

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS

Charles Evered

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Evered is an author and journalist who has written for *The London Times* and *The Star Ledger*, among other publications. His published plays include: *The Size of the World and Other Plays*, (Billings/Morris, London, 1997), *The Shoreham and Other Plays*, (Whitman Press, 2002) and *ADOPT A SAILOR*, (Bakers Plays, 2004). *WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS* is the first play in a trilogy he has written about spies and spying. The second play, *CLOUDS HILL*, was recently presented by The Manhattan Theater Club in a workshop production, directed by David Auburn. The third play, *CELADINE*, was commissioned by Amy Irving and will premiere at The George Street Playhouse during the 2004-05 season.

Mr Evered is a graduate of Rutgers, Yale University and The Naval Aviation Schools Command in Pensacola, Florida. He is a former officer in the United States Navy, (Res), having served with the Naval Office of Information during the onset of the War on Terror. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor at Emerson College in Boston. He is married to Wendy Rolfe Evered and is the proud father of Margaret and John.

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS was first presented at The Harper Joy Theatre in Walla Walla, Washington opening on 10 April 2002. The cast and creative contributors were:

ROBERT ADAIR CONLAN Nick Brooks
SUSAN CONLAN Hannah Goalstone
CHRISTINA Erin Roden
ERIN Anna Bullard
JAMES SINGLETON Alden Ford
JOEL KIRBY Stephen Unckles
WILLIAM GRISWALD Sandor Fejervary
SECOND MAN Dave Brown
THIRD MAN Josh Butchart
COLLEGE STUDENT #1 Rebecca Kramer
COLLEGE STUDENT #2 Joe Dyer
MAN IN THE GREY SUIT Shiv Karin Singh
OTHER MAN Ian Danforth
Director Morgan Murphy
Scenic design Tom Hines
Costume design Robin Waytineck
Lighting Alan McEwen
Sound Kevin Rittner

WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS was given its world premiere professional production at The George Street Playhouse (Managing Director, Mitchell Krieger; Producing Director, George Ryan) in New Brunswick, New Jersey, opening 12 September 2003. The cast and creative contributors were:

ROBERT ADAIR CONLAN Michael Countryman
SUSAN CONLAN Leslie Lyles
CHRISTINA Welker White
ERIN Monica West
JAMES SINGLETON Alex Draper
JOEL KIRBY (*and others*) Yuval Boim
WILLIAM GRISWALD (*and others*) Martin Friedrichs
Director David Saint
Scenic design James Youmans
Costume design David Murin
Lighting David Lander
Sound Christopher J Bailey

CHARACTERS & SETTING

ROBERT ADAIR CONLAN, *a professor at Yale*

SUSAN CONLAN, *ROBERT's wife*

CHRISTINA, *SUSAN's niece*

ERIN, *a student*

JAMES SINGLETON, *a student*

JOEL KIRBY, *a student*

WILLIAM GRISWALD, *a student*

SECOND MAN

THIRD MAN

COLLEGE STUDENT #1

COLLEGE STUDENT #2

MAN IN THE GREY SUIT/CAMPBELL

OTHER MAN

The play takes place in various times between the years 1942 and 1968. The settings are New York City, New Haven, Connecticut, Berlin, Germany, Washington D C, Bethesda, Maryland, and at a safehouse outside Arlington, Virginia, respectively.

NOTES ON PRODUCTION

The set should consist solely of a sparse rendering of the library of the Yale Club in New York City. Parquet floor, finely appointed shelves lined with books around the perimeter, etc. Tables and chairs that exist in the Yale Club in 1968 should be employed to facilitate the scenes occurring in the past. Like a dream, the past “materializes” in front of us.

Everything should be done to facilitate the smoothness of the transitions. The play is meant to flow seamlessly, in and out of time. In that way, lighting is very important. Also, the director should feel free to explore the ways in which some “times” might flow into each other, even overlap with one another.

ROBERT is only in his late sixties in 1968, so his cane does not denote a huge disability. Its meant to help the audience visually understand the differences between scenes in the past, when he has no cane, and the time back at the Yale Club, when if he uses it at all he does so with great ease.

If appropriate, it would be perfectly fine to double cast some of the smaller roles.

As for props; try to employ as few as possible. There’s no need for real food on the tables or real fishing poles. Many of the props needed for the scenes in the past might very well be found in the Yale Club set, on the shelves, etc.

As for the aging of the characters: For JAMES, SUSAN, CHRISTINA, etc, the use of makeup would be appropriate. While ROBERT doesn't seem to age at all.

“There had to be one man who said, ‘yes’. Someone had to agree to captain the ship. She had sprung a hundred leaks; she was loaded to the waterline with crime, ignorance, poverty. The wheel was swinging with the wind. The crew refused to work and were looting the cargo. The officers were building a raft, ready to slip over-board and desert the ship. The mast was splitting, the wind was howling, the sails were beginning to rip. Every man jack on board was about to drown—and only because the only thing they thought of was their own skins and their cheap little day-to-day traffic. Was that a time, do you think, for playing with words like ‘yes’ or ‘no’? Was that a time for a man to be weighing the pros and cons, wondering if he wasn’t going to pay too dearly later on; if he wasn’t going to lose his life, or his family or his touch with other men? You grab the wheel, you right the ship in the face of a mountain of water. You shout an order, and if one man refuses to obey, you shoot straight into the mob. Into the mob, I say! The beast as nameless as the wave that crashes down upon your deck; as nameless as the whipping wind. The thing that drops when you shoot may be someone who poured you a drink the night before; but it has no name. And you, braced at the wheel, you have no name either. Nothing has a name. Except the ship, and the storm. Now do you understand?”

Creon

Dedicated to the men and women I had the honor
of serving with in The United States Navy Office of
Information, 2000-2003.

ACT ONE

*(In the darkness, we hear the Yale Whiffenpoofs singing
The Whiffenpoof Song:)*

...we will serenade our Louis while life and voice shall
last,
Then we'll pass and be forgotten like the rest.
We're poor little lambs who have lost our way:
Baa! Baa! Baa!

*(And as the song continues, the lights fade up, revealing the
library of the Yale Club in New York City, 1968. In a faint
pool of light, semi-obsured, we see the outline of ROBERT,
seated. There is a subtle indication he may be an older man,
as he has a hand wrapped around a silver tipped cane and
seems a little hunched.)*

"We're little black sheep who have gone astray:
Baa! Baa! Baa!
Gentlemen songsters off on a spree,
Doomed from here to eternity,
Lord have Mercy on such as we:
Baa! Baa! Baa!"

*(The music fades as ERIN, around twenty, dressed in
"hippie" like clothes, casually walks into the library.
She has a piece of paper and a pencil in her hand and appears
to be searching for a book. As soon as she enters, ROBERT
recedes into his chair, as though he doesn't want to be
disturbed. ERIN looks over at him, then continues looking
for a book. After a moment, she casually turns to him.)*

ERIN: There's a uh, concert downstairs. The "Whiffs" are here.

(ROBERT remains perfectly still, no response. ERIN continues to look for a book. After a pause, she turns toward him again.)

ERIN: You'd think the library at the Yale Club would have a better filing system. It's a wonder anyone could find a book at all.

ROBERT: Though of course, they'd have to be looking for one.

ERIN: Sorry?

ROBERT: I said...in order to find a book, someone would have to be looking for one.

ERIN: I am looking for one.

ROBERT: Hmm.

(ROBERT turns away. ERIN starts to leave, then turns back to him.)

ERIN: I am curious what makes you think...

ROBERT: ...my dear girl, pretense is something only the young have time to endure.

ERIN: Alright. You're right, I'm sorry. It's just that I didn't want to just "announce" myself.

ROBERT: Oh, but you already have. There's no writing on it.

ERIN: On what?

ROBERT: On the piece of paper in your hand—which suggests to me that it's nothing more than an affectation. As is that pencil in your other hand. The one with no point on it. When people walk into library stacks looking for a book—with a piece of paper in their hand, there is almost always something written on it. Something along the lines of say...the Dewey Decimal

System. If there isn't, why would they bother having the piece of paper in their hand in the first place? And so, you did announce yourself. As a person walking into the stacks of a library for some reason... other...than to find a book.

ERIN: I guess I should have been a little more prepared. Considering who I was hoping to meet.

ROBERT: And who would that be exactly?

ERIN: Well, you.

ROBERT: And who would I be exactly?

ERIN: Professor Conlan.

ROBERT: Down the hall, first door on your left.

ERIN: What?

ROBERT: For whom you're looking. Down the hall, first door on your left.

ERIN: Oh, well...I'm sorry to have bothered you.

(ERIN walks off. ROBERT stays perfectly still. After a moment, ERIN comes in again, standing in front of him.)

ERIN: There is no door on the left. And there is no hall.

(ROBERT starts to grin, then laugh.)

ERIN: Why are you playing with me like this?

ROBERT: Why are you playing with *me* like this?

ERIN: I just wanted to ask you a few questions.

ROBERT: And I just wanted to avoid being asked them.

ERIN: I'm a student, okay? My name is Erin, and I'm a journalism student over at Barnard. I just wanted to get some information for a story I'm writing about spies and stuff. Now...are you Professor Robert Adair Conlan or not? *(Pause)* Are you the one that recruited all those boys at Yale into becoming spies? Are you the one that...

ROBERT: ...are any of us anyone, really? Am I speaking to you now or is it the projected image I have of myself speaking, and if so, does perception follow the reality or the other way around?

ERIN: Not quite following.

ROBERT: I'm trying to communicate in a manner in which someone from your "generation" might actually understand. You are a "hippie," aren't you?

ERIN: I don't really go in much for categorization.

ROBERT: No, of course you wouldn't. This is the "age of Aquarius" after all.

ERIN: Look, I just want to find some things out.

ROBERT: And I just want to avoid being the subject of undergraduate drivel.

ERIN: You're not a very nice man.

ROBERT: *(Dry as bone)* I am "run through."

(She starts to turn away, turns back)

ERIN: Did you take any of them fishing?

(ROBERT slowly looks up, glaring at her. She glares back, then finally starts to leave when suddenly, he calls out to her.)

ROBERT: Sit.

(ERIN stops, surprised. She then reaches into her bag and fumbles for a pen and a notebook. She takes both out. Sets herself to write)

ERIN: How did you know he was the "right sort of man?" I mean, how did you know any of them were?

(Pause)

ROBERT: Like you...they would "announce" themselves.

ERIN: How?

ROBERT: Well, like most meetings, it usually started with a knock.

(On the word "knock" we hear a series of loud, vigorous knocks as lights cross fade revealing SUSAN CONLAN, almost forty, standing in the middle of the living room of an apartment in New Haven, CT, 1942. SUSAN is attractive, with a sharp intelligence in her eyes. Her niece, CHRISTINA, nineteen, stands shyly off to the side as ROBERT turns into the apartment, back in time)

SUSAN: Robert, dont be silly. You can't tell a thing about a person by the way they knock on a door. Now, answer it.

(Another series of loud knocks)

ROBERT: Outgoing, athletic...brash, even.

(Another series of knocks in a goofy rhythm)

ROBERT: Yet not what one would call "overly intellectual."

(SUSAN turns to CHRISTINA.)

SUSAN: Christina, darling, answer the door.

(SUSAN goes in the kitchen as CHRISTINA remains frozen.)

ROBERT: Susan, your niece was too shy to go out and buy me a pack of cigarettes.

CHRISTINA: I got your cigarettes.

(Two more knocks)

ROBERT: From a vending machine.

(Several loud knocks in a row)

ROBERT: Alright, alright!

(ROBERT opens the door. Standing there is JOEL KIRBY in a Yale Letterman's sweater. He's an athletically built young man of about twenty. He eagerly, [Somewhat too eagerly]

*shakes ROBERT's hand, holding flowers in the other.
We notice he has a slightly deliberate walk.)*

JOEL: Professor Conlan. Gee whiz its swell to meet you.

(Finally releases ROBERT's hand)

ROBERT: Well...thank you. And you are...?

JOEL: Oh, Kirby, sir. Joel Kirby. I only just got your invitation this morning or I would have had more time to find something more... appropriate to wear.

ROBERT: Yes, well, they were only sent out this morning. Did you follow my instruction?

JOEL: Which was that, sir?

ROBERT: The one about not mentioning the invitation to anyone.

JOEL: Oh, yes, sir. Although I did let it slip just a pinch to my roomie. He caught me off guard as I was stepping out of the shower.

ROBERT: How exactly?

JOEL: Well, he asked me what my "plans were" this evening and...well, it just slipped out.

ROBERT: I see. Well, I dont know many people who could withstand a grilling like that.

JOEL: I'm a little slow in the ol brains department sometimes, sir.

ROBERT: Yes, as your knock previously indicated.

JOEL: My "knock," sir?

(SUSAN re-enters.)

ROBERT: Oh, my wife...Susan.

JOEL: A pleasure, Mrs Conlan. *(He hands her the flowers.)*
These are flowers.

SUSAN: So they are, yes. And this is my niece, Christina.

JOEL: A pleasure, miss.

(CHRISTINA faintly smiles at him. We hear three mild knocks at the door.)

ROBERT: Ah, now that's a knock. Circumspect...tactful...

SUSAN: Just answer it, Robert.

(ROBERT pauses, waits for another knock. None comes)

ROBERT: And patient...

SUSAN: Robert!

(ROBERT walks over, opens the door. Standing there is WILLIAM GRISWALD, twenty, hawk-like and austere.)

ROBERT: Mr..?

WILLIAM: Griswald, sir. A pleasure to meet you.

ROBERT: Yes, welcome. Allow me: my wife, Susan, niece Christina and Mr Kirby.

WILLIAM: Nice meeting you all.

SUSAN: How would you boys like a hot chocolate to warm up?

WILLIAM:
Yes, Maam.

JOEL:
Very much, thanks.

(SUSAN goes into the kitchen as ROBERT inspects his watch.)

ROBERT: It seems a third of you is late.

WILLIAM: Who is that, sir?

ROBERT: "Singleton?"

JOEL: Never heard of him.

WILLIAM: Nor I. Might I ask, sir?

ROBERT: You might.

WILLIAM: Well, it's not that I'm not flattered to be asked here, certainly. Your reputation, particularly your writings on Hawthorne are renowned, but...

ROBERT: ...what are you doing here, is that it?

WILLIAM: Well, yes, sir. I've never had the pleasure of taking one of your classes.

JOEL: Nor have I. Have I, sir?

ROBERT: Something tells me I would have remembered that, Mr Kirby. The reason is quite simple. There's a little library project I'm working on. It involves the acquisition of...books...and I'm looking for a little help with it. Two of you were chosen out of many considered.

(SUSAN enters with hot chocolate.)

JOEL: And the third, sir?

ROBERT: Oh, yes. One of you was asked to be considered as a kind of...favor.

WILLIAM: Why was that?

ROBERT: Because one of you has a father who is extremely rich. And a Senator. *(Looking directly at JOEL)* I'll leave it up to the three of you throughout the course of the evening to figure out who that is.

SUSAN: Robert...

(JOEL turns red, moves off to the side. ROBERT seems to suddenly have a feeling. He looks toward the door, slowly walking toward it.)

SUSAN: What is it?

(ROBERT suddenly opens the door. Standing there is JAMES, twenty, handsome, but with a mournful mysteriousness about him. He extends his hand to ROBERT)

JAMES: Singleton, sir. James T.

(The lights cross fade as ROBERT turns forward in time to the Yale Club. ERIN is across from him)

ERIN: Why didn't he knock?

ROBERT: He told me years later he was just about to.

ERIN: And you believed him?

ROBERT *Of course not.*

(Lights cross fade up on the students, SUSAN and CHRISTINA, all having just eaten, with cups in their hands. JOEL turns to SUSAN.)

JOEL: Top notch prime rib, Mrs Conlan. And cooked just right, too.

WILLIAM: Here, here.

SUSAN: I'm glad you boys liked it. I hope you saved some room for apple cobbler.

JOEL: Yes, ma'am!

SUSAN: And Robert, remember, just coffee for them. They're not of age yet.

ROBERT: Of course, dear.

(SUSAN exits back into the kitchen as all in one fluid movement, ROBERT produces a bottle of scotch.)

ROBERT: A little cure for what ails you, boys?

(JOEL jumps first.)

JOEL: Yes, sir!

(ROBERT pours some into JOEL's cup. WILLIAM steps up next.)

WILLIAM: Dont mind if I do, sir.

(ROBERT pours some for him, then turns to JAMES.)

ROBERT: Mr Singleton?

JAMES: Thank you, no.

ROBERT: Fair enough. *(He puts down the bottle.)*
Alright boys, down to business.

JAMES: I'd like to register my discomfort, sir.

ROBERT: Your what?

JAMES: I'm very uncomfortable with your lying like that.

ROBERT: Like what?

JAMES: You gave your wife every indication you wouldn't serve us any alcohol, then as soon as she left the room...

JOEL: ...hey, lighten up, Singleton.

JAMES: *You* lighten up.

WILLIAM: Simmer down, buddy.

JAMES: *(Fierce, To WILLIAM)* I'd prefer not to be addressed in a manner that assumes a familiarity that does not exist.

JOEL: You're being rude, Singleton.

WILLIAM: Yes, you are.

(CHRISTINA suddenly stands.)

CHRISTINA: No, he's right.

(As the lights cross fade to the Yale Club, where ROBERT turns forward in time)

ERIN: It was a set up, wasn't it? The drink, pouring it in their cups. It was a way to test how honest they were. And your wife was in on it.

ROBERT: Of course she was.

ERIN: *(Looking toward CHRISTINA)* And the girl— was she in on it, too?

ROBERT: No, in fact I never knew she had it in her.

(The lights cross fade to New Haven again, where ROBERT turns back in time. The boys are all spread about the room as CHRISTINA watches from the side.)

ROBERT: And so, plans for the future. *(Points quickly)*
Kirby!

JOEL: I was hoping to join up, sir. I'd like to kill me some of those Nips or Huns. Maybe some "Eye"-talians, too. I would have joined up already, but it seems I have a little foot problem.

ROBERT: What is that?

JOEL: Well, just what it sounds like, sir. I have... little feet. The doctors, call em "disproportionately diminutive" or some such term like that, as compared to the size of the rest of me. And apparently, the army cares about your feet. Something to do with all the marching they do.

ROBERT: Yes, I imagine that's true. Though I must say, looking at them, they dont seem disproportionate at all.

JOEL: Well, that's because I wear regular sized shoes sir, then stuff 'em with corn husks. In point of fact, my actual feet are less than half the size of the shoes you're all looking at right now.

(Everyone pauses a moment, looking at his shoes. Finally)

ROBERT: Right. Griswald?

WILLIAM: Finance, sir. My grandfather has a firm over in Europe. He says what with the detention of the Jews and all, there's bound to be a killing to be made over there.

ROBERT: Well, what remarkable...foresight? Singleton!

(JAMES and CHRISTINA are caught looking at one another.)

ROBERT: Mr Singleton?

JAMES: Yes, sir?

ROBERT: Plans?

JAMES: Fishing, sir.

(Everyone laughs.)

WILLIAM: Did you say “fishing?”

JAMES: That’s right.

ROBERT: As an occupation?

JAMES: If at all possible, yes.

JOEL: You can’t be serious.

JAMES: Can’t I? I can’t imagine anything I like better.
And why not do what you like most of all?

ROBERT: What is it you like about...fishing?

JAMES: The waiting, mostly. All the work you put into it, and then the waiting. I’m partial to fly fishing mostly. I went for the first time down in West Virginia with my father the summer before he died. He’s the one who taught me all the differences and variations between the flies you tie, the colors you use, the shape of things. I love tying them on. Thinking what tiny, almost imperceptible little piece of it just might glimmer or gleam a little...what part of it I’m constructing might catch their eye. And I’ll walk... up and down the riverbank having a look at all the different kinds of insects there, all the different species of things all along the ground. Just studying them. Because I know if I replicate that sort of creature exactly, tie it onto my hook, the fish in that particular area will be all the more familiar with it. All the more trusting of it. And so the “catch” for me begins hours—sometimes even days before my line ever hits the water. To tell you the truth the fish on the end of my hook is more of just an afterthought, really. It’s the waiting, for me. That’s the fun of it.

(Silence, then)

ROBERT: Griswald...

WILLIAM: Yes, sir?

ROBERT: Kirby...

JOEL: Sir?

(ROBERT moves to the door, opens it.)

ROBERT: It was a perfect pleasure.

WILLIAM: What?

ROBERT: Hop, hop, on your way.

JOEL: But...but...we haven't even had our cobbler yet.

ROBERT: My wife will send a dish to your room.
Shake a leg.

WILLIAM: But...?

ROBERT: Off we go.

(WILLIAM and JOEL unceremoniously exit. ROBERT closes the door. SUSAN steps out of the kitchen, sees only JAMES standing there, smiles at him. CHRISTINA smiles at him as well as he looks back at them all, curious.)

ROBERT: Congratulations, Mr Singleton.

(The lights cross fade to the Yale Club, where ROBERT turns forward in time.)

ERIN: What did *he* know?

ROBERT: Only what he had to.

ERIN: But that's wrong, isn't it? Leaving someone in the dark like that. Especially about their own future?

ROBERT: Exactly how would one define "wrong?"

(As the lights cross fade back to the apartment in New Haven, where SUSAN faces ROBERT, turning back in time)

SUSAN: ...as in the wrong thing to do, Robert.

ROBERT: But sometimes, darling, one has to do wrong to be right.

SUSAN: But this is a human being you're talking about.

ROBERT: And an exceptional one at that.

SUSAN: He wants a father.

ROBERT: What? What are you...? Don't be silly. I have as much chance of being a credible father figure as you have of giving birth. *(Realizing what he said)* Darling, forgive me.

SUSAN: It's alright, Robert.

ROBERT: Look, I'll...keep trying to be something to him other than...

SUSAN: ...a recruiter?

ROBERT: Yes.

(She touches his cheek, strokes it)

SUSAN: That's my good Robert.

(We hear a doorbell.)

ROBERT: What is that?

SUSAN: It's called a "doorbell." I had it installed because I got so tired of your analyzing everyone's knocks.

ROBERT: Well, that wasn't very nice.

SUSAN: Yes. But, as you would say darling: "Exactly how would one define nice?"

(SUSAN smiles, goes into the kitchen. ROBERT opens the door. It's JAMES)

ROBERT: You're late.

JAMES: Sorry, sir.

ROBERT: "Silence."

JAMES: Sir?

ROBERT: "Silence." Explain silence to me.

JAMES: A state of being—bereft of sound.

ROBERT: That's defining it. I want you to explain it.

JAMES: I...

ROBERT: not in a straight line. Don't think like in school.

JAMES: It's....

ROBERT: Yes?

(JAMES *can't speak.*)

ROBERT: Nothing is coming to you because I can hear the machinery of thirteen years of banal systematic educational indoctrination churning away. You're thinking as though you were a human thought factory again—producing replies, answers and retorts. You need to think in terms of prayers and poems—not conclusions.

(JAMES *closes his eyes*)

JAMES: —a room.

ROBERT: Silence?

JAMES: Yes.

ROBERT: With doors closed or open?

JAMES: Open.

ROBERT: Is it a safe room nonetheless?

JAMES: Comforting.

ROBERT: And the color of the room?

JAMES: All grey—and even.

ROBERT: So silence is an "even grey place." Is that it?

JAMES: Yes, that you could lie down in.

ROBERT: And sleep?

JAMES: Or dream.

ROBERT: So silence is a dream?

JAMES: Yes, an "even grey place".

ROBERT: With doors open...

JAMES: That...

ROBERT: Go on...

JAMES: speaks.

(JAMES *opens his eyes again.*)

ROBERT: "Silence speaks."

JAMES: It's exhilarating talking like this. I don't do this with any other professors.

ROBERT: No, I imagine you don't. Have you studied the Latin?

JAMES: *Certe, studui sententiis Latinis.*

ROBERT: And the Chinese?

JAMES: *Hen rongyi.*

ROBERT: Lovely, now...

(SUSAN *enters, sees JAMES.*)

SUSAN: Hello, James.

JAMES: Hello, Mrs Conlan.

SUSAN: Just getting my sewing.

JAMES: (To ROBERT) Could we go fishing?

ROBERT: Could we what?

JAMES: Go fishing.

ROBERT: Well...

(SUSAN *conspicuously clears her throat as she retrieves her sewing.*)

ROBERT: Uhm...alright. Why not? Fishing is known for its... something. Now, about those Latin roots...

JAMES: When?

ROBERT: What about fall? That's fishing season, isn't it?

JAMES *It's fall now.*

ROBERT: Is it?

JAMES: What about this weekend?

ROBERT: I can't this weekend.

JAMES: Why? If you don't mind my asking.

ROBERT: Because we have a uh... (*Turns to SUSAN, clearly making this up*) a barbecue to go to, don't we dear? The uh...Swensons...?

SUSAN: Oh, no, Robert. That's been canceled, don't you remember? Jenny has a little—tickle in her throat.

ROBERT: (*Glaring at her*) A "tickle." No, I did not know that.

SUSAN: Oh, yes. So that frees you up to go fishing. Why don't you come by early Saturday morning, James? I'll be sure Robert is bundled up all cozy.

JAMES: That's great!

ROBERT: Yes, "great." Thank you sooooo much for your help, darling.

SUSAN: Any time, Cuddly Muffin. (*She smiles a loaded smile toward ROBERT and retreats back into the kitchen.*)

ROBERT: Fine, now, when conjugating the Latin...

(CHRISTINA *walks in.*)

CHRISTINA: ...Eridanus is out!

ROBERT: What?

CHRISTINA: The constellation.

JAMES: Is that the "Winding River?"

CHRISTINA: You know it?

JAMES: Just from books. Is it rare that it's out?

ROBERT: Excuse me—if you two don't mind—
(SUSAN enters.)

SUSAN: Christina!

CHRISTINA: Eridanus is out.

SUSAN: Is it really?

ROBERT: Oh for cripes...

JAMES: ...I don't think I've ever seen it.

CHRISTINA: I was just going up to East Rock.

JAMES: (To CHRISTINA) Would you mind if I tagged along?

ROBERT: I would!

SUSAN: Oh, Robert, let him go.

ROBERT: His verbs are flabby!

SUSAN: His verbs will still be there when Eridanus has gone.

CHRISTINA: We should go before it gets cloudy.

JAMES: Sir, I'd very much like to...

ROBERT: ...go, go! Just review your verbs.

JAMES: I will, sir, I promise.

(JAMES follows CHRISTINA out.)

JAMES: Good night!(ROBERT stands defeated.
SUSAN smiles warmly toward him.)

SUSAN: You used to take me up there, you know, to "look at the stars."

ROBERT: Did I?

SUSAN: Hard to believe, I know.

ROBERT: Your little niece has designs on him.

SUSAN: Oh, I think it's the other way around.

ROBERT: Regardless, he can't be distracted.

SUSAN: Robert, for someone so young, you've become such an old fuddy duddy. *(She moves toward him, playing with his tie, starting to stroke his face.)*

ROBERT: I better get some work done.

SUSAN: Of course you better. *(She turns, disappointed.)*

ROBERT: I wouldn't wait up if I were...

SUSAN: ...I wont.

(He collects his papers, turns to her.)

ROBERT: Goodnight, then.

(She faces away. No response. He exits. SUSAN turns toward the closed door.)

SUSAN: Goodnight, then.

(As the lights fade slowly on SUSAN, coming up on CHRISTINA, who is leading JAMES up to the summit of East Rock Park. Above them is the suggestion of a myriad of stars and magical constellations as light spills down upon their young faces. CHRISTINA points skyward.)