

**Fallen Leaves**  
September, 1886

Dramatis Personae:

Abner Bauer - father  
Casandra "Cassie" Bauer - mother

David Bauer - son  
Mary Bauer - daughter

**SCENE 1**

[The Bauer family sits around the breakfast table in their small but comfortable New York farmhouse. The furniture and fixtures are worn, but well-maintained by Casandra's care and attention. Fitting the historic image of the perfect housewife, she holds a good deal of sway with Abner. He is stern at first glance, yet has a soft spot in heart for his family, particularly his devoted wife. Were she even the slightest bit persistent, she might be seen as domineering. But because of her easy-going, and truly kind nature, the family's balance is maintained. David and Mary are close siblings, very similar in their mannerisms and interests. This is especially reflected by the education they have been receiving by their county's recent implementation of a compulsory education law: they are both reading at the breakfast table.]

Casandra:

My children, whom I love so much,  
Whose names I love to say!  
Our home is warm, and safe, and close,  
We've made it just this way.

But David, my beloved son  
And Mary vestal daughter,  
The sun did not shine every day  
Before we crossed the water.

And with that said, I feel it's time:  
There comes a cherished tale.  
You ought to know our family  
Came here at first by sail.

*David enters with text.*

We hadn't any gold or stuff,  
save values in our hearts.

These treasures that we could not count,  
but know when we're apart.

David: [Reading from his book]

*"Here's Huckleberry Finn, he hain't got no family; what you going to do 'bout him?"*

*"Well, hain't he got a father?" says Tom Sawyer.*

*"Yes, he's got a father, but you can't never find him these days."*

*Then they all stuck a pin in their fingers to get blood to sign with, and I made my mark on the paper.*

*"Now," says Ben Rogers, "what's the line of business of this Gang?"*

*"Nothing only robbery and murder," Tom said. "We are highwaymen. We stop stages and carriages on the road, with masks on, and kill the people and take their watches and money."*

*"Must we always kill the people?"*

*"Oh, certainly. It's best. Some authorities think different, but mostly it's considered best to kill them—"*

Cassandra: [Responds to what David just said.]

Our village lay upon a vale and youthful mead  
The mountains guarded farms of flaxen summer wheat.  
But soon the sun would cease to multiply the loaves  
And doom at length to ash all that we had to eat.

Mary: These peasant tales ring out a hundredfold.  
Our farmhouse guarantees this awful bore!  
Wheat, tomatoes, meat, potatoes...  
Mr. Darcy gets drowned out each time!

Cassandra: We fled here on this very day!

The women: Here! Some photographs I've kept!

Wheat, tomatoes, meat, potatoes!

Your mother's house upon the hill.

I declare after all there is no  
enjoyment like reading!<sup>1</sup>

Your grandfather who never wept.

How much sooner one tires of  
anything but a book!<sup>2</sup>

An apfelstrudel, baking still!

Mary: I have not the pleasure of understanding you!<sup>3</sup>

[Mary ceases, and there is a silence at the table for a moment. The silence is so disconcerting that Abner simply must speak up.]

Abner: What is this day?  
Have you no shame  
Not to see that this very day  
We first set foot upon this land  
This country of your beloved books!

[From this point, Casandra sings under Abner.]

Casandra: We first set foot upon this land.

Abner: This house was full of lively talk!

Casandra: This very day.

Abner: The only thing in your hands was a fork and a knife!

Casandra: Some photographs I kept.

Abner: Then the laws that took you to the schools  
The schools I never saw the need to know

Casandra: Your grandfather who never wept.

Abner: We'd speak! Real words! Not printed pictures on a page!

Casandra: An apfelstrudel baking still.

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<sup>1</sup> A quote from *Pride and Prejudice*

<sup>2</sup> Also a quote

<sup>3</sup> Lo, one more fitting quotation!

Abner: Lift your eyes and see!

Casandra: An apfelstrudel baking *still*!

[Her eyes light up as she decides. Perhaps her words cannot convince them, but her recipe will. It will bring her family back together, at the table where they used to pass such meaningful hours.]

Casandra: See this photograph if you will  
An apfelstrudel baking--

Mary and David: [Reading their book texts]

<p><i>"A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and, besides all this...a certain something."</i></p> <p><i>"All this she must possess," added Darcy; 'and to all she must yet add something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading."</i></p>	<p><i>[Mary reads first, then David joins over.]</i></p> <p><i>"Ransomed? What's that?"</i></p> <p><i>"I don't know. But I've seen it in books; and so of course that's what we've got to do."</i></p> <p><i>"But how can we do it if we don't know what it is?"</i></p> <p><i>"Why, blame it all, we've got to do it. Do you want to [do] different from what's in the books...?"</i></p> <p><i>"Oh, that's all very fine to say, Tom Sawyer, but how [can we] ransom if we don't know how to do it to them?—that's the thing I want to get at."</i></p>
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[The music portrays the noise and disarray in the shared consciousness of the table.]

Abner: [Adding to the cacophony] Open your ears and see!

All: If you'd only take the time to understand!

*Brief silence, then, to clear the air:*

Mary: O David, there my brother dear,  
We've had a pleasant run!  
Shall we be trotting out again?

There's still much to be done.

There's not a single sausage left  
We've eaten every one.<sup>4</sup>  
And then we can read all we please  
As soon as we are done!

[Mary leaves.]

David: Mother, might I just suggest:  
The world has changed since we were young.  
We read to know that we are not alone.<sup>5</sup>  
Perhaps you'll finish when we get back home?

Casandra: Of course, of course. Now go on undeterred!  
The fieldwork waits!

David: Farewell and see you soon!

[David leaves.]

Casandra: True knowledge exists in knowing things, not words.<sup>6</sup>

Abner: This house was full of lively talk.  
The only things in our hands were forks and knives.  
We'd speak real words. Not pictures printed on a page.  
But the Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away.  
Soon enough, we'll make them really see.

Casandra: [with a smile] Or taste!

Abner: I will leave the strudel to you!

[Abner leaves. Casandra is alone, and addresses the audience, pausing first. There is excitement in her face, but it will change to plaintive sorrow.]

Casandra: I'll pick the apples fresh from off  
The tree out by the field.  
My children whom I love so much  
Will love this family meal!

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<sup>4</sup> "The Walrus and the Carpenter"

<sup>5</sup> Apparently a quote by William Nicholson. But fitting either way. Also, it's rather ironic in this instance, because reading makes them more alone.

<sup>6</sup> From Lady Montagu's letter to her daughter.

Although their minds are oft elsewhere  
They mean no willful harm.  
But how they keep their eyes upon  
The books they tuck under their arms.

Today marks quite a miracle,  
We found a home and farm.  
I wish my daughter cared a bit  
To hear about its charm.

And David, beloved son of mine:  
He tries to understand  
But will he ever long to know  
How we came to this land?

And will he tell his children,  
As he holds them in his hand?  
Or will he hold a book alone  
I wonder as I stand.

Call to me  
And I will answer you and tell you  
Great and hidden things that you have not known!

## SCENE 2

[Casandra has her back turned to the field, picking apples upon a ladder. David plows the field with their blind horse.]

Casandra: The season's come, for which we wait.  
We'll sate ourselves by the fruits' sweet flesh.  
On all other nights a simple meal is fit,  
But on this night we'll truly dine!<sup>7</sup>

Tempting are those farthest fruits...  
Just a yard away, shall I persevere?

What harm has ever come from picking a fruit?  
'Tis the simplest pleasures of this impermanent life  
Which always please the most!

David: Hear ye! Scrub and meaner cover of ground!  
Let loose your greedy hold, and thus submit  
To the steeled, cruel plow of Caesar Imperator!

Tired I grow of petty children's games...<sup>8</sup>  
The day is young; I've all of Gaul to take.  
The field lies plain, with hours of toil to work.

Simple was time, when I was a lad.  
Imagination filled this hollow man.  
My daydreams now are turned to wasted land.<sup>9</sup>  
What can I do to pass the time anon?  
Mayhaps I'll read until the hours are gone.  
Noble steed, though blind, do take the helm!  
I rivet me to pages; tales they spin!

Both: The temptation has proven itself too great to resist!

David: What harm has ever come from reading a book?

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<sup>7</sup> See the Mishna, Pesachim 10:4 The "Four Questions"

<sup>8</sup> That David considers playing Caesar a petty child's game show how pervasive reading technology is, and what it has done to childhood's usual simplicity. "Nowadays, you've got your iPhone, your iPad, your iPod...when I was a kid, all we had was OUTSIDE."

<sup>9</sup> These references to T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" (1925) and "The Waste Land" (1922) are anachronistic, showing the potential of technology to develop the future. That it can predict art forms yet to come makes it all the more tragic that it cannot predict Casandra's imminent death.

'Tis the simplest pleasures of this impermanent life  
Which always please the most!

Both: What harm has ever come from

Casandra: picking a fruit?

David: reading a book?

'Tis the simplest pleasures of this impermanent life  
Which always please the most!

[Casandra ascends the ladder, higher and higher.]

Casandra: Add a bit of thrill and it makes all the risk worthwhile.

David: Spoken like one truly young at heart.<sup>10</sup>

*COULD "The temptation has proven itself..." go here?*

Casandra: To younger days I look.

David: Oh, the pages of a book!  
May the good times never yield  
Though my eyes are on the page.<sup>11</sup>  
Trusting not in worldly looks,  
My truest world is found in books!

Both: How I grow so very near!

Casandra: Yes, I'm almost at the end!

David: Oh, I'll just read one page more.

Casandra: How on life we can depend!

Both: Just one (David:) page (Casandra:) inch more.  
Just one more.  
I'm almost there.  
The end is near.  
The end is *here*.

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<sup>10</sup> Though a fitting response to what Casandra has just pronounced, David is talking to himself and refers to the line "'Tis the simplest pleasures..."

<sup>11</sup> Because "look" and "book" of the previous lines rhyme, one would expect "yield" to be paired with "field." But alas...David's eyes are not on the field.



[The plow strikes the ladder as Casandra plucks the fruit, sending her falling to her death.]<sup>12</sup>

### SCENE 3

[The Bauer family stands around Casandra's deathbed in their small but comfortable New York farmhouse. The furniture and fixtures are worn, and no longer well-maintained by Casandra's care and attention. She lies upon the bed, clothed in white with a white sheet, and silent. Abner is stern, with no soft spot left in his heart. David and Mary are siblings. But the difference between them is reflected by the way they respond to their mother's death: David is destroyed, but for Mary it seems to be business as usual.]

[The silence is suddenly broken.]

David: [From Shakespeare's King Henry the Sixth, Act 1, Scene I.]

[spoken]

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!  
Comets, importing change of times and states,  
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky,  
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars  
That have consented to Mother's death!  
Mother Dear, too patient to live long!  
Ne'er a mother was of so much worth.  
Virtue had she, loving all God's earth.  
Her sparkling eyes, replete with good and truth  
More dazzled with the innocence of youth  
Than any infant, had he words, could preach.  
What should I say? Her deeds exceed all speech:  
She ne'er lift up her hand, but triumphed.<sup>13</sup>

My mother whom I love so much!

[There is a slight pause.]

David: Whose name I love to say!  
Our home was warm, and safe, and close,

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<sup>12</sup> Because the events occur at the same time, we are to equate David striking his mother with his mother picking the fruit. And therefore with the loss of innocence and ignorance. It is David who was tricked by the snake's temptation and must now leave the garden of Eden--the world of books which was all he'd ever known.

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from King Henry the Sixth Act I, Scene I. "Triumphed" in the sense that she produced in David a son that truly can feel the love of family, and think beyond his books.

You made it just that way.

Abner: David, what would possess  
You to utter such rubbish?  
Today, of all days, you foolish child!  
What talk of comets, crystals, stars?  
Your speech is full of nonsense like your books!  
If ever a word should pass your lips  
Into your mother's ear,  
It should be  
"I am sorry!"

Casandra, my poor wife!  
Are you cold?  
This house has never been so dark  
And for all the candles  
The light is gone forever.  
You were the kindest that God had made,  
You knew so well  
It is more blessed to give than to receive<sup>14</sup>.  
And oh what you have given us!  
And oh, what you had tried to give,  
To tell. If only you could tell again!

The stories that you had to tell,  
And only you could tell them  
For I was never good with words.  
They've died with you  
Forever.

[Tears keep him from speaking further. Abner leaves.]

Mary: For every story that she tried to tell  
I've a story written here as well [indicates book].  
And oh how hard it is to read a word  
With only ever nagging to be heard.  
And so I'll be an even closer pair  
With motherless, independent young Jane Eyre.  
Or David Copperfield or Oliver Twist  
And soon enough like Lizzy, I'll be kissed.  
I wonder...in my books is mother missed?

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<sup>14</sup> Acts 20:35

David, what an eloquent display!  
Each word you crafted with the greatest poise.  
An artful speech your education shows  
With fitting meter, rhyme, and lack of joys.  
I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you  
employed, united!<sup>15</sup>

[Mary exits.]

David: [An aside about Mary, as she is leaving.]  
But throughout your praise,  
Did once you think my words were true?  
And not reciting art for art contrived?

[Addressing now his mother.]

Mother whom I love so much...  
Oh, won't you speak a word?

No words of mine could ever speak  
The sorrow that I feel.

I cannot seem  
To tell you how

I feel

So very--

I speak only one language, and it is not my own.<sup>16</sup>  
Forgive me as I try to tell  
A sorrow whose extent exceeds  
What one my age should be able to feel.  
For I remain,  
While you are gone.

Surviving--that is the other name of a mourning  
Whose possibility is never to be awaited.  
For one does not survive without mourning!  
It is the grievéd act of loving.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Adapted from *Pride and Prejudice*

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida in *The Politics of Friendship*

I knew someday you'd leave me, yet  
A thought to it I never let.  
To think of such a mortal woe!  
A loved one living, just to go...

Every love ends with sorrow,  
Even if we choose to ignore  
That end we know from the start will come.

How soon it came!  
I would have listened through and through,  
I would have paid all thoughts to you!

But now! What have I done to you!?  
The books I read the whole day through!  
They brought me to the precipice  
Of youth, and showed me nearly this:  
That the unexamined life is not worth living.<sup>18</sup>

But no! No man is an island, entire of itself.  
Every man is a piece,  
A part of the main.<sup>19</sup>

I let my books take me from you  
And then they, too, took you away!  
It tolls, so does the bell, for thee.<sup>20</sup>  
And so it does then toll for me!

[David is weeping at this point. The -- is where a sob causes him to drop a metric syllable. And in the end, "And nor again will you..." trails into sobs.]

You had so much to tell and say  
Before I -- sent you away,  
You said that books could never speak.  
Now nor again will you...

How soon it came!  
I would have listened through and through,  
I would have paid all thoughts to you!

The farm, your father, photographs if you will...

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<sup>18</sup> Socrates

<sup>19</sup> John Donne *Meditation XVII*

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

An apfelstrudel, baking still...  
There is no pain so great  
As the memory of joy in present grief.<sup>21</sup>

So will I tell my children,  
As I hold them to my heart?  
I'll never hold a book alone  
Now that we're apart!

Call to me  
And I will answer you and tell you  
Great and hidden things that you have not known!

END OF WORK

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<sup>21</sup> Aeschylus