

EDWARD ALBEE

Finding the Sun

Finding the Sun was written (and copyrighted) in 1983, to satisfy a commission from the University of Northern Colorado. It was first performed there that year, directed by the author (me). It was subsequently performed at the University of California-Irvine (same director) and at the University of Houston (*ibid*).

I was making plans for a New York production of the play in 1987 when Tina Howe's *Coastal Disturbances* (written or at least copyrighted in 1987) opened off-Broadway. By bizarre coincidence, Miss Howe's play shares a beach setting with *Finding the Sun*, a not dissimilar group of characters and—inevitably—some of the same general preoccupations.

Gut instinct told me that while the two plays were independent conceptions Miss Howe's had occupied the field—or the beach, to be more exact—and, should mine be then presented some cloudy journalistic minds would deduce that the earlier play (mine) had been substantially influenced by the later one (Miss Howe's).

Life is tough enough these days without any of that nonsense, so I have postponed New York production of *Finding the Sun* for a while, at least until the sea air clears.

I publish it here with pleasure, however, for I am quite proud of it; further, with both texts now available the interested play reader will discover that Miss Howe's play and mine are, in the end, quite different matters.

CHARACTERS

ABIGAIL *Twenty-three; mousy brown/blond hair, pinched features; not tall; thinnish; not pretty, but not plain.*

BENJAMIN *Thirty; blond, willowy-handsome; medium height.*

CORDELIA *Twenty-eight; attractive in a cold way; dark or raven hair; tallish; good figure.*

DANIEL *Thirty-seven; dark; tall; good-looking.*
EDMEE *Forty-five, or so; smallish; a together, stylish matron.*
FERGUS *Sixteen; blond, handsome healthy kid; swimmer's body.*
GERTRUDE *Sixty; small, gray hair, deeply tanned, thinnish, elegant outdoors woman.*
HENDEN *Seventy; big, sprawly man; white hair; looks like a retired diplomat.*

SETTING

A beach in bright sun. Eight beach chairs—candy striped or of various colors—spread about, leaving a free area downstage center. A narrow boardwalk upstage with railing.

LIGHT

Bright sun; August, a New England day. Toward the end of the play, a lighting shift; until then, still sun.

COSTUMES

Whatever beach outfits seem most appropriate to each of the characters and the actors playing them. Towels, bags, and the usual beach stuff as well.

The scenes of the play flow into one another without pause, although a tiny "breath" between them—more a new upbeat than anything else—would be nice.

SCENE 1

Rise from black; hold for two seconds. ABIGAIL and BENJAMIN enter; bathing suits, beach stuff.

ABIGAIL *(Stretching.)* Ah! Find the sun!

BENJAMIN *(Nods; pleased approval.)* Find the sun! *(They begin setting up. CORDELIA and DANIEL enter; bathing suits, beach stuff. They do not see ABIGAIL or BENJAMIN, nor do they see these two.)*

CORDELIA Find the sun, you said. *(Smiles, stretches.)*

DANIEL *(Abstracted smile.)* Did I? "Find the sun?" Well? So? *(They begin setting up.)*

(EDMEE and FERGUS enter; same action as above.)

EDMEE Finding the sun should always be your first action, Fergus.

FERGUS *(Feigned puzzlement.)* Not finding a chair with your back to the wall?

EDMEE (*Happy with it.*) Outdoors . . . the sun. (*Looks about.*) Goodness, look at all the people!

FERGUS (*Mock concern.*) Gosh, Mother, will we never be alone!?

EDMEE (*Throaty chuckle.*) Oh, hush! (*They begin setting up. GERTRUDE and HENDEN enter; same procedures as others.*)

GERTRUDE Oh, Henden! We've found the sun!

HENDEN We've found what? Oh! The sun! (*Sighs.*) You're right: we've found the sun. (*Pause.*)

ALL (*Settling in.*) Ahhhhhhhhh!

SCENE 2

DANIEL rises, moves down right; BENJAMIN sees him, moves to him; ABIGAIL has her eyes closed, as does CORDELIA.

BENJAMIN Is that you!? It is! It's you!

DANIEL I *thought* it was.

BENJAMIN (*Sotto voce.*) What are you *doing* here?

DANIEL . . . though I remember saying to Cordelia—in the car—do you think that's me?

BENJAMIN I mean, I was sitting there and there you were!

DANIEL (*Quick, mirthless smile.*) Seems like old times.

BENJAMIN (*Blurting on.*) Are you here alone? I mean, are you with Cordelia?

DANIEL No: I'm here with a couple of tricks named Jeremy and Phillip I picked up in . . .

BENJAMIN (*Shy smile.*) Oh, come on, Daniel.

DANIEL (*Mimicking.*) Oh, come on, Benjie-wengie!

BENJAMIN (*After a tiny pause.*) So many people here.

DANIEL (*A hand on BENJAMIN's shoulder.*) I miss you.

BENJAMIN (*Shrugs; smiles.*) I love you.

DANIEL (*Nods; removes his hand.*) I love you, *and* I miss you.

BENJAMIN (*Giggles.*) I wonder what Abigail will say.

DANIEL Abigail will say . . .

ABIGAIL (*Seeing BENJAMIN gone.*) Benjamin!? Where are you!?

DANIEL *That* is what Abigail will say.

SCENE 3

BENJAMIN and DANIEL move back to their places as EDMEE and FERGUS move down left.

EDMEE (*As they come.*) Having found the sun—the good sun, the clear, healing heat—having *found* the sun, *then* you put your back to the wall.

FERGUS (*Imitation of eager student.*) Aha!

EDMEE The sun is the source of all life: the aminos and all the rest couldn't have done their work without it, you see.

FERGUS Aha!!

EDMEE Look at your civilizations! Africa!—if you call that a civilization—four? five million years ago, in the hottest of the muck, down there, closest to boiling, the *cradle* of it.

FERGUS *We* live in New Hampshire.

EDMEE (*Ignoring? Not having heard?*) And the Mediterranean basin? Greece? Rome? The Parthenon is *not* in Bergin, Norway, my dear. (*Peering.*) I wonder who those people are? Nor does the Appian Way run through Tierra del Fuego.

FERGUS Nor New Hampshire.

EDMEE (*Not angry.*) Be civil.

FERGUS Oh, Mother!

EDMEE Everything proceeds comparatively, it is true—there is no light without dark, rest without action, and so forth and so on—and a life in the tropics produces a . . . lassitude which leads to an absence of philosophical inquiry, but nor have the Lapps or the Eskimos given us much beyond some charming little carvings—doo-dads, really; no, time in the sun *and* time away: that's the ticket! Everything comparative; everything in season.

FERGUS Okay.

EDMEE Why do you dwell on New Hampshire?

FERGUS We dwell *in* New Hampshire.

EDMEE You dwell in your own skin. Do you dwell on that?

FERGUS A life of acne?

EDMEE This, too, shall pass. (*Sees GERTRUDE rising, coming toward them.*) Is that lady coming to talk to us?

FERGUS (*Rising.*) To you.

EDMEE (*Sincerely bothered.*) Oh, Fergus! Maybe you'll like her.

FERGUS (*Moving away.*) Let me know. (*Nods to the approaching GERTRUDE.*) Ma'am.

GERTRUDE (*Nods.*) Young man. (*To EDMEE.*) Is that yours?

EDMEE Yes; yes, he is.

GERTRUDE What is he to you, or am I being nosy?

EDMEE I beg your pardon? Yes, you probably are.

GERTRUDE I *always* am. I can't help myself.

EDMEE (*To get it straight.*) What is he to me?

GERTRUDE Henden says to me, you are the nosiest woman in Christendom, and this in spite of that little gouge above the left nostril, that little gouge where they took the cancer off. Would you believe that I've had four skin cancers removed—all from the sun!—and I still won't stay out of it? Don't go in the sun, Gertrude: You know your propensities.

EDMEE What is he to me? Who is Henden?

GERTRUDE Or, more to the point, who is *Sylvia*? Henden is my husband, my third; the other two I lost—not through carelessness, but time: I marry older men. Henden is the youngest I have married—in distance from my age, I mean to say. Henden is only seventy. What is he to *you*; well, what is he to you?—the young boy: Is he your son, your nephew, your ward, your . . . lover?

EDMEE (*A smile.*) You *should* stay out of the sun.

SCENE 4

EDMEE and GERTRUDE stay where they are, GERTRUDE having sat in FERGUS's chair. ABIGAIL and CORDELIA come down right.

ABIGAIL He's such a child; he behaves like . . . such a child!

CORDELIA (*Eyes closed; absorbing the sun.*) Hmmmmmmmmmmmm.

ABIGAIL He comes back—when I call him—he comes back, plops himself down in in his chair, and starts blathering on about . . . all the *sailboats*, there are no clouds, *are* there!, *where* will we go for dinner . . .

CORDELIA Hmmmmmmmmmmmm.

ABIGAIL Not a word! Not one word about running into Daniel . . .

CORDELIA Hmmmmmmmmmmmm.

ABIGAIL . . . which meant, naturally, that *you* were here, which information was of interest to *me*. . . .

CORDELIA Hmmmmmmmmmmmm.

ABIGAIL Not a word!

CORDELIA (*Stretching; drawled.*) Well, what would you expect?

ABIGAIL You would think. . . .

CORDELIA What do you *really* expect?

ABIGAIL (*Too brightly innocent.*) I beg your pardon?

CORDELIA I know them both as well as you know Benjamin—better, probably.

Recall I knew them *before* you, and they were *lovers* then. . . .

ABIGAIL (*Too bright.*) Well, they're not lovers now!

CORDELIA Because they married us, you mean? Remember the leopard.

ABIGAIL I beg your pardon?

CORDELIA Do you not *like* me—or are you like that, I mean . . . naturally?

ABIGAIL (*Abrupt laugh.*) Whatever do you mean?

CORDELIA Your tone, baby.

ABIGAIL (*Haughty.*) I have no idea what you mean.

CORDELIA Okay. Just remember the leopard.

ABIGAIL I'm supposed to understand what that means?

CORDELIA *Are you retarded? Leopard! Leopard: spots. A leopard doesn't change its spots.*

ABIGAIL (*Snooty.*) I can't speak for you and Daniel, but Benjamin is home with me every night.

CORDELIA (*Dry.*) How *nice* for him.

ABIGAIL (*Pleased; proud.*) I never let him out of my sight.

CORDELIA They must love you in the men's rooms.

ABIGAIL (*Riding over that.*) You and Daniel may have what is referred to as an "arrangement"—by which is usually implied a moral quagmire—and, to be sure, Daniel may not have . . . adjusted to the world, but Benjamin has seen the follies of his ways, his *former* ways, and . . .

CORDELIA Oh, bullshit!

(*Abigail fumes, moves away.*)

SCENE 5

HENDEN pattering, FERGUS coming upon him.

FERGUS Hello.

HENDEN Hello.

FERGUS How old are you?

HENDEN What an odd question! I'm seventy.

FERGUS That's what I thought: you're the oldest person here—in the vicinity.

HENDEN I often am.

FERGUS And I'm the youngest. I'm sixteen.

HENDEN Don't be silly.

FERGUS A lot of people say that.

HENDEN There is no such age.

FERGUS Yes, that's what they say. Why are you here?

HENDEN Why am I *anywhere*!? Luck, I guess; or that's what they call it.

FERGUS Who do *you* belong with?

HENDEN *Again* such an odd question! I am *with* my wife, my Gertrude, the one was talking with the lady you arrived with, I believe; that is who I am *with*. As to whether it is Gertrude I *belong* with . . . well, that would take some mulling.

FERGUS Mull away.

HENDEN By which I mean—thank you . . .

FERGUS You're welcome.

HENDEN . . . by which I mean that I am very fond of Gertrude, as wives go—though I've had only two—but whether it is she I *belong* with . . . well, that takes some pondering.

FERGUS What happened to the first one?

HENDEN (*Shrugs.*) She died; after forty-six years of marriage with me she took it into her head to die.

FERGUS Literally?

HENDEN Yes; a brain tumor.

FERGUS Forty-six years is a very long time. (*Afterthought.*) Sorry.

HENDEN Not in retrospect: only during. And I married Gertrude—though I like her very much—I suppose to *be married*, as much as anything: a continuity.

FERGUS Hmmm. I suspect I'm a little young for a sense of continuity. There's a theory afoot, though, that we young and we old have things in common should bind us together against those in the middle.

HENDEN Heavens! And what *are* those things?

FERGUS I haven't the faintest. Doesn't anybody swim around here?

HENDEN The beginning and the end! An alliance! Well, maybe; might work as well as most. Who do *you* belong with?

FERGUS Well, I'm here with my mother—the lady your Gertrude was talking with—and since I *am* only sixteen and I legally belong *to* her, I daresay I belong *with* her. The day will come, though . . . well, the day will come. Who *are* all these people!?

HENDEN Well, we've accounted for the two of *us*, for Gertrude and your mother; that leaves the other four.

FERGUS . . . of those nearby.

HENDEN Well, surely I'm not to account for the entire coast. The couple over *there* (*Indicates CORDELIA and DANIEL.*) are Daniel and Cordelia; Daniel is my son—by my first marriage, of course; his wife, Cordelia, is daughter to Gertrude—by one of *her* earlier.

FERGUS My goodness! You know everything! Who are the others? Do you know?

HENDEN The other couple? Abigail and Benjamin.

FERGUS Heaven, you do! Whose daughter and son are *they*!?

HENDEN No one's—well, someone's, naturally, but none of ours.

FERGUS Strangers!

HENDEN Not exactly. Well, perhaps, though they *are* married—to each other! No, the cord binding them to us is, uh . . . a complex twine.

FERGUS We've heard of that in New Hampshire, I believe.

HENDEN Abigail did not exist before she married Benjamin, but Benjamin . . . well, he and Daniel, before Daniel married Cordelia, he and Daniel were . . . well, how shall I put it . . . ?

FERGUS I don't know!

HENDEN . . . were . . . involved.

FERGUS I beg your pardon?

HENDEN Benjamin and Daniel were "involved."

FERGUS (*Trying to sort it out.*) With one another.

HENDEN Yes.

FERGUS In a business sense?
HENDEN How old are you?
FERGUS Sixteen—but I'm from New Hampshire.
HENDEN (*Understanding.*) Of course. No; in a . . . personal sense.
FERGUS Yes?
HENDEN Benjamin and Daniel were lovers.
FERGUS (*Long pause.*) With each other?
HENDEN Yes.
FERGUS My goodness. (*Considers.*) I believe we've heard of this in New Hampshire. They loved one another?
HENDEN Certainly.
FERGUS And gave each other physical pleasure.
HENDEN As I understand it.
FERGUS Why are they no longer lovers? Pleasure into pain?
HENDEN (*Slightly standoffish.*) You'll have to ask them that, young man.
FERGUS Well, I shall! (*Afterthought.*) I've not been lovers with *anyone*.
HENDEN Well, you're sixteen.
FERGUS Romeo was fifteen, they say, but he was Italian.
HENDEN When you're older.
FERGUS My hand and I will say good-bye?
HENDEN Well, will probably develop a more casual relationship.
FERGUS Oh? Pity.
HENDEN If you *do* speak to Daniel or Benjamin of their . . . liaison . . .
FERGUS Yes?
HENDEN *Do* be cautious.
FERGUS Oh?
HENDEN Well, you *are* very young and very . . .
FERGUS (*Contemptuous.*) Pretty?
HENDEN (*Gently.*) I was going to say "handsome."
FERGUS (*Melting.*) Thank you!
HENDEN But you are . . . young.
FERGUS That's very true, sir, but don't forget that I'm . . .
HENDEN (*A hand up.*) I know! You're from New Hampshire.

SCENE 6

HENDEN moves upstage; FERGUS crosses to EDMEE and GERTRUDE.

FERGUS (*Moving by fast; to EDMEE.*) Have I got things to tell you!
GERTRUDE (*After FERGUS goes.*) Who is that?
EDMEE (*Pause.*) What?

SCENE 7

CORDELIA and DANIEL together.

CORDELIA I was *so terrible* to Abigail!

DANIEL (*Reading? Sunning?*) That's nice.

CORDELIA Do you know what I think it is?

DANIEL (*Ibid.*) Hmmmm?

CORDELIA Do you know why I think I'm so terrible to Abigail?

DANIEL (*Becoming involved.*) Well, let's see: Because she's here? because you don't like her? because she's turning Benjamin into a shell—sucking him dry, you should excuse the expression? because she's a self-obsessed, tedious bore of a woman?

CORDELIA (*Considers it.*) *Those* are interesting.

DANIEL I thought so.

CORDELIA But no; I think I'm terrible to her because there she is with Benjamin and I loathe Benjamin and she *doesn't* control him in *spite* of your lies. . . .

DANIEL You don't loathe Benjamin.

CORDELIA The two of you are as close now as you ever were. . . .

DANIEL What did you do—you and Miss Abbey—marry us as part of a sisterhood solidarity reform movement? And you're falling out among yourselves? You never told me any of this; you should choose your co-conspirators better.

CORDELIA (*Not to be put off.*) The two of you are as close now as you ever were—which I will probably divorce you for one day. . . .

DANIEL (*Harsh laugh.*) You wouldn't dare! Your family'd kill you over the publicity: famous former deb, mainline family heirloom—heiress, sorry!—married to fag, files for annulment, names hubby's former hubby as . . .

CORDELIA The two of you are as close now as you ever were—which I will probably divorce you for one day—and I'm probably taking *that* out on poor Abigail.

DANIEL Plus you don't like her.

CORDELIA Why doesn't she make Benjamin take her to live in Peru, or somewhere?

DANIEL Because, pussycat, then *we'd* have to move to Peru, too, and you *know* how you are with languages. . . .

CORDELIA Why doesn't she . . . (*Stops.*)

DANIEL Yes; why doesn't she!

CORDELIA (*Giggles.*) I accused her of following Benjamin into men's rooms!

DANIEL (*Giggles.*) You're not *nice*!

CORDELIA (*Hand out to him; after a beat.*) What *are* we to do?

DANIEL (*Takes her hand.*) Give it some time.

CORDELIA It's been three years.

DANIEL Give it some *time*.

CORDELIA Do you see him secretly?

DANIEL (*Pause.*) No.

CORDELIA Do you see *anyone*?

DANIEL (*Gently.*) Don't probe.

CORDELIA I love you, you see.

DANIEL And I love you. (*Pause.*) I've got a very roomy heart. (*Pause; then she begins to laugh; he, too.*)

SCENE 8

CORDELIA and DANIEL return to their books, or whatever.

EDMEE (*Turning to GERTRUDE, both still in their beach chairs. Very casual, informal, informational.*) Well, now, to answer your question—your pry, to be more accurate, about Fergus. What he *is* to me is too much. He is my son—he *is*: real mother, real son. And since my husband died—his father—he has been the “man” in my life, so to speak. It's four years now since his father dove off the rocks—showing off, as usual—hit some jutting something underwater wasn't supposed to be there, broke his neck, drowned. (*Shrugs.*) These things happen. I haven't thought of remarrying; perhaps I will, later. I've raised Fergus; he's a good boy. There is, I think—there may be—an attachment transcends the usual, the socially *admitted* usual, that is, by which I mean: given the provocation, Fergus would bed me in a moment. A mother knows these things, even admits knowing them. . . . Sometimes. He doesn't know it, or, if he *does* sense it, is polite or shrewd enough to pretend he does *not*. It is more usual for a son to lust after his mother than a mother for her son, so there is little surprise in the information that my interest in bedding Fergus is minimal. I mean, God! I have birthed him, I have held him, rocked him, comforted him, bathed him, scolded him, dressed him, guided him . . . why on earth would I want to fuck him!?! (*GERTRUDE drops whatever she is holding.*)

SCENE 9

EDMEE and GERTRUDE stay where they are; focus on ABIGAIL and BENJAMIN.

ABIGAIL Cordelia doesn't like me!

BENJAMIN (*Taking the sun; eyes shut.*) Ohhhhhhh . . .

ABIGAIL You know perfectly well she doesn't!

BENJAMIN Well . . .

ABIGAIL Why don't you tell Daniel to *make* her like me!?

BENJAMIN Oh, I don't think I . . .

ABIGAIL Certainly it would make everything easier. I mean, if we're going to live in this proximity, with all the strings and all . . .

BENJAMIN (*Eyes open.*) Oh, God!

ABIGAIL . . . having her like me, or at least making a good stab at *pretending* to like me, would be a help. *You* don't help.

BENJAMIN Oh, God!

ABIGAIL Nor does "Oh, God" help.

BENJAMIN Oh, God!

ABIGAIL You and your sidelong glances, your letters you won't let me read, your odd phone calls, your feeble excuses for getting home late, your . . .

BENJAMIN (*Rises.*) Oh, God! (*Leaves her area.*)

ABIGAIL (*Genuine surprise.*) Where are you going?

SCENE 10

HENDEN comes down front.

HENDEN (*To the audience.*) I get frightened sometimes. Don't you? About dying, I mean? What is the age we become aware of it? That we *know* it's going to happen, even if we don't accept it? It differs with the person, I'm told. The earlier on the better—well, no: I don't mean that young man over there; I don't mean *he* should be burdened with it, not at *his* age, but somewhere in the thirties—forties at the . . . most tardy—it will come on healthy little feet; much later and you're whistling in the . . . light, I suppose. When you reach *my* age you . . . well, you get a little frightened sometimes. Because you're alone. Oh? Really? Wife, if you're lucky? Children? *Grandchildren*? Yes, certainly, if you're lucky, but you're still . . . alone. (*Taps his head.*) Nobody gets in there with you. Greek peasants have a room they keep their coffin in, ready for the day. (*Shrugs.*) No difference there from keeping it in the back of your head, the back of your mind. Being seventy gives me a few more years, if we're to believe the actuaries—three, four. That's a help, though it isn't a guarantee, and I feel pretty well. Oh . . . I have the usual: one hip not so hot; arthritis in the neck; something uncomfortable down in my lower gut, fairly steadily; a little . . . loss of sensation in my left arm now and again, and I fainted once, last week, tying my shoes. (*Shrugs.*) The usual. I go to my doctor once every year or so. I ask him; he says, "You're getting old!" Well, I *am*. Still. Nothing to be done about it, but I *do* get . . . just a little . . . frightened now and again. Being alive is . . . so splendid. (*Smiles.*) Ah, well. (*Moves back to his beach chair.*)

SCENE 11

BENJAMIN moves to where DANIEL and CORDELIA are sunning.

BENJAMIN I can't stand it! Can I move in with you two?

DANIEL *May I.*

BENJAMIN *May I? May I move in with you two?*

CORDELIA No.

DANIEL No.

BENJAMIN *(A whine.) Whhhhhhyyyy?*

CORDELIA Just because.

BENJAMIN Aw, come on, guys!

CORDELIA You made your bed, now sleep in it.

DANIEL Besides, we *have* someone moving in.

CORDELIA *(After the briefest catching-on pause.)* Yes; yes, we have.

BENJAMIN *(Mistrustful.)* Who?

CORDELIA Well . . . *(Looks to DANIEL.)*

DANIEL We wrote in to one of those magazines for swingers. . . .

CORDELIA . . . *Swingers Mag*, it's called. . . .

DANIEL . . . that's right: *Swingers Mag*, and we saw an ad in there for a bi stud wanted to relocate . . .

CORDELIA . . . six foot seven, two hundred and thirty-five pounds, wrestler's body . . .

DANIEL . . . goes both ways, into three-scenes or solos, fully reciprocal, light S and M, no femmes or fatties.

CORDELIA It seemed like a perfect addition to the house: cheaper than a new playroom, or . . .

DANIEL He gets here tomorrow; we paid his way, of course.

BENJAMIN *(After a brief, thinking pause.)* We could do four-sics!

DANIEL Rub-a-dub-dub, three men and a tub?

CORDELIA Don't be witty.

BENJAMIN I don't believe you guys! You wouldn't dare!

DANIEL *(Haughty.)* And why not, pray?

CORDELIA Yes, and why not?

BENJAMIN Because Henden and Gertrude wouldn't put up with it. *(A silence.)*

CORDELIA He has a point there.

DANIEL Mmmmmmmmm; afraid he has.

BENJAMIN They'd let *me* move in with you, though; they *like me*.

CORDELIA Tell you what: you go live with *them*.

DANIEL Right, and we'll send you a subscription to the magazine.

BENJAMIN *(Moving off.)* You guys are no help.

DANIEL *(To CORDELIA.)* No help?

CORDELIA *(To DANIEL.)* Really?

SCENE 12

ABIGAIL and FERGUS. ABIGAIL by herself, talking to herself.

ABIGAIL (*Practicing.*) Benjamin, this can't go on! Benjamin?, you and I have to have a talk. Benjamin, grow up! (*Faster.*) Who do you think I am, Benjamin? Benjamin, just who do you think you are? I'm leaving you, Benjamin; No, I'll never give you a divorce, you . . . you . . . ; you're making our lives a shambles, Benjamin; we could have been so happy together. (*Pause.*) Nuts! (*To FERGUS, who is ambling by, listening, really.*) You're not married, *are* you.

FERGUS Hello!

ABIGAIL You're not, are you; of *course* you're not; you're . . . you're an adolescent.

FERGUS I was going to say, my, aren't you pretty! But that word killed it.

ABIGAIL What word?

FERGUS Adolescent. If there's one thing an adolescent doesn't want to be called it's an adolescent—even those of us *know* we're adolescents, accept it, we don't want the word used: we don't like the sound of it. Ad-o-les-cent; it's an ugly word.

ABIGAIL I'm *sorry*!

FERGUS (*Comforting.*) I *know* you are; I'm *sure* of it.

ABIGAIL What would you *like* to be called?

FERGUS Fergus.

ABIGAIL What a . . . pretty name. I meant generically.

FERGUS Young man?

ABIGAIL (*Considers it.*) Young man. That has a nice sound. *You* are a . . . young man.

FERGUS My, aren't you pretty! There; you see? One good turn of phrase deserves another.

ABIGAIL I don't feel particularly pretty right now.

FERGUS How come?

ABIGAIL (*Looks about to see if anyone is listening.*) I'm . . . married.

FERGUS (*Cheerful.*) I know: to the gentleman over there used to be . . . involved with that other gentleman, who is . . . where? Ah! Over there, with who! —his wife!

ABIGAIL My God, you know everything, don't you. Do *all* of you know everything?

FERGUS Who is . . . all?

ABIGAIL All is too much, most likely.

FERGUS Have . . . have you and the *other* lady been . . . involved?

ABIGAIL I beg your pardon!

FERGUS Have you and the other lady . . .

ABIGAIL Certainly not!

FERGUS You make it seem so . . . definite.

ABIGAIL Well, it *is*!

FERGUS But why?

ABIGAIL Cordelia and I are not . . . that *way*.

FERGUS I see!

ABIGAIL (*Transparent.*) Nor are Benjamin and Daniel.

FERGUS I see; yes, I see.

ABIGAIL Far too much!

FERGUS Ma'am?

ABIGAIL Who have you been talking to? To Gertrude? To Henden? Gertrude is Cordelia's mother, you know.

FERGUS Really?

ABIGAIL Yes, and Henden is Daniel's father.

FERGUS My goodness!

ABIGAIL And Gertrude and Henden are married now.

FERGUS Gracious!

ABIGAIL And who's the woman you're with?

FERGUS Edmee? She's my mother.

ABIGAIL There's too much family on this beach. I'm the outsider.

FERGUS (*Considers it.*) Well, that must give you a perspective.

ABIGAIL It gives me nothing! It gives me the pip!

FERGUS Pip is given a lot, isn't it.

ABIGAIL Stay away from Daniel; he's dangerous. (*Afterthought.*) For that matter, stay away from Benjamin, too.

FERGUS But . . . why?

ABIGAIL You're very young.

FERGUS Where is *your* family?

ABIGAIL They died in a collision.

FERGUS Oh, I'm so sorry! My mother says the roads are a terrible place.

ABIGAIL (*Inaudible.*)

FERGUS Pardon?

ABIGAIL Not a car! Not roads!

FERGUS An airplane!

ABIGAIL No.

FERGUS (*Puzzles.*) A train, then!

ABIGAIL No.

FERGUS (*Awe.*) Boats?

ABIGAIL (*Inaudible again.*)

FERGUS Pardon?

ABIGAIL Balloons.

FERGUS (*Pause.*) Pardon?

ABIGAIL (*Too loud.*) Balloons! (*Softer.*) Balloons.

FERGUS My goodness.

ABIGAIL (*Still sad and perplexed over it.*) They were in central Texas—anti-
quing—and they came upon a town—I don't know, *somewhere*—and the
shops weren't any good, I guess, and they called me, very excited, and said
they were going ballooning, that there was an outfit took people up for an
hour ride—hot air balloons, you know?

FERGUS I *guess*.

ABIGAIL Be careful, I said. What can happen, they said; what are we going to
run into in a hot-air balloon? You never know, I said. Tush, they said, and
off they went!

FERGUS And?

ABIGAIL Texas is a big state.

FERGUS Yes.

ABIGAIL Flat.

FERGUS Yes.

ABIGAIL You can see for . . . miles.

FERGUS I don't doubt it. (*Pauses.*) They hit something?

(*Abigail shakes her head.*)

(*Awe.*) Something hit *them*?

(*Abigail nods.*)

My gracious!

ABIGAIL A boy genius! Are you bright? Very bright?

FERGUS I believe so.

ABIGAIL Damn your eyes! A boy genius, building his own rocket—out in all
that flatness—building his very own rocket. You'd think he would *see*
something in all that flatness, wouldn't you? Sets the fucking thing off—
on its way to Mars, I suppose—and it goes right through the bag of the
balloon, and the bag deflates, and down like a shot it goes with my
appalled mother and father, back to the flat, flat earth, fast, inexplicably
. . . and *Splat!*

FERGUS Oh, dear; oh, dear.

ABIGAIL (*Controlled.*) I went down—grief and disbelief; the boy genius had
such thick glasses—prisms; enormous hands on such a slight boy; enormous
hands and these . . . prisms. He said he was sorry. (*A sudden explosion of
tears.*) And I have to be married to a fairy! (*She runs off.*)

FERGUS (*To her retreating form.*) Yes . . . well . . . (*To himself.*) My goodness.

SCENE 13

FERGUS (*Comes forward; speaks to the audience.*) If you think it's easy being my
age, well . . . you have another think coming, as they say. A New England

boyhood isn't *all* peaches and cream, maple syrup and russet autumns. I know it *sounds* pretty good—wealthy mother and all, private school, WASP education. ASP, to be precise. *Are* there any black Anglo-Saxons? It all sounds pretty nice, and it *is*. I'm not complaining; it's nice . . . but it isn't always easy. Being corrupted, for example; now, that's important to a young fellow. Whether he takes advantage of it or not. The corrupting influences really should *be* there; all you should have to do is turn a corner and there you are, all laid out for you, so to speak—fornication, drugs, stealing, whatever; it should *be* there. But if you live in Grovers Corners, or wherever, pop. Fifteen hundred and thirty-three, it isn't too easy to come by. You have to . . . search it out. Oh, there's the grocer's youngish widow with her blinds always drawn and the come-hither look, and the mildly retarded girl in the ninth grade has some habits would make a pro blush, *and* the florist with the dyed hair and the funny walk and the mustache for those inclined that way, or at least want to try it. These things are to be *had* in a small town, but not without the peril of observation and revelation. What's missing, I suppose, is . . . anonymity. And there are, after all, some things we'd rather do in private—at least until we're practiced—do them well. The lack of anonymity: Well, in a small New England town, if your family's been there eight hundred years, or whatever, and you're "gentry," *and* you're bright, *and* your mother practically sends out announcements *saying* you're bright and destined for "great things," well, then . . . it's not the same, the nice same, as being able to get it all together behind the barn, so to speak, and then coming out all rehearsed and "ready." "I hear you're getting all A's, Fergus; good for you!" "Your mother says you've decided on Harvard, young fella; well, I hope they've decided on you, ha, ha, ha!" Lordy! Even when I was tiny: "Took his first step, did he!?" "Potty trained is he? Good for him!" Royalty must have it worse, or the children of the very famous. I don't even know what I want to *do* with my life—if I want to do *anything*. If I want to *live* it, even. Do you know what suicide rate has been making the biggest jumps? Kids. Kids my age. I'm not planning to . . . kill myself or anything; don't misunderstand me; I'm happy, relatively happy, as I understand the term. It's just that . . . well, we kids have all sorts of options. You grown-ups aren't the only ones. Think about *that*. Thank you. (*Bows, moves off.*)

SCENE 14

CORDELIA (*Comes forward; alone. To the audience.*) I would imagine you've been wondering why I married Daniel, considering everything—Benjamin, I mean. I would imagine you've been wondering; heaven knows, *I* have, now and again. My mother—Gertrude, over there—said to me—how

many times?—"Why are you *marrying* that person? I warn you, young woman, you're in for a lot of woe." "Oh, Mother," I'd say, knowing full well what she meant. "I warn you: they don't change; you'll find out!" "Oh, Mother!" Back and forth; Ping-Pong. "I had a cousin married one." "Oh, Mother!" "Scandals; driven from one town to another." "Oh, God.!" "Mark my words."

GERTRUDE (*From where she sits.*) Mark my words!

CORDELIA (*Out.*) I married him because I love him. Doesn't that seem simple enough? We met; I found him handsome—in his way; sexy—in his way; plus bright plus tender and considerate plus patient plus he cheered me up a lot. I don't mean to suggest that I was greatly in *need* of cheering up; I'm not a manic depressive, or anything. I've had some laughs, some kicks; I've been around—married once before, to a jock, on his way to nowhere, as it turned out. I've been around; I know the scene, the score, whatever. But Daniel was special—*is*. I knew he was gay—right off; some women sense these things; others never get the hang of it. I knew he was gay; I knew he and Benjamin were lovers; and I knew I wanted to marry him. (*Shrugs.*) Well, I'm a grown-up.

GERTRUDE (*From where she sits.*) Mark my words!

CORDELIA Oh, Mother! (*Out.*) I knew what the problems would be—*are*. I knew the chances. I *know* Daniel sleeps around; well, I'm pretty sure I know it, and I suspect it's with guys. I *hope* it is; I mean, I *like* being his only woman. I mean, if I turn him straight . . . then he'll start in with girls. This way's better. As long as he's careful.

GERTRUDE (*From where she sits.*) You're in for a lot of woe! Mark my words!

CORDELIA (*Laughs.*) Oh, Mother! (*Out.*) Every time we're done making love and we have our cigarettes, Daniel'll turn to me and smile and take my hand and say, "Isn't it nice that we're such good friends." Well, I suppose that isn't *exactly* your usual marriage, isn't precisely (*Imitation of jock.*) "Hey, babe, that was good for me; was it good for you, too?" Not exactly that, but I don't mind. I think I prefer it. I think . . . I think perhaps Daniel is more interested in our friendship than our marriage. I mean, he seems . . . happy enough being married to me, certainly no less happy than when he was—married, I suppose, to Benjamin. And if I lose anything, it won't be the way your usual marriage ends—the friendship goes first, and *then* the marriage falls apart. What I mean is, I think I have a friend, and if one day he thinks that our being married is as silly as it *is* . . . well, then I'll lose the marriage, but I think I'll still have a *very good friend*. (*Shrugs.*) There are worse things in the world to have.

SCENE 15

BENJAMIN, DANIEL, FERGUS. Benjamin and Daniel are standing, separate, stretching. Fergus comes up.

FERGUS Let's play catch.

DANIEL I beg your pardon!

FERGUS Let's play *catch*. Here; I have a ball. (*Throws and catches a beach ball.*)

BENJAMIN Hey! Why not?

DANIEL Why *not*? You? Catch something? Herpes is about the only thing you can catch.

FERGUS Who's that?

BENJAMIN (*To DANIEL.*) As opposed to *you*— who comes down with *everything*: herpes, hepatitis . . .

FERGUS (*Helping.*) Harelip, halitosis. This is fun!

DANIEL (*To BENJAMIN.*) Never mind now; not in front of a child.

BENJAMIN (*Mocking imitation of DANIEL.*) And all I did was go to confession: the wafer must have been contaminated.

DANIEL I said: never mind!

FERGUS May we play?

BENJAMIN Okay! Okay!

DANIEL (*To BENJAMIN.*) Be sure to put your glasses on: you *do* want to catch the ball.

FERGUS (*To DANIEL.*) I'll throw it to you and you throw it to him and he'll throw it to me.

DANIEL (*Mildly sarcastic.*) Won't this be fun!

BENJAMIN It *will* be!

FERGUS Okay; here we go. (*Throws at DANIEL.*) Catch!

DANIEL (*Catching.*) Ow! Jesus!

BENJAMIN (*Parody of baseball player.*) C'mon, guy; heave her over here!

DANIEL (*Disbelief.*) *Heave* her over *here*?

BENJAMIN Come on; have fun!

DANIEL Who ever heard of anybody saying anything like that? (*Underhand toss.*) Here!

BENJAMIN (*Sibilant comment.*) Ooooooh! My gracious! Such force!

FERGUS You guys are *fun*! (*Catches BENJAMIN's fair throw.*) Hey! That's good!

DANIEL (*Jock imitation.*) What's ya name, kid? (*BENJAMIN giggles; FERGUS throws sort of hard to DANIEL.*) Ow!

FERGUS Fergus. Was that too hard?

BENJAMIN (*Jock imitation.*) For a guy like him, kid? You kidding? (*DANIEL throws very hard.*) Ow!

FERGUS You guys *are* fun!

(*Natural, casual throwing now; unobtrusive.*)

DANIEL What kind of name is Fergus?

FERGUS Scots, I believe.

BENJAMIN I'm Benjamin.

FERGUS Hi!

DANIEL And I'm Lucille.

FERGUS (*No change in friendly tone.*) Hi!

DANIEL (*Awe at FERGUS's aplomb.*) Wow! No, actually I'm Daniel.

FERGUS I know. You two are presently married to those ladies over there, although . . . since the two of *you* have been . . . uh . . . intimately involved? . . . there is a question floating around this particular area of the beach as to whether these marriages were made in heaven. I have no opinion on the matter.

BENJAMIN (*To DANIEL; false sotto voce.*) The "in-laws" have been talking again.

FERGUS Are you all good friends, you four? You and your wives?

DANIEL It varies; it varies.

FERGUS I . . . wondered.

(*Pause.*)

BENJAMIN Oh?

DANIEL Oh?

FERGUS I was having a little chat with . . . well, I guess *your* wife, Benjamin; uh . . . Abigail is *yours*?

DANIEL Oh, yes; Abigail is *his* and he is Abigail's.

BENJAMIN Enough!

DANIEL Desist? Hold? *Basta*?

FERGUS You guys are really *fun*?

BENJAMIN What *about* Abigail?

FERGUS She's . . . (*Tosses ball above his head; catches it.*) . . . well, she's. . . . unhappy?

DANIEL No kidding!

BENJAMIN (*Gently.*) I *know*.

FERGUS I'd take care if I were you.

DANIEL (*To no one.*) Whatever can he mean?

BENJAMIN (*Ignoring DANIEL's tone.*) Whatever *can* you mean?

FERGUS I'd be careful of her; that's all. (*Quick subject switch.*) Which one of you guys married first?

BENJAMIN *I* did.

FERGUS (*Some surprise.*) Really?

DANIEL I was planning to when this one decided to do something precipitous.

"I'll show *you!*"—*that* sort of thing.

BENJAMIN Untrue! Untrue!

DANIEL . . . when he realized that I was serious—that Cordelia and I were

going to be married. When *that* sank in, he sort of ran out in the street and hooked on to the first gullible girl he could find.

BENJAMIN Unclean! Unclean!

DANIEL (*Naggy tone.*) "I'll show you! I'll show you!"

FERGUS (*To BENJAMIN.*) I'd worry about her a little if I were you.

DANIEL With any luck she might just . . . walk out of our lives, you mean?

FERGUS Something like that.

BENJAMIN (*More or less to himself.*) That is something to think about.

FERGUS (*Starting to leave, still tossing to himself; a kind of "Okay you guys" tone.*) Okay. Okay.

BENJAMIN Where are you going?

DANIEL Where are you taking the ball?

FERGUS You guys don't need the ball; you've got your own game going.

(*As FERGUS leaves, a combination of regret and something private and not too nice.*)

BENJAMIN and DANIEL Aaaaawwwwwwwwwwwww!

SCENE 16

FERGUS moves behind sleeping EDMEE, awakes GERTRUDE and HENDEN.

FERGUS Have I got things to tell *her*! (*Moves past, out of their view.*)

EDMEE (*After a pause; suddenly.*) Who was that?

GERTRUDE Your son . . . or so you say.

HENDEN What a nice boy!

EDMEE My son, or so I say?

HENDEN Bright, too!

GERTRUDE I meant no offense.

EDMEE (*To HENDEN.*) Very bright. Too bright?—perhaps.

HENDEN Oh, come now!

GERTRUDE (*Singsong.*) No offense at all.

EDMEE (*Generally.*) There's danger in consciousness, in too much awareness.

HENDEN We go through it only once, my dear, or so more tell me than don't—better alert than . . . numb, or not comprehending.

GERTRUDE (*To HENDEN; an old argument.*) You're *certain* of that—that we go through it only once.

HENDEN (*To EDMEE; chuckling.*) Gertrude is of the opinion that a move away from the big bang theory to the notion that the universe has always existed, in whatever form . . .

EDMEE (*Lazy.*) I don't believe either one.

GERTRUDE (*Mildly startled.*) Oh? Really?

HENDEN . . . has—what?—permits the concept of . . . cyclism, I suppose it could be called. . . .

GERTRUDE (*Fingertips to temples.*) Stop it, Henden.

HENDEN What? Oh.

EDMEE (*FERGUS is listening, unbeknownst etc.*) (*After a tiny pause.*) It's that Fergus is . . . so bright I worry for him. Oh, a mother with a dumb one has her own problems—can he find his way *home*? Won't he be embarrassed to be in the third grade at fourteen? Whatever will he *do* with his *life*? Those *are* problems, and I don't envy a woman who *has* them. But Fergus is ready for college and he's just sixteen. We're going to Europe for a year, to Rome, to Athens, to Dendura, to Istanbul, to let him see it all, begin to relate time to place, fact to theory.

GERTRUDE Isn't that nice.

EDMEE You *still* don't think he's my son, *do* you!

HENDEN (*Admonishingly.*) Why, Gertrude!

GERTRUDE (*Too innocent by far.*) I didn't say a word! I haven't said a word for . . . minutes.

EDMEE (*Hard.*) He's not my type, lady! I *told* you that!

GERTRUDE I didn't say a word!

HENDEN (*To placate.*) What a nice boy he is!

(*FERGUS turns, pauses, exits just before the end of EDMEE's next speech.*)

EDMEE You know what bothers me most about him, about Fergus—being so special, being so . . . bright, so beautiful and bright? That he'll turn out . . . less than he promises. I don't want to be around when his hair recedes or his body starts its way to fat; I don't want to see the expression in his eyes when he looks at his life and sees it's not going to be quite what it might have been. Tarnish! That's what I don't want to see . . . tarnish.

GERTRUDE (*Cold; to comfort and destroy.*) Well, maybe he'll die young.

EDMEE (*Wistful.*) Maybe.

GERTRUDE Or maybe you won't be around.

EDMEE (*Ibid.*) Maybe.

HENDEN Or, or maybe none of that will happen; maybe he'll . . . *be* . . . everything he might.

EDMEE (*Ibid.*) Maybe.

GERTRUDE (*Caught up in it.*) My goodness! Wouldn't that be something!

EDMEE Yes. Wouldn't it.

SCENE 17

DANIEL and HENDEN, together, HENDEN arriving.

DANIEL Hi, Dad.

HENDEN Hello, son. (*Pause.*)

DANIEL You should keep your head covered.

HENDEN Oh?

DANIEL Burn.

HENDEN Aha! (*Pause.*)

DANIEL Cordelia's over there.

HENDEN I see; I see she is. (*Pause.*) Gertrude's over there.

DANIEL Yes; I saw.

HENDEN Aha. (*Pause.*) How is it going?

DANIEL What?

HENDEN It! You, Cordelia, Benjamin, what's-her-name, and all that?

DANIEL "All that"?

HENDEN All right!! (*Pause.*)

DANIEL (*Shrugs.*) Not bad.

HENDEN Good?

DANIEL (*Harder.*) Not bad. (*Pause.*)

HENDEN Do you want to talk about it?

DANIEL You know better. (*Pause.*)

HENDEN I am your father. . . .

DANIEL (*Explodes.*) Christ! Great, suffering Jesus, do we have to go on with this?

HENDEN (*Hurriedly; mollifying.*) No, no, no, no, now . . .

DANIEL (*Continuing.*) Must we go on with it? There is no hope! There is . . . going on; there is . . . getting through it!

HENDEN (*Softly.*) All right.

DANIEL (*Continuing.*) There is my nature and Benjamin's nature, and we are doing what we can about it, though I think we're idiots. We have fallen between stools, Father; we were better perched on our specialness . . . our disgrace, perhaps. Perhaps not. I don't know—the perch, I mean; not the specialness. I don't know.

HENDEN I know.

DANIEL (*Ironic.*) But we are trying. Jesus, we're trying!! Benjamin is heart-broken and confused; Abigail—what's-her-name to you—Abigail is close to a collapse of some sort; Cordelia is turning tough and brittle at the same time and is beginning to drink just a little too much, though maybe that's in her; and I . . . I can't keep my hands from shaking, or shouting at you, dearest man, whom I love above all creatures on this earth. (*Pause.*)

HENDEN Well.

DANIEL Yes; well.

(*Pause. They embrace; DANIEL seems to sob; HENDEN tentatively hugs him, pats him on the back; they separate, go in opposite directions.*)

SCENE 18

Abigail and Edmee. EDMEE seated next to a sleeping GERTRUDE; ABIGAIL approaches.

ABIGAIL May we talk?

EDMEE I suppose we *could*; I don't really *want* to.

ABIGAIL (*About to leave; shy.*) I'm sorry.

EDMEE (*Removing her dark glasses.*) No! I am! I'm being rude.

ABIGAIL Well, a little.

EDMEE (*None too pleasant.*) I like candor in a girl; next to bitten fingernails, I like candor best.

ABIGAIL (*Looks to be sure.*) I don't bite my nails.

EDMEE (*Expansive.*) I don't know what it is about the sea—the beach and the sea: they bring out in me a tristesse I feel no other place. It's not a lugubrious sadness or a grief; no, I described it as I intended.

ABIGAIL A tristesse?

EDMEE Yes. I have felt fear in the plains, panic in a church, claustrophobia in the mountains, tearing loss at Christmas with all my lovies around me, implausible sadness on a lovely day, but only here, where the earth and water meet, do I feel this . . . tristesse.

ABIGAIL (*Shy.*) I see.

EDMEE We have so much to be thankful for, being alive. *Being alive*!! for one! I've never taken much comfort from "what lies beyond," as they put it. I *doubt* it; I doubt the entire proposition, but even if it does . . . occur, the reports are none too encouraging—hellfire for the wicked and a kind of disembodied cloud sit for the rest? What comfort there! What! No dry martinis? No poetry? No . . . no whatever makes it all worth the effort? Perhaps I could accept an eternity of tristesse, sitting here with a magazine, my mind, and some memories. (*Turns to Gertrude.*) Are you asleep, my dear?

ABIGAIL (*Wistful; lost.*) The water is . . . lovely.

EDMEE It's the line where it meets; that's the magic! One element into another, (*Snaps her fingers.*) Just like that! I would love to be able to walk into it—the water—walk down the grade, enter, submerge, walk about, reverse and march right back to my starting point, all erect, all . . . gliding. I would love to be able to breathe both water and air.

ABIGAIL We can . . . in a way.

EDMEE (*Scoffing.*) Oh, masks and tanks and things!

ABIGAIL No; not really. (*Begins to move away.*) Thank you; I enjoyed our talk.

EDMEE (*To GERTRUDE's sleeping form.*) Gertrude? (*To the retreating ABIGAIL.*) Oh! Oh, so did I! I hope I was some . . . (*To herself.*) Well, I hope I was some help.

SCENE 19

ABIGAIL and BENJAMIN; ABIGAIL returning.

BENJAMIN (*Casual.*) Where have you been?

ABIGAIL Where have *you* been?

BENJAMIN Nowhere.

ABIGAIL Me, too.

BENJAMIN Who were you *talking* to?

ABIGAIL (*Indicates.*) That lady.

BENJAMIN Her son is called Fergus; he's . . .

ABIGAIL (*She can't help it.*) . . . a little young for you, don't you think?

BENJAMIN Oh, come *on!* Jesus, can't we even *talk*?

ABIGAIL I'm sorry! (*Softer.*) I *am*; I'm sorry.

BENJAMIN (*Taking her hand.*) How can your *hand* be so *cold*? It's hot out here; how can your hand be so cold?

ABIGAIL (*Withdrawing her hand.*) I'm always cold; I get colder all the time. If you ever held me anymore you'd know.

BENJAMIN I hold you.

ABIGAIL Sure!

BENJAMIN (*Anger rising.*) I hold you!

ABIGAIL (*A burst of self-propelled anger.*) Yes! *You* hold me! But I hardly know it's *you*, and who are you holding *really*, and why do you want to hurt me in bed, and why are you walking away, and . . . (*BENJAMIN goes.*) . . . and why am I so cold all the time? . . . And (*Raises her hand to the sun; slow, quiet intensity now.*) Why don't you just . . . go out? Burn out? Flare up, sizzle, crackle for a moment, and then . . . just . . . fade . . . bring the ice down on all of us? *I'm* ready; *I'm* cold enough. Go out! I dare you! (*Pause; pain.*) Benjamin! Benjamin!

SCENE 20

EDMEE, GERTRUDE, and HENDEN in their chairs. During this scene ABIGAIL looks off right, gathers her towel and exits, unnoticed by the others.

GERTRUDE (*Waking up; an announcement of subject.*) Am I asleep, my dear.

EDMEE (*Pleased.*) Aha!

GERTRUDE Where is Henden?

HENDEN (*Eyes closed; hat over his face.*) Asleep, my dear.

GERTRUDE Aha. (*To EDMEE.*) I doze; I slip off into sleepettes. Is it tiny strokes, I wonder—the sleepettes? I will be at a dinner party, attentive to my neighbor, and all at once I am aware I have slipped off for a moment. Or

I am reading and it will happen. Tiny strokes? Probably not: Simply that I don't sleep much at night; I cat-prowl. Henden and I still have the same room—the same bed!—and he lies there, a wheezing lump, unconscious.

HENDEN Ah, now . . .

EDMEE (*Literally.*) Tee-hee!

GERTRUDE . . . and I am awake, almost all the night, dozing fitfully until I am awakened by a creak, a chirp, the memory of a dream.

EDMEE *I've* done it.

GERTRUDE I do it as clockwork. I am as familiar with dawn as any farmer, the night as any watchman. I waxed the library table once at three in the A.M., down on my knees in my nightdress doing away at the big claw feet.

HENDEN Looked grand when you were done. (*EDMEE laughs.*)

GERTRUDE And I write long letters in the night—wise, instructive, useful—to our leaders, but I seldom mail them: might change the world; wouldn't do —let bad enough alone.

EDMEE I sleep without moving.

GERTRUDE (*Too bright.*) Who *tells* you?

EDMEE (*Smooth.*) Oh . . . whoever is with me. I have a . . . variety of gentlemen, and one lady, share my night times. I outsleep them; they tell me.

GERTRUDE Why did you wonder if I was awake?

EDMEE (*Mildly corrective.*) I wondered if you were *asleep*.

GERTRUDE Oh. (*Afterthought.*) They are *not* the same?

HENDEN (*Behind his hat.*) Not exactly.

EDMEE That . . . that girl was talking to me, the young one. I wanted to help.

GERTRUDE Abigail?

EDMEE Is that her name?

GERTRUDE Abigail. She is married to Benjamin. We know all about that.

EDMEE Oh?

GERTRUDE (*Hurrying through it.*) It's so tedious. Abigail is married by mischance to Benjamin, who by mischance was lovers with Daniel, who by mischance is now married to Cordelia. Cordelia is my daughter, and Daniel is Henden's son.

EDMEE Goodness!

GERTRUDE (*Waving it all away.*) They travel in a pack; they are not happy! They worry and bother us.

EDMEE Gracious!

GERTRUDE . . . though we have given up trying to solve it all: too much fate; too much irony.

HENDEN I try . . . now and again.

GERTRUDE To any end?

HENDEN You know better.

EDMEE Perhaps it will all resolve itself. I wonder what she wanted.

GERTRUDE (*Shrugs.*) To whine; to explain; to be comforted; to save her soul.
Who knows? Perhaps it will all resolve itself? Yes; well, perhaps; and—then
again—perhaps not. And so . . . Henden sleeps and I prowl.

EDMEE Jack Sprat!

GERTRUDE (*Laughs.*) Yes; in a way.

HENDEN Jack who?

GERTRUDE Go back to sleep.

(*GERTRUDE and EDMEE laugh, sadly gaily.*)

SCENE 21

BENJAMIN, CORDELIA, DANIEL, EDMEE and GERTRUDE. DANIEL and CORDELIA are stage right, EDMEE and GERTRUDE in their chairs stage left, HENDEN is in his chair, back to front.

BENJAMIN (*Comes down to CORDELIA and DANIEL.*) Hold me, you guys.

DANIEL Another bout?

BENJAMIN (*Still standing.*) Just hold me.

DANIEL Come in between.

CORDELIA (*Shrugs; smiles.*) Why not?

(*The sun goes behind a cloud; the sky becomes gray.*)

GERTRUDE (*To EDMEE.*) Are we losing the sun?

EDMEE Hm?

GERTRUDE I said . . .

EDMEE Why, I think we are.

BENJAMIN There are days when I just don't . . .

DANIEL Forget it.

BENJAMIN Why is the sun going away?

DANIEL (*Sad laugh.*) It's one of those *days*.

BENJAMIN (*A child.*) What if it were to . . . go out?

CORDELIA That'd solve a few things.

DANIEL It sure would. (*Sighs.*)

GERTRUDE (*About the sun.*) Awwwwwwww.

EDMEE So much for skin cancer.

GERTRUDE (*Cheerful.*) Oh, it'll come back.

EDMEE You and I should talk about facelift sometime.

BENJAMIN Let well enough alone, I tell her.

CORDELIA *Well* enough?

DANIEL Indeed.

BENJAMIN What?

DANIEL Let bad enough alone, you mean?

BENJAMIN Something like that.

GERTRUDE (*To EDMEE.*) Whatever for? Are you planning one?

EDMEE One likes to think ahead.

GERTRUDE I have the skin of a turtle. I don't bother.

BENJAMIN She says I hurt her in bed.

CORDELIA (*Gleeful interest.*) Oh? Really?

DANIEL (*Chuckles.*) Down, girl!

EDMEE If you're as vain as I am, then you look around the next corner.

GERTRUDE (*A bit chiding, a bit taunting.*) What would your Fergie say?

EDMEE (*Laughs.*) Well, then your dreams might come true. (*Offhand.*) Where is he, I wonder?

BENJAMIN I think one day it'll have to be just . . . the three of us.

CORDELIA Only if you'll promise to hurt me.

DANIEL He'll find a way—one way or another.

BENJAMIN I'm gentle. How about it, guys? The three of us?

CORDELIA The two of you, you mean.

DANIEL Oh, come on, baby!

CORDELIA I'll bow out; I will.

GERTRUDE (*To EDMEE.*) Do you think I *should* have it done?

EDMEE Couldn't hurt.

GERTRUDE I wonder what Henden would say?

EDMEE Ask him.

GERTRUDE (*Looks.*) He's asleep. He probably wouldn't notice.

BENJAMIN The musketeers.

CORDELIA (*Looking.*) There's a crowd down there at the water.

DANIEL A whale, probably; a shark.

CORDELIA (*Puzzled frown.*) No; no, I don't think so.

DANIEL Well, why don't you go see?

CORDELIA (*Rising, moving off.*) Yes. Yes, I think I will. (*Exits.*)

DANIEL (*Imitation of a witch.*) Now we're alone, baby!

BENJAMIN (*Sincere.*) Oh, Daniel; hold me. (*DANIEL does, gently.*)

EDMEE There would appear to be two theories about facelift—at least! One is, wait until you're nicely lined and sagged and wattled, and *then* do it. The other is, do it often and surreptitiously—**never** look a day older than when you've begun it.

GERTRUDE Our skin ages, no matter what you do.

EDMEE Oh, you have to stay out of the sun.

GERTRUDE Stay out of the sun? Are you mad?

EDMEE (*Chuckles; then:*) There are *people* down there.

GERTRUDE (*Not interested.*) Oh? (*Intense.*) Why doesn't the sun come back?

BENJAMIN Do we have to go on this way? Can't we go back to how we were?

DANIEL I don't think so.

(*CORDELIA returns with ABIGAIL's towel.*)

BENJAMIN (*Puzzled.*) That's Abigail's towel.

CORDELIA No beached whale; no shark.

BENJAMIN That's Abigail's!

DANIEL (*Eyes narrowing.*) What's wrong?

CORDELIA (*Looking back toward the water.*) Abigail tried to drown herself. They stopped her. They have her over a barrel—literally; they're pumping the water out of her. She'll live. (*Tosses the towel to BENJAMIN.*) Here; this belongs to you.

BENJAMIN (*Awe; not moving.*) She tried to drown herself? Why?

DANIEL (*He and CORDELIA chuckle sadly.*) Oh, God.

GERTRUDE Henden?

BENJAMIN (*Generally.*) Hold me?

EDMEE Let him sleep.

GERTRUDE (*Senses something.*) Henden! (*Goes to his chair.*) Henden?

EDMEE Let him . . . (*She, too, realizes.*) Is he dead?

GERTRUDE (*Long pause.*) Yes; yes, he is.

EDMEE Poor him; poor you.

GERTRUDE Poor Henden; poor, dear man.

EDMEE (*Quiet panic.*) Fergus!

BENJAMIN (*Not loving.*) I'll have to go to her.

CORDELIA Let them wring her out. What would you say to her?

BENJAMIN (*Pause.*) Nothing?

GERTRUDE (*To DANIEL, from where she is.*) Daniel?

DANIEL (*Pause; soft.*) Yes, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE You'd better come here.

EDMEE Fergus?

DANIEL Is it my father?

GERTRUDE You know. Yes.

EDMEE Fergus?

DANIEL I'll come in a moment.

CORDELIA Oh, Daniel, poor Daniel.

EDMEE Fergus?

BENJAMIN Hold me?

DANIEL (*Gently.*) Oh, God.

GERTRUDE Oh, Henden.

EDMEE Fergus!

BENJAMIN *Hold me! Someone!*

CORDELIA Anyone? Here. (*Holds him.*)

EDMEE Fergus?

GERTRUDE Oh, my poor Henden.

DANIEL Oh, God.

EDMEE (*A frightened child.*) Fergus?

GERTRUDE He'll come back, my dear; they do. Look! The sun's returning.
What glory! What . . . wonder!

(Indeed, the sun is returning.)

BENJAMIN Daniel?

EDMEE Fergus?

GERTRUDE Oh, my Henden.

DANIEL Oh, God.

EDMEE Fergus? *(Pause.)* Fergus?

(Pause; slow fade.)

END.