

The Language of Flowers

Cast of Characters

EMMA: A 20-some, slightly built, plain-
featured Caucasian female.

MARIA: Her stocky older sister.

WALTER: A 40-some year old male.

Scene

A living room and rudimentary kitchen. The furniture, walls, curtains - everything throughout the house ghostly grays. The lights dim. In the living room/kitchen - a couch and chair, table and chairs, a large refrigerator, stove and sink (none of which need to work), and books. Lots of old books. Many on botany and more of poetry. And Emma's herbarium. All around pots of dead flowers. Clocks. Stopped. And a curtain cord. A door to Emma's bedroom. A door to Maria's bedroom. The door in and out. A writing table downstage.

Time

Present day.

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING: A neglected house in a small town.

AT RISE: The refrigerator lit by moon or street lamp light. EMMA, who's dressed in white and wears a red camellia, and MARIA - dressed in black - drag a body from Maria's bedroom across the floor to the refrigerator. They stuff the body inside.

MARIA

(Hushed.)
Mum's the word, Emma.

EMMA

Not really.

MARIA

You know what I mean!

EMMA

All right! It's our secret.

MARIA

He's gone on a long trip.

EMMA

Antarctica.

MARIA

(Does a take on EMMA. Then -)
Good. Remember - he brought this on himself.

EMMA

He fell on the knife.

MARIA

A heart attack. Then he - fell on the knife.

EMMA

Unlucky.

MARIA

Not for us. Agreed?

EMMA

As you say.

MARIA

Now back to bed.

(MARIA and EMMA cross to
their rooms.)

MARIA

Sweet dreams.

EMMA

Are there such things?

(Lights to black. MUSIC.)

ACT I

SCENE 2

SETTING: The neglected house.

AT RISE: EMMA sits at the downstage table using writing implements of the 1860's. During EMMA'S and WALTER'S voice overs, dawn lightens the stage.

EMMA

(Voice over.)

The Gameskeeper wove forget-me-nots into his lover's pubic hair. Callused hands tender as dawn. Was there ever a love such as that? Were I Lady Chatterley, would you weave those white blossoms into my own auburn garden? I ache for such a coronation. Hurry to me. All living things cry out to be consummated.

(Touches herself and in bliss hears the following.)

WALTER

(Voice over.)

I pillow my head like Heracles at Hera's breast and suckled there I am confessed. Such are your letters to me. All these miles and walls mean nothing when I read them. Time, distance, the universe collapses in on itself and I am in your embrace, in you, in you, in you. And so deeply rooted we are all together one thing, and from us one unconquerable seed. I am like a flower. The lily - pistil thrusting up from the cup of its passion waiting for your sweet breath to christen it. And, yes, I am in you, in you, in you again and again and again till we come to where god begins and mortality ends.

MARIA

(Offstage.)

Emma, Grace is awake!

EMMA

Yes. Yes, she is.

MARIA

(Enters cradling GRACE - a doll.)

Up bright and early. Come see her.

EMMA

In a minute.

MARIA

Are you all right?

EMMA

I am now.

(Enters.)

MARIA

Good. She worries about her favorite aunt.

EMMA

Her favorite and only, Maria.

MARIA

One doesn't suggest the other! Look. She wanted her summer dress this morning.

(Tends to GRACE throughout.)

EMMA

But it's only March.

(Prepares a breakfast of bread and water during -.)

MARIA

Grace knows what she wants!

(Shift.)

Don't you, sweetheart? Pardon? Yes, she does look a little - flushed. Spent.

EMMA

And I should be what?

MARIA

Happy as a daffodil - which, by the way, are in full bloom outside my window. Ask Grace.

EMMA

Really? Are they the first?

MARIA

She laughed to see them. Didn't you?

EMMA

I used to. And what handsome lads! They follow the snowdrops. Remember? Snowdrops. Those Fair Maids of February. So brave to be out so early.

MARIA

Grace prefers tulips.

EMMA

They're much later.

MARIA

We know when it's spring!

EMMA

Of course, anyone can tell the seasons just by what's blooming. But what about time? Can you imagine that, Maria? Telling time by flowers. A clock garden! It is possible! I've read of such.

(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)

Plants arranged so their blossoms unfurl in order - chronologically - according to the arc of the sun. The warmth of the earth. Hour by hour. Each petal opening such a hushed transcendent minute passed!

MARIA

You've neglected your garden.

EMMA

With cause, Maria!

MARIA

Emma.

EMMA

(Considers the dead plants
during -.)

I had the frights last night.

MARIA

Is that unusual?

EMMA

Everything magnified. The clocks tick-tocking. So I stopped them. See. But then the silence.

MARIA

They need restarting. Grace is on a strict schedule.

EMMA

I went to wake you, but you slept so beautifully. How is that possible?

MARIA

I'm free of doubt.

EMMA

Martyrs and tyrants alike.

MARIA

Which am I? Emma?

EMMA

First one - then the other.

MARIA

It had to be done and now that it's done we must move on.

EMMA

It's crippling me!

MARIA

Life cripples you. Put your mind on other things.

EMMA

I'm afraid of my mind! What happens to it. What's happened to you.

MARIA

I've lost myself in Grace. That's what's happened to me.

EMMA

It serves your purpose.

MARIA

She exists for both of us.

EMMA

She speaks to you.

MARIA

I'm her voice.

EMMA

But I only hear what you have to say.

MARIA

Why resist when embracing her is such a comfort? Such - relief. She gives us hope of something better. Don't you, child? Helps me sleep. Could help you. Here. Hold her. Reach out to her.

EMMA

(Crosses away.)

No.

MARIA

Why?

EMMA

She's - ambiguous.

MARIA

What on earth does that mean?!

EMMA

I won't negotiate with heaven.

MARIA

Is that what we're talking about?

EMMA

It's been the extent of your conversations since girlhood. It used to be church, the sermons, witnessing. Until the - incident. Now it's Grace. I'm exhausted with your proselytizing. I'm not made for profession. It isn't in me. How I wish it was.

MARIA

That's nonsense.

EMMA

Nonsense! What you're embracing is nonsense.

MARIA

(On top of EMMA'S line - a
vicious mad turn.)

Say no more! Say nothing more, Emma! Your - denial wounds her!
She understands every expression, every word. You know that.

EMMA

I know -!

(Shift.)

What she means to you.

MARIA

There. See. Your aunt does appreciate her niece. A -pre-ci-
ates. No, Mommy loves Grace. And she'll - protect you to her
last dying breath.

EMMA

Maria - you remember how it was? Yes? Before. Before Mother's
illness. Father's - melancholy.

MARIA

You're not to speak of him again!

(Shift.)

It's better forgotten.

EMMA

Is memory such a convenience?

MARIA

Your questions are tiresome.

EMMA

More so for me than you.

MARIA

You were always too sensitive -.

EMMA

Yes, like my flowers.

MARIA

Flowers crave light.

EMMA

It's my eyes that need the shadows. Not my soul. But even the
cereus blooms at night.

MARIA

Where no one can *admire* it.

EMMA

What's to admire? I'm more bitterroot than rose.

MARIA

But she has her distasteful - fan mail. Doesn't she, Grace?
Those - earthy letters.

EMMA

They keep the dark at bay.

MARIA

Must you depend on strangers?

EMMA

They will never touch me!

MARIA

No one's - touched you. How could they - locked away here. Out
of sight.

EMMA

Out of sight, yes. But I know folks gawk and stare and point and
talk with sidelong glances. Children peeping in through the trees.
She's an odd duck they say. What of that man who used to visit
her? Do they know how I was dashed up against the rocks?! How
vanquished a heart open to every sort of weather? To think for a
moment I might have flown away. Gone free. But no. No!

MARIA

All right. Calm yourself.

EMMA

Now I'm rooted here.

MARIA

Where it's safe.

EMMA

Safe? Yes. As long as the electricity stays on -.

MARIA

Emma!

EMMA

Maria, you slept while my heart throbbed and my mind spun. Whirled
out of control! I felt frantic. Like a bird trapped and beating
against a window. So I wrote and wrote and wrote until dawn
whitened the sky and I wept to see it.

MARIA

Those queer little poems, as well.

EMMA

Yes! Words are *my* saviors, Maria. *My* steadfast companions. And
a lexicon *my* bible.

MARIA

If we could find meaning in a dictionary, Emma, then a grand vocabulary is all we'd need for salvation.

(A loud knocking on the door.)

EMMA

(Hushed. Panic.)

What's that?

MARIA

Who's that?

EMMA

Is it Thursday?

MARIA

The dry goods come on Wednesday.

EMMA

Is it Wednesday?

MARIA

It's Thursday, Emma.

EMMA

My god.

(The knocking again.)

MARIA

Don't make a sound.

EMMA

(Calls out.)

No one's here!

WALTER

Emma?

MARIA

Emma!

EMMA

Emma?

MARIA

Silence means there's no one here.

WALTER

Emma, it's me, Walter. I've come to visit - just as I promised.

MARIA

Promised?

Walter? EMMA

I have a present for you. WALTER

You don't know a Walter. MARIA

We're indisposed. EMMA

We? MARIA

I can wait. WALTER

She's sick. It could be weeks. MARIA

Oh. Too bad. I'll just leave it outside the door. WALTER

Walter what? MARIA

I hope you like it. WALTER

So many names. EMMA

It is perishable. WALTER

One of *them*?! MARIA

Goodbye. WALTER

But how? EMMA

And how did he find us?! MARIA

Their letters find me. EMMA

Should have used a post office box. MARIA

EMMA
And who would have collected them?

MARIA
No one and more the reason -.

EMMA
Don't worry! He's left.

MARIA
Walter -? Are you still there? Walter?! Go get it.

EMMA
What?

MARIA
The gift, Emma. The man said it's short-lived. It could be flowers. Roses.

EMMA
Myrtle. For the virgin's grave.

MARIA
It's not in season.

EMMA
Neither am I.

MARIA
You should have read geography. Botany's corrupted your mind.

EMMA
Father made me.

MARIA
We never speak about Father! Ever. It's upsetting. For me and Grace. See how she fusses. There, there, sweetheart. Aunt Emma's always been awkward. Shhh-.

EMMA
You go get it -.

MARIA
I have your niece in hand!

EMMA
Someone might pass by.

MARIA
So curtsey and give them your back. Go. Go!

EMMA
All right. But if anyone stops to inquire.

MARIA

Go on!

(EMMA removes a key from inside her bodice, crosses, fits the key into the lock, turns it, and now the briefest moment before the door burst open and WALTER explodes into the room. He wears a mis-matched collection of clothing - garish and either too big or too small. One hand is behind his back.)

WALTER

Greetings, Emma!

(MARIA dashes off into her bedroom.)

WALTER

I've been waiting for this moment a very - very long time.

EMMA

Dear god.

WALTER

Yes, it's time for prayers.

EMMA

Get out!

WALTER

Not the welcome I expected.

EMMA

We can't accept callers.

WALTER

What about *gentleman* callers?

EMMA

They make appointments.

WALTER

But it's always the unexpected isn't it? Life. Here.
(Shows the flower.)

The present I promised. Does it send the proper message?

EMMA

Hyacinth. The wedding flower.

WALTER

In homage of our relationship.

EMMA

(Accepts them.)

Relationship?

WALTER

Coyness is a charm.

(Gets busy checking the streets and so forth.)

The young used to eat the hyacinth bulbs and roots to repress their sexuality. Crush the roots and made a paste which applied to their genitals suppressed the hair that otherwise would nest there.

(Up against EMMA now.)

But I'm too forward.

EMMA

Yes!

WALTER

I've always been told that. It's my nature. Where's the key?

EMMA

(Hand to her chest.)

You know about flowers.

WALTER

I know about a great many things. 'There was the Door to which I found no Key

(Snatches key from around EMMA'S neck.)

EMMA

(Horrified.)

What are you doing?!

WALTER

'There was no Veil through which I might not see.

(Locks door.)

Some little talk awhile of ME and THEE;

(Drops key into a pocket.)

There was - and then no more of THEE and ME.

EMMA

The Rubaiyat.

WALTER

Precisely. What a fascinating place you have. It's like a - tabernacle - full of dust and secrets. You are Emma, aren't you?

EMMA

Yes.

WALTER

And dead flowers.

EMMA

They grew that way.

WALTER

The fate of all flesh and cellulose. Do you know who I am?

EMMA

Walter?

WALTER

My name, but neither my substance nor my meaning.

EMMA

Who's that?

WALTER

Mine. I'm not entirely dependent upon my superiors.

EMMA

But who are you?

WALTER

Your paramour. Your indentured scribe. Playful pen pal. Cyrano, dear girl. Free at last.

EMMA

Cyrano.

WALTER

Think penal institution.

EMMA

That Cyrano -? No. Impossible. Unacceptable -.

WALTER

You're exactly how you described yourself - a little bird. Translucent. Alabaster. Exquisite.

EMMA

You're in prison.

WALTER

Who isn't?

EMMA

We were never supposed to meet.

WALTER

Yes. Dead man writing. It affords freedom of expression. For both of us.

EMMA

How did you escape?

WALTER
Details. Where's your roommate?
(Checks EMMA's room.)

EMMA
Roommate?

WALTER
The second voice.

EMMA
Second?

WALTER
Unless you're a ventriloquist and a parrot.
(Jiggles MARIA'S bedroom door.)

EMMA
Hide, Maria!

WALTER
Ah - Maria full of grace.

EMMA
Not anymore.

WALTER
What?

EMMA
She's contagious.

WALTER
Lot of that going around.
(Pounds on the door.)
Reveal yourself, Maria - or I'll tear the door off its hinges!

MARIA
All right.
(Appears at the door.)
Here I am. But be quiet. Grace sleeps.

WALTER
Amen.

EMMA
Her - .

MARIA
Baby.

WALTER
Baby? Never mentioned that either.

EMMA
Didn't think it mattered.

MARIA
Emma!

WALTER
Well, now it's double indemnity.
(Yanks MARIA out into the
room.)
Who else is here?

MARIA
Just Grace.

WALTER
But no one in a hidden room? The secret cellar? No deviant uncle
sharpening his scythe or an aberrant aunt darning with bloodstained
knitting needles. The - miscreant father?

MARIA
How did you know?

WALTER
Bingo.

EMMA
Maria!

MARIA
But he's run-off.

EMMA
To - Chili.

MARIA
Yes.

EMMA
Where it's cooler.

WALTER
Compared to this place, everywhere else is a sauna.

MARIA
What do you want?

WALTER
For starters. Food. I'm ravenous. What's to eat? Haven't had
a decent meal in three days.

EMMA
Why should we feed you?

Do you have another choice? WALTER

Food is overrated. MARIA

And apparently so is light - but it's how most people thrive. Anything in the fridge? WALTER

(Blocking.) MARIA

No. MARIA

It's gone bad. EMMA

Gone empty. MARIA

Empty. Right. EMMA

Broken. MARIA

Exactly. Overworked. EMMA

Emma! MARIA

I bake bread. EMMA

There. She could cut a slice. MARIA

That's all? WALTER

Or two. EMMA

We're more interested in feeding our souls. MARIA

You're dying for an after life. Is that it? WALTER

Jokes are wasted on us. MARIA

Laughter is a balm, dear girl. WALTER

Bread or no?!

MARIA

Here.

EMMA

(Applies the knife to the loaf.)

Sit. I'll serve you.

WALTER

All right. Start with the manna. 'Give me again my hollow tree, A crust of bread and liberty.' Pope.

EMMA

(Serves the bread.)

We eat it plain -.

WALTER

And live the same way.

MARIA

For our own good.

EMMA

We believe something if we say it enough times.

MARIA

The truth bears repeating, Emma.

EMMA

Because it's as variable as the weather!

WALTER

Ladies. Let this suffice. It's the sweetest bread I've ever eaten.

EMMA

That's what Father said.

WALTER

A discerning man.

MARIA

A forgotten man!

WALTER

All will be.

MARIA

Eat and leave.

WALTER

You're impatient.

You're her - correspondent. MARIA

A poet. WALTER

Yes. EMMA

A man on death row. MARIA

What man isn't? WALTER

Not anymore. EMMA

He's dangerous, Emma. MARIA

Again, what man isn't? WALTER

There. MARIA

I was speaking metaphorically. But Emma - apprehends me. We've bared our souls to one another. WALTER

You've exchanged -. MARIA

Pornography? WALTER

That. Probably with 20 other women as well. MARIA

Pornography -? EMMA

Thirty-three. WALTER

Thirty-three? EMMA

The number doesn't matter. WALTER

Then why do you remember it? MARIA

WALTER
Emma and I were intimate - intellectually. The others filled the spaces in-between her letters.

EMMA
I wrote every day.

WALTER
And not even that was enough.

EMMA
No.

MARIA
He's a convict. Escaped.

WALTER
A door opened. I walked through it.

EMMA
How could this happen?

WALTER
Who can account for the vagaries of life? The alchemy of attraction? The heart finds its own way.

EMMA
Should we call the authorities?

(MARIA signals EMMA no.)

WALTER
(Springs to his feet.)
You'll call no one! Or call out. There's no going back there. Prisons are the black flower of civilized society. Hawthorne paraphrased.

MARIA
You must leave! They'll trace your letters here. Or something. It's only a matter of time.

EMMA
But I've stopped the clocks.

WALTER
Perfect. I knew we were like-minded.
(Picks up knife.)

MARIA
This is no place for a man!

WALTER
There you're wrong! Where society kept me was no place for a man. There I languished in hell.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

Twenty-three hours of every day in a cell the size, shape and dimensions of a walk-in closet. The stench of my toilet for company. And all that loneliness, Maria. Abject, relentless, pulsating loneliness. Day after day, minute after interminable minute, one excruciating second after another. The nut-job in the adjoining cell announced each quarter hour because he knew what time does. I cut out his tongue. Even the guards thanked me for that.

(Cuts a slice of bread.)

MARIA

See what your letters have done!

EMMA

They weren't invitations.

WALTER

More like pleas.

EMMA

Just finish the bread.

MARIA

He wants something else.

WALTER

Water? I got at least that much in jail.

(EMMA pours water.)

MARIA

You should just leave! You're an intruder. A threat. This is our house. We have a right to be safe.

WALTER

All rights are abrogated by power! And the disenfranchised *service* the gatekeepers. That's why power is such an aphrodisiac. That's why it's good to be god. You get to play with the universe.

EMMA

Play -?

(Glass of water to WALTER.)

MARIA

We're toys to him, Emma. To break as he sees fit.

WALTER

Catnip. Meow.

EMMA

Will you hurt us?

WALTER
Inevitably. But how? When? Why? Who knows? I live only in
the present. Moment to moment.

EMMA
But you must have a plan!

WALTER
The best laid plans, unlike the best laid women, come to nothing.

MARIA
We don't understand you.

WALTER
(Accosts MARIA.)
School is open!

MARIA
I've already learned this lesson.

EMMA
Please. Get out before it's too late!

WALTER
I'll get what I came for first.

EMMA
Money? We have none. See, our purse is empty.

WALTER
Like your cupboards.

EMMA
Food. Water. What more -?

MARIA
Look at us. There's really little else.

WALTER
But you denigrate yourself. There's a whole lot of you.

EMMA
I hear baby Grace.

WALTER
What?

EMMA
You're baby, Maria.

MARIA
Emma?

WALTER
You have a mother's ear.

EMMA
Go to her.

MARIA
But -.

EMMA
She requires comforting. Go.

MARIA
Are you sure -?

EMMA
Go! It's all right. GO!

(MARIA exits.)

WALTER
She has windows in there.

EMMA
They haven't been opened in ages. Probably stuck that way now.
Besides we must keep to ourselves.

WALTER
Must -?

EMMA
It's - prudent.

WALTER
But you're wanting rescue.

EMMA
Why?! Why - Walter? Why should you frighten us?! What have we
done? The man who wrote me letters is someone else. He's kind
and compassionate. Tender. A friend. You're an impostor!

WALTER
I thought myself convincing.

EMMA
Upsetting.

WALTER
Terrifying?!

EMMA
All right!

WALTER
Good. It's my prison persona. But difficult to shed. Too much
time in that - correctional facility. Or too little. Still, I
should regard you with more civility. 'For I was in prison, and
ye came unto me -.

EMMA
'Hungred and gave me bread'. I know it. When will you go?

WALTER
After I'm set free.

EMMA
Too many contradictions!

WALTER
How many different men did you write to?

EMMA
At a time - only one.

WALTER
I'm honored.

EMMA
I'm wounded.

WALTER
Why? Did I neglect you?

EMMA
But - pornography?

WALTER
(Considers the books.)
It's outlawed. Bare-nakedness as well. Artfully composed photographs of female pulchritude clad in skimpy bathing suits or scraps of underclothing pass through - after being thoroughly violated by the the guards. These are traded among the incarcerated like baseball cards. Taped above beds like shrines where monastic monsters practice onanism with religious fervor.

EMMA
What do you mean?

WALTER
My god, you're as virginal as you appear. But not as you wrote.

EMMA
I never sent you a photograph.

WALTER
Because?

EMMA
I'm afraid of cameras.

WALTER
They are intrusive.

So - unforgiving.

EMMA

Depends upon the light.

WALTER

I can't see in the light.

EMMA

Yourself or others?

WALTER

There are no others!

EMMA

Why, for god's sake?!

WALTER
(Slams book shut.)

EMMA

Why, Walter? Only in their presence am I unhappy with myself.

WALTER

But I've come to praise you.

EMMA

I can give you bread, but little else.

WALTER

You've already given me so much more.

EMMA

Pardon -?

WALTER

Your words, Emma. Pure rapture. The imagery more sublime than any ordinary trick of light. Compressed and true. Striking your mark with unerring accuracy. But always something different each time I read them. And I read them time and time again. Though they made the walls thicker; time heavier.

EMMA

How?

WALTER

They're the only things I fled with. Here, in my pocket.

EMMA

You believed them.

WALTER

I wallowed in them - though I suffered their effect.

EMMA

Suffered?

WALTER

'The moist damp earth of my being awaits; awaits the planter; awaits the seed. The loam never broken, yet rising up to greet the plow; urgent to be sundered, a castle keep welcoming the plunder.' Well, here I am standing at your battlements.

(Up against EMMA again.)

EMMA

I wrote them for myself.

(Retreats with book as shield.)

WALTER

And sent them to me.

(Toys with curtain cord.)

EMMA

Like a prayer to heaven. I didn't expect -.

WALTER

Any physical tete-a-tete. And just so you told me things you'd never tell even God.

EMMA

I didn't - don't know you.

WALTER

But you did - do inflame me.

EMMA

They're words.

WALTER

Apart, yes. But the way you strung them together. They brought me to such a pitch.

(Snaps cord.)

EMMA

You're being crude.

WALTER

Nature of the beast.

EMMA

I wrote poetry.

WALTER

Letter sex all the same. Yes. Mail call had its double meaning in the big house. Some sold their - erotica to the highest bidder. They were trash. Worse than pulp fiction. But yours came with flowers, Emma. Pressed carefully between the pages. Violets - self pollinating. Symbol of virgin marriage. An iris - unrequited love. A mallow - forgiveness for having written twice in one day. I looked them up. The language of flowers. Did I read you correctly?

EMMA

You're keep too close.

WALTER

Yes, intercourse - of all sorts - is safer from a distance.

EMMA

Intercourse?

WALTER

You're starved for it.

EMMA

Stay away from me!

(Breaks free.)

You must stay clear of me! No hands. No hands. No touching.

(Hides in her bedroom.)

WALTER

(To EMMA behind the closed door.)

I adore you! I would lay you across a bed of rose petals and like a Roman emperor subject your geography to magnificent ministrations. Hail Emma.

(Shift out of character.)

Damn. Where the hell am I? Back in prison? Or a mausoleum? Sure. Dante's icebox.

(References refrigerator.)

Two - what - spirits wafting about. Poe's tell-tale hearts.

(Listens at refrigerator door.)

Or - or Willians' wounded women. Yeah. And look at this terrific set. A winter's tale is brewing here, Walter. But a tale of what, my boy? Well, what else?

(Back in character.)

Murder. Got to be. Murder most foul. Yes. Exactly. Someone died. Somebody died here, ladies. Alert the authorities! Summon the cops. Sound the alarm!

(Looks for a body.)

Search the place top to bottom!

(Nearly opens refrigerator.)

MARIA

(Enters and on top of WALTER'S lines.)

That's enough! Keep your voice down. You'll attract attention.

WALTER

(Leaves refrigerator unopened.)

Attention -?

MARIA

Wake up the baby.

WALTER
To hell with the baby!

MARIA
Not my Grace! Do you hear me? Never my Grace.

WALTER
It's an expression. You shouldn't take me literally.

MARIA
Where's Emma?

WALTER
She's - regrouping.
(Drops onto the couch.)

MARIA
What did you do to her?

WALTER
What did she do to me? A better question.

MARIA
Entertained your -.

WALTER
Libido?

MARIA
What?

WALTER
It's a civilized word, Maria. But a bit antiseptic. Especially
for a woman who's been - mislaid.

MARIA
Will you speak plainly?

WALTER
Come, come. 'A woman's virtue is man's greatest invention.'
Skinner. Cornelia Otis.

MARIA
My virtue is none of your business.

WALTER
You've had a child. You can't claim virginity.

MARIA
Why *can't* you leave us in peace?!

WALTER
And not pieces?

MARIA

A knife can cut both ways.

WALTER

There's a difference between a loaf of bread, Maria, and the forbidden flesh.

MARIA

Yes. The one cries out when the blade strikes home.

WALTER

(Grabs MARIA.)

And you know this how?

MARIA

One can only imagine.

WALTER

That's a cryptic reply.

MARIA

And it's all you'll get. So get out!
(Breaks free.)

WALTER

Have compassion, Maria. I'm a hunted man. Dogs at my heels. Armed constables with very little discretion and way too much latitude are seeking me as we speak.

MARIA

You murdered someone.

WALTER

I was accused of murdering someone. I was convicted of murdering someone. Neither of those statements testifies to my guilt!

MARIA

A poor defense.

WALTER

It's the motivation, Maria. Shouldn't that matter? The tantalizing why. Tell the jury why, and let reason be their judge! Right?

MARIA

I'll tell you nothing!

WALTER

(Shift.)

Oh? And what would you confess to? Hey? What?

(Crosses to plants.)

The slaying of all these poor defenseless plants? Yes, the evidence gives you away. What a slaughterhouse! Mums and chrysanthemums unarmed and left to your sinister neglect.

MARIA

They're Emma's. Once forsaken, she forsook them. They prove nothing.

WALTER

(Holds up pot.)

Au contraire. Habeas corpus, madam! A body is all that's required. No matter how broken. And when *your* day of reckoning arrives, the judge will ask, 'How can we as a civilized society allow this sort of depraved indifference?!'

MARIA

You're ridiculous -.

WALTER

Reprehensible the court said! Reprehensible. But ridicule the law, Maria, at your peril. Because the facts are clear. Yes. Your - fingerprints are everywhere. Here.

(Places pot on refrigerator
and reaches for refrigerator
handle.)

On this door handle -.

MARIA

It's his fault, hang you!

WALTER

(Steps away from the
refrigerator.)

His? Who he?

MARIA

Nevermind.

WALTER

What fault?

MARIA

You're a stranger.

WALTER

Will *he* return?

MARIA

Very unlikely.

WALTER

The rogue.

MARIA

Yes! He's gone. Gone, Walter. Left this house - cold.

WALTER

Daddy?

MARIA

No! Maybe. It doesn't matter. You must do the same!

WALTER

How so? And leave you in the lurch as well? Impossible. I'd be a knave. The curtain's up. The game's afoot and drunk or sober I always perform with alacrity and dexterity. And finally to devastating effect.

MARIA

Madman!

WALTER

In every sense of the word! And now I'm - shipwrecked with two mythical beings lost in time. Mired in a different era. One untouched by being, the other - blackened by it. One in waiting. One in - mourning. I am beguiled. What washed you up on these isolated shores? What keeps you sequestered?

MARIA

Now hear me - Walter, you may accuse us, but we don't have to testify.

WALTER

Accuse? Testify to what? Innuendo after innuendo, Maria. I'm becoming more and more suspicious.

MARIA

You've overstayed your uninvited visit.

WALTER

So, where *have* you hidden the *human* bodies? Of course! In these very pots.

MARIA

Craziness -.

WALTER

No wonder they've all died. Too much bile.

MARIA

There haven't been - bodies -.

WALTER

A body, then. What with the bread knife? A couple of whacks with this and even Caesar would succumb. 'Beware of Maria, she has a keen and not-so-hungry look -'

MARIA

Put the knife down. You're frightening me.

WALTER

Myself or what I represent: a beating heart; the sweat and stink of the living. The commingling of bodily fluids. The hairy ape.

MARIA

Men always hurt women!

WALTER

YES!

(Knife into the table.)

Yes, we do! Women and children. Our nubile youth. The sweetest flowers. A - father - his son. Damn. This plays too well.

MARIA

There! There. And that's why you're here. Traveled to this forgotten village. Found us out. Yes, Walter. But Emma is - is - fragile. A - a - gardenia. You can see that. Already she's trembling in her room. What pleasure could there be in crushing such a bloom?

WALTER

I took no pleasure damn-it!

MARIA

No. But you will. Food, water and - copulation. What else do men want? Right?!

WALTER

And shelter.

MARIA

So - go on then.

(Undoes her dress.)

Come on and leave. Take what you really came for. Feed the beast.

WALTER

What? The noble sacrifice. I'm touched. But it's the chase, Maria. The hunt. The spoor and scent and quickening of the heart. The tracking and bringing down.

MARIA

You know what it's called.

WALTER

Destiny.

MARIA

(Shifting to memory.)

Rape!

WALTER

I don't mean it to be!

MARIA

(Shift.)

Are you asking for forgiveness?

WALTER

Beforehand?

Aching for release. WALTER

And the terrible - terrible weeping surrender. MARIA

The little death. WALTER

Silence then wretched mumbled apologies. MARIA

The disquieting regret. WALTER

And the awkward - withdrawal. The self-conscious rearranging of clothing. MARIA
(Buttons up her dress.)
And the telling stain. Grace washed it away.

Your - testimony. WALTER

Just mine? MARIA

The flesh wants what it wants. And sometimes its own. WALTER

What? MARIA

And so your child. WALTER

No! MARIA
(Back to the present - turns
on WALTER.)
Never! She was redeemed of man! Understand that! You must
understand that!

How? WALTER

Explanations! Explanations. People always want explanations. MARIA
Proof. Holes in the palms. Blood. Well I bled, Walter. I bled.
Scarlet red. Scarlet bloody red. Shall I bring the sheets so
you can verify the facts?!

As you interpret them. WALTER

MARIA

Men are animals! That's my interpretation. They come and go. They roar and rut. They plow the earth with their - inequities. You're a man. You're one of them. Have mercy on us!

WALTER

Beware, Maria! 'Nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy.' The Bard.

MARIA

You won't have me, but you'll never touch Emma.

WALTER

Or you'll what? Feed me to the marigolds?

MARIA

We have those.

WALTER

I'm sure. Flowers for the dead.

MARIA

I've ignored my baby too long. Please - go.
(Begins an exit.)

WALTER

(Grabs MARIA'S arm.)
Please stay. *She'll* tell you when it's time.

MARIA

Leave before we all regret your coming.

WALTER

Is that *all* you expect?

MARIA

Even now you're bruising my wrist.

WALTER

I will have your company!

MARIA

You're hurting me!

WALTER

It's unintentional.

MARIA

Nothing changes.

WALTER

Am I your father?

(MARIA slaps WALTER and
jerks away.)

Damn you! WALTER

(A brief chase.)

EMMA
Emma! Emma, come be a witness!
(Ends up with knife.)
HURRY EMMA!

(EMMA enters.)

EMMA
That's my bread knife!

WALTER
Ah, our unsoiled dove reenters.
(Disengages.)

MARIA
Your guest wanted to test its keenness.

EMMA
Are you all right?

MARIA
Why ask him?

EMMA
Who has the blade?

WALTER
Point. Counter-point.

MARIA
Okay. Fine. I'm putting it down.

WALTER
Yes. It's over.

EMMA
Then why are you still here? Why is he still here?

WALTER
Where else would you have me go?

MARIA
The other 32 women -.

WALTER
Were pedestrian or abroad or married.

EMMA
Married?

WALTER

Wedded and bedded, Emma. Living their quiet suburban lives, but pen pals with a figurative man.

MARIA

A convicted killer.

WALTER

Shall I describe my crime? The hoary details. Give you reason to quail. A rapier into my rivals belly. Over and over.

MARIA

Dear God!

EMMA

I never wanted to know.

WALTER

Knowledge fails us.

MARIA

And women wrote you letters?

WALTER

From all over the world. Even a mother from New Zealand. After exchanging a number of erotic missives with me, she left her husband of eleven years to marry yours truly by proxy.

EMMA

You're married.

MARIA

This goes from bad to worse.

WALTER

She lived in a motel. A thick sheet of Plexiglas kept us chaste. Frustrated. She compensated with bon-bons, overdosed, went into a coma and died.

EMMA

Did I need to know that?

WALTER

What do you want to believe?

MARIA

She's an innocent.

WALTER

There's no air of innocence here. There's mystery, subterfuge, the odor of estrus, but no innocence.

MARIA

We have nothing to hide.

EMMA

Not anymore.

WALTER

Yet, you are hidden. From what? The blind butchery happening just outside your door, or is the door bolted against your own secret deprivations?

EMMA

Deprivations?

WALTER

Your sister's cloying little hints.

MARIA

Leave her be! She's just a child.

WALTER

A child. No. A flower, as you pointed out, yes. Indian pipe, I should think. Spectral. Delicate, Secluded in the shadows. Difficult to find but easy to admire; aching to love.

EMMA

Please -.

MARIA

She has no idea -.

WALTER

But how did you sign your letters?

EMMA

Emma.

WALTER

The closing.

MARIA

It's a word not a commitment.

WALTER

Still, it has its meaning.

MARIA

It's sincerely exaggerated.

WALTER

Casual words cause casualties! But Emma appreciates this. She selects her words like a jeweler. Links them together with the precision of a watchmaker. So - Love, Emma is a declaration of unbridled affection. Trivial, no.

MARIA

It was a game.

WALTER
Emma doesn't play with hearts - do you?

(WALTER touches EMMA.)

EMMA
NOOO!

MARIA
(With the knife.)
Leave her!

WALTER
You'll hurt someone.

EMMA
Won't be the first time.

MARIA
Emma!

EMMA
I didn't mean -.

WALTER
Yes, you're too eager.

MARIA
I warned you. Now get out!

WALTER
Not yet!

(WALTER wrestles MARIA.)

EMMA
Let it go! Give it up! Maria!

(WALTER has the knife and approaches MARIA. This is no game. MARIA sees she has pushed too far and edges to her bedroom.)

WALTER
You are dismissed.

MARIA
Emma.

WALTER
Your baby mews for her mother, Maria. Once more. And I tire of you.

MARIA
The lame are easier to bring down.

WALTER
The younger are more succulent. Get!

MARIA
Emma.

WALTER
Your baby, Maria, needs to suckle.

MARIA
Emma.

WALTER
NOW! Right now!

(MARIA slams into her bedroom -
locking the door. WALTER
sticks the knife into
door and makes sure it
can't be opened during -.)

MARIA
Don't you hurt her!

WALTER
I'll be in after that infant!

(Silence.)

EMMA
You wouldn't -.

WALTER
Let her think so.

EMMA
And me? What should I think?

(EMMA is a bird in a cage.
WALTER the hand reaching
in to capture her.)

WALTER
Don't think, Emma. Just be.

EMMA
Be what?

WALTER
Who you are.

I'm nobody.

EMMA

That makes two of us. Banished.

WALTER

This will end badly.

EMMA

At least it will end.

WALTER

I can't take visitors. They upset me.

EMMA

I'll leave when it's time.

WALTER

The clocks have stopped.

EMMA

Perfect.

WALTER

I could excuse myself.

EMMA

There's no way out, remember?
(Blocks her door.)

WALTER

What are your intentions?

EMMA

And you wrote with such passion.

WALTER

I wrote about flowers.

EMMA

Their secret lives.

WALTER

I studied botany.
(Gives WALTER a book and
continues evasion.)

That's how I know. Father thought it appropriate for a girl -.

WALTER

But a woman. She saw it for what it is. The torrid goings on.

EMMA

Torrid?

WALTER

Sure.

(Tosses book aside.)

All those stigmas and pistils commingling. The stickiness of their sex. Those voluptuous petals disguising the gritty business of life.

EMMA

Gritty?

WALTER

Yes. Insects copulating with orchids. Their pheromones whispering - 'Have sex with me.' Is that what I'm - hearing, Emma?

EMMA

I'm no orchid.

WALTER

Never sent me those. Too difficult to grow or too close to the - dare I say - genitals?

EMMA

What -?

WALTER

Orchid - Latin derivative for testicle. Did Father teach that lesson as well?

EMMA

Why must you do this?

WALTER

It's how we imagined it.

EMMA

We?

WALTER

Emma. Emma. Emma. Alight. Every flower wants its pollination. You understand that.

EMMA

I understand so little.

WALTER

Yet know so much.

EMMA

My flowers never lied to me.

WALTER

(Referencing the dead flower
on the refrigerator during.)

Do you think they blossomed just for you?

EMMA

They've always been my companions. I keep them close even now. Look. Walter! Yes. My herbarium. Since I was a child. It has over four hundred specimens. Took me ages to complete. I could show you.

(Sits on couch.)

Over here.

WALTER

Good. Okay. Show me.

EMMA

See. I've labeled them. Identified their parts.

WALTER

With precision. Like your poems. In your letters.

EMMA

There. One of my favorites. Coltsfoot.

WALTER

Yes. And stargrass.

EMMA

Pigweed.

WALTER

Ah. Passion flower.

EMMA

Robin-run-away.

WALTER

Love-in-a-mist. The French call it chevaux de Venus. Naughty, naughty those French.

EMMA

The bastard pennyroyal.

WALTER

Who hurt Emma?

EMMA

You will.

WALTER

Yes. It can't be helped. I fear I want you.

EMMA

For what?

WALTER

Communion.

EMMA

(Crosses away.)

Go free! There's the door. You have the key. Use it. Use it. Get out. Escape. Isn't that what you really want?

WALTER

What do you know about freedom? You're a prisoner as much as I ever was - or am.

EMMA

By inclination.

WALTER

I could say the same.

EMMA

But it would mean something different.

WALTER

Have you ever stood in the sun? Risked getting wet in a rainstorm?

EMMA

It's my eyes.

WALTER

Even as a child.

EMMA

I grew up in gardens! I was brown as any boy. Father deplored it.

WALTER

(Stands.)

Father. Father. Father! Where is he - really?

EMMA

There's no telling!

WALTER

He abandoned you.

EMMA

Far from the truth. He - presided over me - cautioned me in summer about the snakes, in fall about the nettles -.

WALTER

And in winter?

EMMA

The cold. Cover your head, Emma. Stay indoors, Emma. Keep yourself for me, Emma.

WALTER

He - loved you.

EMMA
Is that what it was?

WALTER
Are we speaking in riddles?

EMMA
Always.

WALTER
Shall I guess what happened?

EMMA
Do *I* know what happened?

WALTER
Father deflowered Maria.

EMMA
What?!

WALTER
Having cultivated his own little hothouse plants -.

EMMA
You're being disgusting.

WALTER
You were in the wings.

EMMA
He never even touched me. He was stern and domineering, but kept his distance. His heart was fierce and formidable.

WALTER
So you were left to *write* about desire, your body, the intimate keys to pleasure.

EMMA
I wrote about flowers, Walter. The lives of flowers. It's where I found my joy. Will you accept that?!

WALTER
But you let them die.

EMMA
They died on their own.

WALTER
And you would follow. Dying on the vine. Unfulfilled. Emma, better we - rectify that.

EMMA
(Has the knife now.)
I will protect myself.

WALTER

Our rose has a thorn. But so many flowers are lethal. Right, Emma? Remember writing me that - the duplicity of some plants. But a thorn isn't your style. Something subtler for you. The nux vomica. A bit of poison.

EMMA

I can use this.

WALTER

You'd be in a royal rank - with Cleopatra, in fact.

EMMA

Keep your distance.

WALTER

Do you know that story? She considered poison when captured by Octavian.

EMMA

You must keep your distance.

WALTER

Being a wily woman, she tried it on a servant first. The strychnine in the blossom causes violent convulsions.

EMMA

Please.

WALTER

A hideous death. The queen opted for the asp.

EMMA

I know how to apply the blade.

(WALTER lunges. EMMA thrusts
tearing at his clothing.)

WALTER

Damnation, Emma, that's too real! Any closer you'd have a body on your hands. Then what?

EMMA

The oven.

WALTER

Are you mad?

EMMA

I know about madness, Walter. I'm well acquainted with the terrors.

WALTER

What terrors, Emma?

EMMA

Unnameable. Unspeakable. A fire in my mind. A howling of my soul. Wild, wild nights!

WALTER

They could be our shared luxury.

EMMA

Luxury? I prowl my room sheathed in sweat and the pitch blackness grips my consciousness.

WALTER

Like a vise.

EMMA

Grips it and squeezes. Such agony, Walter. Such torment.

WALTER

And you cry out.

EMMA

From my silent heart.

WALTER

Don't wake the baby.

EMMA

Leave Maria her grace.

WALTER

But to something. God?

EMMA

Never God.

WALTER

Because there'd be no answer.

EMMA

Answer or no, either - response would be intolerable! All I can do is endure.

WALTER

Yes, we endure ourselves.

EMMA

And write. And pick up my pen and - and -.

WALTER

Fix your mind with the ferocity of a tiger on the configuration of letters.

EMMA

Yes.

WALTER

The beat of words, the precision of a phrase honed to a fine edge.

EMMA

Yes. Yes.

WALTER

And thereby cut yourself free of those paralyzing fears. And in your paper boat make your way to dawn and safety.

EMMA

(Shift.)

You do understand me.

WALTER

Too well. That's why I'm here.

EMMA

Writing you saved my life.

WALTER

I'm glad.

EMMA

(Gives up the knife.)

It's cold in this house.

WALTER

Yet, you flourish. A strange exotic.

EMMA

No. I'm more pressed like the flowers in my herbarium. Shut away.

WALTER

Why?

EMMA

Away from the sureties, away from the prodding and poking of the church, away from the man who tasted me and found me wanting.

WALTER

Only a taste?

EMMA

I brought him flowers. They should have been anemones.

WALTER

Ephemeral love.

EMMA

Yes. His Adonis to my Aphrodite.

WALTER

Adonis died.

EMMA

That's the mythology. In truth - he never responded to my letters and I disappeared. Faded from sight. I thought he was my way out. Out of myself. Out of this life. But now I am illuminated.

WALTER

Enlightenment is hell.

EMMA

Should we curse it and the darkness?

WALTER

Leave that to your sister. This is our time.

EMMA

The clocks are stopped.

WALTER

Some things are inevitable.

EMMA

Like what?

(WALTER kisses EMMA. MUSIC.)

EMMA

Please -.

WALTER

Emma.

(Another kiss.)

EMMA

No!

WALTER

What else are we left with?

EMMA

It burns.

WALTER

My god, Emma, it's supposed to.

EMMA

Shall I cry out?!

WALTER

You'll wake the baby.

EMMA

The baby is dead.

WALTER

No, it only sleeps.

But I'm unavailable. EMMA

Not any more. WALTER
(Removes the red camellia.)

I always wear red. EMMA

Until today. WALTER

This is implausible. EMMA

Father taught you well. WALTER
(Makes love to EMMA
throughout.)

I was always a good student. EMMA

And willing. WALTER

What can you teach me? EMMA

Touching, Emma. Carnal knowledge. It's how we know we're alive. WALTER

Must I? EMMA

It's where God and man intersect. WALTER

Is that why I'm frightened? EMMA

Yes, you tremble. Like your flowers. WALTER

Which flower am I? EMMA

Indian Pipe, Emma. And a snowdrop. Brave, white, pure. WALTER

Do you have to see me? EMMA

WALTER

There's nothing more intoxicating than the rise of a woman's breast.

EMMA

Will I be happy afterwards? Tell me I'll be happy.

WALTER

Emma. Emma. It's not happiness we seek. It's lack of consciousness. An obliteration of all but this moment. You may have that.

EMMA

No promises.

WALTER

No.

EMMA

Good.

WALTER

Yes, It's better that way.

EMMA

Gently.

WALTER

Yes. Gently. Gently. Gently.

(And the lights fade to black as WALTER makes love to EMMA - a sexual 'ballet' during the following voice overs.)

EMMA

(Voice over.)

I have a longing that has no name. A fierce desire to live outside myself. I think of you standing emblazoned by the sun, bold and unashamed, adorned only as nature has adorned you and majestic for all that. I stand likewise in the tall grasses. This is freedom. The moment ripe as any plum and sweeter. My body sings for you. Oh, it sings and sings and sings.

WALTER

(Voice over.)

You sent me verbena. The good plant. The aphrodisiac. I've placed it in my pillow like brides in Germany who made love potions from the blossoms, scattered petals over bedchamber floors and rest my head and dream of Emma. How you have bewitched your Cyrano! I have no other window out onto the world but your letters. And what I see is haunting. What I feel rises up from my belly - this sweeping wave of melancholy engulfing me in tears.

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

Oh, don't write to me. Write to me. Don't write to me. Write to me. Write to me. Write to me.

ACT II

SCENE 1

SETTING: A neglected house in a small town.

AT RISE: EMMA enters from her bedroom all akimbo. She frees MARIA'S door.

EMMA

(Hushed.)

Maria, come out.

(MARIA enters with GRACE.)

MARIA

Emma. Look at you. What happened?

EMMA

You have to ask?

MARIA

I'm sorry. There's little I could do -.

EMMA

I - survived.

MARIA

Thank God. Our prayers were answered.

EMMA

Several prayers were answered.

MARIA

Emma!

EMMA

Maria, I'm all undone!

MARIA

Did it hurt?

EMMA

The second time - no.

MARIA

Dear God!

(Covers GRACE'S ears.)

EMMA

If you say so.

MARIA

That man is the devil. We've got to get rid of him.

Must we? EMMA

He'll ravish us again. MARIA

Us? EMMA

Our home has been - profaned. Our safety. He's a threat to Grace. Wants to bring down our sanctuary. MARIA

Listen, Maria. He doesn't want anything, but he'll take what he's given. EMMA

If it suits him. MARIA

Pardon? EMMA

How could you, Emma? He's a murderer. MARIA

Told me it was a mercy. EMMA

He'll say anything. MARIA

But it's what he's done. EMMA

Sweet Jesus. MARIA

Shall I deny it? EMMA

Deny what? MARIA

You lied to me. All these years. You and Mother. EMMA

We won't hear you. MARIA

But it's - sublime. Fiction is truth. Lawrence wrote the truth! EMMA

There's a reason he was banned. MARIA

Why, Maria?

EMMA

You're upset. Ravaged. Calm yourself.

MARIA

I don't feel ravaged. I don't know what I feel. I mean I know what I feel, but I feel as though I shouldn't feel that way.

EMMA

That's your conscience.

MARIA

Mine or yours? Mine or the church?

EMMA

Is there a difference?

MARIA

You're angry with me.

EMMA

We're disappointed, Emma.

MARIA

If it's wrong, why did I find joy in it?

EMMA

Stop yourself -. (On top of EMMA'S line.)

MARIA

But now I know why bees hum!

EMMA

Grace, you didn't hear that. None of this. She's - irrational.

MARIA

Me? I'm irrational?

EMMA

You're young and fanciful and full of pretty notions about flowers and gardens, but the petals fall away and gardens turn to seed.

MARIA

Yes. And you have your Grace.

EMMA

No! There you go too far! She was born twice. The second time we were - resolved.

MARIA

Resolved?

EMMA

MARIA
 Absolved. All right?

EMMA
 Who is mad here?

MARIA
 Yes, who is mad? Who suffers from night frights? Who refuses to step outside into the world beyond these rooms? Who writes thousands of poems no one will ever read; mawkish letters to dead men?

EMMA
 Is it so terrible to feel so good?

MARIA
 Evil breeds evil.

EMMA
 What does pleasure beget, Maria?

MARIA
 Suffering, Emma. The body is temporary. Our expectations are greater than the here and now. Men like Walter live there. In the moment. They ignore history and deny the future. That's why he's so dangerous.

EMMA
 That's Father's speech.

MARIA
 Ha! Aunt Emma does listen.

EMMA
 Father preached what other people practiced. Who knows better than us?!

MARIA
 And who kept him from your bed?! Who did that?! Who - submitted - sacrificed herself again and again so her sister might survive her childhood?! Who - unfurled her petals -? Answer me that.
 (Sits.)
 Oh, Grace. Grace. Shhh.

EMMA
 Maria. My god. Do I understand you?

MARIA
 You're the gardener.

EMMA
 When? How -?

MARIA
 Does it matter now?

EMMA
His weekly visits. The prayer sessions -.

MARIA
Oh yes, papa preyed over me.

EMMA
My dear sister. I thought - a stranger - a weak moment. Like
you said. But our father.
(Joins MARIA.)

MARIA
Amen.

EMMA
Unbelievable.

MARIA
You believe so little, but have witnessed the truth.

EMMA
Which one?

MARIA
Father's death.

EMMA
Meaning?

MARIA
I had the babe. You were next.

EMMA
So, the knife did fall on him.

MARIA
Yes.

EMMA
This is too much!

MARIA
I did it in the name of salvation.

EMMA
Dear heavens - is that how you'll be forgiven?

MARIA
And his forgiveness?

EMMA
The man's dead.

MARIA
Are you sorry?

It seemed - regrettable. EMMA

Too much is regrettable. MARIA

But how could you?! EMMA

(Crosses away.) MARIA
 WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?

Called the authorities! EMMA

He was the authority. Besides, I was humiliated. Shamed. MARIA

Yes. Of course EMMA

He was oppressive. MARIA

Puritanical. EMMA

Sick. MARIA

It took - what? Courage? EMMA

Fear. MARIA

Can I be thankful? EMMA

Will you be? MARIA

He would have - wounded me as well. EMMA

Beyond recovery. Now let it go. MARIA

As you have. EMMA

As you will. In time. As you must. MARIA

EMMA

It seems a leap, but what else is there?

MARIA

Hear that, Grace? A testimony for faith.

EMMA

All right. In time. As I must.

MARIA

Good.

EMMA

But - Maria - tell me - please - is it the sinner - not the - sin
that's your - cross to bear?

MARIA

Both. And today - this. This - new - treachery.

EMMA

Shall I regret it as well?

MARIA

Father is dead, but Walter will waken soon to feed on us and use
our bones to pick his teeth.

EMMA

Like an ogre.

MARIA

Yes.

EMMA

Ought every story have a monster?

MARIA

We ought to get rid of ours.

EMMA

A second one.

MARIA

That's another reason why.

EMMA

Maria!

MARIA

We're trapped by our circumstances.

EMMA

Walter doesn't have to be.

MARIA

We must save ourselves and Grace.

EMMA
From such - tenderness.

MARIA
That's how it feels before they take you by the throat!

EMMA
He'll leave on his own.

MARIA
Will you come to your senses! He's a man like father. And men lack - principles. He'll use us without mercy. He'll discover our secret and leave us exposed. And then in prison.

EMMA
We're already there.

MARIA
Emma.

EMMA
How? The knife?

MARIA
It's more difficult than you think.

EMMA
Yes, it's too - familiar.

MARIA
There are poisonous plants.

EMMA
My god.

MARIA
We'll put them in his tea.

EMMA
Oh, cruel apothecary.

MARIA
Find a solution. This book.

EMMA
How many more?

MARIA
As many as it takes.

EMMA
We'll need another refrigerator.

MARIA

The garden. For both of them. When it's dark. Just in case, Emma. Just in case he stays. Trust me.

EMMA

All right. Okay. But only as a last resort. This one.

(MARIA sets GRACE aside and she and EMMA get busy making the brew during the following -.)

EMMA

(Voice over.)

Cyrano, It's strange to think that Milton's heavenly gardener would invest in certain unassuming plants such transformative toxins they can inspire hallucinations and sometimes death. How do we reconcile that? When the soldiers at Jamestown laced their salads with jimsonweed, and played the fools - like comical trolls was the Almighty entertained? And when a child having more than a taste suffers convulsions, lapses into a coma and dies - where is the joy there? Eden has its serpent's teeth. Heaven its hell.

WALTER

(Voice over.)

We should have no secrets between us. Like the Romans who hung roses over their negotiations - a symbol of confidentiality - our sub rosa letters should free us of constraint. Our divinity will be Harpocrates, the god of silence - a finger to his lips. Thus you can tell me everything, and I will take it to my grave.

(MARIA holds up the finished product. WALTER enters.)

WALTER

My god, I'm thirsty.

MARIA

Just in time.

EMMA

Water. There's plenty of water.

MARIA

It won't relieve your thirst.

WALTER

No? What will?

MARIA

This.

EMMA

Maria.

The man's abused you. MARIA

Abused? WALTER

I told her -. EMMA

She's confused. MARIA

Loved, Maria. I loved her. WALTER

Hah! MARIA

Does the euphemism bother you? WALTER

The lie. MARIA

Of course. A woman in your state knows it as fornication. WALTER

Dear God. MARIA

It evoked heaven. Yes. Like so many have. 'That two unbodied essences may kiss, and then like angels, twist and feel one bliss.' Cartwright, I believe. WALTER
(Prepares to leave.)

What you believe is unimportant. MARIA

Rather than dangerous. WALTER

You're leaving. EMMA

Finally. MARIA

One should know when to exit. WALTER

After the fall. MARIA

WALTER
Before the recriminations.

EMMA
There's peanut butter for the bread.

MARIA
There is?

WALTER
You've already nourished me. I'll write.

EMMA
Wait!

(Flashing red and blue and
white lights fill the room.)

WALTER
Damnation. They're here!

MARIA
For our escaped felon, Emma.

EMMA
A wronged man!

MARIA
Is there a right one?

WALTER
Probably brought the cavalry.

MARIA
I said this would happen!

WALTER
(Peers out window.)
Wait. Hold on. False alarm. Someone's been pulled over. A
moving violation.

MARIA
Good. But don't let him see you.

WALTER
What?

EMMA
We can't let him in.

WALTER
Who?

MARIA
The sheriff, Walter.

Heavens no. EMMA

But I'm on the lam. WALTER

Far worse - he's - unattached. EMMA

Exactly. There'd be a scandal. MARIA

Scandal? WALTER

The neighbors would talk. EMMA

Yes. Tell him nothing. MARIA

Nothing? WALTER

Nothing. EMMA

Why? WALTER

He's a simple man. MARIA

And old. EMMA

But fierce. MARIA

Yes. He shoots questions and asks answers first. EMMA

He does what? WALTER

Bang! EMMA

Exactly. MARIA

He could be your knight to the rescue. WALTER

From a visitor? MARIA

My pen pal? Walter, that's silly. EMMA

You wanted me gone. WALTER

Gone, Walter. MARIA

Not departed. EMMA

A fine distinction. WALTER

In this house, an important distinction EMMA

Emma! MARIA

Now what? EMMA

I'd better wait until dark. WALTER

Hours away. MARIA

Indeed. WALTER

We could play charades. EMMA

Hell, you already are! WALTER

That's absurd. MARIA

This is all absurd, Maria. WALTER

Are we insulted? EMMA

Examine yourselves. Two wayward women living in all this gloom and doom. WALTER

(MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)

Hostages even before my entrance. Then the sheriff arrives on the scene and instead of hosannas, it's kate-bar-the-door. What's really going on here? Who are you ladies? Which century have I dropped into? Where is your caretaker?

MARIA

Stop -.

WALTER

What nasty little secrets do hide in the mold and mildew?

EMMA

It's impossible to say.

WALTER

Come on. We're *intimates* now. You can tell me. I won't rat on youse.

MARIA

(Collects GRACE.)

That's what Judas said.

WALTER

(Accosts MARIA.)

And who's the fool for believing him? Hey?

MARIA

See. He's a brute, Grace. Just as I said. A brute.

(The LIGHTS stop flashing.)

WALTER

(Complete surprise leading to a measured inquiry.)

Whoa. Hold - everything. That's - Grace?

EMMA

Her baby.

WALTER

Her - baby. A living - breathing - child?

MARIA

It does happen.

WALTER

This - is what's been calling you?

MARIA

This is what I had.

WALTER

Remarkable.

A miracle. MARIA

More like a mirage. WALTER

You can see her. MARIA

But can she see you? I mean does she - respond to her mother? WALTER

Loves her mother. MARIA

Engages in - communication? WALTER

She's an infant, Walter. EMMA

I understand her. MARIA

How do you understand her? WALTER

It's a mother's -. MARIA

Prerogative. EMMA

Is that the right word? WALTER

Does the word matter? EMMA

She matters to me. MARIA

Why does it matter? WALTER

I don't have to answer any more questions. MARIA

That's right, Walter. EMMA

Because you can't. WALTER

Assume what you will. MARIA

As you have. WALTER

I know what I know. MARIA

There's *no* reason for this. EMMA

I have *my* reasons, Emma. WALTER

Ungodly. MARIA

It's better left alone. EMMA

Left alone it festers - poisons the mind then compromises the body. WALTER

What? EMMA

That's sacrilege. MARIA

Point made. WALTER

She's a distraction. EMMA

She's more than that. MARIA

Yes. But does she nuzzle at your breast? WALTER

Not in public. MARIA

Pooh her pants? WALTER

You're upsetting her. MARIA

Then your infant is dumb. WALTER

MARIA
She's a good baby.

WALTER
Of course. Never really cries. Never even whimpers.

EMMA
Walter.

WALTER
A most mysterious moppet, Maria. Stays neat as a pin.

MARIA
I bathe her.

WALTER
Rub-a-dub-dub a doll in the tub.

MARIA
Barbarian!

WALTER
Where the hell did she come from?!

EMMA
Walter!

MARIA
I man like you will never know!

WALTER
Because it *didn't* require a man like me to make it possible.

MARIA
Man has nothing to do with Grace.

WALTER
Agreed. But Maria did.

EMMA
Of course.

WALTER
Her magical inception.

MARIA
Lucifer! Naysayer. Is your tongue still dry?
(Offers the toxic tea.)

EMMA
(Takes the tea.)
Mine is.

WALTER
It's a toy!

EMMA
 That's enough!

WALTER
 Have her babble the Apostle's Creed and that will be everything.

MARIA
 You will rot in hell!
 (Exits.)

WALTER
 A chemical impossibility!
 (Shift.)
 Damn. It is a doll - right?

EMMA
 Was that necessary?

WALTER
 For me or for her?

EMMA
 You're disrupting everything.

WALTER
 Of course, it's my part to play.

EMMA
 That wasn't play, Walter.

WALTER
 No, it wasn't! Because I've seen what - blind allegiance can do, Emma. I've seen it first hand. Up close and very personal. It offends me. And should be stomped out!

EMMA
 What would remain?

WALTER
 Tranquility? Tell me about Maria.

EMMA
 You're leaving when it's dark.

WALTER
 Okay. I'll follow your leads and use my imagination.

EMMA
 You should eat. More.
 (Gets busy.)

WALTER
 Ah, the culinary distraction. Right. Difficult to defy.
 (MORE)

WALTER (CONT'D)
(Picks up glass with poisoned
tea.)

What *is* this?

EMMA

This?

(Look to see -.)

Don't! Leave it alone.

(Snatches it from WALTER.)

It's medicine - for the baby. Tastes terrible.

(Provides water.)

Here. Drink all you want.

WALTER

Curiouser and curiouser said Walter down in his rabbit hole.

EMMA

Accept it for what it is.

WALTER

Said Emma a very different Queen of Hearts.

EMMA

Am I? Walter?

WALTER

You can't even see yourself.

EMMA

Only through your eyes.

WALTER

A mirror would serve you better.

EMMA

About earlier -. What you did to me.

WALTER

Is over and done with.

EMMA

Is it?

WALTER

It must be. We're no long experiencing it.

EMMA

It has an effect.

WALTER

That will pass. This will pass. Everything will pass.

EMMA

I - liked it.

WALTER
 You're supposed to.

EMMA
 I'm talking to you.

WALTER
 You're pointing out the obvious.

EMMA
 What you said to me.

WALTER
 It was true then.

EMMA
 You're being infuriating!

WALTER
 Already? Now you see why I strive to take little stock in what has happened.

EMMA
 Can you be so detached?

WALTER
 I must be so detached, Emma. It's how *I* survive. It's how I get out of bed in the morning and get back in at night. But you know what I mean.

EMMA
 Explain me to myself. Please.

WALTER
 Because you're a masquerade? Because you can only see in shadows?

EMMA
 It's my eyes. Doctor's orders.

WALTER
 Which - doctor?

EMMA
 Will you belittle my physical impairment?

WALTER
 This is a set piece. A facade. A macabre game. But you and Maria have played it so long you're unable to tell it from reality.

EMMA
 Reality? Are we not real? Touch us - we feel. We feel, Walter.

WALTER
 What the hell has happened here?!

You happened here.	EMMA
Emma.	WALTER
I liked the taste of it.	EMMA
You <i>are</i> a child.	WALTER
The smell of it.	EMMA
It's candy and gone.	WALTER
But there's more where it came from.	EMMA
It's impossible to step in the same river twice.	WALTER
You speak in metaphors. Why is that?	EMMA
You write in metaphors. Why is that?	WALTER
It tempers the truth.	EMMA
Yes!	WALTER
You like me.	EMMA
Fascinated.	WALTER
Did I - <i>touch</i> you, Walter?	EMMA
You have, but be advised - life teaches us to want nothing.	WALTER
Want for nothing?	EMMA
Will I regret bedding you?	WALTER

EMMA
Shall we ever find out?

WALTER
Damn-it, Emma.

EMMA
In another season?

WALTER
Can the future know itself?

EMMA
What would it cost -?

WALTER
My sanity and whatever remains of yours.

EMMA
If it's lunacy then give me madness.

WALTER
Stop this!

EMMA
Will a heart be commanded?

WALTER
Trust me, Emma, desire woken is insatiable. Appetite can never be satisfied.

EMMA
Momentarily?

WALTER
I'm uninterested in the pursuit of happiness.

EMMA
I opened myself up for you.

WALTER
Emma, flowers are beautiful for their own purposes.

EMMA
Am I beautiful?

WALTER
Shall we speak of other things?

EMMA
Am I, Walter?!

(No response.)
Walter - am I?

WALTER

No.

EMMA

Well. I would have appreciated a metaphor.
(Exits.)

WALTER

This is what the truth does! Caveat emptor. Let the buyer beware.
(Shift out of character.)

Beware. Exactly.
(Peers out window.)

I should listen to my own advice. Watch my back. We're in some gothic novel here, ladies. A dark drama. All it's lacking are creaking doors and ghosts. Maybe tonight. Yeah. Maybe tonight there'll be murder and mayhem. Right out of Agatha Christie. Cops climbing in through the windows.

(Picks up an item that belongs in the refrigerator.)

Looking for Colonel Mustard with the pipe wrench. No, something with a bit more bite. Dracula. Or The Haunting of Hill House. Sure. Much more appropriate. The ominous tread. The creaking of floorboards. The long protracted silence. A door being swung open and -

(Opens refrigerator.)

Holy shit!
(Slams door closed. Backs away.)

My god. I was right. I was by-damned right. There *is* a body. Honest to god. There's a body in your refrigerator, sisters! I found the body!

(EMMA and MARIA show at their doors.)

EMMA

A body?

MARIA

What refrigerator?

WALTER

Surprise!

EMMA

It came that way.

MARIA

Emma!

WALTER

Maybe he's the milk man.

MARIA

The iceman.

He no longer cometh. WALTER

We should tell the company. EMMA

Have them remove it. MARIA

Yeah, replace it with somebody smaller. Leave room of the beer. WALTER

We never drink -. EMMA

Who the hell is it?! WALTER

How should we know? MARIA

He just crawled in there. EMMA

On a hot summer's day. MARIA

Boiling. EMMA

And now he's cooling his heels. WALTER

Exactly. MARIA

It's Father. Right? WALTER

So that's where he got to! EMMA

Emma! MARIA

You killed him. WALTER

No! He died. People do that. MARIA

Inside a refrigerator? WALTER

It was something he ate. EMMA

Something laced with arsenic. WALTER

Maybe. MARIA

It's a poison. WALTER

Found in nature. EMMA

So he died of natural causes. WALTER

Yes. EMMA

He died in his sleep. MARIA

Sure. The knife in the bedroom. WALTER

No, in his chest. EMMA

Emma! MARIA

But who? My little bird or her keeper, Mother Courage. WALTER

What do you care? You're an escaped convict. A murderer yourself. What's a dead body to such a man? MARIA

Oh, I've seen enough dead bodies. But never one stuffed into a refrigerator. WALTER

What else could we do? EMMA

Confess? Plead insanity. Or self-defense. WALTER

More like self-preservation. EMMA

Wryness even in your speech. WALTER

MARIA
No one knows he's dead. That's the point. Except you - now.

WALTER
If the sheriff finds Father -.

EMMA
Does he have to?

MARIA
It will only upset him.

WALTER
Only because you've got a man in cold storage!

MARIA
He'll be keeping us alive.

EMMA
Barely.

WALTER
Alive? How?

EMMA
Keeping the lights on.

MARIA
Barely.

WALTER
Wait. Hold on. Hold the phone. I get it. You're by-god bilking the government. Right?

MARIA
Walter -.

WALTER
Direct deposit.

EMMA
That's our plan. Joint account.

WALTER
Like clockwork.

EMMA
The third Tuesday of every month.

MARIA
He can know too much.

WALTER
Minimum wages -.

EMMA
 One thousand, one hundred -.

MARIA
 All right!

WALTER
 Courtesy of our dear Uncle Sammy.

MARIA
 He's our little secret, and we'd like to keep it that way.

WALTER
 The crime is it's own punishment.

EMMA
 What he did to Maria.

MARIA
 (Building to her assault.)
 He doesn't need to know.

WALTER
 But there's always the need to tell. To justify. Have our deeds
 accounted for. Or what was the point?!

MARIA
 You're the convicted one. You tell us. What was the point?

WALTER
 We're all convicted, Maria. By birth.

EMMA
 You can do better -.

MARIA
 Some of us are going to a better place.

WALTER
 Other than an appliance?

MARIA
 A fool laughs at his destiny.

EMMA
 Father never smiled.

MARIA
 If he's discovered, they'll be asking questions.
 (Picks up the knife.)

WALTER
 Oh, yes. The authorities ask their questions. But they hear
 only what they want to hear and see only what they want to see.

EMMA

And when they see dead people?

MARIA

They look for a murderer.

WALTER

That's the trouble! The law strives to make sense of the insensible. Well, good luck with that. With this.

EMMA

You won't tell -?

MARIA

He's keen for a story, but he won't get the chance.
(Gets WALTER in a choke hold with knife at his throat.)

WALTER

(Breaks character.)

What the hell are you doing?

EMMA

Maria!

MARIA

We've got one body. Another will keep us safe.

WALTER

I'm the last person to go to the police.

EMMA

Exactly.

WALTER

Emma!

EMMA

You want me now.

MARIA

Get some rags.

WALTER

I could cry out.

MARIA

You're the trespasser.

WALTER

WAIT! I'm not who you think I am.

MARIA

An escaped killer nobody will regret.

WALTER

I was rashly imprisoned. My only real crime is mediocrity. I'm a bad actor, not a bad character. B movies and so far off Broadway they call it Buffalo.

EMMA

Maria, we should listen.

WALTER

Truly. I could give you a demonstration.

MARIA

You already have.

WALTER

Something rehearsed.

EMMA

If he's innocent -.

WALTER

Of murder.

MARIA

If he's innocent, why did he panic when the sheriff showed?

WALTER

Force of habit.

EMMA

Who doesn't?

WALTER

Fools.

MARIA

Guilty or not, he's seen the body.

EMMA

Maria. Does it become too easy?

MARIA

All right then. All right. Tie him up. With the cord there. Till we sort it out.

(EMMA does.)

WALTER

That hurts.

EMMA

There's pain and there's humiliation.
(A sharp tug on the cord.)

WALTER

The lie confounds itself, Emma.

EMMA

You've been false since breaking in.

WALTER

Of course. It's what you wanted. What women want. An outlaw. The criminal element. Why else write to psychopaths on death row?

EMMA

You're no psychopath.

WALTER

Hell, I wasn't even convicted of intentional homicide. Manslaughter, yes. Somehow those words mattered.

EMMA

My letters -?

WALTER

Bribery.

MARIA

You're one thing and then another.

WALTER

Exactly! That's all I know how to be - somebody else in the moment.

EMMA

So how can we trust you?

WALTER

Cast me that way.

MARIA

I'd rather cast you *away*.

EMMA

What about the rapier in the belly?

WALTER

That was to impress. Keep you in line. But who knew I was dealing with such *stiff* competition.

MARIA

You're worse than mediocre.

WALTER

But you must experience my work. Yes. My best work. My finest few minutes - until now. The one that brought down the curtain and - put me on ice. I call it A Farewell to Arms - and Legs. A morality tale.

EMMA
 Now you're an actor being an actor.

WALTER
 Too much self-analysis kills the spontaneity.

MARIA
 You're playing for time.

WALTER
 Who would have thought -.

MARIA
 Hah!

EMMA
 All right! The stage is set.

WALTER
 Yes. Sure. The show goes on despite our worst efforts.

MARIA
 Your show is for one night only. Make it good.

WALTER
 This is the story of a soldier home from a war. His spinal cord
 traumatized which left him with extremities as useful as the
 proverbial rubber crutch. His colon eviscerated. But the heart -
 the heart beat on.

EMMA
 Someone loved.

WALTER
 But too much or not enough?

EMMA
 Is it ever enough?

WALTER
 If I revealed I ended his so-called life, would that be an answer?

MARIA
 Is this your confession?

EMMA
 But a mercy, like you said -.

WALTER
 For me or for him the good judge queried? For me or for him.

MARIA
 And your answer?

WALTER

They wanted one of two words, Maria, but neither would do. They didn't see his eyes. My god, the eyes! Flashing about in their white pools like frantic fish desperate for a way out. They want release! They want escape!

EMMA

They want to be free.

WALTER

Yes!

MARIA

You played at being God!

WALTER

Nothing of the kind! A god would let him die in little pieces. Little agonizing pieces. Tick by tock. Shallow breath by shallow breath. The same god who turned the other cheek when the shrapnel ripped through his neck and left him immobile from the shoulders down. This man-child who once strode the earth like he owned it trapped now in the cage of his mind. Alive, but not a life.

EMMA

I understand him.

WALTER

(Works to free himself
throughout.)

So you'll understand me taking that pillow in my hands, a most innocuous invention, a resting place for a weary head -.

EMMA

Go on.

WALTER

And pressing the pillow down - my intentions unambiguous, my resolve focused and unrelenting.

MARIA

Melodrama -.

WALTER

WHAT ELSE IS THERE? What else?! And one more reason I snuffed out his too brief candle. Another soldier-boy salvaged from the killing fields. Oh, what we do in the name of one gospel or another. And where the poppies grow we bury the bodies. How many millions? There's your pornography! Your obscenity. But it's the little - murders we quantify. Right, sisters? Those we catalogue. Use as markers to balance the books. Find someone guilty. It doesn't matter who.

EMMA

He asked you -.

WALTER

(Breaking down to tears.)

HE COULDN'T SPEAK! He could not fucking speak! Nor sing. No more singing. Anywhere. Not the carpenter at his plank, not the shoemaker at his bench; no robust melodious songs. Dirges, yes. The soft narcotic breathing, yes; the whirl and bleat of machines, yes; weeping. Yes. That's one thing my soldier could do - and shit into a bag. My god. My god. Did he know how it would haunt me?! How it haunts me now? Day and night and day again. Oh, my, my, my, my -.

(Regroups. Peeks at sisters.)

What? No applause?

EMMA

It felt - too true.

MARIA

Terrible.

WALTER

More critics! Of course. Sitting here in the dark while we poor players strive to make meaning from the very air. But at least we're engaged. At least we're on the stage, in the lights, taking it on the chin.

MARIA

You're dotty.

WALTER

The pot calling the kettle black. The shoe on the other foot. But we know each other.

MARIA

Murderer.

WALTER

Savior.

EMMA

What are we to believe?

WALTER

Whatever mollifies death.

MARIA

Grace answers death.

WALTER

Father's?

EMMA

It's difficult to say.

WALTER

Come on. Yes. It's your turn to pay the piper. Your turn in the spotlight. Acknowledge the elephant.

EMMA

Elephant?

WALTER

Of course. You hide in shadows, behind locked doors, curtains drawn. But inside this fantasy land, the proof is in the puddin'. Father dallied with Maria, and she killed him for his trouble.

MARIA

Again you're absurd.

WALTER

Twice we're agreed.

MARIA

We agree you are the very devil!

EMMA

Maria!

WALTER

My dear, Maria, is an optimist. Her sort have to believe in a Satan. Unhappiness is their lot. Great expectations and all.

MARIA

Hope...

WALTER

Is a burden!

MARIA

Is Grace.

WALTER

Grace is a delusion damn you!

MARIA

That's a lie.

WALTER

Prove me wrong. Come on! Prove - me - wrong.

MARIA

Here. Here!

(MARIA exits to retrieve
GRACE.)

EMMA

She's not ready, Walter -.

WALTER
We're long over due.

EMMA
And you decide?

WALTER
Yes, the catalyst forces the action -.

MARIA
(Reenters with the doll.)
Look! Look. My baby is right here. My joy.

WALTER
There's no joy, Maria. Just the alleviation of pain.

MARIA
Grace is a promise.

WALTER
Grace. Grace. Grace. Grace!
(Free of the cord now he stands.)

EMMA
Take care.

WALTER
There's no grace, Maria. Your baby is one more false prophet! A cheap doll -.

MARIA
Liar.

EMMA
Must you be cruel?

WALTER
She keeps flaunting the child like some sort of curative. Some declaration of a truth -.

MARIA
The truth.

WALTER
It's a poor conception.

MARIA
It enriches me.

WALTER
Well, then share the wealth, Maria.

MARIA
No.

Yes. Bless my soul.	WALTER
Never.	MARIA
No scuttling off to the scene of the crime.	WALTER
Let me by.	MARIA
<i>Let us all be glorified!</i>	WALTER
Walter, please -.	EMMA
Keep away.	MARIA
Suffer the children, Maria, for of such heaven is made.	WALTER
She's <i>my</i> refuge.	MARIA
Leave her be.	EMMA
Greediness is a far cry from godliness.	WALTER
My - light.	MARIA
You're supposed to let it shine damn-it!	WALTER
No! Stop!	MARIA
Give it up!	WALTER
Emma!	MARIA
Walter!	EMMA

(In the quick struggle,
 GRACE is dropped to the
 floor.)

MARIA
Grace. GRACE what has he done?!

WALTER
Damn.

MARIA
Grace. Sweet Jesus. Talk to me!

EMMA
Is this your stomping out?!

WALTER
Yes.

MARIA
Look, Emma. She's hurt.

WALTER
It should feel better.

MARIA
He's broken her. She's broken. Now what will I do?

EMMA
Please, Maria. This is the time to let go. It is just a doll -.

MARIA
NO! No! I heard her cry, Emma! I heard her cry. I heard her cry -.

EMMA
She was born dead.

MARIA
She was born and reborn! Of my flesh but with the holy spirit.
She lived as sure as I live for her! She lived!

EMMA
We'll get another -.

MARIA
There is no other! Grace. Speak to me.
(Exits on -.)
Grace. Grace. Come away. Come away.
(Locks her door.)

EMMA
(With MARIA'S lines.)
Maria. Please. Wait. Maria, let me in. Maria.

WALTER
It's a - convention.

EMMA

(Turns on WALTER.)

Childbirth is anything but convenient!

WALTER

Childbirth?

EMMA

I mid-wifed her.

WALTER

And that your honor is corroborating evidence of their shared psychosis.

EMMA

But the baby was born dead, Walter! Yes. Too early.

WALTER

Which explains?

EMMA

Things happened. They had to mean - something. Had to be - redeemed.

WALTER

Who gave her the doll?

EMMA

I did. A childhood relic. She was frantic. Wailing. Inconsolable. It seemed harmless - at first.

WALTER

Harmless is wearing the same pair of socks during the 77' World Series. The Yankees won anyway.

EMMA

Is it the same thing?

WALTER

By any other name.

EMMA

That doll gave her meaning and you broke it.

WALTER

If it broke, then what did it mean?

EMMA

To Maria it meant everything. Everything.

WALTER

We're all of us grasping at less than straws. Emma, you especially appreciate that.

EMMA

Yes. But I have my flowers and my poetry.

WALTER

Your flowers are dead and only dead men read your poetry.

EMMA

Are you a dead man?

WALTER

Ultimately.

EMMA

But, meantime, Walter, our little triumphs.

WALTER

Triumphs? You mean our agonies. The cold steel, the cold food, the icy stares, the dull lights, the sharp voices, the endless, endless nights. Can I tell you I feel madness feeding on my mind?

EMMA

Mine or yours?

WALTER

Both of ours I should think.

EMMA

But for different reasons.

WALTER

Emma. Emma. All the fuss and bother. This is just a nightmare between unconsciousness.

EMMA

Your sort blame and deny God all at once.

WALTER

The concept eludes me.

EMMA

I'm caught between two extremities!

WALTER

There are the facts.

EMMA

There are only interpretations. Yes, it's true, and I see what happens when - absolutes meet. When we create - meaning. Try to - define our existence - one way or another. Those definitions - those convictions are walls, Walter, and walls - they need defending and defense requires - weaponry and people die at the point of someone else's point-of-view.

WALTER

There. There you are. You're such a - dichotomous thinker. You're - wounded, yet remain standing. The - landscape shifts, yet you keep your balance - straddling heaven and earth. To live in such - duality requires a superior mind. Like yours.

EMMA

A haunted mind. Like yours.

WALTER

Until I emptied myself, Emma. No more explanations. No more rationalizations. No more clocks. And I stared into the black abyss - this great maw of existence without recourse. Without an answer. Without even a question. And survived!

EMMA

Is nihilism survival?

WALTER

Yes. I stopped -

EMMA

Caring.

WALTER

Speculating. Such freedom. Such - release. Like my broken soldier.

EMMA

A fiction.

WALTER

HIS NAME WAS JACOB AND HE WELCOMED DEATH! He welcomed death.

EMMA

Jacob. Your - son - Walter.

WALTER

My - only - son.

EMMA

Yes. Of course. And the root of your - philosophy.

WALTER

I hated receiving your letters.

EMMA

I sent you rose petals. Red roses.

WALTER

Yes. You hide from the light, but have such courage.

EMMA

Enough to love -. Cyrano. Enough to love. Believe that.

(EMMA touches WALTER.)

WALTER
My god - it is - still possible.

(MARIA enters. She has wrapped herself in the bloody sheet and knife in hand is crazed now and fixed on destruction.)

MARIA
It's all over!

EMMA
Maria!

MARIA
Over.

EMMA
What -?

MARIA
Now I have no Grace!

EMMA
Take that sheet off!

MARIA
She's been betrayed.

WALTER
Good god.

MARIA
Exposed and died.

WALTER
This does go too far.

MARIA
Yes. Exposed and died. Died.

EMMA
She only fell.

MARIA
There's nothing left. The end is near.

EMMA
No, Maria. I'll show you.

MARIA
There's nothing left I say! No place to hide.

Here. EMMA

The barbarians have broken through. Broken through. MARIA

He's leaving. EMMA

Entered the sanctum. Everything is defiled. MARIA

Right. WALTER

Defiled. MARIA

I'll leave and no one will be the wiser. WALTER

All is vanity. MARIA

Yes! EMMA

And wisdom is pearls before swine. MARIA

Look. WALTER

Swine like you, sir. Like Father. MARIA

Watch me going. WALTER

Piggies to the trough. Boars in a china shop. MARIA

Maria. EMMA

Breaking hearts and minds willy-nilly. MARIA

See - I'm at the door -. WALTER

And you know the thing about pork - MARIA
(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

(Shift. Sees cup with
poisoned tea.)

- the thing about pork - it makes me thirsty.
(Takes up the cup.)

EMMA

Dear god, Maria, what are you thinking?!

MARIA

Thinking, Emma? I'm thinking about Shakespeare - and us forsaken
flowers!

EMMA

Please -.

MARIA

Two of your favorite subjects, right o' true apothecary? If the
drugs are quick - then thus with a kiss.'

EMMA

Maria!

MARIA

Oh, I know the Bard as well. And you are my cursed Iago. And
this is tea laced with aconite.

WALTER

That was meant for me!

MARIA

Right, Emma? But from what plant did we prepare such a brew?
Perhaps Iago knows it as monkshood or wolfsbane.

EMMA

There are other dolls.

MARIA

Perhaps Friar's cap. It's a resilient perennial.

WALTER

I should be the one.

MARIA

Grows up to three feet tall.

EMMA

Maria.

MARIA

It nurtures one of the most deadly poisons found in the plant
world. Correct, sister?

EMMA

How can I convince you -?

MARIA
It's been done. It's been done and done and done and done! And
so good night.

EMMA
MARIA!

(MARIA drinks.)

WALTER
DON'T!
(Rushes MARIA. MARIA stabs
him. WALTER cries out.)

MARIA
And that is meant for you.

WALTER
(Drops to the floor.)
Finally. But the pain.

EMMA
My god! Oh, my god.

MARIA
Escape, Emma!

EMMA
I can't -.

WALTER
This is no answer. Get out!

EMMA
Impossible.

MARIA
Run, Emma!

WALTER
The key.

EMMA
I mustn't leave the house!

MARIA
They trample the flowers! Run.

EMMA
Please -.

WALTER
Unlock the door, damn it! You can be saved!

The sheriff -. EMMA

Tell him the truth. MARIA

Is that possible? EMMA

GO! WALTER

NOW! MARIA

ALL RIGHT! EMMA
(Begins cross to the door.)
Okay. I'm going.

Be free, Emma. MARIA

To get help. EMMA

Write for me, Emma. WALTER

We need help. Rescue. Deliverance. EMMA

(At the door, EMMA hesitates,
opens it and is flooded in
yellow light.)

Oh, my god. Walter. Maria. Look! The daffodils. A host of
daffodils bright and brassy. Can you hear them. They're
trumpeting the sun. Trumpeting life. Yes! Spring. My god.
It's going to be all right. It's spring. It's spring all over
again!

(A moment and EMMA exits
into the glow.)

(The End.)