

**THE FAREWELL CONCERT
OF IRENE AND VERNON PALAZZO**

a play

by

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This version of
THE FAREWELL CONCERT OF IRENE AND VERNON PALAZZO
was developed at Carnegie Mellon's,
SHOWCASE OF NEW PLAYS

with

Rita Gardner, as Irene
and
Bill Young, as Vernon

Directed by Michael Montel

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

—no, no don't stop playing!—even though I see you want to butt in. —Well, you can't butt in— you're not able to butt in except through your playing — so pleeeeeease butt out! —stay background! Just keep playing! —Like in the old Warner Brother's films, I want wall-to-wall, fade in to fade out, music—I want underscoring throughout this whole shebang! —Yes! I want — No! — I DEMAND! —no dead spots—in this wino riff I'm on!"

On a snowy night in Bodoni County, the songwriting team of Irene and Vernon Palazzo attempt to finish their new and final song — and wait for a long-lost daughter to return. Playwright Gagliano plunges Lyricist/Faculty wife Irene Palazzo, into an over-the-edge, wine-induced. monologue of rage, of regrets, thwarted expectations, self loathing, outrageous and raunchy humor, fear, guilt and pain; a tidal wave that breaks on a series of shocking discoveries; receding, finally, to a calming flow of love and reconciliation; and all underscored throughout by original and standard songs, and by the improvisations of Irene's brilliant, unable-to-speak, composer/accompanist husband, Vernon.

Characters

Irene Palazzo

Vernon Palazzo

**Time:
The Present**

**Place:
Bodoni County, USA**

*In the Den.
A highly waxed baby Grand Piano.*

*A wine rack filled with wine bottles,
near a music stand with stool.*

*A wall-sized picture window.
Snow falling outside.*

*Vernon is playing the piano.
He will play the piano throughout.*

*Irene is sitting on the stool, sipping wine.
She is sight-reading some new music.*

IRENE

*IT HASN'T BEEN ALL HARMONY,
THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER;
OFTEN, "SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET,"
MIGHT CHANGE TO "STORMY WEATHER."*

*ALL OF THAT GAVE CONTRAST
TO THE SONGS WE HAD TO MAKE,
NOW THE MOTIFS HAVE TURNED SOMBER—
THIS ARRANGEMENT IS TOO DISSONANT TO TAKE.*

*WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?
YOUR RHYTHM IS IN MY BONES.
CAN THE MUSIC YOU STILL BRING US
TRANSPOSE OUR SOUR NOTES
TO SWEETER, GENTLER TONES?*

*PERHAPS. . .PERHAPS. . .
AH, YES, PERHAPS. . .*

That's it! I do believe that's it—that cleans it up. *And it's good!*

— / think it's a good introduction to our song;

—don't you, Vernon?

—So good, I'll drink to it.

. . . Ahhhh. There.

—My lyrics, I mean. Good. Good *enough*. — *Too good—enough*—I think—for the *Bodoni County Inn*—the good ol' BCI—*and* for their "*Farewell Concert of Irene and Vernon Palazzo*." . . . —Your music, of course—*good*, too—right on the money. Vernon Palazzo's easy melodic flow—that Italian/American thing—in the blood—the liver—the DNA—*the testicles!*—Meeeeel-ody; easy and overflowing

—always right on the money—on the Lira—*on the Euro!*

. . . And the way you play it! —the way you're *playing* it—now—even while I babble—*always* makes me melt. . . no matter how frozen I become—*have* become. . . these last years . . .

—Yes! —Those wonderful, wonderful chords that you breathe out through your fingertips; that you —*NO!* —*Like speech!* —*Speak out!* —*your* way of speaking, really. —And I consider us lucky—since you can't *actually* speak anymore, Vernon—Yes!—lucky—*blessèd*, even, I mean it!— that you *can* speak that way —through your music—through your wonderful, wonderful speech-chords; and that I know—through them—after all these years—*what* you're saying. **And so** we can continue, therefore; You and I, Vernon—to—**attempt** to —communicate tonight.

. . . Until Billie comes. . . .

And I'll drink to **that**—to communication, I mean—certainly *not* to Billie.

. . . There.

—*And* not only that!—they are chords—the magical Vernon Palazzo chords—that actually seem to accompany the snow. Did you realize that, Vernon? Seriously. I listen to you now. . . brilliantly improvising there on our new song introduction for the *Bodoni County Inn*—*the good ol' BCI*—**and** for their "*Farewell Concert of Irene and Vernon Palazzo*" —improvising there on the Steinway—our beloved, mirror-finished —went into "up-to-the-eyeballs-hock" *baby grand* Steinway—which, by the by, yours truly has always lovingly kept

Enddusted—and your chords—your touch. . .light and tinkly at the moment—
somehow are underscoring for the falling snow. They conjure up the falling
snow, somehow. Somehow *reinforce* the falling snow.

—**OH!**

—Perhaps *it*—the snow—might **stop** Billie from getting here.

—The way it's falling, the amount, I'll bet it does. . . .God. I pray it does—I'll
drink to that!—that it does—**that the snow stops our Billie from getting here
tonight! Salutè! . . .Aaaah.**

. . .—Does, though, make it all cozy in here—the snow. *And* the magic of your
speech/chords. *And* the soft lighting. The fire in the fireplace, the flickering
shadows— . . ."—Flickering shadows."

—There's a song—"flickering shadows" in the lyric.

—Damn! I can't— . . .Oh, right, Vernon. That's it:

*"JUST A SONG AT TWILIGHT,
WHEN THE LIGHTS ARE LOW,
AND THE 'FLICKERING SHADOWS' SOFTLY COME AND GO . . ."*

Right again, Mr. *"Song-Always-At-Your-Fingertips."* And thank you for playing it
straight, Vernon; not making fun of it. It's a sturdy old thing—like a lot of us.
Honest, for its time. . . .Like a lot of us.

*". . .COMES LOVE'S OLD SONG.
COMES LOVE'S OLD SWEET SONG."*

—Can you see it from there, Vernon? The snow? From the piano?

—No! don't get up! —No wasted effort!—you'll tire yourself. And no silence!

—No dead spots tonight! Please! —**Don't** stop playing!

. . .Good. —*I* will be your Weather Anchor Person —**except** that I won't *be*
anchored—I'll be moving around—all antsy; this rarely-empty wine glass in my
hand—the wine rack, close by; filled, of course—with corkscrew at the ready;
—**and I'll give you all the snow data you'll need.** —Tell you if they close the
schools—the roads—how far and fast the barometer falls—tell you when I spy

Billie materializing at the gate, walking up the path to the porch, passing the old swing on the porch— . . ."Creaker" she called it; the creaky metal swing she loved—going to rust; to sit on, she did. . .on those old ratty cushions, for hours. . . to day dream; to listen, out there, to us working in here; making our songs—she loved doing that--remember?—swinging on "Creaker," still there, on the porch. . . — ***You just keep playing!***

—breathing the music out—***speaking*** through your fingertips—now. . .while, with *my* fingertips—I decork Messieurs Merlot. Bottle number two!

. . .*There!* —And I will also try to. . .—"conjure up and reinforce?"

—*our* new song! —The new song we *will* finish tonight. —**PLAY OUR INTRO—MY WORDS, VERNON! AGAIN!**

*IT HASN'T BEEN ALL HARMONY,
THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER;
OFTEN, "SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET—"
MIGHT CHANGE TO "STORMY WEATHER."*

*ALL OF THAT GAVE CONTRAST
TO THE SONGS WE HAD TO MAKE;
NOW THE MOTIFS HAVE TURNED SOMBER,
THIS ARRANGEMENT IS TOO DISSONANT—*

CUT! . . .—**Am I** . . ."beating the musical allusions to death," do you think, Vernon? —**Which** is what our long-lost daughter, Billie, will say. . .our disappeared-ten-years-ago daughter, Billie, will say. . .Billie. . .God bless the poor child, Billie; —named after Billie Holiday, Billie—at the insistence of papa-daddy Vernon. —Who dived, Billie did, out of our lives, Billie did, ten. . . years . . .ago! —**Ten years!** would you believe!? —And who suddenly, **apparently**, resurfaces—*will*, apparently, resurface **tonight**—will **say** when she resurfaces—and of her mother Irene *in particular*—will undoubtedly say! —when Billie resurfaces and hears *it*—the song—daughter Billie—for Holiday—will say: "*you are beating the musical allusions to death, mother!—as usual.*" —**IF** she hears it—if Billie really does come home—if she talks to me at all. . .to her mother at all. . .

—and why is she coming here home, Vernon? —after ten years of only appearing as old Junior High School head shots? —On morning containers of 2% milk?—WHY? . . .

After all that: The police. The private investigators. The money. The energy it all took. The exhaustion. The leads that went nowhere. —*The guilt*—the avoidance of eye contact. . .of body contact, yours and mine. Years of it! Years of avoidance. Years of ache, these aching years! —**Who needs it—Billie coming back!?. . .**—Oh yes! *That* song. —**You need it! Don't you, Vernon? You'd like her back —playing that old song of yours:**

*I WANT HER BACK,
I WANT MY GIRL BACK.
WHY DID SHE GO AWAY?*

—Both music *and* lyrics, *if you please*, by Vernon Palazzo!

*WE OFTEN TAKE A WALK,
BICKER THROUGH OUR QUIET TALK;
BUT WHEN THE TALK ENDS, WE'RE STILL FRIENDS.*

That famous, "My daughter, Billie and I, are more than father and daughter, you know: We're friends—no! Pals!" —**Ugh!** —Well, I don't want to find out—*why* she left. And I don't want to face her. Okay? —Clear and simple—Okay? —Okay! I'm *afraid* to face *her*—to find out. Why she left. —Why she put us through— Because whatever it is, It has to be something against *me!* —Right? —Mothers and daughters! —Mothers and daughters!— Never "*pals!*"

—God! —So there'll be —what—**Accusations!** Then regrets and recriminations! —Confrontations! —**Dredging! Dredging!** —Is that why she's coming back? —To dredge up some muck? —Against me? —Against Irene?—Against her mother? —**FOR WHAT?** —Who needs it? I certainly do not! And you, recuperating "daddy-pal," certainly do not!—no matter what misguided, romantic, guilt-longings for reconciliation and redemption you— *and why did she have to leave the message with Peter?*

Why did we have to hear about it—her coming home—from a colleague of yours? From Peter? Why—? —And who told her about your throat operation, Vernon?

. . .—and *since* she knew, why didn't she show up at the hospital!? Why plan to come here? and why *this* night, Vern—?

AND WHY DO YOU HAVE A SHIT-EATING GRIN ON YOUR FACE, VERNON?! YES YOU DO. YOU HAVE IT NOW—EVEN WHILE YOU IMPROVISE ON THAT SILLY SONG—THAT, "I WANT HER BACK" SONG YOU WROTE. . .

But you've had it all evening, that grin; some shit-eating secret behind that grin — that protects you from being irritated by my constant irritations, which should irritate you right down to your irritating musical testicles—a shit-eating grin, I might add, that makes you ignore my wine-soused ravings tonight—that keeps you grinning—OR—!

. . .—is it a cover? a way to cover. . . —the pain? . . . / do that sometimes. When I have gas—grin. . . I sometimes forget you might be in pain. Still. . . I'm sorry, Vernon; if that's what you're doing; grinning, to cover the pain. . . It's tough for me, Vernon. . . when you're in pain. Always has been.

. . .—**God, he tastes good**—Messieurs Merlo—exceptional tonight. Let's see. Where's this batch from? this label?—Ah! The "Down Under" Vintage. Australian Merlot. —Australia. . . Another Continent we never got to, Vernon.

. . .—Oh, nice, Vernon--what you're playing. —That's right; I do believe you're right!

"THIS LOVELY DAY WILL LENGTHEN INTO EVENING.
WE'LL SIGH GOODBYE TO ALL WE EVER HAD.
ALONE, WHERE WE HAVE WALKED TOGETHER,
I'LL REMEMBER APRIL AND BE GLAD. . ."

Of course. You played "I'll Remember April"— and right after, someone sent us up a bottle. Australian wine, it was. — **Why** the bottle?

. . .—In appreciation, I think. —Appreciation for what? . . .

—Oh, yes! It was because you had lectured a bit that night—as was always your wont, Signore Professore. **On** why the word "lengthen" in that song was what—

quote—"made" the lyric, and—quote—"what lyric writing was all about."
 Unquote.—Arrogant music man, you—talking about lyrics—while I, as usual,
 waited—**sat**—as I so vividly recall—so ladylike, on a side chair—like a good girl
 singer of the Big Band days! —And Irene, the lyricist who, after all, had some
 ideas when it came to lyrics—kept her mouth shut. And knees together. —Well,
 you were right, of course—about the word, "lengthen"—but, what it was all about
 for me, that song, "I'll Remember April"—if you really want to know—what
 touched *me* in that song was the break:

. . . BUT I'M NOT AFRAID
 OF AUTUM AND HER SORROW,
 "CAUSE I'LL REMEMBER APRIL AND YOU."

The idea of Autumn as a woman and not being afraid of "her sorrow" and
 remembering. . .—well. . .—Imagine! We still have this bottle, Vernon—this
 exceptional Messieurs "Down Under" Merlot—smooooothe to the taste. . . Ahhh.
 There. Like licking velvet. **Or**—like, what I suspect Koala Bear cuddlyfur must
 feel like to the tongue . . .

—Well—damn it! I don't care! **What** daughter Billie—Billie for Holiday! —thinks—
will think! —I really don't!

—**About my words I mean!** —But, you can bet, daughter Billie won't be critical
 of **you**—never of her daddy-pal, even after this long period, I'll bet—*or* of daddy-
 pal's music. Oh nooooo!—no matter how long she's been away from **you**, your
music will get the accolades—I know it!

—**AND WHY IS SHE REALLY COMING HOME, VERNON!!!!????-**

—And is it the height of professionalism, our finishing the song? Or are we just
 simply crazy?! —The Bodoni County Inn "Powers-That-Be" **did** fire you, after all.
 —Oops! Sorry! "**Didn't require**" your weekend cocktail piano services any
 longer.

—And *you* certainly didn't put up a fight to retain the gig—just bowed, as is often
 your wont, to the inevitable and—**No no don't stop playing!**—**Even though I**
see you want to butt in. —Well, you can't butt in—you're not **able** to butt in,
except through your playing--so pleeeeeease butt out!—Stay background.
 Just keep playing. —Like in the old Warner Brother's films, I want wall-to-
 wall, fade-in to fade-out, music; I want "underscoring" throughout this

whole shebang!— Yes! I want— No!— I *demand!*— no dead spots— in this wino riff I'm on!

. . . Thank you, Vernon. . . Did fire you, the good ol' BCI "Powers-That-Be". . . didn't need— "*Couldn't stomach,*" is even *more* like it! — Vernon, the piano man, *now with a hole in his throat*— with a patch of gauze over the spout while he recuperates— mustn't have him around! No! Would not do to have him— "El Sicko-from-now-on," around!

. . . 'cause down the road will come the croaking frog device. . . to make piano-man Vernon . . . his witty comments between songs. . . even more grotesque.

. . . — And so what if they throw you a bone, the good ol' BCI "Powers-That-Be" — give you a final concert "*gala*" send-off to salve their consciences? — a benefit, to boot, for the big "C" cause! — and what about me? — I stay on *big deal*— am *allowed* to stay on; but only as the hostèss. "Table number 7, Jeannine. Jeannine will be your server for tonight."- — **Yesssss!** Wife Irene— Better Half Irene. — The Little Woman Irene— can stay on— but no more bone tossed to Professor-piano-man's part-time lyricist wife, to sing some of their songs at late night weekend "to-do's" oh no; and thank god and goody goody for Vernon that he's tenured at the college, so that wife Irene, hostèsssss Irene, could at least remain the "professore's wife" --THE FACULTY WIFE— the hostèss— accent on the tèsssss— at the Bodoni County Inn— oh yes goody goody and— . . .

— oh Vernon, you are incorrigible;

"Hurray and hallelujah,
you had it comin to ya';
Goody Goody for her.
Goody Goody for me.
And I hope you're satisfied
you 'baddie' you!"

— you always *could* defuse my rage with a Johnny Mercer lyric. — But play it slowly— do a variation on it— "Goody Goody"— under, as I babble. I can't bear "up tempo" tonight. — **Though** I may contradict that as my mind continues to fragment and get all wino-fuzzy. Tonight. . . Good. . . — God, you really are the

best: Changes tempos in a wink; changes keys in a blink; does my Vernon, Caro
 Vernon; does my Vernon dear. —And I will drink to that. To you. —To
 Changes! . . . Ahhhhh.

. . . —No no, Vernon--don't even think it—playing *that* song,
 indeed—

"THE DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES,
 SMILE AND RUN AWAY;
 LIKE A CHILD AT PLAY"

—you're begging me to share Messieurs Merlot with you—aren't you?— with
 that Johnny Mercer "*Wine and Roses*" lyric—*and* with those pleading eyes of
 yours. —And keep your fingers *on* the keyboard, please.—No mock pleading
 gestures, reaching out to me that way. You know you're not allowed to drink. It
 would probably kill you—spill out of that hole in your throat—Ha! —Oh, I'm sorry,
 Vernon. Laughing that way. But the image—I don't know—I mean, I had this
 image of your slurping it in and all that Merlot, cascading red out your neck
 spout. . .

—Okay. Okay. Those puppy eyes—puppy eyes in an ol' dog—
 Tell y'a what, ol' pardNer-puppy-FER-life: I'll dip my finger in Messieurs Merlot
 and you can lick it off—my finger. A taste. At least that. —There!
 . . . Oooooooh.—No!—Unsuction my finger, sir! You know what that—! —God!
 Enough, you idiot!—Down! Down!—Back to the keyboard! —Good. Mymy but
 you *are* so good at that, Vernon.

—*Vernon!* —The very first time I made a rhyme for you—Remember?—and out
 of it came one of our first lyrics? Think back now—to the stone age?—Not
 married yet. —Doing the nasty—the "Yin and Yang" together; me and Vernon,
 the Korean soldier-boy veteran; a graduate student then, you were—Manhattan
 School of Music—while I, honor student moi—student-labored crosstown at
 Barnard College. —Bunk partners we were that night, you and I—sans trundle
 board.—On the single-sized bed, we were, for—what—our fourth or fifth yingie/
 yangie time?—With roommate Sally—"Silly" Sally in the next room—and our
 trying to keep it quiet—*and* right while your Ying was Yanging—you suddenly
 stopped and made your surprise *new* move—and I made a rhyme about it right
 on the spot: —And later it became a line in a song—built a song around that

rhyme—In that show, Off Off Off Off Off Broadway? No!—Yes!—in that 1960's store front up in Washington Heights! Our sad attempt to be "*with it.*" —What we thought Rock and Roll was all about—

. . . Yes! That's right. Oh God. Play it:

“COLOR ME BLUE;
I JUST CAME FROM SAYIN' GOODBYE TO YOU.
AN' MY HEART IS ACHIN' CAUSE YOUR SWEET FACE,
IS LUSTING NO MORE FROM MY PILLOW CASE.

“COLOR ME WHITE;
I'M SO DRAINED BECAUSE YOUR OUTTA MY SIGHT.
AN' MY MIND IS REELIN' CAUSE YOUR NOT THERE,
STRUMMIN' YOUR FINGERS NEAR MY BELLY HAIR.

“COLOR ME RED—
MY BROW IS BURNIN' AND I'D RATHER BE DEAD!

—here it comes!—the rhyme from that "yingie-yangie" time

“**NOW** WHEN I AM ALL ALONE IN MY BED,
I KEEP ON REMEMBERIN' HOW YOU GAVE *ME* HEAD—”

HA! —And when you did—that night—go down on me for the first time—and I made that rhyme, you had a laughing fit—**while** you were doing it—**but** didn't stop—ooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhh!

—HaHaahaaahaaa

—No! no laughing now. See?. . . —I've stopped laughing! Please. You, too.

—Stop, Vernon!—Laughing could hurt you.—Besides, it's—well

—grotesque; your laughing that way—body shaking to beat the band—and not making a sound.

. . . **OMyGod!** —**It just dropped in!**—what's been wanting to drop in . . . since the . . . operation. . . How will Vernon Palazzo, the music theory teacher at the college—who makes *our* living at the college—continue to teach—*that way*—in *that* condition?

—NO, VERNON, KEEP PLAYING, I SAID. UNDERSCORE! UNDERSCORE!
 UNDERSCORE *MY FEAR*—THIS MOMENT OF PURE TERROR. *FOR ME. A*
 TERROR DISCOVERY! FOR ME!—A TERROR DISCOVERY THAT JUST
 DROPPED IN!

. . .because if he can't—continue to teach. . .as brilliantly as he used to—Mr.
 "Outstanding-Teacher-Of-The-Year" and *if*, to boot, he turns off students—
repels students—**sickens** students—that way—in *that* condition—that frog-
 croaking condition. . . will that be grounds for dismissal?—YesyesIknow *tenure!*
 But they'll try any excuse now to get rid of you if— . . .omygod can the health
 insurance be dropped?. . . *then* how will we live? —**You see? You see?!** —That
 Canadian offer back when! —we'd be citizens there by now! On *their* health
 plan.

—***YOU CAN'T BE WIPED OUT FINANCIALLY FOR HEALTH REASONS IN
 CANADA, VERNON! ONLY IN THIS COUNTRY! ONLY IN THIS COUNTRY!***
 —And you turned that down! Toronto. The University—The future was **here**, you
 said. "In the good ol' U.S. of A." —Anyway—you said
 —we'd be—what was your joke? "out of the academic woods and back into the
 New York jungle in no time." "In no time!" You said—Twenty seven years ago
 you said it! "**IN NO TIME!**"—Anyway—you **said**—God, you said a lot—all **they**
 wanted, quote—"in the land of maple syrup"—you said—"was to be **us**. —USA
us, **You said!** Even *that* decision—a mistake! — and I went along with it!
 —dutifully complied —Oh God! hindsight, it's true—but— Oh, God! Sip a little
 "down-under" koala-velvet, Irene. —Don't think about all that and/or **if** the
 insurance is dropped and—**no!** You'll go crazy. —Back to work! To our "BCI"
 demise. With no bitterness. Vernon Palazzo insists on that; right, Vernon— Go
 out as professionals. Right, Vernon? With elegance and grace; —**isn't *that*
 right, Vernon?!** Vernon Palazzo: always elegant, always graceful; one of the
 reasons I married him—**And** —"Oh BCI Powers-That-Be"—**In addition**—the
 "classy" song writing team of Irene and Vernon Palazzo—medium sized fish in a
 microscopic pond— will give you a brand new final song, mixed in with their
 farewell oeuvre medley.

AND the pretty pipes of Irene Palazzo will once again sell it
 —the song! —You can count on it!
 —As Irene's pretty pipes have always sold our songs— **YESSSSSS!**

—a voice, in fact, that was on its way to conquer New York—*BEFORE*
 Commisar Vernon sentenced Irene to “Life” in the Bodoni County Gulag!
 —Well. Okay. Let me freshen Messieurs Merlot and let's get back to work. Finish
 the **whole** bloody song tonight—work work work work work work work work
 work work work work work— **While** we wait for prodigal daughter Billie —and
 keep sipping. . .There! Ahhh!
 —In a way I wish she *were* here, Billie, already—seeing her Mum and Da work
 —because they have a deadline and they have always been pro enough to meet
 their deadlines—**VERNON! FORWARD! —TO THE CHORUS! --WORK!**

"AS LONG AS BING BING MUSIC
 BONGS MY BINGY WORDS--
 IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT."

Cut!—What “BING BING” MUSIC? —“YOUR,” of course, has got to be the first
 “BING.”—Play again.

"AS LONG AS *YOUR* “BING” MUSIC. . .”

What?—What “*YOUR* BING” music? . . .Your”Nice” music? Your “Swell” music?
 —No! —Damn! You had to come up with a one note stress. Couldn’t you
 change it so that I could use two syllables? Then “LOVELY” would work. For
 that’s what I think your music—. . .What’s that your playing? . . .Oh, my. Yes.

AH, SWEET MYSTERY OF LIFE
 AT LAST I FOUND THEE. . .”

Your mother’s favorite song. . . .God, I miss that woman. I really do. She’d
 know how to deal with Billie. . . .

“LOVE’S THE ANSWER, LOVE’S THE ANSWER
 ALL ARE SEEKING. . .”

So why are you playing *that* song—and playing that same note over and. . .

“AH, SWEET MYS—’SWEET’. . .”

"SWEET"— of course.

"AS LONG AS YOUR SWEET MUSIC. . ."

Yes. Yes. "Sweet." That *is* often what your music is. Sweet. As counterpoint to my—whatever the opposite is. . . Bitter?

—Play again.

"AS LONG AS YOUR SWEET MUSIC
BONGS MY BINGY WORDS—"

Stop! *What* "BONGS" my "BINGY?" . . ."Wants" my "BINGY" words? "Seeks?"

—No no! Need to raise the emotional stakes—the word neeeeeds to—Ah!

There it is. Play!

"AS LONG AS YOUR SWEET MUSIC
NEEDS MY BINGY WORDS,
IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT."

"Needs!"—Neeeeeeds! Definitely. "Needs"what? —My "*heavy*" words?—My "*dreary*" words?—No! They sound like criticisms *of* the words—"Dreary."
—"Heavy." I want a word that will describe what my words. . .often. . .are; *truly* are. Two syllables again. Accent on the first.—No! Vernon! Please don't try to talk!—make sounds! You'll hurt yourself! —hemorrhage, perhaps, the doctor said!—bleed to death. —There—on the pad—if it's that important—and I can't get it through your speech/chords—then write it down! God knows you write faster than any human being alive—can't even keep up with your *own* swift thoughts, you write so fast--so *Write it on the pad!* . . .Ah. "Mournful!" —Yes! Mournful. Yes, you once called my lyrics. . ."Mournful." Let's try it.

"AS LONG AS YOUR SWEET MUSIC
NEEDS MY MOURNFUL WORDS,
IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT."

Cut! --Does it sing? "Mooournful." . . .I don't care! I like it! —God, you know who could have made magic with a word like that, Vernon?—a million years ago, of course?—When we were New Yorkers?—before you knocked me up

and whisked me off to banishment? —Here's who: —**Frank Sinatra!** — *He* could have made magic with a word like "*mournful*." In one of our songs. And it would have changed our lives-- "*Only the Lonely*." — *That* album.

Remember? . . . —Your cousin Nina's engagement party—that's where we first heard it!—in your Aunt Anna's house. —You invited me; the first time I met your family—a DJ—some kid in the family—with the greasy pompadour—played the recor— **and** from *that* album--"*Only The Lonely*"—remember? . . . And while that was playing, we danced so close, you said we had "siamesed our cheeks"— and we laughed—and we hummed along and you were impressed because we both loved the same song—and hummed along on pitch, together —and even harmonized together, if you please!—which really impressed you . . .and fell in love. Right then, I'd like to think.

Yes. That's the one—as only my Vernon can play it:

"IT'S A LONESOME OLD TOWN,
WHEN YOU'RE NOT AROUND;
I'M LONELY AS I CAN BE."

The way Sinatra phrased those words: "lonesome." "Lonely." Two words; but the simple depths of pain that that then genius colored in. . .

"I NEVER KNEW HOW MUCH I MISSED YOU
BUT NOW I CAN PLAINLY SEE . . ."

Like a dirge, that song. And you really couldn't "dance" to it. Just move—sway —to it. Together. So. . .siamesed like that, cheek to cheek, we swayed and fell in love. . . .Yes, I raise Messieurs Merlot to you, Frank! and sip-sip same . . . —Imagine, Vernon . . .changed our lives if Sinatra—someone like him—had—in New York—we never would have left and— NO!—No more of that! Work work work work work work work—: **GOOD! Yes, Vernon! From there!**

"AS LONG AS YOUR SWEET MUSIC
NEEDS MY MOURNFUL WORDS,
IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT.

"IF MY WORDS BRING SAD SAD THOUGHTS

“AND YES, SOME ANGUISH, TOO;
IT’S ALL RIGHT. IT’S ALL RIGHT.
YOUR SIMPLE SHIFT TO A MAJOR KEY,
CAN MAKE ME GRIN. . .CAN MAKE ME LAUGH. . .”

Look at that, Vernon! Only a few more lyric holes to plug and—

—**Oh My God! The Phone! Yes, Vernon, stop playing. What-a-we-do?! What-a-we-do!?** It must be her. **Billie!**—Should we pull the wire?—God, it's insistent!. . .—You answer it, Vernon! —***Croak into it!***—Frustrate your daughter so that she hangs up and understands and leaves us alone —**NO NO! Don't get up, move here to the phone—I know you can't!** —**Oh, God!**—**Hello!**—Hello.

. . .Jen, hello. —Vernon, it's my sister Jennifer. —Yes, Jen, Vernon is right here. . . He's coming along. We're working, in fact and— you sound—Is something wrong? —**How's mother?** . . .Good. But Aunt Katherine—what? . . . —Vernon, Aunt Katherine—at the Nursing Home?—Her newest bit: Took her excrement from the toilet bowl and put it into the sink. . .—What, Jen?—**BILLIE!?**

. . .Vernon, Billie called my sister Jennifer. . . Wanted to know how her Grandmother was?. . .Yes, that's right, Jen. She *is* back. Apparently. —I know. A shock. For us, too. In fact, we're waiting for her—her call and I thought *you* were— . . .Good idea. Leave the line clear. Yes. Yes. I'll call you back.—I know. A shock. —Kiss Mother. Tell her I love her. I'll call later—No! —tomorrow. I'll call tomorrow. —Bye.

. . .Jesus! Aunt Katherine!—and my 70-year-old sister, Jennifer, having to take care of my 95-year-old mother! —And Billie called. Asking after her grandmother. —The Nurse in her, in Billie. Remember how Billie always wanted to be a Nurse. Ridiculous! With her talents. —Shocked Jennifer—speechless—after all these years, to talk—You bet Jen was speechless!—As I will be if I confront her—Billy—Oh, God, Vernon—it's all too much and—! —Yes. Reight. —Back to work! Maybe that—maybe work work work work work work will—OH GOD! my mind's idling like a cold engine—god god—**God!** Edgy! Edgy! Out of sorts—Ah! There's an idea for a lyric. "*Out of Sorts.*" —And Johnny Mercer always said that that was the toughest part of a lyric; finding a

title. —Look at this, Vernon; after all this time—and in the midst of an inner panic—I still have the impulse to—NO!—I'm pressured to—work—to jot down lyric ideas—titles—in this notebook; the same notebook I've used for years and

—**OH!—THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE!**—moving toward the h—!. . .It's Billie, I'll bet! and—!. . . No. —Shadow of something—a branch? In the snow? —Not quite as heavy as before, Vernon —A dusting now—

—ohgodringring. **Oh! God! The phone again! Go ahead! —Ring off the hook, Billie! It's you, now, Billie! I know it's you this time and your father has stopped playing and his shit-eating grin has disappeared again like when sister Jennifer called before; but this time *it will be you* and you'll say you're on your way, Billie, and I haven't yet told Vernon—have *never* told your father what happened —AND I KNOW WHAT HAPPENED—I *DO* KNOW— and **STOPTHATRINGERINGYESIWILLPICKITUPANDTALKTOYOU!****

. . .Peter! —I thought—it was. . .Billie. . .Oh. . . .Yes. I see. I'll tell him. . . .

It was Peter, Vernon. Not daughter Billie. But Peter. Your colleague. Liaison, for some reason, in all this. He wanted me to "relay" to you that Billie will be delayed. He didn't know why. Maybe a few more hours. "But she'll be here; never fear." Actual quote, rhyme and all—and look at you, Vernon; that shit-eating grin—which you lost when the ringring came—just came back. . . .You have a secret; you and Billie and Peter, don't you? That's what that pasted-on grin is all about, isn't it? . . .Will you tell me what it is? In this cozy room—on this cozy night of snow and flickering reminiscence? Will you tell it to me through your speech/chords? —or write it down for me? On that pad? Either/or? What secret that "grin-de-merde" hides? —. . .No? You just start playing again; keep playing? Our new song?—Well, you know what I'd like, Vernon!? I'd like you to switch gears!—rather, tunes!—and play a Palazzo team oldie instead!; the one we wrote for that puppet musical! No!?!—You'll keep playing our new song! -- Then I'll sing. **IN COUNTERPOINT! OVER YOUR PLAYING!:**

“SECRETS ARE FEASTING
AND FESTERING ALL DAY,

IN A CORNER OF YOUR HEART.
 I FEEL THEM SQUEALING AND CHOMPING AWAY,
 —AND THEY'RE TEARING *ME* APART.”

—I see! You won't let me sing over your playing! You want to change the subject!—get back to work!? beyond the intro of our new song!? —Get to the chorus!? —Finish the song!? —Be “the Pros!” and screw the secrets!? —Well. Suppose I don't want to!? Suppose—***NOW***— I want to pursue, uncover, reveal the secrets!?

. . .Your answer!?

**TYPICAL!— YOU PLAY LOUDER!—DROWN ME OUT; BECAUSE
 WHENEVER HARD-HEADED VERNON; SELF CENTERED, ELEGANT AND
 GRACEFUL VERNON WANTS SOMETHING—WANTS TO AVOID
 SOMETHING, THIS IS WHAT HE DOES: OVERRIDES. . . .
 STOP! PLEASE! —NOTHING ATONAL! —LYRICAL AND DIATONIC,
 VERNON! —THAT'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN ALL ABOUT, YOU AND I! —AND
 MUST CONTINUE TO BE! —OUR LYRICAL AND DIATONIC SELVES!
 —RIGHT TO THE BITTER END!
 BUT YOU DROWN OUT! BANG! HAMMER THOSE CLUSTERS INTO
 DISSONANCE UNTIL YOU GO DEAF! —OR SHOUT YOURSELF HOARSE!
 —ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! YOU WIN, VERNON! SOFTER! PLAY SOFTER!
 —I CAN'T STAND THE POUNDING! —THE DISSONANCE! —YOU WIN!
 WE'LL TRANSCEND THE SECRETS, AND WE'LL GET BACK TO WORK!
 —Play! Play!**

“AS LONG AS THERE'S YOUR MELODY
 TO MELLOW ME,
 IT'S ALL RIGHT; IT'S ALL RIGHT.
 AS LONG AS—”

--Oh God! —Ringring again! —Peter again? *Yes!* And he'll tell me that Billie's *not* coming. Ever. Yes. Then secrets can stay secret forever.
 —Sip-sip/gulp-gulp. . .than pick up phone.

— . . .Hello. . .Yes. This *is* Irene. . .can you, Billie? You can still recognize my voice? That's. . . nice. —The snow?. . .I see. . .But you *will* come—*are* still coming. We *can* depend on that. . .—And you're bringing the—what—Hello? What?—I didn't get—! . . .

. . .Short and sweet. . .I didn't understand the last part. A "dopel—" a "dopel"— something. "Tell daddy I'm bringing the "dopel — " something. . .she still calls you daddy, me, Irene. And I was wrong; she did deign to talk to me. . . —Oh God, I can't breathe. . .—Listen, Vernon, Billie really is coming. The snow is falling, but she's coming. Her car is all-wheel drive, she said. Nothing will stop her. —**Vernon!** No more stalling— I can't. Not even work can —not now. *Not anymore maybe.* I must face Billie—then *you*; when you find out —about *it*. . . No way out now, no way out. . . . Okay. Okay. Listen, Vernon—
 . . .Give me a flourish! . . .—Yes!

—**COURTROOM SCENE.**—Grand Jury, actually. —Oh, yes! I testified before a Grand Jury once —***and you never even knew.***

—How could you? Grand Jury's are secret and you were away—on that sabbatical research tour—for the book you needed to write—for tenure.—With that graduate Teaching Assistant, "Ms Research Bimbo," you took with you.
 —No! don't stop playing!—No need to deal with that!—I knew it was going on—I was glad it was going on—I know you needed—and, anyway, it freed *me* from having to—**PLEASE—PLAY AGAIN!**—**I tell you it didn't matter—it *doesn't* matter; I'm sorry it spilled out. It was Billie—only Billie that mattered then —*that I was living through!* Play! Play!**

"Yes! —gentlemen and ladyhumans of this grand jury investigation! I *have* been drinking—*but* I am lucid—*and* articulate; god knows! I'm *always* articulate!— Well, I *was* Summa Cum Laude, after all; English Lit.—with a minor in music! — But look—I don't know—for some crazy reason Bodoni County has this famous camp—you all know it—the *Performing Arts Camp*—the damn thing is even mentioned in the back of the New York Times Sunday magazine—and the director of it—he's *known* in the business, it seem—has *contacts*, he says—can maybe *send on* the gifted ones to New York—to Hollywood—to London—to

Tokyo—to fame!—to *CELEBRITY!!!* And *CELEBRITY* is sainthood, royalty, riches—*right?!* you all know that. With *celebrity* the world is yours and insures *your getting out!* Might even get you out of this armpit—this 'Cul-De-Sac'—called Bodoni County!

—so he summons me to the bodoni county inn and he's a charmer a cultured boyish sandyhaired man who talks of billie billie the beauty billie with the sexy prone to crack voice who stays stage vivid with her bible black hair and black onyx eyes the size of compact discs and pert c cups and ample thighs and about how the sway of her tush turns every man to mush and he laughs because he knows that mushtush is not a true rhyme and even apologizes for that rhyme impaired ineptitude to billie's lyricist mum sipping vino across the table from him and all the mum really wants to ask him anyway is if he keeps his kiwi clean no cheese please in his prepuce if he has one and does he use a condom and if he's tested plague positive or plague negative but I don't just merely think all that and he mostly talks on and drinks a couple of martini's and looks me deep in the eyes and tells me how he wants permission to take billie along with his other elite female students and how he now wants to take them on a weekend retreat to prime them for bigger things and even recites a lyric he's made up to impress me regarding billie specifically that goes and i will never forget

“priming billie for primo gigs
is the thing we all want for billie
mixing fame with sweet cream and figs
is the thing we all want for billie”

and he keeps droning on about bringing the retreated camp lovelies eventually to the big apple his own special showbiz showcase for all his special agent producer television and movie mogul contacts at his own expense and says of course the retreat here with the girls is necessary essential pivotal as a spiritual as well as an ensemble thing a family thing to have the girls stand out from all the other tushmush girls and all this mother wants to know is if when nude his feet and crotch smell and how hairy he is especially his chest shoulders and ass but I don't and he keeps talking talking talking on about billie's natural talents never hiding her own vulnerability and all this is true and i'm impressed

that he's impressed and then he tells me that i must sign something because i must understand that there are exercises and such that get the beauties to open to the very soul their centers of pain that artists must reveal and he must be protected and free to use these digdeep techniques that always work for him and all i can think of is if he'll expect my billie to swallow him and what happens if my billie gags but i only think that and voice my concern about her age and he says that sixteen is the magical age the wondrous age the translucent age the what he calls the onthecusp age when fathers still see their little girls as girls yet see too the woman on the way and think bad thoughts about it and so it is a dangerous age and that bit of danger gives sweet sixteen an edge he says but i keep voicing my concerns and he tells me that he knows all about me all about the hopes and expectations and regrets and dreams unfulfilled but now he says there's a chance for billie to break free and by the by maybe make a career that will drag the mum with billie to the top and im drinking the wine real good of course and he's hit a nerve and all i want to do is scream and or cry and i begin to fantasize that maybe he'll want me instead he knows so much about the way of the world the showbizworld today and maybe get me hungry again leave billie alone and i come on to him i guess send out vibes i think and he starts to laugh it's so pitiful i'm so pitiful and i know it's the sweet sixteens that he must prime and he tells me gently that i mustn't be jealous of my daughter that her inherited beauty and gifts are as much a reflection of my beauty and talent and he tells me without telling me if you know what i mean that it's up to me to deliver my daughter in return for a career

so then i meet with billie and try to tell her without telling her if you know what i mean and she tells me she doesn't really like the man or the school or the showbiz much that of course and really she did it for me went to that school for me and did enjoy the process but never the results and i lose it break down oh i don't know somehow it all comes crashing down what my life is and what it was what the celebrity expectations had been bb before banishment and i cry and she has pity tells me she's sorry but that the only show biz thing she does love is when daddy/pal and Irene make songs together but i keep crying and tell her that that's not enough that there must be more for billie besides eavesdropping on the going nowhere creations of her loser parents and she sees how distraught i am and says okay okay she'll at least talk to him for my sake but she doubts she'll want to go further than that will turn down the retreat she's

sure and i say fair enough and talk to her about condoms and the plague again because it's on my mind and I don't know what i think or what i'm thinking or even if all of this is real or if i've had that talk with him at all and can't remember if i signed anything or if i even had that meeting with billie and anyway if i did and she's having a meeting with him a conference first well i had conferences with my teachers when i was a student so conferences with teachers are normal things

and then I come home one night the night i return from driving my vernon to the airport for his extended sabbatical and i sense immediately that something is wrong that there's some bad thing in the air in the house and i immediately go to billie's room and her door is open and there are no lights on in the house and the moon is full and the night is clear and the moonlight falls on billie lying on her bed but i can't make out her features and i stand at the foot of her bed and say nothing don't even breathe and finally she says to me she says he said you signed something and gave him the permission and mother instead of talking about condoms and the pill and the plague only why didn't you make me lubricate my rectum too when you sent me to him

and I become a mad woman then and run to him to his house from there and pound and scream on his door and through it he says i did indeed sign what he wanted me to sign and yes he knew that she was underage but think what happens if you go public you and all the other mothers think of what that does to you all and i discover that he has indeed had private conferences with many other girls and all the other mothers give permission too because they now expect reflected celebrity to be their way out too and too are sick and frightened and want to let the world know but fear the scandal more and vote to keep it all hush hush but I don't I can't I blow the whistle and here gentlemen and ladyhumans we are in closed grand jury session and i realize that when vernon returns he'll find out and when indictments are issued the whole of bodoni county and aaaaaall the husbands will find out and what's that oh he didn't think I'd have the guts to and the scumbag killed himself good case closed records sealed

. . .Except in my heart. And deep in the marrow of my soul. And in Billie's eyes; those now old woman's eyes that I can't escape; but finally do avoid.

And when you, Vernon, get back from your research trip you know that something's strange, all wrong, all changed; but Billie says nothing and I say nothing. We have a pact, though we never signed one. . . and then one day Billie disappears, and—You've stopped playing, Vernon. . . .Shocked? . . .You don't look shocked. Why is that?

—Ah. You're finally writing—the speed writing champ of the world is finally writing on the pad.

. . . "I know all this."

. . . How do you know? Who told you?—Yes; write. Write!

. . . "Billie told. She *did* visit me— the hospital."

RINGRING! There's that ringring again!

Yes? . . .Billie. . .When?. . .And you'll bring—? Okay. Twenty minutes?—a half hour—no more? . . .I see. But, listen—I didn't know you had come to the hospital. Why didn't you let me—. . ."

Hung up. . . .She'll be here soon. Very soon now. —Why didn't you tell me, Vernon—that she was coming; that you *had* seen her?—Why did you let me talk out all that? just now?—if you knew already—? Yes. **Write! Write!**

. . . " had to be sure she was coming. Tonight. Necessary for you— to get it out—get it all out--before Billie—".

—Give me that! Don't even finish writ—! How dare you let me go through all that—all *this* tonight, when you knew and—

. . .Wait. "*With* Billie," she said. Billie said, she'd be here soon with *Billie!* What did she mea—? . . .--omygod! "Doppelganger!"

What she said last time—her first phone call—"dopel"--"dopel" something—The word was "Dopelganger." Double. Doppelganger means "double." —She's bringing that . . . **THING?** —that horrible thing? —that machine? with her?—that machine we had to call by a code name? —that—God! —that suicide machine that Peter—colleague Peter told you about—that he—that lots of people, wanted —the one *you* wanted, you said, *before* the operation—and you made a joke about it—laughed and said, "I'd like one of those," you said. "In case I need it later." Code!" —that's right. "Peter said it needed to be talked about "hush-hush, *in code.*"--"Too dangerous," he said "to call it what it was." 'Billie,' " *you* said, "Let's make the code word, 'Billie.' " And you said it immediately—without thinking. And you saw the horror in me and you said, "Well, because it's an angel of mercy," you said. "Like our Billie might have become. A nurse. An angel of mercy." —Look at that! How it registered—how quickly it drops in now—that moment—and how quickly you had found the code name then. "Billie!" —But I ranted—raved and made such a scene—didn't appreciate the joke—because that is what I took it as—a joke, a *sick* joke; **and wouldn't tolerate it!** —You got off it then—let it go—and that was that. ***I thought!*** —**So what is all this?** —What does *our* Billie have to do with that—*that* "Billie?" —that Doppelganger "Billie?!" **That suicide machine!--code named—"Billie!?" —Yes! Write! Write!**

. . ."That's what our Billie *does* now. *Has* done for years. Assists. With *that* 'Billie.' "

ASSISTS!—What are you talk—? —**Billie assists with**—with that crazy doc—!—and she's coming here? —to do what? --Demonstrate? Give a demonstration to all the sickies of Academe? Have a "Billie"/Tupperware Party?— The new *abyss* model—**what?!**

. . .Oh, God, No!

—**SHE'S COMING TO ASSIST YOU! Isn't that right?** Not to see me!

forgive me!—if that is what I hoped, wanted—no —she's coming to kill you and—what's that? . . .what's this you want me to read?

. . .When did you write this?—Set this —your neat notes. . .

“OUR DAUGHTER BILLIE HAS HER OWN CELEBRITY NOW.
THE ‘BILLIE’ THAT SHE BRINGS WILL BRING ME COMFORT.
I NEED TO HAVE THAT ‘BILLIE’ AROUND;

OUR BILLIE WILL SHOW US HOW IT WORKS AND WHAT TO DO.
 I NEED TO HAVE THAT 'BILLIE' AROUND
 I NEED FOR YOU TO WANT THAT 'BILLIE,' TOO.
 ACCEPT THAT GIFT FROM BILLIE
 AND THEY'LL BOTH LIVE HERE WITH US.
 IRENE, YOUR DAUGHTER WILL FORGIVE YOU.

NononononoNO! Too much, it's too much! "A gift?!" — **YOU'RE RECOVERING! THEY GOT IT ALL!** And I will not accept, cannot accept her terms, your terms for her forgiveness. **I WILL NOT LET THAT "ASSISTOR" MURDERESS THROUGH THE DOOR--NOT EVEN UP THE PORCH STEPS —NOT ANYWHERE NEAR "CREAKER" EVEN—THEY GOT IT ALL!**

Oh. Writing again. . .What—?

. . ."Maybe not. And even if they di—"

Why did you stop writ—? What is that you're playing?. . .I don't remem—Wait! Yes. *That* song. . .

"THE BOTTOM LINE BETWEEN US,
 SAY THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SEEN US,
 IS THAT EVERYDAY THEY ENVY
 OUR QUALITY OF LIFE—"

"QUALITY OF LIFE." . . . My "mournful" words. Your truly "lovely" tune. —But—what you're playing— that's not the way the melody contin—. . .—Oh! Yes. You've jumped to the end of the first verse. . .

“. . .AND WHEN THAT QUALITY OF LIFE GOES
 FOR *THIS* MAN
 (FOR *THIS* MAN, OF *THIS* MAN AND WIFE);
 THEN SO GOES—THEN SO *ENDS*
THIS MAN'S DREAMS;
 AND SO ENDS, THEN,
THIS MAN'S LIFE.”

Ah, yes. But then it got very "Broadway." Why don't you play that part of the song?--That Broadway upbeat windup part? No? Well, I'll sing it for you.

“—AND IF THEY TRY TO MAKE US GIVE UP,
 TILL OUR LAST BREATH WE'LL LAUGH AND SAY, ‘NEVER!’ . . .
 YES, OUR QUALITY OF LIFE. . .
 OUR QUALITY OF *LOVE* CAN GO ON—
WILL GO ON
 —YES—
 FOREVER.

**Vernon. We had danced when we first met; and had siamesed our cheeks.
 Remember?—ANYWAY!**

— *What* quality of our life has changed? that makes you want *that* "Billie?"
 Now? —The bitterness? The regrets?—the pain? — **They** have been our
 quality of life for ages now! So what's changed? An operation! —A different kind
 of pain. So what? **IT'S NOT THE END! THEY CAUGHT IT ALL!** —Listen,
 Vernon— I must tell you—in the hospital—pacing in the waiting room—
 bivouacking at the coffee machine, all during the operation—dying for a glass of
 wine—but fighting against it—penance, penance, until you got through it—Yes!
 I'd get through it all without the wine—penance, penance—without any
 fortification.—And the torment—your torment, I told myself, was what was
 excruciating—was what was making me, in veritas, want the vino; . . .but that
 is **not** what was eating at me—what was at war in me—because, yes!—there
 was something warring inside me, fighting to burst through the pain of the
 thought I thought was of losing you; **and then** it did burst through and I knew I
 knew— . . . that part of me **WANTED YOU TO DIE—YES! HOPED YOU**
WOULD DIE!—UNENCUMBERED! I'D BE UNENCUMBERED THEN—AT
LAST! FREE AT LAST. FREE AT LAST. GOOD GOD ALMIGHTY, I'D BE
FREE AT LAST!

. . .Free from what? **TO DO—WHAT?**—I'd been free from you before—when
 you'd go away—to your conventions—to your, whatever—and there was
 always that first rush—freedom! FREEDOM! when at last, at least for a time, I
 could do—anything, anything,

—And you know what I'd do—would *finally* do—would *actually* do?

—THE SAME THINGS I'D ALWAYS DONE. —The housewife things—along with the bitter reminiscences —couldn't write a lyric either. Not one. Without you here, noodling away—without you here suggesting the melodies—I couldn't even come up with a title. Not one! . . .—and then there was the tearing guilt about my baby, Billie. —and I couldn't sleep because I wanted you—needed you—the heat of you—the smell of you—the sharp stabs of your toenails, and, when you turned, the bruising bangs of your sharp shin. And so if you died, I'd be unencumbered, all right. Forever, all right, that's true. **BUT still I'd be doing the same old things —and drinking myself into my kind of oblivion—** . . .alone. So I prayed for you to make it then. **And you did! And I vowed—it would all change when you got home FROM THE HOSPITAL! I'd work for it to change. . . .and then the good ol BCI fired you —US!—and then I heard that Billie was coming home—*might* come home —and I fell apart and --NO! YOU WILL NOT GO AHEAD OF ME! LEAVE ME AN UNENCUMBERED LUSH!—AND I WILL NOT LET BILLIE THROUGH THE DOOR! WITH THAT SUICIDE MACHINE!**

. . .what's that you're playing? Some new melodic line—I never heard—what are you telling me with that melody. . .Ah—I hear it. I hear it. I know what words belong. Yes, the words are dropping in. I know what you're melody is saying. . . :

“THEN GO AHEAD OF ME, IRENE;
 THAT OPTION CAN BE YOURS.
 WHEN OUR BILLIE COMES WITH ‘BILLIE’
 YOU CAN GO AHEAD OF ME
 AND YOU'LL BE REALLY FREE AT—”

Option? *That way?* Never! I never —My God! We would never—Remember? When we were young?—we would never—could *never* accept —even think about—! —A sin!—it was a *mortal* sin!—and now even my daughter—Good Christ! —a growth industry!. . .What's happening? —No! —Okay okay. Let me try to under— —Okay! Option, you say. Option for what? For me? What would make even *me*—? —would make *me* even **contemplate**—*that* "Billie?" — Pain? —Too high a tolerance—*always* higher than yours and there's always drugs—as long as they can deaden—I mean if one can afford the drugs, then—

...

Ah.

...

I hear what you're saying.

“WE WILL NEVER HAVE
A KIND OF CANADA TO EASE IT ALL;
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT.
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT.”

Yes. That's true. I see. Too late to go to Canada. Here, we might, you and I, eventually, be wiped out. What little money we have— . . . God! you understand. . . me. . . so well, don't you, Vernon; the "unendurable" horror. . . the terror. . . for me: Economic humiliation. . . . What you and I are bound to face; and what I would find so unendurable.

—My God! Can I be so fucking middle class?

. . . Yes. I can be. —I am. . . . Isn't that something? Perhaps I *can* then really contemplate. . . under those conditions. . .

An option? . . . —Try to accompany, Vernon. Try to accompany what I'm putting together. Compose, as I drop out the words. . .

. . . I *ONCE* THOUGHT,
ONLY PEOPLE WHO HAD MONEY,
LOTS OF MONEY,
WERE THE ONLY KINDS OF PEOPLE
WHO'D HAVE OPTIONS IN THE END.
I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I WOULD HAVE AN OPTION,
ANY OPTION OF MY OWN

— THAT WHEN HUMILIATION CAME,
THAT I WOULD HAVE A METHOD TO AVOID IT;

BUT NOW, BECAUSE MY BILLIE LEFT,

AND NOW COMES BACK ALL GROWN,
IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ME
TO HAVE AN OPTION OF MY OWN.

—What? . . . Ah.

. . .

AND
IF YOU LET BILLIE COME WITH "BILLIE,"
THEN SHE'LL STAY HERE WITH *THAT* "BILLIE;"
FOR A LONG LONG TIME,
SHE'LL STAY WITH US
AT LAST.

IF BILLIE COMES WITH "BILLIE"
YOU WILL HAVE YOUR LONG LOST CHILD,
AND SHE'LL TAKE THE TIME
TO TELL YOU THAT
WHAT'S PAST IS PAST.

Will she, Vernon? Are you so sure of that?

SHE'S CALM AND SURE,
OUR BILLIE IS;
SHE'S SO SECURE,
OUR BILLIE IS;
THAT BILLIE WILL EMBRACE US BOTH—
AND THEN;
FOR AWHILE, AT LEAST,
OUR FAMILY WILL BE ONE LOVING FAMILY
AGAIN.

. . . yes. Yes. I'd like that. I *would* like that. I *do* want that.

Too.

Family.

Again?

Were we ever one? A family? A *loving* family? No. Celebrity. Celebrity. My phantom child. In the way. Breaking up our family. Coming between my daughter and me. . . .My poor poor Billie. She did have a phantom brother, our Billie did; a sibling called "Celebrity." A sibling I put in the way.

—And what was that all about? celebrity?

What was the truth of it?

. . .Was there ever really a chance for that? celebrity? for us? Vernon?

. . .Were we ever top rung? could ever have been? —Were we hungry enough? vicious enough? . . .and even if we had been

. . .would it have happened anyway?

. . .and would it have mattered?

. . .Vernon. You're so wise. Yes. Billie matters. My daughter does matter.

SHE'S CALM AND SURE,
OUR BILLIE IS:
SHE'S SO SECURE,
OUR BILLIE IS;
THAT BILLIE WILL EMBRACE US BOTH—
AND THEN;
FOR AWHILE, AT LEAST,
MY FAMILY WILL BE ONE LOVING FAMILY
AGAIN.

Does she really forgive me, Vernon?

IRENE, YOUR DAUGHTER WILL FORGIVE YOU.

And if she comes and I allow her to bring that "Thing" in. . .our Billie will stay?
—will come in and out? back and forth—to us? between her
. . .demonstrations? Something like that? Is that right?

. . .

YES, IRENE, YES.

And if that “Thing” remains. . .stays in our house. . .we'll just keep it around—for your comfort? —Just in case?—in case the unendurable . . .the terror. . .the horror happens. . .?

YES, IRENE, YES.

I'M TIRED, IRENE.
EXHAUSTED, IRENE;
BRING ME COMFORT, IRENE.
I'M SORRY, IRENE.
FORGIVE ME, IRENE;
LET BILLIE STAY, IRENE.

Me, too, Vernon. Me, too:

I'M TIRED, MY LOVE.
EXHAUSTED, MY LOVE.
I NEED COMFORT, TOO,
MY LOVE. . .;

The last time I saw Billie I was standing right here, at this window. Looking at her. She was standing in the driveway, waiting to be picked up. For her baby sitting job. She sensed me looking. Looked back over her shoulder and she saw me. Those eyes. Hate? —No. Sadness, I think. Pain. I wanted to run out—shout through the window—“Forgive me?”. . . something . . .But I didn't. And she was picked up. And she was gone.

. . . If that “Thing” is *not* allowed in— *not* allowed to stay in our house. . . I assume that our Billie. . .Billie, for Holiday, will *not* stay either. Never stay. Never come back.

. . .

Yes. . . .

THEN LET HER COME,
IRENE WILL MAKE NO FUSS.

LET BILLIE BRING
 THAT "THING" IN,
**YES—AND LET THE TWO OF THEM
 STAY HERE WITH US!!!**

—My God, she'll be here soon! And we haven't finished our song!
 —But, you know what? Let's *not* finish it for **them**—the good ol' BC!; we'll finish it for—Billie. Yes. —Where were we? What did we still need to finish? In the song? . . .

Right. Right.

“AS LONG AS THERE’S YOUR MELODY TO MELLOW ME,
 IT’S ALL RIGHT. IT’S ALL RIGHT.
 AS LONG AS BINGY BINGY, TO BONGY BONG MY SONG. . .”

What "BINGY BINGY?" What "BONGY BONG?" —Ah!

“AS LONG AS YOU’RE THE SOMEONE
 TO HEAR MY SAD SAD SONG—”

My God! Look at how fast we're plugging up the final holes! —We're grooving, my love; better than ever! Better than ever!

Now to the coda:

“THE WORLD WILL GET
 OUR BRIGHT DUET
 TO BINGY BING THE NIGHT”

—What "bingybing" to THE NIGHT?—Something *against* "THE NIGHT." A musical concept—word. "Bingybing"
 . . .Bingybing. Three syllables; accent on the first syllable—something working —*against* the--Ah! "COUNTERPOINT." Yes, "Counterpoint the night." Play.

“THE WORLD WILL GET
 OUR BRIGHT DUET

TO COUNTERPOINT THE NIGHT:
IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S—!"

That's it! I do believe that's it—that cleans it up. And it's good!
—Good for our Billie and for the "Farewell Concert of Irene and Vernon
Palazzo"—**Now!** —A rehearsal!

From the top, Vernon! ***From the top!***

"IT HASN'T BEEN ALL HARMONY,
THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER;
OFTEN, 'SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET'
MIGHT CHANGE TO 'STORMY WEATHER.'

"ALL OF THAT GAVE CONTRAST
TO THE SONGS WE HAD TO MAKE;
NOW THE MOTIFS HAVE TURNED SOMBER—
AND THIS ARRANGEMENT IS TOO DISSONANT TO TAKE.

"WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?
YOUR RHYTHM IS IN MY BONES.
CAN THE MUSIC YOU STILL BRING US
TRANSPOSE OUR SOUR NOTES
TO SWEETER, GENTLER TONES?

"PERHAPS. . .PERHAPS. . .
AH, YES, PERHAPS. . .

"AS LONG AS YOUR SWEET MUSIC
NEEDS MY MOURNFUL WORDS,
IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT.

"IF MY WORDS BRING SAD SAD THOUGHTS
AND YES, SOME ANGUISH, TOO,
IT'S ALL RIGHT, IT'S ALL RIGHT.

"YOUR SIMPLE SHIFT TO A MAJOR KEY,

CAN MAKE ME GRIN. . .CAN MAKE US LAUGH.

“AS LONG AS THERE'S YOUR MELODY TO MELLOW ME;
IT'S ALL RIGHT, IT'S ALL RIGHT.
AS LONG AS YOU'RE THE SOMEONE TO HEAR MY SAD SAD SONG,
IT'S ALL RIGHT, IT'S ALL RIGHT. . .

“THE WORLD WILL GET OUR BRIGHT DUET
TO COUNTERPOINT THE NIGHT. . .
IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S ALL RIGHT.
IT'S ALL RIGHT! . . .”

There. Finished. Complete. We did it. —Now you just keep playing, Vernon;
noodling away, improvising on our song. . . .Good. And I'll stand here at the
door. . . sans wine glass—See? I've put it down. And I'll wait for our two Billie/ys
— . . .and I'll pull myself together, and. . .when I see them driving up in the
snow. . .the still falling snow. . . I'll open the door and step out onto the porch
. . . oh! —and I'll give old Creaker a push; yes—let old Creaker swing. And the
creaking will be —will be. . .—a counterpoint!—yes—to the whole reunion!. —
And then I'll step back into the house. . .watch our Billie, with son Billy with a Y
in her arms, walking up the path, to the porch. . .past the swinging, creaking
Creaker
. . .and into my waiting arms
. . .Irene's waiting arms
. . .her mother's waiting arms
. . .and I'll lead her—them—into this cozy room
. . .filled still with the warmth of the flickering shadows. . .
—and filled, finally, too, of course,
with *your* wonderful. . .with Vernon Palazzo's
wonderful. . .
with my husband's
wonderful. . .wonderful. . .
chords. . .

CURTAIN