

The Pallid Sphere

A poetical drama

In three acts

David Werner, 1959

Dramatic Personae

Roger McLain, a man

Nancy McLain, his wife

Douglas, his son

A fortune teller, Roger's inner behest illumined

A policeman, expulsion of his inner behest

A beggar, his inner behest romanticized

Victor, practicability: his "out".

Frank, his desk-job self

A naked boy, his soul.

Time: the present [written in 1959]

The action takes place in the abode of the fortune teller and in the McLain's dwelling.

Act I

Scene I

The dimly lit abode of a fortune teller. Forward left, a small plain table and two chairs. On the table rests a large crystal ball which gives off a ghostly, opalescent light. From the back-left corner, and angling slightly forward, extends an un-papered wall, which abuts darkness, half way across the

stage. A door is in the wall. The immediate vicinity of the table is illumed with a dim, blue-white, diffused light. The entire right half of the stage is obscured in darkness.

Seated at a small table is the mistress of the dwelling, a slightly built old lady. The features beset on her world-weathered face are sharply cut. Her lips are thin, almost indiscernible in the dim light. Her small, bright steel-gray eyes give her a wild, penetrating look of a hawk, yet about her is an air of compassion and concern. She has just finished writing a rhyme which that she recites aloud to herself.

Fortune Teller (FT):

*"Spoil and strain and material gain
Stride on, and all is well,
Yet heaven on earth is more painful in birth
Than death . . . for freedom is hell."*

Not too bad, I suppose, but still
I'd say they're far from pretty lines!
I fear I'll never be a poet . . .

A knock is heard at the door. The fortune teller appears not to hear, or if she hears, not to heed.

FT: Ah well...for better or for worse
 'Tis fun to try one's at verse.

A second, louder knock. The fortune teller looks up. Quietly:

Ho! Who knocks?

She arises and walks to the door. Her movements flow freely, rhythmic, but slow, requiring noticeable effort. She heaves open the heavy door. Outside is only blackness is visible.

Who's there? (a movement in the doorway)

Come in, my friend! Come in!

I've been waiting long for your arrival . . .

(aside to the audience)

or your like. . . . Indeed, I've waited longer
than my tummy can afford. Even the children
are sceptic today.

The newcomer enters hesitantly and follows the old lady to the table.

FT: Do seat yourself.

The newcomer, Roger McLain, carefully sits down at the table. He is a young man, perhaps 27, of medium height with a slight, rather sinewy frame. His hands, which he rests palms down on the edge of the table, are fine, with long sensitive fingers. They look to be the hands of the artist, though their owner, if some latent artistic talent is his, has never developed it. The nervous fingers move upon the table rhythmically, pawing at the surface like tethered dogs, eager to follow their master on some exciting adventure, but left at home. His face, though unusual, is not unattractive, and could almost be termed handsome were it a bit, indeed quite a bit, fuller. His fine features are drawn in against the cavities of his cheeks and his eyes, set deeply in his head, stare like lonely lights burning silently at the back of dark, adjacent caverns.

The fortune teller seats herself opposite the young man. She gives him a questioning smile.

FT: Well then?
How is it you have stumbled onto me —
onto this buried well so alien to
our age of light bulbs and denatured thought?
Have light bulbs 'come unpopular? . . . Well then?

Roger: My parents, teachers, neighbors, all have told me
since I was so high of gypsies, mystics,
fortune tellers, and the like. They damned them worse
than beggars, called them thieves, fakers, liars.
So adamant, their rigid disrespect,
that even as a lad I came to question.
The child in me feared such damning verdicts,
for similar convictions more than once,
had flown to roost upon my wicked frame...
It seems, you see, that when I was a lad
I liked such things as were not meant for liking,
I cried at times that were not ripe for weeping,
even chuckled when solemnity was apt. . . .
Though now I more than realize how in error
were many of my foolish childish whims,
on their construction they seemed to me
quite noble. I judged myself a guiltless waif,
so I conceived how blameless blamed could be.

So it happened, auditing the charge
made vehement against you shameless fellows,
that I foresaw perhaps no blame was yours,
I wondered how an honest soul so labeled
could survive the tuneless claws of such attack —
I wondered likewise how I might survive —
And so I came to feel a kind of kinship,

founded, I guess, on mutual damnation:
gypsies were wild, I was also wild;
fortune tellers were thieves...

F.T.: And you a child!

Roger: Well, it seemed we suffered similar reproach,

F.T.: And you have held this so-called "kind of kinship"
all through the years while you've become a man?
I can't believe it!

Roger: Well, not exactly.
You see, in time I came to take a view
not altogether different from my neighbors.
I bow my head, I did not hold my views,
but the rebel rides my fancy, not my action,
when it comes to roads unanimously shunned.

F.T.: Alas, too often is the weakest thorn
the first to tear the skin and spoil the fruit...
Your failing suits your better nature ill...
But tell me friend, if you were turned against me,
what brings you hither now?

Roger: I am returned.

The dim blue-white light suddenly becomes much dimmer, by contrast making the cadaverous glow of the crystal ball more conspicuous, Roger speaks on in a haunting, though halting voice.

I have a dream... a maddening daemon dream...
which like some bat winged specter of the night

comes lurking through the dark to bleed me white.
I waken wet and screaming. It's agony!
I fear to sleep. The doctors aid me not.
The God, whom I beseech, denies my plea.
And still I dream my dream. So I return
to you, with whom I bore my childhood cross.
I recognize your powers - I beg your help...

F.T.: (calmly)

You recognize my powers in your plight!
Where weakness scorns the passions to conform,
and fear converts that scorn back to belief
'tis sycophantic to extreme... My friend,
your bravery becomes you as your breasts!

Roger: (angrily)

You jest! I am a man! I have no breasts!

F.T.: As for that, I had not meant to hold
you did have much in the way of breasts...
though cleverly you are righteously offended
to term my pointed accusation "jest".
But hold your tongue, lest I offend you more,
though sharply I may speak I mean you well,
nor well should I have spoken as I have
had I once thought your vanity, though great,
was more than dust upon your deeper virtue.

Roger: Such scathing compliment confuses me..
Yet well I see the wisdom of your wit.
You judge me right. I am a well intending
coward. A guilted pile of... coal.

F.T.: Ah, no,
your frail heart is cast of yellow gold;
though sad that coal dust mars the finer core...
But let us turn our talk back where we were
that I may judge you less and know you more.
You have a cryptic dream. You beg my help.
You commandeer my powers to your aid.
What power is this? What aid is this you ask?

Roger: (speaking hoarsely, leaning urgently over the glowing crystal ball)
Your mesmerizing power. Your occult aid.
Oh sibyl of this age, forgotten prophetess
of yesterday's tomorrows, how well I know
that you possess clairvoyant powers to peer
into this ball, perceiving the unknown
and fathoming the fate of all mankind.
You gaze upon this vastly traveled globe,
And like a master of the seas unfold
your charts to gaze upon our destinies.

F.T.:(softly)
This sounds like Hamlet — would that it were true!

Roger: (ignoring her comment)
Look you, now, into this pallid sphere,
this miniature moon whose mystic murmurings
possess you. Then for my phantom dream
lend you the croaking music of your life
to that mute wisdom yet enshrined within
this stone.

F.T.: Nay, nay, my friend, you see us wrong!

It's not this ghostly moon which hides the keys
to sepulchers of deeds and dreams of men.
Not likely? Nor is it I, this old
and weather-worn figment of a witch,
who sees (perhaps you think) with deadly insight
into the hidden sanctums of your soul...
The magic I possess is not your caliber.
'Tis crude device as meant for meaner stuff.
This pale crystal ball means little more
Than marriage license means to man and wife:
' It's nothing past the vast respect it harbors.

Roger: (distraught)

Do you who sport the name of fortune teller
Tell me your crystal ball is all but useless?

F.T.: Anything but useless. Though 'tis nothing
I could not deal with certain folk without it —
They would not come had I no crystal ball.
They come expecting sorcery and tricks,
and so I do my damndest to oblige them,
I cry that freedom can be bought with bread,
nor if not bread, with lead, and soul-fires can be kindled
with a safety match — and without friction, too.
I listen to their tales and tell their fortunes
and conjure up the verdicts of their dreams.

Roger: (despairingly)

Though I appreciate your blunt confession
(I cannot help be flattered that it came!)
I fear I must depart. (He rises.) I had so wished.
Indeed, I had believed in mystic forces —

my final hope in this most hopeless struggle —
but you have shattered my last frugal faith
with your confession.

F.T.: (extending her arm to him)

Sit down my blade of grass
I am not beaten yet. Nor are you beaten
by my lack of preternatural devices.
For many days through many minds I've wandered
and many shades of lives I understand
If I may bear with you, and you with me,
Before you know we'll have our ship off sand.

Roger: (wide eyed)

Into the sea?

F.T.: The lovely storm-swept sea!
 The lonely star-swept land, the sea, the sky!

Roger: (concealing a shiver)

What can you do who have not god-like grasp
but tell me that which I myself may know?
How can you reach into a soul so darkened
I cannot drag it forth, though it be mine?

F.T.: I do not plan to reach, nor shall I hazard
 any mystic guess about your soul.
 But if you rest your over-traveled eyes upon
 this ball, and so relax yourself, I'll be
 your mirror, that in this tender pause you may
 reflect upon the image of your dreams...
 you may begin to look upon yourself

not through your sightless eyes, nor with your mind,
but with the magic echo of your soul
upon your whole. Now pour forth your dream.

Roger: Though it's torture to recall
I cannot but recall it, speak or no.
Listen then, and I'll tell you of my dream.

The blue-white light fades out leaving only the whitish glow of the crystal ball, which illuminates from below the now ghostlike faces of the pair. As Roger begins his dream, a reddish glow at floor level gradually appears in the dark right half of the stage. The small figure of a boy, about seven — preferably naked, or in skin colored briefs — can be darkly discerned in the right foreground. Only the boy's feet, which are hobbled with a hemp rope, are clearly illuminated. The red glow gradually gains intensity as Roger's anguished, haunting voice speaks on.

I dream t that all the land was flat and pale,
a chunk of earth as parched as pottered clay
which, badly fired in the furnace of
the land — the Makers crematorium,
that molten appetite to which all bones
are doomed — had long since been abandoned.
A desert waste it spread, a spotless dearth
burned plain and wry by many seasons' drought...
as bleak and sere a spot as any soul
has ere laid eyes on, and hot as Hell
upon midsummer's noon. No blade of grass
dared live upon this waste... nor anything
alive, save only me.

F.T.: And what a waste!

Roger: 'Twas strange indeed for me to stand alone

upon this void, parched as a stale crust.
Yet stranger still, 'twas while I looked
upon myself I swear I was not I,
or if I were, I was another yet!
It seemed I had a disembodied soul
that I could look through space upon my figure
standing single, like a lonesome weed...

As Roger says this, the boy becomes illuminated with burning red light. He stands with his back and right side to the audience, his hands concealed in front of him.

F.T.: Nor any bud did blossom on his brow!
 Alas!

Roger: What say?

F.T.: Proceed... your dream.

Roger: While thus I stood upon this barrenness
 a mist befell the land — obscuring nothing.
 (Snake's faith. 'Twas no thing there to be obscured!)

The red lighting fades out completely, leaving, but for the crystal ball on the left, utter blackness. As Roger continues, a diffused arc-white light centering on the boy appears and gradually gains intensity.

But when it cleared — the mist that is —
the land was far away; the firmament was near.
At first I thought I flew. But then I found the clouds
were flying. I was standing still!
I looked below to see the land unchanged,
As dire and dry and barren as before.
Yet high above it all it looked less plane.

The air was fresh and moving, and the clouds were
ever new. One thing alone was changed
upon that ever-endless desert floor:
From far below my skyward perch arose
a pillar, pure and white as polished marble,
so high as 'twould out-tower the tallest redwood.

A colossal, glowing, translucent-white pillar, like a gigantic fluorescent light tube,
appears toward the back of the stage, right of center. Its column is partially
concealed in clouds.

There it stood and rose out of the shallow
depth beneath me. I stood atop it. Thus
I found what gave me footing in the sky.
A pillar of my dreams was this, diaphanous
by day, but in my slumberings of night
it rose the beacon of the land, so white,
so virtuous, so high, that I had want
to shout with joy that I could thus behold it.
So beautiful, this monumental skylark,
that even as the sunset paints the prairie
it seemed to throw fresh light upon the landscape.

F.T.: Thus, distance lends the drabbest waste a hue
And from afar brings out the finer view.

Roger: Though more than ever now I loathed its dearth
I came to love the land I'd left behind,
And so I wept.
A strange dream, is it not?

F.T.: A common dream uncommon minds are prone to.
But do go on: the fall?

Roger: The fall? What fall?
What speak you of a fall?

F.T.: Did you not fall?

The red glow reappears at floor level, and on the boy's feet.

Roger: Did I not fall? "Do I not fall?"
would better to word the question,
I fell, oh, how I fell!
— and this, by some strange fluke you chance to know –
But never have I stopped! I never hit!
I fell, I fall, I fall, and still I fall;
A fall so filled with unnamed bloodless terror
I cannot bear it. I'm dashed before I hit.
So great my dread of crashing to the ground
I crash ten thousand times while yet I fall.
I wring my hands to God and pray to hell
to splatter now upon that hard-pan plain
and get it over... but still the ground at which
I rush evades me. Still I plummet down...!
A thousand nights — a thousand ways — I've fallen.

F.T.: What made you fall from this most noble pillar?
What shook you from your footing in the sky?

Roger: Many the ways there were by which I fell...

As Roger relates his different falls he begins slowly and builds up (by the last) to a racing tempo, like a falling stone. At each fall, the naked boy takes a hobbled step toward the pillar. Each step is evidently a great ordeal for the boy, showing much fatigue and anguish. The red ground-light, shimmering on the boy's

hobbled feet and on the base of the pillar, bums like hot coals.

Sometimes while thus I've perched for endless hours
surveying all the land and all the sky,
a herd of giant men, ten dozen strong,
has suddenly emerged upon the plain
and like a swarm of army ants has surged
upon my pillar, has gnawed upon my pillar,
Has worn my pillar through... and I have fallen.
Sometimes a pompous plutocrat comes sedately
strolling with his bloodhound 'cross the plain.
He looks upon the bottom of my pillar.
He taps it with his cane and laughs awry,
telling his dog that I be flag pole sitting!
In anger I cry down, "It is a lie!"
But from my height he cannot catch my words.
So arrogantly solid is his talk
that I, from far above, begin to waver.
At last I hold him right — I am a fool —
and so, disarmed, I leap... and hence have fallen.
Sometimes I get so lonely with the clouds
my only company — sometimes I feel
so far away, so hopeless, and so small --
when I look down upon the distant world
tranquilly smothered beneath its cloak
of superficial largess, I feel as though
no world were there at all. I long to curl
up beneath some soft protective cover,
and so, I gently push myself into
a passing fluffy cloud... and so I fell.
Sometimes my mother, buried in her shroud,
has braved the brutal void to call me down —

She barefoot walks the sand in search of me;
I can't refuse her plea, and so start down,
But...begrudgingly descending...I have fallen.
Sometimes a sparkling child, blade in hand,
has whittled at my shaft until it gave.
My pillar leans and falls...and I fall with it.
Sometimes against my will nor willed by man
a natural storm, full charged and blasting fire,
has crashed against my mast and shattered it
Into a million splinters...and I have fallen.
I can go on and on with all my dreadful fates.
Sometimes I fell asleep and walked
freelance into the air... Sometimes I, dizzied
with the heights, teetered, lost my balance...
And I fell...

The boy has reached the pillar to which in a half-crumpled position he clutches
with elevated arms, tied together at the wrists. Against the white pillar the boy
seems little more than a silhouette.

I fell a thousand ways...

F.T.: I pray thee, stop. I've heard enough for now.
I understood your dreams before you had them,
and you yourself must come to plumb them, too.
I'll vouch you comprehend more of your fall than you
find easy to admit.

Roger: Do I?

F.T.: (quizzically)

The spirit was not born for hibernation
and, fraught with oversleep, perspires ill dreams.
The over-rested soon grow over-restive.

You say you fear the night-time with your muses, but
fear you not yet more your daylight hours?
Is not your wakeful life your real despair,
that you, condemning your own vision,
must needs escape to masochistic dreaming?
You say the doctors cannot ease your sleep,
that God, whom you beseech, denies your prayers —
When next you pray, give thanks unto them both,
for if your fearful dream, with which you more
than satisfy your fears, should be destroyed
while thus you sleep, you'd shed three times the tears about
your fallow — nay, fictitious life.

Roger: Hold on, woman! You overstep your bounds —
you make me worse than I already am,
My dream is miserable, it's true, and I'm
a coward to complain, but as it stands
my life is otherwise quite normal.
I have a pleasant home, a lovely wife,
And steadfast work my trade throughout the year.

The boy silently collapses to his knees at the base of the pillar.
The arc-white light and the pillar light will diminish very, very slowly, until, finally,
only the red floor light is left, smoldering faintly.

F.T.: And are you happy?

Roger: Yes...of course I'm happy...
or at least I guess I would be happy...
could I sleep at night without this dreadful dream...

F.T.: (growing vexed)
Oh man, with such imaginative vent!

What tinselled prostitution masks your mind
that you so flee the edicts of your soul
and damn them when they beckon you by night?
In vain you flail your wretched blood-stained sword
to carve what e'er you fashion for your fears —
but man! cannot you see that very blade,
that foil which is whet for your defense,
is your undoing? The blood it bears is yours?
Unwittingly you carve your own castration.
Awaken, man! Awaken to your dreams;
do not defile them.

Roger: Oh, worthless witch,
why did I ever tell you of my dream?
Your foolish twaddle bores me to the core.
I tell you nothing's the matter with my life,
my blasted dream is all that bothers me.

F.T.: Your "blasted dream" is all the life you have,
and nothing's wrong with it but that it's starved.
Why don't you feed it daylight for a change?

Roger: Your mockery and jest gives me a pain —
you've not listened to anything I've said.

F.T.: Perhaps, my friend, but you have listened well.
No matter how self-denial bars your way
Inside yourself lies proof of what I say,
Else you wouldn't anger so.

Roger: (rising stiffly)
I think
The time has come for me to leave. I fear

my wife will worry. I'm late for dinner now.

F.T.: Feed your stomach first, if so you choose,
 But sleep upon your dream tonight more sound.
 Tumble from your pillar in the sky,
 But remember: you have not yet struck the ground.

The red floor light on the right fades out. The blue-white light around the fortune teller's table has again become noticeable. Roger rises to leave and the fortune teller follow him to the door.

F.T.: (in a practiced voice)
 Good luck to you. Come back again.

Roger: Goodbye.
 I thank you for your ear.

F.T.: If not my tongue.
 Goodbye.

Exit Roger. The fortune teller walks slowly forward in a veil of blue-white light. She stops well forward and speaks with slow emphasis.

 You'll not leave me easily behind. Once born
 I do not bid goodbye without a battle.
 If I should I die, your soul is lost with me,
 But should I live, your soul is – liberty . . .

(long pause)

 The time may come, if it be not too late,
 when you may bless my tongue and curse your fate.

A gruff voice from the doorway, which has been left open:

It's too late already.

F.T: (spinning around, alarmed)

Too late already?

Enter a large coarsely constructed policeman. A diffused red light centers on him, making his uniform appear black and his red arm band, on which the large letters S.P. are seen, particularly conspicuous.

Police: Yeah. It's too late for you to be practicin' yer high-spirited hocus-pocus in this here civilized community.

F.T.: Too late in the day?

Police: Don't be stupid, lady. Too late, period! Now I s'pose yer gonna try'n tell me ya didn't know fortune tellers — ya so-called spirit'lists er illegal here 'bouts.

F.T.: The kind of fortune telling I indulge in
is not a crime against my inmost code.
I make attempt to tread on no one's toes.
Then why for should the city tread on mine?

Police (in an imposing voice):

You are forbidden in this here city.

F.T.: But I am not of your city!

Police: Yer in it.

F.T.: In body only!

Police: Body or soul — it's all the same thing to me. (adopting an air of false humility)
Look, lady, I'm not subtle. I'm only a policeman.

F.T.: So now there are policemen in the city
of the soul!

Police: What say, lady?

F.T.: Oh, nothing, nothing much at all. Are you
going to evict me?

Police: That's right, lady.

F.T.: Now?

Police: Not right now. The boss says that we gotta wait 'til somebody
registers a complaint — claims they been homswoggled.
Now, we ain't had no complaint lodged agin' ya yet. But we will have. I
know yer type — can't keep yer fingers out o' trouble...
Yer lucky, ya know.

F.T.: Pray tell, how is that?

Police: Well, ya see, I bumped into a guy jes' now, coming out 'o this hole.
He was fumin' so much he could hardly talk, poor dolt. I'd like to know
the crap ya slung him! I stopped an' told him all he had ta do to get ya
kicked out o' this city was lodge a complaint 'gainst ya.

(pause) Well?...

F.T.: Well what?

Police: Well, ain't ya gonna ask ifen he did?

F.T.: So we might satisfy each other's weakness...?
All right, what did he say?

Police: (confused)

He said he'd think about it.

F.T. (sighing)

One good sign: Perhaps he'll come around.

Police: Ya got him friggin' scared o' ya, that's what! He's scared that if he does anything to cross ya, you'll work yer black cats agin' him. Anyhows, ya don't scare me none — not one little bit. I don't believe in ya, see? Not one little bit.

F.T.: Not one little bit.

Police (turning to go):

Yeah. I know your kind. We'll get a complaint from somebody afore long. I'll be back here before thirty days are up to kick you out o' the city. Jest you wait — I know.

F.T.: And then where should I go?

Police (smiling):

Heaven knows, lady. That ain't my worry. I only do my biddin'.
No more; no less.

CURTAIN

Act I Scene 2

The living and dining rooms of the McLain's home. The living room occupies the entire front half of the stage and can, by means of folding doors, be separated off from the dining room, which occupies the left 2/3s of the rear half of the stage.

The folding doors are pushed all the way back for this scene. The right third of the rear half of the stage is walled off as a large square cubicle, containing (we must imagine) the kitchen. Near the right wall of the living room is a sofa, behind which is the front door. Forward on the left wall of the living room, which is angled slightly toward the audience, is a large hearth. On the rear wall of the living room (that separating off the kitchen) hang two pictures. On the right and quite high, the picture of a young boy sitting on a hill at sunset; the boy has a thoughtful, almost saddened, far-away look in his eyes as he takes in the beauty of the evening sky. On the left, and lower on the wall, a scene of the manufacturing area of the city, complete with storage tanks, flat-topped buildings, and the like; Its colors are drab, save for an admixture of blaring reds and oranges. Directly beneath this picture is a table lamp with a deep red shade, which rests on a rather long, narrow wall table. Both the living room and the dining room are papered in pink, the former being of a darker shade. At the folded doors at the function of the two rooms are, to the right of the dining room, a large, maroon easy chair with a shoe box in it; to the left, a wooden stool, blue legged, with a globose white top. Behind the stool, against the left wall of the dining room, is a large side table, decked with candlesticks without candles, artificial flowers, and other odds and ends. In the wall opposite is a swinging door to the kitchen. Orange-shade light fixtures on the walls. A small, circular dinner table set for three rests a little right of center, with three chairs. In the rear wall is a double set of high, wide French doors, with drawn back drapes, deep red. To either side, a small draped window. Through the glassed French doors can be seen the yard, with an apple tree at the far end, then a picket fence, beyond which lie the neighbors' yards, and beyond these the neighbors' houses, of subdivision originality. The sun has set, but outside it is still light. The almost-full moon stands silvery white and pale above the roof tops. The moon becomes brighter and more conspicuous as darkness falls, but still retains its ghostly whiteness.

Nancy McLain enters from the kitchen, bringing in the dinner dishes.
She is singing softly to herself.

Nancy: *"Oh where, oh where can my joy be,
My jollity,
My frivolity,
Oh where can my growing boy be,
Oh where, oh where can he be..."*

Having placed the dishes, Nancy stands back from the set dinner table, eying it with the air of a meticulous connoisseur of fine table settings. Taking a vase of artificial flowers from the sideboard, she places them as a center piece on the table. Eying the table, Nancy throws herself into various poses, as if taking into consideration her own appearance as affecting that of the set. At twenty-six, her appearance is, in fact, quite attractive. Her blond-brown hair well sets off her poised head, and her facial features are becomingly, if not delicately, proportioned. The shimmering, black skirt she is wearing matches her misty eyes. Her blouse is light pink. As she places, adjusts and observes the flowers she continues singing.

*"He ran away to the apple tree,
To the crying tree,
To the dying tree,
Oh where can my growing boy be
Oh where, oh where can he be?"*

She makes a final adjustment to the table setting.

Let's see... I knew it needed something. Yes!
A dash right there, only a dash. That has it.
I do hope Roger notices how nice . . .

She breaks off and hurries to one of the rear windows, opens it, and calls out.

Douglas, dear, come in at once. I don't
want to have to ask you another time.

A child's voice from outside:

But Mama . . .

Nancy shuts the window again, goes into the kitchen and returns at once with another dish of food.

Nancy: (singing again)

"He ran away to the apple tree

But some day he

Will return to me.

He'll always be a boy to me

Oh where, oh where can he be?"

Enter Douglas through the kitchen door. A slender seven-year-old, he has been crippled from birth, and walks with the aid of a crutch.

Douglas: Mama!

Nancy: (speaking with her back to him)

Sweetie, you don't remember Father saying anything

before he left about

Being late tonight, do you?

Douglas: Look mama!

Nancy: It's so unlike his habit to be late —

He hasn't been looking his best for months . . .

for years, now, come to think of it. . . Oh, really,

It's silly to get so concerned.

Douglas: Mama!

Nancy: What, dear?

Douglas: Look what I've got! He's been hurt!

Douglas holds out an injured cardinal. The little bird struggles to free itself.

Nancy: (somewhat startled)

My heavens? Darling where did you get that?

Douglas: In the yard. He has a broken wing.

Nancy: (sweetly)

Poor little birdie, so pretty and so soft.
Make a little nest for it of that
old shoe box 'til after dinner. Then
if you ask him nicely perhaps Father
will help you bandage up its broken wing...
But be swift now... Dinner's getting cold.
And I'll want to see...

Douglas: (mimicking)

...my nails before I eat.

Nancy: (curtly)

But not your claws... now fly along and wash.

Douglas tucks the bird in the shoe box from the easy chair, places it on the stool by the sideboard, and goes into the kitchen to wash.

Nancy: Fancy bringing that poor broken creature
Into our home. But I'll not have it long.
I hope it hasn't lice! Poor little thing, (singing)
"He ran away to the apple tree,
Oh where, oh where can he be..."

Douglas returns, wiping his free hand on his trousers. He holds out his hands to his mother.

Nancy: (inspecting his hands)

Well, we'll let them pass.

Mother and son sit down at the table facing each other and sideways to the audience.

Nancy: Say grace please, Douglas.

Douglas: God-we-thank-you-for-this-food-amen.

Nancy: Thank you, darling. And don't you gobble your food.
You still gulp like a wild animal.

Douglas: But I am slowing down...
You said the other day...

Nancy: Yes, dear, you're growing up...
What are you looking at?

Douglas: Only the moon
See, it's coming up while it's still light.

Nancy: It will be dark soon. Come now, no more dawdling;
Eat your dinner.

Douglas: Don't you like the moon?

Nancy: I used to...It reminds me of...something unpleasant.

Douglas : (after a pause)

Weren't you happy as a child, Mother?

Nancy: Of course I was. Now hush, and eat your dinner.

Douglas: Are you happy now, Mother?

Nancy: (irritated) Of course I am!

Douglas: Is Daddy happy, too?

Nancy: Yes, yes of course!
Now stop asking such silly questions.

Douglas: (still looking at the moon)
It looks as if it's balancing upon
the apple tree. I hope it doesn't fall,

Nancy: Douglas! don't be silly. Eat your dinner.

Douglas: I'm not very hungry now...

There is the sound of a car in the driveway.

That sounds like Dad!

Nancy: What a time! No sooner do we get started...

Enter Roger, through the living room. He looks withered, his face pale, a haggard expression in his eyes.

Why hello, dear.

Douglas: Hi, Daddy — hey, what's wrong with you.

Nancy: What happened, Rog, darling? Been working overtime?
You're late, you know. (pause for reply) But this time
I'll forgive you.
After all, your very first offense...

Douglas: (anxiously) Dad! DAD!

Roger: (starting suddenly) Yes... Oh, yes, my boy ... What is it?

Douglas: What's the matter?

Nancy: (intercepting)

Oh, nothing's the matter. (to Roger) Come on now, dear,
and have something to eat. You'll feel better.
I left some dinner on the stove for you
to keep it warm.

Roger: No... I don't feel... hungry.

Nancy: But darling, you must eat!

Roger: I can't... I won't...
I find it hard to swallow.

Nancy: Does your throat hurt?

Roger: No... not my throat.

Nancy: Then what?

Roger: I... I can't say
I don't know... I wish I knew... Oh, God!

Nancy: Roger!

Roger: What?

Nancy: Using language like that?
And in front of your son?

Roger: (dazed) Language like what?

Nancy: You know very well, "like what."

Roger: You mean, "Oh, God"?

Nancy: (figuratively stamping her foot)
Roger! don't! You mustn't!

Roger: I'm sorry, I forgot. It's only that...

Nancy: (coaxing)
Come on darling, please come have your dinner.

Roger: (staring at the moon)
I can't eat.

Douglas: (clinging to Roger's arm)
What's wrong! What's wrong?

Nancy: Oh, stop your taunting, child.

Roger: (walking to the window as if drawn)
Look at the moon... it's silver as a mirror.

Douglas: Our mistress said that it reflects the sun.

Roger: The cosmic hormone... sorceress of the soul!

Nancy: It looks so cold up there.

Douglas: Oh no!

Roger: (simultaneously)
Not cold!

Nancy: (sarcastically) It seems as if I've been out-voted.
All right - it looks like fire?

Roger: Yes, white-hot fire,
Not the cold red heat of prison fires.
Ah... the moon... the moon! Nancy, remember
That chill autumn night — just think, eight years
ago this month — we spent beneath the stars,
beneath this very moon...

Nancy: We both caught colds.

Roger: And how I held you to my heart of hearts,
and proved to you I loved you, and you gave proof of
your love to me...

Nancy: (nostalgically, looking out the window)
It was the moon.

Roger: Today we talk of proof! We talk of proof!

Nancy: We have our proof, right here.
(She nods toward Douglas) Roger!
We mustn't talk like this in front of him!
We mustn't talk like this at all. What has
come over us?

Douglas: (cupping his hands in a moonbeam)
The moonlight — look — I've caught it!

Roger: But we must talk...Nancy, are you happy here,
living like this?

Nancy: What do you mean, like this?

Roger: Here, in this city...in this house...this life.

Nancy: This life! Good heavens, is there any other? (Starting)

Surely you don't mean...?

Roger: No... I mean here,
on earth... for the moment. What I mean...
I wish I knew exactly... Look, don't you sometimes
Feel as if you're drying up... as if you were some
flimsy garden plant exhausted from
too much manure and too little sun.

Nancy: Roger!

Roger: I'm sorry. My imagination runs away with
me sometimes.

Nancy: That's just your trouble. It runs away
too much.

Roger: But don't you see?
Some way I have to fly! At times, I feel
like a bird within a golden trap,
singing away the song I have been schooled in...
I feel locked within a friendly cage,
gold barred and covered with a cloth,
with food and water proffered for my song
and comfortable enough, but for the fact
that sometimes in the night a wind picks up,
from where I cannot guess, and fingers with
the cloth, flips it aside, so that for one
brief moment I may see that something lies
beyond.

Nancy: Pray tell what is that?

Roger: This very moon.

Nancy: Roger! What sort, of nonsense? Is this from

another of your nightmares, or did you
just make it up this minute?

Roger: Both and neither.
It fell from me as an abstract self-likeness.

Nancy: Please, darling, if something's on your mind
That's bothering you, explain it to me in
straightforward terms; precisely, directly,
not with all this wily-nilly use
of metaphors and simile and such.
I can't endure it. Furthermore, it seems
to me that if you can't say what you mean
straight out, without your cages and your moons,
there's nothing to it but a lot of nonsense.

Roger: Perhaps you're right. But if there were no moon,
there would be no complaining. But you see —
there is a moon, a glowing, silver moon,
which floats free and alive above the night.
And I must sit here singing in my cage...
Nancy, I can't explain it. It is nothing
I can put my finger on and stroke.
I only know I dearly want to weep,
the way I wept when I was a little boy,
and am unable. I have too many cloaks...
too many crutches. I want to cry
unto the sun, and must not.

The cardinal gives a plaintive chirp from its shoe-box prison.

Roger: (starting) What was that?

Nancy: What was what?

Another chirp.

Roger: There! That crying sound!

Douglas: (turning from the window to fetch the cardinal)

It's a redbird with a broken wing.

I caught him in the yard. He couldn't fly!

(He hands the bird to Roger)

He's mine! I'm going to make a pet of him,
and when his wing gets well I'll teach him tricks
and make him fly onto my head and sing
for dinner. don't you think he's pretty, Dad?

Nancy: Now, darling, you know that I don't like to see
little wild things unhappy – don't you
think that when his wing has mended you ought
to turn him loose?

Douglas: Perhaps his wing won't mend!
Perhaps the good Lord meant him just for me!

Roger: (softly, looking down at the bird in his hand)

You grow too quickly, child, that you should learn
to cast the cause of God as your own snare
and so dismiss your selfish gain as fortune.
You know far more the wants of man than God —
same as we all —
(he looks the boy sharply in the eyes)
So, keep your fervent fingers
to yourself...

Nancy: Be careful, Roger.

Douglas (hurt): Dad, you say such silly things. The way
you talk you'd think I broke his wing myself —
I only found the bird and brought him home.

Roger: (quietly)
You brought him from his home.

Douglas: I mean him well!

Roger: You know not what you mean.

Douglas: (frantically)
I know he's mine!

Roger: (sadly and softly)
Then I shall make him yours, and set him free.

Douglas: Dad! No!

Roger's hand closes hard around the struggling cardinal. There is the sound of snapping bones. The struggle has ceased, for the cardinal. It lies dead and limp in Roger's hand. Roger lets it drop to the floor.

Douglas: He's dead... you killed him... I hate you!

Douglas picks up the bird and runs out of the room, weeping; Roger sinks onto the stool beside the sideboard, his head in his hands, weeping passionately.

Nancy: Mercy, Roger, what has come over you?
He meant no harm. He meant to care for it...
You can't expect his love when you behave

like that. He's sensitive to such abuse.

Roger: I don't deserve his love.

Nancy: Not when you act like that...

Roger: No... not at all. Oh, Nancy,
Can't you understand...What are we?

Nancy: Can I get you an aspirin or something?
You know that aspirins so often help you.

Roger: (muttering) Aspirins? Aspirins? They live on me these days...
But I'm beyond them now. I've fooled them.
The nerves they ride have withered by the hour...
(begging) Nancy, please, I beg you, Understand!...

Nancy: I find nothing to be understood.

Roger: And here I am... that nothing...

Nancy: Hush now, dear,
Come on, get off that awkward little stool,
And get into your easy chair. My poor boy!...
Let's get a little fresher light in here.

Nancy switches on the wall bracket lights. Yellow light floods out under the red-orange shades. Then she goes to the French doors.

I think I'll draw the curtains, too. (draws curtains)Now then,
that's better isn't it? More cheerful?

Roger: (settling into his easy chair):

Hmm...

It's more relaxing, anyway. Where are the

aspirin?

Nancy: I'll get some from the cabinet.

(Exit Nancy)

Roger: (unable to relax) Drat that moon! I looked at it too long.

I see it when I close my eyes. (closes eyes) Smiling white,
like an old lady's face — silent as death,
and sterner for its silence, bolder for
the barrier between us. There it stands (points),
sailing like a pallid crystal ball. Another world...
a world within, without.

Roger rises and walks over to the blue stool, carries it to the light switch, turns off the lights, leaving the room quite dark, then walks to the French doors and draws open one of the curtains about a foot, allowing a tall shaft of moonlight to enter. He places the stool in the shadows next to the pillar of moonlight and sits down. A moment's silence. Then the sound of a door creaking open.

A voice from the dark:

Daddy...

Roger: (after a pause) What?

The voice: (after another pause) I love you.

The door is heard closing. Another silence.

Nancy (entering from the hall door, which she leaves open, allowing a flood of yellow light to enter):

The one box was all used up. I had to hunt
around for another... What is this?
All dark in here! Roger? Roger? (no answer)

Roger! My darling boy!... Where is he?

She walks into the dark room.

Where can he be?

CURTAIN

Act II Scene 1

The McLain's living room. The folding doors to the dining room are partly closed, and behind them can be seen the French doors, through which sunlight is streaming. The apple tree can be seen in the yard. It is afternoon. The boy, Douglas, is playing on the floor next to the blue-legged steel, which has been moved near the center of the room. He is playing with white, cylindrical, building blocks, which he places on top of one another in a single column. Finally, the column becomes too top-heavy to stand, and collapses. A knock sounds at the front door. Douglas rises and, with the aid of his crutch, hobbles over to open it, which he does.

The high-pitched, rather locust-like, cockney voice of a beggar, from outside.

Beggar: From door to door along the lane I roam,
 For a smile, or a penny, I have come, a friend to
 you, or — if you choose — a bum...
 Tell me, my laddie, is your mother home?

Douglas: Yes, she is. I'll get her. Come on in.

Enter the beggar, rather hesitantly, helping himself jerkily along with a blue, ivory ball-handled stick. He is a fantastic, rather hunched, barefooted and shabbily clad little fellow with a large, round face. His hair, as is the stubble on his face, is almost white.

Douglas: (calling) Mother, there's somebody to see you.

Nancy: (from upstairs) Who is it, dear?

Douglas: A man. (to the beggar) She's in the bath.

Nancy: Show him in. I'll be down in a minute.

Beggar: 'Tis kind of you, my lad, to 'low me in,
And kinder still for Mother to agree.
She thinks I am a friend, (chuckles merrily) ... and so I be 'til she beholds me. Then? ...Well, we shall see.

Douglas: Her friend till she beholds you? How is this?

Beggar: Pay no attention, lad, 'tis but a guess,
So often I am welcomed like a leper
I hardly dare to look for more, or less...(laughs)
But on a day as fair as this who'd care
If one were clad in scabs or diamond rings,
for sunshine deems all nature's creatures equals
the fresh air kisses lepers same as kings.

Douglas: You like the sunshine, don't you? So, do I.

Beggar: (waving his cane and speaking with exaggerated rhetorical passion)
Sunshine, the child, and happiness are one,
and he who gives his heart unto the sun

alone can learn the music of the sky
or know the reason why the bluebird sings.
Every child must make the sun his master
lest he wither to a man who is a mole,
lest he starve to death by hiding in his shadow,
for the open road is fodder for the soul...
And yet we take our children from the sunshine
to stain their minds with verbiage we call knowledge;
we plane and polish them in darkened schoolrooms
and finish them by sending them to college...
we teach them facts which cripple them for life
Cold facts!... But, woe, my lad, I see I came
Too late, Alas! You are already lame.

Douglas: Too late?
But I was born like this.

Beggar: Can that be so? . . .
Must you drag on crutches, or die young,
the crippled effort of a crippled soul?...

Douglas: (frightened) Die young?

Beggar: But tell me lad, lest I be made a fool,
what day is this that you're not off to school?

Douglas: You mean to say you don't know what day this is?
This is a holiday for all the children
to celebrate our independence.

Douglas perches on the stool and gestures toward the easy chair.
Sit down.

Beggar: No thank you, lad, I fear, should I once sit
in that plush chair, I'd ne'er rise out of it.
I've seen it happen. Chairs are man's first weakness.
Children don't sit... or not for long... They fly.
Yes! Who is less dependent than a child?
Unless a beggar... And so, you're skipping school?

Douglas: Not skipping school. The day is free for us.
Yet father works today. He always works.
Why is it you are not at work today?

Beggar: (merrily)
Why should I work? I ask, because your father
and your father's friends are hard at work,
does this mean every man should be the same?

Douglas: I only asked, I didn't say you should.

Beggar: Ah, but you thought it, yes? How could you help it?

Douglas: But surely you do some work. All men must work.

Beggar: Must you hold your father's kind so right
that they shall set your standards for all men?
I am a beggar. I do not work a trade.
The standards I have set may not be noble,
but they are mine, the work of my own hand,
Misdeeds I do I sadly lay the claim for,
the same as all misdoings are one's own.
But I also claim the good I do as mine,
I am dependent on and master of my vessel.
Unlike the empty yawl who fills his bilge

with rotting fruits of wisdom from the past,
I stake no claim for treasures not my own...
for wisdom is a perishable fruit
which grows on the eternal tree of life,
and gathered once, it cannot nourish others.
Its purpose is to tell us where it comes from
that we may climb the tree and pluck our own,
and hands which pick the apples not themselves
but gain them second hand across the counter
come not in contact with that flow of love
the tree of life bestows upon her children.
Instead they may be poisoned by harsh toxins
fermenting in the over-ripened fruit...
Indeed, the rope by which the wise man climbs,
ill-used can be a necklace for the fool.
Better to be the deuce than play the queen...

Douglas: But if you do not work how do you live?

Beggar: (waving his cane strenuously and speaking with creaking, though emphatic conviction)

There is a work of life far more important
than that which keeps the family coffer full.
The sweat of labor, with its schismatic pains
which smite the mother when she bears her babe,
must tenfold be repeated by the offspring
if ever he is truly to be born.
For every infant tie must needs be severed.
The fetal mind must burst its tender womb
of blind obedience. It must stand naked
and alone, it must breathe the air directly.
It must know the pain of total separation

if ever it may know the total union
which unites as one the universe and man.
Only then can man endure aloneness...
Only then he lives not off his neighbors.

Douglas: But...

Beggar: I ask you lad, in answer to your questions,
is not the man who prays, but does not reason,
who works, but does not labor in himself,
who uses as his own his brother's bible,
who buys his bread, but takes his life for granted,
dependent on his neighbors more than I?
Who is it then that is really self-sufficient:
the man who begs for bread but keeps his self-hood,
or the man who buys his bread and sells his soul?
Who is the mendicant? Who is it asks
For help?

Douglas: Does not the beggar ask for help?

Beggar: (sadly)

All I ask is kindness. It seems not much.
Yet what I ask for few know how to give.
They give their hard-earned coins as consolation
and try to think as though they're being kind.
And what a shame... They lose so very much.
I come to them as good a man as they,
and they who fear themselves turn me away.
I am the symbol of their own neglect,
conceal it as they may with disrespect.

Douglas: The words you speak I hardly understand,
and yet there is laughter in your tone.
I like the burning sparkle in your eye...
You are alive...

Beggar: Here comes your mother now.
She sees me... Ah, she suffers from surprise.

Enter Nancy, somewhat stiffly

Beggar: Good afternoon madam.

Nancy: Good afternoon.

Beggar: I pray you will forgive my blunt intrusion
into this sacred sanctum of your home.
My lowly looks are only an illusion;
I am the most respectable of bums.

Nancy: Why have you come? What can I do for you?

Beggar: Whatever you would like to do my friend.
I'm tired, hungry, penniless, and sick,
and quite happy... though I fear I'm near the end.

Nancy: Is it not money that you are asking for?

Beggar: All I ask is kindness from your kind,
a blessing from the blessed in your heart;
then give to me, if you are no inclined,
that you may gain by that with which you part.

Nancy: If I give you fifty cents will you

be sure to spend it wisely? Not on such things
as tobacco, alcohol, and the like?

Beggar: Your command, sweet madam, is my law...
But mind you, your conditions pick the bone
A man must have his swallow and his chaw...
Why, best of men can't live on bread alone!
But I shall sacrifice my need of vice
and spend your fifty cents for something nice.

Douglas: Why did you wink at me just then?

Beggar: I? Wink?
Why, laddie, do not think it. 'Twas a blink
of candid consternation and conviction.
I am too serious to be caught winking!

Douglas: I caught you though!

Nancy: (coldly) And I.

Beggar: (chuckling) Then I give up...
Tobacco I don't like. I do not drink.
I fear you can't convert me from such vice.

Nancy: Well, that's one thing to your credit. I'm afraid
I've never quite understood what it is
that makes a beggar tick. Essentially
you seem to be a decent sort of fellow,
and yet you are content to live off others,
like the flea who sucks his dinner from the dog.
Are you content to loaf? Have you no conscience?

Beggar: (laughing)

Were there no dogs, my dear, there'd be no fleas.
Am I contented to loaf? Ah yes, I am.
I'd like more time for loafing than I have.
And do I have a conscience? Yes, but then,
my conscience, for the better or the worse,
is not concerned with how I fill my purse,
or if I gain, or rather gain from, wealth,
but how I treat my neighbors, and myself.
Not how I take from others, how I give;
not how I make my way living, how I live.
If I but stir a bleeding child to smile,
or smiling child to bleed, and then to smile,
I then maintain my day has been worthwhile.

Nancy: "Not how I take from others, how I give;
not how I make my living, how I live..."
a most impressive speech for such a rogue.
But tell me, what worse way is there for you
to live than by begging; what can a beggar give?

Beggar: Be great his gift, or be it only small
each time a beggar gives he gives his all:
To the wise man he gives solace,
to the poor man he gives hope,
to the rich man gives his ego,
to the narrow man his scope.
With the wanderer he leaves the sky,
with the hermit, stars above;
to the strong he gives his weakness,
and to the weak his love.
To the married man he gives a wink,

a smile for the wife.

With every child, he leaves his heart...

but he keeps his soul, for life.

Nancy: So now I know the virtues of a vagrant...
 small wonder all you beggars are not saints!

Beggar: Oh no, my dear, though beggars' hearts be true,
 you must remember, we are human, too.
 Often, we fall short of being saints
 however hard we try.

Nancy: You match my jest
 with jest. A less saintly man I never met.

Beggar: (laughing)
 I jested not; my words were of my best.

Nancy: Then a beggar's best is of lower form than wit,
 I fear I gave you the benefit of the doubt.
 Here is your fifty cents. I'll show you to
 the door.

Beggar: (who has given his walking stick to Douglas to examine)
 Oh, thank you, ma'am, and rest assured
 your parting with this gift gives me great pleasure.

Nancy: Then parting is a pleasure to us both.
(Takes the walking stick from Douglas.)
 Here is your walking stick.

(escorts beggar to door)
 Goodbye.

Beggar: Goodbye.

(to Douglas)

Farewell to you, my lad. I did enjoy
the chance to chat with such a fragile boy.
As days go by and trials have begun,
recall to mind, the secret of the sun...
remember, as a flag you face the world,
unfulfilled in life unless unfurled.
Better to take one helpless step, and fall,
and not get up, than never step at all.

Douglas: I shall always love the sun. Goodbye... Will you
come back?

The door is shut.

Nancy: Thank heavens! Gone at last. Douglas,
if ever anyone like that ever comes
to the door again, don't let him come in.

Douglas: You said to show him in.

Nancy: I didn't know
he was a beggar. I'm sorry for beggars,
poor wretches with neither strength nor will power
to put an honest days-work behind them.
But even so, I'll help them if I can...
But we must not let them into the house!
This old bird was really quite absurd.
I've heard of madmen who thought they were Napoleon,
but never a beggar claiming himself a saint!

Well... I must go upstairs and do my hair.

Exit Nancy, Douglas sits on the floor next to the stool, and again begins stacking the cylindrical building blocks in a single column.

Douglas: The beggar was a funny sort of fellow,
 I wonder why my mother didn't like him,
 I liked him well enough. He meant no harm.
 He spoke to me as if I was a man —
 more than a man and though I could not always
 understand, I know he was sincere
 in what he said. Yes, even in his joking.
 He seemed to speak out of his very eyes.
 I wonder why my mother did not like him...
 I wonder if my father would have liked him.

The column of blocks falls over.

CURTAIN

Act II

Scene 2

The McLain's living room. The folding doors are almost shut. It is evening. Standing in the room is a tall, heavy but handsomely built man, not much older than Roger, looking in his forties. His features, like those of a friendly banker, are firm, while not exactly hardened. His eyes, as if well trained, seem neither here nor there, and do little for his looks in either way. With stalwart dignity, the newcomer moves about taking in the details of the room. He stops before the two paintings on the back wall. That of the boy

on the hill he looks at but briefly. The manufacturing scene seems to fascinate him. He is still looking at this picture when Nancy enters.

Nancy: (approaching softly)
Hello, Victor.

Victor: (in a booming voice)
Oh, good evening, Nancy.
Is Roger around?

Nancy: Shhh. He's upstairs.
He'll soon slip down. But before he does
I'd like a word with you. He's not been well –
Oh, I know it's nothing serious – but then,
I thought since you were coming anyway
You might do something for him.

Victor: Now hold on, Nancy,
I'm a business man, not a heart doctor.

Nancy: Yes, but you've known him since you were both children.
And you've got something that he lacks.

Victor: Ah: What is that?

Nancy: Determination! Will!

Victor: (musing)
But perhaps I'm lacking something that he's got –
I'm sure of it ... and downright thankful, too ...
But come, enough of that. Now tell me. Nancy,

Just what has Roger been up to?

Nancy: Nothing;
 That's just it.

Victor: What do you mean "nothing"?

Nancy: For the last three days, she has been moping
 around the house, he's hardly swallowed a thing
 or spoken a word of sense. He mutters about
 cages and moons... all kinds of silly things.
 He's quite left me behind.

Victor: And does he give you
 the reason for his torment?

Nancy: What reason?
 He doesn't know himself. I think it's just
 that he has too vivid an imagination.
 He fancies that men should all be frowning angels,
 or winged devils, I'm not quite sure which.
 He rants about freedom, claims our life is false,
 Curls his lips, and labels "bourgeois cowards"
 Anyone who is happy, or gets along.
 Well... that includes you, Victor!

Victor: (half-joking)
 Yes, I suppose.
 And you would have me add him to the list?

Nancy: If you could only... Oh, I hear him coming!

He mustn't know that I've been talking about him to you. I'll slip into the kitchen.

Victor: Well, I'll do what I can.

Nancy: I beg you, Victor.

Nancy disappears into the dining room. Victor returns to his position in front of the two paintings, pretending not to notice Roger, approaching.

Roger: How do you like it, Vic?

Victor: Marvelous, stupendous... It's really got the feel of the thing.

Roger: It's sensitively painted, don't you think?
I've kept it since my childhood. I judge....

Victor: It's real, that's what. Almost exactly
The same view I get from my office window:
Petroleum tanks, poles and wires, thick buildings...

Roger: (softly)
I meant the other painting.

Victor: (in a booming voice)
Yeah... That's nice, too.
But tell me, Rog, whatever inspired you
To look me up and ask me here this evening,
after all these years that you haven't even sent
a Christmas card. Why I hardly knew whether
you still existed or not.

Roger: I can't blame you
for that. I scarcely know myself. Coming
at last, to see my own transparency,
I wondered whether you were more opaque,
if you were any better off than I,
more meaningful; and if so, how, and why...
And so, I thought I'd look you up and see.

Victor: (looking speculatively about the room)
Yes... I think I'm better off than you are.

Roger: (sharply)
I speak of your self's value, not your manor's.

Victor: Now, boy, I'm worth six-hundred thousand... Yeah,
and more each quarter, just you think of that...
Now there's something for you to aim at, Rog.
Six-hundred thousand... that's self-value for you.
Success is not far off, Rog. Be a plugger.
Just put your heart behind the massive wheel...

Roger: And roll it backwards... squish! Then go get rich,
And have your cavity filled up with gold,
And smile at people pleasantly and say,
"I'm worth six hundred thousand... and no cents."

Victor: (laughing heartily)
You're really funny, Rog! You're quite a joker.

Roger: (angrily)

You laugh away unlike the way you laughed
when were children. Then you threw your laughter
to the sky, not at a friend. Right, Vic?
Or rather is such laughter self-protecting?

Victor: (laughing again, but weakly)

Perhaps it is. A bit, old boy... You must
Forgive me Rog. I didn't mean to laugh
at you. It's just that I haven't heard
such airy talk since we were in West High
together. Remember; you used to talk about
the great adventures you hoped you would take
when you grew up. Yeah, how you used to dream
you would explore the mountains of Tibet,
see the native peoples in their haunts,
paddle down the Stream of Tears by kayak...

Roger: We talked of grand adventures we would take.

Victor: The plans were yours... I was just coming along.
But little matter; one of us has proved
About as adventuresome in the long run
as the other. Neither of us had left
the city of our birth.

Roger: Nor yet the womb.

Victor: still play the violin, Rog?

Roger: It's been years...
So many things need doing 'round the house.

We've got to keep appearances, you know:
Look better than we could be, and be less...

Victor: Yeah, I know. I've had to give up sport
myself. Well, I guess I'm getting too ancient
for it anyhow.

Roger: At thirty-one!

Victor: Yeah.

Roger: And how we used to dream of grand adventure!

Victor: Adventure is for children. Grown-ups have
more serious performances to attend to.

Roger: Yes... like earning what we blithely call a living,
like banishing what meager dreams we have
to plant ourselves behind some oaken boxcar
called a desk, and scratch away like chickens.
tallying by rote whatever senseless
figures, names, and places may concern us,
like laying waste our souls to hold the pace
which this inhuman plague called progress sets,
like giving up what little art exists
in what we do to quickly get it done
so quickly we can scuttle to the next.
Yet how much better living have we really?
How much more happiness has modern man
for all this stuff that modern man's convenience
has provoked. Give we more time to life?

To nature? No! For as you say, we have
“more serious performances to attend to”.
And what are they? More progress! More convenience!
One great, big, meaningless flea circus...

Victor: You’ve got the general idea, old boy,
but there are softer ways of putting it...
Oh, I know how you feel. You sweat away
without any vast interest in what you’re doing,
and, because that’s the sort of work you
started with, and you don’t want to starve,
you stick to it. And so you come home
tired and discouraged and greet your wife
who, if she isn’t tired and discouraged
already, will be in a few minutes.
To make things worse your kid shows neurotic
symptoms – so do all the kind these days –
except the vandals. And you wonder why.
But don’t worry too much. That’s just the way
the world rotates. It’s a mess, Rog, but
it’s life. And you’ve got to put up with it.

Roger: (sinking into the easy chair)
Can that be so? My God; Can you be right?

Victor: This is a world of speed. Speed and money.
And the harder you work and the faster you go
the faster you seem to get through with it all,
and that’s good. I was slow getting started,
like you, and believe me, it was rough,
really rough. But after I got rolling

it wasn't so bad.

Look at it this way, lad,

Life's sort of like a long car trip:

You go slow and your eyes get to wandering,

you see all the trash along the edge of

the road, the billboards, and everything else,

Makes you feel kind of sick inside. You know...

But if you go fast, you don't see nothin',

Cause you have your eyes glued to the road:

You got to, you're scared to take 'em off it...

I'll grant you it's kind of hard on the nerves –

Doctor says I've got a stomach ulcer –

Got to kind of watch what I eat –

But hell, I reckon it's worth it...

You can't have everything.

Roger: (forcing himself violently out of the easy chair)

You saint!

How can you stand to live like that,

and realize all the while what a farce?

Victor: Discipline, my boy. I only half
realize it, and concentrate hard on
the other half. It's not completely honest,
you may say. Well, so what? At least
I'm a law-abiding citizen.

There aren't any laws about that kind
of honesty, you know.

Roger: Oh aren't there just!...

But tell me, Victor, if you've resigned yourself

to grin and bear this farcical fantasy
you must needs have some temporary exit.
What do you do to keep from going crazy?

Victor: Cigars. I smoke cigars...Here, have one. Rog.

Roger: But is there anything you quite enjoy?

Victor: I enjoy speed. Get going fast
Enough and you'll enjoy it too. You know,
It's the principle of the roller coaster...
Risky but pleasurable...fast!

Roger: And where do you end up?

Victor: Back where
you started, but later...

The front doorbell rings...

Roger: Now who's that? (opens door)
Oh, hello, Frank... Say Victor, I'd like you to meet...

Frank: (Forcing his way in. He is a well-dressed, bug-eyed little man.)
Why Roger McLain, you don't look any worse than usual.
I thought you were sick. That's why I came over. Boy, if
the boss knew you were up and about when you'd taken the
last three days off on sick leave he'd sack you for sure,
and I wouldn't blame him... But don't worry, Roger.
I won't tell him, you know that. I'm your friend!

Roger: (simmering)

Even a butcher will fat the cock for Easter
to sell him, stuffed, for extra on the day.
You'd best not tell, my "friend", nor sport your silence...
As for my being "sacked", as you describe it,
If I make up my mind as I would please,
'twould be inconsequential; I should quit.

Frank: (horrified)

Quit! What do you mean?

Roger: I mean I should no longer choose to work.

Frank: Then you are sick.

Roger: Yes, I am sick. The same as are we all,
the only difference being that I know it,
and knowing it am sicker than the rest,
I'm sick of doing plug and socket duties
which no one with a stable mind would stomach
but that they're done, and everybody does them.
Shall I tell you, then, why I have done them?
Because I want to see the business prosper?
No: Or feel it my duty? No:
Because I think it right that I should be
a good upstanding citizen? But no!
Because I am a coward? Afraid? Yes!
I fear the lonesome hardship I should suffer
were I to stand apart from all the rest.
I am afraid of little men like you,
the peaked-hearted swarm which plagues our race

and waits with gaping mouths and silvered tongues
to fill the groove where some unhappy soul
dares once to step a fraction out of place...
I'm sick to death of being groomed and harried;
I'm sick of life, and home, and work, and you!

Frank: I don't understand. You must be mad!

Enter Nancy, from the dining room, wheeling a coffee table laden with steaming coffee cups and a large white cookie a plate with biscuits.

Nancy: Some biscuits and coffee, gentlemen?

Victor: They look delicious. Did you bake them yourself?

Nancy: Oh, no, they're from the grocery.

Frank: Yes, of course.

Victor: (his mouth full of biscuits)

They're very good... Say, Frank,
What do you think of that pointing over there?

Frank: Which one?

Roger: (sharply)

The little boy on the hill at sunset.

Frank: Oh, that one?... Looks to me like one of those second-rate pictures they get out for calendars.

But it's sort of pretty, I guess...

Roger: (exploding)

Get out!

Frank: Who me?

Roger: Yes, you. The both of you!

Victor: I think I'll shove along, Rog, old boy –
you'll get no where
the way your headed. You're on a dead-end rail,
out on the limb of your own apple tree,
pretending you're Adam, the only freak on earth.
But you're not, see. You think you can just
step off into another sphere. But Rog,
that's lunacy! Someday you'll find you've got
to climb back down to earth. But it's not all that tragic.
The world ain't so bad if you accept
its pleasantries, and don't look at the rest.

Roger: Get out, you over-grown quarter of a man!

Victor: (taking his hat)

Which quarter is that?

Roger: The hind!

Victor: (chuckling)

As I expected...

But no offense... you'll settle down in time.

Roger: (screaming)

GET OUT!

(He walks across the room to the fireplace and places his hands on the mantel piece, his head drooping.)

Nancy: (who had stood in silent astonishment up to this point, hurries forward)

I hope you gentlemen will accept
my apologies for Roger. I don't know
what's the matter with him, but I'm sure
It's just some passing fervor.

Frank: (patronizingly) Growing pains.

Nancy: Yes... that's it exactly...at times he is
just like a little child – that's why I love him –
though sometimes it gets a little difficult –
with moons and dreams and all...

Victor Well, give him time.
Give him a chance to flap his wings a bit
and try to fly, and fall upon his face.
He'll settle down.

Frank: Yes, he'll grow up...I hope!

Victor: (to Nancy)

Well, it's been nice seeing you again.
If I can ever be of any help with... (he nods at Roger)
why, let me know.

Nancy: I know he'll straighten out
all right. But thank you, Victor. Do come back
again.

Victor: Thank you. Good bye.

Frank: Good bye, Mrs. McLain
And if I can be of help too, why...

Nancy: Yes. good bye.

Frank: (turning to Victor, in the doorway)
Why the man's mad. An absolute lunatic: Mr... er..?

Victor: Victor is good enough.

Frank: Well, all right...Victor...I agree with you one
hundred percent about your views on life. Everything you
said is absolutely true... absolutely. I admire you.

Victor: Then you are as great a fool as I am a liar.

Frank: A liar. But I don't understand: Why should you lie?

Victor: (bitterly)
Why? Well, firstly to gain the admiration
of this world's fools: secondly
because I think all hell of that poor lute,
who's twice what I am – if only half a man –
and I want to see him stay and sweat it out

a while longer on this vulgar globe –
He'll never reach his moon. Then, thirdly, I lie
because a man can't live on bread alone:
he needs his falsehoods too. Would I could lie
a little better to myself...I might
be richer yet – moneywise, that is.

Frank: The only kind of wisdom!

Victor: Yes, you fool.

(Exit Victor and Frank)

Nancy: (Approaching Roger. Sternly)

Roger... you owe Victor an apology.

Roger: The hypocrite!

Nancy: I've had enough of this...

Roger: And so have I. Too much! Nancy... forgive me...
I think I'm going to leave.

Nancy: (intentionally misinterpreting)

Perhaps a walk

will do you good. On your way home you might
swing past the grocers and bring back a loaf
of white bread. I think we're almost out.

Roger: You'd better send my boy for it.

Nancy: Roger,

Do you forget; he's crippled?

Roger: No, I try.
...What I mean... oh, how can I say it...
Nancy, if I leave I mean to leave...
forever...

Nancy: (paling)
Forever!? not come back!?

Roger: (softly)
Not come back forever.

Nancy: (bursting into uncontrolled laughter)
Oh, Roger! How absurd.

Roger: Absurd?

Nancy: Yes. Utterly absurd!
Oh Roger, you should like a little boy
Who threatens to run away and see the world.
But little boys don't do that sort of thing,
much less a full-grown man; and if they really
run away, they're home again by nightfall...(shudders)
But where would you go? What would you do? Oh, Roger!

Roger walks slowly across the room and stops in front of the painting of
the boy on the hill at sunset. He replies in a dreamy voice.

I remember as a lad how I would go
into the hills when springtime was in flower.

I'd climb a gnarled apple tree and perch
far out upon the tan and silver branches,
and breathing softly, peering through the bloom
would gaze upon the dale all around me.
Then I remember weeping to myself
and wondering the reason why I wept.
To feel so strange, so vast and yet so small,
as if the world were I, and I were nothing,
I could not understand. I feared myself,
for somehow, past my tears, I was content.
The joy of life was mine as I beheld it,
alone, save in the presence of the orchard.
I was young and all the world was young,
and fresh, and clean, and very much alive.

Nancy: Well, everyone grows up. It can't be helped.

Roger: As a lad those ventures were my treasures,
yet treasures ten times greater are they now
since I have lost them. How I dream I might
return once more to live within the woodland
recovering the fortune of my childhood.

The beggar appears in the front doorway, which has been left open. He is somewhat wobbly on his feet. At first Nancy and Roger seem to accept him more as an expected apparition than the vagabond that he is.

Beggar: It is a pleasant dream few men are wanting,
yet fewer find fulfillment of their dream.
The purity of childhood once burgled
and outwitted by the haughty hand of age

cab seldom be recovered, if at all.
It may be feigned, as in the priesthood,
or be faked, as by the virgin, or enacted
by the elders of the righteous middle class.
But their attempts are all but meaningless.
Alleviating loss annuls it not,
and pretense is a callow form of vice,
I cannot recommend it.

Roger: (blinking)

Who are you?

Beggar: But never mind. Because your goal is rare
the search of it is more worthwhile, perhaps.
At least one doesn't know until he tries.

Roger: I'll try as I have never tried before.

Beggar: Before you try for what you try to decide.
You'll find you need more than the name of freedom
to make your freedom yours and not your master...
for emancipated slaves without direction
are better left in fetters than to fate.
Tell me, then, lad, if you should leave behind
the walls you deem your prison, what would you do?
What way choose you that you would use your freedom?

Roger: (walking, slowly to the front of the stage)

I would make my way into the far-off mountains,
I would sing my song unto the careless breeze,
I would scale the slopes and scramble through ravines

And wade by rocks which waterfalls caress.
I would be one with all the wild things;
The little forest folk whose voices make
The woodland spell complete need fear me not;
I would but learn their ways and share their home.
I would delight in days of wondrous living,
Partaking the joys which Nature's hand hath willed,
And I would share with all the wilderness,
the clearest, freshest fullness of my being.
By nightfall I would watch the waning sun
Last cast its hues upon the snow-capped range,
and then I'd stand alone to give my thanks
unto the shining stars and sheltering trees.
At last I'd lay me down by some great fir tree
in sweet repose, with pine boughs for my bed,
a lone recluse with quietude my counsel
to spend my night-time sleeping in my dreams.

Beggar It can't last very long... But if you go,
then mind you, go with care. You'll need great strength
For freedom is of unrestricted growth,
a verdant land of unrestricted growth,
as likely to entangle as enhance
its youthful suitors; a jungle steaming hazard,
which burgeons forth a fruit few men have tested,
yet tasted once, few men have asked for more.
The beauty of the land is in its nature.
No preset paths are there for passersby
to travel with the aid of worn road-maps.
Decision is one's own. The traveler,
with compass in the stars, his chart his soul,
must find his own direction, choose his course,

and then with his own mettle blaze his trail.

Nancy: (suddenly coming to her senses and running to Roger, frantically)

Roger, throw that beggar out of here,
He's drunk! (Roger stares straight forward, unmoving)
Roger! What's the matter with you?

Beggar: (obviously)

But freedom most endangers him who leaves it.
Sure as the man once given to the grave
Shall not return to his old life the same,
so it is with the man begetting freedom.
For freedom is a fate transcending death,
and life beyond the old will leave its mark.
Its value is not greater than its price.

Roger: (dreamily)

Nor less than heaven!

Beggar: And hell!

Roger: (suddenly turning back toward the beggar)

Oh, not that bad!
Were I to take verbatim your precautions,
I'd run a mile before I ever left.

Beggar: Such lack of fear is that which gives me mine.

But no. I see you have a fear. Well, then,
be of good faith, my lad, and if you fall
at least you'll know within you that you tried.

Roger: (approaching the beggar)
 If I should fall, then I should kill myself!

Beggar: (moving toward the door)
 If you should fail, you could not kill, yourself.

Roger: Get out of here, you drunken tramp! Get out!
 (shoves the beggar toward the door)

Nancy: The wretched bug! He said he didn't drink.

Beggar: I said a man can't live on bread alone.
 Farewell to you. I only come to see
 your son. We understood each other.

The door is shut in the beggar's face.

Nancy: The moon-faced little bug!

The door opens again. The beggar puts his head in. His round face is lit up by a ghostly blue-white light.

Beggar: The lamb who runs away from, but not toward,
 Will find his loss surpasses his reward.
 Ta, ta.

Roger, who is standing by the coffee table, flings the white cookie plate at him. The head retracts just in time. The plate crashes against the door.

Nancy: My good cookie plate!

Roger: The devil.

Nancy: Do you suppose he's gone for good this time?

Roger: Yes... gone for good this time. And I am going, too. I must, I can pretend no longer.

Nancy: Pretend what?

Roger: Pretend that I belong here.

Nancy: But Roger, darling, where else can you belong?

Roger: Anywhere I can be myself.

Nancy: And where is that?

Roger: I wish I knew. Away. I've never been myself here,
Not since I was a tiny child, and then
only in solitude, those secret moments
when I could undress and play that I
was I, instead of this, this onion...
I feel like a shoe without a foot,
that keeps on walking, God only knows how.

Nancy: Roger! Please dear!

Roger: What?

Nancy: Your language.

Roger: Oh, for God's sake, Nancy:

Nancy: (beginning to weep)

Roger, please!

Roger: Oh stop! I rot inside, but works that that
now I'm losing that worm-riddled virtue
which has both preserved me and destroyed me:
my meekness, my susceptibility,
my anything-to-get-along-ness.
My patience, like an over-ripe appendix,
is on the edge of bursting, and I know
no doctor to remove it, that's the shame.
Even pink aspirin and electric sheets
can't ease my spirit now. I'm going to split.
I feel it down in here inside my bowels.
There's something going to seed. I'm going to crack!

Nancy: (half-pleading)

Crack you might, but leave your home? No, never!
You are too weak. You love your home too much.

Roger: Love? Look at this casket called a home?
Look at this shingled scab which sheds the sky
and drinks the rain, that we may never wash
our state hearts. Look at these plastered walls;
this cobweb furniture; these tinselled cups
and saucers. Artificial... Superficial...
All these things are little more than rubbish!

Nancy: All these things we've worked and saved to get.
They're what we want. They're for our own convenience.

Roger: Or vice versa, we for their convenience,

if we be any more than they ourselves!
For what are we but rotten roofs and tinseled
cups and cobweb chairs and hollow walls
abutting at our corners for support!

Nancy: But these things in themselves be well and good.

Roger: And these things in ourselves be our undoing.
We sell our souls for artificial flowers,
like this...

Roger snatches the flowers out of the vase on the coffee table.

We crimp our lives like paper petals
and set them down to meals three times a day –
So many are allergic to the real ones.
Besides, these last three times as long... and safe!
They look so good to apathetic eyes,
What little matter they are not alive.
For their requirements are so much less.
All they need is dusting and a vase.

Nancy: Roger, I can't make any sense of what
you're saying. You're like a fretted little child
Fussing and complaining over nothing.

Roger: (bitterly)

Nothing... over nothing... that's the trouble!
Everything, and all... add up to nothing!
this world... this palsied house... this empty flask –
(picks up the vase)
wineless and smelling of scented dust-cloths...

Nancy, this house is stepping on my soul.

Nancy: (trying for the upper-hand)
And shall we set a fire to our house
to free ourselves?

Roger: Were we to burn this house
we'd build a new one. Could we exist alone?
We are the house. We stand for little more.
A pointless job, a bank account, perhaps,
a movie now and then – that's all. No more.
No thank you, and no more; I've got to leave.

Nancy: But what of your child? Don't you love him, Roger?

Roger: You know quite well I love him. It's very much
my love for him that forces me to leave.
My boy loves me, God knows how or why!
His little crippled heart would seek to follow
in my footsteps, even to the death...
Am I to see him shrivel up, like me,
like a self-portrait of my soul,
before my tearless eyes, while I stand by
in body breathing and in spirit dead.
No, Nancy, I must leave. For him.
He is so like myself I cannot help him:

Nancy: But what of me? What of your wife? Your wife!

Roger: My wife! No, Nancy, you have been to me
Half mother and half stranger, not a wife.

When the moon shone – once – you were my bride.
We were not even married then;

Nancy: But Rog...

Roger: The freely fired passion in our hearts
transcended secondary laws, surrendered to
the primal ones – the natural laws within.
You've fought your nature and the moonlight ever
since. You froze it back into the sky
with all your sense of violated virtue...

Nancy: I've always hated anything not right!

Roger: Is that less right that is built onto man
than is built in him? Yes, I, too
have been a slave to many layers of guilt,
I too, have long deprived my inmost nature
to cater to exterior façade –
as mother, you, Vic, everyone has done...
Perhaps I am too weak to sport a shell,
perhaps – God knows – too frail to walk without one.
But I can bear this cold protective cast
no longer, I am no more convinced...

Nancy: Do you doubt I love and mean you well?

Roger: We all mean well – or many of us do –
and many of us bear our shells like clams,
living inside and only peeping out
when there is no disturbance...and seeing nothing,

call the limits of our soul...

It takes some black-rimmed huntress of the night
to rend apart our valves, and haul us forth,
then stare us in our spineless face,
and spread her jaws and snap, so that we shriek
to recognize our own viscosity... I fear,
were we the only clams upon the shore
the dark raccoon would hunger shockingly,
For nibbling off one layer of shell
she'd find another and another 'til
he'd hit that pen-sized cavity where lies
an injured heart. I leave.

Nancy: But, Rog, you can't...

Roger goes to a closet, takes out an old coat and cap, and walks toward the door.

Nancy is mute. Roger stops in front of the picture of the boy standing on the hill at sunset.

Nancy: Aren't you going to tell your son good bye?

Roger: He is too much a part of me for that –
while either of us lives. For his sake, pray,
and mine, I shan't return.

Roger kisses Nancy softly on the forehead. He is weeping.

Roger: Nancy, good-bye.

Roger walks out the door.

Nancy: But grown men don't do this sort of thing.
You must come back, I'll pray...

CURTAIN

Act III **Scene 1**

The McLain's living room on a stormy evening. The sound of rain and occasional muffled thunder. The folding doors to the dining room are closed. The blue-legged stool has been placed in the right rear corner of the room, where it is scarcely visible behind the sofa. The room is dimly lit by yellowish electric light. From a fire in the fireplace flickering yellow and red light is cast. Nancy McLain is sitting in the easy chair trying to read. Douglas is lying on the hearth in front of the fire. His crutch, leaning upright against the middle of the fireplace casts a grotesque shadow across the room. He looks up at his mother for a long moment, and then speaks.

Douglas: Mama, don't look so sad. It frightens me.
You seem so far away, and I alone.
You're not like my mama when you're sad.

Nancy: (without looking up)
Another night of rain. The twenty-seventh
night since Roger left. When will it end?
This house, which once gave laughter to my being

has withered to a melancholy tomb,
and I have withered with it. I never guessed
how much my life was made into my man.

Douglas: Why did Daddy leave? Where did he go?

Nancy: Before he left he looked up at this portrait,
the lad sitting on the hill at sunset,
then smiled as I once saw him years ago,
and wept; put on his old coat and cap,
and left.

Douglas: But for where? Tell me, mama, where?

Nancy: (slowly, after a silence)

Perhaps he's gone to hunt the pot of gold
beyond the rainbow, that he used to rave about.

Douglas: (scrambling to his knees)

Boy, Mama, do you suppose it's true
my daddy left on such a grand adventure?
Just think: The pot of sun! The rainbow's end!
If I'd have known I'd have gone along!

Nancy: No, child, your mother needs you here at home.
You'd find your father's road sad undertaking.
Just look into the fierce storm outside
and thank your lucky stars you're home with me.

Douglas: There aren't stars in weather such as this...
Yet storms can't last forever. Perhaps soon

the sun will make a passage through the clouds
and make the biggest rainbow ever seen...
Then we'll see Daddy coming down the road,
and far behind him, carrying the sun,
a caravan of men ten thousand strong.
We'll all be rich. The rainbow shall be ours!

Nancy: Alas, my little naive dreamer of
a son, your life is built of fairy-tales
which to you seem more real than solid gold,
But father is too old to hunt such treasures...
though I as much as you want to believe it,
there is no pot of gold beyond the rainbow.

Douglas: (trying to get up, but slipping back to his knees)
But there is a pot of sun? I know there is?

Nancy: (looking toward Douglas for the first time.)

Douglas: Take your crutch away from the fire!

(The fire burns bluer for the moment.)

Nancy: Do you want to burn it up?

Douglas: I wish I could.
Burn it to ashes in a huge blue flame!
Mother, I can't bear being a cripple.
The birds fly and the wind blows and I
can't even stand alone. But why?... Why?
Since Daddy left I notice myself much more.
I'll never to be able to run away as he has.

Nancy: For that we both are lucky.

Douglas: I hate this crutch.

Nancy: You ought to be very thankful that you have it.
Why, without it you couldn't walk at all:
The thing's your sole support,

Douglas: I hate it
I will learn to walk without it. I will, or...

Nancy: Don't be silly, child.

The fire burns red. The doorbell rings.

Roger's voice (from outside):
Nancy, Nancy, dear, I've come home.

Douglas: It's dad! He's back!

Nancy: (hurrying with Douglas to the door)
Roger! Home at last!

The door is opened, and Roger steps in out of the teeming rain. He is
bedraggled, dirty, and very haggard.

Roger: (embracing Nancy)
Nancy!

Nancy: Ech! Errrr!... (drawing away) Oh, Rog, how I prayed.

Roger: It was your very praying that brought me back.

Douglas: Daddy!

Roger: (avoiding looking at his son)
Yes, Douglas.

Douglas: Did you find it?

Nancy: Hush, child. This is no time to taunt Daddy
with your little games.

Roger: (with effort)
Did I find what ... son?

Douglas: The pot of sun! Did you find it? Did you?

Roger: What pot of sun?

Douglas gasps, and his mother places a hand on his head to bid him keep still.

Roger makes a gesture as if trying to push something away from his eyes.
He takes hold of Nancy.

Roger: Nancy, darling, can you
Ever forgive me for this selfish prank?
For my acting like a spoiled moon-struck child
who runs off because his parents love him?
I'll never leave again. Will you forgive me?

Nancy: Oh, Rog, you have returned? You have come back?
A thousand, thousand times I forgive you.

Roger: Once is enough...

Douglas: Daddy.

Roger: What now?

Douglas: Going to ask me for forgiveness too?

Roger: (shaking)
You mean ...for coming home?

Douglas: Dad, don't be funny.
Remember; when you killed my little redbird!

Roger: (forcing himself to look at the boy)
I'll ask you kindly never to mention
within this household anything that happened
on that day. It's a matter for
forgetting, not forgiving... Your face is dirty.
Go and wash at once. I'll have no son
of mine looking like a beggar, The gypsy's
place is on the road, not around here.
It's high time we put our home in order.

Douglas: And I suppose your wet dirty footprints...

Roger: Go wash your face, young man, or take down
your trousers.

Douglas: (sobbing)
OK, you old...

Nancy: Douglas!

Douglas hobbles out of the room, weeping. His exit is made through the folding doors, which he leaves open about a foot. The fire flares up deep red.

Nancy: Well, Rog, let's hope you got everything out of your system. Now...tell me all about it.

Roger: There's not much to tell that matters now.

Nancy: But tell me anyway. What did you do?

Roger: (nervously)

I...simply
had myself one glorious adventure...
tripping through the woods like a hermit
until my whiskers itched. Then I came home.

Nancy: Surely you can do better than that, Rog.

Roger: I can say more, if that's what you mean.
But my words would be as wasted as my venture.
Why bother? And besides, I want to forget.

Nancy: (coaxing)

Bother for my sake, Rog. I'm curious.

Roger: (after a long hesitation)

All right, I'll tell you all that mattered...then.

Roger turns off the electric lights, stilling his wife's reaction with a gesture. The only light in the room now comes flickering from the fireplace. Reddish at first, it becomes progressively bluer and brighter as Roger speaks, casting a huge shadow of the speaker across the room.

Roger: I left as a man of hope and airy dreams...
 I guess to rediscover childhood.
 My memories of childhood I'd built
 into a kind of golden fairytale
 which I in careless fancy had called freedom.
 And so I turned my back upon the city
 whose good and bad as one I had condemned
 and headed for the mountains, which I thought
 held there some magic key that I might use
 to open up my breast and free my soul...
 And for one fleeting moment it was so!
 I was alive and free as I had dreamed!

The fire throws an intense blue light. With Rogers next words it flickers red, and then is blue again.

 This moment of my life I must forget...
 Yet now I can recall it all too well.
 It tears my heart from me and wings it back
 into the woodland where I last knew... hope.
 Ten days I'd passed alone within the forest
 When, at once, I had a strong desire
 to stand upon the summit of a mountain –
 whose name I do not know, it matters not –
 which rose with verdant sides and open crown
 above its neighbors, and far more intense.

(The blue fire-light becomes whiter and brighter.)

My limbs were scarcely fit for such a venture,
but beauty and the grandeur drove me on,
spurred my straining body toward the top.
And so it was, while on the steep ascent,
I rose, and grew to know the pleasant pain
which weary muscles sign unto the heart.
Now and then a respite was in order;
nor ever would you guess my gratitude
to simply sit and rest my tired limbs...

While Roger has been speaking, the picture of the boy on the hill, which has been obscured in the dark portion of the room, has gradually been illuminated by a misty, blue-white light. It is now quite noticeable.

'Twould seem great struggle merits great reward
however small the consequence may be.
And so it was with me. I well remember
one most welcome spell, before the summit.
I sat upon a rock above the treetops,
and all the world rolled out before my eyes.
So filled with joy was I, I wept aloud,
and to myself, and through myself, I said...

The voice of a boy (from far away)

This life is good! The starlight here shines clear
and bright, undimmed by carpets of haze
which glaze the skies where people live too near,
or have too little time to stand and gaze.

This life is real. The animals, the earth,
the shrubs, the trees, the birds, together sing
in varied keys one song they learn by birth
to last them 'til the final harvesting.
This life is whole. And whether man was made
for Nature's joy, or nature made for man,
here matters not. Together they were made
and side by side they live as best they can.
Yet nothing lives but knows its birthright call...

Silence. Then the distant booming voice of Victor (as if through an echo chamber.) He stands on top, who is to stand at all.

Roger suddenly gasps and tries to keep the tears from his eyes.

Nancy: You'll be catching cold. Go change your clothes.

Roger: No! Not yet. You asked to hear my tale,
But stay a while and hear it to the end.

Nancy: But Rog, you'll simply catch your death of cold...

Roger: So I climbed on. The air was getting cold.
Encircling the summit lay a cloud,
through which I felt my way, now saw a thing
save my own hands, and rocks beneath my feet.
Then, when at last I was so short of breath
I felt I could not take another step,
I suddenly burst through the clouds and stood
the victor of myself, upon the summit.

The fire now throws off a brilliant arc-white light, blinding as sunlight.

The breezes sang with free and wild laughter,
the mountains burst with beauty 'pon the heavens,
the very sky was shimmering with joy!
My breath returned. My limbs felt light and free.
I stretched as high as I could stand and braced
against the wind, cast down my eyes upon
the hundred lesser peaks I might have climbed.
My errant mind, at first still unsubdued
groped fast for words such ecstasy to tell
before at last it sank beyond perception
to leave me standing naked in that sphere
of blinding glory mortals call the sun.
How long I stood like that I do not know.
It mattered not. A moment or a year.
But oh, what loss! Oh, death or life?
It lasted not forever, Eventually the clouds,
insidious and slow, but without falter,
stealthily crept in upon my peak
to swallow up my sun in misty sphere.
Then, even as the sky began to crumble,
the suffocating fingers of aloneness
closed hard around my unprotected heart.

The white fire-light has dropped to a dull blue and is waning swiftly.

Down I sank, and frozen through, I wept,
Wept out myself upon the selfless stone.
The fire begins to flicker yellow.
Then through the gale I heard my mother cry...

A woman's voice (echo-like, from the distance)

Child! Will you never act your age?

Roger: I heard my business cohorts laughing loud, (laughter)
and, turning, looked to see within the veil
my neighbor's faces, hard as knotty oak,
all staring at me like I was a freak.
And as they stared the very mountain shook!

A long, lightning flash. The arc-white light from the flash can be seen
through the tall, narrow opening which Douglas had left between the
folding doors. The flash lasts several seconds, and as it ceases, thunder.
Flickering red light from the fire has subordinated the blue.

What daemons lay within that stony top
that they should seep, into my tortured mind
with stark hallucinations I know not,
nor do I care to know. That haunting, living,
nightmare was too much for me to stand.
I staggered to my knees and groped my way
along the rocks and down the mountain side
until, at last. I dropped beneath the clouds
and entered once again the silent forest.
Downhill from that time on I fought my battle.
My own aloneness left me not alone
but met me face to face in every fir tree,
every flower, every dewdrop, every stone.
Everywhere I went it followed close,
its bosom on my shoulder like a shroud,
Its shadow cast on everything I saw,
despising beauty. No longer could I look
as once I had o'er all the natural wonders,

refreshingly, for the quietude depress me,
the beauty mocks the misfit of my venture,
the vastness of the forest frightens me...

The fire now throws a strong, constant, red light into the room.

Upon the seventh day of such estrangement
I fell above a silent rippling stream
and looking down upon my twisted image
reflected there, I spoke to it, and said:
What is a man like this to do, who guided by his soul
determines to accomplish what he sets to be his goal,
but not until that mark is reached finds out how great the cost
of such a mark on any man, and once again is lost?
What is a man like this to do who riding on a cloud
marches into battle and proclaims his victory loud,
and then, when turned about, beholds a last great enemy
he cannot flee nor fight, for woe, that enemy is he?
To this my image, cold and flat, but wise,
shivered on the surface and replied...

The shadowy figure of the beggar appears in the front right hand corner of the room, near the door.

Beggar: A goal is not a precious stone, once found, forever had,
 but like the lotus or the muse can drive its finder mad.
 A goal is not a mountain top, but rather a plateau...
 to be traversed, not stood stop, for clearest waters flow.
 A goal is not a single spar, the victor's for the winning,
 nor rightly held an end in life, but reached, is Life's beginning;
 and all the struggles born to man to reach his high plateau
 on reaching it are lessened not, but that his merits grow...

(with great solemnity)

But woe be to the man who climbs in part to run away,
and finds the lonely heights too much and cannot stand to
stay...

Roger: (violently)

"Enough!" I cried; then spit into the pool,
and watched my jagged image evanesce.

(beggar vanishes)

I knew I'd not be in the fight much longer,
for evil thoughts were singing in my head.
My lesser self was coming to the fore...

The blue-white illumination of the picture of the boy begins to fade out.

He stood above me like a demi-god
and smote my spirit with his black-snake thong
'til, bleeding tears, I begged to be his servant...

Malignant laughing, that of Frank, is heard from above.

First, he would not accept, but lashed me still,
while all the forest, calmly looking on,
blandly smiling, egged him to the whip.
I threw myself against a giant tree trunk,
and gripped it hard, until my fingers bled.
And yet I held it not. It was aloof.
I hid my eyes, and sobbing loud, I cried:
"Your trees stand high, like nobles, while your roots
like blind, dumb slow-worms undermine the earth.
Unmoved, unmoving, meaningless and mute,
you stand, as still-born children, spared of birth.

What satiable fortune yours, dumb trees,
which unlike mine unmindful lets you stand
your fate through fire, hurricane, disease,
unwont to change your lot upon this land.
With grace you grow, and gracefully you fall,
assigned a fate which man may never find,
a state of being condescending all...
How simple for a soul not cursed with mind!"
The silent forest heard my turbid wind
and whispered with a breeze...

A voice like that of the fortune teller (wailing, softly, from afar)

Roger: And so I staggered on those last few days,
 as lost a soul as hell ever known.
 I shut my eyes to prove that I was blind,
 and blind I was as sightless man can be...

The red glow from the fire has died down almost entirely. Roger feels his way to the wall and turns on the electric lights.

When I finally forced myself to open my eyes again, everything was changed. The trees were less beautiful; the forest less vast; the vastness less awful. The sky was drab – flat, in fact – and to make everything worse, it began to rain. For a long time. I crouched under a huge fallen tree. But then the water began dripping onto my throat. I realized that there was no use just crouching there 'til I caught my death, so I said to myself: (raises voice)

"There's no use just crouching here 'til you catch cold. You must be brave. You must strike out for home. Your poor wife will be worried sick about you. Your child ... your crippled child..." No. let that go ...

"A for this fallacy called 'freedom', it is a game for children, and the sooner you learn not to play it the better. Man is a gregarious animal, like the ant, and was never intended to live independently, in any way."

Thus said, I courageously struck out for home. The weather was miserable; it seemed to take an eternity; but I made it back. Well, Nancy, that finishes the confession of a fool's folly.

Nancy: Then you're all right now? You're not bothered
 with those strange ideas you had before you left?
 And your dreadful dreams, are you rid of them too?

Roger: I don't dream anymore. I sleep soundly...
 It's still dark in here... (turns on table lamp, lighting up
 the picture of the manufacturing area of the city.
 The fire is almost out.)

Nancy: It still has a dim red glow... But Rog!
 All this while we've been talking together
 You've been standing there soaked to the skin.
 Get some dry clothes on in a hurry,
 while I go get some coffee ready.

Roger: I wish you wouldn't go. It's so good to be with you...with
 anyone right now. It seems I've been alone a lifetime.

Nancy: Oh Rog, I'm so happy!

Roger: Happy that I've been alone a lifetime?

Nancy: Happy that you're alone no longer. Happy that you're here with me – that we're together. At last you need me, don't you, Rog?

Roger: I need a world of you. I always have, but I never realized it. And you're so right. I must hurry and change my clothes. I must change my clothes and hurry.

Nancy Yes, hurry. I'll have some coffee ready. In just a minute.

(Exit Nancy through the folding doors)

Roger: Yes, I'll need to hurry. Victor was right. I must increase my speed; cover more ground; be more assertive. Maybe even smoke cigars...
Yes...Only the man who keeps busy can be successful and happy.
Well, I will keep busy. I will be successful. I will...

Roger's eyes fall on the painting of the boy sitting on the hill at sunset.

... have to keep very busy. That painting has got to go. It fans old embers. I don't want a fire.

Roger moves toward the painting. He reaches toward it as if to take it off the hook, and then stops. His voice, when he speaks, is very weak and hollow.

Roger: Painting, set against the wall,
 for weeks and months and years I've watched you fade;
 I've seen your fairest tones discolor,
 found your form becoming plain.
 your mouth, which seemed so sadly puzzled,
 yet young with cornered hope,
 I've seen become yet sadder,
 and your eyes, which had inquired, 'come forlorn.
 And still, as though 'twere not enough
 to die a human death, you've faded more.
 Your eyes, which once were live,
 Now flatten to the frame,
 and lips – be mouthless lips –
 now neither sad nor sparked with hope,
 but merely there, no more than painted lobes.
 You hang before my eyes, but are not mine,
 and I, though once inspired, turn away ...

(turns away, toward the audience)

 Distasteful thought to hold today
 that not so long ago
 this very portrait on the wall
 I used to judge my neighbors:
 what could they read into those eyes,
 those quiet lips, that setting sky?
 I used to think it took a gentle heart
 To love a gentle heart,
 And naught for naught. I thought
 those tender lips and living eyes portrayed

the soul, and part of life was quiet and was warm.
But all the world is wrapped in bartered rags.
Thus living passes loud; the hours are cold.
Even as a paining turns to daubs,
Ideals expire. . . . How passing strange
that I, with heavy breath, cannot but know
how wrong, how wrong I am,
nor ever change.

Roger takes the painting off its hook and slowly sets it on the table, face down .

Enter Douglas from the dining room, bringing a cup of coffee. (His eyes are red from weeping.)

Douglas: (weakly)

Have some coffee, Dad... Feeling better?

Roger: Thank you, Douglas.

Douglas: (approaching the hearth) Dad, why'd you let the fire go out?

Nancy: (entering) Rog, haven't you changed yet?

Roger: How silly of me. My mind sort of wandered away.

Nancy: Well, wander it back again and get that coffee into you.

Roger: (settling in the easy-chair)

I meant to hurry, too; and I shall.

From now on my wandering days are over.

Douglas: You look awfully cold, Dad. Yet you seem
 Not to be shivering; you are not blue.
 Are you all right?

Roger: Why do you think I am cold if I am neither blue nor shivering?

Douglas: I don't know. I guess it is your eyes.

Nancy: Your father's very tired, and he shows it.
 But he is well, and safe, and he is home
 For good. Isn't it wonderful, Rog?

Roger: Yes... I guess so. . . . The coffee's wonderful.
 I must hurry and change my clothes.

Nancy turns and walks into the dining room. In her hand is the empty cup. She is followed by Roger, who closes the folding doors behind him. The boy, Douglas, is left alone in the living room. He glances at the back wall and notices the missing painting. Slowly he hobbles over to the table, lifts up the painting of the boy sitting on the hill at sunset, and looks at it with a questioning frown. He tries to lift the painting back to its hook, but finds it too high. Pulling the blue-legged stool out of the corner, he kneels on it and again tries to hang the picture, but still he cannot reach high enough. He tries to stand on the stool. He and the stool both fall. A blue-white light comes over the room. Douglas picks up his crutch and slowly pulls himself to his feet. He faces the painting of the manufacturing area of the city, holds up his crutch for a long, hesitant moment, and then strikes the painting, The glass splits but does not fall out. Douglas flings his crutch away and turns from the wall, facing the audience.

Douglas: I must walk without it. For Daddy.

The boy tries to walk straight forward, but his crippled limb forbids this, and he stumbles diagonally across the stage, toward the fireplace. Almost to the fireplace he falls again, striking his head on the cement hearth.

Enter Roger and Nancy, hurriedly.

Roger: I thought I heard a crash.

Nancy: What was it?

Roger: Look! My child... my child!

Nancy: He tried to walk alone!

They hurry over to the boy and raise him up.

Roger: He has split his head open on the fireplace.
I think he's dying.

Nancy: My God!

CURTAIN

Act III

Scene 2

The abode of the fortune teller. The little old lady is seated at her table in the same blue cloud of light... a little dimmer, perhaps. On the table rests her crystal ball, glowing with an eerie whiteness. The fortune teller is again musing over her poem, the one she was working on when the play opened. In the days gone by she has modified and added to it considerably.

FT: *"Spoil and strain and material gain
Stride on, and all is well;
Yet fine on earth is torture by birth,
The conquest of Heaven is Hell,
And so it is that the cautious man
Cares not to lift his eyes
To the white-hot lights and the pitch-black nights
But would rather be warm than wise,
And so it is that the man who sees
Those hundred hanging brows
Will sweep the skies with the cursed eyes
That his cursed god allows.
For he is a stranger amongst the blind,
And he cannot comprehend
Why the blazing skies don't hurt the eyes
Of his kind and would-be friend.
But he finds no friend in the sightless crowd,
For those who can see are few.
A bitter cloud becomes his shroud,
For he dies ere life is through."*

Hmmm...

It's coming on, indeed it's coming on
Perhaps I'll be a poetess after all.
Now all I need to clinch it is a closing.
Then I shall lay my scribbles on the shelf

To keep them for some rainy day's recall.

A knock sounds at the door. The fortune teller rises and walks over to open it. Enter the policeman.

Police: You the fortune teller I got on this here subpoena?

FT: The name is reminiscent of my own,
 but poorly spelt.

Policeman: Yeah, but it's you, lady, all the same. Ha: What did I
 tell you. Here it is, almost thirty days to the day.

FT: Then I presume you've hooked a snapper? Well?

Police: Snap your head right off, lady. This old turtle was that mad!
(snaps his jaws and laughs)
 Yes, ma'am. I've got the signed
 complaint right here in my pocket. So outcha go. What did
 I tell you? Yes, ma'am, I know yer kind.

FT: And who is placing this complaint against me?

Police: Sorry, lady, the law don't allow me to give his name.

FT: So it is a man. A youngish man?

Police: Pr'aps.

FT: (after a long pause)
 So, the pillar and the man have truly fallen:...

Sometimes a man with too many eyes
will make his stand, and fall,
and if this is so he shall fall below
the level of us all...
How often have good dreams been sadly used!

Police: What say, lady?

FT: Oh, it's nothing; nothing any more.

Police: OK, lady, I'm sorry, but I gotta throw you out o' here.
I'll give you just two minutes to get your things ready.

Ft: Two at once! How generous of you!

Police: Lady...you're rude!

The policeman steps outside again and is obscured in blackness. Only the glowing tip of his cigarette can be seen through the open doorway. The fortune teller goes back to her table and sits down, musing.

FT: If fortune bids me leave then I must go...
Strong is the man who does not share misfortune
with his neighbors; and Roger's highest virtue
was not strength. He must be truly wretched
to share with me his fate, but not his city.
Ah well, so much for Roger! End my poem...
Now let me see... where was I.

Slowly she reads over the last half-stanza.

*"A bitter cloud becomes his shroud,
for he dies ere life is through"...*

hmm...

Would seem the lines were writ to fit the theme.

What more can I say?

Police: (clomping into the room)

OK, lady. Play's over. Let's go.

He reaches across the table and brusquely pulls the fortune teller up. The crystal ball is upset, falls to the floor, and breaks. The blue light disappears at the same time, and a deep red glow comes over the stage. To the right rear of the stage, the dark shape of the broken base of the pillar can be seen. Draped across it, the body of a boy.

Police: Oops! . . . Sorry, lady. Well, I guess that's life.

He leads her out.

CURTAIN