

ONLY THE FIRE

by

Elisabeth Mann Borgese

Music by ~~GEORGE MARTIN~~ MARTIN  
Edgard Varèse

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PERSONAGES

*Mum 47*  
*Josephine*  
*Edgar Varèse*

Mrs. Richie Calder, perhaps a witch

Judge

Priest

Psychiatrist

An attendant

Mr. Brewster

Mrs. Brewster

Two Brewster children

Children in Halloween costumes

A passer-by

Man with flower cart

Woman

Friends

Telephone operators

Saleswoman

Minister on screen and attendants

Chorus of worshipping men

chorus of worshipping women

Chorus of worshipping children

A kitten

Steward

Stewardess

Passengers: An aged couple

Businessman

Modest couple with three children

Mother with twelve-year old boy

Elegant lady with teen-age girl

Couple with small boy carrying kitten  
Old lady on crutches  
Nurse  
Movie-star  
MAID

## FIRST ACT

(Small bells. Like Chairman's adjourning meeting. Like sacristan's, announcing celebration of Mass. Large bells, like church bells, like storm bells. A shriek, a siren. Long-heaving rhythms of breaking waves and waves and waves and crashing rain. Curtain. The stage is dark. Camera projects crowds on rear wall, billowing out of court room, graying fading into waves as lights go on, dimly, on Judge's desk, on left side of stage. Door on left wall, rear. Door on right wall, rear.)

Judge rises, in cap and gown. His face is white without features, giving relief to a pair of conspicuous eye-glasses and a hearing aid. Identical figures, in varying poses, in cap and gown and with white, featureless faces blending with background, with heavily rimmed glasses and hearing aids of various types, are represented on paintings behind Judge's desk and on opposite wall; pompous gold frames are marked with dates (1882-1909; 1902-1908; 1914-1927, etc.) Pictures are lavishly decorated with flags and flowers. Right center of room is occupied by one row of court-room benches with tables. Withh, alone, is seated at center of row. Elbows planted on desk, face buried in hands. Long flaxen hair flows down over her face and hands, forming smooth puddle on desk; witch is wearing elegant travelling suit, blouse with open V-neck collar. Witch rises. Shakes back her hair. Bares tear-reddened eyes. Steps forward.)

WITCH  
(with forced formality)

Your Honor, I beg your pardon if I take some of your valuable time. But I have some information bearing on the crashes of the New York-Paris Flight 8 of June 17 and of the Jdannon-Shwannon of September 3.

JUDGE

One at a time, please. We are investigating the September 3 crash.

WITCH

I am responsible for both.

JUDGE

Lady, you are the sixth, today. Everybody always is responsible when a thing like that comes up. They all want their pictures in the papers. They want the headlines. They want their necks wrung.

WITCH

I have a right to be heard, and judged, and punished.

JUDGE

And punished. For what?

WITCH

I get them down. Crashing in flames. Cutting roof tops. Missing a-sea. I sever wireless connections. I snip the threads of life. I sow havoc and harvest tragedy.

JUDGE

Now lady, lady.

WITCH

Will you hear me? Will you judge me? Will you punish me?

JUDGE

I think you've come to the wrong place lady.

WITCH

I have a right to be heard, and judged, and punished.

(enter attendant, through left door.)

ATTENDANT

X Two more, your Honor, male and female. Locked in the last loft. They say they have the proof. They say they have the key.

(Exit, through right door.)

JUDGE

Come on now, lady. Your name?

WITCH

My name

(takes a slight bow. Opens her arms as though introducing herself.)

JUDGE

Your birthday?

WITCH

My birthday

(laughs)

JUDGE

You were born in?

- 4 -

WITCH

I was born in

(takes a slight bow, opens her arms)

JUDGE

Your marital status

WITCH

My marital status

(wriggles obscenely)

JUDGE

Your profession

WITCH

My profession

(nods pensively)

JUDGE

How long have you been associated with the  
Terror Scouts?

WITCH

Associated with what? What do you mean

JUDGE

((impatient))

They put up the bomb that blew up the plane,  
the Terror Scouts, you know.

WITCH

(knowingly)

Maybe yes, maybe no. It would be, at any rate,  
purely coincidental

JUDGE

They blow up his planes, they poison his mess.  
Some day they'll take our Comrander's life:  
They mean business.

WITCH  
(Contemptuously)

The Comrander wasn't even on the plane

JUDGE

Did you know he was not going to be on the plane?

WITCH

I didn't know he was supposed to be on it. I  
didn't know he wasn't on it. I didn't know...

JUDGE  
(impatient)

What do you want here, then?

WITCH

I said I am responsible for the crash and I want to  
be heard, and judged, and punished.

JUDGE

Everybody always is responsible when a case  
like that comes up. They want their pictures in  
the papers. They want the headlines.

(enter attendant, from left door)

ATTENDANT

There are three more, your Honor, three more.  
A boy and two girls. I herded them into the  
hall. They say they are Horror-hands. They made  
the bomb.

(exit, through right door.)



JUDGE

If they tell you they've written the Diving Comedy, no one listens. If they tell you they have committed murder, they may get away with it. They want to carry the sins of the world. They're fed up. They're phonies.

WITCH

Oh, your Honor, my honor

JUDGE

It's a sad story, lady, and old. The plane was scheduled to take off from Jdannon, with our Comrander a-board. It was a top secret, but the Terror-Scouts got hold of it, and maybe the Horror-Hands, and they managed to smuggle the bomb with the baggage. Our Comrander cancelled his flight-- nobody knew he would -- and travelled, safely incognito, on another plane. Flight 17 blew up on schedule. And forty-three hapless travellers sped to eternity.

WITCH

(aside, agitated)

Our Comrander. So help me heaven. Our Comrander, I've got to talk to our Comrander. He alone...

Together...It may be spreading already...it may be too late. Oh, help. I want...to be heard... and judged...and punished.

JUDGE

Make up your mind, lady. You say you did not know of our Comrander's plans. You didn't know the plans were changed. Nothing you knew about the plot, and that the plot missed. And yet.

WITCH  
(serenely)

Your honor, my honor. Hear, judge, and punish.

(pauses)

(Arioso)

I was about to take the plane out of New York. My reservation had been booked weeks in advance.... You, know, how it is, that part of the year.... I was all packed up and had sent a cable to the Brewsters in Paris, asking them kindly to come to the airport and get me...I've still got the cable; they kept it for me...But then something happened. I slipped up somewhere. Bungled last-minute improvisations. The shopping in town: too alluring. The traffic: impenetrable. When I got to the airport at last, the counter was empty, the gates were closed. "Sorry," they said, "we've called you, we've paged you, we have waited for you, but the plane had to leave on schedule. You know you should be here at least thirty minutes before the departure. Your passport, your ticket, and here is a message for you. You forgot your fur coat at the hotel. We are sorry. We shall try to transfer you to another plane, to another line, leaving tonight."

I cursed and I laughed

(rises. Walks slowly towards background of stage. Stage lights are dimming, court)

room dissappears)

and when I got to Paris, I learned that the plane -- my plane -- had crashed and crew and passengers had perished to the last man.

v (Lights focus on round lunch table in the Brewster's home. The Brewster family -- middle-aged Mr. Brewster, conventional; pretty Mrs. Brewster, conventional; and two conventional children: a boy of about ten and a girl of about 4, in a highchair, are sitting around the table. Witch, carrying in one hand a blue Airliner overnight bag, holding, with the other, her ailing forehead, pale, exhausted, drifts halting towards empty chair at right side of Mr. Brewster. Slumps down. Glum silence.)

MR. BREWSTER

Dear, dear.

MRS. BREWSTER

A close call.

WITCH

I feel dizzy. I feel like I walked across the ocean, and that it was covered with a thin crust of ice.

MRS. BREWSTER

I can't believe you are with us, dear. We didn't get your second cable till late.

MR. BREWSTER

And they had your name on the passenger list, of

course they had

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

So we were absolutely sure you were on that plane.

MRS. BREWSTER

(brings a tray with a cocktail glass on it)

Here, darling, have another drink; a stiff one; you need it.

WITCH

When they told me, first, that the plane had left, it gave me the funniest feeling down in my stomach. And I thought: that plane is going to crash. That's why I missed it.

MR. BREWSTER

That's what you think now dear.

MRS. BREWSTER

That's always the way it goes. You never know when you thought of a thing first, if you thought it, and it happened, too.

WITCH

No, no. I really thought: that plane is going to crash. I even told the Smiths, when I called them up from the airport, to let them know that I missed the plane. I told them: "Shall we bet that that plane is going to crash? I bet you." Of course we were all kidding. "Aren't you sewwt," Harry said. "What a gentle thought".....I wonder what they said when they read the news.

MR. BREWSTER

A lucky gal, That's what they said.

MRS. BREWSTER

A close call that was. Dear, dear.

MR. BREWSTER

The gods must love you.

MRS. BREWSTER

Oh, this flying business. they keep telling you the chances of a mishap are minimal, negligible -- but then, there you are. Forty at a time.

MR. BREWSTER

We are all under the impression of this shock now, but, really, its useless to think of such things. When your hour has struck, it may be a plane that does it, that executes the order, or a disease no one would have suspected; or the famous brick falling from a roof; when your hour has struck. But when it has not...You go travel on any plane, traverse any storm; have bullets whiz around you on the battlefield (I did) and feel just as safe as in Abraham's lap. If your hour hasn't struck...

MRS. BREWSTER

You have so much left to do, Richie, and so many people who need you. That would have been a mean trick, Richie, just to go and cflash.

(turning to the younger child)

Eat your spinach now, Wally

YOUNGER CHILD

I don't want my spinach. It isn't my spinach anyway.

MRS. BREWSTER

(takes a heaping spoon of spinach, makes it travel toward child's mouth, accompanying gesture with a humming sound)

Ssssssss there comes the plane, with aunt Richie on it

mmmm, open your mouth, Wally, so the plane can get into the hangar. That's the girl.

YOUNGER CHILD

Ugh, ugh

MRS. BREWSTER

We won't let aunt Richie's plane crash, will we!

YOUNGER CHILD  
(shakes her head; wide-eyed)

Aunt Witchie's planes don't fall down, do they.

OLDER CHILD

Maybe, if she hadn't missed the plane, maybe it wouldn't have fallen

YOUNGER CHILD

'cause God loves her so.

MRS. BREWSTER

Finish your spinach, Wally

MR. BREWSTER  
(offers highballs)

Well, well, this is a big day, Richie. Let's pour some good whiskey over it. Destiny does not demonstrate every day that you are her favorite daughter.

YOUNGER CHILD

Is it true, daddy, that the plane wouldn't have fallen down if aunt Witchie hadn't missed it?

(light turning greener, faces turning wanner and paler)

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

Thank goodness she missed it!

WITCH  
(rising)

It's an evil thing to miss a plane. You may miss a ~~tramp~~ a bus, even a train. But to miss your plane, is immoral.

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

Ha,ha,ha. If you had done something immoral. The gods would have punished you, and not the poor innocent people who travelled on that plane.

WITCH

There are punishments and punishments

MR. BREWSTER

There are immoral acts -- and immoral acts -- and I wonder whether the gods have time to punish every one of them.

(The three grown-ups are drinking. The conversation is getting more excited, more confused. The audience catches fragments like the following:)

CONFUSED VOICES

I never felt so terrible in my life. It was a horrid shock to all of us. Because it's absolutely impossible to understand a thing like that. What do you care, all that matters is that you. Drink your milk Wally. Are alive. And be grateful. Children don't be so noisy. I feel I've been spared. But why just I. It might have happened to anybody. Quit digging in your nose, honey, you're too old. It's just chance, lucky chance. No, it was me, not anybody. But is it grace or is it punishment. Richie, you're extraordinary. I didn't think I was particularly deserving either. Kids, you are a mess. I can't accept the idea that a thing like this has no meaning...

(also the children are getting more excited. they drive their forks and spoons through the air. They hum like planes. They bang and crash them together. They let them tumble. Noise and laughter.)

YOUNGER CHILD  
(squealing with delight)

— Aunt Witchie did something nasty! She missed the plane! One is not supposed to miss one's plane! Bad aunt Witchie! Zoocom It wouldn't have fallen down crashcrashcrashcrash if she hadn't missed it, nasty aunt Witchie!

(They roar with laughter)

(Noise is fading, lights are dimming, the Brewster home disappears in the dark. Witch, lights focused on her deathly pale face, returns to court room.)

JUDGE

They're only children. They were only kidding: You were exhausted. You were out of your mind.

WITCH

It kept gnawing on me. If I hadn't missed the plane, it would not have fallen.

(enter attendant)

ATTENDANT

Two more, Your Honor: a little old man and a child. They say they are Horror Hands. They say they are Terror Scouts...The jails are jammed, Your Honor, I tossed them into the tower. They say...

(exit attendant)

WITCH

A change came over me after that. They told me:



You look ill, Richie, you should have a rest.  
# Now she's grown old and sinister, they whispered  
behind my back. I investigated the causes of  
the crash. An overload of baggage, they told  
me, from Greenland on. And ice on the wings.  
The plane was too heavy to take off. That made me  
laugh. It gnawed on me: it ate me away, and  
then a series of incidents began to happen. They  
would: with someone around as sinister looking  
as me

(walks front stage. Rear darkens. A bunch  
of disguised children are trotting up  
behind her. Playful tumult.)

CHILDREN

Trick or treat, aunt Ritchie, Give us candies!  
Give us money!

(Witch, good-naturedly, throws a purse full  
of tingling coins on the floor. Children  
throw themselves on the purse. Wrangle  
screams.)

CHILDREN

.....  
Ai, ai...What's going on. Freddy what's the  
matter with you quit fussing, why, he's hurt  
Freddy has broken something go call his mummy  
go get someone to help

(voices are fading. Children are blacked out.  
a piece of halloween costume remains on the floor  
and gives off a phosphorescent glow. Witch  
walks across front stage. Meets passer-by.)

WITCH

Excuse me, can you tell me what time time it is?

PASSER-BY

(stops, looks at his watch, listens to it,  
shakes it.)

*How's the equivalent  
in Italian?*

Sorry, lady I can't help you. My watch stopped.  
Queer, it never did that before....

(Witch walks on across front stage. Meets man pushing cart with flowers, flower pots and vases. He almost bumps into her, turns cart abruptly, hits a stone, cart gets out of control, overturns. Flowers, pots and vases spill on the floor.)

WITCH

Oh, I am sorry, my friend. Let me help you to get it up again.

MAN

(quietly furious)

Friend my foot. Watch where you're going lady. Damn those vases and pots. And look at the flowers. Just look at the mess.

(tramples on them, in disgust.)

WITCH

Sorry, mister, sorry. Would you sell me a dozen roses. Look the carnations. They are as good as new. It isn't as bad as all that. Sell me a nice bunch of carnations. There....

(She gives him some money. Man is still mumbling curses, but begins to right cart and gather remaining flowers and sweep broken pots and vases. Some splinters remain on stage floor, giving off phosphorescent glow. Witch continues walk across front stage. At right front corner, camera projects facade of old-style mansion, of rather gloomy aspect, closed shutters. Witch approaches front door, pulls bell. Pause. Door opens, emitting unkempt tired-looking woman, dressed in black.)

WITCH

Excuse me, I seem to be disturbing. But since

I was just passing by...are you the cook? are you the maid? I'm Mrs. Calder. Excuse me, is Mrs. Winter in?

WOMAN  
(gloomily)

Mrs. Winter passed away this morning.

WITCH  
(in utter confusion)

What? Oh, I am terribly sorry. Terribly terribly sorry.

(Turns, to go away. Woman returns into the house, stumbling over sill, tearing down something. Clatter, lamentations, inside the house. Witch turns back once more, fastens flowers on front door knocker. Turns toward rear of stage. Projected facade disappears. Door, front-door knocker with flowers remain visible in phosphorescent glow. Witch steps into a car, joining gaily chatting group of friends.)

FRIENDS

What a heavenly day. And we'll make it: I bet you we'll make it on time. They'll be waiting for us with lunch; and we'll take a swim late in the afternoon. But for lunch, we'll make it.

WITCH

They would worry, wouldn't they, if we were late. The holiday traffic is rather killing but still...

(car begins to knock, produce gritting noises fumes; stops.)

DRIVER

Oh dear, dear. That had to happen. Didn't it

though, now we are in a real jam. The water's boiling. No oil, I guess, and we burned the bearings.

FRIENDS

You might have watched the temperature,  
You might have checked the oil

DRIVER

The thermometer hasn't been working for ages

FRIENDS

The car isn't new, you know: anyway, this can happen to any car, any time. It's just darn bad luck

DRIVER

My car's bad luck is my bad luck; if my car is not feeling well, that means that I am not feeling well. Something must be wrong somewhere. I'm worried.

FRIENDS

There's just a jinx on it, that's all.

WITCH

Now boys, boys, it isn't as bad as all that. A little bad luck keeps away big bad luck, don't you know. Now let's get out. You, John have a look at the engine -- I guess it's the bearings all right. When the fan belt breaks down, the car acts up differently, and the spark plugs seem fine, and the generator.

DRIVER

You are quite a mechanic, Richie.

WITCH

And there was a phone half a mile back. I saw it. I'll go back and call the AAA, and

I get a message through to the Webers, that we are late. It isn't as bad as all that. Wait a few minutes -- I'll be right back.

FRIENDS

Isn't she sweet, isn't she smart. We would not have noticed that phone back there. We would not have known what to do except curse.

ONE OF THE FRIENDS  
(following with his eyes)

She's an odd one. She knows all right what to do in such cases. She's got a lot of experience. The fan belt. The generator. The bearings. Cars always break down when she is around.....

WITCH  
(has arrived at public phone. Dials a number, through receiver one hears phone ringing on other end of line.)

RECEIVER  
(enthusiastically cheerful woman's voice)

Hello! This is 27981

WITCH

Good morning, may I speak to Mr. Rossi, please?

RECEIVER  
(cheerfully)

Mr. Rossi is not in his office. He's very ill. Would you like to speak to his secretary?

WITCH

All right, put her on.

RECEIVER

Who is speaking, please?

WITCH

~~This is~~  
This is Mrs. Richie Calder speaking.

RECEIVER

Just a minute please

(turns to other person at other end of line)

Mrs. Richie Calder

OTHER VOICE

THROUGH RECEIVER

(distant, excited)

For Pete's sake, don't say that. Touch wood.  
Here. She's got the...She puts the jinx on things....  
It brings bad luck even to pronounce her name.

(clattering noise. Scared laughter. Then clear  
female voice through receiver)

RECEIVER

This is Mr. Rossi's secretary speaking. Can  
I help you?

WITCH

(tired, voice fading)

Mr. Rossi. You see. Our car broke down. You,  
on Mr. Rossi's behalf....

(Lights dimming. Witch leaves telephone booth  
Walks towards center of stage. Stage is almost  
dark. Only halloween costume, pieces of broken pots, flowers  
on door knocker, and a spare tire  
left on the ground by friends, give off a  
pale phosphorescent glow. One hears children's  
laughter.)

CHILDRENS VOICES

(tingling)

Aunt Witchie did something nasty. She missed the plane.

WITCH'S VOICE  
(from nowhere, through loudspeaker)

I don't know. I really don't understand

CHILDREN'S VOICES  
(silvery)

One is not supposed to miss one's plane

WITCH'S VOICE

After all: they'r making mountains out of mole hills

CHILDRENS VOICES

Aunt Witchie is bad  
(laughter)

WITCHES VOICE

I know, it's my fault.

CHILDREN'S VOICES  
(Squealing happily)

~~It would'n~~  
It wouldn't have fallen down if she had not missed it

WITCH'S VOICE

It must be my fault

CHILDREN'S VOICES  
(roaring with laughter)

Bad aunt witchie missed the plane

WITCH'S VOICE

It has always been my fault

WITCH  
(staring into void)

We might as well try. If I can do harm, let's try to do it where it does the most good.

(pensive)

That drunkard, that brute, that good-for-nothing  
that all but wrecked my life...

SALESWOMAN

(appearing from rear of stage, carrying a  
great wax figure of a man, dressed in gray  
flannel suit with a red tie, blond hair  
and very large blue eyes. The whole figure,  
including hair and clothing, is made of wax.  
Only the eyes are of celluloid.)

Here is the doll you ordered. And here are your  
snapshots

(holds up an envelope)

I have used four of them. Isn't that a cunning  
doll! The children will be thrilled. If this isn't  
the spitting image of Mr. Calder. Look. Compare.

(takes out photos)

Every single feature.

WITCH

A good job. Really quite a job. You sell a lot  
of these dolls?

SALESWOMAN

Round Christmas time. Small ones. With their  
own faces, you know, and replicas of their party  
dresses. They just love them.

WITCH

Well, thank. There

(pays her)

and good luck

(Witch drags big doll into center of stage  
drags in large, transparant glass cauldron  
filled with hot water. Lights fire below  
cauldron. Stage is dark, except for fire.  
Strange fumes. Odd color effects. Shadows  
leaping across stage. Thin piercing  
music. Witch is hovering behind cauldron  
which



begins to bubble and boil. She holds the doll affectionately in her arms.)

WITCH  
(talking to doll)

Well, Ralphie, you've brought it upon yourself. You've been a brutal husband and untrue. You've beat me up and driven me crazy. You've all but wrecked my life. Now it's my turn.

(She dips doll's feet into the boiling water. They dissolve. Slowly she immerses him deeper.)

If it works. It's just silly anyhow. But it doesn't hurt to try. Gee, how that wax comes alive in this heat. He's writhing. And sweating. He's actually crying. Poor guy

(takes doll out of cauldron, puts it on her lap, wipes its face, affectionately, with a handkerchief.)

Oh boy, what a mess. We better get through with it.

(Rises, immerses doll into cauldron, at first holding him by the shoulder, letting legs and rump dissolve, then dropping him, letting him float.)

Death will wonder with enchantment. Death will wonder.

(looking horrified at the bubbling brew)

Oh Lord, this isn't my cup of tea. Look, just the eyes are left, floating, rolling, gyrating, grimacing -- what a ghastly mess.

(screaming)

Stop looking at me like that, Ralph

(pushes cauldron toward rear of stage, where it disappears, cold factual lights

go on. Witch finds herself in court room.  
facing Judge, as in first scene.)

WITCH

I guess I was too **en**involved emotionally. At any rate, I never heard that anything at all happened to Ralph. He got nothing out of it at all.

JUDGE

Well, naturally, what would you expect?

WITCH

No, That was not my trick.

(Despondent)

I know what my trick was. I knew it for sure. It had been maturing within me during all that time. That's a terrible thing to happen to you, you know. I thought I was going crazy. I did not wantany of it. But it kept gnawing and gnawing. I was tired and listless and numb. And at last I yielded: telling myself it was the only way to prove, to myself, that the whole thing was nothing but a nightmare.

(narrating monotonously, automatically)

I went to the Airliner Company Inc. down on Seventh Street, and made my reservation. Flight 17, September 3. Then I slept. Some tea, some salt. I felt like licking salt. And bitters. And a cigarette. And I burned a hole into the sheets. Wish I had burned, burned to death, then and there. On the third of September I went shopping. I shopped ~~andly~~, I shopped gladly. Then I took a cab. Late. When I got to the airport, the plane had left. And crashed.

(pause)

You see? You see? I am responsible for both crashes. And I want to be tried. And punished. And punished.

JUDGE

But look. But listen

(enter attendant, from the left)

ATTENDANT

There's one more, your Honor, a lame little lady, and lurid.

JUDGE

What do you expect?

ATTENDANT

The pen's overpeopled

JUDGE

How can I

ATTENDANT

I conveyed her to the convent

(Exit Attendant, to right.)

WITCH

I have a right to be tried and judged and punished

JUDGE

There's no law against buying a ticket, against reserving a seat.

WITCH

The first crash may pass for manslaughter, you may ascribe it to negligence.

JUDGE

No law against missing a plane

WITCH

But the second crash -- that was premeditated

murder

JUDGE

No law whatsoever against missing a plane, by chance or on purpose

WITCH

I've killed eighty persons, and I have a right to be tried and judged and punished.

(lights dimmer, witch's face paler)

JUDGE

Everybody always is responsible. They want to carry the sins of the world

WITCH

(rises, kneels in front of judge)

Give ear to my supplication your Honor, on whose sentence all depends.

JUDGE

(looking far beyond her)

But I cannot lay my hands upon them. Their crimes exceed my competence.

WITCH

Full of terror I am and of dreadful fear of the sentence that fails to come on the day of judgement

JUDGE

Times have changed, my dear lady. It's beyond me. It's beyond me.

WITCH

(rising)

You, yourself, you travel sometimes, Judge,

don't you, By air, don't you?

JUDGE

I daresay, lady, I daresay.

WITCH

In spite of the Horror Hands, Your Honor, in spite of the Terror Scouts?

JUDGE

I think of them in the court room, lady, I think of them on the day of judgement, I don't think of them while I am flying.

WITCH

In spite of...me?

JUDGE

I think of you with pity, lady, I think of you with desire, maybe. I am not scared when I think of you. It's beyond me, lady.

WITCH

Maybe I'll buy a ticket, reserve a seat, some day, when you go flying.

JUDGE

I can't keep you from doing that, lady, not I

WITCH

Maybe I'll go shopping and miss my plane, your plane

JUDGE

I can't stop you, don't you see, I can't. Not for the life of me.

WITCH  
(afflicted)

What shall I do? Where shall I turn? I murdered, and the Judge does not deem me worthy of a hearing. You are cold, your Honor, you are most unkind. I came to confess and to be judged, and you don't bother. I came to save my soul, and you don't care. I came to free society of my sinister impulses, and you don't wish to understand.

JUDGE

It's the law, lady, there is no law.

WITCH

Against premeditated multiple murder. Against genocide. I have upset the laws of nature, and you are deaf to my pleading.

JUDGE

It's beyond me, lady, it's behind me

WITCH

I command unlawful powers. I've unleashed forbidden forces, and now that I have come to look for a force above my forces, for a power over my powers, for a law against my lawlessness, you betray me, you let me down. You leave me all alone on the path of further, inevitable, and dreadful destruction.

JUDGE

I have to stand on the law of the land and the law of the time. I have the Terror Scouts and the Horror Hands to cope with. Your story does not fit in here, dear lady, you've come to the wrong place, at the wrong time.

(Rings bell, enter attendant)

WITCH  
(in triumphant despair)

The jails are jammed! Lock me into the hall,  
herd me into the loft, convey me to the tower,  
toss me into the convent! I have a right to be  
judged and punished.

JUDGE

Will you accompany the lady to the door, please.  
I can find no fault with her. I have no power  
to hold her.

WITCH  
(crying)

Oh, if I knew, if I only knew the formula!

JUDGE

She's wasting my time. Show the lady to the door.  
The next, please.

C U R T A I N

SECOND ACT

(Adagio)

74.

(A church, not resembling that of any particular creed. On rear wall, a large television screen, on which a Mass-like function is projected, with altar boys going back and forth, carrying sacred objects up and down, etc. Flowers and candles are placed on both sides and below screen, Center stage is occupied by three rows of pews with worshipping men (left row), women (right row), and children, five to fifteen years of age (center row). In the foreground, at center, a confessional, very streamlined and shining, resembling the cabin of a cablecar. Left side of cabin is occupied by witch, who wears same costume as in first act, except for a black lace veil covering neatly combed hair. Right side of confessional is occupied by a Priest. His face is white and without features, giving relief to a pair of conspicuous glasses and a hearing aid, connected to a switchboard fastened onto the glass dividing cabin. He also has a telephone at his disposal within the cabin, as well as a tape recorder and some other indistinct but distinctly modern looking instruments. Portraits of similar priests with white, featureless faces, eyeglasses and hearing aids of various types, are placed along both side walls. Baroque gold frames bear inscriptions 1346-72; 1419-78; 1512-18, etc. Flowers and ribbons are lavishly displayed below portraits.)



WITCH

I shopped madly, I shopped  
gladly

Then I took a cab.  
Late

When I got to the airport

the plane had left

and crashed.

PRIEST

The ways of the Lord  
are unfathomable

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING MEN

Six-legged  
this Sunday rises  
toward heaven  
A Roman rider  
on six horses

Conquered,  
measure for measure

The farness  
severing ever  
humans from gods

By six days' labor  
We are nearer to you

MINISTER ON SCREEN  
(Cantus firmus)

In the name of the Lord

WITCH

Help me, Father, I have  
downed two planes. I am  
responsible for the loss of eighty  
lives. I command unlawful powers.  
Deliver me from this evil

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING CHILDREN

How lovely was our week  
We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling  
and if we sinned, we did not know it

PRIEST

A strange story, daughter,  
a strange tale

MINISTER ON SCREEN

Tremble o Satan

But your soul, child,  
is not guilty of murder.  
Your sin, so the gods help me,  
is presumption: presumption  
of guilt which no man has: for  
without the gods' consent does  
no sparrow fall from the tree,  
nor any plane from the sky

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING WOMEN

So green is their valley  
like bounteous jungle  
like garden of Eden  
We've tamed the snakes  
disinfected the apples  
thou art powerless

MINISTER ON SCREEN

1  
Though enemy of the faith

WITCH

It was I, it was all,  
but it was I  
I know my power  
I feel my guilt and  
fear the nameless temptation

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING MEN  
(forte)

We have rocked planets  
burnt suns to ashes

PRIEST

In the old days, daughter,  
power was poor  
power was frightening

We have undone time  
cancelled matter in speed

MINISTER ON SCREEN

Thou foe of mankind

but today  
supranatural powers  
are but natural

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING WOMEN

We've got hearts **g**icking with batteries  
killed sickness

willed by God  
if directed towards the good

made pain  
a thing of the past

MINISTER ON SCREEN

Who has brought death  
into this world

WITCH

But my powers are evil  
I have abused them and  
fear that I will abuse  
them again

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING WOMEN

blown oxygen into still lungs

caused curdled  
blood flow  
we've raised the dead

PRIEST

Daughter, I have had people  
brought in here, men, women,  
and children, with the devil in  
them, and I have exorcised him.  
But their tale wasn't like yours,  
they weren't like you. They were  
very plain people

Have you seen the Evil one,  
ever, in any form

A cat that jumped on your back  
and purred so strangely and kept  
you from breathing

MINISTER ON SCREEN

Who has deprived men of life

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING MEN

We have rocked planets  
burnt suns to ashes

We have undone time  
cancelled matter in speed

Has any man, woman, or child  
that you know of, put the spell  
on you

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING CHILDREN

HOW LOVELY WAS OUR WEEK

(first section)

We've stolen cars

(second section)

We've made love

(third section)

We've looted stores

WITCH

I don't know  
I know I am bad, I know  
I am nasty.  
And I can't resist

(all)  
(ritardando)

And those  
who told us  
not to do it

(fortissimo)

were just funny

MINISTER ON SCREEN

And hast rebelled  
against justice

PRIEST

I can impose on you  
ten prayers  
prayers of humbleness  
and a day of fasting  
and ask you to come  
again  
in a week  
and sing in the choir  
that is all

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING WOMEN

We'll drug their nerves  
inject sweet sleep  
condition their reflexes  
graft calf's lobes unto their brains

WITCH

At other times

(pauses)

YOU BURNED US  
Only the pyre...

MINISTER ON SCREEN

Thou seducer of mankind

PRIEST

other times, daughter,  
they were other times.  
I couldn't burn you,  
daughter, if I wanted to

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING WOMEN

How lovely was their week

WITCH

I have a right to...  
My soul has a right to...  
help me, father, help me

We selected the movies  
chose ~~funnies~~ and tapes elet  
We ordered camps and tours  
to keep them from otioseness

MINISTER ON SCREEN

Thou root of evil

PRIEST

Your tale is different,  
daughter, from the others.  
They are simple folk  
and sick  
with ticks and foam and trembling



CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING WOMEN

We've got hearts ticking with batteries  
killed sickness  
made pain  
a thing of the past

I can lay my hands on them  
and exorcise the evil one  
But you

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING MEN

We turn dirt into gold  
vice into money  
We extract wealth from air  
from sunlight and water

MINISTER ON SCREEN

Thou source of avarice  
discord and envy

WITCH

Do what you can do, father,  
help me. I am distressed and  
confused, Father. There is no  
limit to power, and there's no  
law. If you cannot burn me  
and exorcise the devil

lay your  
hands on me

PRIEST

W. | (shakes his head sadly,  
takes a deep breath)

I'll do my best

| (steps out of confessional:  
beckons witch to follow him;  
stands behind witch, moving  
arms ~~forth~~ back and forth over  
her shoulders; mumbles rapidly)

e1 | (disturbances on television screen.  
Fragmented images. Doubled and  
tripled images. UPSide-down images.  
cracking, hissing, and thundering  
noises. Chorus rises.)

I exorcise thee, unclean spirit;  
in the name of the Lord  
tremble oh Satan  
thou enemy of the faith  
thou foe of mankind  
who has brought death into the world  
who has deprived men of life  
and has rebelled against justice  
thou seducer of mankind  
thou root of evil  
thou source of avarice, discord and envy

(places hands on witch's  
shoulder. Witch begins to  
writhe, in trance, then to  
jump and dance wildly. Priest  
tries to keep after her, to  
lay hands on her shoulders,  
mumbling his formula)

(disturbances, as above)

WITCH

The <sup>steps</sup> steps, the stairs,  
don't stare at me like that Ralphie  
all alike  
fickle fackle fockle  
flying down the chairs  
flying flying

CHORUS OF  
WORSHIPPING CHILDREN

How lovely was our week  
We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling  
and if we sinned, we did not know it

With your robe  
as a parachute  
ha ha ha  
all alike  
when they fly  
so hard  
and I get them down  
all of them

CHILDREN  
(Exeunt, singing)

We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling

fickle fackle fockle  
awawawawawawawawaw  
yes, Ralphie, oh Ralphie, yes, yes

PRIEST

It's Lord Harry, oh, the filthy one  
I know him

! (Shakes his head incredulously)

I will exorcise thee

WITCH

! (slumps, then sits up, on floor,  
legs crossed, composedly)

Where am I? What? Oh

MEN AND WOMEN  
(Exeunt, singing)

Conquered  
measure for measure  
the farness  
severing ever  
humans from gods

PRIEST  
(without much conviction)

Come back, daughter,  
come back soon.  
I will exorcise the devil  
I will deliver you

By six days' labor  
We are nearer to you

C U R T A I N

THIRD ACT

Scene 1

(Psychiatrist's office. Walls are lined with books, portraits of world's great psychiatrists: FREUD and LEID, JUNG and ALT, ADLER and LAMM etc., with names and year of birth below. Center of room is occupied by desk, with all sorts of lamps on it. Comfortable armchairs. Couch. A basket with a cat and kittens in one corner. Psychiatrist sits behind desk. Witch, in armchair, on right side of desk.)

WITCH

Twice, after that, I just pretended to get hypnotized: weaker each time and less convincing. The third time I gave up and stayed calm. The good priest said, the devil had left me now. He gave me his blessings and sent me home.

PSYCHIATRIST

And your devil was still with you, is still with you

WITCH

Nothing had changed at all. I felt as miserable as ever about the eighty lives I had taken... I enquired into each one of them...there were children among them, small children, on their way to a new home in Israel, and a ~~xxxx~~ teen-ager who was supposed to see Paris.....And I felt, I feel, as tempted as ever to do it again....

PSYCHIATRIST

and you really want me to help you

WITCH

The law let me down. I wish they had hanged me.

The church let me down. I wish they had burned me.

(weeps)

PSYCHIATRIST

I will not let you down. I will be cruel with you. I will hurt you.

WITCH

I can't go on living this way

PSYCHIATRIST

Of course you can: Why should you now. I'll be cruel, I'll hurt you:

You live with a doubt, an uncertainty, a fear. Why should you not. There is no truth, no certainty, no security. We all have to live with doubts, uncertainties, and fears.

(gets up, opens a door, returns to his chair.)

You have a gun in your hands. You know, if you aim it at someone and pull the trigger, that someone will die. Don't pull the trigger. Learn to live with your gun.

WITCH

If it were just a gun. It is a power I don't understand, don't you see, that is what scares me so.

PSYCHIATRIST

There are lots of powers we don't understand, or maybe are just beginning to understand, or maybe will never understand. Learn to live with your power. We all have to learn to live with our powers.

WITCH

So you tell me....You do not tell me, "it's all your sick imagination," you don't tell me, "it's just chance," you don't tell me....

(sries)

PSYCHIATRIST

(taking her hand)

You wouldn't believe it if I told you, would you

WITCH

I don't know

~~PSY~~

PSYCHIATRIST

It does not really matter much either. What is real in your imagination, is real to you; that is the reality we have to deal with. That is the reality you have to understand and to live with

WITCH

But if I wickedly murdered, I should be punished.  
I wish they had hanged me.  
I wish they had burned me.  
Only the pyre...

(soft, incredulous)

But if I didn't, really,  
I should be cured...

PSYCHIATRIST

All wicked people are insane and should be cured  
All insane people are wicked and should be punished  
Come on now

(Witch stretches out on couch, relaxes)



WITCH

I dreamed I had to cross a wide ocean  
to get there  
in a boat as small as a nutshell  
alone  
and without compass

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
aren't we all crossing wide oceans  
each one of us in a nutshell  
alone

WITCH

without compassion

PSYCHIATRIST

anybody's

WITCH

I dreamed I'd lost the way to  
somewhere  
and when I wanted to ask a man  
the name,  
the name slipped my mind  
I did not know what to ask for  
I didn't know where I was going  
I didn't know where I wanted to go

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
Aren't we all walking a road  
just because we are on it  
and we don't know where we are going  
and we don't know where we want to go

WITCH

I dreamed I was flying down the stairs  
of the school

flight after flight  
it was heavenly and it was scary  
but I could not get down any other way  
and it was against the law of the school

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
Forbidden flights are heavenly and scary  
and the law of the school is for children  
and you stopped being a child

WITCH

I dreamed I traipsed into the air  
piddling step by piddling step  
offground  
I trod the windlike water  
with nowhere to emerge for breathing

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
You like flying, don't you  
and you'd ~~pay~~ be willing to pay the price,  
any price  
in gasping, choking, but no ground underfoot

(Psychiatrist rises, opens a window. Turns  
on table lamp. Twists leg so as to focus  
beam on witch's pale face. Inserts many-  
colored screen in front of light.)

PSYCHIATRIST

Before the...  
When you went shopping, what did you do?  
How did you feel?

WITCH

I shopped like a bride  
I shopped like a mother

(Light slowly turns red. Witch glows warmer)

A rocking horse with real fur, and an INdian

tent with a camp fire. A puppet theater with a deep stage and settings for half a dozen favorite plays, and sceneries for the electric train. And a wetting mamma doll and a zoo. All the things I always wanted to have. And this suit, and a strapless bra I spent a lot of money. All the money I knew I would not need on the trip I would not take

PSYCHIATRIST

You were envious of the people who fly because you missed the...plane

(Light turns blue)

WITCH

They are vulgar people. They are cold people. They spoil your flight. They take it for granted. They know neither fear nor joy.

PSYCHIATRIST

The children, too?

WITCH

They're born old. They are spoiled. I would not want to be bothered with them.

(Psychiatrist turns off lamp, gets up, sits down on couch, takes witch's hand, examines her pulse.)

PSYCHIATRIST

Are they all like that? Why do you say that

(Pause)

WITCH

I dreamed I was expecting a baby and the pains had started and the baby

was about to be born  
and then the pains stopped  
and I went about in town  
running errands. And I was wondering  
about the aby  
which was probably dead

PSYCHIATRIST

(stroking her hair)

Did you dream of me, you did, didn't you

WITCH

(shakes her head, startled)

I did not.

PSYCHIATRIST

I didn't help you, with the baby, I didn't  
have a watch, a compass, a propeller, a light?

WITCH

You have never been of any help

PSYCHIATRIST

You just don't remember. Try to remember

WITCH

I've tried. I've done my best. I wanted you to help me,  
really. But I begin to despair. Psychiatrists are going  
out of fashion. Our Comrander...

PSYCHIATRIST

You care for our Comrander, don't you

WITCH

I dream of him while I fall asleep. He could  
help me. Only he could help me. But after the

twilight of half-sleep he slips away, and my dreams are bitter and empty as are my days, and I can never get near him, for there are myriads of cops and bureaucrats. It's just at the moment of falling asleep...

(enthusiastic)

He will make us all great and happy

(mysterious, approaching psychiatrist's ear, shielding voice with hand)

He has the SAME power... The crash of September 3, we did it TOGETHER... the JUDGE TOLD ME...He missed his plane ON PURPOSE....just the way I did...

#### PSYCHIATRIST

(sorrowful)

Mrs. Calder, our Comrander won't help you

(looking around for eventual eavesdroppers)

He isn't much help to anybody. He'll get murdered eventually

(louder)

It's just a projection of yours, a construction, another evasion

(kisses her)

I love you, Richie. What you need is love

#### WITCH

Don't do that. <sup>It</sup> is not nice. Stop it

(ravished)

I'd die for our Comrander. With him I would...  
For him I would....

PSYCHIATER

(affectionately)

Comraders are going to go our of fashion...

I won't let you down like the judge  
I won't let you down like the priest  
I will love you with healing love

WITCH

Stop it

PSYCHIATER

Your wellbeing will be my felicity

WITCH

Don't do that

PSYCHIATRIST

I will show you. I will teach you  
I want you to purr like a kitten  
that will be your declaration of love

(gets up, fetches kitten from basket, puts  
it in witch's arms)

Do you know what I mean?  
I wait for her, at night  
till she bounces up, softly,  
in her cattish way, and settles  
on my chest and purrs,  
purrs out of proportion to her size  
purrs...like an airplane,  
and tells me, in her cattish way,  
that she feels well,  
she feels well in my presence.  
That is all. The rest does not count.  
Do you see what I mean?

WITCH

(caresses kitten, then draws back, disturbed)

The priest said...it probably was the root of all...that purred so strangely...the guilt... the crime... the evil one....

PSYCHIATRIST

I don't think so, Richie. I really don't think so. Listen to me. The judge. The priest. The Comrander. I'll heal you into a new era. For you. For me. For all. I'll help you. I'll heal you. I'll loveyou.

WITCH

Stop it. It is not nice

(withdraws into corner. sitting up, legs crossed. Hard)

And we have to learn to live in our own era. I will show you. I will teach you....I live and die for our Comrander.

(Psychiatrist rises. Kitten escapes. Psychiatrist opens another door. Returns to his desk, turns on lamps, focuses light on witch, from red to blue to green to yellow. Then he floods entire room with cold daylight.)

PSYCHIATRIST

(matter-of-factly)

The case is quite clear now. An example of complete disorientation and insecurity. Aren't we all totally disoriented and insecure. You looked for an anchor in marriage -- who would not try? -- and failed. We all have failed. Hence a feeling of guilt, frustrated desire, and envy. We all have it. You reverted to childhood. You mixed up thought and action. You wishfully fancied powers to magnify your guilt. Again, you looked for a law to condemn you, to absolve you thereby of your responsibility. You looked for a secular law; you looked for an eternal law; and you found neither. None of us ever finds it. Life would be so much easier if we did, wouldn't it though

WITCH

But the planes....crashed

PSYCHIATRIST

That is, of course, pure coincidence. You know that now. One out of every 20,000 planes crashes. Obviously it had nothing to do with your missing it; you were just very lucky, that is all.

WITCH

But the second plane, too...crashed

PSYCHIATRIST

The second plane, just like the first, had one chance against 20,000 of crashing. That the crash should have coincided with the same set of circumstances on your part as the first, is, I must admit, rather strange. The odds for that to happen were, I think, something like one against four hundred million. You played on a very big roulette; life is a very big roulette; but your number came up all right. That is all.

WITCH

But I can do it again....



PSYCHIATRIST

Don't be absurd, Richie. The chances, for the third time, would be something like

(figures it out on paper)

like one against eight trillions. This is a chance we can take.

(Rises, animated)

On the contrary. Listen, love: this is part of the cure the doctor is prescribing to you. Tomorrow you get your ticket for whatever flight you wish, and then you go through your usual acts.

WITCH

But, Doctor, you don't know what you are doing. I know I will bring it down. I will heap disaster upon disaster....It's going to crash. What millions, billions, trillions. I act on the roulette of death. The balls are loaded.

PSYCHIATRIST

Will you obey my order? This is a step...an important step...towards your recovery. I, your doctor, I take the responsibility. It's only one chance out of eight trillions. I can assume that responsibility. Anybody could.

^ (see scenario in script)

WITCH

You break my heart. You make my heart rejoice

PSYCHIATRIST

And to show you how absolutely certain I am of the soundness of my advice, of the rightness of my position, I will be on the plane. I will fly for you

^ (sounds very convincing)

WITCH

I will never see you again

(pensively)

I feel sorry for you. You have been far kindlier than the rest of the lot

PSYCHIATRIST  
(encouraged)

Richie, if I bring this extreme sacrifice for you, to show you....if I fly for you....to tell you how much.....

WITCH  
(hard)

I live and die for our Comrander. He'll give us what we do not have; he is what we are not

PSYCHIATRIST

I have never looked through a patient the way I look through you; I have never loved a patient as much as I love you. Richie, do not send me into the cold space without a warming glimmer of hope ..If I bring this extreme sacrifice, Richie, if I come back, will you love me?

C U R T A I N

Scene II

( Stage is occupied by half of a life-sized airplane. Tail is left, propeller, right side, left wing points towards rear of stage. Plane is cut in half, lengthwise, section coinciding with stage ramp. Audience sees corridor running through center of plane, left row of seats, left door (open) and, through it, bridge and stairs to airport. Plane is empty, except for Steward and Stewardess standing by open door to receive passengers. Traffic of passengers, baggage cars, under wing. It is dark. Cabin lights are on. Side, rear, and top of stage are covered by vaulted screen, forming concave quarter sphere, on which camera projects dark outlines of airport buildings, etc., and sky.)

(Enter aged couple)

STEWARDESS

Your boarding cards, please. There. May I have your coats. Take number 3 and 5. I hope you will enjoy your trip.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, it's good to sit down. We are tired, the departure has been an awful strain.

OLD MAN

Now there's time to get rested.

(they go to their seats. Enter businessman with bulging briefcase, portable typewriter and portable dictaphone.)

STEWARD

Good evening sir, your boarding card. May I take your....

BUSINESSMAN

(moody)

Noooo. I need the stuff right there, what do you think I have got time to waste on your lousy plane. Half an hour late. That's a lousy plane, that's a lousy service.

STEWARD

Number seven, please go ahead. I hope you will enjoy your trip.

(Enter modest couple with three small children)

STEWARDESS

Good evening, good evening. Your boarding cards, please. Hi, honey, first time on a plane?

LITTLE GIRL

Gee, that's beautiful

LITTLE BOY

it looks like a fish. It looks like a submarine  
It's got bull's eyes, like a ship

LITTLE GIRL

Has it a kitchen? Where is the toilet

(Enter psychiatrist, carrying raincoat over his arm)

STEWARDESS

Good evening. Your boarding card. May I take your raincoat? You won't need it any more.

MODEST MOTHER

(to psychiatrist)

We're on our way to Israel. My cousin has land there. We're going to work.

MODEST FATHER

What a break. Like starting a new life. That's  
a clean cut, from one world to another.

(Enter mother with twelve-year-old boy)

STEWARDESS

Your boarding cards, please

(They occupy seats next to psychiatrist.)

(Enter elegant lady carrying hat-box, and  
teen-age girl)

STEWARDESS

Good evening. Your boarding cards. May I take  
your box. Your seats are number 13 and 15.

ELEGANT LADY

(pointing to teen-age girl)

She is going to see Paris for the first time.  
Paris. Isn't she lucky.

(Enter couple with small boy carrying cage  
with kitten.)

STEWARD

Let me take that, honey. He'll have to go to the  
baggage room

LITTLE BOY

No, he's going to stay with me

STEWARD

You can't take it with you, kid. It'll have to  
go to the baggage room. We'll take good care  
of him.

LITTLE BOY

No, no, no. I'll keep him, let me go

STEWARD

Sorry, but you can't take him with you into the cabin. . . You sleep well, and tomorrow morning you get him back. We'll take good care of him.

(Steward takes cage. Screaming little boy is taken to his seat.)

(Enter old lady on crutches, accompanied by nurse.)

STEWARDESS

Good evening. Your boarding card. Thank you. I'll get you an extra cushion. I'll get you a blanket. I'm sure you'll be comfortable.

OLD LADY

You are so kind. It does not really matter. I hope I'll be able to sleep. I want to sleep long. I am longing to sleep.

(Enter movie-star, wearing dark glasses and head-scarf. Accompanied by maid carrying three fur-coats.)

STEWARDESS

There we are. Glad to have you on board. Got you a nice quiet place in the corner.

(Movie-star hurries to her seat. Hides behind big open newspaper, showing headline "OUR COMMANDER INAUGURATING/...")  
Steward slams door. Bridge is rolled away.  
Motors are set in motion. Rumbling of engines will accompany action through rest of scene.)

VOICE OF STEWARDESS  
(through loudspeaker)

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, this is Miss White, your stewardess, welcoming you on board. Will you please fasten your seatbelts. First of all, we wish to explain to you the delay in taking off: it is due to unfavorable reports from the aeronautical weather bureau. There have been depressions and high winds, and in order to avoid these as far as possible, the departure has been delayed and the route has been changed. We are now flying at an altitude of twelve thousand feet. Your Captain is Mr. Boatman. We hope you will enjoy your stay on board "The Giant." Dinner will be served as soon as we are out of the port zone. If you have any need or desire, please tell your stewardess. Thank you.

BUSINESSMAN  
(in front of plane)

It's a lousy plane, it's a lousy service.

PSYCHIATRIST

It's wonderful how well organized they are nowadays, how carefully weather reports and routes are worked out. If you think how many cars crash on account of fog or slippery roads, and dilettantish piloting. But here, the chances are one against twenty thousand against crashing. To speak the truth, I have studied the odds of this particular flight, according to the law of probability, the chances of crashing for this plane on this flight are one against eight trillions....

LADY ON NEXT SEAT  
(a little startled)

Yes, yes, I know, it is a negligible chance.

LITTLE BOY  
(seated between psychiatrist and lady)

What's that bad for, Mammy, may I bust it?

LADY

Put it right back where you took it from.  
There is one in the back of every seat...in  
case people have to vomit

(describes function of bag with an appropriate  
gesture. Psychiatrist shakes off a fit of  
nausea. Wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.)

VOICE OF STEWARDESS  
(through loudspeaker)

Your life belts are under your seats. In case of  
emergency, break the glass covering the emergency  
door. Smash your way out, in case of emergency

BUSINESSMAN  
(from his seat)

It's a lousy plane, it's a lousy service. Half  
an hour late, and nothing to drink yet....

ANOTHER CHILD

May I open the window, Dad?

FATHER

One can't open windows on planes, dear. They  
must be shut tight tight tight. There's a terrible  
wind outside: that air pressure is something. If  
one of these windows broke by mistake, you'd  
be sucked right out of the plane by the suction.

(Psychiatrist gasps for air. Stewardess  
begins to serve dinner trays, in front  
of plane.)

LADY NEXT TO PSYCHIATRIST  
(to little boy)

You are going to get your homework done before  
we get off this plane, dear.

(to psychiatrist)



This is my chance, you know. I never can get hold of him. He'd run out from any place. I guess, if we took a boat, he would jump into the water, to get away from his home work. But here he can't get away! Totally shut in! Closed airtight!

(Psychiatrist gasps for air)

LADY  
(to little boy)

Now tell me, how is that, a point...a line is defined by how many points...a plane is defined... by how many points?

LITTLE BOY

Do n't know

PSYCHIATRIST  
(pulling himself together)

Maybe I can help you. Take a point

(fixes point on piece of paper)

Through that point, you can pass an infinite number of lines, an infinite number of planes. From all directions. Free, infinite.

(draws)

See what I mean? Now, here are two points. Through these two points you can draw only one single straight line. The line is fixed. Nailed into position. No fiddling. Now, of course, you still can turn the line, on the spot, around itself, and this way you can pass an infinite number of planes through the two points -- all the infinite planes that make up...a cylinder. The planes that you can pass through two points are less infinite than the planes you can pass through one point -- all the planes in the world -- but they are still infinite. Now take three points. There. The plane is fixed. It cannot move any more. Only one single plane can pass through these three

points. Immovable. Fixed. Nailed to the spot.

(gasps)

Now I am afraid, if the plane is fixed, the volume is fixed, because it consists of an infinite number of parallel planes. And if the volume is fixed, the time is fixed

(beside himself)

Three times does it!

(poking three holes into the paper)

No getting away from it

(covers his mouth with a handkerchief)

I think I better go and have a little walk

(rises, walks towards front of plane)

LITTLE BOY

Mummy, that man is strange

LADY

He seems very nervous, the poor gentleman; maybe it's the first time he's on a plane, and he does not like it.

LITTLE GIRL

(in front of plane)

Why does that man get goose-liver, and we don't?

HEATHER

because he is a first-class passenger, and we are not.

LITTLE GIRL

What's that, a first-class passenger? Aren't we

all travelling on the same plane?

FATHER

He gets goose-liver, and we don't.

LITTLE GIRL

Is that all?

FATHER

I think he is allowed to take more baggage,  
a heavier load

LITTLE GIRL

What heavier load?

FATHER  
(laughing)

The first-class people go to heaven with a heavier  
baggage. We travel lighter

(Psychiatrist, his mouth covered with handkerchief,  
returns to his seat)

VOICE OF STEWARDESS  
(through loudspeaker)

We are now flying over the river Styx.

PSYCHIATRIST  
(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

She said, we are now flying over the river Minx.

(Looking through window)

Look, honey, what a pretty blue ribbon. And there,

the people waiting, like ants. They are waiting  
for the ferryman, they are waiting for the ferry.  
And we just fly across it. Aren't we lucky.

BUSINESSMAN

(from his seat, poking with his fork in his  
goose-liver)

It's lousy food. It's a lousy plane

WITCH'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

We are now flying over the mountains. We are  
flying over the crevice the earthquake tore. 7  
We are passing the limit. We are now about to  
leave this world.

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

She said, we crossed the frontier, we left the  
country.

LITTLE BOY

They speak another language down there,  
don't they, nobody can understand us there

WITCH'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

Forbidden flights are heavenly and scary

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

(somewhat worried)

Nobody said nothing. Are you perhaps not feeling

too well?

PSYCHIATRIST

(wipes his face with handkerchief, gasps.)

SMALL CHILD

(trotting up along corridor)

I want my kitten, where's my kitten

(mother takes him back to his seat)

STEWARD'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

We are now passing through a zone of high fall winds and airpockets. Will you please fasten your seatbelts. Fasten your seatbelts, please.

(In front of plane, light signal FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS. All passengers busy fastening their seatbelts.)

PSYCHIATRIST  
(rises)

Oh no! It's too much! I can't, I can't

STEWARDESS

(with witch's hair, witch's face, witch's voice, walks up next to his seat)

Sir, will you please fasten your seatbelt.

PSYCHIATRIST

No, I can't.

STEWARDESS

The regulations, Sir, please fasten your seatbelt

PSYCHIATRIST

(sits, writhes in his seat, jumps up again)

No! Please! I can't!

(Steward walks up behind psychiatrist's seat)

STEWARDESS

The gentleman refuses to fasten his seatbelt

STEWARD

You will get yourself into trouble with the law, Sir. We will have to denounce you to the airport authorities. We will have to strap

(keeps standing behind him, awkwardly hiding a straitjacket behind his back)

STEWARDESS

I will give you a little something to calm you down. It's nothing.

STEWARD

You know, our Comrander gives the greatest importance to matters of public order and discipline. Fasten your seatbelt now. It's the regulation.

STEWARDESS

You know our Comrander is proud of the good functioning of his airline.

STEWARD

Will you please fasten your seatbelt now or else...

STEWARDESS

...Our Comrander...

(Psychiatrist screams, grabs bread-knife from a tray, stabs at steward and stewardess, runs forward through plane, stabbing and

slashing left and right, screaming. He cuts  
some wires, lights go out. He opens door  
to cockpit. Screams, confusion. Motors  
are rumbling and coughing. Sky, on screen,  
begins to rock and turn.)

VOICE  
(through loudspeaker)

Attention, attention. A madman has cut the electric  
wiring. Your life belts are under your seats. We  
are preparing a crash landing.

(Confusion is mounting. Noises, broken glasses,  
screams. Motors are roaring. Sky is turning.  
Glare of fire.)

C U R T A I N

ONLY THE PYRE

---

by

Elisabeth Mann Borgese

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*return to,*  
~~LIESL FRANK MITTLER  
MÜNCHEN 22 - MAXIMILIANSTRASSE 3~~



PERSONAGES

Mrs. Richie Walder, perhaps a witch

Judge

Priest

Psychiatrist

An attendant

Mr. Brewster

Mrs. Brewster

Two Brewster children

Minister on screen and attendants

Chorus of worshipping men

Chorus of worshipping women

Chorus of worshipping children

A kitten

Steward

Hostess

Passengers: An aged couple

Businessman

Modest couple with three children

Mother with twelve-year-old boy

Elegant lady with teen-age girl

Couple with small boy carrying kitten

Old lady on crutches

Nurse

Movie-star with maid.

## FIRST ACT

(Small bells. Like Chairman's, adjourning meeting. Like sacristan's, announcing celebration of Mass. Large bells, like church bells, like storm bells. A shriek, a siren. Long-heaving rhythms of breaking waves and waves and waves, and crashing rain. Curtain. The stage is dark. Camera <sup>Projector</sup> projects crowds on rear wall, billowing out of court room, graying, fading into waves, as lights go on, dimly, on Judge's desk, <sup>25</sup> on left side of stage. Door on left wall, rear. Door on right wall, rear.

Judge rises, in cap and gown. His face is white, without features, <sup>giving relief</sup> giving relief to a pair of conspicuous eye-glasses and a hearing aid. Identical figures, in varying poses, in cap and gown and with white, featureless faces blending with background, with heavily rimmed glasses and hearing aids of various types, are represented <sup>on</sup> on paintings behind Judge's desk and on opposite wall; numerous gold frames are marked with dates (1882-1909; 1902-1908; 1914-1927; etc.) Pictures are lavishly decorated with flags and flowers. Right center of room is occupied by one row of court-room benches with tables. Witch, alone, is seated at center of row. Elbows planted on desk, face buried in hands. Long flaxen hair flows down over her face and hands, forming smooth puddle on desk; witch is wearing elegant travelling suit, blouse with open V-neck collar. Witch rises. Shakes back her hair. Bares tear-reddened eyes. Steps forward.)

WITCH

(with forced formality)

Your Honor, I beg your pardon if I take <sup>up</sup> some of your valuable time. But I have some information bearing on the crashes of the New York-Paris Flight 8 of June 17, and of the Jdannon Schwannon Flight 17 of September 3.

JUDGE

One at a time, please. We are investigating the September 3 crash.

WITCH

I am responsible for both.

JUDGE

lady, you are the sixth, today. Everybody always is responsible when a thing like that comes up. They all want their pictures in the papers. They want the headlines. They want their necks wrung.

WITCH

I have a right to be heard, and judged, and punished.

JUDGE

And punished. For what?

WITCH

I get them down. Crashing in flames. Cutting roof tops. Missing <sup>the</sup> sea. I sever wireless connections. I snip the threads of life. I sow havoc and harvest <sup>see</sup> tragedy.

JUDGE

Now, lady, lady.

WITCH

Will you hear me? Will you judge me? Will you

punish me?

JUDGE

I think you've come to the wrong place, lady.

WITCH

I have a right to be heard, and judged, and punished.

(Enter attendant, through left door.)

ATTENDANT

Two more, your Honor, male and female. Locked in the last left. They say they have the proof. They say they have the key.

(Exit, through right door.)

JUDGE

Come on now, lady. Your name?

WITCH

My name.

(Takes a slight bow. Opens her arms as though introducing herself.)

JUDGE

Your birthday?

WITCH

My birthday.

(Laughs)

JUDGE

You were born in?

WITCH

I was born in.

(takes a slight bow, opens her arms)

JUDGE

Your marital status?

WITCH

My marital status.

(wiggles obscenely)

JUDGE

Your profession.

WITCH

My profession.

(nods pensively)

JUDGE

How long have you been associated with the  
Terror Scouts?

WITCH

Associated with what? What do you mean?

JUDGE

*planted*  
(impatient)

They put up the bomb that blew up the plane, the  
Terror Scouts, you know.

WITCH

(knowingly)

Maybe yes, maybe no. It would be, at any rate,  
purely coincidental.

JUDGE

They blow up his planes, they poison his mess.  
Some day they'll take our Commander's life: They mean  
business.

WITCH

(Contemptuously)

The Commander wasn't even on the plane.

JUDGE

Did you know he was not going to be on the plane?

WITCH

I didn't know he was supposed to be on it. I didn't  
know he wasn't on it. I didn't know...

JUDGE

(impatient)

What do you want here, then?

WITCH

I said I am responsible for the crash and I want to be heard, and judged, and punished.

JUDGE

Everybody always is responsible when a case like <sup>this</sup> that comes up. They want their pictures in the papers. They want the headlines.

(Enter attendant, from left door)

ATTENDANT

There are three more, your Honor, three more. A boy and two girls. I herded them into the hall. They say they are Horror-hands. They made the bomb.

(Exit, through right door.)

JUDGE

If they tell you they've written the Divine Comedy, no one listens. If they tell you they have committed murder, they may get away with it. They want to carry the sins of the world. They're fed up. They're phonies.

WITCH

Oh, your Honor, my honor

JUDGE

It's a sad story, lady, and old. The plane was scheduled to take off from Idannon, with our Comander aboard. It was a top secret, but the Terror-Scouts got hold of it, and maybe the Horror-Hands, and they managed to smuggle the bomb <sup>in</sup> with the baggage. Our Comander cancelled his flight --- nobody knew he would --- and <sup>he</sup> travelled, safely incognito, on another plane. Flight 17 blew up on schedule. And forty-three hapless travellers sped to eternity.

WITCH

(Aside, agitated)

Our Commander. So help me heaven. Our Commander,  
I've got to talk to our Commander. He alone...  
Together...<sup>it</sup> may be spreading already...it may be  
too late. Oh, help. I want...to be heard...and  
judged...and punished.

JUDGE

Make up your mind, lady. You say you did not know  
of our Commander's plans. You didn't know about the  
plot, <sup>and</sup> that the plot <sup>missed</sup>. And yet...

WITCH

(serenely)

Your honor, my honor. Hear, judge, and punish.

(pauses)

(Arioso)

I was about to take the plane out of New York.  
My reservation had been made weeks in advance...  
You know how it is, that <sup>part</sup> of the year...  
I was all packed, ~~up~~ and had sent a cable to the  
Browsters in Paris, asking them kindly to come  
to the airport and get me...I've still got the  
cable; they kept it for me...But then something  
happened. I slipped up somewhere. Bungled last-  
minute improvisations. The shopping in town:  
too alluring. The traffic: impenetrable. When I  
got to the airport at last, the counter was empty,  
the gates were closed. "Sorry," they said, "we <sup>have</sup>  
waited for you, but the plane had to leave on schedule.  
You know you should be here at least thirty minutes  
before the departure. Your passport, your ticket, and

here is a message for you. You forgot your furcoat at the hotel. We are sorry. We shall try to transfer you to another plane, to another line, leaving tonight."

I cursed and I laughed.

(Rises. Walks slowly towards background of stage. Stage lights are dimming, court room disappears.)

And when I got to Paris, I learned that the plane -- my plane -- had crashed, and crew and passengers had perished to the last man.

(Lights focus on round lunch table in the Brewsters' home. The Brewster family -- middle-aged Mr. Brewster, conventional; pretty Mrs. Brewster, conventional; and two conventional children: a boy of about ten and a girl of about 4, in a highchair, are sitting around the table. Witch, carrying in one hand a blue suitcase over-night bag, holding, with the other, her ailing forehead, pale, exhausted, drifts halting towards empty chair at right side of Mr. Brewster. Slumps down. Glum silence.)

MR. BREWSTER

Dear, dear.

MRS. BREWSTER

A close call.

WITCH

I feel dizzy. I feel like I walked across the ocean, and that it was covered with a thin crust of ice.

MRS. BREWSTER

I can't believe you are with us, dear. We didn't get your second cable till late.



MR. BREWSTER

And they had your name on the passenger list, of course they had.

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

So we were absolutely sure you were on that plane.

MRS. BREWSTER

(brings a tray with a cocktail glass on it)

Here, darling, have a drink; a stiff one; you need it.

WITCH

When they told me, first, that the plane had left, it gave me the funniest feeling down in my stomach. And I thought: that plane is going to crash. That's why I missed it.

MR. BREWSTER

That's what you think now, dear.

MRS. BREWSTER

That's always the way it goes. You never know when you thought of a thing first, if you thought it, and then it happened, too.

WITCH

No, no. I really thought: that plane is going to crash. I even told the Smiths, when I called them ~~up~~ from the airport, to let them know that I missed the plane. I told them: "Shall we bet that plane is going to crash? I bet you." Of course we were all kidding. "Aren't you sweet," Harry said. "What a gentle thought"....I wonder what they said when they read the news.

MR. BREWSTER

A lucky gal, that's what they said.

MRS. BREWSTER

A close call that was. Dear, dear.

MR. BREWSTER

The gods must love you.

MRS. BREWSTER

Oh, this flying business. They keep telling you the chances of a mishap are minimal, negligible... but then, there you are, Forty at a time.

MR. BREWSTER

We are all <sup>suffering</sup> under ~~the impression~~ of this shock now, but, really, it's useless to think of such things. When your hour has struck, it may be a plane that does it, ~~that executes the order~~, or a disease no one would have suspected; or the famous brick falling from the roof; when your hour has struck. But when it has not... You go travel on any plane, brave any storm; have bullets whiz around you on the battlefield, <sup>(I did)</sup>, and yet <sup>you</sup> feel just as safe as in Abraham's bosom. If your hour hasn't struck...

MRS. BREWSTER

You have so much left to do, Richie, and so many people who need you. That would have been a mean trick, Richie, just to go and crash.

(turning to the younger child)

Eat your spinach now, Wally.

YOUNGER CHILD

I don't want my spinach. It isn't my spinach anyway.

MRS. BREWSTER

(takes a heaping spoon of spinach, makes it travel toward child's mouth, accompanying gesture with a humming sound.)

Mmmmmmm there comes the plane, with aunt Richie on it Ssssssss, open your mouth, Wally, so the

plane can get into the hangar. That's the girl.

YOUNGER CHILD

Ugh, ugh.

MRS. BREWSTER

We won't let aunt Richie's plane crash, will we!

YOUNGER CHILD

(shakes her head; wide-eyed)

Aunt Witchie's planes don't fall down, do they?

OLDER CHILD

Maybe, if she hadn't missed the plane, maybe it wouldn't have fallen.

YOUNGER CHILD

'cause God loves her so.

MRS. BREWSTER

Finish your spinach, Wally.

MR BREWSTER

(offers highballs)

Well, well, this is a big day, Richie. Let's pour some good whiskey over it. Destiny does not demonstrate every day that you are her favorite daughter.

YOUNGER CHILD

Is it true, daddy, that the plane wouldn't have fallen down if aunt Witchie hadn't missed it?

(light turning greener, faces turning wanner and paler)

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

Thank goodness she missed it!

WITCH

(rising)

It's an evil thing to miss a plane. You may miss a team, a bus, even a train. But to miss your plane,

is immoral.

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

Ha, ha, ha. Immoral. What do you mean? immoral.

WITCH

I mean, it's immoral to miss one's plane. Culpable.  
I feel guilty.

MR. BREWSTER

Now who has ever heard of such a thing. There she's  
evidently graced; protected; her hour has not struck;  
she's just darn lucky --- and feels guilty at that...

(The three grown-ups are drinking. The con-  
versation is getting more excited, more  
confused. The audience catches fragments,  
like the following:)

CONFUSED VOICES

I never felt so terrible in my life. It was a horrid  
shock to all of us. Because it's absolutely impossible  
to understand a thing like that. Impossible. Understand.  
Impossible. A thing like that. What do you care? A thing  
like that. Drink your milk, Wally. You are alive. Children,  
don't be so noisy. It's grace. It's punishment. Horrible  
punishment. Irresponsible. It's immoral to miss one's  
plane. Immoral is what is immoral. Don't dig in your  
nose, honey, you're too old. Hour not struck. Abraham's  
bosom. Kids, you are a mess. I can't accept the idea that  
a thing like this has no meaning...

(Also the children are getting more excited.  
They drive their forks and spoons through  
the air. They hum like planes. They bang  
and clash them together. They let them fall  
Noise and laughter.)

YOUNGER CHILD

(speaking with delight)

Aunt witchie did something nasty! She missed the  
plane! <sup>she</sup> ~~she~~ is not supposed to miss <sup>one's</sup> ~~one's~~ plane!  
Bad aunt Witchie! Zooooom! It wouldn't have fallen  
down crasherasherasherash if she hadn't missed it,  
nasty aunt Witchie!

(They rear with laughter.)

(Noise is fading, lights are dimming, the Brewster  
home disappears in the dark. Witch, lights focused  
on her deathly pale face, returns to court room.)

JUDGE

They're only children. They were only <sup>having</sup> kidding.  
You were exhausted. You were out of your mind.

WITCH

It kept gnawing <sup>at</sup> on me. If I hadn't missed the plane,  
it would not have fallen.

(Enter attendant)

ATTENDANT

Two more, Your Honor: a little old man and a  
child. They say they are Horror Hands. They  
say they are Terror Scouts....The jails are  
jammed, your Honor. I tossed them into the  
tower. They say....

(Exit attendant)

WITCH

A change came over me after that. They told me:  
You look ill, <sup>A</sup>ichie, you should have a rest.  
How she's grown old and sinister, they whispered  
behind my back. I investigated the causes of the  
crash. An overload of baggage, they told me, from  
Brewster's car. And ice on the wings. The plane was

too heavy to take off. That made me laugh. It gnawed  
on me; it ate me away; and then a series of incidents  
began to happen. They would: with someone around as  
sinister looking as me...

(walks front stage. Hear darkness)

(The following lines are accompanied by suitable  
noises and nebulous images as the director sees  
fit.)

WITCH

Things dropped  
watches stopped  
tubes leaked  
lights went out

HUSHED VOICES

Mrs. Richie Walder. Mrs. Richie Walder. Mrs. Richie  
Walder. Pssss, don't say that.  
She puts the jinx on things  
She brings bad luck  
touch wood  
touch iron  
and don't pronounce that name

WITCH

And people lost money  
when I was around  
people quarreled when I was around

HUSHED VOICES

Of course they would  
with some one  
as sinister looking  
around  
as sinister looking  
as sinister

Ink spilled  
WITCH  
HUSHED VOICES

She's awful  
WITCH

Food burned  
HUSHED VOICES

For Pete's sake  
WITCH

Tires blew <sup>up</sup>  
HUSHED VOICES

Keep away from that woman  
WITCH

and people died when I called on them  
HUSHED VOICES

Unhappy people make unhappy people make  
unhappy people. It's immoral to be unhappy  
CHILDREN'S VOICES

(tinkling)

Aunt Witchie did something nasty, she missed the plane,  
WITCH

I don't know, I really don't understand  
CHILDREN'S VOICES

~~You see~~ (silvery)

One is not supposed to miss one's plane  
WITCH

After all; they're making mountains out of mole hills  
CHILDREN'S VOICES

Aunt Witchie is bad

(laughter)

WITCH

I know it's my fault

CHILDREN'S VOICES

(squealing happily)

It wouldn't have fallen down if she had not missed it

WITCH

It must be my fault

CHILDREN'S VOICES

(roaring with laughter)

Had aunt Witchie missed the plane

WITCH

It has always been my fault

(Witch returns to court room, as in opening scene.)

JUDGE

They were only children. They were <sup>telling</sup> kidding.

WITCH

(despondent)

I had to get rid of it, I had to. I made up my mind. This had been saturating within me during all that time. That's a terrible thing to happen to you, you know. I thought I was going crazy. I was tired and listless and numb. And at last I yielded: telling myself it was the only way to prove to myself that the whole thing was nothing but a nightmare.

(narrating monotonously, automatically)

I went to the Airliner Company Inc., down on Seventh Street, and made my reservation. Flight 17. September 3. Then I slept. Some tea, some salt. I felt like licking salt. And bitters. And a cigaret. And I burned a hole in the sheets. Wish I had burned, burned to death, then and there. On the third of September I went shopping. I shopped madly, I shopped gladly. Then I took a cab. When I got to the airport, the plane had left. And crashed.



(pause)

You see? You see? I am responsible for both crashes.  
And I want to be tried. And punished. And punished.

JUDGE

But look. But listen.

(Enter attendant from left door)

There's one more, your Honor, a lame little lady, and lurid.

JUDGE

What do you expect?

ATTENDANT

The pen's overpopled

JUDGE

How can I

ATTENDANT

I conveyed her to the convent

(Exit Attendant, to right)

WITCH

I have a right to be tried and judged and punished.

JUDGE

There's no law against buying a ticket, against reserving  
a seat.

WITCH

The first crash may pass for manslaughter, you may  
ascribe it to negligence.

JUDGE

No law against missing a plane

WITCH

But the second crash -- that was premeditated murder.

JUDGE

No law whatsoever against missing a plane, on chance  
or on purpose.

WITCH

I've killed eighty persons, and I have a right  
to be tried and judged and punished.

(lights dinner, witch's face paler)

JUDGE

Everybody always is responsible. They want to carry  
the sins of the world.

WITCH

(rises, kneels in front of Judge)

Give ear to my supplication, your Honor, on whose  
sentence all depends.

JUDGE

(looking far beyond her)

But I cannot lay my hands upon them. Their crimes  
exceed my competence.

WITCH

Full of terror I am and of dreadful fear of the  
sentence that fails to come on the day of judgment.

JUDGE

Times have changed, my dear lady. It's beyond me.  
It's beyond me.

WITCH

(rising)

You, yourself, you travel sometimes, Judge,  
don't you? By air, don't you?

JUDGE

I dare say, lady, I dare say.

WITCH

In spite of the Horror Hands, your Honor, in spite of  
the Terror Scouts?

JUDGE

I think of them in the courtroom, lady  
I think of them on the day of judgment,  
I don't think of them while I am flying

WITCH

In spite of...me?

JUDGE

I think of you with pity, lady. I think of you  
with desire, maybe. I am not scared when I think  
of you. It's beyond me, lady.

WITCH

Maybe I'll buy a ticket, reserve a seat, some day,  
when you go flying.

JUDGE

I can't keep you from doing that, lady, not I

WITCH

Maybe I'll go shopping and miss my plane,  
your plane

JUDGE

I can't stop you, don't you see? I can't. Not for  
the life of me.

WITCH

(afflicted)

What shall I do? Where shall I turn? I murdered,  
and the Judge does not deem me worthy of a hearing.  
You are cold, your Honor, you are most unkind.  
I came to confess and to be judged, and you don't  
care. I came to free society of my sinister impulses,  
and you don't wish to understand.

JUDGE

It's the law, lady, there is no law.

WITCH

...against premeditated multiple murder. Against genocide. I have upset the laws of nature, and you are deaf to my pleading.

JUDGE

It's beyond me, lady, ~~it's~~ behind me

WITCH

I command unlawful powers. I've unleashed forbidden forces, and now that I have come to look for a <sup>peace</sup> ~~peace~~ above my <sup>peace</sup> ~~peace~~, for a law against my lawlessness, you betray me, you let me down. You leave me all alone on the path of further, inevitable, and dreadful destruction.

JUDGE

I have to stand on the law of the land and the law of the time. I have the Terror Scouts and the Horror Hands to cope with. Your story does not fit in here, dear lady, you've come to the wrong place, at the wrong time.

(Rings bell, enters attendant)

WITCH

(in triumphant despair)

The jails are jammed! Lock me into the hall, herd me into the loft, convey me to the tower, toss me into the convent: I have a right to be judged and punished.

JUDGE

Will you accompany the lady to the door, please. I can find no fault with her. I have no power to hold her.

WITCH

(crying)

Oh, if I knew, if only I knew the formula!

JUDGE

She's wasting my time. Show the lady to the door.  
The next, please.

C U R T A I N

SECOND ACT

(Adagio)

*incorporating elements  
of Robert Wilson.*

(A church, not resembling that of any particular  
creed. On rear wall, a large television screen,  
on which a Mass-like function is projected, with  
altar boys going back and forth, carrying sacred  
objects up and down, etc. Flowers and candles  
are placed on both sides and below screen. Center  
stage is occupied by three rows of boys with  
worshipping men (left row), women (right row),  
and children, five to fifteen years of age (center  
row). In the foreground, center, a confessional,  
very streamlined and shining, resembling the  
cabin of a cablecar. Left side of cabin is occupied  
by witch, who wears same costume as in first act,  
except for a black lace veil covering neatly combed  
hair. Right side of confessional is occupied by  
a Priest. His face is white and without features,  
giving relief to a pair of conspicuous glasses  
and a hearing aid, connected to a switchboard  
fastened onto the glass dividing cabin. He also  
has a telephone at his disposal within the cabin,  
as well as a tape recorder and some other in-  
distinct but distinctly modern looking instruments.  
Portraits of similar priests with white, feature-  
less faces, eye glasses and hearing aids of various  
types, are placed along both side walls. Baroque  
gold frames bear inscriptions 1846-72; 1419-78, 1512-18,  
etc. Flowers and ribbons are lavishly displayed  
below portraits.)

WITCH

I shopped madly,  
I shopped gladly

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

MEN

~~Six~~ days

we rushed and raced  
to pause on Sunday  
and wonder

Then I took a <sup>C</sup> cab  
late

Step by step  
we conquered

When I got to the airport

the fairness *several*  
~~several~~ over

humans from gods

the plane had left

By six days' labor  
we are nearer to you

and crashed

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

In the name of the Lord

PRIEST

The ways of the Lord  
are unfathomable

WITCH

Help me, Father. I have  
downed two planes. I am  
responsible for the loss

WITCH

(cont'd)

of eighty lives. I command  
unlawful powers. Deliver me  
from this evil

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

CHILDREN

How lovely was our week  
We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling  
and if we sinned, we did not know it

PRIEST

A strange story, daughter,  
a strange tale

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

Tremble o Satan...

But your soul, child,  
is not guilty of murder.  
Your sin, so the gods help me,  
is presumptuousness: presumption  
of guilt which no man has:  
for without the gods' consent  
does no sparrow fall from the tree  
nor any plane from the sky

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

WOMEN

So green is their valley  
like bounteous jungle  
like garden of Eden  
We've tamed the ~~snakes~~ *serpents*  
disinfected the apples



CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

WOMEN

(cont'd)

Thou art powerless

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

Thou enemy of the faith...

WITCH

It was I, it was all  
but it was I  
I know my power  
I feel my guilt and  
fear the nameless  
temptation

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

MEN

(forte)

We have rocked planets  
burnt suns to ashes

PRIEST

In the old days, daughter,  
power was poor  
power was frightening

We have undone time  
cancelled matter in speed

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

Thou foe of mankind...

but today  
supernatural powers  
are but natural

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

WOMEN

We got hearts to tick with batteries  
We've killed sickness

PRIEST

(cant'd)

willed by God  
if directed towards the good

made pain  
a thing of the past

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

Who has brought death  
into this world...

WITCH

But my powers are evil  
I have abused them, and  
fear that I will abuse  
them again

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

WOMEN

blown oxygen into still lungs  
caused curdled blood <sup>to</sup> flow  
we've raised the dead

PRIEST

Daughter, I have had people  
brought in here, men, women,  
and children, with the devil in  
them, and I have exercised him.  
But their tale wasn't like yours.  
They weren't like you. They were  
very plain people

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

<sup>have</sup>  
Who has deprived men of life...

(last)

PRIEST

Have you seen the Evil One,  
ever, in any form

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

MIN

We have rocked planets  
burnt suns to ashes

A cat that jumped on your back  
and purred so strangely and  
kept you from breathing

We have undone time  
cancelled matter in speed

Has any man, woman, or child  
that you know of, put the spell  
on you

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

CHILDREN

How lovely was our week

(first section)

We've stolen cars

(second section)

We've looted stores

(third section)

We've made ~~love~~ petted and necked

WITCH

I don't know  
I know I am bad, I know  
I am nasty,  
and I can't resist

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

CHILDREN

(all)

(ritardando)

And those  
who told us  
not to do it

(fortissimo)

were just funny

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(canto firmus)

And has rebelled  
against justice...

PRIEST

I can impose on you  
ten prayers  
prayers of humbleness  
and a day of fasting  
and ask you to come  
again  
in a week  
and sing in the choir  
that is all

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

WOMEN

We drugged their nerves  
injected sweet sleep  
conditioned their reflexes  
grafted calf's lobes onto their brains

WITCH

At other times

(pauses)

YOU BURNED US

Only the pyre...

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

Thou seducer of mankind...

PRIEST

Other times, daughter,  
they were other times.  
I couldn't burn you,  
daughter, if I wanted to

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

WOMEN

How lovely was their week

WITCH

I have a right to...  
my soul has a right to...  
help me, Father, help me

We selected the movies  
chose funnies and tapes  
we ordered camps and tours  
to keep them from ~~otioseness~~ *idle ones*

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

Thou root of evil...

PRIEST

Your tale is different,  
daughter, from the others.  
They are simple folk

PRIEST

(cont'd)

and sick

with ticks and foam and trembling

*skooling*

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

WOMEN

We got hearts to tick with batteries

We've killed sickness

made pain

a thing of the past

I can lay my hands on them

and exorcise the evil one

But you

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING

MEN

We turn dirt into gold

vice into money

We extract wealth from air

from sunlight and water

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(cantus firmus)

Thou source of avarice

discord and envy

WITCH

Do what you can do, Father,  
help me. I am ditrossed and  
confused, Father. There is no  
limit to power, and there's no  
law. If you cannot burn me,  
lay your hands on me  
and exorcise the devil

PRIEST

(shakes his head sadly,  
takes a deep breath.)

I'll do my best

(steps out of confessional,  
beckons witch to follow him.  
Stands behind her, moving  
arms back and forth over  
her shoulders. Mumbles  
rapidly.)

(Disturbances on television  
screen. Fragmented images.  
Doubled and tripled images.  
Upside-down images. Crackling  
hissing, and thundering  
noises. Chorus rises.)

*stands up*

I exorcise thee, unclean spirit;  
in the name of the Lord  
Trouble, or Satan  
Thou enemy of the faith  
Thou foe of mankind  
Who hast brought death into the world  
Who hast deprived men of life  
And hast rebelled against justice  
Thou seducer of mankind  
Thou root of evil  
Thou source of avarice, discord and envy

(Places hands on witch's shoulder.  
Witch begins to writhe, in trance,  
then to jump and dance wildly.

Priest tries to keep  
after her, to lay hands  
on her shoulders, mumbling  
formula.)

(Disturbances, as above.)

WITCH

The steps, the stairs,  
don't stare at me like that  
darling  
all alike  
fickle fackle fockle  
flying down the stairs  
flying flying

CHORUS OF WORSHIPPING  
CHILDREN

How lovely was our week  
We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling  
and if we sinned, we did not know it

With your robe  
as a parachute  
ha ha ha  
all alike  
when they fly  
so hard  
and I got them down  
all of them

CHILDREN

(chant, singing)

We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling

fickle fackle fockle  
awawawawawawawawawawaw  
yes, darling, oh darling, yes, yes



PRIEST

*father*  
It's ~~hard~~ Harry, oh,  
the filthy one  
I know him

(Shakes his head,  
incredulously)

I will exorcise thee

WITCH

(slumps, then sits up,  
on floor, legs crossed,  
composedly.)

Where am I? What? Oh

MEN AND WOMEN

(chant, singing)

Step by Step  
we conquered  
the farness  
*clerical*  
~~reversing~~ over  
humans from gods

PRIEST

(without much conviction)

Come back daughter,  
come back soon.  
I will exorcise the devil  
I will deliver you

By six days' labor  
we are nearer to you.

C U R T A I N

THIRD ACT

Scene 1.

(Psychiatrist's office. Walls are lined with books, portraits of world's great psychiatrists: FREUD and LEID, JUNG and ALT, ADLER and LAMM, etc., with names and year of birth below. Center of room is occupied by desk, with all sorts of lamps on it. Comfortable armchairs. Couch. A basket with a cat and kittens in one corner. Psychiatrist sits behind desk. Witch, in armchair, on right side of desk.)

WITCH

Twice, after that, I just pretended to <sup>be</sup> get hypnotized: weaker each time and less convincing. The third time I gave up and stayed calm. The good priest said, the devil had left me now. <sup>He</sup> e gave me his blessings and sent me home.

PSYCHIATRIST

And your devil was still with you, is still with you.

WITCH

Nothing had changed at all, I felt as miserable as ever about the eighty lives I had taken... I enquired into each one of them.... There were children among them, small children, on their way to a new home in Israel, and a teen-ager who was supposed to see Paris.... And I felt, I feel, as tempted as ever to do it again.

PSYCHIATRIST

And you really want me to help you <sup>?</sup>

WITCH

The law let me down. I wish they had hanged me.  
The church let me down. I wish they had burned me.

(weeps)

PSYCHIATRIST

I will not let you down. I will be cruel with you.  
I will hurt you.

WITCH

I can't go on living this way.

PSYCHIATRIST

Of course you can: Why should you not. I'll be  
cruel, I'll hurt you; You live with a doubt,  
an uncertainty, a fear. Why should you not.  
There is no truth, no certainty, no security.  
We all have to live with doubts, uncertainties,  
and fears.

(Gets up, opens a door, returns to his chair.)

You have a gun in your hands. You know, if you aim  
it at someone and pull the trigger, that some-  
one will die. Don't pull the trigger. Learn to  
live with your gun.

WITCH

If it were just a gun. It is a power I don't  
understand, don't you see, that is what scares  
me so.

PSYCHIATRIST

There are lots of powers we don't understand,  
or maybe are just beginning to understand, or  
maybe will never understand. We all have to  
learn to live with our powers.

WITCH

So you tell me... You do not tell me, "it's all  
your sick imagination," you don't tell me,  
"it's just chance," you don't tell me...

(cries)

PSYCHIATRIST

(taking her hand)

You wouldn't believe it if I told you, would you ?

WITCH

I don't know.

PSYCHIATRIST

It does not really matter much either. What  
is real in your imagination, is real to you:  
that is the reality we have to deal with. That  
is the reality you have to understand and to  
live with.

WITCH

But if I wickedly murdered, I should be punished.  
I wish they had hanged me.  
I wish they had burned me.  
Only the pyre...

(soft, incredulous)

But if I didn't really,  
I should be cured....

PSYCHIATRIST

All wicked people are insane and should be cured  
All insane people are wicked and should be punished  
Come on now.

(Witch stretches out on couch, relaxes)

WITCH

I dreamed I had to cross a wide ocean

WITCH

(cont'd)

to get there  
in a boat as small as a nutshell  
alone  
and without compass

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
aren't we all crossing wide oceans  
each one of us in a nutshell  
alone

WITCH

without compassion

PSYCHIATRIST

Anybody's

WITCH

I dreamed I'd lost the way to  
somewhere  
and when I wanted to ask a man  
the name,  
the name slipped my mind  
I did not know what to ask for  
I didn't know where I was going  
I didn't know where I wanted to go

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
Aren't we all walking a road  
just because we are on it  
and we don't know where we are going  
and we don't know where we want to go

How did you feel?  
When you went shopping, what did you do?  
Before the...

PSYCHIATRIST

colored screen in front of light.)  
room on witch's pale face, insects many-  
on table lamp. Twists <sup>to</sup> ~~to~~ focus  
(Pavlovian reflex, opens window, turns  
in gasping, choking, but no sound understood  
any price  
and you'd be willing to pay the price  
you like flying, don't you,  
I thought you would

PSYCHIATRIST

with nowhere to <sup>change</sup> ~~change~~ for breathing  
I tried the wind like water  
offground  
piddling step by piddling step  
I dreamed I treaded into the air

WITCH

and you stopped being a child  
and the law of the school is for children  
borderline flights are heavenly and scary  
I thought you would

PSYCHIATRIST

and it was against the law of the school  
but I could not get down any other way  
it was heavenly and it was scary  
flight after flight  
of the school  
I dreamed I was flying down the stairs

WITCH

WITCH

I shopped like a bride

I shopped like a mother

(Light slowly turns red. Witch glows warmer.)

A rocking horse with real fur, and an Indian tent with a camp fire. A puppet theater with a deep stage and settings for half a dozen favorite plays, and scenery for the electric train. And a wetting mamma doll and a zoo. All the things I always wanted to have. And this suit, and a strapless bra.

I spent a lot of money. All the money I know I would not need on the trip I would not take.

PSYCHIATRIST

You were envious of the people who fly because you missed the...plane?

(Lights turn blue)

WITCH

They are vulgar people. They are cold people. They spoil your flight. They take it for granted. They know neither fear nor joy.

PSYCHIATRIST

The children, too?

WITCH

They're born old. They are spoiled. I would not want to be bothered with them.

(Psychiatrist turns off lamp, gets up, sits down on couch, takes witch's hand, examines her pulse.)

PSYCHIATRIST

Are they all like that? Why do you say that?

(Pause)

WITCH

I dreamed I was expecting a baby  
and the pains had started and the baby  
was about to be born  
and then the pains stopped  
and I went about in town  
running errands. And I was wondering  
about the baby  
which was probably dead

PSYCHIATRIST

(stroking her hair)

Did you dream of me, you did, didn't you?

WITCH

(shakes her head, startled)

I did not.

PSYCHIATRIST

I didn't help you, with the baby, I didn't  
have a watch, a compass, a propeller, a light?

WITCH

You have never been of any help.

PSYCHIATRIST

You just don't remember. Try to remember.

WITCH

I've tried. I've done my best. I wanted you to help me,  
really, but I begin to despair. Psychiatrists are going  
out of fashion. Our Commander...

PSYCHIATRIST

You care for our Commander, don't you?

WITCH

I dream of him while I fall asleep. He could help me.  
Only he could help me. But after the twilight of half-



WITCH

(cont'd)

sleep he slips away, and my dreams are bitter  
and empty as are my days, and I can never get  
near him, for there are ~~are~~ myriads of cops and  
bureaucrats. It's just at the moment of  
falling asleep...

(enthusiastic)

He brings order into our lives  
joy and oneness

He will make us all great and happy

(mysterious, approaching Psychiatrist's  
ear, shielding voice with hand)

He has the same power....The crash of September 3,  
we did it together....The Judge told me....He missed  
the plane on purpose....just the way I did.

PSYCHIATRIST

(sorrowful)

Mrs. Walder, our Commander won't help you.

(looking around for eventual eavesdroppers)

He isn't of much real help to anybody. He'll get  
murdered eventually.

(louder)

It's just a projection of yours, a construction,  
another evasion.

(kisses her)

I love you, Richie. What you need is love.

WITCH

Don't do that. It <sup>is</sup> not nice. Stop it.

WITCH

(quite amazed way)  
(awitched)

(cont'd)

I'd die for our Commander. With him I would...  
For him I would....

PSYCHIATRIST

(affectionately)

Commanders are going to go out of fashion...  
I won't let you down like the judge  
I won't let you down like the priest  
I will love you with healing love

WITCH

Stop it

PSYCHIATRIST

Your wellbeing will be my felicity

WITCH

Don't do that

PSYCHIATRIST

I will show you. I will teach you  
I want you to purr like a kitten  
that will be your declaration of love

(gets up, fetches kitten from basket, puts  
it in witch's arms)

Do you know what I mean?  
I wait for her, at night  
till she bounces up, softly,  
in her cattish way, and settles  
on my chest and purrs,  
purr out of proportion to her size  
purrs...like an airplane

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

and tells me, in her cattish way,  
that she feels well,  
she feels well in my presence.  
That is all. The rest does not count.  
Do you see wat I mean?

WITCH

(sarosses kitten, then draws back, disturbed)

The priest said...it probably was the root of all...  
that purred so strangely...the guilt...the crime...  
the evil one....

PSYCHIATRIST

I don't think so, Richie. I really don't think so.  
Listen to me. The judge. The priest. The Commander.  
I'll heal you into a new era. For you. For me. For all.  
I'll help you. I'll heal you. I'll love you.

WITCH

Stop it. It is not nice.

(withdraws into corner, sitting up, legs crossed,  
Hard.)

And we have to learn to live in our own era. I will  
show you. I will teach you...I live and die for our  
Commander.

(Psychiatrist rises. Kitten escaped. Psychiatrist  
opens another door. Returns to his desk, turns  
on lamps, focuses light on witch, frowned to  
blue to green to yellow. Then he floods entire  
room with cold daylight.)

PSYCHIATRIST

(matter-of-factly)

The case is quite clear now. An example of complete

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

disorientation and insecurity. Aren't we all totally disoriented and insecure? You looked for an anchor in marriage -- who would not try? -- and failed. We all have failed. Hence a feeling of guilt, frustrated desire, and envy. We all have it. You reverted to childhood. You mixed up thought and action. You wishfully fancied powers to magnify your guilt. Again, you looked for a law to condemn you, to absolve you thereby of your responsibility. You looked for a secular law; you looked for an eternal law; and you found neither. None of us ever finds it. Life would be so much easier if we did. Wouldn't it though?

WITCH

But the planes...crashed.

PSYCHIATRIST

That is, of course, pure coincidence. You know that now. One out of every 20,000 planes crashes. Obviously it had nothing to do with your missing it; you were just very lucky, that is all.

WITCH

But the second plane, too...crashed.

PSYCHIATRIST

The second plane, just like the first, had one chance against 20,000 of crashing. That the crash should have coincided with the same set of circumstances on your part as the first, is, I must admit, rather strange. The odds <sup>20,000</sup> are that to

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

happen were, I think, something like one  
against four hundred million. You played ~~en~~ <sup>27</sup>  
a very big roulette; but your number came up  
all right. That is all.

WITCH

But I can do it again...

PSYCHIATRIST

Don't be absurd, Richie. The chances, for the  
third time, would be something like --

(figures it out on paper)

like one against eight trillions. This is a chance  
we can take.

(Rises, suddenly less scientific)

On the contrary. Listen, love: this is part of  
the cure the doctor is prescribing to you. To-  
morrow you get your ticket for whatever flight  
you wish, and then you go through your usual  
acts.

WITCH

But, Doctor, you don't know what you are doing.  
I know I will bring it down. I will heap disaster  
upon disaster...It's going to crash. What  
millions, billions, <sup>trillions</sup> trillions. I set on the roulette  
of death. <sup>By April 14</sup> ~~The balls are loaded.~~

PSYCHIATRIST

Will you obey my order...This is a step...an  
important step...towards your recovery. I, your  
doctor, I take the responsibility.

(reassuring himself)

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

It's only one  
chance <sup>in</sup> out of eight trillions. I can assume  
that responsibility. Anybody could.

WITCH

You break my heart. You make my heart rejoice.

PSYCHIATRIST

And to show you how absolutely certain I am  
of the soundness of my advice

(sounds very uncertain)

of the rightness of my position, I will be on the  
plane. I will fly for you.

WITCH

I will never see you again

(pensively)

I feel sorry for you. You have been far kinder  
than the rest of the lot.

PSYCHIATRIST

(encouraged)

Richie, if I bring this extreme sacrifice <sup>to</sup> for you,  
to show you how much I love you...

WITCH

Beware, I cast my spell on you. What you take  
for healing love is a sickening spell. Love  
is a spell.

PSYCHIATRIST

...if I fly for you...to tell you how much...

WITCH

(hard)

I live and die for our Commander. He'll give  
us what we do not have; he is what we are not.

PSYCHIATRIST

I have never looked through a patient the way I look through you; oh, I have never loved a patient as much as I love you. Richie, do not send me <sup>down</sup> into the cold space without a warming glimmer of hope...If I ~~bring~~ <sup>make</sup> this extreme sacrifice, Richie, if I come back, will you love me?

CURTAIN

Scene 2

(Stage is occupied by half of a life-size airplane. Tail is left, propeller, right side; left wing points towards the rear of stage. Plane is cut in half, lengthwise, section coinciding with stage ramp. Audience sees corridor running through center of plane, left row of seats, left door (open), and, through it, bridge and steps to airport. Plane is empty, except for Steward and Hostess standing by open door to receive passengers. Traffic of passengers, baggage cars, under wing. It is dark. Cabin lights are on. Side, rear, and top of stage, are covered by a vaulted screen, forming concave quarter sphere, on which camera projects dark outlines of airport buildings, etc., and, later, sky.)

(Enter aged couple)

HOSTESS

Your boarding cards, please. There. May I have your coats? Take number 3 and 5. I hope you will enjoy your trip.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, it's good to sit down. We are tired,  
the departure has been an awful strain.

OLD MAN

Now there's time to get rested.

(They go to their seats. Enter BUSINESSMAN  
with bulging briefcase, portable typewriter,  
and portable dictaphone.)

STEWARD

Good evening, sir, your boarding card. May I  
take your...

BUSINESSMAN

(maddy)

Noooo. I need the stuff right here, what, do  
you think I have got time to waste on your  
lousy plane? Half an hour late. That's a lousy  
plane, that's a lousy service.

STEWARD

Number seven, please go ahead. I hope you will  
enjoy your trip.

(Enter MODEST COUPLE with three small children.)

HOSTESS

Good evening, good evening. Your boarding cards,  
please. Hi, honey, first time on a plane?

LITTLE GIRL

Gee, that's beautiful.

LITTLE BOY

It looks like a fish. It looks like a submarine.  
It's got bull's eyes, like a ship,  
*part 106*



LITTLE GIRL

Was it a kitchen? Where is the toilet?

(Enter psychiatrist, carrying raincoat  
over his arm)

HOSTESS

Good evening. Your boarding card? May I take  
your raincoat? You won't need it anymore.

PSYCHIATRIST

I bet you I will too.

MODEST MOTHER

(to Psychiatrist)

We're on our way to Israel. My cousin has land  
there. We're going to work.

MODEST FATHER

What a break. Like starting a new life. That's  
a clean cut, from one world to another.

(Enter mother with twelve-year-old boy)

HOSTESS

Your boarding cards, please.

(They occupy seats next to psychiatrist.

Enter elegant lady carrying hat-box, and  
teen-age girl.)

HOSTESS

Your boarding cards...

LADY

(pointing to teen-age girl)

She is going to see Paris for the first time.  
Paris. Isn't she lucky?

(Enter couple with small boy carrying cage  
with kitten.)

STEWARD

Let me take that, honey. He'll have to go to the baggage room.

LITTLE BOY

No, he's going to stay with me

STEWARD

You can't take it with you, kid. It'll have to go to the baggage room. We'll take good care of him.

LITTLE BOY

No, no, no! I'll keep him, let me go.

STEWARD

Sorry, but you can't take him with you into the cabin... You sleep well, and tomorrow morning you get him back. We'll take good care of him.

LITTLE BOY

No, no, no! I'll keep him, let me go.

(Steward takes cage. Screaming little boy is taken to his seat.)

(Enter old lady on crutches, accompanied by nurse.)

HOSTESS

Good evening. Your boarding card. Thank you. I'll get you an extra cushion. I'll get you a blanket. I'm sure you'll be comfortable.

OLD LADY

You are so kind. It does not really matter. I hope I'll be able to sleep. I want to sleep long. I am longing to sleep.

(Enter movie-star, wearing dark glasses and head-scarf, accompanied by maid carrying three fur coats.)

HOSTESS

There you are. Glad to have you on board. Got you a nice quiet place in the corner.

(Movie-star hurries to her seat. Hides behind big open newspaper, showing headline "OUR GOVERNMENT INAUGURATING..."  
Steward opens door. Bridge is rolled away. Motors are set in motion. Rumbling of engines will accompany action during rest of scene.)

VOICE OF HOSTESS

(through loudspeaker)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, this is Miss White, your hostess, welcoming you on board. Will you please fasten your seatbelts? First of all, we wish to explain to you the delay in taking off: it is due to unfavorable reports from the aeronautical weather bureau. There have been depressions and high winds, and in order to avoid these as far as possible, the departure has been delayed, and the route has been changed. We are now flying at an altitude of twelve thousand feet. Your Captain is Mr. Boatman. We hope you will enjoy your stay on board. ~~The~~ Dinner will be served as soon as we are at cruising altitude. If you have any need or desire, please tell your hostess. Thank you.

BUSINESSMAN

(in front of plane)

It's a lousy plane, it's a lousy service,

PSYCHIATRIST

It's wonderful how well organized they are nowadays, how carefully weather reports and routes are worked out. If you think how many cars crash on account of fog or slippery roads, and dilettantish piloting. But here, the chances are one against twenty thousand against crashing. To tell the truth, I have studied the odds of this particular flight, according to the law of probability, the chances of crashing for this plane on this flight are one against eight trillions...

LADY ON NEXT SEAT

(a little startled)

Yes, yes, I know, it is a negligible chance.

LITTLE BOY

(seated between Psychiatrist and Lady)

What's that bag for, Mammy, may I bust it?

LADY

Put it right back where you took it from.  
There is one in the back of every seat...  
in case people have to vomit...

(Describes function of bag with an appropriate gesture. Psychiatrist shakes off a fit of nausea. Wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.)

VOICE OF HOSTESS

(through loudspeaker)

Your life jackets are under your seat. In case of emergency, break the glass covering the emergency doors. Smash your way out, in case of emergency

BUSINESSMAN

(from his seat)

It's a lousy plane, it's a lousy service. Half an hour late, and nothing to drink yet...

ANOTHER CHILD

May I open the window, Dad?

FATHER

One can't open windows on planes, dear. They must be shut tight, tight, tight. There's a terrible wind outside; that air pressure is terrific. If one of these windows broke by mistake, you'd be sucked right out of the plane by the suction.

(Psychiatrist scans for air. Hostess begins to serve dinner trays, in front of plane.)

LADY NEXT TO PSYCHIATRIST

(to little boy)

You are going to get your homework done before we get off this plane, dear.

(to Psychiatrist)

This is my chance, you know. I never can get hold of him. He'd run out from any place. I guess, if we took a boat, he would jump into the water, to get away from his home bark. But here he can't get away! Shut in! Closed air-tight!

(Psychiatrist scans for air)

LADY

(to little boy)

Now tell me, how is that; a point... a line is defined by how many points... a plane is defined by how many points?

LITTLE BOY

Don't know

PSYCHIATRIST

(pulling himself together)

Maybe I can help you. Take a point...

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

(fixes point on piece of paper)

Through that point, you can pass an infinite number of lines, an infinite number of planes. From all directions. Free, infinite.

(draws.)

See what I meant! Now, here are two points. Through these two points you can draw only one single straight line. The line is fixed. Nailed into position. No fiddling. Now, of course, you can torture the line, you can turn it, on the spot, around itself, and this way you can pass an infinite number of planes through it... all the planes that make up... a cylinder. The planes that you can pass through two points are less infinite than the planes you can pass through one point -- all the planes in the world -- but they are still infinite. Now take three points there, <sup>the</sup> plane is fixed. It cannot move any more. Only one single plane can pass through these three points. Immoveable. Fixed. Nailed to the spot.

(gasps)

Now I am afraid, if the plane is fixed, the volume is fixed, because it consists of an infinite number of parallel planes. And if the volume is fixed, the time is fixed...

(beside himself)

Three times does it!

(poking three holes into the paper)

No getting away from it



(Psychiatrist, his mouth covered with handkerchief, returns to his seat.)

VOICE OF HOSTESS

(through loudspeaker)

We are now flying over the river Styx.

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

She said, we are now flying over the river Minx.

(looking through window)

Look, honey, what a pretty blue ribbon. And there, the people waiting. Like ants. They are waiting for the ferryman, they are waiting for the ferry. And we just fly over it. Aren't we lucky?

BUSINESSMAN

(from his seat, poking with his fork in his goose-liver)

It's leasy feed. It's a leasy plane.

WITCH'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

We are now flying over the mountains. We are flying over the crevice the earthquake tore. We are passing the limit. We are now about to leave this world.

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

She said, we crossed the frontier, we left



LADY  
(cont'd)

the country.

LITTLE BOY

They speak another language down there,  
don't they, nobody can understand us there . . .

WITCH'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

Forbidden flights are heavenly and scary.

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

(somewhat worried)

Nobody said nothing. Are you perhaps not  
feeling too well?

(Psychiatrist wipes his face with a hand-  
kerchief, gasps.)

SMALL CHILD

(trotting up along corridor)

I want my kitten, where's my kitten

(Mother takes him back to his seat)

MOTHER

It's getting bouncy, come, sit down, it's too  
hot and stuffy to move around.

STEWARD'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

We are now passing through a zone of high fall  
winds and airpockets. Will you please fasten  
your seatbelts. <sup>?</sup> Fasten your seatbelts, please.

(In front of plane, light signal FASTEN  
YOUR SEATBELTS. All passengers busy)

fastening their seatbelts.)

PSYCHIATRIST

(rises)

Oh no! It's too much! I can't. I can't...

HOSTESS

(with witch's hair, witch's face, witch's voice,

walks up next to his seat.)

Sir, will you please fasten your seatbelt?

PSYCHIATRIST

No, I can't.

HOSTESS

The regulations, Sir, please fasten your seatbelt.

PSYCHIATRIST

(sits, writhes in his seat, jumps up again)

No! Please! I can't!

(Steward walks up behind psychiatrist's seat)

HOSTESS

(to Steward)

The gentleman refuses to fasten his seatbelt.

STEWARD

You will get yourself into trouble with the law, Sir. We will have to denounce you to the airport authorities. We will have to strap

(keeps standing behind him, awkwardly hiding a straitjacket behind his back.)

HOSTESS

I will give you a little something to calm you down. It's nothing.

STEWARD

You know, our Commander gives the greatest importance to matters of public order and discipline. Fasten your seatbelt now. It's the regulation.

HOSTESS

You know our Commander is proud of the <sup>Smooth</sup> good functioning of his airline.

STEWARD

Will you please fasten your seatbelt now or else...

HOSTESS

...Our Commander...

(Psychiatrist screams, grabs bread-knife from a tray, stabs at steward and hostess, runs forward through plane, stabbing and slashing left and right, screaming. He cuts some wires, lights go out. He opens door to cockpit. Screams, confusion. Motors are rumbling and coughing. Sky, on screen, begins to rock and turn.)

VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

Attention, attention. A sick passenger has cut the electric wiring. Your life jackets are under your seats. We are preparing a crash landing.

(Confusion ~~is~~ mounting. Noises, broken glasses, screams. Motors are roaring. Sky is turning. Clare of fire.)

C U R T A I N

ONLY THE PYRE

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by

Elisabeth Mann Borgese

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## PERSONAGES

Mrs. Richie Walter, perhaps a witch

Judge

Priest

Psychiatrist

An attendant

Mr. Brewster

Mrs. Brewster

Two Brewster children

Minister on screen and attendants

Chorus of worshipping men

Chorus of worshipping women

Chorus of worshipping children

A kitten

Steward

Hostess

Passengers: An aged couple

Businessman

Modest couple with three children

Mother with twelve-year-old boy

Elegant lady with teen-age girl

Couple with small boy carrying kitten

Old lady on crutches

Nurse, Movie-star, Maid.

## FIRST ACT

(Small bells. Like Chairman's, adjourning meeting. Like sacristan's, announcing celebration of Mass. Large bells, like church bells, like storm bells. A shriek, a siren. Long heaving rhythms of breaking waves and waves and waves, and crashing rain. Curtain. The stage is dark. Projector shows crowds on rear wall, billowing out of courtroom, graying, fading into waves as lights go on, dimly, on Judge's desk, at left side of stage. Door on left wall, rear. Door on right wall, rear.

Judge rises, in cap and gown. His face is white, without features, setting off a pair of conspicuous eye-glasses and a hearing aid. Identical figures, in varying poses, in cap and gown and with white, featureless faces blending with background, with heavily rimmed glasses and hearing aids of various types, are represented in paintings behind Judge's desk and on opposite wall; pompous gold frames are marked with dates (1882-1909; 1902-1918; 1914-1927; etc.) Pictures are lavishly decorated with flags and flowers. Right center of room is occupied by one row of courtroom benches with tables. Witch, alone, is seated at center of row. Elbows planted on desk, face buried in hands. Long flaxen hair flows down over her face and hands, forming smooth puddle on desk; witch is wearing

elegant traveling suit, blouse with open V-neck.  
Witch rises. Shakes back her hair. Bares  
tear-reddened eyes. Steps forward.)

WITCH

(with forced formality)

Your Honor, I beg your pardon if I take up some of your valuable time. But I have some information bearing on the crashes of the New York-Paris Flight 8 of June 17 and of the Jdannon-Schwannon Flight 17 of September 3.

JUDGE

One at a time, please. We are investigating the September 3 crash.

WITCH

I am responsible for both.

JUDGE

Lady, you are the sixth today. Everybody always is responsible when a thing like this comes up. They all want their pictures in the papers. They want the headlines. They want their necks wrung.

WITCH

I have a right to be heard, and judged, and punished.

JUDGE

And punished. For what?

WITCH

I get them down. Crashing in flames. Cutting rooftops. Missing at sea. I sever wireless connections. I snip the threads of life. I sow havoc and reap tragedy.

JUDGE

Now lady, lady.

WITCH

Will you hear me? Will you judge me? Will you  
punish me?

JUDGE

I think you've come to the wrong place, lady.

WITCH

I have a right to be heard, and judged, and punished.

(Enter attendant, through left door.)

ATTENDANT

Two more, your Honor, male and female. Locked in  
the last loft. They say they have the proof. They say  
they have the key.

(Exit, through right door.)

JUDGE

Come on now, lady. Your name?

WITCH

My name.

(Takes a slight bow. Opens her arms as  
though introducing herself.)

JUDGE

Your birthday?

WITCH

My birthday...

(laughs)

JUDGE

You were born in?



WITCH

I was born in...

(Takes a slight bow, opens her arms.)

JUDGE

Your marital status?

WITCH

My marital status...

(wiggles obscenely)

JUDGE

Your profession?

WITCH

My profession...

(nods pensively)

JUDGE

How long have you been associated with the  
Terror Scouts?

WITCH

Associated with what? What do you mean?

JUDGE

(impatient)

They painted the bomb that blew up the plane --  
the Terror Scouts, you know.

WITCH

(knowingly)

Maybe yes, maybe no. It would be, at any rate, purely  
coincidental.

JUDGE

They blow up his planes, they poison his mess.  
Someday they'll take our Comrander's life: they  
mean business.

WITCH

(Contemptuously)

The Comrander wasn't even on the plane.

JUDGE

Did you know he was not going to be on the plane?

WITCH

I didn't know he was supposed to be on it. I didn't know he wasn't on it. I didn't know...

JUDGE

(impatient)

What do you want here, then?

WITCH

I said I am responsible for the crash and I want to be heard, and judged, and punished.

JUDGE

Everybody always is responsible when a case like this comes up. They want their pictures in the papers. They want the headlines.

(Enter attendant, from left door)

ATTENDANT

There are three more, your Honor, three more. A boy and two girls. I herded them into the hall. They say they are Horrorhands. They made the bomb.

(Exit, through right door.)

JUDGE

If they tell you they've written the Divine Comedy, no one listens. If they tell you they have committed murder, they may get away with it. They want to carry the sins of the world. They're fed up. They're phonies.

WITCH

Oh, your Honor, my honor

JUDGE

It's a sad story, lady, and old. The plane was scheduled to take off from Idannon, with our Comrander aboard. It was a top secret, but the Terror Scouts got hold of it, and maybe the Horror Hands, and they managed to smuggle the bomb in with the baggage. Our Comrander cancelled his flight -- nobody knew he would -- and travelled, safely incognito, on another plane. Flight 17 blew up on schedule. And forty-three hapless travellers sped to eternity.

WITCH

(Aside, agitated)

Our Comrander. So help me heaven. Our Comrander, I've got to talk to our Comrander. He alone... Together...It may be spreading already...it may be too late. Oh, help. I want...to be heard... and judged...and punished.

JUDGE

Make up your mind, lady. You say you did not know of our Comrander's plans. You didn't know about the plot, and that the plot missed. And yet

WITCH

(serenely)

Your honor, my honor. Hear, judge, and punish.

(pauses)

(Arioso)

I was to take the plane out of New York. My reservation had been made weeks in advance... You know, how it is, that time of the year... I was all packed, had sent a cable to the

WITCH

(cont'd)

Brewsters in Paris, asking them kindly to come to the airport and get me...I've still got the cable; they kept it for me...But then something happened. I slipped up somewhere. Bungled last-minute improvisations. The shopping in town: too alluring. The traffic: impenetrable. When I got to the airport at last, the counter was empty, the gates were closed. "Sorry," they said, "we waited for you, but the plane had to leave on schedule. You know you should be here at least thirty minutes before the departure. Your passport, your ticket, and here is a message for you. You forgot your furcoat at the hotel. We are sorry. We shall try to transfer you to another plane, to another line, leaving tonight." I cursed and I laughed.

(Rises. Walks slowly towards background of stage. Stage lights are dimming, courtroom disappears.)

And when I got to Paris, I learned that the plane -- my plane -- had crashed, and crew and passengers had perished to the last man.

(Lights focus on round lunch table in the Brewsters' home. The Brewster family -- middle-aged Mr. Brewster, conventional; pretty Mrs. Brewster, conventional; and two conventional children: a boy of about ten and a girl of about 4, in a highchair, are sitting around the table. Witch, carrying in one hand a blue airliner overnight bag, holding with the other, her ailing

forehead, pale, exhausted, drifts halting  
towards empty chair at right side of Mr.  
Brewster. Slumps down. Glum silence.)

MR. BREWSTER

Dear, dear.

MRS. BREWSTER

A close call.

WITCH

I feel dizzy. I feel as if I had walked across the  
ocean, on a thin crust of ice.

MRS. BREWSTER

I can't believe you are with us, dear. We didn't  
get your second cable till late.

MR. BREWSTER

And they had your name on the passenger list, of  
course they had.

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

So we were absolutely sure you were on that plane...

MRS. BREWSTER

(brings a tray with a cocktail glass on it)

Here, darling, have a drink: a stiff one; you need it.

WITCH

When they told me, first, that the plane had left,  
it gave me the funniest feeling down in my stomach.  
And I thought: that plane is going to crash. That's  
why I missed it.

MR. BREWSTER

That's what you think now, dear.

MRS. BREWSTER

That's always the way it goes. You never know  
when you thought of a thing first, if you thought  
it and then it happened, too.

WITCH

No, no. I really thought: that plane is going to crash. I even told the Smiths, when I called them from the airport, to let them know that I missed the plane. I told them: "Shall we bet that plane is going to crash? I bet you." Of course we were all kidding. "Aren't you sweet," Harry said. "What a gentle thought"...I wonder what they said when they read the news.

MR. BREWSTER

A lucky gal, that's what they said.

MRS. BREWSTER

A close call that was. Dear, dear.

MR. BREWSTER

The gods must love you.

MRS. BREWSTER

Oh, this flying business. They keep telling you the chances of a mishap are minimal, negligible... but then, there you are. Forty at a time.

MR. BREWSTER

We are all suffering under this shock now, but, really, it's useless to think of such things. When your hour has struck, it may be a plane that does it, that executes the order, or a disease no one would have suspected; or the well-known brick falling from the roof; when your hour has struck. But when it has not struck...You travel on any plane, traverse any storm; bullets whiz around you on the battlefield, and you feel just as safe as in Abraham's bosom. If your hour hasn't struck...

MRS. BREWSTER

You have so much left to do, Richie, and so many people who need you. That would have been a mean trick, Richie, just to go and crash.

(turning to the younger child)

Eat your spinach now, Wally

YOUNGER CHILD

I don't want my spinach. It isn't my spinach anyway.

MRS. BREWSTER

(takes a heaping spoon of spinach, makes it travel toward child's mouth, accompanying gesture with a humming sound)

Ssssssss there comes the plane, with aunt Richie on it Mmmmmm, open your mouth, Wally, so the plane can get into the hangar. That's the girl.

YOUNGER CHILD

Ugh, ugh.

MRS. BREWSTER

We won't let aunt Richie's plane crash, will we!

YOUNGER CHILD

(shakes her head; wide-eyed)

Aunt Witchie's planes don't fall down, do they.

OLDER CHILD

Maybe, if she hadn't missed the plane, maybe it wouldn't have fallen.

YOUNGER CHILD

'Cause God loves her so.

MRS. BREWSTER

Finish your spinach, Wally

MR. BREWSTER

(offers highballs)

Well, well, this is a big day, Richie. Let's pour some

MR. BREWSTER

(con't)

good whiskey over it. Destiny does not demonstrate every day that you are her favorite daughter.

YOUNGER CHILD

Is it true, daddy, that the plane wouldn't have fallen down if aunt Witchie hadn't missed it?

(light turning greener, faces turning wanner and paler)

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

Thank goodness she missed it!

WITCH

(rising)

It's an evil thing to miss a plane. You may miss a streetcar, a bus, even a train. But to miss your plane is immoral.

MR. AND MRS. BREWSTER

Ha,ha,ha. What do you mean: immoral?

WITCH

I mean it's immoral to miss one's plane: culpable. I feel guilty.

MR. BREWSTER

Now who ever heard of such a thing. There she's evidently graced, protected, her hour has not struck; she's just darn lucky, and she feels guilty at that...

(The three grown-ups are drinking. The conversation is getting more excited, more confused. The audience catches fragments like the following:)

CONFUSED VOICES

I never felt so terrible in my life. It was a horrid shock to all of us. Because it's absolutely impossible



CONFUSED VOICES

(cont'd)

to understand a thing like that. Impossible. Under-stand. Impossible. A thing like that. What do you care? A thing like that. Drink your milk, Wally. You are alive. Children, don't be so noisy. It's grace. It's punishment. Horrible punishment. Ir-responsible. It's immoral to miss one's plane. Immoral is what is immoral. Don't dig in your nose, honey, you're too old. Hour not struck. Abraham's bosom. Kids, you are a mess. I can't accept the idea that a thing like this has no meaning...

(Also the children are getting more excited. They drive their forks and spoons through the air. They hum like planes. They bang and clash them together. They let them fall. Noise and laughter.)

YOUNGER CHILD

(squealing with delight)

Aunt Witchie did somethig nasty! She missed the plane! One is not pupposed to miss one's plane! Bad aunt Witchie! Zooooom! It wouldn't have fallen down crashcrashcrashcrash if she hadn't missed it, nasty aunt Witchie!

(They roar with laughter.)

(Noise is fading, lights are dimming, the Brewster home disappears in the dark. Witch, lights focused on her deathly pale face, returns to courtroom.)

JUDGE

They're only children. They were only teasing. You were exhausted. You were out of your mind.

WITCH

It kept gnawing at me. If I hadn't missed the plane,  
it would not have fallen.

(Enter attendant)

ATTENDANT

Two more, Your Honor: a little old man and  
a child. They say they are Horror Hands.  
They say they are Terror Scouts...The jails  
are jammed, your Honor. I tossed them into  
the tower. They say...

(Exit attendant)

WITCH

A change came over me after that. They told me:  
You look ill, Richie, you should have a rest. How  
she's grown old and sinister, they whispered behind  
my back. I investigated the causes of the crash.  
An overload of baggage, they told me, from Greenland on.  
And ice on the wings. The plane was too heavy to take  
off. That made me laugh. It gnawed at me: it ate me  
away, and then a series of incidents began to happen.  
They would: with someone around as sinister looking as  
me.....

(walks front stage. Rear darkens. The following  
lines are accompanied by suitable noises and  
nebulous images as the director sees fit.)

WITCH

Things dropped  
Watches stopped  
Tubes leaked  
Lights went out.

HUSHED VOICES

Mrs. Richie Walter. Mrs. Richie Walter

HUSHED VOICES

(con't)

Mrs. Richie Walter, Pssss, don't say that.

She puts the jinx on things

She brings bad luck

Touch wood

Touch iron

And don't pronounce that name

WITCH

And people lost money

when I was around

People quarreled

when I was around

HUSHED VOICES

Of course they would

with some one

as sinister looking

around

as sinister looking

she's sinister

WITCH

Ink spilled

HUSHED VOICES

She's awful

WITCH

Food burned

HUSHED VOICES

For Pete's sake

WITCH

Tires blew out

HUSHED VOICES

Keep away from that woman

WITCH

And people died when I called on them

HUSHED VOICES

Unhappy people make unhappy people make  
unhappy people. It's immoral to be unhappy.

CHILDREN'S VOICES

(tingling)

Aunt Witchie did something nasty. She missed the plane.

WITCH

I don't know. I really don't understand

CHILDREN'S VOICES

(silvery)

One is not supposed to miss one's plane

WITCH

After all: they're making mountains out of mole hills

CHILDREN'S VOICES

Aunt Witchie is bad

(laughter)

WITCH

I know, it's my fault

CHILDREN'S VOICES

(squealing happily)

It wouldn't have fallen down if she had not missed it

WITCH

It must be my fault

CHILDREN'S VOICES

(roaring with laughter)

Bad aunt Witchie missed the plane

WITCH

It has always been my fault

(Witch returns to the courtroom, as in opening  
scene.)

JUDGE

They were only children. They were teasing.

WITCH

(despondent)

I had to get rid of it. I had to. I made up my mind. This had been maturing within me during all that time. That's a terrible thing to happen to you, you know. I thought I was going crazy. I was tired and listless and numb. And at last I yielded: telling myself it was the only way to prove to myself that the whole thing was nothing but a nightmare.

(narrating monotonously, automatically)

I went to the Airliner Company Inc. down on Seventh Street, and made my reservation. Flight 17, September 3. Then I slept. Some tea, some salt. I felt like licking salt. And bitters. And a cigaret, and I burned a hole in the sheets. Wish I had burned, burned to death, then and there. On the third of September I went shopping. I shopped madly, I shopped gladly. Then I took a cab. Late. When I got to the airport, the plane had left. And crashed.

(Pause)

You see? You see? I am responsible for both crashes. And I want to be tried. And punished. And punished.

JUDGE

But look. But listen.

(Enter attendant, from left door.)

ATTENDANT

There's one more, your Honor, a lame little lady, and lurid.

JUDGE

What do you expect?

ATTENDANT

The pen's overpeopled

JUDGE

How can I

ATTENDANT

I conveyed her to the convent

(Exit Attendant, to right.)

WITCH

I have a right to be tried and judged and punished.

JUDGE

There's no law against buying a ticket, against reserving a seat.

WITCH

The first crash may pass for manslaughter, you may ascribe it to negligence.

JUDGE

No law against missing a plane

WITCH

But the second crash -- that was premeditated murder.

JUDGE

No law whatsoever against missing a plane, on chance or on purpose.

WITCH

I've killed eighty persons, and I have a right to be tried and judged and punished.

(lights dimmer, witch's face paler)

JUDGE

Everybody always is responsible. They want to carry the sins of the world.

WITCH

(rises, kneels in front of Judge)

Give ear to my supplication your Honor,  
on whose sentence all depends.

JUDGE

(looking far beyond her)

But I cannot lay my hands upon them. Their crimes  
exceed my competence.

WITCH

Full of terror I am and of dreadful fear  
of the sentence that fails to come  
on the day of judgment.

JUDGE

Times have changed, my dear lady. It's beyond me.  
It's beyond me.

WITCH

(rising)

You, yourself, you travel sometimes, Judge,  
don't you? By air, don't you?

JUDGE

I daresay, lady, I daresay.

WITCH

In spite of the Horror Hands, your Honor,  
in spite of the Terror Scouts?

JUDGE

I think of them in the courtroom, lady, I think  
of them on the day of judgment, I don't think  
of them while I fly.

WITCH

In spite of...me?

JUDGE

I think of you with pity, lady, I think of you with desire, maybe. I am not scared when I think of you. It's beyond me, lady.

WITCH

Maybe I'll buy a ticket, reserve a seat, someday, when you go flying.

JUDGE

I can't keep you from doing that, lady, not I

WITCH

Maybe I'll go shopping and miss my plane, your plane

JUDGE

I can't stop you, don't you see? I can't. Not for the life of me.

WITCH

(afflicted)

What shall I do? Where shall I turn? I murdered, and the Judge does not deem me worthy of a hearing. You are cold, your Honor, you are most unkind. I came to confess and to be judged, and you don't care. I came to free society of my sinister impulses, and you don't wish to understand.

JUDGE

It's the law, lady, there is no law.

WITCH

a/ Against premeditated multiple murder. Against genocide. I have upset the laws of nature, and you are deaf to my pleading.

JUDGE

It's beyond me, lady, it's behind me.



WITCH

I command unlawful powers. I've unleashed forbidden forces, and now that I have come to look for a power above my powers, for a law against my lawlessness, you betray me, you let me down. You leave me all alone on the path of further, inevitable, and dreadful destruction.

JUDGE

I have to stand on the law of the land and the law of the time. I have the Terror Scouts and the Horror Hands to cope with. Your story does not fit in here, dear lady, you've come to the wrong place, at the wrong time.

(Rings bell, enter attendant.)

WITCH

(in triumphant despair)

The jails are jammed! Lock me into the hall, herd me into the loft, convey me to the tower, toss me into the convent: I have a right to be judged and punished!

JUDGE

Will you accompany the lady to the door, please. I can find no fault with her. I have no power to hold her.

WITCH

(crying)

Oh, if I knew, if only I knew the formula!

JUDGE

She's wasting my time. Show the lady to the door. Next, please.

C U R T A I N

## S E C O N D A C T

(ADAGIO)

(A church, not resembling that of any particular creed but incorporating elements of the universal tradition. On rear wall, a large television screen, on which a Mass-like function is projected, with altar boys going back and forth, carrying sacred objects up and down, etc. Flowers and candles are placed on both sides and below screen. Center stage is occupied by three rows of pews with worshipping men (left row), women (right row) and children, five to fifteen years of age (center row). In the foreground, center, a confessional, very streamlined and shining, resembling the cabin of a cablecar. Left side of cabin is occupied by witch, who wears same costume as in first act, except for a black lace veil covering neatly combed hair. Right side of confessional is occupied by a Priest. His face is white and without features, setting off a pair of conspicuous glasses and a hearing aid, connected to a switchboard which is fastened onto the glass dividing the cabin. He also has a telephone at his disposal within the cabin, as well as a tape recorder and some other indistinct but modern looking instruments. Portraits of similar priests with white, featureless faces, eye glasses and hearing aids of various types, are placed along both side walls. Baroque gold frames bear inscriptions 1346-72; 1419-78; Flowers and ribbons are lavishly

displayed below portraits.)

WITCH

I shopped madly  
I shopped gladly

Then I took a cab.  
Late

When I got to the airport

the plane had left

and crashed.

CHORUS  
OF WORSHIPPING MEN

Six days  
we rushed and raced  
to pause on Sunday  
and wonder

Step by step  
we conquered

the farness  
severing ever  
humans from gods

by six days' labor  
we are nearer to you

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

In the name of the Lord

PRIEST

The ways of the Lord  
are unfathomable

WITCH

Help me, Father, I have  
downed two planes. I am

WITCH

(cont'd)

responsible for the loss of  
eighty lives. I command  
unlawful powers. Deliver me  
from this evil

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING CHILDREN

How lovely was our week  
We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling  
and if we sinned, we did not know  
it

PRIEST

A strange story, daughter,  
a strange tale

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

Tremble os Satana

But your soul, child,  
is not guilty of murder.  
Your sin, so the gods help me,  
is presumptuousness: presumption  
of guilt which no man has: for  
without the gods' consent does  
no sparrow fall from the tree  
nor any plane from the sky

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING WOMEN

So green is their valley  
like bounteous jungle

CHORUS  
OF WORSHIPPING WOMEN  
(cont'd)

like garden of Eden  
We've tamed the serpents  
disinfected the apples  
thou art powerless

MINISTER ON SCREEN  
(cantus firmus)

Thou enemy of the faith...

WITCH

It was I, it was all  
but it was I  
I know my power  
I feel my guilt and  
fear the nameless temptation

CHORUS  
OF WORSHIPPING MEN  
(forte)

We have rocked planets  
burnt suns to ashes

PRIEST

In the old days, daughter  
power was poor  
power was frightening

We have undone time  
cancelled matter in speed

MINISTER ON SCREEN  
(Cantus firmus)

Thou foe of mankind...

PRIEST

(cont'd)

But today  
supranatural powers  
are but natural

willed by God  
if directed towards the good

WITCH

But my powers are evil  
I have abused them, and  
fear that I will abuse  
them again

PRIEST

Daughter, I have had people  
brought in here, men, women

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING WOMEN

We've made hearts tick with  
batteries  
we've killed sickness

made pain  
a thing of the past

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

Who hast brought death  
into this world

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING WOMEN

blown oxygen into still lungs  
caused curdled  
blood to flow  
we've raised the dead

PRIEST

(cont'd)

and children, with the devil in  
them, and I have exorcised him.  
But their tale wasn't like yours,  
they weren't like you. They were  
very plain people

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

Who hast deprived men of life...

Have you ~~seen~~ the Evil One  
ever, in any form

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING MEN

We have rocked planets  
burnt suns to ashes

A cat that jumped on your back  
and purred so strangely and kept  
you from breathing

We have undone time  
cancelled matter in speed

Has any man, woman, or child  
that you know of, put the spell  
on you

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING CHILDREN

How lovely was our week

(first section)

We've stolen cars

(second section)

We've looted stores

(third section)

We've petted and necked

WITCH

I don't know  
I know I am bad, I know  
I am nasty  
And I can't resist

(all)

(ritardando)

And those  
who told us  
not to do it

(fortissimo)

were just funny

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

And hast rebelled  
against justice...

PRIEST

I can impose on you  
ten prayers  
prayers of humbleness  
and a day of fasting  
and ask you to come  
again  
in a week  
and sing in the choir  
that is all

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING WOMEN

We drugged their nerves  
injected sweet sleep  
conditioned their reflexes  
grafted calf's lobes onto their  
brains



WITCH

In other times

(pauses)

YOU BURNED US

Only the pyre...

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

Thou seducer of mankind...

PRIEST

Other times, daughter,

they were other times

I couldn't burn you,

daughter, if I wanted to

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING WOMEN

How lovely was their week

WITCH

I have a right to...

my soul has a right to...

help me, Father, help me

We selected the movies  
chose funnies and tapes  
we ordered camps and tours  
to keep them from idleness

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

Thou root of evil...

PRIEST

Your tale is different,  
daughter, from the others.

They are simple folk

and sick

PRIEST

(cont'd)

with ticks and drooling and  
trembling

I can lay my hands on them  
and exorcise the evil one.  
But you

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING WOMEN

We've made harts tick with  
batteries  
We've killed sickness  
made pain  
a thing of the past

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING MEN

We turn dirt into gold  
vice into money  
We extract wealth from air  
from sunlight and water

MINISTER ON SCREEN

(Cantus firmus)

Thou sorce of avarice  
discord and envy

WITCH

Do what you can do, Father,  
help me. I am distressed  
and confused, Father. There  
is no limit to power, and  
there's no law. If you cannot  
burn me, lay your hands on  
me and exorcise the devil

PRIEST

(shakes his head sadly.

Takes a deep breath.)

I'll do my best.

(Steps out of confessional;  
beckons witch to follow him;  
stands behind witch, moving  
arms back and forth over her  
shoulders, mumbles rapidly.)

(Disturbances on television  
screen. Fragmented images.  
Doubled and tripled images.  
Upside-down images. Cracking,  
hissing, and thundering  
noises. Chorus stands up.)

I exorcise thee, unclean spirit;  
in the name of the Lord  
tremble O Satana  
thou enemy of the faith  
thou foe of mankind  
who hast brought death into the world  
who hast deprived men of life  
and hast rebelled against justice  
thou seducer of mankind  
thou root of evil  
thou source of avarice, discord  
and envy

(places hands on witch's  
shoulder. Witch begins to  
writhe, in trance, then to  
jump and dance wildly. Priest  
tries to keep after her, to lay

hands on her shoulders,  
mumbling his formula.)

(Disturbances, as above.)

WITCH

The steps, the stairs,  
don't stare at me like that, darling  
all alike  
fickle fackle fockle  
flying down the stairs  
flying flying

CHORUS

OF WORSHIPPING CHILDREN

How lovely was our week  
We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling  
And if we sinned, we did not know  
it

With your robe  
as a parachute  
ha ha ha  
all alike  
when they fly  
so hard  
and I get them down  
all of them

CHILDREN

(Exeunt, singing)

We grew without ailing  
We learned without toiling

fickle fackle fockle  
awawawawawawawawawawaw  
yes, darling, more, oh yes yes

PRIEST

It's Prince Harry, oh, the  
filthy one, I know him

PRIEST

(cont'd)

(shakes his head in-  
credulously)

I will exorcise thee

WITCH

(slumps, then sits up on  
floor, legs crossed,  
composedly)

Where am I? What? Oh!

MEN AND WOMEN

(Exeunt, singing)

Step by step  
we conquered  
the farness  
severing ever  
humans from gods

PRIEST

(without much conviction)

Come back, daughter,

Come back soon

I will exorcise the devil

I will deliver you

By six days labor  
we are nearer to you

C U R T A I N

T H I R D   A C T

Scene 1

(Psychiatrist's office. Walls are lined with books, portraits of world's great psychiatrists: FREUD and LEID, JUNG and ALT, ADLER and LAMM, etc., with names and year of birth below. Center of room is occupied by desk, with all sorts of lamps on it. Comfortable armchairs. Couch. A basket with a cat and kittens in one corner.  
Psychiatrist sits behind desk. Witch, in armchair, on right side of desk.)

WITCH

Twice, after that, I just pretended to be hypnotized: weaker each time and less convincing. The third time I gave up and stayed calm. The good priest said, the devil had left me now. He gave me his blessings and sent me home.

PSYCHIATRIST

And your devil was still with you, is still with you.

WITCH

Nothing had changed at all. I felt as miserable as ever about the eighty lives I had taken... I enquired into each one of them...there were children among them, small children, on their way to a new home in Israel, and a teen-ager who was supposed to see Paris...And I felt, I feel, as tempted as ever to do it again...

PSYCHIATRIST

And you really want me to help you.

WITCH

The law let me down. I wish they had hanged me.  
The church let me down. I wish they had burned me.

(weeps)

PSYCHIATRIST

I will not let you down. I will be cruel with you.  
I will hurt you.

WITCH

I can't go on living this way.

PSYCHIATRIST

Of course you can: why shouldn't you? I'll be  
cruel, I'll hurt you:  
You live with a doubt, an uncertainty, a fear.  
Why shouldn't you? There is no truth, no certainty,  
no security. We all have to live with doubts,  
uncertainties, and fears.

(Gets up, opens a door, returns to his chair.)

You have a gun in your hands. You know if you  
aim it at someone and pull the trigger, that some-  
one will die. Don't pull the trigger. Learn to  
live with your gun.

WITCH

If it were just a gun. It is a power I don't  
understand, don't you see, that is what scares  
me so.

PSYCHIATRIST

There are lots of powers we don't understand,  
or maybe are just beginning to understand, or  
maybe will never understand. Learn to live with

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

your power. We all have to learn to live with  
our powers.

WITCH

So you tell me... you do not tell me, "It's all  
your sick imagination," you don't tell me,  
"It's just chance," you don't tell me...

(cries)

PSYCHIATRIST

(taking her hand)

You wouldn't believe it if I told you, would you.

WITCH

I don't know.

PSYCHIATRIST

It does not really matter much either. What  
is real in your imagination, is real to you:  
that is the reality we have to deal with. That is  
the reality you have to understand and live  
with.

WITCH

But if I wickedly murdered, I should be punished.  
I wish they had hanged me,  
I wish they had burned me.  
Only the pyre...

(soft, incredulous)

But if I didn't, really,  
I should be cured....

PSYCHIATRIST

All wicked people are insane and should be cured  
All insane people are wicked and should be punished  
Come on now



(Witch stretches out on couch, relaxes)

WITCH

I dreamed I had to cross a wide ocean  
to get there  
in a boat as small as a nutshell  
alone  
and without compass

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
aren't we all crossing wide oceans  
each one of us in a nutshell  
alone

WITCH

without compassion

PSYCHIATRIST

anybody's

WITCH

I dreamed I'd lost the way to  
somewhere  
and when I wanted to ask a man  
the name,  
the name slipped my mind  
I did not know what to ask for  
I didn't know where I was going  
I didn't know where I wanted to go

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
Aren't we all walking a road  
just because we are on it  
and we don't know where we are going  
and we don't know where we want to go

WITCH

I dreamed I was flying down the stairs

WITCH

(cont'd)

of the school  
flight after flight  
it was heavenly and it was scary  
but I could not get down any other way  
and it was against the law of the school

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would.  
Forbidden flights are heavenly and scary  
and the law of the school is for children  
and you stopped being a child

WITCH

I dreamed I traipsed into the air  
piddling step by piddling step  
offground  
I trod the wind like water  
with nowhere to come up for breathing

PSYCHIATRIST

I thought you would  
You like flying, don't you,  
and you'd be willing to pay the price,  
any price,  
in gasping, choking, but with no ground underfoot

(Psychiatrist rises, opens window, turns  
on table lamp. Twists lamp to focus beam  
on witch's pale face, inserts many-  
colored screen in front of light.)

PSYCHIATRIST

Before the...  
When you went shopping, what did you do?  
How did you feel?

WITCH

I shopped like a bride  
I shopped like a mother

(Light slowly turns red, witch glows warmer.)

A rocking horse with real fur, and an Indian tent  
with a camp fire. A puppet theater with a deep  
stage and settings for half a dozen favorite  
plays, and sceneries for the electric train. And  
a wetting mamma doll and a zoo. All the things  
I always wanted to have. And this suit, and a  
strapless bra. I spent a lot of money. All the  
money I knew I would not need on the trip I  
would not take

PSYCHIATRIST

You were envious of the people who fly  
because you missed the...plane?

(Light turns blue.)

WITCH

They are vulgar people. They are cold people.  
They spoil your flight. They take it for granted.  
They know neither fear nor joy.

PSYCHIATRIST

The children, too?

WITCH

They're born old. They are spoiled.  
I would not want to be bothered with them.

(Psychiatrist turns off lamp, gets up,  
sits down on couch, takes witch's hand,  
examines her pulse.)

PSYCHIATRIST

Are they all like that? Why do you say that

(Pause)

WITCH

I dreamed I was expecting a baby  
and the pains had started and the baby  
was about to be born  
and then the pains stopped  
and I went about in town  
running errands. And I was wondering  
about the baby  
which was probably dead

PSYCHIATRIST

(stroking her hair)

Did you dream of me? You did, didn't you.

WITCH

(shakes her head, startled.)

I did not.

PSYCHIATRIST

I didn't help you, with the baby, I didn't  
have a watch, a compass, a propeller, a light?

WITCH

You have never been of any help.

PSYCHIATRIST

You just don't remember. Try to remember.

WITCH

I've tried. I've done my best. I wanted you to  
help me, really. But I begin to despair. Psychiatrists  
are going out of fashion. Our Comrander...

PSYCHIATRIST

You care for our Comrander, don't you.

WITCH

I dream of him while I fall asleep. He could  
help me. Only he could help me. But after the

WITCH

(cont'd)

twilight of half-sleep he slips away, and my  
dreams are bitter and empty as are my days, and  
I can never get near him, for there are myriads  
of cops and bureaucrats. It's just at the moment  
of falling asleep...

(enthusiastic)

He brings order into our lives,  
joy and oneness

He will make us all great and happy

(mysterious, approaching psychiatrist's  
ear, shielding voice with hand)

He has the same power....The crash of September 3,  
we did it TOGETHER....The JUDGE TOLD ME....He  
missed his plane ON PURPOSE....just the way I did...

PSYCHIATRIST

(sorrowful)

Mrs. Walter, our Comrander won't help you.

(looking around for eventual eavesdroppers)

He isn't of much real help to anybody. He'll  
get murdered sooner or later

(louder)

It's just a projection of yours, a construction,  
another evasion.

(kisses her)

I love you, Richie. What you need is love.

WITCH

Don't do that. It is not nice. Stop it

(quite carried away)

I'd die for our Comrander. With him I would...

For him I would....

PSYCHIATRIST

(affectionately)

Comradars are going to go out of fashion...

I won't let you down like the judge

I won't let you down like the priest

I will love you with healing love

WITCH

Stop it

PSYCHIATER

Your wellbeing will be my felicity

WITCH

Don't do that

PSYCHIATRIST

I will show you, I will teach you

I want you to purr like a kitten

that will be your declaration of love

(gets up, fetches kitten from basket, puts  
it in witch's arm)

Do you know what I mean?

I wait for her, at night

till she bounces up, softly,

in her cattish way, and settles

on my chest and purrs,

purrs out of proportion to her size,

purrs, like an airplane

and tells me, in her cattish way,

that she feels well,

she feels well in my presence.

That is all. The rest does not count.

Do you see what I mean?

WITCH

(caresses kitten, then draws back, disturbed)

The priest said...it probably was the root of all,...  
that purred so strangely...the guilt...the crime  
...the evil one...

PSYCHIATRIST

I don't think so, Richie. I really don't think so.  
Listen to me. The judge. The priest. The Comrander.  
I'll heal you into a new era. For you. For me. For  
all. I'll help you. I'll heal you. I'll love you.

WITCH

Stop it. It is not nice

(withdraws into corner, sitting up, legs  
crossed. Hard.)

And we have to learn to live in our own era.  
I will show you. I will teach you...I live and  
die for our Comrander.

(Psychiatrist rises. Kitten escapes.

Psychiatrist opens another door. Returns  
to his desk, turns on lamps, focuses  
light on witch, from red to blue to  
green to yellow. Then he floods entire room  
with cold daylight.)

PSYCHIATRIST

(matter-of-factly)

The case is quite clear now. An example of complete  
disorientation and insecurity. Aren't we all  
totally disoriented and insecure? You looked for  
an anchor in marriage -- who would not try? --  
and failed. We all have failed. Hence a feeling  
of guilt, frustrated desire, and envy. We all  
have it. You reverted to childhood. You mixed up

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

thought and action. You wishfully fancied powers to magnify your guilt. Again, you looked for a law to condemn you, to absolve you thereby of your responsibility. You looked for a secular law; you looked for an eternal law; and you found neither. None of us ever finds it. Life would be so much easier if we did, wouldn't it though...

WITCH

But the planes....crashed.

PSYCHIATRIST

That is, of course, pure coincidence. You know that now. One out of every 20,000 planes crashed. Obviously it had nothing to do with your missing it; you were just very lucky, that is all.

WITCH

But the second plane, too...crashed.

PSYCHIATRIST

The second plane, just like the first, had one chance against 20,000 of crashing. That the crash should have coincided with the same set of circumstances on your part as the first, is, I must admit, rather strange. The odds against that were, I think, something like one to four hundred million. You played at a very big roulette; but your number came up all right. That is all.



WITCH

But I can do it again...

PSYCHIATRIST

Don't be absurd, Richie. The chances, for the third time, would be something like

(figures it out on paper)

like one against eight trillions. This is a chance we can take.

(Rises, suddenly less scientific)

On the contrary. Listen, love: this is part of the cure the doctor is prescribing to you. Tomorrow you get your ticket for whatever flight you wish, and then you go through your usual acts.

WITCH

But, Doctor, you don't know what you are doing. I know I will bring it down. I will heap disaster upon disaster...It's going to crash. What millions, billions, trillions. I act on the roulette of death. The wheel is loaded.

PSYCHIATRIST

Will you obey my order? This is a step...an important step...towards your recovery. I, your doctor, I take the responsibility.

(reassuring himself)

It's only one chance in eight trillions. I can assume that responsibility. Anybody could.

WITCH

You break my heart. You make my heart rejoice

PSYCHIATRIST

And to show you how absolutely certain I am of the soundness of my advice...

PSYCHIATRIST

(con't)

(sounds very uncertain)

of the rightness of my position...I will be  
on the plane. I will fly for you.

WITCH

I will never see you again.

(pensively)

I feel sorry for you. You have been far kindlier  
than the rest of the lot.

PSYCHIATRIST

(encouraged)

Richie, if I bring this extreme sacrifice to you,  
to show you how much I love you...

WITCH

Beware, I cast my spell on you. What you take  
for healing love is a sickening spell. Love  
is a spell

PSYCHIATRIST

...if I fly for you...to tell you how much...

WITCH

(hard)

I live and die for our Comrander. He'll give us  
what we do not have: he is what we are not.

PSYCHIATRIST

I have never looked through a patient the  
way I look through you, oh, I have never loved  
a patient as much as I love you. Richie, do  
not send me flying into cold space without a  
warming glimmer of hope.... If I make this extreme  
sacrifice, Richie, if I come back, will you love  
me?

C U R T A I N

Scene 2

(Stage is occupied by half of a life-size airplane. Tail is left, propeller right side: left wing points toward the rear of stage. Plane is cut in half, lengthwise, section coinciding with stage ramp. Audience sees corridor running through center of plane, left row of seats, left door (open) and, through it, bridge and steps to airport. Plane is empty, except for Steward and Hostess standing by open door to receive passengers. Traffic of passengers, baggage cars, under wing. It is dark. Cabin lights are on. Side, rear, and top of stage are covered by vaulted screen, forming concave quarter sphere, on which camera projects dark outlines of airport buildings, etc., and, later, sky.)

(Enter aged couple)

HOSTESS

Your boarding cards, please. There. May I have your coats? Take numbers 3 and 5. I hope you will enjoy your trip.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, it's good to sit down. We are tired, the departure has been an awful strain.

OLD MAN

Now there's time to get rested.

(They go to their seats. Enter businessman with bulging briefcase, portable typewriter and portable dictaphone.)

STEWARD

Good evening sir, your boarding card. May I take your...

BUSINESSMAN

(moody)

Noooo. I need the stuff right there, what, do you think I have time to waste on your lousy plane. Half an hour late. That's a lousy plane, that's lousy service.

STEWARD

Number seven, please go ahead. I hope you will enjoy your trip.

(Enter modest couple with three small children)

HOSTESS

Good evening, good evening. Your boarding cards, please. Hi, honey, first time on a plane?

LITTLE GIRL

Gee, that's beautiful

LITTLE BOY

It looks like a fish. It looks like a submarine  
It's got portholes like a ship

LITTLE GIRL

Has it a kitchen? Where is the toilet?

(Enter psychiatrist, carrying raincoat  
over his arm.)

HOSTESS

Good evening. Your boarding card. May I take your raincoat? You won't need it anymore

PSYCHIATRIST

I bet you I will too.

MODEST MOTHER

(to psychiatrist)

We're on our way to Israel. My cousin had land there. We're going to work.

MODEST FATHER

What a break. Like starting a new life. That's a clean cut, from one world to another.

(Enter mother with twelve-year-old boy.)

HOSTESS

Your boarding cards, please.

(They occupy seats next to psychiatrist.)

(Enter elegant lady carrying hat-box, and teen-age girl.)

HOSTESS

Your boarding cards...

LADY

(pointing to teen-age girl)

She's going to see Paris for the first time. Paris. Isn't she lucky.

(Enter couple with small boy carrying cage with kitten.)

STEWARD

Let me take that, honey. He'll have to go to the baggage room

LITTLE BOY

No, he's going to stay with me.

STEWARD

You can't take it with you, son. It'll have to go to the baggage room. We'll take good care of him.

LITTLE BOY

No, no, no! I'll keep him, let me go.

STEWARD

Sorry, but you cannot take him with you into the cabin...You sleep well, and tomorrow morning you get him back. We'll take good care of him.

LITTLE BOY

No,no,no, I'll keep him, let me go

(Steward takes cage. Screaming little boy is taken to his seat.)

(Enter old lady on crutches, accompanied by nurse.)

HOSTESS

Good evening. Your boarding card. Thank you. I'll get you an extra cushion. I'll get you a blanket. I'm sure you'll be comfortable.

OLD LADY

You are so kind. It does not really matter. I hope I'll be able to sleep. I want to sleep long. I am longing to sleep.

(Enter movie-star, wearing dark glasses and head-scarf, accompanied by maid carrying three fur-coats.)

HOSTESS

There you are. Glad to have you on board. Got you a nice quiet place in the corner.

(Movie-star hurries to her seat. Hides behind big open newspaper. showing headline "OUR COMRANDER INAUGURATING..." Steward slams door. Bridge is rolled away. Motors are set in motion. Rumbling of engines will accompany action through rest of scene.)

VOICE OF HOSTESS

(through loudspeaker)

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, this is Miss White, your hostess, welcoming you on board. Will you please fasten your seatbelts. First of all, we wish to explain to you the delay in taking off: it is due to unfavorable reports from the aeronautical weather bureau. There have been depressions and high winds, and in order to avoid these as ~~far~~ as possible, the departure has been delayed and the route has been changed. We are now flying at an altitude of twelve thousand feet. Your Captain is Mr. Boatman. We hope you will enjoy your stay on board. Dinner will be served as soon as we are at cruising altitude. If you have any need or desire, please tell your Hostess. Thank you.

BUSINESSMAN

(in front of plane)

It's a lousy plane, it's lousy service

PSYCHIATRIST

Isn't it wonderful how well organized they are nowadays, how carefully weather reports and routes are worked out. If you think how many cars crash on account of fog or slippery roads, and diletantish piloting. But here, the chances are one against twenty thousand against crashing. To tell the truth, I have studied the odds for this particular flight, and, according to the law of probability, the chances of crashing for this plane on this flight are one against eight trillions...

LADY ON NEXT SEAT

(a little startled)

Yes, yes, I know, it is a negligible chance.

LITTLE BOY

(seated between psychiatrist and lady)

What's that bag for, Mommy, may I bust it?

LADY

Put it right back where you took it from.

There's one in the back of every seat...

in case people have to vomit...

(describes function of bag with an appropriate gesture. Psychiatrist shakes off a fit of nausea. Wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.)

VOICE OF HOSTESS

(through loudspeaker)

Your life jackets are under your seat. In case of emergency, break the glass covering the emergency doors. Smash your way out, in case of emergency...

BUSINESSMAN

(from his seat)

It's a lousy plane, it's lousy service. Half an hour late, and nothing to drink yet...

ANOTHER CHILD

May I open the window, Dad?

FATHER

One can't open windows on planes, dear. They must be shut tight, tight, tight. There's a terrible wind outside: that air pressure is terrific. If one of these windows broke by mistake, you'd be sucked right out of the plane by the suction.



(Psychiatrist gasps for air. Hostess begins to serve dinner trays, in front of plane.)

LADY NEXT TO PSYCHIATRIST

(to little boy)

You are going to get your homework done before we get off this plane, dear.

(to psychiatrist)

This is my chance, you know. I never can get hold of him. He'd run out from any place. I guess, if we took a boat, he would jump into the water, to get away from his homework. But here he can't get away! Totally shut in! Closed airtight!

(Psychiatrist gasps for air)

LADY

(to little boy)

Now tell me, how is that, a point....A line is defined by how many points....A plane is defined by how many points?

LITTLE BOY

Don't know.

PSYCHIATRIST

(pulling himself together)

Maybe I can help you. Take a point...

(fixes point on piece of paper)

Through that point, you can pass an infinite number of lines, an infinite number of planes. From all directions. Free, infinite.

(draws)

See what I mean? Now, here are two points. Through these two points you can draw only one single straight

PSYCHIATRIST

(cont'd)

line. The line is fixed. Nailed into position. No fiddling. Now, of course, you still can turn the line, on the spot, around itself, and this way you can pass an infinite number of planes through the two points -- all the planes that make up a...cylinder. The planes that you can pass through two points are less infinite than the planes you can pass through one point -- all the planes in the world -- but they are still infinite. Now take three points. There. The plane is fixed. It cannot move any more. Only one single plane can pass through these three points. Immovable. Fixed. Nailed to the spot.

(gasps)

Now I am afraid, if the plane is fixed, the volume is fixed, because it consists of an infinite number of parallel planes. And if the volume is fixed, the time is fixed...

(beside himself)

Three times does it!

(poking three holes into the paper)

No getting away from it

(covers his mouth with a handkerchief)

I think I better go and take a little walk

(rises, walks towards front of plane.)

LITTLE BOY

Mommy, that man is strange.

LADY

He seems very nervous, the poor gentleman; maybe it's the first time he's on a plane, and he does

LADY

(cont'd)

not like it.

LITTLE GIRL

(in front of plane)

Why does that man get goose-liver and we don't?

FATHER

Because he is a first-class passenger, and we are not.

LITTLE GIRL

What's that, a first-class passenger? Aren't we all travelling on the same plane?

FATHER

He gets goose-liver, and we don't.

LITTLE GIRL

Is that all?

FATHER

I think he is allowed to take more baggage, a heavier load.

LITTLE GIRL

What heavier load?

FATHER

(laughing)

The first-class people go to heaven with a heavier baggage. We travel lighter...

(Psychiatrist, his mouth covered with handkerchief, returns to his seat.)

VOICE OF HOSTESS

(through loudspeaker)

We are now flying over the river Styx

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

She said, we are now flying over the river Minx.

(looking through window)

Look, honey, what a pretty blue ribbon. And there, the people waiting, like ants. They are waiting for the ferryman, they are waiting for the ferry. And we just fly across it. Aren't we lucky.

BUSINESSMAN

(from his seat, poking with his fork  
in his goose-liver)

It's lousy food. It's a lousy plane

WITCH'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

We are now flying over the mountains. We are flying over the crevice the earthquake tore. We are passing the limit. We are now about to leave this world.

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

She said, we crossed the frontier, we left the country.

LITTLE BOY

They speak another language down there, don't they, nobody can understand us there...

WITCH'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

Forbidden flights are heavenly and scary

PSYCHIATRIST

(to lady)

What did she say?

LADY

(somewhat worried)

Nobody said nothing. Are you perhaps not feeling too well?

(Psychiatrist wipes his face with handkerchief. Gasps.)

SMALL CHILD

(trotting up along corridor)

I want my kitten, where's my kitten

(Mother takes him back to his seat)

STEWARD'S VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

We are now passing through a zone of high fall winds and airpockets. Will you please fasten your seatbelts. Fasten your seatbelts, please.

(In front of plane, lightsignal FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS. All passengers busy fastening their seatbelts.)

PSYCHIATRIST

(rises)

Oh, no! It's too much! I can't, I can't

HOSTESS

(with witch's hair, witch's face, witch's voice, walks up next to his seat)

Sir, will you please fasten your seatbelt

PSYCHIATRIST

No, I can't.

HOSTESS

The regulations, Sir, please fasten your seatbelt.

PSYCHIATRIST

(sits, writhes in his seat, jumps up again)

No! Please! I can't!

(Steward walks up behind psychiatrist's seat)

HOSTESS

(to Steward)

The gentleman refuses to fasten his seatbelt.

STEWARD

You will get yourself in trouble with the law, Sir. We will have to denounce you to the airport authorities. We will have to strap...

(keeps standing behind him, awkwardly hiding a straitjacket behind his back.)

HOSTESS

I will give you a little something to calm you down. It's nothing.

STEWARD

You know, our Commander attaches the greatest importance to matters of public order and discipline. Fasten your seatbelt now. It's the regulation.

HOSTESS

You know our Commander is proud of the smooth functioning of his airline...

STEWARD

Will you please fasten your seatbelt now, or else...

HOSTESS

...Our Comrander...

(Psychiatrist screams, grabs bread-knife from a tray, stabs at steward and hostess, runs forward through plane, stabbing and slashing left and right, screaming. He cuts some wires, lights go out. He opens door to cockpit. Screams, confusion. Motors are rumbling and coughing. Sky, on screen, begins to rock and turn.)

VOICE

(through loudspeaker)

Attention, attention. A sick passenger has cut the electric wiring. Your life jackets are under your seats. We are preparing a crash landing.

(Confusion mounts. Noises, broken glasses, screams. Motors are roaring. Sky is turning. Glare of fire.)

C U R T A I N