

Act 2

Prelude to Act 2 :

The Chorus is divided in two parts.

Part One sings: (Sequenza 12 / 16)

Ingemisco, tamquam reus :
Culpa rubet voltu meus:
Supplicanti parce, Deus.

*I sigh, like the guilty one:
my face reddens in guilt:
Spare the supplicating one, God.*

Qui Mariam absolvisti
Et latronem exaudisti
Mihi quoque spem dedisti

Part Two sings 1920's spiritual or hymn-inspired music that will reappear in Act 2 scene 3. Orchestra as needed for both. The impression is increasingly disturbing, cacophonous even.

Eyes have not seen
Ears have not heard
What God has in store
For those who truly love him.
He that believeth
Shall have an everlasting life
Everlasting life / Everlasting life
He that believeth shall have
An everlasting life.

Scene 1

The curtain rises, revealing Pete and Temple.

The scene is exactly that of the prologue. If text was spoken in Act 1, it is now sung, with orchestral accompaniment.

Temple's private apartment. Pete is standing by the closet door.

Temple enters from the house. She stops, glances around at the mess.

PETE : Well?

TEMPLE : No. No-one's seen her since this morning.

PETE : Like I said. Okay.
We still got time.
Where does she live, the bitch?

TEMPLE : And then what?
Hold a cigarette to her foot?

PETE : It's five hundred dollars. Hard cash.
Plus the jewellery.
Maybe nothing to you.

TEMPLE : Pete! Why not quit now?
Clear out till my husband returns.
I'll make good
As soon as he's back.

PETE : Maybe I don't understand...

TEMPLE : The letters. You've still got the letters.

PETE : Oh, the letters.
He quotes, mockingly : «It rises from the wet... »

TEMPLE : Pete!

He reaches inside his coat, takes out a small, carefully tied-together bundle of letters and tosses it onto the table.

PETE : Here. They're yours for the taking.

TEMPLE : I don't want them. I already told you.

PETE : Sure. You don't want them.

TEMPLE : Give me your lighter.

Pete holds his lighter out to her. Temple flicks the lighter on, holds it in one hand, the bundle of letters in the other.

PETE : Go ahead, burn them.
You say you don't want them,
Be my guest – burn them.

TEMPLE : Okay. I'll burn them.
I swear to you I'll burn them.



I'll burn them. I'll burn them.

They watch each other. Finally Temple extinguishes lighter, drops her arm.

PETE : Then put that junk down and come here.

She goes over to him, tosses the lighter and letters on the table. He puts his arms around her, draws her close. Nancy appears in the doorway.

They kiss passionately. Nancy steps just inside the doorway. They don't see her.

PETE : Come on. Let's get outa here.
I can't do it in this house ...

Pete notices Nancy across Temple's shoulder. Temple turns and sees her too.

PETE : What the hell...?!

TEMPLE : What are you doing here?

Pause.

NANCY : I brought my foot.
So he can hold that cigarette against it.

TEMPLE : So - you're not just a thief.
You're a spy too.

PETE : Maybe she ain't even a thief.
Maybe she brought it back.

They watch her. Nancy doesn't respond.

Or maybe she didn't.
Maybe we oughta use that cigarette after all.
(threatening her) That what you want?

TEMPLE : Pete - no!
Take the bags and go to the car.

PETE : I'll wait right here.
You may be needin' me.

TEMPLE : Just go!

PETE : *flicking the lighter towards Nancy* :
Not that I wouldn't like to.
For auld lang syne.

He starts to leave.

NANCY *hesitantly*: Wait.

TEMPLE : Go!
For God's sake go!

Pete leaves, shutting the door after him. Nancy and Temple face each other.

NANCY : Maybe I was wrong
Thinkin' that hidin' that money might stop you.
And them jewels.
Maybe I should have given it him
Soon as I found it.
He'd've been gone so fast,
All you'd've seen
was his tail in the dust.

TEMPLE : So you did steal it.

NANCY : No more than you did.
Weren't your money in the first place,
but your husband's.

TEMPLE *threatening* : How dare you!

NANCY *unflustered* :
But then, when the husband's the sort
Keeps a thousand dollars in his pocket
For taxis and tips,
You can't help but attract
this kind of scud.

TEMPLE : How dare you?!

Temple slaps Nancy. Nancy steps back. The packet of money and the jewel box fall to the floor from inside her topcoat.

NANCY : There it is,
that caused all the grief and ruin.

TEMPLE : Nancy...

NANCY : But I ain't talking 'bout you.
Ain't even talking about Mister Gowan's money.
I'm talking about two little children.

TEMPLE : So am I.
Why else do you think I sent
Bucky on that fishing trip?

NANCY : Yeah. Sure. You gave up one child,
Willing never to see him again.

Temple doesn't answer.

NANCY : So now answer me this :
Who you gonna leave the little one with?

TEMPLE : Leave her ?
Leave her ?
A six-month-old baby?

NANCY : 'Course you can't leave it.
Not with nobody.
So how 'bout leave it here,
In the cradle.
It'll cry for a moment,
But there ain't nobody to hear.

(To the tune of the folksong «Hush little baby, don't you cry»)

«Hush little baby don't you cry
Mama's up and gone, didn't say bye bye.»

TEMPLE : Nancy!
Do you want me to hit you again?

NANCY : Or maybe you'll take her with you.
Then when Mister Pete tires of you,
when he can't pump no more money from you
well, you can drop her in the garbage.
No more bother to no-one.

TEMPLE : Nancy, please!

Arietta

NANCY : Drop her in the garbage
With so many others,
With mine . My baby,
My baby too, dropped in the bin,
Stole' from me,
Beat from me,
Ripped, torn, then tossed.
My baby, my baby too.
My one, my only,
My once and only,
My just maybe could've been baby too.

TEMPLE *repeating Nancy's last line, and NANCY, repeating, hushed :*
Your just maybe could've been baby too.

NANCY : My just maybe could've been baby too.
So now I'm gonna ask you one more time :
Are you gonna do it?

TEMPLE : Yes!

NANCY : You got to say it in words
So as I can hear them.

TEMPLE : You heard me.
I'm going to do it.

NANCY : Money or no money.

TEMPLE : Money or no money.

NANCY : Children or no children.

Temple doesn't answer.

NANCY : If you can do it, you can say it.

They stare at each other.

TEMPLE : Yes. Children or no children.
Now get out.

Temple picks some money off the floor and gives the bills to Nancy.

Here – next weeks pay – now go.

Temple picks up the rest of the money and the jewel box, and takes them to her bag, which she opens. Nancy crosses quietly towards the nursery, picking up the milk bottle from the table as she passes, and goes on. Temple notices Nancy's movement.

TEMPLE : What are you doing?

NANCY : This bottle is cold.
I'm going to warm it in the bathroom.

Nancy stops and looks back at Temple, then looks upwards.

NANCY *as though to God* : I tried.
I tried everything I knowed.
You can see that.

TEMPLE *peremptory*: Nancy!

NANCY : I've done hushed.

*Nancy exits to nursery. Temple finishes putting the money into the bag and closes it. She checks over contents of baby's bag, then puts jewel box into it. (1 -2 minutes)
Nancy emerges quietly from the nursery, without the milk bottle. She crosses towards the exit, pausing at the table long enough to put back the money Temple had just given her. She starts to exit.*

TEMPLE : Now what?

Nancy pauses, not looking back.

TEMPLE : Nancy.

Nancy waits, immobile, looking at nothing. When Temple doesn't continue, she moves towards the door.

TEMPLE : If I –
If it ever comes up,
I'll say you did your best.
But you were right.
It wasn't the letters.
It was me.

Nancy moves on.

TEMPLE : Nancy – you're my sister
Just like before.

Nancy reaches the door.

TEMPLE : You've got your key.
I'll leave your money, here on the table.

Nancy leaves.

TEMPLE : Nancy!

There is no answer. Temple looks a moment at the empty door, goes to table, writes a brief note to indicate the money is for Nancy, leaves money under a paper weight. She picks up the blanket and crosses to the nursery door and exits through it. A couple of seconds later, Temple comes running out of the bedroom as though to scream. We hear only the chorus and orchestra.

CHORUS 1: (*Rex tremendae*)

Rex tremendae maiestatis
Qui salvando salvas gratis,

Salva me, fons pietatis.

Recordare, Iesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae:
Ne me perdas illa die.

*King of tremendous majesty
who freely saves those who should be
saved,*

Save me, source of mercy.

*Remember me, merciful Jesus
that I am the cause of thy way:
Lest thou lose me in that day.*

CHORUS 2 :

We'll soon be free
We'll soon be free
When the Lord will call us home.
My brother, how long?
Oh sister, how long...
...'fore we done sufferin' here?
'Fore the Lord will call us home?

Scene 2

Same as Act 1 sc 4. Governor's office. March 12th 3:09 a.m.

The scene is the same as before except that Gowan Stevens now sits in the chair behind the desk where the Governor had been, and the Governor is no longer in the room. Temple is kneeling before the desk, her face buried in her arms. She doesn't know that the Governor has gone and that her husband is now in the room.

TEMPLE : And that's all.
The police came.
The murderess sat waiting in the kitchen
"Yes Lord, I done it" she was saying.
"Yes Lord, it was me."

STEVENS : Get up, Temple.

Stevens makes a movement as though to help her stand up. Temple resists.

TEMPLE : Not yet.
Not till our plea is granted.
That's what I'm here for, isn't it?
But look – still no tears.

STEVENS : Get up.

He starts to lift her again, but before he can do so she rises herself, standing facing away from the desk, still unaware of Gowan's presence.

TEMPLE : You're not going to pardon her - are you?
All this was to save my soul, not hers.

Pause.

You might as well just say it.

Turning to face the Governor. She doesn't immediately see that Gowan is in his place.

Can't you please just say it?

She sees Gowan.

Ah!

GOWAN : Filthy whore!

She turns to Stevens.

TEMPLE : Why? Why? Why?
Can't you ever play straight?
Is this your idea of truth.

GOWAN : Scum! Scum! Scum!

TEMPLE *to Gowan* : Of course.

You didn't take the sleeping pill.
And the Governor, of course,
he knew you were hiding.
Under the table, behind the door,
in the next room.

GOWAN : Scum! Scum! Scum!

duet

GOWAN : Hiding?
We should have been hiding,
eight long years ago.
in two abandoned mine shafts.
You in Siberia. Me in the South Pole.
Hiding. Always hiding.

TEMPLE : Hiding. Always hiding.
Eight long years,
and always hiding something.
As though we were living,
me in Siberia, you in the South Pole.
Always hiding.

TEMPLE : I would have told you.

GOWAN : You just did.
Thanks.
And thank you, Saint Nancy,
For strangling my baby
So now I can enjoy my virtuous wife.

STEVENS : Enough!

GOWAN : One child dies so the other can...

*He can't continue, stifles a cry, gasps, tries to scream, can't...
As quickly as he had lost it, Gowan regains his composure.
The three of them look at each other. Has anything been gained?*

GOWAN *to no-one in particular*: I guess that's all.
To Stevens : You happy now?
Now you got it.
Wha' d'you call it - ?
The truth?

STEVENS : The truth.

TEMPLE : The truth.

STEVENS : We think we know,
We say we do,
And live our lives in blindness.
We say we know,
We think we do,
But how our lives are mindless.
So yes, the truth,
The hard, harsh, sharp, stark,
Naked, uncompromising truth.
The uncompromising, naked,
Stark, sharp, harsh, hard truth.
We think we know,
We say we do,
And live our lives in blindness.

GOWAN : All right. Time to go home.
To Temple You gonna ride with me, Boots –
or with confessor uncle G?

STEVENS : Go on, Gowan. You can pick up Bucky.

TEMPLE : Bucky?

GOWAN : Yes – you didn't even ask.
He's with aunt Maggie.

STEVENS : Go pick him up.

GOWAN : Right.
to Temple : I carried him to Maggie's.

He picks Temple's bag and gloves off the desk, hands them to her.

GOWAN : Here.
This is what they call evidence.

Temple takes the bag and gloves. Gowan heads towards the exit.

TEMPLE *after him, attempting to be spouse-like* :
Did you have a coat?

Gowan looks at her but doesn't answer. He exits.

STEVENS : Come on. It's late.

TEMPLE : Wait. What did he say?

Stevens doesn't answer.

TEMPLE : He said : "No."

STEVENS : Yes.

TEMPLE : Did he say why?

Stevens tries to move her on.

TEMPLE : Not tonight. It couldn't have been tonight.

STEVENS : He said it a week ago.

TEMPLE : When you sent the wire...

STEVENS : "Who am I" he said,
"to set my puny office
against that simple, undeviable aim?"
"Who am I," he asked
"to nullify the purchase she made
with that lost and worthless life?"

TEMPLE *echoing* : "... with that lost and worthless life."
Then why did I come?
Not to save her.
Not even to confess.

STEVENS : You came for the very reason
Nancy is going to die, tomorrow.
To say that little children
as long as they are little children,
shall be intact, unanguished,
unterrified, untorn.

TEMPLE *echoing* : "...little children
as long as they are little children,
shall be intact, unanguished,
unterrified, untorn."

TEMPLE and GAVIN *together* :

... shall be intact, unanguished,
unterrified, untorn.

CHORUS : Everlasting life, everlasting life
He that believeth shall have
An everlasting life.
Eyes have not seen
Ears have not heard
What God has in store
For those who truly love him.
He that believeth shall have
Everlasting life.

Scene 3

The common room of the county jail. March 12th, 10.30 am.

There is a heavy barred door at the left, the entrance to this common room or «bull-pen» as it is known. A single heavily barred window in the rear wall looks down into the street. Right and left there are doorways leading to rows of cells.

The door, left, opens with a heavy clashing of the steel lock, and swings back and outward. Temple enters, followed by Stevens and the Jailor. Temple has changed her dress but wears the fur coat and the same hat.

She stops just inside the room. Stevens perforce stops also. The jailor draws the door closed behind him as he enters, locks it on the inside with another clash and clang of steel.

At any moment throughout this scene it is possible that we hear an iteration of the gospel singing in the background.

JAILOR : Well Lawyer, tonight's
the last night of singing school, huh?
To Temple : You been away, missus.
You don't know what he's been up to.
Mind you, I would've beat town too,
If I'd been the ma of the very –

He cuts himself off, realizing he was about to commit a faux-pas.

Anyway, every Sunday,
'cept last night – where was you last night, Lawyer? –
Lawyer here and Na – the prisoner –
they been singing hymns in her cell.
Gotta admire the man -
even if he was
out of line, defendin' -

Once again treading on delicate ground – but he has got himself into it this time.

Defendin' a nigger murderer -
let alone it was his own niece was...

He cuts himself off again.

Anyways, the other nigger prisoners here –
they all joined in.

Folks stopped in the street to listen
'stead of going to church.
Got so good I thought the Marshall
should comb the nigger dives
not for drunks and gamblers
but for baritones and basses.

He starts to laugh, guffaws, then catches himself.

'Scuse me Mrs Stevens,
I talk too much.
Not one of us here in Yoknapatawpha
that don't feel –

TEMPLE : Thank you Mr. Tubbs.
If we could just see Nancy.

JAILOR : Sure thing, Mrs. Stevens.

He turns to go out rear right, disappears into the passage

Chuckling to himself: Hey Marshall,
Go search them joints
for baritones or a bass ...

CHORUS : Ears have not heard,
What God has...
...who truly love Him.
He that believeth...

Stevens takes out a pack of cigarettes from his overcoat pocket. Temple declines before he can even offer them.

TEMPLE : No, thanks. No thanks.

Arietta

And now I'm to say "I forgive you"
to the nigger who murdered my baby.
Got to say "Go in peace"
to that whore who strangled my child.
And now got to ask forgiveness,
For something I couldn't not do.
Got to be forgiven,
For someone I couldn't not be.

She stops as Nancy enters from the rear alcove, followed by the Jailor, who passes Nancy and comes on.

JAILOR : Okay, Lawyer.
You keep it short.

STEVENS : We'll keep it short.

JAILOR *to Temple* : You want something,
You just holler.

TEMPLE : Thank you, Mr. Tubbs.

JAILOR *Leaving, chuckling* : I'm gonna go find myself a baritone or two...!

He unlocks the door on the other side, exits, closes and locks it behind him. The lock clashes. Nancy stands where the Jailor passed her, behind Temple and Stevens. Her face is calm, unchanged.

NANCY *to Temple* : You been to California.
I used to think I'd go some day.
But I waited too late to do it.

TEMPLE : So did I.
Too late when I went.
Too late when I came back.
Not only for me
but for you too.

NANCY : I heard you come back
yesterday.
And I knows where you were last night,
you and him both.
You went to see the Mayor.

TEMPLE : Oh God – the Mayor!
No, the Governor, the Big Man himself.
Turns out we weren't even there to talk about you.
We were there for Temple Drake.

NANCY : I know what the Big Man done told you.
I could've told you myself -
saved you the trip.

TEMPLE : Why didn't you?

NANCY : I guess there was still some hoping.
Despite myself – hoping.
That’s the hardest thing to break.
Poor sinnin’ man – ‘cause that’s all he’s got.
Even with salvation laying right in his hand.
He keeps grabbin’ back at hope.

STEVENS : When you have salvation
You don’t have hope?

NANCY : You don’t even need it.
I finished all that long ago,
In the nursery that night
Before I lifted my –

TEMPLE *convulsively* : Oh...

NANCY : All you need, all you got to do
Is just believe.

TEMPLE : Believe?

STEVENS : Believe?

NANCY ; Just believe.

STEVENS : Believe what?

TEMPLE : Believe what?

NANCY : You got to trust in Him

STEVENS: Trust in Him?

NANCY ; You trust in Him
And He will save you.

STEVENS : You too? A murderess? In heaven?

NANCY : I can work.
In heaven there’s still work needs be done.
The washing and the sweeping...

STEVENS : Maybe even the children to be tended
and kept from hurt and harm?

NANCY : Maybe.

STEVENS : Maybe even that baby?
Maybe even that one too?
Because you loved that baby, Nancy.
Even when you raised your hand,
you loved that baby.
Isn't that true?

TEMPLE : Or maybe the other one, yours.
The one you were carrying six months gone,
when that man kicked you – at the picnic -
Kicked you in the stomach, and -

STEVENS : What? Six-months pregnant?
And its father kicked you?

NANCY : I don't know.
Who knows which of them was its pa?

CHORUS : Ears have not heard...

NANCY : If you backed your behind into a buzz-saw,
Could you tell which tooth hit you first?
To Temple : What about that one?

TEMPLE : Will that one be there too?
That never had a father,
That was never born?

NANCY : I don't know.
I believes.

TEMPLE : What? What do you believe?

NANCY : I don't know.
But I believes.

CHORUS : Eyes have not seen,
Ears have not heard
What God has in store
For those who truly love Him.
He that believeth
Shall have everlasting life.

They pause as they hear the sound of feet approaching. The key clashes in the lock and the door swings open. The Jailor enters, drawing the door closed behind him.

JAILOR : Times up, Lawyer.

STEVENS : I'll come back later.

JAILOR : Don't put it off too late
Or there won't be no-one left to visit.
To Nancy : C'mon.
You got a long way to go tomorrow.

He leads the way to the alcove. Nancy turns to follow him.

TEMPLE : Nancy! - what about me?
By this time tomorrow
You'll be nothing at all.
But what about me.
God, what about me?

NANCY : Believe.

TEMPLE : Believe what?

NANCY : Believe.

She exits following the Jailor. The steel door off-stage clangs, the key clashes. We hear some spiritual-inspired singing coming from far away. Temple and Stevens remain silent throughout this time. The Jailor reappears, approaches, crosses toward the exit. He unlocks the door and opens it, pauses.

JAILOR : Yessir. A long hard way.

He waits, holding the door. Temple stands motionless.

STEVENS : C'mon Temple.

Stevens touches her arm slightly. She starts, stumbles slightly, recovering quickly.

JAILOR : Durn it, Lawyer.
Why'd you have to bring her ? –

TEMPLE : I'm all right.

She walks steadily toward the door.

JAILOR : Okay.
Can't say as I blame you.
Durned if I can see
how even a murdering nigger
could stand this smell.

He exits, holding the door from the off-stage side.

JAILOR'S VOICE : Well, howdy, Gowan.
Here's your wife now.

Stevens exits :

STEVENS' VOICE : Gowan. Hi there.

GOWAN'S VOICE : Uncle Gavin.

TEMPLE *walking toward the door* :
Believe. Just believe.
Or I'm sunk.
We all are.

GOWAN'S VOICE : Temple?

TEMPLE : I'm coming.

GOWAN'S VOICE : It's time to go home.

They exit. The door closes, clashes, the clash and clang of the key as the Jailor locks it again. The four pairs of footsteps sound and fade as they pass through the corridor.

Blackout.

The end.