- **WE THREE**

A play by Len Berkman

*Scene One*:

The unseen surround: A major Hanseatic port city, along the North Sea; it will later join in the confederation of Germany. The scene we behold: A somewhat disorganized arbor, in a warm time of year, quite long ago. We are beneath maple, oak, linden, amid bramble, sun-specked, heavily shadowed. Homes are likely near-by, vaguely glimpsed, not close. *Swing Boy* (as we’ll call him, even after learning his official given name) completes the hanging of a rope swing from a partially horizontal tree limb. His left arm is not as adept as his right, but the source of difficulty is uncertain and, with modest effort, overcome. *Swing Boy* is in his teens, lithe, indefinably delicate yet determined.

Before *he* ‘boards’ his swing for fuller-scale enjoyment, *Swing Boy* takes note of his surroundings.  *He* wipes sweat from his brow with his forearm, strips off his shirt, pants, even underpants, as *he* half-sings, half-‘teases’, a hymn he clearly enjoys.  *He* pushes his swing as he might a liked playmate or a percussive musical instrument that lives at the center of his fun. Once *he’s* hopped onto his roped seat, *he* ‘pumps’ with his body and legs to lift his trajectory to an impressive height. His left arm recurrently poses an imbalance *he* manages routinely to correct.

Visible throughout this ‘test-run’ sequence, neither hiding nor coming forth to declare her presence – in fact, appearing surprised when *Swing Boy* surveys his surroundings but fails to spot her – is a teen-age *Girl* in a light summer dress. *She’s* adept at whistling, perhaps with the skills to imitate specific German bird songs – a lively range, from sweet to cackle: elster, amsel, kohlmeise, kolkrabe, stieglitz, *et al*.) -- with affectionate intent to attract attention. Her bird songs are virtual soundtrack to her curious ground, sprig, leaf and limb search for bugs, and *she* may in fact spot an insect or two to lift onto her fingers to inspect them more closely. Though *Swing Boy* catches her periodic whistles, *he* shows no sign of concern to pinpoint their source. The *Girl* is amused, not bothered, when *he* chooses to swing bare. Her whistling frequency and style reflects this: Might *Swing Boy* actually wish to exhibit his vulnerable body? Might *he* delight inbeing swing-flight companion to a wild aviary chorale?

The *Girl* removes her sandals with a flourish, possibly as a mischievous prelude to her doffing additional apparel, much as *Swing Boy* did. Just then a second teenage *Boy,* slightly older, a camera strapped around his neck, tip-toes across the woodland brush toward her, one finger pressed over his lips as signal for her to stay silent. The *Girl* and the second *Boy* exchange quasi-birdsong mimicry, their sustained mutual focus most visibly on *Swing Boy* as *he* swings, though the *Girl* is not averse to slipping an insect down the collar of the second boy’s shirt. Both the *Girl* and the second *Boy* respond with instant controlled alertness, perhaps concern, to *Swing Boy’s* moments of imbalanced wobble.

Then, likewise more in mischief than in malice, the second *Boy* nudges the suddenly startled *Girl* out into the open.

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GIRL (*Amused? Upset?*): Why’d you do that?

2nd BOY (*A whisper to the Girl, not audible to Swing Boy*): Surprise him!

In her attempt to resist the *2ND Boy’s* nudge, the *Girl* loses her balance and nearly stumbles, helplessly visible now to *Swing Boy*, across the arc of his swing. (When he calls her name, it’s pronounced Paulina.)

SWING BOY: Watch out! (*He leaps off the swing and narrowly prevents her injury*.) Pauline! Are you…?

2nd BOY (*As Pauline glares at him, he whispers again beyond Swing Boy’s hearing and sight*): Sorry! I didn’t think!

SWING BOY: Are you alright? (*Pauline shakes her head; her curls reply in the affirmative even more than her face does*.) Pauline. You scared me half to death.

PAULINE: Yes, I’m sorry. I didn’t think.

SWING BOY (*Laughs*): And here I am, more than half naked, without the least clue I had an audience! Besides those squawking birds, of course. Such glorious songs from such sharp beaks! Did my best but I couldn’t spot where they were, or what species.

PAULINE: You were flying right up there with them onto those branches.

SWING BOY: I felt that, too!

*They* share a moment of happy, if still awkwardly excited, silence.

SWING BOY: That nice dress you’re wearing: did you make it yourself? That bird-design has your signature. I should do a sketch of you in it.

PAULINE (*Sweetly, with no subtext*): I like you without your clothes on. (*As a purely sensible deduction*:) Women who marry boys of your sort won’t need to learn to sew, except of course for themselves.

SWING BOY: My “sort”? (*No reply*.) I could learn to sew, even if I don’t need to learn. You’d teach me.

PAULINE: That would be funny to do, but I’d like that.

SWING BOY: The faster I swing, the fresher the air on my skin. Each swoop’s firm and gentle all at once.

PAULINE: I like to imagine the air. I wish I were air, the air on your skin. Is that an improper wish? I’m fully prepared to blush beet red. I don’t want you to stop liking me.

SWING BOY: I’m relieved you didn’t fall in that bramble and get scratched – and dirty all you’ve sewed.

PAULINE: My mother calls this a ‘frock’. It took her over a month to teach me how to assemble its sections. (If you) ask me, it’s really a quilt of little flowers. I look like my own little sister would, if I ever

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got to have a sister. You’re so lucky to have a brother in your life. Someone to be mean to and to love.

SWING BOY: Your mother would have wrung my neck if I’d knocked you to the ground. Only numbskulls can’t jump off their swings in time. If she ordered me to stay out of your sight till I grew up, I’d have had to consent. Causing you to cry or even just to rip your ‘frock’ would have turned her whole month-plus of teaching you upside down!

PAULINE: The fault would have been mine. Totally. Don’t ever claim otherwise! When it comes to faults, you’re always too quick to take the blame.

SWING BOY: We both would’ve sat here weeping.

*Neither* knows what to say next.

PAULINE: Do you want me to leave?

SWING BOY: Why ever why?

PAULINE: Good. Numbskull *me* to suggest that when I truly prefer I stay here with you. I wouldn’t mind either.

SWING BOY: Wouldn’t mind what?

PAULINE: If you found *me* here naked but you stayed. My mother believes in privacy. I’m not sure what privacy is, but sometimes when I guess at things I’m actually correct. I believe in adventure.

SWING BOY: And your mother doesn’t?

PAULINE: My ma and pa call *life* an adventure. Maybe privacy and adventure go together. My parents like to boast how adventurous they are, so I can be proud I’m their daughter.

SWING BOY: Some people think privacy is pretty special, pretty sacred. Like God. Shame is special, too. (*He registers Pauline’s face*.) You look like you’re about to cry. You don’t believe in shame?

PAULINE: You do a lot of thinking.

SWING BOY: I like thinking.

PAULINE: Shame makes us try to hide. But not you: You never hide. You don’t build blockades, here with me or anywhere. I can reach out my arm and not bang it on what you’ve thrown up to protect yourself or to shut me out. You don’t carry armor or weapons, like those gorgeous muscle men we saw in the battle paintings at school yesterday. Most boys in our class hide from me; they want to be gorgeous at a distance. You don’t even dream of becoming gorgeous, do you? Of having me mistake you for some kind of hero?

SWING BOY: Why would I be so ridiculous? Not with anyone I like.

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PAULINE (*Takes in his words*): Not with “anyone” you like? Me among *millions*?

SWING BOY: Isn’t it grand that there are lots of great people all across this planet? Thousands -- *even* millions! -- that each of us can get to meet and like? If we spent our entire lifetime seeking them out, there’ll still be scads of others.

PAULINE (*Who nearly says the opposite*): I agree. (*Then comes her hitch)*: But why do you want to meet practically everyone in the world?

SWING BOY: When I learn how to do that, I’m going to sit down every person I come to like and I’m going to do their portraits. Or they can stand while I paint them, of course. Or do something, some gesture, some action, that reveals their insides. Or I can reveal their insides *for* them.

PAULINE (*Oh, what a trusting outburst*): You really know how to do that! I can’t wait for you to reveal the inside of *me*!

SWING BOY: You’d be one in a million! (*Pauline, uncertain, beams; he* *points to swing*): Like a ride?

PAULINE: Oh my. With you?

SWING BOY: I’ve made it pretty sturdy. I didn’t know for sure that I’d succeed, that I’d have the patience and the stamina. (*A chuckle*) Typically, I might be wrong, but I bet it *can* hold the two of us. (*Pauline pictures that*.) Either of us can be the one who stands and steers the ship. You don’t need more than one reliable arm to steer. The other just has to hold tight.

PAULINE: I could just sit on your lap, you know. You don’t need more than one reliable lap.

SWING BOY: I guess.

PAULINE: Should I apologize for a suggestion like that? I wish I knew what suggestions are OK and what suggestions will make you silent.

SWING BOY: I only wonder what it will mean if I got excited. If that part of me got excited. I’m already excited in other ways, just as you might be.

PAULINE: Do you expect I’d mind a little excitement?

SWING BOY: Some girls would mind very much.

PAULINE: And some boys – not you, I think -- would get embarrassed.

SWING BOY: Or “heroic”. And, I guess, flaunt.

PAULINE (*After a moment*): Or become accusatory. And cruel.

SWING BOY: Because they’re embarrassed? Like you think I never get?

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PAULINE: When it happens with me with a boy, I have to act cruel, too. Boys just assume how heroic they look with that “proof” between their thighs. They expect me to gasp and touch it and swoon.

SWING BOY: Even when we’re adventurous we have to draw lines, I guess. I can’t imagine you cruel.

PAULINE: Self-protective, then. Unless I decide on the opposite. Drawing lines is our adventure’s first step. But next is, hopefully, when we realize there are no lines we need to draw.

SWING BOY (*Laughs*): You wouldn’t say that if you were an artist!

PAULINE: Maybe I’ll become one. Birds inspire me, like people you. (*A growing thought*.) What makes you so different from other boys? Your brother is deep in my heart, too, but I can’t talk with him like *this*.

SWING BOY: Yes you can. I do it all the time.

PAULINE: He’s lucky he has you. (*His response to her saying this strikes her as curious.*) Sometimes I dream about sneaking up, to watch and listen to the two of you when you don’t know I’m inches away.

SWING BOY: It seems to me you don’t really want the ride I offered. (*Amiably*) Maybe, if I make a real effort to be honest about myself, I’m wrong about the impression I make on you.

*Swing Boy* gets back onto his swing, tentatively gestures a welcome to *Pauline.*  But *he* resumes swinging on his own.

PAULINE (*After slight hesitance*): I spy on you a lot.

SWING BOY: Each time I go naked?

PAULINE: I know I’m not supposed to. And I’m sure I’m not your only spy. …I want you to know something.

SWING BOY (*Amused*): Something I don’t already know?

PAULINE: Who knows? I’ll just blurt this out: (*Blurts this fast.*) You’re just as interesting to watch when you have your trousers on. (*They laugh*.) And even when you wear your birthday suit, I try to focus on who you are *inside*. (*They each wait for the other to speak next*.) Does that sound… strange? (*Swing Boy doesn’t* *reply*. *Pauline points to the shirt he dropped across the bramble*.) That’s my favorite shirt of yours, because of its sleeves.

SWING BOY: You can’t tell anything’s wrong with my arm when I wear that, can you.

PAULINE: Nothing *is* wrong with your arm. It’s just not a match for your other. Could be shorter, but not by more than an inch, or a little twisted. Less muscle near your shoulder when you lean, which gives

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you that sweet nervous wobble I keep waiting for. Still, you don’t need two arms to paint your paintings, do you? No artist does! (*She laughs*.) Or is there someone famous who uses two brushes at the same time, and I should know the name? (*She* *laughs again*.) Anyway, you’d hate being famous. I think I’d hate it, too. (*She tries to keep from laughing at herself*.) Is it OK if I keep babbling like this? I could probably talk about your arm for hours and your lack of muscles for days. (*As he takes this in*.) What I mean to say is: Skinny boys can be very nice to… My mother says you’re actually *not* deformed. You just need more exercise on a tilt.

SWING BOY: I don’t really enjoy the attention my arm receives.

PAULINE: Who would? If you’d like, I can *force* myself not to pay attention to it. It’s you, though, who makes me rush to its defense. I’d rather talk about your drawings, the ones you showed us for the first time in class last month. I’m sure I’m going to embarrass you when I tell you this – yes, actually embarrass you! – : I fell in love with your drawings! A memory stays in my head of how you held them up for us to appreciate. What a smile you had as you realized not one of us had snickered. Even your funny arm looked as playful as my face must look when I see you get that happy, all fingers and eyes. And what your drawings *do* with just a few strokes! I officially started spying on you that very night.

SWING BOY: That’s pretty hilarious.

PAULINE (*A deep breath first*): It’s not. In fact, I might be pleased if you ever spot me doing it.

SWING BOY: Even if that makes me puzzled or frightened?

PAULINE: That’s not how you’d react.

SWING BOY: You know that?

PAULINE: Maybe I do. Maybe there’s no difference between the real you and how I imagine you, except when you pretend I’m wrong. I think if you’d spotted me spying earlier, you’d just wave me closer and talk as teasingly with me as you do now. Do you remember the afternoon when school was out and you’d wandered alone – you *thought* you were alone! – to Puffer’s Beach?. You noticed an older child watch a younger one smash a sand pie and gurgle with delight. You whipped out your pad and sketched both toddlers in two seconds flat: Instantly, you knew how to suggest the dazzle of the pond and the caking of wet sand on the pie-smasher’s toes. Your strokes made those children cherubic, hardly the ordinary mischief-makers I saw in front of me. And, magically, the child observer and *you* became one person. (*Pauline gestures uncertainty that her praise of Swing Boy is of interest to him*.) Do I make a mountain out of a…? If I ever become half as skilled with my birds and insects as you are with people, I’ll run through these woods screaming your name.

SWING BOY: I’ve very young, Pauline. You are also. I don’t mean to criticize. I need to declare what’s obvious. You frighten me *lots*. That’s not an insult. Insects and birds are a start for you. Maybe a false start, like what I draw may be for me. I just don’t know for sure yet what’s deepest in my heart. What’s

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inside yours, too, that we’d call our souls. I don’t know what I’ll ever achieve in my life. I don’t even know what I’ve already achieved, despite your nice praise of me. It’s OK to wipe your tears. I hate that I’ve made you cry. I’m truly grateful for every blunt word you throw at me. But I’m terrified. If I’m scared I can’t live up to how you see me, how can I live up to how I want to see myself?

PAULINE: I’m terrified too. I’m so interested in you I get sick. “Interest” is not supposed to make anyone sick!

SWING BOY: What if I’d spied on you doing your bird practice and your insect research? Or sprinted through your bedroom window to see if I’d come upon you sketching your pet beetle?

PAULINE: You’ve actually imagined that? You’re that curious about me?

SWING BOY: Not really. I just meant: What if I told you that you were the greatest ornithologist-and- entomologist-to-be that I could ever hope to meet? Would you roar over my mouthful of words? Would you be no more than tickled pink, thank me, and move on? I wouldn’t have laid a real burden on you?

PAULINE: I’d wonder what feelings prompted your mouthful. If your excitement for my hobbies reflected a fuller excitement about *me*. I’d concentrate less on what you’d expect me to do with my life and more on what we might enjoy today. I don’t know: on how we might simply have fun together: Not scouting for eagles or caterpillars or sketching our different choices of models side by side: Just being in the woods, here by your swing, you naked, me thinking, exactly as we are now.

SWING BOY: I don’t think I could “simply have fun”. Life is too short.

PAULINE: Then what are you doing right now?

SWING BOY: Enjoying our chat while studying these trees and the sky, noticing a number of your favorite winged and tiny six-legged creatures within inches of us.

PAULINE: We’re not having a “chat”. We’re being serious. (*Hesitant*) If you put your arms around me, we could become even more serious. Even your problem arm.

SWING BOY: See? You yourself don’t want to “simply have fun.”

PAULINE (*Laughs*): We’re twins who don’t know it. Or won’t admit it. OK, I won’t admit it. ‘Cause I want us too much to *be* twins.

SWING BOY: Exactly.

PAULINE: But you’re more a mystery to me than that sounds. My life doesn’t stir your questions, like yours stirs mine; why is that?  *I’m* interested in you – for me, ‘interested’ is the most passionate word in existence! –interested in you even when I’m just happy in your home when your ma, in that stern tone of hers, asks in spite of herself if I want to stay for dinner.  *Especially* when.

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SWING BOY: So you spy on us even when you’re right under our noses? Pa says you’re over at our home so much he should charge you rent.

PAULINE: Do you agree with him? Am I such a bother?

SWING BOY: *Daniel* likes you around. He’d enshrine your ‘twins’ idea. He calls you our sister.

PAULINE: He treats me like one. But he’s an even bigger spy than I am. I think he secretly writes down every word you and I say to each other. Once I accused him of wanting to become writer, maybe a novelist, but I told him he’d need more stuff than what he stole through spying. He told me you and I were more interesting – he uses that word too! – than any book he’d ever read. I told him he was silly.

SWING BOY: But you didn’t really consider him silly?

PAULINE: No.

SWING BOY: Are you in love with him?

PAULINE (*After a moment*): Not the way you mean.

SWING BOY: Sometimes, you sound like you love everyone in our entire world.

PAULINE: That’s how *you* sound. You make such a feeling rise in me. Do you know how kind you are? You can be very annoying, but I don’t know anyone as kind.

SWING BOY: I have no idea of what it means to be kind. I imagine it takes a ton of patience.

PAULINE: It does. Take you with your parents when they have you do your overload of chores. They can be totally wretched to you, but you honor each of their demands and you answer their complaints so gently you make me itch. (*Swing* *Boy ignores* *the moment she gives him to reply*.) Where does your kindness come from? And that special way you have with those children in the playground who jump off their mamas’ laps to run to you. How you lift them, “chat” with them, let them see how you draw. Do you picture yourself a father someday? Do you ever make Daniel envy you? He’s incredibly kind, too, but with you I’m in the presence of a miracle. (*Pauline plants herself closer to Swing Boy’s arc, almost too close for his arcs to persist*.) I’m saying too much. I need to look you in the eye and see your response. Stop, please, Philipp. Stop and jump off your swing. Now!

*Swing Boy* stays on his swing, neither markedly speeding nor slowing. During several swings past *Pauline*, *he* glances at her in silence.

PAULINE: You won’t?

SWING BOY: I’m not made to do everything you want me to do. I’m sorry that makes you angry.

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PAULINE: I seem angry? I’m the opposite. But I have foolish questions I can’t hold back anymore: Yesterday: You carried a small bag to your supply store and come out the next minute with a bigger bag., Then you turned right around, brought the bigger bag back in, but this time you stayed for maybe an hour. Finally, when you came out again you had your small bag. What was that all about? (*Pauline clearly does not expect Swing Boy to do more here than hear her question*.) Last week: You start to twirl down from the Zacharias Hill Farm Stand practically in a dance. Minutes later, you climb the hill again, pause again at the stand, but you don’t buy anything. I almost decide I’ll pretend to shop myself, just to see. Would that have interrupted you and someone? Is there someone at the Zachary Hill Farm Stand you *also* call ‘one in a million’? (*She has reached her point of exasperation.*) DO YOU HEAR WHAT I ASK?

SWING BOY: Yes. (*But he says no more as he continues to swing*.)

PAULINE (*Starts to leave*): I shouldn’t throw blunt questions at you. And I shouldn’t expect you to reply. See you around! (*Her parting barb as she steps out of sight*.) I admit it! I’m jealous!

SWING BOY (*Blurts out, the moment Pauline is nearly out of sight*): I *have* been watching you lurk in these woods.

Silence*. Pauline* turns. *She* takes stock. *Swing Boy* faces away, tries to imitate her bird whistle and look indifferent

PAULINE: You can’t take back what you just said. When did you do that?

SWING BOY (*As he slows his swing and leaps off*): I haven’t spied. You know I wander the trails here to mull things. One time, by pure accident, I saw you and someone I didn’t recognize. When some bug became too skittish for him to catch, you dashed in front of him. You were so deft. A flip of your wrist, or how you’d spread your fingers and tilt your head while you gently blew in the bug’s opposite direction. You didn’t mind the dirt on your knees, or even on your clothes. Once you wiped the sweat off your forehead with your skirt. You stir… such curiosity. In me.

PAULINE: Curiosity?

SWING BOY: Girls are mysterious. Maybe if I had a sister…

PAULINE: She wouldn’t be anything like me.

SWING BOY: Like I’m not like Daniel.

PAULINE: If watching me with another boy made you jealous, too, would you admit that?

SWING BOY: To you?

PAULINE: I’m the only one who counts.

SWING BOY: Why wouldn’t I? You’d love to hear me say that.

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PAULINE: Yes. I would. Are you going to?

SWING BOY: If it was true, I would.

PAULINE: Are you teasing?

SWING BOY: I want you to be happy with everyone who makes you happy.

PAULINE: That’s not fair.

SWING BOY: Isn’t that what love should be about?

PAULINE: What are you saying?

SWING BOY: It should be simple. It should be obvious.

PAULINE: What? I’m the one who’s clearly the numbskull.

SWING BOY: That I love you.

PAULINE: Yes?

SWING BOY: That I want the best for you.

PAULINE: Oh.

SWING BOY: You’re disappointed to hear that?

PAULINE: A naked boy who tells me he wants the best for me is pretty disappointing.

SWING BOY: I’m confused.

PAULINE: Oh? Why is that? It’s your friend here, Pauline, who should be confused. You’re the one who’s mysterious. Maybe you’re a girl.

SWING BOY: I’ve made you angry. I’m sorry.

PAULINE: I want to make *you* angry. I want to make you upset when I insult you. I just called you a girl.

SWING BOY: And you’re a girl. Is that an insult?

PAULINE: Don’t pretend to be so innocent.

SWING BOY: I’m not innocent. I’m naked. And we’re never supposed to be, out here. I’m a rebel.

PAULINE: A rebel who wants the best for me. Who says that’s what love’s about.

SWING BOY: Exactly.

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PAULINE: Then at the after-school fair, when I had my insect sketches on display? When you said you’d break your rule against fairs – who in the world has a rule against fairs? – to come see mine? When I thought you’d stopped looking down at me for trying to be an artist like you. You never showed up. Why? I looked for you the entire time. When anyone stopped by to praise what I did, I could hardly say a word. Why did you change your mind?

SWING BOY: But it worked. (*Pauline is taken aback*.) I didn’t want to hurt you.

PAULINE: That doesn’t stop you in the least.

SWING BOY: What should matter to you is what you’ve drawn. Not my praise. Not anyone’s praise. To you, insects are beautiful, just as beautiful as I find people to be. Leave it at that. If I kept my promise to come and applaud, I would get in your way, muddy your gift to yourself. Why help anyone we care for veer from her path?

PAULINE: Really? No day passes without my urge to help someone I care about succeed. If I agreed with you, I’d have to hide in a hole. (*Watches his face react*.) Birds, insects, and people are *all* beautiful.

SWING BOY: Pauline, you didn’t catch sight of me, but I’ve *been* to each of your exhibits, this last one included. It’s not easy for me to keep out of your sight. Even if you didn’t draw as artfully as you do, I’d see what your precision reveals about you. Why it’s safer to say “biology” and “nature” than what your drawings also reflect.

PAULINE: Of what’s inside me?

SWING BOY: How you and that friend of yours crawled so intent, intensely, side by side. So alert to your sharp common purpose you were careless how your bodies touched. Intimate, yet separate, keeping your collection jar inches ahead of you both. I want to capture that in what I draw and paint: how bombarding ingredients in a moment at hand suggest the bombardment within moments to come.

PAULINE (*Shivers*): You see so much you make it hard for me to breathe.

SWING BOY: I get distracted. I forget what I start out to say or do. Or hope to feel. I’m sorry that makes you feel suspicious and rejected .

PAULINE: “Suspicious and rejected” isn’t half of it! (*Whispers, to enable herself to get her words out: is she uncertain she should say this with her fervor at such a pitch?*) I’ll remember what you’ve described of me and Otto for the rest of my life.

SWING BOY: Last week. Do you remember what you did with your blue striped umbrella when that imp of a wind gust blew it inside out? (*He studies her response*.) It impressed me that you’d be out in that storm all by yourself.

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PAULINE: It was such a lovely open field. On other days, filled with butterflies. I imagine your hiding behind that wide white oak at the woods’ edge is pretty irresistible.

SWING BOY: So you did spot me there! I watched you twirl and leap and drop your jar and laugh. A Pauline-with-Umbrella dance just for me.

PAULINE: Did the spy get as drenched as the dancer?

SWING BOY: The spy was tempted to spring from that white oak to *become* your umbrella.

PAULINE: You’re not afraid we know each other too well?

SWING BOY: Or think we should be less like each other?

PAULINE: It’s opposites who are supposed to attract. Isn’t familiarity supposed to breed contempt?

SWING BOY: That first day in kindergarten, when you touched my shoulder in line-up for recess? I concluded it wasn’t accidental, though you never did it again that whole year.

PAULINE: That’s sweet! You drew ‘conclusions’ in kindergarten!

SWING BOY: And ever since. Usually correct ones. That sounds haughty, doesn’t it?

PAULINE: Not if your conclusions are accurate. Not if they goad you to take risks.

SWING BOY: The worst reason to take any risk is when you like someone.

PAULINE: I can’t think of a better reason.

SWING BOY: But there’s so much to lose. And to figure out what’s real. I’m so used to dreaming about you, I don’t know how right now is not a dream. All I had to do was jump off my swing?

PAULINE: Yes! That told me everything.

SWING BOY: Gosh, Paulina. I’m actually so nervous…!

PAULINE: It’s… (*She can’t find the word*.)

SWING BOY (*Laughs*): Excruciating!

PAULINE (*Laughs, too: He’s found her word*): In the extreme!

SWING BOY: How do we make this ridiculous nervousness disappear?

PAULINE: We take a cold shower. We shout for help! We muffle our thoughts We call for sly Daniel to come to our rescue!

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*Swing Boy* grabs onto the ropes of his swing, either to steady himself or to leap again onto the swing.

SWING BOY: If you and I feel the same about each other, shouldn’t we be OK about it? And why do we keep saying we “like” each other when we mean…

PAULINE: If you don’t start swinging again this instant, I’ll…!

The hidden Second *Boy*, *Daniel*, bird-whistles.  *Paulina* startles and lets loose her by-now characteristic laugh.

SWING BOY: If I hoist myself up now, it’ll only be to leap straight down and wrap you in my arms.

PAULINE: No. It’ll only be to let me grab your legs and let me fly with you above that sycamore.

SWING BOY: Gosh. How thoughts can run wild!

PAULINE: We have to *do* something quick or all we’ll *be* are thoughts.

*Daniel* shifts to a wolf-whistle.

PAULINE: If you decide to kiss me, I won’t object. Our wolf here in the woods won’t object either. Have you ever kissed *any*one?

*Swing Boy* lets go of the swing ropes. *Pauline* approaches him. *Daniel* wolf-whistles again, with yet more pronounced humor.

SWING BOY: Something tells me our kiss will have more than a wolf-witness.

PAULINE: The more-than-a-wolf is rooting for us.

SWING BOY: You’re not surprised?

PAULINE: What surprises me is how not-surprised *you* sound. And how pleased you look to havehim as witness.

SWING BOY: His self-pleased wolf whistles and (*shouts the word*) *stupid* (!) bird calls have that effect on me.

PAULINE: The kick of it is that Daniel arrived here exactly when I did. I hoped he’d grow tired of hiding or whatever he thinks he’s been up to out there. (*Now she shouts*:) *And skidoo* !

SWING BOY: From what you disclose, he’s the third excited spy in our club.

PAULINE: You’re OK with that?

SWING BOY: He won’t interrupt our moment of extreme pleasure, if that’s what worries you. Only you can put theke*bash* on what we two are about to do.

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*They* chuckle over this thought.

PAULINE (*More statement than question*): Will I ever stop trying to figure either of you out?

Tentatively, then securely, *Swing Boy* and *Pauline* embrace. With a joyous quasi-‘war whoop’, *Daniel* bounds into view. *Swing Boy* and *Pauline*, indeed, do not break apart.

DANIEL: Don’t mind me, Birthday-Suit Boy.

SWING BOY: I want to mind. Howdy to you, dear Daniel. Paulina says howdy, too. Come join us.

DANIEL: Wouldn’t that’d be a bit ridiculous?

SWING BOY (*To* *Pauline*): Would it be?

DANIEL: It’s one thing to share a bed with you, Swing Boy. It’s another to see you in the arms of our pretty Miss Muffet.

SWING BOY: “Along came a spider/ and sat down beside her.” The spider *did*.

DANIEL: And it frightened Miss Muffet away. Is that what you’d have me do?

SWING BOY: Far from! We lock her in our arms. (*Gazes at Pauline fondly*) We block her routes of escape!

PAULINE: Take him up on it, Daniel. You and I give ‘spy’ a happy new meaning. Do you ever spy on Swing Boy while he sleeps?

SWING BOY: That’s Daniel right on the nose.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): It’s more often the other way ‘round. Birthday-Suit Boy’s the one prone to look over at *me*!

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): I did sneak into Daniel’s practice last week. Did you trail me there, too, Pauline? If you did, you’d gasp at what an athlete he’s become. Shelves of awards lie in store for him.

PAULINE (*To* *Swing Boy*): You’ve made your athlete blush.

SWING BOY: I do that every chance I get. (*To Daniel*) Don’t I?

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): It’s his revenge for how excited I get about his art.

SWING BOY: Rip off your shirt, Daniel. Show Pauline what a build you have. (*To Pauline*) Miles better than mine. Your jaw will drop.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): I have eyes that see through cloth. Your chest swells like a Greek god. No need to undo a single button. (*To Swing Boy*) But your zest for your brother is misdirected.

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SWING BOY (*My simple point is*): I love him. I want you to come to love him too.

PAULINE: I won’t complain about that. But before Daniel let you know he was here, you sounded a lot more zestful about *me.*

DANIEL: Swing Boy’s my biggest, in fact my only, fan. You have to take his exaggerated outbursts with more than a few grains of salt.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Didn’t you recognize those drawings of mine that so impressed you in class? They were all of Daniel.

PAULINE: You let us assume they were *self*-portraits.

SWING BOY: They were that, as well.

PAULINE: This is difficult for me to suggest. I hope you won’t call me vain. You put so much… passion… in how you draw. I think, for you, *looking* is passion. A surge of it before you even grab your pen or brush. I’m not making sense. Let me start again. I want you to take what I ask as praise, as an offering to you. But…

SWING BOY: Yes? (*Pauline doesn’t reply.)* But…?

PAULINE: Might I – ever – model for you, too? Would you object to… concentrating on me for as long as a drawing of yours, of me, would take?

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy, as Swing Boy hesitates before he gives Pauline his answer*): You wouldn’t mind if I took a whack at this (*indicates swing*) contraption of yours, would you?

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): I wouldn’t grow restless. I’d let you stare at me, *scrutinize* me, gaze at me, all you needed. All you wished. To your heart’s content. You could correct any mistake you made without a second of my impatience or pressure. I’d be fine if you spent hours on my lips alone.

DANIEL (*To Pauline, again after checking Swing Boy’s face to make sure what he says is not interruptive*): Birthday-suit boy would be the first to admit I have the stronger legs of us two. (*To Swing Boy*) Will you let me demonstrate my obvious point? Unless, of course, your pet contraption snaps apart when my kicks sail it above these trees.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): You’re not being fair to him. Plus, why block his response to my request?

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): I block your response?

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): He doesn’t block a thing. My response to you is … (laughs)… sure.

PAULINE (*To both Swing Boy and Daniel*): Do you consider me brazen?

DANIEL: It’s not like a girl to step between two brothers. We’re supposed to be *each other’s* rivals.

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SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Coming from Daniel, that’s like you caused *his* jaw to drop.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): I’m a terror when it’s a matter of going after what I want. I see how close the two of you are. And I want, in my own way, to be *part* of that. Not to…

DANIEL: Separate us?

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Don’t get a merciless tease started on his favorite subject

PAULINA: Which is?

DANIEL: Ta da!

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Isn’t it obvious?

DANIEL: When you can’t look to your parents, who do you have left?

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): And, as you’ve seen, I have Daniel.

DANIEL: And I my Birthday-Suit Boy.

PAULINA: And I?

DANIEL: You have your own mommy and your own daddy.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Which is not to send you running home. He means only that he envies you. Though, tease that he is, he won’t rush to correct you if you do worry you’re a threat to us. He may even try to make you suspect that he and I are “more than brothers” so you’ll tread with extra care – perhaps even excitement! – around us.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): You’d actually do that?

DANIEL: Only if it were true.

PAULINE: If I had a sister and she did that to me, I’d push her off a cliff.

DANIEL: You’d be that embarrassed?

PAULINE: I can’t stand people thinking I’m someone I’m not.

DANIEL: That’s pretty funny. Swing Boy and I can stand people thinking *anything* about us.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): All I can think about is how talented and sweet you are.

DANIEL: You’ve never heard of brothers who were also…?

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): Now he *is* teasing!

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DANIEL: I’m glad you’re not horrified. All of our other friends would be.

SWING BOY: Not to mention their parents. (*A quick exchange of looks with Daniel, then a laugh*.) And their priests or rabbis or ministers. Even though…

PAULINE: Well, if I thought you were telling the truth, I’d put a stop to it.

SWING BOY: No, you wouldn’t. You’re a spy, remember. You’d want to watch. (*Takes in her jolt, then* *continues more gently*) Not out of silly sensations. But to figure us out.

PAULINE: Can you and your brother really joke about something like this? Won’t you be punished?

SWING BOY: When there’s trust you can joke about anything. You didn’t hear his tease about my swing ‘contraption’ as a full-out put-down of me, did you?

PAULINE: You become a different person when Daniel’s with you. Why do boys find tussles – *especially* joke fights – so… enlivening?

SWING BOY: Daniel’s just being affectionate in his usual impertinent style. And I like to give his impish spirits my giant harmless punches.

PAULINE: But you let him interrupt your answer to what I struggled so hard with myself to ask. (*Swing Boy* gestures.) How am I supposed to take your doing that?

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): He assumed you heard him finally say ‘yes, *sure*’ to you earlier. He may not look it right now, Pauline, but Swing Boy’s as shy, as you are, maybe more so. I was making it easier for him to give you that yes. But now you’ve left him speechless again. I think he wants to ask if you mean you’d model for him unclothed. He never draws *himself* naked. Frankly, if he asked *me*, I would turn him down flat.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): I’m with Daniel. I turn you down flat. If anyone gets to be undraped in a studio, it should be the artist. Be as naked as you want, strictly for the eyes of your model, not for your future public of strangers.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): She makes good sense. Is that a deal? (*No reply.)* Or does it feel like a cheat?

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): I wish I understood her as effortlessly as I do you.

PAULINE: Isn’t it natural that you wouldn’t? I’m only ordinary. Most girls are. Just like most boys.

SWING BOY: Why does a fact sound like an insult? I didn’t mean what I said to hurt you.

DANIEL: If I may be so bold, I suggest we three lighten up a bit. (*To Swing Boy*) Time for me to swing you on my lap, buddy.

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SWING BOY: And how high might *that* take the two of us? Don’t forget that boast about your legs, lover boy.

DANIEL: Quite an empty boast, as you’ve so well pointed out. Though I’d wager our combined weight wouldn’t give your contraption a second thought. Pauline may voice objections to my bombast, but she herself can spot from miles away the love behind it. (*To Pauline*) Can’t you? (*He hardly expects a reply*.) Actually, since little brother’s so disinclined, would *you* like to swing on my lap?

PAULINA (*To Daniel*): The ‘contraption’s’ all yours, thank you. You and I speak a different language.

DANIEL: Really? (*Daniel whistles. No response from her. He whistles again*. *Then, to Swing Boy*:) We were whistling together before she broke in on you. Her whistle hurls mine into the dust. She *is* our damn rival. (*To Pauline*) Swing Boy was my bird-in-the-woods whistler champ ‘til you popped into our lives. Go ahead: knock his socks off. (*A glance at Swing* *Boy*) So to speak.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): I think I *will* accept your lover’s invitation.

*Paulina* joins *Daniel* at the swing.  *He* hoists her onto his lap.

SWING BOY: Now *I’ll* enjoy spying.

DANIEL: Sure as shooting, pal. (*To Pauline, as he begins to swing her, their trajectory unimpeded*) Whenever your lips are properly pursed, we’re all ears.

*Pauline* keeps her eyes on *Swing Boy*, then whistles, a round of diverse bird calls, beautifully. The brothers’ visibly positive response spurs her tolaunch into full song.  *Daniel* ‘replies’ in whistle harmony. *They* do not stop swinging.

SWING BOY: I wish I *could* whistle.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): Is he being modest? Or were you setting him up?

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): I *have* offered to help him explore his natural equipment, but he always declines. (*To Swing Boy*) The offer still stands. (*Daniel whistles. Pauline responds*.) In private, of course. Meanwhile, my Birthday-Suit Boy, listen to this enchanting creature you so awkwardly adore. (*To Pauline*) Yes: adore. He’s confessed that to me. In murmurs many a night as he drifts into sleep. (*Daniel whistles anew.)* Would that convince a female cardinal? (*He smiles, waits, whistles again, differently.)* A female thrush? ( *He waits, whistles.)* A warbler, male or female? A-swing here from branch to branch, with such a beauty in my lap, my thoughts turn to every endearing bird on this planet.

PAULINE (*Whistles back*): *That’s* a warbler.

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*Daniel* laughs, whistles, waits. This time *he* does not have long to wait. *Paulin*e whistles.  *Daniel* whistles in response. *Pauline* whistles.  *Daniel* whistles in response. So far, *Pauline’s* bird selection takes each lead. But now*, Pauline* whistles in response.  *Daniel* does a bit of lip warm-up movement clowning as *he* whistles again more inventively. *Pauline* whistles, mirrors *Daniel’s* warm-up; then, *she* whistles again, free-wheeling. Throughout, *Swing Boy* listens, watches their dynamic rapport. *He* is puzzled, enthralled. Suddenly, *Daniel* pumps the swing higher. *Pauline* gasps.

DANIEL (*With laughter*): Whoop-D -Whoops, Birthday-Suit Boy! Watch out! I’m sweeping Pauline off her feet!

*Scene Two*:

A day to be indoors. An acoustic flow from the first scene to this second one, as we modulate from human bird whistles to starts and re-starts of varied rhythmic melodies. When revealed, a rustic dance studio. Cool-weather Jackets hung on a clothes tree; and at its foot a rectangular bucket for footwear and umbrellas. At a ballet bar extended along a mirror (all or part of which may well not be constructed but, rather, conjured through performer behavior), *Pauline* in rehearsal dance-wearcompletes her warm-ups. Likewise with or without an actual musical instrument or electronic source, *Swing Boy* tests snippets of songs while *he* rearranges basic multi-purpose set pieces and plays with limited (wall switch or candle rearrangement) light cues. A patent makeshift performance is in the works, centrally evocative of *Swing Boy* and *Pauline* in energetic collaboration, with *Pauline* to be the ‘star’. *Swing Boy* and *Pauline,* several years older, are at first transparently more comfortable in each other’s presence and in their off-hand physicality.  *Their* initial active focus is on *Pauline*, her eyes on her own mirrored movements, his eyes on how she visibly responds or not to his music choices, re-location of objects, and shifts in lighting. Whenever *Swing Boy* passes close enough to *Pauline* for them to make contact of one kind or another, *they* grab the chance, periodically as counterpoint to an emerging edginess, be that in personal or artistic spheres, which *they* cautiously navigate so as to reassert their mutual (though, as we now see, conscientiously determined) ease. Whatever their history between Scene One and Scene Two, *they* tacitly make us aware we have not been privy to it.

SWING BOY (*With each trial song snippet, set placement, rearrangement of light*): This...? This...? You think…? What…? Am I crazy to try it this way…? (*Finally, after a moment of his pause or hesitance*) Do I check in with you too often?

PAULINE (*At last a verbal reply*): Too often?

SWING BOY *(Explanatory*): Do I distract you from your warm-up?

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PAULINE: The more fun for my warm-ups when you can’t take your eyes or mind off of me. Don’t you see my mirror smiling back at you?

SWING BOY: I shouldn’t concentrate so hard on the good or bad of what I’m doing for you?

PAULINE: For us. And no, you shouldn’t. Not if concentrating gets you so tense. So uncertain. If I ever become as serious about dance as I am about fabrics, I’d still just want people to watch me move within each mood you create.

SWING BOY: If my stabs at design came within a mile of my paintings, you’d have a point. But I can’t pretend I’m beyond your amateur assistant here.

PAULINE: I’m such a contrast to you. No matter how old I get, I’m still at a loss for what I want my life to be about.  *You* knew without a second of uncertainty what mattered most to you, practically from when Daniel leaned over your cradle with paper and crayon. Don’t look so downcast; I don’t mean to complain. You know I’m happy enough to keep up my search. I prize your patience with me… and how rapt you are with whatever you watch me attempt.

SWING BOY: You’re my muse, Pauline. Here, now, and ever.

PAULINE: Still, I’m hardly as essential to you as you to me. If you didn’t have me in your studio, you’d be just as inspired by your brother. Or by someone you had to pay. Or by yourself in your mirror. Your brilliance and certainty are in your talent, Philipp, not your models. When we have children, they’ll serve your talents, too.

SWING BOY: I know you don’t mean that’s the reason I should be a father. It’s not even *among* the reasons.

PAULINE: No man lights up around children the way you do.

SWING BOY: Daniel does. You do.

PAULINE: I don’t count. All women are like me.

SWING BOY: You have to be kidding! Really, Pauline, each time you bring up “children”, I wonder why we haven’t yet formally gotten engaged.

PAULINE: Does that matter to you?

SWING BOY: Each time I propose, you burst out laughing.

PAULINE: And immediately you drop the subject. Why is that?

SWING BOY: Doesn’t your laughter tell me I’m being premature? That – who knows why? -- we need more time before we dive into the mud?

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PAULINE: I forget how sensitive you are. You’re such a child, still. If you were to propose to me over and over, through my entire life, I’d laugh every time. And enjoy every moment of your every proposal.

SWING BOY: You’re serious?

PAULINE: You don’t know? Does something about me frighten you?

SWING BOY: If we’re ever to be married beyond being married in our hearts, a formal engagement is a necessary step, don’t you think? (*He laughs*.) Not because we keep being lectured about what’s ‘proper’ and ‘wise’.

PAULINE: The last thing I want us to become is ‘respectable’.

SWING BOY: Which makes me want to throw my arms around you and whirl you across this room.

PAULINE: Why not do so?

SWING BOY: Yes! Why not?

*Swing Boy* takes *Pauline* in his arms and hums, in broad comic fashion, one of the earlier melodies *he* had experimented with as, short of gracefully, *he* guides their dance. *He* favors his ‘good’ arm, which sets him, now and again, mildly off-balance.

SWING BOY (*As they ‘whirl’*): You deserve a more graceful partner.

PAULINE: I have much more than I deserve.

SWING BOY: What a sweet topic for an argument.

PAULINE: If you were more comfortable with yourself, I’d not need to encourage you to show your love for me.

SWING BOY: Don’t most men hold back what they feel?

PAULINE: You aren’t, and you’ve never wanted to be, “most men”.

Their dance comes to a halt. *They* study each other in place.

SWING BOY: Sometimes, that’s true.

PAULINE: I want that always to be true. (*She laughs at herself*.) Up to a point!

SWING BOY: Aren’t I like “most men” when I ask you to be my lawfully wedded wife? And, artists or otherwise, don’t we both want children we don’t purely imagine?

PAULINA: Children we can’t afford. You’re not remotely like those hotshots Daniel has to deal with, Philipp. Love, art, our longing to entwine our lives, is not one whit less if we stay practical.

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SWING BOY: Daniel underscores that more forcefully than either of us, Paulina, but his point is the reverse of yours. Each time he mentions one more ship he’s added to his fleet, it’s not a boast or to suggest we stagnant muddlers follow his lead: He’s out to make us relieved! To assure us he wouldn’t feel the least hardship or sacrifice if we allowed him to give me a hand-*up.* (*Pauline* *noticeably* *aborts a negative response*.) Uh oh, I thought you were loosening up on that front.

PAULINE: His support for your studies and your art work is commendable. How can I fault either of you for *that*? As far as Daniel’s concerned, he can turn his profits to no better end. But I draw the line at both of us owing our fuller future to him.

SWING BOY: He never thinks in terms of “owe”, Pauline. I owe him nothing, even as I owe him everything.

PAULINE: Fine. That’s you. Not I.

SWING BOY: I thought I could never identify with someone who gave up his childhood dreams, even for the sake of someone he loved, but Daniel’s put it all in a new light for me.

PAULINE: What dreams? (*No reply*.) You don’t feel you’re caught up in your own self-serving interests?

SWING BOY: Daniel says I’ve *become* his dream.

PAULINE: He must have become very disappointed in himself. Does he discuss that with you?

SWING BOY: He’d discuss that with you, too, if you encouraged him.

PAULINE: I put him off?

SWING BOY: It’s no secret he’s cared for you as long as I have. I’ve yet to figure out why I’m the one you chose.

PAULINE: I never chose.

SWING BOY: Daniel claims he lacks something inside himself. He doesn’t doubt that he’s a good person nevertheless. But what he lacks, he says, enables him to draw up contracts that turn out in his favor; teaches him to resist making offers of “something for nothing”, at least at work, with no prospect of gain beyond his personal satisfaction. It’s become a thrill for him – he eyes this thrill with a mix of joy and distaste – that he’s learned how to benefit *himself*, and therefore me, by producing and marketing what others want and need and are willing to pay through the nose to get. He argues – despite my opposing arguments – that the arts, maybe even love, *depend* on those who trade their idealistic youthful generosity for what’s ‘less’, what’s measured and graspable, to be invested and converted, so that in time ‘less’ does become ‘more’, admittedly a material and shallow ‘more’. I’m the one, he argues, who transforms *that* ‘more’ into a genuine and deeper ‘more’. The first time he tracked his chosen path for me, I burst into tears.

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PAULINE: Were I with you then, I might have burst into tears myself. I’m on the verge of that now. It’s the Daniel-inside-Daniel I’d guessed him to be.

SWING BOY: I love him so much! I love you both so much!

PAULINE: It hurts even more, though, that he never saw in my passion for examining insects, even in the love of birds that he and I shared – and that he still doesn’t see in my struggle to become a dancer -- what he’s seen emerge from your magic fingers. Nor have I, but I think Daniel would have had to see it first before I had even an inkling of my potential. I don’t’ mean to complain or sound modest. It’s sheer flat fact. Honestly, it’s a fact about me that in your heart of hearts, diplomacy aside, you’d confirm.

SWING BOY: Daniel tells me he never saw inside himself what he sees inside *you* as well as in me, what he sees that connects us. It’s elusive, but he labels it. He says the most elusive aspects of life *require* labels, just as in marketing. He uses terms like beauty… innocence… grace. He tells me how rare each is and how he sees them “indisputably” in the two of us. In you and me. He insists that he simply takes our measure and then his own, like weighing us each on his loading dock scale. He registers, as calmly as he can, the disparity his scale betrays. He has such a thirst to be more than the sum he totals.

PAULINE (*After she absorbs Swing Boy’s account*): Don’t you feel Daniel has beauty inside him, too? Shouldn’t we insist he acknowledge that?

SWING BOY: Here’s what so strange, Pauline: He urges me to marry you as soon as possible. There’s something desperate in how he presses that on me. Something funny, too, as though he were your father and I’d gotten you pregnant. I joked that we would come, or I would come, down on my knees to ask him for his blessing. He’d actually enjoy that, certainly more than my parents will, though they’ll give us their begrudging consent, as with everything in life they feel they can’t prevent. As for wedding presents, you’ll have to let Daniel be as generous as he needs to be.

PAULINA: There’s a gift we can give to *him*. One it would not surprise me to find he’s contemplated.

SWING BOY: I’ve an odd sense that I can read your mind.

PAULINE: We can both read *his* mind, even I can in this regard: He wants us to marry fast because he’s that eager to be part of our marriage himself.

SWING BOY: Which is a problem for you?

PAULINE: It might be.

SWING BOY (*An attempt at lightening the prospect*): It’ll keep us on our toes.

PAULINE (*In kind*): Or stir up a lively village scandal.

SWING BOY: Our children will have a doting uncle and godparent. He will cross *that* line. Buying a welcome mat specifically for Daniel, one that never wears out, would be our first order of business.

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PAULINE (*Guides Swing Boy to what she has in mind as a seat*): I need you to sit down and listen to me for a moment.

SWING BOY: Did I upset you?

PAULINE: Only because I haven’t been totally honest with you.

SWING BOY: About your feelings for Daniel?

PAULINE: Philipp, yesterday when Daniel and I took that walk we often love, across the back fields and into those woods of yours, he anticipated this talk we’re having. He spoke of a need you had to act on, that you couldn’t any longer keep leashed or silent about. He asked if he could join us today, especially to join *you* here, as you worked with me on my dance. I couldn’t refuse.

SWING BOY: He doesn’t plan to spring out of your costume closet and startle us, does he?

PAULINE: That fantasy might appeal to him! Can you picture Daniel in a tutu?

SWING BOY *(Goes along with her jest):* Sounds more like what I wouldn’t be caught dead wearing. (*At her puzzled look*) Face it: you’d howl at the sight of either of us dressed the way you are.

PAULINE: Why does that even occur to you? (*No reply*.) Or to me! (*Pushes past*.) Exaggerated jokes aside, I’m relieved he didn’t show up in time to complicate our personal *(Laughs)* ‘business arrangement’.

SWING BOY: More like Daniel, peppered with his own helpless jokes, to steer us past their shoals.

PAULINE: As our ‘marital facilitator’?

SWING BOY: Yes, our essential third set of eyes, our extra brain.

PAULINE: Devilish Daniel would rather be our extra horse whip or cow prod.  *(Studies Swing Boy’s sober response.)* That was mean of me;I apologize for my ill-humor. I should have been upfront with you about expecting him. I worried you’d postpone any words of decisive importance until he was with us.

SWING BOY: You see me that completely in Daniel’s pocket?

PAULINE: I’ll be blunt. And I won’t confine myself to a whisper for fear Daniel might be behind that door and overhear us. Here goes: I need to caution you against feeling too indebted to him. It’s not wise or healthy for either of you to drop all sense of proper limits between you just because you’re so close. You *can* say to him: this much and no more.

SWING BOY: When Cain answered God with his famous retort, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” you would have me be on the side of Cain?

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PAULINE: Brothers turned into arch-enemies is beside the point. I just wish in your innocence you kept alert to what you consider “desperate” in Daniel. Desperate people, with the best of intentions and all the love we acknowledge they genuinely feel for us, are prone to act with total abandon.

SWING BOY: You’ve never been desperate?

PAULINE: Yesterday, Philipp, yesterday – there’s no straighter route than diving in – Daniel and I became desperate together.

SWING BOY *(After a breath)*: Is that supposed to scare me?

PAULINE: That depends.

SWING BOY: On?

PAULINE: He asked me to tell him things. What you and I do together when no one watches us.

SWING BOY: Like now? We’re doing what we can’t speak about? (*A mock* *circle-turn*.) What are we doing?

PAULINE: Don’t make this harder for me.

SWING BOY: And you gave him details?

PAULINE: Details that excited him. He wanted me to see his excitement for myself. To feel party to it. And I needed to. To know where things stood for the three of us.

SWING BOY: I’m not sure I can grasp what you’re admitting. But I’ll ask you this: Did both of you plan to keep me in the dark about this?

*Daniel* bursts into the studio, swinging a net of freshly picked cherries*.*

DANIEL *(Virtually singing)*: Have I got news to share with you! (*Offering the cherries*) I grabbed these off a road-side farmer’s cart to celebrate.

PAULINE *(Starts to leave)*: I’ll find a bowl.

DANIEL: Don’t. I’ll simply undo this net. I’ve already washed them.

SWING BOY: Luscious and ripe for the gobbling.

DANIEL: Exactly! Like what I’m about to announce!

SWING BOY: Don’t keep us on tenterhooks, Daniel. *(Takes Pauline’s hand.)* It’s not like you to hold anything back from us.

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DANIEL *(As he notes their hand-holding)*:First you, Paulina. I’ve spoken with both directors of a young ballet school about to launch its first year of operations come next fall, the one that’s publicized a fund-raiser contest to come up with its name. You may have heard of this.

PAULINE: I have. It’s daunting.

DANIEL: Application forms and audition notices go out at the end of this week. The auditions get held in the city opera house during winter hiatus.

PAULINE: It’s for serious pre-professionals. I don’t know yet how serious I want to become.

DANIEL: Pauline, you have promise. I sang your praises to each of them. They showed definite interest.

PAULINE: “Definite interest” is a contradiction in terms.

DANIEL: I don’t offer guarantees. I only say we have reason to hope. And be assured I’ll do my utmost to inflate that reason.

PAULINE: Of course you will. That’s you. And the world of investment you inhabit.

DANIEL: Why so reserved, Pauline? So caustic. Where’s the Pauline of yesterday? I don’t like thinking you have a cruel or inconsistent streak. Are you frightened by the mere opportunity? Swing Boy looks as bewildered by you as I am.

PAULINE: I overflow with gratitude, Daniel. I’d be silly to get my hopes up. I admit it’s a comfort to audition for judges who know of you beforehand. There. Let your worries fly. Thank you.

DANIEL: Good: How pointless if you let my putting in a word for you cause you to shy away. I was concerned you’d rush to reclaim your independence, re-start your ‘make it on my own’ streak. Individual talent is one thing, but it’s imperative to go through more formal training than you have, and to be a mutually supportive member of a class.

PAULINE: To accept support – from you and others.

DANIEL: Why not?

PAULINE: To turn my art into a product. As ready for the market as your freshly arrived imports. And these farm-stand cherries.

DANIEL: Cultivated with passion. Not merely with profit in mind.

SWING BOY: For every success, there’s always a secret ingredient. Passion and profit are quite a team.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): I can’t read your tone. Are you angry with me, too? Kill the messenger who bears *good* news?

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PAULINE: You’re a sweet friend, Daniel, who’s gotten only dearer to me with every passing day. I’ve treasured you and your peculiar family from our earliest childhood encounters. But you’re not my unpaid manager. Not my angel. I’m not looking for an angel, not to marry and not to employ.

SWING BOY: Pauline and I have our own news to share!

DANIEL (*After a glance at Pauline*): I can well imagine. But let me finish. My second announcement is for you, Swing Boy.

SWING BOY *(With cautious humor short of sarcastic)*: You’ve gotten those ballet directors to scream for me to audition as well?

DANIEL: It’s no joke, Swing Boy. There’s both gallery *and* publisher interest – O.K. Pauline, I withdraw the tainted word “interest” – *treasuring,* as Pauline might put it, of your portfolio of landscape sketches and in your charcoals. *(Hesitant to add this.)* And in your remarkable self-portraits. I know you consider them private, but yes I let curious and intelligent eyes feast on them. And they tell me – I nearly quote! – that they can’t believe any man as open-faced, as beautiful and vulnerable as you appear – and are! – could survive beyond a week in our all-too-harsh universe. I emphatically share their view.

SWING BOY: My self-portraits *are* private.

DANIEL: Which is why they’re so genuine. Why the goldmine they are. They’re not done for effect. You gaze at your mirrored self and record precisely what you see. What we all see, when we look at you as you concentrate on what you value and what you must expose and critique. When we look at you, at your incisive self-appraisal, and fall in love.

SWING BOY: If I thought you were truly speaking of me and my work, I’d rush to hide in shame. Call me as unduly modest as Pauline, Daniel, but I’m unworthy of what you attribute to me. If I allowed you to go on like that, I’d turn into the most prideful manipulative fool we can imagine.

DANIEL: Listen, you two. I’m the realist here. No matter what accolades others throw at your feet, you won’t for years come near to making a living *directly* through this early work of yours. I give each of you, each at your, yes, uneven levels of achievement, no more than a start. The rest is in your hands. (*To* *Pauline*) Okay, also in your feet.

SWING BOY: I hadn’t asked you to circulate *any* of my work. None of it was ready.

DANIEL: Experts disagree. They outnumber you.

SWING BOY: Like Pauline, I appreciate what you’ve done all the same. I’ll swallow my *lack* of pride. I can’t deny your excellent sense of timing and opportunity.

DANIEL: Nor do I interpret your words as acquiescence, Swing Boy. I don’t feel I’m right and you’re wrong. You *will* do further study, collect degrees, win prizes, *gain* pride. We’ll get you a teaching post. As you also can’t deny, I have no shortage of contacts.

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SWING BOY: And no limit to your excitement for us.

DANIEL: True enough. I fully expect you to continue to resist me, with Pauline the lead drummer of your proud opposition. But aren’t you the least bit excited, too? That, my dear and no longer little Swing Boy, this is happening … *to you?*!

SWING BOY: Yes, of course to me… (*Takes a breath.*) … to the three of us.

DANIEL (*Takes his own breath*): You two have exciting news of your own, don’t you. I delayed my arrival, as I’m sure you also appreciate, to give you the time Pauline insisted you’d need. But you both look disturbed. Did I bungle in some way? Arrive too soon? Please tell me you’ve reached agreement by now. When’s the wedding?

PAULINE: I’m sure you’d prefer to set the date for us.

SWING BOY: My beloved organized brother: May I have you be my best man?

DANIEL (*Laughs*): Your best man? Whom else could you ask?

PAULINE: Kristof, Bobo, Ahmed, Lawrence, Sasha, Daniel Krauss, Daniel Pape, Bjorn. Should I go on? Do you dismiss each of Swing Boy’s buddies without a thought? Just ‘cause they’re never around when you are?

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): You know there’s no comparison.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): Without doubt! (*Persistent, to Daniel*): The facets of his life not indebted to you deserve your explicit acknowledgment. (*To Swing Boy*) I won’t let your look of dread hold me back. (*To both*) Certain kinds of love and generosity carry with them the height of presumption. (*Back to Daniel*) I’ll have to be blunt, my Swing Boy’s proud impresario: Philipp’s independent friendships -- independent of your fostering -- demand your humility and respect. You may understand his talent more acutely than I ever will, but not the pleasures he and I *can* share apart from that.

DANIEL: With all *due* respect, Pauline, you didn’t grow up with us, though sometimes you behave like you think you did.

PAULINE: Do you consider me a threat?

DANIEL: I often wonder whether *you* feel you are. Though, emphatically, I count and treat you as the *opposite* of a threat, both to me and to this boy whose bride you’ve been so determined to become.

SWING BOY (*Laughing*): Hey, now.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): It’s worse. I’ll put it this way: Like two precious pebbles, he actually stores you in his pocket as his younger alter ego. I know that sounds like nonsense. But in Daniel’s view, as brothers grow up together they should have each other’s total access. Even when one of them becomes

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another’s devoted husband. (*To Daniel*) You’re a fool if you’re afraid you’re about to lose what you’ve never, in fact, had…or were entitled to have

DANIEL: Who taught you how to behave with a boy, Pauline?

PAULINE: We say “behave” when our address is to children. You’ve used that word twice in this past minute. It’s a word that conceals an attack.

DANIEL: I can forego being polite, but why cause you to blush? Did your father take that lead? Guide you across that huge male-female divide? Rather, I recall his being characteristic of fathers we know: pretty distant with you, Worse: outnumbered by your mother and sisters, who’d be hopeless on this front.

PAULINE (*To Daniel but with eyes on Swing Boy as he awkwardly withdraws*): You evade the subject.

DANIEL: To the contrary, I’m taking you on. You know what it’s like to feel in love, but you haven’t a clue – at least yet – about real closeness. Swing Boy won’t let you in on that lapse, but I will.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): You know what he’s referring to?

DANIEL: Watch him think twice before he replies.  *If* he finally does reply. I know *both* of his thoughts. I know why he’s retreated from us so uncomfortably, as though he had to explore your rehearsal space for the very first time. As though he had to think about *you* for the very first time.

SWING BOY: This is too much for me.

DANIEL (*Continues to Paulina*): When Swing Boy responds like that to you, there are lessons behind his choice of what to express. I honestly don’t believe you’d want it otherwise. Nor would you – or I -- want the lessons I gave him botched.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): Is he making sense? (*No reply*.) Are there memories he’s tapped?

SWING BOY: Years of them. My pressing questions, his amused but graphic answers. How do boys without willing brothers get on in this world? Sometimes, he’d demonstrate. Get me to act things out with him. Each performance of ours with no audience but ourselves.

DANIEL (*Having fun with his capper*): The works!

SWING BOY (*To Daniel, merrily*): You did always call it that. (*To Pauline*) Daniel would play you.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): It could never have been my mother who taught us how to behave with girls.

*Pauline* lifts the net of remaining cherries and dumps the contents into her trash bin.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): I don’t get what so upsets you. I merely set out the facts. And I pinned the tag ‘behave’ to *our* tails, not to yours.

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PAULINE: In short, as you see it, even when you’re outside of spy range, there’s hardly an instant “Swing Boy” is with me that he won’t suck and act on each nipple of your advice. And you’re proud of that! Imagine! When I touch Philipp’s body, or – this gives me chills – when he touches mine, we’re more precisely touching *you*.

DANIEL: Wow. I’m either insulted or flattered, Pauline, though naturally what you intend me to feel is crystal clear. It’s tough that I can’t prevent your twisting us up in a knot like that. A knot so massive it could anchor one of my ships! And need a high-flying bird with claws as sharp as yours to undo it.

SWING BOY: I have to intrude here, Daniel. You’re mighty condescending to her. I must ask you to apologize.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): Why is it so important to you to make everyone feel so dependent on your contacts, your generosity, on all your strengths and assets that we have no problem absorbing until you go overboard?

DANIEL (*Jocular*): Face it. Both of you *are* dependent! (*His ‘joke’ falls flat*. *He adjusts*.) Look, Pauline, I don’t belittle your new-found talent and promise; I *count* on that to help me help you move forward. Despite your leaps from one artistic mode to another, I have no less faith in you than I had in the earliest stages of Swing Boy’s artistic output – well, almost as much faith; I’m sure you’ll agree with that reasonable degree of distinction. You’ll get nowhere if you take everything I say or give as having a devious edge. It’s no put-down of you to underscore how you need my help. Who *doesn’t* need help?

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): He’s asking us only to stay humble. Humility makes us better human beings.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): What help do *you* need? Specifically from us.

DANIEL: “Humble” is one word, but “proud” applies as well. I need you both to make the most of what you can offer, to pay back my investment in you, even as you slap my face. Doesn’t that position the three of us, in the deepest sense, not as adversaries but as the best, the most grounded and *interdependent* of – what? – collaborators.

SWING BOY: That’s exactly what I want us to be.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy, quietly*): I should have realized the specific vacuum that’s driving him. He knows what it is: It’s transparent. (*To Daniel*) And sad: Your *absence* of talent, except for making money.

SWING BOY: *That’s* a talent!

PAULINE: All it takes is knowledge of how things are.

DANIEL: Knowledge you both refuse to acquire.

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PAULINE (*To Daniel*): It reduces your capacity for genuine regard, especially when you go out of your way to make *us* benefit from *your* profits. Your form of love pinches you when the gifts you think you’ve bestowed upon us fall into question. It’s as if your baby fleet of cargo ships sailed to the wrong port.

DANIEL: That’s never happened.

PAULINE: Nor will it. You’re on top of things in your business: Who gets what and when. Who pays how much and who should pay less. When storms are expected and how to circumvent them if they’re too powerful to weather through. You’re as realistic as people come, Daniel; yet it’s you who believes you lack something that Philipp and I miraculously possess. Without that ‘something’, your sense of yourself shrivels. Yearn as you may to do so, you can’t live your life *through* your brother and me, and you’re hard-nosed enough to deal with that as one harsh fact. Yet you’re so hollow inside you believe you have no other choice; so, blindly, you barge ahead.

SWING BOY: Daniel, she doesn’t mean that. (*To Pauline*) Can you see the pain in his face and still call him hollow?

PAULINE: You can’t see the pain in mine?

SWING BOY: I hear the pain in every barb you shoot at him. I hear its truth. As you admit, he knows its truth. He’s known it since he came upon my earliest sketch – of Daniel himself! -- and burst into tears. And he’s tried so hard and valiantly to make the best of it, for my sake and his, and now yours.

DANIEL: I can’t stand being pitied, Little Brother. I prefer Pauline’s scorn. (*To Pauline*) I thought what you realized was transparent, too. Another indigestible fact I had to confront and transform. Perhaps, for all our sakes, I should have made that effort more openly. When I watch Swing Boy lift his brush and tighten his lips and squint with thought, I’m in the presence of a magical process. When it’s I who lifts his brush, I’m just lifting a brush and maybe wondering whether to put it down elsewhere, in neater order, or whether he might need me to buy a set of new ones. He’s caught me doing that a number of times. He claims that even with tears on my cheeks I look like I’m in a daze. I’m the very definition of an ordinary human being.

SWING BOY (*Rushes to Daniel with an abandon Pauline visibly finds jolting. Perhaps he throws himself* *at Daniel’s feet*. ): I can’t have you reduce yourself like that!

DANIEL: And I can’t see you well up with such emotion on my behalf. We’re men! We’re grown men! (*To Pauline*) He’s beautiful, isn’t he. I’m sorry. I can see you’re shocked. You don’t find his outburst beautiful in the least. But this is how he is. How we are. I’m too conscious of your presence to behave like him right now. But I would. I do. I’m simply more adept at pulling myself together. At clinging to my daily business attire and the role it virtually assures I’ll play. He’s extraordinary. Yet, look at what a simple adult admission of mine can do to him. (*Swing Boy* *looks up at Daniel. Daniel crouches and they embrace, Swing Boy sobbing*.) Hush, little brother: I’ll be fine. I’ll work this out. We’ll all be fine.

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PAULINE: I may never learn to accept how much the two of you mean to each other. It’s I, not you, who drives him to this. (*To Swing Boy*) I want us to return to our Eden, to that funny day I found you naked on your swing. To our excitement, our nervousness, as we started to discover each other. To when it seemed possible for the three of us to help each other fly. With not one wing melting near the sun.

DANIEL (*Rises, lifting Swing Boy in the process, to focus on Pauline*): I had too much inside me, even that day you call funny, that I could talk about only with Swing Boy. …My earlier greatest pleasure was the day he turned eight. I was still eleven: I let him chase me to the top of our favorite hill, which he named Pie Peak after I told him all those nasty ‘hero’ tales about the wild west of the United States. I made it Cherry Pie Peak that day, Pumpkin or Strawberry Rhubarb Peak on subsequent days. We wrestled at Pie Peak and I let him pin me to the ground, giggling with his triumph. He called himself the Invincible Giant of the Universe. (*Swing Boy, having listened intently,* *starts to chuckle*.) You can rest easy, Pauline: That funny earlier day in Paradise won’t cease to cast its seeds.

SWING BOY: I’m still the Invincible Giant. The Invincible Swing Boy Giant.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): Would you go so far as to take off all your clothes again right here?

SWING BOY: I’m a little too old for that now.

DANIEL: You were way too old for that then. But ‘old’ didn’t stop you.

PAULINE: Nor should it have. There’s no age when it becomes right to wag a finger at our innocence.

DANIEL: Innocence is a myth. That’s the one thing those Judeo-Christian Bible thumpers are correct about: We’re not even *born* innocent. Not even you, Swing Boy.

SWING BOY: How does whether or not I take my clothes off again get us into such a huge discussion?

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): You put yourself on display without an inkling of how drawn to you an onlooker might become.

DANIEL: I’d say he had more than an inkling. His being frail since birth didn’t deprive him of that. His illnesses became triggers for every kind soul to latch on to him. Some plant kisses on that arm of his. (*To Swing Boy*) I’m no interpreter of human fantasy and behavior on par with Pauline , but I doubt you’d deny that your nakedness – in every which way that you choose to *be* naked -- straight-out intensifies Pauline’s and my – and practically the world’s! – protective impulse.

PAULINE: Daniel, you’re a cynic. What’s more, you have your Biblical chronology reversed. If Christ is any model, we’re born to *become* innocent, and Swing Boy is the proof you’re out to undermine. A naked infant – virgin birth or secretly ‘non-immaculate’; you name it – can’t even approach the innocence Swing Boy showed us that day with his acceptance of our interest in him and his ease and trust in our company.

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SWING BOY (*A jest?*): Really? Then I’m taking my clothes off again, ready or not!

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): Your nutty notions sure tickle his funny bone. (*To Swing Boy*) Can you repeat that to make some rash kind of Swing Boy statement and still have this feisty worshipper of yours call it innocent? Your supposed ‘pure’ spontaneity is no less calculating now than when a certain numbskull brother I know dropped every stitch of his clothes in our woods, as though only our gawky trees were his long-limbed witness, *just as* – by unadulterated coordination, you’ll both sheepishly allow -- the two individuals on this entire planet who most passionately treasure him pop by, instantly feeling invited, if not *drawn*, to join the numbskull in his swinging, breezy, erotic bliss.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): What Daniel won’t take sufficient credit for is his gift for pointed speech. In *that* realm of art, he has me beat by miles.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): You blur my point. Your ‘getting naked’ right here, right now, whether we’re ‘ready or not’, constitutes at best a nostalgic disingenuous strip tease.

SWING BOY: And ‘at worst’?

DANIEL: I could wonder whether you’re out to prove something fairly dangerous. (*Swing Boy stops in* *his tracks, his clothing half in disarray*.) So, go ahead. Why pause? Why listen to me? I’m sure your future likely bride and I will tingle to see how gorgeous you still look, arm and all.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): Wait a minute, please. Be cruel and sarcastic all you like to me, but not to someone who won’t defend himself. And who’s worked all these years to accept the body he was born with. (*To Swing Boy*) As he makes others realize how beautiful his body *is*.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): I’m being silly, aren’t I. I came here to watch you practice.

PAULINE: And to propose.

SWING BOY: To have us propose to each other.

PAULINE: Which, I think, we’ve done. With dubious results.

SWING BOY: You retract your commitment?

PAULINE (*Eyes Swing Boy and Daniel in turn*): I’ve gotten into more than I bargained for.

SWING BOY: I like the sound of that.

DANIEL (*Takes in their spirit of embraced challenges*): I propose…a wedding present! I’d like to commission a portrait. You (*To Swing Boy*) and you (*To Pauline*) and, if you’ll agree, yours truly, out in our arbor, dressed before ‘the’ event however we choose. The three of us at peace, at one with each other – at one-two-three with each other! -- among those trees that hoist and shelter his swing.

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SWING BOY: Painted by?

DANIEL: *You*, pretty boy! That’s a given.

SWING BOY: I like that: A ‘self-portrait’ of the three of us.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): He looks out at the world through our eyes, and we through his.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): That’s as jolting a thought as your denial of his innocence.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): You’d rather I turned him down?

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): You can be included in the portrait but a bit apart from us.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): I’d expect to be. That would satisfy you?

PAULINE: I guess.

DANIEL: You’re certain of that? I’m not being presumptuous here?

PAULINE: You are. You know you are. But, being Daniel, you’ll live with feeling that way.

DANIEL: A deal, then. (*To Swing Boy*) Yes?

SWING BOY: Double yes!

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): May I request one bargain in return?

PAULINE: In return for what?

DANIEL: Your first-born child. (*Laughs, in response to Paulina’s face*.) You think I’d ask you to kill it on my behalf? Or have you hand it over to me as my own? We’re not characters in Grimm’s. I request only this: If it’s a son, that you name him after me. Would that disturb you?

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): Would it you? (*Sees that Swing Boy, as she expected, wouldn’t object in the* *least. Back to Daniel:)* I must make sure to deliver only girls.

SWING BOY (*Smiles at the two*): Then we would name her Daniela.

Each with each, *Swing Boy, Pauline,* and *Daniel* exchange a sequence of quiet looks.

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*Scene Three:*

A sitting room or parlor, two years later. *Daniel,* doffing his hat and jacket, decides where to putthem without *Paulina’s* assistance*,* as *he* watches *Paulina* look for needless household tasks to perform.

PAULINE (*Self-conscious about being watched in silence*): I’m relieved you’ve come to feel so at home with us in our home.

DANIEL: I never expected to feel otherwise.

PAULINE: It’s been courteous of you not to use the extra house-key Philipp requested I make for you.

DANIEL: I’m sure you gave that key your full consideration before you complied.

PAULINE: Why would you say that?

DANIEL: You’re like I am at my office. You do nothing these days without fully weighing first the implications and potential impact of whatever you are to decide. Just as, at this very moment, you engross yourself in superfluous fidgets with those cushions to gain you time to think.

PAULINE: What have I to think about? Don’t expect me to discuss the likely outbreak of war with you.

DANIEL: Ah. Well, just for conversation’s sake, you haven’t thanked me for the necklace you simply – rudely, I may add – slipped into that drawer without letting me clasp it around your …collar… to see it set off your beauty.

PAULINE: A gift of that kind is an embarrassment. I will determine a way to return it.

DANIEL: To my mother? She has no use for it in her grave. When my father bought it for her, she, too, counted it far too expensive, but she kept it, wore it – granted, on special occasions only -- and she would greatly have wished you to have it. She knew that marriage was a cloud in my own crystal ball. Those pearls seek no other neck than your own.

PAULINE: You clearly chose not to pass them on to Philipp.

DANIEL: To wear around *his* neck?

PAULINE: Nor to give them to me in Philipp’s presence.

DANIEL: I thought you’d toss them back at me, straight into my face. Why risk his embarrassment?

PAULINE: Agreed. I refuse to have Philipp walk in on a scene between us. When he senses our rapport, his face has that look I adore, the same look as when he’s finally succeeded in putting the little one to sleep. I’m hypnotized. The remnant of each lullaby he invents on the spot, that he then quiets to a murmur and forgets, brings exquisite tiny quivers to his lips. It’s practically a mirror to the peaceful tremors of our little one’s closed eyelids. If only I, too, had Philipp’s ability to draw what transfixes him!

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DANIEL: I remember the look on *your* face the day you first met my mother – our mother – in her proud regalia. You asked to finger those pearls of hers. You said you’d never seen real ones close up before.

PAULINE: That was envy, not love. Perhaps a child’s first glimpse of what she someday might treasure. I’m sure I was too young then to use or even know the phrase “close up”. And why *do* you more often say “*my* mother”, “*my* father”, not “our”. It’s as though you wished to protect Philipp from ever having been born to them. Will you call that another of my exaggerations? At any event, you will receive your mother’s necklace back, with a thank you note, in due course. I fear any attempt by me to hand it back to you straight out would result in raised voices at the very least, and at worst a physical tussle.

DANIEL: As might well occur! But I must dismay you a second time this evening, with a gift for little Daniel. You may rush it into the same bureau drawer as your pearls, if you’re so inclined. I’d respect *any* wife’s need to stay ‘calm and collected’.

PAULINE (*Stops Daniel from extracting his child gift from its carrying place*): This I *can* accept. And display. But only if, for kindness’ sake, you await Philipp’s return before you give it to both of us. I know I’m being scrupulous, even a bit fussy, in this regard. Philipp hardly ever feels ‘left out’.

DANIEL: Then let me propose a trade: I oblige your request here; and you, in turn, take the pearls I’ve given you *out* of their hiding place and onto this table or that bookshelf for Swing Boy to spot and appreciate.

PAULINE: Do you think you’re being funny?

DANIEL: I think you think – you nearly accused me of this once, though more in the form of analysis than finger- pointing – that I have ‘designs’ on you.

PAULINE: You deny that you’ve given me mountains of evidence?

DANIEL: I’ve seen you somberly *assume* evidence, without your checking in with me to verify.

PAULINE: Philipp isn’t like most men. But you are.

DANIEL: Which is a problem?

PAULINE: Potentially. Fortunately not, yet, more than potential. I respect that you would never intend to undermine Philipp’s happiness, never even wish, let alone act, to injure his marriage to me. But you embody and inhabit a different world than we do. It rewards you daily for being like most men. It feeds your being so generous to us, makes you our rock. For you, the French threat isn’t cause for alarm; it’s just one more business variable. You have such *capacity* for supporting those you love…a capacity that Philipp and I can scarcely acknowledge without Philipp’s feeling himself…

DANIEL (*Rushes to complete her thought*): Less of a man.

PAULINE: So you understand.

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DANIEL: No. I was reading your mind. With more acute veracity, I suspect, than you read Swing Boy’s. I may conceivably lead the life you see me lead, and be the *kind* of man you negate me for being, but nothing I wish to do or can do makes Swing Boy one jot less of a man, certainly not the man so devoted to you and to Daniel. And, yes as well, to me.

PAULINE: Art does not seek charity, Daniel. Philipp explicitly underscores that when we speak of you. You’ve attended his recent lectures; I can pretty much quote them: “Art is not a noble accessory for the privileged among us, optionally, to indulge in. Art is basic to how we live, to how we are – or can be – with one another, but only on condition that we grant our imagination full reign to turn what our eyes see…”

DANIEL: “… into portals beyond literal view.” I helped him polish his rhetoric there.

PAULINE: Oh? When Philipp proposes that with such passionate conviction, he makes my blood rush. I gave up dance, just as I gave up other of my passions, out of honesty with myself: I recognized that I would always fall short of what Philipp would increasingly achieve. If you can see the difference between his level and mine –

DANIEL: You *know* I can. For years, it’s caused you needless upset.

PAULINE (*Shaken but persisting*): -- you’ll agree that it’s *you* who are in *his* debt. Unlike me, he owes you nothing that should prompt his bows to you in humiliated gratitude.

DANIEL: Your quotation’s pure bull’s-eye, Pauline. You have to admit, though, that Swing Boy’s not the speaker he is as an artist. In my book, he gets a trifle pompous, needs me to tone him down. Still, I agree with him. You expect that I don’t?

PAULINE: I worry when Philipp feels what he paints is inessential.

DANIEL: When did he ever indicate that?

PAULINE: Whenever he counts his achievements largely as repayment for his brother’s love of him… and of it.

DANIEL: Pauline, when it comes to assessment of Swing Boy’s paintings, not to mention his theories of art, color, form, and their societal and psychological influence on us, which I hope I can get him to publish, where do *you* stand? I’ve heard what you just said; yet, forgive me: I can’t help but believe you put modesty in the mouth of someone I know way better than that. I am certain he knows his worth.

PAULINE: His painting makes him so happy.

DANIEL: Is his extraordinary talent not at the heart of why you fell in love with him? and remain so?

PAULINE: I’m a mature woman, Daniel. I make distinctions between an artist and his art, even as his wife. If Philipp’s skill and talent and drive were to diminish, would you then have me fall out of love?

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DANIEL: I was hardly suggesting that. But I need to be convinced you’ve fully taken in the scope of Swing Boy’s achievements, a magnitude you affirm in general but leave to my specifics. How about a detail from you that bears the excitement of your wonderful reference to his lips? Or an insight based on your – granted, admirable – recall of his dubious lecture on the role of art. All I ask is this: Can you track for me one instance of what you see he ‘sees’ and of the portal he offers you when – if I may thieve your pompous-sounding excerpt – he gives his vision full rein. As a businessman, I must do no less to interest yet another gallery owner to host a solo Swing Boy exhibit. Especially now that you *have* given up dance – by the way, this is the first I’ve heard from you of you doing so – and since you yourself have concluded that your talent falls short of what you require of it – I do shout hurrah for your ability to face hard truth! -- where in any of Swing Boy’s paintings can you cite an element as essential to you as, say, taking your next breath?

PAULINE: Essential to me personally? Me alone?

DANIEL: Who else? Give me *your* lecture. “The Role of Swing Boy’s Paintings in the Life of Mrs. Swing Boy.”

PAULINE: You can’t intimidate me, Daniel. In fact, I have to force myself not to laugh in your face. I have a home to manage, Philipp’s as well as mine. Not of your mercantile *scope*, naturally, but quite formidable, And that includes, even when he naps as soundly as I hope he’s doing now, our little cherub of a Daniel to watch over, nearly every second of him.

DANIEL: With a husband’s self-respect, productivity, and drive wholly to depend on.

PAULINE: And protect. Particularly when I can’t count on his assistance. (*She allows a* *moment for Daniel to absorb this*.) Except for his hours of swooning over Daniel. Honestly, I’ve wondered whether soon is my time to return to sewing, maybe a new uniform design: Such a call already out for more hats, shirts, flags; it’s the least I *will* be able to do for our nervous nation without leaving home. I’d make up for what Philipp cries on your shoulder about. Does he really feel a tug to sign up to serve despite his arm? Would they set him up with an easel on the battlefield? I shiver to think any sane person can remotely contemplate folly of that order.

DANIEL: You realize, I hope, how sad your words make me.

PAULINE: Do I sound like I’m mocking him?

DANIEL: I’m the required ‘practical’ one of the three of us. I want you and Swing Boy to – what’s that sentimental –but-apt phrase? – “pursue your dreams”, no matter how beyond your reach they point. There’s a value to dreams beyond their fulfillment and beyond those who dream. In lives like ours that should pin what’s measured and practical within far larger frames, your idea that you must manage and nurture what Swing Boy leaves to your capable hands, is actually *im*practical and short-sighted. Just think of what little Daniel does for his father when, as you do, Swing Boy cradles him and calms his

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screaming, or watches him pummel that stuffed comic monster, or hears him coo as you and Swing Boy sing him to sleep together. Such moments of inspiration take my breath away.

PAULINE: I admit to liking how overcome you look when you observe the two of them together. These past weeks, though, it’s become rare to see you that absorbed. I’ve assumed it’s been what’s happening with your ships, unless it’s something to do with us.

DANIEL: I predict that my nephew Daniel, when he turns toddler, will call me buccaneer and ask to sail the seas with me.

PAULINE: He’ll be disappointed to learn that what you do is both nerve-wracking and dull.

DANIEL: True enough. Still, Pauline, there *is* more. Is it the woman in you who’s blind to what boys see when they glamorize the challenges I face? Nurturing Swing Boy’s genius is an even sharper challenge for me. (*He gestures to a painting not necessarily visible to an audience*.) Look at how he captures that child’s mischief or his playmate’s flight from those scowling parents? How do we educate Swing Boy’s growing public to his contrapuntal perspectives? That’s what my life is about. Without that, my ‘merchant of the seas’ gambles would have no purpose. I’d merely be living out my own childhood dream.

PAULINE: If it really *was* your dream. If I didn’t think your argument masks a clever sneaky pride in your exploits, *your* words would make *me* sad.

DANIEL: Perhaps some sadnessfactors in for both of us. No one in generations to come will have cause to remember, much less herald, my ‘exploits’. That’s as it should be. For the work Swing Boy has done and will yet do, future art collectors will have every reason to herald *him*. And they will thank you and envy you your role in your husband’s output.

PAULINE: You sound so noble, but something in what you assert doesn’t rest right. I can’t tell whether you mean to sound as self-effacing or – worse – patronizing as you do. Even when you praise me, I feel diminished. Do *you* envy me? (*No reply*.) Why ever would you?

DANIEL: Maybe you, too, can’t grasp what gives Swing Boy’s art and aesthetics the stature he’s attained and should fast secure; but, just by being who you are, you sustain him beyond my *any* resources I’m able to set forth.

PAULINE (*After she takes in what Daniel has not made explicit*): I see.

DANIEL: Balances shift, of course: As years pass, I expect you’ll fall short now and again – most painfully as his wife. Your dedication to dance, despite your amateur talent’s disappointments for you, warrants lessons you choose to shirk, even were I to ask you to re-consider.

PAULINE: Let me put pompous words in *your* mouth, dear Daniel: Despite my devotion to Philipp’s happiness, I fail to accord him, as his wife, as failed dancer, and even as mere spectator of his work, the

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detailed respect that he and his *oeuvre-*to date are daily, urgently, due. (*Daniel is silent*.) Good. I see you accept my affectionate parody of your view of me. Respect I do offer him, Daniel. How can I not? Reverence, I refuse. No wife does well to worship her husband, no matter what or who he is. Reverence is *your* terrain.

DANIEL: If you believe that, how can you question my gift to you? Reverence demands periodic outpouring from the heart of one who reveres, wouldn’t you expect? It should be simpler, I’d imagine, for you to accept my pearl necklace than for Swing Boy to agree to a Swing Boy solo show he had no hand in arranging. For a man of some wealth and means, a man you’d be unfair to accuse of flaunting what he can give, such gifts *are* a natural outcome of reverence. It’s impossible *not* to give.

*Paulina* is quiet.

DANIEL: I love my brother.

PAULINE: You always have.

DANIEL: I beg you to stop trying to get between us, and to stop viewing what I’m compelled to give to you my own attempt to intrude.

*Swing Boy* enters, empty baby bottle in hand, beaming.

SWING BOY: Look! He drank it all!

*Pauline* takes in *Swing Boy’s* lively casual entrance, then looks back at *Daniel*, then turns again to *Swing Boy*, but her words of reply can only begin to form.  *Daniel* glances at *Swing Boy*, studies *Pauline* for her response to his blunt and aching plea, glances again at *Swing Boy* but stays essentially focused on *Pauline*.

SWING BOY: Is there a problem? Did something happen while I was upstairs?

PAULINE: I think you’ll appreciate as much as I do the gift your brother has brought. (*To Daniel*) Show it to him.

DANIEL (*Sharp*): Which?

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): “Which”? (*To Swing Boy*) I asked your brother not to open it until you came back down. He loves our looks of surprise and appreciation.

DANIEL (*Hands Swing Boy the wrapped baby present Pauline had previously persuaded him to keep in its carrying place.*): Perhaps my godson would enjoy tearing this open himself.

SWING BOY: Thank you. When Daniel wakes tomorrow morning, he can go right at it.

DANIEL: Has he started to sleep through the night?

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SWING BOY (*Smiles*): His midnight and 3 a.m. feedings might not be the best time for a stimulating gift surprise.

DANIEL (*In sync with Swing Boy’s gentle cheer*): I wish I could be wakened for those feedings. I’d spare you both from interrupting your wildest nightmares.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): Fortunately for your own good night’s rest, you can’t.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline as he catches her sharp tone*): Are you sure everything’s alright?

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): Your wife worries when I become too, in her mind, generous. (*A flash of a* *silent exchange with Pauline*) When I become too reverential. (*Back to Swing Boy*) In moments of self-doubt, even guilt, I’d venture a term for myself to which she’s not resorted, as yet: Transgressive.

PAULINE: Please don’t, again, put words in my mouth.

DANIEL (*to Pauline*): For thoughts already in your head? (*To Swing Boy*) In point of fact, this (*the wrapped baby gift*) hardly cost what it may strike you it might have cost. Plus. no loved child can truly have too many.

PAULINE (*Piqued, crosses to her drawer*): “In point of fact,” I do apply the concept of “excessive” to this. (*Pauline displays Daniel’s gift necklace.*)

DANIEL (*Tries to cover his surprise*): You told me you weren’t sure you could accept that. Did you change your mind?

PAULINE: Yes. Just now. Thank you. (*To Swing Boy*) Is this extravagance of his a problem for you?

SWING BOY: Why would it be?

PAULINE: Most husbands…

DANIEL: There’s no category of “Most…” anything that my brother subscribes to.

SWING BOY (*Gently*): And “most husbands” don’t have a brother like Daniel. (*Lovingly, to Daniel, with a* *direct gaze that spurs a discomforted Pauline, if only for a moment, to look away*) A brother like you. (*To Pauline*) I hope that relaxes your worries, if you had any worries. (*To Daniel*) Would you mind if I clasped your gift around her neck myself?

DANIEL: I’d feel honored to watch.

PAULINE: I’d rather… (*She is of two minds regarding what she was about to say*.)

SWING BOY: Rather what?

DANIEL: She’d rather I gave the two of you a private moment.

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SWING BOY (*Laughs*): Nice! We can have *that* any time we’d like. (*To Pauline*) I *thought* you were about to say you’d rather have Daniel clasp this around your neck instead of me.

PAULINE (*After a moment*): If I suggested exactly that, would you be hurt? Affronted?

SWING BOY: It’s *his* strikingly chosen gift – and perfect for you.

DANIEL; Whatever, she doesn’t want you angry with her. She wants you affronted by *me*. (*Swing Boy is* *puzzled*.) She wants you to throw her necklace in my face.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Really?

PAULINE: Your brother has a stunning sense of humor, doesn’t he: Did he get that from your parents? (*This tickles all three of them, as, first the two brothers and then Pauline* *herself, take in this ludicrous notion, each with a separate memory of Swing Boy’s and Daniel’s grim mom and dad*.) Anytime you want me to burst into guffaws with you, remind me of the time they stood so stiffly side by side, begrudging your attempt at your first full-body portrait of them…until you brought your dad his favorite pitchfork – at his request! – to fulfill his sense of valor and tradition!

DANIEL: And then dad scrutinized your sketch, saw I’m sure how meticulously you exposed him and our mother in their Sunday worst, but -- wouldn’t you know? – remarked to you in that tight pressed-lips mutter of his, “Good pitchfork!”

*Swing Boy, Daniel,* and *Pauline* look about to crack up in laughter.

PAULINE (*Abruptly tries to curb her spirits*): What would your mother have done if she received something like these pearls from your father?

SWING BOY: Fainted.

DANIEL: No. Bitten them first. *Then* fainted.

*The brothers* now let their laughter have outright release.  *Pauline* cannot resist joining in.

SWING BOY: What’s too real does make some people weak with excitement.

PAULINE: When it comes to fainting, count me out. Life’s too complicated *and* exciting to miss a minute. Pearls aside.

DANIEL: Life with Swing Boy, certainly.

PAULINE (*Defiant*): Yes.

DANIEL: And life with Swing Boy’s brother, I suppose.

PAULINA (*Cautious*): That, too.

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SWING BOY (*Holds up emptied baby bottle*): And life with his brother’s guzzling nephew.

PAULINE (*Re: the bottle*): No need to keep holding that. Here, hand it to me. (*They exchange what* *each holds, the bottle to Pauline, the necklace from Pauline to Swing Boy*.) There. A fair exchange. (*To Daniel*) Rub-a-dub-dub. May I dub you our family witness? (*To Swing Boy as she seats herself or stands with her back to him*.) No pitchfork here. My neck is all yours, darling.

*Daniel* tries to focus on *Swing Boy’s* clasp of his gift around *Pauline*’s offered neck, but *he* shifts his glance for a quick interval to check his pocket watch, then looks up again and forces a smile.

[\*\*\*\* If there is an Intermission, best to have it here. \*\*\*\*]

*Scene Four*:

*Swing Boy’s* countryside studio on a hot August day two years after Scene Three. Set apart but near his workspace is a rack of shirts and army boots alongside implements for sewing collars, cuffs, and boot tongues. One may wonder whether these items or the industry they suggest for times other than at present disturb Swing Boy’s concentration. Yet, as heedless of them as of the birdcalls and other sounds of nature in his midst, *Swing Boy,* intent, is at his easel when *Paulina* taps at his open door. She carries a glass of water in one hand. Her other hand is clenched.

PAULINE: May I interrupt? (*No reply*.) Am I disturbing you? (*No reply*.) May I look? (*Swing Boy* *turns to her*.) Can I help? (*Swing Boy turns back to his work*.) Despite the heat, they’ll stay asleep for at least another hour. At least Sarah will. I made Daniel promise to play quietly with his trains if he wakes ahead of her.

SWING BOY: I should still be alive when they both come running in here, I hope.

PAULINE: We all get exhausted from time to time. We all lose our balance. Count your blessings that we agreed to have me sewing over at that corner whenever you allow. You might have lain on your floor till lunch. (*She sets the glass down within his* *reach*. *Opening her clenched fist, she takes from her palm a tiny bottle whose contents clatter. She sets the bottle down next to the glass*.) Whenever you want to take this, I’ll leave it ready here for you. (*She moves to exit*.) Will you pause for lunch at any point? Or would an answer strain your forecast of how much time you have left on earth? (*She lingers*.) I won’t tolerate your silences. It’s not like we know for sure that your symptoms are ominous. Even serious illness can now be treated. I’m sorry I made that comment about your tremors and that rash.

SWING BOY: I’ve simply stated a fact, a hopeful one at that. I *should* still be alive. Even under threat, life is long; naps are short.

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PAULINE: Your cavalcade of quirks may be short-lived as well. Rashes disappear. You haven’t fallen for days, and only one time when you coughed was there something in your spray that made us think of blood. Right now, you imagine the worst. I do too when sleep won’t come. I can’t help but chafe at how you restrict each of my sewing sessions here to an hour. Can our soldiers do their best while lacking collars and cuffs?

SWING BOY: Not to mention if they wear boots without tongues. Please: I don’t disrespect what you and women like you contribute. You don’t add frills; you build morale. Still, must you hover so close to complete these uniforms? I wish you’d move all this stuff back to your regular sewing room.

PAULINE: The ‘stuff’ I need is there as well, but I can’t concentrate as effectively.

SWING BOY: Which forces me to say the obvious: How do you expect *me* to concentrate when the repeated sound of needle into cloth makes me want to pull off my ears.

PAULINE: You’re lucky my caution is all you have to deal with, not – yet at least – the doctor’s pronouncement we fear. Still, that worry turns *you* morbid as a bat; I stick with common sense and address what I can with simple adjustments. (*Absent his further reply*) Since I’ve scheduled your next check-up so soon, let’s keep things as they are for now and, if you don’t mind, pray. (*As she exits the studio*) You *have* taken steps toward recovery. Bang or shout if you need me…or if you panic again.

SWING BOY (*Calls to her*): What steps?

PAULINE (*Pokes her head back inside*): Since you started on those horribly bitter tablets? (*He nods.)* I see the change in your hands. In your new stability on our stairs. Mostly, though, in your cheeks, the gleam that’s back in your eyes. You scarily withheld it in your last, brutally honest, self-portrait.

SWING BOY: I wasn’t sure you noticed.

PAULINE: Am I obligated to give you full reports? (*A scramble for the tone she considers best*.) I’m pleased you keep this door open after I leave so one of us can hear if you black out and crash, but – see? – (*With a gesture toward his easel*) you *are* able to concentrate. No matter what you claim, you *will* meet your deadline.

SWING BOY: To do so, I have to race like a madman through crowds of obstructive pedestrians.

PAULINE (*Steps back into the studio to stand at his side, holding him as they both study the present state of his work*): You race like the devoted father you are, the sooner to free yourself for time with Sarah and Daniel.

SWING BOY: Sometimes I’m most *with* them when they let me capture them in paint or ink. When they’re not restless and Daniel resists his impulse to pose.

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PAULINE: Amazing how you offer the barest hint of Daniel’s pout. Sarah’s cheeks carry an excitement of what she’ll look like as a young lady. You’ve made them so adorable it’s all I can do not to burst into tears.

SWING BOY: They learn so quickly how to play *and* how to fight with each other. Even at four, Daniel’s determined to show he’s the man of the house. Can you see where I suggest that? I want to limit it to the gentlest cause for concern.

PAULINE: Why let that add to your worries? What little boy wouldn’t act that way with his baby sister? His baby anything. Wasn’t your brother like that from the instant you climbed out of your crib?

SWING BOY: No. He used to complain I wouldn’t *join in* with him and dad as ‘men of the house’. Until he decided I was ‘the artist’ of us two. You’re right, though, to brace my spirits. No ‘artist’ worth his brush can afford to be less than tough with his subject. I’m damned if I don’t conquer whatever it is that’s attacked my entire body, but while I’m at it (*refers to his painting-in-progress*) – look at this, and this, and this, in relation to each other. Just before you came with my pill I finally dug my way out of a compositional snag. The solution dawned on me during your morning hour with those dreadful shirts. I’m still not sure, though, that this over-domesticated garden is the best setting for the action. What’s the children’s focus within their wider surround? Should Daniel not notice the flower he’s about to step on? Is Sarah without an escape route from pursuit, unless she scrambles onto that ledge or manages to climb that rickety trellis?

PAULINE: Philipp, they’re simply having fun. As they do around our *real* house!

SWING BOY: Should I foreground the home but not the trees? Might it be better to have elements of natural landscape intrude between them? protect her from his reach? I wonder about all of that. I may have turned a frivolity too melodramatic.

PAULINE: Do you actually still want my advice?

SWING BOY: I’m thinking out loud. Isn’t that permitted? Does that put you on the spot?

PAULINE (*Takes a breath*): Best I look in on you next when you’re in a better mood.

SWING BOY (*As Pauline again crosses to leave*): Please. Uncertainties are important for me to mull.

PAULINE: Damn it, Philipp. As an artist and as my husband, you’ve started to leave me in the dust. You’ll need to enlighten me pointblank as to what’s important about your uncertainties and what, *if* I’m welcome to stay here, I’m to do about them. You’ve developed such knife-edge capacity to –

SWING BOY: To what? torment you?

PAULINE: Yes. Forgive me: It’s what I mean, though I’d prefer a calmer phrase.

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SWING BOY: Discussions when I’m interrupted at work bring out the worst in me. I resent my own attempts to be patient. Please know this, Pauline: I feel nothing but apology for my wretched behavior toward you.

PAULINE (*First, a need to absorb; then, almost inaudibly*): Thank you. (*Again, perhaps to make sure she’s heard*) Thank you. Philipp, apologies help heal wounds – partially. You’re like these paintings of yours: too intense, too full of complication, of lurking results and sudden slaps. All the same, I admit I’m the intruder here. Me to pose; you to dispose. That’s not meant to sound facetious. I won’t nag you to make me your model again, but I’d prefer it to my snatched sewing sessions to keep you company.

SWING BOY: Yes. From now on, except for our morning and afternoon compromise hours, which I’ll try to survive “for our city good”, I ask you this: Kindly stay out of here unless I sense I’m about to faint. I’ll certainly scream for you to come running. You won’t have to lurk among our roses to hear me. And you can bring my medicine and my lunch when you arrive for each day’s quota.

PAULINE (*If she thought they’d made headway, he has angered her to intensified attack*): I hope that’s a joke. A wife can’t ‘stop by’? ‘drop in’? I see your brother do that often enough, with *no* such excuse as I’ve managed to shape; so – ‘why not?’ I said to myself – especially now that Swing Boy’s feeling in sharper-than-usual need of support, ‘let’s give it a shot’.

SWING BOY: Let me tell you what I discuss with Daniel when he ‘stops by’. Why don’t we find out if chat of this sort interests you? He’ll look at this portrait from across my shoulder as I continue at it. ‘You take your previous studies and sketches of Daniel and Sarah to a much more ambivalent level here, he’ll murmur.’ He sees me alert to what he calls ‘the mystery of childhood’. Even in its present incomplete state, he considers what I’ve done a major advance. I can’t yet see that. The skills I need, to freeze them at this moment of frolic, particularly as Daniel withholds your necklace from Sarah’s grasp despite *his* chasing *her*, are insufficiently developed. I’m not yet as suggestive – no, as *provocative* -- as this portrait requires.

PAULINE: How did you explain this ‘requirement’ to Daniel? Does he understand? Would you have him be free to share his and your discussion of this with me? Would he think I’d not understand? Would *you* think that? Do you understand what makes me ask you all these questions?

SWING BOY (*Stares at her for a moment and then resumes where he left off before she spoke, as though she hadn’t thrown a single question at him or else intended her questions as sheer rhetoric*): I want to convey a palpable prediction: The onset of, yes, ambivalence in these ‘innocent’ little creatures: Their behavioral mix prefigures how they may possibly come to treat each other when they both turn adult. A double-edge of feelings and intentions that their present behavior makes plain but that, young as they are still, they would look agog at you for if you or I ever attempted to put their impulses into words.

PAULINE: All that.

SWING BOY: Do I hear a tinge of mockery?

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PAULINE: Do you mean to judge Daniel and Sarah for their ‘ambivalent’ responses?

SWING BOY: ‘Judge’ as in ‘blame’?

PAULINE: That, too. I don’t doubt that they’re the loves of your life, just as they are mine, but for you there’s something else. Something I’m disturbed about and don’t understand. Your passion to *record* them. All I want is to keep them well and safe…and watch them grow. *Help* them grow.

SWING BOY: I can’t paint either of them without a lump in my throat. I feel it, too, in ‘real life’, as you’d say, when I watch them tumble after each other once they’re too exhausted and jangled to let us settle them into their beds. Daniel’s not significantly older than Sarah, but something’s already happened to him beyond her grasp. Or that she’d shiver to realize. Close as they are, they’re now separated beings. Unwitting and unwilling strangers. The last thing in their world either of them is ready to face.

PAULINE: You fear that Daniel and Sarah will somehow grow up apart?

SWING BOY: Don’t most of us? (*He turns from Pauline’s wordless response*.) I have to figure out how to make this canvas show the enormity of their mutual attachment. In their tiny bodies. In their open faces. The contrasting degrees of how unready they are to grow up. Their unknowing refusal to register what each of us bangs our hearts against: how unique we are, how different and therefore distant we are from the ones we most love. The extreme effort we must make if we’re to cross our damaged bridges to those we love, damage our sharpened individuality keeps us forced, over and over, to repair.

PAULINE: You want a single painting of yours to convey that?

SWING BOY: I’m getting closer. That’s what Daniel already sees.

PAULINE: Well, then, bravo for Daniel. If that’s what you aim this portrait to communicate, I’m sure you’ll get there in time

SWING BOY: There *are* times when I feel as optimistic as you try so hard to sound. Though we both keep bumping against what we’re afraid to put into words: Can I count on finishing this? And if I don’t, will Daniel or you find someone who –

PAULINE (*Interrupts him with* *a laugh*): You’re no sucker for that irresistible myth, I hope. Not *all* artists die young.

SWING BOY: True. Only great ones. That should assure you I’ll be spared.

*Swing Boy* gestures that his words are not intended as hostile or bitter or comic. With sad cheer, *Swing Boy* and *Pauline* embrace. *Swing Boy* studies *Pauline’s* face.

SWING BOY: You didn’t ‘drop by’ just to bring me my medicine, did you? Have those money hawks been back to bother you?

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PAULINE: They mean well. They know that what they ask is well below your level. They expected you to turn them down at least twice.

SWING BOY: So there’s still a glimmer of hope in them – in *you!* – that I’ll change my mind?

PAULINE: A reasonable hope, not an expectation. You can’t argue that it would be so much easier, swifter, for you to do it and be done with it than this endlessly layered portrait. You’d get *back* to your masterpiece refreshed!

SWING BOY: You’d have me accept this trivial ‘easy’ commission simply for its unbelievably ‘generous’ cash reward?

PAULINE: Not generous. A sum commensurate with the talent we both know you have. I did check again with Daniel. He doesn’t object. This may sound detached, but he’s as sure as I am you’ll stay well long enough to see *both* projects through, and more besides. You owe it to *yourself* to take on what, finally, Daniel had next to no part in arranging for you. Daniel is the first to see the benefits: This commission reflects another leap in the demand for your work. It’s more than slightly arrogant of you to dismiss the degree, the implications, of your popular appeal.

SWING BOY (*Refers to his easel*): Am I arrogant to insist my crowning achievement be of *this* order? (*Laughs*) You’d have me abandon Daniel and Sarah for a *commission*?

PAULINE: Philipp, more’s at stake in this stubbornness of yours than either of us dares admit.

SWING BOY: Try as you do in such various guises, I can’t have you distract me, Pauline. I *will* complete this; and only after, if there’s to be an after, might I deign to turn frivolous and mercenary. Daniel has to know how grateful we are for every hour he’s freed me to resist this kind of compromise and not sacrifice our necessities as I do so.

PAULINE: He’s not without his own worries, Philipp. Especially with the war now poised to expand, his business, like any other, has serious ups and downs. Your total reliance on him adds to the weight on his shoulders. When I told him I wake in a sweat hours before dawn, he confessed that his nights are pretty much a duplicate. He’s had several narrow escapes he’s reluctant to mention to you.

SWING BOY: If I had my wits about me, I’d find ways to comfort both of you. Perhaps I’m still a boy, your *literal* Swing Boy, who lives up to his persnickety nickname, a child, though, with an unswerving passion to rise to my artistic challenges. I know best who I am in my portraits of our beloved children.

PAULINE: I need you to be more mature. But when I ask Daniel to revert to use of the birth name your parents gave you, he simply shrugs.

SWING BOY: Why do you not prize that, even when they reach our age, our children will have my sight of them to behold – in whatever shape they may find I’ve left it? Won’t they want to know what their father observed and evoked and felt about them while he yet lived?

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PAULINE: No matter what? (*At Swing Boy’s puzzled response*) They’ll ache for what it cost, Philipp, to you, to Daniel, and to me. They’ll know – as I do, looking at this -- what you *could* evoke of them, indeed *already* evoke , whether or not you fully attain what you have in mind for it. What you interpret as my forced optimism – and my distraction of you – is a passion of my own: that you and I not be shaken by the prospect of insufficient time left to us. Don’t you see me fighting my own pain and fear? The three of us, the *five* of us, have so much! We both – not you alone – need to stop clutching. Before I knocked at your door, I nearly turned back. But then I scolded myself: For your sake and mine, we can’t treat every second, every decision we make, every task, every painting, every exchange between us, as precious, as our last. If I have something urgent in mind to talk over with you, I can’t be concerned about what I might interrupt. What might be irretrievably lost.

SWING BOY (*After a moment*): Urgent?

PAULINE: Yes.

SWING BOY: Your husband is a numbskull, isn’t he. It’s actually *I* who interrupted, who kept *you* from what you set out to do when you knocked, isn’t it? (*They look at each other in silence*.  *Swing Boy breaks the silence with a chuckle*.) Not my pills. Not the commission. Excuses! Side-tracks! (*Pauline nods and nearly laughs with him in his manic mockery of how he thwarted her*.) You’re devious! You’re inscrutable! And, with every ounce of *your* patience, you’re willing to waste so much of my time! Pauline! Out with it!!! What’s the urgent matter you truly disturbed me to discuss?

PAULINE (*Takes a breath*): I may go about things round-about, but I’m *not* devious. You know that. I have to work myself up to things. What’s urgent can’t be rushed or crunched, can’t be adequately addressed if lesser concerns proliferate. Not if what’s urgent requires careful deliberation and adjustment.

SWING BOY: It’s you who interrupts yourself, Pauline. Your monumental ‘build-up’ makes me – and you, too! – more nervous than whatever you’d spew out to me.

PAULINE: When were you and Daniel last in touch?

SWING BOY: Late yesterday. He’s been in conference all this morning.

PAULINE: Do you know what his conference concerns?

SWING BOY: Should I? Do you?

PAULINE: Yes, but after the fact. The meeting ended abruptly, much earlier than Daniel expected.

SWING BOY: And he’s already told you, not me, the results? Is he here, in our home? I guess he can’t be; he would have joined you. Why isn’t he here?

PAULINE: He has to think. He has to consider his options.

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SWING BOY (*Takes this in*): For what?

PAULINE (*Carefully*): How to save his company from total collapse. (*Fixed on Swing Boy’s silent* *response, she adds a throw-away*.) He said he hopes to come up with “a swift expedient tactic.”

SWING BOY: He hadn’t let on that he was this close to such a disaster.

PAULINE: It came as a shock today to me, too. Ocean storms are bad enough, but three of his ships were attacked and some sort of blockade put in place. He talked for no more than ten minutes, mostly in tears, mostly letting me hold him. No need to feel hurt: It was I who kept him from rushing to you. The jolt of the events he’d share with you was less important than his need to pull himself together and make contingency plans. I helped him focus. I don’t think you’ve ever witnessed him so helpless, so ‘at sea’. Somehow that shook me up more than his news. I considered keeping it from you unless I –

SWING BOY (*An abrupt connection*): Unless you had to resort to it, so I’d take that commission –

PAULINE: I had to be sure you were strong enough to learn this. It’s he who needs *your* strength now.

SWING BOY: Where is he?

PAULINE: Out walking.

SWING BOY (*In a rush to put his materials away*): I have to find him.

PAULINE (*To slow him down*): Give him space. Whatever length of time it takes. You and I know he’ll think things through. And while you respect his need and ability to do that, consider *your* options.

SWING BOY: Mine?

PAULINE: Forget the commission for a moment. If our reliance on Daniel has to adjust, there’s a ‘good side’: a chance to assert your autonomy, in whatever form you’ll accept. To tap other of your resources, *including* those he found for you. You’d relieve Daniel from the burden we’ve been. He shouldn’t give a thought to what even a temporary shut-down of his ports would do to *us*.

SWING BOY: We’re the opposite of burden to him, Pauline. You can’t relax me by turning gold into straw.

PAULINE: Gold?

SWING BOY: What we three mean to each other, the weight we carry for each other every day: that’s our gold. It’s instantly reciprocal. You can’t ask any of us to shake off that weight and let it crash.

PAULINE: Thanks to Daniel, word of your work keeps spreading, Philipp, well enough to attract scads more benefactors than those you *have* “shaken off.” For reasons not clear yet to Daniel, some of his competitors shifted their routes a month ago, as though they had ‘insider’ word on where the war was

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to spread and even advance word on the weather. None of *their* ships seem imperiled. And with Daniel having opened their eyes to the profits of art- collecting, you need only to recall how impressed they were at your last exhibit. This is their chance, and they’ll grab it if you let them.

SWING BOY: I suppose you think that would suit Daniel just fine.

PAULINE: Doesn’t he want the best for you – for us – and isn’t this very option Daniel’s own for us? I can carry my argument a step further, though Daniel would never suggest this: With a sizable advance commission payment – as is commonly arranged – *you* might be able to help *him* sail through this crisis.

SWING BOY: Does Daniel take what’s happened as his fault? That he should’ve caught the signs his competitors did? What state was he in when he left you? Is he upset enough to harm himself? Were you able to calm him in the least?

PAULINE: How can I know? Do you blame me for not being in the position to help him that you’re in?

SWING BOY: I’m sorry. I’m certain you did your best. It’s just –

PAULINE (*Completes Swing Boy’s reservation*): That I didn’t insist we include you.

SWING BOY: Your comforting him –

PAULINE: Had its limits.  *You* could have made him feel –

SWING BOY: Less alone.

PAULINE: As he might have felt if I’d guided him to you.

SWING BOY: If you had not blockaded his way.

PAULINE: Is that what I did? I’m some kind of devil?

SWING BOY: That tone of yours mocks me – and Daniel’s need for me.

PAULINE: Both of you are amply able to care for your own needs. As I’m sure you and I will witness when Daniel returns from his walk. Men only *claim* they need women to fulfill their dreams. They fulfill each other’s.

SWING BOY: Neither I *nor* Daniel wouldthink to chase a single dream without you, Pauline. You have five of us thoroughly dependent on what you bring to our lives. Granted, just in this instant, each of us seems worlds apart: two asleep, caught up in separate dreams, a third out on his thoughtful walk, while you and I, pumped up with love and foolishness, battle this out when there’s zero reason to fight.

*Swing Boy* reaches for her. *They* embrace.

PAULINE: I sounded more agitated than I meant to sound.

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SWING BOY: And I more impatient with you than serves any purpose. Once Daniel decides his next move, I’ll sound him out about each hope of yours, including that commission. Does that restore me in your eyes to ‘flexible’ status? Even if I own up to being as stubborn as men come?

PAULINE (*With gentle affection*): You’re my human pendulum. You go to such extremes.

SWING BOY: “Swing Boy.”

PAULINE: Swing Boy. If I dash off for now to let you press on with your portrait, I could bring us some tea in a while, enough for Daniel, too, when he returns from his walk. Something in what you said just gave me an idea for the sampler design I’ve fussed with all week. (*Waits, gets no response, then proceeds*) The sampler I’ve had no wedge in our conversation to tell you about, nor to tell you of Daniel’s role in getting my previous samplers to our local distributors. (*With a rueful smile*) You seldom register the fact that when it comes to our reliance on Daniel, we’re – not to blur distinctions or make light of it – quite in the same boat. And if I don’t seem to give enough *weighty* attention to your art, what am I to make of your always forcing me to be the one to bring up the nagging existence of each of my hard-earned skills? It’s worse, of course, when you ask about my dancing, as though I still danced.

SWING BOY (*Matches her tone*): Many a day lacks the hours for all we consider important.

PAULINE: Many a year. For all we forget.

SWING BOY: I don’t mean to seem uninterested in *any* of your recent activities.

PAULINE: Does it even register on you that I’ve begun to establish a small clientele? It’s been months, but you next-to-never ask for updates. Nothing I do is on your scale, I admit. It’s not ‘high art’. Do you and Daniel ever talk of this? Does he ever show you my work?

SWING BOY: I take it your abrupt bringing up of your samplers is intended as a poke in my ribs.

PAULINE: Your ribs deserve worse than pokes. With Daniel’s turn of fortune, with you in your state of self-indulgence and, granted with reason, eyes on the end of your life, I feel important to no one but our children right now. Too bad they‘re far from old enough to appreciate serious needlepoint!

SWING BOY: Have I become too much like *other* men? I’ve wondered about that. I wave my white flag to you, Pauline. I stand worse than poked. I *want* to be a husband whose wife won’t think he diminishes her importance. I despise those men whose view of their wives goes no further than a stove and a bed.

PAULINE (*Amused*): And a personal fan club.

SWING BOY (*With relief to be back on the same wave length*): May I not envy for a second those rugged husbands whobask in the gaze of swooning followers, who’d violate their marriage vows in a snap.Can you picture yourself like their wives who worship their “big guys” at every turn? I’d have you faint with

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pleasure at my upper arm muscles each time I I lift my brush. On my busiest weeks, you’d gape at the first sign of my “masculine” unshaved jaw.

PAULINE: I’m glad you find that humorous.

SWING BOY: Did you know that Danielwas once tempted to grow a beard, just to see?

PAULINE: To see what? What woman in her right mind is drawn to a man for how handsome he may remain for his next ten or twenty years?

SWING BOY: As someone whose life and work revolves on a visual axis, I’d challenge that… despite all I stand to gain if I agree.

PAULINE: True. You’ve strangely never been modest about your appearance.

SWING BOY: Which now makes me shiver. Were you secretly laughing at me?

PAULINE: Apart from the signals of your illness, have I ever voiced concern over your looks?

SWING BOY (*A tease, of course*): Or voiced desire?

PAULINE (*In kind*): In the distant past, I recall a few sweet moments between us.

SWING BOY: Physical vanity is a killer. I’ve *always* been concerned with how I look. Discreetly. Enviously. Self-critically. I don’t consider that superficial: Decay can fascinate. What other option do I have when, in place of the classic male models I’m sure Daniel would hire if I asked, my buckled pride has me settle for each of my self-exposing self-portraits. It helps that I set out to convey my humanity, not just my pallor or the silly expressions that sometimes populate my face, elfin glares that makes even strangers want to pat me on the head or take me home with them. (*Struck by her gesture of response*.) I amuse you?

PAULINE: Amusement mingled with wonder. That you of all people have, your whole life, never painted yourself naked….or anyone naked, apart from those few ‘Mt. Olympus’’ exceptions! Most times, for that matter, you won’t go below your shoulders.

SWING BOY: There’s nothing distinctively human below the shoulders. Mine, at least.

PAULINE: Is that true for you when you look at me as well?

SWING BOY: My portraits of you speak the contrary, don’t you think? (*They share a moment in silence*. *Then Swing Boy lightens up again*.) Pauline! By the time you bring our tea, we’ll have to share our cups with our demanding rascals. Doesn’t this portrait make you feel they’re already with us?

PAULINE: We’d better skip the tea. You don’t address my questions, Phiipp. Speaking up for myself is never easy. Tell me this: For each of the few portraits you’ve done of me – you know how pleased

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they’ve made me! – you had me choose my favorite outfits and accessories. Do you ever wish to paint *me* without a stitch on?

SWING BOY: Is that a request? It’s a complete turn-around for you? Where has the brash but shy woman I married disappeared to, who clutched her privacy like a purse among thieves?

PAULINE: She’s now a robust impatient house frau, clearly impossible to satisfy, who accepts that the weight of her tumultuous household, which never seems to drive her man as mad as she is –

SWING BOY (*Overlaps*): Despite his ridiculous over-noticed frailty!

PAULINE (*Continuous, not hearing Swing Boy’s words*): -- is a puzzle to all beholders.

SWING BOY: If there *is* to be a next major painting after this, Pauline, I’ll consider your bold surprise.

PAULINE: Only “consider”? Not leap at so frisky and intoxicating an offer? An offer, I should note, apt soon to be withdrawn.

SWING BOY: As you’re well aware, I’m not one of those artists eager to flaunt the charms of his wife or – more exultantly! -- his *mistress* for his thirsty following. (*Pointedly lifts* *an implement beside his easel*) At the risk of sounding impatient or “morbid”, I beg you to give me the tiniest chance of completing this.

PAULINA: There’s one thing I appreciate in you, despite the frustration you induce.

SWING BOY (*Laughs*): Only “one thing”!

PAULINE (*Ignores his laugh*): You do stand up for yourself. I know you face your own inner struggle to do that. And I’m forced to applaud. Even if it’s for the distance from me that your self-defense assures.

SWING BOY: Doesn’t my premonition of death require that of me?

PAULINE: Your ‘premonition’ – as you blithely call it -- is exactly what requires our agreement. (*At Swing Boy’s gesture of non-comprehension*) That you and I have all too little time left for each other.  *Strictly* for each other. We must contract each day to off-set what that entails.

SWING BOY: If I dwell on that desperate a point of view, I’ll get depressed.

PAULINE: Weren’t you depressed when you told your doctors this painting might be your swan song? (*Swing Boy wordlessly bows to her logic*.) What’s true cannot be depressing. Your brother said that, years ago. (*Daniel enters quietly* *during Paulina’s reference to him*.) Daniel said that a fact, like a painting, is to be examined for each detail, each implication you can squeeze out of it. Facts grab you by the collar and shout at you, “Deal! Deal with me!” The harshest fact can be a stimulant and challenge.

Only *Swing Boy* notices when *Daniel* enters.  *Daniel* swiftly signals to *Swing Boy* that he wants to hear what *Pauline* has chosen to paraphrase. Both hear *Pauline* out, but *Swing Boy*’s immediate follow-up is

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not to respond; he turns to his brother, instead. *Pauline* now takes in *Daniel*’s presence herself.

DANIEL: And “Deal with it!” is what I’m doing.

SWING BOY: Are you O.K.? Given what Pauline’s been… I expected you to look devastated.

DANIEL: Given the war’s present state, I *should*. But I’m excited by how I’ve decided to handle this.

SWING BOY: Knock you down one minute; the next you’re up and swinging. Pauline even worked out my role in your rescue.

PAULINE: I want to know what Daniel plans.

DANIEL: Too many issues sway in the wind. For now, be reassured that I’ve rolled up my sleeves.

SWING BOY: Pauline’s rolled up *her* sleeves. She wants me to abandon this painting for ‘real work’, if you consent. My ‘real work’ can bail you out before you drown.

DANIEL: I’m pulling out all stops to prevent that. (*To Pauline*) Did you think I’d fallen apart?

PAULINE: I think you should allow our offer of options. Your premature announcement of recovery blinds you to how we can help.

DANIEL: Nothing’s “premature” when we’ve found available steps to take.

PAULINA: You foster Philipp’s habit – his *desire* – to depend on you. Frankly, Daniel, he would like nothing more than to sustain you as his addiction. Bombs may destroy your ships; but the three of us, and Philipp’s artistic growth and recognition, *will* survive regardless. If Philipp learns to stand on his own while you rush off to attend to the first of your ‘available steps’, he’ll have the proof he needs, that he can take steps of his own, to his last.

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): That’s her pitch but not what she truly believes.

DANIEL: But she’s correct. I’ll continue to support you to the utmost, of course; but that’s help you can supplement, hopefully *supplant*, unless you sell yourself short as Pauline feels you’re inclined to do. Without question, you’ve climbed to that ledge from which you can solidly make your own way. Once I’m gone, you’ll have your fuller proof of that.

SWING BOY: Gone? *You*?

PAULINE: It’s urgent that Daniel re-locate the base of his operations.

SWING BOY (*To Daniel and Pauline*): You’ve discussed this with each other?

PAULINE (*Eyes on Daniel*): I merely draw the obvious pragmatic conclusion.

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DANIEL (*Holds her stare*): And an ideal one at that.

PAULINE: For all of us.

DANIEL: But the ideal and what life offers us seldom mix for terribly long. I’ll have five or six months of negotiations and follow-throughs in Copenhagen and Helsinki . You can be sure I’ll take proper travel precautions. I’ll miss you both – and the children – during those months. But, Pauline, I’ve realized my business offices have to stay here. I *will* periodically, the war willing, keep coming back.

PAULINE: Of course you will.

SWING BOY: Good. For a horrible moment, I…

DANIEL: I had my own horrible moment.

SWING BOY: If you need to be at your new base longer than you expect, we’ll visit you there. The little ones will thrill to sail to you. I might even set up a temporary studio, only for your extra time away. (*To Pauline*) It would take only a *small* commission to finance that.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): That’s how I *want* to hear you talk. With optimistic surges, zest for adjustments! Like Daniel, you’ll not let a war crush your spirit! (*To Daniel*) To be realistic, if he’s to complete this painting that, minutes ago, he was so determined he live to complete, he can’t really afford to miss a day in travel. Nor to put our children, much less himself, in danger zones -- and out of reach of his doctors.

*Daniel* looks from one to the other. Neither *Pauline* nor *Swing Boy* speaks in response.

DANIEL (*Finally, to Pauline*): Has there been new word since yesterday that you kept from me?

PAULINE: Disputes over how to interpret certain test results, requiring several repeats. Treatment’s as subject to analysis and strategy as war and works of art. One doctor’s “irreversible” is another’s experimental spur.

SWING BOY: She makes too much of the absence of a clean bill of health. If I die, I die.

DANIEL: You know you don’t mean that. (*To Pauline*) You both sounded so caught up in my optimism.

PAULINE: As we should. As long as you let us contribute.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): “Irreversible?” When did you hear? Before we spoke this morning?

PAULINE: If I let you go on and on this morning about your shipping disasters, don’t fault my keeping from you blows still up for dispute. Swing Boy asked me not to mention them again to *him*. Why should I put you in greater pain than you are? You needed to figure things out, undistracted. As you now have.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): What a pair we are. Neither of us wants to show we’ve been devastated.

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SWING BOY: I’ve had my weak moments today. Paulina will attest to that. Daniel, even if we were destined to live for another century, we *ought* to treat each day, each undertaking, as our last. So: bad news is good news. It makes treating each action as my last easier, all the more rational. (*Fixed upon* *Daniel’s facial response*) It was supposed to be a routine follow-up, though I never thought I’d live past twenty. Taken at their worst, which Pauline both does and refuses to do, the test results suggest that I won’t see the end of summer.

DANIEL: I felt that in my bones.

SWING BOY: I love you.

DANIEL (*After a moment, with a grin*): You couldn’t wait ‘til you were on your death bed to tell me that, could you.

PAULINE: On his death bed, he’ll tell *me* that.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): I proclaim that every day to you. In my own unique style.

PAULINE: Quite unique.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): Do you feel I should forego my departure? Even for the limited time I anticipate?

SWING BOY: Do what you must, Daniel. For *you*. For us. Pauline and I are in accord. We want you to bounce back with not an extra moment’s delay. Like our bouncing still-quite-baby-like children.  *They’ll* need you, no matter what. And I’ll do my best to hang on ‘til you return.

PAULINE (*Advances to Daniel*): We wish you the best. (*She embraces him*, *looks at him somberly*.) We do. (*She laughs*.) Even in my dreams.

DANIEL: Thank you. Farewells are tough, aren’t they, even when they’re sensible, and in that sense desired. (*Daniel and Pauline study each other in silence. Then Daniel turns to Swing Boy*.) And you! You and I are not going to say good-bye. We’re not even going to hug.

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): Don’t rush back. Take all the time you need. What I promise Pauline for when Daniel and Sarah’s naps reach their end, I also swear to you. I rally. I’m up for them. I’m up for you. As long as it may take ‘til you return, I’ll still be here.

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*Scene Five*:

A tree-lined garden in late April, several months later. It may remind us of the arbor in which *Swing Boy* frolicked in *Scene One*, but it differs in not being as enclosed, as private; it’s not a catalyst for youthful adventure. It may also show pronounced but fragmented signs of *Swing Boy’s* ‘commission-based’ economic solidity. A swing, akin to the swing of *Scene One*, is suspended from a tree branch, but its ropes are twisted, entangled, and the swing looks out-of-use, even out-of-place, in its transferred locale. Suggestions of *Swing Boy* and *Pauline’s* home, and *Swing Boy’s* studio, are visibly within reach but at a distance too far for an infirm individual to traverse on his own. In time, we are to grasp that this somewhat compromised setting is essential to the painting *Swing Boy* has labored doggedly over since *Scene Four*, and which, now with a certainty no one can question, even with his medically prolonged life, *he* will be too weak to complete. *Two Young Figures, female and male*, whom we have not encountered before, carry *Swing Boy* to where *they* can position him beside his easel and painter’s implements in the warm sun. No one talks. The *Carrier Figures* use gestures and head movements to coordinate how *they* may most comfortably set *Swing Boy* down. The *Male Figure* has a noticeable limp but it poses no major difficulty for his carrying out his tasks. At first *Swing Boy* appears asleep, but once he is no longer in his carriers’ grip, it grows clear that *he* is as alert to *both figures*, to their silent exchanges, as the limits of his physical state permit.

SWING BOY (*Once the two Figures seem ‘done’ with their task yet appear distracted, uncertain what to do next…Swing Boy speaking when* they *least expect him to speak*): Let me know when you’re ready to pay attention again.

FEMALE FIGURE: We’re almost there.

MALE FIGURE (*To Female*): He looks cold, Effi. Should I fetch the warmer of his blankets?

EFFI (*To* *Swing Boy*): What do you think? The lighter of the two might be less constraining as you paint, at least for a while. But Otto won’t mind if you’d like him to bring either or both.

SWING BOY: They’ll get in the way once you set me up with my brushes.

Throughout the following exchanges, *Effi* and *Otto* multi-task.  *They* bring or re-position all of the ingredients *Swing Boy* requires to resume his painting. There may be a small table nearby on which *they* place a jug and glass of drinking water, a box of crackers, a banana, napkins, etc. There are two easels, each with a blank canvas, near *Swing Boy’s*, but neither *Effi* nor *Otto* attends to them, though a superfluous item (e.g. two containers of identical blue) may find itself ‘stored’ in those separate easels’ proximity.

EFFI: I can’t convince you you’d be better off still working indoors?

SWING BOY: That’s where I’m efficient…and handsomely paid. At this hour I need my forest again, like a cave-dweller needs fresh air.

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OTTO (*To Swing Boy*): You want your work of *this* order to breathe.

EFFI (*To Otto*): This ‘higher’ order? How pretentious and self-defeating.

SWING BOY: Effie. Take a peek around that elm and the snarl of bramble: You’ll see little Daniel and Sarah’s dream space. They’ll ‘discover’ it in a year or so. You’ve been there, but only in passing. Even into my teens, I spent hours dreaming as I swung on that (*Points to swing*) ‘*contraption*’ – silly as it’s looked since I had you ‘transplant’ it *here* so it wouldn’t stay neglected. It’s not weathered well, but it’s survived remarkably. Daniel announces his pet project is to disentangle those ropes, but I’ve yet to see him begin and it’s fine if you beat him to the punch.

OTTO (*To Effi*): It’s the child inside his heart who won’t stop playing with paint. Where else could he do that with greater joy?

EFFI: We’re all entitled to sentiment, however confused.

SWING BOY (*To Effi*): This painting does suffer from being pursued indoors.

EFFI: With that much, I’ll agree.

SWING BOY: Now the war’s finally turned a corner, may my output have gotten Daniel through the worst. I’d become so distracted by the call of commerce that, long as I’ve worked so intermittently on this portrait, I feared it would never leap beyond a figment of an idea.

OTTO: It’s not *remotely* a ‘figment’. Even in the time since Pauline hired us…. (*Realizes how self-promotional that sounds*.) I’m sorry. I didn’t mean… Your work brings such…

SWING BOY: No, that’s sweet. And I think it’s true, Otto. Don’t let effusion embarrass you, and don’t fear you’ll embarrass *me*. I’m too vain for that. When I’m sensible, I know I’ve made strides. When I lose my bearings, I make unfair demands on your generosity and goodness. Calm down. I *prize* how you rush to others’ support, especially to mine. I used to be as impulsive as *you*. To spout sincere praise of someone worthy of such a spout was one of my life’s core joys.

OTTO: You’re that way still.

SWING BOY: Perhaps, only with you. And my wife and brother, I hope. You glide me into it. Just when I feel too weak for one last spout, you resuscitate my drive -- you, not your worthy but inhibiting side-kick here. Sometimes I wonder at the pains I take to preserve my two little ones through this portrait – hardly my first try but it’s my boldest! Tell me again what keeps them from joining us out here?

OTTO: Tell you *again*? (*With affection*) Are you a masochist?

SWING BOY: You must help me come to terms with what Pauline sees me as too dense to admit. Why do they each burst into sobs whenever you lift me out of their reach?

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OTTO: Out of *your* reach of them. To be blunt: They fear being crushed. Debilitated as you’ve become, your hugs are pretty fierce. Bone-crushing, even for me, though I love how each spark of passion reinvigorates you, at least for a moment. Daniel and Sarah aren’t infants anymore. In half a year, I’ve watched them turn into miniature adults. Goya would have had a ball with them. But increasingly they don’t know what to make of you.

SWING BOY: Otto! Such wretched words from you and yet you chuckle!

EFFI: What Otto won’t tell you is that they’ve declared they’ll run away from home if you announce one more time your aim to ‘capture’ them for posterity. Daniel thinks you’ll imprison him for good posture.

SWING BOY (*Sees her humor, but sadly*): Like that twisted rope. Little Daniel and I will have to work on straightening me out.

OTTO: My fault. I read them too many fairy tales and fantasy books. I should be quicker to translate metaphors: Not a second more of their taking ‘capture’ to mean ‘trussed, roasted, and eaten alive by witch or wizard wielding a brush.’

*Otto* provokes *Swing Boy’s* smile over his Webster’s Dictionary ‘riff’. One of numerous instances of their private rapport throughout this scene, that others palpably observe, without comment, whatever else their response.

SWING BOY: I need to be quicker too. (*A moment when each thinks the other is about to* *speak and holds back whatever they might otherwise say, until Swing Boy plunges forward*.) I’ve plugged away at this longer than any painting of mine. We need to sustain the age these imps were when I first sketched their mischievous faces and scampering legs.

OTTO: We?

SWING BOY (*To Otto directly*) You balk at that?

OTTO: To the contrary. You honor us. By now, Effi and I can hardly distinguish your memory from ours. I like how much that tickles you. Your need for us to coordinate *should* feel that natural and smooth.

SWING BOY: Nothing feels natural when you can’t tell who’s knocking at your door... ready to whisk you away. I can’t even grow accustomed to you two daily *with* me. I hope that doesn’t offend you.

OTTO: We’re too thrilled to be with you to take a second of it for granted ourselves.

EFFI: As Otto likes to say, it’s a dream for *us* to apprentice a painter whose work we’ve treasured. We never anticipated we’d get to meet, much less – may I say? -- rescue you.

OTTO (*To Effi*): Couldn’t that be “as *Effi wishes* to say”, as well?

SWING BOY: Forgive me. I’m too off-balance today to feel flattered or grateful to you for your kind (*To*

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*Effi*) if indirect and begrudging, compliment. (*Eyes both, then back to* *Effi*): The beast you see me as apologizes a smidgen.

OTTO: A beast we esteem, well beyond a smidgen. No matter how disgruntled you insist on being with yourself.

SWING BOY: Effusive Otto. That’s the *real* reason the army rejected you. I prefer to take your words as a tease.

EFFI: Otto’s never known how to tease. If pressed, he’d declare teasing, even pure irony, to be immoral.

OTTO: I don’t see any point to it. Beyond what any of us perceive or genuinely feel, what else gives us so deep a joy to express? Do I sound naïve?

EFFI: So, Philipp, never hold back your expressiveness with Otto. Weep in his arms, if you like. He knows what draws you to in him. He’ll cry in your arms, too. Let *me* be the one at whom you aim your gunshots. (*To Otto*) Even the crippled learn to go into battle in due time.

An awkward hesitance before *Otto* changes the subject.

OTTO: If we’ve forgotten to bring something out here for you, Philipp, shout like mad. Are you sure you’re up to painting today?

SWING BOY: I’m not yet so far gone that I’d have you two carry me out here just for kicks.

OTTO: Gee. I didn’t mean to upset you.

SWING BOY: Effi’s description of you is accurate, Otto. You couldn’t *ever* mean to upset me. Better still, I’m not upset. These days, I’m merely impossible. Did I fail to notice your sharper favoring of your bad leg this morning? Of course, I noticed. The instant your limp caught my eye, a nicer Philipp would have killed his plan to move all this out here

EFFI (*To Otto*): Philipp enjoys chiding himself as much as he enjoys your sweetness. (*To Swing Boy*) Call it desperate or worse, you’ve more bite and resolve left in you than you and your wife take into account.

SWING BOY (*To Otto*): Really? You agree? (*No reply. Swing Boy turns to Effi*) Has Pauline told you she’s afraid to have D. and S. bear witness as I breathe my last? Might she see signs I’ll collapse within the hour?

EFFI (*Looks to Otto before she replies*): She won’t have them tire you out. Bewail their absence as you may, she knows you‘ll make better-than-do with your pencil sketches and your previous smaller oils... plus our shared memory, of course, for these last ‘perfect’ details. Your mind’s eye alone more than compensates for two small subjects who scamper clear of you..

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SWING BOY: My mind has the sight of a bird flying smack into Pauline’s just-washed window.

EFFI: Pauline predicted such a retort. Still, for your children’s sake *and* yours, your anxious wife is wise to parcel out what time remains for you to spend as a dad. Give her credit for caring. She must also see how your progress slows when you work directly from models other than yourself.

SWING BOY: I’m amused that you side with her point of view. That she *and* you worry about how my “models” delight, absorb, and distract me.

EFFI: Deep down, you agree. We know you couldn’t cherish each of them more.

OTTO: Don’t take this amiss, Philipp: The best time with your offspring can’t be when you have them pose for you.

SWING BOY (*Takes this in, but sustains his focus on Effi*): I’ll tell Pauline you’re her perfect advocate. Want to know why I need to tell her that?

*Otto* chuckles, nervous. *Effi* is awkwardly silent.

SWING BOY (*Continues*): She balked at my wish to hire you. (*With reference to Otto’s chuckle*) Had he already let that slip, or did he stay discreet?

EFFI (*To Otto*): It’s true?

OTTO (*Regarding a task he decides on the spot he must instantly complete):* Sorry: This can’t wait.

EFFI (*To Swing Boy*): Why would you want me to learn this about her?

SWING BOY: Strictly as praise. You didn’t catch that in my voice?

EFFI: No. Not in your tone. Not in your choice of words. Not in your response to my question.

OTTO (From the space to which he withdrew): I can catch it.

SWING BOY (*To Effi*): How pleased Pauline will be – already is! -- to admit herself wrong about you. Whatever your willfulness, you don’t topple my focus; and your artistic level is a happier safety net for me than the threat she anticipated

EFFI (*A laugh*): Threat?

SWING BOY: Effi, The moment I scanned your portfolio, I recognized a kinship between us. Pauline asked point-blank if my excitement was inspired by your beauty. If it were, would I have kept that a secret? I don’t keep secrets any more than she does. (*To Ott0*) In the years she and I have known each other, she’s not missed a chance to ponder how I feel about *anyone.* Including my brother. Including *you*. She insists she’s not troubled. She just wants to *know*.

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EFFI: Do your answers *help* her know?

SWING BOY: Do *you* have your own questions about me? I like everything out in the open.

EFFI: When there’s a need to ask, the reply will seldom be honest. Or believed.

SWING BOY: I like that. Whatever I might think to ask Pauline, I’ve put into my portraits of her.

EFFI: Are we to call you a painter of suspicions?

SWING BOY: If that’s what you surmise. I simply don’t want to exclude. I want to embrace each possibility a detail at hand may suggest, except where one view taints its alternatives.

EFFI: Does Pauline think I’m more beautiful than she is? I’m younger, of course.

SWING BOY: Which makes you less interesting.

EFFI: To you.

SWING BOY: Naturally. Less interesting to *me*. It’s no insult. No comparison intended either, actually.

OTTO: When you’re pressed to make a point, you seem to revive. Just as when you paint.

SWING BOY (*To Effi*): It’s not to any of our benefits to view each other as rivals.

EFFI: I think that’s unavoidable.

SWING BOY (*To Otto*): To paint with sharp impact, you *must* have a point to make. One passionate point at the very least. Otherwise, you do little more than copy life… at best with consummate skill. (*To* *Effi*) You’ll both learn that earlier in your careers than I did. You’ve skipped my silly stage. If I survived another decade, the two of you would be teaching *me*.

OTTO (*To Swing Boy*): Before we met you, we had the idea that you’d scorn our limited experience. And that we’d have to walk on eggshells with someone so sensitive who’d become so ill. How wrong we were!

SWING BOY (*To Otto and Effi*): Who led you to expect that?

OTTO (*After he exchanges a look with Effi*): Not Pauline. Nor Daniel. Did you think it’s something they said?

SWING BOY (*A joke*?): Now that you mention it…

OTTO: My admiration. Effi will confirm this. When I admire any painter, any artist, as much as I…you, I frighten myself. I even frighten Effi. (*Laughs*) I ‘implicate’ her. As you saw me do this afternoon.

EFFI: Otto needs to be admired in return.

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OTTO: But I don’t deserve to be.

SWING BOY: You’re wrong again.

OTTO: Oh. Thank you.

SWING BOY: Isn’t it fun to be wrong? It’s almost more fun than anything else.

EFFI: Not everyone shares that view.

OTTO (*To Swing Boy*): At any event, I have everything beside your canvas ready for you to begin. I’ve been talking too much.

SWING BOY (*Studies their faces before he speaks*.):  *I’m* the side-tracker. Panic brings on my worst, as though urgency were the mother of sloth. It may be best to treat each last day of mine as casual, but I need to be more considerate of you. What’s that word? Magnanimous.

EFFI: Beyond how you let us take up your brush on your worst days? And hover over each of our strokes? (*Swing Boy and Effi hold each* *other’s stare*. *Effi takes a breath before she smiles and continues*.) Unlike Otto, I think you underestimate me. You rouse my impatience. You make me bold.

SWING BOY: I like bold. But watch out: I might even give you and Otto my brushes on my better days. (*Looks at Otto*) You’re startled? You think an established artist would never do that? (*Otto is* *speechless*.) Neither of you will let me down. (*Regards his canvas*): I’ll die before I leave this half-done.

EFFI: (*To Swing Boy*): No matter what you said about my portfolio, we’re not your peers. Even immodest Effi can acknowledge that.

*Swing Boy* is silent.

EFFI: Will you alone decide what happens with this portrait after you’re…

SWING BOY: Gone?

EFFI: Your wife might just pack up your art supplies and send Otto and me straight back to our garret. No call from the grave would be able to stop her. She’d be within her rights to do exactly that.

*Swing Boy* lets *Effi’s* thought awkwardly hang in the air.

OTTO (*To Swing Boy, with reference to his easel*): How would you like me to angle this for you today?

EFFI (*To Otto*): How it’s been since Day One, indoors or out. That’s hardly a warranted question.

SWING BOY: It *is*. It’s how he reminds me that, to the last hellish instant of my time on earth, I still have certain choices. (*To Otto*) Thank you.

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EFFI (*Gadfly that she is*): Otto? In the ways that matter, does he really have a choice?

SWING BOY: About living, hardly. About my painting, an emphatic yes. Until I start to gasp for air. (*Otto exits*.) For example, as I’ll assure that you adequately register once Otto returns with whatever he’s gone to get, look at this. (*He gestures at his canvas*.) Here I am – about to overlay, within the barest space between these two branches, a faint uncertain image of Pauline, framed on the upper left by a fragment of that oval kitchen window above her sink. I want us a bit jolted by how her eagle eyes, her most emphatic facial feature from the distance I’ve chosen, fix on our frisky ones in the garden, as they frolic next to this pivotal ‘swing’. If need be, I *will* leave the completion of the garden – hopefully, *not* of Pauline, nor of the swing-supporting tree – to you each.  *You* underestimate what some – even Pauline still -- may deem my premature, my immature, regard… for the brazen *pair* of you.

EFFI (*After a moment, a declaration*): You’ve thought it all through this far ahead.

SWING BOY: Of necessity. Not so far ahead. And, dare I add, in miniature tears – you won’t spot them! – tears of relief, you can be sure, that you tolerate my guarded display of such sentiment.

EFFI: When you jest with me like this, and when you don’t attempt to conceal what we mean to you, here with your beautiful family, your ‘sufficient’ family – little Daniel and Sarah are blessings beyond what most of us would ever need to supplement – you bring *me* to tears. (*They look at each other; then break into laughter*.) Yes: Even me.

SWING BOY: Then banish jest forever, as one intemperate king more-or-less declares. Night after night. Smile no more.

EFFI: As that king’s about to breathe *his* last? Not one smile extra, were even his corpse up to a smile?

SWING BOY: Yes! Humor to the rescue! Too often, when I try to spark your lighter side, I turn inept. If I’m forced to leave the end-strokes of this portrait to you, guess what else I may saddle you with? (*Otto returns, lunch items in tow*; *Swing Boy’s focus is on his canvas*) I’d have you hang a subtly comic, tiny death mask from one of these boughs, maybe this bough: just high enough above my son’s head for him and his sister to stay oblivious to it.

OTTO: If you want my opinion, even kept subtle and comic a death mask in that setting is pretty morbid.

SWING BOY: And ruinous of my overall intent, I’d say. You’re kind not to point that out. It’s a mark of my self-pity… even, yes, if kept subtle. So I fight with myself to repress it.

EFFI: We’ll join you in your fight.

*Swing Boy* and *Effi* exchange a gesture equivalent to what in the 20th and 21st Century would be called a ‘high five’.

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SWING BOY (*To Effi and Otto*): Pauline and I so fear another war at just the time when Daniel comes of age to be taken. (*Focuses on Otto*) I wager, though – despite all such military consequence – that you dream, just as I’ve long dreamed, your body was intact.

*They* hold each other’s stare before *Otto* speaks.

OTTO: I brought your medicines with me inside your lunch box. Pauline’s made sandwiches for the three of us. Should you resist, she demands that we force you to accept her nourishment.

SWING BOY: I suppose I’m to accept such force as love.

OTTO (*After an exchange of looks with Effi*): Frankly, yes. Her love. And ours.

EFFI (*to Swing Boy*): What else would you call it?

SWING BOY: Try “interruption”. Try “distraction”. Try “misguided priorities”.

EFFI: Try “lately, you don’t act in your best interests.”

OTTO (*To Effi*): He’s struggling to stay purposeful. If I had to abandon a major work of mine mid-stream – even to hand it over to the likes of *us* – I’d go mad. (*To Swing Boy*) You’re at the end of your rope trying to hold yourself together.  *That’s* behind your death mask. I’d sooner we took that old tangled swing, straightened it out and swung *it* across your canvas.

*Swing Boy* registers every word without reply. As *Otto and Effi* adjust their final set up of easel,canvas, and painting implements in relation to *Swing Boy’s* physical limits, andas *Otto* places sandwiches, medicines, et al. at a discreet distance from the easel, *Swing Boy* watches intently. *He* and *Otto* haveseveral silent exchanges. As ever, *Effi* takes note of these.

SWING BOY (*When the weight of silence grows oppressive*): I take unspeakable pleasure in watching you do this for me. Does that make me perverse?

OTTO: If it does, we’re all perverse. Why else does the sight and smell of another’s sweat make us tremble?

EFFI: Speak for yourselves, boys. I’m just doing my job.

OTTO: No, you’re not.

EFFI: Shut up.

SWING BOY: I wonder if, years from now, Daniel and Sarah will sound just like the two of you.

OTTO: Let’s hope.

SWING BOY: Not all brothers and sisters are as close. I could mistake you for a romantic couple.

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EFFI: Are we supposed to appreciate that remark?

SWING BOY: I wouldn’t mind! (*To Otto*) Nor would I mind if you beat Daniel to the punch. (*At Otto’s* *uncertain* *look*) Do what you wish to my swing, whatever its role in my portrait. When I had Daniel months ago re-mount it here, Otto, I must have already caught wind of you and Effi in my future: You on the swing, little Daniel and Sarah on your lap, their pint-sized fingers clutching your thighs and shirt. Effi beholding you. A painter’s gift!

OTTO: The image of me where you should be doesn’t pain you?

SWING BOY: Because I’d not be alive to witness it? And Effi would replace me as its painter?

OTTO: When some of us think of the world after our death, it’s anguish.

SWING BOY: Thank you for being so sensitive. Somehow, I fuse “beyond” with here and now. Including you, though I scarcely do know either of you. You, that swing, this garden, my canvas, Pauline when she arrives, Daniel from the time I was born, little Daniel, Sarah, each rush of air, each whirl of color, of shape, of composition, all around us: it’s all *here*. ...We all – what? – participate in it beyond the limits, the passage, of time. Memory, fantasy, the radiant now beyond now: it’s what I paint.

EFFI: Can you actually argue that? That how we live *transcends* the ticking clock?

OTTO: He just did.

SWING BOY (*To Effi*): You don’t see it as basic to what keeps us going?

EFFI: I see death as an unfortunate fact. I’ve read poets who tried, but nothing they or I claim can erase that fact. Or triumph over it.

SWING BOY: Whenever I find I’m in agreement with you, I’m good as done for. If I settled for such a ‘realistic’ given as yours, I couldn’t press on with my work. I envy your oblivious drive.

OTTO (*To Effi*): Yet here he is, determined to give us his son and daughter in sheer brush strokes, though he obviously knows they’ll soon – (*He can’t bring himself to say “lose him.*”)

SWING BOY (*Indicates his canvas, perhaps to swerve Otto from his unwanted moment of choking up*): When they no longer have me, they’ll still have this. They’ll see themselves through my eyes even as –

OTTO: Through your *heart*.

SWING BOY: Yes, through my eyes *and* heart, of course. Even as, with each year of their growth, they resemble less and less what they look like here. Whatever I become, even if all I become after leaving this earth is a color, I’ll know that. Prize that.

EFFI: A color has consciousness?

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OTTO (*To Effi*): Why question what comforts him?

SWING BOY: She has every reason to challenge my views and theories. I won’t have you patronize me.

OTTO (*After a glance at both of their faces*): I apologize…to both of you. (*To Swing Boy*) Do you need us to remain here while you set to work?

SWING BOY: Not need. *Want*. With each of my successive day’s downslides, I grow yet more amazed at my sustained ability to choose. (*Demonstrates with his brush*.) See? I choose that shadow, that glimpse of light, whether or not either of you approve. (*To Otto*) I don’t paint outrage as you surprisingly do. I expect outrage from Effi. But what she releases, you harbor, I guess. Me, I paint what I dream. Even if outrage is warranted. Even if, like you, I refuse to express it in life and can do so only on paper and canvas.

EFFI (*As much to Otto as to Swing Boy*): Outrage at life’s impermanence?

SWING BOY: Outrage that love gives impermanence the intolerable anguish that Otto speaks of. (*To Otto*) Or do I put words in your mouth?

OTTO: You speak for both of us, Philipp. I respect your use of me here as your alter ego. (*To Effi*) My voice through his lips is a bit of play that does him good. (*Back to Philipp*) In the end, though, you won’t still want to call your voice mine. I imagine a younger you would have avoided such fancy face-work entirely.

SWING BOY: A younger me would have lacked the wherewithal to stick with this resistant portrait in my current circumstance. (*To Effi*) A younger me would also be riled by what sound like your cynical mutterings right now.

EFFI: But, old man that you are at the ripe age of 33, you welcome these mutterings.

SWING BOY (*As he proceeds to paint*): We old folks *need* the young to keep us on our toes; no, to keep us at the tips of our brush. (*To both*) Watch this. Tell me if I made a major false stroke here. I’m pretty sure I have.

OTTO: Are you concerned with the arc of Daniel’s wrist?

SWING BOY: Daniel hears something that Sarah doesn’t. Only Pauline from her window spots its source. Daniel’s first impulse is not to get his sister alarmed.

OTTO: But Daniel himself is alarmed. Is that what the curve of his thumb should suggest?

SWING BOY: At the moment, It does the opposite, doesn’t it.

EFFI: Does your actual Daniel protect his sister that bravely? If you keep his gesture this subtle and ambiguous, isn’t he too close in age to her for your intent to be clear?

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OTTO (*To Effi*): You don’t think you distract him when you bring up age?

SWING BOY (*As he covers his misguided brush stroke with another*): She doesn’t! She won’t! Otto, when will you finally grasp that I’m grateful she’s such an irritant!

*Pauline*, pregnant, approaches within earshot.

EFFI (*In tears*): I mean only to help!

SWING BOY (*Angrily*): And you do!

PAULINE: Lately, again and again, it seems my timing could be improved.

OTTO (*With resilient grace*): Not if you’ve come to referee. We haven’t touched your sandwiches yet. I’m sure they’ll be delicious.

PAULINE (*To Otto and Effi alike*): Is this what I hire the two of you to do? To turn his last days into scenes?

SWING BOY: Calm down, Pauline.

PAULINE: When I find you in this ludicrous avoidable turmoil?

SWING BOY: Turmoil is my muse. As you’d never admit! I have to goad them to bring the Goddess Turmoil to my side, to give me strength to hold my brush steady, to guide its sweep and point. (*Indicates Otto*) This one is too warm-hearted to comply. He will hone and narrow his career to the illustration of greeting cards. (*Studies Otto*) I don’t incite you to reply? (*Otto stays silent*.) Punch my brains out!

Otto (Smiles): Only if you insist. (*Otto, of course, looks readier to give Swing Boy a supportive and tearful hug*.)

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): Does Otto resemble our Daniel to you? Before disaster toughened him?

SWING BOY: That must be why I’ve loved him from the moment you brought him and Effi to me. I like what you say now better than what I initially surmised.

PAULINE: Initially?

SWING BOY: Yes. You responded to Otto as if he reminded you of *me*, when you and I first grew close. I had no trouble seeing why: That open face of his, that sweet undefended thoughtfulness I hope I caught in my early self-portraits. The ‘boy-look’ in a man that, in the world we know, practically seals his fate. Unless he raises his guard. Trains himself to be dry, curt, purposeful. Hopefully, too, impossibly charming and sexy so he can get away unscathed with his every wrong move.

PAULINE: Is that how you see yourself now? Charming? Sexy? Unscathed?

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SWING BOY: Aren’t my recent self-portraits proof of that? I think I’d like the last of them carved in replica on my grave stone. (*Looks at her*) You don’t laugh.

PAULINE: I can’t find my sense of humor when there’s nothing to laugh at.

SWING BOY: In my past several self-portraits, I did try to balance my flaws with strengths. Forget charm and sexiness, of course: that’s for others to see, or not see. Others like you. If my illness – or my attitude toward it – hasn’t become a veil of sorts between us. I can’t help but suspect it *has*.

PAULINE: You and I are naked wrestlers, Philipp. No veils. Veils would trip us up as we stepped on them.

SWING BOY: I’d give them a kick. (*Indicates Effi*) She reminded me of *you* from themoment you brought *her* to me. The ‘you’ before you and I learned each other’s spots of readiest vulnerability.

EFFI (*To Pauline, with a snort*): Is he insulting me again?

PAULINE (*With cheer*): He’s insulting *me*.

EFFI: Too many of us come to love him.

PAULINE: More than he currently loves himself. (*To Swing Boy*) Should I prepare our sprightly rascals for their ‘sitting’?

SWING BOY: You’ve changed your mind about keeping them from me?

PAULINE: I’m not being ironic, if that’s what you mean. They’re up now and at play, quite peacefully. I imagine you’ll have them continue that as you work out more of your interminably evolving ideas.

OTTO: I can go get them if you’d like.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*) Why was their continued modeling for me at all an issue?

PAULINE: A remark you made yesterday made me wonder. And I do have alternate things on my docket for them to do.

SWING BOY: Such as? (*Pauline won’t elaborate.)* Would you mind quoting my insidious remark?

PAULINE: Something about your “reality” as it yields to your monumentally relentless imagination. You said your view of them replaces how you literally see them. They heard you. They told me they feel dispensable.

OTTO: Little Daniel knows the word ‘dispensable’?

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): *You* interpreted me to mean they were. Do you distort my words to deal with your anticipated grief? As I may well distort yours? As though ill-feeling serves to make us tranquil.

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PAULINE (*Visibly conscious of Otto and Effi as spectators to a battle*): One doesn’t speak that way ‘in public’, you realize.

SWING BOY: I see no “public” here, only the finest of soul mates, each hand-picked by *you*.

OTTO: Not to interrupt, but it does seem fitting that we excuse ourselves. At least for –

PAULINE (*To Otto*): You do interrupt. I’d rather you both remain.

DANIEL (*Steps into view*): Of course you’ll remain. (*To Philipp*) Hello.

SWING BOY: Hello. A sight for sore eyes.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): Is there some disagreement about their wages?

OTTO (*To Pauline*): But –

PAULINE (*To Otto*): Brace yourself. You’re too kind. That you witness Philipp’s behavior doesn’t embarrass me. When he turns maudlin, whom else should I recruit in Daniel’s absence to restore his discipline, and my own? (*To Daniel*) It’s not a moment of silly finance you’ve walked in on, only the hardship of supporting a husband who constantly misperceives and verbally abuses his wife, his over-adaptable/ far-more-distressed-than-she-lets-on devoted wife. (*As Pauline exits*) I’ll be back.

*Daniel*, *Otto, Effi*, and *Swing Boy* each look at one another: What is there to say? With no break to the silence, *Effi* crosses to the swing and works to disentangle its ropes.

SWING BOY: Did she mean she’d be back with the children?

DANIEL: Are you up to that?

SWING BOY: I wish I had a full say.

OTTO (*To Swing Boy and Daniel, as signal of his sympathy for Swing Boy’s ‘shorthand’ response*):

‘It’s now or never’ hardly sits well on the tongue.

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): Otto knows how to tease and comfort me with a single phrase. Just as you do.

DANIEL (*To Effi*): My brother’s fallen prey to slighting the efforts of women. I’m sure Pauline is not the only one to bear that brunt.

EFFI: If so, that’s because we women are too essential, beyond his grace to admit. You needn’t worry about my feelings. (*To* *Swing Boy*) Not, mind you, that I’m devoid of feelings.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): Nor that they’re “devoid” in Pauline.

OTTO: I haven’t known how to ask her whether this final trimester is easier than the previous. Would

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she take that as too personal? She must have worried about the length of her morning sickness

SWING BOY: Why not ask such a question of *me*? (*They study each other as Otto weighs Swing Boy’s tone – slightly irritated? purely inviting?*) Or of your sister. Likely Effi knows more about my wife these days than I do.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): How ironic and sad if, after all you’ve allowed and achieved, you *now* see yourself as a burden to us.

SWING BOY: Should I feel anything but? I’m ashamed I had to plead for your return. Part of me hates that you twisted your schedule to oblige. I’m sure you still have way too much to handle, but I refuse to pretend I’m sorry you listened to me. Why did I let us become so important to each other? I deserve to have you slap my face with your gloves.

DANIEL (*To Otto and Effi*): Given the cantankerous posture my brother seems to favor here, might you catch me up on his day?

OTTO (*To Daniel*): I don’t recommend getting him started all over again.

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): Nor do I. Time hurtles past, and I don’t have a clue as to how *you* are. (*To Otto*) Good for you. You’ve begun to learn how to bite me back.

OTTO (*Unnerved*): I meant only that it’s best you conserve your energy*.* And move forward.

SWING BOY *(With a gesture toward his* canvas): My love of battlekeeps me at this. What the likes of Otto draws from sleep and relaxation, I draw from thought and argument.

DANIEL: Alongside your maverick color theories. (*To Otto and Effi*) Has he changed your outlook? I’ve never heard anyone on that subject near as compelling.

OTTO (*To Daniel*): Effi’s not as won over as I am.

EFFI: Naturally.

SWING BOY (*With abrupt cheer*): Yes, naturally.

OTTO (*Again to Daniel*): I do agree that your brother is onto a possible, if minor, discovery.

SWING BOY: Minor?

OTTO (*Still to Daniel, but with a bit of mischief shared with Swing Boy*): Sweet as I am, I won’t have him take my professional alliance for granted. (*To Swing Boy*) Yes, minor. Live with it.

EFFI: Minor and hardly useful. I’ve dared him to trace how his theories apply to what he achieves here with your nephew and niece. Are their daring youthful souls formed enough to rise to his compound color designations?

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DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): Does all this amuse you?

OTTO: He knows we mean mostly to tickle the soles of his feet.

EFFI: I’m less sure he knows. (*Still to Otto*) Help me with this?

*Otto* goes to *Effi* and the swing. *Swing Boy* touches *Daniel* to absorb his full attention.

SWING BOY (*As though the scene’s recent moments had not occurred*): it’s time I asked: What are your plans for my unsold paintings after I’m gone?

DANIEL: That’s not for me to decide.

SWING BOY: Sure it is.

DANIEL: Pauline’s needs must come first. Not only for her economic options.

SWING BOY: You made each of those options possible for her, Daniel, from the first of them to every one since. She can’t dispute that. And she’s –

DANIEL: A woman? You’d have me take advantage of *that*?

SWING BOY: You caught me there. Too bad thoughts occur to us that we can’t prevent. But we *can* retract them. Still, as Pauline would not hesitate to urge, let’s tackle the hard stuff: Can you convince me that Pauline as fully perceives where I’m at artistically, or what to do with my work, as you do. (*Indicates his work-in-progress*) She’d have everyone see this only as my ‘over-arduous attempt’ to evoke Sarah’s and Daniel’s likeness in motion. (*Looks to Daniel for agreement Swing Boy doesn’t receive*) Purely for its sentimental ‘realistic’ value, she’d deem it priceless. For its place in our wider world or even just in the history of portraiture? She’d have no clue.

DANIEL: It’s your medicine speaking, Swing Boy. You sell her short. What with your health, her pregnancy, her need to manage this home *and* your children single-handed – those are sheer facts! – she has too much on her mind to focus in depth on your later body of work. Especially in light of the hit I took when the war was at its worst, she’s been adamant I not hire a maid or nanny to help her out. You expect her indulgence when she’s past exhaustion. Dear brother, my once gentle brother and still my utmost friend, bite the bullet you ask others to bite: Deal with what looms. She can’t face losing you.

SWING BOY (*Once he takes this in*): But you can?

DANIEL: When the moment arrives, we face what we must, don’t we.

SWING BOY (*To Otto and Effi*): That’s my brother for you!

DANIEL: And that’s you as well, Swing Boy.

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SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): How did you figure out what it takes to survive the…unbearable?

DANIEL: We may come across as sensitive, my beloved Philipp, but we’re made to be hard as nails. Blame whomever or whatever you target to justify ‘becoming a man’, I see you getting there.

SWING BOY: Someone certain from childhood that he’d not live past age 20 might have cause to be bitter, but you’d think he’d let up, not worsen, wouldn’t you. Why wasn’t I as angry earlier on? Given my unstopped outpouring of hopefully major work till now, given a family life I never expected and miserably at times act so ungrateful for, these past thirteen have been my ‘gravy’ years.

OTTO: For us also, in our own ‘gravy’ way. What if we’d never come to know you?

SWING Boy: You would have knocked at Johann Wolfgang’s door. Or Caspar David’s.

EFFI: As we did! And they welcomed us. When the time comes, it’s probably one of them to whom we’ll turn.

OTTO (*To Daniel*): Which would be unthinkable, of course, without the prior introduction you sent them about us.

SWING BOY: No. You could have showed up in their garden as total strangers. They would only have needed to gaze into your eyes as you greeted them beneath their grapevines in the morning sun.

EFFI: Whereupon, the more welcoming of the two would have mulled the exact color of my eyes. And discussed the angle of the sunlight: its impact on that color. As well as which admixture of oils, or of a medium not yet invented, might capture that light and color best. And best convey the dappled chiaroscuro their lattices cause to fragment my face.

SWING BOY (*To Otto*): Will her wry turns ever flag?

EFFI: Not as far as you’re concerned, you realize.

SWING BOY (*A perceptible shift in tone*): Now that you’ve untangled my swing, would the two of you mind testing it out?

*Otto* and *Effi* detect the shift, exchange glances and check in silently with *Daniel*, then turn back to *Swing Boy* in quiet but oddly emphatic assent.

OTTO: Easy.

EFFI: Whatever you ask.

*Otto* beckons *Effi* onto his lap. *She* signals the reverse.  *He* hoists himself onto her lap, carefully positions himself, and *they* swing.

OTTO (*To Swing Boy*): Hey! It can still hold us!

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EFFI (*To Swing Boy as well*): We should get Daniel and Sarah to join in!

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): Their gusto gives me hope.

DANIEL: Hope for what?

*They* hold each other’s focus in troubled silence. *Daniel* sees, too, that something in *Swing Boy* has altered without *Swing Boy’s* explicit announcement of it.

DANIEL: Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable? You seem –

SWING BOY (Abruptly *to Otto and Effi*): I hate to ask you to stop so soon, but might one of you run and retrieve my wife? (*To Daniel*) I’m seeing round the corner to what rushes toward me.

DANIEL: Of course. (*Daniel’s glance darts to Otto and Effi as Otto hops to the ground and heads away*) Thank you, Otto. Be swift.

OTTO (*As he exits*): Swifter than I can.

DANIEL (*As calmly as he can manage*): If she hesitates, tell her there’s no time.

EFFI (*To Daniel*): Should I clear out before she comes?

DANIEL: You and your brother give him hope. Even if he can’t say for what. Stay. Swing Boy and I can be private even in crowds. Pauline the same.

EFFI (*To Daniel and to Swing Boy*): This wry soul counts your letting her remain here an honor.

SWING BOY: Not a burden or chore?

*Effi* looks at *Swing Boy* with a response *she* cannot express.

SWING BOY (*To Effi*): I want to whisper something to you. (*References Daniel*) Don’t worry. He already knows what I’ll say.

EFFI: Then why make such a whisper thing of it?

SWING BOY: You’ll hear my words differently than if I speak them out loud.

DANIEL (*His brother’s interpreter here*, *to Effi*): You won’t let embarrassment block your ears. You’ll still think you and your brother not –

SWING BOY (*Completes Daniel’s thought*): Not worthy of my …love and true esteem. (*After a moment*) I’ve come ‘round the corner. I’ve *had* to come ‘round.

DANIEL (*To Effi*) Given how alert you are to your brother’s less guarded reverence for Swing Boy’s mentoring, I’d say, in this case, believe each excessive word he’ll whisper.

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SWING BOY: Hardly excessive. Today’s been a sham, Effi You must have suspected as much, but you’ve been kind -- (*attempts a chuckle*) granted -- just to put you at ease -- *atypically* kind. I knew from the moment I couldn’t swallow my breakfast that I can’t significantly work further on this albatross -- not beyond my pointless instructive slashes. My brush is a blade; these slashes are my feeble attempts at suicide. With Daniel as witness, it’s time I entrust to you, the two of you, the rescue, not just completion, of what I must leave undone. I place all my painter’s tools into your and Otto’s skilled care. Daniel will keep watch. When this portrait is done, Daniel will carry it from you to wherever my children can be beheld and loved as I wish I could have lived to assure.

EFFI (*After a moment, alert to Swing Boy and Daniel’s focus on how she takes in what Swing Boy hopes to convey*): You will enlist my brother’s “rescue” much faster than… (*An abrupt swerve*) He worships you. You see that, as Daniel does. Our sorrow will rival our gratitude.

SWING BOY: “Our?”

EFFI (*Hesitates… then*): Since you insist on the explicitly individual: *My* sorrow. *My* gratitude, too, damn you.

SWING BOY: Your brother –

DANIEL (*Interrupts*): Is different. Not a hammer to hit his sister with: Where Effi resists, Otto does put what you need to hear in ready words – quite courageously, a bit outrageously. Still. If he’s at present without guile, without edge, without the delicate armor we men *must* and do acquire…. as you ruefully admit – most achingly through your later self-portraits -- that you have acquired…., Otto is neither your model nor your mirror. Nor should you expect him to be that for Effi. Like it or not, little brother, Effi is closer to where you’ve chosen to arrive.

*Swing Boy* studies both of them before he addresses *Effi* alone.

SWING BOY: Let me whisper to you as I’d planned.

EFFI: You’ve more to say?

SWING BOY: There never stops being more. Despite Daniel’s lecture, I rest content.

DANIEL: It may be beyond any of us to grasp the right time and manner for farewell.

SWING BOY (*Laughs*): Except if the right time happens enough before the clock strikes twelve.

DANIEL: In which event, we’ll have to bid farewell twice.

*Swing Boy* and *Daniel* mutually find this comic*.* Another of their numerous wordless ‘brother’ moments. *Swing Boy* then beckons *Effi* to lean toward his lips.

SWING BOY: Listen carefully to each and every reluctant syllable.

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*Swing Boy* whispers briefly. *Effi* listens, then kisses *Swing Boy’s* forehead.

EFFI: Will you whisper that to him as well?

SWING BOY: Why even ask?

EFFI: Without the same reluctance and self-consciousness, I imagine. Maybe not whispered but shouted.

SWING BOY: That hardly affects my need to speak it to you, and its truth.

EFFI: I suppose. He and you, both of you, may feel that between you certain truth “goes without saying” – without whispering! – or that you’ve whispered those words to each other in your dreams…; but, to quote someone I, too… revere… the need for more never stops.

SWING BOY (*Possibly awed by what she has just given to him*): Thank you.

EFFI: Looking straight into another person’s eyes isn’t easy for you, is it.

DANIEL: It used to be easy.

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): No. It never was. I faked it – or forced it. She’s caught me red-handed. And despite your likely protest, there’s always been something off about eyes in my portraits. To varied extents, I – what? -- avert. Rembrandt would have banished me from his class.

EFFI: Or else taught you the useful mystique of denser shadows and sudden glints of light.

SWING BOY: Spoken like the impudent truth-conserver I hope you remain. Why should death justify abandoned diplomacy?

EFFI: Yes. Nor anyone’s sloppy use of your brushes. Otto and I plan to *sweat* to make you proud of us.

SWING BOY: Good. You know now that I share Daniel’s confidence in you both. We are family within family.

EFFI: Does that comment subtly exclude your wife?

DANIEL: Your addressing his slippage is what he needs from you. And what Pauline will need, especially after he’s gone.

EFFI (*To Daniel*): You frighten me. I don’t understand what you mean by “need”.

*Otto* returns, supporting a shaken *Pauline*.

DANIEL (*To Effi*): He has *yet more* to say. And then, you *will* understand. She won’t need your artistic skills nearly as much as she’ll need your kindness.

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PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): From what he said as he sped me here, I feared I would come too late.

SWING BOY (*With a small laugh*): You sound sweetly relieved. Do I look stronger than I feel?

*Pauline* rushes to embrace him, but there’s something at once awkward and direct. As when two who have been intimate for many years encounter a new configuration: the need for a joint outburst of despair that, in a single stroke, encompasses and obliterates their being observed.

PAULINE: I’m sorry for every moment that’s gone wrong between us.

SWING BOY: Why should you be? The fault’s been mostly mine. (*Takes a difficult breath*.) And will continue so to the last.

PAULINE (*Indicates Otto*): He said we might be past the point of calling a doctor. (*A curious* *laugh*.) He asked if I wished to call a priest. Wouldn’t *tha*t make you rejoice!

SWING BOY: I wouldn’t put it past me to change my mind. Just to relieve you.

PAULINE: Any change without our first talking it over wouldn’t relieve me in the least. (*They study each other in silence*.) But something’s happened. (*Swing Boy nods*.) Has your medicine lost its effect? Has your pain increased?

SWING BOY: It’s beyond my control. I’m not really here anymore.

PAULINE: That doesn’t make sense.

SWING BOY: Good. You’re angry. I need anger, to hurl aside what’s harder for us to deal with. And I’m about to assure that. I can’t fully leave you until –

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): Whatever he tells you, you and I can adjust.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): You know what he’s about to say?

DANIEL (*He and Swing Boy lock eyes*): I don’t know how he’ll put it, but… yes.

SWING BOY (*To Daniel*): Please. I count on you. I can’t have you waver.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): There’s more than one of you for me – for us – to think about.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Despite what I’m sure you’d prefer, I can’t let this become my ‘unfinished masterpiece’. My ‘if only’, my ‘would have been the best’ self-portrait of our children. Minus one child I’ll never hold.

OTTO:  *Self*-portrait?

DANIEL: Yes. He means that.

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SWING BOY (*Continues to Pauline*): These two exceptional students of mine – *more* than students; you’ve seen that; you assured that in your choice of them – have earned my *carte blanche*. To finish what I’ve begun however they see fit. It will be what it will be. What they don’t realize fully now, they will come to realize. My final romance with you through our children will rest in their hands.

PAULINE: But they won’t –

SWING BOY: But they will.

PAULINE: You don’t feel the intrusion? Beyond the artistic.

SWING BOY: That’s why I had *you* make the choice that brought them here.

PAULINE: And then you took over.

EFFI: We didn’t ask or expect him to –

PAULINE (*To Effi*): I’m sure, at first, you turned down his generous self-less arrangement. Undoubtedly he had to twist your arm.

SWING BOY (*Swift*): Pauline, there’s more: Daniel is to inherit all of my unsold work, Pauline, even my portrait of you alone.

*Daniel* reaches for *Pauline:* a hard and alert silence.

PAULINE (*Breaks the* silence, t*o Swing Boy*): You expect me to stand here and bite my tongue?

EFFI (*Takes everyone in, but addresses Swing Boy sideways*): Couldn’t a desperate painter have waited for a better time? She could lose her… (*Withholds her intended word: baby*)

PAULINE (*To Effi*): Married to him all these years, thinking I knew him from the second that we – was it I alone? – fell in love, you learn to survive your beloved’s daily shocks.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*):  *Could* I have waited for a better time? (*To Effi)* Obviously, there’d *be ‘*better time’ if I could – if only barely – ‘hang on’… enough to set eyes on our third there in her belly, not to mention conceive *its* portrait, which I’d have to turn over to you as well (*Back to Pauline*) depriving you of that one, too, sorry to add.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): He doesn’t know how *not* to wound us. (*With his eyes on Swing Boy*.) When did he cease to be our naked boy on that swing, the boy you and I fell so deeply in love with?

PAULINE: And love to this day.

EFFI: Pardon my ‘typical woman’s’ outburst, but too many men are like your husband. Life teaches grown men too little. Grown women, also, of course. Thank heavens he likes me to catch him at his flaws. I’d explode otherwise. Not that I see him take what I say to heart and atone.

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PAULINE: No wound he inflicts can hurt more than when the three of us were told nothing further could be done for him. “Just a matter of time” is such an ironic physician’s phrase: Precious it may be, but “time” is a razor.

DANIEL (*To Pauline, but again with his eyes fixed on Swing Boy*): That he suffers does not excuse how he treats you.

SWING BOY (*Eyes equally on Daniel*): Daniel is right.

EFFI (*To Swing Boy*): Is that as close as you get to an apology?

SWING BOY (*A stare at Effi, and then* *to Pauline*): I don’t want you worried about finance. Daniel will see to everything. He’ll swing the best prices for whatever anyone buys, and he’ll funnel the income to you. Only fools would doubt that my death will sweeten each buyer’s investment.

PAULINE: Now that I’ve found my proper niche, money’s not the central matter, and you know it.

SWING BOY: “Proper niche?” Your fabric design? Your creations for shop display?

PAULINE: What have you become: a heart-wrenching snob? What we stroll by and stop to look at is as important, maybe more so, as what we pause for in museums or to enjoy on rich people’s walls.

OTTO (*To Pauline*): Shouldn’t we leave the two of you alone? (*Pauline glances at Daniel*.) Excuse me: the *three* of you. (*Pauline gestures to him*: *“It’s alright if you stay.”)* Isn’t that why he had me rush you back here? You and Philipp don’t want your final time together to be caught up in argument, especially with us as gawking witnesses.

PAULINE (*To Otto*): Some of us draw wider lines for “privacy” than you and I. (*To Swing Boy*) Also for how we handle shame. (*To Otto*) You rightly see you intrude here, but you should also see he’s inclined to set off alarms – with perverse enthusiasm! – from the time he learned his illness had no cure. Not that his false alarms are any *less* false. (*To Effi now as well*) He’s an optimist to the last. His hopes keep a stranglehold on his fears. Smile at my saying this: you reinforce that stranglehold. Has he finally confided how certain he is of *each* of your great futures, and how he feels about not being around to see your future arrive?

OTTO: That’s kind of you to say, but in startling sudden ways he does make plain his faith in us. I hope you won’t take this amiss: he neither fabricates nor overstates those alarms of his. Not that you meant he does. He’s just… far from the boy who cries wolf.

PAULINE: I agree, of course. It’s more frightening than that. It’s the wolf who cries. The wolf who stays

howling at his door.

OTTO: If I may ask, are you actually OK with his decision about this painting and what happens to all the rest of his unsold work?

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PAULINE: Do I appear OK?

OTTO: Forgive me, Pauline, but growing up with Effi I take to greater directness than I generally exercise. Especially in a moment like this. Despite what your husband struggles to face here, isn’t directness what you ask of him? (*He surveys those assembled*.) It’s hard for all of us when we have to guess what each other of us needs. I want to act on what I learn; but when I’m unsure I’m bound to fall short of my best.

DANIEL (*Kindly*): Is there someone here to whom that fails to apply?

OTTO: Thank you. (*To Pauline*) Do I presume too much, human being to human being? I realize I’m still a relative stranger.

EFFI: And an employee.

OTTO: Exactly.

EFFI: Yet we’re already, too, your daughter and son, though you *have* a daughter and son.

OTTO (*To Pauline, Swing Boy, and Daniel*): She can say that with assurance. I can’t.

DANIEL: Well, then, divergent as your perspectives are – (*To Otto*) or your *guesses* are – (*To both Otto and* *Effi*) follow my lead and ask outright: (*To Pauline*) This moment isyours to call. If you wish me to leave, or wish all of us to leave, just nod.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): Philipp wants you here, not me. (*To Otto*) He sent you to get me merely to satisfy his conscience.

SWING BOY (*To Otto and to Daniel*): Don’t you think Pauline is far more hurt than this situation merits.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): Really? How surprising you think so.

SWING BOY (*Directly to Pauline*): And far more bitter.

PAULINE: “Bitter” is how I sound? How *should* a wife sound when she’s about to lose her husband, and when he’s determined to flaunt artistic proof that she may well have lost him already? What does it *really* mean to you that you may never hold in your arms our precious creature inside me. *Our* creation. Our treasure. How can you and I bear such impossible pain *separately*? Is what you and I bring into life less to you than your need to finish this fierce wild work of yours, less than your odd compulsion to be sure it’s completed even ‘after’ you? Even without you?

SWING BOY (*Interpretive*): Deprived.

PAULINE (*Startled while still upset*): I’m sorry? Is that a reply?

SWING BOY: Your clarion call for my genuine feelings makes you sound deprived, you alone. We are

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*both* being deprived: Our children of their father, this painting of its author, you of me, yes; and me of all of that; me of Daniel, too; me – perhaps a mere few intakes of breath from now – of life. But our children, you, live on. You have our home, our memories, our years of profound and idle pleasures. I leave you all that, the material goods, the immaterial portraits you may haggle to retain, to hold on to the ‘me’ in them so you can share ‘me’ with the world, portraits to be diminished by the thick lens of your chit-chat footnotes, your privileged intimate perspectives, as you explain my work to future patrons and beholders. I can only wonder what will survive of me in your widow’s accounts. Whatever you ‘tell the world’, Daniel will not dispute. Despite what else he would yearn to convey… of a part of me you’d have to plummet to find, my ‘danger zone’, that exists within me as fire and seed for all I’ve attempted as an artist and never achieved, that I cannot entrust to you alone.

PAULINE: That you cannot entrust to me at all.

SWING BOY: To my regret.

PAULINE: My “thick lens”? Afraid to ‘plummet’ to your remarkable depths, I shiver at the edge of a drop? (*Her eyes on his painting*) I see the beauty here. The power of your emotion: Its mix of joy and despair. What do I miss? What do I diminish?

SWING BOY: And if these were not our own children?

PAULINE: But they *are*. This portrait is your farewell, cut short. No one will legitimately interpret this otherwise. Its importance *is* in what’s personal to you and to me. It can’t ‘simply’ have its final strokes added by some nice people, some well-trained protégés of yours.

SWING BOY: Who can do exactly what I’ve instructed them to do. But who know they will come no closer to what I yearn to capture there than I would come if I lived to paint hundreds more.

DANIEL (*To Pauline*): It has to do with color and light, with the craziness of composition, and with an indefinable quality beyond ‘likeness’.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*): You expect me to understand the “indefinable”?

SWING BOY: No. To value it.

PAULINE: As Daniel does.

SWING BOY: From his first moment of encouragement of me.

PAULINE: So, In the midst of grief, I’m also to deal with this silliness.

SWING BOY: You have Daniel on your side, you know. (*Re Effi and Otto*) And these two “protégés” as well, I’m sure. Their loyalty to me is not blind. I’m obviously, even to them, in the wrong and out of my skull.

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*Pauline* has trouble with this but chokes down what *she* has in mind to say*.*

SWING BOY (*After waiting for Pauline to speak*): Can you understand, still, that you are the most important person in my life.

PAULINE: “The”.

SWING BOY: I acknowledge that you have every reason to consider my words rhetorical. I’m grateful that at least you didn’t snort at them.

PAULINE: “The” most important person in my life would be you *and* our children –

SWING BOY (*Breaking in*): Of course.

PAULINE: *And* your brother.

SWING BOY (*Considers this, then replies*): Whom you, nonetheless, would have me relegate, as actually you do despite your facade of inclusivity, while I cannot. Your ‘and’ is an afterthought, a truth-softener. (*After a moment*) Sometimes it’s good to leap beyond the edge of our prior capacity to lie or soothe. A relief. Here’s my leap, the hard fact: You would have me die in your arms, just the two of us. Period. Perhaps a mournful chorus at a distance, onlookers in shadows: an anguished but ennobled operatic tableau that’s come to be “all the rage” these days. As my head falls back, you – with face bathed in tears as you unleash a thrilling high C -- close my eyes. Shouts of “Bravo!”, “Brava!”, and roars of applause. Daniel re-enters stage-left just as the final curtain descends.

PAULINE (*Softly*): No extent of anguish could ever spur me to mock as you do what matters so much to the three of us.

SWING BOY: I can’t stand being the source of such pain to you. (*A strange laugh*) Why is my only option to make it worse?

*Pauline* receives this for a moment in silence.

PAULINE: I don’t know how to let you go. (*Looks across to Daniel, then back to Swing Boy*) None of us do.

*Pauline* and *Swing Boy* focus on each other’s face*. They* would sob if they let themselves, but there ismutual refusal to do so*. Effi* and *Otto* look to *Daniel,* who is too caught up in his attention to *Swing Boy* and *Pauline* to notice*.* Their impulse to withdraw is not as strong as their wish to be available, even forso limited a gesture as to bring *Pauline* a chair*,* though *she* willopt not to sit on it*.*

PAULINE: I dreamt again last night of the silence in our home after you leave. I reached for Sarah and Daniel, but they glared at me and pulled away. They spat insults at each other, specifically for my ears, and then they parted ways to search for you in each room of our home that you’d ceased to inhabit. Daniel found an early drawing you’d made of him that you’d set down on the floor in front of your easel.

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He shouted as though he’d found you. Sarah and I came running. Just as we reached Daniel, he set your drawing on fire. The flames –

SWING BOY (*Interrupts*): I’d sooner have you burst into sobs than tell me this. (*Pauline is silent*.) I may sound like I’m resigned to the inevitable and (*turns to Effi and Otto*) I feel I’ve done as much, handed over as little, as I can. (*Back to Pauline*) But it’s excruciating – please, all of you, forgive my burdening you this clumsily – to have to…stop… mid-way. Excruciating, I know, for all of us. To abandon this –

PAULINE: This portrait of my – of *our* -- children that you never intended – or desired – to leave me.

*Swing Boy is now the one silent.*

PAULINE: I lost my husband years ago, didn’t I?

SWING BOY: Given the state you’re in, I’d be foolish to refute that.

PAULINE: Daniel’s question haunts me: When did you turn into someone other than the boy I first came to love? The boy, and then the difficult man you had to know you would become. Perhaps, even as a child, *wished* to become. Your self-portraits in those earlier years seemed to proclaim the opposite. I saw you exactly as you saw yourself, and as we both – Daniel, too – would *have* you be. You were utterly open to me, to us: no defenses, no diplomacy, no bitter twists of phrase and tone, not in the slightest a need to impress me with your manhood, with that wry roughness and posture some – too many – applaud as ‘masculine’. Your direct gaze, your frighteningly unguarded heart: That’s how you opened to me. That’s how Daniel came inside with both of us, too. In those years, we knew that no child on earth would ever have a gentler, more devoted and selfless father. You stood in such contrast to most of your artist comrades, even those women you so generously encouraged as though you had Daniel in your blood: They were all about self. I’d hear them argue *explicitly* that all great art begins with self.

DANIEL: There’s an odd truth to that.

PAULINE: If so, it’s a sick truth. (*Back to Swing Boy*) And clearly contagious. You must have secretly envied those men-about-town who avert their eyes and tighten their lips to make us guess what great profitable schemes they’ve hatched. The ones we see women flock to who should know better. Oh that magnetic gleam and pose of purpose that puts such men so solidly in charge. Daniel developed a bit of that look, but it suits him. It fits what he’s done in life. Seeing *you* take that on chills my bones. Your later self-portraits should have alerted me, with their hard-to-name hints of your change. But leave it to an over-busy wife and mother to take insufficient notice. Not that I was wholly oblivious to what I couldn’t quite pin down. When you and I had a difficult choice to make together, you’d insist on Daniel’s input before we could reach our final decision, even when it had no impact on Daniel whatsoever. Thank goodness, I put a stop to that. (*A sudden certainty*) That was “the straw that broke”, wasn’t it?

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SWING BOY: You’re weaving some kind of fiction here. What “straw”?

PAULINE: When I suggested we have a third child, whom we already knew would –

SWING BOY: Pauline. We both wanted – *want* – this child. No one in this room would refute that. There is no issue here. Unless you’re so desperate to find fault with me, you have to grasp at –

PAULINE: At straws that break? This is what you do: You take on the *air* of listening, of tolerating what I think, what I wish; and somehow my words get warped the moment they reach your ears. Last summer. Philipp, would you have gotten me pregnant again if I hadn’t arranged to have us spend that week away from here, the two of us alone? You said I’d “crowed” when all I did was announce our plans to Daniel, having not consulted him beforehand. You *sounded* fine when I pressed us to do that, but you left it totally to me to bring up the subject. Thank goodness Daniel made no fuss. Since, if he had so much as quivered, you would have –

*Pauline* is too upset to complete her conjectured image of *Swing Boy’s* response*. Daniel* moves toembrace her, to steady and calm her*.*

DANIEL: This isn’t the time, Pauline. This isn’t the way.

PAULINE (*To Daniel*, *her eyes on both brothers*): There is no right way when I’ve let too much time slip by without protest. Without witness. You were too absorbed with the quandary of your ships to notice your brother harden toward me. Sure, he’d acknowledge how much you matter not just to him but to *both* of us; we’d feel the magnitude of our debt to you. Still, he charged me with “wild disrespect”, his very phrase, when I declared it time he assert his own needs, *and* mine, not continue to ‘accommodate’ what he *imagined* your needs were. Needs you’d kick yourself for if you ever, without meaning to, pressured him to fulfill them. His response to our not consulting you became worse for me than when we dutifully, reluctantly, sounded you out. With all you’ve done for us, you *loom*, Daniel. You’re his eternal model to emulate, to anticipate, to *honor,* when – it’s laughable, really – I know that *he’s* the one *you* worship.

SWING BOY: Insane! To claim brothers can “worship” the person they know best in the world.

DANIEL (*Hearing but ignoring Swing Boy as he focuses on Pauline*): Who we each are to one another is simpler than you make it sound. He’s not pulled away from you, Pauline. He shows that in unclear ways, perhaps. You’re hurt and confused right now, but I can’t have you suggest that your love for each other is one degree less intact than mine for the two of you. Nor one jot less valued by him. (*Notes, with a possibly provocative chuckle, Effi and Otto’s visible concern*.) Or by our anxious assistants.

*Pauline* buries her head against *Daniel’s* chest*. Swing Boy* makes an odd and troubling move to comenearer to them, knocking some of his art supplies from their perch. *Daniel* beckons *Effi* and *Otto* to bring *Swing Boy* closer.

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OTTO *(To Swing Boy)*: Let me help. Rest your arms across my shoulders and lean on my back. If any move I make hurts you, yell and I’ll stop. It’s just a few steps.

EFFI (*To Swing Boy, simultaneously, with regard to what’s fallen*): Don’t worry about them. I’ll put them all back where they belong.

DANIEL (*To both, with quiet emotion*): I thank you.

SWING BOY (*To Effi*): They *are* where they belong. Marks of my disturbance. (*To Otto as he gently guides Swing Boy to Pauline and Daniel*): I’m the one who’s *not* where he belongs.

DANIEL: Self-pity doesn’t become you, Swing Boy. *Especially* when things get dire. (*To Pauline*) Focus on *that*. It’s his far more forgivable flaw under stress.

SWING BOY (*To Otto*): I’m not too heavy for you?

OTTO (*With an echo of Daniel’s quiet way of expressing emotion*): How could you be?

*Swing Boy* winces in the face of directly expressed love. Have we seen him do this before?

SWING BOY (*Suddenly giddy, to Pauline and Daniel*): Watch out for flying objects. To this Olympian brute, I’m light as a feather! (*Somehow, he expects everyone’s sudden lightness*.) No?

OTTO (*As Pauline spreads a blanket across a bench*): Should I set him down on your blanket? (*To Swing Boy after Pauline signals yes*) You’re OK with that?

SWING BOY: I have to be OK with that. (*At Otto’s soft chuckle or smile*) Don’t you ever have a sense of humor?

OTTO: Only when I’m with someone genuinely funny.

*Otto* carefully angles *Swing Boy* onto the bench, where *Pauline* and *Daniel* swaddle *Swing Boy* within the blanket.

SWING BOY: Everyone’s ganging up on me.

DANIEL: That’s how we fans always behave.

SWING BOY: “We.”

DANIEL: “We” puzzles you?

SWING BOY: To the contrary. I haven’t lately heard “we” enough. (*Indicates Otto and Effi*) Except from those two. Mostly from one of those two. (*A shift without transition to open* *seriousness*) When Pauline let you hold her a moment ago, I could hardly breathe. The three of us were youngsters again.

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PAULINE (*After she takes this in*): The three of us *aren’t* “youngsters”. We’re who we are now.

SWING BOY: And soon enough will cease to be that, too.

PAULINE: *Too* soon. (*With a deep swallow of breath before she declares*) You must let me speak.

SWING BOY: You’ve already said too much.

PAULINE: And none of it matters to you.

SWING BOY: I’d rather we kissed.

PAULINE: You know we’re not supposed to. You have to stay calm. I’ve not kept you calm.

SWING BOY: I made that impossible for you.

PAULINE (*A rueful smile*): I fell into your trap.

DANIEL: Each of us did.

SWING BOY: Still. If we can’t kiss, you can tell me how much you wish it, and *then* I’ll let you speak, whatever you intend by “speak”: “Let you”, mind, is itself a figure of speech: I never aimed to look –-or sound – like your “man in charge”.

PAULINE (*After a moment*): Yes, Philipp. I wish it. Wish for more than a kiss. Wish it with every inch of my body and soul.

SWING BOY: Are you finally at peace, then? As I am?

PAULINE: I am finally at war, Philipp. Not with an outburst of gunshots to speed up a truce but in for the long haul. Consider how much you want to withhold from me and leave to Daniel. You’ve done self-portrait after self-portrait, plus your paintings – or “self-portraits”, too, as you call them – of the rest of us; plus your mythological landscapes, your sketches, and your endless explorations – as Daniel, yes, promotes – of technique and materials and color and modulated forms, beyond anything my former little-girl attempts to capture the insects I studied could ever approach. There it all is. I hold in my head with unstinting admiration the magnitude of your achievements. I watch a parade of Swing Boys pass by to roars of acclaim, even as I behold now the single, sick, small soul you’ve whittled yourself down to. I don’t love you (*looks at Daniel as she* *echoes his phrase*) “one jot less” for your damaged, diminished being. (*Struck by his look*) Nice: it takes only my frank words to you to stir that hard defensive glint of yours again. My love for you, despite that glint, is, of course, the more ferocious for my memories of the lover you once were.

SWING BOY: And ceased to be… nearly, as you’ve calculated, nine months ago.

PAULINE (*After a moment*): So you confirm that? Who, then, would you call this baby’s father? (*A*

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*glance at Daniel as she continues to address Swing Boy*) It’s not your suspicion; it’s your wish… somehow from our teens, I’ve come to conclude. If only. If only. But you know better. (*To Daniel now*) I’ve never known what to make of his wedding “self-portrait” of the three of us. I even prayed that one of the museums it toured to would burn to the ground just before the exhibit opened: A self-portrait in ashes.

DANIEL: Pauline. It’s essential that you and I remain the rational ones. Swing Boy reaches for more than life allows any of us. That’s what makes him the artist he is – versus, I guess, the mother and the merchant you and I became, happy enough with our storehouse of ordinary skills.

PAULINE: More than “life” allows? It’s not for “life”, it’s for *us*, to make the tough choices we need to learn how best to pursue.

SWING BOY: Or to guard *against* making those choices, as you do.

PAULINE: Of what are you accusing me? What do you expect to happen to me and our children after you…? Oh yes, you assure me I’ll be free of financial worry; but please realize that if Daniel inherits the heart of what you’ve willed, I’ll be more dependent on his looking out for me than you and I both have been these far too many years.

SWING BOY: I’ve worked it all through, Pauline. I’ve left Daniel my tiniest preferences in writing. You won’t actually need to *ask* Daniel for a penny. He’ll be here for you, of course, for this family of ours that he’s totally a member of, any time you call.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): She knows that. It’s exactly what makes her so distressed.

PAULINE: Distressed the more that you put your “preferences” in writing without my input.

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): If a wife left alone must depend in the extreme on someone who’s not her husband, think: How does she retain her basic dignity? How free will she feel to shape the rest of her life?

SWING BOY: When has this woman ever *not* felt “free”.

DANIEL: Much as I love her and – to be frank – respect your silent wish that that I’d take your place, I’m not her husband, nor – forgive me, you both – inclined in that direction. (*At Swing Boy’s reaction*) I’d make any woman a *terrible* husband.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Does he speak for *your* silent wish, too? Is “silent wish” even a phrase in your vocabulary?

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): Do you realize how unfair, how *appalling* you can be? And how obtuse? Pauline has never ceased to yearn for your health, Swing Boy. Never ceased to yearn for the esteem in

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which you once held her. To yearn for the generosity, the expressiveness, I once envied in you and now, instead, envy in these (*with a smile at Effi and Otto*) seemingly mismatched devotees of yours.

PAULINE (*To Effi and Otto*): In the bare short while you’ve been with us, you’ve seen him transform, too, haven’t you?

OTTO: Perhaps each of us in his circumstance, and under yours, would panic and strike out at our loved ones. (*To Swing Boy*) You do strike out at her. (*To Pauline*) I have to say, though, that with me he’s been exceptionally gentle. It’s like I experience in him only the person you first came to love.

EFFI (*To Otto*): It’s *you* who’ve been gentle with him. And whatever’s at stake between you, me, and him is so much less fraught than between him and her. (*To Pauline*) Frankly, to me he’s a constant test. Don’t get me wrong: I love tests. I don’t know a single man, apart from my brother, who isn’t a test.

SWING BOY (*To Pauline*): Why do you bring them into this?

PAULINE: I’m just following Daniel’s line of thought. Will you blame me for that as well? You never say but it’s clear how conscious you are that it’s Daniel who found them for us, for me to hire and you to approve. I could have resented that, but what’s since occurred is proof of how unquestionably we require their services. And of how you resist admitting your gratitude to me: That, though this wasn’t my idea in the first place – why do you keep calling it that? – I bowed to Daniel’s foresight even before I realized how shrewd he was. I’m *capable,* as one person here is not*,* of putting my own views and needs aside.

EFFI: When he’s grateful to me, he has to whisper. It’s that hard for him.

PAULINE (*To Effi*): It used not to be so hard. (*To Swing Boy*) When did you last whisper to *me*?

SWING BOY: Yes! Yes beyond dispute! I’m the one who’s grown detached and bitter! *And* tired, selfish, unfair: *beyond redemption*! Why won’t any of you put an end to my awfulness and murder me?!!!

Stilluncertain as to whether to stay or depart but triggered by *Swing Boy’s* outburst*, Effi* and *Otto* find, during what follows, a peripheral space that they can settle for with tolerable discomfort*. Daniel* signals gratitude to them for their degree of withdrawal*. They* tacitly decide to resort to the swing

DANIEL (*To Swing Boy*): Please. We don’t need another scene. You getting overwrought is the last thing any of us want.

SWING BOY: Should I feel guilty about that as well?!!! (*Adamantly, to Daniel*) She needs to learn about guilt. She needs to learn the consequence of being the cause. Of what it means to a man – yes, Pauline, specifically to a man! – who cannot live as he would *die* to live! A man who can’t any longer be a husband, be a father, be the kind of artist he was! And who is *accused*! (*To Pauline*) Yes! I’m the one

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*you* accuse. You have zero sympathy for what I’ve had to go through since I took this turn for the worse, much less what I’ve had to face and deny since birth. My loving devoted Pauline, you *hate* me.

PAULINE: I hate *it*. This. You *shouldn’t* be going through this. Nor should I.

SWING BOY: When we were little older than our children, I didn’t have to choose between the two of you.

PAULINE: “Choose *between*”? Between the two of *whom*?

SWING BOY (*indicates Otto and Effi*): Do we choose between *them*? She sees what I do for him as done for her, too. Done *with* her in mind. As Daniel has spent his life doing for you and me and our children. When Daniel saw you and me embrace, *he* felt embraced, and rightly! When you saw me turn to Daniel, or I saw *you* turn, turning *to* didn’t bear the cost – the charge you now make! – of turning *away*.

PAULINE: As my view of the fate you decide for your paintings now seems?

SWING BOY: Now *is*!!! You rely on Daniel but you no longer cherish him. Suddenly, he’s separate from us. Why? When his ships were bombed, I caught sight in your face of a fleeting satisfaction you must instantly have regretted. What caused such a shift in *you*?

PAULINE: There’s been no shift, Philipp, except yours. You were the most openly vulnerable, the most expressively idealistic man I could ever hope to find on this planet and *marry*. Do you actually believe you’ve remained that?

SWING BOY: Daniel may still call me Swing Boy, but how can any man remain the boy he was? I’ve *had* to come to see what I’m capable of and where I fall short. And what’s possible for the three of us and what isn’t. Does marriage, fatherhood, my necessary struggle for income and approval, does each of these not take its toll? Should I in maturity remain as slammed by disappointment and emotional pain as when I was a boy?  *All* of us, especially men I would think, come to realize the benefits of personal armor. Would you really have me lack the means to protect myself?

PAULINE: Against what?

DANIEL: Against whom?

SWING BOY: Each inescapable choice. Each trade-off. Each wish that I were not just a better artist but a better man. “Against what and whom”? Against my inability, in the end, to be fully generous and balanced in my response to two souls in my life I count as my own soul. To sustain that yielding of who I am equally to two I cherish but who do not equally cherish each other. I can tell from your faces how fatuous my words are. They sound pie-in-the-sky to me, too. My wish at this very moment? Nothing more than to see the two of you embrace. Truly embrace.  *Cling* to each other. Much as it thrills me when I see these two students, “assistants” “devotees”, “protégés” of mine, -- ‘ prodigies’, in fact! –

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granted they’re virtually twins – support, or simply behold, each other with such effortless, it seems, mutual regard. No*, more* than regard; the term that came up before: *worship*!

PAULINE: I do differ from you in that respect. “Worship” of another human being is foolish, imprecise. Love you as deeply as I have, I’ve never worshipped you. Did you ever expect me to? Or think I did? Do you take what I say now as disparagement? And if you ever expected me to worship your brother, I most certainly also put my other foot down. I’m sure *he* understands.

SWING BOY: So be it, Pauline. Your attitude is exactly what would justify *any*one’s need to self-protect. Do you think it’s of no consequence for me, or someone like me, to live *without* worship? to *decide* to live that way? to *have to* decide?

PAULINE: Clearly, I should have been the idealist you wish I were.

SWING BOY: How could I ever wish you different than you are? Nor could I, even for an instant, ask you to *pretend* you were different: *Given* the person I am, your tight grip on what’s real holds me in check.

PAULINE: And pushes you away.

SWING BOY (*With a chuckle*): Still. I worship you for it.

PAULINE: Your brother and I may resist an embrace that would oblige your request, but nothing stops your brother, your *un*-worshipped-by-me brother, from standing closer beside me so you can look at us both without straining your neck.

DANIEL (*Moves immediately to Pauline’s side*): My apologies. That didn’t occur to me.

PAULINE: Like so much else.

DANIEL: I wanted to give you space.

PAULINE: You give me too much.

DANIEL: We have a lot ahead of us to work out.

PAULINE: An understatement.

DANIEL (*Turns from Pauline to face Swing Boy*); O.K., Swing Boy. Here we are for you. The two of us.

PAULINE (*To Swing Boy*): Look hard and long, my love.

SWING BOY (*Sucks in his breath, nearly his last*): When I close my eyes, when I take my final breath, please: Don’t rush forward to hold me. Just: Stay, standing there together. As you would, as I would have you remain. As I would have painted you.

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A silent tableau as we absorb *Pauline, Daniel* with *Swing Boy,* and hisattempt to hold them in his sight. Wewill not deal with death as this play ends. But the play is over.