

HUGELY ENTERTAINING

CHARACTERS: (10)

(Each is a mixture of the comic and the sad, like most people.)

- KARINNE HOWE, a witty, suicidal lesbian, with lover troubles,
has a play to market, fortyish
- SIMON KIRK, an old actor going blind, Shakespeare idolater,
over sixty
- BRITISH GUEST (multiple parts — actor, director, always the
same person with different names, sometimes a
mustache or other slight changes), over thirty
- GLORIA KNOTTS, self-reliant, impatient, falsely compassionate,
heard it all, once killed someone in a car
accident, over thirty-five
- BRIAN BURPEE, gets facts wrong, self-educated, badly dressed,
outcast, any age
- SYLVIA LUNA, a would-be clairvoyant, sensitive, also a
transsexual, played by a man, over forty, but not
a “drag” role
- BRADLEY GRANNITT, something of a gold-digger but not too
good at it, also a scholarship actor,
thirties, handsome, under thirty-five
- ANTONIA GLOBAL, young actress, opinionated, aloof,
optimistic, overindulged, may have
potential, under twenty
- KAY HOLSCHER, nice, tells people what they want to hear,
others try to guess her secret and gossip about
her, over forty.
- CARNATION, The Countess De La Rue, streetwise, self-assured,
bed-wetting nobility whom others always want to wait
on, changes plans often, exerts natural superiority,
unfazed by her own foibles, over thirty-five

(Ideally, even the off-stage characters in the telephone conversations could be actors saying the lines onstage. It’s possible that some of the telephone conversations can be cut back to their essence.)

- SETS: 1) Ten chairs in a semi-circle
- 2) Seven cell-like dorm “rooms” with imaginary closets, simple cots, indicated by separate areas of light.

(If the budget allows, these small “rooms” can be indicated with flats, or even built with three on top of the other four, with bathrooms and other staff rooms unseen offstage. The audience can see into all seven onstage “rooms.”)

STYLE: Realistic comedy drama.

ACT I

Scene 1, Set 1

AT RISE we see a semi-circle of ten ordinary chairs. After a few moments, the quietly mysterious KAY HOLSCHER enters and takes a seat. After a few more seconds, the transsexual clairvoyant SYLVIA LUNA enters, takes a seat, but not too close to KAY. They smile cautiously at each other but don't speak. Another few moments go by, and the aloof young actress, ANTONIA GLOBAL, enters. She sits apart from the other two. KAY smiles at ANTONIA, who looks away, not interested in older people. We wonder what they are waiting for. Finally, blustery GLORIA KNOTTS enters, carrying a clipboard with some papers on it.

GLORIA Hope you didn't have too much trouble getting here. (The others mutter no.) I certainly did! It's never easy, no matter how much planning you think you've done. But just remember what Samuel Johnson, that great eighteenth-century writer, always said, "When a man is tired of London, he's tired of life!" I'll check off your names later, once we're all here. (irritated) Some seem to be late!

ANTONIA Man, I'm jet-lagged, like for days! Like for the rest of my life!

GLORIA First time to Europe — I can tell.

ANTONIA Actually, it's my third.

GLORIA You'll get used to it by the time you're thirty. Oh, look, here's another one of us!

(Handsome BRADLEY enters.)

BRADLEY So here's where all the pretty women are! (Others look skeptical.) I'm serious! Such a stunning group. It's going to be fun, I can tell. Hi there, I'm Bradley.

KAY Nice to meet you, Bradley.

(The others mumble greetings.)

GLORIA Simon Kirk, my co-coordinator, should be along in no time. We are so incredibly lucky to be getting him. I've known him for years, but it's the very first time he's ever agreed to participate in a theater seminar. Ordinarily he's just too busy working at the National or the RSC in Stratford. But he found some time for us this year! For the whole two weeks! Now I just wonder where he is!

(The lesbian KARINNE enters, unsure.)

KARINNE Hello, I'm Karinne Howe. Is this the seminar?

BRADLEY (too lively) This be the place!

GLORIA Welcome. I'll get all your names later. Don't worry. And your blood types. (blithely) You never know when you might need a transfusion! Just kidding!

(Enter outcast BRIAN BURPEE with two heavy suitcases, looking bedraggled, one arm in a sling. He has to kick one bag to move it.)

GLORIA And who might this weary traveler be?!

BRIAN I'm sorry I'm late. I got a little lost.

SYLVIA Oh, how terrible.

KARINNE What happened?

BRIAN (reluctant) It's not worth going into.

GLORIA Oh, come on! That's how we get to know each other. I'll show you my scars if you'll show me yours!

SYLVIA I notice you still have your bags.

KAY And your arm — what happened?

BRIAN I . . . just this minute arrived. That is, I arrived about twelve hours ago. But I forgot the paper with this address on it — for Canterbury Hall — and when I got to Heathrow — I mean, *out* of Heathrow — I got in a cab and said . . . take me to . . . Canterbury. And sure enough the cabby . . .

GLORIA Took you to Canterbury? The town? (BRIAN nods.) (She laughs.) All the way to the real Canterbury? Fifty miles by taxi? (BRIAN nods again.) Oh, that's awful! Just awful! (She's enjoying it immensely.)

BRIAN And then back again.

GLORIA By taxi? (BRIAN nods.) Not a second time!

BRIAN And then I fell and sprained my wrist. Outside, I mean. I was — I'm not used to these London streets.

GLORIA (laughing) Excuse me for laughing. I don't really mean to. (Laughs harder.) Well, I guess you're the real Canterbury pilgrim this year.

ANTONIA (laughing too loudly) That's really funny!

BRIAN (laughs at himself) I suppose it is.

GLORIA Now that's our first Canterbury tale of the year! (Tries to stifle her laughs, but can't.) But it's safe with us, Brian! Believe me, you won't be the last.

(Enter the very self-possessed COUNTESS.)

COUNTESS (looking at the surroundings, the others) Well, I hope this isn't it! Surely this can't be right!

GLORIA Who exactly are you looking for?

COUNTESS The Magical London Theatre Extravaganza and Seminar.

GLORIA Look no further.

COUNTESS But there must be some mistake. I looked at my so-called room upstairs, and it's like a cell. With a cot! A cot! There isn't even a closet. And this room!

GLORIA Let me guess. You must be the Countess De La Rue!

COUNTESS I don't use my title. Now that I am an American citizen, I'm not allowed to, they tell me. Not that I'd want to. I believe in democracy!

GLORIA Our accommodations are quite clearly spelled out in our brochure. (Takes one from the clipboard and reads from it.) "Seminarists will stay in modest individual quarters at one of the residences of the University."

COUNTESS Modest? This place is downright tatty! Did you see those stains in the entranceway? What are *they* anyway?

GLORIA I spoke to the African man at the front desk, and he promised that those stains will be gone. However, the cleaning staff is now contracted out, and they won't be in again until tomorrow morning. He assures me that even though they speak no English and may come into your rooms even when you say to wait, they are very efficient overall.

COUNTESS I can live with stains. I can live with no English. And I adore Africans! But you expect me to sleep on a mere cot?! And there's not even a basin in that so-called room. To say nothing of a bidet. How are we supposed to —

GLORIA There are only two of you per bathroom — at the end of each hallway. In past years our seminarists have found everything quite congenial, *if* people decide at the start that they are going to enjoy themselves. Of course, if some people make up their minds not to be open to the Magical London Theatre Extravaganza and Seminar experience from the beginning, it can be unpleasant, and I mean for all. As Hamlet wisely says, "Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so."

COUNTESS That's the silliest thing I ever heard in my life. Now I don't mean to be unpleasant. I'm not an unpleasant person. I have often been referred to as an exceedingly pleasant person — in the right circumstances.

KAY I have a slightly larger bed in my room. We could exchange, if you like.

COUNTESS Oh, would you? How lovely. How large is it? Much larger? Or just a little larger?

KAY I didn't measure it. But I'm pretty sure it's wider. Anyway, you're welcome to look at it.

GLORIA There's no need to change rooms or beds just yet. All this can be sorted out in good time. I've been through this many times. It'll all work out! Trust me!

COUNTESS (to KAY) That is a most gracious offer. We will talk later.

GLORIA Good! Actually sleeping on a cot can be good for the soul. That is — or has come to be — part of the spirit of our program here as it has developed over the years. Well, it looks like I've begun, doesn't it? Most of us are here. Aren't we? (counting) Seven. The lucky seven seminarians. We had to turn away dozens this year. (pointedly to the COUNTESS) Dozens. So then! I am Gloria Knotts, the chief co-coordinator for the last I forget how many years. My supposed co-coordinator, Simon Kirk, will be coming along any time now. You know how these temperamental artists are! Anyway, let's get started. I want you to get to know each other. But you're perfectly welcome *not* to get to know anybody here. It's entirely up to you. I am the lucky person you will come crying to when you need something. My trusty shoulder will be here for you to lean on. I have aspirins, Band-Aids, milk of magnesia, Kaopectate, heartfelt sympathy, you name it. And I'll also be giving out the tickets to all the shows we'll be seeing this year — and what an extravaganza of London theater it is going to be!

KARINNE We might even call it magical?

GLORIA She's got it! Welcome, one and all, to the Magical London Theatre Extravaganza!

KARINNE (jokey) And Seminar!

GLORIA Right! I'm sure we're going to have a wonderful time together!

(The others applaud.)

GLORIA Now I want to go around the circle and have you introduce yourselves. But don't let first impressions rule the day! Although I did read somewhere that most people can tell whether they'll like someone in the first eight to ten seconds. So let me begin with myself. Besides running this program, which is totally non-profit, I might add, I also run a little money-laundering service on the side. Just kidding! It's actually hard drugs that I sell. Just kidding! People take me seriously sometimes. What I really am is a part-time staff reviewer for *Brit Perspective*, a theater arts journal that keeps non-British readers up to snuff on what's going on here! . . . I wonder what's keeping Simon?! I'm sure you'll love him. As you no doubt know, he has played Falstaff at the Royal Shakespeare, Leontes at Chichester, The Fool in Regent's Park. You name it, he's done it. Truly one of the great figures of the British stage! So then! That's enough about me. Who'd like to go next? (no one volunteers) Nobody? Okay, what about (looks at her list) Karinne Howe? You're here, aren't you?

KARINNE I think so. At least when I came in I was here. (The others smile.) Well, I am Karinne — accent on the second syllable. I think that's clear now. Not Karen. Karen was my twin sister. Karen and Karinne — that says a lot about my parents, does it not? But we don't have to worry anymore. . . . Karen died.

(Expressions of sympathy from the others.)

KARINNE No, Karen didn't really die. She just became a lesbian.

(General surprise.)

KARINNE Aren't you glad she didn't die? And you don't even know her. Aren't you glad now she's just a lesbian?

BRIAN Did your sister die or didn't she?

KARINNE I don't have a sister.

BRIAN But you just said . . .

KARINNE It's my way of coming out to a pack of strangers. Sorry. A group of strangers.

GLORIA We've had some very nice gay men in our seminar before. Very nice. So knowledgeable! But you're our very first lesbian.

KARINNE I'll be on my best behavior! Scout's honor. I'm also — don't be shocked now — a struggling playwright. Is there anything *but* a struggling playwright?

BRIAN Produced?

KARINNE Once, yes — at the Struggling Playwrights Fest in Omaha, four years ago. Plus two staged readings and one workshop in Shreveport. In other words, lots of foreplay. Lots of *fest*!

BRIAN *Foreplay?* Isn't that a pun?

KARINNE I hadn't thought of it, but you're right — it is!

BRIAN (smiles, to the group) I got that pun! I got it.

GLORIA And here are your theater tickets. For eight plays. Be sure to write down your seat numbers in case you forget them. (Gives KARINNE a packet.) Moving right along. Just jump right in, anybody.

SYLVIA (played real by a man not as drag) I am Sylvia Luna from Tempe, Arizona. I am a certified clairvoyant. Well, almost certified. I still have my finals to take.

KARINNE You take finals to become a clairvoyant?

SYLVIA I agree with you. There is just so much red tape these days. But I'll have that license in this little hand by next year if it kills me. And to be honest, I still have a lot to learn about my own powers.

KAY I had no idea you could go to school for that kind of thing.

KARINNE (tongue-in-cheek) Society can't have people running around being psychics without a license. God know what it might lead to.

SYLVIA There is so much more to this world, both the inner and outer, than most of us ever realize.

ANTONIA Do you do readings? Like of us?

SYLVIA Maybe. But no promises. We'll have to see.

KARINNE What if you fail your finals? What happens to you? Or to us?

GLORIA Here are your tickets. (Gives packet to SYLVIA.) Fascinating! Someone else?

KAY I'll go. I'm Kay Holscher, from Denver. I'm married with three children — Gayle, Cynthia, and Joseph. My husband is a chemical engineer, and I don't do much of anything, just sort of hang around the house and potter in my garden. And that's about it.

KARINNE I'm sure you do lots of things, being a mother. You're just too modest to brag.

KAY Well, I will say this. I'm taking this seminar to broaden my understanding of theater, and it's my very first trip abroad, and I'm enjoying it immensely so far.

(General sounds of approval. GLORIA passes a packet for KAY.)

BRADLEY My turn? I'm Bradley Grannitt, from New York. I like to think of myself as an actor. I'm straight. Sounds strange, I know. But that's how I am. It's my way of coming out. (Looks pointedly at the lesbian.)

KARINNE (a little incensed) Well, it does save time, doesn't it? On who to date, I mean.

BRADLEY I enjoy long walks on the beach. And I really love a sense of humor. And I truly believe that age in a woman is a marvelous thing, not something to be ashamed of.

GLORIA (a dig) And your sign? You forgot that.

BRADLEY Scorpio rising.

KARINNE (under her breath) Oh, brother.

BRADLEY And I'm here on an acting scholarship. Thanks to Gloria here.

(GLORIA acknowledges this and sends his packet on its way to him.)

ANTONIA I've always wondered, who or what are scorpions compatible with? I mean, who'd want to be with a scorpion?

BRADLEY They say they sting in the night, and you're never the same again.

GLORIA Speaking of rooms, be sure to lock yours every single time. We have had, sad to say, some thefts in years gone by. Don't — I repeat don't — lock yourselves out or you could wind up running up and down the halls in your skivvies or

whatever. And if you come in after midnight, remember you will have to ring the night bell, which is to the left of the front door. It says very clearly Night Bell. I'll have some more announcements later, and I'll be down in this room every morning at ten A.M. before our seminar, which starts promptly at ten-thirty Monday through Friday, to answer any and all questions and solve all the problems of your life and mine. All right? Who's next?

ANTONIA My name is Antonia Global. I'm an actor. Like him, I'm here on a scholarship. Although him and me never met before. Antonia Global isn't my real name. It's my stage name. Or at least, like, for now it is.

KAY It's very different.

ANTONIA It was gonna be Antony Globe — you know, after that guy in Shakespeare and his theater, the Globe, cuz I like strong women's names, but then I thought it might seem like it wasn't a woman's name, you know — Antony. So I went with Antonia. And Global sounds sort of international, kinda. I intend to be an international celebrity.

KARINNE (under her breath) Oh, brother.

ANTONIA So for now it's that, but I'm on the lookout for another stage name, so if you think of one, if you'd let me know, I might, like, consider it. And, guys, I'm from San Diego. Now my mom thinks I'm gonna be a big star by the time I've twenty. But I think it could, like, maybe even take me until I'm even twenty-one or something.

GLORIA I was going to save this, but I might as well tell you all. We're hoping to have a presentation by both our scholarship students on our last day — and maybe even by the famous Simon Kirk. Perhaps even some of *you* will summon up your courage to the sticking point and, who knows, delight us with something a recitation. A song? A poem? Don't say anything now. But think about it! Here are your tickets, Antonia. (Hands them over.) Don't lose them. Now who hasn't spoken yet?

COUNTESS The Countess de la Rue. But you may call me Carnation.

ANTONIA Carnation?

COUNTESS That is my first name.

ANTONIA Really?

COUNTESS All my siblings are named after flowers. Primrose, my elder sister, Dandelion, my youngest brother, Juniper, my younger sister. Yes, those aren't flowers, but it *is* vegetation. And I mustn't forget Nettlerash, my irritating older brother.

KARINNE Nettlerash?

COUNTESS That's what in the States you call poison oak.

SYLVIA You don't really have a brother named Nettlerash, do you? Or Dandelion?

COUNTESS You're the clairvoyant! You tell me! If I had a son, I think I'd call him Wallflower, if he is shy. Or maybe Thorn, if he is not.

(No one can tell if she's joking or serious.)

GLORIA And how did you happen to come to us this year? By way of Canada, isn't it? Your tickets. (Hands them out. They get passed along.)

COUNTESS I thought I'd signed up for Tuscany. By the time I found out I'd sent in the wrong form, it was too late. So I came here instead. I don't care one whit about theater, but maybe I can take in a few antiques shows. I also deal, in a very private way, with small collectibles — Victorian beaded purses, knitted, not embroidered. Or parasol handles, *if* made of ivory, and small iron toys, preferably uncuddly animals or automobiles. Iron only. Here is my card. (Takes some out of her purse, passes them around.)

KAY I might have something.

COUNTESS We'll talk.

GLORIA Well, I believe that leaves just one of us left to 'fess up. Brian, is that you?

BRIAN Oh, gosh. Well, I'm Brian Burpee, from —

(Enter SIMON KIRK, rushing in, in a caftan or other flamboyant clothing, his hair askew, an actor in the grand style.)

SIMON Excuse Me! Excuse me, everyone! I am most dreadfully sorry to be late, and on our very first day together. Inexcusable! Inexcusable! But I've been sleeping so dreadfully of late and just couldn't rouse myself. Do forgive me. Do forgive me!

GLORIA All is forgiven, Simon. (They air-kiss cheeks, as in the theater.) Ladies and gentlemen of the seminar, may I present to you — at last — a man, a star, even though you may never have heard of him in the States, a presence that I can only hope you have had the pleasure to see upon the stage, as I have, the magnificent Sir Simon Kirk!

SIMON (exaggeratedly diffidently) I'm afraid the "Sir" is not appropriate. It's just plain old Simon Kirk. For plain old me.

GLORIA Your Queen is guilty of a tremendous oversight. I don't care what she thinks or what she has failed to do. For us, while you are here, you are Sir Simon!

(Applause se from the others.)

SIMON You'll get me in trouble, assuredly. They'll lock me in the Tower.

GLORIA Why don't you tell, us, Sir Simon, a little about your long and glittering career in the theater. You've even played Broadway, haven't you? Before the unions ruined all that.

SIMON Oh, I think I've managed a Broadway foray once or twice. I suspect they've torn that theater down. Probably because I played in it!

GLORIA There ought to be a place here in the West End called the Simon Kirk Theatre. If there were any justice!

SIMON Divine lady, you are too kind, too kind. But, oh my, it was a wondrous time. Yes, it was. That first matinee I played Othello to Orson's Iago, then he played Othello to my Iago that night. One week he even played Desdemona to my Othello *and* my Iago. It was one of those small-cast, out-of-a trunk shows that we did in those days. I remember all those many exits and entrances like they were yesterday. And the cities! Cincinnati, Benton Harbor, Evansville. It was marvelous, every minute of it, and don't let anybody ever tell you it wasn't.

(More applause from the others.)

GLORIA One of the finest *Hamlets* that I have ever seen was the one I saw here — which theater was that now?

SIMON The Royal Gloucester. Alas, demolished last week.

GLORIA In which Simon played Fortinbras, King of Norway. It is, without a doubt, the finest Fortinbras that I have ever seen upon the British stage.

SIMON Divine lady! (Kisses her hand.) You flatter me too much. No, not many words in the part of Fortinbras, not much stage time, but that was the challenge! I hope I rose to it. I'm just a working actor and grateful that I have been able to give my gift to audiences for, oh, these many, many years. (thoughtfully) Too many perhaps?

ANTONIA (calling out) And many more!

SIMON (searching for her) Kind lady! (seeing her) Kind young lady! (Kisses her hand.)

ANTONIA I'm an actor too!

SIMON I can see that. It's all in the demeanor.

BRADLEY (raising his hand) And over here too.

SIMON A plethora of actors!

KARINNE And one playwright.

SIMON It grows and grows. My heart leaps up.

GLORIA (about his quotation) I know that. I know that. Don't tell me.

SIMON Perhaps we should say something about the wonderful guests we've managed to round up for you. Three at last count, I believe.

GLORIA Possibly four. But three for sure. One is Nigel Barrister, the actor. Another is Bertrand Peacock, the actor-director, and the third is Cecil Kendalgreen, the acting director of fund-raising for several theaters here in old London town.

SIMON First rate. I've worked with every one of them. Brilliant!

ANTONIA No women?

GLORIA We tried, we tried. We're still trying.

SIMON Now I want all of you to participate when I interview our guests. Don't be shy. Whatever is on your minds — just ask and you shall receive.

GLORIA If you haven't done this kind of program before, rest assured that the British guests are unfailingly charming. Just like Sir Simon here.

SIMON Dear lady, you spoil me with compliments.

GLORIA Well, they're cheaper than a real salary! (False laughter on both sides.) Perhaps some of our seminarians would like to query our famous actor right now. And thus you can hear it from the horse's mouth.

SIMON That's the best part of the horse's anatomy to which I have ever been compared. So thank you, thank you. Questions? Never mind me and my tiny life. We can practice for our upcoming guests.

BRIAN Okay, I got me a question. When you played *Flagstaff*, did you tend to say your lines more on stage left or more on stage right?

SIMON (faltering) I'm not sure I quite understand the question.

BRIAN When you played *Flagstaff*.

SIMON Indeed. Yes, I must have played *Flagstaff*. Right! That year I toured with the Funts. Lovely couple, even after she lost her leg. We did all of Arizona. What was the question again?

GLORIA (whispering) I think he means when you played *Falstaff*.

BRIAN Did you use stage left or stage right more to say your lines on?

SIMON (politely repeating) Did I use . . . ? Actually I wasn't partial to one side of the stage more than to another, as I recall. I used it all!

GLORIA Another question?

ANTONIA I hope to play *Falstaff* someday.

SIMON Well, I'm sure you will, my dear. And I can only hope it will be in *Flagstaff*.

GLORIA Perhaps we have time for one more question for this first day. I'm sure you're all exhausted from your trips from hither and yon and are dying to get some needed rest. One more little one?

KARINNE Do you think an American playwright — a living one, I mean — has a ghost of chance of getting a play produced here?

SIMON It all depends on the play.

KARINNE Does it? I've been submitting a script — with a British setting — for some time now. I can't seem to get anywhere. A friend of mine — actually I mean my partner, back home — and, believe me, she's no friend —, tells me not to bother, that there's an anti-American bias over here. I'm sorry if that's an awkward question, but maybe it's best if I know the truth and stop wasting my time.

SIMON Well, what do you think, Gloria? I know *I'm* open to Americans. I believe I did a creditable Willy Loman once. I eat up Americans!

GLORIA We Americans are always importing British product, that's for sure. (to KARINNE) If you don't mind my saying so, Sir Simon, I think she has a point. The British like plays about Americans who are hillbillies or plays with a decidedly critical Leftist slant. (to KARINNE) Hope you don't have one of those.

KARINNE Not what I'm doing really. Actually, I'm a former liberal.

SIMON Well, show it to us! Show it to us.

KARINNE You're sure?

SIMON Bring it here one day and we'll eat it up!

KARINNE It's got a sort of a modern-day Falstaff in it. I'd be thrilled if you'd read the part.

SIMON Love to, my dear. You just bring it along any time.

KARINNE Maybe you should read it ahead of time.

SIMON No need. Just cart it in here. I'll be sure to bring my glasses!

GLORIA Any more questions? . . . Agendas?

KAY I'd just like to ask if Sir Simon is married and if we might be meeting his wife.

(Titters.)

SIMON Alas, no more. My lady wife passed on last summer. A great actress in her own right. (Murmurs of sympathy.) She's better off, better off. It was difficult there at the end. But that's the past. We can't live in the past, can we? Once more into the breach and all that! . . . Is it *unto* the breach or *into* the breach?

GLORIA *Unto* the breach, isn't it?

SIMON Of course, of course. How silly of me. (mostly to himself) Oh, this too solid flesh begins to melt.

BRIAN (blurting out) Timmy of Athens?

SIMON Almost! Hamlet!

GLORIA Well, that's it, folks. Go to your rooms now, get those all sorted out, find your bathrooms, unpack, relax. get your brains unscrambled, and we'll see you back here, if not at breakfast, then at ten-thirty sharp tomorrow morning in this room! . . . Be sure to write down your ticket numbers!

(They all start to get up.)

GLORIA Oh, another announcement! Wait! Some people like to discuss the plays right after we've seen them and not wait until the next day. So I will bring wine and some lovely paper cups right here after every performance and we can chat. However, if you don't want to attend, that's fine too. But I must charge those who come this year. So please bring proper change — some British pounds with you each night — to pay for your own wine and the stunning paper cups, which are not cheap. That's it. See you! Thank you for coming all the way to London! Remember, when a man is tired of London he's tired of life!

(People start to scatter, a few speak to each other.)

KAY (feeling sorry for BRIAN, seeking him out) We never got to learn about you, did we? Now that wasn't fair, was it?

BRIAN That's okay. I'm just Brian. I'm a house cleaner in Mattoon — Illinois. Let's see. I'm a self-described celibate. A dropout — eighth grade. But I'm trying to improve myself, so I read lots of books. That's about it. What about you?

KAY Oh, I'm just a study in conventionality. Not much to report.

BRIAN You mentioned having a family. I have my sister back in Mattoon, and I live with her. She has a husband and a little girl named Laura Jean. They are just so nice to me. I love them very much.

KAY How wonderful for you. I love my family very much too.

(Pause.)

BRIAN . . . So they have their own money over here in England, huh?

(KAY doesn't know what to say.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 2, Set 2

(The seven enrollees are in their separate lighted “rooms,” doing different things, some unpacking, arranging clothes, some reading or resting, in various stages of dress, excitement, tiredness, and so forth.)

(Lights up on KARINNE in her lighted area; she is on the telephone. The other voice in all telephone conversations is indicated by a closed ellipsis (. . .))

KARINNE (trying too hard to be cheery but under a strain with the lover) London calling! Pick up, pick up! (Blair picks up. Blair grumbles something.) There you are! Hi, babe. (. . .) Sorry, did I wake you? It should be after eight there. I thought I should let you know I made it safe and sound. So you wouldn't worry. (. . .) You weren't worried? (. . .) How are you? How's Blooper? (. . .) Be sure to put that medicine in his eye, okay? (. . .) No, I'm not saying you won't do it. Let's not fight. Not first thing. Please. Maybe I should call back. (. . .) You're going out at nine. (. . .) I'm sorry you have to work and I'm on vacation. (. . .) I know, I know, you couldn't really do it. . . . Well, I guess I should talk to you while I've got you here! (. . .) Oh, it's pretty interesting so far. Some unusual people. There's this guy who — (. . .) Okay, I won't ramble on. (. . .) You don't have anybody there, right? (. . .) No, I'm not prying. Blair! (. . .) I thought you said you'd give us at least another couple of months — (. . .) Blair? Are you still there? . . .

(KARINNE puts down the telephone. Blair has hung up on her.)

KARINNE (unhappy) Oh, god. (Rests her aching forehead in her hand.) Oh, Blair.

(Lights up on BRADLEY in his room.)

BRADLEY (on his telephone) Hi there!

(Lights up on the COUNTESS.)

COUNTESS (on her telephone) Who's this?

BRADLEY Bradley.

COUNTESS Who?

BRADLEY From the course. The actor.

COUNTESS Oh, that Bradley.

BRADLEY I got your number from the front desk. I noticed you when we all met today. I thought maybe you might like to get to together in a cup of coffee.

COUNTESS Why?

BRADLEY Why? (squirming a bit) Because I'd like to get to know you better. I've never known a countess before. What are you a countess of exactly? I mean from where?

COUNTESS I am thinking about leaving the course.

BRADLEY Really? What's wrong?

COUNTESS I don't care for those in it.

BRADLEY Oh, some of us aren't so bad. But I suppose that's not for me to say. What I meant is that I find you a very charismatic woman.

COUNTESS How do you know this?

BRADLEY How? Uh . . . Gloria said you're divorced. Isn't that true?

COUNTESS I wish she wouldn't give out information about me.

BRADLEY I'm sorry if I'm coming on too . . . Maybe we can talk later.

COUNTESS Stop! Don't ring off.

BRADLEY All right.

COUNTESS When do you want to meet for coffee? Right now?

BRADLEY Now's good. I can't sleep anyway. I'm all turned around.

COUNTESS Do not tell anyone that we are meeting.

BRADLEY . . . Okay.

COUNTESS Give me fifteen minutes.

BRADLEY In the lobby?

COUNTESS Yes, in that filthy lobby!

BRADLEY See you soon. (Hangs up. Smiles.) (Re-dials.)

(Lights up on KAY.)

KAY Yes?

BRADLEY It's Bradley.

KAY Who?

BRADLEY In the group.

KAY Oh, the young actor.

BRADLEY Not that young.

KAY Young enough to be my grandchild.

BRADLEY You're not serious. You can't be a day over thirty-five.

KAY You are such a liar!

BRADLEY I know, but I can't help it when I find someone intriguing.

KAY I am a married woman.

BRADLEY Well, I'm broad-minded!

KAY Hey! What do you want? I don't think this is the way to start an educational experience —

BRADLEY It's just coffee.

KAY You want to have coffee with me?

BRADLEY Why not? You're the most attractive woman in the whole building.

KAY That's bull and you know it.

BRADLEY It's not bull. You don't know me or what I like.

KAY I know that most young men are not going after women my age. That's one thing I do know. Always was and always will be.

BRADLEY Don't hystereotype me.

KAY What?!

BRADLEY It's a word I made up. Hysteria. Stereotype. Hystereotype.

KAY Am I being hysterical?

BRADLEY *I'm* being hysterical. I just don't want you to think that because I'm younger and you're older, we couldn't ever, you know, meet in the middle.

KAY I'll have to think about this, Bradley. But I don't really want to make you think that I'm encouraging you to . . .

BRADLEY No pressure. Let's let it lay. Play it by ear. Is that good for you? Kay, right?

KAY I'd better go now.

(They hang up. BRADLEY grits his teeth because he may have blown that one.)

BRADLEY Damn! (Dials again) Hi, it's Bradley.

(Lights up on SYLVIA.)

SYLVIA That actor?

BRADLEY I can see you've got that psychic gift!

SYLVIA It comes and goes, I'm sorry to say.

BRADLEY Say . . . Sylvia — It *is* Sylvia, right? — I was wondering if you might want to have coffee sometime.

SYLVIA They serve coffee at breakfast, I understand.

BRADLEY I mean coffee with just you and I. Maybe not right now, but later sometime?

(Lights fade.)

(Lights up on SIMON coming from his offstage room — downstage of the other rooms.)

GLORIA (coming from another direction) Simon! Could I speak with you for a minute?

SIMON Well met, dear lady. I thought it went very well today for a first meeting, didn't you?

GLORIA (lowering her voice) You were awfully late getting there. I hope this isn't going to become a habit.

SIMON A rehearsal merely. I've never missed a real entrance in my entire life, I assure you.

GLORIA We have to make sure that our students are happy with the course. I didn't want to tell them, but I will tell you. They were the only seven who signed up, and two of them are on partial scholarships. I simply had to raise the price this year, and the enrollment went down catastrophically.

SIMON I'll give them their money's worth. Don't worry, my dear. (He kisses her on the neck, in a familiar way.)

GLORIA Not here! For god's sake, what are you thinking of. They might see!

SIMON Sorry.

GLORIA Your anecdotes today were fine. Just don't get all moody and mumble to yourself, as you do sometimes. We don't want them thinking we have some actor who can't get any work acting anymore and that's why he's part of this course.

SIMON (hurt) Exquisitely put, divine lady. Exquisitely put.

GLORIA This course is my livelihood, and I don't want it going up someone's ass. Got it? Have you got it? God, you've made me raise my voice!

SIMON Perfectly understood.

GLORIA And don't come to my room. I'll come to yours. I'm better at hiding my intentions.

SIMON When might I expect you? I want to be certain to be wearing something fetching.

GLORIA Oh, don't start that self-pity crap. Remember — in his life each man plays many parts. And now this is the part you're playing.

SIMON And dare I ask what part is that?

GLORIA Let's just say you're not Romeo, and I'm not Juliet.

SIMON No? And I had so hoped!

GLORIA I've had to learn to fuck like a man, in order to survive. Get in, get out. It hasn't been easy. But I think I've succeeded. I've had to succeed! A woman on her own!

SIMON Oh, Madame, in self-reliance you have surpassed every goddess on Olympus.

GLORIA Oh, sod off. And wear your glasses tomorrow so you don't embarrass us! I've told you and told you to get your eyes checked! And don't be familiar with me in front of the seminarians. Keep it professional.

(GLORIA leaves.)

SIMON (after she's gone and can't hear him, taking out his glasses) By the way, I have had my eyes checked, divine lady. But I'll bring my glasses, as you insist. For what they're worth. (Puts the glasses away, sadly, rubs his eyes.) For what it's worth.

(Lights up on ANTONIA, who is on her way to an offstage bathroom, carrying a towel.)

(Lights up on BRIAN in the hall, struggling with his suitcases.)

ANTONIA (not interested at all) Hi there.

BRIAN Fine, thank you. (Struggles with luggage.)

ANTONIA You need some help with those?

BRIAN No, I'm all right.

ANTONIA You could ask someone downstairs, you know.

BRIAN I'm almost there. I can use the exercise.

ANTONIA Okay! (Rolls her eyes.)

BRIAN (suddenly) I can't wait to see you act.

ANTONIA Why, thank you. (She wants to get away.)

BRIAN I bet you're real good. What have you done so far?

ANTONIA Well, I played Mother Courage at my high school. They said I was very good. "Excellent diction" was the exact quote. And I did Maria von Trapp at Humboldt State. I also sing.

BRIAN I bet you were 'super.'

ANTONIA Well, some people thought I was!

BRIAN I act a little bit myself.

ANTONIA (put off, trying to hide it) Do you?!

BRIAN But I've never performed in public. Just something I do in the privacy of my own home.

ANTONIA (rolling her eyes again) I see! Well, excuse me. I've got to be getting . . .

BRIAN Oh, sure. (Lets her pass, then turning back) By the way, what do you think about the parolees in our course?

ANTONIA You mean the enrollees? Oh, they're okay, I guess. Sorta old. What about you?

BRIAN I don't know yet. I find most of them kind of . . . really *weird*. (Makes a face.)

ANTONIA Now that I think about it, I know what you mean! Well, 'bye. (Leaves.)

BRIAN See you around!

(They exit the opposite way they came in.)

Scene 3, Set 1

(GLORIA is in the conference room, answering questions from the early arrivals, SYLVIA KAY, BRIAN.)

GLORIA I believe you take the Piccadilly line to get there — although — let me think now — that's been closed because of the terrorist threats. You'd better take a bus. I'll get the number for you later. But it's a lovely museum. The finest Brancusi ever gathered in one place.

BRIAN That sounds like a good place to go. Maybe after the class this morning?

(Nobody picks up on BRIAN's offer.)

GLORIA (to SYLVIA) Is London agreeing with you so far?

SYLVIA I didn't sleep well. I kept hearing voices. Loud ones.

KAY Ghosts?

SYLVIA Good heavens no! Those French students, or Italians, in the next dormitory. Carrying on all night long. Didn't you hear them?

(The COUNTESS comes hurrying in, upset.)

COUNTESS All right, who did it?

GLORIA What?

COUNTESS Which one of you stole things from my room?

GLORIA Whoa, whoa, madame! Slow down.

COUNTESS I distinctly remember putting them under my cot so that no one would see them, and now they are not there. It could be the Africans. But I think it's more likely to be one of you.

(Somewhat huffy reactions from the others.)

BRIAN It wasn't me!

KAY I don't think that deserves a reply.

SYLVIA What did you lose? What sort of items?

COUNTESS There was a beaded purse, said to be owned by Queen Victoria herself. Very delicate, tiny beads. It's gone. I've looked everywhere, and, believe me, it doesn't take long in that room!

GLORIA I'm sure it will turn up. Did you lock your room when you left it?

COUNTESS Of course I did. (thinking) I'm pretty sure I did. . . . Well, maybe I went out once, to have some coffee, and didn't lock it that time. But I was gone only a short while.

GLORIA What did I tell you! We can't be responsible if you simply won't listen!

COUNTESS Whoever took it can just leave it outside my room, and no further questions will be asked.

GLORIA Madame, you can't assume these people are guilty without proof.

COUNTESS They look guilty to me!

(BRADLEY, ANTONIA, KARINNE enter, noticing the commotion.)

COUNTESS Ah, three more suspects!

KARINNE Suspects?

GLORIA I really must protest this!

BRADLEY What's wrong? . . . Countess?

KAY Some items are missing.

KARINNE (aside) What, her marbles?

COUNTESS (accusingly) Did any of you see them? Hmm?

GLORIA Have you reported the theft to the front desk?

COUNTESS I came right here first.

KARINNE Well, I didn't take it, whatever it is.

BRADLEY Nor did I.

(They all look at ANTONIA.)

ANTONIA Jeez! I didn't take nothin'! What do you take me for? Christ!

COUNTESS Are you sure you didn't take it?

ANTONIA I don't even like Victorian purses!

COUNTESS How did you know it was Victorian? You weren't here when I mentioned it.

ANTONIA You mentioned it yesterday. You collect beaded purses. I remember because I thought what yucky old things to collect.

KAY Is it very valuable?

COUNTESS Invaluable! It could be sold for a handsome profit. No questions ask. All kinds of shops all over the place would jump at it.

ANTONIA Would you all just stop looking at me! I didn't take it. . . . If you don't believe me, then ask her! (meaning SYLVIA) She's supposed to be the clairvoyant. She ought to know who took it. Unless, like, *she* took it!

SYLVIA (ruffled) Me?! Young lady, you are out of control!

BRIAN (to KAY, trying to be quiet but it comes out loud enough for everyone to overhear, about SYLVIA) Do you think she's a *transsexual*?

(General embarrassment, but no one replies.)

GLORIA All I can say about this so-called theft is that there's nothing we can do now. The seminar is about to begin. We'll have to deal with it later, that's all.

COUNTESS Meanwhile the thief is running god knows where and selling my property!

KAY How can he, or she, be? All the suspects are here in the room, are they not?

(Enter SIMON.)

SIMON Are you waiting for me?

COUNTESS I should probably strip-search you all.

BRADLEY I wouldn't mind. (Starts to take off his clothes.)

GLORIA There's no need, no need!

SIMON What's happened?

GLORIA (overly sweetly) If you came on time, Sir Simon, perhaps you'd know.

SIMON It's only a couple of minutes. You haven't even started yet.

GLORIA (aside to SIMON) I abhor Freudian explanations of everything, but I do spy some passive aggressiveness around here.

SIMON Well, shall we all begin then? If you'd all take your seats!

(The others are in a quandary. Some take their seats. Some don't.)

GLORIA Yes, I think that's best. Please!

SIMON Nigel Barrister, the actor, is coming in an hour. But we've got to talk about tonight's play, so many things. Come along, come along!

(They reluctantly get into their chairs.)

SIMON There we are! There we are!

GLORIA (snapping at him under her breath) Must you say everything twice!

SIMON All settled in now? Good. Good. Now how many of you have seen tonight's play before? (Kay's, Karinne's, and Gloria's hands go up, as well as Brian's.) That many? Marvelous. That gives us a head start, doesn't it?

BRIAN What's the name of the play again?

SIMON *A Midsummer's Night's Dream.*

BRIAN Oh, I haven't seen that one. I thought you meant a different one.

SIMON I have read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* innumerable times. I have seen thirty productions. I directed it another five times. I have played Puck. I have played Oberon. I have played Bottom. I have played Philostrate, Master of the Revels,

and I have not yet *begun* to penetrate the profundity of that play, to say nothing of William Shakespeare's other works!

KARINNE (incredulous) *A Midsummer Night's Dream?*

SIMON There will never be another playwright as great as Shakespeare — never. And I don't say that merely because he is British.

KARINNE (to KAY, under her breath) Oh, dear. It's beginning to sound like a cult.

KAY Hang in there!

COUNTESS (standing up) I'm not happy!

SIMON Madame?

COUNTESS I can't concentrate on stupid old plays when I've been robbed blind. I want something done, and I want it done now.

GLORIA Why don't you go check your room again? Maybe you just misplaced the purse.

COUNTESS I did not misplace it. And I want it back, if I have to search your rooms myself!

ANTONIA Well, you're not searching my room. In America we're presumed innocent until guilty!

COUNTESS I love America, even though it is not the land of my birth. I have chosen to become an American citizen. But America is a silly, vulgar, violent country, and if it were not so obscenely wealthy it wouldn't be worthy of a musical comedy. Besides, my dear girl, we're not in America now!

ANTONIA It is not vulgar! You take that back!

COUNTESS I will certainly not take it back.

ANTONIA You want me to slap you, bitch? I have a stun gun in my room. You want me to go get you *that*? (swaggering) How about that, bitch? I'll show you my stun gun, bitch, and then let's see what you say? You bitch!

COUNTESS No doubt, if you hold a stun gun on me, I will clearly at least have to revise my opinion that Americans are indeed violent.

ANTONIA Damn right! . . . Bitch!

COUNTESS I will tend to you later, in some appropriate manner. Right now, I want that Victorian beaded purse back, or I may be forced to resort to what's in *this* purse! (Pats it, as if she has a real gun.)

GLORIA You don't!

(The others are shocked, fearful that she may have a gun.)

COUNTESS Don't make me take it out. But just let me say I never make threats I am not prepared to back up. Now sit down, all of you!

(They sit.)

SYLVIA What do you want us to do?

COUNTESS I've been thinking about it. Are you any good?

SYLVIA What do you mean?

COUNTESS What kind of grades did you get in psychic school?

SYLVIA A's!

COUNTESS Everybody in America gets A's! What do you really know? Do you have any psychic powers or don't you?

SYLVIA Some days are better than others.

KAY Isn't that true for all of us?

(Some smiles, some agreement.)

COUNTESS Since none of you wishes to confess, why don't we use this woman's so-called psychic powers and see what she comes up with? Or, until someone confesses, should I simply shoot you one by one?

KARINNE What if *she's* the thief? Would she tell us that?

SYLVIA I'm not the thief! . . . At least I don't think I am. You see, when I'm in a trance, I don't hear what's going on — as Sylvia Luna. Another person, another voice takes over and speaks through me. If I am the guilty one, the voice will say so.

BRIAN Is it male or female, this voice?

SYLVIA I really don't know. I've never heard it. And no one has ever really said.

KAY Does it have a name?

SYLVIA It's one of those in-between names. Jody.

COUNTESS Some *Jody* speaks through you? Maybe this isn't such a good idea.

BRADLEY We've gone this far with it. Let's finish it.

GLORIA I don't know about this. I don't think my insurance covers it. (The others encourage the use of the psychic.) Well, it's up to her.

SIMON What do you say, Sylvia? Are you up for it? The show must go on!

SYLVIA Now, I can't promise anything.

KAY We understand.

SYLVIA And I could be wrong.

GLORIA What do you mean wrong?

SYLVIA Sometimes, Jody gets the information incorrect.

KARINNE This is great!

ANTONIA Then why are we bothering? I want to talk about plays! That's why I came here!

SYLVIA But sometimes Jody is correct. One time the police found a missing body precisely where Jody said it was — in the rear bleachers of a baseball stadium.

BRADLEY It's worth a try. I'm sure Sylvia is fantastic at this.

SYLVIA All I can say is that I am willing to attempt.

GLORIA Okay, what do we have to do? Whatever you do, don't bring the police into this!

SYLVIA First I would like to lie down. . . . Perhaps here. (Points to a spot.)

BRIAN Do you want us to do anything?

BRADLEY (to BRIAN) Keep out of the way.

SYLVIA (finding another spot) No, here is better. (Lies down, crosses arms over her body.)

GLORIA What next? Are you all right?

SYLVIA Now I want you all to stand around me and touch fingertips.

(They encircle her, having some trouble getting all the fingertips lined up.)

ANTONIA (to SIMON) Can't you say something about the play tonight while we're doing this? So we don't waste time!

KARINNE Shakespeare's a genius and everything he ever wrote is perfect and he'll never be bested, especially by an American. There, you got it!

SIMON I can't wait to see your play — Miss Howe, is it? I'm sure it compares favorably with the greats.

KARINNE Okay, I asked for it, I guess.

SYLVIA I am going into a trance now. My face may change shape, but don't let it alarm you.

BRIAN (alarmed) What kind of shape?

SYLVIA (doesn't answer) My voice may change.

KARINNE Those hormones can be a bitch.

SYLVIA You may want to write down what comes out of my mouth.

(There is some scrambling for notepads from purses, etc. Some decide to take notes, some not.)

KAY (about SYLVIA) Look at her face.

COUNTESS What?

BRADLEY It's changing!

GLORIA (about the face changes) She's just *doing* that.

ANTONIA Did she say anything yet? And who's in this play tonight anyway?

SIMON Dame Judith Punch is playing Titania. I hear she's magical.

ANTONIA Isn't she real old now?

SIMON Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety.

ANTONIA I hate it when she's fat or something and she's gallumphing all over the stage. That really sucks.

SIMON I haven't seen her, but the reviews have been glowing.

SYLVIA (Twitches, makes a noise.)

BRIAN What did she say?

KARINNE (Makes the same sound that SYLVIA did.)

BRIAN What does that mean?

SYLVIA (in another voice) I am Jody. Sylvia is not longer here.

BRIAN Where did she go? Isn't she right there?

KAY Shhh.

COUNTESS What do you have to say to us, Jody? (Pause.) Jody?

SYLVIA (as JODY) I see . . . I see! . . .

KAY Yes?

SYLVIA Nothing.

(General disappointment.)

ANTONIA Who else is in the play tonight? Who directed it?

SIMON Jonathan Risley-St. John. I believe he's doing this *Dream* with a concept — everyone wears scuba gear.

ANTONIA Cool.

SYLVIA (as JODY) Now I am hearing something!

COUNTESS What?

SYLVIA (as JODY) It's sounds like . . . static.

GLORIA Oh, great!

SYLVIA Now the static seems to be lessening.

GLORIA Yes? And?

SYLVIA (upset, as JODY) Oh, my goodness!

COUNTESS What? Can you see who stole the purse?

SYLVIA (as JODY) Worse . . . worse.

KARINNE (joking) Worse, worse than the purse?

ANTONIA (impatiently) What?! For god's sake!

SYLVIA (as JODY) I see a young actress —

ANTONIA I didn't take it. I didn't!

SYLVIA (as JODY) I see a young actress . . . did not take the purse . . .

ANTONIA Well, thank god! (to the others) See!

SYLVIA (as JODY) . . . never be actress . . .

ANTONIA What? Who'll never be an actress? Actor!

SYLVIA (as JODY) . . . talent . . . small talent . . . see it going . . . nowhere . . .

ANTONIA Hey!

SYLVIA (as JODY) . . . tragic . . . nowhere . . . nothing . . .

ANTONIA She's creepy!

COUNTESS Okay, we have to stop this.

KAY Stop it?

COUNTESS I just remembered my appointment with Dr. Ali.

KAY Who's Dr. Ali?

COUNTESS My masseur. The Prince imported him from Bangladesh. I have been to him only once, but he is incredible. I cannot miss my appointment.

BRIAN But aren't we in the midst of a trance?

SYLVIA (as JODY) More sounds! More visions!

BRADLEY What are they?

SYLVIA (as JODY) Hands! I see hands.

COUNTESS I've really got to go. (Starts to leave.)

GLORIA But, Countess, we're doing this for you!

SYLVIA (as JODY) Hands stroking. Rubbing . . . The Prince.

COUNTESS The Prince?

SYLVIA (as JODY) Strangling hands!

COUNTESS What are you saying?

SYLVIA (as JODY) Death will follow, as certain as the hands that touch you.

COUNTESS I don't like the sound of this. What about my bloody beaded purse?!

SYLVIA (as JODY) (moaning) . . . no family for one . . . no friends . . . ever . . . a child calling from the grave . . .

SYLVIA A child?

COUNTESS Whose child?

KAY *Who* has no family?

BRIAN *Who* has no friends?

BRADLEY Do you see anything in there for me?

SYLVIA I can see the future for you all! (Screams.)

KARINNE Oh, my god! What is it?

SYLVIA No one should see the future I am cursed! Oh! Oh! (Collapses.)

GLORIA What's wrong, what's wrong? Wake her up!

(They fuss over SYLVIA.)

BRIAN Loosen her clothing. Aren't you supposed to do that?

KAY (afraid of what's underneath) I think her clothing is fine. Sylvia? Are you there? Josy, are you there?

GLORIA It's *Jody*, for Heaven's sake!

KAY Sorry. Jody. Can you hear me? Jody?

(SYLVIA remains out of it, her body limp, eyes blank.)

SIMON Jody! Jody! Come back to us. What have you to tell us?

(Enter the BRITISH GUEST #1 who smiles and tries overly hard to be ingratiating and modest.)

GUEST #1 (tentative, uneasy) Hello! Nigel Barrister here! Is this the correct room?

SIMON Nigel! You're early!

GUEST #1 Awfully sorry. I was just waiting outside and heard voices.

BRIAN You hear voices too? What do *yours* say? (pointing to SYLVIA) We can't get through here anymore.

GLORIA He means he heard *our* voices. Welcome, Mr. Barrister! Welcome, early or not.

GUEST #1 Wonderful to be here!

SYLVIA (suddenly coming back into the trance) Bed-wetter! . . . (Conks out again.)

GUEST #1 (smiling) I beg your pardon?

(General awkwardness.)

BRADLEY So what do we do next?

KARINNE Is it to be the guest or the trance? Or how about a Morris dance?

ANTONIA I wanna hear the guest. She can keep her old trance!

COUNTESS I'm leaving. Dr. Ali is not to be trifled with. (as she exits) We will get to the bottom of this later! Do not underestimate me, any of you!

GLORIA Well, I think we should go forth with our scheduled guest, who has been kind enough to come and talk to us about the British theater! Excuse us, we're a little discombobulated this morning. But I'm sure you can help us out. Ladies and gentlemen, may I present the man you will be seeing tonight as Snug the Joiner — Mr. Nigel Barrister!

(Polite applause. SYLVIA is still out of it. A few attend to her, but the others sit to listen to GUEST #1.)

BRIAN (Raises his hand.)

GLORIA Yes, Brian?

BRIAN I wanted to ask our guest if he's a barrister.

GUEST #1 No, just a working actor. Barrister is my last name — though I dare say someone among my ancestors must have been a barrister, don't you think? (Laughs modestly.)

SIMON So, Nigel, good of you to come!

GUEST #1 Thank you, Simon. I thought if Simon Kirk can go there, it's got to be a place where I'd want to be!

SIMON And the honorarium is better than a kick in the head, as these Americans say.

GUEST #1 I've had smaller ones, yes.

SYLVIA (coming around again) . . . wanker! . . . I see a wanker.

(General embarrassment.)

GLORIA Sylvia! Wake up! Wake up!

(SYLVIA does not wake up.)

BRIAN What's a wanker? Did a Mr. Wanker steal the purse?

KAY Brian!

BRIAN No? . . Did I say something wrong? I'm sorry.

KAY (quietly) A wanker is someone who masturbates.

BRIAN Oh!

KARINNE Maybe we should ask our guest if he's the . . . one who stole the purse.

GUEST #1 (grinning) I beg your pardon? Purse?

GLORIA It's nothing to concern us now. Do tell us about playing Snug the Joiner. Won't you?

SIMON Yes, Nigel, how have rehearsals been going?

GUEST #1 If you'd asked me that yesterday, I would have had to give quite a different answer. But last night I believe I found Snug the Joiner. Or at least I found *my* Snug the Joiner.

SIMON Well, knowing what I do about Nigel's acting, I would venture that this evening we are probably in for the definitive Snug the Joiner of all time!

GUEST #1 Oh, certainly not, certainly not. Rubbish.

SIMON I'm certain it is. I'm certain it is. Definitive. Definitive.

GUEST #1 Rubbish! I'll be lucky if I remember my lines.

SIMON Not a bit of it. You'll be brilliant! I once played Snug the Joiner, did I ever tell you?

GUEST #1 You didn't, actually. I'm sure you were brilliant. Brilliant!

SIMON Oh, tosh. This is when I was at school. I was all of fourteen and all spotty. (Refers to his face.) And all arms and spindly legs. I'm sure I was dreadful.

GUEST #1 I'm sure your performance was masterful.

SIMON Not a bit of it, not a bit of it!

GUEST #1 I just wish I could have been there to see it. I bet our American friends feel the same way? (Looks at them.)

(They applaud, of course.)

SIMON Rubbish! Rubbish!

GLORIA Perhaps Sir Simon can give us a bit of his Snug the Joiner on our last day. I'm sure he's getting it all together. Aren't you, Sir Simon?

SIMON It's coming along. A bit of trouble remembering my lines. But they will come. They will come.

GUEST #1 You did that one-man show for years, didn't you, Simon? I'm sure the lines are there. It's just a matter of dusting off the old brain cells.

SIMON And having cue cards! (Touches his glasses in his upper pocket.)

GUEST #1 I saw you do your one-man show, did I ever mention that?

SIMON You didn't!

GUEST #1 I came back twice. (to the others) It was one of the defining moments in my own decision to become an actor.

SIMON Really? I had no idea.

GUEST #1 Your Queen Mab speech made me cry. Absolutely turned me to blubber. Changed my life.

SIMON How extraordinary! I had no idea, you see, that you'd ever seen *any* of my work.

GUEST #1 Not to have seen Simon Kirk work? Unthinkable. We all went to see you in those days. I don't suppose the people in this room have any idea what a theatrical legend they have sitting before them.

SIMON It's all gone, all gone. (waving at the air) Wherever it is that theatre goes. Into airy nothingness.

GLORIA Of course it doesn't disappear, Sir Simon — the theater. Once you've seen something, it's always here. (Touches her heart in a sentimental way.) And it will always be here. Always. (to the others) Don't you think so, ladies and gentlemen?

(The others applaud.)

(SYLVIA wakes from her trance.)

SYLVIA (as herself, loudly) Oh, my god! My GOD!

GLORIA What? What did you see?

SYLVIA (seriously) . . . It's too horrible . . . too horrible . . .

(The others look at SYLVIA, at each other, frightened.)

(It should be more serious than comic.)

BLACKOUT

End of Act I

HUGELY ENTERTAINING

ACT II

STYLE: Deeper, more touching than Act I, but still mixed with comedy.

Scene 1, Set 2

(A few minutes later. SYLVIA is being helped by KAY, GLORIA, and KARINNE to the lighted area that is her room. She has not fully recovered from her “visions,” is somewhat disoriented.)

SYLVIA Oh, thank you, thank you. (Stumbles.)

KAY Are you going to be all right?

SYLVIA I'll be fine. If you'll just help me to the bed.

(They do, with difficulty.)

KARINNE Maybe somebody should stay with you for a while.

GLORIA Could you *two* do that? I really have to attend to some course business.

KAY I can stay. One of my children had to have constant nursing.

SYLVIA There's really no need.

KAY Don't be silly. You're not back to yourself yet.

SYLVIA What if I told you this *is* myself?

KARINNE I had no idea being a psychic could take so much out of you.

SYLVIA This was a particularly bad day — some kind of overload. All these images! Things I didn't want to see at all! (Covers her eyes.)

KARINNE I'm afraid to ask.

GLORIA It's a shame we had to cut the class short. Do you think you'll be able to go to the play tonight?

SYLVIA Oh, I hope so. (Swoons a bit.) Oh, look at me. How ridiculous.

KARINNE It's not much of a “gift,” is it?

SYLVIA No, you want to trade?

KARINNE Do you want to be a lesbian playwright?

SYLVIA Could do worse.

KARINNE I may be a bad playwright, but I'm a good lesbian. Although my so-called lover doesn't seem to know that.

GLORIA (in a hurry) I'm sure you are! Now *someone* is going to stay with her, right? Don't let her walk until her head's clear. I've got to go find out if some people want to sell their tickets for tonight. The Countess said she may or she may not go (to SYLVIA) Now if you need to go to a hospital, let the front desk know immediately. (Exits.)

KARINNE We can always get the Africans to bleed her! (to SYLVIA) What is it you saw exactly? It was about *us*, wasn't it?

SYLVIA Yes, the people in the group . . . the rest of their lives.

KARINNE And it made you *scream*?

SYLVIA I could be wrong. I mean Jody could be wrong.

KARINNE Do you want to give a little hint? Not the whole magillah. An appetizer?

SYLVIA Let me gather my thoughts. (trying to steady herself) It's difficult. . . . I'm trying to find words that don't make it sound so . . .

KAY Horrible?

SYLVIA People don't do well when they think their lives are . . .

KARINNE Hopeless? Pathetic? Useless? Choose one of the above?! The prognosis for any life, let's face it, is not all that good, in the very long run! Did you see your own life too?

SYLVIA I'm not permitted to see my own life.

KARINNE So you're just here in the Vale of Tears with the rest of us, huh?

KAY You sound depressed. I had a child who suffered from depression.

KARINNE What's the difference between wisdom and depression? No, no, I'm a happy lesbian. I bring joy wherever I go! Laugh, clown, laugh and all that.

KAY You're in London. You're about to see some wonderful theater. Our guest today was charming. The British Museum, a walk across Victoria Bridge — the Houses of Parliament, the Thames — all beautiful, one of the finest sights in the world.

KARINNE You're absolutely right. There's no reason for me not to be uncontrollably ecstatic. After all, when a lesbian is tired of London, she's tired of life!

KAY But you're not tired of life. You're still young. I just wish I had *more* life! It goes so quickly. You can't be tired of life!

KARINNE (glibly) Okay, I'm not!

SYLVIA I'm a little tired right now. I wonder if I could be alone?

KAY Are you sure? I was going to call home, but I don't mind staying.

SYLVIA Maybe I've just been around people too much.

(BRIAN hurries on, carrying a pop tart.)

BRIAN (knocking on the "door" of SYLVIA'S room.) Hello! Are you there? Hello!

SYLVIA Yes?

BRIAN I brought you a pop tart.

KAY A what?

(KAY opens the "door.")

BRIAN (entering) I think she might need some quick energy. (Offers the unwrapped pop tart.)

SYLVIA A what?

KAY I don't really think you should have that right now. You could choke.

BRIAN Really?

KAY Thank you, Brian, anyway.

BRIAN It's a little banged up. . . . It was in my luggage. At the bottom.

KAY It was very thoughtful of you.

SYLVIA If I could just be alone . . .

KAY Of course. You rest.

(KARINNE, KAY, and BRIAN leave the room.)

KARINNE (to herself, about BRIAN) How *does* that man manage to go on? What does he tell himself?

BRIAN (turning back, to SYLVIA) Should I leave the pop tart or not?

SYLVIA I'll put it right here, in case I need quick energy. (Places it somewhere.)

(SYLVIA closes the door, exhales heavily, glad to be alone. She sits on the cot, shakes her head, then gathers herself, gets up, goes to the phone and dials.)

(Lights down, then up.)

SYLVIA (in-mid-call) No, I'm fine, really. I just had a little dizzy spell, that's all. (. . .) No, no, no, I wasn't doing any of that. (. . .) I wasn't. Tom! (. . .) No, it *doesn't* upset me. (. . .) Well, I'm sorry you feel that way. It's not something I've asked for. (. . .) I'm sorry you feel that way, Tom. Let's not talk about it. How's the business? (. . .) I don't get people all upset! (. . .) I am not upset. Is it so strange I want to talk to my son? (. . .) That late? Oh, I'm sorry. I thought it was earlier than that. See, I'm not much of a clairvoyant after all! (. . .) Yes, I have the exams to finish. (. . .) It is not ridiculous. Don't make fun of what you don't understand. (. . .) Tom! (She listens while TOM complains.) I'm sorry you feel that way. (. . .) No, I won't ask you to come to my graduation! Well, I'd better let you go. I'm sorry I called at an inconvenient time. Say hi to the kids and Kathleen. From grandma. (. . .) (Winces) Okay, I'm sorry. I am not their grandma. (. . .) Well, I don't want them to be confused, either. I don't think they even remember the other me. (. . .) Kristen said what? Why does she have a funny grandma; the *other* kids don't. I see. (. . .) She'll outgrow it. (. . .) Tom! Why are you being so . . . (. . .) I've never noticed anyone staring. (. . .) I don't think I'm embarrassing them. Kristen always gives me a great big hug when I visit. (. . .) Yes, I'm still planning to come. (. . .) Ever? Unless I wear the . . . Oh, I see. I can't visit my grandchildren unless I dress like a man. Pardon me, but I think the older you get the more of a prig you're getting to be. (. . .) I'm sorry if that makes you angry. I'm a little angry, too. Maybe we'd better hang up. (. . .) Tom! It's already done. There's no going back. I did what I had to do. I know you've never really accepted it. But I had hoped that over time . . . (. . .) I see. I see. (. . .) Tom, that is so . . . What do you expect me to say to that? (. . .) I've got to go. Someone's here. I'll talk to you later. (. . .) I'm sure you didn't mean to be. (. . .) We'll talk later. (Hangs up. Sits on the cot, devastated.)

Tom, what a thing to say, what a thing to say, even when you're angry. . . .
(Cries.) "You don't become a woman just because you . . . cut off your . . ."
(Cries harder.) My baby, my baby . . .

(Lights fade.)

(Lights up on KAY in her room.)

KAY (on the telephone, with her door open as though she wants to be overheard)
(. . .) I'm doing well. I miss you. (. . .) (Smiles.) Oh, how nice of you, honey!
That's really sweet. The seminar? Maybe a little more than I expected. But
lively. Did you talk to the kids today?

(The COUNTESS comes past KAY's room.)

COUNTESS (overhearing KAY on the telephone, knocks but comes right in) Excuse me, are
you busy? Your door is open.

KAY Just talking to my husband. I'll be off in a minute.

COUNTESS I'll wait. (She does — inside the room.)

KAY (on telephone) Honey, we have a Countess in our midst over here. (. . .) She's . . .
(Smiles at the COUNTESS.) the genuine article.

COUNTESS Will you be long?

KAY What is it you wanted exactly?

COUNTESS How was the guest today?

KAY Oh, great! Very charming.

COUNTESS I am sorry I missed him now.

KAY How was your massage? (to the telephone) Honey, the Countess had a massage with the royal masseur — he's from Bangladesh.

COUNTESS Dr. Ali cancelled.

KAY Cancelled? (to the telephone) The masseur cancelled, honey.

COUNTESS I am not pleased.

KAY (to the telephone) She's not pleased.

COUNTESS Where is your husband?

KAY Back home, in Denver.

COUNTESS Would I like him?

KAY My husband? I have no idea.

COUNTESS I don't like most people. You seem quite nice.

KAY Bill, the Countess thinks I'm nice. (Laughs at something Bill says.) Oh, you!

COUNTESS I wonder if I should go to that play tonight or not. What do you think?

KAY It's up to you. I couldn't say.

COUNTESS Well, of course it's up to me. But you have an opinion, don't you?

KAY I have the feeling you make up your mind about things on your own.

COUNTESS But I'm torn about this. I am really angry at Dr. Ali! His staff could have called me. God knows he's expensive enough! They claim they tried, but they couldn't get through to this benighted elder hostel or whatever it is.

KAY We're supposed to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* tonight, honey. And the Countess is wondering if she should go.

COUNTESS What does your husband think?

KAY What does *my husband* think?

COUNTESS Yes.

KAY Bill, the Countess wants to know what you think? Should she go to the play or not? (. . .) (then to the COUNTESS) He's not quite sure.

COUNTESS Let me talk to him. (Gestures for the telephone.)

KAY (surprised) What?!

COUNTESS I want an objective opinion. (Takes the phone even though KAY resists.) Hello, Bill. This is a friend of Kay's. You know the play? Some Shakespearean thing. Should I bother or not? (Listens.) (then to Kay) There's nobody on this line. (to telephone) Bill? You there? (holding the phone out) Nothing.

KAY (chagrined, taking the telephone, trying to hide her embarrassment. She's apparently hiding something.) You must have been disconnected. He was there a moment ago. Do you think I talk to phantoms?

COUNTESS I'll ask somebody else about the play. I hope I didn't spoil your phone call. (Leaves the room.) You can call back, I'm sure.

KAY I'm sure I can. (following her) By the way, what about that beaded purse? Did you contact the police?

COUNTESS (blithely) Oh, I found the purse! Didn't I tell you?

KAY No, you didn't.

COUNTESS Oh, yes, it was in my room the whole time! Mixed up with some junk. I simply overlooked it!

KAY Have you told the other people? Gloria?

COUNTESS Do you think I should? They weren't very helpful before.

KAY (at a loss for words) But . . . but . . .

COUNTESS Would you mind telling them?

KAY Me?

COUNTESS You are so much better at those things than I could ever hope to be.
(Takes KAY's hand.) Would you?

KAY Well, I suppose I could.

COUNTESS Grand! You are such a decent human being. And they are so rare. Well then, I'm off! There's may be a chance Dr. Ali can squeeze me in at seven. (a bit suspicious) Odd about that phone line and your husband!

(Off goes the COUNTESS.)

(BRADLEY comes past KAY's room.)

BRADLEY (spotting KAY) Oh, hi there. How are you faring?

KAY As well as can be expected. And you?

BRADLEY Was that the Countess?

KAY Very much so.

BRADLEY An interesting woman. I had coffee with her yesterday.

KAY Did you?

BRADLEY Do you think she's rich or just pretending?

KAY I have no idea. Do you like rich women?

BRADLEY Should I have something against rich women? That wouldn't be very broad-minded of me, would it?

KAY I think women, rich or poor, had better be careful around you, Mr. Grannitt.

BRADLEY Why do I feel I can talk to you?

KAY You sure you don't say that to all the girls?

BRADLEY No, there's something about you. An honesty.

KAY (squirms) Don't be misled. Who's really honest? We wouldn't be able to stand it!

BRADLEY Do you want to marry me? How's that for honesty?

KAY But I'm not rich. And I'm married already. Back in Denver.

BRADLEY Ah, but you're in London now. We could do the town together. (Offers to dance with her.) And then you could get divorced and we could get married at Westminster Abbey.

KAY (correcting him) I believe it's *Westminster*.

BRADLEY What did I say?

KAY *Westminster*.

BRADLEY Oh, are you one of those? You could never marry a man who mispronounces Westminster Abbey. I can tell.

KAY It's a little thing, but telling.

BRADLEY Ah, a woman of insightfulness. A woman to be reckoned with. A woman not to be taken lightly. . . . I think you see through me, don't you?

KAY Do I?

BRADLEY I throw myself on your mercy. Don't expose me.

KAY What would I tell them? I know nothing about you.

BRADLEY That I go after older women, do my best to charm them. And that soon I will marry one.

KAY Or several?

BRADLEY Kind lady, as Sir Simon would say, you wrong me!

KAY Are you charming me right now?

BRADLEY I guess I'm not — if you have to be asking.

KAY Oh, there's a little charm there nevertheless. You're not dangerous, are you?

BRADLEY You are kindness itself. (Bows.) Would you like to have coffee?

KAY (tempted) Maybe later.

BRADLEY Maybe never? My possibilities grow slimmer by the hour. I want to settle down. This actor's life. Whew! I may be forced to date Gloria, again.

KAY What about the Countess? Didn't you two hit it off?

BRADLEY Quite a gal, that Countess. She may be too much for me. I'm just a low-rent gigolo.

KAY Ouch!

BRADLEY I can step back from myself now and then, and I don't need a psychic to do it. And what I see is pretty scary, actually.

KAY And what's that?

BRADLEY You sure you don't want coffee? (Gestures off.)

KAY . . . All right, I'll have coffee with you.

BRADLEY You will?

KAY (deliberately) Yes, I will. Just let me close my door. (She does.)

BRADLEY (quoting) “Let us go then, you and I —”

KAY (quoting) “When the evening is spread out against the sky —”

BRADLEY (faltering) “Like a . . . Like a . . .”

KAY “Patient etherized upon a table.” What a ghastly image!

BRADLEY But somehow beautiful, is it not? Shall we go? (Takes her arm.)

KAY Why not!

BRADLEY (laughing) Remember, you’ve been warned.

KAY I’ve been warned.

(They go off together.)

LIGHTS DOWN

Scene 2, Set 1

(It is late the same night, after they’ve been to the play. They come in separately, or occasionally together.)

GLORIA (with two bottles) Here’s the wine, as promised. Cups, anyone? (Offers them.)
Simon, you? Red or white?

SIMON Just a drop. Of the red.

GLORIA (to the rest) Help yourselves! (They do.)

(After getting the cups of wine all sorted out, some are sitting, some standing.)

GLORIA Well, here’s to us! (Toasts.)

OTHERS (toasting) Cheers! To Us! To Theatre, Etc.

GLORIA So then! What do we all think? I thought it was terrific.

ANTONIA You did? I hated it.

GLORIA Really? The poetry and the way they brought it to life.

BRIAN I thought he had flabby buttocks.

KARINNE What?

BRADLEY Who did? I didn't notice any buttocks.

BRIAN That guy who played Snuggle the Joiner — our guest today.

SIMON You thought Nigel had flabby buttocks? I won't tell him. He'd be crushed.

KAY When did you even see his buttocks?

BRIAN Wasn't he the one who played Wall?

SIMON That wasn't Nigel. Nigel played Thisby. With the little voice. (imitating Nigel playing a woman.) "Where is my love?"

COUNTESS There weren't any buttocks on display by anyone. It could have used more buttocks.

BRIAN Oh, I thought I saw buttocks. And the chink. (Shows the chink in the wall.) Wasn't that supposed to be anal symbolism? . . .

GLORIA Could we move on to another topic?

BRIAN . . . Maybe it was the light where I was sitting.

KAY I enjoyed it.

KARINNE It was okay.

ANTONIA I thought they were all terrible. I wanted to kill them.

BRADLEY A little harsh perhaps. I was impressed overall.

ANTONIA I don't think they should do Shakespeare anymore. He's, like, dead!

KARINNE I wonder if discussing a play ever changes anybody's mind. We saw what we saw.

SIMON Since I've seen it before, I concentrated on the one who played Snout. I didn't catch his name.

GLORIA Russell Trevor Tauntingdon.

SIMON A youngster. But a very clever performance.

ANTONIA But all the characters in the play within the play are so stupid. Nobody's that stupid!

BRIAN I agree with Anthony.

ANTONIA (correcting) Antonia. And my last name's not Global anymore. I've changed it.

COUNTESS To what?

ANTONIA I'm not going to tell you. You and your stolen purse!

COUNTESS I hope it's something that suits your personality.

ANTONIA It does.

COUNTESS Like Antonia Merde.

GLORIA Whoa! Hey! We've got to be civil.

ANTONIA She doesn't bother me! What does *merde* mean?

GLORIA Moving right along!

BRIAN I thought those rich folks making fun of those mechanicals were really mean.

SIMON But tonight we heard every word. So often those biting remarks by Theseus and Hyppolita go unheard by the audience. I thought it was marvelous.

GLORIA What did you think, Sylvia? You haven't said anything.

SYLVIA (weak) It was fine.

GLORIA And we haven't said anything about Dame Judith Punch.

BRIAN Did she play Titanic?

GLORIA (correcting him) Titania.

SIMON Well, she has gained a few stone. She probably could play the *Titanic* now.

GLORIA Sir Simon!

SIMON But a grand lady of the stage. When she's gone, it will be major loss.

GLORIA A major loss. More wine, anyone? (Offers to pour.)

COUNTESS I'm feeling tired. I think I'll retire.

KAY Did you ever get your massage from Dr. Ali?

COUNTESS I did not. (Exits.)

ANTONIA God, I don't like her!

KARINNE But I'm sure she loves you!

GLORIA I hope we're not going to break up already? What about the set tonight? And we haven't even mentioned the scuba gear!

SYLVIA (quietly) I thought the set was very nice.

BRADLEY It couldn't have been cheap.

(Pause.)

KAY Maybe we're all tired. Maybe we should call it a night.

GLORIA So soon? Have some more wine! (Offers.) You party poopers!

(People generally decline. They start to say their goodnights. As they gradually leave one by one, or tell their latest problem to GLORIA, KARINNE seeks out SIMON.)

KARINNE Excuse me . . . Mr. Kirk.

SIMON Sir Simon, Sir Simon! Even though it's a fraud.

KARINNE Sir Simon. I was wondering if tomorrow might be a good time to bring my play to the session. Just for a few minutes. To have you play a part. I think you'd be great in it.

SIMON Tomorrow? Oh, I don't know about tomorrow. Aren't we having another guest?

KARINNE All right. . . . If tomorrow's not good, then another day perhaps?

SIMON Yes, my dear, another day, I think.

KARINNE (awkwardly) Should I mention it to you again, or do you want to mention it to me? I mean, we don't have to do it. I just hoped that because you're here and I'm here and I happen to have the script with me and . . . Oh god, this is so embarrassing!

SIMON We'll get to that play of yours. I'm sure we will, Miss — Miss?

KARINNE Howe.

SIMON Yes, Miss Howe. I'm sure we'll get to your play.

KARINNE I just mean a scene. And you can read it if you want to — ahead of time. (Takes out the script.) I have a copy here. It's a little complicated. So if you —

SIMON Not necessary! You bring it one day, before the class is over. I'm sure we'll get to it. (abruptly greets someone else — Bradley) Well, I could tell you were enjoying the play tonight! (They talk, voices lowered, move off.)

KARINNE (embarrassed) The play's really pretty good. It won a prize in . . . (She rolls up the script and leaves.)

GLORIA (calling) Thank you all for coming! Goodnight now!

LIGHTS DOWN

Scene 3, Set 2

(The seven in the seminar return to their private rooms, each in his or her own mood. They begin to get ready for bed.)

(Show all these actions, some overlapping, but so that the audience gets the main thrust of each person's concerns:

(ANTONIA, wearing a Walkman, paces, throws something in her room, angry, then rehearsing the scene she's supposed to do later.)

(The COUNTESS is massaging her own neck and shoulders.)

(SYLVIA is sitting pensively on her cot, worn out.)

(BRADLEY is holding his phone, making a list, trying to decide who to call.)

(KAY is reading and having some more wine that she took from the conference room.)

(KARINNE throws her script on the floor; then starts to make a call to her lover but decides it's useless, puts it down, is not happy.)

(BRIAN is wearing funny underwear, gets into bed, snores immediately.)

(The lights begin to fade, perhaps one by one.)

(Suddenly BRIAN yells and sits up, in real pain. His calf has a cramp in it.)

BRIAN Oh! No! I took my medicine! I took it! Oh, no, please! Ohhh!

(The cramp persists. He continues to rub his calf, and we feel that even BRIAN has real pains.)

KARINNE (in bed, under the covers, her back resting against a pillow. The room is dimly lighted, but we can see KARINNE enough to figure out what she is doing under the covers.) Oh, Blair. . . . Oh, life . . .

(KARINNE cries softly as she tries to pleasure herself.)

(Slow fade.)

(Enter GLORIA, checking on the students.)

GLORIA Did I hear someone yell? Are you all okay? (Listens. No one responds.) All right then! Goodnight, all.

(Enter SIMON in a robe.)

SIMON Are they all right?

GLORIA I suppose.

SIMON You're a model of attentiveness.

GLORIA Let them sleep. (moving away from the rooms) I'm a model of a woman with financial problems. I checked the enrollment for the next course, and I have exactly two people signed up. I've got to get some of these turkeys to recommend the course to their friends. Are you being nice to them?

SIMON Everything short of fucking them. Shall I try that?

GLORIA I'm not sure that's being nice to them.

SIMON Touché, touché!

GLORIA I'm sorry I'm irritable, Simon. But I'm frantic.

SIMON I understand, my dear. I do. . . . I don't suppose you want me to come to your room.

GLORIA I don't think so.

SIMON That's fine. Perhaps the Countess is receiving.

GLORIA (hitting him) Oh, you! If you even think about it, you're dead meat!

SIMON Just a bit of humor on a chilly night.

GLORIA I expect you to be faithful, at least while the course is on.

SIMON Doesn't that make me sort of a . . . a tart?

GLORIA What nonsense!

SIMON But you never seem to want me to come to your room anymore. What am I to make of that? I don't mind being a tart!

GLORIA You'll be invited back. Just be patient. And faithful!

SIMON I've always wondered — is masturbating being unfaithful?

GLORIA For god's sake! . . . Go to bed! (Starts to leave.)

SIMON Since we're talking, I have another question too.

GLORIA What is it? Keep your voice down.

SIMON I'm sure we're not disturbing them.

GLORIA What is it?

SIMON You haven't asked me to be a part of the next course. Are you planning to?

GLORIA Good heavens, I'm still concentrating on getting students. Never mind staff right now!

SIMON Suppose you get the students, shouldn't you be certain that you have staff as well?

GLORIA Is that some kind of threat?

SIMON Not at all. I just wonder if you mean to continue to employ me or not.

GLORIA Of course I do. You've been very good so far, the little you've had to do.

SIMON Thank you, kind lady. I scramble for the crumbs you throw. (Pretends to eat a crumb.) Ah, delicious!

GLORIA You know, Simon, if I were you, I wouldn't push too hard right now. I'm sort of on the edge.

SIMON I've noticed. I'd just like a bit of security myself. After all, you don't want me running off to be on the staff of some other course now, do you?

GLORIA You know what. I'm not really that worried about it.

SIMON Well, perhaps you should be.

GLORIA If you have another offer, maybe you should take it, Simon. Where is it to be — RADA? Cleveland State? And what will your duties include exactly, since you can barely see your hand in front of your face anymore? Perhaps your students can sit on your lap when they do their scenes. That way you'll at least be able to see what they're doing, to say nothing of possibly giving you an occasional orgasm. (Walks away.) Good night.

SIMON (skewered) . . . Good night.

GLORIA (turning back) As if has-beens like you aren't a dime a dozen all over this sceptered isle! (Exits.)

(SIMON is left standing in the half-light.)

(Lights fade.)

(A few seconds pass. It is several hours of real time.)

COUNTESS (in mid-call, groggy) . . . I want you to call a doctor. Hang up and call a doctor. (. . .) Call an ambulance. (. . .) It will *not* wait. There's got to be someone available even it's late there. (. . .) Nerissa, I don't understand you. Do you want me to call Dr. Jamahl? (. . .) Have you been drinking? (. . .) Have you been drinking? (. . .) But you've got to have that thumb set! (. . .) Nerissa. Sweetheart. Are you listening? (. . .) Are you crying? Are you in that much pain? (. . .) Darnell said what? (. . .) Never mind what Darnell said. (. . .) Nerissa, you are not fat. That is not true. (. . .) Don't listen to him! (. . .) Well, don't listen to her,

either. You are perfectly normal in size. It's their obsession with thinness. (. . .) Believe me, I've been all over the world, and you're not that big. (. . .) not. I'm telling you you're not. (. . .) You should be proud of that heritage. When I decided to have you, it was not an idle decision. I went looking for someone to be your father. (. . .) Yes, I know I've told you this before, but you need to hear it again. There's nothing wrong with being half-Samoan. (. . .) I wanted you to be half-Samoan. (. . .) No, you have beautiful hips. (. . .) Why do you keep seeing him then? Let's not get into that. (. . .) Nerissa, you're just upset because you've broken your thumb. Once you get that fixed, all these negative feelings about your body will go away. (. . .) I'm positive. (. . .) You do *not* have a squashed-in nose. You have a beautiful nose. (. . .) I'm kissing you right now on that beautiful nose. (Kisses into the phone.) Did you get that? How about one for me too? (. . .) Is it coming? (Nerissa kisses the Countess through the phone.) Yes, I got your kiss! Are you feeling better now? (. . .) That's what I like to hear. You have a beautiful laugh. Nerissa, you have the most beautiful laugh in the whole world. And you must never forget that. (. . .) I love you too, honey. You call 911 now. You call me back if that doesn't get taken care of within an hour. Take care of Arabella and Pookie. Leave them some water if you go to the hospital. And don't leave the gazebo unlocked like the other time, okay? I'll be home fairly soon. But if you need me you let me know. But you're doing a fabulous job on your own, this first time. You are! (. . .) Nerissa, now don't start that again. Anybody can slip at the groomers! (. . .) You do not have fat feet. Fuck Darnell! Just fuck him! Believe me, you can do so much better than Darnell. But let's not get in to that. If that's the man you want right now, then that's the man you should have. Darnell has many good qualities. After all, he picked you, didn't he? (. . .) Oh, that's very sweet, Nerissa. You look after that thumb now, okay? (. . .) Bye, sweetie! And I'll see you soon. Love from London!

(The COUNTESS hangs up, exhausted, shakes her head.)

(Lights fade on the worried COUNTESS.)

Scene 4, Set 1

(Lights up.)

GLORIA (spotlight on just her face) Good morning, everyone! Welcome to day two of the Extravaganza! I'm afraid our guest had to cancel today. But he promises to come tomorrow. But let's proceed anyway!

BLACKOUT

(Lights up on Gloria's face again.)

GLORIA Good morning, everyone! Welcome to day three of the Extravaganza! I'm sorry to have to report that our guest couldn't make it again today. But tomorrow for sure! Let's persevere!

BLACKOUT

(Lights up on SIMON.)

SIMON Good morning, ladies and gentlemen!

GLORIA Well, look at this. Sir Simon is actually on time this morning. Oh, brave new world!

(The students are coming in, taking their seats as the scene proceeds.)

SIMON I hope we can have a discussion of the play you saw last evening.

GLORIA Yes! What happened last night? Nobody showed up for the discussion. Not even Simon! I waited and waited. But I had a fine discussion with myself, I must say!

BRADLEY I didn't come because I found the play we saw a bit depressing.

SYLVIA Me too.

GLORIA Depressing? I thought it was very true to life.

KARINNE Maybe people go to the theater to get away from life.

GLORIA People have to face life — head on. I found it a thrilling examination of what we all know to be true but most people won't say!

KAY Well, it was a new play. It had that going for it.

KARINNE Right on! If we don't support new plays, how will the world get any?

BRIAN I felt that what we saw last night were three plays?

SIMON Three plays?

BRIAN There was the play we thought we saw. Then there was the play inside the play. And then there was the play that each of us brought to it.

(They all consider this.)

KARINNE That may be profound. On the other hand, it may not be.

SIMON (cutting in) I've asked our guest today to come a little early. So if you have other comments on last night's play maybe they should all be heard now.

GLORIA (trying to hide her annoyance) Oh, did you change the schedule, Simon? It would have been nice if you had let me know.

SIMON I was sure, dear madame, that you would be agreeable, since you are, as we all know, always agreeable.

GUEST #2 Hello!

SIMON Speak of the devil! Ladies and gentlemen, may I introduce our guest for today — Bertrand Peacock.

(GUEST #2 goes up to SIMON. They shake hands. He is the same person who played GUEST #1 and behaves and dresses the same, only now with a mustache.)

GLORIA As you recall, Mr. Peacock directed the second play we saw — Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*. I believe we enjoyed that one, didn't we, even though it was in preview? Didn't we?

(The group applauds.)

SIMON So, Bertrand, good of you to come!

GUEST #2 Thank you, Simon. I thought if Simon Kirk can go there, it's got to be a place where I'd want to be!

SIMON And the honorarium is better than a kick in the head, as these Americans say.

GUEST #2 I've had smaller ones, yes.

GLORIA Do tell us about directing *Hay Fever*. Won't you?

SIMON Yes, Bertrand, how did the rehearsals go?

GUEST #2 If you'd asked me yesterday, I would have had to give quite a different answer. But last night I believe we found Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*. Or at least we found *our* Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*.

SIMON Really. Well, knowing what I do about Bertrand's directing, I would venture that the other night we probably saw the definitive *Hay Fever* of all time!

GUEST #2 Oh, certainly not, certainly not. Rubbish.

SIMON I'm certain it is. Definitive. Definitive.

GUEST #2 Rubbish! I'm lucky if the cast remembers the lines.

SIMON Not a bit of it. They were brilliant! Once played in *Hay Fever*, ever tell you?

GUEST #2 You didn't, actually. I'm sure you were brilliant. Brilliant!

SIMON Oh, tosh. This is when I was at RADA. I was all of nineteen and all spotty. (Refers to his face) I'm sure I was dreadful.

GUEST #2 I'm sure your performance was masterful.

SIMON Not a bit of it, not a bit of it!

GUEST #2 I just wish I could have been there to see it. I bet our American friends feel the same way? (Looks at them.)

(They applaud, of course.)

SIMON Rubbish! Rubbish!

GLORIA Perhaps Sir Simon can give us a bit of his *Hay Fever* on our last day. I'm sure he's getting it all together. Aren't you, Sir Simon?

SIMON It's coming along, coming along. A bit of trouble remembering my lines. But they will come. They will come. (BRIAN raises his hand.) Yes? You have a question for our guest?

(Others cringe.)

BRIAN Didn't Noel Coward also write something about privates?

GUEST # 2 I think you must mean *Private Lives*. Yes!

BRIAN I haven't seen that, but I read it. Would you say that that play's frothier than the play you directed?

GUEST #2 Frothier? (to SIMON) I'd imagine that depends on how one defines *frothy*, wouldn't you say?

SIMON I imagine so. How would you define frothy, Mr. Burpee? It is Mr. Burpee, right?

BRIAN I would define frothy as . . . as . . . uh . . . (He can't find the words.)

GUEST #2 (very politely) Perhaps I could re-phrase that slightly.

ANTONIA (laughs too loudly)

COUNTESS (about ANTONIA) Perhaps she'd like to define it.

ANTONIA Perhaps you'd like to define this. (Makes obscene gesture.)

GLORIA Please! Please! For the sake of our guest.

KAY I wonder if we're even going to make it to the end of the course.

BRADLEY We can't quit now. We've come this far.

GLORIA So then, where were we?

SIMON Defining *frothy*, I believe.

GUEST #2 Actually, you know, I've always felt that Coward has gotten a "bum rap." (to the group) Isn't that what you Americans say? I mean, I find Coward absolutely, devastatingly spot on about everything. Life is too tragic to take it seriously. Coward knew this! So, amidst the seeming froth, of a Noel Coward play there is, in fact, a heart of darkness. And that's what I tried to infuse into my production.

SIMON *Did you?*

GUEST #2 The play's really about a very sick family. In real life you wouldn't want to be around those people for five minutes.

SIMON Ah, but that's the beauty of it, you see. Coward knew that you must exaggerate.

GUEST #2 Must stir it all up. Put in some nonsense. Some laughs.

SIMON In-between the tragedy. And that's when you get —

GUEST #2 *Good froth.*

SIMON Heavy froth! *Great froth!*

GUEST Exactly!

GLORIA Another question perhaps? (Looks eagerly at the group.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 5, Set 2

(Some are in their rooms — SYLVIA, BRIAN, KARINNE. The others are out for the day.)

(Lights up on BRADLEY. He looks at the telephone, undecided, twiddles his fingers a bit, sits on his cot, then has an idea, and jumps up. Starts down the hallway.)

(KARINNE comes out of her room, headed toward the bathroom. She and BRADLEY bump into each other.)

BRADLEY (taking the opportunity) Hi.

KARINNE (low key) Hi.

BRADLEY (nothing ventured, nothing gained) How's it going?

KARINNE So far it's an overwhelming so-so.

BRADLEY That bad? I see. Uh, I know you said you're a lesbian, but that doesn't mean we can't have coffee — sometime.

KARINNE What's wrong? Nothing working out with the Countess and Kay?

BRADLEY You ladies talking behind my back?

KARINNE Not really. Kay mentioned having coffee with you, that's all.

BRADLEY And what did she say?

KARINNE . . . What did she say?

BRADLEY Yeah, am I wasting my time with her, the way I am with you?

KARINNE I couldn't say. Maybe it's quality wasted time — with her.

BRADLEY Do you really think Kay has a husband and children?

KARINNE She talks to somebody on the phone.

BRADLEY But there's something odd about it. She always leaves the door open, as if she wants people to overhear her. Wouldn't most people not want to be overheard?

KARINNE I haven't thought about it too much. I've been having my own problems. Makes one selfish.

BRADLEY Do you mind if I ask what?

KARINNE I'm afraid it's my problem. Problems.

BRADLEY No, tell me. I'm interested.

KARINNE You're not going to get in my pants, if that's what you think.

BRADLEY Jesus! Give me a break! You look really down. I'm not after your pants.

KARINNE All right, I'll give you that one. I haven't been sleeping too well. Thought I'd take one or two of these and have a nap. (Holds up bottle of sleeping pills.) I may or may not go to the play tonight.

BRADLEY Oo, I don't approve.

KARINNE Sorry, you're not my doctor. (Walks on.)

BRADLEY (calling) Don't take too many of those now. They're not good for you!

(KARINNE shrugs, goes off.) (BRADLEY shrugs, goes into his room.)

(Lights up on KAY knocking on the COUNTESS's door.)

COUNTESS What?

KAY I wonder if I could speak to you for a minute.

COUNTESS (opens door) Yes?

KAY I was wondering if you . . . I mean, you said you . . . (Takes out some jewelry.) It's about these. You said that you deal in antiques like these, I believe.

COUNTESS It's more of a hobby.

KAY Oh, I don't mean to bother you.

COUNTESS What about them?

KAY I was just wondering if you could sell them. I've had them a long time. I don't really need them anymore, and I thought maybe . . . It's really not the money.

COUNTESS Let me see them. (Takes out an jeweler's eye-magnifier and examines them.)

KAY They're just things I don't use anymore.

COUNTESS They're not very good. At least not this one. Any others? (KAY hands her another from a pocket.)

KAY This one?

COUNTESS (examining it) This one's better. But it has a slight chip in the setting.

KAY Really?

COUNTESS I could possibly sell it. How much do you expect to get?

KAY Oh, it's not for the money! I don't use them anymore, and I thought someone might like them because they're so pretty, and . . .

COUNTESS I don't think I'll bother. They wouldn't bring a good price, and you wouldn't want to give up something you've had for a long time, for very little money, would you?

KAY Oh, of course not! I'm sorry I bothered you. I just thought they might be valuable . . . to somebody. It doesn't matter. Thank you anyway.

COUNTESS Maybe something else?

KAY No, no. I'm sorry I bothered you.

COUNTESS Sure there's not something else? Other jewels perhaps?

KAY No, just these. (Takes them back.) Thank you very much. I'm very sorry I bothered you. Bye! (Leaves a bit embarrassed.)

COUNTESS (looking after KAY) No bother.

(Lights up on BRADLEY seeking out SYLVIA'S room. Knocks.)

SYLVIA Yes?

BRADLEY It's Bradley.

SYLVIA (opening her door) Oh, it's you!

BRADLEY . . . I thought I'd come for a visit. We never got that coffee we talked about.

SYLVIA . . . Right. Want to come in? (He does.)

BRADLEY I thought maybe we could just talk, see if we have anything in common.

SYLVIA Have a seat. (Pulls up a chair for him. Finds one herself.)

(They sit somewhat uncomfortably. BRADLEY is very aware that SYLVIA is a transsexual.)

BRADLEY . . . So!

SYLVIA So! . . . How's the Countess?

BRADLEY God! I spent fifteen minutes with her. We didn't click. What can I say!

SYLVIA How about Kay?

BRADLEY You gals do discuss all this! I'm not just being paranoid. Or egotistical!

SYLVIA I didn't say we didn't. Do you have something to hide?

BRADLEY No, I don't. (daringly) Do *you*?

SYLVIA What does that mean exactly?

BRADLEY (uncomfortable) Nothing. Forget it.

SYLVIA I understand you're looking for a woman, an older woman.

BRADLEY I don't cover my tracks very well, do I?

SYLVIA Intention marriage?

BRADLEY Yes, with the right woman.

SYLVIA You're pretty confident, aren't you? That you can just go after a woman and get one.

BRADLEY Not that confident. Some people find me attractive, but I'm not everybody's type.

SYLVIA (after a careful pause) I know the feeling.

BRADLEY How long have you been . . . ? (Gestures about her change.)

SYLVIA (smiling) Available? Seven years. Why?

BRADLEY Just curious.

SYLVIA I understand. Most people are. Except my son. He's furious, not curious.

BRADLEY I'm sorry to hear that. Must be hard. I mean difficult.

SYLVIA On some days.

BRADLEY But you've adjusted well — to everything?

SYLVIA On some days. It's not only my son. I have an ex-wife as well. She won't even talk to me.

BRADLEY That's awful. . . . Do you mind if I ask you something?

SYLVIA Be my guest!

BRADLEY Is it harder being a woman than a man?

SYLVIA . . . Let's say they both have their problems. And in case you're curious, no, I have never had sex as a woman.

BRADLEY Never?

SYLVIA Never.

(Pause.)

BRADLEY Would you like to have sex as a woman? I don't mean necessarily with me. I mean with anyone. I mean . . .

SYLVIA I think I catch what you mean. Oh, I think that will day will come, if I don't get too old first. I haven't pursued it.

BRADLEY It must have taken enormous guts to do it. Really. When you think about it.

SYLVIA It was not a whim, shall we say.

(They laugh together.)

BRADLEY . . . I don't know what I should say next?

SYLVIA We could go for that coffee?

BRADLEY Or we could . . . stay here. Whatever.

SYLVIA I think you're a virgin here, too.

BRADLEY Sort of.

SYLVIA I think this is going a little too far.

BRADLEY Hey, I'm just getting going!

SYLVIA Or are you just horny?

BRADLEY That too!

SYLVIA Any port in a storm?

BRADLEY Come on now. I'm not putting *you* down.

SYLVIA You're right. You're being very nice. Very considerate. Of course, that's how men get what they want.

BRADLEY Hey! That's how women get what they want too.

SYLVIA Remember, I know. I used to be a man!

BRADLEY . . . But you're all . . . changed . . . (meaning her body) Right?

SYLVIA Oh, I'm finished. A complete package!

BRADLEY Well . . .

SYLVIA Well . . .

BRADLEY Well, my offer's on the table, so to speak.

SYLVIA I appreciate that. It's really very nice and sweet and sort of sexy.

BRADLEY Thank you. . . . You're going to turn me down, though?

SYLVIA Of course not. We haven't gotten that far. And this is as far as it's going.

BRADLEY But why? I'm here. You're there. The night is young.

SYLVIA We're on vacation. We're in a foreign country. We're both unattached.

BRADLEY We like each other. Right? What's wrong then?

SYLVIA Well, you see, Bradley, ever since I made the change, well, I . . . I identify as a lesbian.

BRADLEY (Pause.) You had that whole operation. And now you identify as a *lesbian*? (Blinks, confused.) I don't understand. Couldn't you have become a lesbian some other way?

SYLVIA (taking his hand) It's all right, it's all right. (Should be both comic and touching.)

BRADLEY (a little wail) I don't *understand* people!

BLACKOUT

Scene 6, Set 1

(All are present except SIMON.)

GLORIA Welcome to the second and final week of our Extravaganza! I hope you're all holding up under the awful strain of seeing play after play! Guess what? Sir Simon isn't down yet. So let me take this opportunity to find out which among you is planning to perform for the group on our last day? (No one responds.) What?! Bradley? Antonia? Surely you both have been working on pieces. That's why we decided to have scholarship students this term!

ANTONIA I don't feel like it.

GLORIA (trying to sound amused) You don't feel like it? What *do* you feel like?

ANTONIA I don't know, Maybe I'll feel like it later. I haven't got anyone to rehearse with!

GLORIA Why don't you rehearse with Bradley? Bradley, who are you rehearsing with?

BRADLEY (obviously not rehearsing at all) Oh, with — I forget his name. Someone I met.

GLORIA (not pleased) I see. Well, I am assuming that Sir Simon is rehearsing his one-man show we've heard so much about. I've never actually seen it. I believe he does some of his greatest roles from over the years. And some poetry. I wonder that you, Bradley, and Antonia and Sir Simon haven't all gotten together to rehearse. I guess I just haven't organized this enough. My fault. I'll take more control next time.

(BRIAN raises his hand.)

GLORIA Yes, Brian?

(Some of the others cringe.)

BRIAN I've rehearsed.

GLORIA You've rehearsed? You've rehearsed what?

BRIAN A part.

GLORIA Truly? (faking it) Well, how splendid! So you'll be gracing us with a performance!

BRIAN I hope to.

GLORIA Wonderful. Looking forward to it. Anyone else?

BRIAN Do you want to know what mine is?

GLORIA Why don't you surprise us on the last day?

BRIAN I don't know if I'll actually have the nerve to do it.

GLORIA . . . I'm sure you'll have the nerve, Brian.

BRIAN I'm naturally shy.

GLORIA You've overcome it beautifully.

BRIAN Thank you.

GLORIA Anyone else? (No one responds.)

KARINNE Why don't *you* do something?

GLORIA Me? Heavens! I don't act. Good heavens, no! Antonia, we're counting on you.

ANTONIA I don't feel like doing it by myself. It's really a two-person scene. I was gonna do both parts myself, but now I don't really feel like it. To be honest, I don't think I'm up to it.

GLORIA My, how modest. Well, perhaps one of the group will volunteer to do it with you. Do you need a man or a woman?

ANTONIA A woman. To play my mother.

GLORIA Volunteers? Kay? . . . Sylvia? . . . Karinne? . . . (All shake their heads no. GLORIA doesn't ask the COUNTESS because of the fights she and ANTONIA have had.) Now there's always cross-casting. Maybe Bradley could play your mother. (BRADLEY declines, uncomfortable.)

(Pause.)

COUNTESS I'll do it!

(General surprise.)

GLORIA Countess?

COUNTESS I have a daughter, about your age. I can play a mother.

ANTONIA (the most surprised of all) Really? You're willing to do it with me?

COUNTESS Certainly. If it's this morning.

ANTONIA (not nastily) Did Dr. Ali cancel again or somethin'?

COUNTESS I cancelled Dr. Ali! I won't be going there anymore.

ANTONIA Great.

GLORIA So that's a yes?

COUNTESS As far as I'm concerned.

GLORIA Antonia?

ANTONIA Okay. I guess.

COUNTESS Now there is one problem.

ANTONIA (disgruntled) I might have known!

COUNTESS I am going to lunch at Windsor Castle this afternoon, and we'll have to rehearse in my car. We can sit in the back and do our lines.

ANTONIA You have your own *driver*?

COUNTESS Of course. I always use Hugh when I'm in London.

ANTONIA Where is he?

COUNTESS Outside, waiting. Where else would he be?

ANTONIA You have a driver with a limo and you're going to Windsor Castle for lunch and you want to rehearse with me in the back seat?

COUNTESS Only if you want to.

ANTONIA And how do I get back here after we rehearse, before you go to lunch? On the train?

COUNTESS Hugh could bring you back if you're in a hurry. Or you could stay for lunch and come back with me. Although there is the possibility that I might stay over. But then I'm sure you could stay over too. And we could drive back in the morning.

ANTONIA Stay overnight at Windsor Castle? . . . Cool.

COUNTESS And then rehearse our lines on the way back in!

ANTONIA Cool. One more question.

COUNTESS Yes?

ANTONIA I have to be back by the day after tomorrow. I start a new job.

COUNTESS Fine. I approve of other people having jobs!

ANTONIA Oh, it's just on the telephone. It's just part time. It's sort of an acting job.

COUNTESS We'll be back, I assure you.

ANTONIA . . . Just one more question. I just thought of.

(Some of the others are becoming impatient.)

COUNTESS Yes?

ANTONIA You're not a lesbian, are you? And you wanna get me . . . (Gestures.)

COUNTESS Me? (laughs) Not that know of.

BRADLEY Don't worry, Antonia, I've got all the lesbians wrapped up!

(Enter SIMON.)

SIMON Wonderful news! And that's why I'm late.

GLORIA What is it? You've remembered the lines in your one-man show?

SIMON I will be stunning on Friday, believe me! The news is that we are going to have a substitute guest tomorrow. Now Cecil Kendalgreen, the fund raiser, cannot make it, but he has managed to get — we are so fortunate! — no less a personage than Dame Judith Punch herself to agree to visit with us!

GLORIA That is marvelous news!

ANTONIA Is she the one that sat on Mustardseed by mistake in *Midsummer's Night's Dream*?

SIMON Oh, you noticed. She did, actually.

BRIAN You might say she almost crushed that mustardseed!

SIMON Anyway, she has agreed to come here.

GLORIA Might she cancel?

SIMON Well, you never know with royalty, but —

COUNTESS I resent that. There's always, undoubtedly, a good reason.

BRIAN Do you think she'll sit on us?

SIMON I am so looking forward to her visit. I think it should be the highlight of the course.

GLORIA Not at all, not at all. The highlight of the course will be the performances by all of you! (Points to the group and SIMON.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 7, Set 2

(That afternoon. KAY, SYLVIA, and KARINNE are in their rooms. The others are out.)

KARINNE (on the telephone) How's Blooper? (. . .) Oh, his eye cleared up. Good. I'll be home next week. Will you be able to pick me up at the airport? (. . .) Oh, I see. That's okay. I can take Super Shuttle. (. . .) The seminar? Some of the people here! The most selfish person in the whole bunch got invited to Windsor Castle for lunch. Go figure! (. . .) No, I don't really want to go to Windsor Castle for lunch. I can have lunch in my palatial room! (. . .) No, I haven't so far been able to get my script read by Sir Simon. But I keep plugging. No doubt making a nuisance of myself. Maybe the play is no damn good. (. . .) Have you thought about us? (. . .) I see. (. . .) So the jury's still out. My plane's not till the fifth. I thought maybe I could change it, come back a little early. We could go to Calistoga. (. . .) I see. (. . .) No, I see. I see! (. . .) No, I'm not angry. I still think we're going to work it out. Call me a cock-eyed optimist. Or is that coke-eyed optimist? (. . .) No, I haven't touched a thing since I've been here. Not even alcohol. Maybe that's why I feel so terrible! Because I'm clean and sober! (. . .) It's a joke, Blair. I'm trying to be funny. God knows, I'm trying. Everybody around here thinks I'm a hoot. You should be here, really. I just started playing this game in my mind, about all these folks that I've been spending time with. It may just be my imagination, but I don't think I'm too far off. (. . .) The game? It's called Sex Lives of the Seminarians!

(The characters now act out the scenarios that KARINNE mentions, but at a very fast speed, as in an old movie, with a comic strobe light effect.)

KARINNE One of us is a transsexual clairvoyant, and I think she's probably having a torrid affair with Bradley, this youngish actor. Or maybe he's having an affair with both the transsexual clairvoyant and Kay, this woman who's very nice but there's something a little strange about her. I can't quite put my finger on it. Or maybe, just maybe, the actor is having group sex with all three — the transsexual, strange Kay, and the Countess. Yes, we have a real-life countess. There's also Gloria, our beloved leader. She's probably a dominatrix and makes Sir Simon wear a schoolboy's uniform and get caned on a regular basis. No, maybe he canes her! . . . Naw, she canes him! She'd never give up that much control! And of course there's Antonia, this so-called actress. I doubt she can act her way out of paper bag. She's secretly got the hots for Brian, this I-don't-know-what-to-call-him from some small town. And she spies on him when he's taking a shower! Through a peephole. But he's not interested in her, not because he's a celibate but because he has a sex doll at the bottom of his luggage that looks just like Sarah Brightman. (. . .) She was married to Andrew Lloyd Webber. With big, poppy eyes. And there's no question that they're, every one of them, into self-abuse. Serious self-abuse. The mind boggles! And when it comes to the sex toys, don't even ask! (. . .) Blair? Are you still on? (. . .) Oh, good. (. . .) Are these people for real? Let me say you just have to be here to believe it!

(Other possible sexual scenarios continue as the lights fade.)

END OF ACT II

HUGELY ENTERTAINING

ACT III

Scene 1, Set 1

GLORIA Good morning, seminarians! Second last day of the course! How are we holding up? Some of us are missing today, it seems. Tsk, tsk!

KAY I think Antonia and the Countess are still at Windsor Castle. At least they haven't come back yet.

GLORIA Do you think we need to worry? No accident, I hope.

KARINNE They probably had to stop at the Savoy for breakfast.

BRIAN Is the Savoy open for breakfast? . . . Maybe we could all go to breakfast there before we leave? . . .

(No one takes BRIAN up on his offer.)

GLORIA Guess what! Sir Simon isn't here yet.

KAY I saw him early this morning. He mentioned something about a doctor's appointment. New glasses or something?

GLORIA If he'd only wear his glasses! But you know these actors. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. The ego is the largest organ in the human body. And the last to go!

BRADLEY Is Dame Judith really coming this morning?

GLORIA Barring acts of God!

KARINNE (to BRADLEY) Maybe Gloria can arrange a date for you, Bradley — with Dame Judith.

BRADLEY You know what they say.

BRADLEY /
KARINNE (together) There's nothing like a dame!

(Groans all around.)

BRADLEY Hey, it's not that bad!

GLORIA Remember, tomorrow we have no guests. Just you and the final presentations. I hope everybody will participate, even if it's just as an audience member. After all, the audience is a crucial factor in theater. In any case, I'm sure we'll have a great time, and I'm sure it will be —

SIMON (from the back of the group) Ladies and gentlemen, good morning! May I present our guest for today. A woman whose name is synonymous with British theatre — my friend . . .

GLORIA (taking over) — the incomparable Dame Judith Punch!

(Enter DAME JUDITH, played in drag by the male BRITISH GUEST. She is large and elderly.)

(Applause from the group as she and SIMON sit.)

SIMON (gushing) So, Dame Judith —

JUDITH Judy! To you, Simon, always Judy!

SIMON So good of you to come!

JUDITH Thank you, Simon. I thought if Simon Kirk can go there, it's got to be a place where I'd want to be!

SIMON And the honorarium is better than a kick in the head, as these Americans say.

JUDITH I've had smaller ones in my day, yes.

SIMON (surveying the group) And bigger audiences, I dare say.

JUDITH There are no small audiences, Simon, only small actors.

SIMON How true, how true. Do tell us, won't you, about what it must be to be Dame Judith Punch. Perhaps I should take a few moments to explain, to anyone who doesn't know, just the tip of the iceberg of her illustrious career.

BRIAN *The Titanic* hit an iceberg.

SIMON (trying to absorb this) Indeed so. Precisely. Besides her Titania, which you saw the other evening, she also was an absolutely riveting Medea. Riveting.

(DAME JUDITH demurs.)

BRIAN (raises his hand) Question!

GLORIA (reluctantly) Yes, Brian.

BRIAN (not being mean) I was just wondering if Dame Judith possibly created the original role?

JUDITH Of Medea?

BRIAN (all fan) Did you?

(DAME JUDITH looks at him with a squint, then looks at SIMON. They decide to “have on” the stupid Americans, completely deadpan.)

JUDITH No, I’m afraid I was in the *second* cast.

BRIAN (not catching on) How exciting!

SIMON (picking up on the joke) So tell us, Judy, what is was like working with Euripides on *Medea*. He was still around then, right?

JUDITH Oh, certainly. Euripides came to every rehearsal.

SIMON Well, he would then, wouldn’t he, it being a fairly new play and all.

BRIAN Did he make any script changes? Or any suggestions?

SIMON Very good question. Did he?

JUDITH Many! No script changes. But he thought I tended to overplay *Medea*.

SIMON Did he? How extraordinary?

JUDITH Kept giving me notes. “Less eye-rolling. More enchantress.”

SIMON But it must have been marvelous to have the author there.

JUDITH A bit annoying, actually. You see, the director kept telling me, “Roll your eyes, roll your eyes, Judy.” And Euripides kept saying, “Enchant the audience, Judy. Don’t beat them over the head! Enchant, enchant!” It’s a wonder that I was able to perform it at all.

SIMON But the reviews were splendid, as I recall.

JUDITH True. I must say the critics were very kind. *That* time.

SIMON You know what?! Perhaps it’s time for you to do *Medea* again.

JUDITH Heavens, no! I’m too old to play her now.

SIMON You would light up the stage. It would be the theatrical event of the century. *This* century this time.

JUDITH Not at all, not a bit of it! What rubbish!

SIMON You must do it. You simply must. (to group) Mustn’t she? Mustn’t she do it?

(They of course applaud.)

JUDITH You’re too kind. But it’s not just that I’m too old for the part. I’ve also become quite active in the C.C.C.

SIMON The C.C.C.? I'm afraid I don't know what that is.

JUDITH The Crusade for Children's Care. It's an organization devoted to the welfare of children. Founded in America, I believe, and so you see I would not wish to play Medea any longer, seeing as the way she treats her children is hardly the role model one would wish to set and can thus only be a very bad example for others to follow.

SIMON I can see what you mean — murdering her children and all that. Not good, not good one bit.

JUDITH Entirely too much of that kind of thing going around nowadays.

SIMON It used to be confined to the upper classes, didn't it? And now you see it everywhere!

JUDITH A sign, I'm afraid, of the lessening values of modern life.

SIMON I'm sure our little group couldn't agree more. Could you?

 (The group agrees, applauds, although the smarter ones know they are being twitted.)

BRIAN (stands, gives DAME JUDITH a standing ovation.) Bravo! Bravo! (Encourages the others to do the same.)

KARINNE (to BRIAN) Oh, for god's sake!

SIMON I believe Miss Howe has a question.

KARINNE No, I don't.

SIMON Someone else?

KARINNE (seizing the moment) We're not *all* morons, you know! Some of us may actually know something and even be talented!

SIMON That's been evident all these two weeks.

KARINNE All you hear are dumb questions and your own self-congratulation and you get the wrong impression.

GLORIA Perhaps this isn't the time to go into this. You'll have a chance to evaluate the course after we —

KARINNE Yeah! A lot of good it will do!

KAY (trying to soothe her) Karinne, you're just upsetting yourself.

KARINNE So what? The course is over anyway.

GLORIA Not quite!

SIMON I suspect Miss Howe is upset because I have neglected her play.

KARINNE Never mind the fucking play!

SIMON I meant to find some time for it. I'm sorry.

KARINNE You never meant to find the time to do anything but to brag about your great career in the "theatre"! I'd like to have a great career in the "theatre" myself! Well, fat chance with the likes of you!

SIMON What you don't seem to realize is that playwrights are always besieging me with their scripts. Dozens. It's seems obvious the only reason you enrolled in this class is to get access to people you wouldn't be able to meet otherwise.

KARINNE People who wouldn't give me the goddamned time of day.

SIMON Sorry it's so British of me, but it really isn't cricket, your methods. They're underhanded.

KARINNE And no doubt vulgar and very, very American!

SIMON You said it, my dear. I didn't.

KARINNE Because you can't break in otherwise. My accent's all wrong.

JUDITH That isn't all that's wrong.

KARINNE I've written sixteen plays and worked like a dog getting them read, getting them staged-read, getting them work-shopped, getting them discussed, critiqued, polished. They're good. People I don't even know say they're good. And then nothing happens with them. Nothing! They lie there in a metal cabinet — dead. And I begin yet one more play — that nobody will do!

JUDITH We have plenty of British playwrights who aren't getting produced!

KARINNE They get produced. I see them. And they're not that good. Just British! It's not like I'm trying to force more American crap down your throats. The play I brought with me even has a British setting. It could use British actors. In fact, it cries out for British actors! I even had an agent here. But she dropped me last summer. I'm sorry if I'm embarrassing you all. I'm embarrassing myself. But I'm at the end of my rope. . . . I'm sorry. I'll leave. (Starts to leave.)

SIMON (after a moment) Wait! All right, let's have it.

KARINNE What do you mean?

SIMON Your script. Your play. We do speak the same language, right? Let's have this play. The play's the thing!

KARINNE Now?

SIMON You wanted me to read it. Let's do it. Go get the script. We'll attend upon you, Madame. (KARINNE hesitates.) Well?

GLORIA Are you going to get it or not?

KARINNE Well, since you asked, I just happened to bring the script with me this morning. On the off-chance that . . . (Takes the script out of hiding — from a backpack. Hands it cautiously to SIMON.)

SYLVIA Good for you!

(Small smattering of applause from the others.)

SIMON I might have known. Which part is it you want me to read?

KARINNE Falstaff.

SIMON I know the part backwards.

KARINNE This is a sequel. I understand that Queen Elizabeth I wanted to see Falstaff in love. So I imagined what if a contemporary monarch — today, that is — asked to see Falstaff —

JUDITH With AIDS?

KARINNE No, brought back to the castle secretly — by the new king — when Prince Hal is now the king and he's not supposed to fraternize with lowlife anymore!

SIMON And which section do you want me to read?

KARINNE Maybe we should wait until you've had a chance to look it over —

SIMON Not a bit of it. We'll read it now. (Puts on his glasses.) Don't you have any other scripts, just this one?

KARINNE I just happen to have a few more. (Trying to find them.)

SIMON (thumbing through the script) I don't see Falstaff here.

KARINNE He's there!

SIMON What's this? (Points to script.) Lancaster. Shall I read that part?

KARINNE If you like. (Nervous, trying to find another script.) However, maybe we should wait until you've —

JUDITH Is there a part for me too? Why not take advantage of me since I'm already here?!

SIMON What about page twelve? Lady Lancaster and Lancaster — isn't that what it says here?

KARINNE Probably, yes.

SIMON Well, it's your script. You ought to know. It *is* your script, correct?

KARINNE Yes, it's my script. It's a sequel to one of Shakespeare's history plays.

SIMON Ambitious of you.

JUDITH I'd love to play Lady Lancaster. Have you a script for me or haven't you?

KARINNE But some people don't read well cold. Oh, hell, why not! (Produces another script, gives it to DAME JUDITH.)

SIMON All right then. Here we go. (Adjusts his glasses again.)

(ANTONIA and the COUNTESS slip into the room, trying to be quiet, but everyone notices them. They take seats.)

JUDITH Are we all set there now?

ANTONIA Sorry.

SIMON (to DAME JUDITH) Page twelve, yes?

JUDITH You have that long speech at the top there. (Points to it.)

SIMON Oh, let's skip that. There — what does that say? (Points. It's becoming clearer and clearer that SIMON can barely see to read.)

JUDITH "Enter Lady Lancaster."

(BRIAN applauds.)

SIMON Let's have a go! (Gestures at her to begin reading.)

KARINNE (trying to set the scene) It's very early morning.

JUDITH "Is't thee, my husband, wanders through these rooms
Until the sun undroops his courser's eye
To race with Helios 'cross the morning clouds?
Dost thou a posset need to slake thy mind?"

(She reads it very well.)

SIMON (with some difficulty, because of his poor eyesight)
"Nay, Madame, but England may."

JUDITH "Unfold me not what ears now do suspect.
Come thee to bed and mitigate thy brain.
I will the arras draw to give thee night,
Thereby to sleep thyself into thyself."

SIMON (begins stumbling through it, bringing it closer to his eyes, moving it away)
“I have already, lady, . . .slept too long.
Though I be young, yet be I not a . . . babe,
A pukling — puking babe that nods and sleeps and asks
No more than but to have a . . . tickled chin.”

(He breaks off in disgust and anger and embarrassment.)

I can't make heads or tails of this! (to KARINNE) Here! You read it!
(Offers the script abruptly.)

KARINNE (standing) I can't read it. It's meant —

SIMON Well, I can't read it, either. It makes no sense. Read it yourself!

(He tosses the script at KARINNE. She tries to catch it, but it falls to the floor. The others are disturbed by this, KARINNE most of all.)

GLORIA (shocked) Simon!

SIMON What a bunch of rubbish! Utter rubbish!

(After a few seconds, KARINNE, upset, runs from the room, leaving the script behind on the floor.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 2, Set 2

(That night. All the seminarians are in their rooms, doing different things, in different moods.)

(Lights up on the COUNTESS's room. The door is open. Partial light on KARINNE, who can overhear them.)

ANTONIA (in the COUNTESS's room, sitting on the cot) I can't get over how cool the Prince was.

COUNTESS But you didn't say much at lunch.

ANTONIA I was too overwhelmed.

COUNTESS He does tend to go on about organic farming and all that. But at heart he's a decent fellow.

ANTONIA I hope I didn't do or say anything ridiculous.

COUNTESS You were just right. I *thought* I spotted value here, under the rough exterior. I'm never wrong about these things.

ANTONIA It was so terrific of you to invite me along.

COUNTESS (correcting her) It was terrific of me to invite you along. No need to say the word "so." Let your judgments carry their own weight. . . . I was glad to have you there.

ANTONIA You miss your own daughter, don't you?

COUNTESS But I don't want you to think that's why I invited you. You have your individual charms — and lots of potential. One day you could even marry royalty!

ANTONIA Really? Wow. Thank you, Countess.

COUNTESS From now on you may call me Carnation.

ANTONIA (kissing her on the cheek chastely) Thank you, Carnation.

COUNTESS Now do you want to rehearse our lines for tomorrow or go to the Savoy for a late supper?

ANTONIA Is it possible we could have the late supper *and* rehearse our lines at the Savoy?

COUNTESS An excellent idea! Why didn't I think of that! Let me just put on a wrap and call Hugh — or should we get a taxi?

ANTONIA Hugh did look pretty tired.

COUNTESS You're perfectly right. We'll do the taxi!

(The COUNTESS puts on a wrap.)

ANTONIA Let me go get something in case it gets chilly.

COUNTESS Here! Try this on. (Gets one of her own wraps, gives it to ANTONIA.)

ANTONIA (trying it on) How does it look?

COUNTESS As if it were made for you! Shall we?

(Lights down on them as they exit.)

(KARINNE throws herself down on her bed. She can't help feeling jealous.)

(SYLVIA emerges from her room and taps on BRADLEY's door.)

BRADLEY (opening the door, somewhat surprised) Oh, hi!

SYLVIA Got a minute.

BRADLEY I was going to go to sleep. But sure.

SYLVIA Some other time then. (Turns away.)

BRADLEY Naw, come on in. I can sleep anytime.

(SYLVIA enters his room. He's not sure exactly why she's there. She's not exactly sure, either. Maybe she's decided to have sex with him.)

BRADLEY Some juice? (Offers a can.) It's all I've got.

SYLVIA Fine.

(He gets them both some juice, in small cans.)

BRADLEY So what brings you to this neck of the woods?

SYLVIA Couldn't sleep.

BRADLEY Yeah, me neither. How's your juice?

SYLVIA (low key) My juice is fine. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings the other day.

BRADLEY I've recovered! I always bounce back. You have to if you're an actor. "We'll let you know"!

SYLVIA Are you really an actor?

BRADLEY How can you ask! Now I really am insulted!

SYLVIA I'm sorry.

BRADLEY Wait until you see me strut my stuff tomorrow. Even though I haven't prepared anything.

SYLVIA (tongue in cheek) Can't wait!

BRADLEY Are you gonna do something? Another "reading" of us maybe?

SYLVIA I don't think so this time.

BRADLEY Come on, you gotta do somethin'! (about KARINNE, lowering his voice) Do you think *she's* gonna come tomorrow?

SYLVIA I kind of doubt it.

BRADLEY Have you talked to her?

SYLVIA No. And I know I should have. Have you?

BRADLEY Nope. I felt so bad for her today.

SYLVIA When he threw the script at her, I thought . . .

BRADLEY The man can't see a thing, but he won't admit it. I don't think he meant to throw it *at* her exactly.

SYLVIA It was awful and sad all around.

BRADLEY Hey, I'm an actor too, but there comes a time when you have to face up to certain realities.

SYLVIA I think he has macular degeneration.

BRADLEY Sounds terrible. What is it?

SYLVIA I suspected it before — the way he handles reading material. The center of the eyeball loses its vision. For a while you can just see with the outer part, but the area keeps getting smaller and smaller until . . .

BRADLEY Bummer. I mean, *god!*

SYLVIA I wouldn't be surprised if Sir Simon is totally blind in a year or so.

BRADLEY No! Is this a vision you've had or . . . ?

SYLVIA Not a vision. We have to study some of this in our school.

BRADLEY Really! I had no idea.

SYLVIA There's no cure, either.

BRADLEY How awful! (Sits.)

(Lights down on these two as they continue talking without the audience being able to hear.)

Scene 3, Set 1

(Somewhat later. GLORIA is alone in the conference room, having had a good bit of wine. There is not much light.)

(Enter KAY.)

KAY (seeing GLORIA., startled) Oh! Jesus!

GLORIA I'm sorry if I startled you.

KAY I didn't think anyone would be here.

GLORIA I'm not. I'm just about to leave. (Holding up a wine bottle.) Thought I'd finish this up. Don't want it going to waste. Are you okay?

KAY I've recovered. That's what I came down for. I know you leave the bottles overnight sometimes. (protesting too much) Not that I drink too much.

GLORIA Who does? (Waves the bottle.) Join me!

KAY Are *you* all right? (Pours herself some wine.)

GLORIA Sure. One more day and I'm out of here, at least until the next time. If there is a next time.

KAY What do you mean?

GLORIA I have nobody signed up for the next class. I thought I had two, but they just cancelled.

KAY When does it start?

GLORIA In a month.

KAY Here?

GLORIA Right here, in good old Canterbury Hall, the scene of so much culture and joy. And Brian's questions.

KAY I haven't seen you like this before.

GLORIA Like what? A little tipsy? Everyone needs to get a little tipsy sometimes. A lot tipsy. Everyone needs to be a tipsy gypsy! Damn, listen to me!

KAY So how did you think the course went this time?

GLORIA Sincerely? You want to know what I thought? Not what all of you thought, but what *I* thought?

KAY Sure, if you want to say.

GLORIA I'm not allowed to say. Only you people get to say. "We liked Guest #1 but we hated Guest #2." "They ran out of beans at breakfast and we want a total refund!" "What time does the ten o'clock train leave?" Could it possibly be ten o'clock, you stupid ass! What do I think? It doesn't matter what I think. But it was probably the single biggest bunch of jerks, losers, and shits since I started this godforsaken program!

KAY My . . .

GLORIA And what did you think of it? Really!

KAY All right, I'll tell you. I think there's a lot of people with a lot of pain, most of which they cover up.

GLORIA Not nearly enough.

KAY I think they sit in their rooms alone much of the time. Some go out — make themselves go out. Some get friends. Or at least temporary friends. They're all looking for something, even at their age. And most of them haven't found it yet. Most of them will probably never find it.

GLORIA Oh, so you're the psychic now?

KAY No.

GLORIA Give me a break. These people don't feel pain! They inflict pain!

KAY Maybe some of both.

GLORIA And how did you get so wise? I hear you've got some problems of your own.

KAY I suppose no one escapes gossip around here.

GLORIA So what is it? What's wrong, exactly, with *you*?

KAY . . . I don't think I'd tell you even if there were. Certainly not right now.

GLORIA It will never leave this room. All the things that have taken place in this room — and that will tomorrow — not even a trace left. Not even a smell. So why not you too?

KAY Maybe I'd better go. (Starts to get up.)

GLORIA Know what I've heard about you?

KAY You don't need to tell me.

GLORIA But I do. This feels so wonderful! Even though I'll hate myself in the morning. (Laughs.)

KAY You could wind up being not the only person who hates you in the morning.

GLORIA I'm going to say it anyway. And damn the consequences. Maybe it'll lead to a brand new job.

KAY Okay. What is true about me?

GLORIA You're not married. Are you? (KAY does not reply.) You've never been married. You probably don't even have children. Not three, not one. (KAY does not reply.) Do you even live in Denver? (KAY does not reply.) For some reason you've created this family, this illusion, am I right? And you think people buy it because they never say anything to you, just as they never say anything to our so subtle transsexual, either because they're too polite to, or they just don't give a shit. But they do *notice*, or some notice, Kay. Mrs. Holscher. Because you don't quite do it quite right. Am I quite right?

(KAY still does not answer. She is tempted to, but after a moment, she turns and leaves.)

GLORIA Kay? . . . Shit!

(Lights fade as GLORIA takes another sip of wine.)

(SIMON enters, carrying his large cue cards, some published scripts. He searches for the light switch but can't find it.)

SIMON Damn!

GLORIA What are you looking for?

SIMON The bloody light switch.

GLORIA Why?

SIMON Because I want to rehearse in here.

GLORIA There's somebody here.

SIMON I'm sure that somebody won't mind if I rehearse. I'm sure that somebody wants her money's worth out of the actor she's hired. Where the hell is the switch?

GLORIA Don't turn it on. Why don't you rehearse in your room?

SIMON Because I like to rehearse in the place where I am to perform.

GLORIA Don't shit where you eat.

SIMON Well, aren't you pleasant!

GLORIA I'm always pleasant — like the Countess. In fact, I'm probably a countess myself.

SIMON Not bloody likely! What is it you say? You can take the American out of America, but you can't get the American out! Or the *Americans* out. Which is it?

GLORIA Not even close. Don't quote what you don't know.

SIMON Nevertheless, I trust that you get my point.

GLORIA Just some more British crap.

SIMON If you don't like us so much, why do you keep coming back?

GLORIA I may not be coming back, actually. I think this course was the last straw.

SIMON I'm sure you've gleaned all you can from us. It's time to set your sights elsewhere. (Turns on the light.) Ah, there! (Arranges his materials.) Are you going to stay and watch and make sure I get it right? Give notes? Tap me with a ruler maybe?

GLORIA Why were you so rude to that woman today about her script?

SIMON Who was rude? She was rude! You were rude to let her try to impose it on me, on the course!

GLORIA All she wanted was a reading. A scene!

SIMON Sometimes you amaze me, Gloria, with your denseness. In many ways you're smart — but in literary ways, not real ways. That woman wanted me to take her script and get it put on somewhere. She wanted me to read three lines of it and say, "My word, this is incredible! I'm giving up my own career to promote yours!"

GLORIA You mustn't confuse your ego with hers.

SIMON She's not the kind that would be happy with a scene or two. She wants the Royal Shakespeare Company to blow up her ass.

GLORIA The way it once upon a time blew up your ass? With the emphasis on "once upon a time"?

SIMON I earned every moment of what I got. No one came to me and handed me, little working-class Bradford boy, a goddamn thing! I studied. I read. I auditioned. Do you have any idea of how many times I had to audition — until I was forty years old?! How many tiny parts, humiliating parts, and yet I kept on. Kept on! And I will keep on despite you and your brazen, talentless playwrights.

GLORIA You don't know if she's talented or not. You didn't give her a chance.

SIMON It was terrible. Fake Shakespeare!

GLORIA It sounded all right to me. Why can't a play be in the style of Shakespeare? Why be so restrictive? He stole plenty himself.

SIMON Because some of us can tell the genuine article from the plastic version.

GLORIA (after a moment) What exactly is wrong with your eyes?

SIMON Nothing. I need a new prescription.

GLORIA It's no more than that?

SIMON (lying) It's no more than that.

GLORIA Funny you should say that. After all, *I'm* not blind.

SIMON What are you saying?

GLORIA Maybe we shouldn't go where we're going.

SIMON I don't know what you're talking about. You do go on, Gloria!

GLORIA That's rich. That's downright regal! *I* go on? I make up things? Here you are carrying around cue cards the size of billboards. What do those mean, Simon? Who's deluding who here? Do you or don't you know what's happening to your eyes?

SIMON A minor problem. Who doesn't have problems with his eyes as he gets older?

GLORIA It's not minor. I've suspected it. No, I've known it. I just didn't want to face it. I needed you too much — for the course. And in other ways. For a while. For a while only.

SIMON And now the course is over? The course has run its course. The coarse course has run its course!

GLORIA Don't you ever try to write a play, Simon. You'd close out of town.

SIMON Fortunately, I don't have to, my dear. I have more than enough to work with already. (Shows his materials.)

GLORIA Then perhaps I'd best leave you to it, hadn't I? I'm sure I'd just interfere. That Gloria — what a cunt she is! That's what they say, isn't it? Behind my back.

SIMON My darling, my once-upon-a -time darling, none of us should ever hear what people say behind our backs.

GLORIA It would make us too conceited, right? As Oscar Wilde would say.

SIMON If that's what you want to believe, divine lady.

GLORIA (suddenly furious) Oh, shut up, you despicable old ego maniac, with your endless theatre stories and your anecdotes and your interchangeable guests! I'm glad I will never have to sit through another one of those as long as I live. Through another one of *you* as long as I live!

SIMON The feeling is mutual. But you know what I will enjoy most about not seeing you any more?

GLORIA I couldn't care less.

SIMON It will be not having to fake a hard-on in order to have sex with you. Having to work myself up in the shower first and then pretend it wasn't you I was actually "entering."

GLORIA (quietly) Stop. Just stop.

SIMON It's too late. I've already said it.

(GLORIA gets up and starts to leave.)

GLORIA Do you know what I will enjoy most about not seeing you anymore? (He doesn't reply.) The lack of irritation. In my genitals. That red thing you're so proud of

not smearing its disgusting little tracks all over my skin. To say nothing of not having you pump whatever it is you pump into me — old dead sperm, is it? . . . Good night. (as she is about to exit) See you in class tomorrow?

SIMON You bet. You bet! . . . Oh, one more thing, Gloria.

GLORIA What's that, my darling?

SIMON Do you remember telling me about that accident you had some years ago?

GLORIA Accident?

SIMON You told me one night, after we'd been "intimate," saying that you'd never told another human being in your entire life about it.

GLORIA I don't know what you're talking about. I told you no such thing.

SIMON You ran over someone, and killed him.

GLORIA I did not. Your memory's even worse than I thought.

SIMON But you did, divine lady of my dreams. How could you forget? You killed someone, a little boy, I think it was, in a hit-and-run accident.

GLORIA Nonsense.

SIMON You hit him and didn't stop. And you were never caught. But being the person you are, you have managed to suppress it, hold it in, forget about it — help me out here with the right terminology, won't you? — and so even though you are, technically, a murderer — a murderess? — you don't let a little thing like that get in the way of a good night's sleep or an efficiently run class or even, I would venture, a look at your soul, with all those disgusting little tracks all over it.

GLORIA Are you finished?

SIMON Not quite. The boy you ran over was — let me get the term correct now — autistic. Yes? The divine madame here ran over a nine-year-old autistic boy in Biloxi, Mississippi. He couldn't talk, isn't that right? And so he couldn't identify the car that hit him, or the lady that was driving it. And probably wasn't even missed that much by the grieving family, being autistic and all. But somehow this story — this cosmic sick joke — sums you up perfectly, luv, whether it's true or not. Doesn't it? Or almost. Unless of course you also happened to be driving a tank when you did it. . . . Goodnight — as we say here.

(GLORIA leaves without answering.)

SIMON See you in class?

GLORIA (turning back) You bet. Oh, you can bet on that!

(Lights fade.)

(A few moments should pass.)

Scene 4, Set 1

(A small table for the refreshments has been added to the chairs.)

(Lights up on SIMON, BRADLEY, SYLVIA, BRIAN, ANTONIA, the COUNTESS, and KAY getting assembled.)

SIMON Good morning, everyone! Good to see you here on our last day. (Some signs of disappointment that it is coming to a close.) Not to worry. I am sure there will be many other theatre courses, no doubt some of them run by the divine woman who runs this one. . . . Now what could be wrong? Gloria is late! What is the world coming to! Should we wait or should we proceed with our little program of presentations?

(Some debate about whether to wait or to proceed.)

(Enter GLORIA with several boxes of refreshments.)

GLORIA I'm here! And I come bearing refreshments!

(Applause.)

SIMON What a remarkable woman. Don't you all agree? She was here all the time, working. Hasn't she done marvelously for us all? What is it you say now? "Let's *give it up* for Gloria!" (Leads applause.)

(More applause.) (GLORIA and SIMON hide their feelings from the others.)

GLORIA You are too kind, all of you. (Holding up the boxes of refreshments.) Now these are for later — crullers, scones, croissants. (lightly) No acting with your mouths full!

BRIAN (jokey) No grilled tomatoes for breakfast?

GLORIA And no baked beans, either. But let's save all these for the end. The staff will be bringing coffee and tea a little while later. (Puts them on the table.)

SIMON Sounds splendid!

GLORIA So are we ready to begin? As you know, this is our last meeting. Unfortunately we have no more special guests for you. So all of *you* will have to be our special guests today! (More applause.) I am assuming you've all rehearsed whatever it is you've selected to present. (They agree that they have.) So then! Shall we begin? (noticing) Oh, Karinne is not here . . . I wonder if . . .

(Awkward moment.)

KAY I don't believe she's coming.

GLORIA Well, the rest of you are here. The survivors, right? May I applaud all of you for a truly remarkable experience this time. (She applauds the group.) I say it in all sincerity — truly remarkable! (They are pleased or indifferent, etc.) Since the world goes on with us or without us, shall we go on?

SIMON And the Devil take the hindmost.

GLORIA Indeed. . . . Now shall we go alphabetically by last name?

SYLVIA As long as we don't go by talent, from first to last!

GLORIA Now we're not here to judge each other's performances. Remember the number one lesson of all theater, which we sometimes forget, I'm sorry to say, is to have an enjoyable time.

BRIAN What about tragedy?

GLORIA Even tragedies can be enjoyable, as long as they happen to other people.

BRADLEY And have some art to them.

GLORIA Exactly. Bradley knows.

SYLVIA You mean we're not going to give a prize for the best one today?

KAY That wouldn't be fair, since some are professional and some are . . . not.

COUNTESS Could we get on with them, whatever they are? I have an appointment with Dr. Ali at noon.

ANTONIA I thought you weren't going to see Dr. Ali anymore?

COUNTESS I wasn't. But he called and said he wanted to see me. One should never entirely close one's options. He annoyed me, yes, but I want the massage!

GLORIA What if I simply get all your names on slips of paper and we have a lottery?

SYLVIA Good. Perfect.

BRADLEY Sylvia and I will volunteer to write down all the names. Won't we?

SYLVIA It's practically done.

(SYLVIA and BRADLEY tear off little slips of paper from a notepad, write down everybody's name. They seem to have become a couple or at least closer to each other.)

GLORIA What should we put them in?

SIMON Does anyone have a hat? (Some checking.) No hat?

KAY Use the table. Just stir them around.

GLORIA Good idea. (They put the slips on the table with the refreshments.) Who wants to draw the names?

BRADLEY Wait! We forgot Sir Simon's name.

(Adds a slip to the pile.)

GLORIA I'm sure he will be the highlight.

COUNTESS I think either the oldest or the youngest person here should draw the names.

BRIAN Who's the oldest?

(No one will own up to being the oldest.)

GLORIA Nobody? All right, how about the youngest then?

ANTONIA I guess that's me.

GLORIA And not a problem admitting it, right?

COUNTESS (to ANTONIA) Go ahead, dear. Pick!

(ANTONIA goes to the table, swirls the slips around, covers her eyes, takes one.)

GLORIA And the winner is?

ANTONIA Oh, you're gonna think I cheated. I picked my own name.

GLORIA That's fine. If you don't mind going first.

ANTONIA Actually it's both me and Carnation — the Countess. We rehearsed.

SIMON Wonderful! Let's have you up here. Righto!

(Encouraging applause all around.)

GLORIA Do you want to tell us what it is you'll be doing?

ANTONIA I think it stands on its own. (to COUNTESS) Doesn't it?

COUNTESS But it won't hurt to explain. I'll explain. It is a scene between a mother and a daughter. The mother used to be wealthy, but she has fallen on hard times.

ANTONIA And the daughter is now a big movie star and she hates her mother because she abandoned her when she was a baby.

KAY Is it based on the novel *Lace*?

ANTONIA I don't think so. I've never even read that.

SIMON Ladies and gentlemen, Antonia . . . ?

ANTONIA I've changed my last name. In fact, I've changed my whole stage name. I'm going back to my real first name, which is Heather —

COUNTESS Which is a form of vegetation!

ANTONIA And now my last name is DeSavoy.

SIMON Heather DeSavoy. I see. Wonderful. . . . Proceed.

BRIAN (to ANTONIA) Did you get your new name from the hotel?

(General shushes so that they can start acting.)

ANTONIA Oh, and I also *wrote* this scene!

(She and the COUNTESS take their places "on stage.")

ANTONIA (as MOVIE STAR) I've summoned you here, mother, because you were very bad to abandon me when I was a child in rural Switzerland.

COUNTESS (as MOTHER) I had no choice. The Earl, you father, would not marry me, even after all his promises.

ANTONIA So you say! But I think otherwise. I think you just didn't care about the little child that you brought into this world.

COUNTESS I did care! I cared tremendously. But it was a different time then, a different world from the one you've known. Women didn't have choices then!

ANTONIA And what choice did I have, being raised by wolves?

COUNTESS They were good wolves. I made sure of that.

ANTONIA You? What did you have to do with those wolves? You just up and left!

COUNTESS That's what I told them to tell you!

ANTONIA The wolves?

COUNTESS The shepherds I gave you to. I told them to tell you I just left. I thought that would be better, over all. You would just write me off. And just forget about me. You would grow up normal and happy, not knowing. I didn't even want them to tell you they weren't your real parents.

ANTONIA Only you couldn't do that, could you? Because I would figure it out. Those shepherds, my so-called parents, were already in their eighties with a little baby! What did you take me for, Mother? A fool?

COUNTESS I didn't take you for anything, darling.

ANTONIA Don't you call me "darling"! You didn't take me for anything? Well, what did I take you for then? What did I take you for, Mother? I'll tell you what I took you for?

COUNTESS No, don't say it! Don't! Please!

ANTONIA I'm going to say it all right. What does one call a so-called human being who throws her only daughter to a pair of senile peasant shepherds who didn't have enough sense between them to watch over that child with the love she so craved, and instead what did they do? They left her outside unattended, forgotten, abandoned to wolves!

COUNTESS No! No!

ANTONIA Yes! Yes, Mother! And I have just one question for you now? What would you call such a hateful, neglectful person? (aggressively) Huh?

COUNTESS (same tone) Huh?

ANTONIA (as herself) That's my line.

COUNTESS (as herself) Oh, sorry.

ANTONIA (as herself) It's okay. (as MOVIE STAR) (aggressively) Huh?

COUNTESS (head down) I don't know what I can say.

ANTONIA You can say it! I know you can. What would you call such a woman?

COUNTESS . . . I guess the word is . . .

ANTONIA Yes, Mother?

COUNTESS The word is . . . she-bitch.

ANTONIA I thought I'd never hear you say it with these ears. Say it again!

COUNTESS She-bitch.

ANTONIA Again!

COUNTESS She-bitch.

ANTONIA Again!

COUNTESS (weeping) I'm a she-bitch!

ANTONIA (sudden change) Oh, Mother! Mother! (Holds out her arms, weeping.) Mother!

COUNTESS Oh, daughter! Daughter! (Holds out her arms, weeping.)

(They embrace.)

ANTONIA (turning to the group) The end. Of that scene anyway. There's more, when I get around to it.

(Applause.)

SIMON Remarkable! Remarkable. In the classic tradition.

(ANTONIA and the COUNTESS bow.)

GLORIA (applauding) Okay! All right. Who's next?

ANTONIA I guess I get to pick. (Takes another slip of paper.) (reads) Kay Holscher!

(Encouraging applause.)

KAY I'm afraid I'm going to decline. I think I'm coming down with a sore throat.

(General disappointment.)

GLORIA Come on, everyone has to. Or you won't pass!

KAY Let someone else go. But thank you.

GLORIA Antonia, another name?

ANTONIA (Picks another name) Bradley Grannitt!

BRADLEY I thought you'd never call! (He jumps up, eager to perform.)

GLORIA What are you going to do for us, Bradley?

COUNTESS Take us to coffee?

BRADLEY Better than that. I was going to do both my audition pieces — modern and classic. But just for you, I've decided to recite a poem. A short poem! (General applause.) Thank you, thank you, ladies and germs. And the poem is by . . . Guess!

KAY Shakespeare?

BRADLEY Wrong.

COUNTESS Winnie Mandela.

BRADLEY I only do that for an encore. No, I am going to read a poem by William Wordsworth. The poet of the Lake District. I've never been to it, but it's somewhere in this country. And I chose it for no other reason than it's a nice poem. (Applause.) And joining me in the recitation will be none other than . . . (Gestures.)

SYLVIA Me! (Gets up, joins BRADLEY.)

BRIAN Da dum! (More applause.)

SYLVIA It's one of the Lucy poems. And forgive me — I'm no actress, believe me.

BRADLEY Confidence! Confidence!

(He takes out a book of poems, finds the page, shares it with SYLVIA. Their reading together should be well done and also suggest that they are going to become very close after they leave the course.)

SYLVIA I begin, correct?

BRADLEY Right.

SYLVIA "She dwelt among the untrodden ways,
Beside the springs of Dove,"

BRADLEY "A maid whom there were none to praise. And very few to love."

SYLVIA "A violet by a mossy stone"

BRADLEY "Half hidden from the eye!"

SYLVIA "— Fair as a star, when only one"

BRADLEY "Is shining in the sky."

SYLVIA "She lived unknown, and few could know/ When Lucy ceased to be."

BRADLEY "But she is in her grave, and, oh,"

BRADLEY /
SYLVIA (as one) "The difference to me!"

(The others are touched, or some of them are at least.)

SIMON (not insincerely) Brilliant! Super!

BRADLEY We apologize that it gets a little dark there, with her dying and everything.

SIMON No need to apologize whatsoever. Well done, well done.

SYLVIA And short!

GLORIA So who does that leave?

KAY You!

GLORIA Not likely. I'm afraid I decline too.

BRIAN You won't pass the course!

GLORIA No thank you. I'm just a viewer in this big old world.

BRIAN (leading a chorus) Glor-i-a! Glor-i-a! We want to hear Glor-i-a!

(Some of the others join in, including SIMON.)

SIMON I'm sure she's a wonderful actress, even *on* the stage! Glor-i-a! Glor-i-a!

(They won't stop even though she raises her hands, protests.)

GLORIA (finally) Okay, okay, I'll do one little thing. Just for you.

BRADLEY All *right!*

GLORIA A limerick. (Applause.) If I can remember it. Now it's a little racy. So block your ears if you feel like it. (No one does.) (She clears her throat.)
"There was a young nun from Purdue,
Who said as the bishop withdrew.
The vicar is quicker and slicker and thicker,
And longer and stronger than you!"

(Some are rather shocked and surprised at the raunchiness of it. Random applause.)

SIMON Nothing short of amazing.

GLORIA I'm full of surprises. Don't fool yourself. So, Simon, does that leave just you?

KAY Brian didn't go yet.

GLORIA Oh, Mr. Burpee, we can't forget you, can we?

BRIAN I hope not.

GLORIA And what, pray tell, have you got for us? I can't wait.

BRIAN Now you gotta understand that I'm not an actor. I just clean houses. But I have been studying. My sister and her husband, whom with I live back in Mattoon, gave me a book with acting scenes in it. And so I took one of them. And I hope you like it. (Bows clumsily.) Oh, and it's a musical. It's from *Volpeony, or the Fox*, by Benny Jonson. I mean, Ben Jonson. And *Volpeony* says it to Celia, another man's pretty, young wife.
"Nay, fly me not.
Nor let thy false imagination
That I was bed-rid, make thee think I am so
Thou shalt not find it. I am now as fresh,
As hot, as high, and in as jovial plight
As when, in that so celebrated scene,
At recitation of our comedy,
For entertainment of the great Valois,

I acted young Antinous; and attracted
The eyes and ears of all the ladies present!

(Sings:)

Come, my Celia, let us prove
While we can, the sports of love.
Why should we defer our joys?
Fame and rumor are but toys.
Cannot we delude the eyes
Of a few poor household spies?
'Tis no sin love's fruits to steal;
But the sweet thefts to reveal;
To be taken, to be seen,
These have crimes accounted been. (Bows.)

(Even with his own made-up melody, surprise, surprise, BRIAN does a creditable job of it. He's even quite good. He's certainly *not* bad.)

GLORIA So then! That just leaves you, Simon.

SIMON Just me.

GLORIA And what are you going to do for us today?

SIMON (gathering his cue cards and books and play scripts) Some selections from my one-man show — as promised.

(Applause and anticipation from the group.)

GLORIA Doesn't it have a title, your show?

SIMON It does, it does indeed. "Heigh Ho, the Wind and the Rain."

GLORIA Beautiful, as I'm sure it will be. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Simon Kirk — with "Heigh ho, the Wind and the Rain"!

SIMON Now you must forgive me. I do have my props! (Shows his cue cards, the books, the published scripts.) Sometimes these old eyes aren't everything they should be. But I have cleverly made some helpers. (Shows the cue cards, which have very large blow-ups of his acting lines.) And a few other items, to help out the old noggin, should I be tempted to forget anything. Those taskmasters — the Muses — may be watching, and divinity help me if I don't get every word precisely. Now I don't propose to do the whole show for you. Good heavens, no! Just some samples of my wares. I first put together this program some thirty, maybe thirty-five years ago. What I've tried to do is gather together some literary pieces from a host of sources, pieces that somehow have spoken to me over the years, even upon repeated hearings. And pieces that have some connection, however tenuous they may seem at times, with my own life, from little boy in the north of England to whatever you see before you now — "unaccommodated man." (Laughs.) It is my plan to take these on tour again. Fingers crossed!

(Crosses his fingers.)

The first is from William Blake. I don't believe my mother actually ever read it to me when I was a child. But I wish she had. It's always been one of my favorites, for its simplicity:

“Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, wooly, bright.
Gave thee such a tender voice . . .”

(SIMON begins to falter, unable to remember the words.)

“Making all the — all the — all the” (at last remembering) — all the *vales* rejoice!

“Little Lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee.
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb.
He is . . . (forgetting) He is meek, and he is mild.
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb, God bless thee!
(He ends strong.)

Little Lamb, God bless thee!”

(SIMON looks to the group for applause. They give it. The voice is still there, and so is the stage presence, the talent, but the memory is not.)

SIMON And when I was a little bit older, who could resist —
(Launches into the Dylan Thomas poem):

“Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs
About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,
The night above the dingle starry,
Time left me hail and climb
Golden in the heyday of his eyes,
And honoured among the wagons I was prince of . . .”

(to the group) Hold on! I have it here. (He searches for the text on a cue card but can't find it.) “And honoured among the wagons I was prince of . . .”

GLORIA (helping out) — “the apple towns”

SIMON That's it!
 "The apple towns
 And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves
 Trail with daisies and barley
 Down the rivers of the windfall light." (He bows.)

GLORIA Great! Now I think the tea and coffee should be on their way any minute now.

SIMON (continuing although he should stop) And then young manhood took me by the collar, and I was drunk with words. And Gerard Manley Hopkins shook me, made me see what I had taken for granted growing up in the countryside.
 "Glory be to God for dappled things—
 For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
 "For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;"
 (faltering) "Fresh finches' wings"— no, "fresh gear and tackle"— no!

I have it here. (He searches for a book.) It's right here. Hang on. Blast!

(The group is getting worried now, because he is having such difficulty remembering and seeing. They applaud, too heartily.)

GLORIA (distressed for SIMON) You were wonderful. (going to look) Where are those beverages?

SIMON There's more. I'm just getting into it now.

(The others wish he would stop, but he can't really see them and takes their applause as sincere encouragement.)

How can we leave out Shakespeare? The sonnets. Not all of them. Good heavens, no! (Laughs.) I don't even know all one hundred and fifty-four by heart. But one I do remember this one, and let me share it with you, and I will end my song.

(Tries to find the right cue card for it.) (to the closest person) Does that say 29 on it?

(The person nods yes.)

(performing it with gusto)
"When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone bewep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries . . ."

(KARINNE enters at the back of the room, stands there listening. She looks like she's been crying. SIMON looks up, can tell she's there. He's thrown off a bit but gathers himself and continues, trying hard to both read it and act it as though nothing is wrong.)

"And look upon myself, and curse my fate,"— sorry, make that "fate."
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,

With what I most enjoy contented least.”

(The others begin to notice KARINNE at the back listening and feel a general embarrassment for her and for SIMON. They look subtly from one to the other.)

“Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee — and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sodden earth — sudden earth — from “sullen earth”
sings hymns at heaven’s gate — “gate”;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to chase my state — make that “change” my state
with kings.”

(The group applauds, but is uncomfortable. Even KARINNE applauds sadly, and then shakes her head, turns and leaves. Perhaps she even cries quietly for him, for herself.)

SIMON A magnificent poem! Ah, the sonnets of William Shakespeare!

GLORIA (touched by his problems) Thank you, Simon. Thank you so much. I’m sure we all thank you. (Applauding, looking to the crowd to applaud him off.)

(SIMON bows, accepts the applause. He really should sit down now. But when he hears them still applauding, even though it is polite and forced, he can’t resist.)

SIMON You liked it? How kind of you. How kind of you all. Including you, Gloria.

GLORIA (softly, tenderly) Not a bit of it, not a bit of it. (Touched, almost crying for him) You were indeed just wonderful.

SIMON (going for his “helpers” again) Well, I do have a little bit more I could do for you . . . (The group wants him to stop, but it is impossible to tell him to quit.) After all, I did only get up to early manhood now, didn’t I? Let’s see what’s here. (Looks in a book.) “My Last Duchess.” I haven’t done that for you. Have I?

(Launching into it.)

“That’s my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. . . .”

(The others are struck by the tragedy, the pathos, and the annoyance of SIMON’s descent from what he must have once been, to this remnant.)

(Fade out on SIMON, his mouth still moving, but the sound no longer heard.)

Scene 5, Set 2

(That afternoon. The people are in their rooms, most packing, making arrangements to leave. Lights highlight the person speaking, but we should get the sense of these occurring more or less simultaneously.)

KAY (on the telephone, her door closed) Hi, honey! It's me. I should be home late today. (. . .) Because of the time change, silly. You'll pick me up, right? And bring the kids! (. . .) (She now repeats the same lines, with a different intonation, as though she has been practicing. After the second time, she opens her door, starts to say the words again. "Hi, Honey! It's me. I should be home late today . . .")

(Fade out on KAY.)

(Lights up on SYLVIA.)

SYLVIA (on the telephone, after dialing an extension) Hello there!

BRADLEY Well, hello there. I see that you made it safely to your room.

SYLVIA I did. Did you?

BRADLEY I had a little accident on the way here.

SYLVIA You did? What happened?

BRADLEY I fell and broke my ego.

SYLVIA You what?

BRADLEY I've decided I'm getting out of acting.

SYLVIA Really? Why?

BRADLEY It had something to do with Sir Simon's "presentation" today. But I've been thinking about it for some time anyway.

SYLVIA But you're good!

BRADLEY Lots of people are good. Better than me. Or at least more persistent than me.

SYLVIA Well, let's at least talk about it.

BRADLEY What we need to talk about is your final exams. I'm serious about my offer.

SYLVIA (amused) You'll get me through, sure.

BRADLEY I will! I'm very good at motivating *other* people. Maybe we'll even open our own psychic business together.

SYLVIA I'm not sure I really have the gift.

BRADLEY Of course you do. It's just a matter of developing it. There are lots of actors, but, let's face it, not that many genuine psychics!

(Lights up on BRIAN, who is packing.)

BRIAN (on the telephone to his sister) Yeah, they said I was quite good. They seemed surprised. (. . .) Oh, it was a wonderful course, sis. I learned so much. (. . .) How's Bill? (. . .) And Laura Jean? (. . .) Well, say hi to 'em for me. I hope I'm not too tired when I get home. I have an appointment to do Doreen Little's house. (. . .) (Listens for a fairly long time, then softly.) What? (. . .) (Can't believe it, starting to cry.) What? (. . .) Yeah, I know she's gonna be twelve next month. What d'you say we have a big birthday party for her this time. You don't turn twelve every day. (. . .) But . . . But . . . I'm a celibate. (. . .) I wouldn't do anything like *that*! Sis, how could you even think that? (. . .) Just to be on the safe side? (. . .) Really? (. . .) My room? (. . .) I can take the smaller room. That'd be okay. (. . .) I wouldn't mind. Laura Jean can have my room. And then I'd be on the other side of the house and that would . . . (. . .) Oh, I see. (. . .) Oh, I see. (. . .) But I'm packing here, and I thought we might all — (. . .) I won't have to live with mamma again, will I? (. . .) I understand, sis. (. . .) And where will my things be? (. . .) I see. (. . .) No, I understand. (. . .) Sure. Okay. (. . .) I love you too. (. . .) Yeah, I love you too. (. . .) Yeah. Bye. Can I ask you one more thing? (. . .) You didn't send me on this trip just so you couldn't clear out my room when I was gone, did you? . . .

(Lights up on ANTONIA. She has taken some of the refreshments to her room.)

ANTONIA (her telephone rings; she answers) (. . .) Yes, I'm ready. (. . .) No, I'm not nervous. (. . .) I know. Put him on. Hey, I'll be here for a few more days. Now I can stay on longer if you need me. My scholarship here ends today and I can use the money. I don't go back to school until September. (. . .) Okay, I'm ready. Connect me. (. . .) (in a slightly different voice) Oh, hi there! Yes, this is Samantha. (. . .) Of course I'm a real college student. (. . .) Of course I'm an American. Don't I sound like one? Okay, so what do you like? (. . .) Oh, you do, do you? (. . .) Oh, you *would*, would you? (. . .) I bet you *would* enjoy that. You know something, *I'd* enjoy it too. (. . .) Are you touching yourself right this minute? (. . .) Why don't you? I'd like that. In fact, I'd love that. Why don't you grab that thing and get it out? (. . .) (having a refreshment) Hey, it's a big one, isn't it? I bet yours is a really huge one. I can just tell from the sound of your voice, which is so virile, so manly. Oh, my god, it's really getting me hot! Is it out yet? Did you come yet? . . .

(Lights up on the COUNTESS.)

COUNTESS (on telephone) This is she. (. . .) Oh, Dr. Ali! How nice of you — you're not calling to cancel my massage again, I hope! (. . .) You what? (. . .) It's a bit hard to understand you, Dr. Ali. (. . .) How long have you felt this way? (. . .) Ever since the first massage. I see. (. . .) Well, I'm not sure how I feel about you, Dr. Ali. (. . .) Mohammed. (. . .) Certainly I like you. (. . .) Certainly I enjoy your company. (. . .) Yes, that's very flattering. I had no idea you felt this way. (. . .) Oh, that's why you cancelled my massage?! Now I'm beginning to see. You were developing these feelings and you thought by canceling my massage you might be able to cancel the feelings as well. (. . .) But they proved too strong to resist. Well, that's most charming of you, Dr. Ali. (. . .) Mohammed. (. . .) Yes, I suppose I could delay my departure. I was to catch a plane following my massage. I can never rest on a plane without a massage. (. . .) After the massage or before? (. . .) After, of course. I love scampi! I didn't think you ate scampi.

(. . .) That's what I like about you, Doctor. You are of a unique mind. (. . .) Yes, let's have that dinner at your place after the massage, right? (. . .) Very good. Oh, there's one more thing I'd like to mention to you. (. . .) I think it may be time I dealt with this. (not embarrassed in the slightest) You see, I've always been a life-long bed-wetter, and I wonder if it isn't that my bladder has been too small all these years? Is that a possibility? (. . .) You're so good, Doctor. I feel I can talk to you about anything. I do think it's time that I took this bed-wetting in hand, so to speak. If that isn't a mixed metaphor. (Laughs.) . . .

(Lights up on KARINNE.)

KARINNE (on the telephone) London calling! (. . .) I'm coming back today. Or I'm supposed to. How do you feel about that? (. . .) Well, we've got to talk about it sometime. (. . .) Oh, it came back, huh? Poor old cat. Tell him that's life. You start out all kittenish and hopeful. Even a piece of string seems exciting. And then you settle for sitting on a cushion with your eyes blinking. And then you settle for eye medications. Then you curl up in the clothes dryer and just stop breathing. (. . .) Was that morbid? I'm sorry I don't have your *joie de vivre*, Blair. (. . .) No, I'm not trying to start a fight. We've had enough fights. (. . .) I'm super. I'm brilliant. I had my play thrown at me! I'm with a bunch of sad idiots and I'm masturbating alone in a cell. How *would* I be? (. . .) Well, I'm sorry you don't want to hear it. You know what — I don't want to hear it either! I hate whiners. And I've become one. (. . .) I won't go on like this. I promise. Put him on. (. . .) Blooper! Who else! Blooper loves me. Hold him up to the phone. I want to tell him goodbye — I mean hello. (. . .) I am not being ridiculous. I want to whisper sweet nothings in his ear. (Waits) Blair? Are you going to put him on? (. . .) I'd put him on for you. (. . .) I am not being maudlin. Okay, I am being maudlin. At least I'm being something! . . . What happened to us, Blair? (. . .) Oh, you and your goddamn glib therapists. That is not it. That is not it! (. . .) Because I don't want to. (. . .) Because it won't do any good, that's why. (. . .) Blair, it's not going to get any better this time. Fuck my plays. Fuck my life. Fuck you! (. . .) I'm not sorry I said it. Yes, fuck you. And fuck me. And fuck life. It really isn't worthy it. Do you know that? It really and truly is not worth it. (. . .) You're probably right. I'm just tired from my vacation. You always have such great insights, Blair. Those are what kept me going in the hard times. Are you going to put Blooper on? (. . .) Okay, I'm going to hang up now. You take care of yourself, as they say. And I guess I'll see you when I see you. (. . .) No, I'll be fine — in a minute. (Picks up the sleeping pills) I may stay on for a few days, so don't look for me. (. . .) Naw, I'll be all right. I guess I'm just tired. . . . Tired of London. . . . Bye. . . .

(She hangs up, hesitates for a moment, then opens the sleeping pills, and with some water that she's taken from the bathroom begins to swallow them one by one, sitting back on the cot.)

(Lights fade on KARINNE.)

(Lights up on SIMON on a mobile phone, off to the side of the rooms.)

SIMON . . . I thought you were smashing at our seminar. Sorry they were such a bunch of louts, most of them. But it was a job. What can I say?! (trouble with the phone)

Blast! Can you still hear me? (. . .) It's this bloody mobile of mine. Damn technology! Say, I was wondering, Bertrand, about the next play you're directing. Isn't it the complete Greek cycle from beginning to end — twelve hours or something? (. . .) Sounds marvelous. . . . I was curious if you might be seeing actors of a certain age, shall we say. (Laughs, overly hearty.) Maybe there's the part of Nestor or possibly even Agamemnon — on a good day. I was going to mention it the other day when you were here, but then it just sort of slipped — I mean, I just didn't think it was the right time to go into all that. So what do you think, Bertrand? Or am I just barking up the wrong director? (Laughs too heartily.) (. . .) An audition? No, I wouldn't mind auditioning. Not for you, Bertrand. Perhaps you could give me something and I could work it up. (. . .) That would be lovely. (. . .) That's very good of you. I appreciate it, Bertrand. (quietly, overcome with gratitude) No, I really do. I'm sure I can get something together for you. You don't know how much this means to me, Bertrand. (. . .) No promises. Of course, of course. I perfectly understand. (. . .) Oh, you saw my Ulysses, did you? (about the compliments) Not a bit of it, not a bit of it! (Laughs.) . . . Not a bit of it!

(Lights up on GLORIA.)

GLORIA (on her cell phone, cold) Hello. (. . .) Yes, this is Gloria Knotts. (. . .) No, I haven't heard that? Who is this? (. . .) Are you new there? (. . .) Are you sure about those figures? (. . .) Yes, but are you sure about the figures? (. . .) The enrollment! (. . .) Twenty-five. You're sure about that? (. . .) All paid, except for three. (. . .) Monks? Well, why the hell not! At least they won't complain about the small rooms! (. . .) Of course I'm ready for them. I'll confirm the reservations here as soon as I hang up. Now getting twenty-five rooms may prove to be a problem. Why didn't you or someone call me earlier? This delay could have caused me some very serious problems. (. . .) Oh, never mind. Bring them on! Bring on the goddamned monks or whoever the hell they are. The London Theatre Extravaganza and Seminar can handle anybody, by God!

BLACKOUT

END of PLAY

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