

RAIN

By Jerold London

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<https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-in-black-hair-1129039/> amirali beigi

**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 16th 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, 28, married.

ROBERT, Marianne's husband, 30's.

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

CAROLE, Marianne's neighbor.

... 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 economic depression.

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, Kate not getting 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

Gabriel's.
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 people 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 exciting?

MARIANNE

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 work there is 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 the way this world moves nowadays.

CAROLE

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

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

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 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 so much 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 brain problems doesn't solve being problems, as my mother used to say.

CAROLE

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

MARIANNE

Yes, and that's what I mean.
Robby needs a little more ... being down to earth. Being humble. Being 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, cleverness is 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 squeeze people's lives into the dirt just for their personal gain?

CAROLE

We didn't start the War.

MARIANNE

I thank God, Rob was exempt, being an engineer.

CAROLE

Maybe Robby'll be a doctor, and deliver babies.
That's a good life.

MARIANNE

If you're a man who likes babies.

CAROLE

Or caring for 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. Moving to his farm.

CAROLE

Rob's not like that. Rob idolizes you.
I never saw a husband who loves his wife more than Rob loves you.

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

She could be out of John Steinbeck, now that you mention it.

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. Her 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 last 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, Carole?
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. When I'm alone to myself.

CAROLE

Who you are.

MARIANNE

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

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?
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 didn't
have the memories of what I've lost?
But maybe I could be better at it, I think sometimes to myself, if it would be in a
different place.
Some place I'd feel closer to the memory of 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're 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. How important money thinks it is.

CAROLE

What is important, then, to you?

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 his Oz books.

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, and not for the money we have.
Not living in disguise.

CAROLE

That's what real friends are for.

MARIANNE

The best things in the world.

CAROLE

Better than Paris?

MARIANNE

Yes. Definitely!

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. The Japanese way.

CAROLE

What do you mean: You guess?

MARIANNE

I don't think they love quite the way we do....

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 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.

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 man's needs.

CAROLE

How many men find it difficult to really talk to a woman?
About serious things. Not just flirting.
As though their sense of mental superiority might be tarnished by it.

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 desires metamorphed into something else he was less familiar with.
It was friendship more than anything else he felt for Komako.
It was like how he felt about the mountains had extended itself to her.
But the next day the masculine 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

Sleazebag.

MARIANNE

Not exactly.
You see, as I understand it
But really, what do I know about the Japanese?
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's hardly 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 beginning.
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. A man to me. And Japanese.

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 a glass darkly.

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. What are you talking about?
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 and can't write them down.
Winds of motion that move trees and leaves, but leave me motionless.
Fires of desire 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.
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 with you: It's a waste, if you want to get your degree and can't.

MARIANNE

Clever or not is how a person's born.
Like thread off a spool.
Like Robby.
But needing to do something with it. To make the world a better place.
That's something else everybody's born with, too.
I never want to feel like some hired girl doing things around the house.
If I can't be more special than that, 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 specially loved.
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

Which is what, exactly?

ROBERT

I don't know.
Slavery? How we treated the Indians? The Wall Street crash?
You decide.

MARIANNE

The great American tragedy is that 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 a great American tragedy might want to write about what America is looking for, now that the war is over.
What people are struggling to do with their lives today.
Like The Grapes of Wrath people were.
But that's been written, of course.

MARIANNE

When America seemed so rich and invincible. In the 20's.
And then lost it all.
The Depression.
Then the War.
And I lost my mother.
What next?
Now we have Lindsey, who thinks she's too good for us.
That's the 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 a separate 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?
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 move 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, Mare.... 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?
She died in a plane crash.
The irony of it all.

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....
I won't fly. It's too dangerous, and too 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.
I may not write any 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.
Yes! 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 you're not happy right now.
Because of Lindsey.
I know.

The important thing is not the friends we have. It's the friends we keep.
That's what defines us.... 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 Richard and 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.
Other people are getting ahead. Why shouldn'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-eight,
mildly depressed, a bit stir-crazy, missing your mother like crazy,
and blaming yourself ... for things.
Two 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 delusional in life.

Like life itself.

A happy delusion, to be sure, for a while.

Companionship in its best form.

And painful, sometimes, for a while, too.

What I can honestly tell you, Rob, is that I wouldn't be happier with anyone else.

In the end I'll know how deep and sweeping my love for you was.

MARIANNE kisses ROBERT

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 again.

[*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, reading.

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.**

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.
Sadness isn't my strong suit, you know.

MARIANNE

What I like about it is his willingness to give himself up to reverie, and fantasy, and imagination, in place of the aloneness that's with him most of the time. Like the train scene I read to 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, thinking he could hear snow freezing so loud, it roared 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

Escape like that ... cold and lonely.

MARIANNE

Lonely.

CAROLE

He was a cold and lonely man.
Lonely as 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' if that's lonely....
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.

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

Because love is not the thing. Not in Japan, at least.
Their story's so deeply sad and lonely because of that.

CAROLE

Is that the story of Japan today, you think?

MARIANNE

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

CAROLE

Japan's pristine and isolated beauty wasted.
But it can happen anywhere.
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 her, moving away from him.

CAROLE

It says that he wanted to weep.

Pause.

MARIANNE

I feel like crying sometimes, too....
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

God! Love is complicated!

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 break.

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
All 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 necessary for some writers' plots.

MARIANNE

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

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!

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, with the guilt, believing I could.

WRITER

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.
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, Marianne.
Not here, at least.

MARIANNE

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

CAROLE

I certainly did.

MARIANNE

Written by a man.
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, and falling below it.

CAROLE

So all along they both knew their relationship would leave little or nothing behind.

Nothing that would last permanently. Not even hope.

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 reflections on his mind.
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 I've been reading here, this morning....

[reads] 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 is when I'm part of Rob's passion.

Does that make any 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, and not *use* 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

Really!! 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. Emily Dickinson.

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 Rob?
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.
She wrote many a line:

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

[*beat*] I only draw leaves
Leaves are all I can draw
I live in a forest.

[*beat*] 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.

[*beat*] Then snow would fall
And the fall of snow would be the only sound....

My song of you cannot be heard.

[*beat*] My home with you
Never was
Is all the home I know.
No room, no roof
No shelter, floor except your heart.

[*beat*] 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.

[*beat*] I think of you as I think of me
I think of river rushing to sea.

[*beat*] 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.

[*beat*] Let me forget!
Now can't be borne if I recall
My dear days gone.

Oh, that I had prized more the time Rob and I were granted.
And pined less for the time lost with Kate.
If truth were a snake, it would have bitten me blue, and I never saw it.
For death brings only more of itself when it binds us to lost moments.

[*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

