

Michael Bettencourt

One-Act Plays: Volume 1

Block & Tackle Productions Press



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Michael Bettencourt

**Click • The Most Dangerous Woman in America
Let Down The Rains • When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek
Melts Into Air**

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Block & Tackle Productions Press



Co-Founders Elfin Frederick Vogel and Michael Bettencourt

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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

Click (Long Version)

DESCRIPTION

When Marlin reveals to Pinto what he did in the park that night, it changes the whole nature of the moral universe they inhabit. A play about whether hate can ever be moral.

CHARACTERS

- Pinto
- Marlin
- Jonathan

SETTING

- A kitchen

MISCELLANEOUS

- Table, chairs, and other items, as described in the script
- Newspaper

Note: The actors should use a rough-edged British, Irish, or Scottish accent. The accents can be mixed, that is, one British and one Irish, for example, but it must not be done in American tones.

* * * * *

Scene 1

Pinto sits at a kitchen table, ordinary and not IKEA, with three other chairs, wooden. A mint-green vinyl table cloth, on which sit salt and pepper shakers -- clear glass, with silver metal tops -- next to a sugar bowl. A half-height metal paper napkin dispenser, exactly like one on a diner counter, stands next to the sugar bowl. One broken-handled coffee mug holds pens, pencils, markers, and scissors. A second broken-handled coffee mug holds scuffed flatware: spoons, butter knives, forks.

A small cheap transistor radio is on the table, music playing.

Pinto is staring at article in a newspaper, intently.

Marlin, jacket on, stands by the back door of the kitchen.

SOUND: A door opens, rattle of a window in its frame, then closes.
Marlin is now in the kitchen. He looks at Pinto at the table.

PINTO

Is that you?

Pinto turns to look, turns back to the newspaper.

PINTO

It is you.

Marlin hangs his jacket on the back of a chair, straddles the chair at the table, turns off the radio.

Marlin taps the newspaper page with this fingertip.

MARLIN

I did that.

PINTO

You did not.

MARLIN

I did.

PINTO

What's listed here.

MARLIN

Yes.

PINTO

I don't believe it.

MARLIN

Believe me.

PINTO

I don't want to.

MARLIN

It's true.

PINTO

If you really did what's listed here, then kiss me.

Marlin kisses Pinto. Their faces separate an inch, nothing more.

MARLIN

Lock, stock, and barrel to his head. That's not in the article.

PINTO

The cause of death is not in the article.

MARLIN

Only a detail the perpetrator would know. Because I was there.

Pinto's finger traces around the edge of the photo in the newspaper.

PINTO

Then that means -- last night I slept with --

MARLIN

Such a one that would do that, yes.

PINTO

-- would do this --

MARLIN

You always knew I was capable.

With an inarticulate sound, Pinto shoots out of his chair, paces. Marlin pivots the paper so that he can read it. He takes a pen from the mug and scribbles around the edges of the photo.

MARLIN

No photo can ever capture, you know -- two dimensions can't be three -- the air, the brittle light -- pixels cannot --

Pinto leans on the table into Marlin.

PINTO

Tell me. Why. Hard.

MARLIN

Of course. It's not without reason -- a reason. I had my own business to mind --

PINTO

Faster.

MARLIN

-- self-important, going through the park --

Pinto sits down.

MARLIN

-- a mundane day.

PINTO

Then. What.

MARLIN

Not him -- not at first. Jonathan.

PINTO

Jonathan?

MARLIN

I don't think he was there for you think he was there for.
Hair slicked, teeth white -- clean. No prowling for him.
He had found a source.

PINTO

And of course --

MARLIN

We greeted.

PINTO

Innocent.

MARLIN

Jonathan is all done. I have told you that.

PINTO

You have told me that.

MARLIN

But still open, as befits friends -- a kiss, an embrace. We
are not in medieval times.

PINTO

So when did he appear?

Marlin positions the sugar bowl behind the napkin dispenser.

MARLIN

He must have been there, but maybe behind those concrete urns with the knackered flowers, one of those -- niches --

Marlin picks up the salt and pepper shakers, now Jonathan and Marlin.

MARLIN

Jonathan and I, we talk -- by now, dusk -- the lamps splutter on -- traffic, moist air -- you know that garden -- and Jonathan leaves.

PINTO

A big kiss.

MARLIN

You know his manner.

PINTO

Several -- and him watching all.

MARLIN

And I am alone.

Marlin puts the salt shaker to one side.

MARLIN

I thought that that would be brief -- that time of day -- but the place stayed deserted. Only myself. I knew he was there, though I hadn't seen him. Ghost-nerves, you know, the ones that pick up on a breeze: they zizzed. Purple shadows, like ink.

PINTO

I have to know.

Marlin dances the pepper shaker in front of the napkin dispenser.

PINTO

You had no reason to stay.

MARLIN

I had no reason to stay.

PINTO

But you did.

MARLIN

Something stayed me. Danger -- excitement --

PINTO

A center of gravity for you.

MARLIN

It's why you love me. I called out -- "olly olly oxen free" -- he didn't have to stay, either -- but his voice came back: "I saw you." "I can't talk to a ghost," I say. And he, summoned, appears. Go on.

Pinto moves the sugar bowl from behind the napkin dispenser.

MARLIN

And when he did -- I swear the air broke. Not shattered but -- reconfigured.

Marlin gets up, goes to stare what would be the kitchen window over the sink.

PINTO

"I saw you."

MARLIN

"I saw you," he said, with a voice like ripped glass. "I saw you kiss him."

PINTO

A double-edge to that.

Marlin turns to face Pinto.

MARLIN

Doesn't it. "I saw you -- I want" or "I saw you -- I loathe."
And then he brought it down to a single edge: "You faggot."

Pinto's voice changes slightly to take on a different character.

PINTO

I saw you, faggot.

MARLIN

Like that, yes.

PINTO

Because I need to know.

Pinto approaches Marlin.

PINTO

I saw you, faggot.

MARLIN

More hoarse, more outbreath.

PINTO

I saw you kiss him, you faggot.

MARLIN

And something -- clicked. Brittle to brutal.

PINTO

I saw you kiss him. I did. I saw all of it.

MARLIN

"What of it?" I say.

PINTO

Do you want some for yourself?

MARLIN

I did say that, almost beat for beat.

PINTO

That's why I said you said it.

MARLIN

"Do you want some for yourself?"

PINTO

Why do you always have to correct?

MARLIN

Because I knew what was next. I knew, even before the words I knew would come out of his mouth came out of his mouth.

PINTO

I hate you.

MARLIN

See, you know as well. The words lasering in, zeroing out. "I hate your kind."

PINTO

Your kind --

MARLIN

"I hate all of you -- filth."

Pinto sits down. He holds the pepper shaker.

MARLIN

The air frags all around me -- and something just -- clicks.

PINTO

Permission.

MARLIN

Granted.

PINTO

Sit. Please.

Marlin sits.

MARLIN

Permission.

Marlin indicates for Pinto to pass him the pepper shaker, which Pinto does. Marlin pulls the sugar bowl toward him, faces the two items together.

MARLIN

"Filth," "sewage," "deserve to die" "loathe" -- as these grenades come in, I am in this suspension, waiting for the permission to begin.

PINTO

Why didn't you leave? Avoid the temptation.

MARLIN

I had that choice.

PINTO

Sky failing, venom spilled -- but you still intact --

MARLIN

Intact --

PINTO

The higher road to take --

Marlin laughs.

MARLIN

You are so delicious, you are! You would have left.

Marlin lifts the sugar bowl up like a chalice.

MARLIN

"I loathe you" -- infection, viper -- that long "o" -- click.

PINTO

Click.

MARLIN

A voice in the dusk -- no human tether --

Marlin drops the bowl, and it crashes onto the table, on top of the photo.

MARLIN

He had earned his passage out of the garden.

Pinto moves to clean up the mess.

MARLIN

Leave it alone -- stop being who you are!

Marlin gets out of his chair and moves around the kitchen. Pinto doesn't stop cleaning up.

MARLIN

It was easy, actually. Stop it!

Pinto stops.

MARLIN

Come here. Come here.

Pinto goes to Marlin. Marlin takes Pinto's hands.

MARLIN

We share everything. This will out in our every touch from now on -- these hands make you co-conspirator. Co-respirator.

Marlin puts Pinto's right hand around his throat.

MARLIN

I grab him -- click, off go his words -- the soft places to the sides of the larynx. Squeeze!

Pinto squeezes, which constricts Marlin's voice.

MARLIN

I ram him against the wall. Do it!

Pinto, pressing against Marlin's throat, slams him onto the table. Pinto's breathing is heavy.

MARLIN

He feels this vice tighten, tighten until --

Marlin slides out of Pinto's grasp to the floor.

MARLIN

He falls.

Marlin laughs. Pinto looks crushed.

MARLIN

At the foot of the wall, but still breathing.

Marlin imitates thick, rackety breaths.

MARLIN

Pick up that chair -- pick it up! Over your head.

Pinto lifts the chair over his head.

MARLIN

The trash barrel.

Marlin sits up, leans back, his arms supporting him.

MARLIN

"Look at me." Honestly, I can't tell, but I hear him turn his head. "I want you to see what's going to kill you" -- and then I know.

Marlin snaps his fingers.

MARLIN

Click.

Pinto puts the chair down. Marlin reaches out his right hand. Pinto grasps it, pulls him to standing.

MARLIN

No good scare and give him a chance for penance -- but with cold rage end his days. I hated him, friend, I hated every hatred he held for me, for you, for Jonathan -- and it was no effort at all to let gravity judge.

Pinto lets go, moves to the table, sits.

MARLIN

Now one less hater in the world.

PINTO

They're floating it as a possible "hate crime."

MARLIN

How do these things get judged? How do you judge me?
There is one less hater in the world.

Pinto takes a pair of scissors from the mug and cuts out the article and picture.

PINTO

Hate for hate.

Marlin sits at the table.

MARLIN

Hate for hate it was -- but at least now a little bit cleaner,
don't you think?

Pinto cuts and finishes.

MARLIN

Yes? Cleaner?

PINTO

It is not without meaning. And I am scared.

MARTIN

If they find, they find, not likely, but --

PINTO

Not that.

Pinto turns the cutting face down, smooths it.

MARLIN

Of me.

Pinto half-shrugs, half-nods.

MARLIN

But there is one less.

Pinto half-shrugs, half-nods again. He arranges the items on the table, putting them back into order.

PINTO

Could you turn the radio on?

Marlin doesn't right away, but then he does. CLAIR DE LUNE plays at a low volume.

Marlin watches Pinto, who stares at the turned-over article.

Lights to black as CLAIR DE LUNE plays up rich and full.

* * * * *

Scene 2: The Next Day

Lights up as music fades down to coming from the radio. Pinto is in exactly the same chair, staring at the same article -- this time, face up -- but with a different shirt on.

Jonathan appears, standing outside the back door.

SOUND: Knocking on the back door, with the rattle of a window in its frame.

Pinto looks up, stares ahead, says nothing.

SOUND: Another knock.

PINTO

It's open.

SOUND: Another knock.

PINTO

It's open!

SOUND: The door opens and closes as JONATHAN enters.

He pulls up a chair and sits.

JONATHAN

Pinto.

PINTO

Jonathan.

JONATHAN

Marlin about?

Pinto does not answer, stares. Jonathan fidgets but light-hearted, not anxious. He turns off the radio.

JONATHAN

You look stung, bub.

Jonathan, using the edge of his hand, makes a chopping motion between his own eyes.

JONATHAN

Two-by-four'd -- pole-axed.

Jonathan angles himself around to see the newspaper in front of Pinto. He taps the picture with his finger.

JONATHAN

Ah. Ah.

PINTO

You know. Don't you.

Jonathan shrugs.

PINTO

I know. I was -- informed.

JONATHAN

Now I know what I'd only suspected.

Jonathan makes the chopping motion again.

PINTO

Stop that! Lock, stock, and barrel to his head -- I sit here knowing!

JONATHAN

Not doing you any good.

PINTO

Why are you here?

JONATHAN

A visit. Long time.

PINTO

You can have him, his lock, stock, and barrel –

Jonathan picks up the salt and pepper shakers.

JONATHAN

Not why I came.

PINTO

Because he has forfeited! Take him!

JONATHAN

I came by because he said he was happy.

Jonathan makes the shakers do a dance for Pinto.

PINTO

Happy.

JONATHAN

See myself to believe because I am happy for him. I am!

PINTO

Happy. Put those down.

Jonathan puts them down.

JONATHAN

Whatever Pinto wants.

PINTO

All night --

Pinto slams one palm flat on the table, then slams the other one next to it, parallel. Jonathan, for all his coolness, jumps.

PINTO

Like this.

Pinto then claps his hands together, palm to palm, and holds them together tightly.

PINTO

Not like this. All night --

Pinto slams both hands back onto the table.

PINTO

The ceiling steals my eyes all night. Drawn out there -- the scene.

Jonathan makes the chopping motion.

JONATHAN

Barrel.

Marlin appears by the back door. He eases into the kitchen, unseen and unheard by either of them, newspaper under his arm. He watches the scene.

PINTO

Could feel his warmth next to me. And then the barrel -- cold. And then his warmth. And then the -- he slips away early -- I'm glad! Never was before -- but I am now! I have to do something --

Marlin slides in to the kitchen. Jonathan sees him. Pinto sees that Jonathan sees something and stops talking.

MARLIN

What? Hello Jonathan. Do what?

Marlin kisses Pinto on the forehead.

My love.

Pinto does not answer. Marlin throws his newspaper on the table.

MARTIN

So -- are we all knowing all here?

JONATHAN

I didn't when I came in. Completely. Then when I came in,
I did. Completely. Him --

Jonathan makes the chopping motion.

Marlin pulls an empty chair next to Pinto. He clamps an arm across Pinto's chest, as much embrace as stranglehold.

MARLIN

Do what? Do some. Thing. Do what?

Pinto, in response, lifts Marlin's hand and clamps his teeth down on it, but lightly. Pinto slowly but intentionally increases the pressure of his bite.

Not showing any of the pain he feels, Marlin stands up. Pinto carries Marlin's hand in his mouth: a feral image. Then Pinto releases his bite. Marlin holds up his hand like a prize.

MARLIN

I'm not sure that that was unpleasant, given our present circumstances.

PINTO

Jonathan -- a favor.

JONATHAN

By all means.

PINTO

Would you ask him what he expects of me.

JONATHAN

Through me to him?

Marlin holds up his hand.

MARLIN

Because contact is painful.

PINTO

Will you?

MARLIN

Do it, mate.

JONATHAN

Well -- what do you expect of Pinto?

Marlin places the chair at the table, taking a few moments to place it precisely. Then he looks at them both.

MARLIN

I went back. To the scene.

JONATHAN

You punk.

MARLIN

This morning.

JONATHAN

Brass-faced.

MARLIN

The "crime scene." The people milling about -- and the secret lodged right there among them.

PINTO

Jonathan --

MARLIN

I was a battlefield of impulses.

PINTO

Jonathan, ask him again --

MARLIN

No idea how such a secret sizzles --

PINTO

Jonathan --

JONATHAN

Can you answer to him, Marlin?

MARLIN

I am.

JONATHAN

Not really.

MARLIN

Do you like being his solicitor?

JONATHAN

He asked what you expected, and, Christ, he even bit you to get it!

MARLIN

You like being his advocate?

JONATHAN

I like to know the future when I can.

Marlin laughs.

MARLIN

The officer in charge.

Marlin takes a page from the newspaper he brought in and folds an origami admiral's hat as he talks.

MARLIN

To him I say, "I did that." Eyes never flinched. "Did you, now?" "Yes," I repeated, still, composed.

Marlin puts on the hat, models it.

JONATHAN

You look daft.

MARLIN

"Barrel to his head." A flick! of his eyes -- we lock for a moment. Then. "You should move along."

JONATHAN

You are daft as a brush.

Marlin takes another piece of newspaper and rolls it so that it becomes a sword.

MARLIN

"I'm trying to make your career. I need to be caught." But he doesn't bite. Moment's gone. And off went I, a freed man. La di da di da di da.

JONATHAN

Moth and flame -- as usual.

Marlin turns around an empty chair, straddles it, faces Pinto.

MARLIN

Two dark spots on the ceiling last night -- your eyes drilling -- the dust of judgment raining down -- did you not gavel me all night long? By morning, Jonathan, I was encased in judgment. Muddled up, immured. Cask of Amontillado.

Pinto finally turns his face to Marlin.

PINTO

But did you just want me to dismiss it?

MARLIN

Yes.

PINTO

As if what had happened --

MARLIN

Yes.

PINTO

-- did not happen.

MARLIN

Yes. Yes.

PINTO

How?

MARLIN

You mean, "why." Why. Why? For love, of course. For love, love.

Jonathan rolls out of his chair, laughing but without any real humor behind it.

JONATHAN

Oh oh oh.

PINTO

If I did that for you --

MARLIN

Past tense, "did that for you." The thousand-yard stare into the abyss. What?

Pinto gulps in air, as if he can't breathe.

PINTO

Nothing!

MARLIN

Advocate.

JONATHAN

Then -- he would be like you -- barrel held overhead, ready.

PINTO

Co-conspirator, you said. Co-respirator.

MARLIN

Can you love someone who did barbaric but who you know is not barbaric?

Jonathan bursts out laughing derisively.

JONATHAN

Oh, rich, Marlin! Don't you see it, Pinto? He's as deep as the guano on the cliffs of Peru! No doubt at this moment sorry --

Jonathan straddles his chair as well.

JONATHAN

-- sincere -- -- always good at moments --

Jonathan makes a series of faces.

JONATHAN

A little simper, droop of mouth, sad face of sorry -- seen it all, Marlin. Pinto, it's played out.

Pinto turns an anguished face to Marlin.

PINTO

I want to believe you.

JONATHAN

Cherub! There are clues here! He confesses to a brick-brained officer of the court -- he obviously does not care about you --

Pinto, whip-quick, grabs Marlin's paper sword and thrusts it against Jonathan's breast. Jonathan, with exaggerated daintiness, takes the crumpled sword out of Pinto's hand and smooths it out on the table.

JONATHAN

How easy these things have suddenly become.

Pinto tears out of his chair, caroms around the kitchen, his voice constricted.

PINTO

I have to --

MARLIN

I meant what I said --

PINTO

I can't --

MARLIN

I did it because --

Pinto picks up a chair and, for instant, seems capable of smashing it against one or both of them.

PINTO

I -- have -- to -- tell -- I -- have -- to -- tell --

MARLIN

Who? Who?

PINTO

The -- proper -- authorities --

MARLIN

Proper authorities?

JONATHAN

So much for your love.

Marlin grabs Jonathan by the throat.

MARLIN

Shut up!

JONATHAN

I am commanded.

PINTO

I am tired of "Pinto, you can't do"!

Pinto throws the chair down.

PINTO

Something has to resolve! Human being wasted!

MARLIN

Not without meaning, you said --

PINTO

Meaning -- Meaning --

Pinto snaps his fingers faster and faster, as if trying to find a word or words but cannot.

PINTO

Aaaaagggghhhhh! My head -- smashed -- My face --
Ahhhhhhh! One -- less -- hater -- yes -- but -- even -- he
-- deserved --

MARLIN

Deserved?

PINTO

Not -- to -- die --

Pinto smashes his fist into his other hand several times, hard. Pinto breathes heavily for a few beats, then calms himself and snaps his fingers once.

PINTO

(quietly)

I have to.

MARLIN

(equally quietly)

Then what has been unthinkable has become available to
our thought.

JONATHAN

Marlin?

MARLIN

And if to thought, then to action.

PINTO

What could be unthinkable to you now?

MARLIN

Faced with betrayal --

Marlin snaps his fingers.

MARLIN

Faced with being walled away --

Marlin snaps his fingers again.

MARLIN

Nothing is unthinkable.

Marlin snaps his fingers a last time.

JONATHAN

Marlin. Marlin!

PINTO

We have cut each other loose.

JONATHAN

Pinto!

MARLIN

Equals, then.

PINTO

Equals more than we have ever been.

Marlin and Pinto stare at each other for a hard moment. Then Pinto reaches out to caress Marlin's cheek, and Marlin ever so slightly leans in to receive it. Jonathan suddenly moves between them.

JONATHAN

Marlin, come home with me -- you two obviously need a break from each other. Come on -- I'll take care of you.

Marlin does not move. He and Pinto continue to look at one another.

JONATHAN

C'mon, love -- come on -- you know -- you know you've always wanted to come back.

MARLIN

Have I always?

JONATHAN

You can't really mean --

MARLIN

What a finger down the throat is to puking -- that's you. Why would I?

Marlin takes off his admiral's hat and puts it on Pinto.

MARLIN

Real danger, worth courting.

JONATHAN

So I should leave?

MARLIN

You were never invited.

PINTO

No scraps for you here.

Jonathan hesitates, then goes to leave, but stops before leaving.

JONATHAN

I've got no pity for the broken bastard in the park -- but who knows? Investigative dead end, walled in -- then some --

Jonathan snaps his fingers.

JONATHAN

-- tip, anonymous, that cracks the case, as they say. One can never predict how things will click.

Jonathan leaves.

SOUND: Back door opens and closes, window rattling.

Pinto takes off the admiral's hat, lays it on the table.

PINTO

Nothing is changed. Everything is changed. All possibilities. All wounds.

SOUND: Like gunshots, several heavy poundings on the back door.

SOUND: JONATHAN's laughter rings out, then fades away.

Their faces startle, then ease, as they continue looking at each other.

The Most Dangerous Woman In America

DESCRIPTION

Using the format of a lecture, this play presents a one-woman rendition of the life of a character named Emma Goldman.

Please Note: This version is designed for a single person onstage handling all props with a technician running lights and sound.

CHARACTERS

- EMMA GOLDMAN

The actor will play different ages and physical conditions, so she must be versatile enough to do this. Physically, when the play opens, Goldman is approximately in her late fifties, about the time of her exile from the U.S.: stout, near-sighted, plain. She will speak with a slight Slavic-Jewish accent, since Goldman was born in what is now Lithuania and spoke Russian, German, Yiddish, and English. She is wearing a shapeless but comfortable dress, with pockets from which she will pull items. She is wearing a pair of glasses, round lenses in a metal frame.

NOTE: To get a sense Goldman's style, here is an excerpt from Alice Wexler's *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*:

With her imperturbable self-assurance and blunt, earnest, "sledge-hammer" platform style, Goldman created a sensation. A short, sturdy figure with a determined chin and firm mouth, she conveyed an impression of strength and energy.... "She makes great use of sarcasm" noted another, "lashing most severely what she regards as the evils of modern life." Others applauded her "fire and force," her "humorsome [sic] satire," her "vigorous and determined manner."

Settings and time periods will vary.

Note: This production of Most Dangerous is written for a space where the actor can interact directly and physically with the audience.

Props, Sound, Lighting, and Stage Requirements

Where the props will be placed onstage will be determined by the director and performer depending upon the performer's movements. Props can be

placed on table, racks, etc. as long as these devices do not hinder the sight lines of the audience or the free movement of the performer.

PROPS/SOUND

Pre-Show

- An easel with a lecture announcement on it. Or, if desired, the announcement may be hung.
- A program handed out which will list the topics of EG's lecture, using scene titles as topics.
- A lectern
- Tape of revolutionary songs, including the Internationale.

Scene 2

- Underscore: any instrumental music which is soothing and unobtrusive

Scene 3

- Black bandana (pulled from pocket)
- Wooden chair
- Martial music -- suggested: J.P. Sousa, Mystic Chords

Scene 4

- Kerchief

Scene 5

- Sign with "8" on it and phrase
- Black shawl
- Chime -- one used for Zen meditation or anything with a clear, bell-like tone -- no gong

Scene 6

- Large book
- Street sounds, New York in 1889: horse carriages, whistles, trains, bells, etc.

Scene 7

- Letter from Sasha

Scene 8

- Same underscoring as in Scene 2

Scene 9

- Single red rose
- Dance music -- preferably a Lithuanian folk dance tune

LIGHTING

Lighting suggestions are made throughout the script, but the director and lighting designer are free to change them. Two things should be noted:

- In those scenes that use a strobe effect, the effect should be similar to the blinding light given off by a photo strobe rather than the flashing light of a strobe light.
- In Scene 3, where EG undergoes the "third degree," the light should be very bright and hot.

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Scene 1: Introduction

Once the audience is seated, the play will start without beginning with a blackout and then lights up. Placed prominently somewhere on the stage is an easel with a notice announcing a lecture given by Emma Goldman this evening, done in an old-fashioned style. Or the notice may be hung. Emma Goldman enters. The pre-show music fades.

GOLDMAN

Good morning/afternoon/evening.

She waits to get a response from the audience she likes, that acknowledges her presence on the stage.

Well, I'm back. It seems you put out the call, and so I have arrived -- again. And given the state of the deep mierda you people find yourself in these days, I have not arrived a moment too soon.

So, good.

Let's work out some definitions before we do anything else.

First, the main course: Emma Goldman. If you think you know me, it's a good chance you really don't -- because sometimes I'm not even sure I know myself. You've probably heard that slogan that I don't want to be part of a revolution that won't let me dance. I never actually said those words, but that image has stuck: a little flippant, which I don't mind, but definitely safe, which I don't like one bit, because, after all, how dangerous can a woman be if everyone envisions

her dancing the tarantella like that spastic, confused, little Nora Helmer in A Dollhouse, may my otherwise blessed Ibsen rest in peace? Nora Helmer dangerous? Just because she slams a door? Stomps out? Goes "wah-wah-wah"? If all it takes is a slamming door to make people afraid, then it's those people we should be afraid of, not some spoiled pet from the domestic zoo, because they are profoundly and frighteningly and willfully ignorant.

(I'm not talking about you, of course -- if you're here, then you are certainly not one of them.)

The times call for a dangerous woman, an un-safe woman. I think I fit that bill -- I was once given the moniker of the most dangerous woman in America.

So explosive that J. Edgar Hoover stole my citizenship -- stole my life -- and, lock stock barrel and book, packed me off to the Bolsheviks in the revolutionized Russia.

But -- really -- can you imagine him mistaking this -- this pudgy tub 'o guts -- for a slim cylinder of Alfred Nobel's dynamite?

I mean, do I really look like the greatest menace to the American way of life that has ever stalked the face of the earth -- even more dangerous -- maybe -- than whoever soils the bedsheets in the current White House?

She pauses, letting them observe what they want to observe.

But. He. Was. Right. Dead on target. Not because I had grenades in each hand, a dagger in my mouth, and the Stock Exchange blueprints in my back pocket. Because I held an idea, and I held it fierce, I held it bright above me -- "I lift my idea beside the golden door" -- no hiding it under a bushel, no quivering about etiquette. I was a woman with a mind graced by the beautiful and keen and cleansing and lifted ideals of Anarchism -- in comparison to those, dynamite is a fart. So erase the dancing diva from what you think you know. I didn't just slam the door -- I smithereened_it!

Hoover was right to delete me. I wanted to cut him down to size and stuff him, and all his kind, into the dustbin of history -- and he deleted me because he knew that I would delete him and his noxious thugs in the FBI and the Justice Department if given the chance -- half a chance, a quarter of a chance, an eighth, a -- !

Not that I would have -- hurt -- him -- maybe, say, put him in a dress and have him play Nora to Mr. Woodrow Wilson's Torvald -- J. Edgar in a dress -- now that is an avant-garde thought to make one cringe and cry for mercy!

Enough. Enough discussion about those swine. Instead, I want to lay out a premise for you. This premise will underline everything I say during our time together, and the premise is this: The heart of Emma Goldman is the heart of Emma Goldman -- everything, everything, flows from that. I packed my brain with ideas -- I read, I discussed, I debated, I doubted -- but I did all that to ready my heart to speak truth to power -- not that I always did that well -- in the millions of words I spat out in my life, a lot fell short, some were not always honest, many were just blather and bullshit -- but a few exploded on impact right where I wanted them, and when they did, I could say, taking some pride, that I had done something other people hadn't dared to do, that my life was not useless.

So, enough on Emma Goldman -- for the moment.

* * * * *

Scene 2: The Beauty of Anarchism

And for what smelly, obnoxious beliefs did I suffer these slings and arrows? For what palabra sucia, as my Spanish comrades would say?

For Anarchism, the sweetest wine ever pressed from the human brain.

Sees that the audience does not respond. Repeats the line.

For Anarchism, the sweetest wine ever pressed from the human brain.

Time was when there would have been thunderous applause for my graceful imagery. Repeat the phrase after me, and then give me some applause -- just to humor this secular Lithuanian overweight Jewess. "For Anarchism, the sweetest wine ever pressed from the human brain."

They applaud. When they stop, the lights become softer. A soothing music underneath.

Let me explain what the word means -- let me take it back from the salaried fart-makers employed to foul the air by the rapist class of business leaders -- otherwise known as the media and the schools -- but I will need your help.

I need you to focus for a moment, center yourselves, because I'm going to hand you an idea, and I need your minds open and ready to handle it. Relax for a moment. Close your eyes, if you want, but I want you to listen closely to my voice. Breathe slowly. Relax. Listen.

Begin by bringing up a picture in your mind of the most satisfying work you have ever done in your life. Building something, changing something, helping someone -- you fill it in. Something you did, not because someone told you that you had to do it, but something you did simply because you loved doing it: a "labor of love" that called out the angels of your better nature.

Now swallow the wine and see the vision: doing something out of the goodness of your heart, and doing it with people you love and who love you, without fear or slavery. Come back to me now.

Anarchism. This is what touched my heart. This is what the most dangerous woman in America believed: that people like you should be free and not slaves, that your individual face is more precious and fundamental than all the institutions and governments and churches put together.

This is what I dedicated my life to teaching people: freedom through coöperation, power through sharing. And J. Edgar Hoover, and all of them, kept throwing me and a lot of other people in jail for teaching this, and killing a few now and then to make sure the living got the point.

Music stops.

So what could they have been so afraid of?

Lights change.

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Scene 3: Some History Perhaps Not Well Known

I'll tell you what the pigs were afraid of: rebellion. The horrifying image of all of you -- the unwashed, the disinherited, the "proles" -- actually taking the control of your own lives away from them! How dare you!

To prove my pig-thesis, I am going to pass on to you some American history they probably didn't get around to teaching you in your well-funded system of free public education -- history as fleshed out by this flesh.

Thus, presented for your entertainment and uplift, a small divertissement entitled, "Eine Kleine Geschichte Musik, or How History Came Around To Bite Us In The Ass." Starring America 1917, co-starring the end of the Great War (Great War -- these names -- like putting perfume on horseshit), and directed by America hardening, like rancid fat, into a badly managed, Christianized, eat-your-seed-corn empire.

Pulls a black bandanna out her pocket and ties it around her head.

Rebellion! It amazes me how a country that began with a rebellion rebels against rebellion. Rebellion is in your blood -- Shays, the Confederacy, labor resistance, Indian wars, Whitman, Thoreau -- and yet you will twist your knickers into a pretzel denying it. I know this -- the denial has twisted my knickers many times. Let me show you.

Scene-setting: Prologue. There's a war on, the First World War, in Europe -- you know, that place where all those "others" live, and the U.S. of A. is thinking about taking a cut of the action. See you and raise you.

But our Mr. Woodrow Wilson is not so sure.

Goldman pulls a small sheet of paper out of her pocket and reads.

Woodrow Wilson, in 1912, when he is trying to grab the White House for the first time: "The history of liberty is the history of resistance." Not bad, huh? I like him in this mood.

Pulls out another sheet.

Mr. Wilson again, a little later: "[T]he government of the United States [should be] more concerned about human rights than property rights." I could just polish his pince nez when he talks like this. And when the Great War began --

She pulls out another sheet.

"The example of America must be an example...[of] peace because peace is the healing and elevating influence of the world." That got my juices going!

But not for long.

Because the United States has its entrepreneurs, and war is always good for profit if nothing else, President Woodrow Wilson -- a liar, a cheat, and a Christian -- triple-threat -- gets up in front of Congress on his hind dog-legs on April 2, 1917, and says, "The world must be made safe for democracy. The day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and might."

My God -- those butchering words: To spend her blood -- as if young men were just dollar bills, ready to be hemorrhaged from the Treasury to make the world safe for corporations and oil companies and lobbyists. They soon began drafting these dollar bills into the army -- telling them that if they didn't put on a uniform and kill the enemy, they'd go to jail.

Some of us Anarchists -- and lots of people just like yourselves, people of good heart and mind -- don't think this is such a good idea. We figure that if the politicians, the old men, want to make war, then they should go and fight it and leave all the young men at home to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Well, but the old men disagree, so off go the young men to fight the old men's war.

So we say, "Never!" We say "Never!" We held meetings in New York City where thousands of people came to hear us say, again and again, "The government has no right to draft young men, to steal them off the street and kill them!"

Well, stupid us, who thought we had a First Amendment to cover our backsides and frontsides! The government amended us as it amended who really had the right to speak.

Gets a chair.

The police came and got me. This is the kind of thing they did when they questioned us and gave us "the third degree."

The lights undergo a harsh change: a tight focused light center stage, very very bright; everything else dark. Goldman sits in the chair as if she has been roughly placed there by a guard. She takes off the bandana and puts it away. Goldman should consider the audience as the interrogator.

I never said that! And I never said that, either! Well, you shouldn't hire stupid spies, or at least you should clean the wax out of their goddamn ears. I would never say, "We support violence, and we will use violence." I would never say that. The point is to stop the violence, not feed its belly.

Goldman is knocked out of the chair onto her knees.

They also didn't mind practicing a little violence themselves.

I hope that made you feel better. It certainly cleared my head.

Goldman stands.

Next time, smack the other cheek so we can get really Biblical. Are all policemen as stupid as you? I never said that. We just told people how the government -- your boss -- was going to send young men to the slaughterhouse. I thought that a man going off to be turned into ground beef should examine the meat grinder. I told them they had to follow their own consciences.

I can say whatever I want. Do these words ring a bell: First Amendment? It doesn't apply to Jews and foreigners. Can you show me where that's written down?

Goldman reacts as if a truncheon is placed across her throat and she is pulled back against the chair: a chokehold.

Repeat after you? I don't think so. Let me go.

She physically reacts as if released from the chokehold.

There is never too much free speech.

She stands and composes herself, then gets up on the chair.

We are now in a courtroom.

(to the audience)

Oyez, oyez, oyez -- all rise for the honorable judge. Emma "The Mouthy Yid" Goldman is about to get her bloomers blown open.

She stamps three times to mimic the judge's gavel. Speaks in an exaggeratedly gruff voice, imitating/ mocking the judge.)

Hmm, hmm. Yes. I'm Judge Thumb Up My Butt --

(if laughter, add "Silence in the court!"

and stamp on the chair)

-- and I sentence you to two years in the federal penitentiary for conspiracy.

(her own voice.)

Conspiracy? I've been doing my work out in the open for the last 30 years! Where have you been?

(gruff voice)

And a \$10,000 fine.

(GOLDMAN slaps her pockets)
I got some nickels and some pocket lint.
(gruff voice)
And we're kicking you out of the country after that.
(her own voice)
When you clean house, your honor, you clean house.
Thank you for applying the even hand of justice, your honor
-- across my face.

She stamps three more times; she gets off the chair.

Act 2. For speaking my mind I spent two years in the women's prison at Jefferson City, Missouri, and then in 1920 a month-long voyage (certainly not bon) to Finland in a leaking troop transport with 248 other non-persons, and then a ride in a sealed train to Russia, where I lived for two years after the Revolution. Exiled. In the meantime -- the final act.

Martial music begins playing, gradually getting louder so that Goldman has to shout, but never so loud that she can't be heard.

Two fearless pit bulls of liberty: Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and his sidekick J. Edgar Hoover. They planned to drop-kick "60,000 Reds" into the ocean (well, one less, now that I was booted). They turned Ellis Island in New York into a meathouse where they crushed families, stole property, and ruined reputations -- like sloppy butchers they were cutting out the terrorists who lived among us. And all this pain was supposed to make democracy safe? For whom? It is hard to know, hard to feel, the terror we felt for the simple act of putting our thoughts into words -- but we felt it. It was there. We were not the terrorists but the terrorized.

She claps her hands, and music out.

Thus endeth the history lesson -- for the moment. Not too painful, I hope.

She bows, and, if she can do it, encourages applause.

* * * * *

Scene 4: Who Is Emma Goldman? Part 2

Lights change. Goldman moves the chair off.

So -- how did such a nice Jewish girl learn to get so dangerous?

Goldman puts on a kerchief to indicate a change of age.

Family, of course, taught me something. I was born in Russia, to middle-class Jewish parents. My sisters Helena and Lena and I came to America because we got tired of being blistered by a Jewish father who hated women and a Russia that loved butchering Jews as a sport. I learned early on to hate men with lots of power they didn't know how to use.

Part of the lesson comes from place. Before I came to America, I lived in St. Petersburg -- and if you know anything about Peter's "gateway to the West," then you know how its mix of nightmare and power ignited many lunacies. Just think "Dostoevsky" in his mad phase (and when wasn't he mad?), and you'll have a pretty good sense of what I mean.

In St. Petersburg I learned about people like Vera Zasulich, Sophia Perovskaya, Gesia Helfman, Catherine Breshkovskaya -- you probably don't know these names, but to me they traced fire through the dark sky. Sophia and Gesia especially, crushed for assassinating czar Alexander, the despot, eater of his young, my father writ large -- their idealism galvanized me. I learned that a person didn't have to sit still when bad things were being done.

But the biggest lesson of all came from this wonderful, terrible country called America. And I can date the time and place of that lesson, my turning point: Haymarket, Chicago, Illinois, 1886, when I was seventeen years old. A lot of very strange things can happen to you when you're seventeen.

* * * * *

Scene 5: Haymarket

Goldman imitates the Statue of Liberty.

December 29, 1885. Helena and I slide into New York, past Bartholdi's "Liberté éclairant le monde" towering over Bedloe's Island. Tired, poor, homeless, yearning -- we hit every item on the checklist.

Goldman sets a vase of roses, puts on a white apron with a kerchief and a spool of thread in the pocket.

We went to Rochester, New York, where my sister Lena and her family lived -- talk about the huddled masses! A big shoe horn to make ourselves fit in a very small place!

To earn my keep I worked in Garson's clothing factory. For the grand sum of two dollars and fifty cents a week. Not a spare cent for a book or a theatre ticket. I decided to ask Mr. Garson for a raise -- my first lesson in the tender mercies of American economics.

I entered an office full of blue smoke rising from a large, fascinating cigar. And on a table, a vase of American Beauties. I knew how much they cost -- one dollar and fifty cents each. Two of them cost more than what I earned weekly sewing up profits for Mr. Garson. He bid me speak.

She speaks to GARSON directly.

You see, Mr. Garson, after my expenses -- Yes, expenses: carfare, rent -- nothing is left over for a book or theatre ticket. Yes, I like the roses. Extrav -- extrav -- extravagant tastes? I don't know that word. Oh. Liking books is something working girls can't do? I read. Yes. And write. Well. It's not everyone's wages I'm asking you to raise, only mine. So, no is no?

The roses: two of them cost more than my entire salary. So beautiful -- and my enemy.

Goldman takes off the kerchief and put its and the thread into the apron pocket. She then takes off the apron and puts it to one side.

My parents were now in Rochester -- and we worked that shoe horn even harder! And suddenly all these men in my life wanted to direct me: my father, my factory bosses -- and a husband, Jacob Kersner, who I married on the "bounce," hoping for escape. But he was impotent on our wedding night -- no "bounce," if you know what I mean -- and he just became another chain masquerading as a man: jealous and dull and full of stupid opinions, with ear-hair and garlic breath.

Like most adolescents, I was in a constant spasm of confusion and anger. And it seemed that America felt confused and angry, too: workers and bosses at each other's throats, the rich and the poor at war with each other. And nowhere did it heat up more quickly than in Chicago, and in Chicago, no place was hotter than the hot seat of Haymarket Square.

Goldman holds up a sign with a big "8" on it and the phrase "Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for what we want to do."

I told you that what happened at Haymarket Square changed my life, and here's why. It's 1886 -- okay, so it's a little more history, you didn't know you were going to be in school today, but bear with me. Workers around the country were on strike to get their bosses to agree to an 8-hour working day -- usually, a day went for 10 or 12 hours or more. Chicago was the nerve-center for this fight.

She chants.

"Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, and eight hours for what we want to do." That was the simple argument, and isn't it amazing that many people died for something we now take as for granted as breathing?

Goldman puts the sign away.

Here we go: In February, at the McCormick Harvester Company, a labor disagreement leads to a strike. The bosses bring in scabs to break the strike, but things stay calm -- for the moment.

Goldman takes up the black shawl, draping it over her head as if in mourning. Goldman will use the shawl in a variety of ways.

But on the evening of May 4, in a light drizzle, 180 police in Haymarket Square break up a peaceful protest meeting. Someone -- a "someone," no one knows who -- heaves a bomb into the police ranks. Seven officers die, with almost 70 wounded. In a panic, the police --

(miming shooting four people
in the audience)

-- kill four people in the crowd -- blood for blood for blood for blood. No doubt who did it -- the Anarchists, the Anarchists! And pay they must the ultimate price! Evidence? "Later!" The police charge eight Anarchists with a conspiracy to murder.

Lights change, dim.

Final. Act.

She takes the shawl off her head but still wears it as a shawl.

My sister Helena and I, like the whole country, follow the trial, eat it up. I read about the eight men, and I find their beliefs -- brotherhood, justice, peace -- very beautiful -- I am seventeen, remember -- confused, excited, moist, admiring, bombarded by self-centered men -- and very, very scared for these my new brothers. My young heart pounds all through my body.

Faster than an eye-blink, seven of the eight get a sentence to hang -- no matter that no one can tie the bomb to their hands. But not about proof, is it? The prosecutor, between his teeth, hisses to the jury:

(in the voice of the prosecutor)

"Convict these men, make examples of them, hang them, and you save our institutions." To kill their ideas. Kill ideas -- think about that for a moment; think about how it's done, and why. It's just as bloody as butchery, isn't it?

She takes off the shawl and holds it in two hands in front of her.

The Illinois governor changes two sentences to life. One of the five left commits suicide. The other four -- Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, August Spies, George Engel -- have their necks snapped --

(jerks the shawl)

-- on November 11, 1887. Black Friday. On that day, my heart breaks.

At my father's house. That evening. Big news, people arguing about it. Suddenly, this woman's fingernails-on-chalkboard voice drowns the room.

(as WOMAN)

"Why all these sad faces? The men were murderers. They should be hanged!"

(mimes this)

People had to pull me off her. I did not care. I got away and threw a water pitcher at her as hard as hard could go. "Get out of here or I will kill you!" I collapsed, and they had to carry me to bed; Helena soothed me, as always, and I lunged into a deep sleep, almost like a death.

She gets the chime.

I have slept in many strange ways, but never a sleep like this.

She strikes the chime.

Dreams -- dreams -- about the small men in my life who made me feel small.

(chime)

The women whose bodies they used, and then used up.

(chime)

Other women, with ideas heated, smoking.

(chime)

Jewish prophets and Russian czars bleeding into a single cruelty.

(chime)

About freedom drowned in blood.

(chime)

All this and more.

When I wake up, I don't just wake up -- I am re-born, and not in some cheap synthetic Christian fashion. For almost eighteen years I had swilled down the insults and shame fed to young girls with a strong mind and an open heart. Haymarket pierced me with this: find something worth living and dying for -- and not give a devil's fart what anybody else thinks.

I divorced Jacob Kersner -- out goes that candle. I chop off all the deadweight of the dead past and haul myself, like new freight, to New York. I have achieved the age of twenty. My real life --

(chime)

-- breaks through --

(chime)

-- and begins.

(chime)

* * * * *

Scene 6: Sasha

Lights change. Sounds of city life in 1889: horse carriages, whistles, trains, bells. Played very loud -- Goldman will speak over it. Goldman puts down the chime and shawl. Goldman is 20. She picks up a large book.

New York, 1889: streets full of horseshit and the air smeared with freedom. So much freedom and so much horseshit, mixed in their aromatic American dialectic! It didn't take me long to hook up with people on the Lower East Side, where the Jews crammed themselves in. No men sucking away my life, a little money jangling in my pocket, and my mind breathing free -- goddamn alive, at last!

Ideas pour in on me. Books. Lectures. I suck down strong coffee at Sach's Café and argue and argue until I am blind and tongue-numb. A famous man gives me a chance to lecture, and people begin to know my name. My mind pumps large as I turn twenty-three. Things add up.

Lights change.

And unexpectedly, but most welcome: sex, and sex that leads to love. In the name of Alexander Berkman. My

Sasha. My first day in New York I meet him: twenty-one years old, strong, handsome, brutally honest, soaked in radicalism -- and pigheaded and cock-sure and always hungry for life. I had two reactions to him, my dialectic: I thought him obnoxious, and I couldn't keep my hands off him.

He believed completely in The Cause -- justice and freedom and freedom for all. And, if it came to it, you died for The Cause, pure and simple. I couldn't deny that -- for all my sadness, I felt proud when my Haymarket Anarchists died for their beliefs. So we connected like two comets colliding -- we fought, parted, fucked -- oh, the exquisite hard pleasure of fucking! -- repaired, danced, fought again, revised, soared.

And, for the sake of the Cause -- for him -- I plotted to kill a man.

Goldman opens and snaps closed the large book, making a big sound.

We schemed to murder Henry Clay Frick -- manager of a steel factory in Pennsylvania, who used troops and thugs like knives to put down a strike of steel workers. Sasha planned to get into his office and shoot him, and if that didn't work, stab him. I argued that I should go with him, attack with him, die with him, but he said "no," only himself, the explosive sacrifice for the good of The Cause.

Puts the book away.

We argued all night -- my beliefs bare knuckles with my heart: yes, strike back, but Sasha didn't have to deal the blow; yes, the workers revenged, but my Sasha didn't have to tear himself to shreds. I realized I wanted to live with Sasha, even though I said I wanted to die with him. He wouldn't give way, though -- he believed his act would spark the revolution. I knew, as any lover knows, that if I did not walk away right then, I would have no choice but to plunge in completely.

I did not walk away.

So very young, so drunk on our poorly distilled certainties.
So romantically stupid.

And there were a few -- practical problems.

For instance -- a gun. One thing to plan to shoot a man,
another thing to actually get a gun for the shooting.
Especially when you barely have enough money to brush
the scum off your teeth after eating your one meal a day.

And to get to Pittsburgh -- a train ticket. Which cannot
be abracadabra'd out of the thick air of Suffolk Street, no
matter how hot for the Cause you burn.

To borrow it -- how, when all your friends are also your
fellow beggars, with nothing but hollow pockets?

I took it upon myself to find my love the money he needed.
As women have ever found it -- on their backs.

Goldman sets the chair upstage center, angled downstage right. She takes
out a tube of lipstick. During the next speech she dabs some on her lips
and does a small spot on each cheek, which she blends in. Goldman does
not need to do anything else to indicate what she is doing: no unbuttoning
buttons, etc.

At night the men hunted Fourteenth Street for prostitutes
-- so why not me? Made me sick, really, but Sasha --
The Cause -- what was the beast with two backs for an
anonymous hour to all of that? I settled on my target.

Lighting changes. She approaches her target. She is the 23-year old
Goldman.

Hello, are you looking for -- You know -- do you want
-- I'm willing. \$10. Too high? \$5? I do, too, know what
I'm doing. I do, too. Go with you -- well, isn't that -- Hey,
where are you taking me? I don't want to go into this saloon.
All right, then, I'll have a beer -- I'm thirsty. And stop calling
me "little girl" -- I turned twenty-three last month.

As Goldman speaks, she wipes the color off her lips and face with tissues
from her pocket.

He never bought my bluff. He knew I was new to the life. When I asked him how, he said, "I watched you -- the trick is to get the trick, ain't it? You do everything to scare people away. You'll keep your virtue, but you'll starve." He said he didn't care what my reasons were -- I wasn't cut out to hook. He gave me \$10 "to cover expenses," declared me silly, and told me to go home. When I told him, again, I was 23, he laughed: "All right, so you're an old lady, but even old folks can be babes in the woods. Look at me: I'm sixty-one and I often do foolish things." "Like believing in my innocence," I shot back, trying to keep a little dignity in the transaction. "Tell me your name and address so I can pay you back." "I love mysteries," he said, held my hand for a moment, and then left.

So I got Sasha his money -- \$10 from Helena, though I never told her what for, \$10 from my open stranger. The stage was set.

Goldman gets the chair and sits. She holds up her hands.

You can't see it -- but I have blood on these hands.

July 23. Sasha, in a new suit -- his uniform! -- gun in one pocket, knife in the other, and a dynamite cap in his lapel -- in case of emergency. He pushes his way into Frick's office, posing as the head of an employment agency that would provide scabs. Three shots. Frick does not die. Men in Frick's office jump on him -- workers, the ones who were supposed to admire what Sasha was doing! -- but carrying them on his back Sasha still manages to stab Frick. Three times, in the leg. Frick does not die. Frick, bleeding but very much alive, demands to see Sasha's face. They stare at each other for the first time and the last time. Frick says, "Leave him to the law." The law takes him. Sasha has failed. We have failed.

The blood -- in a moment --

My Sasha was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison -- more years than he had been alive. If fate had given us \$15 more -- a train ticket -- I would have been there and we

would have burned together! But it didn't. And we didn't. They buried Sasha in a jail cell in western Pennsylvania.

Such despair -- I couldn't sleep: I would haunt cafés or trolley to the Bronx and back -- just to kill time -- while they were killing him. I defended his name when I could -- I even horsewhipped the great Johann Most in public for defaming him! Broke the whip against his puny bones!

But it was all performance. I did everything to convince myself I was with Sasha except what I should have done: be with him. I could have turned myself in to the police -- they were looking for me. I could have stood with Sasha at trial, proud, and sacrificed myself to what I said I believed with all my heart.

I could have -- but I didn't, because "all my heart" was not with Sasha. I made another choice. I chose to breathe free air -- with no intention of giving it up. I betrayed him. Fully. By choice. Without ever intending to let my guilt argue me into doing the right thing and stand by him full-voiced, in joint resistance.

And even though for the fourteen years Sasha was in prison I visited, I agitated on his behalf, I even helped friends try to dig an escape tunnel under the prison walls -- there was no denying the Judas kiss from the very start.

Goldman takes up the chime.

Do you understand what I'm telling you? Sasha loved the ideal, the perfect, and so he believed he could give up ordinary life.

I loved the imperfect too much -- food, coffee, praise, an appetite for sex, a smug pride in this loud and unpluggable mouth -- and this made me a coward.

Chime.

I was too weak to let guilt purify me.

Chime.

I was vain enough to want the world to want me.

Chime.

In 1906, after fourteen years, they released Sasha; they cut eight years cut off his sentence after cutting fourteen years off his life. For a long time he had horrible nightmares and veered toward suicide.

For me, over those same fourteen years: lecture star, editor of Mother Earth, celebrated prisoner, free speech buckaroo, multiple lover, agitator nonpareil, "the most dangerous woman in America" -- anti-militarism this week, abortion the next, an essay praising Ibsen knocked off in between. If reputation was a whiskey, I turned into drunkard.

Betrayal. Betrayal made that Emma Goldman -- this Emma Goldman -- possible.

We have reached complicated terrain all of a sudden, haven't we? Not too much dancing at the moment. At the beginning I talked to you about my heart's equation: "The heart of Emma Goldman is the heart of Emma Goldman." What does this "heart" look like to you now? What color, what smell, what value does it have?

These are not easy questions to face.

* * * * *

Scene 7: Who Is Emma Goldman? Part 3

But if Sasha ever had any doubts about what I did, he never let me know them, and we continued our fight together for the next thirty years until he died in 1936. By his own hand, I have to tell you. Sick, without any money, feeling useless, this man, who had shot Frick three times up close and still couldn't kill him, decided to shoot himself, and he didn't have any better luck: the bullet split his lungs and stomach and lodged in his spine. It took him sixteen hours to die. His "estate" was only worth eighty dollars. The revolutionary klutz.

Takes a letter from her pocket, does not open it.

A letter to me, meant to be read only when he died: "I consider our life of work and comradeship and friendship... one of the most beautiful and rarest things in the world....I have lived my life and I am really of the opinion that when one has neither health nor means and cannot work for his ideas, it is time to clear out." Sasha, my sweet prince.

But his death didn't shut my mouth -- my mouth had been jabbering on for so long it had taken on a life of its own! I kept right on saying what I'd always been saying, and, man, I had something to say about everything -- you couldn't shut me up or shut me down!

And that was a problem -- because it seemed that while my words went out, not enough words came back in return to return my soul to my self. I was in exile, a long exile. Sasha and I couldn't stay in Russia after the Revolution -- they had no love of anarchists there, and we had no love of communists -- and I spoke against what I saw as the Revolution's injustices and betrayals, even though this put me on the same side as people like J. Edgar Hoover -- imagine that, both of us anti-communists and dress-wearers from opposite ends! Imagine how that made me sick at heart, to find myself in the company of such filth.

That's the funny thing about principles, about sticking to principles. You can be right in your heart, pure and fierce and consistent, and thus feel honorable and even a little bit superior -- and end up either irrelevant or in the company of demons.

The demons I could live with. Being irrelevant -- that ate away at my bones. Sixties, fat, living in France, working on a 1000-page autobiography I was sure no one would read -- I had nothing left but a lot of nothing.

From somewhere, Spanish being sung: perhaps the Internationale or the Hymn of Riego. It catches Goldman's ear.

Then history, which had nipped at my ass all these years -- and fingered me between the legs, I have to admit -- gave me one last vital kiss: Spain.

Spain. Spain. The anarchists had arisen in Spain, against the fascist Franco -- against Mussolini, against Hitler, against the priests and landlords and the mousy bourgeois politicians with their half-assed reforms. My anarchists. My principles. My world, my kingdom come.

And so I went, everything hanging out, everything in me going for broke, and so willing to make it work this time that I put myself under the discipline of an organization -- me, the tree-shaker, now becoming a jelly-maker, the primary English-speaking advocate -- fund-raiser -- cheerleader -- of the CNT-FAI --

(in bad but passionate Spanish)

La Confederación Nacional del Trabajo - La Federación Anarquista Ibérica. And so I came to Spain, thrilled to finally see, touch, embrace what my comrades were doing to make real what had only been words in my books, my essays, my brain.

Farms, schools, cooperatives, factories -- all being run by councils of the people, decisions made by vote and discussion and with full respect for each person's beautiful singularity.

On one trip, I ascended a hill -- almost seventy years old, and I am climbing like a mountain goat! -- to visit a school. And what I saw there, in the upper altitudes -- the sharing, the openness, no leaders but that all were leaders -- well, if I was biblical person, I would have swooned in ecstasies about redemption and a visit to paradise. But I didn't need that. The rude furniture, the simple food, the voices of children learning learning learning in the soft vowels of Spanish and Catalan -- if only Sasha could have seen -- heard -- if only --

Goldman sits.

I died not long after everything in Spain died. Everything there went to smash -- the revolution betrayed again, my

anarchists rubbed out -- I never could get a revolution to work out the way I wanted it to! And so my heart decided not to take it anymore. Of a stroke. In Canada. Among friend, yes, but never delivered from exile.

Until the United States, in one of its rare cases of infinite wisdom, allowed my body burial in Waldheim Cemetery, in Chicago, a few meters away from my beloved Haymarket anarchists. Who knew that the Immigration and Naturalization Service could be possessed of such grace and fine discrimination!

And the final irony, of course: only when dead would they let me back in, when my mouth was wired shut and the tub o' guts could give no breath to the things they hated to hear about themselves.

But if Sasha's death didn't shut my mouth, my own demise wasn't going to have any better luck! My mouth has been jawing on for so long it's taken on a life of its own! It keeps right on saying what it's always been saying, and, man, I have something to say about everything -- as I said before, you can't shut me up or shut me down!

Gets up on the chair.

Here are a few of my ideas.

Marriage: don't do it! When they call it the bonds of matrimony, when they call it wedlock or the ties that bind, they aren't kidding! Marriage is just another kind of slavery for women -- and for men, too, if you think about it.

I never had children, but I made that choice. A woman must control her body, and no man has the right to say anything about it.

Why do we have a society that builds more jail cells than houses and schools? That spends more on pet food than child care? Where you can't get enough money to keep people healthy but there's enough money for fancy weapons to destroy people? Who gets to decide all this

stuff? Did anyone ask you? And what are you going to do about it?

Which reminds me: I hate the military. What good is a democracy defended by people you hire to beat up and kill other people?

And religion -- and I apologize if I offend you, but this is the truth about me. I was an atheist all my life because I felt that there was about as much proof for God and Jesus as for leprechauns and Tinkerbell. Life is hard enough without having to carry gods and goddesses on your backs, especially ones that seem to get a lot of pleasure out of human suffering. You are all divine enough -- you don't need to believe in anything but the power of your own, sweet selves.

* * * * *

Scene 8: Peroration

Gets down.

See, a big mouth. But enough, because I'm sure at this point you're asking, "Doesn't the wench believe in anything positive?"

Oh I do, I do believe in something positive, as I told you at the beginning. I call it Anarchism, but I also call it by another name: love. Anarchism is love: sound odd to you? It shouldn't.

Lights change. Musical underscoring.

What they all couldn't understand is that everything we Anarchists believe comes out of love; Anarchism is love made into politics. Follow me in this thinking; I know you can. In real love, two people honor each other's freedom -- yes? They may fight and spit and complain, but in the end, if they really love each other, neither of them gets to have power over the other. Once one person gets to call the shots and say this is this and that is that, you have slavery. In real love, there is no slavery, only equals.

The next step -- the next thousand or million steps -- is what Anarchism is all about: how to take that real love, that equality, and build a society where everyone gets a fair deal. That's where the politics comes in: who gets to decide the answers to basic questions like who can eat, who has a place to live, who gets an education, who can see the doctor, and so on. Anarchism has some ideas about how to make those decisions, but the ideas are all based on one basic idea: equality among people, fairness to one another, comes out of love and respect. Anything else leads to unfairness.

In the end, the only test result that matters is this: how well we have loved ourselves, our friends and family, and even strangers. If you don't love life and people with this real kind of love, then, as far as I'm concerned, your life hasn't been very meaningful. And, really, in the end, do you want to lie on your deathbed and think about all the good things you should have done and didn't when there's no time left to make things right? Life is too short to waste it on regret or selfishness.

Anarchism, the sweetest wine that ever came from the human brain. I said this before. In the end, it is the only thing that did not betray me. And I did not betray it.

Lights change. Underscoring out.

* * * * *

Scene 9: Envoi

Goldman picks up a single rose.

You know what this is. Look at it. See how it unfolds organically; this is Anarchism. This flower already has all the knowledge it needs to grow. You are no less than this flower; you have all the knowledge you need, if you can just free yourself. Anarchism: teaching us to rise to the sun and hook our roots into the earth.

I don't have a program or a formula for you. My Anarchism is about spirit, about rebellion: never forget how the individual

can do great things when freed from society's weights and measures. System builders: Go elsewhere for blueprints.

But I know all of you have had some of these ideas flit through your brain. That is your natural anarchism speaking out. Take a risk and live up to it. I spent 50 years doing it. It was not easy. It was always "go for broke" with me -- and nearly always I got the "broke" I went for. I would not recommend this Via Dolorosa for anyone. But Anarchism is a journey, not a destination. May you live longer than I did so that this delirious wine can age well in the vessel of your heart.

Lights change.

And while I did not say it, I do believe it: Find yourself a revolution that sparks you to dance -- and then dance it. Some of you may think that's just frivolous and childish -- fine. Some of you may really love the idea and dedicate a lifetime to it -- fine. Just do something rather than nothing, go up rather than down. As for me --

Music comes up and Goldman dances by herself as the lights come down.

BLACKOUT

Let Down The Rains

DESCRIPTION

A journey changes as the journey goes on, without any guarantee that where the journey ends is where it had intended to go from the start. This often happens in taxi cabs. This is what happens here.

CHARACTERS

- NATHAN DEMBIN, cab driver, must have Irish accent; significantly older than CAPELLA
- CAPELLA WING, a radio psychologist; considerably younger than NATHAN

SETTING

- Taxi cab
- Radio station studio
- Empty room in Rutland, Vermont
- Diner
- Doorstep of CAPELLA's apartment

MISCELLANEOUS

- Two chairs -- plain, wooden, armless
- Rocking chair
- A table
- Other props as called for in the play

* * * * *

Scene 1

Two chairs center: the front seat of a cab, automatic transmission, NATHAN driving. Light on CAPELLA, with coat on and holding a small suitcase, hailing a taxi.

	CAPELLA
Taxi!	
	(to herself)
C'mon, c'mon, c'mon.	
	(out loud)
Taxi! Taxi! Yes!	

Lights up on NATHAN. Throughout NATHAN drives as if he were driving through mid-day city traffic.

CAPELLA

Great! Great! May I sit up front?

NATHAN

I usually don't let people sit up [front] --

CAPELLA

Why?

NATHAN

I'm not in the habit of frontloading my --

CAPELLA

I can be your co-pilot.

NATHAN

I prefer my fares in the back.

CAPELLA

But I was hoping for a view from the front. And everyone can use a good co-pilot. Please.

NATHAN

You could ride the hood as an ornament.

CAPELLA

The figurehead on a ship.

NATHAN

A ship'd be lucky to have a figurehead like you. Come on.

CAPELLA goes to get in. NATHAN leans over to move the seat back.

NATHAN

Wait. I wouldn't want to be sued for the bruising of such pretty knees.

CAPELLA

A gentleman and a scholar.

NATHAN

You're half right.

CAPELLA gets in, suitcase on lap. She gives a drum roll.

CAPELLA

Your next line is, "Where to, ma'am?"

NATHAN

I'll bite: "Where to, ma'am?"

CAPELLA

Train station.

NATHAN

Penn or Grand Central?

CAPELLA

Penn.

NATHAN

To where, if I may ask?

CAPELLA

A train to my home.

NATHAN

A good place for you, home?

CAPELLA

Oh yes. Especially now.

NATHAN

And traveling light, I see.

CAPELLA opens the suitcase to show that it is empty.

CAPELLA

For bringing some home back to here.

NATHAN

Very good, then.

CAPELLA

Yes it is.

NATHAN hits the meter, pulls into traffic.

NATHAN

Some radio? Music? More heat, less heat?

CAPELLA

I am just like Goldilocks: everything is just right.

NATHAN

You're easy to please.

CAPELLA

That's not entirely true, but it's nice of you to say it.

NATHAN comes to a stoplight. CAPELLA drums on her suitcase.

NATHAN

And I might as well admit it -- I know who you are, Ms. Capella Wing. You are much better looking than your advertised face plastered on the sides of buses.

CAPELLA

And I have to admit that those pictures scare me -- enlarged pores, the nose like a rutabaga --

NATHAN

"The Shock of the New" -- nifty show title, The Shock of the New.

CAPELLA

Into its tenth year -- one decade of -- well --

(looking at his ID card)

-- Mr. Nathan Dembin, what would you call it? One decade of my doing what?

NATHAN

You're assuming I listen to your show.

CAPELLA

I thought everyone did.

NATHAN

Perhaps one or three who don't -- but I am not among them.

CAPELLA
(mock anxious)

Oh, I was so worried --

NATHAN
Whenever it's on my shift -- like this morning.

CAPELLA
And?

NATHAN
You're looking for a review?

CAPELLA
A considered opinion.

NATHAN
From a raw-faced stranger.

CAPELLA
A warning about me, Mr. Dembin: if I'm in for a dime, I'm in
for a dollar.

NATHAN
And you look eager for an opinion.

CAPELLA
I am all ears.

NATHAN
All right --

CAPELLA
Engage.

NATHAN
As a radio psychologist you, let's say, pull a lot of cars out
of the mud that, personally, I would just leave there because
they often sound like they simply want to spin their wheels
in the muck for the joy of the spinning. I am less forgiving
than you on that account.

CAPELLA

One not much for self-pity.

NATHAN

When I've applied it to myself, I've only gotten a rash, so I don't do it.

CAPELLA

You've never pitied yourself?

NATHAN

I didn't say "never" --

CAPELLA

You didn't say "never" --

NATHAN

Only that when I have so self-pitied, I've found that what I thought were anguished tears was just me peeing in my own boots. Pardon my Welsh.

CAPELLA

So I have these people peeing in their boots, so to speak --

NATHAN

And you take them more seriously than I think their tinkling deserves -- you show them what sounds like real heart.

CAPELLA

"Let no heart be unhinged" --

NATHAN

Sincere without making me feel you're "acting" it. And given the daily crap that sluices out of this radio -- you're a touch above. And did that go on a bit too long?

CAPELLA

I may pay to have you quote yourself on my show.

NATHAN

Sometimes my tongue wags worse than a puppy.

CAPELLA continues to drum on her suitcase.

NATHAN

Or beats like those fingers of yours. You seem a bit jittery
-- have been since you got into my ticking whale.

CAPELLA, noticing her own drumming on the suitcase, smiles and stops
-- for a moment. Then picks it up.

NATHAN

Is it about going home?

CAPELLA

Not about going home.

NATHAN

So home is a good place.

CAPELLA

Home is a great place.

NATHAN

As it isn't for so many. You're lucky.

CAPELLA

I'm not peeing about it. I want to tell you something.

NATHAN

In fact, I'd prefer --

CAPELLA

Would that be all right?

NATHAN

Ms. Wing, I am not a confessional kind of cabbie.

CAPELLA

I wouldn't want to tell you if you were.

NATHAN

Like I said, I usually prefer my fares in the back, limited
information in my ear.

CAPELLA

But up front -- yes? Made room for my knees.

NATHAN

Prow of the ship.

CAPELLA

Meaning I'm not "usually."

NATHAN

What else could be concluded about a woman with a rutabaga nose?

CAPELLA

This would be like me doing a call-in to you.

NATHAN

You to me.

CAPELLA

Bartenders, hair dressers, cab drivers, and parish priests all play in the same league -- whether you like it or not -- and you all aspire to be radio psychologists.

NATHAN

So, my only chance.

CAPELLA

I will never be in the flesh in your cab again.

NATHAN

All right.

CAPELLA

Good.

NATHAN

I'll pick up the phone.

CAPELLA

Good.

CAPELLA hesitates, then pulls back her hair to show NATHAN a bad scrape on her right ear.

CAPELLA

Look, Nathan Dembin.

NATHAN stops but through the next lines inches forward.

NATHAN

What is that?

CAPELLA

What would you call it?

NATHAN

A pretty bad scrape from being in a scrape. Your ear looks like hamburger.

CAPELLA

I -- acquired this -- mark about hour before I got onto your boat.

NATHAN

I should be taking you to the --

CAPELLA

It doesn't hurt --

NATHAN

But still --

CAPELLA

It's minor.

NATHAN

That's not minor.

CAPELLA

I'm not suffering.

NATHAN

Why aren't you?

CAPELLA

You don't really suffer from getting such a gift.

NATHAN

That.

CAPELLA

Who says a gift has to comfort? Where is it written that a gift brings only joy?

NATHAN gives her one long look of understanding.

CAPELLA

You know exactly what I mean, don't you? Because I discovered something. Missing.

NATHAN

Connected to that --

CAPELLA

Yes.

NATHAN

And you want to tell me about that?

CAPELLA

Because of how you complimented my knees. Let me ride up front. Same league, remember?
(coaxing)

"Confrere" --

NATHAN does not refuse to listen.

CAPELLA

All right. I like my show. I think it's good, and you do, too, it seems. I like my life -- I think it's good, too.

NATHAN

Your word on that.

CAPELLA

I have a book out -- soon to be plural --

NATHAN

Congrats.

CAPELLA

I do my lectures, I write my articles. I admit I'm ambitious -- but I admit I'm not all that ambitious because I like things sweet and a little easy --

NATHAN

Who wouldn't?

CAPELLA

The life-gift to me of a happy childhood with two stable parents, no psychic scars, and only mild demons to dance with.

NATHAN

A wonderful litany.

CAPELLA

I have had, and I am having, an intact life. And all of that is true.

NATHAN

An apple without a bruise, it seems.

CAPELLA

Ah -- an apple without a bruise --
(drawn out)

But --

NATHAN

(mimicking her)

But.

CAPELLA

(prompting him)

But --

NATHAN

That "but" bears the sound of a bruise.

CAPELLA

Knew I could depend on you! Exactly. Something -- underneath -- is not right. Something -- inside is not satisfied despite --

NATHAN

Despite all your listed satisfactions.

CAPELLA

Yes.

NATHAN

An emptiness?

CAPELLA

No -- a -- boredom.

NATHAN

Ah --

CAPELLA

You say that like you know it.

NATHAN

I do say that like I know it.

CAPELLA
(pointing to ear)

But then this.

NATHAN

How?

CAPELLA points to her right.

CAPELLA

Could we pull over there? I need your attention.

NATHAN

It's a commercial zone -- no standing --

CAPELLA

I'll pay any tickets.

NATHAN, not especially liking the idea, pulls over and stops.

CAPELLA

Thank you. There's an alleyway I usually exit by from the studio -- and there she was -- Dolores. She was the last caller --

NATHAN

I remember her.

CAPELLA

On me like contact paper, Mr. Dembin.

NATHAN

She had been shouting at you on the air.

CAPELLA

Which she continued to do in the alleyway. Along with some slapping and slamming.

NATHAN

That's how --

CAPELLA

And then, whoosh, gone. But the attack is not important.

NATHAN

You said an hour before --

CAPELLA

And I had a cup of tea after -- not important -- if someone assaulted you in this cab, you'd be scared, right?

NATHAN

I constantly practice the proper "cringing" that is going to save my life.

CAPELLA

Brought up the same way. You know --
(takes up a mock defensive posture)
But -- there's that "but" again, Mr. Dembin --

NATHAN

But no cringing with Dolores?

CAPELLA

And that's not all. What Dolores had done -- it felt good.

NATHAN

It didn't frighten --

CAPELLA

It thrilled me. You do not pronounce me crazy.

NATHAN

No, I didn't. I don't.

CAPELLA beats a quick happy tattoo on her suitcase.

CAPELLA

The one thing I've started to hate lately? My voice. I hate this perk creeping into it.

NATHAN

"Perk."

CAPELLA

Oh so animated, so -- jaunty. You know.

(in a perky voice)

"And how can I help you today solve your problem?" while underneath in subtitles, "your stupid little life?" Not good. People phone me from the heart of darkness looking for ease, and more and more they find this perked-up voice telling them things that I can't believe I --

NATHAN

Like Dolores. I heard what you said to Dolores.

CAPELLA

And?

NATHAN

I thought it flippant. And harsh. And not in your usual vein.

CAPELLA

Exactly! She had the standard guy standard maltreating her like standard crap -- but instead of "shocking" her into, say, the "new" thing of standing up for herself --

NATHAN

You've done that.

CAPELLA

I have done that -- I have -- but, instead, I, the slightly bored perky little meatman --

NATHAN

"Meatman's" a bit far --

CAPELLA

-- I heard myself telling her that maybe the reason he treated her so miserably is that she really is a miserable person and that she needs to --

NATHAN

And that's when the ballistics began.

CAPELLA

And she was right! But see -- with a quick-fingered engineer, that doesn't matter.

NATHAN

Volume to zero.

CAPELLA

And the closing theme plays, and the perky little voice of Capella Wing is already winging out to the stars. I dispense and then move on, out of my hands --

CAPELLA cleans her hands.

CAPELLA

But when Dolores smacked me down, I suddenly felt very, very, very, very real. After Dolores, I was definitely not bored.

(imitating Dolores)

"I am not going to let you fucking make me feel small!" -- that suddenly put me in my body, the complete opposite of radio waves -- I had weight! It was almost erotic, Nathan Dembin. Really. Really! The asphalt, the grit against flesh, "I am not going to let you fucking make me" -- she made me suffer -- and she brought me back.

NATHAN

Ms. Wing, that's not suffer[ing] --

CAPELLA

The pain made me feel full again.

NATHAN

That's not [suffering] --

CAPELLA

I should thank Dolores since she had really, really listened.

Maybe I should have a Dolores smackdown once a week.

(smacks her suitcase)

And that's my story.

NATHAN says nothing, then puts the car into gear and pulls away.

CAPELLA

What?

NATHAN

It's nothing.

CAPELLA

Confreres don't lie.

NATHAN

I don't want to disrespect you, so I'll keep the puppy shut.

CAPELLA

I didn't tell you for you to keep your mouth shut. Give me a response.

NATHAN

I don't think you want a response.

CAPELLA

(statement and question)

I don't?

NATHAN

I think you want approval. A congratulations.

CAPELLA

Is that so?

NATHAN

I think, for some reason, you want --

CAPELLA

(cutting him off)

Enough with the "I thinks." How about this, Nathan Dembin?
Are you listening?

NATHAN

With my unscraped ears.

CAPELLA

(without rancor)

How about confrere Nathan Dembin just giving me the
straight fucking answer I asked for?

NATHAN keeps an eye on CAPELLA and an eye on the road. CAPELLA
keeps her eye on NATHAN.

CAPELLA

(perky)

Have I hit a nerve, Nathan?

NATHAN

You may rent the cab, but you don't rent me.

CAPELLA

So where did "a ship would be lucky to have a figurehead
like you" go to? Or were you just blowing smoke up my
skirt for the sake of a good tip? Maybe you think I need
something else up my --

NATHAN

The Dolores smackdown? One of the daftest ideas I've
heard in a long time --

(dismissive)

Pain as a gift -- adrenaline as truth --

(catches himself)

I think the rest should be done in silence.

CAPELLA

I think the rest should be loud with the goddamn truth.

NATHAN

The benefits of truth are over-rated.

CAPELLA

People who say crap like that over-rate themselves.

Silence as the gauntlet is thrown down.

CAPELLA

Pull over, right now.

NATHAN

I can't be --

CAPELLA

Right there -- there!

NATHAN pulls over to the curb. CAPELLA gets out of the cab. NATHAN looks over his left shoulder as if to pull away.

CAPELLA

Wait a second -- I didn't tell you to leave.

NATHAN

(jamming the gear into Park)

You got out --

CAPELLA

You still have my suitcase --

NATHAN

-- what else am I supposed to suppose?

CAPELLA

Get out of the car --

NATHAN

We can't be having a tête --

CAPELLA

Hup! Hup!

NATHAN, clearly controlling himself, goes to slap the meter off.

CAPELLA

Keep it running -- that's right -- get your hand away from that --

NATHAN gets out of the car and stands opposite CAPELLA.

NATHAN

All right, you pulled me over, you're paying for the time to run -- so what do you want?

CAPELLA

"Daftest." Daftest. Is that the best you can do? I want your full attention. I want a better insult. Look at me straight and tell me --

NATHAN

Take your complaint to the hackney division -- "my driver was not rude enough" -- I have check-off cards --

CAPELLA

Don't get back inside --

NATHAN

Then get back in the cab.

CAPELLA

I've got nothing to hide.

NATHAN

Get back in so I can take you safely where you want to go.

CAPELLA

No.

NATHAN

That's my job. It is not my job to toss trash with you on the street, Capella Wing -- I am just not going to do that.

NATHAN gets back into the cab. Then CAPELLA gets back in. NATHAN puts the car into gear and jerks the car back into traffic. A horn blow, a rude gesture. CAPELLA waits until they're going again.

CAPELLA

Now, that was adult.

NATHAN

Shut up. Sorry. I don't need to insult you. Because you've insulted yourself -- that loopy notion of --

CAPELLA

Loopy --

NATHAN

That daft idea --

CAPELLA

Daft --

NATHAN

Whatever the Christ you want to call it --

CAPELLA

You want to call it.

NATHAN

That stupid idea, then, that pain -- your "Dolores smackdown" -- your suffering -- you didn't suffer -- the -- notion -- that pain is a form a spiritual enlightenment -- that attitude, Ms. Wing -- that -- goddamn -- privileged --

CAPELLA

Go on.

NATHAN

It's exactly what an intact unbruised well-off apple would say. "Aesthetic suffering." The aesthetic suffering of the unbruised apple.

CAPELLA reaches into her coat pocket, pulls out a dollar, slaps it down.

CAPELLA

You and I are definitely in for the whole dollar now, Nathan Dembin.

NATHAN

No we're not. A short distance to go.

CAPELLA

I've got the whole fucking island if I want it.

NATHAN refuses to budge, so CAPELLA begins drumming on her suitcase in a manner calculated to annoy -- perhaps even on to the dashboard and the pine-tree air freshener invisibly hanging from the invisible rear-view mirror and even NATHAN, though she doesn't touch him.

Finally, NATHAN reaches out -- does not touch her hands but indicates that she should stop. CAPELLA adds a tattoo or two more to make her point, then rests. NATHAN reaches into his pants or shirt pocket and pulls out a dollar bill, drops it on her suitcase.

Then NATHAN pulls over to the curb -- or double-parks -- and shifts in his seat to face CAPELLA. He considers what to say, then launches.

NATHAN

One thing I have not been liking about your show.

CAPELLA picks up the two dollars and pockets them.

CAPELLA

I'll hold on to these.

NATHAN

That sometimes, to this ear, you lose your heart and flip up into your head. Maybe that's when this infamous boredom kicks in.

CAPELLA

And how [does this] --

NATHAN

You get all "tough love" -- rub the caller's face into "the truth" -- like you're doing them a favor. That's when you lose me.

CAPELLA

A lot of them need [that] --

NATHAN

And who are you to tell them what they need to need?

CAPELLA

That's why they call.

NATHAN

Now you're just truculent.

CAPELLA

Tru-cu-lent --

NATHAN

Then how's pig-headed and tart-mouthed and spite-filled?
You know that's not why they call you. You said so yourself.

CAPELLA

Nathan Dembin doesn't think people should be made to
face the truth --

NATHAN

"Should be made to" --

CAPELLA

-- when it's not facing the truth that's jerking their lives
around.

NATHAN

"Should be made to" -- a nasty phrase, Ms. Wing. A "head"
phrase, a "perk" phrase. Fascist.

CAPELLA

Daft, loopy, stupid, and now "fascist."

NATHAN

"Should be made to" is just like Dolores grinding your ear
into the ground. "I am not going to let you fucking make me
feel small!" Think about that for a moment.

(touches his ear)

"Should be made to" -- I know what I'm talking about. Is that what you want carved into your tombstone? "Capella Wing, perky little meatman, hurt people for their own good." How nice to provide them with such a service!

(softer)

How nice.

CAPELLA

(sotto voce)

"Perky little meatman."

NATHAN

Not saying it's all the time, or even all that often -- but by your own admission it's more and more --

CAPELLA

(sotto voce)

"Perky little meatman."

NATHAN

And when your voice goes "Now, let me be straight-out with you," I just want to tell the caller to hang it up because you're going to busy-body them to death.

CAPELLA

Does Nathan Dembin think I do anything right?

NATHAN

He already said you do -- it's when your heart is tuned in, not your head. Then you don't go "daft."

CAPELLA

This is not what the marketing people usually tell me.

NATHAN

The "marketeers" --

CAPELLA

They suck up the conflict -- they supposedly can track ad revenue against when callers take offense.

NATHAN

And is that not offensive? No wonder you're bored. Ms. Wing, those who ring you usually have too much "should be made to" being done to them by every bottom feeder in their lives -- they don't need it from you, even if they say they do.

CAPELLA

(to herself)

Phoning in from the heart of darkness.

NATHAN

Those who call you, Ms. Wing, are the bruised apples God threw out of Eden. There's nothing else to call them.

CAPELLA

No aesthetic suffering for [them] --

NATHAN

Not an option for them. All they really want -- is a kind word and what will pass for an embrace to pick themselves up out of their self-pity and move on. The intact ones never have the right to tell the bruised ones what is good for them.

CAPELLA

You know this.

NATHAN

I know this harder than you can imagine.

NATHAN shifts in his seat and pulls into traffic.

NATHAN

I never could be a radio jock.

CAPELLA

Why?

NATHAN

Because when I open my Irish gob, I insert one foot, then the other, and throw in my hobnailed boots for the door prize.

An awkward but not necessarily uncomfortable moment.

CAPELLA

Tell me, Mr. Dembin -- are you a bruised apple?

NATHAN

Funny you should ask that.

CAPELLA

Even while daft, I still have a radar.

NATHAN

Because today I am. To be fair with you -- I feel more bruised today than I have in a long time, and so some of my comments may have come from that --

CAPELLA

Promise not to get tough with you.

NATHAN

All right.

But NATHAN does not speak right away.

CAPELLA

I do promise --

NATHAN

I am in mourning for my friend. For a friend who died. Thomas Carlyle.

CAPELLA

I'm very sorry --

NATHAN

This friend kept me hopeful -- and now I am not so sure.

CAPELLA

How -- did he --

NATHAN

Thomas was murdered.

CAPELLA

Oh God.

NATHAN

Thomas was a beggar and crippled -- that's how I met him -- he had his station up on 59th -- but he had made a complete work of art out of his incompleteness. I'd give him some of my tip money, I'd spot him to meals, we'd take in a game or a museum -- and we'd talk. My dim view of the dim tide of humanity was lifted every time I talked with him.

CAPELLA

Mr. Dembin, I am sorry.

NATHAN

Apparently murdered for sport, since no money was taken. There's nothing else to say.

CAPELLA

I never take "nothing" at face value.

NATHAN

I have heard you use that phrase before.

CAPELLA

So let it gently prod you to go on.

NATHAN

It is not easy to speak of my feelings, even in ordinary hours. But I am angered, Ms. Wing -- I am enraged -- at how a brute coward has broken something so beautiful. I apologize if I have been rude --

CAPELLA

You haven't been rude.

NATHAN

-- since it was driven by an unhealthy regard for my own grief outside the grief of others.

CAPELLA

No apology needed, Nathan Dembin. I'll take this over Dolores any day.

NATHAN

And with that dispensation, we have the train station coming up.

A sudden realization that the ride is over as NATHAN pulls to the curb. They wait.

NATHAN

I haven't asked you where home is.

CAPELLA

Did you love your friend?

NATHAN

I did. I do. I will continue to.

CAPELLA begins to cry. NATHAN digs a packet of tissues out of his jacket pocket. CAPELLA takes them, uses them. NATHAN gently takes the used ones and puts them into his pocket.

NATHAN

I sometimes think a taxi is like a whale, like the ticking belly of a whale, taking all of us scared little Jonahs through a wicked city where everyone swims around in a dream -- and then it lets you go -- abandons you to scrabble around for a truth that will save your life.

CAPELLA

The Farm.

NATHAN

What?

CAPELLA

The Farm -- I'm going to The Farm. You asked me where I was going.

NATHAN

The Farm.

CAPELLA

The Farm.

NATHAN

Where the weary be at rest, hey?

CAPELLA

(grinning)

Once upon a time --

(stops herself)

One hundred acres in Rutland, Vermont -- we, friends,
bought it an ice age ago and started a commune --

NATHAN

And you still have it going?

CAPELLA

It's weird and it's strange but we still have it going.

NATHAN

Now you should see your face --

CAPELLA

Rocking chair on the porch -- such peace in that rocking
chair, Nathan Dembin --

NATHAN

I can hear it rock in your voice.

CAPELLA

Gardens, bird-song -- three or four stay year-round, the rest
of us --

NATHAN

Escape the wicked cities when you can?

CAPELLA

Money has to be made and paid. But yes, escape, and that
is where I am going, where "the weary be at rest."

NATHAN

(taking the last of her tissues)

It sounds wonderful. You are very lucky.

CAPELLA

I'm sorry --

NATHAN

Apology is futile.

CAPELLA

Not for me -- little ol' intact me -- for your friend -- for Dolores --

NATHAN

And some for yourself would be all right.

CAPELLA

Nah-uh -- gotta be "tough" -- no self-pity!

NATHAN

Ah, go on -- take a little!

CAPELLA

And some for yourself.

NATHAN

Acceptable.

CAPELLA digs money out of her coat.

NATHAN

I wish there were more time to hear about The Farm.

CAPELLA hands him the money.

CAPELLA

Here's your dollar back -- and the fare.

NATHAN hands her back some.

NATHAN

No tips for me today. In homage to Thomas -- give it to whom you think needs it so that hope may arise.

CAPELLA

A cab driver not taking a tip -- I'm surprised the world doesn't fall off its axis.

NATHAN

I'm surprised about that very thing every day. You have a good trip.

CAPELLA

Watch out for this wicked city.

NATHAN

Full-time occupation.

CAPELLA hesitates getting out.

CAPELLA

If you would like to talk more about him --

NATHAN

(smiling)

Face to face and not on the phone?

CAPELLA

Even you say I do a good job. It is a something I can do.

NATHAN

Being who I am, Ms. Wing, I am going to let that car sit in the mud a bit and spin.

CAPELLA

All right, then. All right. But not too long.

NATHAN

Eventually an ox will pull me out.

CAPELLA

Take care.

NATHAN

And you as well.

CAPELLA still hesitates, and there is the feeling that they would both sit there far longer if only one of them would suggest it. Finally, CAPELLA gets out, moves out of the light, and stands. NATHAN stares in the direction that CAPELLA has left, as if following her with his eyes.

NATHAN

"There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest."

NATHAN waves. CAPELLA waves back. Lights shift to Rutland, Vermont. Transition with music.

* * * * *

Scene 2

CAPELLA slumps in a rocking chair, coat draped over her shoulders, suitcase by the chair. There is also a second chair. She holds legal documents. She rocks.

NATHAN shows up at what would be the front door, a kit bag slung across his shoulder. CAPELLA notices NATHAN, laughs.

CAPELLA

Oh, oh, oh.

NATHAN

Are you all right?

CAPELLA

In such shapes --

NATHAN

Are you all right?

CAPELLA

-- do our angels come.

NATHAN

Where is everything?

CAPELLA holds out the documents for him to read. NATHAN kneels by the rocking chair and reads in silence.

CAPELLA

I found those in a neat diseased white envelope on the seat of this rocking chair. I'll bet you if I had sat on it, I would've rotted out my cunt.

NATHAN shuffles through the papers.

NATHAN

They took it.

CAPELLA

They took it, all righty.

NATHAN

All of it.

CAPELLA

They took me, all righty.

NATHAN

You got outvoted.

CAPELLA

And, stupid me, I didn't even know they were voting. I left them a message I was coming up -- post-Dolores -- in that hour --

NATHAN

They cut you out of the vote --

CAPELLA

Must've made them scurry around -- like rats --

NATHAN

You being here wouldn't have made any difference --

CAPELLA

That's why they hadn't changed the locks yet -- I had to discover the infection --

NATHAN

(reading)

The new owners are changing the locks next week.

CAPELLA

Funny how we called that a trust.

NATHAN

But they didn't cut you out of the money -- at least that's a --

CAPELLA

We had established the legal entity of a trust, and, stupid me, I thought that meant --

NATHAN

It says here --

CAPELLA

I know what it says.

NATHAN

They just needed a majority --

CAPELLA

I know! And now all I have is the book of the dead and you.

CAPELLA turns to him.

CAPELLA

And why am I not surprised to see you here?

NATHAN sits in the other chair. He folds the papers and hands them to CAPELLA, but she lets them drop.

NATHAN

I am really sorry --

CAPELLA

A sorry one you are -- I assume you hijacked the cab --

NATHAN

I did --

CAPELLA

-- to Rutland-edge-of-the-abyss-Vermont --

NATHAN

I did --

CAPELLA

My used kleenex in your pocket?

NATHAN

They are --

CAPELLA

How gallant.

NATHAN

More gallant than you have at the moment --

CAPELLA

And my not being surprised to see you: what is that supposed to mean?

CAPELLA gets up, paces, then slams the rocking chair against the floor.

CAPELLA

Tell me what anything of this something is supposed to mean.

CAPELLA slams down the chair again.

CAPELLA

The meaning -- what is the goddamn meaning -- betrayal and treachery and murder and treason and false heart and -- aaahhhh!!!

CAPELLA has the chair over her head, ready to smash it down, her coat fallen from her shoulders -- absolute rage. NATHAN gets to his feet.

NATHAN

Ms. Wing, don't -- you talked -- don't -- you talked to me -- don't! -- about the rocking chair, about the chair that gave you peace -- gave you peace -- a friend that stayed -- it didn't do any of this screwing-over --

CAPELLA pauses, looks around, looks at NATHAN, and laughs. NATHAN takes the chair from CAPELLA and puts it down. CAPELLA walks up to NATHAN and puts her hand against his cheek.

CAPELLA

My fool.

But instead of a caress, CAPELLA gives him a vicious slap with her other hand.

CAPELLA

I want to sit myself inside this rage. It is warm and sharp and clear.

CAPELLA goes to slap him again, but NATHAN grabs her wrist. She goes to slap him with her other hand, and he grabs that wrist as well. She gets a hand free, goes to slap, he blocks her. It is a strained awkward dance, but NATHAN has the strength to control it.

CAPELLA pulls her hands away.

CAPELLA

Right now I wish I had Dolores on the phone. Because I would tell her -- all of them -- that I hate being eye-deep in the running sewer called their "lives" because it's so hard to love people who don't love themselves -- "he doesn't like me, I don't feel actualized, what's my full poten[tial]" -- Christ! -- fire! ice! fucking locusts! -- doesn't matter as long as it would wipe away this scum, this scum that -- scum that would -- that would do that, scum that pisses where I sleep and shits where I dream and takes -- and takes -- and takes -- the possibility -- of peace -- away -- from me. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh goddamn it!

NATHAN goes to put her coat around her shoulders. CAPELLA pulls it out of his hands, pulls it tight around her.

CAPELLA

Christ, give me that -- I don't even feel like hitting you again --

NATHAN

Good, because I don't feel like turning the other cheek --

The silence hangs.

CAPELLA

What are you doing here?

NATHAN

I am as surprised as you are about my ending up in Rutland-edge-of-the-abyss-Vermont --

CAPELLA

Stop it -- don't bull[shit me] --

NATHAN

None intended --

CAPELLA

(smirking)

"Geezer on a Quest" --

NATHAN

I did choose -- I chose you --

CAPELLA

And why would The Geezer waste himself on a choice like that?

NATHAN

The Geezer is hundreds of miles past thinking it's a wasted choice.

CAPELLA

Thus proving his mental defect. Because from this point forward I intend to be someone who --

NATHAN

So you're kicking this gift to the curb?

CAPELLA

Gift?

NATHAN

What is a gift but something you don't know you need and still get?

CAPELLA

I needed you?

NATHAN

Why else am I here?

CAPELLA

Just go -- I'm tired --

NATHAN

Will this new "someone" be --

CAPELLA

Go --

NATHAN

-- maybe, Wonder Woman "in her satin tights / fighting for her rights" --

CAPELLA turns on him.

CAPELLA

If you're going to mock me --

CAPELLA goes to kick him.

CAPELLA

-- call me someone with a side-kick so I can kick you in the fucking side --

NATHAN moves out of the way.

NATHAN

Or will you be Achilles -- "sing, O goddess, of the anger of Achilles" --

CAPELLA throws the chair at him.

CAPELLA

Shut up!

NATHAN sets the chair upright, stands on it.

NATHAN

Behold the low-rent hard-ass.

CAPELLA

Shut up.

NATHAN

The car spins its wheels in the muck of its own self-pity --

CAPELLA moves toward NATHAN, who, with a surprising spryness, gets off the chair and puts it between himself and CAPELLA.

NATHAN

Here, this hard-boiled romantic with a stone heart to keep her safe from the bungs of the wicked world --

CAPELLA

Shut up.

NATHAN gets back up on the chair.

NATHAN

"Vengeance is mine" --

NATHAN does a careful little jig on the chair.

CAPELLA

Stop that.

NATHAN

I'm your good-luck Irish leprechaun, come at the end of the rainbow. La-di-dah-di-dah-di-di -- I suppose you're gonna sue 'em.

CAPELLA

You're going to crack your bones --

NATHAN still dances.

NATHAN

Bring on the sharkish lawyers --

CAPELLA

Stop --

NATHAN

I'm here to stop you from such legal foolishness -- top of the
mornin' to ya --

CAPELLA

Irish leprecunt --

NATHAN stops dancing.

CAPELLA

I am going to sue them.

NATHAN

No! No! Ms. Wing, I have to try harder --

NATHAN starts dancing again.

CAPELLA

It's Capella -- and stop --

NATHAN

Still Ms. Wing to me --

CAPELLA

Just stop!

NATHAN stops dancing, catches his breath. They watch each other.

CAPELLA

Why shouldn't I make them suffer? Why shouldn't I murder
them back?

NATHAN gets off the chair.

NATHAN

Sit. Please.

CAPELLA

Answer my question.

NATHAN

Sit.

CAPELLA sits in the rocking chair. NATHAN sits in the other chair.

NATHAN

I add to your docket of heart-murder by supposed friends
the case of Senseless Brutality versus Thomas Carlyle.

CAPELLA

Thomas --

NATHAN

My beggar friend.

CAPELLA

Right.

NATHAN

My bruised apple.

CAPELLA

I'm sorry -- I'd forgotten.

NATHAN

Who do you think got me to come here? It never would
have been Geezer Nathan Dembin all on his own.

With THOMAS' name in the air, they fall into silence.

CAPELLA

Shit! Shit!

More silence.

CAPELLA

It's like I have this fucking monitor that sits up here -- "oh,
look at how rageful she's being, how she's trying to be so
sincere" -- a goddamn critique -- a performance --

CAPELLA faces NATHAN.

CAPELLA

But there was a moment -- a moment --

NATHAN

There always is --

CAPELLA

-- when I saw the papers -- when I first saw you --

NATHAN

Pure --

CAPELLA

Pure it was --

NATHAN

That's why we sometimes hunger for rage --

CAPELLA

-- it was clean -- so clean -- right through the gut -- purged
-- cleansed --

NATHAN

Filleted --

CAPELLA

Chop-chop! -- and then -- to get dragged -- back to -- grief
--

NATHAN

To the Farm and Thomas and [Dolores] --

CAPELLA

-- and all the annoyance of having to, again, breathe in and
breathe out --

NATHAN

And to figure in and figure out --

CAPELLA

Keep in and keep out --

NATHAN

Call in and call out -- that should've been yours --

CAPELLA

It just got me tired --

NATHAN

Me, too -- all of it --

CAPELLA looks at NATHAN directly.

CAPELLA

If you're my weather report, Mr. Dembin, then what's the forecast?

NATHAN

I talked to Thomas, all the way here -- a little like talking to someone on the radio. About what I seemed to be doing.

CAPELLA

Do you know what you're doing?

NATHAN

No. And yes. And then no and yes again.

CAPELLA

You're ahead of me.

NATHAN

Do you want to hear what I said to Thomas?

CAPELLA

Of course.

NATHAN

Good -- because there is much riding on the back of this horse.

NATHAN pauses, then stands, turns, unzips his pants to tuck in his shirt.

CAPELLA

What are you doing?

NATHAN

This is the only way I know how to do this.

NATHAN finishes the tucking-in and turns to CAPELLA.

CAPELLA

You look like a schoolboy.

NATHAN

And altar boy -- old bottle for a new wine.

CAPELLA

(pointing, smiling)

Ah, Mr. Dembin --

NATHAN looks down and sees that his fly is unzipped. He pivots away, zips up.

NATHAN

Oh, for Christ's sake --

NATHAN turns back.

NATHAN

Is everything --

CAPELLA

Intact.

NATHAN

Good. Wouldn't want your mind distracted.

NATHAN once again takes up his recitation stance.

NATHAN

What the schoolboy/altar boy in the ticking whale said to his friend Thomas.

CAPELLA

You look like you've just dropped forty years.

NATHAN

More like forty IQ points.

(prepares himself)

Okay. What I told Thomas. I told Thomas about an article I read about lost twins -- about how in a lot of twin pregnancies, one of the twins just disappears, leaving an empty space. Thomas mused that maybe every single baby is a left-behind twin because he noticed that we never seem to stop hungering for that "one" who makes us feel complete.

CAPELLA

Thomas is a much better co-pilot than I was.

NATHAN

(holds up hand)

I lose track easily. I added that perhaps this also explains the human puzzle that, at one and the same time, we ache to be connected and yet fear any closeness because we may lose it again to chance and death. And yet we do manage, somehow, to connect. Thomas agreed. It went something like that.

CAPELLA gives him two claps of applause, then falls silent. NATHAN cups his hand to his ear, as if he were wearing a headset, and sits.

NATHAN

Thank you for calling. How can I help you?

(to CAPELLA)

Make believe I know what I'm doing. Come on.

CAPELLA

Thank you for taking my call.

NATHAN

How can I help you?

CAPELLA

I'm not sure.

NATHAN

I never take "I'm not sure" at face value. You have to try a little harder.

CAPELLA

I want to understand.

NATHAN

All right.

CAPELLA

And I want amnesia.

NATHAN

To protect you from the understanding -- all right.

CAPELLA

And I want revenge.

NATHAN

Which may or may not bring you peace -- all right.

CAPELLA

And I want peace.

NATHAN

Which may or may not come packaged with the understanding.

CAPELLA

How does this all connect?

NATHAN

Listen closely: Thomas speaks. You have to accept suffering, yours and others', accept its inevitability, and then forget it so that you can move on, but move on without forgetting it.

CAPELLA

I can't --

NATHAN

Ah-ah --

CAPELLA

Take my call again.

NATHAN

Thank you for calling.

CAPELLA

Thank you.

NATHAN

How can I help?

CAPELLA

I have no home to move on to.

NATHAN

I never take "I have no home" at face value. Try a little harder.

CAPELLA

I have no "try" left in me.

NATHAN

That only means that, for the moment, you have no love. And that "for the moment" only means for the moment, mind you. When you have love, then you have "try," then you have home.

(takes his "headset" off)

Or something like that. Thomas would've said it better.

CAPELLA indicates for NATHAN to hand her the papers.

CAPELLA

This is all I have, Mr. Dembin.

NATHAN

These? These are your instructions for letting go.

CAPELLA

You don't know how beautiful it was here.

NATHAN

And there are no more beautiful places?

CAPELLA

But to be cheated --

NATHAN

Vengeance doesn't bring the twin back.

CAPELLA

Can't I chop them in the neck? Just a few blood-spatters?

NATHAN

Always with the gut sensations.

CAPELLA

It's cold in here.

NATHAN

I can't tell you how empty I felt when I saw how emptied out everything was --

CAPELLA

Your one big let's-just-do-it impulse ends in a bust.

NATHAN

Let me finish the call, Ms. Wing.

CAPELLA

(laughing)

Go ahead.

NATHAN

But I think my trip here has been wildly successful. So does Thomas.

CAPELLA stands, grabs the valise, opens it, puts the papers inside.

CAPELLA

The kleenex.

NATHAN puts the used tissues inside as well.

CAPELLA

Take me back, Mr. Dembin. No more gold foil on the dung pile.

NATHAN

The whale awaits.

A few steps, then turns to face him.

CAPELLA

I still hate them. I still want to hurt them.

NATHAN

Betrayal is a form of murder, isn't it? Who wouldn't want to murder back?

CAPELLA

What would Thomas say -- have said?

NATHAN

"Say" is the right tense. Do the murdering in your head -- it's a lot easier to clean up afterwards, and you can do it as often as you want. In the meantime, get your revenge by living well -- much easier on the gut.

CAPELLA

Quite the fool, he was.

NATHAN

Thank God, wouldn't you say? I do.

CAPELLA leaves, standing just outside the light. Then NATHAN follows, slinging his kit bag across his shoulder and giving a push to the rocking chair that leaves it rocking. Then, on an impulse, he goes back and takes the chair. Lights go to black. Transition with music.

* * * * *

Scene 3

A diner mid-way between there and here: table, two chairs, two coffee cups, NATHAN stage left chair, CAPELLA stage right chair. NATHAN's kit bag is slung across his chair.

CAPELLA

I didn't realize I was so hungry.

NATHAN

Adrenaline can kill an appetite.

CAPELLA

You must be exhausted.

NATHAN

This bag of bones still has some kick in it.

CAPELLA

Dancing the little jig --

NATHAN

But it will be nice to get back.

CAPELLA

You'll be in trouble, though.

NATHAN

Still nice to be back.

CAPELLA

I'll take that as a theory-to-be-proved until I'm there.

NATHAN

Fair enough. What?

CAPELLA

(waving it away)

It's all right.

NATHAN

Not a good time to hold anything back.

CAPELLA

No, really --

NATHAN

Ms. Wing --

CAPELLA

It's nothing --

NATHAN

That didn't work in the cab and it won't work here. What is it?

CAPELLA

It's nothing -- As much as I want all this to feel --
adventurous? -- and the food was good, the talk was good
--

NATHAN

Yes?

CAPELLA

My Dolores sense is still ringing.

NATHAN

Really?

CAPELLA

I gotta say it --

NATHAN

Loud?

CAPELLA

Off the hook.

NATHAN

Ah -- you mean, "Why did the geezer cross the road to
Vermont?"

CAPELLA

I mean this -- you, total stranger, meets me once, then
drives himself to Rutland --

NATHAN

Edge-of-the-abyss-Vermont --

CAPELLA

-- without -- look, I should just be flattered --

NATHAN

No -- no --

CAPELLA

Grateful --

NATHAN

-- what Dolores is saying is, What are the nasties in this fool?

CAPELLA

Yes. Exactly. I'm sorry, but -- yes --

NATHAN

When will his dirt hit me -- hurt me?

CAPELLA

Because nobody is this -- can be this --

NATHAN

And because you think that nobody has ever -- you can't trust me.

CAPELLA

Mr. Dembin, after today, who knows what's in anybody's heart --

NATHAN swings his kit bag around.

CAPELLA

Look, forget it -- I'm just being ungrateful --

NATHAN

Why are you so intent at this moment to make it all make out to be nice? It's not all nice.

NATHAN reaches into the bag and brings out an enormous sheathed knife, lays it on the table.

NATHAN

There are times when etiquette will get your balls cut off -- pardon the Welsh.

They stare at the knife.

NATHAN

SOG Recon Bowie.

CAPELLA

It has a name.

NATHAN

High-carbon SK5 steel and gun-blued for rust inhibition and stealth. Epoxied leather handle and spanner nut for balance and feel. Vietnam-war era.

CAPELLA

And it has you as its owner.

NATHAN

Go ahead if you want.

With both reluctance and fascination, CAPELLA picks up the knife.

CAPELLA

This has stories.

NATHAN

Of course.

CAPELLA

Has it --

NATHAN

It has been used. Go ahead.

CAPELLA unsheathes the knife.

NATHAN

Lower it -- I wouldn't broadcast it about.

CAPELLA

You have used this.

NATHAN

Yes.

CAPELLA

You are capable [of] --

NATHAN

Yes.

A moment during which CAPELLA must decide whether to hold the knife and ask the next question or put the knife away and give it back to him in silence.

CAPELLA

I have to ask.

NATHAN

You being you -- Dolores being Dolores -- you do, don't you?

CAPELLA

I do.

NATHAN

Because you know that even perfect angels kill, like St. Michael with his sword, and gallant knights do slaughter.

CAPELLA

Make it quick.

NATHAN takes the knife, sheathes it, puts it away.

NATHAN

We don't need this.

CAPELLA

Make it quick.

NATHAN

Nineteen-eighty-nine, Namibia. Do you know where Namibia is?

CAPELLA

No goddamn asides --

NATHAN

I didn't until 1985, when I went there in the middle of its war against South Africa for independence. I was recruited by one Irish mercenary named Donald Acheson, an IRA

man, like me, who himself was a hired member of a South African Defense Force death squad titled, nicely, the Civil Cooperation Bureau --

CAPELLA

No goddamn editorializing --

NATHAN

Acheson does away with leading Namibian independence activist Anton Lubowski, shot nine times outside his house with an AK47. Acheson was named alongside nine other people for the murder. But. They missed someone.

CAPELLA

You.

NATHAN

I was a member of Acheson's crew -- Lubowski was only one of the many -- But I was also playing the other side -- the money was unbelievably good -- right, no editorials -- and I told the Namibians about the upcoming assassination. But for some reason -- After the killing, I found it expedient to change my occupation since it was not healthy to be pursued by two governments, three if Ireland chipped in. It wasn't hard -- I melted away. Into a taxi cab, my ticking whale. I do have blood on my hands.

CAPELLA

Why?

NATHAN

Many reasons, no absolutions -- I did it because the money was good, I'd known Acheson for the crazy IRA fuck that he was and at that time in the politics of my life "crazy IRA fuck" went a long way with me.

CAPELLA

I'm wondering if I should be afraid.

NATHAN

(pats his bag)

Of this? No -- no. I do carry it for protection -- which is an illusion because I am not sure I could ever use it again. For

what it had been used for. You taking it out is the first time it's been out since -- well, it's never been tested in my cab.

CAPELLA

I meant afraid of you.

NATHAN

All I can say is this: I am what I am because of what I have been. I listen to Thomas and come for you in Rutland because of what I have been. Everything that was has been poured into what is. What else can I say? Except I wouldn't be surprised if you decided --

CAPELLA holds up a hand to stop him.

CAPELLA

Which hand did you use?

NATHAN

Both.

CAPELLA

Most often.

NATHAN

My left.

CAPELLA gestures to him, and NATHAN hands her his left hand. She slides it under her coat and places it on her left breast. NATHAN tries to pull away,

NATHAN

What are you doing --

CAPELLA does not let him go.

CAPELLA

Don't. Feel. Feel! What do you feel?

NATHAN

Nothing.

CAPELLA

Not nothing. Breast?

NATHAN

No -- I don't --

CAPELLA

Then what?

NATHAN

A ridge.

CAPELLA

A ridge of scar.

NATHAN

Cut away?

CAPELLA

Cut off. To the bone. By my own chosen knife. A scarlet letter over my heart.

NATHAN gently tries to tug away, but CAPELLA holds him.

CAPELLA

What else? Feel.

NATHAN

Your heartbeat. Your ribs. Your breathing. In and out.

CAPELLA

You feel my life -- the same as this morning -- and not the same. Take it back now.

NATHAN

"Should I be afraid of you?" is a question on the table as well.

CAPELLA

We all have our knives in their sheathes -- that's all, Mr. Dembin, that's all it was.

NATHAN

Does this swap of information make it that we're traveling back together? Or not?

CAPELLA

I think -- I think we have to give our ticking whale a chance to spit us back onto the beach.

NATHAN

The Bible said "vomit" for Jonah -- but I think I can do us better than that.

They stand. NATHAN puts down money for the check.

NATHAN

Your dollar's in there. Jonah went on to complete his work, you know. Telling people about their sins. The whole city of Nineveh, as a matter of fact -- they put on sackcloth and repented and God accepted.

CAPELLA

The Ninevehns had it easy, though, didn't they? They got a full set of instructions. I'll drive.

CAPELLA gestures for the keys. NATHAN passes them on to her.

NATHAN

You give me a tough co-pilot act to follow.

CAPELLA

Just find us something interesting to listen to on the radio. Think you can do that?

NATHAN

Aye-aye, captain.

They turn to leave the diner, but CAPELLA stops.

CAPELLA

And I want you to know that just because you have the rocking chair in the back seat does not mean anything.

NATHAN

And I am getting close to being double your age.

CAPELLA

Nothing here has been tied up, neatly or otherwise, Mr. Dembin --

NATHAN

Since when is that a requirement? Or even a thing to be desired?

CAPELLA

And Dolores is still "on."

NATHAN

For us both.

NATHAN meets CAPELLA's gaze squarely.

NATHAN

A lot of deal-breakers here, aren't there?

CAPELLA

Just no talk radio on the way home.

NATHAN

Just music.

CAPELLA speaks as she walks away.

CAPELLA

I'm glad you saved the rocking chair.

NATHAN follows. Transition with radio/music.

* * * * *

Scene 4

Several days later. NATHAN is in the rocking chair; there is a second chair next to him. CAPELLA walks in, as if coming from somewhere.

NATHAN

Good show today, Ms. Wing.

CAPELLA

Yeah, it was. Why aren't you --

NATHAN

As you can imagine, I am no longer employed by my hackney company, the trip to Vermont off the meter somewhat outside their rules and regs -- they decided not to press charges once I told them of my heartfelt journey --

CAPELLA

You're kidding.

NATHAN

That and the restitution I made to them seemed to solve everything. They won't give me a letter of reference, though, I don't think.

CAPELLA

What are you going to do?

NATHAN

I have some means -- not to worry. But at the moment it gives me time to cross the river to your New Jersey porch and warm this up for you.

NATHAN gets up and offers CAPELLA the rocking chair, which she takes.

NATHAN

Adjustments for customer comfort.

CAPELLA looks at NATHAN closely.

NATHAN

What?

CAPELLA

Will you do me a favor?

NATHAN

I'm in favor of that.

CAPELLA

Will you call me Capella?

NATHAN

I suppose I've earned that.

CAPELLA

And should I call you Nathan or Nate?

NATHAN

Nate would be neat.

CAPELLA

Nate, sit down. Tell me what you liked about the show.

NATHAN sits.

NATHAN

Capella, your little intro about acting upon one's primary impulses was strikingly apt.

CAPELLA

Nate, I want you to tell me all about what you liked about it.

NATHAN leans into CAPELLA.

CAPELLA

You may.

They kiss.

NATHAN

That's just an introduction to my commentary.

CAPELLA

And we sit where the weary be at rest.

NATHAN

Finally.

BLACKOUT

When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

(A One-Act Techno-Pastoral)

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

DESCRIPTION

Liberty Creek is one of a handful of rural "unincorporated territories" not wired for phone service. 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.
- 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.
- ROLLINS FREEMAN: Repairer of vintage stringed instruments; in his 40s, never really out of his 20s.
- 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.

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

At stage right is ARCHIE's radio station. A telephone is on a small table. Other scenes will take place in areas defined by light.

* * * * *

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

ARCHIE

"Gang" --

Pronounced "gong" -- whereupon ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

ARCHIE

-- Wolfgang! -- 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 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.

ARCHIE takes a deep breath.

ARCHIE

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, too.

ARCHIE

And Jonatha, right?

DUAL

And Jonatha --

ARCHIE

Good.

DUAL

-- the Ice Queen --

ARCHIE
(warningly)

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 [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.

* * * * *

Scene 2

Music button from opening section of Manhattan Transfer's version of "Operator." On the table is a cardboard box; everyone stares at it. ARCHIE has a portable tape recorder. HANNAH holds the plug-end of a telephone line. JONATHA slowly takes a phone out of the box and everyone continues to stare at it. Except for JAKE, everyone speaks in something of a hush.

DUAL

(with the awe of the historian)

The first one. The very first one, Jake.

ARCHIE

Found it in my attic.

DUAL

The first one ever.

JAKE

Just like the serpent in the Garden, Alice.

ROLLINS

Archie, how do you even have room for air in your attic!

JAKE

(to everyone)

Could you all leave now?

ARCHIE

Nabbed the device at a flea market.

JAKE

Begone!

ROLLINS

Your attic is, like --

JAKE

Gone be!

ARCHIE

Never had a use for a phone --

ROLLINS

geological --

JAKE

Thank you all for ignoring me in my own house.

ARCHIE

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

ROLLINS

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

ARCHIE

So come unlayer me sometime.

ROLLINS

Couldn't be done.

DUAL

The first one, Jake.

JAKE

My answer to that: give 'em a dime, they'll take your dollar.

ARCHIE

(to HANNAH and JONATHA)

Not too bad, huh?

HANNAH

Does it work?

ARCHIE

Never used it.

HANNAH

How do you know it works?

ARCHIE

I don't.

HANNAH
(to JONATHA)

What if it doesn't --

JAKE

Fine by me.

JONATHA

It will.

JAKE

She commandeth!

HANNAH

Dad!

ARCHIE

Alice Dual -- we have our work to do.

DUAL

Yes.

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

"This is Alice Dual, folks."

DUAL

"Hannah is looking a bit white around the gills as well."

ARCHIE

"Momentous day, momentous day."

DUAL

"It is. It is."

JAKE

All traps should be shut.

JONATHA

Okay, everyone --

But JONATHA does not move, just stares.

ARCHIE

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

JONATHA

Everyone, please -- we don't have much time.

JAKE

She commandeth! Againeth!

JONATHA gestures to HANNAH, who now holds the plug end of a phone line.

JONATHA

Hannah? That plug in your hand -- give it to me -- gently --

JAKE

Too crowded in here.

JONATHA

Gently.

JAKE

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

HANNAH carefully brings the phone line and hands it to JONATHA. 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

(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.

Everyone shushes him.

JAKE

The four horsemen fart by.

Everyone shushes him again. Everyone waits. Then, like a blast, the phone rings.

ARCHIE

It works.

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

JONATHA

Hello? Yes -- this is she.

JAKE

Uses the subject[ive 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!

JONATHA

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

Everyone cheers, dances around, etc. JAKE looks on with disgust, walks up to JONATHA. As he speaks, everyone quiets down to listen and is more or less frozen in place, watching the scene as if it 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 --

JONATHA

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

Overlapping.

ARCHIE

Ooooh --

DUAL

The gall --

ROLLINS

Hey!

HANNAH

Jonatha --

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 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 --

ROLLINS

No downhill brakes, Hannah.

JAKE

What's wrong with a nurse?

HANNAH

Why bring it --

(to ARCHIE, viciously)

Is that off?!

ROLLINS

(loud whisper to ARCHIE)

Do it, bucko.

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"!

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

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 rock 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 rock 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!

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 in memoriam -- 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 DUAL and ARCHIE at the radio station. As DUAL speaks, 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 DUAL and ARCHIE.

ARCHIE
Welcome back to the only radio station powered by "D" batteries. And with me is our town historian, Alice Dual. Though maybe "hysterian" would be more appropriate for today. What a day, huh? Tell us what you saw. The inquiring public of Liberty Creek --

DUAL
Including all thirty-seven registered voters.

ARCHIE
Almost two score inquiring minds -- they want to know.

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

The old guard dog bit!

JAKE begins the slow descent of his stick. People react in slow motion.

DUAL

Anger of God, it felt like.

ARCHIE

Righteous!

DUAL

People dodging hither and zither --

ARCHIE

Thither and yon --

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Try a full nelson on a force of nature!

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Bam!

The phone pieces "fly" through the air.

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

Whatever it was, Jake saw it.

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric OK Corral.

DUAL

But she did move when he came after her --

ARCHIE

Funny, that --

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Head 'em up!

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Touché.

DUAL

But not funny, no --

ARCHIE

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

They laugh.

DUAL

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."

DUAL

As if she were an immigrant.

JAKE

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

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric Ellis Island.

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

"Wreck"-titude.

DUAL

Handed the handset to Hannah.

ARCHIE

Passing the torch.

DUAL

Turned. Opened the door. And went in.

ARCHIE

Under her own pig-head of steam.

DUAL

Noble.

ARCHIE

It's a keeper for the archives.

Lights out -- ARCHIE and DUAL 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 --

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

HANNAH

Jonatha, come on out.

JONATHA, in the bedroom, seethes.

DUAL

Immovable force.

ARCHIE

Irresistible object.

ROLLINS

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

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

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.

ROLLINS

She's locked herself in.

HANNAH

(to JONATHA)

I can unlock the door from out here. You can't stay in my old room --

ROLLINS

No bathroom.

HANNAH

You've got nothing to eat --

ROLLINS

No food.

HANNAH

I'm going to unlock the door --

ROLLINS

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

ARCHIE

(tapping his temple)

A steel trap, Rollins.

DUAL

Jaws of death.

HANNAH

(to JAKE)

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

JAKE

(dismissive)

Fresh out.

HANNA

Jonatha?

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."

* * * * *

Scene 3

ARCHIE

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

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

ARCHIE

"Gang" --

Pronounced "gong" -- whereupon 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."

* * * * *

Scene 4

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.

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 under[stand] --

JAKE

Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

What's going to happen to our green chalkboards?

HANNAH

I don't know.

JAKE

(takes 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.

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 work doing my instrument repair, which means more time to gather manna with Hannah -- that's to the good, hey?

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. There are several beats as 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 lies on the couch and falls asleep.

* * * * *

Scene 5

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 or not. 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 back to the typewriter and continues to write as she munches on something; JAKE listens, then goes back to the couch and lays down.

Lights out; JAKE exits. In the darkness, the typing continues, now done on a tape loop and louder. Interspersed with the typing sound is birdsong, as if at dawn, and a gradually rise of lights as if the sun were rising. As the lights reach a certain point the tape loop fades out and JONATHA's actual typing takes over so that the dawn light discovers her typing. Beside her is a growing pile of paper. Throughout the next scene she continues to type.

* * * * *

Scene 6

Transition music: music button from Jim Croce, "Operator." JAKE enters, HANNAH following, 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. De-festoon. 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?

HANNAH

It's locked.

JAKE

Turn it!

HANNAH

It's unlocked.

JAKE

Open says-a-you.

HANNAH

It's unlocked.

JAKE

Apparently been unlocked.

HANNAH

But I have the key --

JONATHA

A jiggle --

HANNAH

What?

JONATHA
(louder)

A jiggle, a rattle, a righteous toss over the transom --

JAKE

She's been using the loo and the larder.

HANNAH

Have you?

JAKE

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

HANNAH

How do you know?

JAKE

That Jesus rose --

HANNAH

No! About --

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 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

Whoa -- tension is 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. 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. The air, you could say, is thick with anticipation.

JAKE

You could say --

HANNAH

Rollins --

ROLLINS

What?

HANNAH

Nothing.

ROLLINS

Nothing it is.

HANNAH

Dad, you ready?

JAKE

That question always scared me.

ROLLINS

The pumpkin awaits. Miz C, you absolutely sure? Silence is deafening and definite.

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. Agitated, she rises and goes back 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. Still 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 a report of the election; DUAL is sitting beside him. All of this happens as ARCHIE speaks: she comes across the box that holds a sculpture done by JAKE decades ago, along with the photographs of other pieces he had done 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 that press in upon us now. So, here goes: the official tally.

ARCHIE strikes the gong.

DUAL

18 checkmarks for one of the candidates.

ARCHIE

(strikes the gong)

18 checkmarks for the other. 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 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.

* * * * *

Scene 7

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.

JONATHA hands the letter and book of photos to DUAL.

JONATHA

What is this? And these?

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.

* * * * *

Scene 8

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 standing, and he knows what JONATHA has found. He goes to the bedroom and sees the manuscript on the typewriter. He begins reading, and his face is a mixture of laughter and great pain.

JAKE

Oh, 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 be read following the pauses, rushes, and odd syntax -- do not make the reading smooth or adult.

"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 calculations 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 telescope because 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 beleieve 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 heavenly 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. 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.

* * * * *

Scene 9

Music button: Chorus from Steely Dan's "Rikki Don't Lose That Number." A hospital room. Around the bed are seated HANNAH and ROLLINS. 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

Alice Dual. Apparently she wanted to interview, for archival purposes, of course, the ball-breaker who was supposed to be the tie-breaker. What happened?

HANNAH

Looks like the heart -- not hard, but hard enough against an old body.

ROLLINS

The doctors are monitoring.

JONATHA

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

HANNAH

He used the phone.

ROLLINS

He dialed 911.

(to HANNAH)

Should we?

JONATHA

What?

ROLLINS holds up the "Caution" tape, hands it to JONATHA.

HANNAH

When they found him, he had this wrapped around his forehead. "Festoon!"

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

He called 9-1-1.

HANNAH

Satisfied?

JONATHA

Very. My brother's alive.

HANNAH

And so is my father.

ROLLINS

And our friend. 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. Miz C, this little band of me is 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.

ROLLINS exits.

JONATHA

I saw the sculptures.

HANNAH

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. 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

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

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. 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.

JONATHA

All right, I'm sorry.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Then what?

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 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 heaven 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 heaven 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 in the grave. Don't plan to go there soon.

JONATHA

That is a very good idea.

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 so that when she was resurrected she could call people to tell them about it. 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. JAKE closes his eyes again and reaches for JONATHA's hand, finds it.

* * * * *

Scene 10

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

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 them by complete surprise. Rings again.

DUAL

The etiquette, I believe, is to answer it.

ARCHIE picks it up.

DUAL

(whispers)

And to say hello.

ARCHIE

Hello. Radio True Blue. Why, thanks. 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. As it plays, ARCHIE and DUAL dig out their pieces of chalk and hold them up.

BLACKOUT

Melts Into Air

DESCRIPTION

Just ask a middle-aged white male professional how much wiggle room the capitalist regime in a state of high anxiety gives a person who is found superfluous.

CHARACTERS

- DORITT, wife (also SHADOWY CHARACTER 1)
- CHRISTIAN, husband (also SHADOWY CHARACTER 2, POLICE OFFICER)
- ANGEL, son (also plays INTERVIEWER 1, AGENT 1, SHADOWY CHARACTER 3)
- LAUREN, daughter (also plays INTERVIEWER 2, AGENT 2, REPORTER)

SETTING

- A living room.
- A commune
- Hidden places

* * * * *

Scene 1

A living room. DORITT paces. She wears a shawl over her head, like a headscarf. ANGEL enters.

ANGEL

You look like a nun.

DORITT

Glad you could make it.

ANGEL

Why the --

DORITT

So my head doesn't bust out.

ANGEL

Ah.

ANGEL takes some pistachios out of his pocket, cracks them open, eats. He puts the shells back into his pocket. He holds a few out to DORITT in the palm of his hand.

DORITT

Not on this stomach. Why are you eating?

ANGEL

Hungry? No, habit. Life goes on. You shouldn't worry.

ANGEL gestures overhead.

ANGEL

About.

DORITT

Don't tell me such -- nonsense.

ANGEL

You weren't gonna say nonsense.

DORITT mimics his pointing; the pointing changes into a gesture of "up yours." ANGEL sticks both hands into his pockets.

ANGEL

I'm gonna sit down.

DORITT

I'm not.

ANGEL sits. DORITT paces.

ANGEL

Anything? Has there been -- That bad?

DORITT

If I chopped off all your toes, how would you stand up?

ANGEL

Good answer. That's a good answer.

DORITT

There's blood slopped all over the floor up there.

ANGEL

You don't -- not real blood --

DORITT

Depends.

ANGEL

Maybe I should go up --

DORITT

Maybe you should.

ANGEL stands. DORITT paces.

Lights. Transition.

* * *

Scene 2

LAUREN, in full business-suit array, in the living room. DORITT has bandages on her hands.

DORITT

I got distracted. A lot of that going around. If you care to notice.

LAUREN

Angel called me.

DORITT

I was trying to cook -- it's like a make-believe --

LAUREN

Trying something regular. That's you all over. How bad?

DORITT

How bad which?

LAUREN

First, the hands.

DORITT

Won't get stigmata.

LAUREN

That bug you?

DORITT

I grabbed the handles without potholders.

LAUREN

I see. And in the pot?

DORITT

I don't know -- maybe a favorite of his. Like make-believe, I told you.

LAUREN

You said that.

LAUREN points overhead.

LAUREN

Should I?

DORITT

Wouldn't hurt. Wouldn't help.

LAUREN

I can understand -- you don't think I can?

DORITT

I think you're capable of a lot of things. It's --

LAUREN

What?

DORITT

It's like --

LAUREN

Like what?

DORITT

If I macheted off all your toes, how would you stand up?

LAUREN

He's got some fallback saved up.

DORITT

Angel understood what I just said. You talk about fallback.

LAUREN

That's me. And he does. That's why he always saved the way that he did. I just don't see --

DORITT

Seeing is -- I couldn't finish cooking it.

LAUREN

I'll go up. Dad has got to come down.

DORITT

He doesn't think so.

LAUREN

What does he know what he's thinking?

DORITT

I'd forgotten to put in the parsley -- that's why --

LAUREN

Parsley?

DORITT

Maybe fennel?

LAUREN

Try oregano. He likes oregano. You were distracted.

DORITT

There's blood on the floor up there, Lauren.

LAUREN takes DORITT's bandaged hands and kisses each one.

LAUREN

All right, Mom -- it's all right.

DORITT

Yes and no.

LAUREN sits, keeps a hold on DORITT's hands.

Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 3

DORITT (hands unbandaged), ANGEL, LAUREN. DORITT dandles a rosary.

LAUREN

There's a reality to face.

ANGEL

I want to help -- I really do -- it's hard to think of Dad as --

CHRISTIAN stands in the doorway -- shirt, tie, pants, but very disheveled. Barefoot. Toes are red.

CHRISTIAN

Think of him as what?

ANGEL turns, starts to go to him, stops. DORITT stands. She stuffs the rosary beads down the front of her dress; the cross hangs out.

CHRISTIAN

As what is he thought?

ANGEL

Dad -- pistachios?

CHRISTIAN pounds on himself.

CHRISTIAN

This -- garbage a tsunami leaves behind.

ANGEL

You got your ten toes. No blood on the floor it looks like.
Right, Mom?

DORITT

You scared me to death.

CHRISTIAN

I'm not finished.

LAUREN

That's a good spirit --

CHRISTIAN

I said, I'm not finished --

LAUREN

That's what I meant --

ANGEL

Not what he -- right? Finished -- work to be done.

CHRISTIAN

Those bastards --

CHRISTIAN turns and leaves. DORITT goes to follow but doesn't follow.

DORITT

Fifty-five years old --

ANGEL

We've got nothing to offer, right? -- to him, I mean --

Banging -- things falling, breaking, etc.

DORITT

It's not fair --

LAUREN

It doesn't do any good to say things like that --

DORITT grabs LAUREN by her business-suit lapels and shakes her, growling as she does.

DORITT

Arrggghhh!

Then DORITT lets her go and reaches inside LAUREN's coat pocket, pulls out a pen, begins tattooing stigmata on her hands. Banging continues.

Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 4

CHRISTIAN by himself, even more disheveled. Red toes.

CHRISTIAN

The fuckers. How do they expect -- can't walk now --
fucking masters of the universe -- What am I going to do?

CHRISTIAN grabs his feet and rocks back in what would be, in yoga, the Happy Child's pose

CHRISTIAN

What am I going to do? What am I -- what what what what
--

Then he sits up, wild-eyed.

CHRISTIAN

Dynamite for the fuckers, yes, suppository it up their ass --
asses! -- boom! -- tripe festooned, that's what they deserve
for -- downsize, shit! -- shit! -- they murder and no perp
walk, nah-ah, golden parachute, bailout, and the trolls
and dwarves get spit-sucked and sporned and spun-bum-
fucked into superflu[ous] -- superflu[ous] --

CHRISTIAN cries again.

CHRISTIAN

Can't say it, can't say it, can't say --

CHRISTIAN cries until he can't cry anymore. Takes a deep breath, then speaks.

CHRISTIAN

Superfluous.

CHRISTIAN pronounces with even more vigor.

CHRISTIAN

Su. Per. Flu. Ous.

CHRISTIAN stands, falls down because he has no toes, so to speak. Tries again, falls again. Sits. Slaps his right foot first, then his left. He rubs his feet savagely, and the red paint smears all over this feet and hands. He wipes his hands on his clothes until he looks bloodied.

CHRISTIAN stands again. This time he stays up.

Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 5

LAUREN sits at a table, several typed pages in her hand, editing. CHRISTIAN sits as well, his shirt still "bloodied." Feet still red.

LAUREN

Impressive.

CHRISTIAN

Expensive.

LAUREN

You've done a lot.

CHRISTIAN

I've done not nearly enough.

LAUREN

We have to get it down to a page, though.

CHRISTIAN

You would know.

LAUREN

It's tough -- not fair, not always fair to --

CHRISTIAN

You would know.

LAUREN

We can work this out together -- what can we cut?

DORITT enters. She has the bandages back on her hands.

LAUREN

Did you hurt --

DORITT

I just want to wear them.

LAUREN

All right.

DORITT

Of course it's all right --

LAUREN

Of course -- now, Dad, if we shorten --

LAUREN freezes in mid-edit. CHRISTIAN and DORITT momentarily turn into The Hulk or Wrestlemania.

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

Rage. Rage! Raaaaggggeeeee!!!!!!

They turn back to LAUREN, who continues editing.

LAUREN

-- if we shorten this --

CHRISTIAN

Yes, I can see that --

LAUREN

Cut some of the awards and honors --

LAUREN freezes, mid-edit. CHRISTIAN and DORITT -- more rage.

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

Arrrrggghhhh!

They turn back to LAUREN, who continues.

LAUREN

Maybe not all the awards -- hmm -- two lines, with something like "Representative Aw[ards]" --

CHRISTIAN

Whatever you say.

LAUREN strikes things out.

LAUREN

Yes, that will work --

LAUREN freezes, mid-striking out. CHRISTIAN and DORITT again with the rage, but ending in something that looks like they've made a pact to do something unusual and unexpected and perhaps even a trifle dangerous. They turn back to LAUREN.

LAUREN

And here, Dad -- right here -- we can do the same with the publications -- "Represen[tative]" --

CHRISTIAN

Great -- that should work just fine.

LAUREN continues to edit, ad libbing comments to herself. CHRISTIAN rises, moves away. Begins bad kung-fu moves. DORITT does a bad flamenco.

CHRISTIAN

"Résumé" is spelled the same as "resume" --

DORITT

"Curriculum vitae", the course of life --

CHRISTIAN

But, of course, when the fuckers sack you --

DORITT

When the course of life has run its course --

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

What the fuck can you resume?

They switch, he to bad flamenco, she to bad kung-fu.

CHRISTIAN

All that is solid melts into air --

DORITT

-- all that is holy is profaned --

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

"So you say you want a revolution" --

DORITT

-- and man --

CHRISTIAN

-- and woman! --

DORITT

-- is -- are -- at last compelled to face with --

They stop, breathless, facing each other.

CHRISTIAN

-- to face with sober senses --

DORITT

-- their -- real -- conditions -- of -- life --

They breathe together. LAUREN ends here ending with a flourish.

LAUREN

Got it, Dad, reduced it down to one page!

The look of triumph upon her face is painful to see.

Lights. Transition.

* * * * *

Scene 6

LAUREN hands the résumé to INTERVIEWER 1, who takes a seat. DORITT helps CHRISTIAN put on a suitcoat, pats down the lapels, etc.: the wifely touches. CHRISTIAN takes a seat, tucks his feet underneath.

INTERVIEWER 1

Now, this is quite impressive --

CHRISTIAN

Thank you.

Mutters to himself.

CHRISTIAN

Barely half my fucking age, the twat!

INTERVIEWER 1 traces down the page. CHRISTIAN mutters to himself.

INTERVIEWER 1

Uh-huh --

CHRISTIAN

The snot!

INTERVIEWER 1

Uh-huh --

CHRISTIAN

The baboon shit!

INTERVIEWER 1

Good --

CHRISTIAN

The cock-sucking --

INTERVIEWER 1

Nice -- nicely done.

CHRISTIAN

Thank you.

Mutters.

CHRISTIAN

Why am giving you thanks --

INTERVIEWER 1

You're very well qualified.

CHRISTIAN

I've worked hard all my life -- never cheated -- never --

INTERVIEWER 1

Cheated?

CHRISTIAN

What?

INTERVIEWER 1

You're not -- you don't have a criminal record, do you?

CHRISTIAN

What are you talking about?

INTERVIEWER 1

Well, you mentioned "cheated" --

CHRISTIAN

Literal cunt! No, no, nothing in the legal -- I mean the illegal -- sense -- I meant --

INTERVIEWER 1

You meant what?

CHRISTIAN

I meant in the sense of, well, personal integrity -- What would you fucking know [about] -- Yes -- always staying until the job was done, putting in the time I was obligated to give to my employers -- I played by the rules all my life --

INTERVIEWER 1

Ah -- that's good to know -- now --

INTERVIEWER 1 shifts places with INTERVIEWER 2, hands off résumé.

CHRISTIAN

Even when I had my first job -- always there, on time, eager
--

INTERVIEWER 2

Yes, I'm sure --

CHRISTIAN

Worked for --

INTERVIEWER 2

We need to --

CHRISTIAN

-- a dollar an hour --

This catches INTERVIEWER 2.

INTERVIEWER 2

A dollar an hour?

CHRISTIAN

Big money to a fourteen-year old -- fifty hours a week --

INTERVIEWER 2

Wouldn't that -- that must have broken some child labor law
--

CHRISTIAN

Not the point! -- sorry -- you may be right -- but I learned a
lot about self-discipline, self-pride, sticking to --

INTERVIEWER 2

Yes, I can see that --

CHRISTIAN

Forty years I've spent -- doing -- what --

INTERVIEWER 2

As I said --

CHRISTIAN

And yet it can be just -- thrown -- ah, forgive me -- just waxing nostalgic.

INTERVIEWER 2

Waxing?

CHRISTIAN

Not -- hair --

INTERVIEWER 2

Isn't that what the word means?

CHRISTIAN

It has -- other -- meanings --

INTERVIEWER 2

Really?

CHRISTIAN

I just meant thinking about the past -- no, no -- time to think about the future. Which is why I'm here. Yes.

INTERVIEWER 2

I can understand -- I can -- I also have to tell you that the position --

CHRISTIAN

When I first saw it, I thought, "That is a job" --

INTERVIEWER 1 joins INTERVIEWER 2.

INTERVIEWER 1

That position is no longer available.

CHRISTIAN

Oh. Oh.

INTERVIEWER 2

In fact -- I think I can be honest with you -- that position never really existed.

CHRISTIAN

Oh.

INTERVIEWER 2

Yes.

CHRISTIAN

Oh. Then why --

INTERVIEWER 1

To be honest --

CHRISTIAN

Yes, please --

INTERVIEWER 2

Honesty is a good policy, isn't it?

CHRISTIAN

You decide that, I don't --

INTERVIEWER 1

We are trolling for résumés -- seems a propitious time to do that, given the way things are -- yours floated to the top --

Mutters to himself.

CHRISTIAN

Why is a corporation like a cesspool?

INTERVIEWER 2

We all thought it was impressive --

CHRISTIAN

The big chunks float to the top!

INTERVIEWER 1

We wanted to have you in.

CHRISTIAN

I'm just a big chunk.

INTERVIEWER 2

What?

CHRISTIAN

Nothing -- just a -- thought -- do you have anything?

INTERVIEWER 2

We do --

CHRISTIAN

Yes?

INTERVIEWER 1

But not as an actual employed position -- contract work --

CHRISTIAN

Independent contractor.

INTERVIEWER 2

No benefits, of course --

CHRISTIAN

Of course -- those are so old-fashioned now, aren't they?

INTERVIEWER 1

You understand. Lean and mean is the new --

CHRISTIAN raises both hands, fingers pointed like guns, and shoots them both. They die.

Then they all go back to the interview.

CHRISTIAN

"Lean and mean," I hear, is the new black.

INTERVIEWER 2

Would you be interested?

INTERVIEWER 1

Yes?

CHRISTIAN shrugs, chuckles, spreads his hands open -- shucks and jives and buffoons.

INTERVIEWERS exit. DORITT enters. She shows CHRISTIAN the stigmata on her hands: dollar signs. He shows her his feet: still red.

DORITT

Did you get anything?

CHRISTIAN

They offered me the blue-plate shit special.

DORITT

You put in an order?

CHRISTIAN

And I took the free seconds.

DORITT

And a doggie-bag for home.

CHRISTIAN

So I could get a doggie-bag for home -- I didn't know what else to do.

DORITT

That's what you've been farm-raised to do all your life.

CHRISTIAN

All my life --

DORITT

No insult intended.

CHRISTIAN

Work is noble -- none taken -- do the right thing -- all work is dignified -- your life, too, farm-raised.

DORITT

For the slaughterhouse.

CHRISTIAN

Hmm --

DORITT

The bit in my mouth long ago broke my teeth.

CHRISTIAN

Melting into air.

DORITT

And then broke the spirit. Melting into air.

CHRISTIAN

Superfluous.

DORITT

Really, what is --

CHRISTIAN

Has been --

DORITT

-- the fucking point --

CHRISTIAN

-- of it all?

DORITT

At least we still complete each other's sentences.

CHRISTIAN

That is not a comfort.

DORITT

I didn't mean it that way.

CHRISTIAN

Good. I can do their blue-plate shit special work, you know.

DORITT

Of course you can.

CHRISTIAN

Eyes closed.

DORITT

Nose closed. Better that way.

CHRISTIAN

Then I won't have to see --

DORITT

-- smell -- the train wreck you are.

CHRISTIAN

We'll have something coming in.

DORITT

That's what the sanitation engineer says --

CHRISTIAN

-- at the sewage treatment plant.

DORITT & CHRISTIAN

Something coming in.

CHRISTIAN

Big chunks to the top.

CHRISTIAN slumps to the ground.

CHRISTIAN

I really don't know any other way.

DORITT slumps to join him.

CHRISTIAN

I don't know how to play out my life any different. The rules
--

DORITT

Like a chicken bone in the throat.

DORITT goes behind him and starts the Heimlich maneuver.

CHRISTIAN

What are you --

DORITT

Come on, get it out --

CHRISTIAN

Stop -- you'll break --

DORITT

Come on come on come on --

CHRISTIAN

Stop stop stop stop --

But to CHRISTIAN's surprise, he coughs up a chicken bone. He shows it to DORITT. They stare at it.

CHRISTIAN

How long has that been stuck in there?

DORITT smells the bone, scratches it, holds it up to her ear, drops it to the ground -- tests it.

DORITT

My dating process is imperfect, but I'd say since age fourteen at a dollar and hour. To me -- do it to me --

CHRISTIAN gets behind DORITT and does the same, and she coughs up a Barbie-doll head. CHRISTIAN smells it, scratches it, holds it up to his hear, drops it to the ground -- tests it.

CHRISTIAN

My dating process is imperfect, but I'd say since birth.

DORITT

Really, what is the fucking point --

CHRISTIAN

-- of it all? That question comes around again.

DORITT

And again.

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

And again.

CHRISTIAN

I think it's fucking time --

DORITT

-- we answered it.

CHRISTIAN

That time, finishing the sentence was a comfort.

They stand and grind the chicken bone and Barbie-head under their heels.

ANGEL and LAUREN enter.

LAUREN

Look, I know about these things -- this is just a temporary setback --

ANGEL

Let them do --

LAUREN

You don't have a pot to piss in, so just butt out.

ANGEL

This how you act in court?

LAUREN

I use longer words.

ANGEL

Same kind of cutting-edge.

LAUREN

You'll get work --

CHRISTIAN

I was offered work, based on my superbly edited résumé.

LAUREN

So don't dissolve your assets.

CHRISTIAN

It's mucking-out work in a cow barn -- it has as much dignity as a smelly sock.

DORITT

As gangrene. In both feet.

CHRISTIAN

I don't want to do it.

LAUREN

Things will get back to --

ANGEL

Don't slice me up again -- but are you worried about their will?

LAUREN

I am not worried about their will.

ANGEL

You are worried about their will.

LAUREN

I am worried about how my parents are going to --

CHRISTIAN

We told our lawyer to annul the will.

DORITT

We now have changed minds.

LAUREN

You should have asked [me] --

DORITT

Changed minds, I repeat.

CHRISTIAN

There's always been a reason why we haven't had you handle our legal affairs.

ANGEL

Oh, man, this is rich!

LAUREN

You still should have asked me --

ANGEL

The zest of the dispossessed.

LAUREN

Shut up -- okay, okay, so you've annulled the will.

CHRISTIAN

We said we'd get back to him with any changes in that attitude.

ANGEL

Unlikely, right?

DORITT

Unlikely. We now want as many things as possible to be unlikely.

LAUREN

So, then, what are your plans?

ANGEL

Let it go.

LAUREN gestures to cut him off. ANGEL chuckles.

ANGEL

She's drawn blood --

LAUREN

Have you thought through --

DORITT

Our principle is, "All that's solid -- "

CHRISTIAN

"-- melts into air."

LAUREN

What does that even mean?

CHRISTIAN

You should be better read.

DORITT

Watch out for the chicken bone in your throat.

CHRISTIAN

And the Barbie-doll head --

LAUREN

What?

DORITT

We're highly allusional.

LAUREN

You two have just -- I don't know what to say --

ANGEL

Don't say anything for once. I think it's time for you two to go fuck things up a little.

DORITT

Oh, we have plans.

LAUREN

You're still angry -- I can understand that -- but -- this isn't like you, isn't like how you two always thought outside yourself, about what was good for us --

CHRISTIAN

There comes a time when being responsible -- taking pride in being responsible --

DORITT

-- being the good person --

CHRISTIAN

-- will kill you.

DORITT raises up her hand.

DORITT

And that time is --

DORITT drops her hand, like starting the race.

DORITT & CHRISTIAN

Now.

CHRISTIAN

What a comfort.

DORITT makes the sound of racing car engines at the starting line.

DORITT

Vroom vroom vroom vroom --

ANGEL

Yee-haw!

ANGEL gallops around the room while LAUREN fumes. LAUREN exits, chased by ANGEL.

DORITT rises, exits, returns with a bowl of water and a towel.

DORITT kneels and washes CHRISTIAN's feet. CHRISTIAN washes the stigmata off DORITT's hands.

Raucous musical transition to the farm, otherwise known as Pith In The Wind.

* * * * *

Scene 7

Pith In The Wind.

CHRISTIAN and DORITT in overalls, work boots, etc. Sitting on the porch doing something rural. AGENT 1 and AGENT 2 enter, dressed in something not rural and that looks governmental. They look knackered: sweating, wheezing, etc. CHRISTIAN and DORITT ignore them.

AGENT 1

You do not make it easy. It's not easy -- making it up -- that road of yours. Indeed it isn't. I like the sign, though, I do like the sign -- Pith In The Wind.

AGENT 2

Yes -- I thought that was -- great --

AGENT 1

Great name -- funny name -- and -- that upraised middle
finger chainsawed out of the pine stump --

AGENT 2

-- that is unique --

CHRISTIAN

Do you hear some buzzing?

DORITT

No --

CHRISTIAN

No?

DORITT

No.

CHRISTIAN

I do.

DORITT

I meant I'm not hearing anything worth listening to.

CHRISTIAN

Me neither -- but I've got this buzzing butting up against my
tympanum --

DORITT

Just work your little fingertip in there -- probably wax junk --

CHRISTIAN

It is certainly junk coming into my ears at the moment.

CHRISTIAN roots in his ear with his little fingertip, makes as if he's flicking
away something.

CHRISTIAN

Much better -- cleaning out the tubes -- you about ready?

DORITT

I am about ready.

They pick up what they've been working on and exit, leaving the two AGENTS standing there. AGENT 2 pulls out water, swigs, hands it to AGENT 1, who also swigs, after cleaning the bottle's mouth.

AGENT 2

Now what?

AGENT 1

I'm not sure.

AGENT 2

Didn't even get to show them our badges -- damn!

AGENT 1

They know who we are -- or at least what we are --

AGENT 2

Think so?

AGENT 1

Who else would be climbing up here dressed like this on a day like today?

AGENT 2

Lacks the common touch.

AGENT 1

Also lacks common sense.

AGENT 2

There is nothing like public service.

AGENT 1

And then what we've come here to do.

AGENT 2

You don't see the two as the same?

AGENT 1

Read their online stuff?

AGENT 2

In prep, yes.

AGENT 1

And?

AGENT 2

Thought-provoking -- that would be my word for what the two of them have written.

AGENT 1

So how would you answer your own question?

AGENT 2

Have to admit -- at least online, those two are not loons.

AGENT 1

Unlike the people who sent us here.

AGENT 2

I see your point.

AGENT 1

But we have a job.

AGENT 2

And so what now?

AGENT 1

And so we wait -- our timecards are punched.

CHRISTIAN reenters with a tray of glasses and a pitcher of what looks like lemonade. DORITT carries in a small folding table, which she sets down in front of the AGENTS. CHRISTIAN puts down the tray. CHRISTIAN and DORITT sit and wait.

AGENTS look at each other, then AGENT 2 gestures for AGENT 1 to move forward to pour out the lemonade. AGENT 1 moves to do so.

CHRISTIAN

Before you do that --

DORITT

-- show us your badges. Please.

CHRISTIAN

We know how you guys like doing that.

AGENTS pull them out and flip them open. DORITT gestures, and the AGENTS hand them over so that they can be perused.

CHRISTIAN

Pictures like that never do anyone a service.

DORITT

The Bureau of Investigation -- state level, though, right?

AGENT 2

Yes ma'am.

DORITT

Not the big federal honker, not "J. Edgar's joint."

AGENT 2

Hasn't been "J. Edgar's joint" for a long time.

AGENT 1

Yes, state level -- may we have them back? We're parched.

DORITT places them next to the lemonade. AGENT 1 pours the lemonade. They sip.

AGENT 2

That's tart.

AGENT 1

Whew.

DORITT

Cuts the phlegm from walking up the road.

AGENT 2

I like it.

CHRISTIAN

What little sugar in it comes from the beets -- roughly refined, like most things around here. We have different lemonades for different conditions.

DORITT

Some sweeter for when we're in repose.

CHRISTIAN

Some snappier -- like this one -- when you need the power
of citrus to cut through bullshit.

AGENT 1 and AGENT 2 look at each other, look at the glass each holds,
realize that they are drinking the right lemonade for the occasion.

AGENT 1 pours himself a second glass. AGENT 2 just sips the first. No
one is in any hurry.

Finally, AGENTS both finish drinking and put the glasses down. The visit
has to begin at some point, and it might as well begin now.

AGENT 1

Do you know why we're here?

CHRISTIAN

Any idea why?

DORITT

We pay our taxes, and on time.

CHRISTIAN

We sell vegetables and cheese at the farmer's markets.

DORITT

And pay our taxes for that, too. How long do you want us
to go on like this?

CHRISTIAN

No, wait -- I'm getting an image --

AGENT 2

This leg is feeling very pulled.

CHRISTIAN

Aha! That's it.

AGENT 2

Tug and tug --

CHRISTIAN

It can only be about --

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

Words.

CHRISTIAN

Right.

DORITT

Everything else we do fits in its proper place --

CHRISTIAN

So says our lawyer --

DORITT

And accountant --

CHRISTIAN

In them we trust, not God or state.

DORITT

So it must be --

CHRISTIAN

It must be --

DORITT

-- that latest bumper crop of words --

CHRISTIAN

The blogged ones --

DORITT

The facebook'd ones --

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

The twittered ones --

DORITT

That brought the twits to us -- present company excluded,
of course, since you don't control your means of production.

CHRISTIAN

Now, why do you start out with a question like that -- "do you know why?" -- just gets you into trouble because we are not going to play that banter with you.

DORITT

"What's your beeswax?" is the point, so pour it out.

AGENT 2

Go on -- my leg is thoroughly pulled.

AGENT 1

Well, we've been sent here --

CHRISTIAN

Don't use the passive voice -- Right?

DORITT

Right.

CHRISTIAN

By whom, then?

AGENT 1

By the Secretary of State --

CHRISTIAN

Who is now a colonial governor, isn't he, of the Department of Homeland Security -- might this visit have something to do with the DHS?

AGENT 2

We can't say --

DORITT

Because you can't say or because --

AGENT 2

We don't know --

AGENT 1 makes a gesture.

AGENT 2

Well, we don't -- seems a little late to try playing our cards close to the vest.

CHRISTIAN

That lemonade'll do that to you.

AGENT 1

We -- this is beginning to sound more than a little --

CHRISTIAN

Stupid?

AGENT 1

Awkward -- we're here because of a threat you made.

AGENT 2

C'mon, full disclosure --

AGENT 1

Go ahead.

AGENT 2

A "terrorist threat" is how it was put to us.

AGENT 1

Sent in an email. From you.

CHRISTIAN

To whom?

AGENT 2

The Secretary of State.

CHRISTIAN

Never wasted an email on him. You?

DORITT

Wouldn't spend the electricity on such a weasel.

CHRISTIAN

Know why she called him a weasel?

AGENT 2

We are not supposed to engage in political discussions.

CHRISTIAN

You definitely need more of this lemonade.

AGENT 2

We're fine.

CHRISTIAN

Should we bring out the truth-telling snickerdoodles?

AGENT 1

Really, you shouldn't --

DORITT

The heavy guns, I see -- if you must --

CHRISTIAN

You can come in with me --

AGENT 1

Sir --

CHRISTIAN

-- if you want -- we only have weapons of mass confection in here. You coming?

AGENT 2

No, go ahead.

CHRISTIAN exits.

AGENT 2

Come on.

AGENT 1

This is not how we should be going about this.

AGENT 2

You want to macho it up?

DORITT

I can appreciate your dilemma.

AGENT 1

It's not a dilemma.

DORITT

Fool's errand on a warm day -- and all you're going to get is lemonade and cookies for your trouble.

CHRISTIAN comes back with a plate of cookies.

CHRISTIAN

You underestimate them, dearest chuck, underestimate the bounty of this situation for them.

DORITT

Word inflation index -- you're hitting a bit on the high side.

CHRISTIAN

Here -- one bite, and you will want to drop all pretense to official objectivity and tell us the complete truth of why you have traipsed your way here.

AGENTS look at each other, then AGENT 2 takes a cookie and eats it, looks as if she's tasted heaven.

DORITT

Cardamom -- a touch of it --

AGENT 2

May I?

DORITT gestures. AGENT 2 takes a second cookie.

AGENT 2

You don't take one now, you are not going to get any at all.

AGENT 1 takes a cookie, has the same reaction but tries to hide it.

AGENT 1

They're, um, um, they're quite good.

CHRISTIAN

All right, the game's afoot -- what's all this about a terrorist threat in an email we never sent to His Weaselship?

AGENT 1

May I --

DORITT

Go right ahead.

AGENT 2

See?

AGENT 1

We never saw the actual email.

AGENT 2

We were told about it but never shown it.

AGENT 1

However -- the blog --

AGENT 2

Which quite a few people read --

AGENT 1

Where you do say some things.

CHRISTIAN

Some "things."

AGENT 1

About many topics in general -- about the Secretary specifically --

AGENT 2

We were told --

CHRISTIAN

She told you not to use the passive voice --

DORITT

Bad bad habit -- bad bad habit --

AGENT 2

The Secretary's election coördinator --

DORITT

Much better --

AGENT 2

Mr. Fleisch told us --

AGENT 1

That it was time to bite back.

DORITT

They complete each other's sentences.

CHRISTIAN

Fleisch said that?

AGENT 2

I tell you, this lemonade and these cookies just do a person in.

DORITT

You two are not going to rise high in the ranks, are you?

CHRISTIAN

Should we get them chairs?

DORITT

They are going to need all the help they can get.

CHRISTIAN exits.

DORITT

Have you come to arrest us? I won't go gently. Pow pow.

CHRISTIAN reënters with two wooden folding chairs, hands them to AGENTS, who sit.

CHRISTIAN

If you thought coming up here was hard --

AGENT 1

No, we're not here to arrest you.

AGENT 2

We're just investigating --

CHRISTIAN

Such a euphemism -- we're past the preliminary rounds, now that you've been fed and watered. What is this "threat" we've been accused of launching against the Fleisch Man?

DORITT

Which is the name of a margarine, I believe.

CHRISTIAN

Which is nothing more than a slab of congealed oil. A perfect description.

AGENT 2

Well --

AGENT 1

You made a historical reference.

AGENT 2

In one of the blogs.

AGENT 1

That the Secretary took as --

AGENT 1 sighs, as if what he is about to say is silly.

AGENT 1

As directed at him.

DORITT and CHRISTIAN don't say anything. For what feels like a long time. Which is all right by them.

CHRISTIAN

Nice to know the corn is growing even as nothing seems to be breaking ground here.

AGENT 2

All right -- someone has to take this bull by the tail and face the situation --

At this, DORITT breaks out a guffaw.

DORITT

Well, I like that one -- I'm adding it to my list -- just think of it -- lift the bull's tail -- and there is Fleisch Man's face facing you -- all crusted around with --

CHRISTIAN

This may be a moment where we have to take our thugs seriously -- even though they aren't wearing jackboots --

DORITT

Oh, all right. But still --

And she breaks into laughter again.

DORITT

You lift up the tail -- and there it is, the situation -- all right, all right -- please continue, for my husband's benefit.

CHRISTIAN

What was this historical incident?

AGENT 2

You referred to something called "The Battle of Johnson's Ford" --

DORITT

Sounds automotive to me.

CHRISTIAN

You know about this.

DORITT

Of course I know about it -- you refer to it like it's a weather report -- the fascist front storming across the land --

CHRISTIAN

Please --

DORITT

This lemonade is working very well today.

CHRISTIAN

He took the Battle of Johnson's Ford as a personal threat?

AGENT 2

Yes. He did.

CHRISTIAN

And you two have read about it?

AGENT 1

In our preparation, yes.

CHRISTIAN

Tell me -- tell us -- what you think.

AGENT 1

That depends.

CHRISTIAN

This matter at hand. Why you're here. Homeland Security's threat-level assessment -- is Level Orange enough, too strong, too weak, not the right tint? The connection of snickerdoodles to truth-telling, of lemonade to history. We have so much on our plate. Go on.

AGENT 2

Well, I'm going to venture to lift the tail. Is that all right?

AGENT 1

Let's pretend we haven't lost complete control of this situation and that we are actually "investigating," as we were told to do. So --

AGENT 2

You like the story of Johnson's Ford because it lines up with what you've written about what you consider recent corrupt elections --

CHRISTIAN

Not "consider" corrupt at all -- are corrupt --

AGENT 2

The electronic voting machines --

CHRISTIAN

I call them Trojan horses --

AGENT 2

The supposed irregularities --

CHRISTIAN

Not "supposed," proved -- by me and others --

AGENT 2

I'm going to stick with "supposed" because I wasn't there and I didn't do the crime scene work, so to speak --

CHRISTIAN

I'll get you the proof --

DORITT puts a hand on his arm, pats him, smiles.

DORITT

Let it go.

CHRISTIAN sits back down.

AGENT 2

The point is, you feel passionate about the issue of election fraud.

CHRISTIAN

If you want to talk about lifting the bull's tail and facing a situation, you should look into what the Secretary and Fleisch Man have done to wreck what is the one of the few things a citizen can do to stop a government from sucking out --

CHRISTIAN hears himself, laughs.

CHRISTIAN

If your tongue gets long enough, you'll soon have a noose around your neck. The soap box was starting to rise, wasn't it?

DORITT nods.

CHRISTIAN

I think -- I think that we have said enough to you. After all, you are not our friends, no matter how much you like the cookies.

DORITT

So you're going to give up on them?

CHRISTIAN

After all, they are the fuzz, aren't they? Le flic?

DORITT

Do you ever consider anybody not educable? He never does -- he thinks anyone can learn anything -- haven't you always said --

CHRISTIAN

Even shit --

DORITT

-- even shit --

CHRISTIAN & DORITT

Can be shaped.

DORITT

I have never had that kind of faith in people. But he's daft that way.

CHRISTIAN

But still, I think it's prudent if --

AGENT 1

My grandfather --

CHRISTIAN

You're not going to tell me he fought at Johnson's Ford.

AGENT 1

He fought at Johnson's Ford.

CHRISTIAN

Is he still --

AGENT 1

He died a while ago.

CHRISTIAN

Ah. Well. Damn -- I would've liked to talk with him.

AGENT 1

He would've thought the two of you were weird. He may have fought against the sheriffs then, but -- he was pretty set in some other ways.

CHRISTIAN

He ever tell you why he did it?

AGENT 1

Yes.

CHRISTIAN

So you know it's a great story -- ex-World War II GI's taking the ballot boxes and guarding them from the sheriffs so they couldn't stuff them --

AGENT 1

And you would advocate doing the same today.

CHRISTIAN

Is that a comment or a question?

AGENT 1

Both.

CHRISTIAN

And you?

AGENT 2

It's one thing to blog it -- not very expensive to do that -- but what would push it past the words -- maybe even the words themselves could do that --

AGENT 1

What did you mean -- no, what did you intend -- when you brought the Battle of Johnson's Ford into your argument?

AGENT 2

You did put it squarely next to calling the Secretary a, quote, "shit."

AGENT 1

What did you intend by the reference? What kinds of action did you mean to -- encourage? Permit?

AGENT 2

Maybe the Secretary has a point.

AGENT 1

Or else why bring up the reference at all if that's not the point you wanted to make?

CHRISTIAN

You are both very sly. This is how it begins.

DORITT

You do have a choice.

CHRISTIAN

Maybe -- maybe not -- your investigation is over. I don't know what you'll report, but I don't care.

AGENT 1

You're not a threat.

AGENT 2

That will be the essence.

CHRISTIAN

No, I know -- we know -- what the real threat is.

CHRISTIAN stands. DORITT stands. AGENTS stand.

AGENT 2

It's been a pleasure.

AGENT 2 looks at the plate of cookies but doesn't say anything. DORITT gathers up the remaining cookies and hands them to AGENT 2. They exit.

CHRISTIAN

I feel -- I feel like the bottom's just gone out of everything.
Suddenly just not safe.

DORITT

We don't know that.

CHRISTIAN

Can't you feel the wedge digging into--

DORITT

We'll write about this --

CHRISTIAN

Yes -- yes --

DORITT

Walk loudly and carry a big mouth --

CHRISTIAN

But -- but -- I feel like I just lost my toes again --

DORITT

I have to admit --

CHRISTIAN

What?

DORITT

I felt the sting in the palms of my hands.

CHRISTIAN

I can't do -- that -- again --

DORITT

We don't have to do anything but what we're already doing.
We don't.

But CHRISTIAN curls in upon himself and says nothing. DORITT sits and looks at CHRISTIAN. Raucous musical transition to The Forge.

* * *

Scene 8

The Forge -- a basement somewhere. Fluorescent lights, maybe computer and electronic equipment -- maybe not. Maybe more like mimeo machines and a letterpress -- something old. Whatever is there, it's a mess. ANGEL is cutting out something with scissors that looks like thought bubbles from full-sheet label paper. LAUREN enters in full lawyer regalia, with briefcase. ANGEL keeps cutting but is not pleased to see her.

ANGEL
Shit.

LAUREN
I heard that.

ANGEL
Sorry.

LAUREN
Well? Christ.

ANGEL
He's not here.

LAUREN picks up one or two of the thought bubbles.

LAUREN
I've seen these. Around. Everywhere.

ANGEL
You're supposed to.

LAUREN
He speaks a fourth time.

LAUREN throws the bubbles back on the table, looks around.

LAUREN
If I can find you, anyone can find you.

ANGEL

We're not hiding out. Exactly.

LAUREN

The Grid. You. Not connected. I know.

ANGEL

I think that's a good thing, about the grid.

LAUREN

It's what they want you to think.

ANGEL

I think my own thinking myself.

LAUREN

Will you put the scissors down? Please.

ANGEL finishes one more cut, then puts down the scissors.

LAUREN

All this is not a good thing.

ANGEL

About the grid. Dad says it is. Mom says it is.

LAUREN

She always agrees with what he says --

ANGEL

Not always --

LAUREN

-- no matter how crazy --

ANGEL

That's not true. She has her own -- You should leave.

LAUREN

Aren't you glad to see me?

ANGEL

Don't. Say that.

ANGEL hesitates, then he gets up and gives LAUREN an authentic embrace, which she returns. ANGEL sits back down.

ANGEL

Now you should go.

LAUREN

Can't -- spent way too much --

ANGEL

They didn't ask you to.

LAUREN

Everyone can use a good lawyer.

ANGEL

I wouldn't say that around Dad or Mom not the way they don't trust the court system--

LAUREN

I'm just kidding --

ANGEL

-- or the law they would rather, you know, make some sort of stand --

LAUREN

I'm just kidding, Angel --

ANGEL

-- after what happened on the farm than --

LAUREN

Tell me what happened --

ANGEL

-- not authorized to say but they bring away from that what they're doing here --

LAUREN

Which is what --

ANGEL

-- and will not appreciate anything said that tags them as giving up or giving in or part of the trog -- troglodytic system that pisses down their socks and makes it necessary for simple dignity to do things undignified like --

LAUREN

Like what?

ANGEL

I've said enough.

LAUREN

No you haven't.

ANGEL

Doesn't matter.

LAUREN

What has happened to you? You speak as if -- ou speak as if you're afraid to take a breath, like you're running out of time.

ANGEL

You should leave.

LAUREN

Where's the Angel that insults me? Who doesn't care a fig for the work I did?

ANGEL

You should [go] --

LAUREN

Who just disappeared on me? All of you just disappeared on me.

ANGEL

Not disappeared. Got out.

LAUREN

To do this.

ANGEL

To do this.

LAUREN

Don't you want to know why I'm here?

CHRISTIAN enters carrying a courier pouch full of colorful postcards and cradles fliers in his arm. From his belt -- a gear belt of sorts -- hangs a roll of duct-tape, a roll of masking tape, a cutting knife, scissors, a pouch full of markers, a water bottle, and anything else the director wants to add. DORITT enters from another part of the building.

ANGEL

Mexican stand-off.

LAUREN

I found you.

DORITT

It's not hard.

LAUREN

It wasn't that easy. By the time I got to the farm --

CHRISTIAN

The farm is dead.

LAUREN

Thanks for telling me -- I had to find out --

CHRISTIAN

You never seemed interested, interested as you were in your own "work" --

LAUREN

The anarcho-syndicalist experiment in the hills of Tennessee -- who wouldn't be captivated by --

ANGEL

You shouldn't badmouth --

LAUREN

When did you go to be with them?

ANGEL

Those last few months when the pressure got heavy and helped them move --

LAUREN

Why is he talking like that, like he can't afford to take a breath --

DORITT

Time is short, breath gets short.

LAUREN

You mean, like the end is near?

CHRISTIAN

The end is already here -- in process -- most just don't know it. He knows it.

LAUREN

How did you know where they were?

DORITT

We kept in touch with him.

LAUREN

But not me.

DORITT

No, not you.

ANGEL

Not you.

DORITT

You made it clear you didn't need it.

CHRISTIAN

And why are you here now? Don't look for thanks, by the way.

LAUREN

I just --

ANGEL

She said "everyone can use a good lawyer."

LAUREN

That was a joke.

ANGEL

I told her not to say that around you.

CHRISTIAN

He's right.

LAUREN, distraught, picks up one of the bubbles.

LAUREN

Can you -- tell me -- what this is all --

ANGEL takes one of the larger bubbles, grabs a black magic marker, and pens something on it, then holds the pointed end near LAUREN's temple. LAUREN snaps it out of his hands, reads it. Smirks. Throws it on the table.

DORITT

It's an alternate narrative.

LAUREN

"Desperately seeking purpose" --

ANGEL

Did I hit it?

LAUREN

It's not funny.

ANGEL

But did I --

LAUREN

This is what you're spending the end-times on --

CHRISTIAN

Stenciling is next -

LAUREN

You paste these up --

LAUREN, grabbing something solid, slams it on the table. This gets their attention.

LAUREN

Why are you ignoring me?

DORITT

Why should we welcome you?

LAUREN

I'm not an enemy.

CHRISTIAN

Do you know anything about anything that happened to us?

LAUREN hauls out a thick binder, slamming it on the table.

LAUREN

I even interviewed those two agents who visited you.

DORITT

They were pleasant to be around until they weren't pleasant at all.

LAUREN

I told them that your daughter had died -- does that get a rise? -- okay -- I told them I was the lawyer handling her estate -- needed to find the next of kin --

DORITT and CHRISTIAN leaf through the binder -- clippings, photos, documents, etc.

DORITT

They turned out to be real bastards.

LAUREN

I know how you were hounded, I know how they trumped things up to drive you out --

ANGEL

Our tax dollars at work.

LAUREN

They weren't such bastards -- they gave me a last known address after you left -- your last bank transaction --

CHRISTIAN

We don't deal with banks any more --

LAUREN

That little snippet gave me a clue, which led to another clue -- and so on --

ANGEL

All pro bono.

DORITT

So why are you here?

CHRISTIAN

Why should we trust you?

LAUREN

Would you all mind sitting or at least stop looking like you're going to bolt out the door to do the next important whatever that you're doing to keep the end times at bay?

LAUREN points at ANGEL.

LAUREN

Now I'm talking like him! This suit? The shoes? The briefcase? My underwear? All expensive. At a level to fit my exalted station in life as an officer of the court.

ANGEL

On the corporate side. Well, you are.

LAUREN

As of four hours from now --

LAUREN holds up the watch.

LAUREN

Expensive -- that will not matter because I will no longer have a job. The firm got indicted for some -- improprieties -- I was the juniorest of the junior partners -- and I didn't see until it was too late to see that they had drafted me as the fall guy -- the fall gal -- without consulting me, of course -- someone made sure that enough evidence pointed my way -- I admitted to anything to save my expensively underwared ass -- including disbarment -- so -- so.

CHRISTIAN

So you're superfluous?

LAUREN

Would seem so. Actually, always was -- just didn't know it. Thought I would search out my own kind and, maybe, join up with them.

No one speaks for the moment.

LAUREN

I'm not going anywhere, if that's what you're thinking. So -- what are you guys doing?

CHRISTIAN

This one's called the bubble project.

ANGEL

We stick these on posters bus stop ads --

DORITT

Anything with a person advertising something --

CHRISTIAN

Some product of some sort --

DORITT

Some piece of capitalist poison --

CHRISTIAN

Some religious claptrap --

ANGEL

And people can write in what they want to think want to say rather than absorb the crap the company or church or whatever wants them to think like one we have a photo of where a bubble coming out of God's mouth says "What country would Jesus bomb?"

LAUREN

There are dozens of bubbles [here] --

ANGEL

A lot of people have a lot to say and there are a lot of places where people can have a chance to say it --

LAUREN picks up the bubble that ANGEL had written for her and holds it up next to her temple.

LAUREN

I am not "desperately seeking" -- just seeking. May I?

ANGEL

I already did it you have to do it.

First CHRISTIAN embraces LAUREN, then DORITT.

LAUREN

I promise never to reduce anything of yours again.

DORITT

Ah, well, but we do live in reduced circumstances.

CHRISTIAN

But much happier for it.

LAUREN

So, other than bubbles, what're you guys up to?

ANGEL

Culture jamming!

DORITT

We work on the assumption that every joke is a tiny revolution.

CHRISTIAN

Every true delight is a rebellion.

ANGEL

We call ourselves the "No Men" --

CHRISTIAN

To rhyme, sort of, with Gnomon --

DORITT

The ancient Greek word meaning "indicator" --

CHRISTIAN

One who discerns.

ANGEL

Saying "no" as a way to say "yes" to life.

DORITT

And so we culture-jam away. One hundred fake landmines
in the park to make people think twice about what it's like to
walk on land that will kill you --

ANGEL

Made from painted Frisbees.

CHRISTIAN

Shopdropping.

DORITT

Fake labels on food to let people know where it comes from
and what it really does to you --

LAUREN

We also do fake barcodes on products that come up with
words like "laugh" instead of the price.

DORITT holds up her hands -- on the palms have been tattoo'd bar codes.
ANGEL gets the portable bar code reader, scans one, hands the reader to
LAUREN, who reads the results and breaks into a really hearty laugh.

DORITT

You like?

LAUREN

I like.

ANGEL

Mud stencils on the sidewalk -- washes off harms no property sticks in people's minds like the ones we did near the McDonald's restaurants -- "Fat Zone" --

DORITT

And "Substance Abuse" near liquor stores in poor neighborhoods --

CHRISTIAN

Bus schedules that look like schedules but list out statistics that are meant to make you double- and triple-think -- paste 'em up at bus stops.

ANGEL

Fake blowcards in magazines --

DORITT

We got a million of 'em!

LAUREN

But you don't use the Internet.

DORITT

Won't use it.

CHRISTIAN

Like leaving all the doors and windows unlocked and saying "come in and fuck me over."

LAUREN

I can understand why you wouldn't after what they did but --

CHRISTIAN

Low-tech --

DORITT

Old school --

ANGEL

I've tried to sell them on the opposite point but no good --

CHRISTIAN

Why send the demons an engraved invitation to come -- what?

LAUREN

"Old school" is -- well, no one goes to old school anymore, Mom. Like printing a book with a hand-driven letterpress -- no longer the way to get out the word -- hardly have books anymore, now they're "e-books" and people can port them along in their phones -- the revolution is ones and zeros. How do you know that anything you do has any impact whatsoever, changes a single mind or a single beating heart?

CHRISTIAN

We have had --

LAUREN

I mean on a scale, Dad, a make-a-difference scale --

ANGEL

They don't. We don't, really --

LAUREN

The revolution is televised, Dad, and on screens these days the size of postage stamps. People are already amusing themselves to death in our end times, so why not cut in and at least get them to amuse themselves into something less toxic? "Every little joke is a revolution" I've heard tell. What do you know?

ANGEL

I know a lot.

LAUREN

So do I. The only way they didn't nail me completely was because I had enough techie background to show them that not all of their lies could stick. You willing?

DORITT and CHRISTIAN look at each other. Together they make the Wrestlemania/Hulk anger moves they had done earlier, but this time at a lower volume and with some irony.

DORITT & CHRISTIAN

Aaaarrrrgggghhhhh!

They both sit. They look tired.

CHRISTIAN

As much as I want to believe it -- I don't know if any of this --

DORITT

Hits home with anyone -- we just want to make a dent in the insanity --

CHRISTIAN

But the insanity doesn't dent easily --

DORITT

And it's got a lot more money than we do --

CHRISTIAN

Maybe -- maybe we're not crazy enough anymore for this line of work --

DORITT

Not loony enough! Now isn't that a kick in the pants!

LAUREN and ANGEL look at each other and do their own Wrestlemania/Hulk anger moves, but louder and with much less irony.

ANGEL & LAUREN

Aaaarrrrgggghhhhh!

LAUREN

You two sound so old!

ANGEL

Old school! Old school!

DORITT

Old fools.

LAUREN

Old drools! You old farts -- it's a new world you have to brave -- it'll be fun --

ANGEL

Twitter tweeting retweeting flash mobs I have a flash mob idea lots of flash mob ideas texting --

ANGEL mimes frantically texting.

ANGEL

Come to Grand Central come to Columbus Circle come to Times Square be prepared to -- I have this idea for a giant pillow fight and a silent disco dance people all listen to the same song on their players and hundreds of people coming to a complete stop in Port Authority while everyone else is flying by --

LAUREN

Make people do shit they like, they'll give you their ears --

DORITT and CHRISTIAN look at each other, then nod.

DORITT

That's for you two to work on.

CHRISTIAN

We have something else to do -- to be honest, I can't stand the frivolousness of the whole enterprise --

DORITT

Have to say, neither can I --

CHRISTIAN

-- of tying into the idea that light-heartedness will somehow morph into reason and purpose.

DORITT

We're old school to be sure.

CHRISTIAN

Enjoy the disco dance.

ANGEL

Wait!

CHRISTIAN

Yes?

DORITT

We under arrest?

ANGEL

You don't give up you've put us all through too much to go and give up what're you going to go do start a foundation expect people to be rational influence the power people with facts no one loves facts anymore until you convince them to remember why they're important you've got to break the crust that that how we live has baked onto people this crust that's like a a a mask a tomb the only thing that breaks through is disco I mean being silly enough to stop being so egotistical and expecting the world to be just one big mashup of things that're supposed to entertain you and keep you from being bored to death with your own life it's too bad but if you don't get them to laugh first then they'll bail on you because they're selfish like babies not bad in their hearts just babies kept in baby-mode by the same things that put them inside that crust --

LAUREN

Take a breath.

ANGEL

Breath I'm done. You're staying.

CHRISTIAN

But what's next?

DORITT

Because I don't see it clearly. I see the need but not the way --

CHRISTIAN

I'm not sure I even see the need. You all don't have to look at me like I just vomited on your shoes -- I don't --

DORITT

That smells defeatist --

CHRISTIAN

Well, look, really -- flash mobs? Retweets? Viral video? Cultural memes? The Facebook like?

LAUREN

You don't have to make it sound so vapid --

CHRISTIAN

This is what we would offer in the face of what just happened economically? We come the closest to financial collapse since Herbert Hoover, and what do "the people" do? Do they take to the streets? Do they rise up and demand? Tar and feather the bankers? Do they do anything that makes their leaders fearful?

LAUREN

There's "Occupy."

CHRISTIAN

For four well-meant months. And we're going to bring them back even more with entertainment? Back to what? The American mind is a mosh pit of impulses going in four different directions five different ways -- Thanks. Welcome back to the fold. I don't think I'm crazy enough for this anymore. I don't think I'm going to become crazy enough again --

CHRISTIAN hesitates, grabs his courier bag, then leaves.

DORITT

Don't --

LAUREN

Should we do something? I feel like this is my fault --

ANGEL

You should --

LAUREN

Brought in the snake --

ANGEL

You did --

DORITT

It's not your fault. He's been feeling like this for a while.

ANGEL

No he hasn't --

DORITT

When we had to give up the land -- it worried at him terribly. Something cut out from under him -- he had nightmares about his toes again --

LAUREN

It was, maybe, time for him to --

ANGEL

To what?

LAUREN

Reassess -- it happens, Angel.

ANGEL

And "retire"?

LAUREN

Don't snarl.

DORITT

I wouldn't've minded it, if that's what he'd wanted to do -- not like we got a nest egg --

LAUREN

She's tired, Angel.

ANGEL backs away from them both.

ANGEL

I'll go -- I have to -- I'll go trail him -- make sure that --

LAUREN

Go.

ANGEL

-- he's okay -- damn -- damn --

ANGEL leaves. They sit there, silent.

DORITT

A fool.

LAUREN

Don't.

DORITT

If you care too much you'll get broken --

LAUREN

Could the two of you do it any other way?

DORITT

You got screwed, didn't you?

LAUREN

My own fault -- I wanted to play in the big playground --

DORITT

I -- just -- don't -- know --

LAUREN

That's the craziness of living how we do -- it takes everything out of you and doesn't give you a hell of a lot back.

DORITT

It's not like there's not enough to do.

LAUREN

More than enough.

DORITT

Maybe -- maybe -- it's meant to be done somewhere else -- this place is a lost cause, really, can't think straight, can't see straight, chasing ghosts, eating its young -- your father's right, if after the money meltdown the people who screwed us get rewarded and the people who got screwed get re-screwed --

LAUREN

I know, I know, but --

DORITT

But what? But what?

LAUREN

I don't know. Just trying to find some comfort for you.

DORITT

False comfort is no comfort. A stranger in my own land
-- sick at heart.

ANGEL comes running in, breathless and ashen.

ANGEL

It's not good it's not good it's not good it's not good --

DORITT

What?

ANGEL

It's not good it's not good it's not good it's not good --

DORITT

What??

But ANGEL runs back out. DORITT and LAUREN rush after him. Silence descends.

* * *

Scene 9

ANGEL is in half-shadow. In deeper shadow is REPORTER.

ANGEL

You can write you can record I don't care. It took me a long time.

REPORTER

It took me a long time too --

ANGEL

I had good teachers.

REPORTER

I mean, to track you down --

ANGEL

I had good teachers. It took me a long time --

There is a catch in ANGEL's throat; he recovers.

ANGEL

Hmmm hmmm hmmm -- it took me a long time to bring together the video and the pictures and the testimonies --

REPORTER

Hundreds of people there that day --

ANGEL

Not just that but also from the security cameras --

REPORTER

The police, you know, have questions about how you --

ANGEL

I had friends -- have friends -- there are resisters out there --

REPORTER

The "hacktivists" --

ANGEL

Just like you people to have a term for them -- and others, not just them -- stupid name anyway --

REPORTER

And then you released the video.

ANGEL

My father was not going to go down forgotten --

REPORTER

And the hackers' attacks against --

ANGEL

That wasn't my idea but I don't disagree with it --

REPORTER

Big names, big companies, government agencies --

ANGEL

None of them should think they can't be touched --

REPORTER

Angel --

ANGEL

None of them --

REPORTER

Why do you think your father did what he did?

ANGEL does not answer.

REPORTER

I'm sorry, I -- but I have to --

ANGEL

I wish he hadn't done it naked -- but I'm not sorry he did it --

REPORTER

So why --

ANGEL

Because he was heartbroken --

REPORTER

That's what your video said, but, still, it's not like he didn't have choices --

ANGEL

When your heart breaks, your choices go away.

REPORTER

And what would so break a man's heart that he would disco dance naked and then --

ANGEL

I don't want to talk about it. The video is all anyone needs. It's out there, free to you, free to anyone --

REPORTER

But, and I'm sorry for staying with this, but what's a person supposed to learn from a man who sets himself on fire? In the middle of a crowd of tourists? How would that change anything? How could that --

ANGEL is too heartbroken to say anything.

REPORTER

I do have to say, though -- no disrespect, but it got people's attention.

ANGEL

Thought bubbles everywhere.

REPORTER

What?

ANGEL

Nothing.

REPORTER

What do you make of all the --

ANGEL

People found sympathy, something to sympathize with, about their own broken hearts --

REPORTER

You think so?

ANGEL

I have to.

REPORTER

And the tee-shirts and hats and the copy-cat stuff and the new laws cracking down on --

ANGEL

Nobody can control anything out there, once it's gone it's gone it's free --

REPORTER

And that's what your father would've wanted, really, in the end -- a tee-shirt --

ANGEL

I can't breathe -- I'm sorry -- you have to go --

REPORTER

One last question --

ANGEL

Go -- you have to go -- I have to go I have to go I have to go --

Two SHADOWY CHARACTERS enter. ANGEL turns, terrified.

REPORTER

Sorry -- sorry, Angel -- had to give you up -- these days, Patriot Act, national security --

ANGEL goes to run, but the SHADOWY CHARACTERS restrain him.

REPORTER

So, my last question -- can you not, you know, hold him so tight so that he can answer? --

But the SHADOWY CHARACTERS hold on to ANGEL very very tightly until he doesn't struggle anymore.

REPORTER

You --

SHADOWY CHARACTERS let ANGEL slump to the floor.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

Like father, like son --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

In the service of an ideal --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

Admirable.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

Useless.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

That, too.

REPORTER

You --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

Unless, of course, it's service in one of our wars.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

Four in progress, as of today.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

Still useless, but it will be honored --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

More or less --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

And not forgotten quite so quickly.

REPORTER

You --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

Yes?

REPORTER

Nothing.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

Good. Did you get what you needed?

REPORTER

I --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

She got what she got, which will equal what she needed since there won't be any follow-up.

REPORTER

Are you going to remove --

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

We don't do the clean-up.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

This is for the 24-hour news cycle.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

Attraction and distraction -- the police are on their way. You should leave.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 1

You have a deadline, I suppose -- do they even do that anymore in your declining world of journalism?

REPORTER

Yes.

SHADOWY CHARACTER 2

So go and meet it.

SHADOWY CHARACTERS leave. REPORTER kneels over ANGEL's body. ANGEL convulses; REPORTER falls back in terror. ANGEL lies still.

Police sirens in the distance. REPORTER leaves. Moments pass, then POLICE OFFICER enters, a machete in his right hand. He walks to ANGEL's body, arranges it for the beheading, places the machete blade on ANGEL's neck, then raises it to chop.

Lights cut to black. Raucous background sounds of a prison.

* * * * *

Scene 10

DORITT stands at a table, dressed as if to go to court. On the table is a wrapped cardboard box, just large enough to hold a head, bound by string.

Behind her stands LAUREN in business dress, briefcase in hand.

LAUREN

Mom, you can open it later -- we have to get to the hearing

--

Instead, DORITT starts tugging at the string. She does not see or hear SHADOWY CHARACTER 2 and SHADOWY CHARACTER 3 come in and abduct LAUREN.

Alone, DORITT pulls the string off the box, unwraps the paper, opens the box, looks inside, looks at the audience in panic.

DORITT

All we wanted was a chance an opportunity to makes some sort of --

Lights bump to black and cut her off.

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also looks to collaborate with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers

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