

DIX

by Janice Moore Fuller

Characters

OLDER NURSE

YOUNG NURSE

PATIENT A

Makes sounds with body parts and voice as chorus to action. Never speaks English words. Her story is told through ventriloquism. OLDER NURSE speaks the words when PATIENT A sits in her lap like a ventriloquist dummy and moves her mouth.

PATIENT B

Paints herself, other patients, and the set throughout the play. Speaks the names of paint colors and eventually tells her own story.

PATIENT C

Tells her own story and repeats the routine of locking doors and dancing the Charleston. She also assumes the roles of various other patients.

SOCK PUPPET

Played by OLDER NURSE's hand. Speech provided by a male voice-over.

Setting

The women's ward of Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Hospital. A bare stage with an arched gateway in the middle, often lit by an arch of light.

(Dark stage with sounds of muttering from PATIENTS. PATIENTS A and B mutter key phrases from the play, like “I wanted to see the light,” “a wiff of air,” “They love men who drive them crazy,” “Are you a patient?” “You are so strong. Just like my mother,” “I don’t like bathroom water,” “Who are all these people?” Also body sounds from PATIENT A (who never speaks words) and names of paint colors from PATIENT B. Lights up on arch and lights up slightly on rest of stage revealing random movement by PATIENTS with PATIENT C sometimes doing the Charleston as described later. This “chaos” continues off and on throughout the play, becoming more pronounced at times, more subdued at others, stopping completely when it seems appropriate. YOUNG NURSE enters and approaches front of arch. Puts hand into arch of light. Extends index finger as if to push a giant door bell. Sound of door bell ringing. Instantly, the chaos suspends itself. Patients half-turn and half-watch the arch. OLDER NURSE approaches from behind arch, enters light but only partially.)

OLDER NURSE

(to audience)

I decided to become a missionary on the Fourth of July at our family picnic.

(takes out sock puppet and puts it on as if it’s a glove as she is speaking)

I looked around and thought, “Who are all these people? I don’t think anybody is kin to me and yet it is supposed to be one big happy family. If I stay here long enough, I’ll get to look like them.” But the last night at the tent meeting the preacher said,

SOCK PUPPET

You are here for God’s purpose. Look in my eyes.

(OLDER NURSE turns head to look in SOCK PUPPET’s eyes.)

SOCK PUPPET

Can’t you see the light in my body?

OLDER NURSE

(to audience)

I wanted to see the light in my eyes and have my whole body light up, too, but I didn’t tell anybody except my doll.

(strokes sock puppet with left hand and holds it close to her)

Sometimes I'd practice lighting up with her and sing, "Brighten the Corner Where You Are."

(PATIENT A makes an O with mouth and thumps the tune to the song on her cheek.)

OLDER NURSE

I felt like asking everyone, "Can you see the light in my body?" I thought, "Someone else is living in me and using my name." I learned how to laugh at my broken lamp.

(looks up at arch of light, standing half in it, half out of it.

Pause. Notices YOUNG NURSE. To YOUNG NURSE)

Hello. . . . Dorothea Dix Hospital was founded in 1848 by. . . by. . .

(sarcastically)

Dorothea Dix. Her husband left after she refused to abandon her work and pay attention to him. Welcome.

(OLDER NURSE holds out puppet sock hand for YOUNG NURSE to shake. YOUNG NURSE reaches to shake but stops with hand almost touching OLDER NURSE's hand and then looks back and forth between the two hands. At the beginning of the play, the YOUNG NURSE will present herself as extremely prim, official, rigid, resistant to and somewhat fearful of the chaos around her. This posture should be strong enough that it will be noticeable will she begins to lose her poise and sense of control.)

OLDER NURSE

Come in.

YOUNG NURSE

In?

OLDER NURSE

Yes. Come in.

(Gradually the chaos from the beginning resumes and increases until the YOUNG NURSE is forced to acknowledge it.)

YOUNG NURSE

(looking around, puzzled)

What is this? What is all this?

SOCK PUPPET

(in announcer's voice)

MORNING ROUNDS

(Chaos stops abruptly. In the following scene, as each letter in the list is named, the letter is projected onto the backs of the patients who cluster together forming almost a movie screen. OLDER NURSE and YOUNG NURSE move around in a circle as OLDER NURSE points out imaginary patients. OLDER NURSE shows sympathy. YOUNG NURSE remains detached, resolutely professional.)

OLDER NURSE

Mrs. A touches the wall in spite of WET PAINT signs.

(Letter A appears on backs of patients lined up together.)

YOUNG NURSE

(writing on pad)

A

(She pauses to write.)

Next patient?

OLDER NURSE

Mrs. B walks the halls looking for a bus stop. Mrs. C points to Mrs. D who is soiled and has no shoes.

YOUNG NURSE

(writing on pad)

B . . . C . . . D

(looking up)

Next patient?

OLDER NURSE

Mrs. E is in bed with Mrs. F. Mrs. G goes through the motion of sewing her red apron.

YOUNG NURSE

(impatiently as she writes)

E F G. Next? Next?

OLDER NURSE

(faster, running sentences together)

The family will not come for Mrs. H until the doctor writes them a letter. Before *I* went to bed last night, *I* put a leg of lamb in the oven. Mrs. J wants to help clean and dips a mop

in the commode. Mrs. K eats a bunch of violets that the baldheaded woman, Mrs. L, picked at the back door. Mrs. M is frightened if anyone touches or talks to her. Mrs. N crawls on the floor. Otha the blind woman curses because she doesn't know what happened to her money when she took a shower. Mrs. P is in the courtyard eating grass like Nebuchadnezzar.

(OLDER NURSE stops and takes a big gasping breath.)

YOUNG NURSE

H I J K LMNOP. Next? next? next?

OLDER NURSE

(very slowly)

The Police Chief calls to tell that Mrs. Q escaped to the Station to get a

(dragging out words in bizarre fashion)

laxative and he asks me to make sure she gets one tonight.

(back to "normal" speed and smiling)

At mail time Mrs. R got a new dress printed with pink and yellow eggs.

(without smiling)

Mrs. S is licking Mrs. T's spit cup.

YOUNG NURSE

(professionally with pencil poised)

Next?

OLDER NURSE

(somewhat defiantly)

I join Mrs. U, V, and W on the merry-go-round. It's the worst drunk I ever had. Mrs. X and Mrs. Y ripple water in a plastic bucket with sticks.

(pause)

Mrs. Z sidles into the swing next to me and says,

PATIENT C

(turning head mechanically toward OLDER NURSE and speaking longingly)

You are so strong

Just like my mother.

YOUNG NURSE

(staring blankly at OLDER NURSE for a second, then cocking head sideways]

Next patient,

(pause)

please.

OLDER NURSE

The Woman from the Lumbee Tribe

YOUNG NURSE

(writing in notebook)

Lumbee Woman

(PATIENT C becomes Lumbee Woman She mimes the following actions as OLDER NURSE describes her.)

OLDER NURSE

The Indian woman sits in her chair. She rips her petticoat, winds the unraveled threads into a ball and begins to crochet with a broomstraw. She likes to turn pages in a book but we can't keep anything to read. It gets torn to pieces to eat or, if it's the Bible, to make cigarettes.

(LUMBEE WOMAN mimes rolling a cigarette, lighting it, and smoking it. Smokes for a short while.)

OLDER NURSE

Sometimes I move a chair to sit close to her

(Walks slowly toward the LUMBEE WOMAN, dragging her chair and making a scraping sound.)

but she runs to check all the doors to see if one has been left unlocked.

(LUMBEE WOMAN mimes moving to different parts of the stage checking locks. Suddenly, she stops. Freezes for a moment. Then begins to dance the Charleston in slow motion, barely nudging the floor with one toe to keep turning around and around until she has moved herself in a complete circle.)

YOUNG NURSE

(staring at LUMBEE WOMAN, after she has finished turning in her dance, in silence for a long time before speaking. Writing in notebook slowly as if having trouble spelling.)

Lumbee woman.

(silence, staring at OLDER NURSE)

Who is the next patient? Let's move on.

OLDER NURSE

(sitting down in chair)

Move your chair on over here. It's break time.

YOUNG NURSE

(hesitantly moving her chair, as if nervous about what OLDER NURSE might subject her to)

Break time?

SOCK PUPPET

(in announcer's voice)

BREAK TIME

(YOUNG NURSE sits with her chair beside OLDER NURSE's chair but slightly angled away. OLDER NURSE mimes taking notebook from YOUNG NURSE and tearing a page out of it. YOUNG NURSE looks on, horrified. OLDER NURSE mimes rolling a cigarette, lighting it, and smoking it.)

OLDER NURSE

I smoke so I won't grind my teeth so bad.

(pause)

My grandpa had a grindstone to grind axes. Sometimes he sang an old hymn, "I Will Not Be Denied," to Grandma. Grandma was easy to take offense. They slept in a featherbed. When he sharpened his razor on the leather strop, it hit the window frame and sounded like hands clapping. He whittled flutes out of cane and whistled on a blade of grass.

YOUNG NURSE

I don't know how to whistle.

OLDER NURSE

You better learn. Sugar cane is cut slanted like a whistle. Time talks with bells and whistles. Bells for getting up and going to bed. The cotton mill has the last word of the day with a toot. The bell at the penitentiary is a good bell but it has a dead ring. On the morning of an execution, all gongs sound ominous. Mill whistles raise hell for changing shifts and the asylum whistle screeches.

(Through preceding monologue PATIENT A makes sounds, whistles, half screeches. At the end of the monologue, YOUNG NURSE tries, unsuccessfully, to whistle.)

OLDER NURSE

Simon's orphanage bell rang first as if the bell ringer beat.

YOUNG NURSE

Simon? Who's Simon? Where's my notebook?

OLDER NURSE

Not a patient. My husband. Simon's not here. He's *been* gone.

(YOUNG NURSE finds notebook, erases in it.)

YOUNG NURSE

No Simon.

OLDER NURSE

He was my poor little boy. He didn't have any toys to play with so I brought him all my toys to see. He grabbed and broke them up. We played spin the bottle even though it wasn't empty.

SOCK PUPPET

You are my baby. My honeysuckle girl.

OLDER NURSE

There was something between us. The wind in the pines, the first breath of spring, vanilla in the pound cake.

YOUNG NURSE

I love vanilla.

OLDER NURSE

My skin can't forget the tweed of his new brown suit or the whip he cracked when I begged to be spared because there was too much bed and it wasn't safe in the attic. He didn't want his hotel help to start complaining.

SOCK PUPPET

You fried the wrong egg. . . . My milk isn't in the right glass.

OLDER NURSE

(addressing the SOCK PUPPET)

Sorry.

(addressing YOUNG NURSE)

August hurricaned through cornstalks in grape time, huffing and puffing. Hay dinged the floor.

SOCK PUPPET

Where's my coffee from the far away monkey countries?

OLDER NURSE

(to SOCK PUPPET)

I have to go throw some biddy feed to my Bob Whites.

SOCK PUPPET

Get back here. Sing me the sock song.

OLDER NURSE

Simon's socks were open air. He couldn't match up the holes. The laundry guarandamnteed to pull off his shirt buttons and shoot them through his socks.

(to SOCK PUPPET in a singsong voice)

Tie your mates together. Run scarlet through each pair. Wash them in the shower, two by two. Unravel them for birds. Unravel them for nests. Wash them in the shower. They'll all end up the same. Paint them with a paintbrush. Paint them with a paintbrush. Throw them all away.

PATIENT B

(miming painting her feet.)

Ivory Black. Black, black, and more black

OLDER NURSE

(still singsong)

Sew the holes together. The biggest hole in the world.

(speaking in an instructive voice rather than singing)

Marry a girl who turns socks inside out before washing, to keep them lint free.

YOUNG NURSE

(remembering. During the "sock song" memories seem to have been coming to her.)

It wasn't the way my husband pressed my face deep into the mattress or the way his thighs blocked all escape. No, it was the way crowds of golf shirts slouched in closet shadows, the way the gray crawled from under the arms of t-shirts onto fresh white sheets, the way lint balls from black socks gathered in sullen patterns on the floor.

OLDER NURSE

Your *husband*?

YOUNG NURSE

(finding her notebook and referring to it)

I mean your husband. I wrote down *your* husband.

OLDER NURSE

Sometimes Simon's china doll would show.

(strokes sock like it's a doll)

With any luck he'd talk himself out of it. He'd peter out without having to knock me down. Sometimes all you could see were my ears sitting on the couch. The rest of me was so flat it could be dropped in a mail slot.

(pause)

Early on, he'd been so clobbered he couldn't come straight to the point. Somewhere or other he bought a bag labeled,

SOCK PUPPET

I'M NO GOOD.

OLDER NURSE

He kept building up the store.

YOUNG NURSE

(mumbling and writing in notebook)

He's no good.

OLDER NURSE

Simon thinks some of us write lines that slander him.

SOCK PUPPET

My name ain't Simon. Here's my dick to prove it.

OLDER NURSE

He's a modest man. He has a lot to be modest about.

(pause)

The storm would all blow over when I was back in his pasture to kiss in the waves, fuck in the frogs, and fix old lace cornbread.

(pause)

Simon liked it when I'd dress in my hair.

SOCK PUPPET

That's the prettiest dress you ever wore.

OLDER NURSE

He'd play the blues on my bones. His easy riding made ragtime of red satin hours curled into spoons. Eyes half closed, we'd listen to records from the rummage sale on a windup victrola.

YOUNG NURSE

My daddy would teach me the ballroom steps in private, in the basement—the waltz, the tango, and my favorite, the cha cha. The stereo mounted on the wall lowered its turntable like a tongue lapping up the mildew. I'd step onto his shoes with my bare feet—the leather tassles like the sharp pebbles in the driveway. His feet would rehearse mine through the steps of the rhumba or the foxtrot—slowly at first, then faster.

(moving through some of the dance steps as PATIENT A makes rhythmical sounds with various body parts)

When we were ready to begin, Daddy would slip the black disk from its flimsy dress and set it spinning, its groove vanishing as if smoothed away. He would hold the needle between his third and fourth fingers—fingers still darkened from train parts, derricks, spark plugs. He'd dip it so slow down to the edge of the black spinner, I would wonder if it was even moving. Silence, then the crackle of the speaker. He would turn, offer his

hand, the album cover still in his hand like a brakeman's lantern. And I would step on board. Then the room would begin to turn.

(After monologue, YOUNG NURSE continues dancing various dance steps with PATIENT A making all kinds of bizarre musical sounds. YOUNG NURSE ends up doing the Charleston like PATIENT C, finally moving around and around in a circle. This continues until YOUNG NURSE comes back to herself, stops dancing, and looks around self-consciously.)

YOUNG NURSE

(professionally)

Break time's over. Time to continue making the rounds.

(PATIENT A continues making musical sounds with various parts of her body.)

YOUNG NURSE

(to PATIENT A, professionally poised to write in notebook)

Who are you? What happened to you?

(PATIENT A moves her mouth as if to speak. YOUNG NURSE strains toward her, listening. PATIENT A keeps moving her mouth with no sound coming out. OLDER NURSE pets PATIENT A, lifts her up, puts her on her lap, straightens her hair and clothes.)

YOUNG NURSE

(to PATIENT A)

What happened to you?

(OLDER NURSE cranks imaginary crank at hinge of PATIENT A's jaw. OLDER NURSE speaks like a ventriloquist trying not to move her mouth. PATIENT A moves her mouth but makes no sound.)

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

I was damaged by my father's finger.

(PATIENT A holds index finger up into the light and looks at it. Then she playfully flicks finger against her lower lip, making the "bubbabubbabubba" sound young children make. Then she inserts index finger inside her mouth and

pops it against the inside of her cheek, making the bottle popping sound children make. She laughs. Then she begins to experiment more sensually with putting the finger in her mouth and repeats the bottle popping in a sensual way. While the finger moves sensuously, PATIENT A herself looks slightly alarmed as if finger has an independent will.)

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

I swore to keep my tongue held behind my teeth until I left home.

(PATIENT A rolls r's, then puts her palm to her mouth to stop it. She repeats this process several times in a playful, mischievous way. OLDER NURSE puts her own ungloved index finger to her lips to signal "Shhh." PATIENT A makes "Shhh" sound again and again until it starts to sound like an ocean.)

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

But I didn't have a place to go. . . . I was in the yard when a man came by.

SOCK PUPPET

Honey, you can be my doll.

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

(to SOCK PUPPET)

I don't want to be.

SOCK PUPPET

Honey, you better take me while I'll have you.

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

When he dumped me on the road, I tried to flush the finger out with a needle.

(PATIENT A mimes testing a hypodermic needle with her hand. Then she smacks the inside of her arm with her index and third finger as if preparing to raise a vein and give herself an injection. She repeats the smacking until it starts to become a drum rhythm. She continues the drumming during the next lines.)

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

I tried to slash my wrist with a dirty razor. I wanted to bleed like an open fire hydrant in the house of a grave digger. . .

(OLDER NURSE stops PATIENT A from drumming on her arm. PATIENT A stares at her own hand as if she's just noticed something.)

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

(smiling, surprised)

Somebody tattooed I LOVE YOU on my knuckles.

(After staring at her knuckles for a second, PATIENT A starts playing imaginary black keys of a piano with her knuckles in the familiar piano game: knuckles rolling across the three black keys, side of hand tapping C sharp above twice, then knuckles rolling down the three black keys, side of hand tapping D sharp below twice. As she does this, PATIENT A imitates the sound of a tinny piano playing these notes.)

OLDER NURSE FOR PATIENT A

(PATIENT A looking down at breasts and smiling with mock surprise)

Somebody tattooed SWEET and SOUR on my breasts.

(PATIENT B comes over and starts to paint one of PATIENT A's breasts around the outside, circling it again and again. PATIENT A smiles.)

PATIENT B

(while painting)

Rose Madder. . . . Davy's Gray. . . . Flesh.

(PATIENT B paints PATIENT A's other breast in the same way. PATIENT B tries to start painting OLDER NURSE's breast. OLDER NURSE stops PATIENT B's hand. She smiles but gently shakes her head no.)

OLDER NURSE

Break time's over.

YOUNG NURSE

(mesmerized by the painting)

But. . .

OLDER NURSE

(lifting PATIENT A off her lap)

Break time's over. It's the rule.

YOUNG NURSE

Rule? What rule?

OLDER NURSE

(somewhat sternly)

It's your job to enforce the rules.

SOCK PUPPET

(in announcer's voice)

THE ADMINISTRATOR POSTS NEW RULES ON THE BULLETIN BOARD

SOCK PUPPET

ONE

OLDER NURSE

Do not spit chewing tobacco on the floor.

(Patients make their backs a screen. Projected onto the backs of patients: the numeral "1" and the words "Not spit." For each rule, YOUNG NURSE writes rule in notebook and mumbles it to herself.)

SOCK PUPPET

TWO

OLDER NURSE

Do not wet on the floor.

(Projected onto the backs: "2" and "Not wet.")

SOCK PUPPET

THREE

OLDER NURSE

Find ashtrays and put cigarettes out.

(Projected onto backs: "3" and "Cigarettes out.")

SOCK PUPPET

FOUR

OLDER NURSE

Do not go into other people's rooms.

(Projected onto backs: "4" and "Not rooms.")

SOCK PUPPET

FIVE

OLDER NURSE

Use table manners. Don't fluff in the dining room.

(Projected: "5" and "Don't fluff.")

SOCK PUPPET

SIX

OLDER NURSE

Don't be a nuisance at times.

(Projected: "6" and "No nuisance.")

SOCK PUPPET

SEVEN

OLDER NURSE

Be kind towards others.

(Projected: "7" and "Kind towards.")

SOCK PUPPET

EIGHT

OLDER NURSE

Help older patients that can't help themselves.

(Projected: "8" and "Help older.")

SOCK PUPPET

NINE

OLDER NURSE

Don't stop up the bowls or commodes.

(Projected: "9" and "Don't stop.")

SOCK PUPPET

TEN

OLDER NURSE

Wash your face and hands before meals.

(Projected: “10” and “Your hands.”)

SOCK PUPPET

ELEVEN

OLDER NURSE

Keep your nose out of other people’s business.

(Projected: “11” and “Nose out.”)

(Long silence.)

YOUNG NURSE

Eleven. . . Eleven. . . Where’s twelve?

(Long silence.)

Where’s twelve? Where’s twelve?

PATIENT C

(shouting)

My God! We’ve already got THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. Now we’ve got eleven more. I wish God had given Moses suggestions instead of commandments.

YOUNG NURSE

(quietly, to herself)

Eleven. That’s enough. Be kind toward others. Kind.

(pause, then in normal, official voice)

Could I meet the other patients?

OLDER NURSE

This is Maude.

(PATIENT C becomes Maude.)

YOUNG NURSE

Maude.

(writing in her notebook)

Hello, Maude.

MAUDE

They are a whiff of air.

(Wind and whistling sounds from PATIENT A)

OLDER NURSE

She hears them.

MAUDE

I know who they are. . . . but it's a secret.

OLDER NURSE

They control what she does from the sky, the radio, television. Last month they said,

SOCK PUPPET

Put your head under hot water.

OLDER NURSE

Another time,

SOCK PUPPET

Pull the piano over on yourself.

YOUNG NURSE

I always loved Joan of Arc. Jean d'Arc. She was my favorite.

OLDER NURSE

Sometimes they say,

PATIENT A

(sounding like a frog in the Tagalog language)

kokak! kokak!

(sounding like a rooster in Tagalog)

taktalaok! taktalaok!

OLDER NURSE

Or. . .

SOCK PUPPET

God's gonna start working wonders. You can read about it in Judges. Some heads are gonna hit the floor. Gimme a dime.

OLDER NURSE

They put pictures up in the building. Sometimes they throw them at her face.

(A light is projected toward MAUDE. It casts a shadow on PATIENT B standing behind her. PATIENT B begins to paint around the shadow, tracing the shape of MAUDE's gown.)

PATIENT B

Thalo green.

MAUDE

One just spoke.

(PATIENT A makes violin sound with her hair.)

MAUDE

They flash a light on in my head.

(to YOUNG NURSE)

Do you see the picture inside?

(YOUNG NURSE nods her head. PATIENT B continues to paint. PATIENT A's violin sound using her hair becomes pizzicato.)

YOUNG NURSE

(to herself)

Eleven: Keep your nose out of. . .

(YOUNG NURSE touches her own nose.)

MAUDE

(to YOUNG NURSE)

Do you hear them?

(pause)

Listen here by my head.

(YOUNG NURSE listens by MAUDE's ear. Shakes her head no.)

MAUDE

They threw their voices to the other side.

(YOUNG NURSE moves and listens at MAUDE's other ear. Shakes her head.)

OLDER NURSE

Last night it took six people to rip off the sheet she knotted around her throat to hang at the foot of her bed.

MAUDE

It's hard to know what's spirit and what's skeleton.

(long silence while YOUNG NURSE looks stunned)

OLDER NURSE

Why don't I show you the Dayroom?

YOUNG NURSE

(hesitantly)

Okay. . . . It's daytime. . . isn't it?

OLDER NURSE

There's a squabble over which rocker is whose. Every time anyone sits down to watch tv, somebody changes the station. The commodes are stopped up again with towels and hair rollers. Yesterday it was sheets. There is no soap and the toilet paper is splashed with feces or snuff. You can't tell the difference.

YOUNG NURSE

(mumbling and writing in notebook)

Snuff.

(PATIENT C becomes GRACE)

GRACE

(almost yelling, as with all her lines)

I'm writing Uncle Sam.

OLDER NURSE

Meet Grace.

GRACE

I'm going tell him I don't intend to stay here without coffee, cigarettes, and someone to love.

YOUNG NURSE

(writing in notebook)

Grace. Wants coffee.

GRACE

This is my very first time in this particular shit house. There ain't nothing yet invented to take the stink out of shit.

OLDER NURSE

When she worked in a cafe the boss came out and told her,

SOCK PUPPET

Quit frowning at the customers.

GRACE
(to SOCK PUPPET)

The ice cream's hard to dip.

OLDER NURSE
So she went to the FBI to locate the rogue who stole her man.

GRACE
Having babies was no picnic but neither is the change of life. It must be that or Jesus is going to have a little sister.

(pause)

Look what it's got me. I'm here with nuts who've stayed so long they're afraid of men. I love men and I love the good old USA. Where is the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force?

OLDER NURSE
(to GRACE)
All women are crazy. Don't you remember? They love men who drive them crazy.

GRACE
(to OLDER NURSE)
My corns are killing me, but I never made a living locking up sane people, while idiots like you go free.

(pause)

What comes after two cigarettes in the dark?

OLDER NURSE
Two butts in the grass.
(to YOUNGER NURSE)

I've heard them all.

GRACE
When I get out of here, I'm gonna go to Charm School. I was gonna be on TV but somebody stole my black lace panties. . . . I hope my doctor's wife dies. I intend to marry him if it means doing a hitch in hell.

YOUNGER NURSE
(writing in notebook)
Charm school.

GRACE
I'll play it real cool with ice blue secret deodorant. I want to honky-tonk with him, drink a little gin and orange juice, dance cheek to cheek.

(pause while GRACE mimes dancing)

Please excuse me, ladies, if I fart. God didn't intend men and women to live apart.

YOUNGER NURSE

Do not spit chewing tobacco on the floor. Wash your face and hands before meals.

GRACE

(in YOUNG NURSE's face)

I can't live with the scum of the earth. There must be more to life than living in this jailhouse being ordered around by a walking Rule Book in starched whites with jangling keys.

YOUNG NURSE

I didn't mean to. . .

GRACE

Go pop your tail on elector-shock. I said it. I don't stutter.

OLDER NURSE

(to GRACE)

Soon there will be robots to take care of you.

(pulling YOUNG NURSE away and seating the two of them in chairs)

Let's sit down here for a minute.

YOUNG NURSE

(a little alarmed)

What is it? Another break?

OLDER NURSE

A short one. If my supervisor comes by, we'll tell her we're stringing paper clips before we file our incident report.

(OLDER NURSE and YOUNG NURSE sit silent for a while, the chaos going on in the background.)

OLDER NURSE

Listen.

(PATIENT A makes haunted sounds.)

OLDER NURSE

Is there any love floating around?

YOUNG NURSE

Love?

OLDER NURSE

Theme and variation in an uncertain key?

YOUNG NURSE

(listening, then shaking her head.)

I don't hear it.

OLDER NURSE

Do you dream?

YOUNG NURSE

I think I just walk.

OLDER NURSE

Last night I dreamed somebody was crying but I couldn't find them. A minor triad spilling over the formica counter in waves. Then I was a little girl standing on tiptoe, peeking through a keyhole trying to see my father. He made sausage with his own hands and took it to my mother to smell. As he fed her, she brushed her hair.

YOUNG NURSE

Sausage always makes me thirsty.

OLDER NURSE

Then I had another dream.

YOUNG NURSE

Two dreams? In one night?

OLDER NURSE

I was running after a car that turned into a train with a special berth for me to take me to a funeral. The berth was a booth that slid out of the wall with food on it. I was eating egg custard pie that slipped out of my hands.

YOUNG NURSE

Custard pie. . .

OLDER NURSE

At onedamnthirty I woke up, only to go back to sleep and start where I left off.

(pause)

I've heard dreams are sexy. . . . It could mean marriage, or maybe I'm going to fuck around a graveyard.

YOUNG NURSE

A graveyard. . . . The house of a gravedigger. . . .

OLDER NURSE

You don't have dreams?

YOUNG NURSE

I sleep walk.

(pause)

When we lived on Cleburne Street, Daddy'd bring up water in the night in a Dixie cup. I'd say, *I don't like bathroom water.* He'd laugh.

SOCK PUPPET

No one can tell the difference. . . . Anyway, it's kitchen water.

YOUNG NURSE

But I knew. He'd fake taking the cup downstairs to refill it, stepping in place outside my door. But the stairs didn't groan like when he tiptoed up. I'd cry and say, "I'm not thirsty. I don't like bathroom water."

(pause)

Then I'd sleepwalk. I'd slip out into the boxy hall and down the stairs like a musty smell. Once I woke up ankle deep in wet grass beside the dog house that had no dog. Once I squatted over a chair and peed and peed until it soaked the upholstery and trickled onto the floor.

OLDER NURSE

I don't like bathroom water either.

YOUNG NURSE

One time I wedged myself behind the den door. Nobody knows how long it took Mama to wake up from the sound of something bumping and follow it through the dark to me. In that time, I dreamed. . .

OLDER NURSE

I thought you didn't dream.

YOUNG NURSE

I guess this time I did. While I was waiting, I must have dreamed I was a moth trapped between a padlocked door and a screen. In the dream Mama punched through the mesh with a broom stick—one hole, two, three—a pumpkin nose then two eyes or a belly button and two breasts. Mama poked again and barely missed. But she couldn't pull me out. I put my eye to the breast hole. The nightlight barely flickered.

(During preceding speech, PATIENT B paints her own nose, eyes, belly button, and then her breast. At the end of the speech, YOUNG NURSE puts her hands together to form a telescope and looks up at the arch of light.)

OLDER NURSE

(looking at arch of light)

Yes, that's right. It's a nightlight.

(pause)

But now we'd better finish our rounds before it gets too dark.

(PATIENT C becomes ORA by beginning to crawl on the floor.)

OLDER NURSE

Ora.

YOUNG NURSE

My grandmother's name was Ora.

(Stares in disgust at ORA crawling.)

Next patient.

OLDER NURSE

Her brain was severed to control behavior. Her skin is turning silvery blue from all the years of medication.

YOUNG NURSE

Silvery blue. . .

ORA

(shouting)

Get that man out of me.

He's sawing my backbone.

YOUNG NURSE

(professionally to Ora)

Number six: Don't be a nuisance at times.

OLDER NURSE

She refuses to work in the laundry.

ORA

(shouting)

I will not fold men's pants.

OLDER NURSE

We had to seclude her this morning.

YOUNG NURSE
(addressing ORA)

Ora?

OLDER NURSE

For open sex with another patient.

YOUNG NURSE

Open sex?

(ORA starts crawling off stage.)

OLDER NURSE

I found them licking tongues under the door.

(OLDER NURSE and YOUNG NURSE watch as ORA crawls almost off stage. Just her legs remain visible in the light.)

OLDER NURSE

I don't blame her. What can I give her that is warmer than a lover's tongue?

(ORA crawls slightly further off stage. Long silence as OLDER NURSE and YOUNG NURSE watch ORA's body twitch slightly as if doing something out of sight.)

YOUNG NURSE

(whispering, almost frightened)

Two: Do not wet on the floor.

OLDER NURSE

Simon did these things.

YOUNG NURSE

(looking around)

Simon?

OLDER NURSE

Simon brought his bumblebee into the house. Hektor barked and snapped, then edged up close to the buzz, stuck out his tongue. Simon and I messed around. Like Hektor, we stuck out our tongues for a little taste of sweet.

YOUNG NURSE

I need to see the next patient. Please.

OLDER NURSE

(quoting)

“A woman’s body has a thousand and one thresholds of ardor.” A poet said that. Or maybe a doctor.

YOUNG NURSE

(vacantly)

Four: Do not go into other people’s rooms.

OLDER NURSE

(quoting)

“Her body will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.”

PATIENT A

(Rolling tongue without stopping)

R-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.

YOUNG NURSE

Next patient. No r-r-r-r-r-r. Next patient.

PATIENT A

R-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r.

SOCK PUPPET

Commençant avec les cheveux et le scalp et continuant methodiquement . . . “Beginning with the hair and scalp and moving methodically down, without haste, all the way down to the feet beloved of the corn, the cramp, the kibe, the bunion, the hammer toe, the nail ingrown, the fallen arch, the common blain, the club foot, duck foot, goose foot, pigeon foot, flat foot, trench foot, and other curiosities.” (From Beckett’s “First Love.”)

(PATIENT A slaps feet together, makes sounds from feet.)

SOCK PUPPET

(held so that it “speaks” from behind OLDER NURSE’s buttocks)

The arsehole “is shy as a gathered eyelet neatly worked in shrinking violet.”

OLDER NURSE

Craig Raines. A sonnet.

(PATIENT C and OLDER NURSE begin a tango-like interaction, bodies tangling and untangling as they speak the rest of the Italian/English exchange.)

PATIENT C

“Non permetterò che ti mettano insieme in interezza
assemblato, incollato, incastrato a dovere.”

OLDER NURSE

“I shall never get you put together entirely,
Pieced, glued, and properly jointed.”
Sylvia Plath

OLDER NURSE

“My right foot
a paperweight”

PATIENT C

“Il mio piede destro
un fermacarte”

OLDER NURSE

“Queste sono le mie mani,
le mie ginocchia.”

PATIENT C

“These are my hands,
My knees.”

(YOUNG NURSE listens and watches horrified yet
mesmerized. More sounds from PATIENT A. PATIENT B
attempts to paint parts of PATIENT C’s body.)

YOUNG NURSE

(confused)

Help the older patients that cannot help themselves.

(pause)

Where are the patients?

(to OLDER NURSE)

Are you a patient?

PATIENT C

“J’etais etendu sur elle. . . “ “I lay down across her with my face in her breasts and my
hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved, gently,
up and down, and from side to side.” (from Krapp’s Last Tape)

YOUNG NURSE

(to PATIENT C)

Are you a patient?

(to audience member)

Are you a patient?

(to other audience members)

You? Are you?

OLDER NURSE

Over here. Next patient, Cora Lee.

YOUNG NURSE

(relieved)

Cora Lee. Our next patient.

(PATIENT C becomes CORA LEE)

OLDER NURSE

(loudly)

Cora Lee! What happened between you and the black woman?

YOUNG NURSE

My grandmother's name was Ora Lee.

OLDER NURSE

What happened, Cora Lee?

CORA LEE

You've heard of Mason-Dixon. I'm Mason. I had a dog named Trouble. I signed a paper saying I'm mentally ill. If you want a mental illness, you can get one.

YOUNG NURSE

Where? How?

CORA LEE

The Voices use my spine for woodwinds.

(Sounds from PATIENT A)

CORA LEE

They won't let me play anything but Old Black Joe, and I have epiglottis.

(Gurgling from PATIENT A)

CORA LEE

Sometimes the voices cut it off and all the bubbles go out. But I can conjugate French verbs.

YOUNG NURSE

J'etais etendu, tu etait etendu, il etait etendu. . .

OLDER NURSE

You haven't gotten around to telling us why you bit the black woman.

CORA LEE

It's beneath me to bite someone but she interrupted my hermitism. My skin color goes back to Queen Elizabeth. When I go to Buckingham Palace they raise their swords for me.

YOUNGER NURSE

Five: Don't fluff in the dining room.

OLDER NURSE

Tell the group what happened.

CORA LEE

My rectum ate up my skin. I don't have any place to sit.

YOUNG NURSE

(as if by rote)

The rectum is a shy eyelet, a shrinking violet.

CORA LEE

I lost my kidneys, my gallstones, and what's that third thing down there? Daddy said,

SOCK PUPPET

You'll die for being a bad girl.

OLDER NURSE

If you feel like you have to hit or bite, go out on the porch and cool off or talk to one of the staff.

CORA LEE

(indignant)

The only reason I knocked on your door is to make you more popular and tell you I lost my Pearl Harbor ring. My fingernails are coming off but my parents don't think enough of me to supply me with gloves.

(OLDER NURSE strokes SOCK PUPPET. CORA LEE puts her hand in the arch of light and spreads out her fingers.)

YOUNG NURSE

(holding her hand into the light)

Hands are the most intimate things. Could I show you mine, how I learned to do splits between second and third fingers, then third and fourth, desperate to span more than an octave, frantic to press the keys of Chopin's Prelude in C?

(coming back to herself, removing hands from light, addressing CORA LEE)

Cora Lee? Your fingernails are coming off.

OLDER NURSE

Sometimes she stops for a deep breath, then pulls up her dress and looks in the mirror.

(CORA LEE turns toward the YOUNG NURSE, who mirrors her actions of breathing, pulling up her dress, and looking at herself.)

CORA LEE

I'm at my last rung on the ladder. It looks like I don't have any spine. My Social Security number is 000-00-0000.

(long pause as CORA LEE looks at herself in the mirror of the YOUNG NURSE. Both CORA LEE and YOUNG NURSE start moving their eyes back and forth from right to left in unison.)

CORA LEE

I don't know who I am.

(CORA LEE and YOUNG NURSE continue moving their eyes back and forth together.)

YOUNG NURSE

(breaking out of trance, returning to herself, and writing in notebook)

Cora Lee. Cora Ora Lee. . . . Next patient?

OLDER NURSE

Are you ready to go to the Back Ward?

YOUNG NURSE

What's in the Back Ward?

OLDER NURSE

Are you ready?

YOUNG NURSE

Why does Cora Lee move her eyes back and forth like that?

OLDER NURSE

Her doctor told her to.

YOUNG NURSE

Why?

OLDER NURSE

It's a new therapy.

YOUNG NURSE

Does it help?

OLDER NURSE

It makes you have waking dreams. You move on through the pictures instead of getting trapped in them. It's like a VCR that's stuck on pause. You move your eyes. You get unstuck. You move on with the rest of the movie.

YOUNG NURSE

Does it help?

OLDER NURSE

How would I know?

(pause)

I think we're ready for the Back Ward.

SOCK PUPPET

THE BACK WARD

OLDER NURSE

Miss Pittipat wears eight gowns and three petticoats as she goes through the motions of hand-washing. A plastic corsage is taped to the head of her bed.

PATIENT B

(painting an imaginary corsage on her own breast.)

Cadmium red.

YOUNG NURSE

(writing in notebook)

Corsage is a cadmium red camellia.

OLDER NURSE

Next to her is the woman who swallowed five spoons. She pulls her fingernails off and refuses to eat because she has no money to pay for it.

PATIENT B
(painting her own fingernails)

Chinese red.

YOUNG NURSE
(writing in notebook)

No fingernails.

OLDER NURSE
Another limps around the ward eating broom straws and mop string even though all her teeth were pulled because she tried to bite everybody.

PATIENT B
(painting her own lips)

Chinese red.

YOUNG NURSE
(writing in notebook)

No teeth.

OLDER NURSE
And back here. . .
(gesturing)
an acre of bones to be tube-fed. . . . Locked in the safety of crib-beds with nets tied over the top.

PATIENT B
(painting her own ribs)

Titanium white.

YOUNG NURSE
(writing in notebook)

An acre of bones.

OLDER NURSE
Yet, some still hang themselves as regular as Good Morning.

PATIENT B
(painting her own neck)

Alizarin purple.

YOUNG NURSE
(writing in notebook)

Morning. Good morning.
(breaking into kindergarten song as if in a childlike trance)

Good morning to you. Good morning to you. We're all in our places with bright shiny faces.

PATIENT B

Shiny faces, Cadmium breasts, Chinese red nails, Chinese red lips, titanium bones, Alizarin necks.

(moves toward YOUNG NURSE and attempts to start painting her body parts, takes YOUNG NURSE'S notebook and tries to start painting in it)

Shiny faces. . . . gardenia breast. . . .

OLDER NURSE

Enough. That's enough painting for now. Enough painting for today.

YOUNG NURSE

(scared)

Who is she? What happened to her? What happened to my notebook? Who took my notebook?

OLDER NURSE

She was nine that Easter Saturday when she went shopping with her parents. After they came home, her father worked on his books. Without a word he left his family, his car, his wallet, a clear title to the farm. No evidence of his whereabouts. Her mother said, "Father has gone away."

YOUNG NURSE

(finding notebooks, writing in it)

Easter. Wallet. Father. Whereabouts.

OLDER NURSE

She grew up, married, moved away; always haunted by the sight of her father's body. He did have gauze wrapped around his male parts.

PATIENT B

Father's gone. Down the hole. Gauze.

(painting the floor)

Some kind of white. Gauzy white.

OLDER NURSE

She began to look like nobody was home. They took her to the state hospital. It was hard to crack open a door that had been closed so long.

PATIENT B

Mummy was at the kitchen sink washing pots and pans in blood water. It was Easter morning.

OLDER NURSE

The Case of the Missing Man was reopened. She went to the outhouse and looked down in the hole.

PATIENT B

I can show you the spot where I saw my father's face.

YOUNG NURSE

I don't like bathroom water.

OLDER NURSE

These days her bedroom leaks rusty water, the same color that soaked into the gauze around her father's loins.

PATIENT B

(painting her own loins)

Venetian red. . . Venetian. Almost burnt sienna deep.

OLDER NURSE

She used to smear and eat feces, but we started her in a new group. First fingerpainting. She's painted two pictures. We keep them in the cupboard. One is a picture with a marble statue in an underwater scene. The other one shows her doctor as Sisyphus pushing a rock up a mountain.

YOUNG NURSE

Rule number nine : Don't stop up the bowls or the commodes.

(moving eyes from side to side)

It's easy to get trapped inside. Somebody might hold down the lid. I'd better use a fireman's hose to spray it clean.

(mimes spraying the walls of an imaginary toilet bowl)

I'll hold it like a gun on my shoulder.

(starts marching like a soldier)

I'd better sweep it clean.

(YOUNG NURSE sweeps the imaginary walls of a toilet bowl around her, then begins sweeping the floor around her.)

YOUNG NURSE

(struggling to sound professional, but becoming more disoriented)

It's filthy. Somebody is supposed to clean up. It's a rule. There are regulations. Clean the room when it's dirty. It's a new rule. Number twelve. Clean the room. Three: Find ashtrays and chewing tobacco. No. . . Three: Do not stop up the room. No. . . Three: Do not wet in the dining room. Be kind in other people's rooms. Wash your hands and face. Do not stop them up. Stop up the bowls. Stop them. Stop. Stop. Please stop. . .

(OLDER NURSE comforts YOUNG NURSE, strokes her hair, calms her. Then she pulls up a chair and sits with her in her lap.)

OLDER NURSE

I wanted to see the light in my eyes and have my whole body light up, too, but I didn't tell anybody except my doll.

(strokes YOUNG NURSE)

Sometimes I'd practice lighting up with her and sing "Brighten the Corner Where You Are."

(PATIENT A opens mouth in an O and thumps melody of song against her cheek.)

(Afterwards OLDER NURSE and YOUNG NURSE sing "Brighten the Corner Where You Are" together to same melody PATIENT A used.)

OLDER NURSE

I went out looking for God but Simon said I was no bargain. I was his bonnie angel on Sunday, his jelly roll girl on Monday.

YOUNG NURSE

(to OLDER NURSE)

You are so strong. Just like my mother.

(PATIENT A plays hair like violin.)

OLDER NURSE

I smoked cigarettes so short I needed tweezers to hold the butt. I went out looking for God in the shadow of the Smokies on a train and found Simon. The wheels and whistles sang when they cranked.

(PATIENT A makes sounds of chug a chug by slapping slowly then faster on her legs and belly and makes whistle sound, more like wind than air, by sucking in air.)

YOUNG NURSE

When my father came home from the war, he posed for a picture before the stone steps of his old house, legs locked apart, hands joined, regulation, behind his back. Elbows crooked like broke-down rifles. The klieg-light sun cast shadows across his bricked-up smile. He folded away his brillo pad trousers, his piss cutter cap. And he wrapped silence around him like the stiff blanket from his cot. Instead of war stories, he only spoke bullets of basic fact:

SOCK PUPPET

Cavalry Division. Patton's Third Army. Sergeant First Class.

YOUNG NURSE

He sat down for his hero's dinner. He'd been a telegraph operator. His fingers would tap out the moans on the kitchen table. The dot dot. The dash dash.

(PATIENT A makes telegraph sounds.)

YOUNG NURSE

Persimmons and turnip greens, hominy, spoonbread, scuppernong jam, thick-crustied pies in gunmetal tins. The skinned meat of rabbits, their delicate bones.

(PATIENT A pretends to play marimbas on her ribs while making a marimba sound.)

YOUNG NURSE

The week after Daddy came home, he signed up for the railroad. Listening to the crash of cars coupling together into a single train. Following train wrecks with a derrick. Lifting mangled cars off the sides of the track. One day he saw a train roll toward his friend lying beside him close enough he could reach out and touch him. He yelled out,

SOCK PUPPET

Hold up. Hold it.

YOUNG NURSE

The steel wheels sliced off his friend's two legs as clean as a surgeon's knife.

PATIENT B

(painting each of her legs.)

Parylene Maroon.

YOUNG NURSE

Daddy was the only railroad man who could bear to visit him in the hospital, the only one who could bear to see the flat sheet on the bottom half of the bed.

(PATIENT B continues painting legs, trying to get everyone to notice them.)

OLDER NURSE

The train whistle pulls part of me along the tracks to a time when I thought all railroad stations were a mile apart. Washington, Lynchburg, Spencer, Chattanooga. I wanted Simon to notice me but he didn't because his shaving lotion smelled bigger than me. When he finally moved in, I had to move out. All he wanted was

SOCK PUPPET

the specialty of the house.

OLDER NURSE

I got tired of looking at the ceiling, feeling like a whore who had to go do her duty. The last time I called him there was a desert of silence. I guess I was keeping him from his work.

(Long silence)

The train whistle tells a story of where it's been and where it's going unaware of the sleep that's all around it. I do not forget to wave a thin handkerchief with blue iris.

(OLDER NURSE flaps wrist with sock puppet. PATIENT A makes sound of train whistle.)

YOUNG NURSE

(moving eyes back and forth from side to side through the following speech)

I went for a ride in a car along a road and over a big railroad.

I climbed out of the car and onto the bridge.

(stands up in front of OLDER NURSE)

I stepped down onto the tracks, one foot on each rail.

(spreads out legs, positioning one foot at a time)

My skirted billowed like a parachute and a train went through my legs.

(OLDER NURSE straightens her legs and then bends hers knees very slowly so that her lower legs move between the YOUNG NURSE's legs and then back out several times.)

YOUNG NURSE

It came and went, forward and back, forward and back like a caterpillar. . . I wanted to slide off. . . . I had on black patent leather shoes and a little smocked dress. Standing with my back to something. . . . Somebody behind me took off the dress. I couldn't turn to see. . . . I had on a little white slip underneath. . . . I heard a zipper unzip.

(In unison the other patients and OLDER NURSE slowly nod their heads downward.)

YOUNG NURSE

Out of the corner of my eye. . . somebody was there. . . . Boxer shorts. Below them, hairy white legs.

(Slowly.)

He still had on. . . socks.

(OLDER NURSE, still seated, slowly bends down and places her hand with the sock on it right beside the YOUNGER NURSE's foot so that it resembles a foot. YOUNGER NURSE slowly turns her head to notice the sock/foot. Stares.)

(PATIENT B paints socks onto PATIENT A and PATIENT C's feet and then onto her own feet. They begin a sock dance: As each PATIENT has her "socks" on she sticks out her foot to admire the socks and then starts to move into the Charleston and then turning in a circle by touching her foot to the floor, like PATIENT C did at the beginning of the play. This dance continues with variations until the end of the play.)

OLDER NURSE

(chanting tentatively as accompaniment to the sock dance, as if discovering how to proceed)

Tie your mates together. Throw them all away. Wash them in the shower. They'll end up all the same. Tie your mates together. Paint them with a brush. They'll all come together. Two by two. Wash them in the shower. Bird nests will unravel. You'll need them when you travel. Tie your holes together. Tie your holes together. Tie your holes together. Throw them all away.

OLDER NURSE

(after a long pause, speaking)

My cigarette burned a cave in midnight. Simon had flown to a foreign country by the name of Salt Lake City, Utah. I lay where he lay, searched for him and found him in the smell of his shaving lotion. My skin didn't forget the tweed of his new brown suit. Simon needed another woman like a sow needs a saddle. He was tying slip knots, not the kind that held, saying,

SOCK PUPPET

Get on back in this room. I've got things to tell you.

OLDER NURSE

I knew I was dispensable because I stuck my hand in a bucket of water and saw how big a hole it left when I pulled my fingers out.

(pushes hand up into arch of light then removes hand from light and looks at light)

Women called to say I'm feeling vulnerable tonight. Simon shrugged and yawned,

SOCK PUPPET

Pussy flows like an artesian well.

OLDER NURSE

Each trip, he'd bring me souvenirs, his scent and a towel he'd stolen from the latest hotel. In the bathroom closet, the towels mounted. They threatened to bust down the linen closet door. Towels stamped with names like Melba Court, Sir Walter Raleigh, Volonte Motel, the Velvet Cloak.

(pause)

One day, I took scissors, sharp as a razor, and sliced up all those towels into sanitary napkins.

(OLDER NURSE slowly takes sock puppet off her hand and carefully folds it in half. Gives it to YOUNG NURSE. PATIENT B paints crotch with brush. Pretends to brush on lines of a sanitary belt.)

YOUNG NURSE

(waving sock like a handkerchief and smiling)

I did not forget to wave a thin handkerchief with blue iris.

(long pause)

OLDER NURSE

Mama and Aunt Rose sat on the porch and snapped beans of a night. Mama's womb hung by a thread and Daddy said he was tired of hearing about the bloody thing. Mama said, "Little pitchers have big ears."

(pause)

Then the fireflies lit up all at once. It was the prettiest sight. My brother Charles used one of those bottles to put fireflies in. We put a little grass in first. He called it his lantern. Then I'd remember about the bloody thing on a string and ease back to the porch to listen to the grown ups talk. Aunt Rose said,

YOUNG NURSE

I'll tell you about fireflies. They have six legs, four wings. They're the next thing to a beetle. God invented fireflies. Edison invented the bulb. That's what causes them to blink off and on.

OLDER NURSE

When it was really dark, here came Mary Ellen and her brothers. They played havoc with their fireflies. They boys took them apart. But Mary Ellen made rings for her fingers and stuck them on her dress. She stuck the glow part on her face, and she came down Ransom Street glowing. Then it was bedtime and the kids went home. I took the lid off my jar of fireflies and watched them until I fell asleep. The next morning they were gone.

(Gradually more chaos: various actors miming Charleston; locking, unlocking doors; murmuring random phrases that recur in the play—"I wanted to see the light," "a wiff of air," "They love men who drive them crazy," "Are you a patient?" "You are so strong. Just like my mother," "I don't like bathroom water," "Who are all these people?" PATIENT B paints her face and other patients' faces with arch at forehead. Gradually all actors converge toward arch of light, half in and out, in a mingling of arms and legs.)

(Lights go out but murmuring continues. Foreheads glow in the dark from black light. Black light out. Sounds stop abruptly.)