

BUSY FINGERS

A Play in Three Acts

by
Robert Traver

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

P. 5

Started

~~P. 16~~

~~little ol' Davy (STIFF & ungly)~~

~~P. 29 -~~

~~feverishly~~

P. 32

no - is - 3rd line

~~P. 39~~

~~folding his paper~~

Sheets to be discarded

and then quietly proceeds to make another paper hat. Zaborski furtively watches Millar.)

JUDGE: The witness will proceed.

WITNESS: (Starting. Glancing. Smiling)

Yes, your Honor. (Turning again to the jury) You see, gentlemen, it was this way. (Clearing his throat, he immediately assumes a tragic tone of voice, beginning in a low voice and gradually mounting in pitch, speed, and volume. His big moment has arrived.) As I have told you, we were leaving the rag-house -- (Glancing quickly at the Warden) -- I mean the overall factory. I was behind Millar, and he was behind Mr. Krause. We were crossing the prison yard. A flock of pigeons flew over us. (Like a radio poet) The shadows of the sinking sun. The hush of eventide. At peace with the world.

(Pause. Then rapidly)

Suddenly Millar dropped out of line, on his hands, on his knees. (Faster) He scuttled, turtle-wise, up to Mr. Krause. I saw him raise his arm -- the gleam of shining metal -- (low-voiced) and then -- (shrilly) and then -- he plunged a long metal object into the side of poor Mr. Krause! (Pause) Ah, it was horrible. Horrible! (He shakes his head at the memory. Then rapidly) I ran up to my dying comrade -- there was a pair of pulsing overall shears protruding from his side. (Voice)

NEGRO:

(Chanting)

Quiet am requested, gennemen, foh de benefit ob
doze what hab retahed! (The Negro drops the canvas.)

LOTT:

(Quickly clasping Millar's hand)

Goodbye, Millar. Good luck. I swear I'll get you
out of here.

MILLAR:

Lott, goodbye. I'm sure you will. You're a fine
fellow. Goodbye, Lott.

(Then quickly, almost sobbing, MILLAR
turns and flings himself face down on his cot of
boards. LOTT moves out of the path of light as SAM
comes tiptoeing elaborately around from behind the
cell. As Sam tiptoes past the front of Millar's
cell, watching Lott, Millar rolls over and grins at
his retreating figure. His face suddenly clouds
again, and he buries his head in his arms, and his
shoulders shake. One of the spotlights follows
Lott and Sam back to the door, briefly exposing to
view the pacing inmate and the other one still cling-
ing there, spreading at the bars of his cell. The
other light still shines on Millar's cell.

As Lott and Sam reach the bull-pen door,
Lott turns and stands looking back at Millar's cell,
one hand outstretched. Tableau. Blackout, during
which there is heard an anguished cry, "Lucille!"
followed by a burst of wild gobbling laughter.)

CURTAIN

rising) Shears swathed in gray denim -- and in blood! The guards were running up, but, alas! before they arrived my poor friend gurgled (he gurgles, clutching his side and his throat) and was gone. Gone!

(The WITNESS bows his head, closing his eyes. His grief is boundless. The JURY coughs and shifts restlessly. There is a long pause. The plump juror on the corner, nearest the witness, has sat open-mouthed during this recital. He now feverishly mops his head and neck. The witness finally raises his head, entirely composed, and sits smiling, facing the WARDEN. PROSECUTOR LOTT comes forward, carrying a pair of shears.)

LOTT: (Handing the shears to the witness)

I show you People's Exhibit A, a pair of metal shears. Do you recognize them?

WITNESS: (Minutely examining the shears)

Yes, I certainly do.

LOTT: Where did you last see them?

WITNESS: (Almost sobbing)

In the side of my poor, poor friend, Joseph Krause.

(He puts his hand to his brow.)

LOTT: (Turning to Millar)

Do you have any questions? (Millar slowly shakes his head no. Lott faces the Judge) Your Honor, the People rest.

rising) Shears swathed in gray denim -- and in blood! The guards were running up, but, alas! before they arrived my poor friend gurgled (he gurgles, clutching his side and his throat) and was gone. Gone!

(The WITNESS bows his head, closing his eyes. His grief is boundless. The JURY coughs and shifts restlessly. There is a long pause. The plump juror on the corner, nearest the witness, has sat open-mouthed during this recital. He now feverishly mops his head and neck. The witness finally raises his head, entirely composed, and sits smiling, facing the WARDEN. PROSECUTOR LOTT comes forward, carrying a pair of shears.)

LOTT: (Handing the shears to the witness)

I show you People's Exhibit A, a pair of metal shears. Do you recognize them?

WITNESS: (Minutely examining the shears)

Yes, I certainly do.

LOTT: Where did you last see them?

WITNESS: (Almost sobbing)

In the side of my poor, poor friend, Joseph Krause.

(He puts his hand to his brow.)

LOTT: (Turning to Millar)

Do you have any questions? (Millar slowly shakes his head no. Lott faces the Judge) Your Honor, the People rest.

and then quietly proceeds to make another paper hat.)

JUDGE:

The witness will proceed.

WITNESS:

Smiling
(Glancing. Smiling)

Yes, your Honor. (Turning again to the jury) You see, gentlemen, it was this way. (Clearing his throat, he immediately assumes a tragic tone of voice, beginning in a low voice and gradually mounting in pitch, speed, and volume. His big moment has arrived.) As I have told you, we were leaving the rag-house -- (glancing quickly at the Warden) -- I mean the overall factory. I was behind Millar, and he was behind Mr. Krause. We were crossing the prison yard. A flock of pigeons flew over us. (Like a radio poet) The shadows of the sinking sun. The hush of eventide. At peace with the world.

(Pause. Then rapidly)

Suddenly Millar dropped out of line, on his hands, on his knees. (Faster) He scuttled, turtle-wise, up to Mr. Krause. I saw him raise his arm -- the gleam of shining metal -- (low-voiced) and then -- (shrilly) and then -- he plunged a long metal object into the side of poor Mr. Krause! (Pause) Ah, it was horrible. Horrible! (He shakes his head at the memory. Then rapidly) I ran up to my dying comrade -- there was a pair of pulsing overall shears protruding from his side. (Voice

and then quietly proceeds to make another paper hat.)

JUDGE: The witness will proceed.

WITNESS: (Glancing. Smiling)

Yes, your Honor. (Turning again to the jury) You see, gentlemen, it was this way. (Clearing his throat, he immediately assumes a tragic tone of voice, beginning in a low voice and gradually mounting in pitch, speed, and volume. His big moment has arrived.) As I have told you, we were leaving the rag-house -- (glancing quickly at the Warden) -- I mean the overall factory. I was behind Millar, and he was behind Mr. Krause. We were crossing the prison yard. A flock of pigeons flew over us. (Like a radio poet) The shadows of the sinking sun. The hush of eventide. At peace with the world.

(Pause. Then rapidly)

Suddenly Millar dropped out of line, on his hands, on his knees. (Faster) He scuttled, turtle-wise, up to Mr. Krause. I saw him raise his arm -- the gleam of shining metal -- (low-voiced) and then -- (shrilly) and then -- he plunged a long metal object into the side of poor Mr. Krause! (Pause) Ah, it was horrible. Horrible! (He shakes his head at the memory. Then rapidly) I ran up to my dying comrade -- there was a pair of pulsing overall shears protruding from his side. (Voice

and then quietly proceeds to make another paper hat.)

JUDGE:

The witness will proceed.

WITNESS:

(Glancing, Smiling)

Yes, your Honor. (Turning again to the jury) You see, gentlemen, it was this way. (Clearing his throat, he immediately assumes a tragic tone of voice, beginning in a low voice and gradually mounting in pitch, speed, and volume. His big moment has arrived.) As I have told you, we were leaving the rag-house -- (glancing quickly at the Warden) -- I mean the overall factory. I was behind Millar, and he was behind Mr. Krause. We were crossing the prison yard. A flock of pigeons flew over us. (Like a radio poet) The shadows of the sinking sun. The hush of eventide. At peace with the world.

(Pause. Then rapidly)

Suddenly Millar dropped out of line, on his hands, on his knees. (Faster) He scuttled, turtle-wise, up to Mr. Krause. I saw him raise his arm -- the gleam of shining metal -- (low-voiced) and then -- (shrilly) and then -- he plunged a long metal object into the side of poor Mr. Krause! (Pause) Ah, it was horrible. Horrible! (He shakes his head at the memory. Then rapidly) I ran up to my dying comrade -- there was a pair of pulsing overall shears protruding from his side. (Voice

NEGRO:

(Chanting)

Quiet am requested, gennemen, foh de benefit ob
doze what hab retahed! (The Negro drops the canvas.)

LOTT:

(Quickly clasping Millar's hand)

Goodbye, Millar. Good luck. I swear I'll get you
out of here.

MILLAR:

Lott, goodbye. I'm sure you will. You're a fine
fellow. Goodbye, Lott.

(Then quickly, almost sobbing, MILLAR
turns and flings himself face down on his cot of
boards. LOTT moves out of the path of light as SAM
comes tiptoeing elaborately around from behind the
cell. AS Sam tiptoes past the front of Millar's
cell, watching Lott, Millar rolls over and grins at
his retreating figure. His face suddenly clouds
again, and he buries his head in his arms, and his
shoulders shake. One of the spotlights follows
Lott and Sam back to the door, briefly exposing to
view the pacing inmate and the other one still cling-
ing there, spreading at the bars of his cell. The
other light still shines on Millar's cell.

As Lott and Sam reach the bull-pen door,
Lott turns and stands looking back at Millar's cell,
one hand outstretched. Tableau. Blackout, during
which there is heard ^{an anguished cry, "Lucille!" followed by} a burst of wild gobbling laugh-
ter.)

CURTAIN

and then quietly proceeds to make another paper hat. (Zaborski furtively watches Millar.)

JUDGE:

The witness will proceed.

WITNESS:

(Starting. Glancing. Smiling)

Yes, your Honor. (Turning again to the jury) You see, gentlemen, it was this way. (Clearing his throat, he immediately assumes a tragic tone of voice, beginning in a low voice and gradually mounting in pitch, speed, and volume. His big moment has arrived.) As I have told you, we were leaving the rag-house -- (glancing quickly at the Warden) -- I mean the overall factory. I was behind Millar, and he was behind Mr. Krause. We were crossing the prison yard. A flock of pigeons flew over us. (Like a radio poet) The shadows of the sinking sun. The hush of eventide. At peace with the world.

(Pause. Then rapidly)

Suddenly Millar dropped out of line, on his hands, on his knees. (Faster) He scuttled, turtle-wise, up to Mr. Krause. I saw him raise his arm -- the gleam of shining metal -- (low-voiced) and then -- (shrilly) and then -- he plunged a long metal object into the side of poor Mr. Krause! (Pause) Ah, it was horrible. Horrible! (He shakes his head at the memory. Then rapidly) I ran up to my dying comrade -- there was a pair of pulsing overall shears protruding from his side. (Voice

rising) Shears swathed in gray denim -- and in blood! The guards were running up, but, alas! before they arrived my poor friend gurgled (he gurgles, clutching his side and his throat) and was gone. Gone!

(The WITNESS bows his head, closing his eyes. His grief is boundless. The JURY coughs and shifts restlessly. There is a long pause. The plump juror on the corner, nearest the witness, has sat open-mouthed during this recital. He now feverishly mops his head, entirely composed, and sits smiling, facing the WARDEN. PROSECUTOR LOTT comes forward, carrying a pair of shears.)

LOTT: (Handing the shears to the witness)

I show you People's Exhibit A, a pair of metal shears. Do you recognize them?

WITNESS: (Minutely examining the shears)

Yes, I certainly do.

LOTT: Where did you last see them?

WITNESS: (Almost sobbing)

In the side of my poor, poor friend, Joseph Krause.

(He puts his hand to his brow.)

LOTT: (Turning to Millar)

Do you have any questions? (Millar slowly shakes his head no. Lott faces the Judge) Your Honor, the People rest.

BUSY FINGERS

A Play in Two Acts

by
Robert Traver

Written by:
John D. Voelker
Ishpeming, Michigan

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

"Busy Fingers" is the story of a convict, David Millar; of his trial and acquittal on a charge of murdering a fellow inmate, Joe Krause; of Millar's return to prison, where the Warden gleefully has him thrown into the prison bull pen; of his futile attempt to escape; of his odd friendship with the prosecuting attorney; and of how the sympathetic young prosecutor unwittingly provides the suffering Millar with the means of his final release.

It is hoped, too, that "Busy Fingers" suggests something of the more obscurely known phases of the tragedy of economic depression -- and some of its waifs; of the great natural talent and ability that rots, is rotting, in our prisons; of the gnawing degradation of prison life; and something of the gristle-headed blunders and deliberate cruelties perpetrated by some of our politically appointed prison officials.

And there are some other things.

THE AUTHOR

C H A R A C T E R S

David Millar, a convict

Prosecutor Lott

Warden

Sam, a prison guard

Stanley Zaborski, a convict

Judge, Bailiff, Clerk, Jurors, Convicts, etc.

A C T O N E

Scene: A courtroom. Time: The present.

A C T T W O

Scene I: Warden's office. Time: Nighttime. Three months later.

Scene II: Prison bull pen. Time: Five minutes later.

Scene III: Warden's office. Time: One week later.

B U S Y F I N G E R S

A C T O N E

S C E N E I

SCENE:

A courtroom. The play opens in the midst of the trial of DAVID MILLAR, a convict, for the murder of a fellow inmate, Joe Krause. Millar is already serving a sentence of life imprisonment.

As the curtain rises everyone is in his place except the JUDGE. The young prosecutor, LOTT, is seated at his counsel table in whispered conference with the WARDEN of the Prison. The Warden is a large, thick-necked, square-jawed man who wears horn-rimmed spectacles. Sitting behind the Warden, in uniform, is SAM, the Warden's personal bodyguard, a fat man.

The state's star witness, STANLEY ZABORSKI, an inmate, is seated in the witness chair. Clad in gray denim, wearing steel-rimmed spectacles, he sits there, disdainfully indifferent to all about him. He is a thin, long-faced, monk-like looking individual of about forty-five.

The jury is seated in the jury box fronting the audience, in the middle and rear of the courtroom. The judge's bench is to the right, at a right angle to the jury box, but nearer the front than the jury. The witness stand is between the judge's bench and the jury.

The two counsel tables are considerably in front of the jury, at opposite oblique angles. Prosecutor Lott is sitting at the right of the right table. On his table is a mass of papers, photographs, brief cases, ^{some law books,} a large pair of shears, scratch pads, a water pitcher and several tumblers.

The defendant, DAVID MILLAR, is seated alone at the left of the left table. His head is resting in his right hand, elbow on the table, his face turned toward the jury. He is a tall, thin man of about thirty, clean shaven, with a shock of unruly dark hair which he keeps pushing out of his eyes. He is clad in a gray denim shirt, tieless, and buttoned at the throat, trousers of the same material, and is wearing a pair of clumsy, heavy-soled work shoes.

On his table is a pitcher of water, a drinking glass, a large pad of note paper and a pencil. Arranged near him, on his table, are a number of paper flowers, hats and paper gliders that he has folded, made, during the course of the trial.

The JUDGE comes swishing out of his chambers, from a door at the rear of the stage, between the jury box and the bench, slowly ascends the bench and stands before his chair. The BAILIFF

who sits below him, near the witness stand, pounds his gavel and everyone arises. The bailiff intones: "Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye! This honorable court is now in session." Everyone is seated. The CLERK announces: "Continuing with the trial of People versus David Millar. The charge: Murder."

The Judge wipes his pinch-glasses with a handkerchief, carefully adjusts them, and consults some notes before him. Looking at PROSECUTOR LOTT, he clears his throat and speaks.

JUDGE: When we adjourned this noon the People had just called the witness Stanley -- ah -- Stanley -- --

LOTT: Zaborski, your Honor.

JUDGE: ^{Mr. Prosecutor.} Thank you / Are the People ready to proceed?

LOTT: We are, your Honor. (Lott walks up near the witness, standing between him and the Judge's bench, so that he is facing both the witness and the jury. He turns and speaks to the clerk.) Was this witness sworn this morning? (The clerk nods yes, and Lott turns to the witness.) Your name, please?

WITNESS: Stanley Zaborski. (He has a somewhat affected voice, with considerable lip movement, elaborately enunciating each word.)

LOTT: Where do you reside?

WITNESS: (Drawing back, hurt, offended)

Why, as you know -- in the prison of course. (Pointing at the Warden) The Warden there can tell you -- I'm one of the most trusted inmates of the institution. (He basks in the light of the Warden's nodding agreement.)

LOTT:

Do you know the defendant, David Millar?

(For the first time, MILLAR seems to take some interest in the proceedings. He takes his hand from his head and sits up facing the WITNESS. The witness takes one quick look at him and hurriedly glances away.)

WITNESS:

I do.

LOTT:

Did you know the deceased inmate, Joseph Krause, during his lifetime?

WITNESS:

(Confidently)

I did. He was a very valued friend -- a true gentleman.

LOTT:

Were you working in the prison overall factory the afternoon Krause was killed?

WITNESS:

I was.

LOTT:

Were Krause and Millar working in the same factory that afternoon?

WITNESS:

They were.

LOTT:

What time did you leave the factory?

WITNESS:

About four o'clock, post meridian.

LOTT:

In the afternoon?

WITNESS:

I have just told you so.

LOTT:

How did the men leave the factory?

WITNESS:

In single file.

LOTT:

How many inmates were in the line?

WITNESS:

(Reprovingly)

As the prison authorities testified here this morning, there were seventeen.

LOTT:

(Looking at the Judge)

Will his Honor speak to the witness?

JUDGE:

Proceed, Mr. Lott.

(The WITNESS smirks at LOTT.)

LOTT:

Where were you in the line?

WITNESS:

I was in the rear, Millar was ahead of me, and Mr. Krause was about five men ahead of him.

LOTT:

Will you tell the jury what you saw take place after the men left the overall factory?

WITNESS:

(Drawing back)

You mean, all the horrible details? Everything?

LOTT:

(Through his teeth, restraining himself)

Will you please tell the jury what you saw, Mr. Zaborski?

WITNESS:

(Looking at the Warden, then smiling)

I should be delighted. Delighted, indeed, Mr. Prosecutor.

(As ZABORSKI turns and sits facing the jury, LOTT resumes his seat at his table. The defendant, MILLAR, leisurely takes a drink of water and then quietly proceeds to make another paper hat.)

JUDGE:

The witness will proceed.

WITNESS:

(Glancing. Smiling)

Yes, your Honor. (Turning again to the jury) You see, gentlemen, it was this way. (Clearing his throat, he immediately assumes a tragic tone of

voice, beginning in a low voice and gradually mounting in pitch, speed, and volume. His big moment has arrived.) As I have told you, we were leaving the rag-house -- (glancing quickly at the Warden) -- I mean the overall factory. I was behind Millar, and he was behind Mr. Krause. We were crossing the prison yard. A flock of pigeons flew over us. (Like a radio poet) The shadows of the sinking sun. The hush of eventide. At peace with the world.

(Pause. Then rapidly)

Suddenly Millar dropped out of line, on his hands, on his knees. (Faster) He scuttled, turtle-wise, up to Mr. Krause. I saw him raise his arm -- the gleam of shining metal -- (low voiced) and then -- (shrilly) and then -- he plunged a long metal object into the side of poor Mr. Krause! (Pause) Ah, it was horrible. Horrible! (He shakes his head at the memory. Then rapidly) I ran up to my dying comrade -- there was a pair of pulsing overall shears protruding from his side. (Voice rising) Shears swathed in gray denim -- and in blood! The guards were running up, but, alas! before they arrived my poor friend gurgled (he gurgles, clutching his side and his throat) and was gone. Gone!

(The WITNESS bows his head, closing his eyes. His grief is boundless. The JURY

coughs and shifts restlessly. There is a long pause. The plump juror on the corner, nearest the witness, has sat open-mouthed during this recital. He now feverishly mops his head and neck. The witness finally raises his head, entirely composed, and sits smiling, facing the WARDEN. PROSECUTOR LOTT comes forward, carrying a pair of shears.)

LOTT: (Handing the shears to the witness)

I show you People's Exhibit A, a pair of metal shears. Do you recognize them?

WITNESS: (Minutely examining the shears)

Yes, I certainly do.

LOTT: Where did you last see them?

WITNESS: (Almost sobbing)

In the side of my poor, poor friend, Joseph Krause. (He puts his hand to his brow.)

LOTT: (Turning to Millar)

Do you have any questions? (Millar slowly shakes his head no. Lott faces the Judge) Your Honor, the People rest.

(The WITNESS stalks from the stand and takes a seat near SAM, the Warden's guard.)

JUDGE: (To Millar)

David Millar, the People have now concluded their case, and it now devolves upon you to call such witnesses as you may have. While you may take the stand in your own behalf, I should warn you that if

you do, anything you say may be used for or against you. Do you understand that? (Millar gravely nods his head.) And do you still insist upon acting as your own attorney, instead of having a public defender appointed by the court? (Again Millar nods.) Then you may proceed.

MILLAR stands up. He looks thoughtfully down at the paper flowers and things he has made. He is a tall man, slightly stooped. He slowly walks over to the Prosecutor's table, bows slightly, and takes up the shears. He walks a little forward and stops before the Judge. He bows low. Then he turns to the jury. It has grown very quiet in the courtroom.

MILLAR:

(Slowly)

May it please your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury. My name is David Millar. I am twenty-nine years old. I have spent the last seven years of a life sentence in this same county with you -- and none of you have heard of my existence until now. (The man has a rich low voice, a sort of hollow, resonant baritone, as though he were speaking in an empty chamber.)

How I came to be in prison probably will not interest any of you. You have heard too much of depressions, of sudden, searing poverty, of men who could no longer find work to do with

their hands (flexing his fingers); of young wives and wan little babies whose only sickness was hunger; of lost savings, of homes that were taken away.

You have greatly wearied of hearing of some men -- men who had never wronged or stolen in their lives -- who, in their desperateness, born of a fierce foolish pride at war with this debasing thing called Poverty.....how these men forgot every rule, every precept, and became like hairy, crouching ^{creatures} ~~men~~ of an earlier age -- how they went out and robbed and thieved their fellows to keep themselves, their mates, their offspring.

Such a man (indicating himself) stands before you today -- a man who has broken the laws of his tribe, and who is now paying for that ancient wrong.

(Millar pauses, and looks gravely around at young Prosecutor Lott, as though to see if he is listening. Then he faces the jury again, taking a few steps forward.)

Yes, I am a common jail-bird, a convict. But I still like to suppose, to hope, that the only real difference between us is: I am behind the bars. And you? -- that the strange forces of environment, of life, have not put you there -- yet! (Lowering his voice, as though musing to himself) As I stand here now I no longer

have a mother or a father. They tell me my wife belongs to another man, my child is gone. (Pause) I have nothing. Not even a decent excuse for being here today.

What you may decide here, then, will scarcely affect my lot. (Earnestly) Believe me, my fellowmen, I do not care what your verdict is, so long as you -- you free ones -- feel right about it in your hearts. (While Millar has been saying this last he has been balancing the shears, and feeling the grip; opening and closing them and feeling the blade.) The people say I killed a man -- a fellow prisoner -- with these shears. I think I can show you they have not proven it. (Turning slightly toward the Judge) I should like to call Stanley Zaborski as my witness.

LOTT:

(Leaping to his feet)

I object, your Honor. The defendant has just refused to examine this witness.

JUDGE:

(To Lott, in a kindly voice)

But the defendant may make him his own witness. A young attorney so recently out of law school should surely still remember that. (Smiling slightly) You have just momentarily forgotten, that is all.

LOTT:

(Gamely)

Why yes, your Honor. I guess I was too -- too eager.

(LOTT sits down and gulps a glass of water. The witness ZABORSKI stalks to the stand, making a wide arc, however, around MILLAR, who is still holding the shears. He takes his seat and defiantly faces Millar.)

MILLAR:

(In a low voice)

Now, Stan, you wouldn't mind telling us more about yourself, would you?

WITNESS:

(Snapping his reply)

Not a bit!

MILLAR:

(Easily)

What did you use to do before you came to -- to live with us?

WITNESS:

(Trying to look around Millar at the Warden. The Warden whispers to Lott. Lott shakes his head no.)

Ah -- --

JUDGE:

(Sharply)

The witness will answer.

WITNESS:

(Evasively)

I -- I don't remember the question?

JUDGE:

(To reporter)

Read the question.

REPORTER:

(Reading his notes)

"What did you use to do before you came to live with us?"

WITNESS:

(Defiantly again)

Oh, that. Why, I was a kind of a priest.

MILLAR: (Softly, in mock surprise)
Just a kind of a priest?

WITNESS: I was a priest.

MILLAR: (In wonderment)
Oh! A real honest-to-God priest?

WITNESS: (Scowling)
You heard me.

MILLAR: And how was it they came to put you in prison,
Father?

WITNESS: (Loftily)
Only a little trouble with a young lady -- all a
great misunderstanding. (Shrugging) A matter of
little moment, really.

MILLAR: (Leaning forward)
And how old was this little lady, Father?

LOTT: I object!

JUDGE: (Still looking at the witness)
Take the answer.

WITNESS: (Fawning up at the Judge)
Must I really answer that, Judge? All this is so
kind of personal.

JUDGE: (Grimly)
You must answer.

WITNESS: (Facing Millar. Stumbling)
Why a -- -- they a -- -- they said she was only
fourteen. (Brightly blinking and nodding to the
Judge) But she was a big girl, really she was.

(Closing his eyes, wetting his lips. Softly, slowly) Ah, such a fine big girl.....

MILLAR: (Looking quickly around at Lott, faintly smiling. Then back at the witness)

At your trial you claimed you were insane, did you not, Father?

WITNESS: (Smiling)

Yes I did. (The smile vanishes) I mean, they told me later I did.

MILLAR: (Softly)

And that didn't work, did it, Father?

WITNESS: (Angrily)

No. You know it didn't. I've told you many times it didn't. You're violating a gentleman's confidence.

MILLAR: (Going swiftly, quietly on)

Now the real fact is, the whole case against you was a pack of lies, wasn't it? They framed you, didn't they, Father?

WITNESS: (Brightening, in surprised agreement, considerably relieved)

Why, yes, Mill -- yes -- that's just what they did. (He frowns and sighs at the thought of his injustice.)

MILLAR: (Slowly backing up towards his table)

Just as they're trying to frame me here today, isn't that right?

WITNESS:

(Defiantly)

You killed Mr. Krause.

MILLAR:

(Low voiced. Balancing the shears, shut)

Father, you say I drove these shears into Joe?

WITNESS:

Yes.

MILLAR:

(The shears now open)

You say I ran out of the line and punctured

Joe -- with these very shears?

WITNESS:

(Loudly)

Yes. Yes.

MILLAR:

Father, what were some of Joe's other names? --

little pet nicknames, you know.

(The WITNESS looks at the WARDEN and then at the enchanted fat juror, whose mouth is open, rapt.)

WITNESS:

(In a low voice)

Sometimes they called him the Wolf. Those who didn't like him. He was greatly misunderstood. Vastly.

MILLAR:

And what else?

WITNESS:

Joe the Squealer.

MILLAR:

Why did they call him that, Father?

WITNESS:

(Nervously)

He'd run to the screws -- hah -- the guards, with everything.

MILLAR:

And someone killed poor old Joe?

WITNESS: (Breathing deeply)

Yes -- -- you killed Joe -- -- I saw you -- I saw you!

(MILLAR slowly walks back to his table and leisurely pours and drinks a glass of water. The WITNESS, breathing deeply, sits with his white knuckles gripping and gripping his chair, staring at MILLAR. MILLAR walks back, close to the witness.)

MILLAR: (Swiftly)

Poor old Joe. It was bad they got him, wasn't it?

WITNESS: (Louder, quicker)

No -- no. He was a lousy stool. But you killed him. I saw you -- I saw you.....

MILLAR: (His voice is low, like a lullaby, a caress)

Now put yourself back there that afternoon, Father. The pigeons flying -- the setting sun slanting against the prison walls. And poor old Joe up there ahead, all red-necked and unsuspecting; me back of him; and you behind me. (Pause) Have you got it, Father?

WITNESS: (His chin has nearly sunk to his chest)

Yes, yes, yes.

MILLAR: (Louder. Full, rich, passionate. An aria.)

Father, how did I kill Joe? Did I twist the shears in him this way -- (illustrating) -- or did I drive them straight in! -- right up to the hilt! (Millar had somehow lurched, stumbled toward the witness.)

WITNESS:

(Shrilling like a pig)

No, no, no! (Chattering) It wasn't you, Mill. No, no. It's all a goddamned lie. (Stammering) You -- you didn't get Joe -- the dirty lousy squealer. I -- I -- -- I don't know who did. (Wailing) Mill, I don't know! I don't know.....(His open jaw quivers. With his two hands he pushes his jaw shut. He sits there sobbing, cowering, quivering)

(MILLAR walks back and places the shears on LOTT'S table. He grins down at Lott, quickly winking at him. Then, swiftly composing his expression, he takes a few steps back, and turns to the JURY, pointing at the abject ZABORSKI trembling in the witness chair.)

MILLAR:

(Softly)

They don't know the poor old Father like I do. They haven't lived with him. To know him is to love him. They don't know that he sometimes gets sick here (tapping his head) and dreams -- and dreams.....(Millar bows his head. Then he stands straight, half facing the Judge, low voiced, throwing his hands out from his side.) That is all. That is my case.

(A profound sigh whistles throughout the courtroom, like escaping steam -- a coughing, a mopping of brows, and much shifting in seats. The fat juror is in great distress. MILLAR takes

his seat, drinks some water, and then quietly starts making a paper glider, showing no apparent interest in the proceedings. SAM, the guard, comes and leads the terrified ZABORSKI, by the arm, out the rear door.)

JUDGE: (Looking at Prosecutor Lott)

Is there any rebuttal?

(The WARDEN leans over and whispers earnestly to LOTT, nodding his head vigorously.)

LOTT: Yes, your Honor. I should like to call the Warden of the Prison. (The Warden ^{is sworn and} takes the stand. Millar continues folding his paper.) You're the warden of the state penitentiary located in this county?

WITNESS: (Firmly)

I am.

LOTT: And as such did you have occasion to cause a large number of witnesses, all inmates, to be brought here today, at the subpoena and request of the defendant, Millar? -- to testify for him?

WITNESS: I did. (Waving out at the audience) There are over forty of them back there now, under heavy guard. Millar said they were all eye witnesses. (Then triumphantly, looking significantly from the Judge to the jury) And, mind you, there were only seventeen men in that line that day -- the day Millar murdered Mr. Krause, and he has not called even one of them! (He looks accusingly at Millar, who does not look up.)

LOTT: How was Millar's general conduct in prison?

WITNESS: (Eagerly and rapidly)

I consider him the most vicious, dangerous man in the entire institution.

MILLAR: (Quietly. Not looking up)

I beg to object, your Honor -- and move that the question and answer be stricken. My reputation and character have not been properly put in issue at this trial.

JUDGE: (Looking severely at the prosecutor and the witness)

The objection is most certainly sustained! (To the reporter) You will strike the question and answer. (To the jury) And the jury will entirely disregard the question and the answer. (To Lott) Mr. Lott, do you have any further rebuttal?

(The WARDEN smiles falsely up at the JUDGE and then glares malevolently over at MILLAR, who is placidly folding his papers.)

LOTT: (Flustered)

Yes -- I mean -- -- I guess that's all. No, no further rebuttal, your Honor.

JUDGE: (To Millar)

Do you have any questions?

MILLAR: (After a pause, looking up surprised)

Why no, your Honor. (Shaking his head) I have said all I have to say.

JUDGE:

The prosecuting attorney will then proceed with his argument.

(Young PROSECUTOR LOTT, obviously flustered, motions the WARDEN to leave the stand. They hold a hurried whispered conference at Lott's table, Lott snatching up papers, keeping some, discarding others. He grabs the shears and rapidly walks up before the JURY and begins his argument.)

LOTT:

Your Honor and gentlemen of the jury: It was difficult for me to try this case with a man who would not have an attorney -- who is not trained in the law. (Several of the jurors grin openly at this, and most of them look at Millar, who is calmly rearranging his exhibit of paper flowers, hats, and what not.)

I submit that the evidence shows that the defendant, David Millar, deliberately murdered Joseph Krause on the day in question. (The curtain starts slowly to descend.) Why, we have the sworn testimony of a man of the cloth against the mere word of this man (pointing with the shears) who has blandly admitted to you that he once robbed his fellows to live. (Millar shifts a paper hat for a glider.)

We must have justice! We must not let an injustice go unpunished. (The curtain drops lower. The entire jury is watching Millar now,

absorbed.) We must not let men decide for themselves when they may kill their fellows. (The curtain has nearly fallen. Lott is shouting, waving the shears, now, rushing on frantically.) We must have justice -- -- must preserve sanctity of human life -- -- justice -- -- law -- order -- Must have justice! -- Justice! -- Justice! -- -- --

CURTAIN

B U S Y F I N G E R S

A C T T W O

S C E N E I

SCENE:

The WARDEN'S office, three months later. It is nighttime. The Warden is alone, sitting at his desk, anchored to a fat cigar. He is examining a large key through a reading glass. There are several black-jacks and a crudely made pistol lying on the desk. On one side of the desk stands a tall brass cuspidor. The Warden pauses occasionally, removes his cigar, and casually directs some target practice at this object, with indifferent success. In the background are a number of steel filing cabinets, on one of which stands the model of a sailing ship.

On the walls are photographs of prison baseball and football teams. There is a picture of the President and one of Abraham Lincoln. On the Warden's desk is a large silver-framed photograph, presumably of the governor, on which there is scrawled in big letters some appropriate words of endearment that politicians employ, one to the other. At the rear is a large panelled wooden door on which is printed the words: TO CELL BLOCKS.

PROSECUTOR LOTT comes in from the left, carrying two books. He is accompanied by SAM, the

guard. Sam bustles over and takes a position near the Warden, importantly shifting his holster, so that the Warden is flanked on one side by Sam and on the other by the brass cuspidor. Lott and the Warden shake hands, the Warden remaining seated.

WARDEN: (Briskly)

I'm sorry to have to call you down here this time of night, Mr. Prosecutor, but we've got to get to the bottom of this plot at once. And you can help us.

LOTT: (Smiling)

What plot is that?

WARDEN: A plot to escape. (He lowers his voice and his head, glancing furtively from left to right. Sam glances with him.) And the dope is they were going to get me on the way out.

LOTT: H'm. That is bad. Why of course, I'll help if I can. (Pointing at the desk) What's that?

WARDEN: Nearly completed pistol made of a tobacco tin and lead foil.

LOTT: And these? (He weighs one in his hand.)

WARDEN: Black-jacks. (He reflectively rubs the back of his head.) Made from the foil of shaving and tooth-paste tubes.

LOTT: (Picking up the large key and holding it up to the light)
What's the key for?

WARDEN: Fits Millar's cell-block. Same stuff.

LOTT: Millar!

WARDEN: Yes, Millar. We caught the bastard cold turkey this time -- found all these things on him. (Lott starts back.) No, no. Don't be alarmed, I won't ask you to try to convict him for it. But I thought you could help us.

LOTT: Millar? How can I help you?

WARDEN: We're trying to find out if he was alone in this deal. He won't talk to us. But the bastard likes you -- he told us so after the jury came out and said "NOT GUILTY." (Grinning) You remember that little trial we had, don't you?

LOTT: (Smiling sheepishly) Can I ever forget it.

WARDEN: Well -- we thought you could help us. He'll talk to you.

LOTT: (Uncertainly)

Why -- -- it's funny it should be Millar.....

(Holding out the two books he is carrying) I had brought these down for him -- -- --

WARDEN: (Interrupting)

Fine. Fine! That'll give you an in -- gain his confidence. (Grinning slyly. Sam grins with him.) You see how it is? You see how it is, Mr. Lott?

(Sam the guard has been gradually inching over until he is very close to the Warden. The Warden suddenly turns on Sam, exclaiming petulantly) For Christ's sake, Sam, don't sit on my lap! (Sam,

crushed, bounces back, re-arranges his artillery,
slowly composes his ruffled dignity.)

LOTT: (Slowly, still uncertainly, to no one in particular)
Yes.....I would like to see the man.....this man,
Millar. (To the Warden) How did you know -- how
did you catch him?

WARDEN: (Wagging his finger at Lott, grinning)
You lawyers are always asking questions.

LOTT: (Somewhat sharply)
Well, if you don't want to -- --

WARDEN: (Interrupting, placatingly)
There, there, Mr. Prosecutor. Sometimes the ten-
der little shoots of the prison grapevine -- (He
points, grinning, at the door into the prison) --
come trailing right in that door.

LOTT: (Frowning, and more sharply)
Cut out the riddles! Who squealed on Millar?

WARDEN: (Still slyly grinning)
You see, this is a place of lasting friendships.
For example, there is that beautiful friendship
that exists between Millar and our friend Stanley
Zaborski, the clergyman.....

LOTT: (Relaxing, and smiling somewhat)
So old sourpuss squealed on Millar?

WARDEN: (In mock reproval)
If you must employ such harsh words-- yes.

LOTT: Where's Millar?

WARDEN: (Briskly)
Been in solitary confinement -- -- since our
basket-luncheon up in court.

LOTT: Why do you keep him in the bull pen?

WARDEN: (Smilingly shocked)
You will call a spade a spade, won't you?
(Seriously) Lott, we must discipline the bastard.
He's dangerous. We've got to break him. (Smiling
again, and tilting back in his chair) And as dean
of this exclusive finishing school I must sustain
the morale of my other little charges. And their
morals, too. Got to watch their development
through the three stages: adolescence, puberty,
adultery, you know. Impressionable little fellows.

(SAM grins broadly and appreciatively
over this exchange, again edging close to the
WARDEN, who sends him scuttling with a frown. LOTT
stands half perplexed, half scowling, through this
proceeding.)

LOTT: (Slowly, in a low voice)
I'd like to see this man, Millar. (Louder) Yes,
I'll see him. Can I see him alone, tonight?

WARDEN: (Turning to Sam)
Sam! Take Mr. Lott out to the Pen to see Millar.

SAM: (Electrified, bustling like an old woman herding geese)
Yes, Sir. Right away, Sir, Mr. Warden. (Sam shoos
Lott over to the door marked: TO CELL BLOCKS. Sam

pushes a button on the side of the door. Lott stands, with his back to the Warden and Sam, waiting, looking at one of the photographs on the wall by the door. The Warden silently beckons Sam back to his desk and, still sitting, whispers in his ear, unseen by Lott. Sam nods his head vigorously.) Yes, Sir, Mr. Warden, I'll listen to every -- -- -- (The Warden jabs Sam in the ribs, as Lott, hearing their voices, turns and looks at them wonderingly, but uncomprehendingly.)

WARDEN: (To Sam, blandly)

And have the big car at my door at nine in the morning.

SAM: Car? (The fog lifts.) Yes, of course, at nine in the morning.

(The door is opened by a uniformed and armed guard, from the other side, revealing a steel-barred second door which the first door has hidden. As LOTT and SAM are about to pass into the prison proper, the WARDEN speaks to Lott.)

WARDEN: (Smiling)

By the way, Mr. Prosecutor -- (Lott turns) -- after the trial, after Millar's acquittal, on the way back to the institution, Millar told one of the guards there were four Methodists and two Baptists on the jury.

LOTT: (Wonderingly)
Methodists? Baptists? (Then smiling wryly) Was
he right?

WARDEN: (Gleefully)
Hell, no. The bastard missed one Baptist -- I
checked it later myself.

(The WARDEN laughs uproariously as
LOTT, waving goodbye and smiling ruefully, passes
into the prison, followed by SAM and the other
GUARD, who slowly closes the door. The Warden
stands there alone, laughing uncontrollably,
holding his belly.)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE II

SCENE:

The prison bull pen, five minutes later. The entire stage is the bull pen, a high, dark stone chamber. Out of the right wings immerges the comparatively low cell block, like a series of connected cages set in the large room. The cell block runs out to about the center of the bull pen. The cells are very narrow. Millar's cell is the corner one at the left end, in the center of the stage. It has open bars in the front and around the corner. The third and fourth walls of his cell are covered with steel plates.

A strong spotlight plays on Millar's cell. The cell to the right of his is completely covered with canvas. There is also a spotlight playing on the steel-plated door into the bull pen, situated on the right wall, in front of the cell block. The large chamber is a violent contrast of light and shadow.

MILLAR can be seen lying face down in his cell, his head on his arm, resting on some wooden planks. The only other objects in his cell are a galvanized water pail and a seatless toilet. Intermittent snores, yawns, groans and coughs of unseen inmates can be heard during the entire scene.

The door into the bull pen is opened and SAM enters, followed by LOTT. They stand there silently. The place is throbbingly quiet, like a forest hush at night. The entrance spotlight accompanies Lott and Sam as they slowly walk to Millar's cell. The moving spotlight momentarily discloses the entire cell block as they walk along. Most of the cells are covered with canvas. As Sam and Lott advance, the moving spotlight discloses an inmate clinging to the bars of his cell, high up, arms and legs spread, like a great bat. He stares the visitors out of sight. Lott does not see him. This inmate remains thus during the entire scene. Most of the other inmates are lying down. One of them, the third cell from Millar's, can be seen noiselessly pacing rapidly back and forth in his cell. He pays no attention to the visitors. He can be dimly seen padding back and forth, catlike, during the entire scene.

Millar does not move as Sam and Lott reach his cell. Sam carefully looks in at Millar. Then Sam, whispering to Lott, gesticulating, pointing at Millar, Lott, himself, and behind Millar's cell, tiptoes around the rear of Millar's cell and out of sight. Lott stands there, tightly holding the books he has brought for Millar.

LOTT:

(Softly)

Millar. (Millar does not move. Louder.) Millar!

(MILLAR stands up, blinks his eyes, but otherwise does not seem surprised. The man has changed. He has a straggly beard and moustache. He is thinner, paler, and seems at once taller and more stooped. He is dressed in a one-piece skin-tight buttonless gray denim coverall, which fits him like a suit of underwear. The sleeves and legs are too short. Millar comes forward and thrusts both hands through the bars of his cell, clasping LOTT'S hand warmly.)

MILLAR:

(Smiling, speaking in his low rich baritone voice)

Hello, Lott. I'm so glad you came. I've been expecting you.

LOTT:

How long you been here?

MILLAR:

(Still smiling)

Ninety-one days. Ever since that day, Lott, the day we met.

LOTT:

Yes, Millar, I've wanted to ask you -- why did you subpoena all those inmates as your witnesses -- and then not use any of them?

MILLAR:

(Grinning broadly)

Oh, hell, Lott. I knew there were only seventeen men in the line that day, so I subpoenaed twice as many because I knew that was the only way the Warden'd let any of them come -- thinking he would trap them into perjury, the swollen fox.

LOTT:

(Laughing)

I believe you're a rascal, Millar. But why subpoena any of them?

MILLAR:

(Soberly, reminiscently)

Yes, it was a great day for us; for the boys and for me. (Smiling) You see, Lott, we needed the change -- they needed the outing. That's why.

LOTT:

(Indicating Millar's clothing)

That's quite a garment you're wearing. Seems a little snug even for you -- and I wouldn't say you've got any fatter.

MILLAR:

(Looking down at his thin legs, smiling faintly, then back at Lott. He speaks slowly.)

It seems, Lott, that in this state, where you -- the free ones -- think that death is the worst punishment which may be visited on man;

. (more slowly) it seems, Lott, that you won't even give us the option of choosing death to this (widening his hands at his surroundings). That is why they dress us in these monkey suits -- so we can't take them off and use them for a hangman's noose. (Millar is staring intently at Lott. Lott looks away. Millar continues, more brightly.) Yes, Lott, the only choice they give us, in this room, is to wear these or go naked. And it does get a little drafty at times -- me being on the corner of the principal intersection.

LOTT: (Nervously, changing the subject)
It is drafty -- Oh say, Millar -- I brought some books for you.

MILLAR: Thanks, Lott. What are they? (He takes the books.)

LOTT: "Plutarch's Lives." "Madame Bovary."

MILLAR: Fine. They're favorites of mine. Especially the latter. Whose translations?

LOTT: Yes, damn good books.

MILLAR: Flaubert -- a truly great writer. (He looks at Lott with a half smile.)

LOTT: Yes, Flaubert is a master. He's got Hemingway beat a mile.

MILLAR: (Smiling broadly)
Didn't you like the way Emma left her three children, at the end -- and ran away with the clown in the circus?

LOTT: (Uncertainly, nervously)
Say, that was sure great. Marvellous delineation there. Great guy, this Flaubert. One hot book.

MILLAR: (Laying the books on his wooden bed. Then, soberly)
Lott, you're a pretty good fellow yourself. (Pause. Then smiling) Maybe when you get to be governor you'll give me a job in the prison library -- or even pardon me.

LOTT: (Warmly)
If I ever run for governor I hope you'll pardon me.

(There is an awkward pause. Lott again changes the subject.) What do you do here all day? Where's your bed? Your bedding?

MILLAR: (Looking at the wooden planks on the cement floor)

This is the bridal suite; the wrestling mat. The beast is purged; they don't even trust me with nails now. (Millar's long fingers are playing on the bars, like on an awkward harp. He points up at the spotlight.) Those beautiful goddamn lights watch me day and night. They are my sun -- my moon and stars. (Smiling) And I'm their featured player.

LOTT: (Drawing closer, in a low voice)

Did you make those things the Warden just showed me?

MILLAR: (Brightening)

Why yes, sure. I can make lots of things.

LOTT: How did you make the key?

MILLAR: (Grinning)

Watched the guard. He used to wear the key hanging at his belt, passing by. (Pause. His face clouds. Then, slowly, looking at Lott) If you watch anything long enough, Lott, you can measure it.

LOTT: (Looking nervously around, then back at Millar, and in a low voice)

Tell me, Millar -- you were alone in this business, weren't you?

(SAM can now be seen peering around the rear of the cell. There is a long pause. MILLAR and LOTT stand looking at each other.)

MILLAR: (Deliberately winking at Lott)
No, Lott, there was another person in this. He was really the brains, the leader. His name was -- --

LOTT: (Shouting)
Don't tell it! Don't -- --

MILLAR: His name was Stanley Zaborski! (Lott is silent. Sam is almost falling down, leaning over, listening. Millar, still looking at Lott, cups his hand to his mouth, back at Sam and repeats) I say, Lott, the name is Stanley Zaborski -- -- a kind of a crack-pot clergyman.

LOTT: (Almost petulantly)
I heard you. I heard you. (Lott starts pacing in and out of the path of light.)

MILLAR: (In an awed voice, winking at Lott, shaking his head.)
Yup. A very dangerous man, this Zaborski. Swears he'll get the Warden yet. Says he's got his confidence, already. Shouldn't be allowed out of this rest-room for a single moment!
(SAM can be seen shaking his head wisely, like one receiving important information. He retires behind the cell, out of sight.)

LOTT: (Standing before Millar again. He speaks in a low voice.)
Please, Millar. Do be serious. I want to talk with you, man.

MILLAR: (Seriously)
Yes, Lott, it's fine to talk with you. You'll never know how fine it is.

LOTT: (Quietly)

Did you kill Joe Krause?

MILLAR: (Looking searchingly at Lott. There is a long pause.
Then, in a low voice)

Yes, Lott, I did.

LOTT: Why? (His voice rising) Tell me, Millar -- why?

MILLAR: (Very quietly)

He needed killing, Lott. Squealing was the least of his troubles. You know -- -- you know something of what goes on in prisons. (Lott nods) In the prison Joe Krause was known as the Wolf. He posed as the comforting friend, the father, of young first-termers. (His voice rising) It was unclean. Unclean! I couldn't stand to see it go on! (Shrugging his shoulders, spreading his hands) So I killed him, that's all. (Pause. Lott says nothing. Millar, quickly, anxiously) You understand me, don't you, Lott? -- You understand what I am saying? -- (Lott still says nothing. Millar rushes on, in a veritable spate of words) Tell me, Lott -- tell me that you'd have done the same -- don't lie to me. I haven't lied to you. Tell me it's only an accident that I am here and that you -- you are there. Oh, give me that Lott -- tell me you understand. (Millar is nearly sobbing.)

LOTT: (Half hysterically)

O, Christ, I would, I would have! I understand, Millar, I do so clearly see and understand. (He

puts his arm across his eyes. They stand there silently. Then Lott, more composed, continues) Please, Millar, tell me what you do, man? The days? The nights?

MILLAR: (Still deeply moved)

In here -- most of the fellows.....They're crazy. In the night it is worse. Laughing and chattering. Wailing and barking.....Yes, Lott, some of them bark. In the nighttime some of them bark.

LOTT: (Softly)

It's nighttime now, Millar. Didn't you know?

MILLAR: (Drawing his hand across his eyes. Hesitatingly, uncertainly)

Why, yes -- -- I guess you're right.....(Very slowly) I guess -- I guess I am beginning to forget, to forget -- It's all I had left.....

LOTT: (Still softly)

But what do you do, Millar?

MILLAR: (Smiling)

I pray, Lott. Do you know the Lord's Prayer?

LOTT: Yes, Millar. I know that. Of course. Do you?

MILLAR: (Looking up to the light, clasping the bars, his eyes shining, his lips smiling)

I say that, over and over, and think about it. It is a beautiful thing. The thought is beautiful -- so full of the simple dignity of human life. Then I get thinking of so many people saying that --

all over the world, all of the time -- and I know it is because they have found it so beautiful, they have forgotten about us, here, in this prison, in this room.....

(MILLAR closes his eyes and stands there. LOTT'S voice sounds muffled and choked when he speaks.)

LOTT: Oh, Millar, can't I bring you something more?

MILLAR: (After a pause, smiling slyly)

You might bring me a beautiful woman. After all it's been eight years.

LOTT: Must she be beautiful?

MILLAR: (No longer smiling)

A veritable princess of beauty -- I have been starved so very long.....

LOTT: (Smiling)

I'll smuggle her down in the next batch of books. (Pause) But let me bring you something else, too, Millar. Something to occupy you until I can get you out of this -- this room.

MILLAR: (Echoing)

Get me out of here? Get me out of here. (There is a long pause) All right, Lott. I'd like to make something for you. (Looking at his hands, flexing his fingers) I like to work with my hands. You send me some raffia -- like we used to weave when we were kids -- and something to write with.

LOTT: Yes?

MILLAR: (Brightly)

You square all that with the Warden, and I'll make you a fine belt. And I'll write down for you how I did it; and some other thoughts that have come to me in here.

LOTT: Fine. Yes. Of course, Millar. I'll send those to you.

(The top half of the canvas covering the cell next to Millar's is suddenly lifted, disclosing the naked head and torso of a huge NEGRO, who stares up at the light, unseeing.)

NEGRO: (Chanting)

Quiet am requested, gennemen, foh de benefit ob doze what hab retahed! (The Negro drops the canvas.)

LOTT: (Quickly clasping Millar's hand)

Goodbye, Millar. Good luck. I swear I'll get you out of here.

MILLAR: Lott, goodbye. I'm sure you will. You're a fine fellow. Goodbye, Lott.

(Then quickly, almost sobbing, MILLAR turns and flings himself face down on his cot of boards. LOTT moves out of the path of light as SAM comes tiptoeing elaborately around from behind the cell. As Sam tiptoes past the front of Millar's cell, watching Lott, Millar rolls over and grins at his retreating figure. His face suddenly clouds

again, and he buries his head in his arms, and his shoulders shake. The spotlight follows Lott and Sam back to the door, briefly exposing to view the pacing inmate and the other one still clinging there, spreading at the bars of his cell. As they leave the bull pen there is a burst of wild gobbling laughter from an unseen inmate.)

CURTAIN

A C T T W O

SCENE III

SCENE: The Warden's office, a week later. The scene is the same as Scene I of Act Two. The WARDEN and SAM are playing checkers, sitting very still. Sam, with a flourish of inspiration, finally makes a move, whereupon the Warden, with a shrill of delight, hops a king around the board, and the game is ended. The Warden looks at his watch.

WARDEN: Adjust your girdle. He'll be here any minute.

(SAM arises and struggles to get into his Sam Browne holster. The WARDEN puts away the checkers, carefully sniffs, snips, blows, mouths, and ignites a cigar. A CLERK comes in and timidly interrupts this ritual.)

CLERK: Mr. Lott is outside, Sir. Says you are expecting him, Sir.

WARDEN: Wait till Sam gets into his truss. (Sam is still wrestling with himself. The clerk bows and waits. The Warden finally has to help Sam into his harness. The Warden speaks, with jocular gravity) Sam, one of these days I'm going to send you back on wall patrol. You're getting so damned pregnant you couldn't proctor a girls' school. Or maybe that's where you belong.

SAM: (Grinning fatuously)

Aw, Warden, you wouldn't do that!

WARDEN:

(To clerk)

Send Mr. Lott in.

(LOTT comes in, dressed in a light suit, a jaunty felt hat, wearing a flower in his lapel. He is carrying a large bundle of books, secured by a leather belt.)

LOTT:

(Cheerfully)

Hello Warden, Sam. What's up this time -- another escape?

(LOTT places the books on the desk, shakes hands with the WARDEN and nods at SAM.)

WARDEN:

(After a pause. Slowly)

No, not an escape this time.

LOTT:

(Brightly)

How's our friend, Millar? I have some more books for him. Did he finish weaving the belt he was going to make me?

(The WARDEN and SAM look at each other, smiling faintly.)

WARDEN:

Yes, he's finished, Mr. Lott. And there are some other things for you, too. Sam! (Sam, the alert, bustles over to one of the steel filing cabinets and takes out a large envelope and smiling broadly, hands it to Lott. Lott reaches into the envelope and pulls out a long belt woven of raffia. He stands there holding the belt somewhat uncertainly.)

(There is a long silence, as LOTT
looks at one and then the other.)

LOTT:

(In a ringing voice)

The word, gentlemen, is "hanged." David Millar has
been hanged!

(LOTT turns away from them, facing the
audience, while the WARDEN and SAM gesticulate and
grin at each other. Lott, holding the shears in
one hand and the raffia belt in the other, steps
forward and half raises both hands, palms up, like
an offering. His lips are silently phrasing the
Lord's Prayer as the curtain falls.)

CURTAIN