



# POUND

A play in two acts by  
Sean O'Leary

**Professional Premiere** – The Washington Stage Guild, Washington, DC

**Winner** – Ostrander Award for Best Original Play in the 2006/7 Memphis theatre season

**Winner** – Pittsburgh New Play Festival

**Nomination** – Williamstown Theatre Festival's L. Arnold Weissberger Award

**Nomination** – The Humana Festival of New American Plays

**Finalist** -- Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre ScriptWorks Festival

**Selection** – Round House Theatre New Voices Reading Series

**Selection** – Orlando Shakespeare Festival PlayLab Reading Series

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**POUND**  
**A Play in Two Acts**  
**By Sean O’Leary**

During World War II the American poet, Ezra Pound, made propaganda broadcasts for Mussolini’s fascist government. As a result, he was charged with treason. But, before he could be tried, Pound was judged to be mentally unfit to stand trial and was remanded to the custody of St. Elizabeths psychiatric hospital, where he would remain from 1945 until 1958 when the indictment was dismissed and he was released.

Near the end of his stay, this aggressive and manipulative man, who dominated St. Elizabeths much as he had the literary world in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, suddenly retreated into an emotional shell and, eventually, “The Great Silence” – a period of despair and seclusion from which he never fully recovered. The play, *Pound*, imagines what might have happened in those last days at St. Elizabeths to irreversibly change the character of Ezra Pound.

***Synopsis***

At rise the overbearing, 73 year-old Pound is confronted by Mary Polley, a young psychiatrist who aspires to help the man who has been labeled “incurable”. Pound dismisses her, as he has so many psychiatrists, but when he learns of his imminent release, he experiences an inexplicable dread that drives him to Mary for help.

Mary embarks on a course of treatment that, at first, seems merely peculiar and perhaps justified given the short time in which she has to work. But, soon her techniques become disturbing, visiting extreme guilt upon Pound for a lifetime of manipulation and abuse. Then, after reducing Pound to almost childlike vulnerability, Mary reveals her true purpose – revenge against the man whose radio broadcasts during the war demonized Jews and encouraged “a purge” – a purge that consumed, among others, Mary’s parents.

The play *Pound* challenges us with questions about whether words can be as powerful as actions, whether revenge can be just, and, ultimately, whether sanity is possible when we’re made to see the world as it is and not as we would have it.

***Characters***

Ezra Pound . . . . . Age 73. Lithe, aggressive, and razor sharp.  
Mary Polley . . . . . Age 30. A newly minted psychiatrist.  
Nurse Priscomb . . . . . Age 60. An efficient, but caring nurse.  
Archibald MacLeish . . . . . Age 60. The distinguished poet.

***Setting***

The Staff Library; St. Elizabeths Hospital; Washington, DC. February, 1958.

### ***Reviewers on POUND***

“An unassuming gem.” “It replaces message with mystery and requires viewers to carry on with the dialogue long after the curtain's come down.”

-- *Chris Davis, The Memphis Flyer*

“A wonderful piece of writing that challenges the audience to think on multiple levels.”

--*John Hayes, The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“POUND is a striking portrait of a man in torment. See it!”

--*Bob Davis, WGMS-FM, Washington*

“A well made play . . . where mind and heart clash incessantly.”

--*Grace Cavalieri, The Montserrat Review*

“Compelling.”

--*Ted Hoover, The Pittsburgh City Paper*

### ***Author's Bio***

Sean O'Leary is the author of five completed full-length plays, three of which are receiving Equity productions. His most recent, VALU-MART, is the 2007 winner of The University of Alabama at Birmingham's Ruby Lloyd Apsey Award for plays confronting racial and ethnic issues and was a finalist in the National Arts Club's Playwrights First competition. BENEATH SHELTON LAUREL was commissioned by The Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre where it played for 20 consecutive sold-out performances between 2005 and 2006 and won a National Endowment for the Arts “Access to Artistic Excellence” grant for a touring production that is now underway. Sean's earlier play, POUND, about the poet Ezra Pound, received its professional premiere in October 2004 at The Washington Stage Guild in Washington, DC and has gone on to five other productions. RAIN IN THE HOLLOWS received its professional premiere three months earlier at Tri-State Actors Theater in New Jersey and has gone on to numerous productions as well. Between them POUND and RAIN have won or been finalists in more than a dozen national playwriting competitions. Sean's first play, WINE TO BLOOD was produced by Oglebay Institute's Towngate Theatre and selected by Brandeis University for its permanent collection of works inspired by the Spanish Civil War. Sean is the 2004 winner of the West Virginia Commission on The Arts Fellowship for Drama and was recently added to The Literary Map of West Virginia. He is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America and the Playwrights Forum of Washington, DC. He lives near Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. For more information visit [www.olearyonstage.com](http://www.olearyonstage.com).

## ACT ONE

### SCENE ONE

*February 1958. The Staff Library at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. An ornate room in the classical style with book-lined walls, leather furnishings, and dark, varnished wood. A door leading to a hallway is up right; a closet door is up left, and up center is an alcove with a high, curtained window. An easel stands in the alcove holding a large oil portrait of a distinguished looking man. Furnishings include a couch, a large leather chair, a coffee table, and a desk and chair. A half dozen old-fashioned, wooden folding chairs have been set up in a semi-circle around the leather chair as though for visitors.*

*POUND enters from the hallway with the aspect of a teacher, albeit a shabby one. He carries books and a large scroll. He is gaunt and his seventy-three years are evident in his face. His hair is gray, somewhat unruly, and resolves itself in a narrow beard, which is fully realized only at his chin. He wears a flannel shirt, olive green workman's pants, and a pair of bedroom slippers.*

*Upon entering POUND goes directly to the desk with scarcely a look around. He unburdens himself, double-checking to be sure he has remembered everything. He unrolls the scroll and pauses for a moment to mentally rehearse his delivery, but brings himself back, remembering that there are more preparations required. He takes stock of the room, touching the folding chairs as though to check them off a list. He then looks to an area behind the couch where he expects to find a rolling blackboard, but is disappointed. He walks to the spot and turns to look around the rest of the room. Seeing nothing, he gets visibly perturbed and surveys the room again, this time with rapid, angry glances. His eyes finally rest on the closet door. He crosses and opens it, but again finds nothing and his facial expression becomes frightening. He crosses to the other door and BELLOWS into the hallway. . .*

#### POUND

Priscomb! Where the hell is my blackboard!?

*(He pauses for a moment waiting for a reply. When none comes, he bellows again. . .)*

PRISCOMB!

*(Another pause, but no response. The seething POUND returns to just inside the door and looks disgustedly around the room. He points to the books lining the walls as though he is commanding their attention and shouts. . .)*

Shout with me you goddamn relics! You want to get noticed? Well, you damn well better shout!

*(Then, in disgust.)*

AAAAGH!

*(He looks ruefully toward the portrait, then steps behind it, looking out the window to see if his visitors are coming. He turns and looks at the portrait from behind, contemplates for a moment and, as he does so, an idea emerges.)*

*POUND comes around to the front of the portrait then crosses to the desk where he grabs one of his books and roots around in a desk drawer from which he emerges triumphantly with a grease pencil. He crosses back to the portrait, considers for a moment, and then lifts it up as though to speak to its subject.)*

You wouldn't approve of today's lesson, Overholser, so pretend you're mooning us.

*(POUND spins the portrait around to reveal a clean, white back and places it backward on the easel. He begins to draw a Chinese character on the exposed back of the portrait. He is working happily away when MARY appears in the doorway. She is 30, attractive, and is dressed in winter wraps. She carries a brief case and umbrella.)*

**MARY**

Excuse me, are you Mr. Pound?

*(POUND looks up, but does not stop working assuming that MARY is one of his expected visitors.)*

**POUND**

Sit down and where are the others?

**MARY**

Excuse me?

**POUND**

Anywhere except the throne. Only one old assbones'll tolerate.

*(Gestures to the overstuffed leather chair.)*

**MARY**

Excuse me . . .

**POUND**

I'm not a priest. Stop asking me to excuse you. Where are the others?

*(Goes back to drawing.)*

**MARY**

Mr. Pound, we haven't been introduced. I'm Mary . . .

**POUND**

Carter will handle the introductions. I'll forget anyway. Where is he?

I'm afraid you're confused . . .

**MARY**

I'm supposed to be.

**POUND**

Carter -- these others you keep talking about . . .

**MARY**

You'll like them. They're also confused.

**POUND**

There are no others . . .

**MARY**

Are you sure you're in the right place?

**POUND**

Do you know who I am?

**MARY**

Don't know that either? You're in the right place.

**POUND**

No, I am a doctor.

**MARY**

*(Has finished his character and turns back to face MARY. Guessing.)*  
Literature? No. Economics.

**POUND**

Psychology.

**MARY**

*(POUND winces.)*  
I am YOUR doctor.

You're not with Carter? . . .

**POUND**

While Dr. Overholser is on sabbatical. Nurse Priscomb should have told you.

**MARY**

Mixed up with the blue-hair are you?

**POUND**

**MARY**

We're scheduled for the next hour.

**POUND**

I have visitors.

**MARY**

Well, I'm afraid not today.

**POUND**

Afraid not today?

*(POUND holds up an index finger indicating she should be silent and walks deliberately to the door where he bellows . . . )*

PRISCOMB! Where are my visitors?

**MARY**

*(Shaken by POUND's sudden outburst, tries to be assertive.)*

Mr. Pound, Stop!

**POUND**

PRISCOMB!

**MARY**

Mr. Pound, you will please sit down!

**POUND**

PRISCOMB!

**MARY**

Mr. Pound, if you don't cooperate, I'll call for assistance.

**POUND**

*(Gestures for MARY to take his place at the door.)*

Then you damn well better do it! . . . And loud.

**MARY**

*(Crosses to the door but realizes she's being patronized and turns on POUND.)*

Mr. Pound . . .

**POUND**

*(Ignoring her.)*

Aaaah! It's the longtooth bitch. Priscomb. She sent you, didn't she?

**MARY**

What?

**POUND**

Christ! The bluehaired bat.

*(Turns away disgustedly from the confused MARY and starts collecting his things)*

You can leave now.

**MARY**

Mr. Pound, I'm here . . . .

**POUND**

Get out!

**MARY**

Mr. Pound . . .

**POUND**

*(Derisively.)*

Oh for christ sake, they're falling down laughing at you.

**MARY**

Who?

**POUND**

Your colleagues. You been had, snookered, taken to the cleaners and hung out to dry.

**MARY**

What are you talking about?

*(POUND chuckles snidely, incredulous at her naivete.)*

Dr. Overholser personally assigned me to your case.

**POUND**

He does it to all the rookies. Let Ol' Ez grind 'em up -- show 'em what's what. Here.

*(Crosses to the confused MARY, makes the sign of the cross over her, and intones.)*

"Pax vobiscum" and change the oil every three thousand miles.

*(Waves her away and resumes collecting his things.)*

**MARY**

Dr. Overholser specifically told me . . . .

**POUND**

You said he was on sabbatical.

**MARY**

Before he left . . .

Where'd he go?  
**POUND**

Africa.  
**MARY**

May he get et by a large carnivore.  
**POUND**

Mr. Pound, we need to talk.  
**MARY**

Why?  
**POUND**

I've studied your case and I'd like to help you.  
**MARY**

**POUND**  
*(Turns and locks on to her eyes with a threatening glare.)*  
Help? Help me?

*(MARY nods sheepishly.)*  
Didn't they tell you? I'm incurable – certified by Overholser, the Grand Panjandrum himself.

**MARY**  
You know, everyone doesn't agree . . .

**POUND**  
No, there are those who think I'm faking. Either way, no help for Ez. Get it?

**MARY**  
You don't really . . .

**POUND**  
*(Gathering his things to leave.)*  
All right. Stay if you like, and if you want to do some good, see about the bluehair.

**MARY**  
Who?

**POUND**  
You'll know her when you see her.  
*(POUND has gathered his things and turns the picture on the easel prompting a look of shock from MARY. POUND momentarily enjoys his victory and marches to the door.)*

**MARY**

*(Making a last try.)*  
Mr. Pound, please . . .  
*(. . . but POUND is gone. Not quite sure what to do, MARY wanders to the portrait and begins to turn it when she is surprised by PRISCOMB who, as advertised, has bluish-tinted hair.)*

**PRISCOMB**

Dr. Polley, were you finished with Mr. Pound?

**MARY**

Well . . . . not exactly . . .

**PRISCOMB**

I will get him.  
*(Turns to go, but MARY interrupts.)*

**MARY**

No . . . No, thank you, Nurse Priscomb. I, uh, think we've done as much as we can today.

**PRISCOMB**

Dr. Polley, patients . . .

**MARY**

Mary, please?

**PRISCOMB**

Dr. Polley, patients are not allowed to leave sessions until dismissed by the doctor. I should . . .

**MARY**

No, please. I think it's better if I start fresh with Mr. Pound another time. He was quite . . . um . . .

**PRISCOMB**

I understand.  
*(PRISCOMB begins to straighten the room by returning folding chairs to the closet.)*

**MARY**

I suppose I should have disciplined him.

**PRISCOMB**

You'll have to . . . if you want to work with him.

**MARY**

I'd like to help him. I guess I'm worried that a threat will make him even more obstinate.

**PRISCOMB**

Mr. Pound must be made to obey the rules like everyone else.

**MARY**

Yes, but I'm hoping for . . . something more.

**PRISCOMB**

Doctor, it's not my place to say, but if you accomplish that much, it will be a major victory.

*(Has finished putting the chairs away.)*

May I go?

**MARY**

*(Ignoring PRISCOMB's request and leaving her standing awkwardly with nowhere to go.)*

No one around here expects Mr. Pound to ever leave, do they?

**PRISCOMB**

I really couldn't say.

**MARY**

The records say that Mr. Pound receives almost no therapy. He's not even on the master schedule.

**PRISCOMB**

I think you need to talk to Dr. Overholser.

**MARY**

And he conducts classes . . . or seminars . . . or something in the staff library. Who are these people?

**PRISCOMB**

Mr. Pound has followers.

**MARY**

Followers? Are they other poets?

**PRISCOMB**

No. They're young people mostly. Dr. Overholser calls them "hangers-on".

**MARY**

Hangers-on? Is that really a good thing for someone diagnosed with delusions of grandeur?

**PRISCOMB**

I have nothing to say about Mr. Pound's treatment or whom he's allowed to see.

**MARY**

No, of course not, Miss Priscomb.

**PRISCOMB**

May I go now?

**MARY**

Please, may we talk just a little? I would like your help.

*(Indicates that she would like PRISCOMB to sit in POUND's chair, which PRISCOMB does reluctantly.)*

Thank you. I know I'm new and . . . how long have you been here?

**PRISCOMB**

Thirteen years.

**MARY**

I'm sure you've seen lots like me come and go, but the fact is that I do want to help Mr. Pound and I don't understand why no one seems to have even tried.

**PRISCOMB**

Doctor, I'm in no position . . .

**MARY**

Is it because he's been labeled "incurable"? You know, even when delusional patients can't be cured, many can be helped to at least function in the world.

**PRISCOMB**

I believe there are other considerations in Mr. Pound's case.

**MARY**

If you mean his legal situation . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Among other things.

**MARY**

Like what?

**PRISCOMB**

Doctor, I'm just a nurse. You really should refer to Mr. Pound's file.

**MARY**

With your experience I'm sure you know a great deal more than can be captured in a chart. You must know him . . . at a personal level I mean.

**PRISCOMB**

Everything I know is in the file.

**MARY**

Please, just a few questions?

**PRISCOMB**

Doctor, you can ask whatever you like, but it's all there.

**MARY**

No, it is not all there. If it were, he'd be cured or at least better off than he is.

*(Now appealing to PRISCOMB.)*

Look. You spend eight hours a day with this man. That's more than most husbands and wives.

**PRISCOMB**

Emptying bedpans, administering medication, changing sheets . . .

**MARY**

And talking. You interact with him. What does he say? What do you sense about him? What do you feel?

**PRISCOMB**

Mr. Pound is like everyone else. He cooperates when it's in his interest to do so.

**MARY**

And when it's not?

**PRISCOMB**

It's my job to make sure that it's always in his interest.

**MARY**

But, you must have an opinion, an . . . uh . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Doctor, when you've worked in a psychiatric hospital as long as I have, you learn that opinions are cheap. If you think you can work with Mr. Pound, I will help in any way I can, but for opinions, you should ask the doctors who've tried before you. Many are still here.

**MARY**

Yes, of course.

**PRISCOMB**

May I go now?

**MARY**

Yes. Thank you.

*(PRISCOMB starts to leave then stops when MARY says . . .)*

Oh, Miss Priscomb, one more thing . . . Would you schedule Mr. Pound to see me again on Tuesday at three?

*(PRISCOMB looks at her skeptically.)*

And please explain to him that if he does not, I will have to suspend his visiting privileges.

**PRISCOMB**

Yes, Doctor. But he does have someone here to see him right now.

**MARY**

One of this group – these hangers on?

**PRISCOMB**

No. It's Mr. MacLeish. He's also a writer . . .

**MARY**

Do you mean Archibald MacLeish, the poet?

**PRISCOMB**

Yes. He and Mr. Pound are friends. He's trying to arrange for Mr. Pound's release.

**MARY**

Really?

**PRISCOMB**

He has been for quite a while.

**MARY**

I see. But he knows Mr. Pound well?

**PRISCOMB**

For thirty years.

**MARY**

Miss Priscomb, I'm not sure it's the best of times for Mr. Pound to have a visitor, but I would very much like to talk with Mr. MacLeish. Could you ask him to come in?

**PRISCOMB**

Yes, Doctor.

*(PRISCOMB exits. MARY strolls around the room thinking, stops at the portrait to consider it, then starts to stroll on, but turns back as though the portrait has spoken to her. MACLEISH enters.)*

**MACLEISH**

Doctor Polley?

*(The startled MARY turns to greet MACLEISH.)*

**MARY**

Mr. MacLeish, how are you? I'm Mary Polley, Mr. Pound's doctor.

**MACLEISH**

Call me Archie, please. Everyone does, except Ez who calls me whatever he likes.

**MARY**

Yes, I understand.

**MACLEISH**

So, you've met him. He's all right isn't he? Pris said there was some trouble today.

**MARY**

Oh, it was entirely my fault really. I scheduled a session at the same time he expected to meet with . . . . uh

**MACLEISH**

*(Disapprovingly.)*

His gaggle. Yes, I saw them leaving with long faces.

**MARY**

Miss Priscomb doesn't seem to approve of them either. Who are they?

**MACLEISH**

Oh, assorted misfits who share Ezra's political and economic delusions. Of course, I'm just a crazy poet myself.

**MARY**

I thought you were also an ambassador or something

**MACLEISH**

A long time ago.

**MARY**

And an attorney?

**MACLEISH**

Poets do need day jobs.

**MARY**

So, these visitors, are they really that awful?

**MACLEISH**

A few are merely naïve, some are racists and bigots, and all enjoy basking in the reflected glow of Ez.

**MARY**

Oh, is it that bright?

**MACLEISH**

That crusty old pain in the ass is this century's most important poet. Without him Eliot would be a minor confection and you probably never would have heard of Joyce or half a dozen others.

**MARY**

You included?

**MACLEISH**

Oh, yes. And Kerouac and Burroughs probably wouldn't be writing what they are today. No small accomplishment for a man whose poetry only five people in the world can understand.

**MARY**

I've heard. Miss Priscomb says you've known him for a long time. Why do you think he ended up here?

**MACLEISH**

You mean, do I think he's insane?

**MARY**

Perhaps you could just . . . tell me about him?

**MACLEISH**

Well, to understand Ezra, you have to accept that he is, and I say this affectionately, a snob. In a world of relativists Ezra is an absolutist – a believer in the Great Chain of Being in which all things have a place and those which are superior sit at the top. That's what drives him and his art.

**MARY**

But they don't send snobs to insane asylums.

**MACLEISH**

It also drives his politics. Before the war he fell in love with Mussolini. Just his ticket, a leader who recognized the greater things in life and put them in their proper order. As far

as Ez is concerned democracy and capitalism are too messy – lets the inmates run the asylum, if you’ll pardon the pun.

So, when we were about to go to war, Ez began making radio broadcasts to persuade us that Mussolini was really a swell guy and that Roosevelt and the Jews – always the Jews –would destroy us.

**MARY**

His files say something about anti-semitism.

**MACLEISH**

Vicious – probably his greatest idiocy -- but that doesn’t get you in much trouble even in America. His problem was that he continued his broadcasts after we declared war. So, he’s charged with treason, captured, held for months in a cage, and, by the time he’s returned to the States for trial he is, shall we say, in a state of distress. So, the judge sent him here until sufficiently recovered to stand trial.

**MARY**

And he’s been here ever since. So, do you think he’s insane?

**MACLEISH**

I’m not a doctor, but I don’t think he’s a threat to himself or anyone else.

**MARY**

You are a lawyer, however. Is he guilty of treason?

**MACLEISH**

It depends on how you define it. All I can tell you is that he’s been confined for twelve years and even Tokyo Rose only got six. I think it’s become a moot point.

**MARY**

So you don’t think he’ll be tried even if he does recover?

**MACLEISH**

No offense, but I don’t think anyone knows what recovery means in Ezra’s case. Under the circumstances, I think the best thing all around would be to release him.

**MARY**

Are the prospects good?

**MACLEISH**

I’ll know more after a meeting at the Justice Department tomorrow. But, if past history is an indication, probably not. Still we must try.

**MARY**

Of course.

**MACLEISH**

Will I be able to see him soon?

**MARY**

*(Rises to indicate the meeting is over.)*

Give me a couple of days.

**MACLEISH**

Thank you. Nice to have met you. And good luck.

*(Exits. Blackout, end of Act I, Scene 1.)*

**ACT ONE**

**SCENE TWO**

*(It is Tuesday. A self-satisfied POUND stands before a circle of folding chairs recently occupied by his visitors. Meanwhile PRISCOMB is cleaning ashtrays and starting to remove the chairs to the closet.)*

**POUND**

*(Gesturing to the chairs as though his visitors were still there. PRISCOMB goes about her business.)*

Ah, Pris, I was in fine fettle today. You could see it in their eyes. Lost souls given a mission. – empty vessels made messengers of the gods.

*(Noticing that PRISCOMB is ignoring him.)*

You know, Pris, determined indifference isn't indifference at all.

*(PRISCOMB continues to ignore him, so POUND follows her closely.)*

Still, she pretends to go about her therapeutic chores – straightening, cleaning, ordering, BULLYING, ABUSING, BRUTALIZING . . . !

*(PRISCOMB turns angrily and POUND chuckles and retreats having succeeded in provoking her.)*

Do you suppose Dr. Polley will make a messenger of this empty vessel?

**PRISCOMB**

Leave her alone.

**POUND**

I beg your pardon.

**PRISCOMB**

You heard me.

**POUND**

The dear doctor?

*(PRISCOMB merely looks at him coldly.)*

But, Pris, this isn't my doing. She threatened . . .

**PRISCOMB**

And what's this?

*(Grasps a sleeve of POUND's sport coat.)*

**POUND**

A simple gesture of respect.

**PRISCOMB**

I guess through your rage you managed to find some appealing qualities in her.

**POUND**

I fought her every step of the way. Called her names, humiliated her, ordered her to leave.

**PRISCOMB**

What are you planning to do?

**POUND**

What?

**PRISCOMB**

She's harmless . . . .

**POUND**

And what am I? A toxic substance?

**PRISCOMB**

You don't need her.

**POUND**

Perhaps she needs me . . . .

**PRISCOMB**

*(Derisively.)*

You already have your entourage.

**POUND**

You think I'm a seducer, a corrupter. . .

**PRISCOMB**

And a coward who chooses to . . . .

**POUND**

It was your doctors who decided that I'm insane.

**PRISCOMB**

But, God knows you've embraced it.

**POUND**

Like Socrates, I will be acquitted by posterity.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Motioning to the empty chairs.)*

And they will be your messengers?

**POUND**

Don't worry about your poor little doctor.

**PRISCOMB**

Perhaps she won't become a fool on your account.

**POUND**

No, perhaps I'll become one on hers.

*(POUND chuckles. PRISCOMB looks away in disgust.)*

There was a time when you were not so put off.

*(MARY appears at the door and knocks.)*

**MARY**

Hello, Nurse Priscomb, Mr. Pound.

**PRISCOMB**

I'm just finishing, Doctor.

**MARY**

Thank you. Hello, Mr. Pound.

**POUND**

Doctor Polley. We were just discussing you. I was about to tell Pris that a woman as lovely as yourself must be married, whereas some women must go unmarried . . . well, perhaps forever. Isn't that right, Pris?

*(PRISCOMB glares in angry humiliation.)*

**MARY**

*(Attempting to defuse the situation.)*

Mr. Pound, please. You can finish later, Miss Priscomb. And thank you.

*(PRISCOMB exits. MARY speaks to POUND.)*

That was very cruel.

**POUND**

A game -- a routine. The comedy team of Ez and The Bluehair.

**MARY**

Do you think that was funny?

**POUND**

It must be. Why else play? I can't win. End of day, she leaves, I stay. She dismisses what I say because I'm a lunatic, but I stand condemned by her every sane word. Scarcely any competition at all for Pris.

**MARY**

You think so?

A real howler – that’s me. **POUND**

I can’t allow you to be cruel. **MARY**

To the bluehair? **POUND**

To anyone, but especially Miss Priscomb. **MARY**

What if I’m a cruel person? **POUND**

You’ll have to change. **MARY**

Aren’t you supposed to take patients as they come? **POUND**

I’m evaluated on how I leave patients, not how I take them. **MARY**

So, I’m to change my character because you say so? **POUND**

Because it will please me. **MARY**  
*(Smiles warmly at POUND.)*

Oh. Do people do things just to please you? **POUND**

Yes. **MARY**

And you think that’s why I came today, to please you? **POUND**

I don’t know. **MARY**  
*(Looks at his sportcoat and smiles again.)*

You threatened me! **POUND**

**MARY**

Oh, the visiting privileges. I'm sorry. I was wrong.

**POUND**

So, you won't suspend them?

**MARY**

No.

**POUND**

Then, I should leave.

**MARY**

I wish you wouldn't.

**POUND**

Is this the way it works – people fall over themselves to please you and, when you harm them, they happily accept your apologies?

**MARY**

I am sorry.

**POUND**

Christ! You cling to sincerity like the faithful to the cross.

**MARY**

Is that bad?

**POUND**

Only if you expect it to cure my afflictions.

**MARY**

But, you'll work with me?

**POUND**

Do I have a choice?

**MARY**

Always, Mr. Pound.

**POUND**

Do I? Aren't you forgetting the reason we're at St. Elizabeths Hospital for the Criminally Insane instead of Miss Primrose's Rest Haven for Befuddled Old Poets.

**MARY**

The charges against you?

**POUND**

*(Parodying a bailiff.)*

In the name of the great God Usury and his representatives on earth, Franklin Delano Roosenstein, associated jews and genitalia, I do hereby charge Ezra Weston Loomis Pound with the following high crimes: Treason for providing aid and comfort to the enemy in time of war – that the defendant did knowingly flaunt the truth in reckless disregard for the commercial interests of kikes and money lenders.

**MARY**

And how saith the defendant?

**POUND**

The defendant has been judged unable to say -- not competent to assist in his own defense. Mad . . .

**MARY**

Not mad . . .

**POUND**

*(Now spitting his bile.)*

Permanently, irreversibly insane as certified by the man who signs your meager paycheck . . .

**MARY**

That's not . . .

**POUND**

Of course, there could be a miracle. Sanity could be restored by God, a random kick in the head, or the healing touch of Dr. Polley at which time I will be summarily tried, convicted, and executed.

**MARY**

You may not be . . . .

**POUND**

What is the game you're playing at, Doctor? You can't help me. If you do the impossible and cure me, I get hanged. And, if you fail, I continue my long, slow descent into oblivion. So, what is it that you want?

**MARY**

*(Walks to the window contemplating her answer as the impatient POUND waits.)*

To do my job. To bring comfort.

*(MARY smiles directly at POUND reinforcing the sincerity of her reply.)*

**POUND**

And a soul as pure as yours doesn't relish the challenge of curing the incurable? The fame of saving the renowned poet? Perhaps a book – royalties?

**MARY**

Mr. Pound, may I be blunt?

**POUND**

Oh, God. She's going to assault me with another simple virtue.

**MARY**

I have a sort of sentimental interest . . .

**POUND**

Better not let the bluehair hear that.

**MARY**

You promised.

*(POUND sits, places his hands in his lap, and smiles politely.)*

My father greatly admired your poetry and he hoped that someday I would be a poet too. So, when I was a little girl, he gave me writing assignments and, if he thought my work was an imitation of someone else, he would throw down a copy of your work and declaim, "I poeti buoni non imitano ed i grandi poeti non possono essere imitati."

**POUND**

Do you know what it means?

**MARY**

Good poets do not imitate and great poets cannot be imitated. And you were his example of a great poet. "Un Originale!" he would say.

**POUND**

Your father was Italian?

**MARY**

We all were, Mr. Pound. My real name is Maria Poli.

**POUND**

Poli . . . Poli? I remember the name. Giuseppe Poli? He was published in Il Tempo.

**MARY**

Sometimes.

**POUND**

And he is your father?

**MARY**

He was. My parents died in the war.

*(A pause while POUND takes it all in.)*

**POUND**

Killed?

**MARY**

*(Nods yes.)*

My only relatives were an aunt and uncle in Baltimore, so that's where the American army sent me.

**POUND**

Oh Christ!

*(MARY hands a thin hardcover book to POUND.)*

*Personae.* From Libreria Bonardi in Liguria.

**MARY**

It was my father's. I took it with me when I came to America.

**POUND**

Only thirty miles from Rapallo. I lived there.

**MARY**

Yes.

**POUND**

I've been in Liguria. The Piazza San Marco. There was a cioccolataia there.

**MARY**

Yes.

**POUND**

And the gardens at Villanova?

**MARY**

I used to play there.

**POUND**

All gone, I suppose.

**MARY**

I think some of the piazza is still standing.

**POUND**

Goddamn war! All so the kikes and bloodsuckers could uncoil their tentacles. Have you been back?

**MARY**

No.

**POUND**

Not even to visit your parents' graves?

**MARY**

Maybe next year.

**POUND**

Definitely next year. You must go. Go while you are still the little girl they loved.

**MARY**

I'll try. . .

**POUND**

You must. If you wait too long you become another person and they'll be lost to you.

**MARY**

I promise.

**POUND**

*(Takes her by the shoulders.)*

Do you?

**MARY**

Yes.

*(POUND releases and walks to look out the window.)*

You're not what I expected.

**POUND**

And you are a poet.

**MARY**

No . . .

**POUND**

Why not?

**MARY**

New country . . . new language. In 1943 it was very important to fit in. My aunt and uncle had already changed their name to Polley and changed mine as well.

**POUND**

Baaah! Poli . . . Maria Poli!

**MARY**

It's been a long time since anyone called me that.

**POUND**

You shall be nothing else here.

**MARY**

And what will you be?

**POUND**

I can either be a bastard or a muddled old poet shuffling around, bumping into the furniture.

**MARY**

No, that would be psychosis – very difficult to treat.

**POUND**

Well, there's a blessing. I shall remark on it in my prayers tonight.

**MARY**

It's your energy that surprises me.

**POUND**

St. E's is not an exhausting place.

**MARY**

You must find it boring.

**POUND**

Stultifying.

**MARY**

So, why are you here?

**POUND**

Why aren't you a poet?

**MARY**

Because I chose to do something . . .

**POUND**

No! It's because your home and family were taken from you and you were forced to go to a strange place where you had to play by someone else's rules. The only difference is that now that you're an adult, you have the illusion of freedom. I don't even have that.

**MARY**

Mr. Pound, your situation . . .

**POUND**

We've been over all that, Maria.

**MARY**

Mr. Pound, how old are you?

**POUND**

What?

**MARY**

*(Returns to the desk and looks through a file.)*

Seventy-three, isn't it?

*(POUND looks quizzically at MARY.)*

Well, I was just wondering, at what age does it make sense to throw caution to the wind?

**POUND**

What do you mean?

**MARY**

Take a chance. Find out if they'd really prosecute you.

**POUND**

I don't think indictments for treason are optional.

**MARY**

But, you might be acquitted.

**POUND**

And I might not.

*(Pause during which MARY does not respond.)*

Do you imagine my life is so wretched that I may as well risk losing it altogether?

**MARY**

I don't know.

**POUND**

*(POUND laughs to himself at the audacity.)*

My God, you really mean to make a well man of me.

**MARY**

If I can.

**POUND**

And get yourself fired for making your boss who says I'm incurable look like a fool.

**MARY**

Then maybe I will have to become a poet.

*(POUND laughs with delight.)*

*(Blackout indicating a time lapse. When the lights come up MARY is seated at the desk writing notes. POUND has removed his sport coat and is stretched out on the couch and is evidently bored.)*

**MARY**

I'm sorry, but I need to keep notes. Otherwise, I forget things.

**POUND**

St. E's has a wing for that. Drop in sometime.

**MARY**

Now, do you "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", or "strongly disagree" with the statement, "A place for everything and everything in its place"?

**POUND**

Um . . . uh . . . agree?

**MARY**

Do you "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", or "strongly disagree" with the statement, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder"?

**POUND**

Wait, I know this one. If I agree, ten questions later you'll ask about "Out of sight, out of mind" and if I agree with that too you'll say I have a conflicted personality or something.

**MARY**

No, it really doesn't work that way.

**POUND**

How many more of these do we have?

*(Looks down at the page and then flips to a second page.)*

Never mind. I want to ask you a question?

**MARY**

Yes?

**POUND**

How did you feel when your father criticized your poetry as unoriginal?

**MARY**

What?

**POUND**

Come on. We have a deal. You're going to cure me of delusional whatever and I'm going to make you a poet. It's my turn. How did you feel?

**MARY**

Well, I guess . . . uh . . . inspired . . . to do better I mean.

**POUND**

And you never wrote a word of poetry again.

**MARY**

I told you . . .

**POUND**

Yes. New country, new language.

**MARY**

Yes.

**POUND**

Well, I'd be angry, resentful . . .

**MARY**

No. . .

**POUND**

Working diligently to please someone who refuses to be pleased . . .

**MARY**

It was a little frustrating.

**POUND**

When you tried to meet his expectations, he said it wasn't original and, when your work was original, he said it didn't meet his expectations.

**MARY**

Well, we argued . . .

**POUND**

And he won because he was your father, so you took the only revenge you could. You never wrote again.

**MARY**

It wasn't revenge.

**POUND**

Oh, Maria Poli, it happens to us all.

**MARY**

What do you think you're doing?

**POUND**

Getting you over your inhibitions.

**MARY**

You don't know anything about me.

**POUND**

Perhaps not.

**MARY**

Or my father.

**POUND**

If you say so.

**MARY**

I do.

*(Pause.)*

You know, you can't just project your own feelings onto others.

**POUND**

No, then everyone would be crazy.

*(Pause.)*

I'm sorry.

**MARY**

What did you mean when you said, "It happens to us all"? What happens to us all?

**POUND**

Criticism. People say they want to be surprised by art, but take them someplace new and you're assaulted or ignored. Your father said your work wasn't up to snuff and I'm called an elitist. It's all the same.

**MARY**

But you overcame it.

**POUND**

Did I? Does that mean you don't find my work obscure?

**MARY**

Well, I did try reading some of the Canto's the other night and it was a bit daunting.

**POUND**

Why?

**MARY**

Five different languages in twenty pages?

**POUND**

But, to those who read the languages, the meaning is crystalline. Let me show you something.

*(POUND goes to Overholser's portrait and turns it to reveal the Chinese character.)*

Kung.

**MARY**

Kung?

**POUND**

*(Sharpening the pronunciation.)*

Kung. It's from a Cantonese dialect. It means "true tranquility" – the kind one achieves when he is reconciled with the world. Do you understand?

**MARY**

I think so.

**POUND**

There's another word – "Kyu" that means "false tranquility" – the kind that comes from being detached from the world. Now tell me, what English words correspond?

**MARY**

I suppose there aren't any, but you just explained what they mean to me. Why not in your poetry?

**POUND**

I gave you a definition, but not the meaning. Meaning requires context, atmosphere, the worldview from which the word emanates. Explaining would take volumes and then the simple, irreducible beauty of the concept would be destroyed.

**MARY**

But if people can't understand it . . . .

**POUND**

They don't understand the theories of Darwin or Einstein either, but they believe them – even think they know what they mean. No, it's not the artist or the scientist who's obscure or elitist, it is nature that reserves some truths for a qualified few. To the rest, it must trickle down.

**MARY**

And you're one of the qualified few.

**POUND**

Like Odysseus, I am a pilgrim in the wilderness and my poems are dispatches back to civilization.

**MARY**

But, don't you sometimes feel alone, forsaken out there in your wilderness?

**POUND**

If you're right, men will follow. That is what your father knew – what he wanted for you.

**MARY**

Well, I didn't turn out to be the pioneering type.

**POUND**

But, you can be, Maria -- with my help. You needn't be afraid.

**MARY**

I don't think . . .

**POUND**

You must try. There is no greater achievement than when men fall powerless before your truth.

**MARY**

I'm afraid they'd take one look at my truth and say, "Whoops, poor MARY's gone off her rocker".

**POUND**

Then they're idiots.

**MARY**

But, you can't write off everyone who criticizes as an idiot. At least I couldn't. It wouldn't be healthy.

**POUND**

Healthy?

**MARY**

The Greeks have a word, “hubris”. It means . . .

**POUND**

I know what it means. What does it have to do with being “healthy”?

**MARY**

I’m sorry. I just meant . . .

*(Glances at her watch.)*

Oh, Lord. Look how late it is. Can we continue this next time? I really have to go.

*(Rapidly gathers her things.)*

**POUND**

You mean me, don’t you?

*(A knock at the door and PRISCOMB looks in.)*

**PRISCOMB**

It’s three o’clock doctor.

**MARY**

Thank you, Miss Priscomb.

**POUND**

You think I suffer from hubris – that I dismiss everyone who disagrees with me . . .

**MARY**

I’m sorry. Time’s up. We’ll talk about it next time.

**POUND**

Is that what you’re saying?

**MARY**

*(To PRISCOMB.)*

Miss Priscomb, will you see Mr. Pound back to his ward?

*(PRISCOMB approaches MARY and whispers something in her ear.)*

Yes, of course.

**PRISCOMB**

Thank you, Doctor.

**POUND**

There, what was that?

**MARY**

I'll see you next week, Mr. Pound.

*(MARY starts to exit, then stops and turns the portrait back around. Exits.)*

**POUND**

*(Turning on PRISCOMB.)*

You. What have you been telling her?

**PRISCOMB**

Whatever she figured out about you, it was entirely on her own.

**POUND**

She knows nothing about me.

**PRISCOMB**

Yes, I see.

**POUND**

And neither do you.

**PRISCOMB**

I expect not. Now, if you can compose yourself, you have a visitor. Mr. MacLeish is downstairs.

**POUND**

Archie? What's he doing here?

**PRISCOMB**

For reasons I can't comprehend he'd like to see you. He was here the day before yesterday, but you were throwing a fit.

**POUND**

What does he want?

**PRISCOMB**

He said something about the Justice Department.

**POUND**

Oh, Christ! Bouncing around town reminding everyone they haven't carried out my execution. The fool will get me hanged.

**PRISCOMB**

He's trying to get you released.

**POUND**

When pigs fly.

**PRISCOMB**

Then, you'd better strap on your goggles, Porky.

**POUND**

What? What are you talking about?

**PRISCOMB**

He'll tell you.

*(PRISCOMB turns to go.)*

**POUND**

Wait.

*(PRISCOMB stops.)*

Pris, please? Just tell me what this is all about.

**PRISCOMB**

He only told me a little.

**POUND**

What? You said something about the Justice Department.

**PRISCOMB**

Ezra, I don't know. He just said that he was encouraged.

**POUND**

How encouraged?

**PRISCOMB**

Talk to him.

**POUND**

It's torture.

**PRISCOMB**

What's torture?

**POUND**

Getting my hopes up when there isn't a chance.

**PRISCOMB**

What do you mean?

**POUND**

My enemies will never allow it.

**PRISCOMB**

What enemies?

**POUND**

You're doing what he does – promising the stars.

**PRISCOMB**

No one's promising anything.

**POUND**

And when it all goes to hell, he'll walk away with a "Sorry, old man" and be none the worse.

**PRISCOMB**

What are you saying? You're afraid of being disappointed?

**POUND**

It's not so strange, is it?

*(No response from PRISCOMB.)*

Christ! You, of all people should know . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Know what?

**POUND**

What it's like . . .

*(PRISCOMB is clearly not persuaded.)*

You can't force me to see him.

**PRISCOMB**

No, I can't.

*(Pause.)*

So, what should I say to your old friend of thirty years who has traveled all the way from New York to see you?

**POUND**

Tell him . . . tell him I have a headache . . .

**PRISCOMB**

No. No lies. If you want me to do it, it has to be the truth.

*(Pause. POUND is baffled.)*

And I think I'd like to know what the truth is.

**POUND**

You know, there was a time when you would have lied for me.

**PRISCOMB**

That's when I believed I knew you.

**POUND**

You did – then.

*(Pause. No response from PRISCOMB.)*

All right, show him in.

*(PRISCOMB exits. POUND sinks into the nearest chair and closes his eyes, but a moment later they spring open glaring at the portrait of Overholser.)*

What do you want?

*(Pauses for Overholser's reply.)*

Who cares what she thinks? Or you.

*(MACLEISH appears at the door accompanied by PRISCOMB.)*

**MACLEISH**

Thank you.

*(PRISCOMB exits.)*

Ez, how are you?

*(POUND, still flush with anger at Overholser doesn't immediately respond.)*

Ez?

**POUND**

*(Gathers himself, then speaks with his usual bravado to MACLEISH while continuing to stare at Overholser.)*

Whaddya' think of this fella, Archie?

**MACLEISH**

*(Moves next to POUND to study the portrait.)*

Um . . . straight out of central casting I should say – doctor, board member . . .

**POUND**

He's an ax murderer. Killed his whole family. Claimed his corn flakes told him to do it.

**MACLEISH**

So, why, uh, is he . . . ?

**POUND**

A role model for us loonies. Got sent here. Pumped some volts through that pate and sent him home a year later good as new. So, there's hope for us all.

*(Pause during which POUND turns for the first time to the doubtful MACLEISH.)*

Honest to God.

**MACLEISH**

Ez, where is this going?

**POUND**

In a minute you're going to tell me things are looking up for my release and when I'm not thrilled you'll ask why and I'll say, "Why would I want to be released when . . .

*(Motions for MACLEISH to complete the sentence.)*

**MACLEISH**

. . . there are ax murderers out there.

**POUND**

You know me well.

**MACLEISH**

Yes, but what does it mean?

**POUND**

Mean? Nothing. A joke.

**MACLEISH**

I guess PRISCOMB told you why I'm here.

**POUND**

Everything. Pris and I are just like that.

*(Holds up his crossed fingers for MACLEISH to see.)*

**MACLEISH**

She's told me. You don't sound very happy.

**POUND**

I would be, if it were true.

**MACLEISH**

And what makes you think it's not?

**POUND**

We've done this before. You find some old college chum slumming it in the Justice Department and he offers to see what he can do.

**MACLEISH**

That's part of it.

**POUND**

And for the next three months I'm to be on my best behavior – grovel – stay on the right side of the border. Meanwhile, your naïve friend approaches those in authority whereupon he gets his weenie whacked and sent to bed without cookies. End of story.

**MACLEISH**

I suppose I deserve that. But, this time . . .

**POUND**

This time! But, this time it's going to be different. You know the definition of mental illness? Doing the same thing over and over, always expecting a different result.

**MACLEISH**

You know, Ez, I wish I hated you – because it would be so delicious. Problem is, I wouldn't get to be around when you're proven wrong, which will be even more delicious.

**POUND**

Don't patronize me.

**MACLEISH**

Then quit playing the child. You know how these things work.

**POUND**

You're not the one who has to dignify this hell hole with polite behavior to prove you're fit for decent society.

**MACLEISH**

Then you'll be thrilled because this time you won't have to impress anybody.

**POUND**

What does that mean?

**MACLEISH**

It means, Ezra, that from now on what you think, say, and do is irrelevant. You are irrelevant.

**POUND**

I don't need to be insulted.

**MACLEISH**

It's no insult. The planets have aligned. Cosmic forces are taking over and you, my friend, will be carried with the tide.

**POUND**

Christ, you are cracked.

**MACLEISH**

The reasons are so delightful, I wouldn't want to leave the joy of describing them to anyone else.

**POUND**

Go ahead, read your goddamn tealeaves. Enjoy the moment while you can.

**MACLEISH**

There are three reasons and every one of them is a shining commentary on the man you've become.

**POUND**

Oh, I must hear.

**MACLEISH**

Ike's in his second term, so he can handle the small political fallout. Second, no one cares about your politics any more. And finally, your detention is becoming an embarrassment that will get worse if you die in captivity. At age seventy-three you could go any time and no one wants to get stuck with the corpse.

*(Begins to gather himself to leave. POUND, who is stung by MACLEISH's last comment, looks down and then slumps silently into his chair. MACLEISH realizes that he has gone too far.)*

Ez, I'm sorry. I . . . .

**POUND**

No. You're right . But, you're a shit for enjoying it so much.

**MACLEISH**

Look, I'm just . . .

**POUND**

So, it's a sure thing?

**MACLEISH**

Maybe. These are forces bigger than both of us.

**POUND**

How soon?

**MACLEISH**

Weeks, maybe days.

**POUND**

God damn it!

**MACLEISH**

Was that an expression of joy?

*(No response from POUND.)*

Ez, I'm grateful to you for so much and, as a great believer in the Constitution, I'm appalled that you've been imprisoned without a conviction or even a trial. Sometimes, I

even like you. And it takes every bit of that to outweigh just how big a bastard you can be.

**POUND**

*(Chastened.)*

I'm sorry, Archie. I'm grateful too. Thank you. You're a great friend.

*(Awkward pause.)*

Yes. Yes, I am happy.

**MACLEISH**

*(Approaches POUND who looks anything but happy and gives him an awkward hug.)*

It will come, Ezra. I should be on my way.

*(Releases and starts toward the door.)*

I'll keep you informed.

*(POUND does not look up or respond. MACLEISH exits.)*

**POUND**

*(After continuing to look down for a beat, he looks up and locks eyes with Overholser.)*

Why don't you say something, goddamnit!?

*(Blackout. End of Act I, Scene 2.)*

**ACT ONE**

**SCENE THREE**

*(The Staff Library next evening. PRISCOMB is seated at the desk filling out forms when POUND enters. He does not see PRISCOMB as he crosses to Overholser's portrait. Belatedly PRISCOMB looks up to see POUND standing in front of Oversholser about to speak.)*

**PRISCOMB**

What are you doing?

*(POUND is startled.)*

You're not allowed in here now.

**POUND**

Christ, woman. Don't you ever go home?

**PRISCOMB**

Go to your room! Bad enough that I have to deal with you when I'm on duty, let alone when I'm off.

**POUND**

What are you writing?

**PRISCOMB**

The great American novel.

**POUND**

*(Edging closer.)*

C'mon, what is it?

**PRISCOMB**

It's for work. Now, leave me alone.

**POUND**

It's not about me, is it?

**PRISCOMB**

If you must know, it's about me. I'm filling out my evaluation. Now go . . .

*(POUND snatches the paper from under PRISCOMB's pen.)*

Give that back!

**POUND**

*(Retreats a safe distance and begins to read.)*

"Not sufficiently firm"? You said this is about yourself?

*(The distressed PRISCOMB comes out from behind the desk to retrieve the paper, but POUND stays out of range by going to the other side of the couch where he continues to read.)*

**PRISCOMB**

That's none of your business.

**POUND**

"Sometimes lax in enforcing rules". You're a ball-buster.

**PRISCOMB**

I am not . . .

**POUND**

"Impatient, easily angered"? For God's sake, you have me to deal with.

**PRISCOMB**

Ezra, please?

**POUND**

Why are you being so hard on yourself?

**PRISCOMB**

I'm not.

**POUND**

"Not perceptive"? Pris, at least you know when you're being kidded.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Slumps to the couch, defeated.)*

Why are you doing this to me?

**POUND**

*(Taking pity, he walks around to the front of the couch, sits next to PRISCOMB.*

*Puts the paper in her hand.)*

You don't know a damn thing about yourself.

*(Pause, but PRISCOMB continues to look down.)*

Hell, look at us, Pris. Enemies to the core, but we know each other better than we know ourselves.

**PRISCOMB**

Today you said I didn't know anything about you.

**POUND**

I lied.

*(Motioning to PRISCOMB's form.)*

You should try it.

**PRISCOMB**

I don't think so.

**POUND**

No, of course not.

*(POUND rises and strolls in the general direction of the portrait.)*

I expect you want to know why I'm here.

*(Pause but no response from PRISCOMB.)*

Archie says he's going to get me out.

**PRISCOMB**

It will be just the thing for you.

**POUND**

I thought you didn't lie.

**PRISCOMB**

And I thought you were sick of this place.

**POUND**

Do you think I'm ready?

**PRISCOMB**

I think the question is whether the world is ready for you.

**POUND**

Seriously, Pris, am I ready?

*(The wary PRISCOMB does not immediately reply.)*

I've been here for twelve years.

**PRISCOMB**

You should discuss it with Dr. Polley.

**POUND**

Discuss what? She doesn't know me.

**PRISCOMB**

She's your doctor.

**POUND**

She's a child. . . . Pris, please.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Takes a long look at POUND and decides to take mercy.)*

Ezra, it will be all right.

**POUND**

Has it changed . . . out there, I mean?

**PRISCOMB**

Skirts are shorter. Cars are faster. Otherwise, it's pretty much the same.

*(POUND turns away not relieved.)*

It won't be as big an adjustment as you think.

**POUND**

What?

**PRISCOMB**

It won't be as big an adjustment as you think.

**POUND**

You . . . you said that to me before – a long time ago. Do you remember?

**PRISCOMB**

No.

**POUND**

The night I came to St. Elizabeth's.

**PRISCOMB**

You were unconscious.

**POUND**

Well, later then. When I woke up. You and that doctor . . . what's his name?

**PRISCOMB**

Blandings.

**POUND**

Yes, he told me I was being held for observation and I must have looked terrified because you just blurted it out.

*(PRISCOMB smiles in recognition.)*

It was the first lie you ever told me.

*(Both laugh.)*

**PRISCOMB**

Oh, you weren't so bad.

**POUND**

Not so bad? Then why have I been "under observation" for twelve years?

**PRISCOMB**

They saw you at your worst. That's the way it is for some people when they arrive. Families bring them believing they'll get well. Instead, they get worse – at least at first.

**POUND**

Why?

**PRISCOMB**

Out there they at least try to function. But here, they're exhausted and it's a safe place to let go. So they do

**POUND**

I don't remember very much from that time, except that you always seemed to be hovering.

**PRISCOMB**

I was. It was my first week too and the only thing Nurse Horstmeier trusted me to do was watch you and call for the orderlies if you became violent.

**POUND**

Did I?

**PRISCOMB**

You poked yourself in the eye with your spoon a few times, but since it always had food on it, I chalked it up to lack of coordination.

**POUND**

So, you think I'll be all right?

**PRISCOMB**

You haven't spooned yourself in years.

**POUND**

Pris . . .

**PRISCOMB**

You'll get used to it.

**POUND**

Will I be happy?

**PRISCOMB**

If this place is your only reason for unhappiness, then, yes.

**POUND**

But, you don't think it is.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Rises and begins to gather her things.)*

Do you?

**POUND**

I don't know. That's why I'm asking you.

**PRISCOMB**

Talk to your doctor, Ezra.

*(Starts for the door.)*

**POUND**

Pris . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Good night.

*(Exits.)*

*(Blackout. End of Act I, Scene 3.)*

**ACT ONE**

**SCENE FOUR**

*(The next day. POUND is alone, seated in the overstuffed chair, focused on mid-space when he flashes an angry look at the portrait indicating that it has spoken. The following speech is punctuated with pauses during which the portrait is speaking.)*

**POUND**

Shut up.

*(Pause.)*

I did not “give in”.

*(Pause.)*

Yes, it’s almost over, but there’s an after – an out there. And I won’t take this place with me.

*(Pause.)*

Damn right I’ll throw you over. You stink of this place. You belong here.

*(Pause.)*

Why shouldn’t I?

*(Pause during which MARY appears at the door.)*

**MARY**

Excuse me.

*(POUND turns, embarrassed at having been caught.)*

I’m surprised you came.

**POUND**

No, I want to talk to you. You’ve heard the news?

**MARY**

Yes, we have some things to do.

**POUND**

Archie’s been wrong before.

**MARY**

I just need your help with some paperwork.

*(Starts organizing papers on the desk in front of her.)*

**POUND**

Paperwork?

**MARY**

For your discharge.

**POUND**

What do you mean?

**MARY**

The judge has already requested a letter confirming your fitness.

**POUND**

Well, what did you say?

**MARY**

Nothing. The Assistant Administrator replied and said you're fine.

*(MARY now has the paper she wants before her and asks the first question.)*

**POUND**

Doesn't he have to consult with you? You're my doctor.

**MARY**

Evidently not. Do you want to be discharged to the care of your wife or is there someone else?

**POUND**

We're not going to talk?

**MARY**

About what?

**POUND**

I thought you were going to cure me.

**MARY**

The judge just declared you cured. Do you want to be discharged to your wife or someone else?

**POUND**

What's wrong with you? You wanted to help.

**MARY**

It's not my decision. Are you going to answer the question?

**POUND**

But, Priscoomb must have told you.

**MARY**

Some anxiety about being discharged is understandable.

She said I should talk to you. **POUND**

Why? **MARY**

I thought you cared. **POUND**

There's no time. **MARY**

I need your help, damn it! **POUND**

Just answer the question. **MARY**

**POUND**  
It's your job you said. . . . You don't even know what this is about.

**MARY**  
Mr. Pound, you're going to leave . . .

**POUND**  
*(Exploding.)*  
I'm asking for your help!

**MARY**  
*(For the first time, begins to take him seriously.)*  
With what? You are what you are.

**POUND**  
I don't want to go.

**MARY**  
You don't have a choice.

**POUND**  
But, why don't I want to go? God knows I'm sick enough of this place.  
*(MARY studies him, but does not respond.)*

You don't know what I'm talking about. Not even a hint.

I-iv-

**MARY**  
Do you think you're the only person who's been robbed of his life and thrown into a new one? It's not like you're going to hell – at least not yet.

**POUND**

What do you know about hell?

*(MARY's expression sours and POUND tries to compensate.)*

Maybe you could . . .

**MARY**

Maybe I could what? Listen to you bellyache and complain about the unfairness of it all?

**POUND**

No, I mean help me . . .

**MARY**

You don't even know what help is. You think it's having people agree with you – worship you while you lay the problems of the world at someone else's feet.

**POUND**

*(In despair.)*

Oh Christ!

*(Ashamed, POUND rises and walks to the window and looks out. MARY watches in astonishment.)*

For twelve years you people have been telling me that I need to ask for help – that I needed to hit bottom. Well, I'm there! I'm asking.

**MARY**

Why?

**POUND**

Because I'll die out there.

**MARY**

Die? Of what?

**POUND**

I don't know.

**MARY**

And you want to find out?

**POUND**

I don't want to be afraid. I want peace.

**MARY**

Peace?

**POUND**

Peace. Peace of mind. Peace of the soul. For Christ sake, I don't even know what I'm saying.

**MARY**

And you think I can help you?

*(POUND just looks at her forlornly.)*

Because, when you get my help, we won't talk about "the usurers" or "Roosenstein" or "the jews" or any of the rest. Do you know what we will talk about?

**POUND**

What?

**MARY**

You. Ezra Odysseus will start exploring a new region – himself. Think you're up to that?

**POUND**

And why shouldn't I be?

**MARY**

Are you ready to see things as they are and not as you would have them?

**POUND**

*(Hesitates.)*

I suppose.

**MARY**

*(Challenges him.)*

Is that what you want?

**POUND**

Yes!

**MARY**

You understand it means you must do what I say?

**POUND**

Yes.

**MARY**

You must have complete faith in me.

**POUND**

Yes.

*(MARY begins packing her things.)*

I thought you had to finish the paperwork.

**MARY**

We'll take care of it later. Now, until I tell you otherwise, you're to have no visitors.

**POUND**

No visitors . . . . ?

**MARY**

I'll have Nurse Priscomb make the necessary apologies.

**POUND**

But . . . .

**MARY**

You said you would do what I say.

**POUND**

Yes, but . . .

**MARY**

And agreed we would focus on you.

**POUND**

My wife . . .

**MARY**

Not Carter's group, not MacLeish, not even your wife.

**POUND**

But, why?

**MARY**

Would you rather I fill out the forms and send you on your way?

**POUND**

No

**MARY**

Fine, I'll see you here tomorrow morning at nine.

**POUND**

Nine o'clock.

*(MARY exits.)*

Where else would I be?

*(POUND looks apprehensively after MARY for a few moments then turns and comes face-to-face with Overholser. He reacts as though the portrait has said something insulting to him and, after glaring for a moment, removes it from its easel, pitches it into the closet, and slams the door.)*

*(Blackout. End of Act I.)*

## ACT TWO

### SCENE ONE

*(The next morning. Some folding chairs are set up apparently in anticipation of an audience. POUND enters from the hallway carrying two more chairs, which he puts in place before stepping back to admire his handiwork. Satisfied, he draws himself up as though preparing to speak to the invisible audience when he realizes that his blackboard is again missing. He replicates exactly his attitude and search at the opening of Act I and is again unsuccessful. As before, he charges into the hallway to bellow, but catches himself at the last moment. Instead of shouting, he relaxes, smiles ruefully, and retreats to his chair where he leans back and closes his eyes. Suddenly, he starts and turns angrily to the portrait as though Overholser has said something particularly annoying.)*

#### POUND

And why shouldn't I give in?

*(Opens his eyes and turns his head in the direction of Overholser.)*

They're throwing me out.

*(Pause. POUND rises and approaches the portrait.)*

Yes, I'm irrelevant, but not as irrelevant as you'll be when I leave. A modestly decorated shred of canvas, alone in the world.

*(Pause.)*

Who knows what my hell is, but yours is one from which there's no escape.

*(Pause. POUND returns to his chair, reclines, and closes his eyes.)*

Yes, well, we'll see.

*(MARY enters and is surprised to see the chairs arranged as though for an audience. Recognizing her surprise, POUND responds.)*

One of the orderlies must have set them up. Probably thought I had my regular visitors today. I was just about to put them away.

#### MARY

Don't bother. We have to begin.

*(MARY sits and POUND follows suit.)*

First, I want to be clear about why we're here. You're going to be released sometime soon and you're frightened.

#### POUND

For all I know they could burst through that door at any time and chuck me out in the street.

#### MARY

And you don't want that?

**POUND**

There should be words, thousands of words! – declarations, depositions, sermons, writs!  
Twelve years cannot be consecrated with an exchange of memos.

**MARY**

Do you want to stop it?

**POUND**

And die in this goddamn place? “Forces are at work!”, says Archie.

**MARY**

You’re in a vise.

**POUND**

Goddamn it! This is my life!

**MARY**

So, what are you afraid of? First, you told Nurse Priscomb that you were afraid of being  
disappointed. Then you told her that you’re afraid of the adjustment. Is that it?

**POUND**

Isn’t that enough?

**MARY**

If it’s all there is.

**POUND**

What else would there be?

**MARY**

You said you could die out there.

**POUND**

I exaggerated.

**MARY**

Yes, but it feels that way.

**POUND**

Yes.

**MARY**

Or maybe you like it here.

**POUND**

Like what? St. E’s? You think I’m pathetic.

**MARY**

It's comfortable enough. Regular meals, guests when you like, no responsibilities . . .

**POUND**

I'm a prisoner! – banished, shunned, exiled . . .

**MARY**

But, you're afraid to leave, so whatever frightens you must be even worse.

**POUND**

I'm nervous, that's all. I've been here twelve years. It's a big adjustment.

**MARY**

What adjustment?

**POUND**

I don't know . . . routine things . . . deciding what to eat, when to go to bed, when to wake up, how to pay bills.

**MARY**

You go to bed when you're tired, you wake up when your eyes open and your wife cooks and pays all the bills. There, are you all better now?

**POUND**

What?

**MARY**

I just solved all your problems.

**POUND**

What in the hell are you talking about?

**MARY**

So, you're not all better.

**POUND**

What are you doing?

**MARY**

Proving that you're evading.

**POUND**

Evading what?

**MARY**

You're terrified.

I told you I'm afraid. **POUND**

You could die! **MARY**

You're trying to provoke me! **POUND**

You provoke yourself. **MARY**

You're angry at me. **POUND**

Why are you terrified? **MARY**

It's because of what I said about your father. **POUND**

Answer the question. **MARY**

Little Maria couldn't live up to daddy's expectations. Hates him for it. **POUND**

Answer the question. **MARY**

When he dies, you feel guilty. **POUND**

Why are you afraid? **MARY**

No, you still hate him. **POUND**

Why are you afraid? **MARY**

But, he's gone, so punish me instead. **POUND**

**MARY**

Answer the question.

**POUND**

Then I'm to forgive – absolve you of your sins.

**MARY**

Answer the question.

**POUND**

You're evading. Did he beat you? Was he . . . ?

**MARY**

Yes!

**POUND**

What?

**MARY**

He did. All of it. All the things you're saying are true. I did hate him. And I was thirteen years old and the world was awful and then he died. Do you see?

I lied before because it wasn't any of your business. You were trying to change the subject, like you're trying to change it now. And I used to do the same thing, but I had to confront it. I couldn't stay thirteen years old forever and you can't stay here forever. Do you understand?

**POUND**

*(Pause. Takes in MARY's startling admission and is chastened.)*  
I don't know why.

**MARY**

What?

**POUND**

I don't know why I'm afraid – why I'm terrified.  
*(Start slow fade.)*

**MARY**

And you don't want to know?

**POUND**

No.

**MARY**

But, you have to.

**POUND**

*(Looks at MARY with an expression of abject need.)*

Yes . . . Yes, I have to.

*(Finish fade to black.)*

*(To indicate the passage of time during the brief blackout, POUND and MARY change positions. When the lights come up POUND is starting to look tired and MARY has removed her sweater, but is still energetic.)*

**MARY**

Why are these chairs here?

*(POUND only shrugs in response.)*

There was no orderly, was there?

**POUND**

No.

**MARY**

You miss them, don't you?

**POUND**

I suppose.

**MARY**

*(Forcefully.)*

Do you miss them?

**POUND**

Yes. I miss them.

**MARY**

Why?

**POUND**

I don't know.

**MARY**

Concentrate! Why do you miss them?

**POUND**

It's routine, habit. I've been doing it for years.

**MARY**

Why?

**POUND**

I don't know . . . as a public service.

**MARY**

There's something in it for you.

**POUND**

You don't believe in simple generosity?

**MARY**

No, if that's all it was, you'd be indifferent. But, you miss them because it means something to you. What?

**POUND**

Christ! Isn't anything simple for you?

**MARY**

Answer the question.

**POUND**

I don't know what you want from me.

**MARY**

Tell me about them – your students. Is that what you call them?

**POUND**

Friends . . . colleagues . . .

**MARY**

Colleagues? Are they poets?

**POUND**

Some. Others are artists, journalists.

**MARY**

Are they famous, accomplished in their fields.

**POUND**

They're still young, but maybe . . .

**MARY**

Is that just your judgment or do others agree with you?

**POUND**

No one agrees with me, but they didn't agree with me about Joyce or Eliot either.

**MARY**

So, you think there's another Joyce or Eliot among them?

**POUND**

Oh, for Christ sake. What the hell does it matter?

**MARY**

Mr. MacLeish doesn't think much of them.

**POUND**

Goddamn Archie – forgets he wasn't any better than they are when I met him.

**MARY**

So, you think he's wrong about them.

**POUND**

Look, who knows. They're just kids . . .

**MARY**

You said they were colleagues.

**POUND**

All right, they're not colleagues.

**MARY**

So, what are they?

**POUND**

What is this all about?

**MARY**

You miss them. That means they provide you with something to miss and we're going to find out what it is. How would you describe your relationship?

**POUND**

I'm hungry.

**MARY**

Concentrate.

**POUND**

You concentrate! Take your damn questions and . . .

**MARY**

You will not speak to me in that tone!

*(MARY rises to an intimidating posture as though ready to pounce on the seated POUND who starts to rise.)*

And if you try to intimidate me, I'll have you in solitary until the moment you're discharged.

*(POUND is cowed and drops back into his seat.)*

What is your relationship?

**POUND**

I . . . help them.

**MARY**

Teacher?

**POUND**

Yes.

**MARY**

Imparting the wisdom of decades . . .

**POUND**

Centuries.

**MARY**

Centuries! But, you get nothing in return?

**POUND**

I expect nothing.

**MARY**

What about admiration? Do they give you that?

**POUND**

Well, naturally . . .

**MARY**

In fact, they worship you. Don't they?

**POUND**

That's not . . .

**MARY**

Constant adulation . . .

**POUND**

No, we . . .

You what? Argue?  
**MARY**

Yes.  
**POUND**

And do they ever win?  
**MARY**

It's not about who wins . . .  
**POUND**

They don't. Do they?  
**MARY**

What?  
**POUND**

Are you ever proven wrong?  
**MARY**

I suppose not.  
**POUND**

And they hold you in awe and reverence.  
**MARY**

Yes.  
**POUND**

So, that is what you get from them – constant adulation.  
**MARY**

I guess so.  
**POUND**

What was Oscar Wilde's line? "Every dog thinks his master a god, hence the constant popularity of dogs."  
**MARY**

I don't think of them as dogs.  
**POUND**

No – even worse – you treat them that way.  
**MARY**

**POUND**

No!

**MARY**

You don't tolerate them despite their inability to challenge you, but because of it.

**POUND**

You can't expect . . . .

**MARY**

What have they given you . . . what can they give you, but adulation?

*(Pause. POUND cannot summon up an answer.)*

And what makes it so important – so necessary?

*(Pause. POUND still does not reply.)*

Are you still with me?

**POUND**

I'm tired.

**MARY**

Are you still with me?

**POUND**

*(Angrily.)*

Yes, I'm with you!

**MARY**

*(Approaches POUND and looks directly into his eyes.)*

Are you really?

**POUND**

Yes.

*(Start slow fade.)*

**MARY**

Good.

*(Looks at her watch.)*

It's time for lunch.

*(A relieved POUND rises to go to the dining hall, but MARY stops him.)*

I'll have a tray brought up so we can continue.

*(The dismayed POUND retreats to his seat as MARY picks up the phone.)*

*(Fade to black.)*

*(Again, the passage of time is indicated by a change in positions. When the lights come up a cafeteria tray with the remains of lunch sits on the coffee table. POUND is exhausted, but MARY is intense and animated.)*

**POUND**

What will you do when you find out?

**MARY**

Find out what?

**POUND**

Why I'm afraid of being released or whatever it is you're after.

**MARY**

Depends.

**POUND**

Depends on what?

**MARY**

What it is. What you have to come to terms with.

**POUND**

I don't suppose you have any idea what that might be.

**MARY**

I have a thought or two.

**POUND**

Would you like to share them with me – brainstorm a little bit?

**MARY**

I may be wrong. In any case, it's less important that I discover it than it is that you do.

**POUND**

What? You don't think I'd believe you if you told me?

**MARY**

Not if I was right. You've spent twelve years avoiding the reason, so it's probably not a happy one.

**POUND**

But, you'll help me deal with it.

**MARY**

I'll do what I can.

**POUND**

What kind of promise is that? You lead me into the jungle, then tell me you may not be able to help?

**MARY**

Imagine for a moment that years ago you killed a man and were so overwhelmed with guilt that you repressed the memory. Still, subconsciously you knew and it ate at you. So, you sank into depression and went to a therapist who helped you uncover the truth.

Clinically, you'd be healthier. But, what about your depression? Would it be better . . . or worse?

**POUND**

That's ridiculous. I haven't harmed anyone.

**MARY**

Good. Then, you don't have anything to worry about. Tell me about your wife.

**POUND**

Why?

**MARY**

It's not a trick question.

**POUND**

Whatever my problem is, it isn't Dorothy.

**MARY**

I wasn't suggesting it is. It's just that you don't seem to talk about her much.

*(POUND is unresponsive.)*

I'm told she visits almost every day. She must be very devoted.

**POUND**

We've been married a long time.

**MARY**

You must be very much in love.

**POUND**

It's none of your business.

**MARY**

No, but we're not doing this for me.

**POUND**

You've seen my file. You know about my family.

**MARY**

About your mistress you mean? And your child by her?

**POUND**

Don't try to impale me on your middle class morality.

**MARY**

I wasn't. I was complimenting you – or your wife. I'm touched by her devotion.

**POUND**

Considering my behavior, you mean.

**MARY**

Regardless of your behavior. How many other men here enjoy such affection?

**POUND**

I don't know.

**MARY**

You know, it's a compliment to you that you inspire someone so.

**POUND**

She's the saint, not me.

**MARY**

So, you'd rather not talk about her?

**POUND**

You can threaten to throw me to the wolves only so many times.

**MARY**

No threat. We don't have to discuss it.

**POUND**

Good.

**MARY**

What about Mr. MacLeish?

**POUND**

What about him?

**MARY**

He's your friend, isn't he?

Yes, he's my friend. **POUND**

Is he your closest friend? **MARY**

I don't rank them. **POUND**

I'm sorry. I'll rephrase the question. Are you two close? **MARY**

I don't want to do this anymore. **POUND**

What would you like to talk about? **MARY**

I don't want to talk. I want to be left alone. **POUND**

Why? **MARY**

I told you. I don't want to talk. **POUND**

Why? **MARY**

Leave me alone. **POUND**

Answer the question. **MARY**

God damn it. You start that again and I'll . . .  
*(POUND stops himself and turns away.)* **POUND**

You're close. Don't stop now. **MARY**

Get out! **POUND**

**MARY**

No! You get out! You walk away!

**POUND**

You don't think I will.

**MARY**

I know you will. You did it to me the first day I met you. You've done it to everyone who's ever tried to help you. But, this time you've got no place to go.

**POUND**

Oh, yes I do! That big beautiful world filled with people who admire me, literature that I inspired . . . !

**MARY**

. . . Ideas that you championed. You're taught in colleges, debated in coffee houses . . .

**POUND**

I owned that world! It was mine!  
*(POUND rises in the heat of the moment.)*

**MARY**

The greatest poet of the twentieth century!

**POUND**

It was their depravity that put me here.

**MARY**

The Jews!

**POUND**

The Jews! – the usurers, the perjurers, the destroyers of Europe, the corrupters of men!  
*(Pause. POUND, still standing, is exhausted by the intensity of his outburst and MARY allows him to contemplate. Finally, POUND speaks in a quiet voice.)*

It is my world too.

**MARY**

Oh, yes. It is your world too.  
*(Start slow fade.)*

**POUND**

And you will help?

**MARY**

To see the world as it is, not as you fear it.

**POUND**

Yes, as it is, not as I fear it.  
*(Fade to black.)*

*(It is early evening. The passage of time is indicated by a change in positions. The set has not changed, but POUND is now completely exhausted and even MARY is showing the effects of the grind. There is a knock at the door and PRISCOMB looks in.)*

**PRISCOMB**

Excuse me, Doctor. Do you expect to be much longer?

**MARY**

I don't know, Miss Priscomb. Do you need something?

**PRISCOMB**

My shift's over and it's Mr. Pound's dinner time.  
*(PRISCOMB sees POUND sitting disconsolately, face in hands.)*

**MARY**

Have something prepared that Mr. Pound can eat later in his room.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Concerned about POUND.)*  
I don't think . . .

**MARY**

Miss Priscomb, this isn't open to discussion.

**PRISCOMB**

I was only going to say that patients aren't allowed to eat in their rooms, so Mr. Pound really should . . .

**MARY**

Then have his meal brought to the ward and I'll send for it when we're done. A nurse can stay with him while he eats it here.

**PRISCOMB**

But, Doctor . . .

**MARY**

That's all, Miss Priscomb.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Takes a last look at POUND who has not moved.)*  
Yes, M'am.  
*(Exits reluctantly.)*

**MARY**

*(To POUND.)*  
I'm tired of waiting. Why do you dislike MacLeish?  
*(POUND shows not sign of responding.)*  
You know the answer.

**POUND**

*(Weary.)*  
I don't dislike him.

**MARY**

You do. You show it in every way possible. You avoid talking about him and, when you do, you sneer.

**POUND**

He's a bother sometimes.

**MARY**

*(Turning back in her notes.)*  
Earlier you said, "he enjoys visiting the great ape in his cage".

**POUND**

So?

**MARY**

You think he's taking advantage of you. Patronizing you.

**POUND**

That's not true . . .

**MARY**

Your friend of thirty years who's worked harder for you than anyone and you regularly taunt him, play games with him. You described it to me.

**POUND**

He knows me.

**MARY**

Yes and it baffles him too.

**POUND**

Maybe because he's trying to get me out and I'm afraid. . . . Yes, I can't admit that to him, so I . . . uh . . .

**MARY**

Stop it. I can hear the gears in your head turning. It's more basic than that. Just tell me how you feel when he's here – when he shows the least sign of affection.

**POUND**

It's because he's trying to get me out.

**MARY**

No, because you do the same thing with people who aren't trying to get you out.

**POUND**

You're making this up.

**MARY**

Oh, come on. You did it to me in our first meeting. I watch you do it daily with Miss Priscomb.

*(Picks up a manila folder from her brief case.)*

I have twelve years of doctors' notes talking about your evasion, manipulation, bullying .

..

**POUND**

What the hell do they know?

**MARY**

What the hell does anyone know? And you intend to keep it that way.

**POUND**

They don't understand.

**MARY**

You won't let them . . . or me.

**POUND**

They can't.

**MARY**

Why not? We're human beings like you. Same feelings . . . same fears.

**POUND**

I don't care about your feelings or the bluehair's . . .

**MARY**

Yes, you do. You show signs of affection sometimes. You're willing to connect, but only on your terms.

**POUND**

You don't know anything!

**MARY**

No one can know anything about the great Ezra Pound! – Odysseus exploring new regions, sending his dispatches back to us proles.

**POUND**

*(Defiantly.)*

Yes!

**MARY**

No!

*(Pause.)*

God! Look at you. All that genius, all that originality, all that creativity and you've descended into a cliché – "I'm misunderstood".

**POUND**

Names again . . . !

**MARY**

Yes, but this time we're going to call it by its proper one. Do you know how easy it would be to end this long and painful day by saying you're persecuted and afraid to re-enter a world that misunderstands you?

**POUND**

I am.

**MARY**

Let's you off the hook. Let's me off the hook. But, it doesn't solve the problem, does it?

**POUND**

Some problems can't be solved.

**MARY**

That's it? That's the way you want to leave it?

**POUND**

I can't help the way things are.

**MARY**

All right. Let's leave it that way.

**POUND**

Thank you.

**MARY**

Frustrating day. All that work – really put you through the ringer, didn't I?

**POUND**

Like you said, it's your job.

**MARY**

Oh, come on. Give me a little more credit than that. It was a hell of a shot – really got to you a few times, didn't I?

**POUND**

Can I go now?

**MARY**

No, your dinner's on the way. Remember?

*(POUND grunts signaling that he does remember.)*

I'll wait with you until it gets here.

**POUND**

Suit yourself.

**MARY**

Boy, what a day. You remember back this afternoon when you asked me if I knew what the problem was and I told you I had an idea?

**POUND**

So, now you're going to tell me that you knew all along.

**MARY**

*(Amused.)*

No, not really. I had a completely different notion. Want to hear it?

**POUND**

No.

**MARY**

Oh, come on -- just for laughs.

**POUND**

*(Leans back in his chair and closes his eyes.)*

Have your fun. I'm going to sleep until dinner gets here.

**MARY**

You know how you said you're misunderstood? Well, I had it exactly the other way.

*(Looks at POUND, but there's no response. So, she continues.)*

I was thinking that we are a mystery to you – that you don't understand us. Get it?

*(Still no response from POUND.)*

Think about it. You can't figure out why Mr. MacLeish likes you, so you dismiss him as jealous and opportunistic. You see the anger I feel toward my father, but you can't grasp

my love for him. You're grateful for your wife's loyalty, but you're baffled and humiliated by it.

*(Now POUND is paying attention.)*

And then there's Nurse Priscomb – the bluehair. All the abuse you heap on her and she still cares for you. I mean wasn't that episode about your dinner touching – the way she was concerned about you?

**POUND**

Don't mock her!

**MARY**

No, I mean it. I think it's sad that she cares for you when, as you say, she can't even understand.

**POUND**

Pris knows more about me than you'll ever dream of.

**MARY**

Yes, I've always thought that. I figured that's why you kick her around worse than anyone else. She might have figured you out.

**POUND**

There's nothing to figure out.

**MARY**

Oh, she would have been wrong, of course, just like I'm wrong, because she might have thought you were trying to hide something.

**POUND**

We've been through all that.

**MARY**

The way I had it was that you really don't understand us and you're afraid someone will find out just how different you are – how strange and small and isolated . . .

**POUND**

You don't know anything . . .

**MARY**

No! And that's exactly the point. You don't want me to. You don't want anyone to.

**POUND**

You're the weird one. Provoking me, lying –you admitted it. What kind of psychiatry is that? What will your boss will think of your practices?

**MARY**

Are you going to tell Dr. Overholser?

**POUND**

The moment he gets back from Africa or wherever the hell he is.

**MARY**

Oh, that Dr. Overholser.

*(Pointing to the portrait.)*

I thought you meant that one, the one you talk to all the time.

*(POUND is undone.)*

I'm not the first one to notice. Dr. Rasby made a note of it a couple years ago. And, of course, PRISCOMB.

**POUND**

What does that have to do with anything?

**MARY**

The fact that you find more comfort, more companionship in an inanimate object than you do in people?

**POUND**

People talk to themselves all the time . . .

**MARY**

But, you don't have anyone else. And that makes all the difference.

*(POUND doesn't respond.)*

You've always been . . . different. Haven't you? Even as a child

**POUND**

Not different.

**MARY**

What?

**POUND**

You're talking about me like I'm an alien . . . a creature.

**MARY**

All right. What then? What are you?

**POUND**

Superior!

*(Pause. MARY isn't sure how to respond.)*

**MARY**

What?

**POUND**

I don't have your genius for false modesty.

**MARY**

Did you say, "Superior"?

**POUND**

Go ahead, laugh. Make one of your little notes.

**MARY**

No. Please, tell me about it.

**POUND**

How do you think I've done it all? Poetry, literature, art, Joyce, Eliot, MacLeish . . .

**MARY**

How?

**POUND**

*(Gesturing first to his eye and then to his brain.)*

Vision ! Understanding!

**MARY**

Were you born . . . superior?

**POUND**

Born, embraced . . .

**MARY**

But, you've always been this way?

**POUND**

Maria, do you want to know the secret?

**MARY**

Your secret?

**POUND**

Everyone's secret – the secret of the species. Difference for the sake of difference. Difference without superiority. Difference for its own sake – that is insanity! It's the only insanity – the one from which everyone in this hell hole or any other suffers. But, I made something of it. Don't you see?

**MARY**

And your poetry, your literary criticism makes it all right? The abuse, the pain you heap on others?

**POUND**

I'm talking about something bigger.

**MARY**

Bigger than what?

**POUND**

Politeness, etiquette . . .

**MARY**

People! We're talking about people.

**POUND**

No, you don't under . . .

**MARY**

The things you said to Miss Priscomb the other day, was that your genius? Was that in the interest of art?

**POUND**

I told you to leave her out . . .

**MARY**

The way you treated me – tried to use my father. Was that your superiority?

**POUND**

No. . . . No.

**MARY**

How often, how many people can be sacrificed on the altar of your ego?

**POUND**

That's unfair . . .

**MARY**

Why? Because three generations hence, they'll look back and say, "He was a bastard, but, boy, he was a great poet"?

**POUND**

I don't do it to hurt . . .

**MARY**

But, you know it hurts!

**POUND**

I have to.

**MARY**

Why do you have to hurt, bully, intimidate . . . ?

**POUND**

It's what you're doing to me, now . . .

**MARY**

What am I doing?

**POUND**

All those things – to me.

**MARY**

To you. Yes!

**POUND**

*(Almost pleadingly.)*  
Why?

**MARY**

I wanted to see the little boy.

**POUND**

What little boy?

**MARY**

The frightened little boy – the lonely little boy who says the wrong things, laughs at the wrong jokes . . .

**POUND**

You don't know . . .

**MARY**

He has no friends. He feels strange . . .

**POUND**

Not strange.

**MARY**

But, he has imagination, so he makes a world according to his own vision . . .

Stop it. **POUND**

Ezra Odysseus . . . **MARY**

Stop . . . **POUND**

**MARY**  
A world where he not only has a place, but an exalted one from which he can bestow his grace on his inferiors . . .

It's real . . . **POUND**

**MARY**  
He makes it real because the little boy has genius and he persuades others . . .

You're twisting . . . **POUND**

**MARY**  
Maybe even he believes it, but somewhere he remembers . . .

Millions believe, millions . . . **POUND**

**MARY**  
They did then – years ago, but not now. Now he's just that strange little boy lashing out . . .

Go to hell! **POUND**

**MARY**  
. . . at me, at his wife, at Priscomb and the others – THE OTHERS – who you've hurt even more.

What others? Who have I hurt? **POUND**

**MARY**  
Think!  
*(Pause. The bewildered POUND looks at her pleadingly.)*  
Think!

**POUND**

You're supposed to help.

**MARY**

For you this is help. Now think!

*(MARY starts to pack her things and get dressed to go.)*

**POUND**

What are you doing?

*(MARY does not respond, but continues her preparations to leave.)*

Where are you going?

**MARY**

*(Going to the door.)*

Be here at nine on Monday morning.

*(Exits leaving the bewildered POUND. He is devastated and slowly looks around the room as though seeing it as a desolate and lonely place for the first time.*

*Eventually his gaze rests on Overholser. He rises and approaches the portrait.*

*He runs his fingers around the frame as if to verify that it really is an inanimate object. While he does so, PRISCOMB appears at the door with a cafeteria tray.)*

**PRISCOMB**

Ezra?

**POUND**

*(Looks, but shows no pleasure at seeing PRISCOMB.)*

I thought your shift was over.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Takes the tray to the coffee table and begins uncovering the dishes.)*

Well, you know how second shift always bungles special instructions. Come on. I kept it warm.

**POUND**

*(Sits in front of the meal, but makes no move to eat or drink.)*

What are you doing here?

**PRISCOMB**

What any good nurse does. Eat.

*(Pause. POUND looks at the tray, but makes no move. PRISCOMB sits next to him.)*

You look awful.

**POUND**

Why did you stay, Pris?

**PRISCOMB**

Just eat.

**POUND**

*(Looks PRISCOMB in the eye.)*

You knew?

**PRISCOMB**

What did I know?

**POUND**

*(Begins to answer and thinks better of it.)*

Never mind.

*(POUND turns away.)*

**PRISCOMB**

*(Sensing he doesn't want to talk.)*

Well, if you're all set, I'm going home.

**POUND**

Wait.

**PRISCOMB**

What is it?

*(PRISCOMB sits down again.)*

**POUND**

Why did you never marry?

**PRISCOMB**

Well, I . . . uh . . . never had the opportunity.

**POUND**

No one? Ever?

**PRISCOMB**

I know. Everyone does, no matter how . . . .

**POUND**

No, I didn't mean that. I just wondered if it was a choice you made.

**PRISCOMB**

If you mean did I ever consider just going around throwing myself at men . . .

**POUND**

No . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Well, I did, but I chickened out.

**POUND**

Why?

**PRISCOMB**

I don't know. I don't even remember what I was afraid would happen.

**POUND**

You're not so old . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Yes, I am. Too old.

**POUND**

Yes.

**PRISCOMB**

What?

**POUND**

We both are . . . too old.

*(PRISCOMB is confused and a lengthy pause follows.)*

**PRISCOMB**

Are you going to eat?

**POUND**

Yes, Pris.

*(Picks up a fork and looks at PRISCOMB with a wan smile.)*

Thank you.

*(Begins to eat.)*

*(Slow fade. Blackout.)*

*(End of Act II, Scene 1.)*

**ACT TWO**

**SCENE TWO**

*(Monday morning. MARY is alone in the library waiting for POUND to arrive. PRISCOMB enters.)*

**PRISCOMB**

Good morning, Doctor.

**MARY**

Good morning, Miss Priscomb. Where is Mr. Pound?

**PRISCOMB**

He'll be here. Could we talk for a moment first?

**MARY**

Could we do it later? It's important that Mr. Pound and I get started because it may be another long day.

**PRISCOMB**

Yes, that's what it's about. He's not himself.

**MARY**

*(Apparently pleased.)*  
Really?

**PRISCOMB**

He's withdrawn, barely talks.

**MARY**

I should think that would be a reason to rejoice.

**PRISCOMB**

I'm worried about him.

**MARY**

Oh, why?

**PRISCOMB**

It's like when he arrived at St. E's after they kept him in that cage in Italy – not quite disoriented, but not here either.

**MARY**

So, you think I accomplished in a day what it took them six months to do?

**PRISCOMB**

Accomplished?

**MARY**

Yes. It's a necessary step – strip away the pretense, the defenses.

**PRISCOMB**

But, he's . . .

**MARY**

Vulnerable, frightened. Yes, I know.

**PRISCOMB**

He was already vulnerable and frightened. I thought the point was to help him . . .

**MARY**

Help him how? By adding another layer of delusion so he can torture people out there the way he tortured them here – you most of all?

**PRISCOMB**

He's a cranky old man, not some menace.

**MARY**

I'm not going to debate Mr. Pound's condition with you.

**PRISCOMB**

He has to leave here soon. You can't send him out there like this.

**MARY**

I have no intention of sending him anywhere "like this". I told you, it was necessary to strip away the pretense and, yes, I'm sure he is scared. He should be. That's why now I'm going to start reorienting him, so he can see things as they are.

**PRISCOMB**

Are you going to keep him all day again?

**MARY**

As long as it takes.

**PRISCOMB**

I don't think . . .

**MARY**

Miss Priscomb, I have maybe a week to do with Mr. Pound what would normally take a year . . .

**PRISCOMB**

But he's seventy-three . . .

**MARY**

I know and he'll be just as old and just as vulnerable out there. So, would you rather have him experience it here where it's safe or out there on his own? Now, would you please get him now?

**PRISCOMB**

Yes, Doctor.

*(PRISCOMB exits and MARY composes herself. Moments later PRISCOMB returns followed by a haggard, downcast POUND. PRISCOMB escorts him to the sofa where he sits.)*

**MARY**

*(To PRISCOMB.)*

Thank you. You can go now.

**PRISCOMB**

Should I knock when it's lunch time?

**MARY**

It won't be necessary. I have my watch. Goodbye.

*(PRISCOMB exits, shutting the door. MARY turns to POUND who looks down at the floor.)*

Good morning.

*(POUND does not respond.)*

Good morning.

*(No response.)*

All right, how do you feel?

*(No response. MARY motions toward the window.)*

You know, I could have the orderlies come and throw you out there right now.

**POUND**

*(Looks at MARY in terror.)*

No.

**MARY**

So, you'd rather be here with me.

**POUND**

*(Looks down.)*

No.

**MARY**

Where do you want to go? Here? There? Where?

**POUND**

No, I don't . . .

**MARY**

Anywhere. Just tell me where you belong.

**POUND**

Nowhere.

**MARY**

What?

**POUND**

Nowhere. I don't belong anywhere.

**MARY**

You don't belong anywhere. Is that what you said?

*(No response.)*

Is that what you said?

**POUND**

Yes.

**MARY**

Have you felt this way before?

*(No response.)*

Have you felt this way before?

**POUND**

Yes.

**MARY**

When?

**POUND**

As a boy.

*(A faint smile of satisfaction from MARY who walks to the window. When he hears no response, POUND looks up.)*

The others. You said there were others.

**MARY**

What?

**POUND**

You said I hurt others.

It's not time for that yet. **MARY**

**POUND**  
*(Suddenly assertive.)*  
What others?!

I told you . . . **MARY**

**POUND**  
*(Urgently.)*  
Yes! I was a scared little boy. I was different -- didn't fit in -- didn't want anyone to know -- DON'T want anyone to know. Now tell me about the others.

**MARY**  
I told you to think about it.

**POUND**  
What do you think I've been doing?

**MARY**  
And you don't know?

**POUND**  
Tell me.

**MARY**  
Why do you think that is?

**POUND**  
Damn it!

**MARY**  
Are you angry with me?

**POUND**  
*(Not wanting to antagonize her.)*  
No. I am not angry with you.

**MARY**  
What are you?

**POUND**  
Scared.

Of what? **MARY**

Whatever you're saying I'm guilty of. **POUND**

Guilty! You're prepared to feel guilt? **MARY**

For God's sake. I already do. **POUND**

Dear God! What progress you're making! **MARY**

Please. **POUND**

You're being honest, accepting responsibility . . . **MARY**

All of it. Yes. **POUND**

But, you still can't figure it out? **MARY**

No. **POUND**

And you've tried? **MARY**

What do you want? I'm different. I don't understand. **POUND**

Yes, that's true. But, you will understand. **MARY**

Please. **POUND**

Do you remember I told you my parents were killed when my village was shelled? **MARY**

What? **POUND**

Do you remember? **MARY**

Yes, it's horrible. **POUND**

That's not how they died. They were murdered. **MARY**

Murdered? Your parents? **POUND**

One day the Carabinieri just came and took them. A funny little man, Mr. Baldini. I knew him. He used to share pastries with the children. He came. **MARY**

But, why would the Carabinieri . . . ? **POUND**

He apologized to me – a thirteen year old. Can you imagine? Apologizing to a thirteen year old.? **MARY**

I don't understand. **POUND**

We were Jews – Jews. Do you see? **MARY**

But, what . . . **POUND**

You see, don't you? **MARY**

Maria, I'm sorry, but . . . **POUND**

It's what you wanted – what you said. **MARY**

What do you mean? **POUND**

**MARY**

Your radio broadcasts. I used to listen to them with my father. Do you remember what you said?

**POUND**

*(Realizing.)*

Oh, no, Maria . . .

**MARY**

*(Pulling transcripts from her briefcase and reading.)*

“The leeches. The blight on mankind.” I remember asking him once if you were talking about us, because I couldn’t understand.

**POUND**

That’s not . . .

**MARY**

Mr. Baldini heard them too.

**POUND**

I didn’t tell Mr. Baldini to take your father . . .

**MARY**

But, you did. Don’t you see?

**POUND**

I wasn’t there. I didn’t know your father.

**MARY**

And neither did Mussolini or Hitler. But, Mr. Baldini did – nice Mr. Baldini.

**POUND**

I’m sorry for your father and mother, Maria.

**MARY**

But, where did Mr. Baldini get the idea?

**POUND**

I didn’t give . . .

**MARY**

You gave him more than the idea. You gave him permission. Permission. Don’t you understand yet?

**POUND**

Oh, for God’s sake, it was the times . . .

**MARY**

The times? No, it wasn't the times. It was people -- people deciding it was all right . . .

**POUND**

I wasn't one of them.

**MARY**

No, but you gave them permission!

**POUND**

No!

**MARY**

It was my father and my mother . . .

**POUND**

No!

**MARY**

*(Trying to force the transcripts on POUND who turns away.)*  
Here. Do you want to read what you said?

**POUND**

No!

**MARY**

I was thirteen years old and I heard you . . . on the radio . . . the voice of God.

**POUND**

Stop it!

**MARY**

*(Reading from the papers.)*  
“. . . the big Jew has rotted every nation he has wormed into.” “. . . the kikes have sucked out your vitals.”

**POUND**

Stop it!

**MARY**

“. . . Nothing can save you from the Jew. “ “This filth.” “This dirty bit of meat.”  
“Nothing can save you save a purge”! . . . A Purge!

**POUND**

Words! Just words!

**MARY**

The words that gave them permission.

**POUND**

Words are not murder.

**MARY**

Words are your life! Friday you told me you were superior because of your words.  
When I met you, you said I should become a poet because men would follow my words.

**POUND**

It's not the same!

**MARY**

But, it is.

**POUND**

No.

**MARY**

Either you're a murderer or words have no meaning. Your poetry has no meaning! Your life has no meaning!

*(POUND runs from the room unable to take anymore.) (Blackout. End of Act II, Scene 2.)*

**ACT TWO**

**SCENE THREE**

*(Later. The unperturbed MARY relaxes on the sofa with a book, feet up on the coffee table when the frazzled PRISCOMB enters.)*

**PRISCOMB**

I think we finally got him calmed down.

**MARY**

He was bound to exhaust himself. They always do.

**PRISCOMB**

Raving, sobbing – back and forth. Was he that way when he left here?

**MARY**

No. He just ran out.

**PRISCOMB**

Why? What happened?

**MARY**

A little dose of reality. It can be bracing for someone who's lived in a dream as long as he has.

**PRISCOMB**

He was going on about murder and guilt.

**MARY**

Yes.

**PRISCOMB**

Do you know what he was talking about?

**MARY**

I think so.

**PRISCOMB**

Well, what are we going to do?

**MARY**

Do?

**PRISCOMB**

When he wakes up.

**MARY**

I'm sure he'll be calmer then.

**PRISCOMB**

No. I mean this talk. He's imagining he's guilty of all sorts of things.

**MARY**

Oh. He's not imagining. He is. The reactions you're seeing are fairly normal.

**PRISCOMB**

Normal? The man's delirious.

**MARY**

Well, how do you suppose a mentally healthy person would react if he were to wake up one day to discover he had committed murder. I wouldn't be surprised at a touch of delirium.

**PRISCOMB**

Are you saying he's a murderer?

**MARY**

I'm saying that Mr. Pound has led a long life, most of it spent inflicting pain on others and some of it, yes, does rise to the level of murder.

**PRISCOMB**

That's ridiculous. Every aspect of his life has been examined a hundred times and there's nothing like that.

**MARY**

Oh. The physical act? No. But, in words . . .

**PRISCOMB**

In words . . . ?

**MARY**

They may not mean much to you, but they do to me and they mean even more to Mr. Pound.

**PRISCOMB**

What are you saying?

**MARY**

Have you heard his radio broadcasts . . . the ones that got him indicted?

**PRISCOMB**

No.

**MARY**

Listen to them and you'll understand.

**PRISCOMB**

But, who was murdered?

**MARY**

The Jews, Miss Priscomb, my family and millions of other people who didn't meet Ezra Pound's definition of humanity.

**PRISCOMB**

What did you do to him?

**MARY**

I cured him. I made him sane for the first time in his entire miserable life . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Who are you?

**MARY**

Sanity. The ability to see things as they are, not as he would have them. That is what I have given Ezra Pound.

**PRISCOMB**

You destroyed him because he's an anti-semite.

**MARY**

A vicious anti-semite . . .

**PRISCOMB**

All right, a vicious anti-semite. But, why?

**MARY**

Ezra Pound did what he did. I merely informed him of the fact.

**PRISCOMB**

You're smug about it. You had it planned . . .

**MARY**

You give me too much credit. Oh, I came to St. E's hoping to cure him so he could be tried and hanged. But, that didn't work out and I'd frankly given up hope until I saw how frightened he was of leaving and then I realized an even worse punishment could be inflicted on Ezra Pound – having to live with the truth for the rest of his life.

**PRISCOMB**

Your truth.

**MARY**

The truth, Miss Priscomb. Ask him. He'll tell you.

**PRISCOMB**

I will file a complaint against you . . . right after I find someone to help him.

**MARY**

*(Holds up a piece of paper.)*

You'll have to be quick. He's being discharged tomorrow.

**PRISCOMB**

*(Forgetting MARY for a moment and contemplating the implications of POUND's imminent release.)*

My God. Who will help him?

*(Turns back to MARY.)*

He's seventy-three years old. He won't have to live long with what you've done. But, you will.

*(PRISCOMB exits. MARY returns to "the throne", then suddenly looks at the portrait as though it has said something to her.)*

*(Blackout. End of Act II, Scene 3.)*

**ACT TWO**

**SCENE FOUR**

*(Two days later. MACLEISH is alone in the library looking around, particularly at Overholser, when MARY enters. They make eye contact, but feeling the tension says nothing. She goes to the desk and removes some files and is about to leave when MACLEISH speaks.)*

**MACLEISH**

Doctor Polley?

**MARY**

I'm sorry, but I don't have time to talk right now.

**MACLEISH**

I'm here to take him home.

**MARY**

I know.

**MACLEISH**

Nurse Priscomb tells me he's not well.

**MARY**

No, he's not.

**MACLEISH**

She said you would explain.

**MARY**

I'm sorry . . .

*(Turns to go.)*

**MACLEISH**

You are his doctor aren't you?

**MARY**

Miss Priscomb didn't tell you about that as well?

**MACLEISH**

But you are still his doctor?

**MARY**

*(Looks at her watch.)*

For about ten more minutes.

**MACLEISH**

And you won't be here to see him off? Not even a pretense of care?

**MARY**

Mr. MacLeish, right now leaving is the most caring thing I can do for Mr. Pound.

**MACLEISH**

The most caring thing for him or the most caring thing you're capable of?

**MARY**

If you want to take issue, you can join Nurse Priscomb. I'm sure she's bringing charges.

**MACLEISH**

No, I just want to know one thing. Would you have treated any other patient as you did Ezra?

**MARY**

*(MARY is intrigued and thinks for a minute.)*

In many ways, Mr. Pound is in a class of his own.

**MACLEISH**

You're evading.

**MARY**

I'm sorry. No, I wouldn't have, but that doesn't make it wrong.

**MACLEISH**

You know, it's funny. When Ezra's on one of his rants about "the usurers" and "the capitalists" . . .

**MARY**

. . . . and the Jews.

**MACLEISH**

. . . and the Jews . . . he always claims they rob us of humanity by reducing us to machines valued only for the economic function we perform – they rip out our hearts and souls because they're economically inefficient.

**MARY**

What's funny about that?

**MACLEISH**

It's poppycock, but it means the old Ezra would probably have a great deal of sympathy for what you did, because you refused to separate being a doctor from being a daughter . .

.

**MARY**

. . . from being a human being.

**MACLEISH**

Just what he would have said.

**MARY**

*(Turns to go.)*

I have to go now.

**MACLEISH**

Will you fight the charges . . . if Priscomb brings them?

**MARY**

*(Stops.)*

I have to make a living, Mr. MacLeish.

**MACLEISH**

Yes, but . . . well, it's none of my business . . . but as an attorney I can tell you that sometimes it's better to walk away.

**MARY**

I haven't done anything . . .

**MACLEISH**

Perhaps not. It's just that, if you have even a doubt, in litigation it's something you can't admit. You must build a case and invest yourself wholly. And by doing so, any sin, if there is any, is compounded because you've stood on housetops proclaiming your innocence. You've done again in the minds of men whatever it was you did in fact and, in some ways, that is a greater burden.

**MARY**

Your reputation as a poet is deserved, but you needn't worry, Mr. MacLeish. I have no doubts.

**MACLEISH**

There aren't many of us who can say that in this life.

**MARY**

It may be my only compensation.

*(Pause.)*

Goodbye.

**MACLEISH**

Goodbye.

*(They smile weakly at one another. MARY exits. MACLEISH wanders the room stopping at Overholser's portrait and chuckling gently at the memory of POUND's ax murderer story. Then PRISCOMB guides a shrunken POUND into the room. He carries a small valise and is dressed in a heavy overcoat and a black fedora with a wide brim. The clothes seem to consume him. He is nothing like the animated, energetic POUND we saw at the beginning of Act I.)*

**PRISCOMB**

We're here, Mr. MacLeish.

**MACLEISH**

*(Winces at POUND's surprisingly diminished appearance.)*

Ezra?

*(POUND looks up, but does not speak.)*

**PRISCOMB**

I'm having the orderlies take down his clothes and other things.

**MACLEISH**

Thank you.

*(Then, to POUND.)*

Are you ready, Ez?

*(Still no response.)*

**PRISCOMB**

*(Trying to put a good face on it.)*

Don't worry, he's just pre-occupied right now. This morning he threw a vintage fit when they put cream in his coffee.

**MACLEISH**

I'm sure.

**PRISCOMB**

Where will he go?

**MACLEISH**

I don't know. Around for a while. Before this he had talked about visiting some of the old places – where he grew up, went to school.

**PRISCOMB**

But, permanently?

**MACLEISH**

Italy I expect. Other than St. E's, it's the only home he's known in thirty years.

**POUND**

*(In a smaller, but still determined voice.)*

Where is Maria?

**MACLEISH**

She stopped by, but had to get to another appointment.

**PRISCOMB**

It wouldn't . . .

**POUND**

Pris, go get her.

**MACLEISH**

Ez, she didn't want to be here.

**POUND**

Get her!

**PRISCOMB**

I don't think it would . . .

**POUND**

Don't you pity me!

**MACLEISH**

Ez . . .

**POUND**

Don't you think I can face her?

**MACLEISH**

In her way, I don't think she wants to make it any harder.

**POUND**

Who are you all to pity me?

*(Pause. PRISCOMB and MACLEISH look at one another, but do not speak.  
POUND looks from face to face and then down.)*

**MACLEISH**

We should be going.

**POUND**

She's troubled, you know . . . troubled.

**MACLEISH**

We all are, Ezra. We all are.

**PRISCOMB**

Your wife is waiting.

**POUND**

Pris, tell her . . . tell her I'm not afraid any more.

*(Then, turning to Overholser.)*

I'm not afraid!

*(PRISCOMB and MACLEISH look at each other worriedly.)*

**PRISCOMB**

I'll tell her.

*(Taking POUND by the elbow to lead him from the room.)*

Come on, Ezra.

**POUND**

Let go of me!

*(MACLEISH motions her away.)*

**MACLEISH**

*(Intervening.)*

It's all right. Come on now.

*(Gradually POUND accedes.)*

**POUND**

*(To PRISCOMB.)*

You'll tell her I'm not afraid?

*(PRISCOMB nods.)*

And, Pris . . .

**PRISCOMB**

Yes . . . ?

*(POUND begins to speak, but a look of pained confusion crosses his face. He looks away, pulls his coat tight, and starts for the door. As he passes in front of Overholser's portrait, he considers it for a moment, then removes it from the easel and turns it around to reveal "Kung". He exits with MACLEISH. The anguished PRISCOMB dissolves into the couch, face in hands.)*

*(Curtain.)*