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Black Widow
by Paul Thain

(Winter, 1909. A Cold Wind blows and a Church Bell tolls as Lights slowly rise on Arlington Cemetery. Led by the RECTOR, a Procession of dark & veiled MOURNERS enters and snakes its way centre-stage ...)

RECTOR I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, he shall live. Whosoever liveth and believe in me shall never die.

(The MOURNERS group around an imaginary open grave)

RECTOR Behold, I show you a Mystery ...

(To the Rector's right stands Lady CRESSIDA Arlington, thirties, and her daughter EMILY, mid-teens. Next to them is AUBREY, a retired Police Inspector, and then two ageing spinster sisters - MABEL & DOROTHY

To the Rector's left stands ISOBEL, sixties, her arthritic hands gripping a walking stick. Next is RICHARD Harker, thirties, then MRS HODGE, the Housekeeper, and finally DOCTOR Shawcross)

RECTOR We shall not all Sleep. But we shall be Changed.

EMILY ... into what ? Changed into what ?

CRESSIDA Quiet.

RECTOR For the Trumpet shall sound, and the Dead shall be raised. Man that is born of Woman hath but a short time to live and is full of Misery. He cometh up, and is cut down like a Flower. For in the midst of Life, we are in Death.

(CRESSIDA steps forward, takes a handful of imaginary earth)

RECTOR We therefore commit his body to the ground. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes ...

(CRESSIDA releases earth into the Grave)

RECTOR ... dust to dust.

CRESSIDA Emily.

(EMILY is staring into the Grave, her fist closed tight)

RECTOR In the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection

CRESSIDA Emily, please.

RECTOR Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

MOURNERS Amen.

EMILY Will this happen to me ?

ISOBEL For heaven's sake !

EMILY Will it, Mama ? Will it happen to me ?

ISOBEL Questions, questions, even now.

CRESSIDA Isobel, you are not being helpful. (to Emily) Please, you promised. You promised.

(EMILY releases her earth. CRESSIDA ushers her further downstage

The MOURNERS repeat the ritual, then formally line up to offer condolences. Dr SHAWCROSS takes the Widow's hand)

DOCTOR My dear Cressida. what can I say ? Poor Toby - a tragedy, no other word, a terrible, terrible tragedy.

(Mrs HODGE rushes up, bobs a curtsy, fighting back her tears)

MRS HODGE Oh, ma'am ... all his life. I knew him all his life.

DOCTOR Never forget (smoothing her hand) if there's anything I can do, anything at all ...

MRS HODGE It seems like only yesterday we was - I'm sorry, ma'am, I can't help it.

CRESSIDA (rescuing her hand) Thank you, Doctor. Hadn't you better be getting back, Mrs Hodge?

MRS HODGE (bobbing) Of course, ma'am. Sorry, ma'am.
(MRS HODGE hurries off. ISOBEL begins to approach, escorted by RICHARD, painfully picking their way with her stick ...)

ISOBEL You seem to have made an excellent recovery ?

RICHARD Yes, I'm much better, your Ladyship.

ISOBEL With Toby being somewhat older, I suppose he-
(She pauses, rests on her stick)

ISOBEL Don't worry, sometimes I get a little breathless.
(AUBREY approaches CRESSIDA & EMILY, sighs ...)

AUBREY Dear oh dear, life can seem so cruel. At least now it's all behind you.

EMILY Will he be there yet ?

AUBREY ... beg pardon ?

EMILY Papa. Will he be in Heaven now ?

AUBREY I dare say. Having a good old chin-wag, I shouldn't wonder. Don't you think, Cressida?

CRESSIDA Yes, I expect so.

EMILY But only if he's judged worthy, only if God finds him worthy.

CRESSIDA Emily ...

EMILY Isn't that right, Uncle Aubrey ?

AUBREY Your father was the most righteous of men, I'm sure God -

EMILY Otherwise he'll burn in Hell, he'll be sent to Hell and burn for all eternity. That's what happens to the wicked, to the sinful. That's why we must always be good.

CRESSIDA Emily Arlington, that is quite enough.

EMILY Yes, Mama.

(RICHARD approaches with ISOBEL.
He nods, stands awkward, fumbling his hat)

RICHARD Your Ladyship.

CRESSIDA Mr Harker.

RICHARD I don't quite know what to say.

CRESSIDA Then perhaps it's best you say nothing.

RICHARD I wasn't even sure I should come.

CRESSIDA My husband considered you a friend, Mr Harker.

RICHARD What I meant was -

CRESSIDA I know what you meant. No-one blames you, least of all me, please don't torment yourself. Toby wouldn't want that.

RICHARD No. No, he wouldn't.

(ISOBEL shivers against the cold)

ISOBEL It's no use, the blood's too thin. Mr Harker - would you be so kind as to see me to my carriage ?

RICHARD Of course, your Ladyship.

(As he leads ISOBEL off-stage ...)

AUBREY Poor fellow, must be dreadful.

(DOROTHY & MABEL bustle up)

MABEL You don't remember us, do you ?

AUBREY (escaping) See you back at the house, Cressida.

MABEL Mabel and Dorothy. I'm Mabel ...

DOROTHY ... and I'm Dorothy.

MABEL We're cousins ...

DOROTHY Cousins of Toby.

MABEL Twice removed. From Bridlington.

DOROTHY Bridlington.

MABEL You came to Sunday tea seven years ago.

DOROTHY August, late August.

MABEL Only it rained and the Summer house leaked. Uncle George was there.

DOROTHY You must remember Uncle George?

MABEL No matter, my dear, I'm sure it'll come back. And this must be Emily? My, my ... how she's grown.

DOROTHY Hasn't she grown?

MABEL Quite the young lady, and how are you, my dear?

DOROTHY Yes, how are you ?

EMILY We 've just buried Father. How do you suppose I am ?

DOROTHY ... oh ...

CRESSIDA Emily !

EMILY Well really, Mama - what a silly question.

DOROTHY What I meant, what we meant, that is to say-

MABEL Do be quiet, Dorothy. Well said, Emily. Plain speaking and plain living, these are Arlington virtues, are they not ?
(Distant thunder. CRESSIDA raises her eyes to the darkening sky)

MABEL Wouldn't you agree, Cressida ?

CRESSIDA It's going to rain.

MABEL Poor dear, you look exhausted.

CRESSIDA It's been a difficult time.

MABEL You must be brave.

DOROTHY Oh yes,...yes, do be brave, you must be brave.

MABEL You won't always feel like this.

DOROTHY Oh no, not at all. Time, time can be a great -

CRESSIDA You're both very kind, but I think I should like to be alone now.

MABEL Of course, my dear. Dorothy ! And you Emily ...

CRESSIDA moves upstage as MABEL ushers them off

MABEL Now, now - come along. Mama needs to be alone with her grief.
(CRESSIDA now stands alone, head lowered, staring into the grave

The Cold Wind rises Thunder rumbles closer

Slow fade to Black

From Black, a crash and shudder of white Light, reveals ...

ISOBEL, sitting hunched in a downstage chair, muttering)

ISOBEL ... gone, all gone ... all gone, dead and gone.
(A Man laughs in the Dark

Lights slowly rise as ISOBEL looks behind and calls to her dead son)

ISOBEL Toby ? Toby ... ?
(DOCTOR Shawcross laughs again ...

The SHADOWY FIGURES upstage assume the identity of the MOURNERS

MRS HODGE weaves between them, serving sherry from a silver tray

EMILY approaches ISOBEL ...)

EMILY ... Gran ? Gran ... ?

ISOBEL Toby ... ?

EMILY It's me - Emily.

AUBREY ... revenge, passion, murder ...

ISOBEL I thought ... for a moment I thought ...

AUBREY ... it's all there ...

ISOBEL Your father.

AUBREY ... sure to be a roaring success.

RICHARD ... I'm sorry ?

ISOBEL I was remembering your father.

AUBREY My memoirs, dear boy. I was rather hoping you might help with a publisher ?

RICHARD Aubrey, I run a village bookshop, I stack books and I dust shelves, what possible influence - ?

AUBREY I was rather depending on you.
(MRS HODGE approaches CRESSIDA & the RECTOR, bobs)

MRS HODGE Beggin' your pardon, Ma'am. Cook wants to know how many for dinner ?

EMILY Wasn't it horrible ?

ISOBEL Horrible ?

EMILY I didn't realise it would be so horrible.

ISOBEL What's horrible ?

EMILY Being buried, being left to rot. You're old. You'll be dead soon. Doesn't it scare you?

ISOBEL ... what !

EMILY Doesn't it frighten you ?

ISOBEL Wretched girl ! There you go again !

EMILY It frightens me.

ISOBEL Why can't you think before you speak ?

EMILY But I do. Gran, I always do.

ISOBEL Get out of my sight ! Go on ... get away, get away !
(EMILY retreats, wanders between the MOURNERS eavesdropping)

MABEL And are you a married man, Doctor ?

DOCTOR A widower these past five years.

MABEL ... indeed ? I'm so sorry.

DOROTHY We're so sorry.

MABEL I'm sure there must be times when you find it very lonely?
(EMILY moves on ...)

RECTOR As recent incumbent, I didn't know your husband terribly well,
Lady Arlington, but I understand him to have been a God-fearing
man of unusual zeal and, er ... conviction ?

CRESSIDA He held strong views, Rector. And frequently expressed them.

RECTOR So I believe. But we are all united in Christ, are we not? Which
brings me to a rather important matter concerning - Oh. Hello ...

CRESSIDA Say hello to the Rector, Emily.

RECTOR Perhaps we're feeling a little shy, are we ? ... hm ?

EMILY Do you think it fitting for a man of God to drink alcohol?

RECTOR (laughing) ... oh, I say.

CRESSIDA Emily !

EMILY Papa always said you were far too liberal.

RECTOR Did he indeed ?

CRESSIDA Emily !

RECTOR No, no, please - not on my account.
(EMILY wanders away ...)

RECTOR Mind you, she's certainly her father's child.

AUBREY The Basingstoke Strangler. Now that was my true moment of glory.
I was in all the papers. Oh yes. Pictures and everything.

DOCTOR Aye well, ladies ...

AUBREY National hero, no less.

DOCTOR ... never forget, it come to us all.

MABEL (sourly) ... indeed ...

DOCTOR When your time's up, your time's up.

MABEL ... quite ...

DOCTOR None of us are immune.

DOROTHY ... none of us.

DOCTOR Yet so few are prepared.

MABEL Indeed, quite so, Doctor. But do tell - what exactly happened ?

RECTOR I was wondering therefore if we might usefully consider some kind of tribute to his memory ? The refurbishment of the organ, perhaps?

MABEL We are cousins of the deceased, Doctor Shawcross. We have travelled a great distance.

DOROTHY Yes, a great, a very great -

MABEL Surely we have a right to know ?

SHAWCROSS relents, huddles them together ...

RECTOR As I recall our greatest poet once said, and I myself entirely agree - Music ... music is -

MABEL ... poison !

DOROTHY ... poison ?

DOCTOR ... no, no - food poisoning !
(A sudden lull - all eyes turn to SHAWCROSS)

DOCTOR Corned beef, a corned beef -
(SHAWCROSS discovers he's at the centre of the sudden silence. He smiles woodenly. Conversation politely continues ...)

RECTOR ... suitably inscribed, of course. Nothing vulgar, ostentatious. Something plain and simple. A tasteful brass plaque, perhaps - " In loving memory of a dear, departed - "
(CRESSIDA laughs sadly)

CRESSIDA Forgive me ... my ... my husband rarely approved of music.
RECTOR What ? Not even in Church ?
CRESSIDA He'd have considered an organ far too frivolous.
RECTOR ... frivolous ?
CRESSIDA (leaving) Will you excuse me ?
MABEL (whispering) ... corned beef ?
DOCTOR ... a sandwich ... a corned beef sandwich.
(SHAWCROSS chews with relish as
MABEL & DOROTHY scrutinise their
sandwiches)

MABEL ... good gracious ...
DOROTHY ... how awful ...
(Seeing CRESSIDA, they smile and
bravely eat. RICHARD escapes
AUBREY)

RICHARD Will you excuse me ...
(Before he can reach CRESSIDA he's confronted by MABEL &
DOROTHY

MABEL We understand you're the gentleman who poisoned cousin Toby ?
DOROTHY ... poisoned cousin Toby.
RICHARD Well, I ... I wouldn't quite put it like that.
MABEL We hoped you might tell us about the Inquest.
DOROTHY Oh yes, the Inquest. If it's not -
MABEL If it's not too painful.
RICHARD I'm sorry ladies, but I'd really rather -
MABEL Young man, we have travelled all the way from Bridlington.
DOROTHY ... Bridlington.
MABEL A considerable distance.
RICHARD Yes, well - I do hope you have a pleasant journey back. Now if
you'll please excuse me, I should like to-

RICHARD Well, there are bound to be changes, and I'm sure once your mother-

EMILY Everything changes. Everything dies. Don't you think that's cruel ?

RICHARD It's not cruel, Emily, it's just life. It's the price we pay.

EMILY Papa died like a dog. Why does God allow such things ? All-seeing, all-powerful - yet He does nothing ? That seems very cruel to me, Mr Harker.

(CRESSIDA approaches ...)

CRESSIDA Have you tried the chocolate cake ? It's delicious. Emily?

EMILY Why were you laughing ?

CRESSIDA Laughing ? Was I ?

EMILY You were laughing. I saw you. Have you no respect?

RICHARD Now listen here, young lady, that's no way to -

CRESSIDA I'll deal with this, Mr Harker. Darling, what is it ? You're being -

EMILY Don't touch me !

CRESSIDA I'm only trying to -

EMILY (standing) Leave me alone ! Leave me alone! Hypocrites!
(All eyes turn to EMILY. She points accusingly ...)

EMILY Hypocrites! All of you! Sinners!
(She bolts off-stage, screaming ...)

EMILY Sinners! Sinners and hypocrites!
(Pause)

CRESSIDA I'm ... I'm so sorry.
(Blackout)

Distant Thunder as a pale pool of Light slowly rises on ...

... EMILY, squatting on the Library floor, nursing a long-loved Rag Doll and sadly singing ...)

EMILY
Row, row, row the boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream
Row, row, row the boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily -

CRESSIDA
(off) Emily ... Emily ...
(Still lost in her private world, EMILY echoes tunefully ...)

EMILY
... emily, emily ... merrily, merrily ...

CRESSIDA
(closer) Emily ...
(She suddenly looks round, panics, protectively grips her Doll)

EMILY
... punished ... I'll be punished ... no, no, please, no - hide, hide ... we must hide.

(She scrambles into the upstage Shadows.

CRESSIDA
enters ...)

CRESSIDA
Emily ... ?
(More Thunder. CRESSIDA enters a little further, suddenly turns and sees ...
... RICHARD)

CRESSIDA
Oh, it's you. You gave me such a -

RICHARD
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle. (pause) That was quite an outburst.

CRESSIDA She's upset, she's been very upset. It's perfectly normal.

RICHARD Of course. Of course it is. And what of you ? You seem to be coping remarkably well.

CRESSIDA Am I ? Heaven knows how. I feel as if I'm living in a dream. Nothing seems real. I just watch myself do things. It's the strangest feeling.

RICHARD You'll be fine.
(A sudden gush of emotion -
RICHARD holds and comforts her ...)

CRESSIDA I still can't believe it. He's dead. Richard, he's dead. The fat old pig's dead. Lock the door.

RICHARD Cressida ...

CRESSIDA Lock the door.

RICHARD We can't, not today.

CRESSIDA Today is the happiest day of my life. Now lock the door.
(Pause. RICHARD smiles)

RICHARD You're incorrigible.

CRESSIDA Isn't that what you like, hm ? Isn't it ?
(Kissing him as he turns and locks the door)

CRESSIDA ... love you, love you, love you ...
(EMILY edges into the half-light,
observes ...)

CRESSIDA Come into my parlour said the spider to the fly. Well, my darling demon? Will you come?

RICHARD Cressida ...

CRESSIDA Will you come in my parlour?
(As he kisses her, she gently pulls him
to the floor ...)

CRESSIDA

... that's better ... much better ...

(More Thunder and shuddering Light reveals ...

... EMILY - twisting the neck of her Rag Doll as she watches her mother make love

Blackout

The Storm fades to Silence

Lights rise upstage on CRESSIDA, methodically brushing EMILY's long hair as she sits in her Rocking Chair

After a pause ...)

EMILY

Why did you marry Papa ?

(The Hairbrush pauses ...)

CRESSIDA

What a question.

EMILY

Did you love him ?

CRESSIDA

Darling, I really don't think -

EMILY

Did you ? Did you truly ? Did you really truly love him ?

CRESSIDA

Emily, please - I'm very tired.

EMILY

Papa always said the devil was beautiful.

CRESSIDA

What ?

EMILY

The devil, the darling devil.

CRESSIDA

What on earth are you talking about ?

EMILY

The seducer of Eve. He who brings sin and corruption into the world.

CRESSIDA

That's your father talking.

EMILY

Father's dead.

CRESSIDA

What I meant was -

EMILY

How did he die ?

CRESSIDA I hardly think it an appropriate -

EMILY How, Mother ? I know it was food poisoning, but how ?
(Pause)

CRESSIDA ... corned beef. Silly, isn't it ? A tin of corned beef. Your father and Mr Harker always shared sandwiches when they went fishing.

EMILY If they shared, why didn't they both die ?

CRESSIDA I don't know.

EMILY Don't you think it strange ?

CRESSIDA Strange ? Why strange ?

EMILY I think it's strange.

CRESSIDA Don't be silly.

EMILY I am not silly !

CRESSIDA What I meant, what I meant was Mr Harker's younger, and ... and healthier and - oh, for heaven's sake, I'm not a doctor.
(She fumbles the Hairbrush)

CRESSIDA Oh, that'll do. Kiss me goodnight.
Emily ... ?

EMILY (looking away) I shall pray for you.

CRESSIDA And I ... I shall pray for you.
(Fade to Black)

Mrs HODGE enters with an Oil-lamp,
aiding ISOBEL
to a downstage chair. ISOBEL now
wears a nightdress
& gown)

ISOBEL Thank you, Mrs Hodge.

MRS HODGE Shall I not be helping you to bed ?

ISOBEL Let me sit awhile.

MRS HODGE I'll get you some hot milk. A little brandy, maybe.

ISOBEL Brandy ?

MRS HODGE Just to help you sleep.

ISOBEL Very well, if you insist. But I shan't sleep tonight.

MRS HODGE Now, now - you mustn't be too hard on her.

ISOBEL Isn't that for me to judge ?

MRS HODGE Course, ma'am, certainly. Only it's such a difficult time, isn't it ?
What with her being, well, you know - half child, half woman. Not
that I'm making excuses mind, far from it, but -

ISOBEL She has disgraced us all. Is it any wonder no decent school will
have her ?

MRS HODGE Yes, ma'am, only -

ISOBEL Thank you, Mrs Hodge. You may go.

MRS HODGE (bobbing) Yes, ma'am.

(As she leaves, CRESSIDA enters ...)

CRESSIDA I've come to say goodnight.

ISOBEL Well ? Did you beat her ? I thought as much.

CRESSIDA There's been enough of that.

ISOBEL Spare the rod and spoil the child. Is that what you want?

CRESSIDA Please ... let's not quarrel.

ISOBEL That outburst was unforgivable. Toby must be turning in his grave.

CRESSIDA Isobel - she's very distressed.

ISOBEL Distressed ? What about me ? Am I not distressed ? How do you
imagine I feel ? To bury one's own child is the worst thing in the
world. Haven't I suffered enough ?

CRESSIDA I think we all have.

ISOBEL Yes. Yes, you're right. I have lost a son, but you have not only lost a
dear husband but also the father of your child. Forgive me, you
must think me very selfish.

CRESSIDA There's nothing to forgive.

ISOBEL I do so admire your fortitude.

CRESSIDA We each grieve in our own way.

(After a pause ...)

CRESSIDA I was wondering if next week you might care to play a little bridge ?

ISOBEL ... bridge ?

CRESSIDA I suppose it is rather soon. Only I know how much you enjoy it.

ISOBEL Next week, you say ?

CRESSIDA Or the week after, if you -

ISOBEL No, no. I'm sure Bridge and a cold supper wouldn't be considered too excessive. But no alcohol ... on that I insist.

CRESSIDA Agreed. I'll invite Aubrey then, shall I ?

ISOBEL Provided he doesn't prattle endlessly about his blessed book.

CRESSIDA We will of course need a fourth. Isobel...?

ISOBEL Yes, yes - I'm not deaf. What about Colonel Hutchins ?

CRESSIDA Yes. Why not ? Oh ... I do believe the Colonel's in Town all next week.

ISOBEL Really ?

CRESSIDA And the week after.

ISOBEL I don't re-call him -

CRESSIDA I'm sure he said something. What about Mr Harker?

ISOBEL ... Harker ? Have you lost all sense of propriety ? Fishing is one thing, Cressida - Bridge is quite another ! Heaven's above, his people are scarcely better than peasants. Pig farmers, I believe.

CRESSIDA Aren't you being rather stuffy ? He did go to University.

ISOBEL And where's it got him - a common bookseller !

CRESSIDA Considering his limited means, he's always perfectly presentable. And more to the point - he plays a fine hand.

ISOBEL Does he indeed ? Toby never mentioned -

CRESSIDA Toby taught him.

ISOBEL Really ?

CRESSIDA Very well by all accounts, but if you still don't think he's suitable?

ISOBEL I suppose he does have a certain vulgar charm.

CRESSIDA I'll ask him then, shall I ?

ISOBEL Doctor Shawcross - he plays doesn't he ?

CRESSIDA No ... no, I don't think so.

ISOBEL Yes, I'm sure. And I do believe he's rather good.

CRESSIDA Oh. Well if you're certain, if you're absolutely sure. That's ... that's settled then. Only...

ISOBEL ... only what ?

CRESSIDA It's really rather embarrassing. It's just ... well, sometimes ... sometimes the way he looks at me ...

ISOBEL What ? You mean - ?

CRESSIDA ... even today.

ISOBEL Today ! Has the man no shame ?

CRESSIDA Apparently not. I'll ask Mr Harker then, shall I ?

ISOBEL ... hm ?

CRESSIDA Mr Harker ... ?

ISOBEL There's really no-one else, is there ? Very well. (rising) Thank you, my dear, most thoughtful. I shall look forward to it. Help me to my bed, would you ...?

(CRESSIDA picks up the Oil-lamp and leads them off

Fade to Black

From Black, we hear ...)

AUBREY It was indeed murder most foul. Indeed it was at that moment, that very moment, as the true horror gripped my heart, that I knew...

(Lights rise on AUBREY, pacing to and fro, reciting histrionically from his manuscript. EMILY sits on a stool)

AUBREY ... knew in my bones, indeed in my very soul, that I would never, never rest until this outrageous outrage - outrageous outrage? Doesn't sound right, does it? Top-notch stuff, though, eh? Rather reminds one of Conrad, don't you think?

EMILY But why ? Why do people murder ?

AUBREY Good heavens, any number of reasons - greed, revenge, passion.

EMILY ... passion ?

AUBREY It's when, er, when we allow our emotions to be ruled by-

EMILY ... desire ? Desire of the flesh ?

AUBREY Exactly.

EMILY Lust. Adultery. Fornication ... ?

AUBREY Yes, all that ... all that type of thing.

EMILY ... like animals ... grunting and groaning like beasts of the field.

AUBREY We're all animals, Emily. Or so Mr Darwin would have us believe.

EMILY Papa says Darwin is a Son of Satan.

AUBREY That's somewhat strong. Your father always was a man of somewhat extreme - my dear girl, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to -

EMILY It's not you.

AUBREY Then what ? What is it, Emily ?

EMILY Everything. The whole world's upside-down and I don't know who to trust anymore.

AUBREY Can't you even trust me ?

EMILY He might've used a spell ...

AUBREY Who might ?

EMILY Mr Harker. He's a beast and a devil, a devil and a demon.

AUBREY Now Emily ... haven't we spoken before about-?

EMILY It's not a game, it's not. You're a detective, you should know. Isn't it obvious ? He's covered with hair, covered with hair and he grunts, he grunts, he grunts like a pig.

AUBREY But you've always liked him ...

EMILY He's wicked ... full of sin.

AUBREY That's your father speaking.

EMILY How can he speak if he's dead ?

AUBREY It's just an expression.

EMILY Of what ? An expression of what ?

AUBREY Never mind that. I want to know why you suddenly hate Richard ?
You must surely have a reason ?

EMILY ... can't ... can't say ...

AUBREY Can't or won't ?

EMILY I knew you wouldn't believe me.

AUBREY I don't believe you because I know it's not true.

EMILY How do you know ? How can you possibly ?

AUBREY I think I know the human character better than most. Richard's a
fine fellow, salt of the earth. I'd stake my reputation on it.

EMILY (standing) Thank you for the cocoa.

AUBREY Don't you want any cake ? I bought it specially.

EMILY I liked your book.

AUBREY You did ?

EMILY It was very interesting.

AUBREY Splendid ! Tricky stuff this authoring business, particularly
autobiography. Living one's whole life again, all the good and all
the bad. Especially the bad. Dear oh dear, yes, indeed ... makes one
rather, what's the word ?

EMILY May I borrow it ?

AUBREY ... hm ?

EMILY Your book ?

AUBREY Oh. Well, I've only the one copy. But when it's published, I promise
you'll be among the first -

EMILY Then may I borrow another ?

AUBREY What kind ? An adventure, perhaps ? Jules Verne?

EMILY The same as yours. A book about murder. I know you have lots and
lots.

AUBREY Well yes, but I'm far from certain your mother would approve.

EMILY Please.

AUBREY Unless, of course ... He goes upstage, gets a distinctive, slim
leather-bound volume

AUBREY ... unless you want the very best ? Hm ? La creme de la creme, so to
speak. There we are. I think you'll find this fits the bill. Take it ... a

little present.

(Kissing his cheek ...)

EMILY Thank you.

AUBREY ... I'll get your cloak.

(AUBREY exits.

EMILY begins to read and Lights change as the Book begins to cast its spell - she becomes progressively captivated, circling her way upstage, and finally sitting in her Rocking Chair

The Chair rocks and the Cold Wind rises. EMILY lowers the Book, ponders)

EMILY ... a month, a little month ?

(She considers this, returns to her Book. Lights begin to change when CRESSIDA enters

Now free of funereal black, she hums a sweet song, showing off a new evening dress)

CRESSIDA Well ? Do you like it ? Emily ... ?

EMILY A beast that wants discourse of reason would have mourned longer.

CRESSIDA What ? What did you say ?

EMILY ... wormwood ...

CRESSIDA Don't you like it ?

EMILY Widow Wormwood.

CRESSIDA Emily ... ?

EMILY Emily's gone. Emily's dead.

CRESSIDA Dead ? Whatever do you mean, dead ?

(The Cold Wind disappears)

EMILY It's because he's coming, isn't it ?

CRESSIDA Who ? Mr Harker ?

EMILY That's why you're so happy.

CRESSIDA It'll be nice to see him of course, but he was always your father's friend, not mine. What are you reading ? May I see?
(EMILY contorts her body, protecting her Book)

CRESSIDA Emily - I should like to see your book.
(EMILY complies. CRESSIDA opens it, smiles ...)

CRESSIDA Ah - Shakespeare ... very good. There now. Was that so terribly difficult (returning it) You see - there's no need to be so secretive.

EMILY It's because he's coming, isn't it ?

CRESSIDA Who ? You mean Mr Harker ?

EMILY Can't you see ? He's put a spell on you.

CRESSIDA ... a spell ?

EMILY You're bewitched.

CRESSIDA (amused) Am I indeed ? Well, what if I am ?

EMILY You admit it ?

CRESSIDA I like him well enough. I rather thought you did too ... ?

EMILY I hate him.

CRESSIDA Don't be silly.

EMILY I am not being silly ! Repent ! Mother, you must repent !

CRESSIDA ... what ?

EMILY Confess yourself to Heaven, repent what's past or you'll burn in hell! You'll burn in hell for all -

CRESSIDA Emily ...

EMILY Your soul is in mortal danger !

CRESSIDA I won't ... I won't have you spoiling things, I won't.

EMILY Pray, mother, pray. Pray God will -
(Cressida slaps her face.

She stands stunned and full of

remorse ...

Blackout

A Carriage Clock tinkles Seven - Lights
rise on Richard as Mrs Hodge enters)

RICHARD Any chance of a drop of Scotch, Mrs Hodge ?

MRS HODGE 'Fraid not, sir. Lady Isobel doesn't think it proper.

RICHARD ... oh ...

MRS HODGE I could get you a cup of tea ?

RICHARD No ... no, thank you.

MRS HODGE Glass of hot milk ? That'll warm you.

RICHARD Not quite the same, is it ?

MRS HODGE I wouldn't know, sir.

(Cressida enters ...)

CRESSIDA Richard ...

RICHARD My, my ... what a boobydazzler !

CRESSIDA You don't think it's too - ?

RICHARD You're a sight for sore eyes, believe me.

CRESSIDA Thank you.

(Pause - Mrs Hodge arranges Chairs ...)

RICHARD So, er ... so how are you keeping ?

CRESSIDA Fine. I'm fine. And you ?

RICHARD Oh, not so bad. Busy. Keeping busy.

CRESSIDA Mrs Hodge ... ?

MRS HODGE Yes, ma'am ?

CRESSIDA There are some fresh playing cards on my dressing table. Would
you kindly fetch them?

MRS HODGE ... yes, ma'am ...

(Mrs Hodge leaves)

RICHARD What's wrong ? Something's wrong ...

CRESSIDA Nothing's wrong.

RICHARD Cressida ...

CRESSIDA Emily's being difficult, that's all.

RICHARD Nothing else ?

CRESSIDA No.

RICHARD You're sure ?

CRESSIDA Everything's fine ... relax.

RICHARD ... relax ? I've hardly slept a wink. And when I do finally get off, all I dream of is dummies and no-trumps and -

CRESSIDA You mean you don't dream of me ?

RICHARD I'm glad you find it so amusing. Whatever possessed you ? Couldn't you have suggested Whist or ... or poker or something ?

CRESSIDA Courage, mon brave.

RICHARD For heaven's sake, woman - you can't learn Bridge just from a book.

CRESSIDA You can do anything. Now shush and let me look at you ... oh, yes, very elegant, very - distinguished. Every inch the gentleman. In fact, quite the aristocrat.

RICHARD Just because I ape my betters, doesn't mean I approve of them.

CRESSIDA (kissing him) But you do approve of me ?

RICHARD Does the fly approve of the spider ?

CRESSIDA Aren't we the clever one ? Next time I shall wrap you in my web and gobble you up ... gobble, gobble, gobble. Would you like that ? Hm ? Would you like - ?

RICHARD ... careful !

(The door opens and Isobel enters.
Richard goes to her ...)

RICHARD Lady Isobel ... how very kind of you to -

AUBREY ... hm ? Oh, yes - sorry. Anyway, there I was, musing away, when I noticed something decidedly strange. I know moonlight plays tricks, but it seemed as if it were floating ...

CRESSIDA You mean, the doll ... the doll was - ?

AUBREY Yes - floating. Or so it seemed. However, on closer inspection, I discovered it nailed to a tree ...

ISOBEL ... nailed ?

AUBREY Look - you can still see the hole ... right through the heart.

RICHARD I don't think we need an autopsy, Aubrey.

CRESSIDA I expect it's just another of her games.

ISOBEL What kind of game is that ?

CRESSIDA It's a doll, it's only a doll.

(Mrs Hodge enters - places Cards on the Table ...)

MRS HODGE ... the cards, ma'am.

CRESSIDA Thank you.

AUBREY Thought it rather symbolic myself, death of childhood and all that, what Freud might have -

ISOBEL Freud be damned ! Your grandfather may have been a monkey but mine certainly wasn't !

AUBREY I think you mean Darwin.

ISOBEL Do I ? Well they're as bad as each other - one's an atheist, the other's a heathen. We shall take supper at nine.

MRS HODGE Very good, ma'am.

ISOBEL And throw that thing on the fire.

MRS HODGE She loves that doll, ma'am.

CRESSIDA Mrs Hodge - I asked you to burn it.

MRS HODGE Very well, ma'am.

ISOBEL Shall we cut for partners ?

(Mrs Hodge complies)

ISOBEL You and I, Richard. Splendid ! Cressida tells me you're something of an expert ?

RICHARD Oh, I wouldn't quite -

ISOBEL Now, now, don't be modest. It flatters a woman, but ill becomes a man. Shall we get on ?

(Cross Fade to ...

... Emily, sits in her Rocking Chair, reading. A clock ticks....)

EMILY ... remember, remember, must I remember ? Why, she would hang on him ... hang on him ...

(A Cold Wind rises ...)

EMILY Aye, old mole ... canst thou hear me ?

(The Clock suddenly stops ticking. Then ...

... a Man sobs - at first almost imperceptible, but quickly rising to evoke a surreal and profound sadness ...)

EMILY ... Poppa ? Poppa ... ?

(The Cold Wind swells ...)

VOICE I am thy father's spirit.

EMILY Poppa ...

VOICE Revenge. Revenge this most foul and unnatural murder. Revenge thy father ...

EMILY Poppa ...

VOICE ... remember me ... remember me ...

(The Voice fades and the Clock begins to tick. Emily echoes ...)

EMILY ... remember me, remember me ...

(The Wind dissipates into laughter from the Bridge game below ...)

AUBREY ... how to tell the good from the bad, they certainly seemed respectable, but I knew ...

RICHARD Two hearts.

AUBREY ... knew beyond the slightest doubt ...

CRESSIDA Two spades.

AUBREY ... that one of them was a murderer, a mean and squalid soul - cold, ruthless, calculating, capable of any -

ISOBEL For heaven's sake - do you mind ?

AUBREY ... hm ? What ?

ISOBEL I am finding your constant preoccupation with murder and all things gruesome extremely distracting. Three hearts.

AUBREY You did ask ...

ISOBEL I was merely being polite - I did not anticipate a twenty minute lecture.

AUBREY Suppose I do go on. Comes with living on one's own. Only this morning I found myself conversing with the frying pan. There I was -

ISOBEL Before you embark on yet another sea of prattle, perhaps we might trouble you for a bid?

AUBREY Three spades.

ISOBEL And high time too.

(EMILY enters ...)

CRESSIDA Emily, what are you - ?

(Cressida urgently goes to her ...)

Darling, what is it ?

EMILY I've seen Poppa. Poppa's ghost.

AUBREY ... ghost ?

EMILY My father's spirit.

ISOBEL God in heaven ...

CRESSIDA Poor darling ... it was a dream, only a -

EMILY It was real.

CRESSIDA No, no, it was -

EMILY It was Poppa. He was crying.

ISOBEL ... crying ?

EMILY ... crying and crying ...

ISOBEL You mean Toby ... Toby was actually - ?

CRESSIDA Isobel ! Darling, that must have been awful, but it was only -

ISOBEL ... my poor boy ... my poor, dear -

CRESSIDA Oh, shut up, you stupid woman ! Can't you see ? You're making her worse !

ISOBEL (rising) How dare you !

AUBREY Isobel ...

ISOBEL Never in all my days ...

AUBREY Steady on, old girl. We're all a bit -

ISOBEL How dare she speak to me like that ! I'll not have it, Aubrey, I won't!

EMILY Poppa wants revenge ...

CRESSIDA ... revenge ?

RICHARD You mean he spoke ?

EMILY He said you were a stinging serpent.

RICHARD He said what ?

EMILY He said you were horrible, horrible, most horrible.

CRESSIDA Emily !

EMILY And that soon ... soon you'll burn in Hell !

CRESSIDA There are no such things as ghosts, and I'll hear no more of these ridiculous fantasies.

EMILY He killed Poppa.

CRESSIDA Emily, please ... this is entirely unacceptable. Richard, I'm ... I'm so sorry.

AUBREY Listen to me, young lady - what happened was an accident. Yes, Emily - an accident. Don't you think the poor fellow's suffered enough ?

RICHARD Your father was my friend, I wouldn't hurt him for the -

EMILY Liar !

CRESSIDA Emily !

EMILY See how the serpent smiles !

CRESSIDA Emily Arlington - you will go to bed at once !

EMILY Don't you touch me, you whore ... whore ... filthy, filthy whore!
That's why, that's why he was crying, that's why -
(Isobel smashes down her Stick across the Table ...)

ISOBEL Not another word or God help me I'll beat this madness out of you !

CRESSIDA Don't you dare !

ISOBEL One more word and I shall have her sent to the asylum !
(Terrified, Emily covers her mouth with crossed hands)

CRESSIDA Don't say that ! Don't you ever - !

ISOBEL A whore ! She called you a whore ! Is that normal? Is that sane ?

CRESSIDA Emily - go to your room. Go to your room and stay there.

ISOBEL Aren't you going to beat her ?

CRESSIDA There'll be no more of that.
(As Emily leaves ...)

RICHARD I, er ... I think I'll take a breath of air. Anyone care to join me ?
(Blackout

The Garden - a Peacock screams in the night.)

CRESSIDA ... is it any wonder ? I could cheerfully strangle her myself. She's as twisted as her son, and that's saying something. Oh Richard, everything was going so well ...

CRESSIDA ... is it possible ? Is it possible that somehow ... somehow his spirit, his spirit has -

RICHARD A dream, it was a dream. You said yourself.

CRESSIDA She knows. Somehow she knows. And how could she possibly know from a dream ?

RICHARD Cressida - the dead are dead and the dead stay dead.

CRESSIDA You don't have to live in the damn place !

RICHARD No. And nor do you.

CRESSIDA And do what ? Take in washing ?

RICHARD We'd manage.

CRESSIDA ... manage.

RICHARD (kissing her, whispering) Come live with me and be my love and we will all the pleasures prove.

CRESSIDA ... in two dingy rooms above a bookshop ?

RICHARD Then, you leave me no choice - I shall have to live with you. I'm asking you to marry me. I see - good enough to eat, but not to wed ... ?

(She slaps his face. After a pause)

CRESSIDA I love you.

RICHARD Then marry me

(Bring up pulsing blood ...)

RICHARD what's wrong ?

(Fade up the deep and laboured
Breathing of a dying man ...)

RICHARD ... Cressida ?

ISOBEL Your affection is not at issue. My concern is your suitability. I should have known you had ambitions far above your station. Well it won't do, sir, it won't do at all.

AUBREY Now Isobel, don't you think -

ISOBEL Don't you Isobel me. I detect your hand in this, Aubrey, and don't you deny it. You have long been a valued friend but that does not give you the right to meddle. Yes, Aubrey - meddle. It's as clear as day. And as for you pair of ninnies - have you lost leave of your senses ? How dare you applaud this travesty.

MABEL Whatever do you mean ? We naturally assumed Mr Harker -

ISOBEL Harker has neither money not position.

MABEL Oh.

DOROTHY ... oh, dear ...

ISOBEL His people are pig-farmers.

MABEL Oh.

DOROTHY ... oh, dear ...

ISOBEL Precisely. He insinuates himself into the very bosom of our family and you howl your thanks like the mob at the guillotine ? Yes, Dorothy - the guillotine. You may well tremble. God gave us each a place on this Earth. Some He placed high, some He placed low and it is surely not for any of us to go against His holy Will. That is the work of the Devil. That leads to War and Pestilence.

RICHARD Where do you get such ideas ?

ISOBEL Do you deny the word of God ?

RICHARD I deny bigotry and self-interest.

ISOBEL There will be no Wedding. I forbid it.

CRESSIDA Have you quite finished ?

RICHARD I shall speak to you later.

CRESSIDA You'll speak to me now.

RICHARD Cressida, perhaps we should -

CRESSIDA No, Richard - how dare she ! Sixteen years I've lived in this house. Sixteen years living with this old dragon and her foul son. Sixteen years of sheer bloody misery

ISOBEL ... what ?

CRESSIDA And now I've had enough.

ISOBEL God forgive you !

CRESSIDA Richard is good and kind and I love him. And soon ... very soon, I shall marry him. And nothing. Nothing and no-one is going to stop me. Is that understood ? Well, that seems to have cleared the air rather.

(Off, a Dinner Gong sounds)

CRESSIDA Should any of you feel disgraced by our happiness, I suggest you leave now. If, however, you would like to be our guests for turkey and Christmas pudding, you will be most welcome. Richard ... shall we lead the way ?

(As they leave, the Guests chatter in hushed whispers. Shawcross approaches Mabel & Dorothy ...)

DOCTOR Now then - may I escort you two bonnie lassies to dinner ?

MABEL (giggling) Doctor Shawcross ... you ought to be ashamed.

DOROTHY ... ashamed ...

MABEL But, well ... the son of a pig-farmer, I really don't know. I mean one must have standards.

DOCTOR Come now ... it's Christmas.

DOROTHY Yes, Mabel - Christmas.

DOCTOR And here's me taking you for a romantic.

MABEL You did ? You do ? Well, if you ... if you really think -

DOCTOR I most certainly do. Aren't you coming through, Emily ?

(As they leave, Mabel discreetly whispers ...)

MABEL Tell me, Doctor - what exactly's wrong with her ?

DOCTOR I only wish I knew

(As the other Guests follow, Aubrey approaches Isobel ...)

AUBREY Is it really such a calamity ?

ISOBEL Go away.

AUBREY Isobel, they're in love ...

ISOBEL Don't be sentimental. The man's an upstart, and there's an end of it. But as for her ... as for her. Poor Toby ... scarcely a year, scarcely a year and all but forgotten.

AUBREY They were never happy and well you know it.

ISOBEL Happy or not, he made her a Lady - a woman of character and distinction. Or so I thought.

AUBREY These days even the best of families - damn it, woman, if he makes her happy what else matters ?

ISOBEL If only she'd given him a son, instead of that ... imbecile.

AUBREY Emily needs a father and you need to let a light into your life before it's too damn late.

ISOBEL ... what ?

AUBREY You heard. Too much religion, too little love, that's the trouble with you Arlingtons. Now come on, up you get. Let me take you to dinner

ISOBEL I'd sooner starve.

AUBREY (leaving) Sometimes you make me so angry !
(Isobel sighs)

ISOBEL ... oh dear ...
(Emily creeps up ...)

ISOBEL Oh, it's you. Been spying again, have we ? Hm ? Up to your old tricks? Mind you, dumb as you are, you were certainly right about -

EMILY Listen ...

ISOBEL Oh ... finally decided to speak have we ? Well let me tell you, young lady -

EMILY Listen. This time listen ...
(Emily whispers indistinctly ...)

