

**E.G.O.:**  
**The Passions of**  
**Eugene Gladstone O'Neill**

**A full-length play**  
**in two acts**  
**by Jo Morello**

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**E. G. O.:**  
***The Passions of Eugene Gladstone O'Neill***

A full-length play in two acts  
by Jo Morello

2M, 2F; some doubling

Running time: approx. 55 minutes for each act.

Unit set with suggested sets and costumes.

Suggested music may be available from author on CD-ROM

**Synopsis**

Raised in the theatre as the son of matinee idol James O'Neill, Eugene O'Neill struggled to measure up to and ultimately surpass his father. At 29, he had a wife and son behind him and a life of playwriting ahead—complicated by struggles with alcohol, disease and “the things life has done”—when he met widowed fiction writer Agnes Boulton, 24. Upon his insistence that they must share “an aloneness broken by nothing,” she left her daughter with her parents to marry him—but that aloneness was broken when they had two children of their own, Shane and Oona (the future Mrs. Charlie Chaplin).

While married to Agnes, O'Neill won two Pulitzer Prizes (*Beyond the Horizon*, *Anna Christie*) and wrote *Strange Interlude*, which would bring a third Pulitzer. (His fourth Pulitzer, for *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, was awarded posthumously.) O'Neill began his own “Interlude” in 1927 with beautiful, domineering, second-rate actress Carlotta Monterey while sending Agnes passionate proclamations of love. Finally, the internationally prominent playwright gained worldwide tabloid attention with his secretive, adulterous elopement to Europe with Carlotta.

After finally securing a divorce from Agnes, O'Neill began a tumultuous, 25-year marriage with Carlotta. Never in good health, he suffered with a mysterious neurological ailment (later diagnosed as familial tremor) that left him unable to write for the last ten years of his life. Nevertheless, during his career he managed to complete some 50 plays including *Desire Under the Elms*, *Ah, Wilderness!*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *The Iceman Cometh* and *A Moon for the Misbegotten*. He also left behind his masterpiece, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, with strict legal instructions that it was not to be published until 25 years after his death and never, ever staged—but Carlotta had her own ideas.

*E.G.O.* explores O'Neill's passion to become a great playwright as he jettisoned anything—and anybody—that got in his way. The play, based on facts, dramatizes the relationships of O'Neill, his last two wives and his obsession to excel in theatre, the only profession he knew.

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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Agnes Boulton.....24-35. Eugene's second wife. Attractive, dark, slender. A flirtatious, self-reliant fiction writer in her youth. Completely dedicated to Eugene at first, but harried and more assertive as she shoulders responsibility for their children while Eugene drinks and strays. Ambiguous feelings toward his affair with Carlotta and demands for a divorce, finally taking a firm stand when she realizes divorce is inevitable.

Jamie O'Neill.....39-42. Eugene's idolized older brother. Medium height, stocky build, dark hair. A Broadway dandy, proud of his excellent theatrical voice and prowess with women. A debauched, wasted alcoholic with a cynical, bitter attitude toward life and jealousy toward Eugene.

Eugene O'Neill.....29-65. Tall, thin, very dark eyes, hair and mustache. In youth, a dissipated alcoholic with wit, charm, a sardonic sense of humor. In maturity, a sober, driven, demanding man who was self-involved, self-deprecating, self-justifying and self-pitying. Alternately charming and generous or cold and aloof. At the end, completely compliant with Carlotta's demands and whims while experiencing a devastating, decade-long and possibly redemptive illness.

Carlotta Monterey..38-65. Eugene's third wife. Glamorous, sleek. When older, tends towards plumpness but hides it in elegant, *long*, black dresses. Soigné, imperious. Dark hair and eyes. A grande dame or old-time aristocrat who *will* have her own way.

Reporter.....Any age. Seen only from back. (May be doubled with Jamie.)

Eugene O'Neill, Jr..36. Tall, stocky, dark eyes and hair. Rich, resonant voice. Mustache, goatee. Idolizes his father and seeks always to please him. College professor and political liberal descends into alcoholism and a tragic end. (May be doubled with Jamie.)

Offstage voices (may be prerecorded or doubled as indicated):

Oona O'Neill as Crying Child (voice only)—doubled with Carlotta

Ship's Bursar (voice only)—doubled with Jamie.

Rocky (voice only)—doubled with Jamie

Harry Hope (voice only)—doubled with Jamie

Cora (voice only)—doubled with Agnes

## NOTES TO DIRECTOR:

This play adheres closely to actual events in the life of Eugene O'Neill. Some scenes have been fictionalized and actions were sometimes compressed, but overall the story is true. Because the action extends from 1917 to 1953, and because O'Neill changed homes frequently, the playwright has chosen an abstract, fluid approach for staging and encourages crossfades instead of blackouts whenever possible.

Although some set details are mentioned at the top of each scene, the play could be done most easily by using suggested sets where possible, employing props and lighting to define the playing areas. Actors can be underdressed in black leotards and tights. The costume elements they use for various scenes are on stage, readily accessible. They can take or replace these items in front of the audience as they walk into and out of scenes, perhaps from a clothes tree or similar device. Action flows from scene to scene through crossfades. The goal is to keep it moving. Flashbacks are lit with a blue light.

Eugene and Agnes may smoke cigarettes but Carlotta does not.

O'Neill grew up listening to his mother play the pianoforte and had a genuine love for music—especially jazz, ragtime of the early 1900s and a few classical composers. The play requires music in some scenes and the playwright offers some suggestions, also encouraging music between scenes where appropriate.

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Grants of Rights to use material written by  
**Eugene Gladstone O'Neill and Agnes Boulton O'Neill**  
in the new play by Jo Morello titled  
*E.G.O.: The Passions of Eugene Gladstone O'Neill*

From: "Patricia Willis" <patricia.willis@yale.edu>  
To: "Jo Morello" <jomorello@comcast.net>  
Subject: Request for permission to use quotations by Eugene O'Neill  
Sent: Monday, November 29, 2004 4:08 PM

Dear Jo,

I'm pleased to say you have the permission of the Yale Committee on Literary Property to use all the quotations in your play E.G.O.: THE PASSIONS OF EUGENE GLADSTONE O'NEILL.

Sincerely,  
Pat

---

Patricia C. Willis  
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----- Original Message -----

From: "Maura Jones" <[mauraon@ptd.net](mailto:mauraon@ptd.net)>  
To: "Jo Morello" <[jomorello@comcast.net](mailto:jomorello@comcast.net)>  
Sent: Friday, February 06, 2004 3:10 PM  
Subject: Permisson

Dear Jo,

I wanted to send you an email as it is quicker.

Several years ago my aunt, Agnes' last surviving child asked me to take care of any requests for information or permissions about Aggie. I suppose that makes me the person who can make these decisions. So, based on that I will give you permission to use what you have about Agnes.. . .

Maura O'Neill Jones

**ACT I**

**SCENE 1**

Time: Winter 1917.

Place: The Golden Swan, a sleazy, sinister bar in Greenwich Village known as "The Hell Hole."

A player piano upstage (or off) plays "12<sup>th</sup> Street Rag," "Dill Pickles Rag" or another song of the era. AGNES, 24, is alone at a table DSC, a drink before her, cigarette in her hand. She may wear long pearls, a hat or other indication of the era. She moves self-consciously to the music as she glances toward the door.

EUGENE, 29, and JAMIE, 39, enter from USR, inebriated and cold, each with a bottle. Topcoat over his arm, JAMIE wears a loud black-and-white print jacket, red carnation in his lapel and bowler hat that is slightly cockeyed, as is he. A disheveled EUGENE wears a winter jacket buttoned over a dark blue seamen's sweater proclaiming "American Line" in large white letters.

THEY stop to look around. EUGENE freezes.

JAMIE

WHAT HO! Look who's here!

AGNES

Who?

JAMIE

Ah, my beauteous damosel, don't be coy.

You've changed. Not so wild-looking anymore. A pretty Irish rose.

AGNES

How much have you had to drink?

JAMIE

Not enough. I got lost in the subway, looking for a big blonde with bad breath.

Where's your old man?

AGNES

Wher--? ... Dead!

Squinting drunkenly, HE realizes his error.

JAMIE

Sorry! You remind me of someone else. A dear friend of Gene's.

Accept this, please, with my apology.

AGNES

Who are you?

JAMIE

(kissing her hand)  
Jamie O'Neill, Broadway sport, actor, bar habitu  , rou  .... Why is such a fair maiden all alone?

AGNES

Should I rent an escort?

JAMIE

No need. I'm free.

AGNES

I'm waiting for someone.

JAMIE

Do I know him?

AGNES

Her. My friend Christine Ellman.

JAMIE

You have good taste in friends. May I become one?

SHE takes the flower, shakes hands as GENE walks over.

AGNES

Agnes Boulton, Jamie.... Who's Gene?

EUGENE

I am. Hello, Christine's friend. New to New York?

AGNES

Fresh from New Jersey. It shows that much?

JAMIE

Agnes, my kid brother Gene. Gene, meet Agnes.

SHE offers her hand. HE takes it and holds on.

EUGENE

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill... E.G.O. My friends call me Gene. Playwright. Poet. Drunk.

AGNES

Agnes Boulton. Writer, farmer, new girl in town--

EUGENE

That's why I haven't seen you before. I'm in here almost every day and--

AGNES

In *here* every day?

EUGENE

Officially the Golden Swan, but we call it the Hell Hole.

AGNES

Satan never had it so bad!

JAMIE

"Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!"

AGNES

It does look pretty hopeless.

EUGENE

That's why Jamie's leaving. Aren't you, Jamie?

JAMIE makes a sweeping bow and walks backwards to the door, tipping his hat and speaking as HE goes.

JAMIE

I am. Off to the Great White Way to find a Broadway Baby.

(opening and quickly closing the door, with its windy blast)

Brrr! It's a cold night out there. So cold that the iceman--

EUGENE

Nix on the iceman joke! There's a lady present.

AGNES looks puzzled.

JAMIE

Gene can tell you when he knows you better.... Well, I'm off!

(looking out, calling off)

What ho! Christine is here!

AGNES

Finally!

SHE rises to go. EUGENE touches her arm.

EUGENE

Please stay.

SHE looks at him uncertainly, looks toward the door.

JAMIE

(calling off)

Sorry, Christine. Agnes is busy. Shine your smiles on me! Let's have a roarin' good time.

Exiting, JAMIE emits his famous lion's roar. EUGENE sits beside AGNES, pouring her a drink.

EUGENE

I'm afraid you're stuck with me.

AGNES

Well, you're not exactly Christine, but—

SHE raises her glass. HE clinks the bottle against it.  
THEY drink. There's an awkward pause, then...

EUGENE

So you're the famous farmer's daughter..... What brings you to New York?

AGNES

I got tired of milking cows.

EUGENE

(silly)  
That's udder nonsense!

AGNES

You're udderly ridiculous!

THEY giggle.

AGNES

I've been writing pulp fiction since high school. Doing well, but barely covering the mortgage. So while my parents run the farm, I hope to make more by writing here.

HE swigs from his bottle and refills her glass. SHE sips slowly, becoming slightly tipsy as HE gets drunker.

EUGENE

Do you like poetry?

AGNES

Yours?. . . Would I have seen it somewhere?

EUGENE

Maybe. (grandiosely) I've been published here and there. . . . I meant Francis Thompson's. Do you know *The Hound of Heaven*? It's about a man trying to escape his God. 183 lines and I know every one! May I?

AGNES

(smiling)  
Maybe next time.

EUGENE

Just a few lines, then.  
(quite somber, serious, but nonetheless tipsy)  
I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears I hid from Him—

SHE takes his hand and HE practically melts into her.

AGNES

I'd like to hear *your* poetry.

EUGENE



Wouldn't do you justice... but I'll write a poem just for you. And you can see my plays. *In the Zone* is touring on the Orpheum Circuit.

(sneering)

Vaudeville!

AGNES

It must be wonderful.

EUGENE

Can't possibly be. Too many people like it!

AGNES

But to have your play produced--

EUGENE

(dismissive, perhaps shrugging)

I grew up in the theatre. My old man is the Count of Monte Cristo.

AGNES

The great actor James O'Neill?

HE gives HER several news clips from his pocket.

AGNES

The *Boston Post*, last August. "Many people will remember James O'Neil, who played *Monte Cristo*. His son—Eugene O'Neil--" . . . You really *are* his son.

EUGENE

Someday he'll be remembered as my father... when I bury the bombast that passes for theatre in America. Replace it with the kind of theatre where truth can live.

(slurring)

I'll write like Ibsen, like Stringberg!

AGNES

(outrageously silly)

*Stringberg?*

EUGENE

(giggling)

*Strindberg*. A Swedish playwright. And the Norwegian, Ibsen. You know *Hedda Gabler*?[pron. "gobbler"]

AGNES

You're teasing! First Stringberg, now a gobbler! A turkey! Isn't that what you call a bad play?

EUGENE

G-A-B-L-E-R. Not...

(laughing, perhaps flapping his "wings")

Gobble, gobble, gobble!... *Hedda Gabler*. A play by Ibsen. I saw it done here by the Abbey Players, from Ireland.

AGNES

So you're going to Europe.

EUGENE

Better. I'll bring that kind of theatre here... Real people. Real problems.

AGNES

Nobody wants to see a play about problems.

EUGENE

They will if it's done right.

AGNES

You really think audiences want that?... And you're the one to do it?

EUGENE

(pointing to another news clip)  
Maybe the only one. But don't take my word for it.

AGNES

"Eugene O'Neill, who knocked about the world in tramp steamers and saw life 'in the raw-'" How raw?

EUGENE

Raw.... Keep reading.

AGNES

". . . has written some little plays which have made a very deep impression." What are your plays about?

EUGENE

Life. People. The sea. Man's relationship to God.

AGNES

In that order?

EUGENE

(indicating another clipping)  
Sometimes all at once. . . . and it works!

AGNES

The *Boston-Post*. September. "Provincetown Players have put on two plays by Eugene O'Neil, a young dramatist . . . who is going to be heard from. . . ." Well, you're a playwright, maybe a poet. . . possibly—and I hope I'm wrong—a drunk. But I can tell you're more than that.

HE jumps up jauntily and pulls back his jacket in a  
"ta-da!" motion to reveal his sweater.

EUGENE

An able-bodied seaman!  
(indicating still another clip)  
And genius. It says so right there.

Smiling, SHE returns the clips. HE sits beside her.

EUGENE

I just got \$75 each for three one-act plays, a \$200 advance, \$50 a week in royalties—

AGNES

I'm more interested in who you are.

EUGENE  
How much do you get for your stories?

AGNES  
Is money what matters?

EUGENE  
How much?

AGNES  
I've been at it for years.

EUGENE  
How much?

AGNES  
Oh, fifty. . . a hundred. For a novelette, maybe one fifty.

EUGENE  
That's pretty good, especially for a woman.

AGNES  
For a wom—!

EUGENE  
You make more than I do.

AGNES  
And that upsets you.

EUGENE  
Not at all. I think we should get married.

AGNES  
STOP RIGHT THERE!

EUGENE  
(giggling, silly)  
I've always wanted to be a kept man.

AGNES  
You look pretty UN-kempt to me.

EUGENE  
That's just on the surface. Inside, I'm a complete mess.

AGNES  
You're an odd man, Gene O'Neill.

EUGENE  
You've only seen the tip of my. . .

AGNES

Ego?

EUGENE

Talent!

AGNES

Are you this charming sober?

THEY lean towards one another, inebriated, enchanted.

EUGENE

Stick around and find out.

AGNES

How long would I have to wait?

Then HE pops to attention.

EUGENE

If your "old man" is dead, how can he be running the farm?

AGNES

My *husband* is dead. My father—and mother—care for my little girl, Barbara. I'm the breadwinner.

EUGENE

You're a mother??? *And* a woman writer?

AGNES

Will you stop that!

EUGENE

All right.... But you're a farmer too!

AGNES

Only part-time.... You're a sailor!

EUGENE

Seaman. . . . Only part-time... But you're a widow!

AGNES

Sadly, full-time.... And you're a virgin!

EUGENE

(giggling)

Only part-time.... But you're a mother! With a child!

AGNES

Yes. Mothers usually have children.

EUGENE

I want you all to myself.

AGNES

WHAT???

EUGENE

I need you.... I can become America's greatest playwright... with your help.

AGNES

How could I help?

EUGENE

(grinning)

You know. Cook. Clean. Keep house—

AGNES

You have a house?

EUGENE

I will. I've never had a real home. It's what I want most. After marrying you and becoming a great artist.

AGNES

So I'm to cook, clean—

EUGENE

. . . and love me, of course.

AGNES

(rising and gathering her things)

I have to go.

HE tugs HER back down.

EUGENE

Give me a chance!

SHE sinks down, resigned. HE refills her glass and cajoles her, perhaps touching her cheek or chin.

EUGENE

Please?

AGNES

(smiling)

I don't know why I'm still here.

EUGENE

I'm irresistible.

SHE relaxes and HE snuggles into her.

EUGENE

(drunkenly, childishy)

C'mon. Lemme be your kid.

AGNES

I already have a child.

EUGENE

Leave her with your folks.

AGNES

You're really asking me to leave my child behind!

EUGENE

You've already done it....Please, Agnes, I need your love.

AGNES

I have my own life.

EUGENE

I'll fill it with more love than you ever imagined.... Children grow up and leave. I never would. . . . Marry me, Agnes.

AGNES

(rising abruptly, picking up her coat)

This is all too fast. I need time to sober up... to think... to write!

EUGENE

We'll write together. Two desks. Two pencils.

HE digs in his pockets, extracts a pencil, and solemnly, drunkenly presents it to HER.

With all my worldly goods I thee endow. It's your engagement pencil, Aggie.

SHE laughs, takes it, then returns it.

AGNES

You're crazy, Gene. A mother does not abandon her child!

EUGENE

Of course not. You'll visit her—

Indignant, SHE pulls on her coat, not noticing that she's dropped her hat. HE picks it up and holds it out to her, but SHE isn't looking at him as SHE rushes to leave.

AGNES

Good night, Mr. O'Neill. Meeting you has been very. . . interesting.

SHE yanks on her gloves and heads for the door, looking around for her hat. HE moves quickly, pivoting in front of her and blocking her at the door.

EUGENE

You can't escape. I'm the hound of heaven. Marry me, Miss Agnes ... er...

AGNES

Boulton! Agnes Boulton! You don't even know my last name!

EUGENE

Doesn't matter. You'll change it to O'Neill. You'll be the most wonderful wife--

AGNES

You don't want a wife. You want a mother!

EUGENE

You could be both.

AGNES

You're drunk and insane... and I'm leaving.

EUGENE

(tenderly placing her hat on her head)

It's a cold world, Agnes. Let me keep you warm... for the rest of your life.

SHE tries to push past him.

AGNES

I need to think. Please.

EUGENE

I'm begging you: marry me, Agnes.

AGNES

But... I've only known you for a few minutes.... What if I meet someone else?

EUGENE

I'll step aside. As you'd do for me.

AGNES

Well, . . . of course . . . I mean--

EUGENE

But there could never be anyone else. Agnes, I want to spend every night of my life from now on with *you*. I mean this. *Every night of my life*.

AGNES

And we'll live happily ever after, on love and fresh air.

EUGENE

Have faith in me, Aggie.

AGNES

Gene O'Neill, who plans to be America's greatest playwright . . . let's sleep on it!

Music up ("If You Were the Only Girl in the World" or similar) as SHE takes his arm. HE smiles broadly, triumphantly, as they exit arm-in-arm. Crossfade lights to beach scene: a beach chair or two.

Music segues into "Blow the Man Down" as GENE and AGNES remove their street clothes, don elements of

beachwear and walk into . . .

## SCENE 2

Time: Summer 1920 (Three years later)

Place: The beach at Provincetown, MA. Sounds of gulls and the nearby ocean (offstage right).  
Music fades as EUGENE sings *a cappella*.

EUGENE

COME ALL YE YOUNG FELLOWS THAT FOLLOWS THE SEA.  
WAY! HEY! BLOW THE MAN DOWN!  
I'LL SING YE A SONG IF YE'LL LISTEN TO ME.  
GIVE US THE TIME AND WE'LL BLOW THE MAN DOWN!

EUGENE sways to the music, miming the shipboard chore of pulling a line. HE nudges AGNES and SHE joins in miming the activity, standing close behind him and singing the words SHE can pick up. SHE starts to laugh and HE joins in.

EUGENE & AGNES

O, LAY ALONG SMARTLY EACH LOUSY RECRUIT.  
WAY! HEY! BLOW TH' MAN DOWN!  
OR IT'S LIFTED YE'LL BE WITH THE TOE OF A BOOT.  
GIVE US THE TIME AND WE'LL BLOW THE MAN DOWN!

THEY fall over clumsily, laughing, then get up.

EUGENE

I love it here. We'll raise Shane like my father raised us... summers by the water, winters in the cities.

AGNES

If anybody ever told me I'd be living in an abandoned Life Saving Station--

EUGENE

Best wedding gift ever. I love being near the water. Reminds me of my days at sea, free from society's phony demands. .... Ready for a dip?

SHE waves him off. HE runs into the water.

AGNES

Don't swim out so far this time.

SHE sits in the deck chair, reading. JAMIE enters from the unseen cottage (stage left), ever the dandy. HE is clearly not sober. Unseen, in his pockets, are a letter and a hip flask.

AGNES



Jamie! How could you leave the baby alone?

JAMIE

You'll hear him when he wakes up. You don't call him "Shane the Loud"—

AGNES

"Shane the Proud."

JAMIE

You don't call him "Shane the Loud" for nothing.

HE pulls a letter from his pocket.

JAMIE

The Coast Guard brought the mail. I thought you'd want this letter from Columbia University. (mispronouncing) Pah-litzer? Pull-itzer committee?

HE hands her the letter. SHE tears it open and reads.

AGNES

Oh, my God! Jamie, a prize. A thousand dollars!

SHE cups her mouth and calls offstage right, then waves the letter and signals GENE to shore.

GENE! . . . GENE!!!! . . . He's so far out.... GENE!...He's coming in.

JAMIE

A thousand? (more loudly) A thousand bucks!... It's... finally... too... much! I've been the black sheep since the day he was born. Mama's little darling. Papa's little pet.

AGNES

You're drunk. I've heard all this before.

JAMIE

I had Mama to myself until Gene was born. Then the quacks started her on morphine and for 25 years, I had no mother!

AGNES

Neither did Gene. From the day he was born.

JAMIE

But we always had booze. "Teething, little man? Let's rub some whiskey on your gums".... "Can't sleep? A spoonful will help."... "Havin' a nightmare? Here, Son. Just a little sip now, mind you." ...I grew up in the shadows, followed Papa on the stage. I've even got the old man's famous voice! He doesn't even care. But when Gene wanted a job on that dinky newspaper, Papa paid his salary. Gene never knew. When he wrote his first dumb little plays, Papa paid to have them published. When he wanted to study playwriting, Papa sent him to that fancy class at Harvard. Now Gene wants a house on the beach and Papa buys you the cottage.

AGNES

A wedding gift. Nothing special.

JAMIE

He never bought me a doghouse!

AGNES

You forget how he put Gene in that cheap State Farm when he got TB.

JAMIE

I fought for him. Why do you think the old man moved him to a better place?

AGNES

Papa would've helped you if you ever showed an interest in anything. He sent you to college for four years and you couldn't stay sober long enough to graduate.

JAMIE

That's three more years than your husband, Miss Prim. Princeton got wise to him right away. But he still made his mark. I don't get it. He drank as hard as I did. Bought just as many whores--

AGNES

WHAT?

JAMIE

Got into even more trouble. Failed at more jobs. Lived just as useless a life. Worse. He tried to kill himself.

AGNES

So do you. Every day

JAMIE

Booze doesn't count.... What makes Gene better than me? I'm older. Smarter. A better writer. Better actor. But I have nothing, and he has everything. Even a loving wife and baby.

(smirking)

His second loving wife and baby, truth be told.... Say, did he ever tell you about Kathleen and Eugene Junior? How Papa got him out of that mess? A shotgun wedding, for cripe's sake! And ugly divorce.

EUGENE (off)

AHOY, THERE!

AGNES

(looking out)

Hurry! It's big news!

JAMIE

We'll have to celebrate! Really tie one on.

AGNES

No!

EUGENE enters, soaking wet. As AGNES runs to him...

AGNES

GENE! You won a prize! For *Beyond the Horizon*. You won the ...

(looking at the letter) Pulitzer Prize.

EUGENE

Never heard of it. Forget it. Just a dinner to attend, a speech to write--

SHE waves the letter under his nose.

AGNES

... a thousand-dollar check to cash!

EUGENE

(grabbing the letter)  
A thousand? You're sure? A thousand bucks!

HE jumps into the air in a celebratory pose, then lifts  
AGNES and whirls her in the air.

AGNES

(laughing)  
You're all wet!

EUGENE

Not as a playwright!

JAMIE watches, jealous.

AGNES

I always thought of *Beyond the Horizon* as our play—and now this honor--

EUGENE

I'm already honored every night when the lights go up on Broadway. Papa was skeptical when we did my plays here in Provincetown. Now he's dumbfounded.

AGNES

They're a far cry from his old-time melodramas.

EUGENE

But he always made damn fine suggestions. He should be here now.

AGNES

We'll go down to the hospital next week.

JAMIE

If he's still alive.

EUGENE

He won't be if there's a merciful God. It's a cruel finish for a good man.... After he saw *Beyond the Horizon*, he said--

AGNES

(in a deep voice, dramatically mimicking the old actor)  
"I dragged you into the theatre through the stage door, and you wound up writing the whole show."

EUGENE

No, that was another time. He said,  
(laughing and mimicking his father)  
"Son, are you sending your audience home to commit suicide?"

THEY laugh. JAMIE stands back, swigging.

AGNES

You told me he wasn't a good father--

EUGENE

I didn't understand him.

AGNES

...and your mother wasn't a good mother.

EUGENE

I'll never understand her.

JAMIE

Maybe you're not trying hard enough.

EUGENE

What's there to understand? That she chose morphine over us?

JAMIE

You should understand addiction.

EUGENE

Don't make excuses. You were always too close to Mama.

JAMIE

What are you saying?

EUGENE

Never mind. Nothing. Forget it.

JAMIE

You don't understand addiction? You tend to hit the sauce pretty heavily.

EUGENE

So do you. But we never tried to drown ourselves because we ran out of booze.

JAMIE

You weren't supposed to see that.

EUGENE

Life was pretty rotten after that.

JAMIE

At least you had your nanny.

EUGENE

A poor substitute who scared the bejesus out of me with her gruesome bedtime stories—then left me terrified every night, alone in the dark.

AGNES

Is that why Papa sent you to boarding school?

EUGENE

He had no choice, out on the road with his shows, and Mama--

JAMIE

We hated him for it.

EUGENE

They could have let me come home for Christmas! Six years old and alone in a dormitory.

AGNES

I'm so sorry--but it's in the past.

EUGENE

The past is our present. Our future, too.

AGNES

Isn't this supposed to be a celebration?

EUGENE

Indeed it is. Let's find some good bathtub gin!

JAMIE

Don't have to go far.

HE hands the flask to EUGENE, who takes a swig.  
AGNES looks around desperately for an excuse.

AGNES

Was that the baby?

JAMIE

I didn't hear anything.

AGNES

I'm sure I heard Shane... . Gene, could you check?

EUGENE

(heading off stage right)  
Be right back. (to Jamie) Save some of that hootch for me!

JAMIE

Are you his mama now?

AGNES

I'm whatever he needs, so he can write... and he can't write when he drinks. Don't get him started.

JAMIE

He doesn't need me for that. You're not exactly Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.

AGNES

Writing is his whole life.

JAMIE

Then why'd you have the kid? You know he didn't want any.

AGNES

What brings you here ... again?

JAMIE

(slurring his speech throughout the scene)  
Provincetown isn't the end of the world, Aggie,  
(looking around at the dunes)

but you can see it from here.... I needed a break from Papa's bedside. And I didn't just barge in. Gene invited me. Didn't he tell you? ... You don't like me much, do you?

AGNES

I do... when you're sober.

HE drunkenly tries to hug her.

JAMIE

I like *you*... a lot.

SHE pushes him away.

AGNES

Don't—

JAMIE

I raised him. Baby brother owes me. Just a little piece of what he's got—

AGNES

I'm not your little piece!

SHE raises her hand to slap him, then pulls back suddenly.

JAMIE

(pointing to his cheek, drunkenly)  
Go 'hed. Slap me. You wouldn't be the first.

SHE still holds back.

Whassa matter? Afraid I'll hit you back? ... Thas the other O'Neill brother.

As EUGENE enters...

AGNES

(exiting)  
My marriage is none of your business! You're destructive... cold... cynical.

JAMIE

Uh-Uh. To be cynical, you've gotta believe in something.  
(seeing Eugene)

Like baby brother. He believes he's gonna be a great artist, or nothing. Today he got a letter sayin' he's a great artist. The rest of us. . . we're the "nothing."

EUGENE

Quit it! You still have a chance. The world is your oyster!

JAMIE

I've already eaten it. You're the honored guest at the feast, taking whatever you want.... And to hell with everyone else!

EUGENE

(grabbing the flask away)  
STOP IT!

JAMIE

Hey, it's Prohibition. Get your own stuff!

EUGENE

Go back to the cottage, Jamie. Sleep it off.

JAMIE

Don't wanna sleep.

EUGENE

What *do* you want?

JAMIE

(nose-to-nose with Eugene)  
Your wife.

EUGENE

My WHAT????

JAMIE

Your ... LIFE. An eentsy-weentsy crumb. You can spare it. You've got it all. Lovely little family, plays on the stage, plays on the road, plays in books, plays everywhere!! You're famous. And now this Pulitzer—

EUGENE

How do I share that? You want money? Is that it?

JAMIE

Money????! Papa is so damned proud of you. Keeps your reviews by his pillow. Shows all the nurses, all his visitors.... He's gonna die, Gene! And he hates me.

EUGENE

He doesn't hate you.

JAMIE

Don't lie. He's gonna die full of pride for you ... and nothing but disgust for me.

EUGENE puts his arm around JAMIE'S shoulders and turns him towards the cottage.

EUGENE

Let's go back to the cottage.

JAMIE whirls suddenly.

JAMIE

God damn it, Gene! When Papa was on the road, when Mama was on morphine, who taught you the ropes? I did! I made you. I'm inside you. You're my Frankenstein. Now you're a success, you forget all about me. You should be thanking me.

JAMIE puts his arm around EUGENE and reaches for the flask. HE swigs, then offers it back to EUGENE.

JAMIE

C'mon, Kid. I didn't mean to hurt you. Have a drink on me. I'm your old pal. . .

EUGENE drinks, then passes the flask back. As THEY exit, stage left...

JAMIE

But watch out, Gene. I'm gonna teach you one last lesson: Never trust a man with nothin' to lose.... And that's me, Baby Brother. I'll give you the glad hand, and at the first good chance I get,

(suddenly slapping Gene hard in the back)

I'll stab you in the back!

Crossfade lights for next scene as Jamie exits. Eugene ages to 38 as he enters . . .

### SCENE 3

Time: November 1926.

Place: The main room of Spithead (stage left), the O'Neill home in Bermuda. The interior is a shell undergoing renovation. A clothesline strung across the room sports wet towels, bathing suits, diapers—even Eugene's shirt and trousers. A large mirror on a back wall, luggage piled in a corner, two typewriters back-to-back on a table, chairs facing each other, a phone; papers, scripts, ashtrays scattered about.

AGNES and EUGENE, still in beachwear, are clearly older. Lights up on an angry AGNES, carrying a clothes basket. She is mussed, frazzled, distracted by the wailing of a sleepy 18-month-old CHILD. EUGENE follows, carrying a manuscript and pencils. Through the following, AGNES removes and folds clothes from the line. HE moves towards the table to write.

EUGENE

I never meant to hurt you, Agnes. What happened in New York is over. Dead. Ancient history. If Carlotta meant anything to me, I never would have told you.

AGNES

Maybe you were afraid I'd hear it for myself.... At this rate, we'll never see our tenth anniversary.



EUGENE

Be patient with me, My Own. Once I re-adjust to Bermuda's slower pace I'll be fine. I promise.

No response.

EUGENE

Come on, Agnes. One affair, and just for amusement.

AGNES

Betraying your wife and children? I don't see the humor.

EUGENE

Carlotta would bore me to tears. You're an accomplished writer. She can barely write her name.

AGNES

But she's beautiful.... in her way.

EUGENE

And empty. Like some discarded beach shell.

AGNES

You chose a boring, empty... beach shell!... over me?

EUGENE

Aggie, you're my own dearest wife. Only you, Old Sweetheart.

HE stands behind her and kisses her neck while she takes down the laundry. SHE pushes him away.

AGNES

Don't give me your sweet talk. She's been after you from the day she flounced on to our porch like some two-bit whore!

EUGENE

She's not a two-bit--

AGNES

All right. One bit! We went all the way to Maine for a private vacation and she barged right in!

FLASHBACK: Crossfade to blue light on a porch outside a summer lodge in Maine. EUGENE and AGNES walk into the set. HE sits beside a small table with a tea service. AGNES pours and HE tries to raise a cup to his lips, but his hands tremble badly. AGNES lovingly clasps her hands around his to help. HE looks at her, helpless, embarrassed but appreciative. As they share their quiet moment, CARLOTTA rushes in, daringly dressed (for 1926), in heavy makeup, form-fitting casual clothes and a dramatically draped scarf. AGNES stiffens, quickly shifts gears and greets CARLOTTA coolly.

AGNES

May I help you?

CARLOTTA eyes her coldly. It's mutual.

CARLOTTA

I believe we've met. Backstage at Mr. O'Neill's play?

AGNES

*The Hairy Ape*? Four years ago?

CARLOTTA

You do remember! I'm Carlotta Monterey. Elisabeth Marbury's guest.

AGNES

I thought she was coming.

CARLOTTA

I'm afraid her age holds her back. She sent me. .... Actually I'm here to see Eugene O'Neill.

CARLOTTA spies HIM and extends her hand. AGNES raises hers to shake hands.

AGNES

Yes. Well.. . . I'm Agnes O'Neill, his wi—

CARLOTTA ignores AGNES and makes a beeline for EUGENE, hand still outstretched. HE shakes hands.

CARLOTTA

(breathlessly, dramatically)

Mr. O'Neill! Do you remember me? Carlotta Monterey? I hope you think better of my acting than you did when last we met.

EUGENE

To be honest, I haven't followed your career. But I'm sure you're doing well. Where's Miss Marbury?

CARLOTTA fusses with her scarf and discreetly lets it slide to one of the chairs.

CARLOTTA

Well, I've certainly followed yours. Very impressive. I loved *Desire Under the Elms*.

EUGENE

Uh, thank you....Where did you say Miss Marbury is?

CARLOTTA

Resting. She sends her regrets, along with an invitation for this evening.

EUGENE

Take that up with my wife, Miss Monterey.

AGNES

We're busy tonight.

CARLOTTA

Of course. It IS short notice. Perhaps later then.

(exiting)

I'll give Miss Marbury your regrets.

AGNES

Do that.

EUGENE

Miss Marbury is known for the feminine company she keeps. You don't suppose that Monterey woman—

AGNES

Male or female, they say backstage. But always to the highest bidder.

SHE picks up the scarf, drapes it around her shoulders and  
mocks CARLOTTA.

"Mr. O'Neill! I hope you think better of my acting than you did when last we met." ....

Crossfade lights to the present, as baby OONA is heard  
crying loudly. EUGENE and AGNES walk back into the  
scene. AGNES pulls off the scarf, throws it to the floor.

AGNES

Carlotta!

EUGENE

Agnes, please. Don't let her come between us.

AGNES

You already did that. Carlotta in New York, me in Bermuda. I'm stuck in the Bermuda Triangle!

EUGENE

Can't we go back to the way we were?

AGNES

(exiting angrily with the clothesbasket)

I'm not enough for you, am I? Nor our children, nor your success. No matter what you have, you always  
want more. What do you need to be happy?

HE looks after her, angry and confused. After a minute,  
HE goes to the mirror and regards his image. Troubled at  
first, HE gradually relaxes and becomes pleased. HE slicks  
back his hair and strokes his mustache. With a small smile  
and determined step, HE goes to his typewriter, rolls in a  
sheet of paper and starts to type.

EUGENE

Dear Carlotta,

HE looks up and smiles as if in a pleasant dream. HE picks  
up a pencil, erases, and types again.

*Dearest* Carlotta,

HE rips the page out, crumples it and throws it away.

HE opens his manuscript and starts to write in it. HE erases, writes again, erases again, and closes the cover.

HE rolls paper into the typewriter and starts typing in earnest, speaking the words as HE goes.

EUGENE

Dearest Carlotta, I have missed you so terribly. I try to forget, but I can almost feel your presence, hear your beautiful voice. When you left New York, all the sunshine went with you. But you were right to go.

HE sits at the typewriter but need not type as he speaks.

EUGENE

I keep reminding myself that I'm a married man with children—something it was easy to forget in your arms. You are so bewitching, dearest Shadow Eyes. Who could blame me?... I've confessed my indiscretion to Agnes and she has agreed to forgive—but I doubt she'll forget. Nor will I, Dearest.  
(regarding his chaotic living situation)

The latest O'Neill homestead—we call it Spithead—is the devil's own mess and needs major renovations. Your orderly life makes everything here seem far too chaotic. I have bitten off too much. And I miss you desperately. Sometimes I feel you're so close I can touch you. How I wish I could be with you! ... But I have so little to give.... I hoped that you would forget all about me.... Oh, hell! Please don't forget me! Or, for your sake, please do!

HE rolls the page out of the typewriter and signs it.

EUGENE

As always, Gene.

HE hides the letter in his manuscript. A long pause while HE attempts to gather his thoughts and settles down to work. AGNES enters. Obviously trying to avoid their previous argument, SHE makes small talk while noisily fixing herself a soda and bustling around. It's all too much; HE'S ready to fight.

AGNES

It's not easy having all four kids at once but I'm glad my Barbara and your Eugene could visit. He adores you. He stands on the shore, reciting his poems. To impress you, maybe. Make up for all the years you two missed. And little Shane follows him around, reciting—no, shouting—his eight-years-old version of poetry.

EUGENE cringes as SHE pulls out her chair with a loud, scraping sound and settles at her typewriter, shuffling through and arranging papers.

AGNES

Shane the Loud!. . . And Gene, you won't believe this: My Barbara has a crush on your Eugene. Would that be incest?

EUGENE

SHUT UP! How can I work with all your chatter, in this miserable mess? I've quit drinking, entered therapy, kept busy, cleaned up my life—and still—I can't concentrate. And I'm damned lonely.

AGNES

I'm lonely too. This isn't what I expected from marriage. Stranded in Bermuda, in a crumbling mansion. We keep buying *houses*, and after we live in them a while, you go off looking for a home.

EUGENE

Is it so awful to want my own home? Don't you?

AGNES

Somehow we never get around to what I want.

EUGENE

If I were happy, you would be too.

AGNES

You really believe that!

EUGENE

Of course... If our marriage was just the two of us, as we agreed. An aloneness broken by nothing.

HE piles manuscripts and papers on the typewriter.

EUGENE

Send Eugene and Barbara home. Vacation is over. And tell your nanny to keep Shane and Oona quiet. Take them to the beach. I'm moving my typewriter to the guest house. Make sure I'm not disturbed. I can't get any work done with you around.

HE picks up his things. SHE corners him as he tries to exit.

AGNES

Then how did you win two Pulitzers?

EUGENE

I would have done it without you.

HE puts the typewriter and scripts down again.

AGNES

You ungrateful son-of-a-bitch! When we met, you were a whimpering self-involved alcoholic with a few productions and a lot of dreams. I can remember days you were too drunk even to lift a glass to your mouth.

EUGENE

Those days are over!

AGNES

About time! I've been with you when you couldn't get out of bed for days. Missed trains. Missed deadlines. Missed rehearsals. God damn it, Gene, you can't build a career on hope—especially when you're too drunk to hold a pencil. And now that *you've* found sobriety, the woman who helped you for years needs a drink!

(raising her glass in a sarcastic toast, drinking and scowling)

And you won't let her have a real one!

(breezily, as she drinks)

I swear! Nothing worse than a reformed drunk.

HE heads angrily for the clothesline, throwing back a chair that's in his way. It hits the floor with a crash.