

## SCENE 1

Day sinks. She watches.

Twilight rises, seeps from behind trees, spreads across street and lawn, spills over sill, floods across floor, splashes onto lamp shade and chair cushion, drifts across the toe of her shoe, and comes to rest in dark corners. She listens. Only the swing of the pendulum in the Seth Thomas on the mantle.

The gray tide withdraws, dragging with failing fingers at table legs, fringes of throw rugs, leaving behind darkness. Street lights come on and gradually drown in waves of fog. The silence mounts, like wind at sea, like gathering clouds.

Headlights sweep across the window and onto the drive. She stiffens. A car door slams, footsteps scrape across asphalt, strike solidly up the walk. A key fumbles at the lock. She smiles. No porch light. The door pushes in and for a moment while his hand searches the wall she can see him silhouetted against the pallid night. Howie in regulation dark suit, with briefcase and overcoat.

The overhead flashes on. He blinks in the sudden bright, then blinks again at his wife huddled in the wing chair, purse on her lap, scowling against the light.

—Reggie? What're you doing . . . ?

—Contemplating the dark.

He stares.

—Why the coat? Is the furnace out?

—Dead out.

—Are you sure? It doesn't feel like it.

He drops his briefcase and coat, starts for the kitchen.

—It's Tuesday night, Howie.

He stops. It takes him a second. —Oh my god— His hand slaps his forehead.  
—I'm sorry, Reggie. I got so involved . . .

—You're always involved. With someone else.

—There was this important meeting, the Barrettes . . .

—The Barrettes, the Babbitts, the Whozits and Whatums, the Dowhats and Dwadiddleys, I don't give a damn. You promised this time you wouldn't forget.

—Why didn't you call? I asked you if you'd just call . . .

—No! It's bad enough I have to ask you, *beg* you, please, Howie, take me to dinner and a movie. I have to call and remind you? If you don't care enough to even remember . . .

—I *do* care. It's just— His hand flutters. —You don't know what it's like these days, the pressures I'm under, the things I have to keep in mind.

—How could I know? You never have time to talk to me anymore, you're always too tired or have too much work. How could I know, anymore than you know what *my* days are like.

He looks at his watch. —It's not too late, only a little past eight. We could still . . .

—No!— She stands, purse tumbling to her feet —It is too late, *months* too late— and flees, tripping over strap, dragging purse, strewing contents in her wake.

His voice follows her. —Reggie, wait. Give me a chance . . .

She leaves him listening to the hard beat of her heels receding up the hall.

—Reggie? . . .

She slams into the bedroom, heart pounding, leans her head against the door.

She hears him moving about, imagines him: stooping, retrieving lipstick, brush, compact, handkerchief, breath mints, wallet; stuffing and clutching her purse, looking around; turning off the overhead, switching on table lamps.

His footsteps start up the hall. She dashes for the bed, hunkers on its edge. He stops outside the door.

—Reggie? Can I fix you something to eat?

—No. You've killed my appetite— Her stomach's a clenching fist.

She listens to his retreating steps, hears the kitchen door's swing, the refrigerator's opening suck, sees him staring into the white glare, hears the refrigerator thunk shut.

Hears him shuffle into the living room, wander about. After a few minutes he wanders back up the hall.

She tugs her coat tightly around her. She's shivering.

—Reggie? Am I supposed to pick up the girls?

—If you want them home tonight— Muffled into her pulled-up collar.

—Should I get them now?

—I don't care what you do when.

—I'd rather stay here and talk.

She lifts her head, stops rocking.

—Leave me alone, Howie, will you? I've gotten used to it and now I find it's what I want. Just leave me alone!

Outside the door, he holds his breath and waits. Inside the door, she holds her breath and hopes. His shadow shifts, a soft plop.

—I've left your purse by the door.

She sits rigid as his footsteps withdraw.

*Oh, god.* He didn't even try the knob. She stumbles up, turns the lock.

The front door opens and closes. The car engine rasps to life, hums out the drive, fades down the road.

She listens.

*Oh, god.* The silence tears her apart. And out of the riven hollow comes a wail. She flings herself across the bed. The storm arrives.

*A mistake, a terrible mistake, I wish I'd never done it, I knew I shouldn't do it, I didn't want to. I warned you, Maggie, I told you . . .*

—I don't think I can go through with this.

—What're you talking about? Of course you can go through with it.

—I'm not joking. This whole thing's a terrible mistake.

—The invitations are out.

—Send regrets. Issue rain checks.

—We've ordered the food and flowers.

—Cancel them. Send back the presents. With the money you and Daddy'll save, you can hide me out in Europe until the stink blows over.

—You know your father and I don't worry about putting a few noses in the air. It's your future we care about.

—And I'm telling you. This isn't going to work.

—What do you mean? Howie adores you. He'll make a wonderful husband and father.

—It's not Howie, Maggie, it's *me*. I don't think I'm right for Howie.

—You'll break his heart.

—Better now than in ten years.

—You're being silly, I don't know what's gotten into you.

—I don't feel the way I should.

—You're having bridal jitters, that's all.

—I don't think I understand love.

—That's not what you said four years ago.

*Oh, Casey.*

—That's just it. I don't feel the way I did then.

—And thank god for that. What an adolescent fiasco that was! We thought you'd never outgrow it. You had us scared to death you were going to marry him.

*Oh, Casey . . .*

—You talk about mistakes, what a mistake that would have been.

*Oh, Casey . . .*

—Can you imagine? Where would you be now?  
. . . *Where would we be now?*

—We'll buy a nice little house in a nice little town, and I'll paint it white, and build you a white picket fence with red roses on it, and you'll put up pictures and ruffled curtains. And I'll open that door at night and call out, Hi, Honey, I'm home, and you'll come popping out of the kitchen in a cute little apron and great big smile, and you'll sing back, Hi, Honey, how'd your day go? And I'll give you a hug and kiss, and take you on my lap, and tell you all the great things I did, and the funny things I said, and what a horse's ass the boss is, and how I told off some old fart.

—Then you'll call the kids in to wash their hands and face and comb their hair. And after we've said grace, you'll serve us fried chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy, corn on the cob, sliced tomatoes with mayonnaise, iced tea with sugar and lemon, and strawberry Jell-O with fruit cocktail and whipped cream. And while you clean up the dishes, I'll put the kids to bed.

—Then we'll sit on the couch, just the two of us, my arm around you with your head on my shoulder, and we'll watch TV together . . .

*Just the two of us. Together. Oh, Casey . . . Where are you now?*

The bedroom walls recede, space becomes nebulous, time closes in. She's seeing him, eyes crinkled, smile teasing, as he wrapped them in this homespun fancy they grinned at, and bought whole fabric.

Katelyn's shrill giggle pierces the darkening nimbus and pricks Reggie back to the present. She struggles to sitting position, reaches for a tissue, knocks the box to the floor, gropes down on her hands and knees, bumps the box under the bed, slides to her belly, arm outstretched, and hits her head on the iron railing. She's still dizzily sprawled in dust and tears when Howie tries the door.

—Reggie. I'd like to come to bed.

She struggles to her knees.

—Then go. The guest room's down the hall.

—What about the girls?

—They live here. They have their own rooms.

—They're confused. They don't know what to think.

—Tell them I'm sick, having a nervous breakdown. Like poor Mrs. Rochester I've gone mad and locked myself in the attic.

She holds her breath through his heavy silence, then sags relief as he turns and heads down the hall. She pulls onto the bed, buries her head under the pillow, and