the cup) you don't want it to get cold.

Sher: Really, no thank you. I don't have any time for that. (sets the cup back down) And I'm rather surprised at your demeanor, Reverend. According to your brother in law, you have one man dead in the field and another man missing. Apparently they've been quarreling with one another over some woman and the levee is about to burst and kill us all! I'd say you're acting rather strangely under these circumstances...

Mich: Not at all Sheriff. I'm a man of God! I'm a man of faith! Why, even Moses led his people through the heart of the open sea on dry land and I suppose I have faith that God will hold the waters back for us as well until this situation is resolved. And as you might gather, Sheriff, I rather doubt that Barnez is even out there in that field. I gave him strict orders to leave for Houston straight away and I expect that's exactly what he did. I don't know what Scott saw out there but ever since his breakdown he's been reporting all kinds of delusions. In my opinion, what we need to focus on is getting out of here and we'll meet up with Barnez in Houston just as I instructed him.

Sher: Yes. I suppose that is the best course of action. There is no doubt that the levee is about to fail.

Mich: Here it is! (he presents the tickets from behind the bar and hands them to the Sheriff.) And here inside you see the ticket.

Sher: Yes, there it is. (receives the envelope) But wait! There's another ticket there and it has your wife's name on it!

Mich: Really!?! Oh my God! (he collapses) This can't be. How could this be? What does this mean? What could this mean? After all this time! We've been friends for so long! You don't suppose? No! It isn't possible!

Sher: Now this is all starting to make some sense.

Mich: I must go out to the field immediately! (rises) If that villain is out there right now, why I'll just tear him limb from limb!

Sher: (motioning to stop him) No Reverend! I can't have it. Besides, it could be a trap out there waiting for you. It's far too dangerous. I'll go out there myself and we'll see what I find out. This looks very bad, very bad indeed, but we professionals have a way of going about investigating these things, and I have an uncanny ability to find these kinds of things out. I'll be back shortly. In the meantime, you need to get out of here. Get your wife and leave immediately. And make sure you take separate vehicles from Mr. Notscot. I doubt he's half as daft as you believe he is. This is very bad timing. We all need to leave. (exiting stage right) Very bad timing indeed.

(Sheriff slams the door behind him. Enter Scott stage left).

Scott: Was that the front door? Has the Sheriff gone? (he goes to the window to look out with his back to the room) Is he going out to the field? Michael, what did you tell him?

Mich: (Pulls a decorative rope from one of the curtains and wraps it around his hands) Why I told him the truth, of course! What else would you have me tell him?

Scott: Oh, absolutely! You had to tell the truth. Did he say we should leave?

Mich: (slowly creeping up behind Scott) Yes, of course. Right away.

Scott: This is all so grisly! How can any of it be possible? You didn't see anything while you were out there Michael?

Mich: No, brother Scott. And neither did you!

(He throws the rope over Scott's head and around his neck. The lights flicker and the thunder rolls with lightning outside. There is a struggle and then Scott succumbs. Scott's body falls limp, but for the sake of comedy, every time Michael goes to relieve tension from the rope, Scott twitches (two or three times). Then Michael begins to move the body. As he does so, he hears Jeannie coming from the bedroom stage left calling out).

Jean: Michael! Michael! Why did I ever marry you? How could it all come to this? I have married a monster! An absolute monster!

(Michael quickly tries to dispose of the body. He tries to wrap it in the curtains but it falls limply to the floor. He thinks to stash it behind the bar but it is inadequately concealed. Finally, he stows it in the armoire with much comedic difficulty. It falls once or twice until he puts a hanger in Scott's jacket and hangs him on the rail. As soon as he closes the door, Jeannie emerges from the hallway stage left).

Jean: Michael, I never could have guessed you would do something so absolutely abominable to a man who worked and cared for you for so long! How monstrous you are to me now! I never could have imagined!

Mich: Why, slow down my dear. I haven't done anything to anyone.

Jean: What did you do with Jake?

Mich: I might ask the same question of you my dear. Or more appropriately, what have you been doing with Jake?

Jean: You monster! You've undone him!

Mich: I rather think you've undone him. But now nothing can be undone my dear. All we have left to do is to continue doing. We must do what there is to do before us now and nothing more. So, you need to go get your things and we'll be away to Houston immediately.

Jean: You know I'm not going anywhere without him. Not anymore. I waited for you long enough. I waited for you to put me first and now I'm waiting for him. (begins to cry) I will stay here and wait for him. I will have faith that he will come and we will be off without you!

Mich: Of course you know that's all behind you now. You see, what you had was not faith, but hope. How strangely different they can be. You have hope that he'll return but he won't. You hope that the two of you will be off to St. Louis for a new life but you won't. Hope is what you have when you want things to work out a certain way for yourself. Faith is

what you have when you have released your own hope as a sacrifice for the overall good that God is doing.

Jean: How dare you speak of God? What man of God could possibly sew so much deception for the sake of committing so much violence? What kind of a man could lie so boldly and unconscionably in order to kill and to keep killing so many who have never attacked him? What kind of a person would I be to stand by and simply acquiesce to such abomination? What kind of people will we be if we choose to live this way? You tell me, Reverend Doctor Michael Bulkington! You who are so obsessed with discourse and doctrine! What kind of doctrine is built on something like this? Is it of God? Can it stand or continue? Why, I wouldn't be surprised if one of those lightning bolts came crashing down and struck you dead right here where you stand!

Mich: I suppose that's precisely what happened to me the moment I found those tickets and understood what they meant. It was as if a bolt of lightning hit me on the head and like the reverse of Paul the Apostle, I could no longer see Jesus. I could no longer see anything but the revenge I would calculate out against him. How much more than a man are the things with which life confronts him? Who can blame a simple man for making poor choices in the face of so much fear? So much anger!

Jean: What have you done to Jake?

Mich: Why, I rendered the judgment that God had leveled against him, for no one can do anything without the consent of God. I prayed on it, and I received a vision. And as God decreed it and put it into my mind, so it is now a thing accomplished my dear. Jake is gone. Your tickets are gone. The Sheriff just carried them away with him as he went to find Barnez. Apparently, the Sheriff thinks Jake might be responsible for this entire deplorable situation.

Jean: (stiffening suddenly) And Scott? (calling out) Scott! Scott! (she begins to panic) What have you done with him?

Mich: Nothing! Nothing at all. He's out in the field showing the Sheriff where he saw the body. Now go in and get your things and we will leave immediately.

Jean: Oh no. My dear, dear brother! What has become of you? (She turns and exits stage left crying inconsolably).

(At the same time, Erica enters from the same place, stage left)

Erica: Why, what's the matter with her? Isn't she ready to go?

Mich: Her nerves are overcoming her. With all of these happenings, she's completely losing control. Someone has elevated her terror to a new level, so the power to act has been entrusted to us alone. We will have to act on her behalf. Do me a favor will you? (he steps behind the bar and withdraws a small envelope). I have to go out and prepare the car so we can make a quick escape. Give this to Jeannie. She's as wound up as her brother was.

Erica: What is this?

Mich: It's a sedative. It will help to calm her nerves and it will make it easier for us to get her into the car. Time is of the essence now. I have a feeling the walls are beginning to collapse.

Erica: But...

Mich: Please Erica. (he takes her hands in his, placing the envelope into her hands) I need you to be strong or we shall all surely perish here tonight. I need you to do this for me.

(Erica nods and Michael releases her and exits stage right. After he has gone Erica goes to the bar and pulls a tray from behind it. She pulls out a glass and goes to fill it at the tap but nothing comes out. She remarks about how the water still isn't working. She then goes to fill the glass with bottled water, but the bottle has been used for Scott's towel. It is empty and so is another one she produces. Erica looks panicked and frustrated and then notices the cup of tea that the Sheriff left behind. She empties the sedative into the tea, and then carries it all on the tray to Jeannie, exiting stage left.)

- end scene -

## Macabre: Scene 5: Chorus

Open scene 5 with Scott (a rope around his neck), Jake (bullet holes in his muddy clothing), the deputy (head soaking wet), and Barnez' head in yellow rain cap (this might be accomplished by placing a Styrofoam mannequin's head [like the kind used for wigs] atop a pedestal in front of a concealed projector [possibly in a podium before them]). In unison, they recite the chorus:

Chorus:	I only ask for an honest life	9
	And justice, and belief in the moral code	11a
	As God decrees it	5b
	From the ancient summit	6b
	Of Zion, the sacred abode.	8a

No man made those precepts. They do not  
Decay as men will, but forever they tell  
Immortal courses  
From eternal sources  
Like the purest Artesian well.

But what if a man should disregard,  
Cast off all the virtues to which he lays claim?  
The costs of his rape  
Can he hope to escape?  
Or the repercussions of blame?

Infinite might in a mortal's hand  
The force to destroy all that God has made dear  
Is too much to bear  
He's far too prone to err,  
Too tied to his investments here.

When the slightest of choices is death  
And the best of decisions a monstrous thing,  
The man cannot be  
To blame for the decree,  
On ill-got throne, impious king.

But any man can hold to his faith  
Can fulfill what he says he believes as right  
To choose to deceive  
And to make many grieve  
Is not how we walk in the light.

What judgment is right for these actions?  
What word can we use for a man of such guile?  
In public he prays  
And in private betrays  
And profits on blood all the while.

What judgment of God is this man's due?  
What poetry, physic, is yet to commence?  
Will he remain free?  
What reward will there be?  
And how will heaven recompense?

From the seed of pride tyranny grows.  
Pride upon violence the greater bestows.  
And if this should pass  
Is it not a morass?  
What law can escape from its throes?

When the privileged abuse their power  
And the state is the worse for the calumny  
Let the strong beware  
Something's sleeping in there  
Let the faith of the helpless see.

(Drop lights. Close scene.)

Macabre : Scene 6: Checkmate!

Enter Erica stage left. She is carrying luggage and sets them by the door. Then she exits stage left and reenters with more luggage. The tray is back on the bar with the empty and tipped over tea cup. Enter Michael stage right. He is out of breath and dripping with rain. He throws off his coat and calls out.

Mich: Erica! Erica, you must come quickly!

Enter Erica again stage left with more luggage.

Erica: What's wrong now? What's the matter? Is it the Sheriff? Is it Scott? What's wrong?

Mich: Erica, the levee is breaking! The water is rising in the ditches and it will soon be over the roads! We have to leave now! Go and get Jeannie, and get in the car! We have to get out of here right away! This entire house and everything will soon be swept away!

Erica: Oh this is awful! (she exits stage left)

(Michael picks up the bags and begins carrying them outside. He exits and enters stage right)

(Erica screams from off stage left).

-Enter Michael stage right and Erica stage left, both running and meeting at center stage-

Mich: Erica! What is it? Was that you? I heard screaming.

Erica: It's...it's...it's Miss Jeannie. She's not waking up. I don't think she's...

(Michael runs into the bedroom stage left)

Erica: (looking at the storm out the window) Oh dear oh dear....

Mich: (from off stage) Noooo! Ohhh noooo!

(Erica runs to the doorway, but she is met there by Michael who is carrying a limp Jeannie in his arms.

Mich: How! How! How! Oh say this cannot be! Please, for the love of God and all that is good undo this horrible thing! (He lays her on the couch and weeps bitterly over her.) Oh my dear Jeannie. Dear beautiful Jeannie. How did this happen to you? How could this happen to you? (he stands and faces Erica). Erica, did you do this? What have you done?

Erica: No! I swear! I wouldn't! I couldn't! I didn't! I would never!

Mich: You must have! What have you done? What has happened? (moves in ever closer towards her, looking threatening and raising his hands towards her neck.)

Erica: I didn't do anything! I only gave her the sedative you gave to me! (points at the empty cup).

Mich: (realizing what has happened) Erica, you gave her the tea I left out on the bar?

Erica: (trembling) The water wasn't working! The storm! The bottles were empty! I was in a hurry! Oh this is all so awful! (she collapses)

Mich: (returns to Jeannie) Oh my dear beloved. Oh my darling wife. I never meant for this to happen. I could never have done such an awful thing to you. My sweet love! My dearest!

(Erica sits back up and begins watching more closely.)

Mich: I couldn't foresee this. My anger and my rage have blinded me to this. All of my planning has been for naught and now I've destroyed you! There is no future for us anymore. My dear sweet beloved, Jeannie!

Erica: Michael, here comes the Sheriff.

(Enter Sheriff stage right. He is carrying his deputy's limp body in his arms).

Sher: Reverend, we have to leave here now. The water is rising. Your man Jake has killed my deputy. He tied him to a board and drowned him purposely. I found him on the river bank with his head just under water. Now the water is rising fast and I must get the body up to dry land. Then I'm going to find him, and when I do I'm going to bring that man to justice. Now it is war!

Mich: No, Sheriff. It isn't war. It's revenge.

Sher: What's that?

Mich: War is a political tool. It's used to terrify a population into accepting your policy. Carl Von Clausewitz wrote about it in his book on war.

Sher: What does that have to do with it? I won't stop until that man is brought to justice.

Mich: As a man of the cloth, Sheriff, I have to warn you. War is a tool to persuade a people. What you're talking about is revenge. What you're talking about is punishment. "Vengeance is mine," sayeth the Lord.

Sher: Reverend, I want you to get into your car and leave for Houston right now.

Erica: We can't.

Sher: What's that?

Erica: Mister Scott is missing and Miss Jeannie isn't waking up.

Sher: What's the matter with her?

Mich: We don't know. Her breathing is very shallow.

(Sheriff sets the body down carefully and moves towards Jeannie's body.)

Sher: Step aside. Let me take a look at her. (Michael moves off towards the front door and picks up the shovel. He begins raising it over his head when the Sheriff turns and asks) How long has she been like this? (Michael drops the axe behind him comically and Erica steps in front of him).

Erica: She's been like this for a while now. Maybe fifteen minutes. We're afraid to move her.

(Sheriff lowers his ear down to listen to her breathing. Michael picks up the shovel and charges him screaming. Lightning and thunder. Erica screams. The lights go out in the house and the lightning in the window reveals Michael's silhouette hacking at the fallen sheriff. He continues hacking for a long time [comically too long] while the room remains dark. Suddenly the lights return and Michael stops. The sheriff's huddled body lies bloody on the ground at the foot of the couch.

Erica: Michael! What have you done? You killed him! You hacked him to bits!

Mich: What have I done? What have you done? You were the one who distracted him! You made it possible for me to get a clean run at him!

Erica: I was frightened! I was terrified! I didn't want any of this!

Mich: Of course you did! You made it possible. Besides, I only did it for you.

Erica: For me? I would never have wanted this. I could never have imagined this.

Mich: But you killed her. You gave her the poison and as soon as the sheriff figured that out you'd have spent the rest of your life in jail. I was only protecting you! I was only protecting your way of life and I'd do it again.

Erica: I didn't even know there was poison in that cup. I don't even know *why* there was poison in that cup.

- Mich: (Points at the audience) And you think they'd believe you? Who would have better reason to kill her than her husband's mistress?
- Erica: They didn't know anything about that! They would never have suspected that!
- Mich: Of course they would know. What about the gifts? What about the rooms, the places we've snuck away to together? They would have known about us, about you, and they would have locked you away forever. For murder! I did this for you, my love.
- Erica: I'm so confused. After all of the things I just heard you tell your dead wife. All the sweet things you said.
- Mich: Of course I loved her. She was my wife. And I love you in ways I could never love her. And now (he bends down and takes the tickets back from the body of the sheriff) we can take these tickets and leave here and begin a new life together.
- Erica: You tortured the deputy. You tied him to a board and drowned him!
- Mich: Erica, it wasn't torture. I was just trying to find out what he really knew about Jake and what he really saw of Barnez. It was enhanced interrogation! Everything you've been hoping for would have been ruined, or at least could have been ruined. Might have been ruined. Don't you see? Everything I have done here I did for you. I did it because you wanted me to. Because you wouldn't have accepted anything less. It's my job to look out for you.
- Erica: I would never have approved of this! I would never have wanted you to lie to me and to torture people and to start some crazy killing spree in my defense! These people never did anything to me. They never did anything to you!
- Mich: Maybe they didn't do anything to me, but they all had the information and the ability to hurt us very badly. Or maybe not the ability. Maybe they never would have put it all together. Maybe they never would have caused us any harm, but they could have, so they had to go. Don't you see? It's doctrine.
- Erica: This is madness! How chilling! How much blood is on your hands?! (turns to audience) How much blood is on our hands?! Who could have wanted this?
- Mich: Of course you did or else you would have said something. Anyone who doesn't try to stop it is a part of it.
- Erica: I didn't know! You were lying to me! I was terrified!
- Mich: And I had to protect you. I did it for you. I lied to you for your own good.

Erica: Are you saying you killed and tortured for my good too?

Mich: It was all for you. You needed me to do it. To protect you and your way of life.

Erica: This is not my way of life! My life is endless work. My life is endless debt and now I owe you a debt of gratitude for killing and torturing on my behalf? Because someone might have hurt me or might have been able to?

Mich: You should be more grateful. That sheriff had a gun you know. He might have killed you.

Erica: But I didn't do anything! You created the problem, and so you had to deal with it. Now I can see how many lies you told and how many have died and you still want me to think of you as a hero? It's all so eerie! He never threatened to kill me!

Mich: But he could have. He might have blamed you for the things I did. I was protecting you.

Erica: I see. So you think he might have damaged me in response for the things you did? So you had to kill him, and the others, in order to protect me because I was afraid?

Mich: Yes, that's it! You remember how afraid you were. How afraid WE ALL were. We were terrorized! Our terror level was elevated!

Erica: But Mr. Notscot was just as afraid as any of us. More afraid. He wasn't going to hurt you or me, but now he's disappeared too.

Mich: Think about it my dear. Why was Scott even still here?

Erica: He came to make sure his sister was ok.

Mich: Did he come here to protect her from the storm or to gain her protection? Scott was afraid to face the violence and so was trapped by it. I could only liberate him from that fear by providing him with a more immediate and impressive one. You might say it was a sort of shock and awe. It may not actually have motivated him to rise up and overthrow his fears, but it did open him up to my preferred end result.

Erica: So, you terrorized him more in order to get him to trust you? How unnerving!

Mich: Yes, it's such a good motivator. Keep people in dread and you can set policy. You can tell them exactly what to do. It spreads invisibly, like a virus.

Erica: And I'm so afraid even now. I just can't fight it!

Mich: No, my dear. Haven't you been watching this play at all? You can't fight emotions. You can't even fight terror. Who do you think you are?

Erica: I'm Erica (be sure to pronounce it 'America') (best if there's a flag behind her in the shot). I think I get it now. *We* were afraid that someone might want to get us back for the things you did and so you killed them and tortured them to protect us. (she smiles and hugs him) How sweet!

Mich: (To audience) You do understand that's what it was all about all along. (pause). And now, we can take those tickets I bought...

Erica: You bought?

Mich: And we can go to St. Louis and start a new life together just the way I planned it. Think about it, Erica; no one to get in our way, no one to sneak around, hand in hand for the rest of our lives. Just you and me, Erica. What do you say? The water is rising. Can't we just kiss and start all over like none of this ever happened? (approaches her).

Erica: Well, we have been wanting to get away together for a very long time.

Mich: And now it's finally possible. The water is rising and all of this is about to be swept away. We'll tell them we escaped with our lives and the others didn't make it. Now is our chance. What do you say, my love?

Erica: (she smiles) Yes, let's go. I simply can't fight my love for you! (They embrace and kiss. The kiss breaks and she looks astonished. She says softly) How grotesque!

Mich: Of course, you know, I didn't really buy those tickets. But a man must do what a man must do. (She collapses, impaled upon his knife) You cannot fight an emotion, (turns to face audience) but you sure can exploit one!

(He steps over the bodies to the armoire and opens it to get his coat and Scott's body falls out. Michael pulls on his coat and walks to the door, stage right). CHECKMATE! (exits)

(Drop lights, but use blacklight to show "MACABRE" on curtain again – plus one tight RED spotlight on newspaper)

[Bach Toccata and Fugue in D minor – lightning and thunder].

-The End-

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