

## HARVEY PERR AFTERNOON TEA

Harvey Perr was born in New York City. He was an original member of the Playwrights Unit, which presented his *The Night Little Girl Blue Made Her Social Debut*, *Upstairs Sleeping*, and *Birthday's at Noon*. He taught playwriting at the Lee Strasberg Institute in Los Angeles and was a drama critic for the Los Angeles *Free Press*. In 1969 he won the Los Angeles Drama Critics Distinguished Circle Award for Distinguished Playwriting for *Rosebloom*. Cafe La Mama in Paris produced his *Spies*, and *Adventures of Jack and Max* was performed by Actors Studio West. His teleplay *The War Widow* was produced for KCET's Vision Series. The Mark Taper Forum has produced *Jew!*, *Rosebloom* and *Scandalous Memories*, as well as *Afternoon Tea* which has also been done at the Hartford Stage Company and the Circle Repertory Theater.

### for John, Joseph and Gera

I asked if I got sick and died, would you  
With my black funeral go walking too,  
If you'd stand close to hear them talk or pray  
While I'm let down in that steep bank of clay.

And, No, you said, for if you saw a crew  
Of living idiots pressing around that new  
Oak coffin—they alive, I dead beneath  
That board—you'd rave and rend them with your teeth.

—John Millington Synge

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## AFTERNOON TEA by HARVEY PERR

# AFTERNOON TEA

The people involved in the ceremonies:

**Rachel**

**Aaron**

The time in which the ceremonies take place:

**An autumn afternoon**

The place in which the ceremonies take place: \_\_\_\_\_

**Rachel's house in the country**

*Music: "Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen!" from Mahler's Kindertotenlieder.*

*Almost immediately after the music starts, the lights come up very slowly on the living room of RACHEL's house, until the room is drenched in the sunlight of early afternoon.*

*It is a rustic house: hardwood floors and the suggestion of a beamed ceiling. Dark brown in its feeling and look. In its bareness, it appears to have been designed to create an Oriental austerity. A picture window through which the light, changing*

subtly as the afternoon progresses, dances through. The essential pieces are an oven, a fireplace and a chair near it, a table and two chairs, a phonograph, a screen, closed and unseen now, which is eventually used to separate the kitchen area (oven) from the living area.

*There is a certain peace in this house. One could meditate here.*

*Although the piece takes place in real time and in a real space, it is separated into sections, or CEREMONIES, with some ceremonies occasionally overlapping others. They may flow into another or the changes may be abrupt, according to the director and actors. The actors may even be encouraged to announce aloud the title of each ceremony.*

*The piece has been conceived primarily to explore the spaces between people as if they were caught by a camera in slow motion so that the actors must find those spaces between themselves; very often they respond to some split second within their moments together and focus must be on their gestures, the truth behind their responses. Once they have been found, their effectiveness will depend on how they are focused and, sometimes, on how they are lit. The actors must never indulge in what we have come to know as natural behavior.*

*The attempt is not to distort reality but to intensify it, to find the transcendent beauty in even the most mundane of activities. It is as if we are looking for the very first time at all the things we think we've seen all our lives. This is also a love story. And, because it is a love story, the mood should be warm and solemn and true and quietly magnificent.*

*Before the music comes to an end, RACHEL enters, fresh-cut flowers in her arms. It is not important how old RACHEL is or if*

*she is homely or beautiful or if she is blonde or brunette or grey or if she is thin or heavy. It matters only that she is passionate and alive and suggests at all times that she has found some peace within herself.*

#### **THE FLOWER ARRANGEMENT CEREMONY:**

*RACHEL arranges the flowers with infinite care. She has a special relationship to each and every flower. They should be fresh. Her movement is always slow and graceful; some movements, however, are slower as if, for example, the placement and arrangement of a specific flower is more meaningful.*

#### **THE FRUIT BOWL CEREMONY:**

*RACHEL brings out a basket of fresh fruit and arranges them in a bowl. The sound of a bird singing can be heard and RACHEL stops to listen and when the bird is gone she returns to the fruit.*

#### **THE MORNING SONG CEREMONY:**

*RACHEL sings a song, one that is important to her. (This is true of any actress who plays the part; I suggest a folk song in keeping with the mood that is being created.) Again, some note in the song may be heard as if for the first time and lingered on.*

*RACHEL continues to place the fruit in the bowl as she sings to suggest the overlapping of ceremonies and ends by eating one of the fruits.*

*The door opens and AARON enters. Although he is dressed for a day in the country, he brings with him some of the edginess of city life. He carries a gift-wrapped package, a book, a Sunday newspaper. He is about the same age as RACHEL.*

*RACHEL and AARON stare at each other for a moment as if something about the other startles each of them. But the moment passes.*

#### **THE WELCOME CEREMONY:**

*RACHEL and AARON embrace and, in that embrace is the warmth of friends and the sensuality of lovers and any number of other responses to be found between two people who know each other. From AARON, even some resistance, a flash of fear and pain and cruelty beneath the smile. Within the embrace, a series of alternating reactions, some of them played against the dialogue.*

RACHEL: It's so good to see you.

AARON: To feel you.

RACHEL: I missed you.

AARON: Did you?

RACHEL: More than usual.

AARON: I feel grimy from the train.

*RACHEL wipes the grime from his brow and as he removes his coat, she kisses his hand and when his coat is off*

AARON gives her a gift.

#### **THE GIFT CEREMONY:**

*RACHEL unwraps the package with great deliberation.*

*AARON coughs and the cough is caught in midair and he slows down almost to a freeze to suggest that the care with which RACHEL opens the package is somewhat surreal. He moves more normally when the gift is unwrapped.*

*RACHEL reads the dedication and cries and moves toward*

*AARON who moves away—an unguarded moment—and then moves back to receive her tears and her embrace.*

*The gift is a copy of Diving into the Wreck, poems by Adrienne Rich.*

*Throughout the first section of the piece, one of the two will move more deliberately, caught up in the ceremony while the other moves more or less naturally. At certain moments, their separate deliberateness will converge.*

*AARON moves toward the chair at a normal pace while*

*RACHEL in stillness, looks randomly through the book, stopping at a poem that attracts her and moves with natural grace towards*

*AARON who starts to read the newspaper as if it is the first time he has seen a newspaper. He puts it down without putting away the anxiety that goes with wanting to complete his ceremony as*

*RACHEL starts to read a poem, again, as in the song, lingering with deliberation on some word or another which has special*

meaning. She reads "From a Survivor," one of the poems in Diving into the Wreck. Then:

RACHEL: I have a feeling you're feeling that whatever you'd say right now would be sentimental. And I'm thinking, go ahead, for God's sake, be sentimental.

AARON: I don't think the poem is sentimental.

RACHEL: Neither do I. Thank you.

RACHEL moves away and places the book near the flowers as

AARON picks up the newspaper again.

#### THE READING OF THE NEWSPAPER:

AARON places all his concentration on the newspaper for a long time while

RACHEL moves to the kitchen area.

AARON continues as

#### THE TEA CEREMONY:

begins.

This is the central ceremony around which other, smaller ceremonies take place.

More than any other ceremony, the beauty and dignity is emphasized.

RACHEL pours the water into the tea kettle.

She warms the teapot.

She places the china on the table.

She sets the table.

RACHEL: I want you to hear something. I've been listening to it all week. Over and over again. It's practically worn out. Forget the scratches. Think of them, like I do, as logs crackling in the fireplace. In the background.

RACHEL places a record on the phonograph.

#### THE MUSIC LISTENING CEREMONY:

AARON and RACHEL listen to the music, a contralto aria from Bach's St. Matthew Passion

#### ARIA

Erbarme dich, mein Gott,  
Um meiner Zahren willen;  
Schau hier, Herz und Auge  
Weint vor dir bitterlich.  
Erbarme dich!

There is a long pause.

The tea kettle whistles.

AARON puts on his coat and leaves.

RACHEL pours the boiling water into the heated teapot.

#### THE SLICING OF THE LEMON:

RACHEL sits down at the table with a lemon and a sharp knife and proceeds to slice the lemon ritualistically.

AARON returns with firewood in his arms.

#### THE FIREWOOD CEREMONY:

AARON places several logs in the fireplace and several on the edge of the fireplace. He crumples up pieces of newspaper and places them under the logs.

RACHEL stares at him, and the manner in which she does this should be in focus for it will be important later.

*The fireplace is lit.*

RACHEL brings the teapot to the table.

*She pours the tea.*

*She squeezes lemon into the tea.*

*She pours honey into the tea.*

AARON brings his book and comes to the table.

#### THE TEA DRINKING CEREMONY:

RACHEL and AARON sip their tea. RACHEL holds the cup as if it will warm her hands, and there is sensual pleasure in the taste.

AARON does not so much drink the tea as endow the cup with some memory and it is the memory he drinks.

*There is a long pause.*

AARON: Would you like me to read to you?

RACHEL: Yes.

Would you like to read to me?

AARON: Yes. I came across this book. Where did I come across it? Somewhere. Anyway. I found something, I read something this week I wanted to share with you.

RACHEL picks up the book, fingers it, looks at AARON who shares the moment with her, one of mutual understanding and perhaps mutual fear as he reaches for the book.

#### THE READING CEREMONY:

AARON (reads from Tobias Schneebaum's *Keep the River on Your Right*): "My dear friend,

"You have been gone from the mission for three months and I find my life here unbearable. You are gone; found, I hope, not lost, in a world that saves you. Our dear Father Moiseis has been insisting that you have been killed by

people or by animals, otherwise you would have come back to the mission by now, but though I say nothing, I know that you have discovered a life where you are and that you will some day return to civilization. You thought that you could be content to live your whole life there in the jungle, but you will find, as I did, that it isn't possible, that there will be other needs for you, needs that cannot be fulfilled in your forest. You will manage it for a year, two years, maybe four, but you will go back to where you came from and will paint your paintings from all that you have learned in your time here, and with that learning in your soul, you will have no other way to live but in a better way than you lived there before, and I hope that it will be enough to sustain you for all of your life.

"It is possible that you will never receive this letter, that Father Moiseis will die and Hermano would then abandon the mission and go back to his mountains, or that you yourself are dead. Nevertheless I write it, feeling almost secure that you will read it.

"Your presence here for so short a time forced me again into thinking about myself. There was nothing specific that you said or did that brought about this thinking, not even that you went off in such an astonishing way, but that you were covered when you first arrived, with the veneer of a world that brought back too many memories that made me search out some meaning to my own presence, my own existence, here or anywhere else, the why of why I myself was put onto the earth, a question that so many others have sought the answer to. I have loved so deeply that the aching of my heart and of my soul could not be ministered to by anyone, not even by a loving partner. I nail myself onto the cross each time I love and I cry out each time, 'O God, O

my love, why hast thou forsaken me?' for no matter how I try, no matter what I do, the manner of my love is such that it closes in upon itself and forms a hard shell around it, so that nothing goes out, nothing goes in, and the shell begins to grow inside me, suffocating me, blocking the flow of blood to my brain, which then can barely function, except as an extension of my love. It is something that I know I do to myself; I love and I do not allow love to be returned.

"The world of the mission of course sees me as something else. I appear to be happy enough and I do all my good deeds in the pharmacy and dig up the earth and have my hidden pleasures with the boys. I don't argue with Father Moiseis no matter what I think of what he happens to be doing at the moment. It wouldn't surprise me at all to find out that he says you are dead because he's so jealous of you and where you are, and in his mind you have taken away the delight he should have had in meeting new peoples. He always tells that story of that huge expedition having come and everyone wanting to be the first to have contact with his precious Indians, but it was just as important to him to be first with them again, to show the influence he had because he had been with them before. I'm sure he'd rather think you dead than think you could be living with people he himself has never seen. He is, after all, the great missionary and he should be the first one they accept. His need is to believe that God is protecting him and keeps him safe when he meets savages.

"While I was still up in the mountains, wending my way down to the mission, I met a man who was running for the office of mayor of a small town, and the platform on which he ran was that if elected, he would get rid of all the Indians in the jungle, not saying how he would go about it, so that

the civilized people could all come into the forest and build their haciendas and cut down the ebony and mahogany and not have to worry about arrows in their backs. He went on to say that they, the purer Spanish, should long ago have done in Peru what the North Americans did in the States, which was to kill off all the Indians and thus avoid having any further difficulties with them. Father Moiseis had a plan to get the government to allot him a great section of the jungle that would be a reservation, and no strangers but scientists could enter it. He told me about this the first day I got here, after I had mentioned this man I'd met, and I thought how wonderful the idea was, and how wonderful is this padre. But it was only an idea about which he soon forgot and he never spoke of it again here or on his trips to visit the head of the mission in Lima. I might have pushed him into it, but after being here some weeks, I saw how his plan would work, with him as the director of the reservation, traveling around with his Bible in his hand, from one village to the next, preaching godliness and shame and desire for money to buy more clothes, more machetes, more victrolas, stopping all the drinking, all the sex out of wedlock, and changing them in much the same way they would be changed by any civilization that came close to them.

"But all that is neither here nor there and no longer has anything to do with me. I have lived here for over ten years and could have lived here another ten, going on in this same way, except that you brought with you maybe conscience and I was beginning to see myself from your eyes, or rather as I would see myself had I been looking out at me from your body, and I didn't like what it was I saw. If there isn't much that one can say against me, neither is there much that one can say for me. By which I mean, why am I here? and why have I remained here all these years if not out of a

stupor from which I must escape. When you left, I thought about your going and why you went and what you were going into, what you thought you were going into, and what you hoped to find there, though you never really said anything about that, only that you were compelled to go. For a month I worried that out, about myself that is and where in the world was my end and what I was serving by staying here. Anyone can tell me of all the good I'm doing with my penicillin and sulfa drugs, but more basically, I see that I'm not doing anything either for these Indians or for myself and I've come to the conclusion that I am more important to myself than they are to me, than anyone is, and you can call it any kind of selfishness you like, though you won't because I know you understand what I hope I'm saying. The thing is that I've always wanted myself to be really useful in some way, and frankly I'd have liked it to be in a loving, sensual way, almost in the way that the body of Christ is used in communion, and filling souls with love. I want, for a change, instead of someone else filling me with love, for me to fill someone completely, even if it literally means that my flesh and blood must enter into another body. It isn't easy for me to say this to you because it isn't easy to think it out to the conclusion I'm looking for. I have myself, and I have an end, but it's the road to that end that's giving me trouble. I've had dreams of my body being eaten by men and it thrilled me in such an indescribable way that I had an orgasm before I realized what was going on inside of me. I wonder if such a dream or thought ever passed your way? No, it would be impossible. It would be far too revolting.

"Have I ever told you that I love you? Never of course did I say it in any words, but have you never felt it, have you never seen it in me? Maybe I'd love any man who came in this direction, but you came with such an extraordinary

simplicity that at first I had to laugh, you with your dreams that had been my dreams, the same dreams that I had thought to fulfill here and instead, have been nothing but a failure, and then here you come thinking as I had thought and what could I do but laugh to myself, and then cry to myself because suddenly it did seem possible in you that here was one person who might well work at finding one of life's solutions, and maybe you wouldn't find much, but you would find something because before you left the mission you had already found more than I had found in ten years, and I know that by the time you read this, you will have found at least a touch more of that solution. How many people on this earth have found even that much? But what my own failure is, I think, is that I have never allowed life to enter into me, that for years I went out in search of it and thought about it and thought about it, and looked for more years even in monasteries, hoping that God Himself was a solution, but it never was for me, perhaps because again I thought too much and simply because there are men like Father Moiseis who turn out to be stupid in my eyes is no reason to think that all men are stupid. I know very well that there are human beings and priests among them who do good with their selfishness, and they do help helpless people to come to some sort of dignity. What I want cannot be told in words, but is only to be felt, or what is more likely is that it's not clear enough in my mind for me to express it. It is something that I knew was in you and there was a time when I thought we could manage a life together, but I was never able to word it out, to put it into sentences, in any way, but what I hoped was that a look on my face, which you never saw, would explain it all. You saw so much here, so much more than I saw when I first arrived, but you didn't see me except as a friend and I wanted more than that and I thought that you were capable of giving it. I wanted *you*; I wanted

you in possession, ownership, I wanted you to give yourself to me in a way, to such an extent, that I could even go so far as to eat you while you watched me do it. I think of the love I have to give to the world. I think of myself exploding the energy of love, of that shell inside me bursting apart and sending shrapnel bits not to cut and harm the flesh, but to enter into it and invade the bloodstream with all the gentleness I can offer; sending through each nerve a piece of compassion that would rest the body and soul and allow me, me, myself, to be acceptable before Thee O Lord, my God. But you went off and left me again alone surrounded by people, my problem, people for whom I have no understanding, wanting to be accepted, but accepting nothing, wanting to be loved but only loving myself, wanting a world that never permitted me to exist because I never permitted that world to exist as it was, but only as I wanted it to be, and how could anything be but what it is and no one's thinking will ever change it. If I want to accept you, believe in you, I must accept what you are, not what I want you to be, not what you might have been in my mind. Think how much the same we are, think how different! You will always be discovering new lands, maybe only on your canvases, whereas I have finished my wanderings, and Father Moiseis can forever remain Father Moiseis, for I know that nothing I can think or do will alter his soul or his presence in the slightest. If you live each moment to its fullest, you are living, but once you begin to think Oh! now I am living! you are lost. Lost.

"For I am surely lost now. And I see no living or dying but that they are the same thing. If I am dead inside me, what is life to me? I have no theories about an afterlife, and at this very instant I believe that there can be none, that death is nothing more than extinction, oblivion, an absolute end to

all, but in this same instant, I am lost and there is nowhere to go, no one on whom to make my mark, no one who will some day say Where do you suppose he is now, or What a pity Manolo isn't around to enjoy this moment, or If only I could reach out and touch him now. I don't ask for much. I don't think that I ever have. What I ask is only to love in peace, and that has never come to me and of course never will, and so I must somehow bring to a close an existence that has never been anything but excessively painful. I'm not sorry that I'm writing all this down for you to read. Maybe it's that I need to torture someone else for a change, tired as I am of torturing myself, and you are the most likely person. But there isn't much choice, is there? If I write at all, it must be written to you, because I love you, because you are the only one who might know what it is I'm talking about, because you are certainly the only one who could ever be more than someone I listen to, more than someone whose words do more than just go in my ears. I well remember that day I told you of my episodes with my Puerangas who followed me into the fields, and how barren the experiences had become, but that the experiences had given me life. For a whole month, soon after your departure, I knew no one but myself, a project that I planned to see how I would feel, and it turned out to be just as pleasurable because my mind was able to throw its thoughts as arms around a someone else, and that someone else returned the embrace. Yet, after the month passed, I went back to the fields, because my bed became so empty, so lonely, and there was no reason I could think of that made any difference between my own and another's body, though I don't even know for sure why it was that I wanted to make that experiment.

"Where have I led myself in this letter? Surely there's

something missing, something I meant to say but haven't even begun to think about, yet I am finished. Maybe all these pages are to tell you that I cannot find any reason to live any longer. The emptiness of death cannot be more painful than the emptiness of life. I too am jealous of you, because you are doing what I wanted to do, what I expected to do which I never until now have had the courage to attempt. To go off into the completely unknown. My jealousy has given me the courage and I will be gone long before you return. The miseries I've evolved within myself are already of the past and I begin for once to evolve a sense of contentment. Let us now pray. Missionary that I was, let me missionize myself from madness to sanity.

"An afternote: I am leaving this letter for you along with all my manuscripts in the hands of Hermano. You can read or not read the manuscripts, as you like, but I want them to be destroyed when you are done. If I live at all, I prefer to live in a friend's memory, rather than on paper. Wish me luck."\*

*RACHEL pours the last drops of tea into a cup and the two ceremonies come simultaneously to an end.*

*AARON takes an orange from the fruit bowl and moves to the chair near the fireplace. He does not peel the orange; he merely holds onto it.*

*RACHEL removes the tea set from the table.*

*The light shining through the window is dimmer now.*

\*From *Keep the River on Your Right*, by Tobias Schneebaum, published by Grove Press, Inc., copyright © 1969 by Tobias Schneebaum.

RACHEL moves toward AARON and sits on the floor opposite him.

**THE SMALL TALK CEREMONY:**

*The director and actors find a way, vocally, to create "small talk"*

RACHEL: Have you seen Lois?

AARON: Thursday, I think.

RACHEL: How is she?

AARON: Tired. Depressed.

RACHEL: I haven't heard from her in weeks.

AARON: She sometimes gives me the impression that life is just barely tolerable for her these days. But I get that impression from practically everybody. Sometimes it's okay and sometimes it's terrible and mostly it's terrible.

RACHEL: And the last letter was this long, long letter and when I finished reading it I wasn't even sure I knew what she was saying.

AARON: And sometimes it's not so terrible.

RACHEL: I think for you these Sundays are an oasis. I look at you and it's good being with you, to look at you, and still I look at you and wonder if you see how lonely it can be here.

AARON: That it's different and not so different.

RACHEL: What it is, Aaron, is maybe we've narrowed our vision too much. All those years just talking about the same things. Art. Music. Film. Theater. In the end it was just another self-contained world and there was so much going on outside we shielded ourselves from.

AARON: We filled ourselves, stuffed ourselves. There was no room anymore to let something in.

RACHEL: Maybe Lois needs to empty herself. I need to empty myself.

AARON: She says funny things, Lois. Sometimes not such funny things. But she said to Benjamin the other day, "With the crown of thorns I wear, why should I be bothered with a prick like you?"

RACHEL: Dorothy Parker said that.

AARON: I knew it was too good to have come out of Lois' head.

RACHEL: It sifts through.

The secret, I think, is to start learning about all the things you never even imagined could have interested you once.

AARON: For example?

RACHEL: For example. Religion. Architecture.

For example. Simone Weil. Did you ever read Simone Weil? God. The church. I laughed at those things. When she says the special function of the intelligence requires total liberty, that I understand. Her pain I understand. In that light, it makes sense to make that kind of commitment. Christianity, she says, is catholic by right. Not in fact. That I understand.

AARON: That's what it's about, Rachel. The ones who plunge into it all the way. Through the private pain.

RACHEL: For example. Architecture. Who cares about buildings? You care about buildings? Yes. You care. For example. Ruskin. Did you ever read Ruskin? Wait. I'll read you Ruskin.

RACHEL *rushes—the rush is stopped short for a second as if she is moving through space.*

AARON: You're cuckoo.

RACHEL: Ruskin.

"Nobody wants ornaments in this world, but everybody wants integrity. All the fair devices that ever were fancied, are not worth a lie. Leave your walls as bare as a planed board, or build them on baked mud and chopped straw, if need be; but do not rough-cast them with falsehood."

Ruskin.

"The greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, or in its gold. Its glory is in its age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity."

Ruskin.

AARON: Lois said the other night, I don't know what prompted it, she said, "I'm only human." I thought, what does she mean, only? As if being human meant being reduced in stature. I mean, one should rise to the glory of one's humanity.

*The space between them is almost magical, as if they were the two people in the enchanted cottage.*

RACHEL: I love you.

*They move towards each other in sensuality.  
There is a long pause as they explore the space.*

AARON: But a lot of the time we can't.

RACHEL: And Schopenhauer said that architecture is frozen music. You told me that.

*Suddenly, without warning, AARON stares into space, his body goes limp, and the orange falls out of his hand across the floor. AARON dies.*

*RACHEL moves towards him and stares, shocked, and freezes during*

#### THE DEATH CEREMONY:

*in which AARON alone utters the random thoughts he might have in the second before death.*

AARON: I knew it'd come. But not so soon. Never, so soon. Not in the middle of a strange country. Not with someone I loved and didn't know. Rachel, I want to know you. I want you, Rachel, Rach, I want you to know me. Now you'll never know me. Did you know me? Say you know me. And I want to be able to pull out this twisted heart with my hands and fling it raw into my father's face and thank him for cursing me with the rheumatic agony of my flesh. My father's face. Ashen. In a grey coffin. He didn't know me either, Rach. Simpler. Simpler. I want to make it simpler and I keep thinking I hate Sundays, I've always hated Sundays. And the doctors. The hundreds of doctors. And the escape from doctors. And the things I found out, about things I never wanted to know. And all I want in this second is to go to Africa, to go where some curious gravity pulls me, to Tanzania and Nairobi, the Nile, the Congo, the Sudan, the Zambezi, to Ghana and Uganda, to Kilimanjaro, Ashanti and Cameroon and Dahomey, across the Kalahari and the Sahara, to dance with the Masai, and sing in Mali. To die, heartless, in Africa.

AARON dies as RACHEL comes slowly to life and lets loose a soundless scream.

#### THE AFTERMATH CEREMONY:

RACHEL goes through the motions of pulling herself together and with deliberation checks AARON's pulse and listens to his heart and puts her hand to his heart in a manner that suggests that she has done this before. During this, she is calm.

Suddenly, panic sets in and she begins to scream again and this time, the scream freezes into something that almost looks like joy or ecstasy and is transformed into pain and suddenly it is a real scream.

She sits on the arm of the chair where AARON's body is slumped and holds onto him and starts to talk to him.

RACHEL: Now, here are the possibilities, Aaron. I have to call the doctor. But. In order to call the doctor, I have to put on my coat and get in my car and somehow get to a telephone booth and it wouldn't really be long because even in this wilderness there is probably a telephone booth somewhere. Still. If I did that, I'd have to leave you alone and

Aaron

I couldn't bear to leave you alone.

The other possibility is to stay here with you, what difference does it make now, and go mad.

The first possibility is sane, the second insane and yet one doesn't make any more sense than the other.

Or I could make some fresh tea.

The question then is what form my madness takes.

For openers, I want one moment back. The moment when you were putting the wood in the fireplace. Now you just get up there and stand there.

#### THE FANTASY CEREMONY:

Romantic music up. The light behind the window takes on the colors of a sunset in a painted postcard. The fireplace glows.

RACHEL: Now I come up to you and place my hand on your shoulder and we just stand there for a minute and you turn around and look at me and we laugh.

RACHEL laughs and the sound of AARON's laughter can be heard and together they dance, although AARON remains dead in the chair.

The music stops.

RACHEL: No, that can't be.

The lights are natural again.

That never could have been, could it? We know this much now. Making a fresh pot of tea makes more sense than that. That moment's gone. That moment never was.

#### THE MEMORY CEREMONY:

They haven't timed this autumn yet, it hasn't been clocked yet. This may not even be Sunday. We only think it's Sun-

day because there have been so many Sundays for so many years, so many Sundays of you reaching out for an oasis and me hiding the loneliness I was dying of the rest of the week. Okay, say it's Sunday. The more facts the better. It's Sunday and we had tea and you read to me and I played music for you and we talked about Lois and some moment in the present mingled with some memory of the past connected and we were one in that connection and you died.

Facts.

But what kind of place is this you died in? Where is this place? It's my place. Not yours. Jewtown. That's your place. Poor. Streets. What were those streets? Hester Street. Allen Street. Ludlow Street. Essex Street. Eldridge Street. Orchard Street. Like names borrowed from some English aristocracy, for piece finishers and street Arabs. Division Street. Why didn't you go home to die?

Be blessed, not damned.

Be blessed and damned.

This is no place for you. This is some museum of our encounters. Here, we were different kinds of refugees.

*It is getting darker now. Most of the light comes from the window.*

There is no time. And yet maybe it is autumn. It's getting darker earlier. Or is that because there's no time?

*RACHEL moves slowly to the table. On the way, she retrieves the orange that AARON dropped. She sits down.*

RACHEL: The language of medical journals is like

*Finnegan's Wake* to me. What is there to know about the heart? That it beats? That it breaks? That one day, insidiously, slothfully, it gives out, gives up?

*RACHEL, the orange still in her hand, gets her coat and moves slowly to the door. And leaves. After a long moment, she returns and slowly puts the coat back and returns to the table.*

If I had a minute, just a minute, mind you, no more, no less, one minute of warning, one fucking minute of warning, I could have at least given you some of my energy, my life, to take with you.

Given you what you gave me. Something a little better than what was. To be there like you were there when I went to hell for a dance or two, once too often, with fools. Like that part of you that was in me, that rang Chinese bells in my head and told me, Stop!

That part of you is still with me. Always will be. It was your gift.

*She looks at the book that he has given her today.*

*And Diving into the Wreck.*

Your doctor. Did you see my doctor, you asked. Yes, I said. I saw him. You asked, I remember you asking, What do you think? I said I saw him. And you said, What do you mean by that? You saw him? What did he say? What did you feel about him? You wanted to talk about all the things you knew and understood and I didn't want to talk about it, I couldn't talk about, knowing you knew didn't make it easier. I didn't want to know. To understand. I was afraid. I couldn't let myself know you were afraid, too.

*Pause*

Look, I'll put on my coat and get in my car and somehow I'll get to a telephone booth.

You know something, Aaron, I'm really pissed. I wasn't prepared for this. What I was prepared for was another Sunday. To make love to you, to feel you with me, to drink some tea and pass the time. To be with you today and not to think of what it was like some yesterday. To be with you and to be with myself.

Oh, my God, Aaron, I'm dying.

**THE REBIRTH CEREMONY:**

*RACHEL slowly starts to peel the orange. The stage is dark except for a light on RACHEL. The light begins to focus on the orange and the light follows the peel as it falls to the floor. The lights go out and, in the darkness, after a long silence, we hear from Mahler's Kindertotenlieder: "Nun seh' ich vol, warum so dunkle Flammen."*

*A light may or may not go up again on the flower arrangement.*