

Seminario Multidisciplinario José Emilio González  
Bachillerato de Estudios Interdisciplinarios  
Facultad de Humanidades  
Universidad de Puerto Rico  
Recinto de Río Piedras



IN THE BURNING DARKNESS

by

Antonio Buero Vallejo

Translated by Dr. Samuel Wofsy and

adapted by Dr. Theodore Hatlen

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*Seminario de Dramá*

SEMINARIO MULTIDISCIPLINARIO  
JOSE EMILIO GONZALEZ  
FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES  
UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO  
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IN THE BURNING DARKNESS

ACT I

CHARACTERS

Elise  
Lola  
Marie  
Joanne  
Mrs. Marsden

Andy  
Albert  
Carl  
Mickey  
John  
Mr. Marsden  
Mr. Barlow

SCENE: A student lounge in a college for the blind. The rear wall is entirely of glass which is backed by a terrace. There is a low wall across the terrace over which may be seen the tops of several trees and a patch of blue sky. To the right the terrace leads to the athletic field and the street. To the left the terrace leads to other parts of the college. In the Upper Right diagonal corner is a large glass door opening on to the Terrace. In the extreme Up Left rear wall is another glass door. Another solid door Up Left leads to the administrative offices. A sofa and arm chair form a conversational grouping Up Center. Down stage Left and Right are additional easy chairs and end tables. The glass wall at the back may be covered by long draperies which are mounted on a track in a valance over the windows. There is a record player Up Right.

As the curtain rises seven blind students are discovered on stage. Two or three wear dark glasses; several are smoking. They move around freely. They give the impression of being entirely normal if it were not for one striking feature - they never look directly at the person to whom they are speaking. Marie and Lola are seated on the sofa Up Center, Albert sits next to them in the easy chair. Joanne and Carl are seated Down Left. Andy is standing Up Right by the record player. Elise is standing on the terrace as if waiting for someone. The glass door Up Left is open. All but Elise are listening carefully to a recorded novel.

RECORD: Out of the cool, deep shadows of the glen, he came to a narrow clearing by a stream, and stood for a moment dazzled by the sun. He searched the distant woods and hills in vain. Had she, then, gone another way or was she hiding from his anxious eyes? Troubled and weary he stooped to drink the clear water of the stream, then rising searched the distant hills again, but there was no motion, no sign, no sound but the sunlit drone of bees. She was gone.  
(Andy lifts the needle from the record.)

LOLA: Do you think he'll ever find her?

MARIE: Of course, Lola, he must.

ANDY: Ah, Marie, I fear you are incurably romantic.

MARIE: Of course I am. How else could I love you? (They laugh)

CARL: Now Marie, aren't you a shameless young woman to confess your love in public? (They all laugh)

ANDY: She's not confessing, Carl, she's bragging.

JOANNE: (With a meaningful look at Lola.) Or perhaps warning someone, oh, Lola?

LOLA: (Pretending anger.) Why, Joanne! Of all the nerve! You know very well that I am the studious type and have no use for fellows anyway.

CARL: I take it, Lola, you are planning to turn over a new leaf this year. In the past ....

ANDY: (Bantering) As usual; a sermon from Carl. The golden text this time is taken from the Acts of Lola: Blessed are the loafers for they shall flunk out. (Laughter)

LOLA: (Good naturedly) That's all right. I've got broad shoulders. Go on, Carl, preach away.

MARIE: But I prefer to hear the end of the story.

ALBERT: Yes, let's go on with the story, Andy. How many more records are there?

ANDY: Two, I think. (He returns to the record player)

LOLA: Well, put the next one on, I'm dying to hear the end of the story.

CARL: Don't you think you could postpone your dying?

ANDY: Yes, Lola, don't die now; at least not until you help us pick up our lab supplies.

MARIE: That's right, I suppose we mustn't keep Professor Ricardo waiting since he promised to let us get in before the rush starts.

ANDY: But you said he wouldn't be in his office before eleven o'clock.

ELISE: (Anxiously as she comes in.) How's that, Andy? Did you say it was eleven o'clock? (The answer to this is a general explosion of laughter.) I don't quite get the joke. What's so funny about asking the time?

- ANDY: Elise, it just happens that ... (He clears his throat comically) by coincidence, you already asked about the time twice in the last fifteen minutes.
- LOLA: And you yourself heard the clock strike half past ten.
- ALBERT: Now Elise, you can't expect Mickey to be too punctual for registration when he has so many diversions.
- ELISE: What's Mickey got to do with it? (Laughter)
- JOANNE: Albert is right, Elise darling. Mickey always arrives at the last minute. So why worry?
- ELISE: Who said I was worrying? (There are snickers)
- ANDY: (Teasing) Ah, Elise, but I think you should be worried. Who knows? He may never come back. Mickey may have found some new interest in the big city ... (They laugh)
- LOLA: No one here has heard a word from him the whole vacation.
- ELISE: (Snaps at the bait, heatedly.) Let me tell you this, Lola. It happens that someone here has heard from Mickey.
- LOLA: So, you did hear from Mickey! And your asking the time was only to check on the accuracy of our chapel clock, hm?
- CARL: Let's not talk any more about Mickey ... (Mickey enters Up Left.)
- MICKEY: (With comic pomposity.) Mickey! Mickey! Pray, my friends, 'tis a name never to be pronounced in vain, unless of course it's joined with words profane.
- ELISE: Mickey! (She runs to him and throws herself into his arms. Carl and Andy cross to him.)
- CARL: Well, well, the prodigal has returned at last. (Mickey makes appropriate mimickry.)
- ANDY: The lost sheep has come back to the fold.
- MICKEY: Bahhh!
- MARIE: And here we had nearly given you up to the big, wicked city.
- LOLA: We certainly missed you. It was so quiet without you. Why couldn't you come back a day or two earlier, like the rest of us?
- JOANNE: What on earth have you been doing:

MICKEY: There you have each asked an indiscreet question, the answer to which we'd better leave buried in my bosom. Sufficient unto the day, and the night, are the evils thereof. (Laughter) Such food, such wine, such music, such ... (Sighs) but all in good time. I promise a complete full, detailed, unexpurgated report. But it's good to be back.

CARL: And it's good to have you, isn't it Elise? (Elise holds Mickey's hand. He puts his arm around her affectionately.)

ALBERT: Poor girl, Mickey, she just pines away without you.

ELISE: (Embarrassed) Albert!

MICKEY: Of course she does. That shows she's a young woman with excellent judgment. Phew. I thought I'd never get here. Oh, the city and its terrific streets! All those people piled and stacked together and the incredible jangle of sound. The pressure and tension wear you out in a single day. Here one feels at ease. And now that I'm back this is what I think of my cane. (He puts it in the waste basket: Thanks for the good understanding, dear stick, but I really have no further need for you, until June. Everyone cheers and applauds his action.)

MARIE: And now we want to hear about your vacation ... everything.

LOLA: But not too much imagination. (Ad Lib encouragement.)

MICKEY: (Striking a pose.) Thank you, thank you. Since you discriminating ladies and gentlemen want me to tell you about my vacation, I will. Now some of you may accuse me of exaggeration, but those of you who know me well as a young man of unquestionable integrity and impeccable honor ...

ALBERT: Yes, yet, get on with the story.

MICKEY: If you please. (Laughing) It was on Tuesday ... or was it Wednesday? Tuesday I think. Anyway I took my trusty cane out for a stroll. You'll have to believe me when I tell you that this was my purpose ... a stroll, nothing more. Well ... (He pauses to listen intently.) Listen. Do you hear something?

MARIE: Cut out the clowning, Mickey, and let's hear your story.

MICKEY: But I'm not clowning. I tell you I hear a strange sound. Someone tapping a cane.

LOLA: (Laughing) You hear the sound of your own. You've still got it in your ears.

ANDY: On with the story you idiot. You were going for a stroll..

- CARL: Wait, he isn't joking. Listen and you can hear a cane.  
(The tapping of the cane grows nearer.)
- JOANNE: Yes, I hear it too. (They all listen to the approaching sound coming from Up Left. A long pause broken only by the tapping. John appears Up Left feeling his way with his cane. His face reveals a vague fear. He is a silent, serious-looking, self-centered lad, rather careless about his personal appearance: his shirt collar unbuttoned, his necktie loose, his hair combed with little attention. He is unseasonably dressed in black throughout the play. He hesitates for a moment in the archway, then advances two or three steps into the room Up Left Stage.)
- LOLA: How strange! (John is startled and falls back a step.)
- MICKY: Who are you? (John stumbles over a chair. He thrusts an arm out to protect himself and Elise catches his hand.) Wait! Don't go away. (Mickey catches him by the arm, feels his coat.)
- ELISE: (Uneasily.) He took my hand ... I don't know who he is.  
(John releases her hand.)
- MICKY: Neither do I. Who are you?
- JOHN: (Fearfully) Let go of me.
- CARL: What do you want here?
- JOHN: Nothing. Let me go. I don't know where I am. Can't you see? I'm ... I'm blind.
- LOLA: (Laughing) There's a competitor for you, Mickey.
- MARIE: A competitor? He'll be teaching Mickey tricks.
- ANDY: Must be some cutup from the freshman class.
- MICKY: Just leave him to me. Now then, who or what did you say you are?
- JOHN: (Frightened.) I'm blind.
- MICKY: (With mock sympathy) Well, you poor little tike; dear me, how sad. Come I'll take your arm and help you across the street. (Laughter)
- ALBERT: Listen fellow, we are upper classmen here. Go try your gags on the freshman class.
- ANDY: Or perhaps you shouldn't strain yourself trying to be so funny. Some people might not appreciate it. On your way. (Mickey and Andy push him. He backs Down Stage.)
- JOHN: (Frantically, nearly in tears) But I tell you I am blind.

- MICKEY: You're fond of that phrase, aren't you? You'll go far with it. So start going. (They close in on him.)
- JOHN: But, damn it, I'm blind! I'm blind, I tell you!
- CARL: (Breaking in) Wait a minute. He's apparently telling the truth.
- MICKEY: What do you think of that?
- CARL: (Crossing close to John.) Listen old man, we too happen to be blind, as you say.
- JOHN: You are blind? All of you?
- JOANNE: All of us. (Mickey crosses to Elise and takes her hand.) Didn't someone tell you about this school?
- JOHN: Yes, but I can't believe that you ... you are like me.
- CARL: (Smiling) Why not?
- JOHN: You seem so sure of yourselves ... and you talk as if you were seeing me.
- CARL: You will act the same way when you've been here awhile.
- JOHN: Yes.
- JOANNE: Did you come alone?
- JOHN: No. My father is in the office with Mr. Marsden.
- CARL: He's the director of the school. And they left you outside?
- JOHN: Mr. Marsden told me to walk around and get acquainted. My father didn't want me to but Mr. Marsden insisted.
- CARL: (Taking him under his wing.) And he's right. I hope you won't take your rather rude reception here seriously. Mickey has his lucid moments but unfortunately you didn't happen to catch him in one of them.
- MICKEY: Excuse it, please. Let's just say it all happened because of Mr. Marsden.
- ANDY: (Laughing) Pedagogy.
- MICKEY: Yes, that's the very word ... pedagogy. He tried it on you from the very first. But don't worry, you're sure to get a large dose of that.
- CARL: You'll soon get adjusted. But right now I expect you'd like us to take you back to the office.

- JOHN: Thanks, but I can go back by myself. (He takes a few steps upstage. He pauses. He starts off Right.)
- CARL: (Kindly) No, not that way you can't ... that way leads to the athletic field and the street. (Carl takes his arm in a friendly way, turns John around. Passively and with his head down John allows himself to be led.) Wait for me Joanne, I'll be right back.
- JOANNE: All right. (John's father and Mr. Marsden, head of the school, appear from the Left. The father is anxiously looking for his son. He is a prematurely aged man who seems to be at the end of his rope. He is followed by Mr. Marsden, a calm and smiling gentleman of about fifty, with gray temples, in whom age has not been able to erase a vague air of childish exuberance. He wears dark glasses.)
- FATHER: John, are you all right? (He goes to John and looks anxiously at him.)
- MARSDEN: There now, I told you he'd get along on his own. (Smiling) And in such good company, I believe. Isn't that so?
- MICKEY: The upper crust of the loafers.
- MARSDEN: Well, Mickey, are you finally here? Good. I take it you have all met John. (They ad lib.) And this is his father, Mr. Barlow.
- JOANNE: We're glad to meet you, sir.
- FATHER: Pleased to know you.
- CARL: We were very glad to get acquainted with John, Mr. Barlow.
- MARIE: Carl just started to take him to you.
- MARSDEN: You see, Mr. Barlow? There was no cause for worry. Nothing happened to him. John immediately found friends. If I may say so, that is one of our primary assets ... a friendly atmosphere. Your son will soon be at home with us you may be sure. He will find here happiness, fine comradeship, games ....
- FATHER: Yes, of course. Only I'm afraid the games ... the games I saw are amazing, no doubt about it. I never imagined that the blind could play soccer. And do they really use that high toboggan?
- ALBERT: That's the most fun of all.
- MICKEY: You go like the wind!
- LOLA: And what about skating on the pond?



- MARIE: Andy here is the fastest skater on the pond?
- FATHER: That's wonderful ... (Timidly to Mr. Marsden.) Do you really think John will be able to develop the skill to handle himself safely in such dangerous sports?
- MARSDEN: Of course he will. Don't have the slightest doubt about it.
- FATHER: But they seem so dangerous, especially when you consider that ...
- MARSDEN: Nonsense! We've never had anyone seriously hurt.
- FATHER: But it seems incredible that they should be able to play this way without ending up in ...
- MARSDEN: A serious accident? Not a single one, no sir, in all the years we've had the school.
- FATHER: But all these unfortunate youngsters are blind. They don't see anything!
- MARSDEN: But Mr. Barlow, there are compensations. They have a keen sense of hearing and they find their bearings better than you. Isn't that true? (The students agree audibly) Besides, they don't think of themselves as "unfortunate youngsters". Isn't that right, Andrew? Michael?
- ANDY: Absolutely, sir.
- MICKEY: But definitely. Except when the profs load it on.
- ELISE: Profs and all, we really are fortunate.
- JOANNE: We don't feel the need of pity.
- ALBERT: Anything but that.
- FATHER: I'm sorry. I want to apologize.
- MARSDEN: No, no, don't apologize. We did not mean to reproach you, we meant only to explain. We "sightless" people, as we call ourselves, can succeed as well as anyone. We hold down jobs, even important positions in journalism and literature, professorships ... We are strong, healthy, sociable and our way of life has given us a morale of steel. I assure you that we do not generally engage in such discussions. (The chapel clock strikes eleven.)
- FATHER: I'm sorry I brought it up. I had no idea ...
- MARSDEN: In time your own son will convince you.

- ANDY: Will you excuse us, Mr. Marsden? We were about to go over to the Biology lab. Professor Ricardo said he would let us in at eleven.
- MARSDEN: Certainly, go ahead.
- ANDY: Glad to have met you, Mr. Barlow. (Lola, Marie, Albert and Andy ad lib goodbye to Mr. Barlow and Mr. Marsden and exeunt Upstage Left. Elise and Mickey cross to the terrace where they carry on an intimate conversation in pantomime. They are holding hands. Carl and Joanne stand at the Right, their attention centered on Marsden.)
- FATHER: Mr. Marsden, I am embarrassed to ... I ...
- MARSDEN: It wasn't anything. A person on the outside is likely to have mistaken notions about us. Ever so many people imagine that we lead abnormal lives. You might think, for example, that we don't get married.
- FATHER: Of course ... among yourselves, naturally.
- MARSDEN: No, Mr. Barlow. There are more and more marriages between sighted and sightless persons. I myself, for instance, am sightless by birth, but my wife is sighted. I hope you will have an opportunity to meet her. She isn't here just now, but John will make her acquaintance at any rate, because she is my secretary.
- FATHER: Perhaps sometime when I visit then, I shall have the pleasure of meeting her. (Crossing to John) John, my boy ... I am going away happy to know that I am leaving you in such a good place. I am sure you will enjoy living here. (John remains silent. He turns to Carl and Joanne.) And you, brave young people, please try to make him as happy as you are. (In an inept attempt at merriment.) Imbue him with that morale of steel which you have.
- JOHN: (Irritated) Father, please ...
- FATHER: (Embracing him awkwardly.) You will come out of here an accomplished man.
- MARSDEN: Yes indeed. Fully equipped with a degree and all rights and privileges appertaining thereto. (They laugh lightly) (The tension between father and son diminishes.)
- FATHER: I hope we haven't forgotten anything you'll need here. (With emotion) Let me hear from you if there is something you want. I'll be back soon ... to see you.  
~~You'll write to me, won't you?~~
- JOHN: (With indifference) All right, father. (The father, quite moved, looks at everyone with moist eyes. He is torn by several impulses; to embrace his son again, to say goodbye to the students, to look for advice from Marsden.)

- MARSDEN: (Sensing Barlow's indecision) Shall we go?
- FATHER: Yes, let us go. (They start moving Up Left. The students ad lib goodbye to Barlow.)
- MARSDEN: (Stopping) Carl, show John about the campus will you? And take Mickey along. I think it would be a good idea for them to be roommates. Will you take care of that?
- CARL: Yes, Mr. Marsden.
- MARSDEN: Ready, Mr. Barlow?
- FATHER: Yes, yes. (Exeunt Up Left, the father looking back sorrowfully at his son. John remains rigid until they are gone. He takes a step or two Down Center.)
- CARL: It's a shame you didn't come here earlier. Are you just beginning your college work?
- JOHN: Yes. (He doesn't care to talk about it.)
- CARL: Joanne and I will try to give you a helping hand. I hope you'll feel free to ask us for anything you want.
- JOANNE: We'd like to help you.
- CARL: You'll soon be settled in your room with Mickey. But first you should get acquainted with the building. To begin with ... this is our club room; you've just become a member. In here everything is arranged so there's no possibility of stumbling. (He leads John.) We'll make the rounds so you'll familiarize yourself with the tables and chairs. (The three move Down Right, Carl on one side of John, Joanne on the other.) But you won't want that cane anymore. Let me take it to the office with Mickey's.
- JOANNE: (Taking his cane.) I'll take it. We'll turn it in at the office.
- JOHN: No, no. I can't walk without it!
- JOANNE: Just try it for a while.
- JOHN: I need it.
- JOANNE: You'll soon get along without it.
- JOHN: (Fiercely) But I know I can't! Give me back my cane I tell you! (There is a shocked silence. Joanne returns his cane.) And don't bother to show me around the building. It wouldn't help me much. I feel clumsy. (Another awkward pause.)
- CARL: Very well then, we won't insist. But you really ought to try and overcome that clumsiness you mentioned. I

- CARL: (continuing) take it, you never studied in our prep school.
- JOHN: No.
- JOANNE: Weren't you born without sight?
- JOHN: Yes, but ... my family ...
- CARL: I understand. Don't worry about it. We all went through what you're going through now, only we were lucky enough to have been educated in one of our schools under Mr. Marsden.
- JOANNE: We think Mr. Marsden is a wonderful man.
- JOHN: He is ... an absurdly happy man.
- CARL: Any man would be happy to find his finest aspirations work out in reality. I see nothing absurd in that.
- JOANNE: (To John) If Mrs. Marsden heard you say ...
- CARL: You will meet other teachers just as happy as Mr. Marsden.
- JOHN: Who are also blind?
- CARL: Sightless is the term we use. (Brief pause) Some are and some are not. Professor Ricardo, the Biology teacher is sightless but his wife, the assistant in foreign languages, is sighted. Others sighted are Mr. Levering, the Physics instructor, and the ...
- JOHN: Sighted?
- JOANNE: Yes, sighted. What's strange about that?
- JOHN: Do you mean to tell me that marriage between a blind man and a seeing woman is possible?
- CARL: Does that seem so extraordinary to you?
- JOANNE: There are many of them.
- JOHN: And between a seeing man and a blind woman? (Silence) Well, Carl? (Pause) Joanne?
- CARL: Joanne and I know one between old people.
- JOHN: (Sharply) One.
- JOANNE: And Joe and Louise. How happy they are!
- JOHN: Two.

- CARL: John, I hope you won't be offended, but you're a bit excited, I suppose, by the new experience of being here. I'll never forget my first day. You're bound to feel a bit ... well, shall we say, abnormal? Just take it easy. In this place you'll find plenty of happiness and good times if you just give us half a chance. (He pats John on the shoulders. John resents his touch and moves several steps away.)
- JOHN: You say I may feel abnormal. Well, why shouldn't I? I am abnormal and so are you.
- CARL: (Smiling) Let's save that point for another day, shall we?
- JOHN: (Brusquely) Why are you so patronizing to me? Does it make you feel superior because you find someone who is honest enough to admit his handicap?
- CARL: I'm sorry you react this way, John. I suppose I'm pretty clumsy myself. I didn't mean to step on your toes. What we probably need is someone with a lighter touch ... like Mickey. (Calling) Mickey, come here a minute. Don't play possum. I'd know Elise's laugh anywhere.
- MICKEY: (Coming down into the room with Elise.) There you are Elise; always giving me away. What's the matter, Carl?
- CARL: Come over here.
- MICKEY: I like it better here.
- CARL: Forget your fooling for a minute. Mr. Marsden asked me to pass on a message to you.
- MICKEY: If Elise isn't included in the message, I'm not interested.
- ELISE: Can't you get along without using me for your jokes?
- MICKEY: As a matter of fact, - no.
- JOANNE: Bring him over for a minute, Elise.
- MICKEY: I guess we're caught. (Hand in hand they cross Down Center to John and Carl.) All right, what's up?
- CARL: (To John) John, this is Mickey, the madman of the school, the baby of our institution, our mascot, our fool, our wit, our jester. But in spite of everything, a good egg. And this is his patient nurse, Elise.
- MICKEY: A patient nurse and a nurse patient.
- ELISE: I wonder if you could keep quiet?!

- MICKEY: No.
- CARL: Come, shake hands with John Barlow. (They shake hands.)  
(To John) Mickey will be your roommate. If you don't get along well together, let us know and we'll deal with him.
- JOHN: Why won't we get along? We're both blind!
- MICKEY: Do you hear, Carl? Didn't I tell you he was quite a joker?
- JOHN: I wasn't joking. I meant it seriously.
- MICKEY: Oh, you did? Well, thanks. Although I don't consider myself very unfortunate. My only misfortune is that Elise ....
- ELISE: Will chew your nose off one of these days.
- MICKEY: Isn't that a tender thought? Well, at least I can thank my lucky stars that there is no mother-in-law waiting to gobble me up .
- ELISE: Can't you be serious for just one minute, you idiot!
- MICKEY: Now I'm insulted. That's the trouble with women, no real sense of humor or intellectual wit. They have ears only for gossip.
- CARL: Mickey, we'd better show John your room and help him get located.
- MICKEY: Right! It's time I take you to our room so you can get yourself acclimated to the rarefied atmosphere of intellectualism free from the intrusion, the delicious intrusion, of the female of the species. Ladies, when you carve us up, please remember to use a knife with a nice handle. (Elise pinches Mickey.) Ouch! Come along.
- ELISE: Good riddance. (Carl, John and Mickey exeunt Up Left. After they are gone Elise rushes to Joanne excitedly.)
- JOANNE: At last we have one of our good old fashioned chats.
- ELISE: Oh, Joanne, I've been wanting to talk to you! First let me tell you about what Mickey brought me. It's the sweetest locket; I've been dying to tell you. (She unclasps it from her neck and hands it to Joanne.) It's shaped like a heart.
- JOANNE: (Feeling the locket.) It's lovely -- so smooth. It feels so good to the touch. And such a nice, light chain.

- ELISE: Mickey says it's sixteen Karat gold.
- JOANNE: What sort of stone is it?
- ELISE: It isn't a stone, it's a plastic, and in the middle is a small rose.
- JOANNE: How ingenious. It's wonderful to have someone care so much for you.
- ELISE: Yes, I'm lucky. (Mr. Marsden appears Up Left. He comes down into the room, smiling.)
- MARSDEN: Am I by chance interrupting a bit of feminine gossip?
- JOANNE: Not at all. We weren't gossiping. That is ... not yet. (They laugh lightly.)
- MARSDEN: And what were you going to talk about? Was it about the new student, perchance?
- ELISE: I suspect that we might be more concerned with certain older students.
- JOANNE: (Embarrassed) Elise!
- MARSDEN: (Laughing) A very pleasant conversation. Do you know where John is now?
- ELISE: Mickey and Carl took him to the room.
- MARSDEN: Good! (Mrs. Marsden crosses the terrace and stops at the door. She is forty. Under her arm she has a leather brief case. Smiling, she contemplates her husband affectionately.)
- ELISE: Can you imagine them abandoning our company for that impossible new fellow?
- JOANNE: Poor boy. I think he's nice.
- ELISE: I don't share your opinion.
- MARSDEN: Do not speak this way of a fellow-pupil, young lady, especially when you haven't had time to get acquainted with him. (He senses his wife's presence and turns toward her.) Excuse me a moment ... my wife. (His wife approaches.)
- MRS. M.: Hello, Paul. Forgive me, I know only too well, I am a bit late.
- MARSDEN: (Affectionately, taking her hand.) You are as fragrant as a rose today, Josie.
- MRS. M.: I used no more perfume than usual, my dear. Good morning, Elise, Joanne. What became of your knight errants?

- JOANNE: They went to show the new fellow his room.
- MRS. M.: Is that so? What kind of a young man is he?
- MARSDEN: You've no doubt already heard that he hasn't impressed these young ladies very favorable.
- JOANNE: It's only Elise who is rather hasty in her judgment.
- MARSDEN: Yes, slightly. And for that reason I want to make a few suggestions to you.
- JOANNE: In regard to John?
- MARSDEN: Yes. (To his wife.) And in the meantime you too will get an idea of the problem.
- MRS. M.: Is it something serious?
- MARSDEN: The usual thing. A lack of adjustment to our attitude.
- MRS. M.: A typical case.
- MARSDEN: Typical, yes. But perhaps a mite complicated this time. A brooding, unhappy boy, handicapped by misunderstood parental love. Too much indulgence, pampering, private tutors ... an only child. You understand. Now our modus operandi, which has given us such excellent results in previous cases must depend on the intelligent assistance of a few of you students.
- JOANNE: I tried to get him to give up his cane and he became quite upset. He says he's stupid.
- MARSDEN: Of course he isn't stupid at all, but a victim of unfortunate conditioning. It is our job to convince him that he can be a useful human being and that all roads are open to him if he has the courage. It is true that here he has the example, but it must be made apparent to him with great tact, and to your talent, young ladies, (To Joanne) and to Carl's especially, I entrust the most important part; the creation of a genuine comradeship which will win John over to us. You will do it easily, I am sure. Boys of his type are starved for attention and fun. With your help we'll soon have another convert.
- MRS. M.: Why don't you give him Mickey as a roommate?
- MARSDEN: That has been done already.
- MRS. M.: That should liven things up for him. What is his name?
- MARSDEN: John Barlow.



- MRS. M.: John Barlow. The problem then is to impregnate this boy in the shortest time possible with our celebrated morale of steel. Is that right?
- MARSDEN: Exactly right, my dear. And to you young ladies, I know I can confidently leave this matter.
- JOANNE: You need have no worry, Mr. Marsden.
- MRS. M.: I'm already late for work. No use being any later. With all the new term busy work to do, my desk is overflowing. I'd better be going. (Elise and Joanne ad lib goodbyes.) By the way, Paul, the music is not playing on the loud speaker system this morning ...
- MARSDEN: Oh, yes, I know, I forgot it. I've been thrown off schedule a bit this morning. (They go out talking, through the door Up Left. Joanne and Elise come together again.)
- ELISE: (Anxiously) Oh dear, I hope I didn't say the wrong thing to Mr. Marsden about John, but I couldn't help it. There is something strange about him that sets my nerves on edge ... It must be his magnetic current. Do you believe in such a thing, Joanne?
- JOANNE: Of course. Who doesn't?
- ELISE: Many people claim it's all nonsense.
- JOANNE: (Attempting to ease Elise's mind.) Many fools ... who have never been in love.
- ELISE: You are right. Just as the vibrations of love are good, I suppose there must be bad ones too.
- JOANNE: Why do you say that?
- ELISE: When that boy was in this room I had such an overwhelming sense of oppressiveness, and irritation as if he were taking all of the space and air. And when I took his hand, that dry, burning hand, I felt somehow such a loathing ... as if his flesh were charged with evil intentions!
- JOANNE: Oh, Elise, you're imagining things! I didn't notice anything extraordinary. As a matter of fact I thought he seemed quite nice.
- ELISE: Not me. I much prefer Mickey's wave length. I'm more in tune with him.
- JOANNE: And I with Carl. But as Mr. Marsden said, John is an unhappy being. All he needs is our help to make the adjustment. (The music fades in over the loudspeaker. The Adagio from Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata is played very softly.) Somehow we must help him find confidence.

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Elise, I have an idea which might settle his problem.

ELISE: What is it?

JOANNE: It may sound a bit superficial but what John really needs is someone who will believe in him, someone he can talk to freely, someone who will care for him ... Some one who will love him. What do you think?

ELISE: You may be right. That might be the answer.

JOANNE: I'm sure of it. Don't you remember how you felt before you found Mickey? I know I was moody and down in the dumps much of the time before Carl came along. And then what a change! How thrilled I was when he proposed to me.

ELISE: (She is unconsciously fingering the locket about her neck.) When you told me about Carl, you didn't know whether to laugh or cry. And I was jealous of you because Mickey hadn't said anything to me and I thought he would never love me.

JOANNE: And he proposed the next day, thanks to Carl's example I'll wager.

ELISE: That was the week-end of the Christmas dance, do you remember?

JOANNE: How could I ever forget? (Mickey steals in softly.)

ELISE: And the first kiss.

MICKEY: Like this? (He seizes her in an embrace. Elise gasps in surprise.)

ELISE: Mickey!

MICKEY: Right on cue. (He kisses her.)

ELISE: You scamp! How long have you been listening?

JOANNE: Aren't you ashamed to be eavesdropping?

MICKEY: Not when I could eavesdrop on such a conversation and with such pleasant results.

ELISE: You're incorrigible.

JOANNE: What's become of Carl?

MICKEY: Mr. Marsden waylaid him. He'll be along in a few minutes. He said for you to wait here.

JOANNE: And what did you do with John?

MICKEY: Safely tucked away in my room. He says he's tired. Do you know what? I offered to trade him beds and give him mine with the new inner spring mattress. But do you think he'd take it? No sir. He acted as if I'd insulted him ... and here I was trying to do him a favor. I have a feeling that this is going to be some semester!

ELISE: There you are, Joanne. He's downright uncivil.

JOANNE: He'll come around. Just remember he's got a hard adjustment to make. You can help him a great deal, Mickey.

MICKEY: It's going to be uphill work.

JOANNE: But you'll do it, I know. That's a lovely locket you got for Elise, Mickey.

MICKEY: She's a lucky girl, to have a fellow like me, isn't she? (The girls laugh) Glad to hear you agree, Joanne. Elise doesn't believe it when she hears it from me.

ELISE: You clown!

MICKEY: Well, I guess I'd better go and register. Come along and keep me company, Elise. You better come along too, Joanne. You can't tell when Carl will pull away from Marsden.

JOANNE: No, run along. I'll wait here for him.

ELISE: Good-bye then.

JOANNE: 'Bye. (Elise and Mickey exeunt laughing and talking. Joanne remains alone. She paces up and down slowly, listening to the Sonata. Her attention is caught by the faint tapping of a cane, the sound grows louder. John appears crossing Upstage.) John! (He stops abruptly.) You are John, aren't you?

JOHN: Yes, I am John. And you are Joanne?

JOANNE: (Moving toward him.) I thought you were resting in your room.

JOHN: That's where I'm coming from ... Good-bye. (He turns away.)

JOANNE: Where are you going?

JOHN: (Coldly) I'm going home. (Joanne is dumbfounded) (He takes a few steps.)

JOANNE: But John ... I thought you were going to enroll in school.

- JOHN: I was, but I've changed my mind.
- JOANNE: In a single hour?
- JOHN: That was time enough. (Joanne approaches and takes him affectionately by his coat lapels. He is noticeably agitated.)
- JOANNE: Please don't give way to a sudden impulse. You really haven't given us a fair chance, have you? (He is nervous and attempts to avoid touching her.) Your father will be terribly disappointed! And what will Mr. Marsden say?
- JOHN: (Contemptuously.) Mr. Marsden; ...
- JOANNE: And the rest of us; all of us would feel sorry ... as if we'd failed you. If you will only let yourself, you can find such friendship and enjoyment here.
- JOHN: Oh, cut it! You all have the knack of getting on my nerves. And you are worse than the rest of them. "Happiness" is the theme song of this place. You are poisoned with cheerfulness. This is not what I expected to find here. I wanted genuine friends, not a bunch of deluded, fun-happy fools.
- JOANNE: (Smiling sweetly) Poor John, I'm really sorry for you. You ...
- JOHN: (Sharply) Oh, save it for someone else!
- JOANNE: Don't be angry. It's only natural you should feel this way. We have all been through the same experience, but one day it passes away and you find yourself. You know, John, I think I can suggest a cure if you'll only listen calmly to me. (Pause.)
- JOHN: I'm quite calm.
- JOANNE: What you need John, is someone to care for you, someone who will understand you ... someone ...
- JOHN: (He begins to laugh lightly.) Someone who will love me, is that it?
- JOANNE: (Smiling) You are laughing. You think I'm right then, don't you?
- JOHN: (His laughter stops. Gravely.) You are poisoned with cheerfulness, aren't you? You poor, pathetic, self-deluded people ... you have completely fooled yourselves ... especially you girls. Here, just as outside you repeat the same routines. Do you think you are the first to suggest that puerile solution to me? The girls in my neighborhood had the same empty-headed romantic notions.

JOANNE: John, don't you understand, they were only hinting?

JOHN: No, they weren't hinting. They too were engaged ... like you. They gave me the same stupid advice that the stupid happiness of lovers puts into the mouths of all of you girls: they say to me, "Why don't you get yourself a girl?" But not one of them has ever said to me, "I love you." (Furiously.) You don't say it either, do you? Or is that what you meant? I don't need a girl.

I need an, "I love you", which comes right out of the depths of the soul! I need someone who can say honestly, "I love you, with all your sadness and your anguish. I will suffer with you, and not lead you to some make-believe never-never land of happiness." But do you think I'll ever find such a person? No, because there are no women like that.

JOANNE: (Vaguely hurt as a member of her sex.) Perhaps it's because you've never asked one of them if she loved you.

JOHN: (Harshly) A seeing woman?

JOANNE: Why not?

JOHN: (Ironically.) A seeing woman?

JOANNE: What difference does it make? A woman! (Pause)

JOHN: To the devil with them all, and you first of all! You can save your advice and your happiness for your Carl .. such a kind, such a wise fellow ... and such an utter fool because he thinks he is happy. And all of you share his pipe dreams, Mickey, Mr. Marsden, and the rest. All the rest! You have not earned the right to live because you avoid suffering, because you refuse to face your tragedy by pretending to be normal, trying to conceal your handicap behind a mask of grotesque laughter.

... (Joanne tries to interrupt but he continues.) Do you think you are fooling me? I know what's going on. Your Mr. Marsden was naive enough to suggest it to my father, and he shamelessly asked you to help him carry on this hideous masquerade. (Sarcastically) You are the model students, the loyal puppets of the faculty in the fight against despair which is lurking in every corner of this institution. Blind fools! Yes, blind, not sightless, but blind imbeciles! (Pause. He moves away.)

JOANNE: (Greatly moved.) I don't know what to say to you ... I certainly don't want to deceive you ... But you might at least respect and appreciate our good will. If you would only stay ...

JOHN: No, thank you.

- JOANNE: Please! You must not go away now feeling as you do. It would just be too shameful ... and I ... I can't find the right words. I wish I know how to convince you.
- JOHN: You can't convince me.
- JOANNE: (Distressed) Don't leave us, John. I am very stupid, I know it ... And you have a way of making me feel even more foolish and little ... If you go away now, everyone will know that I talked to you and failed. John, please stay!
- JOHN: Of all the vain creatures!
- JOANNE: It isn't vanity, John. There is more at stake than my own personal feelings. Shall I go down on my knees and beg you? (Brief pause.)
- JOHN: (Coldly) Why on your knees? They say that that gesture produces a deep impression on seeing people, but we who are blind can't see it. Why talk of things you know nothing about? Don't try to imitate those who have real life. At least you might spare me from this disgusting weakness of yours. Such cheap feminine tricks!
- JOANNE: I'm sorry I was so clumsy. I ... I guess there is nothing more to say. I'm sorry. (He goes up to the arch and exits, his cane tapping. Joanne sinks into a chair. The tapping ceases for a moment, then returns and John reappears.)
- JOHN: I am going to stay.
- JOANNE: (Barely audible.) Thank you.
- JOHN: (Moves Down Stage toward her.) Thank you? You are the ones who are striking a bad bargain, because you are too satisfied, too insincere, too unfeeling. But I am burning inside, burning with a terrible fire, which won't let me live and can burn, burn all of you like torches ... burn in this thing which seeing people call darkness, a horrible void because we don't know what it is. I warn you that if I remain here, I am bound to bring you war, not peace. Do you still want me to stay?
- JOANNE: Yes.
- JOHN: Than you are a silly, stupid girl.
- JOANNE: I have faith that we can save you from this morbid self-torture ... we can set you free.
- JOHN: Your optimism is only equalled by your blindness. The war which is devouring me will consume all of you.
- JOANNE: (Distressed again.) No, John. You should not bring us war. Why can't we all live in peace? I don't understand

JOANNE: (continuing) you. Why do you insist on this suffering? What is wrong with you? What is it you want?

JOHN: (Agonizingly.) To see! I want to see!

JOANNE: (Drawing away in amazement.) But what?

JOHN: Yes! To see! Even though I know it's impossible, I want to see! Can you with all of your pipe dreams and wishful thinking promise me my eyesight? Do you dare tell me I shall be able to see?

JOANNE: (In a whisper.) No.

JOHN: Of course you can't. But I refuse to submit. We must not submit. Above all we must not smile and submit to your stupid, "Happiness of the sightless" ... never! And even if there is not a woman with enough courage to accompany me on my Calvary, I shall walk alone, refusing to live in resignation, because I want to see! (Pause. Joanne is paralyzed, with her hand at her mouth and anguish on her face. Carl rushes in through the Door Upstage Right.)

CARL: Joanne! Joanne, are you here? (Silence. Joanne turns around toward him instinctively, then turns back to John, too stunned to answer.) Aren't you here, Joanne? Joanne! (She does not move or answer. John is lost in his despair. Carl momentarily loses his sense of security and feels strangely alone, blind. Irresolutely he moves his hands forward in the eternal gesture of groping the air. He goes hesitantly out the door calling as he goes.) Joanne. Joanne. (As he moves Carl's voice becomes confident and casual.)

- CURTAIN -

SEMINARIO MULTIDISCIPLINARI  
JOSE EMILIO GONZALEZ  
FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES  
UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO  
RECINTO DE RIO PIEDRAS



ACT TWO

The scene is the same as Act One. The time is early afternoon two months later. The trees in the background have not lost their leaves. As the curtain rises Carl is discovered seated on a chair Down Right. Marsden, smoking a cigarette, is pacing restlessly back and forth. He stops at an ashtray by a small table and grinds out the cigarette.

MARSDEN: But don't you realize, Carl, that only means we must redouble our efforts to straighten John out? Where is that old confidence of yours?

CARL: I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Marsden, but I thought you wanted my frank opinion.

MARSDEN: (Crossing to Carl and putting his hand on his shoulder.) Why of course, my boy, I do want your frank opinion because I respect your judgment. I'm not reproaching you. I only meant that it is entirely too early to admit defeat by a young freshman, even if he is as rebellious as John. As a matter of fact, and I tell you this in confidence, of course, some of his instructors have reported to me that they are quite alarmed by his influence, although they did not indicate that the situation was as hopeless as you seem to feel it is.

CARL: But, Mr. Marsden ...

MARSDEN: Don't you think I am ungrateful for your opinion, Carl. I appreciate your sincerity and I'm very glad that you talked to me about it. Indeed I have been on the point of sending for you to talk this matter over with me. There are a number of questions I should like to ask you in connection with student body morale in general, but perhaps we could talk more privately in my office a little later ... say half an hour?

CARL: Yes, of course, but I'm afraid there is not much more I can add to what I've already said. As I told you, I did all I could to be friends with him, but ...

MARSDEN: Now, Carl my boy, I have no doubt that you did. Mrs. Marsden and I are both aware of your invaluable help to us. Obviously I wouldn't have mentioned the matter to you in any way if I didn't have absolute confidence in you. But I want to remind you, as I told some of John's instructors, that sound pedagogy cannot afford to let itself be conquered by Freshman John Barlow or even a dozen John Barlows. You will come over later to the office? (Joanne appears Up Right.)

CARL: I will, Mr. Marsden.

JOANNE: (Calling.) Carl.

- CARL: Yes, Joanne, I'm here with Mr. Marsden.
- JOANNE: (Coming down into the room.) Good afternoon, Mr. Marsden.
- MARSDEN: Good afternoon, Joanne.
- JOANNE: I hope I'm not interrupting.
- MARSDEN: Oh no. I was just leaving, and besides, you are a part of the chat I had with Carl, since I rely on your cooperation as well as his.
- JOANNE: You mean about John?
- MARSDEN: Yes.
- JOANNE: Oh, we must help him, Mr. Marsden!
- MARSDEN: That's the spirit, Joanne ... Well, I've got a pretty mess facing me now. Some sophomores from our High School Division subjected one of their freshmen to a nasty bit of hazing. I had better settle it at once and get it off my mind. See both of you later.
- JOANNE: Good-bye, Mr. Marsden. (He exits. Pause.) I'm glad he realizes John must be helped.
- CARL: If only that would solve the difficulty. (Angrily) All right, we must help him! But how? Haven't we been trying to help him for the past two months? No matter how kindly you speak to him, you scarcely dare to take issue with him or he stirs up a fight. Or do you have some new suggestions, perhaps, while Marsden is pondering the fate of the High School sophomores and to hell with the college of Liberal Arts? (Pause as she walks away from him.) Joanne!
- JOANNE: Yes, Carl?
- CARL: Joanne, I want you to tell me honestly what's wrong.
- JOANNE: I don't know what you mean. Nothing is wrong.
- CARL: There must be. Don't try to deny it. You've been this way for some time ...
- JOANNE: What do you mean by "this way"?
- CARL: I mean you've been distant, preoccupied. Somehow I feel I've lost contact with you. I try to reach you but I can't get through.
- JOANNE: Nonsense, Carl. You're just imagining things.
- CARL: Why aren't you frank with me? We've always told each other our troubles. Don't you want me to share yours now?

- JOANNE: But I haven't any troubles.
- CARL: (Caressing her hand.) Yes, you have. I know you are worried, just as I am.
- JOANNE: You worried? Why?
- CARL: You know as well as I do ...
- JOANNE: Do you really think he'll never adjust himself here?
- CARL: Do you think he will?
- JOANNE: I don't know what to think ... I suppose I am to blame for the whole thing.
- CARL: You?
- JOANNE: Yes. Don't you remember I told you? When John wanted to leave school the first day, I was the one who persuaded him to stay? The way it's working out, it looks as if I was wrong.
- CARL: Too late to worry about that. This situation can be solved if only Marsden would make up his mind to act!
- JOANNE: Just what did Marsden say to you?
- CARL: At first he seemed to agree with me that John's influence is like a malignant disease spreading over the whole student body and that unless something is done the whole college may go to pieces. It was pitiful to see him so worried. But then Marsden, the pedant took over and he began covering up his feelings with brave words. He ended up by convincing himself that there is only a temporary lapse in morale. I tried to show him that the only solution is for John to leave the school, but by the time he got through pumping himself up, he was ready to take on a dozen John Barlows. You know how I've admired Mr. Marsden so much, but I hate to admit that when he came face to face with a crisis my admiration turned to contempt.
- JOANNE: Really, Carl:...
- CARL: Yes I know; that sounds vile doesn't it?
- JOANNE: (Pause) Does he know about Mickey and Elise?
- CARL: Of course, that's common knowledge that he hardly speaks to her now. He wondered whether John was responsible, and I naturally told him he was.
- JOANNE: Poor Elise! She hardly touched her food at lunch.
- CARL: It's a crime that all of this is happening just because of one individual. And for the sake of Elise and all the others, even that idiot, Mickey, we've got to straighten things out.

JOANNE: Yes, but how?

CARL: John has already shown us that our attempts to use kindness and friendliness count for nothing. He only responds with bitterness and ugliness.

JOANNE: If we could only build up his peace of mind ...

CARL: He doesn't want peace of mind. He seems to take some sadistic delight in stirring up trouble. Very well, if that's what he wants, he shall have it. (Joanne rises and walks away to conceal her agitation.) What is the matter with you?

JOANNE: Carl, I never thought I would hear you talk like this. You sound so ... so vindictive. Isn't kindness better?

CARL: You don't understand John. At heart he's a coward. He must be fought! We have tried to treat him with kindness but look what he has done! In just a few weeks we have failed to change his spirit! Instead he has succeeded in tearing down ours by creating friction and tension between us.

JOANNE: At first I thought the solution would be to find him a sweetheart, but that didn't work out. I still think that might have solved everything.

CARL: I don't believe it. John is not the type to be changed by a woman. He doesn't lack for feminine company. Our coeds are drawn to him like moths to a flame, and he scorns them. We have only one road left ... to discredit him before the rest of the students so he'll feel unwelcome. We must force him to get out of here!

JOANNE: Then the school has failed.

CARL: You are mistaken. Right cannot fail, and we are in the right.

JOANNE: (Sorrowfully) Yes, but I still think if he had someone to love he could be reclaimed.

CARL: (Affectionately) Now, now; come over here ... Come. (She moves over and he takes her hands.) My darling Joanne. I love you so much for your kindness. If you were a doctor you would always use balms and never the scapel. (Joanne sits and leans back in the chair. He kisses her.) Now that the others have gone over to him, don't you go and desert too. (Pause.)

JOANNE: Why do you say that?

CARL: Because I need you now more than ever. (They embrace, but break apart as they hear voices approaching and the tap tap of John's cane. Enter Up Stage Andy, John and Albert. John is more untidy than ever. He wears no tie.)

- ANDY: Here, John. (He leads John to one of the easy chairs on the Left.)
- JOHN: Are those silly girls still trailing us around?
- ANDY: I guess not. I don't hear their chattering.
- JOHN: So much the better. They get on a fellow's nerves.
- ANDY: Never mind about them. Come, sit down. (Producing a pack of cigarettes.) Do you care for a cigarette?
- JOHN: (Sitting) No, thanks. Why should I smoke? Just to imitate seeing people.
- ANDY: I suppose you are right. We get started for that reason. The trouble is once you get the habit, there's no stopping. (They are all seated. Andy on the sofa, Albert Up Right. Andy lights his cigarette and Albert's and puts the match in the ash tray on the small table. Carl sits stiffly Down Left clenching the arms of the chair.)
- CARL: (In a tone of voice slightly smacking of challenge.) Good afternoon to all of you. (They ad lib hollos unenthusiastically.)
- ALBERT: Hello, Carl. How's the world treating you? What's the news?
- CARL: Nothing, I was just talking here with Joanne. (John raises his head.)
- JOHN: The air smells so good this time of year. We're having a fine autumn.
- ANDY: It's still early enough for the sun to reach the terrace.
- ALBERT: Continue your story, John.
- JOHN: Oh, yes, where was I?
- ANDY: You were just telling us that you slipped.
- JOHN: (Settling back in his chair comfortably.) Yes, that's right. It was when I was coming down the stairs. It must have happened to every one of you sometime or other. You count and think there are no more steps, then you put your foot down confidently and you suddenly fall off in space. I'll never forget the terrifying instant when I hit the ground. I barely regained my balance; my legs turned to cotton. And the girls burst out laughing. It was a good-natured laughter without malice, but it cut me to the quick.

JOHN: (continuing) I felt that my face was burning. I was only fifteen years old at the time. It was then that I began to think. I tried to understand for the first time why I was blind, and why there had to be blind people. Isn't it abominable that most people without being any better than we are, should be enjoying a mysterious power which emanates from their eyes with which they can embrace us and pierce our bodies without our being able to avoid it? We have been denied that power of perceiving things at a distance -- denied that power unjustly. Isn't it cruelly wrong that we are beneath the people who live outside these walls? Do you remember that old chant of a past generation of blind beggars who sang for alms on the street corners calling out, "There is no possession as precious as sight"? Perhaps that chant does not seem appropriate to us, but I think it is much more sincere, and more valuable too, because they at least didn't act as we do. They weren't stupid enough to pretend that they were normal beings. (As Carl listens to John, his expression of restrained anger has become more pronounced while Joanne reflects her sympathetic listening to John's words.)

ANDY: Perhaps you are right, John. I have often thought about this too. And I believe that because of our blindness we are not only deprived of some mastery of distance, but of some pleasure, some wonderful pleasure. What do you suppose it must be like? (Mickey, who has not completely lost his jovial air, enters Up Stage. He comes inside and listens.)

JOHN: (Gesturing for his own benefit only, with his hands accentuating his words.) I imagine that it must feel as if we were getting through the eyes a sense of a divine vibration coursing through our nerves and our vitals, leading us to become calmer and better.

ANDY: Yes, that is what it must be like.

MICKEY: (Comes into the room.) Hi, everybody.

ALBERT: Hi, Mickey. You've just come in time to tell us what you imagine the pleasure of seeing to be like.

MICKEY: I'm sure my description would be quite different from John's. But there's no need to go into that since I just had a brilliant idea. I'll reveal it to you, if you'll restrain your laughter. Very simple ... but profound. We do not see. All right. But can we conceive light? No. Ergo, sight is inconceivable. If that's the case, then sighted people don't see either. (All laugh except John.) (Elise has come Up Stage on the terrace. She remains outside.)

- ANDY: Well, what is it they do if they don't see?
- MICKEY: What do they do? They suffer from a collective hallucination. The madness of vision! So we must inevitably conclude that the only normal beings in this world of madmen, are we. (Another explosion of laughter. Mickey joins in the laughter. Elise's heart is breaking.)
- JOHN: (The seriousness of his voice shuts off the levity.) Mickey has found a solution, but it's absurd. We might forget our handicap if we did not know only too well that sight does exist. (He sighs.) And so your discovery is worthless.
- MICKEY: It was amusing for a moment though, wasn't it? (Sadly)
- JOHN: (Smiling) Yes, as usual you were trying to cover up the hopelessness of your affliction with a joke. (Mickey's graveness increases.)
- ELISE: (Who is unable to bear it any longer.) Mickey!
- JOANNE: Elise!
- MICKEY: (Casually) Oh Elise, Joanne, were you here? And how about Carl?
- CARL: I'm here too. (He presses Joanne's hand against the chair as a sign.) And if you don't mind, I'd like to join in.
- ELISE: (Moving to Mickey.) Mickey, please. Will you go with me to the skating pond? It would be fun. Please!
- MICKEY: (Indifferently.) I've just come from there, Elise, and I find this a very interesting conversation. Why don't you sit down with Joanne?
- JOANNE: Come over by me, Elise. There is a chair here for you. (Elise sighs and sits near Joanne, who pats and comforts her until they become absorbed in the conversation.)
- ANDY: Were you listening to us, Carl?
- CARL: Yes. It was all very stimulating.
- ANDY: What is your opinion?
- CARL: (Calmly) You know I'm a practical fellow, so I don't understand certain things. Where does your argument carry you? That's what I don't understand. As far as I can tell, you are just following a dead end to anxiety and despair.
- MICKEY: Now take it easy. You are forgetting. There was also laughter ... (Lapsing into melancholy again.) provoked by the hopelessness of my affliction. (Laughter)

- CARL: (More aggressively.) Mickey, sometimes you are not the least bit funny. But never mind that. (Vigorously.) To you, John, (John is shaken by Carl's ton.) to you I would like to direct a question. Do you mean by what you have said that we who are sightless form a world apart from those who see?
- JOHN: (Nervously, clearing his throat.) Well ... I meant ...
- CARL: (Interrupting.) No, please. You must have meant what I just said. Isn't that so?
- JOHN: Well ... yes. A world apart ... yes, and a more wretched one.
- CARL: But that's not true! Our world and theirs is the same one. Don't we study just as they do? Can anyone deny that we are not socially useful like them? Don't we have our amusements, our sports? Don't we love, don't we get married?
- JOHN: (Softly) Don't we see?
- CARL: (Violently.) No; we don't see! But, those on the outside are armless, or legless, or paralytics. They are afflicted with nervous diseases; they have heart trouble, kidney ailments. They die at twenty from tuberculosis or they are butchered in wars.
- ALBERT: That's true.
- CARL: Of course it's true. Misfortune is pretty well distributed among men, so how can you say we are in an isolated group shut off from the world? Do you want definite proof? Consider the marriages between us and seeing people. Today they add up to quite a few. Tomorrow they will be the rule. We would have made more progress a long time ago if we had had courage enough to think this way instead of chanting tearfully the refrain, "There's no possession as precious as sight", which you referred to. (Severely to the others.) And I am quite surprised that you, who have been here for some time should be capable of doubting it, even for a moment. (Pause.) It's understandable if John has doubts ... He hasn't realized yet, how free and beautiful our lives can be. He hasn't acquired confidence yet. Why he's still afraid to put away his cane ... But you are the ones who should have helped him get confidence. (Pause.)
- ANDY: Well, John, what do you have to say to that?
- JOHN: Carl's reasons are weak, but I have no wish to argue with him. This conversation has come to resemble a boxing match. Let's just drop this subject. Carl, I respect you and your sincerity, and wouldn't want to ...



ALBERT: No, no. You've got to answer him.

JOHN: But, I .....

CARL: (Scoffing, thinking he has won.) Why all the scruples? Go ahead if you have anything more to say. There's nothing more annoying than a problem half solved.

JOHN: You seem to forget that unfortunately, most significant problems are not generally solved. (He rises and moves away from the group.)

ANDY: Don't go.

CARL: (With apparent kindness.) Don't stop him, Andy. It's no wonder he wishes to avoid further discussion. He isn't yet sure of himself.

JOHN: (Close to the table Down Right.) And that is why I need my cane, isn't that it?

CARL: You can draw your own conclusions.

JOHN: (Picking up an ash tray noiselessly which he puts in his coat pocket.) We all need one in order not to stumble.

CARL: What makes you stumble is fear, lack of confidence! With your present attitude you will depend upon your cane all of your life and you will stumble all of your life. Why not have the courage to be like us! We don't stumble.

JOHN: You're pretty sure of yourself. You may some day stumble and hurt yourself badly ... Perhaps sooner than you think. (Pause) Anyway, I didn't intend to leave. I want to answer you, but I thought I would do it pacing up and down ... It gives me the feeling that my mind works better that way. (He picks up the little table; taking good care to beat the cane against the floor, and takes it to the Center of the Stage. There he puts it down softly, without the slightest noise.) You evidently mean to tell us, Carl, that we must be bold enough to have confidence; that life is the same for us as for those who see ...

CARL: Precisely.

JOHN: You are too confident. Your feeling of security is sheer illusion. It would not stand up against the slightest test. You make fun of my cane, but my cane allows me to walk around here, as I am doing now, without fear of obstacles. (He goes Down Right and turns around. The lamp table is exactly on a line which might be drawn between him and Carl.)

- CARL: (Laughing) What obstacles? There aren't any here. Do you realize how much you are a victim of your fear? If you were not, you would become acquainted with the place, as we did and you would throw away that stick.
- JOHN: I don't want to stumble.
- CARL: (Excitedly.) But you can't stumble! Everything is foreseen here. There isn't a single corner of the campus that we don't know. The cane is all right for the streets, but here ...
- JOHN: It's necessary here too. How can we poor blind know what can trip us up?
- CARL: We reject the word "poor" and we do know perfectly well that nothing can trip us up. (John laughs openly.) You needn't laugh.
- JOHN: I'm sorry, but your optimism seems so puerile to me ... For example, if I asked you to get up and come over very quickly to where I am standing, can you make us believe that you would do this without fear?
- CARL: (Rising impulsively.) Naturally! Do you want me to prove it to you? (Pause.)
- JOHN: Yes, I do. Very quickly, don't forget.
- CARL: This very minute. (They all move their heads forward straining to listen. Carl takes a few quick steps but suddenly his face indicates distrust; he hesitates and extends his arms. He soon touches the table, and the expression on his face is that of the brutal hate that has been aroused in him.)
- JOHN: You are moving very slowly.
- CARL: (Going around the edge of the table, advances with clenched fists until he faces John.) No I'm not. I am already here.
- JOHN: You hesitated.
- CARL: Nothing of the sort! I crossed over confident of convincing you that your fears are quite silly. And you must admit that there is no danger of stumbling.
- JOHN: (Triumphantly.) But you were not sure of yourself. You can't deny it! (To the others.) He was afraid. Didn't you hear him hesitate and stop?
- MICKEY: You've got to admit it, Carl. We all noticed it.
- CARL: (Red) But I didn't hesitate out of fear! I did it because I suddenly understood ...

- JOHN: What! Perhaps that there might be obstacles? Well, if you don't call that fear, call it what you will.
- MICKEY: A goal for John!
- CARL: (Controlling himself.) I'm telling the truth. It was not fear, but there was a cause which ... which I cannot explain. This is not a valid test.
- JOHN: (Benevolently) Have it your way. (While he speaks he makes his way to the group to sit down again.) But I still intend to answer your arguments ... We study, yes; a tenth of the things that seeing students study. We engage in sports ... except nine tenths of them. (He has sat placidly. Carl, who remains motionless in the foreground, crosses his tense arms and tries to control himself.) And as for love ...
- ANDY: You won't be able to deny that.
- JOHN: Love is something marvellous. The love, for instance between Carl and Joanne. (Joanne, who has followed anxiously the ups and downs of the dispute, is startled.) But that marvel is nothing more than a sad parody of the love between seeing people because they possess the object of their love with the utmost completeness. They have the ability to hold one another in a single glance, while we can only possess ... in fragments ... a caress, the murmur of the voice for a few moments ... As a matter of fact, we don't really love each other. We pity one another and attempt to disguise that sad pity with gay nonsense and we call it love. I believe it would be more satisfying if we did not disguise it.
- MICKEY: A second goal for John!
- CARL: (Restraining himself.) It seems to me that you have forgotten to answer something very important.
- JOHN: No doubt.
- CARL: Do not the marriages between sighted and sightless individuals prove that our world and theirs is the same? Are they not evidence that the love which we feel and cause to feel is not merely a sad parody?
- MICKEY: Sheer compassion, just like the others.
- CARL: Would you go so far as to declare Mr. and Mrs. Marsden do not love each other?
- JOHN: (Laughing) I wouldn't want my words misinterpreted by somebody.
- ANDY: We promise we'll be discreet. (Mrs. Marsden appears silently on the terrace. When she hears her name she stops.)

- JOHN: Carl's optimism protects him from reality. (To Carl) That is why you remained ignorant of a very significant detail that the rest of us know through visitors. A very significant one indeed, Mr. and Mrs. Marsden's marriage came about because he needed a cane. (He beats the floor with his cane.) But above all, there was another reason, one of those things which we blind people may not understand, but which are so important to seeing people, and that is this ... Mrs. Marsden is very ugly! (Silence.) (Gradually the idea comes to please them. There is scattered laughing at first which grows into general laughter. Mrs. Marsden stands in frozen silence. Carl completely exasperated can find nothing to say.)
- MICKEY: Third goal for John! (The laughter grows louder, Carl works his hands. Joanne has sunk her head into her hands and is lost in thought. Mrs. Marsden has regained her composure. She enters.)
- MRS. M.: (Cordially.) Good afternoon. You seem to be in a gay mood. (In response to her voice, the laughter ceases suddenly.) Some joke of Mickey's no doubt ... Isn't that right? (They rise, some of them, struggling to overcome another explosion of laughter.)
- MICKEY: You guessed it right, Mrs. Marsden.
- MRS. M.: Well, I should scold you for making them lose their time that way. It's nearly three o'clock and Mr. Levering is waiting at the field with your skates. What kind of a skating team are we going to have unless you fellows get out on the ice?
- MICKEY: I apologize.
- MRS. M.: Your apology is accepted, if you make a good showing today. And you, young ladies, could do with a breath of fresh air too. No telling how much longer this fine weather will hold. (Mickey, Joanne, Albert and Andy disappear Up Left. Mrs. Marsden speaks to Carl with special tenderness; he is the outstanding pupil of the school, possibly the son in the flesh that her marriage to Mr. Marsden had not given her. Possibly too, she may be a little in love with him without realizing it herself.) Carl, Mr. Marsden said you had an appointment with him. Are you keeping it in mind? (Elise and Joanne go to the terrace.)
- CARL: I'll go presently Mrs. Marsden, as soon as I finish a little matter with John.
- MRS. M.: And how about you, John? Don't you care to skate?
- JOHN: No, I don't care to skate.

- MRS. M.: When are you going to make up your mind to discard your cane?
- JOHN: I don't dare, Mrs. Marsden. Besides why should I discard it?
- MRS. M.: But don't you see son, how your classmates come and go without one?
- JOHN: No ma'am. I don't see anything.
- MRS. M.: (Drily) Of course you don't. Excuse me. It's a manner of speaking. Well; I'll leave you to yourselves. Don't forget Mr. Marsden, Carl.
- CARL: Don't worry. I'll be right along. (Mrs. Marsden goes out on the terrace and watches the boys skating below. She is telling the girls what they are doing. There is a pause.)
- JOHN: You had something more to say? (Carl does not answer at once. He goes Down Stage to the table, picks it up and returns it noisily to its original base. Then he faces John.)
- CARL: (Drily) Where did you put the ashtray?
- JOHN: (Smiling) Oh, yes. I'd forgotten that. Here. (He holds it out to him. Carl feels for it and snatches it rudely away.)
- CARL: I ought to punch you on the jaw? a
- JOHN: What would that prove? That you are right? (Carl controls himself. Then he puts the ashtray in its proper place with a bang, and turns to John.)
- CARL: (Quivering with anger.) Listen, John. (He pauses and goes on more calmly.) Please, let's try to understand each other.
- JOHN: I think I understand you pretty well.
- CARL: I'm talking about coming to a practical understanding.
- JOHN: That wouldn't be easy.
- CARL: Granted. But don't you think it's necessary?
- JOHN: Why:
- CARL: (Controlling his impatience.) I'll tell you why. Since you don't seem inclined to give up your morbid pessimism, I certainly feel that it should be respected by all

- CARL: (continuing) means. That's your privilege. But it's not fair for you to attempt to infect the others. What right do you have to do that?
- JOHN: I am not attempting anything. I limit myself to being sincere, and that infection you mention is only the awakening of sincerity in each one of them. To me that seems very desirable, because there was very little sincerity here. Will you tell me, on the other hand, what right you have to constantly keep preaching your phoney happiness, optimism and all that drivel?
- CARL: John, anyone with a mature mind will tell you why I'm right, and why you are wrong. My words and attitude can help our friends to achieve a relatively happy life. Your gloomy outlook can only divert them from their studies, lead them to despair. (Mrs. Marsden shouting from the terrace to attract the attention of the skaters down on the field. John and Carl pause to listen.)
- MRS.M.: Be careful, Mickey, that's twice you have fallen down already. What's the matter with you, Andy? Why don't you ... Well I declare. He's fallen again. Every day you're getting more and more unsteady.
- CARL: Do you hear that?
- JOHN: What about it?
- CARL: You're the one to blame!
- JOHN: I'm to blame?
- CARL: Yes, you. And I ask you, in all friendliness, to think it over ... and to do your part in preventing this school from failing in its job. It's the concern of every one of us.
- JOHN: It doesn't concern me. This school is founded on a lie. (Mrs. Marsden exits Right. Joanne and Elise remain talking in pantomime on the terrace.)
- CARL: What lie?
- JOHN: The lie that we are normal human beings.
- CARL: Let's not go over that again, now.
- JOHN: (Rising.) Let's not go over anything. There's no possible agreement between you and me. I'll say what I want to and I won't give up a single convert who believes my way is the right way.
- CARL: (Clenches his fist in an effort to control his anger.) All right, if that's the way you feel about it. Good-bye. (He exits quickly through the Left Door. John

- CARL: (continuing) whistles gloomily to himself a few bars of the Adagio from the "Moonlight Sonata". He leans on his cane and bows his head; Pause. Lola steals into the room from the Right, Marie from the Left. They become aware of one another even before they meet and exclaim:
- LOLA: John!  
(Together)
- MARIE: John! (They laugh in embarrassment, feeling cheated.)
- LOLA: He's not here, either.
- MARIE: (Sadly) He's avoiding us.
- LOLA: Do you think so?
- MARIE: He only condescends to talk to us ... but he really despises us. He knows we don't understand him.
- LOLA: I wonder if it isn't because of ... some girl?
- MARIE: No, or we would have found out even if he has kept silent about it.
- LOLA: Who knows? Maybe there is someone.
- MARIE: He may have gone to the study. Why don't we try there?
- LOLA: O.K. (They go out Left. Pause. Joanne and Elise are in a serious conversation. Elise tries to pull away from Joanne but the latter tries to hold her back.)
- ELISE: Let go of me! I don't want to hear any more about John! (She releases herself and crosses away from Joanne. John raises his head.)
- JOANNE: (Following Elise.) Come now, you don't have to get so worked up. Calm yourself. Sit down here.
- ELISE: I don't want to!
- JOANNE: Sit down. (Affectionately she makes Elise sit down on the sofa beside her.)
- ELISE: I hate him! I hate him!
- JOANNE: Now, now Elise, dear. (Raising her voice.) Is there someone here? (John doesn't answer. Joanne takes Elise's hand.)
- ELISE: How I hate that fellow!
- JOANNE: It isn't right to hate.

- ELISE: He has taken Mickey away from me and he will not rest until he has destroyed the happiness of every one of us. Oh, Mickey, Mickey. (She weeps softly.)
- JOANNE: Mickey will come back to you, I'm sure. He loves you. There's nothing really wrong; he's just acted a little indifferent these last few days. Mickey has always been swayed easily! John will only be a temporary distraction to him. Think of what you would have to suffer if Mickey fell in love with another girl.
- ELISE: I'm telling you the truth, Joanne, I would prefer to have him deceive me with another girl.
- JOANNE: Elise, that's ridiculous!
- ELISE: I mean it. This thing is worse. That John has hypnotized Mickey, and he doesn't even know I exist.
- JOANNE: Oh, you're exaggerating.
- ELISE: No. Wait a minute, listen. Isn't there someone here?
- JOANNE: No, we're alone.
- ELISE: It seemed to me ... (Again with emotion!) I told you the first day, Joanne, that that fellow is all evil. How well I felt it. Now he goes around like a persecuted Christ trying to gain disciples! Men are imbeciles to be twisted around like that! And Mickey is the biggest fool of all ... But I love him. (She weeps.)
- JOANNE: Please, Elise, don't cry .....
- ELISE: (Rising and walking in order to release her anguish.) But I love him, Joanne.
- JOANNE: What Mickey probably needs is a little indifference on your part. Don't run after him so much.
- ELISE: I know only too well that I'm making a fool of myself, but I can't help it. (She stops very close to John, who ceases to breathe. She dries her tears and puts away her handkerchief.)
- JOANNE: You must try to be patient with him. He'll come back to you.
- ELISE: How can I try or hope for anything with that devil between us? His presence fills me with revulsion ... Oh, with what pleasure I would slap his face! What is he after anyway? (She raises her hands, clenching them. Involuntarily she turns around slowly toward John without realizing that she senses his presence.) (Advancing toward Joanne.) You really don't have to be so sorry for him. He is an intolerable egomaniac. Let him suffer by himself and not make other people suffer too.



- JOANNE: Come now, sit down and be reasonable. (Elise remains standing so Joanne rises and moves to her.) You accuse John of being an egomaniac. How can he help it, if he is suffering? Perhaps if we were less self-centered we would be more charitable toward other people's weaknesses and soothe them with kindness ... (Pause.)
- ELISE: (Suddenly in violent anger, seizing Joanne's arms.) No, no, Joanne. Good heavens, Joanne, how can you? How can you?
- JOANNE: (Alarmed.) How can I what?
- ELISE: Oh, Joanne, I never could imagine that you ...
- JOANNE: Elise, for Heaven's sake what are you talking about?
- ELISE: Your feelings for John!
- JOANNE: (Annoyed.) What are you saying, Elise?
- ELISE: Promise me you won't give in to him. For Carl's sake, promise it to me. (Shaking her.) Promise it to me, Joanne.
- JOANNE: (Coldly.) Don't talk nonsense. Get hold of yourself, Elise. I love Carl and nothing wrong will happen. I really don't know what you think is likely to happen.
- ELISE: Everything! Everything can happen! That man has taken Mickey away from me and now you are in danger. Promise me that it will not happen. For Carl's sake ....
- JOANNE: (Extremely agitated.) Oh, be quiet, Elise, I won't allow you to talk like that ... (She pulls away from Elise. Pause.)
- ELISE: (Slowly as she separates from Joanne.) I know now. I am your best friend and you resent my words. He already has hypnotized you too. That fellow has trapped you and you dare not let yourself believe it yet.
- JOANNE: (Hoarsely.) Elise!
- ELISE: I pity you! And I'm sorry for Carl, too, because now he is going to suffer as I suffer.
- JOANNE: (Shouting.) Elise! You will either shut your mouth or ... (Goes toward Elise.)
- ELISE: All right. You don't need to threaten me again. I must stifle my feelings. What's the use of struggling any longer? We are no match for him. He is robbing us of everything! Everything! Even our friendship. I don't recognize you ... You were my closest friend, but now I

- ELISE: (continuing) don't know you! ... (She leaves, weeping through the Upstage Door. Joanne agitated and distressed hesitates, not knowing whether to follow Elise or not. John rises slowly.)
- JOHN: (Softly.) Joanne. (She barely stifles a cry of surprise and turns toward John stiffly. He goes over to her side.) I was here and heard you and Elise. Poor girl! I am not angry with her.
- JOANNE: (Trying to regain her composure.) Why didn't you let us know you were here?
- JOHN: I am not sorry I didn't, Joanne. (He seizes her hand.) You have given me my first moment of happiness. Thanks! If you knew how wonderful it is to have someone who understands. How well you guessed what's going on inside of me. You are right. I am suffering terribly. And that suffering is leading me ...
- JOANNE: John ... Why don't you make an effort to think things over fairly? I know very well that you have no intention of harming anyone, but the harmful results are there just the same.
- JOHN: I just can't control myself when I hear lies. I can't leave people in falsehood when they ask me questions ... I am horrified by the sham in which they live!
- JOANNE: But you bring us war instead of peace!
- JOHN: I warned you of it the first day ... (Ingratiatingly.) In this very place. And I am winning the battle ... Must I remind you that you really asked for it? (Pause.)
- JOANNE: And if I asked you now, for your own good, for mine and everybody else's sake, to go away?
- JOHN: (Very deliberately.) Do you really want me to?
- JOANNE: (Weakly) I beg of you.
- JOHN: No. You don't want me to go away. What you really want is to ease my sorrow with your tender heart ... And you are going to give me your tenderness. You will give it to me. You, who were the only one who understood and defended me. Joanne, I love you!
- JOANNE: (In a whisper.) Be silent!
- JOHN: I love you, and not any of those other girls. I knew it from the first day. I love you for your goodness, for the tenderness of your voice, for the softness of your hands ... (Transition.) I love you and I need you .

JOANNE: Please! You mustn't speak like that! You forget that Carl ...

JOHN: (Ironically.) Carl? Carl is a fool who would leave you for the first seeing girl that came along. He thinks that our world and theirs is the same. He would want another Mrs. Marsden. Another ugly wife to watch after him. He would want a complete woman, and he considers you the lesser evil. (Transition) But I want only a girl who's blind! A blind one from my world of the blind who will understand... I want you, because you can only love a blind man, not a poor deluded one who thinks he is normal. You do not dare to say it to me, or to confess it to yourself. You do not have the courage to say, "I love you", but I will say it for you. Yes, you love me; you are becoming aware of it this very instant. You love me with my anguish and my sadness, in order to suffer with me facing the truth and turning our backs upon all the lies that seek to mask our misfortune! Because you have the strength for that and because you are so good! (He embraces her passionately.)

JOANNE: (Choking.) No! (John seals her lips with a prolonged kiss. Joanne scarcely resists. Mr. Marsden and Carl enter on the Left. They stop in surprise.)

MARSDEN: Hmm? It seems we interrupt a love scene. (John parts from Joanne abruptly without releasing her completely. Both listen in agitation.)

CARL: Who are you? (Joanne works her hands.)

MARSDEN: (Cordially) What a lack of propriety! Who are the young turtle doves billing and cooing around here? I shall have to scold you. (No one answers. Joanne is about to speak but John presses her arm forcibly.) Won't you answer me? (John with his cane raised from the floor, leads Joanne quickly toward the Up Right Door. He walks without faltering, possessed of a new and triumphant feeling of security. Joanne is nearly overcome with anguish. Half dragged and almost running she exits with John who holds her fast.)

ACT THREE

- SCENE: A small sitting room in a dormitory. (Note: This act may be played in the same setting as Acts I and II by a little rearranging of the furniture.) In the background, the drapes are pulled to one side revealing a starlit sky. A portion of the drape conceals a door which is placed diagonally on stage right. There is a large radio cabinet up left. There are several shelves with games and books for the blind and two ceramic pieces with flowers. A curtained doorway is placed in the left wall. Down right are two chairs and a chess table with the chess pieces in place. There is a sofa upstage against the window. The light sources are several table lamps and a chandelier. End tables and an easy chair complete the furnishings.
- ELISE: We are ~~very~~<sup>terribly</sup> unlucky, Carl. ~~Terribly~~<sup>Terribly</sup> unlucky. Why must we be in love, I'd like to know? (Pause.) Now I understand that he didn't love me at all.
- CARL: Yes, he did Elise. Remember Mickey is so young -- only seventeen, and ...
- ELISE: I know ... that's true. I'm so stupid--trying to convince myself that Mickey will come back to me ... But I can't make myself believe it, I just can't. (She weeps again, then calms herself.) How selfish I am! You are suffering too, and here I bother you with my troubles. (She rises and goes to his side.)
- CARL: I'm not suffering. You know Elise you may be dead wrong about Mickey.
- ELISE: Oh, Carl, why try to pretend? I understand your feelings because they're exactly like mine. The worst thing of all is to have no understanding, no explanation and we go on outwardly as if nothing had happened but in our hearts we know that everything is over.
- CARL: (Impulsively.) Nothing of the sort! (With despair.) Don't you understand, Elise, that we cannot let John succeed in his efforts to break our spirits? (She sobs again softly. Carl gently pats her hand. There is a slight pause. Then Offstage Joanne is heard calling.)
- JOANNE: John? (She comes across the terrace.) John? (Elise nearly cries out but Carl presses her arm. Joanne stops uncertainly Upstage, then exits Up Right calling once more.)
- ELISE: (Outraged by Joanne's actions.) How could you control yourself, Carl? Oh, what a fool! She is a despicable fool!
- CARL: (Almost smiling.) But nothing has happened, Elise, nothing. Only another girl looking for "poor" John, calling him in every room ... Nothing else.
- ELISE: (With pity for Carl and herself.) Oh, Carl! Carl!

- CARL: (Patting her hand again.) Cheer up. Everything will turn out all right. (Mickey and John enter Up Left in the midst of an animated conversation. Elise is agitated by their presence.)
- JOHN: Of course, not all women are alike, but there is no doubt that blind girls have a good deal in common. I once met a seeing girl who ...
- MICKEY: (Interrupting impulsively.) Sighted girls are plenty nice. I know one whose name is Frances, lived next door to her as a matter of fact. I didn't pay much attention to her, but she liked me ...
- JOHN: Was she ugly?
- MICKEY: (Embarrassed.) I never heard anyone say.
- CARL: Good evening, Mickey, John.
- MICKEY: (With a guilty conscience.) Where have you been keeping yourself? We haven't had a chat for some time.
- CARL: (Stiffly.) Well, you're just in time. I was talking with Elise, and we'll be glad to have you join us.
- MICKEY: (A bit irritated.) Well, well, Elise here too? How are things?
- ELISE: (Drily) All right, thanks.
- CARL: (Pointedly.) Oh, John, I believe Joanne was somewhere around here looking for you. (Elise is startled.)
- JOHN: (Somewhat confused.) I'm ... I didn't know.
- CARL: Yes, she was looking for you.
- JOHN: (Recovering himself.) Oh, yes. We were interrupted before I finished talking to her.
- MICKEY: In the meantime, we didn't finish talking, John. You were talking me about that sighted girl ...
- JOHN: Carl and Elise wouldn't be interested in such an abstract subject.
- CARL: What's abstract about a girl who is actually flesh and blood?
- JOHN: It's a girl who can see, Carl. Is there anything more abstract as far as we're concerned?
- ELISE: (Furiously) You will excuse me, but John is right. I can't stand this kind of gossip! But don't worry about me, I'm going to my room anyway.

- CARL: Call it an order, if you wish. I'll be glad to tell you why it's necessary.
- JOHN: Mr. Marsden told you to take this up with me, didn't he?
- CARL: No, it's my own idea. You can't stay here any longer.
- JOHN: Why not?
- CARL: Because you have deliberately set out with the devilish purpose of destroying the spirit of everyone of us in this school. You are determined to bring it crashing down on our heads. But before that happens, you are going to get out.
- JOHN: My, my, you sound ferocious, Carl. Well, I can tell you, I have no intention of leaving here. Of course, you'd like to get rid of me, that is, one or two of you, beginning with Mr. Marsden ... only he doesn't dare to say a word to me because he knows he has no grounds for it. As a matter of fact, I'm pretty sure, most of the students want me to stay, so you might as well get adjusted to the idea that I'm going to stick around here with my friends.
- CARL: (With a bitter laugh.) Look who's talking about friends!
- JOHN: I know I'm an idiot for wasting my time talking to you. Remember the words, "And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not"? (Increasingly impassioned.) You sneer, "Look who's talking about friends!" I'll tell you who: "A man sent from God, whose name was John, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him."
- CARL: (As if struck by a revelation.) Good God, man! What sacrilege! Can you actually be presuming ...?
- JOHN: Never mind what I am presuming. For the last time I'm asking you to try to understand! Whether you like it or not, I am here with my friends ... Everyone of them, you among them - all of you are my friends, at least, my people. The blindness of each one of you is one more stab in my heart. Listen! When you crossed the terrace tonight, did you feel that the night was dry and cold? Do you know what that means? Of course you don't. (Moving toward the window.) It means that right now the stars are shining with all their splendor, and that seeing people are enjoying the wonder of their presence. Those remote worlds are out there (He is now at the window and touches the panes of glass.) just beyond ... these panes of glass, within the reach of our sight ... if we had any! (Brief pause.) You are not concerned by that, poor, miserably poor, fellow. But I have a mad craving for them. I yearn to watch them to feel their blessed light upon my face. I almost feel

- JOHN: (continuing) 'I see them! (Ecstatically facing the window. Carl, influenced in spite of himself, also turns slightly.) I know only too well that if I could see, I would then be smarting with resentment because I could not reach them. But at least I would see them, and that's more than any of us can say, Carl. Can you actually bring yourself to believe that such longings are evil? Is it possible that you do not feel such longings yourself?
- CARL: (Stubbornly.) No! I do not feel them.
- JOHN: So, you don't feel them? Well, that's just where your misfortune lies ... because you are incapable of understanding the hope that I have brought to you.
- CARL: You speak of hope?
- JOHN: The hope of light.
- CARL: (Sneering) Light?
- JOHN: Yes, the hope of light! I know they say we're incurable, but how can we be sure? No one knows what the world has in store for us ... anything from the marvelous discoveries of science to ... a miracle.
- CARL: (Grunting contemptuously.) Hmph!
- JOHN: Yes, I know that you, with your overwhelming common sense, won't let yourself rise to such a hope, that you have only contempt for the faith I bring you.
- CARL: (Caustically) A fine faith! Light, vision ... we are blind, John, we are blind!
- JOHN: So you finally admit it; that's something ... I thought we were only.... sightless individuals.
- CARL: All right, blind! Granted.
- JOHN: Yes, but blind to what? What is it we don't see?
- CARL: (Hesitating.) I don't know what you're talking about.
- JOHN: Blind to light! That's what I'm talking about! Blind to something you are eager to understand, even if you deny it. (Transition) If you've listened to seeing people as I have, you get a good deal of information. I've heard, for instance, that they sometimes try to get an idea of our affliction by closing their eyes. (The stage lights begin to dim.) All at once they are seized with a shudder of horror. There are even a few cases of individuals who lost their minds just imagining themselves blind ... because a light had not been turned on again soon enough. (The stage is completely dark except for the stars shining in the window.) In

JOHN: (continuing) that horror and the madness, we are engulfed ... without knowing what it is! (Now the light of the stars begins to dim out.) And that is why, to me, it is doubly terrifying. (The theatre is in absolute darkness.) Our voices are for ever crossing each other in darkness.

CARL: (Apprehensively.) Now, John ...

JOHN: Yes, that's a terrible word, that word "darkness", because it is so utterly mysterious, so incomprehensible to us. You are beginning to understand? (Brief pause.) I have been able to feel how seeing people are happy when the light returns in the morning. (The stars and stage lights begin to shine again.) They are gradually able to identify objects, taking delight in their forms and their ... colors. So great is the pleasure of seeing light, considered by them as one of God's finest gifts, that they were inspired to create their own light at night. But for us, everything is the same. What if the light returns to snatch from darkness forms and colors, and give to all life the fullness of existence ... (The lights are back to their original setting.) including even the most distant stars? It's all the same to us. We see nothing!

CARL: (Shaking off abruptly the involuntary spell which John's words had cast upon him.) Yes, John, you can be sure I understand you but I can still find no reason why we should put up with your behavior here. It is obvious that you are ... an unbalanced fanatic with a messianic complex. I think I know what's wrong with you. You have the instinct of death. You say you want to see ... What you really want is to die!

JOHN: Perhaps ... perhaps so. Death may possibly be the only way to acquire complete vision ...

CARL: Or absolute darkness. In any case, you are in search of death and don't know it. Death for yourself and death for the others. That's why you must leave this place. I defend life! The life of all of us, which you are threatening! Because I want to live it thoroughly, carry out its purpose, even if it isn't peaceful or happy ... yes, even if it's hard and bitter. Life demands something from us; it has a claim on us! The struggle for life was in all of us here ... until you came. And now you've got to leave.

JOHN: That was an eloquent speech you made about life! I am not surprised. You are teeming with it. But you are concealing the real reason you want me to leave. And it's a reason certainly "vital" to life! Joanne! (Mrs. Marsden appears Up Stage and observes them.)



- CARL: (Raises his hands threateningly.) Why you dirty rotten...
- MRS. M.: (Quickly) Still here? (Carl lowers his arms.) You've evidently had quite a stimulating conversation. You look quite worked up, Carl.
- CARL: (Controlling himself.) Yes, yes, I suppose so.
- MRS. M.: (Crossing toward Carl.) Don't you think you'd better retire for tonight? Then you can continue your discussion tomorrow with clearer heads. Mr. Marsden was going to join me here in a short while so we could catch up on some work. His office is freezing at night in this weather. Now you run along. Good night.
- CARL: Good night.
- JOHN: Good night. (Mrs. Marsden starts to exit at the Up Left Door, pauses, turns with a puzzled expression, then exits.)
- CARL: (With forced calm.) You mentioned Joanne. Joanne has nothing to do with this. So let's keep her out of it.
- JOHN: Is that so? But you repeated her name twice. I didn't think you were such a hypocrite, Carl. Joanne is the reason you're so furious.
- CARL: I am not furious.
- JOHN: Call it what you like. That rhapsody about life you made a few minutes ago was really a toast to Joanne.
- CARL: I said let's leave Joanne out of this! Before ... you poisoned her, I already had my first run in with you.
- JOHN: Your memory is a bit faulty, Carl. My impression of what you call our first run in is that you already had even then a feeling that you were going to lose her. All right then, I love Joanne! It's true. So there you are. I am supported by the same "vital" reason as you. And because of Joanne I'm going to stay, just as because of her, you want to get rid of me. (Brief pause.) You may get temporary satisfaction in knowing that Joanne is not yet completely mine.
- CARL: (Still calm.) Guys like you seem to have nothing else on your filthy minds. That's the real inspiration for your mysticism. Well, I refuse to talk to you any more about it. The point is, you're going to clear out of here, one way or another.
- JOHN: (Laughing) Too bad, Carl. Your hands are tied. I am absolutely determined to stay. Would you believe it? There was a time when I thought of suicide, but that's all gone now.

CARL: Excuse me ... I didn't quite ...

MARSDEN: I was just wondering how John all by himself could have undermined the spirit of so many students who haven't even been near him? What do they know about light?

CARL: (Gravely) Because they know nothing about it, perhaps that is why it is on their minds.

MARSDEN: (Smiling) A clever observation, Carl. (He rises.)

CARL: But it's true. My unfortunate classmates are easily fascinated by the mysterious. It is a humiliating realization to make; John has not been alone in this, Mr. Marsden. He planted seeds which bore fruit ... and now he has many unwitting assistants, (Pause, gloomily) especially among the girls.

MRS.M.: (Gently) I think that the seeds he planted are not too important. If John should leave, even his most zealous followers would lose the moral force to continue their negativeistic campaign.

MARSDEN: You are right, my dear. I am sure everything would be all right again if John left. We could, of course, expel him, but that might endanger the prestige of our school. You know how many years I have worked to build the name of this institution. It's been a long and arduous struggle and we don't want anything to happen to it now. That is why I'm turning to you for assistance, Carl. May I ask you as a trusted friend to do something for me? for the school?

CARL: Of course.

MARSDEN: Do you think you could suggest to John, under some pretext of your own, and with the utmost tact of course, that he had better withdraw from the school? (Pause) What about it, Carl?

CARL: I'm awfully sorry. I was distracted. I didn't quite get your point.

MRS. M.: You are very strange tonight. Mr. Marsden was asking you whether you might not be able to tactfully get John to withdraw of his own accord.

MARSDEN: Unless you have a better idea ... (Brief pause.)

CARL: I've already discussed this with him.

MARSDEN: You have? And what did he have to say?

CARL: Nothing much. He says he's determined to stay here.

MARSDEN: No doubt you spoke to him cordially, with all necessary tact?

CARL: I did the best I could. You needn't worry on that score.

MARSDEN: Why does he refuse to withdraw? (Mrs. Marsden looks at Carl with curiosity.)

CARL: I don't know.

MARSDEN: Something has to be done. He must go one way or another!

CARL: Yes, he must go.

MARSDEN: (With a preoccupied air.) Indeed he must. He is the most baffling case we have had in all these years. We can't do anything with him. He is absolutely antagonistic in every respect. (Impulsively) Carl, have you a suggestion? You've always been such a help to us.

MRS. M.: Now, dear, you promised you wouldn't get yourself upset again over this matter.

MARSDEN: I know, I know. But it's preying on my mind.

MRS. M.: Paul, it's much too late to think about this tonight. You'll only wear yourself out. Why don't you go to bed and get some rest? I'll take care of these notes.

MARSDEN: Yes, I suppose you're right (Sighs) I'm very tired. But how about you?

MRS. M.: I'll just be a few minutes with these notes. You go along. I know how they're arranged. I'll be with you shortly.

MARSDEN: Please don't work too late, my dear. Good night, Josie. Good night, Carl, and thank you.

MRS. M.: Good night, dear. (Carl does not answer. Marsden exits left. She walks over to Carl and addresses him affectionately.) Did you decide to stay up all night?

CARL: (Startled) What?

MRS. M.: What in the world is the matter with you, Carl?

CARL: (Trying to force a smile.) Nothing.

MRS. M.: For goodness sake go to bed. You look as if you needed a good rest.

CARL: Yes I guess I do but I'm not sleepy. I have a splitting headache.

MRS. M.: Oh, that's a shame. (She lights the table lamp, crosses

- MARIE: What happened?
- LOLA: I don't know. (She crosses Up Stage Right to listen.)
- MARIE: Don't leave me alone! I'm terrified.
- LOLA: (Holding her again) Listen. (Pause) Now there is not a sound.
- MARIE: It's awful. (Kneeling) God ...
- LOLA: (Sharply) Marie! Get hold of yourself, get up. (Lifting her up.)
- MARIE: Something horrible has happened ...
- LOLA: Keep still.
- MARIE: As if we had done something terribly wrong.
- LOLA: Will you keep quiet. Listen. (Sound of approaching steps.) They're coming. (She faces Up Stage.) Let's get out of here.
- MARIE: Let me stay with you tonight.
- LOLA: All right, all right. (Exeunt Up Left. Pause. A murmur of voices grows louder. Mrs. Marsden enters Up Right, crosses to the light switch and turns on the Center Light. Albert and Andy carry in the limp corpse of John. Behind them are Mickey and Carl, all of them shaken, pale with emotion.)
- MRS. M.: Put him here on the sofa. Quick! Mickey turn off that radio. (Mickey shuts off the radio.) Andy, get Mr. Marsden right away.
- ANDY: I'll have him here in a moment. (He exits through Left Door.)
- MRS. M.: (Kneeling, she seizes John's wrist and puts her ear next to his heart.) He is dead! (She stares at Carl with horror. He remains indifferent. Mrs. Marsden covers the corpse with a table cover. Mr. Marsden enters as rapidly as he can through the Left Door. He is only partially dressed and wears no spectacles. Andy follows him in.)
- MARSDEN: What happened? How is John? Are you there, Josie?
- MRS. M.: John has killed himself. He is here on the sofa.
- MARSDEN: Killed himself? My God! (He advances toward the sofa, leans over and feels the body.) How did it happen? Where?

MRS. M.: (continuing) to the wall switch and puts down the Center light. The stage darkens perceptively. She sits down again, takes a sheaf of papers out of her brief case and makes an occasional notation. Suddenly she stops writing and looks at Carl who is rising.) You told John to withdraw from school when I saw you earlier? (Carl does not answer. His expression is strangely rigid. Slowly he advances toward the Up Right door. Mrs. Marsden looks at him closely.) Going to bed?

CARL: (Barely overcoming the terrific strain in which he is caught.) I'm going out for a bit of fresh air. Maybe I can get rid of my headache. Good night.

MRS. M.: Good night. You had better not stay out too long in that cold air. There may be ice on the steps. Be careful. I hope you'll feel better in the morning. (She looks at him with sympathy as he goes out, then continues her work. Presently she stretches herself sleepily. She glances at her wrist watch.) Nearly twelve o'clock. (She rises and goes to the radio, locates the station. A fragment of "The Death of Ase" from Grieg's "Peer Gynt Suite" is played very softly. She returns to her papers with a gesture of impatience. Slowly she approaches the window and contemplates the night. Her attention is attracted by something outside. Suddenly she gasps and recoils with a shudder at something she sees. She looks again using her hands as an eye shade. Her body becomes rigid. She retreats, as if she had received a blow in the chest and utters a muffled exclamation. With the muscles of her face contracted in horror she turns around. She puts her hands against her mouth, breathing fast. She hesitates, then rushes out Up Right. For a few moments the stage is empty; the music continues on the radio. Then distant calls are heard. Pause. Mickey and Andy rush in from the Left.)

ANDY: Anyone here? What the devil's going on?

MICKEY: (He runs to the terrace. Listens to distant shouts. Then he calls in to Andy.) They're calling for three or four to help down on the field. You get a couple of fellows from the dorm. (Mickey exits Right, Andy to the Left. Pause. Marie appears on the Left, trembling and groping. In a moment Lola comes in from Up Left, also terribly frightened. Both are in pajamas and dressing gowns.)

MARIE: Who ... who is it?

LOLA: (Approaching) Marie, dear, I'm glad you're here. (They hold on to one another in fear.)

MARIE: Did you hear?

LOLA: Yes.

- MRS. M.: On the athletic field. I don't actually know how it happened. I got there later.
- MARSDEN: Doesn't anyone know? Who found him first?
- CARL: I did. (Mrs. Marsden does not remove her eyes from him.)
- MARSDEN: Tell us, Carl, for heaven's sake, tell us every detail you know!
- CARL: There is not much I can tell. I had gone out to catch a breath of fresh air because I had a headache. I heard a noise over by the toboggan slide ... I went in that direction. I thought something had just fallen to the ground. I went over to the spot and found John. He must have fallen from the very top of the slide because next to him I found one of those little mats we use for sliding down. Naturally I called for help ...
- MARSDEN: I can't understand it! Why in the world would he be climbing up to the top of the slide at midnight on an icy night.
- ANDY: It might be a case of suicide, Mr. Marsden.
- ALBERT: What did he need the little mat for then? It must have been an accident while he was trying to slide down. That's obvious, because we know he was not much good in any of our sports.
- MARSDEN: But he had refused to have anything to do with the toboggan ... Why this sudden interest? He didn't play in any of the games with you.
- MICKEY: Since he was my roommate, I suppose I knew John about as well as anybody ... (They look at Mickey.) I think I can guess why he was there so late at night. (With deep feeling.) Precisely because he was so tortured by his lack of skill, he might have tried to overcome it secretly, even though he pretended to us he didn't care for sports. And I suspect that tonight, yes and probably many other nights when he didn't come back to our room until late, he was practicing up so he wouldn't be ridiculed for his clumsiness. You know how sensitive he was.
- MARSDEN: Instead of practicing when he was supposed to he has to do it according to his own notions, and now we are faced with this complication because of his bull-headedness. I hope this may serve as a lesson to all of you. (The students remain in embarrassed silence.)
- MRS. M.: Mickey has probably hit on the truth. (Still looking at Carl.)
- MARSDEN: Yes, his idea struck me too as very plausible. The

- MARSDEN: (continuing) suspicion of suicide would certainly look bad for the morale of our school.
- MRS. M.: Shall I go and telephone the authorities?
- MARSDEN: I had better go. I shall have to call the father too ... Poor man! I remember his saying that he was afraid of a possible accident ... But an accident can happen to anybody, and we can prove that tobogganing and other strenuous sports are definitely sound pedagogy.
- MRS. M.: Yes, yes. Don't worry about it, dear. Go and telephone. I'll stay here.
- MARSDEN: Yes, I had better. (He exits through the Left Door. There is a momentary pause, then Elise comes in hesitantly Up Left. She stops Up Stage.)
- ELISE: What happened? They said that John ...
- MICKY: John has killed himself.
- ELISE: (Surprised but without too much emotion.) Oh! Instinctively she moves over to Mickey, puts her arm around his waist in a gesture of reappropriation. Mickey puts his arm around her and gradually Elise leans her head on his shoulder.)
- MRS. M.: I think you'd better all go back to your rooms. Thanks for your help, and please ... do not talk too much about this episode around the school. Good night. (As Andy and Albert exeunt through the Up Left door, Mrs. Marsden pats them on the shoulder. They are followed by Mickey and Elise walking with their arms around each other, he serious and calm she with a happy smile she cannot suppress.)
- ELISE: It was almost the best thing for him ... He wasn't meant for a normal life ...
- MICKY: No ... I guess he wasn't. (Joanne's voice calling for Carl is heard off Left. She appears Up Left in a dressing gown. Mickey sympathetically wants to stop her, but Elise restrains him gently and leads him out.)
- JOANNE: Carl! Carl! Are you here?
- CARL: Yes, I'm here. (She goes to him and throws herself in his arms sobbing.)
- JOANNE: Oh, Carl. (He receives her with a wan smile. Mrs. Marsden looks at them sorrowfully.) Poor John.
- CARL: At last he is at peace.

- JOANNE: Yes. He is happier now. (She weeps) Oh, Carl; you must forgive me. I know I have made you suffer.
- CARL: I have nothing to forgive you for, darling.
- JOANNE: Yes, yes. I have many things to confess to you ... they're crushing me. I meant well ... But I have never stopped loving you! I swear it to you!
- CARL: I know, Joanne, I know very well.
- JOANNE: Will you forgive me? I shall confess everything to you. Everything!
- CARL: It isn't necessary. It can't be anything serious. Whatever it is, I forgive you.
- JOANNE: Carl! (Kisses him impulsively.)
- MRS. M.: (Hesitantly.) Don't you think you had better go back to bed, Joanne?
- CARL: Mrs. Marsden's right. And I'd better go to my room too. (They start out arm in arm, Carl gloomily, Joanne radiantly.)
- MRS. M.: (With great effort.) Will you stay for a while longer, Carl? I wanted to ask you something.
- CARL: (Turning to Mrs. Marsden.) Certainly, Mrs. Marsden. Good night, Joanne.
- JOANNE: Good night, Carl, and thank you!! (She slowly exits Up Left. Carl remains standing and waits. Mrs. Marsden stares at him in anguish. A long pause.)
- MRS. M.: (Awkwardly.) That was an awful thing, wasn't it?
- CARL: Yes. (Pause.)
- MRS. M.: (Walking over to his side and looking straight at him.) It would be silly to deny that the school has been rid of its worst nightmare... (Reproachfully) But no one could have been hoping for ... for such a solution!
- CARL: (Doggedly) Anyway, the danger was out short before it was too late.
- MRS. M.: (Bitterly) You think so?
- CARL: (Contemptuously) Of course. Didn't you notice? As soon as John was dead, his friends forgot what he had meant to them. They seemed to get over the shock easily and relished, even while his body was still warm, talking about what they think were his shortcomings. They some-



- CARL: (continuing) how imagine they are superior when they speak of him with pity ... they, who are so shallow and mediocre! Ah, the blind, the blind! Mickey and Elise are back together. Others are obviously relieved as if freed from a heavy burden. Happiness is back all over the place and there is a feeling that everything will be as it was before.
- MRS. M.: Carl ... I hardly ... How can you speak like this?
- CARL: (Violently) Why?
- MRS. M.: (In a sudden outburst.) Carl! What have you done? Carl!
- CARL: (Stiffening) I don't understand what you mean.
- MRS. M.: Sometimes, Carl, we think we are doing good and we are really terribly wrong....
- CARL: I don't know what you're talking about.
- MRS. M.: And sometimes we fail to understand that people are not trying to hurt us with their words but rather to console us ... We are approached by people who love us and suffer when they see us suffer, and we refuse to understand ... We reject them when our most desperate need is to have the soothing touch of a friend.
- CARL: (Coldly) Many thanks for your kindness... when they speak of him with pity ... they, who are so shallow and mediocre!
- MRS. M.: (Seizing his hands.) Carl, my son! Mickey and Elise are back together. Others are obviously relieved as if freed from a heavy burden.
- CARL: (Pulling them away.) I am not a fool, Mrs. Marsden. I understand only too well what you are hinting at. John and I, at the same time on the athletic field ... well such suspicions are false.
- MRS. M.: Of course. Absolutely false! I have said nothing else.
- CARL: (Slowly) Nor do I intend to say anything else.
- CARL: I won't say thank you, I haven't done anything.
- MRS. M.: (With a fleeting glance at the corpse.) And poor John can no longer say anything either ... For heaven's sake, Carl, let me finish. I know it isn't true, but even if it were, nothing would be gained by saying it ... And the interests of the school come first, don't you agree?
- CARL: How what you're talking about.
- CARL: Yes, I think so. Well?
- MRS. M.: And all our acts must, therefore, be intended for the benefit of the school, or else, for our own personal ... benefit. When our most desperate need is to have the soothing touch of a friend.
- CARL: (Coldly) Many thanks for your kindness... when they speak of him with pity ... they, who are so shallow and mediocre!
- MRS. M.: (Seizing his hands.) Carl, my son! Mickey and Elise are back together. Others are obviously relieved as if freed from a heavy burden.

CARL: And that means ...?

MRS. M.: The school may have enemies ... and a person may have a rival in love. (Pause. Carl turns around and moves toward the Right. He stumbles against a chair, Down Right and drops wearily into it.) Don't you care to confide in me?

CARL: (Stubbornly) Must I say again that what you think is false?

MRS. M.: (Coming from behind and putting her hands on his shoulders.) All right ... I was mistaken. No crime has been committed. You do not wish to arouse anyone's sympathy. Not even Joanne's?

CARL: (Fiercely) Joanne must learn not to yield to that dangerous sentiment. (Pause as he toys with the chess pieces.)

MRS. M.: Carl ...

CARL: Yes?

MRS. M.: It would do you so much good to open your heart.

CARL: (Rising impulsively) Enough! Don't keep asking for a confession which is impossible. What are you after, anyway? To show your cleverness? To play the part of a mother to me because you have no children of your own?

MRS. M.: (Livid) You're cruel, extremely cruel ... I'm not going to be that unkind. Half an hour ago, I was working here, and it could have occurred to me to get up and look out of the window. I didn't do it. Perhaps, if I had, I would have seen someone going up the toboggan slide steps carrying John's body ... John, unconscious, or perhaps already dead! (Pause) Then, from up there the body is dropped without stopping to think about other people's eyes. We always forget somebody's eyesight. Only John thought of it. (Pause) But I saw nothing because I did not get up. (She waits watching his face.)

CARL: That's right! You saw nothing! And even if you had got up and thought you saw ... (With infinite contempt) What is sight? There is no sight here! How dare you invoke the testimony of your eyes? Your eyes! Humph!

MRS. M.: (Fearfully) My son, I never believed you were so hard!

CARL: Too bad, or you wouldn't have wasted your stupid, feminine tricks on me.

MRS. M.: You forget I am almost an old woman ...

CARL: You are the one who seems to have forgotten it!

MRS. M.: What are you saying? (Weeping) You are out of your mind! You are mad!

CARL: (In utmost desperation.) Yes, mad, Mrs. Marsden! Mad! But, for God's sake, will you leave me alone? (Pause)

MRS. M.: (Completely crushed, she starts out; then stops.) I only meant to show you how much I felt for you, to offer peace to a troubled mind. But you don't want friendship ... or peace. Oh, Carl, my sone, you think you have won. But you did not win. Remember my words, you did not win. (She looks at Carl and John's body at once, then exits through the Up Left Door. Carl sinks down into the chair. He relaxes slightly and his head falls to his chest. His breathing becomes more and more agitated; he opens his shirt and removes his necktie. Then he turns his head toward the background as if he were waiting for some inaudible summons. After a moment, he rises, hesitating, accidentally knocking down the chessmen from the board which clatter grotesquely on the floor. He stops a moment, frightened. Then he approaches the corose and with complete bitterness of his awful loneliness, he kneels down and with an abrupt gesture uncovers the pale face of the corpse which he touches with the despair of someone trouching a body he cannot hope to revive. Then he rises as if attracted by a strange force, and gropes his way to the window. There he remains motionless, facing the light of the stars. A grave voice which soon becomes firm and vibrates with infinite passion speaks.)

CARL: And now the stars are shining with all their splendor, and seeing people are enjoying their wonderful presence. Those remote worlds are there, behind the window panes ... (His hands, like the wings of a wounded bird, tremble and tap against the mysterious orison-wall of glass.) Within reach of our sight ... if we could only see.

- SLOW CURTAIN -

SKY

TREE GROUND ROW

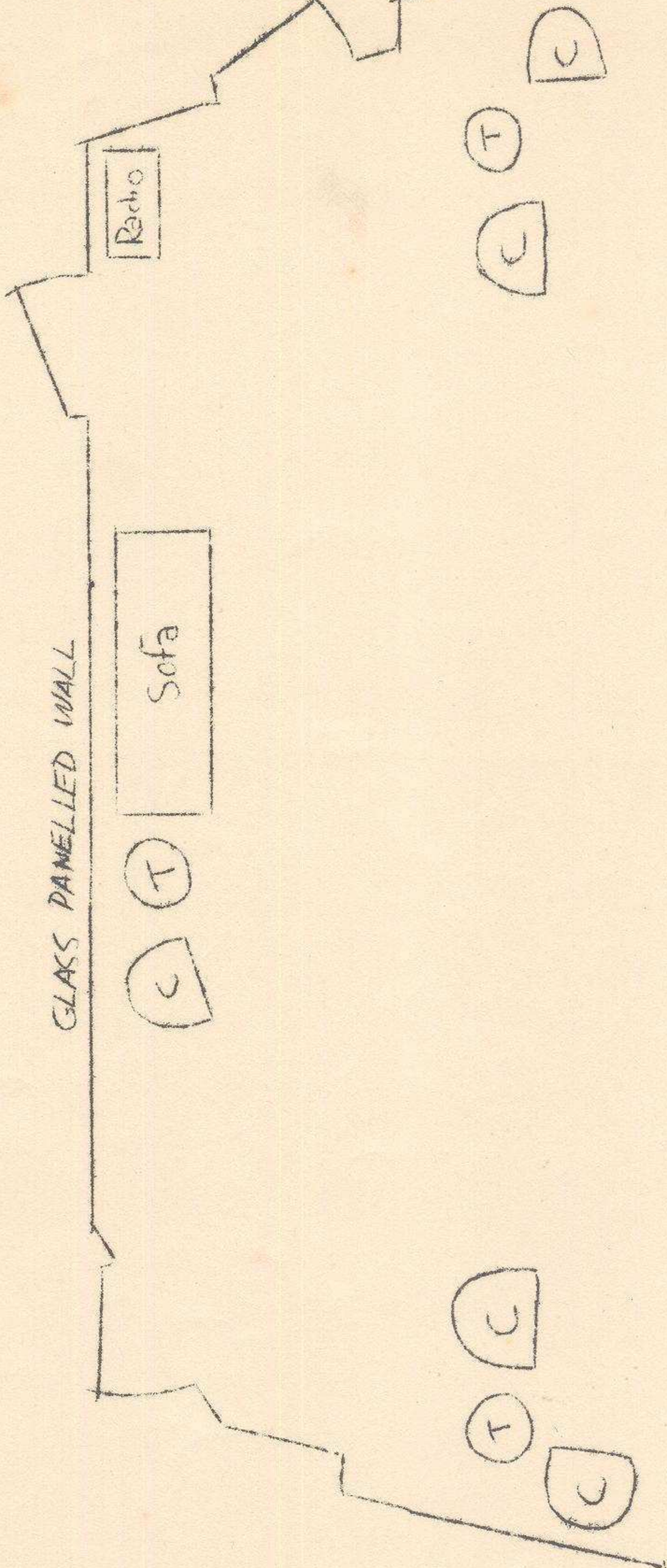
TREE GROUND ROW

LOW WALL

GLASS PANELLED WALL

Radio

Sofa



SEMINARIO MULTIDISCIPLINAR  
 JOSE EMILIO GONZALEZ  
 FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES  
 UNIVERSIDAD DE PUERTO RICO  
 RECINTO DE RIO PIEDRAS

GROUND PLAN OF SANTA BARBARA COLLEGE PRODUCTION SET

1/4" = 160"

- CARL: I'd walk you over, Elise, but if you don't mind, I have something to say to John. Mickey will take you over. (Mickey winces.)
- ELISE: (Sourly) Mickey certainly doesn't have to bother on my account. I'm sure he prefers your company ... and John's.
- MICKEY: (Uncomfortably.) Don't be silly. I'll be glad to take you over. So long.
- CARL: So long. Good night, Elise. See you tomorrow.
- ELISE: Good night. (Elise exits Up Left, Mickey following, Carl and John sit Down Left but before they can begin conversing, Mrs. Marsden enters the Up Left Door.)
- MRS. M.: Good evening. Haven't you boys gone to bed yet? (They rise.)
- CARL: Good Evening, Mrs. Marsden.
- MRS. M.: Please sit down, boys. And what about our young man with the cane? Can't you find a word or two to say?
- JOHN: Good evening.
- MRS. M.: It seems to me you ought to be a happy man, even if because every day you look gloomier, which apparently is your aim in life. Well, I won't disturb you. I'm making the rounds of the rooms. See you presently.
- CARL: Good-bye, Mrs. Marsden. (She goes out Up Left.) I presume Mickey must feel quite cheated that you had to interrupt your story of the sighted girl.
- JOHN: And of course you would prefer arguing about your usual topic of conversation, or did you by chance this time have something different to talk about?
- CARL: No, the usual topic, I'm sorry to say.
- JOHN: Carl, I know pretty well how you think. How many times do we have to go over this?
- CARL: Not many, I hope. This may even be the last time.
- JOHN: Good!
- CARL: John, the day you came here, it didn't take you long to decide to return home. (Bitterly) Joanne told me this ... when she still used to talk things over with me. Your original idea was the right one, and I think this is the right moment for you to do it.
- JOHN: What a subtle way to give an order.

- CARL: What were you waiting for? An example set for you by one of your fellow students that you drove to despair?
- JOHN: (Calmly) Well, I'll let you figure out the answer yourself. For my part, I apologize for any sarcastic remark that offended you. Ordinarily I don't make use of this kind of humor, but you'll have to admit I've had enough provocation. I'm going to take a turn around the athletic field before I go to bed. It's a fine night for a stroll. ... helps you sleep more soundly. Care to join me?
- CARL: No.
- JOHN: Good night then.
- CARL: Good bye. (John leaves Up Right. Carl sits at the chair Down Right and absent mindedly toys with the chess pieces. In a moment Mr. and Mrs. Marsden enter with several folders of papers.)
- MRS. M.: Still here, Carl?
- CARL: (Raising his head.) Yes, Mrs. Marsden, I'm not sleepy.
- MARSDEN: (Who has been led to the sofa by his wife.) Good evening, Carl.
- MRS. M.: (Full of curiosity.) Did John decide to go to bed?
- CARL: Yes ... I think so. He's going for a walk first.
- MARSDEN: (Gravely) I'm glad you are still here, Carl. It seems that we need to talk again about John. Will you give me a cigarette, Josie? (She produces a cigarette which she puts in his mouth and lights.) Thank you, dear. Yes, Carl, this matter has reached serious proportions. Quite frankly, our school is in a critical situation. Who would have thought that one individual could demoralize a school of a hundred students?
- CARL: It's hard to explain.
- MARSDEN: I don't know whether you have become aware of this yet, but Mrs. Marsden tells me that students are beginning to neglect their personal appearance.
- CARL: Really?
- MRS. M.: They haven't been sending their clothes out to be pressed ... and some have stopped wearing their ties, like John. (Carl feels of his own necktie.)
- MARSDEN: He must go around preaching all day long. How is it possible that he should have so much influence in so short a time? How do you explain it, Carl? (Pause) Hmm? (Mrs. Marsden looks straight at Carl.)