

A PERFECT HATRED

a two-act play by

Cy Young

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Cast

Momma.....	Greying hair, early fifties, small but with latent power
C.H.....	Late sixties, intense, over- bearing
Arla.....	Vivacious Blond, late twenties
Bett.....	Good looking but overweight NINETEEN
Jeanie.....	Sixteen, tall, sensuous, very attractive and independent
Kay.....	Twelve, a gangly kid
Mrs. Millet.....	Tall, command- ing, strong willed, a survivor - in her sixties

In the Parsifal Enactment

Parsifal.....	Kay
Parsifal's Mother.....	Arla
Blanch Fleur.....	Jeanne
Hideous Woman.....	Bett

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play is unproduced. At this writing, it is too long and contains some questionable dialogue. I also employ an enactment of the Parsifal legend. All of these elements are open to change or editing. If any theater group likes the basic content of the play and is interested in developing same, I would be more than happy to work with you in shaping it to a compatibility with community theater precepts. The piece captures a time and place that I feel are important to our American heritage and would love to see "Hatred" fulfill what I see as its promise. You may contact me through OCTA or directly at ~~(405) 236-2465~~ (512) 644-5907 (3/12/18)

A PERFECT HATRED

Act I

Scene 1

(THE SET IS A LIVING ROOM IN OKLAHOMA CITY ON A FRIDAY AFTERNOON IN 1946. THE KITCHEN IS OFF STAGE RIGHT. THE DINING ROOM AREA IS STAGE LEFT WITH A LARGE DINING ROOM TABLE WITH 6 CHAIRS AROUND IT. THE LIVING ROOM IS STAGE RIGHT WITH A COUCH AND AN EASY CHAIR DOWN RIGHT. THERE'S A CLOSET STAGE LEFT. THE DOOR TO THE OUTSIDE IS ABOVE IT AND THERE IS AN UPRIGHT (SMALL) PIANO UP CENTER. THERE IS A MIRROR ON THE WALL STAGE RIGHT BY THE CLOSET. THE SET IS SPLIT LEVEL WITH JEANIE'S AND KAY'S BEDROOM ON THE SECOND LEVEL.

AS THE STAGE BRIGHTENS, THE SOUNDS OF FEMALE VOICES ARE HEARD COMING FROM THE KITCHEN. AN ARGUMENT IS IN PROGRESS, VOICES ARE RISING AND THERE IS SOME LAUGHTER.)

(ARLA, A VIVACIOUS BLOND IN HER LATE 20s STEAMS INTO THE LIVING ROOM CARRYING A CUP OF COFFEE. OBVIOUSLY UPSET, SHE PAUSES MOMENTARILY IN THE LIVING ROOM LOST IN THOUGHT, THEN SAYS STRAIGHT OUT WITH A BITING EDGE:)

ARLA

I'd like to play ping pong with his gonads!

(THE OTHERS LAUGH OFF STAGE AND ARLA TURNS AND STRIDES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN. MORE DISCUSSION ENSUES, A VERBAL OUTPOURING WITH EVERYONE TALKING AT ONCE. BETT'S VOICE RISES AND BREAKS THROUGH THE CACOPHANY WITH:)

BETT(O.S.)

Remember the time he whipped me, Arla and Jeanie because his friend got a hard-on watching us play kick-the-can?

(HOWLS OFF STAGE.)

(MOMMA ENTERS WITH A CUP OF COFFEE IN A SAUCER. SHE IS A WOMAN IN HER 50s WITH GREYING HAIR. NOT TALL, SHE HAS A LATENT AUTHORITY THAT, ALTHOUGH DORMANT, IS APPARENT. SHE WANDERS IN AND SITS ON THE SOFA.)

MOMMA

(Vaguely)

I don't remember that...

(ARLA REENTERS AND STANDS JUST BELOW THE KITCHEN DOOR.)

ARLA

Yes you do, momma, it was when daddy still had the store...his friend Brewster came home with him one evening...you remember Brewster, that man daddy met in the coal yard...

MOMMA

(Nodding)

Yes, I...

(ARLA LEANS AGAINST THE WALL, CROSSES HER ARMS AND ROTATES HER COFFEE CUP SLOWLY AS SHE TALKS.)

ARLA

Daddy brought him home that night for dinner and you didn't have enough so Brewster had to leave...daddy was furious, as always...we girls were playing kick the can in the front yard...and before old Brewster left he and daddy were standing on the front porch talking and Brewster was watching us out of the corner of his eye... and he had on those tight overalls with the suspenders...

(SHE'S LOOKING FRONT REMEMBERING. SHE SMILES, THEN STARTS TO LAUGH.)

MOMMA

(Taking a sip of coffee)

Oh...yes, I remember now...that was...

(BETT ENTERS. SHE IS 21, NICE LOOKING BUT A LITTLE OVER WEIGHT. SHE HOLDS A FISTFUL OF COOKIES IN ONE HAND AND IS STUFFING ONE INTO HER MOUTH AS SHE ENTERS. DURING THE SCENE SHE CONTINUES EATING, GOING BACK INTO THE KITCHEN FOR MORE. NOW SHE CROSSES UP BEHIND THE COUCH AND STANDS UP LEFT BEHIND MOMMA.)

BETT

...and daddy saw the bulge and after Brewster left, he made us come into the house and he whipped all three of us...

(MOMMA GLANCES BACK OVER HER SHOULDER AT BETT AND NODS.)

MOMMA

I do remember that...

(She looks down at her coffee cup, musing)

...I should have stopped him...

(BETT CROSSES TO LEFT OF THE COUCH ON HER LINE.)

BETT

Yes, you should have...

MOMMA

(Defensively, to Bett)

Well, I should have but I didn't know, Bett, why he was doing it until after he did it. I only found out about the hard-on part later...

ARLA

(Turning to Bett)

Couldn't you tell he had a hard-on, Bett?

BETT

(Laughing)

Hell, no! I didn't even know what one was then! I was only eight...

(ARLA CROSSES TO THE EASY CHAIR DOWN RIGHT AND SITS ON THE ARM OF THE CHAIR.)

ARLA

I remember Brewster walked kind of funny when he left, he was holding the newspaper over his front...

(BETT IS SAUNTERING AROUND UP CENTER, MUNCHING AND THINKING.)

ARLA(Cont'd)

Remember that, Bett?

BETT

Uh uh...

ARLA

...I'd brought the Oklahoman and Times home to read for a Civics class and left it on the front porch swing...I never got a chance to read it 'cause Brewster took it with him...over his crotch...

BETT

(Shaking her head)

I don't remember that part...

(BEAT.)

MOMMA

(Seriously)

It's a terrible thing to whip innocent little girls because your friend has a hard-on.

(Looks at Arla)

(MORE)

MOMMA (Cont'd)
How old were you then?

ARLA
Well, I wasn't a little girl, I was about
16...and pretty well developed...

(MOMMA LOOKS DOWN AT HER COFFEE CUP AND NODS.)

MOMMA
I should have stopped him...

(ARLA MAKES A 'HELPLESS' MOTION WITH HER FREE HAND.)

ARLA
"Should have, should have...!" Time's
long gone, momma. What you should do now
is divorce him.

(BETT SITS MOMENTARILY ON A CHAIR AT THE DINING ROOM
TABLE.)

BETT
(Savoring a cookie)
That's right, momma, he's made you
miserable, he's made us miserable...

(ARLA PUSHES OFF OF THE EASY CHAIR AND MOVES
RESTLESSLY DOWN RIGHT.)

ARLA
...He doesn't support you...

BETT
(Sipping coffee)
...he's never here except when he wants
to get laid—

(MOMMA JERKS HER HEAD AROUND TO LOOK AT BETT.)

MOMMA
Bett!

(BETT GULPS DOWN HER LAST COOKIE AND STABS AT THE
CRUMBS IN HER PALM WITH HER TONGUE.)

BETT
(Matter-of-factly)
It's true, momma, he's a miserable, mean,
son-of-a-bitch and we'd all be better
off if he wasn't here.

(BETT CROSSES TOWARD THE KITCHEN.)

MOMMA
(Angry)
I don't want to hear that kind of—

(MOMMA LOOKS UP LEFT AS SHE SPEAKS BUT BETT
ISN'T THERE. SHE PIVOTS HER HEAD LOOKING TO up
STAGE RIGHT AND THROWS THE LINE AT BETT'S DISAPPEARING
BACK.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR THAT KIND OF TALK
IN THIS HOUSE!

ARLA
(Down right)
Bett's right, momma...

MOMMA
(To Arla)
Right or not, I didn't bring either
of you up to swear...
(Shouts off stage Right
to Bett)
...SO JUST YOU STOP IT, BETT!!

(THERE'S A BEAT. ARLA MOVES UP RIGHT, TAKES A SIP
OF COFFEE AND STARES INTO HER MUG.)

ARLA
How long's he been gone this time?

MOMMA
(Figuring, looking at ceiling)
Over a month.

ARLA
And no word of why or where he was going
or how long he'd be gone or when he was
coming back...right?

MOMMA
(Shrugs)
It's just the way he is...

(BETT REENTERS WITH MORF COOKIES AND STANDS NEXT
TO THE KITCHEN DOOR.)

(SIMULTANEOUSLY)

MOMMA
 (Fiddling with
 her cup)
 ...ever since I
 met him he's run
 off and left me
 ever so often...
 I'm not defending
 him, it's just the
 facts of life with
 C.H. Daniels...he's
 a mountain man, it's
 the way he was
 brought up, he never
 could hold a job,
 like the store...

ARLA
 That's not good enough,
 anymore, momma, why do
 you defend him? He's
 kept you pregnant for
 30 years, for God's sake,
 30 years! He was gone
 the day I was born, he
 was out on the road
 somewhere...or writing...
 God! I'm sick of him
 quoting Shakespeare and
 the Bible...and he's
 never supported you...
 us...you've practically
 done it all with your
 job at the cafeter—

BETT
 (Studying her cookies)
 ...sorry, momma, but
 everytime I think of
 C.H. I get so mad...
 he's been like a...a...
 tyrant around here...
 and for the life of me,
 I don't know why you
 put up with him...
 everytime he comes
 through the door he
 carries a big, black
 cloud with him...I
 remember when I was
 a little girl...I used
 to pee in my pants when
 I heard him coming home
 singing "On An Old
 Rugged Cross..."

(ON HER LINES, ARLA HAS CROSSED DOWN LEFT. NOW SHE
 TURNS AND FACES BETT WHO IS STANDING TO THE RIGHT OF
 THE COUCH.)

ARLA
 (Picking up on Bett's
 last sentence)
 You used to pee in your pants? I didn't
 know that! So did I!

BETT
 (Nodding eagerly)
 I think we all did. Daddy'd come
 home singing and we'd all start
 peeing...

MOMMA
That I remember, I did the laundry...

ARLA
 Never failed...

BETT
 For me either...

ARLA
 (Thinking, then incredulously)
 You mean Janie did, and Kay?

(BETT DROPS A COOKIE, STOOPS AND PICKS IT UP.)

BETT
 Uh, uh, even Rick and Joel...

ARLA
 ((More incredulous))
 The BOYS!?

(BETT HOLDS THE DROPPED COOKIE, CONSIDERS THROWING IT IN THE GARBAGE, THEN DUSTS IT OFF AND PUTS IT ON HER PLATE.)

BETT
 (Looking at the cookie)
 Arla, I'm not kidding, you got out of the house before it really got bad...
 (Looking up at Arla)
 ...you were long gone by the time he got to be as mean as he is now...

(ARLA KICKS HER HEELS OFF AND RUBS ONE FOOT WITH THE OTHER.)

ARLA
 I don't know about that, he was always mean.

(BETT PICKS A HAIR OFF THE COOKIE SHE JUST DROPPED AND CAREFULLY EXAMINES IT FOR OTHER SIGNS OF DEBRIS DURING THE FOLLOWING.)

BETT
 (With close scrutiny)
 Yes, but after you left and he lost the store and had to work in that coal yard and momma kept having babies...
 (Thinks, looks at momma)
 ...momma, I've always wanted to ask you, why didn't you use a diaphragm?

MOMMA
 (Defensively)
 None of your business.

(ARLA SITS CROSS LEGGED ON THE FLOOR DOWN LEFT CENTER, PUTS HER CUP DOWN AND MASSAGES HER FOOT.)

ARLA
 I've always wondered that too, momma, why didn't you?

(THERE'S A LONG BEAT HERE IN WHICH MOMMA DRAINS HER COFFEE CUP, TURNS IT UPSIDE DOWN OVER HER SAUCER AND WATCHES TO SEE IF THERE'S A DROP LEFT.)

MOMMA
 (Petulant)
 I don't want to talk about it.

BETT AND AUDREY EXCHANGE GLANCES.)

BETT
 Okay.

ARLA
(Holding Bett's gaze)
Okay.

(BETT PICKS UP THE COOKIE, BLOWS ON IT, 'DUSTS' IT AGAIN
AND PUTS IN BACK ON HER PLATE.)

(ANOTHER LONG PAUSE. FINALLY MOMMA SIGHS.)

MOMMA
(Reluctantly and somewhat
evasively)
He wouldn't let me.

(BETT'S MOUTH DROPS OPEN AS SHE STARES AT MOMMA IN
DISBELIEF.)

ARLA
(Shaking her head)
He wouldn't...?! Well, why didn't you
get one and just not tell him, momma?

MOMMA
(Shaking her head)
He would have known...

ARLA
How would he have known? If you kept it
hidden, he would never have found out!

(BETT IS STILL STARING AT MOMMA WITH HER MOUTH
OPEN.)

BETT
He wouldn't let you? That's incredible,
that's really incredible! He wouldn't let
you...you're having a baby every year of
your life, you're doing all the work,
you're killing yourself and he wouldn't
let you?

(ARLA LEANS BACK ON HER HANDS, STRETCHES HER HEAD
BACK IN AN EFFORT TO RELIEVE HER BODY TENSION.)

ARLA
God, momma, you sure are a glutton...

(BETT CROSSES DOWN RIGHT AND PICKS UP THE COOKIE ON HER PLATE
THAT SHE PREVIOUSLY DROPPED.)

BETT
I'd have crossed my legs after the first
two and kept 'em crossed.

MOMMA

(Crossing her legs)
That's pretty hard to do, young lady,
when you're baking biscuits!

(BETT CAREFULLY INSPECTS THE COOKIE ONE LAST
TIME.)

BETT

...or I'd have gotten a chastity belt
or rubbed axel grease on my body.

(ARLA REVOLVES HER HEAD IN A CIRCLE SEVERAL TIMES,
HER EYES CLOSED.)

ARLA

Momma, did you ever try saying "No!?"

(MOMMA DOESN'T ANSWER.)

ARLA (cont'd)

(Looks at momma)

Did you?

MOMMA

(Sheepishly, almost a whisper)
Yes, but I never could do it.

BETT

(Rolling her eyes)
Boy, he must have been something in
bed!

MOMMA

(Pointing her finger at
Bett)
Now you watch your—

ARLA

(To Bett)
Look, Bett, it's easy for us to advise
momma, but we weren't there...

(To momma)
It's just too bad, you sure paid a price
for it, for not saying no. Nine kids and
35 years later you're bone tired, worn
out, and used up.

(BETT IS ABOUT TO POP THE DROPPED COOKIE INTO HER
MOUTH WHEN JEANIE COMES EXUBERANTLY THROUGH THE
DOOR, THROWS HER BOOKS ON THE TABLE, SEES ARLA,
SHRIEKS AND RUNS TO HER. SHE IS A TALL, VERY AT-
TRACTIVE, WELL-BUILT, AND SENSUOUS-LOOKING 16 YEAR
OLD WITH AN EXTREMELY INDEPENDENT NATURE.)

JEANIE

(Bubbling)

Arla!

(ARLA GETS UP TO GREET HER.)

ARLA

Hi, Jeanie honey!

(THEY EMBRACE AFFECTIONATELY. JEANIE PULLS BACK AND LOOKS AT HER OLDER SISTER.)

JEANIE

(In a rush of excitement)

What are you doing here? When did you get in? God—! It's great to see you!

(Hugs her again)

Are you going to stay long? Oh, I hope so, I have so many things to tell you, what are you doing home on a—

ARLA

(Laughs)

Hold on, honey, let me get a word in!

(JEANIE HUGS HER A THIRD TIME.)

ARLA (Cont'd)

We got the day off, it's a Jewish holiday, Passover, everybody at Cooper and Hill is Jewish so they closed the office down, I—

(Turns to momma)

—called and talked to momma and she told me daddy had taken off again and she was working longer hours at the school cafeteria to earn extra money and I decided it was time to talk her into getting a divorce.

JEANIE

(Her mouth drops open)

Oh, God! OH, GOD!!

(JEANIE IS SO EXCITED SHE CAN HARDLY STAND STILL. SHE CROSSES TO LEFT OF MOMMA.)

JEANIE (Cont'd)

Are you going to, momma? Oh, God, please do it, please do it! PLEASE! Say yes! Say YES!!

MOMMA

(Sternly)

Don't say 'God,' Jeanie, now I've told you...

(BETT GIVES UP ON THE COOKIE AND DROPS IT BACK
ON HER PLATE.)

BETT

(To momma)

I'm with Jeanie, momma, I think you
should do it, I think you should have
done it years ago...

(ARLA CROSSES UP BEHIND MOMMA AND STANDS UP LEFT
OF HER BEHIND THE COUCH.)

ARLA

See, momma, it's unanimous, we all agree,
it would be the best thing for you, for us,
and probably for C.H.

(JEANIE DROPS TO HER KNEES DRAMATICALLY AND
CLASPS HER HANDS TO HER CHEST.)

JEANIE

(Begging)

Please, please, please, please, please,
do it, momma, do it, do it, DO IT!!!

MOMMA

(Evasively)

Well...

(WHAT FOLLOWS SNOWBALLS INTO A TORRENT OF EXCITEMENT.)

ARLA

(Takes a step towards momma)

I'll pay for the lawyer, you can say he
deserted you—

BETT

(Nodding)

That's right, momma, desertion, that's
the only grounds you need—

ARLA

(To Bett)

—I'd go for mental cruelty—

BETT

(Takes a step towards momma)

—mental cruelty is good—

JEANIE

(Still on her knees)

Do it, momma, please, do it, do it, do—

ARLA

...mental cruelty, desertion and just plain
orneryness...

BETT

—I'd go for all three...

(To Arla)

Would you throw in the diaphragm stuff?

ARLA

You don't need it...

(JEANIE MOVES TOWARD MOMMA ON HER KNEES.)

JEANIE

Please, please please please please...

ARLA

...getting a wife pregnant isn't grounds
for divorce, Bett...

BETT

Unless he raped her! Could she claim...

ARLA

(Wry look at momma)

I don't think momma would go that far as
to claim—

(MOMMA RISES ABRUPTLY FROM THE COUCH.)

MOMMA

(Shouts)

Stop it, DAMN IT!!!

(THERE IS A BEAT. EVERYONE STOPS AND LOOKS AT
MOMMA.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)

(Flustered)

I'm sorry I swore, but I can't think
straight when everybody's cacklin' at
me! You're all worse than a bunch of
chickens!

(MOMMA CROSSES DOWN LEFT PAST JEANIE.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)

Let me do this in my own way, at my own
pace...

(ARLA TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD MOMMA.)

ARLA

Momma, if we wait for you to do it at
your own pace, it'll be 1990 before
you make a decision.(JEANIE QUICKLY PIVOTS AROUND TO FACE HER MOTHER.
SHE IS STILL ON HER KNEES.)

JEANIE
 (Intensely, eyes closed,
 hands clenched tight)
 Do, momma, do it, do it, do it, do it,
 do it, do it, do it...(Etc. until:)

(MOMMA STARES AT JEANIE WHO OPENS HER EYES AND IS
 STOPPED BY MOMMA'S INTENSITY.)

JEANIE(Cont'd)
 (Shrugs, flippantly)
 Okay, don't do it, see if I care.

(JEANIE JUMPS UP AND RUNS TO ARLA UP CENTER.)

JEANIE(Cont'd)
 (To Arla)
 Guess what? Mrs. Millet says I have a good
 voice and could be a professional singer
 if I studied hard!

(JEANIE GOES DOWN RIGHT TO BETT WITHOUT THINKING AND
 TAKES THE COOKIE OFF HER PLATE. BETT STARES AT HER
 EMPTY HAND/PLATE, THEN AT JEANIE.)

ARLA
 Honey, that's great!

BETT
 (To Jeanie)
 I dropped that on the—

(IT'S TOO LATE, JEANIE HAS POPPED THE ENTIRE COOKIE
 INTO HER MOUTH.)

JEANIE
 (Nodding, munching)
 I'm entering a contest. Ted Mack is
 coming to town next week and she wants
 me to try to get on the show...

ARLA
 I think that's a great—

(BETT EXITS INTO THE KITCHEN AND EMERGES MOMENTARILY
 WITH ANOTHER HANDFUL OF COOKIES AND A CUP OF COFFEE.
 SHE REMAINS JUST INSIDE THE KITCHEN DOOR AND HOLDS
 THE COOKIES PROTECTIVELY CLOSE TO HER BODY.)

(MOMMA CROSSES UP LEFT AND SITS AT THE DINING ROOM
 TABLE.)

MOMMA
 —I don't think you should do it.

JEANIE
 (Innocently)
 Why not?

ARLA

Why not, mamma?

MOMMA

(To Arla)

Because she won't win, she won't get on the show and she'll just get hurt, that's why not, she'll just get her hopes up and she'll go up there and they won't take her and she'll come home and cry and I'll have to deal with the results...

(JEANIE CROSSES TO DOWN STAGE CENTER.)

JEANIE

(Suddenly furious)

Oh, I see, you don't want me to even try 'cause you don't want to deal with what might happen...

MOMMA

(Pushes her cup away from her)

That's right young lady, I've got enough trouble without...

BETT

(At kitchen door)

—I think momma's right, if you don't try for it you won't be hurt if you lose out.

ARLA

(To Bett, confused)

What?!

BETT

(Flustered)

You know what I mean...

(BETT COMES INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND STANDS DOWN RIGHT EATING.)

ARLA

(Turns to momma)

Momma, I think she should do it. It won't hurt for her to do it and if she doesn't get on the show, she can come visit me in San Francisco and I'll take her out for Chinese food and cheer her up for a few days...

JEANIE

(Suddenly joyous)

You will? Oh, Arla, I'd love that! I love to visit you in San Francisco, I haven't been there for a whole year!

(ARLA STEPS DOWN AND PUTS HER HANDS ON THE BACK
OF THE COUCH.)

I-1-15

ARLA

Of course you can, honey, but you're
not going to lose, you'll win and then
instead of coming to visit me to
lick your wounds, we'll celebrate!

(BETT IS MORE CONCERNED WITH THE COOKIES THAN
WHAT SHE SAYS NOW.)

BETT

(eating avidly)

I can't see Jeanie winning a
singing contest, much less being
on Ted Mack.

(JEANIE TURNS SMOLDERING TO BETT AND POINTS AN
ACCUSING FINGER.)

JEANIE

(building)

I don't care what you think, Bett,
I can sing and I have real talent,
Mrs. Millet says so, and I'm not
going to listen to anything you say...
All you think anybody should ever
do is get married and live in
Oklahoma City and have a lot of
babies!

BETT

(stops chewing)

I do not--!

JEANIE

--The only reason you're going to
Oklahoma U. is to meet a man!

BETT

(resumes chewing)

I am not!

JEANIE

Well, I'd rather die first, do you
hear me? I'd rather cut my throat
with a dull, ragged-edged kitchen
knife and choke to death on my own
blood!

MOMMA

Jeanie! I don't want to hear that
kind of talk in this---

(C.H.'S VOICE IS HEARD FROM FAR OFF STAGE
SINGING "ON AN OLD RUGGED CROSS." THE EFFECT
ON THE FOUR WOMEN IS GALVANIZING.)

JEANIE

Oh, shit!

(SHE RUNS FOR THE STAIRS.)

MOMMA

(shouting distractedly
after Jeanie)

Don't say 'shit!'

BETT

Oh shit!

(SHE'S THROUGH THE KITCHEN DOOR, SPILLING HER
COFFEE EN ROUTE.)

(MOMMA WHIRLS ON BETT'S BACK.)

MOMMA

Bett!

(BETT STICKS HER HEAD BACK INTO THE ROOM.)

BETT

I just did it! I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS!
I'm a 21 year old college senior and
I JUST PEED IN MY PANTS!
(She's gone)

(ARLA FIGHTS THE TENDENCY TO PANIC.)

ARLA

(Rigidly)

I'm not going to be intimidated by
that man. He's just a man, that's
all he is...and I will not be
intimidated by him!—Damn it!

(MOMMA GOES TO A MIRROR ON THE WALL AND STARTS TO
FIX HER HAIR.)

ARLA

(Staring at momma,
unbelieving)

Momma! What are you doing? You don't
care how you look, do you? You're not
trying to impress that—that—

MOMMA

(Fussing before the mirror
nervously)

Of course not, Arla, but...it's just
habit, I guess...I don't know...

(MOMMA MAKES HERSELF STOP FUSSING AND FACES ARLA.)

(C.H.'S VOICE GROWS LOUDER.)

ARLA

(Teeth clinched)

I will not be intimidated, I will not
be intimidated, I will not be—

(ARLA HOLDS AS LONG AS SHE CAN UNTIL THE TENSION AND C.H.'S VOICE GROW TO A SUSPENSFUL HIGH...AND SHE IS FINALLY OVERWHELMED. THEN, WITH AS MUCH DIGNITY AS SHE CAN MUSTER, ARLA CLEARS HER THROAT.)

ARLA(Cont'd)

Excuse me, mother, I have to go to the ladies'...

(SHE GOES UP THE STAIRS LEAVING MOMMA ALONE REGISTERING FEAR, DOUBT, ANGER...AND EXCITEMENT.)

(THE TENSION CONTINUES TO BUILD UNTIL C.H.'S VOICE FILLS THE THEATRE WITH ITS STRONG, INTIMIDATING TIMBRE, ITS POWER AND INTENSITY, AT WHICH POINT THERE IS A BEAT OF SILENCE. THEN...)

(C.H. DANIELS BLOWS THROUGH THE DOOR LIKE AN ANGRY TORNADO OBLIVIOUS TO MOMMA AND HIS SURROUNDINGS. HE IS NOT A BIG MAN BUT HIS INTENSITY CREATES THE ILLUSION OF A GIANT. HE CARRIES A SUITCASE WHICH IS A SIMPLE, OBLONG CARDBOARD BOX WITH A BELT AROUND IT, AND A FIDDLE IN ITS CASE.)

(HE CLOSSES THE DOOR AND STANDS JUST INSIDE THE HALLWAY FUMING AS IF HE'S JUST COME FROM AN ARGUMENT.)

C.H.

Man sat next to me on the Greyhound bus comin' up from Tulsa.... Said he thought FDR was the greatest man who ever lived. He actually said those words: "FDR was the greatest man who ever lived—!"

(HE GRIMACES, THEN CROSSES OVER AND PLACES HIS FIDDLE CASE ON THE DINING ROOM TABLE.)

C.H.(Cont'd)

I stared him down and when he started to cring and his eyeballs started to roll back in his head, I said, "You think he's greater than Abe Lincoln? Greater than George Washington? Albert Einstein, William Shakespeare, Johann Sabastain Bach, St. Paul and the Apostles? Greater than Jesus Christ himself?!"

(HE BEGINS MOVING RESTLESSLY AROUND THE ROOM LOOKING AT FURNITURE SET PIECES, PICKING LINT UP OFF THE FLOOR, BUT DOESN'T REALLY SEE WHAT HE'S DOING AS HE'S TOTALLY INVOLVED IN REMEMBERING THIS INCIDENT.)

C.H. (cont'd)

"I meant the greatest president who ever lived," he said. "You didn't say that," I told him, "you said 'FDR was the greatest man who ever lived,' then I stared into the center of that man's soul and said, "you'd better learn to be a better judge of character, mister, 'cause if you see a dog you think's friendly..."

(points to an
imaginary dog)

...and you bend down to pet him and he's a mangy, mogrel mutt who just happens to be the most cantankerous, egg-suckin,' rabid, mean, son-of-a-bitch this side of the Mississippi, he just might rip your face out and spit it back at you, and if you're wonderin'," I said, "why I mention a rabid dog and FDR in the same breath, it's because they're one-and-the-same-thing!, because FDR was a Yellow-Dog-Democrat who ruined this country with Welfare and buryin' pigs and who catered to his rich friends on Wall Street, one of which you aren't, and if you're buyin' his whole line of pap about the common man and you don't know he's talkin' down to you, then you're just a dumb, damn fool who deserves to go to hell with the rest of the country!"

(looks at Momma
for the first time)

What's for supper?

(MOMMA IS STANDING NEAR THE DINING ROOM TABLE AND HAS BEEN OVERWHELMED BY C.H.'s TIRADE. SHE FINALLY FINDS HER TONGUE.)

MOMMA

And what did he say back? That man?

C.H.

He didn't say anything back, he changed seats.

MOMMA

(not moving)

I can see why.

C.H.

What's for supper?

MOMMA

There isn't any, for you.

(C.H. STOPS DOWN RIGHT AND LOOKS AT HER.)

C.H.

Why not? I live here don't I?

(MOMMA STANDS HER GROUND AND BEGINS TO REGAIN
HER COMPOSURE.)

MOMMA

(With an edge)

Do you? Seems I haven't seen much of
you around here lately, seems you just
pick up and go whenever the spirit
moves you—

C.H.

(Amused)

Some of us can't be contained by the
mundanities of this mortal existence...

MOMMA

(Hotly)

Well. Some of us have to be if we
want our kids to eat!

(C.H. STANDS HIS SUITCASE UP LONGWISE AND SITS
ON IT DOWN RIGHT, FACING HELEN.)

C.H.

Arla, Joel, Rick, Charles, Jr. Jude and
Dorie are grown and out of the house,
Bett's working and putting herself
through college, all we got now is
Jeanie and Kay and they're both old
enough to take jobs after school and
earn their own way...seems to me my
job's mostly finished...

MOMMA

And what about the house payments? Who's
going to pay them?

C.H.

Don't worry, my darlin,' everything in
its own time...

(eyes her with a seductive
glint)

...everything in its own time...

(SHE SEES C.H.'S LOOK AND RESISTS MELTING. MOMMA
CROSSES TO BEHIND THE COUCH.)

MOMMA

(Studying him)

Where'd you go this time?

(HE BREAKS THE LOOK BETWEEN THEM AND PAINTS THE
PICTURE OF WHAT HE'S DESCRIBING WITH HIS HANDS AND
BODY.)

C.H.

Houston! That fair city to the southwest
where the hot winds scorch and the modern
skyscrapers soar into the rose-hued
prairie sky...Houston! That fair city
where oil men gather to gamble and dally
with the lovely senioritas with the
wicked eyes from below the border...
Houston! That fair city...

(He holds up a book)

...where the publishers are!

MOMMA

(Not understanding)

You went to buy a book?

C.H.

(A contemptuous snort)

No, to have one published! It's my book,
Helen, my poems, something I've always
wanted to do...that's where I was, that's
what I did.

(MOMMA STANDS A MOMENT TRYING TO GRASP THIS IDEA.)

MOMMA

(Slowly)

They published your poems?

C.H.

(With wry cynicism)

That's right. I know you never could
understand why I had to write, Helen,
you never could see what was deep in a
man and what drove him to search and look
past the temporal things of this world
and put into words what was welling up
inside and had to be said...you never
could understand how..."The poet's
eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, doth
glance from heaven to earth, from earth
to heaven. And as imagination bodies
forth the forms of things unknown, the
poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives
to airy nothing...a local habitation and
a name..." William Shakespeare, A Mid-
summer Night's Dream...

MOMMA

(Incredulously)

They published your poems?

C.H.

(Nods)

Got 25 copies, one for you and each of
the kids...some for my friends...

(HE OPENS HIS SUITCASE AND STARTS TAKING OUT
COPIES.)

MOMMA

(Cocks her head and
studies him suspiciously)

I don't understand how—

C.H.

(Evasively)

Here's your copy, signed, sealed and
now...

(Holds it out to her)

...delivered.

(MOMMA CROSSES AROUND THE COUCH, APPROACHES C.H.
HESITANTLY DOWN RIGHT. SHE LOOKS QUESTIONINGLY
AT HIM, THEN TAKES THE BOOK.)

MOMMA

(Leafing through it)

I never was much on poetry.

C.H.

(Sternly)

That's because you never read, Helen, if
you know what great literature was and
what it says, if you read poetry and tried
to understand it, you'd see its value...

MOMMA

Didn't this cost you something, Charles?

(She looks at him
skeptically)

(BEFORE C.H. CAN ANSWER, KAY, 12, COMES FLYING IN.)

KAY

(Breathless)

Momma, I'm starved, can I—!

(KAY SEES HER DADDY AND STOPS DEAD. HER FACE
FALLS.)

KAY (Cont'd)

(Quickly)

I forgot something—

(SHE TURNS AND STARTS FOR THE STAIRS.)

C.H.

(With great force)

Katharine!

(A BEAT, THEN KAY STOPS HALF WAY UP THE STAIRS.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

Come here.

(KAY COMES DOWN THE STAIRS SLOWLY IN DREAD, THEN WALKS OVER TO HER FATHER DUTIFULLY.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

How about a hug?

(SHE GIVES HIM ONE.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

I have a present for you.

(HE GETS A COPY OF HIS POEMS AND GIVES IT TO KAY.)

KAY

(Shyly)

Thank you.

C.H.

Don't you want to know what it is?

(KAY LOOKS AT HIM BLANKLY, THEN AT MOMMA, THEN AT THE BOOK.)

KAY

It's a book?

C.H.

'Course it's a book. Look who wrote it.

(SHE DOES.)

KAY

(Reads)

"Adventures Of A Wanderer," by C.H. Daniels.

C.H.

(Nods, smiles)

That's me. That's my book. That's your copy.

KAY

Thank you.

(SHE STANDS LOOKING AT HIM NERVOUSLY AND IS VERY UNCOMFORTABLE. SHE WANTS TO GO BUT IS AFRAID TO DO SO.)

C.H.

Okay, you can go if you want to.

(KAY TURNS AND RUNS UP THE STAIRS.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

(To momma)

What the hell's wrong with her, she looked sick.

(MOMMA IS STILL LEAFING THROUGH THE BOOK AND HAS MOVED DOWN STAGE LEFT.)

MOMMA

She hasn't seen you for awhile, Charles, it takes time to get readjusted...for all of us.

C.H.

Hell, it hasn't been that long, only left couple of weeks ago...

(MOMMA CROSSES BACK UP BEHIND THE COUCH AS IF NEEDING AN OBSTACLE BETWEEN HERSELF AND C.H.)

MOMMA

(Warily)

You left 6 weeks ago without a word and you didn't call or write and we didn't know where you were and then you walk in here and expect everything to be the same and to just pick up as if nothing's happened! You are an amazing man! Truly amazing!

C.H.

I don't know why you're so worried, you know I'm comin' back, you know I'll always be comin' back, you got your claws in me and no matter how far I go, all you got to do is flex and pull me in...

(MOMMA'S FACE IS FLUSHED.)

MOMMA

(Voice rising)

What are you talking about, claws? The only claws sticking in you, Charles Henry Daniels, are the claws of your own guilt...

C.H.

(Sighing)

Now don't start up with me...

MOMMA

You know it's true. You know you shouldn't run out on us like you do all the time and go galavantin' around the country from Texas to the hills of West Virginia, visitin,' writing poetry, getting your 'book' published...

(This last said with contempt)
...and all that time your family stays here and struggles—! I work in the high school cafeteria to support us, Charles Henry, and it's barely doing that. I'm there from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m. every week day, then I come home and clean and get dinner and then sometimes I baby sit for the neighbors. I'm tired all the time but somebody's got to put food on the table and make the house payments and it looks like I can't count on you to do it, so I have to do it and that makes me mad!

(Long pause as they both retrench)

I have just one question. Why do you do it? Why do you go off like that?

(C.H. GETS UP AND PACES RESTLESSLY ABOUT THE LIVING ROOM. HE PAUSES WITH HIS BACK TO HER.)

MOMMA

Well?

C.H.

You have to learn to ask the right question, Helen.

MOMMA

(Studies him curiously)
And just what might that be?

(C.H. HOLDS HER GAZE, THEN MOVES AWAY, WANDERING AIMLESSLY.)

C.H.

You wouldn't understand.

MOMMA

(Stands granite stone still)
What is the right question, C.H.? I want to understand...help me to understand.

(C.H. STOPS D.L. WITH HIS BACK TO HER, THEN
TURNS TO FACE HER WITH DETERMINATION.)

C.H.

The right question is: "Whom does
the Grail serve?"

(MOMMA STARES AT HIM BLANKLY.)

MOMMA

The what?

C.H.

The Grail. The Holy Grail - "Whom
does the Holy Grail serve?"

MOMMA

What's that supposed to mean?

(C.H. LAUGHS AND MOVES UP LEFT TO THE KITCHEN
TABLE.)

C.H.

You wouldn't understand...

MOMMA

Well, I know I'm just an ignorant
fool and don't have your great
enlightened mind, but I'd appreciate
it if you would not talk down to me,
Charles Henry, and not snigger and
assume I don't have anything up
here. Give me some credit, please.
I had enough sense to get a job
and support this family, so just
maybe...

(ARLA COMES DOWN THE STAIRS.)

ARLA

(formally)

Hello, C.H.

(C.H. LOOKS UP BUT DOESN'T GO TO HER.)

C.H.

Well, look who's here.

ARLA

(to Momma)

Am I interrupting something?

MOMMA

No, Arla, this has been going on
for thirty five years.

(ARLA GOES TO THE COUCH AND IS ABOUT TO SIT DOWN
BUT THINKS BETTER OF IT AND REMAINS STANDING. SHE
IS HOSTILE TOWARDS C.H. AND PROJECTS THIS FEELING.)

C.H.

Well, now. Suddenly the temperature's
dropped about 30 degrees in here.

ARLA
(ignoring C.H.'s
comment)

Momma tells me you left her alone again
and went off---

C.H.
(explosively)

---I went off on business! That's right,
I did! I'm guilty! I went off and left your
mother and Kay and Jeanie, left 'em alone
in the house with no income, except for what
she makes at the cafeteria, I know it all,
I've heard it before and I'll probably keep
on hearin' it as long as I live! My God, one
woman to deal is bad enough, now I got two!

ARLA
You can shout and rave all you want, C.H.,
I'm not going to cry and run away like I
used to.

C.H.
(pacing D.S. Left)
I got no quarrel with you, young lady, I
never did, but when you side with your
momma against me, you're gettin' into
dangerous territory---!

ARLA
That sounds like a threat---

C.H.
It's not a threat, it's a fact! Why do I
have to keep explainin' everything I say?
'Dangerous territory' means you're pokin'
your nose where it doesn't belong and takin'
sides when you don't know what's going on...

ARLA
All right, then, tell me. What's going on?

(MOMMA CROSSES TO UP LEFT OF COUCH.)

MOMMA
Your father went to Houston and got his
poems published.

(C.H. STRIDES DOWN RIGHT TO HIS SUITCASE, SORTS THROUGH
THE COPIES OF BOOKS, SELECTS ONE AND CROSSES TO ARLA
AT THE COUCH.)

C.H.

Here's your copy.

(ARLA TAKES THE BOOK, LOOKS AT IT, OPENS IT AND STUDIES THE FIRST PAGE AS...)

(LIGHTS DOWN IN THE LIVING ROOM AREA AND UP IN JEANIE'S AND KAY'S ROOM. THEY'RE BOTH STUDYING THE BOOK OF POEMS.)

(JEANIE IS LOUNGING ON THE BED, HER BACK PROPPED UP AGAINST SOME PILLOWS. KAY IS SITTING ON THE EDGE OF THE BED NEXT TO HER FACING FRONT.)

JEANIE

Look, there's a poem to me...and one to you...

(KAY RUNS HER FINGER DOWN THE CHAPTER PAGE.)

KAY

...there's one to each of us...

(JEANIE TURNS TO HER POEM)

JEANIE

(Reads)

Mine's all about something called a muse..

(Looks up at Kay)

What's a muse?

KAY

(shrugs)

I don't know.

(KAY GETS A DICTIONARY FROM THE SHELF AND BRINGS IT TO THE BED. JEANIE TAKES THE DICTIONARY. SHE LOOKS UP THE WORD, FINDS IT, THEN READS:)

JEANIE

Muse..."A source of inspiration for artists, poets..." And down further it says..."Any of 9 goddesses presiding over poetry, the arts and the sciences..."

(Back to poem)

I think the poem means I should be a singer...

(Looks up)

...'Course I don't really care what he thinks, I don't even know why I'm reading this garbage!

(She flings the book away)

(KAY RUNS AND GETS THE BOOK.)

KAY

Jeanie! That's my copy, you shouldn't
treat books that way!

JEANIE

Why not? It's only his old, stupid book...

KAY

—I don't care, it's still a book...

(SHE SITS BACK DOWN ON THE BED AND OPENS THE BOOK.)

KAY
(finds her poem
reads:)
What does mine mean?

JEANIE
Let's see...
(takes Kay's copy,
reads)
It's all about God!
(gives book back
to Kay in disgust)
That's all he knows about, God and Shake-
speare!

(KAY PUTS THE BOOK DOWN AND TURNS TO JEANIE.)

KAY
Jeanie, do you know where Estrus is?

JEANIE
Where? Estrus? Never heard of the place.
Why?

KAY
Today a boy at school said I should have
fun now, 'cause pretty soon I'd be in Estrus.

JEANIE
Maybe it's in the dictionary...
(grabs dictionary)
How do you spell it?

KAY
I don't know...e...s...trus...

JEANIE
(spelling it out
as she turns pages)
E...s...t...

KAY
Is it there?

JEANIE
Wait a minute...here it is.
(reads)
"Estrus. Noun. Zool."
(looks at Kay)
What does Zool. mean? I know, zoology!
(reads)
Estrus is..."The peak of the sexual cycle
in animals culminating in ovulation; heat

JEANIE(cont'd)
 or rut..." (puts book down and
 looks at Kay)
 He was referring to your being in heat.

KAY
 (sitting up)
 Like a dog?

JEANIE
 Like a dog.

KAY
 (jumping to her
 feet, furious)
 I'll kill that little moron! I'll kill him!

(LIGHTS DOWN AND UP IN THE LIVING ROOM.)

(C.H. IS DOWN LEFT, MOMMA UP LEFT, ARLA IS IN FRONT
 OF THE COUCH.)

C.H.
 You don't have to read it now...So. How's
 San Francisco?

ARLA
 It's...all right...

C.H.
 You didn't expect your old man to be
 here, did you?
 (paces across stage)
 Life's like that, full of little shocks and
 jolts..."All the world's a stage, and all
 the men and women merely players..." and
 now I'm playing the villain's part, the
 deserter who returns to his domicile
 seeking warmth and comfort...
 (turns back to Arla
 half-mocking)
 ...and finding only rejection, cold
 shoulders and the relentless questions...

MOMMA
 Which reminds me, you were going to explain
 that question...

C.H.
 "Whom does the Grail serve?"

MOMMA

Yes. What does that mean?

(ARLA HAS A PUZZLED EXPRESSION.)

ARLA

What are you talking about, Momma?

C.H.

I was just telling your mother she has
to learn to ask the right questions.

(ARLA LOOKS ASKANCE AT MOMMA WHO SHRUGS.)

(C.H. LOOKS FROM ARLA TO MOMMA, THEN BEGINS TO MOVE ABOUT RESTLESSLY)

C.H.

It has to do with the Grail Legend, a medieval myth. A French poet wrote a poem about it in the 12th century...the grail is the cup Christ drank from at the Last Supper...

(A STAB OF EERIE MUSIC IN HERE.)

C.H.(Cont;d)

...according to the legend, there is a kingdom whose king is suffering greatly...

(LIGHTS FOCUS ON C.H. AND DIM DOWN IN THE SURROUNDING AREAS. AS THE OTHER ACTORS VANISH, ANOTHER STAB OF MUSIC SLICES IN. WHAT FOLLOWS IS AN ENACTMENT OF THE GRAIL LEGEND. THE OTHER ACTORS ASSIST C.H. IN HALF LIGHT CREATING A MYSTIC, SWIRLING EFFECT AS HE NARRATES. WITH THE USE OF HOODS, FACES HIDDEN IN SHADOWS, EFFECTIVE LIGHTING AND MUSIC UNDERSCORING, THE IDEA IS TO CREATE A SENSE OF MYSTERY AND EERIE FORBODING AND TO REVEAL C.H.'S RICH IMAGINATION AND SUBLIMINAL FEARS.)

C.H.(Cont'd)

...the king had been injured as a boy... while exploring in a forest he'd come upon an empty camp...where a salmon was roasting on a spit...

(HE ACTS THIS OUT. A BEAM OF LIGHT FROM ABOVE SIMULATES THE SPIT.)

C.H.(Cont'd)

...he had a great, great hunger...so he took a piece of the salmon...

(He reaches out and reacts in pain)

...badly burning his fingers...he dropped the fish...it fell on his thighs wounding them also. Despite his pain, he put his fingers in his mouth and tasted the salmon...

(C.H. REACTS TO THIS 'TASTING' AS IF RECEIVING AN INSPIRATION.)

C.H.(Cont'd)

...from that day on he was not productive neither was his kingdom...

(He comes out of his reverie)

C.H.(Cont'd)

...He is called the Fisher King because
he was wounded by a fish...

(C.H. ENTERS ANOTHER LIGHTED AREA AS HE SPEAKS, SEEMING
TO SEARCH FOR SOMEONE.)

C.H.(Cont'd)

...the Fisher King keeps the grail in
his castle but he cannot be healed by
it until an innocent boy arrives in his
court...

(LIGHTS UP IN ANOTHER AREA AS C.H. APPROACHES
'PARSIFAL' WHO IS SITTING QUIETLY WEARING A HOOD,
HIS HEAD BOWED IN PRAYER.)

C.H.(Cont'd)

Parsifal is such a boy.

(HE MAKES AS IF TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE BOY BUT
HIS WOUNDED HANDS WON'T PERMIT IT. HE GRIMACES.)

C.H.(Cont'd)

He lives in a far country and yearns to
be a knight...

C.H.(cont'd)

...he leaves his mother, which breaks her heart...

(THE PARSIFAL MOTHER IS SEEN STANDING IN A SHAFT OF LIGHT. SHE FALLS TO HER KNEES, WEEPING, HANDS EXTENDED, AS PARSIFAL BACKS AWAY FROM HER AND DISAPPEARS INTO THE MIST.)

C.H.(cont'd)

...he finds his way to the castle of a wise man named Gournamond...

(C.H. BECOMES GOURNAMOND.)

C.H.(cont'd)

...Gournamond trains Parsifal to be a knight...and gives his ~~you~~ student two commands:

(to Parsifal)

"You must never seduce or be seduced by a woman...and when you reach the Grail Castle, you must ask of the Fisher King, 'Whom does the Grail serve?'"

(PARSIFAL RUNS OUT JOYOUSLY. C.H. FOLLOWS A FEW STEPS BUT LOSES HIM IN A SHADOW.)

C.H.(cont'd)

...Parsifal finds his way to the Grail Castle and is welcomed with honor...

(ENACT THIS EVENT.)

C.H.(cont'd)

...he observes a ceremony in which the Grail Cup is passed around and everyone drinks from it...but when it comes time for Parsifal to ask the important question, he fails to do so...his mother had trained him never to ask questions...he becomes listless...passive...

(EVERYONE TURNS TO PARSIFAL...WHO WILTS. A SUDDEN BLACKOUT. A SPOT PICKS UP C.H.)

C.H.(cont'd)

He awakens the next morning to find the castle and everyone in it have vanished...

(C.H. PAUSES A MOMENT AS HE LAPSES INTO SHAKESPEARE, SAVORING THE WORDS.)

I-1-32B

C.H. (cont'd)

..."melted into air, into thin air..."

(THE NEXT PART OF THE NARRATIVE IS DELIVERED BRISKLY AND THE EVENTS RUSH PELL MELL ON TOP OF EACH OTHER AS THE 'PLAYERS' ENACT THIS COLLAGE OF IMAGES WHICH INCREASE IN INTENSITY AND BUILD TO A CLIMAX.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

...Parsifal rides forth and has many harrowing experiences: He learns his mother died from a broken heart...

(MOTHER DIES.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

...he meets and kills the terrifying Red Knight...

(C.H. BECOMES THE RED KNIGHT AND IS BEATEN BACK BY PARSIFAL.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

...and others...

(OTHERS CHARGE AND ARE BEATEN BACK BY PARSIFAL.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

...he meets Blanch Fleur whom he serves for the rest of his life...

(THERE IS A BREAK IN THE CONTINUOUS QUICK FLOW OF THE ACTION HERE, AS IF A MUSIC TREMELO BREAKS THE MUSIC PASSAGE, WHATEVER IT IS. THIS HAPPENS ALSO IN THE NARRATIVE ACTION AS BLANCH FLEUR APPEARS IN AN INTENSELY PURE, RADIATING SHAFT OF SHIMMERING LIGHT. SHE IS RAVISHING WITH LONG, FLOWING HAIR... AND SHE IS NAKED. ⊕ WE CAN NEVER SEE HER FACE SO WE'LL NEVER KNOW WHICH ACTRESS IS PLAYING THIS PART.)

(C.H. LOOKS OFF INTO SPACE AS IF SEEING HER IN HIS MIND'S EYE AND REMEMBERING HIS GREAT LOVE.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

...and loves with a passion so intense and a devotion that burns so brightly, that even on his deathbed 40 years later, that light had not dimmed nor that passion abated...and he never...never...betrayed her purity...

(C.H. SHAKES OFF THE REVERIE AND CONTINUES WITH THE STORY AS BLANCH FLEUR FADES FROM HIS CONSCIOUS AWARENESS. THE MUSIC AND ACTION CONTINUE THEIR FLOW AS BEFORE.)

⊕ A FLESH-COLORED DANCE LEOTARD WOULD BE MORE APPROPRIATE.

(A BEAT.)

C.H. (Cont'd)
 (Becoming fearful)
 ...a hideous woman approaches him in
 the forest and recounts his sins...

(C.H. RECOILS IN REAL FEAR FROM THE SPECTRE OF
 THIS GROTESQUE WOMAN WHOM WE SEE IN BIZARRE LIGHTING,
 STALKING C.H. SILENTLY AND POINTING HER FINGER AT
 HIM ACCUSINGLY. HE BACKS UP IN TERROR...HER APPROACH
 BUILDS WITH THE MUSIC...THEN SHE VANISHES IN THE MIST.)

C.H. (cont'd)
 (Recovering, perspiring)
 ...until older, scarred...and finally worthy,
 Parsifal finds his way back to the Grail
 Castle...

(C.H. IS VISIBLY SHAKEN HERE, HE BREAKS OFF THE STORY.)

C.H. (cont'd)
 Chretien de Troyes great poem ends here...
 other writers tried to finish it but..
 nothing...ever...it was no use...it...

(HE BECOMES DISTRACTED AS THE SHADOWY, VEILED
 'PLAYERS' TRY TO SEDUCE HIM WITH PANTOMIME INTO
 CONTINUING. IT SHOULD BE MADE APPARENT THAT
 THEY ARE ALL WOMEN.)

C.H. (cont'd)

...no, I....

(THEY SWIRL AROUND HIM IN EERIE LIGHTING AND WITH MOUNTING MUSIC. ADD MIST EFFECT IF POSSIBLE.)

C.H. (cont'd)

It's over, the poem is...

(THIS ACTION OF THE 'PLAYERS'' INSISTENCE ON CONTINUING THE LEGEND GROWS TO THREATENING PROPORTIONS UNTIL C.H. FINALLY CRIES OUT.)

C.H. (cont'd)

(lyrically)

"Begone, foul spirits of the air, vanish
as the dream you are, as the dream you..."
Six against one, it's not fair, it's not...

(HE COMES OUT OF HIS DREAM-LIKE STATE, THE FIGURES VANISH, LIGHTS RISE AND C.H. FALLS BACK ON THE COUCH, EXHAUSTED, HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS.)

(AS THE LIGHTS SPRING TO BRIGHTNESS, EVERYONE IS AS THEY WERE BEFORE THE GRAIL LEGEND ENACTMENT, WITH MOMMA STANDING UP LEFT AND ARLA IN FRONT OF THE COUCH.)

MOMMA

(long beat)

What does it mean, Charles?

C.H.

(dazed)

What? I--- oh...it...it's a parable,
Helen...it's...

(then gruff, back
to himself)

You figure it out.

(he sags perceptibly)

...I'm tired, been a long trip...

(he rises with
great weariness)

...I'm going to lie down before dinner...

(HE EXITS SLOWLY UP THE STAIRS. IN C.H.'s ENACTMENT OF THIS MYTH, WE SHOULD WITNESS SOME PERCEPTIVE FLASHES INTO HIS CHARACTER AND SEE REVEALED THESE ELEMENTS: HIS VIVID IMAGINATION, HIS GREAT FEAR OF WOMEN, HIS FEAR OF HIS OWN FEMININE OR SOFT SIDE. AS LONG AS THIS IS OCCURRING, THE MYTH ENACTMENT SHOULD BE DRAMATIC AND VALID. IN OTHER WORDS, WE USE THE MYTH ENACTMENT TO REVEAL C.H.'s CHARACTER.)

(ARLA CROSSES TO MOMMA.)

ARLA

He's amazing! He comes strolling in here, after being gone for a month without so much as a hello and kiss my kazoo, dominates the whole household with his stories, and demands dinner! I don't see how you've put up with him for so long!

MOMMA

(looking up the stairs)

It hasn't all been bad, Arla.

ARLA

(crossing away
in anger)

He's been out looking for his "Grail Castle" all these years and having his adventures and leaving us alone to go to hell in a handbasket!

MOMMA

(crosses to the chair
Down Right)

I know it's hard for you to understand, but C.H.'s the only man I've ever known. He's not perfect but...he had a hard life.. those mountain people live in a diffeent world, they're just not like we are...

ARLA

That's no excuse, Momma, Daddy's a human being, he should act like one...what are you thinking about?

MOMMA

(far off look)

He...told me about something that happened when he was a boy. His daddy was a teacher and was away for months at a time...one day he came home, walkin' up the path to his log cabin singin' a hymn, and C.H., who couldn't a been more'n 5, ran to meet him shoutin' "Daddy, Daddy!"...he jumped into his arms and his father slapped him as hard as he could...

ARLA

Why?

MOMMA

Thought C.H. was being disrespectful I guess...let's go into the kitchen, we can talk some more while I get dinner ready...

ARLA

You need anything from the store?

MOMMA

Potatoes and some flour...

ARLA

I'll run down, be back in 15 minutes.

(ARLA GETS HER PURSE FROM THE COUCH AND GOES OUT. MOMMA STARTS INTO THE KITCHEN AS C.H. APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS WITH HIS SHIRT OFF. THE EFFECT TO STRIVE FOR HERE WITH LIGHTING IS TO CREATE A MESMERIC SENSUALITY, A SUBTLE SEXUAL ATTRACTION THAT CONNECTS THESE TWO LIKE A MOTHER'S UMBILICAL CORD CONNECTS TO HER NEWBORN. SOMETHING HAZY, UNDULATING, A THROBBING UNDERCURRENT IS WHAT SHOULD BE OUTLINED IN THIS SILENT ENCOUNTER. MAYBE USE SOUND IN SOME SUBPERCEPTUAL MODE SUCH AS VERY SOFT RECORDED SIGHS THAT COULD BE MISINTERPRETED AS A SOOTHING WIND. WE SHOULD CREATE SOMETHING REAL AND FELT, A TANGIBLE PERCEPT BUT WITH A NEBULOUS OUTLINE.)

(C.H. STARES AT MOMMA A MOMENT, THEN GOES BACK INTO THEIR BEDROOM. MOMMA FIGHTS HER DESIRE TO BE WITH HIM...THEN GIVES UP AND SLOWLY MOUNTS THE STAIRS AS THE LIGHTS DIM...)

ACT I

Scene 2

(THE NEXT MORNING.)

(THE LIGHTS FOCUS ON THE PIANO AREA OF THE DANIELS'S LIVING ROOM. IT BECOMES MRS. MILLET'S HOME AND SHE IS GIVING JEANIE A SINGING LESSON. MRS. MILLET IS AN ATTRACTIVE, STRONG-LOOKING WOMAN IN HER MID-FIFTIES WHO COMMANDS RESPECT. SHE IS TAKING JEANIE THROUGH SOME ARPEGGIOS. JEANIE HAS A LOVELY SOPRANO VOICE, CLEAR AND APPEALING. AFTER A FEW BEATS, MRS. MILLET BEGINS TALKING BETWEEN CHORDS.)

MRS. MILLET

Try the "E" again...loosen that jaw...

(JEANIE DOES A SCALE OF THE "E" VOWEL. HER VOICE IS TIRED.)

MRS. MILLET(Cont'd)

Not hard "E" Jeanie...get more "EH" in it...

(THEY DO ANOTHER ARPEGGIO, JEANIE'S VOICE CRACKS.)

JEANIE

Damn!

(Coughs)

I'm sorry, I'm just...it's so hard today...

(MRS. MILLET DOODLES ON THE PIANO A MOMENT ABSENT-MINDEDLY AS SHE STUDIES JEANIE WHO IS PACING BACK AND FORTH NERVOUSLY.)

MRS. MILLET

How are things at home?

JEANIE

(Rolling her eyes)

Daddy came home yesterday!

(MRS. MILLET IS SILENT A MOMENT.)

MRS. MILLET

That's a problem, is it?

JEANIE

Yeah, it sure is.

(She sings a high sustaining note)

"Eeeeeeeeeee———!"

MRS. MILLET
And you've become very tense, haven't you?
(Studying her closely)

JEANIE
(Surprised)
You can tell?

MRS. MILLET
(Nodding)
I can hear it in your voice.

JEANIE
(Thinks a minute)
It's funny, but it was momma who got me
upset yesterday... She doesn't want me
to try out for Ted Mack...she doesn't
even want me to be a singer!

MRS. MILLET

Why?

(JEANIE BEGINS WANDERING AROUND THE ROOM WHICH
HAS BEEN ALTERED SLIGHTLY FOR THIS SCENE.)

JEANIE
Oh...I don't know, she just doesn't
understand, she's afraid I'm going to get
hurt, but you know what?
I think she just
doesn't want to have to deal with it...
with me and my upset if I don't get on
the show....

MRS. MILLET
But she loves you, Jeanie, she's only
trying to protect you...

JEANIE
(Getting upset)
She doesn't 'love' me! She doesn't have
time or energy, she's too busy trying to
please C.H. You know what happened? My
sister's here from San Francisco to try
and talk momma into getting a divorce?
Well, C.H. comes tromping in yesterday
after being gone for a month and a
half...she goes right to bed with him
BEFORE DINNER! Do you believe that? In
the middle of the afternoon...it's
indecent! I think she's got him by the you-
know-whats! Or he's got her...

MRS. MILLET

I'm sure your mother loves you, Jeanie, maybe she just doesn't show it, but I know she wants what's best for you...

JEANIE

(With great animation)

She wants what's best for her! She wants me to be a housewife! Ugghhpft! I'd rather die than get married and live in Oklahoma City and have babies and learn to knit! I'll become a hooker first!

(This last said defiantly)

MRS. MILLET

(Whoops with laughter)

A "hooker?" Where did that come from?

(JEANIE STRETCHES HER JAW, OPENING HER MOUTH WIDE AND CLOSING IT.)

JEANIE

I don't know, I just get so frustrated ...and the thought of living here, Mrs. Millet, no offense, but...I just have to get out...

MRS. MILLET

I'm not offended. I felt the same way.

(JEANIE CROSSES TO RIGHT CENTER OF THE PIANO AND STARES IN SURPRISE AT MRS. MILLET.)

JEANIE

You did?

(MRS. MILLET BEGINS PLAYING AS SHE TALKS.)

MRS. MILLET

(Nodding, a little weary)

Sure. I couldn't wait to leave this town. Went to Chicago...against my father's wishes...studied voice there, then went to Europe, sang with some opera companies...had two husbands, both died on me...

(Wistfully)

...it was a lot of living...

(JEANIE SHAKES HER HEAD AND BODY TRYING TO RELAX BUT STILL HOLDS HER EYES ON MRS. MILLET.)

(MRS. MILLET STOPS PLAYING AND MASSAGES HER RIGHT SHOULDER.)

MRS. MILLET(Cont'd)
It's not an easy path to take, it may
be more of a curse than a blessing, but...
you do what you have to do.
(Beat)
How is your father?

JEANIE
Daddy is daddy. He comes in the room and
everybody runs! He brought a book of his
poems back...

(MRS. MILLET HAS A FAR AWAY LOOK, AS IF REMEMBERING.
SHE UNCONSCIOUSLY FLUFFS HER HAIR.)

MRS. MILLET
Ah yes...the poems.

(THIS STATEMENT GETS PAST JEANIE.)

MRS. MILLET(Cont'd)
(Looks at Jeanie, a half-
smile on her face)
Do you think your father's a good poet?

JEANIE
(Shrugs, makes a face)
Who knows, I don't know one poem from
the other.

(MRS. MILLET HOLDS ON JEANIE A MOMENT LONGER,
THEN BREAKS IT.)

MRS. MILLET
(Hits a chord)
Is your mother going to prevent you from
auditioning?

(JEANIE COMES BACK TO HER PLACE BY THE PIANO.)

JEANIE
(Thoughtfully)
I don't know...
(Beat)
You know something, Mrs. Millet? I've
never heard momma or daddy say they loved
me or any of us. I've never even heard
them say they love each other.

Mrs. Millet
(Surprised)
They've never said 'I love you?'

JEANIE

(Shakes her head bitterly)
Never. Momma hates my 'dirty words,' as she calls them, I do have a bad mouth, that's the way everybody I run around with talks...but anyway, the dirtiest word in the Daniels's house is 'love.' I don't know what would happen if anyone ever said it...

(Throws her hands up
and laughs.)

Guess the house would collapse and we'd all die right there!

MRS. MILLET

(Stops playing)

I don't want to come between you and your mother, Jeanie...

JEANIE

(Guffaws)

There's nothing to come between!

MRS. MILLET

—but it would be a real pity if you didn't develop this talent. And I'd hate to see you lose this opportunity, you know the auditions are next week. You sing better than anyone in Oklahoma City and I think you must do this.

(JEANIE THROWS HER ARMS OVER THE PIANO AND 'LANGUISHES' FOR A MOMENT, RESTING HER HEAD ON THE TOP OF THE PIANO.)

JEANIE

(Sighs)

I don't know if it's worth fighting so much over.

(Turns her head towards
Mrs. Millet)

Would you talk to her? Maybe she'd listen to you.

MRS. MILLET

Well...

(Considering it)

JENAIIE

(Fervently)

Please—! Mrs. Millet, you've been singing forever and you didn't die, it didn't ruin your life!

MRS. MILLET

(Laughs)

Well...I am still alive and kicking...

JEANIE
(Pleading)
Pleeeeeeeese talk to her. Please?

MRS. MILLET
(Reluctantly)
Well...
(Thinks)
ASK her if she's available tonight,
around 8:00? If there's a problem, call
me, otherwise I'll assume we're on.

JEANIE
(Effusive)
Thanks, Mrs. Millet, I appreciate it so
much!

MRS. MILLET
(A little too casually)
Will your...father be there?

JEANIE
Who knows?
(Looking around)
I love coming here, it's so different
than my house. I'm sure glad Mr. Markley
sent me to you.

MRS. MILLET
He's been very helpful. He's sent me
several students from the school choir.
We went to school together, long time
ago...

(JEANIE IS STUNNED. SHE STARES AT MRS. MILLET
WITH HER MOUTH OPEN.)

JEANIE
You went to school with Markley? God, he's
ancient!

MRS. MILLET
(Laughs)
I'm not as young as I look.
(Back to business)
All right now...
(Hits chord)
Ahhhh....

(JEANIE SINGS AN ARPEGGIO ON THE "AH" VOWEL AS
THE LIGHTS FADE...)

End Scene 2

ACT I

Scene 3

(DINNER, THAT EVENING. C.H. SITS AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE. PRESENT ARE MOMMA, ARLA AND KAY. DINNER IS ABOUT TO BEGIN. C.H. LOOKS OVER AT THE STAIRS.)

C.H.

Where's Bett?

MOMMA

She's got a new job, works cashiering at the Mary Lou Theater...works 'til 7 on Saturday nights.

C.H.

(nods, looks around)

Well, where's Jeanie?

MOMMA

I don't know, I called her...

(calling)

JEANIE! DINNER! WE'RE WAITING!

JEANIE(off stage)

(beat)

I'M NOT HUNGRY!

C.H.

(to Kay)

You go up and tell your sister eating dinner is a family thing and people do it together.

KAY

Yes, sir.

(KAY SWALLOWS HARD AND RUNS UP THE STAIRS. LIGHTS UP IN JEANIE'S/KAY'S BEDROOM. JEANIE IS LYING ON THE BED PROPPED UP READING C.H.'s BOOK. KAY RUNS IN AND STANDS JUST INSIDE THE DOOR.)

KAY(cont'd)

Jeanie, come on! Daddy said eating dinner is---

JEANIE

(aloof, not looking up)

I'm not hungry.

KAY
(pleading)
Please, Jeanie, don't get him mad. I
can't stand it when he gets mad, I can't
eat---

(JEANIE SLAMS THE BOOK DOWN AND SITS UP DEFIANTLY.)

JEANIE
Well, I can't either! I don't go down there
for dinner when he's here because I get sick,
I throw up, and that makes him even madder!

(KAY CLASPS HER HANDS DESPERATELY AND GLANCES OVER
HER SHOULDER.)

KAY
PLEEEEEESE, Jeanie! I'll give you my dessert,
it's chocolate pudding, your favorite, I'll
just fiddle with it and when he leaves the
table, you can have it.

JEANIE
(perking up)
I don't want your chocolate pudding, Kay...

(KAY THROWS HER HANDS UP AND STARTS OUT.)

JEANIE(cont'd)
You're sure we're having it?

KAY
(returning)
Yes, I saw it in the icebox...

JEANIE
(sorely tempted)
I'd feel real guilty if I ate your
chocolate pudding, Kay, since we only
get dessert once a week.

KAY
I don't care! Hurry up before he comes
barreling in here yelling and foaming at
the mouth!

JEANIE
(sighs and puts
the book down)
Okay...

(JEANIE RISES AND STARTS FOR THE DOOR, GETS AN IDEA
AND HURRIES BACK TO THE BED.)

JEANIE

I want to read you one thing real quick!
(she grabs the book
and opens it)

KAY

(a loud, frantic
whisper)

Jeanie!

JEANIE

This is one of Daddy's poems, it's real
short...listen to this:

(KAY CAN HARDLY STAND STILL AS JEANIE PREPARES TO
READ THE POEM:)

JEANIE(cont'd)

It's called "Some Female Spiders Eat
Their Mates!," and it's dedicated to
Momma! Listen:

(reads)

"Some female spiders had a chat
The subject was their prey
Said one, 'My husband was too fat,
I've had heartburn all day--!'

"'Well, mine was tasty!' said a friend
'The best I've had,' she chirped
'So was mine,' a third one grinned
Then smiled and softly burped

"A sad old spider sans her fangs
Was listening nearby
'You should resist those hunger pangs,'
She muttered with a sigh

"Forego your momentary treat
Or you'll be 'lone and blue
I've learned this lesson: One can't eat
Her mate and have him too--!'"

C.H.(off stage)

Hey, up there!

KAREN

(out the door)

COMING! C'mon, Jeanie!

JEANIE

Okay.

(THEY GO OUT THE DOOR JUST AS C.H. PUSHES HIS

CHAIR BACK BRUSQUELY AND STARTS FOR THE STAIRS,
HIS JAW SET. BEFORE HE CAN REACH THE STAIRS, THE
GIRLS APPEAR AT THE TOP AND RUN DOWN PAST HIM.)

KAREN

She was on the john, Daddy.

(C.H. REMAINS STANDING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS.)

C.H.

Why didn't I hear the toilet flush?

JEANIE

(as they sit at
the table)

It was one of those quiet flushes you get
sometimes..."swoosh"...I could hardly hear
it myself...

C.H.

I think you're pullin' my leg but I can't
prove it.

(HE COMES TO THE TABLE AND SITS. THEY BOW HEADS AND
C.H. SAYS GRACE.)

C.H.(cont'd)

(quickly)

Oh, Lord, thank you for this food and all
thy blessings...keep us safe and in the
paths of righteousness for thy namesake,
give us the courage to ---

(JEANIE LIFTS HER EYES TO HEAVEN AND SIGHS AUDIBLY. C.H.
OBSERVES THIS THROUGH A HALF-CLOSED EYE AND NOW THE TENOR
OF HIS PRAYER CHANGES.)

C.H.(cont'd)

"Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, oh God,
for they speak against thee wickedly...
do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?
I hate them with perfect hatred, I count
them mine enemies...!"

(C.H. LOOKS UP AND SHOOTS A PENETRATING GLANCE AT
JEANIE, THEN STARTS LADLING FOOD ONTO THE PLATES.
THIS CONTINUES IN SILENCE UNTIL EVERYONE HAS A
PLATE. C.H. STARTS EATING, ALL FOLLOW SUIT.)

C.H.(cont'd)

So.

(looks around the
silent table)

C.H. (cont'd)
(to Kay)
What'd you learn in school last week?

KAY
(fiddling with her
food)
I don't know...

C.H.
You don't know?
(he looks at Momma,
then back to Kay)
You must have learned something, English,
history, math, civics, geography...the
world's full of subjects, you must have
learned something about one of 'em...

JEANIE
She learned a new word, didn't you, Kay?
(KAY'S FACE FALLS, SHE SCOWLS AT JEANIE.)

MOMMA
What word was that?

KAY
I don't remember...

C.H.
(sopping up some
gravy with a piece
of bread)
You have to concentrate, close your eyes...
try to picture it. That's what I used to
do back in the old school house in Virginia.
Had a good memory, I could memorize anything.
If I couldn't recall something, I'd close my
eyes real hard...
(does so)
...and push it to the front of my mind...
(opens his eyes)
...that's how I memorized the Grail Legend
poem, all eleven thousand lines...try it.

JEANIE
I don't have to 'push it up,' I remember
from Kay telling me. The word was "estrus."

(C.H. LOOKS AT JEANIE WITH A BLANK STARE. MOMMA
BLUSHES.)

C.H.

Never heard of it.

(looks at Momma)

You heard of it, Helen?

MOMMA

(looking at Kay

who is mortified)

It's a female thing, has to do with a
woman's---

C.H.

(cutting her off)

---You got a good dew on this hash, Helen.

(awkward pause)

Missed it when I was gone...

MOMMA

(defiantly)

---a woman's sexual cycle!

C.H.

(slams his fork
down)

I don't want to hear about it! It's for
women to know about, it's none of a man's
damn business, so don't tell me about it!

(ANOTHER AWKWARD SILENCE. ARLA LOOKS OVER AT JEANIE.)

ARLA

Jeanie, honey, guess what? Walter took me
to see a production of Carmen.

(JEANIE HAS BEEN PICKING AT HER FOOD. NOW SHE COMES TO LIFE.)

JEANIE

The opera?! Oh, I'd love to see that! I've
never been to a real, live opera in my
whole life!

ARLA

(smiling)

Well, when you come up and visit me, maybe
it'll still be there...

JEANIE

Oh, that would be so great! To actually
see people on the stage singing and
dancing in those glorious costumes and
the music and...it must be the greatest,
most fantastic thing in the whole world!
I'd probably faint or something!

(LONG PAUSE. MOMMA IS FUSSING WITH THE FOOD ON HER PLATE. SHE BEGINS SHAKING HER HEAD WITH A DISGRUNTLED LOOK.)

I-1-50

MOMMA

Seems like a waste of money to me.

ARLA

Why is that, Momma?

(to Kay)

Please pass the peas.

(KAY DOES SO AS MOMMA MAKES LITTLE DESIGNS WITH HER FORK ON THE PLATE.)

MOMMA

Well, there's lots better things a person can spend his money on, like food, clothes, shoes...

ARLA

But what about a person's soul, Momma? What about things that inspire you, lift you up to the stars, things of beauty, artistry, culture...

(smiles at Jeanie)

...the world would be a pretty sad state if all there was to look forward to was the mundanity of everyday life...

(MOMMA SHOOTS ARLA AN ANGRY LOOK.)

MOMMA

Well, you must have been talking to your father, he used that word just recently. "Mundainties."

(MOMMA SAYS THIS WITH A SMIRK AND THEN GOES BACK TO HER PLATE. C.H. HAS BEEN ENJOYING THE DISAGREEMENT. NOW HE FIXES HIS GAZE ON MOMMA.)

C.H.

Your mother doesn't know about those things, Arla, she doesn't like books or paintings.. or poetry. Do you Helen?

MOMMA

We weren't brought up to know anything about that...who had time to read? And the town where I lived never heard of a live show.

C.H.

(helping himself
to more hash)

Your mother's soul is starving and she
doesn't know it---

(MOMMA LAYS HER FORK ON HER PLATE DELIBERATELY,
THEN LOOKS AT C.H.)

MOMMA

My soul is not starving, Charles Henry,
my soul is alive and doing quite well,
thank you very much.

(C.H. TAKES A FORKFULL OF FOOD AND STARES AT
MOMMA AS HE CHEWS SLOWLY.)

C.H.

For a person's soul to thrive, Helen,
it's got to be fed, just like a child's
got to be fed to grow...if there's no
nourishment, it withers like a grape on
the vine and drops to the soil where it
rots and turns to mulch...

(to Kay)

...there's another word for you, Kay, a
good old farmer's word, mulch. It's the
stuff that covers and protects, helps
things grow. Now, books and poetry, art,
music...are a kind of fertilizer of the
soul, they help it blossom and...

MOMMA

(sternly to C.H.)

Don't use that word at the dinner table,
please, it's not appetizing.

(BEAT. EVERYONE TOYS WITH THEIR FOOD. FINALLY
KAY FINDS HER TONGUE AND ADDRESS C.H.)

KAY

Daddy, Jeanie's singing teacher says she's
good enough to audition for Ted Mack!

C.H.

(looks up)

Singing teacher? Since when did Jeanie
have money to pay a singing teacher?

ARLA

I pay for the lessons. I'm glad I can
do it.

(smiles at Jeanie)

ARLA(cont'd)

And from what I hear, it's been worth it!

JEANIE

(coming to life)

She says I'm really good, daddy, Mrs. Millet says I have a lot of potential.

C.H.

Mrs. Millet's your singing teacher?

JEANIE

Yes, she's a good singer herself and she knows all about singing---!

(C.H. REACHES FOR THE SALT AND PEPPER AND SPRINKLES BOTH LIBERALLY ON HIS FOOD DURING THE FOLLOWING.)

C.H.

Well now, I hope you know where you got that talent from, young lady. I was called the best singer in Toadsuck Arkansas.

KAY

Toadsuck?

(makes a face)

Uggghhhhh!!

(C.H. PUTS THE SALT AND PEPPER SHAKERS DOWN AND LEANS BACK IN HIS CHAIR REMINISCING.)

C.H.

Spent the summer there a number of years ago...I was sellin' Bibles. They had a singing contest in the town square one night...so I got out my fiddle, accompanied myself, did a little tap dance and knocked their britches off.

ARLA

C.H. has a nice voice, he used to sing and play for Joel, Rick and me.

C.H.

(looks at her)

That's right, I did.

(to Jeanie)

So. You're gonna take after your old man, huh? You know I wrote a poem for you, Jeanie, I knew you had talent.

JEANIE

(excited)

I read it, all about my muse. We looked
the word up, didn't we Kay?

KAY

(closes her eyes)

Yes, it means..."A source of inspiration..."

C.H.

Well now, that's three words you learned
this week.

(MOMMA HAS BEEN SILENTLY FUSSING WITH HER FOOD.
NOW SHE PLACES HER FORK DOWN NEATLY AND ADDRESSES
C.H. SEVERELY.)

MOMMA

I don't think you should encourage your
daughter to become a singer.

C.H.

Why not?

MOMMA

She should get married and have a family.

ARLA

(dabs at her mouth
with a napkin)

Momma, not every woman is supposed to
become a housewife---

(KAY PICKS UP HER PUDDING AND BEGINS EATING IT.)

KAY

I think she should do it, become a singer,
like Dinah Shore, become a movie star...
then all my friends would beg me for her
autograph!

JEANIE

(noticing Kay eating
her pudding)

Is that good, Kay?

(clears her throat)

(KAY REMEMBERS HER PROMISE AND PUTS THE PUDDING DOWN.)

JEANIE

(dreamily)

I don't know if I'll ever become a movie
star...

KAY

Why not? I'll bet you're as good as Dinah Shore.

ARLA

Maybe even better...

MOMMA

(shaking her head)

It's not right.

(C.H. REACHES FOR THE BOWL OF HASH, SCOOPS UP SEVERAL SPOONFULS AND PUTS THEM ON HIS PLATE.)

C.H.

Helen, it won't hurt Jeanie to try out for the show, she's got a creative streak in her, I think she should feed it with a little mulch...

(he winks at Jeanie,
then snags a piece
of bread and butters it)

MOMMA

(pushes her chair back
defiantly and crosses her
arms)

Well, it seems that everybody else knows better'n me what's best for my daughter! Everybody has these high falutin' ideas of how easy it's going to be, that all you have to do is ---

JEANIE

(turning her whole
body to face Momma)

---I never thought it was going to be easy to---

MOMMA

(voice rising)

---sing a few notes for some big, famous radio man and suddenly---

(ARLA PLACES HER FORK ON HER PLATE AND LOOKS AT MOMMA.)

ARLA

---but Momma, Jeanie has real talent, I've heard her---

MOMMA

(topping Arla)

---and suddenly Hollywood's callin' up

MOMMA(cont'd)
and talent scouts are bangin' the door
down---

(JEANIE IS FOCUSED INTENSELY ON MOMMA.)

JEANIE
(voice rising)
---well, if I wasn't any good, why would
Mrs. Millet tell me so?

MOMMA
---and Jeanie's miss big hotsy totsy and
everybody's kneelin' down and---

(JEANIE POPS TO HER FEET.)

JEANIE
You're just jealous!

(EVERYONE STOPS AND LOOKS AT JEANIE, EVERYONE THAT
IS BUT C.H. WHO CONTINUES EATING AND FOCUSING ON HIS
PLATE WITH A HALF-SMILE.)

JEANIE(cont'd)
You're jealous because you never did
anything with your life except have
babies! And if I do something, you'll
know it can be done and you can't stand
that!

MOMMA
Well, miss, you should be grateful, then,
'cause if I didn't have you you wouldn't
be standin' here today!

JEANIE
(near tears)
I wish I wasn't! I didn't ask you to have
me, did I? Did I ask you to have sex with
Daddy and---

MOMMA
(jumps to her feet)
---You watch your mouth!

(JEANIE FACES HER DOWN WITHOUT BLINKING, THE WORDS
RUSHING OUT IN AN EMOTIONAL WHIRLWIND.)

JEANIE
DID I? You did it and I have to pay for
it, I had to be born into this miserable,
miserable house where all you ever do is

JEANIE(cont'd)
 fight, you and daddy, fight and yell
 and scream and then go upstairs and---

(MOMMA CROSSES TO JEANIE AND SLAPS HER. THERE IS A LONG PAUSE WHILE JEANIE STANDS UNMOVING, GATHERING HERSELF TOGETHER. WHEN SHE SPEAKS, HER VOICE IS LOW.)

JEANIE(cont'd)
 Daddy was right to dedicate his spider
 poem to you. You eat your mate and---

(JEANIE IS SWEPT BY A WAVE OF NAUSEA, THROWS HER HANDS TO HER MOUTH AND RUNS UPSTAIRS.)

MOMMA
 (to C.H.)
 And just what was that supposed to mean,
 Charles? Did you call me a spider?

(C.H. IS SILENT HOLDING A SLIGHT SMILE. MOMMA MARCHES INTO THE LIVING ROOM, PICKS UP THE BOOK ON THE COUCH, FINDS THE POEM AND READS IT SILENTLY. SHE FINISHES, SITS ON THE COUCH AND BEGINS TO CRY. ARLA SHOOTS A DEADLY LOOK AT C.H., THEN GETS UP AND GOES TO MOMMA AND SITS DOWN BESIDE HER. SHE PICKS UP THE BOOK AND BEGINS TO READ THE POEM. ONLY C.H. AND KAY ARE STILL AT THE TABLE.)

C.H.
 (bewildered, to
 himself)
 Well. It seems that nobody likes my sense
 of humor around here. I thought I was bein'
 funny when I wrote the damn thing...
 (to Kay)
 ...that's another word for you, Kay, mis-
 understood. Jesus said "A prophet isn't
 accepted in his own country..."...and I say
 I'm not accepted in my own house...
 (glances around the
 room)
 ...in my own Grail Castle...

(C.H. SITS SILENTLY STARING AT HIS PLATE AS KAY DOES THE SAME. FINALLY HE GETS UP HEAVILY AND GOES OUT THE FRONT DOOR. KAY FIDDLES WITH HER FOOD, THEN LOOKS UP THE STAIRS, PICKS UP HER'S AND JEANIE'S CHOCOLATE PUDDING, GETS ONE SPOON, AND HEADS FOR THE STAIRS. SHE GETS HALF WAY UP WHEN JEANIE APPEARS AT THE LANDING AND RUNS DOWN THE STAIRS.)

KAY
(startled)

I was just---

(JEANIE RUNS PAST HER, GOES TO THE COUCH AND
THROWS HER ARMS AROUND HER MOTHER'S KNEES.)

JEANIE
(tearfully)
Momma, I'm sorry I said those things,
I feel terrible, I feel---I'm sorry,
Momma, I'm so sorry...

(MOMMA PATS JEANIE'S HEAD AND JEANIE THROWS
HERSELF INTO HER MOTHER'S ARMS.)

MOMMA
(struggling against
tears)
It's alright, Jeanie...I know you...didn't
mean it...it's all right, honey..I'm sorry
I slapped you...

(THEY BOTH SOB AS ARLA PUTS THE BOOK DOWN, HER EYES
FULL OF TEARS.)

(THE DOOR OPENS AND BETT ENTERS. SHE STEPS INSIDE,
CLOSES THE DOOR, AND BEGINS SINGING:)

BETT
(sings)
"From the Halls of Montezuuuma
To the Shores of Tripoli..."

(SHE SALUTES, THEN GOES TO THE TABLE AND SNAGS A
PIECE OF BREAD. SHE DOESN'T NOTICE THE TEARFUL
SCENE ON THE COUCH.)

BETT(cont'd)
...We got a double bill this weekend,
"The Sands of Iwo Jima" and "Battan"..
(searching the table
for food)
...Marines, everywhere you look, Robert
Taylor, John Wayne, George Murphy, Robert
Walker and milllllllions of Japs, Japs in
the trees, Japs in the grass, Japs in the
sand, Japs in the cartoon, Bugs Bunny was
fighting with Hirohito, It was---

(SHE LOOKS AROUND AND SEES MOMMA, JEANIE AND ARLA ON
THE COUCH.)

BETT(cont'd)

What's going on?

(ARLA GETS UP AND CROSSES TO HER.)

ARLA

There was a little disagreement at dinner.

BETT

Oh, one of those...

(SHE GOES BACK TO THE FOOD ON THE TABLE, THEN
STOPS, SUDDENLY AGHAST.)

BETT(cont'd)

What's left for me?

(MOMMA, STILL COMFORTING JEANIE, LOOKS OVER AT
BETT.)

MOMMA

Your plate's in the oven, Bett, I'm
keeping it warm...

BETT

(lightening up)

I knew I could count on my mother, she
knows a growing girl's needs...

KAY

(still on stairs)

Yes, Bett, but you're growing in the
wrong direction.

(BETT CROSSES TOWARD THE KITCHEN.)

BETT

(nose in air)

I'm just going to ignore that snotty little
remark.

(she exits into kitchen)

KAY

(coming down stairs)

Can we play Monopoly Momma? Please?

ARLA

I'll play with you, honey, maybe the others
can join us later...

KAY

Great! I'll clear off the table.

(KAY STARTS FOR THE DINING ROOM TABLE, REMEMBERS THE TWO CUPS OF PUDDING IN HER HANDS, RUNS OVER TO THE COUCH AND HANDS THEM TO JEANIE.)

KAY

I saved these for you.

JEANIE

(sobs diminishing)

I'm not hungry...

KAY

Okay.

(she starts away
with the pudding)

JEANIE

...but leave it anyway...

(KAY PUTS THE TWO CUPS AND SPOON DOWN ON THE COFFEE TABLE, HURRIES TO THE DINNER TABLE AND BEGINS TO CLEAR IT WITH ARLA'S HELP AS JEANIE BLOWS HER NOSE, THEN PICKS UP ONE OF THE CUPS AND BEGINS GOBBLING THE PUDDING AS THE LIGHTS LOWER AND MOMMA DABS AT HER EYES WITH A HANDKERCHIEF.)

End Scene 3

ACT I

Scene 4

(THAT EVENING, HALF AN HOUR LATER. LIGHTS UP IN THE DINING AREA STAGE LEFT. ARLA, BETT, MOMMA, JEANIE AND KAY ARE SEATED AROUND THE TABLE PLAYING MONOPOLY. JEANIE IS DRESSED UP AND LOOKS GREAT. THERE IS A BIG BOWL OF POPCORN NEAR BETH WHO CONTINUES EATING THROUGH THE SCENE. THE GAME IS IN PROGRESS AND AS LIGHTS COME UP, KAY IS SHAKING THE DICE.)

KAY

(with great intensity,
eyes closed)

Three or six, three or six, three or six,
three or six, three or....

JEANIE

(tapping her foot
impatiently)

Kay, will you please just throw the dice?

KAY

(staring at Jeanie)

...three or six, three or six, three or---

JEANIE

(biting her tongue)

You can't affect how the dice will fall, Kay,
just...

KAY

(eyes closed again)

...three or six, three or six, three or
six...

JEANIE

(exploding)

God! Will you throw the damn dice!?

MOMMA

Jeanie, if you don't clean up your mouth,
you're going to be grounded for a week,
including tonight.

(JEANIE LEANS IN ON THE TABLE AND POINTS A THREATENING
FINGER AT KAY.)

JEANIE

Kay, I have a very important date tonight,
and if you make me blow it by acting like an
idiot, and Momma grounds me, I will kill you.

JEANIE(cont'd)
I will stuff popcorn into every opening
of your body.

MOMMA
Jeanie! Just hush!

(JEANIE TURNS AWAY FROM KAY AND CROSSES HER LEGS
ABRUPTLY AS ARLA AND BETT GLANCE AT EACH OTHER,
BETT SHRUGS, THEN TAKES A HANDFUL OF POPCORN.)

ARLA
(to Jeanie)
Who's your date with tonight, hon?

JEANIE
(flushed)
The captain of the track team, the class
president, and the only guy with dimples
deeper than Robert Taylor!

KAY
(so surprised she
stops shaking the dice)
You're going out with three guys?

JEANIE
Of course not. It's all one guy, Norman
McClosky.

KAY
Oh.
(she shakes, throws,
then says gleefully:)
Six! It worked!, it worked!

(SHE QUICKLY MOVES HER PIECE SIX SPACES.)

KAY(cont'd)
I'll buy it, Tennessee is \$200 dollars...

(BEING THE BANKER, SHE FINDS THE TENNESSEE, PAYS THE
BANK AND ARRANGES THE PROPERTY NEATLY IN FRONT OF
HER. JEANIE HAS BEEN WATCHING IMPATIENTLY AND
TAPPING HER FINGERS ON THE TABLE.)

JEANIE
(sweetly)
Are you through?

KAY
Uh, huh...

(SHE PASSES THE DICE TO JEANIE WHO CARELESSLY
TOSSES THEM AND MOVES HER PIECE ALONG THE BOARD.)

(MOMMA HAS BEEN BROODING, LOOKING OFF INTO SPACE,
THINKING. BETT NOTICES.)

BETT

Momma? What's wrong with you? You seem
very fidgety tonight.

ARLA

Daddy wrote a poem about spiders who eat
their mates, he dedicated it to Momma.

(to Momma)

She has a right to be upset.

MOMMA

(to Bett)

Have you read it?

BETT

(shakes her head
as she arranges
her properties)

No. Where's your copy, mine's upstairs...

(MOMMA GETS UP, GOES TO THE COUCH AND PICKS UP HER
COPY OF THE BOOK, COMES BACK TO THE TABLE AND SITS
DOWN.)

(MEANWHILE BETT HAS STOPPED EATING POPCORN LONG
ENOUGH TO THROW THE DICE AND MOVE HER PIECE.)

KAY

MY PROPERTY! With 3 railroads...that's
one hundred and fifty smackeroots!

(BETT PAYS KAY AS MOMMA OPENS THE BOOK AND BEGINS
READING THE POEM OUT LOUD.)

MOMMA

"Some female spiders..."

KAY

Arla, it's your turn, you're holding
up the game.

(KAY SNATCHES THE DICE FROM THE TABLE AND GIVES THEM
TO ARLA WHO HOLDS THEM ABSENTMINDEDLY AS SHE STARES
AT MOMMA.)

ARLA

Okay, momma, go ahead...

MOMMA

"Some female spiders had a chat
The subject was their prey...
Said one, "My husband was too fat,
I've had heartburn all day---!"

(JEANIE LAUGHS AND LOOKS AT MOMMA.)

JEANIE

I think that's funny, don't you?

MOMMA

No, I don't, because he's talking about me!

JEANIE

But daddy's not fat!

MOMMA

It's not literal.

KAY

(anxiously waiting
for Arla to throw
the dice)

Arla...?

ARLA

Oh, I'm sorry, honey.
(she throws the dice
and looks at momma)
What's the rest of it?

(KAY SIGHS DRAMATICALLY, MOVES ARLA'S PIECE FOR HER,
SNATCHES THE DICE, THROWS THEM AND QUICKLY MOVES HER
PIECE ALONG.)

KAY

(quickly shoves dice
to Jeanie)

Your turn!

MOMMA

(reading)

"'Well, mine was sweet,' replied a friend
'The best I've had,' she chirped
'So was mine,' a third one grinned
Then smiled, and softly burped---!"

(JEANIE LEANS BACK IN HER CHAIR AND GUFFAWS.)

JEANIE

I'm sorry, momma. Why does that upset
you?

KAY
(shoving piece to
Jeanie)

Jeanie...

MOMMA
(drops book to table
and looks at Jeanie)
Because your father is calling me a spider!
He's not being funny, he means it. He
didn't pick a deer or a cute little bunny
rabbit---

AUDREY
---Bett? Can I have the popcorn?

(BETT IS STUDYING HER PROPERTY. SHE HOLDS THE BOWL OUT
TO ARLA WITHOUT LOOKING, AND JUST AS ARLA IS ABOUT TO
TAKE A HANDFUL, PULLS IT BACK AND SITS IT BESIDE HER.)

MOMMA
(still talking to
Jeanie)
---he picked a spider, spiders are not
nice things. What do you do when you see
one pick it up and kiss it?

KAY
(drumming her fingers)
Jeanie?

JEANIE
(to Kay)
Just a minute!
(to momma)
I just think it's daddy's sense of humor,
I think he's just trying to be funny...

MOMMA
Well, it may be funny to him, but it's not
to me...

ARLA
(to Jeanie)
It isn't a compliment, Jeanie, that's what
momma means, it's really a nasty thing to
say about anyone...

(KAY JUMPS UP IN FRUSTRATION AND BEGINS PACING BEHIND
HER CHAIR.)

JEANIE
(to Kay)

Okay, okay!

(she throws the dice and
moves her piece)

Boardwalk! Anyone own it?

KAY
(rolls her eyes back)

Oh, no!

(KAY STAMPS HER FOOT AND JUMPS BACK INTO HER
SEAT, SHUFFLES THROUGH THE UNBOUGHT PROPERTY AND
FINDS BOARDWALK.)

KAY
(holding the property
covetously in her hands)
Can I buy it? Please?!

JEANIE
No, I want it.

BETT
Can I have the popcorn back, Arla?

ARLA
(studying her property)
It's right beside you.

BETT
(looks up, surprised)
It is?
(sees it)
You're right.

(BETT GRABS THE BOWL, STUFFS SOME POPCORN IN HER
MOUTH AND HEADS TOWARD THE KITCHEN.)

BETT(cont'd)
(over her shoulder)
Anybody want lemonade?

ARLA
Read the rest, momma.

(JEANIE FORKS OVER THE MONEY TO KAY WHO RELUCTANTLY
HANDS HER THE PROPERTY.)

KAY
I'll trade you Illinois Avenue and St.
James Place for it, then you'll have a
monopoly.

JEANIE
(lining up her
cards)

Nope.

(BETT STICKS HER HEAD INTO THE LIVING ROOM.)

BETT
LEMONADE?

(EVERYONE SAYS 'NO THANKS' AS BETT DUCKS BACK INTO
THE KITCHEN.)

MOMMA
(continues)
"A sad old spider sans her fangs..."

KAY
(looking up)
What does "sans" mean?

ARLA
Without.

JEANIE
Isn't that old fashioned? From Shakespeare?

ARLA
No, it's French. Most people don't use
it but it's still---

JEANIE
(looking around)
Who's turn is it?

KAY
Bett's, it's Bett's turn.
(calling into kitchen)
BETT? IT'S YOUR TURN!

BETT(off stage)
COMING!

(MOMMA LOOKS AROUND THE TABLE IMPATIENTLY.)

MOMMA
May I continue?
(momma reads quickly
the first line again,
then slowly)
"A sad old spider, sans her fangs
Was listening nearby
'You should resist those hunger pangs,'

MOMMA(cont'd)
She muttered with a sigh

'Forego your momentary treat
Or you'll be---

(BETT ENTERS EATING COOKIES.)

BETT
---Momma, these are the best icebox cookies
you've ever---

(MOMMA PUTS THE BOOK ON THE TABLE.)

MOMMA
How can I finish this if everyone keeps
interrupting me? I'll never get through
it if everytime I---
(closes the book)
It's not important anyway, nobody cares
but me.

(BETT CROSSES TO HER MOTHER AND PATS HER ON THE SHOULDER.)

BETT
Of course we do, momma. Here, give me
the book, I'll finish reading it myself.

(SHE HOLDS HER HAND OUT BUT MOMMA IS POUTING AND
DOESN'T PASS IT TO HER. BETT HAS TO GO AROUND MOMMA
TO PICK THE BOOK UP. SHE RETURNS TO HER SEAT AT THE
TABLE AND READS SILENTLY.)

(KAY IS STUDYING HER'S AND JEANIE'S PROPERTIES
INTENTLY.)

BETT
(reading, musing)
I agree with Jeanie, momma, I think he's
just being silly. Daddy has a strange
sense of humor, like bouncing that ball
of his---

(BETT CONTINUES STUDYING THE POEM THROUGH THE
NEXT FEW LINES.)

KAY
(to Jeanie)
I'll give you my three railroads and
Pennsylvania Avenue, then you'll have four
railroads. It's \$200 smackers everytime
somebody lands on it! Four properties I'm
offering here for one.

JEANIE

Big deal! I end up with railroads and
you get the best property on the board...

KAY

But I don't even have a monopoly yet, I
may not even get Park Place...

JEANIE

(nodding knowingly)

Kay, if I know you, you'll get it, you'll
find a way...

BETT

(eating popcorn now
absentmindedly as she
reads)

I was never so embarrassed in my life when---

MOMMA

(brooding, to Bett)

You mark my words, Bett, C.H. wrote that
poem for a reason, and I know what that
reason is...

BETT

(looks up)

---he came into the office that time
bouncing his ball and yelling 'Wake up!
You're all dead and don't know it!

JEANIE

Okay. Deal.

(SHE GIVES BOARDWALK TO KAY WHO GIVES HER THE
FOUR PROPERTIES. THEY ARRANGE THESE PROPERTIES
IN FRONT ON THE TABLE.)

(KAY GIVES THE DICE TO ARLA WHO ABSENTMINDEDLY
THROWS AS SHE READS. KAY MOVES HER PIECE FOR HER.
ARLA HAS LANDED ON PARK PLACE AND KAY COVETS IT
GREATLY.)

KAY

(throws this away)

You want to buy that, Arla?

ARLA

(without thinking)

No, you can have it.

(JEANIE SITS RAMROD STRAIGHT.)

JEANIE
Wait a minute, you can't do that!

KAY
Yes I---

JEANIE
---No you can't!

KAY
She said I could have it!

MOMMA
---the reason is to hurt me...

ARLA
(to momma)
'Course it is---and you've been hurt enough!

JEANIE
That's not the way it is in the rules! The
rules say---

(KAY GRABS THE BOX, LOOKS INSIDE, GETS THE RULES OUT
AND GLANCES THROUGH THEM QUICKLY.)

JEANIE
---that if a player doesn't want a property
he lands on, everybody throws the dice and
the highest roller gets---

(KAY SLAMS THE BOX DOWN.)

KAY
But she said I could have it!

JEANIE
I don't care what she said, Kay-Kay-Kay!
That's not the way you---

(MOMMA BEGINS TO CRY.)

KAY
(also starting to cry)
Well, if you're going to be so nasty, I
don't want to play this stupid game anymore!

JEANIE
(hands to her
head, exasperated)
It's not what I want, the rules say---

BETT

(to Arla)

Want some more popcorn, Arla?

(ARLA REACHES ACROSS THE TABLE AND TAKES MOMMA'S HAND.)

ARLA

Momma, I think it's vicious, especially that he dedicated it to you that way... I told you what I think you should do, I'll get a lawyer for you and pay---

KAY

(gathering up
her property)

Nobody cares anyway, I'm the only one playing---

JEANIE

Oh Kay, stop being such a crybaby!

KAY

(slams her property down
and turns to Jeanie)

Well, momma's crying too, is she a crybaby? Huh?!

MOMMA

(through tears)

Settle down, both of you! I can't stand this fighting...

ARLA

(persisting)

I'll go with you...

MOMMA

(wiping her tears with
a paper napkin)

He's said to me before that I had...my claws in him...

BETT

(looks startled,
still chewing cookie)

Claws? Momma, spiders don't have claws---

MOMMA

You think I don't know that? I've been around a lot longer than you, Bett, and I've certainly learned that spiders don't have claws...but it doesn't matter anyway, it's

MOMMA(cont'd)
the same thing...claws, fangs, it means
I'm a...a...an evil thing, that I...
(she shudders and
bursts into tears)

(KAY GETS UP AND GOES TO HER MOTHER.)

KAY
(stroking her
mother's hand)
Mother?

MOMMA
(looks up, expecting
commiseration)
Yes, Kay?

KAY
(sweetly)
Momma...it's your turn...

MOMMA
(not getting it
for a beat)
My...turn?

(SHE GETS THE MESSAGE THAT KAY'S TENDERNESS IS NOT OUT
OF CONCERN FOR HER BUT BECAUSE SHE WANTS TO CONTINUE
THE GAME. MOMMA BEGINS A NEW CRYING JAG.)

ARLA
Momma, it's all right...

MOMMA
...and what about that grail thing...?
What's that all about? About him being
the...that king guy, what's his name?

ARLA
The Fisher King?

MOMMA
(her crying abating)
Yes...and him being hungry like the Fisher
King...and ~~that~~ horrible looking woman, the
woman who accused him of his sins...was
that me too?

ARLA
No, momma, I'm sure---

MOMMA

(remorsefully)

I know I wasn't that...that...Blanch
Fleur, the great love of his life...

BETT

Are you talking about the search for the
Holy Grail?

ARLA

Yes. Daddy went into a whole big deal
about how important it was for momma to
ask the 'right question' and then he
launched into the whole story about the
grail legend yesterday---

BETT

(surprised)

What does that have to do with anything,
for God's sake?

ARLA

That's what we're trying to decide...

KAY

(to everyone)

Are we through playing?

MOMMA

Kay, we're trying to figure out symbolism,
Monopoly will have to wait.

KAY

(shrugs)

Okay.

(KAY GOES TO THE COUCH AND SITS AS THE DOORBELL
RINGS. JEANIE JUMPS UP NERVOUSLY, GOES TO THE
DOOR AND OPENS IT.)

JEANIE

(surprised)

Oh, hi, Mrs. Millet, I thought you were
my date...

MRS. MILLET

(smiling)

Well, Jean, I hope I'm not too much of
a disappointment!

JEANIE

Oh, I didn't mean that, I was just---

MRS. MILLET
(looking past Jeanie)
That's all right, Jean. Your mother here?

JEANIE
Sure. Come on in.
(calling)
Momma! It's Mrs. Millet!!

MOMMA
(to Arla, sotto)
Oh God! I forgot...Jeanie's singing
teacher is here, I totally forgot, I---
(she hastily begins
dabbing at her eyes)

(ARLA REACHES ACROSS THE TABLE AND GIVES HER MOTHER
ANOTHER PAPER NAPKIN.)

ARLA
(consoling)
Don't worry, you look all right...

MOMMA
No I don't, I...

(MRS. MILLET STANDS INSIDE THE DOOR.)

JEANIE
I'll take your coat..

(MRS. MILLET HANDS JEANIE HER COAT.)

JEANIE(cont'd)
(calling over
her shoulder)
Momma, it's Mrs. Millet!

MOMMA
(flustered)
I heard you the first time!

(MOMMA GETS UP HESITANTLY, STILL WIPING HER EYES,
AND GOES TO THE DOOR AREA STAGE LEFT.)

JEANIE
Mrs. Millet, this is my mother.

MRS. MILLET
(extending her hand)
Hello, Helen.

MOMMA
(taking her hand)

Hello, I---

(MOMMA LOOKS AT MRS. MILLET AND STOPS DEAD.)

MOMMA(cont'd)
Don't we know each other...?

MRS. MILLET
(graciously)
Yes. You knew me as Joyce Fuller. Millet
was my second husband's name.

(MOMMA IS SUDDENLY TERRIBLY AGITATED. SHE DROPS
MRS. MILLET'S HAND ABSENTMINDEDLY. ARLA AND BETT
HEAD INTO THE KITCHEN BUT ARLA NOTICES THIS REACTION.)

JEANIE
(stunned)
You know each other?

MRS. MILLET
(to Jeanie)
Yes, Jeanie. Why don't you let your
mother and I talk for awhile?

JEANIE
(looking from one
to the other)
Sure. I'll wait on the porch. My date
should be here any minute.

(JEANIE GOES OUT THE DOOR.)

JEANIE(cont'd)
Thanks for coming, Mrs. Millet.

MRS. MILLET
Good night, Jeanie.

(JEANIE CLOSES THE DOOR AS MOMMA STANDS FROZEN
IN PLACE, STARING AT MRS. MILLET.)

MRS. MILLET
(laughing)
Do I look that bad?

MOMMA
(startled)
What?

MRS. MILLET

The way you're staring at me, I thought
maybe my nose was in the wrong place.

MOMMA

(laughs nervously)

Oh, no, I...I'm sorry I...I just...it's
been so long, I---

MRS. MILLET

(relaxed, poised)

I know, it's hard to believe so many years
have passed...

MOMMA

Yes, I...

(looks into
living room)

Forgive me, come on in and sit down.

(THEY WALK INTO THE LIVING ROOM. KAY IS STILL
SEATED ON THE COUCH.)

KAY

I guess the game is over, huh?

MOMMA

(distracted)

What?

KAY

The game of Monopoly?

MOMMA

Oh. Yes, Kay, we'll finish it later.

KAY

(getting up)

Okay. I'll go upstairs and read.

(SHE RUNS UP THE STAIRS, PAUSES AT THE TOP, LOOKS
AT MRS. MILLET, THEN GOES INTO HER ROOM.)

MOMMA

(nervously)

Sit down. Please.

(she indicates the
couch)

MRS. MILLET

Thank you.

(THEY SIT AT OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE COUCH.)

MOMMA

(a beat as she
stares at Mrs. Millet,
then)

May I get you something to drink?

MRS. MILLET

No, thank you.

(THERE IS A LONG, AWKWARD SILENCE WHILE MRS. MILLET
LOOKS AT MOMMA WHO GLANCES AT HER NERVOUSLY, THEN
LOOKS AWAY.)

MRS. MILLET

I hope you don't mind my coming to see
you, Helen, Jeanie practically begged me...

MOMMA

No, it's no problem...not at all...

(another pause)

Are you living in Oklahoma City now?

MRS. MILLET

Yes, for the past year. I was living in
Florence but my husband died and...I had
no choice. I inherited my parent's house
when they passed on...

(MOMMA NODS AND LOOKS AWAY.)

MOMMA

(clears her throat)

Excuse me, I...

(looks back at
Mrs. Millet)

I've always wondered what an Italian sunset
looks like...

MRS. MILLET

(smiles)

It's beautiful, but no more than here.

MOMMA

Well. That's nice.

(LONG BEAT.)

MRS. MILLET

Helen, I came over to---

MOMMA

(quickly)

You're still very pretty.

(MOMMA BEGINS TO CRY, HIDING HER FACE IN
HER HANDS.)

MRS. MILLET
(leaning forward,
sympathetically)

Helen...

MOMMA
(gaining control
of herself)
I'm sorry, I...don't know what's wrong
with me...I...I cry a lot lately...

MRS. MILLET
(staring into space)
I can understand that. I went through a
period when that's all I did. I was a
professional crier.
(smiles and looks
at momma)

(MOMMA DRIES HER EYES AND BUSIES HERSELF WITH FOLDING
HER KLEENEX.)

MOMMA
(throws this away)
Was that about 35 years ago?

MRS. MILLET
(not catching it)
Sorry?

MOMMA
(quick change of
subject)
So. You think Jeanie is a pretty good
singer I hear.

~~(MOMMA IS TWISTING A HANDKERCHIEF NERVOUSLY.)~~

MRS. MILLET
Yes. I think she's more than pretty good.
She has great potential and I hope she'll
be allowed to develop her talent...

MOMMA
(looking past
Mrs. Millet)
...I never had any talent for anything. I
guess she inherited from her father's side.

MRS. MILLET

(nodding)

Jean and I talked about it today, about her auditioning for Ted Mack...and I feel she has a good chance of getting on the show, and maybe winning.

MOMMA

(changing positions
restlessly)

And what then? If she wins?

MRS. MILLET

It could be a good start for her... experience. The more experience she has, the more confidence she'll gain and confidence is very important.

MOMMA

(wistfully, looking
at her hands)

I wanted to be a writer when I was little. I thought that would be the most wonderful thing, to write books and...be somebody special...

(suddenly resigned)

...but my momma talked some sense into me and showed me that it would just be a waste of time. So I got married instead...

(looks up and
gazes steadily at
Mrs. Millet)

...as you know.

MRS. MILLET

(no reaction)

There's nothing wrong with marriage, Helen, and just because Jean wants to sing doesn't automatically mean that she won't get married... it just means that she has a special talent and talent should be developed.

MOMMA

(looks away)

That's just what her daddy says...

(eyes Mrs. Millet
warily)

That was something you two always had in common...

(MRS. MILLET BOWS HER HEAD MOMENTARILY, THEN LOOKS UP AT HELEN BRIGHTLY BUT SAYS NOTHING.)

MOMMA(cont'd)

I felt like an outsider. Did you know that?

MRS. MILLET
(shaking her head)

Helen---

MOMMA
(nodding)

---I did, even though...it's like an invisible bond people have when they can do something...creative...it's like a little community of two...

(looks at Mrs.
Millet and smiles
wanly)

...guess I'm just jealous of that bond.

MRS. MILLET

You don't have to be...

(she holds momma's gaze
for a long beat, then)

Think about it. This could mean a lot to Jeanie. She might surprise you. You know, she's well thought of by a lot of people, she has a vibrant nature and...well, a lot of personality. She's a beautiful girl.

MOMMA
(dumbfounded)

Are you talking about my Jeanie? That tall, gangly teenager waiting on the porch out there?

MRS. MILLET

I sure am. Her music teacher and some of the boys and girls who study with me, they're all impressed with your daughter. She's really something special.

MOMMA
(thoughtfully)

Well, maybe you're right, I really don't know...but I'm not convinced.

(JEANIE STICKS HER HEAD IN THE FRONT DOOR.)

JEANIE

My dates here, momma! Bye! Thanks for coming over, Mrs. Millet, I'll see you Tuesday evening!

MRS. MILLET

(waving)

All right, Jeanie, good night!

MOMMA

(rising, taking several
steps toward Jeanie)

Eleven o'clock now, not a moment later!

JEANIE

Okay---bye!

(JEANIE DISAPPEARS AND CLOSES THE DOOR.)

(MOMMA TURNS BACK TO MRS. MILLET.)

MOMMA

All she thinks about is boys, boys and
singing.

(pacing)

I'm not convinced she should do it, any of
it... 'course I'm the only one in the house
who feels that way...

MRS. MILLET

(getting to her
feet)

Well, think about it. I know you want
what's best for Jean.

(ARLA AND BETT APPEAR AT THE KITCHEN DOOR BEHIND
THE TWO WOMEN.)

MOMMA

(staring at the
floor)

Yes, I...

(lifts head, looks
at Mrs. Millet)

I've thought about you often, Joyce, wondered
what kind of life you were having...if you
got married, if you were...happy...lot of
things...

(laughs in a
depreciatory fashion)

...it's silly, isn't it? I never knew you
very well, only what...C.H. told me...but I
really worried about you, and see? It was
all for nothing. Here you are intact, maybe
better off than I am...

(afterthought)

...after all, I've never seen the sunset
in Florence...

MRS. MILLET
(laughs)
There's still time.
(heading for
the door)
Think about it.

(HELEN ESCORTS MRS. MILLET TO THE DOOR STAGE
LEFT.)

MOMMA
Goodbye.

MRS. MILLET
(warmly, squeezing
momma's hand)
Goodbye, Helen.

(MRS. MILLET EXITS. HELEN STANDS A MOMENT LOST IN
THOUGHT AS ARLA AND BETT STEP FURTHER INTO THE ROOM
FROM THE KITCHEN. BETT HAS A CUP OF COFFEE.)

ARLA
Momma? What was that all about?

MOMMA
(distracted)
Oh...nothing.

ARLA
It didn't sound like nothing.

BETT
It sounded like you'd known Mrs. Millet
before...and something happened between
you.

(MOMMA TAKES A FEW STEPS IN TOWARD THE LIVING ROOM
AND STOPS. SHE LOOKS AT ARLA AND BETT.)

MOMMA
(shaking her head
slowly)
That wasn't Mrs. Millet...don't you know
who that was? Didn't you recognize her...?

(ARLA LOOKS AT BETT WHO STARES BACK AT HER. THEN THEY
TURN BACK TO MOMMA.)

ARLA
Momma, what are you talking about?

MOMMA

(a beat, then with
a wry smile)

That was Blanch Fleur...

(LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM AS ARLA AND BETT STAND LOOKING
AT MOMMA WITH A PUZZLED EXPRESSION.)

End Scene 4

Act I

Scene 5

(TWO HOURS LATER. BETT, ARLA AND MOMMA ARE DISCOVERED AS THE LIGHTS COME UP - MOMMA IS SITTING ON THE SOFA, BETT IS IN A CHAIR DOWN LEFT, AND ARLA IS STANDING STAGE RIGHT.)

MOMMA

Will you two stop badgering me? I don't want to go into it, it's all past...

BETT

Momma, all we want to know is what happened between you and daddy and Mrs. Millet---

ARLA

---Just the general story, momma, you don't have to go into the gory details.

BETT

That's right, momma, no gory details... well, maybe one or two, we do like a little gore now and then...

ARLA

(laughing)

Just a soupcon! Let's make some more coffee.

BETT

Good thinking, Arla, let's do it.

(THEY EXIT INTO THE KITCHEN AREA AS MOMMA FOLLOWS.)

BETT

Momma, you're gettin' low on cookies.

MOMMA

I don't wonder, the way you've been gobbling them up...I wonder where your father went?

ARLA(off stage)

Oh, probably out bragging to his old buddy---about having his book published.

BETT(off stage)

You know, I've been wondering about that. It's hard to get anything published, let alone poetry. One of my friends at college has been trying to get a novel published

BETT(off stage-cont'd)
for seven years and hasn't gotten
anywhere!

ARLA(off stage)
I've had the same thought, how the hell
did he do it? I mean, nobody down there
in Houston knows him, do they, momma?

MOMMA(O.S.)

Well, he's got some kinfolk there but...
it's his nephew - they're not in that
business, publishing...

ARLA(O.S.)

Well then, how the hell did he do it?

MOMMA(O.S.)

What time is it?

BETH

Well, my God, it's after midnight!
How'd that happen?

MOMMA.

I told Jeanie to be home by 11 sharp!
She's really going to get it when she
gets home!

FRONT

(DURING THE ABOVE, C.H. ENTERS, HEARS THE VOICES,
AND CLOSES THE DOOR SILENTLY. HE GOES TO HIS VIOLIN
CASE LYING WHERE HE LEFT IT THE DAY BEFORE AGAINST
THE WALL NEAR THE DOOR. C.H. OPENS THE CASE, CAREFUL
NOT TO MAKE ANY SOUND, TAKES OUT THE FIDDLE AND
BOW AND GOES TO THE CENTER OF THE ROOM.)

(HE LISTENS INTENTLY A MOMENT TO THE 'FEMALE CHATTER,'
SMILES AND SHAKES HIS HEAD, THEN BEGINS TO PLAY A
BOUNCY, BLUE GRASS OPUS PUTTING HIS WHOLE BODY AND
SOUL INTO IT KEEPING RHYTHM WITH HIS FOOT/LEG. MOMMA,
ARLA AND BETH POP OUT OF THE KITCHEN AND STAND JUST
INSIDE THE LIVING ROOM WATCHING AND LISTENING NON-
PLUSED. MOMMA IS THE FIRST TO SPEAK.)

MOMMA

Charles! What in heaven's name are
you doing?

(CHARLES TURNS TO FACE MOMMA DIRECTLY, BUT DOESN'T
SPEAK. INSTEAD HE ZIPS INTO HIS PLAYING WITH RENEWED
VIGOR AS IF SPEAKING TO HER THROUGH HIS PLAYING/MUSIC.
HIS ENERGY, CONCENTRATION, RIVETING FOCUS ON THIS
ACTIVITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE FULL REALIZATION OF
CHARLES'S CHARACTER. HE PLAYS WITH THE
VERVE AND DEFINITION OF ITZAK PEARLMAN. THIS IS A MAN
WHO GIVES HIMSELF TOTALLY TO WHAT HE'S DOING, WHETHER
IT'S BERATING A MAN NEXT TO HIM ON THE BUS FOR HIS
LACK OF POLITICAL PERCEPTION OR PLAYING THE FIDDLE;
EACH HAS HIS TOTAL COMMITMENT AND CONCENTRATION.)

(KAY APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS IN HER PAJAMAS
AND SITS ON THE TOP STEP WATCHING.)

MOMMA

(growing more
irritated)

It's too late for...CHARLES! You're going
to wake up the neighbors!

(CHARLES MOVES TOWARD MOMMA, ARLA AND BETH STARING
WITH GREAT INTENSITY AT THEM AS HE PLAYS, STILL NOT
SAYING A WORD.)

MOMMA(cont'd)

CHARLES! For heaven's sake! Will you...

(C.H. CIRCLES THE THREE WOMEN, NEVER MISSING A BEAT.
HE FINISHES THIS ACTION, THEN BEGINS TO SING WITH
GREAT BRIO AS HE ACCOMPANIES HIMSELF AND KEEPS RHYTHM
WITH A POUNDING FOOT.)

C.H.

(singing)

"Froggie went a courtin,' Uh huh
Froggie went a courtin,' Uh huh
With his guitar upon his knee
His lady froggie he did see
Uh huh....Uh huh...

MOMMA

(to Arla)

I think you're father's gone crazy!

C.H.

"He asked her 'Will you marry me?'
Uh huh...Uh huh
He asked her 'Will you marry me?' Uh huh
She said 'I just might marry you
If you will promise to be true
Uh huh...Uh huh

"Well they were married by and by
Uh huh...Uh huh
They were married by and by
Uh huh
They lived very happily
And had a great big family
Uh huh....Ye Ho!

(CHARLES PERSISTS IN CHARMING THE WOMEN. HE STOPS
PLAYING AND RIPS INTO AN IRISH JIG, A WALTZ CLOG WITH
A LOT OF TOE-HEEL WORK. RESEARCH THIS AND BE SURE IT'S
AUTHENTIC. THEN HE PLAYS A RIFF WHICH LEADS INTO HIS
SINGING AN IMPROVISED VERSION TO THE ABOVE MELODY:)

C.H. (cont'd)

(sings)

Sorry if I got you mad, Uh huh...
 Sorry if I got you mad, Uh huh...
 All I tried to do was poke
 A little fun and make a joke
 Uh huh...Uh huh....
 Hope that you'll forgive me
 Uh huh...Uh huh....
 If you don't I'll shoot myself
 Uh huh
 Please have mercy on me Helen
 I'm not perfect, don't you know that?
 Uh huh! Uh huh, Uh huh, Uh huh, Uh huh!

(THROUGH ALL OF THIS, MOMMA HAS BEEN RESISTANT AND STUBBORNLY UNYIELDING, BUT AS HE STARTS THE "I'M SORRY" LYRIC ABOVE, SHE STARTS TO MELT A LITTLE. ARLA HAS BEEN STOIC BUT SHE TOO GETS CAUGHT UP IN THE FUN AS WELL AS BETT. AT ONE POINT, CHARLES JIGS AROUND AND BETWEEN THEM AND GETS THEM TO JOIN HIM IN THIS CELEBRATION WHICH SHOULD BE CHOREOGRAPHED AS A NATURAL OUTGROWTH OF CHARLES'S EXUBERANCE AND VERVE.)

C.H. (cont'd)

(to Kay at
 top of stairs)

Kay! Come on!

(KAY SMILES AND RUNS DOWN THE STAIRS AND JOINS IN AS C.H. CONTINUES DANCING/SINGING. C.H. WHIPS HER OFF HER FEET AND WHIRLS HER AROUND, THEN HE GOES TO MOMMA AND DOES THE SAME THING.)

MOMMA

(breathless)

Charles! I'm going to...have a...heart
 attack!!

C.H.

(shouts)

WELL, HELEN, AT LEAST YOU'LL DIE DANCIN'!

(HE GOES TO ARLA AND BETT AND JIGS WITH EACH OF THEM AND BY NOW EVERYONE'S ENJOYING THE FESTIVITIES. WE BUILD TO A HIGH POINT WITH C.H. PLAYING HIS FIDDLE AGAIN FASTER AND FASTER UNTIL, AT THE APEX...)

(LIGHTS UP ON THE SMALL PLAYING AREA OUTSIDE THE FRONT DOOR...AS JEANIE STAGGERS INTO THE LIGHTED AREA GASPING AND CRYING. SHE LEANS AGAINST THE WALL AND TRIES TO GET CONTROL OF HERSELF. AFTER A BEAT, SHE OPENS THE DOOR...TO FIND THE SCENE OF FESTIVITY.)

(C.H. STOPS PLAYING AS EVERYONE TURNS TO JEANIE.
HER DRESS IS TORN AND SHE CAN HARDLY WALK.)

MOMMA

(Sternly)
Young lady, it's after midnight,
you're in big—

(MOMMA SEES HER STATE OF DISCHEVELMENT AND STOPS
DEAD.)

ARLA

Oh, God!

(ARLA HURRIES TO JEANIE.)

ARLA (Cont'd)

Honey! What happened?

(JEANIE STARTS TO CRY WITH HEART-RENDING ANGUISH
THAT IS DEVESTATING. ARLA HOLDS HER AS:)

(BETT HURRIES TO HER AND STANDS AWKWARDLY BESIDE HER.)

C.H.

(Puzzled)

What's the matter? What's going on?

(NOBODY ANSWERS C.H. STILL HOLDING THE FIDDLE, HE
TURNS TO MOMMA.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

Helen, what the hell's going on here?

ARLA

(Turning to C.H. with tears
in her eyes)

Don't you know?

(C.H. TURNS TO MOMMA WHO IS STANDING RIGIDLY
STARING AT JEANIE.)

MOMMA

If you'd come home by 11 o'clock like
I said—

(JEANIE LIFTS HER HEAD FROM ARLA'S SHOULDER AND
SOBS OUT THE WORDS.)

JEANIE

He wouldn't let me, momma, I begged him
to take me home, momma, he wouldn't let
me out of the car!

(MOMMA'S JAW IS SET, SHE STANDS RIGIDLY STARING
AT JEANIE.)

C.H.
 (Not wanting to accept
 the truth)
 What's that boys name!

(JEANIE CONTINUES CRYING AND DOESN'T ANSWER.)

C.H. (Cont'd)
 Jeanie! I said what's—

ARLA
 Don't make it worse, C.H.! There's nothing
 you can do...!

(C.H. STANDS STARING AT THE SCENE A MOMENT LONGER,
 THEN STRIDES TO THE CLOSET AND YANKS OUT AN OLD,
 SINGLE SHOT .22.)

MOMMA
 (Seeing the gun)
 C.H.! You put that back, you hear me?

C.H.
 —I'll do what I have to do!

(*Like Steve*) MOMMA
 Well, you're not going to go out and
 kill somebody!

(SHE GOES TO HIM AND HOLDS OUT HER HAND.)

MOMMA (Cont'd)
 Give me that gun.

C.H.
 Helen, I—

MOMMA
 (Overwhelming)
 GIVE-ME-THAT-GUN!

(HE TAKES A BEAT AS HE STARES AT HELEN...THEN HANDS
 HER THE GUN. C.H. STANDS HELPLESSLY, CHURNING, STARING
 AT JEANIE. ARLA AND BETT START TO WALK JEANIE SLOWLY
 TOWARD THE STAIRS. AS THEY REACH THE BOTTOM OF THE
 STAIRCASE, C.H. CALLS OUT.)

C.H.
 (Trembling)
 I have one question!

(ARLA STOPS WITH JEAN WHO TURNS A TEAR STREAKED
 FACE TO HER FATHER.)

C.H. (cont'd)
What's your part in this?

ARLA
Her part?

C.H.
It takes two for this to happen!
(points an accusing
finger at Jeanie)
You're to blame for this, young lady!

BETT
Daddy---!

C.H.
(slowly approaching
Jeanie with menace)
You did something to lead him on, didn't
you? You could have stopped it, I know
women, how they...how they act around men
how they move their bodies around, sashay,
flirt, invite...invite---You're to blame!
You did something! You're responsible!

ARLA
(low, deadly)
You son-of-a-bitch---!

(SHE AND BETT TURN AND HELP JEANIE UP THE STAIRS.
MOMMA STANDS LOOKING AT C.H. A MOMENT, THEN FOLLOWS
JEANIE, TAKING THE GUN WITH HER. KAY DISAPPEARS WITH
THE OTHERS INTO JEANIE'S BEDROOM.)

(C.H. STANDS IN AGONY. HE KNOWS HE'S BETRAYED JEANIE
BUT HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHY. AS HE FIGHTS THROUGH HIS
AGONY, THE LIGHTS DIM AND THE NAKED FIGURE OF BLANCH
FLEUR APPEARS IN SHIMMERING LIGHT IN THE UPPER BEDROOM.
C.H. DOESN'T SEE HER BUT FEELS HER PRESENCE. SHE IS WITHIN
HIS SUBJECTIVE SENSE. THE HIDEOUS WOMAN APPEARS ALSO IN A
SHAFT OF LIGHT WITH MUSIC STAB AND C.H TENSES. LIGHTS
CROSS FADE SLOWLY TO A MOTTLED DESIGN AND WE SHOULD REALIZE
THAT THE LIGHTING EFFECT IS THAT OF A SPIDER'S WEB. C.H. GOES
FROM CONFUSION TO TERROR AS HIS FEAR OF WOMEN IS OBJECTIFIED IN
THE WEB AND THE FIGURES OF BLANCH FLEUR AND THE HIDEOUS WOMAN.
THE HIDEOUS WOMAN POINTS AN ACCUSING FINGER AT HIM AS C.H. DROPS
TO HIS KNEES AND BEGINS SINGING:)

C.H.
On an old rugged cross
On a hill far away....
Far...away....far...

(AND WE ARE IN DARKNESS.)

End Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

(IN THE DARK WE HEAR A STEADY THUMP, THUMP... LIGHTS UP TO DISCOVER C.H. PACING IN THE LIVING ROOM, BOUNCING A SMALL, HARD RUBBER BALL. THE SOUND OF THE BOUNCE IS RECORDED AND AS THE LIGHTS COME UP, C.H. STARTS TO BOUNCE THE BALL AS IF HE HAD BEEN DOING SO IN THE DARK. HE IS DISTRAUGHT, ANGRY, FRUSTRATED AND FEARFUL.)

(IT IS THE NEXT MORNING, SUNDAY, 8 a.m. EARLY MORNING LIGHT FILTERS IN THROUGH THE WINDOW.)

(C.H. CONTINUES HIS SILENT PACING/BOUNCING WITH HIS USUAL DEDICATION AND INTENSITY UNTIL MOMMA APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS IN HER BATHROBE. SHE STANDS STARING AT HIM FOR A LONG BEAT.)

MOMMA

Are you enjoying yourself?

(C.H. CONTINUES HIS ACTIVITY WITHOUT ACKNOWLEDGING MOMMA'S PRESENCE.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)

Nobody can sleep with that racket...

(STILL NO RESPONSE.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)

Well...I just want to thank you, Charles, for waking me up so I could come out here and have a conversation with myself...thank you very much!

(SHE TURNS AND GOES BACK INTO THE BEDROOM.)

(ANOTHER LONG BEAT AS C.H. CONTINUES HIS ACTION.)

(ARLA APPEARS IN HER ROBE AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS, LOOKS DOWN AT C.H., SHAKES HER HEAD, AND DISAPPEARS.)

C.H.

(Looks up at the top of the stairs, then in a loud preacher-like voice says:)

It's Sunday morning! This is the Lord's day...this is no time to sleep...the devil walketh to and fro on the earth...to and fro...seeing who he can snare in his pit...wake up, ye transgressors, wake up, ye sinners!

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds..."

(Looks upstairs)

C.H. (cont'd)

...weapons...the sermon for today...

(C.H. STOPS, STANDS FACING FRONT AS IF IN A PULPIT SERMONIZING. HE IS IN A PIN SPOT.)

C.H. (cont'd)

A man's weapons are many. He has strength, wisdom...will power. He can move mountains with his will power. But all of a man's weapons, including guns, tanks and bombs, pale in comparison to the weapons of a woman. She only has three, but with those three, she can meet and conquer any man...and all his weapons become as nothing, they become obsolete in his hands. Her first weapon is her body... with its soft curves, rounded edges and pleasure places, before which men are counted as slaves and fools. Her second weapon is something that, if a man is not subdued by the body itself, will complete the job. And that weapon is a woman's mouth! It's not big, but when she opens it, you might as well get out the white flag, boys! Say goodbye to your freedom, your piece of mind and your good intentions. Say goodbye to your sanity! A woman's mouth is the 8th Wonder of the World because from it can break forth a joyous laugh that can lift a man's weary spirits and give him that courage he needs to sludge through another knife-edged day...it can erupt in a seething, white hot lava flow of rage and fury destroying everything and everybody in its path...it can sigh like the soft, seductive cooing of a dove caressing a wounded cheek with the balm of gentleness...it can whisper and moan until you're crazy with desire...it can..

(he shakes himself
out of the mesmerism)

...And her last weapon, the one to be feared the most, is her tenacity. A woman is relentless, as relentless as the rivers and the seas, she can wear down the mountains with her tenacity, she'll wear you down with it, little by little until you're ground to dust...to a fine powder. She'll never stop until she's had her way, until you're...

(MOMMA, DRESSED, APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS AND COMES DOWN INTO THE LIVING ROOM.)

MOMMA

(coolly)

Where I come from, people who talk to themselves get locked in little rooms with no windows.

C.H.

(to himself)

See what I mean, boys....?!

(to momma)

Since when did everybody in this house stop goin' to church on a Sunday morning?

(MOMMA STOPS ON HER WAY TO THE KITCHEN AND TURNS BACK TO C.H.)

MOMMA

Sometimes we go, sometimes we don't, and this morning, because of what happened last night, we don't.

(SHE STARTS TOWARD THE KITCHEN AND TURNS BACK AGAIN.)

MOMMA(cont'd)

...but why don't you go. That way maybe we'll get a little peace and quiet around here.

(SHE EXITS INTO THE KITCHEN.)

C.H.

I leave the house for a few weeks and come back to a houseful of heathens! If you don't go to church, your soul is going to rot, Helen, you set a bad example for the girls.

(MOMMA TAKES TWO STEPS INTO THE LIVING ROOM.)

MOMMA

---and what kind of example are you setting, C.H.? Blaming your own daughter because she got raped? If you're interested in being a true Christian, why don't you go up there and tell Jeanie you're sorry for the way you acted last night? She didn't need you to yell at her, she needed you to stand by her. Buy why should I think you'd ever stand by one of your own, you've never stood by me.

C.H.

(crosses Up Left)

What are you talking about? I always
stand by---

MOMMA

(approaches C.H.

menacingly)

---of course you do! Like every time I
had to go to the hospital to have a baby,
you were there, weren't you? Every time I
got to make a house payment or we'll be
out on the street, you're there, aren't
you? Everytime I'm alone here and got to
make a decision, you're there aren't you?

C.H.
A man's got to go where—

MOMMA
—Why didn't you ever—ever! Come with me to the hospital?

C.H.
That's woman's business...

MOMMA
Oh? And what's man's business? Gettin' her in bed?

(C.H. TAKES A LONG BEAT AS HE STUDIES MOMMA.)

C.H.
You complaining, Helen? I never heard you complain before. Fact, as I recall, it was you who—

MOMMA
—I got to fix breakfast.

(SHE TURNS AND STEPS BACK INTO THE KITCHEN AS ARLA COMES DOWN THE STAIRS, IGNORES C.H., AND GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. C.H. WATCHES ARLA, THEN CONTINUES HIS PACING AND BOUNCING. AFTER A BEAT, ARLA ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN AND STANDS LOOKING AT HER FATHER. SHE IS TREMBLING.)

ARLA
(Forcing herself to say it)
I have something to say to you...

(C.H. CONTINUES HIS ACTIVITY.)

C.H.
(Evenly)
And I know what it is. You want to tell me what a mean, cruel old savage I am, a thoughtless, selfish bastard who turns against his own flesh and blood, ah irresponsible, shiftless, lazy, no-good-son-of-a-bitch who should go back to the mountains of West Virginia. I know all the words 'cause I been harrassed, harrangued, and nailed to the wall by the master...
(Points toward the kitchen)
...so if you're going to pick up the master's mantle, you better learn how to dissect me from somebody who knows the territory.

(ARLA IS CONFUSED. C.H. IS STILL PACING AND BOUNCING THE BALL, SHE WANTS HIS ATTENTION BUT ISN'T SURE HOW TO GET IT.)

ARLA

What you did last night was despicable.
How in God's name could you—

C.H.

(Bouncing more intensely)
—"Thou shalt not take the name of
the Lord in vain!"

ARLA

(Topping him)
—Hou in God's name could you do that
to Jean? How could you be so unfeeling?

C.H.

(He stops and stands D.S.
L., his eyes narrow slits)
As I remember—! I'm the man in this
house. As I remember, I don't have to
answer to anyone here, least of all my
oldest daughter who moved out 10 years
ago and never writes me, never calls me,
never—

ARLA

—I gave you—

C.H.

(Shouting her down)
—SAYS as much as how d'ya do and kiss
my kazooo—

ARLA

—a Christmas present last year and
you—

C.H.

This being the case, why should I stand
here and listen to this stranger insult
me and tell me how I'm supposed to behave
in MY OWN HOUSE!!

ARLA

—returned it unopened, you—

(C.H. CROSSES UP STAGE, NEVER TAKING HIS EYES
OFF OF ARLA.)

C.H.

I'm not going to accept anything from
some stranger who thinks she can send
me a gift once a year and never talks
to me between times and thinks that
that little gift can make up for all the
silences between...!

ARLA
I wastrying to communi—

C.H.
—and getting back to you criticizing me, if you don't like the way I behave IN MY OWN HOUSE—! Maybe you'd better hurry back to San Francisco where your husband tolerates your uppity ways and you can talk to him like you're doing now and he'll tuck his tail beneath his legs and whimper and go hide in a closet because he's pussy whipped!

ARLA
—Don't you dare talk about Walter that way! He's more of a man than you'll every be!

(C.H. GUFFAWS, BOUNCES THE BALL HARD TO ACCENT HIS DERISION, AND CATCHES IT WITH A JABBING SNATCH.)

C.H.
'Course he is and the Pope eats fish on Friday!

ARLA
—You don't have the right to...

C.H.
(Takes several steps toward her)
I have the absolute right to do whatever I feel like doing! And why don't you just pack right now!?

ARLA
I will...when I finish doing what I came here to do.

(SHE TURNS AWAY FROM C.H., AFRAID TO TELL HIM HER PURPOSE IN COMING HOME.)

(C.H. STOPS BOUNCING BALL AND STANDS BORING A HOLE THROUGH ARLA.)

C.H.
Oh? And what was that? What did you come here to do ?

(MOMMA APPEARS AT THE KITCHEN DOOR.)

MOMMA
She came here to—

(ARLA WHIRLS AROUND AND FACES MOMMA.)

ARLA

—He doesn't have to know, momma! He doesn't have the right to know anything!

MOMMA

I don't care if he knows...

ARLA

(Fearing C.H.'s reaction)

Well, I do! It's none of his damn business, it's just between you and—

C.H.

(Mimicking)

Gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble gobble! You're both like a bunch of turkeys hangin' out in the back yard!

ARLA

—it's something you—

C.H.

(Facing her down)

GOBBLE, GOBBLE, GOBBLE, GOBBLE, GOBBLE, GOBBLE—

ARLA

(Totally frustrated)

DAMN YOU!!

(C.H. ADVANCES ON HER MENACINGLY, BOUNCING THE BALL AND ACCENTING EACH STATEMENT WITH A VICIOUS BOUNCE.)

C.H.

I told you to pack your things and get out of my house! I don't see how I can make myself any clearer...PACK YOUR THINGS AND GET OUT...OF...MY...HOUSE!

(MOMMA PLACES HERSELF BETWEEN ARLA AND C.H.)

MOMMA

This is just as much my house as it is yours, C.H. 'Fact, since I'm making all the house payments, I feel it's more like my house and she stays in my house!

(MOMMA IS MUCH SMALLER THAN C.H. BUT SHE HAS AN INTENSITY WHEN SHE'S MAD THAT EQUALS HIS. ALSO SHE HAS A QUALITY OF QUIET COMMAND THAT C.H. IS AFRAID OF.)

C.H.
 (Backing down)
 I want to know what she came here
 to do.

(MOMMA LOOKS AT ARLA WHO RETURNS HER GLANCE.)

MOMMA
 Might as well tell him, Arla, he'll
 find out sooner or later anyway.

ARLA
 (She faces C.H.)
 All right, C.H. if it's so important
 that you know, I'll say it. I came here
 to talk momma into getting a divorce.

(C.H. STANDS STOCK STILL.)

ARLA(Cont'd)
 She's lived in misery for 35 years and
 I think it's about time she got a
 little peace and quiet!

(C.H. LOOKS FROM ARLA TO MOMMA.)

C.H.
 She wants a little peace and quiet,
 huh?
 (He smiles sarcastically)
 And what do you feel about this, Helen?
 You been listenin' to this pap?

MOMMA
 (Evasively)
 Maybe I have and maybe I haven't...

C.H.
 (A deadly glance at Arla)
 You want to divorce me, Helen?

(MOMMA IS FIDDLING WITH HER HANDS, AVOIDING
 C.H.'S PENETRATING GAZE.)

C.H.(Cont'd)
 You want to unflex and let me go,
 Helen?

(MOMMA FLARES AND SHOOTS A SCATHING LOOK AT
 C.H.)

MOMMA
 Oh. So we're back to my claws, are
 we?

C.H.

Yes, because they're so deep in me now
I'll never get free and you know it!

(MOMMA DOESN'T ANSWER AND C.H. TURNS TO
ARLA.)

C.H.

And tell me, what gave you the idea to
make this great pilgrimage to Oklahoma
City and liberate your momma from the
clutches of this terrible monster who's
been holding her captivity all these
miserable years? Huh? Would you enlighten
me on that little point, please?

(ARLA LOOKS AWAY FROM C.H. WHEN SHE SPEAKS,
IT'S WITH HESITANCY AS IF SHE'S SEARCHING FOR
A WAY TO DEAL WITH Him)

ARLA

I know what's been going on here...
how you've kept us all under your
thumb...how...how you've kept momma
pregnant for 30 years, how you wouldn't
let her wear a diaphragm...

(C.H. DOES A SLOW TAKE TO MOMMA, THEN LOOKS BACK
AT ARLA.)

C.H.

(To Arla)

That what she told you? That I kept her
pregnant?...That I wouldn't let her wear
that...that contraption? Huh?

(C.H. BEGINS TO RELAX. HE SMILES, THEN STARTS
LAUGHING, BITTERLY, FULLY, AS IF PURGING HIMSELF
FROM A DEEP SEATED PAIN. HIS LAUGHTER INFECTS
HIMSELF AND GROWS..UNTIL HE CAN'T STOP IT. TEARS
COME FROM LAUGHING SO HARD AND HE STARTS BACKING
TOWARD THE FRONT DOOR.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

(Out of control)

That's...a good one...Helen...you
told a...good one...I'm the one—!
Helen...

(Recovering enough to
get the sentence out)

I think I'll go to church.

(C.H. HOLDS A BEAT, THEN BEGINS LAUGHING AGAIN
AND TURNS AND WALKS OUT THE DOOR, ROARING AND
GUFFAWING.)

(AFTER HE'S GONE, ARLA FACES HER MOTHER.)

ARLA

What was that all about?

(MOMMA IS NERVOUS AND LOOKS AWAY FROM ARLA.)

MOMMA

(Abrupt)

Don't know. Who ever knows what's
going on inside his head.

ARLA

(Studying her mother)

Well, did he keep you pregnant or not?

MOMMA

(Looks at Arla, her face
white)
That's a damn fool question, Arla.
And you know the answer to it as well
as I do. Look around you. Don't you
see 9 kids? Isn't that your proof?

ARLA

(Shrugs)
He sounded like it was your fault—

(MOMMA FIDGETS WITH HER HANDS AND APPEARS NERVOUS.)

MOMMA

Of course he made it sound that way,
he always blames me for his own short
comings, always has, always will!
(Sniffs the air)
Well, I think I just burned my biscuits!

(SHE TURNS AND HURRIES INTO THE KITCHEN AS BETT
COMES DOWN THE STAIRS IN HER ROBE.)

BETT

I though World War II was over!
(She crosses to the couch)
What was all that yelling?

ARLA

(Pacing, ruminating)
I told daddy I came here to talk momma
into getting a divorce...

(BETH LOOKS BACK AT ARLA WITH A WIDE EYED EXPRESSION.)

BETT

(Flopping down on the couch)
God, you're brave! I'd have never had
the guts to tell him that.
(Looks around the room)
Where is he?

ARLA

Gone to church, where else?
(Stops pacing)
How's Jeanie?

BETT

(Shrugs)
She's awake, like everybody else. Said
she's awful sore but otherwise she's
okay. She doesn't want anybody to
do anything about it, it's too embarrassing
for her...

ARLA

She's got to see a doctor, Bett!

BETT

(Shaking her head)

You talk to her, she doesn't want anybody to know, she wasn't going to tell anybody, if we hadn't been up last night, she probably wouldn't have told us. I can't really blame her...

(ARLA GOES BACK TO HER PACING, WORKING OFF HER TENSION AND ANGER FROM HER ENCOUNTER WITH C.H.)

ARLA

Do you think momma wants to divorce C.H.?

BETT

(Surprised)

I think so, don't you? I mean, the way he's treated her and everything?

ARLA

That's what I thought...but nothing's ever that simple. What's her part in all this? We identify with her because we're female and we've seen it from her point of view...but maybe there's more to it than we know...

BETT

(Sniffing the air)

His point of view you mean?

ARLA

Something like that...

BETT

(Getting up)

Well, I don't really care about his point of view. A bastard is a bastard and why he's that way isn't important I'm starved! Momma burned the biscuits again, didn't she? Hell, what do I care, food is food...

(JEANIE APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS IN HER ROBE AND COMES DOWN THE STAIRS SLOWLY. ARLA AND BETT LOOK UP AT HER.)

ARLA

Jeanie!

(ARLA CROSSES TO THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS AS JEANIE COMES TO THE GROUND LEVEL.)

ARLA (Cont'd)
I thought you'd stay in bed today.

JEANIE
(sleepily)
Screw bed. I want some coffee.

(MOMMA ENTERS FROM KITCHEN.)

MOMMA
(Wiping her hands on her
apron)
How you feeling? And don't say 'screw.'

JEANIE
I want some coffee, momma...I'm all
right...

MOMMA
Well, you sit down there and I'll bring
you some...

BETT
(Near kitchen door)
I'll bring it, momma.

(BETT EXITS INTO THE KITCHEN AS JEANIE SITS ON
THE COUCH GINGERLY.)

ARLA
Momma, I think Jeanie should see a
doctor today—

JEANIE
—I'm all right, I don't need a
doctor!

(ARLA HAS BEEN STANDING BY THE STAIRS. NOW SHE
CROSSES TO JEANIE UP STAGE LEFT.)

ARLA
(Urgently)
Honey, you have to have an examination,
maybe you're damaged...

JEANIE
(Sitting upright)
No! I 'm not hurt...there...I'm all
right, Arla. I don't want to go to
the doctor, I hate him poking around
in me, I won't go!
(To momma)
I don't have to go , do I momma?

MOMMA

(Near kitchen door)

Well...I guess not...

(ARLA CROSSES BELOW THE COUCH TO HER MOTHER.)

ARLA

Mother!?

MOMMA

(Defensively, to Arla)

You know I don't take to doctors,
Arla, I think they do more harm than
good most of the time...

ARLA

God! Are we still in the dark ages here?
She could have gotten a disease! She could
be pregnant! There are a hundred reasons
why she should—

JEANIE

(Jumps to her feet)

—momma says I don't have to go, I'm
not going!

ARLA

God!

(ARLA THROWS HER HANDS IN THE AIR AND STALKS
INTO THE KITCHEN. SHE PASSES BETT WHO ENTERS
WITH TWO CUPS OF COFFEE, A PLATE OF DARK BISCUITS
AND A JAR OF JELLY.)

BETT

Here's your coffee, Jeanie...

(SHE PUTS EVERYTHING DOWN ON THE COFFEE TABLE
IN FRONT OF THE COUCH. MOMMA SEES THE PLATE OF
BISCUITS.)

MOMMA

(Shocked)

Bett! You got those biscuits out of
the garbage!

BETT

(Shrugs)

They're not bad, momma, they're not
the usual black crisps you make...
the can was clean...

(Flicks something off the
biscuit)

... 'cept for some coffee grounds...

MOMMA

But I've got another batch in the—

BETT

(Munching)

These are good, you'll only burn them, too, so what's the difference? Want a bite?

(BETT OFFERS HER MOTHER A BISCUIT.)

MOMMA

(Indignantly)

Not if they've been in the garbage! And I don't burn every batch, just occasionally, it's hard when you've got a housefull of kids, every one of 'em yellin' and carrying on, you'll see when you have your own.

(Turns to Jeanie)

Jeanie, I've been thinking about your singing and what Mrs. Millet said about your talent...and I think it's all right if you go ahead...

JEANIE

(Sits up, excited)

You mean audition? You mean I can audition for Ted Mack, momma?

(MOMMA ABSENTMINDEDLY PICKS UP A BISCUIT FROM THE COFFEE TABLE, SMEARS SOME JELLY ON IT AND TAKES A BITE.)

MOMMA

(Shrugs)

Don't see how it will be such a big deal. If you lose though, don't expect me to glue you back together.

JEANIE

(Jumps to her feet)

You won't have to glue me back together, momma! I swear it! If I don't get on the show, I'll be upset but I won't go around with a long face, I swear I won't!

MOMMA

(Spreading more jelly)

Don't swear...

(JEANIE HURRIES TO THE PHONE.)

JEANIE

I'm going to tell Mrs. Millet, okay?

MOMMA

Jeanie! Don't call so early, it's only...

(Looks at her wrist watch)

...eight thirty, you'll wake her up!

JEANIE

(Dialing)

She gets up early, momma, earlier than this, she told me...

(ARLA COMES BACK DRINKING A CUP OF COFFEE.)

ARLA

Momma? Are you going to divorce C.H. or not?

MOMMA

(Eating)

Well...probably...I think I should, shouldn't I...?

ARLA

(Eyeing her suspiciously)

Why do I get the feeling you don't really want to? Why are you so indecisive?

JEANIE

(On the phone)

Hi, Mrs. Millet, it's Jean Daniels, I hope I'm not interrupting anything...

MOMMA

Well, I...it's hard to change old habits, Arla.

JEANIE

(Excited)

—momma says it's okay if I try out for... yes—! Isn't that great?!

ARLA

Look. You've told me over and over how miserable you are, how miserable this relationship is, you're just blinded by it, you're used to the misery, once you...

JEANIE

—yeah, I think so...

(To momma)

Momma, she wants me to come over and work on my song this afternoon...

MOMMA

What about choir practice?

JEANIE

(Hand over the receiver)

That's not until tonight.

MOMMA

(Shrugs)

Fine.

JEANIE

(Back into receiver)

It's okay, I can do it...two is fine...

Okay, I'll see you then!

(JEANIE HANGS UP AND STANDS THINKING.)

JEANIE (CONT'D)

I have a lot to do, decide what I'm going to wear, get my song down...

ARLA

(To Jeanie)

What are you singing, honey?

JEANIE

"My Hero" from THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER.

BETT

(Starts singing)

"Come, Come I love you oooooonly..."

(Spoken)

I love that song, it's so romantic.

(JEANIE HURRIES UP THE STAIRS, HER SORENESS SEEMINGLY FORGOTTEN.)

MOMMA

(To Bett)

Not as romantic as "Red Sails In The Sunset." That was always my favorite song.

BETT

(Sings)

"Red sails in the sunset...Way out on the sea..."

(She nods affirmatively)

It's pretty but not as romantic as...

(Sings)

"Come, come, I love you oooooonly..."

ARLA

(Grimacing)

Bett, there's only one singer in the family ...

BETT

(Defiantly)

"....My heart is truuuuueee..."

ARLA
(Topping her)
And you're not it!

BETT
(With good humor)
Mrs. Blake said I had a nice voice.

ARLA
Mrs. Blake was your third grade teacher,
things have changed since then.

BETT
I know. I've blossomed into the full
flower of womanhood. I have flowered.
(Looks at her empty plate)
Speaking of flour, I think I'll get
some more biscuits...

(BETT GETS UP AND GOES INTO THE KITCHEN.)

ARLA
(Sipping coffee and pacing in
front of momma)
Momma, you've got to face this thing now.
You don't have to spend the rest of your
life in a hole! You're only 52, you can
start a whole new life. Why don't you
come to San Francisco? You could get a
house there in Oakland or San Leandro
for next to nothing, we could see each
other all the time. Look, you'll have
the house here paid off in another year...

MOMMA
Thanks to your help, I will. If you
hadn't pitched in, I'd have lost the house
for sure.

ARLA
Walter and I are glad we can do it, momma.

MOMMA
(Thinks)
Arla, what on earth would I do in San
Francisco? I don't know a soul there...

ARLA
You know me! You'll meet people...

MOMMA
I can't do anything until Kay's out of
school...

ARLA

(Excited)

I know that, momma, but now's the time to plan for it. At least think about it, okay?

MOMMA

(Nodding)

I'll think about it.

ARLA

I'm going to talk you into this divorce if it's the last thing I do. I'm taking off next week, I can do it, I have the vacation time coming to me...

MOMMA

What about Walter?

ARLA

He'll understand, family comes first. Also I want to try to get you to open up a little and tell me about Mrs. Millet and all that stuff C.H. said before he left just now..

(Starts for kitchen)

Want some more coffee?

MOMMA

(Troubled)

Why, yes, thank you...

(ARLA GETS MOMMA'S CUP AND GOES INTO THE KITCHEN AS MOMMA SITS ON THE COUCH. SHE LOOKS OFF INTO SPACE WITH A DISTRAUGHT EXPRESSION, SHAKES HER HEAD IN DESPAIR, THEN DROPS HER HEAD AND BEGINS SLOWLY MASSAGING HER TEMPLES AS THE LIGHTS DIM...)

End Scene I

Scene 2

(LIGHTS UP. IT'S THE NEXT DAY, MONDAY, MID-AFTERNOON. MOMMA COMES IN THE DOOR DEAD TIRED. SHE PLOPS DOWN ON THE COUCH AND RESTS HER HEAD FOR A MOMENT ON ~~IT'S~~ BACK, THEN SHE GETS UP WEARILY AND GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. A BEAT. THE PHONE RINGS. MOMMA COMES IN TO THE LIVING ROOM WITH A GLASS OF LEMONADE, GOES TO THE PHONE AND ANSWERS IT.)

MOMMA

Hello?...Yes?...Oh, hello, Mr. Seibenthaler...
...no, he's not here just now...certainly...
what's the number there?

(Writes a number down)

All right, I'll have him call you...oh, Mr. Seibenthaler? I sent a payment in last week, did you—? Good...well, I'll have C.H....
Is everything all right?

(MOMMA LISTENS A MOMENT, HER FACE REGISTERS SHOCK.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)

What second mortgage? I don't know anything about...

(AS HELEN LISTENS SHE GOES FROM SHOCK TO DISBELIEF, THEN DEPRESSION.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)

...yes...yes....I see...

(Long beat)

...Yes, I'm still here...when did he do it? Sign the papers?

(Nods, her jaw set)

...I see...no, he didn't tell me about it, this is the first I heard...yes, I'll have him call you...

(MOMMA HANGS UP AND STANDS DUMFOUNDED BY THE PHONE. SHE STRUGGLES TO PULL HERSELF TOGETHER. AFTER A MOMENT, SHE MOVES ACROSS THE ROOM TO THE COUCH AND SITS DOWN IN THE CENTER. SHE'S IN A STATE OF SHOCK AS THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PHONE CALL BEGIN TO SINK IN, SHE FIGHTS BACK TEARS...LOSES THE BATTLE, BURIES HER FACE IN HER HANDS AND BEGINS TO SOB, DEEPLY, OUT OF FRUSTRATION, ANGER, ANGUISH, BITTERNESS, IT ALL COMES OUT. THIS NEWS, WHICH IS ABOUT TO^{Be} CLARIFIED FOR US, IS OVERWHELMING.)

(C.H. IS HEARD APPROACHING, SINGING "FROGGIE WENT A' COURTIN" - MOMMA HASTILY TAKES OUT A HANDKERCHIEF AND DABS AT HER EYES. SHE COMPOSES HERSELF AS BEST SHE CAN AND SITS STOICLY STARING FRONT. HER ONE SIGN OF MOVEMENT IS TWISTING THE HANDKERCHIEF AND PULLING AT IT WITH FISTS CLENCHED.)

(C.H. ENTERS AND CLOSES THE DOOR, TURNS AND SEES HELEN.)

C.H.
Just got offered a job. They asked me
to come back and work in the coal yard...
(He walks into the room)
...don't think I'll do it...never liked
workin' there...got a couple of other
possibilities...

(THERE'S A LONG PAUSE. C.H. LOOKS AT HELEN AND IS
INTIMIDATED BY HER STOIC RESOLVE. C.H. PAUSES A MOMENT,
THEN STARTS UP THE STAIRS. WHEN HE'S HALF WAY UP,
MOMMA BREAKS HER SILENCE.)

MOMMA
Mr. Seibenthaler from the bank called.

(C.H. STOPS AND STANDS ON THE STAIRS. HE DOESN'T
LOOK AT HELEN.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)
Wants you to call him.

(C.H. HOLDS IN PLACE WAITING FOR MORE. WHEN NOTHING
MORE IS SAID, HE CONTINUES TO THE TOP OF THE STAIRS.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)
Why'd you do it?

(C.H. FINALLY LOOKS DOWN AT HER.)

MOMMA(Cont'd)
Why'd you take out a second mortgage on
the house?

C.H.
(Looks at his feet, a long
beat)
I had to—

MOMMA
—You had to?
(She twists around and
looks up at him)
You in debt to someone I don't know
about? You been keepin' a woman?

(MOMMA LOOKS FRONT AS IT DAWNS ON HER.)

MOMMA
(Slowly)
Oh. I know. Now...I know...

(SHE TWISTS AROUND AND STARES AT HIM AGAIN.)

MOMMA

It's the book, isn't it? You had to pay somebody to get yourself that book.

(C.H. STANDS MOTIONLESS ON THE STAIRS.)

MOMMA (Cont'd)

(Shaking her head)

I should have known it, I should have guessed...why would anybody in his right mind publish a book of your poems, put out good money to publish stuff like that...that spider poem, that...piece of garbage...that...

C.H.

(Controlling his anger)

My poems aren't garbage.

MOMMA

...that...how much did you have to pay to have that garbage published—?!

(C.H. TURNS AND LOOKS DOWN AT MOMMA.)

C.H.

(Tight lipped)

My poems aren't—

(MOMMA JUMPS TO HER FEET AND WHIRLS TO FACE HIM.)

MOMMA

—How much—?!

(C.H. PAUSES, AND WHEN HE SPEAKS IT'S WITH AN EVEN, MEASURED TONE.)

C.H.

It cost twenty five hundred dollars, Helen, I paid twenty five hundred dollars...I got three thousand from the bank and I gave twenty five hundred of it to get my poems published and some copies...

(HELEN IS HARDLY ABLE TO CONTAIN HER FURY.)

MOMMA

Well! Do you think it was worth it? Did you get your money's worth?

C.H.

(Grimly)

I'm not sorry I did it...

MOMMA

That's not what I asked. I asked if it was worth it? Was it?

C.H.

Yes, Helen, it was worth it. If you need to hear me say the words, I'll say the words. Yes! It was worth it! And I knew the biggest price I'd have to pay was to have to listen to you call me names and pour out your bile, but it's worth that price, too!

MOMMA

And who ^{else} was it worth it to? Me? The girls?

C.H.

It was worth it to me, it's my legacy to my family...

(MOMMA CROSSES AWAY FROM C.H. TO DOWN STAGE LEFT.)

MOMMA

(Turning back to face him:
unbelieveing)

Your legacy? Your legacy? Your legacy to your family is more debt and deeper pain! Do you know how much longer it'll take me to pay this off now? Do you?

C.H.

I'll get a job, together we can—

MOMMA

(Crossing up stage center)

Together? You've never helped me pay the mortgage, ever in your life!

C.H.

When I had the store—

MOMMA

Once. Once you made enough to make the payment but every other time it's been by my sweat that we've been able to stay here...I got money from my mother to make the down payment and we had to take out the mortgage in your name because I'm only a female, you're the man in the house, you're the one who's supposed to take care of everything, so we got the loan in your name but I'm the one who's stuck with paying it off...and then you go out and take another loan to have your book published? I don't understand it, C.H., I just can't get it in my head why you would do such a thing—how could you be so selfish—

C.H.

—I don't have to explain everything I do to—

MOMMA

(Crossing to the foot of the stairs)
When it affects me and this family you do!

C.H.

(Flaring)

No I don't! If you don't like it, Helen, that's just too bad...I've always wanted to get my poems published before I die and I knew if I didn't do it soon, I'd never do it. I'm a lot older'n you are and maybe when you get to where I am you'll know the importance of leaving something of yourself behind, something to be remembered by—

MOMMA

—Oh, we'll remember you...everytime I have to get up at four thirty to go to work in that cafeteria, I'll remember you, everytime I can't buy something I need or something for the girls because I got to make that damn bank payment, I'll remember you, everytime—

C.H.

I'm going to take a nap.

(HE TURNS AND WALKS UP THE REST OF THE STAIRS
AND DISAPPEARS INTO THEIR BEDROOM.)

MOMMA

(Furious)

Where do you—You come back here!

(SHE GOES UP SEVERAL STEPS.)

MOMMA (Cont'd)

(Shouting after him)

WHY DO YOU ALWAYS WALK OUT LIKE THIS!?
YOU COWARD! YOU COWARD!! YOU—!

(SHE RUNS BACK DOWN THE STAIRS AND STANDS TREMBLING IN RAGE. SUDDENLY SHE GETS AN IDEA, RUNS UP THE STAIRS, GOES IN JEANIE AND KAREN'S ROOM AND SNATCHES UP THEIR COPIES OF THEIR FATHER'S BOOK. SHE RUNS DOWN THE STAIRS, PICKS UP HER'S AND ARLA'S COPIES LYING, ONE ON THE COFFEE TABLE, ONE ON THE MANTLE, STEPS QUICKLY TO C.H.'S SUITCASE WHICH IS STILL RESTING AGAINST THE WALL NEAR THE CLOSET, TOSSES THE COPIES...

CONT'D

INTO THE SUITCASE, SLAMS IT SHUT AND HURRIES WITH
IT INTO THE KITCHEN. WE HEAR THE BACK SCREENDOOR
SLAM SHUT AS THE LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE...)

End Scene 2

Scene 3

(ONE HOUR LATER. LIGHTS UP. JEANIE HURTTLES THROUGH THE DOOR.)

JEANIE

(In a rush of words)

Arla! Bett! Mamma! I'm on the show! I got on the show! Tomorrow night I'm going to sing on national radio!

(ARLA ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN.)

ARLA

What? Did you say—

(JEANIE RUNS TO ARLA AND GIVES HER A BIG HUG.)

JEANIE

(Lickety-split)

Yes! I'm on the show! I just tried out, Mrs. Millet played for me, I sang so good—! I was so good! I wasn't even nervous!

ARLA

(Laughing)

Slow down, honey, I can't understand a word you're—

JEANIE

(Jumping out of her skin)

I got on the show! Just like Mrs. Millet said I would! I sang for some people, Mr. Mack wasn't there, but they all said I was wonderful and that I had a spot! It's tomorrow night, Arla, I'm going to sing on national radio! Where's Bett? Where's mamma?

ARLA

Betts at the university and I don't know where mamma is, I just got in myself and nobody's here...

(JEANIE RUNS TO THE PHONE.)

JEANIE

I'm going to call Tamsey, and tell her about it—

(SHE PICKS UP THE PHONE, THEN SLAMS IT DOWN AGAIN.)

JEANIE (Cont'd)
On second thought, I'll ride the bike
over there, it's only 2 blocks!
(She runs to the door)

ARLA
Who's Tamsey?

JEANIE
My best friend, she's a singer too, she'll
be thrilled!

(SHE STARTS OUT, THEN STICKS HER HEAD BACK IN.)

JEANIE (Cont'd)
Arla, I'm so excited I think I'm going to
die!

ARLA
(Laughs)
Don't die, honey, not at least until after
the show tomorrow night.

(JEANIE RUNS BACK IN AND GIVES ARLA A BIG HUG.)

JEANIE
I'm so grateful for these lessons, Arl,
if it wasn't for you, this would never
have happened...

(SHE KISSES ARLA ON THE CHEEK AND RUNS OUT THROUGH
THE KITCHEN DOOR. ARLA IS ABOUT TO GO BACK INTO
THE KITCHEN WHEN THE FRONT DOOR OPENS AND A VERY
DISTRAUGHT MOMMA ENTERS.)

ARLA
Momma! Where have you been? I was getting
worried about you!

MOMMA
(Sighs)
I've been...walking...thinking...I...

ARLA
Momma, Jeanie got on the Ted Mack show,
she just told me...

MOMMA
(Distracted)
Oh? That's...

(MOMMA STANDS LOOKING OFF INTO SPACE WITH A
BEWILDERED LOOK.)

ARLA
(Crossing to her)
You look terrible. What's wrong?

(THEY CROSS TO THE COUCH WHERE ARLA HELPS MOMMA INTO THE DIVAN.)

MOMMA
(Anxiously looking over her shoulder)
Where's your daddy?
(Glances up the stairs)

ARLA
I haven't seen him. I just got back from having my hair done.

(MOMMA CUPS HER HEAD IN HER HANDS.)

MOMMA
I've done a terrible thing...

ARLA
What do you mean?

MOMMA
(Looking up at Arla)
I found out today that C.H. took out a second mortgage on the house...

ARLA
(Stunned)
He did what?

MOMMA
(Nodding)
Did it to pay for having his book published.

ARLA
(Gasps)
So that's how he did it! Bett and I had the feeling it was something like that, nobody just goes and gets a book published, it's a lot harder than that...
(Shakes her head)
I'll be damned. How typical!

MOMMA
(Extremely nervous)
I was so...upset I couldn't stand it... so I...I...

(C.H. APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS AND COMES DOWN INTO THE LIVING ROOM. HE IGNORES ARLA COMPLETELY.)

C.H.
(Glancing at momma)
Am I going to be allowed to stay in your house for dinner?

(MOMMA DOESN'T ANSWER.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

(Wry smile)

Well, just in case I am, I think I could use a fresh shirt...

(HE GOES TO WHERE HIS SUITCASE WAS. IT'S GONE.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

(Turns to Helen)

Helen, where's my suitcase? My books?

MOMMA

(Nervously fidgeting with her hands)

I don't know, guess where you let 'em...

C.H.

I left it right here, that's where I left it...

(Still not looking at Arla)

Anybody else in the room seen it?

ARLA

If you're referring to me, no.

C.H.

Well, somebody must know what happened to it. Bett upstairs? Jeanie?

ARLA

No, they're not here.

(C.H. LOOKS AROUND THE LIVING ROOM, THEN GOES TO THE STAIRS AND HURRIES UP.)

ARLA

(Looks at her mother)

Mother, did you—

(MOMMA POPS TO HER FEET AND HURRIES TOWARD THE KITCHEN.)

MOMMA

Time to fix dinner—

(SHE EXITS INTO THE KITCHEN.)

ARLA

(Watching her mother go)

Momma? What did you do?

(SHE FOLLOWS MOMMA INTO THE KITCHEN. A BEAT. C.H. SPRINGS DOWN THE STAIRS, MAKES A SECOND HARRIED SEARCH OF THE LIVING ROOM, THEN BEGINS PACING.)

C.H.

(Loudly)

Helen! I want to talk to you! Out here!!

(A BEAT. MOMMA APPEARS AT THE KITCHEN DOOR WITH A POT IN HER HANDS.)

MOMMA

Oh, so now you want to talk so I'm just supposed to be at your beck and call? Well, I don't have time, I got to fix dinner!

(SHE POPS BACK INTO THE KITCHEN.)

C.H.

Helen, dinner can wait! You come out here or I'm comin' in there!

(MOMMA APPEARS AT THE KITCHEN DOOR AGAIN. SHE IS VERY NERVOUS.)

MOMMA

What is it?

C.H.

(Studying her)

What did you do with my suitcase?

MOMMA

I told you I didn't—

C.H.

—Well, somebody did. It was right there...

(Points to the wall)

...two hours ago when I left to go out about the job and it's gone now so somebody did something with it. Bett's in college, Arla was out havin' her hair done, Jeanie was at school...you were the only one here. What did you do with—

(Something dawns on him)

When I was upstairs I smelled...

(Looks at kitchen door)

...something burning in the back yard...

(C.H. LOOKS SLOWLY BACK AT MOMMA.)

C.H.

Jesus, no—!

(HE RUNS THROUGH THE KITCHEN DOOR AND WE HEAR THE SCREEN DOOR SLAM SHUT. ARLA STARES AT MOMMA.)

ARLA

Momma, did you...

(MOMMA COVERS HER FACE WITH HER HANDS.)

MOMMA

I was so mad I wanted to kill him! I had to do something, I had to, I couldn't stand it, I couldn't stand it, Arla...

(SHE DROPS HER HANDS AND LOOKS AT ARLA THROUGH HER TEARS, PLEADING FOR SYMPATHY.)

MOMMA (Cont'd)

...when I found out what he'd done, something snapped, I couldn't help it, I—

ARLA

(Shaking her head)

My God, the misery you two cause each other...

MOMMA

(Sobbing)

I know, I...don't know why, I don't understand it, why we keep...why we...

(THE SCREEN DOOR SLAMS SHUT A SECOND TIME. A LONG BEAT...THEN C.H. APPEARS IN THE KITCHEN DOOR. HE'S HOLDING A BUTCHER KNIFE. ARLA GASPS.)

ARLA

Oh my God!

MOMMA

(Looking up)

C.H., what are you—!

(AS THE TWO WOMEN WATCH HORRIFIED, WITHOUT A WORD C.H. WALKS TO THE COUCH AND PLACES THE KNIFE ON THE COFFEE TABLE, THEN HE RIPS HIS SHIRT OPEN AND BARES HIS CHEST.)

C.H.

(Eyes filled with tears)

Go ahead...why don't you just kill me now, Helen and get it over with? You destroyed my life, you burned my books, just go ahead! Finish the job!

(MOMMA CONTINUES TO SOB, HER HANDS COVERING HER FACE.)

C.H. (Cont'd)

(Quietly)

Can't you do it, Helen? You've been doing it for years with your mouth, now do it with your hand...go on...

MOMMA

(through sobs)

Stop it, Charles, please, stop it...I'm
sorry, I'm...

C.H.

So who's the real coward then? Who's the
real coward?

(to Arla)

You been wantin' to know what happened
between us before you were born...now's
as good a time as any...I came back from
the war, the first one, and I was glad to
be alive...'cause I thought a thousand
times I was a dead man...every time I
went over that trench, I knew I was going
to die..so when I didn't and I got back
home, I was the happiest man alive...
'cause I was not only alive, but I was all
set to marry the great love of my life...
we'd been engaged for 3 years and we were
going to be married...and then I met Helen.
She'd just moved up to Oklahoma from Tomball
with her parents...she was only 16, I was
29...met her in church one weekend when
Joyce was visiting relatives in Tulsa...
making plans for the wedding...

MOMMA

(crying)

C.H....please, don't, please...

C.H.

...she was a cute little thing and I was
weak...I...she was...she liked me and we...
went to a square dance that night...and
afterward, we...we went out to the barn...
didn't we, Helen? We stayed---

MOMMA

(hands over ears)

Stop it!

C.H.

We stayed in the barn all night and the
next night we went back for more...

MOMMA

(shouting)

STOP IT! STOP IT!!

C.H.

What's the matter, Helen? Can't you stand the truth?

MOMMA

(screams)

All right! You want the truth?! You want to hear the truth? All right, then!

(to Arla)

What your daddy is trying to say, Arla, is that I had sex with him and Joyce Fuller wouldn't. She was saving it for after they were married but I didn't save it, I let him have everything he wanted and more! He couldn't get enough of me and that was the end of his big plans to marry little miss virgin --!

(to C.H.)

Did you know I did it on purpose to get you? Did you know I planned it that way? I waited until she was gone and I knew you'd be at church so I went there and I managed to be in the right place to meet you and I did ... and I batted my eyes and played coy and dumb and you loved it, you ate it up! And you know something, Charles Henry? I'm not sorry I did it. I'd do it again!

C.H.

You're happy with all this misery you've caused?

MOMMA

I've caused? You were just as responsible as I was, weren't you? *You* didn't complain, did you?

C.H.

And all those babies you kept havin' ...

MOMMA

(quickly)

I don't want to talk about the babies!

C.H.

Why not? Because they were your weapons?

MOMMA

No!

C.H.

They were, and I was startin' to slip away...you couldn't hold me anymore with sex but you knew you could hold me with babies. That's why you wouldn't wear a diaphragm...

ARLA

(to momma)

Momma, is that true?

MOMMA

No!

ARLA

Momma...

MOMMA

I mothered you, everyone of you...

ARLA

Momma. You mothered us but you didn't really love us...did you?

MOMMA

'Course I did. I do! How can a mother not love her babies?!!

C.H.

(far away look)

I didn't obey Gournemond..."You must never seduce or be seduced by a woman" he said... I gave it all up when I took you to bed... you're my wound, Helen, you're the wound of the Fisher King...

MOMMA

You betrayed yourself! ...But go ahead, blame me if it makes you feel better...

(C.H. HAS BEEN GOING THROUGH THE TORTURES OF THE DAMNED. NOW HE FALLS TO HIS KNEES AND AN EERIE, SAD, PLAINTIVE, FRIGHTENING SOUND EMERGES FROM HIS THROAT, AS IF HE'S A WOUNDED ANIMAL TRAPPED BY A PACK OF WOLVES.)

C.H.

(eyes to heaven)

AHHHHHHHHHHH! God forgive me for I have sinned...I have sinned...I deserve it all, all the "slings and arrows"...every one... I got caught 35 years ago and I can't get out, I can't get out, I can't get out....

MOMMA

You want to go, go. I want you to. I'm not holding you anymore. Go on, do it! The great love of your life is here in Oklahoma City---right now!

(C.H. LOOKS AT MOMMA WITH A BLANK STARE.)

C.H.

What do you mean?

MOMMA

Joyce Fuller is Mrs. Millet, Jeanie's singing teacher...

(C.H., STUNNED, LOOKS FROM MOMMA TO ARLA AND BACK TO MOMMA.)

C.H.

But she went to Italy---

MOMMA

Well, she came back from Italy a few months ago. And I hear she's a widow... so go, little fly...fly away..

(fighting back
tears)

...fly to your great love...after all these years, I'm cutting you free...

(MOMMA OPENS HER CUPPED HANDS AS IF FREEING A BIRD.)

(C.H. STARES AT HER A BEAT, THEN GOES OUT THE FRONT DOOR. ARLA IS LOOKING AT THE FLOOR. THERE IS A LONG BEAT.)

ARLA

You still love him...don't you?

(ARLA LOOKS AT MOMMA WHO IS STARING FRONT, TEARS STREAMING SILENTLY DOWN HER FACE...AS THE LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE TO BLACK.)

End Scene 3

Scene 4

(THE SET BECOMES MRS. MILET'S HOME. SHE IS SEATED AT THE PIANO PLAYING A PIECE AND HUMMING WHEN THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. SHE GOES TO THE DOOR AND OPENS IT. THERE IS A LONG PAUSE BEFORE SHE SPEAKS.)

MRS. MILLET
(Surprised)
Charles? Charles Daniels? What a surprise!

C.H. (Off Stage)
Can I come in?

MRS. MILLET
Of course...

(C.H. ENTERS, MRS. MILLET CLOSES THE DOOR, TURNS AND FACES HIM. C.H. STARES AT HER FOR A LONG TIME. FINALLY MRS. MILLET BREAKS THE SPELL.)

MRS. MILLET
(Smiling brightly)
You haven't changed a bit, Charles, you're still as intense as ever.

C.H.
Helen just told me you were back...

MRS. MILLET
(Nodding)
Yes. I went to talk to her yesterday about Jeanie's singing...
(Long beat)
Would you like some coffee?

C.H.
(Shaking his head)
You look the same...you even smell the same...
(He looks at her hands)
...your hands are still beautiful...

MRS. MILLET
(Laughs)
You always did get right to the point.
Please, come in and sit down.

(SHE REACHES OUT AND TAKES HIS HAND. HER TOUCH SENDS A PERCEPTIBLE SHOCK THROUGH C.H.'S BODY. SHE LEADS HIM TO A CHAIR AND SITS ACROSS FROM HIM. THIS IS THE SAME BASIC SET WITH A FEW ALTERATIONS AND DIFFERENT LIGHTING.)

MRS. MILLET(Cont'd)

(Smiling, graciously)

Now tell me. How are you, Charles? How has life treated you?

C.H.

(Staring at her, then simply)

I never stopped loving you. I've thought about you every day for 35 years...I wanted to see you, to tell you...what happened... but I couldn't...I...

MRS. MILLET

Charles...

C.H.

You are the only woman I have ever loved. You are the only woman I will ever love. Helen always knew that...after...after I betrayed you...I knew I wasn't worthy of you...I knew I had destroyed the purity of our love...I've been in mourning for our love all this time...for the children we should have had...the things we should have shared...my life has been a hell hole and I'm the one to blame for it because I walked out on you...

(MRS. MILLET LOOKS AT CHARLES FOR A LONG MOMENT, THEN GOES TO THE PIANO, GETS A COFFEE MUG RESTING IN A CANNISTER ON THE PIANO, AND TURNS AND ADDRESSES C.H.)

MRS. MILLET

Charles, I think you have me confused with someone else.

(C.H. IS STARTLED AT THIS STATEMENT. IT TAKES A MOMENT FOR IT TO REGISTER ON HIM.)

C.H.

What?

MRS. MILLET

You were always very romantic and you still are. I suppose I was too, but I've become a hard nosed realist. I've had to. I starved for years in Chicago while I studied singing, I've survived two husbands, a bankruptcy, and now I live alone and support myself by giving voice lessons. What we had was a romanticized relationship and we probably wouldn't have lasted two months if we'd have gotten married.

C.H.
 (Shakes his head)
 That's not true, we—

MRS. MILLET
 —I may have seemed an object to be desired to you Charles, but that was probably because I wouldn't have sex with you...as soon as I had, the bloom would have been off the rose and the rose would have stood before you naked with not very good legs—

(C.H. DOESN'T WANT TO HEAR THIS, HE HAS TROUBLE SITTING STILL.)

C.H.
 Joyce, don't—

MRS. MILLET
 I have to Charles, I can't live with delusions. I've thought about this, about us, and I see it now as an idealized version of what every girl is brought up to believe love is, being swept off her feet by a dashing, handsome soldier and ravished on her wedding night. Well, you never ravished me, but my other two ravishments weren't that great. On my first wedding night, we both got drunk and fell asleep and on my second wedding night my new husband had diarrhea and it probably would have been a similar disaster with you...

(C.H.'S FACE HAS FALLEN AND HE'S RECOILING FROM MRS. MILLET'S WORDS.)

C.H.
 I thought you were different than—

MRS. MILLET
 —than Helen? Than other women? I probably am in some ways, in others, we're probably on a par...you know, I went to college, got a BS, a masters and a Ph.D. in music history, I minored in psychology and I've written a book or two on the psychology of post Restoration music and the music of the Middle Ages, if you can believe that subject matter...and my problem with both my husbands, Charles, was that I was brighter than they were, better educated and a lot more talented...

(C.H. TAKES HIS RUBBER BALL FROM HIS POCKET AND BEGINS ROLLING IT NERVOUSLY BETWEEN HIS PALMS.)

MRS. MILLET (Cont'd)

(Sipping coffee)

... my first husband was an organist, played for a church in Chicago, he was a good musician but a rotten lover...not to say I was ever that great in bed...

(winks at C.H.)

...you didn't miss much, Charles, sex was nice but I was never driven as some women are, I could take it or leave it and I usually left it...and my second husband, an Italian...

(rolls her eyes)

...was the artistic director of an opera company in Milan who 'sexualized' all the ladies in the chorus, I was just a sexual afterthought for him—

C.H.

(Utterly confused)

—you used to be quiet, you never said much...

MRS. MILLET

(Laughs gaily)

Yes, I was taught to be passive/submissive like my mother and always to let the man dominate and carry the conversation, make the decisions, everything, but when I began to find myself, I realized I wasn't that way at all, that I was a bright, three dimensional person with likes and dislikes and the right to have an opinion and express it freely, to assert myself...

(C.H. HAS BEEN STUNNED BY THE SHATTERING OF HIS DELUSIONS ABOUT JOYCE FULLER AS HIS ROMANTIZED VERSION OF FEMININITY. NOW HE BECOMES ANGRY AND POPS TO HIS FEET.)

C.H.

(Sarcastically)

In fact you talk a lot more than Helen.

MRS. MILLET

Do I? Well, that's probably because I've lived a fuller life and I have a lot more to say and I say it loud and clear and people have trouble with that, mostly men. —Most men, Charles, are little boys who can't stand a strong woman, all they want is to get laid and have their egos stroked, and as I told you, I was never much good at the

(MORE)

MRS. MILLET(Cont'd)
 former and a total failure at the latter.
 Most men want a mother, not a woman, and I
 don't think it's my province to educate
 them up to my level, let them go out and
 learn how to be big and strong on their
 own, it's not up to me to teach them,
they've got to learn to cut the umbilical
 cord and get away from their mommas and
 you know what I've found? Most men never
 do it! They're stuck with their emotional
 thumbs in their mouths! And by the way, Charles,
 I'm overweight, I have jewels and my beautiful
 hands have brown spots.

(C.H. HAS BEEN PACING. NOW HE STOPS AND STARES AT
 MRS. MILLET AS THOUGH SEEING HER FOR THE FIRST TIME.
 HE'S DUMBSTRUCK AND CAN'T FIND THE WORDS TO EXPRESS
 HIS ANGUISH/DISILLUSIONMENT.)

C.H.
 Gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble,
 gobble...

(HE RESUMES HIS PACING AND BEGINS BOUNCING THE BALL.)

MRS. MILLET
 (Laughs)
 Well, that's one way to deal with me, my
 first husband used to leave the room and my
 second husband got stinking drunk...
 (Repeats admiringly)
 "Gobble, gobble, gobble..."
 (Looks at C.H.)
 ...that's a new one, Charles, and I'd say
 quite original. By the way, Jeanie is a
 wonderful singer and I think she's going
 to make us both proud. She's got more
 talent than I ever had—
 (Looks at C.H.)
 —and probably more than you do, too. You
 know, she's on the Ted Mack show tomorrow
 night on national radio and I think she just
 may surprise you!

(SHE BEGINS TO PACE AND SIP FROM HER COFFEE MUG AS
 C.H. PACES, BOUNCES AND GROWS MORE IRRITATED.)

C.H.
 (Throwing this over his
 shoulder)
 Do you ever close your mouth?

MRS. MILLET
 (Laughing it off)
 Only when I'm eating!
 (Laughs again)

(THEY BECOME ISOLATED IN THEIR OWN WORLDS AS C.H. STEPS THROUGH THE DARKNESS INTO A SMALL LIGHTED AREA DOWN STAGE RIGHT. WE NOW HAVE TWO SPECIFIC LIGHTED AREAS ON STAGE, EACH SELF-CONTAINED. NOW THE HIDEOUS WOMAN APPEARS IN ANOTHER AREA AND POINTS ACCUSINGLY AT C.H. BLANCH FLEUR ALSO APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE STAIR AREA AND BEGINS UNDULATING NAKEDLY, SEDUCTIVELY. C.H. REACTS TO THESE IMAGES AS IF THEY WERE IN HIS OWN CONSCIOUSNESS, WHICH THEY ARE.)

MRS. MILLET(Cont'd)

You know Charles, psychology fascinates me, delving into why we're the way we are and do the things we do, it's especially interesting in its delineation of the difference between the male and female psyches...

C.H.

(To himself, fighting his inner demons)

I've just made a discovery—

MRS. MILLET

—I've had a theory re the proverbial battle of the sexes, why men and women are at war with one another all the time ...and I think it's because men are at war with their own femininity and women with their masculinity—

C.H.

—My discovery is that a woman's mouth has a life of its own—

(C.H. IS REACTING MORE DISTRESSFULLY TO THE IMAGES OF THE HIDEOUS WOMAN AND THE BLANCH FLEUR IMAGES STILL APPARENT IN LIGHTED AREAS ON STAGE. NOW THE FEMALE VERSION OF THE PERSIFAL CHARACTER IS ALSO SEEN AS WELL AS THE PERSIFAL MOTHER.)

MRS. MILLET

(Continuing, not hearing him)

That means that until a man can learn to be at peace with his feminine side, his gentleness, kindness, his nurturing qualities, he'll continue to strut around, flex his muscles and be a lopsided human being who's at war with himself and his inner woman...

(MOMMA ENTERS MRS. MILLET'S LIGHTED AREA UPSTAGE AS THE HIDEOUS WOMAN ALSO STEPS OUT OF HER AREA INTO MRS. MILLET'S LIGHT AND THEY ARE JOINED BY THE PARSIFAL AND PARSIFAL-MOTHER CHARACTERS. WHAT FOLLOWS IS AS IF A GROUP OF PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE GATHERED FOR A SEMINAR. THE STYLE IS NATURAL AND REALISTIC. THEY ALL TAKE CUPS OF COFFEE AND SIT IN A SEMI-CIRCLE WITH THEIR LEGS CROSSED.)

(BLANCH FLEUR IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CONTINUES HER NAKED UNDULATING IN HER HAZY, SHIMMERING LIGHTED AREA.)

MOMMA

(To Mrs. Millet)

You know, I've always felt that way but I never could verbalize it...

(SHE ADDS SUGAR TO HER COFFEE AND TAKES A SIP.)

HIDEOUS WOMAN

(Same business with tea cup)

I agree, I think you encapsulated quite concretely the fact that men deny their feminine presentation...

PARSIFAL MOTHER

(Same business with tea cup)

...yes, they fall into a deep, delusional mode and 'act out' this male ideation...

PARSIFAL

(Same biz)

—it's as if they're wound up as little boys...

MRS. MILLET

—and set in the path of masculine self-indulgence...

MOMMA

—to their own detriment and the total denial of their feminity...

(C.H. IS STRUGGLING WITH THESE SUBJECTIVE IMAGES WITHIN HIMSELF AND HE ALTERNATELY TRIES TO SHAKE THEM OFF MENTALLY AND IS FASCINATED BY THEIR HYPOTHESIS...HE BEGINS BOUNCING THE BALL MORE AND MORE VEHEMENTLY AS IF TAKING OUT HIS CONFUSION AND FEAR IN THIS MANNER.)

C.H.

"...and all a man's weapons, including his guns, tanks and bombs, become nothing... dust in his hands..."

MRS. MILLET

(Sipping casually)

Yes, and sadly the same is true for the distaff side, until we women search and discover our masculine side...

HIDEOUS WOMAN

...and until our strength and independence blend in with our feminine purity and innocence...

MOMMA

...we'll continue to be victimized by the unexpressed masculinity within us...

PARSIFAL MOTHER

(Nodding, sipping)

Well put...

PARSIFAL

I concur...

ALL WOMEN/MYTH FIGURES

Yes, I agree, excellent...

(They applaud)

C.H.

(Looking off into space)

"Whom does the grail serve? Whom does the grail serve...?" The fish is Christianity, and when a man first tastes of Christ, he is wounded by his sins...and he must learn to overcome the old man with his deeds...and ask and answer the right question..."Whom do you serve?" The correct answer must be... must be...I serve God! I serve...

HIDEOUS WOMAN

(Calling to Blanch Fleur)

What do you think, Blanch?

MRS. MILLET

(To Blanch Fleur)

Yes, put in your 2 cents work, Miss Fleur...

(ALL LOOK UP AT BLANCH FLEUR STILL UNDULATING IN NAKED ABANDON IN HER DIMLY LIGHTED AREA INCLUDING CHARLES. HE STARES AT HER A MOMENT, THEN LOOKS BACK FRONT AND TRIES TO SHAKE OFF THIS SENSUAL VISION.)

(BLANCH FLEUR SAYS NOTHING)

PARSIFAL

(Turning to others in her circle)

She's still involved in her narcissistic, self deception...

PARSIFAL MOTHER

—look, it's her life, it's a phase she has to go through, we all did...

HIDEOUS WOMAN

—that's right, solipsism is a facet of the human condition, she'll be involved in it as long as she's mesmerized by the myth of being a sexual object...

C.H.

"...it serves the grail king..."

MRS. MILLET

(Glancing at C.H.)

...good point...yes. Speaking of serving, we as women must serve the male within us, i.e., cultivate our whole range of affect, wouldn't you agree?

HIDEOUS WOMAN

Oh absolutely. We must develop the complete woman...

(THE HIDEOUS WOMAN BEGINS TO TAKE OUT MASKS AND PASS THEM AROUND TO THE OTHERS.)

MOMMA

—Just as men must do...

PARSIFAL

...that's right, and as Goethe said, "A man must first serve woman..."

(C.H. HAS A VIOLENT REACTION TO THIS STATEMENT AS HE PACES AND BOUNCES IN HIS LIGHTED AREA DOWN RIGHT.)

C.H.

No!

(BLANCH FLEUR TIRES OF HER ROLE, SIGHS AUDIBLY AS OTHERS MINIMIZE THEIR ACTIONS SO WE WILL FOCUS ON HER, SHE DONNS A ROBE AND JOINS THE OTHERS.)

THEN

BLANCH FLEUR

(Entering Mrs. Millet's area and taking a mask)

...I take that to mean his own inner woman? His feminine qualities?

MOMMA

(Nods, donning a mask)

That's how I read it...

ALL

(They all agree with this statement as they don the masks)

MRS. MILLET

Then...the gentle female nature must subdue the warlike nature...devour it...

(C.H. IS GROWING MORE AND MORE FEARFUL. NOW HE DROPS TO HIS KNEES AND BREATHES HEAVILY AS HE SENSES WHAT IS HAPPENING BEHIND HIM.)

(BY NOW ALL THE WOMEN HAVE DONNED MASKS AND AT THIS POINT WE CAN'T DISCERN WHAT THEY ARE. THE HIDEOUS WOMAN REACHES INTO HER BAG AND HANDS OUT A LONG, BLACK ROPE THAT THE WOMEN TAKE AND HOLD ONTO AS THEY SPREAD OUT IN A SEMI-CIRCLE ABOVE CHARLES.)

C.H.

(perspiring)

"...and all a man's weapons, his strength, his self-will..."

(SUDDENLY THE LIGHTS BLACK OUT BEHIND C.H. ALTHOUGH HE IS STILL IN A SPOT OR TIGHTLY LIGHTED AREA. THE MASKS OF THE WOMEN ARE PHOSPHORESCENT SPIDERS' FACES AND THE ROPE IS PHOSPHORESCENT, TREATED TO SIMULATE A SPIDER'S MOUTH WHICH THE WOMEN CAN MANIPULATE IN A CHOMPING MOVEMENT. THE SPIDER WEB LIGHTING MOTIF SPRINGS OUT ACROSS THE STAGE AS THE MASKS AND THE CHOMPING MOUTH APPROACH C.H.)

C.H.

(terrified)

"...his guns...his bombs...his weapons of...war..."

(SOUND EFFECT SNEAKS IN TO UNDERScore THIS BEAT AS WE HEAR CHOMPING SOUNDS MIXED WITH WOMEN'S SIGHS AND GROANS AND A SOPRANO VOICE WAILING IN A NIGHTMARISH, KAFKAESQUE PHANTASMAGORIA OF SIGHT/SOUND.)

(C.H. IS HORRIFIED BUT DOES NOT DARE TO LOOK BEHIND HIM. HE SLOWLY RISES TO HIS FEET.)

C.H.

"...turn to dust...turn to...."

(C.H. WHIRLS AROUND AS THE MOUTH APPROACHES HIM. HE SCREAMS AND RUSHES INTO THE MOUTH WHICH CLOSES, OPENS, CHOMPS, AND DEVOURS HIM AS HIS CRIES OF UTTER ANGUISH RING THROUGH THE THEATER AND SUDDENLY THE STAGE IS DARK.)

End Scene 4

Scene 5

(C.H.'S SCREAMS FROM PREVIOUS SCENE BLEND WITH AN ORCHESTRAL BLARE OF TED MACK'S THEME SONG. STILL IN DARK, THE THEME RISES, THEN CUTS OUT.)

TED MACK(Off Stage)
...and now, our next contestant is Miss Jeanie Daniels. HELLO Jeanie...

JEANIE(O.S.)
Hello, Mr. Mack...

TED MACK(O.S.)
Well. You're certainly a beautiful young lady. I wish I was 20 years younger!

(LAUGHTER/APPLAUSE.)

JEANIE(O.S.)
Thank you, Mr. Mack.

TED MACK(O.S.)
How old are you Jeanie, and where do you go to school?

JEANIE(O.S.)
I'm 16 and I'm a junior at Central High.

TED MACK(O.S.)
All right. And I understand you're going to sing for us tonight. And what song will it be?

JEANIE(O.S.)
"My Hero" from THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER.

TED MACK(O.S.)
Sounds fine. Good luck.

JEANIE(O.S.)
Thank you.

TED MACK(O.S.)
All right, everybody, let's sit real still now and give our full attention as Miss Jeanie Daniels sings..."My Hero."

(A SPOT PICKS UP JEANIE STAGE RIGHT (AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS AREA.) SHE IS DRESSED SIMPLY BUT ATTRACTIVELY AND IS BREATHTAKINGLY BEAUTIFUL.)

(THE ORCHESTRA PLAYS THE INTRODUCTION TO "MY HERO."
AS JEANIE SINGS, LIGHTS UP IN THE DANIELS'S LIVING
ROOM. MOMMA, ARLA, BETT AND KAY ARE HUDDLED AROUND
THE RADIO. THEY LISTEN AS JEANIE BEGINS TO SING.)

(C.H. WITH A NEW SUITCASE TIED WITH AN OLD BELT AND
DRESSED FOR THE ROAD WITH A CAP AND WORKMAN'S COAT
ENTERS DOWN LEFT, OUT OF THE SET, SITS ON HIS
SUITCASE AND WATCHES AND LISTENS AS JEANIE SINGS.
WHEN SHE FINISHES, THERE IS WILD APPLAUSE AS C.H.
RISES AND THROWS HIS SUITCASE OVER HIS SHOULDER.
THE WOMEN AROUND THE RADIO SUDDENLY ERUPT INTO CHEERS
AS THEY APPLAUD AND SHOUT FOR JEANIE. THEIR MOVEMENTS,
AT FIRST NORMAL, BECOME SLOW MOTION...THEY SURROUND
JEANIE APPLAUDING SILENTLY AS JEANIE FACES FRONT.)

C.H.

"Our revels now are ended..." but not
really. I'm goin' out that door and life
continues somewhere else...the search goes
on. The search for what? Maybe they're
right...maybe that ideal woman is a dream...
I can't accept that she's in me...I'm a man,
a man can't be a man...and a woman too, can
he?

(looks earnestly
at audience)

Well, can he? Maybe we can talk about that
sometime. Just maybe.

(sings slowly,
thoughtfully)

"Froggie went a courtin,' Uh huh
Froggie went a courtin,' Uh huh...

(starts off)

With his guitar upon his knee..."

(SUDDENLY THE ACTION BEHIND HIM FREEZES WITH A SPOT
ON JEANIE. SHE LOOKS AT HER FATHER, THEN SINGS THE
LAST LINE WITH HIM.)

C.H./JEANIE

"His lady froggie he did see..."

C.H.

(sings alone)

"Uh huh....."

(C.H. HOLDS A BEAT, THEN JUST BEFORE HE EXITS, HE STOPS
AND LOOKS OVER HIS SHOULDER AT JEANIE. THEY MAKE EYE
CONTACT, HOLD A BEAT, THEN C.H. LOOKS FRONT.)

C.H.(cont'd)

Takes after her old man...

(HE WINKS AT THE AUDIENCE AND EXITS AS THE SPOT ON
JEANIE, WHO'S LOOKING STRAIGHT FRONT, SLOWLY DIMS TO
BLACKOUT.

The end