

**When The Phones Came  
To Liberty Creek**

(A Techno-Pastoral)

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086  
201-770-0550; 347-564-9998; m.bett@verizon.net;

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

(Copyright © by Michael Bettencourt)

# When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

Special thanks to Jonatha Newcomb for her stories  
"Grategranmama" and  
"I Think My Eyes Are About To Open"

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

In 1999, Liberty Creek is one of a handful of rural "unincorporated territories" not wired for phone service. People have to travel several miles to reach a pay phone, and cell phones can be used only at great expense and only by standing in certain areas at certain times. But finally, after the work of JONATHA CALDWELL and her niece, HANNAH CALDWELL, phone lines have finally come to Liberty Creek, starting and ending traditions with one simple dial tone.

## CHARACTERS

- JAKE CALDWELL: Curmudgeon in his 80s, still vigorous but has to move with help, which comes in the form of large knobby walking stick as tall as he is.
- JONATHA CALDWELL: JAKE's sister (also in her 80s), who lives with him; for the past five years she has lobbied to get phone service to Liberty Creek and has now succeeded.
- HANNAH CALDWELL: JAKE's daughter and JONATHA's niece, in her late 40s; helped JONATHA on the phone line campaign. In ROLLINS' band.
- JASON BOCK: Reporter, 40s, sent out to cover the coming of the phone to Liberty Creek; wears an old fedora with a card in the band, on which is written "PRESS" -- both a joke and a homage.
- ROLLINS FREEMAN: A repairer of instruments, especially guitars, and who plays in a rock-and-roll band called ROLLINS SHIVA TUT; in his 40s, never really out of his 20s.
- SHANG: A female "shang hunter," Asian background, indeterminate age, a seeker after wild ginseng, which, when found, can be sold for a lot of money. Always carries a canvas bag of her tools: small spade, small garden fork, etc. In ROLLINS' band.
- TRINI: Full name Henry Thoreau Toussaint, from Trinidad and Tobago and still speaks with a hint of island "lilt" -- came north because he read Thoreau's Walden and wanted to live like that man; he thinks Caribbean culture is too "childish." Famed as the only Lutheran Caribbean logger in the entire state. In ROLLINS' band.
- ARCHIE "WOLFGANG" MCFEE: Runs a pirate radio station from his Barcalounger in the basement; otherwise makes his living counting fish at the state dam.
- ALICE DUAL: Simply known as DUAL, the town historian, the same age as ARCHIE.

## SETTING

The play takes place primarily in the living room, kitchen, and downstairs bedroom of the house of JAKE CALDWELL. There is an exit

door upstage right, the door to the outside. Stage left is the bedroom to where JONATHA CALDWELL retreats; a partial wall contains a door with a transom. In the bedroom is a table and a chair, a manual typewriter on the table, a single bed made up, and miscellaneous boxes of all kinds. A window is in the upstage wall of the bedroom, with a chair next to it. If anything, it should look like a small spare cabin. There is also a radio in the room, and when it is on, it is tuned to ARCHIE's station.

Somewhere in the mix is a large-print -- and I mean LARGE PRINT -- calendar which shows the year to be 1999. Anything else that can be included in the set that indicates that year is fair game.

At stage right is ARCHIE's radio station. The same LARGE PRINT calendar is there. A phone sits on a small table. Other scenes will take place in areas defined by light.

# When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

## Act I, Scene 1: Prologue

As the lights fade, music: Andrew Sisters, "Telephone Song." Lights up. Stage right is ARCHIE in his "pirate radio station." ARCHIE wears a headset and sits in a Barcalounger, surrounded by radio equipment.

ARCHIE

Welcome back to Liberty Creek's Radio True Blue,  
I Love You, and I am your one and only host,  
"Wolf" --

ARCHIE pronounces this with a German accent: "Vulf" -- and after he says "Vulf," ARCHIE howls.

ARCHIE

"Gang" --

ARCHIE pronounces this as "gong" -- ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

ARCHIE

-- Vulfgang! -- broadcasting to you from my  
trusty lounge, Barca.

(barks several times)

The only pirate radio station in the first circle  
of hell. And while we wait radiophonically for  
the return of Alice Dual from the hospital, let  
me give you an update on Liberty Creek vitals.

(craning his neck)

Weather: we have some out there, and from where I  
sit, I confidently predict it will continue for  
the entirety of this program -- and even beyond.  
Also, Liberty Creek Week is fast flying towards  
us, our annual tribute to us from us -- and this  
year we will celebrate the historic coming of the  
phones to our fair hamlet, thanks to Hannah and  
Jonatha Caldwell -- the coming of which I would  
say is a quite a sea-change for us even though  
we're land-locked in the mountains.

ALICE DUAL enters, flustered, and sits. ARCHIE gives her a thumbs up.

ARCHIE

All right! Here she is, folks, a breath of fresh  
air breezing in, our very own Alice Dual, town  
historian, with our much awaited very, very,  
very, very extra-special report.

(bangs the gong)  
Grab your breath, and then report, oh mighty  
chronicler.

DUAL  
(while trying to catch her breath)  
Well, as you all know, I just came from the  
hospital --

ARCHIE  
Alice, breathe deeply -- and all of you out there  
-- take a deep breath, a little "air time," for  
Alice Dual.  
(he takes a deep breath)  
Now, ready?

DUAL  
Ready.

ARCHIE  
Set.

DUAL  
Set.

ARCHIE  
Go.

DUAL  
I just came from the hospital --

ARCHIE  
And?

DUAL  
And I want to let everyone know that Jake  
Caldwell is all right.

ARCHIE  
Our patriarch is patched up?

DUAL  
As mended as medicine can make him.

ARCHIE  
Anybody there with him?

DUAL  
Hannah. Rollins and Shang and Trini, too.

ARCHIE  
And Jonatha, right?

DUAL

And Jonatha --

ARCHIE

Good.

DUAL

-- the Ice Queen --

ARCHIE

Be objective, Alice --

DUAL

Well, to lose Jake -- I don't even want to think --

ARCHIE

Don't try to imagine the unimaginable before midnight, Dual. Besides, Jake's turnaround shows the protective effects of ten parts "old coot" vinegar to one part human blood in your veins.

DUAL

Pith and vinegar.

ARCHIE

Like that "lithp."

(gives her an affectionate look)

Whew, Alice Dual!

DUAL

Whew, Archie McFee.

ARCHIE

What a way to cap it all off: pedal-to-the-metal opera, wouldn't you say?

DUAL

And a near-death experience bringing us all near death.

ARCHIE

Why, it was just a week ago today, in the gentle environs of Liberty Creek --

DUAL

Archie -- not "wayback woo-woo" again?

ARCHIE

Folks, I am definitely going into "wayback woo-woo" -- seems like a good time to reverb [pronounced REE-verb] the dire and dramatic and

delightful drama of when the phones came to  
Liberty Creek.

DUAL

I hope Jake is not listening.

ARCHIE

Jake never listens to me. Besides, he is doing  
his job by making himself whole for us again.

ARCHIE makes the "wayback woo-woo" sound -- the aural equivalent of  
when the television or movie screen goes fuzzy to indicate a move back  
into time.

ARCHIE

On the day the phone lines came to Liberty Creek  
-- help me set the mood, Alice --

DUAL

(reluctantly)

On the day --

ARCHIE

After five years of political persuasion by  
Jonatha and Hannah Caldwell --

DUAL

To bring Liberty Creek into the century in which  
it lives --

ARCHIE

After all of this --

DUAL

-- not a rump found itself resting --

ARCHIE

Ants in their pants -- bees in their BVDs --

ARCHIE smiles and gives her a thumbs-up.

DUAL

And Archie, you and I know that in uncertain  
times --

ARCHIE

Yes?

DUAL

A restless rump --

ARCHIE

Yes?

DUAL

Can be a dangerous thing, indeed.

ARCHIE

Indeed, indeed. Okay, listeners, go for your next glass of whatever it is you're drinking while Alice whooshes out of here to get some deserved R-and-R. Then -- onto the epic story of "When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek" from the only pirate radio station powered by the methane effusions of bilious bovines.

ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- The Andrew Sisters, "Telephone Song." DUAL looks tired and worried.

ARCHIE

Even after all these years --

DUAL

My problem, Archie, is that I can imagine, before midnight, that Jake --

ARCHIE puts a tender hand on her shoulder.

ARCHIE

It looks like he's going to be fine, Alice.

DUAL

Woo-woo.

Lights out.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Act I, Scene 2: The House of Caldwell**

Transition music, if needed: opening section of Manhattan Transfer's version of "Operator." On the table is a cardboard box; everyone stares at it. JONATHA and HANNAH slowly take a new phone out of the box. They fuss with it during the next lines, trying to get it set up just right. ARCHIE has a portable tape recorder. TRINI stands near JAKE; SHANG stands near JONATHA, holding the plug-end of a telephone line.

DUAL

(with the awe of the historian)  
The first one. The very first one, Jake.

ARCHIE  
Found that in my attic.

DUAL  
The first one ever.

JAKE  
Just like the serpent in the Garden, Alice.

ROLLINS  
Man, how do you even have room for air in that attic!

JAKE  
(to everyone)  
You can leave now.

ARCHIE  
Nabbed the device at a flea market.

JAKE  
Begone!

ROLLINS  
Your attic is, like --

JAKE  
Gone be!

ROLLINS  
-- like --

ARCHIE  
Never had a use for a phone --

ROLLINS  
geological --

JAKE  
(to TRINI)  
Well, that didn't do any good.

ARCHIE  
-- since I can't do call-in shows.

TRINI  
(to JAKE)  
Being pissed keeps you young.

ROLLINS  
-- like fossils, layers -- bet'cha you got stashed stuff you have no memory of --

ARCHIE  
So come unlayer me sometime, guitar-fixer.

JAKE  
(to TRINI)  
Give 'em a dime, and they'll take your dollar.

TRINI  
And getting younger by the minute.

ARCHIE  
(to HANNAH and JONATHA)  
Not too bad, huh?

HANNAH  
Does it work?

ARCHIE  
It's brand-new.

HANNAH  
But does it work?

ARCHIE  
Never used it.

HANNAH  
How do you know it works?

ARCHIE  
I don't.

ROLLINS  
(sotto voce)  
Good work, Archie.

HANNAH  
(to JONATHA)  
What if it doesn't work?

ROLLINS  
(soothingly)  
It'll work, Hannah nirvana.

JAKE  
Fine by me.

JONATHA  
It'll work.

JAKE  
She commandeth!

ARCHIE  
(to JASON)  
Hey, big-city scribe?

ROLLINS  
It'll work, Hannah.

JASON  
(touching his hat)  
My low-wattage king.

ARCHIE  
(to the others)  
Just love him, don't'cha?

ROLLINS  
No.

ARCHIE  
(to JASON)  
You ready?

JASON  
Ready, radio-meister.

ROLLINS  
(a little louder)  
Suck-up.

JAKE  
Thank you all for ignoring me in my own house.

ARCHIE  
Alice Dual --

JAKE  
(to TRINI)  
They act like they own it --

TRINI  
Over soon.

JAKE  
That's what you think.

ARCHIE  
Stand here and let the finger of Clio amuse us  
all.

("color commentary")  
"And we are recording live from the home of Jake  
and Jonatha Caldwell -- "

JAKE

House is in my name, not hers.

ARCHIE

"Jonatha looks as skittish as a cow with a buck-toothed calf, staring at the phone -- "

DUAL

"And, Archie -- "

ARCHIE

"Alice Dual, folks."

DUAL

"Hannah's a bit white around the gills as well."

ARCHIE

"Momentous day."

DUAL

"Yes it is."

JAKE

All traps should be shut.

ARCHIE

(covering the microphone)

Getting the purple prose?

JASON

The ink runneth over.

JONATHA

Okay, everyone --

But JONATHA does not move, just stares. HANNAH hovers near.

ARCHIE

"We're going to do a little move-through-the-crowd verité here."

HANNAH

Jonatha?

JAKE

(indicating TRINI)

Why don't we get a blessing from the Santeria guy!

TRINI

Jake --

HANNAH

Dad --

ROLLINS

They don't do Santeria in Trinidad.

HANNAH

Trini has never done Santeria --

(back to JONATHA)

-- you okay?

TRINI

I have never done Santeria --

JAKE

Probably can't spell it.

TRINI

I like my dead chickens plastic-wrapped just like you.

HANNAH

Jonatha?

ROLLINS

(to TRINI)

Mr. C, tough guy.

TRINI

(touching JAKE's head lightly)

A teddy bear.

(to JAKE)

I'm as Lutheran as you, old coot.

JAKE

Lutherans can't come from Trinidad -- it's genetic.

TRINI

(island lilt)

But here I is, Jake.

(takes JAKE by the arm)

We be a multicultural couple!

JONATHA

Jake, Trini, please -- we don't have much time.

JAKE

She commandeth! Againeth!

JONATHA gestures to SHANG.

JONATHA

Shang?

SHANG

Yes, Jonatha?

JONATHA

That plug in your hand --

TRINI

Yes?

JONATHA

Give it to me as gently as you handle one of your  
"man-roots."

ROLLINS

(pointing to the plug-end)

Definitely a ginseng "man root," Shangster --  
forked and precious.

JAKE

Too crowded in here.

JONATHA

Hand it to me that gently.

JAKE

(to TRINI)

It's not the heat -- it's the humanity.

TRINI

Quiet, or I'll call down Chango on you!

SHANG carefully brings her the phone line.

JONATHA

Thank you, Shang.

ARCHIE offers SHANG the microphone, indicates for her to speak.

SHANG

Um -- um -- Archie, in traditional Chinese  
medicine, ginseng is linked to the twin tastes of  
sweet and bitter.

SHANG makes a face to ARCHIE, as if to say, "Was that all right?"

JONATHA

Exactly, Shang -- what else for people like you  
and me?

JONATHA gets ready to insert the plug.

ARCHIE

(into the microphone)

"There's a pause -- the phone plug clutched in  
Jonatha's fingers."

DUAL

"Moment of connection here. But wait!"

ARCHIE

"She hands it off to Hannah -- "

DUAL

"Too nervous to make the connection herself."

ARCHIE

"Hannah takes a deep starting-line breath."

ROLLINS puts a gentle hand on HANNAH's shoulder.

ROLLINS

(sotto voce)

Go, girl.

DUAL

"Hannah plugs it in."

Everyone takes a step back quickly as if a bomb has been activated.

JAKE

The seventh seal is off --

TRINI shushes him.

JAKE

The four horsemen fart by --

TRINI shushes him again. Everyone waits. Then, like a blast, the  
phone rings: the ACTORS can vocally make the ringing sound rather than  
have a sound effect.

ARCHIE

It works.

After several rings, JONATHA picks it up. ARCHIE records.

JONATHA

Hello? Yes -- this is she.

JAKE

Uses the objective case --

JONATHA

Hello, Governor. Yes, right on time -- loud and clear, yes it is. Oh, we're all here -- no, not all of us, but those that could get away. Well, all right, if that's what you want.

JONATHA holds the phone up in the air and encourages everyone to say hello to the Governor, which they do in a variety of ways.

JAKE

I didn't vote for you!

JONATHA gets back on the line.

JONATHA

Yes, this is historic.

JAKE

Won't ever vote for you.

JONATHA

Yes, we're looking forward to everything it can bring.

JAKE

Rather vote Communist --

JONATHA

And thank you for all your support in this.

JAKE

Let the corruption begin!

JONATHA

No, no, just noisy in the background here.

JAKE

See, it's already started!

TRINI

Jake.

JAKE

Go chop a chicken.

JONATHA

Thank you, Governor. Yes, technology is an amazing thing. Call again.

Everyone cheers, dances around, etc.

ROLLINS

Ready, guys?

TRINI, SHANG, HANNAH, and ROLLINS get into a group, ROLLINS hums a note, and they break into a four-part chorus of "Hello, My Baby."

ROLLINS, ET. AL.

Hello! ma baby, Hello! ma honey, Hello! ma  
ragtime gal.  
Send me a kiss by wire, baby my heart's on fire!  
If you refuse me, Honey, you'll lose me, then  
you'll be left alone;  
Oh baby, telephone and tell me I'm your own.<sup>1</sup>

While they sing, JAKE looks on with disgust. As he walks up to JONATHA, the song trails off, and as he speaks, everyone quiets down to listen. TRINI and SHANG make a move as if they are going to try to keep them apart, but everyone is more or less frozen in place, as if this were inevitable and unavoidable.

JAKE

Well, sister of mine, I do believe you think you  
have brought progress to Liberty Creek.

JONATHA

I have, brother of mine.

JAKE

Oh, but you haven't.

(to all of them)

You're all going to lose! You're all going to be  
losers!

HANNAH

Dad --

ROLLINS

Mr. C --

TRINI

Jake --

JONATHA

(to each of them)

Don't try reason on him. You can't reason with a  
relic.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Hello, Ma Baby," Words and Music by Ida Emerson and Joseph E. Howard --  
<http://www.rienzihills.com/SING/hello.htm>

Overlapping.

Ooooh -- ARCHIE

The gall -- DUAL

Hey! ROLLINS

Jonatha -- HANNAH

JAKE slams down his stick.

JAKE  
A relic! At least a relic is useful. Show it off. Sell it. Heave it through the palace windows and kill a czar. But that!  
(pointing his stick at the phone)  
The world's corruption will now ooze into your homes because of that! You want to be connected, on-line, wired -- Arguments for five years, in my ear like wasps -- and all of you sheep-like -- bah, bah, bah -- because it would make your lives easier! Easy? Spirit becomes sharp and hard by fighting!  
(pointing at them)  
None of you has any fight left. Giving in to gravity, to luxury. Upward! That's where the fight goes. Keeps us out of the slime, out of the company of animals. That --  
(indicating the phone)  
-- that is the millstone to drown you in your own desires.

JONATHA  
Just a dried-up old Jeremiah.

HANNAH moves toward JONATHA, but JAKE waves her off.

JAKE  
A sybaritic disgusting bag of bones.

HANNAH  
(angrily, to ARCHIE, indicating the tape recorder)  
Turn it off!

JONATHA  
You're still jealous --

HANNAH  
(to ARCHIE)  
Now!

JONATHA  
-- because I went to New York.

JAKE  
Jealous of a deserter?

HANNAH  
Christ, not this!

JONATHA  
Forty years gnawing my bones --

JAKE  
A. De. Ser. Ter!

JONATHA  
An escapee!

JAKE  
Who left me to clean up everything --

JONATHA  
Who so loved a mess --

JAKE  
-- so she could pursue her gift --

JONATHA  
That's right!

JAKE  
Brilliant painter unequalled!

JONATHA  
I had a life to make.

JAKE  
Unmade everyone to make it.

HANNAH  
This is old news --

JONATHA  
Farm wife, schoolmarm, nurse --

ARCHIE  
No downhill brakes, Hannah.

JAKE  
What's wrong with a nurse?

HANNAH  
Why bring it --  
(to ARCHIE, viciously)  
Is that off?!

ARCHIE  
(turning it off)  
It's off!

But DUAL takes the tape recorder from ARCHIE and surreptitiously turns it back on. They exchange a look.

JONATHA  
Nurse, punching bag for an alcoholic husband --  
my full menu. Not me!  
(to everyone)  
The dark ages!

JAKE  
Always brighter!

JONATHA  
Broader --

JAKE  
Badder --

JONATHA  
Bigger --

JAKE  
Head to match!

JONATHA  
And I was damn good in "New Yawk"!

JAKE  
"Damned" was right!

JONATHA  
I knew everybody worth knowing, and they knew me!

JAKE  
But couldn't hack it because no iron your spine -  
-

JONATHA  
Like that rod up your butt?

HANNAH  
Jonatha --

JAKE  
Came crawling back when they wouldn't pet you  
anymore.

JONATHA  
You know nothing about anything of my life!

JAKE  
I know you're a coward.

HANNAH  
(hands in the sign of a "T")  
Time out!

They ignore her.

JONATHA  
This from someone who popped out of the womb  
already an old man.

HANNAH  
Time out!

They ignore her.

JAKE  
Born wise --

HANNAH  
This is old news --

JONATHA  
Afraid of the word "new," always spitting over  
his left shoulder --

JAKE  
(childish tone)  
New, new, new, new --

ROLLINS  
(to HANNAH)  
You gotta let 'em.

JONATHA  
(interrupting)  
At least I tried --

JAKE  
And it got you no husband, no children --

JONATHA  
Never wanted.

JAKE  
No home --

JONATHA  
Not desired.

JAKE  
Nothing solid --

JONATHA  
Didn't need a stone crushing my chest --

JAKE  
Unless all those crates in the attic with your  
"works" nailed up tight is a life -- not very  
solid to me --

JONATHA  
You like the stone on your chest --

JAKE  
Nothing to lay your hands on and say, "This will  
last."

JONATHA  
And does your Rock of Gibraltar include the wife  
dead by childbirth --

HANNAH  
Jonatha!

ROLLINS  
Whoa, Jonatha!

JAKE  
Leave Hannah out of --

JONATHA  
I'm sure Hannah maiden name Dempster really  
appreciated that wifely duty!

ROLLINS  
Miz C --

DUAL  
Jonatha, that's really out of line --

JONATHA

And naming the daughter -- what a stroke!

JAKE

They are exempt --

ROLLINS

Miz C -- that's not --

JONATHA

Shut up!

(to JAKE)

Exempt? Why? Why, why, why?

(looking at them all)

Look at you -- oh weeping tragedy! This good man, stayer-at-home, Mom-and-Dad-protector, dubya-dubya-two vet, raiser-of-Hannah in motherless sorrow and alone -- how could everybody not love Jake! Even Christ comes up short!

JAKE

All your smart-ass --

JONATHA

You want smart-ass, my Moses-like holier-than-me proverb-chewing squat-faced brother of mine.

(pointing at the phone)

Here's progress for us. Now you can call me so I don't have to look at your upright face when it pronounces sentence on me --

(to the others)

-- or any of yours, either.

(to HANNAH)

And especially you. I was your mother when he couldn't handle you anymore --

HANNAH

I know --

JONATHA

His cry of the heart -- "come help your Hannah!" -- that's why I really came home --

JAKE

How she spins --

ROLLINS

Mr. C --

JAKE

-- the web of her defeat!

JONATHA

(to HANNAH)

And just look at your face now -- all slopped over on his side.

HANNAH

That's not true!

JONATHA

You all look like you got a fart jammed up your nostrils.

JAKE

That's it.

(points to the phone with his stick)

The snake. The snake must be scotched.

JONATHA

The reasoning of a relic.

JAKE raises his stick over his head to smash the phone -- everyone freezes. Scene shifts to JASON and ARCHIE at the radio station. As they speak, the cast does a slow motion ballet called "The Smashing of The Phone by Jake." The phone will disassemble, and ACTORS will pick up pieces and make them "fly" through the air. They then follow the action as described by JASON and ARCHIE.

ARCHIE

Welcome back to the only radio station powered by "D" batteries. Folks, I have with me Jason Bock, the reporter the "big city" rag loaned us to cover the new phone lines come to Liberty Creek. Welcome, again.

JASON

Happy to make you happy, Archie.

ARCHIE

What a day, huh? Tell us what you saw. The inquiring public of Liberty Creek --

JASON

All thirty-eight registered voters.

ARCHIE

They want to know.

JASON

Well -- Jake did not take kindly to it --

ARCHIE

The old guard dog bit!

JASON

Old guard-dog like him knew he was going to get  
wasted in the global marketplace.

JAKE begins the slow descent of his stick.

JASON

Anger of God, it felt like.

ARCHIE

Righteous!

JASON

People dodging hither and zither --

ARCHIE

Thither and yon --

JASON

-- either trying to save the phone or hold Jake  
back --

ARCHIE

Try a full nelson on a force of nature!

JASON

-- that club incoming at the speed of wrath.  
When it hit --

ARCHIE

Bam!

The phone pieces "fly" through the air.

JASON

Jonatha never moved -- you could see the "I dare  
you" in her eyes.

ARCHIE

To me -- "FU" in her eyes -- excuse my Indo-  
European, folks.

JASON

Whatever it was, Jake saw it.

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric OK Corral.

JASON

But she did move when he came after her --

ARCHIE

Funny, that --

JASON

Not funny, really, but -- funny -- watching him  
drive her to the bedroom --

ARCHIE

Head 'em up!

JASON

-- her using the handset like a little rapier --

ARCHIE

Touché.

JASON

But not funny, no --

ARCHIE

No, no, not really -- no, no, not at all.

They laugh.

JASON

Well, because none of us was sure how much was  
for real and how much Jake was hustling  
everybody. Him shouting --

JAKE

"You need to be quarantined, sister of mine."

JASON

Like she was an immigrant.

JAKE

"You are infected and I'm going to keep you away  
from everybody."

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric Ellis Island.

JASON

At one point, Jonatha crammed against the bedroom  
door, she just stopped. Cold. Stood up straight  
as she could.

ARCHIE

"Wreck"-titude.

JASON  
Handed the handset to Shang, who handed it to Hannah.

ARCHIE  
Passing the torch.

JASON  
Turned. Opened the door. And went in.

ARCHIE  
Under her own pig-head of steam.

JASON  
Noble.

ARCHIE  
Alice Dual, wherever you are -- it's a keeper for the archives.

Lights out -- ARCHIE and JASON rejoin the crowd in "real time." In the silence is heard the tape recorder clicking off. HANNAH, noticing, walks over to DUAL, takes out the cassette, throws it on the floor, smashes it under foot, and kicks the pieces toward ARCHIE.

HANNAH  
Christ! Dad --

ARCHIE  
(to JASON)  
Human interest galore, hey?

JASON  
At least no gore galore.

HANNAH  
Dad --

JAKE stands stolid and silent, bearing the eyes of everyone in the room.

HANNAH  
Jonatha, come on out.

JONATHA, in the bedroom, seethes.

SHANG  
Jonatha -- please -- this is your brother.

TRINI  
Jake, say something --

SHANG

Ooh, this makes me sad --

ROLLINS

Feels Greek to me -- you know, the House of  
Caldwell --

He makes the sounds and gestures of a house falling in on itself.

SHANG

I think it's so sad.

TRINI

(to ROLLINS)

Feels Biblical to me.

ROLLINS

That, too, Trinidaddio.

TRINI

(to SHANG)

I think it's sad, too.

HANNAH

Dad, Jonatha -- this is not good. This was a day  
to celebrate -- Come on!

JONATHA rattles the key in the door, as if locking it, then throws the  
key over the transom into the living room. HANNAH picks it up.

JASON

She's locked herself in.

ROLLINS

Yow.

JASON

And only we --

(to HANNAH)

-- you -- can unlock her out.

ROLLINS

Twist of fate.

JASON

Practical problems here.

HANNAH

(to JONATHA)

You can't stay in my old room --

SHANG

No bathroom.

HANNAH

You've got nothing to eat --

TRINI

No food.

HANNAH

I'm going to unlock the door --

ROLLINS

No food, though, then you don't need a bathroom.

ARCHIE

Mind's a steel trap, Rollins.

DUAL

Jaws of death.

HANNAH

(to JAKE)

Tell her to come out. Tell her you're sorry.

TRINI

Jake --

JAKE

Fresh out.

HANNAH

You know you didn't mean it, Dad.

TRINI

Jake -- she's your sister.

HANNAH

I know you. I know you love her. Come on.

TRINI

You don't give up on your sister. Shang --

SHANG

Jonatha -- your brother -- he's not the enemy --

JONATHA

Rather eat June bugs.

HANNAH  
(quietly)

You know you didn't mean it, Dad. I know you. I know you love her. Come on.

JAKE approaches the bedroom "wall." JONATHA, on her side, does the same. There is a moment when everyone expects them to speak. Instead, JAKE stamps his stick three times; in response, JONATHA stamps her foot three times.

HANNAH  
Boy, are we all connected now!

Transition music, if needed: Lightnin' Hopkins, "Hello, Central" or Blondie, "Call Me."

\* \* \* \* \*

### Act I, Scene 3: The Election

ARCHIE  
Welcome back to Radio Hot Tamale, By Golly, and I am your one and only griot, "Wolf" --

ARCHIE pronounces it with German accent: "Vulf" -- and after he says "Vulf," ARCHIE howls.

ARCHIE  
-- "Gang" --

ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

ARCHIE  
-- Wolfgang! -- broadcasting to you from my trusty lounge, Barca.  
(barks several times)  
The only pirate radio station powered by the fall of a butterfly's wing. And just to remind you about the upcoming town council special election for the seat recently vacated by Buzz Larch. Buzz, you may remember, recently died in a kind of, well -- what else can you call it but a bizarre twizzler of fate. As reported here on the only radio station for pirates, Buzz, a little down on his money but with a strong thirst for a buzz, mixed gasoline and milk. Not surprising, when it hit bottom it came right back up -- but, unlucky for Buzz, he vomited right into the full-going fireplace. The vomit exploded, Buzz exploded, the house exploded -- and we got ourselves a run-off election.

Bangs the gong. Transition music: Big Bopper or Jerry Lee Lewis, "Chantilly Lace" or Paul Anka, "Kissin' On The Phone."

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act I, Scene 4: Caution**

Two chairs: the front seat of TRINI's truck. JAKE and TRINI sit. TRINI has a roll of yellow "Caution" tape in his hand.

JAKE

Give it to me.

TRINI

No.

JAKE

I'll pout.

TRINI

You're already doing that.

JAKE

I just asked for a ride to the hardware store --  
I didn't ask for a sermon.

TRINI

What are you going to do with this?

JAKE

I assumed a ride to the store also would include  
a ride back free of charge -- and silent.

TRINI

(emphasizing)

What are you doing to do with --

JAKE

Wrap it around myself and dance naked in the  
moonlight.

TRINI

Now that is an ugly thought.

JAKE

So don't think it. Just give it back.

TRINI

I'll bet I can guess what you're going to do --

JAKE

Give it back --

TRINI  
Or at least in the ballpark --

JAKE  
I've got to rehearse my dance.

TRINI  
Something --

JAKE reaches forward and turns on the radio, loud. TRINI immediately turns it off. JAKE turns it on again, TRINI turns it off. JAKE half-reaches out but doesn't turn the switch.

JAKE  
We can keep this up if you want. Or I can do this.

JAKE rolls down his window, then back up, then back down, then back up.

JAKE  
(as he rolls)  
How long you think the crank mechanism will last with a crank like me working it?

TRINI, an exasperated look on his face, starts to hand over the tape. JAKE rolls the window closed. But as JAKE goes to take the tape, TRINI pulls it back.

TRINI  
Wait.

JAKE  
What now?

TRINI places the roll on his knees, then raises his hands and closes his eyes.

JAKE  
What are you doing?

TRINI  
Sshh! I must have quiet to pray.

JAKE  
Jerk the leg with the bells on it.

TRINI  
Sshh! To Olodumare --

JAKE  
You're a Lutheran, for God's sake.

TRINI

Sshh!

(stage whisper)

San-te-ri-a --

JAKE

I never meant --

TRINI

And to Chango -- please! "Eluwekon ashé osain  
cherere adashé kokoni -- "

JAKE reaches for the tape, but TRINI taps him on the hand warningly  
and continues praying.

TRINI

" -- jikoji omó la dufetini cherebinu oluosó  
bogwó ayalu kosó agó." And to the dead Elders  
and to the spirits of the dead: "ibaye baye tonu  
bowo oku be lese olodumare mo yuba ibaye bafayaye  
kosi iku kosi aron kosi ina dosi eye kosi faya  
kosi ofo ariku baba wa."<sup>2</sup>

JAKE

What did you just say?

TRINI

If I were you, I'd be afraid for your soul.

TRINI hands him the tape.

JAKE

My soul should be afraid of me. Go.

TRINI turns on the truck, puts it in gear.

TRINI

(in the voice of the Big Bopper)

"Ah, baby, that's a-what I like."

Lights out. Transition music: Big Bopper or Jerry Lee Lewis,  
"Chantilly Lace."

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Act I, Scene 5: Window Dressing**

JONATHA sits on the bed, fidgety. SHANG knocks on the window.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://w3.iac.net/~moonweb/Santeria/TOC.html>

SHANG

Jonatha! Jonatha!

JONATHA opens the window. SHANG climbs in, clutching a backpack.

JONATHA

I'm not supposed to be visited by angels while I'm in jail.

SHANG

You're not in jail. I'm not an angel. I brought you --

JONATHA

Where's Jake?

SHANG

He went with Trini somewhere.  
(opening the backpack)

Look --

JONATHA

What's everybody doing?

SHANG

What do you think? Jabbering about you and Jake. You two are the biggest thing since the last big thing everyone talked about.

JONATHA

I can just see Alice Dual's jaws clacking --

SHANG

(holding up backpack)  
A care package!

JONATHA sits on the bed. SHANG follows her, kneels by her.

JONATHA

(disgusted)

Inquiring minds want to know. Archie McFee. Ahh-ooo! Stupid man. Just wanted to make things easier for people, Shang.

SHANG

They will be, from now on. Really. The phone lines are here to stay.

JONATHA touches SHANG gently.

JONATHA

You are so -- trusting, Shang. "Make things easier." That's not true, Shang.

SHANG

Of course it is --

JONATHA

Not -- really. Completely. I named myself the bitch that was going to drag them into the future, and I knew they were going to hate me for it --

SHANG

No one hates you!

JONATHA

-- and I didn't care because I liked seeing them, I wanted to see them so upset, having all their little platitudes turned arse-side up and grilled!

SHANG

You did it because you had a good heart!

JONATHA

Shang --

SHANG

Really! Your heart knew we needed it, and so you did it for us. You and Hannah. When no one else would.

JONATHA

Hannah probably hates me now most of all.

SHANG

Naw!

But JONATHA lapses into silence. SHANG rummages in the backpack.

SHANG

Tools for survival, hey?

(pulls out a bed pan)

And this to go with it.

(toilet paper)

Some munchies.

(pulls out a bottle)

Water. The pastels you gave me when you tried to teach me to draw. And, of course, ginseng -- all natural ginseng candy. No sugar! Two hundred milligrams of panax ginseng per chew, along with

honey, butter, dried milk powder and algin -- not sure what that is. One hundred and forty-four of 'em -- not that you'll need them all. This is just to tide you over, you know.

JONATHA picks up the bedpan.

JONATHA

"Submarine" -- that's slang for a bed pan. Uh-huh. And Code Brown -- slang for when the patient doesn't hit the bed pan.

SHANG

Maybe you won't even need it. I'm sure you'll be out of here soon, things all patched up between you and Jake.

JONATHA

Shang -- Jake and I have a Code Brown in the making.

JONATHA takes the backpack and puts everything away, except for the pastels.

JONATHA

Thank you, Shang, but I'm not going to give in. I'm not going to let my brother think --

SHANG

You can't!

JONATHA

I am tempted, Shang -- you tempt me to be a reasonable woman. But I have never won anything in my life by being reasonable. Reason is treason -- at least sometimes. When the dander is up, I can resist anything except the chance to resist something.

JONATHA hands the backpack to SHANG.

JONATHA

Thanks, my angel -- but no thanks.

SHANG touches JONATHA gently.

JONATHA

Hey, it's not a funeral.

SHANG

I just think it's so sad. I gotta go.

SHANG moves to the window, prepares to climb out.

JONATHA

Hey!

SHANG

What?

JONATHA

All right -- give me one of the candies.

SHANG fishes out the bottle, pops it open, hands JONATHA one.

JONATHA

Now go -- you've done your good deed.

SHANG

You're welcome: "Boo you-ng sheh."

SHANG, smiling, climbs out. JONATHA faces the audience, then puts the candy in her mouth and chews. The taste is horrible, and her face shows it, but she continues chewing with determination.

As she chews, she gets down on her knees and looks under the bed, pulls up a large sketch pad. She dives back in, then pulls out an easel. She set them up, takes the pastels, and starts to draw as the lights come down. She will continue drawing through the next scenes.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Act I, Scene 6: The House of Rollins**

Transition music. ROLLINS by himself at a table, a phone near him. Other chairs around. He holds an unfinished body of some musical instrument, like a violin or mandolin, that he has been working on. Tools, sandpaper, chisels, etc. on the table.

He picks up the phone but doesn't dial -- he simply listens to the dial tone. He hits the button, listens again. Dials a number -- his own.

ROLLINS

My number is busy.

ROLLINS hangs up.

ROLLINS

Amazing.

He works on the instrument. A bell tingles, indicating a door opening. JASON shows up, carrying a portable tape recorder. ROLLINS stiffens but doesn't stop what he's doing.

JASON

Front door was open.

ROLLINS

It's open to anyone, friends and strangers alike.

JASON

I thought we were supposed to do the promo now.

ROLLINS

Everyone's running on Liberty Creek time -- big-city scheduling doesn't hunt here.

JASON

It's just that Archie --

ROLLINS

They'll be here.

JASON

O-kay.

JASON starts fiddling with the tools on ROLLIN's table. ROLLINS indicates for him to stop it.

JASON

How did you ever come up with the name "Rollins Shiva Tut" for the band?

ROLLINS

Are we doing small-talk now?

JASON

Inquiring minds want to know.

ROLLINS

Is that what's under your hat?

JASON

I asked Hannah, but she told me to ask you.

ROLLINS

And you just love doing what Hannah tells you to do.

JASON

I'd be stupid if I didn't -- even if it means having to ask you.

They glare: squaring off. As ROLLINS goes back to vigorous sandpapering, the bell tingles again, and TRINI and SHANG show up.

SHANG

You don't have to hold the door open for me. In fact, I'd like it if you didn't --

TRINI

I don't understand why you're --

SHANG

(to JASON and ROLLINS)

Do you know what this loghead did to me?

TRINI

It's not to you --

SHANG

(to JASON)

You'll like this. Henry Thoreau Toussaint, a.k.a. "island Trini-boy" --

TRINI

(to JASON)

That is not my name, or my nick-name, or --

SHANG

Trini-boy here signed himself up to run in the election. That seat was mine. It was mine. I was unopposed --

JASON

I know. And now you're not.

(to TRINI)

The only Lutheran logger in the state from Trinidad is now in the race.

TRINI

(unconvincing)

My civic duty.

JASON

It's a great story. East-west, north-south --

ROLLINS

(to SHANG and TRINI)

Beware the barracuda -- he's living off our backs.

SHANG

(to TRINI)

I just can't believe --

The bell tingles again, and in walks HANNAH, looking very dispirited and carrying the broken handset from the telephone. She sits.

ROLLINS

Hannah --

No response.

ROLLINS

Hannah --

No response.

JASON

Why don't you just let her engine idle?

ROLLINS

And who are you to tell me --

JASON

Hannah has her own rhythms.

ROLLINS

And how would you know that better than I know that?

JASON

You should spend that kind of time knowing her.

ROLLINS

And you have?

ROLLINS is suddenly aware of how harsh he's sounding and backs off.

JASON

It's you who wanted the promo, Rollins.

SHANG

(indicating HANNAH)

Rollins --

ROLLINS

(getting the cue)

Hannah -- they're going to be all right.

SHANG

Right as rain.

TRINI

Yeah.

ROLLINS

They're just being stubborn --

TRINI

Like they've always been stubborn.

SHANG

They could give lessons to a mule.

ROLLINS

Yeah.

HANNAH jabs the handset like a little rapier while she looks at everybody.

ROLLINS

Well, yeah, there was that.

HANNAH brings the handset over her head like a hammer and then down.

TRINI

And that, too.

HANNAH does a mock righteousness pose, a parody of JAKE.

JASON

(tugging on his ear lobe)

Sounds like -- brimstone.

HANNAH points at him as if to say, "The prize!"

ROLLINS

Okay, so it's kind of post-Apocalypse over there at the moment. But it can't last forever -- not with the size of their bladders.

HANNAH looks at ROLLINS and then laughs softly. ROLLINS mugs at JASON, as if to say, "See what I made happen and you didn't?"

ROLLINS

Bladders -- yeah!

HANNAH laughs, uses her thumb and forefinger to indicate a small size.

HANNAH

They got thimbles.

ROLLINS

Bang those thimbles! Pride falleth before pee pee!

(to everyone, indicating HANNAH's laughter)  
Now, that's a good face!

HANNAH

Rollins -- Rollins, Rollins --

(goes to touch him but doesn't; to them all)  
You know what scared me the most?

ROLLINS

Tell on.

HANNAH

I had this -- vision pass in front of me, you know, when he was standing like this and she's, you know, like that -- that they would both drop dead at that moment with all that -- that --

(can't think of the word)

-- whatever carved into their faces. And that's how their thousands of days on this earth would get remembered. Not raising me when Mama passed away, not how they opened to me when David died -- that people would not remember their long arc of life -- just some stupid moment of stupid pride -- end up a joke on one of Archie's "woo-woo's" with Dual. The essentials -- pfft! -- lost --

TRINI

We will all remember everything, Hannah.

HANNAH

We special few, huh?

TRINI

Archie -- Dual -- pfft! We're the real archivists.

ROLLINS

(with a side glance at JASON)

Yeah, no one's life should end up in a joke. And it won't happen, not with us around. Hannah, you know you don't have to do the gig tonight.

HANNAH

I am going to do the gig tonight, Rollins.

ROLLINS

We can slip into three-part if we need to --

HANNAH

We're a four-part sister-brotherhood here -- And even with us off at the tavern, 66 pairs of registered eyes will be trained on that house tonight. They are not going to lack for

observation. I am going to sing -- you know that.

JASON  
Speaking of which -- Archie needs the promo.

ROLLINS  
You up for it?

HANNAH nods yes.

ROLLINS  
(to JASON)  
O-kay, journalista, you got that thing ready?

JASON  
Promo for Rollins Shiva Tut ready to roll.

ROLLINS  
And aren't you ever going back to your real job?

HANNAH  
Pitch us, will you?

ROLLINS hums a note. Each grabs the note, and they begin a capella to sing the first verse and chorus of ROLLINS' new song, "Telephone Zone" -- see Act I, Scene 8. JASON dutifully records, and when the piece is over, he rewinds the tape.

HANNAH  
(to ROLLINS)  
That was cool.

TRINI  
Pushing us -- good.

ROLLINS  
Just comes.

SHANG  
(softly mocking)  
Oh, Master, so much Zen coming off you.

HANNAH  
Sweat and fretboard shavings.

ROLLINS  
The Liberty Creek aphrodisiac.

JASON  
(handing the tape to ROLLINS)  
Nice work, Rollins.

ROLLINS

Good to have the big city weigh in.

JASON mockingly tips his hat.

ROLLINS

And when did you say you were going back?

JASON

Some human interest stuff to finish up --

ROLLINS

Humid interest --

HANNAH

And I think I need to go.

ROLLINS

I'll walk you.

HANNAH

No.

(pointing to the tape)

For the "gig," remember?

TRINI

Give it to us -- we have to be there in five minutes.

ROLLINS

What's the rush? It's just a promo that no one ever listens to.

TRINI

It's not just that.

ROLLINS

What?

SHANG

(bristle)

Archie's interviewing the candidates in the now suddenly two-person race.

TRINI

Constitutional right --

SHANG

The tape?

ROLLINS hands it off.

ROLLINS  
(to HANNAH)

The walk.

HANNAH  
Alone.

They all get ready to leave. HANNAH looks at ROLLINS but speaks to them all.

HANNAH  
Are we too old to be doing "gigs"?

ROLLINS  
When you're too old for gigs, butter won't melt in your mouth because you'll be stone-cold dead.

JASON  
There's also a lot to be said for growing up.

ROLLINS  
So I can wear a funny hat?

SHANG  
(exasperated)  
Man --

SHANG exits -- the bell tingles.

TRINI  
(lamely)  
May the best Lutheran win, hey?

TRINI exits -- the bell tingles.

HANNAH  
(indicating them)  
Think it'll work out between them?

JASON  
Think they even know there's a "between" between them to work out?

HANNAH  
One of them surely knows.

ROLLINS  
There's something between them?

HANNAH  
(joshing him)  
Steel trap, Rollins. Didn't it strike you odd  
that Trini got into the election just when it  
looked like Shang was a shoo-in?

ROLLINS  
Well --

HANNAH  
And haven't you been looking at how he's getting  
real close to that microphone when their  
harmonies come rolling around?

ROLLINS  
(to JASON)  
You notice this, too?

JASON  
It's a big-city thing.

ROLLINS  
(to HANNAH)  
Really?

HANNAH  
We'll see what gets elected at the election.

JASON  
Even a recount, maybe.

ROLLINS  
I have no idea what to count anymore.

HANNAH  
See you tonight.

HANNAH exits -- the bell tingles. JASON and ROLLINS look at each  
other.

ROLLINS  
You won't get her.

JASON  
You haven't gotten her after how long of knowing  
her?

ROLLINS  
There's been an understanding.

JASON  
I understand --

ROLLINS

We go back a long way.

JASON

But time moves forward.

ROLLINS

Maybe I should get a hat like you.

JASON

It'll take more than a hat.

ROLLINS

Isn't there a war you should be off covering?

JASON

I like this one just fine.

They look at each as the lights come down. Transition music: Ray Parker, "Ghostbuster."

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act I, Scene 7 : The Interview**

ARCHIE

Welcome back to Radio Hot Tamale, By Golly, and I am your one and only griot, "Wolf" --

ARCHIE pronounces it with a German accent: "Vulf" -- and after he says "Vulf," ARCHIE howls.

ARCHIE

-- "Gang" --

ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

ARCHIE

-- Wolfgang! -- broadcasting to you from my trusty lounge, Barca.

(barks several times)

The only pirate radio station powered by cosmic rays. Well, you just heard a nice new piece from Rollins Shiva Tut, our very own claim to a small wedge of rock-n-roll fame, who'll be playing at the Downhome Due East tavern tonight. And sitting with me today I have two members of the band, who also happen to be the two candidates running for the town council seat recently vacated by Buzz Larch. On stereo right --

(pointing to TRINI)  
-- is Henry Thoreau Toussaint -- we know him as  
Trini around here -- who I understand has the  
distinction of being the only logger we got in  
the state from the Caribbean area.

TRINI  
That's right, Archie -- and I should add,  
probably the only Lutheran logger -- from  
Trinidad.

ARCHIE  
Trinidad and Tabasco, right?

TRINI  
Tobago.

ARCHIE  
Sorry -- "geo--" was one "--ography" I missed.  
In any case, not too many Trinidad and Tobago-ins  
topping off trees around here.

TRINI  
You're right about that.

ARCHIE  
And on stereo left --  
(pointing to SHANG)  
-- is Shang -- I've never known you by any other  
name -- who makes her way in the world as a  
"shang" hunter.

SHANG  
That's right.

ARCHIE  
What's "shang," Shang?

SHANG  
Wild ginseng.

ARCHIE  
Ginshang -- shang-a-lang -- the stuff that makes  
your --  
(makes a hand gesture of an erection)  
-- well, this is a family show -- but does it?

SHANG  
For some people.

ARCHIE

Then I need to talk with you! "Vulf!" "Gang!"  
Now, you're both running for the seat -- what  
makes the two of you different? Shang?

As SHANG speaks and TRINI "steals" the ideas, SHANG gets more and more  
annoyed.

SHANG

Well, I want to make sure the roads get improved.

TRINI

Me, too.

SHANG

And that we get a new school bus stop.

TRINI

Sign me up for that one.

SHANG

I supported Jonatha and Hannah's phone line  
campaign --

TRINI

Great idea, that!

SHANG

And if elected, I pledge to --

TRINI

Me, too!

ARCHIE

So there ain't a spit's worth of difference  
between the two of you? There's got to be  
something.

SHANG

Well, I was thinking about --

TRINI

So was I!

ARCHIE

(sniffs the air)

Do I smell recount? Voters, have yourselves a  
ball.

Bangs the gong. As lights go down, SHANG glares at TRINI and TRINI,  
smitten with SHANG, looks back sheepishly. Transition music: Big

Bopper or Jerry Lee Lewis, "Chantilly Lace" or Paul Anka, "Kissin' On The Phone."

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act I, Scene 8: The Siege**

JAKE is cutting lengths of yellow "Caution" tape to cover JONATHA's door when HANNAH enters. JONATHA hears everything. She tries to keep drawing, but eventually she is drawn toward the wall of the bedroom. In the background, barely audible, the radio plays the interview with SHANG and TRINI.

HANNAH

Dad, you can't --

JAKE looks at her.

HANNAH

Well, you shouldn't.

JAKE

Counseling me?

HANNAH

No --

JAKE

Good.

HANNAH

-- but you shouldn't.

JAKE goes back to the taping.

HANNAH

One or two strips, you know -- people will get the idea.

JAKE

I don't want them to get the idea, Hannah. I want them to get the smell of apocalypse. "When a man's heart is full of fire, sparks fly out of his mouth."

HANNAH

"Even absurdity has a champion to defend it."

JAKE

Quoting me back, "quoter" queen? You have a place you call your own, right?

HANNAH

Right.

JAKE

Do I tell you how to keep your house?

HANNAH

No.

JAKE

No. Have I ever?

HANNAH

Never.

JAKE

Never. So, butt out. I am my own INS here. I am making a border and making sure my house stays clean.

HANNAH

She's not some foreigner.

JAKE

Your aunt was always some foreigner.

JAKE starts to do the taping, slowly because of his age.

HANNAH

Dad -- Dad --

JAKE

What?

HANNAH

(as much to let JONATHA know as in protest)  
You can't -- tack up yellow caution tape across the door!

JAKE

Clash with the decor? Scene of an accident, aren't we?

HANNAH

No --

JAKE

Watch me festoon!

HANNAH

There's been no accident.

JAKE  
I see destruction all around.

HANNAH  
What are you talking about?

JAKE  
Haven't you noticed already?

HANNAH  
Noticed what?

JAKE  
The trucks.

HANNAH  
Trucks.

JAKE  
Phone company trucks.

HANNAH  
Well --

JAKE  
"Mention the devil and in he rides."

HANNAH  
(exasperated)  
Just getting hooked up --

JAKE  
"Hooked up," yes. Yes. Hooked. Hooked. On.

HANNAH  
It's about time.

JAKE  
Convenience, safety --

HANNAH  
They deserve it.

JAKE  
Heard all your arguments, ad infinitum nauseum,  
right in this room.

HANNAH  
Then you can hardly blame them.

JAKE gets down off the ladder, and what he says is as much pitched to JONATHA as it is to HANNAH.

JAKE

Yes I can, Hannah. I can blame them because they're throwing away treasures with their eyes wide open. That kind of waste I can, and I will, blame.

HANNAH

It's not waste to --

JAKE

Taking what is good and replacing it with what is new -- how often have fools done that?

HANNAH

You think we will never ever see each other again --

JAKE

We won't.

HANNAH

-- never bring over a casserole, never get invited in for coffee --

JAKE

Exactly.

HANNAH

You think people are just going to forget each other --

JAKE

They will.

HANNAH

-- and be hovering, waiting, waiting, waiting for that special phone call --

JAKE

The green chalkboards.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH

(a little confused)

I don't understand --

JAKE

Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

What's going to happen to our green chalkboards?

HANNAH

I don't know.

JAKE

(takes a piece of chalk out of his pocket)  
I have my chalk. I always have my chalk. Check  
your pocket.

HANNAH takes out her piece of chalk. JONATHA also brings out her  
chalk.

JAKE

(holds up chalk)

So do you. You always do, don't you?

(referring to the bedroom)

I'll bet you even she -- right? And so does  
everybody. We all have our chalk. What's going  
to happen to these?

HANNAH

I don't know.

JAKE

Dumped into Archie's attic for the museum that  
man will never build, no matter how much he  
promises, and no one will ever write again --

(JAKE writes on the air)

-- "Haven't seen you in a whole moon -- how's the  
heart?" Or, "Left the coffee-cake on the transom  
so the squirrels wouldn't get wind."

(comes closer)

After David passed away, didn't you always seek a  
message when you came to your door? And wasn't  
there always one there?

HANNAH

You and Jonatha.

JAKE

All of us -- we made the effort.

HANNAH

Yes.

JAKE

Not leaving this no-body voice on a machine,  
something you could do sitting on the toilet!  
Push the body through the air, along the road,  
lift it against gravity, and leave the message. A  
piece of yourself behind. Who wouldn't love  
that?

HANNAH

I loved it every time.

JAKE

And sometimes you'd go to leave a message and up  
they'd come behind you, the ones you were leaving  
it for. So, a cup of coffee. The latest about  
the new roof patch or the cabbage that looks like  
Calvin Coolidge. Advice about the sump pump. A  
couple of stories or three about the human femur  
Henry found digging in his root cellar or the  
pony that used to fart whenever any child came  
near to ride it.

HANNAH

That happened to me!

JAKE

And since it's dark, why not stay for supper?  
Sleep over if you need.

JAKE, with a bit of a struggle, breaks the chalk piece in half.  
JONATHA can barely keep herself from speaking out.

JAKE

Now, not any more. Because now we do things the  
way everyone else does them. We're going to be  
just like everybody else.

JAKE goes back to his taping.

JAKE

"What is new -- "

HANNAH

Dad --

As JAKE says the proverb, JONATHA lip-synchs with him.

JAKE

"What is new is not true, and what is true is not  
new." Thus endeth the reading of the old coot.  
Now go -- I have work to do.

HANNAH

Wait.

JAKE

Why?

HANNAH does not speak right away.

JAKE

Why?

HANNAH

(hesitantly, not wanting to disrespect)  
Because that's not all of it. And you know that,  
Dad. If you were sitting in this room listening  
to their arguments -- to my argument about David!  
-- then you know.

JONATHA makes a move encouraging HANNAH. JAKE listens but says  
nothing.

HANNAH

If you're going to fight this thing, fight fair.  
"Fight fair, and you'll fare well," I seem to  
remember someone saying.

JAKE

The "quoter" queen again.

JONATHA cheers HANNAH on.

HANNAH

Do I have "fair"?

JAKE

Go on.

HANNAH

Mrs. Snole's diabetic shock with no one around.  
Melanda's miscarriage. The Carter house fire.  
Marcus almost crushed by the tractor. The Noble  
boys sliding off the bridge. Bundy losing his  
arm in the snowblower. And every time, the same  
thing. And you know I know this -- know it  
inside-out right to the bone! Ten miles down the  
hill to the gas station pay phone, pray to God  
that when you dropped the coins the line hadn't  
died again, then the tone, the 911, the  
explanation just spewing out and hoping, pray to  
God, that you gave the right directions -- left  
at the sycamore, look for the Mickey Mouse  
windsock, because we can't even be bothered to

name the streets and number the houses! Then racing back, hoping that when you got there you wouldn't have to sit with the dead while the EMTs came. Oh, we're neighbors, all right, you'd like to keep us neighbors even if it kills -- "Fate is the course when men fail to act" -- right? I have already, thank you, had enough fate in my life.

HANNAH breaks her chalk half, puts the pieces in her pocket.

HANNAH

If phone lines make fate go away even a little for anybody, then, mister, I am all for as many of them as we can string up. I have to meet Rollins at his shop -- help him with the back orders. I'll leave you to your work.

As HANNAH goes to leave, ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS

Yo!

JAKE

Hannah --

HANNAH makes a gesture as if to say, "Not now."

JAKE

(to ROLLINS)

Don't you knock?

ROLLINS

Since when have I ever knocked, Mr. C? I haven't knocked since I weighed 120 pounds.

ROLLINS sees the tape.

ROLLINS

Redecorating?

HANNAH

C'mon, let's go.

ROLLINS

I finished all the back orders last night -- guitars glued, violins screwed, dulcimers at their highest amplitude. I just need you to help me ship 'em out.

(pointing to the tape)

What's up, Mr. C?

JAKE and HANNAH refuse to speak.

ROLLINS

I see. This is what it must feel like just before, you know, two duellers get ready to blow each other's brains out. Suspended aggravation. So?

JAKE

Ask the woman over there on whom you've been sweet for years and who refuses to take advantage of you.

HANNAH

Let's go, Rollins.

ROLLINS

I already know that, Mr. C.

HANNAH

Let's go!

ROLLINS

Someday she'll get the advantage of taking advantage of me.

JAKE

Not while we got the journalist in the chicken coop.

ROLLINS

Working on that.

JAKE

More tolerant man than I am.

ROLLINS

Wouldn't be hard, Mr. C.

HANNAH

Are you two finished?

ROLLINS

Mr. C, I've never been one to question you, not someone who's lived the kind of life you've lived -- respect your elders, my elders always told me, so, "No lip." But, the tape -- a little cold, don't you think, Mr. C? This ain't the end of the world.

HANNAH

You just missed the latest brimstone!

JAKE

Do you have your chalk?

ROLLINS reaches into his pocket and pulls it out. JAKE looks at HANNAH.

JAKE

What are you going to do with it?

ROLLINS

I don't know.

JAKE

Chuck it, because now it's just garbage.

HANNAH

He thinks we'll never visit again.

ROLLINS

We all know you're a little -- ragged about this phone thing.

JAKE

A little ragged?

ROLLINS

All right, Armageddon pissed -- but Mr. C, it's a no-brainer.

JAKE

From the no-brainer.

ROLLINS

Good thing us no-brainers don't have the brains to take offense. Look, Mr. C, between a phone and --

(showing the chalk)

-- this -- with a phone I can book more gigs for the band, which means more time to gather manna with Hannah -- that's to the good, hey? And I can take in more work doing my instrument repair.

JAKE

(to HANNAH)

Put him up to this?

ROLLINS

Flo can get more of her tofu to town -- especially the garlic! Ron and Polly can check on their patients -- and with a phone they could do that insurance claim gig at home they want to do. Ray can juggle those fourteen hundred jobs

he has -- and when the kids go away to college,  
they can all call mom and dad for more money!  
With that line, man, we are now in this century,  
all connected to all! I don't mean to  
disrespect, Mr. C, but the fact is, you lost.  
And it's going to stay lost for you because it's  
just better this way.

(holds up chalk)

Nice, but horse-and-buggy.

JONATHA does a few cheerleading moves.

HANNAH

Rollins -- that was just fine.

ROLLINS

Well -- good, then. Good. I guess we better go.  
Mr. C --

(indicating the tape)

-- clashes with everything else.

Before she leaves, HANNAH gives JAKE a kiss.

HANNAH

You are so poetic.

ROLLINS

And it's only the middle of the afternoon.

They exit. JAKE and JONATHA look at each other through the "wall."  
As JAKE moves, JONATHA moves -- it is as if they are miming each  
other's movements.

JAKE

(bangs his stick three times)

Oye, oye, oye -- the court is now in session.

JAKE suddenly seems to lose energy and sits on the couch. So does  
JONATHA, and she sits on the bed.

JAKE

"Everything is good for something."

JONATHA

"Swallows and sparrows cannot understand the  
ambitions of swans."

JAKE painfully lays down on the couch and falls asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Act I, Scene 9: The Gig

We are at the "gig": SHANG, TRINI, ROLLINS and HANNAH; JASON has tagged along.

ROLLINS

Well, all you masters of being plastered, we have one more number to do before our break, a ditty somewhat inspired by those thin little lines that've come snaking into our homes recently in Liberty Creek, delivering us to the outside world.

HANNAH begins doing the Twilight Zone theme, picked up by SHANG and TRINI. The song is sung a capella.

ROLLINS

So be afraid, be very afraid -- you have entered a different time and dimension. You have entered -- "The Telephone Zone."<sup>3</sup>

*First Verse*

Ringin', ringin', ringin', ringin' -- phones are everywhere

Chirping in the bathrooms -- breep, breep in your underwear

Cell phone, mobile, wireless -- there's a calling plan for you

Bounce your words off satellites from here to Katmandu

*Refrain A*

Buzz me, beep me, ping me, zing me -- free minutes by the score

So why can't we communicate much better than before?

Seems its part of human nature, deep in our protein

No matter the technology, we can't say what we mean

*Second Verse*

---

<sup>3</sup> This song is done to the tune of "Feed Me Jesus."

Surgically implanted headsets -- just what people want

Palm Pilots sewn into our palms -- you'll be so au courant

Fully wired while attired, looking "fly" and looking "phat"

But when we're asked to tell the truth, we all go, "What is that?"

*Refrain A*

Repeat

*Third Verse (slower)*

So let's take a breath -- breathe deep -- exhale -- let your eyes go Zen

Breathe once more -- once more -- once more -- and then once more again

You're on the verge of cosmic truth, you can hear Nirvana sing --

And then it all goes straight to (*fart noise*) when the friggin' pager rings!

*Refrain B*

Buzzed out, beeped out, pinged out, zinged out -- can't take it anymore

Let's conversate "f-to-f" like we used to do before

I'd really like to talk with you, hear what you have to say

So when you get on home tonight -- (*spoken*) just give me a ring -- okay?

End of song. The four bow.

ROLLINS

Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

JASON

(comes over and hugs HANNAH)

That was great!

ROLLINS forcibly takes one of JASON's hands and shakes it.

ROLLINS

Thank you for your support, big-city dude.

JASON

It was good, Rollins.

ROLLINS

(continuing to shake his hand)

I wrote it.

JASON

I know you did.

HANNAH

Rollins --

JASON

You can let the hand go.

SHANG

(to TRINI)

Time for a split.

TRINI

Agreed.

SHANG

(announcing)

Beverages!

SHANG and TRINI go to the opposite side of the stage and watch the action.

HANNAH

Let go of his hand.

ROLLINS does, and immediately bear-hugs JASON in an unfriendly way, back-slapping, etc.

ROLLINS

It was so good of you to come. Really good.  
Really great, Jason.

ROLLINS holds JASON at arm's length.

ROLLINS

(in mock-admiration)

Now -- you can leave!

HANNAH

Rollins -- stop acting like a prick.

ROLLINS

Can't -- it's the peer pressure from da man here  
-- gotta keep up with him.

JASON

What is your problem?

ROLLINS lets JASON go.

ROLLINS

I don't have a problem. Wait -- that's not true.  
I don't want to be accused of being a liar. I do  
have a problem -- something about stupid hats.

JASON

I wasn't aware my -- hat -- was so unwelcome.

ROLLINS

It and everything under it -- for some time, now.

JASON

Not by everybody. Liberty Creek is a really  
welcoming place. Right, Hannah?

ROLLINS

Tell him to book, Hannah.

HANNAH says nothing.

ROLLINS

Huh. Maybe I need to help the two doofuses bring  
"beverages."

ROLLINS exits to his own space, leaving HANNAH and JASON.

JASON

Is he always so --

HANNAH

Jason, don't be dense. You know why.

JASON

Give me your hand. The offer still stands.

HANNAH

I can't leave.

JASON

Yet. Jake and Jonatha will work it out.

HANNAH

"Work each other over" is more like it. And, besides, even if --

JASON

You couldn't.

HAHHAH

Me, there --

JASON

Liberty Creek, your downhome home, your downhome homies --

HANNAH

People have let you in, so you have no room to say anything low about them! You will go back someday and make bread off what you wrote here, but while you're in the town limits you will not pity me because I am tangled up with them. Without "these people" --

JASON

Like Rollins --

HANNAH

Especially that man! Especially. That. Man. He gave me life back --

JASON

So you've said. So why are you here talking to me and not off with him getting "beverages"? Can I guess? I think you think I am not entirely out of line asking you to come back with me because, I think, you want to come to the city -- maybe with me, maybe not -- though I'm not a bad-looking dance partner. Or maybe not "the city" but definitely to some place different than "good" "old" Liberty Creek. Where you don't have a five-year fight to get a phone line. Where no one knows your business, or even cares. With a little bit more liberty than Liberty Creek.

(a dance move)

Not so bad, am I?

HANNAH

(not nasty)

Except for the hat.

JASON

Promise to change it inside the city limits.

(holds up his hat, as if at an auction)  
Going once, going twice -- are we gone?

They look at each other, then HANNAH moves away to her own space.  
Scene shifts to TRINI and SHANG at the bar.

TRINI  
Man, I knew this was coming.

SHANG  
Plain as the sun in daytime.

TRINI  
Plain as the moon at night.

SHANG  
I thought Rollins was going to pop him.

TRINI  
Should have.

SHANG  
Why? Hannah's not his "girl."

TRINI  
They have been together since dirt, Shang --

SHANG  
So what?

TRINI  
And he took good care of her when David --

SHANG  
And that means -- she owes?

TRINI  
Time I politely steer this conversation --

SHANG  
Wait -- she owes?

TRINI  
The Fifth I take, and all the other Amendments.

SHANG  
Answer me -- she owes him?

TRINI hesitates.

SHANG

You think so, don't you? You think Rollins has a "claim" on her, a "sale pending" sign?

TRINI

I just think her heart --

SHANG

And I just never believed you would believe in oppression!

TRINI

Oppression!

SHANG

The woman "owes" the man -- the man "owns" the woman -- can hear the handcuffs in your voice!

TRINI

Was thinking more about --

SHANG

I'm glad I'm the one standing up for liberty in this election!

TRINI

That's it! You broke the promise --

SHANG

You brought up politics!

TRINI

You broke the promise. We agreed -- not tonight -- music only.

SHANG

That was before you popped off about the woman's "place" --

TRINI

I did not "pop off" --

SHANG

I'll bet that's what's really driving you, isn't it? You can't stand to see a "woman" be powerful, can you?

TRINI

That's not true --

SHANG

I didn't have any opposition for the seat -- didn't see any on the horizon -- the other board members ready to vote me in -- when out of his woodlot swings Henry Thoreau Toussaint to save malehood from domination!

TRINI

I did not!

SHANG makes a Tarzan noise.

TRINI

Will you cool it? That's not why I got into the race!

SHANG

Take me -- I'm Jane.

TRINI

That's not why!

SHANG

(a fake Chinese bow)

Happy to submit, master!

TRINI

Don't insult yourself -- ! That's not why.

SHANG

Then why, wood man? Why?

TRINI

Can we talk somewhere else --

SHANG

Can't answer, can you?

TRINI

I'm trying --

SHANG

I know what you really think of me. Show me your hands.

TRINI dejectedly holds up his hands.

SHANG

One, two -- good. Full pair. You can bring back the "beverages."

SHANG leaves and goes to her own place. The five actors are now in five separate lights.

TRINI  
(sings to himself)  
"Seems its part of human nature, deep in our  
protein -- "

SHANG claps four times. The next lines are spoken in rhythm.

SHANG  
I'm talking 'bout these twisted --

ALL  
Lines, lines.

SHANG  
Getting all these mixed up --

ALL  
Signs, signs.

HANNAH  
Left side of mouth goes --

ALL  
You're just fine.

HANNAH  
Right side of mouth goes --

ALL  
You're asinine --

JASON  
Knots and tangles and cramps and sighs --

ROLLINS  
Lies on lies on lies on lies --

TRINI  
A half-look here --

SHANG  
There, a look away --

HANNAH  
Never saying what we want --

JASON  
Never meaning what we say --

SHANG

A life in subtitles.

They all clap once. Lights out. Transition music: snippet from Ray Parker, "Ghostbuster."

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act I, Scene 10: The Choice**

JAKE asleep on the couch. JONATHA is sitting in her chair; fidgets. She takes off her socks, puts them on her hands, and begins having the "puppets" talk.

JONATHA

Jake, how could you be so cruel?

Jonatha, I'm doing it for your own damn good.

Oh really, Jake? Is it for my own sake that I'm sitting in here starving and in need of a good pee?

It'll teach you manners, something you've never had.

Oh, you're so right, you're so right -- I have always been a selfish little twat. Now I can be just like you -- sphincter as tight as a plugged septic system!

You'll never be as good as me.

Yes, I will

No, you won't.

The two puppets fight until JONATHA gets tired. She puts the socks back on.

JONATHA

So many bridges turned to bitches; so much time turned to slime.

JONATHA rolls a piece of paper in the typewriter and idly begins to type -- doing patterns, like the old Maxwell House coffee commercial, or something like that. Then she gets up in agitation, holding her stomach, squeezing her knees.

JONATHA

Damn!

JONATHA goes over to the door. Cautiously she opens it and sneaks through the web of "Caution" tape. She tip-toes out of sight -- there are opening door sounds, the toilet seat being put down, a pause, a huge sigh, and the flush of a toilet. She comes back into view and goes to the kitchen, gathers what food she can quietly. All this time she is eyeing JAKE.

Provisioned, she moves back to the door, and as she gets to the door, JAKE suddenly wakes up, clutching his heart and in short breath. He gets off the couch and is in obvious pain. JONATHA makes a move to help him, then stops, and instead watches him.

Gradually his breathing calms and it is clear he is okay. She slips through the tape, and as she quietly closes the door, JAKE turns to look and sees her -- though she is not aware he has seen her.

JONATHA puts the food on the bed and then turns back to the door, clearly unsure whether she should go back and help. She listens and watches JAKE through the "wall"; JAKE stares at her door, perhaps even moves to it, looking very old. Then, deciding, JONATHA moves to the typewriter, rolls in a piece of paper, and begins writing as she munches on something; JAKE listens.

Lights out.

#### **Intermission**

**Sound: Throughout the intermission, a loop of a manual typewriter at work.**

**Act II, Scene 1**

Light comes up on JONATHA at her typewriter -- she is typing. Beside her is a growing pile of paper. Throughout Scene 1 she continues to type.

Lights up on ARCHIE and DUAL at the radio station.

ARCHIE

Welcome to Radio Daddio, with your one, holy, catholic, and apostolic host, "Wolf" --

"Vulf" -- after he says "Vulf," ARCHIE howls.

ARCHIE

-- "Gang" --

ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

ARCHIE

-- Wolfgang! -- the radio-active pirate broadcasting to you from The Lounger of Barca. And this morning we have our weekly report from Dual, the town "hysterian."

(bangs the gong)

Report, oh logorrheic one.

DUAL

Well, the story that has flushed through the vast metropolitan suburbs of Liberty Creek is, of course, the standoff currently known as "Mexican" between Jake and Jonatha Caldwell.

ARCHIE

And what a story, eh? Passionate anger, angry passion, smashed and flying telephones, tragico-comedical, comico-tragedical --

DUAL

Operatic to the kind of max that Jonatha loves.

ARCHIE

And not a fat lady in sight, from what I hear.

DUAL

No Fat Lady finale from the Ice Queen any time soon, it seems.

ARCHIE

(hushing her)

Alice!

(radio voice)  
And how many days now?

DUAL  
Been three -- going on eternity.

ARCHIE  
Any inside information on, well, don't want to be indelicate here, but the more uro- and procto-elements of the impasse --

DUAL  
You mean, What's she doing for a potty?

ARCHIE  
I mean, What's she doing for a potty?

DUAL  
Maybe it all just feels at home in --

ARCHIE  
(interrupting)  
Cast-iron bladder, knowing Jonatha.

DUAL  
Even cast-iron rusts, Archie.

ARCHIE  
Knowing Jonatha, she's probably repealed the laws of oxidation.

DUAL  
She's so repealing, isn't she?

ARCHIE  
Any historical predictions?

DUAL  
She has reached rock bottom and shows signs of starting to dig.

ARCHIE  
(exasperated)  
Anything else?

DUAL  
"You can never know the length of a snake until it is dead."

ARCHIE

An enigma knotty enough to puzzle a Philadelphia lawyer from our own historicized "hysterian," Alice Dual.

DUAL

I'd also like to say --

ARCHIE

Thank you, Alice. And folks: don't forget to vote today -- exercise your franchise and vote for the one who is constant and wise. Alice?

DUAL

I second and third that.

ARCHIE

10-4.

DUAL

24-7

TOGETHER

Three-sixty-five.

ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- Irving Berling's "All Alone."

ARCHIE

You could try to hide it a little.

DUAL

"An ox remains an ox even if driven to Vienna."

ARCHIE

"There is plenty of sound in an empty barrel."

DUAL

"Live with wolves, and you learn to howl."

ARCHIE

"A silent mouth is melodious."

DUAL

"Put silk on a goat, and it's still a goat."

ARCHIE

Hmmm.

DUAL

"Hmmm" yourself.

Lights out. JONATHA continues to type.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act II, Scene 2**

Transition music: snippet from Jim Croce, "Operator." JAKE reading.  
HANNAH enters, carrying another phone; JONATHA types.

JAKE  
(with not much heat)  
Not in my house.

HANNAH  
(to JONATHA)  
You now have a new phone.

JONATHA  
(without stopping)  
Fine.

HANNAH  
(to JONATHA)  
What are you typing?

(to JAKE)  
What's she typing?

JAKE  
I'm not privy.

HANNAH  
What are you typing?

JONATHA  
(loudly)  
My last will and testament.

JAKE  
Need a sound mind and body for that.

HANNAH goes to the door but does not touch it.

HANNAH  
What are you doing?

JONATHA  
It's my magnum opus.

JAKE  
Her magnum sourpuss.  
(to HANNAH)  
She's been at it for three days now.

HANNAH  
Aren't you hungry?

JONATHA  
Nope.

HANNAH  
Don't you have to, like --

JAKE  
Go ahead, say it.

HANNAH  
-- evacuate?

JONATHA  
Cast-iron bladder.

HANNAH  
It's been three days.

JONATHA  
Just like Christ.

JAKE  
He disappeared. No such luck --

HANNAH  
Dad --

JONATHA  
I shall be always with ye.

JAKE  
As with a liver fluke.

HANNAH  
You sure --

JONATHA  
Nothing, thank you!

HANNAH  
Okay, okay.  
(to JAKE, hesitant)  
And how are you?

JAKE  
I was just fine till you brought that.

HANNAH  
That's not going away.

HANNAH takes the phone out of the box, hooks it up. JAKE watches her, then stands.

JAKE

Well, if you insist -- then, I am left with no choice.

HANNAH

Meaning --

JAKE

You've both forced me out play out my role of being the mean old bastard.

HANNAH

Meaning --

JAKE

Since "fish and visitors -- and old writers -- smell in three days," I must play my part.

HANNAH

What are you gabbing about?

JAKE

I want you to know something.

JAKE points to the door with his stick.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

Go on -- walk over there.

HANNAH walks to the door.

JAKE

Take down the tape. Go ahead, rip it down. Defestoon. Now, try the door handle.

HANNAH

It's locked.

JAKE

Go on -- it won't bite. And I haven't painted it with poison.

HANNAH grabs the handle.

JAKE

Turn it! -- do I have to tell you everything?

It's locked. HANNAH

Turn it! JAKE

It's unlocked. HANNAH

Open says-a-you. JAKE

It's unlocked. HANNAH

Apparently been unlocked. JAKE

But I have the key -- HANNAH

A jiggle -- JONATHA

What? HANNAH

A jiggle, a rattle, a righteous toss over the  
transom -- JONATHA  
(louder)

She's been using the loo and the larder. JAKE

Have you? HANNAH

Far as I read, Jesus stayed put for his three  
days. JAKE

How do you know? HANNAH

That Jesus rose -- JAKE

No! About -- HANNAH

JAKE  
She fooled you, too.

HANNAH  
How do you know?

JAKE  
I've seen her.

HANNAH  
How?

JAKE  
Sleeping out here on the coach one night -- saw  
her tippy-toe out, tippy-toe back, as selfish as  
a sponge. Go on -- grill her.

HANNAH  
You said it was about principle.

JONATHA  
It is.

HANNAH  
It can't be if you can get up and pee any time  
you want!

JONATHA  
Peeing doesn't have anything to do with  
principle.

JAKE  
That's why she's been a failure all her life --

HANNAH  
Dad --

JAKE  
Only of her own comfort --

HANNAH  
Dad, mine, not yours, so bug off. Sorry.

JAKE  
Don't mind at all. Go on.

HANNAH  
So what has this been about?

JONATHA  
What it has always been about -- "bringing these  
people into the modern age." Now leave me alone.

HANNAH marches into the room. JAKE follows. JONATHA types.

JONATHA

Later, Hannah.

HANNAH

Now.

JONATHA

Fine.

HANNAH

What are you typing?

JONATHA

I told you.

HANNAH

A last will and testament doesn't run an inch-thick.

JONATHA

Some of us have thicker lives than others.

JAKE

And some are just thicker than others.

JONATHA

The eternal kibitzer --

JAKE

Sorry again.

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JONATHA

-- that's why you've been a failure.

HANNAH

Answer me --

JAKE

Keeps up the family tradition.

HANNAH, angered, goes to pick up a page to read, and JONATHA slams her hand on the pile.

JONATHA

My eyes only.

HANNAH  
Only?

JONATHA  
Yes.

HANNAH  
After all --

JONATHA  
Niece of mine, all in good time.

JAKE  
High-handed wench, ain't she?

HANNAH  
I cannot believe this!

To get JONATHA to listen to her, HANNAH sticks her hand into the typewriter, to block the keys. JONATHA sits back, waits.

HANNAH  
That look -- I am heartily sorry for having interrupted your creative flow! But the door -- you left it unlocked deliberately --

JONATHA  
Always have an exit --

HANNAH  
You lied, Jonatha. To me. To everybody. We all saw you backed into a corner by --

JONATHA  
Armageddon over there.

HANNAH  
We saw you walk in, throw the key away -- the rebel -- I was ready to -- my own father -- because I believed what you believed.

JAKE  
She used you, Hannah.

JONATHA  
Jake --

JAKE  
She used your sadness over David's death --

JONATHA  
Shut. Up.

JAKE  
(stage whisper)  
Nerve has been hit!

JONATHA  
I didn't use anybody.

JAKE  
That would be unusual for you.

HANNAH  
Dad!  
(to JONATHA)  
I thought we were close --  
(with a gesture)  
-- this kind of close. Five years to get phones  
here -- you and me -- the hearings -- affidavits!

JONATHA  
We fought the right fight --

JAKE  
(to JONATHA)  
You should just listen.

HANNAH  
Both of you! Is that what you're writing about  
in this, the "right fight"? Is it? Or is he  
right -- did you just use me to get you wired up?  
Used all of us? From this high I have put you  
here --  
(laying a hand over her heart)  
-- my aunt the artist from the world! And I  
always thought I could be the --  
(making a gesture of linking)  
-- between you and Dad, make up for whatever it  
was the two of you blamed each other for.

JONATHA  
Then you had a tragedy with a husband --

JAKE  
Jonatha --

HANNAH  
(in disgust)  
I had a tragedy --

JONATHA  
Yes.

HANNAH

Is -- is that your real mind about David -- ?

JONATHA

(ignoring the statement)

You found out that the world doesn't owe you a thing that you don't fight for -- and what was wrong with that? You fought, you got stronger -- and you won back a life -- life! -- for yourself. That's the only way it ever happens for real. As for him --

(indicating JAKE)

-- we fight like we breathe, as a habit -- don't bother yourself with our salvation. I have to write.

HANNAH rips the page out of the typewriter. JONATHA, without missing a beat, puts in a fresh sheet and continues typing. HANNAH rips out that one; JONATHA replaces it. HANNAH rips out a third; JONATHA replaces it and waits.

HANNAH

You are dead to me. You have ice for a heart.

JONATHA

Then you have learned much.

JAKE

(audible but not loud)

"Even fools sometimes speak to the purpose."

HANNAH

Last swill and excrement.

ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS

Yo, Hannah!

HANNAH

Christ!

ROLLINS

(sees JAKE sitting in the chair by the window)  
Hey, Mr. C.

(shouting)

Hey, Miz C.

(a bit confused)

You're all in the bedroom.

JAKE

Ever the steel trap, Rollins.

ROLLINS

What are you all doing in the bedroom? I thought we had a Prisoner of Zenda thing going on here.

By this time ROLLINS is at the bedroom door.

ROLLINS

Hey, Hannah.

No one responds.

ROLLINS

(takes a step into the room and reacts physically)  
Whoa -- thick --

JAKE taps his skull, as if the say, "Sharp!"

ROLLINS

What's up?

No one responds.

ROLLINS

All right, shift subjects here. I have come by to take you all down to town hall to vote. You guys ready to go vote? Miz C -- you ready to re-join Liberty Creek in the democratic process?

JONATHA

I have had enough of democracy, Rollins. I've voted myself out.

ROLLINS

(sniffing)

Boy -- density in here.

ROLLINS

Well, if Miz C is opting out of opting in, then the Voter Express is looking to bring in at least three votes.

JAKE

Come on, Hannah, let's go.

ROLLINS

Dual is at the town hall taking notes and doing her own exit polls and then running up to Archie's house for a radio update. That woman has more energy than bees on espresso. Trini and Shang are nowhere to be seen. The air, you could say, is thick with anticipation.

You could say --

JAKE

Rollins --

HANNAH

What?

ROLLINS

Nothing.

HANNAH

Nothing it is.

ROLLINS

Dad, you ready?

HANNAH

That question always scared me.

JAKE

The pumpkin awaits. Miz C, you absolutely sure?

ROLLINS

JONATHA simply sits.

Silence is deafening and definite.

ROLLINS

Everyone leaves. JONATHA goes to type and then just sits back for a moment, as if thinking. She then goes to the bedroom door and looks out at the empty living room. Then she sits in the chair by the window, looking out.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Act II, Scene 3

Lights shift to downstage center: in the woods. SHANG is digging when TRINI enters. TRINI carries an axe. They look at each other for a moment.

What?!

SHANG

Nothing.

TRINI

Are you following me?

SHANG

TRINI

No.

SHANG

Then what are you doing here?

TRINI

Working.

SHANG

This is in the top ten of my most secret spots!

TRINI

I was not following you --

SHANG

Then what are you doing?

TRINI

Leverett Lindenholder said I could clear out the  
downed stuff on his property.

SHANG

(sing-songy)

For the bourgeoisie in the big cit-tee.

(back to normal voice)

For their fake fireplaces.

TRINI

I don't put down who you sell your roots to --

SHANG

And who is that, huh? C'mon.

TRINI

We probably sell to the same people. I don't  
really want to get into it.

SHANG

So you weren't following me?

TRINI

No. Pure coincidence. Pure. Really.

SHANG

And don't tell anyone you saw me here!

TRINI

I don't give away secrets.

SHANG

Well, don't you have to go off clearing, or culling, or cutting off heads, or whatever it is Leverett Lindenholder said you could do?

TRINI

"Clearing" -- I'm off over there.

SHANG

So go.

TRINI

Right.

SHANG

Go! You're just going to stand there, aren't you?

TRINI

I'm not sure --

SHANG

Big and dumb as an oak --

TRINI

(looking downcast)

Maybe I should go --

SHANG

All right -- all right!

TRINI

"All right" what?

SHANG

Do trees feel pain when you cut them down --

TRINI

I don't know --

SHANG

(ignoring his answer)

-- because I felt pain when you cut me down. Do you know what it meant to me? That they were going to chose me to fill that seat? Me -- Shang! Ginseng hunter, some almond-eyed type but as American as thirteen stripes on a flag. Like I finally belonged in Liberty Creek. And then you --

TRINI

I'll withdraw.

SHANG

You don't get yourself off that easy. I'm digging your root out of the ground! I'm a widow-maker screaming down from the sky if you don't answer me now! Why, why, why?!

TRINI

I should go cut --

SHANG

(sticking her small garden fork up towards his face)  
I will pop out your eyeball and roast it if you don't tell me why you hate me!

TRINI

Hate you?

SHANG

Hate me!

TRINI

No closer -- okay?

SHANG

Why else would you do what you did? Why else?

TRINI

(genuinely confused)

I don't hate you. I don't.

SHANG

Maybe I'll do both eyeballs.

TRINI

Put it away, Shang -- wrong dig. Wrong place. I don't hate you.

SHANG

Then tell me.

TRINI

I just wanted --

SHANG

Yeah?

TRINI

I just wanted to be on your ballot.

SHANG

On my what?

TRINI  
(distinctly)  
On. Your. Ballot.  
(broadly, over-emphasizing)  
I just wanted to be on the same ballot.

SHANG  
(overlapping)  
-- on the same ballot.

TRINI  
(slowly, with emphasis)  
Do -- you -- understand?

SHANG realizes.

SHANG  
Running. Mate.

TRINI  
So to speak.

SHANG  
In the race.

TRINI  
To run alongside.

SHANG  
Me.

TRINI  
You.

SHANG  
The east-west girl.

TRINI  
With the north-south guy.

SHANG  
Yeah?

TRINI  
Yes. Sudden change, huh?

SHANG  
Yeah.

TRINI  
Sudden shift.

SHANG

With whiplash. Me?

TRINI

There was one "sudden change" that turned it all for me --

SHANG

Tell me.

TRINI

One time, down at Sarah's Herbal Floressence, you bringing Sarah her usual monthly pound --

SHANG

For her secret tonic --

TRINI

Less than market rate, you always sold it -- and you did this. Come here -- pick something off my cheek, like, oh, say, a wood chip.

SHANG does.

TRINI

Casually toss it away.

SHANG does.

TRINI

You did that.

SHANG

Just that.

TRINI

And when you did that, the smell of the ginseng root off your fingers, the smell of the dirt, the light touch -- made me dizzy.

SHANG

American wild ginseng --

TRINI

Panax quinquefolium.

SHANG

-- is known to have -- those -- qualities --

TRINI

(overlapping and chuckling)

-- those qualities, yes. American Indians used it for a love potion.

(in response to the look on her face)

I read up.

SHANG

You read right. So, it was --

(recreating the move)

-- this.

TRINI

That made me pay better attention. To the shang hunter. The un-earther of man-roots. I was hoping the virile smell of chainsaw oil would pull in the almond-eyed type.

SHANG

"Air of Woodlot," hey?

TRINI

I wore it especially for you.

They laugh.

SHANG

I've -- known you for a long time, Trini --

TRINI

And I've known you for the same long time --

SHANG

The band and everything --

TRINI

Our stand-out band!

SHANG

Both of us -- what? -- kind of like inside outsiders.

TRINI

Spices in the Liberty Creek salad.

SHANG

A lot of common things.

TRINI

In common.

SHANG  
But --

TRINI  
What?

SHANG  
No, you know, no --

SHANG shrugs, makes a gesture or sound as if to indicate "voom."

SHANG  
-- you know?

TRINI repeats the same gesture or sound.

TRINI  
I knew that, no -- I know -- I'm not blind. So  
time to take action --

SHANG  
So you don't really want the seat?

TRINI  
The seat I wanted was to sit next to you. I  
really liked the hand-shakes at the beginning and  
the end of the debates. "Best of luck to you."  
"Good luck to you, too." Admittedly, road-  
plowing was not my strong suit -- you always got  
me on that one --

SHANG  
Not like you didn't know it was coming --

TRINI  
I liked knowing you'd win the point.

SHANG  
Who are you, north-south guy?

TRINI  
I'll show you mine if you show me yours, east-  
west girl.

SHANG  
Like what?

TRINI  
(indicating the digging)  
Well, for instance -- this -- what is so "shang"  
about Shang?

SHANG

The wild ginseng me.

TRINI

Yeah.

SHANG

Besides the money of it?

TRINI

Money never means everything.

SHANG

Because I'm like the forked root itself --  
Chinese one way, American the other.

TRINI

More one than the other?

SHANG

Oh, I can get -- I am very American. Quote you  
daily price per pound. Got the science down pat,  
too.

(in a mock academic tone)

Studies show that ginseng heals general weakness,  
poor appetite, a looowww-gear sex drive, short  
breath --

(a few short pants)

-- cold limbs ("ai-yee, get those popsicle toes  
off me!"), spontaneous sweating ("ai-yee, power  
surges!"), and --

(in a decrepit voice)

-- premature aging.

TRINI

No wonder Archie wanted samples!

SHANG

And I know the folklore, too.

(counting off on her fingers)

Shen-Nung's Pharmacopia, third century A.D.  
Exploited by the Jesuits, who sent tons of it  
(dug up by Indians) to China -- talk about beef  
to Argentina! Etcetera, etcetera. And when I  
dig up one of the real power roots, with forked  
legs and a little bulb head --

(in a deep voice)

-- "man root" --

TRINI

"Man root" --

TOGETHER

Root, root!

SHANG

I count up the profits in the best American style--

TRINI

But --

SHANG

But when I'm doing this -- being out here --

TRINI

Yes.

SHANG

Digging it --

TRINI

Yes.

SHANG

I think -- no, my body thinks -- "It is beautiful any day I do this."

TRINI

That's good to hear.

SHANG

When I do this -- soil, root, air, wind, sun, blood -- I slip -- sideways, backwards -- and I am there. I am not Chinese, Trini. I have never been Chinese. Or I am Chinese as chop suey. But when I dig this ancient root -- China digs itself through me.

TRINI

Touches something deep, heh?

SHANG

And far away.

TRINI

But right next to the skin.

SHANG

It's the skin itself.

TRINI

Yes. I understand.

SHANG

Do you, Mr. North-South Paul Bunyan?

TRINI

The Lutheran logger from Trinidad?

SHANG

Yes, Trinidaddio! What's your skin?

TRINI

From the time I can remember remembering anything, I have wanted to be a northerner.

SHANG

I though you guys were all about Carnival.

TRINI

Silly thing, really, Carnival.

(gyrates)

How wicked! "Oh, look at my hips! My hips is alive!"

SHANG

Trini!

TRINI

(does a shimmy)

"Oh, I am shaking my super-bouncy free-spirit breasts in front of the world!" All that fascist happiness! Too hard! Not me.

SHANG

You give up your culture?

TRINI

(shrugs)

Culture -- what is that? All I know is that the word "north" made me think "upward." Cold made me think "strong." The dead hand of those dead white dead European males didn't feel so dead to me.

SHANG

You must have been -- spooky.

TRINI

Spooky child -- yes. Mama thought I'd been drop-kicked by the devil.

SHANG

I'm sure!

TRINI

She'd say, "curried goat"; I'd hear, "cod fish cakes and brown bread made in a coffee can."

SHANG

Back, child!

TRINI

Mama'd roll her eyes to heaven, disappointment large in her heart.

SHANG

And the Henry Thoreau?

TRINI

Instead of the Alvin?

SHANG

Alvin's your real name?

TRINI

Alvin's my given name. Henry Thoreau's my real name. My beloved high school teacher -- he be the one. He throws me a book.

SHANG

Like a bomb.

TRINI

(more island accent)

"Here --

(catches the "book")

-- you like things outside the lines. Henry David Thoreau. Walden." "What he do?" "Took himself into the woods, built himself a cabin by a pond, lived in it, and wrote a book." "This the book?" "No, that book is the book he wrote about writing this other book he sat in the cabin to write." "He write a lot of books?" "Enough to annoy people, make them remember him. You read it, you tell me what you think." So I read it -- and it made a hair crack -- tiny, tiny, thin -- little crack -- but a crack. "Simplify, simplify" -- pop! "Quiet desperation" -- snap! "Different drummer" -- crack!

SHANG

Like when one of your trees is ready to break.

TRINI

And my weightless teenage brain and body got weight. Culture? Turned out to be next to a

small pond. So north -- for what the south couldn't give me. "When I do this," you said -- this! -- I know. I know. When I stand in a woodlot and smell, I get poured out, and I feel more free than any little butt shake could ever make me.

SHANG

Jake must remind you a lot.

TRINI

Jake's cracked in the same way.

SHANG

He's cracked, all right!

TRINI

Well, Jonatha's got her own fault-lines --

SHANG

To the max allowed!

TRINI

But she digs -- just like you.

SHANG

That's why I dig her.

TRINI

So -- do we end up like Jake and Jonatha?

There is a moment of shyness between them.

SHANG

I need to work.

TRINI

Then I guess I need to work, too.

SHANG

Vote this morning?

TRINI

Yep.

SHANG

Early.

TRINI

Earliest I could get in. Who'd you vote for?

SHANG gives him a "look," and they both laugh softly.

TRINI

Well -- I voted for you.

(responding to SHANG's incredulous look)

It's true. A vote of confidence in your coming administration.

SHANG

Who knows who's going to win?

TRINI

You'll win --

(shimmies, more island accent)

-- I am de swing vote! Had me swung over.

SHANG

I -- I need to -- dig.

TRINI

(laughing nervously)

I should go cut off some more heads.

SHANG

Hey!

TRINI

Yeah?

SHANG

You're not supposed to tell who you voted for.

TRINI

It's a special election -- different rules apply.

Lights down.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Act II, Scene 4

Transition music: Floyd Dixon, "Telephone Blues." JAKE's house. JONATHA goes to the typewriter, looks for a moment at the paper in it, then takes it out and carefully crumples it. She reads the last page, puts it back, straightens the stack of papers, binds them with a binder clip, and sets the manuscript on top of the typewriter.

Now, agitated and nervous, she walks through the house, a ghost. She turns on the radio, and lights come up on ARCHIE as he is giving his final report of the day; DUAL is sitting beside him.

All of this happens as ARCHIE speaks: she comes across the box that holds the sculpture done by JAKE decades ago, along with the photographs of the other pieces and a note that they are stored in

ARCHIE's attic; she examines the sculpture, clearly amazed that her brother had done this; then leaves the house to go to ARCHIE's, hearing as she does that the race is a draw because one person did not show up to vote: JONATHA.

ARCHIE

Well, it's official, folks, as just reportaged to me by Alice Dual, town cliometrician -- the Fat Lady has sung her aria. We have an unprecedented outcome in the election to fill the vacant seat of the dearly deposited Buzz Larch. The press of events press in upon us now. Here goes: the official tally.

(strikes the gong)

Henry Thoreau Toussaint --

DUAL

18 checkmarks.

ARCHIE

(strikes the gong)

Shang --

DUAL

18 checkmarks.

ARCHIE

That's right: tie, tie, tie one on. Because -- if you can do the math -- some one person did not vote out of the thirty-seven registered voters of Liberty Creek.

DUAL

We are not at liberty to say who that is, but whoever you are, you know who you are.

JONATHA pauses for a moment to realize that it is she about whom they are talking, then she crosses directly to the radio station, carrying the note and the photos.

ARCHIE

Stay tuned as people of good heart and a peppy good humor try to figure a way out of our constitutional crisis.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Act II, Scene 5

JONATHA enters the scene.

ARCHIE

Well, well, well, here is Miss Single-Vote-That-Could-Have-Made-A-Difference.

JONATHA

Sorry I fell down on my civic duty. What is this? And these?

Hands the letter and book of photos to DUAL.

DUAL

It's a letter from your brother --

JONATHA

To you --

DUAL

Giving me custody over these --

JONATHA

Sculptures.

DUAL

And these are pictures of the sculptures.

JONATHA

My brother did sculptures.

DUAL

Yes, he did.

JONATHA

And he gave custody of them to you?

DUAL

He did.

JONATHA

To you.

ARCHIE

I do vaguely remember that, yes --

JONATHA

My brother was a sculptor.

DUAL

Yes.

JONATHA

You both knew this?

DUAL

It's our job.

JONATHA

The town "hysterian" -- And you never told me.

DUAL

Why? As the letter says, Jake handed them over to me, for the museum --

JONATHA

Which will never get built.

ARCHIE

Don't be so pessimistically quick about that --

DUAL

In any case, Jonatha, it's clear Jake didn't want everyone to know --

JONATHA

And you're not everyone.

DUAL

Obviously not.

JONATHA

Where are they?

ARCHIE points up.

JONATHA

How do I get up there?

ARCHIE

Stairs are over there.

DUAL

Do you have Jake's permission? For that matter, do you have Archie's permission? Or mine?

JONATHA

Give me the photos

DUAL

The magic words?

JONATHA waits, saying nothing. DUAL does not give her the photos.

DUAL

I have not liked you since the day you came back.

JONATHA  
Then you got started late --

DUAL  
But I held my tongue --

JONATHA  
A blessing for us all.

DUAL  
-- because Hannah seemed to get straight with herself because of you and because I have only great respect for Jake.

JONATHA  
(mostly to herself)  
Yes, Jake --

DUAL  
But I am old enough now not to like you out loud, and I save my awe and respect for things that deserve it. It is so like you to march in and expect to command. Not now.

DUAL holds up the photos.

JONATHA  
May I please -- ?

DUAL hands them over. JONATHA simply crosses to the other side of the stage, now ARCHIE's attic. ARCHIE and DUAL follow. All the objects are "mimed."

ARCHIE  
I don't know where they'd be. Once the museum goes up, though, we can inventory full across the board -- You found 'em -- like a homing pigeon.

JONATHA, with her hand, traces the outlines of one of the sculptures, and then another, and then another.

ARCHIE  
Out there, wood just like that, twisted or knotted or splayed -- big, little, didn't matter -- there's a whole box over there of stuff no more than a foot high, hard-carved and polished -- he'd lug them home and, well, just work them.

DUAL  
That's not right, Archie. He didn't just "work" them.

(direct to JONATHA)  
He was not like some hack tourist chainsaw artist  
with porcupine bookends. Do you want to know  
what it was like to watch him work?

JONATHA  
Tell me.

DUAL  
I saw him at it more than once -- like he sat  
inside the wood and figured out what it wanted to  
be. Then he just followed it out. It was one of  
the most peaceful moments I think I have ever  
tasted on this earth to watch his hands run over  
its grain and his eyes light on its shape.

DUAL and JONATHA look straight at each other. The air is suddenly  
thick with subtext.

DUAL  
His hands were strong.

JONATHA  
And he let you watch?

DUAL  
A delight to watch.

JONATHA  
Really.

DUAL  
Always. He was an artist, Jonatha, pure at home  
in it. What more needs to be said?

ARCHIE  
Alice Dual.

JONATHA  
Why?

DUAL  
Why what?

JONATHA  
Why did he stop?

DUAL  
Life. A daughter growing up in a reckless time  
without a mother. Money to pay this, pay for  
that -- the man must have had half a dozen jobs.

ARCHIE  
Fish counter --

DUAL  
Logger --

ARCHIE  
Stand-in driver at the funeral home --

DUAL  
Maybe he thought one artist tearing at a family  
was enough.

JONATHA looks at the sculptures. DUAL touches ARCHIE, and they get  
ready to exit.

DUAL  
At least up here, they have aged well. Turn the  
lights out when you leave.

They exit. JONATHA alone. Lights out.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Act II, Scene 6

Transition music: Dr. Hook, "When You're In Love With A Beautiful  
Woman." JAKE's house. JAKE enters alone. HANNAH and ROLLINS are on  
the stage opposite ARCHIE's radio station, sitting in two chairs,  
which are actually the front seat of ROLLIN's truck. They sit  
quietly, listening to music off a Walkman with a double set of  
headphones.

JAKE  
They are going to asphyxiate themselves in that  
truck, and not from oil fumes. "Hatred and love  
are blind."

As he takes off his jacket, he sees the statue, and he knows what  
JONATHA has found. Before he can do anything, JASON enters, wearing a  
new hat.

JASON  
Hello, Mr. Caldwell. Just saw you come in.

JAKE  
You're still here?

JASON  
Loose ends.

JAKE

All my ends are loose.

JASON

Is your sister around?

JAKE

Not quite sure where Jonatha is -- why?

JASON

Apparently, she is the vote that would have made the difference -- wanted to talk with her.

JAKE

Jonatha make a difference?

JASON

Tie vote at town hall -- 18 votes each.

JAKE

Don't say -- well, that should provide enough gossip for the next century. She's not here.

JASON

Any idea when --

JAKE

Jonatha does not follow any clock known to man.

JASON

Okay -- well, if you see her --

JAKE

Mr. Bock, I won't be a message service for my sister. Go snoop.

JASON

Yes, sir.

JAKE

By the way -- since you're on about tying up loose ends, a little lesson in knots for you. I know what you've asked Hannah to do. Don't look surprised, or whatever that look on your face is. "Don't make love by the garden gate / love is blind but the neighbors ain't." We got a fast and thick grapevine around here. What has she told you? And tell me the truth.

JASON

She hasn't told me yes or no.

JAKE

You know about her and Rollins.

JASON

To be honest, I see smoke but not much fire.

JAKE

That's always been a slow fire, to be sure -- but it's burned long. And her husband?

JASON

She told me.

JAKE

It nearly destroyed her -- hell, it did. It did. Destroyed all of us -- we loved David dearly. She has built back a life here, and we have built one back around her -- I would hate to see it decomposed by an offer that held no water. And, to be honest, Sir City-Man --

JASON

Yes?

JAKE

-- I don't have much faith in your offer.

JASON

How do you know what my offer is?

JAKE

It's a repeat from the Garden of Eden: "How would you like to bite an apple, young woman?"

JASON

I do find her -- hungry.

JAKE

I know you do. But don't confuse your hunger for her with her. She has battles outside your scope.

JASON

So what are you telling me, Mr. Caldwell?

JAKE

I wish I could make this sound more threatening than it's going to sound -- the creaking bones kind of robs it of its bite -- but here it is: Leave her alone and just leave.

JAKE shakes his stick, half-joking, more than half-serious.

JAKE  
Or I will wreak vengeance!

JASON  
All phones --

JAKE  
And phonies!

JASON  
-- beware!

JAKE  
She has hungers, yes, but they're not what you think they are. Or as simple.

JASON  
And mine are simple?

JAKE  
Much like yourself. This is a whim for you -- admit it. Beautiful woman, well-aged tragedy, thrill of running away -- Go file your last story and go home. You don't need Hannah, and she certainly doesn't need you.

JASON  
You're a scalpel.

JAKE  
I'm her father forever, so I am allowed to cut -- one benefit of mortal decay.

JASON  
I think I'll let Hannah make her decision.

JAKE  
Don't get me wrong, Mr. Bock. I may not be Lancelot or the latest WWF bodywrecker, but I will protect Hannah from all invaders great and small. I will haunt you if you hurt her -- and by asking her you have hurt her. I will find a way.

JASON  
I'm going to see if I can find Miss Caldwell.

JAKE  
That would be a better use of your time. Give my best to the Scorpion Lady. My sting is nothing in compare.

As he exits, JASON sees HANNAH and ROLLINS in the truck. ROLLINS has his eyes closed, but HANNAH sees JASON. They look at each other for a moment, then HANNAH waves goodbye. JASON hesitates, looks back at the house, then doffs his hat to her and exits. HANNAH leans back and closes her eyes, then takes ROLLINS' hand, and for a moment they both nod in rhythm to the music. Lights out -- they exit.

Meanwhile, JAKE looks at the statue. Then, he goes to the bedroom and sees the manuscript. He reads, and his face is a mixture of laughter and great pain.

JAKE

Oh, my, my, my.

(reading from the cover page)

"Jake and Jonatha -- Still Life."

(turns the page)

"These episodes were retrieved by deliberate creative self-induced regression to four or five years of age. I have written them to contain undisciplined words and spelling and syntax, each story no longer than a page, each page written in one breath, so to speak. As you read them -- and if you can, read them out loud in that one breath in which they were written -- remember that a young child can learn life around and outside of the amnesia we later impose on ourselves as adults by fear and threat."

(goes to the bottom of the page)

"This is not exactly a 'Child's Garden of Verses.'"

(next line)

"To Jake, Irish twin brother of mine."

JAKE turns the first page and reads silently at first.

JAKE

I remember this. I remember this naming.

NOTE: the story should follow the pauses, rushes, and odd syntax -- do not make it smooth.

"GRATEGRANMAMA -- She is sitting up in her cripple wheel chair like Papa told us she would be but he did not tell us that her eye would be glued to one end of a black pipe that has its other end stuck thru the window into the night or that we would be standing here watching her twiddle the little nobs we can just but barely see on the black box that is holding the pipe up on three legs Papa is saying to her maMA but he does not say it again until she is taking her eye away from the pipe and rolling her chair

around to look at our faces so Papa is saying  
maMA I have brought over your  
grategrandchildren for you to meet and I think  
you will find out that a lot of you has been  
passed on into them but grategranamaMA is  
turning her chair back to look into the pipe and  
telling Papa we would have to wait until she got  
this chance to get Andromeda in clear fokus for  
her calcu lations ofasudden is letting  
out a skreechy sound that sounds like YOUREEKA  
and she wheels around to us again saying  
beautiful beautiful Beautiful and she is  
asking Papa how old we are and he is telling her  
we are almost 5 and she is trying to take a  
look at us which she does and she is saying too  
young much MUCH too young and Papa is  
answering back and asking her to let us take one  
look thru her tele skope be cause we would  
not touch any part of it and would never forget  
what she would let us see so sure enuf she  
is wheeling herself out of the way saying do not  
trip and stumble on my legs and she is holding a  
big cane out at us to show that she means it  
Papa is putting a little stool which he knew was  
there for us to stand up on I go first my  
eye is seeing a site it says I can not beleeve  
because it is looking at a round piece of night  
cram full of stars winking and twinkling and one  
most of all and I suprise myself hearing myself  
say out loud ANDROMEDA Papa is moving  
me down off of the stool and I am wishing that I  
could leave my eye glued to the pipe at least for  
a while longer Jake pulls his eye to the  
pipe and ANDROMEDA comes out between his teef  
like the woof of steam from the kettle  
GrategranmaMA is saying not bad not bad  
but much too young you may bring them here  
again when they are a few years older I say  
Papa Andromeda will be my name from now on  
foreverand a day but GreatgranmaMA is saying  
like she means it that is a very frivlus  
notion and quite impossible Andromeda is the  
name of a hevenly body and not for any child yet  
born But Jake looks at me look at him and  
our mouths spit stars when we say quiet outside  
GrategranmaMA's ears under the per simmon bush  
ANDROMEDA ANDROMEDA "

JAKE looks up from the book.

JAKE

Andromeda. Andromeda. I had forgotten. My Irish twin.

Suddenly, pain. He holds on to the manuscript as he makes his way to the living room. He hesitates, looking at the door and at the phone. Then he dials 911.

JAKE

Yes, this is Jake Caldwell, calling from Liberty Creek -- I am having a heart attack. I need help because I cannot move. Third house on the right after the second fork with the steel sculpture of the tin-can goat. You'll see two people sitting in a truck outside. No, I can't get to them. And no, I am not going to stay on the phone -- I trust you will get here when you do.

JAKE hangs up. There is a strip of the "Caution" tape on the table. He takes it and wraps it around his forehead like a headband. Then he grabs hold of the sculpture and the manuscript as he sits there. Lights out.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Act II, Scene 7

A single table downstage center, where SHANG and TRINI sit, with a deck of cards between them. ARCHIE, DUAL, and JASON are there.

ARCHIE

It has come to this, folks. The tie, after a very intensive recount of the 36 votes, still stands. And this brings us to the present moment, here at the town hall, where these two remarkably calm candidates sit at a table -- the same table, by the way --

DUAL

Archie --

ARCHIE

Sorry. Digression. Where these two remarkably calm candidates sit at a table with a deck of ordinary playing cards between them -- the chosen instrument of their fate. A single cut of the cards, folks -- that's how fate will fare. They look at each other -- and Trini -- Henry Thoreau Toussaint -- urges Shang to choose first.

DUAL

She, in turn, urges him. There's this little back and forth -- almost like a game -- with so much riding on the line! Finally, Shang bows -- her hand hovers -- and, there, she takes her cut. Trini goes -- his hand hovers, too -- and, yes, he's made his choice!

TRINI and SHANG covertly show their cards to each other but to no one else.

ARCHIE

Who won?

SHANG and TRINI put their cards back onto the pile and reach across the table to shake hands; then they just sit there, holding hands, looking at each other, as the lights comes down. Transition music: Dr. Hook, "When You're In Love With A Beautiful Woman" or something similar and phone-related.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act II, Scene 8**

A hospital room. Around the bed are seated HANNAH, ROLLINS, SHANG, and TRINI. HANNAH has JONATHA's manuscript. JONATHA enters and sits.

HANNAH

Hello.

JONATHA

Hello.

HANNAH

How did you hear?

JONATHA

Over Archie's scanner.

HANNAH

Who brought you here?

JONATHA

Jason Bock. He wanted to interview the ball-breaker who was supposed to be the tie-breaker.

HANNAH

He would do that.

JONATHA

(to SHANG and TRINI)

Sorry about that.

TRINI  
Ball-breaking?

SHANG  
(reaching out to JONATHA)  
No harm done.

HANNAH  
Is Jason here?

JONATHA  
I told him he had some editing to do.

HANNAH  
Good choice.

JONATHA  
What happened?

SHANG  
Looks like heart attack --

HANNAH  
Not hard, but hard enough against an old body.

JONATHA  
And --

HANNAH  
He's fully alive.

ROLLINS  
The doctors are monitoring.

JONATHA  
Aren't we all? How did they get him here? In  
time?

HANNAH  
He used the phone.

SHANG  
He dialed 911.

ROLLINS  
(to HANNAH)  
Should we?

JONATHA  
What?

HANNAH  
(holding up the "Caution" tape, hands it to JONATHA)  
When they found him, he had this wrapped around  
his forehead. "Festoon!"

They all laugh gently.

JONATHA  
The renegade.

ROLLINS  
T- N- T.

HANNAH  
It calmed the paramedics -- I'm frantic, and  
they're smiling -- I'm flipped, and he's  
whispering, "Festoon!" to me. He didn't want  
anyone to worry.

ROLLINS  
(to JONATHA, with emphasis)  
He called 9-1-1.

HANNAH  
Satisfied?

JONATHA  
Very. My brother's alive.

HANNAH  
And so is my father.

ROLLINS  
And our friend.

TRINI  
Yes.

SHANG  
Make it a three.

ROLLINS  
Miz C, sometimes I think it's like that giant  
mushroom up in Michigan.

JONATHA  
What?

ROLLINS  
The giant mushroom.

JONATHA

What is?

ROLLINS

Life.

JONATHA

Life's a giant mushroom in Michigan?

ROLLINS

The "humungous fungus," biggest living thing ever discovered --

HANNAH

He reads a lot --

ROLLINS

-- covers acres and acres -- but all underground and out of sight. Sometimes I think it is all very much like that.

JONATHA

Rollins?

ROLLINS

Yes, Miz C.

JONATHA

You do have some sometimes poetry in you.

HANNAH

More often than sometimes.

ROLLINS

(jokingly)

Good of you to notice.

TRINI

We notice it all the time.

HANNAH gives ROLLINS a look; he nods, pokes SHANG and TRINI.

ROLLINS

Miz C, we band of three are going to try out some of that excellent cuisine they have in the vending machines. Care to partake?

JONATHA

Not hungry.

ROLLINS

Hannah banana?

HANNAH

Bring me back something hot to drink and sweet to eat. Take your time.

ROLLINS

Rock on. Let's go, amigos.

ROLLINS, SHANG, and TRINI exit.

JONATHA

(to HANNAH)

I saw the sculptures.

HANNAH

(puzzled at first, then understands)

Ah.

JONATHA

Why didn't you ever tell me? So much --

HANNAH

Humungous fungus. I think he did them to prove a point.

JONATHA

As always.

HANNAH

That all the talent in the family hadn't gone to one end of the pool.

JONATHA

You watched him.

HANNAH

I sneaked -- I loved what he did but couldn't admit it -- see, my aunt was the real artist, and of course my dad couldn't be a great hero like my aunt who lived real life. So, I sneaked -- I never gave him my full eye.

JONATHA

Jake, Jake, Jake --

HANNAH

Jonatha, favor me -- don't. Don't. Just don't. He had, clutched in his mitts, your "last will" when they brought him in.

JONATHA

Last "swill."

HANNAH

These true?

JONATHA

As true as I can remember.

HANNAH

I read some -- anything to get my mind away from Dad strapped-in like cargo -- Actually I had Rollins read them to me -- just -- sweet! -- he became this five-year old in an instant, right out there -- Don't -- just listen -- And the thing that I loved? How you two protected each other -- big grown-up ground-up world, and the two of you under the "per simmon bush." Made me feel hungry and sad all at the same time. And old.

JONATHA

My Irish twin was --

HANNAH

Is --

JONATHA

Is -- my brother for life.

HANNAH

I'm going to go see if Rollins has found the things hot and sweet I asked for.

(hands JONATHA the manuscript)

It's all so mixed, isn't it?

JONATHA

That's what makes a cake.

HANNAH

I'm going to go find the humungous.

HANNAH exits.

JONATHA

So the phone saved you. Somewhere in that damaged heart of yours I'm sure you appreciate it. I know I certainly appreciate it in my own damaged heart.

JAKE opens his eyes.

JAKE

Enough, Andromeda.

JONATHA  
(half-laugh, half-cry)  
Andromeda! Here, let me help you --

JAKE  
Nice of you to come.

JONATHA  
It's not like I had much of a choice.

JAKE  
So you'd like to think.

JAKE picks up a water glass from the table. JONATHA goes to help him with it, but he brushes her away.

JONATHA  
What do you mean?

JAKE  
What I said -- you'd like to think you didn't have a choice.

JONATHA  
Let me take that glass --

JAKE  
I can handle it myself.

JONATHA  
All right. You're saying I'd choose not to come at a time like this?

JAKE  
I'm saying you keep such a choice on your list of choices.

JONATHA  
That's cruel.

JAKE  
Most truth is.

JONATHA  
There's no time for --

JAKE  
No, there isn't.

JONATHA  
So spit it out. Now.

JAKE

I saw you, Jonatha.

JONATHA

What are you talking about?

JAKE

"I saw you" is what we're talking about.

JONATHA

What?

JAKE

The first time you snuck out of your den. To pee and graze.

JONATHA

You were on the couch.

JAKE

Getting my first fibrillations. I know you saw me. And I know you didn't help me. You chose otherwise, and that's what I mean by "Jonatha's Choices." Always an otherwise. You betrayed me once again. There, spat out.

Long silence.

JONATHA

All right, I'm sorry.

JAKE

Call the Guinness record folks -- I'm not interested.

JONATHA

Then what?

No response.

JAKE

Maybe nothing of what matters to you should matter to me now because a betrayal is a betrayal, and a death gets dealt out with that, and I should tell you to keep your mouth shut because apology is a poor substitute for conscience, and we'll finish it off there and lock the barn door. But I can't finish with it there.

JONATHA

So finish. Finish me off.

JAKE

Hardly that, you lug-nut. We're not doing the House of Caldwell here. But -- for a moment -- for the smallest of moments, Jonatha -- when you closed that door -- when I heard the typewriter clack -- I hated you. For the first time -- and only time. No forgiveness, no slack, no excuses. Just hate.

JONATHA

You aren't the first --

JAKE stops her.

JAKE

That's a worn-out selfish response, Jonatha, so shut up.

JONATHA

Shut.

JAKE

Hating you -- do you know what that was like for me?

JONATHA

No.

JAKE

Like murder. Like I'd chiseled your heart right out of my chest. To hate you? To hate Jonatha? My wild Irish twin? I never felt so scared or so alone in my entire life. And I admit that it colored what I said to Hannah --

JONATHA

Doesn't matter -- doesn't matter -- Alone --

JAKE

Yep.

JONATHA

Scared --

JAKE

Yep.

JONATHA

And yet --

JAKE

And yet.

JONATHA

You didn't give me up --

JAKE

No.

JONATHA

No.

JAKE

The smallest of moments, I said -- the smallest. So, no, I didn't, against all the other moments in our lives. But with this right foot in the grave and the left on a banana peel -- unconfessed business becomes a sin. And you know the long form on me and sin. There, dope slap to you done. If you're stumped because you haven't had much practice at humility --

(points to manuscript)

-- just pick one. That'd do for penance.

JONATHA

Jake --

JAKE

Dealer's choice. Aren't you always the one for more choices?

JONATHA

Me and my choices.

JONATHA picks up the manuscript, leafs through, stops.

JONATHA

When we were sick.

JAKE

Which time?

JONATHA

When they thought we had rheumatic fever.

JAKE

Ahhh -- house full of fear at that point.

JONATHA

Listen.

JAKE

And don't phone it in!

JONATHA

"I THINK MY EYES ARE ABOUT TO OPEN -- I wonder if I tell my hand to close will it know how to do it and what it will feel like if it does and I wonder if my head is too heavy for me to lift it off of this soggy pillo and I wonder if I can still be seeing my room and ever thing there is in it and any body in it like I am looking down at them from the seeling or the sky but I do not feel like giving my self the trouble to try out any thing so I am just going to be where ever I am for a few minits but I feel a hand on my fore head and I can tell it is Mamas hand and she is saying Thank Gawd thank Gawd so I guess if I am up in heven Mama is here too where she sposed to be with me and my eyes do not mind keeping them selves shut for a little while more but they do not get a chance to do it be cause I know Doctor Hudson is here be cause my rist is in his hand like he takes it when I am sick and I have to take back my notion that I am in heven be cause Mama and Doctor Hudson probly do not go to the same ones and I let my eyes open up just a little crack and see Doctor Hudson shaking Mamas hand and telling her Well I guess this is proof again we make a good team we pulled those children over a bad hump again and Mama says Praise Gawd praise Gawd and Doctor Hudson is telling her to just leave us be as is and let us sleep until we wake up natural which I am very glad to hear be cause I do not want to be washed and handled I want to fix it in my magination

how it was to be up over ever thing looking down on it to go with what I know about looking at people strate on at them but humpwegot them over humpwegot them over humpwe gotthem over keeps saying itself in my head and I do not even know what it means and I do not care be cause it is singing us to sleep to sleep to sleep"

JAKE seems ready to fall asleep.

JAKE

Good night sweet prince. Cess.

JONATHA

Rest.

JAKE

Time enough to rest in the grave. Don't plan to go there soon.

JONATHA

That is a very good idea.

JAKE

Jonatha.

JONATHA

Yes?

JAKE

I once heard that Mary Baker Eddy --

JONATHA

Who?

JAKE

Mary Baker Eddy, the maker-up of Christian Science. I heard she was buried with a phone in her grave so that when she was resurrected she could call people to tell them about it.

JONATHA

Long distance.

JAKE

Do me a favor? No phone in my grave.

JONATHA

Duly noted.

JAKE

Bad enough having one in the house.

JONATHA

Good enough, too.

JAKE

As I live and breathe. "To sleep to sleep to sleep" -- the stories are very good.

JONATHA

Good source material.

JAKE

That I cannot deny.

JONATHA

Sleep.

JAKE

That I cannot deny either.

JAKE closes his eyes and rests. JONATHA, feeling something under the covers, pulls out the small statue. JAKE pops one eye open, sees her with the statue. JAKE closes his eyes again and reaches for JONATHA's hand, finds it.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Act II, Scene 9**

Lights up on ARCHIE's radio station. ARCHIE and DUAL sit there. ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- "Hello Ma Baby" -- which plays underneath.

ARCHIE

You didn't have to stay for my whole aria.

DUAL

(joshing, tired)

At least you knew you had an audience of one.

ARCHIE

One is more than none, and that's what keeps me going.

The phone rings, and it takes both of them by complete surprise. Rings again.

DUAL

The etiquette, I believe, is to answer it.

Rings again. ARCHIE picks it up.

DUAL

(whispers)

And to say hello.

ARCHIE

Hello. Radio True Blue.

(listens)

Why, thanks.

(listens)

I'd be glad to play it, Sarah.

ARCHIE hangs up.

DUAL

An audience of two.

ARCHIE

A request. For music. You know, Dual, they have these devices where you can hook up a phone so that inquiring minds can hear whoever calls me up.

DUAL

Talk show.

ARCHIE

Yeah. You think?

DUAL

I think anything is now possible.

ARCHIE

But should I?

They consider the pros and cons of moving into the next tradition.

DUAL

(both question and statement)

You could call it --

ARCHIE

We could call it --

DUAL

-- "The Green Chalkboard."

ARCHIE

Bullseye.

DUAL

We?

ARCHIE

Of course.

Music ends. ARCHIE bumps a switch -- mike on.

ARCHIE

Welcome back, and coming up is a historic phonological event, folks -- the first ever call-in to the radio for pirates, from Sarah, requesting that I play this next song. So, Sarah, out it goes. The phones are open, listeners -- ring-a-ding-ding me up, and let's make some history together.

ARCHIE bumps a switch, pops in a tape -- song is director's choice. As it plays, ARCHIE and DUAL look at each other, then dig out their pieces of chalk and hold them up.

BLACKOUT