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Paradise Park

by CHARLES L. MEE

Outdoors on a summer evening.
The sound of crickets.
Distant music.

As a spotlight slowly comes up on him,
BENNY is lost, turning around and around.

His clothes are dishevelled; his hair is deranged.
He drove all night to get here.
He looks lost and bewildered and frazzled — but cheerful and expectant.

The Ticket

[In a few moments,
a ticket seller's kiosk appears.

The music is a little louder now.]

TICKET SELLER

Hey!

BENNY

Oh, Hello. Is this where I get a ticket?

TICKET SELLER

What do you want?

BENNY

I'd like to buy a ticket.

TICKET SELLER

Right: what do you want?

BENNY

I want to get in.

TICKET SELLER

You want to get in.

BENNY

To the amusement park.

TICKET SELLER

Listen to me carefully: what do you want?

BENNY

What do I want?

Well,

I guess I want to escape from my daily life, you know,
from the abyss of total meaninglessness
that I know lies just beneath my feet at every moment,
so that, I feel nothing so much as unbearable hopelessness and despair
all the time
at some unconscious level,
if I don't distract myself with something.

TICKET SELLER

Right. What I mean is:
do you want the family pass or the individual?

BENNY

Oh, just the individual.

TICKET SELLER

Ten bucks.

BENNY

Thanks.

TICKET SELLER

Hey! No problem.

[Deafening music.

Benny is engulfed by a projection of the amusement park's midway and, at the same moment, a boat enters.]

The Ship of Fools

[On board are hundreds of people with telescopes, looking for the horizon.

Here is a motley crew

Puppets and false figures add to the population of seven live actors, along with some three-dimensional dummies,

some two-dimensional cardboard cutouts

a rubber/vinyl blow-up doll

some giant puppets, some tiny puppets,

some big stuffed animals

a Balinese shadow puppet:

these are travellers from all over the world,

tourists, natives of "exotic" lands,

moms and dads and kids and cool guys and wookies

and people from long-gone historical eras,

explorers and visionaries and holy men.

Among the others on board are
Ella, Jorge,
and Edgar, the ventriloquist,
who has two dummies with him: Charlie and Mortimer.

Three of the people on board the boat are wearing giant fish heads
like Archimboldo heads.

And these fishheads—Mom, Dad, and their daughter, Darling—
like most of the others on board the boat,
are all looking through telescopes.

The Captain of the ship is a mouse named Vikram,
that is, a young man in a mouse suit
carrying his mouse head in his arm like a helmet,
with a sword strapped around his waist.

And he calls out to Benny through a megaphone
as the music fades.]

VIKRAM, THE MOUSE CAPTAIN

Hello there!

BENNY

Hello!

DARLING, a sixteen year old girl
Stranger! Stranger on the port side!

VIKRAM

Put down the gangplank if you please
and let this young fellow come on board!

[and, while Darling starts to put the gangplank in place,
with the help of Mom and Dad,
the captain and Benny continue to speak to one another]

Going our way?

BENNY

Well, I don't know.

Which way are you going?

VIKRAM

That's just the thing.
We're not quite sure.
We seem to be a little lost.

BENNY [smiling]

Lost!
Well. Never mind.
I have a map.
[taking out his map]
There must be a place that says You Are Here.

CHARLIE, THE VENTRILOQUIST EDGAR'S DUMMY

Now here's a young fellow
who seems to have sawdust for a brain.

EDGAR, THE VENTRILOQUIST

Really?
Why do you say that?

CHARLIE

Well, he seems incapable of engaging in any form of ratiocination.

EDGAR

Ratiocination.
There's a big word.

CHARLIE

Yes, it is.

EDGAR

Wherever did you hear a word like that?

CHARLIE

Well, I don't know.

EDGAR

No.

CHARLIE

I don't think I ever heard it before.

EDGAR

I see.

CHARLIE

I just opened my mouth and out it popped.

EDGAR

It just came out.

CHARLIE

Just popped right out.

EDGAR

I wonder where it came from.

CHARLIE

So do I.

EDGAR

And yet you think *he* is the fellow with sawdust for a brain.

CHARLIE

Yes, I do.

And I can prove it.

EDGAR

Indeed?

CHARLIE

Watch this.

Excuse me.

But, where are you now?

[Benny looks around]

BENNY

Well, I don't know....
I may be a little bit
disoriented.

CHARLIE [to Edgar]
Well, there you are.

VIKRAM [politely to Benny]
We've all got maps and charts and compasses and sextants.
We still don't know quite where we are.

MORTON, Darling's dad
I think it's pretty goddam clear
they've planned it here so you get lost.

NANCY, Darling's mom
Oh, Morton!

MORTON
You can oh, Morton me all you like,
nonetheless, it seems to me
the way they have things arranged,
it's like a roach motel.

DARLING
Hello!
Are we letting down the gangplank or not?

VIKRAM
Sorry. Sorry.
Let down the gangplank.

MORTON
Forget the gangplank.
What good is he to us?
He doesn't know which way he's going either!

DARLING
Pull up the gangplank!

NANCY

Cast off amidships!

MORTON

Hoist the mainsail!

ELLA

Wait! Stop!

[silence]

Let him come aboard!

Let down the gangplank.

Hi, stranger. Can I give you a hand?

BENNY

Oh....Well....

Now that you mention it....

[she comes down the gangplank,
one hand outstretched toward him]

BENNY

Hello.

ELLA

Hi.

BENNY

Oh.

I guess,

I guess

you must be from the midwest, too.

ELLA

Why do you say that?

BENNY

Because of the way you say,
hi.

ELLA

Oh, well, yes. Yes, I am.
From Iowa.

BENNY

Iowa.
I've been to Iowa.
I really liked it—
all the:
space.

ELLA

Right.

BENNY

And all the:
landscape.

ELLA

Right.
The line of the distant horizon.

BENNY

Right.
And so you came here....

ELLA

On vacation.

BENNY

On vacation. Yes.
Yes. So did I.
What brought you here?

ELLA

I thought I'd come for a weekend
because it sounded like fun
and I like a little escape from my routine like anyone else.

BENNY

When did you get here?

ELLA

Two weeks ago.

BENNY

Two weeks! What a great escape!

JORGE

I've been here two months.

VIKRAM

I've been here three years and forty seven days.

BENNY

Three years and forty seven days!
That must be a record.

NANCY

We've been here ten years, three months, and two days.

BENNY

Ten years, three months, and two days!

NANCY

We brought Darling when she was just a little girl
and now, as you can see,
she's almost a grownup.

[Darling is sixteen.]

BENNY

What?

DARLING
I like it here.

BENNY
Ten years?

MORTON
Okay, shall we be moving along?

VIKRAM
Alright, people,
if you will just settle down on the boat
we can be on our way.

MORTON
So you keep saying
and yet you have no idea which way you're going.

NANCY
Seems to me he's going the wrong way.

MORTON
Well, I think that's obvious.

NANCY
That's exactly why I'm saying it.

DARLING
I like it here.

VIKRAM
Is everyone ready to go?
People?

NANCY
The thing is:
I think we should go back to where we were
because, if you think about it,
the thing is, right now, we are in the present,

and before we were in the present,
we were in the past
so if we want to get oriented
we should go back to the past!

MORTON

Or, if you don't want to be here,
but you want to go someplace else,
we should go into the future.

NANCY

What?

MORTON

Because where we are, we are in the present,
and if we want to get past where we are,
that would be the future.

VIKRAM

Are we ready, people?
Here we go.

[and, as they start out,
everyone is arguing about where to go]

NANCY

Futureworld.
What you're saying is:
We could go to futureworld.

MORTON

Exactly.

JORGE

Or,
just any civilized place at all would be just fine
if we could just get out of this place
because this is like
nowhere

CHARLIE
This is like
Limboland.

JORGE
And it wouldn't hurt just to get back to civilization

MORTON
where you can sit down at a dinner table and watch TV

NANCY
like CivilizationWorld.

CHARLIE
I say, we should go to Londonland in Englandland
that's what I would call The Civilized World.

Cotton Candy

[As the others all sail away on the boat,
Darling, who got off when we weren't noticing,
is left standing behind
eating cotton candy.

We hear a banjo playing furiously,
as the projections behind Darling show a medley
of ten thousand amusement park rides and adventures
that whirl through at great speed:
shooting galleries and ferris wheels
and villages and cowboy sets, western towns and posses
and small town pharmacies and soda fountains and barber shops
and outer space and paddlewheel steamers and Las Vegas
and cotton candy and ice cream and hot dogs and baseball—

while Darling does a performance piece with cotton candy.]

The Roller Coaster

[While Darling continues with the cotton candy
Nancy enters as
a film of a roller coaster is projected.

Nancy stands in front of the roller coaster film
her arms in the air above her head
and screams over and over again.

Note:

Throughout the piece,
as one scene nears its end,
the actors for the following scene can enter
so that the scenes are continuous, or even overlapping.]

Balloon Head

[Morton comes out, with a plain wooden chair.
He sits in the chair
opens his mouth.

A country western song.

Nancy squirts a steady stream of water into his mouth
with a power squirt gun.
A balloon inflates out of the top of Morton's head
until it explodes.

Then Morton and Nancy dance.]

The Open Air

[A projection of the Grand Canyon
fills the back and side walls.

Edgar enters with Mortimer and Charlie.]

MORTIMER [THE VENTRILOQUIST EDGAR'S OTHER DUMMY]

Well, tsk, I have to say:

here we are in the very middle of the natural world itself.

EDGAR

Yes.

MORTIMER

And yet, to tell the truth, this doesn't seem like Mother Nature to me.

EDGAR

Well, I expect this is a new attraction.

MORTIMER

A new attraction, I see.

EDGAR

Because it's not enough these days to have ferris wheels
and tilt-a-whirls and dart games.

MORTIMER

No.

EDGAR

No. These days people want all sorts of new and different things.

MORTIMER

Well, it's a rich country.

EDGAR

Yes, it is.

MORTIMER

In the olden days, I expect, folks had to make do
with getting drunk on Saturday night
and going to church on Sunday.

EDGAR

Yes.

MORTIMER

Or running amok and shooting the chickens.

EDGAR

Yes, indeed.

MORTIMER

Now people want more.

EDGAR

Among other things, it seems, they want to get back to nature.

MORTIMER

The great outdoors.

EDGAR

The open air.

MORTIMER

The earth itself.

EDGAR

Well, it's a lovely place.

CHARLIE

Lovely. You call this lovely.

This is a total no man's land.

EDGAR

Well, yes, it is.

But, you see,

here you have the open air

the companionship of the animals in their natural homes

the pleasure of being unencumbered by the fashions of the world

free to follow your own thoughts and impulses,

not buffeted by all the demands for compromise

that wear away at you constantly in society.

Here you have the pleasures of the hermit in his cave,
the monk in the monastery,
the pleasures of the cloister,
the cloister garden.

CHARLIE

Right.
Whereas back home you would have make do with
a little nap in a soft bed.

EDGAR

Still, there is nothing quite like the wilds
where you have the pleasure of letting in the universe to your soul.
the pleasure of being answerable to no other force but nature.

CHARLIE

Whereas
back home
you would have to settle
for a glass of sherry in front of the fire.

EDGAR

And yet
even for a person like yourself
who likes a little civilized comfort
here you have
the meteors in the night sky
the wild quince
the fresh pomegranate
pebbles
moss
hail
hummingbirds and their nests
the sighing of the night wind
the scent of the violet

CHARLIE

Frankly I wouldn't mind going back
to some of the other places we went on our last trip.

EDGAR

Is that right?

CHARLIE

I myself found nothing wrong with Teatimeland
and their little crumpets and marmalade pots and whatnot
that was not a bad place to be.

MORTIMER

Or Trigger's Happy Trails.

CHARLIE

Or Tuscanyworld
where the fountains brimmed with Chianti
and one could lie back
and hear the locals reciting Dante over lunch
and singing their arias from Verdi in the late afternoon

MORTIMER

Or Tom Sawyer's Swap Shop.

CHARLIE

Or the beach party in Hamptonland
where one could simply escape into a world of celebrities
hobnobbing with Oprah and Calvin
and feeling, after all, a little special oneself
transcending the life of democratic anonymity.

MORTIMER

Or Hansel and Gretel's House of Cookies.

CHARLIE

Or Trader's Paradise
where one could hedge and arbitrage
send the Thai bhat into freefall
and have some sense of the powers and possibilities
that come from completely unlimited
and irresponsible Wealth.
That's what I call a real escape.

MORTIMER

Or Rip Van Winkle's Napping Nook.

CHARLIE

I get a little tired of Rip Van Winkle
if you want to know the truth.

There comes a time
when that sort of thing rings a bit false if you ask me.

EDGAR

A bit false?

CHARLIE

One is not entirely insensitive, you know,
to the fact that some of these fantasies
deny the brutal forces of the real world
the politics and economics
the sheer muck and filth of life
the seething animal nature of the human species itself
the very things that have made these fantasies possible
the substructure if you will that sustains these dreams—
that these fantasies finally cease to satisfy
because one cannot escape the feeling
that something really immense is missing from the picture,
which is to say the underpinning of human suffering
and power politics.
And once one cannot escape the feeling of the falseness
the fantasy loses its power to please.

EDGAR

Indeed.

And yet this never happens to you in Hamptonland.

CHARLIE

Well, no, it doesn't.

EDGAR

Isn't that odd?

CHARLIE

Well, it may seem odd to you.

EDGAR

Yes, in fact, it does.

CHARLIE

Whereas, to those who were born to it,
it seems quite natural.

EDGAR

I see.

CHARLIE

To one who is accustomed to these sorts of things,
it feels completely comfortable.
Hamptonland, you see, is civilization.
And civilization is, by its very nature,
unhinged.

EDGAR

Indeed.

CHARLIE

Whereas
here in Wildernessland
or Cherry Groveworld
or wherever this godforsaken place is
one can't escape the feeling finally
that what is going on is a certain faux Nature.
A deceitful, lying sort of thing.
Totally bogus and ersatz.
Which makes me feel even more intensely
that I'm going to miss
my afternoon cup of
apricot tea
or, it may be, this would be the afternoon for mango tea,

or black mint, or raspberry,
not to mention the odd sweet
in the fading afternoon light near the hearth

EDGAR

Well, I tell you what.
Why don't you come with me
and we will find some sticks to rub together
to make a fire here on God's own hearth.

CHARLIE

God's own hearth,
will you listen to him,
and not a bit of Irish blood in him either.

EDGAR

Come along, Charlie.
I think you're going to like this.

[as they leave]

CHARLIE

Do I have a choice?

EDGAR

I think you're going to find this to your taste.

CHARLIE

Do I have a free will here?
Help!
I'm a prisoner in someone else's imagination!

EDGAR

That's enough now.

CHARLIE

Help!
Help!

EDGAR

That's enough, Charlie.

Esther Williams

[A bar slides into place,
Vikram, still in his mouse suit, at one end,
Jorge at the other.]

While they speak, in the glass wall behind them,
Esther Williams does an underwater ballet.]

JORGE

I thought:
I'm from Arkansas
and things are pretty normal in Arkansas.

VIKRAM

Right.

JORGE

And so I thought I'd just go to New York
because all the people there are, you know,
different.

VIKRAM

Yes.

JORGE

And on the way, I stopped off here for a visit
and I thought, well:
this is special.

VIKRAM

For sure.

JORGE

All the people here—
it seems to me they're just
unique.

VIKRAM

Unique. Yes.

JORGE

Although, it turns out,
even *they* are not so welcoming
to someone *they* think is odd.

VIKRAM

No.

JORGE

And odd.
Have you noticed what they think is *not* odd?
Like Donald Duck.

VIKRAM

Like the Swiss Family Robinson.

JORGE

You think: vacation.
And then you think: oh! postcards!
I miss postcards.
You know.

VIKRAM

Postcards.

JORGE

Postcards are unique.
And no one sends them any more.
And I often wonder: why not?
Has someone taken a moral position?

VIKRAM

I know what you mean.

JORGE

What I like about a postcard is
with a postcard
you never can tell
which is the front
and which is the back.

VIKRAM

No.

JORGE

With a novel or a book
you always come to the end,
but you can just keep reading or writing one postcard after another
and never come to the end.

VIKRAM

Right.

JORGE

Each one unique—and never an end.

VIKRAM

Right.

JORGE

This is a kind of pleasure we don't know any more.
And when I read a book
— which is a more sort of sustained adventure—
I get very involved in the words, but I don't know what's going on.

VIKRAM

Unh-hunh.

JORGE

You'll notice how—when you begin a sentence—
all the words depend on each other.

It's like when you move your arms.

[watching the gesture as he makes it]

You can't get from here to there without going in between.

VIKRAM

No.

JORGE

And you might take away one word,
and then everything you say is nonsense.

This is linguistics in our time,
and everything depends on it.

You define something in a certain way
and poof there you are.

And I always think:

is that entirely necessary?

VIKRAM

Exactly.

JORGE

The first time I went into this house of the nieces of Louis XVI in Paris, there
were eight of us for lunch.

And we sat in that dining room with the silver,
all from Catherine the Great,
and we had a footman behind each chair.

And in the salon I saw,
embroidered on the brocade of the Louis XVI chairs
these initials "MA";

and I said, "Oh, why do they say 'MA'?"

And this guy Arturo was so happy I'd asked
because then he could tell me that it was Marie Antoinette's crest.

So I was a great favorite with everyone immediately—
not because I was so naive
but just because I'd say whatever came into my mind.

VIKRAM

Yes.

I know just what you mean.

The Photo Booth

[Nancy and Darling enter.

Nancy wears a swimming suit,
carries a towel,
maybe has on a bathrobe.

She goes to the hot dog stand.

While she talks, she makes herself a hot dog
with all the trimmings.

Darling, meanwhile, sits in a photo booth,
taking pictures of herself.

As the flash goes off for each one,
her picture is projected on the back wall,
morphed so that her portrait appears in famous American photographs,
celebrity scenes and wacky scenes (a young blonde in a bed filled with owls,
bobcats, butterflies, falcons, puppies), the bodies of woman body builders, a
party on Oscar Night, and other American scenes]

NANCY

We think we've given Darling a pretty good life here
although we're not sure she's getting the best education.

[flash: Darling morphed]

We always thought it was best for Darling
bringing her here to take her mind off her big sister Dee Dee
which we had to do
because frankly

[flash: Darling morphed]

Dee Dee was a sweet child and all
and we truly loved her
but when she just walked right out of
the Hospital for Hopeless Psychiatric Cases
and showed up back home on the doorstep with her suitcase
well as Morton said, we just didn't have a choice.

[flash: Darling morphed]

Like Morton says:
Frankly there is a thing called normal.
I didn't make it up.
I might not like to be normal myself
but I *have* to be normal, like it or not.

[flash: Darling morphed]

So he told Dee Dee to march right back there
And I think he was right to put her on the train by herself
and let her get back to the hospital on her own
because I think that's how people eventually learn
to have a little self-reliance

[flash: Darling morphed]

Or not.

[flash: Darling morphed]

Or not.
If she couldn't find her way
then, you know,
we're going to die one day ourselves
we can't take care of her forever
some day she's going to have to make it on her own
and it may as well be sooner as later
which is why we brought Darling here
because the whole thing upset her a little bit.

[flash: Darling morphed]

And now we see we made the sort of mistake
a person never recovers from.
The sort of thing that's unforgiveable.
And where we're living now
it's a bottomless pit.

[flash: Darling morphed.

Nancy splurts ketchup all down her front.]

Fred's Polynesian Dive Shop

[Vikram, still in his mouse suit, stands in front of the dive shop,
towels in one hand, snorkels in the other.]

VIKRAM

Me, I wasn't coming for a holiday.
What I meant to escape was poverty.
So I got this job as a guide
because people
it seems they don't know how to make their own way anywhere
needing someone always to be running things for them
telling them what to do next, where to go, how to like it, what to think
when to eat when to laugh
but now this has gotten to be too much for me
everyone saying let's go here let's go there I don't like this
let's go back where are we now?
I'm asking for a modest retirement package, that's all
let someone else do the daily polling, the market testing
the focus groups
I could live my own life!
It's no pleasure for me, frankly,
not allowed ever to take this mouse costume off
so that if I want to go to the bathroom
I just have to shit in my pants and wear them all day.
And this is not a good time for me!

Civilization

[A video is projected of fashion models
coming smartly down the runway toward the audience.]

MORTIMER

I don't like the story about the fellow who is pooping in his pants.

EDGAR

No. Well, I don't blame you.

That's quite a business.

MORTIMER

Yes, it is.

EDGAR

Normally, you would think,
people are trying to escape feces.

MORTIMER

Yes.

EDGAR

Not store them up in their trousers.

MORTIMER

No.

EDGAR

Trying to escape the whole animal way of life
Because I suppose if we are reminded that we, too, are animals
really real animals that perform natural acts

MORTIMER

Like pooping.

EDGAR

Well, yes, like pooping, for example.

Then we are reminded that we are mortal creatures, too,
just like a monkey

MORTIMER

Or a dog.

EDGAR

Right.

MORTIMER

Or a moose.

EDGAR

Right.

MORTIMER

Or a horny toad.

EDGAR

All right. That's enough.

MORTIMER

I didn't start it.

EDGAR

No.

MORTIMER

All this talk about feces

EDGAR

Yes.

MORTIMER

I find it just a smidge embarrassing myself.

EDGAR

Well, it may be you find it embarrassing
because you feel the need to distance yourself from it

MORTIMER

Yup, well, I think I do.

EDGAR

Which is to say probably you feel the need to deny mortality
to deny death itself.

[silence]

I say, to deny death itself.

MORTIMER

Yup. Well....That could be it.

EDGAR

And the fear that goes with that,
that, after death, there is nothing.

MORTIMER

Oh, my, well, that's a shame.

EDGAR

You know, some people think there is no heaven.

MORTIMER

My goodness.

EDGAR

They think
that heaven might be just a story people make up
so they can avoid facing the terrible truth.

MORTIMER

Yes, indeed.

EDGAR

That the truth is:
the dead are like bats fluttering in a cave
or even worse.

MORTIMER

Oh, my.

EDGAR

That after life, we don't even fall into hell.
We fall into nothing.

MORTIMER

Oh, dear.

EDGAR

And that is why human beings are the only animals
that are always trying to escape their natural condition
because it is unbearable.
And everything we do,
all the stories we tell one another
all the buildings we build
all the clothes we wear
all of civilization
is just a single great effort to escape.

[silence]

Probably that's what you think yourself.

MORTIMER

Well. Yup. Probably I do.
But I don't like it.

EDGAR

No.

MORTIMER

No.

EDGAR

What are you going to do about it?

MORTIMER

All this questioning is a bit of a trial, you know.

EDGAR

I'm sorry.

MORTIMER

A person doesn't like to be grilled.

EDGAR

No.

MORTIMER

A person would rather be fried or poached.

EDGAR

I see.

MORTIMER

Or boiled.

if you happened to have a little something to drink.

EDGAR

We could look for something to drink.

MORTIMER

That's very thoughtful of you.

EDGAR

Not at all.

[as they leave]

MORTIMER

No, it's very kind.

EDGAR

I'm happy to do it.

MORTIMER

Exceptionally considerate of you.

EDGAR

Thank you for saying so.

The Dance Hall

[Ella enters to wild, exuberant music.

Benny enters and tries, in vain, to keep up with her.

Darling enters and joins Ella dancing
and does keep up with her
and they enjoy a kind of flirtation
or mutual joy in the dance.

Benny dances like a white man.

Jorge enters, takes off his shirt,
laces his feet into moon boots
and does a wild swaying back and forth
or some similar Dionysian performance event
if the actor has his own specialty.

Vikram enters and tries to dance with Ella.
She dances with him for a time and then blows him off.

Nancy enters and dances with Vikram.

Morton enters and watches Nancy dance with Vikram
and then throws beer bottles against the wall
over and over and over.

Now different bystanders try to enter the dance with various partners,
are thrown out of the dance,
try to get back in, etc.

Everyone leaves
until only Nancy is left dancing,
and Morton is left throwing beer bottles.

Nancy stops,
looks around.]

NANCY
Morton.

Morton.

[he stops throwing beer bottles]

Where is Darling?

[he looks around]

MORTON
She was with you.

NANCY
No. She was with you.

MORTON
She doesn't like to be with me.
I thought she was with you.

NANCY
Are you saying
you can't keep track of her for a minute while I do something?

MORTON
I didn't see her go.

NANCY

Were you watching?

Were you paying the least attention?

MORTON

I didn't see her....

NANCY

Are you saying now you've lost another daughter?

MORTON

She's sixteen, you know.

NANCY

Well,

yes!

Okay, Morton.

You go that way.

I'll go this way.

[She leaves one way.

After a moment, he goes out the other way.]

The Woods

[Ella and Benny are left in the woods.]

ELLA

Whose woods are these?

BENNY

I don't know.

So.

I guess we're lost in the woods together.

ELLA

I've never been lost in the woods.

BENNY

Neither have I.

ELLA

I'm glad I'm not alone.

BENNY

So am I.

I like nature,
but I'm a little bit afraid of it.

ELLA

Well, sure.

BENNY

Of the dark parts especially.
I'd like nature better if it were better lit.
I think everyone is, you know,
basically afraid of the dark.
Even amoebas.
I mean, every life form,
you take them out of the light
and they begin to feel some anxiety.
I do.

ELLA

I do.

BENNY

Light, basically, is how you orient yourself
and a person without a sense of orientation
I mean, if you don't know where you are
and where you're going
and about where you are on the line of the place where you are
and the destination where you're going
a person begins to freak out.
I think that's why
in jazz
they always play the melody at the top

and then
once you know the tune
you think: right, let them riff
because I know where I am
and I know that, in the end,
they're going to come back to the melody
You know what I mean?

ELLA

Well.

Sure.

BENNY

It's like
a love story
you can just get lost in a love story because
we know
whatever happens along the way
we might get confused or we might get lost
or it's on again off again
and it goes down some blind alley
but that's how real life is
that's how it really is to be in love
sometimes you never know
sometimes it seems like it is just drifting
or it becomes hopeless
but it doesn't matter
because in the end
with a love story
you know
either they are going to get together
or they're not.

ELLA

Right.

[silence]

Do you think
you could ever live in the woods?

BENNY
You mean, forever?

ELLA
Well, for a long time.
Say, like five years.

[silence]

BENNY
Five years.

[silence]

With you?

[silence]

ELLA
Oh.
Oh.
Okay.
With me.

[silence]

BENNY
Yes.

[silence]

ELLA
Oh.

BENNY

I've thought about it before
living in the country
because that would be beautiful
and I've always found it frightening
cut off from the world
as it seems to me
all alone
and
with nothing to do
but wait to get to be eighty years old
or ninety
and die.

You know, you might have thought you were going to be a doctor
or go to the moon
or just have a nice civil service job
a career and all the ordinary stuff of life
not throw it away on a great sort of romantic gamble
like you think
oh

I'd like to go to the country for the weekend
but to just fling myself out into the universe
and drift among the stars
and have this be my destiny
take the gamble that this would be a meaningful life
and one you would really like forever
the only life you have.

I mean, not that I'm a morbid person
but, you know, it seems to me,
if you're out there alone
maybe with a farm and fields and trees
and the night sky, the stars
you start to think pretty quickly
how you're all alone
and you just have your life on earth
and then it's over
and it hasn't been much more than a wink
in the life of the stars
and you haven't done anything

that you think is worth an entire life on earth
so I've always felt a lot safer living in the city
where you can't see the stars at night.

ELLA

Unh-hunh.

BENNY

There you have your friends and things to do
you get all caught up
and it's fun
I'm not against having fun
what I mean is
going to movies, having dinner, hanging out
you can forget entirely that you're a mortal person
it seems: this could go on forever
until, I suppose, you meet someone, and you think:

[silence]

I could live with you forever in the woods.
And that would be a life.

[silence.

She starts to back away from him.]

Or not, you know. Or not.

I didn't mean to come on so strong.

I just start talking, and I don't know when to stop.

ELLA

Stop.

BENNY

Right.

ELLA

Good.

Maybe we could just take a walk in the woods.

BENNY

Right. Good.

Good idea.

Let's do that.

ELLA

Shh.

BENNY

Right.

Quiet

like deer.

[They turn and walk into the woods.

Morton crosses.]

MORTON

Darling! Darling!

[and does the old vaudeville bit
of tripping over his own feet,

returning to see what he tripped over,

setting out again,
again tripping,

returning to see what tripped him,
seeing something on the ground,
tracking it, as though it were a string—
maybe this is the *plotline*?!—

to the wings,
and there getting his foot stuck in the wings,
so that he is gradually sucked off stage feet first.]

The Beach

[A beautiful beach.
Blue sky, endless sand.
Lots of bright beach umbrellas.

Jorge enters
wearing a frilly shirt, lace cuffs, silk knee breeches
and a powdered white wig.]

JORGE
Damn!
Oh,
damn!
Look what you've done, you ox!

[He puts down his suitcase
as he checks his stocking.

Darling enters from the opposite side.
She is dressed in black leather
or whatever is the latest boots and chains fashion.]

DARLING
Excuse me.

JORGE
I've gotten a run in my stocking.
Goddammit.
These were brand new stockings
and I don't know where I'll ever get another pair.

DARLING
I'm sorry.

JORGE

They're from Londonland.

DARLING

Oh.

God, I'd like to go to Londonland.

I just had a makeover, but I've never been to Londonland.

JORGE

Oh, yes. Well.

And the countryside is nice, too.

I've just spent the weekend with the Duchess of Devonshire.

DARLING

You have?

Oh, God, I love Devonshire.

I've never been to Devonshire.

JORGE

It's a great attraction, you know.

If you want a real getaway,

Devonshire is the place!

In Devonshire, the silverware is gold!

DARLING

I've never been to Aspen even

or even to Aruba.

JORGE

In Devonshire, in the mornings,

everyone would get up

at eleven o'clock or noon

and they would lie around in their boudoirs

drinking Mexican chocolate or Egyptian coffee

or hot chocolate with crushed carnations.

Because, what they always said was
they liked to drink their hot drinks
in enclosed places
at private moments.

DARLING

Oh.

JORGE

On some days they would eat nothing but vegetables,
on other days nothing but fruit,
on others nothing but sweet dishes made with honey,
and sometimes dishes all made from milk.

DARLING

Milk and honey.

JORGE

Right.
And for ordinary days,
they would dine on
peacocks and armadillos,
and slowly plumped up quail,
and eggs fried in the fat of garden warblers.

DARLING

Oh.

JORGE

And dolphins' brains
which, it seemed to me, are the very best of all possible brains
cooked with vanilla
and served with
tulips and jasmynes
and swallows' nests from India.

DARLING

Oh.

JORGE

And every dish was served with flowers in season,
with ice and white jam and white jellies
with citrus-flavored chocolate and colored pastilles,

DARLING

Dear God.

JORGE

with powders and biscuits, petits fours and compotes,
rose and violet royal conserves,
icings and frostings and candied fruit,
with glace sugar, almond paste

DARLING

Not almond paste, too,
oh god, don't say that.
I have such a problem cutting down on sweets.

JORGE

and sugared almonds, too,
and moussses and meringues
pignoccate, iced buns, iced and pearled ring-shaped cakes

DARLING

Oh no, god, no.

JORGE

snow-white milk drinks flavored with violets
candied flowers, iced hyacinths and daffodils
with daffodil crushed-ice drinks

DARLING

Oh.

JORGE

chocolate sorbet
embellished with vanilla, orange zest and drops of distilled jasmine,

transformed into a holy and noble elixir of sweet life
as it slipped down one's throat

DARLING

Oh, yes.

JORGE

or snow-chilled wine

oh, blessed and drinkable eternity

DARLING

Yes.

JORGE

and, after dinner, lying about recuperating,
they would blow hot tobacco smoke into their anuses by means of a tube.
It was the very pinnacle of civilization!

DARLING

Oh, god, I would so love
to go to Devonshire.

Square Dance

[A simple, white American church is projected.

Morton, as a square dance caller, steps out and sings:]

Four ladies to the center and back to the bar
four gents center with a right hand star
opposite ladies for an aleman thar
back up boys but not too far
throw in the clutch, put 'er in low
it's twice around that ring you go
on to the next for a do pass-o
and bring her on home as fast as you go
down in Arkansas on my knees

I thought I heard a chicken sneeze
I looked around here's what I saw
a bald headed maid with a pretty little taw
too old, too old
I'm too old to cut the mustard any more
etc.

[He claps his hands in rhythm to the music,
and the music cuts out into ecstatic mode—
and he sings the succeeding verses—
as square dancers,
Jorge and Darling,
Benny and Ella,
Vikram and Nancy,
and Edgar and Charlie and Mortimer
come out and do flat out clog-stomping
so that they seem to float in the air
and only occasionally it seems the heel of a boot stomps the floor
as they float in ecstasy.

Couple by couple, they dance out.

Nancy and Morton are left behind.]

NANCY
So, did you see Darling?

MORTON
Darling?

NANCY
You didn't see she was here?

MORTON
You know, I was busy calling the square dance.

NANCY
So you didn't speak to her?

MORTON

No.

NANCY

You just let her go off again on her own?

MORTON

Are you saying you saw her?

NANCY

Of course I saw her!

MORTON

And you didn't speak to her?

NANCY

What do you mean?

MORTON

You actually saw her and you didn't speak to her?

NANCY

I thought she was with you.

MORTON [suddenly yelling at the top of his lungs]

She wasn't with me.

NANCY

It's alright.

Calm down, Morton.

It's alright.

Le Bistrot

[Jorge, as the perfect French waiter,
wheels out a table with white linen table cloth,
arranges the crystal wine glasses and silverware on the table
as two others bring out French cafe chairs.]

Nancy and Morton
enter the restaurant
Nancy a few steps ahead of Morton.

Morton starts to help Nancy with her chair
and she pushes him out of the way.

He throws her to the ground.
She gets up.

Jorge stands back at attention.

He throws her to the ground again.
She gets up.

He throws her to the ground again.
She gets up—and jumps on him and knocks him to the ground.

As we hear a soprano sing an operatic aria,
Nancy and Morton continue to knock and throw one another to the ground,
finally throwing one another to the ground on their way out.

Jorge suavely removes the table.
Two others remove the chairs.]

Starry Night

[A projection of outer space, a skyful of stars.

Ella enters briskly, followed by Benny.]

ELLA
It's too late for that, Benny.
The point is, you came on way too strong.
That's not the sort of thing you can take back now.
The damage has been done.
That's why people, when people play bridge,
they lead with the three of clubs,

they feel it out
and then they can build from there.
But when you throw down the ace of spades,
what is it?
You're going for a grand slam or what?

BENNY

I apologize, Ella.
I know I came on too strong,
but that's not the sort of person I am really.
I'm really a kind of laid back sensitive kind of guy
who really believes in giving other people their space
and respecting their thing
but don't forget
you're the one who said
did I ever think I could live in the woods
and I said with you
and you said yes
which sort of inflamed me.

[silence]

ELLA

I've been thinking of us being together
and what I thought was
the mental picture that came to mind was
I walked into Dean and Deluca
and I saw that the man in front of me was sweating and
twitching
and just then all of the automatic doors slid shut
and the lights started blinking.
The man was shooting at the produce
and screaming instructions in Arabic which no one understood.
So I started interpreting for him
because I could tell what he must have meant.
And everyone got down on the floor on their stomachs
and crawled toward the corners.

They were sleeping in the stairwells and the hallways and

on the bathroom floors.
People started to get sick.
Each night 10 or 15 of the sick old men
were taken to the spare bedroom
and told to lie down in a clump.
The men with machine guns said
that they would fire one bullet per person into the clump
and if anyone managed to live they could live.
But when they opened fire
they just kept on shooting until everyone was hit.
Then the clumps of gold diaphanous fabric on the floor
started moving
and the hookers came out from underneath.
They were all dressed in pink silk genie outfits
and wore long, brown wigs and pink eye make up
and black eyeliner.
They all started to sing
and they had to keep singing
until all of the old men died
and then the men with machine guns shot them too.

You came in and led me to the bathroom.
You sat me down on the toilet and gave me 10 punchlines
and told me to come up with the jokes that went with them.
I matched them up correctly
and then you added in some homeopathic remedies
where you said the herb
and I had to say what it cured.

I ran through the back wall into the garden
where all of my theatre friends were having a lingerie dinner party.

Everyone was dressed in long silk gowns.

The tables were covered with silk pajamas and robes sewn together.

They were using silk panties as napkins.

And then it started raining

and everyone ran around grabbing the silk and disappearing.
So Tessa and I ran for the elevator
but when the doors closed we saw the elevator rolling away
and we were on an Amish schoolbus.
All of the kids and teachers were smiling at us and clapping.

The driver let me off at the elephant trainer's
and he said he would take me back on his elephant.

He went into the tree house and came out with a plate of three sausages.
He said that while he meditated over the sausages,
one had curled up
which meant there was violence in my life.
I told him about Dean and Deluca.
He said that was probably it but he still couldn't take me.

So, the elephant said he would take me on his own,
without the trainer.
So I climbed up on his back
and he started walking
and just a few steps down the road
he turned his head around and wrapped his trunk around my waist
and said that he had fallen in love with me
and he wouldn't ever let go.

What do you think that means?

[silence;

after a moment, she turns and runs out.]

The Beach House

[In the living room of a Hamptons beach house,
all white furniture.]

JORGE

Do you drink champagne?

DARLING

Champagne?

Oh, yes, Champagne, yes I do.

[Jorge opens his suitcase out into a little folding table
with a white linen table cloth
a bottle and a glass and a folded napkin
as they continue to talk.]

JORGE

Let me give you a little something
that was given to me by the Duchess of Devonshire,
who sat to my left at dinner one evening
and said to me,

[as he opens the bottle]

if you want to have some idea of love
look at the sparrows in your garden
contemplate the bull when he is presented to your heifer
look at this proud horse
whom two of his grooms lead to the peaceful mare
who awaits him and who turns aside her tail to receive him....

DARLING

She said this to you?

[as Jorge pours a glass of champagne]

JORGE

see his eyes sparkle,
listen to his neighing
contemplate these erect ears
this mouth that opens with little convulsions....

[as he pours the champagne,
he decides he needs the napkin lying on the table;

he lets go of the glass with his left hand to reach for the napkins—
and the glass remains suspended in mid air as he pours the wine]

DARLING

Oh! Oh! Watch out!

JORGE [calmly]

What's that?

DARLING

Oh....I thought....

I thought you were going to drop the glass.

JORGE [casually]

Oh.

This is the way they pour wine in England.

DARLING

They do?

[Jorge hands the glass to Darling]

JORGE

So, the Duchess of Devonshire said....

[interrupting himself]

Would you like an omelette?

DARLING

She asked if you would like an omelette?

JORGE

No, I'm asking you: would you like an omelette?

DARLING

Oh, yes. Yes, I would.

[Jorge takes out a chafing dish, and puts eggs, butter, and flour into it
as he continues to speak]

JORGE

So, the Duchess said
notice this fiery breath of your stallion
the imperious movement with which he springs
onto the object which his nature has destined for him
but do not be envious.

DARLING

No.

JORGE

and reflect on the advantages enjoyed by the human species
who rise above nature in every way.

DARLING

Yes.

JORGE

Not only, unlike the stallion, is your entire body sensitive
not only, unlike the stallion,
do your lips enjoy a voluptuousness that never grows weary
not only are you able, unlike the other animals,
to have sexual intercourse at all times

DARLING

Right.

JORGE

But the very idea of love explodes in your mind
like champagne on your palate
so that you make love not only with your whole body
but also with your imagination

[Jorge takes out of the chafing dish a bouquet of flowers
or two doves
and hands them to Darling]

Oh, it's not an omelette.

I don't know what went wrong.

Perhaps there's not enough light here in the jungle.

[He takes a large handkerchief,
waves it through the air,
puts his hand up inside it,
and takes out a chandelier fully lit.]

DARLING

Good grief. I've never seen anything like it.

JORGE

No.

This is how it is all the time in England.

DARLING

God I'd love to go to England.

JORGE

Well.

Sure.

[He leaves, chandelier in hand.]

Ella's Dream

[Ella comes in and takes the lotus position.
Darling enters and gets into a complete pretzel position.]

DARLING

I guess you like that Benny guy.

ELLA

Oh.

In a way.

He's kind of a twerp.

DARLING

Right.

Funny how sometimes a person doesn't even care.

ELLA

Although, I was telling him what I thought
when I thought of us being together....

DARLING

Right.

ELLA

How I had this vision of all these bad things happening,
people getting shot
horrible things.

But I didn't even tell him the worst part
about how

in the mornings

all of the bodies of the men who had been shot would be gone
but the spare bedroom would be filled
with piles and piles of feces and rotting intestines
that you could smell all through the house.

One of the sick people would volunteer to clean it all up,
which was a way of not being killed.

That was Benny's idea.

He said that as long as it was all cleaned up
before the children got home from school no one would be killed.
But each night more people were taken to the spare bedroom.

All of the women had their clothing taken away and their jewelry.
Everyone wore sweatsuits and sat outside during the days
eating potato chips.

Benny sent word

that he wanted me to join him at the ball
because he knew I still had my mink coat
and I would look rich and beautiful.

I snuck down to the ballroom without anyone seeing me.

When I got to the ball

there were only men with machine guns

walking around smoking.
One woman who used to be a rich snob ran by
holding a white paper tablecloth around her.
She stopped and asked me how I still had my coat.
And that's when I knew I had to run.

DARLING
Are you crazy?

ELLA
No.
DARLING

Is this the kind of thing you think
when you're just thinking?

ELLA
Well. Sure.

DARLING
And you're not afraid you're like really psychotic or something?

ELLA
This is the kind of thing everybody thinks about.

DARLING
They do?

ELLA
Sure.

DARLING
Do you think I have these thoughts, too?

ELLA
Sure.

DARLING
It makes it sort of scary in a way to live with someone else.

ELLA
Right.

DARLING
Or really even to live alone.

ELLA
Right.

The Prom Dress

[Nancy is standing in the middle of an RV campground wearing her prom dress.]

NANCY
I think, really, if I could just get a job
that would be in some way useful,
like, for example, if I worked for a fan magazine
say an entertainment magazine
about movie stars and soap opera actors
and it made a profit of, say, \$400 million a year
and gave maybe \$80 million of that to charity
I would think: this is a useful life to live
whereas the way it is I think I'm a completely useless person.

I'm not the sort of person who blurts things out.

In fact, just the opposite
so much so that
when I went to the emergency room
because I thought I was having a heart attack
the doctor said you're just panicking
from stress
and you could have a stress heart attack
if you don't just let things out a little more and relax.

Sometimes I think nothing is chance
everything is fate
and then other times I think everything is chance.

I wish I'd have been more, I don't know,
stable.
Which I haven't so much been.
And I could have settled down and taken care of Darling
and it wouldn't have seemed
as it seems to me now
that my life has just gone by like a stampede
and left me in the dust.

And then when we were going through the Grand Canyon
and this little boy was vomiting pizza on Morton's feet
which just freaked Morton out
so he stood up in the boat
we all went into the water
I don't know what happened to the little boy
as far as I know he never got back up again to the surface
But partly I was glad I'd lost you Morton.
I mean, I hoped in a way that you hadn't drowned,
but I used to be in love with a man
who didn't love me as much as I loved him
and now I don't love you as much as you love me
and even though I can't bear to leave you
because I know how much that hurts
still, I wasn't hoping you would exactly drown
but, Jesus, Morton,
like everyone else,
sometimes I wish my husband were dead.

And Darling
we took her to see Cats 23 times
and we took her to see Phantom of the Opera 17 times
but even so
you don't know how much you love your children until they're gone.

Boxes

[Jorge enters, steps to a mike and sings a great Spanish ballad or a great Cuban song like those of Ibrahim Ferrer.]

great Cuban ballad lyrics
great Cuban ballad lyrics

[While Jorge sings, Morton enters and starts to dance.

Nancy enters with a large cardboard box and throws it at Morton, knocking him to the ground.

She turns and leaves.

Morton gets up and resumes dancing.

Nancy enters with a large cardboard box and throws it at Morton, knocking him to the ground.

She turns and leaves.

Morton gets up and resumes dancing.

Nancy enters with a large cardboard box and throws it at Morton, knocking him to the ground.

She turns and leaves.

Morton gets up and resumes dancing.

This continues until Morton and Nancy are exhausted.

Cheerleaders

[Vikram comes out with a couple of metal stanchions and a rope to set up a maze-line of the sort used at banks and airports.

Other cast members join him in a line.

A voice speaks to them from a loudspeaker.]

A VOICEOVER (coming from a loudspeaker)
What would you say are the official qualifications for a good cheerleader?

[Vikram looks around to see where the voice is coming from.

Finally, he answers:]

VIKRAM

I would say:

A pleasing personality.

[silence, and then, finally]

VOICEOVER

Okay. Good.

[Silence as everyone thinks.
Vikram turns to the others for help.]

NANCY

A good personal appearance.

VOICEOVER

Right.

[Silence as everyone thinks.]

VIKRAM

Imagination and resourcefulness.

VOICEOVER

Yes.

MORTON

Organizing ability and leadership

VOICEOVER

Okay.

JORGE

Ability and control of the body

VOICEOVER

And?

ELLA

A commanding voice with volume

VOICEOVER

Good.

MORTIMER

The desire to cheer for the team, not for personal glory

VOICEOVER

Anything else?

BENNY

At least average ability, scholastically

VOICEOVER

Right.

DARLING

Willingness to devote time to further the squad

VOICEOVER

One more.

VIKRAM

Character which reflects well upon the school.

VOICEOVER

Right. Good.

[silence]

VIKRAM

Okay.

If I might add:

Suppose Socrates was wrong,
suppose that the modern philosophers are right,
that we have never seen the truth,
and so,
if we ever do happen to see the truth,
we won't recognize it.

And if that's the case,
then, when someone violates the innocent,
when along comes a Hitler
there's nothing anyone can say along the lines of:
this violates some fundamental human nature
this betrays something deep within us.
If we don't know what is deep within us
what is fixed and eternal
what is not contingent on today
then all we have left to say is
whatever may have been true in the past or not we don't know
but this is true today

we need a little kindness to survive
if nothing else
only that
modest enough
no big deal
something more than that?
no problem
that, too would be nice
icing on the cake.

[no response;

the cast disperses]

The Fruit Cake Toss

[A big red barn is projected.

Jorge pushes a catapult on stage
and proceeds to catapult fruit cakes into the wings.]

MORTON
What is this?

JORGE
This.
This is the fruit cake toss.

MORTON
What is that?

JORGE
You see how far you can throw a fruit cake.

MORTON
I can do that.

JORGE
Go ahead.

[the men take turns catapulting fruit cakes into the wings]

MORTON
It used to be
a man got some respect
in his own home if nowhere else.

JORGE
And other places, too.

MORTON
And other places, too.
Now, you don't know.
You can put a foot wrong without even knowing it.

JORGE
You can't smoke anywhere.

MORTON
You can't even say good morning to a woman
without the possibility of lawsuit.

JORGE
Or to a man either sometimes.

[While they continue to talk and toss fruit cakes
they are joined by Benny and then by Vikram
who join them in the fruit cake toss and in the conversation.]

MORTON
Finally, there might be too many laws in this country.

JORGE
Way too many.

VIKRAM

Too many laws.

BENNY

Except for the laws that try to help create social justice.

JORGE

Oh, social justice.

VIKRAM

That's different.

Social justice.

MORTON

Social justice, that's okay,
but regulations those are something else again.

JORGE

Don't talk to me about regulations.

BENNY

Except for some things.

MORTON, JORGE, AND VIKRAM TOGETHER ON TOP OF ONE
ANOTHER

Sure, sure. Clean air. Clean water.

The FDA.

You want to know what drugs you're getting.

Certain regulations

MORTON

Otherwise you want to be free.

VIKRAM

A free man.

JORGE

A free person.

MORTON, VIKRAM, AND JORGE ALL TOGETHER

Otherwise what is the point?

This is America.

What? This is not America?

VIKRAM

A man wants to be all he can be.

BENNY

And a woman too.

JORGE

And a woman, too.

MORTON

Be all she can be.

VIKRAM

Otherwise, why did I come here?

MORTON AND JORGE

Why does anyone come here?

This is why a person would want to be an American!

MORTON

What happened to the American dream?

VIKRAM

The American dream is alive and well!

BENNY

Too much. Too much.

All over the world, it's too much.

JORGE

Too much, he's right.

VIKRAM

Or not enough.

MORTON

Or not enough.

JORGE

It's too much and not enough!

VIKRAM

Utopia!

JORGE

Utopia!

MORTON AND BENNY AND JORGE AND VIKRAM

SHOUTING TOGETHER, TALKING ON TOP OF ONE ANOTHER,
IN A BIG JUMBLE OF WORDS, SOMETIMES TAKING DIFFERENT
LINES, SOMETIMES ALL SAYING THE SAME LINE BUT NOT IN
SYNCH, REPEATING SOME LINES, EACH ACTOR PICKING OUT
WHAT HE WANTS TO SAY BUT JUMPING IN, NOT WAITING HIS
TURN, A BIG TUMULT

I had a dream

I had a dream of a better life

You think: you work for it

you pay your dues

you make your sacrifices

did I hear they changed the rules?

you work like a dog

you're doing the right thing

the thing you think is the right thing

and all of a sudden nobody appreciates it

no one likes it

no one likes *you* any more

they think you're a bad person

even evil

and all that time you thought this was America

where a man could feel good about himself

where you can make your own way

I don't say I'm entitled to anything

I'm not talking about being entitled

you give a little, you get a little

everyone is a winner
everyone's a winner
we are all winners
winners

[exhausted,
they all fall silent]

Pizza

[A projection of a beautiful slow motion film
of wild horses running in Montana.

Bob—a new character we've not seen before,
played by Edgar, doubling unrecognizably—
enters with a pizza box in his hand.]

BOB

And yet, I think, nonetheless,
forgiveness is possible.

MORTON

You do.

BOB

Well, sure.

Really under any circumstances.

Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...

primarily the question is

does man have the power to forgive himself.

And he does.

That's essentially it.

I mean if you forgive yourself,

and you absolve yourself of all, uh,

of all wrongdoing in an incident,

then you're forgiven.

Who cares what other people think, because uh...

MORTON

Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time?
Did you have to think about it?

BOB

Well, no.

Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I,
did I strike upon,
you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain
uh you know
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did.
And uh,

BENNY

I'm sorry, what was that?

BOB

Triple murder.
Sister, husband. Sister, husband,
and a nephew, my nephew.
And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

JORGE

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?
What were the instruments?

BOB

It was a knife.
It was a knife.

JORGE

A knife?

BOB

Yes.

BENNY

So then, the three of them were all...

BOB

Ssssss...

(points to slitting his throat)

like that.

JORGE

So, uh,

do you think that as time goes by,
this episode will just become part of your past,
or has it already...

BOB

It has already become part of my past

.

JORGE

Has already become part of your past.
No sleepless nights? No...

BOB

Oh, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were so many stab wounds in my sister and I said no, that's not true at all, you know. So I think I had a little blackout during the murders, but uh...

[he sits,

making himself at home]

Well, uh, they said there was something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, and I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once. That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime—my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with

the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that.

Who ordered a pizza?

BENNY

Oh.

MORTON

A pizza.

BENNY

I don't think anyone here ordered a pizza.

BOB

Someone ordered a pizza.
I don't go around delivering pizzas
if nobody ordered one.

VIKRAM

I think there's been some mistake.

BOB

I think you are the one who is making a mistake
if you think nobody
is going to pay me for the fucking pizza.
You know: pizza
is not returnable.

JORGE

Right.
I'll pay you for the pizza.

BOB

Plain cheese.

JORGE

Right.
Here.
Keep the change.

BOB [checking the money Jorge has given him]

Right.
Thanks.
Appreciate it.
Which way did I come in?

[the others all look at one another]

JORGE

Over there.
Right out that way.

BOB
Right.
Thanks again.

Dairy Queen

[Jorge and Darling are having an ice cream at a Dairy Queen.]

DARLING
Once I went shopping with my dad.
I just went wild
I thought
oh god,
he's brought me here
this is like a wonderland
he'd never done anything like that for me before
and I just loved everything
this was when I was seven or eight
and I picked out a dress
all sort of like a flower that twirled out when I spun around
and gloves and a purse with little white beads all over it
like tiny pearls
and patent leather shoes of course
that shone like dark mirrors
I was so happy
and my father looked at me
and he said
do you think you can afford all this?

I said what?

He said can you afford all this with the allowance that you have?

I didn't understand.

With all my savings I had, I remember,
exactly sixty-two cents.

So that I had to put everything back
where it had come from.

Because my father was teaching me
the value of money.

JORGE

When I was a kid,
one night after my parents took me to see the movie Cleopatra
I got together with some of my friends.
We were nine years old.
We all wore towels wrapped around our heads.
The kids in the neighborhood were all the slaves and I,
of course, was Cleopatra.
We erected statues in the living room
and I draped myself in the chiffon curtains as an outfit.
And then when I was in the fifth grade
I was looking at all the fashion magazines
I would tweeze my eyebrows,
and dye my hair
but I couldn't do it right, so it was dyed in spots.
I always was who I was and did what I did.
And also in high school
the collegiate look was in
and I tried to work that look,
but instead I just looked like a lesbian
trying to be collegiate.

DARLING

I bet you were so cute.

JORGE

No.

DARLING

I bet you were.

JORGE

No, no, no.

DARLING

You're cute to me,
right now.

With your frilly shirt
and your satin trousers
and your little pumps and stockings
and your, probably, I don't know
your silk underthings
all sort of frothy and windswept
I mean if you were to take off your trousers
and your, probably, shirttails would I don't know
come down to your knees
I think that would be so
[she can't breathe for a moment]
cute.

JORGE

Oh,
you know,
I....

DARLING

When I was growing up
when everyone else had boyfriends
I never did
and I thought I was just ugly, you know, and worthless
so
feeling this connection with you
it's really special to me
and important.

JORGE

Oh, god,
well....
it's special to me, too, Darling.
I'm, you know, probably a little old for you.

DARLING

I'm not an ageist.

JORGE

What?

DARLING

I don't think age matters.

People are always looking for what keeps them apart
they forget to look for what draws them together

JORGE

Right.

DARLING

I'm drawn to you.

JORGE

Yes. You are.

And, I'm drawn to you, too
although at the moment I'm a little distracted
because I think I dropped somethings back
you know....

DARLING

I'll help you find it.

JORGE

No, no, don't.

Just:

you know,

I'll meet you later,

at the malt shop.

[he disappears]

DARLING

I'm coming with you!

[She disappears after him.]

The Ballgame

[A succession of still pictures is projected in the background of a baseball game.

Ella is alone, eating cracker jack.

Benny comes in, also with cracker jack, sidles over to sit next to Ella.]

BENNY

Okay, what's your problem?

ELLA

What's my problem?

BENNY

Basically, you're not giving me the time of day. You came on to me at first....

ELLA

Came on to you?

BENNY

Invited me to come on board the boat....

ELLA

That was not coming on to you, that was being polite.

BENNY

Oh.

ELLA

Everyone was being so unfriendly.

BENNY

Oh, there's where I went wrong.
See, I thought you kind of liked me
and then, I don't know,
you turned into some kind of prick teaser or something.

ELLA

Prick teaser?

BENNY

Or, I don't know,
you didn't trust me for,
as far as I could see,
no reason at all.

ELLA

No reason at all?
Where should I begin?

BENNY

Suddenly you're having nightmares,
I think I was being moderately okay
just making conversation
that could have led just to a cup of coffee or something
although I have to admit I was hoping it might lead beyond that
I don't know
because, frankly, I fell for you.

ELLA

You fell for me?
You fell for my what?
You don't know me.
You don't know anything about me.
I'm a total stranger.

You know how I look, that's it.
This is how you fall for women?
You fell for my what?

BENNY

I fell for your kindness.

ELLA

Oh.

BENNY

And then I thought you got scared.

ELLA

Oh.

BENNY

But I see now that I was wrong.

[silence]

ELLA

You're a stranger to me.

BENNY

Sure. I know.

I thought:

it used to be in the olden days

I don't know

people would meet at church socials

or some harmless place I don't know

where they could talk without anyone feeling frightened

and now you have to what

meet through a personals ad

or walk up to someone in a bar

how would I ever meet you

even when I'd really like to meet you

and have a chance to get past

just going by appearances or first impressions

get to know each other and maybe
I don't know
fall in love
I don't mean to say
like I don't mean to come on too fast all over again
but I did feel that first moment
when you were so kind
I mean I felt that was your total person
all at once
your whole thing revealed in a millisecond
and sometimes you can tell that about a person at first glance
but I take it back
I take it back
because I don't want to like
make you uncomfortable.

ELLA
Where I come from
I couldn't trust anyone.
Especially men.
Because they would always come on to me.

BENNY
That's the problem for beautiful women.

[silence]

ELLA
Maybe.
Anyhow, that's what they did.
So, you come on to me
like some kind of moron
and I find it hard to get past that
even to see if you might not be a total fool
through and through
you know what I'm saying?

BENNY

Yes.

So you're saying:

a cup of coffee would be out of the question.

ELLA

If you were just a little less pushy

I might do it.

But,

this is how you are.

You are so not cool,

do you know that about yourself?

BENNY

Still, the thing you do know about me

is I respond well to kindness

which would seem to indicate that I, too,

like you, have some good instincts.

And a person might think, well,

there's a place to start,

there's the groundwork

maybe it's worth seeing what could be built up from there.

[silence]

I guess there used to be a time

if a guy would see someone like you

there might be the circumstances that would be appropriate

and acceptable

where he could come up to you

and ask

do you want to dance?

[she leaves;

he watches her go, and then he goes out in the opposite direction]

The Front Porch

[Edgar sits on the front porch swing with Charlie and Mortimer.
From time to time, we hear a screen door slamming
as it does on a summer evening.]

MORTIMER

This is not what I had in mind for a vacation.

EDGAR

It isn't.

MORTIMER

No.

EDGAR

What did you have in mind?

MORTIMER

Well, I wouldn't have complained about a little romance
or even true love.

EDGAR

I see, find the right girl and settle down.

MORTIMER

Yup. Or the right boy.

EDGAR

I see. And don't you think that's just another form of escapism itself?

MORTIMER

What's that?

EDGAR

Love.

MORTIMER

Oh. Yup. Yup, I do.

EDGAR

Indeed, probably you would say love is even the ultimate escape and that is the reason for our obsession with it.

MORTIMER

Uh, yup, I probably would.

EDGAR

Although, paradoxically, probably you would say at the same time this ultimate escape is necessary for the survival of species and not just this kind of love that results in procreation but also love that does not result in bearing children but in caring for our children, and as far as that goes, caring for our neighbors and their neighbors, for society as a whole, really. You don't mean to talk about lust or sex but rather about deep and enduring and unselfish love and friendship, mutual regard and respect, the mutual love within society as a whole, that we call social love, that is an essential glue to hold society together and to allow society to survive, to allow life itself to continue.

MORTIMER

Yup, well....uh...no doubt.

EDGAR

So, you would probably say we come full circle to escape as the means for the species to survive so that in fact love is not just the ultimate escape but also the ultimate reality

[silence from Mortimer]

And probably you think:
If Aristotle was right
that human beings are social animals
that we create ourselves in our relationships to others
then, because the theatre
is the art form that deals above all others in human relationships,
then theatre is the art, par excellence,
in which we discover what it is to be human
and what is possible for humans to be.

[silence]

I say, you probably think
that theatre, properly conceived, is not an escape either
but a flight to reality, a rehearsal for life itself
a rehearsal of these human relationships of which the most essential
the relationship that defines most vividly who we are
and that makes our lives possible
is love.

CHARLIE

Sometimes, I think you're a little slow.

EDGAR

You do?

CHARLIE

I do.

Sometimes when I talk I can see your lips moving.

EDGAR

Oh, you can?

CHARLIE

Yes, I can.

Do you move your lips when you read, too?

EDGAR

Well, I don't know.

CHARLIE

Why don't I watch you?

EDGAR

Okay.

CHARLIE

Read my mind.

EDGAR

Okay.

[he does]

CHARLIE

Your lips aren't moving now.

EDGAR

Well, your mind is a blank.

CHARLIE

That's not true at all.

I think you can't read.

EDGAR

Maybe not.

CHARLIE

No maybe about it.

I think we've just proven it.

You seem to be some kind of an idiot.

EDGAR

I don't think so.

CHARLIE

How can you tell?

EDGAR
Read my mind.

CHARLIE
Okay.

[he does]

EDGAR
Go ahead.

CHARLIE
Well, there's a tabula rasa if I ever saw one.
You have a mind as clean as the driven snow.

EDGAR
I'm thinking about nature.

CHARLIE
You should think a little harder.
So far all you've got is the wind whistling through the trees.

The Nuclear Family

[A projection of a New Jersey highway—
XXX video stores, cheap diners, a cheap bar,
a string of parking lots and strip clubs.

Everyone is eating cotton candy.]

MORTON
You think
when you start out
all you want to do is get a job
support your family
you think you're doing the best you can taking care of them
the next thing you know
you've been sucked into a whole world

that seems entirely alien to you
this was never what you had in mind at all
but it's too late
you made your choice
it was inevitable from the first step you took
you were going to end up here
inside the belly of the beast
and no way out
this is how your life will end
the only life you had on earth
you're lost
lost.

NANCY

Or you think
you'll have children
you'll make a home
you'll give up all those things you thought you might do with your life
or, maybe not
at first you think
I can do both
because everything is possible these days
and then you find out everything isn't possible
because the family just sucks you in
your first child is born
you never sleep
you become delirious
sleepwalking from day to day
as though you live underwater
and just as you think you see a glimmer of the surface
you have another baby
and you go under again
as though you yourself were suspended in the amniotic fluid
and from then on forever your life has no direction and no shape
no boundaries and no light
suspended forever in the present moment
always two days behind or more
you can't drown and you can't get back up to the surface

and you're hurtling forward toward the end of your life
with no control of anything any more
and you think: how did I let this happen to me?

DARLING

Or you grow up thinking
how can I ever get out of here?
I am suffocating with this family!
I am gagging and choking
and I say to them
I am gagging and choking
and then they try to help
which is like pushing your head farther under water
it's not that teenagers commit suicide so much
as that they are murdered by their own hands
and this is if they have ideal parents
whereas most parents let's face it are not even a little bit ideal
they are hopeless
consumed with their own lives
their precious fucking mistakes
their awesome misgivings
their regrets for what they did to you when you were three
so that they are killing you now out of remorse
and you are thinking yes, yes, kill me
I wish I were dead
I can't go on living with you
you make me crazy

MORTON

I'm sorry, Darling,
and I suppose in some way
it is because of all that
that you wind up in love with a pervert.

JORGE

I beg your pardon?

DARLING

Dad, you crazy bigot!
You racist shit!

MORTON

What?

NANCY

Morton, can't you keep your mouth shut for a minute?

DARLING

And now you're attacking him.

NANCY

Who?

DARLING

My father.

If you had ever just left him alone
he might have been a wonderful person
but no, you hounded him into the dirt
because you are such an innate bitch.

MORTON

Now, now, Darling,
this is no way to speak to your mother.

NANCY

As though you have ever cared, Morton!

MORTON

What? You think I never cared?

NANCY

Your family this. Your family that!
You never thought for a minute of your family.

MORTON

I've thought of nothing else!

NANCY

What was the name of Darling's best friend in third grade?

[silence]

Who was that sadistic math teacher in fourth grade?

[silence]

Who was her orthodontist?

What vaccinations has she had?

Childhood illnesses?

Can you even fill out a form for summer camp?

What did she always want more than anything?

Who is her favorite music group?

Does she think spike heels are cool or despicable?

And now she finds a friend

and all you can think to do is call him a pervert?

Look at him.

[everyone looks at Jorge in his angel outfit;
a moment's silence]

This is a *good* person.

This is practically a saint!

MORTON

Women!

They never marry because they love you.

They always marry you for a reason.

For your money, or your job

or how easy you are to push around

to get their way with raising the children it is they really want

and they take you down off the shelf

interchangeable with all the others

no better, they think, not too much worse

this one will do they think

I can make do with him

fix him up a little

whereas a man might really be looking for true love
not all men
not all men
I am not talking about all men
all men might be contemptible shits
but there might be one man out of all of them
who just wanted someone to love
and someone to love him
and he was doing his best
maybe he didn't know any better
but fuck him if he doesn't measure up
women!
women can have a thousand flaws
and expect to be forgiven all of them
and they are
they often are
not always but sometimes by some men
under some circumstances
unless they get really pissed off
and even then
a man figures human beings are not perfect
and he doesn't hold it against them
but a woman marries a man
and then hates him for the rest of his life
and this is not easy to live with
sometimes it will push him to make a mistake
he will get desperate and frantic
he will be blinded by anguish
and he will lash out and do something stupid
he regrets for the rest of his life

NANCY

Men!

I give up.

It used to be I thought all they wanted was a sex object.

But now it seems they don't even want that any more.

They can make do with a picture on the internet

that's as close as a man wants to get to a woman nowadays.

Between abuse and complete indifference

there used to be some middle ground
but now a man would rather live with some lingerie from Victoria's Secret
and a closet to keep it in
where he can go from time to time
and not come out for hours.
This is what he thinks it is to have an intimate relationship.

MORTON

This is what you think about men,
but is this what you think about me?

NANCY

I'm sorry, Morton.
I didn't want to tell you like this.

DARLING

How can you humiliate a person like this in public?

MORTON

Maybe I haven't been the best person.

NANCY

Really.

MORTON

But I'm more or less as good as people get
give or take a little bit around the edges.

JORGE

You are a human shit pile, Morton.
You are a garbage dump.
You are a bottomless pit of snot.

DARLING

Hey! This is my dad!

JORGE

This is the creature who just attacked you—
and me—
I'm doing nothing but defending you.

DARLING
Well, don't!

MORTON
Now, Darling....

DARLING
Are you going to spring to his defense?
Men!
The way you stick together!

JORGE
Excuse me, I am not sticking with him.

MORTON
I don't think I am sticking with him.

DARLING
Except in the way that you both hate women!

MORTON AND JORGE
Hate women!
Not at all!
That's not true.
That's not even partly true.

EDGAR
How could anyone hate women, really?

NANCY
I knew it! I knew it!
From the first moment I met him,
I knew the only man
I've ever known
who was truly considerate and compassionate
and gentle
who speaks with such thoughtfulness
and tries in every way to think of the other person's
needs and preferences

and I would even say—
someone who is even sexy—
is Edgar.

JORGE
Edgar!

VIKRAM
Edgar!
So you've been carrying on with a married woman behind my back?

EDGAR
Behind your back?

NANCY
And what does he have to do with you?

EDGAR
Nothing.

VIKRAM
Nothing???!?!!

EDGAR
Well, almost nothing.
That is to say, we are good friends.

VIKRAM
Good friends!
Is that how you think of me?
After the late-night conversations we have had?
The stroll along the duck pond?
The time together in the Tunnel of Love?

NANCY
And how about us?
How do you think about us?

DARLING

Mother!

MORTON

What the hell has been going on here?

NANCY

I don't care!

I don't care!

All my life I've wanted a man I could just rip into
and now that I've found him

I don't care who knows it.

VIKRAM

Edgar, did you ever tell me about her?

EDGAR

Certainly not!

VIKRAM

And you let me follow you everywhere!

CHARLIE

You seem to be some sort of helpless flirt!

EDGAR

I beg your pardon?

MORTIMER

I think he has a point there.

EDGAR

Oh, you do?

MORTIMER

Yes, I do.

EDGAR

Haven't you been with me at every waking moment?
In fact, aren't you my witness to all my behavior?

MORTIMER

Yes, I am.

And here is this sweet young fellow
who loves you,
and you've never said:
forget it.

This is out of the question.

No.

You led him on.

EDGAR

I did not.

MORTIMER

I think you did.

A fellow doesn't like to be led on, you know.

He puts his heart on the line.

He can have his feelings crushed.

VIKRAM

Exactly.

MORTIMER

A person's feelings are a delicate, fragile thing.

You don't want to be putting your big muddy boots
all over a person's feelings.

They can be damaged forever.

VIKRAM

Exactly.

MORTIMER

Inside, where a person lives
they are a small child forever

VIKRAM

That is so true.

MORTIMER

A ten year old child
who feels very vulnerable
and afraid
and sometimes very lonely
and their heart can be crushed forever.

VIKRAM

This is all I was trying to say.

MORTON

Sometimes I myself feel like a ten year old child.

NANCY

You are ten year old child, Morton.

DARLING

There they go again.
Why can't you two be even just civil to one another?
Never mind love.
Never mind even being nice.
Just even polite would feel so good.

MORTON

Maybe you don't know how hard it is
getting from day to day
you've lived such a comfortable life

DARLING

I've had comforts
I have never been comfortable.

CHARLIE [to Edgar]

I think Mortimer is right.

Let's face it, the kind of person you are
you're not interested in another person unless you can keep that person
like a toy or a pet, a plaything

MORTIMER

a puppet!

CHARLIE

happy if you can do whatever you like with your significant other
but the moment that person,

say I myself

want my own life

then no!

it's over

you love me if I am an extension of yourself
of your interests, your passions, your ideas,
your idiosyncracies, your, frankly, eccentric tastes
but you don't love me for myself

You are, if you want to know the truth,
you are aloof.

EDGAR

Aloof?

CHARLIE

Aloof.

VIKRAM

Aloof.

EDGAR

I am aloof?

VIKRAM

And distant and cool.

CHARLIE
Standoffish.

VIKRAM
Reserved.

EDGAR
I am reserved?

MORTIMER
It's true you are not the sort of person who plunges in.

VIKRAM
Really, you are a typical uptight wasp.
I thought, behind the facade,
behind all the defenses
this house of mirrors
all these personae
was a vulnerable human being
even especially more vulnerable than others
and that that was why you had to put up such defenses.
But, it turns out after all,
you have a relationship with no one except your
who shall I say,
your friends here.
It seems to be who you are.
You are not a multiple personality.
You are not a personality at all!

CHARLIE
It seems you could be a complete lunatic!

MORTIMER [to Charlie]
That seems unfair to me, Charlie.
To me, Edgar has always been a considerate person

CHARLIE
That's because you don't even know what it is
to have a real grownup relationship.

MORTIMER

Oh, well, I think I do.

CHARLIE

You're nothing but a mouthpiece.

MORTIMER

A mouthpiece?

How can you say that to me?

I have a heart, too, you know, Charlie.

CHARLIE

I doubt it:

you have a space where a heart should be, Mortimer,

you are an empty suit

MORTIMER

An empty suit.

CHARLIE

A stiff.

MORTIMER

A stiff.

CHARLIE

A blockhead.

MORTIMER

A blockhead.

CHARLIE

A rag and a board.

EDGAR

Here. Here, that's enough of that.

CHARLIE

A dolt.

EDGAR
That's enough.

CHARLIE
A dummy.

EDGAR
That will do, Charlie.

MORTIMER
I think he's a little irritable today.

EDGAR
That may be.

MORTIMER
Maybe he has a splinter up his butt.

EDGAR
Now, now.

MORTIMER
He'll be sorry when I'm dead.

CHARLIE
You're not going to die, Mortimer.

MORTIMER
After a person is dead, you know,
then you live a life of regret
thinking of the chances you missed
the love you had and treated not so well
and then you feel stupid

MORTON
I feel stupid already.

MORTIMER

I may be stupid, but,
I have a sensitive soul
and I'm just trying to do my best.

VIKRAM

And, to me,
you are doing very well.
Very well.

MORTIMER

Tsk. Gosh. Thank you.

VIKRAM

To me, you are a model human being.

MORTIMER

Thank you very much.

VIKRAM

Perhaps we could start here
to build some sort of friendship.

MORTIMER

Tsk. Well. Perhaps we could.

VIKRAM

I'm going to start by making friends with you.

MORTIMER

Good idea.

Earth Angel

Hundreds of colorful hot air balloons rise in slow motion
as Darling steps up to a mike.

While Jorge dances,
she sings the song:

Earth Angel
Earth Angel

Edgar, Charlie, Mortimer, Benny, and Morton
all join Darling to sing backup.

Road Trip

[Darling and Morton
are riding in an antique car
with the American landscape projected behind them.]

DARLING

What do you think?

First thing: he took me into the woods.

He said:

We all have the same mother.

Every species that you see now
drawing the breath of life

has the earth as its mother.
At the appointed season,
the earth gave birth to every beast that runs wild among the hills.

Who wouldn't be a sucker for sweet talk like that?

MORTON

Right.

DARLING

He said:

When you think
how we used to live in the ocean
in the salt water
you think:
we don't live there any more.
but really, in fact, we just took the ocean with us when we came on land.
The womb is an ocean really,
babies begin in an ocean,
and human blood has the same concentration of salt
as sea water.
And no matter where we are
on top of a mountain
or in the middle of a desert,
when we cry or sweat,
we cry or sweat sea water.

MORTON

Right.

DARLING

He said:

There are things that are both near and distant at the same time.
Like the course of a boat across a lake.
Like the relations between a man and a woman.
Like paradise.

So of course I fell for him.

Then he said to me: he meant nothing personal.

But, I think, if you say things like that to a woman,
she's going to take it personally.

MORTON

I think that's true.

DARLING

He said:

I sometimes wonder:
what would it be like
to have an exquisite sense of things?

You would say, for instance:
there are elegant things—
duck eggs
wistaria blossoms
the Pride of China tree
the Sweet-scented marvel-of-Peru.

I fell for him.

MORTON

Naturally.

DARLING

Then I was the one who said let's go to Outer Spaceworld
because I thought he'd like it
and I was just trying to think what he would like
which of course he didn't because
he's not into techno things all that much
which is fine
so when he suggested let's just keep on going

let's go to heaven
I said sure. Let's go. I've always wanted to go to heaven.
And we did, we did.

MORTON
I'm just happy you're okay!

DARLING
But what I'm telling you is I'm not.
The point is: he took me to heaven.

MORTON
Frankly, Darling, I don't know
what the hell were you thinking anyway
to run off with some guy in a dress.

DARLING
He's been an angel, Daddy.

MORTON
I thought he was sweet on the fellow in the mouse outfit.

DARLING
Vikram?

MORTON
Is that his name?

DARLING
Vikram?

MORTON
Yes.

DARLING
Well, Vikram is sweet on Mortimer.

MORTON
Mortimer?

DARLING

You know, Charlie and Mortimer and Edgar?

MORTON

Mortimer the dummy?

DARLING

Daddy, you shouldn't just be always, like name-calling.

MORTON

I'm sorry, but I thought Mortimer was, in fact,
a dummy.

DARLING

What if he is?

Vikram likes him.

MORTON

How can that be?

What is it Vikram sees in Mortimer exactly?

DARLING

I don't know.

Daddy, don't you get like anything that's going on?

MORTON

I guess not.

DARLING

Do you understand even what it is about Jorge?

how he's such an angel

and then he ignores me

and then he's an angel again.

It's like he can just play with me forever

hot cold hot cold

I just love him like crazy.

MORTON

Well, I guess that's okay then.

The Dolphin Show

[We see a film of beautiful underwater aquarium life forms,
as though from outer space—
eg. the *Desmonema glaciale*—
fantastic, beautiful, heartbreaking life forms
rising up through the ocean water.

We watch the film for a while.
Then Morton speaks.]

MORTON

Sometimes you get all caught up in things whatever they may be
even your career
because you think that's the thing you should pay attention to in your life
providing for the things your children need
or even more than they might need but things they want
so that you forget to pay attention to the children themselves.

We always thought it was best for Darling
bringing her here to take her mind off her big sister Dee Dee
which we had to do
because frankly
Dee Dee was a sweet child and all
and we truly loved her
but when she just walked right out of
the Hospital for Hopeless Psychiatric Cases
and showed up back home on the doorstep with her suitcase
well I didn't have a choice.

Frankly there is a thing called normal.
I didn't make it up.
I might not like to be normal myself
but I *have* to be normal, like it or not.

So I told Dee Dee to march right back there

And I think I was right to put her on the train by herself
and let her get back to the hospital on her own
because I think that's how people eventually learn
to have a little self-reliance

Or not.

Or not.

If she couldn't find her way
then, you know,
I'm going to die one day myself
I can't take care of her forever
some day she's going to have to make it on her own
and it may as well be sooner as later
which is why we brought Darling here
because the whole thing upset her a little bit
but now I see, with Dee Dee,
I was completely wrong.

[After Morton speaks, we watch the underwater film for a while longer.]

The Prom

[Music.

Big band.

Guy Lombardo or Benny Goodman.

Summer night.

Stars in the sky.

Nancy enters in her prom dress and dances solo,
or whirls slowly like a dervish.

After a little while,
Jorge enters in his prom dress and dances solo.

After a little while,
Vikram enters in his prom dress and dances solo.

After a little while,
Darling enters in her prom dress and dances solo.

After a little while,
Ella enters in her prom dress and dances solo.

After a little while,
Benny enters in his prom dress and dances solo.

After a little while,
Edgar enters in his prom dress and dances with Charlie and Mortimer.

Finally,
Morton enters in his prom dress and dances solo.

In time everyone is dancing or whirling alone,
and then, gradually, Jorge joins Darling and they dance together.

After a while, Benny joins Ella, and they dance together.

Nancy joins Morton, and they dance together.

Edgar joins Vikram, and they dance together

as we hear over the music:

ELLA'S VOICE AS A VOICEOVER

In my dream

we drove Bets's red station wagon like it was a convertible.

All of the windows were down

and people were lying across the back seat and

in the back bed with their feet hanging out the windows.

Music was blaring.

Your pager went off

and you said you had to go in for the lead role in The Fantastiks.

You were the understudy for all of the male roles
in all of the shows in New York.
It was playing on Christopher Street
so we pulled the car up
and you convinced them to do the show out on the balcony
so we could see you perform from the car.
When it was over you took us to the largest,
oldest hotel in New York.
It had been abandoned,
gutted,
and then refurbished in a 1970's Vegas style,
but the grand, spiral staircase was still there leading all the way from the
lobby up to the 20th floor.
We took a room up on the roof
and went out onto the boardwalk
to the AM/PM minimart
to buy matches.
They said they wouldn't sell them to you unless you bought cigarettes.
There was a red convertible in the store that was being raffled off.
We signed up and then noticed the thing by the door.
It was Andrei's body in pieces
shrink-wrapped into the kind of package that a yo-yo would come in.
There was the head
and torso
and just one leg.
I saw a scratch on the side of his face
and remembered that I had seen a scratch on Andrei's face earlier that day.
We called the police
and told them that we were sure that Andrei was the killer
because
the body was definitely his.
Just then
he came running out of the back room
and straight out the front door.
He was on his cell phone
and he disappeared
down the beach.

[silence]

BENNY'S VOICEOVER

Well,
it has a happy ending.

[While Ella was speaking,

the couples danced out together, couple by couple:

Jorge and Darling

Morton and Nancy

Edgar and Vikram.

And, gradually, as the music fades into the distance,

we hear the sound of crickets.

A summer evening.

A starry sky.

And then,

as Benny and Ella go on dancing,

a slow fade to dark.]

The End.

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