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Facultad de Humanidades
Universidad de Puerto Rico
Recinto de Río Piedras

CARNEGIE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

SCHENLEY PARK

PITTSBURGH 13, PENNSYLVANIA

September 10, 1952

HENRY BOETTCHER
Head of Department of Drama
College of Fine Arts

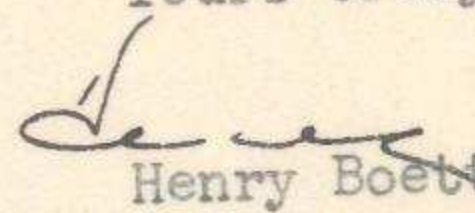
Mr. Leo S. Lavandero
Department of Drama
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Leo:

I am inclosing a copy of the Johnston version
of SIX CHARACTERS. For information about royalties
you should write to Mr. Robert Lantz, Gale Agency, Inc.
48 West 48th Street, New York, New York who controls
performing rights.

All best wishes.

Yours truly,


Henry Boettcher

Inc. 1
HB/ds

SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR

by

Luigi Pirandello

A New English Adaptation by

Denis Johnston

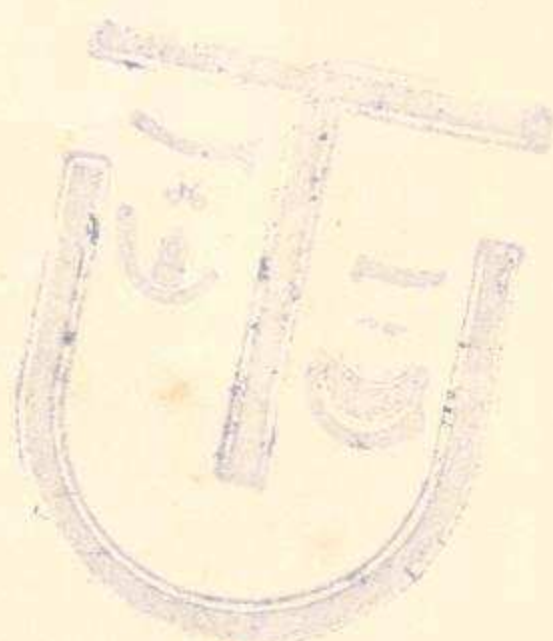
Cast of Characters

- The Doorkeeper
- The Character Man
- The Property Woman
- The Stage Manager
- The Juvenile Woman
- The Leading Woman
- The Leading Man
- The Director
- The Prompter
- The Ingenue

- The Father
- The Stepdaughter
- The Mother
- The Son
- The Boy
- The Child
- Madame Pace

The action of the play takes place on the Stage of a Provincial Theatre, during a rehearsal. There are two intervals, each of about ten minutes.

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Seminario de Drama

Seminario de Drama

ACT I

When we enter the Theatre we find the curtain already up, showing a bare stage. Some pieces of scenery are piled against the rear wall, amongst them a sloping ramp which disappears out of sight behind some curtains. The sides of the stage are unmasked and to the right are doors leading to the Prop Room and to the Director's office. To the left is the Doorkeeper's box, with a small window, a letter rack, and some hooks for coats and hats. Down stage right, close to the proscenium, stands a small table and chair for the Director, and below these a flight of temporary steps leads down into the Auditorium. Some furniture is stacked in the open wings off stage, right, and a couple of chairs stand on stage, left. On the floor of the auditorium in front of the stage is a high stool. The stage is in semi-darkness, but presently the Doorkeeper enters from the left then goes to the letter rack, in which he places some mail. He then goes into his box and switches on a light inside. The Character Man enters from the left, hangs his hat on a hook, ad libs for a moment with the Doorkeeper through his window, looks for mail, and comes to one of the chairs, left, drawing a newspaper out of his pocket. The Property Woman emerges from the Prop Room with two chairs which she brings left, and places in line with the chairs already there. The Stage Manager appears, right, locks around for a moment, and then goes off right. Presently a work light is switched on over the stage, and the house lights are dimmed. The Stage Manager reappears, looking for something.

STAGE MANAGER

My hammer has gone again.

PROPERTY WOMAN

You'll have to move those flats. I can't get my chairs out of the Prop Room.

STAGE MANAGER

I can't do anything without my hammer.

PROP. WOMAN

You can do that.

(They go upstage right, arguing quietly with each other, as the Juvenile Woman arrives, right, places an overcoat on one of the hooks, and goes to the Doorkeeper's Box. The Character Man is reading his newspaper.)

JUVENILE

Good evening, Mr. Pampanickli. Anything for me?

DOORKEEPER (Through his window)

If there is it's in the rack.

(The Leading Man and Leading Lady enter from the right, and go to the box. He hangs a hat on one of the hooks. The Juvenile Woman finds a letter and starts to read it, up centre.)

LEADING MAN

Of course I said to her, It's actually your mind that interest me. And she understood at once.

LEADING WOMAN(Sceptically)

How quaint.

LEADING MAN

Yes, and what a quaint little mind she has.

(The Leading Woman has nodded through the window, and come down to the head of the line of chairs, where presently she is brought a mysterious note by the Doorkeeper.)

CHARACTER MAN

Hello, old boy. How are the corns this evening?

LEADING MAN (Blankly)

Corns? I haven't any corns.

CHARACTER MAN

Sorry. I thought from the way you were walking --

LEADING MAN

What are you driving at?

LEADING LADY (Sitting)

You always rise to his bait, don't you, Cyril.

LEADING MAN (Sitting)

Oh, is that all it is!

CHARACTER MAN

Don't mind me, old boy -- I admire you, really.

JUVENILE (Having read her letter)

Well, isn't that nice of Lawrence! But I couldn't, really. Not while I'm tied up with these ghastly rehearsals, could I?

PROP. WOMAN (Crossing from right with another chair)

Couldn't what?

JUVENILE

He wants me to read for a part.

PROP. WOMAN (Not interested)

Oh -- that! (She goes back to the Prop Room)

JUVENILE

He says such nice things about my performance in "The Fretful Porpentine". I promised that I'd play for him sometime.

LEADING LADY.

Never mind, dear. This thing will never run, and then I'm sure you'll have plenty of time on your hands.

JUVENILE (Looking at her sharply)

I'm sure you're right, darling. With the casting it's got, I hope we survive the opening. (She sits in line with the others)

CHARACTER MAN

Now girls, behave yourselves. Anybody want a cup of coffee?

(The Director enters from his office followed by the Prompter. He comes down, right, to his table. The Prompter goes to the Players with a pile of Sides. The Stage Manager and Prop. Woman reappear, right)

DIRECTOR

Do we have to have all this gloom on the stage? Can't we have some light?

STAGE MANAGER

OK. (He crosses left, and presently full stage lighting is switched on)

DIRECTOR
Now let's get cracking, please. Where's Miss Glubb with her book?

PROMPTER (Crossing to his table)
Right here. I've been waiting twenty-four minutes.

(The Ingenue enters, left, at the trot)

INGENUUE
Oh dear! I do hope I'm not late. What will you think of me, Mr. Vanderveel!
(She takes off her hat, hangs it up and primps vigorously)

DIRECTOR
Yes, you are late. Don't let it happen again. Who are all those people in front?

PROMPTER (Looking at the Audience)
I have no idea, Mr. Vanderveel.

(She goes down the accomodation steps with her prompt book and sits on the stool in front of the stage. The Ingenue is doing her best to sit between the Leading Woman and the Leading Man, but without success)

DIRECTOR
Pampanickli! How did all these people get in?

DOORKEEPER (Emerging)
Nothing to do with me. They didn't come in my way.

(He goes back into his box.)

CHARACTER MAN
Better be careful, Hans. They're probably someone's relatives.

DIRECTOR (A little nervously)
OK. OK. But they've got to keep quiet, that's all. Can't have a lot of chattering out in front during rehearsals. And please don't bang those seats up and down. Now, where do we start, Miss Glubb?

PROMPTER
The second act of "The Game as He Played it."

DIRECTOR
I think we know the title. What's the set-up?

PROMPTER
("Leone Galà's house. An odd looking room serving as a dining room and study.

DIRECTOR
"An odd looking room." Well, that ought to be easy with our scenery. We'll have the red set.

PROP. WOMAN
The red set. OK. (Makes a note)

STAGE MANAGER (Emerging, left)
Sorry. You can't have the red set.

Why not?

STAGE MANAGER
We've taken out the baffle pins.

DIRECTOR (Nettled)
I have no idea what that means.

STAGE MANAGER (With a vague gesture)
Baffle pins. You know. Baffle pins.

DIRECTOR
Well, whatever they are, put them back again.

STAGE MANAGER (Smugly)
Can't. They've all gone to be fixed. You'll have to have the Rich Interior. It'll be all right when it's spattered.

DIRECTOR
Spattered! My God, does that mean buckets all over the stage while I'm rehearsing.

STAGE MANAGER (Going right, to the stacked furniture and bringing a table center stage.)
Well, you want to get the show on, don't you?

DIRECTOR
OK! OK! We'll have the Rich Interior and rehearse in boiler suits. Now what about props?

PROMPTER
Table piled high with books and writing materials. Cook's cap and apron for Leone Gala. Egg beater and an egg in a cup.

PROP. WOMAN.
(Bringing in a bowl and an egg beater to the table, center)
Does that mean a practical egg?

DIRECTOR
Well, -- does it?

PROMPTER
I imagine so. It's got to be beaten.

DIRECTOR
Make the egg practical.

PROP. WOMAN
All right. You asked for it. (She moves left)

JUVENILE
That sounds rather sinister.

DIRECTOR
Alice!

PROP WOMAN

Yes, Mr. Vanderveel?

DIRECTOR

When I say practical, I mean practical and fresh. We don't want to be stunk out with stale eggs that have been left lying around between rehearsals.

PROP. WOMAN (Pained)

You seem to have no confidence in me. (She goes off, left)

DIRECTOR

Yes, dear. Every confidence. All the same, I believe in being prepared for the worst. Now Cyril, you open.

(The Leading Man rises and comes to the center table)

LEADING MAN

What's the layout?

DIRECTOR

There are glass-fronted bookshelves over there, bedroom door upstage center, kitchen door to the left, and hall door on the right.

LEADING MAN

I've got it. (Looking at his part) What's this about a compass?

DIRECTOR

Yes. That's somewhere around. We'll decide where, when we get to it.

PROP. WOMAN (coming in from left.)

A compass too! You never mentioned that.

DIRECTOR

Well it's mentioned now. (Then doubtfully to Prompter) Is it really necessary?

PROMPTER

Absolutely. It ought to be on this list. (She makes a correction.)

DIRECTOR

You heard Miss Glubb. Now let's have the stage directions, please.

(The property woman makes a note and goes off, right, grumbling loudly)

PROMPTER

Leone Gala discovered beating an egg in a bowl. He is dressed in a chef's hat and apron. Filippo detto Secrate, similarly dressed, is beating another egg.

CHARACTER MAN (Rising from his chair with some disgust)

Oh, me too!

LEADING MAN

Excuse me. Did I hear you say that I have to wear a chef's hat?

DIRECTOR

I didn't say so. The script says so.

LEADING MAN

But I can't wear a thing like that. It's absurd.

DIRECTOR

Well, I can't help that. The play's absurd. Is it my fault if no decent comedies are being written any more, and we have to put on a lot of old Italian rubbish by people like Pirandello.

PROMPTER (Rather priggishly)

Pirandello was a very great writer.

DIRECTOR (Nervously)

Did I ever say that he wasn't?

PROMPTER

You said his plays were rubbish.

DIRECTOR

I did not -- or if I did, I take it back. Don't quote me as saying a word against any established author. All I say is that I don't like eggs in a play.

LEADING MAN

Perhaps somebody can tell you why, exactly, I'm supposed to be beating this egg?

DIRECTOR

I imagine it's symbolic.

LEADING MAN

Symbolic of what?

DIRECTOR

Symbolic or -- well -- you see this egg is --(to Prompter) What would you say?

PROMPTER

It's obvious. The play is full of overtones.

LEADING MAN

I may be stupid, but I'm afraid I don't know what that means.

DIRECTOR (Sarcastically)

Maybe you'd like to tell him?

PROMPTER

With pleasure. You see, it's not only that you're beating the egg in your bowl. You, yourself, represent the shell of the egg.

LEADING MAN (Suprised)

I do?

PROMPTER

Exactly. The void form of reason without the inspiration of instinct, which is blind. You are Reason, and your wife is Instinct. In this way, you see, each part in the play also becomes a puppet of itself. It's really quite simple.

STAGE MANAGER(Crossing behind)

Have you got my hammer?

LEADING MAN

No. But I could use it.

(meanwhile an unearthly green light has risen on the ramp, and the Six Characters walk slowly down it, and on to the stage. The three females are dressed in black, and the little boy has a mourning band on his arm.)

DIRECTOR

Well, now that that's been made so delightfully plain, let's get on with this rehearsal. And please face three-quarters. We may as well hear the overtones even if no one understnads the lines except Miss Glubb. Now, who the hell is this? (Shouting) Pampanickli!

DOORKEEPER (Emerging)

Yes, Mr. Vanderveel?

DIRECTOR

What's all this?

DOORKEEPER

I don't know. Friends of yours, eh?

DIRECTOR

They're not friends of mine.

DOORKEEPER

Maybe it's some sort of an audition?

DIRECTOR

In the middle of a rehearsal? You know I can't see them now. Get them out.

FATHER

As a matter of fact, sir, we've not come to see you. We've come in search of an author.

(The Doorkeeper approaches the Son who pays no attention to him. Then the Doorkeeper tries to push the Son towards the exit, left, but the Son appears to be immovable. After a while the Doorkeeper gives up.)

DIRECTOR

What author?

FATHER

Any author.

DIRECTOR

Well, there's no author here. So get out!

LEADING LADY

This is intolerable. Can't you see we are working on a play?

STEPDAUGHTER

That's good. We can be your play.

CHARACTER MAN (Sitting down again and getting out his newspaper)

Not unless it's got eggs in it.

JUVENILE

Oh, do shut up, George.

FATHER (To Stepdaughter)

Yes -- but if there's no author here it may be difficult. Unless this gentleman would be willing --

DIRECTOR

What are you talking about?

FATHER

You see, sir, we have a drama in us.

(The Leading Man sits down again. This time the Ingenue's manoeuvring is successful and he finds himself beside her.

DIRECTOR

Indeed. All six of you! Joint authors, I suppose. Well, leave your script with Miss Glubb and I'll let you know as soon as I've had time to read it. Goodbye!

SON

Yes, do let's go. This is a waste of time.

DIRECTOR

Goodbye!

INGENUUE (Indicating the Son to the Juvenile)

He's nice, isn't he!

SON

I won't have anything to do with this.

STEPDAUGHTER

Be quiet.

DIRECTOR

I'll read it, I tell you! Whatever I promise to read, I'll read.

FATHER

You don't understand, sir. There's no script for you to read. We are the drama in ourselves.

DIRECTOR

You mean to say you're only just thinking about writing it?

STEPDAUGHTER

No, no! We ARE the play -- the characters in it.

MOTHER

That's right, sir.

DIRECTOR

You are the -- ! Pampanickli! Throw these people out.

How?

DOORKEEPER

How?

DIRECTOR

By the -- that's your job, isn't it? You know better than I do how to throw people out.

DOORKEEPER

Not these kind, I don't. When you shove them, nothing happens!

DIRECTOR

God give me patience! What is this!

FATHER

It's quite simple, sir. The point is, we aren't people like you, and that's what the doorman means. We're all of us Abstractions.

STEPDAUGHTER

Characters in a play.

(General excitement)

FATHER

But don't think us any the less real because of that. As I hope to prove before the end, we're all the more real on that account.

STEPDAUGHTER

It's a play that may make your fortune.

DIRECTOR

Go away, I tell you. I have time now for any crazy talk.

FATHER

Please don't think us crazy, sir, unless life itself is crazy.

DIRECTOR

What the devil is he talking about?

FATHER

If it's crazy for us to exist, then there can be no reason for your profession.

CHARACTER MAN

What makes you think there is?

DIRECTOR

So you're trying to make out now that our whole profession is crazy.

FATHER

To give life to people like us on the stage, isn't that your mission, ladies and gentlemen? What else are you here for?

DIRECTOR

My dear sir, you don't imagine that we ever give life to real characters in the theater. You must have a very glamorous view of our authors.

FATHER

Some authors create real characters, sir, and it's just one of those whom we're looking for now.

DIRECTOR

Well you needn't look here. I don't want to hear any more of this.

LEADING LADY

But I do. I think this is rather interesting.

(She rises to speak to the Leading Man, and firmly insists on the Ingenue moving away to another seat)

JUVENILE

So do I.

LEADING MAN

I must say I'd give a lot for a part with some meat in it.

CHARACTER MAN

I always thought you were a vegetarian, Cyril.

LEADING MAN (Irritably)

I dare say has is more in your line.

DIRECTOR

Oh do shut up -- everybody.

CHARACTER MAN

Then how about a nice cup of coffee all round?

FATHER

I only wanted to remind you that one can be born to life in more forms than one. As a tree, or as a stone, as water, as a butterfly, or as a woman.

DIRECTOR

So what!

FATHER

So, also, one can be born as a character in a play.

DIRECTOR

(Sarcastically)

I see. So you want us to believe that you and these other people have been born characters.

FATHER

Exactly. That's what we are.

(General amusement among the Players)

FATHER (hurt)

I'm sorry you laugh, ladies and gentlemen, because we carry in us a tragedy -- a great tragedy -- as you may gather from the fact that this woman is dressed in black. (He indicates the Mother)

DIRECTOR

Oh, take them away, somebody. Can't anybody get them off my stage?

DOORKEEPER

Well, I'll do my best.

(He tries to reason with the Mother who appears not to hear him)

FATHER
 Sir, sir, think for a moment. How often before have you had real characters on your stage?

LEADING MAN
 Is it our fault if they're not real?

FATHER
 No sir. But doesn't that make it all the more important not to turn them away when they are?

DIRECTOR
 We came here to work, you know.

FATHER
 Of course, Of course. And we only want to help you. Now you can be so skeptical, gentlemen -- you, whose business it is to give life to the creations of so many authors. Just because your prompter there has no book in her hand, you don't seem to be able to believe that we can exist.

DIRECTOR
 It's only too obvious that you exist. That's what I am complaining about.

STEPDAUGHTER
 Won't you listen to me for just a moment? We're really six very interesting characters -- lost through no fault of our own. But we can help each other -- You, who need our play, and we, who desperately need to live in your actors here. Please listen to us.

CHARACTER
 She's a nice kid. I'm in favor of this.

INGENUE
 Oh, please, Mr. Vanderveel, don't turn them out.

DIRECTOR
 I don't believe a word you're saying, but God knows we need a play, so I'll give you five minutes to tell me why you've come here.

FATHER
 Because, sir, the author who created us alive made up his mind after he had done so that he would never put us into a work of art.

SON
 How right he was!

STEPDAUGHTER
 No, no. It was a crime.

FATHER
 Yes, in a sense it was a crime. But crime or not, it was a real tragedy for us, sir.

DIRECTOR
 Go on. I'm listening. Why was it a tragedy?

FATHER
 Because -- Heavens -- think of our position. Think of what we're losing by being left as we are. He who has been born a character in a play isn't like you, sir, because he can't die. The author -- the source of his creation -- will die, but that which has been brought into being is beyond immortality and has

to live forever.

CHARACTER MAN

Lucky man! What are you complaining about?

FATHER

Is it lucky, sir, if one hasn't the power to express one's self? Oh, I'm not claiming that we have to be great characters, or be able to work wonders to find fulfillment of ourselves. After all, who is Sancho Panza? What has the grave digger in Hamlet to recommend him except a turn of phrase and a line or two of wit. They're humble people, and yet they live eternally because they've been lucky enough to find a work of art in which to function -- a fantasy that can offer them fulfillment of themselves.

DIRECTOR

That's all very well, but it doesn't explain what you're doing here.

STEPDAUGHTER

We want to express ourselves and to give a meaning to our existence.

DIRECTOR

Eternally? We can't expect a play to run as long as that, you know.

(The Players laugh)

FATHER

No sir, only for a moment, in your players.

CHARACTER MAN

Well, I'll be damned!

LEADING LADY (Amused)

They want to express themselves in us!

JUVENILE

I call that damned impertinence.

INGENUE

Oh, no. It's a wonderful idea.

LEADING MAN (Thoughtfully)

It rather depends on how the parts are distributed.

DIRECTOR

Quiet, please. Let's get this clear. If you haven't got an author, how can there be a play?

FATHER

It exists already, if only you'll let us demonstrate.

PROMPTER

But where's the book?

FATHER

It's in us -- impatient to be performed -- an inner passion in all of us.

STEPDAUGHTER (Disdainfully)

A passion! (She laughs bitterly). A lovely description of my feeling for him!

(She points at the Father, who reacts violently)

DIRECTOR

Wait a minute! Please behave yourselves.

FATHER

Don't let her laugh that way.

STEPDAUGHTER

I can do more than laugh. I can act. I was born to the stage. And if you ladies and gentlemen will allow me, I, a two months orphan will prove it.

(At the Leading Lady's suggestion, the Leading Man politely moves the center table out of her way, and they all settle down to observe her performance. For a moment she stands in a trance-like pose before beginning.)

STEPDAUGHTER

Here we are. Don't you see us now -- hiding in the shadows? No, no! Don't turn up the lamp. We want you to see us clearly, and it's only in the darkness that the eye of the imagination can work without distraction. Here we are -- your own creations -- that Mother with her pleading face, longing for a smile from the sulky son who refuses to speak to her. Don't you know us? I, with this child clinging to my hand -- the little frightened boy wandering around all by himself. And this man, always shambling after me -- trying to peer under the brim of my hat. How I despise him! -- and through him, all men -- except perhaps you -- the matrix of my existence. Oh my God -- can't you sense the scenes that we could play in front of you? (Turning fiercely on the Father) Be off! Stop following me around. Can't you see that he wants to be alone with me? I'm the only one who can do it. I'm the one who tempts him more than any of the others!

(Again she stands for a moment in a trance, and then, coming out of it, she bows to the Players. They are all mystified, but somewhat impressed.)

INGENUUE

Lovely!

CHARACTER MAN

Well, what was all that about?

LEADING MAN

Not bad. Not bad at all.

LEADING WOMAN

She seems to have some experience.

JUVENILE

A little overplayed, maybe.

DIRECTOR

Quiet, everybody. Who is this young woman? Is she crazy?

STEPDAUGHTER

Never mind. If only you'll allow us your stage for a few minutes we'll show you what drama is. If only you'll wait for the moment when God takes this little darling here away from her Mother -- (She takes the child by the hand) Isn't she sweet? Darling! My pet! -- Well, when that moment comes, and that half-witted boy does the most revolting things, like the horried child he is -- then you'll really see me act. That's when you'll know what can be done on the stage.

DIRECTOR

But what happens? What's the story line?

STEPDAUGHTER

All in good time. That moment hasn't come yet. In the meantime, you can hardly expect me to remain here, after what has taken place between him and me. (She points at the father) To stop here and see the torments of my Mother over that fool who won't speak (She points at the Son) and sulks in the corner! Look at him -- pretending not to care -- that he's superior to all of us, just because he's the legitimate son.

SON

Leave me out of this.

STEPDAUGHTER

He looks down on me, despises him, deppises this child here, because we're only bastards.

DIRECTOR

I'm afraid we can't have such expressions. Not in this town anyhow.

STEPDAUGHTER

He doesn't want to admit that she's his mother, although she's the mother of us all. To him she's only the mother of us three -- three bastards.

MOTHER

Oh stop . Stop. Don't you know they can hear you? I can't bear it.

(She staggers and the Father runs to hold her up*)

FATHER

She's going to faint.

DIRECTOR

Alice! Alice! Bring a chair.

PROP. WOMAN (Entering right)

What's the matter? Is somebody in trouble?

DIRECTOR

Get the woman a chair.

(The Property Woman brings a chair center from the right. The Father assists the Mother to it.)

LEADING MAN

Has she really fainted?

LEADING LADY

I guess it's just part of the performance.

CHARACTER

But not bad, if you ask me.

FATHER

Lift your veil and let them see you.

MOTHER

No. No. Don't uncover my face (to Director.) Please, sir, help me.

DIRECTOR
What's the matter? What can I do?

MOTHER
Don't allow this man to do what he intends to do. It's too horrible.

DIRECTOR
Wait a minute. You're getting on too fast. What, exactly, is the position?
Is this your wife?

FATHER
Yes, sir, she's my wife.

DIRECTOR
Then why is she dressed like a widow, while you're still alive.

LEADING MAN
How do we know he's alive? He seems to be in some doubt himself.

(General laughter)

FATHER
Don't laugh. Please don't laugh like that. You see, you've just touched on a point that is a little embarrassing for all of us. My wife has had a lover -- a man who really ought to be here.

MOTHER
No. No. He can't be here. He's dead.

STEPDAUGHTER
Two months ago, it was. That's what I meant when I said I was a two months' orphan. That's why we're all in mourning.

DIRECTOR
I see. Does this mean that there's a strong love interest in this play?

FATHER
I suppose there is. But not in the sense you mean. This woman's drama isn't the drama of a love for two men. She's incapable of feeling anything.

MOTHER
Oh, what a thing to say! If only I could express what I felt for those two men!

FATHER
Pah! Nothing but a little gratitude -- gratitude not even for me but for the other man. She isn't a woman at all. She's only a mother. What feelings she has -- oh, I admit they're strong enough -- are all directed at these four children whom she's had by two men.

MOTHER
And why did I have them? Do you suppose that was my wish? (To the Players and pointing at the Father) It was all his doing. It was he who wanted children. It was he who forced me to go away with the other man.

STEPDAUGHTER

That's a lie.

MOTHER

A lie! How dare you!

STEPDAUGHTER

It's a lie, I tell you -- a lie.

DIRECTOR

Well, make up your mind about it.

MOTHER

She doesn't know anything about it. How could she?

STEPDAUGHTER (To Director)

I'll tell you the only reason why she says she was driven away. It's on account of that fellow there. (Pointing to the Son) She doesn't want him to believe that she abandoned him when he was only two years old. She wants to make him think she was forced to do so.

MOTHER

I was forced to do so! God knows I was forced to do so. (Pointing at the Father) Ask him if it isn't true. He knows better than she does.

STEPDAUGHTER

Didn't you live in perfect harmony with my father up to the hour of his death? Isn't that true?

MOTHER

Yes. It's true.

STEPDAUGHTER

Then how could you have been forced to go away with him? Wasn't he always full of affection for you? And for all of us, too? (To the Boy) Tell them it's true. Why don't you say something, you little fool!

MOTHER

Don't shout at the boy. I don't want to offend the memory of your father, but all you want to do is to make me seem ungrateful. If I ever left my home and my eldest son it wasn't my fault. It wasn't because I loved another man.

FATHER

In a sense that's true enough. It was I who sent her away.

LEADING MAN

If this is a play it seems a little complicated to me.

LEADING LADY

Quite unactable.

PROMPTER

Please don't interrupt. It interests me very much.

CHARACTER MAN

It would, my dear. It's just your cup of tea.

DIRECTOR

Look here, we've got to get this straightened out. Fetch some chairs for these people. Alice! Alice!

CHARACTER

"Alice, where art thou!"

PROP. WOMAN (Appearing)

Yes, Mr. Vanderveel?

DIRECTOR

Can't you get something for these people to sit on?

PROP. WOMAN

Oh, are they staying after all?

DIRECTOR

Only for a few minutes. I want to hear the rest of this.

(The Property Woman brings two more chairs which she places on each side of the Mother's chair, center.)

JUVENILE

It looks as if we're turning into the audience, for a change.

DIRECTOR

Do shut up, Olympia. How does this thing go on?

SON

Oh, you're going to hear a lovely bit now. Delightful! In a few minutes my father will be telling you about the Demon of Experiment.

FATHER

Oh, you're a cynical rascal. I've told you so before. Just because I found a phrase that gives me peace of mind he's always jeering at me.

(He sits beside the Mother. The Stepdaughter is sitting at the other side. The two children are at their feet.)

SON

That's all it is. Phrases. Phrases.

FATHER

What's wrong with that, if it gives me a little peace!

STEPDAUGHTER

So your conscience troubles you?

FATHER

It always has, and I've spent more than phrases trying to make it easier.

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh, indeed you have. There was a little money that came in to it, too, wasn't there! A little matter of ten dollars that he tried to offer me.

FATHER

Enough of that.

SON

This is disgusting.

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DIRECTOR

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Why did he offer you ten dollars?

STEPDAUGHTER

Can't you guess?

DIRECTOR

No.

INGENUUE

Oh, I can.

SON

Don't encourage them. You'll only be revolted.

LEADING MAN

Please. Please. Remember we're all sophisticated people of the theatre.

JUVENILE

It takes a lot to disgust us.

CHARACTER MAN

Hasn't been done for years, old boy.

STEPDAUGHTER

They were in a blue envelope on a little mahogany table in Mme. Pace's shop.

PROMPTER

Who's Mme. Pace? Is she here?

MOTHER

No -- no!

STEPDAUGHTER

She doesn't have to be here. You must know her sort. One of those kind business women who employs well-brought-up young ladies in her establishment under the pretense of selling what she calls "Robes et Manteaux."

JUVENILE.

Oh, I know what you mean!

INGENUUE (Surprised)

I didn't know there was anything wrong in those places.

(The Stage Manager appears, left)

SON

He didn't pay her anything.

STEPDAUGHTER

No, but it was a close call.

MOTHER

How can you talk like that in front of everybody? You ought to feel ashamed of yourself.

STEPDAUGHTER

Why should I feel ashamed? I'm longing to play that scene. (To the Director) Listen, can you imagine the window of the shop with hats and costumes in it?

DIRECTOR

Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Can you get this down, Joe?

STAGE MANAGER (Getting out a notebook and pencil,
and hurrying to the Director's table)

Yes, I've got that. Go ahead.

STEPDAUGHTER (Walking the stage)

Over there, a divan bed -- here, the mirror -- here a screen. And over there, this side of the window, the little mahogany table on which is lying a blue envelope containing ten dollars? Can't you see it? I can. I can almost touch it. But really, gentlemen? You ought to turn your backs, you know, because I'm very nearly naked.

DIRECTOR

I'm not sure that we can have this scene.

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh you needn't get red. You can leave that to him. (Indicating the Father)
And don't worry, he'll be pale enough in a few minutes.

FATHER

I think I ought to be allowed to say.....

STEPDAUGHTER

Talk! Talk!

FATHER

I don't want to talk. I want to explain.

STEPDAUGHTER

Yes. In your own way.

DIRECTOR

Look here, we've got to get this story line clear. If you all insist in taking a different point of view --

FATHER

But don't you see -- that's the whole trouble. Each of us lives in a world of his own. We each see things from a point of view that is peculiar to ourselves. For example, what I feel as pity for this woman (indicating the Mother) she insists on taking as a peculiar form of cruelty.

MOTHER

You drove me away. You can't deny it.

FATHER

There you are. She's at it again. She really believes that I sent her away with another man.

DIRECTOR

Well, did you, or didn't you?

(The Stage Manager goes off, right)

FATHER

I did, sir, but only because there was nothing else I could do. To live in a house with her -- always enduring her misery -- seeing that look in her eyes whenever his name was mentioned -- what else could I do but give her to him?

MOTHER

I wish I knew how to talk, but I don't.

FATHER

You didn't have to talk. You were an expert in silent suffering. Oh, the tyranny of tears.

MOTHER (To the Director)

He was always cleverer than I was. When he married me I was just a poor insignificant creature.

FATHER

But that's the very reason why I married you. I loved what seemed to be that humility in you. But before long I realized what a terrible poker it could be. You see, gentlemen, she pretends not to understand. She's mentally deaf. Deaf -- do you understand? Oh, I don't deny she has a sincere feeling for the children. But in her relationship with me she's deaf to the point of imbecility.

CHARACTER MAN

This is a part for you, Elizabeth.

LEADING

I don't know that it is. Maybe Olympia had better play it.

JUVENILE

Thanks. Thanks a lot.

FATHER

I never wished her anything but good, but you can see for yourselves how good
vsm
can be twisted into evil.

LEADING LADY

Look here! This isn't getting us anywhere! Are we going to rehearse or are we not?

DIRECTOR

Wait a minute. Maybe there's something in this, after all.

PROMPTER

Of course there is. But so far it doesn't seem quite motivated.

DIRECTOR

She means we want more of the facts. Can't you explain it a little better?

FATHER

I shall, sir, if you'll allow me. You see, it was like this. I had an assistant working for me in my business -- a secretary -- a good sort -- devoted, but not very intelligent. (Indicating the Mother) They seemed to have a good deal in common from the first time they met -- not that there was any evil in it. I don't suppose they could even have thought of such a thing -- at first.

STEPDAUGHTER

So you thought of it instead.

FATHER

I did nothing of the sort. I only meant well -- both to them and to myself -- I can swear to that. But in due course there came a time when I couldn't bear to speak a word in their presence because of that look of mutual appeal in their eyes. Can you imagine my feelings, gentlemen -- I, a man of intelligence --

knowing that they were silently asking each other how I was to be kept in a good humor -- knowing that I was the thing they both regarded as standing in the way of their happiness? Is it any wonder that it used to drive me into a state of intolerable exasperation?

DIRECTOR

Then why didn't you get rid of the fellow? Did you have to have him around the house?

FATHER

That's exactly what I did do, sir. I sent him away. But that only made things worse. From then on I had to put up with this wretched woman wandering about the house like a lost thing -- like some sort of a domestic animal that has had its keeper taken away.

MOTHER

That wasn't the only thing you took away from me. What about my son?

FATHER

That wasn't out of cruelty! I wanted him to grow up sane and healthy -- in contact with the real things of life.

STEPDAUGHTER

And now you see the result!

FATHER

Is that my fault? I tried to do my best by the boy. Maybe I was wrong to send him to the country, but that's only because I've tried, foolishly, to strive after a solid moral sanity.

(The Stepdaughter laughs)

FATHER

Oh, stop it! Stop it, I say!

DIRECTOR

Yes, please do as he asks, young Lady. You mustn't laugh at moral sanity.

STEPDAUGHTER

Not even in a client of Madame Pace's.

FATHER

You see, gentlemen, she's sneering at me for being a man. Why should we have to endure the contempt of these women for being made as we are? Do you understand now what it was that I couldn't abide? Contempt and pity.

MOTHER (Weeping)

Did you turn me out to starve because I pitied you?

FATHER

If I turned you out, it wasn't to starve. You were well provided for. I told her to go wherever she wanted to go, and to give me some rest from that look in her eyes.

MOTHER

So you were only trying to free yourself.

FATHER

Maybe it was freedom as much for me as for you. And yet, once she had gone, I knew that I'd lost more than she had.

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PROMPTER

In what way?

FATHER

Because I was alone while she wasn't. That's the proof of my good intentions. I sent her away, and then I missed her in my home. That's why I never lost sight of them, even when they moved to another town. I still kept track of them and watched her tenderly as her new family grew up around her. (To the Stepdaughter) You can tell them that's true.

STEPDAUGHTER

Indeed I can. I was growing up into a gangling child, with long plaits hanging down my back and long knickers hanging down in front -- a child so tall, I suppose -- when he used to wait at the school door to watch me coming out.

FATHER (Sharply)

What harm was there in that?

STEPDAUGHTER

Did I say there was any harm in it?

FATHER

You're hinting at something infamous. I tell you, I was lonely -- lonely as never before.

PROMPTER

But you had your son, hadn't you?

FATHER

No, I had no son. When he came home from where he'd been educated, he wasn't my son any longer. With no mother to bring us together, he had turned in on himself. There were no longer any ties between us, either of affection or of the mind. Is it any wonder that my thoughts turned more and more towards the woman I'd given up, and the other family that had come into existence through my own doing? I wanted to know how they were getting on -- whether they were happy and prosperous -- enjoying all the things that I'd lost? That's why I used to wait at the school door to see the child.

STEPDAUGHTER (Skeptically)

Ha! He would follow me down the street, smiling, and waving his hand -- like this. I used to wonder who he was, until one day I told my mother, and she guessed the answer at once. After that, she kept me away from school for several days, but when at last I did go back, there he was -- still waiting looking as silly as ever, with a cardboard box in his hand. He followed me across the street, stroking my arm, and pulled a lovely straw hat out of the box, with a big bouquet of roses -- all for me!

DIRECTOR

Really, I don't see how this is actable. It's much too literary.

LEADING MAN

A movie, possibly. But not a play.

FATHER

A movie? But this is life, sir.

DIRECTOR

Couldn't get it on the stage, my dear fellow. Quite impossible.

FATHER

Oh I'm not saying that you should. This is all background to the real drama that comes later on.

STEPDAUGHTER

It's after the death of my father.....

FATHER

Yes, that's when it begins. When the other man dies. They have nothing left then, and they come back to the old town, quite unknown to me, and she hasn't the wit or the common sense to let me know that they're in need.

MOTHER

How was I to know you had all this sentimental regard for us?

FATHER

That was always your trouble. You never knew anything -- never had any idea of what was going on in my mind.

MOTHER

I was alone with no one to give me any advice.

FATHER

Nonsense. I was the one who was alone.

STEPDAUGHTER

You had your consolations.

FATHER (Passionately)

Yes, I had -- I had! What would you expect? Was I so old a man that I could do without women, or so young that I could look for them without feeling ashamed? Oh my God, that's a thing no woman can ever understand. The misery of that situation! We do our best to walk before our fellow men with a certain mask of self respect. But every man knows what's going on in the secrecy of his heart. We most of us give way to temptations, but when we have the courage to admit it, -- they only despise us for our honesty.

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh, all these intellectual complications make me sick! All this talk, just to explain away the beast in man. You can't simplify beastiality with a lot of corcodile tears.

DIRECTOR

Look here, let's come to the point. What exactly happened?

FATHER

You're quite right to ask, sir. But the point is like a sack which requires to be filled before it will stand up. And to fill it, you have to put inside all the reasons and sentiments that have brought it into existence. I was out of touch with them for some years, and so I couldn't possibly know that after the death of that man they'd come back here in misery, and that in order to support the children, she (pointing at the Mother) had gone to work as a dressmaker in a place like Madame Pace's.

STEPDAUGHTER (Sarcastically)

Oh, not a dressmaker, please! Madame Pace is a Modiste. Very high class, you understand. Only the very nicest Society ladies form her clientele. But she also arranges matters so that her establishment may be of interest to better-class gentlemen as well.

MOTHER

I never knew that! It never entered my head, when that horrible old woman offered me work, that she had her eye on my daughter.

STEPDAUGHTER

Poor Mama! Of course not. You didn't know, either, that whenever I brought her the dresses you'd finished, she would find fault with them. This place was torn -- that piece was badly sewed. It would all have to go back and be done again. Unless-- unless --

MOTHER

Oh no! No!

STEPDAUGHTER

Unless, maybe, I could oblige her customers in other ways. And so you see, it was really I who had to pay in the long run. While all the time my poor mother kept on believing she was sacrificing herself for her children, sewing all through the night for Madame Pace.

DIRECTOR

Oh, I see now what we're coming to. This is how you met him one day? (He indicates the Father.)

STEPDAUGHTER

Yes, yes! An old client! There's a scene that's coming! What do you think of that?

FATHER

It's not as bad as you think. The Mother arrived in time.

STEPDAUGHTER

Almost in time.

FATHER

No, in plenty of time. In time! Naturally, I recognized her, and I brought them both home to my house. Now can you imagine her situation, gentlemen, and mine? Now do you understand my reluctance in looking this girl in the face?

STEPDAUGHTER

And yet he expects me to be a modest young lady, listening to his ridiculous talk about his solid moral sanity.

FATHER

But that's just where the drama lies -- in this very conscience that torments me -- in the fact that we each of us conceive ourselves as being a single personality, and yet we're different persons in the eyes of everybody we have dealings with. That's why it's so unfair to judge us by one action alone, as if everything about us could be summed up in one single event. Now do you understand the unfairness of this girl towards me? She took me by surprise in a place where she should never have been, any more than I should. And now she tries to give me a reality that is based solely on one fleeting moment of my life. Here's where our drama gets its greatest value. And then there's the situation of all the others -- his situation. (Pointing to the Son)

SON

Leave me out of this. I don't come in.

FATHER

Oh, yes you do.

SON

No, I don't -- and I don't want to. You know quite well it isn't my destiny to be mixed up with any of the others.

STEPDAUGHTER

You hear him! We're only common people, while he's a gentleman. Maybe you've noticed the look of scorn I give him from time to time, and the way he lowers his eyes whenever he sees it. He knows what harm he's done me.

SON

I?

STEPDAUGHTER

Yes, you! It's you I can thank for the kind of life I've had to lead. Didn't you deny us the intimacy of a home -- even the welcome you might be expected to give to a guest? We had no business coming into your world -- your damned little kingdom of legitimacy. Oh, but wait until we get to a certain little scene between him and me. He says I've bullied everyone, but that's only because of his own behavior.

try

SON

They always/to put me in the wrong, and God knows, it isn't hard. But think of me, please, as the son of the house sitting quietly at home one day, when in he walks a brassy young woman who inquires for his father in atone of voice that can only mean one thing. And then to see her come back, more brazen than ever, bringing that child with her! How do you think I felt at having to listen to her talk to my father in an impudent, familiar manner, and taking money from him in a way that implied he had to give it?

FATHER

But why not? It was perfectly right for me to want to help them. Surely you see.....

SON

How was I to know that? When have you ever told me anything about your private affairs?

FATHER

No, I never did. I admit that. But isn't that a dramatic situation in itself? Can't you realize how cruel your attitude must be to me and to your mother -- this Mother whom you won't recognize, even after she's come home? (The Mother weeps) You see.

STEPDAUGHTER

She's a fool to cry over him.

CHARACTER MAN

I suppose this is going to be my part.

SON

Well, don't think you're going to make anything of it.

CHARACTER MAN

I don't, old boy. I think it's a lousy part. Anybody ready for that cup of coffee?

FATHER

No, no, sir. It's a most important part.

DIRECTOR

Very badly developed.

PROMPTER

It's too early to tell.

DIRECTOR (Irritably)

It is not! At this stage of the first act we ought to know at least how he fits into the plot. But all he's done so far is to sit around on the stage and say nothing. We can't have that.

FATHER

You'll realize his importance later on, sir. You see this little boy is always keeping close to his mother. Do you know why he appears so frightened and humiliated? It's because of him. (He points to the Son) Perhaps the most terrible situation of all is his. He feels himself a stranger, more than any of us. Poor little fellow -- how mortifying it must be to be brought into a strange home, but of charity. Dear me. He's very like his father.

DIRECTOR

He'll have to go. Children are only a damn nuisance on the stage.

FATHER

You won't have to bother with him for very long. He soon goes -- and the little girl too. Indeed, she's the first to disappear from the story.

DIRECTOR

The little girl! Now there's another thing. We can't have a child that age....

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh, but you must -- you must!

LEADING MAN (Rising and crossing right)

Look here, Hnas. We've been talking this over, and we think they may have got something here.

LEADING MAN

Crude, of course. But there seems to be one or two actable parts.

DIRECTOR (Incredulously)

What? You like it?

CHARACTER MAN

It can hardly be any worse than the muck we've got now.

PROMPTER

They're right, you know. I'm interested.

DIRECTOR

There's no script. As far as I can see, most of the story takes place before the first act begins. There are two children who appear to have no function except to get us into trouble with the Labor Laws. And one of the other characters keeps telling us that he oughtn't to be in the play at all. And you tell me you're interested!

PROMPTER

We can get most of that straightened out.

DIRECTOR

Maybe we could, if we had an Author. But there's another thing. Who the hell ever heard of a play without an Author?

LEADING MAN
Can't you give them the address of an Author?

FATHER
No, no, sir. (To the Director) You must be the Author.

DIRECTOR
Me?

STEPDAUGHTER
Why not?

DIRECTOR
Why not? Because I'm not an Author. That's why not.

FATHER
Then why not be one now? You don't need any special ability.

CHARACTER MAN
May I quote you on that?

STEPDAUGHTER
It ought to be easy with all of us here.

FATHER
It's only got to be written down as we play it.

DIRECTOR
That's all very well, but who's going to do the writing?

FATHER
Anybody. (Pointing to the Prompter) Let her do it.

DIRECTOR
This is ridiculous. (Pause) Do you think you could?

PROMPTER
Certainly I could.

FATHER
We can give you the first scene at once.

LEADING MAN
O, come on, Hans. What can we lose?

DIRECTOR
Only a day's rehearsal time. But if you're all in favor --

ACTORS
We are. Yes.

DIRECTOR
Then I insist on beginning with ten minutes-sensible work in my office while we get the story line straightened out on paper. Come on.

LEADING LADY
Shall we all come?

DIRECTOR
No please. We'll never get finished that way. You people can break for ten

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minutes. (To Father) Do you think that'll be long enough?

FATHER

I'm sure it will.

(The Doorkeeper emerges from his box)

DIRECTOR

Then all six characters, please, into my office. And you, too, Miss Glubb. Everybody else back in ten minutes. And please don't be late.

DOORKEEPER

What's going on? Do you want me to try again?

DIRECTOR

No, no. (Indicating the audience) But if you can get those others out it'll suit me.

(The Director and the six characters go into the Director's office, followed by the Prompter. The Players rise and get their hats and coats.)

JUVENILE

Well, I've been at some odd rehearsals ---!

INGENUË

Isn't it exciting?

LEADING MAN

A quaint idea, turning up and pretending to be characters.

CHARACTER MAN

Not a bad way to get an audition. I suppose that's the game.

JUVENILE

I wouldn't say they had much experience -- any of them.

DOORKEEPER (To the Audience)

You be off now. You heard what he said.

LEADING MAN

I wonder if we can do anything with it?

LEADING LADY

With proper performance we might pull it through.

(They start going out, left)

STAGE MANAGER (Entering)

Has anybody seen my hammer? (He goes off, left)

CHARACTER MAN

If anybody calls, Mr. Pampanickli --

DOORKEEPER

If anybody calls, he'll be out of luck because I'll be out myself.

(Everybody leaves the Stage. The house lights rise and the Stage lights go off. The curtain remains up)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

The stage is still in semi-darkness and the house lights are on, as the Boy emerges from the Director's room and steals across the stage, examining things as he goes. He disappears behind the Proscenium, and presently the call-bells ring. The Stage Manager and the Doorkeeper appear.

STAGE MANAGER

Hey! Who's been ringing those call bells?

DOORKEEPER

That's wahwhat I'd like to know. There's too much funny business going on round my theatre.

(The House lights go out, and some odd lights on the stage come up)

STAGE MANAGER

Now somebody's playing with the switchboard. Ah, I see! Come out of there, young fellow. (He goes off and re-emerges holding the Boy by the collar) I thought it might be you. Do you want to get an electric shock?

DOORKEEPER (Observing the Audience)

Now you see what you've done! You've brought them all back again. Haven't you any sense?

STAGE MANAGER

Do you know what I do with people who fiddle with the switchboard?

DOORKEEPER

He boils them in size and hangs them in the Prop Room.

(The Boy whimpers, and tries to run away, without success)

DOORKEEPER

Now you just behave yourself, or I'll have to put you out there with the spooks.

(He takes a look around before going back into his Box)

I don't know what things are coming to. Butts all over the Stage, dirt in the dressing rooms, and gangs of peopel sitting out in front whenever by back is turned.

(Meanwhile voices have been heard in argument in the Director's room and the Stepdaughter, Father, Director, Mother and Child appear in that order.)

STEPDAUGHTER

No, no! He's trying to ruin it. I won't agree.

FATHER

Don't argue with him, please.

DIRECTOR

Come back. We haven't finished.

STEPDAUGHTER

It's our play and he can't alter it like that.

DIRECTOR

Just a little cleaning-up....

STEPDAUGHTER

I won't be motivated. I motivate myself.

(The Mother has meanwhile hurried to the Boy, whom she takes from the grip of the Stage Manager. The Stage Manager goes off, and presently the normal stage lighting comes on)

MOTHER

Has somebody been speaking harshly to you, son? Don't mind them.

SON

You spoil that child.

MOTHER

It's little enough to do for him. He hasn't very long.

SON

He's lucky.

DIRECTOR

Quiet, please. I'm Director here, and if I say that I'm not satisfied with the story line -- that certain points will have to be cleared up to make the thing practical for the Theatre, I know what I'm talking about.

STEPDAUGHTER

No you don't.

DIRECTOR

What! Are you suggesting that I don't know my job?

STEPDAUGHTER

Yes.

FATHER

For God's sake don't talk to him like that.

DIRECTOR

Well, I'll be.....

FATHER

She only means, sir, that you're not dealing with an Author now. Your Authors are nebulous things -- maybe not open to reason, but often tormented by doubts that you can play on. But we are Characters -- Facts -- awkward, perhaps, and viewable from all sorts of different angles -- but fundamentally unalterable.

DIRECTOR

Unalterable. In other words -- no rewrite?

STEPDAUGHTER (Firmly)

No rewrite.

(There is a pause, while the Director comes resignedly to his seat, and the Son starts to steal off, left.)

DIRECTOR

I might as well be doing Shaw. Oh well. I admit it never makes much improvement anyhow. Hey -- where are you off to? Stop that man!

(The Doorkeeper emerges and grabs the Son, who struggles.)

What's the idea?
DOORKEEPER

Let me go.
SON

You can't go now.
DIRECTOR

Yes, I can. The play's intolerable. Without some conventions life becomes impossible. Why should I have to stay here and reveal what no Son ought to have any part in -- the relationship of his Father and his Mother?
SON

You heard what the man said. You're not to go. Now -- now! None of that!
(The Son is struggling to draw a gun, which the Doorkeeper takes from him)
DOORKEEPER

Don't, son, don't!
MOTHER

Not now, you fool. This isn't the time.
STEPDAUGHTER

What's going on over there?
DIRECTOR

Tried to pull a gun on me, he did.
DOORKEEPER

A gun!
DIRECTOR

Yes, sir. He carries one. But he'd no business to disclose it.
FATHER

Not yet.
STEPDAUGHTER

Have you got a license for this thing? Loaded too!
DOORKEEPER

Give it back to me.
SON

Not in my theatre. Not unless you've got a license. I'm going to keep this in my box. You can have it when you go home. Not before.
DOORKEEPER

(He goes into his box with the revolver. The Stage Manager enters, and crosses to meet the Property Woman.)

What about the fountain now, you fool?
STEPDAUGHTER

I don't care. I'm glad if the scene is wrecked.
SON

Dramatis Personae

PROPERTY WOMAN
What about furniture?

DIRECTOR
Is there a divan in the prop room?

PROP. WOMAN
There's the green one.

STEPDAUGHTER
No--no. Green isn't right. It was yellow with a floral covering -- chic -- but very comfortable too.

(She laughs harshly and looks at the Father)

STAGE MANAGER (Off)
Here she comes! Look out below.

(A door flat hinged with two narrow wings begins to descend from the flies.)

PROP. WOMAN
There isn't anything of that sort.

DIRECTOR
It doesn't matter. Use whatever we've got.

STEPDAUGHTER
Doesn't matter! It matters very much!

DIRECTOR
We're only walking through it now. Please don't bother me with details.

PROMPTER
Don't forget the shop window.

FATHER
It should be long and narrow.

DIRECTOR (Shouting to the Stage Manager)
Rig something for a shop window, Bert.

STAGE MANAGER
OK. Give me time.

STEPDAUGHTER
And the little table, please. A little mahogany table for the blue envelope.

DIRECTOR
You heard her.

(The Stage Manager appears with braces for the Door which he starts to fix)

PROP. WOMAN
There's a nice little gilt one.

STEPDAUGHTER
Gilt!

DIRECTOR
Pay no attention to her. That's all right.

(The Property Woman moves around, fetching things and placing them in position)

STAGE MANAGER

Would you like a nice ramp? We've got one left over from "Macbeth".

DIRECTOR

No. No ramps. Only the shop window.

CHARACTER MAN

Thank God for that. There's nothing he likes better than making us fall off ramps in the dark.

LEADING LADY (Entering with Leading Man)

What on earth's going on?

DOORKEEPER

I don't know, Miss. It's not like the old days.

INGENUUE (Entering)

Oh Cyril. I thought I'd missed you.

JUVENILE

Not much chance of that.

LEADING MAN

I went out by the other door. (Coming down to Prompter) Is there any sort of a script yet, Miss Glubb?

PROMPTER

Yes, I've got an outline.

LEADING MAN

How about the parts?

PROMPTER

Interesting. Very three-dimensional!

LEADING MAN

You know what I mean. Which is my part?

PROMPTER

I'm afraid I'm not in a position to say anything about casting.

LEADING LADY

Do come along, Cyril.

LEADING MAN

That's an intolerable woman -- Miss Glubb.

(He returns to the line of chairs where there is the usual scuffle over who sits beside who. The Ingenue loses.)

FATHER

Then we need a mirror.

STEPDAUGHTER

And the screen. Don't forget the screen. Otherwise, I can't manage.

CHARACTER MAN

Manage what?

Seminario de Drama

STEPDAUGHTER

I've got to change my clothes.

CHARACTER MAN

I'm afraid we haven't got any screens.

DIRECTOR

Fetch a screen, Alice. If you haven't got one, you can rig another two-foot with a brace.

PROPERTY WOMAN

We've got plenty of screens. Have you forgotten all those French plays?

CHARACTER MAN

Oh, what a pity!

STAGE MANAGER

Is that door OK now?

DIRECTOR

It's too much down stage.

STAGE MANAGER

A nice time to tell me that! It'll take us half an hour to re-hang it.

DIRECTOR

Oh, very well. Very well. It'll do, I suppose. Please move these chairs farther back.

(The line of Players rises and they move their chairs further off stage. The Stage Manager starts to rig a frame for the shop window.)

INGENUE (To Leading Man)

May I sit beside you, Cyril? I'd like to ask you a few questions?

LEADING MAN (Stiffly)

I don't know that I can be of much help.

JUVENILE

Don't be coy, Cyril. You know all the answers.

DOORKEEPER (Depositing ashtrays in front of the Players.)

Ashtrays! And don't forget to use them!

DIRECTOR

Now! Have we got everything?

FATHER

I think we need some clothes pegs.

STEPDAUGHTER

Yes, several. It's a hat shop, you know.

DIRECTOR (To Property Woman)

See what you can do about a hat stand.

PROPERTY WOMAN

All right. I've only got one pair of hands.

DIRECTOR (To Property Woman)

See what you can do about a hat stand.

PROPERTY WOMAN

All right. I've only got one pair of hands.

CHARACTER MAN

-- to coin a phrase.

(She goes off and eventually comes back with a hat stand)

DOORKEEPER (TO the Players, before returning to his box.)

I'm the one that has to sweep up, you know.

DIRECTOR

Quiet, everybody! Please sit down over there. Now here's a rough outline. (Distributes paper) I'm going to ask Miss Glubb to take it down fully in short-hand as they walk through it. Do you think you can manage it?

PROMPTER

I shall have no difficulty at all.

DIRECTOR

Good! Have you got a pencil?

PROMPTER

I've got five!

DIRECTOR (After giving her a look of fury)

Well, get down as much as you can -- at any rate, the most important sections. (To the actors) And you people watch carefully and please make a note of the movements.

LEADING MAN

Excuse me, but you haven't told us yet who is playing which part. Isn't that rather important?

DIRECTOR

It may be assumed, Cyril, that you'll play the part with the most lines, whether it suits you or not.

LEADING MAN

That's all I wanted to know.

LEADING LADY

And who am I?

DIRECTOR

Please don't fuss, Elizabeth. I'm sure it'll be quiet obvious as soon as they start.

INGENUÉ

What about me, if there's only two women?

CHARACTER MAN

You'll have to play the little girl, my dear.

INGENUÉ

Oh, don't be ridiculous. You're pulling my leg.

DIRECTOR

Now, - please! Everyone's ready, so let's start the rehearsal.

FATHER

Rehearsal? Excuse me, but what do you mean by that?

DIRECTOR

A rehearsal for the actors to watch.

FATHERS

But we're the characters ourselves. Surely we must do the acting, not they?

DIRECTOR

No sir. If you're characters, your proper place is in the book down there.

PROMPTER

But there is no book.

DIRECTOR

I'm sorry. I forgot there was no book.

FATHER

I don't wish to start an argument, sir, but surely the actors aren't the characters. I daresay they'd like to be, but that's only pretense, isn't it! Now that you've an opportunity of seeing the real thing before you, surely it'll be better --

DIRECTOR

What are you talking about?

CHARACTER MAN (Rising)

I know what he's talking about. He's going to suggest that they act the play themselves and leave us out of it.

LEADING MAN

Ridiculous.

JUVENILE

I expected that was coming.

LEADING LADY

They can't do that.

DIRECTOR

Quiet, please. (To Father) Was that your idea?

FATHER

Well, sir, it seems to me that as --

CHARACTER MAN

Of course it's his idea. I knew that the whole thing was a racket from the start.

LEADING MAN

Are they members of Equity?

INGENUË

Oh, do give them a chance, please! Maybe they're awfully good.

JUVENILE

All very well for you, my dear. You don't want to have to play that child.

INGENUË

I'll be just as good as you'll be as the mother.

JUVENILE

Who said I was going to play the mother? I'm a juvenile.

LEADING LADY

There's only one juvenile part, and you can get it out of your head that I'm going to play the mother.

DIRECTOR (Shouting)

Will you please be quiet! None of you is going to play any part if these people have their way.

FATHER

I'm sorry if I've caused any argument. I simply thought --

DIRECTOR

Now listen here to me. You come along and tell me that you're characters. OK. That's all right by me. You're characters. But characters don't act in this theatre. Actors do the acting, so let's get that straight.

STEPDAUGHTER

But surely, if we are real --

DIRECTOR

I don't care how real you are. Nobody acts in my theatre except actors, members of the profession. How do you suppose you people would look in front of an audience?

STEPDAUGHTER

We'd look just as we are.

DIRECTOR

That's just it. You'd look just as you are and nobody would believe in you. My dear friends, acting is a serious business and can only be done by those who know how to act.

CHARACTER MAN

Hear! Hear!

LEADING LADY

I knew w.'d have Mr. Vanderveel on our side.

DIRECTOR

So you just confine yourselves to your confounded book and leave the rest to us. We know our business.

STAGE MANAGER (Emerging from behind the door and going to the Doorkeeper's box)

Where's my hammer?

FATHER

I see.

STEPDAUGHTER

I suppose it's the best that we can do.

DIRECTOR

Now, first of all, this vexed question of the casting. I'm afraid Olympia, that you will have to play the mother.

LEADING LADY

Of course.

JUVENILE

Oh, very well -- if you want the play to be ridiculous. It has nothing to do with me. Casting is your headache.

DIRECTOR

Thank you, Olympia. Now we must give her a name.

FATHER

Amelia, Sir.

JUVENILE (To the Ingenue)

His casting always is so ludicrous.

DIRECTOR

But isn't that your wife's real name? We'd better not call her by that.

FATHER

Why not?

DIRECTOR

It usually causes trouble. However, if the lady has no objection, I'm sure I don't mind.

FATHER

I always know her as Amelia. But do as you like, sir.

DIRECTOR

No. No. Amelia it shall be. Now to continue. George had better take the son.

CHARACTER MAN

That suits me. He doesn't say much.

DIRECTOR

What? That woman there as
And that means that Elizabeth will play the Stepdaughter.

STEPDAUGHTER

What? That woman there as me! (She laughs)

LEADING LADY

What's funny about that?

DIRECTOR

Do stop, please!

LEADING LADY

I didn't come here to be laughed at. If I'm going to be laughed at I shall leave the theatre.

STEPDAUGHTER

No. No. Please don't go. It's not you I'm laughing at.

DIRECTOR

What objection have you got to being played by this lady. Do you realize she is our star?

LEADING LADY

She referred to me as "that woman there".

DIRECTOR

Most people of taste would regard it as a compliment.

LEADING LADY

Thank you, Mr. Vanderveel.

STEPDAUGHTER

Please don't misunderstand me. I wasn't speaking about you, you know. It's myself -- whom I can't, somehow, see in you. I don't want to be rude, but really -- well, she's not the least like me, is she!

FATHER

Isn't it all a matter of the soul?

DIRECTOR

Souls be damned! You people haven't any soul until my actors here give body and form to it, voice and gesture. And believe me, my friends, these actors are quite capable of giving expression to much more lofty souls than we are likely to find in this little play of yours. If it ever succeeds at all -- which I doubt -- it will be entirely due to the efforts of my actors.

LEADING LADY

And also to Mr. Vanderveel's excellent direction!

DIRECTOR

Thank you, Elizabeth. I appreciate those kind words.

PROMPTER

Actually, this is a very good play, from what I can see of it.

DIRECTOR

Oh, you think so, do you?

PROMPTER

Quite profound! Very three-dimensional!

DIRECTOR (To the characters)

Miss Glubb, here, is our artistic conscience. You have that on your side at least. I only hope she's right, because I don't know what three-dimensional means. Now, Cyril will play the Father.

FATHER

Really, Sir. I don't want to question your judgment, but surely so smooth and handsome a face could hardly be expected to convey all the suffering that's in mine.

DIRECTOR

Good God! Do you suppose we haven't got any make-up! Cyril plays you, and that's the end of it.

FATHER

I see. I think I can understnad now why the author decided not to put us on the stage after all.

LEADING MAN (Stiffly)

It seems that this gentleman has some objection, too!

FATHER

No, Sir. I'm flattered, I assure you. But with all your art, I have a feeling that you'll find it hard to portray me.

LEADING MAN (Raising a laugh)

It certainly won't be easy.

FATHER

To portray me as I really am -- (He shakes his head) -- No, sir, I'm afraid -- I'm afraid the result will be, apart, of course, from the excellent make-up -- more as he supposes me to be than as I really am in here.

DIRECTOR

That's all right. He uses the Stanislavsky method. Now take your positions, please. The stage is ready. We're waiting to see what you can do.

STEPDAUGHTER

It's a little difficult to recognize the scene.

STAGE MANAGER (From the box)

What's that? Is she picking on me now?

DIRECTOR

My dear young lady, you surely don't expect us to construct the whole of Mme. Pace's shoppe for you? You asked for a door, a window, a table and some clothes pegs. You've got them. Now please go ahead.

STEPDAUGHTER

And an envelope.

DIRECTOR

OK. You've forgotten the envelope, Alice.

STEPDAUGHTER

A blue one.

PROPERTY WOMAN (Putting one on the table)

A white one.

DIRECTOR

A white one. Put it on the table, Alice. Now no more talk, if you please. Read the stage directions.

PROMPTER

Scene I. The young lady with Mme. Pace. Where's Mme. Pace?

DIRECTOR

Yes. Stop a minute. What about this Mme. Pace? Where is she?

FATHER

She isn't with us.

DIRECTOR
Then how the hell do we play the scene?

FATHER
But she's alive.

DIRECTOR
What good is that to me if she isn't here?

FATHER
Maybe she'll turn up.

STEPDAUGHTER
Excuse me. Can we have some hats?

(She takes them from the pegs by the Prompter's box)

ACTRESSES
What? Why? My hat?

DIRECTOR
More props!

FATHER
It's just that she wants to put them on the hat stand. A coat, too, I think is needed.

ACTRESSES
A coat, too! Why can't they bring their own props.

FATHER
It's only for a few moments. Please don't be offended.

PROP. WOMAN
This is really too much for a first rehearsal.

(She goes away in despair)

DIRECTOR
OK. Let them have their way. I can't see why it's at all necessary.

FATHER
You see, sir, it's like this. You mentioned Madame Pade. It may be that if we fix up the stage a little for her -- if we make it look more like her establishment -- she may come hereto join us, called into being by the atmosphere of her trade. There now. Let's see.

(A sinister thudding is heard. Everybody starts.)

DIRECTOR
My God! What's that?

STAGE MANAGER (Emerging from the Doorkeeper's Box)
I've found my hammer.

DIRECTOR
Well lose it again.

STAGE MANAGER
Don't worry. I will.

(He goes off left as the Doorkeeper emerges to speak indignantly after him. The Doorkeeper remains on stage to watch the rehearsal, and in due course the Boy slips into his Box unnoticed. Meanwhile the property door has slowly opened, and Madame Pace emerges, a distinguished-looking, if evil, figure in a dark, high-necked creation. Everybody is amazed, as there appears to be no way by which she could have got there.)

FATHER

I thought she'd come -- if we made a few adjustments.

DIRECTOR

Where has she come from?

SON

Where do any of us come from!

DIRECTOR (Shouting)

Pampanickli! Did you let this woman in?

DOORKEEPER

No. She didn't come in my way.

DIRECTOR

She must have. This place is like Piccadilly. Can't you keep your doors closed?

DOORKEEPER

Are you accusing me of not attending to my business? Because, if so --

DIRECTOR

OK. OK. Let's get on with it. I give up!

DOORKEEPER

I've been in this theatre twenty years and nobody's got through my stage door yet that I haven't seen.

INGENUE

They've been keeping her hidden somewhere.

LEADING LADY

A silly trick!

DOORKEEPER (To the Players)

What do you think those ash trays are for? Easy to see you don't have to sweep up!

FATHER

Please, ladies and gentlemen! Don't deny true existence to a reality which has been born through the power of the stage itself. You must believe in the magic of your own profession and not question the right of Madame Pace to be here. After all, she is a character like ourselves, and has a better right to exist on the stage than any of you people who call yourselves real.

DIRECTOR

Go on, please, go on with the play. I don't like this kind of talk.

JUVENILE

Excuse me, Mr. Vanderveel, but who is to play this part? There are only three of us you know, and I hardly imagine Miss Fintwhistle could play it. (She indicates the Ingenue)

LEADING LADY

It's certainly not my part.

DIRECTOR

Never mind who plays it. I can see we'll have to have a general switch round.

JUVENILE

Well, we'll see how it goes. Maybe + could handle it instead of that mother.

(Meanwhile the Stepdaughter and Mme. Pace have been talking in low undertones. Mme. Pace is shaking her head over some invisible garments which she holds in her hands. Then she indicates the room behind her, and the Stepdaughter hangs her head and nods.)

DIRECTOR

Well? What's going on?

CHARACTER MAN

I couldn't hear a word.

DIRECTOR

Louder, please. Remember, you've got to project.

STEPDAUGHTER

What do you mean -- louder! We're discussing things that can't be talked about at the tops of our voices. If I ever mentioned them before, it was only to embarrass him. (She points to the Father.) But with Madame, they're private.

DIRECTOR

Listen, my dear. I don't give a damn whether they're private or not. If you're got anything to say on the stage we've got to hear it. There's no point in your being there at all if these people can't hear what you're talking about. (Turning to the audience) Even if they have no business to be here at all.

FATHER

Anyhow, this conversation is supposed to take place alone in a room at the back of the shop.

STEPDAUGHTER (Maliciously)

No! It's better here.

DIRECTOR

What do you mean, no!

STEPDAUGHTER

There's somebody else supposed to be in there - somebody else who might har us if we spoke too loud.

DIRECTOR

Do you mean to say you're going to land another character on us? We're over the six already.

FATHER

She means me, sir. I've got to be there, too -- waiting behind that door, and they both know it. In fact, I think I'd better go behind it now so as to be ready.

DIRECTOR

Wait a minute. How do we know that you're there? Has that been made clear?

(The Father goes behind the door)

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh, let's get on with it. I'm burning to act this scene. If he's ready, I'm even more so.

DIRECTOR

My good woman, we've got to know first of all what it's all about.

STEPDAUGHTER

My God! You know already. She's been telling me that Mama's work is badly done and that the material has been crumpled. She says that if I want her to go on helping our family, I've got to do something for her clients.

CHARACTER MAN

This is interesting!

MME. PACE

I no wanta be mean. I no wanta take advantage my position.

DIRECTOR

What's that? Is that the way she talks? (The players laugh)

STEPDAUGHTER

Yes. Yes. She talks like that -- half English, half Italian. Don't you think it's amusing?

MME. PACE (Stiffly, glancing at the Players)

I trya speak English the best I can. Itta not seem polite for ladies and gentlemen to laugh atta me.

CHARACTER MAN

Oh! Damn good!

ACT II -

DIRECTOR

That's OK. I like it. It's just what we want - a little comic relief.
Go on talking just like that.

STEPDAUGHTER

Comic relief is good! I'm glad you see it that way. Laugh at dear, kind
Mae. Pace, by all means. You'll soon see what an amusing old signora she is!

MME. PACE

Not so old, please. I no lika called old.

STEPDAUGHTER

Tell them what you've just said to me.

MME. PACE

I say that even you no lika this gentleman behind the door, he will be kind
and no maka no scandal.

(The Mother has been slowly approaching from upstage, and now confronts Mae. Pace.)

MOTHER

You disgusting old beast - talking like that to my daughter!

STEPDAUGHTER

Keep quiet, Mother. Please don't make a scene.

MOTHER

Then send that woman away.

DIRECTOR

Let's get this clear. Is she supposed to be here too?

(He points at the Mother)

STEPDAUGHTER

No, not yet.

FATHER (Emerging)

That's just the trouble, sir. My wife should still be off stage. If
they're on together as early as this, the whole situation is impossible.

DIRECTOR

Then keep her quiet. Pretend you're not here, ma'am.

STEPDAUGHTER (To Mae. Pace)

Go on, Madam.

MME. PACE

I no speaka while your mother is present.

STEPDAUGHTER

Don't pay any attention to her. Go on and introduce this gentleman who wants
to be so kind to me. We've got to get through the scene somehow, haven't we?

MME. PACE

NO. NO. If she stay, I go. I am insulted, yes.

(She goes back through the door and slams it.)

STAGE MANAGER

Don't knock down the scenery!

(He runs to the back of the Door flat. The Director opens the door from the front and is amazed to find no one there except the Stage Manager.)

JUVENILE

That's not a very long part. I don't think I could play that

FATHER

Please! Please, ladies! Don't judge these parts by the number of lines in them. Madame Face is a magnificent creation, worthy of anybody's talents.

JUVENILE

You must judge allow me to judge that for myself.

DIRECTOR (Scratching his head before the door)

Now what do we do? If the woman's gone, how are we to go on?

STEPDAUGHTER

It doesn't matter. You know now what it is all about. We can go straight to his entrance. (To the Father) In fact, let's suppose you've come in already. No, don't go over there. Stand here with your head bowed a little. Try to look as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. Go on, let's hear you say, "Good afternoon, Miss" in that charming tone of voice you keep for such occasions.

DIRECTOR

Excuse me, but are you directing, or am I? Oh, go on! Do what she says. (To Prompter) Are you ready to write it down?

(He returns to his table)

PROMPTER

I've been ready for the past twelve minutes.

FATHER (With the half leering, half shame-faced manner of a respectable man in a brothel)

Good afternoon, Miss.

STEPDAUGHTER

Good afternoon!

FATHER (Anxiously peering under her hat)

I suppose - ah - this isn't the first time you've come to this establishment.

STEPDAUGHTER (Modestly)

No, sir.

FATHER

Been here before, eh? More than once, I daresay. (She nods) Ah well, then there's no need for us to be shy with each other, is there? Suppose we take off your nice little hat? May I?

STEPDAUGHTER

Please don't bother. I'll do it. (She takes it off and straightens her hair.)

MOTHER

Oh my God! my God!

(The Boy emerges from the Doorkeeper's Box, putting something in his pocket)

FATHER

Let me take it. I'll put it over here. A dear little head like yours ought really to have a prettier hat, shouldn't it? Wouldn't you like to choose something from Mme. Pace's stock?

(He takes one off the hat stand after hanging hers there.)

INGENUE

I say! What are you doing with out hats?

DIRECTOR

Keep quiet, please. Don't you know we're playing a scene?

STEPDAUGHTER

No thank you, sir.

FATHER

Oh come! come! I really would like you to accept a nice hat. There's no harm in that. It will make Madame happy.

STEPDAUGHTER

no sir. I couldn't wear it.

FATHER

I think I know what you mean. You're worrying about what may be said at home, if you arrive back with a lovely new hat. But I'm sure that can be explained.

STEPDAUGHTER

It's not that. Can't you see why it's impossible for me to wear it? Look! (She shows her black dress.)

FATHER

Ah! Of course. How stupid of me. You're in mourning. I'm very sorry indeed.

STEPDAUGHTER

Please don't feel embarrassed or sorry for me. It's I who am supposed to thank you. Forget that I am dressed like this.

DIRECTOR

Don't write that down. I like the bit about the hat, but the mourning - the mourning won't do.

LEADING MAN

It's in rather bad taste.

DIRECTOR

It'll all have to be treated with much more attack. Nobody'll get the meaning if it's played in that hangdog way. Let's see if you can do it, Cyril. Are you ready, Elizabeth?

LEADING LADY

Just a minute. I'll have to put on my hat.

(She goes to the hatrack and gets hers.)

FATHER

Aren't we going on?

DIRECTOR

No. The players are going to do it now. Get off the stage, please. And remember, Cyril, try to make something of it.

(The Father and Stepdaughter reluctantly move down left.)

LEADING MAN

I'll do my best. The situation is good if properly handled.

DIRECTOR

Now, Elizabeth, you're down right center - standing with your head bowed. Remember you're a girl selling herself for her mother's sake.

STEPDAUGHTER

But she isn't dressed in black.

LEADING LADY

I shall be dressed in black, my dear - much more fashionably than you are.

DIRECTOR

Now come on, come on. Let's show them how to do it. Entrance, Cyril.

(The Leading Man comes through the prop door, raising his eye-brows with the smile of a sophisticated roue. The Leading Lady droops her head with exaggerated modesty.)

LEADING MAN

Ah! Good afternoon, Miss.

(The Stepdaughter bursts into laughter)

FATHER

No! Not like that!

DIRECTOR

Quiet. If you persist in interrupting, we'll never get through.

STEPDAUGHTER

I'm sorry, but I couldn't help it. If anyone said, "Good afternoon" to me like that I'd burst out laughing - I really would!

FATHER

The tone was all wrong.

LEADING MAN

This is intolerable. If I've got to play a man coming into a bawdy house -

DIRECTOR

Don't pay any attention, Cyril. You're doing fine. Do it again.

(The Leading Man indignantly goes behind and then comes in again.)

LEADING MAN

Ah! Good afternoon, Miss!

LEADING LADY

Good afternoon!

LEADING MAN

I suppose - ah - this isn't the first time you've come to this establishment.

DIRECTOR (Loving to act all the parts himself)

Good! But keep it light, Cyril. Say it like this: "This isn't the first time you've come to this establishment," and then Elizabeth says, "No, sir."

LEADING MAN (After giving him a resigned smile)

Been here before, eh? More than once, I daressy.

DIRECTOR

No! No! Stop! Give her a chance to nod her head after the "eh". "Been here before, eh?"

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh, my God. (She tries to suppress her laughter.)

DIRECTOR

What are you laughing at now?

STEPDAUGHTER

Nothing. Please pay no attention.

DIRECTOR (Furious)

Go on, Cyril.

LEADING MAN

Not the first time, I daressy. Ah well, then, there's no need for us to be shy with each other, is there? Suppose we take off your nice little hat?

(The Stepdaughter laughs again.)

LEADING LADY

Really, I'm not going to stand here to be made a fool of any longer.

LEADING MAN

I quite agree. I've had enough of this.

STEPDAUGHTER

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

DIRECTOR

You've got absolutely no manners. That's the trouble with you.

FATHER

That's quite true. But I hope you'll excuse her.

DIRECTOR

Excuse her? It's inexcusable!

FATHER

I know, sir, but it had such a peculiar effect when - -

DIRECTOR

What's peculiar about it?

FATHER

Really, sir, I admire your actors very much indeed. I think they're wonderful - but you've got to admit they are not very like us.

DIRECTOR

Who wants them to be like you! This is the Theatre where a seduction has to look like a seduction - not like someone calling about the gas meter. (To the Players) I never could stand having the author present! He's never satisfied. Come on! Let's get on with the scene. And do please try to avoid laughing.

STEPDAUGHTER

Don't worry. I shan't laugh any more. Not at the nice little bit that's coming along.

DIRECTOR

Well then, after you have said, "Please don't feel embarrassed or sorry for me," you'd better come in promptly with "I understand." Get me?

STEPDAUGHTER

What does he understand?

DIRECTOR (Taken back)

Why - er - why you're in mourning, of course.

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh, but that's not what he says at all. When I tell him not to pay any attention to my dress, he answers, "I know what we'll do. We'll take this little dress off."

DIRECTOR (Flinging his script on the floor)

And then there's a riot in the theatre! I expected as much.

STEPDAUGHTER

But it's the truth.

DIRECTOR

Then we can't have the truth.

STEPDAUGHTER

Well, what do you want instead?

DIRECTOR

Now just leave this to me. I can see I'll have to make it playable myself.

STEPDAUGHTER

You will not! I know what you want to do with it - turn it into a silly little sentimental scene about a sad little tart and a kind old man. I know what you want. He's to ask me why I am in mourning and my eyes are supposed to fill with tears when I tell him that it is only two months since poor Papa died. But I won't have it that way! He's got to say to me, "I know what we'll do. We'll take this little dress off," and I, with two months of mourning weighing down my heart, I shall go behind the screen, and with these fingers tingling with shame - - -

LEADING LADY (Indignantly)

Well! I must say.

DIRECTOR

For heavens sake! What do you think you're after?

STEPDAUGHTER

The truth! The truth!

DIRECTOR

It's not possible, I tell you. Not on the stage!

STEPDAUGHTER

Not possible indeed! In that case, thank you very much. I'm off.
(She turns to go.)

DIRECTOR

Now please be reasonable. Don't you walk out on me too.

STEPDAUGHTER

I'm not going to stay here if that's the way you've fixed it up with him in your office. It's he that's talked you into this, so that he can get on with his damned cerebral drama and act all his noble remorsees and his torments, just to curry sympathy. But I want to act my part.

DIRECTOR

Exactly! That's all you care about! But there are several parts besides yours. His, and hers, and his, and his and hers. I'm sure it would be very nice from your point of view if every character could tell all his troubles to the public in a nice big monologue or a one-hour lecture, but we're not going to have it in this theatre. And you needn't pretend to be so modest and disgusted. You've already confessed that it wasn't the first time you've played this game at Madame Pace's.

STEPDAUGHTER (Abashed)

Yes. I admit that - but the others only seem to be him to me now.

DIRECTOR

I don't know what that means. If it's an alibi, it's a very poor one.

STEPDAUGHTER

Once you've gone wrong, you symbolize everything that ever happens to you in one experience only. It is he who is responsible for all my faults, even before I was born.

DIRECTOR

Will you stop blaming the man for everything, and give him a chance to act?

STEPDAUGHTER

How can he act all his damn remorsees and his moral torments if he doesn't act this scene first! - - if he's not going to be discovered with me in his arms! - - if he is not going to find out who I am - the child that he used to watch coming out of school?

(Mother breaks into sobs)

DIRECTOR

Well then - go on with it, and I'll use as much as possible.

STEPDAUGHTER

You'd better ask that mother there to leave us.

MOTHER

No. No. Don't let that go on. Please stop that, sir.

DIRECTOR

It's only a tryout. What's wrong with you?

MOTHER

I can't bear it.

DIRECTOR

But if it's already happened, nothing now can make it any worse.

MOTHER

But it hasn't already happened. It's taking place now - all the time. I'm not just pretending to be in torment. I feel every minute of the thing, in all its horror.

DIRECTOR

All the time? What do you mean?

MOTHER

It's happened, and yet it hasn't happened. I have to stand here and watch her - hear her talking - and yet at the same time I know that she's left me. She's run away and left me, sir, alone with these two men.

STEPDAUGHTER

Oh, the joy of that moment!

MOTHER

There's no joy in it for me. It's terrible.

DIRECTOR (Thumbing madly through his papers)

What scene is this?

FATHER

She's talking about the last scene, sir. That's my big moment - when the younger ones are gone, and the three of us are left alone together.

DIRECTOR

The last scene! Then why the hell are we talking about it now?

JUVENILE

This is all damn confusing.

DIRECTOR

There's no last scene at present.

FATHER

Oh yes, there is, sir. That's just where we differ from you ladies and gentlemen. We live in an eternal present. Our future is every bit as real as our past, and just as unalterable. You may perhaps exert some influence on your own futures, and in that way you're lucky. But ours exists already. Think of it, sir, shackled to the same fate night after night - playing the first act, but knowing that the third act has already been performed, and must be performed again. That's why it's useless to argue with this girl or to try to cut anything out. She'll beat you every time.

ACT II - 24

DIRECTOR

I never said I was going to cut anything out. As a matter of fact, I think this situation is an obvious climax to the first act - I mean the moment when, I suppose, the Mother comes in and surprises you both together.

FATHER

Exactly. The situation that culminates in her final cry.

STEPDAUGHTER

YES, Yes. You can't get away from it. I hear it all the time. Listen, I don't care how you put me on - half naked or fully dressed - whatever way you like - so long as I have one arm bare. Because standing here, with my head against his breast, and my arms twined round his neck (She takes the position and commences to act the part) like this, I saw an artery pulsing in the flesh. And then, as if the sight of that artery had filled my body with disgust, I closed my eyes, and buried my face on his shoulder - thus. Go on, Mother. Scream! Scream out, the way you must.

MOTHER (Running forward with a scream)

No! No! It's my daughter. Don't you know who she is? My daughter!

DIRECTOR

That's fine! I like that. And then, of course, curtain.

FATHER

Of course! That is as it must be.

DIRECTOR (To the Prompter)

Have you got that? This is the curtain. Curtain here.

PROMPTER

Yes. I've got it.

STAGE MANAGER (Dashing to the wings)

Curtain! OK. Here they come!

(The front curtain closes swiftly behind the Director)

DIRECTOR

Damn you for a half wit! I was talking to Miss Glubb, not to you. Take the thing up again. Hi, in there! It may be the proper curtain but it's ruined my throat.

(He fights his way through the curtains, followed by the Prompter.)

END OF ACT II

ACT III

The house dim, and the curtains part on a scene of some activity, although, to begin with, the scene is exactly as before. Everyone is on the stage except the Stage Manager. The Director is standing center, supervising the raising of the curtain. The Leading Man and the Leading Lady are smoking and talking, on the right. The Juvenile and the Ingenue are in conversation with the Character Man. The Son is helping the Property Woman to carry on a property fountain with a curved basin, which he directs her to bring up left center. The Stepdaughter and the Father are going through some papers with the Prompter. The Mother is wiping the Child's nose, and the Boy is running around watching the movement of the scenery. The Doorkeeper emerges from the Box and looks suspiciously around.

DIRECTOR (Referring to the curtain)

That's right. Take them across. All the way.

DOORKEEPER

Come on. Hand it over.

SON

What do you want? (To the Property Woman) Over here. A little further.

DOORKEEPER

You know what I want. You've pinched that gun out of my box.

SON

No I haven't.

DOORKEEPER

Well, somebody has. When my back was turned.

SON

It wasn't me. I haven't been in there at all.

STAGE MANAGER (Appearing)

Have you finished with this door?

DIRECTOR

Yes. You can fly it. We won't need it for the next Act, will we?

(The Stage Manager goes up to the flies, and presently the Door is hoisted out of sight. The Property Woman starts to clear all the chairs from the center of the Stage. The Character Man takes his chair upstage, and starts to read his paper outside the Doorkeeper's Box. The Juvenile and the Ingenue try to engage the Son in conversation without success. The Prompter takes her papers down the steps to her usual seat.)

STEPDAUGHTER

No. This act will show how er were all brought back to his house (Indicates the Father) in spite of his objections. (Indicates the Son)

DIRECTOR

I know. I know.

STEPDAUGHTER

If I'd had my way we would never have gone there. I hope that's quite clear.

MOTHER

It was a great mistake. I ought to have known how it would turn out.

DOORKEEPER

Then I'd like to know who has been. It can't fly, you know.

DIRECTOR

What can't fly?

DOORKEEPER

That gun. Somebody's been into my box and pinched it.

DIRECTOR

Don't bother me with that now. It'll turn up. (To the Property Woman)
Strike those chairs. They're in the way.

DOORKEEPER

It had better. What's more, I have my suspicions. (He goes back grumbling)

MOTHER

I did my best to keep the peace.

STEPDAUGHTER

She means she tried to stop me from annoying him - from paying him out.
But look here, we're not going to play all this Act in the garden, are we?

SON

We've got to have the fountain.

STEPDAUGHTER

Yes, but you're indoors.

SON

Exactly. That's why I can't come into it.

STEPDAUGHTER (Turning to the Director)

But that isn't possible. It can't be in the garden, because he's (Pointing
at the Son) shut up alone in his room. And then there's all the section
about that miserable Boy wandering around the house. That's all indoors too.

DIRECTOR

Maybe so, but we can't change the location of the scene three or four
times in the course of one Act.

CHARACTER MAN

I remember when they did.

DIRECTOR

In the old days, maybe, before we had Unions to worry about.

INGENUE

I agree with Mr. Vanderveel. It spoils the illusion to have the curtain
always coming down.

FATHER

Illusion! Do you realize how painful such a word is to us?

Director

Painful or not, this is the Theatre, and you may as well recognize the fact.

FATHER

That's just what I mean, sir. You and your Actors seem to regard the whole thing as an illusion - a sort of game.

LEADING LADY

A game indeed!

LEADING MAN

If you were a pro, sir, you'd realize how unlike a game it is

FATHER

Of course, Of course. All I meant was that a play isn't real to you, and so you treat illusion lightly. But consider our position, please. We have no other reality outside this thing you call illusion.

DIRECTOR (To Prompter)

I daresay you know what he means, Miss Glubb.

PROMPTER

He means that what is art to us is reality to them.

FATHER

Not only to us. What is reality itself? Just think about it for a moment. Can you really tell me what you are yourselves?

DIRECTOR

Who? Me?

FATHER

Yes, you, sir.

DIRECTOR

I'm myself.

FATHER

If I were to tell you that that's not strictly accurate, because in a sense you're also me -

DIRECTOR

I would say you're crazy. (The Players laugh)

FATHER

It's all very well to laugh, but don't be too certain who you are. (To the Leading Man) What about this gentleman here who has to be me, and who wants us to believe that through his art he can become me? At what point does he cease to be himself? (Pause) You see, I've caught you in a trap.

DIRECTOR

That's not a trap. It's just a quibble. There's no use asking me who I am, because I know.

FATHER

It's a question, sir, that a character may always put to a man. Because a character has really got a life of his own, while a man, - forgive me, sir, if I put it this way - a man may be nobody at all.

DIRECTOR

So I'm nobody, am I?

FATHER

Please don't be offended, sir. I only wanted to defend the fact of my own existence.

PROMPTER

He's right, you know. When you come to think of it, about half of our ideas about ourselves are just illusions. What's real today may seem like fantasy tomorrow.

FATHER

More than half, young lady. (To the others) She understands how little reality any of you have got beyond this fleeting illusion of the present.

DIRECTOR

He'll be saying next that these six characters are more real than I am.

FATHER

Of course, sir. There can't be any doubt about that.

DIRECTOR

Indeed!

FATHER

I thought that was understood from the start.

DIRECTOR

That you're more real than I am?

FATHER

Isn't it true that what you call reality can change from one day to another?

DIRECTOR

Of course it can change. It's always changing. It happens to everyone.

PROMPTER

Not to them. What's what he means.

FATHER

That's it. You've got it.

STEPDAUGHTER

That's the big difference.

FATHER

Our reality doesn't change. It can't.

STEPDAUGHTER

It's fixed eternally.

MOTHER

That's what's so terrible.

FATHER

Ladies and gentlemen, you ought to bare your heads before out terrible reality. You ought to be more humble when you consider that your own is little more than a transitory will-o-the-wisp.

DIRECTOR

Bare our heads indeed! Oh for God's sake, let's get on with this play. You all talk a great deal too much.

PROMPTER

But it's interesting, - what they're saying.

DIRECTOR

Interesting, nuts! It's a pack of lies

FATHER (Shocked)

Lies, sir. Did you say lies?

DIRECTOR

Yes, lies. To begin with, you want us to believe that you're all characters - things created by an Author, who never wrote the play in which you're supposed to appear.

FATHER

Exactly.

DIRECTOR

Well, that's absurd, to begin with.

STEPDAUGHTER

What's absurd about it?

FATHER

I can't understand how a man of the Theatre can say such a thing. (Turning to the others) If he has ever considered it at all - if he has ever analyzed the very basis of his own profession - if he has even thought for a moment, with the thought that comes through suffering

PROMPTER

Mr. Vanderveel has never suffered. He's much too well-adjusted.

DIRECTOR

Will you please stop talking about me as if I was some sort of an exhibit.

FATHER

But, sir, your case is so surprising. It amazes me.

DIRECTOR

In all my life I've never come across a character who steps right out of his part, and talks and argues and speechifies the way you do. Has anybody else?

PROMPTER

Yes.

FATHER

If you've never come across one, sir, it's because most authors hide their mechanics of their creation. You never are conscious of the struggles they have with their work before it acquires that independence that gives it a real existence, quite apart from the mind that has called it into being. It's only after the battle has been fought and won that you ever meet us.

DIRECTOR

I don't follow that at all.

PROMPTER

He means that once real characters are born, they become independent even of their author. Anybody can imagine them in situations where the author never thought of placing them, and you can have your own ideas on what sort of people they are, quite regardless of what the author intended.

DIRECTOR

That's all theory. Miss Glubb has taken a course in playwriting.

CHARACTER MAN

I know. It's one of the things I dislike most about her. (He rises and takes his chair off.)

FATHER

But is there anything surprising in what she says? And if it's true, imagine what a misfortune it must be for characters like us to be born in the imagination of an author, and then denied any real life in a play. Think of what would happen if those characters were left alive and yet without life - doing what we're trying to do now, after having done their best to persuade their creator to finish his work. We've all tried in turn - I - she, - that poor Mother there.

STEPDAUGHTER

That's quite true. I don't know how many times I've tried to tempt him - sitting there at his desk, as the evening grew darker and darker, and the shadows came creeping into the room. And out of those shadows we would whisper to him - tempting him - pleading with him. (She moves almost imperceptibly into the action of her audition of the first act.) Here we are! Don't you see us now - hiding in the shadows? No, no, don't turn up the lamp. We want you to see us clearly, and it's only in the darkness that the eye of the imagination can work without distraction. Here we are - your own creations - that Mother with her pleading face, longing for a smile from the sulky son who refuses to speak to her. Don't you know us? I, with this child clinging to my hand - the little frightened boy wandering around all by himself. And this man, always shambling after me - trying to peer under the brim of my hat. How I despise him - and through him, all men - except perhaps you, the matrix of my existence. Oh my God - can't you sense the scenes that we could play in front of you? (Turning fiercely on the Father) Be off! Can't you see he wants to be alone with me? I'm the only one who can do it. I'm the one who tempts him more than any of the others.

(As she speaks, the Players slowly recognize the passage, and whisper excitedly, one with another.)

FATHER

You were probably at the root of the trouble. I expect you were as irritating to him as you are to me.

ACT III - 7

STEPDAUGHTER

Whatever I am, I am as he made me. (To the Director) It's my belief that he left us in a fit of disgust for the theatre, and for the public that has made it what it is.

DIRECTOR

Oh now, you mustn't run down the public. If it wasn't for them there wouldn't be any plays at all.

(He smirks out into the auditorium, and then suddenly recollects himself with a scowl)

SON

It wasn't that. He was disgusted with us, and all we stand for.

FATHER

Whatever the reason may have been, I appeal to you, sir, to stage the play in such a way that nobody is sacrificed - that none of us has to appear merely as a discreditable fact in somebody else's story. That's the way she would have it, (He indicates the Stepdaughter) but I'm sure you can see through her devices.

DIRECTOR

We'll have no play at all unless you all stop talking, and try to remember that drama is action.

STEPDAUGHTER

Some time ago you were complaining of too much action. You were threatening to throw about half of it out, just because it couldn't all take place in one set.

DIRECTOR

I don't say we've got to throw it out. All I say is that it's all got to be knit together into one location. We can't have the Son in the bedroom, and the child in the garden, and your little brother wandering around the house through God knows how many rooms, trying to make up his mind to . . . By the way, what is it that he's planning to do?

SON

You'll find out.

MOTHER

The situation is destroying him, poor child. Can't you see how he's wasting away?

DIRECTOR

OK. OK. So long as it destroys him wherever the other child is doing her stuff. The garden or the house, whichever you like, but not both.

STEPDAUGHTER

The little girl has got to be in the garden. It's because of the sun. It's my one happiness - to see her playing there in the sunlight, after the misery and the squalor of that horrible room where we all had to sleep together. Do you realize how terrible that was - to have to lie with my contaminated body next to hers - having her creeping into my arms, and trying to hug me? But in the garden it's different. Whenever she sees me, she runs to bring me flowers, and to take me by the hand.

ACT III - 8

(She kneels and holds out her hand towards the Child who has been playing with the Boy around the fountain. The Child runs to her. The players are now grouped to the right of the stage, leaving only the Characters on the left.)

DIRECTOR

That's not bad. We'll have it in the garden, then.

STAGE MANAGER

Does that mean you want a garden?

DIRECTOR

Yes.

STAGE MANAGER

I'll see what I can do.

STEPDAUGHTER

She doesn't like the bigger flowers. Only the little ones. That's my darling. You look lost, with those big eyes full of wonderment. It's the only garden you'll ever know, my pet. A cardboard fountain and make-believe flowers, and over your sweet, innocent head, the shade of trees cut out of canvas and gauze. But it's real enough to you, isn't it - real enough for the bitter little comedy you've got to play.

(As she speaks, a cut-cloth of trees descends behind the fountain, blotting out the Doorkeeper's Box.)

DOORKEEPER

Hey! What's this?

DIRECTOR

She's too young, you know. We'll never get away with it.

PROPERTY WOMAN

Yes. There'll be trouble over that.

DIRECTOR

Maybe we can make her a little bit older.

SON

She's got to be very small. You'll find out why.

DIRECTOR

Quiet, please. Now here's how we'll attack it. That boy, instead of hiding in the house, will have to move around in the garden, peeping out from behind the trees. And, by the way, we'll have to give him a line or two to say. Can't have somebody on the stage who says nothing at all. I've got it. Suppose the little girl catches sight of him amongst the trees and runs over to him! He could say a word or two then.

STEPDAUGHTER

He'll never say anything so long as that Son is around. He frightens and upsets him too much.

SON (Making for the exit)

I'll be glad to go. Nothing would please me more.

DIRECTOR

No! You can't walk out now. Come back.

(The Mother tries to stop him too.)

DOORKEEPER

Where's that gun? That's what I want to know.

SON

Please let me go. I've got nothing to do with anything that happens.

DIRECTOR

How have you got nothing to do with it?

STEPDAUGHTER

You needn't bother stopping him. He won't go.

FATHER

You see, he still has to play that terrible scene in the garden with his Mother.

SON

I'll play nothing. I've always said so. You may as well let me go.

STEPDAUGHTER

Very well. Go, then. (The Son turns away, and then halts as if held by some force.)

You see. He can't go. He's chained to us by an invisible force. Even I can't get away just yet, although God knows I'm aching from the moment when I'll be free at last. But he'll never be free - not even after the thing happens.

DIRECTOR

What is this thing they're always talking about? What does happen?

(He crosses downstage and consults with the Prompter who comes up on the Stage with her papers.)

STEPDAUGHTER

You'll find out. Come along, Mother. We've got to go through with it. She doesn't like all these people to see how deeply she feels it all. And yet she wants to get close to him, and to come to the moment when they are alone together - she and her only son, and that charming Father. All together!

DIRECTOR

Her only son? But I thought . . . (He points at the Boy.)

STAGE MANAGER

I'll get you some lights for this.

(He hastens off to the switchboard side, and as the scene proceeds, the stage lights right, are dimmed, and the lighting on the garden, left, is built up until an illusion is complete.)

SON

No, no! If I can't get away I'll stay. But I'll act nothing.

FATHER (To the Director)

You can make him do it, sir.

SON

Nobody can make me do it.

FATHER

Of yes, he can.

STEPDAUGHTER

Wait! Wait! First of all, the little girl has to go to the fountain. Come along, my dear. Let's see whether there aren't any little ducks swimming around. Maybe you can catch one when Mama isn't looking.

(The Players move forward to observe the action more closely. The Stepdaughter brings the Child to the fountain, where she leaves her with the Boy. The Mother approaches the Son.)

MOTHER

Come, Son.

SON

Go away! Tell them there's no scene between you and me.

DIRECTOR

Be quiet. Let's hear what she has to say.

MOTHER

It was this way. I had gone up to his bedroom . . .

SON

To my bedroom. don't you understand. Not in the garden.

DIRECTOR

That doesn't matter. We can concentrate the action afterwards.

SON (To the Leading Lady)

What are you doing - staring at me like that?

LEADING LADY

Nothing. I was just watching.

SON (To the Character Man)

You too! Studying your part, I suppose?

CHARACTER MAN

Naturally, old boy. Any objection?

SON

It's revolting.

DIRECTOR

You ought to be grateful for their interest. You're not giving them an easy job.

ACT III - 11

SON

It's like living in front of a mirror - a distorted mirror - that throws our images back at us with a disgusting leer.

CHARACTER MAN

I resent that.

DIRECTOR

Please move further away, everybody. There's enough to upset us as it is.

(The Players move back into a group, right, unmasking the fountain, on the lip of which the Boy is now sitting. There is no sign of the Child.)

SON

They can act it for themselves.

DIRECTOR (To the Mother)

Go on, please. You were saying that you'd gone to his bedroom.

MOTHER

Yes - up to his bedroom, because I couldn't bear this silence any longer. I wanted to talk to him - to try to explain a little of what was in my heart. But as soon as he saw me coming in . . .

SON

Nothing happened. I went away to avoid a scene. Don't you understand?

DIRECTOR

Is that true?

MOTHER

Yes, it is. He went away almost at once.

DIRECTOR

Then what are we arguing about? That means we don't need any scene in the bedroom.

FATHER

Maybe not, sir. But it's not over yet. This is when he went out into the garden.

SON (Crying out)

Leave me alone! Leave me alone! I don't like scenes!

MOTHER

I went after him. I had to tell him everything. He'd never given me a chance. I wanted my son back.

FATHER

You've got to do it. For your Mother! For your Mother!

SON

I'll do nothing.

FATHER

For God's sake obey me. Do you want her to humiliate herself to you? Be a son for once in your life!

SON

What madness is that has got into you all? Do we have to parade our family shame before everybody? I won't do it, I tell you. And the Author's with me in this. He made up his mind that he wouldn't put us on the stage at all.

DIRECTOR

Then why the devil did you come here?

SON (Pointing at the Father)

He came here. I never wanted to.

MOTHER (Trying to embrace him)

For pity's sake, listen to me.

SON

No, No, you vulgar, ignorant cow! Why did you have to come back? Can't you see that you and your brood are ruining my life?

(She clings to him, and he strikes her. With a screaming sob she falls into the arms of the Father. The Director and the Players are rightly indignant.)

SON

Now do you want me to go on with it? There's more.

DIRECTOR

I think that will do.

LEADING MAN

That certainly can't stay in.

LEADING WOMAN

That explains quite a lot.

INGENUUE (Wide-eyed)

If it was anybody but his Mother.

SON

All right. Cut the rest with my Mother if you want. But you've got me into the garden now, so you may as well have the curtain. You asked for it.

JUVENILE (Cynically)

I suppose we may as well.

DIRECTOR (Doubtfully)

I don't know. What comes next?

SON

I walked away, and as I was passing the fountain . . .

DIRECTOR

Yes? Where the two children are playing. By the way, where's the little girl?

SON

The Boy was sitting on the edge of the basin, looking at something inside.

DIRECTOR

My God! The child! Where is she?

SON

I sprang to his side, and leapt in.

ⁿ
(Sensation breaks out amongst the Players. As the Son leaps in the fountain, the Boy jumps up and runs to the edge of the trees where he turns. The Son picks up the body of the Child and holds it in his arms.)

LEADING MAN

It's the Child!

JUVENILE

Is she dead? How did it happen?

DIRECTOR

KEEP BACK, everyone. Look at that Boy.

(The Boy has got the revolver in his hand.)

INGENUE

Oh! He's got the revolver.

SON

He's standing there stiffly, with eyes blazing like a madman's, looking at me as I hold his little drowned sister in the fountain.

CHARACTER MAN

Take that thing from him - somebody!

(The Stepdaughter, with a cry of terror, runs across with the Father, and together they tear the Child from the arms of the Son. They carry her off, swiftly, followed by the three Actresses, arguing shrilly.)

SON (Advancing on the Boy)

You little bastard. Give me that gun.

MOTHER (Screaming)

Don't let him do it! Stop him, somebody.

(The Boy retreats behind the tree-cloth, followed by the Son. There is the brief sound of a scuffle followed by a shot. The lights go out.)

MOTHER

My son! My son! He's dead.

(Loud confusion on the stage. Presently the lights come on again, and the Mother has vanished too. The Doorkeeper and the Stage Manager appear.)

STAGE MANAGER

Sorry, Mr. Vanderveel. We blew a fuse.

DOORKEEPER

What's the matter? Have you all gone crazy?

DIRECTOR

Where are they?

CHARACTER MAN

They've gone.

ACT III - 14

DIRECTOR

Pampanickli, what's happened to those people?

DOORKEEPER

I don't know. They didn't go out my way.

DIRECTOR

Good God!

STAGE MANAGER

Made quite a bang, didn't it. Finished your play?

LEADING MAN

A delightful little play, I must say.

CHARACTER MAN

Never mind, old boy. It was only your imagination.

DIRECTOR

My imagination!

CHARACTER MAN

Of course. How about a drink, Cyril?

LEADING MAN

I think I will. People like that don't really exist.

CHARACTER MAN

For the first time in my life, I'm inclined to agree with you, Cyril.

(They go off together. The Director sits down listlessly.)

DIRECTOR

My imagination! Have I been wasting the entire day on a lot of . . . ?

PROMPTER

Is that all, Mr. Vanderveel?

(He pays no attention to her, so she goes off with the Property Woman)

DOORKEEPER (To the Audience)

On your way, now. No more fun tonight.

(He goes off.)

DIRECTOR

The entire day on a lot of What the hell?

STAGE MANAGER

Have you finished with the lights?

DIRECTOR

Yes. You can turn them out. We'll rehearse again tomorrow.

(The Stage Manager's exit is followed by another blackout.)

DIRECTOR

For God's sake do you have to leave me in the pitch dark? Can't you give me a work light or something?

SEMINARIO MUL. DISCIPLINARIC
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RECINTO DE RIO PIEDRAS

STAGE MANAGER (Off)

Sorry, Mr. Vanderveel.

(As the Director gropes his way from the stage, the green light on the ramp comes up again, showing the Father, the Mother and the Son slowly mounting it with heads bent. Suddenly from a dark corner of the stage the Step-daughter emerges with a little cry of joy, and runs swiftly up the Auditorium and out of the Theatre. The green light fades with the departure of the three Characters, and then the House lights rise. There is no curtain.)