

THE STUDY
Also produced as
SNOWSTORMS

By Sophy Burnham

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THE STUDY

CAST
In order of appearance

Catherine Webster, also known as Cat or Kitty

Meredith Marshall, her sister, also known as Mouse

Bobby Marshall, their brother

Freida Marshall, their mother

Gordon Marshall, their father

A covey of voices: *the Shadows*

ACT I

The study, a day in winter around noon

ACT II

The Study later that afternoon

Same, late that night

ACT I

The library of a big house, appealingly shabby and well-used. The walls are lined with books and the tables piled with papers and magazines: an impression that years have passed in this room. It has developed a comfortable spread to the seat of its pants, lived in, and without the glitter of pretension. Its Persian carpets are muted with age and dirt. GORDON's sofa is near the door. At center, is a window with a windowseat. It is empty

Offstage

CAT

Well, where is everybody?

BOBBY

Are you sure it's locked?

MOUSE

I'm not surprised. Nothing would surprise me anymore.

The crunch of gravel. A woman's face appears at the window, indistinctly, peering in.

BOBBY

Can you see anything?

Face disappears

MOUSE

No.

CAT

Did you try the window?

MOUSE

Which window?

Man's face appears, another shadowy form—and is gone.

BOBBY

There's no one there.

CAT

Well, it's certainly strange.

(Man's face appears again as he tugs at window.)

BOBBY

There! I've got it open. Who'll go through. Cat?

CAT

I don't know. . .

MOUSE

I will. Give me a hand.

(We now see MOUSE, who crawls in head-first, awkwardly, all spidery legs and elbows.)

I'm going to run my stockings.I'm stuck.

CAT

There! You're in!

BOBBY

Are you all right?

(MOUSE gets to feet, straightens her skirt, twisting hips. She is dressed conservatively, but somehow just a little wrong, as if in old wet wool. Tall, gawky, plain, she moves in fits and leaps. Once having settled clothing, she glances with pleasure around the room.)

CAT

(banging on window): Mouse! Mouse!

BOBBY

Open the door!

MOUSE

Oh yes. *(Lunges toward door, catching her hip against small table, spilling magazines everywhere.)*

Oh dear.

(exits, rubbing hip.)

From off-stage There.

CAT

There, that's better.

BOBBY

What took you so long?

(They enter study, stripping off coats, and sling themselves into chairs or stand according to inclination: 3 siblings. They are all in their 30's and 40's. An air of excited anticipation.)

BOBBY

Brr. It's going to snow.

CAT

Well, how typical.

MOUSE

Help me with the magazines. I'm not surprised. Are you surprised?

CAT

Mouse, close the window, brr.

MOUSE

Only I wonder where they are.

BOBBY

Mm.

MOUSE

It just makes me so mad. I swear I could cry. Once I remember driving all the way down from New York, four hours, and I'd said I was coming. I mean, they knew. And when I got here there wasn't a soul around. And I waited and waited. *(she is close to tears)* I mean they invited me. And then they came in, all smiles, just as if nothing was wrong. They'd been playing golf. I mean--

CAT

(upset; leaping to her feet) Well, at least we know that's not where they are. *(exiting)* Does anyone want coffee? I want a cup of coffee.

(exit CAT)

MOUSE

Oh, will you--? Well, she walked out. . . do you want some coffee, Bobby?

BOBBY

No, but some tea?

MOUSE

All right.
(starting to exit) I've always loved this table. I'd like this table when they go. Do you mind?

BOBBY

(who has just sat down, leaps up, scalded) You can have it all, for God's sake!

MOUSE

Well, I don't want it all.

BOBBY

I don't want any of it.

(exit BOBBY)

MOUSE

(following him to door) Well, what did I say? Is that so bad? They're going to die someday. It's unrealistic not to --

Beat

*Offstage, the laughter of the siblings in the hallway,
and they re-enter, carrying cups. . .*

MOUSE

How can that be?

CAT

I forget which tribe.

MOUSE

And these Indians don't have *any* word for time?

CAT

Well, that's what I heard.

MOUSE

But everything on this dimension operates on time. When you say grandmother you've used a concept of time. Or, it's a nice day. Day means time. Birth. . . death. . .

CAT

I don't remember really. It sounded right when the professor said it.

MOUSE

Find out if they have a past tense. If they don't have a past or future tense, maybe they really don't have time. I'd like to know.

CAT

Remember the discussion, Bobby, at the dinner table one night, when you brought up the clock on the landing?

MOUSE

I never did understand that.

CAT

It was Einstein's theory.

BOBBY

I don't remember.

MOUSE

I've been reading a lot of Buddhist stuff lately--

BOBBY

Oh Mouse!

MOUSE

--and they believe in reincarnation, of course, like the Hindus. But what I don't understand is why they all believe they'd be reincarnated forward in time. I mean probably it's only here on earth that time moves forward, and everywhere else--

BOBBY

All those other places, you mean?

MOUSE

It could move backwards. Or not move at all. I mean, why shouldn't you be reincarnated back to the Crusades. Or sideways. So you repeat your whole life from a different point of view. You re-live Hitler's holocaust again and again, acting different parts, like the refractions in a frog's eye.

BOBBY

What?

MOUSE

See, probably, in heaven, time is swirling all about, happening all at once, simultaneously, with no progression at all.

CAT

That's so complicated. Why can't you just believe in heaven and angels like everyone else? (*all laugh*) You know, it's almost a year since I've been home?

MOUSE

Oh Cat, no.

CAT

I love it so. All I do is walk in the house—the smell of leather and books—and I become a child again. I used to read hiding in the windowseat—classics, junk novels. I'd read all day long. It's how I ruined my eyes. I can't see anything without my glasses now. . . . The Dog of Flanders. Remember Black Beauty? All those soppy horse stories. And later it was Tolstoy and Jane Austin and Henry James.

MOUSE

Do you remember the time that criminal came after Daddy, and he broke in right here in the study, and Mummy and Daddy were sitting at the fire and just invited him to join them? “Well, how nice, we have a visitor, Gordon—“

BOBBY

You don't remember that.

MOUSE

No, but I've heard it, I mean, we were all too young. And the man had such fun he went off without taking revenge. I love that story.

BOBBY

I like the one where Daddy came bursting in one night, and I do remember this, because I'd just graduated from the kitchen to the dining room and you two already knew how to eat in the dining room. We were at the table, remember Cat? And Daddy burst in, slamming the front door: “I won! I won!”

CAT

“99 years! My client got only—

CAT & BOBBY (*together*)

—99 years!”

MOUSE

I wish they’d hurry. Why do you suppose she invited us here?

CAT

I suppose it’s Daddy.

(*Pause. Each considers the matter*)

MOUSE

I suppose he’s dying. He was so weak the last time I was here.

BOBBY

He can hardly move at all.

CAT

If he can’t move, how come he’s not here, huh?

MOUSE

You don’t suppose he’s already dead, do you? She wouldn’t have not told us, would she?

CAT

Oh Meredith! Of course she’d have told us. . . (*pause*). . . Well, I suppose. . .

BOBBY

You know, she’s perfectly capable of having him already underground by now. “Yes, I know, but I didn’t want to upset you children.”

MOUSE

Like the time she was in the hospital for a cancer operation and didn’t tell us. I was so hurt.

CAT

Poor Mummy, what will she do without him?

MOUSE

You know I came to visit one weekend, and I was sitting over breakfast in the dining room with Daddy, reading the paper, just him and me; and suddenly he bellowed: “Freida! Freida!” And Mummy was all the way upstairs. “I’m coming,” she called, and then clatter-clatter-clatter-clatter she clashes down the steps in her bedroom slippers, and clatter-clatter-clatter across the hall.

“What is it, Gordon?” And he looked up at her innocently. “Can I have another cup of coffee?” He said. I was horrified! “Daddy!” I said. “You called Mummy all the way downstairs and all the way in here just to ask for a cup of coffee? And you’re sitting right next to the kitchen. The coffee’s on the stove. Did it occur to you to get a refill yourself?” “No,” he said, “It never occurred to me.”

BOBBY

Well, that’s their relationship. I mean 46 years of marriage.

CAT

It’s true. She wants to wait on him.

MOUSE

I couldn’t bear it.

BOBBY

Watch the [table]—

CAT

So, that’s why you’re not married.

MOUSE

Listen, Cat—

CAT

(not listening, laughing) but it’s true, she loves to serve him. Feed the horses—

MOUSE

When we had them.

CAT

— chop the wood, mow the lawns. All the physical labor. Do you remember the big blizzard about five years ago? I remember it was right after Katrinka was born. And I telephoned from Ohio and Mummy told me how the snow was up to the window sills. The cars were completely covered, like marshmallows, and the snow was so deep the snowplows couldn’t get into the drive. “The snow was so deep,” she told me, “that your father came to the front door to watch me take the sledge out to the woodpile to get the wood, he was so worried about me.” *(All burst*

out laughing) And she meant it! She was deeply touched!. . . Oh, it's so sad, I can't bear it!

MOUSE

He was the intellectual. . .

(pause)

BOBBY

We don't know that he's dying.

MOUSE

Oh Bobby, come on!

CAT

Poor Mummy.

MOUSE

(with a laugh): Poor Daddy.

CAT

I know, but you know you're not married so you don't know what a rare relationship they have, really. What will she do without him? Somehow I always thought she'd go first.

BOBBY

Did you?

CAT

I mean, when I was little, and. . . oh, it's so awful. Here I am, a grown woman, and I can't bear it. . .

MOUSE

Oh Kitty-cat.

(they embrace)

BOBBY

Well, maybe nothing's wrong. Maybe she just invited us to lunch, and in a minute they'll come in--

CAT

(brightening) And she'll make us a bologna sandwich--

MOUSE

On Wonder Bread--imitation bread--

BOBBY

With imitation mayonnaise.

(they break up laughing)

MOUSE

All right, enough. Now I shall do the Tarot cards and see what's in store.

CAT

Oh Mouse, for heaven's sake!

MOUSE

(beginning the ritual) This is a wonderful room. Do you feel the vibrations? But there are shadows. . . how strange. . .

CAT

I didn't know they had a Knight's edition of Shakespeare. Did you know they had the Knight's edition? Look at these books. Poetry, art. . . trout fishing. . . hunting. . . Rosseau. Here's Plautus in Latin. Did they read everything?

BOBBY

Well, some were Grandfather's.

CAT

I know. But still. Imagine. . . It makes my mouth water. Remember sitting here with Mummy and Daddy in the evenings. And Mummy in that chair there, with her knitting.

MOUSE

I remember that.

CAT

And Daddy always reading.

BOBBY

Or beating us at chess.

CAT

And he'd be concentrating so hard you couldn't get his attention: "Daddy," you'd say. "Daddy I have a question. Daddy?" He never heard a word once he started reading.

MOUSE

I shall do a Tarot about them, here in this room.

BOBBY

I didn't know you could do it for other people.

MOUSE

I'm doing a lot of work with my dreams now, and they're showing me so much. And with painting too.

BOBBY

Painting?

MOUSE

In my group the other day we were supposed to pair up and then each of us had a half-page to work on, and when we'd each done our half-page we had to exchange the paper with our partners. I drew a snake. It came from a dream I'd had earlier that week, and it filled up my whole half-page; and then (*with increasing agitation*) we exchanged, and do you know what he'd done?

BOBBY

Who?

MOUSE

My partner. He left his page blank—all blank, except for the outline of a box, and inside that was another box, and then inside that another one. Three boxes. I wanted to scratch them all out!! Scribble-Scrabble! And then I saw it was a mirror and I drew my face inside the box.

(*silence*)

CAT

Oh.

MOUSE

You see, there's so much to learn. Do you think she'd like orbs or pentacles?

BOBBY

Maybe--

CAT

How can you do a Tarot for someone who's not here?

MOUSE

Pick a card.

CAT

(pointing with her foot) That one.

MOUSE

The Five of Sticks?

CAT

It just speaks to me.

MOUSE

You're teasing me.

BOBBY

This one. That's pretty.

MOUSE

Three above you. . . three below you. . .

(off-stage the sound of a car approaching; the children panic.)

BOBBY

Here they are!

CAT

You better put them away. She'll think you're nuts.

BOBBY

(To MOUSE) The lamp!

MOUSE

Ow!

(off-stage the slam of car doors, then FREIDA's voice)

Off-stage

FREIDA

All right, stand up! Stand UP! That's right! Put your hand there!

BOBBY

I'll go see if I can help.

(exit BOBBY)

FREIDA

(Off-stage) No, there! All right now. . . Move your feet! Lift it! Come lift it, Gordon!. . .

OUT OF MY WAY!! DON'T TOUCH THAT!

CAT

Too bad. . .

(Off-stage)

FREIDA

Gordon! MOVE! Now the other foot!

GORDON

Goddam it! Goddam it!

FREIDA

DON'T SIT DOWN!!

CAT

There's nothing you can do.

MOUSE

I know but I can't stand listening to it. . .

BOBBY

(Off-stage) Can I help?

FREIDA

OUT OF MY WAY! GET OUT! TURN! TURN!

GORDON

Goddam it! OOOHHHHHAAAAAAAAA!

FREIDA

THERE! All right, Bobby, you can wheel him in.

(CAT and MOUSE both rush out door, just in time to block it, as GORDON's wheelchair appears. They all tangle, untangle, spill back into the room.)

FREIDA

(Queenly) Well, aren't you going to say hello? Meredith? Catherine? Don't put him in the sofa.

He'll be going upstairs any minute now. There's no point in getting him up and down.

(GORDON, now in his 70's is partially paralyzed by a stroke. He forces out words with effort and croaking breath. At times he seems unable to bring out any words at all, while at others, and especially under emotional stress, he suddenly opens to the flow, speaking easily. The same is true of his attention-span: sometimes he watches with sharp understanding and at others he reaches out one hand, as if to interrupt and collapses in confusion. At first we are not aware of the shadows of his mind.)

MOUSE moves to kiss father with a yearning wistfulness. She is followed dutifully by CAT.

MOUSE

Hello, Daddy.

GORDON

Mousie.

CAT

Good morning, Daddy.

GORDON

(Holding her hands) Kitty. . .

FREIDA

Well, I see you all got in all right.

CAT

No thanks to you. How come the door was locked?

MOUSE

Where were you anyway? Weren't we invited for noon?

FREIDA

We had to go out.

MOUSE

We had to crawl through the window.

FREIDA

This one? Oh, I thought I'd locked it.

MOUSE

Mother! Didn't you want us to come in?

CAT

It's our house.

FREIDA

Well, Bobby, how are you, dear? Is Henrietta well? Still winning at tennis? I think it's time for a drink. Anybody want a drink?

GORDON

I do.

FREIDA

Bobby? Kitty-Cat? I'm going to have a vermouth.

BOBBY

I'll get it. Daddy, bourbon?

GORDON

Yes. . . I'd like that.

FREIDA

Well, you can't have one! It's not good for you!

GORDON

I think it's damned good for me!

BOBBY

Let him have one. It's a celebration. For you, vermouth on the rocks?

FREIDA

Please. Not too much ice.

MOUSE

Nothing for me.

FREIDA

Meredith doesn't drink anymore. Is that part of your Hindu-bindu mumbo-jumbo?

MOUSE

Mummy!

CAT

Vermouth with soda please. I fall asleep if I drink in the afternoon. Why Daddy, your hand is so cold.

FREIDA

Well, it is nice to see you all. Meredith, you've gotten too thin.

CAT

How are you Daddy?

GORDON

I'm fine. . . Fine. . .

CAT

You look fine.

FREIDA

Hmf. . . . Now, don't start that! Gordon, you stop that this minute.

CAT

Oh, you startled me.

FREIDA

I'll send you right upstairs!

MOUSE

Well, but Mummy, how are you?

FREIDA

Oh I'm all right! What do you think?

GORDON

She's fine. . . fine...

FREIDA

I am not fine! How dare you? Fine indeed--

(Enter BOBBY with tray of drinks)

Oh good, that's what we need.

BOBBY

Mother. . . Cat. . . Daddy. . .

FREIDA

Put it on the table, put it on the table.

CAT

Here, Daddy.

FREIDA

He'll just spill it. Put it on the table.

(All drink except MOUSE. Pause)

FREIDA

The other day Michael Train came in. He drove all the way out here just to see Gordon and you should have seen how your father acted. I've never been so embarrassed.

CAT

What happened?

FREIDA

Michael's 75 years old you know. He doesn't look a day over 60. He got married last year. To Emma Cromwell. You remember her, Bobby? You were at school with her son. Her mother was a Shirley of South Carolina. Very fine family.

CAT

What happened with Michael Train?

FREIDA

Well, he just dropped in for a scotch after Church on Sunday, as he often does, you know. We have a very nice relationship. And we were talking, as usual about this and that. . . the Service and who was there. . . Your father behaved like a perfect maniac. First he collapses against the cushion. You'd have thought there wasn't a bone in his body. His eyes bug out *(To GORDON)* Oh yes, you did. And it's just an act. You don't have to behave like that. We just ignored him, of course, as polite people should. And then he began to. . . to. . . then he unzipped himself, and the next I know he's pulling at--at-- he's totally absorbed in his. . .

(CAT laughs, embarrassed)

MOUSE

Oh Mummy.

BOBBY

Good God.

FREIDA

I remember exactly. We were talking about Rita Bosworth. You heard her father died. She had to sell the old place. The estate tax wipes them out entirely. Wipes them out. This government effort to make everybody equal, it makes me so mad. As if being equal in the eyes of God had anything to do with equal sums of money. Well, Mike was distraught, you can imagine. He thought your father had lost his mind. And as if that wasn't bad enough--(to GORDON) don't look away, you did everything you could to embarrass me--roll your eyes, pretend you can't talk. And then suddenly I look over and there's your father beginning to-- I can't imagine what got into him--wind up like a baseball pitcher. "Mike?" He croaks. He can speak perfectly well. "Mi-ike?" Poor Michael leaped to his feet. "What is it, old fella?" he said, and there's your father, reaching out--reaching out. He grabbed his jacket. Michael was leaning over him, and Gordon just poured his drink all down Michael's pants. "It's good to see you, old man," he said. Honestly, I've never been so. . . so. . .

MOUSE

Maybe he was jealous

FREIDA

Jealous of what?

MOUSE

Jealous of his health and. . . and all. . .

FREIDA

Well, he could do it if he wanted. Listen, your father is the laziest man I've ever met. It's sheer laziness, that's all.

CAT

Mummy, he's had a stroke!

MOUSE

It affects the brain. I mean, it isn't a matter of--

FREIDA

If he wanted to, he could get well. It's all a matter of willpower. He just doesn't care. Damned ice cubes.

MOUSE

You just threw the ice in the fire!

FREIDA

They'll melt. Give them a minute and you won't even know it's wet. (*spotting scarf with tarot cards*) Well, and what is this?

CAT

Oh nothing.

(*FREIDA wards off CAT, opens scarf with exaggerated gesture, using two fingers and wide sweeps of the arm: play-acting but with an undercurrent of hostility.*)

FREIDA

Ah, the future is at hand. This has to be more of your doing, Meredith.

MOUSE

Me?

FREIDA

Tarot, elephant gods. . .

MOUSE

I don't have elephant gods!

FREIDA

Look at them, my goodness, they're perfectly hideous. . . the hanging man. . . the bleeding heart. . . the King of. . . whatever, all covered with ivy. It looks like he's choking in it. Why would anyone want a fortune told with these?

CAT

I don't think it's your fortune exactly, is it, Mouse?

MOUSE

Would you like me to read your Tarot?

FREIDA

(laughing) Good heavens, no. If the future is anything like the present the sooner it's past the better. I believe in hope. Here, you can have them.

CAT

Ok, come on, Mummy. Spill the beans. Are you going to tell us why you asked us here? We're all on tenterhooks.

(BOBBY and MOUSE murmur assent)

FREIDA

I'd have thought you could have guessed. . . Your father and I have decided to get a divorce.

CAT

Mummy!

MOUSE

A divorce?

BOBBY

(nervously laughing) A divorce! Ha ha!

FREIDA

That's right. We have a perfect right to get a divorce if we want.

CAT

But you've been married 46 years. People don't get divorced after 46 years.

FREIDA

And why not, may I ask? At least you can't say we didn't try. . .

MOUSE

Well, it's just so long.

FREIDA

Too long, I say. The trouble with you children is you're so conformist, isn't that right, Gordon?

There's no one so conservative as a child.

BOBBY

No, but you—

FREIDA

You simply can't imagine any marriage breaking up except your own. You're all so. . .

shallow.

BOBBY

But you've got to admit. . . I mean—

FREIDA

People get divorced all the time. It's not exactly socially unheard-of. I want another drink please.

BOBBY

Goodness. You certainly downed that.

FREIDA

Well, it's a very small glass. There's a drop of vermouth in that decanter.

MOUSE

Daddy. . . Do you want a divorce too?

GORDON

That's right. . . We want a divorce!

MOUSE

Mummy?. . . Daddy?

FREIDA

So I've brought you here to take responsibility. It's time you began to take charge.

CAT

Responsibility?

FREIDA

For your father. I'm not going to be taking care of him anymore.

BOBBY

Oh my lord.

CAT

Mummy!

MOUSE

Daddy!

FREIDA

Oh yes, you know what they say, one mother and one father can raise ten children, but ten children can't care for one mother or one father! Well, it's time you took a little responsibility.

And I don't mean by putting him in a nursing home either, that's no solution. I know Aunt Alice was sent to a nursing home, and the children *sold her house!* Sold it right while she was there. And just the other day I heard about a man whose children were living right in the house with him, in *his* house, mind, and they put him in an institution without a thought and left him there. *They* took the house.

(Downs her drink and pours another)

Now, I'll let you all think this over, while I make us some lunch, shall I? I thought bologna sandwiches would be nice.

Mummy!

MOUSE

(exit FREIDA. The 3 children stand avoiding each other's eyes)

Well. I guess I'll help.

BOBBY

(exit BOBBY)

Come on, Cat. We better help with lunch.

MOUSE

I'll be back in a minute, Daddy, with your lunch. Are you all right?

CAT

(smiling up at her) I'm fine. . . Fine. . .

GORDON

(exit MOUSE, followed by CAT. GORDON remains alone. He looks around. Lights dim. . .)

ACT I. Scene 2. a few minutes later:

Enter BOBBY with tray of sandwiches and a glass of milk, followed by CAT and last by FREIDA, carrying her drink.

Here's your lunch.

BOBBY

(FREIDA sets up folding tray from behind a chair)

I don't see why.

CAT

FREIDA
Because he's a dirty old man, that's why. I won't live one more minute under the same roof with him.

CAT

Daddy, you went to a lawyer this morning?

GORDON

I want. . . to go. . . up

FREIDA

That's right. Avoid the entire issue!

CAT

Oh Mummy.

FREIDA

(Leans forward tapping GORDON's plate with one finger)

Eat your sandwich. Go on.

(Enter MOUSE)

BOBBY

Mother!

FREIDA

Go on! You don't leave perfectly good food on your plate. . . That's better. I want another drink.

CAT

Another!

FREIDA

The decanter's empty. Bobby, if you please?

Vermouth?
BOBBY

(exit BOBBY to kitchen)

(calling after him) With no ice.
FREIDA

Don't you thin--
MOUSE

FREIDA
No, I do not. I can have another drink if I wish without my children telling me what to do.
When you get to be my age. . . Go on! I'm not taking you to your room until you eat every scrap on that plate. We're not throwing away perfectly good food. He only does it to torment me.

GORDON
I want. . . to go. . . my room. . . Can I--?

MOUSE
All right, I'll take him in.

FREIDA
I'm just going to wrap it up. You'll eat it for lunch tomorrow. I'm not throwing good food after bad.

(Exit MOUSE wheeling GORDON. In doorway she meets BOBBY and they stand blocking each other a moment before BOBBY retreats to let her pass. Enter BOBBY, hands FREIDA drink)

BOBBY
I'll help you with Daddy, Mouse.

(Exit BOBBY after GORDON and MOUSE)

FREIDA
Thank you dear... Well, Kitty, it's nice to see you. How are the children?

CAT
They're fine.

FREIDA

And Katrinka? She must be in school by now.

CAT

Mummy, are you really filing for divorce?

FREIDA

Now now, don't worry. It has nothing to do with you.

CAT

It has everything to do with me. With us. My parents divorced. Unhappy. What's going on?

FREIDA

We've just decided it's time to split. Are glasses getting smaller now?

CAT

You're just drinking your lunch. You're going to turn into a lush.

FREIDA

I am not a lush. I should shay zchat I am not a lush....

(they laugh)

CAT

Oh Mummy, couldn't you get a nurse for him? It's just that it's too much for you here alone—

FREIDA

Now, Kitty, where am I going to get a nurse? You think I haven't tried? You know very well what happens. You hire some ignorant girl—

CAT

Oh Mummy!

FREIDA

Well, go ahead, you and your liberal ideas. I've lived longer than you, I know what they're like. You can't find decent help any more. *(lowering her voice)* I don't know what's the matter with them. No one wants to work anymore. You pay all this money and fill out papers for the government till you're blue in the face, and they come in for one week, or for three days, and that's it. You just begin to get them trained and they don't even have the courtesy to telephone. Oh no, just get their paycheck and run. Well, I'm sick of it. It's easier to do it all myself.

CAT

But you have to have some help.

FREIDA

I don't need any help. He's leaving, that's all.

CAT

Why then, you're serious!

FREIDA

Why is it that when I make a joke everyone thinks I'm serious and when I make a serious pronouncement everyone takes it as a joke? Is that a fault in me or them? The eye of the beholder sees a diminishing glass. Excuse me, dear, I think I'll just take out these—(*staggers*) I'll be right back. I do so want to hear about Ohio. And Alan.

(*exit FREIDA*)

CAT

I can't bear it.

(*re-enter MOUSE and BOBBY*)

BOBBY

Where's Mummy?

CAT

In the kitchen getting smashed.

MOUSE

Anyone want my bologna?

BOBBY

Sure.

MOUSE

Drunk. Mummy never used to drink.

CAT

She does now.

MOUSE

What in God's name is happening?

CAT

What's happening, dear sister, is that she's close to collapse and she wants us to take care of

Daddy. And I don't see how I can do it. I have this teeny-tiny house—

BOBBY

Well, not that tiny.

CAT

Oh, where would we put Daddy, I ask you? In the basement? I suppose we could build on a room, but my God, I have two children.

MOUSE

And I have a job. I'm out of the apartment all day.

BOBBY

He'd have to go to a nursing home. None of us can take proper care—

(enter FREIDA, pouring liberally from bottle into her glass. She overhears BOBBY's remark.)

FREIDA

Well, I know one thing. He's not staying in my house one more day.

MOUSE

It's his house too.

FREIDA

Not anymore, it's not. He's never cared for it. He just lived here. He's lazy...

MOUSE

Mummy!

FREIDA

Don't you Mummy me—

(from off-stage a horrible shriek, GORDON's wail. The children are transfixed)

GORDON

(from off-stage) OOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

MOUSE

Daddy!

BOBBY

Are you all right?

(Both exit running)

FREIDA

(calling after them) He's perfectly all right! He's fine. He's just doing it to torment me. STOP THAT GORDON MARSHALL, YOU STOP THAT THIS MINUTE!!

CAT

But then he's very sick.

FREIDA

Oh poo, don't you believe it. He just wants attention. Anytime he's alone he gives that howl—

CAT

The Hound of the Baskervilles.

FREIDA

You go in. "Are you all right? What's wrong?" "I don't know," he says.

(MOUSE and BOBBY return wheeling GORDON)

FREIDA

Back again. Well, all right, now you can tell them yourself. Go on, ask him! He'll tell you, won't you?

CAT

Tell what?

FREIDA

Why we want a divorce. Go on, Gordon, you tell them. They're your children. They deserve to know.

MOUSE

Why then, Daddy? Why do you want a divorce?

(GORDON looks at her a long time, eyes humble, brows wrinkled. Leans forward, opens and closes his mouth, unable to marshall his forces)

FREIDA

Go on, tell her.

(GORDON tries again, then

collapses, confused.)

GORDON

I don't know.

CAT

You don't know!

MOUSE

Oh Mummy, this is absurd!

FREIDA

Absurd is it? You all make me sick. Absurd. Why? Because I'm old? It's not absurd when you, Catharine, come crying to me about Alan.

CAT

Mother!

BOBBY

I didn't know you and Alan—

CAT

Oh, it was long ago. It's not—

FREIDA

Or you, Meredith who have not even chosen to get married—

MOUSE

Mummy—

FREIDA

No, it's only absurd when you're—

BOBBY

She didn't mean it that way, Mummy. She just meant that we aren't accustomed to the idea yet.

You have to give us time...And what would you do, have you given that any thought? What would you do without Daddy around?

FREIDA

Oh, just you wait! I shall blossom, flower and fruit. First I shall cut my hair—

MOUSE

Cut your hair!

FREIDA

Don't you think that would look nice? Short hair fluffing up around my face. Perhaps I'll dye it blond, like your Aunt Evie. You'd like that, wouldn't you, Gordon.

GORDON

I don't know.

FREIDA

And I'll get a beau. That's right, I'm not too old to step out to a dance (*executing a dance*).

CAT

You used to go out dancing all the time, remember? You and Daddy would dress up for a ball, and he'd pop his top hat at us—

MOUSE

I loved it. You were both so beautiful.

FREIDA

I don't know what you're talking about...But I am ready now to paint the town. I think I'll make a pass at Adele Potter's little brother. He's so divine. He's just divine.

MOUSE

Mummy!

CAT

(*pulling MOUSE aside*) Have you ever seen her like this?

MOUSE

I don't know what's wrong.

CAT

Does she do this every night? Get drunk?

MOUSE

Well, how should I know?

CAT

Do something.

MOUSE

Me?

FREIDA

And redecorate. Yes, I'll get him out and I'll recover all the chairs and paint the house. Buy new clothes. I'll be entirely new, a whole new beautiful person with a whole new world. You can tell my Tarot, right? You'll see my future. I have a fantastic future ahead of me. Love, romance on dusky ship-board under an autumn moon...

BOBBY

Well, listen Mummy, I can understand how you feel.

FREIDA

Oh you can, can you! What do you understand? OH!

(losing her balance, she pitches forward slowly, one hand outstretched to stop herself, the other holding her glass level all the while...MOUSE leaps to help, knocking over footstool. FREIDA rolls to the floor on her back. She is still miraculously holding her drink up-right over her head.)

MOUSE

Mummy!

(BOBBY bursts into horrified laughter)

FREIDA

I'm fine. I'm all right. I didn't even spill.

MOUSE

You just lost your balance, that's all.

FREIDA

Oh stop it, all of you!

(With a look of rage, she exits in tears.

The others stand paralyzed.

There is an embarrassed silence, filled with little embarrassed movements.)

It's just awful.

CAT

(*lurching across room*) Mummy!

MOUSE

(*MOUSE exits after FREIDA. CAT sits beside her father, takes his hand and looks deeply in his eyes.*)

CAT

Daddy, please try to remember. Why is Mummy so upset? What's happened?. . . (*pause*)

Daddy, she's drunk, do you understand?

GORDON

Yes...I know.

CAT

What do you know?

GORDON

Why we want a divorce. It's because—

CAT

Yes?

GORDON

Bec—it's...my fault. Be-be-Because –

BOBBY

Why? What happened?

CAT

What's your fault?

GORDON

I did it. It was-- It was—

CAT

Go slow. It's all right. What did you do?

GORDON

We want a divorce!

CAT

Yes, Daddy. But why? What did you do?

(Enter MOUSE. BOBBY and CAT are seated at either side of GORDON. MOUSE sits opposite)

CAT

Was it about money?

BOBBY

Anything to do with money?

GORDON

(shaking his head) No. No.

BOBBY

Not money.

CAT

They're not divorcing over money.

MOUSE

Work. Is it connected to work?

BOBBY

Your sickness? Is it related to the stroke?

CAT

You've done something to make Mummy mad. Something very recent?

GORDON

Yes. My fault.

BOBBY

You made a mistake?

GORDON

(gratefully) Yes. A mistake.

MOUSE

What mistake could he possibly make in his present condition?

BOBBY

Maybe that was the mistake.

MOUSE

And then you quarreled, is that it?

GORDON

Yes, a quarrel.

BOBBY

Of course, it's a quarrel.

MOUSE

Is it over religion, Daddy?*(to others)* Well, what could they possibly quarrel over after all these years?

BOBBY

(joking) How about a woman?

CAT

Oh Bobby, really!

GORDON

Yes, a woman!

MOUSE

Yes?

CAT

A woman? It's a quarrel over a woman?

MOUSE

He must mean a man.

BOBBY

Who is it, Daddy?

CAT

Do we know her?

GORDON

The sister.

CAT
 You mean Mouse?

MOUSE
 You mean Cat?

GORDON
(impatiently) No! No.

BOBBY
 Whose sister, Daddy?

CAT
 Do you mean your own sister, Daddy?

GORDON
 Your mu-- muth—

MOUSE
 Our mother's sister?

(GORDON nodding)

CAT
(triumphant) Aunt Evie! Do you mean Aunt Evie?

BOBBY
 The one who died? It has to do with her?

GORDON
 I told her—. . .

CAT
(gently; slowing him down) OK. It concerns Aunt Evie. You want a divorce because of Aunt Evie.

BOBBY
 This makes no sense at all. Was it something about her death, Daddy?

CAT
 Be quiet, Bobby. You confuse him. Go on, Daddy.

I told her...yesterday . . .

GORDON

It's all right.

CAT

I told her...

GORDON

Just go slow, Daddy.

MOUSE

I told her I had an affair with her sister.

GORDON

Oh my god!

BOBBY

With Aunt Evie!

CAT

Oh Daddy, but everyone has affairs.

MOUSE

Mou-sie!

CAT

BOBBY

(laughing) Oh my god. It's *le crime passionale*. We think they're so old... ha ha...that she's too old...

GORDON

(fiercely) She's not...old!

CAT

But Aunt Evie's been dead for years.

BOBBY

Before I was born. *(laughing)* They're quarrelling over something that happened before I was born.

(off-stage, a squeal of tires. BOBBY is convulsed with embarrassed and horrified laughter)

MOUSE

What's that?

BOBBY

We think they're practically dead, and they're quarrelling like teenage lovers.

CAT

Bobby! Stop it!

MOUSE

She's taken the car. She must be driving 50 miles an hour.

CAT

Bobby, have you no decency?

BOBBY

Oh god!

MOUSE

Oh Daddy, how could you tell her such a thing. You should never have told her!

CAT

I can't bear it.

BLACKOUT

end Act I

The Study

Act II. Scene I

The study. Gordon is alone.

(Enter CAT, with MOUSE trailing behind.)

CAT

Everything's going higgledy-piggledy without Mummy here. I can't bear it.

MOUSE

But Cat, listen—

CAT

(turns on her fiercely) No! I will not hear anymore. All we've done for the past three hours is discuss this one single subject. Nursing home, live with us, get a nurse, stay with Mummy, go to Bobby! to you! to me!

(exits, still talking:)

Off-Stage

I won't have it. I am not going to. . .

(Her voice fades to silence. The phone rings once. . . twice. One the third, BOBBY swings into room and dips phone off its cradle.)

BOBBY

Hello? Mona, what are you doing calling me here? No no, of course I'm glad. . . but. . . look, honey, I said I'd call, but but something's come up and it looks like I'm not going to get by this evening. . . Oh, come on, honey, you know I want to see you. . . No, you know a little snow wouldn't keep me away. . . It's deep there, is it? Well, in this case it's just some family stuff that's come up. . . Mona, I'm not hiding anyth—OK, it's my mother, if you must know. She fell down drunk and now she's run off, we don't know where, and. . . About four hours. . . Anyway my father's not well, as you know, and I just think it's going to be hard. . . Oh, I miss you too. (*Singing*): Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, heh, heh—

Enter CAT, trailed by MOUSE.

(BOBBY changes voice instantly.)

So, I'll give you a call when I know something more. Fine. Good-bye.

CAT turns off TV.

Calling Henrietta? How is your wife?

MOUSE

Hmm.

BOBBY

Still playing tennis?

MOUSE

It's really coming down.

CAT

Bobby, make Cat—

MOUSE

No, I'm sick of this. I've told you. No.

CAT

But—

MOUSE

BOBBY

Cat's right. The problem is we don't have enough information to make a sensible decision.

Names, costs. For that matter we don't even know if they're serious about a divorce.

MOUSE

We aren't?

BOBBY

It's my opinion that she's just gone off for a few hours to herself and in a little while she'll come back, acting as if nothing had happened.

MOUSE

It would be just like her!

CAT

Unless she had an accident.

MOUSE

Oh, I don't think—

CAT

The roads will be slippery. Look at it.

MOUSE

Let's say she's had an accident. She's been gone four hours without even telephoning. And he's sick. I mean he's really sick. I had no idea. Bobby, a while ago...I hit him.

CAT

You hit him?

BOBBY

What do you mean?

MOUSE

(topping) My nerves are shot. He screamed. Not hard, not hard, just a tap on the cheek. But

Cat, I hit my father, imagine!

CAT

Mummy will be really mad.

MOUSE

How about me? I'm so ashamed. But don't you see, it just adds one more dimension to the problem. How can we take care of him?

Or Mummy, for that matter? My god.

BOBBY

(Silence as they contemplate it.)

I can't stand this thing.

CAT

Do you think he knows she's gone?

BOBBY

Of course he knows.

MOUSE

Well, you can't tell.

CAT

He knows everything. It's just that he can't speak.

MOUSE

Or move. Or maybe think.

BOBBY

It's so ironic. A man who's lived through words. That was always the most important thing to him, the play of ideas; and he really didn't care which side he argued, so long as he had an opponent to spar against. What he loved was the articulateness of—And I suppose it's all still there, but locked inside him.

MOUSE

You're such a romantic.

BOBBY

I'm not a romantic. But I think of him sitting there, watching, watching. It's as if the doors to his mind are closing one by one. Click. Click. The electric wires are burning out. Fssst. Another pathway's gone. And he must know it. He forms a thought in his head. He knows what he wants to say. That's when he leans forward, clutching the air, but then the roads are blocked between the mind and tongue. The thoughts can't get outside. Think how desperate he must be! And knowing ever day he's losing more.

MOUSE

BOBBY

Do you think that's what's happening?

MOUSE

Look at his eyes. He's caged inside his body. And the form, the body, is what's locking him in at the same time that it's decaying. He can't get out!

CAT

Well, that's one way of looking at it. I have to call Alan. Hello? Hi, Katrinka, it's me, Mummy...How are you? You did! Did you put on a band-aid? Oh good. And was there a lot of blood? Oh, lucky you! I'll kiss it when I get home. How's Toby? Uh huh. Well, tell Daddy to feed him, and—what? Oh. Well, where is he? ...Oh. Well, who's there with you? NO ONE!?! Katrinka...Listen, honey, um. How long has he been gone? Uh huh. Ok. Look sweetie, I'm going to hang up right now and call Daddy at his office. And then I'll call you right back. I won't be three minutes, Ok? I know. What would I do without you? Ok, I'll call you right back. That bastard! How could he?!!

MOUSE

What's happened?

BOBBY

Where's Alan?

CAT

That no-good bastard, how could he do a thing like that? How could he go to the office?

(almost weeping) I leave the children with him for just—

MOUSE

You shouldn't—

CAT

Hello? Hello, can I speak to Mr. Webster, please? Well, do you know where he can be reached? I see. Not all day? I see. The Wallace Proposal, yes. In Pittsburgh? Well, will you please have him call me as soon as you hear from him. It's an emergency, yes. I'm his wife. And the

number is- yes, that's right he told you. Yes, thank you. All day! He hasn't been in the office all day.

BOBBY

Hey now, Kitty-cat. Take it easy.

CAT

Take it easy! I leave him with a a three year old and a six year old for just one day. One night and one day! And he can't even—Hi, Katrinka, it's me again... Well, you see I called back. Don't cry, honey, what in the world is there to be afraid of? ...Oh, you know Toby. Tell you what, Kat-kins, you go down to the kitchen now and get a banana, Ok? And then give it to Toby and he'll eat some and mush the rest into the rug and stop crying... Oh, I know but who cares about the old rug? .. Well, that's when I'm there. When I'm not I don't care. Now listen, tell you what, you go downstairs and pick up the kitchen phone. I'll be on that. No, really I will. Go and see. Run down and pick up the kitchen phone. I'll wait for you in the kitchen...One day. What's the matter with you men?

BOBBY

Hey, it's one man.

CAT

Well look at you. When Mummy is betrayed by Daddy, betrayed—her whole life cast in her face, and your reaction is to laugh!

BOBBY

Oh, come on, Cat.

CAT

I know, so I'm distraught. How could he walk out on them! Yes, I'm right here, honey, hi. umhuh. Ok, you got the banana? Then hang up in the kitchen and I'll go wait for you upstairs...

BOBBY

Well, look at Mouse. She throws her arms around Daddy and says everyone does it.

MOUSE

I know, I know! What was I thinking of?

CAT

I can call Mrs. Sladowsky up the road. Maybe she can take them in. And Bobby, you have to drive me to the airport. I'm going home. Hi, honey. Did you give him the banana? . . . No, no you have to peel it for him. I'll wait, don't worry. (*covering phone with hand*) So it's up to you two. I can't stay. He did this once before. He walked out for a whole weekend once... He's stopped crying? What a good little mother you are. Aunt Meredith and Uncle Bobby send their love. Uh huh. No, everything's just fine here. Listen, K-K, I'm going to hang up and call Mrs. Sladowsky and see if she won't come over and help you with Toby. I'm coming home tonight, but I won't be able to get there for a while. I'll call you right back, Ok? I love you too. OK.

(*dialing frantically*)

Busy...Well, Mouse. I think you're right. This whole marriage business is for the birds.

MOUSE

I never said that. It's just that I haven't found the right man yet.

BOBBY

Are you sure he understood?

CAT

Who, Alan? Of course he understood. He's just a child, is all. (*Dialing*) What happened to responsibi—Hello, Mrs. Sladowsky, this is Catharine Webster. Mrs. Sladowsky, I have a favor to ask. I'm at my parents'...yes, and my husband was watching the kids and he got called away on urgent business. I can catch the six o'clock plane and be home by 8:30 or 9:00 but...yes...oh, thank you! Then I'll come straight to your house... Under the doormat—

GORDON

OOOHHAAAHHHH!

(*Both children spring to him.
At the phone CAT covers one ear.*)

MOUSE

Daddy!

BOBBY

Are you all right?

CAT

Then call me when you've got them. I'll be waiting...*(Hangs up)* Listen, you all, I've got to catch the six o'clock plane. One of you drive me?

BOBBY

I will. Mouse, you stay here with Daddy.

MOUSE

Cat, you can't run off!

CAT

I'm not running off. My children—Daddy, I have to leave. Something's come up. *(he looks at her uncomprehending)*. Do you understand? Bobby's driving me to the airport, and then we'll be right back...

(Telephone rings)

That's Mrs. Slad—

MOUSE

Hello? *(surprised)* Oh, hello, Henrietta. I thought you just talked to him.

CAT

Henrietta, oh lord, now I'll never get my call.

MOUSE

Bobby.

BOBBY

Hello? Oh hi, hon...No, I know I said I'd call, but something's come up here and I won't be home for a while. Listen, let me take this in the other room, OK? Mouse, will you hang up?

(Exit BOBBY)

CAT

I'm waiting for a call, Bobby. *(Calling after him)* Please don't be long...I'm sorry to leave you like this, Daddy.

MOUSE

Cat, you mustn't go. We need you here. You have a sitter, I have to.

CAT

I have to.

MOUSE

(in anguish) You're always running away. What's happening? Everyone's running out. First Mummy—

CAT

(turns on her) She never ran out! She's always done her duty. She understands the meaning of family. What did you know about marriage? Or thinking about others? The only person you ever think about is yourself, me, me, me. I, I, I. All your narcissism and introspection and therapies and fulfillment. As if fulfillment were some goal to be attained. Well, I'm not like that.

(MOUSE bursts into tears; GORDON looks in horror from one to the other.)

CAT

I have my children. And I'm damned if I am going to leave them alone. Mummy wouldn't have done it. I won't. I know what's right.

MOUSE

Is that true? Is that what I do? Talk about myself all the time? I didn't know.

CAT

(Topping) Good-bye Daddy. Take care of yourself.

MOUSE

But, Cat, I was thinking of duty too. There's a duty to stay.

CAT

Well, I have other duties. We choose our responsibilities. And I choose to give this one to you. You and Bobby handle it. I'll do whatever you decide.

MOUSE

Cat, don't go away angry.

CAT

(angrily) I'm not angry. I'm...upset, that's all. Is that all right? Can I have problems too?

MOUSE

Do you talk about books?

CAT

He's not much interested in books. Why?

MOUSE

I just wondered. I wondered what I'm missing out...I mean, I can't help but be affected by you all. I look at you and Alan, or Mummy and Daddy, or even Bobby and Henrietta. But you have each other. If you're lonely you can go to your husband and say—"I feel so alone," and there's someone there to put his arms around you. Or if you think of something, you look up and smile across the room, and you know he's thinking of it too. You share so much. You've borne his children and carried them up to bed, legs dangling, and you've cooked him meals and filled the house with flowers, and...and fought with one another—

CAT

So?

MOUSE

So I look at that constancy and I feel I'm missing out.

CAT

Ben would have married you.

MOUSE

But it's not for anyone in particular. It's for the whole thing. After I come home here, I always go away so depressed. It takes me days to recover, and finally I've understood it's because there's no man to speak about me like that: "My wife." To say, "My wife," to his own heart. I'm not half of a couple...I feel sometimes I'm standing naked in an immense moonscape of rocks and dust, and the white moon is sailing there in a vast, indifferent sky...and then there's me, and I'm absolutely all alone in that enormity. And then I wish there were a partner in my life, someone to turn to in the middle of the night if I wake up. Or I could wake him up and we'd talk and laugh for an hour and go back to sleep holding each other in our arms.

CAT

You don't do that if you're married.

MOUSE

Or in the morning, to wake up and find someone in bed with you, heavy and smelly with sleep, so you roll over and embrace his stolid, drowsy body and know you won't fall off the edge.

CAT

It isn't like that.

MOUSE

No? I think of you with your babies and your husband and your house, living out all over again the life that Mummy and Daddy had, and I see it going on for generations, just like that. And I won't have children, won't pass on the genes.

CAT

Poor Mouse. You don't know that. You may find someone yet.

MOUSE

I find only married men, but it's nice of you to say. I only meant to tell you about how I feel about marriage of so many years. It's something sacrosanct.

CAT

(dismissing) Loneliness is inside you. It has nothing to do with marriage. I wish Bobby'd hurry up.

(She is sitting beside her father. She takes his hand.)

MOUSE

I wish Mummy would come back. Where do you think she's gone?

CAT

Go knows. Do you, Daddy?

GORDON

Do I...what?

CAT

Know where Mummy's gone.

GORDON

No. Where?

MOUSE

(laughing) That's what we want to know.

CAT

Daddy, listen. She went out of here four hours ago, driving. She was drunk, Daddy. Angry and

hurt. Where would she have gone?

MOUSE

She'll be fine, Daddy. Don't worry.

GORDON

I am. I am worried.

CAT

Now, Daddy, you know she doesn't get a chance to get out much, and she thought that with all of us here, she'd just slip out and see a friend...

MOUSE

You know what's funny, Kitty-Cat?

CAT

What?

MOUSE

Bobby's having an affair.

(GORDON jumps, listening)

CAT

Don't be silly.

MOUSE

I'm sure of it. He was talking to some woman earlier and when I came in he said it was Henrietta. But it wasn't.

(GORDON is listening intently.)

CAT

Bobby's too stuffy to have an affair. I'm going to get my things together. Henrietta's such a—*(wags fingertips indicating "chatterbox.")*

(Enter BOBBY)

Oh Bobby, good. I'll be right down.

(Exit CAT.)

BOBBY

It's really blowing up a storm. Henrietta heard on the radio we're to have three feet tonight.

MOUSE

Do you want me to take Cat?

BOBBY

(too heartily) No, no, I can do it. Fact is, I'd like the chance to get out a little.

MOUSE

I'll go help Cat, then. *(Pausing at the door)* Why do you think Alan left?
(BOBBY shrugs. Mouse looks at him a moment, then leaves. BOBBY moves quickly to phone and dials.)

BOBBY

Hello? Oh hi, honey. Look I have to drive to the airport in a few minutes...(laughs) No, no.

My sister. I thought I might drop by for a minute afterwards, Ok? Good. In about an hour...*(singing)* "Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa, I adore you..."

(Hangs up and is startled to see GORDON watching intently.)

(Enter CAT, trailed by Mouse)

CAT

Good-bye Daddy. I wish I could stay, but I've got to catch the plane. Listen, Mouse, if Mrs. Sladowsky calls, tell her I've left.

MOUSE

Ok.

CAT

(To Mouse) It's all so awful.

MOUSE

Don't worry, Cat.

CAT

I'm sorry I can't stay. I should have known. He says the house and children are women's work. If anything's happened.

MOUSE

Still...

CAT

It's not that he's irresponsible. I mean at his work he can be quite competent. He works till

seven at night three times a week at least, and most weekends. And he's good about money...Don't look like that. I know you're judging him, but he loves his children, he really does. It's only that he grew up in such a...Look, he simply doesn't know. He was left himself at that age. And when we talk about it, when I *explain*, he's going to feel so bad...Well, I guess she's not going to call. Good-bye Mousie, take care of yourself. (*Embrace*) I'll call when I get home.

BOBBY

I'll be back in a while.

MOUSE

Good-bye, Cat.

All three exit. The solid thud of the front door. The car motor. Again the room is shadowy, a reflection of GORDON's mind. From somewhere, a little boy's voice, a whisper in GORDON's mind:

Mother?

Enter MOUSE. Then begins a fugue, with MOUSE (in reality) intercutting with the illusions and shadowy images in GORDON's mind. At times GORDON sits, watching, his attention mostly on FREIDA and CAT. At times, he leaps to his feet and enters their conversation, even walking into the shadowed area, to enter their field. Two sections weave in and out of one another, reality and illusion. When GORDON speaks in the realm of illusion, he is strong and virile. When he speaks to MEREDITH, he is the old man crippled by a stroke.

MOUSE

Well, they're gone.

(GORDON is staring into the far)

Daddy? What is it? Do you see something?

FREIDA

Of course he sees something. He sees me.

(From shadows FREIDA emerges. A large white bandage is wound around her head. Behind her is CAT.)

CAT

I can hardly see.

FREIDA

The fire's smoking, that's why.

MOUSE
There's nothing, Daddy. You're all right.

CAT
(to FREIDA) Are you all right?

FREIDA
Stop mothering me, Cat. I hit a tree, is all.

CAT
It's hard to see.

FREIDA
I can see perfectly well. I just didn't expect—oh, damn, here come the tears again. Whatever is the matter with me?

CAT
Sit down, Sit—

FREIDA
I will not sit down. I'm going to stand and get a grip on myself. That's the trouble with you all. You're all so ready to give in to the first difficulty that comes along. But I will not give up.

MOUSE
I'll be in the kitchen, Daddy, if you want.

(Exit Mouse)
CAT
Mummy your head's not what ought to be bandages. You have it on the wrong part.

FREIDA
Oh, you're right. It's my heart that hurts.

*(Together they unwind bandage and
rewind it at her chest, over her heart;
and then we see it is stained with
blood.)*

CAT
(murmuring) Blood.

FREIDA
(murmuring) So much blood.

GORDON
OOOOHHHHAAAAAHAHAHHH
(Enter Mouse on the run.)

FREIDA

Behind my back. While I am cooking dinner and scrimping and saving—

GORDON

(Rising to his feet; angrily) We had a cook. You didn't have to cook.

FREIDA

--He is having a drink after work with my sister, and looking in her eyes and pledging his filthy little faiths --

CAT

Mummy, you don't know that's true.

GORDON

You don't know what's true!

FREIDA

Look at him. Shoo! He's an old, old, shriveled man. Yes, you are, don't deny it! I have eyes to see! And so am I. I look in the mirror and suddenly, look at me! I'm an old woman. One moment I was dancing all night under the stars and running home with Evie in the open roadster. It was red. I was 20 years old. And the next thing, I look in the mirror, and it's all gone so fast.

GORDON

You're not old.

FREIDA

Don't speak to me. I want nothing to do with you. Lies. You lied to me. And now you'd leave, like that. Oh, I knew about Evie. I'm not that dumb. She was the beautiful one. Oh, it hurts.

Here. In the pit of my stomach. I will be physically sick thinking of this.

*(Unwinds bandage and wraps it
round her waist, her gut. It
is drenched with blood.)*

And I cannot touch that man now without thinking how he touched her—I have to do for him. I wash him. I change him. And do you know, all I can think of is how he—with my sister—

*GORDON's next two speeches
come from inside his head,
dreamy, echoing, not real.*

GORDON

I was made whole, became the man I am.

FREIDA

You never cared for me. You never talked to me.

GORDON

I was filled, fulfilled.

FREIDA

It makes a mockery of everything I tried to build.

GORDON

When I made love to her it was to the tree and earth and sky—I was a God!

FREIDA

You watch. I'll leave.

*(Slam of a door. GORDON jerks awake.
Lights up on empty study.)*

Enter MOUSE with tea. GORDON watches her, but is also watching FREIDA, half-seen in one part of the room. She winds the bandage round her knees, hobbling her. She can not walk.

Now the pacing of the fugue increases. . .

MOUSE

You take milk in your tea, don't you? Here. Do you know, I'm scared, Daddy. Isn't that funny?

I'm scared at being alone with you here. What if you need something?

FREIDA

He won't need anything.

GORDON

(To FREIDA) Goddamn it, I need plenty.

MOUSE

(Sitting beside him) It's so ironic. Everyone wants to know why I've never married, and I've never told a soul, I'm so ashamed of it. But you'll understand, won't you? I know that now. You can hear me.

GORDON rises, strides to the center of the room, his step light, arms out. He turns, whistling for his dog.

GORDON

Here, Tidy, come on, boy.

He plays with the imaginary hunting dog, which leaps and gambols around him.

Good dog. Hoo-oold it. . . Hoo-ld the point. You look here, Freida, I'll not be spoken to that way, you hear me?

FREIDA

Of course I hear you. You needn't shout.

GORDON

So I've gotten older. Everyone does. Goddamn it, aging is not for the weak and infirm.

FREIDA

You get no sympathy from me.

GORDON

What's curious, I'm the same person who yesterday was camping in Wyoming. Remember that trip, FREIDA? I have a case to try before the Supreme Court. My brief is here.

(Searching frantically through papers that pile on the table)

MOUSE

I loved him from the first moment that I saw him. He stood in the doorway, with that package in his arms, and he was so beautiful. I didn't intend to get involved. Not with a married man.

FREIDA

It's still betrayal. It's all lies.

MOUSE

And I know he loves his wife, but he loves me too. But I'm only telling half of it. Part of me knows that if he were available to me, I'd be bored. I don't want to lose myself in a man. Like Mummy did. Like Cat.

FREIDA

Blood on the walls.

GORDON

It was an accident.

MOUSE

I just want to be with him now and then. When I love the hills are ringing, the very stones, the sky.

FREIDA

I came in the study—

MOUSE

And I think that must be all God wants for us—to love, I mean.

FREIDA

—blood on the walls.

MOUSE

One day I saw a boy kissing his girlfriend on the street. They were just standing lost in their embrace. It was so lovely, I felt the very earth tip with its delight.

FREIDA

Blood on the chain—her face—her pearls.

MOUSE

Isn't that the whole purpose, Daddy? Just to care for one another?

FREIDA moves bandage to ankles. Now she cannot move at all. She stands in the shadows motionless)

MOUSE

But I know I'm also scared of men. I long to be wanted, and I know—because my therapist has been working with me so long now—I know that I put up barriers to protect myself, so I won't be rejected. And there must be some of that in my choosing a married man. Then I'm safe, because he's never put to the test. He can't choose me. . . I'm so unhappy, Daddy. Daddy, help me. How stupid of me. He's fallen asleep. Oh, Daddy, all I want is acknowledgement. To be heard, otherwise, do I even exist? I wish you could hear.

(The front door slams, lights go harshly up.)

Off-stage

BOBBY

Well, we can't get out. The car broke down.

CAT

(Off-stage) We had to walk back in the snow.

MOUSE

(Exiting) You can't leave?

FREIDA

Leave? Eve?

(She begins to unwind bandages from her knees.)

GORDON

(and old man, anguished) Where are you going?

(FREIDA wraps her bleeding bandage in a turban on her head, to make a fashionable hat; and without looking at GORDON, she moves or fades away.)

FREIDA

Oh, I'll find a home. A woman is never long without a home.

Off-stage

MOUSE

But how will Cat leave?

FREIDA

(Fading) I'll leave. . . ?

(She disappears.)

GORDON

You stay right here, Freida Marshall!

(GORDON, with incredible struggle, pulls himself to his feet, and staggering, drags himself painfully across room to the phone. He reaches out for it, and drops receiver to the floor. The sound of dialtone is loud. And suddenly he speaks toward the instrument in his full youthful voice.)

GORDON

Freida! You get back here now! I know you're there! Don't pretend you can't hear me. I'm

speaking to you—

Michael? You tell her I know she's there with you. And you keep your filthy hands off her, Michael, do you hear? She belongs to me! This is your home, do you hear me, Freida? And I'm. . . I'm. . . And. . . Freida? Answer me, Goddam it! I know you're there. Speak to me. . . Freida? I love you, Fr—

*(He collapses to the floor.
Enter MOUSE, who has heard the noise.)*

MOUSE

Daddy, are you— Daddy! Oh my God. CAT! BOBBY! Come here! Quick! Daddy, speak to me.

(Enter CAT and BOBBY.)

BOBBY

What's the matter—oh!

CAT

Oh my lord!

MOUSE

I don't know what happened. Hello? Hello? There's no one there.

CAT

Did he walk?

MOUSE

Oh Daddy, who were you calling?

BOBBY

We need an ambulance. Give me the phone. Nine. . . one. . . one. . . Hello? Yes. I need an ambulance right away. A stroke I think. Or a heart attack. Marshall. Gordon Marshall. 42 Oxbow Road.

CAT

(gently) Daddy?

BOBBY

Number 42. Just off Route 1. Thank you. *(hanging up)* They're on the way. Thank god the hospital's right near.

MOUSE

He was telephoning someone, can you imagine?

CAT

Telephoning?

MOUSE

Can you imagine—he walked!

CAT

I'll get a blanket.

(Exits)

MOUSE

Shall I come? Should I go?

(Exit MOUSE)

(BOBBY kneels beside GORDON, props his head, making him comfortable)

BOBBY

Daddy? Don't be frightened. We're here. I've called an ambulance. You're going to be just fine. Don't be scared. We're not scared. Oh, goddam it to hell!

(reaches for phone over GORDON's body; dials)

Hello? Mona sweetheart. Darling. Listen, something's come up and I won't be able to make it after all. . . I know but—*(tenderly)* Oh, I love you too. I'm so sorry, Mona. No, it's awful. I'll tell you about it later. . . No, it's my father this time. He's collapsed. The ambulance is coming. . . *(fiercely)* Listen honey, I love you, don't you forget it. Pray for us.

(Enter MOUSE)

MOUSE

Here's the blanket.

GORDON

Bobby?

BOBBY

Yes, I'm here.

. . . help me. . .

GORDON

Of course. Lie still. We're here.

BOBBY

I--need--

GORDON

(gently; caring) We're right here, don't move.

BOBBY

Necklace--

GORDON

What's he saying?

MOUSE

--a necklace. . . I. . . need--

GORDON

A necklace?

BOBBY

Salter's.

GORDON

BOBBY

You want me to take you to Salter's Jeweler's? *(laughing, disbelieving)* Now?

MOUSE

It's all right, Daddy. Lie still.

GORDON

(still struggling) Goddam it!

BOBBY

We're taking you to the hospital.

GORDON

Goddam it! You're my son.

BOBBY

(taken aback) Well, of course.

GORDON

Then you do as I say. . . Goddam it. A neck—

BOBBY

A necklace.

GORDON

P-p-pearls.

(Enter CAT)

CAT

The ambulance will be here any minute. I've turned on the outside lights.

GORDON

I want. . . pearls.

CAT

What's the matter?

BOBBY

He wants some pearls.

CAT

I have some pearls in my case. Do you want pearls, Daddy?

GORDON

Yes, peals.

CAT

I'll go get them.

(Exit, running)

GORDON

P-p—

MOUSE

It's all right, Daddy. We're not going to leave you.

BOBBY

He wants to buy a necklace.

GORDON

For your—for your—

(Enter CAT with traveling jewelry case)

CAT

Here, Daddy. Take my pearls.

GORDON

Goddam it!

(He hurls them to far corner; CAT scurries after necklace.)

CAT

(almost in tears) What does he want?

GORDON

For your mother. . .

(Off-stage, the ambulance siren)

I need. . . OOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

(His banshee wail merges with that of ambulance. Both sounds stop simultaneously. The silence is shattering.)

BLACKOUT

Act II, scene 2

The study. Late at night.

MEREDITH, stockings feet propped on a table, is leafing through a magazine. Enter BOBBY.

MOUSE

How is he?

BOBBY

He's asleep. He's holding it against his heart.

MOUSE

Ah.

BOBBY

He hasn't let it out of his hands since we bought it. I thought he was dying. . .

MOUSE

I know. The way he revived is--

BOBBY

In the ambulance, sitting up--

MOUSE

And in the store. He knew just what he wanted and where it was.

BOBBY

Well, the old boy's got some years in him yet.

MOUSE

I thought it was very pretty too.

(They sit in silence. BOBBY drums on chair arm, suddenly jumps up, paces, sits again, nervously.)

BOBBY

Well, I guess you should know—I've decided to get a divorce.

MOUSE

From Henrietta?

BOBBY

That's who I'm married to.

MOUSE

Oh. For heaven's sake, why?

BOBBY

I'm in love with another woman. Her name is Mona Ceruti. She's a secretary.

MOUSE

Your secretary?

BOBBY

No no. Good god! You don't dip your pen into company ink!

MOUSE

Oh Bobby!

BOBBY

There's nothing you can say that I haven't already said to myself, so don't say it. I know: she's not educated. Her name itself is so. . . so...

MOUSE

I--

BOBBY

And don't think it's an easy decision either. It's not. But Henrietta and I, well Mouse, listen, I haven't made love to my wife in four years. I don't want to. She doesn't want me to. And

damn it, I'm a healthy male— (stops, looks at her). Well, say something.

MOUSE

Well, um. That's fine.

BOBBY

You don't care?

MOUSE

No. I mean yes. Well, should I?

BOBBY

But I mean, because I'm getting a divorce is why! No one in our family gets a divorce. That's a point of pride. We never split up a family in our family. And then you and Henrietta are good friends. I mean. I know you like her.

MOUSE

Oh. . . in a way. . .

BOBBY

Well, I thought you were.

MOUSE

Bobby, listen, I've never said this before, but Henrietta's a very cold person, and Cat and I—and Mummy—we've all made every effort to get along with her, you know, because of you; but really—

BOBBY

(self-pitying) I was too young to get married.

MOUSE

Well, I don't know. You were 28.

BOBBY

Age has nothing to do with it. At the same time, once you've taken those vows, I mean, doesn't form mean anything to you?

MOUSE

Form?

BOBBY

Social propriety. What's right. Maybe you didn't hear me. I said I was in love, for god's sake,

she's not in our social circle.

(pause, MOUSE stares at him)

MOUSE

Listen, Bobby—

BOBBY

What? Tell me, tell me anything. I need advice. Sometimes I think I'm going crazy. Tell me not to marry her.

MOUSE

Don't marry her.

BOBBY

Live in sin?

MOUSE

Just don't marry her is all. I don't care how you live.

BOBBY

And to think I thought you weren't a snob.

MOUSE

I'm not. You are.

BOBBY

I am. I'm the one who's going to marry her. I don't see you marrying a . . . a . . .

MOUSE

(bursts out laughing)

(BOBBY turns away humiliated)

Bobby, it's just you're so aware of the favor you're conferring on the poor girl. Anyway, maybe she doesn't want to marry you. Have you asked her?

BOBBY

No, but she loves me, and oh, Mouse, I love her too. For the first time in my life, I'm so happy.

When I'm with her I feel alive. . . *(confessing)* She calls me Robert. . . .

MOUSE

Oh.

(Outside, the sound of a car.)

Tell me what to do.

BOBBY
(Car door slams. Footsteps. Front door slams.)

(OFF-STAGE) Hello? Anybody home?

FREIDA

It's Mummy.

MOUSE

Mummy!

BOBBY
(Enter FREIDA, tosses coat on sofa and stalks around room. She is feeling pretty good.)

FREIDA

Well, hello everybody. How are you?

BOBBY

Where have you been?

FREIDA

Where have I been! Meredith, my dear, you have a spot on your blouse!

MOUSE

Where?

FREIDA

There, right there. It seems you all are the sly ones. No sooner do I go for a short drive than everyone takes off. You probably thought I didn't know. But I'm telepathic. I saw it on the fortune cards. Also I telephoned. Where is your father?

BOBBY

He's asleep.

MOUSE

We all went out.

FREIDA

Your father too? In a snowstorm?

BOBBY

He wanted to get something for--

MOUSE

Bob--by!

FREIDA
He's a sick man. You don't--

MOUSE
Bobby was just telling me he's getting a divorce.

BOBBY
Mouse!

FREIDA
A divorce from Henrietta?

BOBBY
That's who I'm married to.

FREIDA
My goodness. It's like a contagious disease. How clever, Mouse, that you're immune.

MOUSE
Oh Mummy!

FREIDA
Are you going to tell the reason why?

BOBBY
(*embarrassed*) I'm in love with another woman.

FREIDA
Oh, you're in love with another woman! As if that's any cause to break up a perfectly good marriage! Your generation has no stamina. Marriage isn't a game, you know. Two faults and you're out. You have to work at a marriage. If you have any will-power at all, one iota of discipline. . . well, you stick it out and make it work. It's the fault of this sick society. All this carping on LUV. LUV. It just makes me ill. LUV. That's not what Christ meant. He meant respect, pure and simple. Respect and dignity.

MOUSE
But Mummy, you want a divorce for Daddy's not leaving you--

FREIDA
What do you know about that?

MOUSE

Well, I--

FREIDA

You don't have any idea what you're talking about!

MOUSE

But I thought Aunt Eve-- (*stops; aghast*)

FREIDA

He told you that, did he? . . . Well, why shouldn't he love Evie? Everyone did. She was a great beauty. Sophisticated. She had charm, intelligence, wit. How could you help but love her? I was the ugly duckling. But he chose me, and he stuck by me. And when she died--it was so stupid, as if she didn't know how to clean a shotgun. Look, it makes me weep just to think of it, after all these years. . . So stupid. . .

MOUSE

She shot herself?

BOBBY

I didn't know that.

FREIDA

No, she did not shoot herself. There you go leaping to conclusions again. She was cleaning a shotgun and it accidentally went off. . . Oh, it was horrible. You all were quite young at the time. Just babies.

(*pause; they all reflect*)

BOBBY

Was there an investigation?

FREIDA

You're saying did she-- that it wasn't an accident?

BOBBY

I'm not saying anything. I just-- (*stops; shrugs*)

FREIDA

Don't be silly. For your information, yes, of course there was an inquiry. But no note. No motive. Evie was so happy all the time, there was no reason for--Good God! What do I know

about it? It was an accident, that's all. Good gracious, look at me. I can't stop crying. . .

Excuse me, Bobby, I'm sorry. You were saying you're in love.

BOBBY

So you think it's dishonorable, then, to break up my marriage out of love? Is that what you're saying?

FREIDA

Oh, I don't know anything anymore. You have to do what's right for you. There aren't any simple answers, are there? Well, tell me about her.

MOUSE

She's a secretary.

BOBBY

Meredith, I can speak for myself.

FREIDA

(bitter laugh) The old cliché. Is she your secretary?

BOBBY

No, she's not mine.

MOUSE

He's worried about her being beneath him.

BOBBY

Mouse, for god's sweet sake! Listen, it's not easy for me. Don't think I haven't obsessed about it. It isn't sudden. I've been-- Look, Henrietta and I-- Well, anyway. . .

FREIDA

(goes over; kisses top of his head) Poor Bobby.

BOBBY

Well, despite your acid words, I do love her.

FREIDA

Well, that's the important thing.

BOBBY

(surprised) What?

FREIDA

Just try not to hurt anybody. I'd like to think you've made an effort with Henrietta, but I can see where at a certain point it's a waste of time. She's not exactly. . . bright.

BOBBY

Well, I have tried. I mean, I don't have anything in common with her anymore. Tennis, after all--

FREIDA

(About Mona) The social difference. . . well, just go slowly, Bobby. Take it step by step. And anyway you don't know what will happen. Life is so full of surprises. Now, enough homilies for the day. Where is Cat?

BOBBY

She's gone home.

FREIDA

Well, that was a quick trip.

MOUSE

Alan walked out and left the children alone in the house.

BOBBY

She caught the six o'clock plane. Or tried to. The plans are grounded. She insisted on waiting at the airport.

FREIDA

Poor Cat.

MOUSE

The curious thing is she's so happy with him. That's what I don't understand.

BOBBY

I guess I'll wake up Daddy.

FREIDA

NO! NO!

BOBBY

He'd like to see you.

(exit)

FREIDA

Well, maybe I don't care to see him. . . Oh well. . . So, it was a nice afternoon?

MOUSE
(urgently) Mummy, you haven't come back have you?

FREIDA
Well, I thought I had.

MOUSE
No, but you're going to get a divorce, aren't you? You have so many talents. All your life you've stayed home, and you're right, you should be doing something. Painting. Or make a career. You're not too old to start a career—

FREIDA
(wearily) Oh Mouse will you ever grow up?

MOUSE
I mean, he was wrong about the affair.

FREIDA
Meredith!

MOUSE
But you have your own life and now you can pursue it with no guilt. I've been thinking about it. Look, you could stay with me, in my apartment. I have a couch in the living room and you could look for a job. . . yes, and change your hair. Go to art school. Dance. Go on dates. Oh Mummy, it would be wonderful.

FREIDA
Mousie dear, please listen. I have just had a whole afternoon off. . . You don't know how long it's been. To be alone, even for a few hours—to step back and look at—

MOUSE
What did you do? We were very worried about you.

FREIDA
I went to a movie, if you must know. It's the first film I've seen in nearly three years. And if it's any example of our modern culture, I see I've missed nothing.

MOUSE
(laughing) What was it?

FREIDA

Some adventure film, I don't know. It was silly. But what I wanted to tell you is that about halfway through I had this feeling—like a hand gripping at my shoulder, that something had happened to your father. And I tried to set my mind in place, you know, to see what had happened, and all I got back was a scramble. I thought he had collapsed. Over there. I saw him crumbled on the floor.

MOUSE

Oh but—

FREIDA

Well, I knew that was impossible, so I got a good grip on myself and concentrated on the movie. I heard him calling me. Calling my name. So I left and went and walked in the snow. . . . ruining my shoes. . . . It's been a long time since I've had a day to myself.

MOUSE

And that's all?

FREIDA

The point is that you live with someone for a long time, and somehow you are bonded in so many ways. I was very angry when he told me all about Aunt Evie. But walking in the snow, the white flakes were falling on my cheeks, like tiny, stinging stars, and the snow sifted into my shoes and under my scarf, so light and dry, crawling into my clothes as if for comfort. I couldn't keep it out, and burning cold. It wet my eyes. You'll think I'm crazy, I suppose, first hearing voices, and now this stuff. I couldn't get her out of my mind, Evie, and it wasn't as if I was thinking about her, but rather that she was right beside me. I could feel her presence and her personality like fire in the cold, the snowdrops laying their burning cheek on mine, And melted into tears. "I could have cried for a thousand years," She said, and kissed my cheeks with snow. . . . my sister's hot and burning heart. . . .

MOUSE

(hushed) Mummy!

FREIDA

Anyway, I realized it doesn't matter, any of it. I don't know they had an affair, the ramblings of a sick, old mind. And if they did, it happened long ago—wiped out by years and years of—

(She is interrupted by entry of GORDON wheeled by BOBBY. In one hand GORDON holds a pale blue velvet box, every nerve straining toward his wife.)

GORDON

Freida?

FREIDA

(stiffly) Hello, Gordon. You've been out, I hear.

GORDON

(Holding out box)

Freida?

FREIDA

(suspiciously) What's that?

GORDON

Happy Christmas!

FREIDA

It's not Christmas.

BOBBY

He's confused.

MOUSE

No, it's a joke. It's for you, Mummy. Take it.

GORDON

It's for you.

(She takes it as if it were a snake.)

FREIDA

Good lord, is that what you all did today? Went to buy jewels in a snowstorm? Well, they're very pretty. *(Closes box instantly.)*

MOUSE

Put them on, Mummy.

FREIDA

I don't need any pearls. At my age no one's going to—

BOBBY

Let's see them on.

FREIDA

As if I don't have stacks of jewelry. I never wear it anymore.

MOUSE

There.

(Stands back to admire.)

FREIDA

I don't want any jewelry.

BOBBY

They're very pretty.

FREIDA

Well, Cat and Mouse can fight over who inherits them, I suppose. What a waste.

MOUSE

They're lovely, Mummy.

GORDON

You're lovely. . .

FREIDA

Oh for goodness' sake.

GORDON

. . . Lovely. . .

FREIDA

Well, well. . . no matter. *(Stiffly)* Thank you Gordon. I don't know how you did it. . . Well.

Now, don't just stand there everyone, gawking at me. Would you like something to eat? A drink? A glass of milk?

BOBBY

I'm not going to stay.

FREIDA

You're not.

BOBBY

I want to see my. . . friend.

FREIDA

Oh yes, well, give my love to Henrietta. Oh dear, I guess I shouldn't say that anymore, should I?

But then it's all for the best, really. I look forward to meeting her. Oh Bobby, why don't you give Meredith a lift to the train, while you're at it.

MOUSE

I could stay for the night.

FREIDA

No no. Run along. You have things to do.

MOUSE

But I was planning to stay—

FREIDA

I'd just have to run you out tomorrow at great inconvenience. Bobby can do it.

BOBBY

It's no trouble.

FREIDA

Well, give me a kiss. It's been quite a day, I must say.

(Lights slowly dim. Shadows drift into the shadows at the walls. Amongst the shadows appear flickering shining points of light, together with a gentle rustling.)

I love you, Mousie. Take care of yourself. And telephone now and then, that's all.

MOUSE

Well, good-bye.

FREIDA

Dear me, such a display.

(She wards off embrace with a cool cheek)

Go on now, get out. Don't worry about me. I had a day to myself, and that's enough. Bobby?

(offering him a cheek to kiss) And don't worry, everything will work out.

BOBBY

Good-bye, Mummy. I really think it will.

FREIDA

If you love her. Be tough on yourself. But if you really love each other—then all the forces of heaven and earth will not keep you apart.

BOBBY

Wow. You astonish me sometimes.

FREIDA

Children! You always think your parents are such fools. As if we've never lived ourselves.

BOBBY

She calls me Robert.

MOUSE

Daddy, I'm leaving now. Good-bye. *(embracing him)* Take care of yourself. *(She is close to tears.)*

GORDON

(warmly) Good-bye Mousie.

MOUSE

Oh Daddy, I love you!

FREIDA

Here, Meredith, take your cards.

MOUSE

Don't you want to cast your fu—

FREIDA

Not I. I see it all before me. *(pushing her toward door)* Goodbye.

BOBBY

Good-bye, Daddy. I'll see you tomorrow.

FREIDA

Good-bye.

(GORDON remains alone in room. The lights drop further. From off-stage the final murmurs of good-bye, the door slammed shut. The car motor and car driving off.)

Re-enter FREIDA. Seats herself and picks up knitting.)

Oh my. What a day.

(They sit in silence, GORDON watching her, eyes luminous with love.)

Poor Bobby. It takes courage to throw away ten years of marriage. It's much easier to let things ride. . . Meredith worries me, though, poor girl. I suppose she'll never fall in love. Something's just missing there. I think she's afraid of rejection, I can't imagine why. How can she always say the wrong thing, though? It's uncanny. She has that hang-dog wistful quality; it makes me want to hit her, and she gets on my nerves so. . . I was rather glad she couldn't stay the night. . . Cat will be all right, though. She's a good mother.

(As this scene proceeds a subtle movement of tiny dancing lights slowly dim and now we see sparks, flickering in the increasing darkness, at first ??? one or two, then many--)

GORDON

What?

FREIDA

I said Catherine's a good mother.

GORDON

(To FREIDA, poignantly) A good mother. And a good wife.

FREIDA

(laughs) And a good daughter, and a good woman. On the other hand I guess it's good, Bobby's leaving Henrietta. She was never right for him. He married when he was too young. . . Of course we haven't met the young woman. She may be awful. Still, Patty Jenkins was a secretary for a time--

*In the shadows, spirit-lights now flicker wildly,
many voices whispering; amplified, echoing*

Time

Time In Time

It's Time

Fassa fassa fassa fassa

FREIDA

But imagine his worrying about what we'd think!

From the shadows comes breathless laughter.

GORDON

I hope he'll be very happy.

FREIDA

I can't imagine why he'd care. He's a grown man, after all. It's time he cut his ties to his parents. WE don't want anything to do with him.

GORDON

I do.

FREIDA

Well, of course I do too. You know what I mean.

*The beads of lights, like fireflies whirl round
The room. GORDON watches with pleasure, wonder, curiosity
It is growing increasingly dark*

I do

I do too

Two. Do.

FREIDA

It's late. Almost time for bed.

*Shadows: Time
Time. . . Time. . .*

FREIDA

Are you ready?

*Shadows:
Ready?*

GORDON

I'm not ready.

(Lights brighten slightly and slowly go dim again)

FREIDA

You're not? It's late. Well, all right. We can sit a few minutes longer.

GORDON

FREIDA?

FREIDA

What is it, Gordon?

GORDON

(struggling) I love you.

FREIDA

I know that, Gordon. Of course. I love you, too. . . Now, hush. It's time for bed.

Shadows:

Hush, Hush.

Hush.

Time now

Fassafassafor

Time

hush

GORDON

Freida?

FREIDA

Yes?

GORDON

(struggling) Thank you.

*(The two are sitting almost in darkness now.
Surrounded by flickering lights.)*

FREIDA

Oh, don't be silly. Now you're getting sentimental in your old age. Well, you've given me plenty too. It's not all one-sided. All in all, I'd say it's been a satisfactory life. Come along. It's getting late.

Shadows

Come. . . long. . .

Late—

Come. . . We wait

(They are almost invisible in the darkness)

GORDON

Yes, I'm coming.

FREIDA

What did you say? Are you ready, Gordon?

Shadows:

Are you ready?

GORDON

(to voices) Yes, I'm ready now.

Blinding light and BLACKOUT