

THE INHERITANCE

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Cast of Characters

Matti Anderson, 28 (full name, Violet Matilda Anderson), b. 1970
Andrew Morris, Malcolm's age, b. 1913
Edward Grey, the fourth, b. 1917
Violet Grey, the oldest, b. 1911
Graham Grey, the third, b. 1915
Malcolm Grey, the second child, oldest son, b. 1913
Emma Grey, maiden name, Meyers, b. 1920
Hannah Anderson, Matti's mother, 50's, b. 1940

Dates of Particular events:

Violet leaves, 1937
Malcolm and Emma marry, 1938
Christmas Ball, 1946

ACT 1: THE FUNERAL IN THE PARK

the setting: the stage is bare except for a park bench, CS, and a Victorian nursing chair, to the left of the bench.

HANNAH ANDERSON, sits on the left of a park bench fanning herself with a folded up program. She is dressed in a neat black suit and is extremely hot.

MATTI ANDERSON rushes in, SL. She wears a long black tunic and pants and is out of breath.

MATTI

Oh, thank God. I've been looking all over for you. Where's the funeral?

HANNAH

(hugging MATTI)

I was so worried.

MATTI

I really tried to get here. My plane was delayed, and I missed the connection, and I had to find a ride from Charlottesville.

HANNAH

Well, at least you're here. You missed the service. It was very nice, though. The body'll be buried at sunset. It's one of Andrew's melodramatic performance ideas. Oh, just look at you. I like those pants.

MATTI

They aren't too bohemian?

HANNAH

No, they're cute.

MATTI

I'm twenty eight years old. I am no longer cute.

HANNAH

Oh, my baby, you are always cute.

HANNAH hugs MATTI again.

MATTI

Why is there an overstuffed arm chair in this park?

HANNAH

It's for you. Your father's gone to get a bigger car and we're taking it home. I'll send it to you.

MATTI

For me? Really? Where's it from?

HANNAH

It was Edward's. He left it to you.

MATTI

But I never even met him.

HANNAH

Edward wanted it to stay in the family and you're the last of the Greys.

MATTI

I'm not the last.

HANNAH

Yes, you are.

MATTI

Aren't there any other Greys? Fourth cousins or something.

HANNAH

There's just you. I hadn't realized it until Andrew told me when he brought out the chair. It was the first thing in Edward's will.

MATTI

Why's this chair so important?

HANNAH

All of the Greys have been nursed in that chair for the last hundred years.

MATTI

Nursed?

HANNAH

It's a Victorian nursing chair. For some unknown reason, Edward had it recovered in pink silk damask. It used to be brown, but it's still quite nice.

MATTI

A nursing chair?

HANNAH

We can have it recovered in brown....

MATTI

Brown, pink, margarita green. It's a nursing chair.

HANNAH

It's the family nursing chair.

MATTI

For God's sake, why doesn't he just say in his will... bear fruit and multiply like a rabbit or we're kaput.

HANNAH

Don't be crude. You are so sensitive about children.

MATTI

Because I'm harassed about it constantly.

HANNAH

That's all in your head.

MATTI

You bought a mother-of-the-bride's dress and a bassinet.

HANNAH

They were on sale. You take everything out of context.

MATTI

That's because you buy them out of context.

HANNAH

I can't do anything right. Fine, I'm a failure as a mother.

MATTI

You are not a failure.

HANNAH

Oh, I am. I just live to make your life miserable.

MATTI

Ah! Will you stop this!

HANNAH

Fine. We'll just sit here until your father comes.

Pause. No sign of anyone.

MATTI

(grudgingly and gesturing to the chair)

It looks like it belongs in a brothel.

HANNAH

(delighted)

That's what I thought. We'll have it redone in brown.

MATTI

Brown's nice.

HANNAH

Oh, I missed you so much.

MATTI

I missed you, too.

HANNAH leans over to hug MATTI. Her rear end is stuck to the bench.

HANNAH

Oh, dear.

MATTI

What's wrong?

HANNAH

I've sat in something.

HANNAH flies up, dislodging her tush and then turns it to MATTI.

What is it?

MATTI

Gum.

HANNAH

There's a tissue in my purse. Get it off.

MATTI

You can get it off.

HANNAH

I can't see it. Now, come on....

MATTI

I didn't miss you that much.

HANNAH glares at her.

This is so humiliating...

MATTI gets the gum off HANNAH.

HANNAH

I don't know where your father is. I should have made him wait with the chair while I got the car. Can't you move over?

MATTI

Not really.

HANNAH

Then sit in the chair.

MATTI

Why don't you sit in the chair?

HANNAH

Because I might still have gum on my.... rear.

MATTI

I got it off.

HANNAH

Just sit in the chair.

MATTI

No.

HANNAH

Then move over.

MATTI moves over, slightly. HANNAH sits down, avoiding the gum. MATTI gets shoved so she balances precipitously on the edge of the bench. HANNAH is sitting comfortably.

You have to make everything an issue.

THEY sit and wait.

Tell me about work.

MATTI

Let's not talk about that.

HANNAH

Don't tell me you got fired again.

MATTI

No, I quit.

HANNAH

You quit? Violet Matilda Anderson, you're 28 years old. When are you going to grow up? Don't you dare expect your father and me to support you.

MATTI

I don't. I have an offer.

HANNAH

To do what?

MATTI

A consulting position at RMJ Consulting group. Apparently I'm a creative problem solver.

HANNAH

Of course you are. You're wonderful. This is wonderful. RMJ Consulting? I love you. Oh, my baby, my baby with benefits. You do get benefits, don't you?

MATTI

Yes.

HANNAH

This is wonderful. RMJ Consulting? Really? They have offices all over the world.

MATTI

One of my college friends got me the interview. Dave. Remember him?

HANNAH

He was such a nice boy. Good for him. So, you keep in touch?

MATTI

Yes. He's married, by the way.

HANNAH

That's nice.

MATTI

Right. He got me the interview, and they made the offer.

HANNAH

And you accepted?

MATTI

Not yet.

HANNAH

Why? What are you waiting for?

MATTI

I wanted to think it over.

HANNAH

When do they want to know?

MATTI

I should tell them in the next few days.

HANNAH

Tell them now. There's a phone over in the courthouse. You can call from there. I'll watch the chair.

MATTI

I don't know if I want it.

HANNAH

What do you mean you don't know? Do you want to be unemployed?

MATTI

No.

HANNAH

Do you have other options?

MATTI

I want to finish my novel.

HANNAH

Oh, God help us.

MATTI

I'm serious.

HANNAH

You always are.

MATTI

I'm making clear and distinct progress. I can't give this up. I have a vision, mom. I have this wonderful, driving, soul-igniting vision.

HANNAH

Really. How far are you? Chapter 4?

MATTI

Chapter 3. But I know where it's going.

HANNAH

You've said that 42 times now.

MATTI

Can't you be at least a little bit supportive? I'm trying.

HANNAH

It gets really hard to be supportive when all you do is flit from one thing to the next. Every time I try to support you, you change your mind and do something completely different. I can't keep up.

MATTI

I want to write.

HANNAH

Then write. Fine.

MATTI

I am.

HANNAH

You've been writing since you were twelve. When are you going to finish a story? Even a short one?

MATTI

Soon. Very soon.

HANNAH

What was wrong with your last job?

MATTI

I wasn't happy.

HANNAH

I'm beginning to think you're not happy with anything you do.

MATTI

So far. But I'm happy with writing.

HANNAH

Then why don't you ever finish anything?

MATTI

Aren't you listening? I will.

HANNAH

Why do you write?

MATTI

Because I love it. I need to write.

HANNAH

Because you have something to say?

MATTI

Exactly.

HANNAH

And that is?

MATTI

I don't want to talk about this.

HANNAH

I know you like writing, and I don't doubt that one day you will write something very nice, maybe even wonderful. But, this job is here and now. I know you need the money, and think of the adventure. Traveling all over the world. Persia. You've always wanted to explore Persia.

Doesn't that ignite your soul? And it pays your bills. Use your head, Matti.

MATTI

If I take the job, I'll work eighty hours a week. I have no problem working hard, but I'm not sure I want to work that hard for something I don't love. On top of it all, I won't be able to write anymore.

HANNAH

You'll see the world. Scotland, Norway, Zimbabwe, Morocco.... Persia, my darling. You can watch them dive for pearls.

MATTI

Enough.

HANNAH

Where is your father? He'll talk some sense into you.

MATTI

I don't need sense talked into me. I'm quite capable of figuring it out.

HANNAH

Then what are you going to do?

MATTI

Stop asking me that.

HANNAH

Fine. We'll just wait quietly.

(pause)

MATTI

This is like "Waiting for Godot".... with my mother.

HANNAH

It's no existentialist picnic for me, either. Stupid burial at dusk. Edward wouldn't like all this pageantry. He was always so sensible and kind. Andrew was the exhibitionist of the two. Always had to put on a show. It was just unbearable.

MATTI

Who all actually had the chair? Were you nursed in it, too?

HANNAH

No. I guess mother didn't think there was room.

MATTI

So who was nursed in the chair, then?

HANNAH

Violet was. She was the oldest. You would have liked her.

MATTI

She's the one you lived with, right?

HANNAH

Yes. You remind me so much of her. You never met her, did you?

MATTI

I think I did. She gave me a stocking for Christmas, didn't she?

HANNAH

That's right! She was on her way up to New York and she visited us. What do you remember?

MATTI

She had green ankles.

HANNAH

What?

MATTI

She wore stocking that made her ankles look green.

HANNAH

What else?

MATTI

That's all.

HANNAH

She was tall with dark hair she braided and pinned at the nape of her neck, and she always wore a jade ring her father gave her.

VIOLET enters, SL. MALCOLM enters from the other side.

VIOLET

Mac, I've been looking for you.

MALCOLM

(sitting in the nursing chair)

I was at a client's. There are so many litigious people in the world today, it's a crying shame.

VIOLET

And you, I suppose, are crying crocodile tears?

MALCOLM

As any good member of the bar would, yes. God, I've missed you, Vi. It's been so dull around here with you gone.

VIOLET

I can imagine. Mac, I need to talk with you.

MALCOLM

My dear, that is what we're doing. Did all those travels through Europe dull your mind? You promised to be careful of the champagne.

VIOLET

Mac, this is important. I need a favor, a tremendous favor.

MALCOLM

What is it?

VIOLET

I need you to stay with Mama and let me go to Cedar Ridge, NY.

MALCOLM

Cedar Ridge? That sounds rather rustic. What prompted this wild desire?

VIOLET

Some friends are starting an artist's colony there. It's the chance of a lifetime, Mac. I'm going to paint full time. I have to do this. I've got this feeling... painting is what I was born to do. When I paint, I know who and what and where I am. Everything fits... This is my only chance. I wouldn't ask you this if it didn't mean everything to me.

MALCOLM

(Not believing that she's serious)

Sure, sure. And how do expect to survive? Get a patron?

VIOLET

Not exactly. I need to borrow some money. But I've got a job at a local company lined up, so I can pay it right back. A month, two months tops.

MALCOLM

(Sitting up)

You're actually serious about this, aren't you?

VIOLET

Yes. With all my being.

MALCOLM

You want to just pack up and go live in a cabin in the woods?

VIOLET

It's a cottage, not a cabin. I need to do this; I need to paint.

MALCOLM

Fine, paint. You don't have to go away to do that.

VIOLET

Yes, I do. I know it sounds crazy to you, but there's this part of me that's suffocating. I have these swarming midnight visions. Mac, I'll go insane if I can't at least try to free this... thing.

MALCOLM

Mama needs you. You're her only daughter.

VIOLET

She needs someone.... and I will be back. I just need this year. I'd ask Graham, but he's off at college, and Edward's too young....

MALCOLM

And so it's me, then. You've thought this through with extraordinary care. How can I possibly argue?

VIOLET

Please be serious.

MALCOLM

I am. God forbid that I should trap you in yourself. Go, find your spirit, or whatever you're looking for. I'll stay here with Mama and hold the family together. Just like I've done for the past seven years while you were in Europe and at college.

VIOLET

I know it's asking a lot, but it's not forever. I'll come home. I just need some time to get things going. A year at the most.

MALCOLM

Just one year. It's always one more year.

VIOLET

Once I find my voice, I can paint anywhere.

MALCOLM

You said you were getting a job.

VIOLET

There's a chemical company up there that needs extra technicians.

MALCOLM

I'm sure they'll be pleased to hear you're leaving in a year. And a job will give you lots of time with your artist friends.

VIOLET

I'll make the time.

MALCOLM

Just like you've made the time for us.

VIOLET

That's not fair.

MALCOLM

When was the last time you managed to be in the house for Sunday dinner?

VIOLET

I just got back from school. There's a lot of people I haven't seen, and they've been kind enough to have me over.

MALCOLM

You spend more time with strangers than with your own family.

VIOLET

I've had enough.

MALCOLM

You've been gone for seven years. Seven years, Vi. After all that time is it all you can think of to want to leave us again?

VIOLET

This is important.

MALCOLM

So is your family. You belong here with us.

VIOLET

You let Graham go without all this family guilt business.

MALCOLM

That's different. He has to make his way in the world....

VIOLET

Because he's a man.

MALCOLM

Yes, because he's a man. He has responsibilities.

VIOLET

And I should just stay here and look lovely?

MALCOLM

And be with us and paint, if that's what you want. Don't leave us, Vi.

VIOLET

I'm going, Mac, with or without your blessing.

EDWARD enters, same side as MALCOLM.

EDWARD

Hello, everyone. Guess what I heard?

MALCOLM

Not now, Ed.

EDWARD

No this is good. We've got new neighbors, William and Grace Meyers, and they've got a daughter, Emma, who was kicked out of the Willamina finishing school. Can you believe it? It's impossible to get kicked out of there.

VIOLET

It speaks well of a person to get kicked out of there.

EDWARD

So anyway, she's home with them, which means she's down the street. We've got a drop out two houses down.

VIOLET

Well, there goes the neighborhood.

MALCOLM

A new stranger for you to have dinner with.

VIOLET

Maybe I should go there now.

EDWARD

What did I interrupt?

MALCOLM

Vi's going to become a famous painter by being a chemist in the up and coming town of Cedar Ridge, NY, while you and I stay here and wish her the best.

EDWARD

When did this happen?

VIOLET

I just brought it up. It's just for a little while.

MALCOLM

A year, to start.

EDWARD

I like having you home.

VIOLET

And I like being home. But this is happening now, and it won't wait for me.

EDWARD

I don't understand.

VIOLET

I was invited to work with the greats. Johnson, Franklin, Mendel. They have shows in New York, in the big galleries, and they want to work with me. They're starting a colony in Cedar Ridge.... this is the inspiration I've been searching for.

EDWARD

We can't inspire you here?

VIOLET

Ed, you do inspire me, and I love you. I just need this change of scenery...

MALCOLM

I thought Europe was the change of scenery.

VIOLET

I was with Papa.

MALCOLM

Mama sent you to get all of this out of your system.

VIOLET

It only made it worse.

MALCOLM

Then who's to say this community won't do the same thing. You keep talking about this great vision you're going to have. You paint flowers, Vi. Flowers. And the occasional bird. Flowers and birds aren't the stuff of great art.

VIOLET

They can be.

EDWARD

They're very nice flowers.

MALCOLM

They're great. They're lovely. But they aren't inspired.

VIOLET

And that's the point. That's what I'm looking for.

MALCOLM

And what if you never find it?

VIOLET

Then I'll come home.

MALCOLM

I thought you were coming home no matter what.

VIOLET

I am.

MALCOLM

In a year.

VIOLET

Right.

MALCOLM

(pained)

You're never coming back.

EDWARD

Sure she is. Vi?

VIOLET

Of course I am. I promise.

MALCOLM

Don't even bother. Go on and get packed. You don't want to miss your train.

VIOLET

I haven't even made reservations yet.

MALCOLM

I don't care. If you're going to leave, get on with it. And don't expect to come back. You won't be welcome.

EDWARD

Mac.... *(to VIOLET)* He's angry. None of us want you to leave. Wait 'till after dinner. Mama will be back and we can discuss this together. This affects the whole family.

VIOLET

No, Mac's right. If I'm going to go, I should get on with it. No sense in dragging this out. I just have to pack a few things, and I'll be on my way.

VIOLET exits, SR.

EDWARD

Vi, no. Be sensible. *(to MALCOLM)* You didn't have to throw her out.

MALCOLM

She wants to leave.

EDWARD

She doesn't mean to hurt us.

MALCOLM

But she is. She's deserting us without a second thought. I'm going for a walk.

MALCOLM exits, SL. EDWARD follows about to say something, then turns and follows where VIOLET had gone.

HANNAH

Where is your father? Why won't you just take the job?

MATTI

I shouldn't have come. I didn't even know Edward. I should have stayed in Boston. I could have made my decision free of nagging and free of this stupid chair that hangs like an albatross about my neck.

HANNAH

I will not have you demeaning this chair or your family. You are a Grey. Now, act like one.

MATTI

I don't even know what that means. How can I be someone I don't even know? I'm not a Grey. I'm an Anderson. I share their name, their stories, their inability to make it in the world of professional athletics... that's me.

HANNAH

You and all your children will be Greys. The name doesn't matter, you have the blood.

MATTI

That is so unpleasant sounding.

HANNAH

But it's true.

MATTI

Blood is an overblown excuse for people to get drunk and start wars. That's all.

HANNAH

Blood is who you are. If you would only see how truly amazing you are.... how much of that is from the Greys.

MATTI

If they're so wonderful and perfect, why didn't you tell me about them? Or let me meet them? A lot of good it does when they're all gone.

EMMA enters, SR, with gardening gloves and a bucket, and kneels down. SHE is digging with a trowel.

MALCOLM enters, SL. He is on a walk, enjoying the warm afternoon sun that falls on him. He nods to her.

MALCOLM

Good day.

EMMA

It is a good one, isn't it? The break in the humidity's a godsend.

MALCOLM

Yes, it is.

MALCOLM walks on.

EMMA

Does everyone here only talk about the weather?

MALCOLM

Pardon?

EMMA

Well, it's just that talking about the weather all the time is really dull. It's hot. It's humid. It's no longer as hot and maybe the humidity's less oppressive. I suppose in the winter, one can discuss the possibility of snow, if one's lucky, but that's about it.

MALCOLM

Well, yes, I suppose.

EMMA

There really are far better topics for small talk. For instance, did you know armadillos can swim?

MALCOLM

No.

EMMA

They can.

EMMA goes back to gardening. SHE pauses momentarily.

It was nice to talk with you.

MALCOLM

Yes. *(pause)* I should introduce myself. I'm Malcolm Grey.

EMMA

Oh, Edward's brother.

MALCOLM

You've talked with him?

EMMA

Not directly. He's announced to everyone that I've been booted from school. I'm Emma Meyers.

MALCOLM

I'm very sorry.

EMMA

I like my name, actually.

MALCOLM

I mean about my brother. I'm terribly sorry about his behavior.

EMMA

I'm not. If you're going to be known for something, it might as well be something mysterious. Now everyone's wondering why I was booted.

MALCOLM

All the same, I do apologize for him.

EMMA

That's very proper of you.

MALCOLM

Thank you.

EMMA

You're welcome.

MALCOLM watches EMMA garden with fascination. Finally, HE turns and continues on his walk.

EMMA remains gardening as MATTI and HANNAH continue to talk.

HANNAH

You should call them. You can't keep a big company waiting. Look, I'll even give you a quarter for the call....

MATTI

Mom....

HANNAH forages through her purse. SHE pulls out an envelope.

HANNAH

I forgot about this.

MATTI

What is it?

HANNAH

Andrew gave this to me as I was leaving. He said it was a few odds and ends of Edward's.

MATTI

Open it.

HANNAH does.

What is it?

HANNAH shows her a jade ring and a photograph.

HANNAH

This was Violet's ring.

HANNAH slips it on her finger and looks at it.

EDWARD enters with a small suitcase, followed by VIOLET with a small bag.

EDWARD

Platform two.... this is it.

VIOLET

So it is.

EDWARD

You've got your ticket, the trunk's been loaded... you're ready to go.

VIOLET

I can't believe I'm really doing this.

EDWARD

You don't have to. Say the word, and I'll get your trunk and we can go home.

VIOLET

I want to do this. Once I get settled up there, I know it'll be wonderful.

EDWARD

I'm going to miss you terribly.

VIOLET

I'll miss you, too.

EDWARD

Before you go, there's something I want to give you.

VIOLET

I don't need anything.

EDWARD

(pulling out an envelope)

This is for you.

HE hands HER the envelope.

VIOLET

(opening it to reveal a large sum of money)

Ed! I can't take this.

EDWARD

Sure you can. You need it.

VIOLET

This must be everything you have. I can't take it. You need it for school.

EDWARD

I've got another year 'till college. You can pay me back before then. Please. It means a lot to me.

VIOLET

You're sure?

EDWARD

Definitely.

VIOLET

What am I going to do without you?

EDWARD

You'll be fine.

TRAIN WHISTLE followed by "All Aboard" call

Come home again. I'm already missing you.

VIOLET

I will. I promise. Take care of yourself... and Mac. You'll be all right.

EDWARD

You'd better board.

VIOLET

God bless you. Good bye.

VIOLET runs to the train.

EDWARD waves.

EDWARD

I know you'll be wonderful. Really wonderful. All you need is someone to believe in you and support you. My sister, the toast of New York. To you, Violet Grey.

EDWARD exits.

HANNAH

You would have really liked her. She was so brilliant. I want you to have this.

HANNAH hands MATTI the ring.

MATTI

She was your aunt. You should have it.

HANNAH

She would have wanted you to have it. You're a lot like her.

MATTI

Hardly.

EDWARD reenters with a brief case. HE speaks out towards the audience, addressing an employer.

EDWARD

That's right, sir. Summa cum laude from Robert E. Lee High. I've worked at Falcon Hardware for three years, now. Mr. Falcon has generously enclosed a letter regarding my performance in the paint, trim, and refinishing section of the store. And I've been a volunteer at the church dinners for over four years..... what? No I don't have experience with hauling lumber. Yes, well, thank you for your time.

EDWARD exits, disappointed, stage left.

MALCOLM enters, stage left, and crosses to EMMA.

MALCOLM

Lovely evening, isn't it?

EMMA

Yes, I suppose it is.

MALCOLM

Did you know there's a breed of jellyfish off the coast of Scotland that doesn't sting? You can actually swim with them... there's literally hundreds in the water, and you can touch them... even stroke them... and they'll never sting. Not once.

EMMA

Really? Now that's something.

MALCOLM

Isn't it? Well, good evening.

EMMA

Indeed, it is.

MALCOLM exits, SR, pleased with himself.

EDWARD enters, and again speaks to the audience.

EDWARD

Yes, sir. Five years volunteering at the church dinners. Can I cook? Absolutely. Apple pie, pork chops, and mashed potatoes.... sweet potatoes, too. Well, no I haven't any experience as a short order cook.... but I can learn. Yes, thank you for your time.

EDWARD exits, SR. MALCOLM enters, SR, and walks right up to EMMA.

MALCOLM

Good day.

EMMA

Good day.

MALCOLM

Did you know that the monasteries built in Ireland around 1000 AD actually were designed to be pillaged by the Vikings? They had antechambers to hold valuables and upper rooms for the monks to hide until the invaders passed on?

EMMA

Hmmm. That's very interesting.

MALCOLM

Yes. Well, good day.

MALCOLM begins to walk on.

EMMA

I'm not all that wild about Irish monastic architecture, myself.

MALCOLM

Pardon?

EMMA

I much prefer the Benedictine style. The Benedictines really knew how to build monasteries.

MALCOLM

They did?

EMMA

Of course.

EMMA goes back to her gardening. MALCOLM is dumbfounded.

MALCOLM

Would you like to go for a walk with me?

EMMA

Absolutely.

MALCOLM is relieved and offers his hand, which EMMA accepts. He escorts her off stage left.

EDWARD enters, SR and speaks again to the audience.

EDWARD

No, sir, I don't have any college course work. There is nothing to suggest that I'm qualified. But I am. Just let me show you. Pay me on commission. You'll lose nothing that way. In a month's time, if I don't outsell all your other salesmen, well, then, I'll find something else. Why yes, sir. Thank you, sir. I'll start right away, if that's all right. It is a great honor to work for you. Thank you, Thank you....

EDWARD dashes off, SR. MALCOLM and EMMA stroll across the stage.

EMMA

So you want to be a judge?

MALCOLM

Yes. Ultimately.

EMMA

Judgeships are very competitive, aren't they?

MALCOLM

Yes. But if you do the right things, clerk for the right people, know the right... it can be done.

EMMA

So it's very political?

MALCOLM

Very.

EMMA

It'd be nice to know there's someone involved in politics who's a good person. Honest, and well versed in the behaviors of jellyfish. I would think that's very important.

MALCOLM kisses EMMA.

EMMA and MALCOLM exit, and EDWARD enters, his arms full of textbooks and sits down in the nursing chair and begins to read.

MALCOLM enters, smiling and holding a daisy.

MALCOLM

Hello, Ed. What are you up to?

EDWARD

Learning how the ice age carved up Europe.

MALCOLM

Well, impressive. Getting a jump on classes, I take it.

EDWARD

No. I was just curious, actually.

MALCOLM

Good for you. What classes are you going to take? You'd be a fine lawyer, Ed. You might consider law.

EDWARD

I'm not going to college. I got a job.

MALCOLM

What? You're going to college.

EDWARD

I'm not, at least not right now. I'm selling textbooks to schools, here, in Lynchburg. I can stay with Mama and you can go to Richmond. You're free.

MALCOLM

Free... this is ridiculous. You have a responsibility to go to college and learn everything you possibly can.

EDWARD

But I can learn everything here. I've got the books. College isn't going to offer me more than that.

MALCOLM

How would you know? You've never been. College will open doors for you. You're capable of so much more than being a salesman.

EDWARD

It's good, honest work, Mac, and it's what I'm going to do.

EMMA comes on stage and kneels at her garden.

MALCOLM

(looking at EMMA)

You're throwing your life away.

EDWARD

I can still go to college. Just not right now.

MALCOLM

What sort of textbooks do you sell?

EDWARD

Everything. And I'm learning everything, too. It's really something, Mac.

MALCOLM

You're crazy. This is really what you want to do?

EDWARD

Yes.

MALCOLM

It's your own grave. Good luck.

EDWARD

I'll be fine. I'm good at this, Mac. I get to read, work with people.... and like I said, I'll be responsible for Mama. You aren't stuck here anymore.

MALCOLM

(looking at EMMA)

Yes, well, I have work here, and it'd be nice for Mama to have us both for Sunday dinner for a while.

EDWARD

I can do it, Mac. You don't have to stay because of me.

MALCOLM

I'm not. It's almost dinner. Let's see what's in the kitchen.

MALCOLM and EDWARD pick up the books and exit. EMMA gathers vegetables and exits as well.

MATTI

(placing the ring on her finger)

It fits.

HANNAH

Let's see. It looks very nice. Very dignified.

MATTI

What's the other thing?

HANNAH

Here... I need my glasses.

HANNAH puts on her reading glasses and leans way back on the bench pushing MATTI to the ground.

Sorry. It's a photo of Malcolm, Edward... and Papa. This must be at Malcolm's wedding. Look at it.

MATTI

Which is which?

HANNAH

The one on the left is Edward....

EDWARD enters in a tuxedo.

The one in the center is Malcolm... he looks so handsome

MALCOLM enters

And the one in the right is your grandfather.

GRAHAM enters (with a camera which he sets up)

MATTI

I've never seen a picture of him.

HANNAH

I never had one.

MATTI

He's got my nose.

HANNAH

What?

MATTI

He's got my nose! Look here....

HANNAH

I never noticed before. I always thought you had your grandmother's nose.

MATTI

(very excited and cheerful)

I hate my nose! Don't you see? It's outright awful.

HANNAH

I always liked it.

MATTI

I used to dream of having another nose. Something refined, elegant. I look like I've got some sort of trunk. And he's got it, too.

MATTI walks right up to GRAHAM

You know, it's not so bad on him. It's not so bad at all. It has a certain.... nobility. A certain strength.

HANNAH

He had all those things.

THERE is a FLASH of GRAHAM'S camera.

GRAHAM

All right. That's it then. One for the ages.

MALCOLM

Are you sure I look all right?

GRAHAM adjusts MALCOLM'S tie.

GRAHAM

You are the perfect picture of dashing good looks.

MALCOLM

And you should know. So it's straight.

GRAHAM

Yes. It's straight.

MALCOLM

Ed?

EDWARD

Straight as an arrow. You look great. You'll knock her off her feet.

MALCOLM

I just don't want to look like an idiot.

GRAHAM

Well there's not much I can do about that.

MALCOLM

Why you...

They fake boxing each other. There is a SOUND of KNOCKING.

EDWARD

I'll get it. Who is it?

EMMA

Tell Mac to turn around and not look. I'm coming in.

EDWARD

But you can't.... *(to MALCOLM)* turn around....

A BUSTLE, attached to EMMA enters the room. SHE has a large object wrapped in brown paper in her arms.

MALCOLM

(who has his back to her)

Is something wrong? Is there a problem? What's going on?

EMMA

I'm not looking. Mac, where are you?

MALCOLM

Over here.

EMMA

Edward, could you help me?

EDWARD

Oh, um... certainly.

EDWARD backs EMMA up to MALCOLM

EMMA

(to MALCOLM) Hello, love. *(to EDWARD)* Thanks. Who else is here?

EDWARD

Graham.

EMMA

Graham! I haven't met you yet. Where are you?

GRAHAM

(who is right behind MALCOLM)

Right here.

EMMA

Mac. On my count, rotate towards your left, go...

MALCOLM and EMMA rotate 180 degrees.

MALCOLM

Could you please tell me what this is about?

EMMA

Hello. It's a pleasure to meet you.

GRAHAM

The pleasure's mine. Mac is an extraordinarily lucky fellow. And may I say, those are lovely flowers in your hair.

EMMA

Thank you. They're from my garden.

MALCOLM

Not to interrupt this lovely exchange, but why are you here?

EMMA

I should stop teasing you. A present just arrived for us from Cedar Ridge, NY, and I thought you might like to open it.

EDWARD

Cedar Ridge! Is Violet here?

EMMA

No. It was sent by a messenger.

EDWARD

Oh. She must be busy.

EMMA

(to MALCOLM)

So, will you open it?

MALCOLM

If you give it to me.

EMMA hands the painting to EDWARD who takes it around to MALCOLM. GRAHAM joins them. THEY peel away the paper to reveal a painting. It is a highly stylized rendition of tiger lilies.

EMMA

Well? What is it?

GRAHAM

It's not bad at all...

EDWARD

Not bad? Look at the use of color. It's bursting forth off of the canvas.

MALCOLM

It's still a bunch of flowers.

He hands the canvas to EDWARD who shows it to EMMA.

EMMA

(excitedly)

It is a bunch of flowers. Mac, it's wonderful. We'll hang it in the dining room. Well, I should be going. Mother's going to wonder why I'm taking so long.

MALCOLM

You told her you were coming here?

EMMA

Of course not. I told her I needed fresh air.

MALCOLM

She's going to think you bolted.

EMMA

Keeps her on her toes. I should really get back, though. I'll see you soon.

MALCOLM

I love you.

EMMA

And I you. Now turn. Good bye...

EMMA dashes off, leaving the painting.

MALCOLM

What was she thinking sending this to me? She promised to come home and instead she taunts me with this.

EDWARD

She'll come home.

GRAHAM

I'm sure she didn't mean to taunt you. That's not like Vi.

MALCOLM

It's what she's been doing her entire life. She has no thought for how she treats people or for what they might be feeling. If it weren't for her, I'd be clerking in Richmond.

EDWARD

And you wouldn't have met Emma.

GRAHAM

Speaking of which, we've got a wedding to go to.

MALCOLM, EDWARD, and GRAHAM exit.

MATTI

How come Malcolm and Emma never had children?

HANNAH

I don't know. They didn't. I'm boiling here. This is just ridiculous.

MATTI

We could go inside and find some air conditioning.

HANNAH

And miss your father? I don't think so. I'm sitting right here until he comes if it kills me.

MATTI

Oh, joy. What were Emma and Malcolm like?

HANNAH

Violet always said they were lots of fun. They threw the best parties.

Looking at the photo of the wedding party.

I've heard their wedding reception was talked about for years. Lynchburg hasn't seen the like since. I wish I knew what happened to

Emma's wedding dress. It would look nice on you. It had beautiful lace...

EMMA enters, with a glass of champagne, and MALCOLM.

MATTI

Will you get off the wedding business. I'm NOT getting married.

HANNAH

But think of the reception we could have.... you have to admit we'd have fun. Dancing....

DANCE MUSIC begins. MALCOLM and EMMA dance together. GRAHAM and EDWARD enter. GRAHAM offers his hand to HANNAH.

Papa always could dance so beautifully.

GRAHAM and HANNAH dance.

MATTI

Weddings... sheesh...

MATTI gets very comfortable on the bench. EDWARD comes up to her.

EDWARD

May I?

MATTI

Pardon?

EDWARD

Would you care to dance?

MATTI

Um... yes, actually.

They dance. EMMA finishes her champagne, and gets a refill. The women and men separate to opposite sides of the stage. GRAHAM gets a drink for himself and MALCOLM.

GRAHAM

(handing MALCOLM one drink and then the other)

Mac?

MALCOLM

Thanks.

GRAHAM

Emma's really wonderful. Perfectly lovely. You know, she laughs like Violet.

MALCOLM

She most certainly does not. You're mistaken.

GRAHAM

Perhaps. Well I'd say you've done well, old boy.

MALCOLM

Why thank you, old chum.

GRAHAM

Smile for the camera.

GRAHAM takes pictures of the reception.

HANNAH

I do like a good party.

EMMA

I thought mother would never stop.... she's put doilies on everything. Good God....

MATTI

The lace is nice, though.

EMMA

It is nice. It was my grandmother's. There's something to be said for tradition.

MATTI

I suppose so.

EDWARD comes up to MALCOLM and GRAHAM.

EDWARD

Did you see what Beverly Wilcott is wearing? She looks like an entire mountain range. Oh, and Graham... if you don't dance with Matilda Faith, I'll kill you. She's been eyeing you all evening.

MALCOLM

I've heard she's been eyeing you all summer. You are the next in line....

GRAHAM

Gentlemen, gentlemen.... while Miss Matilda is a lovely lady, I am far too young to consider such things as matrimony... but, I will do my gentlemanly duty and give her a spin about the dance floor.

MALCOLM

You are so kind. And I believe I will dance with my wife.

GRAHAM again dances with HANNAH. MALCOLM dances with EMMA. EDWARD approaches MATTI, who is standing behind the chair.

EDWARD

Would you care to dance again?

MATTI

I'd love to. I forgot how much I love it. I haven't danced in ages.

EDWARD

You're wonderful. Everyone is watching you.

MATTI

(stopping, embarrassed)

They are.

EDWARD

(coaxing her on)

Yes, and they see nothing but perfect grace.

MATTI

Thank you.

EDWARD

You are so like my sister. Have we met before?

MATTI

I don't think so.

EDWARD

It must be the resemblance. It's striking.

The dance ends. EMMA and MALCOLM wave to the guests and leave. The guests throw confetti. EDWARD follows them. MATTI goes to the bench and sits down. HANNAH and GRAHAM continue to dance. GRAHAM leaves, and HANNAH dances alone.

HANNAH stops.

HANNAH

I hate funerals.

MATTI gets up and wraps her arms around HANNAH.

I'm so lucky to have you.... my little girl. Let's see that ring again... it suits you so well. You're from good stock. I wish you could've known them. *(beat)* Well, this is just a pickle, isn't it. Stranded here with this chair and no sign of your father....

MATTI

What happened after Malcolm and Emma married?

HANNAH

They moved down the street. And Papa left to join the Navy. And I guess that must have been when Edward met Andrew.

MATTI

What did Andrew do?

HANNAH

Some sort of law. It's been so long....

ANDREW enters wearing a rain coat and carrying a set of files.

EDWARD enters wearing a raincoat, and carrying an umbrella, books, and a briefcase.

EDWARD looks at ANDREW, who is looking straight ahead. ANDREW turns his head to look at EDWARD who immediately looks straight ahead. ANDREW smiles, then grimaces at the rain.

There is a FLASH of LIGHTNING and a CRASH of THUNDER. The SOUND of RAIN begins.

ANDREW tries to shield his files under his coat. EDWARD opens his umbrella. HANNAH finds an umbrella in her purse and opens it. MATTI gets an umbrella from off stage and opens it. She protects the nursing chair.

EDWARD

Here. There's room.

ANDREW

Thank you.

ANDREW goes under EDWARD'S umbrella.

EDWARD

You're waiting for the 47 bus?

ANDREW

Yes.

EDWARD

I hope it gets here soon. With this rain and all....

ANDREW

Yes, it's a mess, and I'm going to be late.

EDWARD

Isn't that always the way. Edward Grey. It's a pleasure to meet you.

ANDREW

Andrew Morris, and the pleasure's mine. You have the umbrella.

EDWARD

Yes, I suppose I do. What is it you do, Mr. Morris?

ANDREW

Andrew. I'm a divorce attorney.

EDWARD

Divorce attorney? I thought we didn't have any divorces here. Is business good?

ANDREW

Surprisingly so.

EDWARD

Well, I suppose I should say congratulations but that just doesn't seem right, some how.

LIGHTNING flashes and THUNDER echoes. THE SOUND of RAIN increases to a full downpour.

EDWARD

Here, just take the umbrella.

ANDREW

It's yours.

EDWARD

Your files will be ruined if they're wet....

ANDREW

So will your books....

EDWARD

I should have gotten a bigger umbrella. That bus should be here. Any moment....

ANDREW

What is it you do, Mr. Grey?

EDWARD

Edward. I sell books.

ANDREW

And is your business good?

EDWARD

Marvelous, in fact.

ANDREW

Really. What sort of books do you sell?

EDWARD

Westward expansion and diamond cutting. Leather carving and Calculus. Actually, that one's a hard sell. I tell them that Calculus is the description of creation. If they learn it, they'll speak the language of God.

ANDREW

I see. And that inspires them?

EDWARD

Robert E. Lee High and Dolly Madison community college are determined to try. There's so much to learn. It really can be a heady experience.

ANDREW

Do you like Beethoven?

EDWARD

Pardon?

ANDREW

Beethoven. I have tickets for the Seventh Symphony tonight, and I'm afraid my former companion had to cancel. Would you join me?

EDWARD

I only really know the ninth.

ANDREW

The seventh is spectacular. The second movement is angelic.

EDWARD

That does sound promising.... I'd love to join you.

ANDREW

Perfect.

THEY come very close. THE STORM begins to clear.

EDWARD

I think it's passing, and the bus will be here soon.

ANDREW

It will.

ANDREW tips the umbrella, blocking himself ad EDWARD from the audience as he kisses him. THE HEADLIGHTS of the BUS appear and ANDREW and EDWARD exit.

HANNAH

I was told they used to kiss in public.

MATTI

You and Dad kiss in public much to my continued dismay.

HANNAH

If he doesn't get here soon, I can assure you there won't be much more kissing going on.

The weather clears and MATTI and HANNAH put away the umbrellas and HANNAH sits on the bench feeling her forehead, checking her pulse, and not leaving room for MATTI.

MATTI

Could you move over a little?

HANNAH

No. It's hot. I need some space.

MATTI roles her eyes and remains standing.

GRAHAM enters in a navy uniform.

GRAHAM

Ed! Ed, are you here?

EDWARD

Graham. What are you doing home?

GRAHAM

I'm shipping out.

EDWARD

Now....

GRAHAM

Yes. I don't have much time. I have to get back to Norfolk. Matilda's going to have the baby here in Lynchburg. She's with her mother. I'd really appreciate it if you and Mac and Emma could check on her.

EDWARD

Of course. Anything. I'm going to miss you.

GRAHAM

Nah. You'll be busy with all your concerts and plays. Mac said you're learning the piano.

EDWARD

Got to start sometime. You will take care of yourself.

GRAHAM

I'll be fine. Promise me something, though, will you?

EDWARD

Of course. Anything.

GRAHAM

I'm not going to be here when the baby comes, and, well the war being what it is....

EDWARD

You'll be fine, Graham. I know you'll be back.

GRAHAM

Of course. Just promise me you'll tell them about the family. About the Greys. It's a silly thing, I know; I just want them to know us.

EDWARD

I will. You have my word. Take care of yourself, Graham. We'll pray for you.

GRAHAM

And I for you. God bless you, Ed. I will miss you terribly.

EDWARD

I'll send you books to read.

GRAHAM

I look forward to it. I have to go. I can't miss the train. Good bye, Ed.

EDWARD

Godspeed....

HANNAH

I can move over a little, I suppose.

MATTI

That's all right. I'm fine right here. So, your father was in World War Two?

HANNAH

Your grandfather was, yes. He got a medal. He developed photos....

GRAHAM enters in an NAVY uniform with a photograph.

GRAHAM

(to MATTI)

Get this to Admiral Walters. You, come on. This is urgent.

MATTI salutes and exits.

HANNAH rises, and approaches her father.

MATTI returns with a telegram.

MATTI

Sir, this just came for you.

GRAHAM

Thank you. At ease, ensign. Well, I'll be.... I, young man, am the father of a healthy, beautiful eight pound four ounce baby girl.

MATTI

Congratulations, sir.

HANNAH

Eight pounds? I wasn't that large.

GRAHAM

Ensign, would you take a note for me, please?

MATTI

Certainly, sir.

GRAHAM

It's to my wife.

MATTI

Yes, sir.

GRAHAM

Dearest Matilda, I wish more than anything I could be with you now. If it weren't for this stupid war.... I wish we could be together. I'm sorry you have to go through this all alone. Damn war....

MATTI

Damn war.

GRAHAM

Please strike that. I just miss my wife.

MATTI

Yes, sir.

GRAHAM

Matilda, I miss you. I want to take you up in my arms and.... the weather has been very good here. When I'm not on duty, I climb up the hill to the light house and take pictures of the ocean for you. (*To MATTI*) With my own film.

MATTI

With your own film. Yes, sir.

GRAHAM

Just tell her I adore her, and I can't wait to see my daughter.

MATTI

Can't wait. Yes, sir. Sir?

GRAHAM

Yes?

MATTI

Congratulations, sir.... on being a father.

GRAHAM

Congratulations. I'm a father. I'm a father.

HANNAH

Papa. And to think you have his nose.

MATTI

His noble nose.

HANNAH

The perfect nose to be a world-traveled consultant who guides the souls or all the most important corporations. With benefits.

MATTI

With benefits.

HANNAH

And brilliant young men.

MATTI

You must want me to write after all.

VIOLET enters, carrying a painting, and addresses an unseen painter of some note.

VIOLET

Hello. Mrs. Franklin? I'm Violet Grey.... we spoke when you came by the house... you were looking at John and Lynn's work. You said you would like to see mine some day... I've brought it. Here.

VIOLET proudly thrusts her painting up for display.

I call it "Lilies in the evening". Well, what do you think? Really? You think it's promising? That's such a generous compliment. No... I meant to exaggerate the shadows. The sun? Yes, I know it's unnatural... it's supposed to be unworldly.... It's not unlike your work, "Majesty on Mt. Washington". The shadows were exaggerated there. I know it's a novice attempt. I'm a novice. I'm sorry for taking your time. *(to herself)* I didn't come here to be berated. *(to Mrs. Franklin)* If you think I have a lot to learn, then teach me, damn it! Please pardon me. I just want to get better. I want to learn. I'm sorry. Good day. Friday? Noon? I'll be here. Absolutely. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Good bye.

VIOLET exits with her painting.

MALCOLM and EMMA enter in full evening attire.

EMMA

Would you like a nightcap?

MALCOLM

Why not?

EMMA goes off stage.

MALCOLM

(sitting in the nursing chair and calling to her)

Don cornered me again. He says I owe it to the community.

EMMA returns with two glasses of Scotch.

EMMA

And what did you say?

MALCOLM

That a few well-made cases does not mean I have political aspirations.

EMMA

Of course not. Talking to Don means you have political aspirations.

MALCOLM

He cornered me.

EMMA

You were in the middle of the room.

MALCOLM

You don't think I should consider running?

EMMA

I think you should. You've always talked about being a judge.

MALCOLM

That's a far cry from being mayor. I don't know the first thing about administration.

EMMA

You run your own practice.

MALCOLM

I've never held an office.

EMMA

You're fresh blood.

MALCOLM

It'll be a real fight just for the nomination.

EMMA

You fight for clients all the time.

MALCOLM

I'm not sure my view's are that popular.

EMMA

You won't know until you try..... it's trite but true.

MALCOLM

I should be older, more mature, more background. More the statesman.

EMMA

Ah... you don't fit the mold. I shouldn't have raised it, and it's time to turn in.... *(kissing him)* Good night, my love.

MALCOLM

(startled at the sudden turn in conversation)

Good night.

EMMA

Of course, you could break the mold. Be your own person and instill your own ideas. Restore some life to the position.

MALCOLM

What if I'm terrible?

EMMA

Then you'll be tarred and feathered and laughed out of town.

MALCOLM

Oh, well, in that case....

EMMA

Or you might do some good.

MALCOLM

Perhaps.

EMMA and MALCOLM exit. VIOLET enters, in a painting smock, and addresses an unseen comrade in the artist's colony.

VIOLET

A regurgitation of neoclassical values of the landscape? What does that even mean? I'm just trying to understand. I assure you I mean no insult. It honestly is an honor to learn from you, but can't you be more

concrete. Yes, I'll be quiet and listen. The color's too bold? I was trying to create fireworks. I'm sorry.... It's artificial? It's surreal! All right, I'll reconsider. No, I don't think my work is a vain attempt to reinvent impressionism. I'll keep trying. *(muttering)* At least all my brother complained about was they were flowers. All right, next week. Something new.... *(sighs)* thank you Mrs. Franklin. Pardon? No, it's very hard to paint at this rate. I work as well. I'm a quality control technician at Kendall Foods Company. Yes, painting is my passion. But I have to pay the bills, don't I? It's not as if our group generates a profit. Forgive me for complaining... I'm just a little tired. I will bring something new, and hopefully more original next Friday. Thank you again for all your time, Mrs. Franklin.

VIOLET dashes off, pulling off her smock to reveal her work suit.

EMMA enters with her gardening supplies and begins to garden.

MALCOLM enters, having returned from campaigning. HE is wearing a campaign button and straw hat.

EMMA

You're back early. How did it go?

MALCOLM

Good. Good. My speech was well received.

EMMA

And what's the news from Don?

MALCOLM

We're close.

EMMA

And closing in?

MALCOLM

We're trying.

EMMA

I'm sure it's going well. I'm almost done here and then I'll get changed. Should I wear my blue dress tonight or the green?

MALCOLM

Tonight.

EMMA

To the Elk's lodge meeting. If there's dancing, I'll wear the blue.

MALCOLM

I don't think there will be.

EMMA

Then I'll wear the green.

MALCOLM

Maybe you should stay in tonight. It's not going to be much fun.

EMMA

Don't be silly. I can't wait to see you addressing all of Lynchburg's finest in your tux.... and I hear the Elk's lodge has the finest hams in all of Virginia.

MALCOLM

It will be stuffy.... and dull. Stay home and get some rest.

EMMA

I'm not tired. And if it's going to be so stuffy, I'll go and breathe some fresh air into things. Get everyone moving around a bit.

MALCOLM

No. You're not going.

EMMA

I'm not.

MALCOLM

It's just.... it's the kind of thing where it would be better if I go alone. Just for tonight.

EMMA

Did Don put you up to this, or did you decide this all by yourself?

MALCOLM

Don and I talked about it. Emma, this is a very important evening....

EMMA

And that's why I want to be by your side.

MALCOLM

I want you there, too.

EMMA

Then let me come.

MALCOLM

It will hurt my chanced of getting elected. I need these people if I have any hope of winning.

EMMA

And my presence will keep them from voting for you.

MALCOLM

They have money, and they have sensibilities. To get the one, I have to appeal to the other. It's unfair but it's the way things are, and I know, a beautiful, smart woman such as yourself can understand that.

EMMA

I see you've been practicing this. You've become quite the orator, Mac. Now, you're making speeches to your wife.

MALCOLM

You can't come because you can't go an evening without a bottle of gin and a twist of lime. Because you called Mrs. Fielding a stuck up old cow.

EMMA

She said she wasn't sure if a man from the working class had the vision to lead the city.

MALCOLM

That's not the point. They are stuck up, stupid, petty people, but they have the pocketbooks, and we don't. I am working class, and elections cost money. Right now, as stupid and petty as they are, I cannot afford to ignore them. Or offend them. Or their sensibilities. Anyone with any sense could see you are an amazing, wonderful woman with the most gorgeous garden in the state. But these people don't have sense. Instead of the garden, they see the dirt.

EMMA watches MALCOLM, PAUSE.

EMMA

Of course. Well, I'll just finish up here, and go inside. Your tux is laid out on the bed, and there's fresh soap in the tub. And I got you more of the aftershave from Mr. Robert's shop. I'm sure you'll be wonderful tonight.

MALCOLM

Emma... I'm sorry. I do want you to come.

EMMA

I want you to win as much as you do. It's just one evening. It's not important. Now, go inside and get ready. I'll be right in.

MALCOLM

I love you.

EMMA

And I you. Now, go on.

MALCOLM exits, EMMA gardens.

They see the dirt. How could I have been so blind?

EMMA vigorously tries to get the dirt out of her dress, then sits back on her heels.

All I ever wanted to be was your beloved Emma, not your shame.

EMMA gets up, straightens her skirt, dusts herself off and exits.

VIOLET enters, dressed in an elegant dress. SHE shakes the hands of unseen guests at her opening.

VIOLET

Thank you. Thank you for coming. Actually, you should really praise Jackie. She's the one who made the showing possible. The lighting's just wonderful... and the food. Thank God for caterers. God, my feet hurt. When are these people leaving. They mull like cattle. Good to see you, take care. Yes, good to meet you. You're interested in "Moonlit Sunflowers"? Talk to Martin. He's handling the sales. It's one of my favorites, too. They must think it'll match their wall paper.... Well, I suppose I should mingle. Hello. Yes... "Walking with Walter"? No that's not my work. I'm afraid I'm not familiar with it. Yes, I'm sure I didn't paint it. Yes, thank you for coming.... Good grief.... hello. Thank you. Yes, I'm trying some new things.... they're just ideas right now. It's a pleasure to meet you.... Jackie. Thank God you're here. Who are all

these people? My feet ache, and I'm tired of smiling. I'll behave.
Perhaps I'll mingle over to the hors d'oeuvres.

VIOLET mingles her way off the stage.

MATTI

So she really joined a flower club?

HANNAH

Not just any flower club, the Lynchburg garden club. Home to the most snooty, stuck up, petty, but always well dressed ladies of Lynchburg.

HANNAH and MATTI put on wide straw hats covered in flowers and approach the front of the stage. EMMA enters with a basket of flowers.

And they were obsessed with protocol. Everything was done by the book. *(In a very haughty voice)* The Lynchburg garden club and flower guild is called to order. Madam secretary will read the minutes.

MATTI

Thank you, Madam President. At 2:16 pm, the minutes were read. At 2:17 pm Mrs. Walter Miller proposed an amendment to the constitution to allow the induction of hybrid roses into the official register of plants....

EMMA

I can't do this.

HANNAH

Please pause, Madam Secretary. May I help you?

EMMA

Yes. I'm Emma Grey. I'd like to join.

HANNAH

Mrs. Malcolm Grey?

EMMA

Yes...

HANNAH

Won't you have a seat?

HANNAH gestures to the chair. EMMA sits.

MATTI

At 2:18 pm, Mrs. Reginald Davies motioned to....

HANNAH

Enough with the minutes, Madam Secretary. Now, to the business at hand, today we will be making arrangements for the veteran's home.

During this, MATTI retrieves a small table with flowers and frogs from off stage and places it CS.

We'll be working with spider mums from Mrs. Davies' garden. Thank you.

MATTI nods. HANNAH and MATTI begin arranging flowers on either side of the table.

Mrs. Grey, won't you join us?

EMMA

I'd be delighted.

EMMA moves to the center of the table.

MATTI

And how is little William?

HANNAH

Darling. He's over his chicken pox and as wonderful as ever. He's been accepted to St. John's for the fall.

MATTI

Congratulations.

HANNAH

And how is Julia?

MATTI

Her piano lessons are coming along quite nicely, now that Randal put his foot down and made her practice.

HANNAH

Good for him. Do you have little ones, Mrs. Grey?

MATTI glares at HANNAH.

EMMA

Please call me Emma, and no, Mac and I haven't been blessed with them.

HANNAH

Such a shame, Emma. Mr. Grey is such a respected figure. He'd make a wonderful father.

EMMA

Yes, he would.

MATTI

Randal thinks we should send Julia to Willamina finishing school next year.

HANNAH

That's where you went, isn't it, Emma?

EMMA

For a period. These are lovely flowers.

HANNAH

Yes, well, Mrs. Davies has a wonderful gardener. Perhaps you might try him. It's such a shame to see you kneeling in the mud all the time. You really should consider help.

EMMA

I'm the only one who.... yes, thank you. That's a wonderful idea.

HANNAH

Good, good. We're really delighted that you've decided to join us.

EMMA

So am I.

HANNAH and MATTI take away the table, remove their hats, and sit back on the bench. EMMA pours herself a glass of scotch, downs it, pours a second, and sits in the nursing chair. MALCOLM enters, with his campaign paraphernalia.

MALCOLM

Emma? There's a man in your garden who says he's your gardener.

EMMA

Yes. Mrs. Davies recommended him.

MALCOLM

But you hate people in your garden.

EMMA

He's very good.

MALCOLM

Still....

EMMA pours another glass of gin.

Emma, it's not even sundown.

EMMA

I just want a splash of something before I get dinner.

MALCOLM

Emma, don't you think it might be a bit much?

EMMA

I'm fine.

MALCOLM

I'm not saying you aren't, my love.

EMMA

You sound like all those gossip hounds chattering.... you're becoming an old woman. Would you like something?

MALCOLM

No, thank you.

EMMA

How was another day on the campaign trail?

MALCOLM

Very promising. Don says we're neck and neck, now. Things are finally going our way.

EMMA

(sitting back in the nursing chair)

I'm glad.

MALCOLM

Don also mentioned that you dropped by. You didn't say hello.

EMMA

I was busy. I'm sorry, my love. I will next time.

MALCOLM

Why did you stop by?

EMMA

I was just passing by and popped my head in to say hello.

MALCOLM

To Don?

EMMA

Yes.

MALCOLM

Where were you passing to?

EMMA

Why are you asking so many questions? I should start dinner.

EMMA downs the rest of her drink. MALCOLM kneels down and blocks EMMA from rising.

MALCOLM

I'm concerned. You're not yourself.

EMMA

Yes, I am. Now, let me up.

MALCOLM

Not until you tell me where you went.

EMMA

To a garden club meeting. Let me up.

MALCOLM

The Lynchburg garden club?

EMMA

Yes. Move, Mac.

EMMA rises, pushing MALCOLM out of her way.

MALCOLM

What is wrong with you?

EMMA

Nothing.

MALCOLM

Like hell there is.

EMMA

How dare you speak to me like that.

MALCOLM

You're hiding something from me.

EMMA

Mac, you're crazy.

MALCOLM

We have a gardener, you're attending garden club meetings, and you pop in to talk with Don? I want to know why.

EMMA

Because I want to.

MALCOLM

You never did before.

EMMA

Well, I do now. You should wash up.

MALCOLM

Why?

EMMA

Because dinner will be ready soon.

MALCOLM

That's not what I meant.

EMMA

People change. Be happy: you're moving ahead, and I'm keeping busy.

MALCOLM

You can't be happy. The garden club? Whew...

EMMA

That's for me to decide.

MALCOLM

You shouldn't do this for me.

EMMA

I'm not.

MALCOLM

You belong in your garden. I don't want to come home and see some stranger weeding your flowers.

EMMA

I'm busy, now. I don't have the time to do everything here. And he won't be a stranger. You'll get to know him.

MALCOLM

Give up the garden club. They're the most vapid group in all of Lynchburg.

EMMA

But they're married to the most prominent.

MALCOLM

Who a few days ago you were comparing to livestock.

EMMA

And now they're livestock with large bank accounts and power.

MALCOLM

That's my concern, not yours.

EMMA

It is if you want to win.

MALCOLM

I don't need your help.

EMMA

Don't think you do....

MALCOLM

Stay away from him.

EMMA

...And I can help.

MALCOLM

I don't want your help. I want you to be my Emma.

EMMA

Mac, I can't give you a child, at least let me give you this.

MALCOLM

Emma, that's not your fault.

EMMA

You know it is. Now, I have to see to dinner. Wash up, and make some cocktails.

MALCOLM

Emma...

EMMA

I was born to be the mayor's wife. Now, wash up.

EMMA exits. MALCOLM watches, then exits as well.

MATTI

Have you ever wondered if marrying Dad kept you from being your own person and doing your own thing?

HANNAH

My own thing?

MATTI

Making your mark, having an impact.

HANNAH

You're my mark.

MATTI

Seriously...

HANNAH

I am serious.

MATTI

Isn't that sort of empty?

HANNAH

I like to think I dedicated my life to someone else.

MATTI

And that's enough?

HANNAH

Would you rather have had me sit on the couch for the last twenty eight years eating bon bons?

MATTI

I love bon bons.

HANNAH

Success is how you define it.

MATTI

That's frightenly Zen.

HANNAH

I've been studying Eastern religions.

MATTI looks at HANNAH like she's sprouted a third eye.

Wait! Is that your father? Matti, grab the chair! Come with me. He's driving off! Come on.

HANNAH runs off stage. MATTI looks at the chair, then where HANNAH went, grabs the chair, and dashes after her.

MATTI

Wait!

END ACT I, lights down.

ACT II: RETURN TO THE PARK

the setting: the same as the end of Act I.

HANNAH and MATTI enter; MATTI still has the chair.

MATTI

I can't believe we ran after a plumber for two miles.

HANNAH

I can't believe he wouldn't drive us to Charlottesville.

MATTI

It was a little much when you offered him my hand in marriage if he'd take us there.

HANNAH

He seemed nice.

MATTI

You know, you're absolutely impossible.

HANNAH

And you're the little apple who fell very close to the tree.

MATTI

I was thinking about it on the trek back here: I'll take the job. It's time I grew up and settled down. I'm kidding myself with this writing business. I never have written a chapter four, and I'm never going to. At least I'll get to see the world.

HANNAH

Oh, my darling.... You'll be financially secure and think of all the places you'll visit. It'll be a wonderful adventure. I want postcards from everywhere. Especially Persia.

MATTI

Persia. It might surprise you.

EDWARD and ANDREW enter, in formal attire, and move to downstage right.

EDWARD

The Honorable Mayor and Mrs. Grey request your presence at the Christmas ball to raise money for the creation of a new public garden to honor the men of Lynchburg who gave their lives to protect this nation. Whew. That's a mouthful.

HANNAH and MATTI go off stage to retrieve shawls et al.

To Mr. Edward Grey and guest.

ANDREW

I don't want to go.

EDWARD

Nonsense. You're dressed, and you look wonderful.

ANDREW

How can you make a scene at your brother's ball?

EDWARD

I have no intention of making a scene. I simply am bringing a guest to the ball as per the invitation. Come, now. It will be fun, and I promised Emma I'd dance with her.

ANDREW

And me?

EDWARD

We'll find you someone nice.

ANDREW

How revolting.

EDWARD

(rolling his eyes)

Oh, please. Come on.

ANDREW and EDWARD exit. HANNAH and MATTI return with elegant shawls and hats. THEY sit back down on the bench.

EMMA and MALCOLM enter in formal attire.

EMMA

I wish Graham and Matilda could come.

MALCOLM

He's on duty.

EMMA

Poor Matilda. I wish she'd come down here with Hannah. It must get lonely with him away.

MALCOLM

She has the other officer's wives.

EMMA

I suppose. She should have the chair.

MALCOLM

She said she doesn't have room for it.

EMMA

She should find room. She has a child....

MALCOLM pulls out a package for EMMA.

MALCOLM

Merry Christmas.

EMMA

We're supposed to wait for Christmas morning.

MALCOLM

Open it.

EMMA

You are so devious.

EMMA opens the present. It is a silver comb for her hair.

Oh, Mac....

MALCOLM

The beautiful wife of the Mayor should have a beautiful comb.

HE kisses her.

It was my grandmother's.

EMMA

It's stunning.

EMMA puts it in her hair, with MALCOLM'S help.

MALCOLM

Well, hear, hear.... Mr. and Mrs. Ganson. We are so pleased you could join us this evening. Merry Christmas.

EMMA

It's a pleasure to see you again. The gardens will be such a gift to the community. Mr. Roberts, hello again. Merry Christmas.

HANNAH and MATTI enter.

HANNAH

The Christmas Ball, the highlight of Lynchburg's social season. All the hoity-toity in all their best finery came out to be seen.

MATTI

A night to look your best and be your most effervescent.

HANNAH

A night to be someone else.

MATTI

A masquerade without the masks.

MALCOLM

Miss Wilcott and Miss Wilcott! Always a pleasure.

EMMA

(kissing both of them)

Merry Christmas! You two look splendid.

THEY blush and giggle.

Are those new pearls?

HANNAH

Yes. Straight from Persia.

EMMA

Oh, well, they're really wonderful.

MATTI

It takes an oyster it's entire lifetime to produce a single pearl.

HANNAH

But what a thing to make.

EMMA

Well, I'm not being a very good host. Let me introduce you to the Gansons. Right this way.

EMMA leads MATTI and HANNAH across the room.

EDWARD and ANDREW enter.

EMMA

Edward! How are you? Looks like I'll have a marvelous dance partner after all.

MALCOLM

And here I stand, chopped liver with two left feet. Hello, Ed. We're glad you could make it.

EDWARD

Merry Christmas.

HE kisses EMMA on the cheek.

This is my friend, Andrew Morris.

MALCOLM

Welcome. It's a pleasure to meet you.

ANDREW

Likewise.

EDWARD

And these are for you.

EDWARD hands presents to MALCOLM and EMMA.

EMMA

Thank you... Emma, by Jane Austen. The title's quite promising.

MALCOLM opens his present, a copy of the Federalist Papers.

MALCOLM

Well, I'll be. Thank you, Ed. I've needed a new copy for a long time.

EDWARD

Merry Christmas.

EMMA

Would you like a drink? We have warm spiced rum.

ANDREW

Sounds delightful.

Anyone else? EMMA

A small glass. EDWARD

A little perhaps. MALCOLM

Let me help you. ANDREW

Thank you. EMMA

THEY exit to get drinks.

I should say hello to the Wilcotts. EDWARD

More unseen guests arrive. EDWARD socializes with MATTI and HANNAH. HE dances with each of them in turn.

Mr. and Mrs. James. It's a pleasure. Emma will be right back. We so enjoyed dinner last Sunday.... MALCOLM

VIOLET enters in a grand ball gown.

Hello, hello, hello..... VIOLET

Would you excuse me? MALCOLM

MALCOLM rushes to intercept.

What are you doing here?

I came for the Christmas ball. VIOLET

But you weren't invited. Hello, Mrs. Seal. Yes, the park will definitely improve the community. MALCOLM

Hello. VIOLET

MALCOLM

You remember my sister, Violet?

VIOLET

It's a pleasure. Merry Christmas.

MALCOLM

You came all the way to Lynchburg for this?

VIOLET

And to see you and Ed. It's been a long time.

MALCOLM

You made it long. It was you who left, remember?

VIOLET

Of course I do. I was there.

MALCOLM

And now your back to make a scene? Not tonight. I want you to leave.

EMMA and ANDREW return, offering drinks to MALCOLM and VIOLET in due course.

EMMA

(to ANDREW)

So what is it you do?

ANDREW

Divorce attorney.

EMMA

No wonder you're single. *(to VIOLET)* Hello. I don't believe we've met. Emma Grey.

VIOLET

Violet Grey.

EMMA

Oh, my... it's so good to finally meet you.

VIOLET

Likewise. Malcolm is a very lucky man.

MALCOLM

Violet has to rush off. Tragically, she has another engagement.

EDWARD

Violet! Oh, Vi!

VIOLET

Hello, Ed. You look so good.

SHE hugs HIM with great affection.

How are you? I wanted to tell you the last show went superbly, thanks in no small part to an anonymous donor who seems to have been sending money by way of Richmond. I paint because of you. Thank you so much, Ed.

EDWARD

I'm just glad to have you back. I want you to meet someone. Vi, this is Andrew, a friend of mine.

ANDREW

It's a pleasure to meet you.

VIOLET

Likewise.

MALCOLM

It's such a shame you have to leave. But we're all gathering for a family dinner tomorrow. Can you join us then?

VIOLET

I suppose.

HANNAH

Violet Grey? Is that you? Remember me?

VIOLET

Mary Wilcott? Of course. How are you?

HANNAH

Couldn't be better.

MALCOLM

Violet was just leaving....

HANNAH

And you remember my sister?

VIOLET

Emily? Of course.

MATTI

Hello.

HANNAH

We've heard so much about your shows.... what's your favorite work?
And you must tell us all about New York.

MATTI

Absolutely. Do people really stay out all night? Tell us about the art world.

MALCOLM

Violet has another engagement....

HANNAH

M. and Mrs. James! Look, it's Violet Grey.

MALCOLM

This is not happening. Violet!

VIOLET

(to her admirers)

One moment, please....

(to MALCOLM)

Yes?

MALCOLM

This is a Christmas ball... not a chance for you to prance around and flaunt your success. Are you trying to destroy every moment of happiness I'll ever have?

EDWARD

(to EMMA)

They're so busy catching up. Would you care to dance?

ANDREW

Miss Wilcott? Will you do me the honor?

MATTI

Sure.

HANNAH glares at MATTI.

I'd be delighted, of course.

HANNAH

Mr. Williams! Merry Christmas....

MALCOLM

I have no patience for your theatrics.

VIOLET

You've made that very clear.

MALCOLM

Then, please go.

VIOLET

I didn't come here to make a scene.

MALCOLM

You really expect me to believe that? Well, Hello, Mrs. Nelson. Good to see you. You remember my sister, Violet?

VIOLET

Hello. Yes, I'm the artist. No, I'm not married. Yes, well... yes, yes... you have a son? How delightful. Would you excuse me please? Mac, you promised me that dance....

MALCOLM

All right. Good to see you, Mrs. Nelson.

VIOLET and MALCOLM dance. AT THIS POINT, all the characters are dancing, circling around the room. Couples move to the front of the stage as they speak.

She has a son....

VIOLET

Stop it.

MALCOLM

Why did you come? You desert us for years and then, on the most important night.... do you even know that this is the first ball I've hosted as mayor?

VIOLET

Just let me stay and I'll behave. I've wanted to see you for so long.

MALCOLM

Why, why now?

VIOLET

Being successful's no fun if you don't have your brother to tell you it's all just a bunch of silly flowers.

MALCOLM

You want to discuss your paintings? Tonight?

VIOLET

I wanted to congratulate you, in your moment of glory. You've done very well. You make a brilliant mayor, and I like Emma. Now, you're welcome to praise me, but I'd rather you just get back on the beat. One, two, three....

EMMA and EDWARD spin around, replacing VIOLET and MALCOLM.

EMMA

(to EDWARD)

What do you think of Mary Wilcott?

EDWARD

She's pleasant.

EMMA

She's from a good family....

EDWARD

Since when do you care about such things?

EMMA

It doesn't hurt. And she's fun. She's one of the few society ladies who actually reads the front page every day. She cares about the world.

EDWARD

Good for her.

EMMA

Edward, she's a nice girl.

EDWARD

I'm sure she is.

EDWARD and EMMA turn and continue circling as MATTI and ANDREW circle to the front. EMMA gets a glass of champagne and returns to dance. (THROUGHOUT the scene, EMMA always has a glass of something to drink)

HANNAH

(talking to an unseen couple)

Merry Christmas! Have you tried the egg nog? It's not bashful if you catch my drift.

MATTI

You really are a marvelous dancer.

ANDREW

You follow well.... and spin.... and dip....

MATTI

(laughing, delighted)

Good God! I've never done that in a waltz. So, you're a friend of Edward?

ANDREW

Yes.

MATTI

I don't think I've ever met a more charming man. So polite and smart....

ANDREW

Yes.

MATTI

And what do you do?

ANDREW

I'm a divorce attorney.

MATTI

Oh. How awful.

ANDREW

Sometimes.

MATTI

Which firm are you with?

ANDREW

I'm out on my own, now.

MATTI

You were with one before?

ANDREW

Yes.

MATTI

It wasn't Howard and Chandler, was it?

ANDREW

It was.

MATTI

Well. How interesting.

THEY spin on, and VIOLET and MALCOLM come to the front.

MALCOLM

So, some people think you're painting more than flowers.

VIOLET

Some even think I'm painting the face of God.

MALCOLM

There must be something very strange in the water up there.

VIOLET

There's something very strange in general up there. Nonetheless, it pays the bills, and outside the city's nice. You should come and visit.

THEY turn and continue dancing.

HANNAH

(gesturing to her pearls)

Yes, they're from Persia. Merry Christmas! Hello. Oh, what a wonderful gown. These old things? They're from Persia.

EMMA and EDWARD come to the front.

EMMA

You'd make a lovely couple.

EDWARD

It's very kind of you, but I'm really not interested.

EMMA

And why not? At least go for a walk together, talk, something.

EDWARD

I wouldn't want her to get the wrong idea.

EMMA

How is it wrong?

EDWARD

I'm here with Andrew.

EMMA

Yes. I met him.

EDWARD

I'm with him.

EMMA

Edward, please, be reasonable.

EDWARD

I love Andrew.

EMMA

Edward, it is unnatural. You're still so young. Sometimes, things aren't always clear.

EDWARD

This much is clear: I am in love with him. I love everything about him, even the stupid way he wrings out his tea bag before putting it on his saucer.... I can't imagine a day, a moment, without him. Can't you understand that?

EMMA

You must understand there are some things that are not meant to be. There are some things that society cannot and will not accept.

EDWARD

Of all people, I thought you would understand.

EMMA

Then doesn't it say something to you that I don't? I'm trying to understand; I adore you, Edward, and I want you to be happy, but must it be with him? He's so.... obvious. And that, Edward, elicits talk.

EDWARD

You're the mayor's wife. Your word is gold. Tell the gossips to hold their tongues.

EMMA

These gossips are not so easily dismissed as you might think. And when they bore of talk, they'll demand action. They'll ask for Mac's resignation. And so help me, Edward, I won't see him shamed, especially for this.

EDWARD

Then what would you have me do?

EMMA

Dance with Miss Wilcott. Be seen with her.

EDWARD

And the man I love?

EMMA

You will always be welcome to bring your bachelor friends with you, so long as you are not without a dance partner on occasion.

EDWARD

I see.

THE MUSIC stops, the dancers stop and applaud.

EMMA

People don't ask questions when they see what they like. It's the proper thing to do. You are such a wonderful dancer, and there are so many young ladies here without proper partners.

EDWARD

Very well.

EMMA

Mac, could you come here for a moment?

MALCOLM

You called, my love?

EMMA

Malcolm, would you introduce Edward to Miss Wilcott. She's in need of a partner.

MALCOLM

Certainly, Ed. Right this way....

MALCOLM takes EDWARD to MATTI and ANDREW.

Miss Wilcott, Mr. Grey....

ANDREW

Edward, finally....

EDWARD

(offering his hand to MATTI)

Excuse me.

MALCOLM

Perhaps you'd like a drink.

ANDREW

No, thank you.

VIOLET

Mr. Morris, would you care to dance.

MALCOLM

Vi, a lady never asks.

VIOLET

She does if she wants to dance. Mr. Morris?

ANDREW

Of course.

EMMA

Mac, dance with me.

MALCOLM

Yes, my love.

EMMA

Mr. Morris, Miss Grey, could we switch? I haven't had the pleasure of dancing with you yet, and I so wanted to ask you about the Christmas program at the chamber music society. Do you mind, love?

MALCOLM

Whatever you wish. Violet? I want to hear more about how these New Yorkers worship you.

VIOLET

They shall build me a temple of gold before I'm done.

MALCOLM

Not with public money, I should hope.

ANDREW

I didn't know you cared for chamber music.

EMMA

I think one should always try to learn new things.

ANDREW

How liberal of you.

EMMA

Thank you. I wondered if I might have a word with you about Edward.

ANDREW

I can think of nothing more delightful.

EMMA

You spend so much time together... I am delighted that you provide such good company for each other, but I think Edward needs to meet people in other circles, to expand his interests.

ANDREW

I see. And do you object to his appreciation of chamber music?

EMMA

I object to his appreciation of, how shall I phrase it... the Greek arts.

ANDREW

I didn't know you were a scholar of such things.

EMMA

One needn't be a scholar to be aware.

ANDREW

You have become a true politician. You mince no words, say not what you mean, and convey your point with all the charm of your kind.

EMMA

You flatter me to no end, and I'm delighted you understand.

ANDREW

Thank you for such a lovely evening. *(TO EDWARD who is still dancing with MATTI)* We're leaving.

EDWARD

Would you excuse me, please?

MATTI

Uh, yes. The dance isn't over....

MALCOLM and VIOLET come over.

EDWARD

(to ANDREW)

We can't. Not yet.

EMMA goes to intercept them but is blocked by HANNAH.

HANNAH

An entire lifetime for a single pearl. Could you believe it?

EMMA

It really is something.

MALCOLM

My dear Miss Wilcott, have you met my sister Violet?

MATTI

Yes.

VIOLET

Have I told you about the theater in New York? They stay out all night.

MATTI

Really....

ANDREW

I will not stay and be insulted. I do not deserve this humiliation from anyone, lest of all you.

MALCOLM

Gentlemen, gentlemen. It's Christmas. Let's all be merry. We have lovely music, who could resist dancing?

ANDREW

(To EDWARD) If you won't go with me now, you needn't go at all.

EDWARD

Andrew....

HANNAH

Excuse me, but the tree's about to be lighted.

MALCOLM

Thank you.

"O, Christmas Tree" begins.

HANNAH

Mayor, it's your privilege.

MALCOLM

Yes, of course. *(to EDWARD)* Don't go anywhere. Good evening, everyone, and Merry Christmas. We come together on this fine evening not only to celebrate the holiday....

ANDREW

To think the mayor and his family, so noble, so liberal, so above reproach.... so like a pack of hungry wolves.

MATTI

(to HANNAH)

That one's the one fired from Harold and Chandler.

HANNAH

And he's here with Edward Grey? But Edward's such a nice young man.

MATTI

He wouldn't dance with me because of him.

MALCOLM

...But to raise money, as well, for the creation of a new park to honor....

EDWARD

Please, let's all be sensible.

EMMA

(to ANDREW)

I think you should leave.

HANNAH

He must have done something to him.

MATTI

Do you think Edward loves him?

HANNAH

He couldn't.

MALCOLM

The men of Lynchburg who have given their lives nobly to protect our magnificent nation. Now, let us light the tree and continue with the festivities.

THE TREE is lighted, covering the stage in bright colors.

MALCOLM

What do you think you're doing? Can't you contain yourselves for a few short hours?

VIOLET

Now, I know this is a very exciting evening, but let's remember where we are and who we are. Would anyone like something to drink?

EMMA

Yes.

EDWARD

I'm sorry. I didn't mean for this to happen, but he is part of the family.

MALCOLM

This is not the time to discuss it. Please leave.

EDWARD

Of course. Merry Christmas, and good evening.

EDWARD and ANDREW begin to leave.

HANNAH

The tree is the most beautiful in years.

EMMA

That snake will never be part of this family.

ANDREW

(turning back)

How fitting for the mayor's wife to be so familiar with reptilian creatures. And how many skins did you have to shed to get where you are?

EDWARD

Andrew!

MALCOLM

Why, you....

MALCOLM lunges at ANDREW.

VIOLET

Mac, No!

VIOLET jumps on top of him and stops him from connecting.

EMMA

Get out!

ANDREW exits and EDWARD follows.

HANNAH

Is everyone all right?

MATTI

What happened?

VIOLET

We were just recalling our past adventures as children. Mac was a Greco-Roman wrestler.

MATTI

With a few boxing moves.

VIOLET

(to MALCOLM)

I'm going to find Edward.

MALCOLM

Thank you. Music, please. Another dance! My love....

EMMA

I need a drink.

MALCOLM

In a little while. Come, now, everyone's watching.

MALCOLM dances EMMA off stage. MATTI and HANNAH dance back to the bench where THEY sit.

EDWARD

Andrew!

ANDREW

Get back to your party. Your dance card is full.

EDWARD

Andrew, please. I promised Emma.

ANDREW

That you would pretend I don't exist? Then it's as well I don't. I'm leaving.

EDWARD

No. Andrew, please. Stay.

ANDREW

And live like in the shadows like some vile malformity. *(Laughing)* I wanted to stay home tonight.

EDWARD

Had I known all this would happen, I would have never suggested we go.

ANDREW

This happens all the time.

EDWARD

What do you mean?

VIOLET enters, and stands in the shadows.

ANDREW

Everyone looks at us, and they see you. A noble Grey, and me, the snake. This whole town looks at me like that. Maybe it's just as well. You have a whole world in front of you. You have brains, humor, God knows you have such love.... Even if I people didn't see me only as who I love and not who I am, they still wouldn't adore me. Not like you. You should be free. Free to be charming, delightful. There is so much you could do. You would be a far greater politician than your brother.... Or a composer. You have so much talent, and I hold you back.

EDWARD

Never. You are my life. My happiness, my dreams.... They're all wrapped up in you. I started composing because you believed in me. Please don't leave.

ANDREW

I have to. I don't belong here anymore. I'm tired of pretending everything is all right when it's not and it's not going to be. I'm just so tired of it all.

EDWARD

Then we'll leave, together.

ANDREW

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

EDWARD

I'm saying you are the most important thing in my life. I will do whatever it takes to be with you.

ANDREW

It's one for me to leave this place. I have no ties. But you have everything here. Your job, your friends, your family. You can't leave them.

EDWARD

I will.

ANDREW

Your family is everything to you.

EDWARD

You are.

VIOLET

(stepping from the shadows)

Andrew, Edward.

ANDREW

I think I'm going home. We'll talk more tomorrow?

EDWARD

I'm going with you.

ANDREW

Tomorrow. Good night.

ANDREW exits.

EDWARD

I have to go.

VIOLET

I just want a moment.

EDWARD

So you can tell me how unnatural I am?

VIOLET

Good God, no. Why should I?

EDWARD

I'm in love with a man.

VIOLET

So am I.

EDWARD

I don't have time for this.

VIOLET

Ed, it's been so long.... and I just want a moment. Please.

EDWARD

A moment.

VIOLET

Are you really going to leave?

EDWARD

(pauses, then)

Yes. I am leaving Lynchburg.

VIOLET

Where will you go?

EDWARD

I'm sure we'll find some place.

VIOLET

Then.... you've been so good to me over the years. I can't repay you. I don't think I ever can. I'm not that successful, financially. But I do have a place of my own. There's a cottage. It's yours if you ever need it. You can stay there as long as you like.

EDWARD

Thank you, Vi.

VIOLET

No matter how long you're gone, you'll never lose us, Ed. We're a funny flock that way.

EDWARD

I'm going home. Please, go to the party and send my apologies to Mac and Emma.

VIOLET

I will. Good night.

EDWARD

Good night.

EDWARD and VIOLET exit in opposite directions.

MATTI

You remember more than you think.

HANNAH

I remember some things.... Andrew left right away. Edward stayed to arrange things.....

EDWARD and MALCOLM enter.

EDWARD

I keep all her papers in the study. She likes me to pay the bills but show them to her before I mail them. And don't forget bridge on Tuesday nights. She needs help getting ready, but then she likes me.... you now.... out of the way.

MALCOLM

Emma and I will see to it.

EDWARD

Of course. I would stay. I don't want to leave.... this is my home.

MALCOLM

That's fine, Ed. What do I do with the personal correspondence?

EDWARD

I read it to her. Her eyes get tired so easily. I will miss you.

MALCOLM

What about her prescriptions?

EDWARD

They're all upstairs.

MALCOLM

All right, then. That's it?

EDWARD

Yes. I think so. You can always call if you need anything.

MALCOLM

Thank you. I'm sure we'll be fine.

EDWARD

Of course you will. My train is at four. I should finish packing.

MALCOLM

Of course. I'll leave you to it, then.

EDWARD

You and Emma should come and visit us.

MALCOLM

Yes, well, we're very busy here.

EDWARD

Of course. You'll always be welcome.

EDWARD exits. MALCOLM remains.

HANNAH

And Edward left for New York.

MATTI

You remember so much.

HANNAH

There are some things I remember too well.

EMMA enters with a telegram.

MALCOLM

Emma, what are you doing here this time of day? Come to see if your tax dollars are well spent? I like to think they are.

EMMA

Mac, this just came.

SHE hands HIM the telegram.

MALCOLM

Graham's dead?

HANNAH

(standing up)

Papa.

MATTI wraps her arms around HANNAH.

EMMA

This morning. His heart failed.

MALCOLM

He survived the war. A man who survives the war can't just die.

EMMA

Malcolm. I'm so sorry.

MALCOLM

Has the family been informed?

EMMA

Matilda's mother sent out telegrams.

MALCOLM

And Matilda?

EMMA

She's not so well. It's a terrible thing....

MALCOLM

The funeral arrangements.

EMMA

They're being made.

MALCOLM

He survived the war. He lived through hell and came home.

EMMA

I know, my love. I know.

MALCOLM

We will never be all together again.

HANNAH

He was my everything. He loved me. He told me stories. He made me laugh. He loved me. He loved me so much. Oh, Papa. Papa. Papa, no....

*MALCOLM and EMMA line up at the grave. EDWARD enters.
MATTI brings HANNAH.*

MALCOLM

Today we come to lay the body of Graham Edmund Grey to rest. He was a son, a brother, a husband, and a father. He was a noble man in action and deed. He was kind and brave and very well loved. We commence him to your grace. Godspeed....

VIOLET enters and stands beside EDWARD. HE takes her hand.

VIOLET

On your journey....

EDWARD

And may you at last....

MALCOLM

Find peace.

ALL

Amen.

HANNAH

Papa, it's not time. Please. Papa, who will dance with me at my wedding?

EDWARD

(to VIOLET, embracing her)

He was so young....

VIOLET

I know.

MALCOLM

Edward. You're looking well.

EDWARD

As are you.

MALCOLM

We've missed you here. Sunday dinners are nothing without your stories.

EDWARD

It's been strange to be absent from them.

MALCOLM

You are always welcome at our table.

EDWARD

Thank you.

MALCOLM

Violet. You're looking well, too.

VIOLET

It's good to see you, Mac.

MALCOLM

I wish it were under other circumstances.

VIOLET

So do I.

EMMA grasps VIOLET'S hands to comfort her. VIOLET looks at her and smiles.

EMMA

He was so charming....

VIOLET

Indeed, he was.

HANNAH

(Reaching to the grave)

Papa.

VIOLET

Will you excuse me?

VIOLET goes up to HANNAH.

Hannah? I'm Violet Grey. Your Papa's sister. You're going to stay with me for a while.

HANNAH

No. I don't want to leave Papa.

VIOLET

I don't either. Hannah, if you come with me we can walk in the woods and go skiing, and I'll tell you all about your Papa when he was young.

HANNAH

I want him back.

VIOLET

I know, my love. I know. That's why we dream. Please come with me.

HANNAH takes VIOLET'S hand. THE GREYS exit. As they do, HANNAH lets go and remains on stage with MATTI.

HANNAH

Mama fell apart after Papa died. But Violet was there. She loved me.

MATTI

Did you learn to ski?

HANNAH

And swim and paint. We had a wonderful time. And most of the time it didn't hurt so much that he was gone. I had her.

MATTI consoles her mother.

I have been so afraid of remembering for so long.

MATTI

You used to paint?

HANNAH

A long time ago.

MATTI

Why'd you stop?

HANNAH

Other things came along.

MATTI

Me?

HANNAH

Your father. You. Work.

MATTI

What happened to all your paintings?

HANNAH

There weren't that many. They're in the garage somewhere.

MATTI

I'd like to see them.

HANNAH

There's really nothing to see. I just dabbled.

MATTI

Did you ever want to just paint? Be a painter?

HANNAH

Oh.... I liked it, but I wasn't very good. Vi.... she was good.

VIOLET enters with an easel and canvas. HANNAH rises up to join HER.

VIOLET

Look with your eyes, but see with your heart. Harry told me that. It sounds great, but it's crap. Paint. Just paint. Paint however you want and whatever you want. Just love what you do. Got it?

HANNAH

Got it.

VIOLET

Good. Then let's begin. Could you turn on the radio? Play something for inspiration.

HANNAH turns on the radio to a song by Little Richard. SHE and MATTI start bopping about having a ball.

VIOLET

My, God, what is that? Hannah....

VIOLET changes the station to an opera.

Ah. Much better.

HANNAH

Come on, Aunt Vi. Get with the times. Don't you like Little Richard?

VIOLET

My head is spinning.

HANNAH

He's wild.

VIOLET

I am getting old. All right. Turn him on.

HANNAH turns the radio back to LITTLE RICHARD. MATTI and HANNAH resume dancing. VIOLET paints. SHE begins to tap her foot and ends up joining them in their dance.

The PHONE RINGS. MALCOLM enters, on the other end.

VIOLET

Hello?

MALCOLM

Vi? It's me, Mac.

VIOLET

Mac, are you all right?

MALCOLM

Mama's gotten worse.... I don't know what to do. Can you come home? Please.

VIOLET

All right. Don't worry. Everything will be fine. I'll be home soon.

MALCOLM

And Emma's sick.... and she's not going to get better.

VIOLET

Oh, Mac... I'll be right home. I promise.

VIOLET scoops up her painting supplies and exits.

HANNAH

I spent my last year of high school at St. Mary's Academy for Girls, and Violet went home.

MALCOLM enters with gardening supplies, kneels down, and begins to work. EMMA enters.

MALCOLM

You should be inside, resting.

EMMA

Don't be silly. It's a beautiful day... and I feel so much better. You're doing well with the garden.

MALCOLM

I'm trying.

EMMA

Well, let me help a little.

MALCOLM

I can do it.

EMMA

Oh I know you can.... I just want to be part of it. Now, move over.

EMMA kneels down in the garden.

MALCOLM

You do look better today.

EMMA

As if I would look anything but perfect?

MALCOLM

Of course not. You're always perfect, my love.

EMMA

I wish that were true. Where are the peonies?

MALCOLM

Right here.

HE passes the peony bulbs. EMMA begins, then stops.

MALCOLM

Emma?

EMMA

I just need to catch my breath. Don't worry, I'm all right. You'd better finish with the peonies.

MATTI

What's wrong with her?

HANNAH

Her liver.... a lot of things.

MATTI

But she's life incarnate.

HANNAH

Only for a while.

VIOLET enters.

VIOLET

Hello, hello. I just stopped by home. Mama's holding court with the choral society, so I thought I'd drop by and see how you're doing.

MALCOLM

We're holding our own. You're all settled?

VIOLET

As settled as I can be with bridge parties and choral societies perpetually tramping through the living room. Marriage really suits you, Mac. I think you've got a tummy now.

MALCOLM

I'm a fine figure of a man, as always.

VIOLET

Good God, he's delusional.

MALCOLM

I am impervious to such infantile remarks.

VIOLET

(to EMMA)

So he claims. How are you today?

EMMA

I'm fine. I'm enjoying the weather and all that nonsense.

MALCOLM

Why don't I get a chair for you. Would you like some tea?

VIOLET

Yes, please.

MALCOLM

Would you like anything, Emma?

EMMA

I'm fine, thank you.

MALCOLM

I'll be right back.

MALCOLM exits.

EMMA

Good, he's gone.

EMMA struggles up and goes to the garden.

VIOLET

Shouldn't you be resting?

EMMA

I haven't died yet, and I have no intentions of playing the corpse 'till the last possible moment. Besides, I have peonies to plant.

VIOLET

May I help?

EMMA

Certainly. Pull up a plant.

VIOLET kneels down, gingerly, somehow trying to avoid the dirt.

I see you're a natural in the garden.

VIOLET

I'm not crazy about dirt. And mud is right out.

EMMA

That could be a problem in a garden.

VIOLET

And thank God I never worked with clay. Malleable mud.... ugh.

EMMA

May I ask you a question?

VIOLET

Go right ahead.

EMMA

I keep looking at that chair.... do you ever wish you had a child?

VIOLET

Oh, goodness. I'm glad I had Hannah. She's kept me young, and nearly killed me in the process. I think of her as my own. She is a beautiful young woman.

EMMA

If you didn't have her?

VIOLET

I'm just glad I did.

EMMA

When this all first happened.... I thought after all this time, maybe it was possible. I wanted it so much, I thought all the sickness....

MALCOLM returns with a chair and a glass of iced tea.

MALCOLM

Emma, you should be resting.

EMMA

I'll rest soon enough. We're having fun. Join us.

MALCOLM kneels down, and offers the tea to VIOLET.

MALCOLM

I will have you know, I don't approve.

EMMA

So noted.

MALCOLM

And you, aiding and abetting.... disgraceful.

VIOLET

What's disgraceful is I've got dirt on my skirt. Pass the mums.

MATTI brings the mums. HANNAH brings more. THEY kneel down and plant. If it is not too much of a cost problem, it would

be nice to actually build up a garden at this point with rows of flowers. Silk or paper flowers would be suitable.

VIOLET

God, if my friends could see me now. We're a mess.

EMMA

Oh, dear.... look at you.

VIOLET

Being a mess isn't such a terrible thing, is it? I may even begin to like it.

EMMA

The only real way to know is to immerse yourself in it.

VIOLET

Immerse myself. Be one with mother earth....

MALCOLM

Well, here, let me help you....

VIOLET

Malcolm Grey, don't you dare!

MALCOLM hurls a handful of dirt at VIOLET.

VIOLET repeats in kind.

EMMA

I most certainly won't be excluded.

EMMA joins in.

VIOLET

Mac, you're a mudslinger after all.

MALCOLM

One of the best.

HE hurls mud and hits HANNAH.

HANNAH

Ah! This means war.

HANNAH joins in the mud slinging.

MATTI

Peonies, posies, and roses abound.

VIOLET strikes MATTI with good old mother earth.

Excuse me, excuse me, this will not go unavenged.

EMMA

(still flinging mud)

It does add some life to things.

VIOLET

It's so good to be home.

MATTI

It's a beautiful garden. *(Hit by mud)* Hey, watch it!

HANNAH

And in the back, there's tomatoes. With marigolds. Tomato, flower, tomato flower.... keeps the bugs away.

VIOLET

All right. Enough, enough. Mercy and all that....

EMMA

You surrender?

VIOLET

I surrender with arms outstretched to the heavens....

MALCOLM

Will you ever outgrow melodrama?

VIOLET

I hope not.

EMMA

And so it should be. Mac, dance with me.

MALCOLM

But, Emma....

EMMA

Mac, I'm not asking.

MALCOLM

As you wish, my love.

MALCOLM dances with EMMA. MALCOLM sings a waltz....

Da-dum-dum, da-dum-dum....

EMMA rests her head on his shoulder. HE picks her up in his arms.

My dearest love.

MALCOLM carries EMMA off stage.

MATTI

And then she....

VIOLET

Passed on.

HANNAH

At thirty seven years old.

HANNAH wraps her arms around MATTI and strokes her cheek. MATTI drops her head onto HANNAH'S shoulder.

MALCOLM returns, wearing funeral attire, with a pair of pruning shears and some roses. The three women stand, and move behind the garden.

VIOLET

Hello, Mac. How are you?

MALCOLM

Good, good. Just taking care of some flowers....

MALCOLM begins to prune flowers, very carefully.

VIOLET

The garden looks good.

MALCOLM

I'm trying. Emma wrote out some things for me. I've been pouring over them. When things get watered and planted and pruned. We'll see how it goes, won't we?

VIOLET

You're doing well.

MALCOLM

Well, it's all in her notes. They're very detailed. She used the pen I gave her on our first anniversary. She had a beautiful way of forming her Y's.

VIOLET

Would you like me to help?

MALCOLM

No, no. I'm doing just fine here. I can do this. I promised Emma... I'm just supposed to trim things back a little. This is enough, isn't it? I can never tell. Emma always knew. She just knew.

VIOLET

Can I help you plant those?

MALCOLM

All right. Start over there, on the left.

MALCOLM hands VIOLET the roses which she begins to plant.

MALCOLM

What are you doing? They don't go there! Don't you know anything?

VIOLET

No. Just tell me where they go, and I'll put them there.

MALCOLM

I don't know where they go. I don't know where any of it goes. It's not my garden. It's hers and she's gone and I can't do it. Get rid of it. Just tear it up. It doesn't belong here anymore.

MALCOLM begins to prune and finally tear up the garden.

VIOLET AND MATTI

Stop!

MALCOLM

She's dead. This should be, too.

VIOLET

Calm down, Mac. Just stop for a second.

MALCOLM

I killed her. I made her be my perfect Emma, and I killed the very thing that made her so perfect. If I hadn't wanted so much, I could have had so much more. I could have had her longer.

VIOLET

No one, Mac, not even you, could have made her be someone she didn't want to become.

MALCOLM

I should have stopped her. She made me. She gave me everything. She was my miracle. She could have done anything, been anything....

VIOLET

And she chose to be with you. Just be thankful for that. Mac, it takes a lot of guts to do something instead of just anything, and she did something. She did something for you. That takes more guts than most of us ever have.

MALCOLM begins putting the torn up plants back in the ground.

VIOLET

Mac... I don't think....

MALCOLM

I just want it to look like she was here for a little while.

HE continues to try to fix the garden.

VIOLET

Mama doesn't need me all day; she has all sorts of activities and I just pad around the house, and God knows I loathe housework.... What would you think about me painting the garden?

MALCOLM

You want to paint it?

VIOLET

You've got to admit I've got an awful lot of practice with flowers, and maybe I'll throw in a bird or two.

MALCOLM

I don't know.

VIOLET

I'll stay out of your way. I can even just sketch for a few hours and paint at home. And it was just an idea.

MALCOLM

Emma always liked your painting of the tiger lilies.

VIOLET

God, she had good taste. It's just an idea. Think about it.

MALCOLM

Paint it, but do it here. I want to see it. And don't paint anything strange. Nothing too artsy. Just paint the garden.

VIOLET

All right. When would you like me to start?

MALCOLM

Can you start now?

VIOLET

I'll get my things.

VIOLET turns to exit.

MALCOLM

Vi.... thank you.

VIOLET

Don't thank me 'till you see it. I'll be back soon.

VIOLET exits. MALCOLM plants the roses.

MATTI

I like the roses.

HANNAH

They've got a lot of spirit to them.

VIOLET returns with an easel and paints. SHE begins to paint the garden. MALCOLM watches her.

VIOLET

The color of the roses offers good contrast. They have wonderfully wild stems.

MALCOLM

Emma liked them.

EMMA enters, standing behind MALCOLM and VIOLET.

EMMA

They suited me, I think.

MATTI

Very much so.

EMMA turns to MATTI.

MALCOLM

It's coming along well.

VIOLET

Oh, I don't know. It's early on....

MALCOLM

It's good. You're good.

VIOLET

Well, wait 'till it's done to pass judgment.

MALCOLM

Thank you for coming home.

VIOLET

I always said I'd return.

EMMA

You need a little more burgundy in the roses.

VIOLET adds more red to the roses.

EMMA picks a few of the roses, and takes them with her as she leaves.

MATTI

What happened then?

HANNAH

Violet lived out her life in Lynchburg with her Mama, just up the street from Malcolm.

MATTI

And Edward?

HANNAH

He lived with Andrew in upstate New York. Andrew said Edward wanted to be buried here, with his family.

MATTI

It's almost sunset. Edward will be buried soon.

VIOLET watches them. SHE gets up and goes to MATTI.

VIOLET

Mac, it's almost time.

MALCOLM

I'm ready.

MATTI

Thank you for naming me for her.

HANNAH

Violet? It seemed appropriate. You've got her flair.

VIOLET

(to MATTI)

Violet. A regal name.... a noble name....

MALCOLM

A flower.

VIOLET

A flower. A very noble flower.

MALCOLM

(taking her hands, with affection)

A dramatic one.

HANNAH

And so it goes, then.

EDWARD enters, bows to HANNAH, smiles at MATTI.

VIOLET offers her hand and EDWARD takes it.

HANNAH

Sometimes we tell stories that we might share who we are and who we might be, and sometimes....

GRAHAM appears. VIOLET, MALCOLM, and EDWARD leave.

HANNAH CONT.

Papa.

*HANNAH and GRAHAM dance. MATTI sits in the chair.
GRAHAM kisses HANNAH on the cheek, she hugs him, and
returns to MATTI.*

MATTI

That's it. I can't do this. I can't get sucked into another job I hate just to conform to everyone else's wishes. I'm going to write this story. This will be my first novel. My first completed novel, and there's nothing you can say or do that will change my mind. I love you, Mom, but that

doesn't mean I'll live the life you plan for me. You're just going to have to accept that.

HANNAH

Ok.

(looking at Violet's painting)

Maybe I should think about taking it up again. It's time I had something of my own.

MATTI

Ok? Ok, what?

HANNAH

Do it. But, by God, do it well.

MATTI

I'm glad I have a place to sit. A whole novel. I think I might be sick.

HANNAH

It's been too long since I picked up a brush.

MATTI

I think I might be sick.

HANNAH

I had this one painting of a saxophone....

MATTI

I'm serious. I might be sick. What if I make a mistake?

HANNAH

Get it together. You're a Grey. Now, start acting like one. You'll be fine. Of that, I am sure.

MATTI

Thank you.

HEADLIGHTS scan the stage.

HANNAH

Heaven help us, I think I see your father. Where's he going? Jack! Jack! Over here!

HANNAH waves her hand fanatically while clinging to the painting.

Finally. You ready?

MATTI

Yes. Let's go.

HANNAH and MATTI exit with the painting and chair. GRAHAM watches them, then exits in the direction of THE GREYS.

The End