

CLEANSING ACTS

(*Cleansing Acts* premiered at the Labute New Theatre Festival and was performed by the St. Louis Actors Studio in St. Louis, Missouri.)

Characters

WILLIAM/BILLY CASPER: A plain looking man in his twenties, who is quiet, reserved, and contemplating suicide.

MAXINE CASPER: William's mother, who is a bit eccentric. Unbeknownst to her, she is the main reason William wants to end his life.

STAR/SANDY: A somewhat attractive prostitute in her twenties, who has experienced more pain than one should at such a young age.

Setting

A bathroom. The bathroom can be done in a very minimalist way, with just a tub, toilet, and free-standing door. There is no necessity for realism.

Time

The present.

Synopsis

A young man contemplating suicide calls a prostitute with whom he has a long-term platonic relationship in hopes to have her with him when he dies.

PLEASE NOTE: The two central characters, WILLIAM / BILLY, and STAR / SANDY, will ultimately end up unclothed together in a bathtub. This final scene is not for shock effect, it is a form of baptism for the two characters. The nudity can be handled any way the director chooses; it is not necessary for the audience to see the two characters in the nude, only for them to get the idea that they are nude. The aspect of language may also be handled in much the same way. Most prostitutes are rather free in their speech, but if the director feels a more conservative approach is necessary,

then some editing may be made. Also, Star's name is purposely not mentioned, it isn't an oversight.

AT RISE: Lights come up on a bathroom.

WILLIAM CASPER is standing by the bathtub. The room is very sparse. We see WILLIAM remove a razor blade from the medicine cabinet and run his finger lightly along the edge of the blade. He sets the razor down on the edge of the tub and removes all of his clothing. Suddenly the bathroom door opens and in steps MAXINE CASPER carrying a bowl of cookie dough.

WILLIAM quickly grabs a towel to cover himself.

WILLIAM

Mother! What are you doing? Can't you see I'm getting ready to take a bath?

MAXINE

Oh, for heaven's sake, William, I've seen you naked hundreds of times.

WILLIAM

That was when I was a baby.

MAXINE

You haven't changed that much.

WILLIAM

Thanks.

MAXINE

Now here, try this.

MAXINE pushes a spoonful of dough into WILLIAM'S mouth.

MAXINE

What do you think?

WILLIAM

I think this could have waited.

MAXINE

Well? Good or no?

WILLIAM

It's good, Mom...except...

MAXINE

Except what?

WILLIAM

I don't know, something in it tastes funny.

MAXINE

It's probably the raisins.

WILLIAM

I don't see any raisins in the batter.

MAXINE

They're pureed.

WILLIAM

Oh.

MAXINE

You hate raisins, so I pureed them so you wouldn't have to see them. You know? Out of sight, out of mind.

WILLIAM

Didn't work, Mom. Nice try.

WILLIAM pushes her toward the door
while attempting not to lose his towel.

WILLIAM

Now will you leave so I can take my bath?

MAXINE

Why are you taking a bath? You always take showers.

WILLIAM

I just felt like taking a bath today, that's all.

MAXINE

But you don't like baths. You wouldn't take them when you were a child. You said baths were for girls, not boys.

WILLIAM

I've changed my mind, okay?

MAXINE

You're not turning funny on me, are you?

Funny?
WILLIAM

Yes, you know, funny, Gay.
MAXINE

No, mom. I have a girlfriend, remember?
WILLIAM

Oh yes, you want me to tell you when your girlfriend arrives?
MAXINE

Yes, please.
WILLIAM

Will you be done with your bath by then?
MAXINE

No, just send her in here.
WILLIAM

But—
MAXINE

Please, Mom.
WILLIAM

You won't do anything bad in here will you?
MAXINE

No, Mom. We're just going to talk. I just need a little privacy that's all.
WILLIAM

Okay, I just don't want you to do anything that your father wouldn't...Oh, my goodness! Your father--
MAXINE

Mom? Mom!
WILLIAM

MAXINE starts to leave the bathroom, but WILLIAM stops her.

Hold it, Mom. Wait! Where are you going?
WILLIAM

I completely forgot that I must have dinner ready. Your father will be home tonight.
MAXINE

WILLIAM

Mom—

MAXINE

No, I must get dinner ready.

She pulls away from him and starts for the door. WILLIAM grabs her and sits her down on the toilet.

WILLIAM

Mom, he's out of town, remember? Dad went to San Francisco on business. He'll be home at the end of next week.

MAXINE

He will? Why can't I remember these things? I swear, sometimes I can't even remember what your father looks like. Here we've been married twenty-three years and I still forget what he looks like.

WILLIAM

It's okay, Mom.

WILLIAM stares into her eyes.

WILLIAM

You feeling better?

MAXINE nods her head.

MAXINE

I didn't know I was feeling bad.

WILLIAM

You're not. You just get confused sometimes. What do you say you finish baking your cookies?

MAXINE

But you didn't like them.

WILLIAM

The cookies were fine. I just didn't like the raisins.

MAXINE

But I pureed the raisins into the--

WILLIAM

Maybe you can strain them out.

MAXINE

Yeah, maybe I can do that. I love you, William.

MAXINE hugs him.

WILLIAM

I love you too, Mom. I tell you what, let's have tea later.

MAXINE

Tea? Yes, okay. That sounds wonderful. I like it when we have our tea together. Maybe your girlfriend can join us. You know you haven't gone out much lately--

WILLIAM

Don't forget the cookies mom.

MAXINE

Oh yes, the cookies. Seems like all I do is bake cookies. I'll let you know when your company arrives.

WILLIAM

Thanks, Mom.

WILLIAM kisses her on the forehead.

MAXINE

I love you.

MAXINE hugs him.

WILLIAM

I know, Mom. I love you too.

MAXINE Exits, and WILLIAM tests the water in the tub. He climbs into the tub and rests for a moment in the water. He tries to pick up the razor, but it slips from his fingers and it ends up in the tub near his crotch.

WILLIAM

Damn!

WILLIAM frantically searches for the razor blade then finds it.

WILLIAM

Ow! Dammit!

WILLIAM lifts the razor out of the water, but suddenly, MAXINE bursts back into the room, surprising WILLIAM and he once again drops the blade back into the water.

WILLIAM

Mom, I thought I told you I was taking a bath.

MAXINE

And you told me to let you know when your guest arrived. Well, she's here.

WILLIAM

Already?

MAXINE

Yes, but I don't think you should see her. If she comes in here dressed like that, things are liable to happen.

WILLIAM

Things?

MAXINE

Yes, things. You know what I mean. Sex things.

WILLIAM

Mom, nothing's going to happen. Now I think you'd better go and get her. I'm not sure she should be left alone in the house.

MAXINE Exits, and WILLIAM immediately starts looking for the razor blade.

STAR

Can I help?

WILLIAM looks up to see STAR standing in the doorway. She is dressed in a very short skin-tight red skirt and a gold sequin halter top that leaves little for the imagination. She wears a large and ornate bracelet on each wrist. WILLIAM is speechless, just taking her in. STAR crosses over to the tub.

STAR

Can I help you find what you're looking for?

WILLIAM quickly covers himself and ends up splashing water on STAR.

STAR

Hey! Watch what you're doing!

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, you startled me. I didn't mean to do that.

STAR

No harm done. So, what are we doing here? If we're doing it in the bathtub, it'll be extra. Oh, and I don't do water sports. No way.

WILLIAM

Water sports?

STAR

Don't worry about it.

WILLIAM

My wallet is in my pants over there.

WILLIAM points to his pants lying next to the toilet. STAR removes the wallet and pulls out a large wad of bills.

STAR

I take it you want me for the night this time.

WILLIAM

However long it takes, but all I want to do is talk.

STAR crosses to the edge of the tub, sits on it and stares into WILLIAM'S eyes.

STAR

That's all we ever do, lover. Although with the tub I thought we were possibly advancing to another stage of this relationship.

STAR stands back up, and as she does so, she drops a necklace that falls into the tub.

She quickly tries to pick it up, but WILLIAM picks it up first. He holds it up and looks at it.