

# **Phaedra**

by Matthew Maguire

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***Phaedra*****By Matthew Maguire****Characters:**

Faye a young woman of wealth  
 Thomas Faye's husband, a CEO  
 Aricia daughter of the chairman of a multinational ruined by Thomas  
 in a hostile takeover  
 William Thomas' son  
 Angus tutor and friend to William  
 Nonny once Faye's nanny; a life-long friend

**Setting:**

The present moment. An upper class American home. Night.

**Act One**

*Faye wanders in the night murmuring expressions of lust as she tries to find her way out of an invisible maze.*

FAYE

Take me ...

*Light strikes a chair. Faye approaches it. She sits. She struggles to understand what is happening to her. Thomas enters. He touches her. She doesn't respond.*

THOMAS

Couldn't sleep.

FAYE

Neither can I.

THOMAS

Why not?

FAYE

I don't know.

THOMAS

What are you doing?

FAYE

Thinking.

THOMAS

About what?

FAYE  
Nothing.

THOMAS  
Some tea?

FAYE  
No.

•

*William is relaxing with his head in Angus' lap.*

ANGUS  
Why do you sleep alone?

WILLIAM  
So I can breathe.

ANGUS  
Don't you ever feel the urge ... to ... *(at a loss for the word)*

*William wryly completes Angus' thought with a lewd gesture.*

Well ... yes—all right. Don't you?

WILLIAM  
Of course.

ANGUS  
Then?

WILLIAM  
Then *what?*

ANGUS  
If you don't marry and have a child, what happens to the family line?

WILLIAM  
That's a funny thing to ask a bastard.

ANGUS  
Fine. Mock your father. I'll be the first to join you. He's made it his life's mission to fertilize the Western world. But you're his son in every way—it's time you faced it.

WILLIAM

I don't want to stick my head into a domestic trap of squalling infants. I want the wildness of taming horses.

ANGUS

If you don't breed, the air will be a place where nothing moves.

WILLIAM

I love that place. I long for that place.

ANGUS

You're shaking.

WILLIAM

I didn't sleep at all last night. I worked in the stables till one and went straight to bed. I was flooded by a dream of such erotic power I felt I was possessed.

ANGUS

You, the man who's turned his back on love?!

WILLIAM

I awoke in a fever certain the embarrassment of some nocturnal emission would await me. And yes, there it was, but it glistened like quicksilver. I scraped this substance off the sheet and took it to a lab. It was mercury. The growing chaos of my life is so frightening I'm hard pressed not to run to a priest.

ANGUS

Who's the woman?

WILLIAM

I can't say.

ANGUS

Oh come on.

WILLIAM

No.

ANGUS

Why don't you give in? You're in love, it happens to everyone. All right—you said it'd never happen to you. Do you think anyone took you seriously?

WILLIAM

*(smelling the air)*

She must've been here.

ANGUS

Who?

WILLIAM

I have to leave this place.

ANGUS

*(stroking William's head)*

Not yet.

WILLIAM

The walls are too thin and they sweat unknown liquids. The angles are unnatural.

ANGUS

If you leave, your father cuts you off. You'll never get your horse farm.

WILLIAM

The air smells like rutting bodies.

*Angus rubs William's chest.*

WILLIAM

No.

*Angus doesn't stop. William pushes his hands away.*

Stop.

*They make their way into the drawing room where the household is gathered, mid-conversation, after dinner. When William sees Aricia he instinctively turns to go, but Angus restrains him.*

NONNY

I'm so sorry they found little Anastasia's bones.

WILLIAM

All royalty should be found in shallow graves.

*Faye notices William and suddenly hears and sees no one else.*

THOMAS

Watch your tongue. You forget who we are?

WILLIAM

I can't.

THOMAS

Bigger than the Romanovs ever were.

FAYE

They had a certain permission.

THOMAS

And obligations.

FAYE

Have you ever thought about that?

*William is drawn towards Aricia.*

WILLIAM

That I've inherited some deadly noblesse oblige?

FAYE

No.

THOMAS

You've inherited nothing yet!

ARICIA

*(directly in William's face)*

Is that so?

*Faye takes William's arm and leads him away.*

FAYE

Have you?

WILLIAM

What?

FAYE

Thought.

WILLIAM

Of what?

FAYE

Permission.

NONNY

Well, we don't need one.

ANGUS

What?

NONNY

A samovar.

THOMAS

That's right, damn Ruski bullshit, they didn't waste any time building a mafia.

FAYE

Have you ever thought about it?

ANGUS

*(to Thomas)*

It was bound to happen.

THOMAS

I don't believe anything is *bound* to happen.

ANGUS

A pure market is an oxymoron.

THOMAS

How're we supposed to prop them up when they've sold their whole damn system to the black market?

FAYE

Permission.

ARICIA

*(referring to Angus)*

He's right, it's inevitable.

WILLIAM

I don't think I understand what you're saying.

NONNY

Would anyone like a cognac or a sherry?

FAYE

*(taking William's hand)*

I think you do.

NONNY

Faye? *(she doesn't answer)* Faye?

ARICIA

I could go for something, sure.

NONNY

Thomas?

THOMAS

They're using their rubles for wallpaper.

NONNY

Thomas, are you listening?

ARICIA

Always.

WILLIAM

*(subtly trying to remove his hand)*

No.

ANGUS

*(to William)*

Come on, do you good.

THOMAS

Yes, I'll take a Hennessy. William?

*Everyone looks at William trying to extricate himself from Faye—their hands glow with their own light. Faye lets go.*

THOMAS

*(leaving)*

I'm going out.

ARICIA

*(relishing the barb)*

We won't wait up.

*Aricia and Angus manage an awkward exit. William and Faye stare at one another as he backs out the door. She sits in the chair which affects her like a vehicle for erotic transport. Catching herself, she leaps from the chair and stares at it as if it's possessed.*



*She runs out, leaving a startled Nonny alone. Nonny tries to deny her rising despair over Faye's destructive turn.*

NONNY

All quiet now.

*She notices a tea bag on the side of a saucer and lifts it.*

A flea bag! What a delight!

*She sees a corset lying on a chair.*

Look at this! An old-fashioned corset! Now who's been sinkin' their teeth in this?

The hooks and eyes unraveling, eyes still hungry for hooks, hooks still yearning to jump through eyes. Like the hoops of a flea circus. The fleas leap from their bags, through the eyes, and straight onto the hooks. Meat hooks for the miniature, skewers for the carcasses of insects. Dead professionals. No longer ready to do their heady tricks.

But if they were alive they could perform on my body. Lilliputians, clambering over the nooks and hooks and crooks and crannies of my fanny's one-ring circus. Ahh, the big top swarming with little tops. They scurry across the ring and pop through the eye and down the drain into the veins of my love.

My love, my love ... (*moaning*) Ohhhhhh ... Where is he? Moldering in the grave, my poor old lover. Bone man in the bone yard.

*Angus walks in with an armful of cabbage.*

NONNY

You frightened me.

ANGUS

Me?

NONNY

Your body looked as if it was painted on by a gothic devil.

ANGUS

You drinking again?

NONNY

Your crotch was a bloated tulip with petals painted like membranes.

ANGUS

I'm a gardener, not some demon.

NONNY

No, you're the tutor.

ANGUS

Was.

NONNY

Are.

ANGUS

As you will.

NONNY

You hear them again last night?

ANGUS

They're just babies.

NONNY

But Faye acts like she's dying. She can't soothe them. You don't know what I'm going through. I can't help her.

ANGUS

What's wrong with her?

*Pause. Nonny evades the question.*

NONNY

I wish we could soundproof the nursery.

ANGUS

*(grunting)*

Hmm.

NONNY

Does that sound callous?

ANGUS

Not as bad as baking them for dinner.

NONNY

They suckle so hard they've worn out three wet nurses.

ANGUS

Hungry little buggers.

NONNY

And Philly's gettin' teeth, so I know the new one's gonna quit any day.

*Angus puts away the cabbage. Nonny sneaks a drink. Aricia walks in and catches her.*

ARICIA

Nothing like a good stiff shot on the sly.

NONNY

Listen here, you little Miss-whatever-you-are, I ought to scratch—

*She is interrupted by Faye entering.*

FAYE

Nonny, draw me a bath, please.

NONNY

You've already had three.

FAYE

*(leaving)*

One more.

NONNY

*(glaring at Aricia, as she leaves)*

You'll have to excuse me.

*Pause.*

ANGUS

You've upset this house.

ARICIA

It didn't start with me.

ANGUS

Why don't you leave William alone?

ARICIA

You know why.

ANGUS

His father will never accept you.

ARICIA

If I could work or live anywhere else I would, but Thomas blocks my every move. When he *invited* me to live here, what he really meant was "welcome to your cell."

ANGUS

If he catches you with his son, you'll never get out.

ARICIA

What excites me the most is the challenge. Imagine the thrill of seducing someone who swears he'll never love.

ANGUS

Won't work. Your ambition's too obvious.

ARICIA

You're wrong about me. It's beyond ambition. Watching him struggle against what he wants so much--that arouses me.

ANGUS

The chance to regain your position is more like it.

ARICIA

The boy doesn't know he's in love with lust, and he's found an infinite delay mechanism. Cranks me like a bitch in heat.

*William enters. He stops short when he sees Aricia. Nonny, right behind him, pulls him aside.*

NONNY

William, I need to tell you something. *(pause)* Faye's dying. I don't know of what.

WILLIAM

I know.

•

*Alone, Faye dances in awkward lurches because her yearning won't let her be still. She hears Thomas coming and stops. He sits and opens the market listings. Faye embraces him from behind. As he responds she moves away, silent. He waits.*

FAYE

Make him go.

THOMAS

He's my son.

FAYE

And I'm your wife. (*pause*) Aren't I?

THOMAS

It'd make me look weak.

FAYE

Can't you find a way?

THOMAS

The market could crash on the rumors alone.

FAYE

Can't you separate this from business?

THOMAS

I want him to take over the firm when I retire.

FAYE

What about *our* sons?

THOMAS

They're still nursing, for chrissakes!

FAYE

What does that matter?

THOMAS

Will's first in line.

FAYE

He's the bastard child of your fling with some Amazon!

THOMAS

You promised you wouldn't!

FAYE

Our sons deserve better. And he knows what's at stake, that's why he hates me.

THOMAS

That's simply not true.

FAYE

You have to trust me.

THOMAS

*(pause)* I do.

FAYE

Then send him away before it becomes a crisis.

THOMAS

What has he done to offend you?

FAYE

The way he looks at me.

THOMAS

It's only natural a young man might have some resentment for a stepmother. Don't take it personally.

FAYE

Have you seen how he looks at me?

THOMAS

I haven't seen him look at you at all.

*She is silent, moves away.*

What if it came out that the only reason is "my wife wanted it?"

FAYE

Thomas, *(pause)* I hate him.

*Thomas walks out. Alone, Faye is driven back to her awkward dance.*

FAYE

William ... William ... oh Will ...

Bodies lying in a heap, grunting, rutting. It's so laughable; the grotesque shapes the flesh can make. Organs jutting out like red nosed clowns, or hiding coyly, or parading HMS Pinafore engorged. Spewing drops of fluid like fluttering pigeons, those awkward birds that waddle so crudely, yet, when swooping together in their relentless circles so hypnotically beautiful. Thrusting. Will he love me? So silly, makes me want to weep. I have no body. Nothing but a swirling mass of contradictions. All so balled up that it looks like flesh, but it's really petrified struggles. My lips the hardening of a million cries. My breasts the

calcification of countless howlings. Can he love me? Yes, yes, yes. My skin will soothe him. Luscious juices like marraca rinds pouring in his ears, whispering, always whispering, "Love me." Even though my body is a mirage, love me.

*Murmuring "love me" over and over, Faye implodes. Nonny enters and finds Faye out of control.*

NONNY

Darling, what's wrong?

FAYE

I need more light.

*Their cries pile on top of one another.*

NONNY

Why don't— [you turn on the lamp?]

FAYE

Light to wash away—

NONNY

What are you— [talking about?]

FAYE

Wash away this ... (she can't say)

NONNY

Faye, what's— [wrong with you?]

FAYE

More light, more light, more light!

NONNY

*(turning on a lamp)*

That's easy.

FAYE

No! Turn it off, turn it off!

NONNY

But you said— [you wanted more light.]

FAYE

I've never had light, always shadows, bring me shadows, more shadows!

*Nonny seizes Faye to calm her. They struggle.*

NONNY  
Calm your— [self!]

FAYE  
Shadows—

NONNY  
Stop this— [craziness!]

FAYE  
I need the dark—

NONNY  
Please!

FAYE  
Shadows, shadows ...

*Faye collapses in Nonny's arms.*

NONNY  
There, there ... there, there ... there, there ...

FAYE  
I belong in the dark.

NONNY  
What's the matter with you, my little one?

FAYE  
Nonny dear, please don't call me that.

*Nonny tightens her vice-like grip on Faye.*

NONNY  
My little one.

FAYE  
Don't call me that.

NONNY  
My little one.

FAYE  
Don't call me that.





NONNY

I know when you're holding something back. If you think you can shut me out, I think it's time I left this house.

FAYE

*(grabbing her arm)*

Nonny—

NONNY

How can I watch you starve yourself to death and never ask why?

FAYE

I can't.

NONNY

How many pounds this month! I'll have to hospitalize you, and I'm not supposed to— [know why?]

FAYE

No!

NONNY

Then who am I?

FAYE

I love you.

NONNY

Then let me help you.

FAYE

I don't know how.

NONNY

If you're lost, I'm lost.

FAYE

I know.

NONNY

I'm afraid you're going to die.

FAYE

I am.

NONNY

No!

FAYE

It's the only way.

NONNY

I'm not going to watch you die.

FAYE

What are you doing?

NONNY

Leaving.

FAYE

No.

NONNY

Well?

*Pause. Faye can't speak. Nonny turns to go.*

FAYE

Don't leave me.

NONNY

Tell me, or I walk out now.

FAYE

All right.

*Faye hesitates. Nonny waits.*

I keep dreaming of a bull, a sweating black bull, its flanks are heaving and its enormous rod is full and pulsing. He snorts and phlegm shoots out his nostrils, they're gaping pink and chafed. He stamps his right hoof in the dust and an Arabian carpet appears. He lowers his engorged loins onto the carpet and pumps his thick tool over the intricate design. A bull's cock plunging through the labyrinth. It's William.

NONNY

God help you.

FAYE

Too late.

NONNY

You mustn't tell Thomas.

FAYE

And you mustn't.

NONNY

I'd pull all my teeth first.

FAYE

Now will you let me die in silence?

•

*William and Aricia seem separated by an invisible plane.*

WILLIAM

*(whispers)*

Aricia, where are you?

ARICIA

I'm in the Pure Room. Bathing in come. In.

WILLIAM

I can't.

ARICIA

Come in.

WILLIAM

I can't.

ARICIA

Come soon.

WILLIAM

Whisper.

ARICIA

Whisper to me.

WILLIAM

Soon.

ARICIA

I don't dare look at the walls.

WILLIAM

Close your eyes.

ARICIA  
Come to me.

WILLIAM  
I can't.

*Aricia charges at William, their bodies strike like animals in combat. They fall, tangled.*

ARICIA  
Kiss me.

WILLIAM  
I'm too afraid.

ARICIA  
What can you do?

*Pause.*

WILLIAM  
Tell you a story?

ARICIA  
*(laughing)*  
Yes.

WILLIAM  
It's about distance.

ARICIA  
Distanza.

WILLIAM  
The ship was sailing.

ARICIA  
La nave salpava.

WILLIAM  
The waves licking at its hull.

ARICIA  
The bow splitting the foam.

WILLIAM  
Water, luscious water.

ARICIA

The ship yearning to rise above the waves.

WILLIAM

The waves clutching with hungry fingers. The ship tumbling,  
sliding down viscous ridges of distance.

ARICIA

How many days, how many years? have we been ...

WILLIAM

Have we been at ...

*Long pause.*

ARICIA

Sea.

WILLIAM

Are your hands chafed?

ARICIA

Is your skin raw?

WILLIAM

It's been so long.

•

*Faye walks to the chair, stares at it, sits, and crosses her legs. The light grows brighter on her face.*

ANGUS

Faye plays with the top button of her blouse.

NONNY

You keep your lizard's tongue off the mistress.

ANGUS

Her eyes radiate. Her thighs part. Is she thinking of a lover?

NONNY

She's thinking of her husband.

ANGUS

You know she's not.

NONNY

When did a tutor get the second sight?

ANGUS

From my wife. My love had a growth in the small of her back, a sac of tranquility, an elegant membrane. The sac was bulbous, traced with a lacework of faint blue veins. It sang. Nothing vulgar, no caterwauling in the shower. No. This was a sound that if I lay my head near it, say—on her shoulders—I could hear it faintly, as if it were coming from some great distance. It made many kinds of music depending on her mood. Sometimes Puccini, sometimes a tango. (*He sings a melody*) The surgeon wanted to remove it. She refused. You'd never know it caused her any problem. Ain't no other suffered like my lover. Things grow. Grass grows through concrete. The essence of life is miraculous.

NONNY

You're gettin' above yourself.

ANGUS

After she died I kept that sac. Helps me see things.

NONNY

Liar.

*Arcia and William enter from opposite sides of the room.*

ANGUS

Madam's thinking of the chair in the sunlight. And, yes, of course she's thinking of a lover. But the lover is not hers.

ARICIA

Did you say something?

ANGUS

Faye is thinking of a room in which sits William. William is thinking.

WILLIAM

Did you say something?

ANGUS

William is thinking of another room in which sits Arcia.

FAYE

There's going to be a flood.

NONNY  
*(knowing too much)*

Faye, don't.

ANGUS  
Madam, it hasn't rained in years.

FAYE  
It'll fill this room. I've seen it.

ANGUS  
What do you mean? we're on high ground.

FAYE  
I can see it.

*Faye shows them the marks of high water lines on the walls.*

Look at this, eleven years ago, and here, seventeen.

*Disturbed, Nonny and Angus exit swiftly. Faye, with a reluctant glance at William, follows.*

WILLIAM  
Why do you stay?

ARICIA  
Why do you?

WILLIAM  
There's something I have to do.

ARICIA  
I feel the same.

WILLIAM  
But he destroyed your family.

ARICIA  
No. My father's arrogance did that. He left the company vulnerable by expanding too fast and acquiring too much debt. He swore no one would ever dare a takeover.

WILLIAM  
But my father left him nothing, no face saving merger, no golden parachute, he deliberately crushed him.



ARICIA

I saw it coming three months before. Your father has people on his team that hate him. I had three calls giving me inside information. I begged my father to protect our position. He wouldn't listen to his daughter. He thought he was a tightrope walker.

*William starts to leave.*

Where are you going?

WILLIAM

It's feeding time.

ARICIA

We're never alone.

WILLIAM

I don't think we—

ARICIA

Something's happening to me.

WILLIAM

I need to get to the stables.

ARICIA

It's ... never happened before.

WILLIAM

Yes.

ARICIA

Do you know what I mean?

WILLIAM

Please.

*Pause.*

ARICIA

Please.

WILLIAM

What?

ARICIA

Touch my lips.

*William touches her lips, then abruptly leaves. Alone, Aricia touches her lips.*

He touched my lips. He touched my lips.

•

*Aricia leaves as Faye enters. William enters.*

WILLIAM

I heard what you tried to do to me.

*Pause.*

FAYE

You don't understand the reason.

WILLIAM

It's ironic. I was going until I learned you wanted to throw me out of my own house. Then of course I had to stay.

FAYE

You don't understand.

WILLIAM

I'd be so happy—

FAYE

*(overlapping)*

He told you?

WILLIAM

—far away from— [you]

FAYE

How could he?!

WILLIAM

He didn't.

FAYE

Then who?

WILLIAM

But I'm not going. *(pause)* Not yet.

*William leaves. Faye is alone.*

FAYE

Funny how things stick in the mind: a chair in the sunlight.

*Thomas enters.*

FAYE

Take off your shirt.

THOMAS

All things come to those who wait?

FAYE

Please.

THOMAS

*(taking his shirt off)*

All things.

FAYE

Turn around.

THOMAS

*(turning his back to her)*

Okay.

FAYE

*(tracing on his lower back)*

Here it is—eleven years ago, and here *(between his shoulder blades)*, seventeen.

THOMAS

*(turning, grasping her)*

Please.

*Faye wrenches herself away from him and leaves. Thomas fucks the chair. Nonny watches from an unseen distance.*

THOMAS

Strip for me. I wanna hear the crowd get raucous. I want to see the waitress spill the beer. I want to watch you step out of a sea shell. Venus born in a Bourbon Street strip joint. Classy, rattling snare drum. Ass grinding like a jackhammer on my love nerve. Whiskey burns my throat. Pasties, g-string, distant points on a constellation as yet uncharted.

*Nonny clears her throat. Thomas stops. Nonny approaches.*

NONNY  
Working late?

THOMAS  
Yeah.

*Nonny massages Thomas' back.*

THOMAS  
Not the back, the neck.

NONNY  
All right.

THOMAS  
The neck.

NONNY  
I'm getting there.

THOMAS  
*(screaming)*  
The neck!

*The uproar brings Aricia into the doorway where she observes unnoticed.*

NONNY  
What's wrong with you?!!

THOMAS  
*(perfectly composed)*  
I had a perfect butler once—humble man. He'd do anything to please me—lick my ass if I wanted. One day I asked for a glass of water, and he brought me a bottle of 1938 Taittinger Blanc de Blanc and served it for me in a Tiffany crystal chalice. When he finished pouring I fired him. In order to teach him that pleasure consists not in what I enjoy, but in having my own way.

NONNY  
*(offended)*  
I don't work for you.

THOMAS  
Then why are you rubbing me?

*Nonny storms out. Aricia approaches him.*

ARICIA

Poor Thomas, you think of your dicky as a kind of Leviathan, like one of those whales you slaughter on your shipping routes.

THOMAS

I destroyed your father, ate his company, and spit out the bones.

ARICIA

True, I hear it's fat, but can it spout like Moby?

THOMAS

Do you know why I took you into my house?

ARICIA

Do you know why I stay?

THOMAS

You're a living souvenir of my greatest deal.

ARICIA

I'm waiting for the right moment.

THOMAS

Snipe all you want from the junk bond pits because that's where you'll stay. I've seen to that, blackballed you on the exchange so you have to suck my charity.

ARICIA

Is that why you want me here? Makes you feel potent?

THOMAS

I want you where I can watch you.

ARICIA

I'm so thirsty.

*Aricia downs glass after glass of water unable to slake her thirst. Thomas takes the pitcher and leaves.*

•

*Angus is peering around a screen when Nonny enters.*

NONNY

What are you doing?

ANGUS

She's in the bath again.

NONNY

I know that.

ANGUS

Always splashing—and always silent.

NONNY

She's afraid of bursting into flames.

ANGUS

Why?

NONNY

She's heard stories.

ANGUS

Could that happen?

NONNY

Someone is watching.

ANGUS

Who?

*He turns back to Nonny.*

I'm starving.

NONNY

Go eat.

ANGUS

Look at us, still in our formal attire, and no one's had anything to eat but potatoes and tea for weeks.

NONNY

That's a lie.

ANGUS

The cupboard is bare.

*Aricia strips William of his shirt. Angus and Nonny watch.*

NONNY

Gus, we've got to keep this house together.

ANGUS

I'm trying.

NONNY

Stop that girl.

ANGUS

No.

NONNY

She's driving him mad.

ANGUS

Don't blame her.

NONNY

Why not?

ANGUS

The madness is in him.

NONNY

He's a good boy.

ANGUS

A time bomb.

NONNY

How can you say that about him?

ANGUS

I love him.

NONNY

Yeah.

ANGUS

Didn't I teach him everything I know?

NONNY

Yes, Angus.

ANGUS

The poor girl's been shut out like a leper.

NONNY

Bullshit.

ANGUS

I saw her every day as if it were late at night and it was my job to close the cafe.

NONNY

You never worked in a cafe.

ANGUS

And she was locked in an embrace with the last customer in a desperate attempt to make contact—with someone. Anyone. *(pause)* The Cafe De Flore. Tea. Chocolat. Welsh Rarebit. She was a rare bite.

NONNY

Stop it, you wanker.

*Aricia leans in to kiss William. Thomas enters.*

THOMAS

What's this?

*William pulls on his shirt and leaves.*

ARICIA

Your power died centuries ago.

THOMAS

Cross me and you won't walk away.

ARICIA

You're a fossil.

THOMAS

Leave my son alone.

ARICIA

Tell that to him.

THOMAS

Do you like living in this house?

ARICIA

Such a honking sound.



THOMAS

It could be your grave.

ARICIA

I saw a charnel house once at St. Catherine's Monastery. The monks believe it's the place God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. They use a whole building to store the skulls of the monks who've died there. Sixteen centuries worth. I walked into the first room; floor to ceiling skulls. I took it in a long time--how some skulls rested on top of others; one as if embracing; another pressuring about to attack. I never believed a pile of bone could be so expressive. The room seemed alive. I never went back. But this place is just like that charnel house. I'm the burning bush and you're the skull.

*Faye enters and seems paralyzed. Everyone surrounds her except Aricia who strolls off.*

THOMAS

Faye.

*No response.*

Faye?

*He touches her arm but she shows no recognition. In frustration he follows Aricia. Nonny motions for Angus to leave.*

NONNY

Angus.

*Angus leaves.*

NONNY

Where is your husband?

FAYE

He's not here.

NONNY

You know he is.

FAYE

Do you see him?

NONNY

You're deluded.

FAYE

He's never here, he's always vanishing.

NONNY

And when he walks through that door?

FAYE

Maybe he'll forgive me.

NONNY

His last lover is dead. The mother of his—

FAYE

It was self-defense.

NONNY

That was never proven.

FAYE

Are you trying to frighten me?

NONNY

I want you to stop.

FAYE

That's not possible.

NONNY

Can't you see what's going to happen?

FAYE

My eyes are open.

NONNY

Even if you could fool Thomas, you still can't have William. He hates women.

FAYE

Then I've got no competition.

NONNY

You're talking like a fool.

FAYE

I can touch him.

NONNY

He hates you.

FAYE

He's got a wild streak he can't control.

NONNY

So do you.

FAYE

We'll smash into one another.

*Pause.*

NONNY

*(struggling to control herself)*

My sweet girl.

FAYE

What?!

NONNY

What about me?

FAYE

Nothing's going to happen to you.

NONNY

When this destroys you, where will I go?

FAYE

Please—don't.

NONNY

Where?

FAYE

Then there's only one answer.

NONNY

No, stop it.

FAYE

I have to die.

NONNY

No! No! You're just crazed, no!

•

THOMAS  
What do you think a larvae is?

ANGUS  
It's the earliest stages of an insect, right?

THOMAS  
I don't know.

ANGUS  
Why?

THOMAS  
Don't know, just thinking.

ANGUS  
*(getting up)*  
D' you want anything?

THOMAS  
Where are you going?

ANGUS  
The kitchen.

THOMAS  
Oh.

ANGUS  
You all right?

THOMAS  
Why?

ANGUS  
You seem worried.

THOMAS  
Pacific rim.

ANGUS  
Is that all?

*Aricia enters, sees them both, and starts to leave.*

THOMAS  
Sit down.

ARICIA  
*(sitting)*  
You never cease to amaze me.

ANGUS  
I'll be going.

ARICIA  
G' night.

THOMAS  
Check all the doors.

*Angus leaves.*

That advice you gave me paid off better than anything all year.  
How do you do it?

ARICIA  
The basics: observation, analysis, and luck.

THOMAS  
It was brilliant.

ARICIA  
Thank you.

THOMAS  
You have anything else for me?

ARICIA  
*(pointedly)*  
No.

THOMAS  
What do you mean, "no"?

ARICIA  
Not until I have a completely different contract.

THOMAS  
Out of the question.

ARICIA

Do you believe that when a man and a woman are left alone in a room—no matter who they are—they will surely copulate?

THOMAS

No. (*pause*) Do you?

ARICIA

I have trouble with the *old* stories.

THOMAS

Harsh.

ARICIA

Listen to you.

THOMAS

I can be very gentle.

ARICIA

I read you sleep with your thing in a glove of Vaseline.

THOMAS

Myth.

ARICIA

Like everything about you?

THOMAS

No one's more real.

ARICIA

Like a rock, heh?

THOMAS

Why are you always on the attack?

ARICIA

Some day you'll stumble.

THOMAS

You hate me that much.

ARICIA

Not anymore.

THOMAS

I'm disappointed in you.

ARICIA

How so?

THOMAS

I've never known you to lie.

ARICIA

I lie all the time.

THOMAS

You're lying right now.

ARICIA

Perhaps.

THOMAS

I've come to depend on you.

ARICIA

You must be desperate.

THOMAS

Do you think when two people are alone anything can happen?

ARICIA

Yes.

THOMAS

I think it's all very volatile.

ARICIA

Being alone?

THOMAS

Everything.

ARICIA

Can you smell the sulphur and the pitch?

THOMAS

Can you hear the wailing?

ARICIA  
*(laughing)*

Sometimes you can be very funny.

THOMAS

That's why they pay me the big bucks.

ARICIA

And they are big.

THOMAS

Yes, they are. Do you need more?

ARICIA

Need you ask?

THOMAS

Have you seen Faye?

ARICIA

Yes.

THOMAS

Well?

ARICIA

Well?

THOMAS

Where is she?

ARICIA

In the greenhouse. When I walked through she was lying naked, face down, writhing in a bed of begonias. She has a rash across her ass—most unattractive—but the pumping she was doing was appealing. She was clawing at the dirt and shoving it beneath her. It was strange, but I think I understood.

THOMAS

I'm afraid I have a meeting.

ARICIA

This late?

THOMAS

It's already midday on the Nikkei.



ARICIA  
It is late.

THOMAS  
Yes it is.

ARICIA  
Very late.

THOMAS  
Late.

ARICIA  
Yes.

THOMAS  
You'll excuse me?

ARICIA  
Of course.

*Thomas walks to the door and turns back to Aricia.*

THOMAS  
Good night.

ARICIA  
Good night.

THOMAS  
Good night.

ARICIA  
Good night.

THOMAS  
Good night.

ARICIA  
Good night.

*Thomas leaves. Aricia runs to the threshold and sinks, head in hands, then slowly stands rejoicing, elation rising on her face. Nonny enters urgently.*

NONNY  
Where's Thomas?

ARICIA  
It's too late.

NONNY  
What do you mean?

ARICIA  
He's dead.

NONNY  
Oh Lord!

*Thomas speaks at a distance as if in a coma. The others do not hear.*

THOMAS  
Yes ... (pause) There was an accident, and I—

ARICIA  
A call just came.

THOMAS  
... and ...

NONNY  
Oh my God—Faye— (pause) How did it happen?

THOMAS  
I've got to get—

ARICIA  
They found his car in the river. It went off an embankment. His driver was dead behind the wheel, but they haven't found him yet. He must've been washed down river.

THOMAS  
The hounds ...

NONNY  
Then maybe he's alive.

*Aricia shakes her head no.*

THOMAS  
The hounds of hell snarling ...

NONNY  
I never thought he could die.

THOMAS

My strength is gone.

ARICIA

Maybe he can't.

NONNY

Don't talk nonsense.

ARICIA

Do you know what this means?

NONNY

No.

ARICIA

The board will choose a new CEO.

NONNY

How can you think about that when—

ARICIA

*(commanding)*

Be quiet. *(pause)* Who will it be?

THOMAS

Gotta get back.

ARICIA

Go get Faye.

*Nonny runs to the sleeping Faye and shakes her awake.*

THOMAS

I remember her in Manila during the rainy season. She'd walk along the terrace in a sarong, her tits bare, with one of those pyramidal Chinese hats on her head—huge.

FAYE

Let me go.

THOMAS

The rain would pelt her until the paper fan she carried disintegrated. Then she'd get another fan and continue to defy the monsoon. My cock would stiffen.

FAYE

Let me go.

NONNY

No, listen, I have something to tell you.

FAYE

*(groggy)*

Sleep ... sleep ...

NONNY

Listen! Thomas is dead.

FAYE

What!

THOMAS

Have to get back.

NONNY

Thomas is dead.

FAYE

How do you know this?

NONNY

I'm so sorry.

FAYE

How do you know?!

NONNY

You're free.

FAYE

*(dazed)*

Free?

NONNY

Free to love William.

THOMAS

Have to ...

FAYE

*(moaning)*

Ohhhhh ...

NONNY

Let me speak to him for you.

FAYE

No! Let me die.

*Faye passes out. Nonny touches her face.*

NONNY

Never.

*As Nonny leaves, Thomas passes her unseen. Outside Nonny discovers Angus.*

NONNY

Where were you?

ANGUS

Looking for Aricia.

NONNY

Where?

ANGUS

The greenhouse.

NONNY

You spying again?

*Pause. Annoyed, he starts to leave. Nonny catches him.*

Angus?

ANGUS

Yes?

NONNY

Will you ...

ANGUS  
(pausing)

Will I what?

NONNY  
(coming closer)

Would you ...

*She starts to tremble. A horrible resistance builds up in her.*

ANGUS  
Are you (*pause*) asking ...

NONNY  
(*pause*)  
Oh never mind.

*Aricia enters.*

ANGUS  
I've been looking for you.

ARICIA  
Yes?

ANGUS  
(*to Nonny*)  
Would you excuse us?

NONNY  
Aren't you a little old?

ANGUS  
(*waiting*)  
Well?

*Nonny leaves.*

William needs to talk to you.

ARICIA  
I'm afraid to see him.

ANGUS  
What about "the challenge?"

ARICIA  
Everything's different now.

ANGUS  
Why?

ARICIA  
Rebelling against his old man excited him. With Thomas dead I'm sure he'll lose interest in me.

ANGUS  
You're saying you feel something?

ARICIA  
I love him.

ANGUS  
I'm astonished.

ARICIA  
You insult me.

ANGUS  
Forgive me.

ARICIA  
*(pausing)*  
All right.

ANGUS  
I know he loves you.

ARICIA  
There's nothing I want more.

*William enters.*

WILLIAM  
I'm meeting with the board, but before I do there's something I  
have to talk to you about.

*He glances at Angus who understands to leave.*

Now that he's dead, I suppose you want to leave?

ARICIA  
*(struggling)*  
Well, I hadn't ...

WILLIAM  
Every firm wants you, and now there's no one stopping you.

ARICIA  
I don't know what to say.

WILLIAM

With your ability you'll make millions, then you'll start your own company.

ARICIA

I see.

WILLIAM

Whatever's happened in this house between you and me is in the past. You're free. I need you to know that.

ARICIA

Thank you, but do you think that's what I want?

WILLIAM

Are you negotiating?

ARICIA

I'm trying to tell you—

WILLIAM

Some on the board want you. They know Faye's unstable, and the old money doesn't want the stigma of a bastard son at the helm. They'd rather claim the glory of healing bad blood, *and* put a financial genius in the chair.

ARICIA

That's hard to believe.

WILLIAM

And I agree with them.

ARICIA

What do you mean?

WILLIAM

If you'll stay, I'll throw my proxy in for you. It'll be your company, and rightfully so.

ARICIA

I'm afraid I'm dreaming.

WILLIAM

Maybe we are.

*Thomas appears in the distance.*



THOMAS

Have to get back ...

ARICIA

You'd give up your own chance for my sake?

WILLIAM

My reason is caving in to something so passionate it's choking me.

ARICIA

Why?

WILLIAM

I don't want to breathe any more except with your breath. For months I've been incapable of showing you what I feel. Struggling to get free from you. I see you everywhere, in the shadows, even in my horses' eyes. Forgive me. Love is so strange to me my words are all mangled. But ugly as they are, every one's a vow. Please don't reject them. Without you I never would have spoken.

*Angus enters. In another room Thomas kneels by Faye's side and caresses his sleeping wife.*

THOMAS

My poor sleeping one, sleep while you can.

ANGUS

Faye wants to see you.

WILLIAM

*(Looking at Aricia)*

Tell her I can't. I'm waiting for an answer.

THOMAS

The sap is rising.

ANGUS

You've got no choice.

WILLIAM

Hold her back.

THOMAS

Will you wear the red wig? Will you ride the bright lights? Will you do it with the peacocks around us?

ARICIA

Let her come. *(pause)* I accept all your offers.

THOMAS

Will you love me?

*As Aricia leaves, Faye rises, Thomas fades away, and Faye walks through a maze to William.*

FAYE

I found you.

WILLIAM

Yes, you've quite a nose.

FAYE

I can't banter today. *(to Angus)* Would you excuse us?

WILLIAM

No.

FAYE

*(commanding)*

Angus.

*Angus leaves.*

I know you must hate me, and I understand, I've given you every reason.

WILLIAM

What makes you say that?

FAYE

Please don't patronize me. I've come to ask for your help.

WILLIAM

What a droll wit.

FAYE

Not for me, for my sons. I'm not going to live much longer, and with Thomas dead I know the board will eliminate my boys. And because I've made you an enemy I'm afraid you'll turn your anger on them.

WILLIAM

I don't feel anything like that.

FAYE

It's only natural that you would, the things I've done to you. But you didn't know the real reason why.

WILLIAM

Oh, but I do.

FAYE

*(pause)*

Really? *(pause as he looks away)* Do you?

*Faye approaches William. He backs away.*

FAYE

You have to face me.

WILLIAM

Why?

FAYE

Your father's dead.

WILLIAM

*(casually)*

He always has been.

FAYE

Don't joke about death.

WILLIAM

So what's changed?

FAYE

There's nothing stopping us.

WILLIAM

Did he?

FAYE

Yes.

WILLIAM

Interesting.

FAYE

*(exploding)*

Don't stand there with your damn cold mask and pretend you feel nothing!

WILLIAM

I don't wear a mask. That's why I'm offensive to people like you—I say what I think.

FAYE

You're hiding right now.

WILLIAM

Just what am I hiding, "Mother?"

FAYE

Don't call me that!

WILLIAM

*You're* hiding! You'd like to cut my throat.

FAYE

No, I want to stroke it. And that's what you want.

WILLIAM

So says my father's merry widow.

FAYE

I can break down your walls.

WILLIAM

Is that a challenge?

FAYE

Yes.

WILLIAM

A sexual challenge?

FAYE

Yes.

WILLIAM

How titillating.

FAYE

There's a bottle of grain alcohol in the cabinet. One hundred and ninety proof—one of the ways Thomas got his manly laughs. If you give me half an hour with that bottle I'll show you what you really want.

WILLIAM

That stuff's poison!

FAYE

Are you afraid?

WILLIAM

Of what?

FAYE

Me?

WILLIAM

It can make you blind.

FAYE

That's what you are now. Shall I get the bottle?

WILLIAM

After this you'll let me alone?

FAYE

If that's what you want.

WILLIAM

It's a small price—get it.

*Faye gets the bottle and two shot glasses. She opens and pours as they speak.*

FAYE

This is pleasant.

WILLIAM

The end's in sight.

FAYE

*(teasing)*

It will be.

WILLIAM

Look at the name of this stuff!

FAYE  
*(laughing, reading)*

"Graves."

WILLIAM  
 Doesn't that make you uneasy?

FAYE  
 It's where I'll be if I can't have you.

WILLIAM  
 I'll warn you—

FAYE  
 Please do.

WILLIAM  
 I've never been drunk.

FAYE  
 You've never had me.

*William picking up his glass.*

WILLIAM  
 Shall we?

FAYE  
*(toasting)*  
 Love moves.

WILLIAM  
*(toasting)*  
 To the hunt.

FAYE  
 For the secret soul.

*They drink. Both react to their innards in flames.*

WILLIAM  
 Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

FAYE  
*(gasping)*  
 Yes--yes---yes!

WILLIAM

*(not quite recovered)*

'Must taste a lot ... like love.

FAYE

Like fire.

WILLIAM

Like death.

FAYE

Pour another.

*He pours two more shots.*

WILLIAM

Are you having "a good time?"

FAYE

Oh yes. Are you?

WILLIAM

I'm intrigued.

FAYE

*(toasting)*

To your sweet cock.

*They drink.*

WILLIAM

*(gasping, laughing)*

May it ever wave.

FAYE

*(laughing gaily)*

See? Something's happening.

WILLIAM

Always is.

FAYE

Did you know that people have a sexual thought every twelve seconds?

WILLIAM

If that's true about your kind, you're in worse pain than I thought.

FAYE

Pour another and you'll feel it.

WILLIAM

I think you're drunk.

FAYE

I became drunk the first time I saw you. Do you remember? You embraced me.

WILLIAM

Humoring my father.

FAYE

I touched your (*groping for the word*) ...cheek! (*laughing happily that she found it*) I couldn't remember the word for the part of you that I ... that I ... touched. So many parts of you—so many small innocent touches—walking to the table ... brushing up against your sleeve ... would make me tingle. Could you tell? Could you, could you ...

*Rather than getting drunk, William becomes more precise, more fluid, as if he is rising above his body.*

WILLIAM

I've always been acutely aware of people's unconscious signals.

FAYE

So you knew?

WILLIAM

Yes.

FAYE

So do you think twelve people think of sex every ... (*groping for the sense, and laughing*) no, that's not it. So you knew?

WILLIAM

(*laughing*)

And I knew that you knew that I knew.

FAYE

You're so charming when you laugh.

WILLIAM

That's not a laugh.



FAYE

Oh you want to quibble?

WILLIAM

Qui?

FAYE

*(whirligigging)*

A quibble. A quibble on a quim. A quibble is a pun. Would you like to hear a quibble on a quim? Would that be fun? What would you like to hear? Dear? A quim on a quibble?

WILLIAM

No.

FAYE

So how much did you know? Everything?

WILLIAM

Yes.

FAYE

We don't have to talk then, do we?

WILLIAM

I'd like that.

FAYE

So would I.

*They stare at one another in silence.*

FAYE

Are you a virgin?

WILLIAM

Isn't everyone?

FAYE

I've got children.

WILLIAM

Contact between two people is an illusion.

FAYE

Then how'd I conceive two sons?

WILLIAM

You wanted it so badly you dreamt it.

FAYE

Then let me dream again.

WILLIAM

You are.

FAYE

Then dance with me.

WILLIAM

We are.

FAYE

We're not moving.

WILLIAM

The dance is in the eyes.

FAYE

For someone who doesn't believe in love, you're very—

WILLIAM

Lie down.

FAYE

All right.

WILLIAM

Spread your arms.

FAYE

Like so?

WILLIAM

*(standing over her)*

Can you feel the distance between us?

FAYE

Yes.

WILLIAM

It will never go away.

FAYE

Lie next to me.

*He does.*

WILLIAM  
*(deliberately)*

Take my hand.

*She does.*

FAYE

Do you feel what's passing through our fingers?

WILLIAM

Bite my hand.

*She does. William gasps in pain. He rises calmly and drives his point home.*

Understand that you have never *touched* me.

*Faye rises.*

FAYE

Pour another.

WILLIAM

You're drunk enough.

FAYE

Are you?

WILLIAM

I warned you.

FAYE

*(trying to control herself)*

You made a deal!

WILLIAM

Fine.

*William pours two more shots, and they drink.*

FAYE

Ohhhh, it goes right through me!

WILLIAM

Almost pure.

FAYE

Like you—almost.

WILLIAM

It reminds me of riding.

FAYE

Would you like to go riding?

WILLIAM  
*(a little distant)*

I already am.

FAYE

You can ride me.

WILLIAM

I knew I wasn't ready to ride the dappled mare, but she's so beautiful.

FAYE

Mount me.

WILLIAM

She's never been ridden. She's angry.

FAYE

I'll do anything you want.

WILLIAM

She takes me deep into the woods, and starts trying to scrape me off by rubbing up against these sharp pines, and running under low tree limbs.

FAYE

I'll get down on my hands and knees and spread my ass for you.

WILLIAM

That doesn't work so she starts back to the stables, I can't stop her, she's so strong.

FAYE

I'll lie on my back and drink your come all night.

WILLIAM

She's running along a logging road, there's a deep ditch along one side. I'm trying to get control with the reins. I'm pulling so hard I've got her head pulled back all the way to her right side--she's running hard without even looking where she's going. I think if I keep this up I might topple us both into the ditch. I could be killed.

FAYE

I'll bathe your whole body with my juices.

WILLIAM

I have to let go to save us both. So I do.

FAYE

I'll do anything ... anything ...

WILLIAM

What an amazing feeling, she takes off at a full gallop. I'm on a runaway.

FAYE

Anything.

WILLIAM

Nothing's ever felt as good as that wild ride completely out of control, wind streaming in my eyes, tears running down my face, mare panting, the foam rising on her flanks ...

FAYE

*(imploring)*

William ...

WILLIAM

*(rising)*

Thank you for the drink. I have to go.

FAYE

*(breaking down, crying to heaven)*

Oh help me! Please, help me, please ...

*William hears Angus returning.*

WILLIAM

You'd better leave.

FAYE

I'll never give up.

WILLIAM

You don't want to be seen this way.

*She runs out. Angus enters.*

**Act Two**

ANGUS

Why's she running?

*William won't answer.*

Why are you so flushed?

*William is silent.*

I see.

*William approaches Angus but stops, unable to move. Angus offers his arms.*

Come here.

*William folds into his arms.*

WILLIAM

Just hold me.

ANGUS

My dear boy.

*Long pause.*

I came to tell you I heard the board has chosen Faye as the new chair.

*William leaps up in anger and springs towards the door.*

WILLIAM

They can't do that!

ANGUS

*(blocking him)*

They've done it.

WILLIAM

I'll change it.

ANGUS

I thought you wanted no part of it.

WILLIAM

Things are different now.

ANGUS

Before you do something rash, there's a rumor that your father's been sighted.

WILLIAM

What! No, that son of a bitch can't come back from the dead!

ANGUS

It's just a rumor, but I never underestimate your father.

WILLIAM

First we kill the rumor, then we call an emergency board meeting. I told Aricia I'd give her control.

ANGUS

You have changed.

•

NONNY

The smartest thing for us to do is to take the children and leave ... get as far from him as we—

FAYE

*(enraged)*

I can't leave him.

NONNY

You sound like your mother! You'll forget everything, even your children, for this insanity?!

FAYE

You encouraged me!

NONNY

I didn't!

FAYE

You made me believe he could love me.

NONNY

Maybe I did, but there's nothing I wouldn't do to save you from this.

FAYE

I would've died silent, you pried all this out of me. Now you tell me I should run!

NONNY

Yes!

FAYE

I should have run from you!

NONNY

You don't even know what you're saying.

FAYE

I want you to go to him and offer him anything. The chairmanship, I'll step aside. Get down on your knees and beg, but get him for me.

NONNY

I don't know ... how.

FAYE

Do it. I'll wait for you. Go on.

*Nonny leaves. Unseen, Aricia watches Faye.*

FAYE

Whoever—whatever—you are that's doing this to me, please stop. In my dreams he comes to me—not night after night—that'd be too predictable, I could fortify myself. No, he waits until I'm mourning for him and then he makes love to me. He always sits in that chair before he leaves. In the sunlight. And the dust swooning in the beams of light is laden with the scent of our love. It fades when I wake and see Thomas. And I realize I'm not married to the light. I'm bound to a man whose every thought is a conscious act. Then nights go by, and I wait. In the desert. Finally he comes. And our flesh mingles and our minds meld, and my whole being floats into him, and he takes residence in me, and I have an overwhelming feeling of arrival. My parched lungs



drink deep and long wet breaths of salt air. But I can't anymore, I can't ... I can't ...

Whatever you are—why destroy me? I know you want to punish William. Then make him love me. Wouldn't that be revenge? Make him love me.

*Aricia steps out of the shadows.*

ARICIA

What if that's impossible?

*Startled, Faye turns away.*

Why do you avoid me?

*Faye looks at her with scorn.*

That could change.

FAYE

How?

*Faye leaves. Aricia is alone. Light strikes the chair. She sits, almost motionless.*

•

*Nonny enters the sitting room where the rest of the household, gathered around a funeral wreath, is holding a wake for Thomas.*

ARICIA

Shouldn't she be here?

NONNY

She's not well.

ARICIA

No restraint.

NONNY

Hold your tongue!

ANGUS

Nonny.

NONNY

Don't Nonny me ... certain things ...

ANGUS  
(pointedly)

The occasion.

*Nonny takes a moment to recover, then turns to William.*

NONNY  
May I speak to you for a moment—alone?

WILLIAM  
(ignoring her)  
Does anyone know any jokes?

ANGUS  
I don't think this is the time.

WILLIAM  
It's a wake isn't it?

*Nonny erupts with laughter.*

NONNY  
Oh that's funny! Oh, Oh, Oh, that's funny.

*She clutches the wreath and tries to stop laughing.*

Ha, ha, I have to stop laughing, it's not right, ha, ha, ha, ha, no I must stop, ha, ha, please someone help me, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, no, help me.

*No one moves because Thomas enters, as if from the dead, drenched and disheveled. They stare stunned. Nonny's laughter chokes and she reels away.*

•

*Faye senses Nonny returning.*

FAYE  
No, too soon, too soon.

*Nonny enters.*

Too soon.

NONNY  
Thomas.

FAYE

No.

NONNY

He's alive.

FAYE

He'll find out what I've done.

NONNY

Yes he will.

*Long pause.*

FAYE

*(attacking)*

Why would you want to hurt me?!

NONNY

I'd never hurt you.

FAYE

I was ready to die. My offending parts were already below the earth. And you dragged me up. Why?

NONNY

How can you blame me for wanting you to live?

FAYE

I was going to die with my name clean. Now I'm going to die a whore! And you're the reason.

NONNY

Don't you dare put this off on me. You loved him. You went after him.

FAYE

I never would have.

NONNY

Don't make me your scapegoat.

FAYE

William ... you'll enjoy this.

NONNY

What if he doesn't say anything?

FAYE

Don't start twisting again.

NONNY

No, I don't think he will.

FAYE

Even if he doesn't, it'll all be clear to Thomas. This time I'll find a faster way to die. Don't stop me again.

NONNY

You'll give your boys a mother who killed herself for lust?

FAYE

*(breaking)*

No!

NONNY

How could you?

FAYE

Please, no, I don't want to hurt them.

NONNY

Well?

FAYE

That's the only thing I regret.

NONNY

Then attack William before he attacks you. Let me tell Thomas he tried to rape you.

FAYE

NO!

NONNY

It makes me sick too, but this is not the time for—

FAYE

I can't put him in that danger.

NONNY

His father loves him—in his way. He won't really hurt him, he'll just drive him out, and he deserves that.

FAYE

I couldn't get those words out of my mouth.

NONNY

All I need is for you to be silent.

FAYE

I can't.

NONNY

*(lashing out)*

It's not just for you. It's for your boys. Don't destroy them by indulging your self-pity. William wants to crush you. Be brutal and help them survive. That's what a mother does!

FAYE

I don't know anything anymore. I'm completely out of control. Do what you will.

*Nonny leaves. Outside the door, Angus waits for her and takes her arm.*

ANGUS

Nonny.

NONNY

It's late.

ANGUS

Too late to tend the garden.

NONNY

The dark's a good time.

ANGUS

I'll do it in the morning.

NONNY

What if there is no morning?

ANGUS

Touch me.

NONNY

Good gracious, no.

*Thomas enters. Faye sits almost without reaction. He offers his hand. She rises and takes it quietly.*

THOMAS

Faye.

*She doesn't respond.*

Faye?

*No response. William enters.*

WILLIAM

Father.

THOMAS

Later.

WILLIAM

Father. Aricia and—

THOMAS

Leave us alone.

*William withdraws.*

Is this the welcome I get? I've been away a long time. Can you tell me what's wrong?

*She removes her hand, wanders away, and starts a drifting dance.*

Would you like some tea?

*She stops dancing.*

THOMAS

When you don't listen ...

FAYE

Ummm?

THOMAS

I'm lost.

FAYE

Fine, I'll have some tea.

THOMAS

That's not the point.

FAYE

I'll make it.

THOMAS

It's already made.

FAYE

Are the cups full?

THOMAS

Spilling over the rim.

FAYE

Hmmmmmm ...

THOMAS

I'll get the tea—

FAYE

We never used to drink tea.

THOMAS

I know that. *(pause as he gazes at her)* I'm having a miniature stage built for you in the bedroom.

FAYE

Why?

THOMAS

So that you can perform.

FAYE

*Hire* the talent.

THOMAS

No one else will do what I need.

FAYE

I can't.

*Aricia appears in the open doorway.*

THOMAS

What's happened to you?

FAYE

Ummm?

THOMAS

It's as if you're disappearing.

FAYE

Maybe I am.

THOMAS

Do you want me to inform the board?

FAYE

No business after dinner, remember?

THOMAS

They'll divvy your shares like party favors.

FAYE

When you were gone ...

THOMAS

*(pause)* Yeah?

FAYE

Something horrible happened.

THOMAS

What?

FAYE

*(leaving)*

You won't see me.

THOMAS

What's this all about?

*Faye walks out. Thomas notices Aricia who slips away.*

•

*Faye waits until William is asleep, then cuts a lock of his hair. After she leaves he wakes and feels for the missing hair. He panics and starts screaming.*

WILLIAM

Goddammit, you fucking bastard, you cocksucking son of a bitch, you freak fucking dog raper, you—Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh—you goddam—ohhhh—Nooooo—

*Thomas rushes in and grabs William, shaking him to stop.*



THOMAS  
William!

WILLIAM  
Stop!

THOMAS  
Snap out of it!

WILLIAM  
Stop!

THOMAS  
You're all right, it's just a dream!

WILLIAM  
Get away from me.

THOMAS  
Goddammit, get a grip.

*William begins to ease, breathing heavily.*

WILLIAM  
What are you doing?

THOMAS  
I heard you screaming, I ran in.

WILLIAM  
I'm fine now, you can go.

THOMAS  
Why don't you tell me what this was about.

WILLIAM  
Why?

THOMAS  
What the hell went on when I was gone?

WILLIAM  
A boy stood outside the house every single day. He had his hands over his eyes.

THOMAS  
I want to know what happened to Faye.

WILLIAM  
I can't be near that woman any more.

THOMAS  
Why?

WILLIAM  
What do you want?

THOMAS  
I want to help you.

WILLIAM  
What do you want?

THOMAS  
Is that all you can you say?

WILLIAM  
Well?

THOMAS  
I want to talk.

WILLIAM  
Why?

THOMAS  
Every time we talk nothing gets said.

WILLIAM  
Because nothing you say has anything to do with who you are.

THOMAS  
*(temper rising)*  
Boy—who I am you'll never know.

WILLIAM  
You're transparent.

THOMAS  
No, you can't see me, I'm never in the same place twice.

WILLIAM  
I know you by what you do, and that woman you brought into this house is twisted.

THOMAS

I had a stepmother too. She was a piece 'a work: a piece of ass, but a piece 'a poison. So I know what you're going through.

WILLIAM

Ah, the sympathetic father.

THOMAS

One of many faces, all true. Some people call me a demon, others a machine; I kinda like that one—a fornicating machine.

WILLIAM

With a long line of people waiting with their death wish in their sweaty palms.

THOMAS

*(like a laser)*

Now you've made me very angry.

*Aricia appears in the door and witnesses Thomas drive William away with his gaze.*

ARICIA

I saw what you did to your son.

THOMAS

Oh?

ARICIA

Do you want to watch a private act?

THOMAS

*(whispering)*

Yes.

ARICIA

*(forcing him to say it louder)*

What?

THOMAS

Yes.

*Aricia sits at the table, and, drinking straight from the pitcher, is unable to slake her thirst.*

ARICIA

I feel love's raging thirst.

*She rubs her hands in the water spilled on the table top, lifts her dress slightly and rubs the water on the insides of her thighs. Thomas stands behind her, and breathes in deeply.*

THOMAS

What do you want?

ARICIA

A place on the board.

THOMAS

Fine.

ARICIA

Twenty percent of the shares.

THOMAS

Shall we?

ARICIA

Yes, let's.

*They do not move. A long pause. Nonny enters and stares at them transfixed. Aricia leaves.*

•

*In another room William shakes violently like a sapling in a fierce wind.*

•

THOMAS

You're saying he tried to rape her?

NONNY

Yes.

THOMAS

And she's staying silent about it?

NONNY

Yes.

THOMAS

That son of a bitch, I'll kill him. You have proof?

NONNY

Why do you think she fought so hard to send him away? This has been brewing since he first saw her.

THOMAS

It doesn't make sense. Why didn't she say anything?

NONNY

To protect you. She was ashamed.

THOMAS

I can't believe it! I'll kill him.

NONNY

I have to go—I'm afraid to leave her alone.

•

WILLIAM

Do you think she's crazy enough to tell him what she's done?

ANGUS

Yes. You have to tell him first.

WILLIAM

*(vehemently)*

No.

ANGUS

Why not?

*William won't answer.*

I see. *(pause)*

WILLIAM

Stop it! *(pause)* I was about to tell him about Aricia.

ANGUS

Don't.

*William stares at Angus in disbelief.*

Just take her and go.

*William starts to leave.*

WILLIAM

*(turning back)*

No. First I've got something to prove.

*William finds his way to Thomas.*

THOMAS

You've got horseshit on your boots.

WILLIAM

I was working in the paddock.

THOMAS

You're going to stink up the whole place.

WILLIAM

The servants will get it. There's something I have to tell you.

THOMAS

Good, I've been wanting to talk with you too.

WILLIAM

Forget it.

THOMAS

I want you to take over the company when I'm gone.

WILLIAM

Forget it.

THOMAS

God damnit, you can't spend your whole life racing horses, boy.  
Grow up and be a man.

WILLIAM

Like you.

THOMAS

Yes.

WILLIAM

A whoremonger.

THOMAS

You're disgusting.

WILLIAM

You're a feeder—a piranha—

THOMAS

That's enough!

WILLIAM

With your mergers and your hostile takeovers, but mostly you feed on women. Talk about disgusting! Your lechery hangs off your face as plain as a dog's hard on.

THOMAS

Power needs to be fed. I get very hungry. I give my body what it needs. You'll understand someday.

WILLIAM

Will I understand what you did to my mother?

THOMAS

*(blowing up)*

She came after me, I had no—

WILLIAM

And Faye's sister—

THOMAS

You don't know what hap—

WILLIAM

And countless others. I could never live up to your reputation. You're legendary, the Great Cocksman.

THOMAS

Doesn't anyone, anything, move you?

WILLIAM

Yes. I love riding into the tempest sweet sixteen sheets to the wind. Winding around the maypole of the Marquis. Flashflooding the assflooding, and lots of ass, beautiful round asses, and lots of ash, beautiful black coal ash, and the ash raining on the ass.

The labyrinth is a delight, but such a tedious habit. What could it mean? This throbbing of desire. It's a malignant accident of nature. I don't want it.

THOMAS

You're strange.

WILLIAM

You need to see what strange is.

THOMAS

A man that can't love is like a man without an ass.

WILLIAM

How delicate.

THOMAS

Ya can't sit, ya can't shit, you're not fit for livin'.

WILLIAM

You're vulgar.

THOMAS

But I can love.

WILLIAM

Bravissimo.

THOMAS

I understand you tried to rape my wife.

WILLIAM

What!

THOMAS

The virgin finally pulls out his chainsaw *in my bed*.

WILLIAM  
(shouting)

That's a lie!

THOMAS

Which part? The virgin?

WILLIAM

I never touched her!

THOMAS

You expect me to believe you! You sick fuck!

WILLIAM

I love Aricia.



THOMAS

Just another lie to cover yourself. You never loved anyone. And now you're a dead man!

WILLIAM

Listen to me!

THOMAS

Get out! I don't want your corpse in my house.

WILLIAM

How can you believe her? Look at her mother! You know who she came from—

*Angus enters to investigate the shouting and watches aghast.*

THOMAS

*(raising his hand)*

Shut up before I kill you myself! Won't anyone rid me of this scum?!! Please, someone crush him!

WILLIAM

It's in her blood.

THOMAS

GET OUT!

*William leaves. Pause.*

THOMAS

I'm going to grind his body into powder.

*Pause.*

How can I kill my own son?

*Pause.*

How could I have fathered such a degenerate?

*Faye enters. Angus slips away.*

FAYE

I have to ... speak to—

THOMAS

Were you listening to me?

FAYE

I have something I need to tell you.

THOMAS

Not now.

FAYE

Please.

THOMAS

NO!

*Pause.*

FAYE

Thomas.

THOMAS

Do you ever find yourself glancing at animals? At their sexual parts?

FAYE

No.

THOMAS

There was a stallion in the south of Ireland that was awe-inspiring, downright humbling.

FAYE

Have you ever considered that talking about it kills the mystery?

THOMAS

Come here. *(pause)* Please.

*Faye comes close. He gently squeezes her arms.*

I can't kill it. Do you remember why you married me?

FAYE

*(with difficulty)*

Yes.

THOMAS

This mystery—I pretend I'm trying to expose it. It's a game. I know I'll never succeed. And by failing, I pay homage to its power. But when I want to tap its power I say nothing. I let the distance between us call out.

FAYE

*(almost remembering)*

Thomas ... ?

THOMAS

Your eyes call me across oceans. I get so lost in your eyes. Then I'm filled with a longing, your voice singing *come home*.

FAYE

*(becoming aroused)*

Home ...

THOMAS

You are that home.

FAYE

Hmmmm ...

THOMAS

And I desire to make a journey.

FAYE

Home.

THOMAS

I have to navigate. Storms rise. The old salts say the seventh wave is the worst, the one that does the damage.

FAYE

My heart is so damaged.

THOMAS

I know. That makes my desire almost unbearable.

FAYE

Yes.

THOMAS

And I say your name over and over, Faye ... Faye ...

FAYE

*(putting her finger to his lips)*

Shhhh ...

THOMAS

And your eyes ... Beacons.

FAYE

Shhhh ...

THOMAS

Draw me home.

FAYE

Shhhh ...

THOMAS

With your eyes.

*Their lips come close, sensing without motion. Finally, Faye breaks away.*

FAYE

Don't threaten William, please. Call off what you've ...

THOMAS

How can you defend him after what he's done to you?

FAYE

He's innocent.

THOMAS

No one is.

FAYE

Please!

THOMAS

He's a liar. And a good one.

FAYE

No! Listen to me—

THOMAS

He knows if you have to lie make it a big one. So the son of a bitch has cooked up the biggest lie of his life—he claims he loves Aricia.

*Long pause.*

FAYE

What?

THOMAS

You heard me—that's a laugh—him love anyone!

*Faye turns away. Thomas tries to hold her. She stiffens. He leaves.*

FAYE

He loves her. *(pause)* No. I can't save him.

*Faye presses her palms against the door as if to hold back what's outside.*

FAYE

How can he want her over me?

NONNY

How do you know it's true?

FAYE

You've known all along, haven't you?

*Nonny turns away silent.*

I want her out of this house! I'll rip her apart. No, worse. I'll make her a leper. I'll tell Thomas she's been selling company secrets. He'll squeeze the life from her throat—

No! What am I doing?! It's so twisted. Using my husband to destroy my competition for his son. I've lost my mind!

NONNY

Stop it!

FAYE

I'm disgusting! The woman's innocent—she's never done anything to me, and I want to crucify her.

NONNY

You can't help yourself.

FAYE

I'm loathsome. Crawling with lust so thick I'm no longer human!

NONNY

Stop thinking about your body.

FAYE

It's not my *body* that oozes with desire. It's my mind ...

NONNY

Think of other things.

*Faye searches Nonny's face with her fingers as if exploring the features of a lover.*

FAYE

And it hardly seems like my mind. The genitalia of a gargoyle would be more like it. Horribly ugly with its scaly labia, but at the same time sensual and unbearably beautiful, the fleshy folds as innocent as a newborn's. And this thing, it's disembodied, adrift somewhere, maybe everywhere where fluids flow. It knows me, this thing. It touches me, whispers in my ear: "Know him, you must know him."

*As if in a trance, Faye starts moving towards William. Nonny understands what is happening and tries to stop her, holding onto her arm to restrain her. Faye is too powerful and tears away.*

NONNY

Nooooo ...

*Faye follows the voice through a maze until she reaches William.*

WILLIAM

I have nothing else to say.

FAYE

I know who you really are.

WILLIAM

Impossible.

FAYE

I've been in your room.

WILLIAM

When? I don't believe you.

FAYE

I opened the suitcase under your bed.

WILLIAM

You're bluffing.

FAYE

This is delicious.

WILLIAM

It's locked.

FAYE

I thought it would be exciting to slip my hand into one of your riding gloves, and what did I find?

*She holds up a key.*

WILLIAM

*(enraged)*

Goddammit!

FAYE

Are they your drawings?

WILLIAM

You had no right!

FAYE

The sketch of the woman bending over spreading her cheeks was quite well rendered--the crosshatching was positively salacious.

*Faye tries to embrace him. He pushes her away. She pummels his chest with her fists until she knocks him down. Then she mounts him.*

FAYE

Why are you like this?!

WILLIAM

I want you to leave me alone!

FAYE

Grind your hips!

WILLIAM

No!

FAYE

Yes!

WILLIAM

Bitch! I hate you!

FAYE

NO, NO, NO, NO--WHY?!

WILLIAM

Get off me!

FAYE  
Why are you like this?

WILLIAM  
Get off!

FAYE  
*(starting to strangle him)*  
Why?

WILLIAM  
No!

FAYE  
Yes!

WILLIAM  
*(gasping for breath)*  
You're ... chok-ing ...

FAYE  
Why?!

WILLIAM  
My old man—

FAYE  
Why?

WILLIAM  
My old—

FAYE  
Forget about him!

WILLIAM  
My old man's a—

FAYE  
This is about us—forget him!

WILLIAM  
He's—

FAYE  
Why!



WILLIAM  
He's a—

FAYE  
Stop it! Tell me why!

WILLIAM  
He's a rapist!

FAYE  
NO!

WILLIAM  
RAPIST!

FAYE  
NO!

WILLIAM  
I'm made of rape!

FAYE  
NO! Not true!

WILLIAM  
Sex makes me sick!

*She rolls off him and clutches her belly, moaning. Before he leaves he sits on the chair and watches her for a moment. After he's gone she crawls to the chair and lays her cheek where he was sitting. Nonny enters, sees her condition, and runs to her.*

NONNY  
What happened?

FAYE  
He ripped me again.

NONNY  
Everyone's a victim of love. Do you think you're the only one?  
You have to accept it.

FAYE  
*(in a dark fury)*  
Are you still giving me advice? You're the one who accused him  
of rape. That'll be his death! Get out of—

NONNY

But I was—

FAYE

Get out of this house! I'll give you one hour to pack. Then I never want to see you again. I hope your tongue prattles and shakes in hell!

*Faye leaves. Nonny is alone.*

NONNY

Oh God! To save her, I did everything. And I lost everything. And this is my reward. *(pause)* Well deserved ...

*She surveys the room one last time.*

All quiet now.

Flesh is just flesh. The wind will blow a curtain. Thread will unravel. Light strikes the table.

*She retrieves her hidden bottle, but hesitates before drinking.*

No—won't do ...

*She begins searching the room.*

She had some pills.

*She finds them and holds the bottle up to the light, measuring.*

There ... that oughta do. *(laughing ruefully)* The fleas leap from their bags ...

*She leaves slowly, with a purpose, murmuring.*

Well deserved ... well deserved ...

•

*Aricia finds William curled up on the floor.*

ARICIA

Why don't you tell your father the truth?

*He can't respond.*

You told me you never touched her. Is that the truth?

*Silence.*

Why can't you speak?

*He shakes his head—he doesn't know. She lifts her dress. Her thighs become visible. He thrashes out with his arm commanding her to stop. But he can't cry out, and he can't look away because his eyes desire to know.*

Why don't you close your eyes?

*She lifts her dress higher. He's paralyzed. She kneels by his side and lovingly caresses his face.*

I love you. But I don't know how much longer I can wait. You'll drown me.

*Aricia leaves. William's profound struggle to rise and leave evokes the stomping of a panicked horse: a death dance.*

•

*Faye gropes for Nonny.*

FAYE

Nonny, draw me a bath.

*There is no answer.*

Nonny!

•

*Arica approaches Thomas.*

ARICIA

William and I are leaving.

THOMAS

He says he loves you.

ARICIA

He does.

THOMAS

Don't trust him. He's dangerous.

ARICIA

You don't know him at all, do you?

THOMAS

He tried to rape my wife!

ARICIA

How can you believe that? Because that's what you'd do?

THOMAS

I have a witness.

ARICIA

A self-serving liar.

THOMAS

And I have Faye's tears. She's been trying to kill herself.

ARICIA

Call it off before you kill the wrong one.

THOMAS

Shut up!

ARICIA

Thomas—the great slayer of monsters. But they're not all dead. *(stopping herself)* But I can't say any more. *(leaving)* We're leaving.

THOMAS

Wait!

*She's gone.*

What're you saying? *(crying out)* AHHHH! *(pause)* My boy ... I have a bad feeling. *(shouting)* Is *everyone* lying?!

*He sets out determined to question Nonny.*

Where is that old woman? NONNY!

•

*Angus moves stealthily to the screen enclosing Faye's bath. As he peers around the corner he gasps and runs in.*

ANGUS

NONNY!

*We hear the sounds of him trying to pull her out of the bathtub.*

NO! NO! you sweet thing ... NOOO ... Come to me ... come to me ... come to me ... ohhhhhhhhh ...

•

*Aricia enters.*

ARICIA

William is dead.

THOMAS

What!

ARICIA

Your son is dead.

THOMAS

You're lying.

ARICIA

You did it.

THOMAS

No.

ARICIA

Yes.

THOMAS

I said no.

ARICIA

I say yes.

THOMAS

I called it off.

ARICIA

I was there.

THOMAS

It can't be.

ARICIA

They're bringing his body here.

THOMAS

What happened?

ARICIA

He was riding the dappled mare along the shore. Back and forth like a madman. I kept shouting at him to stop. The horse went berserk. She was trying to run out to sea. He fought to control her but she threw him, and he got tangled in the reins. She trampled him to get free. And then they came. His horses ... pounding through the surf. All of them. Churning and crashing blind. Their hooves tore him to pieces. And they were gone.

THOMAS

Please—NO—please ...

*Angus enters in a fury.*

ANGUS

You fucking monster!

THOMAS

Get back!

ANGUS

You did it!

THOMAS

Yes.

ANGUS

I'm going to tell the world everything I know about you, your bribes, your extortions, the corpses you leave in immaculate rooms.

THOMAS

Your body will drop away.

*Angus goes to strike Thomas.*

Wither and turn to dust.

*Angus hesitates.*

Think again.

*Angus storms out of the room. Aricia follows.*

THOMAS

*(grief-stricken)*

Oh William, my poor poor boy, somewhere in your twisted soul was a bright light, and I could never gather it. I was always far away. But loved you. I did. *(lashing out)* I didn't want this! How could it happen? I didn't want it!

*Faye enters.*

FAYE

Thomas?

THOMAS

William's dead.

FAYE

Yes.

THOMAS

I don't know what happened between you, but I'm taking your word because I can't take any more pain.

FAYE

There is no more than this. He was innocent.

THOMAS

You're crueler than life itself.

FAYE

Something beyond me drove me, and with the help of my most loving friend ... I ...

*Faye starts swaying as if trying to do her yearning dance, but her body is wracked with tiny convulsions.*

THOMAS

What're you doing?

FAYE

I took poison.

*Pause.*

THOMAS

Would you like some tea?

FAYE  
Did you hear me?

THOMAS  
I'll help you to bed.

FAYE  
I don't have much time.

THOMAS  
That's always the case.

FAYE  
Do you understand?!!

THOMAS  
No.

FAYE  
I'm dying.

THOMAS  
Yes.

FAYE  
*(faintly)*  
Going ...

*Long pause.*

THOMAS  
You were gone suddenly, out of my hands.

*Faye approaches the chair.*

FAYE  
And now I feel my trembling knees give way.

*Her breathing becomes serene, then she sinks to her knees, clutching the chair. Aricia enters. She and Thomas lock eyes.*

**The End**