

The Myopia: An Epic Burlesque of Tragic Proportion

David Greenspan

Act One: Flare-Up

Characters

THE RACONTEUR
NARRATAGE *in the form of stage directions*
YETTI
KOREEN *Yetti's daughter*
FEBUS *Koreen's suitor, later her husband*
BARCLAY *son of Febus and Koreen*
WARREN G. HARDING *a character from history*
FLORENCE HARDING *Harding's wife*
OLD-TIMER *a country fellow*
HENRY CABOT LODGE *senator from Massachusetts*
WILL HAYS *Republican Party chairman*
GEORGE HARVEY *editor, North American Review*
JAMES WADSWORTH *senator from New York*
CHARLES CURTIS *senator from Kansas*
FRANK BRANDEGEE *senator from Connecticut*
SELDEN SPENCER *senator from Missouri*
REED SMOOT *senator from Utah*
WILLIAM BORAH *senator from Idaho*
WILLIAM CALDER *senator from New York*
JOSEPH FRELINGHUYSEN *senator from New Jersey*
LAWRENCE PHIPPS *senator from Colorado*
MEDILL MCCORMICK *senator from Illinois*
JAMES WATSON *senator from Indiana*
HENRY HASKELL *reporter, Kansas City Star*
IRVIN KIRKWOOD *reporter, Kansas City Star*

Setting

Various.

Notes

YETTI (*speaks with an East European accent.*) The Myopia is performed as a solo — in the “story-telling” tradition. One actor plays all the roles, using the stage directions as narration.

Prologue

THE RACONTEUR I've been thinking about pictures. I've been thinking about pictures and how one might make pictures on the stage, which is not to say that I've been thinking about stage pictures. On the contrary.

I've been reflecting on the difference between the image and the imagined, and the relationship

of imagining to thinking — and I've been thinking about thinking, but for the moment that's tangential.

I've been thinking how a picture is a picture of something, but not the something it is a picture of. And the same for film — which is after all pictures — and for anything that is a picture even if it is not a picture but a recording of something, but not the something it is a recording of. And others have addressed this issue more astutely than I. If you wish, see me after, I refer you.

But that this is not true of live signals, broadcast or monitored, might lead one to consider the televising of something, which is not by necessity a recording though it is by necessity a transmission. Here again others — I must refer you to others — though I will say that television, no matter how it is maligned, shares with the theater! the capacity of presenting things actually happening. Of course this is true with radio, but I'm not thinking about radio because with radio there is no picture — other than the ones one must imagine — which is to say I am thinking about radio.

But — well — others — others will address these issues. I cannot — other than to say there might be a lot of confusion about the theater — with some expecting of the theater what is inherently untheatrical, and some in the theater providing this — some of these some being sometimes successful — abandoning action for image in ways that are thrillingly theatrical — forcing one in one's confusion to wonder whether what one has been thinking all along does not have more to do with the stage than the theater, the stage being a platform for drama, the theater not that same thing entirely.

But — well — so — anyway, thinking about pictures — a picture being a picture of something but not the something it is a picture of, I've thought about the theater, which is not a picture of something, though one might make pictures in it. And not only have I thought about the theater which is not a picture, I've thought about the theater because it is not a picture, thinking instead it is what is happening in it. And that no matter what is happening in it — even if what is pictured happening has already happened, or didn't

happen, or never happened, or never will happen, you know on some level — and I think you know that you know — something is actually happening. And of course this is the difference. Nothing happens in a picture — it's already happened — whereas in the theater what is happening is actually happening — it is happening as it happens — it is an act. A picture is never an act!

So thinking as I said how it might be useful to distinguish if one could the difference between the stage and the theater — a distinction I think marvelous to navigate — the stage from the theater — I've made what I'm doing and what I'm about to do. And if you were to ask me is what I do on the stage a play, I could not be certain, I could not say. If you were to ask me is what I do on the stage theater, again, I could not be certain, I could not say. Of only one thing can I say and of it be certain, and that is that what I do on the stage is an act! And it is full of imitations. And if not imitations, impersonations. And it is actually happening, happening as it happens, happening as I speak. And this has been a Prologue and is a moment more until it ends, and then the next thing begins, and this next thing — this thing to begin — why, it is called *The Myopia*, and it is an epic burlesque of tragic proportion. Ding, ding, ding, ding. And the curtain is rising on its first act, entitled "Flare-Up," and this is scene one:

Scene One

(Light illuminates WARREN G. HARDING, immobile, seated in an easy chair in his room in the La Salle Hotel — Chicago, June 12, 1920. The chair is directed upstage right at an angle of [say] 45 degrees, facing an open window, blind down. Now and again, a faint breeze rocks the blind. Light cuts in at the edges of the blind — more so as the blind is rocked. Try as one might to keep it out, the world gets in. Beside the chair, left, a tall standing lamp. Beside the chair, right, a doiled table with a phone. The lamp is dark, the phone is silent. Down left, an elegant writing table and a matching straight-back chair. Further down left, a door — ajar. Light from the corridor slices through the crack, slashing the back of HARDING's head, making distinct cerebral division between the right and left. Sound, now, of foot traffic in the corridor, buzz of voices. Night fades as the sun rises. This can be determined by witnessing the change in light ev-

idenced at the edges of the blind, particularly as the blind is rocked. As light pervades, Chicago awakens. Through the window come the sounds of the street, sparse at first, denser with time. Sound and light coincidental. HARDING sits out of it. Time passes. Light is extinguished.

Light illuminates HARDING as before — except the window blind is up, thus making visible a rectangle of starry sky, pale to some extent by the city's light. As night fades, the sun rises. Light burns in at HARDING, his hands clutch the arms of the chair, his head, turning left, pushes deeper into the cushion. As light pervades, Chicago awakens. Through the window come the sounds of the street, sparse at first, denser with time. Sound and light coincidental. HARDING stays — unmoved. Time passes. Light is extinguished.

Light illuminates WARREN G. HARDING, immobile, seated in the straight-back chair, pushed slightly back from the elegant writing table. The blind is up. Earliest dawn. HARDING is directed, though, down left, toward the door — ajar — and the muffled tread and buzz beyond. Thus, he faces darkness, having turned from the outer light in favor of that dim interior illumination, which falling in harsh precision on the longitude of his left eye foments a dropping of his blind — leaving him monoptic — stymied in a painful wink. Time passes, light pervades, Chicago awakens. From shadow, now, behind HARDING, a woman appears, her features indiscernible. It is HARDING's wife, FLORENCE, commonly referred to as "the Duchess." She speaks.)

FLORENCE (*Tired exasperation.*) Wurr-n. (*Hold.*)
Wurr-n.

(Curtain as light is extinguished. Noise of the change behind the curtain.)

Scene Two

(Noise subsides. Curtain. Light illuminates a seascape — the ocean downstage, beach upstage. A gray brick tower stands right of center, its single window — like a single eye — open to the ocean, and situated in such a way that only a sliver of the orifice is visible to the audience. Left of the tower, a small square of cultivation — a vegetable garden.

Various green-leaf vegetables sprout from the earth. The rest of the terrain is sand and sparse beach grass. YETTI is working in her garden. Elderly, short, plump, bit bosomy, slightly hunchbacked, shock of dry, white hair. She wears a simple dress and tennis shoes. She calls out to KOREEN, directing her speech to the ocean side of the tower. KOREEN responds from within the tower — unseen.)

YETTI Yoo-hoo. Yoo-hoo. Nice weather, ain't it?
KOREEN It's all right.
YETTI *(To herself.)* The sun is shining on the ocean. There's a nice breeze. It's not too hot. I'm never so happy since I built this tower.
(To KOREEN.) You got a good view from up there, ain't you?
KOREEN It's all right. Are we out of coffee?
YETTI *(To herself.)* I spend my days working in my garden by the sea — tending my lettuces. *(To KOREEN.)* We'll have a fresh salad today for lunch. *(To herself.)* Tender green leaves.
KOREEN We're out of coffee, and I'm down to my last couple of cigarettes. You gotta do something.
YETTI You smoke too much.
KOREEN What do you mean I smoke too much? Don't tell me I smoke too much. You're always telling me.
YETTI Koreen, for Christ sake, can't we have a nice day today? I'm trying to show you a nice time. There's a good view from where you are, ain't it? *(To herself.)* I love to sit by the window and watch the sea on a sunny day. *(To KOREEN.)* Can you see some wildlife — some porpoises or turtles? *(To herself.)* The wonderful panorama of life!
KOREEN I need coffee, Mother.
YETTI Koreen, why don't you wash your hair?
KOREEN Don't tell me what to do. I hate being cooped up like this.
YETTI Come on, sweetheart, you're not cooped up.
KOREEN I can't even stand.
YETTI Try to relax.
KOREEN *(To herself.)* I gotta get out of this place.
YETTI You know what Doctor Edelman said.
KOREEN Oh, look at this, my last cigarette. I can't believe we're out of coffee.
YETTI There's a can behind the farina in the green cabinet.
KOREEN What?
YETTI I say, there's an unopened can of coffee behind the farina in the green cabinet.
KOREEN Oh, holding out on me, eh? Why didn't

you say so before, before I got worked up? Now where is it?
YETTI The green cabinet — top shelf.
KOREEN Jesus Christ! Why'd you stick it in there? My hand barely fits. I'm so swollen.
YETTI Take it easy.
KOREEN *(To herself.)* Why am I being tortured like this?
YETTI You see it? It's right behind the farina.
KOREEN I see it. Oh boy, coffee!
YETTI You got it?
KOREEN *(To herself.)* I'm in such pain.
YETTI You see it?
KOREEN There we go, I got it. Hey, this stuff is regular. I need instant coffee. I don't have time to stand over a goddamn percolator all goddamn day.
YETTI What's 'a matter?
KOREEN This is regular. I need instant! Instant coffee! I am suffering! What am I suppose to do with this shit?
YETTI Koreen, for god's sake, it takes ten minutes! Put it up, go wash your hair, and when you've done, there'll be fresh coffee for you!
KOREEN Oh, shut your goddamn cunt. You think I can wash my hair before I've had a cup of coffee? Are you insane? And now I'm out of cigarettes!
YETTI You smoke too much!
KOREEN Fuck you!
YETTI Koreen, please, I'm begging you not to start with me. I don't know how much I can take today. I'm —
KOREEN Too bad about you and how much you can take. You know what I need.
YETTI *(To herself.)* Impossible!
KOREEN Let me out and I'll go into town for them myself.
YETTI You can't go anywhere. Go wash your hair.
KOREEN I'm gonna burn my goddamn hair. I'm sticking my head over the burners — right now.
YETTI Koreen, stop it. Stop it!
KOREEN I'm turning on the flames.
YETTI Koreen! What are you doing?
KOREEN I'm gonna burn my hair off. You'll never get up here again.
YETTI Koreen, don't be stupid!
KOREEN Here we go. Flame on!
YETTI Koreen, I'm warning you!
Koreen! Koreen! All right, all right, I'm going into town. I'll get you your cigarettes. Just turn off the gas. Come on. OK?
KOREEN *(After a pause.)* Make sure they're Salem.
YETTI Fine, just turn off the gas!
KOREEN The gas is off. Don't forget the coffee. In-

stant!

YETTI All right, in the meantime you'll go wash your hair.

KOREEN Yes, Mother.

YETTI And rinse it good.

KOREEN Fine. Cigarettes and coffee. Hurry back. I'm desperate.

(YETTI grabs her purse and rushes off.)

(To herself.) Wash your hair. Oh boy, all this hair. When will I be free?

(From within the tower, the sound of water running from a faucet.)

Oh, hell. Water is so goddamn hot. Why doesn't the water work? You either freeze or burn in this place.

All right, where's the shampoo? Where'd she put the shampoo? Och, here it is — cheap stuff she buys. Why is she so cheap? Your mother is so cheap. Oh, God how I suffer! People in Africa don't suffer the way I suffer. I've never been happy. Never will be happy. Everybody suffers. Why do we suffer?

(Sound of running water stops. KOREEN sings "Funny Girl." Shampoo bubbles float out the window.)

La da, da da da da —

(After singing the song, KOREEN hums the tune over, rinsing the shampoo from her hair. Enter from left, FEBUS, driving a '53 Oldsmobile. He's just back from THE WAR! Balding, near-sighted — he wears thick bottle glasses. FEBUS stops his car, sticks his head out of the window, listens to KOREEN singing. KOREEN's hair piles out the window, reaching the ground. She shakes it gently, to dry it in the sun. FEBUS gets out of his car, approaches the tower. As she reprises half the song, he climbs KOREEN's hair, arrives at the tower window, looks in.)

FEBUS (To himself.) What a beauty!

(FEBUS climbs through the window. Curtain as light is extinguished. Noise of the change behind the curtain.)

Scene Three

(Noise subsides. Curtain. Light illuminates a square of beige carpet, bordered on its upstage perimeter by a thin veil of beige drape. Vague light — as if the outside — beyond the drape. BARCLAY is situated on the carpet. BARCLAY is an illuminated globe of singularly ocular appearance. His inner light pulses erratically as he speaks. He is raised several feet off the carpet, cradled in

a four-legged metal stand. BARCLAY speaks to himself.)

BARCLAY Why set in a room? Why, because you never ventured outside. You rarely ventured outside. What you know of life is described in this room. The little you know of life.

This is my father's room. I don't remember. It happened one day for a long time. After he'd gone dark? No, before. Before. One day, before he went dark, you began to return to his room, rifle through his books and papers. One day for a long time.

You would appear, suddenly, rifle through your father's books and papers, then slowly disappear. For the life of me. This continued, even as he went dark, after he'd gone dark. Before during and after? Before, during, and after. And progressively your appearances became (a) more sudden, (b) more frequent. Oh, shit. Likewise, the duration of your visits as you rifled through your father's books and papers was greater, progressively.

I wonder, was I looking for something? If you were you did not find it. Why? Why do you say? Had you found, doubtless you would not have continued to return. But you did, more frequently, more suddenly, and for greater duration. Until finally you ceased appearing, disappearing, and remained unmoving, rifling through your father's books and papers.

I stayed unmoved! Now do I remember me. I fancied me a drama of me parent's nightmare marriage — a mythologic burlesque of endless discord. Savages were they! This play to be my revenger's comedy. Thus did I return, finger the wreckage. But what manic distraction. I could not spin their conflict into play. They "played" the same scene time and time again. Obsession with the "drama" altered me. Fixed in purpose I hardened. I find myself self-rendered thus. A fragile globe. Unlifelike shell. Encased. Immobile! And stuck in your head.

("Erh, erh.")

What was that?

(From behind the drape, the sound of a passing seagull.)

A passing seagull, Barclay.

I see. The sea.

The childhood sea.

It batters me still with memory.

Yes, Barclay. Avoid it as you would, you find yourself in your father's room — engirdled in the dark. Until you go dark. All gone dark.

(Light is extinguished. From the dark, BAR-CLAY's voice.)

All gone dark!

(Light illuminates the space as before.)

Paradise restored. In dearth of light, I whispered me, create something! From this, said I? What else, my teasing reply. What a task? What a task? And I, having rifled through my father's books and papers, finding nothing, it would seem, feeling nothing, it would seem. What a task? What —

(Curtain as light is extinguished. Noise of the change behind the curtain.)

Scene Four

(Noise subsides. Curtain. Light illuminates the seascape. If you look closely, you might see a small strand of silken ladder dangling from the seaside of the tower. If you look closely. Now look again. The vegetable garden has been trampled by something. Or someone. Enter from right, YETTI, carrying a brown paper bag loaded with cigarette cartons and jars of instant coffee.)

YETTI (*Calling out.*) Koreen. Koreen, I'm back. I got you everything you want, sweetheart. Today is our lucky day. They were running a special on ... I ...

(YETTI notices the ladder — gasps, drops the bag — cigarettes and coffee all over the sand.)

(Under her breath.) Koreen.

(YETTI rushes to the tower, grabs hold of the ladder, climbs.)

(Calling.) Koreen? Koreen?!

(The ladder falls from the window.)

Koreeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen!

(Curtain as light is extinguished [Thud! YETTI: "Ehh!"] — and cornet music from off left. Music to continue — as will the noise of the change behind the curtain.)

Scene Five

(Noise subsides. Cornet continues off left. Curtain. Light illuminates Ohio. Three miles to Marion on the road from Caledonia. July 1, 1882. Dusk. Rose-streaked sky. As the scene progresses, the sky darkens. Enter from left, WARREN G. HARDING, riding an old sagging mule, tooting away on his cornet. The mule is burdened with a few satchels and household items — beat-up pots and pans. The mule comes to a halt.

HARDING finishes his tune ["Camp Town Ladies"] then looks up at the sky.)

HARDING Well, how do you like that? The evening shades are falling. You like that? You like that, Dearie, "The evening shades are falling?" Sure you like that, sure you do. I wonder how far? I wonder. What do you think? What do you think, Dearie, you think it's far? You think it's far? Could be far, huh? Could be close. Could be close, could be far, we don't know. Do we care? We care. You think we'll make it? Think we'll make it before dark? We're not sure. What happens if we don't make it? *What happens?* We'll make it. We'll make it. All we have to do is get a move on.

(Enter from right an OLD-TIMER, smoking a straw pipe. He moves left, stands unnoticed by HARDING.)

What do you say, Dearie? Shall we get a move on? Shall we go? Come on, Dearie, what do you say?

(Dearie doesn't budge.)

They don't move.

(HARDING performs a speech.)

Mr. President. Honorable judges. Respected audience. The question of morality and immorality on the stage today is one of the most important that can engage us. When we reflect upon the universal passion that has been exhibited to us through this species of amusement, when we further remember that some of the noblest productions of human intellect have been offered to the world through the medium of the stage, and lastly, when we bear in mind that the theater is one of the chief pleasures of the youthful members of society in all times and countries, we should realize at once that we have a topic worthy of debate.

OLD-TIMER She don't wanna move, huh?

HARDING Huh? Oh. Afternoon. Evening. Yea. He.

OLD-TIMER Huh?

HARDING He.

OLD-TIMER He?

HARDING He. He. He's a he.

OLD-TIMER Oh.

HARDING Yea. Dearie. He's a he. Mother named 'em.

OLD-TIMER That right?

HARDING Yea. I'm going to Marion.

OLD-TIMER That right?

HARDING Sure am. Far into Marion?

OLD-TIMER Will be on that mule.

HARDING Well, I'm hopin'.

OLD-TIMER 'Bout three mile.
 HARDING What do you say, Dearie? Three mile, huh, what do you say?
(Dearie doesn't budge.)
 Meeting up with my folks. We're in from Caledonia. They are. Before that Blooming Grove. We're settling now in Marion.
 OLD-TIMER That right?
 HARDING Yep.
 OLD-TIMER You makin' up a story before?
 HARDING Oh no — no — no, that was — that was just un — that was un — that was just a speech. I was uh — done — uh — I uh did that speech. For a debate. College. Just graduated. Yea. Ohio Central!
 OLD-TIMER That right?
 HARDING *(Pointing.)* In Iberia.
 OLD-TIMER Oh. You graduated, huh?
 HARDING Oh yea. One of three. Just did. Class of '82. And that was uh — a speech I un ... did — debated.
 OLD-TIMER That right?
 HARDING "Has the Stage a Moral Tendency?"
 OLD-TIMER Huh?
 HARDING That was the debate.
 OLD-TIMER Oh.
 HARDING I took the affirmative. I was assigned the affirmative. But I don't know, hell — heck — you ask me, I wouldn't at all know. Not too moral to me. Not at all.
 OLD-TIMER That right?
 HARDING I think so.
 OLD-TIMER You been to the stage?
 HARDING Who me? Oh me, no — never — couldn't — couldn't do. I mean, I'd like to go, but never have. But things I uh ... hear, things they do, don't — doesn't at all sound moral. I mean, could be moral, but doesn't sound. All kinds of things they do. Things'd put your pipe out.
 OLD-TIMER That right?
 HARDING The kind of language that's used. Provocation. I couldn't repeat it. Don't sound decent. Could be, but don't sound. Doesn't sound. Things I hear they say.
 OLD-TIMER That right?
 HARDING Oh yea. And do. On the stage. All kinds of things. You know, *(speechifying)* tragedies of milk and water. Dramas of blood, uh ... blue fire and slang. And uh ... operas of the most irredeemable silliness.
 OLD-TIMER That right?
 HARDING Part of my speech. Yea. But uh ... I'd like to go, sure. See for myself. See what it's like. The theater! 'Specially some of them girlie

shows. Wouldn't mind takin' in one of them girlie shows. At least one before I kick. What do you say?

(Dearie nays.)

Hey, not you, Dearie, You don't need to see any of them girlie shows. Don't want you getting all worked up in no girlie show. Imagine that. Big thing like that. *(Laughs.)*

OLD-TIMER What you plannin' to do in Marion?

HARDING Well, meet up with my folks first thing. They're in from Caledonia. Before that, Blooming Grove. After that, haven't figured. Make some friends — that's what I like to do. Just fit myself in. I find once you're well liked, all kinds of things start to happen.

OLD-TIMER What'd you say your name was?

HARDING Didn't say. *(Laughs.)* Harding. Warren Gamaliel. My father's Tryon. Tryon Harding. I'm Warren. Warren Harding.

OLD-TIMER Looks like he's ready.

HARDING Sure does. What do you say, Dearie — to Marion? Here we go. Well, thanks a lot. Thanks for your help.

OLD-TIMER Didn't do nothin'.

HARDING Well, thanks anyway. I appreciate it.

(HARDING exits right on mule. Church bells ring. The evening shades are falling. Curtain as light is extinguished. Noise of the change behind the curtain.)

Scene Six

(Noise subsides. Curtain. Light illuminates the darkened bathroom of a middle-class household. The door is closed. A small window permits only the most meager light of an already gray dawn. Shabby throw rugs scattered on the tile floor. A beige rug — unprofessionally cut — limply hugs the base of the toilet. FEBUS is sitting on the toilet, his boxers at his ankles, his shirt covering his groin. He wears socks and sandals. FEBUS has aged since last seen. What little hair he had has gone gray, and his eyesight — never the best — has deteriorated to near blindness. At his feet, a princess telephone, the cord of which extends underneath the bathroom door. Before him, a small typewriter table on which is stationed a large reel-to-reel tape recorder. The reels are moving — the machine is recording. It will record the entire scene. The only other artifact of note is an old typewriter that has been dumped into the bathroom sink. FEBUS speaks into

his mic.)

FEBUS OK, so then what? Then what? Then what do we got? We got ... We got ... We got ... OK, so then what do we got? We got —

(Telephone rings. FEBUS picks up.)

Hello? Hey, baby. No, it's fine, it's fine. It's fine, she's sleeping. She's sleeping. Yea. Yea. Yea. Yea. Okay.

(He hangs up, returns to the problem.)

Now what?

(Telephone rings. FEBUS picks up.)

Hello? Hey, baby. That's all right. No, she's sleeping — didn't I just say that? Well, why do I have to repeat myself? Why do I have to repeat myself? Yea, but I'm stuck, I'm stuck. I'm not getting anywhere, I can't get anywhere. I'm right where I was, that's where I am, I'm still there. "The evening shades were falling." You like that, "The evening shades were falling"? Or do you like, "The evening shades are falling"? Which do you like, "were" or "are," "are" or "were," which do you like? I don't like either of them. Maybe I should cut it. Should I cut it? You think I should cut it? What do you think? Maybe I'll leave it for now — I can always cut it later. You think I should cut it later? Or should I cut it now? Later or now? Now or later? What do you think? Maybe I'll leave it for now. I'm gonna leave it for now. "The evening shades — " Maybe I'll just say, "The evening shades." What do you think? You like it, "The evening shades"? You don't like it. Do you like it? Maybe I'll just cut it. I'm gonna cut it. Cut the whole thing, it's crap, right? It's crap! You think it's crap? Cut the crap or keep the crap? Keep it or cut it? Cut it or keep it? What do you think? Come on, I'm under pressure. Maybe I'll just keep it for now. You think I should keep it for now? I'll keep it for now. What do you think? That's what I'll do. You think that's what I should do? That's what I'm gonna do. That's what I'm gonna do. Or maybe I'll just put it in the stage directions. They can make it with the lights. What do you think, make it with the lights? Maybe it needs to be said. (Intoning.) "The evening shades." "The evening shades." Would you miss it if I cut it? You wouldn't miss it? You *wouldn't* miss it. You wouldn't miss it?! All right, I'll think about it. You think I should think about it? That's what I'm gonna do. That's what I'm gonna do. Yea, so how are you? Un huh. (Yawning.) Un huh. What time? That's good. Yea, near where they train the dogs. Sounds good. All right. OK. Yea,

big kiss.

(He makes a kiss into the phone, hangs up, returns to the problem.)

No more. No more what? What the hell is happening? Nothing. Nothing is happening. So what?

(Telephone rings, FEBUS picks up.)

Hello? Hey, baby.

(From off right, a groaning as if coming out of sleep. It is KOREEN, waking.)

KOREEN No. No more. Oh. Please. Stop.

FEBUS (Into phone.) Wait a sec.

KOREEN Stop, get off me. Get off me. Help.

FEBUS (Into phone.) No, it's Koreen.

KOREEN Help. Help.

FEBUS (Into phone.) Her medication is wearing off.

Her medication.

KOREEN (Louder.) Oh. No. Help. Help.

(Crying out.) Aaaaah! (Shrieking.)

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

(Silence. Time passes.)

FEBUS (Into phone.) OK.

KOREEN (Calling weakly.) Febus?

FEBUS (Into phone.) Hold on.

KOREEN (Weakly.) Febus?

FEBUS (Into phone.) Wait a minute. (To KOREEN.)

What do you want?

KOREEN Where are you?

FEBUS I'm on the phone. Go back to sleep.

KOREEN Did somebody call?

FEBUS What's 'a matter?

KOREEN Is it my mother?

FEBUS No, baby, go back to sleep.

KOREEN My mother was supposed to call. What time is it?

FEBUS It's just past six.

KOREEN What are you doing up so early?

FEBUS (Into phone.) OK —

KOREEN Where are you?

FEBUS I'm on the toilet.

KOREEN I thought you were on the phone.

FEBUS (Into phone.) OK, listen —

KOREEN Febus.

FEBUS (Into phone.) I gotta get off. I'll see you later.

(FEBUS hangs up. Four knocks at the bathroom door.)

KOREEN Febus, what are you doing in there?

FEBUS I'll be out soon.

KOREEN What'd you, got the phone in the john?

FEBUS In case somebody called. I didn't want them to wake you.

KOREEN What are you doing in there?

FEBUS I'm working on the play.

KOREEN Oh, for Christ sake.

FEBUS I need privacy.
 KOREEN That goddamn play.
 FEBUS What are you talking about?
 KOREEN I can't believe you. What're you, sitting on the toilet writing your play? Someone should put that into a play.
 FEBUS Korky, go back to bed.
 KOREEN I can't believe you.
 FEBUS You know, Longfellow used to work on the toilet, baby. All the greats.
 KOREEN Henry Wadsworth Longfellow did not sit on the toilet writing a musical about Warren G. Harding.
 FEBUS Oh, what do you know.
 KOREEN Besides, we're supposed to look at apartments today. You're not going to spend the whole day sitting on the toilet.
 FEBUS What are you talking about?
 KOREEN Febus, please, don't aggravate me. You know I don't like it here. The rooms are too small.
 FEBUS What are you talking about?
 KOREEN And I didn't sleep last night.
 FEBUS What?
 KOREEN I couldn't sleep. I have nightmares. Always the same. Always the same. Oh, look at me. I'm so swollen. My whole body. How much longer can I live like this, Febus? How much longer can I live?
 FEBUS What's a matter? What do you want?
 KOREEN We have to move, Febus! I can't bear it anymore.
 FEBUS We're gonna move — someday.
 KOREEN Not someday, Febus. Now.
 FEBUS What're you, wanna move today? You think we're gonna move today?
 KOREEN Oh Febus, don't do this to me!
 FEBUS These things take time, baby. They take time — and planning. You gotta have a plan.
 KOREEN Febus, I made appointments.
 FEBUS What?
 KOREEN What do you mean, what? I told you.
 FEBUS What appointments?
 KOREEN I made appointments! To look at apartments. I made them earlier in the week. I told you this. I told you this!
 FEBUS I don't know what you're talking about.
 KOREEN Oh Febus, don't do this to me!
 FEBUS What am I doing to you?
 KOREEN You know goddamn well what you're —
 FEBUS Come on, Korky. I don't wanna —
 KOREEN Wait a minute! Wait a minute!
 FEBUS Listen, Korky, you got big ideas, you know —

KOREEN (*Getting more agitated.*) No. No.
 FEBUS All right, here she goes.
 KOREEN (*Crying out.*) Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!
 FEBUS See, now you're gonna get upset, baby. This is what you're gonna do.
 KOREEN (*Pounding on the door.*) You bastard! You goddamn bastard!
 FEBUS (*Getting into the argument — on the offensive.*) That's right, Korky, let the whole neighborhood know what you're like.
 (*The bathroom door bursts open. KOREEN's hand comes sailing through the doorway. Her hand is bigger than FEBUS.*)
 KOREEN You son of a bitch. Why do you do this to me?
 FEBUS A little louder, baby, come on. Let them know what you're like in Philadelphia.
 KOREEN (*Pounding the floor with her fist.*) Damn it. Damn it.
 FEBUS (*With sadistic disgust.*) Look at that! Look at that! Like a goddamn animal.
 KOREEN (*Sobbing, furious.*) Don't you dare call me an animal!
 FEBUS See that? See that? That's what you're like. Like an animal. For Christ sake.
 KOREEN (*Reaching for the phone.*) Give me that phone!
 FEBUS (*Pushing her off.*) What're you, gonna try to hit me with the phone?
 KOREEN Don't touch me.
 FEBUS Get outta here.
 KOREEN (*Sobbing.*) I'm gonna call my mother. I can't take this anymore with you, Febus.
 FEBUS What'd you think your mother is gonna take you back, baby? Are you crazy?
 KOREEN Give me that phone!
 FEBUS (*Pushing her hand off.*) She knows what you're like.
 KOREEN Get off me!
 FEBUS Everybody knows what you're like!
 KOREEN Please, please, Febus. I beg you. Don't do this to me!
 FEBUS Look at you! Look at you!
 KOREEN (*Wailing.*) Help! Help!
 FEBUS What're you, crazy? Are you crazy?!
 KOREEN Help me. Somebody help me!
 (*Telephone rings.*)
 FEBUS For Christ sake!
 KOREEN (*Sobbing, furious.*) Oooooooooooh. Oooooooooooh, I could kill you!
 FEBUS I hope somebody's taking that down, baby — so you can hear yourself someday.
 (*KOREEN growls, claws at FEBUS.*)
 You better watch it, baby. You're gonna swell

up. You're gonna swell up!
KOREEN (*Wailing horribly.*) Nooooooooooooo!!
Noooooooooooooo!!

FEBUS Get outta here! Get outta here!

(*KOREEN withdraws her hand, wailing, sobbing, growling as she goes. She scratches a gash in the floor as she retreats. The door closes. Muffled sobs now as she crawls away. FEBUS pounds his head.*)

(*To himself, pounding his head with his fist.*)
You see what I gotta live with now? You see what I gotta live with?

(*KOREEN continues to cry. Phone continues to ring. Reels continue to move. It's all recorded. Curtain as light is extinguished. Noise of the change behind the curtain.*)

Scene Seven

(Noise subsides. Curtain. Light illuminates BARCLAY on his carpet, the square of which is littered with reams of paper.)

BARCLAY "The evening shades." "The evening shades." Oh how my dramaturgy is like my life. Both inscrutable.

(*BARCLAY surveys his carpet.*)

My papers in disorder, such disorder.

(*BARCLAY screams at his papers.*)

Relentless enterprise, begone. I am the subject now of unsparing torment. Confusion! Fury! I have lost the thread of my narrative! Is 't possible? No longer simple family play. I am engulfed now in extended scrutinization of that Warren G. Harding. Why Harding? I was revenging myself solely on my parents. Such was the plan.

But flipping through my files, I lit on the prolonged episode: my father's great ambition to musicalize the former president. Forever did he promise composition, threatening my mother with the role of Harding's nagging wife, Florence. Oh, many were the dinner fork flung over that injury.

What, methought, were I to loop the whole farcical-tragic family spectacular — entwine it I say — with some stately pageant of American politics? I sought out reasons for my father's preoccupation. Why make a musicale of Harding? Why Harding? But the more I wondered on my father, the further on I wandered — to the point of rampant convolution. The plot is hopeless. The language hopelessly baroque. And worse, I can't determine which of all this shit has issued from me and which from him. My father? Yes! My father, yes. That most original genius!

Curious I can't determine where my father leaves off and I begin. I wonder that the two of us become like one man? Who? My father and I? No! Horrible. I will not complete the text. He begun it, I should leave it. Well, shouldn't I? Should I?

I find myself in my father's room. Bad enough! I wake here, discover me transformed into an ill-lit globe. Fine, I accept it. Now I glean my miserable excuse for a father and I become like one man, and soon, if this hell continues, there will be no distinction between us. One more monster. Let us pray for oblivion.

Oh Barclay, your continual "drama"! Put your goddamn papers into order. Discover if you can where your father leaves off and you begin. Fine. I'll do it. I will create something splendid beyond belief. Then burn it before a live audience. Now that's theater!

(The lights come up to full. BARCLAY glows intemperate.)

These walls, these floors. It's all on my mind. Noise behind the curtain. Oh, I am slain!

(*BARCLAY continues his drama, he pulses idiosyncratically. He gets the hook.*)

(*As he's pulled off.*) Hey, I'm not finished!

(*Curtain, as light is extinguished. Noise of the change behind the curtain.*)

Scene Eight

(*Noise subsides — giving way to the sound of men coughing. Curtain. Light illuminates the smoke-filled room. Suite 404, 405, 406 — the Blackstone Hotel, Chicago, June 12, 1920. Coughing continues throughout the entire scene — at points singular, at points choral, at points between. The dialogue always rising above. Smoke is everywhere, and virtually impenetrable. Figures appear — phantasmagorically — detected a moment, then — moving or stationary, quickly reenveloped and invisible. The only entity visually persistent is HENRY CABOT LODGE. Somehow his mouth and right leg are constantly visible. He sits apart from the others — as though he were a stage director conducting a rehearsal. He alone does not smoke. He sits in a chair down right, right leg crossed over left, right leg eternally swinging. The smoke screen is forever replenished. There is the occasional striking of the match, the sudden flame, the lighting of the cigar, the match extinguished. Sound*

indicates the addition or subtraction of the players. They move in and out of the suite, they use the john, they move from the living room to the adjoining bedrooms. Cards are shuffled and dealt, drinks are poured. It's sweltering. The men wipe themselves with handkerchiefs, fan themselves with newspapers, straw hats — even fans. LODGE speaks.)

LODGE (*Calling out.*) Hays! Harvey!
HAYS Here.
LODGE Who?
HAYS Hays.
WADSWORTH I'm leaving.
LODGE (*To HAYS.*) Where's Harvey? (*To WADSWORTH.*) Wait!
HAYS He's here somewhere?
CURTIS He's in the john.
LODGE (*Calling.*) George.
BRANDEGEE Oh Henry, give 'em a minute.
CURTIS He does his best thinking on the johnny.
SMOOT All the greats. (*Hiccup.*)
LODGE (*To WADSWORTH.*) James?
WADSWORTH To bed.
CURTIS Early yet.
WADSWORTH Fed up listening to a lot of footless conversation. (*To SPENCER.*) Evening, Selden.
SPENCER You leaving, James? Evening, gentleman.
WADSWORTH Fed up. See you tomorrow.
SMOOT Come on in, Selden. (*Hiccup.*)
CURTIS That Spencer?
SPENCER Good evening, Mr. Curtis. Lodge.
LODGE Get yourself a drink, Selden!
(*Toilet flushes off right.*)
BRANDEGEE There he goes.
SMOOT Damn heat. (*Hiccup.*)
CURTIS Like hell here!
LODGE And worse, it's Chicago! What's the time, Hays?
(*Bathroom door opens.*)
HAYS Half past.
HARVEY Christ have mercy! I can't see a thing.
LODGE What'd you come up with, George?
HARVEY What are you talking about?
LODGE Charles said you do your best thinking in the john!
HARVEY Well, the senator from Kansas is full of shit. (*Laughs.*) Where's Wadsworth?
LODGE Gone!
CURTIS "Fed up listening to a lot of footless conversation." (*Laugh.*)
HARVEY Where are we?
BRANDEGEE Who the devil knows?

LODGE We're reviewing — for the sake of those who have just arrived!
HARVEY Makes sense.
SPENCER Well let's wait a minute now — because Bill Borah is on his way.
CURTIS Oh, let's not wait — we'll fill him in when he gets here.
LODGE Can't be Wood!
(*Agreement among the players.*)
We all know that.
BRANDEGEE Won't listen.
LODGE Wouldn't even speak to Penrose!
SPENCER Is that right?
BRANDEGEE Made him speak with Himrod.
SMOOT That's right. (*Hiccup.*)
LODGE Told Penrose he'd make no promises!
HARVEY (*To SPENCER.*) Then Curtis and Calder saw him.
LODGE Same thing.
SPENCER Here's Bill.
BORAH Good evening!
CURTIS "Shady business, gentleman, and I'll have nothing to do with it." (*Laughs.*)
SMOOT Say that? (*Hiccup.*)
BRANDEGEE Sounds like Wood.
LODGE Won't do. Have to have someone who will "listen." Borah! we waited for you!
BORAH What're you all drinking here? Whoa, do I need one. I need two! Let me take a leak first.
LODGE (*Aggravated.*) Ahhh!
BRANDEGEE Here they are.
CALDER Good evening, boys.
SPENCER Ah, Calder. Your compatriot was just here.
HARVEY Hello, Lawrence. Joe.
CALDER Saw him in the elevator.
LODGE We were just talking about you.
PHIPPS Me?
HARVEY (*To PHIPPS.*) Not you, Larry, Willie.
SMOOT About your meeting with Wood. (*Hiccup.*)
CALDER Won't do. What a fool. He's your man, Henry.
LODGE Yes, but now it's impossible — and undesirable!
CURTIS Well, let's not rule out Lowden.
LODGE The problem, Charles, with Frank is that he's too independent!
(*Toilet flushes off right.*)
CALDER I don't trust him.
BRANDEGEE Neither does McCormick.
CURTIS Why, he's gone out of his way not to antagonize us.
CALDER That's why I don't trust him.
LODGE Besides, he's married to Pullman's daughter. He'll be viewed as a "railroad candidate"!

BORAH (*Calling from the bathroom.*) You talking Lowden out there?

LODGE Come on, Bill, get back in here.

BORAH (*Calling from bathroom.*) Don't start talking Lowden.

LODGE Bill, come on!
(*Bathroom door bursts open.*)

BORAH You know I just spent two and a half hours laying into that son of a bitch. Him and Wood. The kind of money they spent in the primaries. It's unacceptable. We have got to keep the Republican Party sober. Reed, pour me a drink, would you? Not too much ice.

SPENCER Who wants another? Calder?

BORAH Don't get me wrong, I like Frank.

CURTIS I like Frank too.

LODGE Yes, but nominate Lowden and Johnson will bolt!

BORAH That's it!

SPENCER Oh, are we so sure?

LODGE I'm telling you, Selden, Hiram will bolt!

HAYS We all know it.

LODGE Hiram will bolt, and we can't have it. We can't afford to see the Republican Party split!

BORAH Lowden is tainted!

SMOOT He's too rich, bless his heart. (*Hiccup.*)

LODGE Nothing to do with that. He's blackened by those bribes in Missouri.

SPENCER Well, I don't know about that!

BORAH 'Course you don't know, it's your own state, Spencer.

BRANDEGEE All right, hold on.

BORAH I'm telling you, nominate Lowden and Johnson'll bolt! I'm telling you. May I make a suggestion? Compromise with Knox.

SPENCER Oh sweetheart, not Philander.

BORAH Hold on.

SPENCER Bill, honey, the man has a serious heart condition.

BORAH I know that. Knox and Johnson. Henry?

LODGE You think Hiram will run second! And with Philander?

BORAH I think he'll do it. 'Specially if he knows he's a heart attack away from the presidency.

LODGE I want this followed up! Send somebody down to speak with Senator Johnson. I want to know if he'll run second with Philander Knox. Call Senator Crane. See if Hiram will sit second on a ticket with Philander. I don't think he'll do it.

BORAH I think he'll do it.

CURTIS Reed, did you see that button today? "I AM FOR HIRAM." (*Laughs.*) Did you see that?

LODGE You know, one of the problems, Bill, with

Knox, is that he voted against Prohibition and women's suffrage. And the ladies will cast a ballot in this election!

SPENCER I just wish we had another day to work on this.

LODGE Well, we don't! This is Friday night. I'm not going to hold the convention over Sunday!

HARVEY You can't. It's a hundred and ten degrees in that hall. The delegates are on the verge of collapse!

LODGE So are we all! I'd do just about anything to get out of Chicago!

CURTIS Well, let's not rule out Sproul.

SMOOT (*To FRELINGHUYSEN, privately.*) How are you, Joe? (*Hiccup.*)

SPENCER (*To LODGE, privately.*) What about you, Lodge?

FRELINGHUYSEN (*To SMOOT, privately.*) Besides exhausted?

LODGE (*To SPENCER, privately.*) What about me, what?

SMOOT (*To FRELINGHUYSEN, privately.*) This heat, huh? (*Hiccup.*)

SPENCER (*To LODGE, privately.*) What about you?

FRELINGHUYSEN (*To SMOOT, privately.*) Won't end.

LODGE (*To SPENCER.*) Too old! Seventy a month ago!

HARVEY (*To PHIPPS.*) Where you going, Larry? You're here ten minutes.

FRELINGHUYSEN (*To SMOOT, privately.*) How long have you been here?

PHIPPS (*To HARVEY.*) Ready to drop.

SMOOT (*To FRELINGHUYSEN, privately.*) Since the beginning. I been plugging Harding. (*Hiccup.*)

FRELINGHUYSEN (*To SMOOT, privately.*) Warren?

HARVEY (*To PHIPPS.*) Good night.

SMOOT Yep. (*Hiccup.*)

LODGE Have another drink, Spencer! (*To SPENCER, privately.*) We need to start talking about Senator Harding.

BORAH (*To FRELINGHUYSEN.*) Hey Joe, what're you and Smoot talking about?

FRELINGHUYSEN Warren Harding.

SMOOT Gotta break the deadlock. (*Hiccup.*)

CURTIS Oh but Henry, Senator Penrose has very little confidence in Harding.

BORAH (*To SMOOT.*) Because of Cox?

SMOOT (*To BORAH.*) That's right. We have to carry Ohio! (*Hiccup.*)

LODGE (*To SMOOT, BORAH, and FRELINGHUYSEN.*) What are you gentleman discussing?

SMOOT Harding. (*Hiccup.*)
 LODGE Ahhh!
 HAYS Oh good night, Phipps.
 LODGE (*To SMOOT.*) Wait. (*To HAYS.*) Hays! Did you get someone, Hays?
 HAYS Crane talked to Johnson. They want Johnson and Knox, not Knox and Johnson.
 LODGE (*Aggravated.*) Ahhh!
 HARVEY Crane mention Knox's heart condition?
 HAYS Hiram wasn't impressed. He won't take a second spot.
 LODGE I could have told you that! Too bad. Just as well. Deal again.
 CURTIS There's Sproul.
 BRANDEGEE Another "railroad candidate."
 HAYS Coolidge.
 BORAH Cautious Cal! (*Inquisitively to LODGE.*) Henry?
 CURTIS (*Inquisitively to LODGE.*) Oh, Henry?
 SPENCER (*Inquisitively to LODGE.*) Henry?
 LODGE (*To all inquisitors.*) What?
 BORAH He's the governor of your state, Senator. You'd have to push him.
 LODGE No!
 BORAH Why not?
 LODGE Nominate a man who lives in a two-family house? Never! Massachusetts is not for him! Besides, he's too old.
 HARVEY There's you, Will Hays?
 CURTIS (*To LODGE.*) Henry? Hoover!
 HAYS Can't bid at my own auction.
 LODGE (*To CURTIS.*) Oh, Charles. Herbert Hoover has about as much chance of being elected president as Calvin Coolidge!
 SMOOT That's right. (*Hiccup.*)
 LODGE Besides, it doesn't solve the Ohio problem at all. Let's review again. Wood and Lowden are unthinkable. Knox is nix. Johnson a disaster.
 CURTIS Sproul!
 LODGE No, Charles. We went over that already. It won't work!
 MCCORMICK My God, is Congress in session?
 LODGE Ah, the home state senator finally arrives!
 MCCORMICK Either that or the jails are empty. (*Laughs.*)
 CURTIS Ah, Medill. Did you forget where Illinois was?
 MCCORMICK Hey, what's drinking? You know I voted for Prohibition.
 LODGE We all voted for Prohibition. Have a drink.
 CURTIS (*To FRELINGHUYSEN.*) Oh, good night, Joe.
 LODGE (*Aggravated.*) Where is he going? Medill, you're fresh blood here. What are your thoughts

this evening about Warren Harding?
 SMOOT Hey, now we're getting somewhere. (*Hiccup.*)
 BRANDEGEE What's going on?
 SMOOT We're getting back to Harding. (*Hiccup.*)
 MCCORMICK Warren Harding? I love Warren Harding.
 LODGE Borah!
 MCCORMICK But what are we talking about?
 SMOOT His name's been bubbling up all evening. (*Hiccup.*)
 BORAH What are you talking about? Are you talking about Warren Harding?
 LODGE There's a very strong possibility the Democrats will nominate Governor Cox!
 HAYS We have to carry Ohio.
 LODGE Cox has carried Ohio twice now as governor.
 SMOOT That's right. (*Hiccup.*)
 LODGE No candidate of the Republican Party has ever been elected president without carrying Ohio.
 SMOOT None. I feel very strongly about Harding. (*Hiccup.*)
 LODGE I remind you, in all this, we can never seem to eliminate his name. Who said — it bubbles up.
 SPENCER Yea, like tar!
 LODGE Everything goes, Harding remains.
 SPENCER But Henry, I can't think of a single man less qualified to be president of these United States than Warren Harding.
 LODGE It doesn't matter! He's the logical solution to the current psychological development. Hays! Harvey!
 HAYS He's well liked. He looks like a president.
 CURTIS Oh, Penrose said that. Penrose is keen on Harding.
 BRANDEGEE He can take instruction. I don't think he has an original idea in his head.
 LODGE All the better!
 BORAH Well, I like Warren. I always have.
 CURTIS Oh, everyone likes Warren. George made that point. Beautiful speaking voice.
 BRANDEGEE Yes, and he looks good. Like a leader.
 LODGE His availability is outstanding! Hays! Harvey!
 BORAH Well, this might mollify Johnson.
 LODGE Good. But let's not be definite. We must never be definite!
 WATSON Evening!
 CURTIS (*To WATSON.*) Oh Jim! You're missing all the fun!
 SPENCER (*To WATSON.*) You coming? I'm going.
 BORAH I'm out of here too.
 SMOOT Good night. (*Hiccup.*)

WATSON Where in hell are we?
 SMOOT Harding. (*Hiccup.*)
 WATSON Harding? Harding what?
 SMOOT Gonna give 'em a run tomorrow. (*Hiccup.*)
 HARVEY (*To LODGE.*) Haskell and Kirkwood are on their way up.
 LODGE Who?
 HARVEY Guys from the *Star*.
 LODGE Oh yes, fine, you'll talk to them.
 WATSON Why Harding?
 LODGE Only sensible decision, Jim.
 CURTIS Henry, do you think we should try Johnson? You think he'll run second with Harding?
 LODGE Oh, Charles! If he won't run second with Knox, what makes you think he'll run second with Harding? Besides, it doesn't matter. If Harding is nominated, Johnson won't bolt.
 HAYS Right this way, gentlemen. Harvey, can you —
 LODGE (*To the intruders.*) Who's there? Stand and unfold yourself.
 MCCORMICK Guys from the *Star*.
 HARVEY (*To HASKELL and KIRKWOOD.*) Right this way, boys. (*To LODGE.*) Henry, you think you could help me? I might not remember everything.
 LODGE I'm not moving. Frank, get in there with them. Charles.
 WATSON Boy, the air stinks in here.
 LODGE I need a drink. But I can't move. Who can get me a drink? Reed? Thank you. How are you, Jim?
 WATSON Fine. Tired. We all are.
 LODGE Not too much ice.
 SMOOT There's none left. (*Hiccup.*)
 WATSON Dirty business. Takes all day. All damned day. And now the night's no relief. Is it?
 LODGE No relief.
 CURTIS (*Returning with the reporters.*) We'd like to give a try.
 LODGE (*Aggravated.*) What's the problem?
 KIRKWOOD No problem, Senator. Just curious.
 BRANDEGEE (*To HARVEY.*) Pssst. He's the logical selection.
 LODGE (*Irritated.*) Yes. Didn't you explain it?
 CURTIS Everything is fine, Henry. Relax.
 LODGE (*To CURTIS.*) Don't tell me to relax, I'm exhausted! (*To reporters, spelling it out.*) He is the superior candidate. He is from a strategic state. He is experienced — politically. Very popular in the Senate.
 SMOOT Very well liked. (*Hiccup.*)
 LODGE He's very well liked, do you hear that? His appearance is superpresidential! And he listens to reason. We're tired of men who can't take ad-

vice.
 CURTIS "Advise and consent." Remember that? (*Laughs.*)
 HASKELL But the man is scarcely known out of Ohio.
 LODGE He'll be known tomorrow!
 (*Chorus of coughing grows.*)
 CURTIS Listen fellas, this ain't any 1880 or 1904. We haven't got ourselves any John Sherman or Theodore Roosevelt. What we got are a lot of second-raters. And Warren Harding is the best of the second-raters.
 (*LODGE is handed his drink. He takes it, sniffs it.*)
 LODGE Perfecto!
 (*Coughing overwhelms the scene. Everyone but LODGE. He savors a moment his theatrical skills. Then, satisfied with his craft, brings his drink to his thirsty lips. His lips purse, he drinks — as curtain.*)

Act Four: A Fall to Earth

Characters

THE RACONTEUR
 THE ORATOR *and his* DOPPELGANGER

Setting

Irrelevant.

Note

The DOPPELGANGER is Carol Channing.

Entr'acte

THE RACONTEUR The stage is shifting, but how at this stage shall we shift? How change? Must we depend on mortal mechanics? Better had we moral mechanics, and by changing ourselves change this illusory world we temporarily inhabit. Turntables, air casters, lifts, tracks, and drops — honey, who can afford these things? Besides, we've no fly space. Were we to write angels — and I'm not saying we should — how should these creatures of heaven descend? Of course we could hit up on the lighting designer — many were the times he changed the scene by changing the light. But what if we're short on circuits? I was once in a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, and one night a whole bunch of dimmers blew. What light through yonder window

did not that evening break? It's true, all things grow dim — there is death — Everyman knows that. Let us be rid of these transient riches and face facts; we're broke! All we can afford is a noisy old traveler — and then we'd have to find someone to pull it. Better were we a Traveler.

But I have one other concern and that I think somewhat vain. I recently attended a revival of a much-loved musical put on at one of our better-furnished theaters. And it was wonderful. And there was marvelous set. But the piece — having been staged so beautifully in that very beautiful way that some people stage things these days — the set changes were made in front of the audience. And the actors helped make the change. But because the set was cumbersome, the stage crew was required to assist, and since the crew was to be in plain view of the audience — the piece again being staged in that very beautiful way — the crew had to be costumed. And since the actors were dressed as turn-of-the-century roustabouts, so was the costumed crew.

But you know, you can always tell the difference between the actors and the stage hands. I don't know why this is — but I think it is because there is a difference. The actors are always smiling or staying in character while they change the set. But of course you know and I know — and one hopes they know — all they're actually doing is just changing the set. And then the crew lumbers on in that grumpy but purposeful way, and they are not smiling and they are not even remotely in character. They simply are characters. In fact, what they are, are "characters in action" — that action being changing the set. And changing the set is the essence of what they are doing. And it really is, and it really is real, and it really is interesting; because not only are they actually doing something, they are really actually doing something. And you know it, and I know it, and they capture your attention. Or at least they capture mine.

And one particular member of this particular crew did capture my attention in particular; because not only was he actually doing something — really actually doing something — the other thing I found interesting about him was that though he was costumed — perfunctorily at least — as a turn-of-the-century roustabout — he was wearing a digital watch. And that was very interesting, because it made him — if somewhat surreal — nonetheless more real — more than the actors who were more than perfunctorily costumed. And he captured my attention. I

didn't watch the actors — not that they were actually doing anything that actually needed to be watched — I watched him.

Now, am I to allow some surly technician to upstage me? Never! If anyone is going to upstage me, I'll be the one to do it. Which of course I already have. Because you see, while I was talking, and you weren't looking — you were listening — hopefully — I've changed the set.

(Two figures appear on the bare, impoverished stage. They are the ORATOR and his DOPPELGANGER. The DOPPELGANGER bears a striking resemblance to the actress Carol Channing.)

DOPPELGANGER *(As Carol Channing.)* The Orator — who in his Prologue conceived himself a Raconteur, but was transformed in the first act from that into Stage Directions — those stage directions being a Narratage — a narratage you know being a Narrative — which we sometimes use in Drama — whereby a Narrator — seen or unseen — initiates and/or supplements the actual transpiring Story — giving the Illusion that the story Told is itself an expansion of the Words the narrator Speaks — this Orator Explains how the second act, "Republican Ascendancy," and this fourth act, "A Fall to Earth," are cut. He says:

ORATOR Act four. There isn't any act four.

DOPPELGANGER Well, that's exactly what he says.

He says no act four. The second act it seems was Written, then discarded, the fourth act Conceived but never written. And he tells you why. He says:

ORATOR The second and fourth acts would have made the Inner Play.

DOPPELGANGER Oh, did you hear that — the inner play? Oh, say that again — would you, the inner play.

ORATOR — the inner play, at one time called "The Second Part of Warren Harding." Act two being "The First Part of the Second Part of Warren Harding" or "The Second Part of Warren Harding, Part One," act four being "The Second Part of the Second Part of Warren Harding" or "The Second Part of Warren Harding, Part Two."

DOPPELGANGER Because, you see, there are two parts to Warren Harding, just as there are two parts (at least) to each and every one of us — which generally speaking is our inner play. But...

ORATOR There is no play to play.

DOPPELGANGER Or so he says.

ORATOR No play.

DOPPELGANGER So instead of Showing he is Telling, telling how he hopes to tell —

ORATOR *(To DOPPELGANGER.)* What happened?

DOPPELGANGER Exactly.

Gertrude Stein once said — you know she was talking about her writing plays — many plays, she said — and she — well, actually she was writing about her writing plays, but the writing she wrote was a Lecture to be spoken — so it was writing to be heard — she said I remember very well, she said, the first one she wrote, and she called it *What Happened, a Play* — always thinking that if you write a play you ought to announce it as such. She said she'd come home from a very pleasant dinner party and realized that something is always happening. Something is always happening, and that anybody, and I quote, anybody knows a quantity of stories and what is the use of telling another story since there are so many and everybody knows so many and tells so many, and she, naturally she, what she wanted to do in her play was what everybody did not always know nor always tell, and by everybody she naturally included herself. She said that she wrote *What Happened, a Play*, because she wanted to tell what could be told if one did not tell anything. In short, to make a play the essence of what happened.

ORATOR And so she chose not in her plays to tell stories.

DOPPELGANGER But sometimes — excuse me — telling is not just telling something, it is telling of something — which is to say that telling is the essence of what happens.

ORATOR I'll tell you something: I once participated in a reading of *The Tempest*. A play. By William Shakespeare. And after the reading, a playwright said to me how she didn't care for the opening of the play because “there was too much exposition.” The scene in which Prospero narrates to Miranda their history, hers and his.

“I would have cut it,” she said, “gone right to the action.” Which is interesting, because what I find interesting about that scene is not just the telling of how they came to be on the island —

DOPPELGANGER Though dramaturgically, if I may say, it's shrewd — one character telling the other and the audience if they're listening understanding what happened.

ORATOR Ah, but the telling of it. A father telling his daughter who he really is and who she really is, and why they really are where they actually are. And of course how he tells it and how she hears it.

It's telling how telling a telling can be.

DOPPELGANGER Can you imagine your own father sitting you down and telling you all this? Shake-

spere knew what he was about and made a dramatic scene.

ORATOR And so now I'm going to tell you —

DOPPELGANGER Me?

ORATOR Yes, you — what exactly does happen to Warren Harding, and what he does to become president in 1920.

DOPPELGANGER Oh, but now wait a minute, you mentioned the second and fourth acts, what happened to the third act? And what happened to Barclay — our scattered Author.

ORATOR The third act! I can't even talk about the third act — which was called “The Crack-Up” — other than to say that by the end — after trials and tribulations of the most absurd variety — the globe, Barclay — confronted with the myopia of his entire writing project — if not his entire life — is — as the curtain descends — completely and totally shattered.

DOPPELGANGER Shattered? You mean —

ORATOR Cracked up. Shattered.

DOPPELGANGER Oh, dear.

ORATOR But that's what happens. Things happen. We see things — about ourselves — and we are shattered.

DOPPELGANGER I think of that incredible scene — and I know you know it — in the play *Everyman* — where Everyman is just walking along, thinking God knows what, doing God knows what and Death — oh, you know, Death — comes along and says we have an appointment, did you forget?

ORATOR And that's what happens, we're walking along, mindless, absorbed in the progress of our “dramas” and we forget. But you know something?

DOPPELGANGER What?

ORATOR The forgetting is telling.

DOPPELGANGER (*Laughing.*) Exactly. So there's no more Barclay.

ORATOR (*Guiltily.*) A shard here and there.

DOPPELGANGER Good. Why hold on to parts of ourselves that are not viable?

ORATOR It isn't germinative.

DOPPELGANGER Well, I should hope not. And besides, we want to encourage new things to grow.

ORATOR So —

DOPPELGANGER And you'll notice — excuse me — you'll notice there are no Stage Directions in this act. Did you notice that? Even though there might be Descriptions of stage directions.

ORATOR It's telling how telling descriptions can be.

DOPPELGANGER And shorter.

ORATOR Yes, sometimes a telling description is more

concise, more to the point than a telling in showing.

DOPPELGANGER If it's not too long. People — who of course apprehend words by either reading or listening — might be willing to sit a long time apprehending words by reading, but might not be willing to sit a long time apprehending words by listening. Even if they're simultaneously seeing.

ORATOR In reading one is going one's own pace, stopping and starting as one is choosing.

DOPPELGANGER Whereas in the theater —

ORATOR You can't do it.

DOPPELGANGER Exactly. Which is actually one of the reasons the second, third, and fourth acts were cut.

ORATOR The whole thing was just too damn long.

DOPPELGANGER And if they weren't cut we'd be sitting here for another three hours listening without having anything to look at.

ORATOR And someone — I won't say who — wanted someone to listen. Because words written to be spoken are words written to be heard. And they must be played, played for others.

DOPPELGANGER Because even if in a piece to be played one might play by oneself — and some do it — or play oneself — and some do that — or even play with oneself —

ORATOR Some even playing themselves playing with themselves by themselves —

DOPPELGANGER You mean on stage?

ORATOR It's been done.

DOPPELGANGER Oh, goodness me. Still, one cannot play for oneself.

ORATOR Oh, one can do it but if one does, what one is doing is just engaging in the fantasy of performance.

DOPPELGANGER Exactly! And you don't want to do that.

ORATOR If what one makes is made to be played — which is to say made so that others might listen, it should be made so that others can listen.

DOPPELGANGER And playing oneself — excuse me — though it's different is related to being oneself. And whole schools of Acting developed so that actors could be themselves.

ORATOR And some of us took some of those acting classes because we wanted to be ourselves and find ourselves, and eventually find ourselves to be big Broadway musical comedy stars. Only to find there were no big Broadway musical comedies for us to star in.

DOPPELGANGER Well honey, there are very few.

ORATOR And there was nothing — nothing to be done.

DOPPELGANGER Well, unless you just revive your old vehicles — and some people actually do this.

ORATOR And in one of these acting classes — which was really a singing class — we stood up in front of our class and our teacher and our teacher asked us how were we and we said OK or some said great and most said terrible and we were encouraged to get in touch with our feelings — to make that long distance inside phone call — and some started to cry immediately — especially those who had been in the class for a long time, and they were feeling their feelings of generally pain and anger — and it is yes very much an essential part of being an actor — having access to pain and anger — actors generally speaking having to play people who are angry or are in pain because people who are not angry or not in pain are not generally speaking very interesting — at least not on stage — or at least not until the end of the play. So characters can be a bit scary — and the theater at times provocative. And Plato felt this, and railed against the theater, claiming that it stimulates indulgence of Natural Passions — assuming as he did and rightly so that most people in an audience can be angry or be in pain — even if he was grabbing the wrong end of the stick — and it took Aristotle — thank God! — his former Pupil to rebuke him in the *Poetics* and to remind us that in the midst of rage, in the midst of a Passion — given that the passion is Pretend — we might as we Listen, See something — seeing a way of Learning — learning a Pleasure — this learning having sometimes to do with seeing what is pride — pride being evil — evil finding expression in pain and anger — and so they expressed their pain and anger my classmate actors and I did too or tried — and it always came back to mom or dad — and what is that wonderful line from *The Boys in the Band* —

DOPPELGANGER It always comes back to Evelyn and Walt —

ORATOR And obviously it's true. And so we stood up in front of our class thrusting our arms out yelling get off my back get out of my life fuck you Mommy fuck you Daddy — oh God, I swear we did this — and when we were fully in touch with all this pain and anger we would sing our songs — “Raindrops on roses, and whiskers on —”

DOPPELGANGER Honey, excuse me. Honey.

ORATOR What?

DOPPELGANGER We're out of time.

ORATOR What? Out of time? What do you mean? I haven't yet told what happens to Warren Hard-

ing.

DOPPELGANGER Well, I know, but you have to get to the fifth act, and kill off the characters.

ORATOR Do you hear that? There's no time. What happened?!

DOPPELGANGER (*Indicating her watch and his babbling.*) Well, I just —

ORATOR Oh, never mind, what does anybody need to know about what happens! to Warren Harding or how what happens! might have been a play and might still if someone ever figures out why he wants to write a play that his father started years before as a musical comedy.

Harding never had a son, which means the son he never had never had a father. And some of us who are sons feel that same way exactly. Yes, the only thing you need to know about Warren Harding is that he didn't want to be president, he just wanted to stay in the Senate. But he knew — because of the infighting in the Ohio Republican Party in 1920, that if he didn't control the Ohio delegates at the Republican national convention, he would lose control of his state's patronage, and if he didn't control the patronage, he'd never get back in the Senate — so the only way he could stay in the Senate was by running for president — and then drop out once his Senate seat had been secured.

But that's not what happens. And so even though he didn't want to be president he became president, suggesting that he didn't not want to be president enough.

DOPPELGANGER And how many of us at one time or another not knowing do things we know we shouldn't and don't want to but don't not want to enough.

ORATOR And that perhaps not wanting to enough has something to do with not knowing why one does or why one does not because if one did might one not?

DOPPELGANGER And like a man full of pride, pain, and anger who inherits this not wanting to know from his father and continues in this vein, reuniting in this never knowing and more importantly with those who never knowing were, believing he is going somewhere.

ORATOR When in truth he is going nowhere, immobile, stymied in a painful wink.

Though of course there would have been wonderful marvelous speeches and scenes — all culminating in Chicago as the smoke-filled Republicans descend upon their dark convention. And maybe some day there will be the act of the inner play ending after Harding hoping to the end he

will not be nominated engineers it so he must.

DOPPELGANGER It sounds like you know an awful lot about it. Perhaps you should write this play.

ORATOR Perhaps I should. And of course the fourth act would have ended with the exact words Harding spoke the moment after he was nominated.

DOPPELGANGER Oh, say those words, would you — I find them very telling.

ORATOR You mean right here, right now, on this very stage? Do we have the time?

DOPPELGANGER Well, we just cut three hours off the show!

(The ORATOR assumes the role of WARREN G. HARDING.)

ORATOR (*As HARDING.*) We played to a pair of deuces, and filled.

DOPPELGANGER Exactly. And as surely as I'm sitting here, and sitting here surely I am, that would have been the end of act Four.

ORATOR Act Five, "The Pull of the Past."

Act Five: The Pull of the Past

Characters

NARRATAGE *in the form of stage directions*

FEBUS

WARREN G. HARDING *and all that surround him*

FLORENCE HARDING

KOREEN

SHAV *Koreen's father*

THE RACONTEUR *who is a real character*

Setting

A setting.

Note

SHAV *speaks with an East European accent.*

(*Out of a great darkness comes the voice of Al Jolson.*)

AL JOLSON'S VOICE We think the country's ready

For another man like Teddy.

We need another Lincoln

To do the country's thinkin'.

Mi-ster Hard-ing

You're the man for us!

(*A toilet flushes. Light illuminates FEBUS — in the bathroom, bent over the basin, washing his hands in the sink. The sun has set, the evening shades have fallen. The reel-to-reel tape recorder continues to record, but the tape has*

long run out. A smacking sound as the tape spins in infernal revolution.)

FEBUS All day. All damn day. Shit out my brains. Now what?

(FEBUS straightens, stands before the cloudy mirror.)

I can't see myself.

(FEBUS shuts his eyes. Within the mirror, light illuminates WARREN G. HARDING, immobile, propped up in bed in his room in the Palace Hotel, San Francisco, August 2, 1923. In his hands, the Saturday Evening Post — an article about HARDING, entitled: "A Calm Review of a Calm Man." But the president is not reading. His blinds are down; he has drifted into dreamy slumber.)

HARDING Gldphhhhhhhhh ... Gldphhhhhhhhh ...

(The once stalwart frame of the president — ballooned for a time into gross obesity — is, after recent illness, shriveled into flaky corpulence. And that imperial sheen of his silvery hair, tarnished a dandruffy white.)

HARDING Gldphhhhhhhhh ... Gldphhhhhhhhh ...

(HARDING dreams the theater of his entire existence, from boyhood gambol to backwater matriculation; from newspaper ownership, to lieutenant governor to senator, to nominee, to president. All his relations come back to him — they blanket the stage. He calls from sleep.)

Carrie. Carrie.

(CARRIE PHILIPS appears, an elegant figure. She holds forth the love letters HARDING scribbled to her from his seat in the Senate, page upon page decorated with hearts and kisses.)

Oh, Carrie.

(NAN BRITTON appears, pubescent, sporting a medical encyclopedia, pointing to pictures of human anatomy.)

NAN BRITTON Oh, Warren, what rapture!

(FLORENCE HARDING appears in the person of a monumental fury. She throws a chair at CARRIE PHILIPS and hires a private detective to shadow NAN BRITTON.)

HARDING (Reaching for NAN's breasts.) Nan, dearie.

(NAN flips the pages of her encyclopedia, displays a picture of pregnancy.)

NAN BRITTON Oh, Warren. Milk of a most luxurious richness is 't already issuing from both my breasts.

HARDING Oh, fuck.

(Characters of HARDING's life now populate the stage: senators, congressmen, cronies, and crooks. World War I enters, commences, and

concludes. Soldiers return from Europe, litter the stage, impoverished and out of work. Postwar chaos ensues: all over the stage there are race riots, crime waves, and a rise of fundamentalism. Down left, the Democratic Party is paralyzed by the social upheaval. Up right, the Republican Party capitalizes on the nation's discontent, begins its ascendancy.

HARDING's father enters, dragging an old sagging mule, waving his diploma as a homeopathic veterinarian.)

TRYON HARDING You have to aim high, son.

(HARDING corresponds. With one hand, he writes dozens of letters, refusing consideration for the office of president. With the other hand, he writes hundreds more, asking to be considered as a second-, third-, or fourth-choice candidate; the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. The Republican convention convenes, the Smoke-filled Room assembles. At its pontifical center sits HENRY CABOT LODGE. But so thick is the haze of tobacco, LODGE does not discern how his playlet is in vain. His entire performance a shallow act of virtuosity. For HARDING has already sewn up the nomination. His letters requesting second-, third-, and fourth-choice consideration congeal into an iceberg of support. The convention sails blindly on, deadlocks, slams into the iceberg. HARDING is nominated, then elected president. He becomes a political giant.)

HARDING We played to a pair of deuces and filled. But God, what labor.

(NAN BRITTON gives birth to a baby in a cheap hotel on the Jersey shore.)

NAN BRITTON Oh Warren, she looks just like you.

(HARDING's mother rises from the traps on her deathbed. She recalls her conversion to Seventh-Day Adventist.)

PHOEBE HARDING The millennium approaches, Warren! Prepare ye the way. The great work begins!

(The president is transported! He crosses the stage on a miniature train, weakened by a life of material and gluttonous excess, corrupted by a career of political shenanigans, proselytizing the nation about good old family values. He then boards a miniature boat, sails to Alaska, shivers in a blizzard, begins to cough up blood. He hobbles to San Francisco, collapses in bed, wakes.)

HARDING My whole damned life. What happened?!

(HARDING has a massive and convulsive heart attack. He spits up his guts, goes dark.)

Glllll ...

(A knock at the door.)

FLORENCE (*Knocking.*) Wurr'n? Wurr'n?
(The door opens. FLORENCE HARDING appears, her features indiscernible. She steps forward, into some beautiful side light — but just as she does...)

KOREEN (*Knocking.*) Febus? Febus? I heard the toilet flush. Did you finish your play?
(FEBUS opens his eyes.)

FEBUS What happened?

KOREEN I'm feeling much better now, Febus. I washed my hair in the kitchen, I did my nails, I straightened up last night's dinner dishes. I'm much more relaxed.
 I'm sorry to have disturbed you this morning, Febus. I know how important it is for you to write your play. It was rude of me to disturb you. It's just that when I woke I was frightened. There was a bad dream and I couldn't find you. I get frightened in the morning, Febus. I don't know what horrors the new day will hold.
(FEBUS washes his hands.)
 Febus?
(The door slowly opens. KOREEN's hand appears, offering some of her hair.)
 See how I shampooed my hair? Feel how silky it feels.

FEBUS Leave me alone, baby.

KOREEN Oh. Well, maybe you'll feel it later. And look, Febus —
(KOREEN produces a newspaper.)
 I went through the paper, and look what I found. There's a duplex for sale on Hamilton Drive in Beverly Hills. Fifty-five thousand dollars. See what it says? Bright, spacious rooms, high ceilings, two bedroom, two bath. That's just the first floor. The upstairs is smaller, but I was thinking we could rent that out, make a little extra money — help pay off the mortgage. Fifty-five thousand dollars is a fabulous price for Beverly Hills. And it's right near the park — you know where they do the dog training. You like that.

FEBUS Korky, you're living in dreamland. Where're we gonna get the money for a duplex?

KOREEN Fifty-five thousand dollars is not a lot of money, Febus. I'll ask my mother to help us out.

FEBUS I'm not borrowing any money from your mother, Korky. I don't want to get obligated, for Christ sake.

KOREEN It doesn't have to be an obligation, sweetheart. We could let my mother live above us. It's like she's paying a rent. The downstairs has two bathrooms. You could write all weekend and I'd never once disturb you.
 Come on, Febus, be a good guy.

FEBUS Leave me alone.

KOREEN I don't want to leave you alone. Come here. Come to Mama.
(KOREEN extends one finger, tickles FEBUS.)

FEBUS (*Pushing off her enormous finger.*) Come on, Korky, cut it out. I'm washing my hands.

KOREEN You can wash your hands later. Come on, big boy, dance with me.

FEBUS Hey, easy does it.

KOREEN Write me a song about our new apartment. Write me a song about two people who buy a duplex on Hamilton Drive in Beverly Hills and live happy ever after.

FEBUS Hey, come on. I gotta write my play.

KOREEN You've been writing your play all day. Now it's time for me. Besides, you said you finished your play.

FEBUS That was just the book. Now I gotta write the music and lyrics.

KOREEN Oh come on, Febus, stop pretending. Who the hell is gonna be interested in a musical about Warren G. Harding?

FEBUS What're you talking about? This thing is gonna put me over the top.

KOREEN The top of my head. Come on, get dressed. I wanna drive over, look at this apartment.
(Telephone rings. FEBUS picks up.)

FEBUS (*Into phone.*) Hello? Yes. Yes. This is he. Un huh. Un huh.

KOREEN Who is it, Febus?

FEBUS (*To KOREEN.*) Shhhh. It's somebody from work.

KOREEN On Saturday?

FEBUS Shhhh! I gotta take it. Give me five minutes, would ya?
(KOREEN pauses, her hand stiffens, shakes. KOREEN withdraws her hand, closing the door behind her.)

FEBUS (*Into phone.*) Hello? Hey baby. I'm sorry, I'm sorry — I stood you up, I know. I couldn't pull myself away. You know how I get — all wound up in my work. I get carried away. I thought I was on a roll. I thought something was happening. Then nothing came out. Not even the usual crap. I can't live with this shit inside me. It's choking the life out of me. I gotta get outta here. I gotta get out. Well, maybe I should. What do you think? What do you think? You and me, head up north — you and me, up north, out of this stink hole.
 Right now! We could meet in the park. You know, where they train the dogs. A new beginning. Twenty minutes. (*Big kiss into the phone.*)
 Big kiss!

(*FEBUS hangs up, turns to the soiled mirror.*)
I'm outta here!

(*The bathroom door is broken down, shattered into splinters by KOREEN's fist. She pulls what's left of it off its hinges, tosses it into the room.*)

What the hell are you doing? Have you cracked up?

KOREEN You bastard! You goddamn bastard.

FEBUS What are you talking about?

KOREEN (*Sobbing.*) You told me you weren't going to see her anymore!

FEBUS Hey, watch it, you're gonna ruin my whole recorder.

KOREEN I don't care.

(*KOREEN grabs at FEBUS. He puts up his hands to protect himself, feels in KOREEN's hand the receiver of a wall phone.*)

FEBUS Oh, fuck.

KOREEN That's right, handsome. I picked up the extension!

(*FEBUS turns blindly around, winding himself in the wires of his tape recorder.*)

FEBUS You better watch it, baby. You're gonna swell up. You're gonna swell up!

KOREEN I'm as swollen as I'll ever get. I can't get any bigger.

(*FEBUS grabs a reel from his tape recorder, aims at KOREEN.*)

FEBUS You fucking whale!

(*FEBUS casts his reel, but the tape unwinds, he is handcuffed in a tangle of Mylar.*)

We're gonna have to call up Dick Edelman about this, baby. Maybe Dick —

(*KOREEN grabs FEBUS, pulls him toward the door. The phone cord gets twisted around his neck.*)

FEBUS (*Clutching his throat.*) Ran foul!

(*KOREEN lifts FEBUS in her hand, pulls him out of the bathroom.*)

(*As he's pulled away.*) Korky, Korky, put me down. You're gonna wake up the neighbors.

(*And out he goes — all wound up, carried away by his "work."*)

It is quiet now on the wicked stage. Light changes, night passes for day. As the sun rises, light falls into the bathroom. Fragments of the shattered mirror — which had fallen onto the beige mat that hugs the base of the toilet — glimmer in the sunlight of a new dawn.

The beige mat enlarges into a square of beige carpet, and those shards of mirror into the splintered remnants of a shattered globe. The beige carpet expands further, becomes a beach, and the shards of glass shimmering speckles on a stretch

of beige sand. From the sand are formed the scattered stones of a fallen tower. All is quiet.

A screeching gull passes, "Errh, errh," heralding the arrival of some galactic presence. And sure enough. Enter KOREEN. We see her now. She rises fifty feet into the air — her hair cropped short, she wears a shapeless shift. She performs a brief Dionysian dance, hums a Bacchanalian tune. Thus is she envisioned: a maenad in a muumuu. In one hand she holds the lifeless FEBUS. He hangs limp, a shred of telephone cord dangling from his neck. She looks around, sees the crumbled tower.)

KOREEN (*Calling.*) Mother? Mother, it's me. Mother?

(*She turns to the sea.*)

(*Calling.*) Shav! Shav! Shav of the Shav-green sea. It's Koreen, your daughter. Lift up your head to me.

(*An offshore tempest. SHAV's head emerges from the foam. A large green head, bearded, crowned.*)

SHAV Koreenala, what are you doing here?

KOREEN I'm looking for my mother.

SHAV She's gone.

KOREEN What?

SHAV Gone.

KOREEN Gone? You mean ... When?

SHAV Ages, ages ago.

KOREEN Why didn't someone tell me?

SHAV We tried to reach you. Your phone was always busy. What are you doing here?

KOREEN I came home. My marriage fell apart.

SHAV What happened with your hair?

KOREEN I cut it off.

SHAV Your long beautiful hair. You had from when you were a little girl. Why'd you cut it off?

KOREEN I guess I'm not a little girl anymore.

SHAV What's that you got in your hand?

KOREEN My husband. I killed him.

SHAV Why'd you do that?

KOREEN I got worked up. I couldn't contain myself.

SHAV You shouldn'ta killed your husband.

KOREEN I've had a hard life. Nothing really worked out for me.

SHAV You had every advantage, Koreen.

KOREEN Did I? What happened?

SHAV I couldn't say.

KOREEN Each day is misery. I can't go back to the apartment. The rooms get smaller and smaller. I'm so swollen.

SHAV Poor girl.

KOREEN I thought if I came back. I thought if I came home. But look, the tower has fallen. There's no

home to come home to.

SHAV You didn't really want to live in a tower, did you, baby?

KOREEN No. I don't know what I wanted. I guess I never did. Things didn't turn out as I imagined. That made me so angry. The angrier I got, the bigger I got. The bigger I got, the angrier I got.

SHAV Well, that's what happens.

KOREEN (*Weeping.*) What about you, Father? Could I live with you? In your globe beneath the sea?

SHAV I don't think so, baby. There wouldn't be room for you. The ceiling would crack. I wish I could help you.

(*KOREEN bends to the earth, digs with her hands.*)

What are you doing?

KOREEN I'm digging a hole to bury my husband.

SHAV That's wise. You don't want to leave him; the birds will tear him to shreds.

KOREEN No, I wouldn't want that. I choked the life out of him. The least I could do is put him in the ground.

Go away, Father. You've answered my questions. You can't help me.

SHAV I wish I could. I better go down.

(*SHAV submerges. KOREEN unwraps the cord from FEBUS's neck, puts him in the ground. She pushes sand over him and places a few of the tower's stones over his grave. She rises, turns to the sea.*)

KOREEN Hopeless. Completely hopeless.

(*KOREEN walks to the water's edge — pauses, wades in, throws 'round her baleful eyes. Her magnificent bulk begins to harden, petrify. Her body loses human form. Her flesh is made gritty, granitic. Her features indiscernible. Thus is she rendered, immobile, a great misshapen crag. A seagull soars above her, "Errh, errh." The waves pound — their watery insults splash her stony visage — like Niobe now — all salty tears. In time, the vast persisting ocean will make silt this tower of grief. 'Til then, she stands with fearsome aspect, fast against the crashing sea. A final blessed curtain as light is extinguished.*)

Epilogue

(*And of course this Epilogue is spoken in front of the curtain by THE RACONTEUR who is a real Character.*)

The play is done if play it be;
and if not play, might yet we see,
Fate sad of those unthinking souls
who sink expired in murky shoals.

And yet despite the dismal,
despite the shattered bleak;
Despite the shorn, despite the torn,
despite the blasted freak;

Despite the rending garments strewn,
the tearing out of hair,
Despite offending varmints pruned
(pulled fully from their lair);

One last remark before we shuffle off
these coils to take up pen again;
And please consider this as you
consider this shenanigan.

This piece, this thing that has been wrought
and rendered as it could,
An epic, yes, and a burlesque,
to know that would be good.

For Aristotle tells us
and he tells us oh so well
That epics are a mix of form,
a mix of say and tell.

And we have told, and we have said,
here acted parts, here scen'ry rolled,
We ripped at certain monsters but
with jokes have they been scold.

Sure this Gigantor drama's lacking
in the wisdom of Maimonides,
But sure are its conventions those
of not peculiar Comedies.

For one escaped to sing this song,
to sing it loud and clear,
Hoping all the while at least
that some might stay and hear.

For what if words in short life,
fail to sell or pay?

At least one's lived and long enough
the tale to tell and play.

And that certainly is E.O.P. (*Hiccup.*)
End of piece. I thank you very much
for your attendance.