

Say Emily

by

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*TIME: PRESENT*

*PLACE: EAST OAKLAND*

*CAST: ACTRESS*

Say Emily <sup>1</sup>

*SOUND OF RAIN.*

*SCENE 1*

*LIGHTS RISE ON A WOMAN STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF AN EMPTY GARAGE. SHE IS WEARING A RAINCOAT. SHE DOESN'T MOVE, HER EYES SEARCH THE PLACE, FINALLY, HER ASSESSMENT MADE, SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS; THE RAIN AND THE LIGHTS BUMP OUT.*

*SCENE 2*

*VACUUM CLEANER IN THE DARK. THE LIGHTS RISE ON HER FURIOUSLY VACUUMING THE FLOOR. SHE IS DRESSED IN A CLEANING SUIT REplete WITH HEAD GEAR.*

*LIGHTS AND SOUND OUT .*

*SCENE 3*

*THE LIGHTS RISE ON AN EMPTY STAGE; SLOWLY THE EDGE OF A LARGE BOX APPEARS, AFTER A LITTLE WHILE SHE APPEARS AT THE END PUSHING IT.*

*SHE IS DRESSED IN WHAT WOULD PASS FOR CASUAL WEEKEND CLOTHES IN THE HAMPTONS, IN THIS CASE, IT IS NORTHERN CALIFORNIA 'S VERSION.*

*LIGHTS OUT.*

*SCENE 4*

*THE LIGHTS RISE. SHE IS STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE STUDIO. HER STUFF IS UNPACKED.<sup>2</sup> SHE WEARS, OR RATHER IS, UNCOMFORTABLY STUCK IN BRAND SPANKING NEW SWEAT CLOTHES, MATCHING PANTS AND PULLOVER. SHE DRAWS A BREATH, OPENS HER MOUTH, TRIES TO SPEAK, BUT CAN'T. SHE INADVERTENTLY CLEARS HER THROAT, THEN COVERS HER MOUTH AT THE SOUND. LIGHTS OUT.*

*SCENE 5*

*...ON A CELL PHONE IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ARGUMENT.*

...It's a garage. Shot African-American porn in it. So, what do you think of that? I did it just to annoy you, my entire life is dedicated to the pursuit

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<sup>1</sup> A strange tune is always a hard tune to keep because people want to make it right.

<sup>2</sup> Stage dressers quickly set the stage – a team venture, while actor changes. It's as fast as a "click."

of your annoyance. No, I don't want to do it in the house... neighborhood's gone strange, that new family, the Replicants, they burn the same old seven-in-the-morning breakfast franks that I did, it's swallowing the air, I can't perform in that kind of environment. Why perform? Why not? Some people bungee jump. I'm not going to tell you what I'm doing. It's something for myself... Just forget I told you anything... just forget it... I might not do it anyway... For 12 months... Yes, all of it... I don't want to go to Europe, I can get put down in my hometown cheaper – anyway, it all looks the same there now... My health is fine, I'm not doing gymnastics. No, I'm not going weird. Yes, I'm eating. No, I'm not talking to myself, anyway, what business is it of yours? What are you doing with *your* life? Just leave me alone. I didn't call you, all right, yes, I did, just a weak moment. No, I'm not going to tell you where I am, it's a secret. I'll just shut up! I'll just shut up! I'll call you later.

*SNAPS THE PHONE SHUT; TO HERSELF...*

“Delicate frame of health,” nice shot, she's amping up the voltage; *Se vrai, Monsieur Foucault, the warden is waiting... (To her phone as she drops it in her bag)...* my ball and chain. I shouldn't've called Sylvia, just can't stop myself, her ugly is so magnetic.

*SUDDENLY REALIZING...*

...I'm talking to myself.

*SHE SCREAMS, GOES SILENT, CONSIDERS, THEN... WHISPERS SECRETLY SO AS NOT TO SCARE HERSELF.*

What's the big deal, I do it all the time in my head; in the laundry, in the garden, in the attic at ten a.m., in a corner of the kitchen, in the bathroom when the water's loud, but not “out loud.” Listen, I just need a context. Yes, yes, a context.

*SHE GOES SILENT AND CONSIDERS AGAIN, THEN... CAREFULLY...*

Conventional culture allows a performer to speak aloud the ideas surrounding a given recitation to the “space” as if it were a virtual audience.

*SILENCE. AGAIN, SHE CONSIDERS...*

Of course, the use of a director would eradicate the need for talking aloud alone to an empty room, but she doesn't have one, doesn't want one, couldn't get along with another person in the same room watching her

pathetic body, and her equally pathetic recitation of Ms. Dickinson, who is known to be a difficult poet.

*SILENCE. STILL NOT FULLY CONVINCING HERSELF... THEN...*

Would it help you to know that I'm an actor playing a role and that I've memorized every word I'm saying? I have. Doing so right now. Of course, this is a play. Do you think I would talk to myself out loud? Do you think I'm crazy? Okay, don't believe me.

Here's what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna "officially" make myself an actress.

Good evening, Ladies and gentleman, I'm an actress.

*IN HER NEW ROLE AS "ACTRESS," SHE SIZES UP THE ROOM.*

Okay, there is a "forth wall," a wall people can see through. Maybe it's "in the round." Yuk, that's a little close. Maybe it's "thrust." Yeah, me and Judy Garland. It's proscenium, that's what it is.

*SHE CROSSES D.S. TOWARDS THE FORTH WALL, PUTS HER PALM ON IT AS IF IT WERE SOLID.*

This wall is transparent. No, it isn't, it's black and there's crap on it. I'm an actress, "See through it, actress. Open it up."

*SHE GLARES AT IT AS IF SHE WERE TRYING TO HYPNOTIZE IT INTO A WALL; SHE CAN'T.*

Screw the wall. This is ridiculous. I wonder if any one can hear me?

*SHE GRABS HER KEYS AND EXITS. THERE IS THE SOUND OF HER CAR ALARM GOING OFF. SHE SHOUTS "YIKES" AND SHUSHES THE CAR, THE ALARM, HOWEVER, CONTINUES AND THEN FINALLY CEASES WITH A "BLEEP" AS THE CAR DOORS LOCK. SHE ENTERS.*

I've gotta get my money back.

*FINALLY HITTING HER...*

This is a slum!

*SHE PUTS THE KEYS BACK.*

Okay, come on, let's get it on. Gotta take the first step. Play "coach."

*SHE PLAYS THE COACH.*

Notebook!

*SHE GETS HER NOTEBOOK.*

Pencil!

*SHE GRABS A PENCIL.*

Sit!

*SHE SITS.*

One poem, I'll say one poem.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
 Are you – Nobody – too?  
 Then there's a pair of us!  
 Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!  
 How public – like a Frog –  
 To tell one's name – the livelong June –  
 To an admiring Bog!

*SHE THINKS SHE SEES A SPIDER RUN ACROSS THE FLOOR.*

My blessed God, what is that? Is that a spider? It's as big as a gerbil!

*SHE RUNS SCREAMING OUT THE DOOR .*

*LIGHTS REMAIN ON.*

## *SCENE 6*

*SOUND OF THE CAR. DOOR. BEEP/LOCK. SHE ENTERS, IT'S A FEW DAYS AFTER HER FLIGHT AND THE LIGHTS HAVE REMAINED ON ALL THIS TIME. SHE SNEAKS INTO THE ROOM. SHE'S A BIT SHEEPISH.*

Three days, good light bulb.

Sorry, she ran out. Thing is, she's scared of the room, she's scared of the whole neighborhood. Please, please forgive her, she's not really racist, perhaps she is, perhaps she hasn't ever had to test it, it's always so easy from a taxi to be tolerant, but she not racist; it's the visible poor. It's their attitude, they don't even try to look nice.

You gotta understand, this is the first place she's ever rented in her life. It's the only place she can talk to herself. It's the only place she can say

Emily. Please accept her apology. Please let her humiliate herself before you. Watch, she's going to sing to you, she's going to dance for you; she's going to struggle for you with her old body, her old willing body, she's going to show you how willing she is.

*SHE BEGINS SINGING AND DANCING.*

I cannot dance upon my Toes –  
 No Man instructed me –  
 But oftentimes, among my mind,  
 A Glee possesseth me,

That had I Ballet knowledge –  
 Would put itself abroad  
 In Pirouette to blanch a Troupe –  
 Or lay a Prima, mad,

And though I had no Gown of Gauze –  
 No Ringlet, to my Hair,  
 Nor hopped to Audiences – like Birds,  
 One Claw upon the Air,

Nor tossed my shape in Eider Balls,  
 Nor rolled on wheels of snow  
 Till I was out of sight, in sound,  
 The House encore me so –

Nor any know I know the Art  
 I mention – easy – Here –  
 Nor any Placard boast me –  
 It's full as Opera –

*SHE SPIES THE SPIDER.*

There you are! No, no, don't go away, I've got one for you.

*SHE DANCES THE POEM FOR THE SPIDER.*

The spider holds a Silver Ball  
 In unperceived Hands –  
 And dancing softly to Himself  
 His Yarn of Pearl – unwinds –  
 He plies from Nought to Nought –  
 In unsubstantial Trade –  
 Supplants our Tapestries with His –  
 In half the period –

An Hour to rear supreme  
 His Continents of Light –  
 Then dangle from the Housewife's Broom –  
 His Boundaries – forgot –

You're not a brown recluse, are you? Last week, two different women on completely separate TV shows got bit by a brown recluse.

I'd better go. They're watching me since Stephen left. I don't want to go out, I don't like the neighborhood so I hide but it's hard to hide in a place you've lived for decades, it must be maintained, the grounds must not overgrow, and the curtains on the windows must be opened diurnally, and in the night there must be lights, not too bright, not too dim, comfortably, calmly illuminated, and the ritual "Darkening of the House" must be executed in the proper stages: big rooms first, then the smaller, then inner hallways, then finally total darkness. I'll move through the dark until I get my twilight eyes.

*SHE TURNS THE LIGHTS OFF AND STANDS IN THE SHADOWS.*

We grow accustomed to the Dark –  
 When light is put away –  
 As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp  
 To witness her Goodbye –

A Moment – We uncertain step  
 For newness of the night –  
 Then – fit our Vision to the Dark –  
 And meet the Road – erect –

And so of larger – Darkness –  
 Those Evenings of the Brain –  
 When not a Moon disclose a sign –  
 Or Star – come out – within –

The Bravest – grope a little –  
 And sometimes hit a Tree  
 Directly in the Forehead –  
 But as they learn to see –

Either the Darkness alters –  
 Or something in the sight  
 Adjusts itself to Midnight –  
 And Life steps almost straight.

*SHADOW LIGHTS FADE.*

SCENE 7

*SOUND OF GANGSTER RAP APPROACHING – THE GRAVEL CRACKLES AND THE CAR STOPS. THE GANGSTER RAP BOOMS IN THE NIGHT, THEN IS EXTINGUISHED AS THE CAR IS TURNED OFF, THEN OUT GO THE LIGHTS. THE DRIVER’S DOOR OPENS, THEN CLOSES.*

*SHE ENTERS CARRYING A BAG.*

“I’ve dropped my brain.” Emily Dickinson said that.

*SHE PUTS THE BAG DOWN.*

This is what Mary’s thinking or at least, how I see it: gradually all of the people around her, people she’s known forever, start dropping off like flies. I mean *impossible* people dying, *unexpected* people dying, *surprising* people dying, and then she realizes that it shouldn’t be surprising at all considering their age, and that’s when she gets the idea that she’d better start doing what she wants because the egg timer’s running out, no kiddin, check with an actuary, and she ain’t in the best health, “delicate,” that’s what they call her, then there’s dementia, she’s past 60, it’s not out of the question, not for the sanest of people, so she has to watch her step. If Sylvia knew that she was saying Emily again it would be SJCP, Straight Jacket City Pharmaceutical. So she risks a lot coming here. Anyway, she bought a car in a Denny’s parking lot in Redwood City, cost a lot, but she’s good for it, now she won’t stick out and it came with a cd. She’s got her Lex stashed in a parking garage in Hayward, she’ll take this back to the garage, exchange it for the Lex and so drive across the San Mateo Bridge to her necropolis in a proper hearse. Neighbor’s won’t talk then. Like they haven’t already. “Ever since Steve ran away with that grad student, “Donald,” wasn’t that his name, Mary seems a little lost.” That’s where it begins, “a little lost.”

Much madness is divinest sense  
 To a discerning eye;  
 Much sense the starkest madness.  
 ‘T is the majority  
 In this, as all, prevails.  
 Assent, and you are sane;  
 Demur, – you're straightway dangerous,  
 And handled with a chain.

After my father, Dwight, caught my mother, June, singing Emily, and locked her up in the spare room, I stopped liking the taste of food. It was gradual but accelerated and soon I couldn’t sneak it from my plate to the garbage unobserved. It was eggs first, both scrambled and over-easy, then

it was milk, it went on, of course, to flesh: once I screamed at a raw stake. Filling my mouth with foreign matter became unbearable, the heat of it, it's shriek of taste when the teeth crushed it, tongue floating in the sop of it and then the inevitable swallowing, that vomiting in reverse. I became light headed, lost weight, and finally was unable to walk. Light itself became indigestible and dark unconscionable, so I feared to close my eyes lest they disconnect and the bile of darkness swallow me whole; only twilight sustained me and water. Doors must never be closed lest they never open again and must never be left open for then the whole outside could barge in, the sun and outer space as well. From breath to breath something blew my little paper boat along the buzz, and I didn't know what it was or who, and I feared it would stop, and I dare not scream and I dare not shout and I dare not be silent for the noise of the buzz. I finally understood my mother, why she filled her mind with Emily's poems so Emily could say her mind for her.

I felt a Cleaving in my Mind –  
 As if my Brain had split –  
 I tried to match it – Seam by Seam –  
 But could not make them fit.  
 The thought behind, I strove to join  
 Unto the thought before –  
 But Sequence unravelled out of Sound  
 Like Balls – upon a Floor.

Dwight didn't know what to do, so Sylvia told him to take me to the nut house. He drove me to Clarinda and left me there for four years.

So you see that's why I shouldn't be saying these poems.

And Sylvia shouldn't know.

I should.

I don't know.

It's the fragility of it all.

*SHE BEGINS TO CRY.*

Everywhere.

*RECOVERING...*

Stephen assured her he'll always be there if she needs him, but he seems so preoccupied tossing his burdens with Donald that she can't be sure. A

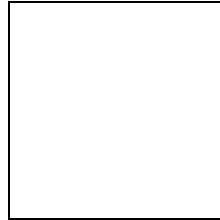
boy of 27 and man of 69, puer/senex, can't turn out good, but he's earned it, worked very hard. So where does that leave Mary?

*SHE CROSSES D.S. WITH A CANDLE, PLACES IT AND LIGHTS IT. SHE TURNS OUT THE LIGHTS. SHE BRINGS A BOX AND CROSSES D.S. AND SITS BEFORE THE CANDLE. FROM THE BOX SHE TAKES OUT A VERY OLD FOLDED PAPER.*

Look at this. It's from my mother, June. Dwight locked her in the room upstairs and boarded up the windows and told us never to near that door. But I missed her so, went to the door and sang into it, the Cricket Song, for I wanted her to know that I was sorry for betraying her, but she didn't sing back, and I waited, was about to leave when she slipped a piece of wall paper under the door. She must have written it on the wall with one of the pencils she carried in her apron.

First, there is a box. Can you see the imprint of her lips on it in blood? Look.

*SHE SHOWS THE BOX.*



And on it was the Cricket Song. Listen.

*SHE SINGS.*<sup>3</sup>

The cricket sang,  
And set the sun,  
And workmen finished, one by one,  
Their seam the day upon.

The low grass loaded with the dew,  
The twilight stood as strangers do  
With hat in hand, polite and new,  
To stay as if, or go.

A vastness, as a neighbor, came,—  
A wisdom without face or name,  
A peace, as hemispheres at home,—  
And so the night became.

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<sup>3</sup> Hermit Thrush.

*BLOWS THE CANDLE OUT.*

*SCENE 8*

*SHE BURSTS INTO THE ROOM SPEWING HER LINES EVEN BEFORE THE LIGHTS COME UP. SHE IS AGITATED, FRIGHTENED AND SHE NEEDS TO TALK.*

She's been having problems with "outbursts." She just get's angry with people, some riff, some jive she's heard a thousand times, it breaks her back now, it breaks her in half! She fairly shrieked at her neighbor, Lavonne, this morning. She get's scabs just being around the female and she's been around her for 25 years and finally, this morning she told her that she loved the poetry of Emily Dickinson. And she said, Lavonne, that is, "Oh, Emily Dickinson, she's so quaint. I remember her from high school." That's when she, "Mary," started to get loud. "She's far from quaint," she said, and her heart was suddenly pounding. "Really," Lavonne said, "wasn't she known for writing about bees and flowers and trees?" "That's because she was unprotected!" Yes, that was a shout. She was screaming in the driveway at 8 a.m., while the neighbor machines gathered their startled brood about them and watched her from their windows. "Because stupid people couldn't imagine what she was saying and no one stepped forward to take her side!" Yes, that was another shout. "Her sister-in-law should have helped her, and that dunce at the Atlantic Monthly was as useless as the rest of you plungers!" She watched Lavonne drop the drape of her charade; and then, the "turning" like, yes, after 25 years, she's giving her, "that look" like "Mary's going weird." And so I, her, me, got scared and we just started screaming at the four bedroom houses with the metal detectors and their wide-eyed androids, "What's your problem? You're just stupid!" So there it is, her outburst, and that's not all, she's always just ready to snap, her skin just can't hold it.

*PULLS A 40 OUNCER FROM THE BAG SHE CARRIED IN.*

I stopped at the neighborhood store and got a local beverage. Those people, they were actually pleasant, they looked at me funny, but I'm sure I looked at them the same way. They recommended this, "King Cobra Premium Malt Liquor."

*UNSCREWS THE CAP AND WITH BOTH HANDS, HOLDS THE BIG BOTTLE. SHE SNIFFS IT, BLINKS.*

Complex. *(She takes a swig)* My god, was this brewed in a bedpan? *(She takes a bigger drink and gasps)* Yikes, that's honest!

*THE BOOZE HITS HER AND PUTS A LITTLE SWAGGER IN HER. SHE MOUTHS OFF. WHILE SHE TALKS SHE DRINKS. SHE GETS LOOSER.*

I'm too old to be divorced, there should be a law against it, or it given a new status like "Dame"; "Mary is now a Dame". We were married for 50 years almost to the day. He was the local Methodist minister's son in an Iowa town of 600. 1959, caught once, was scandal, twice, was crime, a third would bring his father's ministry down; they needed a female quick to make him "right," but who? Mary! Fresh from a "school" back East. He was 19 and cuter than she, she was 21. Who would believe a queer and a nutty girl could escape unscathed a Christian town? Well, it's not so hard to imagine. First, they had to seem to be in love and that wasn't as hard as one might expect as they didn't expect to fall in love so they started out even. Second, after an initial period of awkwardness, they discovered that for once they could be themselves. Oh, she didn't say Emily and he didn't have sex with males but once the door was closed "home" actually happened and the better it happened the less scrutiny they incurred. Third, there was nobody else to have sex with. Forth, sex made children and that made them finally, "normal" so that, when asked, the families could say, "Oh, Steve and Mary, two kids; they moved to California, they're doin' fine." And "they" did, they ascended as a unit up the status tree, him, for ambition's sake, her, to stay the day when she would eventually say Emily. But that was not for a long, long time, not till now.

*SHE TAKES ANOTHER CRACK AT THE BOTTLE.*

This stuff grows on you.

Personally, she don't like poets, she's had so many to dinner. She means the University kind, The Poet Nation, Writers Workshop dumplings. She don't like the way they laugh. Always concerned with the doing it "right." Emily didn't do it "right." But she could write some damn good lyrics, you can sing them to any kind of music.

*SHE SINGS THE FIRST WORDS TO "JOY TO THE WORLD."*

Isaac Watts, wrote that, Emily Dickinson's meter master, the humble iambic trimeter and quadrameter, not the florid, pouting pentameter.

*SHE SINGS "OUR GOD, OUR HELP IN AGES PAST" BY ISSAC WATTS.*

Here's another one by Issac.

Our God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.

Emily Dickinson set to the same music.

The Brain – is wider than the Sky –  
 For – put them side by side –  
 The one the other will contain  
 With ease – and You – beside –

The Brain is deeper than the sea –  
 For – hold them – Blue to Blue –  
 The one the other will absorb –  
 As Sponges – Buckets – do –

The Brain is just the weight of God –  
 For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –  
 And they will differ – if they do –  
 As Syllable from Sound –

Listen to this. This is a little feminist ditty.

*SINGS*<sup>4</sup>

Over the fence –  
 Strawberries – grow –  
 Over the fence –  
 I could climb – if I tried, I know –  
 Berries are nice!

But – if I stained my Apron –  
 God would certainly scold!  
 Oh, dear, – I guess if He were a Boy –  
 He'd – climb – if He could!

*SINGS TO WOODY LATIN BASS 07*<sup>5</sup>

I taste a liquor never brewed,  
 From tankards scooped in pearl;  
 Not all the vats upon the Rhine  
 Yield such an alcohol!

Inebriate of air am I,  
 And debauchee of dew,  
 Reeling, through endless summer days,  
 From inns of molten blue.

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<sup>4</sup> Garage Band Loops – cf. my melodies on iTunes

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

When landlords turn the drunken bee  
 Out of the foxglove's door,  
 When butterflies renounce their drams,  
 I shall but drink the more!

Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,  
 And saints to windows run,  
 To see the little tippler  
 Leaning against the sun!

*SHE TURNS THE LIGHTS OFF. SHE GRABS HER CELL PHONE AND SPEED DIALS SYLVIA.*

Sylvia? Remember how we used to sing it?

*SHE SINGS INTO THE PHONE.*

*CELTIC - A CAPELLA*<sup>6</sup>

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –  
 Success in Circuit lies  
 Too bright for our infirm Delight  
 The Truth's superb surprise  
 As Lightning to the Children eased  
 With explanation kind  
 The Truth must dazzle gradually  
 Or every man be blind –

Yes, I'm finished. Lavonne what? She what? Restraining order? What does that mean, am I going to jail? I can't approach her within a hundred feet? Fantastic. For how many days? Ten? That's not enough. I understand the seriousness of it, but that's it, isn't it? Why did she call you? Drunk? It's none of your business. I can't believe this! How dare you! I'm an adult. If you continue to bother me I'm going to have a restraining order put on you!

*SHE SNAPS THE PHONE OFF, THEN TURNS THE PHONE ON AND PUSHES A BUTTON. SHE WAITS, THEN.*

All right, you're not there. Where are you, Monterey, diving again? With Donald? Or are you dining? I hope you're dining. Okay, I'll talk to myself. Erase this after you've listened to it. Listen, I'm in the dark right now...in a place you've never been...it's a secret. Stephen...I'm working with Emily Dickinson. Don't freak out, it's okay, just don't let Sylvia know. I just need you to tell her I'm fine. And I am, Stevie, I am. *(She starts to cry)* Tell her anything, just keep her away from me. Now that you're gone, I

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

think she's stalking me. Poop, 15 seconds, okay, have fun, say hi to Don and that I like him, okay? I'm fine. Just remember, I'm fine.

*HER FACE APPEARS MOMENTARILY IN THE CELL PHONE LIGHT.*

Mine Enemy is growing old –  
I have at last Revenge –  
The Palate of the Hate departs –  
If any would avenge

Let him be quick –  
the Viand flits –  
It is a faded Meat –  
Anger as soon as fed is dead –  
'Tis Starving makes it fat –

*LIGHTS OUT. GANGSTER RAP, THEN IT FADES OUT ONLY TO...*

#### *SCENE 9*

*...FADE UP AS HER CRAPPER CAR APPROACHES; THE SOUND BOOMS IN THE NIGHT, THEN STOPS. THE DRIVER'S DOOR OPENS, THEN CLOSES, FEET ARE HEARD ROUNDING THE CAR TO THE PASSENGER SIDE AND THAT DOOR OPENS. THERE'S A SOUND OF A STRUGGLE, THEN THE PASSENGER DOOR IS CLOSED. SOMETHING IS BEING DRAGGED TO THE DOOR: THE KEY IN THE LOCK, THEN A SHADOWY FIGURE MOVES IN THE DARKNESS AND FLICKS THE LIGHT SWITCH ON. SHE IS DRAGGING A SHROUDED BODY INTO THE ROOM.*

This afternoon, took a nap, woke up thinking that it was 3, 4 in the morning. Looked out the window, saw all the TV's on. It was only 9:30 in the evening and well, didn't remember sleeping that long. Six hours? Age works that way, by the time you've gone stupid or crazy or both you're already used to it. What does that mean for my future plans? What future plans? I'm living my future. Then, she said to herself, "Mary Sullivan, wake up!"

*INDICATING THE SHROUDED BODY.*

What is that, you ask. Is that Sylvia's dead body? Is it dead? Or is she just drugged? Well, look on your program and see if there is another actor. Is there? Well, then she isn't drugged, or she just wants to be anonymous.

*WITH RITUAL PRECISION, SHE SETS UP A JAPANESE MAKE UP STATION: SHE UNROLLS A TOWEL THEN PUTS JAPANESE MAKE UP ON IT, EYELINER, BRUSHES AND FLUSHES. THERE IS A MIRROR, A BASIN, A WATER-BOTTLE, A FOLDED HAND TOWEL. SHE POURS THE WATER INTO THE BASIN, AND LOWERS HER FACE INTO THE WATER. SHE LIFTS HER FACE AND LETS THE WATER DRIP OFF OF IT, THEN SHE TOWELS HER FACE OFF. SHE PUTS ON GEISHA MAKE UP AS SHE SPEAKS.*

I once audited Stephen's Traditional Theater Studies course: Paleolithic Magic and all that.

*INDICATING THE SHROUDED FIGURE...*

That is a soul catcher. I made it myself from stuff in my bedroom. Then I stuffed it. I won't tell you what I stuffed it with, that's a secret. Now, I just have to do the right things to make it hatch. First, I make myself up into something appropriate. I chose a Geisha. See, when I was in the Nut House, a woman, she (was a psychiatrist and she had seen me fail my sanity requirements three consecutive times, a forth and they'd stop testing me altogether) took pity on me. She sat me down and told me simply to "behave" like a "normal" person. "That's all they require to release you into the general population, which is really just a larger mental hospital where the mad create an organized effort to survive. Just do what *they* do. Read their lips as if you were deaf. Study the social face as you would a foreign language. You are very pretty and I think, intelligent. You are intelligent aren't you? Yes, I see it in your eyes. You could work them, you could become a really fine Geisha, you could rise in the society, you could gain a modicum of freedom by acquiring money, you could concentrate on it like a game and excel because it wouldn't mean the same to you. I know two stunt persons, both at the top of their field, both women, both deaf. Why not you, pretty Mary: get a male to cover for you, then work the system." I did. I became an academic housewife.

*HER MAKE UP FINISHED, SHE PUTS ON A GEISHA WIG AND TURNS THE MIRROR D.S.*

*SHE RISES AND PRESENTS THE POEM FORMALLY WITH FANS. IT IS A SONG.*

Title divine – is mine!  
 The Wife–without –  
 the Sign –  
 Acute Degree  
 Conferred on me –  
 Empress of Calvary –  
 Royal-all but  
 the Crown –  
 Betrothed, without  
 the Swoon  
 God sends us Women –  
 When You hold  
 Garnet to Garnet –  
 Gold to – Gold  
 Born – Bridalled –  
 Shrouded –

In a Day –  
 Tri Victory –  
 "My Husband" –  
 women say  
 Stroking the Melody-  
 Is this-the way –

*SHE CROSSES D.S., KNEELS, THEN TURNS U.S. OF THE MAKE UP STATION WITH HER BACK TO US.  
 SHE BEGINS PAINTING HER FACE IN THE MIRROR BUT IT CAN'T BE SEEN.*

One need not be a chamber to be haunted,  
 One need not be a house;  
 The brain has corridors surpassing  
 Material place.

Far safer, of a midnight meeting  
 External ghost,  
 Than an interior confronting  
 That whiter host.

Far safer through an Abbey gallop,  
 The stones achase,  
 Than, moonless, one's a'self encounter  
 In lonesome place.

Ourselves, behind ourselves concealed,  
 Should startle most;  
 Assassin, hid in our apartment,  
 Be horror's least.

The prudent carries a revolver,  
 He bolts the door,  
 O'erlooking a superior spectre  
 More near.

*SHE TURNS TO THE AUDIENCE: SHE HAS BLACK SOCKET EYES, FACE-SLIT MOUTH, BLOOD TEARS,  
 BIG SCARLET LIPS AND BLACK TONGUE.*

*SHE STICKS OUT HER BLACK TONGUE AND THE MUSIC BEGINS<sup>7</sup>*

My Life had stood – a Loaded gun –  
 In Corners – till a Day  
 The Owner passed – identified –  
 And carried Me away –

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods –  
 And now We hunt the Doe –  
 And every time I speak for Him –  
 The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light  
 Upon the Valley glow –  
 It is as a Vesuvian face  
 Had let its pleasure through –

And when at Night – Our good Day done –  
 I guard My Master's Head –  
 'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's  
 Deep Pillow – to have shared –

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –  
 None stir the second time –  
 On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –  
 Or an emphatic Thumb –

Though I than He – may longer live  
 He longer must – than I –  
 For I have but the power to kill,  
 Without – the power to die –

*THE MUSIC SHIFTS TO A TRAGA-MYSTICAL-SEPULCHRAL WALZT<sup>8</sup> (FAREWELL- GARAGE BAND).*

*SHE LETS HER KIMONO DROP FROM HER SHOULDERS AND REMOVES THE GEISHA WIG. SHE PULLS ON A TUTU, DAWNS A TALL MEDIEVAL POINTY HAT WITH TWINKLES AND A TAIL. THIS IS ALL DONE AS IF SHE WERE A KID DRESSING UP.*

*SHE DANCES TO THE SHROUDED BODY, PULLS THE SHROUD AWAY REVEALING A DOLL THAT LOOKS LIKE HER BUT WITHOUT LIPS. IT HAS A WHITE DRESS ON.*

*SHE BENDS THE DOLL OVER THE CHAIR AND KISSES IT PASSIONATELY, TRANSFERRING HER BIG RED LIPS TO THE DOLL'S FACE, CREATING A "MOUTH."*

*SHE TAKES THE DOLL IN HER ARMS AND BEGINS AN ELEGANT DANCE.*

*SHE LOOKS INTO THE DOLL'S FACE AND ALTHOUGH THE MUSIC GOES ON SHE SLOWLY DANCES TO A STOP.*

*THE DOLL SLOWLY COLLAPSES AS IF IT WERE FAINTING IN HER ARMS.*

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<sup>8</sup> "Farewell" – Garage Band

*THE MUSIC SLOWS.*

*SHE SITS WITH THE DOLL IN THE ROCKING CHAIR. SHE SLUMPS, THE DOLL SLUMPS, THEIR TWO FACES VISIBLE LIKE STRANGE SIAMESE TWINS. SHE TALKS TO THE DOLL.*

What the hell am I doing? Screw you, “What the hell are *you* doing?”  
What the hell *am* I doing?

*TO THE DOLL...*

Who are you?

*SHE GETS AWAY FROM THE DOLL.*

Good god, I *am* crazy. I am. What the hell am I doing? Stephen! Stephen!  
Help me. I’m sorry, I’m sorry, that’s so stupid. Get hold of yourself. Is it  
“hold of yourself” or “a-hold of yourself?”

*SHE POINTS AT THE DOLL.*

Christ Almighty, what is that?

*TO THE AUDIENCE...*

She didn’t mean it. She didn’t mean it. She appreciates the opportunity.

*TO HERSELF...*

Damn, she probably brought the doll into the piece too soon and now has  
left it here with nothing to do, and, god, she’s already wearing the white  
tutu, that’s the big reveal moment,

*TO THE AUDIENCE...*

but listen, she’s really sincere, she’ll make amends for it somehow, if this  
is the last thing she ever does, she’ll make it okay.

*SHE TRIES TO GET BUSY.*

Okay, let’s go again, from her top. “No, from the top, stupid, it’s called,  
“the top.” Knew that. Just joking.

*RE-ENCOURAGING HERSELF.*

The doll’s okay, came in at the right time; did the “Doll Act” and Geisha  
and the Japanese ghost, gave her lips from my lips... That’s a lot. That’s a

lot of ideas. I should probably write them down but then they wouldn't make any sense. Besides, they are already written down, I'm saying them. Look at this place. I must look a mess.

*SHE LOOKS IN THE MIRROR.*

“Good god, I *am* crazy. I am.”

*SHE PICKS UP HER CELL PHONE AND PUSHES THE FAST DIAL FOR SYLVIA. IN A SOFT BIDDABLE VOICE.*

Sylvia? Sylvia? I know you're there, I hear you breathing. Are you crying? What's going on? What? Speak more clearly. Stephen? What? What are you saying? He's dead? What do you mean? Drown? Donald too? No, wait, I'll be there. Where should I go? Where are you? Okay, I'm coming.

*SHE RUNS FROM THE ROOM DRESSED AS SHE IS, LEAVING THE LIGHTS ON, BUT SHE NO MORE THAN EXITS THAN THEY BUMP OUT.*

## Act Two

### SCENE 10

*THE DOLL COMES ALIVE (THIS IS A THING IN ITSELF, DON'T FORGET THE “OPENING OF THE EYES.”)*

*THEN THE DOLL SINGS AND DANCES. PIZZICATO<sup>9</sup>.*

I was the slightest in the House –  
I took the smallest Room –  
At night, my little Lamp, and Book –  
And one Geranium –

So stationed I could catch the Mint  
That never ceased to fall –  
And just my Basket –  
Let me think—I'm sure  
That this was all –

I never spoke—unless addressed –  
And then, 'twas brief and low –  
I could not bear to live—aloud –  
The Racket shamed me so –

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

And if it had not been so far –  
 And any one I knew  
 Were going—I had often thought  
 How noteless—I could die –

*SHE LIES DOWN AND GOES TO SLEEP. THEN SHE STRUGGLES. IT SEEMS PERHAPS SHE'S SUFFOCATING. NO, SHE'S TRYING TO GET THE DOLL OFF BUT SHE CAN'T. SHE LIES STILL, PANTING. THE PANTING SUBSIDES:*

<sup>10</sup>She lay as if at play  
 Her life had leaped away –  
 Intending to return –  
 But not so soon –

Her merry Arms, half dropt –  
 As if for lull of sport –  
 An instant had forgot –

The Trick to start –

Her dancing Eyes – ajar –  
 As if their Owner were  
 Still sparkling through  
 For fun – at you –

Her Morning at the door –  
 Devising, I am sure –  
 To force her sleep –  
 So light – so deep –

*LIES STILL, THEN...*

What does my face look like? Don't tell me.

*SHE ABRUPTLY GETS UP, LOOKS AROUND.*

So this is California? Pretty.

*TO THE AUDIENCE...*

Oh she's so worried is she? Is she worried, yes. Of course, she's worried, she always worried, freaky little gag.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

*SHE TRIES TO TEAR THE DOLL OFF. SHE GOES TO THE FLOOR. IT'S A BRIEF STRUGGLE BUT IT'S FRIGHTENING FOR SHE CAN'T, SHE CAN'T TEAR IT OFF AND SHE SCREAMS.*

*THEN, AFTER CALMING...*

I'm in skin again.

*THEN, HYPNOTICALLY TO HERSELF...*

It's all right.

It's okay.

It's all right.

It's okay.

*GETS UP LIKE A SHOT OF COFFEE, TO AUDIENCE.*

Who are you? I know. Don't worry about it. You are here. I am here. She told you about me did she? No? What ever she said was wrong. She always says stuff like that. She's on edge...all the time. So am I...but I can take it.

*SHE TAKES THE DOLL COSTUME OFF. SHE LOOKS JUST LIKE THE DOLL, WHITE DRESS AND ALL.*

I reason, Earth is short –  
And Anguish – absolute –  
And many hurt,  
But, what of that?

I reason, we could die –  
The best Vitality  
Cannot excel Decay,  
But, what of that?

I reason, that in Heaven –  
Somehow, it will be even –  
Some new Equation, given –  
But, what of that?

They drown that day instead of dining. It was all very romantic. They were snorkeling off the coast of Monterey. Stephen took the lead, he swam deeper and deeper and Donald followed. Finally, in the dark water below the sun they kissed, then headed back for the sky but Stephen ran out of air, Donald went back for him, then he ran out of air. They found them a few hours later. Mary ran to him, she ran to him, but it was too late.

I should not dare to leave my friend,

Because – because if he should die  
 While I was gone – and I – too late –  
 Should reach the Heart that wanted me –

If I should disappoint the eyes  
 That hunted – hunted so – to see –  
 And could not bear to shut until  
 They "noticed" me – they noticed me –

If I should stab the patient faith  
 So sure I'd come – so sure I'd come –  
 It *listening* – listening – went to sleep –  
 Telling my tardy name –

My Heart would wish it broke before –  
 Since breaking then – since breaking then –  
 Were useless as next morning's sun –  
 Where midnight frosts – had lain!

She drove to the morgue in her ghetto car, in her tear stained clown white face, her slit-mouth, her black tongue. She told the coroner she'd come from a Japanese costume party as a Yūrei, a vengeful ghost, they appear usually between 2 to 3 AM, that's what accounts for the late hour and the extraordinary appearance, it's purely cultural, it would seem completely normal to a Japanese, a bit of Department of Asian Studies off the cuff revelry, just fun. She identified Stephen. And she identified Donald. And then she started crying. She crashed her car and died.

This World is not Conclusion.  
 A Species stands beyond –  
 Invisible, as Music –  
 But positive, as Sound –  
 It beckons, and it baffles –  
 Philosophy – don't know –  
 And through a Riddle, at the last –  
 Sagacity, must go –  
 To guess it, puzzles scholars –  
 To gain it, Men have borne  
 Contempt of Generations  
 And Crucifixion, shown –  
 Faith slips – and laughs, and rallies –  
 Blushes, if any see –  
 Plucks at a twig of Evidence –  
 And asks a Vane, the way –  
 Much Gesture, from the Pulpit –  
 Strong Hallelujahs roll –

Narcotics cannot still the Tooth  
That nibbles at the soul –

*SHE PICKS UP HER STAGE HAT AND PUTS IT ON.*<sup>11</sup>

It is time for me to make a story about our family, Mother June, and Father Dwight, and Mary and Sylvia, the-look-a-likes. It is not true, nor has it any resemblance to reality, and all of that.

*HAND PLAY*

There once was a strange girl named June. She was so beautiful the sun ran up the other side of the world to see her, although he knew that darkness always lasts the same time, but his heart beat so strongly to see her again, and she knew it, June Sullivan, the beautiful dark haired girl; she waited for him too, not that she loved him back, she loved the night as much as the day, but she loved it that the very sun of the world loved her, although she was silent, silent, for she wouldn't say the names of things, although she could write them, the "things" of the world named by her parents and her sisters and brothers, but *she* had no names. So they thought she was a mute and sent her to school, but it was hard for her, not because she wouldn't speak but because she was so beautiful that men hated her for the want of her, the sinful ancient desires her face and form cut into them, and girls despised her more, for compared to her there lay no hope for the future of their beauty, so they tormented her until they made her make a sound, yes, and it was a squeal like a throat-cut pig, and they were overjoyed at the ugliness of the sound within her, and her eyes poured clear blood until the teacher came and stopped them; from then on she dressed darkly and covered her body with black thick clothes and shrouded her face with her hands, and everyday she sat alone and alone she was left, until that day at Dawson High when she heard Emily and a door swing open and Emily come in and June whisper her first words in an attic way up inside her house.

Wild Nights – Wild Nights!<sup>12</sup>  
Were I with thee  
Wild Nights should be

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<sup>11</sup> *THIS PLAY IS PERFORMED BEFORE A STAGE THAT IS WORN AS A HAT. THERE ARE LITTLE CURTAINS SHE CAN OPEN AND CLOSE. HER HEAD IS IN THE STAGE AND SHE USES HER HANDS AS THE CHARACTERS: IT IS A KIND OF HAND OPERA. AND OF COURSE, ALL THIS CAN COMPLETELY BE IGNORED.*



<sup>12</sup> Garage Band Loops – cf. my melodies on iTunes

Our luxury!

Futile – the Winds –  
 To a Heart in port –  
 Done with the Compass –  
 Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden  
 Ah, the Sea!  
 Might I but moor – Tonight –  
 In Thee!

She went to the Charles City library and found a whole book and exchanged herself for hundreds of Emilies.

What if I say I shall not wait!  
 What if I burst the fleshly Gate -  
 And pass escaped – to thee!

What if I file this mortal – off –  
 See where it hurt me – That's enough –  
 And step in Liberty!

They cannot take me – any more!  
 Dungeons can call – and Guns implore  
 Unmeaning – now – to me –

As laughter – was – an hour ago –  
 Or Laces – or a Travelling Show –  
 Or who died – yesterday!

Her parents were hard pressed to get rid of her. She scared men to death. But finally they got one, t'was the undertow that pulled him in, for Dwight, he wasn't a pretty man, not by a long shot, 40, hard-nosed, practical, a good farmer, never-knew-a-good-day-in-his-life kinda fella, but she was such a pretty one, such a pretty one, and her eyes so far away, her skin so smooth, her lips like pink flower petals, and the pretty way the corners of her mouth tucked in; but Dwight knew that a woman like that wasn't cheap except that there was something wrong with her, and the outside chance she'd spawn strange children, but, but, but she was such a pretty one, she was such a pretty one – he got caught on his feet dreamin' and married her, June Sullivan, in June.

For him:

he couldn't keep his eyes on her and couldn't keep them off, there was something strange inside there, something looking back that scared his glance. The sultry slide of her eyes while she washed dishes, the sweat she left untouched on her forehead in the jungle Iowa August heat made him jealous and hungry. "She's made for something else, she's made for something else," is all he could say and shook his head that something so beautiful could be inside his house.

For her:

she watched his hands – how they worked things, made them right, cleaned them, healed them, made them grow; how they had eyes – how big and strong they were and how nimble – could twist a fence post or pick a needle from the floor. And they were always kind to her, wanted to touch her face but were too shy. Then one day she took his hands and put them on her face. They had soft wrinkles on the outside and calluses like parrot's feet on their palms.

Sometimes like a doll, a pretty pretty doll, she wrapped around him hot, breathing hotly, kissing him, his silent addiction, her lips, her nose, her haunted eyes, her wolfish heart.

Exhilaration is the Breeze<sup>13</sup>  
That lifts us from the Ground  
And leaves us in another place  
Whose statement is not found –

Returns us not, but after time  
We soberly descend  
A little newer for the term  
Upon Enchanted Ground –

The farm glowed green and gold and she glowed too, and on his tractor, his eyes glowed and felt the best in his life, had not known such a thing could be, and tho she never made a sound, felt her affection, her gratitude, her delight that she was with the earth, in its rhythm, that sun and moon were with her, in her, just as three hearts beat within her great wet clock of life. And she was disquiet for Emily to share the room with us, so she took us to a thicket in the corn and sang Emily to us in her belly, fed us ghosts so we could hop her thoughts as branches do the birds.

These are the days when Birds come back –<sup>14</sup>  
A very few – a Bird or two –

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<sup>13</sup> cf. my melodies in iTunes – ED Exhilaration is the breeze

<sup>14</sup> ibid. ED These are the days

To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies resume  
The old – old sophistries of June –  
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh fraud that cannot cheat the Bee –  
Almost thy plausibility  
Induces my belief.

Till ranks of seeds their witness bear –  
And softly thro' the altered air  
Hurries a timid leaf.

Oh Sacrament of summer days,  
Oh Last Communion in the Haze –  
Permit a child to join.

Thy sacred emblems to partake –  
Thy consecrated bread to take  
And thine immortal wine!

She took care that Dwight would never hear Emily; she knew he couldn't share her with anybody just now that he was at last shining. It would change soon enough when *we* hit the air, clinging to her like leeches and her loving us, preening us. What she didn't know was that Dwight wouldn't have cared about Emily. He had a crush on her, like a geeky high school kid; that she was silent was fine, if she didn't look into his eyes was fine, he didn't care if she had a couple of noisy children as long as he could look at her, gaze at her, sip her in glances. He grew to accept her as silent and it was the silence between them he began to covet; they shared silence with each other. To protect her silence he attended alone all family functions like Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Sunday Church.

So Sundays and holidays June took us to the thicket to say Emily, and in winter we said her in the kitchen, but more carefully, as we didn't want to rouse the house so that Dwight feel it when he came back.

It had to happen one Sunday, the car break down on the way to church and Dwight come back to the house on foot and hear singing coming from the corn. Was so pretty might have been playing on the radio.

The cricket sang,  
And set the sun,  
And workmen finished, one by one,  
Their seam the day upon.

The low grass loaded with the dew,  
 The twilight stood as strangers do  
 With hat in hand, polite and new,  
 To stay as if, or go.

A vastness, as a neighbor, came,—  
 A wisdom without face or name,  
 A peace, as hemispheres at home,—  
 And so the night became.

In the thicket, there she was, chin tilted like a lark, hair tumbled over her shoulders, singing! He remembered all those days how he had carefully made silence for her, honored her privacy as one would a bearer of a secret, never once tried to pry into her eyes, and she honored him he thought, but she was singing, singing to the two look-a-likes he tolerated for being with a man the likes of him, but she didn't mean it, she was a liar, wasn't she?

We came in, silent again, and found him sitting there, white-faced at the table,

a veiled creature.

Then Dwight caught her by the hair, "Why don't you sing to me! Why don't you sing to me!" We twins know she can talk, and he tries to make us tell him that she can talk, and I just keep my mouth shut but Mary, she can't stand him screaming at mother, to talk to talk to talk; Mary begs him, she begs him, then he's crying and he's grabbing Mary's head and he's telling our mother that he's gonna crack it open on the sink if she doesn't say anything, but she doesn't, she doesn't and then Mary is screaming at her, "Say Emily! Say Emily!" And June screams and it sounds like a throat-cut pig!

<sup>15</sup>After great pain, a formal feeling comes –  
 The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –  
 The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,  
 And Yesterday, or Centuries before?

The Feet, mechanical, go round –  
 Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –  
 A Wooden way  
 Regardless grown,

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<sup>15</sup> "AFTER GREAT PAIN A FORMAL FEELING COMES" WITH THE LOON: GARAGE BAND.

A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –  
 Remembered, if outlived,  
 As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –  
 First–Chill–then Stupor–then the letting go–

He drags June to the spare room upstairs, boards the windows up and locks her in there. Then she gives Mary that wallpaper poem, then tears the boards away and hangs herself like a banner from the window.

And Dwight comes undone.

Each soul has its native strategy.

Mary stopped eating.

I told Dwight that she was crazy, that he should put her in the nuthouse and he did, like putting something in the freezer turned bad, might as well one go down instead of two...

so I wifed him, not that he'd want to screw me, he was too much in love with June, hanging by her ghost upstairs; I was the distance between them.

I ironed his pants, cooked his coffee, fried his eggs, made his bed. Took his crap, his skulking void, his accusatory stare, the mine fields he'd set to trap me so he could slap me. But he was already dead, just took a little time to take; a few months later, watched him die raging at a tire one summer afternoon in a thunder storm; broken hearted lovers, they, mom and dad, really.

*SHE REMOVES THE STAGE HAT AND PUTS ON THE POINTY HAT AND DANCES TO MUSIC ALA GARAGE BAND LOOP FAREWELL, WITH THE DOLL.*

I have a lover. We meet at a dance in Albion, in July, Christmas lights hanging around a platform in the open air; Clarence, red-head, freckles, foster boy farm hand five miles outside of Union; I'm pretty and if you don't know who I am you might think I'm a cheerleader. He's coming at me like a snake or a creek, afraid but wanting to do it, me too. He says I smell like soap and that that is good, and my heart is beating so hard I can hardly keep my arms up, and he's shaking too, and my cheeks are so flushed I think I've burned him, so we keep dancing with our faces together all through the evening...

*THE MUSIC STOPS.*

...till Dwight yanks me outta there cuz I told Mary that I wanted to dance that night, and she told him I was probably there, and that boy, Clarence, is shamed and I don't cry because I don't want to shame him more; Dwight drags me back to crazy June and shiny-eyed Mary and that cursed Emily Dickinson.

I want to get away from them, from *her*, that vampire in the white dress.

*THROWS THE DOLL DOWN.*

1954, November Hayride, not with a horse, mind you, but a John Deere tractor. Breath-steam, gibbous moon, lots of clothes, jackets and scarves, gloves and mittens and hay in bales prickly as our wool collars. Faces ruddy, round and shiny and our necks so white and hot and our lips so plump, not a wrinkle, eyes so drunk, undressing our hands to curl and clutch our fingers. Oh, yes, and a kiss that went as far as the moon and the harvested corn, dry and cool as violin cases, hot and satin inside.

The name – of it – is "Autumn" –  
 The hue – of it – is Blood –  
 An Artery – upon the Hill –  
 A Vein – along the Road –

Great Globules – in the Alleys –  
 And Oh, the Shower of Stain –  
 When Winds – upset the Basin –  
 And spill the Scarlet Rain –

It sprinkles Bonnets – far below –  
 It gathers ruddy Pools –  
 Then – eddies like a Rose – away –  
 Upon Vermilion Wheels –

So it lasts one summer, the skinny freckled boy and into the autumn. He's going into the Army. That is until he sees me and I see him and then there's just us and no room for Emily no more, no more, in the dark trees by the water, cicada's eerie, eerie song, August breathing tassels in the ocean in the sky thicker than light, I sneak to him each night, tell Mary if she tells June I'll tell Dwight June can talk. That was a sin. But it got me a skinny freckled boy for a summer and a fall.

Then running away and getting caught because June weeps like November drizzle until Dwight gets in his truck and pulls me out of that one room flat in Saint Louis, left my freckled boy, AWOL, crying at the top of the stairs, big hand dragging me back to that crazy woman with the ghosts in her eyes, back to the silence, back to that farm with a lie made of glass.

And she held him in her arms and she held him, she held him, she never held him, never held, anyone, never...it's bull shit, it's bull shit, and now I don't even care.

*SHE PLOPS HER BUTT ON THE ROCKING CHAIR AND ROCKS, ROCKS, ROCKS AND CRIES.*

Dwight dies

So I stay there and live in that house for 50 years, alone, selling parcels of land to support myself and preserve the house and the thicket. And there are these voices all a'clatter, gobbling round in the house, arguing and mending, the voices of wood and metal and glass and of echoes and dampness and Emily's ghosts, the ones June sent into me. And I lock them in the rest of the house and move into the kitchen and the dining room.

I never say Emily, she says herself, an insane girl running upstairs through the halls in her white dress and pounding on my door.

Alone, I cannot be –  
The Hosts – do visit me –  
Recordless Company –  
Who baffle Key –

They have no Robes, nor Names –  
No Almanacs – nor Climes –  
But general Homes  
Like Gnomes –

Their Coming, may be known  
By Couriers within –  
Their going – is not –  
For they're never gone –

The house screams for 50 years and then it dies and goes silent.

Perhaps the house is silent for 50 years and then goes dead.

I can't decide if the ghosts or the house is silent right away, or if the house is loud because I am ranting, that I have gone crazy in that house and become divine, which I carry over to Mary because she calls me into this doll to help ease her into the biggest change of life since she hit the air.

All her life she has assumed a magnificent horror; hence her rage and despair. But what if it isn't that way? What if all she has learned is wrong?

Imagine this, don't get mad, imagine that it doesn't all end, that it is alive and aware of me, and that I pick up a life as one does a forgotten piece of memory and live it as my own as if it has always been that way and I had just forgotten it along with what ever it was I was searching for in the refrigerator; just like that, a new life without even noticing it save a vague sense of jamais vu.

The voices go quiet and she passes in ecstasy in the rocking chair on the front porch. Everybody can see her from the road but nobody wants to go up there because she's known to be batty, that is, until they see the blue jays eating her eyes, then the sheriff comes.

On a Columnar Self –How ample to rely  
In Tumult – or Extremity –  
How good the Certainty

That Lever cannot pry –  
And Wedge cannot divide  
Conviction – That Granitic Base –  
Though None be on our Side

Suffice us – for a Crowd –  
Ourself – and Rectitude –  
And that Assembly – not far off  
From furthest Spirit – God –

I don't need to fall in love any more, don't need someone to save me, or complete me, not searching for that special some one. So I don't really figure I need to go out. I don't like it, Going Out. What are they doing with each other? They're entertaining each other. And when they talk at the tables with wine and beer, they talk about years, how many it's been. How the rose has faded and the frost has come and burned those days when we used to know each other, and I keep seeing their eyes watching me and I know that the elevator's broken loose in the shaft, it's a long shaft but not long enough and I can't concentrate on what they're saying to me, all I can feel is all of us whizzing down the shaft. I guess we're having a party. Everybody, falling down the elevator shaft, tipsy, wow, yeah, woopie, then, crash, but I don't hear the crash. Can't shake it, can't shake it out of my head, that this, this never really happened when all is said and done. I remember face to face, the miracle of my sister, swimming under the stars, wonder, a common thing shared between hearts, when possibility existed, love, children, boys, the Milky Way and honeysuckle, fairies, and darting shadows where dimensions flutter. Whiz! How can all of that fit into an elevator?

Emily's door is ajar. Go in. Go in. She'll have you. She is living there with Mary and June. Sylvia's there too. And so is Dwight. He is lying in their laps listening to them sing. They are singing Emily. Listen, they are singing. They are on the other side, if you know what I mean, sneaky metaphor. Don't trust them. Mirages, images of the unseeable, but real, more real than flesh. Don't go in. Let her stay in there. Stay out here with us and read her from a distance.

I'm very, very honored to be living with you. All of us have to do the same basic things, we're in the same boat.

What will I do after the show? Go out for drinks or a late dinner? Go home? Do I have a home here? Or am I "on the road." Do I have a husband? A family? Do I go back to my family? But my family is middle aged by now and dispersed and has families of its own and they have families, young ones, tots, and they probably live in different cities, perhaps different countries. But perhaps I do have a husband, or a girlfriend, a lover. At least friends, a clique, right? People in the audience, going to meet friends after the show. Or am I going home alone? Yes, I'll watch late night television. Or I'll read a book. No, I'll study that movie script I'll be shooting in a month. Or I'll get drunk and pass out.

Help me, guys. Help me get out of this. Play me out, make me something. Make me Emily, there is no other name.

*AS THE LIGHTS BEGIN TO FADE.*

If this is "fading"  
 Oh let me immediately "fade!"  
 If this is "dying"  
 Bury me, in such a shroud of red!  
 If this is "sleep,"  
 On such a night  
 How proud to shut the eye!  
 Good evening, gentle Fellow men!  
 Peacock presumes to die!