

# **RAIN**

**By Jerold London**

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**O Western Wind when wilt thou blow  
Down that the small rain down can rain?  
Christ! That my love were in my arms  
and I in my bed again.**

– Anon. Early 16<sup>th</sup> century

**It was raining. A fine rain, a gentle shower.... Where it fell on earth,  
on fields and gardens, it drew up the smell of earth.... On the wide sea  
a million points pricked the blue monster .... Women in childbirth  
heard the doctor say to the midwife, “It’s raining.” And ... the gentle  
rain, poured equally over the mitred and the bareheaded with an  
impartiality which suggested that the god of rain, if there were a god,  
was thinking Let it not be restricted to the very wise, the very great,  
but let all breathing kind ... share my bounty.**

– Virginia Woolf, *The Years*

## **RAIN**

TIME AND PLACE

1948 (and half a lifetime later). A small Midwestern town (and a little beyond).

## CHARACTERS

WRITER, female, 60's.

MARIANNE, 29, married.

ROBERT, Marianne's husband, 30's.

ROBBY, Marianne's 7-year-old son.

CAROLE, Marianne's neighbor, 40's or 50's.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

## SCENE 1 – WEDNESDAY MORNING

**Stage right** WRITER is seated, comfortably, in dim light, speaking into a recording device. The action takes place **center stage** and **stage left**.

### WRITER

I think I'll call it "Rain" for now.

I can always change the name.

But that fits.

And, to start, let's start it on a clear-morning school day. Okay?

So many mornings back then started for Marianne on school days.

Packing lunches.

One for Rob ... Robert ... and one for Robby.

Oh! It was 1948, did I say?

**Lights come up on MARIANNE, in the kitchen in a robe, making coffee and packing lunches in paper bags.**

### WRITER

The War's been over three years,

and people are talking more about Russia than Japan or Germany these days.

The *Cold War*.... Stalin.... Atomic bombs.

Kids will be hiding under desks at school soon. During air raid drills.

Told exactly what to do if there's a sudden, giant burst of light.

New words, new fears, and new beginnings.

People back to work fulltime. No more Depression. Economic depression, that is.

The past ten years are just a memory ... a *bitter* memory in ways....

She's thinking about her right now.

**MARIANNE**

[*to herself*] It's so unfair, not getting really to know Robby.  
What's the point having grandkids if you don't get to know them?  
Or what they like for lunch at school?  
She'd tell him like it is. Better than I can, that's for sure....  
There, that's done. Now Robert's.

**MARIANNE finishes packing the lunches  
and checks the coffee. ROBERT enters,  
dressed for work, kisses MARIANNE,  
grabs his lunch, and heads for the door.**

**ROBERT**

Car pool's here. Got to run.  
Dinner's on me tonight.  
Gabriel's.  
Love you.  
Bye.

**Exits.**

**MARIANNE**

Cafeteria.  
Love you, too.

**ROBBY runs in, grabs his lunch, and  
heads for the door.**

**MARIANNE**

Oh no you don't.  
Not even a Hi?

**ROBBY**

Hi, Mom.  
Love you.  
Bye.

**Exits.**

**WRITER**

Not very sexy.  
But that's how I remember it.  
Back then. Before sexy was hardly a word anyone ever used.

**MARIANNE pours a couple of cups of coffee, sets them on the table with a couple of sweet breakfast rolls, and sits.**

**In a few moments CAROLE knocks, enters, and sits with MARIANNE.**

**CAROLE**

Hi, Neighbor.  
What's the news over here today? Anything?

**MARIANNE**

[beat] We're going out to Gabriel's for dinner tonight.

**CAROLE**

Wish I were so lucky.

**MARIANNE**

It's a *cafeteria*, for heaven's sake, Carole.

**CAROLE**

But it's *out*, at least.

**MARIANNE**

Out.... Yes.... At least....

**CAROLE**

Did you hear? The Newsomes are getting a TV?

**MARIANNE**

We are, too. Next week.

**CAROLE**

Well, that's news.  
When did Rob tell you?

**MARIANNE**

It's from his father.  
They've had it for a year.  
And they're getting a larger one....  
He's got to put an antenna up, he says. On our roof.

**CAROLE**

The more you get, the more you have to do.... But it's worth it.... People say.

**MARIANNE**

[beat] And a new dryer.  
Our old one broke yesterday afternoon.

**CAROLE**

Broke?

**MARIANNE**

Broke loose, I should say.  
The wooden two-by-fours it was on rotted, I guess.  
It just started walking across the basement on them, like a midget Frankenstein.  
Scared Robby to death.  
He screamed, and started running up the steps, before it unplugged itself.

**CAROLE**

Sounds like you need new wood, not a whole new machine, to me.

**MARIANNE**

Rob says it's about time.  
The old one never did sit all that well.  
On the cement down there.

**CAROLE**

We could use a new Bendix, too.

**MARIANNE**

If it's not one thing anymore, it's another.  
You never do get ahead in this world.

**CAROLE**

No. You never do.  
Not if you want to keep up with all the new things to get used to, you don't.  
To make life easier.

**MARIANNE**

It's remarkable our mothers ever made it through, like they did.

**CAROLE**

They had their War.  
We had ours.

**MARIANNE**

And never again, pray God.

**CAROLE**

I have something I have to tell you.

**MARIANNE**

What?

**CAROLE**

A couple of things, actually.

**MARIANNE**

Okay....

**CAROLE**

Robby came over to the house yesterday.

I guess before your clothes dryer horror story. He didn't say anything about it.

**MARIANNE**

You're always so good to him.

He loves you. He's told me that, "Aunt Carole."

**CAROLE**

He's brilliant, you know. And I love him, too.

**MARIANNE**

He didn't break anything, did he?

He's always getting himself into things, or getting hurt, or breaking something.

**CAROLE**

I'm sure, not *always*.

**MARIANNE**

Often enough. Or so Rob's mother's always quick to point out.

**CAROLE**

Well, I was cleaning back in our bedroom, and he was calling out to me.

Asking for more arithmetic questions.

Adding numbers, or subtracting. You know. One after another. How he is.

And finally I wanted a little peace, to think, to myself, so I asked him:

How much is one hundred times one hundred?

That should stop him, I figured.

And it did. For about a minute.

Until he called back: Ten thousand!

Can you imagine? At age seven?



**MARIANNE**

He's got his strong points. I know.  
Not reading though.

**CAROLE**

Give him time.

**MARIANNE**

I hope you didn't make a big fuss over it.

**CAROLE**

I didn't.  
But why?

**MARIANNE**

Because I don't think making a fuss over him is good for him.  
Like ... when he plays chess with Rob, and wins.  
I don't like it how he acts.  
Rob's his father.  
Robby needs to learn that a good mind isn't everything in life.  
Good manners are just as important.  
Solving mind problems doesn't solve life problems, as my mother used to say.

**CAROLE**

He beats Rob at chess?  
Didn't he play chess in college?

**MARIANNE**

Yes, and that's what I mean.  
Robby needs a little more ... being down to earth. Being humble and appreciative.  
He thinks he can make everything work like an equation, or a chess problem.

**CAROLE**

I'd think you'd be over the moon to have a son that bright. I would.

**MARIANNE**

He's not skipping any grade in school, I can tell you.  
I can promise you that.  
I learned my lesson, the hard way.

**CAROLE**

Which grade did you skip?  
I know you've told me, but I forget.

**MARIANNE**

Second.

**CAROLE**

Well, in my opinion, brains are a blessing in this world.  
The way things are going.  
New inventions all the time.  
And TV.

**MARIANNE**

I ask him what he wants to do.  
And, besides being world chess champion,  
he wants to go into the Navy, like his Uncle Joe.

**CAROLE**

The one who got killed in the Pacific?

**MARIANNE**

What's it all worth, being clever at things,  
if you're just going to get killed for nothing?

**CAROLE**

It wasn't *nothing*, Marianne.  
Don't say "nothing."

**MARIANNE**

Don't say war's nothing?  
Men who want to squeeze people under their thumbs, just for the pleasure of it?  
Using other people's lives to do the killing?  
I thank God, Rob was exempt for being an engineer.  
I don't think I'd have made it if he were out somewhere,  
dying all the time, for all I knew. Like Joe.

**CAROLE**

Maybe he'll be a doctor.  
And deliver babies.  
*That's a good life.*

**MARIANNE**

If you're a man who likes babies.

**CAROLE**

Or women.

**MARIANNE**

Men want what men want, and women can come along if they want. Or not.  
How my father is.  
Was.  
To my mother, and his so-called farm.

**CAROLE**

But Rob idolizes you.  
I never saw a husband who loves his wife like Rob.

**MARIANNE**

Rob's the exception.

**CAROLE**

Just saying what I see....  
How especially lucky you are.

**MARIANNE**

[*pause, eating*] I hope that's not the other piece of news you have.

**CAROLE**

Far from it.  
Did you hear?  
Mrs. Nelson up the street has a new gentleman caller.

**MARIANNE**

No!!

**CAROLE**

Yes, she does.  
I saw him pull into her driveway last night.  
Late.

**MARIANNE**

After what she did to the last one?

**CAROLE**

What?  
Slugged him in the face?  
With her baby in her arms.

**MARIANNE**

She's a bruiser, out of John Steinbeck.

**CAROLE**

They say the baby's father was a gangster.

**MARIANNE**

Probably all her men are.

**CAROLE**

Could be out of John Steinbeck.

**MARIANNE**

I've told Robby not to go near that place.

**CAROLE**

Why would he?

**MARIANNE**

The way he loves babies?

**CAROLE**

But that one's odd.  
If you know what I mean.

**MARIANNE**

Doesn't matter to him....  
And the dog they have.  
That's the worst part. That horrible dog.

**CAROLE**

It is something else, I'll admit. And dogs and I get along. But that one's scary.

**MARIANNE**

Robby has no sense when it comes to dogs.  
He's been bitten, I don't know how many times.

**CAROLE**

What is he afraid of?

**MARIANNE**

Not swings, that's certain.  
Remember when he had most of his baby front teeth knocked out on that  
swinging metal ladder in the Hoffman's yard, when he was four?  
And not bikes.  
Rob and I spent a couple of hours getting the stones out of his leg and bandaging  
it up when he fell off his bike on Hathaway, when they tarred it this summer.

**CAROLE**

And not trees. He's fallen out of ours more than once.

**MARIANNE**

Or cats. Trying to keep that stray away from hunting birds in our back yard.  
How it scratched his arms, one end to the other.  
Or that metal stake he pulled up and punched into his thigh. Remember that?

**CAROLE**

Maybe runaway dryers.

**MARIANNE**

And the measles, and chicken pox, and impetigo.  
And asthma. When does it ever end?  
I never knew raising a boy could be like this....  
Hardly said "Hi" and "Bye" to me this morning,  
grabbing his lunch I made and rushing out.

**CAROLE**

Live and learn ... they say.

**MARIANNE**

I think I'd rather have Robby healthy and safe, than bright.

**CAROLE**

Don't wish your blessings away.

**MARIANNE**

"Rock and refuge would I be  
While storms of life travaileth thee;  
Love and comfort would I give  
As you, my child, learn to live.  
I'd rock and refuge gladly be  
If that would mold a man of thee!"

**CAROLE**

What's that?

**MARIANNE**

Something in my mind I've started writing.

**CAROLE**

Poetry?

**MARIANNE**

I've written from time to time since I was a teenager.  
Thoughts. Just thoughts. To myself.... *By myself.*

**CAROLE**

Who you are.

**MARIANNE**

Maybe who we are isn't who we are, I think to myself, sometimes.  
[beat] I love our coffee chats, Carole; but then, I need to be alone.  
I need my space. Call it my being born again.

"Sweet are the uses of solitude!  
My silent hours contain my life."

**CAROLE**

If we're not who we are, who would we be?

**MARIANNE**

"The smile in the mist and the unborn heart  
That lives upon love and follows the dream."

[pause] What I'm trying to say is, people are different where they are.  
Like me. Do you think I'd be the same if we were in New York, let's say?  
Or Paris?

**CAROLE**

No.... Why? Do you want to go to Paris?

**MARIANNE**

You're not getting the point of what I'm saying.

**CAROLE**

Oh, I think I get it, Marianne. You're not so happy on our street.

**MARIANNE**

What I *mean*, Carole, is that I don't know if I'd want to exist at all,  
if I couldn't be the person I am.  
And how could I be the person I am if I hadn't the memories of what I've lost?  
But maybe I could be better at it, I think sometimes to myself in retrospect,  
if it would be in a different place.  
Some place I'd feel closer to my mother.  
But I'm not saying, being away from you. You're my best friend in all the world....

**MARIANNE starts to tear up.**  
**CAROLE gently touches Marianne's arm.**

**CAROLE**

It's all right. I understand.  
I feel the same way, sometimes.

[sings] "Oh, give me land, lots of land, under starry skies above.  
Don't fence me in."

**MARIANNE**

But it's not all right....

**CAROLE**

What's not all right?

**MARIANNE**

I don't know if I can tell you.

**CAROLE**

You can tell me anything.... Is it Rob?

**MARIANNE**

[a pause to catch her composure] Last Saturday....  
Last Saturday we were at our bridge club....

**CAROLE**

And?

**MARIANNE**

And Lindsey announced, at the end, when the evening was just about over,  
that she and Richard....  
Their candy stores, I guess, are doing quite well,  
and they've decided they need to change their circle of friends.

**CAROLE**

What?

**MARIANNE**

We not classy enough for them anymore.  
Peons that we are.

**CAROLE**

She said *that??*

**MARIANNE**

Not in those words.  
But that's what she meant.

**CAROLE**

How rude!

**MARIANNE**

I *hate* it!

**CAROLE**

How classless!

**MARIANNE**

People thinking they're better than us.  
Just because they have a little more money.  
And a bigger house they just bought.  
Like money's the only thing that matters to character.  
I just *hate* it!

**CAROLE**

The snob!

**MARIANNE**

I nearly broke down, right there in the room, in front of everybody.  
Rob and I left. And I sobbed, when we got home.  
And he took the sitter home.  
Robby was asleep. Thank God.

**CAROLE**

What's the bridge club doing about it?

**MARIANNE**

We're all better bridge players, and they know it.  
They're a terrible partnership.  
But that's not the point.  
We didn't kick them out because of how poor card players they are.  
You don't do that to friends.  
Not if you have decent manners.

**CAROLE**

They're obviously not worth worrying about.  
You'll find someone else to take their place.



**MARIANNE**

Of course we will.  
And that's not the point either.  
It's money. And how important people think money is.

**CAROLE**

What is important, then?

**MARIANNE**

Breakfast.  
With your best friend.  
And talking.

**CAROLE touches Marianne's arm again.**

**CAROLE**

Coffee and sweets with your best friend.  
And talking.  
And being quiet, when you're alone ... writing.  
Have you done much of it?

**MARIANNE**

I read more than I write....  
Rob and I talked about it, and he knows he's got to find a job that pays more.

**CAROLE**

Because of what that phony friend of yours said?

**MARIANNE**

Or maybe I could find a job.  
I always wanted to teach.  
But that means going back to school to get my degree.  
And who's to watch Robby?

**CAROLE**

I could....  
I'd be happy to.

**MARIANNE**

Would you?

**CAROLE**

I'd be happy to.

**MARIANNE**

For three years? After school.

**CAROLE**

Of course.

**MARIANNE**

He'll want you to read to him.  
In addition to math problems.  
I fall asleep, each time he has me reading an Oz book.

**CAROLE**

If that's his favorite, I can handle it.

**MARIANNE**

That, and The Tinderbox.

**CAROLE**

One of my favorites, too.  
Dogs with eyes the size of saucers.  
Don't worry. He's no problem for me.  
Nor Hans Christian Andersen, nor The Wizard of Oz, either.

**MARIANNE**

You're an angel!

**CAROLE**

And you're a dreamer.

**MARIANNE**

I just want to be seen for me, and known for me.  
Not living in disguise.

**CAROLE**

That's what friends are for.

**MARIANNE**

The best things in the world.

**CAROLE**

Better than Paris?

**MARIANNE**

Yes.

**CAROLE**

Are you sure?

**MARIANNE**

The best thing about being in Paris would be friends.  
Being with the writers and poets, the artists and playwrights. Everybody sitting  
around a table, talking and eating. Sharing ideas, and giving each other gold.

**CAROLE**

Gold?

**MARIANNE**

Encouragement.  
Encouragement is gold to a writer.  
And when you're in the clouds, in Paris, at sunset,  
with the greatest writers in the world sipping wine,  
new Hemingways, and Fitzgeralds, and Gertrude Steins,  
well, what could be more gold than that?

**CAROLE**

Gold?

**MARIANNE**

Pink gold, then....  
Except ....

**CAROLE**

Except what?

**MARIANNE**

I'm not ready for that yet.  
Until I get my college degree.  
Until I'm ready to better be me, and what I can do.  
To challenge the world's prejudice against women.  
With Rob's help, of course.  
The French have always been more appreciative of the female perspective.

**CAROLE**

So ... if friends are better than Paris at sunset, what about a million dollars?

**MARIANNE**

A million dollars?!

**CAROLE**

See!

**MARIANNE**

Oh, hush-up-with-you.  
If Rob and I are in for a million dollars,  
it won't be by snubbing our friends along the way.

**CAROLE**

[*pause, eating*] Read anything good, lately?

**MARIANNE**

What?

**CAROLE**

You said before, you read more than you write.

**MARIANNE**

Oh...  
Well, no....  
Well, maybe.

**CAROLE**

Maybe??

**MARIANNE**

There's this new Japanese novel....  
By a man named Yasunari Kawabata.  
I've never read anything Japanese before.

**CAROLE**

Well, why would you?

**MARIANNE**

Somebody said it was the best book she'd ever read.  
And I thought it was about time I began to try to understand *their* perspective.

**CAROLE**

How do you like it?

**MARIANNE picks up *Snow Country* from the table. (It was lying upside down.) And reads from it.**

**MARIANNE**

[reads] The train came out of the long tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay white under the night sky. The train pulled up at a signal stop. Low, barracklike buildings that might have been railway dormitories were scattered here and there up the frozen slope of the mountain. The white of the snow fell away into the darkness some distance before it reached them.

[beat] I don't know if I've ever read anything quite like that before.

"The white of the snow fell away into the darkness some distance before it reached them."

You don't make movies that can show what words like that can say.

**CAROLE**

What did you say the author's name was?

**MARIANNE**

[showing] Yasunari Kawabata.

**CAROLE**

About time, eh?

**MARIANNE**

You mean, after the War?

**CAROLE**

Yeah.

**MARIANNE**

Yes, I guess.  
Just curious how much they hate us.  
For Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**CAROLE**

And do they?

**MARIANNE**

It's not about that at all.  
It's as though the War never happened.

**CAROLE**

How?

**MARIANNE**

It's about love.... I guess.

**CAROLE**

What do you mean: You guess?

**MARIANNE**

There's this very wealthy man from Tokyo.

His name's Shimamura,

who, Kawabata says, loses honesty with himself in his idleness.

Too wealthy for his own good.

So he walks.

Often.

Away, in the mountains.

The summer before the story begins he had been hiking in the mountains above a small, remote, hot-springs resort town on the west coast of Japan, across the island from Tokyo. In the winter it's known as the Snow Country.

After a week alone he came down into the town, and inquired about having a geisha....

You know, a prostitute.

But they were all occupied.

In some celebration at the town's cocoon-warehouse theater.

So ...

**CAROLE**

Cocoon-warehouse theater?

**MARIANNE**

It was a combination building, where silk worm cocoons were stored for harvest, and dances were held, and movies were shown.

Anyway, that night every one of the town's geisha were at the dance, and the only suggestion the maid at the hotel could make was a young girl who lived at the dancing teacher's house.

A *female* music and dance instructor.

The girl, the maid told him, was not a geisha, as such, but known to be good at conversation.

Shimamura told her he wasn't interested, but she brought the girl around anyway.

Long story short, he was immediately taken with her looks.

Her wonderfully clean and fresh looks.

A perceived cleanliness, as Kawabata put it, from her head to between her toes.

**CAROLE**

He looked between her toes?!

**MARIANNE**

Actually, to the hollows under her toes.  
And, no, he didn't look.  
The description was under poetic license.

**CAROLE**

They have that in Japan, too?

**MARIANNE**

[*playfully*] Shut up!...  
Where was I?  
Oh, her name was Komako.  
And they started talking.  
First about the mountains. Then about her age. She was nineteen.  
And that she'd been put under contract to become a geisha in Tokyo,  
until a patron stepped in to pay for her to become a dance instructor instead.  
Unfortunately, after a year and a half he died, and her future was in doubt.  
The conversation turned to theatre, and she knew more about the current actors  
and styles than he did.  
They talked, on and on, as though they both were starved for the sound of  
another's voice.  
She seemed to know instinctively how to talk to a Japanese man.  
And that made a difference to Shimamura.  
One he couldn't forget.  
Talking ... to a woman ... rather than merely satisfying his carnal needs.

**CAROLE**

How many men, Japanese or American, find it difficult to really talk to a woman?  
As though their manhood image might be tarnished.

**WRITER**

That will change.

**MARIANNE**

Maybe men are secretly afraid of women....  
But, back to the story ... unless you've heard enough.

**CAROLE**

No. Go ahead.

**MARIANNE**

Shimamura's male desires metamorphed into something else he was less familiar with.

It was friendship more than anything else he felt for her.

It was like how he felt about the mountains had extended itself to cover her.

But the next day the more basic man emerged.

And he asked her to call him a geisha.

**MARIANNE turns to another page.**

[reads] "I didn't come to be asked that" her face reddening.

"There are no women like that here."

"Don't be silly."

"Go ahead, try calling someone yourself."

"You call someone for me."

"Why do you expect me to do that?"

"I'm thinking of you as a friend.

That's why I've behaved so well."

**CAROLE**

Sleaze.

**MARIANNE**

Not exactly.

You see, as I understand it, but really, what do I know?

Except what I read. And I'm just learning, about Japan.

**CAROLE**

Are you defending him? Marianne?

**MARIANNE**

No. It's just ...

What I gather is that contraception isn't used much in Japan by married couples, and the country needs geisha for population control.

In a place where there hardly is enough land and food to go around, comfortably.

Which is one of the main reasons they went from being isolationist to one of the most aggressive countries in the world after World War One.

Anyway, Shimamura and Komako talked it out,

and resolved to keep their friendship despite his social lapse.

It lasts longer if you're just friends, she told him.

But that was all six months in the past when the story begins.

And, if you like poetry, like I do, the actual beginning is sheer poetry.



**CAROLE**

Maybe I should read it for myself.  
If you're done with it.

**MARIANNE**

Sure. Okay.  
You can take it home with you.  
It's only 175 pages.  
An easy read.  
But, just let me read you a little from the first part.  
Only a couple of paragraphs.  
They're so beautiful.

Shimamura's on the train from Tokyo to the Snow Country,  
hoping he can find Komako again,  
but, at the same time, finding it difficult remembering exactly what she looks like.  
He imagines only the index finger of his left hand has a clear memory.  
That's sort of how he is.  
Anyway, there's a girl on the train, riding in the same compartment.  
Her name is Yoko, who comes into the story later as a friend of Komako.  
She's caring for a man travelling with her, who is clearly ill. His name is Yukio.  
Shimamura can't tell whether they're married or not.  
In his mind it occurs to him that illness shortens the distance between a man and  
a woman.  
What I'm reading is three hours before the train goes through the tunnel, that I  
read you before....

[*reading*] In his boredom, Shimamura stared at his left hand as the forefinger  
bent and unbent. Only this hand seemed to have a vital and immediate memory  
of the woman he was going to see. Only the one hand, and in particular the  
forefinger, seemed to be pulling him back to her from afar. Taken with the  
strangeness of it, he brought the hand to his face, then quickly drew a line across  
the misted-over window. A woman's eye floated up before him. He almost cried  
out in astonishment. But when he came to himself he saw that it was only the  
reflection in the window of the girl opposite. Outside it was growing dark, and the  
lights had been turned on in the train, transforming the window into a mirror.

[*reading*] In the depths of the mirror the evening landscape moving by, and the  
reflected figures on it seemed like motion pictures superimposed on one another.  
The figures and the background melted together into a sort of symbolic world not  
of this world. The girl's face seemed to be out in the flow of the evening  
mountains and Shimamura felt his chest rise at the beauty of it.

**MARIANNE closes the book and hands it to CAROLE.**

**MARIANNE**

There.

I'll let you read it before I tell you what I think's going on in Shimamura's mind.

**CAROLE**

That's why you like it so much? What you think is going on in his mind?

**MARIANNE**

Yes, because I'm having those exact same feelings.

It's queer. As though he's writing just to me.

That life and I are passing each other by, one over the other in a silent movie.

Maybe it's the college thing. The disappointment.

Or ... maybe something else....

**CAROLE**

Something else?

**MARIANNE**

Maybe we just don't see clearly enough.

Watching things pass us by like through smoky glass

And go blind to the actual passage of time.

How it's taking life away from us too soon, all the time.

We just don't understand.

**CAROLE**

Ah ... understand what?

**MARIANNE**

How the beauty and the transience of life rest, one on the other.

We never seem to take time enough to really look at each other.

At the ones we love.

Not long enough.

Not hard enough to remember.

Like Shimamura looks away and forgets....

Like my mother.

**WRITER**

It's time for Carole to go home.

Because I'm getting ahead of myself.

Time to end this scene.

**A grandfather clock chimes the hour.**

**CAROLE**

Oops!  
Got to go.  
We'll talk about it Friday.  
After I've read the book.  
I'm going out tomorrow.  
Remember?  
See you Friday.  
Bye.

**Both stand and hug. CAROLE exits with  
*Snow Country* in her hand.**

SCENE 2 – THURSDAY EVENING

ROBERT is on a ladder, working to attach a TV antenna to the roof – a ladder akin to the one in *Singin' in the Rain*, or *Our Town*.

MARIANNE comes out, and calls up to him.

**MARIANNE**

Rob.

Baby Snooks is almost over.

Robby wants you with us when she says goodnight.

**ROBERT**

[*calling down*] Just a minute more, Mare.

I'm almost done.

**MARIANNE**

Well, hurry up.

Baby Snooks isn't going to wait for you.

**MARIANNE goes back into the house and sits on the couch next to ROBBY (in pajamas), by their Philco console radio.**

**ROBERT works a minute or so longer, then comes down the ladder and goes into the house.**

**The show has just ended and MARIANNE is turning the radio off.**

**MARIANNE**

[*to ROBERT*] You missed it.

[*to ROBBY*] Off to bed, Robby. School tomorrow.

**ROBBY exits. MARIANNE and ROBERT sit.**

**MARIANNE**

You know, on nights like tonight it feels, somehow, I'm not my own.

It's only once a week.

And means so much to Robby.

Why did you have to do the antenna tonight?

**ROBERT**

I got started soon enough.  
I thought.  
Just a couple of problems came up.  
And I had to finish.  
Everything could come crashing down if a storm came.

**MARIANNE**

I never know what to say when you get started like that.  
It's the one thing we do with him, special, every week.  
And he looks forward to it so much.

**ROBERT**

I know.  
I know.  
I'm sorry.  
It won't happen again.

**MARIANNE**

[*beat*] There's something else.

**ROBERT**

What?

**MARIANNE**

Carole and I were talking yesterday....

**ROBERT**

[*beat*] About what?

**MARIANNE**

I want to go back to school.  
Finish up, and get my degree.

**ROBERT**

Who'd watch Robby?

**MARIANNE**

She said she would.  
After school.  
When I need her to.  
She wants to help.

**ROBERT**

For how much?

**MARIANNE**

Because she's my friend.  
Money was never mentioned.

**ROBERT**

I don't know.  
We couldn't expect her to do it for free.  
For what? Three or four years?

**MARIANNE**

That's just the problem, isn't it?  
Like Lindsey said.

**ROBERT**

You mean money? We have money. And we have a budget.

**MARIANNE**

We're not going to get ahead until I go back to school and get a job teaching.

**ROBERT**

And our family?

**MARIANNE**

Day after day, the hours drifting away not getting ahead.  
I need to get out and do something, and stop wasting my life.  
For *both* of us.

**ROBERT**

You don't have a wasted life, Marianne.  
You're a mother. And my wife.  
And you write.

**MARIANNE**

My life.  
I can hardly hear it anymore.  
It speaks in such an empty voice.  
All I hear is ....  
I am Rain.  
I am Wind.  
I am Fire.

**ROBERT**

What do you mean?

**MARIANNE**

Rains of words I can't understand why I write them down.  
Winds of motion that move trees and leaves, but don't move me.  
And a fire of desires that leave me cold....

That's how I write.

**ROBERT**

You're just going through something hard.  
After what Lindsey said. The big mouth.  
I always wondered what lipstick women use when they have big mouths like  
Lindsey's.

**MARIANNE**

I need to get to work.  
University, first.  
Then teaching. Or maybe writing.  
My life's like Shimamura's.

**ROBERT**

Who?

**MARIANNE**

A character in a book I read.  
Too idle for his own good. His mind's too clouded with illusions of life.  
He has to go into the mountains to find honesty with himself.

**ROBERT**

You've made up your mind, haven't you?

**MARIANNE**

What Shimamura saw, my mind feels.  
An illusion of beautiful things, here and there, without any real direction.  
I just need to get back to school.  
And Carole wants to be a helping hand.

**ROBERT**

What do you want me to do?  
I know how smart you are.  
And I agree it's a waste, if you want to get your degree and can't.

**MARIANNE**

Smart or not is a way a person's born, I figure.  
Like thread off a spool. Like Robby.  
But needing to do something with your life, to make the world better,  
smart or not, that's something *everybody's* born with.  
I never want to feel like some hired girl you keep around the house,  
and don't like very much.  
If I can't be special enough to you, then ....

**ROBERT**

You've made your point.  
And I swear to you that you're the last person on earth I'd ever want to feel like  
you're not loved and appreciated.  
I love you more than anything. Life itself.  
You mean the absolute world to me.  
For eternity.

**MARIANNE**

Thank you.

**ROBERT**

You *should* go back to school.  
And then write the great American novel.  
And make a million dollars.  
How's that?

**MARIANNE**

About what?

**ROBERT**

The great American tragedy.

**MARIANNE**

What's that?

**ROBERT**

Slavery?  
Lynchings in the South?  
I don't know. You decide.

**MARIANNE**

The great American tragedy is that all men are created equal, and women aren't.



**ROBERT**

All men aren't created equal.

**MARIANNE**

All women aren't either.  
What's that prove?

**ROBERT**

I mean, somebody writing about the great American tragedy might want to look at what people are struggling for nowadays.  
Like *The Grapes of Wrath* back in the Depression.  
But that's already been written, of course.

**MARIANNE**

When we seemed so rich, in the 20's, people went off the road with it.  
Until the stock market crashed, and some of them committed suicide.  
Then came the Depression, and people seemed to try better to help each other.  
And then the War.  
What now?...  
Now we have Lindseys, who think they're too good for us.  
That's a tragedy I'd like to write about.

**ROBERT**

Okay.  
I agree.  
And F. Scott Fitzgerald would, too.  
And did.

**MARIANNE**

For once in my life I'd like a house that makes people's jaws drop.  
And drop further when they walk inside.

**ROBERT**

TV's in every room?

**MARIANNE**

Yes! In *every* room.

**ROBERT**

And an antenna on the roof for each one of them?

**MARIANNE**

Yes. A forest of antennas up there.

**ROBERT**

What about Baby Snooks?

**MARIANNE**

We'll keep our Philco, of course.  
For Robby.

**ROBERT**

Can he keep his chess set, too?  
When you write your novel, and we're rich out of our minds?

**MARIANNE**

You encourage him too much.  
What is chess?... Or math?  
Just something to isolate him from non-chess people.  
Who are most of the people.  
And the ones he ought to be associating with.  
What money is there in chess?

**ROBERT**

Money?

**MARIANNE**

Money. Success.  
Being a person other people won't want to change their social circles away from.

**ROBERT**

What's money matter if Robby's one of the best in the world at what he does?

**MARIANNE**

It opens doors. It keeps doors from being slammed in your face.  
And gets you better medical care.  
And besides, if you're the best in the world at playing chess, who cares?  
Except for other chess geniuses who understand it, and don't make a living.  
I can understand being happy being alive.  
But I can't understand proud to be poor.

**ROBERT**

Maybe that's the great American tragedy.... Money.

**MARIANNE**

Enough of it buys what a person needs.  
Including success.

**ROBERT**

Albert Schweitzer didn't think so.  
To do what he did.

**MARIANNE**

Anyway, writing a book won't make any million dollars.

**ROBERT**

It will if they make a movie out of it.

**MARIANNE**

[*beat*] Hollywood.

**ROBERT**

We could fly out there, and watch you become famous.

**MARIANNE**

Not fly. Take a train.

**ROBERT**

Why?

**MARIANNE**

I'm not going to fly.

**ROBERT**

Why?

**MARIANNE**

Are you forgetting Carole Lombard?  
What happened to her?  
The whole trip she took from Hollywood to Indiana she rode a train.  
Out and back. To raise money selling war bonds.  
Until Las Vegas.  
You know.

**ROBERT**

Of course. Who doesn't?

**MARIANNE**

She was so eager to see Clark Gable she took a TWA flight.  
And it killed her. At thirty-three.  
And broke his heart. I guess you know he became an alcoholic because of it.  
So that's why I won't fly. It's too dangerous. And stupid.

**ROBERT**

I understand. I couldn't stand it if anything ever happened to you.

**MARIANNE**

You know, Rob, I may not be a Carole Lombard, but I'm not a nobody.  
Thank you, Miss Emily Dickinson.  
I may not write an American classic,  
but I'm not a nobody, and never will be.  
People will notice when I'm gone.

**ROBERT**

They certainly will.

**MARIANNE**

Having said that...  
What's my purpose in life?  
What's *our* purpose?  
Just to be respected and remembered?  
For what?  
For my looks?  
I know I'm a beautiful woman.  
My God! I've been told it enough times.  
And I know you know it.  
Most everybody does.  
But I don't want anybody knowing I know it.

**ROBERT**

Maybe that's what Emily Dickinson was saying.

**MARIANNE**

I just want to be happy....  
Oh! That's it!  
Happiness is our purpose in life.... Happiness.  
Except, in one of my poems I wrote:  
"Happiness is an illusion you will always wake up from."  
And then what?  
I don't know. I just don't know.

**ROBERT**

Happiness is a gift. A gift we give ourselves. Or our friends give us.  
And the best measure of friendship is the quality of the friends we keep.  
I know my friendships define *me*. And, of course, my love for you.

**MARIANNE**

[beat] Rob?

**ROBERT**

Yes?

**MARIANNE**

Was Carole Lombard happy?  
Or Emily Dickinson?  
Or Steinbeck, for that matter?...  
When I think of heaven, or happiness, or God,  
I think of rain.  
I *am* rain.  
I'm a drop of rain in a mighty river.  
I think about that.  
I think in another time I might have been a rather extraordinary woman.  
And I think about my mother.  
I remember things that I don't know where I remember them from.  
"Why do I think of things like that?" I ask myself.  
And why wasn't *she* considered to be an extraordinary woman?  
*She* was beautiful. Why wasn't *she* happy?  
And then I think ... the answer was money.

**ROBERT**

Look at it: What *is* money, anyway?  
Jesus said it was just something to render unto Caesar.  
Pay your taxes with. Pay your bills with.  
Not something to make you look better in the eyes of other people.

**MARIANNE**

What's wrong with that?

**ROBERT**

Nothing I suppose, so long as it's not the wrong kind of people.  
Like Lindsey turned out to be.

**MARIANNE**

Money measures your accomplishments.  
Or, rather, it measures what other people think of your accomplishments.  
And that I think is important: What other people think of you.  
And I'm tired of being short of it all the time.  
Other people are getting ahead. Why aren't we?

**ROBERT**

It's not the most important thing.  
Love is more important.  
And Robby, of course.

**MARIANNE**

Love is what love is.  
And a person can have both.

**ROBERT**

You look in a mirror, and that's what you think?

**MARIANNE**

That's what I'm saying:  
I just don't know.  
I just don't know what feelings are real and final.  
Like Shimamura.  
And I'm struggling to find out.  
And that's why I want to get back to school.

**WRITER**

You're twenty-nine,  
mildly depressed, a bit stir-crazy,  
and blaming yourself ... for things.  
One of your so-called friends has just openly shunned you and your husband.  
A fate that feels like something dying inside.  
And you make some decisions.  
And then, whoosh! you're in your sixties,  
and your life, and his, have gone their destined ways.  
Oh, the transience of life!  
That's how such things begin.

"Sweet are the uses  
Of melancholy.  
To write the lyrics,  
Then pipe the tune."

**ROBERT**

Do you love me?

**MARIANNE**

Of course.

**ROBERT**

I mean, really.  
These little cheerful moments aside.

**MARIANNE**

Maybe love is a bit of a delusion in life.  
Like life itself.  
A happy one, to be sure. For a while.  
And painful. For a while.  
What I can honestly tell you, Rob, is that I wouldn't be happier with anyone else.  
Let God tell me, in the end, how deep and sweeping my love for you was.

**ROBERT**

We'll get you enrolled next semester.  
And maybe put off getting a new car for a while down the road.

**MARIANNE**

That would be wonderful. Thank you, Rob...

**Kisses him.**

[*beat*] Let's go to bed.

**WRITER**

God! I was such a pretty thing back then!

SCENE 3 – FRIDAY MORNING

MARIANNE, in a robe, is sitting at her kitchen table with sweet rolls and coffee.

**WRITER**

It's time somebody gets down to brass tacks here.  
Marianne had one of her best nights ever, last night.  
Yet, the chill has returned.

**CAROLE knocks and enters, carrying  
*Snow Country*. She sits down with  
MARIANNE.**

**MARIANNE**

**Pointing to the book in Carole's hand.**

Well?

**CAROLE**

It's thought provoking. I'll give it that.  
And sad.  
In a thought-provoking way.

**MARIANNE**

Did you like it?

**CAROLE**

I won't say I loved it, but I'm glad I read it.

**MARIANNE**

What I like about it is the way he's always ready to give himself up to reverie,  
to fantasy, to imagination, in place of the aloneness that's always with him.  
Like the train scene I read you, when he became almost mesmerized by the  
reflection of Yoko's face in the window-mirror.  
Like the night when he and Komako were in his room, talking about her diary,  
and he was looking out the window,  
envisioning that he could hear the sound of the snow freezing so loud,  
it roared deep into the earth.  
And then the stars, burnished by the clear, cold air, came down at him, as though  
they were actually falling from the sky.  
Times like that. Poetry like that.

**CAROLE**

Cold and lonely.



**MARIANNE**

Lonely.

**CAROLE**

Indeed. Lonely as the silence flowing over him like the voice of rain.

**MARIANNE**

Carole, I'm like that, too....

“I sit in silence and you break into this threaded moment of gold.  
Your voice was a golden one, your hair, the love you gave....”

I felt like that last night.

**CAROLE**

Like ...?

**MARIANNE**

Like I'm living this life as though I'm more looking at it than living it.

**CAROLE**

Are you lonely?

**MARIANNE**

I'm imaginative.... Remember when he met that blind masseuse on the road?

**CAROLE**

Yes.

**MARIANNE**

Well for no reason at all my eyes stopped reading the book, and I heard a totally different conversation in my head, between the two of them.

**CAROLE**

What was it?

**MARIANNE**

He asked her if she could give him a message.  
And she asked him whether he thought she had one, for him.  
And he said, you're blind, aren't you?  
And when she said yes, he said then yes, you have a message for me.

**CAROLE**

I think you must have misread “massage” for “message.”

**MARIANNE**

Could be.  
But I went on:  
She took his hand into her hands, and felt it.  
Thoroughly.  
Front and back.  
And then his face.  
“You are unhappy,” she said, “but that’s not the message.  
You already know that.  
And you know why.  
My message for you is ....”  
But then I lost it.  
My whole thought disappeared, like a forgotten dream.

**CAROLE**

Disappeared?...  
No idea what she was going to say?

**MARIANNE**

Nope.  
Except that later on, while she’s giving him a massage, she says to him,  
“You don’t drink, do you?”  
That surprised him, that she could tell. Being blind and all.  
And then she says something like:  
“When you don’t drink, you don’t know how to really enjoy yourself.”  
That caught his attention.  
And that’s where his mind wanders off, remembering the sound of Yoko’s  
beautiful voice he heard on the train.

**CAROLE**

Same thing when Shimamura hears Komako play the samisen,  
and her music opens up a chill ... a hollowness all through him.  
Like an empty rowboat washed about in the waves of the ocean.

**MARIANNE**

That’s when it hit him, how much she loves him.

**CAROLE**

She loves him, knowing it can never lead anywhere.

**MARIANNE**

Their story’s so deeply sad and lonely.

**CAROLE**

Is that the story of Japan? Today?

**MARIANNE**

I let myself think that that's what losing a war does to you.  
But I think it goes deeper than that.

**CAROLE**

Wasted love in Japan's pristine and isolated beauty.  
But it can happen anywhere. At any time.  
Hollywood notwithstanding.

**MARIANNE**

When Shimamura leaves her the second time, he pictures he can hear her voice in  
the sound of the wheels of the train. The sound of time, and life, moving away.

**CAROLE**

It says that he wanted to weep.

**Pause.**

**MARIANNE**

He went back. The next summer.

**CAROLE**

Yes.

And Komako asks him why, with all his money, he would want to come to a place  
like that. An unexciting, mountain village town.

**MARIANNE**

[*beat*] To see you, he tells her.

**CAROLE**

No wonder she fell in love with him.  
What else was there in her life?

**MARIANNE**

And she tells him she won't ever see him off at the train station again.  
The pain's too great.  
She hated it, she said.

**CAROLE**

She broke down crying. Her head in his lap.

**MARIANNE**

And he felt something warm and wet on his knee.

**CAROLE**

She says, and I agree, you can't go losing your head over every man who likes you.

**MARIANNE**

He stayed away from her six months, and never wrote.  
Not a single line.

**CAROLE**

What is it with men?

**MARIANNE**

Life goes on.  
Men work, year after year.  
And never notice it.

**CAROLE**

Shimamura didn't work.  
He was rich.  
He didn't have to.  
And he didn't have much of a life either, to remember.

**MARIANNE**

What is it with men anyway?

**CAROLE**

Something has to break in their worlds, for them to take notice.

**MARIANNE**

And that's what we're here for.

**CAROLE**

Indeed!  
Sweepers break.  
Washers.

**MARIANNE**

And dryers.

**CAROLE**

Toasters.

**MARIANNE**

And cars. Who knows what, with cars?

**CAROLE**

They wouldn't be anywhere without us.

**MARIANNE**

That, in the end, is the deep emptiness of Snow Country, in a nutshell.  
Shimamura's life will amount to nothing without Komako, and he hasn't a clue.

**CAROLE**

The butterfly, dragonfly, and cricket.  
The pine cricket, bell cricket, horse cricket  
Are singing in the hills....

**MARIANNE**

Yoko's song in the cemetery.

**CAROLE**

The man she was nursing on the train, had died.

**MARIANNE**

And his mother, too.

**CAROLE**

And what Shimamura saw ...?

**MARIANNE**

Frost. Snow. And endless cold in the summertime.

**CAROLE**

Death.  
He saw it in the form of the dragonflies on the hills,  
driven desperately to avoid being pulled into the cedar grove as it darkened in the  
twilight.

**MARIANNE**

Is death the only thing that finally can make us see?

**CAROLE**

Death is like skin, always near to us.... And to some writers' plots.

**MARIANNE**

I miss her so much.... More than I can tell you, Carole.

**CAROLE**

[*beat*] There was nothing you could do.

**MARIANNE**

I could have kept her from dying.

**CAROLE**

How?

**MARIANNE**

I did once before.  
When I was seventeen.  
Coming home from school....

**CAROLE**

That's new.

**MARIANNE**

She was in the kitchen.  
On her knees.  
Her head was in the oven.  
Breathing gas.

**CAROLE**

How awful ... for you.

**MARIANNE**

I pulled her out, and saved her life, and she asked me why.  
She *wanted* to die.

**CAROLE**

No she didn't.  
Or else she wouldn't have waited for the time you were coming home from school.

**MARIANNE**

It never left me ... worrying about her. On her knees.  
Until she absolutely promised me she would never do it again.

**CAROLE**

“For richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish ....”

**MARIANNE**

[beat] But I had Robby. And Rob, of course.  
And I couldn't spend much time with her.

**CAROLE**

You did the best you could.

**MARIANNE**

But I could have saved her life.

**CAROLE**

How?

**MARIANNE**

I've asked myself that a thousand times.  
And I suppose the answer is, I couldn't.  
But I've lived always believing I could.  
And with the guilt.

**WRITER**

And with the guilt.

**MARIANNE**

The honeymoon years should have been the best in my life.  
Not like that.

**CAROLE**

Honey, we expect too much.

**MARIANNE**

I waited for life to bloom on its own. Like an orchid.

**CAROLE**

Is that still what's making you sad?  
Your mother's death?

**MARIANNE**

What she went through, and I didn't do.  
I loved her so much.  
No one else loved her that much.

**CAROLE**

People are strange. Some things can break their feelings into little bits.  
Except, *my mother* and I didn't have the kind of closeness you did.

**MARIANNE**

Everything breaks into bits.

**CAROLE**

Why do you say that?

**MARIANNE**

Because it's how I feel....  
Carole?...

**CAROLE**

Yes?

**MARIANNE**

Am I being too frank with you?  
I think I am. And it's because of this book.  
Normally I'm not so open with people.  
Maybe we need to change the subject.

**CAROLE**

I never talk to anybody about the personal things we talk about.  
Never. To *anybody*.

**MARIANNE**

These questions I have, in the back of my mind,  
I usually call them out to a ship I picture, that's far out in the ocean.

**CAROLE**

[*beat*] Questions like?...

**MARIANNE**

Like, if life feels empty, is it?  
Or is it still beautiful, and all, but simply wasted?

**CAROLE**

There's no answer to questions like that.  
Not here, at least.

**MARIANNE**

Komako said, "Only women are able to really love."  
Did you catch that? When she said it?

**CAROLE**

Yes, I did.



**MARIANNE**

What do you think?

**CAROLE**

Sad.

**MARIANNE**

But do you think it's true?

**CAROLE**

Who knows?

**MARIANNE**

Well, I don't think so.

Unless I believed that Robert lies to me.

Every day.

Telling me how much he loves me.

**CAROLE**

Whether it's true or not, the saddest part of the book is that Shimamura keeps saying he can do nothing for Komako, who may be the only person in the world he should be doing something for.

And it would take so little.

**MARIANNE**

I agree.

It makes no sense. How rich he is.

Except, may be it does.

**CAROLE**

How?

**MARIANNE**

Because, in saying that, he's admitting how meaningless his life is.

And how unwilling he is to do anything about it.

It's like passive aggression against everything Japanese.

**CAROLE**

Even his wealth.

**MARIANNE**

Yes.

Even his own wealth.

**CAROLE**

Because of his wealth.

**MARIANNE**

Not because of it.

There are lots of wealthy men who do things with their lives.

And help other people.

It's because somebody did something to him....

Probably his wealthy father.

**CAROLE**

And he can't love anybody, because of it?

**MARIANNE**

Fathers can do that.

**CAROLE**

And he spends his life ...

wastes his life, I should probably say,

not knowing how to heal himself,

and not finding anybody else who can.

**MARIANNE**

Thinking about it, I fall below it.

**CAROLE**

[*beat*] So all along they both knew their relationship would leave little or nothing behind.

Nothing that would last permanently.

**MARIANNE**

Shimamura knew it.

Komako accepted it.

**CAROLE**

How can you like a man like that?...

I don't think I'll be reading any more Japanese novels too soon.

**MARIANNE**

I don't like him. I am him, I'm afraid.

**CAROLE**

I hope not.

**MARIANNE**

I'm not the only one, you know, being seduced into dreams,  
if only to avoid pain, if only in my quiet-time thoughts. And in my poetry.  
But this is the first book I've ever read that brings it home the way it does.  
That's so open and frank about it.

**CAROLE**

Shimamura was as uncaring as they come.  
And Komako and Yoko were no more than echoes in his brain.  
He was as distant as a cold mountain cave, and you're not like that, Marianne.  
Not at all.

**MARIANNE**

He was cruel, like so many men can be, and be unaware of it.  
And no, I'm not *that* bad.

**CAROLE**

He was a horse's ass.  
Komako offered all of herself to him, and he gave nothing really in return.  
Other than geisha wages and looking at her.

**MARIANNE**

When a woman shares her naked body with a man ...  
there's no physical gift greater than that.  
But it doesn't mean she has to share anything more. Like emotional intimacy.  
Does it?

**CAROLE**

No, I guess not. But what are you getting at?

**MARIANNE**

Yeats's Leda and the Swan....

“He holds her helpless, breast upon his breast.  
How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?  
A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower, and Agamemnon dead.  
Being so caught up, so mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?”

**CAROLE**

What about it?

**MARIANNE**

Sometimes the only respite I find from thoughts about my mother, Kate, is when I'm part of Rob's passion.

Does that make sense?

Or freak you out?

**CAROLE**

Yes, it makes sense.

And no, it doesn't freak me out.

**MARIANNE**

Shimamura needed passion in his life. Needed its purpose.

And no one, and no sex, could give it to him.

I don't want to be that blind.

I need to find my purpose, and fulfill it.

**CAROLE**

Isn't it love? Look at all the love you have around you.

**MARIANNE**

They say without purpose the failure of fulfillment is ... is what?...

Fulfilled.

**CAROLE**

I'm sorry. I just don't understand you sometimes.

Without love, how can you possibly build a fulfilling purpose?

**MARIANNE**

I'm going back to school. Rob has agreed.

**CAROLE**

You're so lucky.

Do you know how much that man loves you?

**MARIANNE**

I don't want a life to pour my heart into,

and leave without writing or doing something that will inspire other women.

**CAROLE**

You will.

**MARIANNE**

I'll be a teacher. Or a writer. Or both. And leave my thoughts to posterity.

“Some words belong to you.  
I may use them when I think of you  
And then I'm honor bound  
To place them in a silver vault  
Take them carefully out and think of you.

Kate, you're up there  
I'm down here  
Do you reach for me  
As I reach for you?”

**CAROLE**

[*pause*] Marianne?... Do you think it was necessary for Yoko to die?  
If you were writing the story?

**MARIANNE**

Kawabata painted Yoko into a corner.  
The only glory he gave to her life was nursing Yukio.  
When he died ... and his mother died, too, Yoko started going crazy.

**CAROLE**

She died of a broken heart?

**MARIANNE**

She was .... Her feelings were locked inside.  
I know what that's like, and that's the best way I can describe it.  
Her emotions became retarded....  
Do you have any idea what I'm saying?

**CAROLE**

If you're taking it personally, I think I do.

**MARIANNE**

After Kate died, I thought I might die, too.

“This then was the Garden,  
And the rains came down, torrentially....  
I said to Adam,  
'Is this the way it will always be?'  
And he said, 'Probably.'”

**CAROLE**

Were you thinking of suicide or something? Like Yoko?  
Jumping from some balcony? In a fire?

**MARIANNE**

The fire came, so suddenly, while they were watching a movie in the warehouse.  
And Yoko jumped. But horizontally. Perfectly horizontally. Like floating.  
Like sliding down a banister to the first floor.  
Her body barely made a sound as it hit the ground.

**CAROLE**

And you're saying Kawabata calculated her death like that?

**MARIANNE**

Well, didn't he? What more poetic way to die?

**CAROLE**

I never thought of it that way.

**MARIANNE**

All creators of fiction, Zeus included, plan their characters' fate.  
And only rarely are they talked out of it.

**CAROLE**

So, what does her death mean?

**MARIANNE**

What any suicide means. Crazy nothing.

**CAROLE**

He created her just to waste her?

**MARIANNE**

"To be truly loved is to be kept alive. Witness Jesus. Omar. Kate."

**CAROLE**

I truly don't understand you sometimes. Really, I don't. Are you saying Yoko's  
death didn't mean a thing? After that cemetery scene? And the butterfly song?

**MARIANNE**

It was the last, long exclamation point at the end of the story.  
We're beginning to hope Shimamura will finally listen to sense.  
But then the fire. Children being thrown from the balcony to save them.  
And what does Shimamura do? He retreats, again, into his fantasies.

**CAROLE**

Gazing at the stars.

**MARIANNE**

I may understand him, but I don't like him any the better.  
And Kawabata apparently didn't, either.  
Komako carrying Yoko's lifeless body through the crowd,  
the warehouse burning,  
and Shimamura, falling back, fading into the shadows,  
admiring the beauty of the Milky Way....

**CAROLE**

You admire writing like that?

**MARIANNE**

If I could write like that, I would....  
And then burn it.

**CAROLE**

Then who would your stories be for?

**MARIANNE**

For everyone who sacrifices gold for lead.

"Your voice was a golden one.  
Your hair. The love you gave was pure, was gold.  
I am as Midas, caressing my gold."

**CAROLE**

I guess you have the right.  
To feel that way.

**MARIANNE**

We all have the right.  
To our private feelings.

**Pause.**

**CAROLE**

May I ask you a personal question?

**MARIANNE**

Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies.

**CAROLE**

When Komako says, only women can love, you said you didn't agree.

**MARIANNE**

That's right.

**CAROLE**

Why not? Because you've been loved so well by a man?  
Or because you have doubts about women?

**MARIANNE**

Both.

Between a man and a woman, women aren't meant to love the way men can love.

**CAROLE**

What do you mean?

**MARIANNE**

Haven't you noticed?  
A woman can love herself.  
A woman can love her children.  
But I could never love a man the way a man can love me.

**CAROLE**

You believe that??

**MARIANNE**

Men throw themselves into loving a woman for different reasons.  
Men need women for different reasons.  
A man needs a woman to love.  
Women need to *be* loved.

**CAROLE**

*People* want *people* to love them.

**MARIANNE**

All I'm saying is that men and women are different that way.

**CAROLE**

But you believe in love, don't you?

**MARIANNE**

I believe men need women to love.



**CAROLE**

And women?

**MARIANNE**

I believe women need to be loved.

**CAROLE**

You're not answering my question.

**MARIANNE**

If the right man loves you, do what you can to keep the fire alive.

**CAROLE**

Do what you can?

**MARIANNE**

What do you want me to say?  
Robert loves me, and I love that he does.  
It's that simple.

**CAROLE**

I'm not sure what I want you to say.

**MARIANNE**

You don't think I'm worthy of being loved for myself alone?

**CAROLE**

That's not at all what I'm saying.  
A woman as beautiful, and intelligent, and vital as you?

**MARIANNE**

Then what *are* you saying?

**CAROLE**

It's something I've been wondering about.  
Because there's nothing in the Bible that says.  
That a woman should *love* a man.  
What it says is that she should respect him.  
And honor him.  
And obey him.  
But love him?

**MARIANNE**

That surprises you?

**CAROLE**

Well, yes, it does.

**MARIANNE**

I loved my mother more than anything in the world.  
She gave me what I am.

“I still see me in my silver dress  
that Kate had made.  
My silver dress.”

**WRITER**

“You loved me so in my silver dress.  
Do you love me still as you loved me then?”

“Bitterness has gone astray  
For I know no one was loved more.”

**CAROLE**

Maybe we’re talking about different kinds of love.

**MARIANNE**

Love *is* different.  
As different as falling rain can be.  
On glass or a tin roof, on flames or on flowers.  
In moments, or in mountains.

**CAROLE**

I’ve had my dark moments, too.  
That made me feel limp as a withered flower.

**MARIANNE**

Since she died and Robby was only two, I’ve felt like I’m surviving life,  
rather than breathing it into me.

**CAROLE**

But that’s been five years.

**MARIANNE**

Could be fifty. Love is love that never changes.

**WRITER**

Could be fifty.

**CAROLE**

But you're going back to school!

**MARIANNE**

Yes! Yes!

Going back to school will make all the difference. I can feel it.

**Light dims, stage left, and comes full,  
stage right.**

**WRITER**

Marianne *did* go back to school.  
Five years later than planned.  
And not for the three years she envisioned.  
Six years. Night school.  
You see, she had gotten pregnant, and had another son.

**MARIANNE**

“Damn! I cried, another son!  
I asked for a rosy little girl to dress in lace and pinafore.  
I have a son, I wailed,  
I don't need another!  
I cried for one full minute  
Then took you in my arms and hardly ever put you down.  
Now you have taken me above the crowd,  
and played for me your songs  
And taught me much of life,  
and have forgiven me for crying, years ago,  
for one full minute.”

**WRITER**

The year Marianne graduated, Robert died.  
Suddenly. Of cancer....  
Death, again, staking Marianne to the unexpected cold.

**MARIANNE**

“Beauty is too hard to bear  
I close my eyes to stars  
And never look at lovers paying court  
I hate all things beautiful  
It turns my knees to pulp  
It turns my heart to stone.”

## MARIANNE

“I only draw leaves  
Leaves are all I can draw  
I live in a forest.”

“Fill in the spaces  
Fill up the days of the week  
The weeks of the year.

Years that are nothing  
Except a lifetime of nothing.  
Everything is to fill in, encompass,  
And move on to more spaces  
To be filled with nothing.”

“Then snow would fall  
And the fall of snow would be the only sound....

My song of you cannot be heard.”

“My home with you  
Never was  
Is all the home I know.  
No room, no roof  
No shelter, floor except your heart.”

“How are we to know  
That happiness was now?  
The wasteland of time and years  
Spent time and time again  
Doing and doing the same mistake  
And never seeing that this time  
There is no difference ....”

“Why didn't you tell me  
How important the signals were?  
Why did you let me fritter away our days?  
Now I know  
And so do you.”

“I wish I had the words of love  
I know you long to hear.”

## WRITER

Like Demeter:

“She hugged her grief tightly to her breast  
Jealous of the slightest word  
That might remove this cold-lipped dragon  
From sucking her life’s blood.  
She hugged her grief so violently  
That one could scarce determine  
Which was her grief  
And which was she.”

“I think of you as I think of me  
I think of river rushing to sea.”

“Release me....  
The child I was  
And always clung to....  
Release this child  
For she has grown  
Now let me love  
The woman  
She’s become.”

“Let me forget!  
Now can’t be borne if I recall  
My dear days gone.”

Oh, that I had prized more the time Robert and I were allotted.  
And cried less for the time lost with Kate.  
If it were a snake, it would have bitten me, and I never saw it. For death brings  
only more of itself when it blinds us to our remaining precious moments in life.

[*pause*] Sometimes, when I find myself awake at night  
At an odd hour  
I ask myself:  
Is there anything I really believe in?  
Love?  
Contempt for insults and rudeness?  
Breathing?  
His breathing?  
Next to me.  
Our son’s breathing in the next room.

## WRITER

Time?  
The sky?  
Its vastness?  
The sky matching my mood?  
The rain?  
Words?  
Do other people love words the way I do?  
Despair?  
Bottomless, powerless human despair?  
Suicide?  
Will I ever?  
Consider it?  
Nietzsche claims whatever doesn't kill us makes us stronger.  
Death hasn't killed my body yet, but my happiness.  
So has death made me stronger?  
I don't think so.  
Then it must be beauty I believe in.  
Beauty is truth, truth beauty.... That is all we know on earth  
And all we need to know.  
Except, without love, beauty becomes an illusion,  
and human existence acquires a certain, indescribable, profound sadness to it.  
All of it.

[*beat*] "My search for rest and quiet  
Has led me back to you.  
I barely hear your gentle voice  
Above my pounding heart."

END

