

***GreenHouse***  
**a black comedy in three entropic acts**

by Jennie Webb

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# ***GreenHouse***

**Act I: WASTE**

**Act II: RUIN**

**ACT III: MULCH**

***all three acts take place in the past, present and future  
of the Green House***

## **CHARACTERS**

<b>MOTHER</b>	The caretaker, is the glue that holds the family together in whatever shape and at whatever cost. Provides.
<b>FATHER</b>	Comfortably ineffectual, is absent both emotionally and physically much of the time, so is figure-head of the household, only. Waits.
<b>SON</b>	An inventor, deals in formulas and solutions, seeking only to fix what is perceived as a problem. Builds.
<b>FIRST DAUGHTER</b>	An avid consumer, her universe—and anything or anyone in it—is limited to how and why it affects her. Uses.
<b>OTHER DAUGHTER</b>	A self-styled revolutionary, creates a world of martyrdom in which her strength & intelligence are sacrificed to fear, anger & hatred. Fights.
<b>STEPMOTHER</b>	Conscientious and careful, takes responsibility for herself and her immediate reality but is reluctant to venture beyond it. Distances.
<b>OFFICIAL</b>	Played by one actor (M or F), is society, government, the collective, created in our own image. Takes.

"What do you do when the past is no longer a guide to the future?"  
Jesse Ausubel, National Academy of Engineers

ACT I. WASTE

*The scene opens on the living area of the Green House. There is a feeling of manufactured opulence, of plenty. It is the morning and the breakfast table is, if not center, the focus of the room; the table and chairs are the only pieces of furniture. Son is fiddling with an Invention and consulting books & manuals; Father is reading the newspaper (he may or may not be actually consuming food); Other Daughter is dissecting and examining food, perhaps placing mutilated bits in a knapsack which is never far from her; First Daughter is circling the table, taking bites of things then discarding them, interested only in whatever is new. Mother is serving. (NOTE: Props, furnishing, costumes, etc. are not necessarily "realistic" or what they appear to be.)*

MOTHER:  
Coffee?

FATHER:  
Thank you.

MOTHER:  
Milk?

FATHER:  
Thank you.

MOTHER:  
Sugar?

FATHER:  
Honey?

MOTHER:  
Fructose?

FATHER:  
Sucrose?

MOTHER:  
Glucose?

FATHER:  
Sugar.

**GreenHouse**

2

MOTHER:

Sugar?

FATHER:

Thank you.

MOTHER (*to Son*):

And what do you have there, Son? Your Father's trying to read the paper, isn't he? Can you put your toys away?

SON (*re Father*):

Why isn't he at the Office?

MOTHER:

I'm sure I don't know. Father, why aren't you at the Office?

*He doesn't respond.*

Father?

FATHER:

Coffee?

SON:

Father?

*Father looks at Son.*

Shouldn't you be at the Office?

FATHER:

I suppose you're right. Would it be possible to. . .

MOTHER:

Coffee?

FATHER:

Thank you. (*he looks at Son again*) He's . . .

MOTHER:

The baby. (*to Son*) Isn't that right? Since you were born?

SON (*re Other Daughter*):

She's the baby.

FATHER:

Hmmmmmn.

*Father goes back to reading his paper. Son returns to fiddling with his Invention. Other Daughter has a scrap of food.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

How long does it take for an animal to decompose? I mean completely; have you ever noticed?

SON:

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Casualties of war, for instance. Would the evidence disappear?

MOTHER:

Dear, couldn't this wait until after breakfast?

SON:

Crime victims are sometimes found years later and identified.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

The skeleton gives them away.

SON:

Dental patterns. But eventually teeth and bones erode. The very term "biodegradable" implies "bio," or life. Life ensures biodegradability.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Are bones alive?

MOTHER *(to Son & Other Daughter)*:

Bacon? Sausage?

SON:

They're essential to life. They manufacture red blood cells, and in themselves serve as a frame, to structure.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

This house—it is alive.

SON:

What?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*talking to the house now*):

And what about us? Are we something you manufactured? To perform your bodily functions? Perhaps we're nothing but your entrails? Your waste products?

MOTHER:

We haven't had omelets in a long time, have we? A nice Denver Omelet . . . Doesn't that sound good?

FATHER:

Is there any. . .

MOTHER (*handing him a piece of toast*):

With or without butter?

FATHER:

Oleo?

MOTHER:

Preserves?

FATHER:

Jam?

MOTHER:

Jelly?

FATHER:

Butter.

MOTHER:

Butter?

FATHER:

Thank You.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

What's he doing here? Shouldn't he be at the Office?

SON:

Father?

MOTHER:

How about a roll? The nice, flaky kind.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Can bones feel pain?

*She hits the floor, or throws something.*

SON:

There is a sensitive coating on the tips of some bones.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

But you can break bones—right in the middle. That hurts. I've done it.

SON:

Because of the surrounding nerve centers.

OTHER DAUGHTERS:

*That's us. We are the nerve centers.*

MOTHER:

Homemade biscuits?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

And this house is all that will be left when we are gone. This house will be the identifying remains. And eventually it, too, will biodegrade when it's not alive anymore.

SON:

When we're not alive anymore.

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to the house or some outside force)*:

I have prepared for my day. I will leave the protection of this structure and come face to face with the forces it shields me from. To combat these powers I make myself strong. Because of them, I nourish myself.

*Other Daughter looks for something to eat among the un-appealing scraps of food in or around her knapsack; she notices Son's food.*

Is that cereal?

MOTHER:

Hot or cold, dear?

*Doorbell rings (or a buzzer or knock on the "door").*

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

*First Daughter goes to the door, comes back with a box which contains pizza and sits at the table. She notices Father.*

Why isn't he at the Office?

*She grabs a piece of pizza, may or may not take a bite of it, then sets it down and asks Mother,*

Did a package come for me yesterday?

MOTHER:

Oh, yes. Didn't you see it?

*Mother points to an enormous box onstage (or a pile of boxes). First Daughter takes another, new, piece of pizza.*

FIRST DAUGHTER

It's not like it's my job to monitor the parcel post scheduling around here, for god's sake.

*She goes to the box(es), at least one of which is large enough to act as an onstage wardrobe, probably discarding second piece of pizza, and disappears inside the box(es).*

*Other Daughter has taken a piece of pizza and somehow mutilated it—maybe peeling off the toppings—with a large knife from her knapsack.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I wonder what flesh would look like if you turned it inside out.

MOTHER:

Son, you haven't eaten a thing. Are you feeling well?

SON:

They're judging the projects today.

MOTHER:

Oh, you needn't worry! You always come home with blue ribbons, now don't you?

SON:

Oh, sure . . . Table top fusion, thermodynamic interaction, laser microsurgery . . . Simple stuff. But this year it's different.

MOTHER:

I can see that! *(to Father)* Have you ever seen so many wires? How many different colors are there? I see red, and blue, and yellow . . . What do you suppose the yellow one's for?

SON:

It re-directs the heat rising from the core of the earth into the atmosphere.

MOTHER:

Why, that could come in handy, couldn't it?

SON:

You see, Mother, it's a device that can be manufactured with the tools in any garage and fueled with the supplies in any kitchen. It supplies us with a positive, more efficient alternative to the ozone layer, replacing it through a heat reaction in the stratosphere . . .

MOTHER:

Now why would we want to replace the ozone layer? Remember when your Father worked at the Plant and he was replaced? It took him the *longest* time to find his position at the Office after that. *(to Father)* Am I right, dear?

SON:

But . . .

*First Daughter comes from behind box(es), having changed clothes.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

You know what I feel like? Chinese.

*Doorbell rings.*

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

*She goes to the door and returns with a box which contains numerous Chinese food containers in all their packaging glory: packages & foil packets of various sizes which are inside bags, inside other bags, and so forth. She unwraps containers, giving each a cursory glance before discarding it.*

*Other Daughter picks up a pair of chopsticks.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Who was it that tortured prisoners by putting bamboo shoots under the fingernails?

MOTHER:

Who'd like some waffles? When did we last have waffles?

SON:

It was in the Korean War.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Very clever.

MOTHER:

Or pancakes? Do you remember me telling you about the pancakes my Mother used to make me?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Torture hasn't really changed all that much, has it?

MOTHER:

On Sunday mornings, before church.

SON:

The onset of the nuclear age changed the nature of torture completely.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

But it's the same conceptually, I mean.

SON:

With post-nuclear torture entire cultures could be destroyed on a wide scale without the manpower requirements or even the need to monitor the results.

MOTHER:

Buckwheat pancakes, and (to Father) what did she put in them, dear?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Then what is the point? That's not torture.

MOTHER:

Blueberries! And sometimes raspberries. Doesn't that sound delicious?

SON:

The damage is still done. The end result is the same.

FIRST DAUGHTER (*re her clothes*):

Mother, tell me the truth. This is just not my color, is it.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

That's not what it's about.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Nothing ever looks the same as it does in the catalogue.

*She returns to the box(es) to change clothes again.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Torture is a *process*.

MOTHER:

Have I ever made banana pancakes?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

Take these chopsticks. With them, for instance, I could eventually get anything I wanted.

SON:

What?

*She begins to tap on the Invention, slowly and methodically.*

MOTHER:

How about banana *nut* pancakes? That would be a treat, wouldn't it?

*Father looks at her with his cup.*

Coffee?

FATHER:

Thank you.

SON:

There's no way you can damage that.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*continuing to tap*):

Okay.

MOTHER:

How many shall I make? *(she counts Father, who doesn't respond)*  
One, two . . . ?

SON:

It's covered with metal that is harder than anything you can even imagine.

MOTHER *(counting Son)*:

Three . . . ?

OTHER DAUGHTER *(continuing to tap)*:

Okay.

MOTHER *(counting Other Daughter)*:

Four, Five . . . ?

SON *(to Other Daughter)*:

It's not working.

OTHER DAUGHTER *(continuing to tap)*:

Okay.

SON *(to Other Daughter)*:

What are you doing! You're not doing anything!

*First Daughter comes back with another outfit on.*

FIRST DAUGHTER *(to Mother)*:

Are you making pancakes?

MOTHER:

Banana nut; one or two?

SON:

Mother, make her stop!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

We never have French toast any more. I want French toast.

MOTHER:

That's simple enough! Let me see, where did I put the bread?

SON:

She's wrecking it!

**GreenHouse**

11

OTHER DAUGHTER (*still tapping*):  
I thought you said it couldn't be hurt.

SON:  
Mother!

MOTHER (*to Other Daughter, who is still tapping*):  
Dear, how'd you like to help me by getting the syrup out?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*while tapping*):  
I wouldn't, really; I'm kinda' busy.

FIRST DAUGHTER (*to Mother*):  
Don't give me any of that berry syrup. I hate that stuff.

*First Daughter goes back to the box(es).*

SON:  
Father . . . !

*Father looks up.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Shouldn't you be at the Office?

SON (*breaking down, to Other Daughter*):  
Stop it! Please stop it! Just stop it!

*She does. Son is still crying. Father looks at him.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
*Psychology is the operative theme in torture.*

*Doorbell rings.*

MOTHER:  
Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
I'll get it.

*First Daughter has emerged from the box(es) in a different outfit. She goes to the door; Official enters and approaches Father.*

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green, I'm M.E. Swellings from the Department of Surplus Acrylic & Naugahyde, and I have here a requisition for any pre-millennium household furnishings. Our records indicate that you have in your possession several items which fall into this category and they must be surrendered immediately. Please sign here.

*Father does, taking a pen out of his pocket which Official confiscates. Going after the table and chairs, Official clears the table with one swipe—Son saves his Invention, Father his coffee cup, Other Daughter the chopsticks—and proceeds to take the table and chairs out of the house.*

*Mother comes toward Official with a full platter.*

MOTHER:

Mr/s Swellings, would you care for waffles or pancakes? This is maple syrup, but maybe you'd prefer berry?

OFFICIAL:

Maple's fine—thank you.

*Official takes the platter & syrup as well.*

MOTHER:

Remember when we had *real* maple syrup? It came in a tin, didn't it? Shaped like a house?

*Father has finished his coffee.*

FATHER:

Well, I'm off to the Office.

*He gives his cup to Mother with a kiss.*

SON:

Goodbye Father!

*Other Daughter is rummaging on ground through stuff, salvaging broken fragments and stowing them in her knapsack, eyeing Official. First Daughter goes to Official with bottle of berry syrup.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Here, take this away. *(she gives Official the syrup, then to Father)*  
Bring me a surprise tonight, will you?

FATHER:

Goodbye . . .

*First Daughter has retreated to the box(es).*

MOTHER:

Goodbye, dear. Remember to pick up a new dinette set on your way home from work.

OFFICIAL:

*(nodding to him)* Mr. Green.

*Father leaves.*

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

Come on, we'll be late for school.

*She is on her way out with knapsack. Son gathers his Invention and materials.*

MOTHER *(to Son)*:

Go on, darling. It's a beautiful day—you're not going to let your little sister walk alone, are you?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I'm older.

*She gives Son a reminder as they go through the door.*

We should never forget that.

*Official gives Mother a receipt.*

OFFICIAL:

*(nodding to Mother)* Mrs. Green.

*Official leaves. Mother begins to clean up the mess by neatly stacking dishes, etc., then throws them out the door. First Daughter has changed clothes.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

This looks better, doesn't it.

MOTHER:

Lovely! Oh, you want to guess what I just thought of?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I look good in hats. I should wear hats more often.

MOTHER:

Remember that Easter dress I made you to wear when you were real little? It was yellow and had little embroidered bunnies on it?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'm glad that my legs are long. Some people have short legs and long bodies, but I have long legs and a long body. I'm glad about that. I would hate it if I had a short body.

MOTHER:

You loved that dress! And you would wear it and you would play with the rabbit that we had for awhile . . . What was his name?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Mother, we need to talk. I'm going through a very special period in my life right now and I want to share it with you. I've made a decision about my future.

MOTHER:

Hector?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I've decided that I'm going to become rich. I think I would be good at that.

MOTHER:

Ralph?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

There are some people who don't do it well at all. They don't take it seriously.

MOTHER:

It wasn't Peter, was it?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I don't think you should bother doing a thing if you don't intend to do a good job of it.

MOTHER:

It was Angus.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I've already done my research, have a plan of action and ordered my supplies. They should be arriving any time now, so for god's sake *please* don't let the others get at them.

MOTHER:

I remember, because one day you had a craving so for Sunday dinner we had broasted Angus with plum sauce. That was different, wasn't it?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I feel good about this conversation, Mother, and about my life ahead as we've planned it. I can't wait to select the proper accessories.

*Doorbell rings.*

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

*She opens the door and it is raining.*

Oh my god, Mother! Come here!

*Stepmother is at the door, under an umbrella.*

MOTHER:

Right on time! May I take that?

*She takes the umbrella and ushers a rather confused Stepmother inside. First Daughter has put her arm outside, it is dripping with water.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Look at me!

STEPMOTHER *(to Mother)*:

Thank you.

*Mother has given First Daughter the umbrella.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

How in the hell am I supposed to do anything important holding onto one of these?

STEPMOTHER:

That's mine . . .

MOTHER:

Of course it is. Why would we need anything like that around here?

STEPMOTHER:

Well, when it rains, for one thing . . .

MOTHER:

Aren't you funny?

STEPMOTHER:

May I sit down?

*There are no chairs.*

MOTHER:

I'm afraid we're re-decorating. There'll be furniture in time for dinner.  
This makes it rather fun, don't you think?

*Son bursts onstage with his Invention, an armful of machinery and his reference books, etc.*

SON:

Mother, have you ever seen a tornado?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Mother, don't you see that I haven't got a thing to wear in this . . . rain!

*Mother gives Stepmother a large tray of hors d'oeuvres.*

MOTHER:

Perhaps you'd like to see if the children would care for a mid-morning snack?

*Son takes umbrella from First Daughter.*

STEPMOTHER:

Children . . .

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Jesus, I'm going to get wet!

MOTHER (to Son):

What are you doing home from school, honey?

*Son is rather frantically assembling pieces of machinery, and now the umbrella as well, into another Invention; he consults manuals as he adds to or re-configures the original Invention.*

SON:

Or a hurricane?

MOTHER:

We don't need to worry about hurricanes or tornados here, dear. Who put an idea like that into your head?

SON:

What about a cyclone?

*Doorbell rings.*

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

*She goes to the door and comes back with a plastic-covered box which she adds to the other box(es).*

MOTHER *(continuing, to Son)*:

Darling, you're being awfully silly, don't you think? Nothing like that ever happens in our house. How'd you do in the competition?

SON:

I got first place.

MOTHER:

What did I tell you? *(she notices that he is covered with water)* Why you're absolutely soaked!

*Son is busy with his Invention & books.*

SON:

It's pouring. They sent us home from school.

MOTHER:

What do you mean, "it's pouring?"

SON:

It's pouring.

MOTHER:

I've never heard of such a thing. Where is your sister?

SON:

She's coming. And it is too pouring—go outside.

MOTHER:

Now why would I want to go outside? And what do you mean, "they sent you home from school?"

SON:

They sent us home from school. They said there was a tornado watch.

MOTHER:

Do you expect me to believe that?

SON:

It's true. And a hurricane watch.

MOTHER:

And a cyclone watch?

SON:

A cyclone alert.

*Other Daughter comes in the door.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

It's pouring!

MOTHER:

Darling, your little brother just told me the craziest thing. There's not a cyclone watch, is there?

SON:

Cyclone alert! And I'm older.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

That's what they told everybody. *I'm older.*

*She begins burrowing in her knapsack, retrieving weapons and battle gear.*

MOTHER:

I just don't see how that could be, do you?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I was born first.

SON:

Mother! Look outside!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

They *told* all the kids that it was a tornado watch, but that's not what it is.

SON:

There's a storm out there! You felt it!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Sure, they say "tornado," but they can't fool me. I know what they really mean.

MOTHER:

Hurricane?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

It's *war*, that's what it is.

*Other Daughter is fully outfitted for it. She joins Son who is working on the Invention.*

MOTHER (to Stepmother):

Why, you haven't touched the canapes. Would you prefer cocktail franks?

STEPMOTHER:

No!

*First Daughter comes out from box(es) carrying plastic sheeting, tarps or covers and rolls of cellophane, wearing plastic gloves and clothing or materials from which she has fashioned rain gear.*

MOTHER:

Why, don't you look lovely, darling?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Well I feel like hell! How am I supposed to get on with my life looking like this?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

They want to get rid of us. They want us out.

MOTHER:

Are you having troubles with the girls in gym again, dear? I'll tell you what, we'll just wash our hands of them. Now who'd like a finger sandwich?

*Stepmother is still holding the hors d'oeuvres. First Daughter, who has begun to place plastic sheets around the house, goes to the door and opens it. Perhaps her hat or hood blows off.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Oh, my god, there's a *wind*! This is insane! Mother . . . ?

*Mother shuts the door and gives her an aerosol can; First Daughter begins to spray her hair, then her body and her surroundings with this and other aerosol cans, as she continues to cover anything around her in plastic.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

But they haven't got an easy fight ahead of them. They don't know what they're dealing with here.

MOTHER (*to Stepmother*):

Shall we begin?

*Mother displays many decks of cards.*

STEPMOTHER:

Begin . . .

MOTHER:

I thought canasta would be nice. Or do you prefer gin rummy?

STEPMOTHER:

Canasta . . .

MOTHER:

That's what I thought. It moves faster, don't you think?

STEPMOTHER:

It . . .

*Doorbell rings.*

MOTHER:

Doorbell!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

*First Daughter opens the door for Official and is blown into the room.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Christ! Look at my stockings!

OFFICIAL:

Mrs. Green, I'm T.R. Snearl from the Department of Qualified Recreational Dissolution and I have here a requisition for any gaming materials and/or innocuous leisure devices smaller than a bread box. I'm afraid it has come to my attention that you are currently negotiating a contest utilizing such accouterments. Please sign here.

*Mother signs the form with her pen and gives Official the cards; Official also takes her pen.*

I have also been authorized to confiscate from the premises the following items which are present primarily for social/entertainment purposes and are not recognized as foodstuffs, per se:

*Official checks his list against the items on the tray.*

Crabmeat puffs, melon balls, shrimp twists, toasted ham circles, smoked oysters, eggplant wisps, turkey tempters, deviled eggs, pastry snails, dried beef rolls, broiled grapefruit, Vienna sausages . . .

*Official then takes the tray itself and places it into the bag.*

Radish roses, carrot curls, green onions, parsley sprigs,  
and serving doilies.

MOTHER (to Stepmother):

Do you suppose Mr/s Snearl might want a beverage of some sort?

STEPMOTHER:

A beverage . . .

MOTHER:

We've got juice or iced-water. Or would you prefer a soda?

OFFICIAL:

Water.

MOTHER:

We haven't made the punch yet, but it would only take a minute.  
Would you like that?

OFFICIAL:

Water.

MOTHER:

The last of the coffee's gone, but I could make another pot. Or does caffeine bother you?

OFFICIAL:

Water. Water's fine—thank you.

*Official takes the pitcher of water also, and gives Mother a receipt.*

*(nodding to both women)* Mrs. Green.

*Official goes to leave, then turns back.*

Mrs. Green.

*Official leaves; Other Daughter follows Official to the door.*

MOTHER:

This'll give us a chance to have a nice chat, won't it?

STEPMOTHER:

Listen. I'm feeling awfully strange about this.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

It's the god damn weather.

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

Well, it stopped raining.

MOTHER:

Don't be ridiculous, Darling.

*Other Daughter returns to Son and the Invention.*

STEPMOTHER:

Maybe it's me, but I'm not sure exactly what I'm supposed to be doing here.

MOTHER:

We'll all find out soon enough, don't you think?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

There used to be *lots* to do in this place. But now?!

*The setting is entirely wrapped in plastic, except for the Invention.*

MOTHER *(to Stepmother)*:

Would you like me to show you around the house?

*First Daughter approaches Son and Other Daughter.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

What are you doing?

SON:

I'm . . .

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Rather than idly watching ourselves degenerate as a prime example of the worsening human condition, we choose to join forces and arm ourselves in anticipation of the inevitable battle ahead.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

My god.

*She touches the plastic sheeting and cellophane that now covers her surroundings & everything in it.*

Didn't I used to have fun around here?

*Mother proceeds to give Stepmother a tour of the house.*

MOTHER:

This, of course, is what we call the family room, or the rec room, or the den, or even the dining room at times.

*They run into Son and Other Daughter with the Invention.*

SON:

Be careful!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Really careful.

MOTHER *(continuing)*:

Unless we call it the kitchen, but that's only around mealtimes. Then it actually is the kitchen, unless someone is sleeping, in which case it is the bedroom. The reason the beds aren't made right now is because we can't find them. The back door is in the back which is why we call it the *back* door and not the back *door*, and that is the door from which we feed the dogs. Or we would, if we had any.

MOTHER (*continuing*):

And the library is the room with the books in it and the billiard room is the room with the billiards in it and the hall is the room which isn't really a room at all but leads to other rooms which are self-explanatory or they're not there at all.

There's a list by the phone which used to be there with a schedule of what's to be done where and when, and the next thing is luncheon. Can you think of anything I've left out, or shall we get on with planning the mid-day meal?

STEPMOTHER:

Luncheon . . .

MOTHER:

If we don't hurry it will be tea time, now won't it?

STEPMOTHER:

I'm terribly, terribly sorry to be . . .

MOTHER:

Oh, but don't be! I'm not, am I?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

You'll be sorry when I die of boredom.

STEPMOTHER:

No! You see, I don't know why I'm here . . .

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Really sorry.

MOTHER:

You've got an appetite, haven't you? How does a tuna casserole sound? Or a cold platter of some sort?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I want Mexican.

STEPMOTHER:

I apologize, I really do! (*to the group*) But I don't know you.

*A pause.*

MOTHER:

*I apologize. What kind of a hostess am I? Whatever must you think of me. (she starts to make the introductions) This is our oldest, my First Daughter, this is our Other Daughter and our Son who is our youngest, the baby. Mr. Green is, of course, at the Office. He should be home for lunch soon. Children, this is your Stepmother.*

STEPMOTHER:

Stepmother . . .

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Nice to meet you.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Nice to meet you.

SON:

Nice to meet you.

SON:

She's the baby.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'm getting kind of thirsty, too.

MOTHER:

Oh, I've almost forgotten the mail! This is quite a day, isn't it?

*Mother goes to the door.*

STEPMOTHER:

Wait! You must be making a mistake . . .

*Mother opens the door; it is extremely windy. Mother is, literally, blown away.*

*A long pause.*

STEPMOTHER *(to the children)*:

She's thinking I'm someone else.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'd like something to drink.

STEPMOTHER:

Ask your . . .

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Something cold.

*Son is at the door.*

SON:

She's gone.

STEPMOTHER:

Tell her to come in here . . .

SON:

No, she's gone.

STEPMOTHER (*looking out the door*):

Where did she go?

SON:

She just . . . blew away.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

With the mail?

*First Daughter runs outside.*

STEPMOTHER:

What do you mean, "she just blew away?"

SON:

She just blew away.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

That's what they want you to believe.

SON:

I saw her. She blew away.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

A rather odd twist of fate, if you ask me. You don't think this is what they've been planning all along?

STEPMOTHER:

I need to sit down.

*First Daughter comes back in with a large box.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

At least she dropped my package, thank god.

*First Daughter begins taking electrical appliances out of the package—fans and blenders and can openers and machines that make electrical humming or buzzing noises—and turns them all on as she does so.*

OTHER DAUGHTER (to Son):

How far can she go before she pops, like a balloon?

SON:

That depends on whether you're talking about distance or altitude.

*Father comes in the door.*

STEPMOTHER (to the children):

Is this . . . ?

SON:

Hello, Father.

*The buzzing is growing progressively louder.*

STEPMOTHER:

Mr. Green!

FATHER:

Yes.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'm going to change before we eat. Don't start without me.

STEPMOTHER:

I'm so glad you're here . . .

FATHER:

So am I. What's for lunch?

STEPMOTHER:

Lunch . . .?!

*Stepmother collapses.*

*There is silence except for the whirring of the machines.*

FATHER (to the children):

What's wrong with your Stepmother?

*-end act I-*

"Humanity is conducting an uncontrolled, globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to a global nuclear war."  
Worldwatch Institute, *The Global Environment and Basic Human Needs*

## ACT II. RUIN

*The stage setting is sparser now, with bits and parts of things strewn about rather than identifiable objects. The noise from the appliances has stopped—they are in bits. The plastic wrapping is shredded and the cellophane in lumps, perhaps there are Styrofoam peanuts around or strips of plastic bubble-wrap. The various empty boxes and packages are being used as furniture. Son is fine-tuning his Invention, which has grown in size but is somewhat in the background. Other Daughter is anxiously at the door. Father is sitting, waiting for lunch. It is obvious that it is unbearably, uncomfortably, irritably hot. They all fan themselves. Trying to maintain her cool, Stepmother is talking to First Daughter.*

STEPMOTHER:

Somebody needs to be notified.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

God I'm hot.

STEPMOTHER:

Somebody that will be able to do something about this.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

And dying of thirst.

STEPMOTHER:

You have to call somebody.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I have to change; this is killing me.

*First Daughter goes to change clothes. Other Daughter comes in from the door. She takes various materials out of her knapsack and begins to assemble what look like explosive devices.*

OTHER DAUGHTER (to Son):

Do you care that you're personally guaranteeing our demise?

SON:

What?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

It's like a crematorium out there.

SON:

I got rid of the wind.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

The storm was better.

SON:

But you told me to.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

This way they can tell if we even make a move. We're like sitting, roasted ducks.

SON:

I'll fix it.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Only if you want to be around much longer. I tell you one thing, they're not going to take me alive.

*In high gear, Other Daughter begins to lay a complicated land mine system. Son frantically adds to his invention again. First Daughter is looking through the useless pieces of junk, etc. around the house.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

This is divine. We've got powdered drink mixes. *(to Stepmother, with packets)* What in the hell am I supposed to do with these?

STEPMOTHER:

Listen to me, will you? There are people that are able to handle these situations.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

There's no god damn water! It kind of a key ingredient.

*Other Daughter is setting up a booby trap at the door.*

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

What is the expression? "At least it's a *dry* heat!"

STEPMOTHER:

Wait a minute! Does anyone intend to do anything?

SON *(to Stepmother)*:  
I'm doing all I—

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Stepmother)*:  
I'm doing what I—

*Son and Other Daughter exchange a quick but purposeful look.*

SON *(to Stepmother)*:

Who's side are you on, anyway?

STEPMOTHER:

About your Mother! Shouldn't someone get someone over here to *do* something?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Yes, someone should, because I can't stand this much longer!

*A short pause.*

STEPMOTHER:

Fine. *(to Father)* Where's the phone.

FATHER:

Is there anything to drink?

*First Daughter passes him the dry packets.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Grape, Orange or Cherry?

STEPMOTHER *(to Son & Other Daughter)*:

Where is the phone so that you can get in touch with somebody who can help you!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Phones can be tapped.

*Doorbell rings.*

*Silence.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

*Other Daughter runs to de-activate the booby trap at the door before Official arrives. She remains there, suspending her own operations while keeping a careful eye and discreet weapon on Official.*

STEPMOTHER:

It's you! Look, I've forgotten your name, but the most terrible thing has happened!

OFFICIAL:

Mrs. Green, I'm F.J. Sparnette from the Department of Catastrophe Intervention.

STEPMOTHER:

I'm so glad you're here, but I'm not Mrs. Green. You met Mrs. Green when you were here earlier. I didn't really even *know* Mrs. Green.

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green, shouldn't you be at the Office? Please sign here.

*He does, again with his own pen which Official takes.*

FATHER:

I'm home for lunch. Speaking of which, dear . . . ?

OFFICIAL (*indicating for Stepmother to sign*):

And your wife . . .

STEPMOTHER:

I told you, I'm not . . . (*indicating the children*) Their Mother was blown away.

OFFICIAL:

Blown away.

STEPMOTHER:

Into the air.

OFFICIAL:

I see . . .

STEPMOTHER:

You have to do something.

OFFICIAL:

Mrs. Green.

STEPMOTHER:

Yes! (*points to Son*) Her Son saw the whole thing.

OFFICIAL:

There's no wind out there.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Dead calm.

STEPMOTHER:

No, I guess not . . . anymore. But there was, and . . .

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

A *morgue* would be nice and cold, though.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Father, don't you have a water cooler at the Office?

FATHER:

A big salad would hit the spot.

OFFICIAL:

You are harboring produce? I have here an invoice to be completed regarding seizure of edible substances in the home originating from plant matter. This includes vegetables but excludes most dairy products at this point, with the exception of cheeses, as they *are* grown.

FATHER:

Or sandwiches.

OFFICIAL:

Bakery items containing wheat, rice, rye or corn, of course, qualify under this edict, unless their sugar content exceeds a pre-determined level which would make them, in fact, desserts.

FATHER:

It's too hot for soup.

OFFICIAL:

Stocks, depending upon whether they are meat-based or vegetable-based, are, I'm afraid, a bit in the gray area. Please take a look at this list and check the types of soup usually served for both luncheon and supper.

FATHER:

A chilled soup might be nice, though.

OFFICIAL:

Dinner choices are on a separate sheet, as are Seafood Chowders. Any provisions not included in the above will not be excepted, but rather commandeered for immediate nutritional analysis. Please mail the completed forms to the address indicated on the top, canary sheet and retain the bottom, carnation copy for your records.

FIRST DAUGHTER *(to Stepmother)*:  
That's not carnation.

STEPMOTHER:  
What?

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
Just thought I should tell you. It's pink. Carnation's paler.

OFFICIAL:  
Pink. Fine—thank you.

*Having confiscated anything remotely edible, Official hands over a receipt.*

*(nodding, to Father and Stepmother)* Mr. Green. Mrs. Green.

*Official leaves. Other Daughter re-sets door booby trap, then finishes wiring the house.*

STEPMOTHER:  
No! Wait!

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
I actually prefer salmon, not that anyone gives a damn.

STEPMOTHER:  
Come back! You can't leave!

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
As a color, I mean. On me. Because of my skintones. I don't care for salmon as a fish.

STEPMOTHER:  
What kind of a house is this?

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
To eat. I don't mind them personally, as long as they stay in a pond or something.

FATHER:  
Or tuna. Albacore.

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
I need something to drink. Didn't we have a fish tank around here once?

SON (*distracted from his Invention*):

Actually, although a salmon is both a marine and fresh water fish, it would be unlikely to be found in a pond.

*Other Daughter fires a warning shot into the air. She gives Son a hard look so that he returns to his task, then goes back to her weapons of mass protection.*

FIRST DAUGHTER (*to Stepmother*):

We have to talk. I'm going through a very confusing period in my life and I want to share it with you.

STEPMOTHER:

*You're confused.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I thought that I had it all figured out. Then, all of the sudden, nothing made sense anymore, you know?

STEPMOTHER:

Oh, yeah.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I could depend on things. I knew what I wanted and I knew how to get it.

FATHER:

I need to be at a meeting before too long, so maybe something quick: a piece of fruit?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

You see, now I'm questioning myself and the things around me! Should I really wear white in the evenings? And how can they make fat-free butter?

FATHER:

Just a snack—some cheese and crackers.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Italian! Where can you get fresh Veal Parmesan without slaughtering your own?

STEPMOTHER:

I don't believe this.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

And no one will deliver anymore! Life used to be so simple.

FATHER:

Coldcuts?

STEPMOTHER (*to Father*):

Look, I have no idea where anything is around here . . .

FATHER:

You could even open a can of something or another.

STEPMOTHER:

If I knew where one was, I could!

*Doorbell rings.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I'll get it.

*Other Daughter manages to turn off booby trap at door just before Official enters. Throughout this visit, she slyly readies an arsenal of hand grenades and other weapons.*

OFFICIAL:

Mrs. Green, I'm P.M. Skiffers. . .

STEPMOTHER:

Wait a minute. You said you were . . .

OFFICIAL:

. . . from the Department of Medicinal Evaluation and I have here a requisition for all petroleum-based packaging or products; any drugs and healthcare items, including vitamin supplements, manufactured and organic chemical toxins and external salves, ointments and liniments in the proximity for the purposes of contaminant classification and additive extraction. Please sign here.

*Father produces a pen, getting up from a box. Official gathers plastics, aerosol cans, etc.*

STEPMOTHER:

And Mrs. Green is the one who's missing, remember?

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green, shouldn't you be at the Office?

FATHER:

Yes, I have a meeting.

*Official takes the box he was sitting on.*

OFFICIAL:

Please sign here.

*He does. Official again takes the pen.*

STEPMOTHER:

What are you doing?

OFFICIAL:

That's fine—thank you.

*Official gives Father a receipt.*

*(nodding to Father and Stepmother) Mr. Green. Mrs. Green.*

STEPMOTHER:

Mrs. Green isn't here! That's what I've been trying to tell you!

*Official leaves with items and box. Other Daughter follows Official to the door, and takes out a bomb or hand grenade. She watches Official's retreat.*

STEPMOTHER *(to Father)*:

You're letting them take that?

FATHER:

I have to hurry back to the Office. Goodbye dear, I'll be home in time for supper.

STEPMOTHER:

I'll pass on the information!

SON:

Goodbye . . .

*Father looks at him.*

. . . Father.

*The time is right, and Other Daughter lobs her hand grenade through the door after Official.*

FATHER:

Yes.

*There is a large explosion. Father leaves. Other Daughter is exhilarated. She continues throwing explosives and perhaps fires an automatic weapon throughout the following. There should be lots of smoke and grand flashes of light.*

STEPMOTHER:

I have to get out of here.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

As I was saying, my life was ahead of me and I was in control of it, you know?

STEPMOTHER:

Look, you have to understand something. I don't belong here.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Exactly! I feel like I'm in a foreign film and I'm dressed all wrong!

STEPMOTHER:

Listen to me. This is not my house. I don't live here.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Right!

STEPMOTHER:

Right.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Right! No one else understands what I'm going through!

SON (*to Other Daughter*):

That's it. I think I've got it!

*Son runs to door with Other Daughter; Other Daughter makes one last offensive, then they try to clear the smoke in order to assess the environment outside. Perhaps they need flashlights or lighters.*

FIRST DAUGHTER (*to Stepmother*):

I'm seeing my life all around me drying up in shreds. I'm wasting away, shriveling up. I'm becoming a piece of beef jerky!

STEPMOTHER:

Look, why don't you and your brother and sister . . .

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Oh, lord, give me a break. You really think I'm related to those two?

STEPMOTHER:  
What do you mean?

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
Ask them.

STEPMOTHER:  
This is getting ridiculous.

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
You're absolutely correct! My whole future is crumbling before me and no one even cares.

STEPMOTHER:  
About your life.

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
The reality of the situation is this: it's kinda' like, what was once real no longer *is*, you know?

STEPMOTHER:  
I guess I do.

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
Take a fashion choice, for instance.

STEPMOTHER:  
What are you talking about?!

*Other Daughter and Son return from the door; Son goes directly to the Invention.*

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to First Daughter*):  
Killed any seals lately?

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
What?

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
The pelts would keep you nice and warm in our new polar climate.

*Burrowing into her knapsack, she prepares herself for cold weather and retrieves a new weapon, something like an Eskimo harpoon gun. First Daughter goes to the door.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
Oh good lord! It's snowing!

SON:

It's classified as a blizzard at this point.

FIRST DAUGHTER (*to Stepmother*):

See what I mean? What in the hell is a girl supposed to do around here? My furs are in storage.

*Fully armed, Other Daughter meets First Daughter at the door.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

You can always wipe out another species.

*First Daughter tries to find something appropriate to change into and Other Daughter fires harpoons out the door.*

STEPMOTHER (*looking out the door*):

It really is snowing!

SON:

Sub-zero temperatures don't allow snow. It's actually just the moisture temporarily settling while the climate re-adjusts simulating precipitation of a sort.

*Stepmother goes to Son, who is still adding to his Invention—something is wrong.*

STEPMOTHER:

You seem like a smart kid. I know you're the youngest, but I'm going to be honest with you and I hope you can understand this.

SON:

I'm not the youngest.

STEPMOTHER:

But . . . Okay, good! Because someone has to take charge of things around here until your mother comes back.

SON:

She's not coming back.

STEPMOTHER:

Oh, honey. Don't give up hope.

SON:

She's not.

STEPMOTHER:

Maybe she's on her way now, with a warm dinner and clothes and . . .

SON:

She can't come back.

STEPMOTHER:

She can and she will! You have to believe in her!

SON:

She no longer exists.

STEPMOTHER:

Please, don't talk like that!

SON (*referring to his Invention*):

This rearranged the currents on a molecular level so that they actually sucked themselves into each other. She no longer exists. She can't come back.

*A pause.*

STEPMOTHER:

What do you mean?

SON:

To get rid of the wind, I created what ended up emulating a vacuum, self-induced by the then existing air streams so that they erased themselves and any solid matter caught up in the flow into non-material form.

STEPMOTHER:

You did what?

SON:

Because the wind and rain were an accident. When I replaced the ozone layer at school there was the time delay and because of the unstable molecular makeup of carbon dioxide, the atmosphere adjusted to the shift in an unprecedented manner. It shouldn't have happened, but it did.

STEPMOTHER:

It was you.

SON:

I won first prize.

STEPMOTHER:  
She's . . .

SON:  
Gone.

STEPMOTHER:  
Does your father know about this?

SON:  
I . . . No, he doesn't.

STEPMOTHER:  
You need to tell him.

SON:  
I can't.

STEPMOTHER:  
He needs to know!

SON:  
No!

STEPMOTHER:  
Of course he does!

SON:  
No! He's . . . He's not really my father.

STEPMOTHER:  
He's not.

SON:  
No. I was genetically engineered.

STEPMOTHER:  
Your mother . . .

SON:  
She never knew.

STEPMOTHER:  
That she didn't give birth to you.

SON:

That's right.

STEPMOTHER:

Would you mind explaining that to me?

SON:

Look, if you don't mind, I have important things to do.

STEPMOTHER:

Look, if *you* don't mind, It's *your* house and I have to get out of here! I have my own life and my own house and my own problems and—

*Other Daughter comes in from the door, her weapon coated with ice and useless.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Well, this is an appropriate ending. Everything's frozen out there. We'll be turned into human icicles and they'll use us to stir their cocktails.

SON:

I know—it over-compensated. I'm taking care of it now.

*Other Daughter is looking for climate-appropriate weaponry.*

STEPMOTHER:

Listen to me! *(to Other Daughter)* You! You and your older brother had better—

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I'm older.

STEPMOTHER:

You and your *younger* brother—

OTHER DAUGHTER:

He's not even my brother. Really.

STEPMOTHER:

Right. Then you. If you care at all about what's going to happen to you and your family now that your mother's gone—

OTHER DAUGHTER:

*My mother is a political prisoner being held captive by the secret police in a distant third world country and my father is a freedom fighter who at this moment is taking a stand against oppression by occupying a corporate-controlled convenience store.*

STEPMOTHER:

Of course.

*First Daughter comes in dressed in a haphazard cold-weather outfit.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

All right, nobody mention that my parka doesn't match. This may be somebody's feeble attempt at humor, but I'm willing to let it go for now. Just give me some hot chocolate, please. Not the instant kind, either.

STEPMOTHER:

And her?

FIRST DAUGHTER:

With three marshmallows. The little ones, not the big ones—the ones that are colored! The pastel ones.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

She was orphaned at a young age; her father killed her mother as a joke, then was the victim of a bizarre gardening accident.

*Other Daughter has found a flame thrower, and now tests it.*

STEPMOTHER:

Suddenly it all makes perfect sense.

*First Daughter is at the door.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Good god, why is this happening to me?

SON (*to Other Daughter*):

Okay. *That's* it.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

It's positively tropical out there! And my tan's already faded!

*Without discarding the flame thrower, but grabbing all her other weapons, Other Daughter moves to the door. First Daughter starts removing her winter clothing.*

STEPMOTHER *(to Son)*:  
What happened?

SON:  
This manipulated the sun's refractive rays so that they were re-directed onto the rapidly forming ice-caps which, in effect, melted them to create a new coastline. Our house is now beachfront property.

*First Daughter is frantically looking through the wreckage.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
Has anyone seen my bronzer? It's not anywhere!

STEPMOTHER:  
You can't just do something like that!

SON:  
It's actually quite simple.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Would you rather have us frozen to death? They would've loved that.

*Doorbell rings.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
I'll get it.

*Official is at the door, which Other Daughter has again disarmed in the nick of time while juggling her own armaments.*

OFFICIAL:  
Mrs. Green, I'm J.L. Smears from the Department of Excess Household Metallurgy.

STEPMOTHER:  
That's not my name and, no, you're not.

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
Excuse me, I'm expecting a something on mail order. You're not blocking the drive, are you?

OFFICIAL:

I have a requisition for any service or decorative items (inclusive of all monetary units) used primarily for comfort purposes which contain aluminum, tin, steel, copper, mercury, cadmium or other hazardous metal particles contributing to the present atmospheric contamination level.

*Official quickly snatches weapons away from Other Daughter, then begins to place remaining pieces of appliances, etc. in boxes around house. Son is shielding his Invention.*

FIRST DAUGHTER (to Official):

If you come across my sun lamp, let me know.

STEPMOTHER:

I don't care what you have, but you're not getting anything else. Not from this house. Get out of here!

OFFICIAL:

Mrs. Green—

STEPMOTHER:

Stop calling me that!

OFFICIAL:

Please sign here.

*One by one, Official takes boxes out of the house. He easily removes Other Daughter's land mines, which give off quiet pops reminiscent of a toy cap gun when he does so. She watches from door, helpless.*

STEPMOTHER:

I'm not signing anything!

OFFICIAL:

I have to inform you that you're in direct violation of Section 23, code 19, sub-section 2.

STEPMOTHER:

Don't talk to me about violation; you leave us alone!

*Stepmother tries to stop Official from leaving with his latest load.*

Put that stuff back!

OTHER DAUGHTER (*at door looking outside, to Son*):  
You might want to come over here for a minute.

STEPMOTHER:  
Yes! Help me!

*Son and First Daughter rush to the door, but make no attempt to block Official from leaving. They look outside.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
My god, look at that surf! I'll need a cover up.

*First Daughter begins to search for one. Official leaves. Son and Daughter look at each other.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
I don't think covering anything up will do much good before too long, do you?

*Stepmother looks around the ravaged house.*

STEPMOTHER:  
What is going on?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*still at the door, looking outside*):  
Looks like a tidal wave to me.

SON:  
I can fix it.

*Son moves from the door to his Invention.*

STEPMOTHER:  
No! Yes! Fine! But here! Look at what's happening *here*!

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
What was the city that was swallowed up by the sea? Atlantis?

*Official has returned and is now gathering the last of the remaining items in the house which are put into one large, refrigerator-sized box.*

STEPMOTHER:  
Look what's happening to your house!

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
It really was an entire civilization, wasn't it?

*Official moves this last box, out from which comes First Daughter, dressed in black.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

I don't suppose it matters to anyone that I can't find anything, even though I take care of my possessions. I rarely use things twice, remember where I put them and I fold things neatly. I don't guess anyone really cares that I've got packages on back order that haven't been delivered and probably never will be and I've paid for those packages. With my Gold Card. And I don't think anyone has noticed that, not only am I inappropriately attired, but my shoes are navy, not black, I'm not wearing stockings and I don't have a hat.

*Official goes to leave with the box as Father arrives at the door.*

SON:

Father!

*Father looks at Son. Son is holding his Invention.*

Father . . .

OFFICIAL (to Father):

Please sign here.

*Father does; Official takes his last pen.*

This is just fine—thank you.

*Official gives receipt to Father.*

*(nodding, to Father and Stepmother) Mr. Green. Mrs. Green.*

STEPMOTHER:

I'm not . . .

*Official leaves.*

FIRST DAUGHTER:

So this is my surprise. He's arrived home early, empty handed.

SON:

Father . . . There's something you should know.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

There's nothing left for me.

*Son begins to move toward Father away from the Invention; Other Daughter steps towards him.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
What are you doing?

SON:  
I have to tell him.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Why?

SON:  
It's all my fault.

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
No presents.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
You can't.

SON:  
He needs to know!

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
What for? What's *he* going to do?

SON:  
I . . .

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
No incoming shipments.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
He'll hate you.

SON:  
What?

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
If you tell him he'll hate you.

FIRST DAUGHTER:  
No catalogues.

SON:

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

He'll hate you if he finds out.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

No toll-free numbers.

SON:

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

It was all your fault and they'll all hate you.

FIRST DAUGHTER:

No bonus give-aways.

SON:

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Yes!

FIRST DAUGHTER:

Nothing.

*A pause.*

SON:

What can I do?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Fix it.

*With a look to Father, Son returns to the Invention. Other Daughter follows him.*

*Father and Stepmother are, after a fashion, alone.*

STEPMOTHER:

Well, I might as well say it. Shouldn't you be at the Office?

FATHER:

I don't know.

STEPMOTHER:

What do you . . . ? *(stopping herself)* What do I mean? What am I doing? I've got to get out of here!

*She begins to leave.*

FATHER:

Don't leave.

*She is stopped short. She turns to Father.*

Please don't leave me.

STEPMOTHER:

I—!

FATHER:

I was on my way to the Office. I had been to the Office and I was going back to the Office and . . . all of the sudden I didn't know where I was going. I was standing there, outside of our house, or down the street or up the block . . . and I couldn't remember where I was going. The Office, of course, I go to the Office every day. But I didn't know where it was. The Office. I stood there. And I remembered that I had come home, had come home for lunch. But I didn't remember how to get to where I had come from.

I sat down. I just sat, right there, and as I sat I realized that not only did I not know where the Office was, I didn't remember what it was. Or why it was. Why it was I was going there. I realized that if I had gotten there I wouldn't have even known that I was there because I wouldn't recognize it, or remember me in it, and I wouldn't have known what to do there. I realized that I don't know what I do.

So I sat there. Doing nothing.

And then I came home.

*A loaded pause.*

STEPMOTHER:

I'll see what I can do about supper.

-end act II-

"The only hope for the survival of the species is for the human race is to abandon its aggression against the planet and seek to accommodate itself to the natural order."

Jeremy Rifkin, *ENTROPY: Into the Greenhouse World*

### ACT III. MULCH

*The stage is bare. There is an air of stillness in the house, almost as if everyone's holding their breath, afraid to move or speak or make a sound. Like in a funeral parlor. First Daughter is lying supine center stage, completely motionless. Father and Stepmother are at back in shadow or partially obscured. Son is with his Invention, which has grown immensely and is prominently visible. He is protectively holding it, perhaps a bit in awe of it, afraid to let it go; he is not tinkering with it. As if she's being watched, Other Daughter is performing what looks to be a macabre ritual with the disfigured bits she has collected in her knapsack.*

OTHER DAUGHTER (*daring to speak*):

It doesn't matter to me, you know. I'm ready to die. It's those that have attachments that have got something to lose.

SON (*under his breath*):

We're not going to die.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Like I said, I'm not really concerned one way or another. But our future doesn't look very bright right now, does it?

SON:

Stop saying that.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Of course we might have a small chance if someone were to make an effort to rectify their mistakes.

SON:

Mistakes!?

*She points to the Invention.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

That.

SON:

Stop it! The waves are gone.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

So is everything else.

SON:

You told me to!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I didn't tell you to put an end to life as we know it.

SON:

Be quiet! You don't really do anything around here. It's me!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Bringing us face to face with ultimate doom.

SON:

SSSHHH!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Are you afraid it's listening?

SON:

You know where we'd be right now without this?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Besides sitting on the edge of oblivion?

SON:

I hate you.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I don't care. I thrive on your hate. Your hate feeds me. I make a meal of your hate and I am nutritionally satisfied while I serve my sentence here on earth . . .

SON:

Shut up.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

. . . what's left of it.

SON:

I hate you.

*After a bit, Other Daughter looks out the door.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

They're out there, you know.

SON:  
Who?

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
*Them. Who else?*

SON:  
How can you tell? It's so dark.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
I can feel them. And I can smell them. And I can hear them. They're laughing at us.

SON:  
You can't hear anything.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
I can! And I can smell them. It's a smell like something that was in a fire and even though you wash it a million times there's still that smell because a part of it is burned away.

SON:  
There's no smell.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
And when I feel them the feeling goes through my body and makes my brain shiver and then it expands and then it shrinks and I wonder whether I am using it right. Whether I am using all of it. My brain is sort of magnified and I can see inside my head that it's all new and parts are never even used. Then, it fills up my head again and the shiver makes the ground move around me and then it's gone. They're there, all right.

SON:  
Who are they?

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
I don't know. But they're not going away.

*Son stares at his Invention. Other Daughter makes a move toward it and Son protects it.*

SON:  
Don't!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I hope the two of you are very happy.

SON:

I hate you.

*Stepmother turns, bringing life onstage. She is very pregnant. Father follows her.*

STEPMOTHER (*loudly and forcefully*):

I tell you, there is no food in this house. You'd better just go out there and hunt something down, because there's nothing left here.

FATHER:

I'm usually a meat and potatoes person, but I could go for a change.

STEPMOTHER:

Look, I'm hungry, too. As a matter of fact, I am ravenous, having developed an absolutely enormous appetite, strangely enough. But I can guarantee you, seeing as how I've just scoured every last inch of this house, that there's nothing even remotely edible!

FATHER:

Come to think of it, what did we have for lunch?

STEPMOTHER (*to Son*):

Talk to your father, will you?

SON:

What do you mean? About what?

STEPMOTHER:

About the fact that we can't pull food out of thin air!

SON:

The air isn't really thin. It's actually quite dense, if you think of it in terms of molecular structure.

STEPMOTHER (*to Other Daughter*):

Talk to your . . .

OTHER DAUGHTER:

He's not my—

STEPMOTHER:

AAAAAHHHH! What do I have to do to make you all realize that we are going to slowly starve to death if we don't get some goddamned food!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

If they don't get us first.

*Doorbell rings. Nobody makes a move toward it.*

STEPMOTHER:

If *who* doesn't get us first?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Since we seem to have pretty much surrendered.

*Doorbell rings again.*

STEPMOTHER:

What in the hell are you talking about?

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

How long would it take a body to starve to death?

SON:

That depends on a variety of factors: You'd have to consider when the last meal was . . .

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Then it might not be a slow death at all.

*Doorbell rings again.*

SON:

The availability of water and/or liquid . . .

FATHER:

Would it be rude to ask for a drink before dinner?

STEPMOTHER:

No, because we don't have anything *to* drink!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Consider that variable eliminated.

*Doorbell rings again.*

SON:

The size of the body mass . . .

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Stepmother*):

How much do you weigh?

STEPMOTHER (*holding her huge belly*):

Don't even start with me.

*Doorbell rings again.*

Why doesn't anyone . . .

*She goes to the door. Official is there.*

I should have guessed.

OFFICIAL:

Mrs. Green, I'm A.K. Spivels from the Department—

STEPMOTHER:

Who sent you this time? Why are you here?

OFFICIAL:

I have here a requisition—

STEPMOTHER:

For what? Just what do you think you're going to take from us?

*Official looks around. Son covers the Invention. Other Daughter has gathered up her gruesome collection into her knapsack which she hides. There is nothing else, except the body of First Daughter.*

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green?

FATHER:

Yes?

OFFICIAL:

Yes.

FATHER:

Yes. I . . . (*He looks to Stepmother*) I'm not at the Office anymore.

OFFICIAL:  
No?

FATHER:  
No.

OFFICIAL:  
No.

STEPMOTHER (*to Father*):  
No! (*to Official*) So tell me! Is there anything else we can help you with? Any forms that need to be signed? Perhaps you'd like to bring something with you next time, so that you won't have to leave empty-handed.

OFFICIAL:  
Fine.

STEPMOTHER:  
Until then!

OFFICIAL:  
Thank you.

STEPMOTHER:  
Anytime! It's really nothing.

*There is no receipt.*

OFFICIAL (*nodding*):  
Mrs. Green. Mr. Green.

*Official leaves; Other Daughter follows. Father moves to Stepmother*

FATHER:  
Where were we?

SON:  
And you have to make allowances for temperature, humidity, presence of other ecological forms and environmental conditions—

OTHER DAUGHTER (*at door*):  
Or lack thereof.

*They look at each other. Son looks at Father, then to his Invention.*

FATHER (*continuing, to Stepmother*):

They always seem to come at the most inopportune times. You handled that nicely, dear.

STEPMOTHER (*to Father*):

All right. But how much do you think I can handle around here?

FATHER:

Are you . . . angry?

STEPMOTHER:

I'm . . . I'm angry, I'm tired, I'm bloated, I'm cranky, I'm sore . . . and I'm hungry!

*Father puts his arms around Stepmother, who is on the verge of tears.*

FATHER:

Shhh. I know. I know you are.

STEPMOTHER:

You gotta' help me out here. I can't do this by myself!

FATHER:

You don't have to!

STEPMOTHER:

Then why couldn't you have done something before things got to this point?

FATHER:

Done something?

STEPMOTHER:

To stop them! You allowed this to happen and now, now I don't know what this family is . . .

*For the first time, Stepmother notices First Daughter.*

What is she doing on the floor?

*They all look at First Daughter. Stepmother steps away from Father.*

*(to Other Daughter and Son)* What is your sister doing?

*Stepmother moves to First Daughter.*

*(to First Daughter)* What are you doing down there?

*First Daughter does not answer.*

STEPMOTHER:

She's dead. *(to Father)* Your daughter is dead.

*Doorbell rings.*

*An expectant pause, as everyone looks at First Daughter.*

*Official bursts in the door.*

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green, I'm T.W. Smillians from the Department of Carcass Intervention. I have here a requisition for one mass of flesh, deceased, formerly female, relatively mercatorial appearance in pre-morbid state, weighing upwards of 100 lbs., before rigor mortis. Please sign here.

FATHER:

Oh. You must mean . . .

*He looks to First Daughter's body.*

OFFICIAL:

Yes! Thank you!

*He begins to take the body.*

STEPMOTHER:

No!

*Official looks to Son and Other Daughter for assistance; they move to help.*

*(to the children)* Get away from there. This is not going to happen. *(to Official)* Do you hear me?

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green.

STEPMOTHER *(to Father)*:

You're going to let them take your daughter?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

She wasn't really his—

STEPMOTHER:

I don't care who she wasn't; are you going to let them take your daughter?

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green? Please sign here.

FATHER:

I don't . . .

OFFICIAL:

If you don't have a ball point pen, any pen will do.

*Father is pen-less.*

STEPMOTHER:

You're going to give them your child?

FATHER:

But . . .

OFFICIAL:

Even a pencil would be fine.

STEPMOTHER:

You're going to leave me to do this by myself?

OFFICIAL:

On second thought, we have your signature on file.

*Official goes back to the body.*

STEPMOTHER:

Because I will.

*Father speaks loudly and clearly, without taking physical action.*

FATHER:

No.

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green?

FATHER:

I said no.

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green?!

FATHER:

Leave her.

OFFICIAL:

Mr. Green!!

FATHER:

You can't have her.

*A perfunctory pause.*

OFFICIAL:

This is . . . You realize what this means.

*Father doesn't respond.*

*Stepmother steps up beside him.*

STEPMOTHER

We realize.

OFFICIAL (*nodding to them*):

Mr. Green. Mrs. Green.

*Official leaves.*

STEPMOTHER (*to Father*):

Thank you.

*Father goes to the door and looks out; he turns back to the gaze of Stepmother, Other Daughter and Son, then moves to First Daughter's body.*

FATHER:

So.

Here we are.

And we should do something about this. (*to Stepmother*) Shouldn't we?

*Stepmother joins him by the body.*

STEPMOTHER:

We should.

FATHER:

Yes. I also think that . . . we should.

*A pause.*

After supper.

*Another pause, as Stepmother moves away.*

*Son makes a decision.*

SON:

Father.

*Father looks at Son. Son looks at Other Daughter, then at Father.*

I . . . Everything that's happened . .

FATHER:

Yes?

SON:

I mean, nothing's turned out the way it was supposed to have and . . .

FATHER:

Yes?

SON:

And . . . I'm not sure what . . .

STEPMOTHER:

Tell him!

SON:

Okay. It started with Mother. I mean, it didn't *start* with her, it's . . . It's my fault!

FATHER:

Yes?

SON:

She's . . . She's . . .

FATHER:

Son?

SON:

She's gone. She's really gone.

*Doorbell rings.*

FATHER:

I'll get it.

*Mother comes in the door, on a grand cart, or pushing an expansive dolly, or even riding a motorized nursery fork lift, with what appear to be a large number of gardening tools and supplies. Once established, she goes to where the body of First Daughter is lying.*

MOTHER:

My, doesn't she look lovely? So natural.

FATHER:

Hello, dear. We were just talking about you!

MOTHER:

You've done some very interesting things with the place, haven't you? Kind of a minimalist approach, but I think it works. It gives such a feeling of space, doesn't it?

*Mother starts unloading her equipment, depositing shovels, hoes, trowels, etc. noisily.*

STEPMOTHER (to Son):

I thought you said—

OTHER DAUGHTER:

You *did* say.

SON:

That couldn't be her! It's impossible.

*Mother returns to First Daughter's body, carrying a large, full bag.*

MOTHER:

I remember one time when I was a very little girl, I felt so lucky because I went with my father, all alone, to the market. Well, we didn't have much money for medicine then but I wanted a puppy so badly. And the thing was, the room that my little brother had to sleep in was actually bigger than mine! "Look here," my mother said to me, "We can't wait forever for you to make up your mind, can we?" And I knew that summer would soon be over and the next year I would be a senior in high school. And you know what that meant, because my bag, the one that I carried to services on Wednesday nights, wasn't brown at all! It was black. And everyone knew, in my town, that if you touched a black man on the very top of his head you would have good luck. So I learned about cooking and ironing, and I grew flowers in my garden and I waited. The train always came at the same time every day, only this day was special. It was at that moment my sisters and I looked at our future. He was dressed in an indigo blue. And whenever I go by the fish pond now and it's covered with ice, I remember that my grandfather broke open the ice one year to show me that the fish were alive and swimming, and I know they are happy. Even if there are only two socks left, and those two socks don't happen to match.

*She empties the contents of her bag over the body of First Daughter—it is straw.*

FATHER:

It's her, all right, and home in time for supper!

*Son looks at his Invention.*

SON:

There's no way she's here!

FATHER:

Do you want to sit down? Rest a bit after your travels?

*Mother retrieves another, weighty bag.*

FATHER:

Sweetheart, do you have any luggage?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Why would she have luggage?

MOTHER:

Which comes first? Columbus Day or Arbor Day?

SON:

She can't have luggage because she can't be here.

FATHER:

Of course she can be here! It's her home! And if I know your mother, she's brought back lovely souvenirs for us all!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I can't wait to see what those look like.

SON:

You never will because that's not her.

MOTHER:

I always try *to* work on Labor Day. Doesn't that make more sense?

*She empties the contents of the bag onto the body—soil or compost.*

FATHER:

Honey? We've been waiting supper for you, but we don't mind if you'd like to rest a bit before we start eating.

SON:

She doesn't need to rest because she doesn't exist.

MOTHER (*to First Daughter, spreading the earth over her body*):

On your very first Halloween we wheeled you about in a wagon, but were you a bear cub with no legs or a little legless cat?

FATHER:

Do you need to freshen up, dear?

SON:

She can't be here.

STEPMOTHER:

She's here.

SON:

It's impossible.

STEPMOTHER:

She is.

SON:

She's not.

STEPMOTHER:

She *is* and I'm . . . going.

SON:

No. You don't understand.

MOTHER:

And you got sent so many valentines and then got terribly sick from eating all the chocolate. What was that boy's name?

*The body is now entirely covered in a rich brown soil.*

FATHER:

Darling?

STEPMOTHER:

I don't want to understand. I don't have a chance in hell of understanding. I just want to leave.

SON:

You can't leave.

STEPMOTHER:

If she can, I can.

SON:

Please! Don't you see! It's . . . she was . . . she doesn't exist anymore!  
She can't!

MOTHER:

Perhaps it would have turned out differently if you weren't born on Christmas. But we always celebrated your half-birthday on June 25th, didn't we? With half of a cake and everything.

*Mother is planting flowers in the dirt around the body.*

FATHER:

Precious?

STEPMOTHER:

What I see is that she's back and you'll all live happily ever after.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

It's them, isn't it?

STEPMOTHER:  
What?

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
They've sent an agent, an imposter.

STEPMOTHER:  
What is it with you?!

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Am I right?

STEPMOTHER:  
What a homecoming. I'm glad I won't be around here on Mother's Day.

SON:  
No.

MOTHER:  
Wasn't it raining when you were baptized? Was that why I couldn't  
decide on a name?

*Perhaps Mother waters the new plants.*

*Father comes over to Stepmother and the children.*

FATHER:  
Children, listen to me. Your mother—

STEPMOTHER:  
She's not their . . . Never mind. She is and I'm not.

SON:  
No! You are!

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Don't tell me, no. The dark forces are capable of illusions so  
convincing you can't tell shadow from substance.

*Mother goes to get more plants, plants in pots, plants without, plants that are trees,  
plants that have fruit, big plants, small plants, seedlings.*

SON (*to other daughter*):  
I wasn't talking to you.

STEPMOTHER:

Your mother is home and I'm leaving.

SON:

No!

MOTHER:

Then there was your confirmation: I never was quite sure about that.

*Mother pulls a rather large plant from its pot, freeing its roots and then places it at the head of the garden covering First Daughter's body.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

A cyborg!

SON (*to Other Daughter*):

No.

FATHER (*to Stepmother*):

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

They've built a replica through cryonics.

SON (*to Other Daughter*):

You don't know anything.

STEPMOTHER (*to Father*):

Pretend that I never came. She'll take care of you just like she's always done.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*to Son*):

What?

FATHER (*to Stepmother*):

She's—

STEPMOTHER:

What?

SON (*to Other Daughter*):

It can't be done.

FATHER:

I must have done something.

STEPMOTHER *(to Father)*:

*Done something? When would that have been?*

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

Not with our technology, no! But they may have access to highly developed surgical procedures.

FATHER:

She won't speak to me.

STEPMOTHER:

Oh. To her.

*Stepmother looks at Mother, who is now breaking up a spot on the stage area with a hoe. As the dialogue continues, sometimes overlapping and building to a rapid-fire pace, she methodically continues planting in various spots around the stage.*

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

Dismembered limbs, chemically-cured tissue, flash-frozen viscera . . .

FATHER:

Or maybe it was something I said.

STEPMOTHER:

I doubt that.

SON *(to Other Daughter)*:

Shut up.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

That explains a lot—the effects of refrigeration on brain cells must be pretty gruesome.

SON:

Leave me alone.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

You'll have plenty of time to be alone when the rest of us are preserved forever in the wonderful world of cryogenics!!!

FATHER:

Then why did she leave?

SON *(to Father)*:

It was an accident.

FATHER:

Maybe it wasn't.

SON:

Father?!

STEPMOTHER:

*(to Son)* He didn't . . . *(to Father)* What do you mean?

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

You know what you have to do now.

SON:

No. I'm through with it.

*Definitively, Son separates himself from his Invention.*

FATHER:

It's because I'm not at the Office.

STEPMOTHER:

What is?

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

What is the matter with you?

SON:

Father!

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

You're going to let our house be taken over?!

*There are bushes, trees, flowers and greenery all around the stage.*

FATHER:

She left because I failed her.

SON *(to Father)*:

That's *not* Mother.

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:

It's them or us!

FATHER *(to Stepmother)*:

And I failed you.

STEPMOTHER *(to Father)*:  
I . . .

*Mother has a garden sprayer and is dousing the Invention; the seeds of hysteria are growing among the others.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Look! It's in their hands!

SON:  
I don't care. I hate it.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
What?!

FATHER *(to Stepmother)*:  
I failed everyone.

SON:  
I hate it! Father!

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:  
You're afraid of it.

SON:  
Father!

FATHER:  
All of you.

OTHER DAUGHTER *(to Son)*:  
You are! You're afraid of it when you should be afraid of them!

*Mother has a pair of pruning shears, and begins clipping off pieces of the Invention.*

SON:  
Father! It was me.

FATHER:  
Yes! What I was supposed to have done . . .

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
You fool! I knew this would happen!

SON *(to Father)*:  
It was *that*!

FATHER:

. . . whatever it was . . .

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I knew you would let me down!

FATHER:

I failed at it!

SON:

I'm sorry! Father!

FATHER:

Miserably!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

All of you!

SON:

Please! It was my fault!

FATHER:

So I didn't even do that well.

SON:

It should have worked!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

But I don't need you!

FATHER:

I can't even succeed at failing.

OTHER DAUGHTER (*looking around her*):

I don't need any of you!

SON:

Father, please! It—it's too late for me to do anything!

FATHER:

If only someone would have told me what I was failing at!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

I don't even know you!

FATHER:

Or how I was doing it, I could have done it correctly.

SON:

I can't fix it now!

OTHER DAUGHTER (*speaking to the house*):

What have you done with my family?

SON:

Help me!

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Who are these people?

FATHER:

There weren't any rules!

SON:

Father?

STEPMOTHER (*to Father*):

I'm sorry!

SON:

Father!

FATHER (*to Stepmother*):

What?

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Now it's just me.

SON:

Please!

STEPMOTHER (*to Father*):

This was a mistake. I'm sorry.

FATHER:

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

And that's the way it's always been.

SON:  
    Father . . .

STEPMOTHER:  
    I can't do this.

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
    Only me.

SON:  
    It was me!

FATHER:  
    No!

STEPMOTHER:  
    I don't know how.

FATHER:  
    No!!

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
    And I don't care!

FATHER:  
    No!!!

*Suddenly, Father grabs a hoe or shovel and smashes the Invention—breaking it apart completely. Large and small pieces are all over the stage. Mother is in the background.*

*A pause.*

STEPMOTHER *(breaking into tears)*:  
    Who is going to clean that up?

*Father bends down to pick up one of the bits of the Invention. He looks at it.*

FATHER:  
    I was thinking. That someone's birthday is coming up.

*He looks to Son.*

    We haven't celebrated a birthday in a long time.

*Father bends down for another bit of the Invention. Son watches him.*

FATHER:

And I love birthdays.

*He looks to Stepmother.*

There'll be cake of course. And ice cream. Maybe costumes. And balloons. I was thinking that I really enjoy blowing up balloons. We can fill the house with balloons.

*Father looks to Other Daughter.*

Wouldn't that be great? A house filled with balloons? From the floor to the ceiling? All colors and all sizes? So many balloons that the house seems like it's floating. A very little girl could hold onto the string of a balloon and reach the sky whenever she wanted to. Go all the way up and not even touch the ground. Wouldn't that be something?

*Other Daughter grabs her knapsack and holds it close to her. Son kneels down among the pieces of what was his Invention.*

And toys. It wouldn't be a party without toys. Lots of toys with lots of parts. With pages and pages of instructions.

*Father looks to Son who has moved closer to him.*

Although I was thinking that they'd be the kind of instructions that it really doesn't matter if you follow them, because you can always make something else. Another kind of toy, or something else entirely.

*He looks to Stepmother.*

There'll be lots of birthdays soon. I'm really looking forward to that, aren't you? It has been such a long time.

*Stepmother starts toward Father. Other Daughter, with her knapsack, rushes to block her.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:

We have to go.

*Stepmother doesn't answer. She looks for Father who, with Son and Mother, is now picking up the scattered pieces of the Invention.*

Quick! They'll destroy us. We have to hurry while we still can.

STEPMOTHER:  
You and I, we?

*Guided by Mother, Father and Son are burying pieces of the Invention around the stage.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Yes, we have to get out of here. I've got everything we need! It's our only chance. We can—

STEPMOTHER:  
No. Wait a minute.

*Other Daughter gives the knapsack to Stepmother.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Here! There's no time! I know what I'm talking about; it's going to get darker and darker. Darker and deeper than anything you can imagine. So dark you can't feel your own skin so you don't know where you stop or if you begin. So deep you can't tell if there's any end or whether you'll know if you get there. Please! Don't make me go alone!

STEPMOTHER:  
You're not alone! We're all—

*She indicates Father, Son and Mother who are incorporating large pieces of the Invention into the garden over First Daughter's body.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
No!

STEPMOTHER:  
What are you afraid of?

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Them!

STEPMOTHER:  
No.

*Other Daughter is frantically trying to get herself and Stepmother to the door.*

OTHER DAUGHTER:  
Now!

STEPMOTHER:

There is no them, it's just us.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

You're wrong!

*Doorbell rings. Other Daughter backs away from the door.*

Don't answer that! They're here!

*Other Daughter looks back at the family.*

They've got us surrounded . . . *(she smells the air)* They're everywhere!

STEPMOTHER:

No.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

They are! I can see inside my brain!

*Stepmother goes to the door.*

Don't!

*Stepmother opens the door. There is no one there.*

*An empty pause.*

STEPMOTHER:

It's getting light out.

*Other Daughter slowly moves to the door and looks out. Father and Son are busy planting bits of the Invention around the stage. Stepmother, holding Other Daughter's knapsack, goes to Mother, who also has moved away from garden which once was First Daughter's body.*

STEPMOTHER:

I'm not leaving, you know.

MOTHER:

No, of course not. The azaleas aren't even in bloom yet.

STEPMOTHER:

I . . . I belong here.

MOTHER:

Yes. You do.

STEPMOTHER:

I do.

MOTHER:

Certainly. Things are much nicer now, don't you think?

STEPMOTHER:

I . . . yes.

MOTHER:

Well then!

STEPMOTHER:

But . . .

MOTHER:

Do you suppose we ought to re-pot the geraniums? They're doing beautifully, but one never knows how much room the roots need, does one?

STEPMOTHER:

I don't . . .

MOTHER:

And we've got bulbs from the winter, as well. It's just about that time, isn't it?

STEPMOTHER:

Are you . . . You can stay, can't you?

MOTHER:

Oh, yes. I wouldn't miss the snap dragons for anything.

*Mother takes Other Daughter's knapsack from Stepmother. She goes back to the main garden and empties the knapsack over it and the pieces of the Invention now a part of it. The knapsack contains a fine sand, perhaps with small reflective chips not unlike some fertilizers.*

MOTHER:

After all, it really takes a group of us to overturn the sod properly. And then there's always the chance that we'll find fresh mint just where we least expected it. Isn't it a lovely thing when you aren't waiting for something to grow and then there it is, under your window. The window is in the corner of the room—really in the corner, because it's on two walls; on both angles. Or it might be that there are two windows, and they both open up to the outside so you can put your bed in the corner and it's the scent that comes first. An outside smell, before you even see anything when you wake up. Sometimes nasturtiums are like that. And when you place them on your tongue they are sweet. Almost like cinnamon toast.

OTHER DAUGHTER:

Mother.

*And she moves in from the door.*

SON:

It's her.

*And he moves toward Mother.*

FATHER:

She's here.

*And he moves beside Stepmother.*

STEPMOTHER:

She . . . is.

*They all stare at Mother as she leans down and reaches deep inside the earth of First Daughter's garden. She lifts out a large loaf of bread.*

MOTHER:

So! What about breakfast!? Who's hungry?

*They each take bread. Mother looks to Son, who opens up a piece of the garden-Invention and hands her a coffee pot.*

Coffee?

*A suspended pause.*

-end act III-