

"THE VEGETABLE"

BY STEPHEN BITTRICH

INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN THE BRONX - DAY

The faucett drips, the clock ticks.

LAMOYNE (the vegetable) is sitting all alone in a wheel chair beside a cheap kitchen table and chairs. HE is a vegetable, by all accounts.

Upon his face is stuck a constant agonizing grimace. HE has intravenous tubes attached to keep him hydrated and fed. Every once in a while a bit of drool might spill from the corner of his mouth if his head droops too far in a particular direction.

INT. THE STAIRWELL - DAY

CLARICE, Lamoyne's wife, and SPIDER are laughing about some shared joke as they stumble up the stairway to the fifth floor walk up apartment.

INT. THE LIVING/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN THE BRONX - DAY

Again Lamoyne, unchanged.

After a few moments, the apartment door opens, and Clarice and Spider gleefully enter.

As soon as Clarice sees Lamoyne, she loses all her humor.

CLARICE

There he is...Mr. Excitement.

Spider circles Lamoyne, checking him out carefully.

SPIDER

What a sour puss.

(In Lamoyne's face)

Hey! Lighten up!

(HE laughs loudly)

So he's been like that how many years?

CLARICE

(Bitterly)

Six.

SPIDER
Jesus! Pull the fuckin' plug already!

CLARICE
Don't think I haven't thought of it.

SPIDER
How long ago did you marry him?

CLARICE
A year before he got hurt.

SPIDER
So you had one good year.

CLARICE
It wasn't that good.

SPIDER
He fell on his head or something?

CLARICE
Construction accident. He fell off a girder 'bout three stories up.

SPIDER
(back to Lamoyne)
Hey...anybody home?
(to Clarice)
What's his name again? Lemon something?

CLARICE
Lamoyne.

SPIDER
Hey, Lamoyne, my man...been gettin' any lately?

Spider laughs.

SPIDER (cont'd)
Does his pecker still work?

CLARICE
How the hell should I know?

SPIDER
Don't tell me you don't got needs, Clarice!

Clarice approaches Spider.

CLARICE

That's what I got you for, Lover.

She embraces him, but Spider keeps looking over at Lamoyne.

SPIDER

Hey, hey, he's creepin' me out. Put a fuckin' bag over his head or something.

CLARICE

I like it when he has to watch. I want to hurt him.

SPIDER

So he's got like feelings and shit?

CLARICE

I don't know, and I don't care.

SPIDER

So how about it, Big Fella? Okay if I bang your old lady? Just say "no" if you got any objections. Hmmmm? Did you say something? Chime in any time.

Clarice and Spider start making out and groping each other voraciously, like they might actually eat each other. Spider keeps looking over at Lamoyne, who is positioned so he's staring straight at them

SPIDER (cont'd)

That's it. He's lookin' straight at me. He's creapin' me out!

Spider gets a towel on the kitchen counter and throws it over Lamoyne's head. Spider sniffs the air around Lamoyne, then sniffs closer to Lamoyne's towel covered head.

SPIDER (cont'd)

He smells like Calvin Klein or some shit. I expected him to stink more. You keep him pretty spiffed up. He's like the fuckin' best groomed vegetable I ever seen.

CLARICE

God, I don't clean him! I haven't touched him in years. He's got a nurse. She takes care of him. He could fall

flat on his face, and I'd leave him there 'til she comes.

SPIDER

That must cost a pretty penny. Private nurse.

CLARICE

It costs a fortune, but his Workman's Comp takes care of it. I even got a little left over for myself every month.

SPIDER

So what's the complaint? Whadda you wanna whack him for?

CLARICE

(in a loud whisper)

Why don't you announce it to the whole fuckin' block, Bonehead!

Spider grabs her hard by the wrist.

SPIDER

Hey, watch yer mouth!

CLARICE

Come in the bedroom!

They move toward the bedroom.

INT. THE BEDROOM - DAY

Spider and Clarice in quiet, yet passionate conspiratorial tones move into the pig sty of a bedroom.

CLARICE

He's got life insurance. But I can't collect on it if I pull the plug. He's gotta die of natural causes.

Already knowing the answer as he picks up a ceramic pig.

SPIDER

And how you gonna pull that off?

CLARICE

I tole you, Spider. I was hoping we could put our heads together on that one.

She starts to kiss him. He pushes her off.

SPIDER

So let's get down to brass tacks. How much?

CLARICE

Two hundred grand.

SPIDER

And how much of that is mine?

CLARICE

I thought we could work that out in the Bahamas or something...once the money comes in.

SPIDER

Naw, naw, naw, dudn't work like that.

Clarice drops the flirtations and gets down to business, lighting a cigarette.

CLARICE

Thirty grand. You get thirty grand if you do the deed.

SPIDER

It's all on me? I want half.

CLARICE

(laughing bitterly)

Listen, I already waited six years. I can just wait him out and keep the whole Goddamned policy. He's not gonna live forever.

SPIDER

I dunno. That nurse polishes him up pretty nice. Cleans up his little dooty underwear, splashes on some Calvin Klein Shit. He might live another thirty, forty years.

CLARICE

Yer not gettin' half. I earned that Goddamned money over the last six years. And it's not like it's a real murder anyway. It's more like a mercy killing.

SPIDER

Fifty grand. Half now.

CLARICE

What are you, Stupid? I don't got any money! He's gotta die first.

Spider grabs her chin in his hand.

SPIDER

You know, Clarice, you gotta smart mouth on you.

CLARICE

I'll give you fifty grand, but you gotta wait. When I get paid, you get paid.

SPIDER

And we're gonna stay real close together until that time.

Grabbing Spider's crotch.

CLARICE

I wouldn't have it any other way.

She kisses him. Spider is suddenly...inspired.

SPIDER

Good, let's do it then.

CLARICE

Good.

Spider goes back toward the living room/kitchenette.

CLARICE (cont'd)

Where are you going?

INT. THE LIVING/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN THE BRONX - DAY

When Clarice enters, Spider is pinching Lamoyne's nose and holding his mouth closed.

CLARICE

Are you fuckin' crazy? We gotta make a plan!

SPIDER

What's to plan? I'm just gonna suffocate him. It'll look like his lungs failed.

CLARICE

Ease up! He can't have any marks on him.

SPIDER

He's a goddamn cucumber. He's not going to put up a struggle.

CLARICE

We gotta make a plan, Spider.

SPIDER

No time like the present, Clarice.

CLARICE

Jesus!

Lamoyne starts to flail his arms a bit and hits Spider in the collarbone and face.

SPIDER

Son-of-a-bitch! You said he was a fuckin' vegetable! Mother Fucker hit me!

Spider gets a little rougher on Lamoyne.

CLARICE

Christ! You're gonna bruise him!

SPIDER

Well, give me a hand! He's movin' all over the place!

Clarice goes over and holds Lamoyne's hands down. He strikes out even worse.

SPIDER (cont'd)

Little Brussels sprout's puttin' up a fight!

CLARICE

Keep your voice down.

SPIDER

You gotta stop tellin' me what to do, Clarice.

Lamoyne finally goes limp. Spider and Clarice sit down on the floor together, breathing heavily.

SPIDER (cont'd)
(quietly)
Man.

After a moment, Clarice lashes out...

CLARICE
I tole you we needed to plan it out
better. You were squeezin' the shit out
of him. What if he bruises?

SPIDER
I barely touched him. He's not gonna
bruise.

CLARICE
He better not.

SPIDER
Or else what?

Clarice rises and crosses the room.

CLARICE
We should leave him now.

SPIDER
What?

CLARICE
Let Charlotte find him...his nurse.

SPIDER
Won't somebody say somethin' about you
leavin' him alone?

CLARICE
I leave him alone every night for about
a half hour. I start strippin' at six,
and the nurse dudn't get here 'til six
thirty usually. She's got another job.

SPIDER
It's getting on six right now.

CLARICE
So that's what I'm sayin'. Let's leave
him. She'll find him dead, and she can
call the ambulance.

She grabs her coat, starts to leave, and Spider grabs her.
He looks into her eyes.

SPIDER
Hey. Fifty grand.

CLARICE
Yeah, I said so. If nuthin' goes wrong.

SPIDER
Fifty grand.

CLARICE
Let's get outta here.

Clarice walks out. Spider gives Lamoyne's a once over. His expression still has not changed...agony.

SPIDER
Been real nice knowing you. Don't go changin'.

Clarice sticks her head back in the door.

CLARICE
You coming?

EXT. A NEARBY PARK - DUSK

Some local kids play basketball as Clarice and Spider pass by, speaking in quiet tones.

INT. THE LIVING/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN THE BRONX - NIGHT

The faucett drips, the clock ticks.

A half hour later, after the sun has set, Lamoyne's expression has not changed.

The lock at the door rattles.

Enter NURSE CHARLOTTE, young, pretty in an odd sort of way, devoted, in denial of real life. She wears an old-fashioned nurses uniform.

NURSE CHARLOTTE
Hello...Clarice? It's Charlotte! I'm early. Hello? Hello?

She sees Lamoyne's body sitting in the chair, but doesn't realize anything is wrong with him.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

Hello there, Honey. Have you been waiting for me long?

She hangs her coat up on the wall.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
I've missed you today. What a long, terrible day at work. I couldn't wait to get out and come see you. How are you?

She puts the back of her hand against his cheek.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
Oh my gosh, you're as cold as ice. How could Clarice leave you without a blanket? Let me see if I can't find one.

She starts looking around the apartment for a blanket.

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Searching the bedroom closet and yelling toward the kitchen.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
You know, Lamoyne, something happened today at my other job. You remember, I told you about that Jimmy character. Well, he started hitting on me again. I tried to take your advice and just ignore him, but he would not let up.

Noticing the mess in the bedroom.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
(to herself)
God what a mess.
(to dead Lamoyne again)
He...he pushed me into the supply closet and started groping me all over. He smelled. I didn't like his smell.
I...I didn't know what to do. I told him I had a boyfriend...I told him...you were my boyfriend. I told him you would come to get him.

INT. THE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Nurse Charlotte enters the bathroom with a blanket tucked under her arm. She checks her make up in the mirror.

NURSE CHARLOTTE
(still talking to dead
Lamoynes)

He doesn't know about you...that you
can't...I mean, for all he knows....

(Beat)

Anyway, it worked for the rest of the
day. He let me go, and he didn't come
around any more. But I don't know what
I'll do tomorrow.

INT. THE LIVING/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN
THE BRONX - NIGHT

She enters the living room.

NURSE CHARLOTTE

I wish you could...I wish you
could kill him, Lamoynes. I
wish you could cut off his
balls with a switch blade.
You'd do that for me wouldn't
you...if you could? I know
you'd protect me.

She wheels him around facing her, so his back is to us, and
covers his shoulders with a blanket.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
There you go. That'll warm you up.

She looks between his legs.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
Oh my! What's all this about?

Seeming to reach down into his crotch area.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
Did you work this up for me? Especially
for me? It's never been that big before!
Did my little story get you excited?
How's that now? Does that feel good?
She stands up and unzips her nurse's
uniform a bit, treating him to some
cleavage.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

What to you want? Do you want me to go down there? Lamoyne? Is that what you want, Honey?

She starts to go down on him.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. A NEARBY PARK - DUSK

Clarice is walking home after a night of stripping. 4 AM. She is wearing her school girl stripper outfit under a fake fur coat.

SOME DRUG DEALERS in the park offer her obscenities. She flashes them and shoots the finger.

INT. THE LIVING/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN THE BRONX - NIGHT

The faucett drips, the clock ticks.

Lamoyne's face.

His expression has changed. What was once a constant agonizing grimace, is now a silly jubilant smile.

He still has a very noticeable erection in his pants.

The door lock jiggles.

Clarice comes warily in the apartment door.

CLARICE

Charlotte? Charlotte? Hey!

Clarice looks pissed as if to say, "Didn't she even come last night?" She sets a huge wad of dollar bills on the table. She gets out her cell phone and dials Spider.

CLARICE (cont'd)

Hey, come up. Little bitch didn't even show last night.

(beat)

No, that's what I'm saying. He's still here. Come up.

She hangs up the cell phone and notices for the first time Lamoyne's expression.

CLARICE (cont'd)

Holy Mother of God! Lamoyne? Lamoyne?
You alive...Honey?

INT. THE STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Spider makes his way quickly up the stairs.

INT. THE LIVING/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN
THE BRONX - DAYSETTING:

Clarice reluctantly feels his neck for a pulse. She can't
look him in the face.

CLARICE (cont'd)
Oh my God. Oh my God. You're dead.
You got no pulse.

She feels for his wrist pulse which is down near his
erection. She notices the erection now.

CLARICE (cont'd)
Oh shit, you got a fuckin' hard on. I
can't handle this.

Spider comes in the door abruptly, and Clarice screams.

SPIDER
Hey, what the fuck, Clarice! What are
you screamin' for? You tole me to come
up.

CLARICE
Look!

SPIDER
What?

CLARICE
Look at his face.

Spider takes a look at him and finally realizes.

SPIDER
Holy shit! Was he like that? Was his
face like that? When we left him?

CLARICE
No.

SPIDER

It wasn't, right? It was like all
frowning, right? All in agony? How'd
he get like that?

CLARICE
I don't know. Look. Look at this...

SPIDER
What?

CLARICE
His, his thing!

Spider looks.

SPIDER
He's got a boner.

CLARICE
Yeah.

SPIDER
That's rigor mortis. That's what that
is.

CLARICE
Just in his dick?

SPIDER
That happens. I read about that shit.

CLARICE
Something's wrong, Spider. Charlotte
knows something.

SPIDER
Who's Charlotte?

CLARICE
Nurse Charlotte! The nurse! She's up
to something. She knows. She made his
face like that.

SPIDER
What are you saying...that she like took
his fuckin' dead face and pushed up the
corners of his mouth, so he's smiling?

CLARICE
Yeah. She's trying to blackmail us.

SPIDER
Us? I'm not in this.

CLARICE
You killed him.

SPIDER
Says you. Got any witnesses?

She grabs his face.

CLARICE
We are in this together, Spider.

He pushes Clarice off.

SPIDER
You don't ever grab me, bitch!

CLARICE
What do we do about this?

Spider takes Lamoyne in.

SPIDER
He's looking straight at me. Was he
always looking at me?

CLARICE
What are you talking about? He's not
looking at you.

SPIDER
Look...come here where I'm standing and
look.

CLARICE
If he's looking where yer standing, then
why don't you just move, Halfwit?

SPIDER
I'm gettin' real tired of you, Clarice.
Call me another fuckin' name, and I'll
slap a permanent expression on *your*
face.

Spider moves to another spot.

SPIDER (cont'd)
His eyes are following me.

CLARICE

His eyes are not following you. It's an optical illusion or something. He's dead. Come feel his pulse. He's dead.

SPIDER

Hey man, quit looking at me!

He hits Lamoyne.

CLARICE

Are you crazy? Are you fuckin' insane? You're gonna to mark up his body!

SPIDER

He's lookin' at me with that freaky smile!

CLARICE

I gotta think what to do!

Spider notices the wad of bills on the table.

SPIDER

What's all this money?

CLARICE

That's mine.

SPIDER

I thought you said you didn't have any money.

CLARICE

I said I didn't have twenty-five grand. That's my tip money from tonight.

SPIDER

You make this kind of money strippin' every night, and you mean to tell me you don't have twenty-five grand?

CLARICE

Spider, yer gettin' off the point!

SPIDER

Hey, I killed this freaky mother for you! You gotta give me half what you owe me...NOW! I'm not going back in.

CLARICE

I tole you, when the policy pays, you get paid.

SPIDER
That's bullshit!

CLARICE
Quiet down! We gotta keep our heads
here.

Spider his Lamoyne again.

SPIDER
Quit lookin' at me, you freak!

Clarice pushes Spider away.

CLARICE
Cut it out! Yer gonna fuck up the whole
thing!

Spider whacks her to the floor.

SPIDER
I tole you to watch it!
(to dead Lamoyne)
I'm gonna fix that smile for good.

Clarice picks up a butcher knife from the counter top.

CLARICE
Leave him alone, Spider.

SPIDER
Oh, you done it now.

They slowly start circling around the kitchen table, with Spider advancing on Clarice while she retreats.

CLARICE
Yer not thinkin' right, Spider. Are you
fucked up right now? You're not
thinkin' straight.

SPIDER
You shouldn'ta pulled that knife on me,
Clarice. Give it to me.

CLARICE
No, you go sit in the corner, and I'll
put it down.

SPIDER

Not happenin', Clarice. You give it to me.

CLARICE
He's dead, Spider. If we keep our heads, we can pull this off.

SPIDER
I'm gonna tear you up.

CLARICE
Just go sit in the corner!

SPIDER
Come on, let's dance.

CLARICE
No!

Spider grabs her by the throat, and begins to strangle her. She plunges the knife into his belly. He steps back for a moment and looks down to see the knife sticking out of his stomach.

He then grabs her head and snaps her neck with a quick twist. She falls in a dead crumple to the ground. HE stumbles back a few steps and falls on his butt, the knife still sticking into him. As the life drains out of him, he looks at Lamoyne.

SPIDER
I said...quit lookin' at me.

He falls over dead.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. THE LIVING/KITCHENETTE AREA OF A RUN DOWN APARTMENT IN THE BRONX - DAY

There is a VOICE IN THE DARK before the darkness slowly becomes a sunny, bright day. The sun shining in through the kitchen window.

A bird chirps.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (IN DARKNESS)
I took your advice with that Jimmy character. He's relentless. He won't take "no" for an answer. But what you said was good. I'm going to invite him

over--so, so you can talk to him. I think that'll make an impression...

We now clearly see Nurse Charlotte with a bowl of oatmeal sitting beside Lamoyne, still with that ridiculous smile on his face.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
Are you sure you're not hungry?
(beat)
Oh well, I'm eating for two...

We see for the first time that Nurse Charlotte is about six months pregnant.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
Mmmmm. That's tasty. I like it with cinnamon. Do you? Hmmm?

Now we see that sitting on opposite sides of the table are Clarice and Spider, also dead, also decomposing in wheelchairs.

NURSE CHARLOTTE (cont'd)
Are you guys hungry? Hmmm?
(beat)
I can't wait until he comes over to meet you guys. I can't wait.
(beat)
Groping a pregnant woman. He has no...decency. He needs to be taught the proper respect. You don't treat people that way. You just don't.
(Beat)
People are sick out there. They don't get along like we do. They are mean. Jealous. Greedy. Perverted. Immoral. I thank God for our family everyday. It's a rare and beautiful thing. Our baby...our baby is the luckiest baby in the world.

FADE OUT.