

Texas Fox Trot

A play by Stanley Rutherford

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The characters

- Leona** A very old, yet agile, erect and graceful woman, still beautiful, and blessed with a magnificent long mane of wild white hair.
- Aldous** A very old man, courtly and kind...a gentleman. He moves with care and precision. He is as sweet and trusting and innocent as a child. He is devoted to Leona, as is she to him.

The setting

The set, the props, the "look"--the aesthetic spirit of the play—are suggested by the works of Joseph Cornell (although the play itself has nothing consciously to do with the artist). Like the works of Cornell the set is a shadow-box—a big-as-life shadow box in which is set a two-storied (or two-tiered) "habitat," the stories (or tiers) of which are connected by a stairway. The habitat contains kitchen elements, a bed, a sofa, etc., but has an overall "surreal" quality, rather than a "naturalistic" one. [See, Cornell's "Soapbubble Set (Lunar Space Object)," late 1950's; "Untitled (Parrot and Butterfly Habitat)," circa 1948, "The Hotel Eden," 1945; and "Pharmacy," 1943, for examples of his work that inform this play. The monograph "Joseph Cornell," by Diane Waldman, George Brazillier, Inc., 1977 is a good source.]

The upper story is Aldous' bedroom. It is as sparsely furnished as the cell of a monk—a bed, a washstand with basin and pitcher, and a dressing screen. A series of closets line the upstage wall. Within the closets are the objects of Aldous' world—objects which are brought out during the course of the play. These objects are larger-than-life, three dimensional recreations of some of the images that appear and reappear in Cornell's works.

The lower story is Leona's kitchen and living and sleeping area. She sleeps in a large rocking chair that sits in the kitchen. The kitchen is simple—a stove, an icebox, a sink, and a large, centrally-placed wooden table. Elsewhere there is a dressing screen, an old crank-up Victrola, and a dress-maker's dummy upon which hangs an extravagantly stylish early 1930's, turquoise blue dress.

Texas Fox Trot

"Texas Fox Trot" is a ragtime tune (like a Scott Joplin rag) composed by David Guion. It is a happy dancing tune with a lilt and a beat and just a hint of sadness.

ACT I, Scene 1

The lights come up very slowly. It is dawn, silent. Aldous is asleep in his bed upstairs, right. Leona is asleep, sitting in the chair in the kitchen downstairs, left. In time Aldous stirs and stretches, then slowly sits up. The light becomes a bit brighter.

Aldous rises from the bed. He is dressed in peasant-simple pajamas. He carefully straightens the bed and folds the covers. He crosses to the wash stand where he washes and shaves and brushes his teeth. He dries himself slowly and carefully folds the towel. He crosses back toward stage center, pauses, then sits on a chair, quietly, meditatively.

As the light slowly rises downstairs in the kitchen, Leona stirs in the chair and slowly awakens. She rises. She is dressed in a long, simple, warm robe. She crosses to the sink and splashes water on her face, then dries herself. Then with an economy of movement she prepares breakfast: boils water for gruel and for tea and sets the table. In a few moments, just about the time that Leona is setting the gruel on the table and pouring the tea, Aldous stands and slowly descends the stairway and enters the area of the kitchen.

ALDOUS: Good morning, my love.

LEONA: Good morning, Aldous.

They kiss, then Aldous sits at his place at the table. Leona pours cream into the bowls of gruel and sprinkles sugar on top. She sits in the chair opposite Aldous. She begins to eat her gruel. Aldous remains motionless.

LEONA: Eat your porridge, Aldous.

Aldous makes a bit of a face.

LEONA: **[Sternly]** Aldous, eat your porridge.

Aldous picks up his spoon and with little enthusiasm dips it into the gruel, but stops just as the spoon reaches his mouth.

LEONA: **[Loudly]** Eat it!

Aldous takes a quick bite and chews it a bit and then swallows very hard. Leona continues to eat, but shortly

realizes that Aldous is once again not eating. She glares at him.

LEONA: **[Patiently]** Aldous, you have to eat. You have to eat in order to live. You have to live because life is what defines you.

Aldous takes a couple of bites of the gruel. Leona smiles and then resumes eating.

LEONA: **[After a pause]** Aldous, where does your napkin belong?

Aldous' napkin is still on the table.

LEONA: Does the napkin belong on the table? Is that where the napkin belongs? **[She shakes her head.]** No...no, my dear... the napkin belongs in the lap...in the lap.

ALDOUS: The napkin belongs in the lap.

Aldous unfolds the napkin and places it carefully in his lap.

LEONA: Thank you.

Leona resumes eating the gruel with great gusto. Aldous eats his slowly with little enjoyment. Leona finishes hers, then waits patiently for Aldous to finish his. He sets his spoon back on the table.

LEONA: Do you know what today is?

ALDOUS: It is a beautiful day.

LEONA: Today could be a very special day. Do you know what today could be?

ALDOUS: **[Beat]** Today is a beautiful day.

LEONA: You have to learn to concentrate, Aldous. **[Beat]** What is today?

ALDOUS: **[Beat]** Today is a beautiful day. May I be excused?

Aldous starts to rise from the table.

LEONA: Aldous, sit back down. **[Beat]** Aldous, you have to learn to focus your attention on the matters at hand. You have to address the issues.

ALDOUS: I'm trying, my love.

LEONA: What is today going to be?

ALDOUS: May I be excused?

LEONA: Not until you tell me what you think today is going to be.

ALDOUS: **[Long pause]** Today is going to be a beautiful day.

LEONA: You said that yesterday.

ALDOUS: Yesterday was a beautiful day.

LEONA: Yesterday was a different day than today, as was the day before that.

ALDOUS: The day before was a beautiful day too.

LEONA: But it was a different day than yesterday, and yesterday was a different day than today.

ALDOUS: They all seem very beautiful to me, my love. May I please be excused?

LEONA: Don't you like talking to me, Aldous?

ALDOUS: I very much like talking to you, my love, but I would very much prefer just now to return to my meditations.

LEONA: I would like to talk.

ALDOUS: **[Beat]** Would you like to talk about astronomy?

LEONA: I would like to talk about today.

ALDOUS: I would like to talk about astronomy and the phenomena of the skies.

LEONA: We talked about astronomy and the phenomena of the skies yesterday.

ALDOUS: We did?

LEONA: And the day before that.

ALDOUS: **[Beat]** Was it an interesting discussion, my love?

LEONA: No.

ALDOUS: Did I tell you about the colors of the moon?

LEONA: Yes.

ALDOUS: Did I tell you about the recent discoveries of the new forms of life?

LEONA: Yes. **[Beat]** Aldous, what day is today? Is it a special day?

ALDOUS: I don't know, my love. You tell me.

LEONA: Today is the day that Mrs. Settemeyer might be coming by for tea. **[Beat]** Won't that be nice?

ALDOUS: May I be excused?

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 2

Upstairs, Aldous, still in pajamas, sits on the floor and gazes intently through an antique brass telescope which is trained upon a pale blue-green moon. (The moon is three-dimensional, a large lunar globe mounted on a stand, four to five to six feet tall.)

Downstairs, Leona, still in her robe, sets out on the kitchen table (which has been cleared of the breakfast dishes) all of the ingredients and utensils she needs to make ladyfingers. As she begins to prepare the ladyfingers, she looks up and addresses the audience:

LEONA: **[To the audience]** Today we're going to be making ladyfingers. **[Beat]** Ladyfingers are made with a sponge-cake batter--egg yolks and sugar, into which are folded flour and stiffly beaten egg whites. **[Beat]** Now the consistency of the egg yolk and sugar mixture is of the very utmost importance, and to obtain just the precise consistency...

ALDOUS: **[Calling down from upstairs]** Leona, my love?

LEONA: **[Calling up]** Yes, Aldous.

ALDOUS: Are you all right, my love?

LEONA: I'm just fine, thank you, my dear.

ALDOUS: I thought I heard you saying something...were you saying something, my love?

LEONA: No, Aldous.

ALDOUS: I was hearing voices.

LEONA: Perhaps you should lie down.

Pause, as Aldous returns to his meditation upon the moon and Leona returns to the preparation of the ladyfingers.

LEONA: **[To the audience, somewhat more softly]** To obtain the desired consistency, the sugar must be added gradually to the egg yolks while you beat the mixture with a wire whisk. And for this I've used three egg yolks and one-half cup of granulated sugar...

ALDOUS: **[Calling]** Leona, my love?

LEONA: What is it, Aldous?

ALDOUS: Are you hearing any voices?

LEONA: **[Pauses and listens]** No, my dear. Perhaps you should lie down for awhile.

ALDOUS: I've just made the most exciting discovery, my love.

LEONA: That's nice, dear...why don't you lie down for awhile.

Pause, as Leona returns to beating the yolks and sugar. Then shortly Aldous slowly rises and quietly begins to come downstairs.

LEONA: **[Softly to the audience]** You have to whip the egg yolks and sugar until the mixture is rich enough to form a pale yellow ribbon. **[She lifts the batter to demonstrate, then begins to beat it some more when suddenly she becomes aware that Aldous has come downstairs and has appeared beside her.]**

ALDOUS: Good morning, my love. Isn't it a beautiful day?

LEONA: It's a lovely day.

Leona quits beating the yolks-and-sugar, sets them aside, and picks up the bowl with the egg whites and starts to beat them.

ALDOUS: I've made a most wonderful discovery.

LEONA: That's nice, Aldous. **[She continues to beat the egg whites.]**

ALDOUS: I've discovered a new moon. **[Beat]** It's an entirely new moon, my love. No one has ever seen it before. **[Beat]** Would you like to come see the new moon?

LEONA: I have to beat the egg whites. **[She beats them with a frenzy.]**

ALDOUS: It's a very pale and lustrous moon, my love.

LEONA: **[Impatiently]** Aldous, I'm beating the egg whites. I cannot talk to you while I'm beating the egg whites. It requires complete concentration.

Leona beats the egg whites with a demented fervor. Aldous watches her intently, quite awed. Then, suddenly Leona stops.

ALDOUS: Leona, my love, you are a beautiful woman.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous. Aldous, would you like to help me beat the egg whites? It's a demanding and exacting task. Would you like to help me with a demanding and exacting task?

ALDOUS: You are a beautiful woman, my love.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous. **[She hands him the egg whites and the wire whisk.]** The idea is to beat air into the egg whites, to lift the egg whites from the bowl and to incorporate air into them. It's a matter of physics and chemistry. **[She pantomimes the beating motion; Aldous copies her.]** A little more wrist. **[He does so.]** A little more... elevation. **[He does so.]** A little faster. **[He does so.]** That's good... a little faster. **[He embarks on a long, exhausting, egg white beating routine, and then he stops, quite satisfied with himself.]**

ALDOUS: May I be excused?

LEONA: The egg whites must come to a peak, Aldous. They must have body and integrity.

ALDOUS: My dear, I have to get back up to my new discovery.

LEONA: I thought you wanted to help.

ALDOUS: I wanted you to come and see my new moon.

LEONA: I have to beat the egg whites. **[She takes the egg whites from him, beats them a moment or two more, then sets them down and addresses the audience]** Now, we're going to fold the egg whites a little at a time into the mixture of the egg yolks and sugar, and as we go along we're going to sift in two-thirds cup of cake flour.

ALDOUS: May I be excused?

LEONA: Aldous, you have to learn to concentrate on the matters at hand.

ALDOUS: Would you like to talk about astronomy, my love?

LEONA.: I'd like to talk about the preparation of ladyfingers.

ALDOUS: I'd like to talk about astronomy and the phenomena of the skies.

LEONA: You may be excused.

ALDOUS: **[Pause]** Don't you love me, my love?

LEONA: I love you dearly, Aldous, but you suffer from dementia.

ALDOUS: I think you're a beautiful woman, my love.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous.

ALDOUS: I think your beauty rivals the stars and moons, my love.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous.

ALDOUS: You are more beautiful than Venus and the Pleiades, my love.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous.

ALDOUS: And I would like to immortalize you, my love, to create of you a legend. **[Beat, then very dramatically]** I would like, my love...with your permission, my love...I would like, my love, to name my newly discovered moon...Leona.

He gestures up to the moon. The lights dim leaving the moon bathed in a blue-green light, then...

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 3

Upstairs, the lights come up upon a great, oversized (five feet high?) glass apothecary jar (or jars) which contains great, oversized blue-green iridescent butterfly wings. Aldous sits before them concentrating on them with awe. Aldous' new moon remains on stage. He remains dressed in his pajamas.

Downstairs, the lights come up slowly upon Leona, who, still in her robe, sits in her chair, which she has pulled up next to the oven. She watches the oven door; the ladyfingers are baking within.

There is a long pause.

LEONA: **[Suddenly calling upstairs]** Are you all right, Aldous? **[Pause]** You're awfully quiet up there? **[Beat]** Aldous? **[Pause, then louder]** Aldous?! **[Then louder]** Aldous, are you still alive?! **[Long pause]** Aldous, we might be expecting company later this afternoon. I hope you haven't fallen into one of your "moods" have you? **[Beat]** You're not in one of your "moods" are you? **[Screams]** Aldous!!!

ALDOUS: **[Calmly]** What is it, my love?

LEONA: **[Screams]** You're not in one of your "moods" are you?

ALDOUS: I've just discovered the most extraordinary thing, my love.

LEONA: Aldous, Mrs. Settlemyer might be coming by later this afternoon for tea, and I don't want you to be in one of your "moods".

ALDOUS: I think I may have discovered a new form of life, my love. It's an extraordinarily beautiful new form of life. Would you like to come up and see it?

LEONA: I think you're tiring yourself out. I think you should lie down for awhile.

Pause as Aldous slowly rises and goes downstairs.

ALDOUS: **[As he approaches Leona]** Are we going to have tea now?

LEONA: It's not time for tea.

ALDOUS: I thought it would be nice to have a cup of tea now.

LEONA: It's not time for tea, Aldous, but it's possible that when it is time for tea that Mrs. Settlemyer will be coming by and I want it to be

an enjoyable and memorable occasion. You're not going to be in one of your "moods" are you?

ALDOUS: Who's Mrs., Settlemeier?

LEONA: She's a journalist. She's very nice.

ALDOUS: A journalist?

LEONA: She's a highly respected journalist, very widely read.

ALDOUS: I didn't know that we knew any journalists.

LEONA: She wants to write about us, my dear. She wants to interview us and write an article about us.

ALDOUS: Is she pretty?

LEONA: She's very pretty.

ALDOUS: She couldn't be as pretty as you, my love.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous.

ALDOUS: She couldn't have as pretty a face and eyes and mouth and...

Gently he kisses her.

LEONA: Aldous, I want you to go lie down for awhile and rest up for Mrs. Settlemeier's visit.

ALDOUS: Do you think that Mrs. Settlemeier would like to see the new form of life that I've just discovered? It's quite remarkable, my love, an extraordinary winged creature, aquamarine and luminous and fragile...it's trapped inside a large apothecary jar.

LEONA: It's a butterfly, Aldous.

ALDOUS: **[Gasps/excited]**

LEONA: It's an old form of life, it's not a new form of life.

ALDOUS: I just discovered it, my love.

LEONA: You "discovered" it yesterday, my dear. Do you remember "discovering" the butterfly yesterday?

ALDOUS: No.

LEONA: And the day before that?

ALDOUS: No.

LEONA: And the day before that?

ALDOUS: No.

Long pause as Leona rocks softly in her chair and softly begins to hum "Texas Foxtrot". Aldous listens with pleasure. Leona hums the tune louder and entertains Aldous as though he were a child. He begins to sway with the rhythm of the music.

LEONA: Do you remember that, my dear?

ALDOUS: Do I remember what?

LEONA: Do you remember the tune? **[She hums a few more bars.]**

ALDOUS: **[Listens for a moment]** Is it an old tune?

LEONA: It's a very old tune.

ALDOUS: Is it as old as the butterfly?

LEONA: It's older than the butterfly. **[Pause]** Do you remember the Chicago World's Fair...1933?

ALDOUS: I don't remember 1933.

Leona: We were there in 1933.

ALDOUS: We were where in 1933?

LEONA: In Chicago. **[She hums more of the tune.]**

ALDOUS: **[Pause, as he thinks very strenuously.]** Wasn't there a hotel?

LEONA: Yes, my dear.

ALDOUS: It was a lovely old hotel.

LEONA: We were very happy there.

ALDOUS: I remember a courtyard.

LEONA: The Hotel Eden.

ALDOUS: And there were tables and a large cage with birds...

LEONA: We lived there for the entire spring and summer.

ALDOUS: ...and we had a lovely room with a window overlooking the courtyard...

LEONA: We were at the height of our fame then.

ALDOUS: **[Perturbed with himself]** What was the name of that hotel?

LEONA: The Hotel Eden, Aldous, Eden.

ALDOUS: You were so beautiful, my dear.

LEONA: Do you remember the Hall of Science, the Century of Progress, that was the theme of the fair, the Century of Progress. It was Chicago's one-hundredth anniversary and they said that a hundred million people came, do you remember? **[Pause]** And we danced? **[Pause]** Do you remember that we danced? Do you remember the Entertainment Pavilion and the dancers and the music? **[She hums the tune again.]**

ALDOUS: **[Having been working very hard to try to remember anything]** Was that the place with the woman with the fans? The woman with the fans, do you remember her? With the fans, the dancer...

LEONA: **[Annoyed]** Sally Rand.

ALDOUS: **[Excited]** Sally Rand! Sally Rand! That's it, Sally Rand!! Wasn't she magnificent!

LEONA: **[Beat]** Is that all you remember of the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, Sally Rand?

ALDOUS: Wasn't she magnificent?!

LEONA: She was indecent, Aldous. She was naked behind her fans.

ALDOUS: **[Shocked/excited/gasps]** Do you think so? [Gasps again, then shakes his head] Sally Rand, Sally Rand... **[Then he realizes that Leona is hurt.]** Oh, my love, she wasn't as beautiful as you though, not as beautiful as you, not nearly, my love. You are the most beautiful. To me you are the most beautiful of the beautiful women of the world, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous.

ALDOUS: And I love a beautiful woman, my love. And I know a beautiful woman when I see one, ever since Miss ... Miss... my teacher, my first teacher, Miss....

LEONA: Livingston.

ALDOUS: **[Excited]** Miss Livingston! Miss Livingston! And she was the first of the beautiful women, of so many beautiful women, and I don't know why exactly, what makes the beauty of a woman, I mean, I just can't say why it's that way, what makes the beauty of a woman, have you noticed that? **[Beat]** I am a student of beauty, my love. **[Beat]** I'm a scholar who has dedicated his life to the study of beauty, the sense of discovery and the surprise... I like to look at something long enough, to study it, until I know what it is, and I've never been able to do that with a beautiful woman, like you, my love, not with a beautiful woman like you... I've never seen your face, my love, as the same face that I saw the time before. I don't why that is.

LEONA: **[Beat]** Sally Rand is dead.

ALDOUS: It's so very sad, so very sad.

LEONA: They buried her with her fans.

ALDOUS: So sad, so sad.

LEONA: **[Pause, then she starts to hum "Texas Fox Trot" again.]**

ALDOUS: What's that you're singing, my love? Is that an old tune?

LEONA: It's a lovely old tune.

ALDOUS: I like the old tunes. I like the old tunes. **[He and Leona hum the tune together for a moment.]** I like the old tunes.

BLACKOUT

ACT I, Scene 4

Upstairs, Aldous sits meditating upon the beauty of the butterflies.

Downstairs, Leona prepares to make an orange butter-cream with which to frost the ladyfingers. After a moment Leona addresses the audience:

LEONA: **[To the audience]** An orange butter-cream is a lovely complement to a ladyfinger and like the ladyfingers the butter-cream is made with egg yolks, sugar and butter. [Pause] Now it's important that the ladyfingers have cooled to room temperature before...

ALDOUS: **[Calling down]** Leona! Leona, my love!

LEONA: What is it, Aldous?

ALDOUS: I've discovered the most extraordinary creature, my love. It's a beautiful, blue-winged creature, unlike anything I've ever seen.

LEONA: You're not getting feverish are you? Are your ears hot? **[Pause, then loudly]** Aldous, are your ears hot?

ALDOUS: What is it, my love?

LEONA: **[Screams]** Are your ears hot?!

ALDOUS: I've discovered an extraordinarily beautiful new creature, my love.

LEONA: I want you to lie down, do you hear me? I want you to lie down and close your eyes and I want you to recite your multiplication tables, do you hear me? Aldous?!

Annoyed, Leona interrupts her work and climbs the stairs up to Aldous' room, where she finds him transfixed, staring at the butterflies.

LEONA: Aldous, I want you to lie down.

ALDOUS: **[Looking up]** It's not time to lie down, is it? I don't think it's time to lie down.

LEONA: I want you to put the butterflies away and I want you to lie down and rest up for Mrs. Settlemeier's visit.

ALDOUS: **[Beat]** Who is Mrs. Settlemeier?

LEONA: Mrs. Settlemeier might be coming for a visit, Aldous, and I don't want your things out all over the place. Look at this mess. Put these things away.

ALDOUS: **[Referring to the butterflies]** Aren't they lovely?

LEONA: Put the butterflies back in the closet and put the moon away too.

ALDOUS: Wouldn't Mrs. Settlemeier like to see the new moon?

LEONA: **[Firmly]** Put the moon away!

Pause, then Aldous starts to pout and then lets out a wail like a child and starts to cry. He works himself up into a frenzy of wailing and crying. Leona is unmoved. Aldous, realizing that his crying is getting him nowhere, starts screaming and ranting and throws himself onto his bed and has a full blown tantrum. In time, the tantrum subsides.

LEONA: **[Very sternly]** I was going to be very nice to you and let you have a ladyfinger, one ladyfinger as a special treat before tea. But now I'm not going to let you have one. **[Beat]** I asked you to pick up your room. I asked you not to tire yourself. I asked you not to get yourself all worked up and over-stimulated and fatigued. And did you listen to me? No. **[Beat]** Aldous, you are getting to the time in life where you can no longer afford not to pay attention to the details.

ALDOUS: I pay attention to the details. I pay very strict attention to the details.

LEONA: You pay attention to the wrong details. Let me see your fingernails. Show me your fingernails. **[He holds out his hands and she inspects the nails.]** Teeth! **[He opens his mouth widely and shows her his teeth.]** Ears! **[He turns one ear toward her, then the other; Leona is not pleased.]** What is Mrs. Settlemeier going to say when she sees your ears, hmm? What is Mrs. Settlemeier going to say?

ALDOUS: I don't think Mrs. Settlemeier's going to say anything, not if she has any manners. **[Beat]** May I have a ladyfinger now?

LEONA: You may not have a ladyfinger.

ALDOUS: I would very much like to have a ladyfinger.

LEONA: **[With finality]** You may not have a ladyfinger.

Pause, as Leona starts to straighten up the room.

ALDOUS: **[Still on the bed]** Come and lie with me, my love. I want to hold you, my love, and sing to you. **[Beat]** Please, my love, come to me, come to me and lie with me and we will watch the moon...it's a beautiful moon, my love...please, my love...please. **[Beat]** Don't you love me any more, my love? Have you grown tired of me, my love?

LEONA: I love you very much.

ALDOUS: You don't care about my studies, though, do you... they're very important explorations, my love, for the betterment of mankind...

LEONA: You need to take a rest now, Aldous. You've tired yourself out.

ALDOUS: ...significant research into the phenomenon of the new moon and the new forms of life, my love, details of colors and patterns...do you see the colors, my love?...the progression of the colors across the surface, shifting, changing, my love...

LEONA: It's time to put the moon away. **[She starts to push the moon back into one of the closets.]**

ALDOUS: **[Trying to stop her]** Oh, please, my love....

LEONA: It's time to put the moon away.

ALDOUS: Oh, please, my love, I want to see the moon, my love...

LEONA: It's time to put the moon away.

ALDOUS: Please, my love, please...please... **[He starts to cry.]**

Leona gets the moon into the closet and shuts the door.

ALDOUS: Oh, please...please...

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 1

Upstairs, Aldous, still in pajamas, is lying on his bed napping. In the place of the moon and the butterflies, there now stands before his bed a great, large, magnificently plumed and colored, stuffed parrot.

Downstairs, Leona, still in her robe, is boiling water in a kettle on the stove. The table has been cleared. The ladyfingers have been frosted and set aside on the counter. As the action begins, Leona sets out a basin and jars of herbs onto the table. She arranges them just so, then pauses and pulls her hair back from her face and wraps it up with a scarf. She pauses again and then looks up and addresses the audience:

LEONA: **[To the audience]** Beauty begins in the heart and spreads through the veins and into the cells and radiates its light through the skin.

She turns and takes the kettle from the stove and pours steaming water into the basin, which she then covers with a cloth. She sets the kettle back on the stove.

LEONA: **[To the audience]** But you can help Beauty along by a regular cleansing of the skin with herbal vapors. This should be done regularly, at least three times a week, although, once a day is strongly recommended.

She starts opening jars and placing ingredients into the water-filled basin, which she quickly covers with the cloth.

LEONA: **[To the audience]** Now, into the basin I'm putting small sprigs of rosemary and lavender, but you don't have to have lavender, buds of chamomile will do nicely or rose petals or sassafras, but don't use ginger root or juniper berries or anything that releases a dark or fulminous fluid like gentian or burdock root. You want a clear, medicinal and cleansing property that is "sympathetic," not caustic or "vituperative".

She lifts the cloth and lowers her head over the basin, then covers her head and the basin with the cloth. She steams her face in this manner for quite some time, then emerges and covers the basin quickly with the cloth.

LEONA: **[To the audience]** Steam the face for several seconds, then let the skin breathe. Then steam the face for several seconds, then let the skin breathe.

She steams her face again, and then she lets her skin breathe. She steams her face again, then lets her skin breathe.

LEONA: [To the audience] Repeat this twenty to thirty times.

She repeats her beauty ritual, and as she does so, upstairs, Aldous rises from his nap, folds the blanket on his bed, and slowly comes downstairs where he approaches Leona and silently watches her perform her routine. In time she realizes that he is next to her, staring in amazement.

ALDOUS: [With complete wonderment] You are a beautiful woman, my love.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous. I steam my skin daily with herbal vapors. It was a regimen taught to me by my grandmother, Margita, the Hungarian. Do you remember Margita, the Hungarian?

ALDOUS: No.

LEONA: She was very beautiful. You met her when she was very old, but still very beautiful. She steamed her skin daily all her life. **[Leona steams again.]** So did my mother. Do you remember my mother?

ALDOUS: No.

LEONA: You didn't like my mother. **[Beat]** My mother didn't like you.

ALDOUS: She wasn't as beautiful as you are, my love, was she?

LEONA: **[Thinks for a moment]** No.

As Aldous watches with fascination, Leona pats her face dry with a towel, then applies witch hazel to her face with cotton balls.

ALDOUS: What are you doing now, my love?

LEONA: I'm continuing to cleanse the skin with witch hazel, which has an astringent effect that helps to close the pores. You must always close the pores after you've steamed them open.

Leona applies more witch hazel, then closes up the bottle.

ALDOUS: You are a remarkable woman, my love.

LEONA: Thank you, Aldous.

Leona opens a big jar of creamy white goo and proceeds during the remainder of the scene to apply the goo to her face as a masque that by scene's end covers her face and neck completely.

ALDOUS: **[After watching her for a time]** Whatever, my love, am I going to do when you die, my love? Whatever, whatever am I going to do?

LEONA: Whatever makes you think I'm going to die?

ALDOUS: I think it's a fact, my love, that everyone dies. I think they've shown that to be true.

LEONA: I have no intention of dying, Aldous. None whatsoever.

ALDOUS: **[Long thoughtful pause]** Your grandmother died.

LEONA: Yes.

ALDOUS: Your mother died.

LEONA: Yes.

ALDOUS: Your sister Bernice died.

LEONA: Bernice had it coming to her. **[Beat, then surprised]** Do you remember Bernice?

ALDOUS: She was awfully nice, I thought.

LEONA: **[Beat]** You don't remember Bernice.

ALDOUS: **[Suddenly upset]** I don't want you to die, my love!

LEONA: **[Annoyed]** Aldous, I am not going to die. You have nothing to worry about.

ALDOUS: **[Long thoughtful pause, then with great resolve]** I'm not going to die either. I'm going to continue with my studies and my discoveries...I have an awfully active mind, my love...there's so much to observe, my love, and just the looking excites me...that was the first word I ever learned, the first word I learned how to spell...look...Miss...Miss...

LEONA: Livingston...

ALDOUS: Miss Livingston taught me... **[He traces the letters in the air as he spells]** ... L...O...O...K. **[Beat]** I love to look. **[Beat]** There's so much to observe, my love. **[Beat]** L...O...O...K. **[Then suddenly]** Would you like to come upstairs and see my latest discovery?

LEONA: Have you dusted your room this week?

ALDOUS: Yes.

LEONA: Have you mopped?

ALDOUS: Yes.

LEONA: Have you waxed?

ALDOUS: Yes...I've discovered the most wonderfully colorful thing, my love.

LEONA: You're a remarkable man, Aldous.

ALDOUS: I don't know what to make of it.

LEONA: Is it the first you've seen of it?

ALDOUS: Just now...it is my latest discovery.

LEONA: Does it have wings?

ALDOUS: Beautiful wings, my love.

LEONA: Do you think it could be a bird?

ALDOUS: **[Gasps/excited/thrilled]** Do you think it could be a bird?!

LEONA: Does it have a beak?

ALDOUS: It has a magnificent beak!

LEONA: It's a bird.

ALDOUS: **[Jumping with excitement]** Do you want to come see it, my love, do you want to come see it?!

LEONA: Maybe later, my dear.

ALDOUS: It is a beautiful bird, my love, a beautiful bird...oh please, my love, please come and see it.

LEONA: Do you think perhaps it's a parrot?

ALDOUS: A what, my love?

LEONA: A parrot.

ALDOUS: Is that a kind of bird?

LEONA: It is a very special bird.

ALDOUS: **[Very excited]** I knew he was special... I knew...I just knew.

LEONA: **[She mimics a parrot]** Squawk! Squawk!

ALDOUS: What was that, my love?

LEONA: That's the sound that it makes. Squawk!

ALDOUS: The parrot makes that sound?

LEONA: Squawk! Squawk! SQUAWK!!!

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 2

Upstairs, Aldous has surrounded himself with the objects of his world: the moon, the telescope, the butterflies in the apothecary jar, and the parrot. As the action begins, Aldous arranges and rearranges these objects to his satisfaction.

Downstairs, Leona lies prone, motionless on top of the kitchen table. Her face and neck are still covered with the white masque applied during the previous scene. She has arrayed herself on the table as though she were a corpse laid out for viewing. She remains motionless and silent throughout this entire scene.

ALDOUS: **[Suddenly addressing the parrot]** What a magnificent creature you are!

Pause, as Aldous moves the parrot to a more central position.

ALDOUS: **[To the parrot]** What a magnificent creature you are! **[Then calling down to Leona]** Leona, my love, would you like to come upstairs and see my magnificent new creature?

Pause

ALDOUS: **[To the parrot]** Shall I call you "Hallelujah"? Shall I call you "Mr. Wonderful?" "Mr. Beautiful?" Mr. Beautiful! I will call you "Mr. Beautiful"...what a wonderful name! **[Coaxing the parrot to speak]** "My name is Mr. Beautiful, what's your name?" **[Beat]** "My name is Mr. Beautiful, what's your name?" Can you say that, Mr. Beautiful? Can you talk? **[Pause]** Can you fly?!

Pause, as Aldous studies the parrot.

ALDOUS: **[To the parrot]** Are you an aerialist, Mr. Beautiful? Can you walk a tightrope and carry a parasol? Can you dance on a trapeze? **[Beat]** Can you sail through the air and skim across the breezes and climb, climb up towards the sun and beyond?

Pause

ALDOUS: **[To the parrot]** I am a scientist, Mr. Beautiful. I am an observer of the details, the blue, green, and the feathering patterns, the tail, claws and beak. **[Aldous is simply thrilled by everything]**

he sees around him.] Isn't life the most perfect thing! **[Beat]** Are you happy, Mr. Beautiful? Do you fly and sing... do you sing?! How could you not help but sing? **[Beat]** I wanted to be a singer, I wanted to travel, I thought, and be a troubadour and sing songs that told stories. I wanted to be a juggler. I wanted to be an acrobat, to eat fire and make magic... **[Suddenly calling down to Leona]** Leona! Leona, my love! I wish you'd come up and meet Mr. Beautiful. He's a magnificent creature, my love. **[Pause, then softly, confidentially to the parrot]** Leona, my beloved, is taking a nap. It's her custom to take a nap at this time each day. She thinks I'm talking a nap too... shhhh... **[Beat]** I don't like to nap. I like to keep my eyes open and observe and look, just look and study everything that I can see. Isn't life the most perfect thing! **[Beat]** I love you, Mr. Beautiful. I love you. **[Then calling down to Leona]** I love you too, Leona, my love! I love you! **[Pause, then calling down louder]** I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you! **[Pause, then calling down louder and with a magnificent exuberance]** I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you!!! **[Beat, then calling down with great tenderness]** Will you come and lie with me, my love? **[Beat]** Will you come and be with me for but a few moments, my love? I will sing a song to you, my love. Would you like that, my love?

Long pause

ALDOUS:

[To the parrot] Is there a woman whom you love, Mr. Beautiful? Is there a beautiful creature whom you desire, whom it thrills you just to see, to see, Mr. Beautiful? Is there another magnificent creature to whom you fly to be with, to whom you fly to spend the night? **[Pause]** Where do you spend the night, Mr. Beautiful? Where do you spend the night? I have always wondered this, I have always wondered with great concern: Where do birds spend the night? **[Then calling down to Leona]** Leona, my love, where do birds spend the night, do you know? **[Then to the parrot]** Is it far away? Is it across the sea? Is it a secret place nearby that I would never guess? Or do you disappear into the night of another dimension? Do birds spend the night in another dimension?! Another dimension?! **[Calling down excitedly]** Leona, my love, Leona, I've just had a revelation, my love, a revelation! Do you want to hear about my revelation? It's a very important revelation, I think. Birds spend the night in another dimension. Isn't that wonderful, my love? Hasn't that always been one of the great mysteries? **[Pause and then to the parrot]** I am the most happy of men, Mr. Beautiful. I am the most happy of men.

Aldous turns and goes downstairs. He stops and observes Leona lying on the table. He walks slowly around her, admiring her with complete love, reverence and joy. He moves closer to her and leans down to her ear.

ALDOUS: **[To Leona]** I love you, Leona. **[Pause]** I love you very much. **[Pause]** Are you having a nice nap? **[Pause]** Leona? **[Pause]** Leona, my love....

Aldous turns from her and wanders around the kitchen. He sees the ladyfingers, freshly iced, sitting on the counter beneath a glass cover. He pauses and looks back at Leona. He looks back at the ladyfingers. Slowly, carefully, soundlessly, he lifts the cover from the ladyfingers. He takes a ladyfinger and replaces the cover. He turns back toward Leona, and just as he is about to put the ladyfinger in his mouth, Leona suddenly sits up, eyes open.

LEONA: **[Screams]** Aldous!!

BLACKOUT

ACT II, Scene 3

The action takes up exactly where it left off in the previous scene. Aldous stands stunned by Leona's sudden awakening. Leona rises from the table and confronts him.

LEONA: **[Loudly, commandingly]** Put the ladyfinger down!

ALDOUS: **[He hands her the ladyfinger]** You are an amazing creature, my love. You are a most magnificent being.

LEONA: **[She places the ladyfinger back on the plate and covers it with the glass cover]** The ladyfingers are for Mrs. Settlemeier, Aldous. I don't want you to have one until she arrives. Now go upstairs and put on your tuxedo.

Pause, as Aldous stands rather amazed and perplexed. Leona continues her beauty treatment: she places a large bowl on the table and fills it from a pitcher with water. She proceeds to cleanse her face of the now dry-and-caked masque. Throughout the remainder of the scene, Leona continues her beauty treatment--rinsing her face, drying it, and then applying make-up.

ALDOUS: **[After a moment]** Who is Mrs. Settlemeier?

LEONA: She's a very interesting woman, a cultured woman who is interested in the arts and literature. She's a writer, a journalist.

ALDOUS: Would she like to meet Mr. Beautiful?

LEONA: She wants to interview us. She wants to write an article about our come-back.

ALDOUS: **[Suddenly excited]** My love, birds spend the night in another dimension! Isn't that magnificent! Birds spend the night in another dimension. They disappear from our perception, my love. That's where they go! **[Beat]** Isn't that wonderful?! Isn't that the answer to the great mystery?

LEONA: Did you take your nap?

ALDOUS: I had a conversation with Mr. Beautiful.

LEONA: You were supposed to be taking a nap.

ALDOUS: It was during the conversation that I had my revelation.

LEONA: I wanted you to be rested for Mrs. Settlemeier.

ALDOUS: Birds spend the night in another dimension.

LEONA: And I want you to wear your tuxedo.

ALDOUS: I named the bird Mr. Beautiful.

LEONA: **[Impatiently]** It's a parrot, Aldous, a parrot... and you named it Mr. Beautiful many, many years ago.

ALDOUS: He spends the night in another dimension.

LEONA: Aldous, you have got to address the fundamentals. Now go upstairs and get into your tuxedo.

ALDOUS: My love, I am thrilled by each moment of my life!

LEONA: You have got to address the facts!

ALDOUS: I am the happiest of men!

LEONA: Have you practiced your multiplication tables?

ALDOUS: **[Shakes his head.]**

LEONA: Have you been reciting your botanical names?

ALDOUS: My love, I am an observer, an explorer, a discoverer...

LEONA: Aldous, you have got to pay attention...you have got to learn to focus.

ALDOUS: Leona, I love you! I love you! I love you!

LEONA: **[Pause]** I love you too, but you have to learn to pay attention to the matters at hand.

ALDOUS: **[Suddenly inspired]** Leona, my love, let's have children!

LEONA: Aldous ...

ALDOUS: Please, my love, please, let's have children. I would love to have children ... wouldn't you like to have children?

LEONA: No.

ALDOUS: Your sister Bernice had children.

LEONA: I don't want to have children.

ALDOUS: I'd so love to have children.

LEONA: We are not going to have children.

ALDOUS: We'd have beautiful children.

LEONA: Offspring are the curse of humanity.

ALDOUS: We'd have remarkable children...

LEONA: Aldous, it pains me, you know, to cause you any disappointment, but, Aldous, my dear, my dear, your children would most assuredly suffer from acute neurological and physiological abnormalities.

ALDOUS: They would be explorers and adventurers.

LEONA: They would suffer from acute neurological and physiological abnormalities, because you, my dear, have come to the inevitable end of your genetic line. [Pause] You are sickly, perpetually anxious, often hysterical, given to tantrums, and unable at any given moment to deal with the essentials of reality...reality at the most primitive level. [Pause] Do you remember when we were walking into town and you became hysterical when we saw the dead cat?

ALDOUS: **[Shakes his head.]** No.

LEONA: You started to cry and you couldn't go on. I had to take you back to the house.

ALDOUS: I love animals.

LEONA: And you cried at the dressmaker's...you started to scream...

ALDOUS: I don't remember...

LEONA: And I've had to keep you secluded ever since.

ALDOUS: **[Pause, then he sighs]** I used to enjoy our outings.

LEONA: You've been sick for a very long time.

ALDOUS: I used to enjoy our outings.

LEONA: You cried at every outing...at the dressmaker's, at the pharmacy...

ALDOUS: I used to enjoy the outings to the zoological gardens and to Mrs. Grimsby's Tea Shoppe.

LEONA: You used to cry and carry on at Mrs. Grimsby's Tea Shoppe when I wouldn't let you have another scone.

ALDOUS: And then we'd take the tram out along the river and past the... do you remember the rhododendron gardens with the ... with the... with... **[He trails off into a loss of memory and lapses into a long, rather sad pause...]**

LEONA: **[Softly, after a few moments]** We've had to keep you in the house. You've been ill for many years, Aldous, many years... too ill to leave the house. **[Beat]** Do you remember the months of the sickness? Do you remember the sickness? Do you remember the fevers and the terrifying chills and the shaking, my dear? And you forgot who you were...do you remember when you forgot who you were? You couldn't remember your name. And for a while you didn't recognize me. **[Beat]** You didn't recognize me. **[Beat]** It's been many, many years...

ALDOUS: I'm feeling much better now.

LEONA: You still can't be trusted outside the house. You still become terrified when we go outside. **[Beat]** Do you remember the garden?

ALDOUS: I would love to have a garden.

LEONA: We had a beautiful garden.

ALDOUS: I would love to have a garden.

LEONA: We couldn't keep it up. We didn't have the strength, and then the winters... You have to maintain things, you have to keep at things, and prune, and fertilize... And then you were sick and I had to take care of you day and night, and feed you and bathe you...

ALDOUS: Did we sit in the garden?

LEONA: We sat in the garden and read and had tea...

ALDOUS: I love to sit in the garden...

LEONA: It was an English garden, Aldous...do you remember the garden? Roses and delphinium and foxglove and the bench and the blue chair...you used to sit in the blue chair and read...don't you remember the gardening? Aldous, my dear, we spent hours and hours every day for so many years, weeding and mulching, and you were forever moving things around because you didn't like where they were and you wanted the foxglove over by the penstemon, and the phlox by the daisies...It was an English garden, Aldous... roses and delphinium and foxglove and lilies, beautiful lilies, my dear... do you remember the lilies? **[Beat]** Do you remember the peonies? Do you remember the columbine and the phlox? It was a beautiful garden...

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: A beautiful garden.

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: A beautiful garden.

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: With birds and butterflies...do you remember the birds and the butterflies?

ALDOUS: The great winged creatures?

LEONA: And the day that the parrot came?

ALDOUS: Mr. Beautiful?

LEONA: Mr. Beautiful came and the blue butterflies.

ALDOUS: In the garden?

LEONA: ...and it had rained in the morning, early in the summer, a heavy mist at first and then the showers and then the sun came out and you went outside to see if there was a rainbow, and I was here in the kitchen and you started shouting and I couldn't imagine what in the world could be going on and you were shouting at me to come outside and I went out and I couldn't imagine...and there they were the most extraordinary, beautiful blue butterflies, huge, giant, beautiful blue butterflies...

ALDOUS: In the garden?

LEONA: In the garden! And we couldn't believe... just amazed... and we stood and then the parrot flew over and circled...a huge, magnificent parrot...and he circled and flew down...

ALDOUS: In the garden?

LEONA: In the garden! And the parrot flew down and it was like nothing we had ever seen before.

ALDOUS: Each moment is a miracle, my love.

LEONA: And we couldn't believe.

ALDOUS: Isn't life the most perfect thing.

LEONA: That's what you said.

ALDOUS: Isn't life the most perfect thing.

LEONA: That's what you said when you saw the parrot..."Isn't life the most perfect thing," you said... and that's when it began, that's when you started to feel faint, and you put your hand up to your head, I'll never forget it, and you had to sit down, and you said, "Isn't life the most perfect thing," once again, and that's when the sickness started...

ALDOUS: I became ill?

LEONA: For many years.

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: For many years.

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: You had fevers and you couldn't speak...for many years you didn't say a thing...

ALDOUS: This started with the bird?

LEONA: The day that the parrot flew down into the garden...

ALDOUS: Birds spend the night in another dimension.

LEONA: That's what you said.

ALDOUS: Birds spend the night in another dimension?

LEONA: That's what you said--your first words--after the illness...you hadn't spoken for years, years, Aldous...and then you rose one morning, all on your own, and you came down to the kitchen... I was completely amazed... and you smiled at me and said, "Birds spend the night in another dimension."

ALDOUS: That's the answer to one of the great mysteries, my love.

LEONA: It's as though you'd spent all those years waiting for the answer and suddenly there it was.

ALDOUS: Isn't life the most perfect thing.

LEONA: That's what you said that made you ill.

ALDOUS: I became ill?

LEONA: For many years.

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: For many years.

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: For many, many years. And that's when the garden died.

BLACKOUT

ACT III

As the lights come up, upstairs, Aldous sits meditatively amidst the objects of his world--the moon, the telescope, the butterflies, and the parrot. Standing in front of one of Aldous' closets is a clothes horse upon which hangs his tuxedo.

Downstairs, Leona is hurrying around. She is still dressed in her robe, but has completed her make-up and done-up her hair--wrapped it and knotted it upon her head. She takes out a dressy turquoise-blue dress from the closet at the back of the kitchen. She holds it up to herself and models it before a full-length oval antique-framed mirror. As she studies herself and fiddles with the dress, she hums the tune of Texas Foxtrot. Suddenly she turns and addresses the audience:

LEONA: **[To the audience]** Every woman has her favorite dress. **[Beat]** And although every woman, I'm sure, has her reasons why her favorite dress is her favorite dress--the style, the fit, the memory of the event for which she wore it--the heart of a dress, the heart of the truth of the essence of a dress is its color. **[Pause, as she models the dress in the mirror.]** Blue is my color. **[She models the dress some more.]** A medium, somewhat green, turquoise-blue, not bright, but not pale either, richer than a periwinkle, but more subtle than a royal or a cobalt or a midnight. **[Beat]** Some colors bring out the light in the skin, others subdue it. And the light of the skin is the light of the soul of the person.

She brushes the dress and hangs it up to display it.

LEONA: **[To the audience]** Good posture is imperative. **[Beat]** And good posture begins with the balls of the feet, and the placement of the hips, and the alignment of the spine, the shoulders, the neck, and the very tip of the head.

She visibly demonstrates this alignment/posture as she speaks.

And then there's the breath. **[She inhales and exhales dramatically.]** From the diaphragm. **[She inhales and exhales.]** Filling the lungs. **[She inhales.]** Clearing the lungs. **[She exhales.]** Did you know that if you didn't have lungs you could still breathe? **[Pause]** Did you know that if you didn't have ears you could still hear? **[Suddenly calling up to Aldous]** Aldous, are you getting dressed?

ALDOUS: **[Motionless, still dressed in his pajamas]** I love you, my darling.

LEONA: I want you to get into your tuxedo,

ALDOUS: I love you, I love you, I love you.

LEONA: Get dressed, Aldous.

ALDOUS: My love, why do some creatures of the world have wings and others don't?

LEONA: Never ask "why", my dear...just get dressed. **[Beat]** And concentrate on your breathing. **[She inhales and exhales and then calls up]** Are you breathing, Aldous?

ALDOUS: I am the happiest of men, my love.

LEONA: Are you dressed yet, Aldous?

ALDOUS: Why do some creatures have wings and others don't?

LEONA: Get dressed! Get dressed! Get dressed! **[Then to the audience]** The child will sometimes resist direction. Be firm. Be persistent. **[Then calling up to Aldous]** Get dressed, my dear! **[Then to the audience]** Discipline, patience, persistence...and eight glasses of water a day. This is the secret to happiness...eight to ten glasses of water a day...and rest, lots of it...fluids and rest... fluids and rest...

Leona gets into her blue dress. She studies herself in front of the mirror and adjusts the dress and her hair. She hums Texas Foxtrot. When satisfied with her appearance she turns and walks upstairs, where she finds Aldous studying the parrot.

LEONA: Aldous, it's time to get dressed.

ALDOUS: **[Surprised]** My love! My love, how beautiful you look! You are surely the world's most beautiful woman, most beautiful, beautiful woman, most beautiful woman in the world!

LEONA: **[Pleased]** Thank you, my dear. And if you, my dear, would put on your tuxedo, you would be the world's most beautiful man.

ALDOUS: Are we going to eat the ladyfingers?

LEONA: After we dance.

ALDOUS: Are we going to dance?

LEONA: That's why you're going to put on your tuxedo.

ALDOUS: I don't know how to dance.

LEONA: You're a marvelous dancer.

ALDOUS: **[Sadly]** I don't know how to dance.

LEONA: You're one of the great dancers, my dear.

ALDOUS: You're very beautiful, my love.

Leona hands him tuxedo trousers and motions him to go behind the dressing-screen. He takes the trousers and goes behind the screen. Periodically during the following dialogue, Aldous emerges from behind the screen and Leona hands him another article of clothing--shirt, suspenders, tie, coat, etc.--and sends him back behind the screen.

LEONA: **[Calling in to him]** You started as a tap dancer, Aldous ...do you remember that? ...at the age of three in a tuxedo that your mother had made and a little cane and top hat...you were a very small child, Aldous, you were a very small child...but with a mature face... do you remember the picture? Do you remember the photograph of you at age three in the tuxedo that your mother had made? Do you remember the photographs...do you remember the photographs that you burned? **[Pause]** And your sister was a tap dancer...you had a sister named Lucy...and you and Lucy became a team and then you started doing ballroom dancing and exhibitions...she was very small too. Do you remember doing exhibitions with your sister Lucy? **[Beat]** Do you remember being in love with Marjorie Wendle? Do you remember being in love with goddamned Marjorie Wendle and then you met me and forgot about her, do you remember that? We were seventeen, Aldous. Do you remember when we were seventeen? Do you remember when we were seventeen and we started dancing together at Murray Lytton's place and we used to have friends? **[Beat]** Do you remember when we used to have friends...Murray and the Liebling Sisters...do you remember Patty Liebling?...and Petey Marsden and Betty Bridges and the Billington Brothers...do you remember the Billington Brothers? **[Pause]** There used to be an audience, Aldous. Do you remember the audience...the blackness and the shining foreheads and eyes ...and the nerves...you were always

nervous before we went on, always...do remember how nervous you got before we went on?

ALDOUS: **[Still dressing]** Were we performers, my love?

LEONA: We were dancers, Aldous, dancers, ballroom dancers. Don't you remember dancing at Murray Lytton's club and then for the Schuberts? We had an act, Aldous, and we danced at clubs and on the vaudeville circuit and for exhibitions, and Bradford Branting called us the Nijinsky-and-Pavlova of the ballroom stage...do you remember when we got that review?

ALDOUS: You've been a wonderful wife, my love.

LEONA: I am not your wife.

ALDOUS: You've been a marvelous wife.

LEONA: We are not married.

ALDOUS: Wouldn't you like to have children, my love?

LEONA: I would not like to have children and we are not married. **[Then changing tone]** Aldous, why did you burn the photographs? If you could see the photographs you'd remember that we were dancers...I'd kept everything, everything...the clippings, the announcements, the reviews and all of the photographs, the production shots and those wonderful studio portraits that Alston Mantor took in the twenties...I had dozens of albums...everything. And then you burned them, you burned them. I will never understand why.

ALDOUS: Did we have photographs, my love?

LEONA: You burned them!

Pause, then Aldous emerges from behind the screen fully dressed in his tuxedo. He poses for Leona and smiles at her like a happy little kid.

LEONA: **[Thrilled]** You are a remarkably handsome man, my dear, a remarkably handsome man.

ALDOUS: Do you love me?

LEONA: I love you, I love you, I love you.

ALDOUS: I love you too. **[Beat]** Why are we getting dressed up?

LEONA: Mrs. Settlemeier may be coming by.

ALDOUS: Who is Mrs. Settlemeier?

LEONA: You'll remember her when you see her.

ALDOUS: I don't remember a Mrs. Settlemeier.

LEONA: It's been a number of years since we last saw her.

ALDOUS: **[Beat]** Maybe she's not going to come.

LEONA: I have a feeling that she will.

ALDOUS: Did she say she was going to come?

LEONA: She didn't "say", Aldous, but she knows that she's had a long-standing invitation to "come by".

ALDOUS: She hasn't "come by" in quite some time has she? I don't remember ever...Mrs. Settlemeier ... Mrs. Settlemeier...

LEONA: She's never come by, Aldous, but she's had a long-standing invitation to do so and I have a strong suspicion, a presentiment that she might be coming by today. **[She fusses a bit with Aldous' tie and coat.]** You're a remarkably handsome man, my dear.

ALDOUS: Do you love me, my love?

LEONA: I love you, I love you, I love you.

ALDOUS: I love you too, my love.

They pause for a long, sweet, romantic kiss, then Leona straightens his ties again and takes his hand and leads him downstairs.

ALDOUS: **[As they move]** Are we going to eat the ladyfingers now?

LEONA: The ladyfingers are for Mrs. Settlemeier.

ALDOUS: I have a feeling that she's not coming... it's a suspicion I have...

LEONA: Mrs. Settlemeier wants to see us dance.

ALDOUS: **[He stops]** I don't dance.

LEONA: You're a wonderful dancer,

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: You'll remember once you start to move. It's in the movement, Aldous, not in the head. The body remembers the movement, you don't have to.

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: Your body does. **[She nudges him and moves him along to lower level and the kitchen, where Leona immediately starts hurrying about straightening things up.]**

ALDOUS: **[Pause, watching Leona]** Have you been happy all these years, my love?

LEONA: I want you to try to concentrate now, Aldous.

ALDOUS: I've been awfully happy.

LEONA: I want you to try to focus your energies.

ALDOUS: I think we've had a wonderfully happy life, don't you?

LEONA: I want you to be ready for Mrs. Settlemyer.

ALDOUS: And you've been a wonderful wife.

LEONA: We're not married, Aldous. You've asked me a thousand times and I've said no a thousand times...and that, my dear is the reason that we've been happy.

ALDOUS: Will you marry me, my love?

LEONA: No.

ALDOUS: It would make me so happy.

LEONA: Happiness is movement. You have to keep moving to stay happy. And you have to drink eight to ten glasses of water a day and get your rest.

ALDOUS: I would very much like to kiss you, my love.

LEONA: We have to rehearse now, Aldous

ALDOUS: Let's kiss.

LEONA: I want you to get your adrenaline going, Aldous. You have to get yourself worked up a bit in order to perform.

ALDOUS: Wouldn't you like to kiss me?

LEONA: We're going to rehearse.

ALDOUS: I would rather kiss.

LEONA: We're going to pretend that Mrs. Settlemeier is about to arrive and you and I will be sitting here at the table spending a quiet afternoon.

She seats Aldous in a chair at the table and then sits across from him. Aldous is rather confused. Leona sits with her hands crossed, back erect, smiling pleasantly—her version of "Aldous and Leona spending a quiet afternoon".

ALDOUS: **[Beat]** Shouldn't we be talking about something?

LEONA: We could be sitting quietly or we could be having a conversation.

ALDOUS: I could be talking about my interests and discoveries.

LEONA: We could be reminiscing,

ALDOUS: Would Mrs. Settlemeier like to see my new moon?

LEONA: Mrs. Settlemeier would like to hear us reminisce about our days as professional dancers. Now, what are you going to do when Mrs. Settlemeier arrives?

ALDOUS: I don't think she's going to arrive.

LEONA: Are you going to stand up and say "How do you do, Mrs. Settlemeier"?

ALDOUS: **[He stands promptly as though well rehearsed, then very graciously]** How do you do, Mrs. Settlemeier. Would you care to see my new moon?

LEONA: **[Correcting him]** "How do you do, Mrs. Settlemeier. Would you care to sit down?" And then you offer her the chair.

ALDOUS: How do you do, Mrs. Settlemeier. **[He mimes offering the chair and seating her.]** Would you care for a ladyfinger? **[He takes the plate of ladyfingers and offers them.]**

LEONA: Aldous, the ladyfingers are for after the performance.

ALDOUS: **[As though to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Perhaps Mrs. Settlemeier would care for a ladyfinger now.

LEONA: Aldous, put the ladyfingers down.

ALDOUS: **[As though to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Would you care to have a ladyfinger, Mrs. Settlemeier, and then go upstairs and meet the great blue butterflies and Mr. Beautiful, the wonderful bird?

LEONA: I think Mrs. Settlemeier would prefer to see us dance.

ALDOUS: I think Mrs. Settlemeier would prefer to see my latest discoveries. **[As though to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Did you know that birds spend the night in another dimension?

LEONA: Aldous...

ALDOUS: Isn't life the most perfect thing?

LEONA: Aldous, you have got to calm down. You have got to concentrate on the matters at hand. Focus, Aldous, focus.

ALDOUS: You're a beautiful woman, my love.

LEONA: Now, Aldous...Mrs. Settlemeier will arrive and you will stand and offer her a chair and I will explain to her how you and I had just been sitting here reminiscing about the old days when we performed professionally, and, of course, she will want to see us dance.

ALDOUS: I don't dance, my love.

LEONA: And, of course, since we don't have any photographs to show her, we'll have no choice but to do our routine.

ALDOUS: **[Shaking his head, trying to remember]** Photographs, photographs

LEONA: You burned the photographs.

ALDOUS: I don't remember any photographs.

LEONA: You burned them.

ALDOUS: Were they important photographs?

LEONA: They were our whole life.

ALDOUS: Each moment is its own phenomenon, my dear, its own discovery and miracle...

LEONA: Aldous, Mrs. Settemeyer is going to be here in a few moments and I don't want you to be distracted.

ALDOUS: I don't think she's coming.

LEONA: There is the ever-present possibility, I would even say probability that she will come... perhaps any moment.

ALDOUS: I don't think she's ever been here, has she?

LEONA: All the more reason to expect that today is the day that she will.

ALDOUS: **[A painful pause]** My love, my love, I'm afraid that you've lost your grip on the realities.

LEONA: That is precisely your problem, Aldous ... the realities.

ALDOUS: I have very nice realities.

LEONA: You have very nice unrealities.

ALDOUS: You have no realities at all, my love ... Mrs. Settemeyer, photographs...

LEONA: You burned the photographs. **[Beat]** You burned the photographs and now I have nothing to show of my life... nothing ... nothing...

ALDOUS: **[Sadly]** I didn't know... I didn't know...

LEONA: Will you dance with me? That's all I'm asking that you dance with me.

ALDOUS: I would very much like to dance with you, my love... I would love to dance with you, my love, but I don't remember how...I don't remember...

LEONA: You danced with me last night. Do you remember dancing with me last night?

ALDOUS: I don't remember.

LEONA: And you danced with me the night before that...

ALDOUS: You've lost your grip on the realities, my love...

LEONA: And we're going to dance tonight just as we danced last night and the night before, me dear, because if we don't dance tonight we won't dance tomorrow night and if we don't dance tomorrow night we'll never dance again. **[Beat]** And then we'll die.

ALDOUS: I have no intention of dying.

LEONA: Then you'd better get up and dance.

ALDOUS: **[Pause as he thinks and struggles with his mind to remember about dancing]** Shouldn't there be an audience? Wasn't there an audience?

LEONA: That's why I've invited Mrs. Settlemeier. **[She looks over to Mrs. Settlemeier's chair, as does Aldous. Then as though to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Would you like to see us dance, Mrs. Settlemeier? **[Then to Aldous]** I think Mrs. Settlemeier would like to see us do our routine. **[Then to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Would you like to see our routine? **[Then to Aldous]** Aldous?

ALDOUS: **[Slowly rising, and quite confused]** Leona, my love, it would be a great honor if you would consider having the next dance with me. **[He bows very gallantly.]**

LEONA: **[As though to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Mrs. Settlemeier, Aldous and I would like to perform for you our very favorite number--Texas Foxtrot. This was the high point of the program that Aldous and I presented as featured performers at The Century of Progress, the 1933 Chicago World's Fair...a performance for which we received a number of great honors and accolades, most notably a photograph of us in these very costumes that appeared on the cover of Life magazine, which I would dearly love to show you, Mrs. Settlemeier, but which was tragically destroyed, as was, all of our memorabilia, in a devastating fire.

ALDOUS: **[Very emotionally to Mrs. Settlemeier]** I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't know what the photographs were, who the people were, I didn't recognize them, and I had just discovered the phenomenon of fire, and I ...

LEONA: **[Calmly]** Aldous, Mrs. Settlemeier would like to see us dance.

ALDOUS: **[As though to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Did you know that birds spend the night in another dimension?

LEONA: Aldous, Mrs. Settlemeier would like to see us dance,'

ALDOUS **[As though to Mrs. Settlemeier]** Each moment is its own miracle, Mrs. Settlemeier...each moment...each moment...
[Pause, as Aldous summons all his courage. Then he bows deeply to Leona and asks] It would be a great honor, my love, if you would consider having the next dance with me.

LEONA: **[She bows in return]** Thank you, my love. I should be delighted.

Leona turns and walks upstage to the Victrola, cranks it, and places the needle onto the record. She hurries back to Aldous and they assume a very correct dancing position. The record begins (and a very scratchy one it is) and the dance team of Aldous and Leona comes to life--striding and dipping and whirling to the ragtime tune, Texas Foxtrot. Their dance is a supremely happy one.

BLACKOUT