

Tea Time with Hank and Ralphie

by
David Jamison

ACT I

(HANK, ANGELINA, RALPH, and SARAH are all luxuriating in a shaded glade, drinking tea. They present a frieze from stage right to left with Hank leaning against a tree; Sarah and then Angelina seated behind the tea service; and Ralph reclining on one arm. All are dressed in mid-19th Century garb. Hank and Angelina are played by black actors, Ralph and Sarah are white. Lights go down on all actors except Hank.)

HANK

Hello, my name is Henry Thoreau and I have a love affair with words. The shape of them, the feel of the them . . . I believe English might be the most beautiful language ever uttered; the perfect melding of the tongues of a thousand conquered kingdoms.

(Lights come up over Ralph.)

RALPH

Of course, most people don't have the money to afford an education such as ours, and as such never develop a viable relationship with their mother tongue.

(Lights come up over Sarah.)

SARAH

But that's the oldest story in the book. It comes in a thousand shapes and colors. My name is Sarah, Sarah Grimke. I followed my younger sister Angelina into the abolitionist's cause, attempting to weed out the evil of slavery from the oak of our mighty nation. This is Ralph Emerson, a philosopher of some renown, though you wouldn't guess it from all that earnest expression and wanton anxiety.

(Lights come up over Angelina)

ANGELINA

And I'm Angelina, the heretofore spoken of and erstwhile star of the show. Or, rather, the queen of the world. Or whatever.

SARAH

Hank and Ralphie are famous for being what some people today call transcendentalists, because of their belief that God exists in all living things, transcending the physical world to manifest in all places at all times. They're both very impressive icons.

ANGELINA

All we ever did was lead female activists in this country out of centuries of second-class citizenship.

SARAH

All part of a woman's work.

ANGELINA

And heavens forbend the notion that we would ever look with an unkind eye at our legacy.

SARAH

The legion of proud young women this country produces is testament enough to its impact.

ANGELINA

It's just that on certain matters, in certain flights of the mind, Hank and Ralphie can be a little . . .

SARAH

Traditional.

ANGELINA

Stuffy.

SARAH

Like with words.

HANK

Words can have a magical effect on the brain. I may use words to transmit information, or I can use them conceptually, to form an image in the listener's mind. But in the end, all that matters is the finished product. Do you see the same things with your mind's eye that I did before I started speaking with you? Language is a trans-chromatic jigsaw, a kaleidoscope of colors with which I can array the canvass of communication.

ANGELINA

Yes, well, that's lovely imagery, dear.

HANK

I know you think that I'm ridiculous.

ANGELINA

You know I think that you're an intellectual snob, Hank. We've had this conversation before. You claim your ardor for the mother tongue, yet you despise the variation in her dialects.

HANK

I think that's unfair. I value a man's integrity far more than I value his intellectualism.

ANGELINA

There's gonna be a revolution comin' round, Hank, you mark my words. It's a Revolution of Indignance. A Revolution of Galled Presumption. The common man knows the low opinion you have of him and his labored speech. He cleans up those vulgar caricatures schoolboys leave on their desks! Who died and made you English God?

RALPH

Our Founding Fathers.

SARAH

Our Founding Fathers have replaced our father in heaven. We dynamite graven images of them onto the sides of mountains.

RALPH

Monuments, dear.

SARAH

Of course.

HANK

I think you're abusing me, Angel, and I know the great sport you take in twisting people's words. Tell *me* about the plight of the common man. Tell me as I wear his legacy as a sheath across my skin, as I go to jail for him. I know how evil comes packaged with slick words and promises. That's why the only way to combat ideas eloquently is to embrace eloquence yourself. Make your speech a celebration of the language.

ANGELINA

Yes, well, that's easy to say . . .

HANK

Do you know that I have students who imitate the warrior culture of the Susquehanna Indians, wearing their pants low and using their hands when they talk, trying to seem more like a Susquehanna brave? And these children actually speak this obscene mixture of English and Susquehanna to each other and to other teachers, never getting either language right and completely frustrating any attempt to understand what they're talking about. How are those children going to succeed in our society? You're so free to call me a snob, but as common as you claim, you still retreat to the glade with us, in your finery. And you still say Mummy and Daddy come Christmases and birthdays.

ANGELINA

Oh, Brother Henry, you cut me to the quick. But I am resolute. I will see a loosening of that upper lip before I'm through. A change is in the winds, as sure as I'm sitting here. A Revolution of Principle. A Restitution of National Priorities. Down with the intellectual elite, up with honesty as a blueprint for living. You're all Mr. Compassion and Upwards Bootstraps, but it's only so long as you have a battle to fight. You have as much fear of embracing the unwashed masses as the industrialists and the moneylenders.

HANK

Oh, that's a foul slander you are throwing down upon me, woman.

ANGELINA

Then come along with me, Brother Hank. Embark upon this journey with me and rejoice in the freedom into which these footsteps will lead you. Your acceptance is granted. Enlightenment, ho! There! Look! We only need start living it. If we can accept all people on the Earth just as they are and just how they express themselves, and put it into practice first amongst ourselves and then have the notion spread over the land like a terrible storm? Well now sir I see revolution on the winds, swooping down over the sierra like a Great Engine of Progress, sweeping up our people into the Golden Age foretold from time immemorial.

SARAH

And we've had a pretty good wait.

ANGELINA

But it starts with you, Henry, and shaking off your last vestiges of this meaty world.

HANK

Well of all that you've said, that sounds like a worthy intention.

ANGELINA

Accept all people. On the Earth. Just as they are. And just how they express themselves. And then you can have your Grand Canvass of Kaleidoscopic Communication. Your Last Great Language of Us. I see your designs, Henry Thoreau, and your vivacious planning. I see that world too, but it starts within, right now.

SARAH

(to audience)

And so on with the show.

(Lights.)

(Lights up, and all four are again at the glade in their original positions. Hank is scribbling on a notepad.)

HANK

Hmm.

SARAH

What? I do so hate it when you go "Hmm" like that.

HANK

It's just that -- Hmm. This isn't good. By my calculations, the military industrial complex assumed control of the federal government after World War II, and engineered the assassination of President Kennedy because he discovered their conspiracy.

Silence.

ALL

Hmm.

SARAH

That isn't good.

RALPH

That's quite disturbing. And you worked this all out mathematically, hunh? (grabbing notepad) Do you mind if I .

. . Hey wait, you didn't carry the one -- Oh no, wait. Yeah you did.

ANGELINA

So they just took control?

HANK

During the post-war buildup. Every president since then has been their puppet except Kennedy. Even Clinton.

RALPH

That's not much of a surprise.

HANK

They put 'em up and then they knock 'em down. (showing pad to Sarah) Look, I made a little bar graph.

ANGELINA

You know what this is? This is Rome after Claudius. When the army just started *planting* Caesars on the throne.

SARAH

But who would've thought it could happen here, in a republic?

ANGELINA

I think the question to ask is what do we do to stop them?

RALPH

They make short work of people like us.

ANGELINA

But they can never silence our ideas.

SARAH

It sounds so unbelievable.

RALPH

Why? Are we above it all? Hasn't it happened a thousand times before?

HANK

A million by my count.

SARAH

President Kennedy deserved better than that.

HANK

He wasn't the only one.

SARAH

I can only imagine. Who are these people again?

HANK

America in the 1960s. Years from now. We'll be barely a memory.

SARAH

I do hate it when you go "Hmm" like that.

ANGELINA

It's always something disconcerting. It's getting cold. Let's go in.

(Actors walk in a circle, picking up sleeping bags from offstage and go back centerstage. Trees and flowers are pulled offstage as lights are dimmed. They all lay in spoons with Sarah facing audience, then Hank, then Angelina, then Ralph. They all get situated. Lots of snuggling and bundling. After Angelina and Ralph stop and Sarah closes her eyes, Hank keeps getting "situated." Sarah's eyes open.)

SARAH

Get that out of there.

HANK

Wha? I-I'm maximizing warmth capacity!

SARAH

I know what your maximizing. Move it or lose it, mister.

RALPH

Is that you?

HANK

Me?

RALPH

I don't know.

ANGELINA

That was me.

SARAH

Hank, I recognize your hands.

HANK

You recognize my hands?

SARAH

You have very distinctive hands. Thick. (exhales deeply)
There they go.

RALPH

How come we can never just sleep?

ANGELINA

Because men can never let an opportunity pass.

RALPH

While women can never pass up an opportunity to present
one.

SARAH

Actually, most of the time we're just trying to keep from
getting pregnant -- Oh Hank, please stop that.

HANK

I'm not touching you!

RALPH

Whoops!

SARAH

How'd you reach all the way over here?

RALPH

My hand slipped!

SARAH

Your hand slipped all the way over here?

ANGELINA

Ralphie has long hands.

HANK

You two are hand connoisseurs.

SARAH

Hands are very important. You can learn a lot about a man by the way he uses his hands.

ANGELINA

Stephen had illustrious hands.

RALPH

Stephen the Negro?

ANGELINA

Don't fence me in.

SARAH

He wasn't *the* Negro. There've been others . . . you know . . . in the world. I mean, it's not as if that's all the man was known for, his being a Negro. He had other accomplishments, you know? Hello?

(As Sarah talks, lights dim out with backlights on. All we see are silhouettes.)

SARAH

(whispering)

Okay.

(She rolls on her back as Hank's hands go to work. She starts to moan a little, and grabs his hands.)

HANK

Am I done?

SARAH

No! No . . . wait . . . wait . . . yes . . . yes!

(Hank's hands stop moving. He starts to kiss Sarah as she rolls over away and he gets her on the cheek. She reaches back with her free hand and strokes his hair.)

HANK

Goodnight, Sarah.

SARAH

Goodnight, baby.

(Lights fade to black.)

(Lights up, and Ralph, Angelina, and Sarah are again in same positions at the glade, drinking tea. Hank enters stage right.)

HANK

Crew, I have news.

RALPH

Out with it, then.

SARAH

And quick; my heart's a-flutter.

HANK

My great uncle's coming to visit.

ANGELINA

Coming to visit where?

RALPH

Angel . . .

SARAH

Ooh, that got the ole bitch warm . . .

HANK

Coming to visit here.

ANGELINA

Here at Walden? At our glade?

RALPH

Ease yourself, Angel.

HANK

He does halfway own the property, and though his beliefs might be near-sighted, he has a good heart, and is worthy of conversion. If we could try to remember what the virtue of patience teaches us -

ANGELINA

I don't know if folks like that convert, Henry. He's got a bit of the bad blood in him; he's a *eugenist*.

SARAH

Forgive men even the sin of pride, Angel; it's the Christian way.

ANGELINA

Aww, Christ and his rules.

HANK

They're more guidelines than rules.

RALPH

Musings on How to Lead a Happy Life Before Being Brutally Executed.

HANK

Someone should write an opera.

RALPH

How is it no one ever has?

SARAH

Because only women die at the end of operas.

(All pause)

I'm sorry, it's true. Didn't you all know?

OBEDIAH (O.S.)

Hello? Henry?

HANK

Over here, Obediah!

OBEDIAH

Where've you gotten to, boy?

HANK

I'm over here, uncle.

(Old white man enters stage
right.)

OBEDIAH

(approaching)

Nothing approaches the sweet aroma of a summer's glade.

RALPH

It's one of God's great wonders.

OBEDIAH

Ralph Waldo Emerson, as I live and breathe.

RALPH

Hey Obie.

HANK

And do you remember the Grimke sisters from South Carolina, Sarah and Angelina?

OBEDIAH

Ah, yes. We met at the springtime cottillion. Pleasure, ladies.

GIRLS

Your honor.

OBEDIAH

Is your mother well?

SARAH

As well as can be expected with two rogue daughters on the loose.

OBEDIAH

Don't be fooled. Though she has perfected the part of the put-upon matron, she takes every opportunity to regale visitors with your adventures.

ANGELINA

Does she?

OBEDIAH

She's become quite the raconteur. She evens makes the occasional appearance in your more progressive circles.

SARAH

She does not!

OBEDIAH

As I'm standing here before you. She's got credibility with the masses now that she's got freedom fighters in the family.

SARAH

Can you imagine mama at a Unitarian mobilization meeting?

ANGELINA

Where would she put her parasol? Or her hat?

SARAH

Or her bustle? Or her corset?

ANGELINA

Or her many many petticoats.

SARAH

Like layers of personality.

OBEDIAH

Your brother likewise seems to be making quite a name for himself with his work.

SARAH

He's our pride and joy.

OBEDIAH

You two seem like nice girls but I think that you should know. Your brother is stirring up trouble with people who don't like trouble.

SARAH

We have implicit trust in our brother's judgment.

ANGELINA

Thomas likes trouble. He's a troublemaker with a capital T.

OBEDIAH

Well, just the same. He's very charismatic. If he has any hope of a political career, he has the potential to be a great

ANGELINA

Thomas isn't concerned with how his actions will benefit him professionally.

RALPH

Angel . . .

OBEDIAH

With all due respect, young lady, I hadn't finished my statement.

RALPH

How's life in public service, Obie?

OBEDIAH

Ah, the vox populi. Sometimes she doesn't appreciate my great sacrifices.

ANGELINA

Ah yes, your sprawling estate and legion of servants is a hard row, your honor.

SARAH

Angelina.

OBEDIAH

What are you implying, miss?

HANK

Uncle, perhaps we could begin our tour of the property?

ANGELINA

You know what I'm implying, Judge. You may not remember, but I heard you at the dance, bragging about your indiscretions with your Negro servants.

OBEDIAH

Perhaps I was indiscreet but -

ANGELINA

Perhaps you were. I'd love to hear how those poor girls must speak of you.

OBEDIAH

Hold fast now lady, I've been tolerant of that lip to this point. If we are to have a referendum on morality I will not be judged by you or by anyone. The only one to whom I give that honor is God above, and I reckon He will have his say in good time.

Yes, I remember the looks you gave me from beneath your flowered bonnet, like so many daggers of rebuke. I could feel your displeasure like a thick shawl. I've known hundreds of young angry girls like you, so furious at the world that you just want to shake all the evil out of it. But you never notice one day when you become a part of the machine. It's your anger and disdain that makes the world go 'round, Angelina Grimke. People like you fuel the world with venomous hate and affected superiority. I may not have all the answers but I go to bed knowing that everyday I tried to make a positive difference for people.

SARAH

But how can - and I didn't want to get into this conversation - but how can chattel slavery be good for a person?

OBEDIAH

You know what I mean. Regular people.

ANGELINA

Regular people? What does that mean?

SARAH

(pulling Angelina aside)

Alright, Angel, let's let this die.

ANGELINA

But Sarah, he's supposed to know better! He's a judge.

SARAH

Exactly why we should treat him with respect.

ANGELINA

Respect? Does he show respect for those girls he violates?
Fuck him.

(All pause and look at Angel.)

ANGELINA

What? *What?* Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

HANK

Perhaps we could begin our tour of the property?

OBEDIAH

You're a mean and vulgar little girl, Angelina Grimke. I came up here hoping to have some intelligent discourse, but if your intent was to convert me I'm afraid you've had the opposite effect. Your wickedness closes every door you open with your wit. What people like you never get is that ugly words will never change the world, they'll just leave you bitter and lonely and your adversaries more entrenched in their position. And the sad part is that you think you're a hero. But you're no hero, you're just mean and ugly.

HANK

Let's be off.

OBEDIAH

Yes, lets.

(Hank and Obie leave)

RALPH

(looking at his pocketwatch)

And . . . time. Well, that lasted about seven minutes. Good going, Angel.

ANGELINA

I tried.

RALPH

Did you even? You know, Hank thinks a lot of you, both of you, that's why he brought his uncle up here. When he asked you to mind your tongue, it wasn't for his uncle's sake, it was for his.

(Hank walks in and over to Angelina.)

HANK

Yes, he's got his struggles, he knows that, he's trying. He's humiliated by his past behavior and he's trying. Does that mean anything to you? Trying? Does everybody have to be perfect right away all the time?

ANGELINA

That man is offensive, Henry.

HANK

But he's family and he's trying, Angel. He comes to me, ashamed of the way he'll be remembered, and I told him my friends have understanding minds and hearts. Why does it always have to be about winning with you, Angelina? He was *trying*. He's waiting. (Hank leaves)

ANGELINA

I don't think it was necessary for him to be so cruel.

RALPH

He wanted to prove that his friends weren't all cracked pots.

SARAH

Face it, Ralph, we're crackpots.

ANGELINA

Always have been and always will be. Who's up for a swim?

(No one answers so Angel exits stage left, alone and bitter, undressing and tossing her clothes behind her as she goes. This is a trope. Every time a character goes for a swim, the actor exits stage left and tosses as many clothes behind as they please)

(Lights fade.)

(Lights up as all four are again enjoying tea and playing cards. All players hold a few cards, and sit around a pile. Angelina, who has one card left, opens the scene by playing her last card.)

ANGELINA

Oh good, I'm president.

HANK

Oh great.

ANGELINA

Hank, I want you to grab Ralphie's ass.

HANK

Angel of my life, why is it that every time we play Presidents and Paupers you turn it into your personal mission to torture me?

SARAH

Oh, I think that's being a little hard on Ralphie's ass.

ANGELINA

I'm not torturing you, Hank. I'm testing your mettle. I'm steeling you for the mighty battles into which your vast intellect will take you.

HANK

You're unbelievable.

ANGELINA

(smiling)

Yeah . . .

HANK

No . . . no . . . I know what this about, you know.

SARAH

Less gabbin', more grabbin'.

HANK

This is about the fact that I said one time that a woman wouldn't make a good president.

ANGELINA

Well that would be very small of me, wouldn't it, Henry? You don't think I'm small, do you?

HANK

Even though I've said repeatedly since then that I only meant most women, not all, and only at this particular stage in their civic involvement. But you've been making me pay ever since.

SARAH

I will insert my head whole into Ralphie's ass if you two agree not to have this conversation again.

RALPH

This is getting to be a less and less attractive proposition for me.

ANGELINA

But how is being educated by men going to create anything but a man in a dress if a woman does become president? What do you consider leading a nation to be? Look at what our present way of doing things has produced. Can you even imagine what an enlightened woman's perspective would bring to the presidency? How differently conflicts would be resolved?

HANK

But how is she even going to get anything done in Washington? How is she going to work with an all-male congress or the old generals? Ralph, please, a dose of reason.

RALPH

Actually I'm with Angel on this one. I'm betting once we get a woman in the White House, world peace won't be far behind. And, (playing last card and getting up to show Hank his ass), since I'm Vice President, I must insist that you honor our esteemed leader's dictate and start grabbin.'

(Hank grabs two handfuls and gives it a firm squeeze.)

RALPH

Tha-a-a-at's the stuff. A little to the left.

HANK

I hope that makes you happy.

ANGELINA

I'm beside myself. Doesn't it feel good to please your sovereign?

HANK

I will hold my head up high through hardship.

SARAH

Hank, you are a such a king.

HANK

And yet it's funny how easily you can just wish me away.

SARAH

Can we not do this here?

HANK

Where better? When better? All I've ever asked for was one beloved, one Sarah with whom I could know where I stood so I could finally just stop wondering all the time.

SARAH

Well I guess now's just not the time.

ANGELINA

Poor Hank, why do you have to be so respectable about it? You are a rugged hunk of a man, but you bandy about like a dandy.

RALPH

Yikes.

HANK

Is that how it has to be? Do I have to take you off into the woods before you'll look at me straight in the eye?

SARAH

I'm looking at you now.

HANK

Well keep looking, baby.
(Starts to get up.)

ANGELINA

Wait, where are you going? I don't recall you asking my leave.

HANK

You said I was being too respectable!

ANGELINA

But there's a time and a place, Henry. There's the propriety of the moment. You can't force this sort of thing. There are windows. It's got to be natural.

HANK

Ralph!

RALPH

Sorry. I serve at the pleasure of the president. And she gives good back rubs.

ANGELINA

I do. (looks at Hank) Not that you'll ever know.

HANK

(Sits back down)

I'm not afraid of a life alone.

ANGELINA

Men like women because we're complicated.

SARAH

(starts to play her last card)

And well-ensconced in the highest levels of government. (looks at Hank) Say hello to your better and deal, you contemptuous pauper.

ANGELINA

Ah, my Secretary of State.

SARAH

(nodding)

Ma'am.

HANK

(dealing)

I see what this is. This is a conspiracy. You think you're going to get to me but you're not. You two will rue the day you took on Henry Thoreau.

ANGELINA

That sounds like treason. Does that sound like treason to you, Mr. Vice President?

RALPH

It does, ma'am.

ANGELINA

Do you know the punishment for treason, you penniless pauper?

HANK

No, ma'am.

SARAH

Madame, if I may, please don't be too hard on him. The pauper's form pleases me.

ANGELINA

(taking off her shoe)

Very well. You must massage your president's feet. And don't rush it.

(Hank massaging very sensually. Angelina leans head back and moans a little.)

HANK

Madame?

ANGELINA

Hmm?

HANK

Might I fondle the royal bosom?

ANGELINA

(gasps)

How dare you! I am not your queen, I am your president. Are you accusing me of being a royalist? Me, a faithful servant of this great republic? Oh, the shame; the indignity! Mr. Vice President?

RALPH

Yes, ma'am?

ANGELINA

I fear the only way to emend this insult to my office is a fondle of condolence.

(Ralph starts to walk over to Angelina with his hands out.)

SARAH

Madame President, is that conduct becoming the commander in chief?

ANGELINA

But Madame Secretary, look at his dimples.

SARAH

Adorable, but also a violation of all known fraternization policies.

ANGELINA

Mr. Vice President, resume your seat.
(They play for about a
minute.)

ANGELINA

I hereby suspend the separation of church and state and declare us all to be Hindus.

RALPH

Excellent decision, ma'am. May I ask why?

ANGELINA

I understand Hinduism, now. The caste system isn't saying that certain people are better than other people.

RALPH

No.

ANGELINA

It's saying, "Though you might be a pauper now, in the next life you might be President."

RALPH

Of course.

SARAH

And you'll get to all the stations in life eventually. But how you live dictates what you'll be reincarnated as.

RALPH

Experience the grace of subservience.

ANGELINA

It's a marvelous creed, really. Don't you agree, you miserable pauper?

HANK

I thank you for your blissful revelation, ma'am.

ANGELINA

I shall be heretofore known as your most glorious Brahmin; Ralphie, you are hereby the noble and mighty Kshatriya; Sarah, you shall be our wise and prosperous Vaishya; and Hank, you shall now be known as a detestable outcaste, you odious pauper.

HANK

You grace me with your contempt, merciful Brahmin.

ANGELINA

(playing last card)

Ooh! I'm president again!

HANK

Great.

ANGELINA

I get Hinduism now.

(Lights out.)

(Lights up, and Hank and Sarah are having tea. Angelina enters stage left.)

ANGELINA

Oh, Sarah, joyous news!

SARAH

Joyous or joyful?

ANGELINA

Joy-filled. Angie's coming to town.

SARAH

Angelina Weld. It will be enchanting to see her again.

ANGELINA

I love her so. Her poise. Her passion.

SARAH

She's quite a dear image of you.

ANGELINA

Heaven's no, she's an exceptional woman on her own.

SARAH

Of course she is.

ANGELINA

It's just . . .

SARAH

(eyes rolling)

And so it goes.

ANGELINA

It's just the pride and honor I feel that our nephew was so touched by my work that he named his daughter after me -

SARAH

It's a great distinction.

ANGELINA

And for that daughter to turn out to be such an articulate soldier in the cause -

SARAH

It seems to justify all the more all the sacrifices we've both made, doesn't it?

ANGELINA

I go on about her too much. I know.

SARAH

She's an exceptional girl.

ANGELINA

And so commanding. And so spirited. Oh, I can't wait for her arrival. I must go down to the road to look for her carriage.

(Exits upstage right.)

HANK

She's fond of her great niece?

SARAH

Like you wouldn't believe.

HANK

And you're not as much?

SARAH

Angie's a wonderful girl.

HANK

But sometimes you wish Angel would finally shut up about her already?

SARAH

It's not that, it's - I love my sister so much.

HANK

I know you do.

SARAH

And she's one of my greatest heroes.

HANK

But you're human.

SARAH

And . . . where are all my admirers? Who's naming their daughters after me? I sacrificed as much as Angel--more even. I went on the same lecture tours, got called the same revolting names--and it's like I don't even exist.

HANK

People who really know the struggle know your name.

SARAH

It's not the same.

HANK

It's more important. Only the people in the trenches can really understand all you've gone through. You've led a remarkable life. Don't shun it for someone else's. I know for a fact that girl would be nothing without you. You're the one she seeks approval from after a speech. You're the one she practices in front of. Do you know she told me once that the biggest reason she got into social activism was because she wanted to show you she could do something meaningful with her life?

SARAH

She did?

HANK

She knew the sacrifice you made practically raising her by yourself and always getting blamed for everything in the house.

SARAH

I know I sound stupid. She's one of my greatest heroes,
really.

HANK

(moving closer)

You need to stop that. All you sound is human. And
wonderful and wise and bewitchingly delicious.

SARAH

Why are you always there at the perfect time?

HANK

Because I'm the perfect man.

SARAH

You are, aren't you? You know, when you get like this - so
. . . earthy - you're really irresistible.

HANK

So stop resisting.

(They start to kiss sexily.)

ANGELINA (O.S.)

She's here! She's here! Crew, she's here!

(Sarah pulls back.)

HANK

I guess she's here.

RALPH

(entering from stage left,
drying himself off with a
towel)

Angie's here?

HANK

You're acquainted?

RALPH

(getting dressed)

We met at last year's May fair. Top-notch woman.

(Angelina entering from stage
right with two pretty black
girls.)

ANGELINA

Introducing the amazing Angelina Weld.

SARAH AND RALPH

Angie!!

ANGELINA

And her friend, Mamie.

ALL

Hi Mamie!

ANGELINA

And this, Angie, is the esteemed Henry David Thoreau.

ANGIE

Nice to meet you, Henry. I love your writing.

HANK

And your poetry is inestimable.

ANGIE

Sweet words and lips this one has.

SARAH

Hello, Angie.

ANGIE

Hey, Auntie Sarah.

(They hug perfunctorily.)

ANGELINA

And you remember Ralph, from the party last year?

ANGIE

The May shindig. I remember those wandering eyes.

RALPH

Madame, such presumption.

ANGIE

My Auntie warned me about boys like you.

(They hug.)

ANGELINA

And this is our glade. Could it be any more perfect?

ANGIE

It's a little Eden. How'd you come by it?

ANGELINA

Hank owns the property. Or, most of it.

HANK

Either way.

RALPH

So Mamie, what's your racket?

MAMIE

I'm a singer.

ANGIE

She's got a voice like liquid smoke.

MAMIE

(smiling)

Angie!

ANGIE

She's such a piece of heaven. Auntie, can we talk?

ANGELINA

Of course. Regale our guest, dears.

(Goes down stage left with
Angie.)

RALPH

I wanna get her to sing for us. (to Mamie) I can cook.
What's your favorite dish? I'll drown you in it.

(Lights fade on main group as
they laugh and fine-ass Mamie
dances and sings in silence.
Spots on the Angelinas.)

ANGIE

Auntie, I'll get to my news in a minute but, I just wanna
ask. What is . . . this all about?

(Gestures at Angel.)

ANGELINA

What?

ANGIE

This. You're not . . . black. Is it some sort of statement?

ANGELINA

(a little self conscious)

This is how I choose to represent myself. There's no law
that says what color I have to be.

ANGIE

Yeah but . . . everybody knows you're white. It's just a little conspicuous.

ANGELINA

Conspicuous?

ANGIE

Showy.

ANGELINA

Do you know how the races were created?

ANGIE

Forget I said anything.

ANGELINA

No, do you know?

ANGIE

No, Auntie.

ANGELINA

About 100,000 years ago, one race, one people, spread out from Africa and settled all over the world. So when the next Ice Age came around, all those people were forced to stay put in whatever climate they were in, for thousand of years. Over time, different peoples developed different physical characteristics depending on whatever environment they were in.

ANGIE

Fascinating.

ANGELINA

Endlessly. And when the world warmed up and people set out again, they encountered all these strange people, who generations ago looked exactly like them but now had thinner hair, or different-colored skin. And do you know what they called each other?

ANGIE

"Brother?"

ANGELINA

"Nigger."

ANGIE

Alright, I get your point.

ANGELINA

We're all the same, Angelina. "Race" is just a term made up by cowards to make us scared of each other.

ANGIE

I get it, Auntie, this isn't what I wanted to talk to you about!

ANGELINA

(excited)

Okay so what did you wanna talk to me about?

ANGIE

I wrote Mamie a letter. I wanna see what you think about it.

ANGELINA

Is it a poem?

ANGIE

Sort of.

ANGELINA

Okay okay, go!

(Angie pulls out paper from pocket of dress.)

ANGIE

"My own darling Mamie, If you will allow me to be so familiar to call you such. I hope my darling you will not be offended if your ardent lover calls you such familiar names. . . . Oh Mamie if you only knew how my heart beats when I think of you and it yearns and pants to gaze, if only for one second upon your lovely face. If there were any trouble in this wide and wicked world from which I might shield you how gladly would I do it if it were even so great a thing as to lay down my life for you. I know you are too young now to become my wife, but I hope, darling, that in a few years you will come to me and be my love, my wife! How my brain whirls how my pulse leaps with joy and madness when I think of these two words, 'my wife.'"

(Angelina looks at her with wide-eyed shock.)

ANGELINA

Your wife?!

ANGIE

What?

ANGELINA

You wanna marry her, forsaking all others till death do you part?

ANGIE

Oh, please do not get started.

ANGELINA

You who have not stayed with one woman for more than, as I recall you saying, a "bushel and a peck," has not only found a girlfriend but is now ready to settle down and raise itty-bitty babies with her?

ANGIE

I know I've had a bit of a past.

ANGELINA

Do not tell me that the legend is ending! What will the wayward young women of the Carolinas do without their sweet mistress of the night?

ANGIE

I love her Auntie. She's the end of it all.

ANGELINA

She must be. I thought you'd be the last one to fall.

ANGIE

There's nothing wrong with marriage if you make it work for you. Do you think she'll like it?

ANGELINA

She'll love it. You have such an amazing gift. I don't know how she could turn you down.

ANGIE

I'm so nervous.

ANGELINA

Where are you gonna live?

ANGIE

Nowhere.

ANGELINA

You got that right. Good luck, sweetheart.
(Hugging.)

ANGIE

You mean it?

ANGELINA

I do. I really do. You deserve it after all you've gone through.

ANGIE

Thank you, Auntie. I hope I wasn't rude before.

ANGELINA

Of course not. I appreciate your honesty. Let's go re-join the group.

(They go back as Mamie finishes up singing jazzy version of "That's the Way Love Goes." When she finishes, lights.)

RALPH

You are the star of stars.

MAMIE

I just like the way the music makes me feel.

SARAH

Who's up for a swim?

(All wave hands and begin taking clothes off and heading off stage left.)

ANGELINA

Ralph, can we talk?

RALPH

Of course. I'll be along in a minute, everyone!

ANGELINA

Mamie seems nice.

RALPH

She's an extraordinary girl. And so demure and sweet. I can see why she and Angie get on so well. The night she and I met, we were up talking for hours.

ANGELINA

She's my favorite niece.

RALPH

She's my favorite of your nieces.

ANGELINA

Why have you not . . . come back to me?

RALPH

We see each other everyday --

ANGELINA

You know what I mean. I knew you were going to say that.
You know what I mean.

RALPH

I wasn't sure if . . .

ANGELINA

Was I not . . . Did I not do something right?

RALPH

No, Angel, you were perfect, it was perfect.

ANGELINA

Well, if it was so perfect why haven't you come back to my
side since then? You knew I hadn't had much experience, so
if it wasn't good I don't see why you wouldn't tell me.

RALPH

There was nothing to tell. I just know how busy you've been
and . . .

ANGELINA

You were calling on me two or three times daily before and
now I have to beg you for a few minutes of your time?

RALPH

You don't have to beg --

ANGELINA

Do you know how desperate I looked just then, asking you to
stay behind? Like the most insecure girlfriend? No, you
wouldn't know because you're a man. I can only imagine what
that poor girl must think of me. I don't want to have to
feel that way to spend time with you, Ralphie.

RALPH

I'm sorry I've made you feel that way. I never meant to . .
.

ANGELINA

Ralphie, is it . . . I feel stupid even asking but I have to know. Is it because I'm black?

RALPH

God, Angel, no baby. You're beautiful. You're a queen.

ANGELINA

I am, you know.

RALPH

I know. Angel, I just . . . I just knew what was happening. Everyday I came to call on you, it was less and less of you that I was seeing. Do you know why I came to your bed that first time?

ANGELINA

An opportunity?

RALPH

You had spoken at the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Meeting that night and you were speaking so passionately that you didn't notice that a braid had shot out from your hair, and was waving wildly up and down, emphasizing every point you made with a violent shake and I just thought. . . I just thought that was probably the most beautiful sight on this earth, a woman so unconscious of herself that it just ends up making her look even more beautiful. It was like . . . it was like you were a flickering flame, the only warmth for a thousand miles. That's what drew me.

ANGELINA

And I to you.

RALPH

So you know why I never came back. What happened? You cancel speaking dates? Put off your writing so we can have late dinners?

ANGELINA

I thought that would be flattering.

RALPH

It is, but not at the expense of you. Not if you lose yourself spending all of your energy trying to please me. That's a cool prospect for me, Angel, and you knew that about me because I'd told you a dozen times. How many

stories did I tell you of that moment, in relationships, when I know it's over, when you can feel the forced effort?

ANGELINA

Well, I don't know how I'm supposed to show you that I care.

RALPH

I know you care. I can feel it in your tone of voice, in the way you look at me. But you're an icon, Angelina. People come from miles around to hear you speak, to have you change their lives.

ANGELINA

No, they don't.

RALPH

Oh, they don't? Okay.

ANGELINA

You have no idea how hard it is. How hard it is to fight against . . . I'm so afraid. I'm so afraid of letting you really see who I am. I can be so ugly . . . and selfish. I don't anyone to see that part of me. I just . . . I just want you to be there when I reach out for you at night. Is that something that you can . . . Is that a role that you think you could fulfill for me?

RALPH

I don't think that's . . . productive for either of us. I had already made this decision before we were ever together that night. For weeks before, actually. I wasn't sure how to say it to you but that night . . . that night . . .

ANGELINA

You were saying goodbye.

RALPH

I hope you'll excuse me.

ANGELINA

Of course. I was making it more than that.

RALPH

I beg your pardon.

ANGELINA

Please.

(Ralph starts to leave)

Ralph?

RALPH

Yes, Angel?

ANGELINA

Do you think it would be possible . . . ? Would you be interested in . . . ? Will you accommodate me for one more night? I haven't been able to stop thinking about you and I thought one last time would allow me to bring a sense of closure to it in my own head.

(Beat.)

You wouldn't have to stay the whole night if you didn't want.

RALPH

I don't think that would be a good idea.

(Angelina nods her approval.)

ANGELINA

Go swim. They're waiting for you.

RALPH

I don't have to.

ANGELINA

Go. Please.

(Ralph leaves. Angelina composes herself, and begins to fold and pile everybody's clothes.)

Lights up on all four drinking tea.)

HANK

(looking up)

Do you know how lucky the squirrel is?

RALPH

How lucky?

HANK

God built him a perfect system of highways all over the world. As trees congregate to make forests, they form a network of branches that overhang the entire ecosystem.

It's a perfect infrastructure of twigs, stems, leaves, and trunks, punctuated by various berry stops.

RALPH

It's a nice little deal.

HANK

And so ingenious!

SARAH

Of course it is. I believe God plants little gifts like that to every species all over the world. The trick is to find them.

ANGELINA

We just manufacture ours.

SARAH

Yes, that reflects a lack of perseverance.

HANK

It seems so ridiculous. We take great strides to mimic nature - the bridge, the skyscraper, the horseless carriage - and when we think we've got it right we destroy the inspirations of our creations, as if we're ready to take on the mantle of Creator.

ANGELINA

What's a skyscraper?

HANK

We've been conditioned to believe that humans are somehow different or other or supranatural.

SARAH

But aren't we just bones and skin and hair?

HANK

We embody nature, and yet we ignore its gifts.

RALPH

The squirrel doesn't ignore them.

SARAH

He makes nature work for him.

HANK

Crafty little squirrel.

ANGELINA

Hopping branch on high.

SARAH

Catch a ray of sunlight.

RALPH

Paste it on the sky.

ANGELINA

Oooh, that's great fun. Let's do it again.

SARAH

Restless little tadpole

RALPH

Will you never wriggle free?

HANK

Gayr times await downstream.

ANGELINA

Juicy bumblebees.

SARAH

Oooh, one more.

RALPH

Ponds are made for swimming

SARAH

Cold water washing me clean.

ANGELINA

Mist and splash and waterfalls.

HANK

Drying on velvet green.

ANGELINA

Okay, now I want everyone to try. Hank and Ralph, pass out paper and pencils to every fourth person. We're all gonna write four-line poems about why we love nature. The first person will write the first line, and then they will pass it to their left to the next person, who will write the second. Oh, this will be great fun! Don't be shy, you can be as silly as you want to be. Okay, first person, begin!

(Hank and Ralphie pass out
paper and pencils, and
audience begins writing.)

ANGELINA

Okay, I'm gonna say switch in a moment, so if you haven't
written anything, try to come up with something. And don't
worry if your poems don't rhyme, we can't all be Emersons.

(After poems are finished,
Angelina chooses three
volunteers to read their
group's poems.)

ANGELINA

Oh that was wonderful, I couldn't be happier. Ralphie,
surely you have some lines to cap the occasion?

RALPH

(flipping through a notepad)

Probably. Oh, here's something, if you're sure you want to
hear it. "There is a soul at the center of nature, and over
the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the
universe. It has so infused its strong enchantment into
nature, that we prosper when we accept its advice, and when
we struggle to wound its creatures, our hands are glued to
our sides, or they beat our own breasts. The whole course
of things goes to teach us faith. We need only obey. There
is guidance for each of us, and by lowly listening we shall
hear the right word. Why need you choose so painfully your
place, and occupation, and associates, and modes of action,
and of entertainment? Certainly there is a possible right
for you that precludes the need of balance and willful
election. For you there is a reality, a fit place and
congenial duties. Place yourself in the middle of the
stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it
floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to
right, and a perfect contentment. Then you put all the
gainsayers in the wrong. Then you are the world, the
measure of right, of truth, of beauty. If we will not be
mar-plots with our miserable interferences, the heaven
predicted from the beginning of the world, and still
predicted from the bottom of the heart, would organize
itself, as do now the rose, and the air, and the sun."

ANGELINA

Well, what a beautiful place to take an intermission. Okay,
go out, share your poetry. Meet us back here at the glade
in 15 minutes!

INTERMEZZO

ACT II

(All four are reclining in the shade of the glade, having tea. A different actress is playing Sarah. Hank is scribbling on a notepad.)

HANK

Hm. How about that?

RALPH

What?

HANK

Turns out, the government designed a mass-information culture so they could make folks more susceptible to subliminal suggestion. Look, I did a proof for this one.
(Shows notepad to Ralph.)

RALPH

What're you talking about?

ANGELINA

I'm galled by the way your mind works, Henry.

RALPH

All people have to do is read to be inspired enough to burst the limits of that kind of conditioning.

HANK

Right. But that'll only last a generation. Listen, you subject children to a stream of images and sound bytes their whole lives, soon they lose their taste for things like critical thinking. It's quite an ingenious plot, actually

SARAH

How does a sound bite?

RALPH

This is ridiculous. You see? This is what I'm talking about.

SARAH

Why do you get him started?

RALPH

You think I'm too extreme with my views and too suspicious and there they are lying right to our fucking face! People aren't even going to notice as their potential is whisked out from under them.

ANGELINA

Well then you must be the truth-teller, Ralphie.

RALPH

A sole truth-teller in an ocean of deception?

ANGELINA

Especially so.

RALPH

Maybe I could . . . come into port once in a while.

SARAH

My word, Ralph Emerson, how you address my tender sister.

ANGELINA

It's okay. I like it.

SARAH

No, it is as a matter of fact not okay *because* you like it.

ANGELINA

Always the protector.

SARAH

Well, someone has to be, little sister.

ANGELINA

Have you given any thought to protecting yourself?

(Beat)

Sarah it's just that on certain subjects, in certain flights of the mind, you can be a little . . .

HANK

Stuffy.

ANGELINA

Hypocritical.

SARAH

Oh! Oh. Well.

ANGELINA

Of course, I'm being absurd.

SARAH

No, don't act like you didn't mean it. I want you to feel like you can be honest with me. And that certainly was honest.

ANGELINA

Well I just don't see how you can constantly lecture on the merits of chastity when, well, I see what goes on between you and Hank.

SARAH

What goes on between me and Hank is none of your business, miss, and I'll thank you kindly not to question my motives.

ANGELINA

I'm not questioning your motives. I have eyes. I'm familiar with that wry smile Brother Henry gets when there's a fire in the veins. And since we're being honest, I hope I don't have to remind you, Hank, about the effects of your charm. I am too young and pretty to be anyone else's auntie. Do we have to have *that* conversation again?

HANK

No teen-pregnancy lectures, please.

SARAH

Alright, Angel, you've made your point. I will endeavor to practice a little more of what I preach . . .

(Angelina starts to speak)

But more pointedly, I will endeavor to preach a lot less.

(She is quelled)

No one could ever say that's it's not an adventure having a woman like you for a little sister. I hope you know that all I'm interested in is your benefit.

ANGELINA

Of course it is. I'm being silly. How can you possibly take anything I say seriously?

SARAH

I do declare, I haven't the foggiest notion of when you're having fun with me.

(They continue having tea.)

ANGELINA

I can tell when you're annoyed with me. You wear it like a big frumpy frock. I can feel the reproach in the air as you walk by.

SARAH

Angelina, I've been preoccupied thinking about the movement. I'm sorry if I've been rude. I have my battles, but I want to explore them on my own sometimes, before sharing them with you.

ANGELINA

Well that's fair. I certainly couldn't say that wasn't fair. But I simply won't tolerate your not being aware of how much you mean to me. I love and admire you, Sarah, and I never want anything to come between us.

SARAH

I know sweetheart, you know how endlessly I adore you.

ANGELINA

I adore you twice as much.

RALPH

(looking bored)
Well let's not argue about it.

ANGELINA

Oh Ralphie, favor us with some words. I so favor your verse wafting over my shoulder on a warm day in the glade.

RALPH

(flipping through his book)
Lemme see if I have something. Ah. "Persons approach us famous for their beauty; for their accomplishments worthy of all wonder for their charms and gifts. To be sure, it would be ungrateful in us not to praise them loudly. Then, when all is said and done, a person of related mind, a brother or sister by nature, comes to us so softly and easily, so nearly and intimately, as if it were the blood in proper veins, that we feel as if someone was gone, instead of another having come; we are utterly relieved and refreshed; it is a sort of joyful solitude. We foolishly think in our days of sin that we must court friends by compliance to the customs of society, to its dress, its breeding, and its estimates. But only that soul can be my friend which I encounter on the line of my own march, that

soul to which I do not decline, and which does not decline to me, but, native of the same celestial latitude, repeats in its own all my experience."

SARAH

That's perfect.

ANGELINA

I'm galled by the way your mind works, Ralphie.

HANK

Who's coming to swim?

ANGELINA

Ooooh, I'm there.

(Hank and Angel take off stage left, both throwing off clothes as they goes.)

RALPH

You're staying back?

SARAH

I'm staying back.

(Silence.)

SARAH

That was an amazing piece you read.

RALPH

Hm. Thanks.

SARAH

Hm? I think my praise merits a mite more excitement.

RALPH

No, sweetheart, I know. I know you mean it and it means the world to me but . . .

SARAH

But what? What're you making up in that immense span of a mind?

RALPH

It's just, sometimes I get the sense . . .

(Silence.)

SARAH

Sometimes you sense . . .

RALPH

Look. Hank's smarter than I am. I know it. And I know you all know it. I know I have the lecture tours and the books, but Henry . . . Henry's ahead of his time. He's got a once-in-a-lifetime mind.

SARAH

I have no doubt that history will regard both of you as men of surpassing intellect.

RALPH

Hank's well-being isn't just important to us, Sarah, his ideas are important for the world. I've seen it. His ideas are going to provide the underpinnings for the great social movements of the next century.

SARAH

You know how uncomfortable I get when you and Henry talk like this . . .

RALPH

Why, Sarah? Why should any of us run from the truth? Why should we be afraid to use the gift of foresight that God gave us? You knew your first day at the glade that you'd been there before, that we'd all always been there.

SARAH

I get uncomfortable when you and Henry talk like this, Ralph. It feels sacrilegious. If you have visions then you must know what an important piece of the puzzle you are. Don't you see that the key is putting together all the pieces people can contribute and embracing the whole? Yes, Henry's a genius, but so are you, and so am I, and so is Angel, and so is everybody else who opens up their mouth and expresses themselves. We are all pieces of God's whole and we are all divine. You can't compare who's more God, Ralphie. You know that.

RALPH

Yes, you're right, you are a genius. Hello, God.

SARAH

Hello, God.

BOTH

(to audience)

Hello, God.

(Lights.)

(Lights up on all four
drinking tea. There is a
white marker board on stage.)

ANGELINA

Okay, let's play American heroes.

SARAH

Oooh, I wanna go first. I've come up with a good one since
last time.

ANGELINA

Alright, have at it.

SARAH

Harriet Tubman.

HANK

Oooh, that is a good one.

RALPH

Why Harriet Tubman?

SARAH

Not for conducting the Underground Railroad, like many
might think.

RALPH

I'm listening.

SARAH

But consider: During the Civil War, as we all know, the
Confederacy passed a law stating that any Negro taken in
battle, free or slave, would be executed on the spot.

RALPH

Desperately unfair, by the way.

SARAH

Truly. But Sister Harriet went behind enemy lines on spy
missions for the Union army over 200 times, each time
risking a bloody, humiliating death. And this was after
she'd already risked her life for years as conductor of the
Underground Railroad.

HANK

Goddamn, she was a warrior. My hero is better, though.

RALPH

Speak on it, Brother Hank.

HANK

John Brown.

SARAH AND RALPH

Ooooooh.

ANGELINA

Why John Brown?

HANK

Not because he tried to take over an army garrison in Virginia, as many might think.

ANGELINA

But instead . . . ?

HANK

But instead because he did not try to take over an army garrison in Virginia. John Brown wasn't trying to conquer the Union Army, he was trying to start a slave revolt that would make Nat Turner take note. He knew his attack would fail and he attacked anyway.

ANGELINA

A self-made martyr for the masses. He was righteous but my hero's better.

HANK

Speak on it, girl.

ANGELINA

Victoria Woodhull.

SARAH

(sighing)

Victoria. She's so my hero.

RALPH

No changing heroes.

HANK

Why Woodhull?

ANGELINA

Not just because challenged General Grant for the presidency, like many may think.

SARAH

People are so narrow-minded.

ANGELINA

Or just because she ran on a platform of equal rights, religious tolerance, and free love.

SARAH

She is so my hero.

ANGELINA

But because she *lived* that life. Married that open-minded man, started that Utopian community, lived with the counterculturalists, and was an *educated* woman.

RALPH

Wise and brave, but my hero's better.

SARAH

The hell you say.

RALPH

Eugene Debs.

(Silence.)

RALPH

Eugene Debs.

SARAH

We heard you the first time.

HANK

Why do you always do this?

RALPH

Do what?

ANGELINA

Who's Eugene Debs?

RALPH

A labor organizer. A socialist.

HANK

Who also ran for president.

RALPH

Five times. The last time from prison, where Woodrow Wilson stuck him because he protested World War I. (to Hank) Do what?

HANK

Nevermind, it's not the right time.

ANGELINA

So who wins?

HANK

Woodhull.

RALPH

Brown

SARAH

Woodhull

ANGELINA

Tubman

SARAH

Harriet Tubman also served as both a scout and a cook for the Union army. Even though she was their most lethal spy, she was still a black woman and they had her cook and clean for those filthy soldiers.

HANK

That's a rough go of it, for sure. But consider: John Brown made several surveying trips into slave states scouting for his rebellion, even though he was a well-recognized abolitionist.

RALPH

Takes some guts.

HANK

And he smuggled back a couple of slaves with him.

RALPH

Takes more guts.

HANK

I'm surprised you chose Victoria, Angel, she was a eugenist too, you know.

ANGELINA

Yes, but she didn't believe that certain races were superior to others, she just thought certain exceptional people should maintain the integrity of their gene pool.

RALPH

So she was an elitist?

ANGELINA

You don't have to vote for Victoria Woodhull, Ralph.

RALPH

I didn't. I voted for John Brown.

ANGELINA

Okay, Woodhull has 10, Tubman and Brown have 7, and Debs has 4. Who's your third choice?

HANK

Debs.

RALPH

Tubman.

SARAH

Tubman.

ANGELINA

Brown.

RALPH

(to Hank)

See, you voted for Debs. What's wrong with me picking him?

HANK

There's nothing wrong with you picking him, except you always pick Communists.

RALPH

I do not!

HANK

Yes you do; and I don't care what you say, you can't choose Karl Marx because he wanted to reform American capitalism.

RALPH

What's more American than that? Besides, Debs was a socialist!

SARAH

Only cuz there was no viable American Communist Party,
though.

RALPH

You're all McCarthyites.

HANK

Of course we are, Ralph.

ANGELINA

That makes it 11 for Tubman, 10 for Woodhull, 9 for Brown,
and 6 for Debs. Sarah wins. What shall we perform for you?

SARAH

"I Been Boked" is my favorite!
(Angelina, Hank, and Ralph
perform a rendition of the
Negro spiritual "I Been Boked
and I Been Scorned" for
Sarah. Lights.)

(Lights up on Hank, Sarah, and
Angelina reclining in a
glade. Ralph enters.)

RALPH

You're gonna be so proud of me.

SARAH

Too late. You're the apple of my eye.

RALPH

That's small pomme de frites compared to what you're gonna
think of me in a minute.

SARAH

Well out with it, tease.

RALPH

I've got groupies!

SARAH AND ANGELINA

Groupies?

RALPH

Girls!

(Two hot young blondes, SUSIE
AND LIZZIE, enter from stage)

left. Lizzie is played by the actress who played Sarah in the first act.)

RALPH

I give you Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

SUSIE

Susie.

LIZZIE

Lizzie.

HANK

Pleased and honored, ladies. To what do we owe the pleasure?

SUSIE AND LIZZIE

We're here to meet the Grimke sisters.

ANGELINA

You know our work?

SUSIE

We were raised on it. I've waited half my life to tell you how much you've meant to me.

ANGELINA

You've come a long way just to tell me that. Ralphie, what did you have in mind?

RALPH

Nothing. I'm just fulfilling a fan's dream. A young, nubile, vivacious fan. And her equally hot friend.

SARAH

Do you two have boyfriends?

SUSIE AND LIZZIE

Nope.

SARAH

I think I know what Ralphie had in mind.

RALPH

I'm just fulfilling a--

SARAH

Would you girls like some tea?

SUSIE AND LIZZIE

Yes, please.

(Girls sit down and Sarah starts to pour. Lizzie keeps looking at Hank.)

SARAH

Careful, now, this is strong stuff. Straight from Delhi.

SUSIE AND LIZZIE

We can handle ourselves (giggles)

SARAH

I have to say that you two are magnificently beautiful. You should have no trouble finding a young noble lad upon whom to set your ambitions.

SUSIE

I'm not really the settle-down type right now. I'm young. I like to have fun.

SARAH

Don't you think they're attractive, Henry?

HANK

Very special young ladies.

SARAH

Do you think Henry is handsome, ladies?

LIZZIE

He's beautiful.

SARAH

He's quite an accomplished writer.

LIZZIE

(looking at Hank wistfully)

Hm.

SUSIE

This tea is strong. Where'd you say it came from?

SARAH

India.

RALPH

The tea-makingest subcontinent in South Asia.

SARAH

Do you think you'd like to kiss him?

LIZZIE

(smiling)

I don't know.

HANK

We've only just met.

SARAH

Well how long do you have to know someone before you know you want to kiss them? I knew I wanted to kiss you the moment I saw you.

LIZZIE

I think people should be able to express their attraction for others without people judging whether it's proper or not.

SARAH

So why don't you?

LIZZIE

Why don't I what?

SARAH

Express it.

LIZZIE

Right now?

SARAH

Why not? Where better?

(She stands up, goes over to Hank, and starts making out with him. He is reserved, and keeps looking at Sarah to see her reaction. Lizzie notices and puts his hands on her butt. He gets more into it. Sarah watches for a second and then listens to following exchange.)

ANGELINA

We were going to play Presidents and Paupers. Would you like to play with us?

SUSIE

Oooh, that sounds fun.

ANGELINA

Susie, I have to say that you have a remarkable figure.

SUSIE

Thanks, miss. I think you're very beautiful, too, by the way.

ANGELINA

Are you uncomfortable about showing your body?

SUSIE

Not at all.

ANGELINA

We should all play naked!

SARAH

That's for the president to decide.

ANGELINA

Oh fine. Let's get started, then.

(Lizzie grabs Hank by the hand and they both cross stage left)

LIZZIE

We're going for a swim.

SARAH

It's not too cold?

HANK

Would you like to come?

SARAH

No. Have fun.

LIZZIE

We will.

(Sarah watches as they exit.)

SARAH

Maybe we should wait to play until they get back.

SUSIE

Oh, I don't think they'll be back for awhile. Lizzie has a way of . . . preoccupying people.

ANGELINA

So it'll be just us, then. Are you ready for a foursome, Ralphie?

RALPH

I am steadfast and pure of heart.

SUSIE

Not too pure, I trust. I wouldn't wanna waste these babies on a saint.

RALPH

Rest assured that I have no shame about admiring the human form. I'm just glad you're comfortable enough with yourself to let us all enjoy.

SUSIE

It's my pleasure. I know I've been blessed. God made every single size and shape of the human body possible. Why be ashamed of the vessel he's made for you? It's beautiful. We're beautiful.

RALPH

And functional.

ANGELINA

I'd imagine it gets pretty lonely up there, formless, omnipotent, made of pure energy.

SUSIE

He can't smell or feel or fuck. Don't you think He wants to come down and play in the sandbox once in a while? I think passion is God possessing you and experiencing life in a new sack of clay. Why be ashamed of the vessel that holds the soul of God?

RALPH

Far out.

ANGELINA

Susan Anthony, you are now officially my friend.

SUSIE

I'm honored.

SARAH

Ralphie, I must say I'm impressed. You did good with this one.

RALPH

Told you you'd be proud of me.

ANGELINA

Deal.

(Ralph starts to deal the cards. Lights)

(Hank comes out by himself with a notebook down centerstage. Direct spot.)

HANK

I have first a story to tell, and then a few thoughts on enterprise.

(Begins reading from notebook.)

"Once upon a time in the ancient city of Kouroo, India, there lived an artist who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it occurred to him to make a staff. He said to himself, 'It shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life.' He proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it could not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution endowed him, without his knowledge, with perennial youth. As he made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way, and only sighed at a distance because She could not overcome the artist. By the time he had found a suitable stick, the city of Kouroo was a hoary ruin, so he sat on one of its mounds to peel the stick. Before he had given it the proper shape the dynasty of the Kandahars was at an end. And with the point of the stick he wrote the name of the last of that race in the sand, and then resumed his work. By the time he smoothed and polished the staff, the North Star was no longer due north; and by the time he had put on the head adorned with precious stones, Brahma had awoke and slumbered many times. When the finished stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest of all the creations of the world. And now he saw by the heap of shavings still fresh at his feet that, for him and his work, the former lapse of time had been an

illusion, and that no more time had elapsed than is required for a single scintilla from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain."

(Stops reading.)

"However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. The faultfinder will find fault even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poor-house. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man' abode. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. Most of the wealthy think that they are above being supported by the state, but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Try this: Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn to the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. God will see that you don't want to be dictated by society. Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to so many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessity of the soul."

(Lights come up behind Hank on Sarah alone, drinking tea.)

HANK

Where's the crew?

SARAH

Taking a walk. Did you have fun with your tart?

HANK

She was tasty.

SARAH

Well I'm glad you got your fill.

HANK

I can always make room for you.

SARAH

Don't be crude.

HANK

Don't be coy. I saw what you were doing, throwing that girl at me to see if I'd bite.

SARAH

I didn't throw her, she threw herself. I just let her know it was okay.

HANK

So you're okay with it?

SARAH

I am if you are.

HANK

Well that doesn't answer the question. You gotta figure it out. Am I your man or ain't I? You're not gonna play me, Sarah. You know where I stand. I've told you a thousand times.

SARAH

Tell me 1,001.

HANK

You're not gonna play me, Sarah. You pluck my emotions like harp strings. You draw me close and then push me away. I don't know how you can treat a man you say you respect like this.

SARAH

Don't you see though, Hank? I push you away because I respect you. I'm too terrified I'm going to do something to hurt you and I can't bear the thought of you not being in my life. But I pull you close because I can't help it.

HANK

(drawing close)

I'm never gonna be out of your life, Sarah. You're my people. How many misfits do you think there are like us out there? We're part of the same tribe. You may not know it or feel it but I'm inside you. I'm there for good.

SARAH

I feel it.

HANK

You're always gonna be a part of my life, no matter what. So what if you do something that hurts me? So I get hurt. You're still the only one I'm gonna wanna talk to about it.

SARAH

Where did you come from?

HANK

Am I your man or not?

SARAH

I suppose . . .

HANK

Am I your man or not?

SARAH

You're my man, Henry Thoreau, through thick and thin.

HANK

That's what I'm talking about. We'll take life as it comes. You don't need to be afraid of anything when you're with me. We are world-conquerors together.

SARAH

You're my man, Hank.

HANK

That's what I'm talking about.

(Lights.)

(Lights up on Angelina alone drinking tea. Ralph enters stage right and goes walking by with a bundle. Doesn't stop or look at Angelina.)

ANGELINA

Ralph?

(Ralph stops.)

ANGELINA

Is this to be it, then?

RALPH

Yes, sorry to say, Angel, but I'm off.

ANGELINA

Do your friends not warrant a goodbye?

RALPH

Angel, you know I'm not good with that sort of thing. I figured you'd notice I was gone sooner or later. I was

going to send you a postcard from the first place I laid my hat.

ANGELINA

And what does the world hold for you out there?

RALPH

Something better. A place where sanity rules. A place where conspiracies and unjust acts are recognized as madness. I'm off to find a sane society.

ANGELINA

Yes, that's one way to do it, but . . .

RALPH

(starts to leave, turns
around)

But what?

ANGELINA

There's also the choice to fight the good fight here at home. Look Ralph, I know you're disillusioned with what America has turned out to be, but does that mean you abandon the ideals that made her such a great experiment?

RALPH

They make quick work of people like us, Angel. They arrest us at protests and shoot us dead in Texas motorcades. How many more times do we have to go to jail? How long before we're declared enemies of the state?

ANGELINA

I don't know, Ralph, but honey, we fight the good fight. You are a warrior, Ralph Emerson, and you know it. It's in your blood. Every fiber of your being is fighting this strategic retreat, I can feel it.

RALPH

I'm tired, Angel. My words are leaves in a thunderstorm. I'm sorry. I love you. I'm leaving.

ANGELINA

And what's to become of me?

RALPH

I'm sorry?

ANGELINA

What do the women do once their young men leave them to the brutish designs of the old quartermasters? Is it that easy for you to leave us behind? You are a warrior, Ralphie. What are you going to do but fight?

RALPH

I'm so tired.

ANGELINA

Then come here and rest up.

(Ralph goes over and lays his head on Angelina's bosom as she cradles him. She grabs the bindle and lays it on the ground.)

ANGELINA

This country needs you, Ralph Emerson. She needs her righteous sons to keep her prow on course. Where else can you find a fight like this? This is where the action is.

RALPH

And you'll be there for me?

ANGELINA

If you fight for me, everything I have at my disposal is yours when you get home. I will cook your food and clean your house and wash your clothes and fulfill your every desire. I'll keep you strong for the fight. But this country needs her men to steer her right. You don't wanna give up this good stuff, baby.

(Ralph opens bindle, in which was present only a flower, and places it in Angelina's hair. He kisses her on the cheek, and exits back stage right.)

(She pauses, then winks at the audience with a clicking sound)

(Sarah enters and Angelina pours them both a cup.)

ANGELINA

I think Hank and Ralphie are the two best people we know.

SARAH

They're good men.

ANGELINA

Besides us.

SARAH

They're good people.

(Beat.)

ANGELINA

What's going to become of us, Sarah?

SARAH

(Putting tea down and grabbing
and putting down the tea of
Angelina)

Nothing. We'll be forgotten. These are our shining moments.

ANGELINA

Oh, I figured we might not be remembered around the world,
but even in our own country?

SARAH

Especially in our own country. Young girls won't be
educated to look at life the way we do. Sure, there'll be
revivals. One will come soon after President Kennedy dies.
But no one will attribute any of those ideas to us.

ANGELINA

What about Hank and Ralphie?

SARAH

They're men.

ANGELINA

So?

SARAH

Haven't you ever noticed? How easily they see the future?

ANGELINA

Yes . . .

SARAH

That's because they'll be better remembered in it. There'll
be talk of us in small colleges, but we'll never be
counterculture icons like the boys. Our speeches will wile
away on something called "microfiche."

ANGELINA

It all sounds so sober.

SARAH

Well it's all for the best, I suppose. They're good men.

ANGELINA

Two of the best we know.

SARAH

I'm in love with Hank.

ANGELINA

Who isn't? Only . . . I hate to say it.

SARAH

You don't have to.

ANGELINA

I don't want to hurt you.

SARAH

How could you possibly hurt me? By telling me I'm going to die a spinster? You can't hurt me with the truth.

ANGELINA

Things were different in our day. You couldn't just dedicate your life to a cause without marrying and having children.

SARAH

But why do I have to be a laughingstock? Just because I never sold my body to some man? What about all the things I did for the world? This is the first chance I've had to be really happy! Haven't I earned it?

ANGELINA

I'm not the one who makes up these rules, Sarah. I appreciate all the things you do. You're not a laughingstock. You're my hero.

SARAH

Angelina, I haven't been completely honest with you. And it's because I am ashamed of this feeling I harbor deep inside me. I love you more than I know how, and yet, at the same time, deep inside in a place I don't how to get into or out of, I hate you. I hate you for your success and the way men melt around you. I hate you for how easily success comes to you and how much you show that off. You're not

perfect, but as far as anyone can tell, you don't care. Your hips are big, your thighs are mighty and you are proud and I have no idea how to get to that place. I just look at myself and I wonder why God had to make those particular mistakes, right there, right where everyone can see them. But you wear your flaws like a badge of honor. And I fight the urge to spread rumors about you and make daggers of my eyes and poison the minds of your children. I hate you, but I can't take my eyes off you.

And that's how I know it's not really hate. I know that all those feelings I think are dark are just places inside myself that I want filled. And so I know that it's not hate, it's love and admiration.

And now I finally realize the truth, that I was focusing on all my faults, and not ever looking at my own beauty, or that anyone could ever love me even though I wasn't perfect. But I now know that I am beautiful and exceptional and always have been. I never saw the things in myself that everyone else did.

ANGELINA

You're ready to come home.

SARAH

I'm in love with Hank.

ANGELINA

You can't have him.

SARAH

I know. I can't because I die a spinster.

ANGELINA

You always will.

SARAH

I know. I made my choices.

ANGELINA

We all do. Every day.

SARAH

He told me we would conquer the world.

ANGELINA

I know he did.

SARAH

(Turns to her)

I'm proud to have you as my sister.

ANGELINA

I am too.

(they hug)

SARAH

Anyway. More tea?

ANGELINA

Yes, please.

(Sarah pours both of them
another cup and Angelina
raises her glass for a
toast.)

ANGELINA

On behalf of the race of mankind, I salute you, Sarah
Grimke, champion of Truth and Justice.

SARAH

Thank you, sister. (to audience) Thank you, ladies and
gentlemen.

(Both women salute the
audience. Curtain.)