

GETHSEMANE SPRINGS

**a buffo-romance
in three movements**

by Harvey Perr

First Movement: AN ORCHESTRA'S PLAYING
Adagio ma non troppo
Second Movement: AN ORCHESTRA'S PLAYING
Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo
Third Movement: VARIATIONS ON A THEME
Allegro vivace e appassionato

THE TIME: Now.
And Marianne's Then.

THE PLACE: Gethsemane Springs.
Two adjoining sitting rooms in the Hervé home.

THE PEOPLE:

Hopkins
Snodgrass
Marianne
Victor
Mme. Hervé
Claude Hervé
Louise Hervé
David Rubin
Shulamith
Elena
Mira

Begin the Beguine.
First Call to the Post.

FIRST MOVEMENT

AN ORCHESTRA'S PLAYING

ADAGIO MA NON TROPPO

In a room,
the one with horses.
At the piano, SNODGRASS.
At a window, looking out
towards the horizon, MARIANNE.

MARIANNE

There are no silver birches.

SNODGRASS

This isn't Russia.

MARIANNE

This isn't even Vermont.

(Pause)

And still. Even without the silver birches. Such a sunset.

SNODGRASS

Yes. But a sunset. Nevertheless.

MARIANNE

I can't think of what to do with my life. Except go backwards.

SNODGRASS

It sure slips away, the past. Right past us, the past.

MARIANNE

But never out of sight.

SNODGRASS

It sounds good. I don't know what it means, but it sounds good.

MARIANNE

It means it's always there. To haunt you. To tantalize you. To remind you. To keep you from. To haunt you.

SNODGRASS

But why waste time looking at your life out of the corners of your eyes? Stick to the sunset.

MARIANNE

At any rate, it's not my past I want to go back to.

SNODGRASS

Somebody else's past?

MARIANNE

Anybody else's past.

SNODGRASS

It's anti-American. Americans always have to move. How long do you think the Pilgrims were at Plymouth Rock before they began talking about how to get to Cheyenne?

MARIANNE

It's an endangered species, the human voice, the accurate human voice, the voice just talking plain talk. I long for. I ache for. Plain talk.

SNODGRASS

More nostalgia. As if you're not hearing any of it. As if you don't expect to. That's terrible.

MARIANNE

I'm not hearing any of it. I don't expect to. Go ahead. Just try it. You saying something. And then my saying something that follows what you've said. And then your saying something that follows what I've said which followed what you said. You and me, you and everyone, me and everyone, we sing different songs and pretend it's conversation. I try to tell you how miserable I am.

SNODGRASS

Silver birches.

MARIANNE

And you talk about the Pilgrims moving to Cheyenne.

SNODGRASS

It's impossible to eliminate history from any dialogue.

MARIANNE

Yes. Silver birches. I long for. I ache for. Silver birches and plain talk and Hawaiian guitars. Weekends in the country. The sweet fragrance of the country. The sweet natural fragrance of the country. Days at the races. Women strolling with parasols. Men with riding whips. In breeches. And not horses sweating in competition. But a steeplechase. Where every obstacle defines some mystery of our lives. When a woman's ankle, barely seen, except perhaps when she climbed into a carriage or got down out of a carriage, when she was forced to lift her skirt, when a woman's ankle was glorified. Dignified. Admired. Glanced at. Out of the corners of one's eyes. As you imagine I would look at my life. If I should go backwards. Which I don't really want to do, but which I do want to do rather than go through what I am going through, rather than go through the agony I am going through. Yes. I would rather go backwards than stick, as you put it, to the sunset, which, anyway, has set, which means that you would rather I look at the night. And in the night, in the evening, the swish of taffeta, long white gloves, silver candleabras illuminating the tapestries on the wall, hunting scenes and scenes of women lifting their skirts, displaying

MARIANNE (continued)

their ankles, before a puddle of water, a puddle of water with the moon reflected in it, and moving before the tapestries, arm in arm, towards the dining room which is rich with the smell of butter, beurre Bercy and beurre d'amandes and beurre Vert Pré and beurre de foie gras. And Champignons à la greque and salade de tomates and oeufs à la coque, eggs delivered fresh that morning from the farm, the butter too would be fresh and sweet and delivered that morning, and aspic in the shape of a swan, and soupe auvergnate and carpe à la juive, carp à la Jewess, carp à la Jewish wife, homard à l'Americaine and carbonnades à la Flamande and faisan rôti and paté en croûte and flan aux framboises but only, of course, if the framboises were in season, and crepes stuffed with plum. And from the cellar, where they have been aging, mellowing, waiting for the perfect moment, waiting for years for the perfect moment in which to make their appearance, the great wines, from the great vineyards, the great whites for the fish and the chicken, the great reds for the meat, the great tangerines and greens, if there were such wines, just for their color, all of this, of course, before the revolution, although just which revolution is totally irrelevant. And somewhere between the pheasant and the framboises, the taffeta would fold upon itself, brushing gently against my ankle, and I would look up, my eyelashes lifting slowly, tentatively, discreetly, and he would be looking at me from across the table and I'd know he was looking at me all through dinner, looking and waiting for me to look up and look at him, and don't think for a moment that I don't know I might actually find romance if my idea of romance weren't so excessive, and, anyway, I'd look down again and I wouldn't see his eyes again until, hours later, when the music started and he asked me for a dance.

SNODGRASS

What I love about you, Marianne, is that you'd imagine all of that and still long for plain talk.

MARIANNE

Not too plain.

SNODGRASS

And Hawaiian guitars.

MARIANNE

But softly.

Through the door,
LOUISE,
and from another room,
SHULAMITH, who is a little drunk
and getting drunker and who
enters so unobtrusively
it's hard to notice anything else.

LOUISE

When everything falls apart, collapses, goes right out the window, we don't have much choice, do we, but to take everything up again, right, start from scratch, so to speak, because, after all, no discouragement is final, is it? Maybe we're even at a better place, because, when you think of it, now you even have some awareness of, some insight into how everything has deteriorated, disintegrated. I mean, when you think of it, what's as funny as knowing how terrible everything is?

SNODGRASS

Any requests? I'm putting together a Hoagy Carmichael medley.

MARIANNE

Shed a little light on the subject. Light, Louise, is all. Light is everything.

SNODGRASS

I start with Hong Kong Blues and segue into Baltimore Oriole.

LOUISE

For some people, Marianne, my angel, there are only shadows.

SNODGRASS

I've been trying to avoid Stardust but I'm not sure I can get away with it.

MARIANNE

There are no shadows without light. Light creates the shadows.

SNODGRASS

I mean, after all, imagine a Hoagy Carmichael medley without Stardust.

LOUISE

Chopin, Snodgrass, Chopin. Background music for my distress.

MARIANNE

Tell. Tell Marianne all.

LOUISE

Did you ever see Dinner at Eight? Billie Burke, I think it's Billie Burke, yes it's Billie Burke, well, everything is falling apart, her husband is dying, her daughter is having an affair with a suicidal alcoholic, the guests of honor at this dinner she's been planning have cancelled out, and she's oblivious to everything, everything, has no idea, no idea whatsoever of what's going on around her, and anytime someone tries to tell her, listen I've got problems, she closes her ears and says You think you've got problems, and she catalogues every insignificant detail of her empty existence, all of it climaxed by the fact that her aspic has fallen and You think you've got problems. Well, my aspic.

SNODGRASS

In the shape of a swan.

LOUISE

I don't know what shape my aspic is in. I only know it's fallen. Billie Burke's aspic and mine. Fallen.

SNODGRASS

Not that I have any moral objection to Stardust.

MARIANNE

What's an aspic between friends?

LOUISE

Friends? I invite you and Victor for a quiet weekend in the country and you ask me if you can invite Hopkins and I say, of course, do I have the heart to separate lovers?, and then Hopkins asks if he can bring a friend or two, after all there is plenty of room and do I have the heart to separate lovers?, and he brings a bunch of communists, not you, Snodgrass, you're a Californian, a bunch of pacifists, a bunch of cynical Marxist pacifists who tell me, to my face, my art is decadent, they're hardly here an hour, haven't even had a drink yet, and telling me my art is decadent, what's decadent about a series on the vagina?, don't they know how radical the idea of a vagina is?, the cunt is at the center, the very heart of the universe, for god's sake, a bunch of pacifists, anti-gun lobbyists, and Claude asks them to get up at dawn to go hunting, hunting, Claude, an underground flag-waver, God bless him, who keeps an American flag in the basement and who, every day, every single day, without fail, mind you, goes down to pretend to work, although Heaven knows what work he could be doing, what work he could imagine we'd think he was doing, Claude who goes down to his basement every day to secretly wave his flag, at least he's enough in this world to wave it secretly, my Claude, surrounded by Marxists, my Claude, whose only obsessions are hunting and breeding thoroughbreds, telling them pheasant is in season and making them promise to put everything they've got, telling Hopkins, whose only obsession is survival, to put everything he's got on Fleeting Pleasure, but of course that's the sweet part of Claude, imagining, taking for granted, in fact, that everybody is as rich as he is, but on Fleeting Pleasure who hasn't got a chance, although, who knows, maybe Fleeting Pleasure has no competition at all in this particular handicap, and because I think it will only be you and Victor and Hopkins, although you know I love you Snodgrass, I didn't expect you but I love you, I also asked Elena, so that I would have someone to talk to, someone to meet in private corners here and there, now and then, just to break the monotony of making arrangements, and she asks me if she can bring Mira, Mira who is the last person I want to spend time with, but do I have the heart to separate lovers?, and so there's also Elena who keeps telling me to faire ma toilette or get off the pot and then my mother-in-law who keeps talking French of which I understand maybe every third word which is no way to make sense of whole sentences and on top of everything else, the aspic has fallen.

SHULAMITH leaves
through the door.

LOUISE
And what's decadent about the vagina?

SHULAMITH
backs into the room
turns,
and without a word
sits down again.
Silence.

SNODGRASS
Maybe a strain or two of Stardust. But without playing it
through.

LOUISE rushes out;
not through the door.
Through the door,
CLAUDE enters with
MME. HERVE and VICTOR.

MME. HERVE
Mes cornes sont trop grandes pour passer par une si petite
porte. Ah, Marianne. you are so lovely. Marianne de ma
jeunesse. Tu te rappelle? C'est un vieux truc. Un ancien
French story.

CLAUDE
Remember, Snodgrass. Up at dawn. Get us some birds. And,
after dinner tonight, if you're interested, remember, down
to the stable. She's in grand shape, Fleeting Pleasure. Gave
the crowd at Santa Anita quite a few thrills coming from
at least twenty lengths back in the last couple of furlongs.
Beat Burlesque Comic by a head. Talk about horses for courses.
She's my honey.

MME. HERVE
Flaubert. When he has described Emma Bovary, it could have
been you he has described. "Jamais Madame Bovary ne fut
aussi belle qu'à cette époque; elle avait cette indéfinissable
beauté qui résulte de la joie, de l'enthousiasme, du succès,
et qui n'est que l'harmonie du tempérament avec les circonstances."
C'est toi. It is you.

MARIANNE
You are remarkable, Madame Hervé, you don't look 85.

MME. HERVE
Do I look 87? Petite blague.

CLAUDE
Yes. Early to bed. Up at dawn. Get us some birds. It's the season for pheasants.

SNODGRASS
My inclination is towards subtlety. Forget about Stardust altogether.

VICTOR
How are you, my love?

MARIANNE
Perfect. Even if. There are no silver birches.

MME. HERVE
Ah, la jeune juive.

SHULAMITH
It's true, it would be hard to say you're 85.

MME. HERVE
Ah, ça. And would it be easy to say I was 87?

MARIANNE
And you?

VICTOR
Couldn't be better?

SNODGRASS
Why the preoccupation with 87?

MME. HERVE
It is my intention, with a lot of rest, good food, short walks, les petits promenades, in the woods, it is my intention to live another two years. Mais, tu sais, pour moi, l'histoire humaine semble finie quand on entre dans la guerre de Trente ans.

MARIANNE
And Hopkins?

VICTOR
Hopkins?

MARIANNE
You were with him, weren't you?

VICTOR
Did Louise say anything?

MARIANNE
Just that her aspic has fallen.

SHULAMITH
very politely
goes through the door
and returns through the door
almost as quickly,
sits down
again.

VICTOR
Nothing else?

MARIANNE
That Fleeting Pleasure hasn't got a chance.

CLAUDE
She said that?

SNODGRASS
Said it? She sang it.

MME. HERVE
There are so many strangers here this weekend. Of course, there is no more family, is that not true? So we must make the family. Souvent, it is a family of strangers. Ah, nous sommes déjà loin du quinzième siècle. Enfin. There are so many strangers, Claude, mon chou, we must show notre film.

SHULAMITH
leaves,
the same way
she first entered.

CLAUDE
She's the favorite.

SNODGRASS
When was fleeting pleasure ever not?

MARIANNE
Would you like to sit down, Madame Hervé?

MME. HERVE
If I do not look 85, pourquoi, why is it that one always asks me to sit down, as if I were 85? Yes, I would like to sit down. No. I find my own chair.

CLAUDE

From at least twenty lengths back. In the last couple of furlongs. Gave them quite a few thrills. At worst, she'll place.

MARIANNE

Can a woman love more than one man at a time?

MME. HERVE

A woman, yes. Because les femmes. Les femmes. Croient innocent tout ce qu'elles osent. You can love two. Three. But a man, no. A man can only love one woman. He can, bien sur, and does, bien sur, pretend to love many, but the real capacity to love more than one man at one time, only a woman can do that. Of this I am certain.

VICTOR

But a man who loves men, can he love more than one man at one time?

MME. HERVE

Ah, ca. Ca, c'est autre chose. Autre comédie. Tout cela n'était que pour rire.

CLAUDE

Beat Burlesque Comic. By a head. A full head.

MME. HERVE

The horse, you know, is like a human. You look into the eyes of a horse and you see le plus triste, the most sad, of men.

SHULAMITH

returns,

in her hand, a fresh drink.

MME. HERVE

One can talk to a horse. This is not myth. C'est la réalité. The horse. Listens. Always. The Camargue. You know these horses? Wild. Free. Savage. Like man must dream to be. He is descended from the Solutré, the Solutré, c'est du temps préhistorique, tu sais, with Arab blood. Of animals, le plus magnifique. There is in him, aussi, the Barbary horse. Un bel animal.

CLAUDE

Burlesque Comic couldn't lose, they said.

MME. HERVE

Le burlesque dominates toujours. L'histoire humaine semble finie quand on entre dans la guerre de Trente ans. I say that. I always say that.

SHULAMITH

politely (and drunkenly)

goes through the door

and returns through the door

almost as quickly.

CLAUDE

An apt phrase. Horses for courses. And the Camino Real turf course. Is the loveliest. And from twenty lengths back. At least.

CLAUDE leaves.

SNODGRASS

The question is, if I forget Stardust, if I forget Stardust altogether, will anyone know it's a Hoagy Carmichael medley?

LOUISE

enters

and, through the door,
leaves.

VICTOR

That's all that Louise said?

MARIANNE

And that the vagina is at the very center of the universe.

VICTOR

She's very funny, Louise. Very funny.

MARIANNE

Was there a time, there must have been a time, when people just stood still and looked at, really looked at, the way things moved around them, the way things might change, literally change, before their eyes, if, of course, they looked, really looked?

SNODGRASS

Of course, I could include Stardust. It wouldn't be hard. It wouldn't be subtle but it wouldn't be hard.

MME. HERVE

It is a very interesting film, notre film, this film, it is un petit morceau, a little piece, of the histoire of Gethsemane Springs. C'est mon mari, you know, who gave Gethsemane Springs its name, who came here, when there was nothing here, rien, rien de tout, this was the, what do you say, the wilderness, un pays sauvage. And he said, mon mari, Gethsemane, Gethsemane is the wilderness to which leaders, prophets must retreat, parce que, c'est un garden of anguish and suffering, alors, one must retreat here to prepare for liberation, in order to grow politiquement, one must find first, d'abord, sanctuary, political sanctuary. A great man, mon mari. You must see this film.

MIRA and ELENA
arrive.

ELENA

Madame Hervé, nobody, nobody would guess you were 85.

MME. HERVE

Would they guess I was 87?

SHULAMITH

politely and drunkenly,
through the door,
departs.

MIRA

Strange young woman. Haunted. Very attractive.

ELENA

Oh, yeah?

MARIANNE

And very fragile.

MIRA

Who isn't?

LOUISE

enters,
through the door.

ELENA

Louise. We haven't had a moment.

LOUISE

Up to here. The weekend. The aspic. Can't locate the key
to the wine cellar.

MME. HERVE

Occupied territory, Gethsemane. C'est ça que mon mari a dit.

LOUISE

What do you think of the vagina?

ELENA

I think it's lovely.

LOUISE

Good. But don't tell anybody. They'll think you're decadent.

LOUISE

leaves.

SNODGRASS
The hell with Hoagy Carmichael.

MIRA
looks through the music.

MME. HERVE
"Alors Jésus parvient avec eux à un domaine appelé Gethsémani, et il dit aux disciples:

SNODGRASS
When they reached a place called Getsemane, he said to his disciples:

MME. HERVE
"Restez ici, tandis que je m'en irai prier là-bas.

SNODGRASS
Sit here while I pray.

MME. HERVE
"Et prenant avec lui Pierre et les deux fils de Zébédie, il commença à ressentir tristesse et angoisse. Alors il leur dit:

SNODGRASS
And he took Peter and James and John with him. Horror and dismay came over him, and he said to them:

MME. HERVE
"Mon ame est triste à en mourir; demeurez ici et veillez avec moi."

SNODGRASS
My heart is ready to break with grief; stop here and stay awake.

VICTOR
That's a very sexy gown, Elena. One hell of a sexy gown.

ELENA
Oh, yeah?

SNODGRASS
Then he went forward a little, threw himself on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, this hour might pass him by.

MIRA
Can you play this?

SNODGRASS
I can play anything. Except Stardust.

MIRA

It's such a beautiful aria.

SNODGRASS

Sing?

MIRA

Sure.

Casta Diva, Casta Diva che inargent
 Queste sacre, antiche pianti,
 A noi volgi, il bel sembiante
 Senza nube e senza vel.

Casta Diva che inargent
 Queste sacre

Queste sacre antiche piante
 A noi volgi, il bel sembiante
 A noi volgi
 Ah! il bel sembiante
 Senza nube e senza vel.

And then the chorus comes in, it's just so beautiful the
 way the chorus comes in.

Casta Diva che inargent
 Et cetera.

MARIANNE

So lovely. If only I could sing like that.

MIRA

And then, as the chorus sings, under, Norma again.
 Ah! si. Ah!

Tempra, O Diva
 Tempra tu, dei cori ardenti
 Tempra ancora, tempra ancor
 Io zelo audace.
 And then the chorus again.
 Si.

MARIANNE

God, it's so painful.

MIRA

And Norma.
 Spargi in terra, ah! quella pace
 Ah! che regnar tu fai regnar
 Tu fai nel ciel.

DAVID

enters, through the door.

MIRA

You must hear it, Callas, Muzio, and the way the voice and
 the chorus overlap.

A noi tutti volgi il sembiante
 Senza nube e senza vel.

MIRA

And Norma again.
 Tu fai...Ah! si....
 Tu fai nel ciel.....

And
 MIRA
 continues the song
 to the end
 in this manner
 and at the end,
 DAVID
 leaves.

MIRA

It must be the secret of art. To bring something to life
 without reducing life in scale. Whatever it is. The secret.
 The mystery. The enigma.

MARIANNE

If I could sing. Like that.

MIRA

If it's written, you can learn to sing it.

MME. HERVE

Le comte Rosenberg, un comte et un juif, the aristocracy
 but also Jewish, he has said que la musique de Mozart est
 beaucoup trop difficile pour le chant, that the music of
 Mozart is much too difficult for the song, for the singing,
 but of course he was a very silly count. Mais par example,
 ce n'est qu'après la mort de Mozart que Don Giovanni sera
 reconnu par l'ensemble des critiques comme un grand opéra.

ELENA

If it's written, you can learn to sing it. What a ridiculous,
 what a pompous thing to say.

MIRA

If you want. If it's from the heart. It comes out. If it's
 real. If it's straight. It comes out. There's no keeping it
 in. If it's there. If it wants to come out.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça.

ELENA

To bring something to life without reducing it in scale.
 What does that mean? You're so full of sweeping statements.
 What does that mean? You could bring shit to life without
 reducing it in scale.

MIRA

Some do. I make no moral distinctions. What's shit to you
 may be a touch of paradise to me.

ELENA

Are you telling me you have no morals?

MIRA

Of course, my morals are the sum of me, who I am, what I am, what I know, have been taught, have learned, have found joy in, have suffered through, have made peace with and still find unsettling, all of me, absolute right now and always, always, subject to change, so that nothing, not even my morality is really absolute. It can change tomorrow, next year, in the very next moment if I'm open to it, and possibly, just possibly, it might never change, and I think that's what we call life and that's all there is, nothing more, nothing less, and there's no end to it.

ELENA

And what you find strange and haunted and attractive I might find plain.

MIRA

I see.

SNODGRASS

Plain talk.

MARIANNE

Plain talk.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça.

VICTOR

The plums. Has anyone tasted the plums? Straight from their plum tree. The most delicious plums I've ever tasted. I have a passion for plums.

MIRA

leaves,
through the door,
just as
HOPKINS
enters,
through the door.

VICTOR

I'd like to bite into one of those plums right now.

HOPKINS
sits down,
at the piano,
next to SNODGRASS.

MARIANNE

Plum. It's such a lovely word. Somehow. To eat it, to bite into it. Is to destroy it.

ELENA

Or appreciate it. Enjoy it.

MARIANNE

I've never thought of a plum, one way or the other, as something to eat, something to eat for its taste, something to eat for the pleasure of eating it, the sheer pleasure of eating a plum. No. It is because I loved the sound of the word. Plum. Because I loved the sound of the word that I enjoyed the idea of eating a plum, but the reality, the simple act of eating the plum, enjoying the plum for itself, that has always eluded me. It suddenly seems sad, very very sad to me that I've reached a kind of middle-age and knowing that I've wasted so many years taking pleasure in the word and not in the fruit.

VICTOR

The sense of it. I don't understand the sense of it. Eating a plum without enjoying it for what it is. A plum.

MARIANNE

I know you don't understand.

HOPKINS

You could do both. Take pleasure in the word. Take pleasure in the plum.

ELENA

I don't like plums. I never liked plums.

LOUISE

returns.

In her arms,

a basket of fruit.

VICTOR takes a plum.

LOUISE

Found the key to the wine cellar. Located the key to the wine cellar. But something else will get lost. Something else will get dislocated.

VICTOR

These plums are delicious.

MARIANNE

takes a plum.

Bites into it.

LOUISE

And do you know where it was? Right where it always was. Right where it was supposed to be. And it was the last place I thought of looking for it.

MARIANNE

I like the plum. I really like the plum. I just don't like the word anymore.

LOUISE

The word?

MARIANNE

Plum.

LOUISE

Something else will get lost. Something else will definitely get lost before the evening is over.

LOUISE

leaves,
through the door.

MME. HERVE

The coming. The going. Toujours le mouvement. For me, not so much the coming, not so much the going, mais ici, avec le souvenir, le memory.

SNODGRASS plays:
Begin the Beguine.

HOPKINS

When they begin the beguine.

MME. HERVE

Voila. La musique.

HOPKINS

Funny. People hear this, they only hear the music.

ELENA

hums, moves, hums.

HOPKINS

Never the words. As if there were no words. As if the words didn't exist. As if it were just. The beguine. Some corny romantic song. From some other time. Frivolous. Not to be, never to be, taken seriously. But it's a poem. About loss. The torment of loss.

MARIANNE

Loss?

SNODGRASS

From the top, Hopkins?

HOPKINS

From the top, Snodgrass.

HOPKINS

When they begin the beguine

It brings back the sound of music so tender.

Imagine that. Someone starts to play a melody, barely starts to play, and it's enough to bring back a sound. Of music. And not just music. A special kind of music. Tender music. Tender. The sound of which rushes back into memory just because someone has begun the beguine.

It brings back a night of tropical splendor.

And the sound of that tender music also brings back the memory of a night, a very specific night, in the tropics. It's not enough that it brings back the sound of music so tender, it also brings back the whole goddamned night. And a night of tropical splendor, no less. Can't you just see it? It's every phantasy you've ever had. It's Rio. It's Majorca. It's. It's Palm Springs.

It brings back a memory ever green.

Clearly it's not one of those memories that gets put away, never to emerge again. It's Ever. Green.

I'm with you

See? Already it's down to the personal. I. You. Very specific. The imagery is so intense, the sound of the music, the night in the tropics, the memory of it all, so fresh it's as if it were happening all over again, just the way it happened then.

I'm with you once more

See?

under the stars

And down by the shore

Now we know it's near a beach, the waves probably roaring, shimmering in the moonlight, the waves lapping against the. Lapping against the. Against the. Against the shore.

An orchestra's playing.

It's Rio. It's definitely Rio.

And even the palms seem to be swaying.

You see? It's as if the palms seem to be swaying. Now. To the music they were playing. Then. Now, that's a very complicated, very sophisticated thought.

When they begin the beguine.

Now. I'm alone. And I hear this music. And it brings back everything so vividly that I'm living it again. But.

To live it again is past all endeavor

Of course. Can you imagine anything more exhausting than having to live through something you've already lived through once?

MARIANNE

I can't. I can't imagine anything more exhausting.

HOPKINS

We do it, though, don't we? We know how exhausting it is and yet we continue to do it again, over and over again, just live through the same thing, the same ordeal over and over again.

Except when that tune clutches my heart.

Well, that lightens the load. That definitely lightens the load. Something about that tune makes it a little easier to live through it again.

And there we are

Just like before. Just like we were the first time.

swearing to love forever

Now some people think it's swearing true love, but it's just to love, the irregular verb, the simple act, to love. After all, under the circumstances, it's enough, to love. Without swearing true love forever. Of course, the concept of forever is rather immense. And yet. There are some situations. An orchestra playing. Tender music. Under the stars. Down by the shore. In the tropics. Are you going to swear to love for an hour and twenty minutes? Nobody's taking forever seriously.

And promising never -

Well, if you accept the concept of forever, it's impossible to promise less.

Never to part.

What moments divine, what rapture serene

Even Cole Porter is entitled to his excesses.

Till clouds came along

Now this is the part that everyone forgets. That it wasn't all wonderful. That even in that perfect setting, even under the most ideal circumstances in the history of romantic literature, even in Rio, clouds came along.

to disperse the joys we had tasted

Just the word: disperse. It is not a very romantic word. It is the image of reality intruding. The guys in the orchestra, down by the shore, have stopped playing, are probably soaking wet, you're probably wet yourself and are forced to move indoors, go back to your hotel room, change your clothes, dry your hair. The momentum has broken. The joys you had tasted have disintegrated.

And now when I hear people curse the chance that was wasted The people. The common clay. The millions of us who dream of reaching that peak and never do. Who regret, who curse, every boring day of our boring lives, the missed opportunities. The rejected dreamers. Who have depended on the radio for our music. Who have never even been to Atlantic City. Who maybe stick a popper up our noses to create the thrill. We're the ones you, who have reached the peak, finally, ultimately have to identify with, once reality has intruded. Once reality has intruded, where are you? Right down here with us, one of the rejected dreamers. Regretting. Cursing. The chance that was wasted. I only hope you've learned something from the fall.

HOPKINS

I know but too well what they mean
 The resignation. God. The defeat. He has learned something.
 He knows only too well what they mean when they curse the
 chance that was wasted.

So don't let them begin the beguine!

Are you kidding? It was exhausting enough to live through
 the romance a second time. If they begin that fucking beguine,
 we'll have to live through the reality a second time, too.

Let the love that was once a fire remain an ember

Our only salvation, the only redemption we can know, the
 only way we can hold onto at least a small part of it all,
 is to not be reminded, to cut the memory out, to stay away
 from the music.

Let it sleep like the dead desire I only remember
 Of course, it's hard to cut memory out altogether. Even the
 memory of something that's dead.

When they begin the beguine.

Oh yes, let them begin the beguine, make them play
 And even harder to stay away from the music. The music that
 dredges up the memory. In particular. You know what the
 music does, you have no illusions at all about what it is
 the music does, and still you ask to hear it again, to make
 them, force them, encourage them to play it again. It's
 the ultimate masochism.

Till the stars that were there before return above you
 If you thought living the romance again was exhausting, if
 you thought living the reality again was exhausting, just
 imagine how exhausting it is to live with the false hope,
 the phantasy.

Till you whisper to me once more "Darling, I love you!"
 As if, even if were possible, it would make any difference,
 as if it would make any difference even if we could find
 again what we've clearly lost. And yet. Perhaps. If we've
 really learned something. If our perspective has really
 changed. Perhaps.

And we suddenly know

Yes. What do we suddenly know?

what heaven we're in

God!

When they begin the beguine.

SNODGRASS

keeps playing
 as HOPKINS
 gets up and dances,
 through the door,
 with MARIANNE.

After a moment,
VICTOR leaves,
not through the door.

ELENA

Where's he going?

SNODGRASS

Probably to the john.

ELENA

I've always wanted to see a play where a character leaves a room not to go anywhere in particular, not to do anything specific, anything monumental, just leaves to go to the bathroom. Just to take a leak. Or something.

SNODGRASS

Maybe he is going to do something. Monumental.

ELENA

He's cute. Don't you think he's cute? I think he's cute.

SNODGRASS

Attractive.

ELENA

Cute.

SNODGRASS

Because he has power, he is attractive. Like Hitler.

ELENA

Cute.

SNODGRASS

Genghis Khan.

ELENA

Very cute. There's a little boy in that man's body.

SNODGRASS

Nixon.

ELENA

You don't like him.

SNODGRASS

I don't like him.

ELENA

Even so. You'd like to spend an hour with him.

SNODGRASS

I'd like to spend an hour with Hitler.

ELENA

You think he's alive?

SNODGRASS

Victor?

ELENA

Hitler.

SNODGRASS

And well. And living in Rio. And an orchestra's playing.

ELENA

You're crazy. You're all crazy.

SNODGRASS

It makes the weekend, don't you think, the fact, that we're all crazy?

ELENA

If you're perverse.

SNODGRASS

I'm perverse. I want to do a Hoagy Carmichael medley and not include Stardust.

ELENA

That's perverse.

SNODGRASS

That's what I thought.

ELENA

But. Understandably so.

SNODGRASS

Does that eliminate perversity from the whole thing?

ELENA

It eliminates perversity.

SNODGRASS

Too bad.

ELENA

But not charm.

SNODGRASS

Ah. Charm. That's another thing.

ELENA

It is?

SNODGRASS

Very much so.

ELENA

But. Perversity and charm, do they go?

SNODGRASS

Always.

MME. HERVE

Qui est-ce qui habite à Rio?

SNODGRASS

The Brazilians.

ELENA

Those are the breaks in Brazil.

SNODGRASS

plays a bit of a samba.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça.

ELENA

Then.

SNODGRASS

Yes?

ELENA

You're charming. And perverse.

SNODGRASS

And Victor. He's cute.

ELENA

I think so.

SNODGRASS

I think so, too. Still.

ELENA

Still?

SNODGRASS

It's not enough.

ELENA

Charm. Perversity. Are they enough?

SNODGRASS

If I have them both, I'd say so. Yes. I'd say so.

ELENA

But if Victor has whatever he has, no matter what it is, and in what combination, it would never be enough, would it?

SNODGRASS

Not for me.

ELENA

Ah!

SNODGRASS

Ah!

ELENA

You're cute, too.

SNODGRASS

But enough for Marianne. And. Obviously. For you.

ELENA

I only give the impression it's enough for me. In reality, it's not. In reality, nothing is enough for me.

SNODGRASS

In reality, nothing is enough for anybody.

ELENA

I think you're cute. Don't you think you're cute?

SNODGRASS

Would you spend an hour with me?

ELENA

I'm here with you. Right now.

MME. HERVE

Et moi.

SNODGRASS

The lady vanishes not.

ELENA

Those are the breaks.

SNODGRASS and ELENA

In Brazil.

SNODGRASS

plays a bit of a samba

and

ELENA dances with MME. HERVE.

MME. HERVE

Ah, I was déjà veilli, already grown old, when they danced such dances. When we were the good neighbors. But not assez veilli, not old enough, to not want to go to Rio de Janeiro pour le mardi gras, to dance through the night. Avec un jeune quelqu'un. Tu sais?

ELENA

Je sais.

CLAUDE
enters,
with a camera
and takes a picture.
The candid shot.

MME. HERVE

Alors. I do not look 85 and yet I am 85 et je suis fatiguée, je suis si fatiguée. Claude, mon chou, you have taken encore the photograph.

CLAUDE

Tu es jeune assez, Maman.

MME. HERVE

Not nearly young enough. mon chou. And Claude, your French, c'est terrible, tu sais.

MME. HERVE
sits down
and procedes to take a nap.

CLAUDE

Another picture of Maman sleeping. So many of the pictures I take of Maman these days are of Maman sleeping. And now you, Elena, and you. Together. By the piano. That'll be a nice picture. By the piano. The two of you. Smiling. Happy. Say happy. Not cheese. Happy.

ELENA and SNODGRASS
pose
and smile.

ELENA

Happy. Did I look beautiful?

SNODGRASS

Would you send me a copy of that picture? I have so few pictures of me with my hair short. My hair used to be long. When it was threatening to wear your hair long. Before it was fashionable to wear your hair long. Before Madison Avenue absorbed the threat and transformed the threat into a style. As they transform every threat into a style, making sure no threat becomes a genuine threat, a danger.

CLAUDE

Did it ever occur to you that perhaps they appreciated your long hair?

SNODGRASS

No. It never occurred to me. But. It occurred to you. At any rate, now my hair is short. Now they've got me right where they want me. Now I look like a Nazi youth. Now I look like my father.

CLAUDE

And, yes, Elena, you look beautiful.

ELENA

Yes. That's what they say. That I'm beautiful. You're very beautiful, you know, that's what they say. You're very beautiful. And yet there's always a but in it. Without really saying 'but,' there's always a but in it. You're very beautiful. But. Not you're very beautiful. And. No. You're very beautiful. But. You live in a world where beauty is all, that makes a premium of beauty, that tells you beauty is the only real virtue, the only real virtue is beauty, that everyone wants nothing more than to be beautiful, to be like everyone else, and to be like everyone else, beautiful, and then people stop and stare and say, yes, you're beautiful, you're very beautiful. And then that silent 'but.' That oh so silent but nevertheless screaming 'but.' That says, well, yes, it's true, you're beautiful, but if you're beautiful, well, what else is there? As if beauty, the thing that everybody wants, is all you've amounted to, all you've accomplished in your life, as if it were impossible to have anything else on the plus ledger but your beauty. But. As if beauty, which was the blessing we all counted on, was, in truth, a curse, as if being beautiful meant that you were silly, brainless, mindless, empty, empty, mindless. As if I were frivolous. So that even if I discovered something as mysterious as the secret of life, you'd want to see what I looked like, and then, once you've seen what I looked like, you'd measure my discovery by what I looked like, and consider my discovery not by its own standards but by your standards of how beautiful I was versus your standards of what intelligence was, and, under either of those conditions, I would not be taken seriously. And that is the peril of looking like what I look like, looking like what everyone wants me to look like, looking like what everyone else wants to look like.

SNODGRASS

If you discovered the secret of life, I promise I'd take you seriously. Very seriously. No matter what you looked like.

ELENA

And yet I'd rather be beautiful than not beautiful. That's the truth. That must be the truth. Look at me. You can see, can't you, how much energy I pour into being beautiful, how many hours I spend in front of a mirror making sure that before I leave it I am perfect, that I can say to myself, Elena, you look beautiful. I am, as they say, into it. I am into that. I won't leave that goddamned mirror before it tells me that I am the fairest in the land, that Snow White is dead.

SNODGRASS

I know of no other country in the entire world which persists, as ours does, no other country which persists, persists, in reducing its history to such mediocrity.

CLAUDE

The thing about mediocrity. Doesn't please anyone. Doesn't offend anyone.

SNODGRASS

To be so young, as our country is, and so foolish, as our country is, and have so much power, as our country has, so much influence over the world.

SNODGRASS

has continued the samba beat,
in counterpoint to the dialogue,
slower now
and therefore more sensual
and also sadder.

ELENA

But Snow White isn't dead. Snow White never dies. And then time enters into it. Time takes me away from the magic mirror on the wall, time takes me away before the mirror has had time to tell me I'm the fairest, time to do this and time to do that, time to go to work or time to go dancing or time to go away for the weekend, and so I leave the mirror knowing I'm not the fairest, that there is someone more beautiful than I am, that in order to be the most beautiful I'd have to stay in front of that mirror forever, and why?, because although people tell you that what they're looking for in someone is her soul, what they're really looking for is her beauty and one can never be beautiful enough, I can never really be beautiful enough. If I could just grow with my beauty as I grow with the rest of me, if I could just let it be instead of trying to maintain it, if I didn't worry all the time, as I do, and I do, that I've gotten older, yes, I've gotten older, but then, who hasn't? I promise you, Snow White never dies.

CLAUDE

takes another picture of
ELENA,
in her vulnerability,
her real beauty.

SNODGRASS

I could play it to a samba beat, couldn't I? Stardust, I mean. Claude, I'd like a copy of that picture, too.

CLAUDE

It's yours.

SNODGRASS

To be under so much pressure, when the results are as mediocre as they are, that, I think, is the really hateful part.

ELENA

Never dies and never shows her face, her real face, never shows her face and never goes away either. Never. She is the mystery, Snow White, I'm helpless against. And. If only. If only I didn't confuse beauty with passion. But I do. And I should, after all, know better. I owe it to myself as a woman, I owe it to other women to know better. And my private life, my intimate life, everyone's private life, it seems, every woman's private life, certainly, loses its richness, but then again, our public life has lost its richness, too, hasn't it?, but it has, my life, private and public, it has lost its richness and as life becomes harder, I become softer, and just when I need my strength, my will, to break every magic mirror, to kill Snow White, to once and for all stop being helpless against such foolish mysteries, the strength to get in there and fight, to get into the struggle, to say this is who I am, not this is what I look like, to not get trapped by my own helplessness, but, rather, to die, if I have to, for who I am, to die, if I have to, without being a slave to men, fuck them, to women, fuck them, to Snow White, above all fuck Snow White, to every mirror which has the magic power to destroy who I am, and fuck every mirror, too. Is there too much blue around my eyes? Does my gown reveal enough? Too much? Can you see, can you look at me and see that something in me is breaking?

SNODGRASS

Like I said. All that pressure. And such mediocre results.

CLAUDE

Why do I get the feeling that, somehow, you blame me for what you call mediocrity?

SNODGRASS

Maybe I do. Maybe I do. Blame everyone who never understood that my long hair was not the all of me, that I didn't wear it that way because it made me attractive, although it did, I think it did, but because it was a badge against mediocrity.

CLAUDE

Lad, I have a son, not unlike you, who fled to Canada to avoid the draft, who never came back home, who may never come back home again, who has never even written, not once, to his own father.

CLAUDE leaves,
not through the door.

ELENA

That's another fine mess you got us into, Ollie.

SNODGRASS
becomes Oliver Hardy
and
ELENA laughs.

ELENA
becomes Stan Laurel
and
SNODGRASS laughs.

SNODGRASS

The All-American Family is in very deep trouble.

ELENA

You know what I heard, I don't believe it, of course, but I heard it just the same, and I have no real reason not to believe it, either, but I heard Ozzie and Harriet were gay. I mean, when you think of it, imagine them young, Harriet a band singer, you know what they say about band singers, I mean, even if she wasn't gay, she was probably having a fling with the trumpet player or, at least, getting high with the drummer. And Ozzie, with that high, funny voice. And, you know, in those days - in those days, that's a laugh - just to squelch the rumors, you know what I'm talking about, people would, well, they would get married. Wouldn't it be something, wouldn't it be terrific, if it were true? If it were revealed? Exposed? That the great all-American couple was gay? But it's probably not true, huh? Tough. I know it's make believe, but it's the only hope for me. Who said that?

SNODGRASS

Somebody. Somebody certainly said that.

ELENA

I think it was Barry White. Who was it that said that oh so wonderful thing, it's only make believe but it's the only hope for me, Barry White, that's who! You know who I always wanted to be?

SNODGRASS

No. Who did you always want to be?

ELENA

Fred Astaire. I always wanted to be Fred Astaire. And Mira has always wanted to be Wonder Woman, which you have to admit, doesn't exactly make us an unbeatable combination. But just. Imagine me. In a top hat. Tilted. Cocked. Over one eye. Like a cutie in the chorus line. Know what I mean? You know what I mean. And a walking stick. Very definitely. A walking stick. Just vamp it.

(sings)

Without my walking stick
I'd go insane
I can't look my best
I'd feel undressed
Without my cane.
Must have my walking stick
'Cause it may rain
When it pours
Can't be outdoors
Without my cane.

ELENA

(continuing the song)
If I ever left my house
Without my walking stick
Well, it would be something
I could never explain.

Ah, the thing that makes me click
On Lover's Lane
Would go for naught
If I were caught
Without my cane.

Keep vamping. And castanets. Pretend you can hear castanets.

ELENA and SNODGRASS
sing together
the first chorus
and then, alone,
SNODGRASS improvises.

ELENA

I'm Fred. And I'm also Rita Hayworth. Rita Hayworth, not Ginger Rogers, not Joan Leslie, certainly not Cyd Charisse, Rita Hayworth was my great, my perfect dancing partner. If I'm Fred, Rita's the other half of me. If I'm elegant in my top hat and with my walking stick, then Rita, with her red hair and her black satin strapless gown and her black satin gloves and her black satin sex, is the other half of me. If I'm stern, on the surface, then Rita, in her lush romanticism, is the other half of me. If I'm top hat and walking stick, Rita is the movement. If I'm Fred Astaire, then Louise, I feel, I may be wrong but I feel it, then Louise could be my Rita Hayworth.

LOUISE and CLAUDE
enter, not through the door.

CLAUDE

Ask me, I think it looks like the beginning of a perfect weekend.

LOUISE

You do, do you? Maybe you're right, darling. You're usually right. I don't know why, but, to me, every moment looks like the beginning of a perfect descent into Hell.

LOUISE
leaves, not through the door.

CLAUDE

Nice people, gathered together. The smell from the kitchen divine. The hunt tomorrow morning. The races tomorrow afternoon. Never can understand why Louise never can see how simple things are.

MIRA

enters, not through the door.

SNODGRASS

improvises his Hoagy Carmichael medley without Stardust.

ELENA

And how is the alcoholic Jewess?

MIRA

If only you could be serious for a minute.

ELENA

I could be serious for a lifetime. If anyone asked it of me.

MIRA

They've been waiting, she and her brother, for two years, two years, do you know how long two years can seem like?, just waiting, for their mother to die. I ask it of you all the time. The question is whether you ask it of yourself. At any rate, I know what it's like, to wait like that, for death to come, and if I were her, I'd stay as drunk as I could as long as I could. Until I passed out cold and then I'd wake up and start drinking again. That's what I'd do. If I were her. Just stay as drunk as I could. For as long as I could.

DAVID,

stricken,

his face as pale as ash,

enters, not through the door,

followed by

SHULAMITH.

SNODGRASS

gets up and moves towards

DAVID

who, in rashness,

runs across the room

and out of the room,

through the door.

SHULAMITH

makes an attempt to follow him

but stops: she thinks better of the idea.

From a distance,

we hear a scream,

wrenched from the bottom of his soul,

from DAVID.

The Scream

is followed by

The Shot.

A start.
CLAUDE
moves as calmly as possible
towards the door
and leaves,
closing the door gently behind him.

SNODGRASS

He wouldn't?

SHULAMITH

No. He wouldn't. He couldn't. I don't know. Maybe he could.

MME. HERVE
awakens.

MME. HERVE

Qu'est-ce qui arrive? Où est Claude? Mon Dieu, the comings.
The goings.

SHULAMITH
falls into
SNODGRASS' arms
and sobs gently.

MIRA

And. If you drink enough. When it comes, death, the vodka turns
to tears.

ELENA

The question is whether I ask it of myself, huh?

MARIANNE
enters, not through the door,
just as
CLAUDE
enters, through the door,
a bloodied rabbit in his hands.

MARIANNE

What's happened?

CLAUDE

Caught himself a rabbit, Victor. Catch another one, we'll
have rabbit for dinner tomorrow.

SHULAMITH
starts laughing:
laughter, of course, is close to hysteria.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça. Un lapin. Pauvre petit. Le film, Claude, faut voir notre film.

CLAUDE

Oui, Maman.

CLAUDE

leaves.

And SNODGRASS
returns to the piano.

And MIRA
embraces SHULAMITH.

And ELENA
leaves, through the door.

And MARIANNE
places her hands on
MME. HERVE's shoulders.

And SNODGRASS
continues playing.

MARIANNE

So Victor killed a rabbit. Well, that certainly surprises me. Victor's never killed anything in his life. Victor's never even held a gun in his life. Victor's never even been able to sit through a movie where anybody gets killed. Especially animals. So Victor killed a rabbit. I take it back. Nothing surprises me. Nothing. Nothing about Victor. Nothing about anybody. Still. The idea. Of Victor, a gun in his hand, all alone, going out into this darkness, to shoot a poor defenseless rabbit. Doesn't anybody else think that's crazy? If I hadn't lived with the man for twenty years, I'd think he'd gone mad. Maybe he has gone mad. Maybe I've been living with him for twenty years. And never even noticed. He was going mad. Maybe. Although. It's more likely that in those twenty years, it was me who would've gone mad and Victor who wouldn't have even noticed. And still. Nothing surprises me. I take that back. Everything surprises me. Why is everyone so gloomy? Why is everything so dark? So Victor killed a rabbit!

MARIANNE

leaves, not through the door.

MME. HERVE

Alors. C'est son mari qui a tué le petit lapin. Enfin.

SHULAMITH

moves towards the piano;
it is as if she were going to
give a recital.

MIRA

Leave boiling water in a pot without watching it, without using it, it evaporates.

MME. HERVE

You must see, dans notre film, la chasse, the hunt, as it was in another time, the old times. Ça, c'était la chasse. A little rabbit like that one that monsieur has killed, mon mari, my husband, he would have thrown away such a rabbit.

MARIANNE
returns.

MARIANNE

Something's happened, hasn't it?

SNODGRASS

A death in the family.

MIRA

Their mother died.

SHULAMITH

Let me tell you a thing or two about my mother. She went into post-partum depression the day my brother David was born and stayed in it for thirty-five years.

MARIANNE

I'm sorry.

SHULAMITH

Through three more children and a marriage she must have considered intimate because she and my father were able to pass wind in each other's direction without shame. She never really wanted children. Even though she was taught the lesson we were all taught, all of us, that women were born to have children, to be mothers, to give their ~~lives~~ over, to surrender, as mothers do, to their children, for their children, she never wanted any of us. We were each of us, all of us, burdens to her, obstacles to her freedom.

SNODGRASS

The steeplechase.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça.

MARIANNE
understands
and leaves again,
not through the door.

SHULAMITH

And she let us know it. Not by saying it to us outright. I don't think she'd know how, either because the words wouldn't come to her or because she feared God would strike her dead if the words did come to her, but she let us know just the same. That we were the blight, the plague, the tsouris, that befalls the wicked. Father, bless him, bless the son-of-a-bitch, sat by the window all day, it was the only place in the hole we lived in, in those years, those early years, the only place where there was light, sat and read the Talmud and cursed my mother, in the name of the Talmud, for being a woman, just as he cursed the fact that three of his four children were girls. He was to have only sons, you see. I was meant to have sons, he'd say. As if having daughters was God's way of punishing him. And yet, though David was his light, his sun, his moon, the son he was meant to have, he treated him worse than any of us. Me, in fact, he pretended to love with such intensity, it was an embarrassment to me always. Me, he'd give dreams of a better world. Have dreams, he'd say. See how far we've come, he'd say, see how far you can still go. Look me right in the eyes and tell me to have dreams. Not as if it were dreams he was giving me, but as if it were the only reality. He loved me, looked right at me and loved me and I would turn my eyes away from him.

CLAUDE

enters, through the door.

SHULAMITH

(continuing)

My mother I never turned my eyes away from. And. Funny. She never looked at me. Marry a man with money, she'd say, her eyes somewhere else, Watching the tea, The jam she'd sweeten the tea with. Putting things in order. Always. She had no dreams. She didn't believe in dreams. She didn't say it. She didn't have to. She didn't believe in dreams. That was that.

LOUISE

enters, through the door.

SHULAMITH

(continuing)

Marry a man with money. A jeweler. A furrier. A little business on a good corner. Otherwise. She'd say without saying it. It's a struggle. Look at me, she'd say without saying it. Look. A struggle. And not once did she look into my eyes, not once in all those years of moving from one room to another, up and down stairs, in and out, passing through.

LOUISE

leaves, not through the door.

SHULAMITH

(continuing)

Not once. Never. Not even in these past two years, in and out of the hospital, from one bed to another, not just a woman given a death sentence, two more years to live, but a woman who was given instead death itself. And two years to live through it.

(Pause)

It never snows up here in Gethsemane Springs, does it? I have a feeling it would be beautiful here in the wintertime. If it snowed.

(Pause)

But no. It's endless summer here, isn't it? Always warm. You never know what it's like to hunch your shoulders up against the cold, do you? In the warmth, your shoulders relax, your whole body relaxes, you're open to pleasure, to sensuality, aren't you? But you don't know what it's like to hunch your shoulders up against the cold, go out into a blizzard, feel tension, the tension of just hunching your shoulders up against the cold, that little tension without which you're lost, you know. That's David Rubin's Theory of Necessary Tension. After all, who can survive an endless summer? Who can survive pleasure? Pleasure. All the time.

(Pause)

And. In these past two years. I'd hold her hand. Look at her. And her eyes were always somewhere else. Somewhere else. On the wallpaper. The pattern on the wallpaper. Once she looked at David, looked right at him, and, suddenly, there was black around her eyes. They sank, her eyes, into her head. And she looked away and never looked at him again, either. At least, not in front of me.

(Pause)

She would have liked it here. The warmth. The summertime.

All the clocks chime
eight times
and then,
in succession,
they play the
First Call to the Post.

MME. HERVE

Enfin. Huit heures.

CLAUDE

A little film. Before dinner. In the next room.

DAVID

enters, through the door
and leaves, not through the door.

MME. HERVE
L'histoire de notre famille.

MME. HERVE
rises.
CLAUDE
helps her.

SHULAMITH
I'm afraid we'll have to miss your film.

MME. HERVE
Ah, ça. Another time.

CLAUDE
We understand.

MIRA
Shall I stay with you? I'll stay with you if you like.

SHULAMITH
We'll be okay.

SNODGRASS
gets up
and kisses
SHULAMITH.
MME. HERVE
starts a procession
towards the door.
She leaves, through the door,
followed by
CLAUDE, SNODGRASS and MIRA.
SHULAMITH
is alone.
After a moment,
DAVID
sails in.

DAVID
Aren't you coming?

SHULAMITH
Should we stay for dinner?

DAVID
Shulamith, Mama is dead.

SHULAMITH
Yes, David. And still we must eat. Sooner or later, we must eat.

DAVID
Eat? With this grief? This anguish? You don't feel it, this grief?

SHULAMITH

Yes, I feel it, this grief. And also I feel relief.

DAVID

But the grief, Shulamith, the grief.

SHULAMITH

For losing Mama? Or for ourselves? For the missed opportunities?
For knowing too late the things we should have said? The
things we never said? Never said and should have said?

DAVID

What's the difference, for what?

SHULAMITH

No difference. You're right. We should go. Steal away.

DAVID

You could eat?

SHULAMITH

Go away. You're right. These people, they live with fantasy.
So we'll let them have the fantasy of our grief.

DAVID

You don't feel it? In the pit? Here. Inside. All the way in.

SHULAMITH

Not yet.

DAVID

Eating away.

SHULAMITH

It sounds as hungry as I am, this grief.

DAVID

God. Oh. God. Stop.

SHULAMITH

Stop? I'm not here to stop. Stop, I'll be happy. I don't know happy. I don't know stop. I know to suffer and to take up again. And keep moving till I'm so tired I'm free. To accept this loss, to know Mama, alive, kept from us possibilities that are now open to us. Like sun coming through the rain. Like the end of misery, not the reason for misery. Misery, I knew before. Misery, I'll always know. And, with that, Mama has nothing to do. She's gone. So, of course, we feel the pain. But there's cure in it, in this pain.

DAVID

Look at us. We're young and we seem old. We're born here in this country and we are like immigrants. Still. God is generous with us. Whenever things look too good, He reminds us how terrible everything really is. It's a blessing.

SHULAMITH
gives DAVID
such a look.

SHULAMITH

Come. David. Come.

DAVID

What kind of Jew changes his name to Hopkins?

SHULAMITH

Come. Quick.

DAVID

Tell me.

SHULAMITH

A Jew who has a long way to go. But that's what a Jew is. Into the journey, not the destination. A Jew who loves you, that's who. These people, they don't know how to live, it's true. But I think they know how to eat.

SHULAMITH and DAVID
leave, not through the door.
HOPKINS and SNODGRASS
enter, through the door.
SNODGRASS
sits down at the piano.
HOPKINS
rolls a joint,
lights the joint,
smokes the joint
and choreographs for himself
a shuffle to some traveling music
in his head.
SNODGRASS
finds the beat.
After a moment,
HOPKINS
joins SNODGRASS
at the piano.
SNODGRASS
doesn't want the joint.

HOPKINS

I talk to horses, you know. And horses, they talk to me. They talk to me and I listen. I talk to them and they listen. It is what I suppose you'd call authentic social intercourse. Linear conversation. Plain talk. It's an endangered species, plain talk. You do know that, don't you?

SNODGRASS

I knew it an hour ago when Marianne first brought up the subject. Now that you've brought it up, I'll give the idea some serious attention. Whose idea is it? Yours? Or Marianne's?

HOPKINS

Marianne's. I think she formulated it once after trying to talk to me. I'm much better, it's much simpler, with horses.

SNODGRASS

And what do they say? Horses. When they talk to you.

HOPKINS

All sorts of things. Where the grazing is best. How it feels to be saddled. You know. The regular sort of thing horses would talk about. Pretty basic stuff. But no less revealing for being basic. I bet you never guessed that there are some horses, more horses, in fact, than you'd guess, that actually prefer to be kept in a tiny stable than be allowed to run free.

SNODGRASS

I'd have guessed that.

HOPKINS

Anyway. Today. And I got it straight from the horse's mouth. That's funny. Don't you think that's funny? Well, I guess it wasn't that funny. I got this tip. Don't bet on Fleeting Pleasure tomorrow. Turns out it's just a myth our friend Claude is trying to promote.

SNODGRASS

I'd have guessed that as well.

HOPKINS

Well, like I said, it's pretty basic stuff. It's all in the perspective, in the way we look at it, it's the difference between us. You'd have guessed it on instinct alone, that Fleeting Pleasure doesn't stand a chance. I had to hear it from the horse himself.

(Pause)

I'm leaving.

SNODGRASS

I understand. David.

HOPKINS

I'm too old to run off with the circus.

SNODGRASS

I just thought. To be with him. During this crisis.

HOPKINS

There's tomorrow. And the day after tomorrow. And the day after that.

SNODGRASS

Then you're leaving alone.

HOPKINS

I don't know. Do you want to leave with me?

SNODGRASS

There's a part of me that always wants to leave with you.

HOPKINS

There's a part of you that leaves with me whether you leave with me or not.

SNODGRASS

What part is that?

HOPKINS

Your goodness. Your grace.

SNODGRASS

Didn't you ever learn any bad habits from me?

HOPKINS

Only a few that I knew existed before but that I never owned up to until I discovered that you were capable of them yourself.

SNODGRASS

We were meant for each other.

HOPKINS

Did you ever read James Agee's review of a movie called "You Were Meant for Me?"

SNODGRASS

No.

HOPKINS

"That's what you think." That was the whole review. "That's what you think."

SNODGRASS

I'm serious.

HOPKINS

I know you are.

SNODGRASS

It's easy between us. It's real between us. It's fun between us.

HOPKINS

Do you think I could live with someone who told me that making love to me had become, what was it you said, boring?

SNODGRASS

I give you facts, not illusion. It's not a bad way to begin a love affair.

HOPKINS

And you'd always want a pretty boy in a dark corner from time to time. Which would make me insecure. And you'd always want that house in the suburbs with a woman who'd give you babies. Which would make me insecure. And they're so common, your fantasies, no matter which direction they come from, and that makes me very insecure.

SNODGRASS

Why do you persist in imagining that everyone else's fantasies are less than your own?

HOPKINS

I want more.

SNODGRASS

You say that so simply. As if it were a virtue. As if it wasn't greed. You think, don't you?, that I wake up at four every morning and meditate and do my yoga just to keep my balance, to maintain my composure, that's what you think, isn't it? You think, given half the chance, I'd become like Claude, don't you? A fool. Riding off. Into the sunset. On Fleeting Pleasure. Maybe you're right. I think you're wrong. But maybe you're right.

HOPKINS

It is easy between us, real between us, fun between us. And yet.

SNODGRASS

(sings)

To live it again is past all endeavor

HOPKINS

(sings)

Except when that tune clutches my heart

HOPKINS and SNODGRASS

(sing)

And there we are swearing to love forever
 And promising never, never to part.
 What moments divine, what rapture serene
 Till clouds came along to disperse the joys we had tasted
 And now when I hear people curse the chance that was wasted
 I know but too well what they mean.
 So don't let them begin the beguine!
 Let it sleep like the dead desire I only remember

LOUISE

sticks her head in, through the door.

LOUISE

Dinner.

LOUISE
leaves, through the door.

SNODGRASS

Did he say who would win?

HOPKINS

He said something about Fancy Dancer, but, you know, you
can't always trust a horse. It's probably some filly he'd
like to make it with.

HOPKINS

gets up and
leaves, through the door.

SNODGRASS

alone,
plays Stardust.

HOPKINS

enters, through the door,
kisses SNODGRASS

and leaves.

SNODGRASS

plays a few more licks,
gets up and
leaves, through the door.

Lights down.

MUSIC NOTES: SECOND MOVEMENT

The movement starts with Pachelbel's Canon in D Major and ends with the Closing Scene from Strauss' Capriccio, Op. 85. In between, we hear the Second Movement (Adagio) from Schubert's String Quartet in C Major and the first part of Brahms' Cello Sonata in E, opus 38.

Somewhere on the tape there is a piece of disco music, which Elena plays, which interrupts whatever is playing at that moment; when it is played out, the tape should be returned to the place where it was interrupted. The music should affect the way the scenes are played.

Pachelbel: Canon in D major

SECOND MOVEMENT

AN ORCHESTRA'S PLAYING

CAVATINA:
ADAGIO MOLTO ESPRESSIVO

In the other room,
HOPKINS and VICTOR
are dancing.

HOPKINS

It is by magic, not logic, that we are transformed.

VICTOR

Odd.

HOPKINS

Odd?

VICTOR

This.

HOPKINS

Listen. David says just when you think it can't get more
beautiful, because things don't, it does.

VICTOR

I will never hear it again without thinking of you. And still.
It's odd. Dancing. Like this. With a man.

HOPKINS

And the rest? With a man?

VICTOR

Well, within the privacy of one's bedroom.

HOPKINS

And in the privacy of one's cosmos?

VICTOR

Twist. You twist everything. To make a point.

HOPKINS

Are you uncomfortable dancing?

VICTOR

That's what I'm trying to say.

HOPKINS

We don't have to dance.

VICTOR

I want to dance.

HOPKINS

Well?

VICTOR

Still. It's odd.

HOPKINS

What's odd to me is that no choreographer, not Balanchine, not Graham, has ever created a ballet set to it. That's what's odd to me. But to dance to it, here, with you, right now, seems natural.

VICTOR

Following. That's the hard part.

HOPKINS

Lead?

VICTOR

No. I'm into the rhythm.

HOPKINS

We could alternate. I lead. You lead.

VICTOR

I have the rhythm.

HOPKINS

There's no sense in your following, all the time, not if following is hard for you.

VICTOR

I have the rhythm.

HOPKINS

We could alternate.

VICTOR

And if someone came in, came in and saw us, that's another part of it that's hard.

HOPKINS

If someone saw you following?

VICTOR

Just saw us, caught us, dancing.

HOPKINS

If Marianne came in.

VICTOR

Yes. And yet. When I have the rhythm.

HOPKINS

The deceit, that's the hard part.

VICTOR

When I have the rhythm, when I'm into the rhythm, it's easy, the dancing. I want to dance. I can dance. And I think, yes, I have the perfect life, dancing whenever I want with whomever I want and knowing that after the dance I can go home to my house, my wife, my children, knowing that I can dance and that after the dance everything I have to come home to is there, will be there, just as I left it.

HOPKINS

Just the same. After the dance, maybe in the middle of the dance, sometimes even before the dance has started, there's the hard part, the deception, a dance all its own, with its own rhythm, strutting into your head, waltzing around in your head, breaking the rhythm, stopping the rhythm, making it impossible to hear the rhythm, its own rhythm so persistent, so plaintive, so powerful, so persistent.

VICTOR

It would hurt her.

HOPKINS

It would break her heart.

VICTOR

She'd be so hurt.

HOPKINS

She'd hate us. If Marianne came in.

VICTOR

And saw us, caught us, dancing.

HOPKINS

And imagined that you and I, alone, know each other in the same ways that the three of us, together, know each other.

VICTOR

The deceit, it's the hard part for you, too.

HOPKINS

Yes, but I can keep the rhythm. I haven't as much at stake.

VICTOR

Do you love me?

HOPKINS

Yes. Very much. But not that part of you. Not knowing that where, in spirit, we're adversaries, in reality, we're accomplices. And there's nothing worse than hypocrisy. Still. It deserves our respect. And our pity.

VICTOR

We could alternate.

HOPKINS

We could.

VICTOR leads
and the dance goes on.
And LOUISE enters from the side
and exits through the door.

HOPKINS

We could keep it up. Make the effort and keep it up. We could. Keep the dance going. Bend to the music. The pretense. That the next moment is going to be as intense as the last. That what we feel for each other we will always feel for each other. We could. Keep our bodies moving. Raise our arms, throw up our hands, our outstretched hands, towards the ceiling. In our effort to touch the sky. We could. Without ever giving in, surrendering to our exhaustion. We could. Dance until the dance becomes rigid. Monotonous. Desperate. Fixed. We could. Keep telling each other we love each other, whether we do or not, as if our loving each other was the all, the only truth of what we know between each other, without looking at each other and admitting we've had good times and we could have good times again and drift in and out of many dances, dance many dances together, we could keep holding onto this one, this dance, until the music changes and we drift apart. We could. I could. Without ever admitting I'm tired. I'm tired, Victor.

MME. HERVE
and CLAUDE
enter.

MME. HERVE

Petits pays, mais grandes positions militaires.

CLAUDE

Remember. Up at dawn. Get us some birds.

VICTOR

It's amazing. Nobody seeing you, Madame Herve, nobody, tell me, Hopkins if I'm wrong, nobody seeing you would ever think you were 85.

MME. HERVE

Would they think I was 87?

CLAUDE

And remember. After dinner. Down to the stables. She's in grand shape, Fleeting Pleasure, in grand shape. Should see her. Never ran greenly, that one.

VICTOR

Can't wait, Claude. Can't wait.

CLAUDE

And how's the writing business, Hopkins?

HOPKINS

I am not a writer. I am a dying man. Not dead, mind you. Just dying. If I were dead, I'd have more in common with the rest of the world.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça. Quelle histoire.

HOPKINS

If I were to write about all this, you, Madame Hervé, you would be the heroine.

MME. HERVE

Moi? I am not important. I have never done anything worthwhile except get old.

HOPKINS

I've always thought that if you could just get through it all, live long enough to get yourself into black tie and walk out on a stage, any stage, you'd get a standing ovation. No matter what it is you've accomplished in your lifetime.

CLAUDE

About tomorrow, Hopkins. Teach you how to use a gun. If that's the problem. Be glad to teach you how to use a gun.

HOPKINS

As if the accomplishment, the only real accomplishment was to have survived.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça.

HOPKINS

To have not surrendered to exhaustion.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça. Ce n'est pas un plat pour les dents de mes Viennois.

VICTOR

I imagine, though, for you, Madame Hervé, the good part, the rich part, is living out this time of your life in a place as beautiful as Gethsemane Springs, in a place where the landscape is so remarkable.

HOPKINS

counter to the music,
choreographs for himself
a shuffle to some traveling music
in his head.

MME. HERVE

Ah, the landscape. Ah, monsieur, you know, de temps en temps, from time to time, Claude, he makes the little promenade with me, and we drive, n'importe où, and he says to me, look at this, look at that, look at that mountain, look at that tree, look how still the lake is today, and by the time I turn my head around to look, I see un cimetière, one cemetery après un cemetery, as if the landscape were rien qu'un grand cimetière, nothing but one grand cemetery.

HOPKINS

As if, if we did surrender to our exhaustion, we might not recover.

SHULAMITH

enters, through the door.

SHULAMITH

Excuse me.

SHULAMITH

backs out, through the door.

HOPKINS

Which, of course, is foolish. We do recover.

MME. HERVE

Ah, ça.

CLAUDE

Remember. Up at dawn.

MME. HERVE and CLAUDE

leave,

through the door.

MME. HERVE

A bientôt.

VICTOR

kisses HOPKINS

and follows

MME. HERVE and CLAUDE.

HOPKINS

sits down,

rolls a joint,

lights the joint,

smokes the joint.

HOPKINS

Remember. Up at dawn. Get us some birds. Teach you how to use a gun. If that's the problem. Teach you how to use a gun. Remember. Up at dawn. And after dinner, down to the stables, Fleeting Pleasure, that's the one to beat, in grand shape, Fleeting Pleasure. It's the one to beat. Ah, ca. If Marianne saw us. Caught us. Dancing. Ah, ca. I'm tired. To the death.

DAVID

and his anxiety
sail into the room.

DAVID

There are, by personal count, that's just the ones I've seen myself, thirteen phones in this castle, this mansion, this extravagance, this waste, how do you know these people?, and they're all separate phones, not extensions, and I've left all thirteen numbers with the hospital, and still no word. Not one word. On thirteen phones. One phone isn't enough? What's that music? It's very beautiful.

HOPKINS

Come. Sit. Be still.

HOPKINS and DAVID

listen.

The music,
for a few moments,
quiets them.

DAVID

I can't go on like this. Waiting like this. Waiting for what? Waiting to hear. That it's over, finished, ended. That she's dead, that the life in her, once and for all, is gone, that she's let go, put an end to the misery, given up, that she's accepted the fact that death is the only way she'll ever find the peace she must have always wanted. Maybe she doesn't want peace. Maybe she never wanted it. Maybe she never wanted what would be better for her. Maybe none of us want what would be better. And what am I doing in this house, with these people, with thirteen phones, none of them ringing for me, what am I doing here, eating caviar, drinking champagne, talking potato chip talk with strangers, with fools, talking about horses, what do I know about horses?, talking about hunting, what do I know about hunting?, what am I doing here, while she's lying there, dying?

SHULAMITH

enters,
through the door,
closes the door behind her
and screams,
and then leaves again
through the door.

DAVID

She's going mad. You think she's not going mad? Cigarettes. I've smoked I don't know how many cigarettes, waiting. It's very beautiful, this music. What is it? Schubert? In this house, with these people, you think she's not going mad? Talking talk about horses, talking talk about hunting, what does she know about horses, about hunting, you think she's not going mad? Waiting like this for thirteen phones to ring, you think she's not going mad? How do you know these people? What are you doing here? What am I doing here with you? What is my sister doing here? Going mad, that's what she's doing here.

HOPKINS

Come. Sit. Be still.

HOPKINS and DAVID

listen.
The music,
for a few moments,
quiets them.

DAVID

Still? With the whole history of my suffering inside me? With my mother dying and my sister going mad. Still? With this craziness all around me, inside me, all around me. Still? In this wilderness?

HOPKINS

In this wilderness. For a minute, David. For a minute. Sometimes it seems as if it's all we have. One minute. To be still. To be still together. If we're the music, let's be still together, for a minute, and listen.

HOPKINS

takes the minute.

DAVID

tries.

DAVID

With the others, you dance. With me, you sit still.

HOPKINS

That's why I love you.

DAVID

Am I funny, dancing?

HOPKINS

Why, when you came into my life, the sun came in with you.

DAVID

I want to dance with you.

DAVID and HOPKINS
dance.

HOPKINS

Why, when I first saw you, the madness in me subsided. Why, when I'm with you now, the madness in me. Subsides. Again. For a minute.

DAVID

Your body. I know it like I know my own. I can feel it, the totality of it, the secret corners I feel the possessor of, even when you're not there. And when you're not there, knowing it, your body, as I do, an extension of my own, I long for it, because without it, a piece is missing. The pleasure part. The comfort part.

HOPKINS

Closer.

DAVID

And yet sometimes I look at you, you're a stranger to me. I can't go on like this. Waiting.

HOPKINS

You, David. You can't go on like this. Waiting. And I can't go on like this. Dancing.

SHULAMITH

enters,
through the door,
closes the door behind her
and screams,
and then leaves again
through the door.

DAVID

A stranger to me. I look at you, into your eyes, the same eyes I looked into once, and it broke my heart looking into them because they made me look into myself, the same eyes that dazzled me with their beauty, dazzled me so much I had to look away, in fear of blindness, I look into them and I remember them as they were once to me and they are the same and still, you are a stranger to me.

LOUISE
enters,
through the door.

LOUISE

Enjoying yourselves? Happy? Having a good time? It's not exactly music for dancing, is it? You can change the music, you know. There's a switch. Somewhere. If there's anything I can do, anything, just ask. Excuse me. I've lost a key. I've got to find the key.

LOUISE
leaves.

HOPKINS

Feeling that we're strangers, it makes no sense.

DAVID

But I do love you, God help me.

HOPKINS

Seems cruel to me. Hurts me when you say it.

DAVID

Like I never loved anybody.

HOPKINS

We're all strangers to one another, from time to time, in snatches, at isolated moments, maybe most of the time, but not us, not you and me, not most of the time, not us, or is that what any two people say who have known intimacy between them when the alienation sets in, when the thing they're clinging to falls apart, when the life preserver they're holding onto disintegrates in their hands, before their eyes?

DAVID

I love you, baby. Hold on. Like that.

It is not a dance.

It is movement in stillness.

HOPKINS

I don't care that you love me. I care that I'm a stranger to you.

DAVID

Hurt you. And I hurt me.

HOPKINS

And yet. You do.

DAVID

What do you want, you think my feelings are discreet, that I can change what I feel when I feel it, you want me to lie, I can lie if you want me to, if you think that lies are stronger than truths?

HOPKINS

I'm tired. To the death.

DAVID

I see it.

HOPKINS

You see it? It shows? Where? How? In my body? In my eyes?
How do you see it? How does it show? Am I freezing into
weariness, David? Am I?

DAVID

If you want me to, I'll lie, if you think our lives are defined
not by the truths but by the lies, I'll lie, but me, I don't
believe that, I can't believe that, I won't believe that, and
so I tell you that I love you and still, there are times,
you're a stranger to me.

SHULAMITH

enters,
through the door
and screams.

DAVID

No word.

SHULAMITH

No word?

DAVID

About Mama.

SHULAMITH

She'll be okay. The doctors say she'll be okay.

DAVID

She's dying.

LOUISE

enters.

LOUISE

(in passing through)
You haven't changed the music. You couldn't find the switch?

LOUISE

leaves,
through the door.

HOPKINS

It shows? In my face? Shulamith. That I'm tired?

SHULAMITH

It shows in your face that you're beautiful. These people, they have everything. Is there anything they don't have? If they put murder in a bottle, package it, put a label on it, said on television it was good for you, and they put it in a bag with scotch tape on it and sold it over a counter, they'd buy it and use it. No, these people, they'd order it, have it charged, probably even manufacture it themselves.

DAVID

You're not having a good time, either.

SHULAMITH

Me? I don't have a good time at the movies.

DAVID

If you can't have a good time at the movies, where can you have a good time?

SHULAMITH

These people, they make their own movies.

HOPKINS

We'll probably have to sit through them.

SHULAMITH

You, you love movies.

HOPKINS

When they're good. When they're art.

SHULAMITH

Every movie you see you find good in.

HOPKINS

It's true. I love movies.

SHULAMITH

These people, even if they didn't really make their own movies, they'd make their own movies anyway. It's Hollywood, the way they live. Hollywood. When we drove through the gates, that wasn't a house, it was Manderley. I thought when they opened the door, there'd be nothing inside. That's the way they make movies. The front of the house is here. The inside is somewhere else. Over there somewhere. A mile away. It's illusion. Lights. Camera. Action. They move. They speak. Cut. It's finished. In a can. Then they go to the movies and watch themselves live again. For two hours. These people.

DAVID

Thirteen telephones they have. Different. Not extensions.

SHULAMITH

And stables. And a race track. And private hunting grounds. And a hundred servants we never see. It's illusion.

HOPKINS

They walk.

SHULAMITH

Like in the movies.

HOPKINS

They talk.

SHULAMITH

Like in the movies.

HOPKINS

They eat, get gas, vomit, sleep, cry, laugh, bleed, have children, bleed, go to the sea in the summertime, drown, have heart attacks, develop cancerous tumors, get exhausted, tired to the death, commit suicide, have nervous breakdowns, love, try to love, try to control their fates. They die.

DAVID

They're dead.

HOPKINS

You're right. They're human.

DAVID

I have no sympathy for the privileged.

SHULAMITH

They drink good vodka. Real vodka. Russian. It's the only thing I've come across in this house that's good for the soul. The vodka these people drink.

HOPKINS

They go through the motions.

SHULAMITH

Illusion.

HOPKINS

And still they bleed.

SHULAMITH

And never feel it. What a romantic you are, Herschel, to think they bleed.

HOPKINS

And what do we do?

SHULAMITH

We live.

HOPKINS

That may be the greatest illusion of all.

SHULAMITH

Maybe. Try the vodka.

HOPKINS

It's too abstract, too abstract, this question of what's real and what's illusion. It seems to me in what I call my real life, when I move through whatever I'm moving through, in time, in space, the ordinary moments of my daily living that pile up almost inconsequentially in their effort to define a consequential life, the two are always overlapping and it's hard to tell where one begins and where one ends or if they do anything so discreet. At all.

SHULAMITH

With these people, nothing, very very little, is real.

DAVID

What's real is an old woman dying of cancer, shrunken into a whisper of herself, imprisoned within the confines of her hospital sheets, being fed and drained by a million indifferent plastic tubes. What's illusion is the doctors telling us that everything will be, as they put it, okay. And what's somewhere between the two is waiting for thirteen telephones to ring, waiting for someone to tell me that it's an illusion she's dying, that it's real that she will be okay, which is what I want to hear, waiting for someone to tell me that I'm right, she's dead, that the fact of her death is the only reality, the only reality that won't, like so many of our illusions, go away, the only thing that makes, finally, once and for all, makes something real out of the illusion of our lives. My breaking heart is real. That music, it's real. And yet. How it affects us, that music, how it affects you, how it affects me, that's the illusion part.

DAVID and HOPKINS and SHULAMITH
listen.

The music,
for a few moments,
quiets them.
In DAVID,
there is a stirring.

DAVID

I'll go. I'll call the hospital. Like this, the way I am now, crazy like anything, I can't go on.

DAVID
leaves,
through the door.

SHULAMITH

I hope she's dead. I hope the pain she's had to live with, every single moment, awake, asleep, every single insane moment of her life, is over, finished.

HOPKINS holds SHULAMITH
and SHULAMITH
surrenders to his tenderness
and, together,
their holding onto each other
becomes a dance.

HOPKINS

You have, around your waist, holding onto you, the arms of a man who is about to experience a nervous breakdown.

SHULAMITH

Relax. Release. Let go.

HOPKINS

I can't.

SHULAMITH

Then don't.

HOPKINS

I want to.

SHULAMITH

Then do.

HOPKINS

And I can't.

SHULAMITH

Talk?

HOPKINS

I can always find the words.

SHULAMITH

Find.

HOPKINS

If I could destroy the words, rip them apart and put them together again in such a way that you'd be forced to listen, even without understanding, just so you'd be forced to listen again, if I could create language, get rid of the dead language that's useless to me now, if I could find, not the words, I can always find the words, if I could find a language I can live with. There, where your hand is, that's right, between the neck and the shoulder blade, that's it.

SHULAMITH

Let go.

HOPKINS

Everything exhausts me.

SHULAMITH

Be exhausted.

HOPKINS

Pain exhausts me.

SHULAMITH

It's not easy, pain.

HOPKINS

Pleasure exhausts me.

SHULAMITH

Pleasure, I know from experience, is definitely exhausting.

HOPKINS

Just getting through the day, getting through an hour, that exhausts me.

SHULAMITH

A day is hard. An hour. Passes.

HOPKINS

Never fast enough. Except at the movies. Or when I'm sleeping, when I dream, because my dreams are movies, which is why I long for sleep, which is why I can't wait sometimes until it's time for sleep, because my dreams are movies, and my waking life, more and more every day, isn't like a movie at all. Anymore. And, even at the movies, the hour passes only if the film's sense of time corresponds with my own sense of time, only if the movement is elegant and graceful and swift, did you ever notice in Hitchcock how people move, as if it will take forever for them to get where they're going, as if they're moving in a dream, and only if the images are dazzling, only if the sensibility is somewhere between the exquisite and the painful, and so I hardly go to the movies anymore except to see the ones I've seen a hundred times before, and I'd rather dream because only then am I sure that each night the dream will be new, will be different, will be a movie of the heart. Ah, movies! They've shaped my life, the movies. Everything I know, feel, think, about the world, about art, about myself, comes from the movies. And worst of all, the really terrible part, the part that, more and more every day, frightens me, terrifies me, because I've loved the movies, I've learned to fall, not just a little bit, in love with illusion. I'd like to write a book someday about my love affair with the movies. I'd like to write a book someday about how exhausting and exasperating my life is, not about my life, not about who I sleep with and why, but just about how exhausting and exasperating it is to go through the motions and still bleed, about how really difficult it is to shed the illusions. I could, I still have it in me, I still have the energy, I could go out every day, meet a stranger every

HOPKINS

(continuing)

day, and, with concentrated intensity, look into that stranger's eyes and, thinking that I am who I am, how, after all, could I be anyone else, open, direct, honest, I could look into that stranger's eyes and dazzle him, make him fall in love with me, every day, it would be easy, and all I'd be doing is bringing out the old bag of tricks, re-making the same old movie, recreating the old illusions, creating new ones, and the most exhausting thing of all is keeping up the pretense. That, Shulamith, is the most exhausting of all. And I've done it all, had every disease, gone through every cure that has been thought of in this time we're living through, in pursuit of what lies beyond the horizon, only to come across one myth after another. Psychoanalysis. Marriage. Children. I've tripped, primaled, meditated, danced whole nights away, made love with men, made love with women, wrote a few books, got a little attention for the few books I wrote, and yet, never, not once, was I impelled to make something more of my life than some vast romantic epic. And I'm exhausted. And, in my exhaustion, I've come here, to Gethsemane Springs, to this wilderness, to this what you call a movie set and yes, you're right, it is a movie set, which is perfect, it's perfect that it's so much like a movie set, I've come here to break down, fall apart, disintegrate, rest a while, bringing with me, as protection against the fall, a cushion against the fall, a fortress against the fall, what I've come to feel is my family, the only family I really have, this family of lovers past, present and future, the ones I have a history with, the ones who know me so well that they won't allow me my illusions, who encourage me, force me, by their mere presence in my life for so long a time, to confront what I, what everyone, imagines is reality, this reality I don't trust, am threatened by, this reality which is like no movie I've ever seen, no dream I've ever dreamed, I've come here, bringing with me, selfishly, manipulatively, to protect me from collapsing, to collapse with me, my family, my family of lovers, the ones I've loved and wounded and driven up the wall with my craziness, and who have loved me beyond reason and wounded me beyond reason, who have driven me mad by insisting upon my sanity, the ones with whom I have a history, with whom history was made, history began, in a bed, on soft sheets, with dimmed lights, set to music by Mozart, because history, to me, is not just a record of the wars we've fought, the wars we've won and lost, but a record, too, of the acts of love we've won and lost, the ones with whom I have a history, the ones who have gone beyond the romance I still cling to, Marianne and Victor who imagine they brought me here which is their illusion, Sully and David, most of all David, David who I love most of all because with David, everything is a dare, a challenge, a risk, every one of which attracts me, every one of which frightens me to the death. David, who has no use for illusion. David, to whom I've become a stranger. In defiance of history. Is it possible, do you think it's possible, Shulamith, that even history is illusion? Now, now that I'm primed for the final stage of this breakdown, perhaps I'm already past it, after all, who knows anymore how to define the difference between breaking down and growing up, the difference between sanity and insanity, nothing, nothing being discreet anymore, the line so precariously thin that it's impossible to tell

HOPKINS

(continuing)

whether you've fallen off or are still standing up, now, now
that I'm wherever I am in my craziness, I think I'll join the
party.

HOPKINS

leaves,
through the door,
just as
MIRA
enters,
through the door.

MIRA

I've been thinking, what do you think?, that we're always
being given signals, warnings.

SHULAMITH

We're never given any warning. For me, at least, everything
comes as a surprise.

MIRA

External warnings, warnings that seem to have nothing to do
with who we are but which, if we look at them, tell us exactly
who we are, what we are, which define for us the pattern of
our lives.

SHULAMITH

The throat is dry. When the throat is dry, it's a warning I
need a drink.

MIRA

Take mine.

SHULAMITH

Thank you.

MIRA

You're lovely.

SHULAMITH

Thank you.

MIRA

Do you mind my saying that?

SHULAMITH

Drunk, I don't mind anything. Even sober, I don't mind anything.

MIRA

Such lovely music.

SHULAMITH

And constant.

There is silence between
MIRA and SHULAMITH.

The music
fills the silence.

MIRA

For example. You set up house, with full understanding of what setting up house means, because this time, you think, it's special, it's different, this is the one that will last, this is the one you want to work, this is the one that will alter your life, this is the one whose life you will alter, and the years pass, and you still believe, need to believe, that this is the one, and at the same time, the stereo breaks down and the television set doesn't really work, and one of the doors becomes unhinged and you don't bother to fix it, and, in the bathroom, the toilet doesn't flush properly and the ceiling begins to peel, and the books that were once put neatly on the shelves in another order that made them easy to find are no longer in the same order, many of them, in fact, just lie around the house in disarray and you don't bother anymore to pick them up so that they just lie around, and even the things that are in the same order, the same place you put them originally, the paintings on the wall, for example, now seem frozen in place.

LOUISE
enters,
through the door.

LOUISE

Nothing seems to be where it's supposed to be.

CLAUDE
enters,
with a camera
and takes a picture.
The candid shot.

LOUISE

Oh, Claude, you might have warned us.

CLAUDE
takes another picture.

LOUISE

The least you could do is let us pose for you, put our arms around each other, smile for you, Claude, so that the memory of the moment, which those photographs will capture, is perfect even if the moment wasn't.

CLAUDE
takes still another picture,
but LOUISE
just in time,
manages a pose.

Then
 LOUISE
 leaves.
 CLAUDE
 smiles
 and then,
 he too leaves.

MIRA

Warnings. That some things are falling apart. And other things have frozen into place.

SHULAMITH

They do anyway, fall apart or stay what they are, with or without the warning. A toilet that doesn't flush properly, I couldn't live with.

MIRA

I'll have it fixed.

SHULAMITH

Books lying around, that I could live with, I could live with that. They'd be reminders I should read them, the books.

MIRA

I'll leave the books where they are.

SHULAMITH

Falling apart. Frozen into place. Falling down. Standing up. Breaking down. Growing up. Reality. Illusion. The metaphors you people live with, they're so extreme. No wonder you're in such conflict. With me, it's simpler. I'm drunk. I'm lonely. I don't care why, I don't care what lies at one end of it and what lies at the other end of it, it's enough of a burden just being drunk, just being lonely. Imagine looking at a door off its hinges, thinking somehow it represents the disorder in your life, as if the disorder in your life wasn't enough. Fix the door. Fix the toilet. Fix the stereo. The paintings on the wall, rearrange them. That's what the Japanese do, they rearrange things so that they don't get used to things the way they are, so that they can find inner peace. Then they commit harakiri.

MIRA

I'll leave the books where they are.

SHULAMITH

Who are you, not in relation to the house you live in but in relation to the world around you?

MIRA

We're selfish, aren't we? We don't have any political consciousness, do we?

SHULAMITH

The pressure, the pressure is always political, it's always there, the pressure that comes from the world and is directed at you, that's what's political, the pressure. The corruption,

SHULAMITH

(continuing)

that comes from closing yourself off from the pressure, from closing your mind to the alternatives, the possibilities, from putting a period on your point of view.

MIRA

That's what you think, though, isn't it, that we're selfish, that we have no political consciousness? Well, you're right. It's true. We do, we do lead empty lives. That's the plain simple truth of it. It's the only word for the lives we lead. Empty. Irreducibly, unpardonably, unquestionably. Empty. I have wasted so many years of my life crying over that plain and simple fact, that my life is empty, that I have decided to give into it, to say, okay, what can I do about it?, that's the way it is, my life is empty. You, you flutter about, like a pigeon that's been wounded, a pigeon trampled upon by the other pigeons because you're hurt, because flight is impossible for you, and one is attracted to you because you are so much like a wounded pigeon, I am attracted to you because you are so much like a wounded pigeon, and yet, maybe I guessed it, maybe I had no idea whatsoever, under that facade, under that facade of a pigeon who has been wounded, you have the power, because there's something enigmatic to me about a pigeon who has been wounded, you have the power to make me confront again what I have tried so desperately to forget, that I've become trivialized, banalized, that my life is empty. I could have, under the circumstances, given the situation, a weekend in the country, all of us to one degree or another strangers to each other, I could have flirted with you, flattered you, told you outright that what I'm interested in is going to bed with you, and yet, because you're who you are, and because I give power to who I imagine you are, I appeal to you on the level I think you'll understand, and I accept your loneliness, give you my emptiness, and suddenly, in the midst of that appeal, I am struck by the great discrepancy between loneliness and emptiness, that one doesn't complement the other, and I ask you, what do I do? I could sing to you, that I do well, or well enough, if this, this encounter between us, is an encounter and is not an audition. For you, I could play the realist, which would be difficult but which I'd be more than willing to play, because that, I imagine would be what you wanted from me, and I could play the fool, which would be easier, which would be the role I wanted to play for you, because, between foolishness and loneliness there is not such a great discrepancy. So. Tell. Which should it be? The realist? Or the fool?

SHULAMITH

Not the one. Not the other. I'm perverse, I like you as you are. And I'm perverse. I like women. I love women. I love the company of women. I love to be with women. I love to talk to women. Easier to laugh with a woman, easier to cry with a woman. And I can certainly imagine a world where men didn't exist at all. And still even more perverse. Sleep with women, I don't want to do, either because I'm not ready for it yet or because the idea of it doesn't thrill me within an inch of my life, although it's also true that not very much these days thrills me within an inch of my life.

MIRA

It could have been good.

SHULAMITH

And then there's tomorrow, always there's tomorrow, whenever you drink too much tonight, the tomorrow when you wonder what you did last night, when you're sure, even if you did nothing at all, which is usually the case, damn it, that you did nothing at all, when you're sure you committed the worst transgression of your life in some moment that floated away, and so, I'd hate to something meaningful tonight that I blamed on drunken transgression tomorrow.

MIRA

It's a lovely night. Still young. Still warm. I like the night. I get tired of blue skies. We could take a walk. Get some air. We could be in each other's company. I could tell you the story of my life.

SHULAMITH

I could fill my glass.

SHULAMITH and MIRA

leave.

The room is empty,
still except for the music.

After a moment,
HOPKINS and MARIANNE
dance in,
through the door,
romantically sweeping the door shut
behind them.

HOPKINS

If I could only make my darkest thoughts sing, dance, leap, soar, fly, if I could release the joy that lies somewhere within the darkness, if I could find what that is that does that. I feel it when I dance, when I watch others dance. I feel it in music, in song. I feel it in life, in those brief moments that pass into other brief moments, as if it were nothing but a succession of brief moments, this thing we call life, when the small, almost unnoticed things magically become the very things that define our existence, only defined without definition because they're the things we see, not hear, except in our heads. But all I have sometimes are words, and words, I've begun to hate words, are grounded, flightless, like anchors, like dead weights. Hate them, and yet, when the music stops, when I read Tolstoy or Proust or Shakespeare, when I'm reminded again of what they do do, what they can do, my love affair with words is on again, off and running, like Fleeting Pleasure tomorrow in the third. Words. They.

MARIANNE

Give information.

HOPKINS

That, it seems to me, is the least of their virtues. That, and making rational sense out of all the things we know are irrational, could never be rational no matter what words we used. Because nothing makes sense anymore.

VICTOR,
unseen by either
MARIANNE or HOPKINS,
enters,
and sits,
in a seat
unseen by either
MARIANNE or HOPKINS.

HOPKINS

(continuing)

Maybe a few ideas, a few theories, the ones that are radical enough, that have anarchy in them, maybe they make sense, make sense because, through words, they could transform themselves into action, and somehow, someway, transform as well the chaos we're living in, but then there'd be more chaos, of another sort, perhaps, but chaos just the same, but, for me, words, through the sheer sound of them, transport us, not by their logic - I've said that before, haven't I, about something else? What was it? - but by their magic. Archdiocese. Sebastapol. If there were an archdiocese in Sepastapol, I'd want to write about it.

MARIANNE

Who'd stop you? Even if there weren't, who'd care?

HOPKINS

Katamaran. Katmandu. Catarrh. Obsequious. Orchestra. Byzantine. Baroque. Bakery. The Bronx. Has it ever occurred to you that it's the only borough, The Bronx, in the city of New York, that is preceded by an article, not the Brooklyn or the Staten Island, but the Bronx. I've had this title, no idea whatsoever to support it, just a title, just words, how often I'm defeated by the very thing I love, words, Christ!, defeated by what I love, well, anyway, I have this title, and if ever I find the idea to support it, I'm going to use it: The Bronx is Dead, Long Live the Queens! But nothing literal, Marianne, not a story about a boy from the Bronx, a boy who leaves the Bronx and moves to Christopher Street and becomes gay, not that one, and about nothing as prosaic as the passing of an era, which the title might suggest, and not a comedy, which the title also suggests it should be, although everything is a comedy, a farce, a burlesque.

MARIANNE

What are we doing here?

HOPKINS

Louise invited you. You invited me.

MARIANNE

I mean, what are we really doing here?

HOPKINS

We're going crazy.

MARIANNE

But you look so well. You've never looked better.

HOPKINS

Nor you.

MARIANNE

Well, if we look so well, how could we be going crazy?

HOPKINS

If you'll excuse my lack of subtlety, it has nothing to do with how we look.

MARIANNE

We're not going crazy. It's the world that's gone crazy.

HOPKINS

Romance.

MARIANNE

Still, I believe it.

HOPKINS

Well, if we manage to hold onto that belief, and if we hold onto each other at the same time that we hold onto that belief, perhaps the panic will pass, this particular panic, perhaps this particular panic will pass.

MARIANNE

Or not.

HOPKINS

Within every possibility lies another possibility.

MARIANNE

And still. Holding onto each other would be fun.

HOPKINS

And dancing.

MARIANNE

Or not.

HOPKINS

And if Victor came in.

MARIANNE

He'd come in. He'd see us dancing. He'd smile. He might even join us.

HOPKINS

Never imagining that you and I, alone, know each other in the same ways that the three of us, together, know each other.

MARIANNE

Never. Victor's the one who sits next to me at the dinner table, telling me how wonderful the steak is, while I wait, very patiently, for someone across the table to stare into my eyes, and, in that stare, to promise me the moon. Victor could walk into a room where the tension was impossible, where someone was ready to kill someone, where someone else was ready to make love to someone else, but unless he saw the gun, unless he saw clothes coming off, he'd think everyone was just having a good time and he'd smile and he might even join in. And it's not that he's stupid, it's just that he sees things they way they are, for him, very clearly, rather than the way things might be if we weren't so good at hiding, and because it's clear to him, it's safe, it's the given. And so, no, never, because, to Victor, Hopkins is gay and Marianne is his wife and all he'd imagine possible between them is a dance.

HOPKINS

In your dreams, in that little half-sleep just after we've made love and only minutes before you suddenly decide it's time to go, in those moments of reverie you caress, lying on the rug in front of the fireplace or when we drive out to the beach and your toes cling to the millions of crystals of sand beneath them, in your dreams, you sometimes say things, only part of which I hear, only part of which, I think, you mean for me to hear, and what I do hear is that, in those moments, there is no passion grand enough, no romance fantastic enough. And yet, here, not only here but in all those times when you're awake, standing upright, feet on the ground, going about your business, most of which I don't understand, it's all onions and potatoes.

MARIANNE

I know my life. I know Victor. Knowing Victor, I feel I know men.

HOPKINS

Men. Arrogant. Selfish. Cruel. Insensitive. Insane. How did we get this far - although this place we've come to isn't so terrific, is it? it always seems as if we're approaching the end, doesn't it? - how did we get this far, paying hommage through so many centuries to so many of those tap-dancing lunatics? I'll narrow it down. Men. The men in my life. One doesn't have the courage to sustain a relationship. The other doesn't have the courage to break it off.

MARIANNE

Then why do you love men so much?

HOPKINS

I'm inconsistent.

MARIANNE

You're crazy.

HOPKINS

I've been trying to tell you that all day. I've been trying to tell everyone. Crazy. And crazier every minute.

MARIANNE AND HOPKINS

And why do you love me?

HOPKINS

Because you're a woman.
Because, with you, I see... the truth of myself that I never saw before.
Because, with you, I can't lie.
Because with you, I know my limitations.
Because, with you, there is pain as well as pleasure.
Because, with you, I can't lie.
Because you love two men at the same time with the same commitment.

MARIANNE

Because you're a man.
Because with you I can go on dreaming and not accept what it is I settled for.
Because, with you, I can't lie.
Because, with you, I know my potential.
Because, with you, I experience so much pleasure.
Because, with you, I can't lie.

Are you talking about me or are you talking about you?

HOPKINS

Because, in love, you're a militant, obsessive and stubborn, ferocious and graceful, because you love without logic, without reason, because all the ways in which you love make you so extraordinary, because, being a woman, you can be extraordinary, because you go all-out, because you're spiritually free, because, in your loving, you give so much of yourself, you give endlessly, until, it seems as if you would die giving, as if the gift itself was your martyrdom, because the force of your feeling transcends what is clear to almost everybody but you: that you're not getting very much in return.

MARIANNE

You're missing the point. Loving you and Victor both, I have everything. And what I don't have I will always want, no matter how much either of you give me in return.

HOPKINS

When I think of what it is you have, I say to myself, I want some of that, I want, as a matter of fact, all of that, to creep into my bones, to release me, to make me whole, to dare me to confront the darkest part of me, and, wanting that, all of that, I feel coming back to me the energy that seems always in danger of slipping away.

MARIANNE

And, loving both of you, I protect myself from one or the other of you leaving me alone. I don't want to be left alone. Ever. It's my frailty.

HOPKINS

You're extraordinary.

MARIANNE

You never listen to me.

HOPKINS

And, with you, I'm extraordinary. Again. And we know each other, we have a history, don't we?, and, still, what we share is mystery, which makes us strangers, and so, like strangers, we can start out, make a beginning, knowing the important things there are to know about each other, and not knowing the rest, and because I'm gay and because you're a woman, we have oppression in common, we're the skeletons in the closet they can't keep locked in anymore, and you, with me, and me, with you, we can inhabit our love without inhibiting it, which is impossible, for me, with everybody else.

MARIANNE

Never. You never listen to me. You hear everything and yet you never listen.

HOPKINS

I set fire to my life, Marianne, not once, but over and over again, sometimes just to keep from freezing to death, sometimes just to make sure I'm alive, as if a slow steady flame weren't enough, but it's what I know, it's how I live, and I'll do it again, and yet again, set fire to my life. Like now. I ask you, run away with me, forget everything and run away with me, so that I can learn to be capable of the kind of love you're capable of, so that I can have that part of you within me, and yet, and yet, I'm selfish, and that's one of my frailties, I ask you, run away with me, and I can't promise that there won't be a man whose hairy chest I'll want to cling to, a boy whose long legs I'll want to tackle, even a man somewhere whose soul I'll want to possesss.

MARIANNE

What do you want? Who do you want me to be for you?

They are dancing again.
Or perhaps they have never stopped dancing.

HOPKINS

Who do you want me to be for you?

MARIANNE

Just who you are.

HOPKINS

That wouldn't be enough for me.

MARIANNE

I'd watch you grow.

HOPKINS

What's that?

MARIANNE

What?

HOPKINS

That, Behind your ear. That fragrance.

MARIANNE

Gardenia. Mingled, I imagine, with sweat.

HOPKINS

Odd.

MARIANNE

What?

HOPKINS

It's odd. I've smelled it before. I know I've smelled it before. Somewhere.

MARIANNE

Probably on me.

HOPKINS

Yes. But. Also. Another time. Wait. I'm trying. To remember. I need. To remember. It wasn't that long ago. A year ago. Less than a year ago. If I could create the flashback, if I could send myself, transport myself back to whenever that moment was, put the puzzle of that moment together, whenever, whatever that moment was. If. And I can't.

The dance
once more,
but without flow.

HOPKINS

seems lost in
MARIANNE's gardenias.

MARIANNE

The scent of gardenias, the essence of gardenias, which, I suppose, is why I've always been attracted to it, has in it, for me, some crushed memory of something so exotic, perhaps even erotic, that I feel it's a memory of something that never really took place, a memory of something I wish might have taken place, but which never really did take place.

HOPKINS

Something erotic.

MARIANNE

And lush.

HOPKINS

The dunes, the moonlight, not quite a full moon, a heavy moon, a restless moon, peers through the tall grass and the knotted brush, but just for a moment, moving away as quickly as it appeared, a dark moon that leaves behind it just the night, and beyond the dunes, the sound of the sea, with no particular rhythm of its own that night, not a roar, not a steady gentle lapping against the beach, not a sound that lulls you to sleep, not a sound that keeps you awake, a sound without a particular sound, and a part of the moonlight, no longer above me really, no longer above us, I'm with someone, a part of the moonlight keeps it light enough to see, in the thicket, among the dunes, makes glisten the damp leaves beneath our naked bodies but keeps in shadow our faces, so that we don't really see each other as we really look but as we want each other to look, we are each other's fantasy, in that light, and we've just made love, we are exhausted from our making love, it's been so long, so slow, so sensual, it seemed, for a time, as if it would never end, and yet, then, then, it has ended, and I smell that smell, and it's not gardenias at all, it's that interplay between sweat and salt and come and the night air, and yet, now, as it rushes back to me, as it becomes clear again, clear as if it were seconds ago, it is the smell of gardenias, it is your smell, and it is that same smell, although that time, too, it wasn't really there, not gardenias, how could there be gardenias without knowing there were gardenias, that same smell the night I danced to Stardust, and I remember thinking it was my parents' favorite song, I had always known it was their favorite song, and yet that time, that particular time, something about the way the saxaphones insinuated themselves into my loins, something about the yearning, the longing, the desire, the loss, always the loss, all of it in the saxaphones, it seemed to me, that time I suddenly realized it was their favorite song because they had made love to it, it was not just a song they heard together, danced to together, but a song they made love to together, but, now, Marianne, it's bridging over into something else, now. Why is this all coming back, rushing back? Now? Why? Nothing in any of it smells of gardenias, nothing. And yet it does. Keep rushing back. It's not by logic, never by logic, that we're transformed, is it? I'm ten years old. I'm in bed. With a cold. I smell the smell of Vicks, Vicks in every pore of my body, Vicks, not gardenias, and I can't get rid of the smell. I smell it now. Still. I can't go on, Marianne. I'm exhausted. And I can't stop. And. Nothing. In any of it. Smells of gardenias. And yet. The smell of it. On you. If I push you away. But I don't want to push you away. I want to hold onto you. And I'm at my uncle's funeral, and most of it is blurred, like that part of the dream you want to remember and can't remember, and some of it is clear, like that dream in which I'm on a ship and I realize the captain is going to kill all of us, although I don't remember who the other people are, and somehow I know the captain is gay and I know I can survive by making love to him, and just as I'm about to make love to him, I suddenly realize he is a Nazi and I'm a Jew, although I don't remember how that realization came, and I wake up knowing I will be killed too, knowing that I'm tied not to my sexuality but to my race, like that dream in which some things are blurred and some things are clear, I'm at my uncle's funeral, and most of it is blurred and some

HOPKINS

(continuing)

of it is clear, and the clear part of it, the vivid part of it, the part of it that has burned into my memory the way the Vicks, it seems, has seeped into my pores, the clear part is my father, the image of my father, standing on a stairway leading to an elevated subway, somewhere in Brooklyn, at twilight, the sun setting behind him, distorting his shape, keeping in the shadows his face, so that I don't really see him as he really looks but as I want him to look, my fantasy of him, in that light, as I look up at him, the setting sun glaring in my eyes, making it hard for me to see anything, and still he looks down at me, and starts to wave, and when he does, a coat that has been hanging over his arms falls and somebody else's arm rises, as my father waves, as if the other arm is attached to his, and between them, the sun behind them, falling too, something gleams, a pair of handcuffs, and something else can be seen in that light, my father's embarrassment as the coat is picked up and they turn towards the subway, into the shadows, away from me, the subway on which he'll begin his journey back to the prison from which he was allowed, the one time, the only time, in all those years he spent in prison, the first time and the only time he was allowed to come into the real world, to attend his brother's funeral, to acknowledge not life but death, in a suit too large for him, handcuffed to a stranger, a coat concealing not very well the metal chains, and the smell of that day is of the earth, of my father's skin, of Brooklyn, not, not of gardenias. And now, now I am in a movie house, my cousin has taken me to a movie, and it's the day my mother has re-married, only I don't know that then, I don't guess that until later, and she has got me out of the way by asking my cousin to take me to the movies, the movies, my only escape, my only pleasure, my only reality, then and now, they've shaped my life, the movies, no wonder they've shaped my life, and I am in a movie house with my cousin and the film we're watching is "The Uninvited." And the smell is of popcorn and fear, not, not of gardenias. And now, now I'm on a horse, in a saddle, and underneath me, straining at the bit, the horse is running through the woods, out of the woods, and even as I see this, I see also a faded photograph of me sitting on a pony, and the horse is running out of the woods and onto a beach and I don't hear the sound of the sea, I hear only the galloping, my own breath of excitement, and I imagine the sound of the sea is without a particular sound. And now, now, help me, Marianne, this is crazy, I'm not even born yet, it's another time, another place, and, there's another horse, and it's me, it's me, the horse, running free on a field of lime, wild and savage and happy and crying, and the smell is of the soil and of sweat and of manure, not, not of gardenias. And I need air, air, Marianne. Please. I'm tired. To the death.

Embracing HOPKINS,
MARIANNE leaves with him.
And VICTOR
is alone, with the music.

VICTOR
sits, for a long while,
almost a comic figure,
and, in a moment of divine madness,
takes a rifle from
The Rifle Collection,
loads it
and leaves.
After a moment,
DAVID
enters, through the door,
and leaves.
We hear a scream,
wrenched from the bottom of his soul,
from DAVID.
The Scream
is followed by
The Shot.
CLAUDE
enters, through the door,
gently closes the door behind him,
and dashes out,
across the room,
to the other side,
reaching the other side
just as
HOPKINS and DAVID
enter.
HOPKINS cradles DAVID,
the music its own sad litany between them,
until DAVID breaks down,
in wracking sobs,
in the arms of HOPKINS.
After a moment,
CLAUDE,
a bloodied rabbit in his hands,
and VICTOR
enter.

CLAUDE
Caught himself a rabbit, Victor. Catch another one, we'll have
rabbit for dinner tomorrow.

CLAUDE
leaves, through the door.
HOPKINS and DAVID
leave.
As they do,
there is an exchange between
HOPKINS and VICTOR
which HOPKINS doesn't understand.
VICTOR
is left alone again
until
ELENA
enters, through the door,
and proceeds to change the tape
to a sensual disco beat.

VICTOR

In a farce, you try to kill a man and almost kill yourself instead, just missing, of course, so that it's funny. In a tragedy, you don't miss him, or yourself, and you live long enough to experience the whole spectrum of suffering, the suffering caused by killing, the suffering in dying, and every detail of that suffering is recorded. In life, you don't do either, you're not noble enough, and you just go on living, uselessly. So, in life, you shoot at a man and kill instead an innocent rabbit, and, most of all, because you don't know how to use a gun. So, you make a fool of yourself. And then you have to come back, a fool, and live with the man you tried to kill, with the woman you're married to and he's sleeping with, and, worst of all, with yourself. I don't like the way things happen in life.

ELENA

Dance?

VICTOR

I tell you the history of my life and how it's neither a farce or a tragedy, just a meaningless joke, and you, like everyone else around here, want to dance.

ELENA

Come on. It's easy. You don't have to know too much about this music, either. It's about something or other being on fire, and it's about no matter how high you are, you can get even higher, hear it? And you can get through it all, life I imagine, or the next three minutes at least, just as long as you keep dancing.

Through this,

ELENA

is dancing.

And finally,

VICTOR

joins her.

ELENA

(continuing)

One part of the beat, hear it?, says, go slow, take your time, let the sensuality flow, there!, and then the other part, hear it?, drives you forward, drives your body forward, says, faster, faster, leading up to the orgasm, naturally, but not without slowing up again just before you come. You sweat. You keep cool. La. La. La. La. That's it. That's good. You're good. La. La. La. La. Mmm.

CLAUDE

enters,

with a projector.

CLAUDE

Don't mind me. Just setting up. Going to see a little film.

CLAUDE

goes through the business
of setting up:
film in the projector;
a screen goes up.
ELENA and VICTOR
continue dancing.
Numbers appear
on the screen.
LOUISE
enters.

LOUISE

Do we have to sit through that film again?

CLAUDE

Mother insists. You know Mother.

LOUISE

With commentary?

VICTOR

Going to get me a drink.

ELENA

I'll be right with you, baby.

VICTOR

leaves.

LOUISE

Are you going to seduce him?

ELENA

Why not? Nobody else seems to be paying me any attention.

LOUISE

I said I would see you later.

ELENA

I just wanted a few minutes alone with you. A few minutes.

LOUISE

What you want is a decision of some sort. I'm too crazy for
decisions of any sort.

CLAUDE

begins to leave,
through the door.

LOUISE

With commentary, Claude?

CLAUDE

You know Mother.

CLAUDE

leaves, through the door.

LOUISE

Where's Mira?

ELENA

With the alcoholic Jewess.

ELENA

starts to leave.

LOUISE

Where are you going?

ELENA

I told Victor I'd be right with him.

LOUISE

In my house.

ELENA

We can have those few minutes now.

LOUISE

I won't be forced into a decision. Not now. Not ever. Not about this.

ELENA

leaves.

LOUISE

changes the tape;
it is where it was left off
before ELENA changed the tape.

Music.

LOUISE

leaves, through the door,
as DAVID and HOPKINS
enter, from the other side.

DAVID

Who are these people?

HOPKINS

Spectators.

DAVID

These friends of yours?

HOPKINS

And participants.

DAVID

Without faces.

HOPKINS

And the sport, though nameless, is ancient.

DAVID

With frozen masks for faces. You're not embarrassed to parade them in front of me?

HOPKINS

And exhausting.

DAVID

To dangle them, these puppets, in front of my nose? To tell me, look, how do you like them, my friends? These are the people in Mozart's operas, totally frivolous, totally silly, totally ridiculous, and don't say to me one word about Mozart's sensibility. In the balcony, workers look down on the stage, see these people, and, right there, in the middle of the performance, the revolution begins. Fascism? You want to know what fascism is? It's this. This. What you see here. Weekends in the country. Days at the races. Fucking everyone. Anyone. Anyone with a frozen mask for a face. Behind a screen.

HOPKINS

I'm the one who's crazy, David.

DAVID

You have your craziness, let me have mine. Care? Nobody cares for anything. Humanity? Doesn't exist. There is, in this house with thirteen phones, no idea that, in this world, people starve, people die, that there are people who live for what they believe, not for what they want. Like children. At Disneyland, Disneyland. The bourgeois excess I see here, that's what fascism is. These people would kill you. Without blinking. Without blinking. And walk over your body. Maybe pick at it. Necromancy is the disease of the rich. And why are they rich? Because the poor pay all the bills, have always paid the bills, every last bill the poor have paid. I look at your face, Herschele, you're so sweet, but what kind of Jew are you if these are your friends? Maybe I'm wrong. No. I'm right. I know I'm right. But if I'm wrong, it won't be the first time. That's the sort of thing I would admit. You think these people think, for one single minute, they could be wrong? Never. But if they're right, what are they right about? Where to go. What to see. What to wear. What wine to drink. What food to eat. Where to spend the next holiday. The next weekend. And.

DAVID

(continuing)

Anti-semitic, Herschele, anti-semitic. The French, they make the Germans look like nothing when it comes to hating Jews. And don't tell me that most of the guests are Jewish. The hosts are not. Definitely not Jewish. Behind the fancy stables, Auschwitz. And what am I doing here? You think loving you is enough to keep me here, you think your sweet face is enough to keep me here? No. Not enough, Herschele, not enough.

All the clocks chime
eight times
and then,
in succession,
they play the
First Call to the Post.

DAVID

(continuing)

My mother's dead, Herschele. Dead. Tomorrow I bury my mother.
In the ground.

HOPKINS kisses

DAVID

who, after a moment,
leaves, through the door.

And then

MARIANNE

comes in, and
MARIANNE and HOPKINS
take a moment together
to love each other
without words.

HOPKINS

Marianne.

MARIANNE

Hopkins.

HOPKINS

Run away with me.

MARIANNE

Just like in the movies.

HOPKINS

They've shaped my life.

MARIANNE

I can't.

HOPKINS

You won't.

MARIANNE

I can't.

HOPKINS

I'm leaving. Going home. I'll wait there for you. Until midnight.

MARIANNE

And after midnight?

The convergence:
 Through the door,
 MME. HERVE
 enters,
 followed by
 CLAUDE, SNODGRASS and MIRA.
 From the other side,
 a second later,
 VICTOR and ELENA
 enter.
 And,
 in a pantomime of feelings
 the unspoken tensions
 are expressed.

MME. HERVE

Et maintenant, pour notre amusement, un petit film, l'histoire
 de notre famille.

The lights dim.
 CLAUDE starts the film.
 During the film,
 HOPKINS and SNODGRASS
 move towards each other
 in friendly affection
 and genuine warmth.

The Film:

An era passing,
 a collection of old photographs
 and old home movies
 depicting, among other things,
 the aging process of the late M. Hervé,
 the time-lapse erection of the Hervé home
 from wilderness to bourgeois comfort,
 Claude as a child,
 horses running free
 and horses in captivity
 and horses in contest.

MME. HERVE

Voila ce pays sauvage, ça. It is like this, the country, when we arrive here, mon mari et moi, and it is parce que, because, it is sauvage like this que mon mari has said we must call this Gethsemane. Ah, ça, I say, but régarde-là, these natural waters, et lui, he say, alors, we call it Gethsemane Springs. Ça, c'est mon mari, my husband, M. Hervé, when he was young, comme il était beau, a very handsome man, vous ne trouvez pas? Ah, oui, comme il était beau. It is assemblé, put together, this film, des vieux trucs, des photographies. Et ça, it is the house mon mari built. It is very clever how they do this, in the film, to show how the house was then, and how the house, the house mon mari built, is now, maintenant, ici, where we sit. Encore, mon mari, un peu plus vieux, a little older, toujours un bel homme. It is said of mon mari that, il y a un fois, once upon a time, he has killed a man for my love, what man would do such a thing today? Ça, c'est la chasse. He loved the hunt, mon mari. More than anything. Except his horses. Alors, here is our first horse, notre premier cheval, et quel chevalier, mon mari. Il s'appelle Le Premier. Un bel animal, vous ne trouvez pas? Ça, that is our tree, we walk every day together to look at our tree, to talk to our tree, it still stands there, our tree, I see it not so often these days.

HOPKINS and SNODGRASS
slip quietly out of the room,
through the door.

MME. HERVE

(continuing)

Ah, le petit Claude. Un bel enfant, vous ne trouvez pas? A very handsome child, notre Claude. Et ceci, the first race track, very primitive, you can see, and soon you see how it is today, very different. Ah, we have lived, mon mari et moi, through all the grand inventions in this century. The automobile. The airplane. The cinema. We have sat right here in this room with Bernhardt, a very little woman but who, c'est vrai, on the stage, was very majestic, with Matisse.

MARIANNE

You remember all of that?

MME. HERVE

And who is here in this room to dispute me? Ah, les chevaux. Le concours. Ah, you see, the race track as it is today. Quelle différence! Mon mari, encore, déjà veilli, old, mais toujours beau. Et Claude, un jeune homme de caractère. One can see already that he will be as he is today. Ah, ça, un grand documentaire. Et triste. Qu'ai-je raconté? Rien du tout. Ce rien est quelque chose. Car c'est le fond du temps.

(The above is not spoken in a steady stream; it takes as long as the film takes; the music and the sound of the projector form part of the dialogue.)

The lights come up.
CLAUDE
re-winds the film
and removes the screen.
MME. HERVE
is lost in reverie.
Everyone stirs,
but very slightly,
caught in a mood,
restless,
trance-like,
away from each other,
and, again,
towards each other.
LOUISE
enters.

LOUISE

See the film?

ELENA

A Day at the Races without the Marx Brothers.

MIRA

With a lovely French commentary.

VICTOR

And no subtitles.

LOUISE

Dinner is being served.

CLAUDE

Remember. After dinner. Down to the stables.

CLAUDE

leaves.

VICTOR and ELENA

leave.

MIRA takes MME. HERVE

into the dining room.

MARIANNE

What have I told?

LOUISE

You say something?

MARIANNE

Madame Hervé, she said something quite strange. What have I told?, she said. Nothing at all. This nothing is something. For it is the end of time.

LOUISE

Peculiar. A very peculiar woman.

LOUISE

opens the door,
sticks her head in,
for a moment,
and then closes the door
behind her
and leaves.
A moment later,
HOPKINS
enters, through the door.

HOPKINS

Until midnight.

MARIANNE

And after midnight?

HOPKINS

I am a dying man. Not dead, mind you. Just dying. If I were dead, I'd have more in common with the rest of the world.

MARIANNE

And so?

HOPKINS

After midnight, I set fire to my life. Again.

MARIANNE

Hopkins.

HOPKINS

leaves, through the door.

And,

a moment later,

SNODGRASS

enters, through the door,

smiles at MARIANNE

and passes through

towards the dining room.

MARIANNE

If only things were as I imagined they'd be instead of the way they are.

Music up.

Lights down.

Mozart: Ah, che tutta in un momento
si cangio la sorte mia!

THIRD MOVEMENT

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

ALLEGRO VIVACE E APPASSIONATO

Music in the darkness.
Small light on MARIANNE.

MARIANNE

If only things were as I imagined they'd be instead of the way they are.

It would seem to be where the Second Movement left off. But as the lights come up, we see MARIANNE as she was at the start of the First Movement. In this, the Third Movement, the First and Second are played back simultaneously: the difference is that the men are all in riding habits, the women in elegant gowns of another era, and occasionally, during MARIANNE's arias, the sound of Hawaiian guitars can be heard. Softly. But nothing else changes; it is as before, just as before. MARIANNE cannot have everything. When the movements converge, the closing scene from Capriccio is followed by the "Ah, guarda, sorella" duet from Cosi Fan Tutte and finally at the very end, the Casta Diva, all of this under the final scene, the only part of the Third Movement which we have not yet seen, the dialogue between MARIANNE and LOUISE.

MARIANNE is alone,
as she was at the end of the
Second Movement.
LOUISE returns.

LOUISE

Marianne darling, are you coming to dinner? And where is Hopkins? And why is Victor so goddamned happy? And has anybody seen my mother-in-law's glasses?

MARIANNE

Here. Are the glasses. Victor is mad. Hopkins has gone. And I am not hungry.

LOUISE

Marianne, my angel, come sit down, here, beside me, and tell me why there is a faint whiff of poignance in the air.

MARIANNE

Your dinner.

LOUISE

Can wait. At last count, eleven dwindled down to nine, now down to seven. And the formal dinner being one of the rituals, among so many, we no longer observe, one more won't matter.

MARIANNE

Plain talk?

LOUISE

Plain talk.

MARIANNE

I have been, from the start, an ordinary person, a woman taught not to put too much faith in promise, a woman for whom the only preservation, the only protection, was a good marriage and a good marriage was exactly what I got, a good marriage and everything that goes with a good marriage, a good house in a good neighborhood with two good cars, and two good children, a little spoiled, a little demanding perhaps, but good, not very good, just good, and very little promise. And a good husband, who at forty is still in good shape and still good where it counts, still good in bed and good about paying the bills, even the little extra ones for the things that aren't really necessary. And one day, a tap-dancing lunatic - that, Louise, is a metaphor for Man - came into our lives, a tap-dancing lunatic who set fire to his life who has more lovers at one time, presumably to keep the flame burning, than anyone I know has had in a lifetime, except maybe you, a tap-dancing lunatic who has refused to accept the fact that what I am is an ordinary person, who has in fact convinced me that I am quite extraordinary, much too extraordinary to be bound by the institution of a good marriage, even a marriage to a good man he himself is in love with. And this very same tap-dancing lunatic who admits he prefers men to me, who thinks he is not nearly extraordinary enough for me, for me, Marianne the very ordinary, has asked me to run off with him, to leave everything I have and run off with him, to have, in the name of romance, a perfectly terrible relationship. And I want to.

LOUISE

Plain talk?

MARIANNE

Plain talk.

LOUISE

Do it.

MARIANNE

Too plain.

LOUISE

He's right. You are extraordinary. Tragic. Dissatisfied. And right now radiant. And extraordinary. If only because you're a woman, an ordinary woman who has put up with a good marriage for twenty years, you're extraordinary, and it is of no little value to have that much acknowledged. Do it.

MARIANNE

He's crazy.

LOUISE

He doesn't hide it.

MARIANNE

He hasn't got a nickel, not a lousy dime.

LOUISE

What have you got saved up?

MARIANNE

He'll strip me of every illusion. It's not the glamor of romance he's holding out to me, not the glamor I always wanted, dreamed of, yearned for, it's hard-core romance he's offering, it's throw caution to the wind, burn your bridges, give it all up, all for maybe nothing, something that will last a month, maybe, with luck, two, with an outside chance, a long shot, that it'll last forever, a very outside chance.

LOUISE

The obsession, Marianne, is always more magnificent than the object of the obsession.

MARIANNE

Except to the obsessed.

LOUISE

You love him.

MARIANNE

What did you think?

LOUISE

I didn't think.

A silence between
MARIANNE and LOUISE:
something understood
and, at the same time,
no understanding at all.

MARIANNE

Louise. Why haven't you ever left Claude?

LOUISE

You don't like Claude very much, do you? Why should you? Nobody likes Claude much anymore. He is a little absurd, isn't he? When people stop liking men like Claude, it's not so much a sign of indifference, although there is that in it, but an indication that there are more important things in the world to care about, that the Claudes are dying out or are about to be confiscated. But I'll tell you something about Claude. He has a genuine respect for valuable property. His horses. His house. His wife. He takes the best possible care of what he holds valuable.

MARIANNE

For someone who has so much to settle for so little. It just seemed curious to me. So many people love you.

LOUISE

I don't want to be loved by anybody.

Another silence between

MARIANNE and LOUISE:

Something sad and,
at the same time,
dangerous
has been spoken.

MARIANNE

I want to go now. Before the spell breaks. Before the momentum stops. Before the dream disintegrates. My cape.

LOUISE

And Victor?

MARIANNE

Tell him I'm a dying woman. Not dead, mind you. Just dying. If I were dead, I'd have more in common with the rest of the world. My cape.

LOUISE leaves;
For a moment,
MARIANNE, alone,
fills her body with the music.
And LOUISE returns with
MARIANNE's coat.

MARIANNE

Call a carriage.

LOUISE

The keys to my car are in your pocket. Take it. It's faster.

MARIANNE goes off into the night;
LOUISE goes to dinner;
Casta Diva grows louder in intensity
drowning out the silence.