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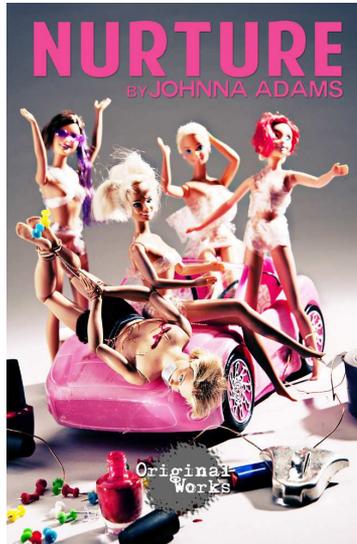
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*Johnna Adams' The Angel Eaters Trilogy, Part One
Angel Eaters*

Trade Edition, 2014

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*Also Available By
Johnna Adams*



NURTURE

Synopsis: Doug and Cheryl are horrible single parents drawn together by their equally horrible daughters. The star-crossed parental units journey from first meeting to first date, to first time, to first joint parent-teacher meeting, to proposal and more. They attempt to form a modern nuclear family while living in perpetual fear of the fruit of their loins and someone abducting young girls in their town.

Cast Size: 1 Male, 1 Female



ANGEL EATERS
BY JOHNNA ADAMS

Characters

JOANN HOLLISTER, 19

NOLA HOLLISTER, her sister

AZAZYEL, a watcher

MYRTLE HOLLISTER, 40s, her mother

ENOCH CLAY, 20s, a traveling faith healer

FORTUNE CLAY, 30s, ENOCH's manager

DOC O'MALLEY, 50s, doctor and amateur ornithologist

Setting and Time

Tulsa, Oklahoma 1937

Hollisters' backyard, chicken coop and back porch

Doc Murphy's laundry

Carnival

The world premiere of ANGEL EATERS was produced in repertory with the other two plays in the trilogy (RATTLERS and 8 LITTLE ANTICHRISTS) by Flux Theatre Ensemble, New York, New York, November 3-22, 2008. The world premiere production was directed by Jessi D. Hill. The cast was as follows:

JOANN HOLLISTER	Marnie Schulenburg
NOLA HOLLISTER	Tiffany Clementi
AZAZYEL	Cotton Wright*
MYRTLE HOLLISTER	Catherine Michele Porter*
ENOCH CLAY	Isaiah Tanenbaum
FORTUNE CLAY	Gregory Waller*
DOC O'MALLEY	Ken Glickfeld*

*These actors appeared courtesy of Actors' Equity Association.

The production team for the world premiere of all three plays in the ANGEL EATERS TRILOGY was as follows:

Dramaturg	Kay Mitchell
Set Design	Caleb Levensgood
Lighting Design	Jennifer Rathbone
Costume Design	Emily DeAngelis
Sound Design	Asa Wember
Composer	Gerard Keenan
Props Coordinator	Angela Astle
Fight Directors	Autumn Horne and Shannon Michael Wamser
Assistant Costume Designer	Becky Kelly
Costume Assistant	Whitney Adams
Electrician	Edward Hammer
Postcard Design	Isaiah Tannenbaum
Managing Director	Heather Cohn

Act One

1. God'll Taste Dust

(A chicken coop in the HOLLISTERS' backyard. A wretched, leaning space suggested by weathered planks of wood.

NOLA is violently ill in a bucket. JOANN sobs behind her.)

JOANN: God don't like it when you kill. He don't! It reminds him of the falling. It worries him--

NOLA: If you don't shut your mouth--!

JOANN: Don't. God'll taste dust.

NOLA: Jesus H. Christ.

JOANN: That weren't said in prayer.

NOLA: Lower your voice. You want mama to come out here?

JOANN: That's blaspheming.

NOLA: Hand me that bottle.

(NOLA points at a bottle of turpentine in the hay at JOANN's feet.

Through the cracks in the walls of the coop, we see dark red lights and occasionally an undefined swirling movement of flesh and feathers. Something scratches at the walls. Only JOANN hears it.)

JOANN: No! I hear judgment and wings.

NOLA: Goddamn it! You think I'm kidding around here?

JOANN: It's listening. The one with wings. The bird thing out of the bible pages. You hear it?

(JOANN scurries away from the scratching noises, which follow her to every corner of the coop. She mutters strange birdsong under her breath. AZAZYEL peers in at her, and she starts.)

NOLA: If there was ever a worse damned time for one of your fits. Jesus Christ!

JOANN: The birds told me this story. They say we used to have horns. All God's good ones. In the garden. And we loved them horns. They grew straight out of our heads and they might be tiny things or might be more than a foot long, depending on your goodness. Made of ivory and bone. Curved and beating with a pulse just like a heart.

(NOLA spits and retches into the bucket.)

NOLA: Pass me the turpentine, Jo. Or I swear--

JOANN: God forgive you, Nola. You do this and you might not get back your horns. Those horns was dipped in gold and all carved over with the sacred word--

NOLA: I don't care! I don't want to have a damned horn sticking out of my head like a cow anyway. Stop it!

(NOLA shakes JOANN until she snaps out of it.)

NOLA (CONT.): Help me do this. I cain't do it alone, Jo.

(JOANN grabs the bottle of turpentine and holds it pinned to her chest, protecting it from NOLA.)

JOANN: No.

NOLA: Give that here.

JOANN: Mama'll kill you. I'll tell Mama and she'll--

NOLA: Don't you tell Mama! Shut your mouth!

(NOLA shoves JOANN to the floor. NOLA grabs for the bottle of turpentine and the girls wrestle for it. AZAZYEL shakes the walls and forces her hand through a crack in the walls.)

JOANN: No! You wouldn't do this if Daddy was still alive.

NOLA: Well, he ain't, you stupid hen! He ain't.

(NOLA brutally wrestles the bottle out of JOANN's hands. She shoves JOANN out of her way and takes a long swig.)

NOLA (CONT.): Don't you tell, Mama, stupid little lackwitted--

(AZAZYEL grabs JOANN. She screams.)

NOLA (CONT.): Shut your mouth! You'll bring mama out here! Jo, hush!!

(NOLA yanks JOANN away from the window and holds her, covering her mouth.)

NOLA (CONT.): Jo, hush, now. It ain't nothing but a fit.
Be calm, now. Oh, God.

JOANN: It's coming. Judgment and the bearing back of
the horns. I hear the bird thing a' scratching and scrap-
ing.

NOLA: That's just birdsong.

JOANN: No, it's something else.

NOLA: Don't tell Mama. Don't you ever tell Mama
about this. Promise me.

JOANN: Nola, don't you want a little baby? A pretty little
baby in your arms? It don't matter where the baby
come from.

*(NOLA starts to cry and shakes her head. Then she starts
to gag.)*

JOANN (CONT.): You're in here making murder in your
belly. All heaven's going to rip open and pour down on
us and those horns will be aiming straight at our
hearts. Blood and retribution.

NOLA: Just don't tell Mama-- don't-- Oh, God--

*(NOLA retches into the bucket. AZAZYEL leaps into the
window sill and speaks to JOANN in strange birdsong.)*

JOANN: Oh! It's not just bird noise. It's words, ain't it?
But what can I do about it, if she won't listen?

AZAZYEL: Eat your way through her stomach and pull
that baby out!

JOANN: Oh, no! No, I couldn't! I'll tell Mama is what I'll do. If Daddy weren't dead--

AZAZYEL: He don't have to be. He's standing at the gates of hell with his bags packed and dust on his boots. Waiting and ready to be called back.

JOANN: He is? Daddy?

AZAZYEL: Called back by the angel eater.

JOANN: What's that? Is Daddy coming back? Is he?

(AZAZYEL cries out, eerie birdsong, and spreads her wings.)

NOLA: No, you fencepost! You doorknob! He's dead! Murdered! You know that.

(AZAZYEL disappears.)

JOANN: Oh. Right.

2. The Resurrection Boy

(The HOLLISTERS' back yard, facing the screened in back porch. It is the next morning.

NOLA and JOANN are standing on the porch steps. NOLA holds a basket of laundry. JOANN has a potato peeler in one hand and a half-peeled potato in the other.

MYRTLE HOLLISTER stands in the middle of the yard, wiping her hands on a worn apron. Behind her, on a chopping block, there is a headless chicken and an axe covered in blood. Her hands and apron are also bloody.

FORTUNE CLAY stands in front of MYRTLE holding an envelope full of cash. He is counting out the money. Behind FORTUNE, ENOCH CLAY is shifting nervously and twisting a hat in his hands. He and FORTUNE are dressed in worn suits, shabby coats, and hats.)

MYRTLE: It's all there. Fifty dollars in cash. Like you said.

NOLA: Jesus H. Christ, Ma.

MYRTLE: Don't blaspheme in front of the preacher boy.

ENOCH: It's all right, ma'am. I don't pay no mind.

MYRTLE: No, it ain't all right. She's a sass-mouthed little fool--

FORTUNE: *(laughs lightly, smiles)* God don't sweat the small sins, ma'am. He surely don't. Taking the lord's name in vain once or twice don't disqualify you from the miracles this boy has been granted. I promise. Why

we have brought back the dead for straight-up sinners, to be sure. Isn't that right, Enoch?

ENOCH: Yes, sir.

FORTUNE: Straight up sinners it would terrify you to meet. This boy and I done the miracle for them just the same.

JOANN: For murderers even?

(NOLA elbows her sharply.)

ENOCH: Yes, ma'am. We brought back the wife of a man who killed thirty-eight Germans in the Great War just last February.

MYRTLE: Surely God don't count killing in war time as murder.

FORTUNE: I'm afraid God does count killing in war time as killing. He's a literal God, ma'am-- hence his emphasis on the word and the good book. He wouldn't have writ it all down if he wanted to be vague, begging your pardon.

ENOCH: But, be mindful that he is all forgiving, ma'am.

MYRTLE: Well, surely.

JOANN: Not all forgiving. Some on judgment day won't get forgiven--

NOLA: Knock it off.

JOANN: It says so in the bible.

MYRTLE: Don't tell the preacher boy his business.

JOANN: Yes, ma'am.

MYRTLE: Well, how are we going to do this thing? That there's your money. You counted it, Mr. Clay.

FORTUNE: I sure wish you'd call me by my Christian name, ma'am. It's Fortune. Fortune Clay, at your service.

MYRTLE: Your money is all there. So, how does this thing work?

FORTUNE: Well, if you don't have the body to hand, then we need to dig it up out at the cemetery so the boy can see it.

MYRTLE: I got the body to hand. He's laying out on the back porch here. Just yonder through the screen door.

NOLA: Smelling up the place, too.

(MYRTLE dives for NOLA and grabs her, shaking her.)

MYRTLE: If you cain't respect your daddy, I will send you out of this house with the clothes on your back and nothing else!

(JOANN comes between them and pulls NOLA away from her mother.)

JOANN: No! She didn't mean nothing, Mama. And you cain't go shoving her just now, she's--

(NOLA elbows JOANN sharply and glares at her.)

MYRTLE: You ungrateful, unfeeling, selfish, sinning--

(FORTUNE touches her shoulder.)

FORTUNE: That's just fine, then. Everything seems to be in order.

MYRTLE: Well . . .

ENOCH: How long has your mister been dead, ma'am?

NOLA: Three whole days.

MYRTLE: Three days.

FORTUNE: That's still fine.

MYRTLE: I told the funeral parlor we was having a viewing and a vigil. They embalmed him

ENOCH: Won't make no difference, ma'am.

FORTUNE: Embalming don't touch the soul. Now, the boy will just go in and take a look. And then, he'll know what needs to be done to bring your man back to you. Go on, now, Enoch.

ENOCH: Ma'am.

(ENOCH ducks his head respectfully in MYRTLE's direction and goes into the screened in porch. JOANN watches him through the screen door.)

MYRTLE: Give those potatoes over to your sister, Joann. Get away from that door. Go on and get yourself over to work.

JOANN: When daddy's about to be raised from the dead?
No!

MYRTLE: People's laundry and your paycheck ain't going to wait on your daddy's resurrection.

NOLA: We need the money now that all of Ma's money went to these carnival people.

MYRTLE: Shut your mouth.

FORTUNE: It's only natural you should have doubts, Miss. But my nephew will soon lay that to rest. There's more to him than meets the eye.

JOANN: Mama, want me to take your apron over to the laundry and get the bloodstains out? I'll wait here if you want to soak it.

MYRTLE: No, I ain't done dressing the bird for supper. I want a nice meal for your daddy when he comes back. Get going so you aren't late for work.

JOANN: (*shyly, to FORTUNE*) I work over at the laundry.

FORTUNE: Well, that's real nice, ma'am.

MYRTLE: She's lucky to get that job. There's men right now that don't have work. There's families starving. Her sister Nola there ain't working. I wish someone would explain that to me.

NOLA: Yeah, hi-de-ho. Ma. Real good mystery.

JOANN: I can get the bloodstains out real good. Energine and lava soap and the hydrogen peroxide soaking is what does it.

FORTUNE: I'll keep that in mind.

JOANN: I could get another job. I thought on doing the preaching. You know why?

FORTUNE: Why's that, honey?

JOANN: 'Cause I get the angels something fierce.

NOLA: She gets fits. She gets the crazy fits.

JOANN: Maybe I could help with the resurrection of my daddy?

MYRTLE: No. Don't you go getting in that resurrection boy's way. Stay out of it. These men are professional at this.

JOANN: I moved our dog Sally out behind the barn.

(JOANN shows FORTUNE a chain with a cast iron collar and padlock.)

JOANN (CONT.): I did that because she's a mean old dog and full of the devil. And I thought that would interfere with you all calling God to the back of the house and doing the resurrecting.

FORTUNE: Well, thank you kindly.

JOANN: So can I help? Can I watch?

MYRTLE: You want to give yourself one them angel fits? Get to work before I lose my temper with you!

FORTUNE: No, it's fine. It's a right good idea, in fact. Darling, you can certainly help. You can have a real important job on the resurrection.

JOANN: What's my job?

FORTUNE: I want you to pray for me. You turn that sweet little face up to God and do the hardest praying you ever did. That's how you can help.

JOANN: That's it? Praying? That ain't much.

FORTUNE: Why, it's just about the most important job there is, sweetheart.

JOANN: I been taking lessons in speaking to the angels. Maybe I ought to do that instead.

FORTUNE: Have you? That's something, honey. Who gives those kind of lessons around here?

JOANN: Old Doc O'Malley. It's his hobby.

NOLA: Ornithology. That's his hobby. He's teaching her the birdsongs is all.

JOANN: He's been lessoning me on the bird music. He makes the whistles and learns 'em me. Sweet, sweet, I'm-so-sweet! And whichisit, whichisit, whichisit, which. Teach'r teach'r teach'r teach'r teach'r--

FORTUNE: Is that right?

JOANN: Birds is angels. And the songs are them speaking to us. Hear 'em?

FORTUNE: Well, I didn't know that.

NOLA: I'm surprised you not knowing that, you being so much holier than us and all.

JOANN: Birds is little angels and they chirp out God's will.

FORTUNE: Thank you for telling me. I'll listen closer from now on.

NOLA: I bet.

MYRTLE: Stop that nonsense and go to work, Jo. Nola, you go in the house and get me the receipts from your trip to the store yesterday.

NOLA: I ain't going in there with that boy doing God knows what to a dead body.

JOANN: I'll get 'em, Mama. I'll go in there!

NOLA: You won't either.

(JOANN runs up and throws open the porch door. She meets ENOCH, coming out of the house.)

JOANN: Are you done? Is he resurrected? Already? Did I miss it?-- Daddy? Daddy--

ENOCH: No, ma'am. Not yet.

JOANN: Oh.

FORTUNE: This was just the consultation portion of the resurrection. The boy needed to look at the body so he

could an idea about how much of his power it'll take to raise your mister and your daddy. How's it look in there, Enoch?

ENOCH: Looks like he died of a heart attack.

JOANN: That's right! You got that right just by looking at him? That gives me gooseflesh. That is exactly how Daddy died.

NOLA: And that's exactly what the newspaper printed in the obituary yesterday. Hi-de-ho.

MYRTLE: Shut up. I ain't paying you men to tell me how he died. I'm paying you tell me how he's coming back.

FORTUNE: What do you think, Enoch? What'll it take?

(A pause. ENOCH closes his eyes and stretches a hand back toward the porch door. He has a small fit. NOLA sneers. MYRTLE moves out of his way in alarm. JOANN watched him eagerly. After a moment, ENOCH collapses onto the porch steps, shuddering. FORTUNE fans him with his hat, concerned.)

ENOCH: I can do it. I can raise him.

FORTUNE: *(crying a little, pulling out a kerchief to dab his eyes)* Praise the Lord! . . . I'm sorry, ma'am. . . . As often as I see the miracle before me, I cain't help but be moved by it. . . . I'm sorry. . . . Ma'am, my nephew can raise your man from the dead. Will you and your girls join me in a prayer of thanks for the Lord's generosity? The Lord is willing to send your man back to you and I for one would like to get on my knees and humbly thank him!

MYRTLE: No, I will not.

FORTUNE: Ma'am?

MYRTLE: Is this is the same Lord that killed my man in the first place? The one that left me and my girls nothing to live on except for the peanuts my youngest, retarded daughter earns at the laundry? The same Lord that did this in the middle of the worst damned drought anyone can remember? The drought he created? Well, he ain't getting a word of thanks out of me, fella'. I'd just like you to correct the bastard's mistake and get on with it.

NOLA: (*laughs*) I'd like to see that. Why don't the pair of you get on with it?

FORTUNE: Well, the Lord understands your anger and heartache, ma'am--

MYRTLE: Can you do this? Can you really do this?

(*Pause. FORTUNE looks at ENOCH.*)

ENOCH: Ma'am. What your man needs is enough glorious love to restart his heart; enough passion to stir his veins and turn the dust there into warm, gushing blood; enough electricity to fire his nerves back into life; enough startling color to open his dead eyes with the wonder--

JOANN: Enough birdsong and the touch of angel tongues to open his ears! The feathery touch of angel wings to awake all his skin! The promise of his forgotten and lost horns in his mouth to give him back ambition and greed for life! Those horns growing right off his head!

Those eager, upthrust horns!! Horns and gold and bone
and blood and thirsty lips!!!

NOLA: Ma, she's going into a fit.

MYRTLE: Hold her down.

(NOLA grabs JOANN and holds her down on the porch. JOANN starts to shake. She mouths things, strange bird noises. Behind her, we begin to see strange flashes of red light inside the screened-in porch. AZAZYEL faintly echoes her.)

MYRTLE (CONT.): I don't care about your poetry, boy.
Can you bring him back?

ENOCH: I can. But I need to rest up, first. It's going to
take a lot out of me and I need to be ready.

FORTUNE: Well, it's settled then. We'll head back to the
fairgrounds and rest up in our trailer and then come on
back here tonight. You keep a plate warming on the
stove for your man, ma'am.

ENOCH: He'll be hungry when he comes back from the
dead.

FORTUNE: Come on, Enoch. Let's head back, and you
take it easy. Don't walk to fast. You're saving up your
strength.

ENOCH Yes, sir.

FORTUNE: And, ma'am. If you have enough of that
chicken to spare, you keep a plate warming for me and
the boy---

(MYRTLE grabs the bloody axe off the chopping block and holds it to FORTUNE's throat.)

JOANN abruptly snaps out of her fit. The lights fade and AZAZYEL is silent.)

ENOCH: Ma'am! Don't!

JOANN: Mama! That ain't godly.

MYRTLE: Do you mean to tell me that you think you are going back to that carnival where I found you?

FORTUNE: Just to rest up.

MYRTLE: With my fifty dollars in your pocket and my man un-resurrected?

FORTUNE: Well, if you cain't trust a man of God--

MYRTLE: I don't trust anyone.

FORTUNE: How about I take twenty-five and leave twenty-five here. That seems fair, now, don't it? So you are putting a deposit down on your resurrection and the balance will be do when your man is brought back to life. How's that sound?

(MYRTLE wipes chicken blood from the axe onto FORTUNE's suit. She puts the axe back up to his throat.)

MYRTLE: How's this sound? Nola, let your sister go and put Sally's chain around that boy's neck.

(NOLA releases JOANN and gets the dog collar. ENOCH fights her when she tries to put it on his neck.)

ENOCH: No!

FORTUNE: Now, wait! You wait here!

(FORTUNE tries to back away from the axe. MYRTLE grabs his suit front, and backs him up to the porch railing.)

MYRTLE: That boy stays here until he has done what he promised! Or we'll see how much damned love and passion and electricity it takes the little bastard to bring back your slit-throated corpse.

FORTUNE: Enoch. . . . Enoch, let them collar you, boy.

ENOCH: What? No!

FORTUNE: It'll only be for a while. I'll come back and get you after you resurrect the nice man for his family.

ENOCH: What?

FORTUNE: Just let her collar you for now, boy, and trust in the Lord.

ENOCH: All right, uncle.

(ENOCH stops resisting. NOLA locks the collar onto his neck.)

JOANN: Mister, you bring that suit over to the laundry later. Energine and lava soap and the hydrogen peroxide soaking will take care of that blood.

MYRTLE: I'll walk you to the road. Don't you try to come back here and free him until I send word that my

man's back. And God help you if you're lying to me about what this boy can do, Mister.

FORTUNE: I ain't lied to you, ma'am.

MYRTLE: Start walking.

(FORTUNE catches ENOCH's eye and winks. He starts walking.)

MYRTLE (CONT.): Nola, go in the house and get the damned store receipts. Jo, get to work. I want this house in order when your daddy starts breathing again. Go to it.

JOANN AND NOLA: Yes, Mama.

(MYRTLE and FORTUNE exit.)

NOLA: You stupid buttermilk heifer. You got her started on all this miracle junk with your fits. What do you think's gonna' happen when this poor jerk can't do it? You're going to mopping his blood off the linoleum, peach. That's what. 'Cause I sure ain't gonna' do it.

(NOLA exits into the house, slamming the porch door behind her. JOANN and ENOCH stare at one another. We hear hawks, eagles and screech owls, also, songbirds and warblers.)

JOANN: You hear that?

ENOCH: Hear what?

JOANN: Angels is talking through birds.

ENOCH: What are they saying?

JOANN: You're here to bring me something.

ENOCH: Yeah. Right. I'm here to bring your daddy back.
Praise the Lord.

JOANN: No, not that. Oh, heavens and stars. Oh, it's the best news I ever heard. The angels say you're going to bring back the horns so long lost and almost forgotten.

(The windows in the house turn red while the screened in porch stays dark. AZAZYEL appears.)

AZAZYEL: Those lost horns that thrust themselves up off your head like something dirty.

JOANN: They don't have to be dirty. They could be clean again. And full of sweetness.

AZAZYEL: Nothing sweet comes out covered in blood and born of sin. God knows that. What you reckon God does up there all day on his throne of ivory and bone? Oh, I'll tell you what. Not a damned thing.

JOANN: Why not? Is he resting?

AZAZYEL: I don't know what he's doing. But he ought to be ashamed. That just ain't no way for someone whose calls himself God to act. Is it?

JOANN: Well, no. I guess it ain't.

(The sound of birdsong grows louder and then turns into the scratchy, recorded version of a single warbler's song.)

3. The Song of the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

(DOC O'MALLEY's laundry and office. JOANN stands at a tub of wet clothes, scrubbing on a washing board. DOC O'MALLEY stands at a phonograph player. He is in his shirtsleeves and suspenders, grimy with sweat. He places the needle on a revolving phonograph and we hear -)

VOICE ON PHONOGRAPH: The scissor-tailed flycatcher.

(From the phonograph we hear the song of the scissor-tailed flycatcher. DOC O'MALLEY lifts the needle.)

DOC O'MALLEY: Hear that? Hear how it goes? Pidik pek pik pik pidEEK!

JOANN: Pick pick pek pik Picky!

DOC O'MALLEY: Oh, almost. Almost. Pidik pek pik pik pidEEK. Hear that end song? PidEEK.

JOANN: Pideek pek pek pik pidEEK. Pidik pek pik pik pidEEK

DOC O'MALLEY: That's it.

(DOC O'MALLEY hands JOANN a piece of candy.)

DOC O'MALLEY (CONT'D): The scissor-tailed flycatcher. He's a pretty bird. It's always the male bird that sings, remember.

JOANN: I remember. Pidik pek pik pik pidEEK. Flycatcher.

DOC O'MALLEY: Scissor-tailed flycatcher. Stops in Oklahoma on his way to Mexico to breed. He's got red armpits. And a long forked-looking tail. You hear that song and you look for him. It's bird you can't miss.

JOANN: What does his song mean?

(DOC O'MALLEY pulls out a flask, sits at the desk and takes a swig.)

DOC O'MALLEY: Well, if you listen closely, "pidik pek pik pik pidEEK." I think the fellow is saying "Pick me, O' pick, pick, pick me." Right? It's a mating call, after all.

JOANN: So, that's an important song. If you were using it to talk to angels, it's like a plea. It's like saying, "Pick me for your tasks, I think I'm worthy." That's a big thing to say.

DOC O'MALLEY: Yep. 'Suppose it is. Come sit down a second.

JOANN: I have to finish the washing before it goes sour.

DOC O'MALLEY: Let it sit a second. Come sit down.

(DOC O'MALLEY pats his knee. JOANN goes and perches on his lap.)

DOC O'MALLEY (CONT.): That's all right then. That's my little songbird. How is my little songbird doing?

JOANN: Fine.

DOC O'MALLEY: What game does my songbird want to play today?

JOANN: I don't care.

DOC O'MALLEY: You gotta' pick the game, now. That's how it works. I don't want to be forcing nothing on nobody.

JOANN: I don't care.

DOC O'MALLEY: Bird in the hand?

JOANN: That's fine.

(DOC O'MALLEY unbuttons her blouse and puts his hand on her breast. He smiles and sighs. He is content to grope around slightly and doesn't otherwise bother her.)

JOANN is unconcerned and thinking of something else.)

DOC O'MALLEY: Is my songbird doing all right? Is she a' unhappy little bird?

JOANN: No.

DOC O'MALLEY: I know how you loved your daddy, and it cain't be easy getting set to watch them put him in the ground, now, sweetwings.

JOANN: It's fine.

DOC O'MALLEY: You miss your daddy?

JOANN: No.

DOC O'MALLEY: You don't?

JOANN: No. He's coming back.

DOC O'MALLEY: What?

JOANN: Later tonight. He's coming back.

DOC O'MALLEY: From the dead?

JOANN: Uh huh.

DOC O'MALLEY: Your daddy's coming back from the
dead later tonight?

JOANN: Yes.

DOC O'MALLEY: Huh.

JOANN: He sure is.

DOC O'MALLEY: Well. That's something.

JOANN: I guess.

DOC O'MALLEY: How is he going to do that do you
think?

JOANN: Mama hired some fellows from over at the carni-
val.

DOC O'MALLEY: Hired some fellows?

JOANN: They're going to raise Daddy from the dead for
her. She gave 'em fifty whole dollars. Nola was ugly

acting and said Daddy weren't worth that much. But,
I cain't blame her just now because she's---

DOC O'MALLEY: She's what?

JOANN: I cain't say. . . . Is the game over yet?

DOC O'MALLEY: Uh. Yes. The game's over.

(He releases her breast.)

JOANN: Did I win?

DOC O'MALLEY: Oh, you always win that game.

JOANN: Good.

DOC O'MALLEY: Tell me a little more about these fellows raising your daddy from the dead.

JOANN: We got one of them chained up in the front yard. Are we going to play 'Bird in the Bush' or 'Thresher Bird?'

DOC O'MALLEY: No. No, ticklefeather, not if you don't want to.

JOANN: I don't guess I do. Not especially.

DOC O'MALLEY: Do you think your mama's mind is entirely sound?

JOANN: Well, I guess so. Why?

DOC O'MALLEY: Well, sometimes when a woman loses her husbands she gets a little unfocussed.

JOANN: No. She's focused all right. You didn't like the game like you usually do. You didn't get the shiver shake.

DOC O'MALLEY: Well, I got all distracted what with your daddy coming back from the dead and all.

JOANN: Doc?

DOC O'MALLEY: Yes, honeychirper?

JOANN: If you knew someone was going to do something bad and it might even end with that person killing herself, but you was promised not to tell another person who might stop the first person from doing this thing, would you tell anyway? Even if it made the first person mad?

DOC O'MALLEY: I can see that this business of your mama's trying to raise your daddy's spirit has you upset. Maybe I better ride out to your place this evening and have a talk with her.

JOANN: No, I don't mean that. I mean if you knew a person was set on evil business and it might end in her accidentally killing herself along with a baby and--

DOC O'MALLEY: There's a great deal of religion in your family. And that's the problem here. I blame your grandmother, who you didn't know but I did. She was half-Cherokee and her folks converted to Baptist on the Trail of Tears. She had this feeling that there was a dark family curse that ended the moment her parents converted to Christianity. It was probably just her limited understanding of the pagan habits they set aside and not a real curse, of course. But she embraced the

Christ child and the bible as if they'd save her from some dark fate better not even guessed at.

JOANN: What sort of dark curse?

DOC O'MALLEY: Oh, nothing you want to hear about.

JOANN: What was the curse?

DOC O'MALLEY: I don't like to fill your head with any more nonsense.

JOANN: No more games until you tell me what the curse was!

DOC O'MALLEY: Oh. Well, it had something to do with her family being the shamans of the tribe and having the power to--

(A bell over the front door rings. FORTUNE enters the laundry. He is dressed in worn work clothes and holding his bundled, bloody suit under his arm.)

FORTUNE: Good afternoon, ma'am. Sir. I don't believe I have had the pleasure. Fortune Clay, sir. It is so good to make your acquaintance.

DOC O'MALLEY: Huh! O'Malley's the name. Doc O'Malley. You new around these parts?

FORTUNE: I come into to town to perform some entertainments at the fair grounds for the delectation of the population hereabouts, sir.

DOC O'MALLEY: Oh. You're one of them carnies the girl's been telling me about.

JOANN: Hi!

DOC O'MALLEY: You the carny that raises the dead?

FORTUNE: Oh, no, sir. No, sir. Nothing like it. . . . It's my nephew that raises the dead.

DOC O'MALLEY: You don't say.

FORTUNE: Just a knack he's got. A divinely-inspired talent that has a beneficial commercial potential to it.

DOC O'MALLEY: I guess that makes your nephew the second coming, then?

FORTUNE: I don't like to speculate, sir, and I don't like to brag. And any answer I formulate for that question is going to tempt me in both directions.

DOC O'MALLEY: Sounds real unlikely, Mr. Clay. My best advice to you is to leave off all temptations before the town sheriff gets out the tar and gives you some feathers, sir.

JOANN: You might get feathers!

FORTUNE: I don't think the good doctor means feathers in a good way, ma'am.

JOANN: Feathers is always good. Did you come to get me to soak out those bloodstains?

FORTUNE: I surely did. I only got one suit and I need it to go on stage tonight and do my show.

(JOANN takes the clothes from him and sets about soaking them in a tub.)

DOC O'MALLEY: You do resurrections out at the carnival every night?

FORTUNE: No, sir. You might say resurrections is sort of a side business for me and my nephew. Our main bread and butter is earned running the small sideshow affiliated with the amusement event. I'm the barker and leader of the enterprise and my nephew is Enoch the Intriguing who beguiles the crowds with his manifold mental powers of divination and prophecy, if it pleases you.

DOC O'MALLEY: It don't please me much.

JOANN: Well, it pleases me! I didn't know that resurrection boy was half so talented! Does he tell fortunes?

FORTUNE: We both do, ma'am. Why, I also have the gift to foresee.

JOANN: If someone were planning on doing something bad-- like killing a thing at a risk to their own life, could you look into the future and see how it would all come out? Like if Mama should be told about it?

FORTUNE: I surely could.

JOANN: You could?

FORTUNE: Surely. Once I have my suit on and five dollars in my hand.

JOANN: Oh. All right then.

(JOANN goes back to scrubbing the suit frantically.)

DOC O'MALLEY: On the delicate subject of money, Mr. Clay--

FORTUNE: I sure wish you'd call me by my Christian name, Doctor. It's Fortune, sir.

DOC O'MALLEY: When it comes to money, Mr. Clay. Just how much money would it take for you and your nephew to move along from this here town? Let things lie. Let things alone. Let the dead bodies lie and the hopes of the women folk alone. You get my meaning?

FORTUNE: I don't think I do, sir.

(DOC O'MALLEY makes sure that JOANN is caught up in her work and not listening. He draws FORTUNE aside.)

DOC O'MALLEY: How much do you want to get dad-blamed out of town, sir? I'll pay you to let the girl alone and walk away from the mess before you disappoint her expectations.

FORTUNE: That's a kind offer and may I say that your consideration and monetary generosity is an uncommon providence in this drought-plagued purgatory--

(JOANN carries a load of clothes outside to hang dry.)

DOC O'MALLEY: Leave off that flowery crap and spit it out. Man to man. If I was going for the sheriff, I'd already be out the door.

FORTUNE: I cain't get out of town until her mama takes the dog's chain off my partner's neck! Which she ain't planning on doing until he resurrects her man.

DOC O'MALLEY: She's got your nephew chained up in the yard?

FORTUNE: He ain't my nephew. We met in the Salt Lake City jail four years back. Look, can you get me two hundred dollars?

DOC O'MALLEY: Two hundred? In this drought?

FORTUNE: Or you want me to draw this situation out and keep them all hoping and praying on this another six weeks?

DOC O'MALLEY: If I get you the money, how the hell do I know I'll get shut of you?

FORTUNE: Why, you got my word as a gentleman.

DOC O'MALLEY: Ha!

FORTUNE: Relax, pops. We's got outta' lots of towns all right. We know how to do it.

DOC O'MALLEY: I'd go get that sheriff if it weren't for the girl. She's got it in her head that you are some sort of religious man and it would hurt and offend her to see you exposed for what you truly are.

FORTUNE: Yeah, sure, pops, it would hurt and offend me, too.

DOC O'MALLEY: Wait here and don't talk to that girl about God while I am gone.

FORTUNE: I'll only talk about the devil, don't worry.

DOC O'MALLEY: She may be soft-headed a touch, but she is the sweetest and brightest creature on this planet, and if you hurt her--

FORTUNE: Relax, pops. I ain't run a lawn mower over a kitten's head even once this week. She's safe with me.

DOC O'MALLEY: I'll hold you to that, sir.

(DOC O'MALLEY exits. FORTUNE lights a cigarette. The bell over the doors rings again. NOLA enters. She has MYRTLE's axe and puts it up to FORTUNE's throat.)

NOLA: Give me one good reason not to finish what Mama started and carve you a jack o' lantern smile, you son of a bitch.

FORTUNE: Hello, there, darling. Ain't this a nice surprise?

NOLA: You think I'm funning?

FORTUNE: Come on, now. Ain't I worth more to you alive than bleeding on the floor?

NOLA: I cain't think for what.

FORTUNE: How about for old times sake?

NOLA: Old times weren't so good, Fred.

FORTUNE: I meant to look you up as soon as I got to town, sweetheart.

NOLA: But you got sidetracked and figured you take some time to see the sights? And con my mama into believing your lies like I did?

FORTUNE: Yeah, that's about right.

NOLA: The world could do without you.

FORTUNE: The world could, but you couldn't, Nola.

NOLA: Don't make me laugh while I'm holding a sharpened axe to your throat.

FORTUNE: You said you loved me in the funhouse in Abilene, darling.

NOLA: That was Abilene, Fred, and it was a funhouse.

FORTUNE: Didn't I take the time to answer your letter? Don't that prove you was in my thoughts?

NOLA: I don't call a postcard from El Paso with the words "Sorry I knocked you up, them's the breaks, kiddo," scrawled on it real thoughtful.

FORTUNE: I'm not real good expressing my feelings when the feelings run deep, Nola.

NOLA: I'm real good expressing my feelings, Fred. And my feelings say to let the axe bite deep.

FORTUNE: You know I'm only doing this to save up money. For you and the baby. I was just earning money the best way I know how so that I could keep you and the baby in comfort. That's the Lord's honest truth.

(NOLA removes the axe.)

NOLA: How are you going to keep me and a baby on fifty dollars, you half-wit? What's that going to buy? You're not only running the stupidest con in the country, you're undercharging!

FORTUNE: It don't seem Christian to pauper the populace for works of wondrous reanimation, dollface. Don't seem sporting.

NOLA: Of all the towns and all the people in this world, you gotta walk into my town and run your con on my mama?

FORTUNE: It struck me as a rather unfortunate coincidence as well.

NOLA: I might've forgiven you if you'd got more money off the old bag.

FORTUNE: I'll make more money. Don't you worry yourself. While there are still dreams in men's hearts---

NOLA: You're here to exploit 'em for a profit.

FORTUNE: That's right. Boy, you're a sight for sore eyes, Nola. I ain't realized how much I missed you.

NOLA: Speaking of profit

FORTUNE: Your soft skin, your flashing eyes, those firm thighs--

NOLA: Give me that fifty dollars.

FORTUNE: Well, this is a shock. You saying you're charging for things now?

NOLA: I'm saying that's my mama's money and I want it back.

FORTUNE: It's money I'm saving for us, so what's the difference?

NOLA: The difference is that I cain't hitch a ride to Oklahoma City and get rid of what I'm carrying with that fifty dollars if it's in your pocket.

FORTUNE: Oh. Well, if that's how you feel, honey, I guess I understand. Maybe that's better than starting a family unplanned after all.

NOLA: Well, don't get all broken up and tender-hearted on the baby's account, Fred. I can see what a store you set by little Fred Junior here.

FORTUNE: If you think now's not the right time for you to be in a breeding condition, I can sacrifice my happiness in the little fellow for your benefit.

NOLA: That's good of you, Fred. Start by sacrificing that fifty dollars right here into my hand.

FORTUNE: I will surely fund and fortify you on your medical necessity, Nola.

(He gives her some money.)

NOLA: Two dollars?

FORTUNE: Yes, ma'am. I have a duty and a responsibility in this matter that I am not evading.

NOLA: Fred. I cain't get an abortion from no medical doctor for no two dollars!

FORTUNE: Have you tried drinking turpentine? Quinine? Long rides on horseback?

NOLA: I should have finished what mama started!

(NOLA reaches for the axe, FORTUNE stops her and holds her arms pinned.)

FORTUNE: I've had just about enough of you and your mama putting my throat at risk, Nola. Watch it, now!

NOLA: I oughta' turn you in to the sheriff. What's stopping me?

FORTUNE: Stop kidding around, Nola. You're on my side in this. The two of us, we're a team.

NOLA: Yeah, right.

FORTUNE: What did you mean locking the collar on Enoch like you did?

NOLA: Ha! You shoulda' seen your face, you big fake.

FORTUNE: It ain't funny. I need you to unlock him. Give me a chance to spring him so we can get of this town.

NOLA: Yeah? What's in it for me?

FORTUNE: A new life with me in California when I get settled.

NOLA: What's in it for me besides a bedtime story?

FORTUNE: You'd take my last fifty dollars in the world?
Are you that kind of girl?

NOLA: I'm that kind of girl and then some. But, tell you what, if you bring Daddy back from the dead, I'll let you keep the money. How's that?

FORTUNE: I'll give you the money tonight. But first you free Enoch, so we're clear to blow this joint.

NOLA: Sure thing.

FORTUNE: Now, money cain't be all that's on your mind, Nola.

NOLA: Oh, no?

FORTUNE: No. No, sure it ain't. I know you, kitten.

NOLA: Yeah? What do you know?

(He kisses her.)

NOLA (CONT.): Say, what was that for?

FORTUNE: You're a big girl, work it out for yourself.

NOLA: Cain't do me much harm in my current condition, I guess.

FORTUNE: That's right. The barn door's open.

NOLA: And the horses are gone. Remember the funhouse in Abilene.

FORTUNE: Yeah. The hall of mirrors.

NOLA: The shaking stairway.

FORTUNE: The exploding confetti cannon. Yeah. That was a fun house all right.

NOLA: Let's go back some time.

FORTUNE: Sure thing.

(They fall onto a pile of laundry, clawing at one another's clothes. JOANN enters with an empty laundry basket.)

JOANN: Oh! That's 'Thresher Bird.' I know that game!

(NOLA and FORTUNE part quickly and refasten their clothes.)

NOLA: Jesus H. Christ!

JOANN: You're playing 'Thresher Bird. Pidik pek pik pik pidEEK! Teach'r teach'r teach'r. Sweet sweet—

NOLA: Knock it off! Dumb cowbell. Mama sent me into town to get her axe sharpened. She's going to use it on the resurrection boy if he don't live up to his promise. Take it home to her.

JOANN: Why? Where are you going?

NOLA: Never you mind where I'm going. Come on, Fred--

FORTUNE: Fortune, ma'am. Name's Fortune. And I cain't step out with you and counsel you on Christ just right now.

NOLA: What?

FORTUNE: I'm waiting here for the good doctor to come back.

NOLA: What for?

FORTUNE: A consultation on a medical problem. My heart gets to racing every time I'm alone with you and I want his advice on how to stop it.

NOLA: Knock it off.

FORTUNE: I'm not joking around, Nola. I'll see you at your mama's house later tonight.

JOANN: You're going to come to the resurrection?

FORTUNE: Why, I wouldn't miss it for the world, ma'am.

NOLA: Suit yourself. I ain't going to beg. You're not worth spit to me, you sadsack old hustler. I almost wish you were bringing my daddy back tonight. He'd work you over but good!

FORTUNE: I'll be charmed to shake his cold, rotting hand come midnight.

(FORTUNE kisses NOLA's hand. She slaps him and exits.)

FORTUNE (CONT.): Hell of a woman, your sister.

JOANN: Is Daddy going to come back with rot on him?
Should we be rubbing him down with vinegar?

FORTUNE: No, no. He'll be just dandy and sweet-smelling like a new spring flower when he climbs out of the coffin.

JOANN: Oh, good. I'm glad. Your suit should be dry in a few hours. And I'll get you your five dollars tonight.

FORTUNE: My five dollars?

JOANN: So I can get my fortune told. Like you said.

FORTUNE: Oh. That. It'll be my pleasure, ma'am.

JOANN: And, I thought of a way I can help you with the resurrection, if you want to hear it.

FORTUNE: You thought of a pretty little prayer you could say?

JOANN: No. Praying ain't much help. I told you that. I want to really help. I been thinking it over. I know what I can do!

FORTUNE: What's that?

(AZAZYEL crawls out of a pile of laundry. She holds JOANN and plays with her hair, massaging the places on her head where horns might someday grow.)

JOANN: Fight God. Peck out his eyes. Shred his skin. Gnaw off his nose. Claw open his gullet and scream

down his throat. I can fight God, tear his body into bloody strips, and win back Daddy's soul. This angel I know told me so. While he's distracted we can get Daddy back. I saw it really clear and pure. It was like a tableau all in crystal. Me and God fighting one another. And I was winning.

AZAZYEL: Good girl! You gotta' win those horns back. You gotta' fight for 'em and win.

JOANN: I gotta' earn the horns.

FORTUNE: Well, sure thing. I'd be obliged for any help you can give me, doll. The quicker we get this over and done with the better.

(AZAZYEL turns the phonograph on. FORTUNE jumps when it starts playing.)

VOICE ON PHONOGRAPH: The scissor-tailed flycatch---

(The needle scratches off. JOANN and AZAZYEL massages JOANN's forehead, where horns might grow. FORTUNE cowers back.)