RIGHTS OF PASSAGE:
AN ANTHOLOGY OF ORIGINAL PLAYS

by

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THIS IS AS RECEIVED FROM THE CUSTOMER.

INTRODUCTION

The following five plays represent the growth and struggles of my attempts at playwriting during my years as a graduate student at Kansas State University. Coming from a graduate degree in English, I began by experimenting with language first in my dramatic writing, and the result was the poetics of Everywoman. Gradually, I progressed to the point where I became more aware of the supremacy of plot, and strove to present, through action, the middle class predicament in my one act, Ebb Tide. Drawing upon an increased awareness of Greek Theatre, I decided to experiment with myth to reveal archetypal reality. This resulted in two plays: The Last Glow of Firelight, a treatment of the "Cinderella" myth, and The Beanstalk Country, a children's play. Finally, inspired by Lessing's biography of one of our lost but great American inventors, I have tried to present the character of Edwin Howard Armstrong and David Sarnoff in my full-length drama entitled Armstrong.

EVERYWOMAN

Everywoman was first conceived as a modern version of Everyman. The initial play was written entirely in blank verse, and it strongly resembled an Elizabethan soap opera. Through numerous rewrites and a careful production, the drama reached its present form. As a playwright I learned an important lesson from the production of this play, that language alone is not the soul of drama, and that conflict and action must be present to move an audience. I also began, for the first time, to experiment with music, and composed a theme song to introduce the work. The production of the play was truly the most beneficial aspect of the learning process, for I was able to cut out much that was unessential, and I learned the importance of creating transitions from one moment to the next. For example, many of the long passages were cut and turned instead into dramatic action. The objectives of Act II, Scene ii were reclarified several times and the scene was rewritten five times. That scene, however, was the most effective scene in the play. Also, the first act was changed so that the action all took place at a party, and the dialogue became witty repartee rather than poetry. The resulting play is thus a far cry from the original conception.

EVERYWOMAN

A Drama in Two Acts

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Everywoman--a famous modern poetess in her mid-forties.

Husband--a cynical man in his late forties who has never adjusted to his wife's success, but who covers up his insecurity with a biting sense of humor.

Dean--an attractive, worldly man in his late forties who is utterly sure of himself and his power.

Third Friend--an extremely sexy woman who is both witty and earthy. She is in her late thirties.

Father--an old man of seventy who has never gotten from life what he desires.

Mother--an old woman, also in her seventies, who has experienced great loss and drifts in and out of the past.

Daughter--a young girl of about eighteen who is Everywoman's only child. The daughter blindly admires the mother's thirst for fame and power, and grows up by confronting her mother's death.

Death--a cold, non-descript woman.

Maid--a small, easily frightened young girl.

1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th Friends--Everywoman's group of friends who all desert her when they learn of her impending death.

The action takes place in a modern living room.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I, Scene 1	Early evening
Scene 2	About thirty minutes later
Ace II, Scene 1	A few hours later
Scene 2	An hour later

THE PLAYWRIGHTS' WORKSHOP OF THETA ALPHA PHI,
THE K-STATE PLAYERS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH
PRESENTED THE PREMIER PRODUCTION

of

EVERYWOMAN

April 18-20, 1974

Directed by Norman J. Fedder

CAST

Everywoman	Lynette Steele
Husband	Steve Turner
Maid	Laurie Johnson
Daughter	Connie Doebele
Guest 3	Carmaline Spurrier
Dean	Norman Burge
Guest 1	Steve Blomquist
Guest 2	Phyllis Mar
Guest 4	Nancy Baker
Guest 5	Cindy Helferstay
Guest 6	Doug Frost
Death	Natalie Green
Father	Dennis King
Mother	Janet Cotton Young

(The setting is the living room of EVERYWOMAN'S home. It is spacious and beautifully decorated. There is a large bar stage right. The time is early evening, just before a party EVERYWOMAN is throwing for her friends. She has recently won several well-known literary prizes and is an attractive woman in her early forties. The HUSBAND is in his late forties and is starting to grey. He has an air of weariness and sadness about him. While EVERYWOMAN is dressed in simple but elegant evening attire, he is dressed in a sloppy flannel shirt, partly unbuttoned, and old pants, and he has not yet shaved. On the coffee table, rather prominently displayed, are several books, all of them written by EVERYWOMAN. As the scene opens, EVERYWOMAN is somewhat agitated; she is pouring herself a drink as the HUSBAND enters.)

EVERYWOMAN
(Sitting down in a chair, fingering the edge of her glass.)
You're not dressed, I see.

HUSBAND
Well, I'm certainly not standing here stark naked! . . . . mind if I join you?

EVERYWOMAN
No, of course not.

HUSBAND
(Pouring himself a drink.)
You look glum. Isn't this supposed to be the evening of your triumph?

EVERYWOMAN
Yes, my triumph . . . You know, tonight when I looked in the mirror I noticed for the first time how grey I'm getting.

HUSBAND
Cheer up, you'll get used to it. . . . After a while one gets used to anything.

EVERYWOMAN
Won't you please get dressed and come to the party, just this once? I can't see that I'm asking so much of you!

HUSBAND

What difference should it make whether I come down or not? No one will notice me.

EVERYWOMAN

It makes a difference to me.

HUSBAND
(Draining his glass, laughing)

Oh, that's a good one!

EVERYWOMAN

It does!

HUSBAND

Why?

EVERYWOMAN

Your being with me would give a sense of solidarity, of security.

HUSBAND

In other words, I give you universal approval, I complete the syllogism. Everybody likes me; people whom everybody likes must be real, therefore, I exist, is that it?

EVERYWOMAN

Once again, you refuse to understand.

HUSBAND

I think I understand too well . . . I wonder if you understand . . . Today I had an unusual experience . . .

EVERYWOMAN

It's getting late.

HUSBAND

I interviewed a new graduate student . . . he's 29, older than the rest, and do you know, he was just released from prison! Seems he refused to step forward when they wanted to induct him into the army! He didn't qualify for Conscientious Objection, and he refused to cop-out and run, so he wasted five years of his youth in a federal penitentiary . . . five years of his youth. The remarkable part is that he still isn't jaded, claims he did a lot of good among the inmates; poor fool still feels there's hope for humanity!

EVERYWOMAN

And you admire him!

HUSBAND

I envy him! I envy him his sense of purpose.

EVERYWOMAN

Do you envy my sense of purpose also? Is that why you won't come down tonight?

HUSBAND

It's not the same thing.

EVERYWOMAN

Why not? We are all defined by what we have done.

HUSBAND

No, this is different. Whatever you have done you have done only for yourself; this boy gave his life away for others; he made a selfless choice.

EVERYWOMAN

Don't be ridiculous. The most selfish people in the world are martyrs.

HUSBAND

But he never told anyone about it; he never made headlines. He only told me because I dragged it out of him! . . . now he wants to sit on his ass and study literature! He wants to read all the useless words written by all the people who would never have had the humanity or the guts to do what he did! . . . he made me hate everything I have become.

EVERYWOMAN

No one ever stopped you from making commitments; you've no one to blame but yourself!

(HUSBAND gets up hurriedly and fixes himself another drink. There is a long pause; EVERYWOMAN watches him, sighs, starts again.)

Why let it upset you? You think you admire him, but what has he done really? His little act of protest didn't stop the war or change the way things are.

HUSBAND

Everything changes . . . everything stays the same . . . it's all circular, but if there were more people like him. . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Beauty is the only thing that lasts.

HUSBAND

Art has done nothing for the world! Hamlet rails on suicide while the young girl, beyond despair, opens the veins in her arm like a rose. Words may move people to tears, but they cannot stop them from destruction.

EVERYWOMAN

Then what is significant in this life?

HUSBAND

(Pause) Death.

(Another pause, EVERYWOMAN pours herself another drink.)

EVERYWOMAN

Please come downstairs with me tonight. Please share this with me . . . please!

(HUSBAND gets up slowly, crosses to EVERY-WOMAN, touches her lightly.)

HUSBAND

I will, if you come upstairs with me first.

EVERYWOMAN

Don't be ridiculous! People will be arriving . . .

HUSBAND

We have plenty of time yet. (He kisses her, she turns her head from him) Come on, like in the old days.

EVERYWOMAN

I spent an hour getting dressed and now you want me to get undressed!

HUSBAND

To paraphrase your own statement, "I can't believe I'm asking too much *of you.*"

EVERYWOMAN

(Pulling away) Don't be absurd!

HUSBAND

(Hurt) I suppose it is absurd to want to hold a real woman!

EVERYWOMAN

Sometimes you're so unreasonable! Of all the times to pick, with a party about to begin, my parents upstairs, and our daughter getting ready for a date and you expect me to fling off my clothes and jump under the sheets as though we were on our honeymoon!

HUSBAND

All right then, later, when the party's over . . .

EVERYWOMAN

That's impossible.

HUSBAND

Why?

EVERYWOMAN

Must you press it now?

HUSBAND

No, of course not; I mean, later, the Dean will be here, won't he?

EVERYWOMAN

Please, not tonight. . .

HUSBAND

He'll be around later, he always is, the man of power . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Just stop it.

HUSBAND

The question is, how long will he be around. Best beware, my dear, of younger friends!

EVERYWOMAN

Stop it!

(Enter the MAID with a tray of hors d'oeuvres. Realizing she has interrupted an argument she proceeds to the bar quickly.)

HUSBAND

Ah, the hired help has arrived.

MAID

Excuse me, where would you like this? (Indicating tray)

EVERYWOMAN

On the table next to the bar would be fine.

HUSBAND

(To MAID) Tell me, are you the upstairs maid or the downstairs maid?

MAID

I'm sorry sir, I don't . . .

HUSBAND

I've often wondered, what would happen if the upstairs maid were suddenly sent downstairs and the downstairs maid were sent upstairs. Then the upstairs maid would really be the *downstairs* maid and the downstairs maid would really be the upstairs maid. Wouldn't you poor creatures get confused? I mean, it must be difficult working out of one's element.

MAID

(Trying to laugh, embarrassed) I suppose so, sir. (To EVERYWOMAN) Your mother said I needed to clean down here; would you tell me what you would like done?

EVERYWOMAN

My mother tends to exaggerate. Actually . . .

HUSBAND

Actually, my wife and I were having sort of an upstairs-downstairs discussion before you came in. The question is, does the wife belong upstairs and the husband downstairs, or do they both belong upstairs or downstairs together? The matter demands a lot of thought, and since you

have experience in this sort of thing, perhaps you could answer.

EVERYWOMAN

(To HUSBAND) Please!

MAID

Perhaps I should just dust a little.

HUSBAND

The real problem seems to be one of expectations. Does the husband have a right to expect a woman to stay upstairs and be soft and feminine . . .

EVERYWOMAN

My husband's definition of soft and feminine is flabby and unobtrusive.

(The MAID hurriedly straightens the room; she picks up EVERYWOMAN'S books and starts to place them on the shelf.)

HUSBAND

Hold it, you can't move those. They have been placed in a modest position where no one can possibly miss them!

MAID

I'm sorry, I . . .

HUSBAND

Put them back, put them back. You hold in your hand the masterpieces, my dear. They were conceived in the dark and the delivery was bloody, let me tell you. They all come equipped with a little red light that lights up and shoots out smoke every time some blatant metaphor pops up.

EVERYWOMAN

You've never understood what I was trying to do in my works.

HUSBAND

No, but your friends do, as long as you buy the booze.

MAID

(Flustered) What should I do with the books, madame?

EVERYWOMAN

Put them down . . . I don't care.

HUSBAND

Don't care!! What else have you ever cared about.

EVERYWOMAN

I think you had better go upstairs after all.

HUSBAND

Not a bad idea. (To MAID) Tell me, my dear, are you free? Would you care to come upstairs with me? I mean, a man needs a maid; I wonder what it would be like to tell everyone you made a maid?

MAID
Please, if there's nothing more . . .

EVERYWOMAN
I must apologize for my husband. He's not himself tonight.

HUSBAND
Not myself, yes that's it. I'm nothing. Tell me, does one clean for a purpose? Are you in your profession to make others happy? Do you have anything tangible to show for your life? Nothing. Not myself . . . not anybody's self, nothing . . .

EVERYWOMAN
(To MAID) You can go now. I'm sorry.

MAID
(Leaving in a hurry) That's all right, m'am.

(She stares for a moment at husband, then exits.)

EVERYWOMAN
That was really inexcusable. What must that girl think!

HUSBAND
What must anyone think.

EVERYWOMAN
If you won't stay for the party, then perhaps you should go. (Pause, he does nothing.) There have been so many times . . . so many times when I reached for you in the night and you turned over in your sleep, so many times I needed you and you looked at me as if I were a stranger. Now, suddenly, you want me again, and you can't understand why I don't run to you . . .

HUSBAND
You are a stranger. You have always been a stranger.

EVERYWOMAN
All you've ever needed me for is to be something for you to catch your reflection in, something to hang on the wall and forget until your ego needs straightening.

HUSBAND
My ego!!

EVERYWOMAN
Yes, your ego. You're drowning in self-pity.

HUSBAND
That's better than making love to myself every night in the dark!

(Enter DAUGHTER. She is seventeen and very pretty. She is dressed for a party.)

DAUGHTER

Oh, excuse me!

EVERYWOMAN

It's all right, dear. You can come in.

DAUGHTER

You're sure?

HUSBAND

It's safe now. All we need is for someone to mop up the blood!

DAUGHTER

Try grandmother! Honestly, she's driving me crazy. Today she rearranged the perfume bottles on my dresser three times!

EVERYWOMAN

You have to be patient. Mother always was the Joan of Arc of the washing machine set! You look beautiful. Where are you going?

DAUGHTER

Nowhere. I'm staying here.

EVERYWOMAN

Here!

DAUGHTER

Yes, I'm coming to your party.

HUSBAND

That's ridiculous. You should be out with people your own age.

DAUGHTER

I can do that any night. (To HUSBAND) Are you going to be here looking like that?

HUSBAND

No. When the doorbell rings the room explodes and I turn into Prince Charming.

EVERYWOMAN

You father's not coming to the party.

DAUGHTER

Oh, I see.

HUSBAND

Do you now! Tell me, what is it that you see?

EVERYWOMAN

(Breaking in) Your father's right. You should be with people your own age.

DAUGHTER
They're all so boring. . . . Lately everything is boring. Personally, I prefer older men.

HUSBAND
(To EVERYWOMAN) Ha! And I told you to beware of younger friends!

EVERYWOMAN
(Turning from him) It's important to be young. The lights, child, are all out there.

DAUGHTER
I used to think so, but lately the things I thought would be so exciting have become routine.

HUSBAND
What you need to liven things up is a good, healthy dose of poverty.

DAUGHTER
There is more than one kind of poverty, father.

HUSBAND
Perhaps you find everything dull because you yourself are boring.

DAUGHTER
Comes from living around you, I guess!

(HUSBAND slams down glass. EVERYWOMAN intervenes.)

EVERYWOMAN
Listen you two, it is getting late and I'm not up to anymore arguments.

HUSBAND
I'm not up to anything.

EVERYWOMAN
(To DAUGHTER, with a glare at HUSBAND) Are you sure you want to stay?

DAUGHTER
Yes, I'm sure.

EVERYWOMAN
Well fine, dear. That's sweet of you, really.

(EVERYWOMAN kisses DAUGHTER perfunctorily on the forehead.)

DAUGHTER
(Turning sadly away) Unless, of course, I'd be in the way.

EVERYWOMAN
Don't be silly. (She paces around the room, making sure it is right)

HUSBAND
Relax. It takes her years to shove somebody out--emotionally.

EVERYWOMAN
People will be here soon. Are mother and father coming down?

DAUGHTER
No. Grandma says these aren't her kind of people and grandpa just looks sad.

HUSBAND
Your grandfather always looks sad.

DAUGHTER
That's because he allows people to get to him.

HUSBAND
And you don't?

DAUGHTER
I don't need anybody.

HUSBAND
Liar.

DAUGHTER
It's true. I have a nice face; I'm bright. I'll get what I want.

HUSBAND
I love you most for your modesty. The older you get the more you'll cling to other people.

DAUGHTER
Sure, just like you and mother.

(Pause, a long silence, EVERYWOMAN and HUSBAND turn away.)

HUSBAND
(To break the silence) Let's have another drink. I prefer wine this time--the dried blood of the grape.

EVERYWOMAN
Sounds harmless enough. How about you, dear?

DAUGHTER
Sure.

HUSBAND
(Handing each a glass) Isn't it touching. Here we are, a sweet little family unit, communing in our sacramental living room.

EVERYWOMAN
There is more--and less--divinity in revelation.

(HUSBAND glares at her; EVERYWOMAN raises her glass to him.)

Sweets to the sweet!

DAUGHTER
So you're Ophelia tonight, eh mother?

HUSBAND
Well, that's certainly an improvement. Usually it's Lady MacBeth!!!

(EVERYWOMAN glares at HUSBAND. They finish their drinks. The MAID enters with a tray of glasses and two bottles of champagne.)

MAID
(To EVERYWOMAN) Where should I put these?

EVERYWOMAN
Over there on the bar.

(The MAID walks over to the bar.)

HUSBAND
(Taking a bottle of champagne off the MAID'S tray) Well, have fun!

MAID
Sir, the champagne!

HUSBAND
No one will miss it. The Messiah will be here any minute. That's why my wife and daughter are so dressed up. When he walks in the door they will both forget the champagne and fawn all over him as if his entrance were the second coming.

EVERYWOMAN
Most of the time you can barely manage the first!

(The MAID sets down the tray loudly. HUSBAND storms out.)

DAUGHTER
Father, where are you going with that?!

HUSBAND
Upstairs to watch the whole thing on television. I hear they're airing reruns of the Twilight Zone! (Exit)

DAUGHTER
Sometimes he absolutely disgusts me!

EVERYWOMAN

You're young. That's why you should be out dancing or laughing with your peers. You have plenty of time later for disgust.

DAUGHTER

I won't live that long.

EVERYWOMAN

Don't be melodramatic.

DAUGHTER

I'm serious. Everybody's always telling me to think of the future. I don't understand about right now! . . . lately I find that I hate to look in the mirror. I know that I'm physically attractive--it's the expression on my face that frightens me . . . then, sometimes I look and there's nothing there at all, just the curtains and the bed and the picture on the wall . . . if my face did appear, the mirror would shatter into a million tiny fragments, and I would shatter with it.

EVERYWOMAN

We scratch our visions on the back walls of caves to prove we have hands.

DAUGHTER

Mother, did you hear anything I said?

EVERYWOMAN

Yes, of course, dear. But you have plenty of time to find out who you are. Right now you have it all before you, the laughter and the sun; you can feel the warmth upon your cheek, run your hand across the soft green night, fold the velvet river in your lap. There is great luck in beginnings.

(The doorbell rings. EVERYWOMAN is startled out of her mood.)

They've begun to arrive already. (To the MAID) Answer the door, and get the glasses ready.

(MAID answers door, then exits. Enter THIRD FRIEND. She is beautiful in a flamboyant way. Her figure is what men call "stacked," and she dresses to that advantage. She is wearing a cocktail dress with a neckline that plunges daringly to her waist. Strategically placed at the V of this neckline is an exquisite broach. In spite of the daring style of her dress, everything else about her is in perfect taste. She is worldly and cynical.)

DAUGHTER

(To THIRD FRIEND) That's quite a dress!

THIRD FRIEND
(Sweeping by her, looking around the room) It's a hot night.

EVERYWOMAN
If it's not now, it certainly will be when everyone sees you! I must say, I'm surprised. This is the first time I've known you to come early to a party--and alone!

THIRD FRIEND
That gives me all the more reason to make sure I don't leave alone.

EVERYWOMAN
There are a few guests you had better leave alone or I will be forced to watch while several irate wives poison your drink!

THIRD FRIEND
Oh, I do hope so! It would liven things up. Besides, I'm partial to hemlock.

EVERYWOMAN
Ten to one they don't pour it in your ear, either.

THIRD FRIEND
My, my. You're becoming obnoxious in your old age!

DAUGHTER
Would you care for a drink?

THIRD FRIEND
Out of the mouth of babes . . . but then you're no longer a babe. I was wondering where you were hiding the stuff. Of course I would like a drink!

DAUGHTER
What will you have?

THIRD FRIEND
How about a Bloody Mary.

EVERYWOMAN
Now I know you're preparing for a fight!

THIRD FRIEND
And you love it, don't kid me! I bet you invited at least several worthy antagonists for me. Sometimes I get the feeling that I've become your head butcher!

EVERYWOMAN
Let's just call it "body guard."

THIRD FRIEND
My dear, one look in the mirror will tell you that I'm the one who needs a bodyguard!

EVERYWOMAN
That's true. Tonight you're in real danger of dying from exposure!

THIRD FRIEND
Not me! I've plenty to expose.

EVERYWOMAN
Enough!! You win!!

THIRD FRIEND
You can afford to be magnanimous. You are a famous author.

EVERYWOMAN
(Pouring herself a drink) Yes, I can afford to be magnanimous.

THIRD FRIEND
(To DAUGHTER, who has been fumbling around the bar) Where's my drink anyway?

DAUGHTER
(Embarrassed) I'm afraid I don't exactly know . . . what . . . goes into a Bloody Mary.

THIRD FRIEND
There's an old dirty joke that goes perfectly with that question!

EVERYWOMAN
She doesn't need any more dirty jokes. Just having you here is enough! We need tomato juice. I'll get it.

(Doorbell rings.)

THIRD FRIEND
(Pouring straight Vodka into a glass) Forget it. I think I will just have the Mary! (She takes a swig, winces) My nails are ready. Bring on the Christians!

(Enter the DEAN. He is a tall, commanding handsome man in his late forties. He is dressed in impeccable taste. The DAUGHTER cannot take her eyes off him and obviously has a crush on him.)

THIRD FRIEND
(Motioning him in) Well, I sure called it wrong that time!

DEAN
(Staring at THIRD FRIEND'S cleavage) Called what wrong?

THIRD FRIEND
I asked for Christians!! (Noticing his stare) Do you like my . . . frock?

DEAN
That's precisely what it calls to mind!

EVERYWOMAN
(Motioning towards DEAN) Please, you two, there are children present!

DAUGHTER
(Chagrinned) Really, mother.

DEAN
(Eyeing DAUGHTER attentively, DAUGHTER blushes.)
Leave her alone. She's not as young as you think.

THIRD FRIEND
No, but she's the only person here a good deal younger than me, and I never like attractive people who have the gaul to be younger than me! We were talking about my dress. Don't you think it has style? I call it my "conversation piece."

DEAN
I'll take it--without the conversation.

EVERYWOMAN
(Upset by their intimacy) I didn't know you two cared so much about each other.

DEAN
(Going to EVERYWOMAN, pulling her aside) Lately you're beginning to develop fangs
(He kisses her. DAUGHTER hurriedly moves to the other side of the room.)
You look wonderful.

EVERYWOMAN
I was beginning to think you didn't notice I was even in the room.

DEAN
My dear, you <u>are</u> the room. (He kisses her again. THIRD FRIEND sips her drink.)

EVERYWOMAN
Would you laugh if I told you I loved you?

DEAN
Love is no laughing matter. When can I see you?

EVERYWOMAN
After the party. I need you tonight, badly.

DEAN
What about your husband?

EVERYWOMAN
Upstairs pouting. This is my special moment. If I can't share it with someone, it will slip by like a fly in August.

(Doorbell rings again; THIRD FRIEND goes to answer it.)

THIRD FRIEND
I hear the hoard pounding the pavement. Shall I open the corral gate?

EVERYWOMAN
Why not?

(THIRD FRIEND opens the door and many people file in; the guests make up an assortment of middle-aged, upper-middle-class to upper-class people.)

FIRST FRIEND
There you are my dear. So nice to see you again. Wonderful book . . .

SECOND FRIEND
You look lovely. All that work hasn't taken its toll . . .

FOURTH FRIEND
It's been a long time . . .

FIFTH FRIEND
There you are! I've been trying to get a hold of you all day. The Woman's Auxiliary meets next week and I was wondering if you could speak to us about . . .

THIRD FRIEND
(Entering with a tray of drinks) I think it's time for a toast!

(They all take glasses. The DEAN raises his to EVERYWOMAN.)

DEAN
To the First Lady of Literature!

(They all toast her.)

EVERYWOMAN
Thank you.

FOURTH FRIEND
Tell me, how does it feel?

EVERYWOMAN
Strangely safe.

FIRST FRIEND
You always did have such an odd way of putting things! What's next on your agenda?

EVERYWOMAN

I'm writing my autobiography.

FOURTH FRIEND

How fascinating, but don't you think you should rest for a while?

EVERYWOMAN

To rest is to die. There must always be something else. As long as there are words inside my head, they wait to be cornered by my pen into a thought and tamed.

SECOND FRIEND

(Bringing EVERYWOMAN another glass) How about another drink?

EVERYWOMAN

Thank you.

THIRD FRIEND

So you're writing your autobiography next. Isn't that extraordinary, (glancing at several of the woman in the room) so am I!

FIFTH FRIEND

Humph!

FOURTH FRIEND

I'm afraid there are laws against pornography.

THIRD FRIEND

But, dear, it would be such a wonderful way to find out how versatile your husband is!!!

FIFTH FRIEND

(To EVERYWOMAN) You know, I was going through the attic the other day and I found a book that I had written back when I was about your age--all about my life up until my first child was born; I read on and on and it was all so absolutely fascinating, I thought, you know, this would make a wonderful novel, and I was thinking, if I could just get <u>your</u> opinion it wouldn't take long and you could read it for me and tell me where to send it and . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Well, uh . . .

THIRD FRIEND

(Interrupting FIFTH FRIEND) Oh, I don't know, dear, wouldn't it be a great bother to cart all those stone tablets over here?

FIFTH FRIEND

I don't . . .

THIRD FRIEND

Besides, I don't think she is very good at hieroglyphics!

FIFTH FRIEND

WELL!

EVERYWOMAN

(To ease the mood) I think it's time I proposed a toast. (Everyone gathers around) To all my friends, who have laughed with me and cried with me and supported me in all my endeavors, and . . .

(At this moment DEATH enters. EVERYWOMAN cannot finish the toast, and DEATH is seen only by EVERYWOMAN. DEATH is a pale woman whose hair, complexion, and clothing are grey. She is coldly hideous, but not physically unattractive, and altogether weary. The lights dim.)

It's so cold in here. I'm afraid the world is rejecting spring this year.

DEAN

Hey, you suddenly act as if this were a wake or something. (To DAUGHTER) Why don't you pass around some hors d'oeuvres? I'll play bartender.

DAUGHTER

Of course. Whatever you say.

(She picks up a tray and circulates around the room, constantly watching the DEAN. EVERYWOMAN can't take her eyes or her thoughts off DEATH.)

FOURTH FRIEND

(To EVERYWOMAN) Where's your husband?

EVERYWOMAN

(Pause) What?

FOURTH FRIEND

Your husband. Where is he?

EVERYWOMAN

Upstairs reading . . . He . . . wasn't feeling well.

FOURTH FRIEND

What a shame. (Glancing at DEAN) But then, one can always find replacements, can't one?

THIRD FRIEND

At least she knows where her husband is!

FOURTH FRIEND

I've had just about enough . . .

EVERYWOMAN

It's so cold in here!

THIRD FRIEND
(To EVERYWOMAN) Say, are you all right?

EVERYWOMAN
(Moving towards DEATH) I don't know . . .

(The DEAN grabs her arm as she approaches DEATH; EVERYWOMAN is relieved and almost clings to him.)

DEAN
Where are you going in such a hurry?

EVERYWOMAN
There's someone I have to see.

DEAN
That can wait.

EVERYWOMAN
Yes . . . hold me, please!

(DEATH continues to stare at her. EVERYWOMAN and the DEAN embrace.)

DEAN
What's the matter with you?

EVERYWOMAN
Nothing, I just wanted to be near you.

DEAN
My apartment, after everyone else leaves?

EVERYWOMAN
Of course.

DEAN
And what about Hubby? Is he going to make a fuss?

EVERYWOMAN
I think we've gone beyond that now. Anyway, what would you do if he did?

DEAN
Laugh or fire him. English professors are a dime a dozen. He won't cross me.

EVERYWOMAN
I don't know any more.

DEAN
Listen, there are two types of people in this world--the owners and the owned. I am the former, your husband the latter. He will always be weak.

EVERYWOMAN

A very human characteristic which I'm sure you would never understand. Perhaps that's what makes you so attractive.

(DEATH moves toward EVERYWOMAN again. DEAN notices THIRD FRIEND, moves toward her; EVERYWOMAN toward DEATH.)

DEAN

See you later.

(EVERYWOMAN and DEATH stand face to face.)

DEATH

Good evening.

EVERYWOMAN

Good evening. I don't believe that we've met. Did you come with someone?

DEATH

I came alone. I always come alone.

EVERYWOMAN

Who are you?

DEATH

Don't you recognize me? We are old friends.

EVERYWOMAN

What are you doing here now?

DEATH

I have come for you.

EVERYWOMAN

That's ridiculous. I have guests here; this is a private party.

DEATH

What I have to say to you is also private.

EVERYWOMAN

Then make an appointment with my secretary. This is my home, and . . .

DEATH

All homes are open to me; I provide the final entertainment.

EVERYWOMAN

Look, if this is some kind of joke, it's ceasing to be funny.

DEATH

I am the final joke, the last laugh rippling through time.

EVERYWOMAN

What do you want?

DEATH

(Slowly, sadly) You.

EVERYWOMAN

(Visibly upset) I've had enough of this. Leave this house, now!

(DEATH stands immobile.)

This is my home and it is my party. Now GET OUT!!

(DEATH stands immobile.)

I said, GET OUT!!!

(The guests at the party slowly freeze, one by one and the lights then fade. Only DEATH and EVERYWOMAN are animated and in the light.)

Who are you?

(Long pause. DEATH'S face takes on an expression of extreme weariness.)

DEATH

I am a bottomless well; each stony life that falls troubles the surface . . . of human fear, but beyond that, no mortal eye has ever seen.

EVERYWOMAN

Your words are whirlpools, pulling me down.

DEATH

Look closely at me and you will know me. I am the black beneath the black, the shadow beyond all shadows. Each person sees his water-rumpled face upon my waves, but no deeper.

EVERYWOMAN

Please go. There is nothing for you here.

DEATH

I am the question beyond all questions, empty sleep, deeper than all dreams. Close your eyes and float on nothingness, close your eyes and do not see me then. Blind rest is the only peace.

EVERYWOMAN

I will not close my eyes! You were not invited; I did not choose to have you come. I tell you, there is nothing for you here!

DEATH

I am never invited, yet I am the eternal guest. Behind the night blooms my darkness. You cannot shut me out with doors or walls . . . or even laughter.

EVERYWOMAN

NO!

DEATH
Look into my eyes and see yourself!

EVERYWOMAN
I tell you, there is nothing for you here!

DEATH
Look at me and you will know.

EVERYWOMAN
I will not accept you!

DEATH
I will say my name and you will have no choice.

EVERYWOMAN
NO!

DEATH
I am death.

EVERYWOMAN
No; it can't be. I'm young. I have everything. I have no need of you. Leave my house. You are a lie!!

DEATH
I am the ultimate truth.

EVERYWOMAN
Leave me. I will not hear you any longer.

DEATH
Sometimes I am a young man, hard and warm, who turns to ashes in your arms, or owl-like, flies away. Sometimes you feel my presence in the dark, or through a cloud of smoke that fogs your sight you watch me fetch the ones you love in dreams.

EVERYWOMAN
All my nightmares have come into my house!

DEATH
I bring an end to despair and loneliness.

EVERYWOMAN
You bring me nothing. You cannot come for me now. I am important!

DEATH
Important? The world washes away beneath your feet--you face the chasm and no one will stand by to hold your hand, no one. I am the ultimate negation.

EVERYWOMAN
No!

DEATH

The ultimate negation.

EVERYWOMAN

That's not true! I have value. There are people in my life who would give up their lives for mine; who live through me.

DEATH

You have no one.

EVERYWOMAN

I will not accept that!!

DEATH

You must. I give you the chance to die quietly and keep your visions intact. Close your eyes in silence and forget.

EVERYWOMAN

I will let nothing close. I tell you, I have significance! Look at all I have created. My words will exist years after I die. I have my work. You cannot destroy my work, or my name, even if you destroy me!

DEATH

In the language of eons, of the emptiness before even the stars were cold, you are only a finger-snap in tune-timed silence.

EVERYWOMAN

No! I have lived my life well. I can prove it. Give me more time . . . give me . . . a reprieve.

DEATH

You ask for the worst possible agony. I will haunt you with memories of loves you never knew and dreams you trampled in your waking hours.

EVERYWOMAN

I trampled over nothing! I have a right to more time . . . a <u>right</u>! I refuse to simply fade away. I have never settled for the mediocre. I have never <u>bought on sale</u>! I will not stand for a life with illusions.

DEATH

A life with no illusions is a dagger in the soul. You are asking for eternal blood.

EVERYWOMAN

Better blood than sleep! . . . All I ask for is <u>time</u>!

DEATH

(Weary) Your request will only bring you pain. I am the final wisdom.

EVERYWOMAN

Please . . . just a few more hours, and I will prove that I am right. I will show you who I am.

DEATH

Always the same. I am so tired. Tired of the faces with no name, of the names with no faces . . . I will give you until dawn, but I warn you, you will be broken. I always win in the end.

EVERYWOMAN

I search for beginnings . . . (sadly) Leave me, please.

DEATH

(Slowly vanishing into the darkness) I'm going. I will return, again and again, I return . . . all is lost; all is withering into winter. Let your tears rain where they may, they will not bring the green again.

(Exit DEATH. EVERYWOMAN alone is lit. She walks around the room, touching everything, as though she sees it for the first time. She takes a deep breath and looks all around her.)

EVERYWOMAN

How vividly the earth begins to glow. The thunder-soft evening sings to me old melodies that, like birds, wing southward through cloud-snowed skies. The world is a drop of water in a fountain touched with ember twilight, and my youth is a maiden, raven-haired and gentle, with eyes that explode, storm-bright, into laughter, or rain into her spring-white hands.

(One by one the party members become animated and the buzz of conversation is heard. EVERYWOMAN does not rejoin them.)

DEAN

I would like to propose a toast this time.

THIRD FRIEND

(Laughing) We wait upon your words, oh great man of wisdom!

DEAN

(Raising his glass; they all raise their glasses with him.)

To life . . . to liberty . . .

THIRD FRIEND

Hear, hear!!

DEAN

And the pursuit . . . of Money!!!

(They all laugh and drain their glasses. EVERYWOMAN buries her head in her hands. End Scene 1.)

ACT I, Scene 2

(The living room of EVERYWOMAN'S home. EVERYWOMAN sits far to stage left, very dimly lit in a pool of light. She does not respond to what goes on in the rest of the house, and is represented as being in another room, or alone. The party itself is in full swing, however, with the DEAN acting as host. Everyone fawns over him. THIRD FRIEND stands off stage right to herself, enjoying the whole scene and sipping a martini. The MAID circulates around the room with a tray of drinks, and mingles among the guests admiring all of them.)

DEAN

(With a crowd around him, in the middle of a story) . . . so I told him that what this country really needed to bolster the economy was to turn the space program over to the Japanese. That way we could have kamikazi astronauts and save a fortune--I mean they would all crash-land on the moon and save us the expense of a return trip!

(Everyone except THIRD FRIEND laughs, even those who don't think he is funny.)

FIFTH FRIEND

Oh, you always tell such charming stories. That's what John, you know my husband, well, I'm sure, nearly everyone does, well . . . that's what he says. He finds it delightful to work under a man like you . . .

THIRD FRIEND

(Loud enough to be heard, as though to herself) So do I.

DEAN

Yes, well that's very kind of . . . John . . . I'm sure.

SIXTH FRIEND

(Continuing to DEAN) Charm is important. You know, I feel that is exactly what is wrong with much of what is going on in the classroom today. Did you get a chance to read my article on the subject of reaching out towards the effective domain in our approach to intellectualizing the concepts of emotion as outlined . . .

(The discussion continues, THIRD FRIEND moves to MAID and takes a refill.)

SECOND FRIEND

. . . but one must not leave out the inductive method, oh no, it's of the essence that we use the inductive method, for what good is a fact, in and of itself . . .

(The DEAN nods, like a king to his subjects, and THIRD FRIEND moves toward the group, amused.)

THIRD FRIEND
(Interrupting) Especially when the problem is to separate the true facts from the false facts.

SECOND FRIEND
(Haughty) I was discussing facts per se; there can be no such thing as a false fact, any more than there can be such a thing as a true fact, because the word "fact" in and of itself connotes truth and means established principle, now, as I was saying . . .

DEAN
I understand. I believe the lady was making an attempt at humor.

FOURTH FRIEND
(Under her breath) Lady, my ass . . .

THIRD FRIEND
(Replying, also under her breath) which is in very poor condition.

FIRST FRIEND
(Continuing conversation with the DEAN) The question of the novel is to me still one of whether or not the candle on the mantelpiece is intended as a phallic symbol or a representation of organized religion . . .

THIRD FRIEND
(To MAID) That depends, I'm sure, on the size of the wick!

(The MAID giggles, SECOND and FOURTH FRIENDS who heard the comment, glare at her, she moves away.)

DEAN
I'm afraid that these questions can really only be answered by the author. By the way, where is she?

FOURTH FRIEND
I was about to ask the same question. She left the room a while back and I haven't been able to locate her since.

DEAN
Well, all of you, help yourself to another drink; I'll go see where she's keeping herself.

(DEAN leaves, FIRST FRIEND, a rather bashful male, proposes a toast.)

FIRST FRIEND
Here's to everyone's health.

THIRD FRIEND
Thank you. That's one toast I don't need.

FIRST FRIEND
No, I would say that you are in full bloom.

(FOURTH FRIEND glares at him, he blushes THIRD FRIEND laughs. DEAN returns, pulls THIRD FRIEND aside.)

DEAN
Where the hell is she? I can't find her anywhere!

THIRD FRIEND
Probably off somewhere dreaming of royalties. Let her alone; she'll be back.

DEAN
But this is her party.

THIRD FRIEND
And she's lucky enough to be famous enough to be rude.

DEAN
(Taking the drink from her hand) I think you've had enough. So far you've managed to insult everyone here. Why don't you just cool it!

THIRD FRIEND
Because everyone here deserves being insulted. They're all pathetic, insipid phonys . . .

DEAN
Perhaps so, but you needn't remind them of the fact every minute.

THIRD FRIEND
That's all right. I never did care much for martinis anyway. The olive, after all, makes the drink.

DEAN
I thought that was the job of the bartender.

THIRD FRIEND
Anytime you want.

(Pause. They stare at each other knowingly.)

DEAN
Well, I'd better get back to my "adoring" public.

THIRD FRIEND
Relax. They need you, not you them. You're an expert pitcher and they're all afraid of striking out.

DEAN
(Trading proverbs) It's not how you play the game, but whether you win or lose.

THIRD FRIEND
And don't put all your eggs into one person's bed!

(Enter EVERYWOMAN. She is distraught and sad. She goes immediately to THIRD FRIEND and DEAN.)

There you are! We were just beginning to wonder if you had flushed yourself down the toilet!

(EVERYWOMAN doesn't respond.)

DEAN
You look upset. Is anything wrong?

EVERYWOMAN
(Weakly) No. I'll be all right.

THIRD FRIEND
(Indicating DEAN) Our friend here has been handling things just fine. He always knows the correct form . . .

EVERYWOMAN
(Almost to herself) Yes . . . my mother once said that style was everything.

THIRD FRIEND
(To DEAN) I bet you never had pimples as a kid!!

DEAN
Of course not. It was against my better principles . . . One must have a master plan, you know. My clothes were in vogue but never garish; I was a brilliant student but managed an occasional B or C to show that I was "well-rounded." I was excellent at sports, but not too excellent--being a jock would be too self-limiting. I was invited to all major social events, was in on or made most important decisions around my fraternity, screwed a few carefully selected girls but always used birth control, and made sure that even when I went drinking with the guys, I never got roaring drunk.

THIRD FRIEND
You're the only person I know who has perfected mediocrity and made it an art!

DEAN
Don't be nasty to a man who has always helped old ladies across the street.

THIRD FRIEND
(Indicating EVERYWOMAN) Is that why you two are such good friends?

EVERYWOMAN
(Failing to return the sarcasm) It's no good being smug. Time will catch up with you, too, one of these days. You'll end up passing by the mirrors in the hall without looking.

THIRD FRIEND
You don't have to tell me that. I'm a very lucky person; I know how sadly limited I am, so I'm sort of "gathering my rosebuds." The best I can hope for is a long future of paid escorts or an early death.

DEAN
Don't be ridiculous. Only the good die young.

EVERYWOMAN
(Softly) Not always.

THIRD FRIEND
Like it or not I'm having another drink.

(She grabs one off the MAID'S tray as she goes by.)

DEAN
Personally, I think growing old has its advantages. It's all a matter of balance. You win some; you lose some.

EVERYWOMAN
What can one possibly "win" at our age?

DEAN
We become like the aging fox--shrewder and thinner after many wild years in the woods.

EVERYWOMAN
Yes . . . we can't run as fast, but we know many more places in which to hide.

(Pause. All three are depressed. Exaggerated laughter from the party.)

DEAN
(To EVERYWOMAN) What is the matter with you, anyway? You suddenly seem so depressed. And this is the first time I have ever known you to walk out on your own party!

EVERYWOMAN
(Softly, to herself) It's all . . . too much. I can't bear it. It's all going, everything . . .

DEAN
For god's sake . . .

EVERYWOMAN
I'm old.

THIRD FRIEND
So that's it. The herd is finally closing in on you.

EVERYWOMAN

I don't understand . . .

THIRD FRIEND

You're the old leader of the pack who comes out to face the young bulls. You know you will lose, you know you're alone . . . You end up putting up the fight without really believing in it, just for the fight's sake . . . constant upheaval makes the stars turn . . . Hey, that sounded philosophical, didn't it? (To EVERYWOMAN) Bet it winds up in your next book!

DEAN

(Noticing EVERYWOMAN is really distraught) Leave her be. Can't you see she's upset?

THIRD FRIEND

What I said is the truth. The best ideas in her books have all come from me. The rest is so much romantic dribble!

EVERYWOMAN

This is no time to be attacking my work. What kind of friend are you?

THIRD FRIEND

The best friend you could possibly have. I offer you no illusions. I never lie to you. True, I may not give you much, but then I never ask anything from you either . . . I laugh with you and drink with you, and I never use you. That's as much as any two people can have together in this lousy world.

(FIFTH FRIEND catches sight of EVERYWOMAN and leaves the others.)

FIFTH FRIEND

Well, well, well, I've finally cornered you. I was wondering where you were keeping yourself. I've been trying to tell you all evening what a wonderful book your last one was--so--magnetic, powerful--of course, I haven't finished it yet, but what I <u>have</u> read is simply fabulous.

EVERYWOMAN

Just exactly which part did you like the best?

FIFTH FRIEND

Well, I haven't gotten very far yet, as I told you, I am so busy that I have very little time for reading, but when I do, I try to pick those books, of which yours is one, of course, which appeal to the intelligentsia . . .

THIRD FRIEND

My dear, you couldn't fight your way out of a pay toilet!

(EVERYWOMAN takes advantage of the moment to pull the DEAN aside.)

EVERYWOMAN

I have got to talk to you, <u>alone</u>!

DEAN
For god's sake, you do have guests, you know!

EVERYWOMAN
(Raising her voice so others turn around) I don't care!

(THIRD FRIEND joins them.)

THIRD FRIEND
A six-hundred-page book and I bet she hasn't gotten any farther than page ten! Such is your discriminating public!

DEAN
Cover for us, will you?

THIRD FRIEND
I wish I were famous enough to be temperamental. Go ahead, but I'm hardly the one to cover for anyone!

(She rejoins the group. DEAN pulls EVERY-WOMAN aside.)

DEAN
All right! Now what is it?

EVERYWOMAN
Hold me. I just want you to hold me!

DEAN
This is hardly the time and place.

EVERYWOMAN
Please.

(She moves toward him; he moves away; she moves back, hurt.)
Do you still find me attractive?

DEAN
Of course.

EVERYWOMAN
As attractive as when you first met me?

DEAN
We all change with the years.

EVERYWOMAN
Am I important to you?

DEAN
What's going on? Are you preparing for menopause?

EVERYWOMAN
I've got to know. Am I important to you?

DEAN

Damn it, of course you are!

EVERYWOMAN

The years are cruel, you know . . . If you take a picture and rumple it in your hand, unfold it, and smooth it out again, it is the same and not the same----there are bulges and distortions where the paper crinkles, lines across the forehead and the lips . . . Time does that. It rolls you up and crumples you into the trash heap . . . Death uncrinkles you and lays you, battered, out to dry.

DEAN

I've never seen you like this. I don't understand.

EVERYWOMAN

(Breaking down) I can't bear it . . . can't bear it . . .

DEAN

This is the evening of your greatest triumph. What have you possibly got . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Do you love me?

DEAN

What a ridiculous question!

EVERYWOMAN

Do you remember the long nights we spent together by the fireplace . . .

DEAN

Of course.

EVERYWOMAN

The snow outside silvered the voices in the street and covered us with silence----there was only our breath coming stronger, and the fire crackling and spurting while the light-splayed ceiling rose and fell . . .

DEAN

We usually woke up freezing our asses off!

EVERYWOMAN

They were good nights, weren't they?

DEAN

Why don't you just take it easy?

EVERYWOMAN

Weren't they?

DEAN

Yes . . . yes . . . they were. Look, it isn't good for you to be like this; you're beginning to live inside the pages of those books you write.

EVERYWOMAN

You don't understand!

DEAN

I understand more than you think. You've been working too hard. If you want my opinion, I think that you should get away for a while, far away. You need to change your perspective.

EVERYWOMAN

I can't be alone now, not now.

DEAN

Who says you have to be alone? I'm awfully busy, but I could manage to get away for a weekend.

EVERYWOMAN

Really? Would you come away with me?

DEAN

Of course, if that will make you happy.

EVERYWOMAN

I knew you wouldn't desert me, I knew it!

DEAN

Desert you?

EVERYWOMAN

I knew it, from the first time I saw you. You weren't like the other men I had known. You weren't weak--tall and sure-of-yourself, and laughing and young. You will never grow old, never!

DEAN

You embarrass me. I already am old, and I'm hardly some Apollo striding down from the heights.

EVERYWOMAN

That's where you're wrong. You're flesh and blood, not like the phantoms in my childhood dreams. Oh, I used to imagine princes and knights coming out of castles to rescue me, but they would always disappear. At the moment I was about to reach something, I don't know what, so beautiful, so warm, . . . someone would call me and I would awaken, more desolate than words.

DEAN

You're a fool--always have been. Don't you realize all the heroes are dead?

EVERYWOMAN

You underestimate yourself.

DEAN

Me!! Good god, I never had the urge to be heroic! All the heroes are dead, I tell you.

EVERYWOMAN

You're wrong.

DEAN

The poets drown in the mud.

EVERYWOMAN

No, they only sleep.

DEAN

My dear, their blood flows through the streets.

EVERYWOMAN

Does my blood flow also? Am I out of fashion?

DEAN

Why do you, of all people, ask such a question?

EVERYWOMAN

I've got to feel that something has mattered in the tattered scheme of things.

DEAN

You . . . er . . . fill a void . . . a needed void.

(She is silent. He tries to pick up the mood.)

What matters is the moment. We'll go away this weekend. I think I can get away. It will be a good break for me, too, before things get hectic around here.

EVERYWOMAN

If you're willing to stay with me, then I can win a reprieve; I can ask for more time.

DEAN

Reprieve?

EVERYWOMAN

More time. I need more than a weekend. I want to spend the remain . . . will you marry me?

DEAN

MARRY YOU!!

EVERYWOMAN

Yes. We've been so close.

DEAN

You forget that you're already married.

EVERYWOMAN
That was finished a long time ago. . . we've both been putting off the inevitable, waiting for things to change, knowing they never would . . . my husband and I are a hopeless case; he would never object to a divorce. It won't take that long, and then we can finally be together.

DEAN
I wish you would let me catch my breath. Married . . . I'm not exactly a good risk, you know. I've been around that route twice . . . married!

EVERYWOMAN
I realize that I'm not the one who should be proposing, but under the circumstances . . .

DEAN
Circumstances?

EVERYWOMAN
Nothing matters but that we're together. I need to carry that with me. I want to close my eyes with the vision of you lingering on the last breath, like smoke across the stars.

DEAN
I don't understand your mood or your urgency.

EVERYWOMAN
Do you love me?

DEAN
(Pause) I care for you as much as I have ever been able to care for anyone in my life. You have given me great joy . . . without incumbrance.

EVERYWOMAN
(Pause) Then let's not wait for next weekend. Let's leave tonight.

DEAN
Tonight!!

EVERYWOMAN
Yes. We can go now. I'll telegraph my husband tomorrow, and make arrangements with my daughter, and . . .

DEAN
You have guests! I have plans for this weekend . . .

EVERYWOMAN
My guests are all busy now. They won't even notice we're gone until later.

DEAN
You're being absurd!!

EVERYWOMAN
I don't see what's so absurd about it.

DEAN

Well, for one thing, it's late. I don't even know where we could get transportation . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Please, I want to go now!

DEAN

Hush! People will hear you.

EVERYWOMAN

It's got to be NOW!

(Several people at the party stop talking and turn around to look at EVERYWOMAN and the DEAN.)

DEAN

(Apologetically) It's all right. Just a little too much to drink. (Turning back to EVERYWOMAN) Get hold of yourself. I realize that artists are expected to be temperamental, but you're carrying it to extremes.

EVERYWOMAN

But our going away immediately would give me a reprieve--I would have time to complete my autobiography. It would be my masterpiece.

DEAN

I think you have garnered quite enough laurels for a while. What you need is rest.

EVERYWOMAN

No. What I need is something to work toward--to take away the horror of it all--a final contribution.

DEAN

You've more than earned your "rights of passage." Don't push your luck.

EVERYWOMAN

I don't understand.

DEAN

You're in no condition to go into it tonight.

EVERYWOMAN

What do you mean, "don't push your luck!"

DEAN

I think you had something to say; you've said it. There's nothing else left.

EVERYWOMAN

(Pause) You're suggesting that I've reached my peak, is that it?

DEAN

Something like that. This is no time for such speculations. Let's relax and have a drink. We started out having a nice evening!

EVERYWOMAN

(Upset, to herself) Not yet . . . not yet! . . . The last leaf clings to the branch, remembering green, remembering sweet sap in the perfumed nights, remembering opening full to the gentle light, feeling the warmth in its veins, remembering the joy of breeze-blown rains . . .

DEAN

So we're playing lady-poet tonight, eh, my dear . . .

EVERYWOMAN

There at the moment of frost, that leaf--in the agony of not forgetting--crys to the coming grey, "I will not let go; I will not let go!" Then a careless cloud . . . that tiny hand tears loose . . . crushed by the supple silence of the snow.

DEAN

I feel like I've just left a seminar on creative dramatics! If you are sincerely trying to tell me something, would you mind using the English language? I'm really getting poor at translations.

EVERYWOMAN

I will not let go!

DEAN

God, you've actually gone mad!!

EVERYWOMAN

There is no sanity at the end of things.

DEAN

End of things! . . . Look, that comment I made about your writing . . .

EVERYWOMAN

It's more than just my writing, or a weekend . . . I'm dying.

DEAN

(Choking on his drink) You're what?

EVERYWOMAN

You heard what I said, dying.

DEAN

Everyone feels that way when they reach a pinnacle in their lives.

EVERYWOMAN

I'm talking about the real thing.

(A long pause; the DEAN takes it all in.)

DEAN

I don't believe it! You've been perfectly fine!

EVERYWOMAN

I know. I used to think death was just something that happened to other people, something you fold into a book and forget. I never thought it would happen to me.

DEAN

So that's why all this talk of marriage and your autobiography! . . . You should have told me sooner. I've been so insensitive.

EVERYWOMAN

I only just found out myself . . . that's why I need you so much. You are everything to me; all I want is a short time with you--you and no one else. We can be married and travel all over the country--anywhere you wish--it's all the same to me! With you I can still create, with you--

DEAN

All right . . . all right. Now, let's catch our breath . . . let's think things through, carefully . . . First of all, there's my job to think of, and that's a mammoth consideration. There are two months left in the semester, and I'm committed to be around for part of summer school. I can't just wave goodby to the university and be on my merry way!

EVERYWOMAN

You could take a leave of absence.

DEAN

I've spent years building up my career. A leave of absence now could be disastrous. We've got to figure this out. I mean, you're asking me to make a lot of changes in a short time.

EVERYWOMAN

I can't help that!

DEAN

I know, dear. It's really you I'm thinking of. I hate to bring it up, but what if you start declining? What if you took some turn-for-the-worse in some out-of-the-way place? What would we do then?

EVERYWOMAN

It wouldn't matter if I were with you.

DEAN

You never have been practical! You're going to need doctors and medicine; you may also require the facilities of a good hospital. I would never forgive myself if something happened to you and I didn't get you the help you needed.

EVERYWOMAN

The help I needed! Do you think I would want my life extended if I knew I would have to live it out in the midst of ether and needles and white? I want a few moments of life--not existence!

DEAN

I can understand that! I can--truly--look, we'll go away next weekend, and I'll be with you as much as possible--but as to some sudden marriage and the utter abandonment of sense that you're suggesting, I'm afraid I must say no. I can't take the responsibility.

(EVERYWOMAN turns away from him)

Look, if I didn't care about you, I'd go along with your crazy scheme. You're asking the impossible.

(EVERYWOMAN says nothing.)

What if it all turned out wrong? Then we would both be truly empty.

(EVERYWOMAN says nothing.)

I know this is all painful, but you must face it, you really must.

EVERYWOMAN

You have never, never loved me.

DEAN

Oh, come on . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Never loved me . . . I'm not asking you to do what is easy. If the love were there, there would be no question of willingness. This is the only time in all our years together I have ever asked you for anything.

DEAN

Let's not go over all that now.

EVERYWOMAN

You are the only man I ever sacrificed anything for. If you wanted love, I gave it; if you needed a friend, I was there. I sublimated my independence to you--we played by your rules. I have given up my husband, my way of life, everything, for you!

DEAN

You act as if I were sending you away or something! We can still be together.

EVERYWOMAN

If the situation were reversed, I would give up everything to be with you!

DEAN

Would you give up your precious writing career, that you insist gives you some hold on eternity?

EVERYWOMAN

(Pause, she thinks a moment) Yes, for you, I would.

DEAN

Then you are a fool!

EVERYWOMAN

And you are a selfish bastard!!

DEAN

My, my, you have lost your sense of poetry, haven't you! You label me selfish; in truth I am simply pragmatic. I am not very good in situations involving sickness or death. I try not to think about either one. You've built up a romantic picture of me over the years . . . I'm not strong enough for what you ask. I am not capable of that sort of love. If I were to lie to myself and pretend I were, you would hate me more than you no doubt do now; you would hate me for my weakness, for coming to you with my armor on, my lance in hand, and falling off my horse.

(A roar of laughter goes up from the crowd. THIRD FRIEND, who is beginning to show signs of tipsiness, comes toward them. EVERYWOMAN is silent.)

THIRD FRIEND

Hey, what is this, a wake?

EVERYWOMAN

Some might call it that. The question is, "Does life die, or does death live? Which came first, the grave or the fetus?" Perhaps you could solve the riddle for us.

THIRD FRIEND

Not me, honey. I'm no expert on dying.

EVERYWOMAN

You will be--give yourself time!

THIRD FRIEND

(To DEAN) What's with her?

(DEAN glances at EVERYWOMAN, not knowing whether to speak or not.)

EVERYWOMAN

Go ahead, tell her! She might as well know.

THIRD FRIEND

Tell me what?

DEAN

(Softly) She's dying.

THIRD FRIEND

Oh, come on!

EVERYWOMAN

It's true. The person you see before you will self-destruct in three seconds!

THIRD FRIEND

If this is some kind of sick joke . . .

EVERYWOMAN

I assure you, I'm not laughing.

THIRD FRIEND

(Long pause) Wow!! I have nothing to say . . . dying!

EVERYWOMAN

Join the crowd.

DEAN

She's angry with me because I wouldn't fly off with her tonight and get married.

THIRD FRIEND

(To EVERYWOMAN) I thought you were already married . . . dying . . . dying . . . of all the people I know, you're the last one I ever thought of as dead.

DEAN

I think I had better be going.

EVERYWOMAN

Don't stay on my account.

DEAN

I'll call you in the morning . . . don't look at me that way. I told you, all the heroes are dead.

EVERYWOMAN

That's right. Look at yourself--a flanneled god, pasted together with the evening paper. Someday your little edifice will begin to shred; somewhere a living rat is gnawing in the silence of the basement. Time has a great crumbling effect.

(DEAN shakes his head and exits, THIRD FRIEND starts after him.)

(To THIRD FRIEND) Where are you going?

THIRD FRIEND

Look, this isn't my scene. I'm not very good at playing defensive.

EVERYWOMAN

Don't go. Please.

(She grabs THIRD FRIEND'S arm. THIRD FRIEND pulls loose.)

THIRD FRIEND

Hold on. It's getting late . . .

EVERYWOMAN
Please! We've known each other for many years. You said earlier that you were my best friend, please!!

THIRD FRIEND
Best friend, yes, but martyr, no.

EVERYWOMAN
He walked out on me! When I needed him most. He doesn't care. All these years . . . his career . . . that's all he cares about!

THIRD FRIEND
What makes you think you're any different?

(EVERYWOMAN is silent.)

You haven't got an answer for that one, have you? Surely you didn't expect him to stay!

(EVERYWOMAN is silent.)

I could have told you he'd run! How do you think he got to the top?!

EVERYWOMAN
And you're going to run, too, I take it.

THIRD FRIEND
If you mean walk completely out of your life, no. If you mean, will I hold your hand to the end, the answer is yes, from <u>that</u> I run.

EVERYWOMAN
I can't believe you're saying this to me!

THIRD FRIEND
Truth. Like I said before, the best thing I can give you is truth. I'm not worth much; I know that, but I <u>survive</u>. Survival is the only reality! It's that or suicide. Listen, you're a walking symbol of what we all fear--the more you begin to die, the more we die who have to look at you. If you've really only a short time left--which I find hard to believe--then so do we all. . . . If I think about that for too long, I'm going to fall apart, too. So yes, I'll run, as fast and as far as I can. When it comes down to the end, we're all alone. It's every man for himself in this damned world. Poets who tell us otherwise are either liars or idiots. I used to accuse you of being the former. Now I'm not so sure.

EVERYWOMAN
(Softly) Alone in the wind with the young bulls waiting.

THIRD FRIEND
What?

EVERYWOMAN
Just something you said earlier. You had better beware. You may be the next leader of the herd.

(THIRD FRIEND is silent a moment--pause.)

THIRD FRIEND
I'm sorry. I really am. I'm sorry. I wish I were the type of person who could stay.

EVERYWOMAN
It's all right. He's right, you know. You spend one warm night with him and freeze your ass off in the morning.

(THIRD FRIEND leaves quickly. DAUGHTER emerges from the crowd and approaches her mother.)

DAUGHTER
Mother? I'm running out of things to say! What have you been doing all evening?

(EVERYWOMAN says nothing.)

Is the Dean gone?

(EVERYWOMAN nods, DAUGHTER is crestfallen.)

Why don't you come back and join the party . . . something's wrong, isn't it, mother!

EVERYWOMAN
No, nothing . . .

DAUGHTER
Mother?

FIFTH FRIEND
(Coming up to EVERYWOMAN, catching her by the arm.)
There you are, at last! You seem so distraught tonight. Here it is the night of your triumph, and we have been ignoring you. Well, no more.

FOURTH FRIEND
That's right, how about another toast.

FIRST FRIEND
I agree . . . (To MAID) Go get the glasses.

DAUGHTER
(Under her breath, to EVERYWOMAN) I think this is the twentieth time!

(The MAID, looking weary, goes off and returns with glasses, while the others crowd around EVERYWOMAN.)

SIXTH FRIEND
(Opening still another bottle of champagne) Here we are!

(SECOND FRIEND puts his arm around EVERY-WOMAN and draws her to the center.)

FOURTH FRIEND
(Hushing the group for silence) I would like to propose a toast. "To the Woman who has everything."

(Sounds of "hear, hear." DAUGHTER watches EVERYWOMAN closely. EVERYWOMAN doesn't even drink her drink. SIXTH FRIEND pours another round.)

SIXTH FRIEND
(To EVERYWOMAN) You're getting behind. You can't get behind at your own party. As a matter of fact, we haven't heard from you yet. It's your turn. <u>You</u> propose the toast.

EVERYWOMAN
(Softly) If you don't mind, I . . .

DAUGHTER
(Worried) Mother?

FIFTH FRIEND
Yes, <u>do</u>, my dear. You have such a way with words.

(For a moment EVERYWOMAN does nothing. She runs her finger around the rim of the glass. There is an uneasy silence. Finally she raises her glass.)

EVERYWOMAN
Time lifts a moment to our lips . . . the red wine in the chalice flows. We're born each second's taste ago, and die unto ourselves.

(Another uneasy silence. They slowly raise their glasses, puzzled by her depressing words. DAUGHTER stares at her.)

FIFTH FRIEND
Hear, hear . . . I guess!

(They drain their glasses.)

FOURTH FRIEND
(Breaking the silence) Well, I'm afraid I must bid farewell to the rest of you. It's late, and I must be going.

EVERYWOMAN
No; don't leave. Please! It's early yet. There's plenty to drink, and I'm sure we can find something for you to eat!

(She begins to break down.)

Please, please, don't go, don't leave me alone.

(Another uneasy silence.)

FIFTH FRIEND
My dear, what on earth is wrong with you?

EVERYWOMAN
(Slowly, a pause) I'm dying.

(Shock goes around the room. The DAUGHTER looks puzzled, then horrified. No one knows what to say.)

FOURTH FRIEND
Surely, you're not serious! This is just some macabre bit of humor, I mean . . .

EVERYWOMAN
No. I've known all evening. . . or, almost all evening. Happens to the best of us, you know.

DAUGHTER
(To herself) Dying . . .

FOURTH FRIEND
(Going to her, in a phony show of friendship) I'm so sorry; I had no idea . . .

(DAUGHTER begins to back away.)

SIXTH FRIEND
Why didn't you tell us? Here we've been carousing around while you've been aching inside . . .

FIFTH FRIEND
I can't believe it. How long have you known? I had another friend who was supposed to die and she lived three years . . .

FIRST FRIEND
Of course, if there's anything I can do . . .

(They continue to crowd around her, DAUGHTER backs away. EVERYWOMAN notices DAUGHTER for the first time.)

EVERYWOMAN
(Calling out to DAUGHTER, who is leaving the room) Wait! Don't go! Don't go, wait . . .

(DAUGHTER exits. EVERYWOMAN struggles to go after her, but they crowd around her too much.)

Please, let me out! My daughter! Move aside! Let me out!!

(Breaking free of them, frantic, noticing the DAUGHTER is gone.)

Get away! Will you just leave me alone!!

(They all back away, startled.)

You fawned all over me when I became famous, and now you're fawning all over me because I'm dying! I can't stand the sight of any of you. Will you get out! I said, get out!!

(They are all shocked, then angry.)

FIFTH FRIEND

Well! I never!

FOURTH FRIEND

Give a person a little sympathy and they bite your head off!

SECOND FRIEND

It's late anyway . . .

SIXTH FRIEND

Artists!

FIRST FRIEND

She'll be sorry in the morning.

(One by one they leave and EVERYWOMAN is alone in the room. MAID enters with a tray of food. Looks around at empty room, perplexed.)

MAID

Madam, I thought your friends wanted . . .

EVERYWOMAN

My friends . . . my friends . . . I'll tell you about friends!

(She goes up to MAID, who is frightened.)

The crowd waves; the crowd cheers. You open your laurel eyes when they encircle you with green, until their singing drowns the sun. But the ivy turns into a rope; it binds your thoughts. Then the crowd laughs; the crowd screams; it pulls the string, and your dog-dreams follow through the streets; your tongue touches the ground.

(Pause, the MAID is silent.)

MAID

Should I leave then, m'am? I take it the party is over.

EVERYWOMAN

Yes, the party's over.

(Exit MAID.)

The party's over. And didn't we all have fun!

(She pours herself another drink. Long pause. She looks at it.)

We put on the night like a black suede shoe and waltzed with the moon; the music was a bell-song winging outward to the sad hills. We drank the lonely calm of rocks and stones and the fragile scent of grass. We laughed with the crickets, surrounded by the leafy madness of trees. We were grand . . . we were dying . . . we were nothing even as we sang . . . And didn't we all have fun.

(She sinks to the couch, crying. End of scene.)

ACT II, Scene 1

(The living room, same as before. The lights are much dimmer; it is very late. EVERYWOMAN is frantically cleaning everything; she wipes the tables, sometimes two or three times. DEATH enters; EVERYWOMAN doesn't see her at first.)

DEATH

It's very late.

EVERYWOMAN

(Jumping, startled) Oh! . . . I didn't see you come in!

(She moves away, agitated, upset, and continues cleaning.)

DEATH

No one ever does . . . what are you doing?

EVERYWOMAN

This place is a mess . . . there's nothing more empty than the aftermath of a party.

DEATH

I warned you it would come to this. Forget the clutter. It's time we were going.

EVERYWOMAN

No!

DEATH

Everything is useless . . .

EVERYWOMAN

No! My daughter . . . just ran out of the house . . . just ran . . . she's alone in the dark somewhere . . . alone! I must wait up for her and explain. She needs me.

DEATH

She'll go on. She's young. She'll go on.

EVERYWOMAN

And my parents. They're both upstairs. How will I tell them?

DEATH

They're old. They will understand. They're tired.

EVERYWOMAN

Tired, yes. My mother was born tired. She never smiles. Used to when I was little. Poor father . . . why can't we grow up without growing old?

(FATHER enters carrying a large box of pictures, on top of which is a large, frayed teddy bear. FATHER is in his late seventies, wears baggy pants and an old sweater. He shuffles toward the bar and doesn't see EVERYWOMAN at first. He never sees DEATH. EVERYWOMAN consciously ignores DEATH, who shakes her head and slowly departs.)

FATHER

(Mumbling) Never saves anything. Throw out the last shirt I had if I let her! This isn't even her house!

(FATHER pours himself a large drink.)

EVERYWOMAN

Father!!

(He spills the drink all over himself.)

I've never seen you take a drink in your life!

FATHER

Neither has your mother. I'm what is known as a discreet wino! What're you doing up, anyway? I thought the party was over a long time ago!

EVERYWOMAN

It was. I'm straightening up. What are you doing down here?

FATHER

Thought I'd relax by myself and go through these old things your mother was about to throw away. The only part of the day worth living is the time when everybody else is asleep and you have the world to yourself.

(He sits down and begins to lift various toys and pictures out of the box.)

Will you look at that!

(Peruses one picture.)

Seems like a million years ago, or like an old movie of somebody else's life. (Holding up teddy bear) Remember this?

EVERYWOMAN

My old bear! Where did you find it? (She takes it in her arms.)

FATHER

Your mother found it in your attic and was going to throw it away.

EVERYWOMAN

You mean she's actually been going through our attic? Now that is the limit! And what right has she to throw away old Freddie? He was my favorite toy!

FATHER

You know your mother. Where she cleans, she cleans! Permanently!

EVERYWOMAN

But why would she even consider throwing such things away? Excluding the fact that they are my possessions, why would she want to throw away momentoes?

FATHER

I'll never understand that woman . . . look here . . . it's a picture of our first house. Remember the apple orchard in back?

EVERYWOMAN

(Sitting next to him, beginning to remember) Apples . . . oh, yes . . . how could I have forgotten those apples. The stem cracked as you pulled one off, and when you bit into the hard skin, the lush sweetness of leaves and laughter flowed through your mouth.

FATHER

I was young then; everything was young then.

EVERYWOMAN

I used to dream myself to sleep with the wind blowing through those branches in the spring. The breeze touching my face felt like a soft hand soothing back my hair to look in my eyes.

FATHER

Good years they were . . . you were a cute little thing, you and that bear.

EVERYWOMAN

Why would she ever want to throw it away?

FATHER

(Continuing to reminisce) And those damn birthday parties!! Your mother always picked a Sunday, my one day of relaxation! Twenty-five screaming

kids on my one day of relaxation. Monsters! Little girls with fancy dresses and big eyes--ha--they almost fool you, but LOOK OUT! They're the first ones to throw the ice-cream across the room, and dump the goldfish on the floor, or eat the chocolate cake with their hands and smear it on your shirt! The boys I could understand. They were miserable in the shirts and ties their mothers insisted they wear so they felt it their duty to take it out on my possessions.

EVERYWOMAN

I was always too much for you, wasn't I, father?

FATHER

I never did understand women of any age, least of all your mother!

(Enter MOTHER. She is in her seventies also. She wears an old sweater and a baggy old dress of the order of those designed for older ladies. She is grey and tired, but she bustles into the room and straight for FATHER.)

MOTHER

I figured you'd be down here! How many have you had? (indicating his drink)

FATHER

One . . . just <u>one</u>. Daughter and I've been sitting here going over old times.

EVERYWOMAN

I'm glad you came down, mother. I need to talk to you.

MOTHER

(To FATHER) Better make that drink your last and come to bed.

FATHER

Don't know what got into me. I never drink, you know.

MOTHER

Never drink! You've been hitting the bottle on weekends since the day I married you!

FATHER

Oh, now . . .

MOTHER

Thought you were so smart all those years, didn't you! Well, I've always known. You don't live with a person for fifty-two years without knowing those things.

FATHER

Women--it's your world, make no mistake about that.

MOTHER

Ha!

EVERYWOMAN
Father and I were just reminiscing. Remember our first house, mother? We were looking at these pictures just now and . . . mother, why were you going to throw all this away?

MOTHER
You ever realize what a mess your attic's in? You've got so much junk up there . . .

EVERYWOMAN
Mother, these are precious keepsakes! How could you . . .

MOTHER
It's all gone, all of it.

EVERYWOMAN
But the apple orchard, and the house and the lake . . .

MOTHER
It's changed.

EVERYWOMAN
It can't have changed! If I had time, I'd go home with you again. I always wanted to . . . if, I had time . . .

MOTHER
Wouldn't matter. The orchard's a parking lot.

EVERYWOMAN
A parking lot!

FATHER
Sure. Has been for years. They turned the whole neighborhood into a giant shopping center several years back.

EVERYWOMAN
I never thought . . .

FATHER
I knew it would happen, even back then. All those college men (to EVERYWOMAN), like those friends of yours--all those young college guys coming into the plant with their big ideas. Every one of them educated, climbing high, speaking a language I couldn't understand . . . they always knew the formula; I only knew the process . . . I always hated the thinkers; I've been a doer all my life. All I have ever known are my two hands . .

MOTHER
There's no point in thinking about it now. Gone, all gone.

EVERYWOMAN
Why not? I was formed by those trees and that house. It's our heritage. Those were good years. It's important to remember the good years.

MOTHER

If you close your eyes long enough, it doesn't seem possible that they ever happened to you at all.

EVERYWOMAN

They did happen. Mother, it's important for me to remember. I want you to see what I've become since then; I want you to be proud of . . .

MOTHER

I never did understand you. The only time I was ever sure about you was when you were a baby.

FATHER

We brought her home to that house, remember? Every time she got the hiccups you thought she was going to die!

MOTHER

There's nothing like the feel of a baby, soft breath on your neck when it sleeps, a warm wound in your heart. A baby clings to you, unlike the years . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Mother, why did you throw Freddie away?

MOTHER

Why not?

EVERYWOMAN

Mother, he was my favorite toy!

MOTHER

What's the use of letting him mold in the attic? Where'd you get a name like Freddie anyway?

EVERYWOMAN

It was as good as any other name I could think of. I used to drag him through mud-splashed afternoons. Twilight was a dessert we shared, while the popsickle sun dripped away across the yard. He was the companion through all the untold countries of my mind, across oceans and back again, rocking through the gentle waves of sleep.

(She clasps the bear in her arms for comfort, like a child.)

FATHER

Look how frayed he is. His fur is all matted.

EVERYWOMAN

(Still clutching him) The best years of my life were the years I played with him.

MOTHER

That may be true, but what difference does it all make now? He's ruined, can't you see--just an old rag with a head full of cotton, nothing more.

EVERYWOMAN
Mother, there's something you have to know . . .

MOTHER
I already know. It's about your daughter.

EVERYWOMAN
My daughter! No, what I meant was . . .

MOTHER
She's ruining my life, ruining it. She has everything and she's throwing it all away. She's pretty, and it's time for the young men to come. What does she do, sit around and dream and go to parties for older people. I can't do a thing with her.

EVERYWOMAN
I think it's because right now she wants to accomplish something with her life and she's not sure what.

MOTHER
Accomplish something! Think of the dances and the flowers . . .

FATHER
Oh, come on, momma. Not that again.

EVERYWOMAN
She wants to do something important with her years.

MOTHER
There you go! Just like always. I never understood you. All your friends did so well for themselves.

EVERYWOMAN
What do you think I've done, mother! I've written four prize-winning novels, I've . . .

MOTHER
Of course, I always wanted you to be around the best people, like the Richards. You were nasty to their son Tommy.

EVERYWOMAN
That's because he was always threatening to pinch my nose off with a pair of pliers! Mother, how can you fail to recognize what I've . . .

MOTHER
Tommy Richards, whom you scorned, became a successful dentist.

FATHER
Now he can pinch people and get paid for it.

MOTHER
(Glaring at FATHER, then to EVERYWOMAN) And all your friends married well.

EVERYWOMAN
Mother, there are more things to life than . . .

MOTHER
(Letting it pour out) Like Betty Daniels. She was such a pretty little girl . . .

FATHER
Brother!! That kid was so prissy, I don't think she ever went to the bathroom.

MOTHER
She was a lovely girl. She married a nationally famous urologist!

FATHER
Well, that should take care of her bathroom problems!

(MOTHER glares at FATHER.)

EVERYWOMAN
Please. You must recognize what I've done . . .

MOTHER
Done, done, done. That's all I ever hear from the two of you. Well . . . what are you going to do about your daughter, about the excitement she's missing?

EVERYWOMAN
I'm not going to do anything!

MOTHER
But the young men . . .

EVERYWOMAN
Young men can be cruel. Perhaps it's our world that makes them that way. You can tell them all your songs and let your thoughts ripple from your body until you are naked, but they always keep themselves fully clothed.

MOTHER
Your problem was that you told too much. A woman should be mysterious. Never let anyone know you too well.

FATHER
Oh, brother!

MOTHER
I could never understand any anyone would give up the dancing and the dreams.

FATHER
I can feel it coming!! I should have gone to bed hours ago!

MOTHER
(Suddenly soft, she too remembers) There were young men around my house all the time.

FATHER

I've heard this so many times I have it memorized.

MOTHER

The best of them all was Howard Winters. He was tall and charming. We'd take long walks at sunset and dream. Did you know that once I was going to be a great singer?

FATHER

Where? In the shower?

MOTHER

(Ignoring him) Everything was so simple and beautiful then. I was pretty, really pretty. A woman has to be pretty, you know.

EVERYWOMAN

Mother . . .

MOTHER

The night of my first dance was so special. I had a new dress; it was soft and had rows and rows of lace. I put a ribbon in my hair. It was so long and shiny. I stood near the dance floor, wondering if anyone would ask me to dance. I was so afraid I would be left alone. Girls around me were being asked, the music started, I was so humiliated--when there came Howard Winters, the best-looking boy in the class, and took my hands, and off we went! I could hear the material in my dress rustle as we moved.

(Lost in reverie, she takes her dress in her hands, stands up and begins to waltz around the room. EVERYWOMAN buries her head in her hands. The MOTHER sings, in the off-key voice of an old woman.)

East Side, West Side/All around the town./Me and Rosie O'Grady, London Bridge is falling down./Boys and girls together,/Me and Mamie O'Rourke,/ Tripped the light fantastic/on the sidewalks of New York.

FATHER

Good God! I thought you said you could sing!

MOTHER

I could . . . once.

(She is silent and sad for a moment. Then she remembers and smiles again.)

Those were the days . . . Howard and I would take long walks in the autumn afternoons. One day . . . with the leaves falling around us like flame, we lay down . . . I was dizzy . . . and happy . . . I was pretty .

(She loses the reverie, feels foolish, sits down, once again a worn old woman.)

God help a woman if she isn't pretty!!

(A long pause.)

EVERYWOMAN
Mother, I know there were many things you wanted for me, but . . .

MOTHER
(Anguished) All I ever wanted for you was that your visions would not end up in the back yard!

(Pause. The MOTHER sinks back into the past again. She begins to rock an imaginary baby in her arms and hum "East Side, West Side" again.)

MOTHER
(To the imaginary child) Go to sleep now . . . go to sleep. Are you mommie's good boy? Are you mommie's darling . . . dead . . . what do you mean, Dead?

FATHER
Oh, no! Not again . . . Momma, momma, snap out of it . . .

MOTHER
Can't be dead! . . . going to be a great man. I'm the mother of a great man! Don't you understand?

FATHER
Momma, please.

EVERYWOMAN
How long has she been like this?

FATHER
I don't know . . . six months, maybe. It's always the same, Howard Winters or the baby!

(The MOTHER continues to rock back and forth, violently.)

EVERYWOMAN
She never got over it, did she?

FATHER
One never gets over something like that . . . I would have had a <u>son</u>! A son is a man's only hope of power.

EVERYWOMAN
I never realized it meant so much to you, pappa . . .

FATHER
It meant everything to me! A man goes on . . .

EVERYWOMAN
(Hurt) Is that why you *didn't* stay home much afterwards? (No answer) Seems like I never saw you after that . . .

FATHER

Well, damn it, I was busy.

(MOTHER continues to rock violently.)

They were always changing things at the plant! Someone would invent some new machine, I would have to learn the job all over again, . . . so I kept on working . . . Times were hard and men were laid off right and left, but I kept on working . . . the young men, the college men were always waiting, watching, wanting my job, but I kept on working . . . I kept on working, do you hear!

MOTHER

(Picking up his last words) Working, working do you hear. Your father's working, always working . . . doesn't matter, you'll be pretty. My last child, my daughter . . . she's coming down the stairs in a daffodil dress. Her eyes smile . . .

(MOTHER becomes more frenzied, EVERYWOMAN goes to the bar quickly and pours a drink.)

smile . . .

EVERYWOMAN

(Handing MOTHER the drink) Here, mother, just this once, drink this.

(MOTHER takes a couple of sips, coughs, begins to return to the present.)

MOTHER

(Looking bewildered) Oh, my head . . . (To EVERYWOMAN) Never grow old if you can help it.

FATHER

You okay now, momma?

MOTHER

Of course I'm okay . . . what are you two so upset about?

EVERYWOMAN

Nothing, momma . . . we were just remembering . . .

MOTHER

Does no good to remember . . . just makes you sad, thinking about all the things you've missed . . . (looking around her) Party over? It's dark down here.

EVERYWOMAN

Yes, momma, the party's over.

MOTHER

Thank goodness for that! Vulgar crowd!

FATHER

Not vulgar, momma, smart. I thought of coming down a couple of times, but I wouldn't have fit in with all those college men.

EVERYWOMAN

Yes you would, pappa. You've always been so sensitive about those things.

FATHER

Always wanted to go to college.

EVERYWOMAN

You should have.

FATHER

There wasn't enough time or money . . . there was a wife and child to clothe, a wife and child to feed, a wife and child to worry about, a wife and child who could not understand what it was like to struggle . . .

MOTHER

I never realized I was such a burden!

FATHER

Well, you certainly couldn't get the things you wanted for yourself! There was nothing practical you could do.

MOTHER

(Huffy) That's not true! I had a lovely voice!

FATHER

Oh, that's a fine profession!

MOTHER

I could have gone far!

FATHER

Then why *didn't you*?

MOTHER

(Suddenly vehement) Because if I wanted to sing, the baby was crying and the floor needed scrubbing and supper had to be fixed! If I needed to read, the furniture was dirty and the clothes needed washing . . . and the floor . . . was crying . . . and the baby . . . needed scrubbing . . . fixed . . . the baby . . . baby . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Momma!

MOTHER

(Snapping out of it, still remembering) The dust blows; the dust covers. Nothing stays clean, . . . nothing . . . you just get tired.

(Long pause.)

FATHER

What more did you want?

MOTHER

Perhaps to be . . . just a little bit crazy.

FATHER

Crazy!! Whatever does that mean?

EVERYWOMAN

(Almost a whisper) Yes--crazy . . .

MOTHER

Life is nothing if you haven't the courage to be reckless. I wanted to be daring, to put everything we had on the line, just once.

FATHER

That's the most assinine thing I've ever heard! Wildness is for the very young. You would have been the first to run scared at the thought of anything new. God knows, I longed for change, too,--God knows--but you have to be realistic. You can't risk security when you have responsibilities. Why did you have to dream for everybody else? Why did you have to dream things for me?

MOTHER

(Pause, angry) Because I never had any dreams of my own!

FATHER

(Hurt, she has never admitted this much before) You make me sound like some sort of ogre!! What right have you . . . I gave you a good life, I made you happy!

MOTHER

Happy! You really think you made me happy? Sometimes, after the morning dishes, when I was young, I'd walk out to the hill and watch the winter day set in. The trees would knife the sky while the wind moaned with pain. From where I stood, everything was dead.

EVERYWOMAN

Mother, don't!

MOTHER

(Cutting her off) Winter is the only thing that is real. Spring is a lie we cling to, a short green lie . . . a moment's sunbirth before the ice. The cold is hungry.

EVERYWOMAN

Mother, don't!

MOTHER

Death is the mother of life.

FATHER

(Pause, hurt) You make it sound like we never had anything.

MOTHER

We *didn't*.

EVERYWOMAN

Mother!

MOTHER

It's true. He never went anywhere . . . never did anything, except grow grey. It was like living with a ghost.

FATHER

(Turning on her) So I'm the one who's shrivelled, eh! Look at yourself! Look at your hands, your face! What do you think it has been like to make love to you over the years--an old bitch who does nothing but dream of bones!

(MOTHER smashes her glass to the floor and begins to cry. FATHER turns away. They have said too much.)

EVERYWOMAN

(Bending to pick up broken glass) You've broken it.

MOTHER

Such a mess . . . a mess . . . old bitch of a dog . . . old bitch . . .

FATHER

Momma, I'm sorry. I didn't . . .

MOTHER

Nothing but disappointments . . . a daughter who isn't pretty . . . a husband who . . . whole family a mess . . . and the baby, the baby . . .

EVERYWOMAN

(Bending down, trying to comfort) Momma, listen. I know how you feel, but you have succeeded. I'm not a failure. I have made a name for myself; I have created something lasting, my books. You can be proud of them.

MOTHER

Proud of them . . . books? How can anyone be proud of words?

EVERYWOMAN

Mother, I've won many prizes. I've become respected, famous . . .

MOTHER

Did you make a lot of money?

EVERYWOMAN

That's not why I wrote them!

MOTHER

What good are they if they didn't bring you money?

(EVERYWOMAN stands up, stunned)

EVERYWOMAN

Mother, there are other things . . .

MOTHER

You never were pretty, and then you had to go and marry that weakling who never went anywhere . . . but then, what else could you expect when your mother is an old bitch of a dog . . .

FATHER

I said I was sorry . . .

MOTHER

No you're not! What is a woman if her family hates her?

EVERYWOMAN

Momma, I'm trying to tell you. I don't hate you!! I haven't had to live through others, like you have. I've made my own name. I've given both you and pappa importance!

FATHER

Importance! What meaning does that have? We work for it all our lives, we pray at night, "Please God, don't let me be average," but in the end we die . . . we die, baby.

MOTHER

(Begins to rock back and forth again, slipping out of reality.)

Baby . . . baby . . .

FATHER

(To EVERYWOMAN) If you think you have given us importance, you have given us nothing!

EVERYWOMAN

(Hurt) Don't say that, poppa, not now.

FATHER

(MOTHER continues to rock her imaginary child.)

Nothing.

EVERYWOMAN

(Pause) Please . . . I'm dying.

FATHER

You're what?

EVERYWOMAN

Dying.

FATHER

No. Old worn out people like me die. Not you! You're still young . . .

EVERYWOMAN

I know, poppa, I know.

FATHER

How can <u>you</u> be dying? Why you?

EVERYWOMAN

(Breaking down) Please, please, don't say I've given you nothing. Don't say . . . I'm afraid.

FATHER

(Trying to rouse MOTHER) Momma, you hear that, the child's dying.

MOTHER

(Looking down at her bare arms) No . . . already dead . . . stopped moving . . .

FATHER

No momma, our daughter, our daughter is dying.

MOTHER

(Slowly realizing) Our daughter . . . no! It's a lie . . . not both of them. You're lying.

FATHER

She needs you now.

MOTHER

No! It isn't fair! If my daughter dies, who am I?

EVERYWOMAN

Momma, please.

MOTHER

I have no name!

EVERYWOMAN

I'm afraid. I've never been so afraid. Help me! Help me!

MOTHER

I'm nothing. Nothing!

EVERYWOMAN

Please!

MOTHER

Without a daughter I have no name. I'm somebody who cooked the meals and kept the house clean . . . nobody.

EVERYWOMAN

Hold me, momma! When I was young and the white-eyed moon howled through my window, and every leaf was a black hand ready to clutch my life away, I would cry out and you would lift me up and rock away the shadows. You would sing soft songs and fear would fall from my eyes like tears. Hold me! I'm afraid!

MOTHER

I can't. There's nobody left to hold. I'm a shadow . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Dying is terrible. You've turned my memories inside out!

FATHER

The seams always show anyway.

(EVERYWOMAN picks up the teddy bear in the corner and clutches it to her.)

EVERYWOMAN

I'm afraid.

FATHER

Who isn't? Life is a credit card that breaks you dry . . . youth is a plastic dream you fold in your wallet until it expires . . . what you've purchased is your own emptiness.

MOTHER

(Lost again, looking at EVERYWOMAN with teddy bear.)

Put your toys away, child. It's time for bed.

FATHER

(Gently) A good idea. We all need sleep. We'll talk in the morning. (To EVERYWOMAN) I wish I knew what to say.

MOTHER

(Almost incoherent) All gone . . . a-llll gone . . .

EVERYWOMAN

(Gently) Try to sleep now, momma.

MOTHER

Death is the best of all bad prayers.

(Pause. EVERYWOMAN clutches the bear to her and turns from them. FATHER and MOTHER shuffle out.)

MOTHER

(Lost in the past) My daughter is coming down the stairs in a daffodil dress. Her eyes smile; she will set the young man's heart on fire . . .

FATHER

(Pulling her along) Come to bed, momma.

MOTHER

(Almost hysterical) She will burn with pain. He will leave her behind. He has stars to run to. Don't let her go! Call her back, tell her it's no use . . . no use . . . no use. . . .

FATHER

Come on now, momma. It's cold down here. Must be the wind.

EVERYWOMAN

Or only a thought . . .

(The lights fade. MOTHER turns around just before her exit.)

MOTHER

Oh, my child, my poor child. The dust blows; the dust covers; nothing stays clean . . . EVEN WORDS.

(Exit FATHER and MOTHER. EVERYWOMAN stands still, shivering, then slowly lets the teddy bear fall from her arms. End scene.)

ACT II, Scene 2

(The living room of EVERYWOMAN'S home. The lighting is dim. EVERYWOMAN sits slumped in a chair, her head in her hands. The HUSBAND enters with a half-empty bottle. He goes to the bar, places the bottle on it, and takes in the appearance of EVERYWOMAN and the whole room.)

HUSBAND

Party's over, I see.

EVERYWOMAN

Yes.

HUSBAND

Isn't it rather early?

(EVERYWOMAN doesn't answer.)

Ignoring me won't make me go away, you know . . . I intend to hang around and let the prestige seep into my portfolio, sort of by osmosis . . . which is why I drink, you know, osmosis . . .

(Still no response from EVERYWOMAN. The HUSBAND pauses and stares at her, trying to understand the new mood.)

You know, I've been dreaming about this moment for a long time; I knew that sooner or later, he'd come to page 599, jump on a hyphen, and zoom off into the never-never-land of apostrophes and colons . . . That's where he's always belonged anyway, the colon . . .

(EVERYWOMAN doesn't move.)

Aren't you going to contradict me? Aren't you going to tell me that he's simply out buying cigarettes . . . oh, I forgot, his kind never do . . . the least you could do is tell me you don't know what I'm talking about!

EVERYWOMAN
(Tired) You're talking about the Dean . . . He is gone, you're right. . . . they're . . . all gone.

HUSBAND
(Pause) Do you realize that you're making it impossible for me to gloat?

(EVERYWOMAN is still silent.)

Couldn't you scream or something?

EVERYWOMAN
How about if I just have a drink.
(She gets up slowly, goes to the bar. He watches her.)

HUSBAND
Well, now you'll be able to end your autobiography with a flourish. The public loves nothing better than another person's tragedy.

EVERYWOMAN
I never plan to finish it.

HUSBAND
Oh, come on; you'll get over him. I believe that you're capable of getting over just about anything.

EVERYWOMAN
It has nothing to do with him . . . you were right after all . . . words are formless lines printed on sand. I do not plan to finish my autobiography because all the time in the world--if I had it--would not make it worth finishing.

HUSBAND
You're stealing all my lines.

EVERYWOMAN
I always have.

HUSBAND
I don't understand this new you. Do you think that you can simply make me vanish?

EVERYWOMAN
I have never wished you to vanish.

HUSBAND
No. Of course not. We have the perfect relationship!

EVERYWOMAN
We did . . . once . . . I have been sitting here for hours, just thinking about you . . .

HUSBAND

I didn't think you ever thought about me at all . . . semantics!! Think you thought!! . . . funny thing about sentences, they trip you up.

EVERYWOMAN

Don't you ever think about the past . . . the days out by the lake?

HUSBAND

Those memories are stagnant algae, creeping up our thighs at night . . . Sure, I recall those days--like a slam in the jaw . . . we've missed it all . . . missed it all. Once we were young . . . that's enough to cry about all night. Once we were not so lost.

EVERYWOMAN

Yes . . . lost . . .

HUSBAND

Sometimes I wonder why we go on at all.

EVERYWOMAN

The tragedy is that we do . . . we end up staring at all the silhouettes in the fireplace, the shadows we took for real . . . (With sudden fervor) If we could just go back . . .

HUSBAND

Forget it.

EVERYWOMAN

You were sun-hot brandy flowing over me. There was nothing I didn't feel; there was so much to know. . .

HUSBAND

It's always that way when you're learning someone. You don't mind poverty, you have sex at the most ridiculous hours . . . you don't mind anything because everything is wonderful.

EVERYWOMAN

I am old. I can feel the sagginess where my skin was once smooth . . . I am old.

HUSBAND

I think I have always been old.

EVERYWOMAN

That's not true.

(She impulsively takes his hand. He is startled, but he does not pull it away.)

HUSBAND

I don't understand you at all tonight!

EVERYWOMAN
Once we were at the beginning and thought everything would be uphill. We didn't know we were on top, about to drop into the biting wind.

HUSBAND
I wish we had stayed on the bottom.

EVERYWOMAN
So do I!

HUSBAND
No . . . you don't really mean that. You could never ride the merry-go-round. It had to be the roller-coaster. You are what is known as a driven woman.

EVERYWOMAN
And you've always needed an old-fashioned wife. You wanted the pot roast in the oven and the laundry done every day.

HUSBAND
I guess you're right. It bothered me when you asked me to play with the child or cook supper. I tried to pretend I was beyond that, but I wasn't. I never will be . . . I'm sorry, it's true . . . but I have never . . . (He finds this hard to say.) never stopped loving you or desiring you, ever.

(A long pause. They kiss.)

EVERYWOMAN
My dear, you should have left me a long time ago.

HUSBAND
I couldn't. There was the small matter of my being hopelessly in love with you, and I kept hoping . . .

EVERYWOMAN
. . . that the roses would bloom outside the cottage?

HUSBAND
Yes, something like that. Why didn't you leave?

EVERYWOMAN
I don't know . . . I thought about it many times. Almost did once. I put on my coat and stormed out of the house . . . but I never got any further than the end of the street. Everything around me seemed so sinister and cold. I ended up walking back again--slowly, so you'd worry, but home again, nevertheless.

(She smiles to herself.)

It turns out you never even knew I was gone!

HUSBAND
Sometimes I think marriage is a great destroyer.

EVERYWOMAN
Perhaps we should have stayed single and retained the joy . . .
I see now how wrong I was . . .

HUSBAND
(Slowly) There is no such thing as wrong or right. We choose a road that takes us where we think we ought to want to go . . . and lose our dreams.

EVERYWOMAN
(Suddenly rising) I'm cold . . .

HUSBAND
Let it go . . . there are worse things than growing old . . . dying young, for instance.

EVERYWOMAN
Yes, dying young . . . help me! I can't bear it!

HUSBAND
Can't bear what?

EVERYWOMAN
I'm dying . . .

HUSBAND
Dying?

EVERYWOMAN
That's why I ended the party early.

HUSBAND
You can't be serious . . . dying . . .

EVERYWOMAN
I've lost everything.

HUSBAND
Oh, my god, dying . . . I don't believe it . . . I can't believe it.

EVERYWOMAN
(Losing control) No escape . . . there has always been a way out before . . . I'm alone, really alone.

HUSBAND
(Trying to comfort) Hush, hush, don't . . . if I had only known . . . Those things I said . . . (He goes to her, takes her in his arms.) I'm so sorry, so sorry . . .

EVERYWOMAN
Don't . . . there's too much wrong everywhere. Just hold me; I'm so afraid . . . I need you.

HUSBAND
That's the first time you've ever said that to me.

EVERYWOMAN
It's true . . . No one can help me but you.

HUSBAND
(Sadly) Why is it, when the drink is sour, we dream of thirst?

(They hold each other for a long pause.)
How long . . .

EVERYWOMAN
Only a little while.

HUSBAND
I won't let you down this time, not this time. We'll make the best of it. We'll go away somewhere together. I'll take a leave of absence.

EVERYWOMAN
Do you really mean that?

HUSBAND
Of course.

EVERYWOMAN
But what about your job?

HUSBAND
That doesn't matter now. You are all that matters.

EVERYWOMAN
You really mean to stay with me, in spite of the things I've done!

HUSBAND
You can't know what it means to me to discover that I'm the one you've come to. For once I'm the first person you've turned to in trouble. If only it weren't the end. If only you'd have told me sooner . . .

EVERYWOMAN
I wanted to ; it was hard.

HUSBAND
I was only right upstairs.

EVERYWOMAN
Yes, right upstairs.

HUSBAND
The important thing is that you sent the others home and came to me only! I'll do the best I can to make it up to you.

EVERYWOMAN
You have nothing to make up for. I admired all the wrong people.

HUSBAND
I could have told you the dean would only bring you emptiness.

EVERYWOMAN
I know. When I told him I was dying he ran as fast as his legs could carry him.

(Pause. The HUSBAND takes in her statement.)

HUSBAND
(Slowly) Then you did tell him . . .

EVERYWOMAN
At the party . . . yes . . .

HUSBAND
Then he was the first person you turned to . . .

EVERYWOMAN
I . . . merely . . . mentioned it . . .

HUSBAND
You just mentioned a little thing like the fact that you are about to die!

EVERYWOMAN
We were talking. I told him . . .

HUSBAND
So I was last, afterall.

EVERYWOMAN
You don't understand.

HUSBAND
Oh, but I do. No one else is left, so you come to me.

EVERYWOMAN
You're distorting everything!

HUSBAND
He and I . . . it's always been the two of us, and I always lose. Every time I sweat or go to the bathroom, I lose!

EVERYWOMAN
You have never lost. There was a time when I wanted you both. He filled a void in my life for a time--that's all. I never really loved him the way I have always loved you. I know that now . . .

HUSBAND
Do you! For once, you are vulnerable. Your mortality has slapped you in the face and you want me to patch up the wounds . . .

EVERYWOMAN
Please. You don't understand.
(She tries to explain patiently.)

You plant a garden with roses, place them in lace patterns and tend their threaded petals to form your own design. Then the weeds come, in the night, lavender and lovely in a wild way . . . they cannot grow together, the clover and the roses, and you must decide . . . the poor weeds bleed upon the grass. Your roses stand proud within the soil, but all their sun-caught beauty is undone.

HUSBAND
So you were forced to decide, and your decision destroyed us both . . .

EVERYWOMAN
Every vision frays into a choice between snares.

HUSBAND
(Hurt) Well, maybe you had better run after him then . . .

(The DAUGHTER enters. She is upset.)

DAUGHTER
(Startled to see her mother) Mother!! What are you doing up!

(She sees the HUSBAND.)

Father!! I might have known!!

EVERYWOMAN
Where have you been all evening? I was so worried!

DAUGHTER
Walking . . . just walking . . . trying to straighten things out in my mind . . . trying to face . . . the streets are so empty this time of night . . . Mother, why didn't you tell me sooner?

HUSBAND
So I was the last of the last!

DAUGHTER
Will you just keep out of this, father! Don't you have <u>any</u> feelings? She's dying, can't you see that?

(She is horrified by her own admission.)
Dying!

HUSBAND
Yes, I know. I have finally been let in on the secret!

EVERYWOMAN
I've handled this badly, but then I haven't exactly had practice.

(She goes to HUSBAND, pleading.)

Will you forgive me, and . . . stay?

HUSBAND

(Pause; he is hurt) Yes.

EVERYWOMAN

(Kissing him) Thank you.

HUSBAND

(Drawing back) I have received the mark. Tell me, am I the victim or the initiate?

DAUGHTER

Now just what is that remark supposed to mean?

HUSBAND

Nothing. This doesn't concern you.

DAUGHTER

What do you mean, this doesn't concern me? She's my mother, isn't she? Since when have you started caring about her! You've done nothing but live off her money and reputation all these years!

HUSBAND

Now, look . . .

EVERYWOMAN

(To DAUGHTER) Please, you're upset; you don't know what you are saying!

DAUGHTER

Oh, yes I do! (To HUSBAND) What's your angle this time--do you hope to become the hero of her next book? Is that it?

HUSBAND

(With sarcasm) You are a truly lovely child. Your outlook on life is wonderful to behold! I can't tell you how proud you have made me to be your father!

DAUGHTER

Fatherhood is more than a biological fact!

EVERYWOMAN

Please, please, both of you! Whatever mistakes we have made in the past, please don't tear into each other now. I need you both; we need each other.

DAUGHTER

I'm sorry, mother . . . it's so hard . . . I have never considered it possible that you wouldn't be around forever. I've always counted on your presence . . . and <u>you die</u>.

HUSBAND

(Trying to be gentle) We've got to make the best of the time we have. . . . I haven't been much of a father to you, I know that . . . I never quite knew what to do with a daughter . . . we'll start again, somehow.

DAUGHTER

That's the phoniest thing I've ever heard! Start again! What do you know about care or concern? You're weak, father, and mediocre, and you've never been able to stand that! Now, out of all the people she could have asked, out of all the people who would have been glad to support her, she picks you to ask for help! You--the first one to run for a bottle and a hiding place!

HUSBAND

That's enough!

EVERYWOMAN

(To DAUGHTER) I'm afraid you don't understand at all!

DAUGHTER

I understand, mother. I understand what you are and what he is! You are strength, and beauty, you have a name, an image . . .

HUSBAND

I see . . .

DAUGHTER

(To HUSBAND) Oh, no, you don't see anything. You've always been a shadow, a nothing following behind her when the sun shines!! Mother has a name to be proud of and I wan't let you drag it through the rum cabinet, father!!

EVERYWOMAN

So that's what I have given you! What a legacy I leave! (Slowly, to DAUGHTER) You think you admire me . . . well, I want you to take a good hard look at me now!

HUSBAND

(To EVERYWOMAN) Don't do this . . . you don't have to. You have enough pain, don't . . .

EVERYWOMAN

(Continuing, to DAUGHTER) Go ahead, look!! Every parent wants to create the illusion in the child that she is perfect; it gives us our one chance of self-esteem. If you're going to grow up, you must see me as I really am. Look at me! I'm an ordinary woman, with talent only a little above average, who happened to know what I thought were the right people at the right time, and so I made it big. I have no close friends . . . no, don't protest . . . all those people you admire so much, the Dean, all of them, they've left. And worst of all, I don't think I have ever unselfishing loved anybody . . . now, when I look back on it all, I find there was very little joy or sorrow, just indifference . . . I have never even begun to know who I am, and now it is too late.

(Pause. DAUGHTER is shocked.)

DAUGHTER
That's not true!! You have no right to speak of yourself that way!

HUSBAND
Your mother is only trying to explain to you that she's human.

DAUGHTER
Human!! Like you! You've put her up to this. You've finally destroyed her self-confidence! You've waited all these years and now you finally have the chance!

HUSBAND
I've taken all I'm going to from you!

DAUGHTER
Oh no, you haven't! You have an angle like everyone else, and you'll go on taking and taking until she's dead, and then you'll still rob every last moment . . .

HUSBAND
It may be late, but I'm going to shake some sense into that head of yours.

(He grabs her by the arm.)

DAUGHTER
Take your hands off me!!

HUSBAND
Not a chance!

DAUGHTER
You're hurting me!

HUSBAND
Good!!

DAUGHTER
(Continuing to struggle) You have to right to treat me like this!

HUSBAND
I have every right! I'm your father!! A little ragged around the edges, but your father nevertheless, and I count for something!

DAUGHTER
You count for <u>nothing</u>!

HUSBAND
I'll bring your heart right up into your teeth!

(He becomes violent. The DAUGHTER is really afraid.)

EVERYWOMAN

Stop it!! Stop it!!

(HUSBAND lets go; the DAUGHTER is shaken.)

DAUGHTER

My arm . . . I think it's broken . . .

HUSBAND

I don't know what got into me. I've never wanted to hit someone so badly in all my life!

EVERYWOMAN

She's all right.

HUSBAND

(Going to the DAUGHTER) I'm sorry . . . you made me so angry . . . it's always been wrong, you and me. I don't know why . . . a lot is my fault . . . some is yours if you will admit it . . .

(DAUGHTER says nothing.)

I'm sorry . . .

(DAUGHTER still says nothing.)

I know I haven't been much of a father to you . . . we must try again . .

(DAUGHTER remains silent.)

EVERYWOMAN

(To DAUGHTER) Please . . . he's laying himself bare before you! Don't turn away from him . . . please . . .

HUSBAND

Damn it, I said I was sorry!

(DAUGHTER looks up at him and pronounces each word slowly and finally.)

DAUGHTER

I hate you!!

(HUSBAND turns away as though slapped.)

EVERYWOMAN

She didn't mean that.

HUSBAND

The hell she didn't!

(He turns to leave.)

EVERYWOMAN

Where are you going?

HUSBAND

(Hopelessly) Away.

EVERYWOMAN

No! Not like this!

HUSBAND
Let's face it; we're all bad for each other.

EVERYWOMAN
You're upset.

HUSBAND
I think we're both beyond that.

EVERYWOMAN
Stay with me!

HUSBAND
You're afraid. It means nothing when you come to me afraid. If you had come to me when I would never have asked, or could never have known, when there was absolutely nothing I could give you, then it would have meant something. Now you offer me your tattered hopes in trade for a crust of life.

EVERYWOMAN
Please!

HUSBAND
I wish I could stay . . . I wish a lot of things . . . I wish I had never been born.

EVERYWOMAN
Don't talk that way!!

HUSBAND
If it makes any difference, I would gladly change places with you. I would be more than happy to give you my battered life.

EVERYWOMAN
We could make it work!

HUSBAND
(Barely audible) Our day has gone out.

EVERYWOMAN
I only ask for your love.

HUSBAND
(Lying) That is more than I can give.

(He moves closer to the door.)

EVERYWOMAN
Where will you stay?

HUSBAND
I don't know.

EVERYWOMAN

You can't leave!!

HUSBAND

I have no choice.

EVERYWOMAN

You can't!!

HUSBAND

I can . . . that's the real tragedy, I can.

(There is a long pause. EVERYWOMAN is visibly shaken, as is the DAUGHTER.)

DAUGHTER

He's gone . . . he's really gone!!

DAUGHTER

Come sit down, mother, please . . .

EVERYWOMAN

(Almost a whisper) He's really gone . . .

DAUGHTER

Mother!

EVERYWOMAN

. . . but then he was already gone . . . I only lied to myself because I wanted to believe that something of what we had lingered . . .

DAUGHTER

Don't do this to yourself, mother, not for him . . .

EVERYWOMAN

It's terrible how everything passes . . . children's footsteps down a darkening hall . . .

DAUGHTER

Stop it, mother!! You're well rid of him! He's a <u>nothing</u>!

EVERYWOMAN

Don't say that again, do you hear me? I won't let you belittle him. You drove him away!! We were fine and you came in here and drove him away!

DAUGHTER

Mother, don't turn on me! You've got to face the truth about him. We don't need him. We never have! Face the truth . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Truth! I'll tell you about truth! He's a jester who pours your water and then spills his leering riddles into your lap. He turns your words upside down, makes somersaults of your plans, changes your scars into laughter, then asks, "What was it that you wanted after all?"

DAUGHTER

Mother!

EVERYWOMAN

He brings you a paper crown that shreds with the seconds on his hands until you fray, limp and cluttered, into a shadow strewn with bells. Cap in hands, you dance, as jingle-jangle questions cross your feet, and you ask yourself over and over again, "What was it that you wanted after all?"

(Pause. DAUGHTER is stunned.)

DAUGHTER

I can't believe it! I can't believe that you would ever question your life, mother, ever! What did you want, for heavens sake?

EVERYWOMAN

I don't know . . . I don't know now, and I never will . . . perhaps no one ever does . . . Perhaps it doesn't really matter anyway . . .

DAUGHTER

Don't say such things, mother. You make me want to despair. Without you I have nothing!

EVERYWOMAN

That's not true! You have your father. He can care for you if you will only let him.

DAUGHTER

I won't hear another word about that man!

EVERYWOMAN

You're too selfish to even try to understand him! First you drive him away . . .

DAUGHTER

Don't blame me for his leaving! That isn't fair! Don't let him come between us now. He's not worth it.

EVERYWOMAN

He is worth it, but you can't see that. You haven't suffered enough.

DAUGHTER

Oh, I've suffered plenty! Years and years of living in this house, the emptiness . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Come now, you had a perfect childhood, an untrammeled adolescence from which you have not yet emerged.

DAUGHTER

Come on, mother. You're the one who claims to understand truth--well, look at it! I have always been alone, always. You know, I don't ever remember being truly happy . . .

EVERYWOMAN
That's not true! I don't recall a sorrowful moment . . .

DAUGHTER
You never saw what you didn't want to see! The loneliness--you never saw the loneliness, did you? . . . I was always watching others through the window. I had a vision one autumn in the play-yard at school. The leaves crackled beneath my feet; the only sound was my breath coming quickly. I suddenly realized that if at that moment I were to die, there beneath the swings tossed in the cold wind--no one would ever know. First the crunching leaves would sift and cover me. Then the snow would layer my body, while the world went on as before. Nothing would change and I would sleep, amid the crumbling, shifting silence.

EVERYWOMAN
(Pause) I never dreamed . . . I never wanted you to be unhappy . . .

DAUGHTER
(On the verge of tears) Who ever gets what he wants?

(She walks away from EVERYWOMAN and turns toward the window.)

Look, it's almost dawn. Perhaps we should go to bed.

EVERYWOMAN
(Frightened) Dawn! I had no idea it was so late . . . no more time, and I find that I have failed you also, that I have given you nothing.

DAUGHTER
(Tenderly) No. I don't feel that way. You've been a good mother; you couldn't help the way things were. What more could you have done? What else could you have offered me?

EVERYWOMAN
I don't know . . . perhaps softness, the ability to make everything you see dwell within you, and the ability to place all that is inside you in your hands. I would have given you the courage to be gentle.

DAUGHTER
Do you think I would be any better off?

EVERYWOMAN
Probably not . . . who is ever better off.

(At this moment the lights dim and DEATH enters. This time her warmth is gone and she speaks with a cold urgency.)

DEATH
(Whispering) Time is passing; time is passing . . .

DAUGHTER

What was that!

EVERYWOMAN

The air brooding with chill!

DEATH

(Almost hissing) Time for ending, now!

EVERYWOMAN

It's over . . . it's all over . . . the night is shattered on the grass. The broken stars spread across the breeze, while fragments of dark imaginings linger on the air, speaking of faded silver sprinkled on the lawn, of loss beyond despair. . . .

DAUGHTER

Mother, I'm afraid.

EVERYWOMAN

(With terrible urgency) There is one thing you must promise me, no matter what happens!

DAUGHTER

What, mother!

EVERYWOMAN

That when it is all over, you will . . . go to your father.

DAUGHTER

What!!

EVERYWOMAN

Please! You will need each other!

DAUGHTER

Oh, for heavens sake, mother . . .

EVERYWOMAN

I mean it! That's the only thing I ask of you.

DAUGHTER

I'll try.

EVERYWOMAN

PROMISE ME!!

DAUGHTER

All right, I promise.

(DEATH moves closer to them. Both become more and more frightened.)

DEATH

Time is passing . . .

DAUGHTER

Mother, what is that!

DEATH

Come, now!!

DAUGHTER
(To EVERYWOMAN, who is frozen with terror.)

Mother?

EVERYWOMAN

Listen to the silence!

DEATH

(Whispering) The dawn comes; it comes . . .

EVERYWOMAN

Like a great, muffled heartbeat.

DAUGHTER

Mother, let's leave, now!

EVERYWOMAN

Too late . . . too late.

DAUGHTER

No!!

EVERYWOMAN

Can't you feel it?

(DEATH raises her arms.)

A great winged hand is closing over us!

DAUGHTER

Mother!!

(EVERYWOMAN turns to the DAUGHTER and realizes her fear. She tries in vain to comfort the DAUGHTER.)

EVERYWOMAN

Hush, hush now, child. I've been letting my fears conquer me . . . there is nothing to fear. You were right earlier, it is late. Go to bed. There is nothing for you here. You are young, and the young are blessed without knowing it.

DAUGHTER

No! I won't leave you alone!

EVERYWOMAN

I'm all right.

DAUGHTER

I'm frightened!

EVERYWOMAN

There is nothing to fear. Come.

(She puts her arm around DAUGHTER and leads her slowly up the stairs.)

I used to love this time. Once, when you were very small, I played with you in the early hours. I held you before the windowed shadows and felt your sleep fall heavy in my arms.

DEATH

(With great urgency) The dawn . . . the dawn . . .

(EVERYWOMAN leaves the DAUGHTER and descends the stairs.)

DAUGHTER

Don't leave, mamma!!

DEATH

(To EVERYWOMAN) We've stayed too long! Come!

EVERYWOMAN

But my daughter, she's so frightened! Will she be all right?

DEATH

The game is ended. The rules are folded inside the galaxies, the reasons written in space.

EVERYWOMAN

Don't you answer anything?

DEATH

I am myself the answer. Now come!

EVERYWOMAN

At least tell me what lies out there.

DEATH

(Slowly) The stark aloneness of time.

(The DAUGHTER watches in horror. EVERYWOMAN and DEATH move slowly away.)

EVERYWOMAN

(Pausing) If I could only do it all over again!

DEATH

Everyone says that, but if you did, what would you change?

EVERYWOMAN

(Slowly) Nothing, I suppose . . . only, I would reverse the order of things. I would begin with the end. I would start with forgiveness.

(EVERYWOMAN moves slowly off into the darkness. Only DEATH and the DAUGHTER remain.)

DAUGHTER

Mother!!

(DEATH turns and stares at DAUGHTER a moment, then disappears. DAUGHTER remains alone at the top of the stairs.)

DAUGHTER

MOTHER!! . . . . . Mother!

(Pause, then very softly, with fear and wonder.)

Mother?

(End of scene.)

EBB TIDE

Believing that the tragedy of the American Middle Class lies in the lack of vision in our everyday lives, I set out to mirror the fear that underlies the mundane in all of us. The result was my one act play, EBB TIDE. Here the issue is nothing more than the disappearance from the local restaurants of authentic scallops, and a forgotten anniversary as well. This play is essentially one of character, and I departed entirely from the poetic diction of Everywoman, using instead a realistic and often earthy prose. The play was presented as a part of a bill of One Acts at the university in which the entire bill centered around a religious theme. In the interest of time, the section with Laura was cut, but I have left it in the script because I feel it adds to the dramatic action if the play is able to be presented in its entirety. The religious aspect of the story lies in the absence of any semblance of faith in the lives of these people, and in their resulting failure to find adequate substitutes to help them face the prospect of growing old.

EBB TIDE

A Drama in One Act

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges near
And naked shingles of the world.

— from "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold

THE K-STATE PLAYERS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH
PRESENTED THE PREMIER PRODUCTION

of

EBB TIDE

October 4-6, 1973

Directed by Alice Fischer

CAST

Julia Armstrong . . . . . Cheryl Meier

Steven Armstrong . . . . . Casey Johnson

Carolyn . . . . . Jan Allen

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Julia Armstrong--An attractive socialite in her early forties. All her life she has been the embodiment of the American Dream. She is extremely wealthy; she is married to a handsome and successful man, she has a pretty daughter.

Steven Armstrong--The male component of the American Dream. He is first vice-president of a major bank in a major American city. He is well-educated and works hard. There are many things which he has desired to own and at this stage of his life, finally possesses. He has never stopped to consider whether or not he is happy. Such considerations, like anniversaries, are not pragmatic.

Laura Armstrong--A bright girl of 13 who possesses all the important attributes of her mother--looks, money, brains--without the mitigating attribute of self-knowledge. She is precocious but insensitive, protected from life by a thin veneer of plastic.

Carolyn--A wealthy, often caustic friend of the family. Carolyn has a cynical sense of humor which often cracks to reveal the sadness beneath.

The scallops--a small sea animal which has all but disappeared.

Setting--a spacious home in a wealthy suburb of a large city.

(The setting is a large, spacious home in a wealthy suburb of a large city. JULIA, the wife, is relaxing on a large sofa in the living room. She is smoking a cigarette slowly, blowing smoke into the room. She is dressed in shorts and top, casual but expensive. She is a very attractive woman in her early forties.

STEVE, the husband, is also attractive. He is a man of quiet power. He is in his mid-forties and large-built; there is evidence that he was once an athlete.

JULIA is alone in the living room. She stands up and saunters around, touching various pieces of furniture with pride as she does so. She takes in the whole room for a moment, then collapses upon the sofa. She does not hear the door open or STEVE enter. He is dressed in an expensive business suit, and carries the proverbial leather briefcase.)

STEVE
(Slamming the door, throwing the briefcase on a table by the entrance.)
Whew! Is it ever hot out there!

JULIA
(Jumping at the sound of his voice, quickly snuffing out her cigarette.)
I didn't hear you come in!

STEVE
(Going to her and kissing her on the back of the neck.)
Were you asleep?

JULIA
No, just turning the room over and over in my mind.

STEVE
(Sinking on the couch beside her, with irony.)
So you like the house, eh?

JULIA
(Laughing, excited) This old shack! It's just temporary lodging, you understand! (They both pause to look around them) I still can't believe it!

STEVE
Well, if you're not too busy not believing it, would you mind fixing me a drink?

JULIA
There's already a pitcher ready.
(She goes to the bar, takes out a pitcher of martinis, pours him one, hands it to him.)

STEVE
(Taking it from her, his hand shakes and he spills part of the drink.)
Sorry.

JULIA
You've been doing that a lot lately.

STEVE
Occupational hazzard.

JULIA
Why now? I've never seen you so nervous as you have been in the last week.

STEVE
Nonsense. Just shows more now that I'm getting older.

JULIA
At this point in our lives there is no reason to be upset about anything. Think of all the years we dreamed of a house like this.

STEVE
You don't become first vice-president of Marlborough National Bank by staying relaxed. (He takes a drink, looks around him again) Every second I spend in that building presses on a different nerve! The trembling starts when I enter the revolving door on the first floor; my body stiffens on the elevator ride, number by number, until my mouth is stretched taut across every perfunctory hello. I have to move quickly, thinking a thousand miles ahead of where I am, and turn off everything but the papers and the decisions before me. (He takes another sip of his drink, loosens his tie, kicks off his shoes, puts his arm around JULIA) It's good to come home to a room like this, where the tension drops off with your shoes.

JULIA
Then you're not sorry.

STEVE
About what?

JULIA
The house. You're not sorry we bought the house?

STEVE
Sorry!!

JULIA
Well, the other house was lovely . . . and plenty big enough when you look at it realistically . . . I mean, I was the one who wanted . . .

STEVE
(Kissing her) You love "all this" and you might as well admit it! And so do I!

JULIA
You're sure.

STEVE
Look, Julie, this is the kind of house every man builds toward. Now when we have friends in from out of town, we can house them in style. I have always dreamed of a place like this, and now HERE IT IS! It's a monument, Julie, a monument to everything I've worked for.

JULIA
You're sure it's not this house that's giving you the nerves.

STEVE
I told you, there have always been nerves! Now I simply have to keep on top to keep this house, the same way I kept on top to get it!

JULIA
I wish you'd tell me what's going on down there!

STEVE
You know I never talk about my work with you. That's how I keep my sanity. The part of me that grinds away out there doesn't exist in here--I'm two people, Julie, I have to be! (Julia sighs, they both finish their drinks) Where is Laura?

JULIA
With Jim, where else!

STEVE
She spends a lot of time with that boy.

JULIA
I know. According to her, they're going steady.

STEVE
At thirteen!

JULIA
I know! I guess times have changed!

STEVE
I don't care how much times have changed, thirteen is too young!

JULIA
I agree, but I just can't get through to her.

STEVE
Well, it's about time that you did!

JULIA
I had a long talk with her last night. She told me not to worry, that she was a sensible girl.

STEVE
What the hell is that supposed to mean?

JULIA
I don't know, but at this point I feel like following her advice and letting things go.

STEVE
Do you really mean that?

JULIA
No, but what else can I do? I mean, we've given her discipline; she has never wanted for anything; I guess we can only hope for the best.

STEVE
The problem is she has always had too much of everything. She doesn't know what it means to struggle. How can she comprehend poverty, or bitterness? She has no pride of achievement, no . . .

JULIA
(Interrupting) You don't want to talk about your job; I don't want to talk about mine! Laura is out, and we are alone in our house.

STEVE
(Taking her in his arms) I must be getting old--I actually hadn't noticed.

JULIA
Can you believe that all this is really ours!

STEVE
We've come a long way from that basement apartment.

JULIA
I'll say! What a place that was. I fought World War II with the roaches and the rats and lost on both fronts!

STEVE
If there are any roaches around here, they eat nothing but caviar and have a whole string of servants!

JULIA
(Pulling away from him for a moment) Steve, there's something I want to ask you.

STEVE
No!

JULIA
You haven't even heard what it is!

STEVE
No, but I have a strange feeling that it involves a lot of money!

JULIA
Actually, it involves very little.

STEVE
The apocalypse is upon us! I'm all ears!

JULIA
Well, . . . what would you say to my taking a few courses at the university?

STEVE
(Surprised) Courses at the university?

JULIA
Yeah.

STEVE
Well, sure, but . . . why in heavens name do you want to do that?

JULIA
I never had the chance to finish my degree after we got married, and the maid takes care of the house, and Laura is in school all day, and . . . well, I get uneasy around here by myself all day.

STEVE
What in the world do you have to feel uneasy about?

JULIA
I don't know. I guess it's silly . . . but I feel so . . . unproductive.

STEVE
Unproductive!

JULIA
Yeah. There was a speaker at the club yesterday, one of those self-made women, you know, up-from-the-ghetto and all, and she said that women like me could do anything we wanted if we just got ourselves mobilized. She said we had the brains and money to really change the world. She said we could get a Ph.D., write, paint, go into politics, run a corporation, anything!

STEVE
She's right, but why should you want to?

JULIA
I don't know . . . it's just that, she's done so much with her life, and me, well . . .

STEVE
(Beginning to kiss her on the neck) I think you're just fine.

JULIA
Steven, be serious . . . do you care? I mean, the university isn't far from here; I could take a few courses at a time . . .

STEVE
(Beginning to make love to her) I don't care, Julie, go ahead if it'll make you happy.

JULIA
I thought you'd be averse to the whole idea!

STEVE
You sound like you want me to be averse to the whole idea!

JULIA
(Backing down) No. It's just that I'm so much older . . .Do you think I could compete with all those young kids?

STEVE
(Kissing her again) Julie, you're the most competitive woman I know. You got me, didn't you?

JULIA
Steven, I'm serious!

STEVE
So am I! If you want to go back to school, fine! You can certainly handle it. Now let's get on to more important things (Kissing her) Laura should be gone at least another hour.

JULIA
I don't know if that's what I want.

STEVE
Is something wrong with your glands?

JULIA
I mean going to school! I was just thinking about it, that's all.

STEVE
Hey, as you said earlier, we are <u>alone</u> in the house.

JULIA
I thought you were tired!

STEVE
Only of the office! (He pulls her down onto the couch)

JULIA
(Her arms around his neck) Steven, do you know what day tomorrow is?

STEVE

(Frustrated) Saturday.

JULIA

What else?

STEVE

It's the day I finally get Laura to clean out the pool!

JULIA

What else?

STEVE

(Starting to get exasperated) The first anniversary of the fish failing to come in at Peru! I don't know!

JULIA

You really don't know!

STEVE

Julie . . .

JULIA

Tomorrow happens to be our anniversary, Steven!

STEVE

Oh, that.

JULIA

Yes, that!

STEVE

I suppose you think I forgot again, don't you?

JULIA

Your track record isn't exactly perfect.

STEVE

Well, this time you're wrong. I did remember! I even bought you a present. It's in my coat pocket.

JULIA

Really? Let me see! (She goes toward his coat, he pulls her back, they struggle) You're lying! You won't let me see. You're lying!

STEVE

I'm not lying, but you can't see it until tomorrow. It's supposed to be a surprise.

JULIA

Okay, then I won't tell you what I got for you either!

STEVE

So you have plans, eh!

JULIA

Yes.

STEVE

Well, what is it going to be?

JULIA

You'll just have to wait until tomorrow.

STEVE

Come on, Julie; you're going to tell me. You always do.

JULIA

Not this time; I can be coy, too.

STEVE

All right. I'll make a deal with you then. I'll show you what I'm giving you if you'll tell me what you're giving me.

JULIA

Promise? You have been known to cheat!

STEVE

(Raising his left hand) I swear!

JULIA

You're raising the wrong hand! I'm going to get the Bible!

STEVE

Won't work! I'm an agnostic, remember? You'll just have to take my word for it.

JULIA

All right; who goes first?

STEVE

Ladies, naturally.

JULIA

That leaves me out!

STEVE

(Starting to make love to her again) Then let's forget it. Laura will be back soon.

JULIA

All right; I'll tell you.

STEVE

(Not really wanting to get involved) Animal, mineral, or vegetable?

JULIA

Animal. What do you like to eat above anything else?

STEVE

Lobster.

JULIA

No. Come on. What have we had to eat at every major event in our lives? What is it we had to eat the first night of our marriage?

STEVE

Scallops! (Smiling) You've gone out and bought scallops and champagne!

JULIA

You guessed it. Just like old times. I haven't ordered the scallops yet, but I have plenty of time before tomorrow night to do that! It will be just like old times!

STEVE

So many old times. Remember that restaurant in Maine? We were so young. What a thing to have a fetish for, scallops! We ate and ate . . .

JULIA

Scallops have become a ritual, that's all, our own private sacrament, and now we have so much to celebrate--a new year, a new house.

STEVE

Funny. Just a little sea animal, and I wouldn't feel safe without them. Sometimes I think if we didn't have scallops, our luck would run out!

JULIA

We've come too far to lose our luck.

STEVE

(Pulling her towards him) It's a great gift. Now how about giving me something <u>this moment</u>--before Laura decides to come in.

JULIA

(Pushing him away) Hold it a minute! It's your turn. I get to see what you have for me.

STEVE

Sorry, you'll still have to wait for tomorrow!

JULIA

Oh, no you don't! We have a deal, remember?

STEVE

I warned you I was an agnostic!

JULIA

Steven, you promised!

STEVE

A good businessman promises a lot of things.

JULIA
So the whole thing was just a big lie in the first place. You did forget, after all.

STEVE
No, I remembered. And I do have a present. But I intend to keep it a surprise until the night of our anniversary, and that's that!

JULIA
That won't do, Steven. You have nothing at all for me, and you intend to cover the whole thing up with laughter and deception so I won't find out the truth.

STEVE
And what is the truth?

JULIA
That you forgot the date again; that the event of our marriage is not important enough to even put on your calendar!

STEVE
That's not true! You are the most important thing in the world to me!

JULIA
No. You have nothing at all for me. You were afraid I'd be hurt, so you lied and said you bought me something; now you'll sneak out sometime before tomorrow night and buy something and pretend you had it all the while. You don't play fair, Steven Armstrong!

STEVE
You're blowing this whole thing up out of proportion! I want it to be a surprise. (She remains silent) You know what you're trouble is? (No answer) You're a little girl who waits for months for Christmas, and then wants to open her presents ahead of time. Think what would happen if you did that! Christmas day would be dusty tinsel in the cold light. There would be no need to wake early, to laugh, to wonder. You would sit there beneath the tree with your splendid presents and no joy, all the anticipation would lie soiled around your feet like old wrapping.

JULIA
(Relenting) You don't play fair, Steven Armstrong.

STEVE
(Pushing her back down onto the couch) Let's not spoil the holiday . . .

JULIA
Steven! . . .

STEVE
Hush. We now have less than an hour until Laura gets home.

(They embrace, and the lights go out.)

Scene ii

(The same room, Saturday afternoon. JULIA is on the phone. The daughter, LAURA, is reclining in a chair, looking bored. She is a pretty girl of 13 who looks older than her age. She wears a fasionable halter and short-shorts. JULIA is chain smoking.)

JULIA

(On the phone, blowing out smoke) What do you mean you can't get them any more? . . . Look, I've had all I'm going to take of this nonsense! . . . I'm willing to pay you well for . . . I told you, money is no object . . . . . This is my anniversary and I simply must . . . . I don't believe that for a minute . . . listen, they can't all just disappear that way!! . . . . Listen . . . . Okay, okay . . . I'll take my business elsewhere . . . never mind! Good bye . . . I said GOOD BYE! (She slams down the phone, very upset)

LAURA

(Examining her fingernails) I thought you had given up smoking, mother.

JULIA

(Thumbing frantically through the yellow pages) Damn! I've called everyone. There must be some place . . .

LAURA

I said, I thought you had given up smoking.

JULIA

I had.

LAURA

(Petulant) Well, if it's all right for you to smoke, I don't see why I can't.

JULIA

Look, I'm in no mood to get into that now! If I want to smoke, it's nobody's business but my own. (She lights another) How can they be gone, wiped off the face of the earth?

LAURA

I'm not trying to mind your business, mother; I just don't see why you have to constantly mind mine. I am mature enough to make my own decisions about a lot of things, and I don't see why my smoking should upset you.

JULIA

Smoking is filthy, stupid, unfeminine, and hazardous to your health! I wish I had never started, and I intend to make sure that you don't.

LAURA

The best way to teach a child, mother, is by example.

JULIA
Don't push, Laura. I mean it, don't push!

LAURA
Hey, you really are upset! What's the matter with you, anyway?

JULIA
Nothing. I'm just tired, that's all.

(Throws the phone book aside, looks at it, upset. LAURA swings her foot over the arm of the chair, knocking it back and forth against the edge.)

Laura, you're going to ruin the upholstery!

(LAURA stops, looks long and hard at JULIA, JULIA becomes uneasy.)

Laur, don't you have something you should be doing?

LAURA
Not really. There's a dance down at the club tonight and that's it. Everything is so boring!

JULIA
Thirteen, and you already think life is a bore!

LAURA
At the rate things are going, by the time I'm eighteen, there won't be anything left to do that I won't have done.

JULIA
(Startled) What is that supposed to mean?

LAURA
I was only joking.

JULIA
Your father is right; you are beginning to be frightening!

LAURA
Thank you very much.

JULIA
When I was your age, I still played with dolls.

LAURA
Well, it was hard to get around in a horse-and-buggy!

JULIA
Very funny . . . things have changed though . . . Laura . . . is it possible for a whole race of animals to just die out, all of a sudden?

LAURA

Sure. We're always hearing about those kinds of things at school. You know, everybody's sort of on a big ecology kick. Mr. Lucas says there are lots of endangered species.

JULIA

(Lighting another cigarette) Who is Mr. Lucas?

LAURA

At the rate you're smoking those things you're going to run out. (JULIA starts to say something, LAURA heads her off) You met Mr. Lucas at parent-teachers a couple of weeks ago. He's my biology teacher.

JULIA

I don't remember him.

LAURA

I don't see how anyone could forget Mr. Lucas! Jim and some of the other guys call him Drac because he has two great big fangy teeth in front, and he actually slobbers when he talks! I mean, he's really creepy! Not only that, but he's terribly nervous and says "okay" after every sentence. One day during a boring lecture of his we tallied up his okays--he said 598 in one hour! Imagine, 598 okays!! We're taking weekly averages now. It's all Jim's idea.

JULIA

(Sarcastically) Lovely boy, that Jim. It's nice to see that you go with such a sensitive crowd.

LAURA

Mr. Lucas also trips over the waste-paper basket, and get this--when he trips over it, he turns around and says excuse me! Imagine, saying excuse me to a waste-paper basket!

JULIA

(With irony) Must be a million laughs.

LAURA

Oh, it is. He really believes in the junk he tells us, too. I mean, he really is into birds and all that stuff, and he thinks we care, too.

JULIA

Poor old guy. I remember him now . . . he was older than most of the other teachers.

LAURA

Yeah, that's the one.

JULIA

He seemed very gentle to me. There are a lot of things you could learn from him.

LAURA

I doubt it.

JULIA
Does Mr. Lucas really say that things have gotten to the state where whole species are dying out?

LAURA
Oh, sure. It all has to do with the balance of nature. You upset it a little and everything gets mixed up. (Noticing that JULIE is really upset) Cheer up, mom! Jim says that the only endangered species around here is Mr. Lucas, and that would improve the environment.

JULIA
(Sarcastically) That Jim is a real card!!

LAURA
Why do you always get that tone of voice when you talk about Jim?

JULIA
Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I can't stand him.

LAURA
You've never been fair to him. He's the most popular boy in the class.

JULIA
And he got that way by being cruel and insensitive to kind old men like Mr. Lucas. Jim is stupid and spoiled; other than that, I see nothing wrong with him.

LAURA
Well, I happen to like him a lot!

JULIA
I know. Both your father and I feel that you spend too much time with him.

LAURA
Oh boy, here it comes!

JULIA
Here what comes?

LAURA
The real reason for the concern--and the lecture.

JULIA
I'm not going to lecture!

LAURA
Yes you are.

JULIA
Look, I just feel that you are a little young to spend so much time alone with one boy. You should be with <u>lots</u> of young people, you should get to know . . .

LAURA
You can relax, mom. I know all about the plumbing.

JULIA
The what?

LAURA
The plumbing--you know--tubes and fertilization and all that. We get that in biology, too.

JULIA
Biology is beginning to sound like the universal subject!

LAURA
I just want you to know that I'm not going to do anything foolish; I mean, I'm pure!

JULIA
(Shocked) Laura! That's not what I meant!

LAURA
Yes, it is. If we were Catholics, I could pass for a nun!

JULIA
Where do you get all this talk? Girls your age shouldn't even think about such things.

LAURA
I'm not a child, mother!

JULIA
You <u>are</u> a child!

LAURA
Times have changed. I even know all about birth control.

JULIA
God wreaks his vengence on the wayward by sending them precocious children!

LAURA
It's all a matter of evolution.

JULIA
Well, things have gotten out of hand, and I intend to put a stop to all this talk!

LAURA
Mother . . .

JULIA
You are <u>not</u> going out with Jim tonight.

LAURA
Mother . . .

JULIA

Don't whine.

LAURA

I'm not whining. You're just being unreasonable.

JULIA

(Lighting another cigarette) It's my prerogative. I am your mother.

LAURA

A biological fact.

JULIA

Laura, I don't want to get into all this now! Why don't you go outside and take a swim. That's what we put in a pool for.

LAURA

I can't. I just washed my hair.

JULIA

Well, get out of mine, will you!

LAURA

Okay, okay! (Getting up, languidly) Gee whiz, are you jumpy today.

(JULIA lets ashes fall on carpet, jumps, trys to pick up ashes, burns her fingers. LAURA watches whole thing.)

You know, the correlation between cigarette smoking and lung cancer is truly staggering, mother.

JULIA

I'll stagger you!

(LAURA leaves quickly and bumps into CAROLINE on the way out. CAROLINE is letting herself in. She is an over-weight, well manicured socialite in her mid-forties. She has a protective air of cynicism about her.)

CAROLINE

Hi. (Looking at JULIA and LAURA) Thought I'd let myself in, as usual. What's going on here, the next world war?

LAURA

Nothing that serious. Mother's just riding her broom again.

JULIA

(Warning tone) Laura!!

(LAURA shrugs to CAROLINE and exits quickly.)

CAROLINE
What's with her, she discover another pimple?

JULIA
She doesn't get pimples. That's what we pay the dermatologist for.

CAROLINE
(Going to the bar) Oh, yeah, that racket. Mind if I have a drink?

JULIA
(Preoccupied) Help yourself.

CAROLINE
I tell you, the only worse racket is orthodontistry! They charge you upwards of $2000 to wire your kid for sound and tell you it's bound to make him gorgeous. The junk they put on him gives him a permanent inferiority complex, but after all that money you tell yourself, and him, that he looks better when the things finally come off. Then the doctor tells you it will cost you another $1000 for something called retainers to keep the teeth from going back to the way they were before, which really wasn't bad in the first place! Lovely world we live in, Julie!

JULIA
(Glumly) Yeah, lovely world!

CAROLINE
What's with you, anyway!

JULIA
Other than the fact that I feel like the whole world has fallen apart, nothing.

CAROLINE
Julie, I warned you way back that it was going to happen to you some day--you just can't go through life without having your fingernail polish crack at least once!

JULIA
Cut it out, Caroline, this is serious!

CAROLINE
Then tell me about it.

JULIA
I've called all over town, and nothing. It's the scallops, Caroline, they're gone.

CAROLINE
The what?

JULIA
The scallops--the entire breed is wiped out!

CAROLINE
(With mock dramatic movements, collapsing into a chair, feigning heart attack.)
How awful; surely the end of the world is at hand! How long do we have left?

JULIA
Cut the Sarah Bernhardt routine--this is serious!

CAROLINE
Of course; a real tragedy. The only thing I can think of that would be worse would be for them to run out of silicone.

JULIA
Caroline!

CAROLINE
It's true. Think how flat the world would be!

JULIA
(Lighting another cigarette) Your humor gets worse every day. Imagine--wiped out, just like that!

CAROLINE
I thought you had stopped smoking.

JULIA
(Exasperated) If I hear that one more time!!

CAROLINE
Okay . . . let me finish my drink and I promise to shut up.

JULIA
That'll be the day!

CAROLINE
Now, was that kind? Think how dull your life would be if I weren't around. Personally, I don't know what I would do without me.

JULIA
(Pause, ignoring CAROLINE'S last comment) Caroline, do you think I look old?

CAROLINE
I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that you are two years younger than I am. (JULIA doesn't react) Say, you really are upset about those oysters, aren't you!

JULIA
It's scallops, and yes, I am upset!

CAROLINE
Oh, come on, are you on some kind of end-of-the-world-ecology trip or something?

JULIA
No. It's just that tonight is our anniversary and I promised Steve we'd have them.

CAROLINE
So eat something else!

JULIA
You don't understand. Scallops have a special significance for us. We've eaten them on every important event in our lives.

CAROLINE
Then I certainly can't understand why there's a shortage!

JULIA
(Giving her a dirty look) Scallops have been a part of our life. And tonight we were going to christen the new house . . .

CAROLINE
(Looking around her) My dear, anything this size is not a house, it's an ediface!

JULIA
The whole evening is ruined!

CAROLINE
Nonsense. Eat caviar.

JULIA
It's the idea behind it, Caroline! It's what the scallops stand for--they've always been a symbol for us.

CAROLINE
Honey, the only thing symbolic to you and Steve is the color green, and I'm not referring to spring . . . or algae!

JULIA
That's what I like about you Caroline, you're so sensitive.

CAROLINE
Comes from years of self-sacrifice.

JULIA
Yeah. (She lights another cigarette) Is that what keeps you warm at night?

CAROLINE
(Upset by the last comment, gets up) Think I'll have another drink. (She mixes herself a drink)

JULIA
What do you suppose got them?

CAROLINE

Got what?

JULIA

The scallops! Pollution, or too many predators?

CAROLINE

More than likely neither.

JULIA

What do you mean?

CAROLINE

I think it was probably boredom that forced them into oblivion.

JULIA

Caroline!

CAROLINE

I'm serious. The pollution probably started the process, but all the predators got killed off first. Then the water was safe, really safe for the little guys. I mean, after all, you can live a long time in poisoned waters before it gets you. They died off slowly, one by one . . . (she sits, takes a swig of her drink). We all need predators, Julie, something to run from so we have something to run toward.

JULIA

And what do the predators run from?

CAROLINE

(Sadly) Themselves, I guess.

JULIA

(After a pause as she considers CAROLINE'S word, then suddenly.)

Oh, my god, Caroline, sometimes I'm so afraid!

CAROLINE

I know.

JULIA

I don't even know what of. I just feel uneasy, and alone.

CAROLINE

You should drink more than you do.

JULIA

It doesn't help. You can't drink away the dreams you dream when the lights go out.

CAROLINE

We all have nightmares, but staying awake can be worse.

JULIA
Have you ever had a recurring dream?

CAROLINE
Not that I can talk about.

JULIA
I do. It's horrible. It always starts in a forest; I'm alone, lost, looking for Steve and Laura. I can hear their voices but I can't see them; their shadows move past the trees, but I never find their faces. The faster I move toward them, the more quickly they disappear. I end up calling out to the darkness.

CAROLINE
Maybe it's just a subconscious urge to have an affair.

JULIA
It's not that kind of a dream, Caroline!

CAROLINE
Too bad; those are the only kind worth having.

JULIA
I'm serious!

CAROLINE
In that case, it's probably menopause.

JULIA
Thank you, friend!

CAROLINE
Okay, I'll be serious, just this once. I don't like to get into these things. I mean, I'm depressed enough about myself without looking at your dirty underwear.

JULIA
I don't see that depression has to be dirty, Caroline. Just because you're afraid to face your problems . . .

CAROLINE
(Interrupting) Look, you're worried about your life. Who isn't! I mean, neither of us is getting any younger, our kids are growing up--we're on the edge of some great change and we're insecure about our footing . . . or maybe we wish we were on the edge of some great change and are afraid nothing will change at all.

JULIA
So what do we do?

CAROLINE
I don't know; we just go on and cope somehow.

JULIA
I can't sit still and wait for something to happen! I'm afraid, afraid for everyone, especially Laura. She terrifies me!

CAROLINE
My children used to frighten me, too--until I informed them that I was leaving all my money to the Humane Society!

JULIA
Come on, Caroline! Nobody that I know worries about her family as much as you!

CAROLINE
(Turning her glass in her hand) Ah yes, but the question is, do my children worry about me? . . . I don't believe they even <u>think</u> about me.

JULIA
What bothers me the most about Laura is that she is so flippant.

CAROLINE
Consider yourself lucky on that score. A few years ago the in-thing was to be depressed!

JULIA
She tosses off a lot of words, but I never know what she's thinking. That scares me.

CAROLINE
Everything seems to scare you today!

JULIA
She doesn't seem to have any values, Caroline.

CAROLINE
That used to scare me about mine, too. Then I realized that they <u>did</u> have values and it was the <u>values</u> that scared me!

JULIA
There are times I wish Steve and I had been, you know, more consciously religious.

CAROLINE
Religious!

JULIA
Yeah. I wish I could have given Laura something to believe in.

CAROLINE
Oh, come now, do <u>you</u> believe in anything?

JULIA
(Thinks for a moment) I don't know. I used to.

CAROLINE

Me, too, when I was three! Don't tell me you're thinking of becoming a Jesus freak or something.

JULIA

I only wish I could!

CAROLINE

Oh, brother!

JULIA

I mean it! The idea of Christ has always fascinated me. I wish I had lived in his time.

CAROLINE

No, you don't. Think how awful it would have been to travel around the golf course on a mule!

JULIA

Don't be sarcastic. Things were simple then.

CAROLINE

Sure! You would have loved rubbing your wash-and-wear sackcloth against the river rocks!

JULIA

Just listen for once, will you! Can you imagine what it must have been like to see and hear a man like that!

CAROLINE

You're forgetting, my dear, that it was Christ who preferred daisies to diamonds. Somehow I can't see you and Steven giving up your Mark IV and feeding the poor.

JULIA

You don't know what we might have done!

CAROLINE

You're not the religious type now, Julie, and you wouldn't have been then. You never would have seen Christ if he had been living right next door to you, much less if you would have had to put out any effort to hear him!

JULIA

That's not true!

CAROLINE

Yes it is, and I'll tell you why.

JULIA

Let's forget it.

CAROLINE

No. It isn't healthy for you to go on this way. It's too late for people like us to wish for visions. You would never have seen Christ because you would have been too busy to bother to find him. Some morning you would say to Steve, "Let's go see the Messiah," and he would say, "We went to the theatre last week," and you would persist and say, "No, I mean the Christ," and he would say, "Forget it, you see one desert, you've seen them all!" Finally you would decide to go alone, but you would find out it was a long walk and you were entertaining that night, and what if some of your friends saw you, and besides it would be such a hot day, and et cetera, et cetera, for excuses. You'd end up deciding to read about it in the papers instead.

JULIA

You're speaking about yourself. Not me.

CAROLINE

Unfortunately, we're both very much alike. Neither of us has the moral energy to have convictions.

JULIA

Why?

CAROLINE

I don't know. Maybe because once we thought we knew what we wanted and were afraid of never finding it--now we aren't sure of what it is we hold in our hands.

JULIA

Are you saying it's too late?

CAROLINE

It always has been too late. You know, if you ever would have been the type to finally get up the nerve to find Christ, even then it would have been too late. You would walk for miles, through city after city, hoping to see him, but he would be nowhere in sight. Then you would finally ask someone and they would say, "Oh, I'm sorry. Didn't you hear? They crucified him yesterday."

JULIA

You make me despair.

CAROLINE

Despair is healthy. It gives one something to do. It helps one develop a sense of humor. My humor is all I have. You, on the other hand, have a very sexy husband.

JULIA

Isn't there anything else you hang onto, Caroline, anything that sustains you?

CAROLINE
(Thinking) Yeah. I remember the years when my children were small and we lived in a little town in Wisconsin. I especially remember the autumns; after school the children would fall into the house like leaves, and the trees would cast soft shadows in the slant-light. Wonderful years. I didn't know it then; I was too stupid . . . God, am I depressed. You and your damn scallops. This started out to be a fairly decent day!

JULIA
The scallops! I had almost forgotten. Maybe it's time for our luck to start running out, Caroline.

CAROLINE
People like us never run out of luck, Julie . . . just out of laughter.

(STEVEN'S voice is heard outside, arguing with LAURA.)

STEVE
I don't care what time it is, you are going to help me clean out this pool!

LAURA
I don't see why I should have to be responsible for a big job like that!

STEVE
You sit around the house like a prima-donna!! If you intend to live in it you had better start taking some responsibility for it!

LAURA
(A little softer) Right on, big daddy!

STEVE
What was that remark?!

LAURA
Nothing.

STEVE
(Entering the room, not noticing CAROLINE right away.)
It had better have been nothing! (Muttering to himself) . . . no sense of responsibility, thinks money grows on trees, won't even lift a finger for anybody. Trouble is that damn TV . . .

CAROLINE
(Interrupting) It's electronic mother's milk.

STEVE
What?

CAROLINE
Why else do you suppose it's called the boob tube!

STEVE

(With obvious sarcasm) I didn't realize you were here, Caroline. It was so quiet.

CAROLINE

(Getting up quickly) I can see it's time for my exit.

JULIA

There's no need to leave.

CAROLINE

Yes, there is. All I need to really get depressed is to get caught up in a father-child yelling session. Do me a favor, will you Julie? The next time you get depressed about the disappearance of some fish, take two aspirins and a swim and slam the door in my face if I happen to drop by, okay?

(Exit CAROLINE. *JULIE* lights another cigarette. STEVE watches her.)

STEVE

I thought you had stopped smoking!

JULIE

I had!

STEVE

Well, what brought this on? Caroline, I presume.

JULIE

If I want to smoke, I will smoke! I'm tired of being told what I can and can't do.

STEVE

I'll tell you one thing you <u>should</u> do--sit on Laura.

JULIA

I've been trying.

STEVE

Well, you had better try harder; she's getting impossible!

JULIA

In case you have forgotten, she's <u>our</u> daughter!

STEVE

You're the one who is around her all the time.

JULIA

So I suppose it's my fault that she's gotten out of control.

STEVE

Frankly, yes.

JULIA
Listen, Steven, it's not my fault you choose to spend most of your waking and sleeping hours down at that office! What's wrong with Laura is as much the result of what you don't do by default as what I do do by being here all day long!

STEVE
I spend all those "waking and sleeping hours" as you put it at my office so that we can afford to have you sit here in luxury all day long! If I came home every evening and spent four hours a night with my child, we'd still be living in a two-bedroom flat above a grocery store!

JULIA
Ah, here we go again! You're about to tell me how lucky I am to have so much, how unproductive I am in my own life, how inferior I am to you!

STEVE
Those are <u>your</u> words, not <u>mine</u>.

JULIA
But that's what you think, isn't it?!

STEVE
(Exasperated) All I'm asking is that you take a little more time with Laura, not that you change your whole life!

JULIA
How would you know how much time I spend with Laura?

STEVE
(Going to the bar, mixing himself a drink) Let's just drop the whole thing. You're in no condition to discuss the matter rationally.

JULIA
Don't take that tone with me! I'm not another executive--I'm your wife, remember?!

STEVE
What is the matter with you? When I woke up this morning you were fine! Is Caroline getting you upset again?

JULIA
It has nothing to do with Caroline. (Calming down, lighting another cigarette) Remember what we talked about last night, about me being like a little kid who rushes Christmas? Well, I feel like the holiday is over; nothing is left but the clutter.

STEVE
You take everything I say literally.

JULIA
That's because everything you say <u>is</u> literal!

STEVE
What in the hell has gotten into you!! I get enough hysterionics at the office; I don't need them at home.

JULIA
Of course not. I almost forgot. The great calm leader doesn't like to be disturbed by the messy process of living!

STEVE
Just tell me what I did to deserve all this. I walk in here for a moment, stumble over Caroline's mouth, which was occupying most of the room, and you jump all over me!!

JULIA
You're always so sure of yourself. Does anything really scare you?

STEVE
That's the most assinine question I've ever been asked!

JULIA
Just answer it.

STEVE
Of course I have fears!! Who doesn't?

JULIA
What are they, Steven?

STEVE
Come on . . .

JULIA
I want to know! What are they?

STEVE
I'm afraid of the young guys who are after my job, I worry about my daughter's survival in the world, about my wife who flys off the handle without the slightest provocation . . .

JULIA
Don't you fear anything deeper than that?

STEVE
Oh, come on, Julie.

JULIA
Like the end of the human race, or the end of your life . . .

STEVE
This is ridiculous!

JULIA
Death is never ridiculous.

STEVE
Julie, this is our anniversary . . .

JULIA
Have you ever stopped to think how mortal we are?

STEVE
Of course!

JULIA
I don't believe you. Not really. You think that dying is for other people, for unfortunate friends, or the very old, but not for you or me. You operate under the delusion that the things you care about will last forever.

STEVE
Everyone acts under that delusion. To do otherwise is to commit suicide.

JULIA
To do otherwise is to become aware! We are both going to die, Steven. Our parents are all already dead. We are at the head of the line.

STEVE
Julie, stop it!!

JULIA
Right at this moment you could be dying. You've had a nagging cough for almost a month.

STEVE
Julie, for God's sake!

JULIA
At your age and weight and with your job, you're ripe for a heart attack.

STEVE
(Visibly upset) Just stop it!

JULIA
Any moment everything we have built towards could end. As a matter of fact, it is ending slowly, every second. We are dying every second . . .

STEVE
(Slamming down his drink, breaking the glass, spilling the drink)
Stop it!!

(They both stare at the carpet, JULIA does not move)
I'm sorry. (Watches JULIA closely) Aren't you going to clean it up? (JULIA shakes her head, no) What in the world has brought all this on? Have you been reading something?

JULIA
No. If you must know, it's the scallops.

STEVE

The scallops?

JULIA

I've tried every place in town. No one has any.

STEVE

Is that all?

JULIA

What do you mean, is that all? We've never celebrated without them before.

STEVE

It's not exactly the end of the world. We'll have them some other time. It's probably just the season of the year.

JULIA

No. They're gone forever. There are no more of them anywhere.

STEVE

That's ridiculous. They can't all just disappear.

JULIA

That's what is so horrible! The whole breed has died out. The entire race is gone!

STEVE

That's impossible, I tell you. They're listed on every seafood menu in town.

JULIA

I know, and therein lies the biggest joke of all, if you can call it a joke. When you go into a restaurant and order scallops, what you really get is skate.

STEVE

Skate?

JULIA

They couldn't even pick a fish with a romantic sounding name. Skate!! It's a flat fish that tastes like scallops. They stamp out little circles of it like cookies out of dough. You never realize you're not getting the real thing.

STEVE

(Depressed) I'll admit, that is rather upsetting. I don't like hoaxes, but it doesn't exactly mean the earth is coming to an end!

JULIA

It's the beginning, Steven. A whole species is gone forever. The world should turn over in its sleep when a whole species dies out. It's erosion . . . you don't think much when the mud ripples in little rills, but ten years later the whole hill is gone!

STEVE

Not necessarily.

JULIA

Every big event in our lives has been celebrated with scallops. Even then we might have been eating skate. All the hard-earned dollars of our youth might have been spent on skate!

STEVE

Maybe there never were any scallops in the first place.

JULIA

Then all our evenings have been a fraud!

STEVE

How can you make a ridiculous statement like that?

JULIA

Don't you see? It's the quiet simplicity with which it happened that upsets me so much! We were busy with our lives, and they were dying. We were making love, and they were dying. We were building our world, raising our child, decorating our house, and they were dying! We didn't lift a finger; we didn't even think of them, yet the shadow closed upon them . . . what else have we lost, Steven? What else is disappearing at this moment that is beautiful, that is a part of us, that we won't know about until it is too late?

STEVE

I don't know; that's something we have no control over.

JULIA

(Lighting another cigarette) I wish we could pray.

STEVE

Prayer is not pragmatic.

JULIA

There may be miracles.

STEVE

If so, we've missed most of them. The fate of the world is out of our hands.

JULIA

I thought you said you weren't religious.

STEVE

I'm not; God lost the scallops, didn't he?

JULIA

Yes. I wonder if the scallops lost God.
(Pause; he is becoming more and more depressed.)

You fall into a deep hole with no bottom and nothing to hang on to, not even the thought that someone will remember, that someone will care. We're sliding into the pit; no one can save us. Don't you see, Steven--we are beyond redemption!

STEVE

(Visibly shaken) Your trouble is that you are rich enough to be neurotic. We both need to get out of this house.

JULIA

We just got into it.

STEVE

It's hard to live with having what you've always wanted.

JULIA

It's harder to live with the idea that what you've always wanted doesn't really matter and can't make you happy.

STEVE

There are a lot of people in the world who are starving or frustrated or more unhappy than we are in many ways.

JULIA

Then why do you smile so seldom?

STEVE

I smile very seldom because on the rare days I have to rest my wife rattles on about death!

JULIA

Think of all the days we waste! We spend so little time when we are truly glad to be alive.

STEVE

So we aren't that happy! So what! Nobody really is happy in this world, and I don't believe there is any other. Look on the bright side: we aren't overly miserable either. We at least have the luxury of being able to buy oblivion.

JULIA

You make it sound as if we were already dead.

STEVE

(Sadly) In some ways, I guess we are.

JULIA

We weren't always like this. Don't you remember when we were young and just starting out, how happy we were, how exciting our life was then?

STEVE

Julie, there's no way we can return to those days! You couldn't live in that small apartment any more. Those years are dead, over. If we had stayed there we would be desolate now, overwhelmed with failure. Everyone dreams of youth when they grow old.

JULIA

And we are old, aren't we, Steven!

(She goes to the bar, begins to mix herself a drink)

"Slowly the poison the whole bloodstream fills/the waste remains, the waste remains/and kills!"

STEVE

What the hell is that from?

JULIA

An old poem. Some sort of villanelle. Funny, it's always stuck with me.

STEVE

Let's get out of here! We'll go out to dinner . . .

JULIA

There was one verse in particular, something about poems . . . I wish I could remember . . .

STEVE

Julie, it's our anniversary.

JULIA

"It is the poems you have lost" . . . that's it, "It is the poems you have lost/the ills from missing dates/at which the heart expires."

STEVE

Julie . . .

JULIA

Poems you have . . . the ills . . . missing dates . . . missing dates . .

STEVE

Julie, please.

JULIA

(Looking at him long and hard) I'm afraid we can't have any scallops--but last night you claimed to have bought me a present. Don't you think it's time you showed it to me?

STEVE

Why don't we just have a drink . . .

JULIA

My present, Steven. You promised, remember . . . Please, please have something for me. Just this once--have something for me!

STEVE

Why don't you just go and get dressed . . .

JULIA

My present . . . please!

STEVE

(Reluctantly) The truth of the matter is that, well, you were right last night. I did forget again. It was a rough week. (She stares at him) Well, I just let it slip, all right!! I mean, I'm human, you know.

JULIA

(Quietly) I know.

STEVE

I meant to sneak out this morning and buy you something. I guess it's just destined to be a bad evening.

JULIA

This is the fifth year in a row you've forgotten. Sometimes I think you try to forget.

STEVE

Julie, I love you.

JULIA

(Draining her glass) . . . the ills from missing dates, at which the heart expires . . .

STEVE

Julie, I'm sorry.

(He goes to her, takes her in his arms, she doesn't resist, they embrace.)

JULIA

I'm afraid, Steven.

STEVE

If it's any consolation to you, so am I. (They look at each other for a long pause; he leaves the room) I'm going to get dressed. (She turns to the bar, mixes herself another drink, he watches a moment, exits)

JULIA

(To herself, looking at her glass, slowly) "Slowly the poison the whole bloodstream fills/the waste remains/. . . the waste remains . . . and kills.

(She continues to drink, the lights fade slowly on her.)

THE LAST GLOW OF FIRELIGHT

Myth was crucial to the lives and drama of the Greeks, and indeed Greek mythology has formed the basis for much of the great literature of the Western world. Because of the power of archetypes, I longed to experiment with the power of myth; but instead of a Grecian theme, I chose the more modern, all pervasive, all-American myth of Cinderella. This play is the product of that desire. I have used the story of Cinderella to mirror the position of the artist and dreamer in society at large. Cinderella is an eternal romantic, and she cannot survive in the pragmatic world of the prince. Thus, I changed the ending from the original tale in order to change the perspective of an audience which would know the story well. Influenced at this time by the study of the works of Adolphe Appia, I extended my use of original music in the drama. This time I centered the entire play around the song which Cinderella sings, "Lady St. Ariel." The musical theme weaves in and out of the play, providing a commentary upon the action and setting the mood. The language again became poetic and the approach to the drama was naturally symbolic.

THE LAST GLOW OF FIRELIGHT

A Play in One Act

THE K-STATE PLAYERS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH
PRESENTED THE PREMIER PRODUCTION

of

THE LAST GLOW OF FIRELIGHT

December 10-12, 1973

Directed by Kim Riley

CAST

Cinderella . . . . . Ellen Shanline

Mother . . . . . Mary Ann Link

Daughter 1 . . . . . Connie Doebele

Daughter 2 . . . . . Natalie Green

Daughter 3 . . . . . Laurie Johnson

Fairy Godfather . . . . . Steve Turner

Prince . . . . . Michael Haley

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Cinderella--a young, attractive girl who is in every aspect a romantic. She does not have to be pretty in the traditional sense, but she must be sensual. While she may be voluptuous, she is innocent of the fact, hence her tragedy.

Mother--an attractive, well-groomed woman in her late fifties or early sixties.

The Daughters--three sophisticated, fashionable, worldly young women.

The Wizard--a middle-aged male dressed entirely in black.

The Prince--a handsome young man of the "all-American-Joe-College-type."

The action takes place in modern times.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene i	The MOTHER'S home and CINDERELLA'S basement dwelling.
Scene ii	CINDERELLA'S basement dwelling.
Scene iii	The PRINCE'S castle.
Scene iv	The MOTHER'S home and CINDERELLA'S basement dwelling.

(The scene opens on a stage divided into three levels. The lowest level, stage right, is Cinderella's room. It is grey and dimly lit. Within her area is a large open hearth scattered with ashes. Next to the hearth is a huge spider web containing a large, black spider. Several steps higher, stage left, is the step-mother's and step-sisters' level. It is brightly lit, plastic, and colorful. It contains three lawn chairs, a brightly colored lawn table, an umbrella, and a pitcher of martinis on the table. Evenly spaced between the other two levels, much, much higher, the apex of the triangle, is the third area. This is the dwelling of the prince. It is white, without furniture of any kind, and brightly lit. All three levels are interconnected by steps.

The three DAUGHTERS lounge on the lawn furniture in their area. They are dressed in expensive, stylish outfits; their hair is tightly set and sprayed. CINDERELLA sits in a rocker in her area, darning and mending. She is shabbily dressed and there are smudges of ashes and dirt on her face. As she rocks, she hums the St. Ariel tune to herself. She can hear the DAUGHTERS only when the speak loudly or call to her.)

DAUGHTER 1

(Aggravated) I keep hearing music from somewhere! Listen!

(They all sit up and try to hear.)

There it is again!

DAUGHTER 2

It's only the wind banging the city noise against the door.

DAUGHTER 1

But the voice!! It whines across my sleep like city sirens in the doom of night. It frightens me!

DAUGHTER 3

There are always voices if you care to listen, but that will drive you mad. Have another drink . . . we are all young, and nothing rattling in the bottom of the glass can have effect . . . it's probably a child's song . . . nothing more.

DAUGHTER 1

Children are monstrous--you can't drink them away when they bother you, and their beastly understanding can't be bought.

(The humming starts again.)

There it is again!! Did you hear?

DAUGHTER 2

Relax. It's only Cinderella.

DAUGHTER 1

Cinderella!!

DAUGHTER 2

Yes. I've heard her many times. She always sings while she works.

DAUGHTER 3

She sings!! (Laughing) To whom? There's nobody down there.

DAUGHTER 2

Except the mice and the cockroaches . . .

DAUGHTER 1

(Shuddering) Or the . . . spiders.

DAUGHTER 3

(Taunting DAUGHTER 1) Yes, dear, the spiders--especially the large ones with hair-twined legs that spit their webs out like old tobacco. Perhaps they dance upon her face when she sleeps at night!

DAUGHTER 1

Stop it!! How awful!

DAUGHTER 3

Think of all the dark dreams you'll have now!

DAUGHTER 1

You know how I hate spiders.

DAUGHTER 2

Really--such an unromantic phobia!

DAUGHTER 1

It isn't the spider itself--it's the silk it turns, tight and unrelenting, around soft insects unaware!

(CINDERELLA begins to hum again, this time more loudly.)

There she goes again! I wish to hell she would stop.

(Enter MOTHER on DAUGHTER 1's last words. She looks the part of a wealthy socialite. Her hair is beginning to grey.)

MOTHER

Wish who would stop?

DAUGHTER 1

Cinderella! She's started that infernal singing again.

MOTHER

What singing?

DAUGHTER 1

Listen.

(The all listen as the humming becomes louder again.)

DAUGHTER 2

It's driving us all crazy!

MOTHER

Well, I'll soon settle that!

(MOTHER descends a step towards CINDERELLA'S level and calls to her.)

CINDERELLA!

CINDERELLA
(Getting up and moving toward the steps.)

Yes, ma'm?

MOTHER

Will you please hush! No one up here can hear herself think with all that racket!

CINDERELLA

I'm sorry. My head seems to burst sometimes with the old ballads father used to sing.

(Pause. MOTHER is sad and troubled.)

MOTHER

(Tenderly, to herself) I never knew he could sing . . . (Snapping out of the mood) Well, please keep you music to yourself. Let what is dead fly off to who knows where.

(She steps back up to her own area. CINDERELLA stares after her.)

DAUGHTER 1

Silence at last! You settle everything, mother.

MOTHER
(As if in a trance.)
When your father died, I did the best I could . . . then I met him . . .

DAUGHTER 1
Mother . . .

MOTHER
Cinderella's father. I walked through vaulted hours, past memories I still think into a dream sometimes. Cinderella is a breeze you feel against your hair on a spring day . . . I could never hold her.

DAUGHTER 2
Here we go again!

MOTHER
. . . My daughters grew and I did the best I could . . . what else can a mother hope but that her children go beyond her?

DAUGHTER 3
Mother!!

MOTHER
(MOTHER snaps out of her reverie; CINDERELLA moves up a step to hear what she says.)
The news! I almost forgot the news! The prince . . .

DAUGHTER 3
The prince?

DAUGHTER 2
The prince!

CINDERELLA
(Quietly, as in a caress)
The prince.

MOTHER
. . . has decided to wed.

DAUGHTER 3
(Jumping up, excited.)
To wed! To wed! He is tired of crushing armies and wants to hold a woman in his arms!

DAUGHTER 2
He wants to share his name; he will break it in half and offer its sugared music to another!

CINDERELLA
(Softly, sadly) The prince is horribly alone.

MOTHER
(Continuing, on her level. She does not hear CINDERELLA; they speak from different levels, different points of view.)
Not to just another, to one of you!!

DAUGHTER 1
One of us!!

MOTHER
Of course! Who else is as lovely, as well-dressed, as wealthy as you three? Young men are always knocking at the door and bringing flowers . .

DAUGHTER 2
And smelling of sweat. Why is it young men always smell of sweat!

DAUGHTER 3
Not the prince! He's too careful!

(CINDERELLA begins to hum sadly as they talk.)

DAUGHTER 1
I saw him passing yesterday. They say even the button on his collar is pure gold and he has a servant whose only job is to polish that solitary button. Think of the hundreds of buttons and the hundreds of servants shining until late just so the prince might keep his coat on!

DAUGHTER 2
His armies knife the sky with their cries and the sun bleeds into evening.

DAUGHTER 1
The prince is still unwed . . .

DAUGHTER 2
The prince pretends to be a virgin . . .

DAUGHTER 3
(Mockingly) The poor prince is alone . . .

DAUGHTER 1
It is not good for a man to remain unwed . . .

DAUGHTER 3
Or alone . . .

DAUGHTER 2
Or a virgin!!
(All three laugh.)

CINDERELLA
(She rocks and sings the first verse of the St. Ariel song sadly to herself, but loud enough to bother the others on their level. The MOTHER is sad; the DAUGHTERS are angry.)

Lady St. Ariel
Drowned in her wishing well
When all her petals were gone.
All those who lived near-by
Heard her slow, solemn cry;
They turned their eyes from the sun.

Poor spring was parting her hair with flowers
And dressing her hands with green gloves.
When winter touched her with all his powers,
She languished away without love,
Languished away without love.

Lady St. Ariel
Drowned in her wishing well
With only an autumn-soft moan.
All those who lived near-by
Turned from her mournful cry.
She sang her last song alone.

(CINDERELLA continues to rock and hum the tune.)

DAUGHTER 1
I can't stand that singing any longer!

(MOTHER walks down a step toward CINDERELLA. She speaks softly.)

MOTHER
Cinderella?

CINDERELLA
(Startled) What? . . . Oh, I'm sorry; I was singing again.

MOTHER
Why do you sing, Cinderella?

CINDERELLA
Because I am happy.

MOTHER
How can you be happy? Your days are spent cooking and washing by the fireplace!

CINDERELLA
(Slowly) There is a special holiness in the hearth; there is a special truth in the purity of ashes.
(Pause)

MOTHER

I suppose you are never afraid.

CINDERELLA

No, only . . . lonely.

(MOTHER is visibly shaken. DAUGHTER 1 begins to pace around her area.)

DAUGHTER 1

To think! I shall marry him!!

DAUGHTER 2

You!!

DAUGHTER 3

Why you, may I ask?

DAUGHTER 1

I am the oldest; it's my right.

DAUGHTER 2

We aren't talking of rights.

DAUGHTER 3

No, we aren't talking of rights; we are talking about attraction. He shall marry me, plain and simple, because I am the prettiest!

DAUGHTER 1

You!!! Ha, ha, ha . . . the only beauty you have comes from the plaster you pat on your bladder-dry skin, the poultices you apply to your lips wounded by time, and the jelly you use to thicken your fraying hair on rollers every night! Wait until the prince sees that!

DAUGHTER 3

Oh, yeah! Well, wait until the wedding night when you remove your girdle and mounds and mounds of sticky fat roll in oceans down your thighs, and your breasts sink to your stomach like melted candles!! The prince has cows in his stable; he doesn't need you!

DAUGHTER 1

Shut up!! You haggard hen who plops her eggs in front of any old rooster who waddles up to her!

DAUGHTER 3
(Grabbing DAUGHTER 1 by the hair.)

I'll kill you, you sour moulded dumpling!!

(The MOTHER moves in to break up the fight; she gets caught up in it. DAUGHTER 2 stands back, laughing hysterically.)

MOTHER

Stop it!! Remember yourselves. Think who you are!

(They shove MOTHER aside.)

My goodness!!

DAUGHTER 2
(Looking at her fingernails.)

Well, you two keep on fighting. I must be off; I have so many things to do if I am to be married soon.

(DAUGHTERS 1 and 3 stop fighting and stare at her.)

DAUGHTER 2

The prince is a dignified gentleman. What would he say to such a scene? It disgusts people of quality, like myself. You are both right, however. You (pointing to DAUGHTER 1) are disgustingly overweight, and you (pointing to DAUGHTER 3) are pathetically plain without your makeup. I am simply as you see me--lovely, natural, perfect for the prince.

(DAUGHTERS 1 and 3 go for her in a mad fury. CINDERELLA shakes her head in sadness.)

DAUGHTER 1
(Grabbing a handful of DAUGHTER 2's teased and sprayed hair.)

So you think you can have him all to yourself, eh!

DAUGHTER 3
(Also pulling DAUGHTER 2's hair apart.)

Look! See these pins and lacquer in this "natural" wonder!! We'll pull here and here . . .

(The other two DAUGHTERS completely wreck DAUGHTER 2's hair. A mass of over-teased frizz, it stands out in all directions. She looks utterly ridiculous.)

DAUGHTER 1
(Pointing to DAUGHTER 2)

Here she is, ladies and gentlemen, " . . . simply as you see her; lovely, natural . . ."

DAUGHTER 3
(Roaring with laughter.)

Perfect for the prince!!

DAUGHTER 2

I'll kill both of you!!

(DAUGHTER 2 slams the glasses and pitcher off the table. She chases the other two DAUGHTERS. The MOTHER frantically asserts control at the top of her voice.)

MOTHER

STOP IT!!

(They stop, all out of breath.)

Remember yourselves . . .

(They begin to calm down.)

Remember . . . yourselves. You must look your best and act your best. You compete not only with yourselves, but with every young girl in the county. He will know you. He has eyes like swords. You have seen him in passing; you have seen his image only. No one has seen him truly--not in these times. You must beware. You are dealing with something deeper than you know.

(CINDERELLA listens to MOTHER'S last speech, and thinking about the prince, she remembers. She rises from her chair and moves about her area. The MOTHER does not hear what she says, and she does not listen to the MOTHER, but they, in their respective areas, give the two opposing viewpoints about the prince--the realistic and the romantic.)

CINDERELLA

I have seen him. Once, by the seashore, while the waves painted the sand with gentle strokes of foam, I heard what I thought was thunder, and turning, I saw it was the sound of hoofs as he came riding . . .

MOTHER

He is no fool! He is cold . . .

CINDERELLA

. . . even the egg-shell sun oozing warmth upon our heads could not burn as did his eyes. His lips formed a smile amidst the spray which blew everywhere like desert sand . . .

MOTHER

He has a position to protect . . .

CINDERELLA

. . . he stopped his horse and bent down towards the children playing. They could not bear to look at his face, and watched his shadow only. But I raised my heart slowly to meet his gaze, and, wonder of wonder, the smile was gone. What I took for mist was tears . . .

MOTHER

He has not time for tenderness . . .

CINDERELLA

I wanted to cup my hands to his sorrow, catch it to myself and drink it into my soul. I wanted him to be true light . . .

MOTHER

He will crush you if you are not careful . . .

CINDERELLA

. . . I felt so small in his presence, and hiding behind the grass, I watched him ride on again, bearing his isolation with him. I let him ride on because I was not worthy . . .

MOTHER

You must be everything he could possibly desire. You must be elegant . . .

CINDERELLA

Poor man, no one will ever be worthy . . .

MOTHER

And charming . . .

CINDERELLA

No one could ever be more alone than he.

(CINDERELLA hangs her head in despair.)

MOTHER

. . . and witty! It is always important for a woman to have wit! Now, we must prepare. Call Cinderella and tell her to get busy; we have very little time and there is much sewing to be done.

DAUGHTER 1

Right away!

(CINDERELLA goes back to the hearth and strokes the spider gently on the back.)

(Pausing to think a moment) But what if she also wants to go. Cinderella is young, after all, and she is a woman.

DAUGHTER 3

Cinderella!! Oh, that would be something! She and the prince could make love on a bed of fading embers and write letters to each other in charcoal. The prince would learn what it's like not to bathe!!

DAUGHTER 1

It's not a jesting matter. In spite of the way she looks, there is something about her . . . when you think she is busy, you look up suddenly and realize she is watching you, and in that look there is a flash, like someone running swiftly around a corner, a flash of infinite beauty . . . She frightens me!!

DAUGHTER 2

Frightens you!

DAUGHTER 1

Mother, she mustn't to, do you hear!! She mustn't go!

MOTHER

(Sadly) She will be too busy.

DAUGHTER 1

I have the feeling that she was pretty once.

MOTHER

As a child, yes . . . when her father was alive . . . always whispering, the two of them, always sharing summer secrets when I was out of the room. I was never a part of them, NEVER!! . . . Now he's dead . . . she understood him; I didn't . . .

(As she remembers she becomes hurt and angry.)

She will never go to that dance! Now get busy, all of you!

(MOTHER exits)

DAUGHTER 3

(Going to stairs and calling to CINDERELLA.)

Cinderella . . .

CINDERELLA

Yes . . .

DAUGHTER 3

Prepare your needles and your thread. We must have dresses. We are going out, and I must make the prince forget he ever was a soldier!

(She exits; DAUGHTER 2 goes next to the head of the stairs.)

DAUGHTER 2

Give me rows and rows of frills. I will make the prince wonder what waits for him beneath the lining.

(She exits. DAUGHTER 1 goes to the head of the stairs.)

DAUGHTER 1

Help me, Cinderella. I hear the prince owns diamonds large as melons. You are an artist; stitch me up a lady . . . you only know how . . . I will bring you back something lovely from the ball . . . it will be as if you were going, too . . . when I go.

(CINDERELLA nods, gets up, goes to the hearth again. DAUGHTER 1 watches her a moment, then hurries out. Lights fade on stage left area.)

CINDERELLA

. . . as if I were going, too . . . if I were going, it would be to give him the comfort I kept from him out of fear . . .

(She sits down in her rocker, takes up her sewing again.)

Fear . . . fear . . . ah, yes, that is the worst enemy of the heart.

(She rocks silently for a moment, then begins to hum the St. Ariel tune as the lights go out.)

Scene ii

(CINDERELLA sits next to the hearth, beside the spider. She is stirring something in a large pot that hangs there. Two lovely evening gowns hang in the corner. A third is draped half-finished over her rocking chair.)

CINDERELLA

(To the spider) It's so hot! The whole city is a large kettle of soup steaming towards the clouds. It is strange to work over a fire on a hot day! It is different with you, little spider; your legs are your fingers. You can move and touch at the same time. Your art is at once your home and your snare . . . . I wonder if it is hot where the prince lives? No, couldn't be . . . I wonder if there are any spiders there? . . . It must be wonderful to spin one's insides into faultless spectres and float within breezy visions!

(The WIZARD enters. He is a tall man of indeterminant age. He accidentally brushes the spider web, sees the spider, and lets out a yell.)

WIZARD

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!!

(He brushes himself off with loathing.)

CINDERELLA

(Startled from her reverie by the yell.) It's all right. She's harmless!

(CINDERELLA goes to the spider.)

Oh, dear, you've damaged her web! Look, it's torn! See how she writhes in pain. When you tear her net you tear her also. It comes from inside her, you know.

WIZARD

I'm sorry. You see, I <u>hate</u> spiders!

CINDERELLA

Everyone does. I can never understand why.

WIZARD
Perhaps because most of us see only their dark balloon-bodies bursting with venom.

CINDERELLA
Why must people always look for ugliness? Personally, I think the spider is lovely. She alone is untainted, a black flower unfolding for herself only. She is complete in what she is, and what she weaves.

WIZARD
You are entitled to your own view of things . . . I hope she will be all right. I didn't mean to harm her.

CINDERELLA
I know . . . You mustn't be upset. She is preparing to mend. See how she draws into herself . . . the web, however, will never be the same.

(CINDERELLA ceases to muse and turns to the WIZARD.)

I've been very rude. I haven't even asked your name! Very few people come down here except me. What can I do for you?

WIZARD
I should be the one to ask you that question.

CINDERELLA
I don't understand.

WIZARD
Yes, you do. You simply aren't aware of it yet.

CINDERELLA
Who are you?

WIZARD
Let's just say that I'm a believer in miracles.

CINDERELLA
Isn't everyone?

WIZARD
No. Most people are, at best, wishers-for-miracles. Very few make it to believers.

CINDERELLA
I'm sorry, but I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about!

WIZARD
Yes, you do . . . you have the blessing--or the curse--of being able to dream beyond yourself. The rain on the roof is never rain to you--it is an old voice crooning softly.

CINDERELLA

You seem to know me quite well.

WIZARD

I do . . . tell me, do you believe in magic?

CINDERELLA

Yes, I think so.

WIZARD

Then why don't you use it?

CINDERELLA

I am always afraid that it will dissolve into grey, like the rainbow colored rainfall.

WIZARD

Your fears are wise perhaps, to a point; you want to keep the threads of your desires intact. But you will never be whole until you understand the world in which you weave.

CINDERELLA

(Disturbed) What do you want here?

WIZARD

I heard your wonders! I thought I was becoming obsolete. I can show you new powers if you will only let me, and I can function once again.

CINDERELLA

Powers?

WIZARD

Yes. I can help you realize all your wishes. You can have the things you have hoped for in your life.

CINDERELLA

You are joking.

WIZARD

Test me then!!

(CINDERELLA remains silent.)

Go ahead! Test me!!

CINDERELLA

All right! There, on that chair, are the unsewn pieces of my sister's dress. Make them into a lovely gown!

(WIZARD claps his hands, the lights go out and come on again.)

WIZARD

It is done!

(CINDERELLA takes up the material and it unfolds into a beautiful dress.)

CINDERELLA

Why, it's finished. Perfect!! To think of the hours I might have spent . . .

(Her excitement begins to mount.)

Make me a pair of shoes of solid silver!!

(The WIZARD claps his hands, the lights go out, come on again, and a pair of silver sandals lies on the hearth.)

Bring light into this room!!

(The WIZARD claps his hands as before and CINDERELLA'S area is flooded with light.)

Here, in the heart of summer, give me snow, and fill my hearth with roses!!

(Once again, the WIZARD claps his hands, and show and roses cover the hearth. CINDERELLA is engulfed by orgiastic delight, and shouts in ecstasy.)

Let me see my father once again!!

(There is a long pause. Nothing happens; the WIZARD'S hands hang limply by his side.)

I said, "Let me see my father once again . . . "

(The WIZARD turns from her, sad.)

WIZARD

I can't. The currents of the dead are beyond my stroke.

CINDERELLA

But you said you could give me all my wishes . . . you said . . .

WIZARD

Within reason! Always within reason.

(The lights dim to their original level.)

I'm sorry . . . look, there must be other things you want. Ask for anything else and I will grant it.

CINDERELLA

There is only one other thing I desire in the world.

WIZARD

What is that?

CINDERELLA

To go to the ball and see the prince!

(The WIZARD turns from her abruptly, extremely agitated.)

WIZARD

Come now, you don't mean that!

CINDERELLA

With all my heart I do!

WIZARD

No. You only <u>think</u> you desire to go there.

CINDERELLA

What you really mean is that you can't grant that wish either.

WIZARD

No, I can grant it . . . but I don't want to. Why must you ask for such things!

CINDERELLA

You know me well. Answer your own question!

WIZARD

It is because I know you so well that I want to say no!

CINDERELLA

Why? Am I too ugly?

WIZARD

Ugliness is all a matter of who is looking.

CINDERELLA

Then why can't you do this for me?

WIZARD

(Pause) Because it will destroy you.

CINDERELLA

Destroy me! How?

(She moves sensuously around the room, unaware of the sensuality of her movements.)

I want to be transformed until the petals of loneliness fall from me, and only the barren ripeness remains . . . I want to climb with the white wind where songs dance into silence and silence into song. There I will look into his untouched eyes and wipe his sorrow dry with my laughter . . .

WIZARD

You don't understand the dreams you speak of!! You are incapable of merging with such a world.

CINDERELLA

Incapable?

WIZARD

You see only your inner shadows. At the final hour, in the dark claws of midnight, lurks the curse. That is the moment when his beauty will change, and you in turn will stand before the prince as you are now, with your visions in rags before your feet and your songs tattered and bare!

CINDERELLA
(Pondering his words.)

That would be horrible . . . but then, what good is the hearth if I never go beyond it? . . . Perhaps even a few hours up there would be worth an eternity of exile.

WIZARD

You think so now, with the glimmer before you. With the lights behind you, it's another story.

CINDERELLA
(Not listening to him.)

I could leave before the clock chimes! . . . I could rush from him down the many hills to the basement, bar the door, and watch my feet turn black. He would never know. My face would remain sealed within his mind!

WIZARD

You will despair, I tell you!! Listen to me! Right now you are happy. This room is your security, and when your thoughts roam, they always return here. It is one thing to bring more light into the dusty corners, another to confront the heights altogether! How will you bear the hearth after you have been up there? You will want to rip your heart out with your hands! You think you trade contentment for fire. You are only buying one agonizing flicker.

CINDERELLA

Why did you have to appear to me at all!!

WIZARD

I had no idea you would go this far.

CINDERELLA

All my life I have sat down here because I never dared raise my head. Well, let the hearth boil over my heart--I don't care! All I want is one moment in the sky! You <u>can</u> help me! You must! I want to go to the ball!

WIZARD

You won't change your mind?

CINDERELLA

No.

WIZARD

Then there is nothing I can do for you but let you go. You have no one but yourself to blame.

CINDERELLA

I know.

WIZARD

(Sadly) I will leave you . . . I will return tomorrow night.

CINDERELLA

Until tomorrow then.

(The WIZARD slowly exits. He stops beside the spider web.)

WIZARD

Look, your spider has left the strings of her web hanging sadly in the heat. She doesn't seem to have the heart to weave them back again.

CINDERELLA

Spiders are very sensitive about their designs.

(The WIZARD pauses a moment, watches the spider web sadly, then exits.)

Come, little spider. You can spin again!!

(She bends down and touches the spider gently.)

I tell you, you can spin again!!

(CINDERELLA goes to the hearth, picks up a small box, returns to the spider, and scoops it into the box. It is dead. She goes sadly back to her rocker, sits down, and begins to sing the St. Ariel song.)

Lady St. Ariel
Caught a star as it fell,
Hid it away by her breast.
Though with the night she lay down,
Tucked it within her gown,
She found it gave her no rest.

(CINDERELLA looks straight ahead, suddenly afraid.)

She found it gave her no rest.

Scene iii

(The top level is now lit, as are the two lower levels. On the top level sits the PRINCE. He is handsome in an "All-American-Joe-College" way. The three DAUGHTERS, all dressed in fashionable evening attire, ascend to meet him. DAUGHTER 1 wears a dress which is more low cut than those of the other two, and so immediately catches his eye. He greets each one, but looks horribly bored with the whole situation. Finally, he dances with DAUGHTER 1, who flirts and smiles a great deal. All this action takes place while CINDERELLA speaks with the WIZARD on her level, and is thus mimed. CINDERELLA stands next to the hearth and is totally transformed. She is dressed entirely in black. Her gown is decidedly "sexy," but she is not aware of the fact. The top is made of lace or net, and the gown should cause the audience to immediately identify CINDERELLA with the spider. She is holding the box with the dead spider in her hand. The WIZARD examines it sadly.)

CINDERELLA

I never realized there was such perfection in death.

(She points to the spider.)

See how still she is, almost like a shining black jewel preserved forever from time.

WIZARD

Your innocence is unhealthy. Time erases everything . . .

(He changes the subject.)

You look beautiful.

CINDERELLA

(Unaware of the power of her appearance.)

Do I really? Do you honestly think that the prince will notice me?

WIZARD

He will more than notice you!! . . . Listen to me. You must think of tonight as a . . . transformation. You must not let yourself be shocked by what you find up there.

CINDERELLA

Shocked?

WIZARD

It's time for you to grow . . . you must be able to protect what you are and still accept what you find; you must . . . alter, . . . but not change . . . your pattern.

CINDERELLA

I'm afraid I don't understand you.

WIZARD

(Sadly) I didn't think you would. You had best be on your way. There are the stairs; follow the light.

(CINDERELLA slowly ascends the stairs to the top level; as she does so the conversation between the prince and DAUGHTER 1 becomes audible. The MOTHER and the other two irate DAUGHTERS stand to the side on the top level and look on.)

DAUGHTER 1

(To PRINCE) You seem preoccupied.

PRINCE

(With a cynical tone that he maintains throughout the whole scene.)

It goes with my image. I always try to seem lost in thought when I am in the market place.

DAUGHTER 1

So you think I am here to sell you something.

PRINCE

Deceit often fills a hungry stomach.

DAUGHTER 1

Perhaps some people cannot be bought.

PRINCE

Oh, no. You simply need to understand their kind of price . . . Each person draws a line and says, "I will pay no more than this." I have learned to dangle such people on their limits. Then I pull on their dreams and the coins fall in my hands.

DAUGHTER 1

(Moving sensuously) I will dance whichever way you move.

PRINCE

(Running his hands up her back.)

Then you had best beware of my hands. They have been known to wander.

DAUGHTER 1

I have heard you are a conqueror. I am not afraid of being crushed.

DAUGHTER 2
(To MOTHER and DAUGHTER 3)
That's a laugh. Best keep your hands at home, dear prince! The land you move over has been trampled by every goat in the county!

DAUGHTER 3
Yes. If you close your eyes you can hear the bleats across the stars!

(MOTHER hushes them. CINDERELLA reaches the top and stares at the PRINCE and DAUGHTER 1.)

PRINCE
(Not yet seeing CINDERELLA.)
What toll do you charge?

DAUGHTER 1
Dear prince, everything is free.

PRINCE
Only lies are free!

(At this moment he notices CINDERELLA and cannot take his eyes off her cleavage. He brushes DAUGHTER 1 aside.)

PRINCE
Who is that?

DAUGHTER 1
I don't know . . . the face looks vaguely familiar.

PRINCE
Oh, yes, the face. I hadn't noticed . . . what a fair plum just perfect for plucking!

(CINDERELLA notices his stare. She is embarrassed.)

DAUGHTER 1
(Pulling the PRINCE back.)
Don't go! What can she offer you?

PRINCE
I'm not sure yet, but I intend to find out.

DAUGHTER 1
If you are hungry, I will spread a slice of my thigh before you!

DAUGHTER 2
(Pulling DAUGHTER 1 away.)
Like butter, it will ooze over the sides of the bed!

DAUGHTER 3
Come dear, the prince is tired of mutton!!

DAUGHTER 1

What right . . . who the hell . . . what right has she!

(The MOTHER pulls them aside.)

MOTHER

Hush!! Be careful and listen!

(The PRINCE goes over to CINDERELLA. He strikes the pose of the "angry young man" and stares off into space.)

PRINCE
(To CINDERELLA)

Good evening. How nice of you to come.

CINDERELLA

Thank you. I've always wanted to view the earth from up here.

PRINCE

I don't believe we've met.

CINDERELLA

We haven't. At least, not that you would remember . . . Where I come from, one can see nothing but what is directly before one's hands.

PRINCE

I would remember. You have the kind of face that makes men tear cities in their teeth and spit the crying children out upon the ground.

CINDERELLA
(Drawing away, frightened.)

I wouldn't know of such things.

PRINCE

I'm sorry . . . I must have frightened you . . . strange . . . my mind is usually so preoccupied with battlefields I find it hard to remember what it means to be gentle. But then, this is no world for gentility.

CINDERELLA

I suppose that depends on where you live. I have been protected by the gracious oblivion of smoke.

PRINCE

Oblivion is never gracious.

(The MOTHER can stand it no more. The PRINCE takes CINDERELLA'S hand and the MOTHER rushes down the stairs to the lower area. The DAUGHTERS follow her.)

MOTHER

It isn't fair!! NO, NO, NO! I had three daughters. I did the best I could. It's a hard world in which to raise daughters! From nowhere!!

A stranger in silver sandals slips into his brooding visions! It isn't fair, I tell you!

DAUGHTER 3

Momma, he can't take his eyes off her!

DAUGHTER 2

Do something, momma!

DAUGHTER 1

I have had bad dreams. I knew this would come . . . I dreamed I was caught in a huge net strung across the moon. All around me I heard laughter. I called out to the dream to stop, but it began to revolve and spin . . . and . . . in despair, I closed my eyes to morning.

MOTHER

Come to bed, children . . . the secret is beyond us. We must not look. . . . Come to bed.

(The MOTHER exits into the dark. The lights dim on the DAUGHTERS' area, but the DAUGHTERS remain there, looking up and watching the PRINCE and CINDERELLA.)

PRINCE
(Continuing to speak with CINDERELLA)

If I have missed you along the way, I must be blind.

CINDERELLA

Or just preoccupied with starlight.

PRINCE

Preoccupied with starlight!! You have such an original way of putting things.

CINDERELLA

I'm sorry.

PRINCE

Never apologize for being extraordinary.

CINDERELLA
(Beginning to be afraid.)

It's so cold up here. You can wear the chill across your arms like a silken shawl.

PRINCE

How strange you are, and beautiful.

CINDERELLA

(With shyness) Thank you.

PRINCE

You're blushing.

CINDERELLA

I'm not used to compliments.

PRINCE

How rare! I never believed until now that someone like you existed! Down there everything is for sale. Beauty comes in a plastic container and happiness is found in the right kind of handshake.

CINDERELLA

You sound so bitter.

PRINCE

It's the air up here, as you say.

CINDERELLA

I wish you were not so sad.

PRINCE

Ah yes . . . but enough of me. Can I get you anything?

CINDERELLA

No. It is enough just to be here. When I first saw you . . .

PRINCE

Then we have met before . . .

CINDERELLA

Not really. I have often watched you when you ride the beach . . .

PRINCE

So that's it! Grand spectacle, isn't it!

CINDERELLA

Oh, yes . . .

PRINCE

How could I ever have missed you! In the midst of the burnt-out eyes of the fat peasant women yet! They squat everywhere; their multitudinous children all stink of sweat and seaweed!

CINDERELLA

No! The women you speak of are not like that!! They are beautiful, and your coming is the only song they know. The little boys follow after your horse and watch it disappear. Your people love you!

PRINCE

My people! My people, you call them!! . . . The very stench of them sickens me!

(CINDERELLA pulls away in horror.)

They are not born. The sea vomits them up when her bowels are polluted!

CINDERELLA

Stop! You mustn't speak that way. It's wrong to do so, terribly wrong!

PRINCE
Yes . . . of course . . . you really are upset, aren't you?

CINDERELLA
My life sifts across your words like shadows.

PRINCE
There now. Don't be troubled. Those who possess such beauty as yours should never feel pain.

CINDERELLA
Beauty is leaf-spun sunlight on a forest floor.

PRINCE
Whatever does that mean!

CINDERELLA
Simply that it doesn't last. At the dark hour of midnight, when the young world draws its last gasp, the stars vanish, and the sky grieves its way into light.

PRINCE
(Becoming exasperated) You speak in riddles.

CINDERELLA
I speak the truth. The beauty I have now is fading. It is no more than an image upon an image.

PRINCE
I believe in the things I can see and touch.

(He moves closer to her.)
It is growing late.

CINDERELLA
Late!! What time is it?

PRINCE
I don't know, but everyone will be leaving soon, and you've come such a long way . . . Why don't you stay . . . the night?

CINDERELLA
The night!!

PRINCE
I promise not to hurt you.

CINDERELLA
What of the morning?

PRINCE
I have told you, you are beautiful; your face and your body are charms; they will bring you nothing but luck.

CINDERELLA

You are making fun of me!

PRINCE

Nonsense . . . You're trembling. I do believe you have never been with a man before!

CINDERELLA

No, I haven't.

PRINCE

In these days yet. Who would believe it!

CINDERELLA

Surely you don't think that's why I came!

PRINCE

That's why everybody comes here sooner or later. Let's all have a little piece of the prince!! Don't you think it's only fair that I have a bite of the pie, also!!

CINDERELLA

Please, you don't understand!

PRINCE

The evening is growing short! I've heard the phony pretense of purity before!

CINDERELLA

I only came to touch your sorrow!

PRINCE

To touch!! . . . oh, come now! In that gown you may touch anyone anywhere and he will be cured! Stop dressing your body in little girl pleas. Do you think I am a fool?

CINDERELLA

No. I'm the one who has been foolish. I have to leave now.

PRINCE

(Grabbing her arm.)

Oh, no! I have a fine eye for what is unique! I won't let you leave.

CINDERELLA

I am cold! I must leave. The music is harsh and out of tune! Let me go!

PRINCE

(Grabbing her.)

Let's dance. It will warm you.

CINDERELLA

I don't know how.

PRINCE
(Increasingly more violent.)
You have only to follow when I move.

CINDERELLA
You have hard hands.

PRINCE
Your breasts are soft. They ripple against me. Even when you are silent they are not still!

CINDERELLA
(Struggling with him.)
I tell you, that's not why I came!

PRINCE
What difference does it make?
(The clock strikes one.)

CINDERELLA
Let me go!
(The clock strikes two. They continue to struggle until the last strike.)

PRINCE
You are fresh snow on the battlefield before the blood.

(The clock strikes three.)

CINDERELLA
When I saw you on the shore, I thought you cried for us all.

(The clock strikes four.)

PRINCE
It was only the mist.
(The clock strikes five.)

Your breasts flow through my hands like water . . .

(The clock strikes six.)

CINDERELLA
I should have known that truth is mad.

(The clock strikes seven.)

PRINCE
Truth is useless . . .

(The clock strikes eight.)

CINDERELLA
As are dreams . . .

(The clock strikes nine.)

and songs . . .

(The clock strikes ten. CINDERELLA finally breaks free. The clock strikes eleven. The PRINCE grabs her again; she trips, loses her sandal, rushes down the stairs and collapses by the hearth, out of breath.)

PRINCE
(Calling after her.)

You can't leave!! You can't!

(The clock strikes twelve.)

Perhaps I went too fast. I'm sorry. Where are you? . . . I said, where are you!! . . . let's be calm . . . come back!!

(Still no answer.)

You can't leave, you can't!!

(Lights out on PRINCE. CINDERELLA and the hearth are dimly lit.)

CINDERELLA
(Lying on the floor; her dress is torn.)

I thought the universe was only light, but light is sand and sand cannot be held . . . nor can tears . . . nor can tears . . . nor can tears.

(Lights out on CINDERELLA. Only the DAUGHTERS and their area are still lit. They break their frozen positions.)

DAUGHTER 1
(Peering up to where the PRINCE and CINDERELLA were.)

Did you see that!!

DAUGHTER 2

What?

DAUGHTER 1

Up there.

DAUGHTER 2

I saw the two of them dancing. Then it seemed they were struggling, and I thought I might as well leave, and then . . .

DAUGHTER 1

Looking up, I saw it. It must have been a portent!

DAUGHTER 3
(Staring up into the blackness.)

Perhaps so. Only time will tell whether it was good or bad.

DAUGHTER 1

Then you saw it, too!

DAUGHTER 3

Yes. Just at the stroke of midnight.

DAUGHTER 2

What was it that you saw?

DAUGHTER 3

I thought the sky darkened, and then . . . a star fell.

DAUGHTER 1

Not a star really. It was more like a comet.

DAUGHTER 2

A comet?

DAUGHTER 1

Yes. It seemed to fall from the sky. And when it fell, the strangest thing happened. The earth beneath me seemed to shudder, and when the moon darkened, my heart darkened with it.

(All three pause, upset.)

DAUGHTER 2

Come to bed, sisters. We've done our share of watching for one night! Come to bed and the forgetfulness of sleep.

Scene iv

(Both the DAUGHTERS' area and CINDERELLA'S area are fully lit. CINDERELLA sits in her rocker, staring ahead of her and singing. She is disheveled and dressed in rags again, and she is wild-eyed and almost mad with grief. She sings, but the song is now horribly out of tune. Her frenzied rocking and singing bother the DAUGHTERS. They, too, are upset. They are dressed in old slacks and their hair is unkempt. The gowns they wore the night before are strewn around the stage.)

CINDERELLA
(Singing, cacaphonously.)

Lady St. Ariel
Practiced a magic spell
Weaving her thoughts into dreams.
Her laughter was daffodils
Scattered on peaceful hills,
Raising their scent to the streams.
But while the willows were quietly sighing
And stroking the birds with their hands,
The leaves were talking of spring and lying
In words she could not understand,
In words she could not understand.
Lady St. Ariel
Had a long tale to tell
Hoping for lands far from home.
She asked the morning why
Blossoms should ever die,
The answer turned her to stone.
The answer turned her to stone.

DAUGHTER 1
She's started that infernal singing again!

DAUGHTER 2
My head is beginning to throb from all that screeching!

DAUGHTER 3
It's so strange . . . it's suddenly as if she were obsessed . . .

CINDERELLA
The answer turned her to stone . . .

DAUGHTER 3
(Yelling down to CINDERELLA.)
Cinderella, stop it!

CINDERELLA
(Still singing, not hearing her.)
The answer turned her to tone.

DAUGHTER 3
I said, stop it!!

CINDERELLA
(Beside herself.)
To stone . . . to stone . . . to stone.

DAUGHTER 3
STOP IT!!

CINDERELLA
(Responding now, in a whisper.)
To stone . . . to stone . . . to stone.

DAUGHTER 2

Thank goodness that's over. What do you suppose possessed her to carry on like that?

DAUGHTER 1

It's the heat sifting off the walls of this house. Ruin is infectious.

(DAUGHTER 1 picks up the dress she wore the night before and begins to tear it to shreds.)

Here's to the prince in his popsicle castle, here's to the candy girl who coated his lips and melted into a neat little puddle by his feet! Damned be the castle, damned be the girl,

(Enter MOTHER.)

Damned be everything!!!

MOTHER

You've shredded your dress!

DAUGHTER 1

What does it matter! I could slide naked through the streets and the prince would wade right through me!

MOTHER

Please! Try not to be bitter!

DAUGHTER 2

Try not to be bitter, she says!! It isn't fair. He hardly even noticed me!

DAUGHTER 3

To see a man who could squeeze armies like ripe grapes kneel down and kiss her sweaty sandal as though it were a fragrant lily!

DAUGHTER 1

But it was I who was dancing with him when she entered. There I stood with my dreams running down my face like eggs!

DAUGHTER 3

It's your own fault! You threw yourself at him like old garbage!

DAUGHTER 1

Oh, shut up! I was the only one he bothered to talk to! If she hadn't come . . .

DAUGHTER 2

Well, I'll tell you what! If I could get a hold of that girl now, I would carve out her eyeballs and serve them to the prince as brown olives in his noonday salad!

DAUGHTER 3

I would pull her hair out thread by thread and weave it into a silken coat for him to wear!

DAUGHTER 1

I would carve her heart into a star and let it drip on him in the clear evenings!

MOTHER

(Horrified) Stop it! You act like hyenas when the fox got away.

DAUGHTER 1

We have a right to anger! She didn't want him--she left him standing alone. Now he'll think of no one else. She has ruined him!

MOTHER

Nonsense!!

DAUGHTER 1

Come now, mother. You wouldn't understand what it's like to lose a man!

MOTHER

What do you mean, I wouldn't understand!

DAUGHTER 2

Two men loved you to their deaths.

MOTHER

One man loved me when I was new because I was a mystery. The other man loved me for my late summer bloom. When my petals faded, he turned to watch the stars. It was a quiet folding away, a soft shift, like the clearing of clouds around the moon, but just as final . . . I was brushed away . . . Be grateful you met with sudden rejection! The slow ebbing of emotions is the cruelest loss of all.

DAUGHTER 3

(Knocking her coffee cup to the ground.)

I wish I could die!

DAUGHTER 2

Why? Surely you don't think the prince would come to your funeral!

DAUGHTER 1

Your flesh would be yellow as old lace before he would blow the dust off your bones!

DAUGHTER 3

(Really violent this time.)

I've had enough from you!! The first child, always getting the best of everything! Even when you were a bloody-nosed brat who blew her snot into everybody's business, they said you were beautiful!

(DAUGHTER 3 goes for DAUGHTER 1's throat.)

You have never been beautiful!! You have never been anything!

(DAUGHTER 1 shoves DAUGHTER 3 so hard she falls to the floor.)

DAUGHTER 1

Your ugly mouth can do nothing but flap in the wind. Come near me again and, so help me, I'll kill you!!

DAUGHTER 3

(Getting up and rushing at her.)

You'll never get the chance!!

(They fight desperately. DAUGHTER 2 also gets involved. The MOTHER intervenes.)

MOTHER

Stop it!! Stop it!!

(They continue to fight.)

What's the use!!

(They begin to settle down.)

None of you has a chance, NONE OF YOU!

(This stops them. They know she speaks the truth.)

DAUGHTER 1

(Sadly) She's right . . . we've all lost . . . if I just knew who that woman was . . .

DAUGHTER 2

Every eligible girl in the county was there and accounted for . . . except Cinderella.

DAUGHTER 3

And of course it couldn't have been Cinderella!

DAUGHTER 1

(Slowly coming to realization.)

Wait a minute . . . Cinderella . . . the face . . . the face was awfully familiar . . . it was the eyes . . . I remember thinking that the secret was in the eyes . . .

MOTHER

(Defensively) Don't be ridiculous! Leave that poor girl alone!

DAUGHTER 2

Why do you always feel sorry for her, mother?

DAUGHTER 3

Yes, I've noticed it, too. Sometimes I think she is the one you love best!

MOTHER

That is the most absurd statement I have ever heard!

DAUGHTER 2

You do nothing for her but weep!

MOTHER

I don't weep for her!! She is a servant in my cellar, nothing more! She is not a part of me. She never wanted to be! Always smiling that knowing smile at her father . . . the two of them singing songs I couldn't understand . . . condescending . . . shutting the door on themselves and leaving me outside . . . How could I love her! She took him from me!!

(MOTHER is surprised at her own revelation.)

She took him from me!

(MOTHER turns away from the DAUGHTERS.)

DAUGHTER 1

But she looks so much like him, mother. You can't deny that! And you admire what she is, don't you, mother?

MOTHER

(Defensively) Admire her! A girl who plays with pieces of coal!

DAUGHTER 1

Yes, admire her. You would like to think you fashioned her in the dark corridors of your womb, that she was the product of your life and love. But you had nothing to do with her! We are yours!! We are mirrors of what you do not like about yourself, and so you hate us!!

MOTHER

How can you say that! I gave you birth; I rolled in agony for you, cried for you, worried for you . . .

DAUGHTER 1

Not for us, through us!!

(She pauses.)

Cinderella! I have always been afraid of her. She has powers we know nothing about--her father certainly did. Our enemy has been living on the bottom floor all the time, and we haven't had the sense to notice it.

DAUGHTER 2

Of course! Always so gentle! Those are the most dangerous kind, the gentle ones!

DAUGHTER 3

I'll rip her lips right off her face!!

MOTHER

Please, all of you, stop it!

DAUGHTER 1

Of course, mother. Cinderella must remain inviolate!

MOTHER

You don't understand. Just supposing for one outrageous minute it was Cinderella at the ball, you have revenge enough. She lost him, too, didn't she? Now she sits alone in the shadowed cellar, singing jangled

songs that jar the ear. What could be more desolate, or lonely! Leave her alone . . . get on with the business of your own lives!!

DAUGHTER 3

Perhaps you're right, but what are we supposed to do? Everything is so boring!

MOTHER

Find someone else. There are plenty of rich men in the neighborhood.

DAUGHTER 1

Next to the prince, they are all pale as glass.

MOTHER

They will have to do. Things could be worse.

DAUGHTER 1

(Pondering her words.)

I suppose you're right. We wanted more . . . so what! . . . Everyone wants more . . . I suppose there is some solace in keeping up appearances.

DAUGHTER 2

I suggest we all have a drink. That's one way of keeping warm. Our little "friend" has let the fire go out!

MOTHER

I know, poor child, even the embers are crushed.

DAUGHTER 1

(Smashing her glass to the ground.)

Oh!

(DAUGHTER 1 rushes off stage, the MOTHER runs after her. DAUGHTERS 2 and 3 freeze and the lights dim in their area and come up on CINDERELLA'S area.)

CINDERELLA

(Rocking back and forth, disconsolate, unable to take constructive action.)

The flickers are dry . . . no sparks left to shimmer the shadows away . . . Ashes . . . ashes . . . everywhere grey . . . the soft wings of gulls are grey . . . perhaps if I let my visions slap against my sides, I too can fly, and dwell on the underside of soaring . . . No! . . . I can't go up there anymore . . . I can't go up there . . . I can't go up . . . I can't go . . . can't, can't, can't . . . Wouldn't he laugh if he saw me now! . . . wouldn't he laugh! . . . here on the edge of never . . . and can not, can not, can not . . .!

(The WIZARD enters, watches CINDERELLA, picks up the matches from the floor.)

WIZARD

You've spilled your matches.

CINDERELLA
No matter. All my thoughts are flint.

WIZARD
Please, child, didn't I warn you?

CINDERELLA
All my dreams hang in tatters *and no one but myself* is to blame.

WIZARD
No, it's my fault. I try to bring happiness and pain follows me like a stray dog, biting everyone I feed. I do nothing right.

CINDERELLA
It's the world up there which isn't right . . . What he must have thought! *His rough hands* stumbled across my body. I must have seemed a dark lady promising warm secrets beneath my dress . . . those hands . . . so sure, so knowing . . . understanding where to clutch . . . everywhere, . . . without asking, without needing . . . without <u>loving</u>! . . . I can't bear it, I'm so alone!

WIZARD
So are we all, child.

CINDERELLA
Love is a curse!

WIZARD
Hush now. Don't think any more--get on with your work.

CINDERELLA
Love is a curse, I tell you! The heart is a great chasm that can never be filled.

WIZARD
Turn your eyes to the hearth. Concentrate on what is directly in front of you. You can't change the way things are.

CINDERELLA
Of course! I'll just mark out the days with memories of soot!

WIZARD
Get hold of yourself! You are making too much of this!

CINDERELLA
He must be laughing now . . . he must be telling everyone how ridiculous I am . . .

WIZARD
Stop pitying yourself and get busy . . .

CINDERELLA
I thought he would be kind. His eyes could not stare without sneering. Every word he spoke was a snarl! . . . Lies . . . lies . . .

WIZARD
All right! Your vision was a lie! The world is still intact . . .

CINDERELLA
When he touched me, I forgot about the morning . . . something tore inside me. I was free . . .

WIZARD
That's it. There's your truth. It's not the dream only; you are desperate because now you understand yourself.

CINDERELLA
(Turning from him.)
Leave me be.

WIZARD
Now you know. When he reached out for you, you understood for the first time what it is to be alive . . .

CINDERELLA
No. . .

WIZARD
You understood how much you have always, always wanted him!

CINDERELLA
No!

WIZARD
(Moving in on her.)
You wanted him to hold you. There's nothing to be ashamed of! Don't be afraid of the world. Perhaps the prince sees more than you think!

CINDERELLA
The prince sees only shiny surfaces. Nothing that refracts can interest him! He wanted to clutch my flesh between cold sheets. A woman, to him, is something to be pinched and trampled . . .

WIZARD
(Whispering, insinuating) Yet the thought of him wraps your nights in warmth.

CINDERELLA
No!

WIZARD
Admit it!! You wanted him, you wanted him, you wanted him!!

CINDERELLA
All right!! It was exciting just to be near him . . . his face brushes across my sleep . . . his hands push aside all ordinary thought . . .

(She is afraid of her own revelation.)

What do I do now? How do I live, knowing that?

WIZARD
You create your life all over again. I can give you back your loveliness.

CINDERELLA
No, you can't!! I've lost it all . . . I'm not what I was. You can't give me back what I was!!

WIZARD
You will have more than you had before! Remember him again, remember yourself. He will hold you now, in the black of night he will hold you.

CINDERELLA
No, it's all broken . . . my desires are ordinary desires . . . I am nothing.

WIZARD
Nonsense! Recreate him as you first saw him, on his long ride down the beach . . .

CINDERELLA
It was all a pose!

WIZARD
See him as you want to see him! Not as he really is!

CINDERELLA
His eyes were . . . I can't!

WIZARD
The sun . . . go on . . . his eyes were the sun. They caught . . .

CINDERELLA
. . . the children and the sand in a bubble of light . . .

WIZARD
Good, that's it! Go on, go on!

CINDERELLA
I cupped my hands around it . . . No! I'm losing it!

WIZARD
Hang on. Remember--he came riding . . .

CINDERELLA
Yes, riding. He was the warm earth rolling to meet the sea, a spring of sand and sky forever flowing.

WIZARD
There, you've done it. Now you can work again, live again . . .

CINDERELLA
Work . . . yes . . . I can keep my hands busy after all . . .

WIZARD

And you can sing for me.

CINDERELLA

No. I will never sing again.

WIZARD

You don't mean that!

CINDERELLA

You ask too much. I can fill up the time with tasks, but all my music is shattered against the hearth. I tell you truly, I will never sing again.

(The WIZARD turns away from her. She strikes one match after another, but the fire will not light. She throws the matches on the floor.)

The old song wants out, but it's no use. Over and over it plays, banging against my eyes . . . now that I know the truth . . . truth . . . Knowledge is <u>death</u>. Wisdom is the rough edge of a tomb!

WIZARD

Cinderella, stop it.

CINDERELLA

The rough edge of a tomb!! Why do people live? Answer that one if you can! Why do people live!

(CINDERELLA collapses in her rocker and rocks furiously again. The WIZARD stands helplessly in the corner. The lights come up on the DAUGHTERS' area. This time CINDERELLA listens to all that is said up there.)

DAUGHTER 1

(Bursting in.) News! Things are looking up again! Get out your Saturday night shoes--we may dance again!

DAUGHTER 2

Have you gone mad?!

DAUGHTER 3

Why the outburst! I was almost asleep!

DAUGHTER 2

You must have read somewhere that it brings beauty!

DAUGHTER 3

Now, look! . . .

DAUGHTER 1

Stop it and listen! The prince is coming here!!

(DAUGHTER 2 jumps up, upsets the table and begins to dance around. CINDERELLA rises in horror.)

DAUGHTER 2

My hair is a mess!

DAUGHTER 3

Where is my dress? Cinderella!

CINDERELLA

Not here! I must hide! I must!

DAUGHTER 1

I need my shoes. Cinderella! . . . Why doesn't she answer?

(Enter MOTHER.)

MOTHER

What is going on here?!

DAUGHTER 1

Haven't you heard? The prince is coming!

MOTHER

I have heard that he is searching the city, but what can he want here?

DAUGHTER 1

Me, of course. When he sees me he will forget what he has been searching for!

MOTHER

But he's not looking for you. He's looking for . . .

DAUGHTER 1

When he arrives I will convince him I'm really the one . . .

DAUGHTER 2

You! You forget you were the limp sack he let fall to the ground when she came in! What makes you think he will want you now?

DAUGHTER 3

(To MOTHER) You see! She always thinks everything is hers because she's the oldest. Not this time!!

DAUGHTER 1

Shut up! He's mine . . .

MOTHER

(Exasperated) He is none of yours! He carries her sandal. You are the wrong parts of his puzzle. Forget him. Please, forget him!

DAUGHTER 1

No! You don't want us to have him . . . you don't care about us, only about Cinderella!

MOTHER
Please, I just don't want you to be destroyed!

DAUGHTER 1
I will only be destroyed if I can't have the prince!

(The continue to mime an argument while CINDERELLA and the WIZARD converse.)

CINDERELLA
Hide me! The prince is coming here! You must hide me!

WIZARD
Nonsense. You have been given a second chance. I will make you look as you looked that night.

CINDERELLA
And what will he do when he wakes to a bed stained with ashes! Laugh, or recoil! Oh, no, he mustn't find me!

WIZARD
Nonsense! The prince will remember you . . .

CINDERELLA
I will not argue any longer. You said you came to give me my wishes! I wish to be anonymous, to crumple into the air.

WIZARD
No. I won't let you ruin everything!

CINDERELLA
It's my decision!

WIZARD
I absolutely refuse!

CINDERELLA
Then let me die!

WIZARD
Don't be absurd! Just because of a little embarrassment . . .

CINDERELLA
One more wish and your duty is done! Let me die.

(The PRINCE comes into view on the top level, and begins to descend to the DAUGHTERS' level.)

DAUGHTER 1
(Whispering, to the others.)
The prince is coming. He will forget the autumn and smell the iris beneath my skirt!

MOTHER

Stop it!! You bring the sky down upon yourselves! Damn the prince! Damn all princes and their hollow castles they hold up to the howling mobs as holiness!

DAUGHTER 2

Mother! You were the one with the plans! You were the one who first told us of the prince!

MOTHER

I know. I'm sorry. I should have understood. It was all over when Cinderella's father died. I should have known then. I have brought nothing but grief to us all . . . let the prince pass by . . . let him pass!!

DAUGHTER 1

Of course! Leave him for Cinderella!

MOTHER

Don't be foolish! Think how he would feel if he did see her now! In her rags!! He would certainly despair.

DAUGHTER 3

Our own mother, selling us out to a stranger in the basement!

MOTHER

How can you be so blind. You three are my <u>daughters</u>; you are all I have in the world!!

DAUGHTER 1

(Slowly turning on the MOTHER.)

I am not your daughter. From this day on I do not know you!

MOTHER

You don't mean that!

DAUGHTER 1

I do! I want nothing more to do with you, ever!

MOTHER

Please, please . . .

DAUGHTER 1

You may rot out your remaining years alone! I will not comfort you. I won't even bury you! . . . Go to Cinderella! Perhaps she will let <u>you</u> work in <u>her</u> cellar!

MOTHER

Please . . .

DAUGHTER 1

I tell you, I do not know you!!!

(The DAUGHTERS all turn away from the MOTHER. The PRINCE reaches their area and DAUGHTER 1 sees him.)

DAUGHTER 1
(To the PRINCE.)
Your majesty, come here, please!

MOTHER
No! Don't do this!

DAUGHTER 1
The game is over, mother! . . . Here, your highness, here, in the black folds of our cellar is the jewel you seek!

MOTHER
(Whispering, to DAUGHTER 1.)
You are mad!

DAUGHTER 2
(To the PRINCE.)
My sister is right. You have been looking in the wrong places. Lower your eyes and you will find her.

PRINCE
But the woman I seek is a soft pearl in a wild ocean.

DAUGHTER 3
Swim to the bottom; you will find her!

(The PRINCE slowly descends to CINDERELLA'S area. She is panicked.)

CINDERELLA
The prince is coming! Let me die, now, before he sees me!

WIZARD
No! This is not how I planned it. Death has never been a dream that can be hoped for!

CINDERELLA
Perhaps not, but it is one's last priceless possession. I can do with it as I desire, with or without you. I will die!

(The PRINCE reaches the bottom and sees CINDERELLA; she moves expectantly toward him; he stares at her, then turns and laughs.)

PRINCE
Is this some sort of hideous joke? There's no one down there but a dirty girl!

CINDERELLA
(In despair) How frail the human body is. One tiny prick in a lattice of cells, and life gently bleeds away into a lacey memory . . .

(CINDERELLA turns her back to the audience and bends down toward the hearth. She slowly slumps over, as DAUGHTER 1 takes hold of the PRINCE'S arm.)

DAUGHTER 1
Look closer, prince!

MOTHER
(Pulling the PRINCE back.)
No. Go out into the light again. There is nothing for you here!

(The PRINCE, puzzled, descends again. The DAUGHTERS and the MOTHER watch him. He moves to the hearth, touches CINDERELLA, and she falls backward, her body limp and lifeless.)

PRINCE
What goes on here?! She's dead!

DAUGHTER 2
Dead!

DAUGHTER 1
No! Not in our own house!

MOTHER
(Descending to CINDERELLA'S area.)
She can't be dead!

(The DAUGHTERS exit, horrified.)

PRINCE
Her body is as cold as a wet shield on iron-white snow.

(He takes her body in his arms and stares into her face. The MOTHER bends over the body also. The WIZARD stands off in the corner, unseen as always.)

MOTHER
You're right. There is not a thread of life remaining.

PRINCE
How can there be death without blood?

MOTHER
The truth of that is beyond us.

PRINCE

Truth! What sort of word is that?

MOTHER
(Sadly getting up to leave.)

Truth is the hidden print of thorns on the world.

PRINCE
(After a pause.)

You murdered her, old woman!

(The MOTHER begins to ascend the stairs.)

MOTHER

Old . . . yes, old . . . But you, young man, are the killer.

PRINCE

Me!

MOTHER

Don't you recognize her yet?

(The PRINCE stares long and hard at the body in his arms. The MOTHER exits slowly.)

MOTHER

I am old . . . it is a cruel world, you see. I had three daughters and inherited the fourth . . . I did the best I could . . .

(The PRINCE continues to stare at CINDERELLA and does not respond to her.)

I did the best I could . . .

(Exit MOTHER. The lights fade on the entire stage except for CINDERELLA'S area.)

PRINCE
(To the empty room about him. He does not see the WIZARD, who moves toward him.)

Her face shines in the dying embers. I hadn't noticed until now how beautiful she is . . . Perhaps if I had noticed, things would have been different . . . see how her hair spins the last glow of firelight into softness . . .

(The WIZARD bends down to touch CINDERELLA'S hair. The PRINCE senses his presence and pushes his hand away as one would brush aside the wind. He continues to stare deeply into CINDERELLA'S face. The WIZARD retreats sadly to the corner, sits in CINDERELLA'S rocker, and sings the St. Ariel song softly to himself.)

WIZARD

Lady St. Ariel
Drowned in her wishing well
When all her petals were gone.
All those who lived nearby
Turned from her mournful cry.
She sang her last song alone.

(On the word "alone," he moves his hand in a sweeping gesture, and the lights go out with the movement of his hand. The scene ends.)

THE BEANSTALK COUNTRY

The Beanstalk Country represents my first experiment with Children's drama, and was inspired by Orlin Corey, a specialist in Children's Theatre who visited the campus of Kansas State and taught a course in Children's Theatre here. His theory is that Children's Theatre is a wasteland because so many writers underestimate their audience. Children, according to Corey, respond to language and character with depth, and should never be "talked down to." With this idea in mind, I wrote The Beanstalk Country, based on the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. The original tale is extremely violent and amoral, for Jack steals from a woman who is kind to him, and he also kills for money. I chose instead to use the story to display the agony of growing up and the inevitability of existential choice and crime. Jack makes a fatal decision that brings tremendous pain to all concerned. In the process, however, he grows up and is left forever with a sense of loss and the knowledge of his human responsibility for his actions and their consequences. This play also involves music. Jack has a song which he sings throughout, and there is theme music underneath many of the speeches, all of it my own composition. During the production, I found that the music created an atmosphere and mood which greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the piece.

The only rewriting of this script occurred after a session in Dr. Fedder's playwriting class. We all felt that the last scene was too short

and that the mother's decision came too abruptly. Thus, she was shown to change as Jack attacks her values. A special performance of the play was given before a group of children from a grade school in the area. They enjoyed the play, understood it, and many claimed to be deeply affected by it, in spite of the difficulty of the language and the sensitivity of the subject matter. Perhaps, then, Orlin Corey's theory is correct.

THE BEANSTALK COUNTRY

A Children's Play in One Act

THE K-STATE PLAYERS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH
PRESENTED THE PREMIER PRODUCTION

of

THE BEANSTALK COUNTRY

November 13-15, 1975

Directed by Norman J. Fedder

CAST

Jack . . . . . Kevin Hensley

Mother . . . . . Patricia Davies

Freddy Duell, Professor 1 . . . . . Bill Watt

Billy Duell, Professor 2 . . . . . Michael Byington

Johnny Duell, Professor 3 . . . . . Steve Pepoon

Billowendle, Giant . . . . . Bruce Alan Bardwell

Old Woman . . . . . Deborah Dotson

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JACK, a pleasant, slightly over-weight boy of seven or eight.

MOTHER, a gaunt, intense woman in her early forties.

JOHNATHAN AND FREDERICH DUELL, two strong, well-dressed boys around Jack's age, but much larger.

BILLOWENDLE, a tall, happy-faced man of middle-age who glows with joy and contentment, and is dressed in bright colors.

THE OLD WOMAN, a haggard old woman with ratted hair and teeth missing, but very kind eyes.

THE GIANT, a huge, growling, bitter man.

PROFESSORS 1, 2, and 3, three tweedy, academic types who all look alike.

The action takes place in a small English village.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene i	Outside Jack's cottage
Scene ii	The forest
Scene iii	Outside Jack's cottage and The-Land-with-No-Name
Scene iv	The base of the beanstalk
Scene v	The Land-with-No-Name
Scene iv	The front yard of Jack's house, now a great mansion

(The setting is the front of Jack's cottage. It is badly in need of repair. Far in the distance can be seen fine, tall houses nestled in the hills. The MOTHER, dressed in rags, is mending a badly tattered pair of pants. JACK is reclining against a tree, singing a carefree song.)

JACK

If my voice were a golden bowl
I'd fill it up with laughter.
For a dance with spring I'd sell my soul
And care not what comes after,
And care not what comes after.

MOTHER

Johnathan Duell is inside studying right now . . . That boy is always thinking . . . He's going to make his parents proud some day, you can bet on that . . .

(JACK goes on humming.)

He'll probably grow up to manage a bank or be president of a large corporation . . .

(JACK continues to ignore her and hum.)

His mother claims he already has a fine head for business . . .

JACK
(Singing.)

I care not what comes after the sun
As long as it keeps shining.
I'll drink the raindrops every one
While on the dark clouds dining . . .

MOTHER

Yes, indeed, a fine businessman . . . He works so hard. His father tells me they're already saving up to send him to college some day! Imagine that! He's only seven years old, and already planning ahead for college!

JACK
(Continuing to sing.)

. . . While on the dark clouds dining . . .

MOTHER

I wish we had the money to send you, Jack . . . Oh, I'd show these women, every one of them!! . . . No one would be as fine and smart as you, and I could say, "You see that young man there--that famous doctor, or professor, or that great leader or lawyer--that's my son!! You would make lots of money and no one would ever look down on us again!! . . Or ignore us .

JACK

. . . while on the dark clouds dining . . .

MOTHER
That's the worst thing, Jack, being ignored,

(She gets no response.)
being unimportant . . .

JACK
(Sitting up.)
I wish I had a guitar---or maybe a harp.

MOTHER
You haven't been listening to a word I've been saying!!

JACK
It would be wonderful to pick out my own melodies . . .

MOTHER
(At the top of her voice.)
JACK!!

JACK
Yes, mother?

MOTHER
I have been talking to you!! Are you deaf!

JACK
I'm sorry, mother . . . Every time I look at the clouds I start to dream

MOTHER
Dream, dream, dream! That's right, DREAM. That's all you ever do! Take my word for it, you'll never amount to anything, just like your father . . .

JACK
I wish I could sing like father used to . . . What a voice he had!

MOTHER
That's all he had---except a stomach that was never full and an unquenchable thirst for beer!

JACK
Sometimes on a windy night, the pines sound like his humming and he seems so near . . . Some of the people in town claim he died singing; some say it was for the jealousy of his voice that the lightning . . .

MOTHER
Oh, stop it, Jack!! Those are silly old tales you are not to listen to!! He was a lazy, good-for-nothing bore who made everyone laugh and spent every cent we had . . .
(She stops sewing and remembers.)

He sure could dance, though.

JACK

Really! What was it like?

MOTHER

Oh, I don't know, natural and flowing, like water over rocks. He would toss back his big head and . . .

(She gets hold of herself and is flustered.)

There you go again, Jack, getting me to change the subject! Well, not this time young man, not this time!!

(She looks up at the sky.)

It's beginning to get dark early . . . When do you start work at Mr. Bowen's?

(JACK is silent.)

Jack, you did see Mr. Bowen about that job, didn't you?

JACK

Well . . . . not just yet . . .

MOTHER

(Exasperated, throwing her mending down.)

NOT JUST YET!!! I told you to go see him three days ago!

JACK

I know . . . I'm sorry.

MOTHER

Well, why didn't you?

JACK

I started to mother, truly. The first day I walked a ways and lay down to rest in a field. The grass was tall and smelled like burnt sunlight. Everything was so still, except for the choked buzz of the grasshoppers, and the clouds overhead kept wobbling by. Suddenly I felt my heart stop--it did!--it stopped, but the things around me kept moving, softly--I was scared, but happy. It was like I was alive and dead at the same time, and the field and the sky moved in a kind of dance, you know, the way you describe father, and the music of the insects grew louder and louder . . .

MOTHER

Jack!!

JACK

I couldn't move, mother, until twilight came and everything settled down. The same thing happened every day . . .

MOTHER

(Beside herself.)

Oh, Jack, Oh Jack, I don't believe this is happening, I really don't. We have hardly any money left and

(She shudders.)

Winter is coming. You must get a job. It's our only hope!! All the other boys have jobs, even the rich ones who don't need it, but here you are, falling asleep in the grass . . .

JACK
I didn't fall asleep, mother, I . . .

MOTHER
Jack, LISTEN to me--for just once--LISTEN!! The other boys have purpose. They have plans. Oh sure, they dream, too, but their visions are practical ones . . . You've got to grow up, Jack!! . . . I'm sorry for that, I truly am, but you can't stay a child forever.

JACK
Why not? I can't see one good thing about getting older.

MOTHER
(Exasperated.)
Sometimes you make me think I am losing my mind! You can't stay young and that's that; it's a fact of life and it's especially true for you because you're poor. Poor people can't afford the luxury of childhood.

(JACK looks away, sad.)

Winter's coming on, and I'm afraid . . . We've sold everything but the cow, and now I'm afraid we have to sell her, too.

JACK
NO!! Not Betsy, mother. We can't!! She's my best friend.

MOTHER
There, you see!! It's not good for a boy to care so much for an animal.

JACK
We can't sell Betsy! We can't!!

MOTHER
I'm sorry, Jack . . . but there's nothing else we can do. We have to live . . .

JACK
But, mother! . . .

MOTHER
If you had gotten a job like you were supposed to we wouldn't be in this fix. You have no one to blame but yourself . . .

JACK
But Betsy . . .

MOTHER
(Sadly.)
You have to grow up, Jack. The night shadows are slowly shoving out the breezy days. There is a cold touch to twilight now---can't you feel it? Winter is coming, and we will be all alone . . . all alone . . .

(JACK shudders also. There is a pause. MOTHER snaps out of her mood.)

Well, take the cow to market, and sell her for what you can get . . . Then cut through the woods to the Bowen farm. Tell them you've been sick or something and would still like work if they have it . . .

JACK
(Sadly.)
All right, mother.

MOTHER
And no dreaming, Jack. Not anymore. Do you hear!! No more dreaming!!

JACK
All right, mother.

MOTHER
Do you promise?

JACK
I promise.

MOTHER
Don't fail me, Jack. It's our last chance.

JACK
I know, mother. I won't let you down this time. I swear it!! I'll go get Betsy now.

(He turns to go. She calls after him.)

MOTHER
Jack!

JACK
Yes, mother.

MOTHER
You think I'm mean, don't you?

JACK
(Lying.)
No, mother.

MOTHER

Yes, you do. You think I'm mean because I make you work and settle down. It's just that I want you to have security. Get power, Jack, get power. Then you can sleep peacefully at night, then you can be proud when you walk down the street. The only way to get power is to have money. That's what the world is made of. I'd like to think that life was composed of gusty days and cornflowers, but it isn't so. You can't survive on images you think you see in the clouds. Winter has cold breath, Jack; it'll freeze your plans to ice. All I want is to be proud of you . . .

(He is silent.)

I want you to be somebody!

JACK

But I am somebody, mother, I'm Jack.

MOTHER

(With a sigh.)

It's getting late. Best wait until morning before going to market. Go wash up and I'll try to find us something to eat.

(She exits.)

JACK

(To himself.)

She's right; it's starting to get dark. At least now I have a little more time with Betsy . . . If Betsy goes, who will I talk to . . .

(He looks around him, thinking.)

Maybe the stars . . . Even in winter there are stars.

(He sits down, looks up at the sky, and begins to sing.

If my voice were a silver bowl
I'd fill it up with starlight
And catch the new moon when it's full
To make the morning dawn.

(He continues to sing as the lights dim.)

Scene ii

(The forest. A projection could be used, with dark and gloomy colors. There are several bushes scattered about, and two boys are hiding behind the shrubbery. They are JOHNATHAN and FREDERICH DUEL. Both boys are larger than JACK, and both boys are well-dressed.)

JOHNNY

Do you see him yet?

FREDDY

Naw . . . Last time I looked he was just entering the woods, crying over that dumb cow!

JOHNNY

Are you sure he sold it?

FREDDY

Sure, I'm sure! I heard mother telling father they had to, and father even said he might buy it, said it was a good animal or something like that, so I know he has money with him.

JOHNNY
(Laughing.)

Now ole dopey Jack won't have anyone to talk to!

FREDDY

You mean he talks to that cow!

JOHNNY

Sure--just like it was a person or something . . . Of course, who else would talk to old fat Jack!

FREDDY

He's weird all right!! You got enough stones?

(JOHNNY empties his pockets which are full of rocks, as does FREDDY.)

JOHNNY

How's that!

FREDDY

Great!

JOHNNY

It's dark around here . . . He should have been here by now . . . Are you <u>sure</u> he has the money with him!!

FREDDY

Sure I'm sure . . . That was a fat cow and it got a good price . . . He has to come this way . . .

JOHNNY

I know, but it's going to be dark soon . . . Maybe we should just go home and forget it!!

FREDDY

Nothin' doin'! Are you going chicken on me!

JOHNNY

No . . . but I've heard stories about the forest at night . . . Some people say that strange shadows come and . . .

FREDDY

You are goin' chicken!! Run home if you want to. Then all the money will be mine!

JOHNNY

Nothin' doin'! It was my idea!

(JACK'S voice cuts them off.)

JACK'S VOICE

If my voice were a silver bowl
I'd . . .

FREDDY

Quick! Hide!

(They scurry behind a tree. JACK enters the stage. When he reaches the area where they are hiding, they advance upon him, pelting him with stones.)

JACK

And catch the new moon . . .

(A stone hits his head.)

Ouch!

(They advance upon him, sinister.)

JOHNNY AND FREDDY

Fat Jack sleeps with the cows
and dines on corn and figs.
Fat Jack sleeps with the cows
BUT HIS FATHER LOVED THE PIGS!

(They laugh and pelt JACK harder with stones.)

JACK
(With great anger.)

Stop it! Don't you say that about my father! Stop it!!

(The boys become more violent.)

JOHNNY AND FREDDY
His father slept with pigs!! With pigs, with pigs, with pigs!!

JACK
Stop it, I tell you!!

JOHNNY
(Throwing a large stone.)
Your father was so fat, he couldn't even see his toes!!

JACK
One more word . . .

FREDDY
When the wind was right, you could smell him ten miles away!!

(They both laugh, JACK is beside himself with anger. He rushes at them.)

JACK
I'll punch your eyes out!

(One knocks JACK to the ground. The other pelts him with rocks and stones. He is hurt, but unafraid. They circle around him, more and more menacing.)

FREDDY
Where are you off to, Fat Jack!

JACK
(Warding off the stones as best he can.)
Don't you call me that! I'll take your head off . . .

JOHNNY
Fat Jack
Fat Jack
Your cow has gone to waste.
You sold her to the blacksmith's wife
Who turned her into paste.

JACK
Stop it!!

FREDDY
They ground up her bones
and cut off her ears
and turned her into Paste!

JACK
Stop it!!

JOHNNY
That's what they're going to do to your old cow, Jack, hack her up and make paste out of her.

JACK
No!!

(They close in on him. The stage begins to darken, large shadows begin to form.)

JOHNNY
(Growing uneasy.)
Night's coming, we've got to go . . .

FREDDY
Not until we finish what we came for! How much did you get for that old cow, Jack?

(They circle around JACK, like predators around their prey. JACK realizes what they want.)

JOHNNY
You heard my brother! How much, Jack?

JACK
None of your business!

FREDDY
Sure it is, Jack. Your pockets are bulging. Don't you think it's time you shared with your friends!

JACK
You get away. This is my mother's money . . .

(The boys are taunting, ominous.)

FREDDY AND JOHNNY
Fat Jack sleeps with the cows
until they've gone to waste . . .

(JACK tries to run away, they stop him. They almost hiss at him.)

Then he sells them to the blacksmith's wife
Who turns them into paste.

(The shadows grow still deeper.)

FREDDY
We're wasting time! Give me the money, Jack!!

JACK
Never!

FREDDY
I said, give it here!!

(Both boys pounce upon him. They beat him violently, he fights back with all his might, but he is outnumbered.)

FREDDY
(Holding up a purse full of money.)
GOT IT!

(The stage grows darker and several large shadows loom over them.)

JOHNNY
What's that!!

FREDDY
I don't know.

JACK
(Struggling towards them.)
Give it back. That's my mother's money!

(A voice is heard, singing the tune JACK sings, only higher and lighter.)

JOHNNY
Let's get out of here!

FREDDY
Wait for me!

JACK
That melody again. . .
(He runs after the boys.)

Come back. Come back!! That's my mother's . . .

(The humming stops, and the stage darkens still more. The shadows are larger.)

JACK
Get it's dark . . . Got to get home where it's light . . . but I can't go home . . . How can I tell mother the money's gone . . . and Betsy's gone forever . . .

(One large black shadow looms over him, and the shadow itself speaks.)

SHADOW
(In a whisper.)
Jack . . . Jack . . . .

JACK
(Frightened.)
Who's there?

SHADOW

Winter whistles through the pines
warning of his coming.
His step is cold.
His voice is old
With darkness he is running.

JACK

Who's there!

(All is silent now.)

What shall I do. I should have gone straight home . . . If only I hadn't stopped to watch the brook flow . . . The water almost spoke to me when it tripped past the stones, and it was fun to make leaf boats and send them on journeys . . .

SHADOW

Jack . . . Jack . . . the darkness

(THE SHADOWS close in on JACK. Then the clear crisp voice is heard again. Instantly, the shadows disappear and the stage is bathed in soft light.)

BILLOWENDLE'S VOICE

Where the Linden dances down
the rocks of Jacob's Spindle,
there I weave my long night-dreams
They call me Billowendle.

(The voice continues to hum after singing the words.)

JACK
(Incredulous.)

The shadows are gone!! And that song . . . it's the song I always hear at night . . .

(BILLOWENDLE enters the stage. He is tall and thin and of indeterminant age. Everything about him is bright--his clothes, his voice, everything. He radiates happiness and peace. He carries a large bulging sack over his shoulder, and continues to sing in a loud, clear voice.)

BILLOWENDLE

I've been to where the Lorey lilts
across a sun-specked sea,
I've been to where the moon-streaks float
and are forever free.

(JACK steps back; frightened, but trying not to look it.)

BILLOWENDLE
Don't be afraid, Jack. I won't hurt you.

JACK
You know my name!

BILLOWENDLE
I know a lot of things. Are you all right?

JACK
(Suspiciously.)
Yes, . . . the shadows left at the sound of your voice.

BILLOWENDLE
You needn't be afraid. Those bullies are as fragile as wind and as frightening as people's memories! They only came because they sensed your fear. Had you ignored them they would have left on their own.

JACK
How come you know so much about everything?

BILLOWENDLE
I only understand what is important for me to try to understand, Jack. Now, why did you sell old Betsy?

JACK
(Taken aback.)
Well, I had no choice. My mother made me.

BILLOWENDLE
You should have talked her out of it.

JACK
Never! She would have started crying.

BILLOWENDLE
(Laughing.)
So you can't stand a woman's tears, eh, Jack!

JACK
No, . . . it's just that she starts crying right before she starts screaming, and she starts screaming right before she starts hitting! When the tears come, look out!!

BILLOWENDLE
Sounds like frost-panic.

JACK
What?

BILLOWENDLE
Frost panic--an unreasonable fear of the first frost.

JACK
Everyone hates Winter. It's long and cold, and nothing grows.

BILLOWENDLE
That's where you're wrong, Jack. Winter is stasis. The ice puts the warm earth to bed so it can sleep before the wildness of spring. Winter is soft and quiet, and wise . . .

JACK
You'll never convince my mother of that. Now we have nothing! We'll starve, and it's all my fault.

BILLOWENDLE
You haven't exactly managed things as well as you could have, but selling Betsy was no answer. She was very special.

JACK
I know. I should have gotten a job . . . It's just that I look at all the people around me who work all the time. None of them ever smile . . . From morning til night, all their lives, they're busy, and they never do what they want to do . . .

BILLOWENDLE
Many people mistake the quality of their work for the quantity. It's important to put things in perspective.

JACK
What does that mean?

BILLOWENDLE
You're a bit of an all-or-nothing person, Jack . . . You should be more like my friends, the Grenulians.

JACK
The Who!

BILLOWENDLE
The Grenulians.

JACK
I never heard of them!!

BILLOWENDLE
Few people have. They're only two inches high and live along the banks of the Linden where it flows down to meet the Lorey and then on to the sea. The Grenulians work just long enough to provide simply for themselves. The rest of the time they sing and laugh. They're a hardy people. Their greatest wealth is the babble the brook makes in spring . . . It's a matter of balance. If you had taken that job with Mr. Bowen, you would still have Betsy.

JACK
(Feeling guilty.)
I don't want to talk about Betsy anymore. She is just a silly old animal. What's so bad about giving up an old cow..

BILLOWENDLE
You have to learn what things in life must never be sold, Jack.

JACK
Good grief!! It's not as if I committed some great crime or something!!

(Pause.)

BILLOWENDLE
It all begins with a cow, Jack.

(JACK hangs his head. He is silent.)

JACK
What do I do now! We have nothing left. My mother and I will starve.

BILLOWENDLE
It's not as bad as all that . . . I wouldn't want you to stop singing, Jack. I can help you.

JACK
How?

BILLOWENDLE
I can give you something in place of the money you lost, something really valuable.

JACK
Really!!

BILLOWENDLE
Yes, but I don't know if I should or not. I don't know if you're ready for such a gift. You might misuse it.

JACK
Oh please, please help me!! I promise I'll pay you back as soon as I can!

BILLOWENDLE
You could never repay me for what I give you . . . except by unselfishly giving to someone else some day . . . and recognizing what is truly important in life . . .

JACK
I already know that . . . my mother told me . . . money and power.

BILLOWENDLE
That's only your mother's answer. What's yours?

(JACK is silent.)

The answer is different for everyone. You must seek your own questions, Jack.

(JACK is distressed. BILLOWENDLE reaches over and gently strokes his hair.)

There now, Jack. You may not be ready, but I will help you because I must. I couldn't let you go hungry, you mean too much to me . . .

(JACK looks up, puzzled.)

That's right. It's my worst failure. I'm partial to children who have their heads in the clouds . . .

(BILLOWENDLE'S voice takes on a note of sadness.)

I suppose I'm just partial to children, period . . .

JACK

Please!!

BILLOWENDLE

All right, Jack . . . but you must promise me that the only coins you will go after are those hidden in people's hearts.

JACK

Huh!

BILLOWENDLE

Never mind. Here . . .

(He reaches into his knapsack and brings out four, golden, shimmering seeds.)

JACK

Wow! They're beautiful, but what are they?

BILLOWENDLE

They're growth, Jack. They will take you to places you have never heard of--tall lands where you will be smaller than a fly, places of great sadness--places of great terror . . .

JACK

Wow!

BILLOWENDLE

You mustn't lose them. They're seeds. Plant them beneath your window at night and they will carry you up beyond the sky . . .

JACK

BEYOND THE SKY!!

BILLOWENDLE

(Sadly.)

Yes . . . there is great danger in such places. Be careful, child.

(They look at each other strangely.)

Well . . . I really have to go now. I promised the Grenulians a visit, and I'm already late.

JACK
How do you talk to people two inches high?

BILLOWENDLE
People are people . . .

JACK
Will the shadows return?

BILLOWENDLE
I doubt it. But if it will make you feel better, we can walk together out of the woods.

(He runs his hands through JACK'S hair. They smile at each other, like a bond between them. BILLOWENDLE sings and JACK joins in. JACK admiringly imitates BILLOWENDLE'S walk.)

BILLOWENDLE AND JACK
Where the Linden dances down
the rocks of Jacob's Spindle,
there I weave my long night-dreams,
They call me Billowendle.

I've been to where the Lorey lilts
across a sun-specked sea,
I've been to where the moon-streaks float
and are forever free
and are forever free
forever free . . .

(Their voices trail off and the lights fade. There is a pause, then the lights come up to reveal the MOTHER and JACK approaching her. BILLOWENDLE is gone, but JACK does not immediately recognize this. He is at the edge of the forest.)

JACK
(Into space, but he thinks BILLOWENDLE is behind him.)
We're out of the woods. You were right, there's nothing to be afraid of.

MOTHER
(Advancing towards him.)
JACK!! Where have you been!

JACK
Just talking to Mr. Billowendle here . . .

(He looks around, sees BILLOWENDLE is gone, is at first perplexed, then afraid of his MOTHER.)

MOTHER

Oh, Jack, not another one of your imaginary friends again! Where have you been!! I was so worried!!

(He says nothing. She speaks anxiously.)

Did you sell Betsy?

JACK

Well . . . . . yes . . .

(MOTHER claps her hands in relief. Then under his breath.)

sort of . . .

MOTHER

The heavens be praised!! How much did you get!

JACK

Well . . .

MOTHER

Naturally you wouldn't count it . . . probably took the first bid you got . . . well, never mind, anything's better than nothing. Give it here . . .

(JACK reaches into his pocket, pulls out the beans, is afraid to show them to her.)

JACK

Mother, I didn't . . . get the . . . money.

MOTHER

(Slowly, unable to let the horror slip in.)

Didn't get . . . what do you mean you didn't get the money!

JACK

(Slowly.)

Well, I <u>had</u> the money at first, but

(Now spelling it all out quickly as his MOTHER'S anger mounts.)

Freddy and Johnny Duell jumped me in the woods, they started saying things about father and then, well, look at my black eye, it really hurts, I mean

(MOTHER begins to panic.)

they fought me and took the money.

MOTHER
(Nearly hysterical.)
TOOK THE MONEY!! You're lying! You must be lying! Their family is wealthy, what need have they for money . . . YOU LOST IT!! That's what happened! You lose everything! We're going to starve!! STARVE!! And no one will help us, NO ONE!! We've lost everything; Winter's on its way, WINTER!!!

JACK
There's nothing wrong with winter . . .

MOTHER
What!

JACK
That's what Mr. Billowendle says . . .

MOTHER
Jack, you're the death of me, the death of us all! . . .

JACK
No, I'm not, mother. We'll be all right. Mr. Billowendle gave me something to help us . . . something more valuable than the money I got for Betsy . . .

MOTHER
(A shred of hope amid the panic.)
You mean you did meet someone . . . What! What did he give you!

JACK
(Handing her the beans.)
Here.

MOTHER
(Staring at them, incredulous.)
Why, these are nothing but . . .

JACK
Aren't they beautiful. They look like they're real gold . . .

MOTHER
Gold . . . why, they're nothing but plain, old, ordinary . . .

JACK
Mr. Billowendle says we must be careful how we use them . . .

(The MOTHER'S panic returns, this time with mounting anger that grows and grows with each moment.)

MOTHER
Oh yes, careful . . .

JACK
I know they're valuable, but he didn't have time to tell me more. He was on his way to visit the Grenulians . . .

MOTHER
(In dazed anger; she can't believe this.)
The Who!!

JACK
The Grenulians . . . they're little people two inches high who live next to babbling brooks and . . .

MOTHER
Oh, of course, two inches high, with blue and orange skin, no doubt!

JACK
Gee, I don't know. Mr. Billowendle didn't say anything about that.

MOTHER
(Losing control, smashing everything in sight.)
Oh, of course not!! Oh heavens, we're lost . . . LOST!! And you go on about your imaginary Mr. Bellowbendle . . .

JACK
Billowendle.

MOTHER
I DON'T CARE WHAT HIS NAME IS!! IF YOU WEREN'T MY OWN CHILD I'D . . .

JACK
Please, mother, Mr. Billowendle says . . .

MOTHER
If I hear you say that <u>one more time</u>!!! . . .

(He backs away . . . she collapses.)

Lost! Lost . . . your good-for-nothing father destroyed most of it, and now you . . .
(She breaks down.)

and winter almost upon us . . . no food, no milk . . . no clothes, nothing, nothing, nothing . . .

JACK
Please, mother, it will all be all right.

MOTHER
Get to your room, Jack. Go on, go inside . . . all over . . . and you have the nerve to hand me four beans, four lousy, yellow beans!!

(She throws them to the earth.)

JACK
(Horrified.)
Mother, don't!! We have to plant them carefully . . .

(She crushes them into the ground with her foot. JACK is doubly horrified.)

MOTHER
That's what I think of your beans; now get inside and go to your room . . . . while you still have a room to go to.

JACK
(Going to his MOTHER, trying to put his arms around her.)
Mother, I'm sorry . . .
(She pulls away from him.)
You'll see, mother, have faith . . .

(She refuses to even look at him.)
Maybe . . .
(Barely audible.)
Mr. Bowen . . . will still give me a job . .

(He slowly backs off, she cries and does not respond to him, which frightens him.)
Maybe . . . in the morning . . .

(She continues to cry. Faintly, in the distance, BILLOWENDLE'S voice is heard, but she does not respond. JACK runs off stage. The lights go out.)

Scene iii

(The front of JACK'S house again, only this time a large beanstalk appears, and it can be easily climbed by a boy JACK'S size. The MOTHER'S VOICE can be heard, her tone excited.)

MOTHER'S VOICE
Come out, Jack, you must see it for yourself . . . Just the leaves themselves must be ten feet wide or more! And the stem!! Why, it disappears clear up into the clouds!! Hurry up, Jack! Hurry!

(They appear on stage. JACK is pulling on his pants and wiping the sleep from his eyes. He is still half asleep.)

JACK

. . . I had the nicest dream . . . I was way up among the stars, singing and laughing with Mr. Billowendle . . .

MOTHER

Jack, look!!

JACK

. . . shouldn't have sold Betsy . . . should never sell the things you love . . . that's what Mr. Billowendle said . . . nice dream, mother . . . way up in the sky . . .

MOTHER
(Shaking him.)

Wake up and look!! I'm afraid!

(JACK snaps to, aroused by the panic in her voice. He stares at the plant in wonderment.)

JACK

Wow!! Why didn't you say something about this sooner, mother?

MOTHER
(Exasperated.)

Goodness knows I've been trying, Jack!! There's one thing you are diligent about, and that's sleeping! What do you suppose it is!

JACK

A giant bean-stalk, of course! Oh, I knew there was something special about those seeds!!

MOTHER

What seeds!!

JACK

The golden ones Mr. Billowendle gave me! You remember!!

MOTHER

You mean those silly things you claimed were payment for the cow!

JACK

Yes. And there's obviously nothing silly about them, mother.

MOTHER

But I threw them away.

JACK

On the ground! You stamped them into the ground and they grew on their own!

MOTHER

Oh, I don't know, Jack . . .

JACK
Overnight yet, on their own . . . . . Mother, Mother, it's a miracle . . . a real miracle!!

MOTHER
I don't know . . .

JACK
Think how beautiful it will be when the snow falls on the leaves and icicles form!!

MOTHER
There you go again, impractical as ever!! It's a terrible eyesore . . . no telling what the neighbors will say . . .

JACK
They'll be amazed. I'm sure there's not another beanstalk like it in the entire history of the world.

MOTHER
(A light dawns.)
You think not?

JACK
Of course! You should be proud . . .

MOTHER
If what you say is true, I bet a lot of scientists would be glad to get their hands on it!

JACK
I guess so, mother . . . I wonder where it goes!

MOTHER
Maybe we could charge admission . . . become rich and famous . . .

JACK
Mr. Billowendle said it would take me to strange places . . .

MOTHER
I'm going to telegraph the university and have them send someone over . . .

JACK
I'm going to climb it . . . I'll find some treasure up there, I know it!!

MOTHER
Our names will be in all the papers. . .

JACK
I'll be back soon, mother.
(He begins to climb the beanstalk.)

MOTHER
Stop!! You're not going to climb that thing, are you!!

JACK
Of course . . . I'll be back soon.

MOTHER
But I need your help down here . . . and you might damage the leaves before anyone can see them!!

JACK
I'll bring us back another miracle, mother. You'll never have to worry about starving again. Mr. Billowendle promised. . . .

MOTHER
Yes, Mr. Billowendle . . . odd name . . .

(JACK climbs a little further. The MOTHER calls after him.)

MOTHER
Jack . . . if you see your friend again, ask him if he'll give you some more seeds . . .

(She returns to inspecting the bottom of the stalk. JACK climbs still higher, singing all the time. The lights fade out at the end of his song.)

JACK
(Singing.)
If my voice were a china bowl
I'd fill it up with flowers
My joy would sprinkle all the world
With tender little showers.

(The lights come up upon a grey, dank, dead land. The same beanstalk is seen, extending still higher, but ending at the ceiling. A projection of a castle surrounded by fog appears. In front of the castle sits an old woman. She is very gaunt and ugly. She has several teeth missing, her hair is matted, her clothes torn and patched. She would be frightening, but all her movements and features portray an inner kindness. The light comes up first on her, and we hear JACK humming in the distance. The sound startles and frightens her. She moves toward the vine and sees JACK, although he doesn't immediately see her.

JACK
. . . my joy would sprinkle . . .

(He looks at the bleakness around him.)

Wow!!

OLD WOMAN
A little boy . . . I can't believe it . . . a true miracle . . . a little boy . . .

JACK
(Seeing her, recoiling, backing away.)
Leave me alone . . .

OLD WOMAN
Dear child . . .

JACK
Get away from me!! . . .

OLD WOMAN
Please, don't be afraid . . . please don't leave . . .

(She gropes for him.)

Are you a vision . . . oh, my eyes. . . . . they're getting worse . . .

OLD WOMAN
(Grabbing him, he struggles.)
You <u>are</u> real!!

JACK
Let me go!!

OLD WOMAN
And I had stopped believing . . .

JACK
Let me go, I tell you!!

OLD WOMAN
Please don't be frightened; I won't hurt you . . .

JACK
Then take your hands off me.

OLD WOMAN
(Letting him go.)
All right . . . but please stay. It's been so long since I've seen another living person . . . besides . . . my . . . husband . . .

JACK
(Brushing off his clothes.)
Are you and your husband the only people who live up here?

OLD WOMAN
As far as I can tell. Although with all the grey and fog, it's hard to be sure.

JACK
Do you mean it's always like this!! Doesn't the sun shine in the daytime? Aren't there stars at night?

OLD WOMAN
(Sadly.)
Not any more . . . not here . . . just constant shadowed clouds without rain.

JACK
(Shivering.)
How did you and your husband get here?

OLD WOMAN
The road just . . . ended . . . over there the rainbow thaws out into little puddles . . .

JACK
Really!! Is there gold there like everyone says!!

OLD WOMAN
Used to be . . . but my husband took it long ago. . . .

JACK
(Disappointed.)
Oh . . . I was hoping maybe I could take it home to my mother.

OLD WOMAN
If I had you for a son, you would be my gold . . .

(She senses that she is making JACK uneasy, so she changes her tone.)

Well, what I would like to know is, how did <u>you</u> get here!

JACK
I climbed that beanstalk over there. It was easy.

OLD WOMAN
Yes . . . how strange . . . It wasn't there before.

JACK
I know. It grew from the seeds Mr. Billowendle gave me.

OLD WOMAN
(Suddenly brightening.)
Billowendle! Billowendle gave them to you!! Of course! He sent you to me!! Oh, what a voice he had . . . And he could dance . . . always happy.

JACK
Then you know him!!

OLD WOMAN
(The sadness returning.)
Knew him . . . . once . . . in a far-off time . . . in another world . . . The older you get the more your past seems like a strange book you read . . . stories that happened to someone else, not you . . .

JACK
(Relaxing.)
I'm glad he's a friend of yours. He's a very powerful man.

OLD WOMAN
Yes, I know. He gave us the magic harp for a wedding present.

JACK
Magic harp? Where?

OLD WOMAN
Oh, nothing . . . nothing . . . My, what a fine looking boy you are!

JACK
(Embarrassed.)
My mother says I'm lazy.

OLD WOMAN
Where does your mother live?

JACK
Way down there . . .

OLD WOMAN
She must be very happy with you to keep her company . . .

JACK
What's this place called?

OLD WOMAN
It has no name . . .

JACK
Everything has a name.

OLD WOMAN
Not this land . . . it's too final.

JACK
I don't understand.

OLD WOMAN
(Crooning sadly.)
Here the wind is gone----only it's howl remains.
Here the sea dries up----only the sand remains.
Here the lightning sparks out----only the thunder remains.
Here the poor rain dies----only its beating remains.

(She pauses, looks at him for a moment. She goes on, almost in despair.)

Here even sorrow is gone----only the crying remains.
Here the children have left-------only the dying remains,
In the land-with-no-name
the land-with-no-name.

JACK
(After a pause.)
Everything seems so sad.

OLD WOMAN
This was not meant to be a happy place.

JACK
My mother is unhappy, too.

OLD WOMAN
Why?

JACK
We have no money and winter is coming!

OLD WOMAN
(Ironically.)
She's unhappy because she has no money!!

JACK
Yes.

OLD WOMAN
Customs are strange. Here we have lots of money. I never could see much use in it!

JACK
Really!! You have lots of money! Where?

OLD WOMAN
In back of the castle, we have two entire houses full of it . . . my husband spends his days counting it . . . only comes up to the castle to eat and drink . . .
(She shivers when she thinks of her husband.)

JACK
A whole house full of money . . .

OLD WOMAN
. . . and jewels, too . . . I wore them, once . . . rows and rows of pearls I had . . .

JACK
(Interrupting her.)
With all that money, do you suppose you could let me have some . . . I mean, you would never miss a handful of coins, and my mother is getting desperate.

OLD WOMAN
(Horrified.)
Oh, my, Jack, NO! If it were mine I'd give it all to you, but that money belongs to my husband,
(She trembles when she speaks his name.)

and he is a terrible man, Jack, you have no idea. He's a crazed storm sweeping up everything in his path. He'd destroy us and scatter our bodies across the heavens if we tried such a thing!!

JACK
Is he really all that bad?

OLD WOMAN
Such a word cannot even begin to describe him!

JACK
But he wouldn't have to know!

OLD WOMAN
Oh, but he would!! He knows everything when it comes to money . . . He's off hunting now, but he'll be back. He's so mean, especially if things aren't exactly as he likes them!

JACK
If he's so terrible, why did you marry him?

OLD WOMAN
(Sadly.)
Oh . . .

JACK
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked that question. I asked mother that once, when she was going on about how awful father was, and she got very mad . . .

OLD WOMAN
I'm not angry, child. People marry for many reasons. My husband wasn't always like he is now. Once he was handsome, a huge, smiling mountain. And I was beautiful.
(JACK looks at her incredulously.)

Oh, I know it's hard to believe now, but once I had long smooth hair and soft skin. We lived in a wonderful palace where everything was silver--even the leaves on the trees. When the wind blew through them they rang softly like little glass bells . . . Everywhere there was music . . .

JACK

What happened?

OLD WOMAN

I got married. You should have seen the wedding!! Your friend, Billowendle, was there.

JACK

Then you knew him well!

OLD WOMAN

I loved him!!

JACK

You . . . . !

OLD WOMAN

My father broke it up . . . said Billowendle was unsubstantial, too much of a dreamer. I tried to explain that he had such magic . . . but poppa didn't understand until too late . . .

JACK

What happened to all the silver trees?

OLD WOMAN

My husband sold them.

JACK

What!

OLD WOMAN

All the silver--he picked the leaves off the trees and dug up the earth and when there was nothing left, he moved on. He sold everything he could lay his hands on until the ground was barren; all the people were sad. They left their homes and moved on.

JACK

What about your father?

OLD WOMAN

He looked out on his adored trees standing naked against the sky, and that was it . . . . . I've heard people say you can't die of a broken heart, but that's not so . . .

JACK

How could your husband be so horrible!

OLD WOMAN

Evil is an avalanche, Jack. One stone trips, and before you know it, the whole mountain is upon you.

JACK

(Pondering her words.)

What did your children do?

OLD WOMAN
(Despairing.)
We . . . never . . . had . . . any . . . children . . . We tried so hard . . . That's when my husband started to change, began thinking the whole world was out to steal his gold . . . He's frightened all our old friends away . . . If we had had a little boy like you, I know things would have been different.

JACK
I don't see how you stand it!!

OLD WOMAN
What choice do I have! I'm ugly and old. This is the absolute end of the line, Jack.

JACK
I'm sorry.

OLD WOMAN
(Touched.)
Well, I do have two pleasures. They are my husband's greatest treasures, but they give me the most joy. If you promise not to tell anyone about them ever, I'll show them to you.

JACK
Okay.

OLD WOMAN
(Leading him to a large black box.)
Here we are . . .
(She reaches in and pulls out a large hen.)

Isn't she lovely. Until you came, she was all I had to talk to.

JACK
Why, it's just a hen . . .

OLD WOMAN
Oh, no . . . not an ordinary hen . . . look!

(She reaches under the hen and pulls out an egg of pure gold.)

JACK
Wow!! Is it real?

OLD WOMAN
Solid gold!! Aren't they lovely? My husband stores all the eggs below the castle . . . soon we'll run out of space . . . She's my only friend.

JACK
If you owned a hen like that, you would never be poor. Every day you'd have gold, for the rest of your life . . .

OLD WOMAN
(Patting the hen.)
She really understands me . . .

JACK
(To himself.)
If my mother saw that hen . . .
(The sound of a harp playing the BILLOWENDLE song is heard.)

OLD WOMAN
Listen . . . do you hear that? It's the harp.

(She goes to the box and pulls out a golden harp.)

It plays music all by itself . . . the hen gives me friendship, but the harp, ah, the harp gives me beauty. Without them, I would despair.

JACK
I don't suppose you'd ever give them up . . .

OLD WOMAN
Goodness, NO!

JACK
Well, I have to be going . . .

OLD WOMAN
(Desperate.)
No!! Wait!! I'll fix you a wonderful supper. We have all kinds of food . . . and I'll make you some new clothes. I'll hide you from my husband, and you can stay here . . .

JACK
I can't. I belong down there, with my mother . . .

OLD WOMAN
Yes, of course . . . what was I thinking of . . . But look, you can still stay and eat dinner; then, every time my husband is gone, I'll shake the vine for you down there, and you can climb up and visit me from time to time. Do you think your mother will let you do that?

JACK
I don't know . . . Sure, I guess so.

OLD WOMAN
Oh, Jack, that would be so lovely. I won't be lonely any more, and you can play with the harp and the hen while you're here.

JACK
(Stroking the hen.)
I would love that.

OLD WOMAN

I'll go inside and fix us some dinner. My husband will no doubt beat me for it, but . . . I'll give you a small sack of his coins to take to your mother.

JACK

Thank you! Oh, thank you!! I knew this would be a good place. Now we will eat all winter.

OLD WOMAN

There is quite a sum in there, but you must promise me that you will never tell anyone below about the wealth of this place! If you do, many people will come here to steal; my husband will become more vicious and there will be much killing. Do you understand how it is?

JACK

Yes, and I promise never to say a word.

OLD WOMAN

Good . . . Now come inside . . . We will have many secret visits and . . .

(Just then a booming voice is heard. It is violent and cynical, thus horrible.)

GIANT'S VOICE

Fee, fie, fo, fum
I smell the blood of an Englishman,
Be he here, or be he there
Such a scent brings on despair.

OLD WOMAN

It's my husband! He's early. Quick, put away the hen and the harp!

(They stuff them quickly into the black box.)

JACK
(Heading for the beanstalk.)

I'll see you again!

(The voice is heard, louder.)

OLD WOMAN

Stop! He's near the door, there isn't time. Quick, hide here.

(She gestures towards the box with the hen and the harp.)

Be careful of your thoughts. If you threaten him, they will betray you, otherwise you are safe.

(JACK gets in the box. The GIANT enters. He is, of course, larger than the others. He has the gait of an animal, but carries with him a sense of cunning, of a warrior gone soft with time.)

GIANT
An Englishman will steal your bread
And sleep upon your new-made bed,
He's likely to cut off your head,
Of Englishmen, beware!!

OLD WOMAN
You're early, husband . . .

GIANT
Way across the swamp, I smelled it . . . And I thought the land had been cleared of vermin long ago!! WHO ARE YOU HIDING!!

OLD WOMAN
(Trembling.)
No one . . .

GIANT
I don't believe you . . . There's someone here. I know!

OLD WOMAN
What you smell is simply dinner cooking. Since you're early, it will still be a while. Sit down over here and I'll get your harp.

(She seats him far from the box. He looks around warily. It is obvious he doesn't trust her. She goes to the box, takes out the harp, and whispers to JACK.)

OLD WOMAN
He'll eat and the harp will lull him to sleep. Then you can escape.

GIANT
I hear you talking, old woman. There's someone here!

OLD WOMAN
(Advancing, with the harp.)
Nonsense. I was only speaking to the harp. Perhaps some music before supper will soothe you.

(He takes the harp. It begins to play the BILLOWENDLE theme.)

GIANT
Funny . . . It's never played that before! . . . . . Something is wrong here . . . I smell it . . .

(The GIANT grows sleepy, and begins to snore. JACK appears out of the box. He is holding the hen, looking at it long and hard, on the threshold of a decision.)

OLD WOMAN
Now, Jack, HURRY!!

(JACK still clutches the hen as he emerges from the box and tiptoes towards the beanstalk.)

You can put the hen down now. Promise you'll come back. I'll miss you so much, Jack!

JACK

I promise.

OLD WOMAN

You can give the hen to me, Jack.

(JACK reaches his decision, and with a sudden leap, he jumps toward the beanstalk, with the hen in his arms.)

OLD WOMAN

No, Jack, NO!! Not the hen!! Please, Jack, NO!

(Just then the hen lets out an awful screech, waking the GIANT.)

GIANT

AHA!! A boy!! And a hen-stealer, too!

(He brandishes a huge knife and lunges at JACK.)

Fee, fie, fo fum
I smell awful things to come
When the knife-blood turns to lead
Its point shall paint the long hall red!

(He advances upon JACK, and would have killed him, but the OLD WOMAN stands in the GIANT'S way, protecting JACK.)

OLD WOMAN

Run, Jack, RUN!!

(JACK runs towards the beanstalk, the OLD WOMAN and the GIANT struggle. He knocks her down, but JACK is gone, The OLD WOMAN, prone on the floor, is crying.)

GIANT

He got away . . . with my hen, yet!!

(He looks long and hard at the OLD WOMAN.)

FOOL!!! You let him use you! They'll steal you blind, these ENGLISHMEN!! You are even worse than a fool, you are an <u>old</u> fool!! Now get up and get my supper!!

(She rises sadly. He taunts her.)

Who will you talk to now, eh! Even the wind up here is empty!! I hope you're satisfied!

OLD WOMAN
(Motioning to him.)

Your supper is warm now.

GIANT

I'll give you one warning . . . Your friend has what he wants, and no doubt won't be back . . . but if he does come back, I'll smash him to bits and use his powdery bones for flour, do you hear!!

OLD WOMAN

Yes . . . yes . . . I hear.

(She goes to the beanstalk, the lights begin to dim. She sits down and cries softly.)

OLD WOMAN

Oh, Jack, you must come back, somehow, you MUST . . . Why did you take the hen? . . . she was all I had. Without her, and the memory of you, I am the useless fog . . . all my past exhaling away . . . the ghost of a storm, Jack . . . the ghost of a storm . . .

(She mourns softly. The lights go out.)

Scene iv

(The base of the beanstalk. The MOTHER and PROFESSORS 1, 2, and 3 are examining the beanstalk. The MOTHER is well-dressed. The PROFESSORS are tweedy-looking and bespectacled.)

PROF 1
(Examining his slide rule.)

. . . humm . . . The base is equal to 12.438 sq. ft. . . . remarkable . . nothing like it anywhere . . .

PROF 2
(Conferring with PROF 1.)

. . . yes . . . now here the log shows that 1.4056 to the minus 10 over pi equals . . .

PROF 3

The important thing is the phylum . . . We must put it in the right cage-gory . . .

PROF 1

I think all our computations are incorrect . . . Perhaps we should go over it all again.

(The MOTHER is pacing back and forth, looking for JACK to come down.)

Ah, Madame . . . Madame . . . Could you tell us one more time exactly what happened . . .

MOTHER

Please . . . I've told you all I know!!

PROF 1

But there must be a logical

PROF 2

mathematical

PROF 3

explanation

PROF 1

As to how it grew!

PROF 2

There are rules

PROF 3

laws

PROF 1

Reasons . . . Now, start from the beginning . . .

MOTHER

All right . . . Jack . . .

PROF 2

Came home

MOTHER

. . . came ho . . .

PROF 1

With seeds . . .

MOTHER

Yes . . . seeds . . .

PROF 3

But not ordinary seeds . . .

MOTHER

No. Gold seeds

PROF 2
(Blowing up, losing control.)
No!!! . . . NO, NO, NO!!! They couldn't have been gold . . . there's nothing anywhere on gold seeds . . .

PROF 1
Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear . . .

PROF 3
Now gentlemen, control yourselves. The answer is quite simple. It's just that at the moment it's eluding us . . .

PROF 2
(Calming down.)
Yes. Of course . . . For a moment I thought we were nearing chaos . . . but no . . . we can measure and divide and . . . FIND THE FORMULA!!

PROF 1
(With rhythm.)
All aberrations

PROF 2
are explainable

PROF 3
Their roots are

PROF 1
mathematical.

PROF 2
Oh, the roots are

PROF 3
mathematical

PROF 1
(With triumph.)
So all aberrations are explainable!!

(A huge rumbling is heard, like violent thunder. JACK can be seen on the top of the beanstalk. He carries the hen.)

PROF 2
(Trembling.)
What's that!!

PROF 3
(Stating a hypothesis, also trembling.)
Thunder?

PROF 1
Without rain? Or lightning???

GIANT'S VOICE
FEE FIE FO FUM (More rumbling.)

PROF 2
Fee fie fo fum . . .

PROF 3
Oh dear, oh dear . . . what language is that!!!

PROF 1
Not of Indo-European origin . . .

(The rumbling is heard again, then disappears. JACK descends. The hen lays a golden egg which drops on the head of PROF 2, knocking him out.)

PROF 3
(Going to PROF 2, picking up the egg, not looking to see if PROF 2 is hurt.)
My word!!

PROF 1
It's an egg . . . most extraordinary . . .

JACK
(Reaching the bottom.)
A golden egg! This hen lays at least one each day!

MOTHER
Oh, Jack, let me see!

PROF 1
NO, NO, NO, NO!! Hens do not lay golden eggs . . .

PROF 3
Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear . . . chaos again . . .

PROF 1
We must test it . . . you can't tell pure gold by the feel . . .

(MOTHER pulls JACK aside and whispers.)

MOTHER
Jack, these gentlemen are from the university. The plant has made us rich and famous . . . It's so wonderful. I was beginning to think you were lost forever up there . . . and now . . . oh, dear little Jack, you bring us this hen . . . Now, be polite, make a good impression . . .

(To PROFS 1 and 3; PROF 2 begins to come to.)

Gentlemen, this is my son, Jack . . .

PROF 1
Yes, now to get to the point . . .

PROF 3
The egg . . .

PROF 1
No! The point first, then the egg. Order, dear sir, ORDER!

PROF 3
Yes, of course . . .

PROF 1
Now, Jack, how did you first come by the seeds?

JACK
Well, Mr. Billowendle . . .

PROF 3
Billowendle! Would you spell that please?

PROF 2
(Still a little dazed.)
Definitely not of Indo-European origin . . .

PROF 1
Billowendle . . . don't recall the name . . . Is he a Botanist, Biologist, neuro-biologist, Neuro-physiologist . . .

JACK
He's just an old man who sings . . .

PROF 2
Oh, dear, oh, dear . . . another aberration . . .

PROF 3
And nothing mathematical . . .

PROF 1
The solution isn't practical

PROF 2
The academic world will demand that we explain

PROF 3
(Angry.)
. . . a silly old man with a very strange name!!

PROF 1
(Running in circles.)
Chaos, chaos, chaos, chaos . . .

(JACK pulls MOTHER aside.)

JACK
Mother, are you positive we're rich?

MOTHER
Of course. Look at my clothes, our house . . .

JACK
Then I must return the hen, immediately!

MOTHER
Certainly not!

JACK
But, mother, it's all the old woman has!

MOTHER
What old woman!

JACK
The one who lives up there! Without the hen, she's all alone except for the golden harp . . .

MOTHER
Golden harp?

JACK
Nothing . . .

MOTHER
Don't hold out on me, Jack! What golden harp!!

JACK
Oh, she just has this old harp that plays music by itself . . .

MOTHER
Oh, Jack, think what it would be like if we had THAT!!

JACK
No, mother. We have enough. I'm going to take the hen back, now.

MOTHER
(Snatching the hen.)
Oh, no you don't! Give it here!!

(JACK reaches back for the hen . . . the BILLOWENDLE song is heard faintly from above.)

PROF 1
(Running to them.)
Did you feel that!!

JACK
(Distraught.)

What?

PROF 1

Rain!

(They all make motions of getting wet.)

PROF 2

But the sun is shining!!

PROF 1

Most strange! Another aberration . . . no explanation!

JACK

It's the old woman crying. Her tears are falling to earth. See, the leaves are trembling, they know it's her! Mother, I've got to take that hen back!

MOTHER

NO!

PROF 1

Old woman crying!

PROF 2

Superstitious nonsense!! Let's measure the drops as they come down. Then we have something concrete!

(They walk around with rulers, trying to catch raindrops on their rulers and measure them.)

MOTHER

Jack, you are going back up there!

JACK

Oh, thank you, mother! Now give me the hen, quickly!

MOTHER

No, Jack. You are going alone.

JACK

But . . .

MOTHER

And you are coming back with the harp you spoke of!!

JACK

NO! I couldn't. I won't!

(The three PROFS begin to take samples of the beanstalk. They begin a chant which sounds like a high school cheer and they continue to chant until the end of the scene.)

3 PROFS
(In unison.)

Categorize
Equalize
Label

MOTHER
(Vicious.)

Oh, yes, you will, Jack. I'm your mother, and you must do as I tell you. With the stalk and the hen, we may be wealthy, but with that harp, we will be immortal. Finally, we have luck, and time is running out . . . No get up there, immediately!!

JACK

But . . .

MOTHER

Jack, either you go up there and get that harp, or don't bother coming back here, ever!!

JACK

But, mother, this is my home!

MOTHER

Not if you disobey me!

JACK
(Hurt and afraid by her statement.)

All right, mother. It's raining harder.

MOTHER
(Shivering.)

The rain is getting colder . . . Winter is coming! Hurry, Jack, HURRY!

(JACK climbs higher. It rains harder. The lights dim out.)

Scene v

(The Land-With-No-Name. The OLD WOMAN sits alone by the beanstalk, crying. The harp beside her plays the BILLOWENDLE theme.)

OLD WOMAN
(Seeing JACK, who has reached the top of the beanstalk.)
JACK!!

JACK
(Ashamed.)
Yes. It's me.

OLD WOMAN
(Joyously going to him.)
You've come back; you've come back!!!

JACK
Yes . . .

OLD WOMAN
(Taking him in her arms.)
Oh, I'm so glad . . . so glad . . .

JACK
How can you say that? I stole from you!

OLD WOMAN
Yes. That was a cruel thing to do, Jack.

JACK
I know. I'm sorry . . . You see, I thought my mother needed . . .

OLD WOMAN
Never mind. It doesn't matter now. You're here; that's what matters. You've come back!!

JACK
Don't you hate me!

OLD WOMAN
Heavens, no. Life is too short. It was mean for you to take my hen, but we don't stop loving people because they sometimes are evil. You have a lovely smile, Jack; it breaks away the loneliness.

JACK
You've been crying. I've made you cry.

OLD WOMAN

Don't feel bad about that. It's good for people to cry sometimes. My tears fill the thirsty ground below, and in the winter, they mingle with the ice, and spatter your yard with gentle flakes of snow.

JACK

My mother says that winter is the end of all things, that the snow is cold . . .

OLD WOMAN

Only to the touch. How can something formed from another person's feelings be cold?

(JACK is silent, coming to some sort of decision.)

My husband was very angry about the hen, but I've managed to smooth things over somewhat. We must be very careful, however. Look here, see what I've been able to make for you!

(She goes to the corner, takes out a lovely multi-colored coat and gives it to him.)

JACK

It's beautiful! . . . I'm so ashamed . . .

OLD WOMAN

Please, don't be! If you're ashamed, you won't come here any more . . . And I couldn't bear that, Jack, for, you see, I love you. You are the son I never had.

JACK

Let me stay up here with you from now on. Let me be your child.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, Jack, I wish you had said that earlier. But now it's too late. My husband is constantly looking for you, and he's very clever. We would never be able to hide you from him forever . . . but you can come and visit . . . often! I can signal you . . .

JACK

No, I can't. When I'm not here, there's no place to go to!

OLD WOMAN

Of course there is, Jack. What about your mother?

JACK

She's told me never to come home!

OLD WOMAN

Oh, she couldn't have meant it!! Not your own mother. She was only angry or threatening . . .

JACK

No. She meant it. I can't go home again unless . . .

OLD WOMAN
But you can't stay here! Your life would be in constant danger . . .

JACK
Listen! I can't go home unless I bring the harp with me!

(The OLD WOMAN is shocked.)

That's what she said. I won't lie to you. I don't want the harp, but that's the only way.

OLD WOMAN
Oh no, oh no, we're lost, Jack, we're lost . . .

JACK
If you give it to me, I could play it in the evenings and you could sit on the edge of the clouds and listen. When it was safe, I could bring it back here with me and . . .

OLD WOMAN
Oh, I wish that were possible. I'd give it to you gladly, Jack, only the harp has a strong allegiance to my husband. It would never go with you.

JACK
I thought it was yours!

OLD WOMAN
No. I was only allowed to listen . . .

(The GIANT'S voice is heard suddenly, violent, like a storm.)

Oh, no!! He's sensed your presence!! He's coming!!

GIANT'S VOICE
Fee fie fo fum
All the clouds have killed the sun
I smell awful things to come
Fee fie fo fum.

OLD WOMAN
Quick, HIDE!!

(Once again, she shoves JACK and the harp in the large box in front of the house.)

GIANT
(Advancing upon her.)
So your little friend is here again!! I thought I told you never to let him near this place!!

OLD WOMAN
I don't know what you mean . . .

GIANT
I have well-developed senses, woman, I smell him!!

OLD WOMAN
You only smell your supper . . .

GIANT
That was your excuse last time!! I won't fall for that one again! But you, you never learn, do you!!! You're hiding him again! FOOL! He'll take everything we have, and you will sit by quietly and let him!

OLD WOMAN
I don't know what you mean!

GIANT
He's laughing at you, old woman. Now bring him to me!!

OLD WOMAN
NO!! . . . I'll just go set the table . . .

GIANT
Not this time!
(He pushes her aside.)
Listen!!
(They both pause. Silence.)
I can hear him breathing . . .

OLD WOMAN
NO!
(GIANT advances around the room. He notices the coat she has made for JACK dropped in a corner.)

GIANT
(Picking it up.)
What's this!! It's certainly too small for you or me . . .
(He strikes her, hard.)
Now, where is he!!

OLD WOMAN
(To fend him off.)
Out there . . .
(She points to the area of the castle.)
When he heard you, he ran off, into the fog . . .

GIANT
I'll get him . . . and then I'm coming back for you . . .

(GIANT leaves the stage.)

Fee fie fo fum
I smell the blood of an Englishman.
I'll break the thief upon my knee,
And scatter his teeth across the sea.

OLD WOMAN
(As soon as he is gone.)

QUICKLY, JACK, QUICKLY . . .

(She pulls JACK out of the box, with the harp.)

We have one chance. Take the harp and go quickly down the vine. It will call out to him and he will come running. He'll stop at nothing, this time, and will follow you down the stalk to your own yard . . . only . . . I'll be waiting. He forgot his ax, you see, and . . . when he climbs onto the vine, I'll cut it from up here and he will fall to his . . . death.

JACK

But what about you!

OLD WOMAN

Never mind about me!! Just go . . . You mustn't be anywhere near the stalk when it falls, for it will make a terrible crash with him on it--and take your coat, quickly . . .

JACK

But with the stalk gone, I'll never be able to come see you again, and you won't have the harp, or anything. . . .

OLD WOMAN

Listen, Jack . . . when the dark reaches out to the day and the wind spits snow across your cheeks, know that it is only my voice touching you through the cold. Play the harp for me, Jack, when you can, and I'll keep away the ice.

(She kisses him.)

NOW RUN!!

(JACK hurries to the beanstalk and disappears. The harp calls out MASTER loudly; the OLD WOMAN picks up the ax.)

GIANT
(Rushing in, beside himself with fury.)

My harp. I heard it call!!!

(He hurries to the beanstalk and begins to climb it.)

He'll not escape, not if I have to follow him to the ends of the earth!! You'll pay for this, Old Woman, you'll pay . . .

(The lights dim on him.)

OLD WOMAN
(To herself.)

I already have . . .

(She waits a moment. Then strikes the stalk violently with the ax. A loud, horrible crash, followed by a terrible yell is heard.)

OLD WOMAN
(After a long pause.)

Oh, Jack . . . it's so quiet . . . I've never killed before . . . once upon a time . . . he was a charming man . . . once . . . the trees rang the sky with silver music . . . Oh, Jack, sing for me . . . December's rolling in and I'm lonely . . . lonely . . .

(The lights fade on her, and wind noise is heard, until her voice and the wind are one. Then all is black.)

Scene vi

(The front yard of JACK'S house. The house is large and grand now. JACK holds the harp in his hands. The MOTHER is elegantly dressed in a fur cape. A winter landscape is seen.)

MOTHER

They removed the giant's body this morning . . . You're safe now . . .

(She kisses him. He pulls away from her angrily. Rebuffed, she trys to smooth his hair. Again he pulls away.)

Jack . . . Jack . . . we're all right . . . it's over . . .

(JACK is silent.)

We have security now; we'll never have to worry about going hungry again . . . ever!

(He continues to ignore her, humming softly, with great sadness.)

Look at our new home!

(Continued silence.)

And your harp! Think of the music!

(The wind begins to moan, shadows darken. The MOTHER shudders.)

It's getting cold.

JACK
(With quiet anger.)

But, mother, you have furs to keep you warm.

MOTHER
(Listening, a voice is heard, moaning.)
What was that!!

JACK
The wind dying in the lost caves of our hearts, mother . . . soon the snow comes . . .

MOTHER
Don't talk like that, Jack . . . you're so gloomy . . .

(The wind moans again, the voice with it. Shadows darken. MOTHER moves closer to JACK. He turns away from her.)

Jack . . . my dear, please . . . be happy . . . Life is short, be happy .

(JACK buries his head in his hands.)

MOTHER
(Desperately trying to cheer him up, caught in her own fear.)
Jack, please! Think of the future! Now you can go to college and be a great man . . .

JACK
No, mother . . .

MOTHER
What do you mean, NO!

JACK
Oh, I'll probably go to the university . . . but I've missed forever my chance to be a great man! I've made too many wrong choices for that.

MOTHER
(Panicked by his words.)
Jack! You're just a child! Don't say such things! You make everything sound so . . . final . . .

(The wind howls again, the moaning is heard. It becomes darker, the MOTHER is more and more afraid.)

Jack, you're angry with me! I said some cruel things . . . I don't know what got into me . . . I really do love you . . .

(He pulls from her with a cynical laugh.)

Oh, Jack, don't! Don't push me away. When you went up there and I heard those terrible noises, I was so frightened . . . All I could see was your sweet face . . . how could I have lost the sweetness . . . I'm old, Jack. . . . please . . .

(She reaches for him; once again, he pulls from her.)

JACK! I was wrong. I admit it! I was wrong. For heaven's sake, what else can I say!

(He is still silent.)

Jack!

JACK
(Slowly.)

So you admit you were wrong . . . so I admit that I was wrong, too . . . that doesn't help the old woman, does it!

MOTHER
(Sadly.)

No . . . I guess not . . .

(Suddenly.)

Jack, forgive me!

(JACK fights within himself. Part of him wants to, part can't.)

MOTHER
(Crying.)

Please, forgive me . . .

JACK
(Softly.)

All right, mother, I forgive you.

(They hold each other gently. JACK is softer, but still reserved. The moaning voice and the wind is heard again. The MOTHER becomes agitated.)

MOTHER
(Looking around, fearful.)

Sounds like a storm brewing.

JACK

No, wait mother, listen . . .

(The OLD WOMAN'S VOICE can be heard in the wind, calling "Jack . . .")

It's the old woman . . .

MOTHER

Stop it and come inside!

JACK

Can't you hear it . . .

MOTHER

Jack, please . . .

JACK
(Taking up the harp, which plays the theme.)
The snow will come in a moment . . . her tears will fall with it and bring us warmth . . .

MOTHER
Stop it, Jack, please!! I'm afraid . . . Winter is upon us and . . .

JACK
The sky is soft . . . it only hides her face . . .

MOTHER
Come inside . . . where it's warm . . . I'm afraid . . . We have <u>everything</u> . . . . . and I'm still <u>frightened</u> . . . COME INSIDE . . .

(He continues to sit with the harp and look up in the sky.)
I'll build a fire . . .

JACK
No, mother . . . the real warmth is out here. I can feel the snow on my cheeks now . . .

(The MOTHER strokes his hair, but he pulls away. She hurries offstage. The harp begins to play, and the OLD WOMAN'S VOICE is heard, singing. JACK joins in the song.)

JACK and OLD WOMAN'S VOICE
If my voice were a golden bowl
I'd fill it up with laughter.
I'd wait for spring and calm my soul
And care not what comes after . . .
and care not what comes after . . .

(The lights slowly fade as the snow falls harder.)

ARMSTRONG

Armstrong represents for me the greatest challenge of any of the plays in this volume, and the culmination of my work in theatre at Kansas State University. I read Lessing's biography of Armstrong, called The Man of High Fidelity, and felt immediately that it was one of the great stories of our time. To provide further insight into the history of the man, I read as well a biography of David Sarnoff, who figures prominently in Armstrong's story, and I decided to use him as the antagonist of the play. The result was a year and a half of revising, condensing, and revising again.

In order the prepare the script for performance, the play was read by a group of faculty members on two successive evenings. On the basis of these readings, the final revision was made. Afterwards, Edith Hinrichs, the director, and I sat down to a line by line polishing session to arrive at the piece included in this anthology.

The play is both expressionistic and realistic in style in that it is narrated by Sarnoff as he relives his years with Armstrong. The language is both prosaic and poetic, but I have tried to link my images to character this time and consciously relate metaphor and meaning, whereas in Everywoman, the images themselves often ran away with the sense. In Armstrong, I have tried to deal with the American dream. To Sarnoff, it lies in giant corporations and their collective strength. To Armstrong, the vision lies in the supremacy of the single individual and his creations. It is the battle

between these dreams that is the tragedy of the two men. Sarnoff ends a saddened victor. He is like Colderidge's Wedding Guest, who can never be the same, who must tell the story again and *again as a form* of expiation. Sarnoff relates his agony to an audience of strangers in order that by doing so it will "deliver its own forgiveness."

ARMSTRONG

A drama in two acts

THE K-STATE PLAYERS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH
PRESENTED THE PREMIER PRODUCTION

of

ARMSTRONG

December 2-4, 1976

Directed by Edith Hinrichs

CAST

Armstrong . . . . . Greg Blakey

David Sarnoff . . . . . Woody Jones

Old Sarnoff . . . . . David Roesler

Marion . . . . . Cindy Helferstay

McCormack . . . . . Skip Warren

John Armstrong . . . . . John Rohe

Cricket . . . . . Grace Schuessler

DeForest . . . . . Tim Blacker

Mother . . . . . Liz Slinkman

RCA Lawyer. . . . . Kurt Brecheisen

AT&T Lawyer . . . . . Dennis Reh

Moderator . . . . . Roger Arnold

Judge . . . . . Sam Ziegler

And lo! the Albatross proveth a bird of good omen, and followeth the ship as it returned northward through fog and floating ice. The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen . . .

Coleridge
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Edwin H. Armstrong--a tall, somewhat gangly man who ages throughout the play. In Act I, scene i, he is twenty; in scene ii he is in his early twenties; in scenes iii and iv, he is in his mid-late twenties. In Act II, scene i, he is in his mid-thirties, in scene ii he is in his late 40's, in scene iii he is in his fifties, and in scene iv, he is in his early 60's.

David Sarnoff, Narrator--this is Old Sarnoff, the narrator of the play. He is in his early-late sixties.

David Sarnoff, character--this part should be played by a different actor than the previous Sarnoff, but they must obviously resemble each other. He ages throughout the play along the same progression as does Armstrong, for the two men are the same age. Both Sarnoffs should be contrasted to Armstrong. Sarnoff is short, wiry, quick, while Armstrong is tall, more deliberate.

Marion Armstrong--Edwin's wife. She is Edwin's age, and ages throughout the scenes the same way he does. In Act I, scene iii, she is in her mid to late twenties.

Alfred McCormack--Edwin's friend and lawyer. He is a small, tubby man, who is more lean at the end of the play. He is Edwin's age and also follows the same progression throughout the play.

John Armstrong--Edwin's father. He is a tall, distinguished turn-of-the-century gentleman.

Emma Armstrong--Edwin's mother. She is likewise an attractive, well-dressed, middle-class woman of her time.

Cricket Armstrong--Edwin's sister. She is a pretty, lively young woman of sixteen in the first scene, and has aged to early twenties in Act I, scene iv.

Lee Deforest--a wiry, embattled man, in his late 30's.

Two Lawyers--these parts should be played by the same men in different suits for each separate section. They are archetypal Wall Street.

Judge--a distinguished, rather weary, graying man with a touch of irony.

Moderator of Institute of Radio Engineers--a well-dressed, articulate, middle-aged man.

Members of the Institute--a group of well-dressed, successful looking men.

Act I, Scene 1

(The stage is bare except for center stage. Two rows of stairs lead up to an abstract attic scene. At the foot of the stairs is a straight leather chair. The attic consists of an open window, outlines only, a small picture of Thomas Edison, and a large work table cluttered with wires, buttons, tubes, etc. A giant erector set box sits on the table. Next to it is a mysterious black box. DAVID SARNOFF walks slowly out to the edge of the stage, center. He looks like one who has just awakened from a deep sleep. He is slightly unkempt but still commanding.)

SARNOFF
(Weary)
I should be home in bed . . . I'm old, and old men get tired, even old men who have built their lives on work . . . I would like to sleep . . .

(He peers out over the audience.)

but I can't . . . over and over I keep having this dream . . . and then I find myself here on top of a sea of strange faces and I always tell it . . . I'm on the deck of my ship--I was a sailor once, you know, for American Marconi--and it's a few moments before dawn. The cold sun begins to slant across the sky and the clouds rise. At that moment I look up and see a giant bird winging slowly out of the horizon, from nowhere . . . As he approaches, my heartbeat takes on the rhythm of his wings, and for no apparent reason I am filled with excitement . . . The sun captures his colors which drift like a windy rainbow across his body. He circles, lower and lower, until I catch his eyes--that's what I remember most--the <u>eyes</u>, black soft with the lower depths of the ocean boiling in their darkness. My whole being is filled with joy! If you could see him as I do, you would understand. He is luck--a smile out of a storm. His beauty lifts and rises, higher, higher, higher! I cannot bear it! The breeze rolls across the morning and he floats upon the sky--free, perfect. I cannot contain my ecstasy, and then . . . for no reason . . . that's the part I always forget--the reason--perhaps it was an accident, a slip of the hand, a careless shipmate, sometimes I think . . .

(His voice falters. He is so weary.)

I think, after all, I had nothing to do with it, or then again, perhaps I did . . . then, a gun fires, and he falls. . .

(He moves the leather chair downstage and sits on it, burying his head in his hands for a moment.)

he falls into the murky water, splattering it with blood. It happens in slow motion. No one notices the descent but me. His wings buoy him up for a moment, but his lovely eyes are quiet. Finally softly, softly as he came, he vanishes beneath the waves, and my heart darkens into wakefulness . . .

(He pauses a moment. Seems to come to. Looks out at the audience. Shakes his head, takes out a cigarette. He lights his cigarette, straightens his tie--sits up straight.)

My name is David Sarnoff. I'm sure many of you have heard of me. I am responsible for the existence of radio, talking films, and television, so you owe me a lot . . . I am RCA--I built it; I steered it across time. I don't know how many millions I'm worth, but I fought for them every inch of the way . . . Yes sir, I'm 66 years old with an empire at my feet. Poor-emigrant-boy-from-the-ghetto-makes-good!! And it's true. Amazing!! I should, by all rights tell you about my life, I should--but I can't.

(He rises again, painfully, agitated. He begins to move around the stage.)

The truth is that in the end, what I really am is a recorder of disasters. I rose to fame because the Titanic was sinking. That's right, the Titanic!! I manned a wireless set on the top floor of Wannamakers one year, it was purely a gimmick, when suddenly I received this call for help. I tried to pass it off as nothing, but the signals kept coming and coming. She was sinking!! Soon all channels were quiet for me, and I became the lone receiver.

(He recalls the whole thing with horror.)

The whole world held its breath for me. Great men whose families were on board gave me food and support. The names were flashed in lights across New York and then the world. At first there was joy because I sent out the names of the survivors---but then

(His horror mounts.)

then the reports of the dead came pouring in. Name upon endless name. My fingers were numb, my back ached, and still they wouldn't stop. They wouldn't stop!! I saw men who could crush whole industries without batting an eye wail in agony . . . I knew then it would all be different for me--I would build and lead . . . I rose upon the ruin of a century!

(He stops. Gets control of himself.)

Edwin Howard Armstrong . . .

(He rolls out the name, tasting each word, drawing it out.)

another disaster--the last of his kind. He was an inventor.

(Laughs, cynically.)

Inventors, I've had to deal with a lot of them in my time--stubborn, single-minded, impractical. Edwin was the inventor's inventor. Some of you might recall his great discoveries, the regenerative circuit?

(He goes out towards the audience, asking for some recognition. The attic set is dimly lit.)

the superheterodyne?

(Lights up more on set.)

FM! . . .

(Pause--he lets the words ring out.)

When I first met him, he was tall and shy, with a sort of nervous tic in his eye and great winged hands that seemed always ready to fly off in all directions. When he spoke, I always got a mental image of long green lawns, plump apple pies, and women in cool, white dresses who went to church and played croquet in the back yard. I try to see Edwin in the attic

(Lights up full on attic.)

dreaming of soundwaves and Edison, or Edwin nearly killing himself in the middle of a storm climbing unbelievably high in an antenna mast he built. The man always loved heights . . . Edwin the child, the peaceful child, high up in the dust with the leisure of his dreams . . .

I never was a child . . .

Some of you here no doubt came with friends; some of you probably have many friends . . . in all my life, I only had one, Edwin Howard Armstrong, and my memory will not let him go . . . even in dreams.

(Lights fade slowly on Sarnoff. Only attic is lit. Then attic off. Lights come up on sr family scene. It is a large dining room table, with buffet, breakfront, etc. The room should reflect middle-class luxury, but should be as abstract as possible and suggest the setting.)

EMMA

Where is Edwin?

CRICKET
(In a matter of fact tone.)

Upstairs hanging out of the attic window by his feet.

EMMA

What!! Not again!!

CRICKET

He was stringing wires or something. Mrs. Almar even came down off her porch! She told me it drove her crazy to see him dangling up there like that.

EMMA
Someday he's going to fall, I just know it. And Mrs. Almar looks at me as if I were an idiot to allow it.

CRICKET
I know; that's what she told me.

EMMA
She did!! Well . . . I never . . .

CRICKET
But I told her that if Edwin made her nervous, she should quit watching our business all the time and go inside where she didn't have to see him!

EMMA
You said that to Mrs. Almar!! I hope I don't run into her for the next week or two . . . First it was that ridiculous antenna mast of his and now . . .

CRICKET
It wasn't ridiculous, mother! Do you know he's bringing in signals all the way from . . .

EMMA
Oh, for heaven's sake, Cricket; sometimes you're as bad as he is!

CRICKET
Well, cheer up. Some day he will tumble down and make a cute little brown spot right in the middle of the sidewalk. Then you can invite all the neighbors over and say, "See that sad little puddle there? That was my son, Edwin."

EMMA
Cricket, stop it. These escapades of his are not something to make light of.

CRICKET
I know! We could name it The Edwin H. Armstrong Memorial Splat! That sounds good, doesn't it?

(She reaches for another roll, EMMA slaps her hand, and thunder is heard.)

EMMA
Storm's brewing . . . Edwin shouldn't play around up there when there's lightning in the sky. I wish I knew what he was doing!

CRICKET
He's raising the dead!!

EMMA
(Exasperated.)
Oh, Cricket!!

CRICKET
That's what I told Mrs. Almar when she asked.

EMMA
You didn't!

CRICKET
Yes I did. But I told her it was all right, because he's crazy and we're all trying to humor him!

EMMA
Cricket, you mustn't say such things to people, especially Mrs. Almar, and you mustn't make such jokes about your brother.

CRICKET
(Suddenly serious.)
I never joke about Edwin, mother, not really. He doesn't look at life the way the rest of us average people do. I'm sorry; I know you don't like to think of yourself as ordinary, mother, but we all have to face the fact that Edwin is beyond us.

EMMA
Humph! You wouldn't think he was beyond anyone to look at his grades.

CRICKET
Oh, for heaven's sake, he's been too busy with his invention to study. He can bring his grades up anytime.

EMMA
Those silly inventions! Now that's another thing!! But we can't sit here talking any more. Your father will be home any minute and you know how angry he gets if dinner isn't punctual.

(Thunder is heard again as EDWIN descends from the attic. He is tall and gangly, and he carries a large black box.)

EDWIN
Mother, come up in the attic; there's something that I want to show you.

EMMA
Oh, for pity's sake, Edwin, dinner's almost ready. Go get washed!

EDWIN
You've got to come now, mother! You won't believe your ears!

(He puts the box down, gets black smudges on the table cloth.)

EMMA
Edwin!! Don't put that there! You're getting smudges all over the tablecloth!

EDWIN
Today I got New Mexico!! Can you imagine that, Cricket, New Mexico!!

CRICKET
That's wonderful, Edwin! Do you hear that, mother, New Mexico!

EMMA
Yes . . . yes, . . . now will you please, please get that thing off the table!

EDWIN
Of course, mother.

(He picks up the black box, still in a state of great excitement.)

Please, mother, you have to come now! I want to explain what I've done!

(She dismisses him with a gesture of her hand and moves towards the kitchen. He follows her, trying a new approach.)

Mother, of all the places on earth, where would you most like to go?

EMMA
(Stops a moment.)
Well, nowhere, really. I've always been perfectly content to stay on my own front porch.

CRICKET
Oh really, mother!!

EDWIN
(Impatiently motioning CRICKET to keep still.)
Oh, come on, everyone dreams of faraway places sometimes.

EMMA
Well, I suppose, if I really ever had the chance, I would like to see Paris.

(CRICKET bursts out laughing, EDWIN gives her a look which says, hush.)

EDWIN
Mother, I have discovered something which may soon allow you to hear signals all the way from . . . Paris, right in your own attic!

EMMA
Now, Edwin . . .

EDWIN
It's true, and I'll prove it to you . . . come upstairs now!!

EMMA
But your father will . . .

(He takes hold of her arm and pulls her up the steps into the attic. CRICKET follows.)

Edwin . . . I haven't finished setting the . . .

CRICKET
Mother, please, --this will only take a minute.

(The reach the attic. MOTHER starts to straighten up. EDWIN stops her.)

EDWIN
Please, mother . . . leave that be--Mother!!

EMMA
I swear this room gets worse every day. One of these days I'm going to clear this mess out.

EDWIN
This "mess" represents years of work!

EMMA
It certainly does, for ME!

(EDWIN begins adjusting wires, etc., on the table.)

EDWIN
Listen, mother.

(A series of dots and dashes as in Morse code are heard, loud and clear.)

EMMA
Why, it's just some silly noises . . .

EDWIN
(Unable to contain his pride and excitement.)
Those "silly noises" as you call them are coming all the way from New Mexico!

CRICKET
Wow!! New Mexico, mother!

EDWIN
This could revolutionize the world! For years everyone has been working on special high-powered transmitters and receivers, but now, with one simple circuit, we can reach distances never before dreamed of! I was working with the audion when . . .

EMMA
(Rising to leave.)
Edwin, you know I don't have a mind for scientific words.

EDWIN
But I want you to understand, mother. You see, I've broken free, at last! I began thinking on another plane, away from older theories, in areas others dismissed--I went back, circled over them and there it was! Of course, the initial discovery was largely luck. I happened to notice one night that alternating current . . .

EMMA
I'll never understand, dear, . . .

CRICKET
Understand that here in our own home he's bringing in signals from everywhere!

EDWIN
Not quite everywhere, Cricket. Not just yet. But the possibility does exist. We could bring the whole world into our attic!

EMMA
(Turning to go.)
You will never grow up, Edwin, I've resigned myself to that.

EDWIN
Mother, please don't treat this as something silly or childish. My whole life has been moving towards this moment. I've stumbled across something revolutionary! . . . I've got to protect it . . .

(His voice softens, becomes more tentative.)

I've got to patent the design before someone else does. That takes money, and I've got to get the money now before it's too late.

EMMA
How . . . much . . . money?

EDWIN
Five hundred dollars.

(He clears his throat and waits for the bomb to fall.)

EMMA
FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS!! That's a sizable sum, for a toy!

EDWIN
A TOY! Mother, this is the most serious work of my life!

EMMA
I didn't mind the jars and the kites and the sparks . . . I put up with the all-night sessions and I didn't say anything about that frightful antenna mast! I even let you alone after you almost broke your neck hanging out of windows and flying kites in the worst storms . . .

(Thunder is heard again.)

But, Edwin, you're not a boy any longer. You only have one more year to go to get your degree, and your father has poured so much money and love into your education. You should hear him talk about "my son, the professor." Now you're neglecting your studies for this foolishness and on top of all that, you want FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS!!

(EDWIN is shaken; but he is in control.)

EDWIN
I was hoping you'd understand.

EMMA
And I've been hoping for years you would finally settle down!

CRICKET
(Whispering to EMMA.)
You're not doing well at all. I expected more out of you.

(EMMA is about to reply, when a commotion occurs at the table below. The FATHER has just entered. He looks the part of the turn-of-the-century gentleman, complete with mustache and newspaper. His back is straight, and when he speaks, his voice is loud and strong, but it can be warm and humorous. At the moment it betrays only frustration.)

JOHN
Well, where is everybody, anyway!! Emma! Is anybody home?

EMMA
Oh dear, it's your father, and I haven't even set the table.

(She and CRICKET rush downstairs. EDWIN remains where he is and puts his invention back in order.)

JOHN
What is this family coming to! 6:15 and no one about and nothing on the table. We always eat at 6:00!!

(EDWIN lovingly places the device into the black box. Every movement is done with care. He holds the box for a moment and stares out the window.)

EMMA
I know dear . . . I was up in the attic with Edwin.

JOHN
You, too!! Next thing you know you'll be hanging from your toes also!

EMMA
(Cautiously.)
Edwin had something to show me, you see . . .

CRICKET
(Whispering.)
Not now, mother!

EMMA
. . . er, the window is stuck. He can't get it closed.

JOHN
Humph!! He can dream up "incredible marvels" but he can't fix a simple window.

EMMA
You've tried several times yourself, dear, without any luck.

JOHN
(Changing the subject.)
Well, he should show more consideration for you than to drag you up there this time of day! By the way, Mrs. Almar patted me on the shoulder when I stopped to talk to her, said she was sorry about Edwin and should we leave him alone so much of the time! Whatever did she mean by that?

(EMMA gives an angry glance at CRICKET.)

CRICKET
Oh, you know Mrs. Almar, father. She's such an old busybody!

JOHN
Young lady, you watch how you talk about your elders!!

CRICKET
(Going into the kitchen to help bring out supper, in a whisper to EMMA.)
He's in a bad mood.

EMMA
I know. I'm beginning to get a headache.

CRICKET
You always get a headache when you sense controversy coming!

(Bringing out more items for the table.)

JOHN
Where's Edwin?

EMMA
(Putting a dish on the table.)
He's coming.

JOHN
In a civilized country, a family eats together.

EMMA
He'll only be a minute, I'm sure.

JOHN
That boy would never eat if you didn't make him! He spends too much time up there. It's beginning to worry me.

EMMA
He is getting awfully thin.

JOHN
And what about girls? There are many lovely young ladies all around him. He hardly ever notices them. I don't understand it.

CRICKET
Edwin's very shy, poppa.

JOHN
(Picking up a tennis trophy from the buffet.)
He wouldn't be if he spent less time with those wires of his. He doesn't even play tennis any more.

CRICKET
He was working on something important, poppa.

JOHN
(With a sigh.)
It's always something important!

(He goes to the stairs and calls loudly. EDWIN jumps up nervously and excitedly at the call.)
EDWIN!

EDWIN
Right away, father!

JOHN
We're eating supper, NOW!!

(EDWIN hurries into the room.)

EDWIN
I know it's late, father, but I must talk to you right away!

JOHN
Edwin, I've had a long, tiring day and a session with Mrs. Almar about you. I'm hungry and this family always eats at 6:00. It is now 6:20.

EDWIN

I know, father, but this can't wait. I have to show you my new invention, and . . . talk to you about something of utmost importance. It won't take long, I promise!

JOHN
(Softening at the sight of his son, but trying not to show it.)

Edwin, we have rules around here.

EDWIN

Father, Please!

JOHN
(Softening in spite of himself)

All right, Edwin . . . I can see this wasn't destined to be my day. Emma, . . . hold supper for a few minutes please. I'm going up to the attic with Edwin.

CRICKET
(Fairly bursting)

Can I come, too!

JOHN

No. Edwin alone is enough to give me a headache, thank you. You stay with your mother.

(CRICKET looks hurt as they climb the stairs, and sits below and tries to listen.)

JOHN
(As they reach the attic.)

Now suppose you tell me what in tarnation this is all about, Edwin.

EDWIN
(Pointing to the black box and a series of unimpressive-looking wires.)

You're looking at an invention that will change the course of wireless forever!

(JOHN looks at the box, obviously skeptical. Just then a loud clap of thunder is heard again.)

JOHN

There's lightning in the sky! Are we safe up here with all this apparatus?

EDWIN

Of course. Perfectly safe. I love to watch storms from up here. I feel like I'm in the middle of the clouds, far away from the world. All that matters is the logic of the elements.

(Thunder is loud this time. JOHN goes to the window and tries to shut it. He can't. This occurs during the last half of Edwin's speech.)

JOHN
(Disgusted, leaving the window. He has taken out his tension on it.)
Damn thing won't shut!! I never have been able to fix it right!

EDWIN
Never mind that now, father. Let me show you how my invention works.

(He begins to adjust and hook up elements in his black box.)

I call it the regenerative circuit. I've already shown it to Randy Regan and some others in the Wireless Club. They're really excited . . .

JOHN
Edwin . . .

(EDWIN still fiddles with the circuit.)

Edwin, don't bother just now. I probably won't understand it in the first place.

EDWIN
Sure you will, father. Just let me adjust a few things here and . . .

JOHN
Edwin . . . I've been meaning to have a talk with you for some time . . . You know, Edwin . . . I've always encouraged you to be creative and have hobbies, because when I was a child, I had very little time for leisure. I had to work hard to achieve what I have today.

EDWIN
Father, if you will just listen now, I think I have it all set . . .

JOHN
Now wait, Edwin, hear me out! In some ways, I suppose I've spoiled you. I certainly have failed to prepare you for the world out there. We all imagine ourselves as something more than we are. We all try to escape from the ordinariness of our lives. But you've started to live inside your fantasies, and that isn't healthy. Son, there was only one Thomas Edison . . .

EDWIN
(Hurt.)
I know that, father. But if you'll just listen a moment, I'll show you that I can bring in signals from all over the world. Listen . . .

(EDWIN adjusts the circuit, a series of bleeps like those heard over a telegraph are heard. EDWIN beams.)

Well?

JOHN
Is that it?

EDWIN
Yes, father! Isn't it wonderful?

JOHN
Sounds like little tapping noises to me.

EDWIN
Well, yes, father, it sounds like an ordinary telegraph message except that this one is coming all the way from New Mexico.

JOHN
(Trying to sound impressed, but obviously not.)
Yes . . . well, that's--uh--very nice, Edwin . . . is this the "miracle" that has been occupying all your thoughts since you started college?

EDWIN
Yes.

JOHN
Well, Edwin, I saw your grades yesterday.

EDWIN
(Stung at his father's lack of enthusiasm and insistence on talking about grades now.)
I'm not failing anything.

JOHN
No, but you're doing poorly. Your overall grade point is barely average!

EDWIN
I can always bring up my grades, father. Right now I have to push ahead with this.

JOHN
Edwin, do you realize how many times in your life you have put off doing what was mature in order to follow some experiment? When you were young, I indulged you because I thought it was clever and I loved to watch you, so a lot of this is my fault. But Edwin, I've poured a lot of time and money into your education, so you would have a chance for a good, solid, stable profession. Now, when you're reaching the time of graduation, you're suddenly letting it all go!

EDWIN
Listen to me, please. This isn't some boyish experiment. Men of science, like Dr. Adams, all say it's a major discovery. I have managed to work on my circuit and still keep up with my other courses, but once I stumbled onto this, it had to come first because what I have here is revolutionary. I do understand the world out there. That's why I came home to talk to you. Soon someone else will discover what I already know, and get all the credit for something which is first and foremost mine. I want you to recognize how great my invention is because I need your support. I need you to help me protect it.

JOHN
(Slowly.)
In what way?

EDWIN
I must patent it, now, before anyone else hears about it and steals it!

JOHN
I see. The patent process can be pretty expensive, so you want . . .

EDWIN
I want you to loan me the money for the patent . . .

(More thunder and lightning. JOHN goes to the window, his back to EDWIN.)
LOAN, father.

JOHN
Just exactly how much are we talking about?

EDWIN
(Softly.)
Five hundred dollars.

JOHN
(After a long pause, no change in his voice.)
That's quite a sum, Edwin.

EDWIN
You'll get it all back, in triplicate. Once this thing goes . . .

(JOHN says nothing.)

Father, believe me, if there were anyone else to turn to, I would. I hate coming to you with this thing. But my friends don't have the money, and I can't go to anyone at the university, and I don't trust anyone else. As soon as I get a position, I'll pay you back, I promise . . .

JOHN
(Turning to him, slowly.)
I'm sorry, son, the answer is no.

EDWIN
Father, please . . .

JOHN
Absolutely and finally, no.

(EDWIN turns from him, hurt and disgruntled.)

Listen to me, Edwin, LISTEN . . . you know that there isn't anything I wouldn't do for my children. You are my only son, and I've never given you anything but the best. Don't think that by telling you this I am asking for your thanks; you don't owe me a thing. Edwin, I'd gladly hand you a <u>thousand</u> dollars if I thought that was the right thing for you . . .

(EDWIN turns to him, expectantly.)

but I don't . . . I can't hand out that kind of money for another boyhood hobby. Some day you'll understand that I say no for your own good, Edwin. It's time to put up your toys.

EDWIN
(Stung)
But, father, if you could have seen the faces of Adams and the other professors when I demonstrated my circuit, if you could have felt the excitement, the admiration they displayed for me . . .

JOHN
Son, I don't for a moment deny that you are brilliant and creative. I only want to see you channel your gifts into an area that has some stability and security.

EDWIN
Father, if you would just let me demonstrate . . .

JOHN
Remember that Erector set I bought you when you were eight?

EDWIN
Of course. I still have it, over there. But I don't see what that has to do with . . .

JOHN
(Goes to large box, opens it, takes out some parts.)
So you do . . . well, you were always demonstrating wonderful pieces of wizardry with that thing, too! You used to build incredible machines that no one but you understood. Some of our best friends said, even then, that you were a genius. Your mother and I were very proud.

EDWIN
If you were so proud of tiny things I made out of childhood springs and metal, why can't you even try to understand what I am doing now!

JOHN
Edwin, nothing in that Erector set ever built a city or ran a country or changed the world. There's nothing there that can even fix this damn broken window!

EDWIN
(Gathering up his pride.)
Well, thank you for listening anyway, father.

(He begins to gather up the parts of his circuit. His hands are trembling.)

JOHN
(Trying to lighten the mood.)
I don't know about you, but I am really hungry for my supper which is cold by now. Why don't we go down now.

EDWIN
(Fighting back the tears.)
No thank you, father. I'm not hungry.

JOHN
I'm sorry, son . . . are we still friends?

(EDWIN doesn't answer. JOHN senses the pain in his voice, pauses a moment at the head of the stairs.)

I tell you what! You have one more year to go to finish your degree. You apply yourself well, bring your grades up, graduate on time and get a teaching position, and then, when you've proved to me you can get your feet on the ground, then, well, I'll give you the five hundred dollars free and clear as a graduation present!! How about that!

(EDWIN keeps his back to his father. After a long pause.)

EDWIN
By then it will be too late. Someone else will have thought of my idea and stolen the whole thing out from under me.

JOHN
(Gently.)
Now, Edwin . . . it can't be as crucial as all that! You think about it.

(EDWIN remains mute.)

Just think about it, all right?

(EDWIN keeps his back to his father. JOHN pauses a moment, then exits. Slowly, EDWIN'S shoulders heave, then he smashes his fist on the table.)

EDWIN
(Turning to where his father has been.)
You're wrong, father . . . you're wrong . . . I should never have asked. You can be sure I never will again, not for anything! From now on, I'll do it on my own.

(He goes to the window, lets the storm blow across him. Suddenly he is struck by an idea. He walks rapidly to the Erector set scattered over the table, scrounges through its various parts, selecting several. He takes those parts over to the window, hammers them into place, steps back, and triumphantly slams the window shut.)

You see, father! You're wrong about Erector sets, too!

Scene 2

(SARNOFF sits in a chair, upright, staring at the space where the Armstrong family scene had been. He turns to the audience, gets up, moves toward them, shakes his head.)

SARNOFF

Never had memories . . . me, I don't like to remember the past . . . I point myself north and move on . . .

(He places his hands on his temples.)

Moving forward, that's me, the good luck kid. It's true; I've always had uncanny luck . . . brains, too, and determination, and all those other traits people like to associate with success, . . . but mostly it all comes down to the stars you were born under . . . I remember . . . there I go again, damn it . . . I was just a child. My mother and I were in the hold of a ship bound for America . . . we had nothing to our name but one small basket of food . . . The ship had been tossing for days in a storm, and we were all sleeping in our own vomit, starving and crapping and sleeping and sweating, while up above ladies in crisp, cool dresses sipped tea, but let that be . . . we had only one small basket of food and when we docked, someone in the rush knocked into me and the basket fell down into the hold. It was all we had, you see, and in a panic, I dove down after it! It was like falling in space, down, down, down. I landed on some sacks of grain and was only a little bruised. I gathered together the contents of the basket, and two startled crewmen came over to make sure I was all right. One looked at me for a long time, scratched his head, and said, "Boy, you'll do well in America!"

(SARNOFF is sad; walks across the stage.)

. . . yes, sir . . . you'll do well . . . that's what Armstrong told me the first time I met him . . . It was on Cliffden Island; he was displaying his regenerative circuit . . . bringing in signals all the way from Ireland! I was rising fast in the ranks of the company--RCA had just been formed--and I knew this Armstrong was the hottest thing going. I took another executive out there with me to see his discovery, but mainly I wanted to meet him. He was big and tall and naive as hell, I liked him right away. I knew I could trust him . . .

(The attic window is dimly lit. Bright lights come up on rugged interior of a cabin. Armstrong sits at a table with his telegraph equipment and a black box next to him. Behind the table stands a well-dressed man in gray or some other nondescript color. Next to them stands a short, vibrant young man who even when standing still appears to be moving or about to move. He taps a foot here or his pencil there. It is DAVID SARNOFF. He is bent over the apparatus along with ARMSTRONG. They are

(He is enthused, the others look bored and uncomprehending. Lights up full on the scene. SARNOFF resigns himself, is calmer.)

It's so much better not to look over your shoulder . . . Then you don't wind up screaming in the middle of the night or calling out names you haven't heard in years!! Take my word for it . . . never have memories. They turn you inside out until you're lost, running blind in a storm with only the roaring wind all around you, caught inside yourself with no land in sight . . .

(Lights out on SARNOFF, fade into lit scene.)

DAVID
(To ARMSTRONG.)
Listen to that!! It's so clear! Remarkable! Magnificent!

(To the other two.)

Come closer! Can you believe it!!

LAWYER
It's late. We have a train to catch. I think we had better be going. Thank you very much for your time, Mr. Armstrong.

(ARMSTRONG is busy listening. He does not even notice that he is about to leave. DAVID pulls him aside.)

DAVID
Thank you very much, Mr. Armstrong! Is that all you can say to him?

LAWYER
Really, David, I don't know what you expect me to do. I don't understand the apparatus . . .

DAVID
(Exasperated.)
Well, understand this! He's doing the impossible. He's bringing in signals from all over the world!! With his patent, we can move out in front! None of the other companies have anything like it! You've got to go with me to the board of directors. We've got to make him an offer!

LAWYER
(Tired.)
David, sometimes you let your enthusiasm run rampant. It takes time to move on a thing like this. We need trained men to evaluate this device more fully; we need to carefully prepare a report . . .

(He pulls on his gloves.)

DAVID
By then it will be too late!! Listen, with his invention . . .

LAWYER
We really must leave, David! We can talk about it on the way home.

DAVID
(Trying to restrain his anger.)
You go on ahead, then. I'm staying.

LAWYER
Staying! If these engineering idiots want to freeze their rear ends off that's their business, but I thought you had more sense!

DAVID
They're staying up all night to bring in more signals. Don't you see! History is being made here tonight!

(ARMSTRONG hears the last comment. Gets up, goes to DAVID.)

ARMSTRONG
You're right, history! Would you like to stay?

DAVID
Thank you, yes!! I'm afraid my friend has to leave.

LAWYER
(Shaking ARMSTRONG'S hand in business fashion.)
It's been very nice meeting you, Mr. Armstrong. I've been hearing for months what a remarkable young man you were. Thank you for the demonstration. We'll be in touch with you. . . . Good night, David.

(He exits. DAVID and ARMSTRONG move back to the table. ARMSTRONG takes long, nervous, ambling steps. DAVID, short staccato ones.)

ARMSTRONG
I'm glad you're staying. It's wonderful to talk to someone who really understands the significance of my circuit.

DAVID
I'm glad, too! Don't let the others bother you. They'll come around! The trouble with most corporations is that all the fellows at the top are like him--they have no knowledge about science and technology, or even how the typewriter works--all they understand is high-level paper work! To move forward, you have to know your company from the bottom upward, the way a captain knows his ship!

ARMSTRONG
(Laughing.)
You sound like you own the entire corporation!

DAVID
Not me! I would like to run things, yes, but never own them! . . . Thank you for asking me to stay. I've never been the part of anything this remarkable before.

ARMSTRONG
It's nice to have someone to talk to.

DAVID
Edwin . . . all evening I've been thinking how valuable your work is . . . and . . . Edwin . . . I've wanted to ask . . . would you consider coming to work for us . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Stunned.)
What!

DAVID
Come to work for us, Edwin! Listen, I have lots of pull now, and you should see the plans for our new lab! You'd have the run of the place! I know how to swing it. Anything you want!

ARMSTRONG
You're really serious, aren't you!

DAVID
You bet I am! You're a genius, Edwin, that's obvious. I would like to create a lab that would function as a mind pool--you know, bring in bright people from all over the country. You could work together; no telling what you would come up with. And RCA would take care of all the legal work.

ARMSTRONG
(Smiling.)
And who would get the credit for our discoveries?

DAVID
RCA, of course, but . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Laughing.)
That's just what I thought!
(He moves to his invention, gets excited.)
It's London! Listen!

(DAVID moves over toward him. They both take down a message and compare it and laugh. It is the same message.)

Think of it! Just the two of us here, with the snow and the emptiness outside, and the whole world out there, talking to us!

DAVID
When I first heard about your invention, I didn't believe it! But now,

. . . you know, Edwin, it's the funniest thing, just the thought of what you've done has set me to thinking about what all this could mean, on a grand scale!

ARMSTRONG
(Excited.)
You're the first person other than some friends at the university who has ever appreciated what I have done! You . . . can't know what that means . . . most people think I'm a crackpot . . .

DAVID
That's because most people are afraid of genius. I'll tell you something most people would think was a crazy idea . . . as a matter of fact, you might, too . . . but somehow I doubt it . . . it has to do with the long range results of what you have done . . .

ARMSTRONG
What is it!!!

DAVID
Well, I have this dream that some day wireless won't be just a means of sending signals . . . Some day people will begin sending music and literature out into the air and everyone will have his own little receiver in his home, kind of like your black box . . . I mean . . . it will be true democracy, Edwin, because everyone will be able to bring in music and learning from all over the world right into his own living room whenever he wants to.

(He pauses, looks toward EDWIN for his response.)

Do you think that is absurd?

ARMSTRONG
No, of course not, it's wonderful. I never thought of that . . . but you're right. That's really wonderful, David! You think the way I do--in the opposite direction from everyone else.

DAVID
(Flattered.)
Thank you. I've never told that to anyone else before. It's just a thought now, of course, but some day I know I'll make it happen!

ARMSTRONG
You enjoy your work, don't you David.

DAVID
The corporate world has always excited me. That's where the real <u>power</u> is, Edwin! You can almost taste it in the streets of New York!

(He becomes more and more animated.)

Individual great minds come together and are merged in the tremendous progress of mankind. Chicago, New York, nothing can stop this country.

(EDWIN is so quiet. DAVID looks at him, pause, wondering if he has said too much.)

ARMSTRONG
I've never liked cities much. I'm afraid I don't have much experience with the forces you speak of. All I want to do is find the basic principles of wireless and harness them. I can do that alone.

DAVID
No you can't, Edwin. I know how you feel, but no one does anything alone any more . . . I learned the importance of power on the East side of New York. My father was fragile; my father tried to make it alone . . . he's dead.

ARMSTRONG
My father is a rock . . .

(Pause. He is sad. Looks at DAVID.)

You've had quite a life, David . . . I think I envy you, because you have survived so well and accomplished so much . . . me, I've always known quiet. I belong in a library, I guess.

(He pauses. Smiles at DAVID.)

It's funny . . . I usually don't talk about myself like this. I hardly know you.

DAVID
I feel as if I have always known you . . . I knew I would like you the instant I found out you didn't play tennis or bridge!

ARMSTRONG
I think our friendship is safe on those grounds.

DAVID
(Slowly.)
I meant what I said earlier, Edwin . . . come work for us . . .

(No response. ARMSTRONG nervously fiddles with his apparatus. Otherwise he appears calm.)

or it not that . . . at least . . . sell us your patents.

ARMSTRONG
Sell you my patents!

DAVID
(Moving in quickly.)
Yes, Edwin, sell them to us. Let us license them; let us protect them. Otherwise you're going to lose them.

ARMSTRONG
If I sell them to RCA, I would surely lose them! My creations wouldn't belong to me anymore.

DAVID
What possible difference could that make? They'd be safe!

ARMSTRONG
They're already safe! I've saved up the money for the patents myself.

DAVID
That doesn't mean a thing. You don't understand what you're up against. Listen, you have to be very careful. Do you know Lee Deforest?

(Light comes up suddenly on opposite side of the stage. In the pool of light is Lee Deforest, frozen over a lab table, notebooks piled high in front of him. Behind him stands a lawyer, perhaps the same as we saw at the beginning of the scene, only now in a brown suit instead of gray.)

ARMSTRONG
Lee Deforest! That idiot! He's been out on a lecture tour trying to prove that all this is impossible! How could he ever take credit for something he doesn't even *believe exists*!

DAVID
He's famous for doing exactly that! He's tried to claim credit for most of the major inventions in wireless in the last ten years. He even went after Marconi! The audion is his one invention that means something, and you come along and prove he doesn't understand it! Deforest is a loser, Edwin, that's what makes him dangerous.

ARMSTRONG
I still don't see how he could hurt me.

DAVID
AT&T, Edwin. That's how. They own his patents. They've put a lot of money into Deforest. There's a war on, Edwin, and it's not across the ocean like everyone thinks; it's right here in America. It's quiet, but total control of the wireless industry is at stake. AT&T has been trying to come up with something like you have here for years. They've had their labs working constantly, pouring money into projects by the millions. Then you come along, in some dusty university, and take it right out from under their noses.

ARMSTRONG
But I tried to interest them in my circuit years ago!

DAVID
That's the trouble with most of these corporations! No vision, and that's why you need to sell us your patents, <u>now</u> before Deforest goes after <u>you</u>. It does happen, you know. The man who invented the fine-toothed comb was denied a patent by the man who invented the picket fence because the language in the fence patent seemed to cover combs as well!

ARMSTRONG

That's absurd! A comb is not a picket fence--no matter how you phrase it!! When a man creates something, it's his. My regenerative circuit works. It sits there, ticking away. That's all the evidence anyone needs. No . . . I don't think, in the end, that the big corporations you speak of are going to advance society. Not in American anyway . . . This is the time when one man, alone, in the privacy of his own attic, with nothing more than his brain and his own two hands, can change the shape of the entire world! That's what I believe.

DAVID

If you'll pardon my saying so, I think you're a little naive. You've been up in your ivory attic too damn long. But I wish you luck . . . you certainly are going to need it.

(Another signal starts to come in. DAVID gets up excitedly and goes over to listen. ARMSTRONG, rebuffed, turns his back.)

Hey, listen to this!! It's from France! All the way from Paris! Edwin! . . . Edwin! Aren't you going to come take the message down?

ARMSTRONG
(Sadly.)

No . . . you do it . . . I've already heard France . . . in my own attic, do you understand . . .

(His voice becomes a whisper.)

in my own attic . . .

(DAVID excitedly continues to take down the message. ARMSTRONG looks away. Lights out on their area. They remain on in the Deforest area and a pool comes up also on SARNOFF, who is seen watching the last scene. He turns from it sadly, and watches the Deforest scene.)

DEFOREST
(Unfreezing.)

Who is this Armstrong, anyway? Who does he think he is!

LAWYER

It doesn't matter. The important thing is the notebook . . . you say you have an entry, dated August, 1912, with you still. We need to examine the wording . . .

DEFOREST
(Nervously)

Yes . . . it isn't fair! I develop the controlling element of the audion, and all they put in the textbooks is one page! One lousy page! Someone else always gets the credit!! Today it's this egotistical young brat named Armstrong, tomorrow it will be somebody else! Everyone is always trying to steal my ideas.

LAWYER
(In a cold tone.)
I'm afraid, Mr. Deforest, that you're the one with that reputation!

DEFOREST
That's not true! I've never laid claim to anything that wasn't my own. It's you lawyers that don't understand. All you care about is profits on paper . . . you have no respect for genius . . . for art . . .

LAWYER
(Sarcastic.)
Was it genius or art that made you go after the Fleming valve? . . . trying to patent an old Bunsen burner experiment with two electrodes as a wireless detector . . . I'll say this, Lee, you have nerve.

DEFOREST
(Ignoring him.)
Armstrong . . . how did he ever get a name like that anyway! Armstrong.

LAWYER
Look, we lost the initial fight because Armstrong proved conclusively that he discovered regeneration. All your circuit diagram showed was that you put together a howling telephone repeater circuit. Now, scientifically, we haven't a leg to stand on, but we have a break--Armstrong hasn't waived . . .

DEFOREST
(Interrupting, carried away.)
That abominable judge! . . . I can still hear his closing speech . . .

(Micking an old man.)

"It is necessary to recognize that Armstrong is a clear thinker. His achievement . . . "
(His voice cracks.)
His achievement . . . "was not the result of an accident, but the consummation of a thoughtful and imaginative mind!" What would that damn judge know about an imaginative mind! And that Armstrong sitting there like a lopsided goose, grinning his ears off, and that funny, beady-eyed Sarnoff next to him jumping up and down . . . who the hell does he think he is!

LAWYER
Now, Armstrong has refused to waive damages . . .

DEFOREST
So?

LAWYER
Mr. Deforest, will you please pay attention! AT&T has no intention of losing the money it has invested in your patents.

DEFOREST
What does it mean if he refuses to waive damages?

LAWYER
It means that Mr. Armstrong wants you to pay!

DEFOREST
He wants me to pay! Good God, haven't I paid enough already? That thief! That scoundrel!! I won't give him a dime! I'll rip him off the earth! Wants me to pay . . .

LAWYER
I've got to examine the counts again. He's going out of the country soon. We'll have to move fast to get the wording changed; then we can start interference. By not waiving damages, he's left the whole legal thing wide open . . .

(DEFOREST begins to take interest. LAWYER goes through briefs, knowing he can catch DEFOREST.)

DEFOREST
I don't know . . . I don't like the idea of winning something like that . . . I mean, if hard, scientific proof isn't enough, where would we all be . . . it seems like a dirty trick . . .

(The LAWYER looks mockingly at DEFOREST.)

Maybe I'll try going to see him. Face to face we can work something out . . .

(He returns, looks over the LAWYER's shoulders at the documents, then he reaches down and picks up a document.)

seventeen years is all the protection a paper gives, and ten of those are gone . . . I'll try talking to him. We haven't hit it off too well in the past . . . young upstart . . . thinks he's God almighty!

(He puts down the paper decisively.)

If we can get the word "high-frequency" here changed to the more general term "electrical," we might just bend it to fit my discovery.

LAWYER
Of course! That's more like it, Mr. Deforest.

(He begins to write.)

"High-frequency electrical." Excellent. AT&T may just save her investment yet.

DEFOREST
AT&T! AT&T! That's all I ever hear from you. You never say "I" or "me," just AT&T. What is AT&T anyway! Does it get hungry? Does it have pride? Can it hate! . . . I'll go and talk to him.

LAWYER
(Smiling.)
You do that, Mr. Deforest . . . you go and talk to him. Meanwhile, we'll get busy on this.

(They continue to brood over the papers. DEFOREST watches for a moment, then puts on his coat to leave. Lights up in attic. ARMSTRONG stands with his back to the window. DEFOREST mounts the stairs, stands humbly before ARMSTRONG.)

DEFOREST

Mr. Armstrong?

ARMSTRONG

Yes.

(Turns, recognizes him, somewhat surprised. His voice is cold, his neck stiffens.)

Mr. Deforest. What can I do for you?

DEFOREST

I've come to see you about the regenerative circuit patent . . .

ARMSTRONG

I thought that was thoroughly settled in court, Mr. Deforest.

DEFOREST

(Trying to control himself.)

Yes, it was . . . only, my lawyers tell me you have refused to waive damages.

ARMSTRONG

(With finality.)

That is correct.

DEFOREST

I've come to ask you to reconsider that decision, Mr. Armstrong. I think we have all suffered enough from this unpleasant affair. What more do you need?

ARMSTRONG

You should have thought about that before you began all this "unpleasant business," as you call it.

DEFOREST

You won in the courts; can't we both go on about our lives now? I'm willing to forget that you now have patents to my idea.

ARMSTRONG

(Suddenly angered beyond control by this.)

YOUR IDEA! YOUR IDEA! Surely you're not still trying to claim . . .

DEFOREST

(Losing control also.)

What about my 1912 notebook entry! You can't deny that!

ARMSTRONG

What do you mean, deny it! Cross examination eliminated it!! We proved what that was! Your circuit had nothing to do with wireless reception or transmission and was totally incapable of performing either function!

DEFOREST

Now listen, Armstrong . . .

ARMSTRONG

No, you listen, Deforest! You're not going to go around saying that I won this suit on a technicality! I proved beyond a doubt that I was the inventor, and you're going to recognize that! I won't have you blackening my name!

(DEFOREST moves to interrupt.)

In spite of your vast experience in the patent procedure, you made no move to patent any discovery in feedback. I was delivering papers everywhere--shouting it to the world. But you couldn't see beyond your own nose. You even presented some lectures to the fact that what I had done was impossible! Admit it!! And then, when you realized that what I was doing was possible, you tried to steal my vision! You are a criminal, Mr. Deforest!

DEFOREST

I won't stand for this!!

ARMSTRONG

Oh, yes you will!!! People who steal jewelry or money are put in jail and fined, but people who steal ideas think they can get away scot free. That's wrong, Mr. Deforest, and maybe if everyone sees that you pay, then others will be less likely to try the same thing.

DEFOREST

Why!! You won't reap any benefits from it! Why!!

ARMSTRONG

I just told you why.

DEFOREST

You conceited, self-righteous bastard!! You think you will break me, don't you! Well, I'll tell you something, Mr. Armstrong. I fought hundreds of people bigger and brighter than you, and I've often lost, but I've never been broken, and I never will be. I won't crawl to you! Do what you like, but I won't crawl.

ARMSTRONG

That's where you're wrong. You exist continually in the slime.

DEFOREST

(Totally losing control.)

You're dead, Armstrong! Sooner or later you're dead! You think you understand the universe? That world out there you think you're defending--that very world will crack you in two, and when it does, think about me and know that I'll be laughing.

ARMSTRONG
We'll see, Mr. Deforest, we'll see!

DEFOREST
You don't know what suffering it! Your time is coming! I've seen my dreams stolen a thousand times.
(His voice cracks here.)

Wait until that happens to you, then you'll change! The great ideals you think you represent don't exist. Survival is all that counts. If you don't come to realize that, you'll never make it.

ARMSTRONG
(Sarcastic.)
Thank you for your profound advice, Mr. Deforest. Now, if you'll kindly leave, it's getting late.

DEFOREST
Good evening, Mr. Armstrong . . . just remember . . . I'll be laughing!

(He sweeps out, knocking some Erector set parts on the floor. He stops and picks up some of the pieces.)

Still playing with toys?

(Exit DEFOREST. ARMSTRONG stands erect for a moment. Then he slowly and forcefully picks up the pieces of his Erector set and puts them away. Lights out.)

Scene 3

(Lights up on office scene--SARNOFF'S office. MARION sits at a large desk, eating a jelly doughnut and drinking a cup of coffee while reading a copy of a Hemingway novel. SARNOFF is down stage left observing. He has removed his tie completely. There is a suggestion of a large, steel-and-glass office building interior. The phone constantly buzzes.)

MARION
(Answering the phone with one hand, her doughnut in the other.)
Hello . . . No, I'm sorry, Mr. Sarnoff is out to lunch; you can try to reach him again in about an hour . . . I'm sorry . . . you'll have to call back later because I'm out to lunch also.

(She gets jelly from the doughnut on the phone.)

Oh, and I hope you like lemon!

(She hangs up. Picks up the book again. Phone rings a second time.)

Rats . . . fifteen minutes a day is all I ask . . . Hello . . . oh, it's you, Phil; sorry, I'm out to lunch . . .

(She goes to hang up, he obviously stops her vocally.)

I'm sorry, catch me in fifteen . . . I don't care what the emergency is, nothing, absolutely nothing, is going to come between me and Hemingway, do you understand! . . . I said, . . . WHAT! You're kidding! . . . no, come to think of it you have no sense of humor . . . HE'S WHAT! HANGING THERE! . . . Well, how did he get up there!! . . . No, Phil, I didn't think he flew. You're a laugh a minute, you know that, Phil! . . . What do you mean you can't get him down? YOU HAVE TO GET HIM DOWN. Mr. Sarnoff will kill us all . . . Listen, this Armstrong may be a nut, but Mr. Sarnoff is very fond of him, and I happen to be very fond of my job . . . WHAT! He's henging!! . . . By nothing but his heels . . . WHAT!! SWINGING!! Phil, that tower is over two hundred feet off the ground! Phil . . . Phil, don't panic . . . maybe he's calling . . . He's . . . SINGING!!? Yes, that fits the description . . . He wouldn't just hang, he'd sing, too . . . Yes, that fits! . . . Oh dear . . . Phil!! Are you there? LISTEN! PHIL, YOU HAVE TO GET HIM DOWN, QUICK, BEFORE MR. SARNOFF

(The door slams open and in comes DAVID. MARION slams down the phone, quickly in a panic.)

just came in. Goodby, Phil.

DAVID
(Efficient, commanding, in a hurry.)
Any calls, Marion?

MARION
(Snapping her pad open, very efficient.)
Mr. Wood's office called. They're sending a young lawyer over with the briefs, A Mr. McCormack . . . Van Ellison left these for you to sign . . .

(She hands him a huge stack of papers. All through their conversation, he reads and signs, even while talking to her. She accidently gets jelly on one of the papers as she places it in front of him.)

Oh, dear . . . I hope the board of directors likes lemon.

(Sheepishly wipes off the jelly.)

DAVID
For heaven's sake, Marion, this isn't like you!!

(She busily hands papers to him, talking while he reads and writes notes in the margins, etc.)

MARION
I know. Usually I order strawberry . . . but today, I was down at the bakery getting ready to order my usual, and I heard these two salesmen talking in the corner . . . you know what they were in? Danish fillings! Imagine, spending your whole life in Danish fillings!

DAVID
Almost as absurd as spending your whole life in radio! Now, Marion . . .

MARION
Anyway, one of them looked sort of bedraggled and sad, and he was complaining to the other one; it seems he was in lemon, and it is a bad year for lemon filling, and I had this vision of his poor wife and ten children starving because no one wants lemon Danish, so I ordered a dozen, very loud so he would hear me . . .

DAVID
Something's wrong, Marion . . . whenever you run away with yourself I know that something's up. You might as well tell me now . . .

MARION
(Pause. She takes a deep breath.)
Well, it's Mr. Armstrong, sir . . . if you must know, he's . . .

DAVID
(Handing her papers he has signed, one by one, reading others.)
Ah, so you've finally met him, eh!

MARION
So far I've had the luck to escape the pleasure . . .

DAVID
He caught a glimpse of you the other day when he stopped in here . . . He's heard me talk about you so many times, and one look did it. I think he's really fallen for you.

MARION
(Flustered, trying not to show it.)
Sign here, sir . . . that's ridiculous. We've never met! I don't even know what he looks like.

(DAVID looks up, a mischievous grin on his face.)

DAVID
Next time he comes in, be sure to speak to him. You'll recognize him because he is very short, very fat, and has a squeaky voice.

(MARION is both disappointed and worried.)

MARION

Oh . . . oh, dear! Is he very fat?

DAVID

Very. He wants to take you for a ride in his car.

MARION

A ride?

DAVID

Now, Marion, under no circumstances do I want you to accept a ride with him. I value you greatly as a secretary, and when that man takes off, he leaves your soul behind you on the pavement. Marion, I've been caught in gang wars on the lower East side in my youth, but never, never, even in those times, was I half so scared as I was the first and only time I accepted a ride with Edwin! Sixty miles an hour, his foot all the way to the floor board and him singing and telling stories about the war all the time!

MARION
(Softly.)

Singing again . . .

DAVID

What?

MARION

Ah . . . sir . . . there's something . . .

DAVID

. . . However, I think it would be nice if you went out with him . . . some place quiet. I mean . . . well . . . he could use some diversion . . . he lives forever cooped up alone in that attic of his with his inventions . . . and now I have to tell him the bad news . . .

MARION

Bad news?

DAVID

His lawyers have been trying to get hold of him all day. No one knows where he is, so they called me. He lost, Marion . . .

MARION

What!

DAVID

It's the biggest mess I have ever seen. Deforest pulled a fast one and got the counts changed from "high frequency" to "electrical." He sneaked that in while Edwin was in France. The decision went to Deforest on the basis of the wording of the counts!

MARION
But that's horrible!! The New York courts clearly declared Armstrong the inventor years ago!

DAVID
(Teasing.)
I thought you didn't know anything about Armstrong.

MARION
(Embarrassed.)
Well, I've read a great deal about him, and I've heard you and some of the others talk about him, and . . .

DAVID
You're interested, Marion, go on, admit it! That is, you were, until I let it slip that he is short and fat . . .

MARION
(Shoving the last of the papers at him.)
I am not interested!! I want nothing to do with a crackpot who hangs by his heels from the Aeolian tower. Still, they had no right to take his patents away from him!

DAVID
Technically they aren't his patents any more, Marion, since he sold them to us . . . HANGING BY HIS TOES FROM THE . . .

MARION
Heels. That's what I've been getting around to telling you. Phil called me and . . .

DAVID
You mean he is actually hanging up there, two hundred feet off the ground!!

MARION
Yes, sir.

DAVID
WELL, DON'T JUST STAND THERE!! GET HIM DOWN!!

MARION
Everyone's trying, sir, but no one knows how.

DAVID
Why is he doing this?

MARION
No one has enough courage to crawl up and ask him, sir . . . but he seems happy enough. Phil said that he was singing . . .

DAVID
Jesus Christ!!

MARION
I think we could, er, signal a message to him, sir, if you want to . . .

DAVID
MARION! Listen and listen carefully. I want Edwin down off that tower and over here immediately! Do you understand/ I am a busy man, I don't have time to send him messages, that's your job! . . . GET HIM DOWN! . . . McCormack will be here shortly. Show him in when he arrives . . .

(He exits and slams the door.)

MARION
Oh, dear, now what do I do?

(On a whim, she sits down at her desk and dials the phone.)

Phil, this is Marion. Is he down yet? Oh dear . . . listen, can you get a message up to him? Okay . . . listen . . . tell him, if he'll come down immediately, Miss Marion McInnes would like very much to take a ride with him in his new car . . . I know it sounds ridiculous . . . I know, Phil, a note from me wouldn't bring you in from a blizzard, but it's worth trying, isn't it? . . . Mr. Sarnoff has ceased to be even momentarily pleasant . . . that's right, 'bye, Phil!

DAVID
(Coming out, papers in hand.)
Well . . . did you get him down?

MARION
(Meekly, lying.)
Yes, sir . . . just now . . . he should be here soon . . .

DAVID
The way he drives, I expect him in about three minutes! Send him in when he arrives!

(He exits back into his office. The phone rings.)

MARION
(Answering.)
Phil! Good! . . . oh, thank God . . . that's not very funny, Phil! No one ever said that man had taste, Phil . . . well, I'm glad you finally have found something to laugh about. I'd hate to think of you going through life with an expression that looks like your face was punched out by a mad baker . . . you do that, Phil . . . you visit me in the hospital . . . you're so clever, before you know it you may be promoted to bathrooms . . . 'bye, Phil!

(Enter MCCORMACK. He has the same physical build as DAVID jokingly described ARMSTRONG. He is short, fat, rather jolly and shy.)

MCCORMACK
Excuse me, is Mr. Sarnoff in?

MARION
(Thinking he's Armstrong.)
My word, that was fast!! You must have been down already when I called Phil.

MCCORMACK
Er . . . I was in the lobby . . .

MARION
(Eying him carefully. He is embarrassed.)
All I can say is, that must be some car you have!

MCCORMACK
I'm afraid I don't understand . . .

MARION
(Stares at him for a long time.)
You can go right in. Mr. Sarnoff has something he has to tell you.

MCCORMACK
Oh, dear . . . I was hoping that he would simply sign these so I could get back to Mr. Wood . . .

MARION
You know, it's really strange . . . you hardly look the type!

MCCORMACK
I beg your pardon!

MARION
Weren't you afraid of falling?

MCCORMACK
Falling?

MARION
Never mind. You can just go straight in. And tell Mr. Sarnoff that I said I won't do his dirty work for him--job or no job!

MCCORMACK
(*Looking bewildered.*)
Yes, of course . . .

(He exits into Sarnoff's office. MARION begins to type. ARMSTRONG bursts into the office with a huge steel ball in his hand. He is dressed in a rumpled suit. MARION can't believe her eyes, but she is obviously attracted to him.)

ARMSTRONG
(In a mock grandiose manner.)
Well, here I am!

MARION
Mr. Sarnoff will see you in a moment. He's busy just now. He's in there talking to a crackpot inventor.

ARMSTRONG
(Amused and curious.)
Oh, really? Whom, may I ask?

MARION
A fellow by the name of Armstrong. They're very good friends and all that.

ARMSTRONG
(Confused and amused.)
I see. Well, what is this crackpot inventor like?

MARION
Why do you ask?

ARMSTRONG
Oh, I do a little inventing myself on the side.

MARION
I might have known!

ARMSTRONG
How's that?

MARION
I mean, you look the part! Tell me, do you always carry a steel globe into court?

ARMSTRONG
Everyone must have a pocket calendar! But seriously, you think I look like an inventor, eh?

MARION
Certainly more than that Mr. Armstrong. He doesn't look like the type who would drive a car over five miles an hour.

ARMSTRONG
Ah ha! It's his car you're really interested in.

MARION
Well, this Armstrong character is a real speed demon! Mr. Sarnoff made me promise never to get inside a car with him.

ARMSTRONG
But you plan to anyway. At least that's what my message said.

MARION
Oh, no, I just said that to get . . .

(She catches on.)

Oh, dear . . . you're not McCormack . . . that's McCormack . . . you're .

ARMSTRONG
Edwin Howard Armstrong at your service . . . cracked pot and all!

MARION
(Genuinely embarrassed.)
I have one big disability. . . my mouth. You see, I never met you and Mr. Sarnoff said you were short and fat . . .

ARMSTRONG
That sounds like something David would say. It's quite all right, really. Are you ready?

MARION
For what?

ARMSTRONG
For the ride in my car. It's a Hispano Suiza--really fast. You can leave the wind behind you when you drive. It's almost like outmoving movement; you become suspended outside of time. Wonderful. You'll love it.

MARION
That's very nice, but the truth is, I have a great deal of work to do. I only get 15 minutes to eat lunch. I sent that message on a fluke in hopes it might get you down.

ARMSTRONG
I came immediately. This is for you.

(He plunks the steel ball down on the desk.)

MARION
For me!

ARMSTRONG
That's right. I didn't have time for flowers, but I'll bet you're the only young woman around who can boast that a young man has brought her the steel ball from off the top of the Aeolian Hall Tower!

MARION
(Laughing, impressed.)
I'm sure I am!! You know what! I'm glad it's you and not him. You certainly do look strange.

ARMSTRONG
But you like strange men?

MARION
Oh, some.
(She begins to flirt a little.)

From the top of the radio tower . . . Wow! . . . weren't you frightened?

ARMSTRONG
No. You should try it. Everything is clear and open; nothing can touch you. It's the only way to make life stop long enough to look at it.

MARION
(Impressed.)
MY! . . .

(ARMSTRONG goes to the window, opens it, leans out.)

ARMSTRONG
Come over here; I'll show you what I mean!

MARION
No, thank you. I'm afraid of heights.

ARMSTRONG
You'll get over it. I'll show you.

(He sits on the window sill and leans out over the city.)
See, it's easy.

(MARION rushes over to him.)

MARION
Oh, no. Please don't!! You'll fall!

ARMSTRONG
I never fall. My balance is perfect; it's part of my nature.

MARION
Oh dear! Please come in!! Now! Please!

ARMSTRONG
Nothing doing!! You promised to go for a ride with me and it turned out to be a lie. I won't be fooled this time!

(He leans out further. She panics.)

MARION
Stop!! Mr. Sarnoff!! Mr. Sarnoff!! Come out here, quick!!

(DAVID comes rushing out, followed by MCCORMACK.)

He's out there! Armstrong!! Do something before he falls!

DAVID
Oh, for Christ's sake!! Edwin, come in here!!

(EDWIN starts to sing, "Yes, sir, that's my baby, no sir, don't mean maybe . . .")

I said get in here! This is no time for playing around . . . your lawyers called.

(ARMSTRONG stops singing in mid sentence. He brushes off his suit nervously, and comes in.)

ARMSTRONG

Well?

DAVID
(Slowly, he can't look at ARMSTRONG.)

You lost, Edwin.

MARION

Mr. Sarnoff, I believe this could wait . . .

(ARMSTRONG stiffens, lets it sink in.)

ARMSTRONG

You can't mean that, David.

DAVID

Call them if you like. No one could reach you. You were too busy playing with the birds! . . . I'm sorry, Edwin . . .

(ARMSTRONG is shaken. He says nothing.)

Look, it's really out of your hands now. Since we have purchased your patents, the fight is really between us and AT&T.

ARMSTRONG

I couldn't have lost! It's impossible. Every court upheld me! Why now?

DAVID

A lousy trick, Edwin. A semantic trick. The D.C. court never examined the evidence; they went by the language. If you had just waived damages or come back earlier from France so you could have blocked the change of wording in the counts . . .

ARMSTRONG

Well, he won't get by with it! Some clown with nothing on his mind but cheating is not going to steal my name!! There's been a mistake.

DAVID

There's no mistake . . .
(He lets the following sink in.)

Delaware made the same decision by upholding the D.C. court . . .

(ARMSTRONG is deeply struck.)

. . . so did . . . Philadelphia . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Almost inaudibly.)

Philadelphia . . .

DAVID

. . . Edwin . . . perhaps this is the time . . . I want you to come to work for me, in our labs.

MARION

Mr. Sarnoff! You mean you intend to let the matter drop?

DAVID

Hush, Marion . . . What else can we do? . . . Take it to the Supreme Court?

ARMSTRONG

(Seriously, angry.)

That's exactly what we will do; we will take it to the Supreme Court!!

DAVID

Damn it, Edwin, I was being sarcastic! You run off with everything I say . . .

MCCORMACK

It's not a laughing proposition at all, Mr. Sarnoff. Many types of cases have been taken successfully to the Supreme Court that seemed more far-fetched than Mr. Armstrong's. As a matter of fact, Mr. Armstrong, you might have a chance. There is some ruling somewhere that says if a private citizen is hurt by a decision, the case can be reopened and submitted to the Supreme Court. I remember Mr. Wood handling a case like that once . . .

ARMSTRONG

Of course . . . that's perfect!! I'm sure some small businessman who's been hurt by the new ruling will fight. We'll find him and support him! That's wonderful, Mr. . . . ?

(DAVID keeps trying to break in, to no avail. He becomes more and more frustrated.)

MCCORMACK

McCormack. Glad to meet you, Mr. Armstrong. I've been following your case in the papers. I can't believe you lost.

ARMSTRONG

You're a lawyer, Mr. McCormack?

MCCORMACK

Yes . . . of sorts . . .

ARMSTRONG

How would you like to represent me when I take my case to the big court?

MCCORMACK

(Taken aback.)

Why, I'm just out of law school, I'm a junior, junior partner. For something like that, you would need Mr. Wood, himself . . . I mean, I don't begin to have the expertise . . .

ARMSTRONG
To hell with that!! You have the right spirit! I can teach you everything you need to know about radio electronics. We'll prepare briefs that are accurate beyond any doubt. There won't be any slip-ups over words this time. What do you say?

DAVID
(Finally breaking in.)
Now hold on a minute!!

MCCORMACK
(Sputtering.)
Well . . . I . . . mean . . . I just suggested . . .

MARION
(Jumping in, excited.)
I'll get out a list of all our licensees! We're bound to find one who's been hurt by this whole thing. Edwin, we'll contact him, and get the case going, and win once and for all!

DAVID
Why, Marion, I had no idea you and Edwin were on a first name basis!

(MARION is mute, embarrassed.)

ARMSTRONG
I'm grateful, Marion, truly! Now if you get that list, Mr. McCormack and I can start our course. I'll see you in my office, McCormack, and I'll construct those briefs with you, word for word. I'm not licked yet! Is it a deal, McCormack?

MCCORMACK
Er . . . I'll have to check with Mr. Wood . . .

ARMSTRONG
To hell with Mr. Wood!

DAVID
HOLD IT!! JUST HOLD IT, EVERYONE!

(There is terrible strength and command to DAVID's voice now.)

YOU . . . CAN'T . . DO . . THAT . . EDWIN!! Those patents belong to RCA! We license all the people on that list you want--we have entire control of licensing for all radio patents by agreement with AT&T, Westinghouse, and GE. If you fight this, I can't support you, because, in effect, you will be fighting me! Do you understand that, Edwin?

ARMSTRONG
But, David, you're my friend. You know this whole business is wrong . .

DAVID

You win some, you lose some; the important thing is to make sure you win more than you lose and that you stay on top. I think I can keep RCA on top--we don't necessarily need those patents. . . . Listen, Edwin, you've never even bothered to visit our labs. You'd really be impressed. . . . Come to work here, for us . . . let this whole ridiculous thing drop . .

ARMSTRONG

(Trying to shut out DAVID. In a flurry.)

Mr. McCormack, have you ever ridden in a Hispano Suiza?

MCCORMACK

No . . . I've never had the . . . pleasure . . .

DAVID

Edwin, you're not listening to me . . .

ARMSTRONG

I don't need a job in your labs. I have plenty of money and my old assistant professorship . . .

DAVID

You know it's not money I'm talking about, Edwin . . . and you're a professor in name only--I'm talking about your talents, your creative talents. You can use them best here.

ARMSTRONG

I don't work well in groups, David. I need air.

DAVID

Edwin . . .

ARMSTRONG

Thank you, David, but I don't want to talk about it.

(With stubborn determination.)

Now, Marion, . . . er, Miss McInnes, if you could get to work on that list . . .

DAVID

(Losing patience.)

She's my secretary, Edwin, and she has work here to do first! When will you ever grow out of this exalted view of your own importance! I can't believe that you'd actually even consider the Supreme Court . . .

ARMSTRONG

(Fighting for control.)

You don't think I'm worth much, do you, David . . .

(DAVID starts to protest, ARMSTRONG shrugs him off.)

I'm just another "crackpot inventor," as Miss McInnes puts it . . .

MARION

Please . . . I didn't mean . . .

ARMSTRONG

It's all right. I understand. You think that because *I work alone*, that because I don't command the lives of thousands of people or head some giant research team, that I'm unimportant. Well, let me tell you something! Without us "little people" there wouldn't be any RCA or AT&T--- you'd be out of a job, David. But lucky for you,

(He glares at MCCORMACK.)

the gnomes sit quietly and do their job and accept their fates and are swallowed up in all your phony promises. There wouldn't be a Mr. Wood without you, Mr. McCormack, but you sit still and let the people ahead walk all over you, because you think yourself small!! One man alone contains the whole world inside him. If we cease to believe that, we cease to exist!!

(He is spent, surprised that he has said so much himself.)

DAVID

(After a pause.)

Edwin, I had no intentions of hurting your feelings . . .

ARMSTRONG

(Stiffening with pride.)

I have to be going . . .if you'll excuse me . . .

MARION

(Shaken, knowing she's going against Sarnoff for the first time.)

Mr. Armstrong, could you wait a minute, please. I need some help with this globe . . .

ARMSTRONG

(Mistaking her intentions, thinking she is joking, hurt.)

This is not my day for humor, Miss McInnes. Good day . . .

MARION

I wasn't joking. I'm going to look awfully silly carting that thing on the subway, and I do intend to take it home with me! Also . . .

(Glancing at Sarnoff.)

You promised me a ride in your car . . .

DAVID

MARION! <u>You</u> have work to do. <u>I</u> have work to do, <u>RCA</u> has work to do!

MARION

As I was saying, Mr. Armstrong, you promised me a ride in your car, and I have a list to prepare for you. Perhaps we could discuss it over supper.

DAVID

MARION!

MARION

The women of my generation are forward, Mr. Sarnoff.

DAVID

I have an incredible schedule yet this afternoon. I have no intention of letting you go. This whole business has gotten out of hand. Now if you'll all just cool off . . .

MARION

(Gathering her things together.)

I haven't taken an afternoon off in two years. I think I deserve one!

DAVID

You walk out that door, Marion, and in spite of my affection and admiration for you, you're fired.

ARMSTRONG

Get another secretary from the pool, David; you have hundreds of them. You can charge it to my account if you like.

(Pause.)

DAVID

Damn it, do what you like, Edwin. There's no use arguing with you. Get in here, McCormack. We need to finish those papers. Marion, call the pool and have them send someone up, immediately.

(MARION goes to the phone to call.)

McCormack, are you coming?

MCCORMACK

(Looking down.)

No, sir . . .

DAVID

Now the whole world has gone mad!! McCormack, get in here before I have your ass.

MCCORMACK

Please, sir, there's a lady present. Mr. Armstrong, if you still want me for your lawyer, I would be proud to represent you.

DAVID

(Laughing.)

Oh, brother!! Now Don Quixote has his Sancho Panza!! I tell you the Supreme Court is going to love this!!



the k-state players
and dept. of speech present

ARMSTRONG

an original play by charlotte macfarland

purple masque theatre

december 2, 3, 4, 5—8 p.m.

MCCORMACK
(An edge to his voice now.)
I may be just out of law school, but I graduated first in my class.

ARMSTRONG
(Shaking his hand, excited.)
Thank you, Mr. McCormack! I am proud to have you aboard!

DAVID
Jesus Christ!

ARMSTRONG
You'll have dinner with us, of course.

(He picks up the ball.)

We can put this on the back seat. Of course, it will slow us down a bit.

(He pauses, mulling the problem in his mind.)

Perhaps . . . Mr. McCormack could balance the weight in the back seat, and Marion, er, Miss McInnes could sit in the front, then we could still maintain some of the speed . . .

MCCORMACK
(To himself.)
Oh, dear . . .

DAVID
That's what happens when you cease to be a gnome, McCormack . . .

(Pause, as EDWIN reaches the door, DAVID is struggling to reach out to him, doesn't know how, at last.)
Edwin . . .

(He speaks softly for the first and only time in the scene.)

I . . . hope you make it, Edwin . . . I truly do . . . Good luck.

ARMSTRONG
(Touched.)
I'm glad there are no hard feelings, David.

(He extends his hand, as does SARNOFF. There is an awkward moment, as both men express their emotion and are embarrassed by it and don't know what to do.)

DAVID
(With attempted flipancy.)
Good luck, Marion. You'll need it!!

MARION

I doubt it. It's going to be a better year for lemon. Besides, I brought him down out of the sky, didn't I?

(They all exit except DAVID. The lights hit DAVID--he closes his eyes and shakes his head. Lights out on him. Lights up on SARNOFF, who does the same. He shakes his head and closes his eyes. End of scene.)

ACT II, Scene 1

(SARNOFF is in a pool of light. He faces the audience, takes off his coat.)

SARNOFF

What about that Armstrong, eh? Hanging from his heels just to impress a young woman! Of course, he married her. After all that trouble, he would have been crazy not to . . . And he went to the Supreme Court, too, with McCormack armed to the teeth with the most accurately compiled scientific briefs ever written! . . . Armstrong even hired a train when he thought they weren't going to make the session in time! Imagine that, an entire train!! That's Edwin for you!

(SARNOFF laughs, remembering.)

He was a millionaire, and yet he'd throw it all away at a moment's notice for an idea. Buying a train was nothing! He'd buy radio stations and networks to prove a point!

(He moves out towards the audience.)

You have to understand money--it's the universal language. Like in this Supreme Court fight. Edwin backed a small engineering company, which had been sued by RCA for infringement of the Deforest patents. You see, RCA had administrative rights to all the patents because of an agreement back in 1919 with AT&T. Armstrong never understood how we could be fighting AT&T in one area, and administering their patents and fighting court cases with them in another. He saw everything in terms of armed camps--the good guys versus the bad guys. The trouble is, there weren't any camps or any principles of right and wrong--just giant amoebas moving through the night, picking up cells, multiplying blindly, merging, flowing, clashing, moving off into the shadows, but always forward--guided by the primordial desire for food.

(SARNOFF sits down again.)

Edwin, on the other hand, was always fighting for ideas, and, like all such fools, he lost. No one on the court could understand the briefs.

I doubt they even read them.

(He pauses, tired, and almost pleads with the audience.)

I tried to warn him. I mean, Columbus didn't discover a continent to prove the earth was round. That law was a side effect. One goal made old Isabella twitch a little and say yes, and that was GOLD. You understand money, and you understand all there is to know about world history . . . I would like to rest . . . I would like to go home . . . but it's important that you know that I was for him . . . in my dreams I was for him . . . It's important that you know I loved the man.

(SARNOFF leaves the stage completely. Lights up on a family scene sr. CRICKET and ARMSTRONG have just entered the room. They are arguing. Opposite this scene sl, is a group of distinguished-looking men, with one man at a podium in front of them. Under the podium is a sign which says "Institute of Radio Engineers." This whole scene is frozen, and does not become animated until late in the scene, but is visible--like a tableau--for the entire time. CRICKET is a lovely young woman now. There is a mature grace about her--although her movement is still quick and light.)

CRICKET

Edwin, you can't! I won't let you!

ARMSTRONG

Cricket, I will not keep anything that doesn't belong to me!

CRICKET

Edwin . . . don't! . . . What will Marion say! She was so proud of that medal.

ARMSTRONG

It doesn't matter now . . . I don't plan to tell Marion. She's upstairs with Mother. When she comes down, tell her I've left for the convention. She doesn't have to know the rest.

CRICKET

It's Mother! I knew we shouldn't have come here! Edwin, she's had two strokes since he died.

(EDWIN turns to her, strokes her hair.)

ARMSTRONG

(Gently.)

I'm glad you came, Cricket. You'll be getting married soon, and you don't want to be gloomy. The whole world is before you. Marion and I will see to Mother. You just be happy, please! For me, be happy.

CRICKET
I will; if you don't go to that meeting.

ARMSTRONG
(Storming away.)
We've been through it all, damn it! I'm going now, and that's that! I have to do what's right!

CRICKET
Edwin, even the newspapers have come out against the Supreme Court's decision! Just about every respected engineer has made a public statement deploring the action! Why won't you accept that and just go on!

ARMSTRONG
Because in the eyes of the world I am nothing. It is as though I never existed! RCA and AT&T already have their propaganda mills working. They're out to discredit me! You should see the popular literature!! Deforest is portrayed as the FATHER OF RADIO!! They're trying to say that I never was the inventor of anything!

(He begins to break down. CRICKET goes to him, gently comforting.)

CRICKET
Edwin . . . it doesn't matter. Think about your new idea! Marion said that David told her FM is going to be your greatest invention! And there's that new laboratory that David has set up for you! Is it really on the top of the Empire State Building?

ARMSTRONG
(Brightening at the mention of FM.)
Yes--FM! Having FM in my back pocket is the one thing that has kept me going through the whole regeneration mess. Without my experiments, I don't know what I would have done. Oh, Cricket, if only he could have lived to see it!

(He begins to break down again.)

CRICKET
Please, Edwin . . . don't . . .

ARMSTRONG
He was so angry . . . he just didn't understand. Said I was unfair to Marion . . . In his eyes, Cricket, . . . I never amounted to anything!

CRICKET
Edwin, don't, please . . . we never should have come here.

(A commotion is heard. Enter MARION and EMMA. EMMA is quite old now, and shakey from two strokes. She drifts in and out of the present.)

EMMA
There you are, Edwin. I'm glad to see you're downstairs. A storm is coming and I've been having such bad dreams.

ARMSTRONG
I'm glad you were able to get some sleep, Mother.

EMMA
Sleep . . . nothing more . . . your father used to sleep so soundly . . . could snore in three part harmony . . . now the room's so . . . quiet . .

MARION
Mother, let's go out on the porch. The fresh air will do you . . .

EMMA
(To ARMSTRONG.)
Edwin . . . I've had such a dream . . . you were lost, and your father and I were looking everywhere for you . . .

MARION
Mother . . .

EMMA
All the neighbors were watching the sky, and when we asked them where you were, nobody said a thing . . . Suddenly, we remembered that antenna mast. We looked up and there you were, going higher, and higher. Your father tried to climb the mast to get you, and then there was this awful peal of thunder and . . . poppa fell . . . while you went further and further away. Edwin! . . . You should have been there.

(She is trembling. EDWIN comforts her.)

ARMSTRONG
I'm here, Mother, and I'm fine. It was just a dream, nothing more.

CRICKET
Come on, Mother, let's do what Marion suggested.

EMMA
But where's poppa! What do I do without your father!

ARMSTRONG
You'll be fine, Mother.
(He gently breaks away.)

I have to go. I must catch a train.

MARION
Catch a train? Where?

ARMSTRONG
Marion, you remember. I told you I was going to attend the Radio Engineers convention this week.

CRICKET

Edwin!

MARION

No, I don't remember any such thing. What's this all about, Edwin?

EMMA

(Catching the word radio--repeating it to herself.)

Radio . . . Edwin is neglecting his work . . . radio . . . that's all we ever hear in this house . . radio!!

MARION

It's all right, Mother . . . Edwin! What's going on?

CRICKET

Tell her, Edwin!

MARION

Tell me what?

ARMSTRONG

Cricket, you promised!

CRICKET

I don't care! Tell her!

(ARMSTRONG is silent.)

Ask him why he's going to that convention, Marion, ask him!

MARION

Well?

ARMSTRONG

I'm doing what I have to do . . .

CRICKET

He's going there to give back his Medal of Honor!

MARION

What!!

CRICKET

Since he lost in the Supreme Court, he says that the medal no longer belongs to him because in the eyes of the law, the invention no longer belongs to him. . .

MARION

Edwin, no! Just because the Supreme Court has made legal precedent out of the fallacy that two totally different things are identical because they can be described in the same words, doesn't mean we have to believe in such nonsense. That decision was based on semantics, not scientific proof. No engineer would believe such nonsense.

EMMA
(Picking up the last word.)
Nonsense . . . This whole radio business is sheer nonsense. I won't have you mentioning it again! If you love your father at all . . .

ARMSTRONG
Mother, please!!

CRICKET
Edwin, she doesn't know what she's saying . . .

EMMA
Even at the end, he called for you, Edwin. I didn't have the heart to tell him you couldn't come because you were fighting some RADIO battle . . . . You should have been there, Edwin, . . . you should have . . .

CRICKET
(Trying to stop her.)
Mother, don't . . .

ARMSTRONG
No . . . Mother, listen! You could have called me! Do you think that anything would have kept me from his side if I had known he was dying?! You have to believe that. I would have come!

MARION
Edwin . . . she doesn't know . . . she doesn't mean . . .

EMMA
Looking at the sky, calling for you . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Breaking down, crying for the first time.)
Mother, mother, please . . . I only wanted him to be proud, I only . . . Mother, I loved him!

EMMA
Storm's brewing . . . it's not safe up there in that attice . . . Edwin?

(She realizes again, with horror.)
Poppa's dead! He's dead . . .

(MARION rushes forward, CRICKET takes hold of her, leads her out.)

CRICKET
Come on, mother . . . let's go out on the porch . . . You'll feel better out there. . . Edwin, I'm sorry . . .

(MARION motions CRICKET and EMMA out, then holds EDWIN gently. He slowly gets hold of himself.)

ARMSTRONG
Marion . . . I don't know any more . . . I never thought he would go like that . . . and I never thought I would lose this fight . . .

(Pause. He nervously gathers together his belongings. Slowly he straightens up, embarrassed.)

Well, I had better be leaving if I'm going to make that meeting.

MARION
Edwin, if you're so intent on going, then I'm coming with you . . . I'm always with you, Edwin, you know that.

(He looks at her fondly. Draws her to him.)

ARMSTRONG
Yes, Marion, I know that . . . you deserve more than this, more than an attic full of wires, cold suppers, and court battles . . . and now mother . . .

MARION
(Gently pulling from him, trying once more.)
Edwin, keep the medal . . . for your father's sake.

ARMSTRONG
No, Marion . . . It's for <u>his</u> sake I'm returning it.

(Lights out on their area--lights come up on convention which suddenly becomes animated.)

MODERATOR
Good afternoon, gentlemen. Could we have it quiet, please? I think we're about ready to begin . . .

(The sounds of a roomful of people. The MODERATOR looks around. MARION and ARMSTRONG enter. The room is instantly quiet. ARMSTRONG is slightly slumped. He looks more "beaten" than usual. The men assembled cannot look at him. MARION sits down by the side of the dais.)

MODERATOR
(Nervously.)
May I introduce Edwin Howard Armstrong, who has requested a few minutes of your time for a matter of importance. Mr. Armstrong . . .

(ARMSTRONG steps to the dais. He is obviously nervous. His voice quavers. He unfolds his crumpled speech nervously and looks down at it; his hands shake. Still, he possesses a dignity in the way that he

manages to resume an erect posture as he continues to speak, until finally his voice contains some of the animation and fire it once had.)

ARMSTRONG
Gentlemen of science, Members of the Institute of Radio Engineers. I deeply appreciate your giving me this moment of your time. I hold in my hand one of my most prized possessions. It is the distinguished MEDAL of HONOR which you awarded to me in 1918 for my discovery of regeneration. I have come to return it to you . . .

MODERATOR
(Interrupting him.)
Mr. Armstrong . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Doggedly going on.)
I have been away from you for a long while, away in a world different from the world of science, a place composed of layers of words-like-clouds which obscure the pure light of truth from our eyes. I have tried to balance between the two worlds, but I have lost my hold. I once thought the man of truth could live out there, and in the depth of my heart I still believe it, need to believe it, but my sense of reason tells me such beliefs are only childish illusions, and the time has come for me to put away my dreams . . .

(His voice falters. The MODERATOR gently interrupts him again, by coming to the podium with ARMSTRONG.)

MODERATOR
Major Armstrong, by unanimous opinion of the members of the board, I, Charles Johnson, president, have been directed to say to you: First: It is their understanding that the Medal of Honor of the Institute was awarded to you by the Board in 1918 with a citation saying the following: "The Medal of Honor is awarded to Edwin Howard Armstrong for his engineering and scientific achievements in relation to regeneration and the generation of oscillations by vacuum tubes."

Second: The present Board of Directors, with full consideration of the great value and outstanding quality of your original scientific work and of the present high esteem and repute in which you are held by all the members of this institute, proudly reaffirms the original award, and also proudly reaffirms the sense of the original citation.

(ARMSTRONG is profoundly struck and moved. The MODERATOR pins the medal on his lapel. ARMSTRONG once again stands erect as one by one the men gathered leap to their feet in a standing ovation. ARMSTRONG stands proud, MARION cries . . . the lights slowly fade but they do <u>not</u> go out. The ovation continues in mime, as SARNOFF enters into a spot on the opposite end of the stage.)

SARNOFF
(Carrying a large textbook with him.)
It's like I've told you all along . . . what I really am is a recorder of disasters . . . Edwin went to work night and day on FM, with a feverish fanaticism, for, despite the plaudits of the scientific community, regeneration was closed to him forever . . . disasters . . . RCA and AT&T did their work well . . . This is an electronics textbook; Armstrong is barely mentioned, but Lee Deforest is called the "Father of Radio."

(He moves out to the audience, almost offering them the book.)

But who, I ask you, are fathers? Do they die with visions of their sons, who are, in effect, their creations, on their lips? Who really was the father of Edwin H. Armstrong? More important, who was the father of his dreams, and who, tell me, WHO, allowed them to die!

(He pauses, pleading, shaken, then shakes his head and walks slowly out of the pool of light. Lights out on the ovation scene and SARNOFF spot out. SARNOFF moves across the stage.)

Scene 2

SARNOFF
(Seated again, he puffs on a cigar; picks up the medal of honor.)
Somewhere, in a book I dimly remember reading, a historian claimed that a major cause of World War II was the existence of entangling alliances. . . . That's what happened to Edwin and me, and the war was just as vital to us, only ironically we came to blows over thin air. I was getting into Television; RCA was on its way to becoming first in the field, but Edwin could think of nothing else but FM. He wouldn't stop begging us to look at his experiments and listen to what he called a "revolution in sound." The problem was that FM and TV both operate best on the same wave lengths. Armstrong received FCC permission to operate on the very frequencies we needed for television. We had to have those channels or TV would never have moved out of the experimental stage . . . I mean, what was FM anyway compared to television; who needed clear sound except Edwin, up there in the Empire State Building all by himself with nothing but the wind . . . He was blocking the greatest idea of the century . . . holding the line in a war RCA had to win . . . The man was a fanatic . . . an . . . entangling alliance, damn him, and we both needed air so our dreams could breathe.

DAVID
(He is on the phone with EDWIN.)
Edwin . . . let's bury the hatchet . . . you have your frequencies, your experiments are going well . . . I miss you, Edwin . . . Yes, I know, it's been a long time . . . Yes, I would like to see you and Marion tonight . . . like old times . . . What? Alfred, too! That's wonderful! How is he, anyway? . . . 8 o'clock? I'm looking forward to it, Edwin. . . . I can't tell you . . . Right. See you tonight.

(He hangs up the phone, obviously pleased. Stands up, goes to the window, takes in a breath of fresh air. The intercom sounds.)

SECRETARY'S VOICE
Mr. Sarnoff?

DAVID
Yes, Elizabeth?

SECRETARY'S VOICE
Your lawyer is here to see you.

DAVID
Tell him I'm busy just now . . .

(DAVID is somewhat agitated.)

SECRETARY'S VOICE
He says it's very important, Mr. Sarnoff.

DAVID
(Resigned.)
Very well . . . send him in . . .

(Enter LAWYER.)

LAWYER
(Always in a hurry.)
I understand you were just on the phone with Armstrong.

DAVID
Yes.

LAWYER
Did you come to an agreement?

DAVID
. . . No . . . we didn't talk business.

LAWYER
Just as I expected! . . . Well, there are other ways to get around it. His patents can be circumvented . . .

DAVID
Look, it's been a long day, . . .

LAWYER
This is crucial!! Our legal staff is working the matter out. Under no circumstances should we take one of his regular licenses! . . . The other matter concerns congressional committees and the press. I think we should let out the story that Armstrong only imagined he needed to build his own station to prove the worth of FM. We can say that RCA was only taking its time studying the aspects of the situation. We can say we collaborated with Armstrong in making his first FM tests and getting his transmitter. .

DAVID
No.!

LAWYER
What do you mean, no!!

DAVID
I've pushed him as far as I intend to. I won't hurt him again.

LAWYER
Oh, come on, Mr. Sarnoff!!

DAVID
You don't understand. The man is my friend . . .

LAWYER
(Shaking his head.)
One should never have inventors as friends. They aren't good business.

DAVID
I can't do that to Edwin . . .

LAWYER
(Nonplussed.)
Listen . . . this country is at war. Do you know what that means?

(DAVID buries his head in his hands.)

It means SUSPENSION OF ALL CIVILIAN FM ACTIVITY. You know that! When this war's over we can move in on the channel issue again and get them back. Sarnoff, this is our one chance! We have to work now to build an iron-clad case.

DAVID
We might lose the war! There might not be a world left! Did you ever consider that? We're speaking here of Hitler, and bombs, and death.

LAWYER
Mr. Sarnoff, this isn't like you. This war isn't in Europe . . . it's right here, and you know it! We can pull out on top of this one, you know that, too!! . . . As head of RCA you have to make a choice--your friend, or television! Which is it going to be?

DAVID

. . . I know Edwin . . . he'll be patriotic and magnanimous . . . He'll put all his patents at the disposal of the government, royalty free . . . you should have seen him in the first war . . . This one is a good deal uglier . . . everything is . . .

LAWYER

I'm waiting, Mr. Sarnoff . . . The word has to come from you . . .

DAVID

(Pause. He hates what he does.)

Okay, god damn it, you do what you have to do . . . Only I don't want to hear any more about your god damn schemes . . .

LAWYER

You know what the consequences are, whether or not you know the minute details. Armstrong is an ass!

DAVID

Say that again and you'll be looking for another job!!

LAWYER

(Backing off a little.)

Look, I'm only calling what I see. He's a fool, and he's on the way to making you one, too.

DAVID

No!!! . . . Now get out!

LAWYER

(With some sarcasm.)

Yes, sir. I'll inform you of any progress made.

(He exits.)

DAVID

You do that . . .

(Long pause. Old SARNOFF watches him intently.)

Why does it have to be so complicated . . . pictures across the wind . . , everything passing on the air . . .

(DAVID picks up the phone, dials EDWIN'S number.)

Hello . . . Edwin . . . glad I still caught you at home . . . Look, about this evening . . . something has just come up, and . . . well, I'm afraid I can't make it after all . . . I hope you understand . . . Listen, I'll have to take a rain check . . . soon . . . right . . . Oh, and Edwin . . . give Marion my best.

(He hangs up slowly, sadly. Goes to the window, opens it, looks out.)

I can't let go, Edwin, not now, not ever . . .

(Almost a whisper.)

Not even for you.

(The lights dim on DAVID . . . he stands frozen. Lights come up on old SARNOFF. He stands frozen.)

Scene 3

(Lights up on living room of ARMSTRONG'S.)

ARMSTRONG
(With great frustration, his head in his hands.)

I don't believe it . . .

MARION
(After a pause, gently.)

Edwin . . .

ARMSTRONG

It can't be happening . . . can't . . . not again . . .

(He rises from his chair, hardly able to control himself.)

. . . can't . . . I knew that closed-door meeting of the FCC would publish a lie . . . they moved us . . .

MCCORMACK

Edwin . . . I need to talk to you . . . Edwin, it's about your finances.

ARMSTRONG

They moved us out of our channels! The FCC has made us obsolete! . . . Even though I proved them wrong!! Alfred, they were picking up Alpine from clear down in Alabama! . . . We proved we worked fine in our original frequencies. Even before the war we were going strong . . .

MCCORMACK

Listen, Edwin . . . we have to be practical. I need to see your books, Edwin, I need to know what you've spent!

ARMSTRONG
(Not hearing him.)

I keep wanting to fight and I keep hitting air!! How could they ignore my careful evidence! All my transmitters and receivers are obsolete!

MCCORMACK

Edwin, they're too powerful. Accept the fact that you can't make any money from FM. You need to get hold of yourself, build up your assets, you need . . .

ARMSTRONG

I've got to petition the FCC again!! Without those original frequencies, FM is dead! We've got to have them back!! Think of all the people who invested in transmitters and receivers! Now they're all junk.

MCCORMACK

It's over, Edwin. Accept it. It's terrible but it's over. . . . Television is all anyone will talk about, and politics is what it's all about. Richards, the FCC chairman who decided against our FM case . . . well, he's just been hired by RCA . . .

ARMSTRONG

What!!!

MCCORMACK

It's economics, Edwin, and frankly, we're all getting too old to fight this any more.

ARMSTRONG

I'll never be too old to fight! And I'm not through now, Alfred, not by a long shot! What about that possibility of taking the channels fight to the Senate? The government will set things right.

MCCORMACK

Everything gets buried in committees, Edwin. You just don't have the power. Senator Williams is a fighter, but he carries little respect. He isn't influential. Nothing will come of it.

ARMSTRONG

Alfred, we're talking about the Senate of the United States!!

MCCORMACK

Listen . . . Edwin . . . have you looked at yourself lately?

ARMSTRONG

Now don't start that again!

MCCORMACK

Well, have you!! You have black circles down to your ankles! There are so many things you could be doing instead of eating yourself up over all this. With your genius, there's no telling what you can still do. Edwin . . . make your peace with David.

(ARMSTRONG reacts negatively.)

Edwin! . . . I know how you feel about your inventions. I know it's terrible to be knocked down twice in a row, but you can't blame David for all this . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Rising up.)
CAN'T BLAME DAVID FOR ALL THIS!! Do you know!! . . . Do you know what the RCA legal department has been doing!! DO YOU!

MCCORMACK
(Backing down, somewhat.)
Edwin . . .

ARMSTRONG
I'll tell you what!! First they tried to create their own patents on FM and circumvent mine. They tried to claim credit for my invention . . . Then they got licensees for their patents. They're stealing from me . . .

MCCORMACK
Edwin, that's a common business practice.

(ARMSTRONG walks away from him. MCCORMACK motions to leave.)
There's no use talking to you now . . .

(ARMSTRONG breaks down. MCCORMACK softens.)
You need a rest . . . you need to get on with other work . . .

ARMSTRONG
FM <u>is</u> my work!

MARION
(Tired, wan, unable to stand it any longer.)
Edwin, please . . . listen to him . . .

MCCORMACK
I think, Edwin, . . . I think *you should* settle . . . with RCA. The battle is senseless. They've made numerous overtures . . . David tells me . . .

ARMSTRONG
So now even you're siding with Sarnoff!! He tried to say FM wasn't even an invention!! He tried to destroy me, and you say it was just common business practice . . . I can't . . . I don't understand what's happening any more . . .

MCCORMACK
I'm not taking David's part! It's just that I can't bear to see what you're doing to yourself . . . and to Marion . . .

(ARMSTRONG looks at her. She is nervous, on the verge of tears.)

MARION
Please, Alfred . . .

MCCORMACK

NO, I'm going to say it and I'm going to say it now! When during this whole thing, Edwin, have you ever given thought to how it affects Marion! Look at her!

(ARMSTRONG does. He moves towards her. She goes to the corner.)

MARION

Alfred, please . . . you're overstepping yourself. This is not a legal matter.

MCCORMACK

I'm not speaking as your lawyer, now. I'm speaking as your friend. I hate this whole business as much as you do; it's unspeakably unfair. Sometimes, to be honest, it's made me hate my profession, and despise the whole legal system in this country. But we can't fight it. It's too complex. I say, grab what happiness you can, live for each other, and forget this rotten business . . .

ARMSTRONG

(Looking hard at MARION.)

Nothing's clear . . . I'm a selfish bastard, Marion . . . Nothing's clear any more . . . Alfred . . .

MCCORMACK

Listen, David called me this morning. He wants to see you, Edwin . . . Make peace with him. He's trying to control a steam roller and he is under terrible pressure . . . Make your peace . . .

ARMSTRONG

Alfred . . .

MCCORMACK

I told him you were home. He's waiting downstairs in the car. See him, . . . talk to him, . . . if not for your own sake, then for Marion's . . . Go on a vacation, rest . . .

(Pause. ARMSTRONG is upset.)

ARMSTRONG

Don't you see, he's ruining the quality . . .

MCCORMACK

Edwin!!

ARMSTRONG

All right!! I'll see him! . . . But I want you here, Alfred.

MCCORMACK

Edwin, this is a matter for the two of you . . .

ARMSTRONG

NO!! I'll see him, but I want my lawyer present! I . . . don't . . . trust him . . .

(MCCORMACK touches his shoulder, gently.)

MCCORMACK
All right, Edwin. I'll go get him.

(He goes to leave, stops at MARION.)
I'm sorry . . . I had to.

MARION
It's all right, Alfred.
(He kisses her affectionately, leaves.)

ARMSTRONG
(At last, gently.)
I've been so selfish. This has all been terrible on you. Marion, forgive me . . . I never realized until this moment how . . .

MARION
Hush, Edwin . . . it's not you. It's--it's a kind of . . . of . . . erosion that's pulling me down . . . At twenty you tell yourself, oh, twenty is young. Then you hit thirty, and you say, "Oh well, I'm in the prime of life." Then suddenly you're forty, and it's all slipped away and there's so little left . . . Oh, Edwin, that's what I can't bear, the slipping away . . .

ARMSTRONG
Marion, I'll make it up to you. You're so important to me . . .

MARION
It was glorious in the old days. All of you, David, Alfred, talking about important things until all hours of the night. I thought to myself, here are some of the greatest men in the whole country, and they're all right in my own home. Sometimes, at night, I dream that you are all still right there laughing, and talking, and I call out to you, only you seem so far away, and I can't get to you. I start crying out for something, something lost at the edges of my mind, eluding me and gone forever . . . something so beautiful . . .
(She is extremely agitated.)

ARMSTRONG
(Slowly.)
I can't be what I was then, Marion.

MARION
Oh, Edwin, I don't want you to be what you were then!! I don't want anything more now than you do, truly. Not even children. Edwin, what hurts me the most is that I can't give you joy!

ARMSTRONG
Oh, Marion. . .

MARION

NO! It's true. Edwin . . . I love you. I don't love your regenerative circuit, or FM or anything else you've thought of, I love you. You don't have to prove anything to me. The first time I saw you in David's office, your hair all tousled from the wind, that terrible suit all full of dirt, and carrying that silly steel ball off the tower, I knew I would love you. You were ridiculous, but so beautiful. You have such wonderful eyes, such a lovely, clumsy way of walking. You light up the sky, Edwin. And you would whether you had ever invented anything or not. If I had it all to do over again, I wouldn't change a thing. I'd marry you in a moment . . .

(She presses close to him.)

I'm afraid for you, Edwin . . . If something . . . There isn't ever enough time in the universe, my dear, and what speck of it we have is running out.

(He draws her to him. Holds her for a long time.)

ARMSTRONG

Marion, don't ever say you don't give me joy . . . don't ever . . .

(Enter DAVID, followed by MCCORMACK. There is great tension between both men. MARION and ARMSTRONG pull apart, she dries her eyes, tries to compose herself.)

DAVID

(Beginning slowly.)

Edwin . . . it's been so long . . .

ARMSTRONG

(Cold, reserved.)

Yes . . . it's been long . . . but then you certainly have managed to keep yourself occupied, haven't you, David . . .

DAVID

(Ignoring the sarcasm.)

Trying to keep a big company running takes a lot of time, yes.

MARION

(Toying with the tension.)

How are the children, David?

DAVID

Fine! Oh, Thomas had the measles, but he was up and around before the week was over . . . you know how children are!

MARION

No, I wouldn't know . . .

DAVID

I beg your pardon . . .

MARION
(Recovering.)
Nothing, David. Come sit down.

(She moves toward him, extends her hand with genuine affection. They both smile. ARMSTRONG is infuriated.)

It's good to see you again. Can I fix you a drink?

DAVID
(Relaxing a little.)
That would be nice . . .

MARION
The usual?

DAVID
The usual.

MCCORMACK
(Sitting down relaxing, ARMSTRONG alone stands, his back to them now.)
Me too, Marion. Hey, remember the night we all got drunk, and walked across town singing! We were lucky we weren't killed!

DAVID
Yeah!! That was right after the regeneration . . .

(He has made a mistake. They all pause, sense it.)

ARMSTRONG
(Slowly, with great animosity.)
Manufacturing a lot of FM sets lately, aren't you David . . .

DAVID
(Slowly.)
We're moving into television, Edwin.

ARMSTRONG
When one moves <u>into</u> something, David, that means someone else has been moved <u>out</u>!

MARION
Edwin, please!! David came here . . .

ARMSTRONG
I know why David came here. . .

DAVID
(Beginning to get ruffled.)
I came here as a friend, Edwin, to settle this fight. I can't bear what you've been thinking. If only you'd let me explain . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Stiffening again.)
There's no need, I understand. I've learned to understand a great deal about the corporate world.

DAVID
No, you don't. I did what I had to do, Edwin . . . I have all of RCA to think of now . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Looking at him, hard.)
When have you ever thought of anything else! . . . You look much older since the last time I saw you . . .

DAVID
Edwin, please, I'd like to explain! . . . These things are business. They shouldn't affect our friendship!

ARMSTRONG
Men are not made of separate layers, David! Each man is a totality. What you do in your occupation is as much a part of you as what you do in your home. I could understand your moving me out of the Empire State Building . . .

DAVID
Edwin, I'm sorry about that, truly . . .

ARMSTRONG
No, David! That, I could at least attempt to comprehend, and I am glad to have built my own laboratories anyway . . . but what I will not ever understand is how you could
(DAVID is agitated, starts to interrupt. ARMSTRONG cuts him short.)
say nothing, absolutely nothing in your reports to the commission and to the public about the advances of FM made in your laboratories! I gave you the first exclusive preview of FM; but you ignored it, and then tried to destroy it! Imagine hiding confidential engineering reports from the FCC!
(With great hurt.)
. . . and all for nothing . . . I would gladly have given RCA everything, David! . . . You . . . you . . . the only person who has ever really understood my work . . .

DAVID
(Pause, he tries to hide his shame.)
Edwin . . . you're not being fair. You're taking all this personally. You think every move I make is to destroy your previous FM!!

ARMSTRONG
Well, that's certainly what it looks like from here, David!

DAVID
Edwin, nothing as important as television will ever happen again, and we at RCA have the chance to be the ones to pioneer the whole thing. Television is uncharted territory, Edwin, a total revolution. FM is a modification, nothing more. It's not actually an invention at all . . .

(ARMSTRONG reacts violently.)

I mean . . . well, it is an invention . . . but . . . we already have radio, AM!

ARMSTRONG
Ah ha! Economics. I knew it! RCA has a huge stake in AM radio. My invention would make RCA's investment obsolete, and you're running scared. That's your real purpose! Go on, admit it!

DAVID
I won't for a minute deny that we have a great investment in AM, but that's not the reason I'm fighting you, Edwin! We both need the same channels, and TV has to come first. Why can't you see that?

ARMSTRONG
(Pause--he thinks.)
FM doesn't just mean better sound, David. It has to do with freedom, too. AM has been bogged down by restrictions caused by the limited amount of stations. The number of possible stations on FM is almost infinite! For the first time little people with little budgets would have a chance to grow. Creativity could expand to never-before-realized limits!! Right now radio is trapped in a cage. FM could unlock the door and let it soar free!

DAVID
(Pause.)
Edwin, you're dreaming. Little people with little budgets are going to offer little programs that gather little audiences and few advertisers and thus make your backers very little money! . . . You claim FM is a revolution in sound. That may be so, but television, Edwin, television is pictures across space! Sound and sight in one! THINK OF IT! The whole world will be changed. To be able to see someone thousands of miles away in your own living room. Nothing this important will ever happen again!

(ARMSTRONG moves away, angry.)

DAVID
(Pleading.)
Listen, Edwin . . . Television is to me what regeneration was to you . .

(ARMSTRONG stiffens at the mention of regeneration also, he is empathetic.)
It was discovered in our labs. You speak of RCA and the little people we trample under foot? Well, how about Zworykin--He invented modern television. Vladimir Zworykin. Before he came to me he had nothing. No money, no support, NOTHING. But I realized what he had. Through RCA I set him up and poured NINE MILLION DOLLARS into his invention. Maybe I

have made some moves which you would naively call unethical, but Edwin, you've seen what good ethics does in the courts--I'm not going to let the other corporations take this away from me!! Television is my contribution, and I have to fight for it!! You, of all people, should understand that!

(ARMSTRONG is moved. He softens.)

ARMSTRONG
All right, David, get to the point.

DAVID
We are prepared to offer you a total cash payment of one million dollars for a non-exclusive license under your patents . . . We will pay no royalties.

(Pause--it sinks in.)

ARMSTRONG
(Slowly, indignant.)
. . . ONE MILLION DOLLARS . . . with no payment of royalties . . . for an invention you could have had free years ago . . . one million dollars for something you call of minor importance . . .

(Pause.)
You know, David, I don't think until this moment I have ever really known you . . .

(DAVID is hurt. Pause; he knows he looks bad.)
The answer is no.

DAVID
Edwin, don't be a fool. There won't be a second offer!

ARMSTRONG
Listen, David, I have testified time and time again that all my licensees are treated alike. They all pay two percent royalties on FM receivers and equipment. If I suddenly allowed you to have a license without royalties it would be like slapping those faithful people in the face.

DAVID
Edwin . . .

MCCORMACK
(Going to ARMSTRONG with papers.)
He's prepared a handsome settlement, Edwin. Frankly, you've poured so much of your own money into this thing, that you can't go on with your research. Take it . . .

ARMSTRONG
. . . and RCA will really win . . . you and your licensees will inherit the earth . . .

DAVID
(Hurt, angry, sinister.)
It's my last offer, Edwin . . . I swear by all that's holy, I won't make another . . .

(ARMSTRONG takes the paper from MCCORMACK, moves to the table to sign it; they all relax, but he pauses a moment. He is making a decision. Then he picks up the paper, walks over to DAVID, and tears the papers to shreds in front of him.)

DAVID
(Shocked.)
You've lost your mind, Edwin!

ARMSTRONG
I'm going to fight you, David. I'm going to court again. I will not let you get by with this. I'm the only man left to fight you before you overrun the universe!

DAVID
You'll lose again, Edwin! We'll crush you! And when Armstrong's FM lies bleeding on the ground, remember that I offered to settle; I tried to make amends! Remember that!

ARMSTRONG
The rules have changed since Deforest. I have the right to look into your records now . . . I have more rights than I had then. . . .

DAVID
We'll tie it up forever, Edwin . . . You can't afford it . . . you'll lose!

MARION
(With despair.)
He's right, Edwin.

(MCCORMACK walks away. He can't look.)

ARMSTRONG
(Slowly, he builds to that.)
I know . . . he's right.

(They all turn to him, startled at the admission.)
I've been around long enough to see that now . . . I'll lose in the end . .

MCCORMACK
(Shocked.)
Then for God's sake, Edwin, why . . .

ARMSTRONG
I'll lose, but in the process, David, I can make you look very bad. I can dredge up the dirt, I can make people think, I can keep the issues open before it's too late for the rest of the world. Maybe I'll give courage to someone else who does have the resources to beat you!

MCCORMACK
I can't believe . . .

ARMSTRONG
I may lose, but, David, I'll make it so you have no peace . . . I'll be the thorn in your foot, David, just before it steps down!

(DAVID is shaken, angry, hurt.)

DAVID
(After a pause.)
I came here . . . out of friendship . . . I thought, perhaps, there was some hope of reconciliation . . . I hoped you could find it in you to see my position . . . I thought we could finish this and go out and laugh again . . . I've missed you, Edwin . . .

(Pause.)
It's over. You've no one but yourself to blame. I don't care any more. Dig your grave, be a fool. I have ceased to care. I no longer give a damn!

(He turns to MARION, who has moved to EDWIN'S side.)
I'm sorry, Marion.

MARION
(Straightening, holding ARMSTRONG'S arm.)
Goodby, David.

MCCORMACK
(Sad, ushering him out.)
I guess . . . we'll see you in court . . .

DAVID
You're the biggest idiot of all, McCormack. Any fool should know when to leave a sinking ship.

MCCORMACK
I guess that's the difference between us, David.

(DAVID shakes his head, looks at them once, then leaves.)

ARMSTRONG
(Muttering after him.)
The thorn in your foot, David, remember that--THE THORN IN YOUR FOOT!

(Lights out--end of scene.)

Scene iii

SARNOFF
(He looks into the light.)
Lights are hot. You can see heat rippling across your pain. . . . It's hell being a survivor; you're always the last to leave the ship. You have to stay around and watch the sun set over nothing. Perhaps those of us who hang on, who refuse to sacrifice our living bodies for anyone or anything, perhaps we are the real heroes in the end. We remain long enough to truly comprehend the wreck . . . that concept alone should make the storm less frightening, and deliver its own . . .

(He fumbles for a word.)

its . . . own . . .

(He tries to offer a gesture of pleading to the audience; his hands sink, he slumps to the edge of the light . . . in a soft tone.)

forgiveness.

Scene iv

(1949. An office-courtroom setting, however abstract. The tables and chairs have been rearranged so that opposing sides could sit. MARION and MCCORMACK are talking. OLD SARNOFF continues to watch.)

MARION
I'm sorry, Alfred, I tried to talk to him. . . .

MCCORMACK
I don't think he can take much more . . . I don't believe you can take much more.

MARION
I had no idea a hearing would take so long! Why don't they get on with it!

MCCORMACK
They're stalling. They have no intention of getting on with it! We've got to get him to drop it!! I think RCA will settle. The publicity has been bad enough . . .

MARION
(She begins to break down.)
Alfred, he can't drop it now!

MCCORMACK
What do you mean?

MARION

You know how proud he is, how he never told anyone about our finances, even me . . . well, last night I pulled it out of him . . .

MCCORMACK

And?!?

MARION

It's bad, Alfred . . . Worse than I ever expected. He has put so much into court battles and research . . . He has to win and collect back royalties, otherwise . . . We might not even be able to pay you . . .

MCCORMACK

Marion, my salary is unimportant, you know that . . . but . . . I had no idea . . .

MARION
(Breaking down.)

He's so proud. I'm afraid, Alfred, I'm so afraid . . .

(DAVID and lawyer enter opposite side. DAVID looks at MARION a long while. Enter ARMSTRONG. His entrance should be focused, the change in him everywhere apparent. He walks slowly, it is obvious he is in pain. He is bent, everywhere tired. There is still some fire in him, but one can see that he is broken. Everyone looks at him. SARNOFF looks away.)

MCCORMACK
(To ARMSTRONG.)

Are you ready?

(ARMSTRONG nods. Sits down heavily in his chair.)

I swear to you, Edwin, this is the last time. I've petitioned. It's our turn . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Almost incoherent.)

I . . . looked through some textbooks in the library the other day. Do you know I'm hardly mentioned in connection with FM . . . hardly mentioned . . .

MCCORMACK

It will end soon, Edwin . . .

ARMSTRONG

They'll carry this on until I'm either dead or broke . . .

(The JUDGE enters. He looks as weary as the rest. He sits down, the rest settle back; papers are shuffled.)

JUDGE

Mr. Armstrong . . . will you take the stand, please. You may resume, gentlemen.

(RCA LAWYER approaches ARMSTRONG, who moves slowly, but with great dignity to the chair appointed for him. He always maintains his dignity.)

LAWYER

You are the plaintiff in the present action?

ARMSTRONG

You know that. You've been questioning me for months.

LAWYER

Answer the question.

ARMSTRONG

Yes.

LAWYER

What is your name.

ARMSTRONG

Edwin Howard Armstrong . . .

LAWYER

What?

ARMSTRONG
(Louder.)

Edwin Howard Armstrong . . .

LAWYER

I'm sorry, you'll have to speak up . . .

MCCORMACK

Your honor, I protest . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Shouting.)

EDWIN HOWARD ARMSTRONG.

LAWYER

What is your profession?

MCCORMACK

Your honor . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Resigned.)

It's all right, Alfred. I am an electrical engineer.

LAWYER
Do you have any other occupation?

ARMSTRONG
I am a professor of electrical engineering at Columbia University . . .

LAWYER
Now, Mr. Armstrong, last week we established the conditions of your appointment at Columbia . . . We would like proof that you have a formal agreement that allows you to be referred to as "professor."

ARMSTRONG
My lawyer has finally found my letter of appointment by Harold Richter. I hope that satisfies you . . .

LAWYER
It is interesting that you are called a full professor and yet you have taught no classes . . .

ARMSTRONG
We have been through that . . .

LAWYER
I think we should go through it again, Mr. Armstrong. Why were you paid a salary when you did not teach?

ARMSTRONG
I told you before, research . . . at one point I was paid a dollar a year . . .

LAWYER
We will need records of every cent you were paid, Mr. Armstrong, along with added restrictions of your contract.

ARMSTRONG
Mr. McCormack has finally found the required information . . .

LAWYER
Good . . . now, the next question is, why, at times did you write letters on stationery with the University's letterheads?

ARMSTRONG
(Almost beyond his ability.)
I don't know . . . I used whatever paper I could find.

LAWYER
But why didn't you use your own stationery?

ARMSTRONG
I don't know . . .

LAWYER

You don't know . . . You were using up university stationery and you don't know why. The defense would like a copy of all the letterheads you have used for its inspection.

MCCORMACK

Your honor, I object! This whole business is absurd . . .

JUDGE

The defense has a right to request such information at this hearing . . . However, it would seem that more important matters could be brought to the courtroom. . . .

LAWYER

Your honor, our purpose is to inquire into every aspect of the plaintiff's financial records. He is listed as a professor of electrical engineering, and as such, records this as an occupation. We find this suspicious . . .

ARMSTRONG

(Losing control.)

How dare you!! How dare you attack the validity of my work at Columbia. . . . My basic profession . . . for over thirty years . . . has been to discover new principles and apply them to the art of radio . . . Twice I have done what other men have called impossible . . .

LAWYER

It is just that we are here to investigate, Mr. Armstrong . . . Now, we have been all over the fact that you have always kept your own accounting books . . . we have been over your financial transactions at great length, but there is still one question to be explored . . . Some of your FM licensees carry the oval insignia on their FM sets that says Armstrong/FM. Is that true?

ARMSTRONG

(Barely audible.)

Yes . . . but what difference . . .

LAWYER

Why was it oval, Mr. Armstrong?

ARMSTRONG

How should I know?

LAWYER

Why wasn't it a circle, or a square?

ARMSTRONG

For God's sake . . .

MCCORMACK

Your honor, this is all irrelevant . . .

JUDGE

Objection sustained. Will you please consider more pertinent information.

LAWYER
Very well, your honor . . . Mr. Armstrong, who thought of this insignia?

ARMSTRONG
I did.

LAWYER
Why?

ARMSTRONG
Because I invented FM, so my system is known as Armstrong/FM.

LAWYER
That remains to be proved, Mr. Armstrong . . . You were determined to make a profit from this, weren't you?

ARMSTRONG
(Beginning to explode.)
All my life I have used the proceeds from one invention to help finance another one. Any inventor who doesn't is crazy!

LAWYER
Is that what you're doing now, Mr. Armstrong?

ARMSTRONG
What I am doing now is protecting what is mine from charlatans who would take it away from me . . .

LAWYER
Now, Mr. Armstrong, you must indeed <u>prove</u> that anyone is taking anything from you . . .

ARMSTRONG
It's a sin, doesn't anyone see that!! A sin!! You are all destroying radio, and you're destroying me! A sin . . . Isn't anyone aware of the right and wrong any more!!

LAWYER
Mr. Armstrong, please confine your remarks.

(Simultaneously.)

MARION
(To MCCORMACK.)
Do something, Alfred!

MCCORMACK
Your honor . . .

JUDGE
(To LAWYER.)
Please confine your questions to matters at hand . . .

LAWYER
I am trying to, your honor. Mr. Armstrong, we were talking about your profession as a professor. Do you have still another profession . . .

ARMSTRONG
(In despair.)
Yes . . . I sometimes make inventions!!

LAWYER
Yes . . . so you occasionally make inventions . . . But your patents are running out, Mr. Armstrong.

JUDGE
As is the patience of this court! . . . Please assign your questions to matters of relevance . . .

LAWYER
Very well, your honor . . . Mr. Armstrong, we have examined your records at great length . . . Did you seriously think you could build a case on . .

ARMSTRONG
(Losing control.)
I'll tell you what I built a case on! Honesty! But honesty is dead . . . I built a case on integrity, but that is dead, too . . .

MCCORMACK
Edwin, please, . . . your honor, this has dragged on for almost a year at great personal expense to my client . . . I have petitioned that the case for the defense be closed as there is nothing more to be . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Bursting in.)
I'm not finished yet!! You don't want the truth, but I'll give it to you anyway! I've been fighting for a myth, a lie. The lie will destroy us all. Once upon a time . . . once . . . upon . . . a time . . . a man, alone in the privacy of his attic, with nothing more than his brain and his own two hands . . .

(He begins to break down completely.)

could change the shape of . . . I have a right . . . a right . . . the whole world . . . and it's a . . . lie . . . right . . .

(They are all silent . . . ARMSTRONG is broken.)

MCCORMACK
Your honor, I move that the case for the defense be closed and the plaintiff be allowed to begin its investigation. It has been close to a year now . . .

(DAVID makes a move towards ARMSTRONG, then checks himself. MARION helps ARMSTRONG from the chair. Even the defense lawyer makes no move to stop the action.)

JUDGE

Motion sustained.

(With abject weariness and a little cynicism, to defense lawyer.)

I'm afraid to ask, but do you have any further questions of this witness?

LAWYER

No, sir.

JUDGE

Very well. You may leave the seat, Mr. Armstrong. Mr. McCormack, are you ready to begin your investigation?

MCCORMACK

(Waiting until ARMSTRONG is seated.)

We are, your honor . . . we have a ruling from the district court giving us permission to require RCA to produce every record, letter, report, memorandum and paper having any reference to FM from their files. Before we proceed . . .

(The defense LAWYER registers surprise and upset over this decision.)

with that, I would like to call as our first witness, Mr. David Sarnoff, as this is one of the rare occasions he will ever have to appear in court.

JUDGE

Very well.

(DAVID walks to the chair, is sworn in. His manner should be contrasted to that of ARMSTRONG . . . he is confident, sure of himself, powerful.)

MCCORMACK

(Allowing DAVID to settle himself.)

Mr. Sarnoff, would you kindly give the court some of your background?

DAVID

(Relishing the opportunity to talk about himself.)

Of course. I am Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Radio Corporation of America. I started as an office boy, for the early Marconi Company. As a matter of fact, I used to carry Marconi's bags. Since I was poor, I had to grab my education where I could. As a young executive I had dreams of the future and I had great respect for the men who made them possible. It was in such a connection that I met Edwin Howard Armstrong.

(ARMSTRONG looks at him, stoney-eyed. There is a pause. There is sincerity to his voice. ARMSTRONG only continues to stare.)

I learned much from Mr. Armstrong. I learned more from him about the technical operation of receivers and radio than from anybody else. Of course, I don't regard myself as a scientist or engineer . . .

MCCORMACK
(Cutting him off, always polite.)
Thank you, Mr. Sarnoff. Now, you admit that you are not a scientist or an engineer, but you do know a lot about the techniques of radio, and most of this knowledge came from your . . . friend . . . Mr. Armstrong, is that correct?

DAVID
Yes.

MCCORMACK
And with all this knowledge, would it be safe to assume that, given your fine mind, one that enabled you to gain the equivalent of a university education without ever setting foot in the door . . .

(DAVID almost beams. He definitely feels complimented.)
given this mind, that you are capable of understanding all the reports your technical advisers present to you?

DAVID
With all modesty, I would have to say yes.

MCCORMACK
Then, when you received the engineers' reports in 1935 about Mr. Armstrong's findings concerning his new invention, FM, which he developed in your laboratory atop the Empire State Building, would it be fair to say that you completely understood them?

DAVID
(Caught off-guard.)
Yes . . .

MCCORMACK
We have copies of those reports, Mr. Sarnoff, and we also have copies of other reports from your offices which make no mention of this important new concept. I would like to know on the basis of what technical advice you chose to ignore this idea until many years later?

DAVID
(Straightening in his seat.)
Mr. McCormack, by then I had as many technical advisors as the ocean has fish. You forget, sir, that in 1936 I was no longer a little boy carrying bags for Marconi, I was president of a corporation.

(He settles back in his own importance.)

I had men who were paid to summarize reports for me, and I read their summaries. These men kept telling me that merely widening the band of frequencies over which FM might operate was not a subject for a patent . . .

(ARMSTRONG rises in his seat. DAVID looks at him, then away, and goes on.)

Although, given Mr. Armstrong's reputation and his great contributions to the radio art, a court might feel that it was an invention . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Rising, breaking in.)
Of course it is an invention! You have always known it was!

LAWYER
Your honor . . .

JUDGE
Mr. Armstrong, this proceeding has been wearing on all of us. Will you please be seated and control yourself . . .

MCCORMACK
(Motioning EDWIN down.)
Edwin . . .

(ARMSTRONG sits down, looks incredulously at DAVID.)
Please go on, Mr. Sarnoff.

DAVID
(Beginning to get hot under the collar.)
Anyway, since the court might consider it an invention, there was an element of risk and doubt which had to be considered from commercial and public relations standpoints.

MCCORMACK
(In his quiet way, becoming rough.)
Would you explain that in detail, Mr. Sarnoff?

DAVID
I don't see the need, since it is a matter of record . . .

MCCORMACK
Your honor, for nearly a year, the defense lawyers have kept my client on the stand, badgering him about every detail . . .

LAWYER
(Rising to his feet.)
Your honor, I object. I was doing my duty in trying to get the facts . . .

MCCORMACK
Which is all, your honor, that I am trying to do!

JUDGE
(Weary.)
Please continue, Mr. McCormack. But omit the use of such words as badgering . . .

MCCORMACK

Yes, your honor . . .

JUDGE
(To DAVID.)

Please answer all the questions put to you.

DAVID

Yes, sir.

MCCORMACK

Now, would you explain yourself in detail, please.

DAVID

Well, my technical advisors kept telling me that it was RCA's staff, and not Armstrong, who discovered the basic laws of FM!

ARMSTRONG
(Leaping to his feet.)

That's a lie!! A LIE! A LIE!

(Chaos erupts. MARION pulls ARMSTRONG down. MCCORMACK is yelling, the LAWYER is yelling, the weary JUDGE raps on his desk.)

JUDGE
(Watching them settle down.)

Order, now! Order!

(They settle down.)

I want no more outbursts! Is that understood!!

MCCORMACK
(Looking at ARMSTRONG.)

Yes, your honor.

MCCORMACK

Is that so, Mr. Sarnoff . . . Why is it, then, that we have innumerable records here of Mr. Armstrong's experiments, speeches, and court proceedings five years before there is any mention of FM by RCA?

(DAVID is silent.)

Why didn't RCA speak up when Mr. Armstrong was awarded the Franklin Medal for his experiments in FM? Or when he received the Edison Medal? Why did RCA . . .

DAVID
(Defensively.)

There are many textbooks which do not even mention his name! . . . but that is not important. I am speaking of the reports I received . . . and I was busy with television, which I considered a much more important invention!

MCCORMACK
Then, perhaps, Mr. Sarnoff, you would explain to us precisely, and with complete supporting data, exactly what was RCA's role in developing FM.

(DAVID is angry, he rises to his feet.)

DAVID
I WILL GO NO FURTHER! . . . I will say . . . I will say that this is an insult! RCA and NBC have done more to promote the development of FM in this country than anyone, . . . including Edwin Howard Armstrong!!

(ARMSTRONG rises to his feet. He and DAVID face each other. ARMSTRONG reflects great hatred, stiffens, and leaves the room. There is murmering. The JUDGE raps for order. MARION rushes after ARMSTRONG. MCCORMACK is shaken.)

JUDGE
Gentlemen, please. It is very late. Mr. McCormack, have you any more questions of this witness?

MCCORMACK
(Slowly, with great anger held in check.)
No, your honor; I have no more questions . . .

(DAVID starts to leave the chair.)
Not now, your honor . . .
(DAVID turns toward him.)
not ever.

(They face each other for a moment. Lights out, end of scene.)

Scene 5

SARNOFF
(Turns to audience.)
Can't you feel it--the wind holding its breath just before a storm--a calm that is moving forward threatening to break open at any second. The worst kind of quiet. . . .

(He turns as ARMSTRONG enters up right in attic. He looks rested. MARION enters. Old SARNOFF cannot look at them. He leaves the stage in despair.)

ARMSTRONG
(As she enters, holding out his hand to her.)
Are they gone?

MARION

Yes . . .

ARMSTRONG

Marion, what is it? You've been distraught all evening.

MARION

Nothing . . . I'm just not feeling well . . .

ARMSTRONG

I think you should go to another doctor. This one hasn't done a thing for you.

MARION

I'm just getting old, Edwin.

ARMSTRONG

And I'm an old man, at least we're both in the same predicament! Still, it was a lovely Thanksgiving, seeing some of the old-timers. It was a good change of pace. This court business will be settled soon, and then we'll go away somewhere, I promise.

MARION

(With a trace of bitterness.)

Where? When? With what?

ARMSTRONG

We'll win, Marion. Only a little while longer.

MARION

NO!

ARMSTRONG

What?

MARION

NO! All my life it's been just a little while longer, and the little while turned into years. No, Edwin, not any more . . . we're nearly ruined. I was worried we wouldn't even be able to pay for the holidays.

ARMSTRONG

(Becoming angry.)

Stop exaggerating, Marion! I should never have levelled with you about our finances. The only time I share my worries with you, and you turn them back against me.

MARION

Oh, Edwin, I'm not trying to turn against you! But you've gone through two fortunes, and time is running out. We may not live to see the end of this thing . . .

ARMSTRONG

Marion . . .

MARION
It's a minor battle to RCA! They can go on for decades. They don't care! Nobody cares except you!

ARMSTRONG
That's not true, Marion!! I can't believe this is coming from you! The principles I'm fighting for matter, they . . .

MARION
I'm tired of principles! They've never brought anything but grief. I'm tired, I'm sick . . . I'm old . . . All I want now is a little peace. Is that asking so much!

ARMSTRONG
Marion, sit down . . .

MARION
Edwin . . . I love you, you know that, and I have always stood by you, and I have never, never asked you for anything.

ARMSTRONG
You've been an angel, Marion. I love you for it.

MARION
Well, now I'm asking . . . Edwin, Alfred told me about the latest offer from RCA . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Anger rising.)
Now look, Marion, we've been all through that . . .

MARION
THEN WE'LL GO THROUGH IT AGAIN!

(He is shocked at her tone.)

Edwin, it's our last chance. They've given us a one-year option. At the end of that time, if the suit is called off, RCA might make a settlement of one million dollars.

ARMSTRONG
Why, that's incredible! Where did you hear this?

MARION
I told you, Alfred called . . .

ARMSTRONG
(Incredulous.)
Do you realize what they're doing? They want to leave me dangling in the air for a year while all my subsidiary claims are wiped out by the statute of limitations!

MARION
Take it, Edwin!!

(Her words hit him like a knife.)

ARMSTRONG

What?

MARION
(Softly.)

Take it . . .

ARMSTRONG

You can't mean it!!

MARION

I have never meant anything more in my whole life.

ARMSTRONG

Marion, how can you . . . after all we have been through together, how can you even suggest such a thing?

MARION

Edwin, I have always had a dream . . . oh, not a grand one like yours, but a dream nevertheless . . . The farm is in good shape now . . . the trees are so lovely in the autumn. I've always hoped that we could . . . retire . . . there.

ARMSTRONG

Retire!

MARION

Yes . . . you could build a small laboratory there and continue your work in peace. We could walk and enjoy the silence.

ARMSTRONG

This isn't like you . . .

MARION

Oh, yes it is. It's all I've hoped for. I can't take the long battles, your inevitable moods, and hurts, the grief. If I thought we had a chance, I'd still urge you to go on, but if this continues . . .

(She can hardly control herself.)

we'll lose the farm, too, and I'll never have anything to hold on to. Edwin, I'm asking you to do this for me . . . out of love, just once to think of me!

ARMSTRONG

To do what you ask would be to renounce my entire life. I can't!

MARION

That's right! Your life! Your name!! That's all you've ever cared about! Your principles! They're more important than me!! Good old Marion. She'll always be there, like an old shoe, when your feet are sore. You haven't even noticed how sick I've been. Last week my fever

was 104! Still you had to come up to me at two a.m. and discuss the latest strategy! You say you love me! You've never loved anyone but yourself!

ARMSTRONG
(Deeply shaken.)
I don't understand this . . . Marion . . . what's happened. You are the dearest thing in the world to me . . .

MARION
Then prove it!

ARMSTRONG
Marion, please . . . if I back out now, think of the little people who will be hurt, who are hoping for my victory . . .

MARION
I don't care about them . . . I care about you, and me!

ARMSTRONG
(Stung.)
Marion . . . we'll still go to the farm, after I've won. And I will win because I'm right.

MARION
Face it . . . give in!! You have to. Call Alfred. Even he's begging you to settle, and he doesn't know how truly desperate we are.

ARMSTRONG
No, Marion. I won't give up; this fight is too important.

MARION
(Hurt, as is ARMSTRONG. There is a long pause.)
All right, you've made your priorities very clear, but you'll have to see it through alone.
(He turns to her.)

ARMSTRONG
What!!

MARION
I can't take the strain any more, Edwin. I'm not well.

ARMSTRONG
Marion, I can't believe this . . . I thought you loved me.

MARION
And I thought you loved me . . . I'll be at my sister's if you want to get in touch with me . . .

ARMSTRONG
To think that you would walk out on me! You . . . you . . .

(He is fighting to keep from breaking down. He stiffens, she moves towards him, feels his hurt, backs away. She waits for him to stop her. He doesn't. In anguish she leaves; after she is gone, he falls apart, and calls after her, into the emptiness.)

ARMSTRONG

Marion . . . Marion . . .

(The lights dim; ARMSTRONG ascends the stairs to the attic set, which becomes lit as he enters it. SARNOFF enters sr into a pool of light, haggard. He watches EDWIN.)

SARNOFF

Have you ever been fishing out in the ocean? Off Bermuda, I caught a sailfish on my line once. It's a curious thing, almost beautiful. For a long time it leaps into the air, the sun glances off its scales to form a flash of light. It's strong, and grand, and if you hope to keep it, all you can do is hang on. Slowly, very slowly, it grows tired.

(ARMSTRONG in the attic buries his head in his hands.)

Its flights get lower and lower until it no longer jumps at all . . . Then all you do is reel in the line . . . when you pull him into the boat his eyes are cold. He still breathes, but it takes only a moment to kill him; he died the moment the line went slack . . . I only went fishing like that once; I don't like the sport . . . When the line began to go slack, I did a strange thing. I cut it and let the fish run free. My friends thought I was crazy . . . they didn't understand atonement. I needed a gift for the gods; I had to make my peace with nature. When a man cannot atone, ah, then he is truly lost.

(SARNOFF turns to watch ARMSTRONG. It pains him to do so. ARMSTRONG appears totally broken. He fiddles aimlessly with the wires on his desk. He has many papers beside him. He shuffles them listlessly. MCCORMACK enters the attic, unseen by ARMSTRONG. He watches him for a long while.)

MCCORMACK

(Tenderly.)

Edwin . . . you've been here alone for so long . . . Why don't you come home with me. Mary and I would love to have you come for supper.

ARMSTRONG

Thank you, Alfred, but families belong together at Christmas . . .

MCCORMACK

Edwin, <u>you</u> are family, you know that . . .

ARMSTRONG
Thank you, Alfred. You're a wonderful friend. But I'm afraid I'd be poor company . . . I heard from Marion today . . . she's very ill . . .

(He breaks down. MCCORMACK tries to comfort. Lays a hand on his shoulder.)

Alfred . . . I'm ready to settle . . . I'll do whatever Sarnoff wants . .

MCCORMACK
Do you really mean it?

ARMSTRONG
Yes . . . I've prepared a summary of my finances . . . Here, read . . .

(MCCORMACK peruses the paper, looks up shocked.)

MCCORMACK
Edwin, there's hardly anything left! Why didn't you tell me sooner! I could have done *something*!

ARMSTRONG
(Frantic, incoherent.)
I still believed . . . hoped . . . I could win . . . I thought I could pull us out . . . but Marion . . . Marion . . . was here . . .

(His mind wanders.)

Remember what she looked like back when she worked for Sarnoff? She was so wonderful during the first court fight. There were times. . . . I never admitted it to anyone . . . but there were times when I was so afraid . . . Then I'd look over, and there would be Marion sitting there, giving me hope . . . I could never have done anything without her . . .

MCCORMACK
Edwin . . . We have to move quickly. I'm going to call Sarnoff tonight. I don't like the *settlement*, but it's all we have.

ARMSTRONG
. . . laughing eyes . . . Marion has such happy eyes . . . at least, they used to be . . .

MCCORMACK
Edwin, please . . .

ARMSTRONG
. . . Miss Marion McInnes would like very much to take a ride in your new car . . .
(He laughs.)
You'll never known how fast I got down from that tower when I heard that! You were fat in those days, Alfred . . . Has knowing me made you lean?

MCCORMACK
(Worried.)
You are the finest man I have ever known, Edwin . . . don't forget that.

ARMSTRONG
I lost track of how much I owe you in back fees, Alfred. The settlement should pay you . . .

MCCORMACK
Edwin, stop it!! Turn your thoughts to what you have accomplished . . . You have been blessed with gifts that few men have ever possessed . . . You'll be remembered long after the rest of us are dead and forgotten . .

ARMSTRONG
(Slowly.)
Alfred . . . When your personal life is shattered . . . Make the best settlement you can . . . for yourself and Marion. . .

MCCORMACK
I'll get on it tonight.

ARMSTRONG
No, not tonight . . . It's Christmas . . . be with your family . . . you can work on my settlement in the morning . . . try to have one night when you don't have to think about my problems.

MCCORMACK
I wish you'd come home with me . . .

ARMSTRONG
Thank you, Alfred . . . but no . . . I think I'll try to get some sleep.

MCCORMACK
That's a good idea. We'll need to be sharp to pull this off well.

(MCCORMACK turns to go. ARMSTRONG picks up an envelope from the table.)

ARMSTRONG
Oh, Alfred . . . would you do me a favor . . .

MCCORMACK
Sure, what is it?

ARMSTRONG
Would you give . . . this letter . . . to Marion for me. It explains a lot of things . . .

MCCORMACK
(Taken aback.)
Why can't you give it to her yourself, or send it?

ARMSTRONG
(Slowly.)
I don't want to send it, that's too impersonal, and . . . I don't think she wants to see me . . .

MCCORMACK
(Reluctantly taking it.)
Marion will always see you, Edwin . . .

ARMSTRONG
Please . . . give it to her for me . . . I'll talk to her about it . . . later . . .

MCCORMACK
All right, Edwin . . . whatever you like . . . I guess I'll go now . . .

(ARMSTRONG looks straight ahead, says nothing. MCCORMACK regards him for a long pause.)

Edwin, I wish you would reconsider and come home with me . . .

(There is no answer.)

Edwin!

ARMSTRONG
(Snaps out of it.)
I'm sorry, Alfred, I was just thinking . . . Better dress warm, it looks like it's going to snow.

MCCORMACK
We're supposed to get four inches by morning.

ARMSTRONG
Snow . . . my father always loved the snow. We used to go for winter walks . . . just the two of us . . . he had long dreams for me . . .

(His voice trails off.)

. . . go home, Alfred . . . your wife is waiting . . . don't ever keep her waiting . . .

(MCCORMACK regards him a minute, then turns to exit. He stops.)

MCCORMACK
I'll call you first thing in the morning, Edwin.

(He exits. ARMSTRONG sits for a long pause, staring at his hands; SARNOFF still watches from his pool of light, sr.)

ARMSTRONG
(Picks up his black box, toys with some wires for a minute, puts it down.)

Radio is dying . . . you're right, Marion . . . it's a new world . . . sweetness, Marion . . . that's what you are . . . once I thought I knew what it was for . . . To think I could hurt you, the dearest . . .

(His voice breaks off. He cries for a moment, gets hold of himself. Goes to the window, opens it.)

Going to be a cold night, Marion . . .

(He moves to a chair upon which is thrown a coat and overshoes, etc. Carefully he puts on a scarf, then a sweater, buttons it down, then a large coat, then gloves, then his overshoes, then his hat. Then he walks to the window. Stands before it.)

It's so quiet, Marion . . . not a sound in the sky . . .

(He steps up on the window ledge, leans out, lights out abruptly. It should be apparent he has jumped to his death. There is a long pause. SARNOFF watches, then slowly turns to the audience.)

SARNOFF
(Fighting for control.)

When a body falls, the momentum . . . when a body falls . . . thirteen stories . . . it's all true about luck . . . Edwin Howard Armstrong . . . I tried to call him . . . I settled; handsomely. I tried to call . . .

(He can't go on.)

You know . . . I never watch television any more . . . I can't . . . whenever I turn it on, all I see is death. Everything disintegrates; there's even a law for it. I saw that years ago, when I was young and recording those dead from the Titanic. I remember the faces of the fathers when they saw the names of their sons . . . but when one remains alive to record disasters, all he dares recall is his hands, typing out the endless names on the cold keys. I would like to sleep . . . but the moment my head touches the pillow, I see it all, and I stand before an ocean of faces, setting out again to record the final vision--broken feathers on an empty deck, and a wind that returns endlessly . . . to fray the edges of all my dreams.

(He turns slowly, then shuffles out of the light. The light remains on for a second; then, darkness.)

RIGHTS OF PASSAGE:
AN ANTHOLOGY OF ORIGINAL PLAYS

by

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Rights of Passage is an anthology of original plays, all of which were composed and produced between 1973 and 1976 at Kansas State University. The first of these, Everywoman, is a poetic drama based upon the medieval morality play, Everyman. In this drama, Everywoman is a famous poet who, at the zenith of her career, must confront death and, in turn, her failing family relationships. The second play, Ebb Tide, is a one act drama which deals with the subtle erosion of meaning in the life of an upper-middle class American family. The third selection, The Last Glow of Firelight, is a return to poetic drama. It is based upon the Cinderella myth, and includes much music in the original song written for it, "Lady St. Ariel." Cinderella, in this version, is an artist and a romantic who cannot live with reality. Original music is again used in the fourth selection, The Beanstalk Country, which is based upon the story of "Jack and the Beanstalk." It treats the adolescent confrontation with maturity and the painful necessity of choice. The final play, Armstrong, is a modern tragedy about Edwin H. Armstrong, the actual inventor of modern radio circuitry and FM. It shows the way in which the American ideals of individuality and integrity are destroyed in a corporate society.