

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

Composed by Courtney Bryan

Libretto by Daniel Fish and Gideon Lester

Based on the Play by Tennessee Williams

Presented by special arrangement with The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee.

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CHARACTERS

Catherine Holly — soprano

Mrs. Venable (Catherine's aunt) — spoken role

Dr. Cukrowicz — spoken role

Mrs. Holly (Catherine's mother) — spoken role

George Holly (Catherine's brother) — spoken role

Chorus of young men

SCENE ONE

MRS VENABLE

Yes, this was Sebastian's garden.
The Latin names of the plants
Were printed on tags attached to them
But the print's fading out.
Those ones there— *[She draws a deep breath]*
Are the oldest plants on earth,
Survivors from the age of the giant fern-forests.
Of course in this semi tropical climate—
Some of the rarest plants,
Such at the Venus flytrap—
You know what this is, Doctor?
The Venus flytrap?

DOCTOR

An insectivorous plant?

MRS VENABLE

Yes, it feeds on insects.
It has to be kept under glass
From early fall to late spring
And when it went under glass,
My son, Sebastian,
Had to provide it with fruit flies
Flown in at great expense from a Florida laboratory.
Well, I can't do that, Doctor.
[She takes a deep breath.]
I can't, I just can't do it!
It's not the expense but the—

DOCTOR

Effort.

MRS VENABLE

Yes. So goodbye, Venus flytrap!— like so much else . . .
Whew! . . .

CATHERINE (*offstage*)
When...

MRS VENABLE
I don't know why,
But—I already feel I can lean on your shoulder,
Doctor— Cu? — Cu?

DOCTOR
Cu-kro-wicz.
It's a Polish word that means sugar.

MRS VENABLE
Well, now, Doctor Sugar
You've seen Sebastian's garden.

DOCTOR
A well-groomed jungle.

MRS VENABLE
Nothing accidental,
Everything planned and designed
In Sebastian's life and his...

CATHERINE
Can...

MRS VENABLE
Work.
His *life* was his occupation.
Sebastian was a poet.
The work of a poet is the life of a poet
The life of a poet is the work of a poet
A poet's life is his work and his work is his life....

CATHERINE
I...

MRS VENABLE
Oh...

DOCTOR
Mrs. Venable.

Did your doctor okay this?
Meeting this girl
You think is responsible
For your son's death?

MRS VENABLE
I've waited months to face her.
I won't collapse! She'll collapse!
I mean her lies will collapse
Not my truth

CATHERINE
When...

MRS VENABLE
Not the truth
Sebastian had no public name as a poet
Didn't want one
Refused to have one.
"Violet? Mother?
You're going to live longer than me.
When I'm gone,
It will be yours, in your hands."
Well here is my son's work, Doctor!
Here's his life going *on*!

DOCTOR
"Poem of Summer"?

CATHERINE
Can....

MRS VENABLE
"Poem of Summer."
Date of the summer.
There are twenty-five of them.
He wrote one poem a year
Which he printed himself

On an eighteenth-century hand-press
At his—atelier in the—French—Quarter—
So no one but he could see it...

DOCTOR
He wrote one poem a year?

MRS VENABLE
One for each summer we traveled together.
The other nine months...

CATHERINE
I....

MRS VENABLE
...were only preparation.

DOCTOR
Nine months?

MRS VENABLE
The length of a pregnancy, yes.

DOCTOR
The poem was hard to deliver?

MRS VENABLE
Yes, even with me.
Without me, impossible.
He wrote no poem last summer.

DOCTOR
He died last summer?

MRS VENABLE
Without me he died last summer.
His last summer's poem.
One long-ago summer
My son Sebastian said:

MRS VENABLE

“Mother listen to this:
The Encantadas”

CHORUS (*offstage*)

The Encantadas
Galapagos Islands
Five and twenty heaps
Of cinders dumped
Some of them magnified
Mountains
Vacant lot
The Sea
The Encantadas
Enchanted islands

MRS VENABLE

He said we had to go there
So we did, that summer
Chartered a boat
Four-masted schooner

CATHERINE

When....

CHORUS

Extinct volcanoes

CATHERINE

Can....

MRS VENABLE

The Encantadas
Great sea-turtles crawl
Once a year the female
Crawls up out of the equatorial sea
Blazing sand beach

CATHERINE
Blazing...I
Stop....running...

MRS VENABLE
Dig a pit in the sand
Deposit their eggs
Their annual egg-laying
Long and dreadful thing
Depositing of the eggs
Sand pits
Finished, exhausted female turtles
Crawl back to the sea, half-dead.
Never see their offspring.
We did. The hatching of the sea-turtles
Their desperate flight to the sea!

CHORUS
Narrow beach
Color of caviar
All in motion.
The sky in motion, too...

MRS VENABLE
Flesh-eating birds
The noise of the birds
Horrible savage cries
Carnivorous birds

CATHERINE
When can I stop....
When can I stop...stop...
Running down...

MRS VENABLE
The narrow black beach
Just-hatched sea turtles
Flesh-eating birds made the sky
Black as the beach

CHORUS
The Encantadas
The Encantadas

CATHERINE

That steep....

White....

MRS VENABLE

Sand all alive, all alive,

Hatched sea-turtles made their dash for the sea

Birds hovered and swooped to attack

CHORUS

And hovered and swooped

Attack and hovered

Swooped to attack!

CATHERINE

Hill....

MRS VENABLE

Diving down on the sea-turtles

Turning them over

Tearing the undersides open

Rending and eating their flesh.

DOCTOR

This fascinated your son?

CATHERINE

When can I stop

MRS VENABLE

My son was looking for...

Let's just say he was interested in sea-turtles.

CATHERINE

Running down

That steep white hill

In Cabeza de Lobo...

DOCTOR

That isn't what you started to say.

Say what you started to say.

CATHERINE

When can I stop

Running down

That steep white hill

In Cabeza de Lobo?

MRS VENABLE

I started to say that my son was looking for God.

DOCTOR

Mrs. Venable,

Doctors look for God, too.

Some do. I do.

The first operation at Lion's View

How anxious, nervous I was.

The patient a young girl

Hopeless, put in the Drum,

the violent ward at Lion's View

Like the inside of a drum....

Very bright lights, burning all day, all night...

After the operation I stayed with the girl

As if I'd delivered a child.

I stayed with her

Walked along by the rolling table

Holding onto her hand, my heart in my throat...

Nice afternoon, as fair as this one.

Wheeled her outside,

She whispered, she whispered,

"Oh how blue the sky!"

CATHERINE

Cousin Sabastian

Said he was famished for blonds

DOCTOR

Till then her speech,

Everything babbled

CATHERINE

Fed up with the dark ones

DOCTOR

A torrent of obscenities!

MRS VENABLE

My son *was* looking for God.

CATHERINE
Famished for blonds

MRS VENABLE
He spent the whole blazing equatorial day
In the crows-nest of the schooner
Watching this thing on the beach
And when he came down from the rigging
He said:
“Well now I’ve seen Him!”
And he meant God.
From then on we still lived in a world of light and shadow
Shadow almost as luminous as light.
You would have liked my son
He would have been charmed by you.
He insisted upon good looks in people around him
A perfect little court

CATHERINE
That’s how he talked about people

MRS VENABLE
A little entourage

CATHERINE
As if items on a menu

MRS VENABLE
The beautiful, the talented, the young.

DOCTOR
Your son was young, Mrs. Venable?

MRS VENABLE
Both of us were young, and stayed young, Doctor.

DOCTOR
Could I see a photograph of your son, Mrs. Venable?

MRS VENABLE
Yes, you could indeed, Doctor.

I'm going to show you not one photograph but two.
Here. Here is my son Sebastian
In a Renaissance pageboy's costume
At a masked ball in Cannes.
Here is my son Sebastian
In the same costume
At a masked ball in Venice.
These two pictures were taken twenty years apart.
Now which is the older one, Doctor?

DOCTOR
This photograph looks older.

MRS VENABLE
The photograph looks older but not the subject.
It takes character to refuse to grow old, Doctor.
Discipline, abstention.
One cocktail before dinner, not two, four, six...
A single lean chop
And lime juice on a salad.

CATHERINE
"That one's delicious
That one is appetizing"

MRS. HOLLY [*offstage*]
Violet, dear, we're here.

MRS VENABLE
Wait upstairs in my upstairs living room for me.

DOCTOR
Mrs. Venable —
Did your son have a...well...
What kind of a *personal*, well, *private* life did...

CATHERINE
He liked me
And so I loved him...

MRS VENABLE

Listen to me

Before you hear from the girl:

My son, Sebastian, was chaste.

Not c-h-a-s-e-d –

Oh he was chased in that way of spelling it too.

CATHERINE

If he'd kept hold of my hand

MRS VENABLE

I meant he was c-h-a-s-t-e! Chaste.

CATHERINE

I could have saved him.

MRS VENABLE

I was the only one in his life

That satisfied him...

We were a famous couple.

“Sebastian and Violet

Violet and Sebastian”

CHORUS

Violet and Sebastian

Sebastian and Violet,

Violet and Sebastian

CATHERINE

Sebastian suddenly said to me last summer

MRS VENABLE

Every appearance, every time we appeared

CATHERINE

Let's fly north little bird

MRS VENABLE

Attention was centered on us!

CATHERINE

I want to walk under

Those radiant cold northern lights

MRS VENABLE

Everyone else – Eclipsed!

CATHERINE

I've never seen

The Aurora Borealis

MRS VENABLE

Most people's lives...

CATHERINE

We're all of us children

MRS VENABLE

What are they but trails of debris

CATHERINE

In a vast kindergarten

MRS VENABLE

Every day more debris, more debris

CATHERINE

Trying to spell God's name

MRS VENABLE

Long trails of debris with nothing to clean it up

CATHERINE

With the wrong alphabet blocks

MRS VENABLE

But, finally, death...

My son, Sebastian, and I constructed our days

Each day

Like a piece of sculpture.

We left behind us a trail of days

A gallery of sculpture!

But...last summer...
I can't forgive him for it

CATHERINE
Cabeza de Lobo

MRS VENABLE
He let in this...*vandal*...

MRS VENABLE
We put bread in her mouth
And clothes on her back.

CATHERINE
Big city beach

MRS VENABLE
The role of benefactor is worse than thankless.
The role of a victim, Doctor

CATHERINE
The harbor

MRS VENABLE
A sacrificial victim, yes
They want your blood, Doctor

CATHERINE
Grabbed my hand

MRS VENABLE
They want your blood on the altar steps
They can't shut her up at St Mary's

CATHERINE
Dragged me in

MRS VENABLE
She *babbles*!
They couldn't shut her up

In Cabeza de Lobo
Or at the clinic in Paris
She babbled

CATHERINE
In the water

MRS VENABLE
Babbled, babbled

CATHERINE
All the way in

MRS VENABLE
Smashing my son's reputation.

CATHERINE
Cabeza de Lobo

MRS VENABLE
"So shines a good deed in a naughty world,"
Doctor—Sugar...

DOCTOR
Mrs Venable
In your letter last week
You made some reference to a...
To a...fund of some kind...
An endowment fund of...

MRS VENABLE
My lawyers and bankers and accountants
Are setting up
The Sebastian Venable Memorial Foundation
To subsidize the work of young people like you
That are pushing out the frontiers of art and science
But you have a financial problem.
You have a financial problem, don't you, Doctor?

DOCTOR

We need a separate ward for my patients
I need trained assistants
I'd like to marry a girl I can't afford to marry.
I don't want to turn you against my work at Lion's View
But I have to be honest with you,
There is a good deal of risk in my operation.
Whenever you enter the brain with a foreign object...

MRS VENABLE

Yes.

CHORUS

Yes...

DOCTOR

Even a needle-thin knife...

MRS VENABLE

Yes.

CHORUS

Yes...

DOCTOR

In a skilled surgeon's fingers...

MRS VENABLE

Yes.

CHORUS

Yes...

DOCTOR

There is a good deal of risk involved in...
The operation...

MRS VENABLE

You said it pacifies them
It quiets them down
It suddenly makes them peaceful.

DOCTOR

Yes, but...

MRS VENABLE

What?

DOCTOR

It may be the person will always be limited afterwards

Relieved of acute disturbances

But—*limited*, Mrs. Venable...

MRS VENABLE

What a blessing to them

To be just peaceful

To be just suddenly peaceful...

MRS VENABLE

After all that horror

After those nightmares

Just to be able to lift up their eyes and see

A sky not as black with savage, devouring birds

As the sky we saw in the Encantadas, Doctor.

DOCTOR

I can't guarantee that a lobotomy

Would stop her—*babbling*!

MRS VENABLE

That may be, maybe not

But after the operation

Who would believe her, Doctor?

DOCTOR

My God...

Suppose that after meeting the girl

I feel that non-surgical treatment

Insulin shock...Electrical shock...

MRS VENABLE

SHE'S HAD ALL THAT AT SAINT MARY'S!!

Nothing else is left for her.

DOCTOR

But if I disagreed with you?

MRS VENABLE

That's just part of a question.

Finish the question, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Would you still be interested in my work at Lion's View?

MRS VENABLE

Aren't we always more interested

In a thing that concerns us personally, Doctor?

DOCTOR

You're such an innocent person

It obviously doesn't occur to you

That anybody less innocent than you

Could interpret this offer of a subsidy

As, well, as sort of a *bribe*...?

MRS VENABLE

Name it that—I don't care—

She's a destroyer.

My son was a *creator*!

Now if my honesty's shocked you

Pick up your little black bag

Without the subsidy in it

And run away from this garden!

Nobody's heard our conversation

But you and I, Doctor Sugar...

I'm not ready to face her.

I have to have my five o'clock cocktail

To fortify me.

CATHERINE

Five o'clock!

MRS VENABLE

Doctor? Sugar?

You may stay in the garden if you wish to

CATHERINE
Five o'clock
Time to meet him
Outside the bath houses

MRS VENABLE
Or run out of the garden if you wish to

CATHERINE
That five o'clock lunch
At one of those fish places

MRS VENABLE
Or go in this way if you wish to

CATHERINE
Five o'clock, Along the harbor

MRS VENABLE
Or do anything that you wish to

CATHERINE
of Cabeza de Lobo

MRS VENABLE
Or do anything that you wish to
But I'm going to have my five o'clock daiquiri—*Frozen!*
Before I face her.

CATHERINE
Hot blazing white. Five o'clock in the afternoon.

[Catherine enters and sees the Doctor]

CATHERINE
Do you want to bore a hole in my skull
And turn a knife in my brain?
Everything else was done to me!

SCENE TWO

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Sit down.

Be still.

[CHORUS vocalizes throughout the scene]

CATHERINE

When...

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Put it back.

CATHERINE

Can I stop...

Too late!

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Give it here.

CATHERINE

When can I stop....

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Give it here.

CATHERINE

Running....

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Give it here.

CATHERINE

Let me smoke!

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Catherine, give it here.

CATHERINE

This is an afternoon out.

Don't be a bully!

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Give me that cigarette.

The violent ward.

CATHERINE

When can I stop

Running down that steep white hill...

I'm not being violent.

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Give me that cigarette!

CATHERINE

In Cabeza de Lobo...

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Give me that cigarette!

CATHERINE

All right, take it, here!

Take it, here! Take it, here!

Take it, here! Take it, here!

Take it, here!

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

You burned me!

CATHERINE

When can I stop

Running down that steep white hill

In Cabeza de Lobo

I didn't mean to.

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

You deliberately burned me!

CATHERINE

I'm *sick*

I'm *sick*—of being *bossed* and *bullied*!

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Sit down!

CATHERINE

There goes the Waring Mixer

Aunt Violet's five o'clock frozen daiquiri

You could set a watch by it!

We're in Sebastian's garden.

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Did you have any medication?

CATHERINE

No. Give me some?

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

The doctor will.

CATHERINE

I knew I was being watched!

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Sit down.

Be still.

CATHERINE

Lion's View, is it, Doctor?

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Sit down, dear.

CATHERINE

Is it Lion's View, Doctor?

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Be still....

CATHERINE

When can I stop running down
That steep white hill in Cabeza de Lobo?

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Catherine dear, sit down.

CATHERINE

I loved him!
Why wouldn't he let me save him?
I tried to hold onto his hand
He struck me away
And ran, ran, ran in the wrong direction!
If they give me an injection
I won't have any choice
But to tell the truth
It makes you tell the truth
Everything comes out
Decent or *not* decent
You have no control
But always
Always the truth!
I didn't invent it
It's hideous
A true story of our time
What did truly happen
To Cousin Sebastian
In Cabeza de Lobo...

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Catherine dear, be still.

CATHERINE

The Doctor's still at the window
He's too blond to hide
He catches the light
He shines.
We were going to blonds
Blonds were next on the menu.

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Be still now. Quiet, dear.

CATHERINE

He was famished for blonds
Fed up with the dark ones
Famished for blonds.
Copenhagen...Stockholm.
Fed up with dark ones
Famished for light ones:
That's how he talked about people
Items on a menu.
"That one's delicious, that one appetizing"

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Catherine, be still.

MRS VENABLE (AS SISTER FELICITY)

Catherine, be still.

CATHERINE

He liked me so I loved him...
If he'd kept hold of my hand
I could have saved him!
Sebastian suddenly said to me last summer:

CHORUS

"Let's fly north, little bird
I want to walk under those
Radiant, cold, northern lights,
I've never seen
The Aurora Borealis."

MRS VENABLE

We're all of us children

In a vast kindergarten

Trying to spell God's name

With the wrong alphabet blocks!

— *CHORAL INTERLUDE* —

SCENE THREE

MRS. HOLLY

Catherine, dear! Catherine—

GEORGE

Jesus! What are you up to? Huh? Sister?

Are you trying to RUIN us?

MRS. HOLLY

GAWGE! WILL YOU BE QUIET.

George inherited Cousin Sebastian's wardrobe

But everything else is in probate!

And Violet can keep it in probate as long as she wants.

The horrible death of Sebastian

Just about *killed* her!

Dear...

I'm sure you understand

Why we haven't been out to see you at Saint Mary's.

They said you were too disturbed...

Not a soul even knows that you've come back from Europe.

When people enquire we just say you've stayed abroad.

[She catches her breath.]

Be *very* careful what you say to Aunt Violet

About what happened to Sebastian

In Cabeza de Lobo.

Just don't repeat that same fantastic story!

For my sake

And George's sake

The sake of your brother and mother

Don't repeat that horrible story again!

GEORGE

You were the only witness to it, Cathie.

MRS. HOLLY

Sebastian has BEQUEATHED! —

To you an' Gawge in his *will* —

GEORGE
To each of us
Fifty
Grand
Each!

AFTER! TAXES! — GET IT?
Cathie, Cathie
You got to forget that story! Can'tcha?
For *your* fifty grand?

MRS. HOLLY
If Aunt Vi contests the will, and we know she'll contest it,
She'll keep it in the courts forever! We'll be—

GEORGE
It's in PROBATE NOW!
And'll never get out of probate
Until you drop that story.
We can't afford to hire lawyers
Good enough to contest it!
So if you don't stop telling that crazy story
We won't have a pot to—cook *greens* in!

CATHERINE laughs wildly.

MRS. HOLLY
Don't laugh like that
It scares me.

GEORGE
She's crazy like a coyote!
We won't get a single damn penny, honest t'God.

MRS. HOLLY
Cathie, why, why, why!

GEORGE
Lose us a hundred thousand! Cathie?
You are a BITCH!

MRS. HOLLY
GAWGE!

GEORGE
A bitch!
She isn't crazy, Mama, she's just perverse!

MRS. HOLLY
Gawge, Gawge
This is no way to talk to your sister.
You tell your sweet little sister
You're sorry you spoke like that.

GEORGE
I'm sorry, Cathie
But you know we NEED that money!
I got *ambitions*!
And, Cathie, I'm YOUNG!
I *want* things, I *need* them, Cathie!
Will you please think about ME?
Us?

MRS. HOLLY
Catherine, Gawge put it very badly but you know that it's TRUE!
WE DO HAVE GET WHAT SEBASTIAN HAS LEFT US
IN HIS WILL, DEAREST!
AND YOU WON'T LET US DOWN?
PROMISE?
YOU WON'T? LET US DOWN?

GEORGE
[fiercely shouting]
HERE COMES AUNT VI!
Mama, Cathie, Aunt Violet's...
Here is Aunt Vi!

SCENE FOUR

MRS VENABLE ENTERS

MRS VENABLE

She sees me and I see her.

MRS. HOLLY

Gawge, tell Aunt Violet
How grateful you are for...

GEORGE

Aunt Vi? About the will?
I was just wondering
If we can't figure out some way to...to...

MRS. HOLLY

To EXPEDITE it!
To get through the red tape quicker?

MRS VENABLE

Get the Doctor.

DOCTOR

He had to answer an urgent call
From Lion's View.

MRS. HOLLY

Not Lion's View!

MRS VENABLE

Are you all prepared
To put out a thousand a month
To keep the girl at St Mary's?
I'm paying to keep her in a private asylum.
Your mother's dependent on me —
All of you are! — financially...

MRS. HOLLY

Cathie, Cathie dear

Tell Aunt Violet how grateful you are
For makin' it possible for you to rest an' recuperate
At such a sweet, sweet place as St. Mary's!

CATHERINE

No place for lunatics is a sweet, sweet place.

MRS VENABLE

Doctor, I thought you'd left us
With just that little black bag to remember you by.
This is Dr. Cukrowicz.
He says it means "sugar"
We can call him "Sugar" —

MRS VENABLE

He's a specialist from Lion's View.

CATHERINE

WHAT DOES HE SPECIALIZE IN?

MRS VENABLE

Something new.
When other treatments have failed.

CATHERINE

Do you want to bore a hole in my skull
And turn a knife in my brain?
Everything else was done to me!

DOCTOR

A quiet atmosphere will get us the best results.
Your niece seems to be disturbed.

MRS VENABLE

She has every reason.
She took my son from me.

CATHERINE

You couldn't travel. You'd had a—
[She stops short.]

MRS VENABLE

Go on!

She meant that I had a stroke.

I DID NOT HAVE A STROKE!

I had a slight aneurysm.

A little vascular convulsion!

Not a hemorrhage

Just a little convulsion of a blood-vessel.

She was trying to take my son away from me.

A little temporary—muscular—contraction—

I was disgusted, sickened.

She'd lost her head over a young married man

Made a scandalous scene at a Mardi Gras ball

My son Sebastian felt sorry for her

And took her with him last summer instead of me.

CATHERINE

I can't change truth, I'm not God!

MRS VENABLE

She was in love with my son!

CATHERINE

Cabeza de Lobo

MRS VENABLE

All right, *Lion's View*!

MRS. HOLLY

CATHERINE! CATHERINE!

DOCTOR

I'd like to be left alone with Miss Catherine.

GEORGE

Cathie can't go to Lion's View.

Everyone in the Garden District

Would know you'd put your niece in a state asylum.

MRS VENABLE

Get me away from these people!
Let me go or I'll strike you!

CATHERINE

Sebastian couldn't use her.

DOCTOR

Use her?

MRS VENABLE

We all use each other
And that's what we think of as love
And not being able to use each other
Is *hate*.

DOCTOR

What was your feeling for your cousin Sebastian?

CATHERINE

The feelings you have in a dream.
Last winter...
Suddenly last winter...

DOCTOR

Something happened last winter?

CATHERINE

Last winter, a Mardi Gras ball,
Boy that took me
Got too drunk to stand up.
I wanted to go home.
Somebody took my arm:

CHORUS

"I'll drive you home"

CATHERINE

Don't think I'd ever seen him before.
Took me another place first
The Dueling Oaks

CHORUS
The Dueling Oaks

CATHERINE
Stopped...
What for?
Didn't answer
Struck a match
In the car
Light a cigarette
In the car

CHORUS
[*whispered*]
In the car

CATHERINE
Looked at him
In the car
I knew what for.
I got out
Of the car
Walked through the wet grass
To the great misty oaks
As if somebody was calling us for help there
Help!
I lost him.
He took me home
Said an awful thing
I sat there thinking a little
Went right back to the Roosevelt Hotel
Ball still going on
Gone back to make a scene
On the ballroom floor
I spotted him on the floor
Ran up to him
Beat him as hard as I could
Cousin Sebastian took me away
Couldn't go out any more
Couldn't go out any more.

MRS VENABLE

One morning Sebastian
Said: "Get up!
Mother can't go abroad with me
This summer.
You're going to go with me
This summer
Instead of Mother."

CATHERINE

If you're still alive after dying,
Well then, you're obedient, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Miss Catherine, let me give you something.

MRS VENABLE

What is she going to be stuck with this time, Doctor?

DOCTOR

Miss Catherine?
I want you to give me the truth.

CATHERINE

One hundred! Ninety-nine!
Ninety-eight! Ninety seven!
Ninety-six! Ninety-five!

MRS VENABLE

They say truth is at the bottom of a bottomless well.

CHORUS

Ninety-four! Ninety-three!

DOCTOR

Relax.

CATHERINE

Truth.

DOCTOR

Give me all your resistance. See
I'm holding my hand out
I want you to put yours in mine
And give me all your resistance.
Pass all your resistance
Out of your hand into mine.

CATHERINE AND MRS VENABLE

Let me! Let! Let! Let me! Let me, let me, oh, let me!
I've been so lonely.
It's lonelier than death
If I've gone mad it's lonelier than death!

DOCTOR

Now, Miss Catherine
You're going to tell the true story.
Last summer...?

CATHERINE

Last summer. Oh last summer.

DOCTOR

About last summer: How did it begin?

CATHERINE

With his kindness
And six days at sea
So far from the Dueling Oaks.
He was affectionate
So sweet and attentive
People took us for a honeymoon couple
Till they noticed we had separate staterooms.
And then in Paris
He bought me so many new clothes
I turned into a peacock!
Of course, so was *he*...
Responding too much to his kindness
Taking hold of his hand, his arm

Leaning on his shoulder
His kindness...

MRS VENABLE
A poet's vocation, Doctor...

CATHERINE
And suddenly...

MRS VENABLE
rests on something...

CATHERINE
Last summer...

MRS VENABLE
As thin and fine as the web of a spider.

CATHERINE
He began to be restless...and—oh!
I failed him.
I wasn't able to keep the web from—breaking.

MRS VENABLE
Now the truth's coming out.
We had a covenant between us
Which he broke last summer
When he took her with him!
When he was frightened his hands would shake
And his eyes looked in, not out
I'd touch his hands with my hand
Until his hands stopped shaking
And his eyes looked out, not in.
In the morning the poem would be continued
Continued until it was finished!
He was *mine*! I knew how to help him!
You didn't, you couldn't!
I would say, "You *will*" and he *would*.

CATHERINE

Something had broken
That string of pearls
Old mothers hold their sons by.
An umbilical cord...

MRS VENABLE

She means I held him back
From destruction.

CATHERINE

Last summer
Cabeza de Lobo
And suddenly, last summer
Cabeza de Lobo
A big city beach near the harbor
He bought me a swimsuit
White
A one-piece suit
Made of white lisle
He'd grab my hand and drag me into the water
All the way in
I'd come out looking naked!
I was PROCURING for him!
She used to do it, too.
In nice places, decent ways.
She used to do it too.

MRS. HOLLY

Oh, Cathie! Sister...

DOCTOR

Hush!

MRS VENABLE

Sebastian was lonely, Doctor.
I knew what I was doing.

CATHERINE

When the weather got warmer
And the beach so crowded
He didn't need me anymore;
The ones on the free beach
Began to climb over the fence
Or swim around it
Bands of homeless young people
That lived on the free beach
Like scavenger dogs
Hungry children...
I'd go to a faraway empty end of the beach
Write postcards and letters
Till it was five o'clock
Time to meet him
Outside the bathhouses
On the street.
He would come out, *followed*.
The homeless, hungry people.
He'd pass out tips among them
As if they'd shined his shoes
Each day the crowd
Bigger, noisier, greedier!
Sebastian began to be frightened.
We stopped going out there.
One day
One of those blazing
White days
In Cabeza de Lobo
An open-air restaurant on the sea
Sebastian was white
As the weather
Spotless
White silk Shantung suit

CHORUS

White...

CATHERINE

White silk tie
White Panama
White shoes

White-white lizard skin pumps!
Kept touching his face and his throat
White silk handkerchief
Popping little white pills
Bad time with his heart
Frightened.

CHORUS

“We ought to go north”

DOCTOR

“We ought to go north”

CATHERINE

He said.

CHORUS

“We’ve done Cabeza de Lobo,”

MRS VENABLE

“We’ve done Cabeza de Lobo,”

CATHERINE

He said.

CHORUS

I think we’ve done it, don’t you?”

DOCTOR

“I think we’ve done it, don’t you?”

CATHERINE

I thought we’d done it.
Where was I?
Oh yes
That five o’clock lunch
At one of those fish-places
Along the harbor of Cabeza de Lobo
Naked children along the beach
A band

Of frightfully thin
Dark naked children
Like a flock of plucked birds
Blown there by the wind
The hot white wind from the sea
Cousin Sebastian
Popping those little white pills said:

DOCTOR

“Don’t look at those little monsters.
Beggars are a social disease in this country.”

CATHERINE

The band of children
Began to—serenade us.

CHORUS

OOM PAH OOMPAH!!

CATHERINE

On Instruments!
Make music!
If you could call it music..

DOCTOR

Your Cousin Sebastian was entertained by this—*concert*?

CATHERINE

He was *terrified*!
He recognized some of the boys
Between childhood and—older...
He said:

DOCTOR

“They’ve got to stop that!”

MRS VENABLE

“Waiter, make them stop that!”

GEORGE

“I’m not a well man”

MRS HOLLY

“I have a heart condition”

GEORGE

“It’s making me sick!”

CATHERINE

The waiters charged the barbed wire
Beat the little musicians away with
Clubs and skillets, anything hard
They could snatch from the kitchen!
Cousin Sebastian left the table
Stalked out of the restaurant
Throwing a handful of money on the table
Fled from the place.
I followed.
White outside
White hot
Blazing white hot
Hot blazing white
Five o’clock in the afternoon
In the city of Cabeza de Lobo.
It looked as if...

DOCTOR

It looked as if...?

CATHERINE

A huge white bone
Had caught on fire in the sky
And blazed so bright
It was white
And turned the sky and everything under the sky
White!
Cousin Sebastian seemed to be paralyzed
Near the entrance of the café
I said, “Let’s go!”

He started up the steep street
Hand stuck in his jacket
Pain in his chest
Palpitations...
Walked faster and faster in panic,
The faster he walked the louder and closer it got
The oompa of the following band.
They'd gotten through the barbed wire
Out onto the street
Following, following up
The blazing white street.
The band of naked children
Pursued us up the steep white street
Sebastian started to run
They all screamed at once
And seemed to fly in the air
Outran him
I screamed
I heard Sebastian scream
He screamed just once before this flock of
Black plucked little birds
Pursued him and overtook him
Halfway up
The white hill.
I ran down
Down, down, down, down
The hot, white, blazing street
Screaming, "Help!"
Cousin Sebastian had disappeared
In the flock of Featherless little black sparrows
He was lying naked
Against a white wall
And this you won't believe
Nobody *has* believed
Nobody *could* believe
Nobody, nobody on earth
Could possibly believe—
They had *devoured*
Parts of him.
Torn, cut

Parts of him
Away with their hands
Torn bits of him away
Stuffed them
Into those gobbling
Fierce little empty black mouths.
Not a sound anymore
Nothing to see but Sebastian
What was left of him
Like a big white-paper-wrapped bunch of red roses
Torn, thrown, crushed!—
Against that blazing
White wall...

MRS VENABLE
Lion's View! State asylum!
Cut this hideous story out of her brain!

GEORGE
Mom, I'll quit school, I'll get a job, I'll...

MRS. HOLLY
Hush, son!
Doctor, can't you say something?

DOCTOR
[Pause. Comes downstage. After a while, reflectively, into space]
I think we ought at least
To consider the possibility
That the girl's story
Could be true...

END