

coma, in and out, in and out. Sometimes I'd wake up and wonder who I was, and *where* I was, and who were all those people looking at me? Sometimes I wouldn't wake up ... not all the way, and I'd half try, and then I wouldn't. You brought me flowers, you brought freesia. You know I love freesia; that's why you bring them to me, because I *love* them! Why do you do that? You hate me; why do you do that? What do you want? You *want* something. Well, you just wait. You'll get what's coming to you. In my premonition I knew I was dead, and it didn't seem to matter any, and I was all alone. There was no one there with me and I was *dead*! No one! Just the chauffeur and the maid. I was there an hour, and I was *dead*, and then you came in, and you had your flowers, your freesia. You came into the room, and they were there, and I was dead, and you stopped at the door of the room, and you knew right away, and you stopped and you ... *thought!* (*Laughing.*) I *watched* you *think*! And your face didn't change. (*Wistful.*) Why didn't your face ever change? And there you were, and you thought, and you decided, and you walked over to the bed, and you touched my hand, and you bent down, and you kissed me on the forehead ... for them! They were there and they were watching and you kissed me for them! (*Softer.*) And then you stood up, still holding on to my hand, as if ... what? You didn't know what to do with it? You held on to my hand, and my hand wasn't warm anymore, was it? My hand was cold, wasn't it? (*Pause.*) Wasn't it? (*He looks at her once more, shudders, weeps, looks back at "A."* A moves away from the bed.)

B. (*Softly.*) And so it goes.

C. (*To A, slowly, with great emphasis, but no anger.*) I ... will ... not ... become ... you. I will not I ... I deny you.

A. (*Mildly amused.*) Oh? Yes? You deny me? (*To them all.*) Yes? You all deny me? (*To C.*) You deny me? (*To B.*) I suppose you do too. (*B lowers her gaze. Continued.*) Yes; of course. (*To him.*) And, of course, you deny me. (*He looks at her. Continued, gently.*) Well, that's all right: I deny you too; I deny you all. (*To C.*) I deny you, (*To B.*) and I deny you, (*To him.*) and, of course, I deny you. (*General.*) I'm here, and I deny you all, I deny every one of you.

// **stact**

C. *Is it like this? What about the happy times ... the happiest moments? I haven't had them yet, have I? All done at twenty-six? I can't imagine that. I had some, of course, some of what probably will be the happiest even when I get to the point I can begin to think about looking back without feeling silly, though God knows when that will be! — not feeling silly — if ever. Confirmation, for example, that wonderful time: the white dress Mother made, Sis all jealous and excited, jumping up and down and sulking at the same time. But even now, you see, I'm remembering, and what I'm remembering doesn't have to do with what I *felt*, but what I remember. They say you can't remember pain. Well, maybe you can't remember pleasure, either — in the same way, I mean, in the way you can't remember pain. Maybe all you can remember is the memory of it ... remembering, remembering it. I *know* my best times — what is it? happiest? — haven't happened yet. They're to come. Aren't they? Please? And ... and whatever evil comes, whatever loss and taking away comes, won't it all be balanced out? Please? I'm not a fool, but there is a lot of happiness along the way. Isn't there? And isn't it always ahead? Aren't I right? Aren't I? I mean ... all along the way? No? Please? (*B comes to the right or left of C, leaving center free for A later. B shakes her head to C, not unkindly.*)*

B. Silly, silly girl; silly baby. The happiest time? Now; now ... always. This must be the happiest time: half of being adult done, the rest ahead of me. Old enough to be a little wise, past being really dumb ... (*An aside to C.*) No offense.

C. (*Looking forward: tight smile.*) None taken.

B. Enough shit gone through to have a sense of the shit that's ahead, but way past sitting and *playing* in it. This has to be the happiest time — in theory, anyway. Things nibble away, of course; your job is to know *that*, too. The wood *may* be rotten under your feet — your nicely spread legs — and you'll be up to your ass in sawdust and dry rot before you know it, before you know it, before you can say this is the happiest time. Well, I can *live* with that, *die* with that. I mean, these things happen, but what I like most about being where I am — and fifty is a peak, in the sense of a mountain.

C. (*An aside.*) Fifty-two.

B. Yes, I know, thank you. What I like most about being where I am is that there's a lot I don't have to go through anymore, and that doesn't mean closing down — for me, at any rate. It opens up whole vistas — of decline, of obsolescence, peculiarity, but really *interesting*! Standing up here right on top of the middle of it *has* to be the happiest time. I mean, it's the only time you get a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view — see in all directions. Wow! What a view! *(A moves to center, B and C stay where they are.)*

A. (*Shakes her head; chuckles; to B and C.*) You're both such children. The happiest moment of all? Really? The happiest moment? (*To the audience now.*) Coming to the end of it, I think, when all the waves cause the greatest woes subside, leaving breathing space, time to concentrate on the greatest woe of all — that blessed one — the end of it. Going through the whole thing and coming out ... not out *beyond* it, of course, but sort of to ... one side. None of that "further shore" nonsense, but to the point where you *can* think about yourself in the third person without being crazy. I've waked up in the morning, and I've thought, well, now, she's waking up, and now she's going to see what works — the eyes, for example. Can she *see*? She *can*? Well, good, I suppose; so much for that. Now she's going to test all the other stuff — the joints, the inside of the mouth, and now she's going to have to pee. What's she going to do — go for the walker. Lurch from chair to chair — pillar to post? Is she going to call for somebody — anybody ... the tiniest thought there might be nobody there, that she's not making a sound, that maybe she's not alive — so's anybody'd notice, that is? *I* can do that. I can think about myself that way, which means, I suppose, that that's the way I'm *living* — beside myself, to one side. Is that what they mean by that? I'm beside myself? I don't think so. I think they're talking about *another* kind of joy. There's a difference between knowing you're going to *die* and *knowing* you're going to die. The second is better; it moves away from the theoretical. I'm rambling, aren't I?

B. (*Gently; face forward.*) A little.

A. (*To B.*) Well, we do that at ninety, or whatever I'm supposed to be; I mean, give a girl a break! (*To the audience again.*) Sometimes when I wake up and start thinking about myself like that — like I was watching — I really get the feeling that I *am dead*, but going on at the same time, and I wonder if she can talk and feel and ... and then I wonder which has died — me, or the one I think about. It's a fairly confusing business. I'm rambling. (*She gestures to stop B.*) Yes; I know! (*Out.*) I was talking about ... what: coming to the end of it, yes. So. There it is. You asked, after all. That's the happiest moment. (*A looks to C and B, puts her hands out, takes theirs. Continued.*) When it's all done. When we stop. When we can stop.

#### END OF PLAY