

SCENE VII

**PAGANINI**  
*from*  
*Freefall Frostbite*

*Another vagrant enters, empty handed.*

HOMELESS #4:

There is nothing here to burn.  
This city's made of steel and stone.  
It's an electronic tomb.  
Ashes to ashes, dust to doom.

*The Homeless turn on the audience.*

HOMELESS #2, #3, & #4:

Do you have anything that we can burn?  
Anything to keep the fire going?

HOMELESS #2:

Ticket stubs?

HOMELESS #3:

Subway maps?

HOMELESS #4:

A wooden leg?

HOMELESS #2:

A Haitian hat?

SHARON:

We should help.

STEVEN:

We'll be soon  
inside and warm  
and quite immune.

HOMELESS #2:

Think of it as providence,  
a chance to get rid of evidence,  
your pockets stuffed with ripped receipts  
that detail sex on Shakedown Street.

HOMELESS #3:

Letters, subpoenas, invitations,  
all those boring obligations,  
let us burn them and you'll soon believe  
yourself they never were received.

*The VIOLINIST walks on, sets out a hat and begins to play. The Homeless continue.*

HOMELESS #2, #3 & #4: (a fugue)

#2: Playbills? Checkbooks? Notebooks? Bibles?

#2:	Playbills	checkbooks	notebooks	bibles		
#3:	Playbills	checkbooks	notebooks	bibles		
#4:		Playbills	checkbooks	notebooks	bibles	

#2: Draft cards? SAG cards? Protest placards?

#2:	Draft cards	SAG cards	protest	placards		
#3:	Draft cards	SAG cards	protest	placards		
#4:		Draft cards	SAG cards	protest	placards	

#2: Chopsticks? Nunchuks? Scrabble tiles?

#2:	Chopsticks	nunchuks	scrabble	tiles		
#3:	Chopsticks	nunchuks	scrabble	tiles		
#4:		Chopsticks	nunchuks	scrabble	tiles	

#2, #3 & #4: Drawings? Scribblings suicidal?

*The Violinist persists, and has monopolized everyone's attention.*

HOMELESS #3:

I'll put something sought-after in your hat  
if only you'll stop strangling that cat.

DOORMEN:

It's of course an empty promise.  
Inside out their ragged pockets  
are dark and void of anything  
but cockroaches and stinking steam.

*Homeless #2, #3 & #4 begin to circle their prey.*

HOMELESS #1:

Didn't quite ascend to the symphony,  
did we, Paganini? Didn't surface  
from the conservatory sought after?  
Auditions subject you to stifled laughter?

*The Homeless are focused not on the Violinist, but the violin.*

Who did you have to sacrifice  
to pay precociousness's price?  
Can you calculate the cost  
of all that you suspect you lost?

*Attacking, they struggle to wrest the violin from him.*

Ten million minutes spent alone  
doing strange things to your bones  
fingers like anemones  
in imaginary murky seas.

*They succeed, though the Violinist retains the bow.*

Lonely nights of unknown number  
in battle with baroque cadenzas,  
all the dreams delayed, denied,  
pursuing that pale ghost, precision.

*They smash the violin and feed the pieces into the fire.*

Perfecting pizzicato  
will not ease compulsion's pain.  
Expertise is entertainment  
for an affliction of the brain.

Julliard's just as much a jungle  
as anaconda'd Amazon.  
Virtuosity is venom  
and its vibrating in your arms.

Comfort only comes from fire  
consuming all wrong reasoning,

incinerating sadness,  
fire rising from the rosined strings,

fretboard burning, purfling curdling  
ebony and spruce entwined  
shellac crackling, stressed wood screaming.

HOMELESS #1, #2, #3 & #4:  
Farewell performance funeral pyre.

*The fire roars.*

EX-VIOLINIST:  
Maniacs! Murderers!

HOMELESS #2, #3 & #4:  
Euthanasia's merciful.

EX-VIOLINIST:  
Psychopaths and perjurers!

HOMELESS #1:  
Hand to God, we're liberators.

Make music now without constraint  
of all external instruments.  
Let what's inside you resonate.  
The night is now your violin.

HOMELESS #2, #3 & #4:

Come over here and share our fire.  
Abandon dead dreams and desires.  
In this fire's too fair light  
all our faces blank and bright.

*The fire roars.*

HOMELESS #2:

What's burning in this wire cage?

HOMELESS #3:

All evidence of yesterday.

HOMELESS #4:

All that might have been tomorrow.

HOMELESS #2, #3 & #4:

All chance for ecstasy or sorrow.

Come over here and share our wine  
and insights from the sort of sane.  
Our wine distilled from broken dreams  
and rotten grapes.

HOMELESS #1:

It's cruel champagne.

*The ex-violinist has become almost unrecognizable as a result of the struggle, his clothes torn, his hair a mess, his face smeared with ash. With nothing left, he has no choice but to join the Homeless, whom he now resembles. He gently places the bow in the fire and watches it burn.*

SHARON:

Still think they're not here to hurt us?

STEVEN: *(to Doormen)*

Couldn't you have tried to stop that?

DOORMAN #1:

We're not police. It's not our province.

DOORMAN #2:

Besides, they were just being honest.

*The leader charges #4 & #5 (the ex-violinist):*

HOMELESS #1:

Vultures, now renew your search  
fantastic out from this low perch.  
With this new soldier's amazed eyes  
search alleys and scale balconies.

Pick apart the carcasses  
of underwater mortgages  
look minutely 'mongst the bones  
of astronomic student loans.

Go! Don't stare at me like fish.  
A New Year's freeze is coming fast  
and the fire's ravenous.

*Homeless #4 & #5 exit.*