AFTER ADAM

by Christina Ham

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

BOYD	male, African-American, mid-forties
RUTH	female, African-American, mid-forties
TANK/OLDMAN/ADAM	male, African-American, late-thirties

TIME:

The action of this play takes place over a five-minute period of time. Time is slowed down here so that we—the bystanders—can observe the moments in between. The one thing that is a constant is that it is Christmas time.

PLACE:

A suggestion of a living room—somewhere—in San Pedro, CA.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

In Act Two, Tank, the OldMan, and Adam *must* be played by the same actor.

Act One takes place in the present. Act Two is five minutes before this.

The director might consider projecting the preludes in the play for each scene.

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For the dead…and the living that mourn them.

"When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced."

-- Native American proverb

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Act One
(Aftermath)

SETTING: The suggestion of a living space that consists of low-rent, dilapidated furniture. There might be one too many couches, chairs with some of the legs missing, lamps with no base to them, a fireplace with no mantle piece, etc. There is a pathetic tabletop Christmas tree that sits on a crooked side table sparsely decorated. However, one item that is prominent, is a twice-upholstered LA-Z-BOY chair whose latest color is *Exorcist* green.

AT RISE: RUTH emerges from the shallows in a nightgown in the early morning darkness. The faint outline of TANK, late-thirties, sexy, sweaty, slightly wild-eyed, standing with an urn underneath his arm is somewhat pronounced.

Genesis

1. **In Japanese Buddhist tradition, family members go to the crematorium and the burned body is slid back out. Each family member is given a set of chopsticks to pick up the bones to put into the urn. The attendant points out the key pieces to select for the urn, the most important being the Adam's apple. The family members pick up the bones and put them into the urn with two persons grasping the same bone fragment together and putting it into the urn in unison.**

TANK

Relive the past? Usually, I let bygones be bygones.

RUTH

Who's there?

TANK

Something like this—so sudden—don't just happen over night. Must be bad genes or something.

RUTH

Tank? Is that you?

TANK

The blood—that's where it started. When I was a kid I tried to cut it outta me. Shoulda known—in this family we don't bleed easy.

(RUTH turns on the light.)

RUTH

How'd you get in here?

TANK

Door was open. I let myself in. Figured Boyd went to get the necessary supplies.

RUTH

Wish he woke me before he left. 'stead of leaving us both here—in the dark.

TANK

He was trying to bury the evidence.

RUTH

'xcuse me?

TANK

(looks at her closely)

Did a piss-poor job of it. 'cause now that the lights is on there ain't no doubt in my mind it's you.

RUTH

Who?

TANK

The OldLady—in the flesh.

RUTH

You got the wrong person.

TANK

Saying I don't know what my own mama looks like?

RUTH

I'm saying…you mistaken.

TANK

Why you think he been keeping us from each other?

RUTH

Boyd swore we'd never met.

TANK

Boyd's wrong. Dead wrong.

RUTH

Somebody like you should be hard to forget.

TANK

I'll jog your memory—if it's the last thing I do.

(TANK paces around her.)

TANK (Cont.)

Remember, I used to ask you—couldn't have been more than yea high—
(puts his hand below his waist)
—if I looked anything like him? You told the truth—told me "no". But, I wasn't gonna take "no" for an answer—so I pulled out my Johnson. Asked you again. You still didn't know how to tell a lie back then. Made me get a second opinion. That entire summer I was showing it to everybody trying to get they take on the situation.

RUTH

What?

TANK

Me—running around the house—pecker flapping in the wind—and all you did was laugh at me. But, now I think you'd be impressed.

RUTH

You peed on yourself. That's all Boyd told me.

TANK

When?

RUTH

Apparently, all the time.

TANK

He bother to tell you why?

RUTH

Figured you was weak—in that area.

TANK

When we was younger the OldMan used to make us hold it. ‘til we liked to burst. Boyd —always like the desert—never leaked. But, when I did…I got to stay and bake in it for the rest of the day.

RUTH

He only told me about the time when you was in the attic—during the skirmish.

TANK

Skirmish?

RUTH

You was a lil’ bit.

TANK

Just me and the raccoons that day.

RUTH

Raccoons?

TANK

Their nest—in the attic. You tried to get rid of’em once or twice, but I think you liked they company ‘cause they was rabid—like you. Figured you put me up there so if anything went wrong I’d go to a good family.

RUTH

I wasn’t there.

TANK

I know. Most of the time you tuned in. Dropped out. But—that day—he woke you up.

RUTH

What?

TANK

He was sick of closed doors and the lies within'em. Busted'em right off they hinges.

RUTH

The OldMan?

TANK

Course. This his requiem, ain't it?

RUTH

What set him off?

TANK

Telling me you don't know?

RUTH

Should I?

TANK

You totaled his car. Took him five years to rebuild that engine. Drove him right over the edge.

RUTH

Me?

TANK

You knew which buttons to push. Knew he wasn't medicated at that point. His eczema—off the charts. He was a pansy then. You—being like Mother Nature—took advantage.

RUTH

Ain't old enough to be your mother.

TANK

How old was you when you started bleeding?

RUTH

What?

TANK

You heard me.

RUTH

(pause)

Twelve. Thirteen at the most.

TANK

Q.E.D., girlie.

RUTH

Me and Boyd ain't met 'til '78—married in '80. So, what you saying ain't add up.

TANK

Don't play me. I was there. *With* you. It was like a siege. Shock and awe.

RUTH

Boyd remembers things differently.

TANK

Fire. Cursing. Crying. Blood. Neighbors.

RUTH

Fire?

TANK

You might remember the blood. That was always your thing.

RUTH

Look, Tank…

TANK

OldMan said he was coming to smoke us out. That's why you hid me in the attic. I was old enough to know heat rises. For the longest time I thought maybe you wanted me dead. Why else would you hide me up there?

RUTH

Your mother—whoever she was—tried to protect you the best way she could under the circumstances.

TANK

Protect me? You left. Even took my piggy bank with you.

RUTH

I didn't leave!

TANK

That was my money for the zoo. Couldn't have been less than ten dollars in it.

RUTH

This is nonsense.

TANK

Family always is.

RUTH

And, where was Boyd?

TANK

He watched the whole thing from underneath the bed—*behind* the covers. Just like a coward. I stayed up inside that fucking roof for a whole day—with RABID raccoons—'til somebody found me—shit and piss in my pants. So, let's get something straight—'til you two can come clean 'bout what happened you gonna remain. Here.

RUTH

I never left. I've been. Here. What is this?

TANK

Thirty years you was all I could think about. Bet I was easy to forget.

RUTH

I'm sure your mother had her reasons for leaving the way she did.

TANK

No reason. No letter. Just gone. What you gotta say for yourself?

RUTH

If I were your mother—

TANK

A child knows its mother. Why you gotta play tricks on my mind?

RUTH

I'm telling you the truth.

(TANK paces around the space.)

TANK

Where's my picture? Burn the evidence 'fore I got here?

RUTH

Boyd's doing. Not mine.

TANK

Not one? That's rich.

RUTH

Told me you guys never took'em. Said if God created the world in seven days and it took nine months for someone like him ain't no need to see the raw footage.

TANK

'course we took'em. Not many, but we did.

RUTH

You got one?

TANK

I lost it. But, you was in it.

RUTH

The holidays. Tough time to lose a loved one.

TANK

There ain't never a good time to meet the Reaper.

RUTH

Gotta point.

TANK

Here I am busting your balls, but you should know the OldMan woulda been really happy to see you. You was all he thought about up until he—you know—called it quits.

RUTH

Gimme too much credit.

TANK

Don't pussyfoot with me, girlie. Remember, you came to him just 'fore it happened. Got him all riled up. What you tell him?

RUTH

Don't know what you talking about.

TANK

Near 'bout killed him to see you and then—it did.

RUTH

Whatever he saw it wasn't me. I keep telling you. I ain't never met him before.

TANK

Calling him a liar?

RUTH

I'm just saying… Maybe he was a little confused. Like you.

TANK

Ain't nobody in this family like me.

RUTH

Ain't that a relief.

TANK

Done that part on purpose—made me different—but, nothing special.

RUTH

Just stop it.

TANK

And the OldMan? All he could do was watch—for nine months.

RUTH

You gone off the deep end now.

TANK

He sat in the dark talking to you for hours. I saw it with my own two eyes. Said you was back for good this time.

RUTH

No. That's not right.

TANK

Son-of-a-bitch. Here you is.

RUTH

Maybe it's best things turned out the way they did.

TANK

His life for yours?

RUTH

He's at peace—much needed apparently.

TANK

You don't know that. He never said that.

RUTH

When Boyd gets back he'll settle this once and for all.

TANK

Talking 'bout your alibi? The prodigal son? How he taking it?

RUTH

Well…considering.

TANK

Guess he would be. He had the easy part—bystander.

RUTH

He didn't want it to be this way.

TANK

'course he did.

RUTH

The funeral arrangements was—swift. 'fore he knew it you was in Tijuana sunbathing.

TANK

You ever plan a funeral?

(beat)

I asked you a question.

RUTH

Once.

TANK

Then, you know there ain't no need to make it a long, drawn-out affair.

RUTH

Still… You gotta give people a chance to catch up.

(TANK pulls out of his pocket what appears to be a handkerchief with an “R” embroidered on it. He places it on the table. RUTH picks it up.)

TANK

This should get you up to speed.

RUTH

Where’d you…?

TANK

You left it—the night you and the OldMan said good-bye. When I found him it had rigored in his hands.

(RUTH drops the handkerchief.)

RUTH

Can’t be.

TANK

No matter what went down…he always wanted to make you happy.

RUTH

He just wasted a bullet ‘cause death ain’t never made me happy.

TANK

Who told you it was a bullet that took him?

RUTH

You did.

TANK

I ain’t say no such thing.

RUTH

I assumed… Coming in here with this *X-Files* shit got me all shaken up.

TANK

What you gotta say for yourself?

RUTH

Wanna drink?

TANK

(picks up the handkerchief)

It'll interact with my meds. But, you go right ahead. You look like you could use one.

(RUTH pours herself a drink. Her hands are shaking. TANK watches her closely.)

RUTH

Bet you wasn't expecting this.

TANK

DTs? OldMan said alcoholism ran on your side of the family.

RUTH

Heavy drinking. Not alcoholism.

TANK

Fuck's the difference?

RUTH

A liver.

(RUTH drains her glass and pours another.)

TANK

Now that you done had a dose of truth serum it's time for you to come clean—'bout all of it.

RUTH

I ain't gonna confess to something I ain't done.

TANK

Look, maybe you was on some lost weekend—blacked out—found yourself back where you started—with the OldMan.

RUTH

(swigs)

No. That can't be it.

TANK

Think! Where was you? Before he pulled the trigger?

RUTH

Here! I swear it.

(TANK picks up the liquor bottle.)

TANK

With Rock Hill?

(RUTH breaks down.)

RUTH

I don't know anymore. Maybe I was here. Maybe I wasn't. I come and go these days and Boyd don't notice the difference either way. And to be honest…neither do I.

TANK

Useless. What you is.

RUTH

I'll drink to that.

(TANK puts down the bottle. He looks at the urn.)

TANK

Got some place safe I can put this?

RUTH

Try the mantle.

(TANK looks closely at the beat up faux fireplace. He puts his finger through a hole that he's found.)

TANK

This a bullet hole?

RUTH

I don't allow no guns in this house.

TANK

Looks like you had a reason. Fuck it. I'll hold it.

RUTH

Suit yourself. Just don't know how Boyd's gonna feel about that being here.

TANK

Boyd needs to pay his respects. As the first born he picks up the crown of thorns on this one. 'cause from the look of things—this where the family line ends.

RUTH

Just warning you.

TANK

I'll take care of Boyd. Be just like old times.

RUTH

We got worried when we didn't hear from you—after the OldMan—you know? We expected you—sooner.

TANK

Had to think about what I was getting myself into—coming here.

RUTH

Boyd called, but kept getting a busy signal.

TANK

See he couldn't take a hint.

RUTH

He needed to talk to someone.

TANK

Got busy. Few stops to make along the way.

RUTH

Tijuana? How was it?

TANK

An all-you-can-drink buffet.

RUTH

They still got those dollar tequila shots?

TANK

That was twenty years ago.

RUTH

How time flies.

TANK

Don't matter. I BYOB when I'm there.

RUTH

Casa Del Mar still around?

TANK

Don't know nothing 'bout no hotels. When I'm there I stay in bed with my gal all afternoon. Then, when the sun sets, we go out, have some Mescal, and listen to the Mariachis.

RUTH

You single?

TANK

Sorta.

RUTH

Married?

TANK

Kinda.

RUTH

Which is it?

TANK

Ain't real comfortable talking with you 'bout my sex life.

RUTH

Jesus.

TANK

(beat)

Was it nice? This hotel?

RUTH

It was a real shit hole.

TANK

Drops two stars when you cross the border.

RUTH

So I've been told.

TANK

You and your OldMan stay there?

RUTH

For our honeymoon.

TANK

Mexico ain't the kinda place you visit. Go there to get lost.

RUTH

Why'd you come back?

TANK

The only thing kept me going on my way here was how I was gonna let you have it.

RUTH

Funny… I look so much like the OldLady, but you and Boyd look nothing alike.

TANK

Thanks to the milkman.

RUTH

Boyd rarely talked about the two of you growing up.

TANK

Talking about it ain't the same.

RUTH

And a living? What you do for it?

TANK

Don't live too much these days. I'm on disability.

RUTH

You was down there gimping around helping your OldMan?

TANK

It's more of a state of mind sorta thing I have trouble with.

RUTH

You and Boyd do got something in common.

TANK

More a danger to myself than others. But, now that I got you back in my life you can take care of me the way a real mother should.

RUTH

I gotta hard enough time taking care of myself.

TANK

You'll come around soon enough. Besides, it's still Christmas time—and you owe me some apron strings.

RUTH

Boyd's got a lotta catching up he'd like to do with you.

TANK

He still unemployed?

RUTH

He'd been working for two years straight.

TANK

Doing what?

RUTH

Data entry. Second shift.

TANK

How the mighty have fallen.

RUTH

The downgrade was a good move.

TANK

Guess Boeing didn't take too kindly to drinking on the job and building airplanes.

RUTH

How'd you know he was unemployed?

TANK

Used me as a personal reference for a job he'd applied for.

RUTH

They contacted you?

TANK

Yeah. Wanted to know if he was my brother. Told'em, "Rarely".

(beat)

Not a good thing—secrets.

(RUTH motions with her hands to fix his toupeé.)

RUTH

Um…you…

TANK

Goddmanit. Hold this.

(TANK thrusts the urn into her arms, which she holds uncomfortably.)

RUTH

No. I don't wanna—

TANK

Which way's it headed?

RUTH

Uh… South.

TANK

Fuck's a mirror around here?

RUTH

Here. Lemme do it.

(RUTH hands TANK the urn and turns him to face her. She begins to fix his toupeé.)

TANK

Fucking custom piece I got here and the shit's skating all over my head like Michelle Kwan and her triple axle.

RUTH

Don't worry.

TANK

Fix it good. Don't make me look like the OldMan.

RUTH

Got some tape for this thing?

TANK

No. Had some glue somewhere. Fuck if I know what happened to it.

RUTH

That's okay. I think I got it.

TANK

Thanks.

RUTH

Ever think about hair plugs?

TANK

Nobody's sticking a needle and thread through my head like some fucking Frankenstein. Gotta have some dignity left.

RUTH

One thing about Boyd—he still got a head full a hair.

TANK

Call that trying to make me feel better?

RUTH

Just…trying to lighten things up.

TANK

Never knew how to kiss a boo boo before. Don't try to make up for lost time now.

(TANK sits on the couch. He makes a poor attempt to untie his shoe while juggling the urn. Suddenly, he stops.)

TANK (Cont.)

Goddamn eyes keep getting funny on me. Tearing up my sockets. Like somebody's turned up the heat on'em.

RUTH

They're…red.

(TANK hangs his head in a muffled, painful moan. He rocks back and forth. RUTH moves away from him. Then, she moves closer.)

TANK

See, if my lids would just get heavy—heavy enough to shut the bullshit out—I could keep the salt from pouring from my eyes.

RUTH

Want an aspirin?

TANK

I don't gotta headache. I gotta cry.

(wipes eyes with shirt)

I ain't usually like this—sissified. Ya know? It takes a lot for my balls to shake like that.

(RUTH offers the handkerchief.)

RUTH

Grief…is complicated.

TANK

Stole that offa dead man. Don't insult his memory.

-END OF EXCERPT-

To finish reading the play contact the playwright: emailme@christinaham.com