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*The Beautiful People*  
*Sweeney in the Trees*  
*Across the Board on To-morrow Morning*

by the same author

★

*The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*

*Inhale and Exhale*

*The Gay and Melancholy Flux*

*Little Children*

*The Trouble with Tigers*

*Peace, It's Wonderful*

*My Name is Aram*

*The Insurance Salesman and Other Stories*

THREE PLAYS  
BY WILLIAM SAROYAN

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*The Beautiful People*

*Sweeney in the Trees*

*and*

*Across the Board*

*on To-morrow Morning*

FABER AND FABER  
LONDON

To  
THE NEW AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS  
whoever and wherever they may be  
with the sincere hope that they  
will soon let us know

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with the authorized economy standards*

The three plays which appear in this book have something in common besides the inevitable fraternity which comes from having been written by the same writer.

This thing is anonymity, and these plays are the property of art, not the property of the writer. The message of each play, such as it is, comes from the world—which the writer regards as the only and therefore the best place known to man. The comedy, tragedy, absurdity and nobility of these plays come from people—whom the writer regards as beautiful.

As *The New Yorker Magazine* observed of *The Beautiful People*, these plays are letters to the living—but they are also letters *from* the living. The writer is only the letter-carrier and receiver.

How or why these messages go forth through the writer's work, he does not pretend to know, and does not regard as anything of any importance, since they would be a cinch to go forward through somebody's work, no matter who.

In the event that the writer is mistaken, however, and he alone—of all the people in the world—is responsible for what is here, he humbly accepts the responsibility.

WILLIAM SAROYAN

*San Francisco*

15 July 1941



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# The Beautiful People

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To John Mason Brown

## NOTE

The following private note tells something about this play:

SUNDAY MIDNIGHT

5TH JANUARY 1941

*A little after midnight 31st December 1940—last year—I began to write a play entitled A Cup of Kindness, which I have just now finished. It will probably be called Pole Star and Pyramid.*

*There doesn't appear to be any sadness in the play, and that is the biggest thing against it. There are a lot of other things in it, however, and maybe it doesn't need sadness, or maybe there is sadness in it, and I don't realize it yet.*

*The play has only one set, and only a handful of characters. Each part is good. I think it is going to turn out O.K.*

The play was finally called neither *A Cup of Kindness* nor *Pole Star and Pyramid*, and it turned out that there *was* sadness in it. One important character, Harold, was added to the play, as well as one minor character, Steve. Harold, and his horn, came from Don Freeman, the artist. Steve, the homeless young man, came from Peter Xantho, stage manager of the show. Considerable literary writing was taken out of the play, some of it on the suggestion of Jed Harris. The part of Dan Hillboy was expanded because of the possibilities I saw in the talent of Farrell Pelly. In fact, almost every part in the play was expanded, once I had met the players and saw what they could do.

The play was produced by myself, with my own money, and directed by me. I think this is the only way for me to work in the theatre, and I can imagine that it is possibly the

## *The Beautiful People*

only way for other playwrights to work in the theatre too. If so, I hope they will have money enough to do so. The success of *The Time of Your Life* on the road and of *My Name Is Aram* in the bookstores and through the Book-of-the-Month Club provided me with just enough extra money to gamble on this play—which I was eager to do.

Three free performances of the play were given before the opening: one for children, one for people who had never seen a stage play, and one for people who stood in line one morning to get their free tickets for the performance that evening. Three paid preview performances were given. The play did not go to another city for a try-out. There wasn't money enough; there wasn't time enough; and I didn't think there was any necessity to try the play out, except during the three free performances.

Putting on this play was the happiest experience in the theatre I have known. No bosses, no pressure from investors, no fancy theories, and a decent chance to make a decent and honourable mistake.

I am aware of the play's defects. Although not negligible, they possess some dignity. I am sorry they needed to be, but they needed to be. Next time I hope there will be fewer of them.

WILLIAM SAROYAN

*San Francisco*

7 June 1941

*The Beautiful People* was first performed at the Lyceum Theatre in New York on Monday, 21st April 1941. It closed, after 120 performances, on Saturday, 2nd August 1941. The setting was designed by Samuel Leve.

## THE PEOPLE

OWEN WEBSTER, *a poet, scientist, son, and brother*

HARMONY BLUEBLOSSOM, *a little old lady in the summertime*

AGNES WEBSTER, *a saint*

JONAH WEBSTER, *a father*

WILLIAM PRIM, *a vice-president*

DAN HILLBOY, *a good companion*

FATHER HOGAN, *a Catholic*

HAROLD WEBSTER, *a son and brother*

STEVE, *a homeless young man*

## THE PLACE

*The living-room, the front porch, and the yard of an old house on Red Rock Hill, near Quintara Woods in the Sunset District of San Francisco.*

## THE TIME

*Afternoon and evening of a summer day.*

# ACT ONE

---

## SCENE ONE

*A cornet is heard. The song is Wonderful One.*

*The curtain rises.*

*Owen Webster is in the house alone. He is leaning over the table, concentrating on a letter. He lifts it, reads some of it to himself, folds it, puts it back into its envelope, and puts the envelope in a back pocket.*

OWEN. What's in New York—mice? We got mice right here in the house.

*(He takes a penny from his pocket, flips it in the air, slaps it on his hand, and looks at it.)*

Heads.

*(He goes to the piano and starts to play Wonderful One. Soon the cornet is heard again. He stops playing to listen. The cornet fades away. He rests his head on his folded arms, then strikes all the keys of the piano, from left to right. He gets off the stool, stands on it, opens the top of the piano, and examines the strings inside. He runs a finger across the strings, from left to right, in three different movements. He climbs the piano, stands on it, and reaches up for one particular book on the high shelf. He opens the book, examines it, closes it, and puts it back.)*

Just a lot of words.

*(He comes down from the piano, and walks on the edge of the bay-window. He picks up a copy of the Saturday Evening Post, sits at the table and turns the pages.)*

*(Singing or chanting softly.)*

Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream,  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,  
Life is but a dream.

*(He stops. His attention is drawn to a particular picture.)*

## *The Beautiful People*

Amazing! Automobile!

*(He tears the page out of the magazine, crumples it, throws it over his head on to the floor.)*

*(Sings again and turns some more pages.)*

Gently down the stream.

*(Discovers a new picture.)*

Beautiful! Airplane!

*(Tears out page, throws it away.)*

Jello!

*(Turns pages again. Reads a moment, rises.)*

Elinore, he said, I love you.

*(Eloquently.)*

Literature!

*(Pause.)*

Oh, Elinore of the Saturday Evening Post, I love you.

*(Harmony Blueblossom is seen coming up the hill. She looks around at the view, comes to the house, looks at the number on the house, and slowly enters the room.)*

I love you, Elinore. Do you hear me?

*(Miss Blueblossom watches and listens, fascinated.)*

I would travel to the far corners of Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia to see your shining face.

*(He ends this eloquent recitation with outstretched arms.)*

HARMONY. Young man! *(Owen jumps and turns.)* Who in the world are you talking to?

OWEN. Elinore. *(Lowers his arms, embarrassed.)*

HARMONY. Who's Elinore?

OWEN. Nobody. She's a dame in the Saturday Evening Post. She's the sweetheart of the nickel magazines. What's *your* name?

HARMONY. Harmony Blueblossom.

OWEN. Harmony Blueblossom! Honest?

HARMONY. Cross my heart.

OWEN. Nobody ever comes up here on Red Rock Hill. Are you lost?

HARMONY. I'm looking for a man named Jonah. Do you know him?

## *The Beautiful People*

OWEN. Do I know him? He's my father.

HARMONY (*looking at him closely*). Your father?

OWEN (*proudly*). Sure.

HARMONY. Jonah Webster?

OWEN. That's right. Jonah Webster. (*Very politely*.) Please come in. Won't you sit down?

HARMONY (*at chair*). Is he here?

OWEN. He isn't here *now*, but he'll be here soon. Please sit down.

HARMONY (*sits*). Thank you.

OWEN (*looking at her*). Blueblossom!

HARMONY. Yes.

OWEN. Wonderful! My father sure is a killer. If you're this pretty now, boy, what you must have been back there in the good old days before I was born!

HARMONY. When was that?

OWEN. Oh, I haven't been around long—fifteen years. (*Proudly*.) I'm a failure.

HARMONY (*she brings out her knitting*). I don't believe it.

OWEN. It's the truth. No education, no social contacts, no political affiliations. I just loaf. (*Looking at the knitting*.) What is all that stuff?

HARMONY. Knitting.

OWEN (*after watching her knit a moment*). Is that good?

HARMONY. Perfectly harmless. Surely you must do something other than loaf.

OWEN. Oh, I read, too. And sleep. And *think*. I do a lot of thinking for a punk my age.

HARMONY. Punk?

OWEN. Yeah. Loafer. Good-for-nothing. I haven't done a day's work in my life. I'm opposed to work. Aren't you?

HARMONY (*knitting faster*). No. I believe I'm in favour of work.

OWEN. Well, that's all right—but *I'm* opposed to it.

HARMONY. If nobody worked, I have heard that civilization would—(*scarcely daring to say the fearful word*)—collapse!

## *The Beautiful People*

OWEN (*leans against the table*). Ah, that's a lot of jitney propaganda.

HARMONY. I read it in *The Reader's Digest*.

OWEN. Who wrote it?

HARMONY. I don't remember.

OWEN. Well, whoever he is, he's a dreamer.

HARMONY. What do you mean?

OWEN. I mean that collapse stuff is a lot of hooey. Anything that collapses—for *any* reason—deserves to. If nobody worked, nothing would collapse. Everybody would look around, take it easy, find out what they *want* to do, and then *do* it. Then it wouldn't be work, it would be living, which is what we're supposed to be doing around here, I guess.

HARMONY. Yes. I believe we are supposed to be living.

OWEN. All right. (*From porch*.) On a day like this—a beautiful summer day—any man who works—well, I feel sorry for him. He's not living. He's doing things he doesn't want to do. He's thinking about things he doesn't want to think about; worrying; losing his mind all the time. (*Angry*.) A life has a right, hasn't it?

HARMONY (*looking up at him severely*). Young man! Are you a Communist?

OWEN. Hell, no. They're no different from the Republicans, and the Republicans are no different from the Democrats. That's all politics. I don't believe in *little* rights and *little* freedoms. Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. Who've they got to talk *to* or assemble *with*? I believe in freedom of freedom. Communist? I'm a poet.

HARMONY (*challenged*). Well, you *eat*.

OWEN. Oh, sure. I *love* food. Don't you? But I fast, too, you know.

HARMONY. You do? Are you a Catholic?

OWEN. No, no—just a poet.

HARMONY. Then why do you fast?

OWEN. Why? Because there's no food. (*He looks around the room, then disappears in the hallway*.)

HARMONY. What in the world are you looking for?

## The Beautiful People

OWEN (*sticking his head out*). A mousetrap.

HARMONY. What?

OWEN (*sticking his head out again*). A mousetrap.

HARMONY. Now, what do you want with a mousetrap?

OWEN (*holding mousetrap*). Interesting, isn't it? Here, I'll show you how it works. (*Sets trap and places it at the centre of the room right in front of her.*) How'd you like to be a mouse and get caught in something like this? (*Snaps the trap with a piece of rolled paper.*)

HARMONY (*startled*). I beg your pardon?

OWEN. I mean, it would be quite a surprise, wouldn't it? (*Showing her the trap.*) One would feel very foolish. (*Rises.*) My sister is always burning the traps because she's so afraid one of us is going to be cruel to something else alive. (*Sets trap again.*) That's why I've got to hide them. You've got no right, she says. Owen Webster, you've got no right. (*Looking for a place to put the trap.*)

HARMONY. Over in the corner. Over in the corner, boy—if you want to catch a mouse.

OWEN (*places trap at centre of room*). No—I've tried the corners. They don't fall for the traps there.

HARMONY. No mouse is going to fool with a trap at the centre of a room. And where's the cheese?

OWEN. Cheese in traps doesn't fool our mice. They want cheese where it belongs—in the pantry, and traps where they belong—out in the open, where they can study them. They just study the traps. They don't crowd into them.

HARMONY. I have never heard of such mice. (*Pause.*) And where has your father gone?

OWEN. Nowhere in particular. He likes to stand on a street corner now and then and talk to the people.

HARMONY. What does he talk *about*?

OWEN (*kneeling on the chair*). Don't you know my father?

HARMONY. Not lately. You look a good deal like Jonah when I saw him last. I don't understand his talking on street corners.

OWEN. Well—sometimes he hollers, too. (*He looks down*

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*on the trap, smiling.*) One of them will come out and look at the trap.

HARMONY. I don't know why a mouse would want to look at a trap.

OWEN. They're suspicious. They've been trained not to be fearful, but I suppose they'll always be suspicious.

HARMONY. Who in the world trained them?

OWEN. My sister! St. Agnes of the Mice, we call her. I believe the mice worship her.

HARMONY. *Worship* her?

OWEN. You don't often hear of mice bringing people flowers, do you?

HARMONY. Young man!

OWEN. Yeah. And last Christmas when my sister had the 'flu the mice got together in this room—over by the stairs there—and prayed for her. And St. Agnes got well without so much as taking an aspirin.

HARMONY. I have never heard of anything so interesting.

OWEN. Yeah. My sister says we must love them, but I think they should at least *see* a trap occasionally. Don't you?

HARMONY. Yes, I do. I'm not absolutely sure, however. Perhaps it would be best not to hurt their feelings, since they bring her flowers. (*Pause.*) What sort of flowers?

OWEN. Little flowers. On her birthday the flowers had been arranged to spell Agnes. It was the sweetest sight the human eye ever saw. They ask very little, take care of their own sick, and pray for the best. It's simply a question of who lives here—the *mice* or us?

HARMONY (*with affection*). I would like to see Jonah again.

OWEN. You ought to see him. He's a failure, too.

HARMONY. Not Jonah. (*Pause.*) And what do *you* want to be when you grow up?

OWEN. Nothing. I'm a writer.

HARMONY. A *writer*? How wonderful.

OWEN. Yeah. I look at things carefully. I'm going to turn everything upside down, inside out, all the way around, and make it better—well, less worst. (*He demonstrates.*)

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HARMONY. I almost believe you. And your sister—of the mice—what does she do?

OWEN. She fights off boys and men. She's very pretty, and every man who sees her thinks she's the girl he's been waiting for all his life.

HARMONY. Is she *that* pretty?

OWEN. Oh yeah. I'll bet she's just as pretty as you were when you were a little girl. She rambles around all over the city, fighting 'em off all day. There's not a man in the lot, she says.

HARMONY. How strange. There used to be.

OWEN. Not any more. To look at her you wouldn't think a little girl like that would pack such a mean wallop.

HARMONY. Surely *one* of them must be worthy of more than a wallop.

OWEN. *Not one*. There isn't a man in the whole kit and kaboodle, she says. She expects a lot of human beings—especially men. They've been here long enough, she says. She won't have any traffic with people who don't understand how long they've been here and what a responsibility it is. There's no excuse for it, she says.

HARMONY. No excuse for what?

OWEN. For being the way they are—weak and foolish and fearful.

HARMONY. What a strange young girl.

OWEN. Yeah. The mice worship her. They spell her name with flowers. I suppose an undertaking like that calls for every hand.

HARMONY. Are there *several* of them?

OWEN. Several? There must be a *thousand*, at least.

HARMONY. A *thousand* mice in one house!

OWEN. Yeah. No *rats*, mind you—just little mice. Of course a house is a pretty big proposition—and a house like *this*—well, the good Lord knows there's room enough. My sister says there's room enough *anywhere* for a little human kindness. There are certain behind-the-scene corners and areas and spaces that *we* could never live in—well, that's where they live.

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HARMONY. And Jonah's other children—who are they?

OWEN (*he looks at the little old lady*). Haven't you got any children?

HARMONY. No, I haven't.

OWEN. My father's got three. Me, my sister, and my brother Harold. (*Pause.*) Only he's in New York.

HARMONY. New York!

OWEN. Yeah. New York, New York. Do you know how many miles away New York is?

HARMONY. No, I don't believe I do.

OWEN (*dramatically*). Three thousand three hundred and thirty-three miles.

HARMONY. What's he doing there?

OWEN. Search me. He's nineteen years old, though. He's got a mind of his own. He's got a cornet, too.

(*He stands back, listening, and again the cornet is heard from far away.*)

HARMONY. What are you listening to, young man?

OWEN. My brother. Harold. Playing the cornet.

HARMONY. Do you mean to say you can hear him *now*?

OWEN. Perfectly. Three thousand three hundred and thirty-three miles is a long way, but I can hear him. I know he's blowing that cornet *some* place in New York.

HARMONY. Oh, tush, tush, young man!

OWEN. Tush, tush? Honest I can hear him. Right here in this room, I used to play the piano and he used to sit over there in that chair and play the cornet. You know, you don't miss a fellow much until he goes to New York. That's the city that makes you miss people more and more.

(*The solo ends.*)

HARMONY. Is it?

OWEN. Oh, yeah. That's some city.

HARMONY. Have you ever been there?

OWEN. Only in my sleep. The other night I was there and I saw him standing on a corner. I went up to him and I said, Come on home. And do you know what he said?

HARMONY. No, I don't.

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OWEN. He said I've got to make my fame and fortune first. I've got to make a million dollars.

HARMONY. A *million?*

OWEN. Yeah. That's what he said.

HARMONY. Now, what would he want with a million dollars?

OWEN (*comes forward*). I'm glad you asked me that, because that's exactly what I asked *him*, and do you know what he said?

HARMONY. I'm not *sure*.

OWEN. Well, he said he wanted a million dollars to throw away.

HARMONY. *Throw away?*

OWEN. That's right. Put it in a big truck, drive around town and throw it away. The stuff's no good, he said—throw it away!

(*Harmony looks at the boy, trying to figure him out, as the boy throws the money away.*)

HARMONY. Of course it was a dream.

OWEN. Sure. But it's true, too.

HARMONY. You're fifteen, your brother in New York is nineteen, and how old is your sister—St. Agnes of the Mice?

OWEN. She's seventeen. You ought to see her. You ought to see my brother in New York, too. I've got a *letter* from him. Only it's a month old. I'll read it anyway. (*Pause, solemnly.*) Here's what he says. (*Sits on table.*) Dear Shakespeare. He's always kidding me about being a writer, you see. Shakespeare, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Burns, Milton—and sometimes just to get me sore he calls me Longfellow.

HARMONY. You don't *like* being called Longfellow?

OWEN. Who would? He wrote Hiawatha, didn't he? (*Chanting.*)

On the ocean's shining surface,  
On the wide-extending billows,  
From the dark sea rose a hero,  
Rose a hero from the sea-swell.

And so on and so on for years and years.

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HARMONY. I rather like Hiawatha, young man.

OWEN. Well, if you like it that's different. But he calls me Longfellow when he wants to get me sore. I'm a poet, not a sewing-machine.

HARMONY. What does your brother say in the letter?

OWEN. Dear Shakespeare, he says. This is the biggest city in the world. There are nine million people here. It sure feels different, not knowing anybody. I miss you, and Saint, and Father, and Dan, and Father Hogan—and the mice, too. I play the cornet every chance I get. I feel fine. Don't worry about me because everything is fine, but when the next pension check comes please send me two or three dollars—general delivery. I don't need it, but send it anyway, just in case. So long. Harold. (*Pause.*) He's been in New York nine months. You know, that's a long time. This is the last letter we got from him. To tell you the truth, we're all worried, but we act like we're not. My father worries most. Well, maybe Saint does. I'm not sure.

HARMONY. Why did he go to New York?

OWEN. I guess because's he's nineteen—I don't know.

(*He turns his attention to the trap.*)

One of them will come out and look at the trap.

HARMONY. Don't you suppose they'd be a little timid about coming out—with so much talking going on?

OWEN. I don't know why they should. (*Pause.*) Maybe if we sit quietly for a moment—and wait?

HARMONY. Perhaps it might *encourage* one of them.

OWEN. O.K.

(*Sits on floor. They sit quietly, smiling at one another. They look at the trap, around the room, into corners, and everywhere. The old lady lifts her feet off the floor.*)

(*Whispering.*) Are you fond of mice?

HARMONY (*softly*). Not particularly. Are you?

OWEN (*softly*). Only insofar as they reveal still further the magnificence of Almighty God. There's a thousand of them at least—somewhere in the wood. (*Aloud.*) No rats, mind you, just little mice. Give them a chance, my sister says. If

## *The Beautiful People*

God gave them a chance, we've got to give them a chance, too.

HARMONY. I never looked at it that way.

OWEN. That's the way my sister looks at it, and the mice are grateful too. (*Rises.*) They go all over, looking for things for her.

HARMONY. I don't believe it.

OWEN. It's the truth. The whole thing is practically a small religion. There's a heart beating in those little animals. (*Sits on table, folding his legs.*) Only last week, as I got on the Number Seventeen Street Car, I saw one of them sitting on the cow-catcher.

HARMONY. Incredible. Are you sure it was one of your mice?

OWEN. Positive. We exchanged glances.

HARMONY. Where was the mouse going?

OWEN (*gets off the table*). I don't know for sure, but when I got off at Third and Market, the mouse was still there, sitting on the cow-catcher. We exchanged glances again. I suppose it went down to the waterfront, to one of the boats down there.

HARMONY. The boats! I understand that's where mice pick up diseases. The most dreadful diseases imaginable.

OWEN. A *cold*, maybe.

HARMONY. No—*dreadful* diseases. Malaria, bubonic plague, yellow fever, leprosy, and all sorts of other horrible diseases.

OWEN. Not *these* mice. They don't pick up anything that isn't worth while.

HARMONY. And where did *you* go?

OWEN (*quickly, sporty-like*). I dropped in at a gambling joint I visit once in a while. I bet the horses whenever it appears to be the smart thing to do. Well, I went into Joe's and bet fifty cents on the nose of a two-year-old named Tree—because that's also the name of a book I have written—but she got a bad decision in a photo-finish. It was a six-furlong sprint and the jockey knew both his race and his mount. Jockey Infante. He held her back until the far turn;

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eased her gently into contention; went to the rail; turned her loose, and began to shout. He didn't use the whip. He just shouted, and Tree moved from fourth to third, from third to second, and then you could *really* see her heart. In fifteen seconds she closed *seven* lengths. I knew I had the right horse. *Tree.* (*Pause.*) It was a photo-finish, but they gave it to the favourite, Hatchet.

HARMONY. You lost?

OWEN. Well—fifty cents, but it wasn't that. It was simply that I'd named my book Tree.

HARMONY. What is your book about?

OWEN (*clearly, but casually*). Tree.

HARMONY. Trees?

OWEN. No. *Tree.* One.

HARMONY. Well, what do you say about it?

OWEN. I don't say anything *about* it. I just *say* it. *Tree.* You've seen a tree, haven't you? Here.

(*Harmony goes to doorway.*)

That's a tree right there.

(*The tree lights up.*)

I planted it myself seven years ago, right after we moved to this house. I had an idea we'd be staying. This house has got the best view in San Francisco.

HARMONY (*returns to chair*). Of course I've seen a tree. What else do you say?

OWEN. That's all. That's only *one* of my books. It's one of my favourites, of course, but I've got others, too.

HARMONY (*sits*). The whole book is just the *one* word?

OWEN. Just the one.

HARMONY. What does it mean?

OWEN (*impatiently*). *Tree.* That's all. T-r-e-e. Well, I wasn't in Joe's ten minutes, and then I was broke and back on the Number Seventeen Street Car, headed home. Well, *when* I got home my sister was right here in this room as quiet as a human being could be, so of course I knew something was up. What do you suppose that mouse had brought her?

HARMONY. The mouse on the cow-catcher?

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OWEN. Yeah. The one that went down to the waterfront while I was in Joe's betting on Tree. What do you suppose he came back with—for my sister?

HARMONY. Surely not something—*huge*.

OWEN. No. He brought her an almond.

HARMONY. An almond?

OWEN. Yeah, an almond. All the way from the waterfront. He got home *sooner* than I did. An almond—all the way from the waterfront. Well, who can you feed on an almond? I went for the trap, but my sister said, You've got no right. It's not the almond, it's the effort and the kindness.

HARMONY. But isn't that stealing?

OWEN (*officially*). Miss Blueblossom, the mice of St. Agnes do not steal. My sister is opposed to theft and murder. In *any* form. I will not have any stealing, she says, and I will not allow any murdering. That's why she's always burning the mousetraps.

HARMONY (*getting her bag ready*). Well.

(*She stands.*)

I'm afraid I must be going. Thank you very much, young man, for receiving me.

OWEN. Please don't go. If you'll wait just a *moment* longer, we'll see one of the mice.

HARMONY. Young man. I am an old woman. It's been pleasant listening to you. You *are* convincing, you know—but I came to call on your father—Jonah Webster. I have not seen him in—well, thirty years, I believe, but in *you* I see him again. He was *then* not quite as young as you are now, but you are, I have no doubt, his son, and he is your father. He had a mind as wild as yours.

OWEN (*impressed and not offended*). Yeah. That's him. He'll be here soon, just like I been telling you. He's out on a street corner somewhere, talking to the people. Wait a little longer. He'll be glad to see you. I don't even know you and I'm glad to see you.

HARMONY. You're very charming. Please tell Jonah I called. Miss Harmony Blueblossom.

## *The Beautiful People*

OWEN (*following her to the door*). Oh, I'll tell him all right. I'll tell him you didn't get married. He'll be awfully flattered. But I wish you'd wait.

HARMONY (*at the door*). And thanks again for your delightful fairy-tale about the mice.

OWEN. Fairy-tale? You don't think I was making that stuff up, do you?

HARMONY (*smiling gently*). Good-bye, young man.

OWEN. Good-bye—(*she goes*). Old lady.

(*He stands on the porch until she disappears. Turns back to the room, and suddenly becomes excited. Runs after her.*)

Hey! Old lady! The mouse! The mouse! It's come, just like I said it would.—Hey! The mouse! Old lady!

(*He comes back on the porch. Suddenly points at the trap.*)

I saw him. He was right there, looking at the trap. I told her if she'd wait a minute, she'd see him.

(*He enters through the window, stands over the mousetrap for a moment, looks at the piano. In the distance the cornet is heard playing.*)

People don't believe anything any more—not even old ladies.

(*He sprawls on the windowseat and is about to go to sleep.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT ONE

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### SCENE TWO

*About an hour later.*

*Small flowers on the floor spell the name Agnes. Owen is flat on his back, sound asleep. His sister Agnes—St. Agnes of the Mice—comes into the yard, quietly and sorrowfully. She is a handsome girl in haphazard clothes. Her legs are bare—a healthy brown from long walks in all kinds of weather. She goes to the window and looks at her sleeping brother, then enters the house. She sees the trap on the floor, picks it up and throws it in the fireplace.*

AGNES. You've got no right. (*She stands near Owen.*)

Owen. (*She shakes him.*)

OWEN (*in his sleep*). Is that you, Saint?

AGNES. Wake up, Owen. Wake up. (*Owen sits up.*)

OWEN (*quickly, as he wakes*). What's the matter?

(*Owen shakes his head, then smiles foolishly.*)

Oh, hello, Saint. I thought it was you.

(*Stretches sleepily, suddenly notices the flowers and leaps.*)

Hey, Saint—look!

(*He points dramatically, going to the flowers.*)

A-g-n-e-s, Agnes. St. Agnes, the Little Sister of the Mice.

(*He turns to his sister, smiling foolishly. Her face is troubled.*)

What's the matter?

AGNES (*quietly*). You ought to be ashamed.

OWEN (*innocently*). Why?

AGNES. How could you put a trap out when they're so full of sorrow?

OWEN. I didn't know they were full of sorrow. What are they full of sorrow about?

AGNES. One's lost.

(*Stands quietly by the piano.*)

OWEN (*snaps his fingers*). That's why one of them didn't

## *The Beautiful People*

come out. (*Pause, reflecting.*) *Sure.* But after she *left*, one of them came out.

AGNES (*sadly*). After *who* left?

OWEN. We had a visitor. An old lady. I wanted to entertain her, so I put the trap out. (*Goes to her.*) What's the matter?

AGNES (*softly*). I met a man. (*Sadly.*) Well, a *boy*.

OWEN. Well, what's the matter? Are you sorry you hit him?

AGNES. I didn't hit him. (*Sits.*) We just walked and talked. That's all.

OWEN. Ah, what's the matter?

AGNES. Well, I like him. He's not nearly what I thought I'd find, but I like him.

OWEN. Well, that's fine. It's nice to like somebody. *Anybody.*

(*Agnes puts her hands over her eyes.*)

Hey! What are you bawling about?

AGNES. I *like* him.

OWEN (*on one knee*). Is that the way it makes you feel?

AGNES (*slowly*). It makes you feel sick, like a whole world sick, and nothing to do about it, but to like him, more and more with every breath you take. All we did was walk and talk. We didn't even talk *sense*. I came home, feeling pity for everything. Not love—*pity*.

OWEN (*rises and touches her arm*). Ah, Saint. Don't feel bad. Look at your name—in flowers. I told the old lady about them, but she didn't believe me. Are you sure he's *lost*?

AGNES. He's been gone a week.

OWEN. Where'd he go?

AGNES. He went to St. Anne's.

OWEN (*angrily*). St. Anne's? Well, it's a nice state of affairs when one of our mice gets caught in a church trap and we can't even *set* a trap in our own house.

AGNES. What the church is pleased to do about mice is no affair of ours. (*Rises.*) Owen? (*Pause.*)

OWEN (*objecting*). How am I going to find a mouse in a church?

## *The Beautiful People*

AGNES. Just go there and look around. He may not be caught, he may be lost—trapped in some small room.

OWEN (*takes hold of a chair*). Are you sure that's what it's all about?

AGNES. Yes, I am. They're all crying.

OWEN (*as he tries to balance the chair on his head*). Well, let 'em cry. What'd they expect—fun? Things end. They change. They spoil. They're hurt. Or destroyed. Accidents happen. (*Releases chair and catches it.*) Without these things, there could be no—no felicity. You ought to know that. Eventually even a tree ends. One at a time, each of them ends, but there are always *trees*. And that's the reason: because eventually each of them ends. If you're going to teach them things, teach them *everything*. I suppose it's an improvement for them to be crying over *one* mouse that's dead or lost, but sooner or later everybody's got to know that death is with us from the first breath we take. (*Pause.*) Are they crying *hard*?

AGNES (*simply*). Yes, they are.

OWEN. I guess he's *dead*.

AGNES. Maybe he isn't. Maybe he's only hungry and weak—caught in a room he can't get out of. Please hurry, Owen.

OWEN (*ready to go*). All right. If he's alive and in the church, I'll find him. I'll bring him home.

(*Jonah Webster, a little drunk, arrives singing in French: L'Heure Exquise by Reynaldo Hahn. He disappears into the house, followed helplessly by Agnes, and returns in a moment with a bottle of Scotch and a glass. Jonah Webster is a big, powerfully built man in his early sixties. There is something of the poet about him, and something of the fool—who is fool by choice. He seems young, almost boyish, simultaneously full of humour and love and noble anger. He is as carelessly dressed as his son and daughter. He pours a drink, is about to toss it down, then suddenly stops. He looks first at Owen, then at Agnes, then at the flowers, and then all around the room.*)

JONAH. Spectacles and satellites, what's the tragedy? What's troubling this space? I feel commotion in the air,

## *The Beautiful People*

as though great and tender values were the object of some brutal assault. (*Quietly.*) What tragedy is it?

AGNES. No *tragedy*, Father.

OWEN. She met a boy she likes.

JONAH (*loudly, and with some delight*). Time reckoning of bone and blood, is this true?

AGNES (*broken-hearted*). Yes, it is, Father.

JONAH (*convinced*). Pole star and pyramid!

AGNES (*by the chair*). Won't you sit down, Father?

JONAH. Sit down? In this celestial zenith of sweet and holy disorder? (*Eagerly.*) It *is* sweet, is it not?

OWEN (*casually*). She's pretty sore about the whole thing.

JONAH. By the changing heavens, speak English, boy. Do you mean *angry*?

OWEN. Well, angry, then.

JONAH. Of course she's angry. Forfeiture and exchange are bound to make one angry, *since one is likely to be swindled*. Where is he? Let me behold him.

AGNES. He is not *here*.

JONAH. Where is he, then?

AGNES. I don't know.

JONAH. Well, *who* is he?

AGNES (*softly*). We happened to meet on our way out of the Public Library. He held the door open for me. (*Quickly.*) I could have held ten doors for his one, but *he* held the door for me. We walked along together and talked. I don't know who he is.

JONAH. Does *he* know who *you* are?

AGNES. I'm nobody, Father.

JONAH. As the sun rises and sets, you *have* given over.

OWEN. She was crying a minute ago.

AGNES. Owen! (*She turns away.*)

JONAH (*reprimanding Owen*). Hold on. Pole star and pyramid! You know, I hope, that decent pride collapses into animal sickliness when it compares its poise with the insecurity of humility. Flaunting is arrogance, not strength.

## *The Beautiful People*

OWEN. I wasn't flaunting anything. I just thought you ought to know, that's all.

JONAH. I *knew*.

OWEN. Well, how should I know you knew?

AGNES. *Did* you know, Father? Is it so plain?

JONAH (*smiling at the flowers*). And these flowers, Saint? Another valentine from the mice?

AGNES. They're unhappy.

OWEN. One of them has been gone a week.

AGNES. He went to St. Anne's.

OWEN. I'm going there to look for him.

JONAH. By the adoration of the lamb, that's the least we can do. Go then, and on your way back, buy a wide variety of provisions.

OWEN. A wide variety of provisions?—with what?

(*Pulls a pocket inside out.*)

JONAH. With *what*? With money.

(*He produces a cheque out of his pocket.*)

The pension cheque has come.

(*Reading the cheque.*)

Pay to the order of Wilbur M. Stonehedge twenty-four dollars and thirty-seven cents.

(*To Owen.*)

Have you a pen?

OWEN. Father, that cheque's been coming for seven years now.

JONAH. Let *me* fix the meridian. A pen, please.

(*Owen goes to the fireplace shelf for a pen.*)

I was here when the *first* cheque came. I am aware of the chronology involved.

OWEN (*at the table, with pen*). That cheque isn't for us, and never has been.

JONAH. Spectacles and satellites, of course it's for us.

OWEN (*handing his father the pen*). It's *addressed* to Wilbur M. Stonehedge.

JONAH (*impatiently*). By the moon's geocentric parallax, the man's dead! (*Pause.*) And we're not.

## *The Beautiful People*

(*Agnes at his right, Owen at his left, Jonah puts his arms around them.*)

Now I shall fix the meridian.

(*Agnes goes out on the porch steps and sits there. Jonah endorses the cheque, speaking as he writes.*)

Wilbur M. Stonehedge. Revolving property! The man worked hard for thirty or forty years. Was duly retired on a pension. Came home to live—here, in this house. (*Simply.*) And died.

(*He hands the cheque to Owen.*)

OWEN. Yes, sir.

JONAH. Soon after his burial, by the principle of the fixed period, I rented this house for myself and my children, and the cheque continued to come. If it's not for us, who is it for?

OWEN. Nobody, I guess.

JONAH. Then run along and fetch the mouse home.

OWEN. Yes, sir—if I can find him.

JONAH. And on your way back, be sure to buy a wide variety of provisions. A little of everything. We shall spend an hour or two eating and drinking. After that, we shall put a fire in the fireplace and sing. Meat, bread, wine, cheese, greens, a pie, and anything else that occurs to you. If you see Dan, send him along with the provisions.

(*Takes another drink.*)

OWEN. Yes, sir.

JONAH (*softly*). And send something to your brother in New York.

OWEN. I don't know where he is. Where shall I send it?

JONAH (*impatiently*). Send it to New York. He's there somewhere. Send him some money, that's all.

OWEN. Yes, sir—(*begins to go, stops*). Oh, yes. An old lady called to see you.

JONAH (*irritated*). Old?

OWEN. Yes, sir.

JONAH (*swiftly*). Then say no more about it.

OWEN. She was a very nice old—lady.

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JONAH (*holding the speech off—and pointing at him*). Quiet, by the sun's retreat through constellations, I am reminded enough of my years by *you*.

OWEN. Yes, sir.

(*Runs out, and jumps off the porch.*)

AGNES (*sadly*). Please try hard, Owen, Look *everywhere*.

OWEN. Don't worry. If he's *there*, I'll find him.

JONAH. We'll be waiting for you.

OWEN (*stops*). Her name is Harmony.

JONAH. *Whose* name?

OWEN. The old lady's. Harmony Blueblossom.

JONAH. Blueblossom! (*Pause.*) Never heard of her.

OWEN. Sure you have. She's a little old lady. She *knits*.

(*Owen runs off.*)

JONAH (*shouting*). I don't know anybody who knits.

(*He stands a moment, looking toward the door, perhaps trying to remember who Miss Blueblossom might be. Looks at the flowers on the floor, smiles, turns to Agnes. She faces away, looking into the distance, at the sunset. Jonah goes to the piano and plays softly. Agnes enters the room. Jonah stops playing, turns toward her. The sunset deepens.*)

Saint. (*Agnes turns.*) What did you read at the Public Library?

AGNES. The encyclopædia—about hummingbirds.

JONAH. Oh, they're wonderful.

AGNES. Yes, they can fly backwards. They're funny, too. They fight great big birds. (*Pause, suddenly.*) But I could have held ten doors for his one.

JONAH (*easily, as if he were talking about nothing*). How did it happen? Did you reach the door exactly when he did?

AGNES. Not quite exactly. He was there first.

JONAH. Was he waiting?

AGNES (*by the doorway*). I'm not sure. The door's a big glass door that I never noticed before. And I never noticed before that with all the room in the world a space could still be made. If he wasn't waiting, he was there, with the space for me.

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JONAH. Did he smile?

AGNES. No—he almost cried, and then I almost cried, too. He didn't need to stand there that way, and neither did I, but that's what we did. I could have turned and walked away quickly. I *had been* walking quickly, but now I couldn't move. I wanted to, I guess, but I just couldn't. He was too alone, and then I was, too—and we just had to stay together.

JONAH. Where did you go?

AGNES (*puts her arms around his neck*). First we went out on the steps of the library, but we just stood *there*, too. We got in the way of some people who were in a hurry. About eleven of them. They didn't like us. *Both* of us. They turned around and looked at us. There were other people coming and going, too, and we were still in the way. When we got out of their way we were facing the same direction—we weren't facing each other. We were together.

JONAH. Did you speak to him?

AGNES. Not at first. I couldn't think of anything to say. I didn't think I'd be able to speak English even—and I suppose I didn't, after we *did* talk—what we said was so foolish.

JONAH. Did you run with him suddenly, perhaps?

AGNES (*kneeling*). Run? We could barely walk. He kept bumping into me and I kept bumping into him, and he kept saying excuse me and I kept saying oh that's all right. He stumbled, too, and said something about his shoes.

JONAH. What did he say?

AGNES. He said they didn't fit.

JONAH. He's a good boy, Saint.

(*William Prim arrives, stands at the open door, listening intently.*)

AGNES. I know he is, but now I don't understand anything. I began to see! I didn't used to *see*. The street cars going by had people in them suddenly. There have always been people in street cars, but now they were beautiful people. I never saw people that way before. They were still sad and funny and worried-looking, but now they were

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beautiful, too. We walked through the park and looked at everything together. It's not the same as looking at things alone. We looked at the pigeons, as if they had just come down from the sky. As if there had never been birds before. As if they came to be with us.

JONAH. Pigeons are good to behold, Saint.

AGNES. Oh, they're beautiful. They know people. They live in buildings.

JONAH. How many of them were there?

AGNES. Oh, a sky full—a thousand, I guess. They circled around and around. He pointed at them and said pigeons. I knew they were pigeons, but when he said they were—I *liked* him. And I knew what he meant, too.

JONAH. What *did* he mean, Saint?

AGNES. I can't *say* what he meant, but I *know* what he meant. He didn't mean pigeons. He couldn't mean pigeons and say it so sadly. It was the same with everything else, too. Everybody in the street that we passed was new. They were like *him*. I felt sorry for them. I thought love would be another thing—not pity. Is pity love?

JONAH (*rises*). He's a good boy, Saint.

AGNES (*angry, rises*). He's bewildered and shy and full of terrible sorrow, and his shoes don't fit.

JONAH. But his feet within them do.

(*He turns and notices Prim, whom he believes to be a door-to-door salesman.*)

Not to-day. Some other time.

PRIM. Oh.

(*He goes.*)

AGNES (*slowly, as if she were seeking the words*). I've waited every day—to meet one person in the world—who wouldn't offend me—and now that I've found him—instead of being heedless—and strong—and full of humour—he's sad. He could be barefooted for all I care, if he wouldn't be sad—because now I'm sad, too. (*With youthful anger.*) I won't allow it. Pity's no seed to throw among the living. It's for mice, whose littleness rejoices with it. I can't believe to live

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—to *really* live—is foolish or impossible. (*In soft voice.*) Is it impossible, Father?

JONAH. No, Saint. Not for you; not for me; and not for your brothers.

AGNES (*solemnly*). We're not apart from the others, Father. I *thought* we were, but we're not. We are *they*, and they are us. I know that now. I don't want the foolish life. I'll learn to live all over again, but if I can't live the life I know is mine to live, if everything is to be meaningless and foolish—

JONAH. Saint! It *isn't* meaningless or foolish.

AGNES (*almost angry, turning away*). But I can't forget him. Why am I so afraid I'll never see him again? (*Almost breaking down.*) Will I see him again, Father?

JONAH. He's not lost, Saint.

AGNES. He *looked* lost. I don't even know who he is.

JONAH. Whoever he is, he'll be here in this room before the world comes to an end. Will you be glad to see him?

AGNES (*sits*). I don't know.

JONAH. *You* must decide, Saint.

AGNES. I guess I'll be glad, then. (*Pause.*)

JONAH. And will you look for him? (*Agnes looks up.*) Will you go out into the streets and look for him? (*She looks at her father.*) Will you go everywhere in the city looking for him? (*She rises, looking away.*) He can't get far, Saint. His shoes don't fit. Will you *look* for him?

(*Agnes moves to the door. There she stops momentarily, moves to the porch, then suddenly hurries away down the hill and disappears, suggesting a bird in joyous flight.*)

(*Jonah picks up one of the flowers, looks at it, smiling, and then goes back to singing in French.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT TWO

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### SCENE ONE

*Jonah is at the piano playing softly.*

*Agnes comes home, holding a flower. She drops it inside the room, at the door. She hurries into the house. Jonah stops playing and turns.*

*William Prim returns. He is a neatly dressed little man of fifty or so.*

*He checks the house number, comparing it with the number he has on a small piece of paper. He comes up on the porch and is about to enter, when he notices the flower on the floor. He picks it up, smiles, and puts the flower in his lapel. At the open door he knocks. Jonah turns and looks at him.*

JONAH. All right. Come in.

*(Prim enters the room without saying a word. He goes to the table the hard way, takes off his hat, lays it on the chair. Places his briefcase on the table and begins to take out a number of envelopes, papers, and documents with seals and ribbons on them. Suddenly he stops, his attention drawn to something fascinating in his briefcase. He looks for a moment, then looks again as he lowers his head. He takes out a small toy whistle. He smiles at the toy, lifts it to his lips and blows it. The whistle makes a sorrowful little sound.)*

JONAH (*loudly*). Cool, clean chemistry, man, is that what you're selling? Here's a dime. Give me that whistle.

PRIM (*protesting*). Oh, no—that's my own. (*He looks at the whistle proudly.*) A souvenir of a voyage to Mexico eleven years ago. (*Remembering the voyage, while Jonah looks on sombrely.*)

JONAH. Oh, I see.

PRIM (*speaks in a hushed, shy, courteous whisper, but with great emphasis.*) Yes. There was the second officer—a man named

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Gabbage. A schoolteacher from Calistoga with a very large nose. A young man named Collins who was interested in bull fighting. A *Mrs. Sedley* of society. And myself—*(Realizing his presence there, as he smiles.)* Of course. Dinner was quite an event every evening, but *one* night—the third night out—there was a celebration—an *actual* celebration—the choicest food, the very best wine, music, singing, speeches—*friendly* speeches, spontaneous, unrehearsed, and with no subject. Dances—ah! *(Pause, while he smiles.)* A celebration *truly*. In the finest sense of the word. *Mrs. Sedley*, a most cultured woman, was very friendly to me.

JONAH *(pleased)*. I'm delighted.

PRIM. A memorable experience *(sadly)* from which I have salvaged this souvenir.

*(He blows the whistle again. Remembers the happy occasion a moment longer, and then puts the whistle on the table.)*

But there is work to be done. I have here—

JONAH *(moving in)*. Yes, by the science of seafaring, what *are* all those papers?

PRIM *(going over the papers, and examining them one by one)*. Well, this is the—*(mumbling)*. The third party of the third part—*(In his natural voice.)* And this is— And *this*— In short, we were under the impression that you were alive.—But *this*—*(picks up another paper)*—an obituary which has come to our notice—reports your death and burial. Consequently, we are no longer obliged to continue the monthly pension payment—in the sum of—

*(Looks for something else on the table, finally remembers it is in his pocket. He brings forth a small wrinkled paper from which he reads.)*

Twenty-four dollars and thirty-seven cents, every month, twelve months per year.

*(Replaces paper in his pocket.)*

In the event of death, you see the pension becomes automatically null and void—null and void. *(Sincerely.)* I'm sorry. *(Turns to his papers.)*

JONAH *(loudly)*. We stand in the orbit of a superior planet.

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PRIM (*not quite able to understand. Looks at Jonah, then up and around*). Thank you.

(*He replaces the papers. The whistle is the last item. He smiles again, blows it, then with determination places it in his briefcase and finally is ready to leave.*)

It's been a pleasure.

JONAH. As you say, then.

PRIM (*offers his hand to Jonah, who takes it*). Good-bye.

JONAH. Good-bye.

(*They bow to each other, Prim goes out, but stops on the porch, not able to straighten out everything in his mind. Agnes enters, looks at her father, then goes to the mantelpiece over the fireplace and fills a glass with wine. Prim returns. He comes forward toward Jonah. Looks all around Jonah, still not able to understand.*)

PRIM (*eagerly*). Isn't there a mistake?

JONAH (*casually*). No, I believe not. I believe everything is quite in order.

PRIM (*very much relieved*). I thought so myself. (*Delighted.*) Of course.

(*Agnes brings the glass of wine forward, notices Prim, offers him the drink. Prim is ready to accept, but must with regret refuse.*)

No, thank you. I never partake of intoxicating beverages.

(*Agnes offers the wine to Jonah, who drinks it and returns the glass to her. She puts the glass back on the mantelpiece. Prim looks at Agnes, turns to Jonah intimately.*)

I have a daughter of my own. Seventeen years old. (*He offers his hand to Jonah again, who takes it again.*) Good-bye. (*They bow to each other. He bows to Agnes.*)

OWEN (*from a distance*). I found him! I've got him, Saint!  
(*Owen hurries to the porch and into the room, Agnes runs out to meet him. Prim follows Agnes, stops by the doorway.*)

AGNES (*looking out*). Where is he?

OWEN (*stopping, just inside the room*). Here. In this paper. (*Prim follows him to the centre of the room.*)

JONAH (*to Owen*). By the map of the stars, what the devil happened to you?

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OWEN (*putting the paper on the floor and getting down on his knees*). He was up in the steeple. (*To Agnes.*) Here he is, Saint. Safe and sound. I knew I'd find him. (*Agnes is turned away.*) Hey, Saint.

AGNES (*coming forward*). Is he all right? (*On her knees.*)

OWEN. All right? He's in better shape than ever. Tell 'em to stop crying. Tell 'em the lost sheep has been returned to the fold.

PRIM (*looking at the crumpled paper*). What's in that paper?

OWEN (*to Jonah*). Who's that?

JONAH (*casually*). The man who made the voyage to Mexico.

OWEN. Oh. (*To Agnes.*) Well, Saint, take a look at him. (*He opens the paper a bit.*)

JONAH (*with delight*). Wee sleeakit, tim'rous beastiel

PRIM. Is it a mouse?

AGNES (*sadly*). But it's not one of *our* mice. (*She goes toward door.*)

OWEN. Sure it is.

AGNES (*turning*). No, it isn't.

OWEN (*leaping to his feet*). Well, it was the only mouse in the whole church. (*Rises.*) Saint, I'm not going to take him back up to that steeple. That's no place to live anyway. I don't know *what* he's been eating. He *looks* like one of our mice.

AGNES. He isn't, though.

OWEN. Well, maybe they'll like *him* just as much as the one that's lost—or dead. What's the difference? This is a nice mouse. How'd he ever get way up there in that steeple?

PRIM (*to Jonah*). It's a mouse, isn't it?

JONAH. A shaft of lightning in the clod.

PRIM. What's the matter with it?

JONAH (*explaining*). It liveth.

PRIM. Oh, it's alive, then.

JONAH. The same as thou—or I.

PRIM (*smiling*). Well, look at that—perfectly alive.

OWEN (*to Agnes*). Well, aren't you glad? You're always complaining about the traps. Well, here's a mouse from the

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steeple of St. Anne's—living alone up there; no friends, no fires, no people with their crumbs and cheese, no songs or music—only the bells. Aren't you glad, Saint?

AGNES (*on her knees again*). I'm glad, Owen. Only that's a proud mouse.

OWEN (*delighted*). Is it?

AGNES. That's a mouse that doesn't like other mice.

OWEN (*sincerely*). Say—that's swell. No fooling, Saint?

AGNES. That's a mouse that isn't afraid, either.

PRIM (*like a child*). What are you going to do with him?

AGNES. I'll take him back to the steeple.

OWEN (*rises, objecting bitterly*). No. I'll keep him.

AGNES (*rises*). You have no right.

OWEN. What do you mean? (*To Jonah.*) If I set a trap because the house is full of mice, she says I have no right. (*To Prim, as he points his finger.*) If I go all over St. Anne's looking for a mouse that's supposed to be one of our mice, and find *another* mouse instead—and a proud one, too—and want to keep him, she says I have no right *again*. (*To Agnes.*) Why not?

AGNES (*determined*). He's going back.

OWEN (*giving up*). All right, there he is. You can do anything you want with him. Where's my paper? (*Takes his pad and crayon from fireplace.*) I'm going to write another book. (*He looks at the mouse.*) Mouse. (*Loudly, as he points.*) There he is. Mouse. (*Agnes goes to window.*)

JONAH. Pole star and pyramid, when are you going to write a book with *two* words?

OWEN. When I *know* two of 'em. (*Writing on a large tablet.*) I've got to find out about nouns before I move to verbs. You've got to be careful about verbs, otherwise you'll get things all mixed up—even worse than they are already. *Is*. That's a verb. I've got to be careful when I use a word like that. (*Pause, shaping the earth with hands.*) *Is*.

PRIM. Is what?

OWEN (*angrily and loudly*). What do you mean, *what*? *Is*, that's all. *Is*.

## The Beautiful People

PRIM. Oh.

OWEN (*showing the tablet to Jonah*). There—another book.

JONAH (*takes pad and examines it. In a loud voice*). Moose? Moose and mouse are not the same, boy.

OWEN. Oh. I've got to learn to spell some day. (*Sits. He corrects the spelling. To Prim, suddenly, scaring him.*) What sort of a voyage was it?

JONAH (*to Prim*). Tell the boy about the voyage.

PRIM. Oh, yes. (*Delighted, rises.*) Well, we left San Francisco at five o'clock in the afternoon. A beautiful day. My wife and daughter were on the dock, waving and *crying*. My daughter was six at the time, and my wife—was pretty well along in years.

AGNES (*at window*). I'll take him back after supper when I go for a walk.

OWEN. To the Public Library?

AGNES (*angry*). Owen!

PRIM. I waved back of course, and *cried* a little, too. It was so wonderful having them on the dock, with me on the boat—bound for Acapulco, adventure, and romance. Well, we sailed out of the harbour, through the Golden Gate, and on out into the beautiful sea.

AGNES (*looks in the paper, excited*). He's gone!

OWEN (*hurriedly opens the paper*). He's gone all right. Well, maybe he's gone back to the church.

AGNES. He mustn't go among the other mice.

OWEN (*angry and offended*). Why not?

AGNES. Well, he mustn't, that's all. I know why.

OWEN (*shouting*). Well, what did you let him get away for, then?

AGNES (*controlling her voice*). You needn't shout. I can shout as loud as you. I can't help it if he ran away.

PRIM (*bewildered, on knees*). Did the mouse go?

JONAH. There have been greater tragedies.

PRIM. What was the matter with it?

JONAH. The same. It liveth.

PRIM. Oh.

## The Beautiful People

OWEN. I did my best, that's all I know. He's probably gone back to the steeple anyway, where he belongs. (*To Prim.*) Then what happened?

PRIM (*confused*). When?

OWEN. When you got out on the beautiful sea.

PRIM (*rises, goes to table*). Oh, yes. Well. Here. I'll show you. (*He opens the briefcase and begins bringing out the papers and envelopes again.*)

OWEN (*to Jonah*). What's he looking for?

JONAH. By the changing heavens, a whistle!

PRIM (*pausing to read a document with a seal on it*). In the event of death, you see, the pension becomes automatically null and void. (*Pause, as he puts the paper back into the briefcase.*) Null and void. A routine procedure, of course— (*He stops suddenly, horror-stricken.*) Oh, dear.

OWEN. What's the matter?

PRIM. I believe something alive is in the palm of my hand. (*Excited.*) Oh, goodness.

OWEN. What's the matter *now*?

PRIM. I believe it's moved up my shirt sleeve. (*Confused.*) Dinner was quite an event every evening, but one night— (*he wiggles his left shoulder, while everybody watches with fascination*)—there was— (*he wiggles his right shoulder*)—a celebration. Mrs. Sedley—

JONAH. Wonderful!

PRIM. It was the happiest experience of my life. (*Pause.*) I do believe something rather large is crawling about on me.

OWEN (*anxiously*). How many feet has it got?

PRIM. Let me see. (*He wiggles, counting on his fingers.*) Three.

OWEN (*to Agnes*). Three? Was that a three-legged mouse?

PRIM (*correcting himself*). No. Four.

OWEN. It's the mouse all right.

AGNES (*to Prim*). You must hurry right down to St. Anne's.

PRIM. *Who?*

AGNES. *You.*

PRIM. But *why?* I'm not a Catholic. I'm a Methodist.

## *The Beautiful People*

AGNES (*trying to hurry him out*). It's five blocks down the hill. You must hurry up into the steeple.

PRIM (*severely*). I beg your pardon?

AGNES. Hurry now, before it's too late. Run! (*She hurries him out of the open door.*)

PRIM (*in the yard*). *Run?* I haven't run in years.

AGNES. Well, you simply *must* run now.

PRIM. Very well, then. (*He runs across the yard and down the hill.*)

AGNES. Yes, he is. (*Pause.*) No, he isn't. (*Shouting to Prim.*)

OWEN. Is he running?

Run—run!

PRIM (*from a distance*). The mouse—it's gone.

AGNES. Are you sure?

PRIM (*closer now*). Yes, I am. It ran down my leg.

AGNES. He's lost the mouse. (*Returning to the room.*) The mouse simply doesn't *want* to go back to the church. It wants to stay here, with the other mice.

OWEN. Well, all right, then, let the poor mouse alone.

PRIM (*returning to the room and standing at the table, as before*). Well, there we were, alone on the top deck.

OWEN. Who?

PRIM. Mrs. Sedley and myself—on the voyage to Acapulco. (*He takes up his briefcase again.*) Here. I have a souvenir of the occasion right here. (*To Jonah suddenly, eagerly.*) Was it a mouse?

JONAH. It was not a part of thyself crawling.

PRIM (*suddenly shocked*). Oh, dear. (*He collapses into Jonah's arms. Jonah lets him down easily, to lie on the floor.*)

JONAH. Pole star and pyramid!

AGNES. I'll get him a glass of water.

OWEN. What's the matter with him?

(*Dan, an old drunkard, comes in carrying a basket full of groceries.*)

DAN. Here's the provisions, Joe. (*He sets the box on the table.*)

JONAH (*delighted*). It's about time you arrived. Now we'll sit down to a royal feast.

## *The Beautiful People*

DAN (*noticing Prim*). What's the matter with *him*?—  
Drunk?

*(Owen goes to the basket of groceries and starts to examine them. Agnes returns with a glass of water, tries to get Prim to drink, fails, drinks the water herself. Dan shakes Prim.)*

Get up, man. Pull yourself together. It's alcohol that's made the war. Alcohol and weak men, such as yourself. (*Holding Prim up.*) Stand up, man. Here. Let me take you to the kitchen for a glass of water. Sooner or later, like I've been telling 'em thirty years, alcohol is going to destroy the human race. (*To Prim.*) And a little mouse of a man like you, drinking intoxicating beverages. Come along, man. You'll be the ruin of the race. (*Everybody follows Dan and Prim into the kitchen.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT TWO

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### SCENE TWO

*After supper, about two hours later. Beyond the windows is visible a beautiful clear night, with moon and stars.*

*The three men come in from the interior of the house.*

PRIM. Again let me say, thank you, thank you for a most happy evening. The food could not have been finer. The conversation—could not have been—finer. The singing could not have been—finer. The speech-making could not have been—finer. (*In a stronger voice.*) As for the company—

DAN. The company could not have been finer.

PRIM. Yes, Dan. I shall never forget this wonderful evening. It has been most memorable.

JONAH. I'm delighted you have been happy. Come by any time at all.

PRIM (*sincerely thrilled*). May I?

JONAH. I shall be disappointed if you don't.

DAN. But don't drink. Just keep a sober head on your shoulders and everything is going to be all right.

PRIM (*sincerely*). Thank you, Dan. It's friends like you who carry a man through.

DAN. Ah, it's nothing. Any sober, God-fearing, home-loving man would have done the same.

PRIM. Thank you, Dan. (*To Jonah, as he pats his briefcase.*) Well, I have everything in order. The cheque will continue to come on schedule of course, but *hereafter* the sum will be ten dollars more.

JONAH. By the law of fertility and timekeeping, I am deeply grateful.

PRIM (*modestly*). It's nothing. The company can well spare it. As vice-president, I have the authority to do so.

DAN (*impressed*). *Vice-president?*

## *The Beautiful People*

PRIM. Oh, yes, Dan. (*He extends his hand to Dan, who shakes it vigorously.*)

DAN. You're going to be all right, don't you worry about *that*. A little sip now and then for the stomach, but nothing more. Can I help you to the street?

PRIM. No, thanks, Dan. I'm quite all right. (*To Jonah.*) I shall never forget this evening. (*He extends his hand. Jonah takes it warmly.*) Good-bye, Mr. Stonehedge. (*Prim goes. Jonah and Dan stand by. Prim waves. They wave back.*)

DAN. *Stonehedge?* Joe, a weak man like that should never touch a drop.

JONAH. Now, Dan, I've been dry long enough. Fetch the pretty bottle and we'll sit down to a quiet little game of casino.

DAN. It's the disgrace of the weak that makes the noble life of the strong so full of sorrow and misery. (*Bringing out a big beautiful bottle of wine and two glasses.*) It's the terrible disgrace of the weak.

JONAH (*as he looks out at the sky*). Then pour a drink, Dan, to the sweet smiling face of the universe.

DAN. We'll take a cup of kindness yet, with none of the little vice-presidents around.

JONAH (*shuffling a deck of cards idly*). Then pour it, Dan, while you and I are still alive.

DAN (*pouring*). The little vice-presidents who stumble and fall in every parlour. The little men with the wonderful official documents.

JONAH. Then drink it down, Dan.

DAN (*lifting his glass*). Then down it is, Joe. (*They drink together. Dan smacks his lips, then belches.*)

JONAH (*as he pushes his glass forward again*). By the changing heavens, Dan, then pour again, and cut the cards.

(*Dan cuts the cards, and Jonah deals. They take their hands and begin to play. They talk and drink as they play.*)

DAN. It's the weak make the wars, Joe. (*Pause, as they play.*) And Harold—what's the word from *him*? (*Jonah looks away in silence. After a moment the cornet is heard playing in the distance.*)

## The Beautiful People

JONAH (*as the cornet stops*). He's well, Dan.

DAN. Then God protect him.

(*Father Hogan of St. Anne's comes in. He is a heavy-set cheerful-faced man in his early sixties. Dan gets up quickly and bangs his head.*)

HOGAN. Good evening, Jonah!

JONAH. As the sun rises and sets, Father Hogan! (*Taking Hogan's arm.*) Come, sit down and sip a glass of wine, young man.

HOGAN. I'm no younger than thyself—and we're both old men, and maybe old fools. (*Shouting.*) Dan, for the love of God, sit down!

DAN (*leaping*). Yes, Father. (*He sits down as if obeying a command.*) Just a drop for my stomach, as the good Lord's my witness. (*He points upward, toward the good Lord.*)

HOGAN (*shakes his head*). Dan, you don't understand. I believe you. I've always believed you. You needn't imagine that every time you speak I regard what you say as a lie. I *don't*, Dan. I believe you. (*Softly.*) So why don't you?

DAN. I *do*, Father. I believe every word I say. *Every word.* Nobody in the world believes more than Dan Hillboy.

JONAH (*shouting warmly at Hogan*). Come you, now, sit down and sip a glass of wine. (*Dan gets a chair.*) You need not be a vigilant Christian *every* minute. Sit down, Hogan.

HOGAN. Let me stand a moment, Jonah. Is there a drop for *my* stomach?

JONAH. Dan, a glass for Father Hogan.

DAN (*fetches a glass with the happiness of a retriever*). Aye, we'll take a cup of kindness yet.

JONAH. Then pour it, Dan.

DAN (*brave and loud*). Aye, a cup of kindness among men of the good brotherhood. (*Offers glass of wine to Father Hogan.*) Father? (*Father Hogan takes the glass.*)

HOGAN (*waves them to sit*). Sit down, boys— (*He sips, then very seriously.*) Jonah (*he sighs and stops*). Your son Owen came to the church this afternoon—for the first time in his life.

## *The Beautiful People*

JONAH. I've no quarrel with the church. Why shouldn't a son of mine go to St. Anne's?

HOGAN. His behaviour in church was most irregular.

JONAH. *Irregular?*

HOGAN (*noticing Dan with his hand on his glass, wanting to drink but ashamed to do so*). Go ahead, Dan, *drink* it. I know it's for thy stomach.

DAN (*trying to rid himself of his sense of guilt*). I was just going to, Father. I was just going to. (*Lifting his glass*). To the good brotherhood, Father.

HOGAN. Very well, Dan.

DAN (*to Jonah as he drinks*). Joe?

JONAH. Then, drink it down, Dan. (*Dan nods and drinks, behaving very much like a boy who has been forgiven and is beside himself with joy. Jonah gets up, speaking to Hogan*). Sit down, now. (*He takes Hogan by the arm and makes him sit at the table. Jonah remains standing*). Cool, clean chemistry, man, tell us what the boy's done. Get to the point, so we can drink in peace. What's he done?

HOGAN (*sits down*). Jonah, he was found running about the church, upstairs and down, and was asked by Father O'Mara what he was doing. He replied that he was worshipping, and continued to run about with Father O'Mara following as well as he was able to. Father O'Mara called Father Lewis who asked the boy what he was seeking. He replied that he was seeking the lost lamb, as any good Christian would. Father O'Mara and Father Lewis, both young men, were confused and, I suppose, a little upset. They returned to their studies, but soon after heard a terrible commotion in the church itself, like the opening of the heavens. It was the boy, *inside* the pipe organ. (*Very emphatically*.) He'd *fallen* in.

JONAH. He was looking for a mouse.

HOGAN (*shocked*). A mouse?

JONAH. One of our *own* mice. His sister had sent him. Half in jest and half in earnestness, she has been watching over the mice of this house for many years now, with the

## *The Beautiful People*

result that we have named her St. Agnes of the Mice.

DAN (*drinking*). Aye—St. Agnes of the Mice.

JONAH. Now, you and I know mice are insensible creatures and cannot respond to affection and kindness. Well, it appears *she* did not know, and that they *did* respond—in a way.

HOGAN. I don't understand.

JONAH. Father Hogan, if I do not encourage the imaginations of my children, I also do not hinder them. With her faith in the mice grew her faith in herself. As that faith grew, intelligence and humanity grew, and with these things came a greater and deeper expectation of others, of *all* the living. And, naturally, the possibility of deep disappointment, which may eventually become disillusionment, or even contempt. I think I'll soon know, since only this afternoon she met a boy whose reality moved her to pity for the whole world. Which is, of course, the beginning of true humanity.

DAN (*drinking*). Aye, the true humanity.

JONAH. Her brother sometimes puts flowers out for her, here on the floor, as though they were from the mice, and once when she was very ill, he stayed up all night, grumbling to himself. Actually he was praying for her. When she was better again, he told her the *mice* had prayed for her. Because *she* had watched over *them*. It's no matter to me what pattern faith or humour may take. She came home this afternoon broken-hearted, and told him so by pretending the *mice* were crying because one of them had been lost—at St. Anne's. Your church. That's why he was there this afternoon. I suppose he ruined the pipe organ. Well, I'll pay for it—little by little.

HOGAN. On the contrary, the pipe organ has been out of order for some time. It's in better condition now than it ever was.

JONAH. Well, that's fine. He probably pushed something into place.

DAN (*holds glass out*). Aye, it's the truth.

JONAH (*standing*). Then, drink to it, Dan. (*Pause.*) I

## *The Beautiful People*

wouldn't be able to speak of these things to anyone but you and Dan here, because the poor faithless minds of the others I know would make the meaning foolish instead of simple and true, as it is. (*Pause, trying to explain.*) Every life in the world is a miracle, and it's a miracle every *minute* each of us stays alive, and unless we know this, the experience of living is cheated of the greater part of its wonder and beauty.

DAN (*drinking*). Aye, the wonder and the beauty of it.

JONAH. I sometimes stand on street corners and talk to people, as you do inside the church. My only disciple is Dan here, but he's a good one. But my *church* is the whole blooming universe, and mice are as much a part of its magnificence as men, if they only knew. We are alive with all other things alive, from the mite to the whale. Pole star and pyramid, man, I tell them the same things on street corners that you tell them inside the church. (*Pause.*) From my heart to the pole star is the straightest line in the world, and as the star moves, so moves my heart—and yours, and Dan's and everybody's.

DAN. Aye, the wonder and the beauty of it. (*He sips.*)

JONAH. The image of the pyramid to the human mind is the image of our grace as men. The slaves who built the pyramid—the thousands of them over the hundreds of years—did not know the majesty of the thing being made. But the *image* of that thing began where it ended—in the living human mind. The line goes from one to the other: from the heart to the star, and from the star to the pyramid, and from the pyramid *back* to the heart. From *one* thing to *all* things. They're all *one*, to be seen as a whole majesty, or not to be seen at all. I choose to see, since I am by nature a religious man.

DAN. Aye, and I, too. (*He drinks.*)

HOGAN. I know that, Jonah.

JONAH. It's not enough to make a record of the world—it's necessary to change it! And you cannot begin to change it from the *outside*. The image of the good must first be real to the *mind* before it can inhabit substance and occupy space. My world is myself and my kinship with all other things.

## The Beautiful People

And my delight is my children. We are exactly the same as all other people, but I know we live better than the rich and better than the poor, because the values which make rich and poor are without image or reality, and the real values are the only values *we* recognize and cherish. We live faithfully, and sometimes, by the standards of the world, mischievously, or even dishonestly. A cheque for twenty-four dollars comes here every month for a man who has been dead seven years. We have no idea who the man was, but he's dead, and each month we have sent the money back, spending it. My youngest—the boy who ran about in your church this afternoon—gambles, and sometimes, I must say, wins. *Again* we send the money back. Even in the eyes of the world, we *would* be better, gladly and gratefully, if the world itself would be, but since it *isn't*, we refuse to exchange our values for its values. I know—and I have taught my children to know—that all things of matter must be only the *image* of the *real*. The pyramid must not be the waste of a million lives, but the poetry of *every* life.

DAN. Aye, the poetry. The wonder and the beauty of it. (*He sips, listening drunkenly. Agnes runs up on to the porch.*)

AGNES (*whispering*). I found him, Father. And we walked again and talked, and he's coming here to-morrow to meet you. He's shy and afraid—but I've found him.

JONAH. Of course you've found him, Saint.

AGNES. And I don't feel sad any more. I feel the same, but I feel happy now. His name's John.

JONAH. It's a good name.

AGNES. I want to go out and walk and look at everything again, because now I understand.

JONAH. You needn't tell me, Saint. Tell the night. Tell the little children who aren't sure and the old people who've forgotten.

(*Agnes kisses Jonah's forehead. She goes to Dan, kisses him on the forehead, then to Father Hogan and kisses him on the forehead. Then quickly turns and runs. The three men are silent a moment. Jonah goes to the window, then turns.*)

## *The Beautiful People*

Did you *see* her, Father Hogan? Did you see her, Dan?

DAN (*very drunk*). Aye, and a finer lass never breathed. (*He buries his head on his arms, wearily.*)

HOGAN. I'm glad the boy came to the church this afternoon. His presence there, for the first time in his life, now has meaning, and I'm grateful, even if he was only looking for a mouse.

JONAH (*standing*). No, not a mouse. For the *image* of the living heart's shyest, most kindly smile. (*Pause, solemnly.*) The absence of their brother has taught them—and myself, too—the preciousness of one another. One's son, one's daughter, one's neighbour—and the stranger, brotherless and homeless. (*Almost pathetically.*) We've been worried, Father. Oh, we know he's all right—we know nothing can happen to him, because he's good—but we can't help it. He wanted to go, so *I* wanted him to go. Now, I've lost faith, because I believed goodness was a coin for exchange more powerful than any coin minted by any government—the *only* coin. (*Pause.*) I'm no longer sure. (*Angry but softly.*) If anything happens to my son—if the world destroys him or anything *in* him, which *all* men should have—(*bitterly*)—I shall be the most corrupt of men. (*He goes to the piano—sits—his back turned to them.*) It was good of you to come to-night, Father. I needed you to talk to. My children must not know that what I have taught them may be useless in this world.

HOGAN (*simply*). I understand, Jonah.

(*Jonah in silence turns to the piano, as if to play. He strikes several chords softly, then stops. He stands, moves to archway and leans there, turned away.*)

(*Rises, goes to Dan. Places his hand on Dan's shoulder.*)

I'll take you home, Dan. Can you walk?

DAN (*lifts his head*). Walk? Dan Hillboy? Of course I can walk.

(*He tries to stand, alls back, makes a real effort, falls back again. He looks up pathetically into Hogan's face, almost weeping.*)

## *The Beautiful People*

I'm drunk, Father.

HOGAN. Shall I leave thee, Dan?

DAN. Wait, Father. I'll walk beside thee. It's my head—the years I've lost. The swift, sweet years that passed me by. I was turning a corner, Father, and then all of a sudden the years were gone. I've told Joe, Father. He knows. He believes me.

HOGAN. I believe you, Dan.

DAN (*amazed at the waste*). A street corner, Father. But ever since, on a night like this, the years come back. They come back to the breathing of my boyhood, and want *me* back, where I belong. (*Calling bitterly*.) Dan Hillboy! Lean, young Dan—with his muscles hard and his belt tight and his shoe hitting the sidewalk like the feet of the Lord of Life. Now, I walk with a stranger—a weak, pathetic fool who's stolen the name of my life. (*Swiftly and with anger*.) I was the good companion of them all, and they knifed me. (*He clutches his heart*.) They ganged up on me in the dark night as I came by whistling and hitting my shoes against the sidewalk, and they fell upon me. But they'll never kill *me*. As long as there are nights like this night in the world, Dan Hillboy will be there, young and hard, in the street of life. The murderers won't be there, Father, but Dan Hillboy—he'll be there. Where a man's born, he'll live, and Dan Hillboy was born in the immortal world. (*He stops, looks around pathetically*.) I'm sick, Father. I'm sick of the waste. I'm sick of the lies I tell myself.

HOGAN. They're not lies, Dan.

DAN (*looking up at him*). Do you believe me, Father? Do you believe me?

HOGAN. I believe you, Dan. Come. Stand up, and we'll go out and look into the sky.

DAN (*standing*). Aye, Father, I'll walk beside thee.

(*Owen comes running in with something in his clenched fist. He stops short, looks around, trying to understand what's the matter. Jonah turns and looks at the boy. As he smiles, the boy begins to smile.*)

## The Beautiful People

JONAH. Pole star and pyramid, boy, she's found him. He goes by the name John.

OWEN (*pleased, then suddenly*). Oh. I forgot to give you the change from the cheque. (*He hands Jonah a fistful of coins.*) You'll be wanting a coin to jingle soon.

JONAH. Spectacles and satellites, have you kept something out for gambling?

OWEN. I've got something kept.—You know what I've got here? A little frog! I found him! I'm going to write another book.

JONAH (*puts his arm around the boy. He notices Dan and Hogan waiting*). I'll be home soon. (*He takes Dan's arm.*) Come along, Dan. We'll walk down the hill to St. Anne's—and Harry's Bar.

DAN. Aye, Joe. St. Anne's, and Harry's.

HOGAN. And I'll buy thee a drink, Dan.

(*The three men go, as Owen watches. He then opens his fist and looks closely at what he's got in his hand.*)

OWEN. Now. Hop and let's have a look at you. Come on, now, hop. Hop!

(*The frog hops and lands on the floor. Owen gets down on all fours and looks into the eyes of the little frog.*)

Can you see me? Can you hear me?

(*He goes to the window and tosses the frog out. Then turns to the piano. From a distance the cornet is heard again. He tries to get closer to the music. Mr. Prim comes in shyly.*)

PRIM. Your father said I could come by any time at all. Can I come by now?

OWEN. Sure. Sure. Glad to have you.

(*He goes on listening. At the window, he sits. Harmony Blueblossom comes in. She stands, amazed, staring at Prim.*)

HARMONY (*to Prim*). Jonah?

PRIM (*with his customary bewilderment*). How do you do?

HARMONY. Surely you're not—Jonah?

PRIM. Jonah? Who's Jonah?

HARMONY (*to Owen*). Young man. This man is not your father, is he?

## *The Beautiful People*

OWEN. No, but he's a *good* man. He sends the pension cheque. He made a voyage to Mexico once, too. (*He continues to listen. The cornet is heard closer.*)

HARMONY (*to Prim*). Is that so?

PRIM. Oh, yes. It was the most wonderful experience of my life. (*The cornet comes closer.*)

OWEN (*suddenly, desperately*). Miss Blueblossom—are you sure you don't hear a cornet?

HARMONY. What's that?

OWEN. A cornet.

HARMONY (*listening*). Of course I hear a cornet. Someone's playing a cornet.

OWEN (*to Prim*). Tell the truth, now. Do *you* hear a cornet?

PRIM (*listening*). Why, yes, of course. (*Owen stands, as if in a trance. Harmony looks at him intently.*)

OWEN (*to himself*). He's coming up the hill, through the woods where we used to play. (*Takes his tablet to the table, sits and writes.*) Two words: My brother.

PRIM. Are you his mother?

HARMONY. No. Not exactly. Almost.

PRIM. Almost? Oh, it's wonderful to be here.

(*Agnes runs into the house. Owen and Agnes look at one another, hoping the cornet is real this time.*)

HARMONY. St. Agnes of the Mice!

PRIM. Oh, yes. One of the mice got *on* me. *On* me.

(*Agnes and Owen move to archway, listening. Everybody stands still. Nobody speaks. The cornet comes very close, and then Harold appears. He is playing the cornet. Walking behind him is a small young man, Steve, who is smoking a rolled cigarette. In front of the steps, the solo ends, and Harold stands staring at the place. He enters the house. Owen pushes Harold's chair forward for him. Harold sits, Steve in back of him.*)

HAROLD. Hello, Saint. Hello, Shakespeare. (*Points at Steve.*) This is Steve. He hasn't got a home. (*To Steve.*) Didn't I tell you? Isn't it exactly like I told you?

(*In quick succession, first Jonah, then Dan, and then Father*

## *The Beautiful People*

*Hogan arrive, and stand looking at the miracle, speechless but smiling.)*

JONAH (*whispering*). Pole star and pyramid! Play it again, boy. Play it again.

*(Harold begins to play the cornet again. Steve places a battered black stovepipe hat over it, and watches with admiration. Owen goes to Harold and sits on the floor. Agnes takes the stovepipe hat off the horn and places it on Harold's head. Prim and Harmony move in, watching. All look at Harold as he plays. The curtain comes down and quickly goes up again as Harold is still playing.)*

CURTAIN

# *Sweeney in the Trees*

---

To John Anderson

## NOTE

After writing *The Time of Your Life* (in the spring of 1939) I went to Dublin, as I had long planned to do, and there met a number of young Dubliners, poets and writers, one of whom, Flann O'Brien, revealed to me that the original title of his first novel, *At Swim Two Birds*, had been *Sweeney in the Trees*.

*Sweeney in the Trees?* As these things sometimes happen, I saw a whole amazing, incredible, delightful, tragic, unbelievable, magnificent work of art in the picture of the young man in the trees. The name was just right and the location was just right.

Sweeney, and trees.

Now, Sweeney is one of those names art cannot resist. I became acquainted with the name first as a child when someone said to someone else, Tell it to Sweeney. I saw Sweeney as the greatest young man who ever lived—the only man who would believe anything. The name came up again in the poetry of T. S. Eliot, and with no books at hand to refer to, as I remember it, Sweeney was still the same great young man. He was among the teacups at the time, and the teacups rattled. Soon after meeting Sweeney in Mr. Eliot's poetry, I myself was among the teacups, and again the teacups rattled. Running into him still again, in Dublin, was most delightful, and you can ask Flann O'Brien how much I laughed about Sweeney being in the trees.

What trees these were I did not know and did not need to know. I did know, however, that *I* had been in the trees. I had no sooner learned to stand than I began climbing into whatever trees were near by, and it was pleasant to learn

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

that this compulsion of infancy and boyhood had at last caught up with Sweeney himself. One of the earliest injuries I suffered was at the age of two and a half, as I climbed down from a china-ball tree in Fresno, California, and stepped on broken glass. Several years later, in the eucalyptus woods of Alameda which Joaquin Miller had planted, I shinned up eucalyptus saplings and made them bend. I climbed peach, apricot, walnut, and olive trees in Fresno, but most memorable of all was the climbing of the giant fig trees, when figs ripened every morning.

What trees were Sweeney's? *All trees. The trees.* Sweeney's trees. The trees which provided shade for human comedy, and human tragedy. Shade, cool, height, and beauty. The trees of poetry.

If no message other than the one of Sweeney in the trees had come to me in Dublin, my visit would have been all that I could ever have imagined it might be, and Flann O'Brien was no less that year than James Joyce in Dublin twenty years before.

Who Sweeney *is* I do not know, but I know he is, among others, yourself, and without a doubt myself.

Where he will be next is up to you. I've seen him where they said he was, and he will be there until you see him somewhere else.

From Dublin I returned to London—Marble Arch, right off Hyde Park, where in the summer evenings I listened to the most immortal speech-making of our time. One of these orators sat on the branch of a tree and spoke gently to a crowd of about a hundred people. He was of course Sweeney, and he spoke as wisely as anybody ever spoke. (You God-damn people, he said, are dead and don't know it. Yes, you are. But I love you. Why don't you live? Look at me, in this tree. *I'm living.*) Of course that was only part of what he said, but it was a good part of it. The rest was about the war, which made him lift his voice.

From London I took an airplane to Paris. I went to a publishing house near Notre-Dame and the next thing I

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

knew I was on the telephone talking to James Joyce. He made a point of pronouncing my name very accurately—he pronounced it as Armenians do. I never telephone anybody, but somehow or other this telephone call went through. I didn't want to meet James Joyce or anybody else by appointment. That is like asking somebody to breathe next Tuesday at two-thirty. I had met him in Dublin—in Flann O'Brien anyhow. So I didn't keep the appointment. I returned to London. But on the afternoon of the day of the famous telephone call I walked through some of the streets of Paris and found a small boy in a tree throwing the seeds of the tree at his mother, who was very angry. She insisted that he come right down out of the tree, and he insisted on staying in the tree.

Back in London I listened some more to the Hyde Park immortals, and then returned to New York. From New York I returned to my home in San Francisco, and there, the day after Christmas, I began to write a new play. Soon after I began to write, the play began to write itself. On the last day of 1939 the play was finished. It was this play, *Sweeney in the Trees*. I cabled Flann O'Brien and told him what had happened. He cabled back saying it was O.K. for me to have the title. I promised to try to furnish him with a title some day.

No play by me may be said to have been performed unless I direct it. This I learned during the summer of 1940 when three of my plays were produced in summer theatres.

When written, I identified *Sweeney in the Trees* as follows, and this identification may, for all I know, still be correct: 'A play, a dream, a poem, a travesty, a fable, a symphony, a parable, a comedy, a tragedy, a farce, a vaudeville, a song and dance, a statement on money, a report on life, an essay on art and religion, a theatrical entertainment, a circus, anything you like, whatever you please.'

I believe a play—any work of art—should be several things, all inseparable, all integrated, all constituting the whole, which in the case of the theatre is a living thing,

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

enduring from one moment in time to another moment in time.

I shall very likely produce and direct *Sweeney in the Trees* some day.

Mr. T. C. Upham of The Cape Theatre, Cape May, N.J., made an admirable attempt to present *Sweeney in the Trees* during the week of 27th August 1940.

The scene was designed by Peter A. Xantho.

WILLIAM SAROYAN

*San Francisco*

29th May 1941

## THE PEOPLE

- MICHAEL SWEENEY, 27, *a noble fool*  
JIM LARK, 15, *a genius*  
ALMA ELIXA, 24, *Ophelia*  
ALICE LILIACIK, 11, *a singer*  
LUKE PADGETT, 21, *a dreamer*  
KIORI OKADA, 57, *a father*  
FRANCIS SHAKEPIERCE, 73, *a small boy*  
SWEENEY HIMSELF, 27, *a good companion*  
PEREZ, 44, *half a dance team*  
CONSUELA, 41, *the other half*  
LIEUTENANT PIOTOR AROSHA PIPITSKI, 37, *a Russian*  
HELEN SWEENEY, 24, *a wife*  
EVANGELINE, 19, *a young woman*  
MRS. MIRIAM LILIACIK, 41, *a foreign woman*  
KIROKI OKADA, 9, *a son*  
POSTAL MESSENGER, 17, *a bringer of tidings*  
IKE HEPBO, 41, *a member of The Elks*  
PAUL, 27, *a lover*  
POLICEMAN, 57, *a moralist*

## THE PLACE

*Room Eight on the third and top floor of an old building at 123 Geary Street in San Francisco. Also, a portion of Room Eight, a portion of Room Seven, the Hall, Elevator, and Stairway.*

## THE TIME

*From morning to night.*

## ACT ONE

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*Sweeney's room has two large windows, with rain splashing against them. Two wicker chairs. A wicker couch. A big cement pot. Out of the pot is growing a strange-looking tree. There is a telephone on the floor.*

*Next to this room is the establishment of Miss Alma Elixia who teaches singing. She is now teaching a girl of nine or ten named Alice. The girl is singing opera, very sweetly. On the other side of this room is the room of Francis Shakepierce, an old poet.*

*Sweeney is standing at the window, looking out. He is a well-dressed young man of twenty-seven or so. He is wearing his hat and overcoat, both expensive. He has an open book in his left hand.*

*Jim Lark breaks into the room, whistles newsboy style, and slides up to Sweeney.*

JIM. You the man who advertised?

SWEENEY. I am.

JIM. My name's Jim Lark. I want the job. I'm dead tired, too. I've been walking all morning and most of last night. I can barely keep my eyes open. (*He slides to the window.*) Boy, it sure is raining.

SWEENEY. You don't seem tired.

JIM. I never *seem*. Nobody ever knows, unless I tell 'em and then they don't believe me. Can I have the job?

SWEENEY. Yes.

JIM (*indicating couch*). Can I sleep a little first?

SWEENEY. Sure, but take off those wet shoes. I'll put them on the radiator.

JIM. Thanks.

*(He whistles, slides to the couch, takes off his shoes, curls up on the couch. Sweeney puts the shoes on the radiator, looks at Jim a moment, takes off his overcoat, puts it over him. He returns to the window. Miss Elixia's piano-playing and Alice's singing end.)*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE. Impossible. (*Pause.*) Simply impossible.

SWEENEY. What's impossible?

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE. Her mother wants her to sing. She works hard to pay me two dollars for a half hour. It is impossible.

SWEENEY (*loudly*). Why?

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE. *She can't sing.*

SWEENEY (*louder*). She sounds all right to me.

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE (*very loud*). You are a fool.

SWEENEY. So are you.

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE. How dare you?

(*She beats on the wall. Jim lifts his head, looks, goes back to sleep.*)

SWEENEY. How dare you?

(*He waits for an answer. There is none. He hurries to one of the wicker chairs and sits down. He brings out a large, black, false moustache, puts it on, takes up the book and pretends to be reading. Miss Elixia breaks into the room. Jim looks up, whistles, goes back to sleep. He sits up again for a second to observe Sweeney's moustache. Miss Elixia is a very attractive, slim young woman. Sweeney is stunned by her beauty. She is followed by Alice, the little girl, who is also angry. Miss Elixia looks at Sweeney suspiciously.*)

(*Standing.*)

Oh. Excuse me. I was so caught up in this shabby novel I'm reading, I'm afraid I didn't hear you come in. How do you do?

MISS ELIXA. How do you do. I cannot have all this shouting and whistling. (*Indicating Jim.*) Who is that?

SWEENEY. Jim Lark. (*To Alice.*) How do you do.

ALICE. How do you do.

SWEENEY (*to Miss Elixia*). Your daughter, of course.

MISS ELIXA. No more than *he's* your son. She's my pupil.

SWEENEY. You teach?

ELIXA. Singing.

SWEENEY (*with pretended excitement*). Singing!

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

ELIXA. I must not be interrupted.

(*Sweeney goes back to his book, ignoring Miss Elixia. The teacher and the pupil stand together, looking at him. Jim sits up, staring at Miss Elixia and Alice. He smiles, goes back to sleep.*)

ALICE (*confused*). He is a liar.

SWEENEY. I worship the truth.

ELIXA. You shouted at me.

ALICE. Yes, you did. You old man.

SWEENEY (*to Alice*). I'm twenty-seven years old. Your teacher is probably twenty-four, although she *looks* younger. You are probably eight going on nine, or nine going on ten.

ALICE. I'm eleven.

SWEENEY. Going on twelve.

ALICE. I'm just eleven.

SWEENEY. May I say I am delighted?

ALICE. You stop shouting at us.

SWEENEY. I heard singing. I heard someone say, Im possible. Loving truth as I do, I spoke up in defence of the singer—yourself.

ELIXA. She *cannot* sing.

ALICE. I cannot sing.

SWEENEY. I *heard* you sing.

ELIXA. That was not singing.

SWEENEY. If you refuse to respect the truth, please go away.

ELIXA. I must not be interrupted when I am teaching.

SWEENEY. If she can't sing, what are you teaching her for? (*Pause.*) Ah-hah. Then go away swifter. I despise those who love money.

ELIXA. I do *not* love money.

SWEENEY. Then why do you take two dollars from her mother for a half hour?

ELIXA. Her mother wants her to sing.

SWEENEY. Wouldn't it be more fitting to give the lessons to her mother?

ELIXA. Her mother cannot sing.

SWEENEY. Neither can *she*, according to you.

## Sweeney in the Trees

ELIXA. She can sing a *little*.

SWEENEY. Please go away. Even here in this hidden-away hothouse, where this amazing tree has grown thirty years in peace and silence, watered every day by a succession of seventeen elevator operators—here to-day and gone to-morrow—even *here*, money is worshipped.

*(He removes an enormous roll of bills from his pocket and peels off a half-dozen, which he tosses around him recklessly.)*

I despise money.

*(Alice moves toward the money. Miss Elixia holds her. Jim, pretending to be asleep, snatches one of the bills from the floor, jams it into a pocket. Sweeney gets up and begins kicking the money about the room.)*

ALICE. Miss Elixia.

SWEENEY *(stopping suddenly)*. Miss Elixia?

ELIXA. Alma Elixia.

SWEENEY. Michael Sweeney. *(He shakes her hand.)* How do you do?

*(He looks at the money with terrible distaste and begins kicking it again.)*

ALICE. He's not crazy. He's just showing off.

ELIXA *(Picking up one of the bills while Sweeney goes on kicking at others)*. This is not real money.

*(Jim sits up, takes the bill out of his pocket, looks at it, throws it back on the floor, lies down.)*

SWEENEY *(turning a little angry and a little shocked)*. I beg your pardon?

ELIXA. I say this money is not real.

SWEENEY *(irritated)*. Please go away. I implore you.

ELIXA *(angry)*. How dare you pretend to be indifferent about money? Kicking money around that is not real? *(Studying one of the bills.)* Not the least bit real. For a moment I thought you might be someone worth while.

SWEENEY. I *am* indifferent to money. *(He kicks some of the money.)* I *am* someone worth while.

ELIXA. You are not only a liar, you are also a fraud. A horrible fraud.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

ALICE. You're a horrible old liar.

SWEENEY. Now, please—patience, patience.

ALICE. You're a horrible old fraud, too.

SWEENEY. Now, child.

ALICE. I just know that moustache on your face isn't real, either.

ELIXA (*sadly*). That, too? You *are* a horrible person.

SWEENEY. Two years ago I had a *real* moustache exactly like this. (*He removes the moustache.*)

ELIXA. Two years ago.

SWEENEY. It's true.

ELIXA. Two years ago I suppose you had money to kick around, too.

SWEENEY (*kicking*). Yes. All kinds of money. I have absolutely no use for it.

ELIXA. That's a pose.

SWEENEY. What can a man do with money, if he has money? Do you know? If you do, tell me.

ELIXA. Why are you here? Why are you in this room?

SWEENEY. Why? (*Pause.*) Well——

ALICE. You see? A horrible old fraud.

SWEENEY. Now, child. Your voice was made for singing.

ALICE. You're just the biggest old fraud in the whole world.

SWEENEY. I am not; (*To Elixia.*) I could tell you why I am here, only it would take a little time.

ELIXA (*briskly*). I have no more time.

ALICE. We're busy.

ELIXA. Come, Alice.

ALICE. And don't interrupt us any more.

ELIXA. Please don't shout at me when I'm trying to teach.

SWEENEY. You shouted first.

ELIXA. I didn't shout at *you*.

ALICE. She shouted at *me*.

(*Luke Padgett comes in. Stands quietly near Miss Elixia.*)

ELIXA (*to Luke*). How do you do.

LUKE. How do you do.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SWEENEY. I don't think he wants to take singing lessons.

ELIXA (*angry*). He's homeless and hungry. I have a right to be nice to anybody I like.

LUKE. What's all the money on the floor for?

ELIXA. It's not money. It's not real. Not the least bit real.

SWEENEY (*kicking some money*). It serves the purpose. I despise the stuff.

LUKE. *I don't.*

SWEENEY. That's because you have none.

ELIXA. You haven't any either. At least not to kick around.

SWEENEY (*he kicks furiously, his foot going very high*). I can dream, can't I?

LUKE. Isn't it really money?

ALICE. No.

LUKE. May I kick some, too—if it isn't really money?

SWEENEY. Please *do*.

LUKE (*kicking timidly*). I wouldn't do it if it was real money, but it sure feels good.

SWEENEY. Of course it does. (*Inviting her to kick some.*) Miss Elixia?

ELIXA. How dare you? Alice. Come along.

ALICE. You big fraud.

(*Alice and Miss Elixia go. Sweeney goes to the window while Luke kicks the money all over the place, stopping now and then to look at Jim. Luke stops suddenly. Sweeney turns from the window, watches Luke a moment.*)

LUKE. I hope I didn't kick it too much. It costs money, I suppose.

SWEENEY. Very little. I always carry fifteen or twenty thousand dollars' worth.

LUKE. You can't spend it, can you?

SWEENEY. No. But I've already bought everything. You can't get anything with money.

LUKE. You can get food.

SWEENEY. I don't care a great deal for food.

LUKE. And clothes.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SWEENEY. I don't need any more clothes.

LUKE. And pay room rent.

SWEENEY. What you say is true. The things you've named are all precious—if you haven't got them. But if you have, or if you can get them, they aren't.

LUKE. I could sure use a few of 'em. That's why I'm looking for a job.

SWEENEY. What sort of a job do you prefer usually?

LUKE. Anything. Anything at all. You're the man who advertised aren't you? (*He looks at a piece of paper.*) Michael Sweeney?

SWEENEY. I am Michael Sweeney.

LUKE. What's the job?

SWEENEY. I want to meet people who are looking for work.

JIM (*sitting up*). Socially ambitious?

SWEENEY. In a way.

LUKE. What am I supposed to do?

SWEENEY. Nothing.

LUKE. Is that what the job is?

SWEENEY. Yes.

LUKE. I don't suppose I'll do.

SWEENEY. Why not?

LUKE. I haven't got an education.

SWEENEY. Neither have I.

LUKE. All I want to do is make a little money so I can get along.

SWEENEY. Well, I may as well tell you, you can have the job, if you want to call it that, but there's no salary. You can come and go as you please. You can sit here, write a letter, read, rest, or just get out of the rain.

LUKE. Is that the job?

SWEENEY. Yes.

LUKE. Gosh.

SWEENEY. I'm sorry you're disappointed.

LUKE. Even my dreams are untrue.

SWEENEY. Is that so?

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

LUKE. Yeah. Last night I dreamed I was going to get a job. A real job, with working hours, and a boss, and a salary.

SWEENEY. What work have you done?

LUKE. I worked in a hardware store once. There was a girl across the aisle from me named Evangeline.

SWEENEY. Evangeline?

LUKE. I fell in love with her.

SWEENEY. Of course.

LUKE. The job was temporary.

SWEENEY. You went back and found her, of course?

LUKE. It was temporary for *her*, too. I went back all right, but she was gone.

SWEENEY. What other work?

LUKE. Another year I worked in a warehouse.

SWEENEY. Who was there?

LUKE. There was a lady named Mrs. Hawkins.

SWEENEY. Did you fall in love with her?

LUKE. Not exactly. She was about sixty, I guess. We used to eat lunch together and sometimes go for a walk. And last night—I dreamed I was going to get a job to-day.

SWEENEY. Then I don't suppose you want this job?

LUKE. It's not that I don't want it. It's just that I haven't got any more money.

SWEENEY (*kicking some money*). None at all?

LUKE (*showing several coins*). This nickel and these four pennies.

SWEENEY. I wish you had more.

LUKE. Oh, that's all right. It's just that a man likes to believe his dreams.

*(Sweeney walks around thoughtfully. Okada, the Japanese elevator operator, about sixty, small, quiet, dignified, comes in, carrying a water pail and a broom.)*

OKADA. Excuse me. I come to see tree. (*He looks at tree.*)  
Oh beautiful.

SWEENEY. Good morning.

OKADA. Oh thank you. Good morning. (*He waters the tree.*)

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

LUKE. It sure is a beautiful tree, isn't it?

OKADA. Oh thank you, very beautiful tree.

*(Sweeney goes to the window. The telephone rings. Sweeney ignores the telephone. It rings again. Luke goes to him.)*

LUKE. The telephone's ringing.

SWEENEY. Is that so? Somebody's got the wrong number.

LUKE. Maybe it's the right number. Shall I answer it?

SWEENEY. If you like.

LUKE *(at phone)*. Hello. *(Pause. To Sweeney.)* She wants to talk to Michael Sweeney. I guess she's got the right number all right. *(In telephone.)* Who's calling, please? *(Pause. To Sweeney.)* She says for you to come to the phone immediately.

SWEENEY. I'm sorry to involve you in this. Would you mind hanging up?

LUKE. She's got a beautiful voice.

SWEENEY. Beautiful?

LUKE. Well, I guess it's the way she talks, then. Please talk to her. She's very anxious.

SWEENEY. Anxious?

LUKE. Impatient.

SWEENEY. Impatient?

LUKE. Well, I guess she's angry then.

OKADA. Excuse me. Shall I sweep up the money?

*(Sweeney gestures approval. Jim takes money out of Sweeney's coat pocket and throws it around. Okada sweeps up the money, picks it up, sorts it, and gets it all back in order.)*

LUKE. Please talk to her. I never could hang up on anybody.

*(Sweeney takes the phone. Listens. Decides not to talk. Hangs up.)*

Gosh.

*(Okada hands Sweeney all the money.)*

SWEENEY. Thank you, sir.

OKADA. Oh thank you. If you want me, I be in elevator.

SWEENEY. Very well.

OKADA. You like tree?

SWEENEY. It's one of the reasons I rented this place.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

OKADA. Four years I take care.

SWEENEY. You have done beautifully.

OKADA. Four years I see tree alone. Office empty.

SWEENEY. This is an old building. Not at all modern or stylish.

OKADA. Oh very fine building.

SWEENEY. *I think so.*

OKADA. Oh fine people here.

SWEENEY. I'm sure.

OKADA. Miss Elixia next door, singing. Mr. Shakepierce other side, writing books.

SWEENEY. Shakespeare?

OKADA. No. Shakepierce.

SWEENEY. A poet?

OKADA. Old, old man, drink very much. Kiss people in street with love. Oh fine people here. (*Pause.*) Excuse me.

SWEENEY. Yes?

OKADA. Please. You have business?

SWEENEY. I despise the thought of it. (*He kicks money.*)

OKADA. No business? Please. Why you come here?

SWEENEY. This tree. A place to sit down. Windows on the street.

OKADA. You like tree?

SWEENEY. Very much.

JIM (*sitting up suddenly*). I lived in a tree seven days once.

OKADA. Oh tree grow big in four years. I watch every day.

JIM. I nearly learned to fly.

SWEENEY. You have a family?

OKADA. Oh thank you, big family.

JIM. The birds brought me food.

SWEENEY. You're a fortunate man.

LUKE. I wish *I* had a family.

OKADA. Oh family fine. My boy Kiroki very smiling boy.

LUKE. I wish *I* had a son.

JIM. The only time I fell, I didn't break anything. Most people break their arm or their neck.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SWEENEY. *You* should have a family.

LUKE. It doesn't look like I'll ever get a family at the rate I'm going. I've got to get a job first.

JIM. The trees. The trees.

OKADA. Excuse me.

LUKE. Yes, sir.

OKADA. Family fine. You try hard get job.

LUKE. I try every day, but it just doesn't seem like anybody's got a job for me.

OKADA. Excuse me. You try hard. Family good. (*Okada goes.*)

LUKE. You know what?

SWEENEY. What?

LUKE. You know what I'm afraid of?

SWEENEY. Are you *afraid* of something?

LUKE (*pause, looking about*). I'm afraid of dying.

(*Sweeney leaps back dramatically, amazed. He walks around Luke once, steps back, looks at him.*)

SWEENEY. What's your name?

LUKE. Luke. Padgett.

SWEENEY. How old are you?

LUKE. Twenty-one.

SWEENEY. I'm twenty-seven. Tell me about it.

LUKE. Sometimes all of a sudden death walks beside me.

SWEENEY. Are you sure it's death?

LUKE. I don't know. Whatever it is, it walks beside me like a tiger. It scares me.

SWEENEY. Tell me about it.

LUKE. Well, I'll be in a movie, just sitting there. Not walking. I go to ten-cent movies to rest sometimes. I get tired of walking. I see the people in the movies with all the things I want, and then the tiger comes to me. (*The telephone rings. Luke stops talking and turns.*)

SWEENEY (*shouting*). Ignore it. Tell me about the tiger.

LUKE (*loudly*). I see them with good things around them. Food and fires and faces smiling at them. (*The phone rings. He stops.*)

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SWEENEY. Ignore the God-damn thing. Tell me why you're afraid of death. Death is no enemy. (*The phone rings.*)

LUKE. I sit there in the darkness with all the good things in my mind. (*The phone rings.*) All the things I want. The things every man's got to have. (*The phone rings.*) And then death comes to me. I've got nothing. She wasn't there when I went back. (*The phone rings.*) It was temporary for her, too. Everybody around me is an enemy. (*The phone rings.*) I want nothing but a chance to have a fire and food and a place I can belong to. I only want to see one face smiling at me. (*The phone rings.*) I can't have anything. Death keeps following me around. I'm afraid of it. (*Mr. Shakepierce comes in, drunk.*)

SHAKEPIERCE (*half-talking, half-humming*). Am I not yours for weal or woe? (*Luke and Sweeney are silent.*) Who made that speech?

LUKE. It wasn't a speech.

SHAKEPIERCE. No? (*To Sweeney.*) My name is Francis Shakepierce.

SWEENEY. Michael Sweeney. (*They bow.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. Yours?

LUKE. Luke Padgett.

SHAKEPIERCE. Who is this?

SWEENEY. Jim Lark. He's asleep at last. He's very tired. (*Shakepierce looks at Jim.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. Now. What seems to be the trouble?

LUKE. I'm looking for work.

SHAKEPIERCE. Work is for slaves. The living were never intended to work. The human body was never intended to be exerted, except for great living.

LUKE (*a little angry*). I want work.

SHAKEPIERCE. Why?

(*Miss Elixia begins playing the piano and Alice begins singing again. Shakepierce listens a moment. He turns suddenly to Luke.*)

I said, why?

LUKE. I'm hungry.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SHAKEPIERCE. Hungry?

LUKE. Yes, hungry. I've been hungry a month. A year. All my life.

SHAKEPIERCE (*looking at his vest-pocket watch*). At twenty-two minutes to twelve, may I ask how, on this rainy day, in this broken-down building, in this room which has been vacant eleven years that I know of, with phone bells ringing, it has come to pass that two young men—one hungry, and the other most likely out of his head or on the verge of greatness—in the presence of a third who is asleep—how it has come to pass, I say, that these three are gathered together—is it for the purpose of loud talk, or what?

SWEENEY. I'm sorry if we've—

SHAKEPIERCE. Don't be sorry for anything. Forty-seven years ago I made up my mind to be a great poet. I am now—but only in the presence of people capable of greatness, and only by my own judgment—a drunkard. And I'm *not* sorry. What is this occasion?

SWEENEY. I am seeking to be anonymous.

SHAKEPIERCE. You have been someone?

SWEENEY. In a way.

SHAKEPIERCE. In what way?

SWEENEY. In the empty way which comes to those who enter the world needing nothing.

SHAKEPIERCE. I see. (*He listens to the girl singing.*) A heavenly voice. (*To Sweeney.*) You are, I take it, the son of a rich father.

SWEENEY. Mother.

SHAKEPIERCE. You are also a person of some quality.

SWEENEY. Some. Quality is not absent from anybody. My father's father was a small-town doctor. My mother's father was a pioneer. I know nothing of the women they married.

SHAKEPIERCE. And you?

LUKE. My father was nothing. My mother was nothing.

SHAKEPIERCE. My father was a minister. Now. Who are *you* and who are *you*?

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

LUKE. Mr. Sweeney advertised in the paper. I came here to see if I could get the job.

SHAKEPIERCE. Job? Here?

LUKE. Well, I guess it isn't exactly a job. I guess Mr. Sweeney can tell you about it better than I can.

SHAKEPIERCE. What sort of a job?

SWEENEY. I wish to know people who need money. I have no use for money.

SHAKEPIERCE. Nor have I, but the poor have. This boy is one of the poor.

SWEENEY. We've reached an understanding.

LUKE. You mean I've got to go?

SWEENEY. Not at all. You may come and go as you please.

LUKE. I'd like to stay.

SWEENEY. Thank you.

SHAKEPIERCE. May I stay, too?

SWEENEY. Thank *you*.

SHAKEPIERCE. I don't care a great deal about people. My spirit shrinks from their faces. However, in this room, in this company, in the presence of this tree, I find my spirit in sweetness and grace. (*To Luke.*) What do you want?

LUKE. A job.

SHAKEPIERCE. *Now*. This very minute.

LUKE. A hamburger sandwich.

SHAKEPIERCE (*on telephone*). Hemlock 3399. (*To Luke.*) With or without onions?

LUKE. With.

SHAKEPIERCE. Coffee?

LUKE. Can I have coffee, too?

SHAKEPIERCE. Three cups?

LUKE. Thank you very much.

SHAKEPIERCE. Not at all. (*In telephone.*) Sam? Mr. Shakepierce. I'm visiting friends. Same building. Room 8. (*Pause.*) Six hamburgers with onions. A quart of coffee. (*Pause.*) Yes. (*He hangs up.*) What do *you* want?

SWEENEY. I want nothing.

SHAKEPIERCE. I see.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

(*Alice finishes her song in the next room. Shakepierce applauds loudly.*)

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE (*loudly*). Please do not *interrupt*.

SWEENEY. She's very sensitive.

SHAKEPIERCE. You know her?

SWEENEY. I rented this office six days ago, but I didn't move in until this morning. We met only a moment ago.

SHAKEPIERCE (*applauding*). Bravo. Bravo.

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE. You fraud.

ALICE'S VOICE. You horrible old fraud.

SHAKEPIERCE (*powerfully*). I am not a fraud. I am seventy-three years old, but not a fraud.

SWEENEY. Not you. They mean *me*.

SHAKEPIERCE. *You?*

SWEENEY. Yes.

SHAKEPIERCE. But why? I have been in the office next door eleven years. Why haven't *I* met these people? Who are they?

SWEENEY. A voice teacher and her pupil.

(*Miss Elixia and Alice come in, very angry.*)

MISS ELIXA. You must not interrupt.

ALICE. You old fraud, you.

SHAKEPIERCE. It was *I* who applauded. (*To Alice.*) You have a most beautiful voice.

ALICE. I have not.

MISS ELIXA. I am trying to teach this child to sing.

SHAKEPIERCE. I'm delighted. Let me congratulate *you*.

MISS ELIXA. I have been in this building three years. I have had no trouble until this young man moved into this room.

SHAKEPIERCE. I have been in the room next door eleven years. I'm sorry we have not met before. You are someone good to behold, and your voice is one which, even in anger, refreshes the spirit. This young man wants nothing. I've asked him. This boy wants food. I've ordered some. This child wants glory, no doubt. What do *you* want?

ELIXA. I want to be left alone.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SHAKEPIERCE. I have already told these young men that I am a drunkard. Even so, may I tell you that you are too unhappy to be left alone. Such sweet sorrow must be shared with others. I have not been unhappy in years.

*(Miss Elixia stares at Shakepierce, who goes to her and kisses her forehead. Miss Elixia takes Alice by the hand and goes.)*

SWEENEY. I'm not in love with her.

SHAKEPIERCE. *I am.* This boy is. You are, aren't you?

LUKE. I don't know. May I look at the money again?

*(Sweeney hands Luke the big wad of money.)*

SHAKEPIERCE. Money? What money is this?

SWEENEY. It's the money I kick around.

SHAKEPIERCE. I beg your pardon?

LUKE. Yes. He was kicking it around when I came in a few minutes ago. It's not real money.

SHAKEPIERCE. No? I thought you were rich.

SWEENEY. I was; I no longer am; but for the first time in my life I am.

SHAKEPIERCE. You kick money around?

LUKE. Yes. I saw him. Can I kick some of it around a little?

SWEENEY. If you like.

*(Luke throws some of the money on the floor and begins kicking it around.)*

SHAKEPIERCE *(watching)*. You'll only make yourself hungrier.

LUKE. It makes me feel good. Every one of them is a hundred. If they were real we would never kick them around.

SHAKEPIERCE. That would be a pity.

SWEENEY. *I think it would.*

SHAKEPIERCE. You want nothing?

LUKE *(kicking the money)*. Everybody wants something.

*(Sweeney Himself comes in. Sweeney is at the tree looking through the leaves. Luke stops kicking the money, in terrible fear. Shakepierce stands by. There is a pause. Miss Elixia plays a prelude to a song, Alice begins to sing, her voice cracks, Miss*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*Elixa cries out, Impossible. Sweeney Himself moves to the centre of the room. Takes off his coat, puts it over Sweeney's coat on Jim Lark. Luke picks up the money, hands it to Sweeney.)*

SWEENEY (*introducing*). Francis Shakepierce. Luke Padgett. The boy sleeping is Jim Lark.

SWEENEY HIMSELF. How do you do.

SHAKEPIERCE. I'm in the office next door. (*Offering bottle.*) Drink? I have no glasses.

LUKE. I'll go get them

SHAKEPIERCE. Would you do that? It's room seven. Three rooms to each floor, you know. They're all alike. You'll find the glasses all around. Bring several.

LUKE. Yes, sir. (*He goes.*)

(*Miss Elixa begins to play the prelude again. Alice sings, her voice breaks.*)

MISS ELIXA'S VOICE. What's the matter with you?

ALICE'S VOICE. I don't know. Now, I can't sing at all.

(*Sweeney picks up the novel, sits down, and begins to read. Sweeney Himself goes to the window and looks out.*)

(*A middle-aged man and his wife, Perez and Consuela, come into the room. Perez is holding a newspaper. He reads from it.*)

PEREZ. Michael Sweeney?

SWEENEY HIMSELF (*turning from the window*). Yes?

PEREZ. You advertised in both columns, male and female. My wife and I have come to apply for the job. Perez and Consuela. We are dancers. (*Perez stoops to pick up one of the bills.*)

SWEENEY HIMSELF. Don't bother. It's not real.

(*Piotor Pipitski, waiter at Sam's O.K. Restaurant, comes in carrying a large brown paper sack.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. Lieutenant.

PIPITSKI. Lieutenant Piotor Aroscha Pipitski! At your service, Mr. Shakepierce! Six de luxe hamburgers! One quart of coffee!

SHAKEPIERCE (*giving him a coin*). Thank you, Lieutenant.

PIPITSKI. Is it for you, Mr. Shakepierce, by the grace of God, I hope?

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SHAKEPIERCE. For one who is hungry. I have not been hungry in years.

PIPITSKI. I beseech you, Mr. Shakepierce, please eat. Come to the restaurant. Sit at a table. Eat. Eat. Everybody eat. I beg of you, come to the restaurant.

SHAKEPIERCE. Thank you, Lieutenant. I shall remember your solicitude.

PIPITSKI. Solicitude, mollicitude. You must eat. You must be healthy.

SHAKEPIERCE. Thank you, Lieutenant.

PIPITSKI. This is the idea, the idea is this. Eat. Eat. Everybody eat. (*Luke comes in with the glasses.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. There is your food, son.

LUKE. Six glasses enough?

SHAKEPIERCE. Eat. (*Luke takes a hamburger sandwich out of the bag, bites into it. To Perez and Consuela.*) Won't you have a sandwich? (*Perez holds the arm of Consuela, who is very hungry.*)

LUKE. Sure. There are six of them. I can't eat 'em all. There's a quart of coffee, too.

SHAKEPIERCE. Please eat.

CONSUELA. All right.

(*Perez and Consuela go to Luke, who offers them the bag. They each take a sandwich out. Shakepierce hands Sweeney Himself a glass. Pours. Hands Pipitski a glass. Pours. Pours one for himself.*)

PIPITSKI (*to Shakepierce*). To you, Little Father. To you.

SHAKEPIERCE (*to Sweeney Himself*). To you.

SWEENEY HIMSELF (*looking about*). I drink to everyone. (*Miss Elixia and Alice come in.*)

MISS ELIXA. Now, she can't sing at all (*Alice rushes up to Sweeney Himself.*)

ALICE. You horrible old fraud, you.

(*Sweeney drops his book. Gets up and walks to the window. Everybody stares at him, frightened.*)

PIPITSKI. Eat. Eat. All of you, eat. I beg of you, eat.

(*Shakepierce goes to Miss Elixia and kisses her forehead. She*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*rests her head on his shoulder, weeping. Okada comes in and waters the tree.)*

PEREZ (*to Luke*). What's the matter?

LUKE (*with his mouth full*). I don't know.

(*Jim Lark sits up and whistles.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. God bless you, son. (*He lifts his glass.*)

(*Jim Lark gets up and walks to the radiator for his clothes, pushing Sweeney Himself aside.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT TWO

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*Portions of the office of Francis Shakepierce and Sweeney's room. A little forward of Shakepierce's office, as at the end of a hall, is Okada's small elevator door, and a stool. Beside the elevator is a stairway.*

*Five minutes later.*

*Okada is seated on the stool, reading a Japanese newspaper: The elevator buzzer buzzes. He gets into the elevator and closes the door.*

*In Shakepierce's office are Luke, Perez and Consuela, and Shakepierce.*

*In his own room, Sweeney is standing, looking at the tree, which is bigger now. Sweeney Himself is at the window.*

*Okada comes out of the elevator and sits down again.*

*Shakepierce is drinking and talking to himself. Perez and Consuela are eating. Luke is standing at the window. He turns suddenly with a start. He looks around, frightened, then walks to Shakepierce.*

LUKE. If I could find somebody to smile at me in the evenings after work—if I could find a job.

SHAKEPIERCE. The Lieutenant and the boy will be back in a minute with more food. Eat more food. *(Luke goes back to the window.)*

LUKE. What good is rain if you haven't got a fireplace?

*(Sweeney Himself turns from the window and goes to Sweeney.)*

SWEENEY HIMSELF. I feel I'm intruding.

SWEENEY. Not at all.

SWEENEY HIMSELF. These good people. It embarrasses me to frighten them.

*(He takes one of the overcoats from the coat-rack and puts it on. He puts his hands in the pockets of the coat and discovers the money. He brings out the wad and looks at it a moment.)*

You may want this. *(He peels off one bill. Lets it drop to the floor.)* May I?

## Sweeney in the Trees

SWEENEY. It is silly, I suppose.

SWEENEY HIMSELF. Even so.

*(He kicks the bill. Kicks it again. He tosses all the bills around him, and kicks at them eight or nine times. Sweeney kicks several times, too. Sweeney Himself turns to go. Stops. Takes one more kick. Sweeney Himself goes. As he passes in front of Shakepierce's room, Luke starts. Sweeney Himself takes the stairs. Sweeney walks around, kicking gently at the money occasionally. Okada opens the door of the elevator. Jim Lark whistles. Pipitski, carrying a large paper sack, comes out of the elevator, followed by Jim Lark, also with a paper sack. Jim slides toward Shakepierce's office, returns, sliding, to Okada. He takes a sandwich out of the sack and without a word hands it to Okada.)*

OKADA. Oh thank you.

*(Okada puts the sandwich in his pocket. Jim whistles and slides to the table in Shakepierce's room, where Pipitski is unloading the sandwiches.)*

PIPITSKI (*shouting*). I beg of you, Little Father. Eat. Please eat. This is the idea, the idea is this. You must eat. There is no time to lose. *(Sweeney begins to pick up the money.)*

SHAKEPIERCE (*roaring*). Lieutenant, I have not been hungry in years.

PIPITSKI (*patiently, with pleading*). This is the idea, Little Father. The idea is this.

SHAKEPIERCE (*to Pipitski, to Luke, and to Perez and Consuela*). Eat. Eat. All of you. Eat.

PIPITSKI. Little Father, you must eat.

*(He holds a wrapped sandwich out to Shakepierce, who looks at him a moment, a moment at the sandwich, smiles, and accepts it.)*

Thank you, Little Father. Now. I will eat, too.

*(He unwraps a sandwich for himself. Shakepierce unwraps his sandwich. They touch sandwiches and bite together.)*

*(Miss Elixia and Alice, who is dressed for going out, pass before the two rooms and go to the elevator. Miss Elixia puts Alice in the elevator. Okada begins to close the door. Alice runs out of the elevator.)*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

MISS ELIXA. Alice!

ALICE (*running*). I don't care.

(*She runs into Sweeney's room, followed by Miss Elixia. Sweeney is on his hands and knees, gathering the money.*)

You! You! (*Sweeney turns, defiantly*).

MISS ELIXA. Alice! (*Sweeney looks up into Miss Elixia's beautiful face, smiling dumbly*).

ALICE. I don't care. Now, I can't sing *at all*.

MISS ELIXA. You have the most beautiful voice in the world.

ALICE. I haven't, and it's all his fault. Him and his money and his friends.

SWEENEY (*still on his hands and knees*). Please don't insult my friends. I hardly know them.

ALICE. I *will* insult them. I will insult everybody, because everybody's bad. Nobody's good, so I'm bad too, and I *will* insult everybody.

MISS ELIXA. Alice! Apologize!

ALICE. No.

MISS ELIXA. Alice.

ALICE. I will never apologize to anybody. Never. They won't let *anybody* be good.

(*She turns and runs. Miss Elixia follows her. Sweeney moves after them on his hands and knees. Stops. Gets up slowly. He begins to move after them. The telephone rings. He stops, but doesn't turn. Alice gets in the elevator. Okada closes the door. Miss Elixia stands at the elevator. The phone rings again. Sweeney goes to Miss Elixia. He looks at her a moment.*)

SWEENEY. Why did you cry?

(*The telephone rings.*)

(*Jim Lark whistles and leaves Shakepierce's desk. Goes past Sweeney and Miss Elixia, sliding.*)

JIM (*going*). Phone's ringing.

SWEENEY (*to Miss Elixia*). Why? (*Jim slides to the phone. He whistles.*)

JIM (*on phone*). Hello. (*Pause.*) I'm not Michael Sweeney. Don't holler at me. (*Pause.*) Yeh? Horsefeathers. (*He puts*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*the receiver down. Runs out.*) (*Sweeney holds Miss Elixia by the shoulders.*) (*Announcing the name.*) Michael Sweeney! Some dame on the phone told me to come to my senses, thinking of course that I was you. And of course I wasn't. What shall I tell her?

SWEENEY (*dropping his arms*). I'll talk to her.

JIM. O.K. (*He slides back to Shakepierce's office.*)

(*Okada opens the door. Miss Elixia rushes in. Okada closes the door. Sweeney stands a moment staring at the closed elevator door. He turns and goes to his room. Before he is half-way there Sweeney Himself comes up the stairs and follows him. As Sweeney Himself passes, Luke starts. Jim Lark whistles. Sweeney ignores the telephone. He sits down.*)

VOICE ON TELEPHONE (*angry*). Michael. Michael.

(*Sweeney Himself stands by the tree.*)

LUKE (*turning from the window*). It's stopped raining.

SHAKEPIERCE. Is the sun shining?

JIM (*sliding to the window*). No, but there's a bird flying around out there.

SHAKEPIERCE. Well, just so there's a bird.

LUKE. I guess I'll go out and start looking for a job again. (*He goes to Shakepierce.*) Thank you for the food and everything. I'll say good-bye to Mr. Sweeney.

SHAKEPIERCE. You may not find a job. Come back.

LUKE. What I want is a home and a family.

SHAKEPIERCE. Nobody ever wants anything less than glory. I hope you find a job.

LUKE. Thank you. (*To the others.*) Good-bye.

ALL. Good-bye.

JIM. I'll give you odds of twenty to one you don't find a job. I'm a genius and *I* can't find a job.

LUKE. I used to be a genius.

PIPITSKI. I have always been an idiot. I have always been ignorant.

LUKE. Well, good-bye, everybody.

PIPITSKI. This is the idea, the idea is this. Education. Get yourself an education. There's a lot of time for you. It's too

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

late for me. Ignorance. From the first day of my life. I, Piotor Arosha Pipitski, to be ignorant! I, to be a waiter! Alas, Piotor. (*With anger.*) Lieutenant! I never killed a man in my life. I burst with kindness. Eat. All of you. Eat. Poor Pipitski.

LUKE. Thank you, Mr. Pipitski.

PIPITSKI. It's nothing. A little advice. Read the books. Be a lawyer. Study hard. Let me be an example for you. Never gamble. Never.

LUKE. Yes, sir. (*He goes.*)

PIPITSKI (*turning to Jim*). And you, too.

JIM (*whistles*). Me? Jim Lark?

PIPITSKI. Lark, Mark. Don't gamble.

(*Luke goes to Sweeney's room. Stands terrified when he sees the two identical figures.*)

SWEENEY HIMSELF. Don't be afraid. (*Sweeney looks up. Luke shivers.*)

LUKE (*to Sweeney Himself*). I've come to say good-bye, Mr. Sweeney.

SWEENEY HIMSELF. Good luck.

VOICE ON TELEPHONE. Michael! Michael!

LUKE. Thank you. It's stopped raining, so I'm going out to look for a job again. (*Indicating phone.*) Why don't you talk to her?

SWEENEY HIMSELF. Don't look for work. Look for something better. You may find it.

LUKE. Yes, sir. (*Pause.*) If she wanted to talk to me, I'd talk to her.

(*Luke goes. Sweeney Himself lifts the receiver and puts it back in place. Miss Elixia comes up the stairs, running, and passes Luke, who slows down, staring at her. She slows down, too.*)  
(*Moving slowly.*)

It's stopped raining.

MISS ELIXA. Is he in his room?

LUKE. Who? Mr. Sweeney? Yes, he's there.

(*He takes the stairs. Miss Elixia walks into Sweeney's room. She stands staring at Sweeney Himself, who walks out and*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*goes down the stairs. Sweeney leaps to his feet. Miss Elixia stares at him a long time, takes one step toward him.)*

MISS ELIXA. I was afraid you would be gone.

PIPITSKI (*to Shakepierce*). Good-bye, Little Father. (*He smiles.*) This is the idea, the idea is this. I must go back to work. Work! For what? Money? How much money? Not enough. Never enough. Food? Always. Money? Never. Therefore, I gamble. Why? For *enough* money. Enough for what, Little Father? That is the question. Enough for *what*?

JIM. *What?*

PIPITSKI. I don't know. *Enough*. There is never enough. I burst with kindness. I gamble. I throw away my life. I lose. Always. There is no horse in the world that will not lose if I bet on it. This is the idea, the idea is this. I am ignorant. In the end I sit at a table and eat. I eat and eat. I read the newspaper and eat. I beg of you. There is so much to lose every minute.

JIM. So much of what?

PIPITSKI. Life. Life. Am I alive? (*Loudly.*) No. This is not me. Look at my hair. All gone. I am not Pipitski. Then who am I?

JIM. I don't know, but any time you want a tip on a horse, just talk to me.

PIPITSKI. Don't gamble.

JIM. How can I gamble? I've got no money. Yesterday I picked three winners in a row.

PIPITSKI. What track?

JIM. Bay Meadows.

PIPITSKI. Favourites?

JIM. No. Not exactly long shots either, but they *won*.

PIPITSKI (*bringing a paper from his back pocket*). What races?

JIM. Fifth, sixth, and seventh.

PIPITSKI (*turning to the sports section*). Fifth, sixth, and seventh. (*Pause, studying odds.*) Zeva. Brown Betty. Jail Boy. This is the idea, the idea is this. Have you any winners for to-day?

JIM. I haven't looked at the entries.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

PIPITSKI. Here are the entries. I beg of you. Pick me a winner. I am ignorant.

JIM. Any time. (*Jim Lark and Pipitski settle down to study the horses.*)

SWEENEY (*loudly*). Why have you come here?

MISS ELIXA. Please don't shout at me.

SWEENEY. I'm not shouting. Why did you cry? Why have you come here?

MISS ELIXA. Because everybody is so wonderful and wasted.

SWEENEY. Wasted?

MISS ELIXA. Yes. *Everybody*.

SWEENEY (*objectively, laughing*). You are more real than anybody in the world.

MISS ELIXA. I am not.

SWEENEY (*angry*). Don't talk like Alice. (*He walks around her.*) *I love you*—more than any love can understand. I don't even know you. Nevertheless, I love even the *air* you breathe. The air you've breathed all your life. I love every moment you've lived. I love you dead, a hundred years from now, with all the people of the world changed, and nobody remembering you.

JIM. O.K. Bet North Arrow in the second.

PIPITSKI. North Arrow?

JIM. North—Arrow.

PIPITSKI. I believe you. (*To Shakepierce.*) North Arrow. Good-bye, Little Father. I will come back. (*He goes.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. What is your faith?

JIM. I believe in everything, but especially in Jim Lark. (*He whistles.*) I'm sleepy. (*He races out of Shakepierce's and into Sweeney's room, sliding. To Sweeney.*) Can I go back to sleep?

SWEENEY. Of course.

(*Jim stretches out on the couch. Sweeney takes off his coat and puts it over the boy.*)

MISS ELIXA. Your love is like the money you kick around.

SWEENEY. I know the falseness of all things. The falseness

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

of love I know better than the falseness of any other thing. I say to you: I love your father and mother before you were born. I love them as children, unknown to one another. I love their brothers and sisters, and their fathers and mothers, and the fathers and mothers of *their* fathers and mothers. In all, I love almost seven hundred people who, one after another, moved you forward to this day and the piano in the room next door. I know all falseness. I tell you what is true. Therefore my love is like the money I kick around. Would it be purer if it were like some other kind of money?

MISS ELIXA. All I have ever known is poverty, and respect for the ugliness and treachery of money. Not contempt.

SWEENEY. All *I* have ever known is contempt for everything rude and confounding. In this room you have seen the children who are in need. To keep money from them is rude. To give them money is confounding. Since you are love itself, of money and myself, let me tell you this. No illness has ever wearied my substance or spoiled my spirit. I have had to imagine pain. I have never known it. Look at my teeth. My hair. All my bones are sound. You have seen the companion who has been near me all my life. Who is not nearer to anyone else in the world. And yet I, and not they, the greedy, the rich, the poor and the confounded, am the one who is at least a little alive. My ignorance is most abysmally deep and broad, and yet my ignorance is their deepest understanding. I know too much to be the companion of anyone but Life and Death. Everyone is wonderful and wasted. The pity of it is that they are so feebly wasted. (*He lifts the book off the floor.*) These days I read shabby novels. I want nothing, since I know of nothing to want.

MISS ELIXA (*with almost real contempt*). You are stupid.

SWEENEY. More stupid than you know. Only *I* can know the depth and horror of my stupidity.

MISS ELIXA. You are hard and cruel.

SWEENEY. No. Most gentle and most kind.

MISS ELIXA. And crazy.

SWEENEY. Perhaps. In my own way. The cackle of

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

laughter is not absent from any object of this world or from any event of this life.

MISS ELIXA. If I love you and if you love me, is the cackle of laughter in that love?

SWEENEY. Among other things, yes. And in the laughter itself is every variation of delight and grief.

MISS ELIXA. I have been teaching singing to children. The children of the poor.

SWEENEY. Nothing amazes me more than the faith of the living who sing. Your student Alice is our living grace.

MISS ELIXA. She is angry at you.

SWEENEY. *You* are not angry?

MISS ELIXA. I don't know. I don't think so.

SWEENEY. If you are not angry, then let me stop talking. I am displeased with the sound of my voice, the galloping idiocy of my words. I want no meaning in *words*. It is an accident that we speak. We improved that accident a little by breaking into song. We should be silent for years and do nothing but love one another. By that time maybe we shall have something to say. (*Pause.*) No. We have already known our silence.

MISS ELIXA (*sitting down*). I am not speaking. (*Sweeney sits down.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. You are dancers?

PEREZ. We have danced in Europe, North America, South America, Australia, and Asia. Perez and Consuela.

SHAKEPIERCE. Is it embarrassing not to be dancing?

PEREZ. When we dance, we are alive. First, there is an understanding. So many performances a night. Then there are costumes, sometimes as many as seven each. Then there is the area in which we dance. Then the music, which is quite often by Brahms and, occasionally, by Bach. Then the lights. Then there is our entrance. Then the dancing. In the end, we have money, and write letters to friends. We have not written a letter in three years.

CONSUELA. There is nothing to write.

PEREZ. I must not forget the programmes, the comments

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

of the critics, the posters outside the theatres and cafés. And the applause. But the applause doesn't really count.

CONSUELA. We found that out in Boston. We were both tired and angry. We had been quarrelling a whole week. Usually when we quarrel we can dance, but this night we *couldn't* dance. We were like wood. The applause was greater than ever, and we were terribly ashamed.

SHAKEPIERCE. Ashamed?

PEREZ. Oh yes.

SHAKEPIERCE. Why?

CONSUELA. There is a difference between good and bad. It is shameful to be applauded for either.

PEREZ. After that we danced better every night, but the applause grew less and less.

CONSUELA. And now, when we can *really* dance, we can't get a job in a saloon, even.

PEREZ. We are ready to do *any* kind of work.

CONSUELA. In a saloon, even.

PEREZ. Any kind of work at all.

CONSUELA. We are dancers.

PEREZ. But we are ready to do any kind of work. (*To Consuela.*) Wife. (*He stands, bows. Consuela stands, curtsies, takes his hand.*)

CONSUELA. Husband. (*They begin to dance, while Shakepierce watches them.*)

JIM (*half-asleep*). Ha haaaaaaah.

(*Sweeney and Miss Elixia turn to him as a father and mother might turn to an ill child.*)

When I lived in the tree the birds flew down from the sky and sang to me. Jim Lark, they sang. Oh you Jim Lark. They brought me food. My best friend was an eagle. I knew a hummingbird, too. Little ones and big ones. I knew 'em all. I'm part bird myself. My name's Lark. Except for the small amount of public schooling I've had, I'd probably be living in a tree *now*. I can get along with people if I have to, but birds have space all around them. And I need space.

(*Okada opens the door of the elevator and Sweeney's wife Helen*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*gallops out, down the hall, and into Sweeney's room. Miss Elixia starts when she sees Helen. Sweeney lifts a finger to his mouth and says, Shhh. Then points to Jim, asleep. Helen walks around a moment. She begins to open her mouth several times, but Sweeney shushes her.)*

Ha haaaaah. The birds, the birds. The trees and the birds. The strong sweet green trees and the swift proud birds.

*(Helen opens her handbag and takes out an envelope and a little pencil. She writes a note, hands it to Sweeney, who reads it and shakes his head. Helen takes the envelope from him and swiftly writes a new note which Sweeney reads. He shakes his head again.)*

HELEN (*furiously*). I must talk to you, Michael.

SWEENEY. Not now.

JIM (*half-asleep, delight in his voice*). Ha haaah.

HELEN. Who is that?

SWEENEY. Jim Lark. He lived in a tree once. He says the birds brought him food. His best friend was an eagle. He knew a hummingbird, too. What do you want?

HELEN. Why have you refused to talk to me on the telephone? What is the meaning of this nonsense?

SWEENEY. Nonsense?

HELEN. Yes, nonsense.

*(Jim whistles suddenly. Helen leaps.)*

JIM. Ha haaaaah.

HELEN. What's the matter with him?

SWEENEY. Nothing, except that he's a genius.

HELEN. Is that good?

SWEENEY. No, but it's compulsory with him.

HELEN. Who is this—young woman?

SWEENEY. Miss Elixia, my wife Helen.

HELEN. How do you do.

*(Miss Elixia gets up suddenly, runs to her room, and immediately begins to play the piano loudly and with anger. Perez and Consuela really begin to dance when the music begins.)*

SWEENEY. She teaches singing to children.

HELEN. Are you taking lessons?

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SWEENEY. No, but she's more real than anybody else in the world.

HELEN. What do you mean?

SWEENEY. I mean go home and stay there.

HELEN (*taking Miss Elix'a's chair.*) Make me.

SWEENEY. Don't be vulgar.

HELEN. Make me.

SWEENEY (*takes Helen by the shoulders. Helen throws her arms around him. Sweeney kisses her, then pushes her away.*) Get out of here.

HELEN. I love you and you love me. If you want to make trouble, go ahead, make it.

SWEENEY. I don't love you and you don't love me. We happen to be married, that's all. We were in love a couple of weeks a long time ago.

HELEN. Oh, we'll be in love again.

*(The piano and dancing are going strong. Shakepierce gets up and walks out into the hall, very drunk.)*

*(Okada opens the elevator door and Pipitski bursts out. The elevator buzzer buzzes. Okada closes the door.)*

PIPITSKI (*to Shakepierce*). The horse, Little Father. The horse. North Arrow. It won. Where is the boy? (*He discovers Jim, wakes him up.*)

JIM. What's the matter?

PIPITSKI. North Arrow. The horse. It won.

HELEN. Who are these people?

PIPITSKI. It won by *five* lengths. *Five!* It paid sixteen-forty. *Sixteen-forty.*

JIM. How much did you win?

PIPITSKI (*kneeling*). Please forgive me. I beg of you.

JIM. What?

PIPITSKI. I didn't bet North Arrow. Forgive me. I believed you, but I didn't bet him. At the last minute I bet Inca. *Inca!* This is the idea, the idea is this. I am ignorant.

SWEENEY. Money is all they ever think about. (*He brings the wad of money out of his pocket and throws some around and begins to kick it.*)

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

HELEN. You stop kicking money around, Michael.

PIPITSKI (*startled*). Kicking money around?

JIM. It's not money. Get up off your hands and knees. Give me that entry form and I'll pick you another winner.

PIPITSKI (*after examining one of the bills, throwing it aside, and getting to his feet*). Please forgive me. I am an infidel. This time I promise I will bet the horse you name.

*(Okada opens the door of the elevator and Luke comes out, holding the hand of a girl of eighteen or so. He walks with her to Sweeney's room. The girl is startled by what is going on.)*

LUKE (*to the girl*). It's not money. I kicked some of it this morning myself. (*To Sweeney.*) I didn't find a job, Mr. Sweeney, but I found Evangeline.

SWEENEY (*startled, turning, looking at the girl*). Evangeline! Yes, this is truly Evangeline.

LUKE. She was looking for a job in the same building that I was looking for a job in.

*(Shakepierce comes into the room. He kisses Evangeline on the forehead. Then goes to Helen and kisses her on the forehead.)*

HELEN. Thank you. (*Pauses.*) Michael, who are these people?

LUKE. She's all right, but she's a little hungry, I think.

SHAKEPIERCE. Hungry? Lieutenant!

PIPITSKI. Yes, Little Father.

SHAKEPIERCE. Run down to the restaurant and bring up a dozen hamburgers.

PIPITSKI. Yes, Little Father. (*Indicating Jim.*) The boy. He's picking another winner for me. (*To Jim.*) Who's it going to be?

JIM. Tournevire.

PIPITSKI. Tournevire. I thank you. This is the idea, the idea is this. Tournevire. One dozen. Immediately, Little Father.

*(He runs out. Okada is in the hall with his water pail and broom. Okada comes into the room. Sweeney stops kicking the money and hurries to him. Sweeney takes the water pail from Okada and waters the tree. Okada begins to sweep up the*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

money. Alice and her mother, Mrs. Miriam Liliacik, come up the stairs.)

ALICE (*angry*). I just can't sing any more, that's all, Momma. It's all *his* fault.

MRS. LILIACIK (*with an accent*). Try. Try once more before we see Miss Elixá.

ALICE. All right, I'll *try*.

(*Miss Elixá's piano-playing now reaches the beginning of a delightful yet sombre aria which Alice sings. She sings magnificently. She sings the whole aria. While she is singing, Okáda's son Kirokí comes up the stairs and goes to Okáda and stands almost behind him, smiling. Sweeney Himself comes up the stairs, listens a moment, turns around and goes away. First Sweeney, and then, one by one, everybody joins Alice in singing.*)

SHAKEPIERCE. Now, I am ready to sleep.

(*He stretches out on the couch and goes to sleep.*)

(*A Postal Messenger comes up the stairs. Listens to the singing. Joins in. Watches Perez and Consuela dancing. Goes into Sweeney's room.*)

(*Alice finishes the aria. Miss Elixá stops playing the piano. Perez and Consuela stop dancing.*)

(*Mrs. Liliacik opens her arms and Alice throws herself into them. Perez and Consuela sit down at a table and look at one another, shaking their heads. Miss Elixá appears in the hall.*)

MESSENGER. Telegram for Francis Shakepierce. What's going on around here?

SWEENEY. This is Mr. Shakepierce.

MESSENGER. What's the matter with him?

SWEENEY. He just died.

MESSENGER (*angry*). What?

LUKE. How do you know?

SWEENEY. I saw him with an infinity of space around him like a bird. He's dead.

(*Everybody gathers around Shakepierce.*)

MESSENGER. Well, if he's dead, I guess he's dead. Can't deliver a telegram to a dead man. If I didn't stop for a cockeyed Coca-Cola I probably would have made it.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

KIROKI (*pointing at Shakepierce, speaking in Japanese*). Is he dead?

OKADA (*in Japanese, lifting the boy and holding him overhead, like professional acrobats. They continue various acrobatics until the end of the scene*). He was an old man.

MESSENGER. Well, I guess the only thing to do is to take the telegram back to the office.

LUKE. What's it say?

MESSENGER. It's for Francis Shakepierce. It's not for you or me.

SWEENEY. This is Francis Shakepierce. Read it to him.

MESSENGER. He's dead.

SWEENEY. Read it.

*(The Messenger tears open the envelope, unfolds the telegram, and becomes stunned. Everybody gathers around him to read the telegram.)*

MESSENGER. There must be some mistake somewhere. There's no message.

SWEENEY. It's no mistake.

MESSENGER. What kind of a telegram is a cockeyed telegram without a message?

SWEENEY. The kind you get when you die.

MESSENGER (*going*). Well, something's cockeyed some place. *(He drops the telegram and envelope on the floor, and goes.)*

SWEENEY (*in the hall, bringing the wad of bills out of his pocket*). Here. I've got no change.

MESSENGER (*looking at the bill*). A hundred dollars? Wow. Thanks, Mister. *(He goes.)*

*(Sweeney goes back into the room.)*

*(Everybody stands around Shakepierce. Jim whistles. Okada and Kiroki do some swift and beautiful acrobatics.)*

CURTAIN

## ACT THREE

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*Sweeney's room again. A little after six in the evening. The tree is very big now. Heavy branches. Heavy foliage. Small green leaves. The rain has stopped. The sun is going down. Early evening light pours into the room from the two windows. In her room next door Miss Elixia is playing the piano softly and sadly. The room appears to be empty. The telephone rings.*

JIM LARK'S VOICE. Telephone bells ringing all the time. Somebody always wanting to talk to somebody. (*The telephone rings again. Jim sticks his head beyond the foliage of the tree. He is very irritated.*) Shut up.

HELEN SWEENEY'S VOICE. What did you say, young man?

JIM. I said shut up, so shut up. (*The telephone rings again.*) Now, shut up, I said. Don't always be wanting to talk to somebody. You haven't got anything to say.

HELEN SWEENEY'S VOICE. I want to talk to Michael Sweeney.

(*Jim Lark swings down out of the tree and stands over the telephone.*)

JIM. Sweeney isn't here, so don't bother *me*. You're beautiful and all that, but don't be making bells ring all the time. (*The telephone rings again.*) Now, shut up, I said. You make too much noise. Every time a bell rings I think something's going to happen. Don't be giving all these false alarms. What's going to happen? I'm going to walk around town all night. What are you ringing bells for? (*The telephone rings again.*) Get away from that telephone and read a book by some important writer or something. Read a little biology or something. It might do you a little good. Read poetry or philosophy. Read the society pages. Read the message in Polish on the bottle of Eno Salts. Go to a movie. Go somewhere and die. Don't ring any more bells. (*The telephone rings again.*) I'm warning you. (*The telephone rings*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*again, Jim is burned up.*) All right. You asked for it. *(He tears the telephone cord loose.)* How do you like that? Ringing bells all the time. *(He goes back to the tree and begins to climb into it. The telephone rings again.)* What? Don't fool with me, sister. My name's Jim Lark. *(The telephone rings again. Jim gets down from the tree. He lifts the telephone off the floor, opens one of the windows, throws the telephone out. A pigeon flies up from the street. A cry of surprise.)* That'll hold you for a while. *(The telephone rings again.)* Ah, nuts. *(Jim climbs back into the tree and disappears.)* Spoiled people. No manners. No breeding. Riff-raff. Stupid. Selfish. Well, don't fool with Jim Lark, that's all.

*(A middle-aged, small-sized man comes into the room, holding the broken phone in one hand. His other hand is on the bump on his head. His name is Ike Hepbo.)*

HEPBO. If I ever catch the guy who threw this. Hello. Anybody here?

JIM. No.

*(The telephone rings. Hepbo looks around. He lifts what's left of the receiver to his ear.)*

HEPBO. Hello.

JIM. There's nobody here.

HEPBO. Who? Michael Sweeney? No. My name's Ike Hepbo. Ike Hepbo. I-k-e, Ike. H-e-p-b-o, Hepbo. Somebody threw this phone out the window and hit me on the head. I am a member of The Elks, in good standing.

*(Jim peeks out of the foliage.)*

Yeah. Right on the head. Right on the conk. Yes, ma'am. If I ever catch the guy who threw it. *(He listens for some time, nodding and smiling.)* Yes, ma'am. Good-bye. *(He hangs up. Puts the telephone down on the floor. Rubs his head. Looks around.)* What's a big tree like this doing in an office? *(Pause.)* No sense in waiting a life-time for nothing.

JIM. Who?

HEPBO. Me.

JIM. You. What's a little underweight guy like you waiting for?

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

HEPBO. Underweight? I was born small. I don't *know* what for.

*(The telephone rings.)*

JIM. Answer that God-damn telephone and see what she wants now.

HEPBO *(into telephone)*. Hello. *(He listens.)* No, ma'am. No. Yes, ma'am. *(He hangs up.)*

JIM. What's she want?

HEPBO. She wants this guy Sweeney to telephone her. *(Hepbo picks up the telegram on the floor.)* Telegram? What's this telegram doing on the floor? *(He reads the telegram.)* Francis Shakeupierce, 123 Geary Street, San Francisco. Tell Jim Lark——

JIM *(excited, but still in the tree)*. Jim Lark?

HEPBO. That's what it says here.

JIM. Do you mean to say there's a message on that telegram?

HEPBO. There sure is.

JIM. Well, go ahead, read it, then.

HEPBO. Let me get my glasses.

*(He gets his glasses out of his pocket, out of their case, and adjusts them, while Jim peeks through the foliage.)*

JIM. All right, go ahead. Read it. You've got your glasses on now.

HEPBO. Francis Shakeupierce, 123——

JIM. I heard that. Read the message.

HEPBO. Who's Francis Shakeupierce?

JIM. He's an old man. He died a couple of minutes before the messenger brought this telegram.

HEPBO. Died?

JIM. Yeah. You know. He stopped breathing. Read the message.

HEPBO. Well, it says: Tell Jim Lark—— Who's Jim Lark?

JIM. What do you care? Read the message.

HEPBO. Tell Jim Lark—— *(Sweeney comes in. Hepbo turns.)*

JIM *(shouting)*. What the hell are you waiting for? Read the message.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

HEPBO. Somebody threw the phone out the window. It hit me on the head.

SWEENEY. Hurt you badly?

HEPBO. I thought it killed me at first, but it didn't. I guess I'm as strong as a horse. There's a pretty big bump on my head, but I can still think. Are you Sweeney? Michael Sweeney?

SWEENEY. Yes.

HEPBO. I'm Ike Hepbo. Helen wants you to phone her right away. Did he really die?

SWEENEY. You mean Shakepierce? Yes, he did.

HEPBO. Did he die peacefully?

SWEENEY. Quite.

HEPBO. What were his last words?

SWEENEY. I think he said, Now I am ready to sleep, or something like that.

HEPBO. Some fellow who died said, Good-bye, my friends. God bless you. I forget who he was. I read the last words of about a thousand different great people who died once.

SWEENEY. How's your head now?

HEPBO. Oh, it's all right. My *head's* all right.

SWEENEY. Something else wrong?

HEPBO (*lifting his pants leg*). My knee. It gets stiff every once in a while. Do you know what causes that?

SWEENEY. No, I don't.

HEPBO. I don't either. It sure hurts, though.

SWEENEY. What do you do for it?

HEPBO. Aspirin. What's a great big tree like this doing in an office?

SWEENEY. I don't know. It's a contemporary miracle, I suppose.

HEPBO. Oh. She phoned twice.

SWEENEY. Thanks.

*(Hepbo puts the telegram in his pocket and goes. Jim swings down out of the tree and hurries to where the telegram had been dropped by the Messenger.)*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

JIM. Where's that telegram? (*Looks around.*) I guess that guy took it away with him. If the Russian waiter comes in here, tell him to wait for me. He promised to bet Tournevire. He didn't even come back with the sandwiches. (*He runs out.*)

(*Miss Elixia's piano solo ends. Sweeney stands by the tree, studying it. Miss Elixia, carrying an armful of mixed flowers, comes into the room. Sweeney swings up into the tree and disappears.*)

MISS ELIXA. If you love me, come down.

SWEENEY. I am finished with bargaining.

MISS ELIXA. What bird are you now?

SWEENEY. Bird? No bird. You have a lover?

MISS ELIXA. He is not a lover.

SWEENEY. Whatever he is, you have him.

MISS ELIXA. I have brought you flowers.

SWEENEY (*his head appearing*). Flowers? (*Gently, almost smiling.*) Go back to your piano.

MISS ELIXA. If you love me, take these flowers from my hand.

SWEENEY. Go back to your music.

MISS ELIXA. Come down. You fit poorly in a tree.

SWEENEY. Not nearly as poorly as in the world.

MISS ELIXA. You love the world.

SWEENEY. I love its dream and its dreamers.

MISS ELIXA. Come down and take these flowers. Here's a daisy. I'd give you roses, but they died.

SWEENEY. What is his name?

MISS ELIXA. I forget.

SWEENEY. Remember his name.

MISS ELIXA. Paul.

SWEENEY. Give *him* the flowers.

MISS ELIXA. This one is yours. (*She throws it down.*) This one is mine. (*She throws it down.*) This one is yours. And this one. And all of these. These are all yours.

(*She throws them all around, then kicks them, as he kicked the money. She goes. He draws his head back into the tree.*)

(*Pipitski comes into the room.*)

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

PIPITSKI. Flowers? (*He stoops and smells one.*) Oooof! Has someone died? Has something ended?

SWEENEY. *He died.*

PIPITSKI. He? (*straightening up half-way*). Who?

SWEENEY. My neighbour.

PIPITSKI (*straightening up almost all the way*). Who? I beg of you.

SWEENEY. The old man.

PIPITSKI (*straightening up more than all the way*). My Little Father?

SWEENEY. He died in his sleep.

*(Pipitski breaks down, sobbing softly. He gathers himself together suddenly, becomes very rigid, clicks his heels, salutes, holds this position fifteen seconds, then brings his arm down.)*

PIPITSKI. I begged him. Eat. Eat, Little Father, I told him. Come to the restaurant, I told him. Is he dead?

SWEENEY. He's dead.

PIPITSKI. Then, *I* am dead. This is the idea, the idea is this. I am worse than dead. I am ignorant. Tournevire. Ah, Tournevire. The boy gave me one horse. North Arrow. I did n't bet North Arrow. I bet Inca. North Arrow won. He gave me another horse. Tournevire. I didn't bet Tournevire. I bet Agotaras. Tournevire won. I promised. I gave my word. I am worse than dead. I am disgraced. I am excommunicated. The Church will not speak to me. He sent me for sandwiches for the hungry. I did not come back. I stayed and gambled. All wrong. All wrong. Dead? Worse. I lost. Everything. Eleven dollars and fifty cents. My job. They fired me. If I were them I would fire me, too. I lost. Everything. This is the idea, the idea is this. My father. My mother. Why did they go to Odessa? Why did they look at each other and talk politely about the weather? Why did they walk through the gardens and believe it was very important? Why? Am I the answer? Piotor Arosha Pipitski? Nothing. Everything lost. Flowers on the floor. (*He picks up one and smells it.*) Oooof! Wonderfull (*He throws it down with terrible distaste.*)

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*(Luke and Evangeline come in.)*

LUKE. You did not come back with the sandwiches. She is very hungry. Now it is almost night.

PIPITSKI. Please. Say no more. I have already died. I have already attended my funeral.

EVANGELINE. I'm not very hungry.

LUKE. You are. I *know* you are. Here. Sit down and *rest*, at least. *(Evangeline sits and folds her hands on her lap.)*

PIPITSKI. Ignorance. Ignorance.

SWEENEY. Lieutenant!

PIPITSKI. Yes, sir! At your service! Piotor Aroscha Pipitski!

LUKE *(looking toward tree)*. Mr. Sweeney?

SWEENEY *(putting out his head)*. Lieutenant. Take my coat, sell it, and buy food. *(He throws down his overcoat. Pipitski catches it.)*

LUKE. Don't sell your *coat*, Mr. Sweeney.

EVANGELINE. Please don't.

SWEENEY. Lieutenant!

PIPITSKI. Yes, sir.

*(He turns to go. Jim Lark runs into him. Jim stands back and looks at him. Pipitski hangs his head.)*

JIM. I see. So now you're stealing, too. *(He grabs the coat away from Pipitski.)*

SWEENEY. I'm sending him to sell the coat and buy food.

JIM. He'll steal it.

PIPITSKI. I beg of you.

SWEENEY. Give him the coat and let him go.

JIM *(giving Pipitski the coat)*. Don't you wear it.

PIPITSKI. *Wear this coat? (He goes.)*

JIM *(he brings out the telegram)*. It doesn't say anything.

LUKE. I don't suppose we'll *ever* get a chance to start a family.

JIM. I *lived* in a tree once. A tree is never complete until it's got birds. I told him to bet Tournevire. Now there are no more races. I guess I'll have to walk all night again? What are *you* going to do?

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

LUKE. We don't know. Where do you walk?

JIM. I know a warm route. If you've got a nickel, you can go into an all-night cafeteria and get a cup of coffee and stay there a long time. You get sleepy, though. (*He smells a flower.*) Where'd these come from?

(*Perez and Consuela come in.*)

CONSUELA. Flowers? We tried a dozen saloons.

JIM. You shouldn't spend money for liquor.

PEREZ. We have no money to spend. We went to the saloons looking for work. We're Perez and Consuela. Dancers.

LUKE. Can I kick some of the money around, Mr. Sweeney?

(*Sweeney tosses Luke some of the money. Luke throws the bills around and kicks them.*)

(*Perez and Consuela stand together, amazed.*)

JIM. It's not money. (*He kicks some.*)

PEREZ. May I?

JIM. Sure. He doesn't care.

(*Perez kicks some of the money. Consuela joins him. After kicking a while they begin to dance together and Luke and Jim stop kicking to watch them.*)

LUKE. They're dancers.

JIM. Professionals.

(*Miss Elixia comes into the room and stands on one side, watching.*)

(*Okada and his son Kiroki come into the room with broom and water pail. Okada waters the tree.*)

(*Paul, a young man, comes in. Miss Elixia throws herself into his arms.*)

MISS ELIXA. Paull

(*Sweeney watches Miss Elixia's performance. Paul is embarrassed, delighted, bewildered, and a little suspicious. Miss Elixia stops her performance suddenly. Turns and runs. Paul follows her slowly.*)

JIM. What was that? Romance? (*He looks at the telegram.*) Tell Jim Lark—*what?* There's nothing printed here.

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

*(A policeman drags Pipitski into the room.)*

POLICEMAN. He says he didn't steal this coat. He was in the street trying to sell it. He says it was given to him by Michael Sweeney. What's this money on the floor?

LUKE. It's not money.

POLICEMAN. Who is Michael Sweeney?

SWEENEY *(swinging down out of the tree)*. I.

POLICEMAN. Is this your coat?

SWEENEY. It is.

POLICEMAN. Do you know this man?

SWEENEY. He is Lieutenant Piotor Aroscha Pipitski.

PIPITSKI. Who should never have been born.

POLICEMAN. Lieutenant?

PIPITSKI. A name given by kind friends.

POLICEMAN. You asked this man to sell your coat?

SWEENEY. I did.

LUKE. She's hungry.

OKADA. Oh please.

*(He brings the sandwich that Jim Lark gave him out of his pocket and offers it humbly to Luke. Luke takes the sandwich.)*

LUKE. Thank you.

*(He hands the sandwich to Evangeline, who unwraps it slowly and begins to eat.)*

OKADA. I come back later and sweep. *(He and Kiroki go.)*

POLICEMAN. I didn't believe him.

SWEENEY. I wanted him to steal the coat, if he wanted to.

PIPITSKI. I am disgraced.

SWEENEY. He's a good Christian.

POLICEMAN. Your coat's a better one. *(He goes.)*

PIPITSKI. I beg of you. Do not send me out with the coat again. I lied. I was going to sell the coat and steal the money.

LUKE. Don't sell your coat. She has food now.

PIPITSKI. This is the idea, the idea is this. Please wear your coat. Let me help you.

*(He puts the coat on Sweeney. Sweeney buttons it carefully. Puts his hand in one of the pockets and brings out the wad of money. He throws the money around.)*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

SWEENEY (*kicking at one of the bills*). God bless you all. (*He goes.*)

*(Everybody except Jim Lark sits down. Jim walks around, occasionally kicking at one of the bills. He looks at the telegram every once in a while. He throws it on the floor and kicks it. The sun goes down and the room begins to darken. Jim picks up a bill and straightens it out as a bank clerk does. It gives a real sound. He begins to examine it closely, reading its message. He throws the bill down. Walks away. Turns and picks it up quickly. Everybody watches him. He picks up another one. Examines it quickly. Another.)*

JIM (*very calmly*). This money's real.

LUKE. No, it isn't. (*He picks up one of the bills, examines it quickly.*) Yes, it is. (*Perez picks up one. Pipitski. Consuela. Evangeline. Luke another. Perez again.*) Is it real? (*To Perez.*) It is, isn't it?

PEREZ. It *looks* real. It *feels* real. I've never seen a hundred-dollar bill before.

LUKE. No. It's not real. We've been kicking it around all day.

PIPITSKI. I beg of you. This money is real. This is the idea, the idea is this. I have *seen* a hundred-dollar bill. This money is real.

*(Everybody is silent a long moment.)*

LUKE (*to Evangeline*). We can have everything we want.

JIM. Bring it all here. We'll put it together and divide it. (*All the money is handed to Jim.*) Everybody stand in a circle. Now. One each, one at a time. (*He hands one to each of them. Puts one aside for himself. Another for Okada.*) This is for the elevator man and his boy. This is for me.

LUKE. Yes.

*(Jim divides all the money. Each person gets ten bills, including Okada. One bill is left.)*

JIM. This one goes out the window.

PEREZ. Yes. For somebody in the street.

*(Everybody sits down. Okada and his boy come in with the broom. Okada is carrying Sweeney's coat.)*

## *Sweeney in the Trees*

JIM. This is for you. From Mr. Sweeney. (*He gives Okada the money.*)

OKADA. Oh thank you. *This is for you.* From Mr. Sweeney. (*He gives Jim the coat.*)

JIM. Me? Jim Lark? Are you sure?

OKADA. Yes. He say Jim Lark. *I know you.*

JIM (*getting into coat which is very big for him*). Did he say anything?

OKADA. He say wear it, always.

*(Everybody goes, saying good-bye, except Jim Lark, Okada and his boy. Jim swings up into the tree. Sweeney Himself comes into the room in his overcoat and stands at the window. Helen Sweeney comes in. Sweeney Himself turns and smiles. Helen takes his arm. They go out together. Jim swings down from the tree. Looks around. Walks out. A white bird flies out of the tree. Okada and his son do acrobatics.)*

CURTAIN

# *Across the Board on To-morrow Morning*

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To Grenville Vernon

## NOTE

*Across the Board on To-morrow Morning* held the boards at the Pasadena Community Playhouse for two weeks beginning 11th February 1941.

The play was performed without interruption, and ran a little over an hour.

It was quite shocking, and nobody seemed to know what it was all about.

I knew it was wonderful, and therefore arranged with Gilmore Brown, Supervising Director of the Playhouse, to have the play performed twice in succession at each performance, so that anybody who cared to see it a second time could do so after an intermission. There were five of these performances. Although unprecedented in the annals of the theatre, this idea was a success.

The play itself, however, was a flop. My brother Henry liked it, but most of the critics didn't.

The play was directed by Frank Ferguson, with a few last-minute suggestions from me. After the first performance, a number of changes were made in the play.

The set was designed by Rita Glover.

The following note was printed as a Curtain Preface and handed to those who came to the theatre:

It's a sad work of art that needs an explanation, a bad work that can't stand one.

This is a sad work of art.

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It is sad, however, because it is about reality now, not because it is badly written. That would be a negligible kind of sadness, and nothing to bother anybody with.

While this play needs no explanation, two or three remarks are in order.

These remarks are not to be taken for a defence of this work. Art *has* no defence. Bad art has nothing else. Art can be no better than whom it reaches, but in case you don't like this play, don't let that worry you. Frankly, I like it, and not, as some people might imagine, because I wrote it. I like it because I think it is simultaneously sad and funny, which is also the way of reality.

Even when art is bad, it is almost always a little better than him by whom it was made. There may have been great poets with no means of expression, but in all probability they brought up large families. This was a loss to nothing. On the whole, however, men of art have said what they have had to say, and we have taken it for what we knew how. Now, that is the truth: we can go no farther than that. The play isn't going to be the same for every person who sees it. Two times two is the same for everybody, but *one* never is, and you start to understand everything when you start to understand one. One of anything. That's what art goes after. The whole. The works. One.

How to take this play is the problem of the people who see it. The problem of the writer of the play was to say something and to be entertaining at the same time. The writer, as always, has done his best.

It is no secret that I do not write for that collective non-entity which goes by the bogus term *the public*. In nearly thirty-three years and over a distance of hundreds of thousands of miles I have not yet met one public. With sincere eagerness I myself have tried to become public, but have failed. *Public?* My name is Saroyan, and I guess you know what yours is.

To put it bluntly, I write for *you*, and naturally I expect a good deal *from* you in return for this courtesy. I think you

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count. To begin with, I expect you to be at least my equal as a human being. I don't believe you can fail there—not with a little effort and concentration, at any rate. If, however, you are a *better* human being than I am, I am indebted to you, because you will improve this play, and the good Lord knows there is no play in the world that can't stand some of that.

Although my writing is clear enough for a child to enjoy, a lot of nice people pretend to find no meaning in it. I suspect these people of deliberate teasing, with the intention of irritating me into making a fool of myself in a long essay about Saroyan and his quarrel with society. Although I do not regard these people as personal enemies, or advocate cancellation of their citizenship, I can't believe they are sincere. I think they're kidding. My work is as simple as simple can be. I think it's unfair of people to be always pushing me into braggadocio.

If you will take it easy, I think you will enjoy this play and leave the theatre none the worse for the experience. In fact, I think you may be glad you came.

WILLIAM SAROYAN

*San Francisco*

1 June 1941

## THE PEOPLE

JIM, *a bartender*  
THOMAS PIPER, *a waiter*  
JOHN CALLAGHAN, *proprietor of Callaghan's*  
HARRY MALLORY, *a young man*  
HELEN, *a hat-check girl*  
PEGGY, *a young woman*  
R. J. PINKERTON, *an elderly man from Wall Street*  
LOIS, *a young woman*  
PABLO, *a Filipino dish-washer*  
PANCHO, *a Filipino dish-washer*  
SAMMY, *a Union man*  
CLAY, *a Negro doorman*  
RHINELANDER 2-8182, *a mother*  
FRITZ, *a taxi-driver*  
CALLAGHAN MALLORY, *a recent arrival*

## THE PLACE

*Callaghan's, on East 52nd Street, New York.*

## THE TIME

*Continuous, for the duration.*

## THE PLAY

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*A portion of Callaghan's Restaurant-bar in New York. Thomas Piper, a waiter, is seated at a table reading a newspaper. He turns a page, notices the audience, goes on reading, remembers the audience, studies the audience, folds the paper, gets up, and moves forward.*

PIPER. Ladies and gentlemen, before you is an illusion of a restaurant-bar in New York City: the bar, the bartender, a few tables and chairs, entrances, exits, Men's Room, Ladies' Room, kitchen, a cook and two Filipino boys in the kitchen, a hat-check girl out there near the door, a doorman on the sidewalk, a couple of cabs in the street, New York all around, the world everywhere else.

Before I noticed you, I was seated there at the table, as you saw, reading the paper. I looked up a horse I bet on last night and discovered that it ran fifth. A horse named To-morrow Morning, which of course is beside the point. I lost two dollars. It's no matter. I read about a man who died, too. He was pretty well along in years. Seventy-one years old. He was a scientist of some kind. Left a large family. Never heard of him before.

*(John Callaghan, the proprietor of the restaurant-bar, emerges from the Men's Room.)*

You feel sorry for people who don't stay alive to see what's going to happen. How things are going to turn out. A lot of things are going on in the world. They're all in the new style, too. Swifter.

CALLAGHAN. What do you think you're doing?

PIPER. My boss, John Callaghan. He owns this place. Excuse me. *(To Callaghan.)* There was nothing to do. No business. I happened to notice the people. I was chatting with them.

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CALLAGHAN. What people?

PIPER. *The people.* Out there.

CALLAGHAN (*noticing the audience*). Now, go on, get about your work. (*Noticing the audience again, unable to believe his eyes.*) What happened?

PIPER. I don't know, but there they are. I didn't want to be rude. Under the circumstances they don't talk, you see, so naturally we've *got* to. I was telling them I noticed where a man died. I was saying I feel sorry for people who don't stay alive so they can find out what happens.

(*Callaghan is nervous and embarrassed. He whispers in Piper's ear.*)

No, no. Just act natural. You've seen people before, and they've seen you. Now don't be shy. Just go about your business as if nobody were looking. I'll talk to the folks until we get a customer. How do we know somebody interesting isn't going to come in here and order the dollar dinner? Do *you* want to say a few words? Introduce yourself or something like that? (*Callaghan whispers.*) Oh, sure. I think that would be very nice.

CALLAGHAN (*with great effort, embarrassment, and confusion*). Ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to Callaghan's! (*Pause, confusion.*)

PIPER. Go ahead, don't be afraid.

CALLAGHAN. Ladies and gentlemen!

PIPER. That's it. Loud and clear, and political. Give it flowers.

CALLAGHAN (*softly*). Welcome to Callaghan's.

PIPER. They're *here*. They've got nowhere to go, or they wouldn't be here.

(*Callaghan whispers again.*)

Now you're talking. (*To the audience.*) Since Mr. Callaghan can't talk, he wants to dance. (*Callaghan goes.*) While he's getting his derby, I'll say a few words about him. Ladies and gentlemen, the proprietor of this establishment, by name John Callaghan, is sixty-two years old. Not so very long ago Mr. Callaghan operated a speakeasy. He is the

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father of two sons, one a lawyer and the other a doctor, both married, both fathers; and two daughters, both married, and both mothers. (*Callaghan returns wearing a derby and carrying a stick.*) Mr. Callaghan is now going to dance.

CALLAGHAN (*whispering*). O.K., Tom?

PIPER. I'll count three, and then break right into it. Ready? One. Two. Three. (*Callaghan lifts one leg and stops.*) All right. Again. One. Two. Three.

CALLAGHAN. I can't move.

PIPER. Take it easy, boss. You want to dance? All right. I'll dance first. (*He starts to dance.*) You see? Nothing to it. (*He stops.*) Are you ready now? O.K. One. Two. Three.

(*Callaghan can't dance. Piper refuses to help him any more. Callaghan in desperation begins to sing 'The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls. He does a very heroic job. Piper applauds.*)

CALLAGHAN. I thank you.

(*He bows. Piper applauds some more; he bows; more applause; he bows; Piper stops applauding.*)

PIPER. O.K., boss. Now, let me get on with my lecture. (*Harry Mallory, a swift-moving young man of twenty-seven or so, comes in, followed by Helen, the hat-check girl.*)

HELEN. Your hat and coat, sir.

HARRY. I'll put them on a chair. Here's a dime. No, wait, that was a quarter. That's all right. Keep it.

HELEN. Thank you, sir. (*She goes.*)

HARRY (*to Piper*). Get me a glass of water, will you please?

PIPER. Yes, sir.

HARRY. What's on the dinner? O.K., medium rare. (*To Callaghan, who has been watching, with his mouth open.*) Have you looked at this afternoon's paper yet? (*He sits down, gets up.*) The whole place is on fire. Get me something to drink. A pleasant wine of some kind. To hell with it. Get me a Scotch. Have you read the paper?

(*He sits down. Piper returns with a glass of water which Harry takes and gulps desperately, spilling quite a lot, which*

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*he wipes off with his hand. Piper opens a bill of fare and offers it to Harry.)*

I've ordered.

PIPER. The New York cut, sir?

HARRY. That's fine. You got the time? Ten-thirty, is that right?

PIPER. Ten thirty-five.

HARRY. Thanks. Never carry a watch. Don't need to. Bore me. Always know what time it is anyway. Got more time than I can use. Who am I to know the time right down to the last minute? Now, if you'll excuse me, I want to finish this paper. Workers are the luckiest people in the world. Got their time regulated for them. Safest way to live. The *only* way. I'd be a waiter myself if I could do it. You belong to the union, I suppose. Make a fair living. Nice atmosphere. (*Suddenly shouting.*) Where the hell is that drink?

PIPER. Right here on the table, sir.

HARRY. Who put that there? (*He drinks the whole thing down.*) What kind of Scotch was that? O.K., let me have another.

PIPER. Yes, sir. Anything else, sir?

HARRY. Yes. Thanks for reminding me. (*Gives Piper a nickel.*) Get me Rhinelander 2-8182. (*Suddenly notices the audience.*) Who are those people?

PIPER. New Yorkers, for the most part. A few out-of-towners.

HARRY. Rhinelander 2-8182. What are they doing out there?

PIPER. Watching us.

HARRY. People stink. I avoid them. O.K., get that number. Any music in this place?

PIPER. Only the nickel phonograph.

HARRY. Well, don't let anybody put a nickel in it.

(*Callaghan leads a beautiful young woman into the dining-room. Peggy. Harry stands.*)

Cancel that call. (*The young woman sits down.*) Ask the young lady what she'll have.

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PEGGY. Nothing, thank you. (*Piper goes.*)

HARRY. Have you looked at this afternoon's paper yet?

PEGGY. Yes, I have.

HARRY (*to Piper*). Is that girl a shill? Does she work here?

PIPER. I beg your pardon, sir?

HARRY. I never saw anybody take up with a stranger so swiftly. It's O.K. As a matter of fact, I'm fond of people who are professional in all things.

PIPER (*bringing another drink*). Yes, sir.

HARRY. I'm an amateur myself, always have been, always will be. Don't know the first thing about anything. Don't want to learn. (*Sips.*) Despise everybody. (*To Peggy.*) Do you live in New York? (*Piper takes away one glass, puts down another.*) Rhinelander 2-8182.

PIPER. Shall I ask for someone in particular?

HARRY. Just say Harry Mallory's calling and ask her to hold the line.

PIPER. Harry Mallory. Yes, sir.

(*Piper goes. Harry returns to the paper. A dignified gentleman of sixty or so, accompanied by a beautiful young woman, comes in. R. J. Pinkerton. Lois.*)

HARRY. Good evening.

LOIS. Is he talking to you?

PINKERTON. I don't believe so.

LOIS. We mustn't be seen. You promised we wouldn't.

PINKERTON. Nobody comes here, and the food's very good.

HARRY. How are things down on Wall Street?

PINKERTON (*irritated*). I beg your pardon, have you been speaking to me?

HARRY. Unless it's to the girl. I don't know *her*.

PINKERTON (*angry*). Are you under the impression that you know *me*?

HARRY (*slowly*). There's a war in the world. You'll be dead in ten years. Sit down and go on with whatever it is you're going on with. (*To Piper, returning.*) Did you get that number?

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PIPER. There's no answer, sir.

LOIS (*to Callaghan*). What kind of a place is this, anyway? (*She suddenly notices the audience and gasps.*) Hurry. Let's get out of here.

HARRY. Sit down and eat your supper.

PINKERTON (*noticing the audience, to Callaghan*). I had no idea.

CALLAGHAN. I'm sorry, sir. It's not usually this way.

PINKERTON (*to Lois*). Do you want to go?

LOIS. What's the use going *now*?

HARRY. Have *you* looked at this afternoon's paper yet?

PINKERTON (*to Callaghan*). I would rather not shout across the dining-room.

CALLAGHAN (*to Harry*). Excuse me, sir. We've all been young and troubled.

HARRY. Who's young and troubled?

CALLAGHAN. The gentleman would rather not shout with you.

HARRY. Who?

CALLAGHAN. The elderly gentleman with the young woman.

HARRY. Oh. Well, that's all right. Young and troubled? I suppose you think I'm a little crazy, too.

CALLAGHAN. No. I don't believe I do.

HARRY. Well, as a matter of fact I am, but so are you. And so is he, too. Some people have sensibility and some haven't. Some have a little and some have a lot. I have a lot. If it were money I'd be a millionaire. (*To Pinkerton.*) How *are* things down on Wall Street?

PINKERTON (*with anger and great aloofness*). What things?

LOIS. Don't answer him. He's drunk.

HARRY. Drunk? I'll drink everybody in this place under the table and still be more sober than a man about to be electrocuted for a crime he didn't commit. (*To Callaghan.*) What do you want to run a restaurant for? People are no good. What do you want to feed them for?

PIPER. Your steak, sir.

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HARRY. Is it medium rare?

PIPER. Yes, sir.

HARRY. O.K. Try that number again. I'd be a waiter myself if I could do it. (*Going to Peggy.*) Don't you see they keep doing things over and over again without thinking, and without ever doing anything right. Naturally they never catch up with what's right. What are you doing, eating alone? (*Shouting suddenly.*) Somebody put a nickel in that phonograph, will you?

PEGGY. I wanted to be alone for a change.

HARRY (*the music begins. Peggy stands; he holds her as if to dance*). I hope you don't mind. I'd like to be *unalone* for a change. I have not yet met an honest man. I've found men honest for a moment, but *only* for a moment. I *myself* have been dishonest, and am still. How is anything good ever going to come about if a man who *wants* to be honest, can't? I don't mean small honesty, the kind that goes in ledgers, the honesty of poor intimidated workers who *ought* to be dishonest. I mean broad generous reckless deep honesty. There's no one to talk to, and it gets very lonely.

PEGGY. I think I know what you mean.

HARRY (*pause, slowly*). Thanks for the dance. (*They have not danced. He seats her.*) How is it that you are able *not* to talk?

PEGGY. There's so little to say.

HARRY (*amazed, slowly*). Oh. (*He just misses his chair and sits on the floor. Callaghan comes running over to help him.*) Where's my coffee? (*He remains on the floor, looking at the paper. Piper arrives.*) Did you get the number?

PIPER. Yes, sir.

HARRY. Tell her to get in a cab and come right down.

PIPER. Yes, sir. (*He turns to the audience.*) What'd I tell you? (*The stage lights go down. Thomas Piper, the waiter, comes out from the wings, and stands in a spot of light.*)

PIPER. You will forgive me, I hope, for coming out here for a moment before we go back into the restaurant.

As I began to say before the good customer arrived, you

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feel sorry for people who don't stay alive, since they can never again find out what happens.

But a lot of people who *stay* alive never find out what happens. They never find out what happens even to *themselves*. Some of them have good educations, too.

Already some of you may be asking yourselves, for instance, what's this stuff mean? Well, all I can say is, I'm glad you came to-night instead of last night because what happened last night wouldn't make *anybody* ask, What's this stuff mean? A few people came and ate and paid their cheques and went. Before you arrived to-night, it was the same here as last night. Around five o'clock a few people came for drinks. A young fellow I know who writes for *The New Yorker* flirted with a young woman who turned out to be from his home town, Pasadena, California, and they went to the theatre together. Around six a few people came for dinner. By half-past nine the place was empty.

I would have tried to entertain you to-night myself, but I'm glad the people came, especially the young fellow. Once we get back into the restaurant, chances are I won't have time to do anything except wait table. That's why I've come out here now.

Even though I'm a waiter by profession, I find casual talk easy and effortless for me, although I can sing and dance a little, too. Consequently, in the absence of someone more suited to the work—which is a pleasure—I shall try to keep direct contact with you.

Callaghan's isn't exactly Jack & Charlie's or The Stork Club, so naturally when unusual people come here I feel grateful and a little happier about my humble position in the American social world. Most of you have been to Jack & Charlie's or The Stork Club anyway, and I dare say a good many of you have sat at tables near the people you read about every day in Walter Winchell's column, or the column in *The Post* by Leonard Lyons, or in the news sections when they get married or divorced. I myself, I suppose, have waited on everybody who goes to Jack & Charlie's at one

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time or another, and on the whole they're no different from anybody else. On the other hand, some of the people who come here sometimes are, in my opinion, characters out of fiction.

There was a man came in here one night, absolutely unknown, never gossiped about in newspapers, personal life unrevealed, about a hundred and thirty pounds in weight, a little bald, ate four thick steaks one after another and wanted to box Callaghan and me put together. Wasn't drunk, had no hard feelings, only wanted to box. Sang three songs, paid his cheque, and we never saw him again. He might have been the vice-president of a bank somewhere. Mild, courteous, worried-looking.

What I mean is, a restaurant may very often be the scene of great anonymous events. Especially a restaurant in New York, the biggest city in the world. A place where people eat and drink is more likely to witness the emergence of the flamboyant from ordinary human beings than a place where people *do not* eat and drink. But not necessarily the flamboyant *alone*. Such a place might witness the arrival in human lives of nobility of one sort or another, or a delicate synchronization of wisdom and mischief, or even a delightful balance of irrelevant truth and irrelevant error.

It may seem odd to you that a waiter can throw about such language as the language I have been throwing about, and to others of you it may seem, *in our time*, perfectly natural. There are no doubt waiters at Jack & Charlie's who, owing to the people they serve, are capable of wit far surpassing anything I shall ever be likely to amaze myself with.

Henry, for instance, whom many of you know. I have heard that some of the finest minds of this country have asked questions of Henry, and I don't mean questions concerning food or drink. I mean questions of some aesthetic significance. And well they might from what I hear of the intelligence operating in Henry.

As for myself, away from the more heightened atmospheres of gracious living, such as Jack & Charlie's, I

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believe I can explain my occasional use of the expressive word and phrase by revealing that, for many years, I have read *The New York Times*. As well as magazines and books published in this country, in the English language, which are available to all. *Life Magazine*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *The New Masses* occasionally, *The Racing Form* every day, and a wide variety of contemporary writers, including, at random, George Santayana, John Dewey, and, I say this with no embarrassment, William Shakespeare. I listen to the radio: symphonies, and other programmes, especially broadcasts from Europe. With all that is happening in the world, including what I myself witness here at Callaghan's, I am sure you understand a little better why I feel unhappy about the people who die every day, who shall not continue to witness the further unfolding of whatever drama this is that is taking place. You may also understand a little better what goes on here to-night, which is, at best, I might say, not altogether unrelated to what goes on everywhere else every day.

I'm delighted you've come, and hope you will forgive me for having taken advantage of this opportunity to say these things.

HARRY'S VOICE (*shouting*). Where the hell's my waiter?

PIPER. I must go now, but I'll be seeing you again as soon as possible.

(*The stage lights go up.*)

PIPER. Yes, sir.

HARRY. Here. Read this pamphlet some time. It was given to me by an elderly lady in Central Park.

PIPER. Thank you, sir. I shall read it at the very first opportunity.

HARRY. I've been carrying that pamphlet around for over three years. I remember the old lady very clearly: she was angelic and unbalanced. About sixty-seven years old. Smiling, brittle and efficient. I watched her hand out eleven of the pamphlets. No one refused. No one dared. (*Pause.*) Have you had your supper? All right, sit down and I will

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bring *you* your supper. No. Please. I insist. You must not deprive me of the privilege.

PIPER. Thank you, sir, but I can't.

HARRY. Why not?

PIPER. It's against the rules.

HARRY (*angry*). Rules? (*Pause, standing.*) Let me tell you, there are no rules. None whatsoever. Honour, none. Grace, none. Truth, none. Therefore, rules, none. Where in this configuration of error and crime which is called contemporary history, may we find one rule in operation? (*Pause.*) Nowhere. (*Taking off his coat.*) Let no foolish rule, therefore, operate here, in this sudden accidental moment of religion. Let no bluff of map or chart, measure or theory, impurify my compulsion to exchange places with you. My coat. Kindly give me yours.

(*He hands Piper his coat. Piper gives Harry his coat. Callaghan comes over. To Callaghan.*)

He is to dine and I am to wait upon him.

CALLAGHAN. Please.

PIPER. Yes, sir, please.

HARRY. I insist. This is, thank God, still America. I am still a free man. Sit down.

(*Piper sits down, wearing Harry's coat. Harry hands him a bill of fare.*)

Your pleasure, sir?

(*Helen comes in.*)

CALLAGHAN. Don't order, Tom. It's a violation of union rules. We'll be picketed in ten minutes. You know who the hat-check girl is going around with.

HARRY (*defiantly*). Who?

CALLAGHAN. Sammy, that's who. The biggest organizer in the Waiters' Union.

HARRY. You have swords?

CALLAGHAN. No, sir.

HARRY. Pistols?

CALLAGHAN. No, sir.

HARRY. Banana knives?

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CALLAGHAN. No, sir.

HARRY. Then he and I shall duel with salad forks. (*To Piper.*) I repeat: Your pleasure, sir.

PIPER (*to Callaghan*). Maybe Helen won't notice.

HELEN. Won't notice? I shall telephone Sammy immediately.

CALLAGHAN. Helen, please don't. He's not really waiting table. The man's a Democrat, don't you see? Why bother Sammy? This man's not a professional waiter.

HELEN. He's wearing a waiter's jacket, and he's waiting table.

HARRY (*proudly*). I am. (*To Piper.*) Your pleasure, sir.

PIPER. All right. To hell with it. I'll start with a chilled Dubonnet cocktail.

HARRY. Dubonnet cocktail.

PIPER. Blue point oysters on the half shell.

HARRY. They're very good, sir.

PIPER (*shouting*). Where's my drink? (*To Peggy.*) I beg your pardon.

PEGGY. Oh, that's all right.

PIPER. Onion soup, *à la carte*.

HARRY. Onion soup, *à la carte*. Your drink, sir.

PIPER (*sipping*). I suppose, at work like this, one cannot help meeting occasionally, interesting, or at least fairly interesting, people.

HARRY. Yes, sir.

PIPER (*to Pinkerton*). Hath made battleships?

PINKERTON (*to Callaghan*). That's your waiter, isn't it?

CALLAGHAN. It is, and by God I wash my hands of the whole thing.

PIPER (*to Lois*). Art negotiating?

LOIS. Art nothing, and mind your own business.

HELEN. Sammy's coming right down. He's bringing six picketers with him, too.

CALLAGHAN. To hell with Sammy and to hell with the picketers, too.

(*He sings The Harp etc. again, while Harry waits on Piper.*)

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*After the song Harry applauds.)*

HARRY (*to Piper*). The two Filipinos in the kitchen are shooting craps.

PIPER. Instruct the little brown brothers to cease. If they invite you to enter the contest, refuse. If possible, confiscate the dice.

HARRY. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Did you enjoy the cocktail?

PIPER. Never ask questions. Do you want to be a waiter, or a nuisance?

HARRY. A waiter, sir. Thank you. I meant no offence.

PIPER. And never apologize. To *anybody*. Nothing is more offensive to those who enjoy an advantage than to be apologized to by those who enjoy a disadvantage. Having become humble, do you wish to become superior, too? Or are you already weary of the exchange?

HARRY. Weary? Oh, no, sir.

PIPER. Very well, then. Get me another drink.

HARRY. Yes, sir.

*(He goes. Piper opens the little pamphlet and studies it.)*

PIPER (*to Peggy*). Can you guess what the message here might be?

PEGGY. Only vaguely.

HARRY. I can't, even vaguely. Therefore, I shall turn the page and read. (*To Pinkerton.*) Hear this. (*To Lois.*) You, too.

LOIS. He's a waiter. How dare he talk to me?

PINKERTON (*angry and loud*). Mr. Callaghan!

*(Pablo, one of the Filipino boys, appears, holding a head of lettuce and a knife.)*

CALLAGHAN (*humbly*). Mr. Pinkerton.

PINKERTON. Your waiter must be asked to stop this foolishness, this mockery— (*He stands eloquently.*) This fantastic disregard of moral order.

PABLO (*going to Pinkerton*). Shut up.

PINKERTON. I beg your pardon?

PABLO. Sit down. What do *you* know about the Philippine Islands?

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PINKERTON. Not very much, I'm afraid.

PABLO (*standing over Pinkerton*). Have you studied the situation, imports and exports, sanitation, public schools, free clinics, agriculture, mining and manufacture of the Philippine Islands?

PINKERTON. No, I haven't.

PABLO. Have you had the honour of an audience with the President of the Philippine Islands?

PINKERTON. No, I haven't.

PABLO. Do you know the problems of the people of the Philippine Islands?

PINKERTON. Not insofar as they differ from the problems of people everywhere else.

PABLO. Is the situation of the Filipino boy in America something you have put on the scale of justice?

PINKERTON. I'm afraid not.

PABLO. Do you know the cultural, racial, and religious background of the Filipino people?

PINKERTON. *Yes. That is a field I have investigated.*

PABLO. Shut up. You know nothing. You do not know anything.

CALLAGHAN. Pablo, what's all this talk?

PABLO. Mr. Callaghan, in spite of the fact that my position is a lowly one, I have no protest to make. I am satisfied with the salary. I prefer the hours, which leave me time during the day for tennis. My countryman Pancho is also my friend, and it is a pleasure to work with him. It is also a pleasure to help you maintain the excellent service for which Callaghan's is famous. However, the situation of the Filipino boy in American is such that, in the presence of speech-making which misrepresents the truth, the Filipino boy who has been educated in the American schools of Manila is not so stupid as to allow such misrepresentation to go unchallenged.

(*Pancho appears.*)

CALLAGHAN. All right, but put away that knife, at least.

PABLO. The knife is for the lettuce. I am making a salad

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for Pancho and myself. (*To Pinkerton.*) Have you had the honour of an audience with the President of the Philippine Islands?

PANCHO (*in Filipino*). Pablo, what are you doing out here in the dining-room? Get the hell back into the kitchen where you belong.

PABLO (*in Filipino*). This man has been making false remarks about the Philippine Islands. (*To Pinkerton.*) Excuse me just a moment. (*In Filipino, to Pancho.*) He is an ignorant man, but very rich.

PANCHO (*in Filipino*). Who's the woman with him?

PABLO. Some chicken he picked up somewhere.

PANCHO. Not bad, is she?

PABLO. She's sitting down. What would she be standing up?

PANCHO. Very nice, I believe.

PABLO. You are probably mistaken.

PANCHO. No, I believe she's got quite a carriage.

PABLO. In my opinion, I believe it is not possible to know unless she stands.

PANCHO (*in English, to Lois*). Excuse me. Would you be good enough to stand? (*Lois looks around, terrified, but stands. In Filipino.*) You see?

PABLO. No, I don't. (*To Lois, in English.*) Would you please step away from the table? (*Lois does so.*) Thank you. (*In Filipino, his eyes brightening.*) You are right, for once in your life. How would you like to engage that in a little night-time contest?

PANCHO. I would like that very much.

PABLO (*very dramatically, to Pinkerton*). The situation of the Filipino boy in America. (*To Pancho, in Filipino, with anger.*) I'll take care of this. (*To Pinkerton.*) In Manila the boys go to American schools. They learn to speak correct English. They read good books. They see American moving pictures. They come to America.

LOIS. May I sit down?

PANCHO. They apply for a position in a bank.

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PABLO. Just a moment, Pancho. (*To Lois.*) Please sit down. It is not *your* fault. Our quarrel is not with *you*. (*To Pinkerton.*) In Manila there are Clubs, progressive and patriotic.

PANCHO. They apply for a position in the capital of the United States: Washington, D.C.

PABLO. Just a moment, Pancho.

PANCHO. They apply for a position in the moving-pictures.

PABLO (*in Filipino*). Don't lose the thread of the thought. (*In English.*) In Manila the Filipino boys take pride in their kinship with the American people.

PANCHO. In Honolulu, the girls dance the hula-hula. (*He demonstrates.*)

PABLO. Never mind Honolulu, hula-hula. The boys come to America. They are American citizens.

PANCHO. The work is hard, the wages are low. In Honolulu they dance the hula-hula.

PIPER. Sit down, Pancho. I hear you and Pablo have been shooting craps.

PANCHO (*sitting down*). Pablo is not a good gambler.

PABLO. One minute please.

PIPER. Quiet, everybody.

PABLO (*to Piper*). Have *you* studied the situation in the Philippine Islands?

PIPER. All right, Pablo. Sit down. (*Pablo sits down.*)

PABLO (*to Pinkerton*). In the future, before you talk, investigate your subject. Go ahead, Tom.

PIPER. Listen. All of you. (*Reading.*) Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. John 3: 3.

PABLO (*to Pinkerton*). In Manila the Filipino boys—

PIPER. Wait a minute, Pablo. (*Reading.*) There is not a just man upon earth. Ecclesiastes 7: 20. (*Pablo goes to Pinkerton's table.*)

PABLO (*to Lois*). May I have the honour? (*He bows very low.*)

PINKERTON. I beg your pardon?

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PABLO (*lifting his head, but not the rest of his body*). I spoke to the young lady, not to you. (*To Lois.*) May I have the honour? I am waiting.

LOIS. Thank you so much. I'm really too tired. *Really.* (*Pablo comes up briskly.*)

PABLO (*bowing to Pinkerton*). May I have the honour? (*Pinkerton leaps to his feet, outraged.*)

PANCHO (*to Peggy*). In Honolulu, hula-hula.

(*Harry looks around. He takes off Piper's coat.*)

HARRY. My coat, please.

PIPER. Yes, sir.

HARRY (*getting into his coat, while Piper gets into his*). One thing is obvious. The insanity of the world, or the art of the world, the grace thereof, or the foolishness thereof, must touch all who live therein, and *all* live therein.

HELEN (*coming in*). Here comes Sammy.

(*Sammy comes in briskly, a small, energetic fellow.*)

SAMMY. Stop in the name of Local 1!

HARRY. Take it easy. This is not local. Have a drink. (*To Jim, the bartender.*) Give him a drink.

JIM. Yes, sir.

HARRY (*looking around*). The world, we know, is amok. The realm of *all* reality, therefore, is now also amok. The world has always been uninhabitable, but every man alive has been himself a place of refuge from the world—from its murder, its spiritual pestilence, its adultery, its false-witness, its contempt, its treachery, its perjury, its whoring, its mean streets, its rotting cities, its diseased governments: all the things which engage in contest with the free spirit of a man. The world has always been unworthy of that free spirit, but now *also* the body of each man in the world has lost its base, its location, its position, its security, its relation to God and grace, its source, its power, its youth and form, its blood and ensemble, its beginning and continuity: the things which combine miraculously to make of it a refuge. And now, therefore, *like* the world, the *body* of every man is uninhabitable. Life is on fire; caught in hurricanes; submerged in

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deep and blind waters; bitten by insects; eaten by microbes; broken by shell-fire; driven mad by machines; pushed down by heavy things on wheels; spit upon by the radio; and confounded by all the other absurd things that happen every day. (*He pauses, looking around.*)

Unless next you want to murder one another, for whatever humour there may be in it, each of you go back to his place and person, and another drink for me.

*(He watches everybody straighten out. He sits down and picks up the paper again.)*

This may be the last day of reality. We had better try to be human while there is time.

*(Excited voices from the street. Harry puts the newspaper aside, and looks toward the entrance.)*

PEGGY. What is it?

LOIS. I wish I knew what's going on.

PINKERTON. Something new has happened in Europe, that's all.

*(Clay, the enormous Negro doorman, in uniform comes running in.)*

PEGGY, LOIS, PINKERTON and CALLAGHAN. What's the matter?

HARRY. Who's being murdered?

CLAY. On the contrary. A cab just came up with a lady. She's having a baby. It's too late to take her to a hospital.

*(Excitement and talk: A baby? Here? This is a restaurant. Bring her in. Don't bring her in. Who is she? What are we going to do?)*

Anybody around here know anything about having a baby? (*He turns and runs.*)

HARRY. This is no year in which to be born, and no world to be born into.

*(Voices from the street. Pablo and Pancho come out of the kitchen.)*

PABLO. What's the matter with everybody?

LOIS. Somebody's having a baby.

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PABLO. A baby? (*To Lois.*) Go in the kitchen and get some hot water. (*Lois goes, followed by Pablo.*)

PANCHO (*to Peggy*). You, too. (*Peggy goes, followed by Pancho.*)

(*Clay returns with the young woman on his arm. Supporting her also is a small taxi-driver named Fritz.*)

FRITZ. A Scotch and soda, please!

(*Everybody stands around nervously, confused and helpless.*)

CLAY (*to the young woman*). Hold on, lady. Hold on.

(*Harry gets up and is walking to the young woman as the stage lights go down.*)

(*Again Thomas Piper, the waiter, comes forward and stands in a spot of light.*)

PIPER. The time required for the making of one human life is, for all I know, probably closer to nine thousand years than to nine months. In view of the incredible amount of time and effort involved, and the astonishing ineffectuality of that which comes into being, the transaction must be regarded as a swindle.

I speak on this melancholy theme, inasmuch as only a few minutes ago, by the grace of God, another nine thousand years achieved its wholeness in the arrival here of one more human being. The infant, I am pleased to report, is all right, and so is the mother. A little over seven pounds in weight, the new inhabitant of the world has been named Callaghan, after Mr. John Callaghan, whose son Dr. Neal Callaghan reached the mother four minutes after the birth had taken place. Mother and son have been transferred to a nearby hospital.

For the record, I think you might like to know who helped most to make the birth a success. It was Pablo. I myself, ordinarily not very much amazed by *anything*, was very much amazed at the superior poise and control with which Pablo met the emergency, while almost everybody else stood around paralysed and eager to take orders from him. No doubt a savage at heart, the situation, although unfamiliar, was one he could cope with instinctively, as he did,

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with perfect timing, magnificent calm, considerable humour, perfect English, and not the slightest abandonment of his own ego.

Nine thousand years: one human being. Anonymous at birth, nobody knows who he's liable to turn out to be. He is the most imaginative of all creations, and yet what happens, as his own years come to him, is usually ordinary, dull, and for the most part boring. We can predict for the man just born anything we like, but the truth is he is not very likely to grow into anything extraordinary. His father, at the age of twenty-seven or so, is in many ways special, in many things admirable, but on the whole nothing more than a good-natured, loud-voiced, intelligent, angry, sensible, absurd, and heroic young man. Callaghan Mallory, the new arrival, is breathing, and here to stay. If we are honest, we must admit with regret that he is here to no avail—other than perhaps that ultimately he shall enjoy good company, good food, good drink, and the several other things of this sort which are, in one degree or another, the compensations for all who have been swindled, and are breathing in the world.

Critics of art, of music, of cooking, of manners, and of all other things are men and women who want to know what goes on, *why*, and what it means. As I myself am a critic of all things, from the behaviour of the common fly to the shape of the great fable, so, too, is each of you such a critic. Now, more than ever, you are wondering. What is this about? I don't blame you. Finding little or no meaning in the world, you insist upon unmistakable meaning in created things, in things of illusion, of which this is, good or bad, an example. Is anything here intended to be taken seriously? Are you expected to understand any of this?

The answer is, courteously, No more than you would be apt to understand anything else. No more, and no less. Neither I nor you are the same as we were when we met an hour ago. One hour from now we shall be a little different from what we are now. I am, here, the illusion of an Ameri-

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can wait in New York. You are, each of you, the illusion of the person who owns your name, your past, your years, your belongings, and so forth and so on. Each of us was once placed at the centre of the universe as Callaghan Mallory has just been placed. Each of us has been, once, in his own person—small and helpless and charged with an infinite variety of compulsions—the substance, but not the explanation, of the great mystery of mortality. It appears to be our destiny that as long as we live we shall be *only* the substance of that mystery, and that as soon as we die there is no telling. In the meantime we are allowed to endure the interlude as pleasantly as we are able to manage. Outside of this restaurant is the illusion of the world. Here, in this restaurant, is the illusion of our reality—(*the stage lights rise*)—which we shall proceed to explore, while there is still time, and no deaths among you.

(*The place is empty except for Fritz, the taxi-driver, and Jim, the bartender. They are drunk, but they are still drinking. They speak softly, almost whispering.*)

FRITZ. Do you want to know *why*?

JIM. I want to know why she came here in a cab.

FRITZ. Because I brought her here in a cab, that's why.

JIM. Why did you bring her?

FRITZ. Because she was going to have a baby, that's why.

You want to know why?

JIM. Why?

FRITZ. Because you've got to have a lot of babies.

JIM. Why?

FRITZ. To keep the cabs going, that's why.

JIM. Why?

FRITZ. So the cab-drivers can keep going. (*Pause.*)

JIM. Oh.

FRITZ. I want to shake your hand.

JIM. Why?

FRITZ. Because you're a gentleman. (*They shake hands.*)

You want to know why?

JIM. Why?

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FRITZ. Because *you* want to keep the cab-drivers going, too, that's why. You want to know why?

JIM. Why?

FRITZ. Because *I* want to keep the *bartenders* going.

JIM. Oh. I want to shake your hand. (*They shake hands.*) Because you're a gentleman, too. You want to know why?

FRITZ. Why?

JIM. Because you don't ask questions the way some people do.

FRITZ. What questions?

JIM. The kind of questions people are always coming into a place and asking a bartender all the time. Why this and why that and why this and why that.

FRITZ. I want to shake your hand again. Do you want to know why?

JIM. Why?

FRITZ. Because you're intelligent. Do you want to know what that means?

JIM. Yeah. What does it mean?

(*Fritz looks around, as if he were about to utter a great State secret. He discovers the audience. He gets off the stool.*)

FRITZ. Just a minute.

JIM. What's the matter?

FRITZ. Somebody's listening. Somebody's been eaves-dropping.

JIM. Who?

FRITZ (*indicating audience*). The people.

JIM. Oh.

FRITZ. Have I said anything I'll regret?

JIM. What's it mean to be intelligent?

FRITZ. Nothing. Just forget I brought it up. Do you think I want to lose my chauffeur's licence? I've been drinking a little, that's all. Give me one more drink.

(*A young man comes in.*)

THE YOUNG MAN. Give me one, too.

JIM. Scotch?

THE YOUNG MAN. O.K.

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*(Jim places a drink each on the bar, and makes one for himself.)*

Your health, gentlemen.

FRITZ and JIM. Yours, too. *(They drink.)*

THE YOUNG MAN. Have you seen to-morrow's paper yet?

JIM. No, I haven't.

FRITZ. Well, I guess I'll get back to work.

THE YOUNG MAN. It's too late now.

FRITZ. What do you mean?

THE YOUNG MAN. Have you seen to-morrow's paper yet?

FRITZ. No. Why?

THE YOUNG MAN. Well, if you had seen to-morrow's paper, you'd know.

FRITZ. Know what?

THE YOUNG MAN. That it's too late to get back to work.

FRITZ. Why?

THE YOUNG MAN. Because of the news in to-morrow's paper.

FRITZ. What news?

THE YOUNG MAN. That for over one thousand nine hundred and forty-one years the world has been inhabited by the dead, not the living.

FRITZ. You mean we're dead?

THE YOUNG MAN. According to to-morrow's paper.

FRITZ. You mean you and me and the bartender? We're all dead?

THE YOUNG MAN. I believe that's the message in to-morrow's paper.

FRITZ. You mean the lady who had the baby? And the baby? And everybody in the world? And everybody who ever lived in the world since one thousand nine hundred and forty-one years ago?

THE YOUNG MAN. That is the impression to-morrow's paper seems to give.

FRITZ. What edition?

THE YOUNG MAN. The edition that came off the press at midnight.

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FRITZ (*to the bartender*). Run out and get a *later* edition, will you, Jim?

THE YOUNG MAN. There aren't any later editions.

FRITZ (*to Jim*). Well, run out into the street and ask somebody.

THE YOUNG MAN. There's no street out there, and no people, either.

FRITZ. What do you mean?

THE YOUNG MAN. I mean the illusion broke at midnight to-night.

FRITZ. What illusion?

THE YOUNG MAN. The illusion of reality. Consequently, ever since midnight the dead have been truly the dead, and the unreal has been truly the unreal. There is nothing any more anywhere.

FRITZ. On the level?

THE YOUNG MAN. It's in to-morrow's paper and it appears to be on the level.

FRITZ. In that case, Jim, give me another drink.

JIM. In that case, I think I'd better have another myself. How about you?

THE YOUNG MAN. Thank you.

FRITZ (*looking around*). Well, what do you know? This *is* a surprise. I always thought something was phoney around here. Well, now I'm glad I know. I don't have to get back to work any more, is that it? I'm through, hey? (*The Young Man nods.*) Well, that's fine. Give me another drink, Jim.

JIM (*getting three drinks*). Well, this beats everything.

FRITZ (*to The Young Man*). What about those people out there? (*He indicates the audience.*)

THE YOUNG MAN. What about them?

FRITZ. Dead or alive?

THE YOUNG MAN. Officially? Dead. They'll last as long as we last.

FRITZ. How long is that going to be?

THE YOUNG MAN. Not very long.

FRITZ. Well, give me another drink, then. No more living.

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That's all right. No more world. Are you sure? What about this money in my pocket? This seven dollars and forty-seven cents?

THE YOUNG MAN. You can give it to charity for all it's worth.

FRITZ. How much more time we got? An hour? Ten minutes? Fifteen? Five minutes? Half a minute? Or what?

THE YOUNG MAN. Oh, no. Infinities, if we have any time at all.

FRITZ. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. There's a catch here somewhere. What do you mean, *infinities*? How much more time we got before we're dead?

THE YOUNG MAN. All the time in the world. We're dead now.

FRITZ. Jim, just for the devil of it, run out into the street and take a look at things.

JIM (*going*). Sure.

FRITZ. Fond of drinking?

THE YOUNG MAN. Extremely.

FRITZ. Loaded to the gills, at the moment?

THE YOUNG MAN. At the moment, no. Sober as a judge.

FRITZ. Sober as a judge. Everybody dead. No world. Well, that's all right. (*Louder.*) How about it, Jim?

JIM (*returning*). He's right all right.

FRITZ. What do you mean?

JIM. There's no street out there and nothing else, either.

FRITZ. You know what street that is out there, don't you?

JIM. I know it used to be 52nd Street, East.

FRITZ. What is it now?

JIM. On my word of honour, nothing.

FRITZ. Isn't my cab out there in front of the place?

JIM. No street, no cab, nothing.

FRITZ. Give me another drink. (*To The Young Man.*) No more illusion and stuff?

THE YOUNG MAN. No more.

FRITZ. Nothing's going to happen any more?

THE YOUNG MAN. The same things are going to be re-

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peated, and I might say they're going to be repeated more or less endlessly, but outside of that everything is ended.

JIM. Why?

FRITZ. Why? What do you mean why, Jim?

JIM. Why is everything ended? What happened to 52nd Street, East?

FRITZ. Explain that to the bartender.

THE YOUNG MAN. The illusion broke at midnight. It was an accident, most likely.

FRITZ (*to Jim*). Does that explain it? (*Suddenly.*) Where's my cab? You're drunk, that's all.

THE YOUNG MAN. Everything's ended. The glue's run out.

JIM. What glue?

FRITZ. Yeah, what glue?

THE YOUNG MAN. The glue that held the illusion together.

FRITZ. Well, give me another drink anyway. You may be right, you may be wrong. For all I care, you may be sober, you may be drunk. Whether I'm alive or whether I'm dead, all I want is a drink. If it's ended or if it's just begun, a Scotch and soda, please. Illusion or reality, no illusion or no reality, one drink more before I go.

JIM. My own words. (*Drinks all around.*) My very own sentiments. (*To The Young Man.*) You a native of California?

THE YOUNG MAN. No. New York.

JIM. My name's Jim. (*He offers his hand.*) I'm pleased to meet you.

FRITZ. My name's Fritz. (*They shake hands.*) I'm pleased to meet you, too.

THE YOUNG MAN. It's a pleasure.

FRITZ. What's your name?

THE YOUNG MAN. Callaghan.

FRITZ. Callaghan. Isn't that the name they gave the baby that was born here to-night?

JIM. That's right. Callaghan. Callaghan—what was that young fellow's last name? Harry—

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THE YOUNG MAN. Mallory?

JIM. Yeah, Mallory. How did you know?

THE YOUNG MAN. A man usually knows his own name.

FRITZ. You're not—Callaghan Mallory, are you?

THE YOUNG MAN. I am.

FRITZ. How come? Callaghan Mallory was born right here in this restaurant less than an hour ago.

THE YOUNG MAN. I entered the world just as the illusion broke, consequently I was here all the time the illusion was unbroken, as well as all the time thereafter.

HARRY MALLORY'S VOICE (*from the street*). Where's that door? Open up, let me in, I've been here before. (*He breaks into the place.*) For a while there I was afraid I'd lost the place. Give me a drink, boys.

FRITZ. Who's that?

THE YOUNG MAN. Myself. My father. My son. Yourself. Each of us.

HARRY (*delighted*). I suppose you guys are wondering where I came from, at a time like this. Well, let me tell you, there have been a lot of things holding me back, but, by God, one way or another, I'm here. I've brought six or seven diseases with me, but I've got good news, too. Give me another drink.

FRITZ. We heard the good news, if you want to call it good. The illusion's broken or something. Everybody's dead or something. Is that right?

HARRY. Take it easy, boys. Take it easy. (*To Callaghan.*) Who're you?

THE YOUNG MAN. Callaghan's the name.

HARRY. Oh, yes. I thought so. I'm your father, I believe. Well, that's fine. If you like, I apologize. She had a kind of helplessness that was irresistible. I liked her voice, the way she mispronounced words, the freckles on her feet, and a few other miscellaneous things like that. I am speaking, I hope you understand, of your mother. Rhinelander 2-8182. I never intended my affection for the freckles to set in motion energy endlessly deep in the past, and consequence

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far removed in the future, but, as you yourself by this time know, the order, or disorder, which governs this reality allows no alternative. Hence, yourself at this bar, by name Callaghan, a memorial, perhaps, to my eagerness and her freckles. I hope you have a pleasant visit. To the day after to-morrow, gentlemen.

FRITZ. I don't get it, but to the day after to-morrow.

*(They all drink.)*

JIM. What about to-morrow morning's paper?

HARRY. The message there is one that has been in every paper, morning or afternoon, since the beginning.

JIM. Some illusion or something is supposed to be broken or something, and five minutes ago when I went out to the street there was nothing there. What about that?

HARRY. An improvement in optics, which was, perhaps fortunately, temporary.

FRITZ. What do you mean?

HARRY. Simply that, for a moment, for magnificent reasons, the eye was blind to the irrelevant and open to everything else. 52nd Street is again only 52nd Street.

FRITZ. We're alive again?

HARRY. If you choose to call it that.

FRITZ. Is my cab out there?

HARRY. Unless it's been stolen, or borrowed.

FRITZ. This is a hell of a note.

JIM. Everything's the same again?

HARRY. The same? It's worse, getting worse every minute. But it's so in a way that's irresistible to me, like her freckles. And, for one reason or another, irresistible to you, too.

FRITZ. We're right back where we started from?

HARRY. Nobly, and with that delicate balance of despair and delight which glues all unrelated things into the continuity and architecture which are the fable and fantasy of this world and life. It took a lot of glue to bring your cab together; a lot of dying to make your Scotch; a lot of freckles to name you Callaghan.

FRITZ. Well, in that case, I guess I'll get back to work.

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(*Music begins—Impromptu for Harp, by Gabriel Fauré, Op. 86, part 2. Everyone moves slowly.*)

THE YOUNG MAN. It's been pleasant drinking with you, gentlemen. (*He moves to go.*)

FRITZ. Can I drop you somewhere?

THE YOUNG MAN. It's not far. I'll walk. There's no hurry. I've got all the time in the world.

FRITZ. You've had a few to drink. Let me take you. What's the destination?

THE YOUNG MAN. No. Thanks. I'd rather take a little time. (*He goes.*)

FRITZ. Where's he think he's going?

HARRY. To his mother—to himself. To a little over seven pounds of something or other that breathes. To about an hour and a half of infinity.

FRITZ. Well, so long, Jim. (*Pause.*) Who do you like in the sixth at Saratoga to-morrow?

JIM. The big race?

FRITZ. Yeah, who do you like?

JIM. There was a jockey in here day before yesterday said a long shot might do it. A three-year-old named To-morrow Morning.

FRITZ. To-morrow Morning. The names they give them nags is something I can't figure out. I'll bet him two on the nose, three to place, and five to show. I'll lose, but I like the name. So long.

JIM. So long.

(*Harry stands alone, listening. Jim changes his coat and goes. Helen and Sammy go. Pablo and Pancho, carrying tennis rackets, go. Callaghan and Piper go. Clay goes. Peggy comes in. Harry turns. He stands looking at her a moment. He goes to her, takes her by the arm, and they go.*)

CURTAIN









