

**DAY SIX**

**A Play in Two Acts**

**By Martin Halpern**

**Copyright 1986**

**Revised, 2010**

**Characters:**

**DAVID PORTER, middle forties**

**ELEANOR MANNING, middle thirties**

**Scene:**

**A one-room studio apartment on East Second Street in Manhattan. Shabbily furnished, but clean. Down Right, the only window, with an easy chair beside it. Up Left of the chair, a brick-and-boards bookcase, packed with books in disorderly heaps. Up Center, a dresser. On the dresser, a cassette tape recorder, several cassettes, scattered piles of paper, and a large Bible. Left of the dresser, the front door, with a key-operated double deadlock. Left of the door, a kitchenette with an eating table, a small stove and refrigerator, and a dish cabinet. On the table, a box of assorted donuts. On the stove, a coffee pot heating up. Down Left of the kitchenette, a daybed with a small table beside it. On the table, a telephone, a pad of paper and a pen.**

**Time:**

**Late October, 1986. About 10 A.M.**

## ACT I

At rise, DAVID PORTER, wearing old chinos and a T-shirt, stands speaking into a hand microphone attached by a cord to the cassette machine on the dresser. He is nearing the end of an improvised sermon in the style of an evangelical preacher. The words come out spontaneously, fluently, and in a more or less southern accent. As he speaks, he moves about the stage a good deal, gesticulating at an imagined congregation surrounding him on three sides.

## PORTER

An' so it was pride, brothers 'n sisters, the deadliest sin of 'em all, that turned Lucifer, Son-o'-the-Morning and Angel-of-Light, inta Satan, Prince o' Darkness, an' got 'im hurled outa Heaven f'r darin' t'rise up in revolt against the Almighty! An' ever since then he's been goin' up an' down the length an' breadth o' this world tryin' t'satisfy that pride by seducin' the minds an' the hearts an' the flesh o' mankind inta his worship an' his service! An' he's done pretty well f'r 'imself, hasn't he? Jus' look around you t'day an' see how ev'rywhere in this world the servants o' Satan multiply an' are fruitful – the murderers an' liars an' hypocrites, an' the pimps an' whores an' sodomists an' perverts of ev-ry persuasion, an' the drug-pushers an' pornographers, an' worst of all the proud blaspheming cynics who mock an' defile an' desecrate all that's sacred and holy and in keepin' with God's word and God's will! Well what are you gonna do about that, brothers 'n sisters? Are you gonna join 'em or fight 'em? 'Cause there's no other choice, y' know! You either join up with Satan or you fight 'im, inside y'rselves an' out there in the world he's fast takin' over! An' the time f'r that choice is right now, this very minute, before it's too late! 'Cause sure as I'm standin' here, the day is comin' soon –

(He grabs the Bible off the dresser and brandishes it)

make no mistake about that, the day is comin' very soon when as the Holy Scripture tells us, God's judgment's gonna strike “as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west!” An' He's gonna line up on His left hand all who've joined up with Satan, an' He's gonna say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!” But on His right hand – oh, on His bright and bountiful right hand! – He's gonna gather all who've fought Satan with all their might an' overcome him, an' *them* – oh *them* by a flick of His divine will – He's gonna raise straight up into the everlasting bliss of Life Eternal!

**(He drops the Bible on the dresser and crosses quickly down to the edge of the stage)**

**Now I don' know about you, an' you, an' you, but I know where *I* wanna be when that great day comes. I wanna stand among those who can say, an' mean it, an' prove it by how they've lived their lives, "Yes Lord, yes yes yes, it's You I've worshipped, You I've served! All praise an' glory an' thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father who planted His Holy Spirit inside me to combat the seductions an' abominations of Satan! Oh yes, Lord, glory glory glory t' You only, now an' forever, Amen an' Halleluiah!" Come, say it with me, brothers an' sisters, shout it out loud with me an' mean it, mean it, mean it before it's too late! Shout yes Lord, You Lord, only You! Oh yes Lord, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!**

**(He stands a moment, somewhat spent)**

**Whew.**

**(He crosses to the cassette machine, presses the Stop button, lays down the microphone, ejects the cassette, put it into its case, and tosses it down on the dresser. Then he crosses to the kitchenette, pours some coffee into a mug, grabs a donut, eats it, swigs down some coffee, and crosses back to the dresser)**

**Okay, next order.**

**(He takes the top sheet off the pile of papers and scans it)**

**Mmm.**

**(He drops the sheet, grabs another cassette, inserts it into the machine, presses the Record button, picks up the microphone, crosses to the armchair, sits, thinks a moment, then speaks into the microphone in a completely different manner than before – quiet, dignified, urbane)**

**The text of this morning's sermon is those splendidly enigmatic verses in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew in which –**

**(The telephone rings)**

**Shit.**

**(He rises, crosses to the dresser, presses the Stop button, drops the microphone, crosses to the telephone and answers it)**

**Yes?**

**(His voice brightens but his face does not)**

**Ah, good morning, Reverend. – Fine, thank you. And you? – Good.**

**(He listens a moment)**

**Well I'm glad you liked it. That's always gratifying to hear. But I'm sure it was your delivery as much as my words which so affected your congregation. – Oh yes, I got the check. Thank you.**

**(He listens again)**

Mm, well I've got a bit of a backlog now, but-- When would you need it by? -- Sorry, I've got four other sermons due on Thursday. Friday is the earliest I can -- Ah, good. Any particular text? -- Ah, Nehemiah, Chapter Four, Verse Ten. "And Judah said, the strength of the burden bearers is decayed, and there is much... rubbish." What? -- Oh yes, almost total recall when it comes to Scripture. -- Yes, I'll have it in your hands by Friday, if that typing service doesn't foul things up. They haven't always been on time lately with the transcripts of my tapes. Well, charity, Revered, charity. Anyway, I'll do my best. -- Oh no trouble at all. My pleasure. God be with you.

(He hangs up, crosses back to the dresser, presses the Rewind button on the cassette machine, and when it stops re-winding presses the Play button. We hear the playback of his voice: "The text of this morning's sermon is those splendidly enigmatic verses from the Gospel According to Saint Matthew in which" -- phone ring -- "Shit." He presses the Stop button, rewinds to the start, presses the Record button and picks up the microphone. He stands a moment, at a loss, then presses the Stop button)

Engine's gone cold.

(He ejects the cassette, fumbles around on the dresser for another one, finds it and inserts it into the machine)

Okay, Johann Sebastian, get me going again. Fill the air with Christian joy.

(He presses the Play button. We hear, fairly loudly, the *Cum Sancto Spiritu* chorus from Bach's B-Minor Mass.)

A-ah!

(He stands listening, with obvious pleasure. The doorbell sounds. He is too absorbed in the music to respond. After a moment it sounds again)

Shit.

(Calling)

Who is sit?

(No response. He presses the Stop button and calls again)

Who is it?

MRS. MANNING (Off)

I'm from the typing agency!

PORTER

Oh! About time!

(He takes a key from his pocket and crosses to the door)

MRS. MANNING

**Does David Porter --?**

**(He unlocks the double deadlock and opens the door.  
Mrs. Manning, wearing a trench coat and shoulder purse,  
stands with a manila envelope in one hand and a cassette  
case in the other)**

**Does David Porter live here?**

**PORTER**

**(Pocketing the key)**

**Well hello. You're not one of the delivery boys.**

**MRS. MANNING**

***You're David Porter?***

**PORTER**

**So it seems.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(With admiration)**

**Oh!**

**PORTER**

**Well don't just stand there in that dismal hallway. Come in.**

**(She enters. He closes the door behind her. She stands taking  
in the contents of the apartment. He stands taking her in. Then  
she turns to him quickly and holds out the envelope and cassette)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I know this was promised yesterday.**

**PORTER**

**As a matter of fact, it was.**

**(He takes them)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**It's my fault, not the agency's.**

**PORTER**

**Oh?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I was supposed to have it done by four o'clock so they could deliver it to you by closing time**

—

**PORTER**

**Ah! You're one of the typists!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes. But one of my children suddenly took sick —**

**PORTER**

**Oh. Sorry to hear that.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Nothing serious as it turned out. He's back in school today, thank heaven.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. Amen to that.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes. But I did have to get him to the doctor, and there was a long wait, and by the time I got home to my typewriter it was past closing time. So this morning, as soon as the agency opened, I phoned and got your address and told them I'd rush it straight over to you myself.**

**PORTER**

**Well that was thoughtful of you.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I don't live far from here. The West Village.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. A nicer neighborhood.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**This hasn't caused you some great inconvenience, has it?**

**PORTER**

**Oh no – so long as it's here now.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well that's a relief.**

**PORTER**

**(Gesturing at the envelope)**

**You've proofread this?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I certainly have!**

**PORTER**

**Thoroughly?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I read it, and played the tape while reading it, twice last night and once this morning.**

**PORTER**

**Three times? Well that's certainly above and beyond the call.**

**(He drops the envelope and cassette on the dresser)**

**Then I'm sure there aren't any typos.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Believe me, there aren't.**

**PORTER**

**(Turning back to her)**

**Are you the one who types all my-- ?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I wish I were! But that's the first tape of yours they've given me. And I played it back that many times, not just to proofread – once would have been enough for *that* – but because – well, because I found it very powerful.**

**PORTER**

**Oh?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**It really reached me, deeply, and in a very personal way.**

**PORTER**

(Awkwardly)

Well thank you.

**MRS. MANNING**

Thank *you!*

**PORTER**

Uh -- you're not a native New Yorker, are you?

**MRS. MANNING**

No. I'm originally from Nebraska. I – *we* – moved here five years ago, when my –  
(Slight hesitation, which he takes note of)  
my husband was transferred, by his company, to its New York office.

**PORTER**

I see. Well that explains it.

**MRS. MANNING**

Explains what?

**PORTER**

Well few *native* females as attractive as *you* would venture so fearlessly into a building like this one, and into *any* strange man's apartment, in *this* city.

**MRS. MANNING**

(With a small laugh)

Oh neither would *I*, ordinarily.

**PORTER**

Well that's a relief.

**MRS. MANNING**

I confess that when they gave me the address, I thought: that's strange, East Second Street between Avenue A and B? But walking here, and remembering all the compassion in that sermon, I realized this *would* be the kind of neighborhood you'd choose to live and preach in.

**PORTER**

**(Very awkwardly)**

**I see.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Putting out her hand)**

**Well it certainly is good meeting the man behind the voice.**

**PORTER**

**(Taking the hand)**

**Well it's good meeting *you*, Mrs. – uh –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Manning.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. Mrs. *what* Manning, if I may -- ?**

**ELEANOR**

**Eleanor.**

**PORTER**

**Ah.**

**(Realizing he is still holding her hand, which she is trying gently to remove)**

**Oh. Sorry.**

**(He lets go of her hand)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**That's all right.**

**PORTER**

**Uh-- would you care for a cup of coffee, Eleanor, before you -- ?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes! I would!**

**PORTER**

**Then do take your coat off and –**

**(Gesturing at the armchair)**

**make yourself as comfortable as you can.**

**(He crosses to the kitchenette. She crosses to the dresser, opens his Bible, peers quickly at the title page, closes it, then crosses to the armchair, takes off her shoulder purse and coat, and lays them on the arm of the chair. She is wearing a plain skirt and loose-fitting sweater. Porter watches as she sits in the chair, carefully pulling her skirt down over her knees)**

**PORTER**

**(Pouring coffee into a mug)**

**Do you take cream, Eleanor? Milk? Sugar?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No. Nothing, thank you.**

**PORTER**

**That's a relief. I don't have any cream, milk or sugar.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(With a small laugh)**

**Oh.**

**(He crosses to her and hands her the mug)**

**Thank you.**

**PORTER**

**(Watching her sip the coffee, and assuming the manner of the minister she thinks he is)**

**How many children do you have, Eleanor?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Three. One boy in second grade, one in first – he's the one who took sick yesterday – and a little girl in kindergarten.**

**(She lays down the mug, opens her purse, pulls out a photograph and holds it out to him. He takes it and looks it over)**

**PORTER**

**Hmm!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Neil, Kevin and Vickie.**

**PORTER**

**Handsome boys! And the girl – Vickie – looks a lot like you.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**So I'm told.**

**PORTER**

**(Handing the photograph back to her)**

**Second grade, first grade, and kindergarten. You had them one right after the other.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Putting it back in her purse)**

**One right after the other.**

**PORTER**

**You must be a Roman Catholic.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well yes, I am.**

**PORTER**

**Yet you don't happen to wear a wedding band.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You've noticed that.**

**PORTER**

**Are you ... widowed?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No. Divorced.**

**PORTER**

**Really? A Catholic, and divorced?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I wasn't Catholic *then*. Only since.**

**PORTER**

**Ah! A convert!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**In the wake of a failed marriage, you –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**Sought comfort and solace in –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**And have found it?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Sometimes.**

**PORTER**

**Only sometimes?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**The kind of faith I heard on that tape – that's something I feel only occasionally.**

**PORTER**

**I see.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yesterday – last night – before I sat down to transcribe your sermon – was one of those times when my faith was not very strong.**

**PORTER**

**Why? Your sick child?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well -- mainly, my priest.**

**PORTER**

**Oh? What about your priest?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Lately, at Mass and Confession, and the few times I've been to see him in his office, he's seemed so ... apathetic, like he's just going through the motions, if you know what I mean.**

**PORTER**

**Yes, I do know what you mean.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**But then –**

**PORTER**

**The strength of the burden bearers *is* decayed, hm?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Excuse me?**

**PORTER**

**“The strength of the burden bearers is decayed, and there is much rubbish.” Nehemiah, Chapter Four, Verse Ten.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Oh.**

**(Reflecting)**

**“The strength of the burden bearers is – “ Yes, that just about says it for my poor priest.**

**PORTER**

**Alas. But I interrupted you. You were saying? “But then – “?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well then I turned on that tape and picked up my pen to get it down in shorthand – I always do that before typing – and I expected it to be just another dreary routine job. But instead -- ! Well all I can say is, I envy the congregation that has you as its minister.**

**PORTER**

**Mm. Well thank you again, Eleanor. But you're neglecting your coffee.**

**(She picks up the mug and sips from it)**

**How long? Since you ... completed your conversion?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Thirteen months tomorrow.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. And ... since you completed your divorce?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Two years and two months.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. I take it you get – if I'm not becoming too personal – adequate alimony?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No. None.**

**PORTER**

**Then surely adequate child support.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Oh, just having my freedom has been enough.**

**PORTER**

**Hm! It was that bad, was it?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**And of course, the children.**

**PORTER**

**Of course. But without child support –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I manage. My husband did leave us the apartment, rent-stabilized. And I do take in a lot of this typing.**

**PORTER**

**Which, dreary though it is, you can do at home, and still look after Neil, Kevin and Vickie.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Exactly.**

**PORTER**

**But there must be a lot of scrimping and saving in that rent-stabilized apartment. Much doing without.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Of course. But as you said in that sermon, “there are deprivations which stunt the spirit, and deprivations which *enrich* the spirit.”**

**PORTER**

**Hm! Is that how I put it?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Word for word.**

**PORTER**

**Hm!**

**(He crosses back to the kitchenette and picks up the coffee pot)**

**More coffee?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No thank you.**

**(He pours some coffee into his mug and stands sipping it)**

**I wondered all night which denomination *you* were.**

**PORTER**

**All night? You thought about that all night long?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well, for *much* of the night. Which denomination *are* you?**

**PORTER**

**Well, as a matter of fact, the same as you, Eleanor.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You are?**

**PORTER**

**Only, by the chance of birth, not the higher *choice* of conversion.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(She lays down her coffee mug, rises and crosses to the dresser)**

**But this is a King James Bible, not a Catholic Bible.**

**PORTER**

**Ah, you've noticed that.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**And the wording in your sermon didn't exactly *sound* Catholic.**

**PORTER**

**Well you might say I *am* rather ecumenical.**

**(He lays down his mug and crosses back into the room.**

**Trying to lighten the tone)**

**Say, have you heard the one about this very ecumenical Catholic priest and the Protestant minister at one of those inter-faith council meetings? "After all," says the priest to the minister, "we both worship the same God. You in your way, and I in His."**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Laughing )**

**That's very good! You in –**

**PORTER**

**Your way –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**And I in –**

**PORTER**

**His!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Wonderful!**

**(They laugh together for a while. Porter stops first and stares at her until she stops)**

**PORTER**

**Yes, Eleanor, I may be a renegade, but a renegade from the *true* church.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**A renegade?**

**PORTER**

**An apostate. A defector. *You* know – lapsed.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You mean, you've also converted? *From* Catholicism to -- ? Well that explains it.**

**PORTER**

**Explains what?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**The King James Bible. And –**

**PORTER**

**Ah yes. The wording in that sermon.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well where *do* you preach? I'm pretty ecumenical myself, and I'd like very much to hear you in your own church.**

**PORTER**

**Only here, Eleanor.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Here?**

**PORTER**

**(Gesturing at the cassette machine)**

**That machine is my only congregation.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Oh! I see! You're on some kind of sabbatical, and you're taping those sermons and having them typed to prepare them for publication.**

**PORTER**

**Oh no, God forbid.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well then, I'm afraid I don't understand.**

**PORTER**

**No, of course you don't.**

**(He picks up the cassette and envelope she brought. With a heavy sigh, knowing he can no longer sustain the pretense)**

**You see, Eleanor, this sermon you played back three times is of the high Episcopal denomination. For a very popular minister on the *upper* east side of Manhattan.**

**(He lays them down and picks up another cassette)**

**The one before that – which someone else at your agency typed and has already been mailed off – was rather low Unitarian. Staten Island.**

**(He lays it down and picks up the cassette he finished at the start of the act)**

**Just before you came, I had finished an order from one of those pentecostal evangelists in South Jersey.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You mean – you mean you're a sort of – ghost writer?**

**PORTER**

**Exactly. A sort of *holy* ghost writer, you might say.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Quite shaken)**

**I see.**

**PORTER**

**You're shocked.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well I – to tell you the truth, I never knew there *was* such a thing. I mean, for politicians, of course, and -- But ministers?**

**PORTER**

**Why should they be any different? Just think how busy men of the cloth can be. Tending their flocks? Fighting for pet social causes, on the left *or* the right? Fund raising? You can't expect every one of them to write a whole, new, original, effective sermon every week in addition.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Still shaken)**

**You do this – for a living?**

**PORTER**

**Not a bad one. But when you subtract alimony and child support payments from two divorces, what's left is this neighborhood and this apartment.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You've been divorced twice?**

**PORTER**

**That's right. Two times. And unlike you, neither of *my* wives was content with just having her freedom and the children. They have since moved, *with* the children – two from each disaster -- as far as possible from New York.**

**(He tosses down the cassette and turns from her)**

**Well now you know, Eleanor. And I'm sorry that the man behind the voice has turned out to be me.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(She stands looking at him for a moment, then picks up the cassette and envelope she brought)**

**Well the fact that you write these for pay, and for others to speak, doesn't make what's *said* in them any less genuine.**

**PORTER**

Oh doesn't it?

MRS. MANNING

I heard quite a few sermons growing up in Nebraska, in our Presbyterian church, and quite a few more these past thirteen months. And I can't remember *one* that was as – as meant, and felt, as this one.

PORTER

(Turning back to her)

You think all that was meant, and felt?

MRS. MANNING

I know so!

PORTER

Well suppose I told you that for *me* that sermon, like all the others, was just a routine job, a going-through-the-motions –

MRS. MANNING

If you did tell me that, I wouldn't believe you.

PORTER

(With a mocking laugh)

You're patronizing me!

MRS. MANNING

No! Not patronizing! Just the opposite!

PORTER

What do *you* know of *me*, anyway? What do *you* know of what I mean and don't mean, feel and don't feel?

MRS. MANNING

I only mean that it seems impossible to me that anyone could just ... fake something like ...

(Holding up the cassette and envelope)

this!

PORTER

Well I assure you, Eleanor, it is quite possible, for *me*.

(Gesturing at her coat and purse)

**So perhaps, knowing that, you'd just as soon be on your way.**

**(She lays the cassette and envelope back on the dresser, crosses slowly to the coat and purse, picks them up and starts toward the door; then stops abruptly, looks at her watch, and turns back to him)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Prove it.**

**PORTER**

**What?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I said, prove it.**

**PORTER**

**Prove what?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I have to pick Vickie up at kindergarten at twelve-thirty. So I'll have to leave here by eleven-forty. Do you think, between now and then, you could do another sermon as good as that one, by just ... going through the motions?**

**PORTER**

**Oh hoh! A little challenge! You're throwing down the gauntlet!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes!**

**PORTER**

**Well well! That might be fun! A little companionship, for a change, while I'm working. Of course, I'd insist on paying you for your time, and labor.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Labor?**

**PORTER**

**Well why waste a tape when you could get it all down in shorthand?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Oh. Well I –**

**PORTER**

**You might as well reap *some* profit from this visit. And of course I'll also pay you for typing it up later, after you leave.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All right, fine!**

**PORTER**

**This way, that exploiting agency won't get its cut.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**That'll be nice too.**

**PORTER**

**Then it's a deal!**

**(He crosses quickly to the small table beside the daybed and picks up the pad and pen)**

**Here's a clean pad and pen –**

**(Gesturing at the daybed)**

**and you can sit right here.**

**(He pulls the table around in front of the daybed and lays the pad and pen on it)**

**This will be your desk.**

**(He takes the coat and purse from her and crosses with them to the armchair)**

**So you don't need to ask, the bathroom is just down the hall to the right.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Sitting on the daybed)**

**I don't need a bathroom.**

**PORTER**

**Ah, good.**

**(Laying the coat and purse on the armchair)**

**Never?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Ignoring this, she picks up the pad and pen)**

**I'm ready, Mr. Porter.**

**PORTER**

**More coffee?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No thanks. I think we should get right to work.**

**PORTER**

**Then how about a donut?**

**(Gesturing at the kitchenette)**

**I've got some good ones in there.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No thank you.**

**PORTER**

**Ah, want both hands free to do the Lord's work, eh? Well then, *to* that work!**

**(He grabs the top sheet of paper on the dresser  
and scans it quickly)**

**Next order, due Thursday. Lutheran minister, Mount Vernon. Sermon on Matthew  
Twelve, Verses Thirty-eight and Thirty-nine.**

**(He drops the sheet and quotes resoundingly)**

**"Then certain of the Scribes and of the Pharisees answered saying, Master, we would see a  
sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them: An evil and adulterous generation  
seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it."**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You know that by heart?**

**PORTER**

**Well not exactly –**

**(Clasping his heart ironically)**

**"by heart."**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I mean, by memory. Word for word.**

**PORTER**

**Oh yes. Almost total recall when it comes to Scripture.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All Scripture?**

**PORTER**

**All the salient sections. I was, after all, raised on this stuff. Parochial schools. A pious and saintlike mother who believed that her only begotten had the true priestly vocation. It was her devout wish – reiterated from her bed of pain as she was dying – that I enter a seminary.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Did you?**

**PORTER**

**Naturally. For the better part – the worse part, I should say – of two years, I strove with all my might to realize her vision of me. Till I finally succumbed to – if you'll pardon my French – a *crise de foi*.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Crisis of faith.**

**PORTER**

**Yes. I see your education goes beyond secretarial skills. Others called it a mental breakdown.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I see.**

**PORTER**

**But that was a long time ago. I did eventually recover – from all of that – and began pursuing, quite productively, and with no guilt whatever, my new vocation.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**This?**

**PORTER**

**No, not quite yet. For nearly a decade I earned my living as a prolific author of paperback**

**pornography.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You're joking.**

**PORTER**

**Not in the least. You might still find some of my products, if you'd care to search them out in your local x-rated bookshop, under my pseudonym, Randy Studwell.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I don't think I'll bother searching them out.**

**PORTER**

**Hm. Wife Number One never read the stuff either. Didn't exactly disapprove, so long as it paid the bills, but was as uneasy with it as she finally became with *me*. Then, one fateful day a dozen years ago, just as that marriage was self-destructing, who should run into me on the subway but an old boyhood chum, now an ordained Methodist minister, and about to be named chief pastor of a brand-new church on our native Long Island. Recalling my youthful way with words, he asks if I might lend him a hand with a big sermon for the church's consecration. For old time's sake, I oblige. In fact, I end up writing the whole thing for him. It is so well received that he starts paying me to do this on a regular basis, and passes my name on to another minister with similar needs, who in turn passes sit on to another, and he to another, and so forth. And it came to pass that, by the time I had rashly decided to marry again – to an ex-friend of my ex-wife – this labor had become rewarding enough so that I could utterly renounce and repudiate pornography.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well – good for you.**

**PORTER**

**Of course, the changeover wasn't too difficult. What are my sermons, after all, but another form of pornography? Pure wish-fulfillment with little concern for the reality-principle. Eh, Eleanor?**

**(He stares hard at her. She meets his stare unflinchingly.)**

**All right. I admit the analogy may be a bit ... loose.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**It certainly is.**

**(Holding up the pad and pen)**

**Well, I'm waiting, Mr. Porter.**

**PORTER**

**Yes. Back to work.**

**(He picks up the sheet again and glances over it)**

**Not sure I'm up to *this* assignment this morning. Tough one even for *me* to fake. Those poor maligned Scribes and Pharisees. They ask your Savior for a sign, any little supernatural demonstration to prove he is what he says he is. And he turns them down flat.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Of course. They asked in a spirit of mockery. Their minds and hearts were closed.**

**PORTER**

**Ah! You're petty well versed in all this yourself.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well I may not have your total recall, but I *have* come to know my Gospels pretty well.**

**PORTER**

**Then you know that to his apostles he gave oodles of signs. Or so it is written. Turning water to wine. Walking on the waves. Dragging poor Lazarus back from the dead. They didn't have to believe out of mere faith, did they?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**They had that already. Otherwise they wouldn't have *been* apostles.**

**PORTER**

**So these signs were a way of strengthening that faith.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**In part, yes.**

**PORTER**

**Yet the chief apostle, Peter himself, in the end, when the going got tough, denied the maker of those miracles no less than three times in one night!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**The flesh is weak, Mr. Porter. Peter was only a man.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. You mean, as distinguished from ... a woman?**

**MRS. MANNING**

Of course not. I meant, as distinguished from *him*.

**PORTER**

Ah yes, from *him*. Yet this same weak Peter, it is written, was chosen, *by him*, to be the rock on which his church would be built. While those poor maligned Scribes and Pharisees, who merely asked, quite politely, for a little sign, and were turned down flat, have become a byword through the ages for self-damning faithlessness! Well it does seem a bit unfair, if you ask *me*.

**MRS. MANNING**

Since you can't relate to *that* text, you obviously won't do a very good sermon on it. Maybe you should try another.

**PORTER**

Of course, I *could* turn it over to you. You seem to –

**MRS. MANNING**

Oh I'm a good *judge* of sermons, not a creator of them.

**PORTER**

Hmmf.

(He tosses the sheet on the dresser and picks up another one)

All right, okay, let's try this one.

(He scans the sheet)

First chapter of Genesis. Verses twenty-five to twenty-seven, on the creation of man. Also due Thursday. For a rabbi in Great Neck.

**MRS. MANNING**

A rabbi?

**PORTER**

My most recently acquired client. Very useful to the business, these inter-faith councils. And the scriptures are, after all, the same, at least up to a point. – Ready?

**MRS. MANNING**

(Poising the pen over the pad)

Ready.

**PORTER**

**(Scanning the sheet again)**

**Hm, let's see. "Stress man as apex of creative miracle. Consciousness. Freedom to choose between good and evil." Yes, uh huh.**

**(Dropping the sheet on the dresser)**

**Shouldn't be much problem with this one.**

**(He gestures for her to begin taking shorthand)**

**Uh – Dearly beloved. No. Brothers and sisters? No. Shalom? I should have asked him how rabbis start out. Well, we'll let *him* supply the salutation. Right into the body of the thing!**

**(She crosses out what she has written. He raises his index finger)**

**Consider the -- No, make that, imagine the – imagine the – Hmmm.**

**(He ponders for a moment)**

**I'm hungry. Sure you wouldn't like a donut?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Quite sure.**

**PORTER**

**Come, let us break bread together.**

**(He crosses quickly into the kitchenette and holds up the donut box)**

**All kinds and shapes in here.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(With an impatient sigh)**

**All right. Half of one.**

**PORTER**

**Good! Plain, old-fashioned plain, jelly, or crumb?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Plain.**

**PORTER**

**Old-fashioned plain or plain-plain?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Plain-plain!**

**PORTER**

**Plain-plain it shall be.**

**(He takes out a plain donut and holds it aloft)**

*Hoc est enim corpus meum –*

**MRS. MANNING**

**Stop that!**

**PORTER**

**Oops, sorry. I thought you wouldn't recognize the Latin, what with the Mass performed in English nowadays.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Now who's patronizing whom?**

**PORTER**

**Yes. *Touché*, Eleanor.**

**(He breaks the donut in two, crosses to her and holds out one piece to her. She takes it drops it on the table)**

**Oh but you mustn't cast that away. I have broken bread, and this sacred act must be consummated. A human communion – with a small "c" of course.**

**(She sighs impatiently again, then relents and picks up the half-donut. He holds up his half as in a toast. She holds her half up and takes a small bite)**

**Good, hm?**

**(He gobbles his half in one bite. She lays the rest of her half on the table and holds up the pen)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Now, where were we?**

**(Reading from the pad, mockingly)**

**"Imagine *the*.**

**PORTER**

**Yes. Well, make that "*Let us imagine.*"**

**(In a broad Yiddish accent)**

**“Let us imagine on this *Shabbat* morning – “**

**(He looks to see if she is amused. She is not)**

**Sorry.**

**(He drops the accent)**

**“Let us imagine on this Sabbath morning the last in the acts of divine creation. Conceive if you can – “ No no, cross that out. Sounds like Gilbert and Sullivan. “Conceive me if you can/A commonplace young man/ A steady and stolidly/Jolly bank-holiday/Everyday young man.”**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Still not amused)**

**You’re not doing very well, are you?**

**PORTER**

**Oh I’m always a slow starter. But once I get going, it comes out in a rush. So be ready for that.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I’m ready.**

**(As he proceeds, she takes everything down in shorthand)**

**PORTER**

**Let us imagine on this Sabbath morning the last act before God rested from the labor of creation. Day Six. The context complete. A sun and a moon in place. All the stars in place on the firmament. Uh – that’s f – i - r –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I know!**

**PORTER**

**The seas teeming with organic life, the dry land with all manner of brute beast.**

**(With increasing speed)**

**And then, as the culmination of all that, at the apex, miracle of miracles, a creature midway between brute beast and angel, capable of contemplating his own existence and choosing consciously and freely between good and evil.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well now you’re going a bit too fast.**

**PORTER**

**Ah, there, you see? Where did I lose you?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Checking the pad)**

**At the apex.**

**PORTER**

**Mm. Yes. At the apex.**

**(More slowly, but heavily rhetorical)**

**At the apex, miracle of miracles, a creature midway between brute beast and angel -- a *conscious* being midway between –**

**(Breaking off)**

**Shit. It must be you. Can't seem to get up any momentum.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**That's obviously because you're not feeling any of this, the way you –**

**PORTER**

**It's got nothing to do with feeling. It's you. You're making me self-conscious.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Dropping the pad and pen and rising)**

**Well then, do you want me to leave?**

**PORTER**

**NO! I'll get used to you, I'll adjust. I confess, I can get pretty sick of having only that machine to talk to, fourteen, fifteen hours a day.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Do you really work that much?**

**PORTER**

**Oh yes, quite often. Don't *you*?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Sometimes. But it's a different kind of work than yours. And I do have three children to support.**

**PORTER**

**Well I have four, Eleanor. And their mothers as well. Besides, I'm not much of a sleeper.**

**(Crossing into the kitchenette)**

**Four or five hours is all the oblivion I can expect on the best night.**

**(He takes a liquor bottle from the cabinet and pours a shot into a glass)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well that gives you a lot more hours to –**

**(She breaks off, seeing him swig down the shot)**

**PORTER**

**A lot more hours to enjoy the blessings of consciousness, yes.**

**(He pours another shot)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Excuse me, but don't you think one of those is enough at this hour of the -- ?**

**PORTER**

**Oh it's only a bit of – as the Irish say – lubrication. Not for me. For the as yet unresponsive muse.**

**(He turns to her and holds out the bottle)**

**But excuse *me*, I should have offered you some too.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No thank you.**

**PORTER**

**You're sure?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**Well in that case –**

**(Pouring the shot back into the bottle)**

**it'll have to be enough for the muse too.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Thank you.**

**PORTER**

**Don't mention it.**

**(He lays down the bottle and crosses back to her)**

**Well now, to business again. If you'll be seated, we'll resume.**

**(She sits on the daybed and picks up the pad and pen)**

**Good.**

**(He picks up the assignment sheet and scans it again)**

**Day Six. The creation of man. Yes, all right, I feel one coming. Ready?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Ready.**

**PORTER**

**Good.**

**(He walks around some, then stops abruptly and raises his index finger again)**

**And so. Yes, write that. And so.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Pointing at the pad)**

**What about all this?**

**PORTER**

**Cross all that out. I'm starting fresh.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(She tears the top sheet off the pad, crumples it up and drops it, then writes on the fresh sheet)**

**And so.**

**PORTER**

**I know, it's kind of starting midway, but – Just a minute, I had something.**

**(He bangs on his head, trying to recall it)**

**What was it? -- Yes, I remember! Yes! Go!**

**(In an expansive narrative manner)**

**And so on the sixth day He drew us all together to reveal the culmination of His grand design. That's a capital "h" on He and His.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All right. But – “us”?** Drew *us* all together?

**PORTER**

**Yes. Us. But no capital on the “u.”** And so on the sixth day He called us all together to reveal the culmination of His grand design. And as we looked around at all He had already made – from the remotest galaxies to the most minute organisms on that minor planet He had chosen to favor with the miracle of life – oh we were mightily awed with His power and His imagination and the infinite reachings of His goodness, and from every pore of us we exuded loud hosannahs!

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Looking up at him)**

**Oh that’s very nice. “From every pore of us we exuded loud hosannahs.”**

**PORTER**

**But all of that, He now told us –**

**(Seeing her still looking at him, he gestures for her to keep writing)**

**Please.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Sorry.**

**(Writing)**

**“But all of that, He now told us – “**

**PORTER**

**Had been mere preparation, merely the setting for the final surprise: a human race, a race of conscious creatures with, miracle of miracles, freedom! To choose, choose, choose, at every moment of their waking being, between -- between living and dying!**

**(She stops writing and looks at him dubiously)**

**What’s the matter?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Good and evil.**

**PORTER**

**What?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**The assignment – it said freedom to choose between good and evil, not living and dying.**

**PORTER**

**Never mind! Who’s writing this, you or I?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All right.**

**(She writes)**

**“Between living and dying.” But I don’t think that rabbi’s going to like this.**

**PORTER**

**Well of course I warned Him against it. – Not the rabbi! Him! That’s the next sentence. Get it down please.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(She looks at him dubiously again, then manages a small shrug and writes)**

**“Well of course I warned Him against it.”**

**PORTER**

**Thank you.**

**(Pause. Then at a fairly slow pace and very expressively)**

**I said to Him: Lord, look at thy handiwork already complete. The heavenly bodies in their ordered courses on the firmament, shedding light and loveliness on the dry land and the teeming waters between, where all those magnificently varied creatures, from the lowly jellyfish up to Leviathan himself, move in the ordered beauty of innocent instinct – reproducing, seeking food, shunning foes, and when they fail, perishing. But perishing into Nature, their destinies fulfilled in that moment of transfiguration from animate to inanimate parts of the Whole! Lord, I said, what more is needed? How perfect and wondrous this work of creation!**

**(He pauses, affected by his own eloquence.**

**She looks up at him)**

**How’s that?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well it’s certainly more like what I heard on that tape. But what do you mean “I warned Him against it?” Who is I?**

**PORTER**

**I. Me. Never mind. Just write.**

**(She resumes writing as he continues)**

**Lord, I said, don't spoil it! Know when to stop! Know when enough is enough! But He wouldn't listen! He just waved me away and held the others off and stood there, vibrating – with this far-off, glassy, *stoned* look in His eyes, and said, "Let us make man in our – "**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Throwing down the pad and pencil)**

**Oh no, Mr. Porter! That's not a sermon you're –**

**PORTER**

**Never mind! Write, damn it, write!**

**(Intoning, thunderously)**

**"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air –**

**(She rises and grabs her coat and purse)**

**and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth! And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good!"**

**(Whirling around to face her)**

**But it *wasn't* good! Anyone with eyes to see could see that! You're not getting this down, damn it!**

**(She starts backing slowly away from him. He advances on her)**

**And I begged Him, begged Him to destroy this aberration, this freak He called man, and woman! Destroy them, Lord, before that insufferable consciousness you've given them destroys the harmony of all you've created! Destroy them or I'll revolt and cast you down and do the job myself!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Mr. Porter – please –**

**PORTER**

**But he just stared me down, with that serene, superior look on His face, that holier-than-thou, I-know-what-I'm-doing-and-you're-just-a-proud-cynical-faithless-blaspheming-angel-**

**look that made me want to just – just –**

**(He grabs her shoulders and shakes her. She gasps. He pulls back quickly, and she stares aghast at him. Then she turns and runs to the door. He beats her there, and stands with his back against the door, panting from his emotional exertion)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Let me out!**

**PORTER**

**Why? I was only –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Please let me out!**

**PORTER**

**Only illustrating. I got a bit carried away.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I've got to get out of here! Now please!**

**PORTER**

**Sorry.**

**(He takes the key from his pocket and locks the double deadlock)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**What are you doing?**

**PORTER**

**(He turns to her, pocketing the key)**

**I can't let you get away from me, Eleanor. Not yet.**

**(Blackout. End of Act I)**

**ACT II**

**(Seconds later. Mrs. Manning, still clutching her coat and purse, has retreated behind the armchair. Porter still stands with his back against the door, struggling to gain control of himself)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Please – Mr. Porter – I must get home to my children.**

**PORTER**

**They're not there yet, Eleanor. Vickie doesn't get out of kindergarten till twelve-thirty.**

**(Gesturing at the armchair)**

**Won't you be seated again.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**What are you going to -- ?**

**PORTER**

**(Gesturing at the daybed)**

**Or perhaps you'd rather sit there.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**What for?**

**PORTER**

**Well not for dictation. That, I'm afraid, is done. You've won that contest, hands down. I couldn't fake a proper sermon, not in your presence.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Then what are you going to – ?**

**PORTER**

**So instead you got something I really did mean, and feel, for the moment. But I was only illustrating, playing a role in a little – well call it a little dramatic enactment. And it wasn't you I was attacking, or meant to attack. It was -- *you* know -- Him. And I got a bit carried away. Believe me, Eleanor, I am not a rapist, or some kind of –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All right, I do believe you. But I've still got to get out of here.**

**PORTER**

**Why? It isn't nearly eleven-forty. And you said you'd stay till then.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I know I did. But since you're done dictating, there's no more reason for me to --**

**(She moves toward the door)**

**So please, let me --**

**PORTER**

**Not yet, Eleanor.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Why? What do you want from me?**

**PORTER**

**Well, let's say, a little further communion. With a very small "c." I'd like you to forget about sermons for a while, and just sit and talk to me. You'll still be paid well for your time.**

**(He crosses to the table by the daybed, picks up her partly eaten donut piece, breaks it in half, and holds one piece out to her)**

**Come, I have broken bread again. Let us eat together.**

**(She turns away)**

**Take it, please, Eleanor.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Turning back to him)**

**Mr. Porter, what kind of communion can there be between us -- ?**

**PORTER**

**Oh I think there can be. I think there can be.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I mean, so long as that door is locked and that key is in your pocket.**

**PORTER**

**Oh. Well yes, you have a point. All right, fair enough.**

**(He lays the two donut pieces back on the table, takes the key from his pocket and starts toward the door, but stops,**

puts the key back in his pocket, and turns back to her)

**Provided you promise – no, swear – to commune honestly. Not just to mollify me by saying what you may think I want to hear, but to truly open yourself out to me.**

**(He crosses to the dresser, picks up the Bible, and holds it out to her)**

**Come, on the Holy Bible. It's a Protestant Bible, but holy nonetheless.**

**(He crosses to her and reaches out to take her hand)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Pulling the hand away)**

**No – don't.**

**PORTER**

**All right. I understand your not wanting to be touched again, even *that* way, so I promise not to touch you again, in *any* way. But you must swear, with your hand here –**

**(Patting the Bible)**

**to commune honestly and openly – till eleven-forty. Otherwise, that door will have to stay locked, and this key in my pocket. What do you say, Eleanor? Is it a deal?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Looks at him uncertainly for a moment, then at her wristwatch, then back at him; then quickly touches the Bible)**

**I swear to commune openly and honestly.**

**PORTER**

**Thank you.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Till eleven-forty.**

**PORTER**

**Yes.**

**(He drops the Bible back on the dresser, crosses to the door, takes the key from his pocket, unlocks the double deadlock, crosses to the table and lays the key on it)**

**There.**

**(He picks up the two donut pieces and hands one to her. She takes it. He holds up his piece as in a toast. She**

holds up her piece. Both eat)

**Good.**

(He gestures for her to sit in the armchair. She sits, still clutching her coat and purse)

**Now: why don't we begin with -- ?**

(The telephone rings)

**Shit.**

(He hesitates a moment, then crosses to the telephone and answers it, keeping his eyes on her)

**Yes? -- Oh, Father Doyle. – Fine, thank you. And you?**

(He purposefully turns his back on her)

**Yes, yes, but can you call back later, Father? I'm in the middle of something. – No, I can't take an order now. You'll have to call back later.**

(She starts to get up, but then sits again, opens her purse and takes out a small pillbox)

**I don't know when I'll be free. Maybe by eleven-forty. – Yes, do try at around eleven-forty. Bye bye.**

(He hangs up and turns back to her. She takes a pill from the box)

**PORTER**

**Aspirin?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No.**

**PORTER**

**Valium?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Librium.**

**PORTER**

**Ah!**

(He crosses quickly into the kitchenette, fills a glass with water, crosses quickly back to her and hands her the glass)

**MRS. MANNING**

**Thank you.**

**(She puts the pill in her mouth, swallows it with the water, then hands the glass back to him)**

**PORTER**

**(Laying the glass on the table)**

**How often?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**When ... necessary.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. And for how long has it – sometimes – been necessary?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Since -- For about two years.**

**PORTER**

**You mean, since about the time of your –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Of my divorce, yes.**

**PORTER**

**I see.**

**(Pause. Then gesturing at the telephone)**

**One of my steadiest clients, Father Doyle. A pastor of the true church.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well you said you were ecumenical.**

**PORTER**

**Yes. He hasn't delivered a sermon of his own in ten years. But after all, if the apostle Peter could be so weak as to deny the maker of all those miracles three times in one night, what can you expect of this lowly parish priest, in this *un*-miracled day and age?**

**(Pause. Earnestly)**

**Thank you for not leaving when I gave you the chance.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**A vow on the Bible *is* a vow on the Bible.**

**PORTER**

**Even when made under duress?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Even then.**

**PORTER**

**Well that's really being a serious Christian.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I try to be – even in this day and age. But thank *you*, for *giving* me the chance to leave.**

**PORTER**

**Well I *was* taking a rather large risk. But I thought it necessary, as a further sign of trust, both ways.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**So – where was it you wanted to begin?**

**PORTER**

**In the obvious place. That marriage of yours.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**What do you want to know about it?**

**PORTER**

**The salient facts. How it came about. How it ... was. And how it ended.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**In that order?**

**PORTER**

**It seems the most logical order.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All right.**

**(Pause)**

**How it came about.**

**(Taking as matter-of-fact a tone as she can manage,  
considering the painfulness of the subject)**

**We were childhood sweethearts.**

**PORTER**

**Oh? You mean, from *early* childhood?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well, from junior high school on.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. From early pubescence on.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**Uninterruptedly?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Uninterruptedly, through high school and college. He was the only boyfriend I ever had.  
And I was the only girlfriend *he* ever had.**

**PORTER**

**My! Rather exceptional, that.**

**MRS. MANNING**

***We were* ... rather exceptional.**

**PORTER**

**And when did you ... progress, from boy and girl friend to husband and wife?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Three weeks after college graduation.**

**PORTER**

**A church wedding, I suppose?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Naturally.**

**PORTER**

**Which ... denomination?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**It was in the Presbyterian church we had both ... indifferently attended, with our parents, *since* early childhood.**

**PORTER**

**I see. Indifferently attended. Except on that occasion.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**Go on, please.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**He began working for an export-import company; and I, being an old-fashioned midwestern girl, contented myself with ... nest-building.**

**PORTER**

**And supporting him in his career.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**And once his salary got large enough to support *them*, with bearing and raising the three children we'd agreed to have, one right after the other.**

**PORTER**

**I see. Very ... orderly. And *were* you content with all this?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Oh yes. I loved him quite passionately.**

**PORTER**

**You did.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**And each of the children, as they came.**

**PORTER**

**Of course.**

**(Pause)**

**So did I, as a mater of fact. Each of them, as they came.**

**(Pause)**

**And this quite passionate love for *him* – it was of the flesh as well as the spirit?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Of the flesh as well as the spirit, yes.**

**PORTER**

**Hmm.**

**(Pause)**

**Till?**

**(Pause)**

**I mean, when did it all start to – *you* know -- ?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**After his transfer to New York.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. To a different *kind* of nest, eh?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**It was soon after we moved here that he began to complain of feeling ... trapped.**

**PORTER**

**By you?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**By this city. By a job he'd lost interest in and had come to despise. And the responsibility for the four of us, which was all that kept him in that job.**

**PORTER**

**I see.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**He began drinking, heavily.**

**PORTER**

**Ah. So that's why you were so concerned before, when I –  
(He gestures at the liquor bottle in the kitchenette)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**In part, yes.**

**PORTER**

**Because when he did drink so heavily, he would ... abuse you?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Sometimes.**

**PORTER**

**Hmm. Well believe it or not, that's something *I* never did. Physically, anyway.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Mostly, though, he'd just withdraw, into a deep self-pity.**

**PORTER**

**Now that *does* sound familiar.**

**(Pause)**

**And you? Was there nothing you could do to raise him *out* of this self-pity?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**God knows I tried. And felt more and more inadequate, and guilty, when I – But I simply could not deal with all that negation!**

**PORTER**

**Hmm. Couldn't deal with it *then*. And could you any better *now*, do you think?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well I know this much: I'm not the same person I *was* then.**

**PORTER**

**No, I'm sure you're not. But being unable, *then*, to deal with all that negation, you simply**

expelled him from that nest, eh?

**MRS. MANNING**

Oh no. I was much too dependent on him, financially. It was he who chose to leave.

**PORTER**

For the sake of the children.

**MRS. MANNING**

For his own sake. I woke up one morning and found a note saying he'd quit his job and was going away, to ... "find himself."

**PORTER**

Ah yes, yes. To find himself. And has he been successful?

**MRS. MANNING**

Successful?

**PORTER**

At that worthy and demanding occupation: finding one's self.

**MRS. MANNING**

How would *I* know?

**PORTER**

Well what did he do? Where did he go?

**MRS. MANNING**

I have no idea. I've never heard from him again.

**PORTER**

What? You mean he just disappeared? Leaving all four of you with -- ? My oh my oh my, he makes *me* feel like a goddamn saint!

**MRS. MANNING**

I went through a very bad time for a while. The divorce, for desertion, with all that entailed. Having to, somehow, explain it to the children, and comfort them as best I could. And I had no real professional skills, except the typing and shorthand I'd learned in high school.

**PORTER**

**Why didn't you go back to Nebraska?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**The children – they had friends, attachments, here.**

**PORTER**

**But at those ages, such attachments –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**And *I* couldn't have stood it, being back where we'd grown up together!**

**PORTER**

**Ah. That makes better sense. So instead, you took up with that typing agency.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**And soon after that, with your ... chosen system of belief.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**To sustain you, with a little help from librium, through all the pain and hardship and loneliness.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well not the kind of loneliness *you* know. I do have my children.**

**PORTER**

**Indeed, indeed. Lucky you. Lucky *them*!**

**(Their eyes meet for a moment. Then she rises, lays her coat and purse on the armchair, and crosses away from him)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well, have I told you enough salient facts about my marriage?**

**PORTER**

**I think so. And I do thank you, very much, for your candor. But about that system of belief, Eleanor: I've been there, you know. And I could give you a score of arguments against it. Historical, political, contraceptive –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well don't, please. I'm aware of them. But for me there couldn't have been any other choice.**

**PORTER**

**Ah, you were given a sign. Water turned to wine in your presence. Lazarus appeared before your half-vacant bed one night, saying "Behold, I am returned from the dead to tell you that you must convert from indifferent Presbyterianism to the *true* church."**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Very funny.**

**PORTER**

**Well *why* couldn't there have been any other choice?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Because it was a very large vacancy I had to fill! I needed a belief, and a ritual, that were very ordered!**

**PORTER**

**Well that they certainly are. That they certainly are.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**But that's not all. There was also a – an experience I'd had, years before.**

**PORTER**

**What kind of experience?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well, it won't sound like much, just telling it. But to me – it was something I'd often re-live, during those awful months after my husband left.**

**PORTER**

**Well? What was it?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Have you been to Europe, Mr. Porter?**

**PORTER**

**Yes. Once.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Did you visit any of those great medieval cathedrals?**

**PORTER**

**Oh yes. All the great ones.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**The summer after we were married, my husband and I took a camping trip through France and Italy. It was the happiest two months I've ever known.**

**PORTER**

**I can imagine. Passion and culture combined, eh?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I'd never have thought that I, with my midwestern Protestant upbringing, could be as affected as I was by those cathedrals.**

**PORTER**

**Well even *I* was *affected*. Some of them are pretty overwhelming.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**One Sunday morning, in Sicily, in the cathedral of Monreale –**

**PORTER**

**I've been there! Marvelous mosaics!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You thought so?**

**PORTER**

**Yes! So? What happened on that Sunday morning?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I was standing in the apse, alone. My husband was – I don't know – somewhere else in the church, or outside. I was looking up at that huge mosaic, in the vault , of –**

**PORTER**

**Your Savior's face.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**Imbedded in all that amazing gold leaf.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**(Starting to re-live the experience)**

**A High Mass was being celebrated on the main altar. A full chorus, organ. The music was swelling and soaring and just – filling up every inch of space around me with such – such ineffable joy!**

**(He turns from her and begins surreptitiously fingering the cassette machine)**

**Then all of a sudden, this incredibly bright shaft of sunlight fell right on the face, and just stayed there, for –**

**(He presses the Play button. We hear Bach's *Cum Sancto Spiritu* chorus from the point at which he turned it off before. She breaks off and looks at him, then looks away. Both listen in silence for a while)**

**PORTER**

**You were saying?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Listens a while longer)**

**I was saying that, for a moment – for much more than a moment –**

**(Turning to him and quoting his earlier words)**

**“every pore of me exuded loud hosannahs!”**

**PORTER**

**Ah.**

**(Pause)**

**Lucky you.**

**(He starts, almost involuntarily, to move toward her.  
She stiffens slightly)**

**Sorry.**

**(He backs off. Both become absorbed in the music again)**

**Yes, great church music and sunlight on a medieval mosaic *can* be rather beguiling, can't they? Especially when newly wed, impassioned by one's mate, unburdened, a whole future before one –**

**(He turns to stare down at the cassette machine, then presses the Stop button)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Startled when the music stops; coming back to the present)**

**Why did you do that?**

**PORTER**

**What? Turn this thing off?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No. Why did you turn it *on*?**

**PORTER**

**Oh. I suppose I was illustrating again. The power of seduction. In a spiritual sense, of course.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I see.**

**PORTER**

**I often use music like this when I'm warming up for work. This happened to be in the machine when you rang that bell before.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I know. I heard it.**

**(Pause)**

**And you turned it off because you were afraid *you* were getting seduced, in a spiritual sense?**

**PORTER**

**Well I did feel that my virtue was in some peril for a moment.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Smiling)**

**Poor Mr. Porter.**

**PORTER**

**Yes, one cannot be too careful with old Johann Sebastian. And *you*.**

**(He ejects the cassette and drops it on the dresser)**

**So – what did *he* think, your bridegroom, of this mystical experience, when you told him about it?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I didn't say it was a mystical experience.**

**PORTER**

**This ... peak esthetic experience then.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Better.**

**PORTER**

**Which later made only one system of belief possible for you. Well, what *did* he think when you told him about it?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I never told him.**

**PORTER**

**Never?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Some things aren't easy to share, with anyone. In fact, you're the first person I *have* shared it with.**

**PORTER**

**You mean that?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**But why? If not your bridegroom, or your priest, or -- I mean, why me of all people?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Because we're having an honest communion. Aren't we, Mr. Porter?**

**PORTER**

**(Strongly moved)**

**Mmm.**

**(Pause)**

**Tell me, Eleanor, why did you come here today?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You know why.**

**PORTER**

**To rush that typing job straight over to me.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**And find out where I preached, so you could --**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**With what ... end in view?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**End?**

**PORTER**

Of course, you *might* have assumed I was a happily married man. Or very old. But then, there *was* at least a *chance* that I'd be single, or widowed, and reasonably young.

**MRS. MANNING**

What you're implying never entered my mind.

**PORTER**

Oh I don't mean fornication, of course. But some longer-ranging hope? A compassionate clergyman as father to your fatherless children?

**MRS MANNING**

I took you for someone who might be a – a spiritual mentor to me. Believe me, that was the only "end" I had in view.

**PORTER**

Well considering how honest a person you clearly are, I suppose I *have* to believe you.

(Pause)

And look what you found.

**MRS. MANNING**

What *did* I find? A lonely, tormented man.

(She crosses to the dresser and picks up  
the cassette she brought)

But a man who can create, *out* of that torment, something like this.

**PORTER**

Oh God, back to that again!

**MRS. MANNING**

Why must you keep belittling that gift you've been given?

**PORTER**

Gift?

(He grabs the Bible and holds it up)

Do you know what it's like not to be able to get this stuff out of your head, ever, waking or sleeping?

**MRS. MANNING**

Why? If none of it means anything to you, why can't you get it out of your head?

**PORTER**

**How do I know? Call it a curse!**

**(He drops the Bible back on the dresser)**

**Now what do you say we get back to *you*?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes, that's how you see yourself, don't you? A cursed lost soul, like Lucifer in that fake sermon you dictated before. Well, if you're so convinced of that, why don't you just end it all – since you could hardly believe it would be a mortal sin? Or do you, Mr. Porter?**

**PORTER**

**Hardly. And don't think I haven't contemplated it, seriously. But I don't happen to have the courage.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Or the irresponsibility to leave four children unsupported?**

**PORTER**

**Yes, that too, of course.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**But isn't there another reason also?**

**(Holding up the cassette)**

**Doesn't this work prove you've made that choice between living and dying?**

**PORTER**

**Well it does keep me from starving, if that's what you mean.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Only physically?**

**PORTER**

**And it does pay the alimony and –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**There are other ways a man like you could pay the alimony *and* child support, and live a lot better than you do here. Why, Mr. Porter? Why this work, fourteen, fifteen hours a day, and almost nothing else in your life?**

**(She lays down the cassette, crosses quickly into the kitchenette,**

takes a donut out of the box, breaks it in half, crosses back to him, and holds one piece out to him)

Come on, an honest communion.

(He smiles, abashedly, and takes the piece. She holds her piece up. He holds his piece up. Each takes a small bite. She lays the rest of her piece down on the table)

Well? Why, Mr. Porter?

**PORTER**

(Laying the rest of his piece down on the table. Softly)

David.

**MRS. MANNING**

What?

**PORTER**

My name, Eleanor. It's David.

**MRS. MANNING**

(Pause)

Why – David?

**PORTER**

(Pause)

Well, compared to other kinds of work, it does come easy.

**MRS. MANNING**

*I haven't seen it coming so easily.*

**PORTER**

I don't usually have *you* around to –

(Pause)

And it *can*, sometimes, be intellectually stimulating. There's certainly no lack of variety.

(Pause)

And then, there *is* the thought of –

(He breaks off)

**MRS. MANNING**

**Of what? The thought of what, David?**

**PORTER**

**(Pause)**

**Even a hack may have some ... vanity.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Holding up the cassette)**

**You mean, you know that sermons like this one move people, and give them comfort.**

**PORTER**

**For people who *can* be comforted by lies, I suppose I do provide a – a useful service.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**But these aren't lies!**

**PORTER**

**When you say things don't know are true, and say them as if they're true, you're lying.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You don't know they *aren't* true! And where you can't know, you can –**

**PORTER**

**Please, Eleanor, please! Can we just agree to disagree on that? I've answered you as honestly as I could!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All right.**

**(Laying down the cassette)**

**I agree to disagree.**

**-PORTER**

**Thank you. Now can we get back to a more concrete subject? You didn't come here in search of a husband. Is that because there's already a man – men – a whole host of suitors competing for your favor?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Laughing)**

**A whole host of suitors?**

**PORTER**

**Well you know you're an attractive woman, Eleanor. And one does have one's profane as well as sacred needs. *Are* there any men in your life, apart from ... Him?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No.**

**PORTER**

**None whatever?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**None whatever.**

**PORTER**

***Have* there been?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**There was my husband.**

**PORTER**

***Since* your husband!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No.**

**PORTER**

**Hm!**

**(Pause)**

**Are there, or have there been, women, in the profane sense?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Slightly embarrassed by the question)**

**None.**

**PORTER**

**No men, no women, in over two years.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**That's right.**

**PORTER**

**Is it just that, the way you live, no opportunities present themselves?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I haven't wanted opportunities.**

**PORTER**

**Why? Because that childhood sweetheart of yours, no matter how monstrously he treated you, is still the only one you could even imagine yourself with, that way?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No. I can ... imagine myself with others.**

**PORTER**

**You can.**

**(Pause)**

**Even with ... me?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Even with you.**

**PORTER**

**But *only* imagine.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**Because only in holy matrimony could you – And since the church says that marriage after divorce is adulterous –**

**(Pause)**

**But Eleanor, that divorce came before your conversion! And for all you know, he may not even be alive any more!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Even if I knew he wasn't alive, this wouldn't change.**

**PORTER**

**Why, Eleanor? Why?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Well if you must know –**

**PORTER**

**Of course I must know!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**It's because of a – a hope I've nourished, since my conversion –  
(Picking up the cassette again)  
which you strengthened last night, in a way my priest couldn't – or wouldn't.**

**PORTER**

**(With dread)**

**What – kind of hope?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Of, one day, when the children are grown up and on their own –**

**PORTER**

**No. Don't say it, don't say it. Of – becoming a nun.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**Oh my God –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Now do you understand?**

**PORTER**

**Oh yes – yes I understand. The only boyfriend you ever had – to whom you gave everything – disappears. So you live a life of denial, deprivation, giving everything to the children he forsook. But all the while preparing yourself for the day when those children will also disappear, and you can give everything to – To what, Eleanor? TO WHAT?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**You know very well to what!  
(Brandishing the cassette)  
The answer's right here, in your voice!**

**PORTER**

**The hell with my voice! *You* say it!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**To the greater glory of God!**

**PORTER**

**Who can't walk out on *His* bride, right? Or forsake the children *He* created! Right?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**RIGHT!**

**PORTER**

**But He has!**

**(He stalks over to the window and gestures out)**

**Just look at the world around you! He's seen His folly and washed His hands of us! Or has gone off somewhere, to – to find Himself!**

**(She turns quickly to the dresser, jams the cassette into the machine, presses the Fast Forward button, then the Play button. We hear Porter's voice speaking in a quiet but very impassioned tone)**

**PORTER'S VOICE**

**-- and there, at that bedside, watching that loved one dying in unimaginable and utterly unmerited pain, when out of the depths of you a voice cries, "There must be more, there must be more than this," it is a voice to be heeded and comforted by.**

**(Porter turns from the window and starts to cross to the dresser, but stops short as the voice continues)**

**There must be more! There must be more than my eyes can see and my mind understand!  
All roads out of despair begin with that. And though –**

(He quickly crosses the rest of the way and presses the Stop button)

**PORTER**

**How dare you! I never play these back!**

**MRS. MANNING**

(Quoting the rest of the passage with quiet intensity, staring straight at him)

**“And though the journey be long, and dark, and beset with snares, there *will* come a point – believe me, there *will* come a point, if you persist – when the road will open out into a clearing, a place of peace where all doubts dissolve into the light of – “**

**PORTER**

**ALL RIGHT!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Maybe *you* don’t play these back, but *I* played *that* one, three times. All forty minutes of it. And I say there’s more there than some hack going through the motions!**

**PORTER**

(Pause. Then more subdued)

**All right. There *are* times when the loneliness, and the emptiness, are more than I can bear; and I suppose I do – sort of – lose myself, for the moment, in –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**In what you felt while your mother was dying? That *was* your mother you were thinking of, wasn’t it?**

**PORTER**

**It was my mother I was thinking of. But those moments don’t last. They pass, very quickly, Eleanor. Very quickly.**

(He ejects the cassette)

**Which is why I never play these back. Because once they *have* passed, the words I’ve spoken ring as false as –**

(Gesturing at the discarded pages of the dictation she took before)

**as some of the stuff you’ve heard in here today.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Gesturing at the cassette)**

**But *these* words are different, David. Believe me, there *is* a difference.**

**(Pause)**

**Isn't it possible that, when you do... lose yourself, something greater than you speaks through you? From beyond all ... manmade systems and creeds? Isn't that possible, David?**

**PORTER**

**(Pause)**

**Well, I suppose that's as good an explanation as any of what happens while those moments last.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(With a gratified smile)**

**Well that's what brought me here today. And has kept me here. Because I need that something. Very much.**

**PORTER**

**To sustain you, through all the pain and hardship – and loneliness.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**And to strengthen that hope you've nourished, of becoming a –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**(Picking up the cassette)**

**Well if that's the way these words sustain you –**

**(Dropping it on the floor)**

**so much the worse. So much the worse.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Oh David – David –**

**(She picks up the cassette and holds it to her bosom)**

(He opens a drawer in the dresser, takes out some checks, crosses to the table, picks up the pen, and begins endorsing them one by one)

What are you doing?

**PORTER**

Endorsing these. Checks from last week's work. It's a lot more than that agency would pay you.

**MRS. MANNING**

Oh God, I don't want your money, David.

**PORTER**

I said I'd pay you for your time here.

(He drops the pen, opens her purse, and stuffs the checks into it)

You can buy a few weeks' supply of Librium with these. And some amenities, for you and the children.

(He turns to her, pointing at the cassette)

Yes, I did say that there are deprivations which enrich the spirit. And for all I know, that may be true, for *some*. But I also said that there are deprivations which *stunt* the spirit. Remember?

**MRS. MANNING**

I remember.

(She lays the cassette back on the dresser, crosses to her purse, takes out the checks and lays them on the table)

But these belong to *your* children. And your wives.

**PORTER**

All right, forget the money then! But at least take this much profit from the time you've spent here: forget that hope you've been nourishing! Why, if you had any real vocation for it, any real conviction that you were meant to be a nun, would you have needed *me*, or your priest, or anyone to – ?

(He breaks off. Then more quietly)

I mean, it's one thing to have chosen that ... manmade system and creed you've chosen. I *can* understand that. But this becoming-a-nun business? For God'sakes, how can anyone so honest, and so intelligent, not see that it has nothing to do with faith? That it's all just a

**grand, pretentious fantasy to shut out even the possibility of another Mr. Manning!**

**(The telephone rings)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Looking at her watch)**

**It's eleven-forty.**

**PORTER**

**Isn't it, Eleanor?!**

**MRS. MANNING**

**That must be that priest calling back.**

**(She picks up her coat and purse)**

**And I really must –**

**PORTER**

**All right, the door is unlocked. You can let yourself out.**

**(He picks up the telephone receiver, snatches it to his ear, and turns away from her)**

**Yes!**

**(She stays put, listening)**

**Yes, Father, I suppose I'm free now.**

**(Pause)**

**Hm, a *special* sermon. Not the usual assigned Sunday text. Well how about one I've started for another client, but don't think is right for him. It's on Day Six of the Creation –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**No!**

**PORTER**

**Yes, the day human consciousness was invented. You'll get to imagine yourself as poor, maligned Lucifer, hurled out of Heaven for thinking it wasn't such a –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**NO!**

**PORTER**

**Yes, of course I was joking, Father. Who ever heard of a sermon with Lucifer as the hero? And I'm sure you're looking for something more positive and life-affirming. So how about –**

**(He turns to face Mrs. Manning)**

**How about good old First Corinthians – that always apt thirteenth chapter?**

**(Quoting, with increasing expressiveness as he proceeds)**

**“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my good to feed the poor, and though I –**

**(He hesitates)**

**though I – “**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Give my body to be burned.**

**PORTER**

**(To her)**

**Thank you.**

**(Into the telephone)**

**“Though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing!”**

**(Pause)**

**What? Oh, sorry, Father. I'm sure you *are* familiar with those words. I got a bit carried away.**

**(Pause)**

**Well yes, it *is* a somewhat overworked text, but we'll see if we can't put some fresh life into it. Personalize it a bit, as it were.**

**(Pause)**

**Yes, I'll get right to it. I'll put everything else aside and – and will have it in the hands of a typist by – well, as soon as it's ready for her.**

**(Pause, as Mrs. Manning starts to weep softly)**

**What? Oh. Well bless *you*, Father.**

**(He hangs up and looks at her for a moment)**

**Of course, in that passage Saint Paul wasn't referring to – he meant a – a more inclusive kind of love than –**

**MRS. MANNING**

**(Through her tears)**

**Yes. He did.**

**PORTER**

**Still, one kind *can* lead to – make possible – open one out to –**

**(Pause)**

**There's a lot we can agree to disagree on, Eleanor. But that text – surely it's one we can both subscribe to, can't we? I in my way and you in -- ?**

**(She laughs through her tears. He laughs with her for a moment, then stops abruptly)**

**PORTER**

**In any case, do you suppose we might ... bypass that exploiting agency? Just this once?**

**(She stops laughing and weeping, takes a handkerchief from her purse and dries her eyes)**

**Do you, Eleanor?**

**(She picks up the pen and pad, flips to a fresh page, writes, and hands the pad to him)**

**MRS. MANNING**

**My address.**

**PORTER**

**Thank you.**

**(Looking at the address)**

**The mails can be pretty slow in this city, and you live right across town from here. Would you allow me to rush it straight over to you, in person, as soon as it's done?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**I'm sure to be there, all afternoon and evening.**

**PORTER**

**Good.**

**(Pause)**

**And ... Neil, Kevin and Vickie?**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Of course.**

**PORTER**

**I'll be grateful for any criticisms you may have. Or suggestions for revision.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**All right.**

**PORTER**

**You are, after all, an excellent judge of sermons. Who better than you can tell me when I'm just faking, and when something ... greater than me seems to be speaking through me? And I do want this to be as honest as I – as you *and* I – can make it.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**PORTER**

**And now you'd better hurry to pick up Vickie.**

**MRS. MANNING**

**Yes.**

**(They look tenderly at each other for a moment. Then she crosses quickly to the door, pulls it open, and rushes out. He watches her go, crosses to the door, closes it, and stands with his back against it looking at the address on the pad. Then he crosses to the dresser, lays down the pad, inserts a fresh cassette into the machine, picks up the microphone, presses the Record button, takes a deep breath, and speaks quietly and feelingly into the microphone as lights fade slowly to black)**

**PORTER**

**My text this morning – *our* text this morning – is the words of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, after the scales had fallen from his eyes: Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”**

**THE END**





