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Wintertime

by CHARLES L. MEE

Beautiful heartbreaking music:

Dawn Upshaw singing "lorsque vous n'aurez
rien a faire" from Massenet's Cherubin.

It is snowing.

Icicles hang from a summer dress on a tree branch.

A forest of white birch.

A white summer house set in the white winter woods.

The desk is covered with snow,
the piano is covered with snow,
the fireplace mantel is covered with snow.

And, since the house is closed for the winter season,
all the furniture is covered in white muslin.

The snow is beautiful, peaceful,
not a cold winter storm
but rather a snowfall of beauty and solitude,
just after Christmas.

Jonathan and Ariel enter through the woods
and through the non-existent "wall" of the house
carrying their cross country skis.

Neither of them wears a winter coat.

Jonathan puts down a suitcase in the snow.

ARIEL

Oh,

I love it here

the beauty and the quiet

and being here with you

I've never known anything like it

JONATHAN

Never?

ARIEL

No. Never.

I'd like just to sink into it with you.

JONATHAN

Into the snow?

ARIEL

Into the snow

and into you

into the world

falling through space

and feeling safe and warm and held close

there's nothing better.

I think this is why there is music

and painting

because there was love first

and music is how it feels:

weightless in outer space
with nothing but feeling you want to cry
this is probably why people invented dancing
and talking
not so they could say: look out, there's a bear
OK take this stick and we'll kill that tiger
but so they could talk to each other
and feel how it is to be with the person they love
feeling they really exist with the planets and the stars
and so they already have eternal life in the present moment
even if they know they are going to die,
they feel already that they are living forever.

I think of the earth flying through the universe.

I love you.

JONATHAN
Do you dance?

ARIEL
I am dancing.

[they dance—
not just for a moment, but, rather:
they dance;
and it is its own scene,
a long, romantic dance
with the beautiful music.]

Maria, in a negligee, enters with a glass of champagne in her hand.]

MARIA
Oh, Jonathan.

[the music stops]

JONATHAN
Mother!

[she immediately exits]

JONATHAN
That was my mother.

ARIEL
Your mother.

JONATHAN
Yes....

JONATHAN AND ARIEL TOGETHER
I thought....

JONATHAN
Yes, I thought so, too.

ARIEL
That we were going to be alone.

JONATHAN
Yes.

[Francois enters to look
holding a champagne glass in his hand, wearing his bathrobe.]

FRANCOIS [with a bit of a French accent]
Ah,
Jonathan,
how wonderful to see you!

JONATHAN
Francois.

FRANCOIS
And this is?

JONATHAN

Oh,
this is my friend Ariel.

FRANCOIS

Hello. I am delighted to meet you.
I am Francois.
And the two of you: you are friends, you say?

[Maria has returned, wearing a robe]

MARIA [with a bit of an Italian accent]
Francois and I, we are friends, too.

JONATHAN

You know, mother, I think everyone knows what....

FRANCOIS

What everyone knows and what everyone says
are sometimes two entirely different things.

MARIA

And should be....

FRANCOIS

And should be....

JONATHAN

This is America, Francois; we are a plainspeaking people.

FRANCOIS

So you say and yet it seems to me people lie to me all the time,
lie and lie, I never know what to believe in America.

MARIA

If what you are doing is speaking to me in some roundabout way....

FRANCOIS

Speaking to you!

Of course not,

of course not.

Of course to be sure

you might lie about some things at some times

a person cannot be criticized for this

certainly I would not be one to judge

even though

I myself am a truthful person

but when I talk about lying I am not always talking about you,

necessarily.

MARIA

I thought we could be alone here, if that's what you mean.

JONATHAN

So did we.

FRANCOIS

So did I, that's all I'm saying.

JONATHAN

Perhaps we should leave.

FRANCOIS

No, no, no, perhaps we should leave.

MARIA

Not at all, this is our house, too.

FRANCOIS

Well, your house.

MARIA

I think of it as our house.

FRANCOIS (to Maria)
I think of it as your house.

JONATHAN
I think of it as my house.

MARIA (to Jonathan)
I think of it as your house, too.

JONATHAN
Forget it, Ariel and I will leave.

MARIA
I won't hear of it.

JONATHAN
I don't think we can all stay....

[Frank enters carrying a suitcase,
and snow shoes.]

FRANK
Maria!

MARIA
Frank!

FRANK
Francois!

FRANCOIS
Hello, Frank.

JONATHAN
Ariel, this is my father.

FRANK
Jonathan!

ARIEL

Hi.

FRANK

How do you do?

MARIA

Frank, I didn't think you would be here.

FRANK

No. No. You wouldn't. I mean you didn't
and I don't know why you would.

MARIA

No, I didn't.

FRANK

I came just to get away
to be alone
to have some time by myself

FRANCOIS

after the Christmas holidays with all the parties

FRANK

to have a little quiet time as it were.

MARIA

Of course. It's just that you said you wanted to hear some music.

FRANK

Music?

MARIA

Mozart. Or Puccini. I don't know. At Carnegie Hall?

FRANK

Oh, yes.

MARIA

So, of course, I thought....

FRANK

Of course. And yet, I thought:

ARIEL

a chance to be alone.

FRANK

Exactly.

[Edmund enters,
carrying a suitcase
and ice skates,
having come, as arranged, to be with Frank.]

EDMUND

Oh, Frank, you're already here,
I wondered....

Oh, Maria.

MARIA

Hello, Edmund.

EDMUND

Francois.

JONATHAN

Edmund.

EDMUND

Jonathan.

FRANCOIS

Edmund.

[silence]

EDMUND

Lovely. We know who we are.
And who is this?

JONATHAN

This is Ariel.

EDMUND

Hello, Ariel.

ARIEL

Hello.

FRANK

So!

FRANCOIS

Well

MARIA

we are all here.

FRANK

We didn't know you would be here.

MARIA

No.

FRANCOIS

No.

EDMUND

No.

JONATHAN

We didn't.

ARIEL

No.

FRANK

I see you've brought your ice skates, Edmund.

EDMUND

And you have snow shoes?

FRANK

Yes, well, you know I don't skate.

MARIA

What's the fun of snow shoes,
it just seems like hard trekking to me!

FRANCOIS

Well, what's the fun of snow?

EDMUND

What's the fun of winter?

FRANK

What's the fun of the whole fucking four seasons except for the occasional, rare peaceful summer afternoon when you can sit on the porch completely alone and have a gin and tonic by yourself?

[silence]

ARIEL

The truth is:
I love all the seasons.

FRANCOIS

Do you?

EDMUND

How lovely.

MARIA

I think, when a person is in love
she does love all the seasons.

FRANCOIS

And what did you think you might do?
I see you've brought your skis.

ARIEL

What do I want to do?

FRANCOIS

Yes.

ARIEL

You mean now?

FRANCOIS

Yes. Or on New Year's Eve.

ARIEL

On New Year's Eve, or in the New Year I guess
or at least before I die
I want to go to all the strange, distant places in the world
to China and Afghanistan and Uzbekistan
geographically, I mean, actually in the real world
and also in Jonathan's heart and in our hearts together
to explore the whole world before I die
so that I'm not up in the ether somewhere
looking back at the earth
and saying
oh, that was my only life on earth
and I hardly got to know it at all
and I want it to be just with Jonathan
and no one else
so that I'm not lost
and adrift in the world
disoriented, disconnected,
not knowing where I belong.

FRANK

That's very charming.

MARIA
Perfect.

FRANCOIS
Absolutely right.

FRANK
I'm happy for you.
Happy for Jonathan, and for you.

EDMUND
Who could hope for anything more?

FRANCOIS
For two people to be in love
and to have such a longing for such faithfulness
to one another
this is what we all hope for
and this young woman, Jonathan,
you are such a lucky young man
to have found already a woman with such an openness to love
and to life and to the world
to speak so directly from the heart
not afraid if someone thinks, oh
she is a bit naive or a little sentimental
no,
to be brave
not to care if she seems foolish
to put her heart out into the world
she is a very special person
so attuned to every little breath of life
so perceptive and delicate
such a sensitive vessel
an exquisite person really
if such a thing may be said about another human being these days.

[silence]

MARIA

Are you in love with this young woman, Francois?

FRANCOIS

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

You speak of her with such how would you say.

Have you known this young woman before?

FRANCOIS

Before when?

MARIA

Before today.

FRANCOIS

No, no, no, of course not.

I meet her at this moment

but anyone can tell

she is a very special soul.

MARIA

You can tell that on first encounter?

FRANCOIS

Well, yes.

I feel I have known her all my life.

MARIA

You do!

JONATHAN

Ariel, have you known Francois before today?

ARIEL

Are you kidding?

MARIA

He greets you with such how would you say,
such enthusiasm
such warmth
such knowingness.
And he is, after all,
as they say:
well-known.

FRANCOIS

What does this mean: well-known?

MARIA

I'm making no judgment
this is who you are
and if you are the sort of despicable person
who can't keep himself from women
therefore,
I am making no judgment
this is who you are.

FRANCOIS

You are so I don't know,
practically a paranoid schizophrenic with your suspiciousness.
One greets young love.
So full of hope.
So full of, I don't know,
one doesn't say innocence any more these days,
and yet....a certain
lack of experience, I suppose one could say,
not that, of course,
a lack of experience
deprives one of wisdom
or even maturity
I mean, love: it knows no age really. Or anything else.
Love of any kind is a wonderful thing.

EDMUND

One is always happy to see another person in love.

FRANK

Love is the very balm of existence.

EDMUND

The world can't do without it.

MARIA

And yet, in fact, it seems you know her.

FRANCOIS

What would it matter if we did know one another?

JONATHAN & MARIA

What would it matter?

FRANCOIS

People know one another

People have known one another in the past

People have never never known anyone in the past

this is how people are

and this is good

for people to have had experience of life

to bring to another person not ignorance

but knowledge

the experience they have had of the world

we are not all virgins!

We don't even want to be virgins!

JONATHAN

Is this true

what he says?

ARIEL

That we are not all virgins?

JONATHAN

That he has known you?

ARIEL

Are you crazy?

FRANCOIS

I am only saying

it would not be bad if we had known one another in the past.

JONATHAN

Oh. I understand.

It seems you're not denying it.

FRANCOIS

I would not dignify it with a denial.

Of course I am denying it.

But I do not make denials

I am not going to base my life on denials!

This is like mother like son with the paranoid schizophrenia.

ARIEL

It's the same for me, too.

JONATHAN

What is?

ARIEL

What he said:

exactly what he said.

I'm not going to spend my life
defending myself against wild talk.

I'm just introduced to these people for the first time
and the first thing you do is accuse me
of having had a love affair with one of them?

Is this how it's going to be for us?

JONATHAN

But this is not normal.

Normally I would never ask you such a question.

But this is my mother's lover!

ARIEL

What does that have to do with me?

JONATHAN

It has to do with both of us!

[she turns and runs out]

JONATHAN

Ariel!

[he turns to the others]

We were going to be engaged!

MARIA

Engaged!

JONATHAN

That's why I brought her here,
to be alone,
so that I could propose to her on New Year's Eve.

MARIA

How wonderful!

JONATHAN

And now look what's happened!

BERTHA

People! People! Quickly!
Help! Hilda she is drowning!

[Bertha, an elderly woman,
comes running through the woods to the house.]

FRANK

What?

BERTHA (still running into the house)

We were ice fishing
and we had our lunch with us
by the side of the what, you know,
the hole you fish through
and she reached for a sandwich
and fell through the hole
and I couldn't reach her
and she has disappeared
disappeared under the ice.

FRANK

My God. We'll come right now.
Let's get a rope.

EDMUND

Or a pole, a ski pole.

[everyone is rushing around
gathering up their athletic equipment,
everyone talking at once]

FRANCOIS

Or a ski, a ski is even longer than a ski pole.
I have a ski.

MARIA

Blankets. Blankets.
We'll take some blankets from the bed.

JONATHAN [to the others as they rush around]

If you take a snow shoe
you can break your way through the ice
because she might have floated away from the hole
and you'll need to open up more water.

HILDA

Bertha! What the hell do you mean
running away and leaving me there!

[Hilda, another elderly woman,
soaking wet, dripping water,
enters fast, shivering.]

BERTHA
Hilda!

HILDA
I'm freezing my butt off
you leave me to drown.
What the hell is going on
you had a tea party you had to get to?

BERTHA
Oh, Hilda, I'm so happy.
I'm so happy.

JONATHAN
Are you the drowning person?

BERTHA [weeping]
I thought you had drowned.
I thought you were gone forever.
I thought I would never find you.
Oh, god, I am so happy.

HILDA
What the hell happened?
Did you push me in?
Did you think you'd have a little joke?

BERTHA
Of course I didn't push you in.

HILDA
Did you think you'd be better off without me?
Doesn't anyone have a blanket?
I'm freezing my butt off and you're standing there!

BERTHA

Excuse her.

Hilda, she is a frank talker.

HILDA

What the hell, I just fell through the ice,
you expect some chitchat?

BERTHA

I came to get help.

JONATHAN

Who is this?

Is this a neighbor?

HILDA

A neighbor, yes!

And wouldn't you think there would be a little neighborly offer
of some coffee or hot chocolate.

MARIA

Oh, of course. I'm sorry.

[Maria rushes out.

Others help Hilda into a chair,
pile blankets and overcoats over her.]

HILDA

I don't mean to complain.

Ordinarily I'm not such a bitch
but I just fell in the water and damn near drowned.

FRANCOIS

Here, let's wrap you in a blanket.

FRANK

And put this coat on as well.

You can't be too warm after such a chill.

EDMUND

Have my sweater.

Let's put this around your feet.

HILDA

There you are, Bertha.

You've been wishing I were dead,
you almost had your wish.

BERTHA (weeping)

Hilda, how can you say such a thing!

FRANK

We should get you into a hot bath really.

HILDA

She thinks if she had me out of the way
she could take up with Ursula.

BERTHA

I don't.

EDMUND

Would you like a hot bath?

HILDA

You do.

You think I don't notice?

I hear you talking to her on the phone
the way you giggle
the way you are excited when she calls.
Are you ever excited when I call home?
No.

EDMUND [to Frank]

I could run the bath.

HILDA

Do you ever giggle when I say things?

No.

What do I do that pleases you?

BERTHA

Every day you are alive pleases me.

HILDA

What is that?

Yes, for sure, I think you like me,

I think I am a good companion for you,

you like to sit with me by the fire after dinner

we can talk

we can say, oh, I read this book,

I saw this television show,

oh?

and how was that?

But as for thrills,

I don't think you feel them from me.

You don't think my jokes are funny.

You don't think what I have to say is worth thinking about.

Your first instinct, everything I say,

is to disagree,

not to think,

the way you do with Ursula,

oh, this is an interesting insight

I'd never thought about that,

don't you think that's amazing, Hilda?

No. No, I don't.

I think she's a dumbkopf.

No one else would give her the time of day.

[Maria returns with coffee.]

MARIA

Here.

HILDA

Thank you.

[Silence.]

BERTHA

I love you, Hilda.

I thought I myself would die if I had lost you.

I can't live without you.

FRANK

You know, one doesn't want to seize on any little thing

some doubt one has of another's love

or faithfulness

and blow it up.

Otherwise there's no end to it.

There's something every day you can make a case out of
if you choose.

JONATHAN

Unless it's clear someone is being unfaithful to you

and then you don't want to wander around oblivious

to the fact that you are being betrayed behind your back.

FRANK

Still, as a grownup

one has to let the little things pass

even if sometimes some little rumor might possibly be true

one has to let it pass for the sake of a larger love.

JONATHAN

If sometimes some rumor might be true?

FRANK

I'm not saying whether it is or it isn't.

I'm only saying

as man to man

you keep your eye on the goal line
you don't let yourself get caught up
in the details along the way.

JONATHAN

Unless, in fact, you can easily hear in the other person's voice
that she hates you.

As I could hear when Ariel spoke to me.

And then things are clear enough.

FRANK

I didn't hear that.

JONATHAN

Did you hear the way she spoke to me?

FRANK

No.

JONATHAN

The contempt in her voice.

FRANK

No.

JONATHAN

The scorn.

FRANCOIS

I didn't notice it.

FRANK

No.

FRANCOIS

This jealousy and suspicion,
it's like a rising tide,
it could swamp all boats.

JONATHAN

Did you hear her say:
"I'm not going to spend my life
defending myself against wild talk."

FRANCOIS

Perhaps it was a little wild.

JONATHAN

The sneering.
The derision in her voice.

FRANK

I didn't notice it.

JONATHAN

I did.

FRANCOIS

Still, seizing on these things—
sometimes women speak this way
even if in this case she didn't
sometimes they do
possibly sometimes we deserve it I don't know
but one lets it pass
water off a dog's back
if one wants to change the mood
and move on toward making love.

JONATHAN

I don't think, anyway,
that anyone is going to change the mood in this house
where all of you are in such a tangle with one another
that no one ever knows if they are standing on solid ground
and you come here
and create such an atmosphere
how could anyone ever propose marriage in this house?
Thank you, you people have ruined everything.

FRANCOIS

I don't think we have ruined everything.

I think you yourself might have ruined your own engagement

I don't know.

JONATHAN

Is that a fact?

Is that what you think?

[he picks up the little delicate desk chair and slams it down
and picks the chair up and slams it down again
and picks it up and grabs it in his arms
as though he would rip it in half;

and Jonathan struggles and struggles to pull the chair apart with his hands
and falls to the ground, wrestling with the chair,
and, kneeling on the ground, slams the chair over and over on the ground,
breaking its legs, breaking its back, smashing it to bits,
reducing it to wreckage.

And then he slowly gets up,
looks around at the others— who are all standing back, away from him—
and turns and leaves.

Silence.]

MARIA

We can fix it.

FRANK (looking at the chair)

I don't think so.

MARIA

We can have an engagement party for them
just the family
to show we are sorry and we care
and then they will feel relaxed and happy together

and everything will be perfectly all right
and then we can all just slip away and leave them alone here.

Unless, Francois, you would rather stay.

FRANCOIS

Stay?

MARIA

With Ariel.

FRANCOIS

Maria, why do you go on with this jealousy and suspicion
you see what it does
you see what it did.

MARIA

She is a beautiful girl
who would blame you?

FRANCOIS

No one would blame me,
and yet it seems you do.

MARIA

Of course I do!
Everyone knows who you are as a person.
Who can trust you?

FRANCOIS

Or it might be said:
who can trust you?

MARIA

Haven't I been faithful to you?

FRANCOIS

How can it be faithful to me
if you are married to Frank?

FRANK

Let's face it, Maria, you're not a faithful person.
You have many fine qualities
but you have never been a faithful person.

EDMUND

I didn't know Maria's faithfulness was such a concern to you.

FRANK

Of course it is!
She's my wife.
We had an understanding, Maria and I,
we might have the occasional flirtation

EDMUND

Flirtation, you say. Flirtation!

FRANK

because we are adults
and we know these things happen
but we wanted to be faithful to one another fundamentally
to have a lasting marriage
and so we might have our flings

EDMUND

Flings!

FRANK

but never, never where we live
or with anyone the other one knows
but always out of town.
And I know Francois.

MARIA

You've known Francois for years.

FRANK

That's what I mean.

MARIA

So why do you make an issue of it now?
You have Edmund for your special friend.

FRANK

You had Francois first.

MARIA

And now you have Edmund.

FRANK

And now I have Edmund—
What of that?

EDMUND

What of that?

MARIA

What are we arguing about?
Are we in a tizzy about chronology?
Now today in the present moment
you are not faithful to me!

EDMUND

Or to me either.
Even now after all these years
Maria remains first in your heart.
You know, Frank,
I can take your marriage,
your involvement with your children,
I understand
and I think it is a good thing and a fine thing
and shows what a good heart you have
but always, when it comes down to it,
if she is in trouble, or she needs something,
Maria is first in your heart
and
I need to be first in someone's life.

[he leaves,
not in anger, but in pain]

FRANK [to Maria]
And so do I, to be candid.

[he leaves—in a different direction—
also not in anger, but in pain]

MARIA
And so do I.

FRANCOIS
Well,
so do I.

HILDA
Who doesn't?

BERTHA
Come, Hilda,
we will get you into a hot tub.

HILDA
Don't think you can get into a hottub with me now, Bertha.
[getting up to leave]
You think I'm easy.

BERTHA
I don't think you're easy, Hilda.

HILDA
Oh, yes, yes you do, you think I'm easy,
but a person doesn't forget
if you leave them in the icy water to drown.

[she leaves, Bertha following]

BERTHA

I didn't leave you, Hilda.
I would never leave you.
I went for help
because
let's face it
when you're soaking wet
as you well know
nobody can lift you by themselves.

[A love song:

Hahn: L'Heure Exquise from In Love With Love

We listen for a few moments, and then:

Francois sits down with a stack of paper,
writes something on a piece of paper,
lights the paper on fire with his cigarette lighter,
and watches it burn before he drops it to the floor.

He writes something on another piece of paper,
and lights it on fire.

Maria watches him for a while before she speaks.]

MARIA

What are you doing?

FRANCOIS

I am writing down my memories of you
and lighting them on fire
one by one
and when the last one is burned up
you will be gone from my heart.

MARIA

This is lunatic.
You can't do this.

FRANCOIS

Oh yes, I can.

I can't get rid of all my memories of you all at once
but I can do it one at a time
and, at the same time, it gives you fair warning.
You can see the countdown to the end.

Or, you have an option
you can go away with me
and I'll stop burning up my memories.

MARIA

I can't go away, this is my house.

FRANCOIS

And so?

MARIA

It's my house, I live here.
I can't leave.

FRANCOIS

And I can't go on.

MARIA

Why not?

FRANCOIS

Because how it is:
when you feel you might be losing me
as you have felt over these Christmas holidays
then you run to me
and we make love
over and over and over again
until we are exhausted
and you feel sure that you have me again
and so that makes you feel confident
that you can drop me and go back to Frank
because he is your husband and

by then, you are afraid he doesn't love you any more
because he is jealous
or he is angry
or he feels lost or left out
and so you go back to him
and I guess you make love to him over and over and over
until he feels reassured
and I am, by this time, crazy because you have dumped me
and so you run back to me
and you make love with me over and over and over again
until you have me again
and then you dump me again.

So it turns out,
the way to keep you
is to make you feel anxious and uncertain
and if I show my love for you
I lose you.

So I have to behave backwards:
if I love you I have to reject you,
and if I don't love you I should seem to love you,
so that I have to live an opposite life
and I can never show you the love I really feel for you
because if I do, I will lose you,
and this is what people call crazy
and if you do it and do it over and over and over
you become crazy.

Because our whole love for one another
is not just a thousand times coming together
but also a thousand rejections.

Not to mention you
because you are already crazy
and anxious
running back and forth
never doing what you might want to do
but only going where anxiety drives you
back and forth back and forth
like a ping pong ball.

Frank feels OK: ping

Francois feels OK: pong

Frank feels OK: ping.
So this can't go on
or we will all end up in the hospital with padded walls.
So I am being decisive.

MARIA
No.

FRANCOIS
Yes.

MARIA
No.
Francois, you know you are the only one I love.

FRANCOIS
You say this and you say this
and yet
how can you say this?

MARIA
Because you know it's true.
I belong to you.
My heart belongs to you.

FRANCOIS
And yet you go home to Frank
and you sleep with Frank.

MARIA
Only on Friday nights.

[silence]

FRANCOIS
Only on Friday nights?
What do you mean?

You didn't tell me this.
You sleep with him on Friday nights?

Why on Friday nights?

MARIA
I wouldn't know.
That's all.
That's how it always has been.
This is our bargain.

FRANCOIS
You trade a home for sex?

MARIA
Certainly not.
I have a home.
Frank lives there.
And that's what Frank wishes
and because I love him in a way, you know,
as one loves a husband
that's how it is.

[Frank has returned
to have the last word with Maria.]

FRANCOIS
So then
that's what I am saying:
you love him.

MARIA
Not the way I love you
because when I see you I quiver.

FRANK
I beg your pardon.

FRANCOIS

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

I quiver

because even if you are a bad person

you are an eager person

you are an enthusiastic person

so

I love you.

FRANCOIS

You sleep with him every Friday night?

MARIA

You shouldn't get so attached to that.

It's nothing.

FRANCOIS

How can I get it out of my mind?

Why do you tell me this?

Now it's worse than I imagined.

So.

That's it,

you are going to have to choose.

FRANK

I beg your pardon.

MARIA

Try to be a mature person, Francois.

How can I choose?

FRANCOIS

How can you not?

MARIA

Frank.

He is a good person.

And I wouldn't want to give him pain
(any more than I need to).

We have children together.

We are still our own family
and you can never leave your family.

If you love me

you can understand that.

And want me to be happy.

And it's such a little thing

it means nothing to us

but to Frank, you know,

it's important.

FRANCOIS

Ah, to Frank, it is important!

FRANK

I beg your pardon.

FRANCOIS

No. No.

Excuse me.

I am leaving.

I am leaving.

I am going for a walk in the ice and snow.

Because nothing is important to me!

[he leaves]

MARIA

The point is

of course we did have an out of town understanding
until you accused me of being a slut with that puppeteer
in New Hampshire.

FRANK

I'm sure I never said quite that.

MARIA

Oh, yes, you did.

FRANK

I think what I said was you had become known
as a person who would sleep with anyone.

MARIA

I was younger then.

FRANK

Yes?

MARIA

I had an appetite for life, Frank!

FRANK

Not for the whole of life, it seems.

MARIA

Yes. The whole of life.

FRANK

The whole of life includes other things
such as the paradox of faithfulness and freedom.

MARIA

The what?

FRANK

The difficulty of being both faithful
and still discovering freely and completely
what it is to be a human being.

MARIA

I couldn't do both at the same time.
It was too much.

FRANK

You were doing neither one.

MARIA

What are you saying?
I thought I was doing too much freedom.

FRANK

You were an addict, Maria,
not a free person.
It's no different than if all you liked in life was
reading novels
or eating lettuce
and you let everything else fall by the wayside
and you think you're alive
because you embrace your novels or your lettuce
but you're not
you're not completely alive.

MARIA

I thought I was.
I thought I should be.
I thought this was my only chance to be alive.

Sometimes a woman likes sex, Frank,
and not always something gentle and considerate
sometimes a little wild or it could be ridiculous
like a ride on the handlebars of a bicycle
and therefore she will do something wrong to have this
and not be very proud of having done it
but not be needing a lecture afterwards
from a person pretending to be a sort of moral authority
or even actually being a sort of moral authority
but even if he is
being a little boring and depressing because of it

a little like a heavy thing
as much as she hates to say it
because she may feel this person is a really good person
deep down
deeply good and kind and considerate
and deserving real love in return because of that
not just some stiffling person who ought to be snuffed
but in his own way
even if it is not her way
in his own way even lovable
but possibly lovable by someone else.

And also I love you, Frank.

FRANK

No.

MARIA

Yes.

FRANK

I don't mean to just dwell all the time
on some narrow aspect of our relationship
because it's true you've been steadfast with me
a good partner in life
solid and considerate

MARIA

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

Or, maybe not entirely considerate,
in a way taking advantage of me
thinking of me as the provider
never thinking what performing that role cost me
or what else I might have wished to do with my life
but, most of all,
I never felt you loved me
really loved me.

MARIA

I don't even understand what you mean.
I never promised to love you
in some romantic way.

FRANK

What other way is there?

MARIA

I don't even understand
what it is you have in mind
to love in the way you mean.

[Edmund has entered,
to speak with Frank.]

FRANK

The love I mean is to love someone else completely
to be unable to stop yourself
to be so excited by them and carried away
so in love with how they are
or what they do
you just can't help loving them
cherishing them
enjoying them.

[silence]

And you see,
even now,
you don't rush in to say, oh, but I did, I do.

[silence]

And, finally,
I've come to feel that living with you
I'm living alone

isolated
in a cold world,
all by myself.

MARIA
I'm sorry.
So do I really.

FRANK
Still,
I feel such a bond with you
it seems that every day when I get up in the morning
I can't decide whether I most want to hurt you
or give you something.

MARIA [gently]
I know.

FRANK
I can't go on like this

MARIA
Neither can I.

[she leaves, in sorrow]

EDMUND
You say you can't go on,
but you always do go on.

Because how it is:
when you feel you might be losing me
as you have felt over these Christmas holidays
then you run to me
and we make love
over and over and over again
until we are exhausted
and you feel sure that you have me again
and so that makes you feel confident

that you can drop me and go back to Maria
because she is your wife and
by then, you are afraid she doesn't love you any more
because she is jealous
or she is angry
or she feels lost or left out
and so you go back to her
and I guess you make love to her over and over and over
until she feels reassured
and I am, by this time, crazy because you have dumped me
and so you run back to me
and you make love with me over and over and over again
until you have me again
and then you dump me again.
So it turns out,
the way to keep you
is to make you feel anxious and uncertain
and if I show my love for you
I lose you.
So I have to behave backwards:
if I love you I have to reject you,
and if I don't love you I should seem to love you,
so that I have to live an opposite life
and I can never show you the love I really feel for you
because if I do, I will lose you,
and this is what people call crazy
and if you do it and do it over and over and over
you become crazy.
Because our whole love for one another
is not just a thousand times coming together
but also a thousand rejections.
Not to mention you
because you are already crazy
and anxious
running back and forth
never doing what you might want to do
but only going where anxiety drives you
back and forth back and forth
like a ping pong ball.

Edmund feels OK: ping
Maria feels OK: pong
Edmund feels OK: ping.
So this can't go on
or we will all end up in the hospital with padded walls.
So I am being decisive.

FRANK
No.

EDMUND
Yes.

FRANK
No.
Edmund, you know you are the only one I love
why do you be idiotic about Maria
when you know she doesn't matter to us.

EDMUND
How can you say this?

FRANK
Because you know it's true.

EDMUND
I think you are lying to me, Frank.
You are always lying to me
because you wish something would be true
but it isn't.
You are a weak spineless person, Frank,
feckless, feeble and ineffective.

But I love you like a cicada.

FRANK
A cicada?

EDMUND

Yes.

FRANK

Like a grasshopper you mean?

EDMUND

Do you know what a cicada is?

FRANK

I thought I did.

EDMUND

There was a time long ago, in prehistoric times
when cicadas were human beings
back before the Muses were born.
And then when the Muses were born
and song came into being
some of these human creatures were so taken by the pleasure of it
that they sang and sang and sang.
And they forgot to eat or drink
they just sang and sang
and so,
before they knew it,
they died.

And from those human creatures a new species came into being
the cicadas
and they were given this special gift from the Muses:
that from the time they are born
they need no nourishment
they just sing continuously
caught forever in the pleasure of the moment
without eating or drinking
until they die.

This is the story of love.
If you stay there forever in that place
you die of it.

That's why people
can't stay in love.

But that's how I've loved you.
And how I love you now.
And how I always will.

I thought you were a person who would give yourself entirely to me
you said you were the sort of person who
if you were betrayed in love
you would throw rocks
through the window of the person who betrayed you
and I called up all my old lovers when we got together
and said I was no longer available
but you
you
you insisted your family was your family
and your friends were your friends
and there was no reason to drop family and friends
because it had nothing to do with love affairs
and friendships don't have to end when you stop sleeping with someone
and when I told you I felt jealous
however irrational that was
you said you couldn't be controlled by my irrationality
and you would continue to see your friends
what if I didn't
that was my choice
so when I said then I would see my old lovers
you said, why would you do that, you said you didn't want to
I said I will do it if you do
you said that was infantile
I was doing it just to get back at you
whereas you were doing it because you wanted to do it
and I said then I want to do it, too, I always wanted to do it
and you said you never wanted to do it

I said I got the idea from you, I think it is a good idea
I will do it, too
and you said, if you do, I will leave you without thinking twice about it
you will leave me, I said
you will leave me?
yes, you said,
because you are an adolescent
and I only want a relationship with an adult, you said,
so I said, fine, fine, forget it
see whoever you want
have your marriage if that's what you want!!!

[Frank and Edmund look at one another for a moment.
Music comes up:
music from a performance they were to go to
or that they went to in the past—
Una Furtiva Lagrima from Donizetti's L'Elisir d'Amore.

The two of them listen for a few moments,
looking at one another,
and then Edmund goes offstage for a moment
and returns with a door on wheels.
He wheels it out,
looks at Frank,
and slams the door (which is miked to resonate).

Frank looks at the door,
looks at Edmund,
looks at the door,
walks over and slams the door.

Edmund slams the door.

Frank turns and leaves.

Edmund slams the door.

Frank returns and slams the door and leaves.

Maria enters and slams the door.

A performance piece of opera and door slamming.

All the other family members (but not Hilda or Bertha)
come out and slam the door in turn
over and over
watching one another do it

and, by the end of the music,
they are finally all on stage together,
gathered around the door.]

FRANCOIS

You see, Jonathan,
this feeling of jealousy
or the feeling of having been betrayed
or thinking you are not loved
or not loved enough
that you are not first in another's heart

you can't indulge it
because, if you do,
the next thing you know
you are blowing up the world
so at a point
you stop yourself
you say,
good
I am loved
of course I am loved
I am not a cockroach
I am a loveable person
and for sure somebody loves me
and so, here is this lovely young person
who loves you

JONATHAN

Who is that?

FRANCOIS

Ariel.

JONATHAN

She doesn't love me.

She hates me.

She speaks to me with such hatred in her voice.

Do you know what she is doing now?

FRANCOIS

No, I don't.

JONATHAN

She is getting her stuff together.

Because she is leaving.

And as far as I'm concerned

she can't leave too soon.

And who are you to lecture me, anyway,

or even speak to me?

MARIA

How can she be leaving?

JONATHAN

Because she doesn't love me.

And probably because she is sick of you.

FRANK

I don't think she can be sick of your mother, Jonathan.

What has your mother done wrong?

JONATHAN

Starting out with being here

and then being here with Francois.

FRANCOIS

And, let's be honest:

it was Maria who set this whole hurricane off

with her suspicions about Ariel and me.

[When we didn't notice,
Bob, a big scary-looking guy, entered,
and stands to one side.]

MARIA

I set it off?

I think you were the one who set off the hurricane.

FRANCOIS

I set off nothing. I was living my life as an innocent person.

JONATHAN

But really, finally, mother,
to be honest

I'm grateful that you did it
because then I could see just what Ariel thinks of me deep down
before I almost proposed to her.

FRANCOIS

It's very soon in life for you to know what she feels
deep down.

FRANK

It took me thirty years.

MARIA

For what?

FRANK

To discover how you feel about me deep down.

BOB

Excuse me.

FRANK

Yes?

BOB

I've brought the composter.

FRANK

The composter?

Did we order a composter?

MARIA

I don't remember ordering a composter.

BOB

Someone ordered a composter.

FRANK

I don't think so.

BOB

I have the order form right here.

MARIA

Begging your pardon, but

I don't think this is the perfect moment to....

BOB

The thing is

I have just brought this composter

on the back of my snowmobile

an hour out from the shop

and now it will be an hour back to the shop through the snow

and I'll be needing someone to sign for the composter

before I leave.

FRANCOIS

And yet, to be fair,

I'm not sure if....

EDMUND

No one wants a composter now!

This is the middle of winter!

BOB

I think there's someone here who can sign for it.
You could sign for it.

EDMUND

Yes. Fine. Of course.
I could sign for it.
Let me have it.

[Bob gives him the clipboard with the form to sign.]

You know,
there is no one here by this name.

BOB

What name?

EDMUND

Bevington.

MARIA

Oh, the Bevingtons live down the beach a few miles.

BOB

Do they?

MARIA

Yes. Don't they, Frank?

FRANK

A couple of miles, I think.
In the gray house.

MARIA

The white house.

FRANK

I would call it gray.

JONATHAN

Do you mean where David Bevington lives?

MARIA

Yes, dear, there's not another Bevington.

JONATHAN

That's the brownish house,
it's like three miles down.

MARIA

I don't think so.

JONATHAN

I know where David lives, mother.

FRANK

In any case:

[smiles in a friendly way]

Not far.

BOB

I went by there, and there was no one home.

So you folks can take the composter over to the Bevingtons
when they come back up in the summer.

EDMUND

Fine.

BOB

Just sign right here.

EDMUND

Fine. No problem.

BOB [while Edmund is signing]

I wasn't sure anyone would be here between Christmas and New Year's.
I took a chance.

EDMUND

Yes, yes, you did.

BOB

What are you folks doing here
if you don't mind my asking?

JONATHAN

Oh, you know, it's complicated.

BOB

I'm not stupid.

JONATHAN

It's just,
you know....a private matter.

[silence]

I came out with my friend Ariel
hoping for a time alone....
And then my family showed up,
and their friends
and now suddenly it seems
Ariel has had an affair with my mother's lover

[a gesture toward Francois]

BOB

Right.

JONATHAN

And I really don't understand how she could do this.

BOB

And with a man your mother's age.

JONATHAN

Almost my mother's age.

BOB

Right. People are not faithful, that's how it is.
You know what they say.

JONATHAN

No. No, I don't what they say.

BOB

What they say is
once you have your love,
you lose interest.

JONATHAN

Who says that?

BOB

Everyone says that.
Sappho.
Everyone.
I've done some reading about this, because
you know,

I've had some time.

And what you find is, in Greek,
what eros means is a desire for something that is missing.
And, once it is no longer missing,
you no longer have the desire.
That's eros.

FRANK

That's completely stupid.

BOB

That's what the word means
in Greek.
What Plato said was

desire can only be for something that is lacking.
If you don't lack it,
you can't desire it.

MARIA

You mean a person can't love another person?

BOB

Can't keep loving another person.

EDMUND

I think that's true.

FRANCOIS

I've noticed that myself.

JONATHAN

I think that must be it.

BOB

And the Greeks thought:
people can't help themselves.
That's why people talk about falling in love,
because they didn't choose to step into love,
you never hear of someone who stepped into love,
they fell, they plunged, they lost themselves.

MARIA

I don't think the Greeks knew much about love.

BOB

Why do you say that?

MARIA

I've seen Greek plays, you know.
There's not a single one that's a love story.

BOB

Every single one of them is a love story.

MARIA

Not one.

They're all about killing your mother and killing your father.

BOB

Because the thing that starts everything is:

Helen

falls in love with Paris,

and he takes her

to Troy,

and then Helen's husband,

to get her back,

starts the Trojan war,

and then Agamemnon,

to get the favor of the gods for the war,

has to sacrifice his own daughter,

as a result of which Agamemnon's wife

Clytemnestra

kills him,

and their son Orestes

murders Clytemnestra—

all the murders and wreckage and ruin of Greece

comes from a love story.

MARIA

Really.

BOB

Why do people kill each other all the time

if it isn't because of love gone wrong

or hurt feelings

feeling someone was disrespected

or despised

or deprived of what should have been his

treated fairly

as a good person, given in return what he himself gave

to the other person

then maybe it would be something bad would not have happened.

Or you could say in a more general way

if society itself had provided
which is to say, been more generous,
which is to say, loving
maybe you would not be seeing certain social behaviors.
You could say
economic exploitation itself is a lack of social love
where selfishness has made love difficult to give
or possessiveness or a fear of loss has overpowered love
and when you see a person dying of poverty
of the lack of medical care
this is a symptom of perversion
of the withholding of love
or the positive imposition of sadistic impulses
and thus, as you can see,
it is not just the whips and chains of sadists and masochists in nightclubs
that you might call perverse
but the practice of politics altogether
when it deprives people of the life-giving sustenance they need.

JONATHAN

Oh, right, well, sure, OK, I can accept that.

FRANCOIS

This could be true.

BOB

This is how it is to be a human being.

You've heard of Jeffrey Dahmer.

JONATHAN

Sure.

BOB

That's how it is if love goes wrong.

JONATHAN (laughing easily)

I hope I'm not going to kill someone.

BOB

How do you know?

JONATHAN

I'm not that sort of person.

BOB

Maybe you don't know what sort of person you are
until you do something
and then you see what sort of person you are.

Right. Nice chatting.

But I'm going to have to get back to the shop.

I can't just be staying here socializing with you people all day.

EDMUND

No.

Of course.

Nice chatting.

[Ariel has entered,
wearing a winter coat and scarf and knitted cap
and carrying her cross country skis.]

BOB

Enjoy that composter!

[he leaves]

ARIEL

I've called for a tow truck.

MARIA

A tow truck?

ARIEL

Because the car is stuck in the snow.

MARIA

But that's okay.

We don't need the car.

ARIEL

I'm leaving.

This is not fun for me.

I am not having a good time.

I don't feel happy.

So I am leaving.

FRANCOIS

Well, that's not a reason to leave.

That was never a reason to leave.

For anybody.

MARIA

Ariel, dear,

if we've been

somehow

to blame for your having a bad time

you know, we'll have a party or dinner

or cocktails

FRANK

Would you like a cocktail?

MARIA

Or we will all leave

and leave you and Jonathan alone here in the house together

because we never meant to spoil your time together.

JONATHAN

We don't want to be together now.

MARIA

Don't be silly. Of course you do.

JONATHAN

We don't.

FRANK

I'm sure you do.

EDMUND

People always like to be together.

ARIEL

We never want to see one another again.

MARIA

Now then, I know Jonathan wants to see you again.

I speak as his mother.

JONATHAN

Don't speak as my mother, mother.

Ariel has spoken to me with such loathing

I hope I will never ever see her again.

ARIEL

And you have spoken to be with such

superiority

such loftiness

as though you were my father

reprimanding me

for what?

You're such a stupid dick.

JONATHAN

There.

MARIA

She doesn't mean it the way it sounds.

FRANCOIS

You know, your mother speaks to me this way all the time.

FRANK

And to me.

FRANCOIS

She doesn't mean it really.
Well, she means it, of course,
but only for the moment
and then a moment later
she means something else
this is how it is to be a human being
we have feelings
they come and go
and when we are in love
we learn to weather it

JONATHAN

It's easy for you to say.

[everyone speaks at once]

FRANCOIS

No. No, it isn't.

FRANK

No.

EDMUND

It never has been.

MARIA

No, it's not easy.

FRANCOIS

But, it's the way it is.
You can't stop living
just because you run into a little obstacle along your path.

And here, you see,
a moment ago,
everyone was suspicious of me
thinking I had somehow had some relationship with Ariel in the past
thinking I am that sort of person
who would have some sort of illicit love affair
and now
poof
that's all in the past and forgotten.

[Doctor Jaqueline Benoit enters.]

JAQUELINE
I beg your pardon.
I am looking for Hilda Braunschweiger.

FRANK
And you are?

JAQUELINE
I am going to be called Doctor Jaqueline Benoit.
I had the phone call
that Ms. Braunschweiger has had the severe chill and needs the doctor?

FRANK
You are a medical doctor?

JAQUELINE
Oh, yes.

MARIA
And you're making a house call?

JAQUELINE
A house call I don't know.

MARIA
You are coming to the house
and not having the patient come to your office.

JAQUELINE

Ah, because I am the doctor without walls
and I happen to be here
because the snow she is not having the other doctors to be here.

FRANK

I see.

FRANCOIS

And you are visiting for the holiday?

JAQUELINE

Francois?

FRANCOIS

Yes?

JAQUELINE

You don't recognize me?

FRANCOIS

Ah!

Recognize you!

Recognize you!

Of course I recognize you!

Jaqueline!

JAQUELINE

I would hope so.

After this night in Zagreb.

FRANCOIS

Ah. Yes. Well.

[checking with Maria and the others]

That afternoon.

JAQUELINE

Yes, this afternoon and this night and this day.

FRANCOIS

The uncertainty of the political situation. No place to spend the night.

JAQUELINE

I like this hotel.

FRANCOIS

Yes, I mean, of course, we finally found a hotel
which we had to share, with...
so many others, refugees.

MARIA

The room?

JAQUELINE

The hotel.

MARIA

You mean there were other guests in the hotel.

JAQUELINE

Yes. Of course.

MARIA

Are you saying the two of you spent the night together?

JAQUELINE

In Zagreb.

MARIA

When was this?

FRANCOIS JAQUELINE

Oh, long ago. This spring last time.

FRANCOIS

It seems so long ago.

MARIA

Last spring?

FRANCOIS

It couldn't have been.

JAQUELINE

And then your wife took you away.

MARIA

Your wife?

What wife?

JAQUELINE

He had to go with her
because, although no longer they were close
as the lovers
and had not to make love in years before—
as I think I can know,
because of how it was to be with us
this afternoon and this night and this day—
his wife, she was ill
and he was devoted to her.
Very nice. Very gentle.
How is she, Francois?

FRANCOIS

Ah, she has passed away.

MARIA

She has passed away?

JAQUELINE

I'm sorry to hear this.

FRANCOIS

Yes, well....

JAQUELINE

But, does this mean you are now free?

Because, I don't, excuse me,

I am not with thinking,

I don't mean just to jump like this at you.

I am only thinking, perhaps you need the friend.

FRANCOIS

Yes, indeed, I do.

DOCTOR

And because you did say,
one day, when you are free,
you want to be with me.

MARIA

You are a pig, Francois.

FRANCOIS

Yes, it's true.

I am afraid it's true.

I am a pig.

I can't understand it.

MARIA

And on top of that
telling her you had a wife.

FRANCOIS

Except that, in a way,

I did have a wife

I mean,

even if,

in an official sense

she was someone else's wife.

JAQUELINE

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

He doesn't have a wife.

FRANK

He has my wife.

JAQUELINE

I have been waiting for you, Francois.

Waiting and waiting for you.

I thought—

the way you care for me—

I never know a man like you.

From the moment we make love

my life she has never been the same.

MARIA

He is a bad person.

FRANCOIS

You know, I have never pretended to be other than
a bad person

MARIA

And you are.

How you are:

it is not funny

it is not charming

FRANK

It's not even French, necessarily.

EDMUND

Or male even.

MARIA

No one is amused.

EDMUND

People are not going to forgive you
for being the person you are.

JAQUELINE

I am....I don't know.
I feel air in the head.

[she sits]

FRANCOIS

No, yes, I am,
here, let me help you,
it is not funny
it is not funny to me
I am a tormented individual
a sick person
from birth probably
you would know about this, being a doctor,
but also you know the way I have been socialized
perhaps I don't know
probably I was raised too permissively
or not
or not
it may be I was raised to be hypermasculine
and allowed to run and jump
and be rowdy
and even shove and wrestle
probably because there was recess
and there should not have been any recess.

I should have been forced to play with dolls
to bathe them and help them get dressed
I live a life of such confusion
sometimes I think I can't go on

MARIA
and then you do

FRANCOIS
and then I do and I regret it
because look at me
I am a wreck.

FRANK
No one feels sympathy for you, Francois.

FRANCOIS
Good. Good.
Everyone blames me.
And is this fair?
[to Maria]
Let's say it were you
let's say it would be a woman who did this
no one would think she is a pig

MARIA
I would never do this.

FRANCOIS
What?

MARIA
Have a fling with a woman in Zagreb.
Or a man.
This is not what women do
that's why they are not pigs.

FRANCOIS
Maybe it is not something you would do
but some woman might do it.

MARIA
No woman would do it.

FRANCOIS

How do you say no woman would do it?

JAQUELINE

I did it.

FRANCOIS

So you see.

MARIA

You are still a pig, Francois.

FRANK

I am ashamed to know you, Francois.

EDMUND

And yet, Frank,
let's not be the first one to cast a stone.

FRANK

Why do you say that?

MARIA

He is only saying:
because are you in such a position really to criticize others?

FRANK

Are you criticizing me for criticizing him?
And who are you to talk of casting stones?

EDMUND

She is only saying,
let's not be too quick to judge.

FRANK

But you are not too quick to judge me?

EDMUND

What are you saying?

What does he mean?

MARIA

He means you are judging him.

EDMUND

I am only saying perhaps he shouldn't judge Francois.

FRANK

And you are judging that I am judging him
and you judge me wrong for that.

JONATHAN

Always this bickering and bickering.

FRANCOIS

You will see
in a relationship that lasts
people bicker.

JONATHAN

Are you saying I know nothing about
how to conduct a long term relationship?

FRANCOIS

I am only saying that perhaps
you've not had one
and so possibly you don't know.

JONATHAN

I don't think you should be casting stones at me.

FRANCOIS

Good. Good.

So.

I am out of here.

JAQUELINE

I am out of here, too.

That's it to me.

No problem.

I know if I am not to be wanted.

I know if I am to be neglecting and ignoring.

I am not a person without a sense of my own worth of myself.

I am to be out.

[they are all leaving at once,
all in different directions,
as, at the same time, they are all speaking at once:]

FRANK

So am I if it comes to that!

FRANCOIS

I've had enough!

JAQUELINE

Let the chilly woman suck it up!

MARIA

I am leaving, too, Francois,

and when I leave,

don't think I am coming back.

FRANCOIS

No, don't come back. Don't.

Because I am not coming back either!

FRANK

I am finished with trying and trying and trying

and no one cares!

ARIEL

This is a total nightmare!
And you bring me here to this place?
Why did you bring me here?

JONATHAN

I thought we were going to get married.

ARIEL

Jonathan, I would not marry you
if you were the last dildo on earth.

JONATHAN

Ariel! Ariel!

[he leaves in pursuit of Ariel]

MARIA

I am gone! I am gone!

I am gone!

[Everyone is gone except Edmund.

Francois returns with lingerie.

He has done nothing more than step off stage

and right back on.]

FRANCOIS

So.

It's nothing.

All this.

It will pass over.

EDMUND

What?

FRANCOIS

We have forgotten, that's all.

We have lost perspective.

We think

if only we will argue and argue and argue

someone will win

and then everything will be good.

But, obviously, this is absurd.

As my mother used to say,

I am sure your mother used to say,

honey will draw more flies than sugar.

[Francois starts to take off his clothes
and put on the lingerie.]

EDMUND

What is this, Francois?

FRANCOIS

A person wants to be seduced, that is all.

Because a person likes to be desired and flattered

and wooed

to feel your desire for her

or him.

Why

why do people get upset?

Because they think the other person doesn't love them

or doesn't love them enough

or doesn't love them any more

or loves someone else.

Does a person want to yell and yell

and break up with their love?

No, of course not.

They want you to say: I love you

I love you

I have always loved you

and I always will

I love you with my whole heart
come to me
come to me
I love you.

EDMUND
Unh-hunh.

FRANCOIS
And first
you want to get their attention
so you seduce them a little bit
with a look
a manner
this sort of thing
and then it melts their heart
and so you are back together again.

EDMUND
To you life is so simple.

FRANCOIS
Well, yes. It is.
We keep forgetting this.
But, what do you think?

EDMUND
If it were for me you were doing this,
I would want it a little more
racy somehow.

FRANCOIS
How do you mean?

EDMUND
A little striptease, maybe.

FRANCOIS

I can do that.

I can do that.

[he snaps his fingers
and music comes up

Dick's Holler by Clifford Jordan
from Atlantic Jazz, The Best of the Sixties

and he starts into a seductive dance;

he is dancing, stripping,
and flirting with Edmund,
dancing for Edmund

when Maria comes into the room
and stands looking at him]

MARIA

Francois!

[the music stops]

Now you are taking up with Edmund?!

And to think I was was coming back to forgive you!

FRANCOIS

Oh, thank god,

because

I love you, Maria.

I love you.

I love you to the moon and back.

I have always loved you

and I always will

come to me

come to me

I love you.

[she slaps him
and leaves]

Edmund!

Speak to her!
Tell her!

EDMUND
Tell her what?

FRANCOIS
Tell her I love her!

EDMUND
Are you crazy, Francois?
You are just some fucked up
repulsive old seducer.
This sort of thing
it's not even in fashion any more, Francois.

FRANCOIS
I love her, Edmund.
After all,
I love her.

[silence;

Edmund leaves in disgust;

Ariel enters to get the suitcase, or skis, that she forgot]

ARIEL
I'm sorry.
I didn't know anyone was....

Anyone was....

Anyone was here in their lingerie.

I just came back to get my suitcase.

FRANCOIS

Oh,

I was just doing a striptease.

ARIEL

Why?

FRANCOIS

Just practicing my technique.

ARIEL

Are you a stripper?

FRANCOIS

Oh, no, no,

just thinking

if someone thought I were

sexy or appealing

or even funny

then perhaps

they would forgive me

and

you know.

ARIEL

No.

FRANCOIS

Probably it doesn't matter

because I think it's not working.

ARIEL

That could be a good thing.

People are animals, it's true,

but maybe they should try a little harder
also to be human beings.

FRANCOIS

This is my plan.
So far, I have always been tripped up.
But this is my plan, now,
to be a civilized animal.
But I think, who cares,
still, it's too late.
This time I've gone too far.

[Jonathan enters.]

ARIEL

I'm sure it's not too late.
I'm such an impulsive person.
I think you are, too.
Maybe we've both been too quick to give up
finding fault in the other and in ourselves
forgetting what we had in the beginning
how fun it was
what pure pleasure
how it lifted our hearts
how happy it made us feel
how it seemed even to give a point to our lives
how the whole world seemed filled with energy and lightness and spark.

I gave myself to our love
in a way I'd never given myself to anyone or anything before
and I felt finally in the center of my life
and at the center of the universe.
I knew now I had a life
and so I wasn't afraid even of dying any more
I wanted more and more of it
I wanted to live forever to have our love
but I was no longer afraid of anything.
Our love gave life to me
and I hope it goes on forever and ever.

JONATHAN
OK, it is true.

ARIEL
Yes!

FRANCOIS
What is true?

JONATHAN
You and Francois.

ARIEL
No!

JONATHAN
I don't ever want to see you again, Ariel.

FRANCOIS
Please....

JONATHAN
You're a filthy lying shit, Francois.

but now I see that Ariel is just a slut, too
worse than a slut
taking up with you
two human beings so despicable
it makes me want to vomit.

ARIEL
Jonathan....

JONATHAN
I can't believe I loved you
I thought you would be my whole life
I saw nothing else ahead of me
but you and our life together
and now it turns out

you've been sleeping with this creep
he's not even a person
he's just a loose phallus
going from bed to bed
trying to find a real life
and so it turns out
what?
you're just the same?
now how could I ever trust you again?
I thought you were an honest person
and a sensitive person and vulnerable
and now I see you're just a lying, disloyal, fickle, deceitful
woman.

ARIEL

You
are an ignorant shoot from the hip cowboy
with your boots in cowshit
like a cow puncher savage
thinking you are such hot stuff
rolling your cigarette with one hand at a full gallop
but in reality you are a baby
a baby dude ranch greenhorn dweeb
who knows nothing
nothing
nothing about whatever
nothing about life
nothing about women
nothing about men
nothing about horses
you are a guy that's all
you are just a guy
I could spit at you
[she spits]
I could spit at you and spit at you
[she spits and spits]
because what you are is a typical male
I'll say no more
a typical male

you are a
typical
male
which is to say a shithook
and a dickhead

JONATHAN

I wish you were dead.
Dead.

FRANCOIS

And yet, perhaps you are being just a little hasty....

JONATHAN

Dead.

[deafening music comes up—
a love song at full volume:

Jussi Bjorling singing "nessun dorma" from Puccini's Turandot

Jonathan turns
and yells
and runs full tilt into a tree
and falls down

He picks himself up
a runs full tilt at another tree
and falls down.

He does this over and over.

Ariel, watching Jonathan do this,
picks up a coffee cup and hurls it offstage
with a crash.

Then she takes the saucer and hurls it off
in the opposite direction with a crash.

Then she picks up another cup or glass and does the same
as Francois watches her.

Then, while she continues to hurl one item after another

Francois picks up a glass
and he hurls it offstage with a crash.

And then, joining in with Ariel,
he takes another and another
and hurls them offstage
just as Ariel is doing.

Frank enters,
stops,
sees people are throwing things,
looks around for something to throw,
goes to the CD player,
takes a pile of CDs
and hurls or sails them one by one into the wings.

Edmund enters,
stops,
sees people are throwing things,
looks around for something to throw,
goes to the couch
and throws the pillows down again and again
(carefully, on the couch, so they don't get dirty,
picking one up and dusting it off if by accident
it fell to the floor,
and then throwing it again onto the couch).

By the time the music ends,
everyone is reeling from exhaustion
or collapsed on the floor—
or poised to hurl another dish.

Hilda enters.]

HILDA

People. People.

Come quick.

Maria has thrown herself into the lake
and drowned.

FRANK

And what?

HILDA

She has disappeared under the ice.

She is gone.

She is drowned.

FRANK

No.

FRANCOIS

Maria!

JONATHAN

Mother!

FRANK

God no, don't let it be true!

HILDA [speaking as others speak over her]

It's true.

She's gone so far under

or to the side

I can't see her.

FRANK

It's not too late.

Bring some rope.

Bring some ski poles.

FRANCOIS

I can swim! I can swim!

EDMUND

I'm coming, Frank!

ARIEL

Jonathan!

FRANK

Maria! Maria!

[he runs out,
followed by everyone else
with skis and ski poles and snowshoes.

Hilda hastens after them.]

Act Two

We hear an aria:
the full eleven minutes plus of
Cecilia Bartoli singing "gelido in ogni vena" from Vivaldi's Farnace.

The whole house is draped in black.

White orchids to one side.

Seven chairs, covered in black, face front in a line.

Two tables,
one at each side,
with orchids and funeral cakes and drinks.

As the music continues,
Frank enters, dressed in black.
He checks the room.
He fixes an orchid.
He checks the room.
He sits, at last, deeply dejected.

Edmund enters, dressed in black.
He looks around the room.
He moves toward the line of chairs,
without thinking about it, to sit next to Frank;
he stops, thinks about it,
moves to the chair furthest from Frank.

Jonathan enters, dressed in black,
sits as far from the other two as he can.

Ariel enters, dressed in black,
sits as far from Jonathan as she can.

Bertha and Hilda enter together, both dressed in black,
take two seats together.

A long silence.

At last, Frank speaks,
very quietly at first—
not making a speech
but just saying what he feels.

Because they are all sitting in a line,
they can't very well speak to one another
but speak front.]

FRANK

I suppose
the way that we could
honor Maria the most....

[silence, as he collects himself]

would be
to end the squabbling and the jealousies
that sent her out to the lake
to plunge
into the water

to plunge
under the ice

[silence]

the least we could do for her now
would be

to let our love for one another
find its way into our hearts again
in her name.

[long silence, as he collects himself]

Because
now we see that
without trust
the world falls apart
the whole world
and everyone in it

that the whole secret to life
is to be brave enough to trust
in another human being.

And we see
what harm it does
to be caught up with what we lack
rather than to treasure what we have.

And we think
if only what we have lost

[silence]

could come back.
This time it would be treasured.

[silence]

ARIEL
This is why people believe in heaven
because this is the second chance we have
if we believe in heaven.

EDMUND
Or in reincarnation.

ARIEL
Or in reincarnation.

Because the idea that you haven't got a second chance in life
is too unbearable.

FRANK
Yes.

[silence]

It is.

[Francois enters]

FRANCOIS

I apologize.

I'm sorry to be late.

FRANK

You're not late.

We haven't started.

EDMUND

The minister should be here any minute.

FRANCOIS

The truth is I

felt a little sheepish

feeling that

all of you blame me.

FRANK

No.

EDMUND

No, no, Francois.

JONATHAN

We don't blame you

any more than we blame ourselves.

FRANK

All the jealousies

all the imagined and real betrayals.

FRANCOIS

Real betrayals?

EDMUND

The fact that you did take up with Dr. Benoit.

FRANK

And the fact that I did take up with you, Edmund.

EDMUND

And, as far as that goes,
the fact that you betrayed me every day
going back to Maria again and again as you did.

FRANCOIS

Well, and the fact that Maria betrayed me.

[silence]

I beg your pardon.

Not that this is the moment to blame Maria for anything.

Frank, I apologize to you.

Our jealousies, you know....

FRANK

I apologize to you, Francois.

FRANCOIS

No.

FRANK

Yes.

And I apologize to you, too, Edmund.

EDMUND

For what?

FRANK

For making you feel anxious all this time we've been together
not knowing quite where you stood with me
being uncertain of my regard for you
I know how destructive that can be
and I see now
how I've let my anxieties

get in the way of the big things
the primary things.
I will never let you feel uncertain again, Edmund.

EDMUND

You owe me no apology, Frank.

JONATHAN

I owe you an apology, too, Ariel.

ARIEL

Yes, really, you do.

JONATHAN

I'm sorry.

I think, really, it's all my fault.

I think my mother did this

to put a stop to the mistake I was making with you.

I know probably she did it

because she was just sick of all the difficulties with everyone
but I think

maybe she thought, too,

even if there was no hope for them

there was hope for us

starting out fresh

and she could save our love and our lives.

And I

I apologize

and I'm sorry, Ariel

and I wish you would forgive me

because I love you

and I treasure you

and I don't ever want to wreck my life again

ARIEL

I love you, Jonathan.

I love you, with all my heart.

I love your hands and your kneecaps and your hair and your ears
and I love the way you are sweet when you are sweet
and the way you fuck up
because even when you fuck up
and it makes me so mad
you are actually so incompetent at it
such a wild, untargeted loser that I love you
because I think the reason you are such a loser
is that your heart is good
and so you can't hit the bullseye
when you are acting like a nasty shit
so that people don't have to take it seriously
and they can just wait till you realize
how wrong you've been
and also right
also right
because I don't think you are a pathetic loser
that people love out of pity
or because they want to be with some weak
useless guy they can manipulate
you really are a winner
because of your heart
which is always there
and when you come around
we all see it
and see you always were a good human being.

HILDA

OK.

We can have a little memorial service now
and then
with the spring thaw
we can recover the body and have a proper funeral.

[silence at the brutal frankness of this]

FRANK

Yes.

ARIEL

When is the spring thaw in this part of the country?

HILDA

March, I would say.

EDMUND

March.

BERTHA

Early March or the middle of March.

HILDA

I remember when a friend of mine
went to Aspen
to go skiing over the New Year's holiday
and he drove up into the mountains in his rental car
to see the heights
not a good time
to go driving up into the mountains in a car
and so, of course, he slipped off the road into a ditch
and couldn't get it out again
and had to walk all the way back down the mountain
to find a tow truck
and by the time he got there it had started snowing
a real blizzard
and so the tow truck guy said
there was no way he was going up the mountain in that snow
my friend, he said, would just have to wait for the spring thaw
so my friend said,
right, when does the spring thaw come in this part of the country
and the tow truck guy said,
July.

Luckily, luckily,
it comes here in March.

FRANK

I know how sad it is for a son to lose his mother, Jonathan.
And, for me,
thinking about you now
I think about when I will die
and how I will miss you
and I think

how I have neglected you all these years
taken up with my career
and, let's be honest, with my love affairs
and even my golf game

EDMUND

What golf game?

FRANK

You don't think my golf game is any good?

EDMUND

I don't think you can say you really play golf I mean
when you go out now and then
maybe only once a month

FRANK

Not like you, possibly
with the, one might almost say,
the obsessive compulsive disorder you have about it

EDMUND

I am a player, Frank.

FRANK

I am a player, too.

EDMUND

You would be a player if you would come out with me more often.
I beg you and beg you and you never do.

FRANK

I've had other things to do.
I have my family, you know.

JONATHAN

I'll miss you when you're gone, dad.
More, probably, than I miss you now.
Now, I just mostly wish you'd leave me alone.

FRANK

Yes, you do, and really, that breaks my heart
because I see that I am mortal
I won't live forever
and I think one day I'll be on my deathbed
I'll have a day or two to live
or maybe only hours
and you will come to be with me then
and we will both feel
we ran out of time
we thought we had all the time in the world
but we ran out of time
and now it's too late
we will never have those times together as father and son
just relaxed times
not you trying to measure up to some goal I've set
or you think I set
not me trying to nudge you this way or that in your life
but just to be together
to pass an afternoon or an evening together
many afternoons and evenings
and feel some sense of continuity
some sense of life going on even when it ends
because I live in you
I will live in you
and I will always wish I knew you
better than I do.

JONATHAN

This time I've been here
you've hardly spoken to me.

FRANK

Or you to me.

JONATHAN

No.

FRANK

And now, in my old age,
what consolations will I have
aside from cheap movie tickets and air fares?
Where will I go?
Where do I want to go?
I don't think I want to go to Phoenix over and over again
and you get no discount for Paris.

HILDA

Still, there are compensations for declining powers
most of all, I think,
the sheer pleasure of luxuriating in old age.

EDMUND

If you are lucky enough not to be sick
and in pain.

FRANK

Sometimes it's hard to know
whether one would rather die in middle age or old age.

EDMUND

Of course,
it's always better to die in middle age
than in youth.

BERTHA

And how sad it is
when you are older
to be deprived of the time to look back over your life
as you never had while you were living it.
To relish it finally.

HILDA

Or, not just to live in the past
but to go on living to the end
to have more and more and more time
to keep going
never to get tired of it

BERTHA

to be released from the anxieties that, when you were young,
held you back or clouded over the pleasures

HILDA

to have the weight lifted

BERTHA

and be able to wallow in each moment

HILDA

to enjoy the early morning and the long afternoons

BERTHA

and the sunsets.

HILDA

To be deprived of that by early death
is to be deprived of the dessert of life
of the after-dinner brandy and cigar.

Because, in old age,
we are not always sick or ruined altogether
but just some chunk has been taken out
you still have your knowledge of algebra

even if you can't remember a single song lyric
or your knowledge of the classics is still completely intact
even while you breathe from a cannister of oxygen.

All the time I'm talking to some old guy
who can't remember who I am or where we are
and he has spit running out of the corner of his mouth
and suddenly he's talking about Nietzsche
with perfect clarity
and still taking pleasure
in the possession of his consciousness of being alive.

Because a person loves life
that's the truth of it.

ARIEL

It seems to me especially sad
for a woman to die in the prime of her life
to me she seemed still so vital and young
with so much more life ahead of her
to die just when her children were raised
and finally she could live for herself
do all the things she wanted to do
this is the most tragic age for a woman to die
after she has given all her life to others
and she is about to have her own life
and then she never does

JONATHAN

Last night I dreamed
my mother and I were in a white,
sun-filled summer house together,
and my mother was at the top of the stairs,
and I was at the bottom looking up at her,
and she said to me all of a sudden:
do you remember always to hold onto the bannister
when you go up and down stairs?
And I reassured her that I did,
even though I didn't.
Good, she said,

and yet, she didn't remember herself,
because one day she was carrying an armful of tulips
in the upstairs hallway,
and, even though she had lived in the house for thirty-five years,
she forgot to pay attention,
she let her mind wander for a moment,
and she walked right out through an open window
and fell to her death.

[Ariel speaks now partly to Jonathan,
partly to the others.]

ARIEL

When my mother died I dreamed
she was in an airplane
a small plane
a Piper Cub or some other little plane
like a mosquito
and she was taking off and landing
taking off and landing
going up to heaven
and coming back again to earth
and she could come and go
just as she wished
there was no finality to it
she came back to me again and again.

For the first year after she died
I dreamed of her all the time.
I was so grateful for my dreams.
And so grateful to my mother
for coming to me in my dreams.
And now I don't dream of her much any more.
Very rarely.
She's leaving me at last.

[Jonathan takes her hand.]

Bob enters.]

BOB

Excuse me.

I don't mean to intrude
if you are having a private family moment.

FRANK

Ah. The compost man.

Yes, indeed, as it happens
we are having a memorial service for my wife who

just passed away.

BOB

Right. OK.

I'm here to conduct the service.

FRANK

You?

BOB

You see, the minister is in Barbados,
and I often serve as deacon,
and so
I've come in his place.

Where is the deceased?

FRANK

Ah. The deceased.

EDMUND

She's in the lake.

Her body is in the lake.

She drowned in the lake,

and because she is down under the ice

we can't find her

so we thought we would have a little memorial service now

and then in the spring,
after the thaw,
we can have a proper burial service.

BOB

Right.

Excellent.

I'm glad you're not going to have her cremated.

So often people think that would be a nice idea

and just this last summer

a fellow's wife died

and she wanted to have her ashes scattered over Long Island Sound

so he got a pilot to take him up in a private plane

but when he opened the cannister with the ashes

they all just blew back into the plane

so he more or less inhaled his wife.

EDMUND

No. We won't be doing that.

BOB

Right. Excellent.

Your wife fell into the lake.

FRANK

She jumped in on purpose.

BOB

Ah. A suicide.

EDMUND

Yes.

BOB

Still, we don't judge people for these things.

Because a person can come into the world

different from all other people

and we don't know where such a person has come from

like fruitflies, like worms in cheese,
they come from nowhere,
like the universe itself
which, in the beginning,
was nothing but chaos
and out of that chaos a mass was formed
just as cheese is made out of milk
and worms appeared in the cheese
and these were the angels
and among the angels was also God
he too having been created out of the cheese at the same time
and all the creatures
of all kinds
as a result of which we have today
the inhabitants of the islands of Nacumera
who have the heads of dogs
and yet are reasonable people with good understanding
and the pigmies
who are beautiful and graceful because of their smallness
and they get married when they are six months old
and have children when they are two or three years old
and do not live more than six or seven years
and they battle against the birds in their country
and often are taken and eaten by the birds.

EDMUND
Indeed.

BOB
And we don't judge these people
because this is how they are
just like you and me.

EDMUND
Yes, indeed.

BOB
We don't judge them
just as I am not judging you

and you are not judging me.
Live and let live
this was God's intention
to love all the creatures of the earth
and try not to kill them or hurt them.

EDMUND

No.

BOB

And if you can't help yourself
never mind then, that's your nature
because it was how you were made
and you are going to want to try to do better next time.

EDMUND

Yes. Indeed.

BOB

I'll be leading you in some prayers
but I wondered if any of you has anything you'd like to say.
A memorial service, customarily,
has some memories if you'd like to mention them.

[silence]

FRANK

I remember when I met Maria
our first date
I don't remember who arranged it
a blind date
and I picked her up at a little hotel where she was staying
when she first came to New York
and she came running down the stairs
to meet me in the lobby
there was no elevator
and we talked there for a moment
and then we saw
water running down the stairs

amazing it was
a little waterfall
cascading down the stairs
and then Maria said, Oh,
I left the bathtub running!
And the water just flooded the lobby
before they got it turned off.
So of course she was kicked out of the hotel
and I told her she could come and stay with me
so she did.

FRANCOIS

She was always a little absent-minded.

FRANK

Caught up in the moment.

FRANCOIS

Exactly.

FRANK

Living in the present.

FRANCOIS

Exactly.

When I first met Maria
it was in the lobby of a theatre.
A friend of mine had said
oh, you're coming to see whatever it was
this evening, that's good
because there is a woman named Maria
who wants to meet you.
And so, when I got to the theatre and I saw my friend
I went over and he said this is Maria
and I said, oh, would you like to have a drink after the performance?
And she looked a little shocked and said
no, I don't think so.
And so I said, how about dinner tomorrow?

And she seemed almost offended
and said, no, no, I don't think so.
And all the time
this friend of mine was standing behind her
and making faces and sort of waving his arms
but I didn't know what he meant
and, ordinarily I would not have been so forward with a woman
but after all she was the one who wanted to meet me
so I said
then how about lunch the next day or dinner
or lunch the day after that or tea
or breakfast the following day
so that finally she said she would have lunch with me
on the following Friday
and I said good, perfect, good,
and she excused herself to say hello to someone else
and after she had gone
my friend said to me,
that was the wrong Maria.

But, of course, it wasn't at all.

EDMUND

I remember when—this was a few years ago
when women wore panty hose—
and Maria and Frank and I went to a casino together
and I was wearing my loafers without socks
and, for some reason, the guy at the door decided to pick on me
and he said I couldn't come into the casino without socks
and I said that's completely demented
because look at all the women you have in the casino without socks
and it sort of got ugly really fast
and so Maria took my arm
and led me away from what was getting to be really nasty
and told me to wait for her for a minute
and she went into the women's room and took off her panty hose
and came out and gave them to me
and told me to put them on right over my shoes and my pants
which I did

because I was always happy to do whatever she told me
and then she took me back to the door of the casino
and said to the guy
there, now he's wearing socks
so there was nothing the guy could do but let us in.

HILDA

All right, all right,
these are lovely memories
but it seems a little easy
to be cozily consoling yourselves like this
as though the only thing that matters is how sad you feel
when what you did was to drive a woman to distraction
with all your bad behavior
bad, childish behavior
and these memories are not going to bring her back
here was a wonderful woman
and none of you appreciated her
none of you got past your own petty little feelings
to understand here was a life worth honoring and esteeming
worth keeping from all harm
keeping alive with you forever and ever
because none of you will ever know another person
as vital as she was

you should spend the rest of your lives doing penance now
mourning her death
and chastising yourselves for your self-centeredness
and your pettiness
these little, little emotions that have such big consequences
that cost other people their very lives on earth
in the olden days you would have worn ashes and sack cloth
and a good thing it would have been.

FRANK

It's true. What you say is true.

FRANCOIS

Very true.

FRANK

There's no bottom to it.

HILDA

I think this is the time for everyone to rend their garments.

FRANK

Rend our garments?

HILDA

Yes, rend your garments.

Show your grief.

Never mind your lovely clothes.

You have lost the woman you love.

Rend your garments.

This is a ritual that was done in ancient times.

BOB

Yes, we've done that, too, in some of our services.

People seem to like it.

They feel better after they've done it.

I guess the ancients knew what works.

EDMUND

I don't think I'm going to rend my garments.

ARIEL

I don't know how to rend a garment.

FRANK

I'm going to rend my garments.

JONATHAN

I'm going to rend my garments, too.

EDMUND

Fine then, I'm going to rend my garments, too.

FRANCOIS

Let's all rend our garments.

ARIEL

I'm rending my garments.

HILDA

I'll show you how.

[she takes hold of a piece of her dress
and, the very instant she rends it,
and everyone tears their clothes to shreds
[they all have on bright, flowered, colorful underwear]

music comes up at full, deafening volume:
O mio babbino caro from Gianni Schicchi:

Edmund sings:

O mio babbino caro
Mi piace e bello, bello;
Vo'andare in Porta Rosa
a comperar l'anello!

Everyone joins him in singing:

Si, si, ci voglio andare!
e se l'amassi andaro,
andrei sul Ponte Vecchio
Ma per buttarmi in Arno!

as Maria enters—unseen by the others—
and, finally,
Maria sings the very last phrase of the aria,
at full volume
and with immense passion:
Mi struggo e mi tormento!
O Dio, vorrei morir!

Silence.]

FRANK
Maria!

FRANCOIS
Maria!
Is it really you?

FRANK
Is it true?

EDMUND
Is it some sort of hoax?

JONATHAN
Is this some horrible trick?

FRANK
Maria.
You're alive.
You really are alive.

FRANCOIS
It's really you!

FRANK
Thank God, you're alive.
Oh, Maria, what happened?

FRANCOIS
How did you get out?

[Everyone goes to Maria to kiss her
and hug her.]

FRANK
We thought you were gone forever.
Thank God you've come back.

JONATHAN

We looked for you and looked for you and looked for you
and we thought we would never find you.

FRANCOIS

I should have known you would find a way.

BOB

Is this the deceased, then?

FRANK

How could we have given up?
I told you we should have kept looking for her!
How could we have given up?
Oh, thank God you're alright.

ARIEL

How did you get dry?

EDMUND

Did you just come out of the lake?

ARIEL

You've had time to change?

MARIA

I never was in the lake!
Hilda only said I was to see how you would feel
if I were dead.

FRANK

Hilda?

EDMUND

After we were so nice to you when you fell in
you thought this was a good trick to play on us?

MARIA

Because every single one of you
was so consumed by jealousy and suspicion
you were ruining your lives
forgetting how lucky you are
each one of you
to have found someone who cares for you so completely
this thing that people live for
and some never find ever in their lives
each one of you already has it
and then you would throw it away
and it would be gone forever
and you would die alone
and what would have been the point?
But none of you would stop
even for a moment
to consider what you really had
until you realized
oh
I could die
and it would be over
and now suddenly I see what was possible for me
as long as I was alive
so now
maybe you can thank god for your good luck
for what you have
and savor it
before it's too late.

FRANCOIS

This was a cheap trick.
How can you just jerk us around?

MARIA

Francois, you have jerked so many people around.

FRANCOIS

Not on purpose.
Never on purpose.

MARIA

All the time on purpose!

JONATHAN

Mother, how could you do this?

EDMUND

It was very sly, I have to admit.

FRANK [gently, not accusingly]

You gave us a scare

you broke our hearts

all of us

you plunged us into thoughts of the end of our own lives.

FRANCOIS

I tell you what, Maria:

now I will never trust you again.

So

I am out of here.

Forget it.

I am out of here.

[he leaves]

MARIA

Francois!

JONATHAN

I don't understand how you could do a thing like this.

You've never tricked me like this.

How can you do this?

[Francois returns]

FRANCOIS

If you want to know who feels betrayed now

I'll tell you:

I feel betrayed!

Everyone feels betrayed by you!
You think you can frighten me like this?
I thought you were dead!
So, now, you have what you want!
No one will bother you any more
because no one will ever live in the same house with you again!

[he leaves again]

MARIA
Francois!

JONATHAN
And neither will I, this is not my house any more.
This is not how you treat your own child
so that he can't count on anyone any more
or ever learn to trust another person
if he can't trust his own mother!

BOB
Maria, it may be that you can't just play with people like this
because other people are people, too.
They have feelings, too, just as you do.
They thought they never could go on with their lives.
They thought they would live forever in sorrow.

FRANK [again, gently, not accusingly]
I thought I would end my own life.
But it doesn't matter.
Nothing matters
as long as you are alive.

[Francois returns]

FRANCOIS
No one is ever even going to speak to you again.
I am going to tell everyone I know what you have done
and no one will want to be your friend any more!

MARIA

What are you saying
I have to kill myself again to get your attention?

[silence]

The next time I die it will be the real thing
this is your chance right now
if you don't take it, it's gone forever.

ARIEL

We are glad to see you back.

MARIA

Thank you.

FRANCOIS

You are right, you are right of course
what is this remorse and anger
when we could be feeling relief
and joy!
Because you are alive again!
And this is a happy time!

[music;

Francois instantly pulls his shorts down to expose his butt;
looks at Hilda;
she pulls her shorts down to expose her butt;
and the two of them dance
a sort of fraudulent flamenco dance,
moving toward one another

while we hear the Buena Vista Social Club's
El Cuarto De Tula

Everyone else pulls their shorts down to expose their butts,
and they, too, join in the dance.

The dance transforms into a big celebratory dionysian dance number
until, at last,
one by one,
they sit exhausted in the chairs,

and the two tables come in from the sides
to form a banquet table at which they sit,

and we begin to hear fireworks in the distance.]

HILDA

And now we can have our party.
Bertha and I have been planning a Viking feast
for New Year's.

[some of the guests pick up party hats from the table
and put them on

Music for the Royal Fireworks from Handel Greatest Hits
plays through the following scene

FRANK

I would like to propose a toast

[colorful confetti rains down]

to Hilda
who has never given up on life
who has, in fact, insisted on it
and who has saved us all from drowning
and brought us all back to life with her.

[firecrackers;
and the sound of fireworks
becomes louder, more present]

HILDA

And to all of you.

May you live as long as I have
and get to be half as smart.

[music]

EDMUND

I would like to offer a toast
to the end of squabbling
the end of jealousy
the end of suspicions
to the new times of gratitude
for what we have.

[all raise their glasses]

FRANCOIS

I will drink to that absolutely.

I will drink and drink to that.

Because I am grateful to you, Maria,
for being alive.

That's all.

You don't need to do anything else
if only you are alive
every morning I will thank God for that

FRANK

And so will I.

MARIA

And I will drink to you, Francois,
and I will never distrust you again
even though I know
you are not to be trusted
because I love you.

FRANK

Oh!

MARIA

I love you, too, Frank.
But I realized while I was gone,
if I am going to die,
I need to die with Francois.

FRANCOIS

So, OK, it's good. OK.
I am going to die with you.

MARIA

But first I am going to take you to the other room
and knock you down
and have my way with you.

FRANCOIS

So. OK. Good.
What could be wrong with that?

[she takes him by the hand
and they leave]

FRANK

Maria!

[he gets up to follow Maria,

stops,

watches her go with Francois,

turns back to the table,

sits, his head in his hands;

Edmund watches him for a moment.]

EDMUND

I had a dream
that I finally agreed to let you kill me, Frank.

FRANK

Oh, Edmund.

EDMUND

I took off all my clothes
and you went into the kitchen and came back with the butcher knife
and you stabbed me all over my body.
78 wounds.
And then you left.
and I put on my white bathrobe
and lay down on the deck
so that the blood would run down between the wooden slats.
And I closed my eyes and waited.
But there wasn't any blood.
I opened the robe to look at my wounds
and they were all gaping wide but no blood was coming out.
And then people started arriving for dinner.
and they just stepped over me on their way into the house
and no one noticed me.
So then I closed my eyes again and waited.
and then I stood up and jumped up and down to get the blood running
but still no blood came out.
The maitre d' was getting impatient.
He said if I wasn't going to die, I should do something useful
so I started seating people in the main dining room
and handing out menus
but then one lady said to me,
you better get over to blah blah hospital and see doctor blah blah
he's the only one who can get rid of those scars.
And I thought: my god, she's right,
if I live, I don't want to have these scars
so I ran out into the streets to get a taxi
but there were no cabs in the streets
and I was panicked
so I started running and screaming for help

and then I fell face first onto the pavement
and I couldn't get up
and that was when I knew that it had worked
that you had finally killed me.

[Edmund picks up his suitcase and ice skates
and leaves]

BOB
Hey, hold up! I'll drive you!

[Frank turns to see Edmund is gone.]

BERTHA
Well!
So much for your Viking party!

HILDA
As swift as a Viking raid!

BERTHA
These people should show a little more appreciation
for all the trouble you've gone to.

HILDA
I know they feel it in their hearts.

BERTHA
I think they should be showing you a little more outward recognition.

HILDA
Now, now...

BERTHA
A little more gratitude.

HILDA

Come, Bertha, you're getting grouchy staying up this late.
These young people can stay up till all hours if they like.
But it's past our bedtime.
Come, come, I'm putting you to bed.
Say goodnight to these nice young people.
Happy New Year to you, Jonathan,
and to you, Ariel.

BERTHA

Happy New Year.
Happy New Year.

ARIEL

Thank you.
And to you.

[As Hilda and Bertha leave, they speak.]

BERTHA

I am not grouchy.

HILDA

Bertha, you were born grouchy
you live in a snit
and you will die in a huff.

BERTHA

I never heard such a thing.

[they are gone]

FRANK

You think if you had your life to live over again
you could make it turn out right;
but then, for some of us, it turns out to be exactly the same
no matter how many chances we get.

[he puts his head in his hands]

JONATHAN

Ariel.

ARIEL

Yes.

JONATHAN

Do you still love me?

ARIEL

I love you again.

[They kiss,

while the music and the fireworks

and the rain of confetti continue

and the lights fade on the couple

and on Frank, with his head in his hands.]

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A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

Wintertime was deeply affected by reading Anne Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet*, and it incorporates text from Laurie Williams.

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