

**OCTET**

a concert play  
for three actors and eight musicians

by  
Mark Dunn

Music  
by  
Merek Royce Press

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2415 Kestrel Court NW  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
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**CHARACTERS**

in order of appearance

SALLY CUBBAGE ..... early thirties

DOCTOR JANICE GOLDMAN ..... forties

THE COMPOSER ..... (a man), thirties

**THE MUSICIANS**

in order of appearance

CELLIST

CONCERT MISTRESS

VIOLIST

CLARINETIST

FLUTIST

TROMBONIST

TRUMPETER

PERCUSSIONIST

**TIME AND PLACE**

The play is set in a nameless mental health institution in a nameless town somewhere in the United States.

The play is set in the present, the action taking place in the middle of winter.

**THE PROGRAM**

ADAGIO FOR CELLO IN D MINOR ..... will be performed by Cellist

TEA FOR EIGHT; OPUS POCUS ..... will be performed by all the members of the Octet

PRELUDE CONFUSED IN F MINOR ..... will be performed by Concert Mistress, Violist, Cellist, Flutist, Clarinetist and Percussionist in succession

AUBADE FOR BRASS BRACE ..... will be performed by Trumpeter and Trombonist

SONATA FOR CLARINET, VIOLA, CELLO ..... will be performed by Clarinetist, Flutist and Percussionist

ANTI-RHAPSODY FOR SOLO FLUTE WITH INEVITABLE REFERENCE TO THE PENSIVE WOMAN ON THE SOFA ..... will be performed by Flutist

PAVANE FOR TROMBONE, TRUMPET AND CLARINET WITH TRIANGULAR INTRUSION ..... will be performed by Trombonist, Trumpeter, Clarinetist and Ms. Sally Cabbage on the Triangle

DUET FOR VIOLIN AND TROMBONE WITH PEDESTRIAN INTERLUDES ..... will be performed by Concert Mistress and Trombonist (with helpful assistance from Ms. Sally Cabbage)

CONCERTO FOR OCTET AND SCREAMING WOMAN ..... will be performed by all the members of the Octet and the severely traumatized Ms. Sally Cabbage

## ACT ONE

In the darkness we hear a somber, brooding TUNE played on a single cello. Slowly, a narrow SPOT comes up on the source of the music: a male CELLIST who wears a comfortable sweater and knock-around pants. NOTE: the attire of all the musicians in this play will be Saturday-morning-casual up until the play's last moments when other attire will be noted. On the upstage scrim is now projected the name of the piece in the same typeface as it appears in the program: "ADAGIO FOR CELLO IN D MINOR". The projection holds for a moment, then fades. CELLIST plays on: a lonely figure perimetered by darkness. Slowly LIGHTS come up until the whole stage is lit. SALLY CUBBAGE enters, drawing CELLIST'S interest. SALLY is young: perhaps in her early thirties. SHE is pretty, perhaps beautiful, but not glaringly so. SALLY is dressed in a smart suit-dress. CELLIST studies her curiously as SHE wanders about the barren stage apparently in search of something or someone. The MUSIC turns brighter, buoyant and cheerful. SALLY suspends her search; SHE remains fixed to a spot, attending the music. SHE seems suddenly moved by it. SHE closes her eyes, letting it caress her gently like a cool breeze. Then, as if waking from a dream, her eyes pop open. SHE turns. SHE crosses purposefully to CELLIST. HE stops playing.

SALLY

I'm sorry for interrupting. That was very beautiful. I'm looking for the office of Dr. Janice Goldman. Could you direct me?

(THE CELLIST stares at her blankly.  
HE doesn't seem to comprehend.)

SALLY (cont.)

Dr. Goldman. I'm looking for her office.

(No response.)

Do you know her?

(No response.)

I'm lost.

(No response.)

You see.

(No response.)

Could be I'm not even on the right floor.

(No response.)

You don't understand me, do you?

(HE shakes his head. HER EYES  
narrow on him.)

But you understood that or you wouldn't have -- Hmmm. Verstehen  
sie mich? M'avez vous compris?

(HE shrugs.)

The guard at the front desk was asleep. I didn't want to wake  
him. Didn't want to get him into trouble. Please don't tell  
anyone. I guess you won't. Anyway, I entered the building  
undirected. I found the water fountain and the lady's room  
without difficulty, but when it came to Dr. Goldman's office  
which was the primary purpose of my visit this afternoon, I  
wasn't so lucky. I've been wandering these halls for quite some  
time now. Without success. You really don't know what I'm  
saying, do you? I'm so sorry for bothering you.

(to herself)

What's the universal sign for "I'm sorry"?

(SHE thinks about this, then cups  
her hands together and executes a  
slight deferential bow. CELLIST  
smiles, nods, and picks up his  
bow.)

Thank you very much.

(CELLIST plays five notes closely matching in pitches and meter her reading of "Thank you very much.")

SALLY (cont.)

I'll let you return to your practice.

(CELLIST plays nine notes which match the syllables in "I'll let you return to your practice." As if about to resume her search:)

Maybe that corridor --

(CELLIST pauses as if to make sure she isn't going to continue her thought, then plays six notes to echo "Maybe that corridor --" THE TWO eye one another for a moment.)

I know what you're doing.

(Six notes to match what she just said.)

You're very clever.

(HE responds in musical echo.)

You should take your act on the road.

(HE responds in musical echo. Enjoying herself:)

You think you're so smart!

(HE responds in musical echo.)

Well, you're not!

(HE responds in musical echo.)

So smart.

(HE responds in musical echo.)

Sir.

(HE responds in musical echo.)

Not-at-all-not-at-all-not-all.

(HE responds in musical echo. SALLY thinks for a moment, takes a deep breath, then launches her next retort, delivered at a comfortable canter and employing deliberately imposed inflections and sonorities not usually heard in normal speech. Some of her words push the envelope of her range in either direction. Others erupt as animal-like noises or come dressed in otherwise strangely inhuman coloration.)

SALLY (cont.)

And I'll tell you why you can never win at a game like this: because I have -- call it the gift of gab, call it merely a special facility for extemporaneous speech -- perhaps I got it from my father who could talk your ear off about absolutely nothing -- or my mother who spun the most wonderful fanciful fairy stories at my bedside -- or my grandfather who once -- speaking in his own defense -- talked a seemingly recalcitrant jury out of the death penalty and into a recommendation for two years probation and community service. Words come easy to me, Mr. Cellist. I can't explain it. I gather them like a philatelist collects his stamps. I combine them in strange, interesting ways. In strange combine I interesting ways them. I celebrate that which separates the human animal from all of God's other glorious creatures, save perhaps Flipper, a few beluga whales, and my Aunt Louise's cockatoo cockatoo Grasmere whom she swore would occasionally argue religion with her -- he was a Calvinist -- and sometimes correct her diction. So there you have it. I'll go head to head with you, antiphonally speaking, till the cows come home. Speak now or forever hold your peace!

(CELLIST takes a few moments. HE seems to be registering, processing all that Sally has just said. HE then takes the bow, smiles, and begins to play back for her -- note for syllable -- exactly what SHE just said, translated to the strings of his cello. SHE steps backward, her arms folded, gawking in amazement. Here and there, perhaps in spots where her voice went deliberately high or low, she remembers the spot and joins in: "community SER-vice", "CAL-vin-IST." SHE is oblivious to the approach of DR. JANICE GOLDMAN who stops and listens quietly for a moment. JANICE is in her forties:

a handsome woman wearing professional woman's attire ... and tennis shoes. SHE steps forward to tap Sally on the shoulder. SALLY turns. CELLIST stops playing.)

JANICE

(extending her hand to shake)

Hello. I'm Dr. Goldman. Please call me Janice. You are, I'm guessing, Sally Cabbage?

SALLY (shaking hands)

Yes. I'm afraid I couldn't find your office. This gentleman wasn't any help at all, but we did have a pleasant conversation.

JANICE

It's being repainted -- my office. I'm currently working out of a empty storage closet in the basement.

(The CELLIST stands and holds out his hand. SALLY takes it as well.)

Cellist, I'd like you to meet Sally Cabbage. Sally, this is Cellist.

SALLY

Just "Cellist"?

JANICE

For now. Until we get a second cellist. Then, of course, there will be terrible confusion. We'll have to devise some other system of appellation. But for the time being this one works well enough.

(to Cellist)

Wouldn't you say?

(CELLIST smiles; it's unclear whether he got this or not.)

SALLY

And your other patients -- they're named in the same way?

JANICE

We prefer the term, "residents", Sally. Each of our residents -

(the school teacher)

-- say it with me.

SALLY and JANICE

"Residents."

JANICE

-- has chosen a name to reflect interest in a particular musical instrument.

SALLY

So in addition to Cellist --

JANICE

There are nine in all. Violist. Flutist. "Flautist" is acceptable but she doesn't answer to it willingly. Clarinetist. Percussionist. Trumpeter. Trombonist.

SALLY

Surely: Violinist.

JANICE

She prefers "Concert Mistress." A touch of the prima donna.

SALLY

And --

JANICE

That's the complete ensemble.

SALLY

I counted eight.

JANICE

Yes. Well, there's one who isn't in the Octet. But still under my supervision. The Composer.

SALLY

Composer?

JANICE

Quite a different animal from the others. They play. He writes.

SALLY

Ah.

JANICE

We don't see much of him, I'm afraid. Spends most of his days up in his garret --

SALLY

Scribbling away.

JANICE

Yes. He's quite prolific.

(CELLIST holds up for Sally's inspection, a sheet of music from his stand. HE points something out.)

SALLY (reading)

Opus 640.

(SHE hands it back.)

JANICE

And that's one of his earlier works. Was the guard asleep when you arrived?

SALLY

Well --

JANICE

I'd be surprised if he wasn't. The poor man: either a narcoleptic or a first time father. He's never been awake long enough for me to inquire.

(The TWO WOMEN move downstage of Cellist as a desk and two chairs roll on. CELLIST salutes "goodbye" with his bow, then sits quietly. JANICE and SALLY sit down on either side of the desk. THEY look one another over.)

SALLY

Do you mind if I smoke?

JANICE

Not at all.

(SALLY begins to hunt through her handbag for her cigarettes.)

You work in the mental health profession as long as I have you get used to functioning in a perpetual cloud of blue smoke.

SALLY

So I'm assuming that you and Dr. Moseley have spoken? He explained the reason for my visit?

JANICE

Yes, in ample detail. He said he's gathering material for a book on non-traditional mental health facilities. Of course, he isn't the one doing the actual gathering, now is he? That falls to Sally Cabbage, doesn't it?

SALLY  
 (finding her cigarettes)  
 I'm his research assistant.

JANICE  
 But I take it he'll be paying us a visit himself perhaps at some later date?

SALLY  
 (lighting up)  
 Depending on my report.

JANICE  
 Sally, you should know that it doesn't matter to me whether my institute gets a chapter in Dr. Moseley's book or not. I just want to make sure that if we do --

SALLY  
 My report will be objective, Janice. Whatever your methods, I'm not here to assess them, and I can assure you that it isn't Dr. Moseley's wish to make light of them. He only wants to inform his readers that there are a number of alternative methods out there -- a number of different approaches to the treatment of the mentally ill.

JANICE  
 Well, you can make great points with me, Sally, first, by never again using the phrase "mentally ill" when referring to the individuals under my care. Because the residents of this institute aren't mentally ill -- as the medical community has so broadly defined the term. Is Dr. Moseley aware that each of these men and women came here voluntarily?

SALLY  
 Yes. He told me that.

JANICE  
 They are here for the simple reason that they do not wish to be there.

(SHE points "outside." Upstage the  
 CELLIST begins to play.)

SALLY  
 He's very good.

JANICE  
 They're all good. They live for their music. It constitutes their world -- sets the boundaries of their existence.

(CELLIST is now joined by CONCERT

MISTRESS. SHE carries in both a violin and a chair. SHE sits down next to CELLIST and begins to play along with him.)

SALLY

He has company.

JANICE

Witness an afternoon ritual of sorts.

SALLY

Cellist and Concert Mistress.

JANICE

And Violist and Clarinetist, and whoever else might wish to join in. We had a building custodian, now retired, who two or three days a week would jump in with his harmonica.

SALLY

It's nice. It's so beautiful.

JANICE

And very distracting if you allow it to be.

(Seeing that Sally has surrendered herself to the music JANICE does as well. The DUET becomes a TRIO as the VIOLIST joins the other two musicians. The TRIO becomes a QUARTET with the addition of the CLARINETIST. The QUARTET plays on for a few moments longer, then is made a QUINTET by the addition of FLUTIST. The QUINTET plays, then becomes a SEXTET with the addition of TROMBONIST. The SEXTET plays for a few moments, then joined by TRUMPETER becomes a SEPTET. Last comes the PERCUSSIONIST who tinkles his triangle. Our OCTET now complete, there is projected on the upstage scrim the name of the piece: "TEA FOR EIGHT; OPUS POCUS" The projection holds for a moment, then fades away. The OCTET continues to perform the piece as LIGHTS dim over JANICE and SALLY. THEY continue their conversation, becoming more relaxed in each other's company. JANICE produces two tea cups, hands one to Sally.

THEY take sips, the casual mood and tone of their implied conversation mirroring the tone and mood of the piece. As we near the piece's end each of the MUSICIANS will rise, one by one, pick up their chairs and carry them off along with their instruments in reverse sequence to the order of their entrances until the CELLIST is again playing solo. The piece ends. The two WOMEN applaud.)

SALLY

I'd like -- with your permission -- to observe each of your patients. I'm sorry: residents. Individually and in --

JANICE

My "charges" would be an acceptable compromise. I am, somewhat like the Mother Hen around here. Individually and in ensemble. That can be arranged. In fact I have no problem granting you as much access as you require, should my musicians be agreeable to it.

SALLY

Thank you. And that includes interviews?

JANICE

"Interviews?"

SALLY

Yes.

JANICE

Interviews in the traditional sense would be difficult, don't you think, when the subjects have eschewed all forms of verbal and written communication?

SALLY

There are certainly things I can learn from them without need of an exchange of words.

JANICE

True.

SALLY

So access won't be a problem?

JANICE

You have my permission to see whomever you like whenever you wish. We have nothing to hide here, Sally. I should warn you though -- some may require time to warm up to you.

SALLY  
How long would you say?

JANICE  
At least a year. To win their full confidence. Their trust.

SALLY  
A year?

JANICE  
At least.

SALLY  
Dr. Moseley gave me a month.

JANICE  
That won't do. In my opinion. But then, this is only my opinion.

(an awkward silence)

SALLY  
Given that they don't speak --

JANICE  
Or write. Or read. Anything, that is, except music.

SALLY  
I'm wondering then, how it is you communicate with them.

JANICE  
(with a mischievous grin)  
"There are certainly things I can learn from them without need of an exchange of words."

SALLY  
(smiling over the Janice's cleverness in throwing her own words back at her.)  
And are they ... happy here?

JANICE  
Most seem to be.

SALLY  
Most?

JANICE  
I clearly haven't spent enough time with the Composer to know what he wants. Quite the recluse. But extremely gifted as a composer. Much of what you'll hear during your visit he wrote.

SALLY

The other eight -- they play his music?

JANICE

They're all very fond of it. Where are you staying?

SALLY

In town at the Wayfarer's Inn.

JANICE

That won't do. You'll stay in my guest room. I live right here on the grounds.

SALLY

I really wouldn't want to impose.

JANICE

You won't be imposing. And with the reduction in your expenses, perhaps Dr. Moseley will allow you to stay on an extra week or two. I could do with a little conversation. I fear my verbal skills are absolutely going to pot. What with musicians who do not speak, a guard who only sleeps, and two orderlies from Malta for whom the English language is posing a major challenge.

SALLY

I like to talk. You may regret this decision.

JANICE

If you get on my nerves I pack you up and send you off to the Wayfarer's Inn. But we should at least give it a shot, don't you think?

SALLY

All right.

(thought shift)

Janice, I have to ask you --

JANICE

Whatever you like. If I don't know the answer or don't wish to respond, I'll let you know.

SALLY

I want to know why you're here. Why you founded the institute. What was it you hoped to accomplish?

JANICE

I didn't set out with a specific purpose in mind. I sought merely to offer refuge to those who did not seek a cure.

SALLY

Then you admit that there is something wrong with these people.

JANICE

That was my initial belief, yes. But as I came to know them, to study them, I came to realize that their desire to escape from the outside world wasn't a flight of fear at all. They were running, yes, but only to a place where they might find kindred spirits, where they could make their own rules. You'll find this out as you move among them. You'll find that they relate to one another, interact in ways that make speech -- language as we know and define it -- totally irrelevant.

SALLY

And this you do not acknowledge as a handicap.

JANICE

Perhaps out there. Not within these walls. Here traditional language is superfluous.

SALLY

My great aunt gave up traditional language about eight years ago. She had a stroke. A terrible stroke which left her incapable of putting any of her thoughts into words. I would sit next to her bed and hold her hand and share my day with her. And she would look at me and cry. She would cry because she could not react -- because she knew exactly what I was saying, could follow every nuance of my meaning, yet was robbed of the ability to respond in a way I could understand. And this has always been one of my great fears: that my thoughts might some day become trapped inside my head, imprisoned for the rest of my life.

JANICE

My musicians communicate, Sally. They just do so in a non-traditional way. Through the emotion of their music. They communicate emotion as your great aunt communicated her feelings to you. Through her tears. Through the way she held your hand.

SALLY

There is no complexity to the language of emotion.

(JANICE smiles and shakes her head.)

JANICE

You put too much stock in words, Sally.

(a beat)

How about a game of scrabble after dinner?

(BLACK OUT. In the darkness we

hear a VIOLIN playing a lush, hauntingly romantic melody. When lights come up, each of the MUSICIANS with the exception of Trumpeter and Trombonist will be set up with chair and music stand in various spots about the stage, heads bowed, or eyes closed -- disconnected. It was the CONCERT MISTRESS -- we now realize -- who was playing in the darkness and she continues playing still -- SALLY standing beside her, clipboard in hand. A new projection: "PRELUDE CONFUSED IN F MINOR." A moment passes; SALLY circles her in silent observation, jotting upon the clipboard. SHE flips through several pages clipped on the board and finds a page from which she reads aloud.)

SALLY

Concert Mistress. A.k.a. Violinist. A.k.a. Melissa Vickery. Suzuki. Eastman School of Music. Husband: insurance agent, two children. Passionate love affair with a matador on a family vacation to Madrid, gored by a bull, not she, he, comatose, his last words spoken with a Barcelona lisp, "Remember me always, deareth Melitha. Carry the passion within your heart." Hasn't spoken a word since the day of her lover's death, except for one night, the tenth anniversary of his goring when she cried his name in her sleep: "Carloth! Carloth de Vega!"

(Now the VIOLIST picks up the melody from the CONCERT MISTRESS who stops playing. SALLY walks over to where he sits, circles him as she did the Concert Mistress, then finds his bio and reads it aloud.)

Violist. A.k.a. Vincent de Venuzio. A.k.a Vinnie the Mouse. Private violin and viola lessons with Gregor Yurevich, principal violist for the Minsk Philharmonic. Fell silent after witnessing a drive-by shooting in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Inherited a large sum of money from one Gino del Grano and came here. Has spoken only once since his arrival; during a broadcast of game three of the 1996 World Series, he was overheard to mumble, "Da Bums."

(Now the CELLIST picks up the melody from the VIOLIST. VIOLIST

stops playing. SALLY crosses to Cellist, finds the page containing his bio, and reads aloud.)

Cellist. About which little is known. Showed up at the Institute March 8, 1994, with his cello and a valise filled with negotiable bonds. Class clown. On occasion puts a dress on his cello and spins her about.

(Now the FLUTIST picks up the melody from CELLIST. CELLIST stops playing. SALLY walks over to Flutist, finds the appropriate page and reads aloud.)

Flautist.

(FLUTIST shoots her a disapproving look. SALLY corrects herself.)

Flutist. A.k.a. Bernice Phillips. Born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Flutist in high school orchestra, marching band. Employed by Tupperware, Mary Kay. Divorced, no children. Stopped speaking on June 23, 1997 when she allegedly witnessed an incident of barnyard levitation at her uncle's dairy farm -- eight cows suspended in mid-air for twenty-seven and a half minutes prior to early morning milking.

(SALLY looks up, gives Flutist a quizzical look. FLUTIST smiles and shrugs. Now the CLARINETIST picks up the melody from Flutist. FLUTIST stops playing. SALLY walks over to Clarinetist, finds the appropriate page and reads aloud.)

Clarinetist. A.k.a. Mary Mary Nordgren. Native of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The story from the family is that she was visited by the voices of God and Satan on several occasions during her childhood. Satan instructed her to put rat poison in her parent's coffee, while God told her not to listen to Satan and to please try to be more conscientious about cleaning her room. Stopped speaking the night she was visited by Mary Magdalene who was filling in for Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who had the night off. She was instructed to do three things: take a vow of silence, begin playing the clarinet, and change her name to "Mary." "But my name is already Mary," Ms. Nordgren responded. "Then you shall be Mary Mary," was the heavenly retort. Self-taught. A lovely young woman with need of only slight embouchure correction.

(Now the PERCUSSIONIST begins to

ping his triangle. CLARINETIST stops playing. SALLY walks over to him, finds the appropriate page, and reads aloud.)

Percussionist. A.k.a. Jules Richardson de Speer. Heir to the de Speer Dental Orifices fortune. Studied the triangle under leading percussionists in several of the world's premiere symphony orchestras. Spent several years commissioning preeminent composers to write concerti for orchestra and triangle, none of which has ever been performed. Last words spoken: "Holy shit!" These coinciding with witnessing a fatal 57 car pile up on the Santa Ana Freeway on May 8, 1998.

(PERCUSSIONIST continues to tinkle his triangle as TRUMPETER and TROMBONIST enter, walk across the stage, pass Sally and then exit. SHE follows them off. LIGHTS go out. In the darkness, we hear "Reveille" played by TRUMPETER. As he plays, LIGHTS come up on the COMPOSER. HE sits on the floor, writing on music paper. HE is surrounded by a jumble of music stands and chairs. There is an urgency to his work which borders on frenzy. JANICE and SALLY enter.)

JANICE

Composer?

(COMPOSER looks up.)

Good morning. I'd like you to meet someone. This is Sally Cabbage. You may have seen her about the building. She's been here --

(seeking assistance from Sally)

-- a week, has it been?

SALLY

Almost.

JANICE

She'll be with us through the middle of next month.

(COMPOSER stares at Sally, then passes a puzzled look to Janice.)

JANICE (cont.)

She doesn't play an instrument.

(to Sally)

Do you?

(SALLY shakes her head.)

She's here to observe.

(COMPOSER nods.)

So you wouldn't mind, would you -- if Sally and I sat here for a while and watched you work? Would that be all right?

(COMPOSER thinks about this, then shrugs, returns to his work. JANICE turns to Sally.)

He's very focused. Gives himself over -- totally -- to the creative process. My guess: he's already forgotten we're even here.

(Apparently to prove Janice wrong, COMPOSER, without looking up, waves exaggeratedly at the two women. THEY laugh. SALLY goes to sit in one of the folding chairs, but Janice stops her with a shake of her head, and points to the floor.)

JANICE

Down here. Those are for people with instruments.

(The TWO WOMEN settle themselves upon the floor. THEY study Composer for a moment in silence.)

JANICE

(cont., sotto voce)

He's in a fine mood this morning. I predict we'll hear something light and airy in the halls this afternoon.

(COMPOSER pulls out a tuning whistle and blows a "G" followed by a "D." TROMBONIST has been summoned; she carries her trombone with her.)

JANICE (cont.)

He's like Captain Von Trapp. He's given each musician a different whistle pattern.

(COMPOSER hands TROMBONIST the sheet of music he's just been working on. SHE looks it over for a moment, then nods. SHE goes to one of the chairs, pulls over a music stand and sets the music down, loosens her slide, adjusts herself in her seat, then attacks the music -- playing for a few measures. The piece is, as Janice predicted, light and frothy -- a merry little ditty. COMPOSER claps his hands: a sign that the playing should stop. HE blows the tuning whistle again: this time an "A" followed by an "E." TRUMPETER appears. TRUMPETER carries his instrument, as well. HE pulls up a chair and sits down next to TROMBONIST. The two MUSICIANS greet one another with a nod. COMPOSER claps. THEY begin to play off the same sheet of music. It's now a duet. COMPOSER listens for a moment, then claps. The TWO stop playing. HE jumps up, stands looking at the musicians for a moment, arms crossed, thinking. Then HE crosses to them, picks up the sheet of music from the stand, turns it upside down and sets it back down. TROMBONIST and TRUMPETER trade odd stares, then trade places. COMPOSER steps back, claps. THE MUSICIANS play: a different tune now, but one just as melodic and cheerful as the one before. COMPOSER nods. A few measures into the piece, its title: "AUBADE FOR BRASS BRACE" is projected on the upstage scrim, holds for a few moments, then fades away. When the piece is finished, JANICE and SALLY applaud. Both MUSICIANS dutifully rise, turn in their music, nod to JANICE and SALLY, and exit. COMPOSER returns to his work, absorbed again in his composition. We now hear from off stage the SOUND of all the instrumentalists playing short snatches

of various pieces of music, some together, some alone; in the aggregate the music shouldn't have an "orchestra tuning up" sound to it; the effect should be that of scattered conversations and greetings.)

SALLY (to Janice)

What's happening now?

JANICE

"Rise and shine." "How'd you sleep?" "Good morning, good morning." Concert Mistress, it seems, didn't sleep well at all; she tossed and turned all night long.

SALLY

How can you tell?

JANICE

You pick up on these things.

SALLY

I'm serious. How can you possibly know what they're saying? Their language -- if you can call it that -- it's frustratingly imprecise.

JANICE

No one said language has to be precise. "Betty gave Brenda her purse." Whose purse? Betty's purse? Brenda's purse? Frustratingly imprecise, I would say.

(SHE cocks her head, listens.)

Goodness. Clarinetist just woke up with a crick.

SALLY

Now you don't know that!

JANICE

I most certainly do. She can't hold her head up. She's got the bell of her instrument muffled by the folds of her nightgown.

(During the dialogue which follows the COMPOSER will remain seemingly oblivious to everything that is being said about him.)

SALLY

Do you think, Janice, that I might have some time alone with him?

(A nod to indicate the Composer.)

JANICE  
Right now? This very moment?

SALLY  
Yes.

JANICE  
That would be up to him. And it would be for what purpose, I might ask.

SALLY  
To talk to him.

JANICE  
"To" him or "with" him? You know he doesn't speak.

SALLY  
Doesn't, period? Or doesn't wish to? You said last week that you weren't quite sure what was going on up in that gloriously creative head of his.

JANICE  
But I have noticed possible indications of protracted pseudo-autistic/degenerative malnormal syndrome.

SALLY  
I've never heard of that.

JANICE  
I just made it up.

SALLY (ignoring this)  
I think he can talk.

JANICE  
You do, do you?

SALLY  
Yes.

JANICE  
You base this on a five-minute observation?

SALLY  
No, I base it on a feeling. A sense that he isn't like the others in this way. That he doesn't speak simply because he's too busy. Every word uttered takes him away from the singularly directed task of composing his music.

JANICE  
It's an interesting theory.

SALLY

Look, I know that's all it is: a theory. But what's the harm in letting me try to pry a few words out of him?

JANICE

Pry away. There's fresh Danish down in the community room when you're finished.

(JANICE gets up, stands, looking down at Sally for a moment. Suddenly hostile:)

You know, you're not the doctor here. It isn't even your book. You're a paid research assistant.

SALLY

I know that.

JANICE

You came here to observe and make notes. You're not here to effect change. That's my job. If this be my choice. And it isn't my choice. Things are fine as they are. Perfectly fine.

SALLY

Yes, I understand.

(A silence.)

JANICE

Well, that was certainly rude. I sincerely apologize. I haven't had my coffee and Danish, you see. Once I've had my coffee and Danish I'll be good as new. Will you forgive me?

SALLY

Nothing to forgive. I'm a little cranky myself in the morning.

JANICE

Please. Let me bring you something to eat. Would you like eggs?

SALLY

I don't generally eat breakfast, Janice. My stomach is usually a little unsettled in the morning.

JANICE

As is my head. Go ahead. Try to work some magic. You have my permission.

(to the Composer)

Your muse is here. Would it be all right if she stayed for a while? For inspiration?

(COMPOSER looks up, thinks this over, nods.)

JANICE (cont.)

Fine.

(to Sally)

This is the most receptive I've seen him in weeks. We'll regroup at lunch.

(SHE exits. COMPOSER stares at Sally. SALLY stares back at COMPOSER.)

SALLY

I don't mean to keep you from your work. Go ahead. I'm just going to watch. Does it bother you? Someone watching you compose your music?

(COMPOSER shakes his head. A revelation:)

You understood everything I just said! That's a step in the right direction. I'm not having much success getting through to the others here. I passed Flutist in the hall this morning. She had a strip of medical tape or something all tangled in her hair. I tried to point this fact out to her, but she looked at me as if I were insane. And then that little game with Cellist last week. But at least you understand me. That's good. If you don't want to talk, that's fine. But, you see, I believe that you can talk. That you once had the ability, and you used that ability to talk up a storm. You gave impassioned orations to whomever would listen on a variety of subjects: love of music, the music of love -- Now I was up all night and devised this perfectly ingenious means for us to communicate. We'll need a keyboard of some sort and I will ask you questions and you will feel free to answer me using words containing those letters "A" through "G" found in musical notation. In fact, we don't even need a keyboard. You can just point to the notes on the page -- I read music -- and there I'll have your answer. Feel free to use other musical symbols as well: for example I might ask: "What would you like to do? Keep conversing or rest?" And if you think maybe it's time to take a nap or something, you point to the "rest" symbol, see, right there on the page?

(SHE picks up a sheet of music from in front of Composer and points to a spot.)

COMPOSER

What if I want to keep working?

(SALLY drops the sheet of music --  
a moment of shock.)

COMPOSER (cont.)

Unfortunately, there's no symbol for "go away." I couldn't point out the notes because while I have a "g" here and two "a's", the musical scale doesn't go up to "o", let alone "w" and "y". We'd be at a little communicational impasse, wouldn't we?

SALLY

I knew you could speak.

COMPOSER

Of course, our conversations would be very "espressivo" thanks to the Italians. We'd always know exactly how we felt: "Molto mosso." "Maestoso." "Dolcissimo." "Animato ma non troppo."

SALLY

You don't have to be so flip.

COMPOSER

"Molto cantabile." "Apassionato." "Tranquillo."

SALLY

Do you want me to go?

COMPOSER

"Ritard."

SALLY

You are not a very nice person, Mr.-Whatever-Your-Real-Name-Is. I don't know what kind of game you're playing here, but you have Janice -- Doctor Goldman -- totally convinced that you're a sociologically and emotionally detached, hyper-creative mute, when I seriously doubt you're any of those things.

COMPOSER

I won't argue with "hyper-creative." I had my creativity tested when I was eight. The proctor said I had the passion of a Beethoven, the intellect of a Bach and the determination and drive of a Wagner. He said I'd either be writing double choral symphonies by the age of twelve or be confined to a mental hospital for having my creative potential thwarted by real life. Well, I'm in the mental hospital, but fortunately I get to keep writing. Albeit for a smaller ensemble. You're really beautiful, did you know that? My type. Thank you for coming into my life.

SALLY

Excuse me?

COMPOSER

Nothing.

SALLY

I don't think it's right, your leading Janice on like this.

COMPOSER

Leading her on? I'm not leading anybody on. You're the first person I've opened my mouth to in eight years. I'm taxing my long dormant vocal cords even as we -- as I speak. But you're worth it. You know, you are really gorgeous.

SALLY

I don't know how to respond to that.

COMPOSER

Say "thank you." Say you'll come up here every morning, preferably without Dr. Feel Good, and be my muse. My personal muse of music. Of course, if you're any student of Greek and Roman mythology, then you know that that particular job is still unfilled, there not being a muse of music per se. There was, of course, Polyhymnia, muse of sacred song. And Polly did happen to pay me a few visits over the years, but the secular has always held more appeal for me than the liturgical. So I appoint you my official muse of music for all occasions: Sallymusica.

SALLY

I'm going downstairs now and inform Janice that the composer has found his voice. She'll be happy to hear.

COMPOSER

She won't be happy. She'll be pissed. She wants me mute. She wants to keep things just the way they are; weren't you listening?

SALLY

You don't like that woman very much, do you?

COMPOSER

I don't really have a strong opinion of her one way or another. I suppose I should be grateful. To have a place to work. A sanctuary. I do pay her, though. A large amount of money. We all do. If not for our sizable trust funds and what not, we could never afford to stay here.

SALLY

I don't know if I can believe anything you say. Is this really the first time you've spoken in eight years?

COMPOSER

No. Three or four years ago, I stubbed my toe. I think I said "damn-fuck." You know, like one word: "damnfuck." There was no one around to hear me. If a tree fell on Helen Keller alone in the forest, would there be a sound? Truth be told, I just really haven't had much of a desire to speak. To anyone. I guess you were right when you surmised that it took time away from my composing.

(Now from offstage we hear a sweet romantic MELODY played by the CONCERT MISTRESS, VIOLIST, CELLIST AND FLUTIST. It underscores the rest of the scene.)

SALLY

Why then, now?

COMPOSER

Because I can't think of any other way of communicating my desire to go to bed with you.

SALLY

You want to --

COMPOSER

In the worst way.

SALLY

You just met me.

COMPOSER

Is that supposed to mean something?

SALLY

You're attracted to me.

COMPOSER

Quite.

SALLY

Oh.

COMPOSER

That was articulate.

SALLY

I just don't -- generally -- outside a singles bar -- find people who are so up front, right off the bat, about this sort of thing.

COMPOSER

Like I said, I don't have much time. So I come right to the point. If there's another way to do it, please forgive me. I've been out of the social loop for a while. So now you know. May I kiss you?

SALLY

How do you know that I'm attracted to you?

COMPOSER

Well, aren't you? Am I not sufficiently mysterious and brooding -- the tortured, tormented, lonely soul in the garret, the Rochester to your Jane Eyre, and here I am in the flesh. With beautiful, sensuous music coursing through my veins, no less.

SALLY

Are you trying to seduce me?

COMPOSER

(moving toward her)

Yes. Is it working?

SALLY

Tell me your name.

COMPOSER

I am ...

(with a flourish)

"Composer."

SALLY

I want your real name.

COMPOSER

How can I be sufficiently mysterious if I have to reveal things like my real name? Suffice it to say, it's an average name with not much going for it. I prefer my professional name. Is Sally Cabbage your real name?

SALLY

Yes.

COMPOSER

I like it. It sounds like an herb. Or vegetable. Or spice.

(HE takes her in his arms and  
kisses her.)

COMPOSER

I will tell you this much about myself, dear Sally Cabbage: I have felt sexual desire in my life on only eight occasions. That I can remember. Sexual desire for a woman. For a human being. Sexual desire that didn't become subsumed by my music. You should know this: as I sit here writing, as the music envelopes me, as I let it work its magic, it becomes -- often becomes -- a sensual, sensuous, an altogether sexual experience.

SALLY

(guessing at his intent)

You have orgasms when you compose.

(COMPOSER nods.)

Better than with a woman?

COMPOSER

I wouldn't know.

SALLY

You mean you've never --

COMPOSER

Never.

SALLY

But you said there were eight times.

COMPOSER

Eight times I felt the stirring. But I never acted on them. Twice was with you. The first time I saw you. Downstairs, that first day. Trying to get your directions to the doctor's office. I was watching you from behind the door to the community room. Noticing the way your skirt static-clung to your hips. Outlining your hips. The subtle curve of them.

SALLY

And the second time.

COMPOSER

Moments ago. As you stood in the doorway, briefly silhouetted against the morning light flooding in from the windowed corridor. As you hesitated, before entering -- several paces behind Dr. Feel Good. Like an angel -- ethereal. All but the wings. My heart began to race. My skin -- clammy. These are signs. That my body wants something from you. Something it's never gotten from anyone before.

SALLY

And the other six times.

COMPOSER

Other women. Appreciated from afar. Except for Dr. Goldman.

SALLY

You're sexually attracted to Dr. Goldman?

COMPOSER

I enjoyed a brief moment of "what if." When. Shortly after my arrival here, she demonstrated a welcome appreciation for my music. Her eyes spoke. Revealed to me through whispers all the places deep inside her my music touched. And at that moment I wanted desperately to find those places. To be in those places.

SALLY

I can't sleep with you.

(beat)

To do so would compromise my reason for being here.

COMPOSER

Yes. I knew that it was not to be. In my heart I knew, but I had to ask anyway. You understand this, right?

(SALLY nods.)

You like my music?

SALLY

I love your music.

COMPOSER

Then this will have to be enough.

SALLY

You do --

(SHE falters.)

Please. Try to under[stand] --

(HE looks at her without answering.)

I can't -- You know I just can't believe that this was your only reason for talking to me. I can't believe there aren't thousands of other reasons for finally finding your voice.

(HE looks at her without speaking.)

And thousands of reasons not to lose it again. I can't be the sole -- the only -- I don't merit this. I don't.

(HE is staring hard at her.)

SALLY (cont.)

Talk to me. Please. Please talk to me.

(HE is staring hard at her.)

Then hold me.

(HE puts his arms around her, holding her like this for a moment. Then another kiss, which HE initiates but which SHE doesn't reject. LIGHTS slowly fade out and as they do the MUSIC stops. LIGHTS come up on CLARINETIST, FLUTIST and PERCUSSIONIST seated in a triangle, instruments in hand -- [the Percussionist with his triangle] -- music on the stands in front of them. Projected on the upstage scrim are the words: "SONATA FOR CLARINET, VIOLA, CELLO AND MEMORY." The words fade away. Elsewhere illuminated on stage, COMPOSER is seated at a table with his music paper. SALLY sits across from him. Every now and then HE will look up to nod or smile. Now and then HE touches her affectionately on the hand or cheek.)

SALLY

I had a dream about my mother last night. I can't shake the images. They haven't evaporated as most dream images do. Probably because the dream -- the whole dream was a replay of something that really happened. Dreams rarely mirror reality, but this one did -- I think. Should I spill it? Would you like to hear it?

(COMPOSER doesn't answer one way or another.)

C Tonic Chord for yes. Dominant Seventh for no.

(COMPOSER grins, points to a place on the page in front of him and as he does the TRIO play a C tonic chord. SHE cocks her head to see where he's pointing, smiles. SHE begins her story, and as she does,

two things happen -- first, JANICE appears out of sight of COMPOSER and SALLY, but clearly within earshot. SHE is, in fact, eavesdropping, and will be present for the telling of the story which follows. Second, the Trio will accompany Sally's story -- partly underscoring, partly filling in the gaps and pauses, almost as if they are telling their own story, the two tales becoming intertwined. The MUSIC will be at times complementary, at other times, at odds with the tone and mood of Sally's monologue.)

SALLY (cont.)

When I was eight. Something happened. The winter I turned eight. There was a snow storm. A terrible blizzard with snow and ice. Ice that knocked down all the power lines to the farmhouse where I lived with my mother and father. Daddy was away. Was staying with my grandmother a half day's drive away. Grandmother was ill, very nearly dead, and Daddy had gone to be with her, leaving Mother and me in a house which soon was without electricity or a working phone, with snow piling high outside. Mother made a decision. Mother decided that we should try to reach her sister's place in town. Where she was sure things would be better. We had plenty of food and logs for the fireplace. We were much better off remaining at the farmhouse than striking out for my aunt's -- into that blinding blizzard, but this was what Mother felt we should do, and I at only eight was not all that skillful in the art of dissuasion.

The road disappeared under the blanket of white, but Mother kept driving, her jaw set, gripping the steering wheel, her eyes fixed on the swirling white canvas beyond the windshield. I begged her to turn around, to go back to the farm. But Mother would not be deterred. And so we pressed on. Travelling several miles, in fact, Mother following the course of the road by straddling the place where blacktop met shoulder -- hugging the edge of that blacktop until her tires lost all traction and sent us off the road entirely, and down a frozen embankment where the car came to rest in a icy ditch.

She didn't want to leave me alone to get help. She stayed with me. For a day and a half. We ate the food which she had packed for just such a possibility and huddled together under the blanket she'd brought. The car heater gave out when the engine finally died. The blanket, our layers of clothes were little use against the cold. A cold such as I'd never known before, especially when the snow had stopped falling and the night

descended like a great black weight upon us. Mother told me stories to keep me awake. Wonderful fairy tales -- many I'd heard before, some she made up on the spot. I dozed off a few times and had to be shaken awake. She covered me, wrapped me tightly with her own body, rubbing warmth into my limbs as she conjured up just the right word pictures to paint for me, to distract me from thinking that perhaps she had brought me to this horribly cold and dark place only to die.

I remember falling asleep and waking only when the hand of a highway patrolman reached beneath the blanket and beneath the lifeless body of my mother to take my wrist -- to seek a pulse. He found one. A weak one. But a pulse. And within moments my body was being lifted free from its maternal cocoon and out of the car.

I mourned the loss of my mother by not speaking. By refusing to speak to anyone for weeks. By choosing to remain alone in my room until finally the desire to be a part of my father's life and the life of all the others I loved and who loved me became too great to be kept down.

(long beat)

But a part of me ... a big part of me ... still misses her.  
Still wonders ... why.

(The MUSIC stops. COMPOSER gets up, goes to Sally, holds her. SALLY steps back. THEY look hard at one another, thoughts passing between them. HE closes in, takes her, kisses her: raw, passionate kisses. SHE begins to unbutton her blouse. JANICE turns and walks away. LIGHTS fade out. End of ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

(LIGHTS come up on JANICE and SALLY on the sofa. SALLY is smoking.)

JANICE

He speaks to you?

SALLY

Yes.

JANICE

I'm having a little trouble believing this.

SALLY

Why? Because he's never spoken to you?

JANICE

He's never spoken to anyone. The whole time he's been here, that I'm aware of. You couldn't have imagined this, perhaps? Delusions of dialogue?

SALLY

I didn't imagine our conversations, Janice.

JANICE

I was outside his room. Last week. You should know this. I heard only one voice. Yours.

SALLY

And what was I saying?

JANICE

You were telling the story of your mother. A lovely story of sacrifice and stupidity. I didn't believe a word of it. You missed the ash tray.

SALLY

I'll smoke outside. I'm sorry. I didn't think you minded.

JANICE

I don't mind if you smoke in my house, Sally. Although it's quite a nasty habit. Have you ever tried to quit?

SALLY

Hundreds of times.

JANICE

I'll put you under hypnosis. After dinner. Through the power of my suggestion you'll be free of cigarettes in a matter of days.

SALLY

Thank you.

(beat)

I'm not imagining it: our conversations. His and mine. Nor am I imagining the other things --

JANICE

Other things?

SALLY

I love him, Janice. I have fallen in love with him. And I am sure that he feels the same for me.

JANICE

That certainly makes things a little complicated.

SALLY

Yes. I know.

JANICE

Falling in love with one of my -- one of the residents here -- well, it makes things very complicated indeed.

SALLY

Yes, yes. I -- This is why I feel that I ought to -- you know, go.

JANICE

Or perhaps you should suspend this silly affair and return to your work. Your work here is far from finished, you know.

SALLY

There's no closure to this kind of research, Janice. I'm sure I'll be giving Dr. Moseley plenty of material to sketch out his chapter on the institute. Where he wishes to fill in the gaps he can come here and fill them in himself.

JANICE

So I take it you've drawn no conclusions on your own -- with the exception of the fact that you and the Composer find yourselves wildly attracted to one another.

SALLY

It isn't my job to draw conclusions.

JANICE

But if it were --

SALLY

You want to know the truth? I don't understand these people. I will never understand them. And I don't, frankly wish to understand them. I give myself headaches just trying to figure out the Composer. Where the drive comes from. The creative impulse which he can't seem to shut off, like an uninterrupted current from his heart to his brain. He goes long hours without sleep -- creating -- ream upon ream of music that no one save the privileged few will ever hear. His music stirs me, uplifts me, moves me, but no more than I am stirred, uplifted, and moved when he takes me in his arms. When he kisses me. When he --

(not easily)

-- with him inside me.

JANICE

(equally uneasy)

You may stop there.

SALLY (not heeding)

That moment -- the apex of that moment. Cannot be put into words. But excites, exhilarates, awakens me just the same. Maybe this is my conclusion: that the music -- their music has become a replacement -- a substitute for love.

JANICE

And by association my --

SALLY (interrupting)

I'm not saying that.

JANICE

Is he still writing?

SALLY

He's blocked.

JANICE

Since when?

SALLY

Since we started having sex.

JANICE

Then perhaps you should go.

SALLY

It's that simple, is it?

JANICE

You're right. You don't understand. You'll never understand.

SALLY

Try me.

JANICE

It's about transcendence. About going beyond all that we know. Beyond the concrete. Beyond the things you can hold in your hand. Or between your legs.

SALLY

I don't know how to respond to that.

JANICE

I didn't say it to elicit a response. I'm going to check the pot roast.

(SHE gets up, exits. SALLY doesn't move. SHE continues to sit quietly on the sofa, lost in thought as the FLUTIST appears in limbo upstage. SHE begins to play a dulcet but contemplative tune which grows darker and more dissonant in its progression. Early in the piece its title: "ANTI-RHAPSODY FOR SOLO FLUTE WITH INEVITABLE REFERENCE TO THE PENSIVE WOMAN ON THE SOFA" is projected on the scrim. When the piece is finished, SALLY applauds. The FLUTIST takes her bows and exits. BLACK OUT. LIGHTS come up on the sofa. SALLY, now wearing a robe, sits thinking. JANICE, dressed for the day, enters.)

JANICE

There's Danish in the kitchen.

SALLY

Thank you. I'm not hungry.

JANICE

You're not smoking.

SALLY

I lit up. It tasted like smoldering tires.

(JANICE smiles smugly.)

SALLY (cont.)

Have you ever been in love, Janice?

JANICE

Should I sit down for this? Yes, I've been in love.

SALLY

Then you know the way that made you feel. Love transcends. It does.

JANICE

I know of no other love than the earth-bound variety. Frangible, impermanent, enslaved to whim and fancy, soured by changing disposition or flagging interest or the deflecting appearance of the newer, younger model. You really should eat breakfast. It's the most important meal of the day.

SALLY

The love you describe: that isn't the only kind of love there is.

JANICE

For most of us, it's the only kind of love we'll ever know.

SALLY

I leave myself open to the possibility of a different kind. A selfless love, a love of sacrifice and total devotion.

JANICE

And have you found that with the Composer?

SALLY

I don't know. I only know that there is that possibility --

JANICE

A love of sacrifice. Like the love that required your mother to extinguish her own life to save yours?

SALLY

Yes.

JANICE

The ultimate sacrifice.

SALLY

Yes.

JANICE

I don't believe that to be true.

SALLY

What do you mean?

JANICE

I mean that I don't believe that your mother would have risked

JANICE (cont.)

leaving that farmhouse if she didn't have an awfully compelling reason for doing so.

SALLY

She was afraid that we'd become snowbound. Without heat -- without --

JANICE

Pooh!

SALLY

Pooh?

JANICE

Yes, pooh. Your mother had a far more pressing need to go into town that day, and you know it.

SALLY

I don't know what you're getting at.

JANICE

Come now. Your father gone. The opportunity to see someone. Someone who wasn't your father.

SALLY

Oh really? This is your theory?

JANICE

It isn't mere theory, Sally. It's what happened. It's what you told me happened while you were under hypnosis.

SALLY

You asked me questions about my mother while I was under hypnosis?

JANICE

Now, you really don't think helping you kick the nicotine habit was the only reason I wanted to put you under. Your mother was driving into town to see someone. It took a while for me to pull this important fact out of you -- so deep have you buried all the truth about that day --

SALLY

How dare you!

JANICE

You may be indignant. But you ought to thank me. She -- your mother -- was clearly hoping for a rendezvous of some sort. Oh hell's bells, let's be honest about this. It was a dirty little assignation is what it was. There was a desperate need on your mother's part to do the nasty with a man who was not your sainted

farmer father. E - I - E - I ohhhhhhh!

SALLY

I would never have told you something like that. You're making this all up.

JANICE

She had to be with him, you see. Even if it meant endangering the life of her child to get there.

SALLY (overlapping)

Please stop.

JANICE

She couldn't leave you alone at the farm, now could she? She had to take you with her, didn't she? So she could be with him. This person. This lover of hers.

SALLY

(frantically, overlapping)

I beg you to stop saying these things.

JANICE

With your father away. To fly to his arms after dropping you off at your Aunt Louise's.

(SALLY covers her ears. JANICE pulls them brutally down to Sally's sides.)

What propelled her, Sally? This special love of which you speak? Lofty. Noble. Or was it simple, base desire? A desire born of nothing but hormones and instinct. And you equate this with the passion of artistic creation? Your Sampson in the garret, you shear off all his hair -- draining him of his creative muscle, and take what little passion remains with you to your bed. You say that language escapes you when he is with you. Inside you. And yet you know this isn't true. The words are there, as they were there for your mother. Carnal words. Words without beauty or resonance. Words grunted. Words moaned. Words your mother longed to speak in the company of her adulterous liaison.

SALLY

(overlapping, destroyed)

I never told you any of this. Why would I tell you such things?

JANICE

Words, Sally, she died to say. Words for which she was willing to sacrifice her own daughter.

(SALLY runs from the room.)

JANICE (cont.)

Wait! You forgot your cigarettes!

(JANICE exits. Upstage the CELLIST enters. HE sits down and begins to play. SALLY enters, crosses to him.)

SALLY

He isn't in his room. The Composer. He isn't there. I've looked all over and can't find him. I tried the library. The door was locked. I knocked. No one came to the door. I need to speak to him. I must speak to him.

(CELLIST continues to play, oblivious to her presence.)

I'm here talking to you. I will not be ignored.

(CELLIST continues to play, not acknowledging her. SHE reaches over and places a hand over his bowing hand. HE stops playing. SHE removes her hand.)

I'm having a nervous breakdown and you're not helping.

(CELLIST responds in musical echo.)

Stop it! You will not do that!

(CELLIST responds in musical echo.)

You disgusting man! Have you no compassion!

(CELLIST responds in musical echo. On the scrim is now projected the words: DUET FOR CELLO AND WOMAN ON THE VERGE. SALLY turns, sees the words. To no one in particular:)

Take that down! Immediately!

(The words fade. More to herself.)

I will maintain control.

(SHE wanders downstage and is met by COMPOSER. CELLIST exits. COMPOSER and SALLY sit down.)

SALLY

I couldn't find you. I started to panic.

COMPOSER

I was in the library.

SALLY

What were you doing?

COMPOSER

I was reading. A National Geographic. Then some inspirational stories. From Reader's Digest. Then I did a crossword puzzle. Then I looked up my horoscope in the newspaper. Then I read an article about dietary fiber. Then I copied a poem I liked -- by Wallace Stevens -- one of his plum poems. And I read it backwards. Then I think I dozed off. It was dark when I awoke.

SALLY

You wrote no music today.

COMPOSER

I haven't written anything in several days. I cannot find the inspiration.

(beat)

I'm a little concerned.

SALLY

I'm checking into the Wayfarer's Inn. I can't stay with Janice anymore.

COMPOSER

I sat at my piano waiting. Nothing came. I sat there staring at the keys. I placed my hands on the keyboard. They played a Bach two part invention. They played this piece -- this piece imported into my head. Not one home grown. I'm really unhappy about this.

SALLY

I thought your block would be gone when we stopped having sex.

COMPOSER

We have stopped having sex. I am still blocked.

SALLY

Maybe you're blocked because you still want to have sex.

(beat)

Don't you?

COMPOSER

Yes. Well, of course I want to have sex. It's more than that, I'm afraid. I'm not in that place anymore. The place I used to be.

SALLY

How do you feel?

COMPOSER

Like filet mignon has disappeared from the butcher's shop. Now I'm eating ground beef.

SALLY

She said things about my mother.

COMPOSER

Janice?

(SALLY nods.)

What kind of things?

SALLY

Things to hurt me.

COMPOSER

Why would she want to hurt you?

SALLY

I don't know why. I haven't done anything to deserve this kind of cruelty.

COMPOSER

The word in the corridors is that you're an agitator. You're the one who bangs the garbage lids together outside the bedroom windows, waking everyone up.

SALLY

I only ask questions.

COMPOSER

You're threatening the status quo.

SALLY

You think I'm the reason you've stopped writing?

COMPOSER

Trumpet Player has stopped playing [his] trumpet. I caught [him] down in the community room watching an old rerun of I Dream of Jeannie.

SALLY

I didn't do this.

COMPOSER

Flutist yesterday was heard to mumble over her breakfast, "How about waffles for a change? I'm sick of fucking Danish."

SALLY

You're making this up.

COMPOSER

They say you're a virus.

SALLY

I was going to leave at the end of the week.

COMPOSER

Why wait?

SALLY

Do you want me to leave?

COMPOSER

Of course I don't want you to leave. I love you.

SALLY

After what you've just been saying?

COMPOSER

I'm telling you how things are. Summing up: I cannot write. Trumpeter has packed away [his] trumpet. Flutist has spoken her first words in [count from 1997] years. You are in pain not because Janice has been cruel to you but because Janice has told you the truth about your mother. For whatever reason, I don't know. But we all have to come to face certain cold truths, and why should Sally Cabbage be spared? Know the truth and it shall make you free.

SALLY

I loved my mother.

COMPOSER

With all your heart. But your mother was flawed. Accept the fact that your mother was a sadly flawed woman. That there is no perfect love, because there are no perfect people. We are proof of that. Stripped down to our souls. Hear the music of our bared souls, because this is all we have left. Why were you waiting until the end of the week?

SALLY

To give myself a few more days with you. Because I know that once I leave I will probably never see you again.

COMPOSER

What do you want, Sally?

SALLY

To scream. A scream to wake the dead.

COMPOSER

Go ahead. You're in a mental hospital. Nobody will bat an eye.

SALLY

I don't know how.

COMPOSER

You don't --

(SALLY shakes her head.)

It can't be that difficult. You open your mouth and out it comes.

SALLY

I open my mouth and nothing comes out. Except words. And fewer words with each day.

COMPOSER

I've noticed.

SALLY

I'm afraid.

COMPOSER

Of.

SALLY

I need --

COMPOSER

Help.

SALLY

Yes. But I don't know who --

COMPOSER

You're right. There's only so much that I can do.

(Long silence. The TWO staring at one another.)

I can't go to her.

SALLY

I'm not saying you should.

COMPOSER

I don't like her.

SALLY

I'm not saying -- [that you should go to her].

COMPOSER

Of course you are. You defended her a moment ago. You said there were certain "cold truths."

SALLY

I don't like her either. Those annoying habits of hers. The dirty sneakers. I have a list somewhere.

COMPOSER

She assaulted my love for you.

SALLY

Did you strike back?

COMPOSER

I don't know how to strike back.

SALLY

Did she succeed in knocking you down?

COMPOSER

I don't [know] --

SALLY

Could this be a cruel means to a beneficial end?

COMPOSER

I don't know.

SALLY

Neither do I. Which is why I'm not recommending you go to her. But I'm not counseling against it, either.

COMPOSER

Thank you for the help.

SALLY (sarcastic)

You're welcome.

COMPOSER

(HE kisses her on the forehead, and

walks off. SALLY stands alone for a moment, then tightens her fists, contorts her face and executes a silent scream. SHE sighs and shrugs, then crosses downstage to Janice's office. JANICE is waiting behind her desk. SHE smokes a cigarette. SALLY sits down across from her. [SALLY has, by the way, stopped smoking.]

JANICE

How are you sleeping?

SALLY

Not well. The bed in the motel is lumpy.

JANICE

Then ask them for another room.

SALLY

I tried. I walked up to the desk. I could not say what I wanted.

JANICE

You could not articulate --

SALLY

A basic need.

JANICE

You looked --

SALLY

Very foolish.

JANICE

My opinion is that you should postpone your departure. Friday is much too soon for you to be leaving us. I want to see you -- twice a day -- for the next two weeks. Dr. Moseley will have to be patient. You are a woman in crisis.

SALLY

Twice a day.

JANICE

For the next two weeks. Or longer if I note further regression.

SALLY

I can't afford you.

JANICE

I charge on a sliding scale.

SALLY

I don't know if you slide that far down.

JANICE

What's important is making you better.

SALLY

Yes. I want to get better.

JANICE

That's what I'm here for. Excuse me.

(SHE steps away from her desk and returns with PERCUSSIONIST. HE carries his triangle.)

JANICE (cont.)

I want you to start playing a musical instrument. It will be good therapy for you.

(to Percussionist)

Give her your triangle.

(PERCUSSIONIST shakes his head. A command:)

I said, give her your fucking triangle. She's a woman in crisis.

(HE surrenders it reluctantly, then exits, crestfallen. JANICE offers it to Sally.)

Take it. It's very easy. It plays only one note. We'll call you "One Note Sally." You'll be a hit at parties.

(SALLY takes it, hesitantly, uneasily.)

Try it. It makes a sweetly whimsical little sound. You need more whimsy in your life, Sally Cabbage. Your life is currently without any whimsy whatsoever.

(SALLY taps the triangle: ping!)

There. That was nice. Wasn't it?

(SALLY shrugs.)

JANICE (cont.)

Now go away. Come back tomorrow morning at ten.

(SALLY gets up and wanders upstage. SHE is joined by a trio: TROMBONIST, TRUMPETER, and CLARINETIST. The name of the piece is projected on the scrim: "PAVANE FOR TROMBONE, TRUMPET AND CLARINET WITH TRIANGULAR INTRUSION." The words fade away. The three MUSICIANS play: an angry chaotic, dissonant, brutal work. Now and then SALLY will hit her triangle with its tiny mallet but we won't be able to hear her contribution over the din. SHE is, to make matters worse, ignored by the others, finally receding into the background behind them until all we can see of her are her arms rising above their heads to strike her all but silent triangle. Near the end of the piece JANICE appears downstage, her hands covering her ears, the pained look on her face relaying her opinion of the music. COMPOSER sits next to her. HE doesn't seem as disturbed. The MUSIC stops. The MUSICIANS and SALLY fade into the shadows.)

JANICE

(to the Composer)

I know you can speak, so speak, Goddamnit! Who wrote this dreck?

COMPOSER

(after a long silence)

I don't know.

JANICE

It wasn't you?

COMPOSER

It wasn't me.

JANICE

Are you still writing?

COMPOSER

Not lately.

JANICE

How long has it been?

COMPOSER

How long has it been since what?

JANICE

Since you stopped writing. Don't fuck with me.

COMPOSER

It has been eight days. This is my eighth day of not writing.

JANICE

Will there be any more music from you in the foreseeable future?

COMPOSER

I do not know.

JANICE

I am very disappointed in you. I'm disappointed beyond words.

COMPOSER

I know.

JANICE

Do you require incentive? Are you without incentive?

COMPOSER

I'm without incentive.

JANICE

How can we get you back up on that horse?

COMPOSER

I'm worried about Sally.

JANICE

Sally needs our help. She doesn't need fretting from either of us. You'll find some way to help her. While I will continue our twice daily psychotherapy sessions. I'm learning much about her. That can only be of value. I do not think that it would constitute a betrayal of professional confidence for me to tell you that Sally Cabbage has lived in a fairy tale world for years -- a world built upon sandy foundation. It would, however, egregiously violate such confidence for me to tell you that the ground has finally shuddered -- has veritably quaked. The potential for profound disillusionment has officially come to pass, and while Sally is presently being slapped in the psyche by the truth about her philandering mother, she is also being assailed by other sad truths about those who have been near and dear to her. A barrage of disabuse and betrayal -- one naked, unvarnished verity after another. She reels from the blows.

JANICE (cont.)

Shall I name them one by one? Professional ethics be damned!

(counting off on her fingers)

A father whom she adored found to be a charter member of a violent white supremacist paramilitary organization. An aunt who rounded up homeless puppies and shipped them to Beijing for casserole fodder. A brother who paid a large sum of money so that Sally would have a date for her high school prom -- the recipient absconding, in breach of contract. All of this has come back to her. Has come cascading back -- haunting her like the barks of those puppies being trundled off to a land of --

COMPOSER (interrupting)

Will you shut up?

JANICE

I'm informing you.

COMPOSER

I stand informed.

JANICE

Find her. We will work together to help her gain peace.

COMPOSER

We're going to be partners?

JANICE

Yes.

COMPOSER

You want her the way she was?

JANICE

Why wouldn't I?

COMPOSER

I don't know. I detected a grin when you chanced upon her playing that triangle alone in a corner of the cafeteria.

JANICE

I smiled because I felt it was giving her joy.

COMPOSER

Was that why you smiled?

JANICE

What are you saying?

COMPOSER (angrily)

Nothing.

(HE storms out. LIGHTS dim on JANICE who doesn't exit. CONCERT MISTRESS and FLUTIST enter and takes their seats upstage. THEY do not play. SALLY enters, crosses downstage, carrying her triangle. SHE is met by COMPOSER. THEY look at one another for a moment without speaking. HE goes out. SHE crosses downstage to Janice's office.)

JANICE

Hello, Sally Cabbage. Have a seat.

(SALLY sits down.)

Put your triangle down.

(SALLY puts her triangle down.)

How are you feeling?

SALLY

Empty.

JANICE

Describe the feeling for me.

SALLY

Hollow.

JANICE

Yes?

SALLY

Vacuous.

JANICE

Yes?

SALLY

Vacant.

JANICE

Sad?

SALLY

Yes. Sally sad.

JANICE  
Sorry Sally sad. So --

SALLY  
Hungry.

JANICE  
You don't eat breakfast. I'm always after you to eat breakfast.  
(offering a muffin)

Muffin?

SALLY  
No.

JANICE  
Do you like your room? Here at the hospital. Your new room. Do you like it?

SALLY  
Concert Mistress snores.

JANICE  
But aside from that?

SALLY  
Bed is hard.

JANICE  
Do you have anything good to say about the room?

SALLY  
Lovely view. Of the woods.

JANICE  
Yes?

SALLY  
Beautiful. Even now.

JANICE  
Now?

SALLY  
Bare branches.

JANICE  
Wait for the snow. Dusted with snow it will be a wonderland.

SALLY (fear)  
Snow.

JANICE  
Sally, are you in pain?

SALLY  
I am in pain.

JANICE  
Take the muffin.

(SALLY shakes her head, turns away.  
CONCERT MISTRESS and FLUTIST begin  
to play. The music is melancholy,  
wrenching in its solemnity.)

JANICE  
The world gives us joy, Sally. The world gives us pain. I am quite pleased that for the first time in your life you are able to feel -- to feel, Sally, with something approaching the intensity of feeling of those others so blessed who reside here. You have set foot on that exalted plain of pure, unadulterated emotion. You will become, I believe, a truly evolved creature of heightened sensibility. You will rise from the depths of heartache and regret to soar. You will be the shining example of the triumph of passion over reason. After you recover. And you will recover, my Sally. And I will help you find your way. You can count on that, my dear, dear Sally. And you will graduate from that perky little triangle to a far more expressive instrument. I will buy you an accordion.

(A look of veiled terror comes over  
SALLY'S FACE.)

What do you think of that?

(SALLY doesn't speak.)

Excellent. Go now. Learn to speak with your heart.

(SALLY gets up, crosses to where the CONCERT MISTRESS and FLUTIST sit. SHE sits down next to them. Projected on the scrim is the name of the piece which they now begin to play: "DUET FOR VIOLIN AND TROMBONE WITH PEDESTRIAN INTERLUDES." SALLY sits silently except during specific moments in which the MUSICIANS deliberately incorporate her punctuation: a

cough, a cleared throat, a deliberate adjustment of her chair. When the piece is completed, all THREE rise and take their bows. SALLY sits back down. JANICE enters. SHE carries an accordion. Without speaking SHE sets it in Sally's lap and exits. SALLY sits, holding the accordion -- not playing it, not even looking at it. It is as if SHE has been handed a thirty pound sack of flour. COMPOSER walks up, carrying music paper. HE clinches a pencil between his teeth. HE sees her and goes to her.)

COMPOSER

(removing the pencil)

I'm writing again. I thought you should know. I summoned the muses. I made a bargain. One among their number is to visit me on alternate Wednesday nights. I felt this was fair. I am no longer obsessed. Janice will be unhappy to hear this. She has triumphed with you, though. You will take my place, I suppose.

(indicating the accordion)

They can polka now. Or soon. Have your lessons begun?

(SALLY shakes her head.)

Sally Cabbage. Cabbage like a vegetable. Sally is a vegetable. How did you get to this place?

(SALLY shakes her head. A sudden explosion of rage:)

I will not accept it, Goddamnit! Do you hear me? She said we were to work together to help you. However, I think we are at cross-purposes, Doctor Feel Good and I. I don't want you to die here. An old woman without teeth playing "Volaré" at two in the morning. I want you the way you were. Chatty Cathy. Bending my ear with your Goddamned opinions. Blowing your fetid cigarette smoke in my face. Analyzing, examining everything. Passionate in your assessment of a world unfathomable. You felt. I know that you felt. I want you back. I miss you.

(HE takes her hand.)

I did a bad thing. I hope you'll forgive me. I stole into your room last night while you and Concert Mistress were downstairs having dinner. At about eight o'clock yesterday evening I went

COMPOSER (cont.)

into your room and found your notebooks. I chanced upon your journal.

(SHE reacts unhappily to this.)

COMPOSER (cont.)

I read it from beginning to end. Curious. Yesterday's entry. Distilled down to the nearly indecipherable. But I worked to discover its meaning. Working against the clock, my Sally, knowing I'm in danger of losing you. You must work with me. To save yourself. Eight words -- this was the entirety of yesterday's entry. Eight words: "Deliver through the music or deliver me dead." What did they mean? Over and over in my head, the words -- trying through the night to understand. Was still struggling this morning over my Prune Danish. And then it came: the epiphany. That music -- that art could liberate. But it could also imprison. But listen to me: it doesn't have to. When parcelled properly. Art: the spice of life. The seasoning, the salt and pepper of our existence. I take mine extra-salty. But man does not live by salt alone. We've retreated into the kitchen, my dear Sally, and we crowd around a fucking salt lick and expect it to sustain us. And my tongue has fallen off. And I want back in the world again. I want to fight the arrogance of those without taste buds -- fight it with my music -- but music tempered, music to flavor life, not to convey us from it --

(JANICE now steps from the shadows and addresses the Composer.)

JANICE

Music. Art. Marginalized. Compromised. Music to ride elevators by. Bubble gum for the ears. Art to match the wallpaper.

(JANICE's rant seems to have put SALLY to sleep. HER chin drops to her chest.)

Death to the discriminating palate, to sensitivity and culture.

(contemptuously)

You and your bite sized nuggets -- your aesthetic kernels. You cannot have it halfway. To have it thus is to have lost your artistic voice -- to relinquish all control.

COMPOSER

(indicating Sally)

Is this what you call "maintaining control"? Look at her.

JANICE

Sally's is a special case, I admit it. Her trauma was great. She spun too fast. She hasn't stopped spinning.

COMPOSER

You made her remember things that were best left forgotten.

JANICE

Her life is shit. She should know this. And either get herself a shovel, or find her peace in --

COMPOSER (interrupting)

Safe and protected among your brood. "Suffer the mute children to come unto you." Why did it take me so long to figure out your game? Excuse me. I have one last piece to finish. Then I'm gone.

JANICE

I'm happy to know that you're writing again. You can't possibly be serious about leaving --

COMPOSER

I can't stay here, Janice. I don't want Sally here either.

JANICE

She can't leave now. She's found her peace. See?

(JANICE lifts SALLY'S head up by the hair. SALLY is catatonic.)

COMPOSER

I'm going. I'm taking her with me.

JANICE

In her present state? Don't make me laugh. She won't last a day out there.

COMPOSER

Like that? No. But I don't happen to believe this is her fate. Just as it was never my fate. For the same reason that your Octet now sits downstairs -- having found their voices -- arguing politics, exchanging gossip, reading aloud, singing. Yes: singing.

(JANICE looks skeptical.)

COMPOSER (cont.)

You don't believe me?

(COMPOSER mimes opening a door. We hear the SOUND of the door creaking open, then a small chorale singing:

"How Dry I Am." JANICE recoils in horror.)

JANICE (sputtering)  
She -- is -- responsible -- for this. For all of this. She came here and changed everything. I should lobotomize her.

COMPOSER (to Sally)  
Come on. You're moving into my room. I'm not letting you out of my sight.

JANICE (to Composer)  
I should have attached the electrodes when I had the chance. Or increased her medication ten-fold. But that was never my style.

(COMPOSER helps Sally to her feet.)

JANICE (cont., to Sally)  
I pampered and coddled you, when I should have exercised a little tough love. I should have beat the ever-fucking shit out of you, that's what I should have done.

(SALLY pushes the accordion into Janice's arms. COMPOSER and SALLY go off as CELLIST enters, sits down and prepares to play.)

JANICE  
You wouldn't desert me, would you? Not you.

(CELLIST shakes his head and begins to play the Adagio from early in the play. JANICE allows the music to speak to her, to stroke her. SHE sinks to the floor, sitting child-like, enrapt, before him. Suddenly, HE stops playing.)

CELLIST (to Janice)  
So hey, I'm wondering if maybe you could get someone up to my room to check out the banging in my radiator. Kept me up most of the night last night.

(Hearing CELLIST'S voice for the first time JANICE reacts with horror. LIGHTS fade here and come up on COMPOSER and SALLY elsewhere on stage. COMPOSER is writing, Sally sitting next to him, not doing much of anything.)

## COMPOSER

I've moved into the recapitulation too early. I also think I'm pushing the upper range of the flute and clarinet a bit. Still, though, this section seems to be working, don't you think?

(HE shows the music to Sally who nods, not really seeming to comprehend.)

I've convinced them all to stay on for at least two more days -- the other musicians. To give me time to finish. So that we may have our farewell concert. One piece really. Your piece, Sally. If this doesn't work, well -- we just won't think about that.

(motherly)

You're drooling a little there.

(HE takes out a handkerchief and dabs at her mouth.)

When was the last time you bathed? You really are letting yourself go, honey. Comb your hair. Do something. I hate seeing you like this. A specter. You scare the be-jesus out of me.

(One by one the MUSICIANS enter and set up for the final piece of the evening. The MEN wear performance tuxedos, the WOMEN, black formals. LIGHTS fade out on SALLY and the COMPOSER and come up on JANICE sitting alone in half darkness, smoking.)

## JANICE

You can put this in your book, Doctor Moseley: that the Institute, my institute was, in the end, a noble experiment that failed. For utopias, sir, are fragile, ephemeral things. Are you getting this down? They do not last, Doctor M, for they are rarely equipped to defend their soft, spongin ramparts against incursions from the Sally Cubbages of the world. Did you send her here deliberately? Huh? To destroy? To rip out all that was beautiful and harmonious herein? Or did she come without such purpose or design at all, but merely stumbled through our front door -- a hapless imbecile -- tripping, falling, pulling the lot of us down with her? I think not. I think, in fact, that I should have cut out her tongue upon admittance. And would that have been enough? What other means might she have found to undermine and subvert our raison? As emissary. Emissary for whom?

JANICE  
(cont., a revelation)

For them!

(with contempt)

Those out there. Those who shun the music. Who twist it and disfigure it. Who transform it into mere ambient noise. Joining words to it. Replacing it with some ragged, obscene pulse. A pulse to match the beat of their ridiculously petty lives. And to this my ensemble now happily returns. Fools joining fools. And I -- the biggest fool of them all for thinking my walls could hold them. Delicious comic relief for your dry, clinical text, Dr. M. And do not as you close our chapter resist that one final irony: that dear Sally Cabbage -- catalyst in this sad tragedy, now becomes a victim of her own intended or accidental orchestrations. And upstairs he sits -- her protector, her deliverer -- the keeper of the beast -- toiling to free her soul.

(after a beat)

Her soul is already free, you idiot! Don't you see? Free and pure. She is the soul survivor.

(laughs, to herself, takes out her cigarettes and lighter and through the following, tries unsuccessfully to engage her lighter)

Isn't that rich? Oh you work your magic.

(regarding the recalcitrant lighter)

Shit.

(continuing)

Work it, baby! Work it! Work it!

(the lighter still uncooperative)

Fuck.

(tosses the lighter to the floor, looking about)

Anybody got a match?

(LIGHTS fade out on Janice and come up on the full OCTET, seated to

play in ensemble. A podium has been brought on, as well. Upon the scrim is now projected "CONCERTO FOR OCTET AND SCREAMING WOMAN." COMPOSER and SALLY CUBBAGE now enter. COMPOSER wears a tuxedo. SALLY looks simply awful -- a parody of a madwoman. HER HAIR has been teased to the point of exaggeration, her makeup has been applied clown-like; the pastel evening gown she wears is soiled and hangs from her in shredded tassels. HER FACE appears hauntingly deranged. As the projection fades out SALLY takes her place downstage facing the audience. COMPOSER mounts the podium. HE raises the baton and is about to signal the beginning of the piece when he notices out of the corner of his eye something about Sally which he isn't pleased with. HE jumps down, crosses to her, and in the end does nothing more than tug at the bottom of her hem to hide a visible inch or two of her slip. HE returns to the podium, gives his downbeat and the piece begins. It's a grand, full-scale assault on the ears, filled with dissonant fury, marked by passages of gut-wrenching pathos and anguish, which progresses in a slow, inexorable climb toward that one climactic moment in which there is nothing left to do but invite Sally's participation. And participate she does. SALLY screams: a window-rattling, blood curdling shriek transformed into a animal-like howl, transformed again into a mournful, cathartic wail. Protracted, it comes parcelled in waves, sometimes broken by the music, other times accompanied, accented by the music, swallowed whole, then regurgitated up and finally standing alone and unadorned: pure vocalized pain. When she is finished, SALLY collapses into a heap on the floor.

COMPOSER goes to her, cradling her in his arms. The OCTET continues to play -- its mood now one of after-storm tranquility -- gently lapping waters. One by one each of the MUSICIANS will put down his or her instrument and begin to speak to one another -- casual conversation -- adlibbed, yet where one is able to catch the gist now and then, about nothing important at all: everyday conversations about everyday things -- the commonplace and prosaic. When all have stopped playing the conversations will continue; when all have risen from their seats, the conversations will continue still; when all have exited, leaving their instruments behind, the conversations will continue on for a moment longer, then die softly out until silence fills the vacuum. SALLY looks at Composer and smiles.)

I'm hoarse.	SALLY
Rest your voice.	COMPOSER
I'm cured.	SALLY
You aren't cured. You're better.	COMPOSER
I'm talking.	SALLY
Yes.	COMPOSER
Thank you.	SALLY
You're welcome.	COMPOSER
Where's Janice?	SALLY

COMPOSER

She hung herself in her office.

SALLY

You're kidding.

COMPOSER

She got a job with Century Twenty One. She's being fitted for her new blazer.

(HE helps her to her feet.)

You need a bath.

SALLY

I know.

COMPOSER

Then we'll take a walk in the snow.

SALLY

It snowed last night?

COMPOSER

Two feet. I have snow shoes.

SALLY

What time is it?

COMPOSER

(looking at his watch)

Eight o'clock.

SALLY

A.M. or P.M.?

COMPOSER

P.M., I think. Or A.M. I don't know.

SALLY

I love you.

(COMPOSER and SALLY are at the podium now. HE picks up the conductor's score and looks it over.)

COMPOSER

I know. Hush now. Rest your voice. Take your bath.

SALLY

We'll leave soon?

COMPOSER

As soon as you're ready.

(COMPOSER has become engrossed in the sheet music. HE produces a pencil and begins to make a few marks.)

SALLY

I'll take my bath.

COMPOSER

See you soon.

(HE erases furiously. To himself.)

Crescendo here. More punch. Not enough punch.

(SALLY stands staring at him. HE looks up.)

I'll be right here.

(SALLY nods, starts out. COMPOSER sits down on the floor, now totally absorbed in his work. SALLY stops, glances at him over her shoulder, smiles warmly, and exits. LIGHTS dim on COMPOSER as we hear the first few measures of the ADAGIO FOR CELLO played in the distance.)

COMPOSER

(sucked up, yet again, into the vortex of the creative process)

Ah yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

(LIGHTS fade out.)

END OF PLAY