

LES ENFANTS TERRIBLES

A dance-drama in three acts by Mark Dunbar

Based upon the novel *Les Enfants Terribles* by Jean Cocteau
English translation by Rosamond Lehmann

Composed March – October 2010

ROLES:

Paul – A fourteen year old boy; from Act 2, seventeen years old. Tall and pale with a striking resemblance to his sister, Elizabeth. At seventeen he looks older than his years.

Elizabeth – Paul's sixteen year old sister; from Act 2, nineteen years old. She has a "*strong physical resemblance to Paul. She has the same blue eyes shadowed by dark lashes, the same pallor of complexion. But whereas the lines of his face betray a certain weakness by comparison, hers, two years older, beneath soft curling hair, has already ceased to be a sketch for the finished portrait, is already groping for its organic principle and racing, disheveled to overtake its final beauty.*" (Pg 26)

Gérard ('Giraffe') – Paul's school friend, and eventually Agatha's husband.

Agatha/Dargelos – Dargelos is "*a tall boy, tumbling locks, blazing cheeks, scarred and gory knees, long coat with enthralling pockets...*" venomously beautiful. (Pg 10)
Agatha is an orphan girl, whom Elizabeth works with as a mannequin. She bears a striking resemblance to Dargelos.

The Proctor/ The Doctor/The Priest – played by same actor, all slightly aloof comical figures from the 'real' world, totally out of place and out of their depth.

Corps de ballet (optional)

2 flutes (piccolo, alto), 2 oboes (cor anglaise), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 french horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, 1 percussionist (marimba, xylophone, glockenspiel, tam tam)

Page number references are from:

The Holy Terrors (*Les Enfants Terribles*) by Jean Cocteau translated by Rosamond Lehmann, 1957 New Directions Books NY. Twenty first printing

ACT 1 SCENE 1 – DANCE OF THE SNOWBALL

LITTLE LIGHT, SHAFTS OF WHITE REVEAL WHAT MAY BE AN EMPTY STREET. SNOW LIGHTLY FALLS. MUSIC IS SLOW, CHILDLIKE, EERIE. WITHIN THE MUSIC AND SHIFTING LIGHT, A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Great are the prerogatives of beauty, subduing even those not consciously aware of it.*

(“Gleaming with that soft effulgence of a luminous dial, the snow’s incandescence, self-engendered, reached inward to probe the very soul of luxury and draw it forth through stone till it was visible; it was that fabric magically upholstering the Cité, shrinking it and transforming it into a phantom drawing-room”. Pg 6 – DESIGN IMAGE)

MUSIC BUILDS; THE OCCASIONAL PASSERBY, WRAITH-LIKE DANCES THROUGH THE SCENE, BARELY HUMAN. THEN A SECOND VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Children stop talking when grown-ups draw nigh. They stop talking; they take on the aspect of beings of a different order of creation. Their rites are obscure, inexorably secret; calling, we know, for infinite cunning, for ordeal by fear and torture; requiring victims, summary executions, human sacrifices.*

A SUDDEN TUMULT BREAKS THE MYSTERIOUS STILLNESS OF THE SCENE. A HORDE OF SCHOOLBOYS EMERGE AND TAKE POSSESSION OF VARIOUS PLACES, MILITARY-LIKE. A CRIPPLE, HUNCHBACKED AND DEFORMED, MOVES IN THE NO-MAN’S-LAND BETWEEN THE BATTLE LINES. MELANCHOLY EYES, A LIMP, HIS LONG CLOAK HANGS ODDLY OVER THE STRANGE HUMP. HE SUDDENLY THROWS OFF HIS COAT AND REVEALS THE CAUSE OF HIS DEFORMITY, HIS SCHOOL SATCHEL. HE DROPS HIS SATCHEL, CEASING TO BE A CRIPPLE.

CRIPPLE: Seen Dargelos?

THE DANCE CONTINUES IN VARIOUS CAMPS. PRISONERS ARE TAKEN AND INTERROGATED. EARS ARE TWISTED; SNOW IS RUBBED IN MOUTHS AND EYES. THE WOUNDED ARE BROUGHT IN FOR TREATMENT. SNOWBALLS ARE HORDED IN WEAPON DUMPS.

A PALE BOY, PAUL NAVIGATES A PATH BETWEEN SHOT AND SHELL, ANXIOUS, LOVE-TORN. VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Great are the prerogatives of beauty, subduing even those not consciously aware of it.*

PAUL: Seen Dargelos?

A TALL BOY AND HIS ACOLYTES ARE INTERROGATING A PRISONER; TUMBLING LOCKS, BLAZING CHEEKS, SCARRED AND GORY KNEES, LONG COAT WITH ENTHRALLING POCKETS, VENOMOUSLY BEAUTIFUL. HE IS DARGELOS. PAUL SPOTS HIM, SWOONS AND HESITATES; HE WILL RUN; HE WILL SEEK OUT DARGELOS, FIGHT SHOULDER TO SHOULDER BY HIS SIDE, DEFEND HIM, SHOW HIM WHAT METTLE HE IS MADE OF.

PAUL: (YELLS) Dar...

SOMETHING HITS PAUL IN THE MOUTH STOPPING HIS CALL, AND HE HEARS THE CRUEL LAUGHTER OF ONE OF DARGELOS' ACOLYTES. BLOOD STREAMS AS HE LOOKS AND SEES, AS IN SLOW MOTION, HIS GOD, DARGELOS PLACE A STONE IN A LARGE SNOWBALL, RAISE HIS ARM, TAKE AIM AND HURL IT. PAUL IS HIT IN THE CHEST AND COLLAPSES UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THE MARBLE FISTED BLOW. AS HE FALLS, PAUL HAS A VISION OF DARGELOS RAISED ON A DAIS, SUPERNATURALLY LIT, ARMS HELD TOWARD THE FIRMAMENT.

A WHISTLE IS HEARD AND THE STREET IS SUDDENLY DESERTED, EXCEPT FOR PAUL LYING PARALYSED AND BLOODIED AND A BOY NEXT TO HIM CASUALLY OBSERVING THE BLOOD WITH AVID CURIOSITY; ANOTHER WHISTLE AND HE TOO SKEDADDLES; SHRUGGING, WAGGING HIS HEAD PORTENTIOUSLY, AND MAKING A DASH FOR HIS SACHEL AND SKIDDING AWAY.

DARGELOS STANDS TRANSFIXED AND ARROGANT IN HIS CELESTIAL LIGHT AS THE PROCTOR AND GÉRARD APPROACH.

PROCTOR: Is that you Dargelos?

DARGELOS: Yes sir.

PROCTOR: Follow me.

THE THREE FORM A CHOREOGRAPHED PROCESSION TOWARD PAUL.

VO: *Great are the prerogatives of beauty, subduing even those not consciously aware of it.*

PROCTOR: Tell me what happened Dargelos?

DARGELOS: There's nothing to tell, Sir. Some of the fellows were chucking snowballs. I chucked one at him. It must have been a hard one. It hit him smack in the chest and he went 'Ho!' and fell down. At first I thought his nose was bleeding from another snowball that had hit him in the face.

PROCTOR: A snowball wouldn't crack a person's ribs.

GÉRARD: Sir, Sir! He put a stone inside that snowball.

DARGELOS SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AND SMILES AT PAUL.

PROCTOR: Haven't you anything to say?

DARGELOS: What's the use...look, he's opening his eyes. You'd better ask him.

THE VICTIM STIRS SHOWING SIGNS OF LIFE. GÉRARD SLIPS AN ARM UNDER PAUL'S HEAD AND CRADLES HIM WITH DEVOTION.

PROCTOR: How are you feeling?

PAUL: Sorry...

PROCTOR: There's no need to apologise. You're ill; you fainted.

PAUL: I remember now.

PROCTOR: Have you any idea what made you faint?

PAUL: A snowball hit me in the chest.

PROCTOR: A snowball? Why should that make you faint?

PAUL: It's the only thing that hit me.

PROCTOR: Your friend has given me to understand that this particular snowball had a stone in it.

THE PATIENT SEES DARGELOS SHRUG HIS SHOULDERS AGAIN.

PAUL: Gérard must be cracked...you're cracked, Gérard. It was just an ordinary snowball. I was running; I expect I sort of blew up.

THE PROCTOR BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF. DARGELOS SMILES AND SAUNTERS AWAY ACQUITTED BY THE COURT-MARTIAL.

PROCTOR: I will call a taxi and take you both home.

GÉRARD: No, no! I will take him, there's no need for you to come...besides his family will be alarmed for no good reason if they see you.

PROCTOR: As you wish, but be careful with him.

PROCTOR EXITS. GÉRARD STROKES PAUL'S HAIR AS A LOVER WOULD DURING THE VOICE-OVER.

VO: *A child's reaction to this type of calamity is twofold and extreme. Not knowing how deeply, powerfully, life drops anchor into its vast sources of recuperation, he is bound to envisage, at once the very worst; yet at the same time, because of his inability to imagine death, the worst remains totally unreal to him.*

GÉRARD MURMURS TO HIMSELF AS THE LIGHT FADES.

GÉRARD: Paul's dying. Paul's going to die. Paul's dying.

WE SEE IN SHADOW, A TAXI AND THE SILHOUETTE OF GÉRARD NURSING PAUL INTO THE CAR.

ACT 1 SCENE 2 – THE ROOM, THE GAME

GÉRARD AND PAUL ARE OUTSIDE PAUL'S APARTMENT DOOR. GÉRARD CLASPS PAUL AROUND THE WAIST; PAUL'S ARM IS SLUNG OVER GÉRARD'S SHOULDER.

VO: *Children play games, monstrous but normal for ordinary children.*

GÉRARD TOUCHES THE DOORBELL. SILENCE THEN:

GÉRARD: Elizabeth!

FOOTSTEPS SOUND, CEASE THEN SILENCE.

GÉRARD: Elizabeth!

STILL NOT A SOUND

GÉRARD: Elizabeth! Open the door, it's us.

ELIZABETH: I shan't open the door! I'm sick to death of boys. Turning up at this hour of the night...you must be mad. I'm fed up with you.

GÉRARD: Lisbeth, do open the door...hurry up, Paul's ill.

PAUSE AND SILENCE; THEN THE DOOR OPENS JUST A FRACTION

ELIZABETH: Ill? You can't catch me. I know you're only trying to make me let you in. You're telling an untruth, aren't you...are you?

GÉRARD: Paul's ill, I tell you, do buck up. He's with me, he's shivering.

THE DOOR OPENS AND ELIZABETH SEES IT IS NOT A HOAX. STRUCK DUMB, SHE AND GÉRARD LIFT PAUL AND HELP HIM TO THEIR BEDROOM.

("Here the furniture consists of two diminutive beds, a chest of draws, three chairs and a mantelpiece...It is a bedroom to startle the unaccustomed eye. But for the beds, it would have seemed a lumber room. The floor is strewn with empty boxes, with towels and various articles of underwear; apart from these, one threadbare rug adorns it. A plaster bust, its features emphasized by inked in eyes and a mustache, occupies a central position on the mantelpiece. Every available inch of wall space is stuck with thumbtacks impaling sheets of newspapers, pages torn out of magazines, programs, photographs of film stars, murderers, boxers..." Pg 29 DESIGN IMAGE)

GÉRARD (not whispered): He was hit by a snow...

ELIZABETH (interrupts): Idiot! There you go as usual. Trust you to make a hash of it. Must you shout? Can't you be quiet? Do you want mother to hear?

THEY CLEAR PAUL'S BED OF DEBRIS AND PLACE HIM ON TOP OF IT.

GÉRARD: Paul's dying...he's going to...

ELIZABETH: It's the limit! Here am I tied hand and foot to my sick mother, while you go snowballing. A precious pair, I must say. My poor sick mother! I tend my poor mother on her bed of sickness while you disport yourself with snowballs. I bet it was you who made Paul do it, you idiot! (PAUSE) Who'll have to nurse Paul, you or me? What are you standing there for, gaping at me?

GÉRARD: Libbie darling...

ELIZABETH: I'm not Libbie, and I'm not your darling. Kindly keep a civil tongue in your head. Besides...

PAUL (interrupts): Gérard old fellow...don't take any notice of the bitch. It's too boring.

ELIZABETH: Oh, I'm a bitch am I? All right you dirty dogs, I'm through. You can damn well fend for yourself. It's the end. Fancy me bothering about a feeble ass who can't stand up to a harmless little snowball! Look, Gérard...watch.

SHE EXECUTES A SUDDEN VIOLENT HIGH KICK THAT FLINGS HER RIGHT LEG HIGHER THAN HER HEAD. THIS LEADS INTO A SOLO DANCE FULL OF IMPRESSIVE LEAPS AND TURNS. SHE STOPS SUDDENLY.

ELIZABETH: I've been practicing that for weeks; and now be off! Get a move on.

SHE POINTS DRAMATICALLY TO THE DOOR

GÉRARD (stammers): Perhaps...oughtn't we to get a doctor?

SHE SWINGS A LEG UP AS BEFORE

ELIZABETH: A doctor? I was so hoping to have the benefit of your advice. What it is to be brainy! Perhaps I might humbly beg to mention the doctor's coming to see Mummy at seven o'clock and I thought of getting him to look at Paul. Go on now, skedaddle! Or are you a medical man, by any chance? Oh, you're not? Then leave this house. Will you be off?

SHE STAMPS HER FOOT, EYES FLASHING AND STEELY. GÉRARD BEATS A HASTY RETREAT BACKWARDS THROUGH THE ROOM, AND KNOCKS OVER A CHAIR.

ELIZABETH: Idiot! Idiot! Don't pick it up; you'd only knock over another. Make haste for heaven's sake! And mind you don't bang the door.

GÉRARD EXITS. ELIZABETH KNEELS BESIDE A BED, TALKING TO HER SICK AND DYING MOTHER.

ELIZABETH: Are you asleep Mummy or just dozing? Paul's strained himself. I've put him to bed. I'll ask the doctor to look at him. He says it hurts when he walks. He sends his love. He's got his newspapers; he's doing some cutting out. The maid has left, but don't worry Mummy I can manage without one.

AS SHE FINISHES HER CHAT, PAUL WALKS BY. HE IS SLEEP-WALKING. ELIZABETH NOTICES HIM; HE PAUSES THEN LEAVES. ELIZABETH DANCES BACK TO THEIR BEDROOM. PAUL IS BACK IN BED.

ELIZABETH: Are you asleep?

PAUL: Leave me alone.

ELIZABETH: Very polite, I'm sure. Charming manners. I suppose you've *gone away*.

ELIZABETH: Here am I toiling and slaving while you *go away*. Well two can play that game. You're a heel; you're a disgusting heel. Here, hold your foot up; let me take off your shoes. Your feet are frozen. Wait I'll get you a hot water bottle.

ELIZABETH GETS A HOT WATER BOTTLE AND PLACES IT UNDER PAUL'S FEET. A DANCE COMMENCES BASED AROUND HER UNDRESSING OF PAUL. IT IS A TENDER DUET. ELIZABETH, AS USUAL IS DISARMED, MELTED ALMOST TO TEARS, BY THE GRACE AND BEAUTY OF HIS BODY. DESPITE THE SURFACE ANIMOSITY, THE SIBLINGS ARE DEEPLY ENMESHED; TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. THE DANCE CONVEYS THIS UNCANNY PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BOND. DURING THE UNDRESSING PHASE ELIZABETH PUNCTUATES THE DANCE WITH THE FOLLOWING OR SIMILAR:

ELIZABETH: Lift your head...lift your leg...will you kindly stop shamming dead? I'll never get this sleeve off.

ONCE HIS CLOTHES ARE REMOVED AND SHE HAS PUT ON HIS NIGHT SHIRT SHE BEGINS EMPTYING HIS POCKETS OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS: AN INK STAINED HANDKERCHIEF, SOME BAIT, A FEW LOZENGES STUCK TOGETHER WITH FLUFF, A MINIATURE HAND IN IVORY, A MARBLE, AND THE CAP OF A FOUNTAIN PEN. THE LATTER ITEMS SHE CAREFULLY PLACES IN ONE OF THE DRAWERS. AT THE SAME TIME A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Here is the treasure, master of the Room, lord of the Game. A treasure impossible to understand because the miscellaneous objects in the drawer have been so far stripped of their original function, so charged with symbolism, that what remains looks merely like old junk – empty aspirin bottles, metal rings, keys, curling pins, a revolver; all worthless rubbish save to the eye of the initiate.*

ELIZABETH TUCKS PAUL IN AND STROKES HIS FOREHEAD.

ELIZABETH: Go to sleep, silly.

SHE CONTINUES HER CARESS UNTIL THE DOORBELL STARTLES HER.
SHE FLYS TO THE DOOR AND LETS THE DOCTOR IN.

DOCTOR: Go and get the thermometer and then run along, there's a
 good girl. I'm going to sound his chest and I always dislike
 an audience.

ELIZABETH EXITS. THE DOCTOR EXAMINES PAUL THEN CALLS:

DOCTOR: Lise!

ELIZABETH ENTERS TEARFUL.

DOCTOR: Come now, no need to make such heavy weather of it. He's
 not dangerously ill. It's serious, mind, but not dangerous.
 The slightest blow on a weak chest like his...no more school,
 that's out of the question. Rest, rest and again rest. You
 were quite right to tell your mother it was just a strain, we
 don't want her worried. You're a sensible girl; I can rely on
 you. I'd like a word with your maid.

ELIZABETH: There isn't a maid any more.

DOCTOR: Capital! I shall be sending a couple of nurses in tomorrow.
 They'll take turns running the house and doing the shopping.
 You'll be in charge of course.

THE DOCTOR EXITS. ELIZABETH GOES TO PAUL. PAUL SLEEPS. SHE KEEPS WATCH BESIDE HIM, LISTENING TO HIS BREATHING, HER PASSIONATE ANGER SPENT, OR RATHER TURNED TO A PASSIONATELY TENDER CONTEMPLATION. SICK AND ASLEEP HE IS EXPOSED TO SCRUTINY, IMMUNE FROM TEASING. SHE EXAMINES THE MAUVE STAINS BENEATH HIS EYELIDS, THE FULLNESS AND FORWARD LIFT OF THE UPPER LIP; SHE LAYS HER HEAD AGAINST THE BOYISH ARM. THERE IS A SUDDEN UPROAR IN HER EARS. BLOCKING ONE EAR SHE STRAINS TO LISTEN, HEARS HER OWN HAMMERING PULSES AMPLIFYING HIS...LOUDER, LOUDER. SHE PANICS. SURELY IF THIS GOES ON IT MUST MEAN DEATH.

VO: *Paul's dying, Paul is going to die*

ELIZABETH (to herself): Wake up...I must wake him up!
(to Paul): My darling!

PAUL: Mm? What do you want?

HE STRETCHES, HER HAGGARD FACE CONFRONTS HIM

PAUL: What's the matter? Have you gone nuts?

ELIZABETH: *Me*, nuts?

PAUL: Yes, you. What a nuisance you are. Can't you let a fellow get a bit of sleep?

ELIZABETH: Some people could do with a bit of sleep themselves, but oh, dear no! *They* have to listen to the row other people make.

PAUL: What row?

ELIZABETH: A damned awful row.

PAUL: Idiot!

ELIZABETH: I was going to tell you something...some very exciting news.
But as I'm an idiot, I won't bother.

PAUL SMELLS A RAT

PAUL: You can keep your old news, I couldn't care less.

PAUL TURNS AWAY FEIGNING SLEEP. ELIZABETH UNDRESSES. THIS IS DONE AS A LITTLE DANCE WITH ECHOES OF HER UNDRESSING OF PAUL. THERE IS NO SHAME OF NAKEDNESS BEWEEN THE TWO. SHE CLIMBS INTO HER BED AND MIRACULOUSLY CONJOURS A MAGAZINE, SOME SWEET BISCUITS AND A BOTTLE OF GINGER BEER. SHE MUNCHES, HER EYES A LITTLE TOO GLUED TO THE PAGE...SHE IS THINKING OF HER NEXT MOVE. FINALLY SHE TOSSES TO PAUL:

ELIZABETH: Doc said you won't be going back to school.

PAUL TURNS TO HER THEN CLOSES HIS EYES. THERE IS A VISION OF DARGELOS, AS BEFORE UPON HIS PEDESTAL BATHED IN LIGHT, BUT THIS TIME SLOWLY FADING TO NOTHING. IT IS PAUL'S VISION. THE PAIN IS TOO SHARP AND HE CRIES OUT:

PAUL: Lise!

ELIZABETH: Well?

PAUL: Lise, I don't feel well.

ELIZABETH: What's the matter now? What is it you want?

PAUL: I want...I want you to stay by me, near my bed.

PAUL TURNS AND SOBS. ELIZABETH GETS UP AND DRAGS HER BED NEXT TO HIS. SHE GETS INTO HER BED AGAIN, REACHES FOR HIS HAND AND STARTS TO STROKE IT.

ELIZABETH: There, there...who's a silly Billy? You tell him he's never going back to school, and he boohoos. Just think...We needn't ever budge from this room now. We'll have nurses dressed in white, the doctor promised me, and I'll never leave you except to go out for sweets and books.

DARGELOS APPEARS AGAIN AS BEFORE AND TEARS CONTINUE TO POUR DOWN HIS DRENCHED WAN FACE AND ONTO HIS PILLOW. ELIZABETH IS PUZZLED AND TAKEN ABACK. SHE BITES HER LIP.

ELIZABETH: Are you in a funk?

PAUL SHAKES HIS HEAD

ELIZABETH: Are you as keen on lessons as all that?

PAUL: No.

ELIZABETH: Then what on earth? Listen; blast you, would you like to play the Game? Do wipe your nose. Look at me. I'm going to hypnotise you.

ACT 1 SCENE 3 – DARGELOS

PAUL DREAM-DANCES A VAGUELY HOMOEROTIC FANTASY OF BEING RAVISHED BY DARGELOS.

THEN THE NEXT DAY. PAUL SITS UP IN BED WASHED, HAIR BRUSHED NEATLY, HE LOOKS ALMOST BLOOMING. GÉRARD, VISITING, SITS BY PAUL. ELIZABETH HOVERS.

PAUL: Do you know his address?

GÉRARD: No, old boy, I don't. Fellows like him never let on where they hang out.

PAUL: Poor Dargelos! That's that, then. Go and get the photographs.

GÉRARD FINDS TWO BEHIND THE BUST AND HANDS THEM TO PAUL. ONE IS A SCHOOL GROUP SHOWING THE WHOLE CLASS RANGED ACCORDING TO HEIGHT, WITH PAUL AND DARGELOS SQUATTING SIDE BY SIDE. ARMS FOLDED, ARROGANT, POSED LIKE A FOOTBALLER, DARGELOS DISPLAYS THOSE LEGS WHICH SO NOTABLY CONTRIBUTED TO HIS PRESTIGE. THE OTHER PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS HIM DRESSED AS *ATHALIE* – THE TITLE ROLE FROM A RECENT SCHOOL PERFORMANCE. TIGERISH BENEATH HIS VEILS AND TINSEL DRAPERIES, HE LOOKS LIKE SOME GREAT TRAGIC ACTRESS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY. THE

BOYS LOOK PIOUSLY AT THE PHOTOS UNTIL ELIZABETH MAKES HER PRESENCE FELT. PAUL WAVES THE *ATHALIE* PHOTO IN THE AIR.

PAUL: In with it now, I think, don't you?

ELIZABETH: What? Where?

PAUL: Into the treasure.

ELIZABETH: What's to go into the treasure?

PAUL: If you agree, it's the fellow who chucked the snowball...his photograph.

ELIZABETH: Let me see.

ELIZABETH TAKES A LONG TIME TO STUDY THE PICTURE.

PAUL: He chucked the snowball; he threw pepper at the headmaster. He's been expelled.

ELIZABETH PACES UP AND DOWN, BITING HER THUMBNAIL, RAPT IN SILENT CONTEMPLATION. FINALLY SHE OPENS THE DRAWER A FRACTION AND PUSHES THE PHOTOGRAPH INSIDE.

ELIZABETH: It's a bad face. Mind you don't tire Paul, Giraffe. I must go back to Mummy. I've got to keep an eye on the nurses. It's awfully difficult, you know. They're trying to get the upper hand. I daren't leave them for a moment.

HALF IN EARNEST, HALF IN SELF-DERISION SHE MAKES A HISTRIONIC GESTURE OF RUNNING HER FINGERS THROUGH HER HAIR; THEN, TURNING, SWEEPS FROM THE ROOM AS IF MANIPULATING AN IMAGINARY TRAIN.

ACT 1 SCENE 4 – PAS DE TROI ‘Suicide is a mortal sin’

LOW LIGHT, SHADOWS, MIRRORS AND MIRAGES FILL THE SCENE. ELIZABETH, PAUL AND GÉRARD DANCE THE ROOM INTO CHAOTIC LIFE. BEFORE LONG THE PATIENT SUCCEEDS IN IMPOSING HIS PERSONAL TOWN AND LANDSCAPE UPON THE CHAOS. STREETS WIND IN AND OUT OF THE LITTER; TRUNKS FLANK HIS BROAD AVENUES; STREWN PAPERS ARE HIS LAKES; PILES OF DISCARDED LINEN ARE HIS MOUNTAINS. ALL THESE ELIZABETH WOULD POUNCE ON AND DEMOLISH, REJOICING IN THE HAVOC SHE CREATES, THE ATMOSPHERE OF PERPETUALLY IMPENDING STORM WHICH IS THE BREATH OF LIFE FOR BOTH OF THEM. DURING THIS, A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Only Dargelos could have persuaded Paul to go back to school. With Dargelos cast out, school had become a prison. But Dargelos' prestige was beginning to undergo a subtle change of scale. Far from dwindling, his figure was expanding, beginning to take off into the upper reaches of the Room. Those sunken eyes, those lips, so course, that lock of hair, those clumsy hands, those knees and all their scars, were becoming separate stars of one great constellation, spinning, turning in interstellar vacancy. Dargelos enters the treasure to rejoin his photograph. Image and original are identified; the prototype loses its function. As an abstraction, as the ideal of a handsome fellow, Dargelos is a valuable property, potent in the magic zone; thus delivered of him, Paul revels freely in the sweet delights of sickness and perpetual holiday.*

TOWARD THE END OF THE DANCE, GÉRARD MOVES TO A MIRROR AND TRACES WITH HIS FINGER THE SENTENCE SCRAWLED IN SOAP “*SUICIDE IS A MORTAL SIN*”. HE STRANGELY HEARS IT BEING SUNG. HIS REVERIE IS BROKEN BY A TIFF:

PAUL: Ah, you wait till I’ve got my own room.

ELIZABETH: You wait till I’ve got mine.

PAUL: Fine sort of room that’s going to be!

ELIZABETH: Better than yours! I say Giraffe; he’s going to have a chandelier!

PAUL: Shut up!

ELIZABETH: And a sphinx, Giraffe, he’s going to have a plaster sphinx on the mantelpiece, and he’s going to give his chandelier a coat of paint!

PAUL: Perfectly true, I do intend to have a sphinx and a chandelier. You wouldn’t understand, of course, you’re too ignorant.

ELIZABETH: O.K., I’m off. I shall take a room in the hotel. I’ve got my bag packed. I shall go and live in the hotel. He can look after himself. I simply refuse to live here any more. I’ve packed my bag. I’m not going to live with the great oaf any longer.

MUSIC INTENSIFIES. GÉRARD BEGINS A SOLO DANCE WHILE PAUL AND ELIZABETH SULK. GRADUALLY HE INVOLVES EACH OF THE OTHERS SEPARATELY BUT NEVER AS A TRIO. GÉRARD IS ENTRANCED BY BOTH

THESE FORCES, BUT BY IMPERCEPTIBLE STAGES; ELIZABETH BEGINS TO TAKE THE PLACE IN GÉRARD'S HEART ONCE OCCUPIED BY PAUL. DURING THIS A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *The average upright citizen would doubtless have found Paul and Elizabeth preposterous, would doubtless have invoked their tainted heredity – one aunt insane, an alcoholic father – to help explain them. Preposterous they were, indeed; so is a rose; so are the solemn arguments of average, upright citizens.*

Besides, the Room craved marvels and miracles and it was something miraculous the children were creating. A masterpiece devoid of intellectual content, devoid – and this is the miracle – of any worldly aim; the masterpiece of their own being. Nothing in our hero and heroine was conscious; no notion crossed them, even faintly, of the external impression they produced. They lived their dream, their Room, played their Game fancying they loathed what they adored.

Time passes; the Room craves marvels. To Elizabeth's extreme annoyance, Paul is now half a head taller than herself. Suddenly their mother dies. Far from bequeathing them a distressful legacy, their mother did much, by her fabulous death, to raise her credit in her children's estimation. It was as if a thunderbolt had forged an image of her, acceptably macabre, entirely unrelated to the person whom they missed. Moreover, in matters of bereavement, creatures so primitive, so uncorrupted, are unaware of social usage. Their reactions are animal, instinctive; and orphaned animals are notoriously cynical in their approach to death. This death of hers, indubitably a marvel, forged her a sarcophagus, a Gothic monument, enshrined her in the Room; was duly to translate her into the eternity of dreams, into their magic heaven, with pride of place. The Room craves marvels; Gérard moves in to stay.

ACT 1 SCENE 5 – THE CRAYFISH VARIATION

THE BEDROOM, CHAOS AS BEFORE. TWO BEDS CONTAINING THE HERO AND HEROINE AND GÉRARD BEDDED DOWN ON A HEAP OF CUSHIONS BETWEEN THEM. A SINGLE ELECTRIC LIGHT HANGS OVER PAUL'S BED. PAUL GETS UP AND COVERS THE LIGHT BULB WITH A PIECE OF BUNTING, PLUNGING THE ROOM IN REDDISH SHADOW.

VO: *And now the Room, like a great ship, put out to sea. Higher the waves, wider the horizons, rarer, more perilous, the cargo.*

ELIZABETH JUMPS OUT OF BED IN A FURY AND REMOVES THE BUNTING. PAUL PUTS IT BACK. A TUG OF WAR ENSUES: BUNTING-ON-BUNTING-OFF, CHOREOGRAPHED AND COMIC WHICH ENDS WITH PAUL TRIUMPHANT AND ELIZABETH CRUSHED. PAUL, NOW HALF A HEAD TALLER IS NO LONGER CONTENT TO PLAY THE INVALID. IN VAIN ELIZABETH MOCKS HIM, LAYING DOWN THE WEAPONS OF THE TOMBOY, SHE EXPLOITS HER UNTRIED FEMININE RESOURCES, WITH GÉRARD AS HER STOOGES.

ELIZABETH: *Isn't it delicious? Remember, Giraffe – everything's simply delicious now. Films are delicious; books are delicious, what a delicious armchair, ginger pop and raspberry sodas are simply delicious. I say Giraffe, isn't he revolting? Look at him! Preening himself like a peacock!*

PAUL IGNORES HER, FLINGS OFF HIS CLOTHES AND ASSISTS GÉRARD INTO HIS DRESSING GOWN. NAKED, PAUL WANDERS UP AND DOWN, MAKING HIS BED, SMOOTHING THE SHEETS, PLUMPING THE NEST OF

PILLOWS. PROPPED ON HER LEFT ELBOW, WITH THE STERN MASK OF A BYZANTINE EMPRESS, ELIZABETH LIES, STARING AT HER BROTHER. WITH HER RIGHT HAND, SHE SCRATCHES HER HEAD. HAVING SCRATCHED IT RAW, SHE RUBS OINTMENT FROM A POT KEPT FOR THIS PURPOSE BY THE PILLOW. PAUL SEIZES HIS CHANCE.

PAUL: Idiot! If ever there were a sickening sight, it's that idiot and her grease-pot. She thinks it's good for the scalp. It's a tip she got from some Hollywood mag... Gérard!

GÉRARD: What?

PAUL: Gérard, are you listening?

GÉRARD: Yes.

ELIZABETH: Gérard, you're too patient. Go to sleep, don't let him be a nuisance.

SILENCE ENSUES. PAUL BITES HIS LIPS; HIS EYES FLASH FIRE. FINALLY HE GETS INTO BED AND BEGINS HIS SLEEP RITUAL. IT IS LESS A PREPARATION FOR SLEEP THAN AN EMBALMING; IN FUNERAL BANDS, HIS FOOD AND DRINK AND SACRED BRIC-A-BRAC BESIDE HIM, HE SETS FORTH ON HIS JOURNEY TO THE SHADES.

VO: *Night after night she awaits this supreme moment of departure; through four long years, her cue had never altered. Incredible as it might seem, apart from a few trifling variations, the essence of the play is preserved. It may be that elemental beings such as these follow some law of nature as mysteriously imperative as the law of flowers that close their petals up at night. It was Elizabeth who introduced the variations.*

ELIZABETH DIVES UNDER HER BED AND PRODUCES A CUT-GLASS SALAD BOWL FULL OF CRAYFISH.

ELIZABETH: Gérard, have a crayfish? You simply must; this dressing's perfect.

GÉRARD GETS OUT OF BED WITH TREPIDATION.

PAUL: The old cow! She loathes crayfish. She loathes anything peppery. It's as much as she can do to get it down.

GÉRARD AND ELIZABETH SAVOUR THE DISH. PAUL IS INCREASINGLY TEMPTED; FINALLY:

PAUL: Gérard, please let me have a taste?

ELIZABETH: Gérard, fancy a boy of sixteen abjectly begging for a crayfish! Could anything be lower? Honestly, you know he'd lick them off the mat; he'd grovel for them. No, don't you take it to him; let him come and fetch it! The great sissy, he's simply revolting – he's dying of greed but he can't be bothered to budge. He shan't have a crayfish. I'm too ashamed of him.

PAUL HAS TURNED AWAY, FEIGNING SLEEP. TOWARD THE END OF HER HARANGUE HE SEIZES HIS OPPORTUNITY AND HURLES A GLASS OF MILK AT HER. MILK STREAMS OVER HER IN RIVULETS.

ELIZABETH: The wretch! The beast! Gérard, give me a hand, get a cloth; help me mop it up. (LOWERING HER VOICE) And I was just going to let him have some crayfish... (TO PAUL) want one?

VO: *The burden of the crayfish came muffled to Paul's ears. Sleep was stealing over him. Crayfish had become a matter of indifference. Already he had weighed anchor.*

ELIZABETH NOTICES PAUL HAS GONE TO SLEEP AND WITH THE CRAYFISH MOVES TO PAUL'S BED.

ELIZABETH: Go on, horror! I'm not as mean as all that. You're welcome to your crayfish. Go on, eat up. You said you wanted it, and now you don't. Now's your last chance...

THEN LIKE A SEVERED HEAD MAKING A SUPREME LAST EFFORT AT COMMUNICATION, PAUL OPENS HIS MOUTH A FRACTION. ELIZABETH PEELS A PIECE AND DELICATELY PLACES IT IN HIS MOUTH.

ELIZABETH: Well, if this doesn't take the cake! He's chewing in his sleep! That beats his silly sleep walking! Do look, Gérard, it's most peculiar. The greedy pig! He really is the end.

HER NOSTRILS DILATED, THE TIP OF HER TONGUE PROTRUDING, AS IF ENGROSSED IN SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENT, SHE GOES ON FEEDING HIM. INTENT, PREOCCUPIED, AND MAD SHE LOOKS – A MADWOMAN HUNCHING OVER A DEAD CHILD AND CRAMMING IT WITH FOOD. SUDDENLY THE CORPSE SPRINGS TO LIFE; PAUL, CHEEKS BALLOONING AS IF FULL OF CRAYFISH SITS BOLT UPRIGHT, FEIGNS SPITTING THE MASTICATED FISH INTO ELIZABETH'S FROZEN FACE, (IT IS ONLY AIR, HE SECRETLY SWALLOWED THE FISH), LAUGHS AND GRABS GÉRARD LIKE SOME MARIONETTE.

PAUL: Come on, Gérard; leave the bitch to her fish. Let's go out for a piece of *delicious* tart.

THEY ARE UP AND DRESSED IN AN INSTANT, GÉRARD TOO ENTRANCED TO RESIST, ELIZABETH STRUCK DUMB.

ACT 1 SCENE 6 – DANSE MACABRE

ELIZABETH ADVANCES INTO THE DEAD CENTRE OF THE ROOM AND STANDS TO ATTENTION, HER ARMS ALONG HER SIDES, STARING AHEAD OF HER THROUGH THE ENGULFING SHADOWS. THE ROOM IS SINKING, ABOUT TO BE SUBMERGED; AND SHE TOO IS SINKING, MOTHERLESS. SHE STANDS LIKE A CAPTAIN ON THE BRIDGE AND LETS HERSELF GO DOWN.

AS BEFORE, A FIGURE APPEARS ENGULFED IN INCANDESCENT LIGHT; A STATUE ON A PEDESTAL. IT PERFORMS A SLOW PIROUETTE, WHICH ELIZABETH BECOMES ENTRANCED BY. IT IS DARGLOS DRESSED AS *ATHALIE*; OR RATHER IT IS AGATHA. THE VISION AND THE VISIONARY DANCE TOGETHER, ENTWINING FIRST BODIES, THEN ESSENCE, AS IF SEALING A PREMONITORY PACT. LIGHTS GO DOWN AS THE MUSIC CONTINUES UNDER THE VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Beyond the boundaries of the ordinary world of lives and houses, unguessed, undreamed of in their commonsense philosophy, lies the vast realm of the improbable: a world too disordered, so it would seem, to hold together for a fortnight, let alone for several years. And yet these lives, these houses continue to maintain a precarious equilibrium in defiance of all laws of man and nature. All the same, persons who base their calculations on the inexorable pressure of the force of circumstance assume, correctly, that such lives are doomed.*

The world owes its enchantment to these curious creatures and their fancies, but its multiple complicity rejects them. Thistledown spirits, tragic, heart-rending in their

*evanescence, they must go blowing headlong to perdition.
And yet, all started harmlessly, in childish games and
laughter...*

End of Act One

ACT 2 SCENE 1 – ATHALIE

DARGELOS DRESSED AS *ATHALIE* PERFORMS A SLOW PIROUETTE IN A MYSTIC LIGHT AS IN ELIZABETH'S VISION. HE IS ALONE. THE DANCE DEVELOPS AS A MAGICAL TRANSFORMATION. GRADUALLY HE REMOVES HIS COSTUME, BECOMES DARGELOS, THEN DURING THE DANCE SHAPESHIFTS INTO AGATHA. AGATHA FREEZES INTO A SHOP MANNEQUIN. DURING THIS A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Thus three years, monotonous and unremittingly intense, passed by. Elizabeth and Paul, incapable of growing up, went on rocking their twin cradles. Gérard loves Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Paul adore, devour each other. Regularly once a fortnight, after some nocturnal quarrel, Elizabeth packs a bag to live in a hotel. Then one torrid night, the stern opening bars of a new theme sounded in the Room.*

ELIZABETH, PAUL AND GÉRARD NOW TAKE UP THE DANCE. THEY COME TO A SUDDEN HALT IN THEIR RESPECTIVE BEDROOM POSITIONS.

ELIZABETH: You see, Giraffe I'm sick of being his drudge. Besides it's time he looked after himself. I *am* nineteen you know. My health is going to pieces; I simply must find a job.

LONG PAUSE, GÉRARD LOOKS UNCOMFORTABLE AND BEWILDERED; PAUL ACTS AS IF HE HAS NOT HEARD A WORD, PRETENDING SLEEP. ELIZABETH CONTINUES, WARMING TO HER SYMPHONY.

ELIZABETH: You see, Gérard darling Paul's got no ties, and besides he's useless, he's no good, he's a half-wit, practically mad. I'll have to fend for myself. Anyway what's to become of him if I don't work? I must earn a living. I shall get a job. I must!

A SLIGHT PAUSE AS SHE MODULATES INTO THE SECOND SUBJECT

ELIZABETH: Poor kid, he does need help. You see he's really not much better. The doctor...no it's all right, Giraffe, he's asleep...the doctor's awfully worried about him. He'll never be able to go to school again. It's not his fault; I'm not blaming him; it's just that I've got a chronic invalid on my hands. To think that one snowball, one little snowball, could do him in like this.

PAUL MUTTERS UNDER HIS BREATH

PAUL: Devil! Devil!

ELIZABETH: What's that, Giraffe? I think he's waking...

SOLICITOUSLY, FINGER ON LIP, ELIZABETH BENDS OVER PAUL, TURNING THE SCREWS WITH EXPERT FINGERS, STRESSING THE PATHOS OF HIS PRESENT STATE...FINALLY, UNABLE TO CONTAIN HIMSELF A MOMENT LONGER, PAUL STIRS, AS IF BEGINNING TO WAKEN.

ELIZABETH: Darling Paul, can I get you anything?

PAUL: Whore!

ELIZABETH: Listen to him, Gérard he is a worm, a downright tramp...I wouldn't put it past him to set up as a pimp and have me walk the streets. (PAUSE FOR EFFECT) I think I'll get a job as a salesgirl, or a mannequin...

PAUL, NO LONGER PRETENDING SLEEP, LAUGHS RIOTOUSLY AT THE ABSURDITY OF THE PROPOSITION.

PAUL: My poor girl, take a look at yourself in the glass. You'll only make an exhibition of yourself. You'll be out on your fanny within an hour. Mannequin indeed! Stick yourself up as a scarecrow. That's more your line. You'll just be a high-class tart...I'd sooner see you on the streets.

ELIZABETH: I'd rather not thank you very much...I might run into you!

ACT 2 SCENE 2 – AGATHA

THE LIGHT SHIFTS TO AGATHA AS MANNEQUIN. ELIZABETH APPROACHES HER. THE MANNEQUIN DANCE BEGINS. AGATHA AND ELIZABETH TAKE TURNS IN DRESSING EACH OTHER UP. A WARM AFFECTION – FOR ELIZABETH A HITHERTO UNKNOWN EMOTION – GROWS BETWEEN THE TWO MOTHERLESS GIRLS. THEY ARE BOTH SOCIAL MISFITS. THEY PLAY TOGETHER CURLED UP WITH MODEL FURS, EXCHANGE MAGAZINES AND CONFIDENCES, AND ACT AS A MUTUAL TONIC. DURING THIS A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *So all the wheels begin to turn; the parts to be assembled begin to travel, with smooth coordination, stage after stage, to their appointed ends: one moment more and Agatha is introduced to the Room.*

ELIZABETH LEADS AGATHA OVER TO PAUL AND GÉRARD.

ELIZABETH: My brother Paul, his friend Gérard. This is...

SHE PAUSES, BRACING HERSELF, EXPECTING PAUL TO LAUGH AT AGATHA'S NAME. HE RECLINES, EGYPTIAN MUMMY LIKE, IN HIS TOMB.

ELIZABETH: Agatha.

LONG SILENCE THEN:

PAUL: Ah, what a fine, illustrious name. A name immortalised, as you no doubt know, in one of the most beautiful poems in the French language!

ELIZABETH IS SUSPICIOUS OF HIS CHIVALRY, BUT SIGHS IN RELIEF ALL THE SAME. AGATHA NERVOUS, SURVEYS THE MANTELPIECE. THE TREASURE IS ON DISPLAY. SUDDENLY SHE EXCLAIMS IN A STRANGE VOICE, WAVING THE PHOTO OF DARGELOS AS *ATHALIE*:

AGATHA: Have you got my photograph?

PAUL LIFTS HIS HEAD FROM HIS SARCOPHAGUS AND PROPS ON HIS ELBOWS, A STILL-LIFE STUDY OF VAGUE CURIOSITY.

VO: *Great are the prerogatives of beauty, subduing even those not consciously aware of it.*

ELIZABETH: It's not your photograph.

AGATHA: No, I see it isn't; the clothes are different. But it's incredible, the likeness to an old one of me. I'll bring it. It is exactly the same – me, me! – The living image...Who is it?

ELIZABETH: It's not a girl, duck. It's that fellow I told you about, the one at Paul's school who threw the snowball... You're perfectly right; he is like you. Paul, *is* he like Agatha to look at?

ASTOUNDED STILLNESS, AS THE LIKENESS BURSTS INELUCTIBLY ACROSS THE THRESHOLD. GÉRARD RECOGNISES THE FATAL PROFILE. AGATHA TURNS TOWARDS PAUL, HOLDING UP THE RECTANGLE OF WHITE; AND IT IS DARGELOS PAUL SEES AGAINST THE SHADOWS, BRANDISHING THE SNOWBALL, ABOUT TO STRIKE HIM DOWN. HE LETS HIS HEAD FALL BACK AND ANSWERS FAINTLY:

PAUL: No, my girl, no. The photograph has got a look of you, but you're not really like him in the least.

GÉRARD AND ELIZABETH LOOK AT PAUL, FROZEN BY THE BREADTH OF THE LIE. DURING THIS FROZEN MOMENT A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *From that night on, the loom of Paul and Agatha began to weave a crisscross pattern. The wheel of fortune had come round full circle; pride had had its fall; proud Dargelos of the marble heart, insensible to love, had suffered metamorphosis, was now a shy young girl whom Paul could wholly subjugate. In less than a week, Agatha, following in Gérard's gentle footsteps had moved into the Room.*

ACT 2 SCENE 3 – AGATHA AND PAUL

AGATHA AND PAUL DANCE TOGETHER. TO BEGIN WITH, PAUL IS DOMINANT, CRUEL IN HIS BRAVURA PERFORMANCE. AGATHA IS CALM YET ENTHRALLED. SHE JOINS HIM IN THE DUET, MATCHES HIM STEP FOR STEP, EXCEPT HER GRACE IS EXQUISITE. BY THE END, THERE SHOULD BE NO DOUBT THAT IT IS PAUL WHO IS SUBJUGATED. TOWARD

THE END OF THEIR DANCE, ELIZABETH AND GÉRARD ENTER. THEY TAKE OVER THE DUET, PAUL AND AGATHA ARE STILL. GÉRARD IS FIXED UPON THE ALTAR OF ELIZABETH, BUT ELIZABETH, FOREVER VIRGIN, THE IRON MAIDEN, HAS EYES ONLY FOR PAUL.

ACT 2 SCENE 4 – THE LETTER

PAUL IS ALONE HOLDING THE PHOTOGRAPH OF DARGELOS AS ATHALIE. HE DANCES WITH THE FRAMED IMAGE. DURING THIS A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Paul dreams of love; and fate the lacemaker, holding upon her knees the cushion of our lives, stuffing it with pins is implacably at work.*

Paul is in love; it does not follow that he is loved, or ever would be. He never dreams that Agatha could feel a deep respect for him – not only that, he mistakes her feeling for aversion. His is a positive emotion, a total invasion of his being, a gnawing hunger that could not be appeased. It harries him incessantly, spurring him to take action...But what action? Never would he dare to tell his love. Besides, there would never be the opportunity. The formal pattern of their faith, its schisms no less than its shared dogmas, made it well nigh impossible to conduct a love affair; and so little did their public mode of life allow of private and particular communication, that even if he were to bring himself to speak, she might not take him seriously.

A letter seems the best solution. Fate has flung a pebble the quiet pool ripples; now, blindly he will fling another, let it fall at random. He will drop his letter (special delivery) into the void, to take its chance. It would land secretly at the feet of Agatha, or in full view, and noisily; from one or other of these two alternatives the rest will follow logically. He will conceal his agitation, pretend to retire for the evening in a fit of the sulks, thus saving his face and achieve the necessary privacy while waiting for Agatha's response.

PAUL EXITS DECISIVELY

ACT 2 SCENE 5 – THE NIGHT OF WRATH: *DANCE OF THE SPIDER*

ELIZABETH AND GÉRARD ARE DINING DISMALLY TOGETHER.

ELIZABETH: This is ridiculous, Giraffe; Agatha and Paul both refuse to eat. I will talk with Agatha; you force yourself into Paul's room and get him to come clean. I want to know what it's about.

GÉRARD EXITS WITH HANG-DOG OBEDIENCE; ELIZABETH GOES TO AGATHA WHO IS PROSTRATE ON THE BED, IN FLOODS OF TEARS, HER HEAD BURIED IN THE PILLOW. SHE TAKES THE UNHAPPY CREATURE IN HER ARMS AND ROCKS HER ON HER BREAST. CONSOLED, AGATHA POURS OUT HER HEART.

AGATHA: I love him, I adore him...he doesn't care a rap for me.

ELIZABETH SMILES FROZEN AND UNSEEN BY AGATHA, AS SHE LISTENS TO THE VOICE OF LOVE, OF ARTLESS, BOUNDLESS LOVE. SHE STROKES AGATHA'S HAIR, IT IS AUTOMATIC AND ROBOTIC. IF AGATHA COULD HAVE SEEN ELIZABETH'S GRAVEN FACE OF ADAMANTINE JUSTICE A FEW CENTEMETRES ABOVE HER HEAD, SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN STRUCK DUMB! SHE CONTINUES TO STROKE DURING THE FOLLOWING:

ELIZABETH: Silly girl, what makes you think he doesn't care a rap for you? Has he told you so? Of course not...very well then. He doesn't know his luck, the silly ass! If you want him, you must marry him; and he'll have to marry you.

AGATHA: Lise, you are an angel. But I'm sure he doesn't love me.

ELIZABETH: What makes you so sure?

AGATHA: He couldn't, not possibly.

ELIZABETH: Gérard's awfully shy, you know.

A BEAT THEN AGATHA SITS BOLT UPRIGHT

AGATHA: But...Lise...I didn't mean Gérard. I mean't Paul!

ELIZABETH RISES TO HER FEET

AGATHA: Forgive me...please forgive me, Lise.

ELIZABETH, CONFRONTED BY THE VERY MASK OF TREACHERY,
STRUGGLES TO CONTROL HERSELF. FINALLY, IMPROVISING
COMPOSURE, SHE SPEAKS:

ELIZABETH: Paul! I'm staggered. I'd absolutely no idea...

THEN IN MORE HONEYED TONES, THINKING FAST NOW

ELIZABETH: Well, how extraordinary! It seems so odd. It's staggering.
Tell me all about it, how did this occur?

THEY BOTH SIT; AGATHA BLOWS HER NOSE AND DRIES HER EYES.
LULLED BY ELIZABETH'S DULCET TONES, SHE ONCE AGAIN LEANS INTO
ELIZABETH'S SPIDERY EMBRACE.

AGATHA: Lise, I feel I've always loved him, from the moment we met. It's just now, I've realised it. I love him, Lise. I adore him, I love...

ELIZABETH STANDS UP AGAIN, SMILING AND INTERRUPTING:

ELIZABETH: Now listen...just relax, don't worry. It's perfectly simple. I'm going to talk with Paul.

AGATHA (WITH FEAR): No, no! Paul must never guess! For God's sake, promise me you'll never breathe a hint...

ELIZABETH: Hush, darling, hush. You're in love with Paul. If he loves you back, everything's fine. I won't give you away, I promise. I'll just sound him casually. I'll soon find out. You know you can trust me; go to sleep now. Don't budge from your room.

LIGHTS DOWN ON AGATHA. ELIZABETH BEGINS *THE DANCE OF THE SPIDER*. SHE WEARS A BATHROBE FASTENED ROUND THE WAIST WITH A NECKTIE. IT IS TOO LONG AND GETS IN HER WAY, BUT SHE DANCES, NOT OF HER OWN VOLITION, BUT AS IF MECHANICALLY CONTROLLED, IMPELLED TO TURN LEFT, TURN RIGHT WITHOUT GETTING THE HEM OF HER BATHROBE CAUGHT IN HER MOVING SANDALS. SHE HAS BECOME A ROBOT; HOLLOW, LEADEN, BUOYANT, ADVANCING, HER WHITE WRAP BILLOWING ROUND HER ANKLES, SEEMS TO FLOAT HER ONWARD LIKE A CLOUD. ONLY A FAINT HUMMING PERSISTS IN HER HEAD; AND IN HER BREAST NOTHING ANY MORE BUT AN AXE, THUDDING OUT ITS MORTAL STROKES. DURING THIS, A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *From this time onward, Elizabeth does not look back. The genius of the Room, my genius, informs her utterly. She is possessed by it, as men of action – sea captains, say, or*

financiers – in moments of supreme emergency may suddenly become possessed and know by inspiration what act, what word, what gesture will save their ships and fortunes from the rocks; or as a criminal, in a blinding flash of intuition, lights on the one, the fool-proof alibi certain to save him from the gallows.

GÉRARD ENTERS, THE SPIDER SHUDDERS BACK TO HER HUMAN FORM.

GÉRARD: I was looking for you; Paul is in a very queer mood. He asked me to come and find you. How's the other invalid?

ELIZABETH: She's got a sick headache; she's trying to get some sleep and doesn't want to be disturbed.

GÉRARD: I'll just look in on her.

ELIZABETH: Don't! She's got to be kept quiet. Go to my room. Wait there till I come. I'm going to see Paul.

GÉRARD, BEWITCHED BY HIS OWN LOVE, OBEYS AND EXITS. ELIZABETH SHAKES HER CEREMENTS AND MOMENTARILY RESUMES HER SPIDER'S DANCE AS THE LIGHTS COME UP ON PAUL SITTING ON THE FLOOR, HIS HEAD AND SHOULDERS FLUNG BACK AGAINST A PILE OF RUGS. HE IS WEEPING. HIS TEARS ARE NOT THE FRENZIED SOBS OF AGATHA; NOR ARE THEY THE TEARS HE ONCE SHED FOR RUINED FRIENDSHIP. ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY FORM BETWEEN HIS EYELIDS, SWELL, BRIM OVER, TRICKLE DOWN HIS CHEEKS, COLLECT NEAR THE CORNER OF HIS LIP, AND FALL AGAIN, SLOWLY DROP AFTER HEAVY DROP. THE SPIDER STEALTHILY MOVES TO HER PREY.

PAUL: Agatha...the letter...please, Lise...I beg you, tell me?

ELIZABETH SURPRISED, AND CHANGING TACK

ELIZABETH: What letter my poor darling?

LIKE AGATHA, PAUL IS LULLED BY HER MERCIFUL TONE AND CONFESSES.

PAUL: I sent her a letter, special delivery...I told her that I love her. Why hasn't she answered me? It's killing me.

ELIZABETH: Just a moment, my pet. I was just with Agatha and I have got some important things to say to you. Agatha never said a word about our special delivery letter. It can't have flown away. It's simply got to be found. I'm just going upstairs. I'll be back in no time.

LIGHTS DOWN ON PAUL. ELIZABETH SPIDER-DANCES AND FINDS THE LETTER AMONG A PILE OF UNOPENED OTHERS. SHE SMILES AND TEARS IT OPEN. IT IS CONTAINED IN A YELLOW ENVELOPE AND WRITTEN ON A TORN RULED PAGE FROM AN EXERCISE BOOK. SHE READS IT ALOUD:

ELIZABETH: "Agatha, don't be angry. I love you. I was a fool. I thought you were my enemy. I've found out now that I love you and that if you don't love me, I shall die. I am on my knees, begging for an answer. I'm in agony. I shan't stir until I hear from you."

ELIZABETH LAUGHS CONTEMPTUOUSLY. HER DANCE RESUMES, MORE DIABOLICALLY THAN BEFORE. SHE DANCES WITH THE LETTER AND THE ENVELOPE. SHE STOPS AND NOTICES THE ENVELOPE. VOICE-OVER:

VO: *The name on the envelope was his. He had written to himself! Dashing down his own address, Paul, in his desperation, had mechanically prefixed it with his name as well.*

ELIZABETH: So typical of him, he will never change.

VO: *Supposing this letter had come hurtling back to him like a boomerang, instead of lying impotent and undelivered? He would have lost heart, lost hope, and, utterly humiliated by his own absent-mindedness, destroyed it.*

ELIZABETH: I will spare him that.

LIGHTS UP ON LUCKLESS PAUL, AS ELIZABETH GENTLY APPROACHES HIM.

ELIZABETH: My poor pet! Listen, Agatha is fast asleep. I did see a special delivery letter beside her bed...it was in a yellow envelope with a sheet of ruled paper sticking out...the same paper you use, my dear.

PAUL: Didn't she even mention it when she was talking to you?

ELIZABETH: No, and I'd rather she never knew I'd seen it. And we must be particularly careful not to seem to be inquiring after it. She'd be sure to say she doesn't know what we're talking about.

PAUL BREAKS DOWN AND SOBS. ELIZABETH HOLDS HIM, CONSOLES HIM, STROKES HIM, AND THEN STRINGS HIM UP ON HER LOOM.

ELIZABETH: You are a silly boy, my pet. You must have guessed...Agatha is in love with Gérard. She told me all about it, just the other night.

PAUL IS STUNNED INTO STILLNESS, DRINKING THIS INCONCEIVABLE AND BITTER CUP.

ELIZABETH: It's odd that Gérard hasn't said anything to you. I know he's afraid of me; I seem to scare him stiff. But it's different with you. I suppose he thought you wouldn't take it seriously...anyway, it's for the best, don't you think? Agatha is such a simple girl and Gérard such a nice boy; they are made for one another. Gérard's uncle is getting old; Gérard will come into money soon; he will be free to marry Agatha and start a respectable bourgeois family. There can be no impediment to their happiness. It would be monstrous, criminal, yes, criminal to throw a monkey wrench, to cause trouble, to upset Agatha, to shatter Gérard, to poison their futures. You must not, will not do it Paul. This 'love' of yours, this little whim is nothing but a passing fancy...you must see that now? When you think it over pet, you will see for yourself that such a frivolous fancy must yield to genuine and reciprocated love.

LAUNCHED ON THE FLOOD OF HER OWN ORATORY, ELIZABETH SHEDS A TEAR. PAUL BOWS HIS HEAD SUBMISSIVELY AND PLACES HIMSELF WITHOUT RESERVATION INTO HER EIGHT SPINNING LEGS.

ELIZABETH: You must promise me that you will hold your tongue, and try to look cheerful when the young couple break the news to you...promise?

PAUL NODS HIS HEAD

ELIZABETH: It is clear from Agatha's silence that she has decided to forget about the letter, to make light of it, to forgive you. If there is any awkwardness between you now; if Gérard notices, it would never do. The happy couple have the wedding to look forward to and in no time they will be off on their honeymoon; then by-gones will definitely be by-gones.

ELIZABETH DRIES PAUL'S TEARS, KISSES HIM, TUCKS HIM IN AND STROKES HIM TO SLEEP. LIGHTS DOWN ON PAUL, THEN LIGHTS UP ON GÉRARD. ELIZABETH GOES TO HIM; THERE IS URGENCY NOW TO HER MOVEMENT.

GÉRARD: What's the news?

ELIZABETH: How often have I told you not to yell? It's one of your worst habits. Well, *the news* is that Paul's ill. He hasn't got the sense to realise it. I know by his eyes, by his tongue. He's got a temperature. It's for the doctor to say whether it's a relapse or just a bout of flu. Meanwhile, I've taken it upon myself to keep him in bed and not allow him any visitors. You can have the bed in the maid's old room.

GÉRARD: I think I might go and visit my uncle, he's also unwell.

ELIZABETH QUELLS HIM WITH A GLANCE

ELIZABETH: Don't go. I want to talk to you.

SHE BEGINS A SLOW PACING AROUND GÉRARD. HE IS VISIBLY ENTRANCED, AND THEN SHE STOPS. SHE IS CLIPPED AND ABRUPT.

ELIZABETH: So, what do you propose to do about Agatha?

GÉRARD: Do what? Why?

HER TONE HARDENS

ELIZABETH: What do you mean by 'why'? You are simply not going to get away with it, Gérard. You know perfectly well that Agatha is in love with you, and is expecting you to propose. Why do you keep the tormented soul waiting? What are you playing at Gérard?

GÉRARD (STAMMERS): Agatha...Agatha?

ELIZABETH (SPITTING VENOM): Yes you fool, Agatha!
Are you a half-wit? Surely your lovely outings with Agatha have given you some clue? She loves you. She wants to marry you! And you, you dumb-bell treat her like a sister! This won't do! You can't keep torturing the girl. She now thinks that you love me...me, how ridiculous is that? She sees the way you look at me, we all have. That has got to stop, it is Agatha you love, and she loves you! You *will* marry her, and I positively forbid you to ever mention that I had anything to do with it. I only played the go-between because of your stupid obtuseness. Agatha must never feel herself beholden to me for her married happiness, not for the whole world would I do that to sweet Agatha, and nor shall you.

GÉRARD LONGS FOR THE GROUND TO SWALLOW HIM UP. HE STARES AT HER DUMB-FOUNDED. SHE SOFTENS AS SHE REALISES HE IS BEATEN.

ELIZABETH: Well, now, we've made a big step forward. Now go to bed. I'll just run up to Agatha and break it gently to her. You *are* in love with her. You've been living in a dream world. Wake up. Think how lucky you are. Give me a kiss and let me hear you say you're the luckiest man alive.

GÉRARD, TOO STUNNED TO OFFER FURTHER RESISTANCE, PECKS HER CHEEK AND CHANTS THE AFFIRMATION IN A SLOW MONOTONE.

GÉRARD: I'm...the...luckiest...man...alive.

LIGHTS DOWN ON GÉRARD, AS ELIZABETH RESUMES HER DANCE TOWARD AGATHA. DURING THIS A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *Night-spinning spider, dexterous, deliberate; sleepless Arachne, she goes on her way, drawing her thread relentlessly behind her, hanging it to the four corners of the night. The killer's instinct tells her to strike blow on blow and never to stop to think...and yet, curiously, murderers are known to find that young girls give them more trouble than anybody else...*

LIGHTS UP ON AGATHA. ELIZABETH SITS BESIDE HER. AGATHA IS HAGGARD, HALF DRESSED, INERT, HER HEAD FLUNG BACK, HER DAMP HAIR STICKS TO HER FOREHEAD AND ONE HAND IS PRESSED TO HER HEART AS IF TO STAUNCH A WOUND SUSTAINED IN A LONG BATTLE.

ELIZABETH: He is incapable of love, you know that! He doesn't love you because he can't love anyone. It's not your fault, that's the

way he is, the way he's always been. He's a child, with a child's monstrous selfishness. His self-destructiveness would end up destroying you too; he would end up destroying any woman who surrendered to him. Do you hear me Agatha?

SOFTENING AND NEAR EXHAUSTION

ELIZABETH: Gérard, on the other hand is that rare being, a man devoted and reliable enough to guarantee a woman's happiness. He adores the ground you walk on, if only you could see what I see, that he will make you so happy. You can see that can't you?

AGATHA COLLAPSES UNDER ELIZABETH'S ASSAULT AND SHE RELINQUISHES THE LAST VESTIGE OF HER DREAM. ELIZABETH RAISES AGATHA'S FACE, POWDERS IT AND FIXES HER DRESS.

ELIZABETH: Don't you see how happy you will be? You are so lucky; Gérard is the kind of man that fairytales are made of. Don't worry about Paul; he need never know of your feelings for him, I can make sure of that. All you need to do is to put on that beautiful, happy face and tell him you are going to marry Gérard.

GASPING BETWEEN SOBS

AGATHA: Thank you...thank you...you are so kind to me.

ELIZABETH: Don't thank me, go to sleep. All will be well when you've had a good rest.

LIGHTS OUT ON AGATHA. ELIZABETH STANDS ALONE AND TRIUMPHANT.

ACT 2 SCENE 6 – PANIC

ELIZABETH BEGINS A VICTORY DANCE, WHICH IS AN ELABORATION OF HER HIGH KICKING DANCE FROM **ACT 1, SCENE 2**. SUDDENLY SHE STOPS. SHE SEES PAUL. HE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN WATCHING HER. SHE FREEZES, ALL GLOAT GONE. PAUL WALKS SLOWLY TOWARDS HIS SISTER, AS A PALE LIGHT ILLUMINATES AGATHA SLEEPING. PAUL IGNORES ELIZABETH AND HEADS MECHANICALLY, INEVITABLY TO AGATHA, AN IRRESISTABLE GRAVITY. HE WEARS A FLOWING, WHITE BATHROBE, SIMILAR TO ELIZABETH'S; HE APPEARS LUMINOUS. PANICKING, HER MIND RACING, SHE IS ABOUT TO PREVENT HIM, WHEN SHE REALISES HE IS SLEEPWALKING.

RELIEVED, SHE DANCES ABOUT AND AROUND HIS SLOW PROGRESS, DELIGHTING IN THE RISK OF HER NEAR MISS. PAUL SUDDENLY STOPS, AND WITH HIM ELIZABETH STOPS ALSO. SHE DARE NOT MOVE A MUSCLE NOW LEST PAUL SHOULD WAKE. BUT HE LOOKS THROUGH HER WHERE SHE STANDS PALPITATING, LIKE A DOE READY FOR FLIGHT; HIS GAZE IS ON AGATHA.

ELIZABETH IS A WOMAN CAST IN BRONZE NOW; HER THUDDING AXE OF A HEART BEATS SO LOUD, SHE IS SURE PAUL CAN HEAR IT. HE MOVES CLOSE TO AGATHA, AS IF SMELLING HER LIKE A LION MIGHT SNIFF OUT A MATE. HE WAITS; THEN TURNS AWAY SLOWLY, AND VANISHES INTO THE SILENCE. ELIZABETH NOW RELEASED LOOKS DRAWN AND HAGGARD. SHE GOES TO THE CORNER AND WASHES HER HANDS.

End of Act Two

ACT 3 SCENE 1 – NUPTIALS

THE ROOM IS GAUDILY DRESSED. A PRIEST STANDS IN FRONT OF THE BRIDE AND GROOM, ALL SUITABLY ATTIRE. ELIZABETH AND PAUL STAND AS WITNESSES; ALL FALSE SMILES EXCEPT FOR THE PRIEST WHO SEEMS GENUINELY IMPRESSED WITH THE VIRTUES OF MATRIMONY.

PRIEST: You may kiss the bride.

THERE IS APPLAUSE AS GERARD AND AGATHA MOVE TOWARD EACH OTHER TO KISS. THE LIGHTS FADE ON THE COUPLE THEN SUDDENLY A LIGHT IS ON PAUL AND ELIZABETH KISSING PASSIONATELY. THE EFFECT SHOULD BE DISTORTED, DISTURBING THE REALITY, NIGHTMARISH.

NORMAL LIGHTS AS THE MUSIC STARTS UP AND THE NEWLY WEDS BEGIN THE BRIDAL WALTZ. PAUL AND ELIZABETH JOIN THEM. THE PRIEST FINDS A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE AND LOOKS ON, GETTING SOZZLED RATHER TOO QUICKLY. A VOICE-OVER MIDWAY THROUGH THE DANCE.

VO: *The characters play their allotted parts in an atmosphere of false cheerfulness and competitive generosity. Behind the buzz and hum of cozy ritual lay the mortal weight of the unspoken. The artificial merriment of Paul, Agatha and Gérard, weighs like lead upon Elizabeth's heart. In vain she tells herself that her vigilance has saved them all from shipwreck, that thanks to her Agatha would be preserved from Paul and all his waywardness, and Paul from Agatha's mediocrity. In vain she rehearses her inward monologue: Gérard and Agatha are two of a kind, they were bound to come together, we were nothing but the intermediary, a year from now there'll be a baby, they'll be blessing me. She loved them all, poor dears. They are her lifework, her vocation.*

AS THE VOICE-OVER ENDS, SO DOES THE DANCE. ELIZABETH GATHERS HER 'LIFEWOR' INTO A TIGHT CIRCLE AND WARMLY KISSES EACH IN TURN.

ELIZABETH: I love you all, my dears. I do! Now what are you waiting for? Run along, don't worry about us. Have a simply wonderful honeymoon and come back and tell us all about it.

LIGHTS DOWN ON ALL BUT PAUL WHO SMILES.

ACT 3 SCENE 2 – COCOON

PAUL DANCES HIS BROKEN HEART. HE GATHERS AND SURROUNDS HIMSELF WITH *THE TREASURE* ALONG WITH A MYRIAD OF BLANKETS, PILLOWS AND ASSORTED BED CLOTHES. AS THE DANCE PROGSESSES WITH FLOURISHES AND STILLNESS, HE CONSTRUCTS A COCOON INTO WHICH HE FORLORNLY CRAWLS TO BURY HIS PAIN.

A MUFFLED LIGHT FALLS ON THE SEATED FIGURE OF ELIZABETH AS SHE WATCHES PAUL; BOWED FORWARD, HER CHIN PROPPED IN HER HANDS, STARING INTO SPACE, CAREWORN, CONSUMED WITH SOMBRE THOUGHTS. LIGHTS GO TO BLACK, THEN A VOICE-OVER:

VO: *The death of Gérard's uncle brings the young couple hurrying home. The genius of the Room, my genius will not be denied.*

ACT 3 SCENE 3 – POISON

THE QUARTET SIT ROUND A TABLE AT LUNCH

GÉRARD: Guess who I ran into?

PAUL SHRUGS INQUIRINGLY

GÉRARD: Dargelos!

PAUL: Not really?

GÉRARD: Yes really, my dear fellow. I was almost run down as I crossed the street, the car stopped; Dargelos was driving it! He'd heard I'd inherited my uncle's property and am now managing the factories. He asked to be shown around. He obviously has an eye for the main chance still!

PAUL: What did he look like? Has he changed?

GÉRARD: Not really, pretty much the same, a bit less color than he used to have...extraordinarily like Agatha...might be taken for her brother. Quite the opposite of high-hat these days. Very, very friendly, in fact. He travels a lot between France and Indo-China, some kind of sales agent. He took me back to his hotel, asked me if I saw anything of snowball...that snowball fellow! He means you!

PAUL: So what of it?

GÉRARD: I told him I saw you constantly. Then he asked me if you still liked poison?

AGATHA GIVES A START AND STOPS EATING, HER KNIFE DROPS WITH A CLANG.

AGATHA: Poison?

PAUL: You bet, glorious stuff, poison! I was always dying to get hold of some when I was at school.

GÉRARD: You mean Dargelos was obsessed by poisons, and you, as usual, copied him!

AGATHA: What could be the point?

PAUL: No point at all, simply because I wanted it, I wanted to have some poison. It's glorious. I'd like to have it in the same way as I'd like to have a basilisk or a mandrake, in the same way that I like having a revolver. You've got it, you know you've got it; it's there for you to look at. It's poison. Glorious!

ELIZABETH JOINS IN THE POISON PRAISE, MAINLY TO SNUB AGATHA

ELIZABETH: You're right Paul, I adore poison too. In fact, when I was little I used to play at brewing poisons, bottling and sealing them, sticking gruesome labels on them, making up sinister names.

AGATHA: How ghastly! Gérard, they're mad! I know they'll end in the jug.

ELIZABETH DELIGHTS IN AGATHA'S OUTBURST. SHE CONSIDERS IT SATISFACTORILY BOURGEOIS AND IT CONFIRMS AGATHA'S UNSUITABILITY FOR PAUL. SHE WINKS CONSPIRATORILY AT PAUL.

GÉRARD: Dargelos showed me his whole collection. Poisons from India, China, Mexico, the West Indies, poisons for arrow-tips, poisons for lingering death by torture, vendetta poisons, poisons for sacrificial rites! He said jokingly: "Tell snowball I haven't changed. I always wanted to collect poisons, now I do. Here, give him this to play with".

UNDER THE GOGGLING EYES OF ELIZABETH AND PAUL, GÉRARD FEELS IN HIS POCKET AND PULLS OUT A SMALL PACKAGE WRAPPED IN A PIECE OF PAPER. AGATHA TURNS HER BACK ON THE PROCEEDINGS. THEY OPEN THE PARCEL, AND FIND INSIDE IT A LUMP OF SOMETHING ROUND AND DARK, ABOUT THE SIZE OF A FIST, CONTAINED IN A FLIMSY PAPER SHEATH. IT IS THE COLOR OF EARTH, AND HAS A TEXTURE NOT UNLIKE A TRUFFLE, APART FROM ONE RAW REDDISH GASH IN IT. ONCE OPENED; GÉRARD, PAUL AND EIZABETH STAND BEFORE THIS OBJECT THAT DRAWS AND YET REPELS THEM. IT IS DEATH'S ABSOLUTE PRESENCE THAT CONFRONTS THEM. NOBODY SPEAKS FOR ONE MINUTE, UNTIL AGATHA BREAKS THE REVERENTIAL RITE.

AGATHA: Oh, the smell of it is ghastly!

PAUL: It's a drug...he must be a drug addict. He wouldn't make so free with it if it really were poison.

PAUL MOVES TO TOUCH IT. GÉRARD PUSHES HIS HAND AWAY.

GÉRARD: Don't touch it! Whatever it is, it's a present from Dargelos, but he said you weren't on any account to touch it. Anyway I wouldn't dream of letting you keep the horrible thing...you're much too casual.

PAUL CATCHES ELIZABETH'S SMILING EYE AND RETURNS HER WINK.

PAUL: Oh, don't be so stuffy, Giraffe. Who do you think you are? You sound just like your dear, departed uncle.

ELIZABETH: Casual are we? We'll see about that!

ELIZABETH SNATCHES UP THE PARCEL AND BEGINS CHASING PAUL AROUND THE TABLE WAVING IT AT HIM.

ELIZABETH: Go on, eat it, eat it!

AGATHA FLEES THE SCENE IN HORROR. PAUL LEAPS ON THE TABLE AND BURIES HIS FACE IN HIS HANDS. ELIZABETH PANTS AND JEERS AT HIM.

ELIZABETH: There's a brave boy! See how casual he is!

PAUL: Eat is yourself, you fool; and die of it, I suppose. Suit you fine, wouldn't it? No thanks, I propose to deposit *our* poison in the treasure.

GÉRARD: The smell's absolutely overpowering. You ought to put it in a tin.

ELIZABETH WRAPS IT UP, SHOVES IT INTO AN EMPTY BISCUIT TIN AND MOVES SOLEMNLY TO THE DRAWER THAT CONTAINS THE TREASURE. THE LIGHT ONLY ILLUMINATES ELIZABETH AND THE TREASURE NOW. THE TREASURE CHEST IS LITTERED WITH THEIR VARIOUS POSSESSIONS – REVOLVER, BOOKS, THE WHISKERED PLASTER BUST. SHE OPENS THE DRAWER AND RITUALISTICALLY HOLDS ABOVE HER HEAD THE ITEMS OF TREASURE, THEN SHE PLACES THE TIN ON TOP OF THE PHOTO OF DARGELOS. CAREFULLY, WITH INFINITE PRECAUTIONS, SHE SETS IT DOWN, WITH A SCHOOLGIRL'S GRIMACE OF CONCENTRATION; WITH SOMETHING OF THE AIR, THE GESTURES OF A WOMAN PRICKING A WAX IMAGE, AIMING PRECISELY, THEN RAMMING HOME THE PIN.

ACT 3 SCENE 4 – LETHAL MAGIC

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN ON ELIZABETH AND UP ON AGATHA STANDING ON HER PEDESTAL. SHE HAS SHAPESHIFTED INTO DARGELOS. PAUL WITH HIS FRIENDS ENTER AS SCHOOLBOYS FROM A TIME WHEN DARGELOS WAS THE UNRIVALLED MONARCH OF THEIR WORLD. THEY JOIN DARGELOS, WHO COMES DOWN FROM HIS SACRED PLINTH. THEY DANCE A STYLISED RE-ENACTMENT OF THEIR SCHOOLBOY PAST; PAUL AND THE OTHERS APING DARGELOS OBSESSED WITH VIOLENCE AND BARBARIC RITES, DREAMING OF POISONED ARROWS, HOPING TO IMPRESS THEIR HERO, ALL TO CURRY FAVOUR WITH A LOU. DARGELOS SHRUGS AND TURNS AWAY, SCORNFUL AS OF A SILLY GIRL. PAUL STANDS ALONE DURING THE VOICE-OVER:

VO: *The latest addition to their treasure fills the brother and sister with a strange elation. The Room becomes richer by an extra, an incalculable dimension. It acquires the potentials of an anarchist conspiracy; as if a charge of human dynamite had been sunk into it, would be touched off at the appointed hour, explode in blood sublimely, and stream in the*

incandescent firmament of love. They invest the poison with symbolic properties; for Paul it is a swipe at Gérard, for Elizabeth, ecstatic at seeing the old Paul back on the warpath, it is the antidote to pettiness and parochialism; would, must – surely – lead to the final overthrow of Agatha. But Paul fails to respond to witchcraft. He continues to pine.

ACT 3 SCENE 5 – PREMONITION DREAM

PAUL IS JOINED BY ALL THE OTHER DANCERS EXCEPT ELZABETH. THEY FORM A MOUND; AMORPHOUS, ANIMAL-LIKE AND SEDUCTIVE.

ELIZABETH ENTERS, SHE DREAMS SHE IS WALKING THROUGH A FOREST, BUT THE FOREST IS ALSO *THE ROOM*. SHAFTS OF LIGHT CASCADE AS IF BEING FILTERED THROUGH A FOREST OF TREES, OR THROUGH TALL WINDOWS SET IN DARK INTERMITTENT PANELS OF OPACITY. ELIZABETH IS STRIVING TO REACH THE MOUND. IT IS A SLOW DANCE OF FRUSTRATION AND LONGING. EVENTUALLY SHE IS DEFEATED. SHE LIES DOWN SOME DISTANCE FROM THE MOUND AND GOES TO SLEEP. THE MOUND STIRS, RELEASING PAUL FROM ITS ENTRAILS. HE ROUSES ELIZABETH. SHE WAKES WITH A START.

ELIZABETH: Paul, oh Paul! So you're not dead?

PAUL: Yes I am dead, but so are you. You've just died. That's why you can see me. You're going to live with me forever and ever.

THEY DANCE TOGETHER, TWO SOULS FUSING INELUCTIBLY. THEIR DANCE BRINGS THEM CLOSER TO THE MOUND. AS THEY APPROACH A NOISE LIKE BUZZING TELEGRAPH WIRES BECOMES LOUDER AND LOUDER.

PAUL: Listen to the parting knell.

THE NOISE BECOMES UNBEARABLE; DEMENTED. PAUL REJOINS THE MOUND. ELIZABETH WAKES UP SITTING BOLT UPRIGHT; DRENCHED IN SWEAT. THE BUZZING TRANSFORMS INTO THE DOORBELL.

ACT 3 SCENE 6 – DEATH OF THE GAME

AGATHA, ON A WHITE WHIRLWIND, DISHEVELED AND DESPERATE, BOLTS IN, AS SHE ENTERS THE MOUND DISSIPATES AND EXITS.

AGATHA (YELLS): Where's Paul?

ELIZABETH COMES AROUND, SHAKING OFF THE DREAM'S LAST CLINGING THREADS.

ELIZABETH: What do you mean? What's the matter with you? Paul's asleep as usual, I suppose. He said he didn't want to be disturbed.

AGATHA: Quick, quick, run, we must hurry. I had a letter, he said by the time I got it, it would be too late, the poison, he'd have taken the poison, he said he was going to shut you out of his room and take it.

ELIZABETH STANDS STOCK STILL, INCOMPREHENDING. IT MUST BE THE DREAM, SHE THINKS; SHE WAS TURNED TO STONE. AGATHA PUSHES AND PULLS HER TRYING TO URGE HER FORWARD. SUDDENLY SHE IS RUNNING. SHE AND THIS OTHER GIRL ARE RUNNING. SHE REACHES

PAUL'S ROOM, BUT IN THE DREAM STILL, SHE IS IN A SPECTRAL GLADE OF ROARING WIND AND DARKNESS, OF TREES WHIPPED WHITE IN THE INTERLUCENT SPACES; AND THERE, IN THE DISTANCE, STILL THE MOUND, THE REAL NIGHTMARE RELIC OF AN EARTHQUAKE. IT IS PAUL.

ELZABETH: Paul! Paul! Speak to us! Paul!

AGATHA REELS FROM THE VILE AROMA OF THE ROOM. THE FULL IMPACT OF THE DISASTER HITS THEM SIMULTANEOUSLY.

AGATHA: Arrgh, that disgusting smell...

PAUL LIES SUPINE, WEARING A BATHROBE EXACTLY LIKE HIS SISTER'S. HIS EYEBALLS START FROM THEIR SOCKETS, HIS FACE DISTORTS BEYOND RECOGNITION. NEXT TO HIM LIES THE REMAINDER OF THE POISON AND THE PHOTOGRAPH OF DARGELOS. AGATHA RUSHES AT THE UNKNOWN SHAPE THAT IS PAUL. SHE FLINGS HERSELF ON HER KNEES BESIDE HIM, BRINGS HER FACE CLOSE TO HIS AND DISCOVERS HE IS STILL BREATHING.

AGATHA: He's alive; I think he is still alive. Lise, don't just stand there doing nothing, go and get dressed, he may be only doped, this frightful thing may not be deadly poison. Get a thermos bottle, run and fetch the doctor.

ELIZABETH, DREAM-LIKE:

ELZABETH: The doctor's away, he's shooting this weekend...there's nobody...there's nobody.

AGATHA: Quick, quick, get a thermos! He's breathing, he's icy cold. He must have a hot water bottle; we must get some hot coffee down his throat.

ELIZABETH IS AMAZED AT AGATHA'S PRESENCE OF MIND AND GOOD COMMONSENSE. SHE PULLS HERSELF OUT OF HER COMA, AND FLIES INTO ACTION, THEN EXITS TO GET HER THERMOS BOTTLE.

AGATHA (SOBS): Paul! Paul! Open your eyes, speak to me...

PAUL: Drink...

AGATHA: Try to be patient...Elizabeth has gone to get the thermos. She's bringing a hot water bottle.

AGATHA MOISTENS HIS LIPS WITH WATER. SHE TAKES HIS LETTER OUT OF HER POCKET AND SHOWS IT TO HIM.

AGATHA: Paul, what madness is this?

PAUL: It's your fault, Agatha.

AGATHA: My fault? What's my fault?

PAUL: I told you, in the first letter, I love you, Agatha, I love you. But you don't care, you didn't even answer it. This is your fault!

AGATHA: But I've...never had any other letter from you...

THERE IS A MOMENT WHERE BOTH UNSCREW THE DIABOLICAL CONTRIVANCE PIECE BY PIECE. THE CRIMINAL MACHINATIONS OF

ELIZABETH THAT NIGHT IS NOW CLEAR. ELIZABETH RE-ENTERS DURING THE SILENCE. SHE FUSSES ABOUT, LOOKING FOR A CUP, FILLING IT WITH COFFEE. AGATHA THROWS HER ARMS AROUND PAUL.

AGATHA: You mustn't die!

PAUL: Too late.

ELIZABETH APPROACHES PAUL AND HOLDS THE COFFEE OUT TOWARD HIM. SHE IS ARRESTED BY AGATHA'S HYSTERICAL RESPONSE.

AGATHA: Paul, don't touch it!

ELZABETH: You're mad; I'm not trying to poison him.

AGATHA: I wouldn't put it past you.

ELIZABETH SWAYS ON HER FEET. SHE KNOWS SHE IS UNDONE. SHE OPENS HER MOUTH BUT NOTHING COMES OUT. PAUL, WITH HIS DYING BREATH CHANTS:

PAUL: Devil! Filthy devil!

PAUL: Devil! Filthy devil!

PAUL: Devil! Filthy devil!

PAUL: Devil! Filthy devil!

EXHAUSTED HE STOPS.

ELZABETH: Yes, you're right, it's true. I was jealous. I didn't want to lose you. I loathe Agatha. I wasn't going to let her take you away.

ALL IS STILL AS THE CONFESSION SINKS IN, THEN A VOICE-OVER. DURING THE VOICE-OVER ELIZABETH COLLECTS THE PHOTO OF DARGELOS AND THE POISON FROM BESIDE PAUL AND DANCES TO THE TREASURE DRAWER. SHE HOLDS THESE OBJECTS WITH THE OTHER TREASURES ALOFT IN SACRED OBEISANCE.

VO: *Stripped, her disguise thrown off at last, she takes the truth for garment; she grows in stature. As if blown by a storm, her locks stream back and her small fierce brow looms monumental, abstract, above the lucent eyes. She stands fast by the Room; she stands against them all, defying Agatha, Gérard, Paul and the whole world.*

ELIZABETH TAKES THE REVOLVER FROM THE TREASURE AND HOLDS IT HIGH ABOVE HER HEAD.

AGATHA (CLUTCHING PAUL): She's going to shoot! She's going to kill me!

PAUL FALTERS, ALMOST LIFELESS IN HER EMBRACE. ELIZABETH WALKS SLOWLY TOWARDS THE MIRROR. AGATHA WATCHES HER, QUIVERING. SHE WATCHES AS ELIZABETH, THE MANIAC, DISINTERGRATES BEFORE HER VERY EYES, STANDING BEFORE THE MIRROR, GRIMACING, DROOLING, SQUINTING, TEARING HER HAIR OUT BY THE ROOTS.

ELIZABETH APPROACHES PAUL. HE OPENS HIS EYES. SHE ENCOUNTERS A REMOTE YET DWELLING GAZE, EMPTIED OF HATRED NOW, BEGINNING TO DEEPEN SECRETLY WITH CURIOSITY. SHE SEES AND FEELS A SURGE OF TRIUMPH, KNOWS THAT THE KNOT THAT BINDS THEM STILL HOLDS FAST. FIXING HER EYES UNSWERVERINGLY ON HIS, SPINNING OUT THE THREAD OF TRANCE TOWARD HIM, SLOWLY SHE

SPREADS THE NET AROUND HIM, DRAWING HIM BACK TO NOTHINGNESS, BACK INTO THE GAME, BACK INTO THEIR PRIVATE WORLD.

AGATHA BEGINS TO SOB AND SCREAM, BUT PAUL AND ELIZABETH ARE TOGETHER NOW AND DEAF TO HER. THEY ASCEND, TOGETHER THEY ASCEND; ELIZABETH BEARS AWAY HER PREY.

VO: *One little moment longer and they will be where flesh dissolves,
 where souls embrace, where incest lurks no more.*

ELIZABETH WATCHES AS PAUL SINKS AND SUCCUMBS TO HIS MORTAL SPASM. AGATHA SCREAMS, BUT ELIZABETH DOES NOT HEAR HER. SHE LIFTS THE REVOLVER TO HER TEMPLE AND FIRES.

LIGHTS TO BLACK, THEN A GLIMPSE OF DARGELOS SMILING ARROGANTLY ON HIS PLINTH.

Finis.