The Lesser Magoo
By Mac Wellman

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THE LESSER MAGOO

persons of the play:

Ms CURRAN, an adept and assistant of
Mr CANDLE, an expert on the topic of
Crowe’s Dark Space,
Mr TORQUE, the new man, and replacement for
Mr Bullock, who is discovered hanging
in the closet and later as
JOEGH BULLOCK’S GHOST,
CANDLE’s wife, RUTH, and their daughter,
TESSARA, at the Summer Place in Moonhat;
and their guests:
Mr GABRIEL PLEASURE, a literary person,
Mr CANDLE PROSPER, a country-cousin of the
CANDLES and former United States Senator;
Mr FOSS, former Genius and mathematician,
SHIMMER, who has catered the whole affair, and Aunt
SYCORICA, a remote relation from the
deep, interior regions of Central Asia.

THE LESSER MAGOO follows A MURDER OF CROWS, THE
HYACINTH MACAW, and SECOND-HAND SMOKE and con-
cludes the author’s CROWTET; the play was commissioned by the
Bottom’s Dream Theater of Los Angeles, Jim Martin, Artistic
Director.
Dear, it’s only a paper moon, sailing over a cardboard sea,
But it wouldn’t be make-believe, if you believed in me.
And it’s only a canvas sky, hanging over a muslin tree,
But it wouldn’t be make-believe if you believed in me.
Without your love, it’s a honky-tonk parade.
Without your love, it’s a melody played
In a penny arcade.
It’s a Barnum and Bailey world, just as phony as it can be
But it wouldn’t be make-believe, if you believed in me.

— Billy Rose, from THE GREAT MAGOO (1932)

Note: The occasional appearance of an asterisk in the middle of a speech indicates that the next speech begins to overlap at that point. A double asterisk indicates that a later speech (not the one immediately following) begins to overlap at that point. The overlapping speeches are all clearly marked in the text.
Scene [bounce]: An office in a large building where important work of an unmentionable kind is done. CURRAN, CANDLE’s assistant is dressing down the new man, a poor fool named TORQUE. Pause.

CURRAN
You did not answer my question, Mister Torque.

TORQUE
I did not answer it because I did not understand what you were asking.

CANDLE
Did you hear that, Curran, he did not understand? Ain’t that rich.

CURRAN
You are saying you did not reply to my question because you did not understand my question?

TORQUE
That is what I am saying, yes, Ms Curran.

CURRAN
What was it about my question that escaped you, Torque, if you don’t
mind my asking?

CANDLE
Surely the poor man is MAD.
   He cackles— hides his
   face in his handkerchief.

CURRAN
Sir, I must ask you to hold your
reaction, Mister Candle, till I have
finished the rogatory phase.

CANDLE
I did assume, my dear Curran, you
had concluded the rogatory phase
as the poor ape is clearly on the
ropes. But if I have been premature
in my postrogatory celebration please
accept my apologies.

TORQUE
Gee—

CANDLE
No, not you, you mildewed sock;
you, you walking flea-circus.

TORQUE
Mister Foss would not address me
in such a fashion.

CANDLE
Doctor Raymond Bojangles Crapley Foss is
a genius— you are a flaming crow’s head
of mediocrity. Go on, Curran.
CURRAN
Now Mister Torque, you were saying you did not understand my question. What precisely about it did you fail to comprehend?

TORQUE
Pretty much all of it—from the head part all the way to the tip of its tail.

CURRAN
I find this incredible, sir.

TORQUE
I am saying I did not understand the language of it.

CURRAN
“I did not understand the language of it”, What am I supposed to make of that? And this is not a mere Quine statement.

TORQUE
I believe my statement speaks for itself; it is self-evident.

CURRAN
Perhaps Mister Torque, I shall follow your tack and reply that my previous question speaks for itself. And also, perhaps I shall also announce that the statement I am in the process of just now uttering speaks for itself. How would you respond to that?

TORQUE
Look, I don’t know what you’re getting
at. For the life of me. If you want to ask me a question, ask me a question I can understand, in a language I can understand.

CURRAN
Why should I do that Mister Torque? After all it is you, there, twisting in the catbird seat ...

CANDLE
Attagirl, Susannah! Twist the old corn knife.

TORQUE
I can’t believe this guy.
They glare at each other.

CURRAN
All I am trying to do, Mister Torque, is shed some light on the matter at hand.

TORQUE
On what matter, for Pete’s sake?

CURRAN
On the matter at hand, the matter of the previous question.

TORQUE
Could you repeat it please?

CURRAN
What did you say?

TORQUE
I said: could you repeat it
please?

CURRAN and CANDLE consult. Pause.
Could you please repeat what you just said?

CANDLE
No. Not* really.

CURRAN
Could you please repeat what you just said?

TORQUE
Why the hell should I? Jesus, you people have a lot of nerve, you ask me.

CANDLE
Do you always behave in such a peremptory fashion, cheesehead, during interviews of this kind? Pause. TORQUE lowers his head.
Do you?

TORQUE
Sorry. It's just. It's just that I, well, I have never been interviewed before in precisely this fashion. I'm sorry, and ...

CURRAN
How have you been interviewed then, Mister Torque? Tell us, really,* we'd very much like to know. We would like to know, wouldn't we, Mister Candle?
TORQUE
Well, usually, people ask me ... oh, crap ...

CURRAN
What is it, Mister Torque?

TORQUE
All this sarcasm, I’m sorry I just don’t see the point of it. Where I come from interviews are conducted in such a way that ... that ...

CANDLE
I cannot believe the fatuous* cheesehead.

CURRAN
Go on, go on, Mister Torque. We are listening to everything you say.

TORQUE
Well ... in a way that is dignified and low-key. All this badgering and question-begging ... well it baffles me. And I just don’t know how, how to respond. I mean, I literally ... I tell you I don’t understand what you are saying and all I get is this really objectionable ridicule.

CANDLE sob with stifled laughter. CURRAN stares coldly at the poor man.

CURRAN
Perhaps then you are not interested in this job.

TORQUE
But I am, I am, don’t you see? It is
only I do not understand ...
Groping helplessly
for words, anything.

CURRAN
Perhaps then you are not really
interested in this job.

TORQUE
It is only that I do not understand
what it is I am expected to do.
CURRAN rolls her eyes as
CANDLE whinnies. Pause.

CURRAN
Since you refuse to answer my first question,
I propose asking you a second one, with the
caveat that I shall not ask a third.* Do I
make myself clear?

TORQUE
But, but Ms Curran please I ... I ... certainly
would have answered the question, only you see,
I must confess that English is my only language
and that therefore I meant no harm. Only, you
seemed to be speaking, I would say, a foreign
tongue.

CURRAN
What!

CANDLE
Indeed. What?

TORQUE
Yes I would say a foreign tongue, and not only
that, but a language at some remove from those
with which I am ... most familiar. Altaic, I would say. A variant of Turko-Tungusic perhaps.

CANDLE
Perhaps, eh?
He laughs again

CURRAN
That would seem to imply an unusualist position on your part, Mister Torque. Are you quite sure that is the stance you would like to leave us with the impression of, as you complete your interview?

TORQUE
You have no reason to call me an unusualist. I am not an unusualist, er.

CURRAN
You mean to say you deny categorically any association with members of the unusualist camp, either here, or back home in New Delbert whence your people originated?

CANDLE
Slouching in their foul turbans and pointy-toed shoes.

TORQUE
I would deny that charge categorically; yes, that is true, I would, indeed.
Long smoke-filled pause.

CURRAN
Sir, do you know what Crowe’s Dark Space is?
TORQUE
Sure, it’s the place where the One He Refused to Meet encounters the Crocodillian Mahoon and therefore lays an egg. Quite a large egg, in fact.

CURRAN
And you are sure of that?

TORQUE
Well— that’s what I was taught at Princeton. School of Upper Malabar Philocubist and Macrurous Studies.

CANDLE
Was old Jenkins still around at that time?

TORQUE
No, Mister Candle, I do believe that, owing to a random bicker at the College of St John the Stylite he had already been given the mad-dog skull cap and forced to resign in favor of Foss. His true love was not resonance and radiance in any case.

CURRAN
Foss would never’ve stooped to such a thing.

CANDLE
And there is no such thing as a “random” bicker, Mister Torque, you ... you ... 

CURRAN
Actually on this* score he is correct, Mister Candle.

CANDLE
You, you fetid, cronking bagpipe.
TORQUE
Yes, quite.

CURRAN
At the German Club quite. Random bickers did occur, if I recollect it correctly.

TORQUE
Yes, that’s what I’m saying. There is such a thing as a random bicker. And random bickers did occur at the German Club.

CANDLE
Phooh. Lucky guess ...

CURRAN
And, Mister Torque, do you know the precise location of the Bad Place?

TORQUE
Er,

CURRAN
Only a confirmed unusualist would hesitate at this juncture, Torque. Come clean.

TORQUE
Er, only a bit of phlegm in the throat. You cannot imagine how unnerving an experience this is.

CANDLE
Poor little philobrutist .... Tsk, tsk.
CURRAN
Must I repeat myself, sir?

TORQUE
The Bad Place lies deep within the Forest of Whim. In the deep, interior regions.

CURRAN
And?

TORQUE
And he holds sway there who stamps with a silver hoof.

CURRAN
And? Go on.

TORQUE
And all the children of desire are raised exponentially to serve at his banquet.

CURRAN
And what is the name of this banquet?

TORQUE
Er, the Madison Avenue Transcendental Beetle-dance, I think.

CURRAN
You think.

TORQUE
Er, I am sure of it.

CANDLE
He thinks, ha.
CURRAN
And what are the tools of the Lesser Magoo?

TORQUE
Tools?

CURRAN
Yes, tools.
TORQUE grimaces, brightens.

TORQUE
Oh, you mean the implements and instruments at her disposal?

CURRAN

TORQUE
Whisk broom.

CURRAN
One ...

TORQUE
Valve trumpet.

CURRAN
That’s two.

TORQUE
Tom and Jerry Tongs— and tongue depressor.

CANDLE
“Tom and Jerry Tongs”. Is that what they call them in New Delbert? How vulgar.
CURRAN
In Chenango, Mister Torque, we refer to these as Ludovican Constrictors. File that away for future reference. In the unlikely event you are invited to join the firm. Do you understand what I am saying? Good. Now please continue.

TORQUE
Chattahoochie Star-Toothed Harrow.

CURRAN
And ...

TORQUE
Number six parting tool ... tub chair ... Klein bottle and ... er.

CURRAN
That's eight. Good. Five more.
Pause.

TORQUE
I thought there were only twelve.

CANDLE
We bicker in New Style here, fool. Check your manual in CD rom. Dolt. Cheesehead.

TORQUE
Sorry, er.

CURRAN
Go on, please.
TORQUE

CURRAN
Eleven.

TORQUE

CURRAN
Fine. You’re almost there. Four more.
One of them tricky.

TORQUE
St Louis Double-Hinged Rainbow-Roof.
Pause.
Ramses Motorized Lawn Cable.

CURRAN
And?

TORQUE
Er.

CURRAN
Hint: there’s a trick to it. It is two things,
not one.

TORQUE
I don’t get it, er.

CANDLE
Phooh.

TORQUE
I get it: The Obeah-Man Refluent Bow
and Arrow.
CURRAN
That is correct, Torque. You have completed round one of the first cycle of Presley's Title One Rogation Exercise. Sir, would you like to visit the Men’s Room?

TORQUE
No, but I would like a drink of water.

CURRAN
There’s a water cooler down the hall to your left. Room 8. Be quick about it.

CANDLE
Dullard.
Hurriedly TORQUE exits.

Both CURRAN and CANDLE shut eyes, place handkerchiefs over eyes (i.e. Einstein fashion with knotted corners).

Neither one makes the slightest move for three minutes.

Both remove the handkerchiefs.

CANDLE
Susannah, would you like to stop by for dinner next Friday? We’re opening our place out by Moonhat for the summer.

CURRAN
I’d be delighted, Mister Candle.
CANDLE
You’ve never met Ruth, and my daughter, Tessara. About your age, I reckon.

CURRAN
I’d be delighted, Mister Candle.

CURRAN
Five sharp. Dress is informal.
CURRAN
Five sharp it is.
Pause. Neither moves for another full minute.

TORQUE re-enters. Something terrible has happened to him. He looks like he has seen a ghost. Perhaps his own.

He has vomited, soiling his shirt and jacket. His left shoe and stocking are gone, and the foot is bloody. Tremblingly, he crosses the room, leaving bloody splotches; and quietly sits as before.

CURRAN and CANDLE exchange meaningful glances.

As TORQUE sits trembling CURRAN quietly begins talking. CANDLE looks away and smokes a cigarette.
CURRAN
Torque, do you know the story of the
Marabou Man-Orchid?
No reply.
And what is the taboo name for the
flensing knife?

TORQUE
George.

CURRAN
Very good. Now, you must listen
very carefully to every word I say.
For every word is of the utmost
importance.

The history of our people begins in the
Malabar nightshade. For once upon a time,
deep in the Malabar nightshade. In the
deep, interior regions of it, I mean.
A man named P. Johnston Crapley
fell off his horse and like you,
injured a foot. Staring up to
Heaven, he began to hear voices.
The voices told him to go to a far,
far place. And arrange for a billet
on the next steamer bound for New
Delaware. He spoke with a local
carcoon and all was arranged as he
desired. The voices were
followed by visions. Visions of Resonance
and Radiance ...

CANDLE
He makes an odd salute
with one hand.
Within a short time it appeared clear to P. Johnston Crapley that he had been selected for a unique spiritual mission, namely the compilation and editing of the Variorum New Delaware Florilegium. Thus, his grandson J. Mahoon Crapley was subsequently able to found this firm upon the soundest of principles in 1923. In 1925 his son, Clarence Jeremiah and Clarence’s sister, Clarissa Madrasah were suspected of Philadelphian tendencies, and so involuntarily separated. She was sent to London to be secretary to Lady Ernestine Pomfret du Nouyes. He went to Germany where he studied Rotor Statistics and Upper Silesian Slide-Bar Rotation with a certain Doktor Dornier at Dusseldorf. Later he escaped, with a superior doodle-bug of the Herr Doktor’s design to the Yellowstone River region—which he had always wanted to see. And in especial, the “hoodoo” or goblin land of that country. Devastated by the forced separation from his dear sister Clarissa, he only thought to make an end of it all there. The world and all it contained had become for him what it is we mean when we refer to the Bad Place. Do you understand what I am saying? It is very important that you are clear about the meaning of each word. Do you?
TORQUE
I understand, er.

CURRAN
Meanwhile sweet Clarissa would open a pillow from time to time, and confess her unholy passion. Do you understand what I am saying? It is very important that you are clear about the meaning of each word. Do you? Are you? Fine. Finally she arranged with some Soho hoodlums to kill a black cat on the last quarter of the moon, and place it on the doorstep of the person she intended to hoodoo—namely Lady Pomfret du Nouyes. In this way she was able to disguise herself in Indian boots, and make her way into the night, with only a husking pin and a corn knife.

Years later she prepared the first complete anatomical description of the Hutchin’s goose. She married late in life to a distant uncle of Mister Candle here [He nods.], a certain Lyell Crapley, the true inventor of Mergenthaler linotype and rusticated here, where she spent her sweet, latter years.

CANDLE
Indeed, her corn knife is rumored to be buried deep in the woods of my summer estate out at Moonhat, near the casino.
CURRAN
Is that so? I wasn’t aware of that.
She turns sharply
back to her prey.
And what is the taboo name of the flensing
knife?

TORQUE
George, I said. George.

CURRAN
Just checking to see if you’re paying
attention. Now,
She takes a drink
of water.

TORQUE
Er,

CANDLE
What is it, you moron. You CHEESEHEAD ... 

CURRAN
Please, Mister Candle, let me get
to the meat of the matter.

Some thirty years later, a group of
youths in black jackets were observed
moving in a ring near Bug River. Some
of them were smoking cigarettes. Now,
presently, as we speak, all of the,
the descendants of P. Johnston Crapley
are now dead. So the point is how do
you explain the following. Say I am
in my laboratory and I stumble upon a
very lovely little North Wind Camwood
Ergometer. I say, it seems to have
been left by someone. You reply, if it is such a beauty someone will surely come back for it. I respond, that makes sense, but in truth it is such a beauty I should really like to have it. You assure me that you understand my desire. I suggest that I shall wait a week, and after that time if the Camwood Ergometer still remains here unclaimed, well then the precious device shall belong to me. Where precisely is the error in my argument?

TORQUE
J. Mahoon Crapley’s fame did not arise from his dealings with emissaries of the Bad Place, but as a result of his subsequent work on Lower Silesian Side-Bar Rotation, and to a lesser degree, upon his treatise on the Brazilian, or “Silvery”, poodle. A rare beast (Pudelhund Argentum).

CURRAN
Very Well.

The closet door opens with an eerie creak.

We see in the shadows a body swinging from a rope. A suicide. The MAN is dressed identically to poor Mister TORQUE. TORQUE stares, then screams once.

TORQUE
For the love of Christ. What’s he doing
there?

CANDLE

CURRAN
Mister Candle, this is really disgusting. I feel I shall have to file a report. I had assumed we were operating under the terms of the St Cloud System for Stress Reduction, New Orleans Resonance and Monkeyhat Preadmonishment.

CANDLE ignoring her
You heard me, moron, move it.

TORQUE lumbers up to the swinging corpse. Stares. Cuts him down with a wicked looking knife secreted in his shoe, and slowly proceeds halfway to the door. He stops.

TORQUE
Where?

CANDLE
Bugger yourself.* Phooh.

CURRAN
Take it down the, Mister Torque, down the hall, to the wall chute, please.

TORQUE lumbers out with the corpse. Closes the glass door behind
him. Pause.

CANDLE
He’ll do.
She yawns.

CURRAN
Long day.
Stands.

CANDLE
Remember: next Friday at my summer place.

CURRAN
Off Route 6?

CANDLE
Near the Republican landfill.

CURRAN
Bring a bottle of wine?

CANDLE
Bring a white. I have the red. Loads of red in the basement. And in the deep woods. In the deep interior regions of the woods.
Both begin to pack their bags, and prepare to close the office for the day.

Slow black. End of scene.
Scene [**ricochet**]: Late afternoon, of a pleasant summer’s day, near the gazebo, on CANDLE’s vast estate, close to both Bug River and the deep woods adjoining. The guests stroll about drinking, smoking—having a good time. These include Ms CURRAN and CANDLE himself; his wife RUTH and daughter TESSARA; the literary person, GABRIEL PLEASURE and CANDLE PROSPER, a country cousin of the CANDLES, also a former U.S. Senator. In addition: SHIMMER, who serves the drinks, and Aunt SYCORICA from Central Asia. And of course, the old philosopher FOSS, who is confined to a wheelchair and says not a word. They all drift in and out of scenes, and observe the others. Principle of the Act: when you’re not on, you’re off. [Note: at some point all the characters stop whatever they are doing, and join together to sing Billy Rose’s “Paper Moon” (See page 3).

TESSARA
I wasn’t funny—so I got hosed.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I beg your pardon?

TESSARA
In the school play, back at school.

CANDLE
What is the point of writing crap
like that, Ruth?
   Crumples paper
   and tosses it.

   RUTH
She was to see the doctor.
She was to see the doctor
if it got worse.
   As they drift off
SHIMMER rescues the
paper, secrets it
on his person.

   Senator CANDLE PROSPER
   hums a little tune to
AUNT SYCORICA who is
staring at TESSARA
with flaming eyes.

   CANDLE PROSPER sings:
Ask too many questions
and you fly, fly, fly.
Ask too many questions
of the woods, the creek, the sky!
Of the corn, the wheat, and
of the sacred monkshood—
Ask too many questions
of the bluegrass and the hay ...
       He stops.
I forget the rest of it, but it was
our song. The song of our people,
you might say.
       Notices AUNT SYCORICA’s
intense stare.
Yes, yes. She’s a lovely young girl.
Absolutely stunning.
CURRAN hands CANDLE a bottle.
He kisses her lightly
on the cheek.

CANDLE
Now go mingle.

CURRAN
Could you introduce me to your family?

CANDLE
They’re a pretty dull bunch. Oh, Ruth,
They wave, but
don’t bother.
I never know how to behave at
social situations. Oh, there’s
someone you ought to meet.
Mister Gabriel Pleasure.

GABRIEL PLEASURE turns at the
mention of his name and trips,
nearly falling. Smiles and
waves.
He’s a literary person of some note.
Can’t recall actually reading anything
the poor fool has written. But everywhere
one goes one encounters it— books and
books of the stuff. Dyed-in-the-wool
unusualist, I suspect. I dunno. One of
his epistolary novellas was written in
high school French. **Anomalous Narcolepsy**
it was called I believe. Decent enough
fellow, and a pretty fair tennis player.
Lives over in ... ah ... Corntown, that
big old, run-down Corinthian courthouse
by the morgue. A Minnesotan, ah...

SHIMMER brings them
wine. Our host hands
CURRAN’s bottle over
to him.

CURRAN
Tell me, Mister Candle, is what we’re
dealing with classical Quadratic
Stark Effect?

CANDLE
No, I wouldn’t call it “classical”.
In fact, in point of fact, it doesn’t
really qualify as Stark Effect either.
No, I’d prefer to call it a case of
Quadratic Zeeman Effect.

CURRAN
You don’t say?

GABRIEL PLEASURE approaches. Pause.
So the Q value is joint?

CANDLE
Hello, Gabriel, this is Susan Curran.

CURRAN
Susannah...

CANDLE
Sorry, dear, Susannah Curran.
Susan, this is Gabriel Pleasure,
a person of some literary standing.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Delighted.
CURRAN
How do you do?

CANDLE
Might be thought of as Q switching.
The vulcanization of products, etc.
Rubber and rubber trees.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I’m having a bad hair decade.

CANDLE
I beg your pardon?

GABRIEL PLEASURE goes off.

AUNT SYCORICA
That little rabbit, I’d swear she’s giving off Cerenkov radiation. The soft blue aura. Amazing.

FOSS
—

AUNT SYCORICA
You bet I’d like to monkey with her bore-hole.

FOSS
—

AUNT SYCORICA
When the moonlight comes perhaps I’ll tell you the true tale of our people.
Not before. We were unusualists, all of us, you know.

FOSS

—

AUNT SYCORICA
The historical trace is persuasive.
Admiral Miraldi was the first to diagnosed the condition: The “Monocoque Money Illusion”, he named it.

She laughs softly.
Yes, I’d like to monkey with that.

She sings:
In Shantung, Charlie,
The sharks all live on a hill.
The sharks all live on a hill.

Pause.
The sharks all live on a hill.
In Shantung, Charlie ...

—

CANDLE
Transcaucasia? Not bloody likely,
Ruth. The daypart morning drive picks each bid off the wall. Won an Emmy.

RUTH
Eligible liabilities, I should say.
Gabriel is the sweetest man.
CANDLE
Walks like he’s fouled with
Lepas Anatifera. Barnacles
conceal his ball of glass.

RUTH
Tessara’s a-tingle. Ho.

CANDLE
At least she doesn’t need any character
merchandising. The sensuous young!
You like Curran?

RUTH
Where’s she from? She acts like a rabbit
in a challenge box. Unusualist.

CANDLE
Her? No way. A bean counter.

RUTH
Bean counters can be unusualist too.

CANDLE
Ha. Ha.
Pause.
Go ask Shimmer if the gimmick fruit
can be that funky. Magneto-hydro-
dynamically speaking. Look. Hey,
Don’t look at me that way. Funk
money is not funk art.

RUTH
You old lefty.
She kisses him on the nose.
Funkum.
CANDLE
Funkum. Funkum. Funkum.
Fold.

BOTH
Funkum. Funkum. Funkum.
Fold.

RUTH
Bold. Old old. Future* schlock.

CANDLE
Optical wand.

RUTH
Future schlock.

CANDLE
Optical wand.

RUTH
Mahoon. Mahoon. Mahoon. Mahoon
Mahoon. Mahoon. Mahoon.

CANDLE
Morbidezza, my dear.

RUTH
Morbidezza?

CANDLE
Indeedy do. Folded nicely will do.

———

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK shuffles
up to the solitary CURRAN, but
only TESSARA can perceive him.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Miss Curran, it’s me. I took the open-jaw
ticket here. The half-life of my half-death
doesn’t seem to read. I never accused those
Petra’s Bulk-Handling Machine people. I
never did. Someone else cooked the books.

Sniffs her wine.
This wine’s got halitosis. If someone
doesn’t acknowledge me I’ll fade out and
dark about till my dunlops dangle, till
they dark me out in the daddy tank with
Dagmar over there. Please.

But she doesn’t
notice anything.

CURRAN
Dado.
Pause.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Please help me.

CURRAN
Dado. Deedo.
Pause.
The suave GABRIEL PLEASURE joins her.

Hi.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Jiminy jiminy jump.
He bows.
Now jump cut the neon
with your nerfing bar.
Now now now.
CURRAN
Now now now.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
That’s called Rotary Swaging. It’s a half-moon do-or-die kind of thing.

CURRAN
Usual or unusual?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
You expect me to answer that?

CURRAN
?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
It is, also, of course, a door check kind of thing. Drastic. Like the murmur of the comb-tooth spider.

They engage in some friendly ribbing:

CURRAN
You look at me like I’m a Murjite.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
One could do worse, Miss Curran. Forty-five thousand tons of drop weight does not an umble make.

CURRAN
How clever. First generation scare-head stuff. And I had you pegged as an unabhorrent. Albeit an unusual one.

Gives her a look, and
then bursts into song:

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Scam. Scam. Scaly scam.
Climb the side-pipes
and back again.

Scam. Scam. Scaly scam.
Climb the side-pipes
and back again.

Oh, steady state. Steady state. Steady state.
Steady state. Steady state. Steady state.
My stick-dad is named
Pellagra.

Oh, my stick-dad* is named
pellagra.

CURRAN
My stick-dad* is named
Pellagra.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
My stick-dad* is named
pellagra.

CURRAN
My stick-dad is named
pellagra.

BOTH
Pellagra. PELLAGRA.
Pause. All stare
at them.
CURRAN
Stick him on!
Stick him on!
Stick him on!
Stick him on!
Stick him on!
Stick him on!
Stick him on!
[Repeat X 7.

---

TESSARA
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
[Repeat X 7.

Pause.
Ward X is my washingmachine, oh.
Wango, wango is my washboard.
What a wandering whistle-stop, oh. [Repeat X 7.
Pause. Sadder
but wiser.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
Sforever.
[Repeat X 7.

---
CANDLE looks adoringly at his
daughter:
Tessara, where you’re at’s
a white rabbit.

CANDLE PROSPER
A wheelsucker, you ask me. Heh?

CANDLE
I beg your pardon? What did you say?

CANDLE PROSPER
Heh. I said “heh”. White alert.

AUNT SYCORICA and RUTH
quietly chat.

RUTH
Are you having a good time, dear?
That’s Foss you were chatting with.
A deranged former genius. Mathematics.
He elaborated the theory of Resonant and
Radiant Doohickeys. Arrays of infinities
arranged in torus-ellipsoids, topologically
speaking. Thought to be quite useless,
the whole bumfoozle. Lost his poor wits.
The Phantom of Philosphaster Hall, they
named him. Couldn’t be put away; it
would be unseemly for a genius to be
confined to the bughouse. Now his ideas
undergird the whole foundation of things
like Airy Disc implants, Avalanche Lilies,
all those cheeses made from petroleum
byproducts. Ultra-large Crude Containers,
or: ULCC’s. Rhode Island Electromagnetic Rat-tail Hinges. Things like that, practical down-to-earth things that give a person ballast in the community. You’d never know to look at him; he was the agent of all that.

AUNT SYCORICA
A fascinating old gentleman.

RUTH
Did he say anything?

AUNT SYCORICA
I was under the impression his mind was gaga.

RUTH
No, no, no. He listens to everything, watches everything. He misses nothing. Only he plays his cards rather close to the chest. He’s a distant relation of ours. Just like you, only not quite that distant. The exact connection has been diagrammed for me, but I’m still not too clear. Something morganatic. Or perhaps a tontine. Or something tontine-like.

AUNT SYCORICA
Sounds morbid.

RUTH
Do you have such things in your country?

AUNT SYCORICA
In Baku we tie the old, useless ones. One like him, with faculties gone. We tie them to a waterlogged stump and throw him in the tombi, deep glacial ponds.
A shocked pause.
Was this old gentleman, in his fine, former years, by any chance a philumenist?

RUTH
My word, what in the name of Jupiter is that?

AUNT SYCORICA
A collector of matchboxes.

RUTH
Come to think of it ... 

AUNT SYCORICA
I want to listen to the old Senator talk about politics. I only ask because he has a grip of steel when he has clasped a box of matches I show him from Baku.

RUTH
?

AUNT SYCORICA
Oh, by the way, that Curran slut is after your husband.
She goes.

_____

CANDLE PROSPER
That old witch used to say the whole shindig is a flannel tunnel.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK has been following him, and stands patiently to one side.
TESSARA
Did she now? How original.* And what. do you suppose, did she mean by that?

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Please, Tess.

CANDLE PROSPER
Yes, yes, and more. I was on the Senate Committee then. Had access to things, things like, well, you know. Plans for the Mohawk All-Purpose Vehicle, or MAPV. I was Chairman on the Subcommittee for West Virginia Radiosensitive Interversion, and Syllabicity. As you can imagine a lot of the paperwork was highly classified. Did you know there is no way in round number terms to arrive at an adequate derivative for the Fan Choral Display? It means, my dearie, we literally have no way of knowing what we are doing on a macro level. Across the board, I would say. Buckley’s wrong; so is Ross Perot. It’s all one big Boston haircut, no matter how much you indulge in chest-thumping, whatever. The hate-mongers don’t have to be accurate. We do. That’s why polls are both nonsense, and not. Ever watch television and get the eerie feeling all that coon-track boss-out is being enacted within, that is right, within the regular confines of your personal noggin? Your own head? Well there is a reason for that. Because it is, you see, it is.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Please, Tessara, please.
TESSARA aside:
Joegh, Joegh. What are you doing? You don’t belong here. What are you doing? What are you doing?
The SENATOR is surprised.

CANDLE PROSPER
Who’re you talking to, Tess*, if you don’t mind my asking?

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Please, Tessara, please.

_____

GABRIEL PLEASURE
After I hid forty I began to not worry about a whole class of things

CURRAN
Did I hear you correctly? Did you say: “When I hid forty”?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I thought I said, “When I hit forty”.

AUNT SYCORICA
That’s not what you said. Maybe you too are becoming vacant-headed. Ha.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I beg your pardon?

AUNT SYCORICA
Certain persons are most interesting at that point in their life when things
begin to go wrong. Radically, drastically wrong:

Pauselet.
But that doesn’t seem to be the case with you, Mister Please-her.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Pleasure, please.

AUNT SYCORICA
Pleasure, an odd duck of an name.
She abruptly goes.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Odd duck indeed.

CURRAN
Mister Candle says you write books in a foreign language.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
No, although some of them apparently read that way. I practice both ideology and the truth. A little spade work in whatever’s current, but not too taxing. Nowadays poetry is all about line breaks, and that’s not too taxing. A little trivial though, even for a has-been like me. I rather prefer investigative ideology—don’t matter what you turn up, the facts always fit. You might say I alter like the moon between phases of stuttering polysemy and plausible journalism.

CURRAN
I don’t know what you mean.
GABRIEL PLEASURE
That’s all right.

CURRAN
Have you spoken with old Senator Prospero? I can’t believe a man like that would just retire. His “abdication” he calls it, as if he were royalty.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I suppose after four terms in the Senate one feels entitled. That Shimmer oaf is looking at Tessara as if she were a ... a ...

CURRAN
Yes?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
A succulent morsel. A dainty dollop.

CURRAN
Mister Candle is an excellent host, and the estate is fabulous.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
You must get Ruth to show you around the upper rooms. The third floor ballroom. Not to mention the hair-filled ogive. And the Rat Tower. Later on we must explore the deep, interior regions of the woods. A good deal of it remora’d to be first growth, though I don’t buy that.

CURRAN
Mister Pleasure, what did you just
GABRIEL PLEASURE
I said, I don’t buy that. What, am I talking too loud?

CURRAN
No, no. What you said before that. I thought you said “remora-ed” to be first growth.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
What’s a “remora-ed”?

CURRAN
Well, exactly.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
—?

CURRAN
Actually, a remora is a type of parasitical fish, isn’t it?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
My good word! [For he sees something.

CURRAN
What? What’s wrong? Am I talking too loud?* Sometimes I talk too loud ...

GABRIEL PLEASURE
No, no. Look. It’s him. Look, he’s gotten up out of his wheelchair.
Pause.
Would you get a load of that look on his face?
CURRAN
There is something terrible in the sight
of a great person in decline.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I wouldn’t know. Let’s get another
drink, and go for a walk. I’d love
to hear more about your work, Oh,
there’s Shimmer. I’ll just go and
fetch us two more glasses of wine.
As he goes off, THE GHOST
OF JOEGH BULLOCK shuffles up.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Can’t we have a conversation,
Susannah?
But she can’t hear him.
I guess it’s because I’m dead.
That’s it, isn’t it?

_____

CANDLE
Shimmer, be a good boy, and make sure
everyone gets a little tight. I’m very
delighted with the company, and hope to
make quite a splash with our little
show at midnight, in the third floor
ballroom, bigosh.

SHIMMER
Beg your pardon, sir? There’s no question
of that. They’ve been drinking like
bloody fishes, sir.
CURRAN joining them:
What show was that, Mister Candle?

CANDLE
The video display I’ve prepared—with the aid
of the folks over in Marketing and Non-
Invasive Lowball Sites. A short industrial
entitled “New Delaware’s Upper Peninsula and
the Development of Post-Lurid Nonsel Hedges.”
Tessara appears in a brief cameo, as the
Princess of Leeks and Scallions. Directed by
Nigel Duff-Whippet. He’s the one responsible
for that turkey at the Rep last year.
Ramses Inflated, a perfectly dreadful show.
Fart jokes in fat suits, ugh.

CANDLE PROSPER also joining:
Morally, I thought it unimpeachable.
Only, why can’t the theatre leave us lawyers
alone, and be done with it?

CANDLE
A successful lawsuit is one worn by a
policeman.

GABRIEL PLEASURE arrives on the skid:
Robert Frost. I rather prefer:
Why does a hearse horse snicker
Hauling a lawyer away?

CANDLE
I thought you were with Sycorica and
poor old Foss.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
He appears to have gotten up and
rusticated himself somewhere else,
perhaps even to the deep, interior regions of the adjoining forest.

CANDLE
I'll send Tess after.

CANDLE PROSPER
Said the most remarkable things as I was talking to your Aunt, or cousin Sycorica. Strange, witchified name. “It’s all hollow, “ he said, “Hollow” in his strange, quavering voice.

CANDLE

—

CURRAN
Hold this.

Gives glass to SHIMMER. She goes.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Hollow with respect to what?

CANDLE PROSPER
Who knows? Who cares?

CANDLE
Dear Ruth, ah, darling, would you come here? Ruth?

Sees he must go to her to get her attentions. Goes.

SHIMMER
Look what I found under the boxwood.

Holds up a dirty, old tool. It is the corn knife alluded to by CURRAN in the
first scene.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Looks like a prehistoric paleolith. Have a look.

But CANDLE PROSPER snatches it away.

CANDLE PROSPER
Have a look indeed.

The Senator looks at it carefully.

Just as I thought. A corn knife.

SHIMMER and GABRIEL PLEASURE

What?

CANDLE PROSPER

You, boy, your name is Shimmer?

SHIMMER

Yes, sir.

CANDLE PROSPER

Well, what kind of a name is “Shimmer” anyway?

SHIMMER

From the Manganese Island. North of the bay.

CANDLE PROSPER

Well, look. You take this back to the boxwood and dispose of it. Filthy thing. And not a word of this to anyone. Especially not my cousin, Mister Candle. Do you hear?

GABRIEL PLEASURE

I’ve heard nothing—! Off I go, to dance
with the princess.

He goes trippingly.

CANDLE PROSPER
And stop looking at my niece that way.

SHIMMER
It’s only that ... she’s so very, very beautiful.

Embarrassed, SHIMMER moves off with the corn knife in a soiled hanky.

Pause. The Senator alone. RUTH approaches, but stops a few steps behind him, as if to watch him unobserved; a few steps behind her is SYCORICA who has likewise positioned herself to observe both him and her. It is getting dark now. We hear night noises, and are only now aware of the seven Japanese lanterns that are all that illuminate the fading party. Bats, crickets.

Somehow CANDLE PROSPER feels eyes upon him, and begins quietly and slowly to talk.

CANDLE PROSPER
Yes, yes, yes. Soon it will be dark. But without a secure power base one can do nothing. I always wanted a true conversation with the American people. But things have changed. What with the rough new
crowd in Washington. I grew up with certain ideas about ... well ... civility, and how far one is ... or ought to be prepared to go. And now I’m tired of it all. I’m just plain tired. Tired of having to explain over and over again the difference ... the difference between right and wrong, truth and lies. Bobby Kennedy was right: he told me, if you don’t spend full time stonewalling the Pentagon they’ll just roll over you. That’s a free paraphrase. I dunno. And yes, I know, I know. This all sounds so old and ... hopelessly liberal. So old hat.

Scratches his head.

But the Defense Department’s the least of it now. Corporate this. Corporate that. Why can’t the voters perceive that all this corporate hebephrenia is just a cover for the big grab? So much money amassed, and amassed in a way that shall ... that shall bury the common man, whoever that may be, under a fecal tide-flow of dead, little dead-end dreams. Little, dead dreams. Nightmares, in fact. With cyber bats in the internet belfry, ugh. Hebephrenia’s a big word, I know; means the foolish kind of crazy. Delusional. Politically cuckoo. All of us, flushed down into the crapper of ... political enfeeblement and, and Holy Roller misrepresentation, sheer moral equivocation. Mendacity. Drastic mendacity. Drastic enfeeblement.

My record on the important topics speaks for itself. I knew when Jimmy Carter’s bunch skewered McGovern that all was lost. Only Mason-Dixon border-state borderline liberalism after that. Saddled with do-gooder rhetoric, but fundamentally unmoored. No real agenda any more. We defanged ourselves, you see. But I’m told the young are tired of politics anyway, so what’s the use? As if you could make “politics” go away by turning off the tube. A little lying is just so damn tempting, so
you give in, and the cities fall apart, there’re riots, because something like three trillion dollars has gone and been dumped into that filthy abattoir, in Viet-Nam. At least I was firm on that. No one ever accused me of waffling on that. Ditto for Watergate. So now our schools are shot, and everyone moves to Sunbelt states where no one gives a damn about education or medicare or the environment. Hell, I was for the Brady bill (or something just like it) before Brady ever got drilled; I told Bob Packwood to pack it all in months before the Ethics Committee requested his diaries. Still no one apparently can READ and the Republicans can reproduce faster than a speeding rabbit. SALT I and SALT II were my god-children, only, only no one cares about proliferation anymore. SALT I and SALT II: who remembers that? But they should. I wouldn’t want to live downwind of Hanford, Washington. Poor Packwood, the poor ... dope.

Hell, I was never in politics to be loved. Not to be loved, precisely; no. But, hell, it gets to you. I mean how for instance no one in the minority caucuses ever bothers to say a simple “thank you”. And I’ve always supported minority rights; see, I’m wearing one of these little, anti-AIDS ribbons. No one forced me. No, no one forced me.

Hell, a man of principle doesn’t do the right thing because he expects to be loved, and I’d have gone after that kook Alphonse D’Amato at every juncture, but, I don’t know, I don’t know.

I know some things about George Bush that would make you truly wonder what it takes. Yes, there is, I am coming to believe, a fundamental disconnect between the means of power and the exercise of power. Real, political power and I am ... certain ...
... that, well, things will turn around, and anyway
I never gave those really fabulous speeches, speeches
like the kind Cuomo .... And he has ... in a sense
abdicated also; I mean, he was defeated and I've resigned.
Cuomo bumps. And Senator Bill Bradley. But, hey, he was
a celeb before his ingestion into the culture of politics.
Still: Bradley bumps. Paul Simon bumps. And now
Senator Candle Prosper bumps, bumps, bumps.

Do you suppose they'll miss me when I'm gone? Don’t
get me wrong, one of my kids is working with Ralph
Nader; I mean, I stood for something ... in my time ...

Nader, that ass.

You know what so mattered, and what has
so totally eluded everyone on what
used to be called “the left”, is not fighting
the good fight, but fighting the good fight on
a ground of our own choosing. Because I

I don’t

I don’t want only to fight the good fight
I want to win. But But

It is them, the other side, who now
determine the agenda: crime (yawn),
taxes, welfare reform and so on. All
down the line. All non issues because
they all amount to grotesque versions
of real, desperately real issues.
Issues that have been redescribed by those
who wish to do nothing whatsoever
about their true causes: poverty,
a criminal redistribution of wealth
vertically, up the social hierarchy,
more poverty and bad schools. That’s it.
That’s it. That’s all there is to it.

So I’ve had enough.

And so I’m abdicating. People want
term limits, let’em have term limits.
I’m with Bill Bradley and Paul Simon.
Maybe if people get a real taste of what
the right wing has in store for them.
    A gesture of futility.
Want to hear something funny?
    Whips out a bit of newsprint.
These are Bill Clinton’s remarks in
Minnesota just before the election, the
largest crowd of his whole campaign,
20,000 strong. His opening remarks
as transcribed by the Federal News Service:
    “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you! Thank you very much. Thank you. Hello, Minnesota!
Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank You. Thank you so much. Wow. Thank you.
    “Thank you....”

Kinda says it all, doesn’t it?
    He bows a courtly bow.
Thank you.

    AUNT SYCORICA yelling
To live in mankind is far more than
to live in a name.
Both turn suddenly to face her.

RUTH
Sycorica, I almost leaped out of my skin.
SYCORICA smiles.

AUNT SYCORICA
Senator Prosper. In the Christian year 1605 Estergom was taken by the Grand Vizier, Lala Mehmet Pasha, and in November of that year he crowned his vassal the Hungarian Bocskay as King of Hungary. After his return to the capital it was decided that he should remain the next year in the capital and lead the war on two fronts. The young Sultan, however, changed his mind, in keeping with the wishes of the Kapudan Pasha Derwish who was intriguing against Lala Mehmet. Accordingly, the latter was ordered to take command of the army against Persia. He had already put up his tents in Ushkudar, when overcome by sorrow because of the frustration of his plans, he was seized with an apoplexy and died three days later (23rd of May 1606). He was buried near the turbe of Sokullu Pasha. His weak heart and lack of steadfastness betrayed him.

Pause.

CANDLE PROSPER
Afraid I don’t follow what you’re driving at?
AUNT Sycorica
I never repeat myself.

Candle Prosper
It is all about the sheer insolence of big money.

AUNT Sycorica
Look at yourself.
Pause.

Candle Prosper
I said it is all about the insolence of big money.

AUNT Sycorica
Look very hard at yourself.

Candle Prosper
Okay. It is all about the sheer insolence of big money.

AUNT Sycorica
I said, I never repeat myself.

Candle Prosper
This is what passes for conversation then?

AUNT Sycorica
Kind sir, look around you and quail.
Feel fear. Tremble.

Candle Prosper
—?

AUNT Sycorica
In my country, in my own lifetime, people
pretended to be MAD ... insane, mind you, just in order to escape responsibility.
He bows low.

CANDLE PROSPER
Alihu Ahkbar, you ...
Turning away rapidly.
Kewpie.
She spits.

_____

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Hullo, Sycorax, hey, nonny-nonny no.
I’m having a bad hair decade, hey, philo, philo, philo, phlum.
Phililero, lero, lum.
She stalks back in the direction of the house.

RUTH looks wildly around herself: What has happened to everyone?

RUTH
Where is Shimmer? Where is he?
Her husband emerges from the shadows, looking somewhat shaken.

CANDLE
Everyone is acting so strangely, and I can’t find Foss.

RUTH
Miss Curran followed Tessara too.
GABRIEL PLEASURE looms up
grinning madly.

My word.

CANDLE
What are you looking at, you grinning
ninny?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Your name.

CANDLE
?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I mean your nose.

He sings:
I want to be a static tube,
static tube, static tube.

Off a bit CANDLE PROSPER
hears and ambles over.
Oh, want to be a static tube,
static tube,* static tube.

CANDLE PROSPER
Oh, I want to be a static tube,
static tube, static tube.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Static tube, static head,
static field, static dead,
static equilibrium, Oh,

BOTH MEN
I want to be a static head,
static tube, static field.
I want to be a static tube
of static no delivery.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Of static no delivery.

CANDLE PROSPER
Of static no delivery.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Of static no delivery.

CANDLE PROSPER
At the static moment
of static* equilibrium.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Of static equilibrium.
All enjoy the moment.

CANDLE PROSPER
That seagreen parrot fish cousin of yours
has pursued her paranoid epicycloids
back to the Rat Tower of the old manse;
see, she’s on the widow’s walk gleaming.

CANDLE
Ruth, make sure she doesn’t
break something breakable.

RUTH
I’m tired of being solely wifely.
I want a drink. Shimmer.
He appears from the
darkness, gleaming.

SHIMMER
Mrs Candle, I have had the most
extraordinary experience, yes, it
was as I was flailing about in
the boxwood. A thought came to me,
and this is that thought ...  

RUTH
Shimmer, is there more champagne?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
I praise the wild alfalfa.
I praise the wigwag man.
I praise all those who wild
amid those wigwag cats.  [Repeat X 3.

SHIMMER
People are so happy. So happy.
It’s nice to be so drunk on
nothing in particular.

RUTH
Where, please, is the drink? I’ve quite
suddenly developed the thirst of
Mahomet, but not for the Lord’s truth
but for a simple drink.* It’s true.

SHIMMER
But that’s what I think, you see.
After my illumination I can see
that all problems are the same.
All true problems are problems
posing as problems.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Bony, bony, bony* fish.

CANDLE PROSPER
Bony, bony, bony* fish.
GABRIEL PLEASURE
Bony, bony, bony* fish.
Bony labyrinth, oh ...

BOTH MEN
Oh, bony boohoo bojum. [Repeat X 7.

SHIMMER
No, no, no, no, no. This is true.
Truth is a little thing, like death and fucking. Truth is both terrible and local, terrible and local. Truth is the language of a gaggle of untuned violins.

CANDLE
I'll pass on the book of wisdom for now, Shimmer.

SHIMMER
There was a Being in the boxwood and it said things in my ear.
Low level language of the strange—you'll notice I said “strange” not “unusual”.

He goes.

CANDLE
Perhaps a prayer would be in order. Have all our guests randomly dispersed?

But THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK slowly shambles up. As usual, no one sees him.

RUTH
Scattered according to Glitter’s Rule.
Shimmer, however, will bring about a general *reconcilatio*.

**THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK**
Please. Please help me. I’m so desperate.

**CANDLE**
Him? Not that lad. He’s suffering from a botched effort at an idea.

**THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK**
Please. Please help me.

**CANDLE PROSPER**
Our poor Sciatica has turned into an Halloween masque. Look at her up there. The flashlight emphasizes the fearful symmetry in her facial structure.
All look. Pause.

**CANDLE**
Damn! I want to get on with the viewing.

**RUTH**
All I want is a silly little drink.

**CANDLE**
You know how you get.

**RUTH**
Rest assured I have no intention of getting that way now, anyway ...
CANDLE PROSPER and GABRIEL PLEASURE appear, on synchronized pogo sticks. SHIMMER follows. They are singing in unison:

Rubber, rubber,
rubber tree.
Rubber, rubber. [Repeat X 3.

They sing:

Wiggery.
Piggery.
Triggery.

Liftable.
Shiftable.
Siftable.

Niftily.
Shiftily.
Thriftily. [Repeat X 7.

They sing:

Bowery,
dowery,
flowery,
glowery,
lowery,
showery,
towery. [Repeat X 3.

Attar,
batter,
chatter,
clatter,
fatter,
flatter,
natter,
patter,
platter
shatter,  
spatter,  
splatter,  
yatter.  

[Repeat X 7.

---

CANDLE
Think I need a drink. Suddenly  
all our guests begin to look suspiciously  
unusualist. Or mayhap I am mad,  
and have simply done a Brodie because  
of a fetish with the generalized other,  
I dunno.

RUTH
Why are they reciting all those meaningless  
behavitives?  

CANDLE
What on earth do you think I’m referring to?  
Seriously, do you think I am mad?.

RUTH
No, darling, merely jaundiced.

CANDLE
After witnessing this I believe I shall  
swoon. Oh, Shimmer, can we perhaps  
assemble our scattered guests? Yes,  
alert them to the viewing of the film.  
Third floor ballroom. In twenty minutes.  
But SHIMMER looks dazed.  
Retreats past THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK  
into the forest.  
My word. What is this?
He goes after. THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK approaches RUTH, who stands there, now all alone.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Please, Mrs Candle, please help me. I do so much need someone to help me.

RUTH
Let me propose a prayer to ... no,
no Lord God of Hosts, no, perhaps ...
The Adversary, Great Toothy, er,
no ... no ... Black magic is most certainly out of the question, ah.

Pause. While she is thinking, we are treated to a lovely cameo of GABRIEL PLEASURE and CANDLE PROSPER, serenading (whoever).

BOTH MEN
Oh we wander like the wind, or as a stream Singing the mazurka Madrilene.

Oh, we wander like the wind, or as a stream Singing the sonata Consomme. [Repeat X 7.

RUTH
Oh, please, may the semi-divine Magoo of ditherers, throwbacks and the, ah, socially untenable appear before me with trowel, and run the rule over all;
Likewise I pray to the ghost of P. Johnston Crapley, our founder and beacon. Please, Sir, lift this farce to a new dimension and hallow the brass ring of our hopes; make a snowplow of our human shoes, and forgive us our unusualist lapses and all this ... old hat ... hullabaloo

_____

Suddenly up close, we see and hear the red masque of AUNT SYCORICA:

Long ago our people came here, to Central Asia and Turkestan, from an even more remote place. From the “hoodoo”, or goblin region of the Western North American Coast. There our people quarrelled, raged and swore, played cards, and committed outrages against visitors at the train station, and at the race track. Our people cleaned airplane restrooms at night, and one among us went off to live amongst the crows. This is true. One of them wiser than the rest, and one of us.

Hullabaloo. Blackout.

End of scene.
Scene [carom]: At a glade, deep in the interior region of the forest. TESSARA has followed and found the old mathematician, FOSS. Now CURRAN arrives at the edge of the glade; for she, likewise, has followed and found, both TESSARA and FOSS. She stands quietly apart, not wishing to disturb them. Night noises; a bright moon, waning. A shallow pond at the center of the glade. We hear a frog plop.

TESSARA
Oh, hi. I thought I’d follow him.

CURRAN
And I was curious where the two of you were going.

TESSARA
Escape.
Both laugh lightly.
Then pause.
It’s hard to have a conversation ... I mean ...
with people acting so, so ... random.
Gestures.

CURRAN
I know. Believe me, I know.
Pause.
TESSARA
I mean, they’re all very sweet and like,
Tessara’s so sweet, Tessara’s so pretty,
Tessara’s so ...
    Another futile gesture.
CURRAN
I know. Believe me, I know.

TESSARA
—

CURRAN
—

TESSARA
What’s, what’s it really like, I mean, downtown,
at the firm. like, working with Dad?

CURRAN
Oh, it’s not so ... ah.... Er, do you know
what the Upper Michigan Indifference Curve
is?

TESSARA
No.

CURRAN
Well, how do I explain? Well, it’s like the,
the old open the kimono, you know? The
story of Tecumseh’s red stick and the rat-
tailed hawk. And of course the, the tools
of the, ah, Lesser Magoo?

TESSARA
It sounds fun.
CURRAN
Overpressures, you know. And some buried transuranics, hopefully in subcritical states. All hypothetical, of course. It’s like we humans can withstand something like levels of 30 psi. Drop the other shoe syndrome. But anything over 5 psi can cause burst eardrums and hemorrhaging.

TESSARA
Wow. I didn’t know that. That’s really neat.

CURRAN
Pacers and speeders do best. But then I suppose that’s obvious.

Slightly awkward pause.

TESSARA
He said the most amazing things to me, you know.

CURRAN
Who did?

TESSARA
Mister Foss. Can’t you see him, there? Yes, indeed. FOSS is standing off in the brush. We can only make out his legs. The rest is hidden.

CURRAN
Why doesn’t he come out?
TESSARA
I don’t know. You can ask him if you like.

Looks. Pause.

CURRAN
I think I’ll pass.

TESSARA
Do you like my parents? They like you.

CURRAN
I think I do. Yes, I do. It’s just that right now I’m not so sure of a lot of things. And ... and I guess it shows.

TESSARA
You seem quite serene to me. What’s your first name?

Pause. CURRAN lights a cigarette.

CURRAN
Why, er. Why, it’s Lydia.

CURRAN
I thought I heard people calling you Susannah?

CURRAN
That too, Susannah Lydia. Yes. That’s it.

TESSARA
Why did you follow us out here? Is there something you wanted to talk about?
CURRAN
No. No. I don’t really know.

TESSARA
Guess I’m asking all the wrong questions.

CURRAN
No. No. No. It’s me. It’s me. I’m in a funny state. I don’t do well at parties. And ...

TESSARA
I suppose the others will hunt us down before long. They always do.

CURRAN
People who make a ruckus can’t stand it if people don’t want any part.

TESSARA
You can say that again. Pause. Do you think it’s possible to see someone who is dead? I do; I mean, * I’ve done it.

CURRAN
With your heart maybe. I mean—

CURRAN
I meant emotionally. Loss is a thing that can be capped.

TESSARA
No. No. No. I wasn’t trying to make a creepy and sentimental metaphor.
CURRAN
I didn’t mean to ...

TESSARA
It’s quite real: there is a person who
is very dead. And that person comes around
and tries to talk to me. As if we had, like,
anything in common. I mean, like, how
can you relate to a dead person?

CURRAN
Go figure.

TESSARA
I don’t want to die.

CURRAN
I don’t think you have anything to worry
about for quite some time.

TESSARA
Death is always looking down at us, Death
sees far but is deaf, Death is a black
camel that kneels once at every man’s door.
Pause. CURRAN is a bit puzzled
by this dark turn of the
conversation.
When you lose a sock in the washing
machine? It’s matter becoming spirit.

CURRAN
You’ve got a funny sense of humor
Tessara.

TESSARA
Taratantara. Tarantantara. Taratantara.
Both pause. Both
look at the moon.

GABRIEL PLEASURE dressed as a donkey a la Bottom, appears down left. Silently he gestures and CANDLE PROSPER joins him in the nettles. They stand observing the young women. Pause.

Why do you think people don’t like each other and like, act so cruel and like, totally random?

CURRAN Because we don’t know any better I guess. I don’t know. Why do you ask?

TESSARA I don’t like to be unsure of myself.

CURRAN Who does? Jeez.

Pause.

TESSARA Once you know I came out here, well not here exactly, it was over the rise of the hill there where Route Six divides the forest just south of the diner, the Moonhat Diner, they’ve got the best jukebox in there, my absolute fave, and, like one day I caught my folks dancing around in the woods here, only they had brought some furniture all the way from the house, and they were like, wearing each other’s clothes
and yelling things in a fierce, fierce language, a language I couldn’t, you know, follow because it sounded both barbaric, and contrived? Fake.

And like, there were these bottles of what looked like blood, do you suppose it was blood? It sure looked like blood, and they didn’t see me even though I was just standing there going, duh, hey parents, it’s me, your daughter Tessara Candle and there’s a call for Dad from people downtown at the office saying there’s been an accident and there’s something wrong with the metacarpal prepunch, that it’s gone slack-baked, and the dog has ripped the mailman’s pant-leg again not to mention broken the screen door, poor Woofly, and I’m supposed to go to my bowling lesson and also am supposed to receive this week’s allowance and well it weirds me out Mom just standing there with what looks like clots of black blood all over her and one boob sticking out from Dad’s L.L. Bean shirt and they’ve dug something up or buried something with shovels because the ground all around has been disturbed and I’m afraid to think about that because who knows what it might be? and I’m standing there thinking, hey, am I, like invisible? Am I, I mean really, am I?

So I run back to the house, and pretend not to notice anything strange. But I know if I do this for too long I’ll
end up an unusualist like Cindy Perkins at school and what a rinky-dink she is. A true buttfeaster. No one* will talk to her and.... Nobody will treat her with any respect. And I won’t either because she’s an unusualist and everyone knows the fact. I hate her. I hate Cindy Perkins so much I could splash her with kerosene and set her on fire. BURN UP AND DIE, YOU BITCH. You snivelling, little unusualist. What you do in your dirty little mind is so nasty I don’t even want to think about it, so leave me alone and stop infecting me with these unusual thoughts. I want to be like I am, a normal kid with a normal-type home life, a normal family and a normal dog. No cats, only a dog. So I don’t have thoughts like, like of killing this big animal—the Giant New Delaware Silver-Tipped Martin, for example—and killing this big, hairy animal with my teeth, and dragging its body up into the crabapple tree and eating part of it, the part of it that isn’t sticky and rotten. I mean isn’t that gross?** I think that it is really gross. Sticky and rotten. Too gross for words. Borderline unusual, in fact. Me, borderline unusual.

CURRAN
“Buttfleaser”? What’s that?

TESSARA
Yeah, as in “Sure, buttfleaser, just find us a car, woman”.
CURRAN
No, no, no, it isn’t. No, really.

_____ 

TESSARA
I want to stay open and free.
Like Missouri, the Show Me State.
I don’t want to die.
   Slowly the bushes part
   and we see THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK,
   radiant because he found
   his beloved.

CURRAN
I think you have a very special gift,
and it is a ...
   She sees the displeasure
   on TESSARA’s face and stops
   short.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Please, Tessara, please. Don’t hate me
just because I’m dead.

TESSARA
I really don’t know why you insist on
following me everywhere I go. I really
find it quite revolting.
   Poor CURRAN is stunned.

THE GHOST OF JOEGH BULLOCK
Please, Tessara. Please help me.
TESSARA
Oh, for the love of Christ.

CURRAN
I know, I know. I just wanted ...
I dunno ... I just* wanted to tell you
how much I admire the special quality.

TESSARA
No, no, no. It isn’t you. No, no. It’s
Joegh ... but there’s no sense in explaining
the situation. You’d never believe.

CURRAN
I just wanted to say that I think you are
very special.

TESSARA
Everyone treats me as if I had emerged
from a one-way window, like some paranormal
grasshopper. Like I was standing at the
bottom of a Julia set. And I don’t even
know what a Julia set is.

FOSS begins to move
about where he stands
half-hidden.

CURRAN
Everyone has moments of some kind of special
radiance, and I think* you are entitled.

JOEGH BULLOCK’S GHOST
Please, Tessara, please. Please help
me. I’ll go away if that’s what you
want, but please ... please ...

TESSARA
Oh, shut up you pathetic creep and for
the love of Christ just stop following me around. You’re truly sickening.

CURRAN
Okay, Tessara, if that’s what you want.

JOEGH BULLOCK’S GHOST
Okay, Tessara, if that’s what you want.
Poor CURRAN is trudging out.

TESSARA
This is maddening. Clairvoyance is a total bummer.

Pause. JOEGH BULLOCK’S GHOST
is likewise trudging out.
You go. Miss Curran stay, please.

JOEGH BULLOCK’S GHOST turns
hopefully. CURRAN stops, but
doesn’t dare to turn.
You go, go. Please.

JOEGH BULLOCK’S GHOST
turns back and goes.
Susannah, it’s an unworkable dichotomy.

CURRAN turns back
and smiles:
Sorry, I’m odious and pathetic. But
there’s something you’ve got. And I...
Well, I suppose that something is something
I want too.

CANDLE PROSPER and GABRIEL PLEASURE
whisper and retreat. They have decided
to go and collect the others. JOEGH
BULLOCK’S GHOST has disappeared by
time, but FOSS now has fully emerged.
There is a great radiance in his face, but the WOMEN have not noticed. His left foot is a silver hoof.

TESSARA
I know.
Pause. She looks down.
I’m.... I’m really you.

CURRAN
Yeah. That’s it. Only younger and much much prettier.

TESSARA
No, no. Susannah, no. Don’t say things like that.* It’s a terrible thing to do to yourself.

CURRAN
Yes, it is true. Yes, it is. I guess I’ve just got a ... a morbid interest in you.

She becomes very cold and hard.
She lights a cigarette.
She puts it out, abject.

TESSARA
But you’ve got ... experience.
Experience has to be worth ... well.
Experience has to count for something, doesn’t it? Ant and the grasshopper, you know? Listen to me.

FOSS
Hollow. It’s all hollow. Ever hear
of the Bertrand Duopoly Model? You both are in perfect duopoly mode. Here, in our moonglow ragtime. The model of the unusualist heresy suggests much the same. Because the usual just gets stranger and stranger without the tocsin of the unusual. I am talking tocsin, not toxin. I am talking the tocsin wake-up alarum. Not the rat poison variety. All this I learned back there up in the Rat Minaret, when in a former life I dwelled in these here parts, and worked as a humble shoe-salesman. Yessiree. The past is no prologue; it’s looped to a Cant-Wheel Mississippi Nonself. Consider that as you differ with your shoes, your selves and selflings. There are no such things as crows neither.

Clears his throat.

The WOMEN are rapt. Tessara, you are good girl. Piffle-headed, but still too good for this rat’s-ass sewer of a Moonhat. Moonhat, ha! Moonhat? Bad place, period. Go figure. Now, something higher wants you out of here so that that thing you do may accomplish its own unusual ellipsoid. So that’s it, I guess.

A golden circle of light appears around TESSARA. You are simply too good for these shit-eating swine. That’s it. So long.

TESSARA
Hey! What is this?

CURRAN
Tessara, honey,
FOSS
Say hello to whoever it is.
Slowly TESSARA ascends— yelling—
and disappears in the night-sky.
Pause.
Hollow. All of it hollow.
GABRIEL PLEASURE rushes up,
carrying his ass’s head. He
has seen something in the sky.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
For the love of Christ what was that?

FOSS
What?

GABRIEL PLEASURE
That. That. [Pointing to the sky.

FOSS
Jackass.

CURRAN
It’s okay. It’s okay.
Pause.
She’s gone back to the big house. Everything’s
fine, Mister Pleasure.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Back to the big house?

CURRAN
Yes, back to the big house.

GABRIEL PLEASURE
Oh ...
He doesn’t know whether to believe her or not. But what can he do? He goes out. Pause.

FOSS and CURRAN exchange glances. He shuffles off back into the woods.

She kneels by the little pool, looking at the moon.

CURRAN
Taratantara. Taratantara. Taratantara.
A silvery pause. She finds an object in her pocket. It is a whisk broom.
Taratantara. Taratantara. Taratantara.

Black out.

End of play.

End of CROWTET.