

When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

(A Techno-Pastoral)

by

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

DESCRIPTION

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

CHARACTERS

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

SETTING

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

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

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

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PROLOGUE

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

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

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

ARCHIE: "Gang" --

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

ARCHIE: -- Vulfgang! -- broadcasting to you from my trusty lounger, Barca.

ARCHIE barks several times.

ARCHIE: 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.

ARCHIE cranes his neck.

ARCHIE: Weather: we have some out there, and from where I sit, I confidently predict it will continue for the entirety of this program -- and even beyond. Also, Liberty Creek Week is fast flying towards us, our annual tribute to us from us -- and this year we will celebrate the historic coming of the phones to our fair hamlet, thanks to Hannah and Jonatha

Caldwell -- the coming of which I would say is a quite a sea-change for us even though we're land-locked in the mountains.

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

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

ARCHIE bangs the gong.

ARCHIE: 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, and Shang and Trini, too.

ARCHIE: And Jonatha, right?

DUAL: And Jonatha --

ARCHIE: Good.

DUAL: -- the Ice Queen --

ARCHIE: Be objective, Alice --

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

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

DUAL: Pith and vinegar.

ARCHIE: Like that "lithp."

ARCHIE gives her an affectionate look.

ARCHIE: Whew, Alice Dual!

DUAL: Whew, Archie McFee.

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

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

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

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

ARCHIE: Folks, I am definitely going into "wayback woo-woo" -- seems like a good time to reverb [pronounced REE-verb] the dire and dramatic and delightful drama of when the phones came to Liberty Creek.

DUAL: I hope Jake is not listening.

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

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

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

DUAL: *(reluctantly)* On the day --

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

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

ARCHIE: After all of this --

DUAL: -- not a rump found itself resting --

ARCHIE: Ants in their pants -- bees in their BVDs --

ARCHIE smiles and gives her a thumbs-up.

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

ARCHIE: Yes?

DUAL: A restless rump --

ARCHIE: Yes?

DUAL: Can be a dangerous thing, indeed.

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

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

ARCHIE: Even after all these years --

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

ARCHIE puts a tender hand on her shoulder.

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

DUAL: Woo-woo.

Lights out.

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ACT I, Scene 1: The House of Caldwell

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

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

ARCHIE: Found that in my attic.

DUAL: The first one ever.

JAKE: Just like the serpent in the Garden, Alice.

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

JAKE: *(to everyone)* You can leave now.

ARCHIE: Nabbed the device at a flea market.

JAKE: Begone!

ROLLINS: Your attic is, like --

JAKE: Gone be!

ROLLINS: -- like --

ARCHIE: Never had a use for a phone --

ROLLINS: geological --

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

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

TRINI: *(to JAKE)* Being pissed keeps you young.

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

ARCHIE: So come unlayer me sometime, guitar-fixer.

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

TRINI: And getting younger by the minute.

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

HANNAH: Does it work?

ARCHIE: It's brand-new.

HANNAH: But does it work?

ARCHIE: Never used it.

HANNAH: How do you know it works?

ARCHIE: I don't.

ROLLINS: (*sotto voce*) Good work, Archie.

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

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

JAKE: Fine by me.

JONATHA: It'll work.

JAKE: She commandeth!

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

ROLLINS: It'll work, Hannah.

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

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

ROLLINS: No.

ARCHIE: (*to JASON*) You ready?

JASON: Ready, radio-meister.

ROLLINS: (*a little louder*) Suck-up.

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

ARCHIE: Alice Dual --

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

TRINI: Over soon.

JAKE: That's what you think.

ARCHIE: Stand here and let the finger of Clio amuse us all. (*color commentary*) "And we are recording live from the home of Jake and Jonatha Caldwell -- "

JAKE: House is in my name, not hers.

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

DUAL: "And, Archie -- "

ARCHIE: "Alice Dual, folks."

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

ARCHIE: "Momentous day."

DUAL: "Yes, it is."

JAKE: All traps should be shut.

ARCHIE: *(covering the microphone)* Getting the purple prose?

JASON: The ink runneth over.

JONATHA: Okay, everyone --

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

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

HANNAH: Jonatha?

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

TRINI: Jake --

HANNAH: Dad --

ROLLINS: They don't do Santeria in Trinidad.

HANNAH: Trini has never done Santeria -- *(back to JONATHA)* -- you okay?

TRINI: I have never done Santeria --

JAKE: Probably can't spell it.

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

HANNAH: Jonatha?

ROLLINS: *(to TRINI)* Mr. C, tough guy.

TRINI: A teddy bear. *(to JAKE)* I'm as Lutheran as you, old coot.

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

TRINI: *(island lilt)* But here I is, Jake.

TRININ takes JAKE by the arm.

TRINI: We be a multicultural couple!

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

JAKE: She commandeth! Againeth!

JONATHA gestures to SHANG.

JONATHA: Shang?

SHANG: Yes, Jonatha?

JONATHA: That plug in your hand --

TRINI: Yes?

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

ROLLINS points at the plug-end.

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

JAKE: Too crowded in here.

JONATHA: Hand it to me that gently.

JAKE: *(to TRINI)* It's not the heat -- it's the humanity.

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

SHANG carefully brings her the phone line.

JONATHA: Thank you, Shang.

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

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

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

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

JONATHA gets ready to insert the plug.

ARCHIE: *(into the microphone)* "There's a pause -- the phone plug clutched in Jonatha's fingers."

DUAL: "Moment of connection here. But wait!"

ARCHIE: "She hands it off to Hannah – "

DUAL: "Too nervous to make the connection herself."

ARCHIE: "Hannah takes a deep starting-line breath."

ROLLINS puts a gentle hand on HANNAH's shoulder.

ROLLINS: *(sotto voce)* Go, girl.

DUAL: "Hannah plugs it in."

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

JAKE: The seventh seal is off --

TRINI shushes him.

JAKE: The four horsemen fart by --

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

ARCHIE: It works.

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

JONATHA: Hello? Yes -- this is she.

JAKE: Uses the objective case --

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

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

JAKE: I didn't vote for you!

JONATHA gets back on the line.

JONATHA: Yes, this is historic.

JAKE: Won't ever vote for you.

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

JAKE: Rather vote Communist --

JONATHA: And thank you for all your support in this.

JAKE: Let the corruption begin!

JONATHA: No, no, just noisy in the background here.

JAKE: See, it's already started!

TRINI: Jake.

JAKE: Go chop a chicken.

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

Everyone cheers, dances around, etc.

ROLLINS: Ready, guys?

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

ROLLINS, ET. AL.: Hello! ma baby, Hello! ma honey, Hello! ma ragtime gal. / Send me a kiss by wire, / baby my heart's on fire! / If you refuse me, Honey, you'll lose me, then you'll be left alone; / Oh baby, telephone and tell me I'm your own. ["Hello, Ma Baby," Words and Music by Ida Emerson and Joseph E. Howard -- <http://www.rienzihills.com/SING/hello.htm>]

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

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

JONATHA: I have, brother of mine.

JAKE: Oh, but you haven't. *(to all of them)* You're all going to lose! You're all going to be losers!

HANNAH: Dad --

ROLLINS: Mr. C --

TRINI: Jake --

JONATHA: 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!

JAKE points his stick at the phone.

JAKE: The world's corruption will now ooze into your homes because of that! You want to be connected, online, 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!

JAKE points at them.

JAKE: 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 --

JAKE indicates the phone.

JAKE: -- that is the millstone to drown you in your own desires.

JONATHA: Just a dried-up old Jeremiah.

HANNAH moves toward JONATHA, but JAKE waves her off.

JAKE: A sybaritic disgusting bag of bones.

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

JONATHA: You're still jealous --

HANNAH: (*to ARCHIE*) Now!

JONATHA: -- because I went to New York.

JAKE: Jealous of a deserter?

HANNAH: Christ, not this!

JONATHA: Forty years gnawing my bones --

JAKE: A. De. Ser. Ter!

JONATHA: An escapee!

JAKE: Who left me to clean up everything --

JONATHA: Who so loved a mess --

JAKE: -- so she could pursue her gift --

JONATHA: That's right!

JAKE: Brilliant painter unequalled!

JONATHA: I had a life to make.

JAKE: Unmade everyone to make it.

HANNAH: This is old news --

JONATHA: Farm wife, schoolmarm, nurse --

ARCHIE: No downhill brakes, Hannah.

JAKE: What's wrong with a nurse?

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

ARCHIE: It's off!

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

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

JAKE: Always brighter!

JONATHA: Broader --

JAKE: Badder --

JONATHA: Bigger --

JAKE: Head to match!

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

JAKE: "Damned" was right!

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

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

JONATHA: Like that rod up your butt?

HANNAH: Jonatha --

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

JONATHA: You know nothing about anything of my life!

JAKE: I know you're a coward.

HANNAH makes "T" with her hands.

HANNAH: Time out!

They ignore her.

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

HANNAH: Time out!

They ignore her.

JAKE: Born wise --

HANNAH: This is old news --

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

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

ROLLINS: (*to HANNAH*) You gotta let 'em.

JONATHA: (*interrupting*) At least I tried --

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

JONATHA: Never wanted.

JAKE: No home --

JONATHA: Not desired.

JAKE: Nothing solid --

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

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

JONATHA: You like the stone on your chest --

JAKE: Nothing to lay your hands on and say, “This will last.”

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

HANNAH: Jonatha!

ROLLINS: Whoa, Jonatha!

JAKE: Leave Hannah out of --

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

ROLLINS: Miz C --

DUAL: Jonatha, that’s really out of line --

JONATHA: And naming the daughter -- what a stroke!

JAKE: They are exempt --

ROLLINS: Miz C -- that’s not --

JONATHA: Shut up! *(to JAKE)* Exempt? Why? Why, why, why?

JONATHA looks at them all.

JONATHA: 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.

JONATHA points at the phone.

JONATHA: 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: 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.

JAKE points to the phone with his stick.

JAKE: The snake. The snake must be scotched.

JONATHA: The reasoning of a relic.

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

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

JASON: Happy to make you happy, Archie.

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

JASON: All thirty-eight registered voters.

ARCHIE: They want to know.

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

ARCHIE: The old guard dog bit!

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

JAKE begins the slow descent of his stick.

JASON: Anger of God, it felt like.

ARCHIE: Righteous!

JASON: People dodging hither and zither --

ARCHIE: Thither and yon --

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

ARCHIE: Try a full nelson on a force of nature!

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

ARCHIE: Bam!

The phone pieces "fly" through the air.

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

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

JASON: Whatever it was, Jake saw it.

ARCHIE: Like a geriatric OK Corral.

JASON: But she did move when he came after her --

ARCHIE: Funny, that --

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

ARCHIE: Head 'em up!

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

ARCHIE: Touché.

JASON: But not funny, no --

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

They laugh.

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

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

JASON: Like she was an immigrant.

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

ARCHIE: Like a geriatric Ellis Island.

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

ARCHIE: "Wreck"-titude.

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

ARCHIE: Passing the torch.

JASON: Turned. Opened the door. And went in.

ARCHIE: Under her own pig-head of steam.

JASON: Noble.

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

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

HANNAH: Christ! Dad --

ARCHIE: (to JASON) Human interest galore, hey?

JASON: At least no gore galore.

HANNAH: Dad --

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

HANNAH: Jonatha, come on out.

JONATHA, in the bedroom, seethes.

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

TRINI: Jake, say something --

SHANG: Ooh, this makes me sad --

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

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

SHANG: I think it's so sad.

TRINI: *(to ROLLINS)* Feels Biblical to me.

ROLLINS: That, too, Trinidadio.

TRINI: *(to SHANG)* I think it's sad, too.

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

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

JASON: She's locked herself in.

ROLLINS: Yow.

JASON: And only we -- *(to HANNAH)* -- you -- can unlock her out.

ROLLINS: Twist of fate.

JASON: Practical problems here.

HANNAH: *(to JONATHA)* You can't stay in my old room --

SHANG: No bathroom.

HANNAH: You've got nothing to eat --

TRINI: No food.

HANNAH: I'm going to unlock the door --

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

ARCHIE: Mind's a steel trap, Rollins.

DUAL: Jaws of death.

HANNAH: *(to JAKE)* Tell her to come out. Tell her you're sorry.

TRINI: Jake --

JAKE: Fresh out.

HANNAH: You know you didn't mean it, Dad.

TRINI: Jake -- she's your sister.

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

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

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

JONATHA: Rather eat June bugs.

HANNAH: (*quietly*) You know you didn't mean it, Dad. I know you. I know you love her. Come on.

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

HANNAH: Boy, are we all connected now!

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

* * * * *

ACT I, Scene 2: The Election

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

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

ARCHIE: -- "Gang" --

ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

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

ARCHIE barks several times.

ARCHIE: 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."

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ACT I, Scene 3: Caution

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

JAKE: Give it to me.

TRINI: No.

JAKE: I'll pout.

TRINI: You're already doing that.

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

TRINI: What are you going to do with this?

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

TRINI: (*emphasizing*) What are you doing to do with --

JAKE: Wrap it around myself and dance naked in the moonlight.

TRINI: Now that is an ugly thought.

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

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

JAKE: Give it back --

TRINI: Or at least in the ballpark --

JAKE: I've got to rehearse my dance.

TRINI: Something --

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

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

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

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

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

TRINI: Wait.

JAKE: What now?

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

JAKE: What are you doing?

TRINI: Sshh! I must have quiet to pray.

JAKE: Jerk the leg with the bells on it.

TRINI: Sshh! To Olodumare --

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

TRINI: Sshh! *(stage whisper)* San-te-ri-a --

JAKE: I never meant --

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

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

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

JAKE: What did you just say?

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

TRINI hands him the tape.

JAKE: My soul should be afraid of me. Go.

TRINI turns on the truck, puts it in gear.

TRINI: *(in the voice of the Big Bopper)* "Ah, baby, that's a-what I like."

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

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ACT I, Scene 4: Window Dressing

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

SHANG: Jonatha! Jonatha!

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

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

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

JONATHA: Where's Jake?

SHANG: He went with Trini somewhere.

SHANG opens the backpack.

SHANG: Look --

JONATHA: What's everybody doing?

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

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

SHANG: A care package!

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

JONATHA: (*disgusted*) Inquiring minds want to know. Archie McFee. Ahh-ooo! Stupid man. Just wanted to make things easier for people, Shang.

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

JONATHA touches SHANG gently.

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

SHANG: Of course it is --

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

SHANG: No one hates you!

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

SHANG: You did it because you had a good heart!

JONATHA: Shang --

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

JONATHA: Hannah probably hates me now most of all.

SHANG: Naw!

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

SHANG: Tools for survival, hey?

SHANG pulls out a bed pan.

SHANG: And this to go with it.

Toilet paper.

SHANG: Some munchies.

SHANG pulls out a bottle.

SHANG: Water. The pastels you gave me when you tried to teach me to draw. And, of course, ginseng -- all natural ginseng candy. No sugar! Two hundred milligrams of panax ginseng per chew, along with honey, butter, dried milk powder and algin -- not sure what that is. One hundred and forty-four of 'em -- not that you'll need them all. This is just to tide you over, you know.

JONATHA picks up the bedpan.

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

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

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

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

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

-

SHANG: You can't!

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

JONATHA hands the backpack to SHANG.

JONATHA: Thanks, my angel -- but no thanks.

SHANG touches JONATHA gently.

JONATHA: Hey, it's not a funeral.

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

SHANG moves to the window, prepares to climb out.

JONATHA: Hey!

SHANG: What?

JONATHA: All right -- give me one of the candies.

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

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

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

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

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

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ACT I, Scene 5: The House of Rollins

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

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

ROLLINS: My number is busy.

ROLLINS hangs up.

ROLLINS: Amazing.

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

JASON: Front door was open.

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

JASON: I thought we were supposed to do the promo now.

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

JASON: It's just that Archie --

ROLLINS: They'll be here.

JASON: O-kay.

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

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

ROLLINS: We doing small-talk now?

JASON: Inquiring minds want to know.

ROLLINS: Is that what's under your hat?

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

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

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

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

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

TRINI: I don't understand why you're --

SHANG: (to JASON and ROLLINS) Do you know what this loghead did to me?

TRINI: It's not to you --

SHANG: (to JASON) You'll like this. Henry Thoreau Toussaint, a.k.a. "island Trini-boy" --

TRINI: (to JASON) That is not my name, or my nickname, or --

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

JASON: I know. And now you're not. (to TRINI) The only Lutheran logger in the state from Trinidad is now in the race.

TRINI: (unconvincing) My civic duty.

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

ROLLINS: (to SHANG and TRINI) Beware the barracuda -- he's living off our backs.

SHANG: (to TRINI) I just can't believe --

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

ROLLINS: Hannah --

No response.

ROLLINS: Hannah --

No response.

JASON: Why don't you just let her engine idle?

ROLLINS: And who are you to tell me --

JASON: Hannah has her own rhythms.

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

JASON: You should spend that kind of time knowing her.

ROLLINS: And you have?

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

JASON: It's you who wanted the promo, Rollins.

SHANG: (indicating HANNAH) Rollins --

ROLLINS: (getting the cue) Hannah -- they're going to be all right.

SHANG: Right as rain.

TRINI: Yeah.

ROLLINS: Just being stubborn --

TRINI: Like they've always been stubborn.

SHANG: They could give lessons to a mule.

ROLLINS: Yeah.

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

ROLLINS: Well, yeah, there was that.

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

TRINI: And that, too.

HANNAH does a mock righteousness pose, a parody of JAKE. JASON tugs on his ear lobe.

JASON: Sounds like -- brimstone.

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

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

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

ROLLINS: Bladders -- yeah!

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

HANNAH: They got thimbles.

ROLLINS: Bang those thimbles! Pride falleth before pee! Now, that's a good face!

HANNAH: Rollins --Rollins, Rollins --

HANNAH goes to touch him but doesn't; to them all.

HANNAH: You What scared me the most?

ROLLINS: Tell on.

HANNAH: I had this -- vision pass in front of me, you know, when he was standing like this and she's, you know, like that -- that they would both drop dead at that moment with all that -- that -- whatever carved into their faces. And that's how their thousands of days on this earth would get remembered. Not raising me when Mama passed away, not how they opened to me when David died -- that people would not remember their long arc of life -- just some stupid moment of stupid pride -- end up a joke on one of Archie's "woo-woo's" with Dual. The essentials -- pfft! -- lost --

TRINI: We will all remember everything, Hannah.

HANNAH: We special few, huh?

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

ROLLINS: *(with a side glance at JASON)* Yeah, no one's life should end up in a joke. And it won't happen, not with us around. Hannah, you don't have to do the gig tonight.

HANNAH: I am going to do the gig tonight, Rollins.

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

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

JASON: Speaking of which -- Archie needs the promo.

ROLLINS: You up for it?

HANNAH nods yes.

ROLLINS: *(to JASON)* Okay, journalista, got that thing ready?

JASON: Promo for Rollins Shiva Tut ready to roll.

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

HANNAH: Pitch us, will you?

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

HANNAH: *(to ROLLINS)* That was cool.

TRINI: Pushing us -- good.

ROLLINS: Just comes.

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

HANNAH: Sweat and fretboard shavings.

ROLLINS: Liberty Creek aphrodisiac.

JASON hands the tape to ROLLINS.

JASON: Nice work, Rollins.

ROLLINS: Big city weighs in.

JASON mockingly tips his hat.

ROLLINS: And when did you say you were going back?

JASON: Some human interest stuff to finish up --

ROLLINS: Humid interest --

HANNAH: And I think I need to go.

ROLLINS: I'll walk you.

HANNAH: No.

HANNAH points to the tape.

HANNAH: For the "gig," remember?

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

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

TRINI: It's not just that.

ROLLINS: What?

SHANG: *(bristle)* Archie's interviewing the candidates in the now suddenly two-person race.

TRINI: Constitutional right --

SHANG: The tape?

ROLLINS hands it off.

ROLLINS: *(to HANNAH)* The walk.

HANNAH: Alone.

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

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

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

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

ROLLINS: So I can wear a funny hat?

SHANG: *(exasperated)* Man --

SHANG exits -- the bell tingles.

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

TRINI exits -- the bell tingles.

HANNAH: Think it'll work out between them?

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

HANNAH: One of them surely knows.

ROLLINS: There's something between them?

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

ROLLINS: Well --

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

ROLLINS: *(to JASON)* You notice this, too?

JASON: A big-city thing.

ROLLINS: *(to HANNAH)* Really?

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

JASON: Even a recount, maybe.

ROLLINS: I have no idea what to count anymore.

HANNAH: See you tonight.

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

ROLLINS: You won't get her.

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

ROLLINS: There's been an understanding.

JASON: I understand --

ROLLINS: We go back a long way.

JASON: But time moves forward.

ROLLINS: Maybe I should get a hat like you.

JASON: It'll take more than a hat.

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

JASON: I like this one just fine.

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

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ACT I, Scene 6: The Interview

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

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

ARCHIE: -- "Gang" --

ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

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

ARCHIE barks several times.

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

ARCHIE points to TRINI.

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

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

ARCHIE: Trinidad and Tabasco, right?

TRINI: Tobago.

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

TRINI: You're right about that.

ARCHIE: And on stereo left --

ARCHIE points to SHANG.

ARCHIE: -- is Shang -- I've never known you by any other name -- who makes her way in the world as a "shang" hunter.

SHANG: That's right.

ARCHIE: What's "shang," Shang?

SHANG: Wild ginseng.

ARCHIE: Ginshang -- shang-a-lang -- the stuff that makes your --

ARCHIE makes a hand gesture of an erection.

ARCHIE: -- well, this is a family show -- but does it?

SHANG: For some people.

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

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

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

TRINI: Me, too.

SHANG: And that we get a new school bus stop.

TRINI: Sign me up for that one.

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

TRINI: Great idea, that!

SHANG: And if elected, I pledge to --

TRINI: Me, too!

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

SHANG: Well, I was thinking about --

TRINI: So was I!

ARCHIE sniffs the air.

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

Bangs the gong. As lights go down, SHANG glares at TRINI and TRINI, smitten with SHANG, looks back sheepishly. Transition music: Big Bopper or Jerry Lee Lewis, "Chantilly Lace" or Paul Anka, "Kissin' On The Phone."

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ACT I, Scene 7: The Siege

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

HANNAH: Dad, you can't --

JAKE looks at her.

HANNAH: Well, you shouldn't.

JAKE: Counseling me?

HANNAH: No --

JAKE: Good.

HANNAH: -- but you shouldn't.

JAKE goes back to the taping.

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

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

HANNAH: "Even absurdity has a champion to defend it."

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

HANNAH: Right.

JAKE: Do I tell you how to keep your house?

HANNAH: No.

JAKE: No. Have I ever?

HANNAH: Never.

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

HANNAH: She's not some foreigner.

JAKE: Your aunt was always some foreigner.

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

HANNAH: Dad -- Dad --

JAKE: What?

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

JAKE: Décor clash? 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: 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: I don't understand --

JAKE: Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH: What?

JAKE: What's going to happen to our green chalkboards?

HANNAH: I don't know.

JAKE takes a piece of chalk out of his pocket.

JAKE: 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 his chalk.

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

JAKE points to the bedroom.

JAKE: 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.

JAKE: -- "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." 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: (*hesitant, respectful*) 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.

ROLLINS points to the tape.

ROLLINS: What's up, Mr. C?

JAKE and HANNAH refuse to speak.

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

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

HANNAH: Let's go, Rollins.

ROLLINS: I already know that, Mr. C.

HANNAH: Let's go!

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

JAKE: Not while we got the journalist in the chicken coop.

ROLLINS: Working on that.

JAKE: More tolerant man than I am.

ROLLINS: Wouldn't be hard, Mr. C.

HANNAH: Are you two finished?

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

HANNAH: You just missed the latest brimstone!

JAKE: Do you have your chalk?

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

JAKE: What are you going to do with it?

ROLLINS: I don't know.

JAKE: Chuck it, because now it's just garbage.

HANNAH: He thinks we'll never visit again.

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

JAKE: A little ragged?

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

JAKE: From the no-brainer.

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

ROLLINS shows his chalk.

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

JAKE: *(to HANNAH)* Put him up to this?

ROLLINS: Flo can get more of her tofu to town -- especially the garlic! Ron and Polly can check on their patients -- and with a phone they could do that insurance claim gig at home they want to do. Ray can juggle those fourteen hundred jobs he has -- and when the kids go away to college, they can all call mom and dad for more money! With that line, man, we are now in this century, all connected to all! I don't mean to disrespect, Mr. C, but the fact is, you lost. And it's going to stay lost for you because it's just better this way.

ROLLINS holds out his hand, chalk in his palm.

ROLLINS: 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 --

ROLLINS points to the tape.

ROLLINS: -- clashes with everything else.

Before she leaves, HANNAH gives JAKE a kiss.

HANNAH: You are so poetic.

ROLLINS: And it's only the middle of the afternoon.

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

JAKES bangs his stick three times.

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

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

JAKE: "Everything is good for something."

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

JAKE painfully lays down on the couch and falls asleep.

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ACT I, Scene 8: The Gig

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

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

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

ROLLINS: So be afraid, be very afraid -- you have entered a different time and dimension. You have entered -- "The Telephone Zone." [This song is done to the tune of "Feed Me Jesus."]

First Verse

Ringin', ringin', ringin', ringin' -- phones are everywhere
Chirpin' in the bathrooms -- breep, breep in your underwear
Cell phone, mobile, wireless -- there's a calling plan for you
Bounce your words off satellites from here to Katmandu

Refrain A

Buzz me, beep me, ping me, zing me -- free minutes by the score
So why can't we communicate much better than before?
Seems its part of human nature, deep in our protein
No matter the technology, we can't say what we mean

Second Verse

Surgically implanted headsets -- just what people want
Palm Pilots sewn into our palms -- you'll be so au courant
Fully wired while attired, looking "fly" and looking "phat"
But when we're asked to tell the truth, we all go, "What is that?"

Refrain A: Repeat

Third Verse (slower)

So let's take a breath -- breathe deep -- exhale -- let your eyes go Zen
Breathe once more -- once more -- once more -- and then once more again
You're on the verge of cosmic truth, you can hear Nirvana sing --
And then it all goes straight to (fart noise) when the friggin' pager rings!

Refrain B

Buzzed out, beeped out, pinged out, zinged out -- can't take it anymore
Let's conversate "f-to-f" like we used to do before
I'd really like to talk with you, hear what you have to say

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

End of song. The four bow.

ROLLINS: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you.

JASON comes over and hugs HANNAH.

JASON: That was great!

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

ROLLINS: Thank you for your support, big-city dude.

JASON: It was good, Rollins.

ROLLINS continues to shake JASON's hand.

ROLLINS: I wrote it.

JASON: I know you did.

HANNAH: Rollins --

JASON: You can let the hand go.

SHANG: *(to TRINI)* Time for a split.

TRINI: Agreed.

SHANG: Beverages!

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

HANNAH: Let go of his hand.

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

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

ROLLINS holds JASON at arm's length.

ROLLINS: *(in mock-admiration)* Now -- you can leave!

HANNAH: Rollins -- stop acting like a prick.

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

JASON: What is your problem?

ROLLINS lets JASON go.

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

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

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

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

ROLLINS: Tell him to book, Hannah.

HANNAH says nothing.

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

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

JASON: Is he always so --

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

JASON: Give me your hand. The offer still stands.

HANNAH: I can't leave.

JASON: Yet. Jake and Jonatha will work it out.

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

JASON: You couldn't.

HANNAH: Me, there --

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

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

JASON: Like Rollins --

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

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

JASON busts a dance move.

JASON: Not so bad, am I?

HANNAH: (*not nasty*) Except for the hat.

JASON: Promise to change it inside the city limits.

JASON holds up his hat, as if at an auction.

JASON: Going once, going twice -- are we gone?

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

TRINI: Man, I knew this was coming.

SHANG: Plain as the sun in daytime.

TRINI: Plain as the moon at night.

SHANG: I thought Rollins was going to pop him.

TRINI: Should have.

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

TRINI: They have been together since dirt, Shang --

SHANG: So what?

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

SHANG: And that means -- she owes?

TRINI: Time I politely steer this conversation --

SHANG: Wait -- she owes?

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

SHANG: Answer me -- she owes him?

TRINI hesitates.

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

TRINI: I just think her heart --

SHANG: And I just never believed you would believe in oppression!

TRINI: Oppression!

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

TRINI: Was thinking more about --

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

TRINI: That's it! You broke the promise --

SHANG: You brought up politics!

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

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

TRINI: I did not "pop off" --

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

TRINI: That's not true --

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

TRINI: I did not!

SHANG makes a Tarzan noise.

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

SHANG: Take me -- I'm Jane.

TRINI: That's not why!

SHANG gives him a fake Chinese bow.

SHANG: Happy to submit, master!

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

SHANG: Then why, wood man? Why?

TRINI: Can we talk somewhere else --

SHANG: Can't answer, can you?

TRINI: I'm trying --

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

TRINI dejectedly holds up his hands.

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

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

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

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

SHANG: I'm talking 'bout these twisted --

ALL: Lines, lines.

SHANG: Getting all these mixed up --

ALL: Signs, signs.

HANNAH: Left side of mouth goes --

ALL: You're just fine.

HANNAH: Right side of mouth goes --

ALL: You're asinine --

JASON: Knots and tangles and cramps and sighs --

ROLLINS: Lies on lies on lies on lies --

TRINI: A half-look here --

SHANG: There, a look away --

HANNAH: Never saying what we want --

JASON: Never meaning what we say --

SHANG: A life in subtitles.

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

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ACT I, Scene 9: The Choice

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

JONATHA: Jake, how could you be so cruel?

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

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

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

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

You'll never be as good as me.

Yes, I will

No, you won't.

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

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

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

JONATHA: Damn!

JONATHA goes over to the door. Cautiously she opens it and sneaks through the web of caution tape. She tip-toes out of sight -- there are opening door sounds, the toilet seat being put down, a pause, a huge sigh, and the flush of a toilet. She comes

back into view and goes to the kitchen, gathers what food she can quietly. All this time she is eyeing JAKE.

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

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

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

Lights out.

INTERMISSION

Throughout the intermission, a sound loop of a manual typewriter at work.

ACT II, Scene 1

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

Lights up on ARCHIE and DUAL at the radio station.

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

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

ARCHIE: -- "Gang" --

ARCHIE strikes the tinny gong.

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

ARCHIE bangs the gong.

ARCHIE: Report, oh logorrhoeic one.

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

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

DUAL: Operatic to the kind of max that Jonatha loves.

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

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

ARCHIE: *(hushing her)* Alice! *(radio voice)* And how many days now?

DUAL: Been three -- going on eternity.

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

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

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

DUAL: Maybe it all just feels at home in --

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

DUAL: Even cast-iron rusts, Archie.

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

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

ARCHIE: Any historical predictions?

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

ARCHIE: (*exasperated*) Anything else?

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

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

DUAL: I'd also like to say --

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

DUAL: I second and third that.

ARCHIE: 10-4.

DUAL: 24-7

TOGETHER: Three-sixty-five.

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

ARCHIE: You could try to hide it a little.

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

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

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

ARCHIE: "A silent mouth is melodious."

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

ARCHIE: Hmmm.

DUAL: "Hmmm" yourself.

Lights out. JONATHA continues to type.

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ACT II, Scene 2

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

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

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

JONATHA: *(without stopping)* Fine.

HANNAH: *(to JONATHA)* What are you typing? *(to JAKE)* What's she typing?

JAKE: I'm not privy.

HANNAH: What are you typing?

JONATHA: *(loudly)* My last will and testament.

JAKE: Need a sound mind and body for that.

HANNAH goes to the door but does not touch it.

HANNAH: What are you doing?

JONATHA: It's my magnum opus.

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

HANNAH: Aren't you hungry?

JONATHA: Nope.

HANNAH: Don't you have to, like --

JAKE: Go ahead, say it.

HANNAH: -- evacuate?

JONATHA: Cast-iron bladder.

HANNAH: It's been three days.

JONATHA: Just like Christ.

JAKE: He disappeared. No such luck --

HANNAH: Dad --

JONATHA: I shall be always with ye.

JAKE: As with a liver fluke.

HANNAH: You sure --

JONATHA: Nothing, thank you!

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

JAKE: I was just fine till you brought that.

HANNAH: That's not going away.

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

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

HANNAH: Meaning --

JAKE: You've both forced me to 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 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 --

HANNAH makes a gesture.

HANNAH: -- 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 --

HANNAH lays a hand over her heart.

HANNAH: -- my aunt the artist from the world! And I always thought I could be the --

HANNAH makes a gesture of linking.

HANNAH: -- 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 -- 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: Hey, Mr. C. (*shouting*) Hey, Miz C. (*a bit confused*) You're all in the bedroom.

JAKE: Ever the steel trap, Rollins.

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

By this time ROLLINS is at the bedroom door.

ROLLINS: Hey, Hannah.

No one responds. ROLLINS takes a step into the room and reacts physically.

ROLLINS: Whoa -- thick --

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

ROLLINS: What's up?

No one responds.

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

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

ROLLINS sniffs.

ROLLINS: 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. Trini and Shang are nowhere to be seen. 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?

JONATHA simply sits.

ROLLINS: 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.

* * * * *

ACT II, Scene 3

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

SHANG: What?!

TRINI: Nothing.

SHANG: Are you following me?

TRINI: No.

SHANG: Then what are you doing here?

TRINI: Working.

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

TRINI: I was not following you --

SHANG: Then what are you doing?

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

SHANG: *(sing-songy)* For the bourgeoisie in the big cit-tee. *(back to normal voice)* For their fake fireplaces.

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

SHANG: And who is that, huh? C'mon.

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

SHANG: So you weren't following me?

TRINI: No. Pure coincidence. Pure. Really.

SHANG: And don't tell anyone you saw me here!

TRINI: I don't give away secrets.

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

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

SHANG: So, go.

TRINI: Right.

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

TRINI: I'm not sure --

SHANG: Big and dumb as an oak --

TRINI: Maybe I should go --

SHANG: All right -- all right!

TRINI: "All right" what?

SHANG: Do trees feel pain when you cut them down --

TRINI: I don't know --

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

TRINI: I'll withdraw.

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

TRINI: I should go cut --

SHANG sticks her small garden fork up towards his face.

SHANG: I will pop out your eyeball and roast it if you don't tell me why you hate me!

TRINI: Hate you?

SHANG: Hate me!

TRINI: No closer -- okay?

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

TRINI: I don't hate you. I don't.

SHANG: Maybe I'll do both eyeballs.

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

SHANG: Then tell me.

TRINI: I just wanted --

SHANG: Yeah?

TRINI: I just wanted to be on your ballot.

SHANG: On my what?

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

SHANG: (*overlapping*) -- on the same ballot.

TRINI: Do -- you -- understand?

SHANG realizes.

SHANG: Running. Mate.

TRINI: So to speak.

SHANG: In the race.

TRINI: To run alongside.

SHANG: Me.

TRINI: You.

SHANG: The east-west girl.

TRINI: With the north-south guy.

SHANG: Yeah?

TRINI: Yes. Sudden change, huh?

SHANG: Yeah.

TRINI: Sudden shift.

SHANG: With whiplash. Me?

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

SHANG: Tell me.

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

SHANG: For her secret tonic --

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

SHANG does.

TRINI: Casually toss it away.

SHANG does.

TRINI: You did that.

SHANG: Just that.

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

SHANG: American wild ginseng --

TRINI: Panax quinquefolium.

SHANG: -- is known to have -- those -- qualities --

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

In response to the look on her face.

TRINI: I read up.

SHANG: You read right. So, it was --

SHANG recreates the move.

SHANG: -- this.

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

SHANG: "Air of Woodlot," hey?

TRINI: Wore it especially for you.

They laugh.

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

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

SHANG: The band and everything --

TRINI: Our stand-out band!

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

TRINI: Spices in the Liberty Creek salad.

SHANG: A lot of common things.

TRINI: In common.

SHANG: But --

TRINI: What?

SHANG: No, you know, no --

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

SHANG: -- you know?

TRINI repeats the same gesture or sound.

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

SHANG: So, you don't really want the seat?

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

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

TRINI: I liked knowing you'd win the point.

SHANG: Who are you, north-south guy?

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

SHANG: Like what?

TRINI indicates the digging.

TRINI: Well, for instance -- this -- what is so "shang" about Shang?

SHANG: The wild ginseng me.

TRINI: Yeah.

SHANG: Besides the money of it?

TRINI: Money never means everything.

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

TRINI: More one than the other?

SHANG: Oh, I can get -- I am very American. Quote you daily price per pound. Got the science down pat, too. *(in a mock academic tone)* Studies show that ginseng heals general weakness, poor appetite, a looooo-gear sex drive, short breath --

SHANG gives a few short pants.

SHANG: -- cold limbs ("ai-yee, get those popsicle toes off me!"), spontaneous sweating ("ai-yee, power surges!"), and -- *(in a decrepit voice)* -- premature aging.

TRINI: No wonder Archie wanted samples!

SHANG: And I know the folklore, too.

SHANG counts off on her fingers.

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

TRINI: "Man root" --

TOGETHER: Root, root!

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

TRINI: But --

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

TRINI: Yes.

SHANG: Digging it --

TRINI: Yes.

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

TRINI: That's good to hear.

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

TRINI: Touches something deep, heh?

SHANG: And far away.

TRINI: But right next to the skin.

SHANG: It's the skin itself.

TRINI: Yes. I understand.

SHANG: Do you, Mr. North-South Paul Bunyan?

TRINI: The Lutheran logger from Trinidad?

SHANG: Yes, Trinidaddio! What's your skin?

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

SHANG: I thought you guys were all about Carnival.

TRINI: Silly thing, really, Carnival.

TRINI gyrates.

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

SHANG: Trini!

TRINI does a shimmy.

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

SHANG: You give up your culture?

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

SHANG: You must have been -- spooky.

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

SHANG: I'm sure!

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

SHANG: Back, child!

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

SHANG: And the Henry Thoreau?

TRINI: Instead of the Alvin?

SHANG: Alvin's your real name?

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

SHANG: Like a bomb.

TRINI: (*more island accent*) "Here --

TRINI catches the "book."

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

SHANG: Like when one of your trees is ready to break.

TRINI: And my weightless teenage brain and body got weight. Culture? Turned out to be next to a small pond. So north -- for what the south couldn't give me. "When I do this," you said -

- this! -- I know. I know. When I stand in a woodlot and smell, I get poured out, and I feel more free than any little butt shake could ever make me.

SHANG: Jake must remind you a lot.

TRINI: Jake's cracked in the same way.

SHANG: He's cracked, all right!

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

SHANG: To the max allowed!

TRINI: But she digs -- just like you.

SHANG: That's why I dig her.

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

There is a moment of shyness between them.

SHANG: I need to work.

TRINI: Then I guess I need to work, too.

SHANG: Vote this morning?

TRINI: Yep.

SHANG: Early.

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

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

TRINI: Well -- I voted for you.

Responding to SHANG's incredulous look.

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

SHANG: Who knows who's going to win?

TRINI: You'll win --

TRINI shimmies, more island accent.

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

SHANG: I -- I need to -- dig.

TRINI: *(laughing nervously)* I should go cut off some more heads.

SHANG: Hey!

TRINI: Yeah?

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

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

Lights down.

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ACT II, Scene 4

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

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

All of this happens as ARCHIE speaks: she comes across the box that holds the sculpture done by JAKE decades ago, along with the photographs of the other pieces and a note that they are stored in ARCHIE's attic; she examines the sculpture, clearly amazed that her brother had done this; then leaves the house to go to ARCHIE's, hearing as she does that the race is a draw because one person did not show up to vote: JONATHA.

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

ARCHIE strikes the gong.

ARCHIE: Henry Thoreau Toussaint --

DUAL: 18 checkmarks.

ARCHIE strikes the gong.

ARCHIE: Shang --

DUAL: 18 checkmarks.

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

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

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

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

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ACT II, Scene 5

JONATHA enters the scene.

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

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

Hands the letter and book of photos to DUAL.

DUAL: It's a letter from your brother --

JONATHA: To you --

DUAL: Giving me custody over these --

JONATHA: Sculptures.

DUAL: And these are pictures of the sculptures.

JONATHA: My brother did sculptures.

DUAL: Yes, he did.

JONATHA: And he gave custody of them to you?

DUAL: He did.

JONATHA: To you.

ARCHIE: I do vaguely remember that, yes --

JONATHA: My brother was a sculptor.

DUAL: Yes.

JONATHA: You both knew this?

DUAL: It's our job.

JONATHA: The town "hysterian" -- and you never told me.

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

JONATHA: Which will never get built.

ARCHIE: Don't be so pessimistically quick about that --

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

JONATHA: And you're not everyone.

DUAL: Obviously not.

JONATHA: Where are they?

ARCHIE points up.

JONATHA: How do I get up there?

ARCHIE: Stairs are over there.

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

JONATHA: Give me the photos

DUAL: The magic words?

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

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

JONATHA: Then you got started late --

DUAL: But I held my tongue --

JONATHA: A blessing for us all.

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

JONATHA: *(mostly to herself)* Yes, Jake --

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

DUAL holds up the photos.

JONATHA: May I please -- ?

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

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

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

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

DUAL: That's not right, Archie. He didn't just "work" them. (*direct to JONATHA*) He was not like some hack tourist chainsaw artist with porcupine bookends. Do you want to know what it was like to watch him work?

JONATHA: Tell me.

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

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

DUAL: His hands were strong.

JONATHA: And he let you watch?

DUAL: A delight to watch.

JONATHA: Really.

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

ARCHIE: Alice Dual.

JONATHA: Why?

DUAL: Why what?

JONATHA: Why did he stop?

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

ARCHIE: Fish counter --

DUAL: Logger --

ARCHIE: Stand-in driver at the funeral home --

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

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

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

They exit. JONATHA alone. Lights out.

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ACT II, Scene 6

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

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

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

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

JAKE: You're still here?

JASON: Loose ends.

JAKE: All my ends are loose.

JASON: Is your sister around?

JAKE: Not quite sure where Jonatha is -- why?

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

JAKE: Jonatha make a difference?

JASON: Tie vote at town hall -- 18 votes each.

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

JASON: Any idea when --

JAKE: Jonatha does not follow any clock known to man.

JASON: Okay -- well, if you see her --

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

JASON: Yes, sir.

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

JASON: She hasn't told me yes or no.

JAKE: You know about her and Rollins.

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

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

JASON: She told me.

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

JASON: Yes?

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

JASON: How do you know what my offer is?

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

JASON: I do find her -- hungry.

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

JASON: So, what are you telling me, Mr. Caldwell?

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

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

JAKE: Or I will wreak vengeance!

JASON: All phones --

JAKE: And phonies!

JASON: -- beware!

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

JASON: And mine are simple?

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

JASON: You're a scalpel.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JAKE: Oh, my, my, my.

JAKE reads from the cover page.

JAKE: "Jake and Jonatha -- Still Life."

JAKE turns the page.

JAKE: "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."

JAKE goes to the bottom of the page.

JAKE: "This is not exactly a 'Child's Garden of Verses.'" "To Jake, Irish twin brother of mine."

JAKE turns the first page and reads silently at first.

JAKE: I remember this. I remember this naming.

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

JAKE: "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 nobbs we can just but barely see on the black box that is holding the pipe up on three legs Papa is saying to her maMA but he does not say it again until she is taking her eye away from the pipe and rolling her chair around to look at our faces so Papa is saying maMA I have brought over your grategrandchildren for you to meet and I think you will find out that a lot of you has been passed on into them but grategranamaMA is turning her chair back to look into the pipe and telling Papa we would have to wait until she got this chance to get Andromeda in clear fokus for her calcu lations ofasudden is letting out a skreechy sound that sounds like YOUREEKA and she wheels around to us again saying beautiful beautiful Beautiful and she is asking Papa how old we are and he is telling her we are almost 5 and she is trying to take a look at us which she does and she is saying too young much MUCH too young and Papa is answering back and asking her to let us take one look thru her tele skope be cause we would not touch any part of it and would never forget what she would let us see so sure enuf she is wheeling herself out of the way saying do not trip and stumble on my legs and she is holding a big cane out at us to show that she means it Papa is putting a little stool which he knew was there for us to stand up on I go first my eye is seeing a site it says I can not beleeve because it is looking at a round piece of night cram full of stars winking and twinkling and one most of all and I suprise myself hearing myself say out loud ANDROMEDA Papa is moving me down off of the stool and I am

wishing that I could leave my eye glued to the pipe at least for a while longer Jake pulls his eye to the pipe and ANDROMEDA comes out between his teef like the woof of steam from the kettle GrategranmaMA is saying not bad not bad but much too young you may bring them here again when they are a few years older I say Papa Andromeda will be my name from now on foreverand a day but GreatgranmaMA is saying like she means it that is a very frivlus notion and quite impossible Andromeda is the name of a 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. 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.

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ACT II, Scene 7

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

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

DUAL: Archie --

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

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

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

ARCHIE: Who won?

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

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ACT II, Scene 8

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

HANNAH: Hello.

JONATHA: Hello.

HANNAH: How did you hear?

JONATHA: Over Archie's scanner.

HANNAH: Who brought you here?

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

HANNAH: He would do that.

JONATHA: *(to SHANG and TRINI)* Sorry about that.

TRINI: Ball-breaking?

SHANG reaches out to JONATHA.

SHANG: No harm done.

HANNAH: Is Jason here?

JONATHA: I told him he had some editing to do.

HANNAH: Good choice.

JONATHA: What happened?

SHANG: Looks like heart attack --

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

JONATHA: And --

HANNAH: He's fully alive.

ROLLINS: The doctors are monitoring.

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

HANNAH: He used the phone.

SHANG: He dialed 9-1-1.

ROLLINS: *(to HANNAH)* Should we?

JONATHA: What?

HANNAH holds up the caution tape, hands it to JONATHA.

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

They all laugh gently.

JONATHA: The renegade.

ROLLINS: T- N- T.

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

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

HANNAH: Satisfied?

JONATHA: Very. My brother's alive.

HANNAH: And so is my father.

ROLLINS: And our friend.

TRINI: Yes.

SHANG: Make it a three.

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

JONATHA: What?

ROLLINS: The giant mushroom.

JONATHA: What is?

ROLLINS: Life.

JONATHA: Life's a giant mushroom in Michigan?

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

HANNAH: He reads a lot --

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

JONATHA: Rollins?

ROLLINS: Yes, Miz C.

JONATHA: You do have some sometimes poetry in you.

HANNAH: More often than sometimes.

ROLLINS: *(jokingly)* Good of you to notice.

TRINI: We notice it all the time.

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

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

JONATHA: Not hungry.

ROLLINS: Hannah banana?

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

ROLLINS: Rock on. Let's go, amigos.

ROLLINS, SHANG, and TRINI exit.

JONATHA: *(to HANNAH)* I saw the sculptures.

HANNAH: 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.

HANNAH hands JONATHA the manuscript.

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

JONATHA: That's what makes a cake.

HANNAH: I'm going to go find the humungous.

HANNAH exits.

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

JAKE opens his eyes.

JAKE: Enough, Andromeda.

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

JAKE: Nice of you to come.

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

JAKE: So you'd like to think.

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

JONATHA: What do you mean?

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

JONATHA: Let me take that glass --

JAKE: I can handle it myself.

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

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

JONATHA: That's cruel.

JAKE: Most truth is.

JONATHA: There's no time for --

JAKE: No, there isn't.

JONATHA: So, spit it out. Now.

JAKE: I saw you, Jonatha.

JONATHA: What are you talking about?

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

JONATHA: What?

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

JONATHA: You were on the couch.

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

Long silence.

JONATHA: All right, I'm sorry.

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

JONATHA: Then what?

No response.

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

JONATHA: So, finish. Finish me off.

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

JONATHA: You aren't the first --

JAKE stops her.

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

JONATHA: Shut.

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

JONATHA: No.

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

JONATHA: Doesn't matter -- doesn't matter -- Alone --

JAKE: Yep.

JONATHA: Scared --

JAKE: Yep.

JONATHA: And yet --

JAKE: And yet.

JONATHA: You didn't give me up --

JAKE: No.

JONATHA: No.

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

JAKE points to the manuscript.

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

JONATHA: Jake --

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

JONATHA: Me and my choices.

JONATHA picks up the manuscript, leafs through, stops.

JONATHA: When we were sick.

JAKE: Which time?

JONATHA: When they thought we had rheumatic fever.

JAKE: Ahhh -- house full of fear at that point.

JONATHA: Listen.

JAKE: And don't phone it in!

JONATHA: "I THINK MY EYES ARE ABOUT TO OPEN -- I wonder if I tell my hand to close will it know how to do it and what it will feel like if it does and I wonder if my head is too heavy for me to lift it off of this soggy pillo and I wonder if I can still be seeing my room and ever thing there is in it and any body in it like I am looking down at them from the seeling or the sky but I do not feel like giving my self the trouble to try out any thing so I am just going to be where ever I am for a few minits but I feel a hand on my fore head and I can tell it is Mamas hand and she is saying Thank Gawd thank Gawd so I guess if I am up in heven Mama is here too where she sposed to be with me and my eyes do not mind keeping them selves shut for a little while more but they do not get a

chance to do it be cause I know Doctor Hudson is here be cause my rist is in his hand like he takes it when I am sick and I have to take back my notion that I am in heven be cause Mama and Doctor Hudson probly do not go to the same ones and I let my eyes open up just a little crack and see Doctor Hudson shaking Mamas hand and telling her Well I guess this is proof again we make a good team we pulled those children over a bad hump again and Mama says Praise Gawd praise Gawd and Doctor Hudson is telling her to just leave us be as is and let us sleep until we wake up natural which I am very glad to hear be cause I do not want to be washed and handled I want to fix it in my magination how it was to be up over ever thing looking down on it to go with what I know about looking at people strate on at them but humpwegot them over humpwegot them over humpwe gotthem over keeps saying itself in my head and I do not even know what it means and I do not care be cause it is singing us to sleep to sleep to sleep”

JAKE seems ready to fall asleep.

JAKE: Good night sweet prince. Cess.

JONATHA: Rest.

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

JONATHA: That is a very good idea.

JAKE: Jonatha.

JONATHA: Yes?

JAKE: I once heard that Mary Baker Eddy --

JONATHA: Who?

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

JONATHA: Long distance.

JAKE: Do me a favor? No phone in my grave.

JONATHA: Duly noted.

JAKE: Bad enough having one in the house.

JONATHA: Good enough, too.

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

JONATHA: Good source material.

JAKE: That I cannot deny.

JONATHA: Sleep.

JAKE: That I cannot deny either.

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

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ACT II, Scene 9

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

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

DUAL: (*joshing, tired*) At least you knew you had an audience of one.

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

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

DUAL: The etiquette, I believe, is to answer it.

Rings again. ARCHIE picks it up.

DUAL: (*whispers*) And to say hello.

ARCHIE: Hello. Radio True Blue.

ARCHIE listens.

ARCHIE: Why, thanks.

ARCHIE listens.

ARCHIE: I'd be glad to play it, Sarah.

ARCHIE hangs up.

DUAL: An audience of two.

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

DUAL: Talk show.

ARCHIE: Yeah. You think?

DUAL: I think anything is now possible.

ARCHIE: But should I?

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

DUAL: *(both question and statement)* You could call it --

ARCHIE: We could call it --

DUAL: -- "The Green Chalkboard."

ARCHIE: Bullseye.

DUAL: We?

ARCHIE: Of course.

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

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

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

BLACKOUT