

1 - JOE + STEVE

fade on the Interview Area and come up full on the cottage.)

STEVE. (Running out of the cottage.) Mom? Where the hell . . .

JOE. (Turning toward the cottage.) Stephen! Hey, dad!

STEVE. Holy shit! Holy . . . ! (He does a little dance, runs to his Father and embraces him.) Where the hell . . .

JOE. There you are . . . I been waiting all day. STEVE. . . . have you been? We been traipsing around the whole goddamn place. . . .

JOE. (Laughing.) I been here. Waiting. Where's your mother?

STEVE. One cottage after another. Is this it. Is this it. MAGGIE. (Still Off.) Joe? Stephen, is that your father?

STEVE. Far out! I brought my guitar. Wait till you hear . . . (Calling Off.) Mom! Over here, for Christ's sake. (To Joe.) So many goddamn trees . . .

JOE. What do you think? Huh? STEVE. So many . . . JOE. There's a bunk in there. MAGGIE. (Off.) Joe?

JOE. Hey, Maggie. Get the lead out! STEVE. Yeah. I saw. Bunk beds and a fireplace . . . we got any wood?

JOE. You can take the top one night and the bottom the next. STEVE. Uh-uh. I'll take the bottom. I fall off, I'll break my fucking head. JOE. I'll break your fucking head, if you don't watch your fucking mouth.

STEVE. Holy, holy shit! (STEVE hugs his Father again. JOE holds him at arms length for a second, to catch his breath.) You okay?

JOE. (Quickly recovers and returns to his previous level of energy.) Yeah, yeah. I'm great.

STEVE. You look terrific. I was worried. I missed you. Hey! How long can we stay? Huh?

JOE. (Holding him tightly.) I don't know. A couple of weeks . . . I don't know how long it . . .

STEVE. Great. (He drags JOE into the cottage.) Come on. I'll show you the guitar. It was pretty cheap. I ripped off the case, so that didn't cost anything. It's got a little compartment on the inside for picks and capos and dope and shit like that . . .

(They go into the cottage. MAGGIE struggles onto the stage, a mass of bundles, shopping bags and suitcases. She's dressed up—high heels, bright yellow print dress—but she looks a mess. She's been walking too long, carrying too big a load. Finally, she stops near the cottage.)

MAGGIE. End of the line. Everybody off. (And she lets all the shopping bags, packages, and suitcases crash to the ground around her. She straightens her back with a groan and looks around her.) Steve? Joe? The jackass is here! Come and get your luggage? (No answer. She walks up to the porch of the cabin, and tentatively takes one step up. But the cottage seems to frighten her. She stops, looks at it and then backs away from it.) You leave me alone out here for one more minute and I'm taking the next plane back to Newark. (She gives out a long, loud whistle through her teeth.) Stephen, are you in there or not?

JOE  
STEVE

# 1 - Maggie and Joe

## 16 THE SHADOW BOX ACT I

bushel. So I made some sauce. (*Another jar emerges.*) We can . . . do you have a stove in there?

JOE. Sure. Come on inside. I'll show you. It's real nice. (*He starts to head her toward the cottage, but she pulls away.*)

MAGGIE. No, I don't want to go inside.

JOE. Huh? Why not?

MAGGIE. I don't . . . I'll see it. I'll see it.

JOE. But . . .

MAGGIE. How do I look? It's a new dress.

JOE. You look real pretty.

MAGGIE. I got dressed for the plane. I don't know. I should have worn pants. You get so tired, sitting, all pushed together like that. My ears hurt so bad. Steve loved it. I couldn't make him sit still. He was all over the place, taking pictures. The stewardess was crazy about him. She was *pretty*, too. They look real nice. They wear . . . they smile. I asked her what to do about my ears and she just smiled. I don't think she heard me. So I smiled, too, but it didn't do any good . . .

JOE. (*Hugs her.*) You must be tired, huh?

MAGGIE. Yeah. I don't know.

JOE. Come on in. You can rest.

MAGGIE. (*Ignores his offer.*) One minute you're there. The next minute you're here. I still feel like I'm there. (*She pulls away from him and starts rummaging through the bags.*) What else? Three thousand miles, it must be. They . . . Oh, yeah. I made a ham . . . (*She pulls the monster out of a bag.*)

JOE. What?

MAGGIE. A ham. We can have it for lunch.

JOE. Christ!

MAGGIE. What's the matter? It's no good?

## ACT I THE SHADOW BOX 17

JOE. You mean you carried a ham three thousand miles across the country?

MAGGIE. No. I put it under the seat.

JOE. Well, what the hell are we going to do with it?

MAGGIE. I don't know . . . I thought it'd last, so . . .

JOE. We got everything we need. I told you.

MAGGIE. I don't remember. You can't eat this, huh?

JOE. No, I can eat it. I can eat it. That's not what I'm talking about.

MAGGIE. Then what *are* you talking about?

JOE. I'm talking about they got ham in California. They got stores like everywhere in the world and you go in and you buy whatever you want . . .

MAGGIE. (*Making a vain effort to hide the ham.*) I'll take it back with me . . .

JOE. It's all right! It's here now.

MAGGIE. It'll keep. I'll put it away. You don't have to look at it.

JOE. No. It's fine. It's all right. What the hell are we talking about?

MAGGIE. (*All upset, still holding on to the ham.*) You didn't say in the letter. And we talked and I couldn't remember. I tried. What the hell. They said to come and bring Steve. That's all. At first I thought that was it. Then I got your letter and you sound fine and I talk to you . . . so, I made the ham, I . . . (*She cries. JOE goes to her. Holds her and the ham in his arms.*)

JOE. I missed you, Maggie. I missed you real bad. (*Hugs her.*)

MAGGIE. You got to tell me what's going on. Don't make me feel so stupid. Like I'm supposed to know

MAGGIE  
JOE

MARK. Well. (*Pause.*)

BEVERLY. Well, now that we know who we are . . . how about a drink.

MARK. A what?

BEVERLY. A drink. A drink.

MARK. Oh, no.

BEVERLY. No?

MARK. No. We don't keep any liquor here. I could get you some coffee or some penicillin, if you'd like.

BEVERLY. No. No. I was inviting *you*. (*Out of her tote bag she pulls a half finished bottle of Scotch.*) I had an accident with the Scotch on the way out here. There's quite a dent in it. (*She laughs—MARK doesn't.*) Anyway, we both look like we could use a little. Hm? MARK. No. I don't drink.

BEVERLY. (*Rummaging in her bag.*) Ah, a dope man. MARK. Neither. I like to avoid as much poison as possible.

BEVERLY. I see.

MARK. Anyway, it's really not the time or place, is it?

BEVERLY. Oh, I don't know.

MARK. Well, you go ahead. If you feel you have to. BEVERLY. No. No, really. I don't need it. I mean, I'm not . . . forget it. (*She looks remorsefully at the bottle, takes off the cap, takes a swig, replaces the cap and puts the bottle back in the tote bag.* MARK stares at her, obviously displeased by the action. *There is a pause.* BEVERLY smiles. MARK does not.) So. How is he?

MARK. Dying. How are you?

BEVERLY. (*Taken aback.*) Oooops. Let's start again. Is he feeling any pain?

MARK. Are you?

BEVERLY. Strike two. Well, I think we've got it all

straight now. He's dying. I'm drunk. And you're pissed off. Did I leave anything out?

MARK. No, I think that just about covers it.

BEVERLY. Tell me. How is he?

MARK. Hard to say. One day he's flat on his ass, the next day he's running around like a two year old. But he is terminal—officially. They moved him down to these cottages because there's nothing they can do for him in the hospital. But he can't go home, either. There's some pain. But it's tolerable. At least he makes it seem tolerable. They keep shooting him full of cortisone.

BEVERLY. Ouch!

MARK. Yes. Ouch. You should be prepared, I guess.

BEVERLY. Prepared for what?

MARK. The cortisone.

BEVERLY. Why? They don't give it to the visitors, do they?

MARK. No. I mean it has side effects. It . . . well, you may not notice it, but the skin goes sort of white and puffy. It changed the shape of his face for a while, and he started to get really fat.

BEVERLY. His whole body?

MARK. Yes. His whole body.

BEVERLY. Charming.

MARK. Well, don't get too upset. A lot of it's been corrected, but he's still very pale. And he has fainting spells. They're harmless. Well, that's what they tell me. But it's embarrassing for him because he falls down a lot and his face gets a little purple for a minute. BEVERLY. All the details. You're very graphic.

MARK. It happens a lot. The details aren't easy to forget.

BEVERLY. I guess not.

1

Steve, Joe + Maggie

Steve)  
Joe +  
Maggie

26

THE SHADOW BOX

ACT I

MARK. I just want you to know. If you're staying around. I mean, I think it would hurt him if people noticed.

BEVERLY. Well, if he turns purple and falls on the floor, it'd be sort of difficult not to notice, wouldn't it?

MARK. (*Taken aback.*) What?

BEVERLY. I mean, what do people *usually* do when it happens?

MARK. I don't know. I mean, there hasn't been any-one here except me and . . .

BEVERLY. And you have everything pretty much under control.

MARK. I do my best.

BEVERLY. I'm sure you do.

MARK. Look. I don't mean to be rude or stupid about this . . .

BEVERLY. Why not? I like people to be rude and stupid. It's one of the ways you can be sure they're still alive. Oh dear, I did it again, didn't I?

MARK. Yes. You have to understand—I mean, you will be careful, won't you?

BEVERLY. About what?

MARK. That's exactly what I mean. You're . . . I'm sorry, but you're very stoned, aren't you? And you're dressed in funny clothes, and you're saying a lot of funny things but I'm just not sure, frankly, what the fuck you're doing here.

BEVERLY. (*Still flip.*) Neither am I. You sure you wouldn't like a drink?

MARK. Positive. Look, please, don't you think it'd be better if you came back some other time, like tomorrow or next year or something?

BEVERLY. I'd just have to get drunk all over again. MARK. I mean, it's sort of a delicate situation, right

ACT I THE SHADOW BOX 27

now. He's had a very bad time of it and any kind of, well, disturbance . . .

BEVERLY. Such as me? Oh, you'll get used to it. You just have to think of me as your average tramp.

MARK. . . . any disturbance might be dangerous, especially psychologically and . . . *Shit!* I sound like an idiot, the way I'm talking. But you don't seem to be understanding a goddamn word I'm saying!

BEVERLY. *No.* I am. I am. You know, you don't look like a faggot.

MARK. Oh, for Christ's sake!

BEVERLY. No, I mean it . . . I mean, I didn't expect . . .

MARK. Well, you'll get used to it. You just have to think of me as your average cocksucker. All right?

BEVERLY. Good. Now we're getting someplace. Are you sure you wouldn't like a drink?

MARK. *No!* I would not like a drink. You have a drink. Have two. Take off your clothes. Make yourself at home. (*He grabs his jacket and heads for the door.*) When you're ready to throw up, the bathroom is in there. (*He exits.*)

BEVERLY. (*Left with the bottle.*) Hey!

(*The lights come up on the porch area where STEVE is just coming out of the cottage to join MAGGIE and JOE.*)

STEVE. Hey! Is this place bugged or what? JOE. Bugged?

MAGGIE. (*Reaching into a shopping bag.*) I brought some Lysol. Here.

STEVE. No. Bugged. *Wired.* What do they do? Listen in with hidden cameras?

JOE. (*Laughing.*) Yeah. Every move. Every word.

MAGGIE. Joe, cut it out.

STEVE. (*Continuing.*) But they got wires near the bed.

JOE. That's for me. Don't worry about it.

MAGGIE. (*Changing the subject.*) Here. (*To STEVE.*) You take this stuff inside. And keep the noise down.

JOE. (*To MAGGIE.*) Come on in, Maggie. I'll show you around.

MAGGIE. No. I want to stay outside. For a while, it's nice.

STEVE. (*Runs back into the cottage.*) I'll get my guitar . . .

JOE. You like it, don't you?

MAGGIE. Sure. It's nice. (*Calling.*) Stephen, you help me with this . . .

JOE. (*Overlapping.*) I knew you would. I'll take you for a walk later. They got a swimming pool. And a tennis court. There's a little river, just a little one, runs back through the trees. Over there. I'll show you later. We got time. There's no hurry.

MAGGIE. Stephen!

JOE. Ah, leave him be. I'll get this. (*He starts to pick up the bags.*)

MAGGIE. No, you rest. Stephen!

JOE. I can get it. The more exercise I get, the better I feel.

MAGGIE. (*Stopping him.*) There's no sense pushing it, huh? Steve can do it. (*STEVE comes out of the cottage with his guitar. He sits down and starts to play it.*) Stephen! Put that thing down and give your father a hand.

JOE. (*To STEVE.*) Wait till you see, dad. From the north side, near the gate when you come in, you can

see the whole valley. All squared off and patched up with farms like a quilt. Hundreds of them. I'll show you.

STEVE. Farms? They got farms?

JOE. Yeah. Hundreds of them. Christ it was great to get out of that city.

MAGGIE. Stephen, take this bag inside. Put this one in the kitchen. (*To JOE.*) You got a kitchen?

JOE. Sure. A kitchen, a bathroom, two bedrooms, a living room . . .

STEVE. (*Overlapping.*) We never did get our farm. We should do that. We should get that farm. (*He takes bag inside.*)

JOE. Well, maybe we should have.

MAGGIE. (*To STEVE.*) There's more here, when you're finished, so hurry up.

JOE. A little place like this.

MAGGIE. Don't start on the farm, for God's sake. It always ends up bad when you start on the farm.

STEVE. (*Returning.*) We could sit out every night, singing and howling at the moon. (*He howls like a wolf.*)

MAGGIE. (*Getting more and more agitated.*) Stephen, be quiet. Where do you think you are? This goes in the bedroom.

STEVE. Aren't you ever coming in?

MAGGIE. (*A little too firmly.*) I'll go in when I'm good and ready. (*STEVE exits with suitcase.*)

JOE. (*Noticing MAGGIE's nervousness, trying to keep things happy.*) It might have worked, Maggie. See me all dressed up in coveralls, early morning, up with the sun. What do you think?

MAGGIE. (*More irritated.*) It's a lot of work. I don't want to hear about it.

# I - Maggie and Joe

to the windows and the doors. It's hard to remember sometimes what you're listening for. A whistle, maybe . . . or a shout . . . somebody calling your name. Or maybe just a few words. A few kind words. A ticket to Louisiana . . . a letter . . . something . . .

(In the porch area.)

JOE. It would have been nice.  
MAGGIE. What?  
JOE. A farm.  
MAGGIE. We couldn't afford it.  
JOE. Some place all our own.  
AGNES. Something.  
MAGGIE. Just to watch the sunset?  
JOE. Every day a different job. Every day a different reason. Something grows. Something . . . all in a day.  
AGNES. Something . . .  
MAGGIE. It would have been nice.  
JOE. Something to have.  
AGNES. Something . . .

JOE. Jesus Christ, we built the house, and before we finish, fifteen years, and it's gone.  
MAGGIE. We didn't need it. It was more work to keep up than it was worth.  
JOE. Maybe . . . maybe it was. But it was *something*, wasn't it? Something to have. You put in one more fucking tree, you fix up another room, I kept seeing grandchildren. What the hell else was it for? Not right away, but someday, you figure, kids running around, falling down under it, when it's grown big enough to climb and you can chase them down, spend some time running around the goddamn house . . .

MAGGIE. (Still detached.) The apartment is nice. It was closer to work.  
JOE. (Starting to get really angry.) Work? Shit. Fifty weeks a year in a flat-wire shop. Twenty-four years.

MAGGIE. We had the saloon in between. And the oil truck . . .  
JOE. A bartender and a truck driver in between.  
MAGGIE. We owned the bar. That was ours.  
JOE. Gone.  
MAGGIE. And the truck, we owned . . .  
JOE. All gone. Christ, even the factory is gone.  
MAGGIE. They couldn't get along without you.  
JOE. Twenty-four years. Two weeks a year at the beach. One week off for Christmas . . . (Pause.) Talk to me, Maggie. Talk to me.  
MAGGIE. What? What can I say?

JOE. I don't know. Somebody walks up one day, one day, somebody walks up and tells you it's finished. And me . . . all I can say is 'what?' . . . what's finished? What did I have that's finished? What?  
MAGGIE. We give up too easy. We don't fight hard enough. We give up . . . too easy . . .  
JOE. We got to tell him, Maggie. We got to face it and tell him. Some son of a bitch walks up one day and tells you it's finished. What? What did we have that's finished?

MAGGIE. (Breaking down.) Us. Us. For Christ's sake, don't make me say things I don't understand. I don't want to hear them. I shake all over when I think about them. How long? Two weeks? Three? A month? And then what? What have I got *then*? An apartment full of some furniture I can't even keep clean for company, a closet full of some old pictures, some curtains I

MAGGIE  
JOE

made out of my wedding dress that don't even fit the windows . . . What? What do I do? Sit down with the TV set every night, spill my coffee when I fall asleep on the sofa and burn holes in the carpet, dropping cigarettes?

JOE. Maggie . . .

MAGGIE. No. I want you to come home. What is this place, anyway? They make everything so nice. Why? So you forget? I can't. I can't. I want you to come home. I want you to stay out four nights a week bowling, and then come home so I can yell and not talk to you, you son of a bitch. I want to fight so you'll take me to a movie and by the time I get you to take me I'm so upset I can't enjoy the picture. I want to get up too early, too goddamn early, and I'll let you know about it, too, because I have to make you breakfast, because you never, never once eat it, because you make me get up too early just to keep you company and talk to you, and it's cold, and my back aches, and I got nothing to say to you and we never talk and it's six-thirty in the morning, every morning, even Sunday morning and it's all right . . . it's all right . . . it's all right because I want to be there because you need me to be there because I want you to be there because I want you to come home.

JOE. Maggie . . .

MAGGIE. Come home, that's all. Come home.

JOE. I can't, Maggie. You know I can't.

MAGGIE. No, I don't know. I don't.

JOE. I can't.

MAGGIE. You can. Don't believe what they tell you. What do they know? We've been through worse than this. You look fine. I can see it.

JOE. No, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You get stronger every day.

JOE. It gets worse.

MAGGIE. No. I can see it.

JOE. Every day, it gets worse.

MAGGIE. We'll go home, tomorrow. I got another ticket. We can get a plane tomorrow.

JOE. Don't do this, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I put a new chair in the apartment. You'll like. It's red. You always said we should have a big red chair. I got it for you. It's a surprise.

JOE. No! It won't work.

MAGGIE. We'll get dressed up. I'll get my hair done. We'll go out someplace. What do we need? A little time, that's all.

JOE. It's not going to change anything.

MAGGIE. No. It's too fast. Too fast. What'll I do? I can't remember tomorrow. It's no good. We'll look around. Maybe we can find a little place. Something we like.

JOE. No. This is all. This is all we got.

MAGGIE. No. Something farther out. Not big. Just a little place we like. All right, a farm, if you want. I don't care. Tomorrow.

JOE. (*Angry and frustrated.*) Tomorrow is nothing, Maggie! Nothing! It's not going to change. You don't snap your fingers and it disappears. You don't buy a ticket and it goes away. It's here. Now.

MAGGIE. No.

JOE. Look at me, Maggie.

MAGGIE. No.

JOE. Look at me. You want magic to happen? Is that what you want? Go ahead. Make it happen. I'm waiting. Make it happen!

MAGGIE. I can't.

2 - BRIAN AND INTERVIEWER

20 THE SHADOW BOX

ACT I

BRIAN. So do I . . . now. But then I didn't. I became totally irrational . . . idiotic, in the Greek sense of the word. I blamed her, I damned her, I hated her . . . I missed her. And I got so worked up I began to realize what she was talking about. You see, I'd lost the energy of it, the magic of it. No wonder she left. After all, the universe isn't a syllogism, it's a miracle. Isn't it? And if you can believe in one small part of it, then you can believe in all of it. And if you can believe in all of it . . . well, that is a reason for dancing, isn't it?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. What happened to her?

BRIAN. Beverly? Oh, she's still dancing as far as I know.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. I see.

BRIAN. Well, every life makes sense on its own terms, I suppose. She must be very happy. I'm sure of that. Otherwise she would have come back. There I go, rambling on again. I'm sorry.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. You seem to have everything so well thought out.

(In the living room area of the cottage, MARK enters.)

He is a young man, passionately intelligent, sexually attractive.)

BRIAN. (Still talking to the INTERVIEWER.) Well, I think it's important to be sensible. Even about the miraculous. Otherwise you lose track of what it's all about.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. How is Mark? (MARK enters.)

BRIAN. (Smiles.) Speaking of the miraculous . . . Well, he's fine.

ACT I THE SHADOW BOX

21

MARK. (In the living room, looking around.) Brian? BRIAN. (To INTERVIEWER.) What's the official line on him now?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. How do you mean?

BRIAN. Well, I know these are supposed to be strictly family situations. I'm curious. I mean, what are we calling him this week? Nephew? Cousin? Butler?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. No. I have him down as a friend.

BRIAN. I see.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. In the Greek sense of the word.

BRIAN. (Laughs.) Very good. Very good.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. He's welcome to come and talk to us if he likes. (In the living room area, MARK takes off his jacket, throws it on a chair, sits down and takes out a package . . .)

BRIAN. Well, we've talked a lot about it already. Generally, we have the same opinion on the subject. Wisdom doesn't always come with age. Occasionally the young can be as rational as you or I. (MARK carefully takes six or seven bottles of medication from the package. He makes notes of each label, copying down the information in a small pad.)

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes. I suppose they can.

BRIAN. (Checking his watch.) My watch is stopped. How long have I been babbling?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. It doesn't matter. There's no hurry.

BRIAN. Not for you, maybe. Some of us are on a tighter schedule.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. I am sorry. I didn't mean . . .

BRIAN. (Laughs.) It's all right. It's all right. You

BRIAN INTERVIEWER



# 2 Beverly and Mark

mustn't take all of this too seriously. I don't . . . Our dreams are beautiful, our fate is sad. But day by day, it's generally pretty funny. We can talk again tomorrow, if you want. I don't mind. It's a bit of a shock, that's all. You always think . . . no matter what they tell you . . . you always think you have more time. And you don't. But I appreciate what you're trying to do here, and I do enjoy being a guinea pig.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Good. Very good.

BRIAN. Tomorrow, then. If I'm still breathing. Or even if I'm not, I don't think it'll stop me from talking.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes. Tomorrow.

(BRIAN exits. The lights fade on the Interview Area and come up on the living room. MARK puts the medicine in a bookcase that is already loaded with bottles of pills and boxes of medical supplies. BEVERLY comes bursting into the living room, blowing a party horn.)

BEVERLY. Surprise! Oh, who are you? I'm sorry. I'm looking for Brian . . . uh . . . Two. They said cottage two. I must have . . .

MARK. No, you didn't . . .

BEVERLY. I didn't?

MARK. No. This is two. This is cottage two.

BEVERLY. Oh.

MARK. Yes.

BEVERLY. Thank God. (Pause.) Is . . . uh . . .

MARK. (A little uncomfortable.) No. Not at the moment. But he should be back any minute.

BEVERLY. Good. (Another pause. They look at each other.) I wanted to surprise him and he's not here. Well . . . surprise! (BEVERLY starts to walk around

Beverly  
Mark

the cottage. She is an extremely attractive woman. Middle-aged. She's dressed curiously in what was once a very expensive, chic evening dress. But it is now soiled and torn. She also has over and around the dress about twenty odd pieces of jewelry attached wherever there is room for them. In her hand a noise-maker that squeaks uncheerfully, and over everything, a yellow slicker raincoat and rubber boots. Looking around.) Him. Very nice. Very nice.

MARK. Glad you like it.

BEVERLY. All the comforts of home. Amazing what you can do with a coffin if you put your mind to it.

MARK. (Who would have found it difficult enough dealing with a postman, let alone this.) What!?

BEVERLY. Oh, sorry. Sorry. Introductions first. That way you'll know who you're throwing out. (She extends her hand in a handshake.) I'm Beverly. No doubt you've . . .

MARK. (He doesn't shake hands.) Yes.

BEVERLY. That's what I figured.

MARK. Brian's wife.

BEVERLY. Ex-wife.

MARK. Former.

BEVERLY. Yes. Former. Former wife. He prefers former, doesn't he?

MARK. (Shakes her hand.) Yes. I figured it was you.

BEVERLY. You did?

MARK. Yes . . . it wasn't hard.

BEVERLY. No, I guess not. (She smiles.) And you're . . . uh . . .

MARK. Yes.

BEVERLY. Yes. I figured.

MARK. Mark.

BEVERLY. Great. Well—

2 - Beverly + BRIAN

ACT I THE SHADOW BOX 37

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes. And if you have time, Agnes, we'd like to talk to you.

AGNES. Me? FELICITY. We'll see about tomorrow. You sons of bitches.

AGNES. (To INTERVIEWER.) All right. FELICITY. Push, Agnes. Push!

AGNES. Yes, mama. Off we go. (They go up to the kitchen area of the cottage.)

FELICITY. That's the spirit. Put some balls into it!

(Back in the cottage, BRIAN enters the living room area where BEVERLY is waiting.)

BEVERLY. Caro! Caro! You old fart! Vieni qua!

BRIAN. (Delighted.) Sweet Jesus! Beverly!

BEVERLY. My God, he even remembers my name! What a mind! (She hugs and kisses him.)

BRIAN. What a picture!

BEVERLY. (Taking off her coat to show her dress and jewels.) All my medals. All of them! I wore as many of them as I could fit.

BRIAN. Fantastic.

BEVERLY. Everything I could carry. I tried to get X-rays done but there wasn't time. Inside and out. I'll strip later and show you all of it.

BRIAN. (Laughing.) Good. Good. What a surprise! (Another embrace.) I'm so happy you've come. Where's Mark? Have you met him?

BEVERLY. Oh, yes. He's beautiful. A little cool, but I'm sure there's a heart in there somewhere.

BRIAN. Where is he?

BEVERLY. Well . . . he's gone.

BRIAN. What?

Beverly -  
BRIAN

36 THE SHADOW BOX ACT I

ing middle-aged woman—very neat, very tense, very tired. Hair drawn back tightly. She has tried all her life to do the right thing, and the attempt has left her very confused, awkward, and unsure of herself. When she hears her Mother call, she obediently goes to her.) Agnes!

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Mrs. Thomas . . . ?

FELICITY. (Her voice and manner growing harder again.) Claire has two children, now. Two beautiful, twin angels . . . (Calling.) Agnes! (To INTERVIEWER.) Agnes has me.

AGNES. (Approaching the Interview Area.) Yes, mama. I'm coming.

FELICITY. She's a little slow. It's not her fault. She takes after her father. Not too pretty, not too bright. Is she here yet?

AGNES. (Standing behind FELICITY's wheelchair.) Yes, mama. I'm here.

FELICITY. (To INTERVIEWER.) There. You see what I mean? You be careful of Agnes. She's jealous.

AGNES. (A little embarrassed.) Mama . . . please. FELICITY. Get me out of here.

AGNES. (To INTERVIEWER.) Is that all for today? VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes, thank you, Agnes, that's . . .

FELICITY. (Overlapping.) That's all. That's all! Now take me back.

AGNES. Yes, mama. (She turns the wheelchair and starts to push it toward the cottage.)

FELICITY. Easy! Easy! You'll upset my internal wire works.

AGNES. I'm sorry. (Turning back to the INTERVIEWER.) Same time tomorrow?

BEVERLY. It's my fault. I made a very sloppy entrance. I think he left in lieu of punching me in the mouth.

BRIAN. I don't believe it.

BEVERLY. It's true. But I do like him.

BRIAN. Good. So do I.

BEVERLY. (*Insinuating.*) So I gather.

BRIAN. (*Cheerfully.*) Uh-uh. Careful.

BEVERLY. Is he any good?

BRIAN. Beverly!

BEVERLY. Well, what's it like?

BRIAN. 'It'?

BEVERLY. Yes. Him, you, it . . . you know I'm a glutton for pornography. Tell me, quick.

BRIAN. (*Laughs.*) Oh, no.

BEVERLY. No?

BRIAN. No. And that's final. I refuse to discuss it.

BEVERLY. Brian, that's not fair. Here I am all damp in my panties and you're changing the subject. Now come on. Tell me all about it.

BRIAN. Absolutely not. I'm much too happy.

BEVERLY. Brian . . . I was married to you. I deserve an explanation. Isn't that what I'm supposed to say?

BRIAN. Yes, but you're too late. No excuses, no explanations. (*Singing.*) He is my sunshine, my only sunshine . . . He's the—pardon the expression—cream in my coffee—the milk in my tea—He will always be my necessity . . .

BEVERLY. Ah, but is he enough?

BRIAN. More than enough.

BEVERLY. Shucks.

BRIAN. (*Laughs.*) Sorry, but it's out of my hands. All of it. Some supreme logic has taken hold of my life. And in the absence of any refutable tomorrow, every

insane thing I do today seems to make a great deal of sense.

BEVERLY. What the hell does that mean?

BRIAN. It means there are more important things in this world.

BEVERLY. More important than what?

BRIAN. More important than worrying about who is fucking whom.

BEVERLY. You *are* happy, aren't you?

BRIAN. Ecstatic. I'm even writing again.

BEVERLY. Oh, my God. You couldn't be *that* happy!

BRIAN. Why not?

BEVERLY. Brian, you're a terrible writer, and you know it.

BRIAN. So?

BEVERLY. Outside of that wonderful book of crossword puzzles, your greatest contribution to the literary world was your retirement.

BRIAN. (*Finishes the sentence with her.*) . . . was my retirement. Yes. Well, the literary world, such as it is, will have to brave the storm. Because I'm back.

BEVERLY. But why?

BRIAN. Pure and unadulterated masochism. No. It's just that when they told me I was on the way out . . . so to speak . . . I realized that there was a lot to do that I hadn't done yet. So I figured I better get off my ass and start working.

BEVERLY. Doing what?

BRIAN. Everything! Everything! It's amazing what you can accomplish. Two rotten novels, twenty-seven boring stories, several volumes of tortured verse—including twelve Italian sonnets and one epic investigation of the Firth of Forth Bridge . . .

BEVERLY. The what?

I can't draw a straight line. But with my vision all cockeyed—I could do a bowl of fruit that sent people screaming from the room.

BEVERLY. I can believe it. So now you're painting.

BRIAN. No, no. They changed the medication. Now all the fruit just looks like fruit again. But I did learn to drive.

BEVERLY. A car?

BRIAN. Yes.

BEVERLY. Good grief.

BRIAN. Not very well, but with a certain style and sufficient accuracy to keep myself alive—although that is beside the point, isn't it? Let's see, what else? I've become a master at chess, bridge, poker, and mah-jongg, I finally bought a television set, I sold the house and everything that was in it, closed all bank accounts, got rid of all stocks, bonds, securities, everything.

BEVERLY. What did you do with the money?

BRIAN. I put it in a sock and buried it on Staten Island.

BEVERLY. You did, didn't you?

BRIAN. Almost. I gave back my American Express card, my BankAmericard—severed *all* my patriotic connections. I even closed my account at Bloomingdale's.

BEVERLY. This is serious.

BRIAN. You're damn right it is. I sleep only three hours a day, I never miss a dawn or a sunset, I say and do everything that comes into my head. I even sent letters to everyone I know and told them exactly what I think of them . . . just so none of the wrong people show up for the funeral. And finally . . . I went to Passaic, New Jersey.

BRIAN. The bridge. The railroad bridge in Scotland. The one Hitchcock used in 'The Thirty-Nine Steps.' You remember. We saw the picture on our honeymoon.

BEVERLY. Oh, yes.

BRIAN. And I swore that one day I would do a poem about it. Well, I've done it.

BEVERLY. Thank God.

BRIAN. Yes. Four hundred stanzas—trochaic hexameters with rhymed couplets. (*He demonstrates the rhythm.*) *Da-da-da, Da-da-da, Da-da-da, Da-da-da, Da-da-da, Da-da-da, Da-da-da, Da-da-da-Dee!* It's perfectly ghastly. But it's done. I've also completed nearly one hundred and thirty-six epitaphs, the largest contribution to the Forest Lawn catalogue since Edna St. Vincent Millay, and I've also done four autobiographies.

BEVERLY. Four?!

BRIAN. Yes. Each one under a different name. There's a huge market for dying people right now. My agent assured me.

BEVERLY. I don't believe it.

BRIAN. It's true. And then we thought we'd give them each one of those insipid dirty titles—like 'Sex . . . And the Dying Man'!

BEVERLY. Or 'The Sensuous Corpse.'

BRIAN. Very good.

BEVERLY. (*Affectionately.*) You idiot. What else?

BRIAN. Not too much. For a while they were giving me this drug and my vision was doubled. I couldn't really see to write. So I started to paint.

BEVERLY. Paint?

BRIAN. Pictures. I did fourteen of them. Really extraordinary stuff. I was amazed. I mean, you know

2 - Mark (Beverly)

aluminum, last forever—the white table with the umbrella, the hammock, the bar, I put that wood paneling in the basement, we finished the attic—well, half of it, I got the insulation in—the patio, with screens . . . Jesus, it was a lot to let go of.

MAGGIE. I don't want to talk about it.

JOE. Before you know it, everything you had is gone. Not that it was ever yours but you feel it anyway when it's gone.

MAGGIE. I'm telling you, I don't want to talk about it.

JOE. (He turns from her.) Alright! Alright! We won't talk about it.

MAGGIE. You get tired. You get old. My hands got too big. I got too fat. I don't know how it happens, I can't remember.

(In the living room.)

MARK. . . . when I met Brian, I was hustling outside a bar in San Francisco. Right after the great 'summer of love.' You remember the summer of love . . . one of those many American revolutions that get about as far as Time Magazine and then fart to a quick finish. Well, just after the summer of love, winter came. Which was the last thing anybody expected. And suddenly it got very cold. People were starving to death in the streets.

BEVERLY. Sounds lovely.

MARK. Very colorful—you would have liked it. Anyway, like everybody else, I was very hungry, very desperate . . . the whole scene. So there I was one night, like many other nights, selling it down on Market Street, I wasn't very good at it, but it was

paying the rent, and Brian walks up to me . . . I didn't know him of course . . . he walks up and asks me the time. Right? Well, I did my little number about time for what and how much was it worth to him . . . I figured anybody who'd come on to me with an old line like that was good for a fast twenty. And all of a sudden, he starts explaining exactly what time was worth to him . . . Philosophy! On Market Street. And before I know it, he's into concepts of history, cyclical and lineal configurations, Hebraic and Greco-Roman attitudes, repetitive notions . . . time warps, even! Jesus, I thought, I've got a real freak on my hands!

BEVERLY. You did.

MARK. And he's talking and talking and talking and I'm thinking I've got to score soon because it's getting late and I need the bread and I'm hungry . . . but I can't get rid of him. I walk away, and he walks away with me. I go inside the bar and he goes inside the bar. A real 'fuck bar.' I figured this has got to shake him. Right? Nothing. He didn't even notice. People are humping on the tables practically and he's quoting Aristotle to me and Whitehead and elaborating on St. Thomas Aquinas' definition of sin . . . completely oblivious to everything around him! I thought I was losing my mind. Finally, I said, 'Look, man, I haven't eaten in a long time, and I'm getting a headache. Why don't we talk some business before I starve to death?'

BEVERLY. What did he do?

MARK. He bought me dinner! I couldn't believe it. I mean, what the hell did he want from me? And he never stopped talking. Never.

BEVERLY. Perfect. And then he left.  
MARK. Right.

MARK

BEVERLY. He didn't want *anything* from you.

MARK. But before he went, I lifted his wallet.

BEVERLY. I always warned him not to talk to strangers.

MARK. It doesn't matter, because the next day I returned it. I don't know why. I just did. And that's how I got to know him. I got interested in what he was doing . . . which as it turns out was nothing. But he was doing it so well. He gave me a room. I could use it whenever I wanted. I started reading again . . . I thought to myself, my god, I could really *do* something. Salvation! We talked and talked endlessly . . . word equals idea equals action equals change equals time equals freedom equals . . . well, who knows? But the point is . . . I don't know what the point is. What am I talking about?

BEVERLY. Dead people.

MARK. Exactly! I mean, exactly!

BEVERLY. Exactly what?

MARK. I mean *it's not enough!* Ten thousand pages of paraphrased garbage . . . it's just words. We are dying here, lady. That's what it's about. Brian looks at me and I can see it in his eyes. One stone slab smack in the face, the rug is coming out from under, the light is going *out*. You can do the pills and the syringes and the "let's play games" with the cotton swabs and x-rays, but it's not going to change it. You can wipe up the mucous and the blood and the piss and the excrement, you can burn the sheets and boil his clothes, but it's still there. You can smell it on him. You can smell it on me. It soaks into your hands when you touch him. It gets into your blood. It's stuck inside him, filling up inside his head, inside his skin, inside his mouth. You can taste it on him, you can

swallow it and feel it inside your belly like a sewer. You wake up at night and you shake and you spit. You try to vomit it out of you. But you can't. It doesn't go away. It stays inside you. Inside every word, every touch, every move, every day, every night, it lies down with you and gets in between you. It's sick and putrid and soft and rotten and it is killing me.

BEVERLY. It's killing him, too.

MARK. That's right, lady. And some of us have to watch it. Some of us have to live with it and clean up after it. I mean, you can waltz in and out of here like a fucking Christmas tree if you want to, but some of us are staying. Some of us are here for the duration. And it is not easy.

BEVERLY. And some of us wouldn't mind changing places with you at all.

MARK. And some of us just don't care anymore.

BEVERLY. What?

MARK. Some of us just don't care.

BEVERLY. You're cute, Mark. But next to me, you are the most selfish son of a bitch I've ever met.

MARK. Oh, wonderful! That's what I needed. Yes, sir. That's just what I needed.

BEVERLY. You're welcome.

MARK. Look, don't you think it's time you picked up all your little screwing trophies and went home?

BEVERLY. Past time . . . way past time. The sign goes up and I can see 'useless' printed all over it. Let me tell you something, as one whore to another—what you do with your ass is your business. You can drag it through every gutter from here to Morocco. You can trade it, sell it, or give it away. You can run it up a flagpole, paint it blue or cut it off if you feel like it.

3 - Felicity and Interviewer

MAGGIE. Because . . . it isn't true. It isn't true. It isn't . . .

(She runs off away from the cottage. Joe is stunned. He sits down on the porch steps and puts his head in his hands. The lights come up on the Interview Area. AGNES is pushing FELICITY to the area. FELICITY is wide awake now. She is about sixty or seventy years old. She is singing vaguely to herself. The INTERVIEWER is trying to get her attention with little success.)

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. . . . but you don't have to talk to us if you don't want to . . . Felicity? (She continues to sing to herself.) If you'd rather not talk now, we can wait until tomorrow. (She pays no attention to him.) Shall we do that? Shall we wait until tomorrow? (No response.) Felicity? (No response.) Well, why don't we do that, then? Why don't we wait, and later if you feel . . .

FELICITY. Piss poor.  
VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. What?  
FELICITY. Piss poor. Your attitude. It's a piss poor way to treat people.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. But, Felicity . . . (AGNES returns to the kitchen area of the cottage.)  
FELICITY. But, but, but!

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Please . . .  
FELICITY. Please what?! Alright. Alright. You want to talk? Let's talk. "I feel fine." Is that what you want to hear? Of course it is. I feel fine, there's no pain, I'm as blind as I was yesterday, my bowels are working—and that's all I got to say about it.  
VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. We're only trying to help.

FELICITY. Well I appreciate your concern but I don't need any more help from you. Do I?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Well, we don't know.

FELICITY. Of course you know. I've just told you. I've just said it, haven't I?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes.

FELICITY. Well, then . . . there you are. There's nothing more to say. You should learn to listen.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes.

FELICITY. What, have you got your friends out there again? All come to look at the dead people.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Felicity . . .

FELICITY. He doesn't like me to say things like that. He's sensitive. Why don't you go hide yourself out there with the rest of them?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Would you like me to . . . ?

FELICITY. No. (Beat.) No. You stay where you are.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. All right.

FELICITY. How do I look today?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. You look fine.

FELICITY. You're a liar. I look like I feel. I smell, too. (She turns away from him.)

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Are you tired, Felicity?  
FELICITY. No.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Do you want to talk some more today?  
FELICITY. No.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. All right then. Do you want to go back to the cottage?

FELICITY. No.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Will you tell us if you're in pain?  
FELICITY. No.

~~Fel~~  
Felicity + Interviewer

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. You could help us if you talked to us.

FELICITY. Help you? Help you? Don't make me laugh, I'll split a stitch. Which one of us is kicking the bucket? Me? Me or you?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Well . . .

FELICITY. Come on. Spit it out. Don't be shy. You're not stupid on top of everything else, are you? One of us is dying and it isn't you, is it?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. No. You are the patient.

FELICITY. Patient?! Patient, hell! I'm the corpse. I have one lung, one plastic bag for a stomach, and two springs and a battery where my heart used to be. You cut me up and took everything that wasn't nailed down. Sons of bitches.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. But we're not your doctors,

Mrs. Thomas.

FELICITY. (*Overlapping.*) We're not your doctors

. . . Claire . . .

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. What?

FELICITY. Claire . . .

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Mrs. Thomas? Afe you alright?

FELICITY. I'm alright! I'm alright! I'll tell you when I'm not alright. It isn't five, is it? Is it five yet?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Five?

FELICITY. Sons of bitches . . . my daughter, Claire.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes.

FELICITY. She writes to me regularly. A letter almost every day. I have them at the cottage.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. That's very nice.

FELICITY. Yes!

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Where does she live?

FELICITY. Who?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Your daughter, Claire.  
FELICITY. Yes. I've kept them all—every letter she ever sent me.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. That's a good idea.

FELICITY. So I'll have them when I go home. She's a good girl, my Claire.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Where is she now?

FELICITY. Now?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes.

FELICITY. She's with me.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Where?

FELICITY. Here. At the house.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. The house?

FELICITY. Yes. You don't run a place like this on dreams. It takes hard work. The property isn't much but the stock is good. We showed a clear profit in '63.

Nobody was more surprised than I was—but we did it. How do I look today?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. You look fine. Do you want to talk about Claire?

FELICITY. I look terrible.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. The more we know, the easier it is for us to understand how you feel.

FELICITY. No! Claire isn't with me anymore. She'll be here soon. But she isn't here now. Agnes is with me now . . . (*She calls out.*) Agnes! (*To the INTERVIEWER.*) Agnes is my oldest.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes, we . . .

FELICITY. (*Calling again.*) Agnes!!! (*The lights come up on the cottage behind FELICITY. AGNES is discovered inside, writing at a table. When she hears her Mother's voice, she gets up slowly, folds the paper she has been writing on, puts it into an envelope, seals the envelope and puts it into her pocket. AGNES is a very plain look-*



# 3 Agnes and Felicity

AGNES. Would you like that? Would you like some tea, mama?  
FELICITY. Put me by the table.  
FELICITY. (*More singing.*) AGNES. You should try to rest, mama. This medicine does no good if you exhaust yourself . . .  
Lay me down, roll me over, do it again . . .

(*AGNES wheels her to the table.*)  
FELICITY. Other side! Other side! (*AGNES moves her to the other side of the table.*)  
FELICITY. AGNES. We've done this is number three and enough singing, now, his hand is on my knee. mama. I want you to stop. Lay me down, roll me over . . ."  
(*FELICITY feels for the edge of the table.*)  
Closer! Closer!

AGNES. (*Pushing her closer to the table.*) There. Is that all right?  
FELICITY. (*Ignoring her.*) This is number four and . . . I don't remember four. What's four?  
AGNES. (*Setting up a game of checkers.*) I don't know, mama. I don't think I know this song.  
FELICITY. This is number five and his hand is on my thigh . . . Do you know that one?  
AGNES. No, mama. I don't.  
FELICITY. They'll pass you by, Agnes. They will.  
AGNES. Who, mama?  
FELICITY. They'll leave you at the station with your suitcase in your hand and a big gardenia tacked onto your collar. Sons of bitches.  
AGNES. I'm not anxious to be going anywhere.

BRIAN. Well, all these roads, they all go to Rome, as they say.  
BEVERLY. Yes. But why is it I always seem to end up in Naples?

(*BRIAN and BEVERLY embrace. The lights come up on the kitchen area of the cottage where AGNES is singing quietly to FELICITY.*)

AGNES. (*Singing.*)  
Holy God, we praise thy name  
Lord of all, we bow before Thee  
And on earth thy scepter claim  
All in heaven above adore Thee.  
FELICITY. (*Who appeared to be asleep.*) What the hell is that?

AGNES. It's a hymn, mama.  
FELICITY. Hymn! The time for hymns is when I'm in the coffin. Sing us a song!  
AGNES. A song?  
FELICITY. You know what a song is, don't you?  
AGNES. Of course I know what a song is, but I don't think I know anything . . .  
FELICITY. (*Singing.*)  
'Roll me over, in the clover,  
Lay me down, roll me over, do it again . . .'  
AGNES. Mama, people can hear you.  
FELICITY.

Do them good.  
'This is number one and the fun is just begun  
Lay me down, roll me over, do it again . . .'  
AGNES. All right, mama. I'll get you some tea.  
FELICITY. (*Ignoring her.*)  
'Roll me over, in the clover  
Lay me down, roll me over, do it again . . .'

FELICITY. 'This is number six and his hands are on my tits . . .

AGNES. Mama!

FELICITY. Does that make you anxious?

AGNES. No.

FELICITY. Well, it makes me anxious. And I haven't even got tits anymore.

AGNES. I'll get you some tea, mama.

FELICITY. Tea . . . tea . . . !

AGNES. Please, mama. I'm very tired.

FELICITY. (At the top of her lungs.) 'This is number seven and we're on our way to heaven. . . !'

AGNES. (Suddenly and violently screams at her.) Mama!!!! Stop it!!!

(FELICITY stops singing. She looks hurt, confused. She seems to drift off again as she did earlier, all her energy draining away. AGNES covers her mouth quickly, immediately ashamed and sorry for her outburst. There is a long silence. BRIAN goes to the Stage Left porch. JOE crosses to the Downstage porch and sits on the camp stool.)

FELICITY. (Very gentle, very weak.) Put 'em away. Put 'em away. Shoot 'em and bury them. You can't get good milk from sick cows. Can you?

AGNES. No, mama. You can't.

FELICITY. They're not doing anybody any good. Standing around, making noises like it mattered. Bursting their bellies and there's nothing good inside. Just a lot of bad milk. Put 'em away. You see to that machinery.

AGNES. Yes, mama. I will.

FELICITY. It wants attention.

AGNES. We'll manage. We can sell off some of the land, if we have to.

FELICITY. But not the house.

AGNES. No, not the house. We'll keep the house.

FELICITY. What . . . what time did you say it was?

AGNES. Oh . . . about four. Four-fifteen . . .

FELICITY. Claire? Claire . . . ?

AGNES. No, mama. It's Agnes.

FELICITY. It hurts . . . hurts now . . .

AGNES. I know, mama . . .

FELICITY. Make it stop. Make it stop now . . .

AGNES. I'll give you some of the medicine.

FELICITY. Yes. With some tea. Could I have it with some tea?

AGNES. Yes, mama. I think so.

FELICITY. Just one cup. Very weak.

AGNES. Yes, mama. I'll make it for you. (She lets go of FELICITY's hand and goes to make the tea.)

FELICITY. (A sudden small panic.) Agnes . . . !? (She reaches out for AGNES, searching the air for her hand.)

AGNES. Here, mama, here. I'm just going to make the tea.

FELICITY. Yes. All right. (She panics again.) Agnes!

AGNES. (Takes wet cloth and wrings it out.) Yes, mama. I'm here. (She goes to FELICITY and wipes her brow with the cloth.) It's all right. I'll get you your tea and then I'll read you your letter.

(STEVE starts to play "Goodnight Irene" on his guitar.

MARK crosses to the Down Right Interview Area.)

FELICITY. Where are they now?

AGNES. Let me check the calendar.

# 3 - Agnes and Interviewer

Agnes & Interviewer

ACT II THE SHADOW BOX 57

AGNES. (Speaking to the INTERVIEWER.) I shouldn't stay too long.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. (At Down Left stool, but still miked.) Yes. We won't keep you.

AGNES. You said you wanted to see me. Are there people there?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes. AGNES. I don't know what I can tell you.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Well . . . AGNES. The doctors saw her yesterday. They said they were going to change the medication, and after that, they weren't sure . . . Oh, but they must have told you all this.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes. AGNES. Oh. What . . . what was it you wanted to know, then.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Well, we wanted to know about you.

AGNES. (Almost smiles.) Me? Oh, that's . . . (Then worried.) Why? I've done everything that . . . just like the nurse tells me. I've been very careful to . . .

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. No. No. It isn't that. You're doing very well with her. Much better than anyone could ask. We know that.

AGNES. Then . . . what? VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Well, we were just wondering how you were?

AGNES. (Relieved.) Oh. I'm fine. Is that what you mean? I'm fine.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes. AGNES. I'm fine.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Good. AGNES. Yes. I'm a little tired. And sometimes a headache . . . I used to get headaches.

56 THE SHADOW BOX ACT II

cultures who had barely invented the wheel. At this very moment, some simple peasant in Mexico is planting seeds in his veins with the blind hope that flowers will bloom on his body before the frost kills him! And here we stand, the combined energy of our three magnificent minds focused irrevocably on a jacket. (He puts the jacket on sofa to dry.) My God. There are more important things I promise you. (MARK does not respond. BRIAN goes to BEVERLY and takes her in his arms.) Come on, my beauty, I'll show you a dancer. (They begin to do the Lindy. BRIAN turns on the tape recorder and "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" starts to play.)

BEVERLY. (Laughing.) Brian! Stop! (Suddenly BRIAN falters. Breathless, he starts to fall, catches himself, and then falls. BEVERLY goes to him.) Brian?! Are you all . . . ?

BRIAN. No! No. It's all right. I'm all right. He walks, he talks, he falls down, he gets up. Life goes on.

MARK. Let me give you a hand.

BRIAN. Leave me alone. (Carefully he exits to the bedroom, but bumps into the end table on his way. BEVERLY looks anxiously at MARK.)

BEVERLY. Do you think you should . . . ? MARK. No. No.

(MARK doesn't move. He seems frozen, terrified. He shakes his head "No" and turns away. Finally, BEVERLY follows BRIAN to the bedroom. BEVERLY exits. MARK picks up the bottle, turns off the recorder, sits down and starts drinking it from the bottle. At the same time, AGNES comes down to the stool at Down Right porch area, which becomes her Interview Area.)

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Oh?

AGNES. Yes. Terrible headaches. Mama always said they were psychosomatic. She said if I concentrated hard enough, they would go away.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. And did they?

AGNES. As a matter of fact, they did. Not right away.

But after a while . . .

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Do you still get them?

AGNES. What . . . ?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. The headaches. Do you still get them?

AGNES. I don't know. I used to get them so often. Now sometimes I don't know I have them—until they go away. You get used to them and you don't feel any different until they're gone. And I . . . what was it you wanted to ask me?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Tell us about Claire.

AGNES. What?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Claire. Felicity has been telling us that . . .

AGNES. Claire.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Your sister.

AGNES. Oh, Claire . . .

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes.

AGNES. Claire is my sister.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes.

AGNES. (*With great reluctance.*) We were very close. Our whole family. Especially after my father died. We were just children then. Mama worked very hard to keep us together. We had a dairy farm. It was a beautiful place. Big, old house . . . 1873. And so much land. It seemed even bigger then . . . I was so little. We were very happy. And then Claire . . . there was a boy . . . well, she left us . . . just like that. She

was a lot like Mama. They would fight and yell and throw things at each other . . . they got along very well. Claire was so beautiful. I would hide in my room. I got so frightened when they fought, but . . . I don't know . . . suddenly the fight would be over and Mama would throw open her arms and curse the day she bore children and Claire would laugh and then Mama would laugh and hug her close . . . and then all of us, we would laugh . . . I can still hear us . . . But she left. And we never heard from her. Almost a year. The longest year I can remember. Mama waited and waited, but she never wrote or came back to visit . . . nothing. And then one morning, we received a phone call from a man in Louisiana. There was an accident . . . something. And Claire was dead. They said at first they thought she was going to be all right, but she was hemorrhaging and . . . This is very hard to remember.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. But these letters from Claire.

AGNES. Yes. You see, it was after Claire died that Mama started to get sick. All of a sudden, she was 'old.' And she isn't, you know. But she just seemed to give up. I couldn't bring her out of it. Claire could have. But I couldn't. We lost the farm, the house, everything. One thing led to another. The letters . . . uh . . . It was after one of the last operations. Mama came home from the hospital and she seemed very happy. She was much stronger than ever. She laughed and joked and made fun of me, just like she used to . . . and then she told me she had written a letter while she was in the hospital . . . to Claire . . . and she said she was very nice to her and she forgave her for not writing and keeping in touch and she asked her to come home to visit and to bring her children . . .

Claire had been dead for a long time then. I didn't know what to do. I tried to tell her . . . I tried . . . but she wouldn't listen . . . And, of course, no letter came. No reply. And Mama asked every day for the mail. Every day I had to tell her no, there wasn't any. Every day. I kept hoping she would forget, but she didn't. And when there wasn't any letter for a long time, she started to get worse. She wouldn't talk and when she did she accused me of being jealous and hiding the letters and sometimes . . . I didn't know what to do . . . So . . . (Pause.)

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. How long have you been writing these letters?

AGNES. Almost two years . . . You're not angry with me, are you?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. No.

AGNES. It means so much to her. It's important to her. It's something to hope for. You have to have something. People need something to keep them going.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Do they?

AGNES. Yes. Sometimes I think, if we can wait long enough, something will happen. Oh, not that Mama will get better, but something . . . So I write the letters. I don't mind. It's not difficult. I read little things in books and newspapers and I make up what's happening. Sometimes I just write whatever comes into my head. You see, Mama doesn't really listen to them anymore. She used to. It used to be the only time I could talk to her. But now it doesn't matter what they say. It's just so she knows that Claire is coming.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. What happens when Claire doesn't show up?

AGNES. Oh, but I don't think that will happen. I mean, Mama . . . well, she won't . . . I mean, even if . . .

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. You mean she'll probably die before she even finds out.

AGNES. (Nods her head.) Yes.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. What will you do then, Agnes?

AGNES. (Surprised by the question, she looks out at the INTERVIEWER for a long time. Then . . .) It makes her happy.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Does it?

AGNES. (More confused.) I don't know.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. What about you, Agnes?

AGNES. Me?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Does it make you happy?

AGNES. Me?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes.

AGNES. (She touches her head lightly.) Please, I . . . I should be getting back.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Agnes?

AGNES. Sometimes she does things now, I don't know why . . . I . . . (Trying to accuse the INTERVIEWER.)

The pain is much worse. This medicine you've given her . . . it doesn't help.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. Yes, we know. It may be necessary to move her up to the hospital again.

AGNES. But you said before . . .

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. I know.

AGNES. And now?

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. It's hard to say.

AGNES. No.

VOICE OF INTERVIEWER. I'm sorry.

AGNES. No, you're not sorry. You don't know anything about sorry. You put her in some room. You do one more operation. You wrap her up in your machines. You scribble on her chart. And then you go away. You don't know about sorry.