

Description Beggared;

or the

Allegory

of

WHITENESS

~

Mac Wellman
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fifth Draft
PERSONS OF THE PLAY **w h i t e n e s s** :

UNCLE FRASER, Fraser Outermost Ring₄, a damnable marplot;
AUNT BIANCA, a sort of human Blank, perhaps a parrot;
COUSIN JULIA, called "The Eraser" because of a wicked habit
she has;
MOTH, an elegant older person, and
LOUISA, something of a ninny (not really); she doubles as the
DISPUTANT, who possesses two ASSISTANTS; a PHOTOGRAPHER, and
two MUSICIANS.

—

The floor is circular, a Malevich white-on-white target; time noodles around the here and now, whatever that may be.

—

Unto a life which I call natural I would
gladly follow even a will-o-the-wisp
through bogs and sloughs unimaginable,
but no moon nor firefly has shown me
the causeway to it. Nature is a personality
so vast and universal that we have never
seen one of her features.

--

Thoreau, Walking

—

WHITENESS has been commissioned by the Actors Theatre of Louisville, Mark Masterson, Artistic Director.

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Note: The occasional appearance of an asterisk in the middle of a speech indicates that the next speech begins to overlap at that point. A double asterisk indicates that a subsequent speech (not the one immediately following begins to overlap) at that point. The overlapping speeches are all clearly marked in the text.

Scene [**Steam**]: A party in a hypothetical Newport, Rhode Island; late summer; only something has gone wrong, radically wrong, during the taking of the annual family photograph; present are The Marplot (Uncle FRASER), Aunt BIANCA and Cousin JULIA (the Eraser), MOTH and LOUISA, (the one they call The Ninny); and two MUSICIANS. And a very frustrated PHOTOGRAPHER, standing next to an enormous silver-plate camera. Everyone is gossiping (at the same time) animatedly about everyone else; there is a lot of bad jazz. Abruptly the bad jazz stops.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER in horror

Cousin Julia the Eraser.

HORN GIRL

They don't call her The Grande Parade for nothing.

Bad jazz starts up once more.

JULIA in a rage

Whited sepulchers. Whited hypocrites
and creatures of the blench. Blenched
and two-faced, the whole bloody lot.* We
get together once a blue moon, once a
decade, once a century, once a millennium,
and you see the incredible result. Chaos.
A horrid, nasty scene. A picture of the
most appalling kind. A model of indecorous
outrage and unhinged incivility. Injured
merit run amuck.

Observe the Marplot there. Fraser is so filled
with swarthy venom he must disrupt this,
this most innocent of occasions.

Can he hear me? No, of course not. Too
wrapped up in his own foul rancor,
a whirlwind of a man. A local disturbance
posing as one of us. A hypothetical
human.

BIANCA

And I was doing nothing harmful;
and I was doing nothing of the kind;
and I was merely minding my own business
when the two of them, yes, the two
of them swept down upon me
like the spider; yes, very much the spider.

She makes the spider.

The two of them, with their eight legs
arranged just so. The two of them, yes

creeping sideways in
her idea of spidery motion,

her long red tongue lolling.

She stops; looks over her shoulder to see if FRASER is noticing her; he is not; reprise.

And* I was doing nothing harmful, etc.

FRASER

Can you believe it?* I am surrounded by maniacs and idiots. It is hard to say which is worse, the maniacs or the idiots. It is hard to say which is worse, the mania of the maniacs, or the idiocy of the idiots. For if there is one thing I cannot abide it is the mania of maniacs; for if there is something I hate even more than that it is the idiocy of idiots. And the worst ...

He rages silently.

And the worst is the idiocy of bad jazz, and the noise of these infernal idiots and maniacs, idiots and maniacs as you see arrayed all about me. Me! Arrayed all about in a way that I find ... Arranged in obsequious propinquity. Arranged in a way cunningly contrived to inflict the maximal insult upon the auditory person of my personhood.

He dances a jig of insult.
Reprise.

MOTH

I am the only soft one; I am the only soft one, even though I am not covered with fur. Yes, not with fur.
I am the only soft one; I am the only soft one, because I am covered with feathers. Yes, with feathers. Not with fur.

Yes.

Yes. The others are not covered with feathers.

Yes. With fur, look at them. Fur.

Yes. And I should have stayed home.
Yes, I should have stayed, and rested quietly behind the floral screen, in my very own room.

Yes, behind the floral screen, where I love to sit
in the darkness reading the geometrical writings
of Isaac Ring Barlow, our ancestor. Yes and yes,

I should have stayed at home, behind the
floral screen, in my own little room, eating
a prickled bloatfish,

there,

in suburban Kama-Loka, where I grew up. Curious.

She smiles and shows
her good teeth.

JULIA

When we were young, we girls sang a
song about Fraser. I shall sing it now:

Curious
Curious is the man

Curious the man
who has time to fiddle
hack upon a can
but not to riddle
the heart of man, nor his piddle;
Curious the man
who has time to fiddle.
Curious

whether boy or girl;
whether top or swirling
curiosity.
O black black black
hearted curiosity. [Reprise by all the WOMEN

LOUISA

Er,

Poor MOTH faints in horror.

All this is my fault, I suppose, and, er ...

It is true that I am a ninny though my name
is not that, er ...

It is Louisa; but I am called "Ninny" because
as a child, I visited with some distant relatives,
strange white people from the deep, interior regions
of Rhode Island's vast wasteland
and was told many wondrous things, er ...

well, I suppose it comes down to that:
I told my parents how ... how impressed

I was by those strange people, not to mention their whiteness which was of an extraordinary kind;

All stop to hear what she is about to confess:

and, well, I said to them, my parents, I mean, er ...

I want to be one of them when I grown up.

All turn slowly to regard her with cold condescension.

Pause.

All look away.

So, I guess, well, I guess you could say I was a real big disappointment.

The Marplot breaks out of the freeze and begins a confidential talk to some of the members of the audience.

FRASER

Can you believe it? Can you? Well, I can't. Because actually it is quite beyond whatever we mean when we call something "unbelievable". Such a pretty girl, and so stupid. Yes, so profoundly stupid that her stupidity possesses a pallor that is almost ...

He considers the question of what might constitute an apt comparison.

... that is almost godly; in other words, a whiteness that simply beggars description. And all this must be the outcome of some genetic predisposition or some ancient curse laid upon our tribe by ...

A glimmer of insight.

Who knows? By some other tribe of equally ancient, but heathenish morons ...

A more substantial glimmer.

I am referring to those ancient and heathenish ones who occupied the place even before us.

A pause for reflection.

If indeed the place could be said to have been occupied at that remote time, because it is clear that in the absence of our occupation the place can hardly be thought of as a place, place qua place.

A place actual, that is.

No, for in our absence a place cannot be said to constitute a place, only an emptiness.

A noplacé.

A primeval wasteland, devoid ...

He illustrates what it is
he is attempting to convey with
a motion of hand and arm.

Pause. He does this again,
it was so much fun;

However;

clearly such gestures are not
The Marplot's long suit, and so
he gives it up.

Seeing him apparently conclude
his remarks, the MUSICIANS start
up their machines again, and we
hear more Bad Jazz.

Stop ... stop ... stop* that hideous din.

JULIA

Oh Fraser, do put a lid on it, will you?

She steps forth, imperiously;
a magnificent specimen.

LOUISA in particular is impressed
by her aristocratic bearing:

LOUISA

This is a cousin-- not of the moron variety--
but of another, equally drastic: Cousin Julia,
Cousin Julia, called The Eraser because her visits
tend to be accompanied by an unexpected removal,
so that these visits are much feared by the rest
of the family; er,

Cousin Julia has just returned from a trip
to Jerusalem, where she has become a ... a

jewel.

FRASER

A monstrous carbuncle, one might say.

JULIA

Just who am I? you ask and since you pose that question I shall give you a fit reply. I am The Grand Parade, and that is the whole of it. That is also why I am universally feared and respected.

Yes, I am she who guarantees when a way is found that it be the right way because what good would a way possibly be if it were not the correct way? The splendor of my being shall illuminate all these matters until the time comes.

LOUISA

Er,

JULIA

Please do not interrupt.

Yes, my dear, The Grand Parade must run, run and run her course till what has been implied has taken on manifestation, a local habitation, and born the shame of such.

LOUISA

No, I was merely going to point out, however, weakly and without conviction, that it has begun snowing. Even though it is still September.

A pregnant pause, as it has indeed begun to snow.

We hear, very quietly, the Siegfried Idyll;

Or is the music emanating from some far stranger, metaphysical domain?

All are deeply concerned about this question,

but none of them wishes anyone else to be aware of his or her concern.

An Aryan pause.

FRASER

It **is** snowing, of course. What of it?

BIANCA

May I go back to the cupboard now?

JULIA

Yes, Lady Blank, you may go back to your damnable cupboard. Only see that you behave.

BIANCA

Only the tiniest peek, I promise.

JULIA

Only the tiniest.

Scene begins to fade out
strangely.

MOTH

And so, at the turn of the century, we all assembled in this place, to greet the new century, and yes, the new millennium, yes, only somehow we got it dreadfully wrong.

JULIA

Radically wrong, one might say.
Drastically wrong.

The Marplot turns away from them.

All turn to him.

An accusatory silence.

From depths of his remoteness:

FRASER

Yes, yes. I know what you are thinking.
You are thinking it is Uncle Fraser's fault.

It is a problem I have with the black art, yes, the black art of photography. And that problem revolves with a regular orbicularity about an unassailable truth: namely, that the photographer's devilish craft involves the complete effacement and wiping out of the human soul. This process can be gradual or instantaneous, depending on the relative thickness or thinness of the spiritual entity in question.

He casts a significant glance at
The Ninny, who looks down
abashedly.

I of course have suspected this all my life,
but did not arrive at a finished conclusion
until I had secured my fortune, and by implication

the fortune of the entire clan, with that old enterprise in the depths ... of the depths of the Telegu Archipelago.

All the WOMEN do something strange.

Yes, yes. You scoff at things foreign. Strange gods and the like. But after we signed documents with the presiding fogleman in Frontenac Bay, all went according to our whitened way.

A pale-faced pause.

Deep, deep truths I learned from my hetman there, Baga and his catchild, Squeech. Deep, deep things.

A strange, slow and dark music breaks out.

At the rituals we ... we participated in, as full equals, I might add....

As BAGA:

WHATAMDISFER? WHATAMDEMFER?
WHATEMDOSFER? WHATAMYAMFER?
Or, more correctly:

WHAT AM DIS FOR? Holy holy holy.
WHAT AM DEM FOR? Lordy lordy lordy.
WHAT AM DOS FOR? Allalu, allalu, allalu.
WHAT AM YAM FOR? Blory, blory, blory.

The MUSICIANS take up the chant, quietly.

And, thus, even among the indigenous dwellers of that remote region, the central questions revolve just as they do for us; with, one might say, as equal and perfect an orbicularity: Who am I? What am I here for? Who are they? What are they here for?

Music ends.

Baga and his catchild, Squeech. These were the first to clarify the matter for me; the whiting out of the oft photographed human soul.

JULIA

All this feels rather arcane and superfluous, Fraser, given the difficulty of assembling the family. All at one time. All at any one place, that is.

FRASER

I am resolved in my decision.

JULIA

You have marred the occasion.

FRASER

The occasion be damned.

The PHOTOGRAPHER, who has been standing idly by, rages and chews on the brim of his hat.

JULIA

The camera is prepared; the photographer has been standing idly by; we shall be forced to proceed without you.

FRASER

I, the photographer be damned.

LOUISA

Er,

Another white pause.

Aunt BIANCA abruptly sits down.

Cousin JULIA signals to the MUSICIANS.

JULIA

Aunt Blank, will you lead us in a few verses of the originary document?

Aunt BIANCA brightens, gets up.

BIANCA

The family hymn?

JULIA

Yes, my dear. That will do. After all, it is Founder's Day and Founder's Day it shall be all day long, despite the black mood of Kaiser Fraser here.

The MUSICIANS do their best as BIANCA begins, uncertainly:

Mine eyes have seen the something of the coming of the Lord; he is something something something with his terrible swift sword ...

The song dissipates as it becomes apparent that neither BIANCA nor

the MUSICIANS know what they are
Doing.

The scene piffles out.

All leave except The Marplot and The Ninny.

FRASER

Have they all gone?

LOUISA

Not quite.

And in fact: JULIA and BIANCA
are intently observing from just
offstage, in the audience.

Elsewhere, MOTH observes both
the observers and observed, herself
unseen.

FRASER

They have ruined me, Louisa, with their wicked
wicked obsession with establishing a visual
record of all events, even the most seeming innocent.

LOUISA

I don't know what to say.

—

BIANCA

What are they saying?

JULIA

How can I hear if you're always yapping?

BIANCA

I think* they are talking about how you
turned Mother into an insect by an act of partial
erasure.

—

FRASER

Well, they know what to say, Louisa. And
what they are saying they are saying
about you and me; some of it about you and
the greater part no doubt about me, and
all of it revolting.

LOUISA

They mean well enough, Uncle Fraser.
They can't help being who they are, vague
and insubstantial. Fraught with the intangible.

These qualities go with the terrain of their awful whiteness.

MOTH

I think all of this is very silly. I think all of this is so very silly, so silly I am going to tell you all a little story about the olden days when the vast metropolis of Newport had not been dreamt of. Long before our ancestors had discovered the principle, long hidden, of certain, wonderful flea circuses far away in the Telegu Islands, and came shortly thereafter to corner the market here. Long before Fraser, who was just a young boy (I think it was this Fraser), who had not yet developed such a malign and flinty dislike of all things associated with mechanical flea circuses and other miniature, wind-up automata. A profound hatred of all miniatures, be they natural, or artificial.

Long before Grandfather Lockhart stood up during a performance of the Ninth Symphony at the Crystal Pavilion and took the bullet meant for Governor Gormley, a big, bald, whitish sort of man, and was declared a hero in his abrupt deconstruction.

LOUISA

She's talking about imaginary things again, Uncle Fraser. Decompression. Shadow dances on the Neman River in old Byelorussia. White Russia. Lovemaking under a pontoon bridge on Decoration Day.

FRASER

She has changed into one of them.

LOUISA

What?

FRASER

A lepidopteran.

MOTH

Long before that, indeed. Long before Cousin Julia the Eraser erased the last two letters from

my good maternal appellation and spat them out
at poor little infant Louisa Outermost ...

Er, LOUISA

What is it? FRASER

Er. I said "Er". LOUISA

Be quiet then. FRASER

It has started to snow again. LOUISA

MOTH
And long before my own Great Uncle, Tom Blank,
exhibited his device at the World's Fair
in Providence, the Rhode Island White-tailed
Dioptrical Silver Plate, in whose shimmer
shimmer even the Negro and his Negress might take
in the radiant whiteness of his and her eternal
Christian soul.

JULIA
What are they talking about now?

BIANCA
Something about going to the cemetery.
Putting up a monument to the Bishop
He wrote books, I think.

JULIA
Who wrote books?

BIANCA
The Bishop. He collected things too. They tell me
he was a bug man.

JULIA
What?

BIANCA
He had these pieces of cork with needles in
them, and he catches bugs and sticks them
on. We don't understand these things but
it's true, just the same. Can I go to the kitchen
and look at the Chiffonier?

Something strange happens.

All stop whatever they are doing; and

missing a beat,
try to figure out, privately,
what has gone awry;
they attempt to do this
without being detected.

JULIA

What did you say?

BIANCA

I forget, something about wanting to go
back to the kitchen.

JULIA

And just what would you be up to, if
you should do that?

BIANCA

Well ... ah ...

JULIA

Yes.

BIANCA

Well, since Lady Moth seems to be preoccupied
with a fit of fantastical reminiscence, I shall
maybe, at any rate, I might ... ah ...

JULIA

Yes. I think I know.

BIANCA

If you think you know, why do you ask me?

JULIA

I am hoping, dear Bianca, that I have
misjudged your intentions.

BIANCA

Well, I thought with all these temporary
disturbances, what with everyone acting
like the white mouse trapped within the
tikum-tokum of an ordinary Diophantine
Challenge Box ...

The original model came only in alabaster
and Mother of Pearl. Even the
brilliant porches of Newport were not so
brilliant, but ... dear me ... I have quite
lost the thread of my idea.

JULIA
That is because you are being evasive.

BIANCA
Was I really?

JULIA
Yes you were.

BIANCA
Funny, I was not aware of being evasive.

JULIA
That is not a justification.

BIANCA
Do you think my lost thread of thought
requires a justification?

JULIA
There is a justification, or the implication
of one floating about in the fluid suspension
of your consciousness, my dear. Just asking
to be rubbed out.

BIANCA
My word, Julia. You make it sound like
we are bobbing for apples.

JULIA
--

BIANCA
--

—
The MUSICIANS mutter in their corner,
their hushed voices, strange, barely
human. They sound like rodents.

MUSICIAN ONE
They call him The Marplot because he's a grump.

MUSICIAN TWO
They call him something like that, I suppose.

MUSICIAN ONE
He hates us. He hates the music we make.

MUSICIAN TWO
He is rich. And large, and white. He can get angry
at whomever he will.

MUSICIAN ONE

He hates us because he is one of us.

MUSICIAN TWO

You don't say? Say, he and that ninny niece
of his are making faces at us.

Indeed, they are. Quite ugly faces.

MUSICIAN ONE

He is a hateful grump. And a grouch.

MUSICIAN TWO

What is a grouch?

MUSICIAN ONE

Similar to the grump, but worse.
Worse as rat is to mouse.

MUSICIAN TWO

Worse.

MUSICIAN ONE

Yes, much worse.

Ruminative pause. MUSICIAN ONE
scratches his hump (he has a hump).

Then why have we been hired to play
music here?

MUSICIAN TWO

His wicked cousin, the one they call The
Grand Parade has arranged the whole business.
My surmise is that, in a previous life, he
was an inventor of music boxes and mechanical
flea circuses himself* ... but I cannot be
entirely sure ...

FRASER

What are you saying, my good man? What
idiotic calumny are you giving voice to?
You have laid siege to my wits with
this expensive, idiotic noise.

JULIA

Music, it is called, Fraser. Please desist
from this outrageous behavior. They are
only doing as they have been commissioned.

FRASER

Noise, noise, noise.

The MUSICIANS start up in a fury.

He dances his angry jig.

Expensive noise then.

A stench in the ear.

The two MUSICIANS sing:

Description is the beggar
rolling up the floor
cutting up the carpet
upon which the Devil poured

bleach of his depiction.
whirling like a djinn,
pure description beggared
White as sin.

White as sin; white as sin;
white as description beggared
whirling like a djinn
whirling like a djinn.
White as sin; white as sin.

—

Reprise. All begin to whirl, their
white clothes like monstrous blooms
rotating around them.

They sing:

In the white squall
of the metaphysical ocean.
Ocean, ocean, ocean.

White as sin; white as sin;
white as description beggared.
Whirling like a djinn.
White as sin
white as sin

—

Music stops suddenly-- as a mean
and petty practical joke of the
two MUSICIANS. They hide a cackle.

All the others look somewhat embarrassed.

In this awkward moment, MOTH
chooses to start up her story
again:

MOTH

... and long before that; and long before that even,

and before the time we celebrate on Founder's Day
and before, yes, even before the signing of the
originary document and the preliminary description;
and before even the first voyage of our brave
ancestor to the Isthmus of Telegu ... and the
station at Whydah, along the bleached, bone-white
sands of Dahomey;

and before the invention of the Rhode Island
Silver Plate Dioptrical Flea Circus, and all
the various types of music box:
those of ivory and those of horn;
those of the right, and those of the left brain;
those of the angel who is the wandering
albatross, and those of the imp Obsidian
whose weight forces the fulcrum up,
whose weight forces the fulcrum down;

and before even the naming of names;
of Leucoblast and Leucorrhea;
of Leucocyte and Leucocytosis;
of Leucoderma and Saint Leukemia;

of all things so turned and so leprous
they outwhite oblivion; for

Softly; all the WOMEN join
in the song, as this is a ritual
from the olden days;
all conventional lights dim;
but black light comes in.

In every town, there is a white girl;
whiter than the rest, whiter
than snow, whiter
than corn tassel, whiter than
wheat flowing in the evening breeze;
whiter than the air we breathe;

A fluffy white silencio.

Whiteness is the color of what
want is. Whiteness is want;
what we all want, not knowing.

A choral reprise.

In every town, there is a white girl
whiter than
the rest;
whiter than the air we breathe;
breathe.

MOTH once more

And I thought I was that girl.* I was, I confess,
that girl.

FRASER

I should have stayed at home, Louisa.

LOUISA

Oh, Uncle Fraser, cool it, will you?
Dear Moth is entitled to her imaginary
raptures.

FRASER

All this resembles nothing so much
as a Sikkimese hangover.

JULIA

Don't like it, Fraser, when the hens come
home to roost?

FRASER

Witchetty, all of it. Witchetty. Witchetty.
Witchetty.

LOUISA

What's "Witchetty"?

JULIA

What in the name of Great Aunty Dahlia
do you mean?

Aunt BIANCA brightens.

A music of ominous footfalls.

A transcendental music lifts
our souls.

Pause.

BIANCA

I was just getting around to that.

LOUISA

"Witchetty". What's it mean?

FRASER

How the devil should I know?

A strange, little MAN enters. This
is the WHITE DWARF. All freeze
except The Marplot, who is the only
one to see him.

The WHITE DWARF, like the others,

is dressed entirely in white
except for a red fez with a
black tassel.

This is the only scenic color
in the play (well, almost).

The WHITE DWARF mutters to himself
angrily. We do not hear much of what
he says.

—

He limps over to an audience member
(a shill); grabs that person's program;
bites it and growls; rips the program
into pieces; stomps on the pieces, and
rolls around on the stage scratching at
them with his hind feet, rather like
a nasty housecat with her prey.

The Marplot watches all this in horror.

A Dwarfish pause.

Suddenly the WHITE DWARF catches sight
of the Marplot, gets to his feet, and
begins to mutter again. We hear only
the following amidst his demented garble
and cackling.

THE WHITE DWARF

"Witchetty"! Witchetty, ha. It's all one big Polo
Bear bottom. One big white torpedo. An obsessional
white horde, ha!

Now he begins taking flash pictures
of FRASER with his instant Kodak.

The latter grimaces in the agony of
unwilling exposure;

but the WHITE DWARF continues, briefly,
examining each photo before discarding
it with gleeful contempt;

The WHITE DWARF moons
The Marplot, who thereupon faints.

Before exiting, he places his visiting
card in The Marplot's open mouth.

—

A stuffed ZEBRA, on wheels, appears just at the lip of the stage. Greeting this with delight, the WHITE DWARF carefully places his camera on the stage, where it shall remain for the rest of the play, lit by a pin-light.

Pause.

The transcendental music stills.

The WHITE DWARF hobbles off, with the zebra (his trophy) in tow.

The MUSICIANS are the first to snap out of it, and begin to play in a more soothing vein-- but still their old Bad Jazz.

—

BIANCA

I said. I was just getting around to that.

JULIA

Getting around to what?

The Ninny spies The Marplot stretched out at her feet, and let's out a short but energetic scream.

Lights back to normal.

All focus on him; MOTH alone smiles because, with all her years and wisdom, she finds the scene amusing;

LOUISA leans over to remove from FRASER's open mouth the visiting card which the WHITE DWARF has placed there. She reads:

LOUISA

Parking lot of the Wallmart on Route 7.
Near the dumpster. At the back of the abandoned Weiss Mechanical-Musical Flea Circus Factory. This Tuesday. Four pm.
Be there. The Dwarf will lead you on from there. White Whiskey John, Assistant to the Disputant.

The Marplot has come to his senses,

but is still groggy;

turns to MOTH, almost tearful.

JULIA

Disputant? We shall have no disputes during the holiday. Fraser, what does this mean?

LOUISA

I'm sure there is a rational explanation, cousin Julia.

BIANCA

Moth, what can this mean? Whatever can this mean?

LOUISA

White whiskey John?

MOTH

It's a kind of shrike.

All look at MOTH with surprise.

BIANCA

And what I was going to suggest is that we call it a day, since the photographer seems to have disappeared.

All look at JULIA, who feigns innocence.

And Fraser has suffered from a stroke or other moral lapse;
and the musicians, or whatever they are, have assumed a dark and gloomy aspect, probably because they are waiting to be paid; and they shall not be paid;

And they shall not be paid
because there is no money to pay them with;

The music stops.

And they shall not be paid,
because they are dark and witchetty, and possibly in league with the Adversary;

And they shall not be paid,
because given the family structure, it is unclear who among us holds the authority and controls the purse-strings governing the writing of checks;

And they shall not be paid,

because their music is of a disturbing kind,
and lacks the melodious harmoniousness which
above all the family fancies on these occasions,
such as Founder's Day, or the Day of the Signing
of the Orinary Document; or on

White-Handed Goose Day; or
Woonsocket Day; or
Gravity Feed Day; or
Moon Dead Dog Day; or
Anna Innermost Ring Day; or
on Prickled Bloatfish Day ... or ...

JULIA

You are not making any sense, Bianca.

BIANCA

That is because I wish to return to my little room,
and hide behind my little floral screen ...

JULIA

We all wish to return to our little rooms, and we
all wish to hide behind our little floral screens,
but all the rest of us have the internal fortitude
and the will power to resist that temptation.

BIANCA

I know, I know, I know.

Pause. Something happens
in the vicinity of The Marplot's
nose.

Something connected to the
idea of butterflies.

Suddenly FRASER sits bolt
upright. Perhaps he is
aware of the possibility
of the WHITE DWARF's return.

JULIA

In fact, Bianca. In fact you are resorting
to your old bad habits.

BIANCA

Julia, how can you say that? In what way
can I be said to be resorting to my old
bad habits?

JULIA

You know.

BIANCA

I do not know.

Yes you do. JULIA

No I don't. BIANCA

A standoffish pause.

Yes you do. JULIA

No I don't. BIANCA

You know. JULIA

I do not. BIANCA

Er, LOUISA

Shut up, you feeble-minded white-handed tree-mouse. JULIA

Just because I would like to tip-toe into the kitchen and out the back way ... BIANCA

Yes? JULIA

Out the back way, and down the steps that lead to the other place; BIANCA

Universal fear at the mere mention.

The other place, you call the Gaming Room (FRASER);
and you (LOUISA)
call the Montessori Bughouse Underfloor Area;
and you (MOTH)
call the Highborn Muskrat Hideaway;
and you (MUSICIANS)
call the Take-After Take-Out Taj Majal;
and you, Julia,
call the White-Haired White Leather White Tie;
but is, in fact, only the antique cupboard,
or chiffonnier, that was Great Aunt Dahlia's.

And is now her final resting place. JULIA

BIANCA

I only want a teensy peek. Teensiest of the teensy.

JULIA

It is a low, depraved wish on your part, Bianca. Ancestor worship must aspire to more elegant expression in our contemporary Rhode Island, dear.

LOUISA

Er,

JULIA

Shut up, you hideous white crappie.

Shock.

The Grand Parade gestures to the MUSICIANS, who begin to play more or less morally affirming music--

Whited sepulchers. Whited hypocrites and ... and creatures of the blench. Blenched and ... two-faced, the whole bloody lot. Great Aunt Dahlia has entered into the phase of her long and rich existence we denominate as her Egyptian Alabaster years; not quite among the living; not quite among the dead. So;

Bianca,

when we disturb her profound meditation upon the higher things, transubstantiation and the transmigration of the human soul, we threaten her delicate equipoise. For good reason she has returned to the enameled sanctuary of her treasured chiffonnier, most treasured of all the family heirlooms we possess;

Before her it belonged to Lydia Lockhart; and before her to Anastasia, perhaps better known as the natural daughter of Mr French Church; and before that to Gloria Defiance Ring; and before that to Philippa Outermost Ring; and before that to Augusta Outermost Ring; and in the beginning, before the signing of the originary document, and before the framing of the preliminary question, and the opening of the field and the closing of the old Weiss factory across Route 7 and before the establishment of Founder's Day which is also known in the local parlance as Prickled Bloatfish Day; and before the framing of the other question, the eternal one ...

In a whisper:

The one we dare not think too much about ...

A thoughtful pause.

to Louisa Outermost Ring, for whom our
silly little Louisa was named, named
with the misguided hope that names truly
are fates, as the philosopher Pseudo-Mennipus
opined, and are not mere slank appellatives.

LOUISA

But I thought she was dead.

JULIA

She will be dead, silly, if Bianca continues to
disrupt her dream time flat line.

BIANCA

So I am to have nothing for my trouble?

JULIA

What trouble is that, Bianca?

BIANCA

The trouble of driving here, all the way from my
little room in suburban Kama-Loka.

JULIA

That is not such a far place. I drove all the
way from Paris, France.

MOTH

Disaster, disaster, disaster.

JULIA

--

BIANCA

--

LOUISA

Er,

JULIA

Be quiet please.

LOUISA

Er,

JULIA

Please.

LOUISA

Er, I was only going to point out that it has begun to stop snowing.

All look about, as if to confirm or contradict this assertion.

JULIA

It has begun to do no such thing.

Indeed, The Grand Parade is, on this occasion, quite correct.

MOTH

Disaster, disaster, disaster.

Aunt BIANCA lies down on the stage, and thrashes both hands and feet in total postverbal frustration.
One of the MUSICIANS grows bold (the First);

All glare at him disapprovingly; he loses his nerve;

BIANCA rages once more; his nerve returns;

he approaches very close to JULIA's chin.

MUSICIAN ONE

We will be paid.

JULIA

I beg your pardon?

MUSICIAN ONE

We have played some music, some pretty darn good music and we will be* paid.

MUSICIAN TWO

Yes. It is only right that, as god fearing tax payers, that we be paid.

JULIA

Go whistle for it then.

All turn their backs on the poor MUSICIANS;

save MOTH who has put on her snow shoes and trudged out; and FRASER who is studying the card lately placed in his

mouth by The WHITE DWARF;

Ambivalent as ever, LOUISA
does not know what to do,
nor with whom to sympathize
so she counts imaginary
rabbits as they hop on her knee.

After a stingy pause, MUSICIAN ONE
signals to MUSICIAN TWO who
thereupon sings a song:

I am in an economic hell;
bell, do not ring for me
bell, do not ring for me
bell, do not ring for me

because I am not ... not at all
and I have lost my whiteness.

BOTH MUSICIANS

Have lost thereby,
lost my rightness, it's true.
And have lost my rightness.

BOTH and LOUISA

Oh what a hell. Oh what a hell.
ALL THREE

Oh, rabbit of loss
I am in an economic hell
Bell
tell me what to do.

Humiliated, The Grand Parade opens
her ratty little clutch purse,
produces a coin; bites it;
regrets biting as the taste is foul;

pauses;

and tosses the coin over her
shoulder; the MUSICIANS let the
coin fall where it may; pause;

then MUSICIAN ONE signals MUSICIAN TWO
who recovers the coin and pockets it.

—

BIANCA and JULIA slip out

as MUSICIAN ONE signals once more
to MUSICIAN TWO who begins to
sing:

MUSICIAN TWO

Beautiful girl, you are so fair* ...

The Marplot angrily and quite suddenly
interjects:

FRASER

And just what the hell am I supposed to do
about this idiotic invitation?

LOUISA

Er, I suppose you might want to take
the bull by the Melanesian antlers,
cross the road, as the message indicates
and see what lies on the other side.

He considers this option;
reconsiders.

FRASER

Storm's approaching white out.

LOUISA

Then you'd best stay at home.

FRASER

Stay at home is what I should have
done in the first place, Louisa.

Dresses for the storm and
vanishes into the storm like
the white-tailed deer.

No one knows what to do
for a second.

LOUISA smiles fetchingly at the
MUSICIANS who smile back.

MUSICIAN TWO begins to sing
once more:

Beautiful girl, you are so fair
I am made deaf;
one bite of your blanch
collides with my habit
and I shall fall down like the
moon.

ALL

And I shall fall down like the
moon.

Blond beyond belief, and
wrecked upon the coco reef
of disbelief;

belief in whiteness
ultimate whiteness.

Whiteness alchemical;
whiteness metaphysical;
whiteness allegorical.

Beautiful girl, etc.

—

Lights dim as the storm
whitens.

We catch sight of The Marplot
trudging along in the direction
of the highway, and the abandoned
Musical-Mechanical Flea Circus
Factory where his fateful
appointment is shortly to
occur.

FRASER

Witchetty. All of it, witchetty. What a hell
of a local disturbance is mankind ...

We see MOTH high up
in a dormer window.

MOTH

Disaster, disaster, disaster.

The First Scene peters outs
like the last of the white sand
in the hourglass.

First Entr'acte [**Sleet**]: The Marplot staggers through the storm, as if on a treadmill. He passes the ghostly white mansions of Astors and Vanderbilts; he mutters to himself. Far above, on the metaphysical plane and surrounded by fluffy white clouds are JULIA, BIANCA, LOUISA and MOTH; they look down on Fraser's progress with transcendental benignity -- and softly sing, as before:

Mine eyes have seen the something
of the coming of the Lord;
he is something something something
with his terrible swift sword.

FRASER

Damn that crowd at the white horse tavern ...

Damnable flea circuses.

God Damned Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House.

Witchetty. All of it vile and witchetty.

Damnable Samuel Whitehorse Museum.

Astors and Vanderbilts be damned, the whole
lot. Arrivistes and social climbers, all of 'em.

Isaac Bell? Phooh? I knew Isaac Bell
When he was shucking shellfish at a
third rate clam-shack down by the pier.

Damnable music-boxes. Witchetty and
damnable, the whole shebang.

All fades to white.

Scene [**Snowy**]: The vast interior of the abandoned factory. Eerie light from a skylight high above. A very very long table with a chair at each end. At the far end of this is The DISPUTANT, cloaked in silvery whiteness (though shadowy) and barely visible. Two ASSISTANTS hover nearby and whisper in the DISPUTANT's ear. Light silvery laughter rises from time to time, barely audible and barely human. The Marplot enters and stands near the empty chair; he can only just make out the distant figure for all the gloom. A silvery pause.

FRASER
And so?

DISPUTANT
Your name is Fraser Outermost Ring₄?

FRASER
And so? What of it?

DISPUTANT
Answer the question.

FRASER
What question was that?

DISPUTANT
Must I repeat myself, Mister Ring?

FRASER
Why have I been summoned to this place?

DISPUTANT
You are the fourth Ring to bear the family name of Ring?

FRASER
Why should I discuss my family name with you?

DISPUTANT
And so? I might just as well reply, "And so?", and then that leads us, in perfect circularity, back to the beginning.

A circular pause.

FRASER
And so? What of it? What do you want from me?

DISPUTANT

Maybe the whole point is that there is no issue to any of it.

FRASER

There is no point to any of WHAT? What the hell are you driving at?

The distant FIGURES consult and whisper. Light, silvery laughter.

FRASER takes off his coat and drapes it carefully over the back of the chair.

He scratches his head.

He sits down upon the chair.

DISPUTANT

Why do you think you have been summoned here?

FRASER

Have I been summoned here? I believe I came of my own free will.

DISPUTANT

Do you imagine you are whiter than the rest?

FRASER

Of course I am whiter than the rest. All the Outermost Rings are whiter than the rest. What the devil does that have to do with the price of tea in Telegu?

Silvery laugh.

DISPUTANT

Quite the wit.

FRASER

Runs in the family, on my mother's side at least.

DISPUTANT

Quite the wit. Wit. From Witan in Old English: to know. Are you the knower, Mister Fraser Outermost Ring?

FRASER

I misspoke: Wit does not run in the family. Rather it runs from the family-- idiots and maniacs the whole bloody lot.

DISPUTANT

Strawberry.

FRASER

What? (Clearly shaken

DISPUTANT

Was that not the name?

FRASER

I have no idea what you're talking about?

DISPUTANT

Strawberry. As in strawberry blond-- your nickname as a youth in the remote, wild outer reaches of North West Rhode Island some three thousand miles away, where you and your young accomplices made balls out of the blubber of the white seal and toyed with the bleached skull of the Telegu white stork.

FRASER

And so? What is the point of this?

Well, what if I did? What of it?

A silvery pause.

DISPUTANT

Is there not hell to pay? Hell, Fraser, hell?

CHORUS of FIGURES

Shake shake shake
Shake the devil off
in the name of Jesus.* [X7

And did you not play Taji in the school play;
Taji, lost in the mindless pursuit of Yillah?
Lovely, yellowhaired Yillah, she who was
whiter than the rest?

FRASER

The part was a minor one.

DISPUTANT

Cloud you speak closer to the machine,
Strawberry?

FRASER

The part was a minor one. The play of no
significance. I have forgotten the whole matter
till this very moment.

DISPUTANT

Your various selves seem to have a way

of sliding away from the central axis.

FRASER

That is natural, is it not? I see nothing wrong with that.

DISPUTANT

Others in the family call you The Marplot because you have a way of spoiling their plans, Strawberry.

FRASER

Their plans are often silly, silly ones. Plans deserving of spoliation. And who in the name of Roger Williams are you?

DISPUTANT

I am your Disputant.

FRASER

My what?* What is the name of hell is that?

DISPUTANT

You heard me, Strawberry. I am your Disputant, and you have been summoned to this place to answer for some actions undertaken in your name, by you and your other selves and selflings-- as the Millennium draws nigh.

The Marplot laughs.

In particular, you are accused of disrupting the fundamental plan;

as proposed in the Originary Document;

as a response to the Preliminary Question, and the opening of the field, and other cognate selves and selflings relative to that question.

He is stunned.

In fact the whole family of Ring is responsible; is responsible for these actions; actions which have over the course of time beggared description, and which have caused the heavenly dome of whitest heaven to be

The DISPUTANT and her Assistants,

Each & every one,

make a motion,

ever so slightly,
of the hand

To become smutched, to become as smutched
as the black orchid Taji brought to Yillah
in that high school play, foolishly thinking
that by so doing he would win her love.

Black as the teeth of the inhabitants of
Tsalal.

He reaches the boiling point.

FRASER

What does this have to do with me? I have
always been an exception to the white rule
of the Ring family.

DISPUTANT

You are one of the central rings; the last, in fact,
of a long succession of Rings; you are, therefore,
a critical link in that deplorable argument.

FRASER

And precisely what argument would that be?

DISPUTANT

Enough of this backpeddling. You know
perfectly well what I am talking about.

FRASER

Damnation. I had nothing whatsoever to do
with the evils you have alluded to. The
lunacy of the Ring family has nothing to do
with me. Why hound me? It is senseless.
Why not pursue your savage vendetta
against all the others? Cousin Julia, for
instance, the one they call The Eraser;
the one who calls herself The Grand Parade?
Cousin Julia the Eraser so called because
of her strange ability to cause people and
things to vanish. Whole epochs of the family
chronicle caused to disappear under the insidious
rub a dub dub of her India rubber eraser.
Most of the chronicle from the time of Fraser₁
and Fraser₂ reduced to powder, mere pulverized
rubber. Similarly, my own childhood, the time
of my own father, Fraser₃ has become, through her
doing, a horrid, white blank or blot. An empty page
in an old old book, once hallowed, now hollow.
Hollow through the vile praxis of Cousin Julia.

The DISPUTANT and her ASSISTANTS

move about and make a noise
like crumpled paper.

Er, her visits are seldom. It is duly recorded:
Her visits are seldom, but much feared because
they are so terrible.

Pensive. Grasping for straws.

Just now she has returned from a trip to
Jerusalem, where she has become a jewel.
Can you imagine?

As if we needed jewels after the vast fortune
I made lately in Durango, yes, in the uranium
mines at Durango; and somewhat earlier at
Telegu ...

His mind grows dim
with hollow time.

Yes, at the Isthmus of Telegu, where my
father's friend, Isidor -- Isidor Weiss--
first devised the Weiss Semi-Pneumatic
Musical Flea Circus in ...

DISPUTANT

That was fifty-four years before your
birth, Fraser.

FRASER

Well, what of it? (Sputtering, confused.)

DISPUTANT

You have confused your self with other
semi-erased fingers of your pseudogroup.

Holds up her hand, sheathed
delicately in a white glove.
She moves her fingers ever so
slightly.

FRASER

What in the name of Babbalanja is that? A
pseudo-group?

DISPUTANT

Identical selves-- out of time they form a pure
group, white on white so to speak, of identical,
yet separate beings. I am speaking of Fraser the
first, Fraser the second, Fraser the third, and you:
Fraser the fourth. In it, time that is, they
fool eye and mind by an apparent difference that
both IS and is NOT the case.

High above, near the skylight
a white rag flutters.

All look up.

We hear the winter wind
blow, blow whitely.

A dreadful pause.

FRASER

Are you saying I am not who I am?

DISPUTANT

In this particular instance, you have
confused your doing, the doing of
Fraser₄ with those of your ancestor,
Fraser₁.

The Marplot is stunned.

He looks out: can this be?

You have confused Late Capitalism with
the dawn of the Wealth of Nations;
mediocrity with accomplishment;
parasitical decline with the miracle
of appearance.

Sudden realization.

FRASER

Oh, now I see.

Quietly.

My own failings, modest though they be, are
to be confounded with those of my forebears.

DISPUTANT

The others and selfings of your pseudogroup,
Strawberry.

Light and silvery laughter.

FRASER

I wish you would not use that ... that turn
of phrase.

DISPUTANT

And why not, Strawberry?

He lowers his head.

FRASER

It is just that it reminds me of so many things I would just as soon forget.

DISPUTANT

Like that clandestine meeting, with a certain gentleman, at the Astor?

FRASER

The encounter happened by chance, I swear.

DISPUTANT

The bargain sworn on that day, or rather ...

With grim determination.

... late in the witching hours of that day, did not happen by chance.

FRASER

The version you recount is not the correct version.

DISPUTANT

It is the version as recorded by you, in the diary you kept for that year, and it is in no way ambiguous. Your agreement with that certain gentleman

A Whitish pause.

Specifies in great detail ...

Assistants snap their fingers seven times.

FRASER moves from one foot to the other.

He has forgotten, thus, that he is standing.

... the intended terms of the arrangement.

The white rag in the skylight is ruffled, lightly-- whitely.

FRASER

You have been speaking with Bianca, my country cousin-- the young ninny's aunt.

Silence. Pause. Silence.

Bianca, Bianca. Tsk, tsk.

A hissing from the distant Assistants.

She was so, so pretty so long ago.
Her eyes the color of the deep ice we
sawed in massive cubes and hauled
up from White Wolf Lake.

All she is up to now is obsessional stuff.
Bianca wants to go to the kitchen, and to
the old cupboard or chiffonnier, which for
the good of all concerned has been closed to
public view these long years. She wants to
go to the kitchen so she may take a peek.

He titters lightly and silvery,
almost, but not quite

like the DISPUTANT's Two
Assistants.

This seems to make them
uncomfortable.

So she may take a peek (Can you imagine?)

BIANCA, MOTH, and JULIA
appear high above,
in a floral cameo;

they echo his last:

BIANCA, MOTH, and JULIA
... take a peek (Can you imagine?)

He is a little unnerved
by this.

FRASER

Take a peek at Great Aunt Dahlia (whom
we call the Madwoman in the Cupboard)
whose exceptional pallor, you see, derives
from her complete innocence of the sun's
rays for seven full decades.

He titters again, despite himself.

Bianca we used to call Aunt Blank. You
might say she was totally erased by
Julia and became a radical. A lot of us
Rings were radicals in those days. But
then the bubble grew in swollen ... in
swollen wonderment, and we all grew
richer even than the Rings who worked
for it. Yes, richer by far.

He whistles in the bubble

of his wonderment,
intensely white.

And so radical Aunt Blank went off to
gay Paree, much to the shame of the
family and became at first a photograph
(Can you imagine?); and then, and then:
and became a rhododendron;
and became a speck of hoarfrost;
and became a hangnail;
and became a doorstep;
and became a great white peach louse;
and became a whited sepulcher;
and BECAME A PARROT.

The ASSISTANTS

Shake shake shake
Shake shake shake
Shake shake shake
Shake the Devil off
in the name of Jesus.
Shake the devil off
in the name of Jesus. [X3

He acts as if he had done nothing
unusual.

DISPUTANT

But we have strayed from the mark.

FRASER

Indeed, we have. For the worst crime of all
also came about as a result of Julia's
penchant for the systematic removal of
all traces. For concealed within that penchant
lay the even deeper obsession, common to all
us Rings, Innermost and Outermost alike,
to go back to the starting point with a
series of ... with a series of searching
questions.

And thus to initiate an interrogation,
in the simplest of language, but an
interrogation nevertheless. A drastic
interrogation.

Simple terms. Drastic interrogation.

Much like this one, in fact.

DISPUTANT

And? And so?

FRASER

And the long and short of it was that
Before Julia had quite gotten the hang
of it all (these two impulses being
in direct contradiction), she had
accidentally erased the last two
letters of her mother's good
name, and so transformed her from
A Mother into a Moth.

DISPUTANT

And what did she do with the two letters
she had removed from her Mother's good
name?

FRASER

Trick question. But I was prepared for it.

He prepares himself further
to reply; and replies:

Thereupon she accidentally sneezed, and in
so doing accidentally obliterated poor
little Louisa's wits and replaced her
adolescent speech faculty with a single,
odd vocalization.

DISPUTANT

And what was that vocalization?

FRASER

Er,

All three FIGURES lean
forward, as if mishearing.

All THREE

Beg your pardon?

FRASER

Er. The letters E and R. Er. The fragments
of our own dear Moth's former matriarchal
appellative. Er.

Amused by a peculiar thought.

At least we were able to keep the two
errant letters in the family.

Suddenly sarcastic.

So that
We Outermost Rings are able, despite
all Bianca's slanders and Julia's
erasures, to perpetuate the miracle
of appearance, even amidst the sham
of the contemporary and likewise

the parasitical decline of our kind
in the debacle of Late Capitalism
you have so astutely alluded to.
The miracle of appearance and the
riddle of amazement. Yes, these
remain to our credit. White out!
Bull's-eye! White out!

He gestures stiffly,
but triumphantly;

just like Uncle Adolf
in the railway car
outside gay Paree.

ALL THREE OF HIS TORMENTORS

Bull's eye! Ha! (He is caught off guard by this
DISPUTANT

All this lies as far afield of the mark,

ALL THREE

Strawberry;

DISPUTANT

All of this lies as far afield of the mark
as the silver-tipped claw of the White Flaw

Pausing for effect.

A kind of rooster you will* recall [Aw...

ASSISTANTS

Aw ... aw ... aw ... (They flap arms as wings.

DISPUTANT

... that was given to you, in the Ivory Room
of the Astor, by that certain gentleman,
oh, oh, oh, so long ago.

Do you recall that silver-tipped claw?

He is suddenly frightened by the snare.

FRASER

That was not me. That was my great grandfather,
the primal Fraser, Kaiser Fraser, whose wicked ways
we in the family have long since amended;

amended, indeed and made up for, in various
noble ways ...

DISPUTANT

Made up for? How can what is fixed in
the past be so easily "made up" for?

FRASER

Over the years we have given to the poor,
and mentally impaired; we have rewired the
chronically dislocated and restored the
oh so endangered ...

ASSISTANTS

And rare. And rare. And* rare.

FRASER

endangered Sweet Ratfish to his
native habitat in the vast, oily
cypress bog region of Lower Rhode Island;
especially near Lake White Cholera where
year round the mists hang heavy in
the spidery Spanish moss and sawgrass;

Pause to see if his tack
has taken; it has not.

FRASER

established foundations and institutions for
the better class of Arts and Letters, those
tending toward the spiritual and moral correction
of the stained and bleached American soul;
I am referring to the Outermost Ring and
Plantation of Providence Foundation, and
her cousin at White Fin Harbor, The Prickled
Bloatfish Institute which is devoted to the,
ah,

reintroduction, ah,

Clearly doesn't know what
he is talking about.

... of all that glides, monstrous and half seen;
of all that rests there, submerged and
opalescent. Deep, deep at the bottom of the sea.

Desperate. Sings, badly:

And has suffered a sea-change
into something rich and strange.

This does not placate anyone.

And then there's this INSANE dwarf following
me around, following me taking pictures ...

An odd ritual begins:

all are locked into
the mechanism.

ALL THREE

And did the Long white man give you
the coconut?

FRASER

For the coconut brings good luck; yes, yes,
he did. In sooth.

ALL THREE

If you have the gift of ivory,
you will be very lucky.

FRASER

I was not worthy, but I was given
the gift of ivory. Yes, Yes, I was.
In sooth.

ALL THREE

And did the Long White Man make the
fairies dance by moonlight,

DISPUTANT

Strawberry?

FRASER

Er,

DISPUTANT

And? So?

FRASER with great difficulty

He said: "I shall teach you how to knead
the white triangular cake of St Wolof";
and he did.

ALL THREE

And he did.

FRASER

He said: "I shall make for you white witches
sensible of the stroke of the white elder
at seven miles"; and he did.

ALL THREE

And he did.

FRASER

Yes, he did. (Finally broken

A sudden quiet.

We hear the snowy wind
high above, in the eaves.

The three WOMEN above (BIANCA,
JULIA and MOTH) sing a
wordless hymn of thanks.

DISPUTANT quietly
So, you do admit.

FRASER
Yes, it is all true.

DISPUTANT
All of it?

FRASER
Yes. All of it.

DISPUTANT
You admit this all? All of your own free
will?

FRASER
Er,

DISPUTANT
All of your own free will? Under no
compulsion?

FRASER
Under no compulsion. Yes.

DISPUTANT
And you admit you bartered away what is
most precious in an evilish compact
with that certain gentleman ...

FRASER
... at the Ivory Room of the Astor, yes.
But I never received that damned silver-tipped claw,
the claw I was promised, no, all I received in return
was a wooden nickel ...

The wordless hymn ceases.

An innocent afterthought.

At the time I imagined there was a great future
in wooden nickels. How was I to know?
Skip it.

DISPUTANT
And to hide your crimes you confined poor
Great Aunty Dahlia to her treasured chiffonnier;
and banished poor Bianca-- with her stutter--
to exile in gay Paree, knowing full well
she was doomed to become, through a sordid

series of transformations, to become a PARROT;

He is shaken;

and gave to Cousin Julia, the one you
contemptuously term "The Eraser"...

he writhes in the grip
of remorse;

... and gave to her, her first seemingly
innocent Kodak Instamatic, knowing
full well what might, given her proclivity
for scratching or rubbing out, what
might be the outcome?

he accepts the whitest
of white judgements
upon his white soul;

his expiation begins;
sobbing, etc.

FRASER

A slow white out begins.

ALL THREE

And what will you say to the White Zebra?
And what will you say to the White Zebra?
And what will you say to the White Zebra?

Fade to White.

The Second Entr'Acte [**Hoarfrost**]: The Marplot trudges back to the Big House from his meeting with The Disputant at the abandoned factory. There, the Marplot encounters the stuffed ZEBRA from earlier. He looks at the Zebra. The Zebra looks at him. Next to the Zebra there is an old stone bench. Slowly the heavy snowfall is covering everything.

Pause.

Silence.

Pause.

He stands for a long time looking looking at the Zebra.

He has never seen a Zebra in real life before, and this Zebra is a mighty fine one.

FRASER

Wow.

ZEBRA

--

The Zebra is the most beautiful creature The Marplot has ever seen.

A joyous and brindled pause, after which The Marplot claps his hands;

FRASER

Wow.

He waddles through the thick snow, and sits down on the little stone bench, next to the Zebra.

ZEBRA

--

FRASER

That's okay. That's okay. I understand.

I would like to tell you a story, a true story from my youth. Owing to an accident of history and the foolhardiness of youth I ended up a volunteer with the American Brigade of the Finnish Army in the Winter War of 1939. I was wholly innocent, at the time, of the darker implications of the project, and we were stationed at Turku in the Karelian Isthmus ...

The Marplot's story is lost in the story of the winter storm.

All fades to whitest opalescence.

Scene [Icicle]: Back in the Big House. The fury of the storm has abated, and as the scene begins we see, through the windows, a marvelous sunset. MOTH, JULIA and BIANCA are snapping the palest of wax beans and LOUISA, seated facing her across the room, shells cranberry beans, mirroring the former. It is a good deal quieter than it ought. The WHITE DWARF is lurking, lurking somewhere unseen.

LOUISA
Will Uncle Fraser be home for supper?

MOTH
No, Louisa. He will not.

LOUISA
Why not?

Has he decided to return to his mountain fastness at White Jaw? on the Yukon? in the remote crag regions of Northwest Rhode Island? Has he?

MOTH looks at The Ninny queerly and stops snapping beans.

The WHITE DWARF enters and narrates of the stage directions which follow.

Something odd happens.

The smiling faces of the MUSICIANS appear in the window;

they unsmile;

they disappear.

MOTH
Louisa.

JULIA
Louisa.

BIANCA
Louisa.

LOUISA
Er, did I say or do something wrong?

MOTH looks away.

MOTH begins snapping beans.

JULIA

Devil raise a hump upon that damnable Marplot,
that Kaiser Fraser ...

Kaiser Fraser.

BIANCA as a parrot

Er,

LOUISA

An ivory pause.

Something happens somewhere.

Someone does something;
only it turns out to be a
naughty something;

so it must be effaced;

so it must be done all over
again

this something is a thought
thing--

this something is a thought
thing--

so it must be done over and
over till someone (whoever)
has got it right.

This happens.

This happens, and all the time
MOTH remains stiff in her chair
snapping beans;

and The Ninny remains motionless
in her chair.

She devises an imaginary world
in her head;

a world of white water and
alabaster beaches, glowing
under a white star.

White water crowfoot and white
water lilies abound;

this world is called "Whizzbang"
and she is happy here.

The two MUSICIANS enter, one playing
the violin. The other sings:

Poor Louisa, poor Louisa,
why are we doing so poorly?
The bugs and the bats are alive,
bright eyes ablaze in the halls
in the walls of the halls
of "The White Rose", your home.

LOUISA
Sorry. I was someplace else. For a moment.

MOTH
Well, he's had a very serious accident, and he
won't be coming back.

LOUISA
Won't be coming back? Uncle Fraser?

BIANCA
No. He won't be coming back.

JULIA
Not ever.

The song continues:

The big, blank, bucket-faced moon, oh,
the moon has risen early,
for you, just for you, riding a wire
The moon's high wire,
just for you, just for you.

For Louisa, poor Louisa.
Louisa Outermost Ring;
It's for you alone we sing,
we sing ...

All stop suddenly.

Pause. Silence. Pause.

All begin again; ghostly quiet.

Hold on, Hold on,
Poor Louisa,
why are we doing so poorly....

LOUISA

Because ...

MOTH

--

LOUISA

Why can't he come home again?

MOTH

Because.

LOUISA

Because why? Because why not?

JULIA

Because he did not know how to reply.

LOUISA

Did not know how to reply to WHAT?

BIANCA

To the White Zebra of course.

This simply baffles The Ninny,
just as you would expect.

She sighs, goes back to her
cranberry beans;

MOTH

You see, Louisa, he was not able to finish
the story he was telling and that story was the
most telling of all.

LOUISA

All this is my fault, I suppose, er.

MOTH

Silly ninny. Confine yourself to the
shelling of cranberry beans, while dear
old Moth confines herself to the
telling of a true tale.

Owing to an accident of history, and the
foolhardiness of youth, Fraser₂ ended up
a volunteer with the America Brigade of the
Finish Army in the Winter War of 1939. Young
Fraser was wholly innocent, at the time, of the
darker implication of the project, and was
promptly stationed at Turku, in the Karelian
Isthmus.

Young Fraser, like many in those days, believed
what he had been told: that the Soviet Union
must be stopped in her aggression against

tiny Finland, a truth as apparent to him as the fact that Stalingrad had been named for Lenin.

He and a young colleague, Truesdale, came to be posted on a low bluff, near the outermost ring of Turku, with an ancient Maxim gun from the Great War, seven crates of rusty ammunition, and a firing radius of 45 degrees. The Finns deposited these young Americans here thinking the main Russian thrust would come well to the South. Foolish Finns.

Well.

As she applies some Gum
Arabic to her whitish gums

LOUISA once more
counts imaginary rabbits
as they hop on her knee.

For several hours, the two discussed boyish things such as Fraser's shocking escape from the altar at the rehearsal of his wedding to young Dinah Morgan, a relation to the great magnate of Hartford-- and ever after a source of embarrassment to the family.

Do you think, do you think, Clyde, for that was Truesdale's Christian name, that I did the right thing or was I a cad; or was I a cad to do the right thing? Or was I not a cad even though the thing was not the right thing? Or was the act both wrong and right and hence undecidable, and therefore was I not in fact both a cad and not a cad? Both P and Not P in the symbolic logic of Nkosi Whiteman Rudge, his tutor and of late a disciple of both Russell and Wittgenstein.

LOUISA

--

MOTH

Truesdale, ended the conversation and incidentally, their friendship forever, with the rude insult:
Why Fraser, you strike me simply
as a passive aggressive hostile fuck!

As it began to darken and glower;
as it began to darken and glower and to

snow rather heavily.

An uncomfortable few minutes passed
with this reply hanging heavily
in the air.

And all this despite Dinah Morgan's exceptional
pallor.

But just at this moment

Fraser happened to catch sight of something rising
slowly out of the snow, at the far end of the
snowy field. A snowy figure, in fact.

She adjusts the working of her
teeth and gums.

And then another, and then another, and another.
Slowly arising like squat, appalling snowmen
from the snowfield, each indistinguishable in hue
from the field itself; each figure arising then
slowly, very slowly trudging towards the two lads.
What is that? quipped Fraser. Damned if I know,
responded his fellow;

but

what it was, was the Russian Winter Army, yes,
advancing slowly but inexorably across the
snowy field and through the snowy haze.
Young Fraser watched in astonishment, and
so did young Truesdale.

Slowly trudging across the snowy field
of frightening angles and incalculable
vortices.

At three hundred meters Fraser and Truesdale
opened fire, raking the open field from one side
to the other, rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat;
For a time Fraser would fire and Truesdale
would feed the long belt of cartridges; then
Truesdale would fire and Fraser would feed. Oh,
the advancing snowmen would fall silently
one after another, and be buried in the mounting
drifts of snow. Be buried as more and more
snowmen rose behind them in the white mists
beyond, near the edge of the white wood.

And thus it went for hour upon hour. The little
rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat of their Maxim,
and the slowly toppling snowmen, advancing
only to be mowed down, row upon row upon row.

LOUISA stands and speaks, all
without the slightest pause;

LOUISA

The sky was gray, like that day in the
Karelian Isthmus, but there was a white
gleam behind, and from where I was
sitting I could look down on the town
of Newport, and it was still and quiet
and white, like a picture.

I remembered that it was on that hill
that Moth (or someone very much like her,
maybe even older and more white) taught
me to play an old game called "Whizzbang"
in which one had to dance, and wind in
and out of a pattern in the grass, and
then when one had danced and turned long
enough the other person asks you questions,
and you can't help answering whether you
want to or not, and whatever you are told
to do you feel you have to do it. This
person said there used to be a lot of games
like that that some people knew of, and
there was one by which people could be
turned into anything you liked and an old
man her great grandmother had seen had known
a girl who had been turned into a large
snake. And there was another very ancient
game of dancing and winding and turning,
by which you can take a person out of
himself and hide him away as long as you
like, and his body went walking about
quite empty without any sense in it.

Suddenly thoughtful.

This was before we Outermost Rings
discovered, quite accidently, you could
do the same thing by photography.

Suddenly pensive, in her
white way.

But I came to that hill because I had been
talked to by the terrible white Zebra, and
I wanted to think of what had happened
the day before, and of the secrets
of the woods. From the place where I was
sitting I could see beyond the town, into
the opening I had found, the opening in
the field, the opening leading to the
question standing at the beginning of things,
where a little brook had let me into an

unknown country. And I pretended I was following the brook over again and I went all the way through into my mind.* And at last I found the wood, and crept into it under the bushes, and then in the dusk I saw something that made me feel as if I were filled with fire,

Violin plays the tune from
"Whiter than the rest...";

Everyone, except for FRASER
troops out for the family photograph,
which is now possible.

as if I wanted to dance and sing and
fly up into the air, because I was
changed and wonderful. But what I saw
was that I had not changed at all,
and had not grown old ...

The jubilant PHOTOGRAPHER sets
up the antique camera.

... And I wondered again and again
how such things could happen and
again how Uncle Fraser's rage against
depiction had so totally backfired
and whether Moth's stories were
really true, because in the day time
in the open air everything seemed
quite different from what it was
at night, when I was quite frightened,
and thought I was to be burned alive.

The bright magnesium flash
of the camera ignites
a slow

fade to (can it be?) black;

a sort of white blackout
(in black-light to emphasize
the terrible pallor of their
clothes)

in which we hear the entire
cast sing:

Description is the Beggar
rolling up the floor
cutting up the carpet
upon which* ... Etc.

LOUISA

A white witch, I hope. (We see her teeth are quite pointed.

... the Devil poured
bleach of his depiction.
whirling like a djinn.

Pure depiction beggared
white as sin

White as sin; white as sin;
white as sin;
white as sin.

—

All begin
to whirl
their
white
clothes
like
monstrous
blooms.

Slow fade to white.

End of play.