

Southern Nights: Unsung Songs of the Southern Nightingale

One-Act Plays by Tennessee Williams

Enter Tennessee Williams. He speaks in the Tennessee-Mississippi border country accent spoken by many of his characters, which made him a target for ridicule as a teenager in St Louis.

Tenn

Good evening. I'm Tennessee Williams. All right, I am not Tennessee Williams; I'm an actor *playin'* Tennessee Williams, 'cause after all I passed some time ago. Besides, I am somewhat more comfortable as a character in my plays than as myself. I really don't look anything me, which is acceptable in theatrical circumstances since our outsides are never a faithful representation of our insides. (*Touches head to indicate the mind inside its bone box. Looks at audience. Chooses prettiest girl he sees.*) Who is this beautiful person here really? Is she tough as nails, or fragile as a delicate flower? Is she Miss Alma or Stella? This young man: is he Stanley given to anger and violence; is he an educated doctor confused by passions twisting inside him? Will he pass through a time of turbulence in his life and come out the other side a good and caring person? (or) Will he turn out like me?

Likely, the best description of me is offered by Tom at the end of *Glass Menagerie*. Let me read it for you. It's a speech every actor worth their salt want to do, and this is my chance. (*He opens a play script and begins to read. It becomes clear; he does not need the script at all.*)

(Insert Text from GM)

This was me. A leaf, torn away from my branch, blown by the capricious winds of life from Mississippi to Missouri and on to Iowa, from St Louis to Memphis to New York, to Rome, Paris, Corsican villages, Key West, Hollywood, New Orleans and back again. I'd just decide to move on for seemin'ly no reason and be off, typewriter in tow. I really didn't know if I was runnin' from somethin' or tryin' to find it. I did love the company of strangers.

I was, at best, homosexually promiscuous. Through the years, I had a couple serially "monogamous" relationships, but, when the cat was a way, I'd play, either out of emotional attachment or attraction satisfied by purchase. It's not that I didn't care for my partners; I just couldn't not . . . My life was trying to understand why I, why my family, did the things we did. I never achieved this level of cognition. What I could do was describe in stories, pictures, metaphors, the sounds of words that place where our religious and self-delusions met. I was trying to discover the truth. That something to hold on to that made you safe. I did not succeed.

I did find some pieces of truth though. Mostly they weren't pretty. They are in the plays you will see tonight. My major works, as literary aficionados say, explore the southern cultural. Tonight's plays are not about the south. My major works explore the clash of animal propensities and cultural repression of same,

and the dysfunctional maladjustments that paradoxically keep us sane and make us crazy. Tonight's plays span my lifetime. The first is a symbolic, cardboard cutout, hopeful play set near Boston, dating to the early 1940's shortly after I was 30 years old and three years after I adopted the moniker of Tennessee. The second, from 1953, was written for television and concerns the nature of comfort we can provide one another when we are humble enough to recognize mutual needs. The third was written the mid 1960's and makes use of Absurdist stylistic tendencies to reveal the shallowness, egocentric fixation, the social insanity of straights and gays. The last was written shortly before my timely passing at age 71. It has a clarity, a beauty about it while, at the same time, depicting the vile relationship of dictatorial power and the common persons ineffectual efforts at self preservation as it plays out in the world.

Anthologizers of my plays credit me with seeking and explanation for the madness I saw around me and in me. They politely refrain from articulating that last phrase, but I know, and the director of tonight's plays knows too, that madness was as much mine as anyone else's. He marvels, I think, that I could write at all, given my addiction to alcohol and prescription drugs. But in the mornings when I sat down to write there was another me present, one with clarity of mind and the words would just flow out my fingers. Still, I was and inveterate rewriter. I'd kept coming back to a story or play sometimes years after the first drafts. Somehow I knew though the words were adequate the idea wasn't complete. It takes time, I think, from when we first have an insight to when we have a richer, subtler understanding of the nuances at work below the choppy sea of actions and flotsam of words. Enrichment is continuous.

I'll leave ya'll with that thought for now. I'll visit with you again before we part.



BERT: Knocked it over?

KENNETH: It's disgraceful, what I done. I'm standin' there, havin' a decent conversation, that's all, and before I know it I start rockin', the damned thing, and it toppled over and broke every glass in the place, and the beer spoutin' out of teh pipes all over the floor. They took all me money; I'll be six weeks payin' them back.

I'm for the Civil Service, I think, I'll get back to regular there I think.

BERT: Well—good luck, Kenny.

(Blushing.) I hope you'll remember the poems again.

KENNETH (as though they were unimportant): No, they're gone, Bert. There's too much to do in this country for that kinda stuff.

WILLY enters with goods.

TOM: Hey, Willy, get this right away; it's a special for Peeksilk!!

WILLY: Okay.

WILLY takes the order and goes, and when BERT turns back to KENNETH he is wrappin' again. So BERT moves away from the table. JERRY enters, leaves; and JIM enters, drops goods on the table, and leaves. LARRY enters with a container of coffee, goes to the order book, and checks through the orders. BERT goes to him.

BERT: I'm goin', Larry.

LARRY (over his shoulder): Take it easy, kid.

PATRICIA enters and crosses past BERT, looking out through the windows. TOM gets up and bumbles through a pile of goods on the table, checking against an order in his hand. It is as though BERT finished it could stop for a moment, and as each person enters he looks expectantly, but nothing much happens. And so he gradually moves—almost is moved—toward an exit, and with his book in his hand he leaves.

Now KENNETH looks about, sees BERT is gone. He resumes his work and softly sings.

KENNETH: "The minstrel boy to the war has gone!" Tommy, I'll be needin' more crayon before the day is out.

TOM (without turning from the desk): I'll get some for you.

KENNETH (looking at acrylon, peeling it down to a nub): Oh, the damn mice. But they've got to live too, I suppose. (He marks a package and softly sings.)

"...in the ranks of death you will find him.
His father's sword he has girded on,
And his wild harp stung behind him."

CURTAIN

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WILLY: Okay.

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A Lyrical Fantasy

by Tennessee Williams

CAST

Dorothy Simple
Police Officer
Young Man
Mrs. Dull

can see for yourself. Last night this house was surrounded by a beautiful double row of pink and lavender petunias. Look at them now! When I got up this morning I discovered them in this condition. Every single lime petunia deliberately and maliciously underfoot!

OFFICER My goodness! Well, well, well!

DOROTHY "Well, well, well" is all going to catch the culprit!

OFFICER What do you want me to do, Miss Simple?

DOROTHY I want you to apprehend a petuniacidal maniac with a size eleven D foot.

OFFICER Eleven D?

DOROTHY Yes. That is the size of the footprints that crushed my petunias. I just now had them measured by a shoe clerk.

OFFICER That's a pretty large foot, Miss Simple, but lots of men have got large feet!

DOROTHY Not in Primapproper, Massachusetts. The shoe clerk, assured me that there isn't a man in town who wears a shoe that size. Of course you realize the danger of allowing this maniac to remain at large. Any man who would crush a sweet petunia is equally capable in my opinion of strangling a helpless woman

or killing an innocent child!
OFFICER I'll do my best, Miss Simple.
See you later.

DOROTHY (Curly) Yes. Good-by.
(Slams door. She returns
behind her motion counter and
burns restively with her pink
pinkpolished nail. The canary
cheeps timidly. Then tries an
arpeggio. DOROTHY, to
canary.) Oh, hush up! (Then
contritely.) Excuse me, please.
My nerves are all to pieces!"
(Blows her nose. The doorbell
tinkles as a customer enters.
He is a YOUNG MAN,
shockingly large and aggressive
looking in the flower-
papered cubick of the shop.)
Gracious, please be careful.
You're bumping your head
against my chandelier.

YOUNG MAN (Good-humoredly)
Sorry, Miss Simple. I guess I'd
better sit down. (The delicate
little chair collapses beneath
him.)

DOROTHY Heaven have mercy upon
us! You seem to have a genius
for destruction! You've broken
that little antique chair to
smithereens!

YOUNG MAN Sorry, Miss Simple.

DOROTHY I appreciate your sorrow,
but that won't mend my
chair. — Is there anything I can
show you in the way of
actions?

YOUNG MAN I'd like to see that pair
of wine colored socks you
have in the window.

DOROTHY What size socks do you
wear?

YOUNG MAN I keep forgetting. But
my shoes are eleven D.
DOROTHY (Sharply) What size did
you say? Eleven? Eleven D?

YOUNG MAN That's right, Miss
Simple. Eleven D.

DOROTHY Oh. Your shoes are rather
muddy, aren't they?
YOUNG MAN That's right, Miss
Simple. I believe they are.
DOROTHY Quite muddy. It looks like
you might have stepped in a
freshly watered flower-bed
last night.

YOUNG MAN Come to think of it,
that's what I did.

DOROTHY I don't suppose you've
heard about that horrible case
of petunia crushing which
occurred last night?

YOUNG MAN As a matter of fact, I
have heard something about it.

DOROTHY From the policeman on the
corner?

YOUNG MAN No ma'am. Not from
him.

DOROTHY Who from then? He's the

only man who knows about it
except— except—the
man who did it! (Pause. The
canary chirps inquiringly.)
You—you—you—are the man
who did it!

YOUNG MAN Yes, Miss Simple. I am
the man who did it.

DOROTHY Don't you try to get away!

YOUNG MAN I won't, Miss Simple.
DOROTHY Stand right where you are
till the officer comes!

YOUNG MAN You're going to call the
officer?

DOROTHY Yes, I am. I certainly am.—
In a minute. First I'd like to ask
you why you did it? Why did
you crush my petunias?

YOUNG MAN Okay. I'll tell you why.
First, because you'd barricaded
your house" — and also
your heart — behind that silly
little double row of petunias!

DOROTHY Barricaded? My house—
my heart-behind them? That's
absurd. I don't know what you
mean.

YOUNG MAN I know. They're
apparently such delicate,
fragile creatures, these petu-
nias, but they have a terrible
resistance.

DOROTHY Resistance to what, may I
ask?

YOUNG MAN Anything big or
important that happens to
come by your house. Nothing
big or important can ever get
by a double row of petunias!
That is the reason why you are
living alone with your canary
and beginning to dislike it.

DOROTHY Dislike my canary? I love
it!

YOUNG MAN Secretly, Miss Simple,
you wish the bird-seed would
choke it! You dislike it nearly
as much as you secretly
disliked your petunias.

DOROTHY Why should I, why should
you, why should anybody
dislike petunias!

YOUNG MAN Our animosity and its
resultant action is best ex-
plained by a poem I once
composed on the subject of
petunias and similar flora.
Would you like to hear it?

DOROTHY I suppose I should, if it's
relevant to the case.

YOUNG MAN Extremely relevant. It
goes like this: (With music.)
How grimly do petunias look
on things with listed in the
book, for those dear creatures
never move outside the
academic groove. They mark
with sharp and moral eye
phenomena that pass them by
and classify as good or evil
mammoth whale or tiny
weevil. They note with con-
summate disdain all that is

mASCULINE or plain. They blush down to their tender roots when men pass by in working boots. All honest language shocks them so they cringe to hear a rooster's crow. Of course they say that good clean fun's permissible for every one. But find that even Blindman's Bluff is noisy and extremely rough AND — (Stage whisper.) — Not quite innocent enough!

What do you think of it?

DOROTHY Unfair! Completely unfair! YOUNG MAN Why don't you then? DOROTHY Only because you made an honest confession.

DOROTHY Yes, and besides, I don't think anyone has the right to impose his opinions on the form of footprints on other people's petunias!

YOUNG MAN (Removing small package from pocket.) I'm prepared to make complete restitution.

DOROTHY What with?

YOUNG MAN With these.

DOROTHY What are they?

YOUNG MAN Seeds.

DOROTHY Seeds of what? Sedition?

YOUNG MAN No. Wild roses.

DOROTHY Wild? I couldn't use them!

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YOUNG MAN Why not, Miss Simple?

DOROTHY Those flowers like human beings. They can't be allowed to grow. They have to be... regimented...

YOUNG MAN Regimented? Ahhh. I see. You're a horticultural fascist!

DOROTHY (With an indignant gasp.) I ought to call the policeman about those petunias!

YOUNG MAN Why don't you then?

DOROTHY Only because you made an honest confession.

YOUNG MAN That's not why, Miss Simple.

DOROTHY No?

YOUNG MAN The actual reason is that you are fascinated.

DOROTHY Am I? Indeed!

YOUNG MAN Indeed you are, Miss Simple. In spite of your tale unlamened petunias, you're charmed, you're intrigued — you're frightened!

DOROTHY You're very concealed!

YOUNG MAN Now, if you please, I'd like to ask you a question.

DOROTHY You may. But I may well answer.

YOUNG MAN You will if you can. But

you probably won't be able. The question is this: What do you make of it all?

DOROTHY I don't understand — All what?

YOUNG MAN The world? The universe? And your position in it? This miraculous accident of being alive! (Soft music background.) Has it ever occurred to you how much the living are outnumbered by the dead? Their numerical superiority, Miss Simple, is so tremendous that you couldn't possibly find a ratio with figures well enough above the line, and small enough low to represent it.

DOROTHY You sound like you were trying to sell me something.

YOUNG MAN I am, just wait!

DOROTHY I am not in the market for

YOUNG MAN Please! One minute of your infinitely valuable time!

DOROTHY All right. One minute.

YOUNG MAN Look!

DOROTHY At what?

YOUNG MAN Those little particles of dust in the shaft of April sunlight through that window.

DOROTHY What about them?

YOUNG MAN Just think. You might

have been one of those instead of what you are. You might have been any one of those infinitesimal particles of dust. Or any one of millions and billions and trillions of other particles of mute unconscious matter. Never capable of doing, thinking, feeling anything at all! But instead, dear lady, by the rarest and most improbable of accidents, you happened to be what you are. Miss Dorothy Simple from Boston! Beautiful! Human. Alive. Capable of thought and feeling and action. Now here comes the vital part of my question. What are you going to do about it, Miss Simple?

DOROTHY (Who is somewhat round, in spite of her crushed petunias.) Well, goodness-gracious — sales alive! I thought you came in here to buy some socks?

YOUNG MAN Yes, but I've got to sell you something first.

DOROTHY Sell me what?

YOUNG MAN A wonderful bill of goods.

DOROTHY I'll have to see it before I sign the order.

YOUNG MAN That's impossible. I can't display my samples in this shoppe.

DOROTHY Why not?

YOUNG MAN They're much too precious. You have to make an appointment.

DOROTHY (Retreating.) Sorry. But I do all my business in here.

YOUNG MAN Too bad for you.—In fact, too bad for us both. Maybe you'll change your mind?

DOROTHY I don't think so.

YOUNG MAN Anyway, here's my card.

DOROTHY (Reading it, bewildered.)—LIFE-INCORPORATED.
(Looks up slowly.)

YOUNG MAN Yes. I represent that line.

DOROTHY I see. You're a magazine salesman?

YOUNG MAN No. It isn't printed matter.

DOROTHY But it's matter, though?

YOUNG MAN Oh, yes, and it's a matter of tremendous importance, too, but it's neglected by people. Because of their ignorance they've been buying cheap substitute products. And lately a rival concern has sprung up outside the country. This firm is known as "Death, Unlimited." Their product comes in a package labeled "War." They're crowding us out with new aggressive

methods of promotion, and one of their biggest sales points is "Excitement." Why does it work so well? Because you little people surround your houses and also your hearts with rows of tiresome, trivial little things like petunias! If we could substitute wild roses, there wouldn't be wars! No, there'd be excitement enough in the world without having wars! That's why we've started this petunia-crushing campaign. Miss Simple, "Life, Incorporated" has come to the realization that we have to use the same aggressive methods of promotion used by "Death, Unlimited," over there! We've got to show people that the malignantly trivial little petunias of the world can be eliminated more cleanly, permanently and completely by "Life, Incorporated" than by "Death, Unlimited!" Now what do you say, Miss Simple? Won't you try our product?

DOROTHY (Anxiously.) Well, you see it's like this—I do all my buying in Boston and

YOUNG MAN What do you buy in Boston?

DOROTHY You can see for yourself. Look over the stock.

YOUNG MAN (Examining the shelves.) Thimbles—threads—ladies' needle-work—white gloves—

DOROTHY Notions. Odds and ends. YOUNG MAN Odds and ends—of existence?

DOROTHY Yes, that's it exactly. YOUNG MAN What do you do after hours?

DOROTHY I carry on lot of correspondence. YOUNG MAN Who with?

DOROTHY With wholesale firms in Boston.

YOUNG MAN How do you sign your letters?

DOROTHY "Sincerely." "As ever." "Very truly yours."

YOUNG MAN But never with love?

DOROTHY Love? To firms in Boston? YOUNG MAN I guess not. I think you ought to enlarge your correspondence. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll meet you tonight on Highway No. 77!

DOROTHY Oh, no! I have my correspondence!

YOUNG MAN Delay your correspondence. Meet me there. We'll have a couple of beers at the Starlight Casino.

DOROTHY (With frantic evasion.) But I don't drink!

YOUNG MAN Then eat Swiss cheese on rye. It doesn't matter. Afterwards I'll take you for a ride in an open car.

DOROTHY Where to?

YOUNG MAN To Cypress Hill.

DOROTHY Why, that's the cemetery.

YOUNG MAN Yes, I know.

DOROTHY Why there?

YOUNG MAN Because dead people give the best advice.

DOROTHY Advice on what?

YOUNG MAN The problems of the living.

DOROTHY What advice do they give?

YOUNG MAN Just one word: Live!

DOROTHY Live?

DOROTHY I don't see how—?

YOUNG MAN I'll tell you how. There's one thing in Death's favor. It's a wonderful little process of simplification. It rids the heart of all inconsequential. For instance, it goes through the dictionary with an absolutely merciless blue pencil. Finally all that you've

Got left's one page — and on
that page one word!

DOROTHY The word you hear at
night on Cypress Hill?

YOUNG MAN The word you hear at
night on Cypress Hill!

DOROTHY Ohhh. Oh, oh!

YOUNG MAN But on one hears it fill
they deal with me. I have a
secret patented device that
makes it audible to them.
Something never processed by
Du Pont. But none the less a
marvelous invention. It's
absolutely weightless and
transparent. It fits inside the
ear. Your friends won't even
know you have it on. But this
I guarantee: you'll hear that
word, that sounds much like
the long, sweet sound of leaves
in motion!

DOROTHY Leaves?

YOUNG MAN Yes, willow leaves or
leaves of cypresses or leaves of
windblown grass. And after-
wards you'll never be the same
No, you'll be changed forever!

DOROTHY In what way?

YOUNG MAN You'll live, live, live! —
And not just behind petunias.
How about it, Miss Simple?
Dorothy? Is it a date? Tonight
at half-past eight on No. 77?

DOROTHY Whereabouts on Highway
No. 77?

YOUNG MAN By the wild plum-
tree — at the broken place in
the long stone wall — where
roots have cleft the rocks and
made them crumble.

DOROTHY It sounds so far. It sounds—
uncivilized.

YOUNG MAN It is uncivilized, but it
isn't far.

DOROTHY How would I get there?
What means of transportation?

YOUNG MAN Borrow your kid
brother's bike?

DOROTHY Tonight's Scout meeting
night he wouldn't let me.

YOUNG MAN Then walk, it wouldn't
kill you!

DOROTHY How do you know? It
might. I come from Boston.

YOUNG MAN Listen, lady, Boston's a
state of mind that you'll grow
out of.

DOROTHY Not without some insulin
shock treatments.

YOUNG MAN Stop evading! Will you
or will you not?

DOROTHY I've got so much to do. I
have to return some books to
the public library.

YOUNG MAN Just one more time —
will you or will you not?

DOROTHY I can't give definite
answers — I'm from Boston!

YOUNG MAN Just one more mention
of I Boston's apt to be fool!
Well, Miss Simple? I can't wait
forever!

DOROTHY I guess I — might.

YOUNG MAN You guess you huh?

DOROTHY I mean I guess I will.

YOUNG MAN You guess you will?

DOROTHY I mean I will — I will!!

YOUNG MAN That's better. — So long,
Dorothy. (He grins and goes
out, slamming door.)

DOROTHY Good-by. (She stares
dreamily into space for a
moment. MRS. DULL comes
in.)

MRS. DULL (Sharply.) Miss Simple.

DOROTHY Oh! Excuse me. What do
you want?

MRS. DULL I want a pair of wine-
colored socks for my husband.

DOROTHY I'm terribly sorry, but the
only fair in stock have been
reserved.

MRS. DULL What does it come in,
then?

DOROTHY I'm not sure yet. But I
suspect it's something uncon-
fined, something wild and
open as the sky is! — Also, I'm
going to change the name of
the store. It isn't going to be
"Simple Notions" anymore,

MRS. DULL "Life, Incorporated"?

Huh, I never heard of it.

DOROTHY Neither had I before. But
now I have. And tomorrow the
store will be closed for exten-
sive alterations.

MRS. DULL Alterations of what kind,
Miss Simple?

DOROTHY I'm going to knock out all
four walls.

MRS. DULL Knock out — what — ?

Incredible!

DOROTHY Yes, to accommodate some
brand new merchandise.

Things I never kept in stock

before.

MRS. DULL What kind of things?
Things in bottles, Miss Simple,
or things in boxes?

DOROTHY Neither one nor the other,
Mrs. Dull.

MRS. DULL But everything comes in
bottles or boxes.

DOROTHY Everything but "Life,
Incorporated."

MRS. DULL What does it come in,
then?

MRS. DULL Reserved for whom, Miss
Simple?

DOROTHY A gentleman who repre-
sents this line. (Showing card.)

it's going to be "Tremendous
Inspirations!"

MRS. DULL Gracious! In that case
you'll certainly lose my
custom.

DOROTHY I rather expected to.

MRS. DULL And you're not sorry?

DOROTHY Not the least bit sorry. I
think I caught a slight skin
rash from dealing with your
silver. Also you snuff too
much. You ought to blow your
nose. Or better still, you ought
to trim it down. I've often
wondered how you get your
nose through traffic.

(MRS. DULL gasps, looks desperately
about her, rushes out.) You
forgot your groceries, Mrs.
Dull! (Heaves them out the
door.)

(Loutr impact, sharp outcry.
Music up.) Officer? — Officer!

OFFICER Did you say size eleven D,
Miss Simple?

DOROTHY Never mind that now,
that's all been settled.

OFFICER Amicably? Out of court you
mean?

DOROTHY Amicably and out of court.
The saboteur has made full
restitution and the case is
dropped. Now what I want to
ask of you is this: how to I get
out to No. 77?

OFFICER Highway No. 77? That
road's abandoned.

DOROTHY Not by me. Where is it?

OFFICER It's in awful condition, it's
overgrown by brambles!

DOROTHY I don't care! Where is it?

OFFICER They say the rain has
loosened half the stones. Also
the wind has taken liberties
with it. The moon at night
makes such confusing shad-
ows people on their way, go-
dangerous places, do outra-
geous things!

DOROTHY Things such as what?

OFFICER Oh—senseless acrobatics,
cart-wheels in mid-air, un-
heard-of songs they sing,
distill the midnight vapors
into wine — do pagan dances!

DOROTHY Marvelous! How do I get
there?

OFFICER I warn you, Miss Simple,
once you go that way you
can't come basic to
Prim and Proper, Massachusetts!

DOROTHY Who wants to come back
here? Not I! Never was anyone
a more willing candidate for
expatriation than I am tonight!
All I want to know is where it
is — is it north, south, or east or
west of town?

OFFICER That's just it, ma'am. It's in

all four directions.

DOROTHY Then I don't suppose that I
could possibly miss it.

OFFICER Hardly possibly, if you want
to find it. Is that all?

DOROTHY Yes, sir, that's all — Thank's
very much. — Good-by! (Music
up. DOROTHY softly.) Good-
by forever!

Curtain

CHARACTERS

MAN

WOMAN

*Child's Voice
(off stage)*

*Talk to Me Like the Rain
And Let Me Listen . . .*

SCENE: A furnished room west of Eighth Avenue in midtown Manhattan. On a folding bed lies a Man in crumpled under-wear, struggling out of sleep with the sighs of a man who went to bed very drunk. A Woman sits in a straight chair at the room's single window, outlined dimly against a sky heavy with a rain that has not yet begun to fall. The Woman is holding a tumbler of water from which she takes small, jerky sips like a bird drinking. Both of them have ravaged young faces like the faces of children in a fannished country. In their speech there is a sort of politeness, a sort of tender formality like that of two lonely children who want to be friends, and yet there is an impression that they have lived in this intimate situation for a long time and that the present scene between them is the repetition of one that has been repeated so often that its plausible emotional contents, such as reproach and contrition, have been completely worn out and there is nothing left but acceptance of something hopelessly immutable between them.

MAN: (hoarsely) What time is it? (The Woman murmurs something inaudible) What, honey?

WOMAN: Sunday.

MAN: I know it's Sunday. You never wind the clock.

(Woman stretches a thin bare arm out of the ravelled pink rayon sleeve of her kimona and picks up the tumbler of water and the weight of it seems to pull her forward a little. The Man watches solemnly, tenderly from the bed as she sips the water. A thin music begins, hesitantly, repeating a phrase several times as if someone in a next room were trying to remember a song on a mandolin. Sometimes a phrase is sung in Spanish. The song could be Estrellita.)

(Rain begins; it comes and goes during the play; there is a drumming flight of pigeons past the window and a child's voice chants outside—)

CHILD'S VOICE: Rain, rain, go away!

Come again some other day!

(The chant is echoed mockingly by another child farther away.)

MAN: (finally) I wonder if I cashed my unemployment. (The Woman leans forward with the weight of the glass seeming to pull her; sets it down on the window-sill with a small crash that seems to startle her. She laughs breathlessly for a moment. The Man continues, without much hope.) I hope I didn't cash my unemployment. Where's my clothes? Look in my pockets and see if I got the cheque on me.

WOMAN: You came back while I was out looking for you and picked the cheque up and left a note on the bed that I couldn't make out.

MAN: You couldn't make out the note?

WOMAN: Only a telephone number. I called the number but there was so much noise I couldn't hear.

MAN: Noise? Here?

WOMAN: No, noise there.

MAN: Where was "there"?

WOMAN: I don't know. Somebody said come over and hung

up and all I got afterwards was a busy signal . . .

MAN: When I woke up I was in a bathtub full of melting ice-cubes and Miller's High Life beer. My skin was blue. I was gasping for breath in a bathtub full of ice-cubes. It was near a river but I don't know if it was the East or the Hudson. People do terrible things to a person when he's unconscious in this city. I'm sore all over like I'd been kicked downstairs, not like I fell but was kicked. One time I remember all my hair was shaved off. Another time they stuffed me into a trash-can in the alley and I've come to with cuts and burns on my body. Vicious people abuse you when you're unconscious. When I woke up I was naked in a bathtub full of melting ice-cubes. I crawled out and went into the parlor and someone was going out of the other door as I came in and I opened the door and heard the door of an elevator shut and saw the doors of a corridor in a hotel. The TV was on and there was a record playing at the same time; the parlor was full of rolling tables loaded with stuff from Room Service, and whole hams, whole turkeys, three-decker sandwiches cold and turning stiff, and bottles and bottles and bottles of all kinds of liquors that hadn't even been opened and buckets of ice-cubes melting . . . Somebody closed a door as I came in . . . (The Woman sips water.) As I came in someone was going out. I heard a door shut and I went to the door and heard the door of an elevator shut . . . (The Woman sets her glass down.) —All over the floor of this pad near the river—articles—clothing—scattered . . . (The Woman gasps as a flight of pigeons sweeps past the open window.) —Bras! —Panties! —Shirts, ties, socks—and so forth . . .

WOMAN: (family) Clothes?

MAN: Yes, all kinds of personal belongings and broken glass and furniture turned over as if there'd been a free-for-all fight going on and the pad was—raided . . .

WOMAN. Oh.

MAN: Violence must have—broken out in the—place . . .

WOMAN: You were—?

MAN: —in the bathtub on—ice . . .

WOMAN: Oh . . .

MAN: And I remember picking up the phone to ask what hotel it was but I don't remember if they told me or not . . . Give me a drink of that water. (*Both of them rise and meet in the center of the room. The glass is passed gravely between them. He rinses his mouth, staring at her gravely, and crosses to spit out the window. Then he returns to the center of the room and holds the glass back to her. She takes a sip of the water. He places his fingers tenderly on her long throat.*) Now I've recited the litany of my sorrows! (*Pause: the mandolin is heard.*) And what have you got to tell me? Tell me a little something of what's going on behind your—(*His fingers trail across her forehead and eyes. She closes her eyes and lifts a hand in the air as if about to touch him. He takes the hand and examines it upside down and then he presses its fingers to his lips. When he releases her fingers she touches him with them. She touches his thin smooth chest which is smooth as a child's and then she touches his lips. He raises his hand and lets his fingers slide along her throat and into the opening of the kimona as the mandolin gathers assurance. She turns and leans against him, her throat curving over his shoulder, and he runs his fingers along the curve of her throat and says—*) It's been so long since we have been together except like a couple of strangers living together. Let's find each other and maybe we won't be lost. Talk to me! I've been lost!—I thought of you often but couldn't call you, honey. Thought of you all the time but couldn't call. What could I say if I called? Could I say, I'm lost? Lost in the city? Passed around like a dirty postcard among people?—And

then hang up . . . I am lost in this—city . . .
WOMAN: I've had nothing but water since you left! (*She says this almost gaily, laughing at the statement. The Man holds her tight to him with a soft, shocked cry.*)—Not a thing but instant coffee until it was used up, and water!
(*She laughs convulsively.*)

MAN: Can you talk to me, honey? Can you talk to me, now?
WOMAN: Yes!

MAN: Well, talk to me like the rain and—let me listen, let me lie here and—listen . . . (*He falls back across the bed, rolls on his belly, one arm hanging over the side of the bed and occasionally drumming the floor with his knuckles. The mandolin continues.*) It's been too long a time since—we levelled with each other. Now tell me things. What have you been thinking in the silence?—While I've been passed around like a dirty postcard in this city . . . Tell me, talk to me! Talk to me like the rain and I will lie here and listen.

WOMAN: I—

MAN: You've got to, it's necessary! I've got to know, so talk to me like the rain and I will lie here and listen, I will lie here and—

WOMAN: I want to go away.

MAN: You do?

WOMAN: I want to go away!
MAN: How?

WOMAN: Alone! (*She returns to window.*)—I'll register under a made-up name at a little hotel on the coast . . .
MAN: What name?

WOMAN: Anna-Jones . . . The chambermaid will be a little old lady who has a grandson that she talks about . . . I'll sit in the chair while the old lady makes the bed, my arms will hang over the—sides, and—her voice will be—peaceful . . . She'll tell me what her grandson had for supper!—

t. ca and—cream . . . (*The Woman sits by the window and sips the water.*)—The room will be shadowy, cool, and filled with the murmur of—

MAN: Rain?

WOMAN: Yes. Rain.

MAN: And—?

WOMAN: Anxiety will—pass—over!

MAN: Yes . . .

WOMAN: After a while the little old woman will say, Your bed is made up, Miss, and I'll say—Thank you . . . Take a dollar out of my pocketbook. The door will close. And I'll be alone again. The windows will be tall with long blue shutters and it will be a season of rain—rain—rain . . . My life will be like the room, cool—shadowy cool and—filled with the murmur of—

MAN: Rain . . .

WOMAN: I will receive a check in the mail every week that I can count on. The little old lady will cash the checks for me and get me books from a library and pick up—laundry . . . I'll always have clean things!—I'll dress in white. I'll never be very strong or have much energy left, but have enough after a while to walk on the—esplanade—to walk on the beach without effort . . . In the evening I'll walk on the esplanade along the beach. I'll have a certain beach where I go to sit, a little way from the pavilion where the band plays Victor Herbert selections while it gets dark . . . I'll have a big room with shutters on the windows. There will be a season of rain, rain, rain. And I will be so exhausted after my life in the city that I won't mind just listening to the rain. I'll be so quiet. The lines will disappear from my face. My eyes won't be inflamed at all anymore. I'll have no friends. I'll have no acquaintances even. When I get sleepy, I'll walk slowly back to the little hotel. The clerk will say, Good evening, Miss Jones, and

I'll just barely smile and take my key. I won't ever look at a newspaper or hear a radio; I won't have any idea of what's going on in the world. I will not be conscious of time passing at all . . . One day I will look in the mirror and I will see that my hair is beginning to turn grey and for the first time I will realize that I have been living in this little hotel under a made-up name without any friends or acquaintances or any kind of connections for twenty-five years. It will surprise me a little but it won't bother me any. I will be glad that time has passed as easily as that. Once in a while I may go out to the movies. I will sit in the back row with all that darkness around me and figures sitting motionless on each side not conscious of me. Watching the screen. Imaginary people. People in stories. I will read long books and the journals of dead writers. I will feel closer to them than I ever felt to people I used to know before I withdrew from the world. It will be sweet and cool this friendship of mine with dead poets, for I won't have to touch them or answer their questions. They will talk to me and not expect me to answer. And I'll get sleepy listening to their voices explaining the mysteries to me. I'll fall asleep with the book still in my fingers, and it will rain. I'll wake up and hear the rain and go back to sleep. A season of rain, rain, rain . . . Then one day, when I have closed a book or come home alone from the movies at eleven o'clock at night—I will look in the mirror and see that my hair has turned white. White, absolutely white. As white as the foam on the waves. (*She gets up and moves about the room as she continues—*) I'll run my hands down my body and feel how amazingly light and thin I have grown. Oh, my, how thin I will be. Almost transparent. Not hardly real any more. Then I will realize, I will know, sort of dimly, that I have been staying on here in this little hotel, without any—social connections, responsibilities, anxieties or disturbances

of *y* kind—for just about fifty years. Half a century. Practically a lifetime. I won't even remember the names of the people I knew before I came here nor how it feels to be someone waiting for someone that—may not come . . . Then I will know—looking in the mirror—the first time has come for me to walk out alone once more on the esplanade with the strong wind beating on me, the white clean wind that blows from the edge of the world, from even further than that, from the cool outer edges of space, from even beyond whatever there is beyond the edges of space . . . (*She sits down again unsteadily by the window.*)—Then I'll go out and walk on the esplanade. I'll walk alone and be blown thinner and thinner.

MAN: Baby. Come back to bed.

WOMAN: And thinner and thinner and thinner and thinner! (*He crosses to her and raises her forcibly from the chair.*)—Till finally I won't have any body at all, and the wind picks me up in its cool white arms forever, and takes me away!

MAN: (*presses his mouth to her throat.*) Come on back to bed with me!

WOMAN: *I want to go away, I want to go away!* (*He releases her and she crosses to center of room sobbing uncontrollably.* She sits down on the bed. He sighs and leans out the window, the light flickering beyond him, the rain coming down harder. The Woman shivers and crosses her arms against her breasts. Her sobbing dies out but she breathes with effort. Light flickers and wind whines coldly. The Man remains leaning out. At last she says to him softly—) Come back to bed. Come on back to bed, baby . . . (*He turns his lost face to her as—*)

Something Unspoken

The Pronoun 'I' (a short work for the lyric theatre) was first performed at the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival on September 29, 2007. It was directed by Julie Atlas Muz; the set and costumes were designed by Jerry Stacy and Jon Pacheco; the lights were designed by Megan Tracey. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

MAD QUEEN MAY	Julie Atlas Muz
DOMINIQUE, her young lover and a poet	James Tigger! Ferguson
A YOUNG REVOLUTIONARY	Zachary Klause
A COURTIER	Daniel Nardicio
A NUMBER OF BEDRAGLED MOBSTERS INTENT UPON THE QUEEN'S DESTRUCTION LEADER OF THE MOB	A dozen members of the audience Adam Berry

Time: some centuries past. Scene: minimal representation of a throne room, and a section of the Queen's bedchamber, upstage right, concealed at rise by a purple velvet curtain bearing the crest of her House.

Mad Queen May should be performed by a young actress, lovely of face and figure. Since she is required on all public occasions and most private ones to play a part old enough to be her grandmother, age must be simulated by an artfully designed mask over which is usually drawn a veil suspended from the tip of her medieval, cone-shaped hat, which is gleaming and glittering with pearls and jewels.

At rise she lolls in her throne chair, toying with the curls of a petulantly pretty youth named Dominique, sprawled indolently on cushions at her feet. He is her latest lover and an enormously vain poet who cannot begin a poem without the pronoun 'I'. Only his genitalia are clothed. Offstage there are sounds of a riot, reduced to a murmur by closed gates and curtained casements.

QUEEN: I am May of England, now known as Mad Queen May.
—I wonder why?

DOMINIQUE: And I?

QUEEN: I doubt that you're more than partly why.

DOMINIQUE: I?

QUEEN: My ministers were supposed to report to me on the latest insurrection. The report was to be delivered hours ago. There's still not a peep out of them and I can hear the rabble louder than ever, as if it were—

[*A ragged young revolutionary steals into the room and conceals himself behind a tapestry beside the door, downstage right. The Queen is not unaware of his entrance, but seems unperturbed.*]

DOMINIQUE: I?

QUEEN: Yes, it's always "I".

DOMINIQUE: You call yourself "we", which is the plural of "I".

QUEEN: On public occasions only—privately I am "I." Once I was known—could you believe it, my dear? —as Fair Queen May.

DOMINIQUE: That I don't remember.

QUEEN: I'd hardly expect you to remember what I was called before you were born or conceived, but I was once known as Fair Queen May. Later, as Good Queen May. And now? As Mad Queen May.

DOMINIQUE: So you were once favorably regarded by your subjects?

QUEEN: Favorably, once, and tolerantly for quite a while. [*She moves downstage to address the audience.*] My ministers say that my failure, my refusal, to make important alliances with various foreign princes to whom I was neither sexually nor spiritually attracted has made it necessary for them and their successors to impose upon my subjects a series of deceits, passed off as miracles, which have replaced Fair Queen May and Good Queen May with this reproduction of Mad Queen May.—I trust none of you enough to disclose the unscrupulous methods by which this deception was practiced upon my subjects and the successors of my subjects. Well. Of course the kingdom, they tell me it's now an empire, has been visited by such distractions as the black plague, the pox, reverberations of the inquisition in Spain, attacking armadas from hither and yon, Irish wars, altered conceptions of the shape and movement of the planet: then more wars, always and always more wars that we've survived by grace of a surrounding sea—

[*She has, during this, revealed her fair young face, and there has been the music of a court dance. Dominique lolls in slumber beneath the throne. She dances a bit to the music.*]

QUEEN: —Now there seems to be a very, very serious insurrection among my subjects against whom they believe to be still Mad Queen May who is also Despised Queen May. I didn't despise my subjects, not in any of my earlier impostures and certainly not in the present. I was simply immured from them, I was permitted no contact after Fair Queen May the First could not be passed off any longer as young and fair.

DOMINIQUE [*rousing slightly from slumber*]: Did you say "fair"?

QUEEN: Did I? Why, Yes, I did—remembering times long past . . . [*She lowers her veil over her face and replaces the mask.*]

DOMINIQUE [*dreamily*]: Were you ever as young and fair as I?

QUEEN: Courtiers told me so but mirrors exposed their deceit. Still. —I had young lovers which is a considerable compensation . . . No? dear final boy . . . —my doom. May of England known as Mad Queen May declined to play the game demanded of her. Chose her own rejection of politically advantageous marriages to princes who repelled me, for—gifted young courtiers, lovely of face and figure, excellent dance partners, some of whom could sing sweetly into my ear in bed at night. It didn't matter to me that I had to apply my fingers and tongue to their privates to make them rise to the intimate occasion. I was young, once, and fair. [*She returns to throne steps.*] Kiss me, Dominique.

DOMINIQUE: Caress me. Play with my body.

QUEEN: Adorable little narcissus . . .

DOMINIQUE: Have you read my new poems?

QUEEN: Of course I did, as soon as you gave them to me.

DOMINIQUE: You haven't commented on them.

QUEEN: By commented, don't you mean praised?

DOMINIQUE: Naturally. Why not?

QUEEN: I thought them pretty as you. However—I have a suggestion to offer.—Delete from them all sentences that begin with the pronoun “I”.

[*He shrugs. His eyes close again. Dominique snores softly. The Queen now addresses the intruder behind the tapestry.*]

QUEEN: He's fallen asleep, the subject of discussion not being himself.—Do you hear me? I mustn't raise my voice, it might wake him up, and I'd soon be obliged to comment on his latest dalliance with the art of verse. Pretty boys, pretty boys, if I didn't have them I would have to invent them but preferably none of the literary persuasion.—Come out from behind that arras, this isn't the chamber scene from Hamlet and you're much too young for the part of Polonius, Sir.

[*The Young Revolutionary, dagger held behind him, emerges from behind the wall-hanging.*]

QUEEN: —We offer you our compliments on your youth and beauty. We know your purpose, although the weapon's concealed behind your back, but we're not alarmed, somehow. It's our ancient sovereignty, I suppose, a thing that runs in our blood. A certain chill, almost a thrill, is aroused in us by the abrupt and still not spoken-out meaning of your presence.—Are you speechless because you confront a crowned witch on a throne?

Dominique [rousing slightly]: What?

QUEEN: Nothing concerning you is nothing and so go back to sleep. [*Queen May removes her slippers and descends from the raised level of the throne.*] Voluntarily we approach our possible assassin, old veins inflamed by the fearless approach to—[*She crosses to the Young Revolutionary with a candelabra.*] —challenge of insurrection.... [*Slowly she lifts the candelabra.*] Ravishing, your appearance.... Look! Here's Fair Queen May. [*She removes the mask from her face.*] —Well? What say you, Sir?

YOUNG REVOLUTIONARY: I came to assassinate a demented old hag—not you. . . .

QUEEN: Then drop the weapon you're holding behind your back.

[*He stares at her a moment. The weapon falls to the floor.*]

Dominique [dreaming]: I.

QUEEN [*to the Young Revolutionary*]: Meanwhile I'll find a way to get rid of that pretty little obstruction.—A critical comment on his verse should do it.

Dominique [eyes shut]: You've made no comment on my latest poems.

[*The Queen points to her bedchamber entrance. With a slight nod, the Young Revolutionary picks up the weapon he dropped and enters the bedchamber, leaving the arched doorway uncurtained.*]

Dominique [*drowsily, eyes shut*]: Where are—why are—

QUEEN [*to the Young Revolutionary*]: Since the boy never looks at my face why should I bother with this uncomfortable mask.—The charade, the bal masque is nearly over now.... Now I offer you the secret of my young body.... [*She opens her padded robe.*] If your preference is for boys, well, there's Dominique, all but the genitalia exposed. A lovely-looking boy and his limitless narcissism—sadly amusing.—Victim, yes. We all are.—Victims.... Our defects are not things chosen but things imposed. My defect—the eroticism that runs riot in my veins, an hereditary thing as common to my House as, say, the arrogance of the Hapsburgs and their pride....—collateral relatives. Name them, the Houses, I've got a bit of them all. But something entirely my own. [*She leans forward.*] I am very, very clever!—in that respect at least, allow me to say that I crown the lot of them. You'll see!—Centuries from now this thing I have in my finger tips, this sensual stroking compulsion—would

classify me as a—"skin-freak"?—So what? [*She runs her fingertips over the body of her boy-beloved.*] Music! Dance!—celebration of the flesh! [*She throws off her padded robe and whirls about the room in an ecstatically sensual dance.*] —While obscene drawings of one I'm supposed to be are carried about the streets and effigies burned—of one gone long ago.

DOMINIQUE: My new poems! Are you ready to discuss them?

QUEEN: I've advised you not to begin so many with the pronoun "I". [*She toys with his curls.*] Of course I realize that that would reduce their number quite drastically, yes, to a fraction of—

DOMINIQUE: All of my poems begin with the pronoun "I".

QUEEN: Oh, dear, I suspected as much, since I've yet to come across one not begun with a great gilded assertion of the first person singular, the largest and most brilliantly illuminated letter on the page, appearing not just at the beginning but scattered throughout with a truly staggering succession of the same without variation. Change the pronoun, change it at least to "we".

DOMINIQUE: Meaning include you in it?

QUEEN: No, no, I wish no part of it, dear boy. Collaboration between us? In a literary form? Disastrous, in view of the unpopularity that we both suffer equally at this time. The pronoun "we" could concern a common human condition, a confession of sharing the general human fate. This might disarm certain critics who find you unduly infatuated with the—what do they call it? Enormity of personal concern, disregard of all others on earth.

DOMINIQUE: Detractors are dishonest.—Life commences with the pronoun "I" and probably ends with it, too.

QUEEN: A passable aphorism, dear boy, but not an impregnable defense against your detractors who charge you with total self-concern, complete narcissism.

DOMINIQUE: My narcissism is true.

QUEEN: Unquestionably, sweet plaything, pretty toy of mine. [A trembling courtier enters. *The Young Revolutionary retreats from view.*]

COURTIER: Madam, the enemy has entered the palace grounds.

QUEEN: Overcome my guards?

COURTIER: They've all deserted you, Madam.

QUEEN: So. That's how it is, that's how it goes. Well, if our defenders do nothing, what are we to do? What action would you advise, Sir?

COURTIER: Take flight at once.

QUEEN: Once there were secret stairs and passageways through which one could take flight, but the stairs have collapsed and where do the passageways go?

DOMINIQUE: What will happen to me?

QUEEN: —That's something best not considered. [*She rises.*] Why am I seated on this—mockery of what I now am? [*She stumbles down three steps from her throne, staggers to the casement windows—throws them open.*] Smoke blowing in. The capital's on fire. Gates battered, stormed.—I've no defenders. Have you? Poor shivering boy, you haven't even a voice to answer. Title and position meant little when I had them and mean even less when lost. —I'm going to retire to my bedchamber now. Hadn't you better come with me? —The relation between us is known. —We're condemned together.

DOMINIQUE: You made the mistake of—

QUEEN: What mistake did I make? [*To the Courtier.*] You're excused, Sir.

DOMINIQUE [as the Courtier rapidly exits]: —Using your ridiculousness in inappropriate position to indulge your lunacy.

QUEEN: As grave an error as beginning too many sentences with the pronoun "I"?

Dominique: The consequences appear to have been more fatal in your case.

Queen: Only *mine*, Dominique?

Dominique: I'm still young, I can escape in disguise. Throw on a monk's cloak and cowl—there are vestments in the chapel.

Queen: Which is across the courtyard.

Dominique: It's not yet daybreak. [He runs to the opposite door.] I'll race quickly across through the wall shadows.

Queen: Yes, do that, go quickly, quickly, quickly!

[He dashes out. She seizes a candelabra and rushes to the windows and throws them open.]

Queen [crying out]: THERE GOES MY LOVER! THERE GOES MY BELOVED DOMINIQUE!

[She holds the candelabra out the windows. The mob howls wildly below and there is a shrill, despairing cry from the fugitive boy. She closes the windows and crosses slowly to her bedchamber.]

Queen:—Poor treacherous young fool. He's done with the pronoun "I".—not just with me.

[She enters bedchamber. The Young Revolutionary springs forward—tears her regal clothes off, strips her naked.]

Queen: Now when they enter, they will ask "Where is she?" To that, what shall we say?

Young Revolutionary: Say that she is dead.

Queen: Several times over.

Young Revolutionary [embracing her]: How was that accomplished? By what magic?

Queen: Perhaps she had her own secret assassin in her heart.

[A mob of revolutionaries burst into the thrown room.]

Leader of the Mob: Where is she?

Young Revolutionary [to Queen]: Turn.

Leader of the Mob:—Where is she?

Queen: Down secret stairs, to underground passageways, hurry, let's pursue her!

[The candles blow out in the windy rush as the mob about them runs from the room. They are alone and resume their embrace.]

Young Revolutionary: You.

Queen: You . . .

CURTAIN

The Chalky White Substance was first performed by the Running Sun Theatre Company on May 3, 1996 at Center Stage in New York City on a double bill with *The Traveling Companion*, collectively titled Williams' *Guignol*. It was directed by John Uecker; the set design was by Myrna Duarie, the costume design was by Robert Guy, and the lighting design was by Zdenek Kriz. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

LUKE

Sam Trammel
Greg Cornell

MARK

Time and place: a century or two after our time and possibly an almost equal time after a great thermonuclear war.

At rise: against a cyclorama of sky, which is cloudless and yet faintly blurred by tiny granules of something like old powdered bones, a youth of about twenty years of age, Luke, sits upon the precipitous verge of a chasm over what is presumably a dried-up riverbed (it is called, now, Arroyo Seco) with an air of perplexed and anxious waiting. He has a pure and luminous quality in his face when the hood of his monk-like robe is thrown back. Upstage and to the left of Luke, an older man, Mark, is seated watching him with an enigmatic fixity of expression. After some moments, Mark rises and slides stealthily off his upstage perch, disappearing from sight for a minute. He reappears silently behind Luke and stoops to clasp his large, powerful hands over Luke's eyes.

Throughout the brief play there is a wind that rises and falls, always infinitely sad in its implication as much as in its actual sound, for this is the wind that constantly blows about an earth shrivelled and desiccated as a terminally sick being.

MARK [in a prolonged, deep growl]: Whoooooo?

LUKE: Youuuuuu! — You can disguise your voice but not your hands. What makes you so late?

MARK: Boys are inquisitive, aren't they? What, why? I wasn't late. If you'd turned around you'd have seen me sitting back there on that boulder behind you.

LUKE: Why?

MARK: I thought to myself, "It could be the last time I'll observe him, sitting here, waiting for me?"

LUKE: You're planning to go away? Somewhere? Without me?

MARK: Make a departure? From you? From this precipice over the Arroyo Seco, this desolation, so beautiful through the con-

tinual screen provided by the—chalky white substance? No, I'm making no departure. But how I do know that you're not?

LUKE: A secret departure? One I'd not mentioned to you?

MARK: Don't you know departures can be made without warning? You don't say you're going, you don't even know you're going, then—[He snaps his fingers.] —you're gone. —Life's full of sudden departures; what a pity death isn't.

[*Mark removes his hands Luke's eyes.*]

MARK: Don't pull that cowl over your face.

LUKE: It protects my eyes from the dust always blowing, blowing constantly—from where?

MARK: The shrinking earth's a desert and barren mountains: in our part of it, the vicinity here, most of the chalky white stuff is provided by the Arroyo Seco, down there. I've heard that once, a few hundred years ago, there was a river in it—their's nothing drier and dustier than an arroyo in which there was once a river that's now dried up.

[*Luke lowers the cowl over Mark's head. Mark draws it back up.*]

LUKE: I thought you admired my eyes for being so clear, not inflamed?

MARK: This evening let me have a long look at your face, memorize it, as if I might never be seeing it again.

LUKE: You said you weren't going away and I told you I wasn't either. —I still don't understand why you kept me waiting here while you were right back there all that time?

MARK: You learn a great deal about someone you care for by observing him without him knowing you are. You notice whether he waits indifferently, or with increasing concern as it gets later, oh, you learn many things you'd never know otherwise.

LUKE: What did you observe you didn't already know?

MARK: More and more tension in you as the sky started to fade.

LUKE: You know I'm afraid of the dark when I'm alone at night. If it had gotten a bit darker I would have started home and missed our meeting.

MARK: —Fear, that's a bad thing to feel.

LUKE: A natural thing to feel. Now that women are so much fewer than men, there are bands of nomads that will seize a boy after dark and—

MARK: I know. Ravage him. And when their lusts are satiated, they leave no witness, just the lifeless body.—Lean back.

[*Luke leans into his embrace.*]

MARK: It always amazes me, the smoothness of your skin under the robe, not granulated at all by the chalky white substance.

LUKE: I know you like the touch of smooth skin so I keep mine smooth for your pleasure.

MARK: How do you do that?

LUKE: Before I go to meet you here, I bathe myself and then immediately I put on my robe.

MARK: You bathe once a day, before you come here to meet me, not just at night as we're ordered to do?

LUKE: I bathe twice, once for you and again at night, Mark.

MARK: Bathe twice? Did you say twice? But that would mean that you disregard the water restrictions as if they didn't exist. —You know, this confirms my suspicion that you have another protector, one in a high position in the regime, you little—cheater, yes, you get by with violating the restrictions because you give yourself at night to someone of great power among the—

LUKE: I've never had more than one protector at a time. That one protector now is you.

MARK: Before me, you had others.

LUKE: They were necessary. I hardly remember my parents. I'll tell you something that'll amuse you. On the wall at my place, I have a colored picture of the lady that was called the Madonna.

MARK: Those old mythological pictures are a rarity now and could be sold to the Center for special privileges, you know.

LUKE: I'd rather keep the picture on my wall.

MARK: What were you going to tell me that will amuse me. Something about the picture of the Madonna?

LUKE: Once I had a protector. When I woke up one morning, he was standing there staring at the picture. He said, "Is this your mother?"

MARK: Thought that the Madonna was your mother . . .

LUKE: The funny thing is that I said, "Yes, that is, that was my mother." —Women were a comfort. —Why are they disappearing? Do they succumb more quickly to the chalk all about us now?

MARK: The earth's not able to support its shrinking population. There's little food, and even less water. I've heard that a man will use a woman a while and then, when she's no longer desirable to him, not as she was before, he's likely to destroy her. You see, Luke, the battle between people that happened so long ago that it's barely recorded, I understand that it had a brutalizing effect. Do you understand me?

LUKE: Brutalizing—?

MARK: Opposite effect from the care of a Madonna.

LUKE: So that now we have only each other.

MARK: Have I told you that I have a woman at home?

LUKE: A mother? A Madonna?

[*Mark laughs harshly.*]

MARK: No, what remains of a girl, the remnant of her, used too much, not able now to excite me nor even to—serve . . . only to stagger about, looking more and more frightened. I suspect she knows.

LUKE: You suspect she knows what?

MARK: That her withering, frightened look, her choking sounds at night—

LUKE: From the disease? She has it?

MARK: She's breathed too much of the chalk. I think she knows that soon it will be necessary to relieve myself of her presence in my place.

LUKE: I don't think you'll do that. No, you couldn't do that.

MARK: You haven't sat for an hour observing me waiting for you and so you know me less.

LUKE: Since I know you completely—

MARK: Are you sure that you do?

LUKE: I feel secure with you, Mark. And as for the woman you've never mentioned before, have you told her about us?

MARK: I say nothing to her now but, "Oh, are you still here? Go lie down in that corner over there and don't cough and don't crawl toward me."

LUKE: You're making all this up, I know it's not true.

MARK: You know so little, boy. You know dangerously little. You don't know enough to distrust.

LUKE: Oh, I distrust them all except you, Mark.

MARK: That might be a mistake. The worn-out girl at my place, she—trusted me once as you do. But when I go home tonight, if she's still there—out she'll go, I'll throw the door open, and kick her living or dead body into the wind she can't stand against, that will sweep her away and bury her in white dust. No, don't trust. So.—You said you bathe twice a day, before you come here to meet me and again at night, violating the water restrictions?

LUKE: When I was very young—

MARK: Younger than now?

LUKE: Little more than a child, I had a protector, my first, who was very clever, very wise, at secret, mechanical things. Did I say that right?

MARK: Perfectly. Go on.

LUKE: One day he put his ear to the earth.

MARK: In or out of the house?

LUKE: Both in and out, and he discovered that not far under the earth running under the house there was water, he said a stream of it, not wide, nor deep, but—

MARK: Ohhhh . . .

LUKE: He was a strong man, he dug and dug down to it and built steps down with stones.

MARK: But when the house is inspected by the—

LUKE: Inspectors, no. You see, the opening to the steps is covered over with an old, dry animal skin, and even if the inspectors looked under this ragged leather—you know their eyes are bad, half-blinded by the chalk—they wouldn't notice the width of the cracks

MARK: By which you can lift the cover to the underground spring of water? —How very foolish of you!

LUKE: He did it all, not I.

MARK: But he's gone, now, and you have it all to yourself for your own private and—illegal—use. You are not at all wise.

LUKE [*shrugging*]: I must live, and to live I must please.

MARK: But you mustn't talk about it.

LUKE: Of course not. To no one but you.

MARK: No, not even to me, because by talking about it to me, you make me a conspirator with you, as criminal as you are.

LUKE: Oh, but—you—

MARK: Would bear the same penalty you would, knowing what you've told me and not—informing.

LUKE: Whom would you—

MARK: Inform? The ones you inform to. The rulers, the authorities of the regime.

[*There is a pause.*]

LUKE: You believed that story? You didn't know that it was all made up? Just an invention, like yours about the woman and what you'll do to her tonight?

MARK: That was no invention. And neither was what you told me about the underground spring.

LUKE: You're holding me so tight it's hard to breathe.

MARK: You're a light-footed boy. You might suddenly spring up and take to your heels.

LUKE: From you?

MARK: Of course, now that you realize that you've made such a dangerous mistake. I suspected something. And now I know.

LUKE: But I know something, too.

MARK: What?

LUKE: You've told me how completely you love me.

MARK: A thing that I also told the woman when she was desirable to me.

LUKE: She doesn't still attract you. I do. Don't I? Mark?
MARK: You've put in my possession a secret that to keep from the authorities would expose me to the same penalty you're exposed to. You know what such penalties are?

LUKE: A term of imprisonment, but—

MARK: A long, long term, and even if you're alive when it expires, you'd be—unrecognizable, Luke.

LUKE: I'd be disfigured, you mean?

MARK: By more than time, by more than the terminal effect of the chalky white substance.

[He clamps his arms tighter about Luke.]

LUKE: What are you, why are you—!

MARK: I must deliver you to them and repeat your confession and—receive the bounty. Did you know there's a bounty offered for turning in a person who violates the laws, the restrictions? The authorities regard him with more respect, he's given a title, sometimes, and his licenses are extended. The inspectors pay his house a—respectful visit, they smile at him and say, "The place needs some improvements in keeping with your new position. We'll see to that right away."

LUKE: The authorities are vicious.

MARK: I understand that's always been their nature, even before the people of the earth divided into two or three hostile parts that

battled for ownership and rule with the great explosive devices.
—Who won? —Nobody. NOBODY!

[*The word "nobody" is echoed, after a couple of moments, from the opposite side of the chasm.*]

MARK: —Hear that? Know what that was? As if somebody called back? That was an echo. So many of the old words have dropped out of use and aren't known anymore.

[Pause.]

LUKE: The authorities are corrupt but we don't have to imitate them.

MARK: To save our skins we do.

LUKE: Would they still be worth saving?

MARK: I understand that there used to be considerations called moral. And for these considerations, morality, a thing such as the betrayal of someone you love, would be held in contempt. But that was once, long before I remember. Stop struggling. I'm hard and strong. What's the use? You can't escape. Light's faded. We must get going.

LUKE: Where? The cave? Or my place?

MARK: Neither this evening, Luke. We're going to the cabildo where you will stay confined till long out-used, to the end of your time. —TIME!

[Pause. Then an echo of the word "time."]

LUKE: Then kill me. Kill me, Mark!

MARK: And sacrifice the reward?

[*The wind rises. Luke thrashes impotently in the grasp of Mark.*]

MARK: Call him, the great protector called God. No breath? I'll call Him for you. PRO-TEC-TOR!

[Pause. Then an echo of the word "pro-tec-tor."]

MARK: What a huge creature, what an immense beast He must have been to have left such enormous white bones when He died . . . Endlessly long ago, the bones of Him now turned to powder that blows and blows about His broken—creation . . .

[Mark bears Luke futilely struggling down the upstage declivity. The stage darkens.]

THE END

THE DAY ON WHICH A MAN DIES

(AN OCCIDENTAL NOH PLAY)

For Yukio Mishima,
in token of long friendship
and much admiration.

Tenn

Well, there you are. Four by Tenn. If you will indulge me a reflection, Modern drama is a synthesis of 19th century Realism in which characters like those of Ibsen have the ability to change their lives and the Expressionist observation that reality is in the mind. Post Modern plays combine 19th century Naturalism in which characters are trapped by their heredity and environment and can't escape and the Expressionist observation that reality is in the mind. So I may well be the first post modernist, but I think this a false duality concocted for clarity of definition. I don't believe we are "trapped" by our biology and upbringin' but we can't escape them either. Our crazy mothers, ineffectual fathers, and desperate sisters, our addictive propensities for drugs, promiscuity, power or prestige, our asthma, arthritis, or athletic prowess or lack thereof are constantly with us, constant reminders of our inadequacies. They are the governing dynamic of humility on our inflated sense of self-importance. Our failures are more important than our successes for they define our humanity. Without our failures, we would not be subject to the kindness of strangers. If the entire world were an assembly of romanticized hopes, absurd egocentric babble, and sadistic power plays, we'd certainly deserve the disasters we create. But that is not all the world.

Indeed, we are all strangers locked in our heads. But in admitting our inadequacies we ask for comfort, for mercy that "falls like the gentle rain upon the earth below." We can listen to the gentleness of everyday words and accept the kind touch of a stranger's body as it invades our mind and elicits the chemistry of life that makes us one in a moment that never lasts but may be endlessly renewed.