

LAWRENCE

A play in four acts

by

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## THE PLAYERS

LAWRENCE WILLIAMS, A forgotten (but wealthy) painter

MARCELLA, his wife, from Spain,

SAM, their eldest son, a carpenter

JOHN, the younger, a PhD candidate in Art History

LUCIA, Sam's wife, a painter also from Spain,

BOB, John's lover, a Classics scholar

and

JOAO and SVEN, actors

## THE SCENE

The art studio of the Lawrence Williams estate, in a secluded Northern California village. The studio, separate from the estate, is at the end of a perfectly tended lawn. A lit pathway connects the studio with the Estate. However, only the studio interior is seen by the audience.

Moonlight shines through the many windows of the studio. Each of several "works in progress" are concealed by a white sheet. In the center of the space, there is a distinguished (but unoccupied) white coffin. Although one would think it quite a monstrosity to have a coffin in an art studio, the oak casket is strangely in tune with the rest of the room. On top of this coffin are a canister of wood polish and a handful of rags. To the side is a mess of woodworking equipment, and an old chair. There is a radio on a shelf.

## THE TIME

Thanksgiving evening, 1962.

ACT ONE - six o'clock

ACT TWO - eight o'clock

ACT THREE - ten o'clock

ACT FOUR - Midnight

## ACT ONE

(SAM is alone in the studio, flirting with the radio. He tunes to a few stations, and each is heard clearly for a moment before churning into an indiscernible fog. Finally, he finds a station playing a Chopin Mazurka, and turns the volume up loud.)

SAM

A pretty song, but sad. Pretty and sad.

(The music becomes a piercing wail.)

Piece of crap!

---

(JOHN enters.)

JOHN

Hello there, Sam!

SAM

Damn machine!

JOHN

(Grabbing his brother)  
Sammy, it's, -

SAM

Get your damn hands off me!

JOHN

Sam!

SAM

Thief! Spy! Terrorist!

JOHN

Brother!

SAM

John!

(The vice-grip turns to an embrace)

JOHN

What lurking terror were you expecting?

SAM

Nothing, but I had stopped expecting you.

JOHN

I'm not that late, -

SAM

But it's nearly seven!

JOHN

I'm just in time to fetch you for dinner;  
Mom's lacquered up some poor mortal bird  
And etched maple leaves in the mashed potatoes.  
I think it's a tacky, gluttonous mess, but -

SAM

You promised you'd be here hours ago.

JOHN

We were lost.

SAM

On the way to your Father's home?

JOHN

I've been away from here quite a while -  
Or else I'd have told a much better lie.  
But now that I'm back in the liar's den,  
And the liar himself has awoken,  
All I've to do is listen to relearn,  
And soon I will feed you a much improved  
Reason for why I have kept you waiting.

SAM

Can you last a minute without - he's out?

JOHN

Indeed.

SAM

Two months of utter seclusion,  
Just as he promised.

JOHN

He must be famished.  
And I've been talking too much, as usual.  
To the table, else Mother disowns me.

SAM

Wait.

JOHN

Yes?

SAM

How does he look? Does he look sick?

JOHN

Though I'm rarely not the first to provide  
A fanciful elevation of all  
That should strike an audience arresting;  
My humility, and the situation,  
Urge me to withhold all description, Sam.  
You'll be forced to see the man for yourself.

SAM

That bad?

JOHN

It's not that he looks gravely ill;  
Only a son or a lover could see  
A hint of his terrible affliction.

SAM

Then why won't you describe him for me?

JOHN

Because you are his son.

(He goes back to the window)

Rain is coming.

SAM

And how can you tell?

JOHN

Just look at the moon.  
Notice the crown of light that surrounds her?  
Little dancing droplets quickly joining,

As the pressure is slowly lowering.

SAM

You Romantics, always stealing wisdom  
From a rock.

JOHN

But that rock is wise. Listen.

(Rain is heard on the roof.)

SAM

You always were the brilliant one, Johnny.

JOHN

Nonsense. A poet sets his gaze upon  
The moon and knows the face of all sorrow,  
While all I see is a damn weather report.  
But, tonight wasn't made for my laments.

(He moves to the door)

Quick, before the storm arrives.

SAM

Just a minute.

(SAM sets to work polishing the coffin.)

JOHN

Oh, come on.

SAM

What?

JOHN

Nothing.

SAM

You don't like it?

JOHN

I despise it.

SAM

I don't give a damn what you think.

JOHN

Your work is good, it's the design that's absurd.

SAM

Well, the artist, whose opinion matters  
More than yours, will be inspecting it soon,  
And this craftsman intends to make it perfect.

JOHN

And this critic intends to drink heavily.

(JOHN takes a long drink from a flask)

SAM

Is that the Doctor's whiskey you reek of?

JOHN

There's no man of superior taste to Bob.  
Would you like a pull? It's aged thirteen years.

(JOHN tosses him the flask)

SAM

Thirteen years? Why, he's nearly as patient  
With his drink as he is with his young lovers.

JOHN

It's simple minded fools like you that keep  
The minds of men from changing.

SAM

Oh, Johnny.  
It's his age that worries me, not his gender.  
Older men are dangerous to the young.

JOHN

You should take your own advice.

SAM

Is that right?

JOHN

(Returning to the coffin)  
Quite a lot of trouble he's put you through.  
Two months you've taken for this one favor?

SAM

Favor? How could you see my task so low?  
Not only do I honor the final wishes  
Of my Father, but of Lawrence Williams,

The world's finest artist.

JOHN

Ha! *Lawrence, Williams.*

You love to cut the hack in separate parts,  
Scribbler and breeder, when you should merely  
Know him as the single charismatic  
Fool he really is. Perhaps you'd finish,  
Then, and I'd be eating. Come.

SAM

I'm almost done.

JOHN

But nearly out of time.

JOAO (off-stage)

Hello? In there?

SAM

It's a giant! With an elf underneath!

JOHN

They promised they would wait in the car.

SAM

You invited the circus?

JOHN

No. They're journalists.

(JOAO knocks at the door)

JOHN

One moment.

JOAO

But it's pouring out!

JOHN

One second!

SAM

How could you exploit him - On Thanksgiving!

JOHN

Exploit him? What's left that's not been yielded



With deep pleasure? He asked me to invite  
The press.

SAM

Not those.

JOHN

All those who showed interest.

SAM

But what about his friends, all the critics?

JOHN

All the ones that he ever fooled are dead.

(JOAO and SVEN enter.)

JOAO

We thought we should just let ourselves inside.  
Ah, so you must be the other brother!  
It's an honor to be invited here.  
I'm Joao, and that's my Swedish photographer, Sven.

SAM

The two of you have no business here.  
I believe that it's time for dinner, John.

JOHN

I'll join you in a minute.

SAM

Fine. But if  
I catch them snooping around the estate,  
You can't blame me for what I'll do to them.

(SAM exits.)

JOAO

(jotting a note)  
Quiet type. Lacking brother's charisma.

JOHN

That's enough of that.

JOAO

It's not authentic?

SVEN  
It reached me.

JOAO  
I thank you.

SVEN  
You are welcome.

JOHN  
And what happened to your accent?

JOAO  
He thought  
He'd use it sparingly indoors.

JOHN  
Why's that?

JOAO  
He's scared you'll mistake his lofty speech  
For a storm cloud, and a leak in the roof.

JOHN  
Nonsense. Let me hear.

JOAO  
Do you own a hat?

SVEN  
*Capitalist svine! Stupid bourgeois monkeys!*

JOHN  
That's terrible.

JOAO  
Then he simply won't speak.  
I'll do the talking for the both of us.

JOHN  
Lawrence won't let you get a word in, anyways.  
Just be as quiet as you can tonight,  
And silent as to what happened here, tomorrow.

JOAO  
That's what we're being paid for. And on that note,  
I was wondering if we could discuss .

The details, -

JOHN

First we'll see to the extent  
Of his disgrace, and you'll be paid accordingly.  
And if tonight is what I think he's planned,  
Your silence will not go unrewarded.

JOAO

But that's blackmail!

JOHN

It's a dark cloak I wear  
For my protection. I'm willing to buy  
Him a little circus to entertain him,  
So long as the shameful show stays in this room.

SVEN

We're not a circus - I'm a trained actor, -

JOHN

That's being paid to play dumb.

JOAO

He is dumb.  
Not that, he will play dumb. Is that right, Sven?

SVEN

That's not my name.

JOHN

Well, get in character!

JOAO

We are.

JOHN

Good. Shall we?

JOAO

I have to tie my shoe.

JOHN

Then I'll trust you to find your own way to the car.

(JOHN exits.)

I don't like him.

SVEN

JOAO  
He's rich.

SVEN  
His Father's rich.

JOAO  
A different kind of rich. Just look at that coffin.

SVEN  
Impressive.

JOAO  
Grotesque.

SVEN  
But entertaining.

JOAO  
He is an artist.

SVEN  
I was an artist.

JOAO  
Oh yes, of high art -

SVEN  
And elevated  
sensitivity.

JOAO  
But he was famous.

SVEN  
A genius?

JOAO  
For a minute he sold like one.

SVEN  
Then?

JOAO  
And then nothing.

SVEN  
What happened?

JOAO  
Detraction.  
The man never found a movement, I recall.

SVEN  
That's a shame.

JOAO  
Ever seen his photograph?

SVEN  
Why?

JOAO  
He looks like a statue.

SVEN  
Classical?

JOAO  
Baroque.

SVEN  
I can hardly picture that.

JOAO  
You'll see.

SVEN  
I heard something!

(JOAO goes to the window)

JOAO  
The crazy brother's returned!

SVEN  
He'll beat us!

JOAO  
Hush! Let's hide.

SVEN  
Where?

JOAO  
Hush! I know!

SVEN  
I'm too tall!

JOAO  
Hush! We must.

SVEN  
Then fold me up.

(They enter the coffin just as SAM enters. SAM begins to polish the coffin. Then, LUCIA enters under an umbrella, with a plate of Thanksgiving dinner in her hand.)

LUCIA  
You said you were going to the bathroom.

SAM  
So how did you think to bring me dinner?

LUCIA  
I know you.

SAM  
I'm not hungry, Lucia.

LUCIA  
I know. It's too dry. Your Mother gave me My big chance this year, a step up from the Stuffing and mashed potatoes. I'm sorry. I failed miserably, but, -

SAM  
All right, All right.  
Do you have a fork?

LUCIA  
Right here.

SAM

You know I  
Wasn't fooled by any of that.

LUCIA

You weren't?

SAM

I know you.

LUCIA

And I know that you're hungry.

SAM

This is really good.

LUCIA

Isn't it? It turned  
Out perfectly, I must say. I'm quite proud  
Of myself, actually. That's why I brought  
It out to you.

SAM

So you didn't bring it out  
To heal your worried husband?

LUCIA

No. I came  
here only to be praised.

SAM

Well, if it's praise  
You want, it is praise you shall receive.  
My lovely wife, who paints and speaks and lives  
With the most sensitive and intelligent  
And beautiful of minds; Your Thanksgiving turkey  
Is an invigoration of the soul.

LUCIA

Thank you.

SAM

Thank you. But you're still here.  
Haven't you got what you wanted, honey?

LUCIA

Yes. But now I want more.

SAM

More compliments?

LUCIA

No. Well, yes, But later. Right now I don't  
Want praise, I want the praiser.

SAM

That's not a word.

LUCIA

I know it's not a word, it's a man.

(They kiss)

SAM

I'm so sorry I walked out on dinner.

LUCIA

It's fine. After you fled the dining room,  
He said, "my son's confused me with a ghost,  
And so confirming my diagnosis"  
Or something like that, I forget. We laughed.

SAM

I'm so ashamed.

LUCIA

Don't be.

SAM

I'm just so scared -

LUCIA

But why?

SAM

I don't know.

LUCIA

I know. But please, tell me why.



SAM

Once I read in the newspaper that when  
a surgeon's child is badly injured,  
They refuse to let the doctor operate,  
As they say that the emotion of love,  
And the craft of surgery, when combined,  
Lead to shoddy stitching, and tragic ends.

LUCIA

But there isn't anything wrong with this  
Coffin, it's perfect, and as beautiful as  
A thing like this can be. And tragic ends?  
You always knew the fate of this project.

SAM

I know the work I've done here is the best  
A man like me can ever hope to do.  
But it's not for the safety of his child  
That the surgeon doesn't operate, no,  
He paces in that waiting room for the  
welfare of his own insides. I know that  
My craftsmanship is sound, Lucia,  
But inside I am all in shambles.

LUCIA

Then please, let me put you back together.

SAM

But what if in rebuilding me, I left  
You torn apart?

LUCIA

You're worth the risk.

SAM

I'm not.

LUCIA

Then I've done a poor job on you so far.  
I say I have the talent to rebuild you,  
But lately I've been so ignorant of your  
State of disrepair. To think that I barged  
Out of this room in tears two days ago,  
So angry with you, and so self-absorbed.  
I'm sorry. I thought only of myself.

SAM

Lucia isn't all that you think of.

LUCIA

Oh. I understand. I guess there is  
Another. But she, -

SAM

Or he, -

LUCIA

Is not yet even  
A twinkle in my eye. But even though  
I only can imagine her, I feel  
As if our daughter's already with us.

SAM

You thoughts can't only be your dreams.

LUCIA

Why not?

I see her, Sam. I know her. From her big  
Green eyes to her ballet shoes to even  
Her first painting: A simple landscape,  
Nothing that at first should grab the eye -  
But if one should look closer, great potential  
Is revealed, and suddenly the painting  
Bursts with life, and light, and stories, -

SAM

Lucia.

LUCIA

Yes?

SAM

You will only make the wait more painful.

LUCIA

Oh, it's harmless, Sam. Without fantasy,  
This life would be unbearable.

SAM

Not at all.

Without fantasy, this life would make more sense.

LUCIA

But finally we've found real reason to hope -

SAM

Real reason to hope for what? For patience?

LUCIA

For help.

SAM

Are you still fooled by that quack doctor?

SAM

Perhaps if you came with me one day to  
His office, you would see that he was a man  
Of good intentions.

SAM

Why should I do that?

LUCIA

Maybe you could talk to him in private,  
And he could ask you a few questions, -

SAM

Is this an accusation?

LUCIA

No, but, -

SAM

It sounds like it.

LUCIA

I'm merely doing my best, -

SAM

I'm not talking to some quack doctor  
Who's only interest is my checkbook.

LUCIA

Why do you see my concern for us  
As simply an attack on your manhood?

SAM

I don't.

LUCIA

Then why do you refuse to help me?

SAM

I'm not refusing to help you. It's just  
That I've been so absorbed in my work.  
My life is so small compared to this man, and I  
Still feel I haven't met his expectations.

LUCIA

A few times you've used that excuse on me,  
And each attempt sounds less and less sincere.

SAM

How could you question my love for him?

LUCIA

It's not your love for him that I doubt, -

(SVEN is heard, sneezing.)

SAM

(As he opens the coffin)  
What the hell was that?

JOAO

Well, Sven, I think that  
We have the story on the coffin interior.

SAM

Filthy parasites!

JOAO

(Jotting a note)  
Stunning craftsmanship.

SAM

Don't you have any respect for privacy?  
Get the hell out of here!

JOAO

We were invited.

SAM

Like hell you were!

JOAO  
But here comes our subject!

(LAWRENCE enters, with  
MARCELLA and JOHN on each arm.  
Behind them is BOB.)

LAWRENCE

(As they enter)  
Let them call me a chauvinist, a sadist,  
And a misogynist; I still catch them  
Staring; for how can they resist the man  
Who lends more mystery to a still life  
Of a dead turkey than is given to  
All the ambiguous shapes and charmless  
Hints of his contemporaries combined?  
But this coffin is quite a vision.

(LAWRENCE inspects the coffin)

JOHN

He's pleased.

LAWRENCE

Quite a vision.

SAM

Thank you, Father.

LAWRENCE

Sammy.

(SAM and LAWRENCE embrace)

SAM

I'm sorry I walked out on you.

LAWRENCE

Nonsense.

MARCELLA

I brought you some pumpkin pie.

SAM

Thank you.

JOHN

Will the gentleman require a fitting room,  
Or shall I ring it up for you immediately?

LAWRENCE

What? Oh. I think that this should fit me fine,  
After all these years I know my size quite well,  
But I was wondering, sir, if you would,  
Perhaps fetch me this item in sandalwood?

JOHN

I could check to see if we had it in stock,  
But I really insist on this white one.  
Not only does the shade become you,  
But It's offered at such a fine price.  
Between you and me, the labor cost next  
To nothing, and a new one would not be  
Ready for; oh, how many months did it take  
You, boy?

SAM

How dare you make a joke of this.

LAWRENCE

Sammy, how could he not be light-hearted?  
John captures the tone this night desires.  
Forever I've been rapt in earnest fevers  
With ambitions of a modest gift to man;  
A momentary, yet momentous glimpse  
Of pleasure in a cosmos whelped by chaos.  
And how have my intentions been answered?  
With nothing but a great big cosmic joke.  
While selfless efforts serviced yearning souls,  
That cruel muse, from wherever she writhes,  
Oozed her way so deep between the temples,  
And within this fecund shrine to fancy,  
Amidst reverent offerings to inspiration,  
And memories of unbound creation,  
She trailed an all consuming residue,  
The taint and stench of which promise Cancer,  
And an ignoble and untimely death.

MARCELLA

Oh, Lawrence.

SAM

It's such an injustice!

LAWRENCE

But I beg you, don't cry for me tonight.  
Although it warms my ever-doubting soul,  
Hide Your suffering, grief is what she craves!  
She's mad I've had it easy, and I have,  
For her voice, a faint suspicion denied by most,  
Pours into me like Wagner, furious,  
German, and translated by this fluent hand.

BOB

But who sings to you? If you don't mind me asking.

LAWRENCE

Of course not, Bob. But before I begin  
Again, I would like to express my wish  
For all of this evening's events to be  
Documented. Journalists, please feel free  
To begin your work.

JOAO

Thank you, Sir.  
We hesitated for fear of intrusion.

LAWRENCE

Oh, not to worry. I want the setting  
For tonight to be very intimate,  
So think of yourselves as friends of Lawrence.

JOAO

I am honored, Sir.

LAWRENCE

And photographer,  
I recommend a low-level flash for this room.

SVEN

Eh?

LAWRENCE

Can he not make any sense of my words?  
Or can the giant even hear me?

JOAO

Actually -

LAWRENCE

John, is this the very man you spoke of?  
The one who shot Elvis Presley?

JOHN

He did, he did, -

JOAO

He did! It's just that all those photo shoots  
Were done in Sven's native Sweden, you see?

LAWRENCE

Elvis flew there only for his talents?

JOAO

One has to reach the summit of culture  
To pique the interest of solitary Sven.  
And though he refused to erode for Elvis,  
Sven felt it would be no fracture of honor  
To drift his way across to Lawrence Williams.  
But, please, everyone, forget we are even here.  
Let Sven look on you from his foggy peaks,  
And me to report from shadows underneath.

LAWRENCE

Why hide in the shade of a sparkling chance?  
If you do, you'll fail to discern my triumph.  
And so I wend my way back to my thoughts:  
For what reflection gives resplendent life  
When instead of quick transmutation,  
It's swallowed by the sickly, stagnant muck?

JOAO

A terrible conclusion.

LAWRENCE

And one for which  
Iridescent man should have no patience.  
That's why I laughed at the diagnosis,  
And wrote a quick prescription for myself.  
A death to match the elegance of my life,  
That is all this humble man desires.

BOB

History often lauds the man who strove  
To die with honor rather than make waste  
For the sake of his own impatience. But, -



LAWRENCE

Thank you, Bob. But even greater men than I  
 Have had the dream of noble deaths snatched from them!  
 Garcia Lorca, *el gran poeta*,  
 Had the details of his demise all drawn,  
 From the way his corpse lay in the coffin,  
 To the sound of his procession on the  
 Winding cobbled streets of old Seville.

LUCIA

I believed it was Grenada.

LAWRENCE

Grenada?

MARCELLA

Grenada.

LAWRENCE

Grenada. No matter. My point is,  
 It was not until his own death pleased him  
 That Lorca gave a passing thought to life.  
 But even he could never have his way!  
 The Fascists called him *maricón*, and shot  
 Him twice in the ass before leaving him  
 To rot in some still-anonymous hole.  
 Lorca, the finest poet in all the world;  
 Violated, and stripped of his free will.  
 But I will not let that fate come to me!  
 The vile side of this world must hurry,  
 For even if she has planted the seed  
 Of wretched suffering in my mind,  
 I'll be far along and gone before  
 She ever has the chance to come to bloom!

JOHN

And when can we expect this beautiful death?

LAWRENCE

A timely question, my son, for my answer  
 Is tonight!

SAM

What?

MARCELLA  
Tonight?

LAWRENCE  
This very night!  
What better evening could there be than this?  
All my family is present, I just had  
A brief and lovely meal, -

SAM  
But, I'm not yet finished  
With your preparations.

LAWRENCE  
Sure you are, Sam.  
And this very room, the shrine to my fancy,  
And the entryway into my inward world,  
Shall be the very place I make my exit!  
It's here I shall meet whatever awaits,  
For what dreadful wave could plunge through the doors,  
And not be calmed to languor by my charms?  
But still, I shall seek my death wearing the mask  
Of patience, as a solemn Buddhist monk  
Whispers to himself that now's the time,  
And meets, without fear, the great mystery.

JOAO  
Are you a Buddhist, yourself, sir?

LAWRENCE  
No, no.  
But I do admire their style.

SAM  
You can't do this to me!

LAWRENCE  
You're not to be hurt.  
It's not as if I'm taking you with me.

SAM  
I mean, you must let me finish here,  
I don't feel as if I've honored your vision.

LAWRENCE  
Oh, Sammy, I feel honored to the point  
Of suffocation. I'm told you've spent

My entire seclusion on this silly box.

SAM

But you're details were filled with so much detail,  
Down to the most minute descriptions.

LAWRENCE

Oh, God! All of them mindless rants, I'm sure!  
How could you read through all of the wine-stains?  
I admit those were finished as the sun rose  
On the last of my drunken tirades!

SAM

But Mom said it was so important, -

MARCELLA

And it was, -

SAM

Father! Does my work mean anything to you?

LAWRENCE

It's very nice. But I'm very surprised  
That I could so undervalue the influence  
Of my impulses. But it looks as if  
You're nearly finished, and I am nearly  
Finished as well! This all should fit nicely  
Into plan. But only if we hurry!

MARCELLA

The rest of your designs are in the study.

LAWRENCE

Quick, then, all, we're off, to the study!  
But share an umbrella, it's raining out!

(All exit except SAM.)

SAM

"It looks as if you're nearly finished."

(SAM strikes the coffin, but does no damage)

(MARCELLA re-enters.)

MARCELLA

I heard a noise. Is everything all right?

SAM

You could hear me from the top of the hill?

MARCELLA

I walk slowly. But look at that poor hand!

SAM

It was only a little accident.  
Nothing you should have to worry about.

MARCELLA

Why shouldn't I worry? You're my life.  
Let me take a look at that hand.

SAM

It's fine.

MARCELLA

(As she tends to him)  
Can I tell you a secret?

SAM

You always do.

MARCELLA

When illness first interrupted Lawrence,  
And dry indifference broke his playful voice,  
I felt as much pity for the altered man  
As awe, and envy, of what suddenly  
So transformed him.

SAM

I don't believe you.

MARCELLA

No?

His illness changed him more in a moment  
Than my thirty years presence could make do.  
And I once thought I'd made a deep impression.  
And, did you know, I have to tell you I  
Was jealous of you, just now, for that same  
Reason - You've shown him something worth his close  
Attention - a talent I once had, but  
Quickly wasted.

SAM

He still - He barely glanced  
At it, and wasn't pleased. I know I've failed him.

MARCELLA

How could you say that when you've restored him?  
Can't you see he's himself again?

SAM

I can't.

MARCELLA

He called it a vision.

SAM

Oh, what does that mean.

MARCELLA

He thought it quite a vision, Sam, and he  
Only uses words like that to admire  
His own creations.

SAM

I don't think - Like what?

MARCELLA

Like you, for example. When he was first  
Allowed to hold you, he was terrified,  
Half in fear, I think, that he would drop you,  
And half in fear, I know, of my wrath if he did.  
But he held you tightly, with trembling hands,  
And whispered to himself, "quite a vision."  
I told him not to be too proud, for only  
A third of you were his, as I had provided  
At least two thirds of the parts and labor.

SAM

You're always kidding, just like John. And I  
Can't understand how you could on a night  
Like this, after Father said what he said -

MARCELLA

Oh, Sam, we laugh because we get the joke -  
You know better than to take him at all -  
You don't. Oh, Sammy, you always were the  
Innocent one.

SAM

I know better.

MARCELLA

Then you know

His only sincere words were those that thanked you.  
The rest was prelude to the night's performance;  
The first number in his baroque revue-  
Sometimes riveting, when he holds together,  
And sometimes repulsive, when songs come apart,  
But always revealed as hollow as dreams,  
Good or bad, upon waking. So let's let  
Lawrence have his fun, he won't do any harm.  
I promise tomorrow you'll both wake and laugh.  
Shall we?

SAM

But I'm still not yet finished.

MARCELLA

And neither is your Father. Tonight is his  
Artistic end, and nothing more. Come with me.

(MARCELLA takes an umbrella, and  
they exit together.)

## ACT TWO

(Rain is still falling. JOHN and BOB enter the studio with flowers.)

BOB

But how can matter no longer matter?

JOHN

Matter's reached extinction.

BOB

Oh, come on now.

JOHN

The figure's subject to repetition.  
What's new to be done with a pretty face?  
Sentimental yearnings for a dead man's dream.  
All that's left to make is abstract music,  
In my opinion. That's all that paint can make  
These days, and still be fresh.

BOB

But fresh at what cost?

At the cost of beauty?

JOHN

That's an awful word.

BOB

Bad form! Bad form!

JOHN

The ideal of beauty  
Is an adolescent lie, but it's kept  
Through old age to hide one's lust behind.  
Just look how my Father's been affected.

(JOHN reveals a painting)

BOB

Why, it's an aphrodisiac on canvas.

JOHN

A climactic portrait.

BOB  
That's the title?

JOHN  
It doesn't matter. It's a work in progress.  
Anyway, I could never sell the thing.

BOB  
Why not?

JOHN  
I think it's a piece of shit, that's why not.

BOB  
I think it is beautiful.

JOHN  
I don't think, -

BOB  
And I don't give a damn what you think.  
I'd nearly forgotten what this was like,  
To have such explicit intensity  
Forced into the gaze, as if the world  
And the work were at war for my attention.

JOHN  
But it's so vulgar.

BOB  
No, it's flattering.  
All you show me are haughty contradictions,  
Sterile offerings from spirited youths  
Unwilling or unable to please me.

JOHN  
What a curmudgeon you've become. It's your  
Imagination that's barren, not their art.  
My soul is removed by their creations  
To places of infinite repose, to  
Vast yet orderly halls, immune to waste,  
And rot, and the furious flowing liquids,  
And all the other animal curses;  
But not separate from those animal curses,  
For they conceive entropy as a river  
Upon which their perspective turns the tide,  
So as others thrash against foul liquids,



Whining for their quick loss of vision, grace,  
 Suppleness, potency, and even hair,  
 My artists all float calmly with the tide,  
 Willfully yielding all inessentials  
 To dissolve, slowly, with a certain pleasure.

BOB

And what pleasure is that?

JOHN

Of subtlety.  
 See, within what others see as minimal,  
 I am witness to the pure, unwanting  
 Energy of God. And it's a sadistic  
 Piece of crap like this painting which reminds  
 Me of the hell I'm still condemned within.

BOB

At least admit that you think it's pretty.

JOHN

I admit nothing.

BOB

Well, I think it's lovely,  
 If only a tad anachronistic.  
 But that's why it's so inspiring to  
 A middle-aged man like me.

JOHN

Robert. Not now.

BOB

Blame the painting, blame your father!

JOHN

My Father?  
 That sounds a little strange. But what do I care  
 Of the source? After all, it's only art.

BOB

The beautiful boy admits that it's art!

JOHN

I hate it when you call me that.