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The Noise in the Room (Based on the Diaries of Carolyn Taylor)

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I have just finished my fourth year as a theatre major at the University of Kentucky. Although acting is my first love, I have a great deal of interest in directing, costume design and playwriting. I am a member of the Honors Program and the Gaines Center for the Humanities. I have been awarded two Oswald Research and Creativity Grants for playwriting, one that funded my first full length play, The Noise in the Room: based on the diary of Carolyn Taylor. There have been three staged readings of my play at the University of Kentucky’s Black Box theatre and The Downtown Arts Center. Currently, I am writing a screenplay based on Carolyn’s story and eventually would like to write a play for each journal, making the ‘The Noise’ a three piece collection. My career goal is to open a theatre that specializes in installation art and performance theatre.

This project has changed my perspective on the value of recoding my life and the lives of those around me. I think there is so much to be learned in the present through the personal record of one’s daily activities and thoughts of the past. In this way, Carolyn’s diaries have been a doorway, a threshold, of creativity and understanding. I would like to thank the Bracken County Historical Society members for giving me support while researching in Augusta. This play is not only about the past or the present, but how they intertwine and weave a new story.

When she was a little girl, Lauren Argo liked playing in her grandmother’s closet. For hours, she could get lost indulging herself in the texture and look and sensibility of another time, measuring herself against the seams of an earlier era. She knew that she owed much to lives that preceded hers and she cherished those obligations. Once again, she is acknowledging a legacy to her forebears with this play that she has constructed from the words of a woman who died before she was born. For Lauren, history is not musty and old, better forgotten and discarded. It informs us today. It creates the texture we live. History is in our pores, but we who are alive now have the opportunity and the mandate to shape what we have inherited in line with contemporary fashion and demand.

History is also a chronicle, and it was in the diaries of Carolyn Taylor, a woman who recorded her life for fifteen years, that Lauren Argo found a mirror of a past she wanted to explore. Early in the century, women in America struggled and waged a public battle to be noticed and to have options in their lives, not simply to be the voiceless appendages of men. Carolyn Taylor, a native of Augusta, Kentucky, was engaged in that fight on the circumscribed stage of the local. She devoted her energies to making positive changes happen in her milieu not just for herself but also for those who had less power and privilege than she.

Lauren Argo, who has benefited from the progress that Taylor and her sisters in suffrage demanded, pays tribute to Carolyn Taylor. She darns the frayed narrative of Taylor’s life and in the process she celebrates this woman who could have been her great grandmother. From the fragile and fading pages of the first of three diaries that Taylor kept, Lauren Argo translates five years of Taylor’s life to a drama that makes palpable how the fight of women for recognition and social acceptance at the beginning of the last century forms a continuum with the struggles of women and the underprivileged today.

It has been a pleasure to listen to Lauren develop her ideas and her approach to this material, which she felt bound to honor at the same time that she wanted to make it her own. Her job, as she saw it, was not just to set out on the discovery trail after the facts of Carolyn Taylor’s life, but to add the tinge and resonance of today. She has succeeded, and in the process she has helped us see the shifting panorama and the fragility of life. How easily it can pass without a trace. The moments we live are evanescent. They vanish all too quickly. Art extends those moments, and drama is metaphorically a garment-filled closet that allows us to touch and breathe the aura and memory of the past while we rehearse the future.

Develop interest in life as you see it; in people, things, literature, music—the world is so rich, simply throbbing with rich treasures, beautiful souls and interesting people. Forget yourself.

Henry Miller
Carolyn H. Taylor was born in Bracken County, Kentucky on March 4, 1871 to Benjamin F. Taylor and a Mrs. Hamilton Taylor. Carolyn’s legal guardian, as recorded in Bracken County court records, was Mrs. Finniah Taylor, possibly a family member on her father’s side. Carolyn was released from the custody of Finniah Taylor on her twenty-first birthday, March 4, 1892, and had been overpaid by said guardian the sum of One thousand and twenty-six dollars and sixty-five cents. Although this is the only record of finance I found for Carolyn, her lifestyle as recorded in her diary concludes that she was a woman of wealth. It is my belief that Carolyn inherited money and property after her father’s death.

Miss Taylor lived with her mother in downtown Augusta for a large part of her life, renting the family farm in Bracken County to temporary tenants. Harry McDonald cared for the farm from 1916-1919, raising hogs, cows, hay, tobacco, and other goods. The profit from these goods was split between Mr. McDonald and Mrs. Taylor and Carolyn for living expenses. Carolyn took several months of the year with her family in Cincinnati, Ohio, to attend Art and Sewing School, leading a very social life in the city.

While living in Augusta, Carolyn participated in several society groups in her free time. She sewed shirts for the soldiers for the Red Cross and believed in supporting the war effort with her service and financial contributions. Carolyn was a leader in the Augusta Chapter of Red Star, an organization focused on animals in World War I. An Emergency Service of the American Humane Society, Red Star was created to raise money to send medical supplies, veterinarians, and ambulances to the front line to care for injured horses. Carolyn was an active member in the Presbyterian Church women’s group, although she retracted her membership to the church in 1917 over a difference of opinion. Carolyn was a strong woman of her time and place, supporting controversial issues such as women’s rights in the Suffrage Movement. A very social woman, Carolyn’s love of the arts is obvious from her attendance at picture shows, art museums, plays, and music performances.

Carolyn moved from Augusta to Frankfort, Kentucky, around 1935 where she worked as a clerk for the Economic Department of the State of Kentucky until her retirement. She returned to Augusta to cast her vote on Election Day in August of 1939 when she finally celebrated her right to vote. Carolyn eventually moved into Green’s Rest Home in Frankfort where she would reside until her death. She was found deceased by Mrs. Ireland Davis on November 12, 1961, at the age of ninety. Her remains were cremated in Louisville, Kentucky, and taken to Davis Funeral Home in Paris, Kentucky.

I am honored to be a part of Carolyn Taylor’s life and will continue to seek the answers to questions about her that cloud my dreams. This woman, who is not famous by the standards of the world, has been the most influential woman in my life, giving me the desire to know my own grandmothers and mother better. My life is dedicated to finding her truth and creating a record of my own great life.
THE NOISE IN THE ROOM

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is based on the 1914-1919 diary entries of Carolyn Taylor and my discovery of these diaries. The scenes, 127 and THE HYSTERICAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY are based very closely on real life experience and should reflect such realism. Other scenes that require a focus on realism include THE PARLOR and THE CEMETERY. The remaining scenes are based in the abstract worlds of Carolyn and Elizabeth’s dreams and thoughts. Please be creative with your production with consideration to the following suggestions:

VIGNETTES: The Vignettes should reflect the style of 1919 silent films; presented as black and white videos, with music but without words. They are shown throughout the play, the THE MOON VIGNETTE is the prologue for the first act, THE PAPER VIGNETTE is the prologue for the second act, and THE MASQUARADE VIGNETTE is the epilogue.

CASTING: The cast should have strong abilities in creativity, style, and versatility. Double casting the following roles should be considered, but is not required:

- MRS. SCARLETT and MISS. LIZZIE BLACK
- MRS. RUBY and MRS. BIRDIE
- MRS. CRIMSON and ELISE ELLIS
- MRS. CARDINAL and SALLIE BANK
- DOCTOR and HE
- PREACHER and MYRON MUDD

The time period and personalities for these pairs of characters are very different, which will create a challenge for the cast, but they share similar qualities. When acting these roles, the opposites are critical, but in some cases time to make the transition is limited.

VISUAL ELEMENTS: There are several visual elements in the play, including the costumes and set. These elements can be complex or simple, realistic or abstract, and should clearly define and differentiate the past and present. Carolyn and Elizabeth should always be in red to represent their similar ambition and passion. Please pay close attention to the use of hats throughout the play, considering that they represent the time and personality. The moon should not be a representation, but an actual set piece.

MUSIC: The use of music is another important element that must be considered. Music that Carolyn Taylor listened to includes (but is not limited to) Mozart, Schumann, Brahms, Howard Boward, pianist Joseph Hoffman, and violinist Eugene Ysaye.

Please take great care with the project, paying close attention to the characters and symbolism of the play. This script is a guide line to the story, you are the storytellers.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Moons

ELIZABETH KEY, a woman of the present, early 20s
CAROLYN TAYLOR, a woman of the past, mid 40s
LYDA BELLE, her country companion
SHE/NURSE

The Stones

DOCTOR, the provider
MR. WOLF, the deceitful past and present
MYRON MUDD, the thief
HE

Keepers of the Past

MRS. SCARLETT
MRS. CRIMSON
MRS. CARDINAL
MRS. RUBY

The Remains

MISS. LIZZIE BLACK
MRS. BIRDIE
ELISE ELLIS
SALLIE BANK
PREACHER
PICTURE SHOW ATTENDANTS
THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY JOURNAL OF UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP

THE NOISE IN THE ROOM

ACT ONE

127
The Moon Vignette
Elizabeth’s Poem
Confession: The Wooing
The Hystorical Historical Society
The Parlor
Nightmare # 1

ACT TWO

The Cemetery
The Paper Vignette
The Mystery Man
The Picture Show
The Masquerade Vignette
The Resuscitation

Act II is available on-line at www.uky.edu/kaleidoscope/fall2004.

ACT ONE

Lights up on a bright, summer’s day at the 127 yard sale. Signs reading “Lawrenceburg, KY,” “Welcome to the longest Yard Sale in the world!” and “Highway 127” are visible to the audience. The stage is a typical rural yard sale, littered with small, cluttered tables of random trinkets, dishes, and broken appliances. Similar tables should be placed in the lobby and throughout the theatre to accentuate the sense of infinite bargains. At each table there is a “seller” pushing items for the audience to buy. This setting should be the most realistic representation of life in the play. ELIZABETH is holding an oddly tall, green bottle, walking around the busy set, looking for more interesting items. The other consumers walking around looking for items are the characters who appear later in the play. They are dressed in contemporary “rural Kentucky” attire. The same actors playing DOCTOR and LYDA are playing HE and SHE, two country people standing over a table on stage. Their conversation catches ELIZABETH’s attention. She moves close enough to hear what they’re saying without being noticed.

SHE
Hey! Hey look at this, Bud.

HE
(without looking) What is it?

SHE
Just come over here and look at it, huh. It’s real neat.

HE
Hey, look at this George Foreman grill. I saw one of them on T.V. before. It cooks steaks and burgers real fast and all the grease runs off into this little tray —

SHE
(engaged in her own find) Would you get over here and see this?

HE
(moves in) What the hell you been lookin’ at over here?

SHE
These things right here. I wanna buy†‘em.

HE
What in the world are you talkin’ about?

SHE
These are journals somebody wrote a long time ago.

HE
What? This old thing? (He picks one up and starts to examine it.)

SHE
There’s three of ‘em. Look at her old writing, it’s all in cursive.

HE
Why in the hell would you want somethin’ like that? You wouldn’t even be able to read them things.

SHE
Well how would you ever know if you didn’t at least try to read ‘em. Look here—“April 9th, 1914. It was rainy.” I could read that much. (flipping to the front cover) She was from Augusta, Kentucky. Says right here in the front.

HE
How much?

SHE
Forty-five.

HE
You are gonna spend forty-five dollars on some dead lady’s journals? Damn, you been wastin’ money all day. I’m goin’ under the tent. I’m ready to go.

SHE
I think they’re neat.
HE
(while exiting) She’s dead, honey. She don’t matter no more. Come on when you’re done.

SHE sets the book down and begins to count out the money in her purse when ELIZABETH moves to her.

ELIZABETH
(she picks up the books.) Excuse me.

SHE
Are those yours?

ELIZABETH
I just paid for them. I’m sorry, were you looking at them?

SHE
I didn’t know somebody had already bought ‘em. How much you give for ‘em?

ELIZABETH
Forty-five — same as the tag.

SHE
Whatcha gonna do with ‘em?

ELIZABETH
I don’t know.  I didn’t know somebody had already bought ‘em. How much you give for ‘em?

ELIZABETH
Forty-five — same as the tag.

SHE
Whatcha gonna do with ‘em?

ELIZABETH
I don’t know.

SHE exits and Elizabeth picks up the books and carries them over to the MAN behind the table. He is dressed in a thin, white t-shirt and blue jean overalls and has a long, white beard. He continues to eat chicken wings throughout the scene, wiping his hands on the overalls.

MYRON MUDD
What you got, honey?

ELIZABETH
These journals.

MYRON MUDD
Well, I’m finally gonna sell them things.

ELIZABETH
How long have you had them?

MYRON MUDD
I don’t know, a couple years, probably since I was a young’un.

ELIZABETH
I’ll give you thirty-five.

MYRON MUDD
Deal. (He takes her money and begins to count it.)

ELIZABETH
Do you know where they came from?

MYRON MUDD
Nope.

ELIZABETH
It says Carolyn Taylor on the first page. Do you know who that is?

MYRON MUDD
Nah.

ELIZABETH
(reading) Augusta, Kentucky. Are you from there?

MYRON MUDD
Why you wanna know?

ELIZABETH
Do you realize how old these books are?

MR. MUDD
Yeah, they’re pretty old. (laughs) Just about as old as me.

ELIZABETH
Have you read them?

MR. MUDD
I got other business to attend to.

ELIZABETH
Okay. Thank you. (He hands her the change and she turns to leave.)

MYRON MUDD
(calling to her) Hey, girl.

ELIZABETH
Yes—

MYRON MUDD
They was in the attic of a house that burned. That’s all I can tell you.

ELIZABETH
Thank you. I hope you make some money today.

MYRON MUDD
(gazing up at the sky) I just hope it don’t rain. That would ruin my whole damn day. Hey, where’d you get that crazy bottle?

ELIZABETH
Up the road at a white house with a wagon in front.

MYRON MUDD
Yeah, I know that guy. He sells a buncha crazy shit every year. Hey, remember I gave you a deal. You come back and see us, now.

ELIZABETH
(under her breath) You gave me a whole new life.

ELIZABETH walks down stage of the table and stands reading the journal. For a moment the other actors join together in a clump to watch her walk away. The lights dim as she reads the following passage, the tables and signs are replaced with a dock, material water, the moon, and a backdrop of the city of Cincinnati. CAROLYN is dressed in high collared, early twentieth century attire and a red hat, dancing with the SNAKE CHARMER. The moonlight is exceptionally beautiful on the figures and the water.

ELIZABETH
(On tape. These readings should sound as if they are being played on a monograph.) April 22, 1914. Once in awhile a pause is absolutely necessary. May 12, 1914. May 22, 1914. August seems like a strange country this summer. September 7, 1915. This has been in every sense of the word “Blue Monday.” Reynolds Hook came this afternoon and has suggested something that may solve the problem. Friday, June 4, 1915. The Tom Thumb wedding was given this evening by seventy-four of our little home children. November 5, 1915. Came to our new home this evening and everything is in a topsy turvy state. Tuesday, November 16, 1916. The pain got so bad today Dr. Norris had to come twice and give me opiate. Friday, June 9, 1916. This has been another wet season and I have no energy but manage to get a little done each day. Sep 28, 1917. Spent this evening with Travel magazine. Feb 22, 1917. Washington’s Birthday. Went up to the tobacco sale this morning. Had my piano tuned today. Saturday, Feb 26, 1918. Practiced on my Mozart today and was out for a little while. June 17, 1919. Thursday and Circus day! The boat and barges were here early in the morning. August 7, 1918. The moonlight was absolutely breathtaking. I watched late into the night, gazing out my window.

BLACKOUT
THE MOON VIGNETTE

CAROLYN TAYLOR is sleeping peacefully in her bed. Suddenly, because of a bad dream, she sits up in bed and notices the moon outside her window. Eventually she climbs out of the bed, out of the window, and onto the large wooden moon. She covers her eyes with a blindfold and begins to sleep on the moon.

BLACKOUT

ELIZABETH’S POEM

Lights up on the dock and river. Alone, CAROLYN TAYLOR, is standing close to the edge of the dock, waiting for a ferry. While gazing at the moon, she occasionally wipes her eyes with her handkerchief. ELIZABETH KEY, is downstage, dressed in contemporary attire, writing at a small table. The characters do not interact.

ELIZABETH

I have been dreaming of you all day, Carolyn. Trapped in the idea of wanting to see you—Your hair—Your eyes—Imagining you are beautiful wearing a high collar and long skirt, flowing over the sidewalks of the city.

I was there, one day far from now, wondering about youDid you cry the day you left your life in Cincinnati—Your hat pin slipping from your tight bun as you looked out across the water,The years of your childhood slipping beyond what you know?

How did you become the woman I know? Who were you before I felt the rain drown your heart and stop your breath? What was it like, the day you died? Did you feel your eyes close for the last time? I wish I could have held your hand and touched your face—so soft and pale. Dressed in the most beautiful red.

Can you imagine what I am feeling right now looking into your life? Your pain and loneliness is my heartache. Sometimes I want to say I’m sorry. So sorry for doing this—I do not mean to pry, I only want to resuscitate you.

BLACKOUT

CONFESSION: THE WOOING

Lights up. CAROLYN TAYLOR is sitting at a small table with a lamp. Her clothing suggests bedtime and her appearance is newly taken down. She stares into the audience with a blank look on her face. A recording of the following monologue is heard. The monologue is a collection of thoughts whirling through her head. As the recording plays, her face melts with expression; the intensity grows until she breaks down at the recording’s conclusion. While this scene is being played, the dock can be transformed to the Bracken County Historical Society set.

CAROLYN (on tape) It is rainy and dismal again today. I feel empty from last night. I usually can’t recall what it is like to have his hand on the back of my neck, until it happens. It was so sudden last night, just as we were walking from the dining room to have a game of Rook in the parlor. I wonder what on earth he could be thinking to touch me twenty feet from that group of vultures. I tried to pull away, to excuse myself as any lady would, but he grabbed tightly to my wrist and pulled me toward him. Breathing down my dress, examining my neck, forming stillness around my shoulders like a shawl, petting the tiny hairs at the base of my neck like some feline. Wooing, wooing, always wooing, scaring me today. He’s scaring me to death, Lyda. Do you understand that? Can you even imagine what it is like to be there—to be waiting, gazing out the window in search of any sign, any arrow pointing down the road? (imagining what she saw) I saw him round the corner of the house, peering straight into the window, and directly behind it my face. For a split second I saw his eyes adjust, as if I were the sun, shining white rays into his skull. His face remained still, waiting; the narrowed eyes of a snake with its charmer—a venom-mouth connected to a stone heart. He showed no affection, no softness on the corners of his mouth, the center of his palm. And that’s when my heart started to throb, raging to break free of my chest and call out to him through the window. That’s when I knew, in an instant, he was enjoying this suffering just as much as I was.

CAROLYN, now visually emotional, throws open the small drawer of the table and extracts a small, almost square book. She searches frantically for a pen and as she pulls it out it falls to the floor. She retrieves it and writes, speaking aloud in a hushed voice as she goes.

CAROLYN

September 14, 1917. Rainy and very dismal. (pause) We both feel bad. Lyda came over and we made her stay for dinner. I do hope my year will not continue like this day.

She shuts the book, replaces the objects in the drawer, looks around, opens the drawer and removes a hair brush and begins brushing her hair.

BLACKOUT

THE HYSTERICAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The scene begins in the cozy office of the Bracken County Historical Society in Brooksville, Kentucky. The room is messy but sorted. Along the wall there are a number of shelves filled with folders, and volumes of records, file cabinets, and two microfiche machines. The walls are decorated with antique signs, photographs and paintings, each part of the history of Bracken County. The tables are littered with handmade baskets filled with peppermint and butterscotch candies. A phone is mounted on a wall close to a small table near the center of the room where four women are seated, quietly listening to a light rain tapping at the window. MRS. CRIMSON is quietly copying down a recipe while MRS. SCARLETT is munching very loudly on a small pack of oyster crackers. The other two women seem to be bored, starring blankly out the window. MRS. RUBY begins mumbling to MRS. CARDINAL about the weather, when the creak of a door is heard.

ELIZABETH enters slightly out of breath with freshly damp clothing and satchel. She is dressed in an eccentric red outfit that seems to glow under her raincoat. The four women turn to the new visitor, forgetting their present business. MISS CRIMSON can be heard talking in her breath.

MISS SCARLETT

Hello. (pause)

ELIZABETH

I’m looking for some information about a woman named Carolyn Taylor. (begins to stumble) I was trying to arrive much earlier, but with the rain ... I couldn’t, well actually I couldn’t find Brooksville so I’ve been lost for...
most of the day. I just, I want to know anything I can about her. Do you think it would be possible to find out where she lived? Or how old she was when she died? (no response) I’m not actually sure if I’m in the right place. Is this the old jail? (goes to the window) It must be because your recording said you’re located near the Court House and . . . there it is— (pause) Isn’t this rain terrible? I was driving for so long — at Falmouth I stopped at a Rite Aid to buy some snacks and ended up buying all this makeup on sale. But when I left the Rite Aid I called my Dad and said, “I’m in Falmouth. Am I close to Bracken County?” and that’s when I found out I was really lost. So, I get back in my car and leave Falmouth — back on the road now, and finally, when I thought I had reached Brooksville I saw all these little fires, burning away even through the rain. It didn’t make sense, but there they were, fires in the rain on hillsides. No matter how hard it rained, there were those fires on steep hills with bulldozers. (pause) Does that normally happen here? I mean, I’ve never actually been to Brooksville. I mean, not until right now...

MISS SCARLETT
What was the name?

ELIZABETH
Carolyn. Carolyn Taylor with a C and Y. (pause)

MISS SCARLETT
Well girls, let’s get to work.

Suddenly all of the women rise from the table and take separate corners. MISS SCARLETT begins to hunt for a large book while MRS. CARDINAL is pulling out microfiche and loading it on the machine. MRS. CRIMSON and MRS. RUBY bring small folders to the table and begin to shuffle through the contents. Everyone is automatically engaged but ELIZABETH who stands awkwardly at the door with her umbrella at a downward angle, a puppy’s tail.

MRS. SCARLETT
You can sit here. (sliding a rolling chair toward ELIZABETH)

ELIZABETH
Oh, yes. Thank you. (She shakes off her umbrella and sits. She has not removed her raincoat or closed her umbrella, a huge soggy blob in the small chair)

MRS. RUBY
What year was she born? Do you know honey?

ELIZABETH
No, I actually don’t know much about her at all. Well I know some things, but, not really a record of sorts. I was —

MRS. SCARLETT
What is she to you?

ELIZABETH
Uh, nothing actually. I, well . . . the thing is . . . I have her diary. Diaries. I’m just trying to find out anything I can.

MRS. RUBY
You have her diaries you say? (her face brightens)

ELIZABETH
Yes, the first one begins in 1914, so I do know that she was alive and living in Augusta at that time.

MRS. RUBY
Oh, Augusta. I see. Taylor . . . 1914.

MRS. SCARLET
Where did you get the diaries?

ELIZABETH
I bought them at a yard sale. In Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, at the 127 yard sale.

MRS. SCARLETT
(turning toward MRS. RUBY) I bought the table in my front hall from a man in Danville on the 127 —

MRS. RUBY
(Flipping through a book, not looking up) Is that so? The one in the hall with the brass handles?

MRS. SCARLETT
No, the room in the back with the curtains that —

MRS. CARDINAL
I’m going to try the census sweetie. She might be in there. Was it Mrs.?

ELIZABETH
No. I think it’s M-I-S-S. I don’t think she was married.

MRS. CRIMSON
Really. (Looking at ELIZABETH over her glasses on the tip of her nose) Mm... Not married —

MRS. CARDINAL
She’s not married!

MRS. SCARLETT
We’ll if she’s not married who knows where in the world she could be.

ELIZABETH
Well. I don’t think so. Unless she’s a widow —

MRS. SCARLETT
(Eating her last cracker, walks to the phone and picks it up, turning to the rest of the ladies) You know who I bet knows something. Art Taylor.

MRS. CRIMSON
Well, yes, maybe —

MRS. RUBY
Art? (beginning to chuckle) You had better try his sisters.

MRS. SCARLETT
Well, I’m just gonna see. (While punching numbers she clears her throat, preparing to use her phone voice.) Art? Hello. It’s Carmine Scarlett down at the Hysterical Historical Society. (giggly laugh. He doesn’t seem to respond so she continues in a more serious voice.) There is a young lady down here that is trying to do some research on somebody from Augusta and we thought . . . what? Well, she just wants to. (pause) No, she’s the literary type. You know. She’s doin’ some kinda research. Anyway, she’s looking for a Carolyn Taylor. Do you have any idea of who that could be? Well . . . you ain’t ever heard nobody mention her? Sallie Jean or your Mamma or any of them? You know, it could be those Taylor’s down my lane. Yup. Oh. Okay. Well, good to talk to you Art. Have a good one. (Pause) Honey, how’s your Mamma been doin’? She feeling any better these days? Mamma been doin’? Mamma been doin’? She feeling any better after that old cold a hers. Oh, well okay then. You take care sweetie. Okay. Tell your Mamma we’re sendin’ our prayers. An’ your sisters. An’ everybody down that lane. Alrighty . . . Bye-bye now. (she hangs up with a sour face) Well, Art didn’t know anything.

MRS. RUBY . . . MRS. CRIMSON
Call his sisters!
MRS. SCARLETT
They don’t see eye to eye on a lot of things. Maybe I should just call them up and mention that I talked to Art. They’d get a kick out of that one wouldn’t they? (chuckles)

MRS. RUBY
What does he do these days?

MRS. CRIMSON
Work ... as little as possible.

MRS. SCARLETT
Well, he claimed to know nothin’ about it. (She sits back down and starts sifting through a book.)

MRS. RUBY
What does he do these days?

MRS. CRIMSON
Work as little as possible.

MRS. SCARLETT
Well, he claimed to know nothin’ about it. (She sits back down and starts sifting through a book.)

MRS. CARDINAL
I don’t think he knows much a nothin’.

MRS. SCARLETT
Mrs. Cardinal! I’m shocked at you. (She gets out another small pack of oyster crackers and begins eating again.) You know, he didn’t even act like his Mamma was sick. She hasn’t been able to get up in ages. They say the doctor says it’s a cold, but I bet it’s the gout.

MRS. CRIMSON
Have you ever had the gout?

MRS. SCARLETT
No, but you talk crazy when you got it and she’s talked crazy for as long as I’ve known her!

MRS. CARDINAL
Okay. Here were go. (to ELIZABETH) Okay Hun. Looks like she isn’t in the census of 1900 and I can’t really go back any more because the census of 1890 burned in Bracken County.

ELIZABETH
They burned?

MRS. CARDINAL
Yes, Ma’am. It was a sad day in the history of Bracken County.

MRS. CRIMSON
(to herself) Had a few in my time.

MRS. SCARLETT
Speaking of burning, you know what happened last night?

MRS. RUBY
You talkin’ about the fire over there on Hamilton Lane?

MRS. SCARLETT
Yes, I sure am. I tell you what, when I heard sirens at 2:38 A.M. and turned on my scanner you better believe I already knew what it was.

MRS. RUBY
Well, how did you have any idea what was goin’ on?

MRS. SCARLETT
There are only two things in this town the police wake up for. A fire ... or a snack. (The women erupt with laughter. ELIZABETH, feeling a bit more at home, begins to remove her rain gear and get settled in.) No, I’m serious. You know they always just dismiss all those fires — either those old barns or gutted houses — it don’t matter. No one cares about what happens to those old buildin’s anyway. That’s why they get away with it, they’re never gonna even try to catch them hooligans.

MRS. CRIMSON
Well, who do you think’s doin’ it?

MRS. SCARLETT
I think it’s them two Mudd boys. Always up to no good. Either they’re sneakin’ aroun’ downtown outside their dirty mother’s store or they’re out burnin’ buildin’s and tippin’ cows!

MRS. RUBY
(cracking up) Cow tippin’! You even know what that is?

MRS. SCARLETT
I most certainly do know and I think it is just awful.

MRS. CARDINAL
Well, I think it’s a grand time. (the ladies erupt with laughter once more. This time ELIZABETH begins to giggle. MRS. RUBY hands her a book off the table.)

MRS. RUBY
Here sweet pea, you take a look in there for your Carolyn. With a Y and N. (chuckles and winks)

MRS. SCARLETT
What’s your name?

ELIZABETH
I’m Elizabeth Key, from Cynthiana.

MRS. RUBY
Just down the road from us, huh?

ELIZABETH
Well, from the four hours in the car I thought it was longer than that! (she begins to flip through the book looking for an index)

MRS. SCARLETT
(jumps up) You know what. I’m gonna call Mrs. Oldum.

MRS. CRIMSON
George Oldum’s wife?

MRS. SCARLETT
Well, why not. Don’t you think she knows somethin’ about everybody in this town?

MRS. CARDINAL
She helped my Mamma have me when I was born.

MRS. RUBY
Is that so?

MRS. CARDINAL
She knows everybody in this whole town’s phone number. Sometimes I even think she knows what they had for dinner too.

MRS. SCARLETT
Yes, sir. I’m just gonna dial her up and see if she can get that brain of hers switched on and warmed up! (she begins to dial a series of numbers off the top of her head. MRS. RUBY leans over to ELIZABETH)

MRS. RUBY
They switched it. She knows everybody in Bracken County’s phone number. Sometimes I even think she knows what they had for dinner too.

MRS. SCARLETT
Thanks, sweetie. (to the girls) That man is deaf I think. Hello Mrs. Edna. (pause, getting louder) Hello Mrs. Edna.

MRS. RUBY
(to ELIZABETH) Apparently she is too.

MRS. SCARLETT
Sweetie, this is Carmine Scarlet down at the Hysterical Historical Society and we have a young lady here looking for some information on a Carolyn Taylor. Do you remember her? Carolyn. A woman who lived in Augusta in the nineteen teens. (pause) She was a Taylor. (pause) No, no. Not a sailor. A Taylor. You know, the Taylors out by me. (pause) We’ll all right then sweetie. Thank you for your time. Just thought I’d call but this is rather irritating so I’m gonna hang up now. Okay. Alrighty then. You have a good night sweetie. Goodbye Mrs. Oldum. Goodnight. (hangs up) Well, I swear to God. Somebody needs to lock her up.

MRS. RUBY
Oh No. She just can’t hear any more that’s all. Who really needs to hear anyway? I’d like to live my life confused and mixed up, it would make it a lot easier to justify my work in this room. (the women explode with laughter this time. MRS. CARDINAL puts a folder in front of her face to hide that she is blushing from ELIZABETH)

MRS. CARDINAL
I think I found something girls.

ELIZABETH
I have it out in the car. I’ll go get it for you.

MRS. RUBY
You do?

MRS. CRIMSON
Would you bring it in so we can see it?

ELIZABETH
Sure. Just give me a second. (she puts on her raincoat and exists.)

MRS. RUBY
Can you just imagine how old that book is?

MRS. CRIMSON
Isn’t this excitin’? And to think she bought it at a yard sale.

MRS. CARDINAL
I just usually find some Tupperware.

MRS. RUBY
Have you all ever thought to keep a diary?

MRS. SCARLETT
Well, I don’t know. I used to write in somethin’ when I was younger, but my life isn’t very excitin’ now.

MRS. CARDINAL
I think I found her—

MRS. RUBY
“I think I found her—"

MRS. CARDINAL
If this is right, she was born March 4, 1871 and died November 12, 1961.

MRS. RUBY
That must be Latin—

MRS. CRIMSON
That makes her ninety years old.

ELIZABETH
(angered) Ninety years old.

MRS. RUBY
“Copyrighted 1892 by Samuel Ward Company, Boston, Massachusetts.”

ELIZABETH
Oh my God.

MRS. RUBY
“You have neither the time nor the inclination, possibly, to keep a full diary. Suppose, however, out of the multitude of matters that crowd each day, you jot down in a line or two those most worthy of remembrance. Such a book will be of the greatest value in after years. What a record of events, incidents, joys, sorrows, successes, failures, things accomplished, things attempted. This book is designed for just such a record. It can be commenced on any day of the year, and is so printed that it is good for any five years.”

ELIZABETH
No day without a line.

A shadow screen is lowered down stage. As MRS. RUBY continues reading different images appear behind the screen as shadows. Slowly throughout this passage the women at
work put down what they’re doing and turn to watch the screen. It is their collective imagination. As the images appear the room slowly goes dim.

**MRS. RUBY**
The day was dreadfully hot. *(a beaming sun appears on the screen)* Lunch at Mrs. Bradford’s as usual. I went for a visit with Garret and Lucile. We had a jolly time this evening. *(pause)* November first. Dandelions in bloom. *(slowly, one at a time several flowers sprout onto the screen. MRS. SCARLETT is replaced by MISS LIZZIE)* Went down-street to call on Elise Ellis. This evening joins the sun.

**ELISE ELLIS**
This evening I watched the sailboats on the river. *(Water appears, the airplane lands with a splash and movement joins the sun.)* Thursday, June 18. Club met with Mrs. Birdie this afternoon for a Red Star meeting. The moonlight was beautiful. *(The sun is replaced by the moon. MRS CRIMSON exits and LYDA enters, taking her seat)* This afternoon I watched the sailboats on the river. *(An old airplane, complete with sound and movement joins the sun.)*

**LYDA**
There will be plenty to do. I have even extended an invitation to Mattie Belle Harberson, *(to Lyda)* her brother, and Lulu Camden from the city. I have invited quite a big group of the unmarried people.

**ELISE**
Of course, yes, the unmarried people! That’s me! Well, I will not be there because of the unmarried people, I will be there to see Lulu. I never miss an opportunity to see her. *(teasing Lyda)* I won’t have to entertain you Lyda, not if Mr. Harberson is there.

**LYDA**
*(defensively)* Well, I don’t care if you invite Garrett Harberson or not.

**MRS. BIRDIE**
Well done, Elise. *(clearing her throat)* You should have studied recitation instead of short hand!

**LYDA**
*(teasing)* I’ve seen you care. Like last year at the Chautauqua festival in Maysville I saw Lyda Byar and Garrett Harberson kissing on the Ferris wheel when it was stopped at the top.

**LYDA**
That is absolutely not true!

**ELISE**
Oh yes it is! When we stopped I couldn’t even see your faces! You had one your purple and green feathered hat, leaned over necking! It’s just like the poem —

**LYDA**
What poem?

**ELISE**
*(She clears her throat as she gets up from the table to recite the poem.)* Education of a Co-ed. She learned to love, she learned to hate. She learned a care would carry eight. She learned to smoke and how to tell Wood alcohol. By taste or smell she learned to coax she learned to teach she learned a new way of cooking cheese *(to Lyda)* She learned to neck And break a date she’s ready now To Graduate. *(The women burst into laughter. Lyda is clearly embarrassed.)*

**MRS. BIRDIE**
Well done, Elise. You should have studied recitation instead of short hand!

**LYDA**
I will come, but only because I want to play a good hand of cards. It will be the perfect opportunity to play a game of Five Hundred. *(pause)*

**CAROLYN**
Five Hundred is such a bore! I’d rather play Rook.

**LYDA**
You’d rather have a doctor’s visit.

**CAROLYN**
You’d rather Mr. Harbeson play doctor.
LYDA
(shocked) I can’t believe you!

MISS. LIZZIE
I don’t understand why you are ashamed of liking that man. He earns a decent living.

LYDA
Garrett Harberson is inconsiderate and hot tempered —

CAROLYN
(changing the subject) Who would like some tea while we’re waiting for the chocolate and cake?

MRS. BIRDIE
Please, Carolyn. That would be delightful.

LYDA
I’ll help you prepare a pot in the kitchen.

CAROLYN
Thank you Lyda Belle.

ELISE
Do you have any English tea Carrie?

CAROLYN
I’m not certain, but I would be glad to check.

ELISE
Thank you.

CAROLYN and LYDA exit into the kitchen. The kitchen set should be very minimal and off to the side of the parlor. Black cubes for an oven with a red tea set on a silver platter. As the following conversation takes place CAROLYN and LYDA prepare the tea.

LYDA
And that is exactly what she’s doing. I will not just sit silently while my affections are disclosed.

LYDA
Well, of course if Garrett Harberson is going to show up. Knowing those Cincinnati boys they’ll have a swim with their shirts off! (seriously) Please come Carrie. I want you to be there. You haven’t been out for ages now. I’m worried about you.

CAROLYN
Everyone always worries about me when I am perfectly fine. I have been ill. That is simple and common, isn’t it? I remember you being ill last winter for nearly a week! Don’t you remember … you wouldn’t come out of bed no matter how much broth I made —

LYDA
At least I was able to go to bed and stay there. (she takes the teapot from CAROLYN’s hand and sets it on the table.) Have you been dreaming again?

CAROLYN
(irritated) It’s not dreaming Lyda. They’re nightmares and they refuse to stop. You can’t understand. No one can understand.

LYDA
Please don’t dismiss me with everyone else. I will try to understand. I promise.

MISS. LIZZIE
(offstage) Carolyn! Be a dear and put sugar in mine please.

LYDA
Why do we bother being friends with her?

CAROLYN
Shh. (under her breath) Because she throws the best gatherings! Come on now. (picking up the tray) Let’s get back. (They return to the parlor with the tray. CAROLYN begins to serve the tea.) Yes, Miss. Lizzie, I would love to accept your invitation. A party on the river sounds delightful.

LYDA
Well, I’m not sure if I would say they are all beautiful, but certainly interesting … and red.

MRS. BIRDIE
If the tide refuses to fall that will certainly be an experience!

ELISE
Carolyn, would you be interested in going with me to Hamilton Striprates to pick out a rowing outfit?

CAROLYN
I would be delighted Elise. I am having some trimming done to my favorite hat and can hardly stand this dreadful wait. One would think Mrs. Hamilton would help her friends first —

MRS. BIRDIE
You have more hats that anyone I know Carolyn, and they are all so beautiful.

MRS. BIRDIE
If the rain continues we could only have a light gathering. The kitchen is still a bit minimal, but we can add a table or two.

LYDA
I’m asking you for my sake. Elise and Birdie know perfectly well what Miss. Lizzie is up too. Just stay calm and you’ll hush her up soon enough. (pause.) So, you are going to her night on the riverbank then?

ELISE
(begins to clap) We’re going to have a wonderful time! Alice Butler and Mrs. Fitzgerald have accepted as well.

LYDA
This tea is wonderful, Carrie.

CAROLYN
I would be delighted Elise. I am having some trimming done to my favorite hat and can hardly stand this dreadful wait. One would think Mrs. Hamilton would help her friends first —

MRS. BIRDIE
You have more hats that anyone I know Carolyn, and they are all so beautiful.

MRS. BIRDIE
Well, a night in an old farmhouse. That sounds dreadful —

LYDA
I couldn’t imagine you have anything better to do, Mrs. Lizzie.

MRS. BIRDIE
(stunned) Well, I —

MISS. LIZZIE
This tea is wonderful, Carrie.

CAROLYN
Thank you Elise. Did you all hear about the fire last night out Hamilton Lane?
MRS. BIRDIE
Do you think it’s one of those Mudd men? You know, I’m never gonna understand why anyone would want to destroy something so precious. I can’t even imagine how horrible it would be if someone tried to burn our barn down. That thing has been in our family for years.

LYDA
I think it’s just awful.

CAROLYN
People here are ignorant. No one obeys the law because they don’t have too. There aren’t any consequences for actions.

MRS. BIRDIE
Well, going off to the war sure will jerk a knot in their tail.

CAROLYN
You’re right but I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. What an awful thing, this war.

CAROLYN crosses the kitchen and opens the door. SALLIE BANK, an attractive, thin African American woman stands in the doorway holding a large cake pan. She is shy and gentle, dressed in a simple skirt, blouse and work hat.

CAROLYN (warmly) Hello Sallie. How are you?

SALLIE
Well, I’m just fine Mizz Taylor. My feet hurt somethin’ awful, but it’s almost time for me to be off. An’ ya self?

CAROLYN
Well, not the best, but I’m doing much better. Thank you.

SALLIE
I want to apologize for being late, Mizz Taylor. I had to make a delivery to Mrs. McKibbon and it took longer than I ‘spected.

(Handing her the cake) Here’s the cake you ordered, Ma’am. It must be good, we sold all eight today.

CAROLYN
No need to apologize, Sallie. Would you like to come in and have a piece of cake and a warm cup of tea?

SALLIE
No, Ma’am. That wouldn’t be right. I should just get home. I gots to get some sewin’ work done.

CAROLYN
Well, I had no idea you sewed, Sallie. I would love to talk to you about helping with some of the Red Cross work, if you would be interested.

SALLIE
What kin’ a work you do?

CAROLYN
Well, right now we’re sewing some shirts for the soldiers. The work is simple, but the more people that can help the faster they’ll have our contribution. Please, please come in just for a cup of tea. I am sure you would like some refreshment after a long day of work.

SALLIE
Well, if you don’t mind, Ma’am.

CAROLYN
Certainly not. And call me Carrie. All my friends do. Come on in here. (Putting her hand on her shoulder and leading her into the parlor) Come in, please and let me tell you about the progress we’ve made already. (They enter the Parlor where the conversation continues.)

MISS. LIZZIE
Carrie, what do you think of Lucy Wilson attending the—

SALLIE
No —

MISS. LIZZIE
What are you here to do?

SALLIE
I was jus’ ... well, Mizz. Taylor —

CAROLYN
She is my guest, Lizzie. Sallie is going to join us for cup of tea. I wanted to talk to her about doing some sewing with the Red Cross group.

ELISE
Oh, you sew. How wonderful.

MISS. LIZZIE
Well of course she sews. She’s the help. What good would she be if she couldn’t operate a sewing machine?

LYDA
(to MISS. LIZZIE) I do not think that comment was appropriate Lizzie. This is Carolyn’s guest.

MISS. LIZZIE
I like to keep the colored where they belong — in the kitchen and on the farm.

SALLIE
(to CAROLYN.) I’m sorry, Ma’am. I should go —

CAROLYN
No, you will stay and have a cup of tea. It is Miss Black that will leave. (to MISS. LIZZIE.) You will not speak that way to my guests. I suggest you leave now and take your invitation with you. It seems I was mistaken earlier, I will be busy next Tuesday night.

MISS. LIZZIE
Well —
CAROLYN
Good day Miss. Black. Please shut the door behind you on your way out.

MISS. LIZZIE
Well, I can assure you Carolyn, my friends and I will not be able to attend your Red Star meeting next Wednesday. It seems those poor little animals will just have to do without my contribution.

CAROLYN
(calmly) Get out of my house.

MISS. LIZZIE slams down her teacup, stands up and grabs her invitation off the table. She stumps to the kitchen and leaves the house, slamming the door behind her. When Carolyn hears the door slam she bursts out laughing.

CAROLYN
(to Sallie) Please do not worry about her, Sallie. We’ve been trying to get rid of her all afternoon!

MRS. BIRDIE
You have to understand, Sallie, Miss. Lizzie is the worst kind of woman — one that no one likes! (the women laugh.)

CAROLYN
Now, let me pour you some nice hot tea.

SALLIE
Thank you so much, Ma’am.

LYDA
Sallie, how long have you been sewing?

SALLIE
Well, nearly all my life. My boys are growin’ out their clothes so fast I have to keep up.

MRS. BIRDIE
You are exactly what we need! We have been trying to sew some shirts for the Red Cross, but other than Carolyn, we are fairly mediocre for the most part.

SALLIE
(to Carolyn) Have you been sewin’ all your life?

LYDA
Carolyn is a very talented seamstress, Sallie. She went to sewing school in Cincinnati.

SALLIE
Woo. Is that so? I bet you make some real nice clothes, Mizz. Carrie.

CAROLYN
Sallie, call me Carrie, please. (to everyone) And let’s have some of this chocolate cake! It looks too delightful to not be eaten. Would anyone like more tea as well? (CAROLYN starts for the door. LYDA follows her.)

ELISE
Yes, please. (calling after her) Carolyn, what do think about Tuesday with the Red Cross?

CAROLYN
(in the kitchen) Yes, fine! (when she enters the kitchen she begins to look for plates and forks. LYDA comes in through the door immediately.)

LYDA
Here, let me help. (she takes the cake from CAROLYN’S hands.) I hope you’re happy now that you have started being rude to Miss Lizzie.

CAROLYN
Oh, Lyda. Everyone cares too much about what everyone else thinks. If she really cared she would have the decency to not act like a witch to anyone that is the slightest bit different.

LYDA
I know that’s how you feel, Carolyn. And I’m sure she does too, since you turned down her invitation.

CAROLYN
Her party is on the river bank — who can stop us from going?

LYDA
I knew you wouldn’t miss a party.

CAROLYN
(She stops cutting the cake) Lyda, doesn’t this town seem like a strange place this summer?

LYDA
Meaning what?

CAROLYN
I’m not sure. I just have a strange feeling inside ... like something is going to happen.

LYDA
Nothing’s going to happen, this is Augusta, Carrie.

CAROLYN
But how do you know? /It could happen. I just don’t know what it is.

LYDA
Well, of course I don’t know. /This doesn’t have anything to do with your illness does it?

CAROLYN
Please, quit mentioning my illness. (turning away) It’s this weather. When it gets pretty again I will feel better.

LYDA
Are you sure? /It might be something else Carrie.

CAROLYN
(Shes leaning against the table) It’s so oppressive. /When it stops raining I’ll feel better.

LYDA
Why do you act as though you aren’t ill? (sternly) Carolyn, you have Encephalitis, you have to be careful! (softly, comforting her) You just love the city too much. You aren’t at home in Augusta. (She goes to her side to help support her) Let’s go to Cincinnati next week for a nice, relaxing visit. Wouldn’t that be lovely. We can ride the train up and go shopping. We could walk though Eden Park — Carolyn!

CAROLYN
I’m not at home anywhere, Lyda.

CAROLYN passes out on the floor. LYDA goes to her side and freezes in a kneeling position. The women in the parlor also freeze. Next, CAROLYN raises and delivers the following monologue in a trance, slowly walking through the kitchen and parlor, talking to the women who do not respond, representing the isolation she feels in Augusta. By the end of the monologue CAROLYN is getting into her bed, showing signs of drowsiness, making her way to the bed.

CAROLYN
I’m not at home anywhere, Lyda. It’s not a matter of place, it’s getting up in the morning and living through the day. Pulling off the covers and facing the rain. I despise it. I wake up in the morning to stare at my broken, torn curtains and dream of the moon. I buy hats and...
new skirts and dress for the moon. And fi-
nally, after the day’s charade, I take down
my hair, and invite him under the sheets. I
wrap my legs around the trees and make love
to the moon, watching him moan through
the window. That is my complete happiness.
But in the morning, when the sun comes up
and he’s gone, I die. All the days line up,
tiny red Xs, filling my heart with a thousand
little deaths. A thousand spiders in a jar
waiting to take my place, to spin a web around
the moon and devour it whole. Break the jar
Lyda, so they will devour me instead. Let
them devour me so I can sleep and never
wake up.

She falls asleep on the bed. Softly music be-
gins to play, gradually growing to a crescendo.
A light from the window follows the same cue,
growing to unnatural brightness. At the maxi-

mum point of the crescendo, CAROLYN wakes.

Lyda, so they will devour me instead. Let
them devour me so I can sleep and never
wake up.

NIGHTMARE  #1

All lights on the stage are off. A few seconds
pass. The sound of crickets can be heard in
the distance. A window is barely lit from the
light of the moon. Suddenly out of the dark-
ness, we hear CAROLYN struggling. Her sleep
is getting more fitful with vocal sounds until
dialog breaks the silence.

CAROLYN
Lyda! Lyda! Help me. Lyda please! They’re
all over the bed — all over me! Please! Ah!
Get Off!

LYDA rushes into the room and fumbles with
the lamp on the small desk stage left. As the
lamp lights, the lights gradually come up stage
left on a small bed angled toward the audi-
ence. CAROLYN is flailing about in the covers
with her eyes closed.

CAROLYN
Spiders — They’re still on me.

LYDA
Carolyn! What is it? Carolyn! Stop it. Calm
down, Honey. You’re having a nightmare.
Wake up, Carolyn, it’s Lyda. Wake up. You’re
having a nightmare, Dear. Come on now.
Easy open.

CAROLYN
Of Lyda! Thank God. Oh, Lyda! (Carolyn is
exhausted from flailing about. She embraces
Lyda when she recognizes her friend.)

LYDA
What’s wrong with you? You must be hav-
ing a terrible dream.

CAROLYN
(ruffling the covers) Do you see any in here?
Help me look—

LYDA
Any what? /What, in where?

CAROLYN
Oh god /I can still feel them.

LYDA
Calm down / Shh.

CAROLYN
But I can feel them on my leg /What?

LYDA
What are you looking for? /I’m confused

CAROLYN
I’m sorry.

LYDA
No I’m sorry. (let’s out an exhausted chuckle)
You wake up from a nightmare babbling and
I’m asking you all the questions. Shh. I’m
just confused that’s all. Let’s try this again
— what are you looking for in the sheets,
Sweetheart?

CAROLYN
Spiders. I could have sworn they were crawl-
ing all over me ... everywhere, in my hair
and eyes and inside the pillow sham. (moan-
ing in pain) I’m not getting any better Lyda.

LYDA
There’s nothing anywhere. Shh. Calm down.

CAROLYN
Can I tell you my dream Lyda? (frantic) Be-
fore I forget it. please.

LYDA
Lie back down first. Calm. Calm.

CAROLYN
(still riled up) The two of us were at the
picture show, in Cincinnati — I was dressed
exactly like the other night. Oh what a beau-
tiful black dress I wore with my hat, and my
best pearl set, beaming, freshly polished. It
was magnificent, but in my dream I had stone
instead of pearls. Little small round tan stones
around my neck and it grew heavier and
heavier as the show progressed. Mary
Pickford was Stella Maris and the film was
so wonderful — but there was this scene be-
tween the villain and Mary’s character, Unity,
but just when she fired the gun, I felt some-
thing going up my leg. Crawling! Tiny legs
crawling up my skirt! It was awful — so
fast, I was wiggling and screaming — (defen-
sively) I couldn’t help it. It was skittering up
and down my leg. I couldn’t stay seated! I
leapt up and everyone had their eyes on me,
of course, and the music stopped. Faded into
a light gray ghost. I could feel it Lyda, all
their eyes on me and then the spider — still
in my dress (she shudders) in my pantaloons
(starts whispering) I could feel it Lyda. Try-
ing to get inside of my privates, it’s long legs
moving, probing. (She flails on the bed at the
thought.)

LYDA
Alright, Dear. It’s just a dream /I’m sure there
isn’t a single spider in that sheet …

CAROLYN
But that’s not it / You promised to listen.

LYDA
I’ve checked your bed Carolyn /let’s not be
crazy —

CAROLYN
What did you just say? Is that it? You think I’m crazy? (plowing through the story) Everyone in the audience started yell-
ning at me! People were disgusted when I
stood up and screamed. The film started to
melt on the screen, and then I was running
down aisles trying to get away from every-
one — all the eyes and spiders. I went out
into the street, past the city shops and stoll-
ers, and I ran until I reached the Ohio River
and then at the dock I felt a tug on my neck
— the stone pearls were growing heavier
and heavier, pulling me into the water. I was sink-
ing Lyda. I was sinking into nothingness.
The moon was so bright. (pause) Lyda, please
tell me I’m not insane. (She moans in pain)

LYDA
They’ve gone to call the doctor, Carolyn. It’s
going to be just fine.
CAROLYN
Thank you for trying to understand, Lyda. Thank you. (she collapses on the bed) Please read me something while we wait to keep my mind off of the pain.

LYDA
What would you like to hear sweetheart?

CAROLYN
The Noise In The Room, the poem in my little book. Read to me Lyda, it brings me comfort.

LYDA
Okay, Okay dear. I’m getting it. (Lyda retrieves her book and finds the correct page. She plays with CAROLYN’s hair as she reads the poem.)

The Noise in the Room
The dear, little, queer little noise you hear, when you lie down to sleep in the twilight my dear. Is the quaint, little, faint little step of a dream, as she climbs to your bed in the silent moon beam. The gray, little, gay, little shadow you see, when first you look up in the morning to me. I’m the smart little, sweet little, dream on her way, to hear hymns in the clouds for the rest of the day.

CAROLYN
Isn’t it beautiful, Lyda. I love the part about the moonbeam and the dream. I want to have wonderful dreams again, Lyda.

LYDA
I know, Love. You will. If you could have any dream in the world what would it be?

CAROLYN
I don’t want to hurt anymore. That’s what I want. I want to be able to sleep on the moon. I would stand out on the dock and the moon would come to me and he would kiss me on the lips. And it would be like God stepping down to hold my hand. I would be able to die then, Lyda. I would be able to die if I kissed the moon because I would know that God wanted me in heaven — I would already be there.

LYDA
Shh. Don’t talk about that. You aren’t going to die. You’re going to dream again.

CAROLYN
Recite me a Whitman. Please, Lyda.

LYDA
What would you like to hear darling? Seadrift?

CAROLYN
Yes, Seadrift. A wonderful Seadrift.

As LYDA recites the following poem, the image of the sea and the moon should be projected on a wall of the room. This image should not be clear, but painfully static to represent CAROLYN’s inability to have beautiful thoughts.

LYDA
Soothe! soothe! soothe!
Close on its wave soothes the wave behind, And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one close, But my love soothes not me, not me.

Low hangs the moon, it rose late, It is lagging — O, I think it is heavy with love, with love.

O, madly the sea pushes upon the land, With love, with love.

O, night! Do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers? What is that little black thing I see there in the white?

Loud! loud! loud! Loud I call you, my love! High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves, Surely you must know who I am, my love.

Low-hanging moon! What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow? O, it is the shape, the shape of my mate O, moon do not keep her from me any longer O, darkness! O, in vain! O, I am very sick and sorrowful. O, brown halo in the sky near the moon, drooping upon the sea! O, troubled reflection in the sea! O, throat! O, throbbing heart! And I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night.

O, past! O, happy life! O, songs of joy! In the air, in the woods, over fields, Loved! Loved! Loved! Loved! Loved! But my mate no more, no more with me! We two together no more.

DOCTOR
(A knock on CAROLYN’s bedroom door is heard). Carolyn? Carolyn! May I come in?

LYDA
Please come in, Doctor.

DOCTOR
(entering) Well, Hello Miss. Byar. How are you?

LYDA
I’m fine, thank you.

DOCTOR
(moving to the bed) Carolyn — how are you? I’m sorry I couldn’t come earlier.

LYDA
I’ll leave you alone, Doctor. I’ll be in the parlor if you need anything.

CAROLYN
(straining to sit up) Please don’t feel like you have to stay, Lyda. Go home and get some rest.

LYDA
I don’t mind taking care of you, it’s the least I can do. (to the DOCTOR) Let me know if you need anything. (LYDA exits.)

DOCTOR
What’s wrong this time? Are you having one of your spells?

CAROLYN
I’m in terrible pain. It’s one of the worst nights. I can’t stay asleep — either the nightmares or the pain.

DOCTOR
(pulling out his medical bag) Let’s see where your pulse is …

As he gets out his stethoscope CAROLYN raises up out of bed and grabs onto his shirt, pulling him close to her face.

DOCTOR
Carolyn, please —

CAROLYN
Please don’t do this to me —

DOCTOR
I can’t help you, Carolyn. Not this time.
CAROLYN
Do you just expect me to suffer here all night in pain?

DOCTOR
Well, of course not, I was going to crush up something for you to take to get you through the night —

CAROLYN
Please, just give me a shot. Please.

DOCTOR
Carolyn, I —

CAROLYN
Shh. You don’t have to say anything. Just get out the needle and we’ll figure everything else out.

DOCTOR
You can take too much of this, Carolyn. It’s only for emergencies, I’ve told you that several times. I’m asking you to respect me right now.

CAROLYN pulls the DOCTOR close to her and kisses him on the mouth. It is visible that he tries to pull away and then gives in to the kiss. As they continue to kiss she opens his bag and dumps it out on the floor. The sound of bottles falling onto the floor can be heard. The Doctor finally pulls away and searches the bed for a needle. When he finds the right one, he takes CAROLYN’s arm, kisses it, and then injects her with opiate. After she is injected she falls back into bed, suddenly relaxed.

CAROLYN
Thank you. Thank you so much.

DOCTOR
Carolyn, this can’t go on. I don’t know what it will do to you. You have to stop this. (he pushes her away)

CAROLYN
(groggily) I can’t stop!

DOCTOR
Listen to me! (pushing her away) You have to stop this! You might be killing yourself! Don’t you realize that? You might go to sleep one night and never wake up.

CAROLYN
(she slowly close her eyes) I don’t care if I die, Doctor.

DOCTOR
(The light begins to fade as the DOCTOR begins to shake CAROLYN.)
Wake up, Carolyn! Wake up!

BLACKOUT

THE END

(the complete play, Acts One and Two plus Notes, is available in the on-line version of the journal at www.uky.edu/Kaleidoscope/fall2004.)