

# **The Last of Abdul**

**A Southern Expressionist Drama in 15 Scenes**

By Clyde Coreil

### **Characters**

Simeon Cormier	65 years old, terminally ill head of the Cormier household and ex-puppeteer of national fame. Determined to tear down his house before he dies.
Noone Cormier	34 years old, daughter of Simeon, single, trying to hold together a family and a past that she values above all else. She opposes the destruction of the house.
Aubrey Cormier	30 years old, son of Simeon, mentally ill member of the defunct puppet show who returns from the hospital to see his father.
Thomas Morein	45 years old, long-time servant and assistant in the Cormier puppet show. A clever, wily man totally dedicated to Simeon.
Privette	A local banker, anxious to take control of the Cormier residence and turn it into a museum. A minor character.

### **Time, Setting and Action for *The Last of Abdul***

October, 1960. All scenes except the third take place in the Cormier residence. The Third scene takes place in the Homestead Parish Bank. This brief scene involves only an interview and requires only a pool of light. The action of the play is approximately a 24 hour period in early October.

## Scene One

*THE STUDY IS LIKE THE REST OF THE CORMIER RESIDENCE--SPACIOUS; HIGH CEILINGS; HEAVY, DARK WOOD; STAINED GLASS AROUND THE LONG PANES OF THE TWO TALL WINDOWS IN THE REAR WALL WHICH FLANK A FIREPLACE. OLD PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS OF PAST GENERATIONS OF CORMIERS HANG ON THE WALLS. THERE ARE FOUR DOORS: THE ONE UP RIGHT LEADS TO A HALLWAY THAT EXTENDS FROM THE FRONT ENTRANCE TO THE REAR ENTRANCE; UP LEFT, TO NOONE'S ROOMS; DOWN LEFT, TO THE CELLAR; AND DOWN RIGHT, TO SIMEON'S BEDROOM. THE HOUSE, WHICH IS LOCATED NEAR A SMALL TOWN IN LOUISIANA, WAS BUILT IN THE 1890's, AND THE ARCHITECTURE AND THE FURNISHINGS ARE IN GOOD TASTE. SIMEON'S WHEELCHAIR IS DOWN RIGHT. NOONE'S COVERED PAINTING EASEL IS NEAR THE WINDOWS.*

*IT IS 10:30 A.M., AND THE WARM LIGHT OF THE OCTOBER MORNING COMES THROUGH THE WINDOWS IN THE REAR WALL AND MINGLES WITH THE SHADOWS THAT NEVER DISAPPEAR FROM THE OLD STRUCTURE. SIMEON IS DRESSED IN DARK PANTS, BLACK SUSPENDERS, A WHITE SHIRT WITHOUT A NECKTIE BUT WITH A VEST. THE CLOTHES ARE WRINKLED, AND IT IS OBVIOUS THAT HE HAS SLEPT IN THEM. SIMEON HAS THE DRAINED APPEARANCE CHARACTERISTIC OF PERSONS WHO ARE SICK AND SOMETIMES IN GREAT PAIN. HE IS SITTING MOTIONLESS, HAND TO HEAD, IN A LARGE OLD BUT STILL HANDSOME ROCKING CHAIR, WHICH IS POSITIONED DOWN LEFT CENTER, ONE-QUARTER IN. HE LETS HIS HAND MOVE FROM HIS HEAD TO THE ARM OF THE ROCKER, STRAIGHTENS UP, PUTS ON HIS GLASSES, RISES, CROSSES TO THE DOOR UP LEFT, AND UNLOCKS IT WITH A KEY HE TAKES FROM HIS VEST POCKET. THEN HE GOES TO HIS ROLLTOP DESK AND TAKES A FINE CIGAR FROM A POLISHED WOOD CASE. AFTER CLIPPING THE END OF IT, HE RETURNS TO HIS ROCKER, LIGHTS IT WITH ONE OF THE KITCHEN MATCHES HE CARRIES IN ANOTHER POCKET OF THE VEST, AND BEGINS PUFFING SLOWLY AND MEDITATIVELY. A WAVE OF SEVERE PAIN IN HIS ABDOMEN GRIPS HIM FOR A FEW MOMENTS AND THEN SUBSIDES. THERE IS A KNOCKING AT THE DOOR UP LEFT.*

## SIMEON

It's unlocked.

*NOONE ENTERS WITH TRAY, WHICH SHE TAKES SILENTLY TO A SMALL TABLE STAGE LEFT. HER HAIR IS FRESHLY BRUSHED, AND SHE IS NEATLY DRESSED IN A WELL PREPARED, OLD BUT SOMEWHAT EXPENSIVE WHITE DRESS. A RED RIBBON IS IN HER HAIR. SHE POURS COFFEE FROM A POLISHED SILVER POT INTO TWO CUPS, ADDS CREAM AND SUGAR TO BOTH AND TAKES THE CUPS TO THE TABLE BESIDE HER FATHER. THE ACTIONS ARE GRACEFUL, AND WE KNOW THAT THIS HAS BECOME A RITUAL IN THE CORMIER HOUSEHOLD.*

*NOONE HANDS A CUP WITH SAUCER TO SIMEON AND SITS IN THE ROCKER OPPOSITE HIS. THEY BEGIN DRINKING QUIETLY.*

SIMEON

They should be here by now.

NOONE

It's a long drive.

SIMEON

They've had time.

NOONE

The hospital would've called if there had been any difficulty. He's fine. They said so...(RESTRAINED JOY) I think this time, he will be able to stay. Dr. Domingue (DOUGH-MANG) said there's a good chance. If Aubrey is....

SIMEON

(INTERRUPTING) Thomas didn't brace the nursery wall. It's being held together by the siding. The whole thing will fall in if a wind comes up.

NOONE

There's no wind.

SIMEON

That's all we need. They'd come bellerin' and screamin' about THEIR house. I give him a chance to get out of here for a few hours, and he takes all day....

NOONE

(INTERRUPTING NERVOUSLY) It's going quickly. (TROUBLED) I'll paint the flat....for my room...this afternoon.

SIMEON

What about the nursery flat?

NOONE

I finished that myself...last light...late. (LONG PAUSE) Is it better today?

SIMEON

No...(PAUSE. HE STUDIES HER HAIR.) Your hair is different.

NOONE

For Aubrey. I was looking at the blue album last night. There's a picture of Anna in front of the house...

SIMEON

...of Anna...with her hair pulled back like yours...I have my arm around her shoulders. It's 11 o'clock in the morning. She's wearing a light yellow blouse. Her shoes are dark blue. Daddy is squinting. The cottonwoods are full of leaves....My eyes are almost as bad as his were.

NOONE

You must give me a key.

SIMEON

(IGNORES HER REQUEST) I went through my room again last night.

NOONE

Did you find it?

SIMEON

No...(PAUSE. SIMEON RISES, POINTS TO THE TREES OUTSIDE THE WINDOWS.) When it would get cold, blackbirds and cedar wax-wings would flock to the trees. I used to go out and listen to their whistles and duckings and murmurs. Daddy would join me sometimes, squeezing his eyes behind his thick glasses, his hands moving across the sketch pad.

*SIMEON LOOKS AT THE COVERED EASEL NEAR THE DOOR UP RIGHT.*

NOONE

Not today.

SIMEON

This afternoon.

NOONE

(OBJECTING) Please. I want to spend a little time with Aubrey. We've got to make him feel welcome. That's very important. The doctor said that's the main...

SIMEON

(INTERRUPTING) You have to finish. I have to see it.

NOONE

Tomorrow. I promise.

SIMEON

(ACCEDING) The colors must be right. Not like now. The house was snow white then. And no blacktop driveway...dirt and gravel. The pecan (PAH-KOHN) grove in the background and...

NOONE

(SLIGHT IMPATIENCE) I know. (CROSSES TO HIM) I think it'd be better if you sat down. (LEADS HIM TENDERLY BACK TO HIS CHAIR) I promise. I'm almost finished.

*THERE IS THE SOUND OF A DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING IN ANOTHER PART OF THE HOUSE.*

SIMEON

Is that them?

NOONE

(STANDS UP, SMOOTHS HER DRESS) Now be nice. Daddy.

*THERE IS KNOCKING AT THE DOOR UP RIGHT. NOONE GOES TO IT, TURNS THE KEY, WHICH IS STILL IN THE LOCK, AND OPENS THE DOOR TO THOMAS, A CLEVER, SHIFTY LITTLE MAN WHO IS DRESSED IN A CHAUFER'S JACKET AND CAP.*

NOONE

(HAVING EXPECTED AUBREY) Thomas...Where's Aubrey? (NERVOUSLY) Is anything...wrong?

THOMAS

No. He's in the bathroom. (HE REMOVES HIS CAP AND JACKET, AND ROLLS UP HIS SLEEVES.)

NOONE

How is he?

THOMAS

Still like a log. Afraid...! think.

NOONE

Did they say anything at the hospital?

THOMAS

They said to call them if anything goes wrong. They seemed...apprehensive.

NOONE

Does he talk?

THOMAS

A little....! picked up the mail. (HANDS A LETTER TO NOONE)

SIMEON

What is it, Noone?

NOONE

A letter...from Privette.

SIMEON

Tear it up.

NOONE

(SLIPS LETTER INTO HER POCKET) Maybe I should see about Aubrey.

SIMEON

Noone, tear it up.

THOMAS

He's okay. (STEPS TO DOOR, LOOKS OUT) Come on in, Aubrey. Everyone's waiting. They want to see you. (EXITS TO COAX AUBREY INTO ROOM)

NOONE

(TO THOMAS BEFORE HE EXITS) Don't force him.

THOMAS

(ENTERS WITH AUBREY IN TOW. AUBREY BALKS OUTSIDE DOOR WHERE THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE HIM.) May I present Mr. Aubrey Cormier.

*AUBREY ADVANCES TO CENTER OF DOORWAY. HE IS A TALL AND SOLIDLY BUILT MAN, HANDSOME IN THE MANNER OF SOMEONE WHO HAS SPENT A LOT OF HIS LIFE OUTDOORS. NEVERTHELESS, HE LOOKS SOMEWHAT SEEDY. HIS SUIT IS NEW BUT CHEAPLY MADE. HE IS HESITANT TO DO ANYTHING, BUT AN INNER POWER AND STRENGTH IS EVIDENT.*

NOONE

(DEEPLY JOYFUL) Aubrey! Come in, please. Come in. We've been waiting for you. (AUBREY TAKES A STEP INTO THE ROOM. NOONE CROSSES TO HIM AND EMBRACES HIM. HOLDING HIS HANDS, SHE BACKS UP AND HAS A LOOK AT HIM.) You're looking very, very nice. It's wonderful to have you back...where you belong. Isn't that right. Daddy?

*THOMAS EXITS UP RIGHT.*

AUBREY

Thanks.

SIMEON

(HE ADDS A LAYER OF SOMETHING LIKE SOUTHERN CHARM TO A TROUBLED CENTER.) You look strong. Son.

NOONE

(EXCUSING SIMEON'S LACK OF EXPRESSIVE WELCOME) Daddy...hasn't been feeling too well lately.

SIMEON

Sit down, Aubrey. Would you like a drink?

AUBREY

No.

SIMEON

Coffee, then. Noone, get him a cup of coffee.

*NOONE HASTENS TO FILL THE REQUEST.*

SIMEON

Is...everything all right?

AUBREY

We've been moving too much.

SIMEON

(MOTIONING TO ROCKER OPPOSITE HIS) Please.

NOONE

Yes, we have. We'll all slow down.

SIMEON

I thought you had taken up permanent residence at the hospital.

AUBREY

It's not all that easy to find a permanent residence anywhere.

NOONE

It was never...permanent. This is Aubrey's home. And I've missed him terribly.

SIMEON

Do you like it over there?

AUBREY

It's alright.

SIMEON

Have you made any friends?

AUBREY

Yes...One.

*NOONE APPROACHES WITH COFFEE, WHICH SHE SERVES QUIETLY AND PULLS A CHAIR FOR HERSELF. SIMEON STUDIES HER FACE. SHE IS TUCKING STRANDS OF HAIR BEHIND HER EAR. SIMEON ADDRESSES AUBREY.*

SIMEON

Do you remember Anna's face?

AUBREY

(WHEELS AROUND IN FEAR TO LOOK AT ANNA'S PICTURE ON THE WALL WHICH HE DOES NOT FIND.) Where is it...the picture? What happened? What is happening here?...Noone!

NOONE

Daddy, how could you? (COMFORTING AUBREY) Of course we have other pictures. Thomas was cleaning up, and he misplaced the one that was here. It'll show up.

AUBREY

It wasn't Thomas.

NOONE

It wasn't intentional. Things have been...somewhat confused lately. (SHE BECOMES INCREASINGLY ANXIOUS.) We were cleaning up for your visit. For your return. I'm so happy that you're here. We'll talk later...after you've rested. There's so much to tell you about, to explain. We'll take it bit by bit. There're so many things you can't put in a letter. Did you get mine? I wrote once a week.

AUBREY

They read them.

*A NOISE OF HAMMERING IS HEARD FROM UP LEFT. SIMEON IGNORES IT. NOONE IS PERTURBED, BUT TRIES TO PRETEND THAT SHE DOES NOT HEAR IT.*



NOONE

But you do...did get them?

AUBREY

What is Thomas doing?

NOONE

Tell us about your friend.

AUBREY

(THE HAMMERING STOPS FOR A MOMENT.) We sit in a big room with windows...and we watch the trees.

SIMEON

What kind of trees.

AUBREY

Oaks...huge oaks...cottonwoods...and a few pines.

NOONE

Are there any squirrels?

AUBREY

No. (AUBREY SITS)

SIMEON

Birds?

AUBREY

Yes... sparrows and pigeons...and starlings

*SIMEON CLOSSES HIS EYES AND KNITS HIS BROW AS HIS SHOULDERS DROOP.*

NOONE

Daddy! Are you all alright? What is it?

SIMEON

The pills. The pink ones. (POINTS TO A SMALL BOX ON THE FIREPLACE MANTEL)

NOONE

(CROSSES TO FIREPLACE) We agreed not to take these anymore. ((SHE POCKETS BOTTLE, CROSSES TO SIDEBOARD STAGE LEFT, PICKS UP BOTTLE OF WHITE LIQUID MEDICINE AND A TEASPOON, GOES TO SIMEON) This'll help.

SIMEON

(LOUD, ROUGH, DEMANDING) The pills!

NOONE

No. (PRESENTS SPOONFUL OF MEDICINE, WHICH HE TAKES)

SIMEON

(DEFLATED) Where are the pills, Noone?

NOONE

They'll make it worse, much worse. They'll destroy your stomach and you won't be able to eat anything. The doctor knows. We don't.

SIMEON

(RISES, REFUSES NOONE'S SILENT OFFER OF ASSISTANCE, CROSSES TO WINDOW) What time is it?

NOONE

(CHECKING WATCH) Ten thirty.

SIMEON

(STARING OUT OF THE WINDOW) Anna'd be coming from her novenas and rosaries now. Through that door. (POINTING TO DOOR UP LEFT) Long, wide skirt. Eyes...full of...tranquility. It's her eyes that I carved into Fontin. Hers. Did you know that, Aubrey.

AUBREY

Yes.

NOONE

(CROSSES TO SIMEON) Get some rest. Daddy.

*SIMEON EXITS TO HIS BEDROOM THROUGH DOOR DOWN RIGHT.*

END OF SCENE

## SCENE TWO

*THE SAME.*

NOONE

(SILENTLY APPROACHING THE SEATED AUBREY FROM BEHIND, RESTING AN ARM ON HIS SHOULDER, LOOKING DOWN AT HIM. HE IS MORE OR LESS STONE-FACED, STARING STRAIGHT AHEAD.) It feels good to have you in this room again.

AUBREY

What's wrong with Daddy?

NOONE

He's...sick...very sick.

AUBREY

How sick?

NOONE

(AFTER A LONG PAUSE) He's...leaving us. THE HAMMERING BEGINS AGAIN.

NOONE

(CROSSING TO DOOR UP LEFT) Can't he ever stop. NOONE EXITS. A FEW SECONDS LATER, THE HAMMERING STOPS. NOONE ENTERS.

AUBREY

(A SHADE UNSETTLED) What's happening, Noone?

NOONE

Thomas doesn't know when to stop.

AUBREY

What's he doing?

NOONE

Working....

AUBREY

(REFERRING TO SIMEON) He's...dying?

NOONE

Yes.

AUBREY

How long?

NOONE

Four months ago...the doctors said three months.

AUBREY

(RISES, CROSSES AWAY FROM NOONE) Why didn't you tell me?

NOONE

Your doctor said no.

AUBREY

And now?

NOONE

I insisted. (TAKES STEP TOWARD AUBREY.) I wanted you to see him. He doesn't have much time. I wanted you here. (MOVES CLOSER) It's time you come home. We can take care of you. (TAKES AUBREY'S HANDS.) This is where you belong. This is where we all belong.

AUBREY  
 Yes.  
 NOONE  
 (STEPS AWAY FROM AUBREY) Is it...better...lately?  
 AUBREY  
 Yes...I don't know. At times, I'm moving away.  
 NOONE  
 Moving where?  
 AUBREY  
 Into someone else...Maybe someone who is dead.  
 NOONE  
 We're all moving into someone who is dead.  
 AUBREY  
 Am I going to stay this time?  
 NOONE  
 Dear Aubrey...I would so very much love to have you stay.  
  
*HAMMERING BEGINS AGAIN.*  
  
 AUBREY  
 What's happening, Noone.  
 NOONE  
 This house...it doesn't belong to us anymore.  
 AUBREY  
 (LOOKS AT THE FLOOR UNDER HIS FEET, THEN TO THE WALLS, THEN TO THE CEILING) Not ours? ...Whose?  
 NOONE  
 The bank's. Daddy couldn't make the payments on the mortgage.  
 AUBREY  
 The puppets...Fontin?  
 NOONE  
 We had to come back. Our shows were cancelled.  
 AUBREY  
 But everyone in the country knows Fontin.  
 NOONE  
 Knew. Now, no one cares.  
 AUBREY  
 Where...where will we live?  
 NOONE  
 There's a chance...a small one.

*THERE IS KNOCKING AT THE DOOR UP LEFT. NOONE ANSWERS IT. THOMAS ENTERS, CARRYING A SMALL PACKET OF PHOTOGRAPHS.*

THOMAS  
I found some more pictures....Ma'am. (HANDS HER THE UNTIED PACKET)  
NOONE

Were they untied?

THOMAS

Yes.

NOONE

You're mistaken. There is the mark of a recently removed string on the top one.

THOMAS

Yes, Ma'am. You're prob'ly right. It must've come off when I was taking it out.

SIMEON

(ENTERS GROGGILY) Y'all find something?

THOMAS

Inside the guest room wall.

SIMEON

Let me see. (HALF SNATCHING PHOTOGRAPHS AND NEGATIVES FROM NOONE'S HANDS AND RETIRING TO A CORNER, HE BEGINS LOOKING AT THEM GREEDILY, HOLDING THE NEGATIVES UP TO THE LIGHT FROM THE WINDOW.)

NOONE

(ANXIOUS TO GET AUBREY AWAY FROM HER FATHER) Maybe you'd like to rest for a while, Aubrey.

AUBREY

Yes. In my room. I think of it very often. I want very much to lie down in my bed.

NOONE

(TAKES AUBREY BY THE ELBOW, LEADS HIM) Come. I'll wake you for lunch.

THOMAS

That might not be such a good idea.

NOONE

Why not?

THOMAS

The room's done...at least one wall is.

NOONE

(ANGRILY) Is it, now.

THOMAS

Yep.

NOONE

I told you to wait.

THOMAS

Simeon.

NOONE TURNS TO SIMEON, WHO IS LOOKING DIRECTLY AT HER.

NOONE

(NOT WISHING TO MAKE A SCENE, BUT ANGRILY) Very well. He will stay in the room next to mine.

AUBREY

(TO THOMAS) What do you mean, "done"? THOMAS LOOKS TO NOONE, REDIRECTING AUBREY'S QUESTION.

NOONE

(COLDLY) He's...Aubrey, come sit down. I was going to explain later.

AUBREY

(RESISTING) Now. Don't explain, just tell me what's happening.

NOONE

The house. We're...

AUBREY

We're what?

NOONE

...tearing it down.

AUBREY

Tearing it down. We're tearing down the house.

NOONE

Yes.

AUBREY

All of it.

NOONE

We'll see.

SIMEON

(WITHOUT INTERRUPTING HIS EXAMINATION OF THE MATERIAL) All of it.

AUBREY

All the rooms.

NOONE

Yes.

AUBREY

My room...

NOONE

...is gone. Going, at least.

*AUBREY TURNS TO THE WINDOW, STARES OUT WITHOUT SHOWING ANY EMOTIONS. WHEN HE SPEAKS, HE BREAKS A SILENCE.*

Aubrey

I saw it as we drove.

THOMAS

You saw painted canvas. Most of the exterior walls are gone in that part of the house.

AUBREY

Noone...you painted the canvas?

THOMAS

To look like siding...It's a shell...Or will be if we ever finish. f that cheap, rotten canvas doesn't fall apart first.

AUBREY

Where is it...the boards...the house...What do you do with it?

*NOONE TRIES TO ANSWER, BUT DOESN'T. THOMAS STEPS IN.*

THOMAS

We...bury it.

AUBREY

(AFTER LONG SILENCE) Where?

THOMAS

In the pecan grove...and the cellar. We started in the cellar but ran out of room. Now, we take them to the grove...at night.

NOONE

I was going to tell you after you rested.

AUBREY

Why?

THOMAS

It's Simeon. He wants it done.

NOONE

Daddy doesn't want the bank to have it. He says there's too much of us in the walls. I think he's right about that...about this house being part of us.

AUBREY

(TO THOMAS) So you destroyed my room.

*THOMAS BECOMES A BIT APPREHENSIVE. HE POINTS TO SIMEON, WHO S STILL STUDYING THE PHOTOGRAPHS. AUBREY SLOWLY TURNS TO FACE SIMEON.*

SIMEON.

(CALMLY) It isn't here. How very disappointing.

AUBREY

Why?

NOONE

Come on, Aubrey. You really have to rest. I'll explain.

SIMEON

Thomas, help me. (THOMAS HELPS SIMEON TO THE CHAIR.) Sometimes, get very tired.

NOONE

(TO AUBREY) You have to get some sleep.

SIMEON

If it weren't for that, I'd be finished by now.

NOONE

Finished what?

SIMEON

The play...and the puppets. But I can't hold the wood.

NOONE

(CAUGHT UNAWARE, SUSPICIOUS) What play?

SIMEON

The last one.

NOONE

(SOMEWHAT STERNLY, APPREHENSIVE) What do you mean? When did you start it?

SIMEON

I'm not sure. But it's short. It won't take long.

NOONE

What won't take long? Finishing it?

SIMEON

No. Doing it.

NOONE

But you can't. You physically can't hold up the puppets.

SIMEON

(THUNDERING) Yes, now.

NOONE

But you can't. YOU physically can't hold up the puppets.

SIMEON

You're right.

NOONE

Then how...?

SIMEON

(LONG PAUSE; THEN HE ADDRESSES FIRST NOONE, THEN THOMAS.)  
You...and you...and...

NOONE

INTERRUPTING, But...I thought Fontin...as...lost.

SIMEON

Not puppets. Actors...Three characters. (LOOKS AT AUBREY)...and you.

NOONE

(ALARMED AT THE MENTION OF AUBREY) No. We can't...Aubrey...Aubrey's just got back. He's...

SIMEON

(RISING, STRIDING, SHOUTING, CAUGHING, HALF-COLLAPSING) I have to see it. DON'T TELL ME NO!

NOONE

(HELPING SIMEON BACK TO HIS CHAIR, okay, okay. Where's the script?)

SIMEON

You can read it cold. Tonight.

NOONE

(OUTDONE) Anything you say. Come on, Aubrey.

AUBREY

No. (CROSSES SLOWLY TO FAR UPSTAGE CORNER)

*DEFEATED FOR THE MOMENT, NOONE HALF-COLLAPSES ONTO A CHAIR AND STARES AT THE FLOOR. ONE GETS THE IDEA THAT EXTREMITIES HAVE BEEN REACHED OFTEN BEFORE. SIMEON BREAKS A VERY LONG STAGE SILENCE.*



*WHEN HE DOES SO, HIS SPEECH IS VERY SLOW, VERY DISTINCT.*

SIMEON

The cedar wax-wings would eat the camphor balls in the trees out front. Get drunk on 'em. They'd hit the branches, fall halfway down sometimes. For days. The racket would drive Daddy crazy. It really was loud. He'd shoot his shotgun. A few of 'em would fall. The rest would rush away...(NOONE SLOWLY CROSSES TO THE SIDEBOARD, PICKS UP A BRUSH, CROSSES TO THE BACK OF SIMEON'S CHAIR AND BEGINS BRUSHING HIS DISSHEVELED HAIR SLOWLY. SIMEON ACKNOWLEDGES HER ACTION BY BECOMING QUIET FOR A LONG WHILE. THEN HE RESUMES.) The rest would rush away like a strong wind had suddenly come up and swept them away like fallen leaves. But in a few seconds, they'd be back, clattering like a bunch of kids. Then one day...one morning, you'd wake up, and they'd be gone. Every last one of 'em. Not a sound. A beautiful quiet...Then Daddy'd go out and sketch the branches.

THOMAS

They don't come any more...When did they stop coming?

SIMEON

I'm not sure. One fall...about six years ago...I was working...carving a new face for Fontin...there at that desk. I thought about the birds...I went outside...I'm not...! don't know when they stopped coming.

NOONE

(WAITING A FEW MOMENTS TO LET THE STORY FADE AWAY) What about Privette?

*SIMEON IGNORES THE QUESTION.*

SIMEON

Wax-wings—The males had a feathered crest like a cardinal. Blackbirds in the same tree would ignore them. (DRIFTING OFF TO SLEEP) Red wing blackbirds...tongue of the Holy Ghost on their wings...like a red flame...licking at...(GROGGILY)...your soul like... a snake...(FALLS ASLEEP)

*NOONE TAKES HER LARGE SHAWL FROM A NEARBY TABLE OR CHAIR AND LAYS IT ON SIMEON'S SHOULDERS. SHE MOTIONS THOMAS TO GET THE WHEELCHAIR, WHICH THEY POSITION NEXT TO THE ROCKING CHAIR AND TRANSFER SIMEON WHO WAKES FOR A MOMENT AND FALLS ASLEEP AGAIN AS SOON AS THE TRANSFER IS COMPLETED. NOONE REMOVES A SET OF KEYS FROM SIMEON'S POCKET, WHEELS HIM TO HIS BEDROOM DOWN RIGHT, CLOSES THE DOOR, AND RETURNS TO THE STUDY. SHE GOES TO THE WINDOW AND STARES OUT.*

NOONE

(ABSENTLY) Aubrey, do you remember those birds.

AUBREY

Yes. (EXITS UP LEFT)

NOONE

(TO THOMAS) Do you have the play?

THOMAS

Might.

NOONE

(SUDDEN IRRITATION) Don't play your cat-and-mouse games...Not now. Do you have it.

THOMAS

Cat-and-mouse, eh? What do you call all this craziness? He's crazy; he's got roe breaking my back tearing this house apart; and you go along with him, pulling that crazy brother of yours out of the insane asylum...Its ...

NOONE

(SLAPS THOMAS ACROSS THE FACE) How dare you.

THOMAS

...all crazy. (THOMAS CURTSIES LIKE A LITTLE GIRL AND STARTS TO EXIT UP RIGHT.)

NOONE

Thomas...I'm sorry.

THOMAS

So am I. So is this whole thing. Twice, I packed up and was ready to leave—Twice. I don't know where I'd go, but there's one hell of a lot of places that are one hell of a lot saner than this damned hell hole.

NOONE

If you leave, there's no hope. At least not for us...none. Wouldn't that...could you live with yourself...knowing that? All these years.

THOMAS

How would my not leaving change anything? How?

NOONE

There is a chance. I'm not sure for how long—a few weeks, months...Probably nothing. But a chance...for a while.

THOMAS

I'm listening.

NOONE

I have to go to town to talk to Privette. We'll talk when I get back....Just don't tear anything else down.

THOMAS

We been through that before. Simeon wants it torn down; I'll tear it down. Simeon says stop, I stop. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is.

NOONE

(STIFFLY) Do you have his play?

THOMAS

Not any more. I made some copies for him.

NOONE

We'll do it at eight. (THOMAS NODS, CROSSES TO EXIT.) Thomas. (HE STOPS.) I need the car. Give me the keys.

THOMAS

There's not much gas left.

NOONE

(EXTENDS AN OPEN HAND, IN WHICH THOMAS DROPS THE CAR KEYS)  
Thanks..(THOMAS TURNS TO LEAVE, PAUSES WHEN NOONE CALLS HIS  
NAME.) Oh, Thomas. I'm locking the door to the cellar. (POINTS DOWN LEFT) That's  
where Daddy hides the pills, isn't it?

THOMAS

Ask him.

NOONE

I'm locking it. That one too. (POINTS TO UP RIGHT DOOR) They'll tear up his  
stomach...(THOMAS STARES AT HER. SHE BECOMES ANGRY.) The doctor said  
they would. He'd start vomiting blood.

*THOMAS EXITS. NOONE TAKES A LAST LOOK IN ON HER FATHER TO MAKE  
CERTAIN THAT HE IS ALLRIGHT. THEN, SHE TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND LETS  
HER HEAD TILT BACK ON HER SHOULDERS. SHE HOLDS THIS POSITION FOR A  
LONG TIME AND THEN EXITS UP RIGHT.*

END OF SCENE TWO

## SCENE THREE

*LIGHTS ISOLATE A DESK DOWN RIGHT CENTER. MR. PRIVETTE OF THE HOMESTEAD PARISH BANK IS SEATED, DOING PAPER WORK. HIS INTERCOM BUZZES.*

SECRETARY'S VOICE

Miss Noone Cormier is here.

PRIVETTE

Send her in. (NOONE ENTERS.) Miss Cormier. So glad to see you.

NOONE

Good morning.

PRIVETTE

I hope your father is comfortable. Sit down, please.

NOONE

(SITS) His condition is grave.

PRIVETTE

So we've heard. I'm very sorry.

NOONE

Then why do you keep hounding us?

PRIVETTE

In my opinion, the Cormier puppets are a distinct asset, not only to this town and state, but the whole country. Your father has worked very hard to share them with children—and adults—in all parts of the United States. If it were up to me and the Homestead Bank, we would write off the debt. Believe me, I have spoken for that position. But banks aren't allowed to do that sort of thing. There's a strict code. If we break it, we are in violation of federal laws.

NOONE

Couldn't you at least wait until Daddy...instead of making his last days miserable.

PRIVETTE

The proposal I described last time you were here is very unusual and very generous. Turning the house into a museum would be a great service to...everyone concerned.

NOONE

Everything would be in glass cases.

PRIVETTE

But the debt would be cleared and your family would be given compensation, enough to buy a more modest place...right here in town. It's not an unfair arrangement by any means. A receiver is standing by. The Lion's Club would make the arrangements to...make the necessary conversion.

NOONE

It would be the end of Daddy...and the show...and everything.

PRIVETTE

Isn't the show...I mean it's...over...isn't it?

NOONE

Maybe...maybe not.

PRIVETTE

What do you mean?

NOONE

Do you know Thomas Morein? (MOH-RANN)

PRIVETTE

I've never met him...but I do know that he's been with your family for a long time.

NOONE

All his life. He's just about as good as Daddy ever was at working the puppets. We could continue to run the show.

PRIVETTE

(INTERESTED) Go on.

NOONE

That's it. That would seem more interesting than just stuffing it all into a bunch of showcases. We'd put on a show every weekend. Something like that. Even three days a week.

PRIVETTE

And what...would be the obligations of the receiver.

NOONE

We would be allowed to continue living in the house. They could have a couple of rooms on the first floor. But they wouldn't have the right to bother us.

PRIVETTE

(INTERESTED) That's an interesting proposition. Of course, the receivers would have to approve.

NOONE

If you approve, they will approve.

PRIVETTE

And when...when would this arrangement begin...if they approve?

NOONE

One year after...Daddy's death.

PRIVETTE

A year! That's too long.

NOONE

Six months. That would be a minimum.

PRIVETTE

That would be a maximum. You and Mr. Morein would have to sign a contract.

NOONE

A long one.

PRIVETTE

And you would be happy with this.

NOONE

No. But we'd live up to it. Provided that you and whoever else leave Daddy alone while he's alive. We would require a small salary, of course. Not much. And you wouldn't set foot in our part of the house.

PRIVETTE

You understand that this—if they agree—would not affect any —of the properties involved. Including the physical puppets and any related copyrights.

NOONE

We are the stone you're getting blood from. Let them say they own the house; let them say they own Fontin; let them say they own everything in the world if that makes them happy. (NOONE RISES AND BEGINS TO EXIT.)

PRIVETTE

I...(NOONE PAUSES.)...! will do my best.

NOONE

Thank you, Mr. Privette. (BEGINS TO EXIT AGAIN)

PRIVETTE

Just a moment...I'll present your offer to the president of the bank and to the receivers...today, if possible. Then you and Mr. Morein will have to come in to discuss the details. We have to make some progress in this and resolve it quickly. If you can't come to an agreement, we'll have to ask you to vacate under supervision...immediately. You'll hear from me tomorrow or the day after at the latest.

NOONE

We're not asking for much. Mainly the opportunity for Daddy to die in peace.

PRIVETTE

Your sentiments are most honorable and understandable. I'll do all that I can to help reach a satisfactory resolution.

END OF SCENE THREE

]

## SCENE FOUR

*PARTY AFTERNOON IN THE CORMIER RESIDENCE. NO ONE IS ON STAGE. SIMEON ENTERS FROM HIS ROOM DOWN RIGHT AND BEGINS TO CROSS TO THE DOOR UP LEFT. HE FEELS HIS POCKETS FOR HIS KEYS, BECOMES APPREHENSIVE WHEN HE CANNOT FIND THEM, TRIES ALL THREE DOORS. UNSUCCESSFUL, HE BEGINS SHOUTING.*

SIMEON

Noone! Noone! (RATTLING DOORS) Thomas! Thomas!

*THE SOUND OF HAMMERING, WHICH BEFORE HAD BEEN BARELY AUDIBLE, GROWS IN VOLUME UNTIL IT OVERWHELMS SIMEON. HE FALLS TO THE FLOOR. THE HAMMERING STOPS.*

THOMAS

(OFFSTAGE AT DOOR UP LEFT) Simeon! You alright in there? I can't open it. I don't have a key.

AUBREY

(OFFSTAGE, DOOR UP LEFT) Break it down.

THOMAS

We'd better wait a few minutes. If he's alright, he'll get mad as hell.

*SIMEON HEARS THEM, IGNORES THEM. SLOWLY, HE PICKS HIMSELF OFF THE FLOOR, SITS IN THE ROCKER AND ROCKS.*

AUBREY

(OFFSTAGE) Get out of the way. (HE BEGINS TO BUTT THE DOOR WITH HIS SHOULDER. THE DOOR BREAKS AND GIVES WAY. THEY ENTER AND SEE SIMEON. AUBREY MOTIONS THOMAS AWAY. THOMAS EXITS.

SIMEON

(CALMLY) Where's Noone?

AUBREY

I don't know.

SIMEON

Is the car there?

AUBREY

I don't think so.

SIMEON

(MOMENTS OF SILENCE PASS AS SIMEON DRIFTS, THEN CALM AND REFELCTIVE) Are there woods near the hospital?

AUBREY

Yes. Thick woods.

SIMEON

Do you walk in them?

Yes. AUBREY

Often? SIMEON

Yes. AUBREY

Did you find a place for yourself? SIMEON

Yes. AUBREY

How? SIMEON

He showed it to me. AUBREY

Tell me about it. (HE WAITS. AUBREY IS SILENT.) I said tell me about it. SIMEON

It was about a mile into the woods. Two big oaks, side-by-side...as though someone had planted them. AUBREY

Did you talk? SIMEON

No. AUBREY

What did you do? SIMEON

Sometimes we'd take off our clothes and feel the wind. AUBREY

Does he touch you? SIMEON

Not like that...Sometimes he'd hold me before we put on our clothes. AUBREY

Did you make any marks on the trees? SIMEON

No. AUBREY

Sometimes Anna and I used to go into the pecan grove and make love. SIMEON

Yes. AUBREY

Did you know that? SIMEON

Yes. AUBREY



How?  
SIMEON

(PAUSE) I just knew it.  
AUBREY

I miss her.  
SIMEON

Yes.  
AUBREY

Could you come back here to live...without her?  
SIMEON

You're tearing it down.  
AUBREY

They want to come in here, to walk through these rooms, to sleep.  
SIMEON

Noone said it wasn't ours anymore.  
AUBREY

(ROUGHLY) Is it theirs?  
SIMEON

Why isn't it ours anymore?  
AUBREY

Fontin...I didn't want the show to come off the road...We knew it would never go back. I mortgaged the house...kept things going for a while.  
SIMEON

What's going to happen to Noone?  
AUBREY

Nobody wants to see puppets anymore. They don't believe them.  
SIMEON

Fontin...  
AUBREY

(INTERRUPTING) Fontin...is dead.  
SIMEON

(STARTLED) Where is he?  
AUBREY

In the pecan grove.  
SIMEON

What?  
AUBREY

I buried him.  
SIMEON

AUBREY

(DOING LITTLE TO SHOW THE SHOCK HE FEELS, AUBREY IS SILENT, THEN RESPONDS.) Is the grave marked?

SIMEON

No.

AUBREY

(LONG PAUSE) We were careful not to touch anything...(RISES, IMPASSIVELY) You shouldn't have buried him. (SILENTLY EXITS UP LEFT)

SIMEON

(RETURNING TO ROCKER, HE BECOMES ALARMED AS HE SEES SOMETHING THROUGH THE WINDOW.) Aubrey...AUBREY!

AUBREY

(RETURNS TO DOOR, STARES AT SIMEON, WHO IS SQUINTING DESPERATELY) What?

SIMEON

Come here...COME HERE! Is there a car at the end of the drive?

AUBREY

(LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW BRIEFLY) Yes.

SIMEON

What color is it?

AUBREY

Black.

SIMEON

What kind?

AUBREY

I don't know. Small.

SIMEON

How about on the drive itself. Do you see anyone? (AUBREY REMAINS STARING AT SIMEON WHO BECOMES IRRITATED, TAKES AUBREY'S FACE IN HIS HANDS, WRENCHES IT TOWARD THE WINDOW, AND SHOUTS.) Is anyone there?

AUBREY

(IMPASSIVELY) No.

SIMEON

(WALKING AWAY) It's that damned librarian. She's watching us. They take turns. Idiots. During the day. At night they--ha—go home to sleep. They're afraid I'll burn the house down. Ha! Burn it down. Librarian...Best way to hide a secret from her is putting it in a book.

AUBREY

The car left.

SIMEON

Best way to hide one from you is pasting it on your nose.

*AUBREY BEGINS CROSS TO EXIT UP LEFT.*

SIMEON

Aubrey. Fix the door.

AUBREY

You fix it.

SIMEON

FIX IT!

AUBREY

(IMPASSIVELY) No. (EXITS)

END OF SCENE FOUR

## SCENE FIVE

*SIMEON IS STRUGGLING TO REPLACE THE PANEL IN THE DOOR. NOONE UNLOCKS THE DOOR UP RIGHT AND ENTERS IN HER HAT AND COAT. THERE IS A SOUND OF HAMMERING COMING FROM THE BASEMENT.*

Daddy! What happened? NOONE

Where have you been? SIMEON

Are you alright? NOONE

Where? Give me my damn keys...NOW! SIMEON

(NOONE GIVES SIMEON THE KEYS.) Thomas can fix that. NOONE

Where have you been? SIMEON

To...to town. I had some errands. NOONE

What errands? SIMEON

Groceries. NOONE

Where are they? SIMEON

Sit down, please. NOONE

At the bank? SIMEON

Yes. NOONE

Did you tell Privette about me...tearing the house down?...(SHOUTING) Noone, did you tell him? SIMEON

No. NOONE

Goddamn it, what did you say? SIMEON

They want to turn this house into a museum. NOONE

You know damn well that I know that. What else? SIMEON

We've got to stop all this. Daddy. Please! NOONE

SIMEON

(FURIOUSLY) What else. What sort of deal did you make? Tell me, dammit, dammit. Tell me.

NOONE

I...asked...if they would let us stay here after...

SIMEON

You won't have anything to stay in....after.

NOONE

Can't you see what you're doing? Mama and her prayers. Grandpa's drawings...the hours he would spend in the garden. The house itself...It's Cormier, designed by my great-grandfather. The glorious suppers in the dining room. You have no right to destroy all that.

SIMEON

That's all over, finished. And it's not me who destroyed it. Tell Thomas to fix that door.

NOONE

It's not...

SIMEON

(ATTEMPTS TO SHOUT, BUT BEGINS COUGHING) Thomas. Thomas!(COUGHING)

NOONE

(CROSSES TO DOOR UP RIGHT) Thomas...(LOUDER) Thomas. (HAMMERING STOPS)

SIMEON

Get the flashlight. (NOONE DOES NOT RESPOND) I'm going to the cellar. GIVE ME THE FLASHLIGHT!

NOONE

(GETS FLASHLIGHT FROM SIDEBOARD CABINET) Don't, Daddy. You're too weak. Wait until you're stronger.

SIMEON

(TAKES FLASHLIGHT, HALF-STUMBLES TOWARD DOOR DOWN LEFT, ENCOUNTERS THOMAS, WHO IS ENTERING) Fix that door. (EXITS)

END OF SCENE FIVE

## SCENE SIX

*THE SAME.*

NOONE

What happened to the door?

THOMAS

He started beating on it and calling me- I couldn't get in. Aubrey came...told me to break it.

NOONE

(EXHAUSTED) He wants you to fix it.

THOMAS

Okay. I'll get my tools. (STARTS TO EXIT)

NOONE

Wait. (THOMAS STOPS.) I talked to Privette.

THOMAS

And. . . ?

NOONE

It might be possible to keep this place. I told him that you and I could run the puppet show...We could, you know. You did it when Daddy was getting sick. You're good, very good. And you can make new puppets...and repair them.

THOMAS

So Privette said, "Here, Noone; here's the title to your property. You and Thomas go and run the show for the amusement of Aubrey. All you have to do is show him how to clap." (THOMAS CLAPS HANDS TOGETHER SLOWLY AND METHODICALLY.)

NOONE

Please don't do that. Please...(SILENCE) I didn't mention Aubrey. We'd run the show and this (WAVES HER HAND AROUND) would be a museum. They'd have a couple of rooms. We'd have the rest.

THOMAS

You're serious.

NOONE

It's not much...but it's all we can hope for. Do it, Thomas. Agree. Because without you, even that's gone.

THOMAS

You're as crazy as he is.

NOONE

Please!

THOMAS

Look, we're tearing this place down. There'll be nothing left.

NOONE

So far, it's just the siding. There's still the roof and the frame.

THOMAS

That's next on his list. He's crazy but he knows what he's doing.

NOONE

We could...slow down.

THOMAS

No, ma'am. Like I said—He wants it down, he'll have it down. You convince him to keep it up, I'll keep it up.

NOONE

Okay, okay. But will you stay...when everything's over. Please.

THOMAS

I'll think about it.

NOONE

Can't you tell me you'll do it. I don't know how much more of all this I can take.

THOMAS

You're asking for more...a lot more.

NOONE

Please, Thomas. I'm begging. Please. We have to let them know very soon.

THOMAS

If I had any sense, I would have left last month.

NOONE

Please.

THOMAS

All I can say is I'll think about it.

END OF SCENE SIX

## SCENE SEVEN

*AUBREY'S TEMPORARY BEDROOM. LIGHTS COME UP IN A SMALL, HARD-EDGED POOL STAGE CENTER RIGHT. THEY ISOLATE AUBREY, WHO IS STANDING STILL NEAR HIS COT. HIS EYES ARE ON THE FLOOR. THERE ARE THREE KNOCKS ON THE DOOR TO HIS ROOM, WHICH IS THE DOOR UP LEFT. AUBREY DOES NOT MOVE OR SAY ANYTHING. NOONE OPENS THE DOOR AND ENTERS QUIETLY, CLOSING THE DOOR BEHIND HER.*

	NOONE
Aubrey, are you alright?	
	AUBREY
(LIFTS HEAD) Yes.	
	NOONE
May I come in?	
	AUBREY
You're already in.	
	NOONE
Maybe I should leave.	
	AUBREY
The morning is ended.	
	NOONE
Lunch will be ready at about one-thirty....What are you thinking about.	
	AUBREY
A friend.	
	NOONE
At the hospital? (AUBREY NODS SLOWLY. MOMENTS PASS, AND NOONE WANTS TO FILL THE VACCUUM.) What is he probably doing...at this moment?	
	THOMAS
Crossing the quadrangle. He wears boots that lace from the toes.	
	NOONE
(SITTING ON THE COT) What's his name?	
	AUBREY
(RESPONDING TO A QUESTION HE HAD NEVER THOUGHT OF) I...don't know.	
	NOONE
Do you want to go back?	
	AUBREY
No.	
	NOONE
Never?	
	AUBREY
You said I could stay.	
	NOONE
And you can stay. That would make me very happy indeed.	
	AUBREY
My room is gone.	



Only the walls...so far.

NOONE

A room needs walls.

AUBREY

NOONE

For him, there's no other way but to tear it down. But for me...for us...Without it...we can't be the same. Nothing would be the same.

AUBREY

He's different...and he won't change back.

NOONE

He might. We have to try. The bank said we could stay here...(AUBREY KNITS HIS EYEBROWS)...if we agree to do shows. You could help...and Thomas. You'd be home.

AUBREY

Shows...Fontin is dead.

NOONE

What?

AUBREY

Did you know?

NOONE

What do you mean?

AUBREY

Daddy buried him.

NOONE

Are you serious?

AUBREY

That's what he said.

NOONE

Where?

AUBREY

In the pecan grove.

NOONE

My God. (NOONE LETS HERSELF FALL TO A SEATING POSITION ON THE COT.)

AUBREY

Why did he do that, Noone?

NOONE

(SILENT FOR A LONG WHILE BEFORE SHE SPEAKS) When we were on the road...he started getting...more and more nervous during the show. Fontin began to move roughly and his voice became...harsh...ugly. One day, I found Daddy at my dressing table. I laughed and asked him if he was trying on my clown face. He was startled...He turned to me and his face was made up, but it wasn't Bingo. I couldn't take my eyes from his. I saw fear and hatred. I couldn't move. Then I realized....that the face was that of Fontin. It was so unexpected and... incomprehensible that I simply walked away...after a while...I don't know how long. But I knew that the fear and hate...no, it was more than that...what he was doing...was out of respect, even reverence for Fontin...and...I don't know... for you and me.

AUBREY

Did you ever ask him?

NOONE

No. I couldn't. At that moment...when I saw him, it was like a bolt of electricity went through me. I knew exactly what he was doing...Not...something that I could say or talk about. But in that split second, I understood. The feeling was so...involved...so complex that...incredibly pure and rich and awful...terrible. I was absolutely positive that if I had not been his daughter, it...couldn't have happened. I felt what it means to have a father...and a brother. For the first time, I knew what it meant. At least, it seemed like that. And I was so unbelievably happy that you were still in this world. It's totally inconceivable that anyone could ever begin to try to give that...to show it. But it had happened. I was crying...and I didn't even know it. I looked down, and when I looked back, I saw him wiping off the make-up. I knew he was terribly embarrassed...So I left. That evening, I knew that I had to be with him...and with you. I think that somehow Daddy....(VOICE TRAILS OFF)

AUBREY

Yes.

NOONE

Do you...want to stay here?

AUBREY

Would my friend be able to visit me?

NOONE

Yes, or course. Will you stay?

AUBREY

(AFTER LONG PAUSE) Yes.

NOONE

(EMBRACES AUBREY WITH DEEP JOY. MOMENTS PASS.) We need Thomas. We need him desperately.

AUBREY

He won't stay.

NOONE

You don't know that. Where would he go?

*AUBREY WAITS A FEW MOMENTS, THEN EXITS UP LEFT. NOONE SLOWLY LIES DOWN ON THE COT, THEN SITS, SMOOTHS BACK HER HAIR, GETS UP AND EXITS UP LEFT.*

END OF SCENE SEVEN

## SCENE EIGHT

*LIGHTS UP A FEW POINTS ON SIMEON, WHO IS IN THE CELLAR EXAMINING A FLAT. A COLORED POOL OF LIGHT AND A FLAT IDENTIFY THE CELLAR. CARDBOARD BOXES INDICATE CROWDING. THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR UP RIGHT, WHICH IS THE ENTRANCE TO THE CELLAR.*

SIMEON

What is it?

NOONE

(OFFSTAGE) Are you alright down here. Daddy? (KNOB TURNS, LOCK PREVENTS OPENING)

SIMEON

What do you want?

NOONE

(OFFSTAGE) We'd like to talk to you.

SIMEON

Who's "we"?

NOONE

(OFFSTAGE) Aubrey, Thomas and me.

SIMEON

Sounds like a conspiracy, which it is....(OPENS DOOR) Thomas, why haven't you taken out this damned dirt. (MOTIONS TO BOXES) You can hardly move around down here.

THOMAS

I thought we were using the grove.

SIMEON

But if we need the space for...I don't know...an emergency.

THOMAS

Tonight. I'll start hauling some of it out tonight.

SIMEON

You might give him a hand, Aubrey.

NOONE

No.

SIMEON

Why not?

NOONE

Aubrey is...tired.

SIMEON

Are you tired. Boy? (AUBREY DOES NOT ANSWER.) Good. Then you'll help out tonight.

NOONE

That's what we'd like to talk to you about.

SIMEON

I'm hungry. Where's lunch

NOONE

(SOMEWHAT OUTDONE) In half an hour.

SIMEON

(REACTING TO THE SOUND OF A RAT, PICKS UP A JAR, STUDIES AREA OFFSTAGE, SEES RAT, THROWS JAR) Damn rats. I hate the way they putter around, making their disgusting noises. Thomas, are you still poisoning them?

NOONE

There's no money for poison. The welfare check goes for food. We have to talk. Daddy.

SIMEON THIS AIR IS DAMP AND MISERABLE. Let's go up. SIMEON CROSSES TO DOOR UP LEFT. OTHERS FOLLOW AS LIGHT DIMS AND OUT.

END OF SCENE EIGHT

## SCENE NINE

*LIGHTS UP ON THE MAIN LIVING ROOM. SIMEON, NOONE, AUBREY AND THOMAS ENTER THROUGH THE DOOR UP LEFT. SIMEON IS BRUSHING DUST FROM HIS CLOTHES.*

SIMEON

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. (GLANCES AT BROKEN DOOR) Why isn't that door fixed yet.

THOMAS

I haven't had time.

SIMEON

Fix it now.

THOMAS

Alright, dammit, alright.

NOONE

Daddy...(REALIZES SOMETHING) Did you take one of those pink pills?

SIMEON

No. It was more...lavender.

NOONE

Please stop. Daddy. They'll destroy your stomach. They don't do any good.

SIMEON

That, Dear Child, is where you and the doctor are mistaken.

NOONE

(BEGINNING TO COME APART) We can't keep on like this. (SITS)

SIMEON

How long, O Lord, how long?

NOONE

Everything is tear down, tear down, tear down.

SIMEON

(WHISPERS LOUDLY) Tear down, tear down, tear down.

*THOMAS ENTERS WITH HAMMER AND NAILS, BEGINS REPAIRING THE DOOR.*

NOONE

There's a point....Past that, everything is meaningless.

SIMEON

(PATS NOONE ON THE CHEEK) Past that, it's still better than nothing.

NOONE

(FRUSTRATED) We have to stop this destruction.

SIMEON

Of what?

NOONE

Everything.

SIMEON

You want to stop tearing down the house?

NOONE

(LONG SILENCE) It's us. Daddy. It's all we have left. You have no right to take it from us...(SIMEON IS SILENT.)...The Cormiers built this place. It's our fort against all the craziness of the world. If we tear it down, there's nowhere to go. There're other houses, but they...

SIMEON

(INTERRUPTING) Aubrey, get the letters from the top drawer in the desk. (AUBREY GETS THE LETTERS.) Read the one on the top.

NOONE

What is this?

SIMEON

(TO AUBREY) Read it!

AUBREY

(DOES NOT BEGIN READING UNTIL NOONE NODS HER HEAD) July 22, 1895. Dear Octahve (OAK-TAHV)...

SIMEON

Octave Cormier was the glorious father of Adeus (AH-DEYUSS), the grand architect.

AUBREY

(READING) "Adeus is bothering the architect and generally making quite a nuisance of himself. I suggest that he join you in New Orleans until the house is finished or until you finish your business. We are all fine. Answer as soon as possible. Signed, Irene. P.S. Send another puppet. Adeus likes them, and they keep him out of trouble."

SIMEON

Irene was Adeus's mama.

NOONE

I don't understand. Adeus was obviously a child. What house was she referring to?

SIMEON

Not a child. A man of thirty years. The house was this house.

NOONE

You're ly...You're mistaken. Daddy. (TAKES LETTER) Who wrote this?

SIMEON

Irene...Irene Hebert Cormier.

NOONE

(EXAMINING THE LETTER) Why isn't the paper yellow?

SIMEON

Adeus Cormier, architect. Adeus Cormier, man of letters. Adeus Cormier, last of the Southern gentlemen. Ha, ha, ha, ha. (ALMOST UNCONTROLLED LAUGHTER, THEN WHISPERING LOUDLY WITH A STRAIGHT FACE) Adeus Cormier was a Mongolian idiot.

NOONE

What are you talking about?

SIMEON

Adeus had two half-sisters who inherited a fortune from their dead father. They needed

someone to throw themselves on in adoration because they couldn't find a man decent enough to please Irene. So they turned around and invested their idiot half-brother. They hired an architect but gave the credit to Adeus. They hired a ghost writer and signed the novel, "Adeus." And they occasionally dressed him up and took him for rides around the countryside to show him off. They..."engaged" an impoverished woman with a kid to be his wife, and that kid was your glorious great-grandfather. A bastard, no less.

NOONE

It's not true. Daddy. It's not true. Mama never told me a word about any of that.

SIMEON

She didn't KNOW about that. I believe she suspected, but she didn't ask...She didn't WANT to know. She had better taste and more sense.

NOONE

You're making it up. (TO AUBREY) He's making it up.

SIMEON

Daddy told me when he was almost gone. He was drawing, and he didn't look at me at all when he told me. I started laughing. Then he started. We laughed louder and louder, and couldn't stop.

NOONE

It's a lie. A LIE. It doesn't make any difference, but it's still a lie.

SIMEON

Look at the paper. Notice the edge. (TAKES LETTERS FROM NOONE AND BEGINS TO FIND EVIDENCE OF THEIR AGE) There are lots of little cracks. And the ink...it's turned brown.

*THE LIGHTS IN THE HOUSE GO OFF. THE LIGHT ONSTAGE IS SUBDUED.*

AUBREY

What's happening?

NOONE

They cut the electricity. They've been threatening for months.

SIMEON

Why didn't you pay the bill?

NOONE

I bought food.

SIMEON

You're lying. (GRABS NOONE BY THE ARM) YOU'RE LYING.

NOONE

(ENERGY FAILS HER) I...I've been trying to pay the interest.

SIMEON

I want this house down. Quit trying to stop me, Noone. It's my house.

NOONE

You inherited it.

SIMEON

Something you'll never do. (HE BEGINS TO SHOW WEARINESS.)

NOONE  
 (TRYING TO SUMMON HER STRENGTH) It's not coming down.  
 SIMEON  
 Oh no?  
 NOONE  
 We've decided.  
 SIMEON  
 Who's "we"?  
 NOONE  
 All of us.  
 SIMEON  
 Thomas. (THOMAS STEPS FROM THE DOOR HE IS REPAIRING.) Did you agree?  
 THOMAS  
 I...I...No...  
 NOONE  
 He agreed.  
 SIMEON  
 And Aubrey.  
 NOONE  
 Yes.  
 SIMEON  
 Adeus was an idiot  
 NOONE  
 I'm sorry. Daddy, but I don't believe it.  
 SIMEON  
 Yes, you do...This place, the Cormier aristocracy...it's all a joke. Do you want to live in a  
 joke? They'll find out and you'll be drinking a lot of cheap bourbon and going to bed with  
 the puppets and listening to the flap of rotting canvas.  
 NOONE  
 How...How will they find out.  
 SIMEON  
 I'll send these to that snooty librarian (POINTS TOP LETTERS WHICH HE HAS  
 PLACED ON A TABLE. NOONE REACHES FOR THEM. SIMEON CALMLY PUTS  
 THEM IN HIS POCKET, AND SAYS IN A SURPRISINGLY FATHERLY TONE OF  
 VOICE...) Now go fix lunch, Noone. I want to rest for a while....(NOONE BEGINS TO  
 EXIT.) Noone, call the electric company. Threaten to sue. Ask them for another month.  
 Okay. (SHE EXITS THROUGH THE DOOR UP RIGHT.)  
 SIMEON  
 Are you finished with that door?  
 THOMAS  
 Just about.  
 SIMEON  
 Start on Noone's room.



THOMAS

(ANXIOUSLY) You mean...tearing it down?

SIMEON

(SITS IN ROCKER) Yes.

THOMAS

But where will she sleep?

SIMEON

In here. Or in the cellar with you. Or in the hall.

THOMAS

You ought to tell her yourself...There're other things I could be tearing down.

SIMEON

She knows...Is that right, Aubrey?

AUBREY

Yes.

SIMEON

(TO THOMAS) Well, what are you waiting for? (THOMAS EXITS UP LEFT. LONG SILENCE.) Were you frightened by the wind last night?

AUBREY

I didn't hear it.

SIMEON

It probably howls more out here. Like a pack of wolves. Like wolves, scattered in the woods.

AUBREY

There're no wolves around here.

SIMEON

There used to be...Once, one came to that window. Put his paws on the sill. His lips were drawn back and his fangs were bloody. There was a look of absolute desperation on his face. I'll never forget the eyes. They began to close, and he sank from the glass. I went outside. He was dead. He had been shot.

AUBREY

I don't believe you.

SIMEON

It's dark in here. Turn on the lights.

AUBREY

There's no electricity.

SIMEON

Noone...Aubrey, whoever. Get a kerosene lamp, some candles, anything. (AUBREY IS MOTIONLESS.) GET SOME CANDLES!

AUBREY

You get some candles.

SIMEON

(TRIES TO SHOUT BUT FAILS) Thomas...Thomas...(SITS BACK) Aubrey, get the medicine. (POINTS TO THE SIDEBOARD. AUBREY GETS THE BOTTLE OF MEDICINE, GIVES SIMEON A SPOONFUL.) Find the picture, Aubrey. Find

it...Anna...

AUBREY

(TAKES PHOTOGRAPH OF ADEUS FROM THE WALL) Why did you say that about him?

SIMEON

It's true.

AUBREY

(SMASHING PHOTOGRAPH) You knew it would hurt Noone.

SIMEON

Reality awaits Noone and you and your precious friend of the woods.

AUBREY

And you, old man, and you.

SIMEON

(BEGINS CROSS TO DOOR DOWN RIGHT) I'm looking forward to the play, Aubrey. It's been so long since I've see you act...(SUDDEN PAIN) Get the pills...the bottle's taped under the fifth stair...

AUBREY

The pink ones?

SIMEON

Just get them.

*AUBREY EXITS UP LEFT, RE-ENTERS WITH BOTTLE WHICH HE HANDS TO SIMEON.*

NOONE

(ENTERING) The electric people said they'd turn the lights back on for a couple of hours as a courtesy. They said not to ask for more Thomas is tearing down my room...He won't answer when I talk to him. (SHE NOTICES WHAT AUBREY IS HANDING TO SIMEON.) Where did you get those, Aubrey....(LEAPING TO ANGER) Where? (SILENCE FOLLOWED BY HER RUSHING OUT UP LEFT.)

*AUBREY FOLLOWS NOONE OFFSTAGE, PAST SIMEON WHO MANAGES TO GET UP AND LOCK THE DOOR. HE CROSSES TO THE ROCKER IN WHICH HE COLLAPSES. HE TAPS ONE OF THE PINK PILLS FROM THE BOTTLE AND SWALLOWS IT.*

SIMEON

SLOWLY RESPONDING TO THE MEDICATION) His lips were drawn back, and his fangs were bloody. There was a look of absolute desperation on his face. I'll never forget the eyes. They began to close, and he sank from the glass. I went outside. He was dead. He had been shot.

END OF SCENE TEN

## SCENE ELEVEN

*THE FOLLOWING IS A DREAM OF SIMEON'S. THE ATTEMPT IS NOT TO PRESENT AN INTERPRETATION OF THE PRECEDING EVENTS IN THE PLAY, BUT RATHER TO ELABORATE THOSE EVENTS IN A MANNER THAT MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS IMPRESSIONISM CONSISTENTLY FINDING ITS TRANSITIONS IN THE MOTIVE OF FREE-FORM DANCE.*

1 .

The sound of hammering, prying, nail pulling, tumbling boards, etc. is heard coming from offstage while the stage is dark. Lights come up slowly. They are colored to indicate night and a dream. The cacophony of sounds stops and the recorded sound of a shovel loading sand becomes louder and louder. As it does, the door down left opens and Simeon enters, carrying soil in a small box. He is wearing a mask in which his (the actor's) real facial features are accentuated. He lugs the soil out the door up right. After Simeon exits or as he is exiting, Noone, wearing a mask designed with her features, performs the same action as did Simeon. After her, Thomas then Aubrey, both wearing masks. As Aubrey is crossing, a puppet tumbles from his box of dirt. Aubrey continues his cross and exits without noticing the puppet.

2.

The colored lights fade and out. They are replaced by a narrow pool of white light on the puppet. Noone enters from the door down right, searching for Fontin in stylized dance movements and calling his name. She finally sees him but cannot penetrate the barrier formed by the edge of the pool of light. She longs for Fontin but is unrequited. She drags herself, exhausted, to stage right.

3.

High-pitched whirring sounds are heard in the distance. They change to the howling of wolves, still in the distance. Aubrey exits slowly from the cellar (down left), carrying a painted model of a house which he places over Fontin. Simeon enters from down right and stares at the house. Aubrey exits to the cellar. Noone moves around the perimeter of the stage, moaning. Simeon looks at her, follows her movements. She works up her energy and finally plunges through the barrier of light. Once she does so, the whirring sounds and the wolves and any music that might be played are stopped immediately. Noone knows that Fontin is beneath the house but can't get to him.

4.

Noone slowly stops expressing her anxiety when a figure dressed as a child going to Sunday school approaches her. The figure, Adeus, is played by the actor playing Aubrey, without mask.

ADEUS

What'cha doing here. (CURIOSITY BECOMES BITCHINESS.) That's my house. Get away. It's mine. Get out.

NOONE

Who are you?

ADEUS

It's mine.

*IRENE, ADEUS' MOTHER, PLAYED BY SIMEON WHO IS HOODED AND DRAPED IN THE BROWN SHAWL, ENTERS FROM THE CELLAR.*

IRENE

Adeus, quit making a nuisance of yourself...nuisance... nuisance...nuisance...nuisance...

ADEUS

It's mine.

IRENE

Of course it's yours. What are you doing here, young lady? Who are you, anyway?

*THE WIFE OF ADEUS ENTERS FROM UP LEFT. SHE IS PLAYED BY THOMAS IN AN EMOTIONLESS WHITE MASK.*

IRENE

Please, Please. He's a good man.

WIFE

He might be good for someone else, but he's not suitable.

*IRENE FALLS TO THE FLOOR AS MOTHER BACKS INTO THE CELLAR. SLOWLY, IRENE RISES AND TAKES A CREAM-COLORED JACKET WHICH HAD BEEN HANGING ON THE LEFT WALL. SHE WALKS TO ADEUS, LAYS THE JACKET ON A TABLE AND PROCEEDS TO SLOWLY AND SENSUOUSLY STRIP ADEUX OF HIS BOYISH JACKET. THEN THEY KISS IN SLOW PASSION AFTER WHICH SHE PUTS THE CREAM-COLORED JACKET ON ADEUS. THEY SLOWLY WALK, ARM-IN-ARM TO THE CELLAR.*

5.

Noone slowly lifts house and reveals Fontin. She sets the house aside and gathers the strings that control the puppet's movements. She makes him walk to the chair and sit down. Then she mimes talking to him calmly, casually. She hears someone coming and quickly picks up the puppet as she would something of little significance. She hurries off up left.

6.

*IRENE (SIMEON) ENTERS FROM CELLAR, SITS IN SIMEON'S ROCKER, AND ROCKS SLOWLY. LIGHTS FOCUS ON THE WINDOW. A SOUND OF AMPLIFIED, DESPERATE ANIMAL-LIKE PANTING BECOMES LOUDER AND LOUDER. IRENE TURNS TOWARD THE WINDOW, AND THE FACE OF THE WOLF APPEARS FOR A FEW MOMENTS AND THEN SINKS AWAY. IRENE GOES TO THE DOOR UP RIGHT, OPENS IT AND A SHIRTLESS MAN (AUBREY) WEARING THE MASK OF A WOLF FALLS ONSTAGE. IRENE PULLS HIM TOWARD THE ROCKER. HE SLOWLY STANDS. IRENE GUIDES HIM TO A SITTING POSITION IN THE ROCKER. SHE ROLLS THE WHEELCHAIR AS A SEAT FOR HERSELF AND CALMLY WALKS TO THE SIDEBOARD TO GET TWO CUPS OF COFFEE. SHE HANDS ONE TO THE MAN, AND TAKES THE OTHER FOR HERSELF AND SITS IN THE WHEELCHAIR. THEY DRINK, LOOKING AT EACH OTHER. THE SOUND OF A GUNSHOT*

*SHATTERS THE SILENCE, THEN ANOTHER AND ANOTHER. THE MAN-WOLF GRABS HIS CHEST, JUMPS US AND FALLS TO THE FLOOR, WRITHING WITH EACH SHOT. LIGHTS OUT.*

7.

Noone enters from up left without her mask, taking a seat in a chair up right center. Aubrey enters from the cellar dressed as Aubrey. He takes the small house and puts it in the cellar and then helps Thomas carry pieces of lumber into the cellar. Aubrey enters from the cellar carrying a sack of soil, almost stumbles. Noone rises to help him. He exits up right. Thomas enters from cellar carrying a similar sack of soil and exits up right. Noone crosses to sideboard and begins washing her hands at a basin with a pitcher. Noone says, "It's time" as Aubrey enters from up right and joins her in washing his hands. Thomas enters up right and washes his hands. Noone repeats, "It's time." The three dry their hands and seat themselves center stage.

END OF SCENE ELEVEN

## SCENE TWELVE

*THE LIVING ROOM OF THE CORMIER RESIDENCE AT 8 P.M. OF THE SAME DAY. NOONE, AUBREY AND THOMAS ARE SEATED IN A SEMI-CIRCLE CENTER STAGE.*

NOONE

It's time.

THOMAS

What's keeping him?

NOONE

There're papers all over his room. He'll find it.

AUBREY

I want to go back.

NOONE

No, Aubrey. There's still a chance.

AUBREY

It's finished. (HE STARTS TO RISE.)

NOONE

(RISING, ATTEMPTING TO REASSURE AUBREY) It'll be alright. I know this is upsetting, but it'll be over in a few minutes. Then we won't ask you to do anything you don't want to do. I promise. Can you trust me?

AUBREY

I don't like it. Can you take me back...now?

NOONE

It'll be alright...(AUBREY LOOKS DIRECTLY AT NOONE, WHO TURNS AWAY.)...We'll talk about it in the morning. I promise.

SIMEON

(STILL UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE PINK PILLS, HE ENTERS WITH A BOX. HE TAKES OUT THREE MANUSCRIPTS WHICH HE GIVES TO NOONE, WHO GIVES ONE TO THOMAS AND ONE TO AUBREY.) Noone, read the stage directions.

NOONE

I'm Fathma, Aubrey, you're Abdul. And Thomas is Howami.

SIMEON

Exactly.

NOONE

"The Last of Abdul," a farce by Simeon Cormier. Setting: A desert at midnight. Enter an Arabian palace guard in full dress with bandoliers and a big curved dagger in the belt. He is outrageously proud but a coward at heart. He looks around nervously.

SIMEON

Here it's for Aubrey. (HE REACHES INTO THE BOX AND GIVES NOONE A CHECKERED ARABIAN HEADSHAWL AND A HEAVY, COILED BLACK CORD TO KEEP THE CLOTH IN PLACE.)

NOONE

What's all this. Where did you get it...

SIMEON

Give it to him.!

NOONE TAKES BOX FROM SIMEON AND HANDS HEADGEAR TO AUBREY.

ABDUL (AUBREY)

I am Abdul, a proud Arabian palace guard but a coward at heart. I walk pensively along the top of the palace wall at midnight and am refreshed by the warm desert air which heals ^troubled mind and helps to build in me what I prize most but possess least...BRAVERY.

THOMAS ACCEPTS SIMILAR HEADGEAR FROM NOONE AND PUTS IT ON.

HOWAMI (THOMAS)

Psssst.

ABDUL

(STARTLED FEAR) Aaaaaggggghhhh.

HOWAMI

It's only me, Howami. How are you?

ABDUL

What did she say? What did she say?

HOWAMI

That she could not love you as long as you have not proven your bravery.

ABDUL

Curses. I have become a palace guard. At all times, my life is in danger. What does she want? What does she want?

HOWAMI

I asked her. She smiled mysteriously and faded into the alley whence she had come.

ABDUL

(GRANDLY PUTTING THE BACK OF HIS HAND TO HIS FOREHEAD) Woe is me, Howami. Woe is me.

HOWAMI

But I do know what they said.

ABDUL

(LOSING GRANDNESS, A BIT CONFUSED) Who are..."they"?

HOWAMI

The Balzaki Boys.

ABDUL

(IN GRAND ALARM) Oooooh....What?

HOWAMI

What?

ADBUL

What did they say, goddammit?

HOWAMI

Oh. That if you don't agree, heads will roll. Namely, yours and mine.

ABDUL

(REMOVES HEADGEAR, WIPES SWEAT FROM HIS FOREHEAD, REPLACES HEADGEAR) Agree to what?

HOWAMI  
(AFTER GLANCING BOTH WAYS) To kidnap the king.

ABDUL  
WHAT! Oh, no. Woe is me, Howami, woe is me.

HOWAMI  
ABDUL  
Where did you get these?

HOWAMI  
She gave them to me.

ABDUL  
(CONFUSED) She?

HOWAMI  
Yes. Fathma. (POINTS TO NOONE WHO HAS PUT ON THE BROWN SHAWL AND A VEIL THAT COVERS ALL OF HER FACE BUT HER EYES AND FOREHEAD.

ABDUL  
Does she...(SCRATCHING HIS HEAD)...What's the connection?

HOWAMI  
I was trying to convince her that you were a brave man. She kept staring at me. Wouldn't say a word. I told her about how you take your life in your hands every night...every minute of the day by guarding the king in his palace. She might have been smiling behind that veil. Or frowning. I don't know. I HAD to preserve you honor...so I told her about the Balzaki Boys...what they had just asked me to ask you. So now...(TRAILS OFF, TROUBLED)

ABDUL  
What, you idiot, what?

HOWAMI  
...HER HEAD WILL ROLL WITH OURS IF YOU DON'T AGREE.

ABDUL  
Why would it roll?

HOWAMI  
(ABSOLUTELY STRAIGHT) it might not. It might land on its ear and stay put.

ABDUL  
(REMOVES HEADGEAR AND HITS HOWAMI WITH IT IN SLAPSTICK FASHION) Idiot, idiot, idiot. I mean how will the king know if I don't agree?

HOWAMI  
They would send him some kind of secret message, I suppose.

ABDUL  
Oooooh. Woe is me, Howami, woe is me.

HOWAMI  
Do you...Will you do it?

ABDUL  
What choice do I have?

HOWAMI  
Even if...



ABDUL

Even if what?

HOWAMI

Even if...the pills do more than put the Old Boy to sleep for a while?

ABDUL

What do you mean?

HOWAMI

They might—it's just a possibility, mind you—shorten his life considerably.

ABDUL

I...I...

*IN JERKS, AUBREY PULLS THE HEADGEAR OFF AND STALKS AROUND THE ROOM OR OTHERWISE MANIFESTS A BREAKDOWN. THOMAS AND NOONE, STILL IN COSTUME, TRY TO CALM HIM DOWN AND COMFORT HIM. HE STRIKES THOMAS. HE CRINGES FROM NOONE. HE THROWS THE BOTTLE OF PILLS AT THE PHOTOGRAPH OF ADEUS. HE THROWS OTHER OBJECTS AT OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS. SIMEON OBSERVES THIS CALMLY. THOMAS TACKLES AUBREY.*

THOMAS

A rope...a rope. We have to tie him.

*NOONE EXITS TO CELLAR. AUBREY BREAKS AWAY, CROSSES TO SIMEON, RAISES HEAVY OBJECT TO STRIKE HIM, AND FREEZES IN THIS POSITION. NOONE ENTERS WITH ROPE, IS DUMBFUNDED. SIMEON LOOKS AT HER. THE PICTURE IS FROZEN. SIMEON CALMLY RISES, EXITS TO HIS ROOM. THE SOUND OF A DEAD-BOLT LOCK BEING SHOT IS HEARD. LIGHTS FADE AND OUT.*

END OF SCENE THIRTEEN

## SCENE FOURTEEN

*LIGHTS UP ON STUDY. LATER THAT EVENING. AUBREY IS TIED UP, GAGGED AND SEATED STAGE LEFT. NOONE AND THOMAS ARE MOVING FURNITURE IN FROM HER ROOM. IT IS RAINING. THEY ARE WEARY, DAMP, IRRITABLE.*

NOONE

Watch what you're doing.

THOMAS

If you wouldn't let your side drag all over the floor. I don't know why you didn't just move into the hall. When he comes out and sees you, he'll probably tell you to get the hell out anyway.

NOONE

(GOING TO AUBREY) Are you alright, Aubrey....! think we can take that gag out now. (THOMAS REMOVES WHITE CLOTH FROM AUBREY'S MOUTH. AUBREY DOESN'T ACKNOWLEDGE THE ACTION BUT CONTINUES HIS CATATONIC GAZE.) Aubrey. It's going to be alright.

THOMAS

Let well enough alone. He's liable to start raising hell again.

SIMEON

(ENTERS FROM DOWN RIGHT, STAGGERS A FEW STEPS, LEANS AGAINST A WALL) Noone...Noone! (HE COUGHS UP BLOOD.)

NOONE

Daddy.

*SIMEON FALLS TO THE FLOOR. NOONE AND THOMAS HELP HIS INTO THE ROCKER.*

NOONE

(PRESENTING HIM A SPOONFUL OF WHITE MEDICINE) Here...take this.

SIMEON

I..I can't.

NOONE

Please try...It's for the bleeding. (SIMEON SWALLOWS MEDICINE.) You'll have to go to bed.

SIMEON

It's raining...did you hear it

NOONE

Is...it alright if I sleep in here?

SIMEON

Your room...is it finished?

NOONE

No. But it's well under way. Part of the north wall is gone, and the rain whips in.

SIMEON

(LOOKING AT AUBREY) How is he?

NOONE

It was too much for him.

SIMEON

Untie him. Thomas!

THOMAS

I'd just as soon not. He's strong as a bull.

SIMEON

I SAID UNTIE HIM! (THOMAS BEGINS TO DO SO.)

SIMEON

Did you get the flat...up...in Noone's room? (HE SPEAKS WITH DIFFICULTY, COUGHING AND SPITTING BLOOD INTO A HANDKERCHIEF.)

THOMAS

Halfway...(THOMAS CONTINUES TO STRUGGLE TO UNTIE COMPLICATED KNOTS.)

SIMEON

Begin on that wall. (POINTS TO REAR WALL)

THOMAS

For god's sake, I just finished fixing it...(SIMEON IS SILENT)...Let me get Mr. Houdini free first.

NOONE

(ANXIOUS) Later, Daddy. It's raining very hard. And it's late.

SIMEON

Now!

THOMAS

(UNTYING LAST KNOT) There. (STRAIGHTENING OUT AUBREY'S SHIRT) He looks like new. (BEGINS TO EXIT DOWN LEFT)

SIMEON

Bring him here.

THOMAS

I'm going to get some tools...You want that wall down, I gotta get some tools. (EXITS)

SIMEON

Noone, bring him here where I can see him better. (NOONE DOESN'T RESPOND.) Goddammit, I said bring him here! (SIMEON SUDDENLY BEGINS VIOLENT FIT OF COUGHING.)

NOONE

Daddy, stop. It's crazy. (SHE GOES TO SIMEON TO HELP HIM. HE TRIES TO RISE TO WALK TOWARD AUBREY. NOONE ALMOST PUSHES HIM BACK INTO THE ROCKER.) I'll try. (SHE GOES TO AUBREY.) Aubrey, Daddy wants to talk to you. Let's go to him. Only for a few minutes. (AFTER STRONG PULLING, AUBREY LETS HIMSELF BE LED. SIMEON TAKES AUBREY'S FACE BETWEEN HIS HANDS, KISSES HIM ON THE CHEEK, AND EMBRACES HIM.

SIMEON

I love you. Son. (RELEASES AUBREY AFTER A LONG WHILE, TURNS TO NOONE, DOES THE SAME WITH HER) And you, Noone. I'm so sorry, but this must be done. (NOONE LEADS AUBREY AWAY.) Thomas...THOMAS! Where's Thomas?

NOONE

Let him alone for a while. Daddy. He's probably exhausted.

*SIMEON BECOMES VERY UPSET. HE TRIES TO RISE. NOONE RUSHES TO MAKE HIM REMAIN SITTING. WITH A DESPERATE BURST OF STRENGTH AND IN THE MIDST OF MUCH BLOODY COUGHING, HE GOES TO THE WALL, PICKS UP THOMAS' HAMMER AND BEGINS TO PRY OFF A STRIP OF WOOD AROUND THE WINDOW.*

NOONE

(WARY OF GETTING TOO CLOSE) Thomas...THOMAS!

*THOMAS ENTERS AS SIMEON STARTS TO COLLAPSE. THOMAS AND NOONE HELP HIM TO HIS CHAIR. SIMEON SPEAKS MORE AND MORE AS IF IN A TRANCE, IN SOMETHING APPROACHING A SPIRITUALLY LUCID ECSTASY.*

SIMEON

It's almost done.

NOONE

Yes.

SIMEON

Thomas...will you finish it? (THOMAS LOOKS AT NOONE; SHE NODS.)

THOMAS

I...I

SIMEON

WILL YOU FINISH IT?

THOMAS

Yes.

SIMEON

Swear. SWEAR!

THOMAS

I swear.

SIMEON

Noone, swear. (FIT OF COUGHING RETURNS) SWEAR!

NOONE

Okay, okay. I swear.

SIMEON

I know you won't. But it's already done. Hear that, Aubrey? It's done...(GOES TO AUBREY)..If anyone knows that, you do. (COUGHS AGAIN, DOUBLES UP IN PAIN THEN STRAIGHTENS UP. THE STAGE BECOMES SUDDENLY DIM AS THE LIGHTS GO OUT.) Turn on the lights. Noone, call them again.

NOONE

It wouldn't do any good.

SIMEON

Candles. Thomas. Under the stairs. Anna's votive candles. The cellar stairs.

NOONE

I know. (EXITS DOWN LEFT)

SIMEON

Anna...(DRIFTING) You remember the candles. Always burning. Always. Wax melting

in luminescent globules...tears moving down the long candles. NOONE REENTERS WITH SEVERAL CANDLES AND METAL HOLDER FOR VOTIVE CANDLES AS ARE FOUND IN CATHOLIC CHURCHES. SHE HANDS THESE TO THOMAS, WHO ARRANGES AND LIGHTS THEM AND PLACES THE CANDLEHOLDER NEAR SIMEON.

SIMEON

So many candles...The flames...moving quickly...like burning wings...Like the cedar wax-wings...getting drunk...falling halfway down...the blackbirds ignored 'em...Blackbirds with evil in their dull eyes...The eyes...Fontin's buried, Noone. The way he was looking...at me. I couldn't stand it...Who could...Not even Anna...(SURGE OF RENEWED ANXIETY) Her picture...Did you find it? Did you...(BEGINS COUGHING MOST VIOLENTLY)

NOONE

DADDY! (CROSSES TO HIM AS HE COLLAPSES)

SIMEON

Light it...(BETWEEN COUGHS) Light...it...Light...Light... Light... LIGHTS FADE EXCEPT POOL ON SIMEON IN HIS ROCKER. HE DIES. POOL FADES.

END OF SCENE FOURTEEN

## SCENE FIFTEEN

*THE STUDY. IT IS 2:30 A.M. ALL OF THE CANDLES ARE LIGHTED. LIGHT COMES UP ON NOONE WHO IS ARRANGING SIMEON'S BODY, WHICH IS LAID OUT ON A FOLDING COT OR SOMETHING OF THE SORT. FROM THE CELLAR, SOUNDS OF HAMMERING AND SAWING. AUBREY IS SEATED IN THE ROCKER DOWN LEFT, FACING TOWARDS BUT NOT LOOKING AT NOONE AND SIMEON'S BODY.*

THOMAS

(ENTERS FROM DOWN LEFT) It's done, Maam.

NOONE

Get it.

*NOONE FINISHES ARRANGING THE BODY, TURNS AND PUTS ON THE BROWN SHAWL. SHE TAKES A SMALL BIBLE IN HER HANDS AND PRAYS WITH A LARGE ROSARY.*

NOONE

(CROSSES HERSELF) In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. (RESPONSE) Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed are thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. (RESPONSE) Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

*THIS PRAYER AND ITS RESPONSE ARE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES. THERE IS NO MOVEMENT ON STAGE. THE THIRD TIME THE PRAYER IS SAID, AUBREY RESPONDS, AT FIRST IN MUMBLES AND THEN SOMEWHAT MORE DISTINCTLY. IF IT WEREN'T FOR SUCH A DEEP STIMULATION, HE WOULD NOT RESPOND AT ALL. NOONE MAKES NO SIGN OF RECOGNITION THAT AUBREY HAS JOINED HER.*

*DURING THE PRAYER SCENE, THOMAS LUGS AND DRAGS THE COFFIN HE HAS JUST MADE FROM THE CELLAR INTO THE STUDY. WINDED, HE SITS WHEEZING SLIGHTLY, FANNING HIMSELF. NOONE FINISHES THE LAST PRAYER AND CROSSES HERSELF.*

NOONE

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

THOMAS

Should I go for the priest?

NOONE

No, he would not have wanted it.

THOMAS

Where will we bury him?

NOONE

Here. He wanted it to be here.

THOMAS  
 In the morning?  
 NOONE  
 No, they'd see us.  
 THOMAS  
 I don't understand. It's not against the law to die, is it?  
 NOONE  
 One has to be very careful.  
 THOMAS  
 Okay. When? Tomorrow night? It shouldn't be very much later than tomorrow night.  
 NOONE  
 Tonight.  
 THOMAS  
 Tonight? You mean I have to go dig a hole in all this rain? It's almost a storm. We won't be able to see anything.  
 NOONE  
 In the cellar.  
*AUBREY TURNS AND STARES AT HER.*  
 THOMAS  
 The cellar?  
 NOONE  
 Yes.  
 THOMAS  
 Now?  
 NOONE  
 Yes. I'll get Mama's breviary and read the services. Can you prepare a grave?  
 THOMAS  
 You mean...dig a little....(NOONE NODS.) We have a couple of holes that would fit quite nicely. It'll only take about ten minutes to shape it up.  
 NOONE  
 Okay.  
 THOMAS  
 But I'll need some help getting Simeon down there.  
 NOONE  
 I'll help.  
 THOMAS  
 You're not strong enough. I don't want Simeon rolling down the stairs.  
 NOONE  
 Aubrey, will you be able to help Thomas?...(AUBREY DOES NOTRESPOND IN ANY WAY.) Please, Aubrey. We have to do this.(AUBREY NODS.)  
 THOMAS  
 Can we count on him?  
 NOONE  
 Yes. (THOMAS EXITS TO CELLAR. NOONE EXITS TO HER ROOM.)

*AUBREY REMAINS WITH THE BODY. AFTER A FEW MOMENTS, HE RISES, GOES TO THE COT, SITS, AND RAISES SIMEON'S HEAD AND SHOULDERS AND PRESSES THE BODY TO HIS CHEST.*

END OF SCENE FIFTEEN



## SCENE SIXTEEN

*THE STUDY AT 5:30 A.M. NO ONE IS ON STAGE. THE LIGHTS TELL US THAT THE SUN IS ABOUT TO RISE. THE ONLY SOUND IS THAT OF SHOVELING AND THE EARTH FALLING ONTO SIMEON'S COFFIN. NOONE ENTERS FROM THE CELLAR, STILL WEARING THE SHAWL AND HOLDING A ROSARY, A PRAYER BOOK AND A VEIL THAT SHE HAD WORN AT THE RECENTLY COMPLETED FUNERAL SERVICE. SHE SITS IN SIMEON'S ROCKER AND BEGINS ROCKING SLOWLY. THOMAS ENTERS FROM CELLAR.*

NOONE

Have a seat.

THOMAS

Thank you. (HE SITS.)

NOONE

Well, it's over. It seems hard to believe, but it's finally over.

THOMAS

Aubrey wanted to finish up alone.

NOONE

Fine.

THOMAS

Those were some mighty fine words you read. It really was a proper funeral.

NOONE

We owed him that. We owed him so much more.

THOMAS

He led a full life...Anna...you...Aubrey...Fontin.

NOONE

Aubrey said he buried Fontin. Is that right?

THOMAS

Yeah. Out in the pecan grove.

NOONE

Where in the pecan grove?

THOMAS

I think it's better to let that alone.

NOONE

You might be right. You....can make a new Fontin, can't you?

THOMAS

I made most of that one. Simeon was a very demanding teacher.

NOONE

How long will it take you?

THOMAS

I said I made that one. I didn't say anything about making another one.

NOONE

There's no hurry. The arrangement will let us have six months to collect ourselves. That should give us a lot of time.

THOMAS

To do what?

To put this back together.  
 NOONE

To put what back together?  
 THOMAS

The show...Fontin...this house.  
 NOONE

How can we put it back together?  
 THOMAS

Aubrey will be able to help you. And I have a pretty good idea about where things go.  
 NOONE

I don't understand.  
 THOMAS

If the bank finds out about all this tearing down, the deal will be off. They might well press charges. We've got to put this house together again.  
 NOONE

How can we put it together again. Most of it is torn down and buried.  
 THOMAS

We'll have to unbury it...The boards haven't had time to rot. It won't be all that hard...we both remember where the different rooms are buried. Of course, first, you and I will have to go into town later today to sign a contract. Once that's done, we will have six months to get things straight. That should be more than enough.  
 NOONE

What contract?  
 THOMAS

About the museum. About us putting on shows. (THOMAS RISES, CROSSES TO WINDOW, STARES OUT.) Thomas, what is it?  
 NOONE

I can't. I can't do it.  
 THOMAS

What do you mean, you can't do it.  
 NOONE

(IRRITATED) Enough is enough. Simeon's gone. That's that. I just can't go through this craziness again.  
 THOMAS

(APPREHENSIVE) But without you, we have...nothing. The bank wants you to sign the agreement.  
 NOONE

I'm sorry. I can't do it. Most of my things are packed.  
 THOMAS

(INCREASINGLY NERVOUS) Couldn't you at least think about it? You've been with us all your life. All your life. We've given you a home....Where would you go? (THOMAS DOESN'T RESPOND.) I'm scared, Thomas. Scared. Without Daddy and you...It's just so stark.

THOMAS

I can't stay. There's no chance. Zero. There's nothing here...It's over. Miss Noone. Can't you see that?

NOONE

There's the house. We could put it back together and run the shows. You and me and Aubrey.

THOMAS

No. But I could do this. I'm headed for my sister's in Mississippi. Beth. You met her once. She and her husband would put us up until we find somewhere for you to go.

NOONE

It's kind of you, Thomas. But no.

THOMAS

But what will you do? They'll take this place and put you out on the street.

NOONE

We have a few days.

THOMAS

You HAD a few days. With Simeon dead, they'll come down on you like a ton of bricks.

NOONE

But they don't know that Daddy's gone. You could go to the bank and sign their agreement. Tell 'em you'll be in New Orleans a few days and that I asked you to sign. You'll be in Mississippi. They wouldn't bother you in another state. I'll drop by in a couple of days and sign for myself. They won't expect anything for six months anyway.

THOMAS

Maybe you could come with me...to the bank, I mean.

NOONE

I can't leave Aubrey alone...not yet. But he and I could begin digging up the boards.

THOMAS

You're crazy...But if that's what you want, I'll try. But that's all. If they won't let me sign, I'll just head for Mississippi. But when they find out that you and Aubrey are here alone and what you're doing, they'll be madder'n hell.

*THE SOUND OF SHOVELING STOPS AND IS REPLACED BY AUBREY SLOWLY CLIMBING THE STAIRS. HE APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY DOWN LEFT. HE IS ZOMBIE LIKE AND LETS NOONE LEAD HIM UPSTAGE.*

NOONE

Thank you, Aubrey. Daddy would appreciate it....But it'll give us a little time....We need some time....Thomas....

THOMAS

What?

NOONE

Don't tell them Daddy's gone.

THOMAS

Why not?

NOONE

It might give us a little more time.

THOMAS

Those hawk-eyed old women will spot Aubrey. And Simeon not taking a couple of steps out front every day. They'll know something's up.

NOONE

(OVERCOME WITH AN IDEA) Oh, my god. Forgive me. Daddy. (CALLING) Aubrey. (HE DOES NOT MOVE. SHE LEADS HIM TO CENTER STAGE.) Thomas, get Daddy's old suit. I left it on the bed in his room. (SHE RUSHES TO HER ROOM, GETS A MAKE-UP KIT, AND RE-ENTERS WITH IT.) Now we have to take off that shirt. (THOMAS RE-ENTERS WITH CLOTHES.) Thomas, help me.

THOMAS

(SEES WHAT SHE IS DOING) No, Maam. I gotta go. This is far, far too kinky for me.

NOONE

THOMAS! Just this once...(THOMAS DOESN'T MOVE.) Please. I'm so scared I'm shaking.

THOMAS

Okay. But after I'm going to the bank and then to Mississippi. And don't try to call me. I don't want any part of this.

*THOMAS ASSISTS NOONE IN REMOVING AUBREY'S SHIRT AND PUTTING ON THE WHITE SHIRT THAT SIMEON WAS WEARING. AUBREY IS ENTIRELY PASSIVE, ALLOWING HIS ARMS TO BE MOVED. HE HAS BECOME LARGELY CATATONIC.*

NOONE

That's it. That's it. Now sit him down. Now we'll just add a little makeup and powder your hair. Now, the glasses. (SHE PLACES SIMEON'S GLASSES ON AUBREY.) There. A passable resemblance. Thomas, is hawk-eye on the blacktop?

THOMAS

(PEERS THROUGH WINDOW) Yeah.

NOONE

Good. She'll report having seen you and me and Daddy outside. We took him to watch me paint. (TO THOMAS) Can you take my easel and paints out front? (THOMAS DOES SO. SHE KNEELS IN FRONT OF AUBREY, TAKES HIS HANDS, AND FORCES HERSELF TO BECOME CALM AND SMILING.) Aubrey...do you understand what's happening? (NO RESPONSE) You'll be Daddy for a while. During the day. At night, we going to put the house back together. I don't like it, but that's the only way I can be with you here in the house. If ever you want to go back to the hospital, that's okay. But for now, do you want to stay here with me? (AUBREY LOWLY MAKES A SLIGHT NOD. NOONE EMBRACES HIM.) Now come outside. It's a lovely day after all that rain. Louisiana suns are brilliant and strong after the rain. And I'm going to paint a beautiful picture of you in that brilliant and strong sun with the house and the pecan grove in the background. Would you like that, Aubrey? (NO RESPONSE) Of course, you would.

*NOONE LEADS AUBREY SLOWLY OUT THE DOOR UP RIGHT.*

THE END