

When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

(A Techno-Pastoral)

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and
"I Think My Eyes Are About To Open"

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

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

CHARACTERS

- JAKE CALDWELL: 80s, still vigorous but has to move with help, which comes in the form of large knobby walking staff 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 50s; helped JONATHA on the phone line campaign. One half of Two-Oh Duo, with ROLLINS.
- JASON BOCK: Reporter, 50s, 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 is the other half of Two-Oh Duo, with HANNAH; in his 50s, never really out of his 20s.
- ARCHIE "WOLFGANG" MCFEE: Runs a pirate radio station from his Barcalounger; lives with ALICE; makes his living as a shang hunter.
- ALICE DUAL: The town historian, the same age as ARCHIE; lives with ARCHIE; makes her living as one of the very few female loggers in the state.

NOTE

ROLLINS and HANNAH must be able to sing competently.

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.

Act I, Scene 1: Prologue

Music: Andrew Sisters, "Telephone Song." ARCHIE is in his "pirate radio station." ARCHIE wears a headset and sits in a Barcalounger, surrounded by radio equipment.

ARCHIE

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

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

ARCHIE

"Gang" --

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

ARCHIE

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

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 around, and I confidently predict it will continue for the entire 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 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 extra-special report.

ARCHIE bangs the gong.

ARCHIE

Grab your breath and report, oh mighty chronicler.

ALICE

Well, as you all know, I just came from the hospital --

But ALICE can't quite catch her breath.

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?

ALICE

Ready.

ARCHIE

Set.

ALICE

Set.

ARCHIE

Go.

ALICE

I just came from the hospital --

ARCHIE

And?

ALICE

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

ARCHIE

Our patriarch is patched up?

ALICE

As mended as medicine can make him.

ARCHIE

Anybody there with him?

ALICE

Hannah. Rollins, too.

ARCHIE

And Jonatha, right?

ALICE

And Jonatha --

ARCHIE

You need to mention her.

ALICE

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

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

Pith and vinegar.

ARCHIE

Like that "lithp."

ARCHIE gives her an affectionate look.

ARCHIE

Whew, Alice Dual!

ALICE

Whew, Archie McFee.

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

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 --

ALICE

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 dramatic and delightful drama of when the phones came to Liberty Creek.

ALICE

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 does "wayback woo-woo," the aural equivalent of the television or movie screen going 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 --

ALICE

(reluctantly)

On the day --

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

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

ARCHIE

After all of this --

ALICE

-- not a rump found itself resting --

ARCHIE

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

ARCHIE smiles and gives ALICE a thumbs-up.

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

ARCHIE
Yes?

ALICE
A restless rump --

ARCHIE
Yes?

ALICE
Can be a dangerous thing, indeed.

ARCHIE
Indeed, indeed. Okay, listeners, go for your
next glass of whatever it is you're drinking
while we take a small break. 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 bovines.

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

ARCHIE
Even after all these years --

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

ARCHIE puts a tender hand on ALICE's shoulder.

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

ALICE
Woo-woo. And us, you and me?

ARCHIE
I confidently predict we will continue for the
entire program -- and even beyond.

ALICE
I heard that on my way in.

ARCHIE
Bears repeating, Alice Dual.

They give each other a chaste kiss and hold hands as the music plays.

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Act I, Scene 2: The House of Caldwell

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

ALICE stands next to JAKE, with her arm through his.

ALICE

The first one. The very first one, Jake. The first one ever.

JAKE

Just like the serpent in the Garden, Alice. You can all leave now. Begone!

HANNAH

Dad --

Everyone stares at the phone sitting on the table.

JAKE

Thank you all for ignoring me in my own house.

JAKE turns to ALICE.

JAKE

Give 'em a dime, they'll take your dollar.

ALICE

Jake -- it'll be over soon.

JAKE

That's what you think. Gone be!

HANNAH turns to ROLLINS.

HANNAH

Will it work? What if it doesn't [work] --

ROLLINS

It'll work, Hannah nirvana. We checked out Consumer Reports, we did our homework --

JAKE

Fine by me if it doesn't.

JONATHA

It'll work.

JAKE

She commandeth!

ARCHIE

Hey, big-city scribe.

ROLLINS

It'll work, Hannah.

JASON touches his hat brim.

JASON

My low-wattage king.

ARCHIE

(to the others)

Just love him, don't'cha?

ROLLINS

No.

ARCHIE

You ready?

JASON

Ready, radio-meister.

ROLLINS

(a little louder)

Suck-up.

JAKE

Thank you all, again, for ignoring me in my own house.

ARCHIE

Alice Dual -- stand here with me and let's have the finger of Clio amuse us all.

ARCHIE and ALICE do their "color commentary": ALICE holds the microphone while ARCHIE holds the recorder itself.

ARCHIE

"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 -- "

ALICE

"And, Archie -- "

ARCHIE

"Yyyeeesss -- "

ALICE

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

ARCHIE

"Momentous day."

ALICE

"Yes it is."

JAKE

All traps should be shut.

ARCHIE

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."

Which they do, hovering near HANNAH and JONATHA.

HANNAH

Jonatha?

JONATHA

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

JAKE

She commandeth! Againeth!

JONATHA gestures to HANNAH.

JONATHA

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

JAKE

Too crowded in here.

JONATHA

Gently.

JAKE

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

HANNAH carefully brings the phone line and hands it to JONATHA.
JONATHA gets ready to insert the plug.

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

"Moment of connection here. But wait!"

ARCHIE

"She hands it off to Hannah -- "

ALICE

"Too nervous to make the connection herself."

ARCHIE

"Hannah takes a deep starting-line breath."

ROLLINS

(sotto voce)

Go, girl.

ALICE

"Hannah plugs it in."

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

JAKE

The seventh seal is off.

Everyone shushes him.

JAKE

The four horsemen fart by.

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

ARCHIE

It works.

ALICE

The first one ever.

After several rings, JONATHA picks it up. ARCHIE and ALICE record.

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!

JONATHA

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

Everyone cheers, dances around, etc.

ROLLINS

Ready, Hannah?

HANNAH and ROLLINS break into a chorus of "Hello, My Baby." ARCHIE and ALICE record away.

ROLLINS & HANNAH

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.¹

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, more or less frozen in place, as if this were inevitable and unavoidable. ARCHIE and ALICE, of course, record away.

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

HANNAH

Dad --

ROLLINS

Mr. C --

JONATHA

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

Overlapping.

ARCHIE

Ooooh --

ALICE

The gall --

ROLLINS

Hey!

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JAKE slams down his stick.

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

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 staff at the phone.

JAKE

The world's corruption will now ooze into your homes because of that! You want to be connected, on-line, wired. Arguments for five years, in my ear like wasps -- and all of you sheep-like -- bah, bah, bah -- because it would make your lives easier! Easy? Spirit becomes sharp and hard by fighting!

JAKE points at each and every one of 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, the company of animals. That --

JAKE once more points his staff at the phone.

JAKE

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

JAKE slams his staff down to make his point.

JONATHA

You are a dried-up old Jeremiah.

HANNAH moves toward JONATHA, but JAKE waves her off.

JAKE

And you are a sybaritic disgusting bag of bones.

HANNAH turns on ARCHIE and ALICE, pointing to the tape recorder.

HANNAH

Turn it off!

JONATHA

You're still jealous --

HANNAH
(to ARCHIE)

Now!

JONATHA

-- because I went to New York.

HANNAH

Christ, not this!

JAKE

Jealous of a deserter?

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 --

JAKE

What was wrong with nurse?

(to ARCHIE)

Is that off?!

ARCHIE turns it off.

ARCHIE

It's off!

But ALICE surreptitiously turns it back on. They exchange a look.

JONATHA

Nurse, punching bag for an alcoholic husband --
my full menu. Not for me, the dark ages!

JAKE

Always had to be 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 every artist 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 a "T" sign 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 "new," always spitting over his left
shoulder --

JAKE

(childish tone)

New, new, new, new --

JONATHA

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 --

ALICE

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!

JONATHA squares right up to JAKE.

JONATHA

Exempt? Why? Why, why, why?

JONATHA gives them all a glare.

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 jabs a finger at the phone.

JONATHA

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

JONATHA her gaze around the room.

JONATHA

-- or any of yours, either.

JONATHA focuses on HANNAH.

JONATHA

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 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 aims his staff at the phone.

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-seven 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 it was "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 a hearty 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 Hannah.

ARCHIE

Passing the torch.

JASON

Turned. Opened the door. And went in.

ARCHIE

Under her own pig-head of steam.

JASON

Noble.

ARCHIE

Human interest galore, hey?

JASON

At least no gore galore.

ARCHIE

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 ARCHIE, takes out the cassette, throws it on the floor, and smashes it under foot.

HANNAH

Christ! Dad -- Dad --

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

HANNAH

Jonatha, come on out.

JONATHA, in the bedroom, seethes.

ALICE

Immovable force.

ARCHIE

Irresistible object.

ROLLINS

Like Greek -- the House of Caldwell --

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

HANNAH

Dad, Jonatha -- Christ! 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 you can unlock her out.

ROLLINS

Twist of fate.

JASON

Practical problems here.

HANNAH

You can't stay in my old room --

ROLLINS

No bathroom.

HANNAH

You've got nothing to eat --

ROLLINS

No food.

HANNAH
I'm going to unlock the door --

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

ARCHIE
Mind's a steel trap, Rollins.

JASON
Jaws of death.

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

JAKE
Fresh out.

HANNAH
Jonatha --

JONATHA
Rather eat June bugs.

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

JAKE approaches the bedroom "wall"; so does JONATHA on her side.

Everyone expects them to speak, but instead, JAKE stamps his staff
three times; in response, JONATHA stamps her foot three times.

HANNAH
Boy, are we all connected now!

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

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 3: The Election

ARCHIE

Welcome back to Radio Hot Tamale, By Golly, and I am your one and only griot, Wolfgang! reporting to you from 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 special 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 4: The House of Rollins

ROLLINS at his work table, a phone near him. He holds an unfinished body of some musical instrument, like a violin or mandolin, that he has been working on. Tools, sandpaper, chisels, etc.

He picks up the phone but doesn't dial -- he simply listens to the dial tone. He re-sets the hook, listens again. Dials his own number.

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

She will 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 "Two-Oh Duo" for you and Hannah?

ROLLINS

Are we doing small-talk now?

JASON

Inquiring minds want to know.

ROLLINS

Is that what's under your hat?

JASON

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

ROLLINS

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

JASON

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

They glare: squaring off. ROLLINS goes back to vigorous sandpapering. They wait.

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?

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, focuses on HANNAH.

ROLLINS

Hannah -- they're going to be all right. They're just being stubborn -- they could give lessons to a mule.

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.

ROLLINS

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 pee! Now, that's a good face!

HANNAH

Rollins -- Rollins, Rollins -- you know what scared me the most?

ROLLINS

Tell on.

HANNAH

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

ROLLINS gives JASON a side-glance.

ROLLINS

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

HANNAH

I am going to do the gig tonight, Rollins.

ROLLINS

I can solo it --

HANNAH

A solo duo? Even with us off at the tavern, 70 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

O-kay, journalista, you got that thing ready?

JASON

Promo for Two-Oh Duo ready to roll.

ROLLINS

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

HANNAH

Pitch me, will you?

ROLLINS hums a note. They sing a capella the first verse and chorus of ROLLINS' new song, "Telephone Zone" -- see Act I, Scene 6. JASON dutifully records, and when the piece is over, he rewinds the tape.

HANNAH

(to ROLLINS)

That was cool.

ROLLINS

Just comes.

HANNAH

Oh, Master, so much Zen coming off you.

ROLLINS

Not to mention sweat and fretboard shavings.

JASON

The Liberty Creek aphrodisiac.

JASON hands ROLLINS the tape.

JASON

Nice work, Rollins.

ROLLINS

Good to have the big city weigh in.

JASON mockingly tips his hat.

ROLLINS

And when did you say you were going back?

JASON

Some human interest stuff to finish up --

ROLLINS

More like humid interest --

HANNAH

And I think I need to go.

ROLLINS

I'll walk you.

HANNAH

No. Give me the tape -- I'll drop it off at Archie's.

ROLLINS hands it off, but HANNAH doesn't leave right away.

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 a lot to be said for growing up.

ROLLINS

So I can wear a funny hat?

And immediately ROLLINS is sorry he said that with HANNAH in the room.

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 glare at each other, then JASON books out of the shop to catch up with HANNAH, leaving ROLLINS alone with his sweat and fretboard shavings. Transition music: Paul Anka, "Kissin' On The Phone."

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 5: The Siege

JAKE is cutting lengths of yellow "Caution" tape to cover JONATHA's door when HANNAH enters. JONATHA is drawing with pastels in a sketchpad. She hears everything. She tries to keep drawing, but eventually she is drawn toward the wall of the bedroom.

HANNAH

Dad, you can't --

JAKE looks at her.

HANNAH

Well, you shouldn't.

JAKE

Counseling me?

HANNAH

No --

JAKE

Good.

HANNAH

-- but you shouldn't.

JAKE goes back to the taping.

HANNA

How'd you get it?

JAKE

Alice gave me a ride to town -- she was on her way to the woodlot -- Archie gave me a ride back after dropping off his shang to Sarah.

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

Have I ever?

HANNAH

Never.

JAKE

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 speaks as much to let JONATHA know as in protest.

HANNAH

You can't -- tack up yellow caution tape across the door!

JAKE

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
So do you. You always do, don't you? 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 struggles to break the chalk in half.

JAKE

Damn!

Finally he 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 stuffs the pieces into his pocket, 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

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

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. Just wondering if you could help me ship 'em out. 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 -- 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

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 up his chalk.

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 at 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 staff 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 coach and falls asleep.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 6: The Gig

We are at the "gig": ROLLINS and HANNAH, and 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. 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."²

First Verse

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

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

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

Bounce your words off satellites from here to Katmandu

Refrain A

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

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

Seems its part of human nature, deep in our protein

² This song is done to the tune of "Feed Me Jesus."

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. They 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 his hand.

ROLLINS

I wrote it.

JASON

I know you did.

HANNAH

Rollins --

JASON

You can let the hand go.

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

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.

But HANNAH says nothing.

ROLLINS

Huh. Huh. Beverages, I guess, right?

But ROLLINS moves off to his own space, leaving HANNAH and JASON. He can watch them.

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.

HANNAH

I can't.

JASON

Jake and Jonatha will work it out.

HANNAH

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

JASON

You couldn't.

HAHHAH

Me, there --

JASON

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

HANNAH

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

JASON

Like Rollins --

HANNAH

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

JASON

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

JASON pops a little dance move.

JASON

Not so bad, am I?

HANNAH

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.

The three actors are now in separate lights.

ROLLINS sings.

ROLLINS

"Seems its part of human nature, deep in our
protein -- "

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

HANNAH

I'm talking 'bout these twisted --

ALL

Lines, lines.

ROLLINS

Getting all these mixed up --

ALL

Signs, signs.

JASON

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 --

HANNAH

A half-look here --

JASON

There, a look away --

HANNAH

Never saying what we want --

ROLLINS

Never meaning what we say --

HANNAH

A life in subtitles.

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

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 7: 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?

I'm doing it for your own damn good.

So it's for my own good 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 -- 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.

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

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

Lights out.

INTERMISSION

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

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 ALICE at the radio station. Next to ALICE is a chainsaw.

ARCHIE

Welcome to Radio Daddio, with your one, holy, catholic, and apostolic host, Wolfgang!, the radio-active pirate. And this morning we have our weekly report from Alice, the town "hysterian." Report, oh logorrheaic one.

ALICE

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 --

ALICE

Operatic to the kind of max that Jonatha loves.

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

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

ARCHIE

And how many days now?

ALICE

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 --

ALICE

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

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

Maybe it all just feels at home inside --

ARCHIE

Cast-iron bladder, knowing Jonatha.

ALICE

Even cast-iron rusts, Archie.

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

She's so repealing, isn't she?

ARCHIE

Any historical predictions?

ALICE

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

ARCHIE

Anything else?

ALICE

"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.

ALICE

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?

ALICE

I second and third that.

ARCHIE

10-4.

ALICE

24-7

TOGETHER

Three-sixty-five.

ARCHIE

And we'll see you all again tonight.

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

ARCHIE
Honey, you could try to hide it a little -- not
that the FCC is going to say anything.

ALICE
Everyone knows I don't like her.

ARCHIE
Everyone does, indeed.

ALICE
"Put silk on a goat, and it's still a goat" is
what I say. I gotta go.

ALICE stands and grabs the chainsaw.

ARCHIE
Where are you working today?

ALICE
Leverett Lindenholder wants his top ten acres
thinned -- gave me the wood for free.

ARCHIE
More logs for those urban fireplaces.

ALICE
Ornament for them, money for us. You?

ARCHIE
Got a big order for that natural food store
again.

ALICE
They love your shang.

ARCHIE
They love my shang.

ALICE
I love your shang. That's what got me, you know.

ARCHIE faces ALICE.

ARCHIE
I picked that wood chip off your cheek.

ALICE
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.

ARCHIE
American wild ginseng -- Panax quinquefolium --
known to cure what ails ya. I did take a similar
liking to your eau de chainsaw oil.

ALICE
That and oak bark is a powerful aroma.

ARCHIE
Olfactory overflow.

There is a moment when, perhaps, they would rather not go off to work
but do something else.

ALICE
C'mon.

ARCHIE
You can't blame me for wondering if we could.

ALICE turns to go, the chainsaw hanging from her confident hand.

ALICE
Isn't one of your top ten spots over near
Leverett's?

ARCHIE
I get your drift.

ALICE
Maybe see ya later, then.

ARCHIE
Let's go vote, and you can drop me off.

The song ends. ARCHIE shuts down the station and grabs his shang sack
from behind the lounge, and off they go.

JONATHA continues to type.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 2

Transition music: snippet from Jim Croce, "Operator." JAKE reading.
HANNAH enters, carrying another phone; JONATHA types. JAKE looks up,
goes back to his reading.

JAKE
Not in my house.

HANNAH
You now have a new phone.

JONATHA

Fine.

HANNAH puts down the phone, takes it out of the box.

HANNAH

What are you typing? What's she typing?

JAKE

I'm not privy.

HANNAH

What are you typing?

JONATHA

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. 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. And how are you?

JAKE
I was just fine till you brought that.

HANNAH
That's not going away.

HANNAH hooks up the phone. JAKE watches her, then stands.

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

HANNAH
Meaning --

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

HANNAH
Meaning --

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

HANNAH
What are you gabbing about?

JAKE
I want you to know something.

JAKE points to the door with his staff.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

Go on -- walk over there.

HANNAH walks to the door.

JAKE

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

HANNAH

It's locked.

JAKE

Go on -- it won't bite.

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

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

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

HANNAH
Have you?

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

HANNAH
How do you know?

JAKE
That Jesus rose --

HANNAH
No! About --

JAKE
She fooled you, too.

HANNAH
How do you know?

JAKE
I've seen her.

HANNAH
How?

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

HANNAH
You said it was about principle.

JONATHA
It is.

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

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

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

HANNAH
Dad --

JAKE
Only of her own comfort --

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

JAKE
Don't mind at all. Go on.

HANNAH
So what has this been about?

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

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

JONATHA
Later, Hannah.

HANNAH
Now.

JONATHA
Fine.

HANNAH
What are you typing?

JONATHA
I told you.

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

JONATHA
Some of us have thicker lives than others.

JAKE
And some are just thicker than others.

HANNAH
Jonatha -- answer me --

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

Nerve has been hit!

JONATHA

I didn't use anybody.

JAKE

That would be unusual for you.

HANNAH

Dad! I thought we were close -- this kind of close. Five years to get phones here -- you and me -- the hearings -- affidavits!

JONATHA

We fought the right fight --

JAKE

You should just listen.

HANNAH

Both of you should! 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?

JONATHA says nothing. HANNAH drops to her hands and knees and rummages under the bed until she pulls out a scrapbook. With immense anger, she slams the scrapbook onto the bed.

HANNAH

Have you ever seen this?

JAKE shuffles over to the bed, sits, and opens the scrapbook.

JAKE

You should see this.

Still JONATHA says nothing, does not move.

HANNAH

I would cut the articles out of the newspapers in the library, like a thief -- tear things out of the magazines at the drugstore --

JAKE

Hannah, I never -- Jonatha -- you should --

HANNAH

Always held you in my heart -- my aunt the artist from the world!

JAKE

You really did a lot --

HANNAH

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

I had a tragedy --

JONATHA

Yes.

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

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.

HANNAH

Last swill and excrement.

ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS

Yo, Hannah!

HANNAH

Christ!

ROLLINS

Hey, Mr. C. Hey, Miz C. 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 as he steps into the room

ROLLINS
Whoa -- thick --

JAKE taps his skull, as if to 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
Boy -- density in here. Well, if Miz C is opting out of opting in, then the Voter Express is looking to bring in at least three votes.

JAKE
Come on, Hannah, let's go.

ROLLINS
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, with great reluctance, she takes up the scrapbook from the bed and sits in the chair by the window.

But before she leafs through many pages, she closes it, tosses it back on the bed, and paces paces paces. She turns on the radio -- and it is not ARCHIE's show. She begins to rummage through cabinets and closets until she comes across a box that holds a sculpture in wood done by JAKE decades ago, along with the photographs of 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.

She pulls on a pair of hiking boots, grabs her coat, and heads out the door. She can't stay inside any longer, and so off she goes.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 3

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

JAKE

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

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

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

JAKE
You're still here?

JASON
Loose ends.

JAKE
All my ends are loose.

JASON
Is your sister around?

JAKE
Not quite sure where Jonatha is -- why?

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

JAKE
Jonatha make a difference?

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

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

JASON
Any idea when --

JAKE
Jonatha does not follow any clock known to man.

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

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

JASON
Yes, sir.

JAKE

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

JASON

She hasn't told me yes or no.

JAKE

You know about her and Rollins.

JASON

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

JAKE

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

JASON

She told me.

JAKE

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

JASON

Yes?

JAKE

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

JASON

How do you know what my offer is?

JAKE

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

JASON

I do find her -- hungry.

JAKE

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

JASON

So what are you telling me, Mr. Caldwell?

JAKE

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

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

JAKE

Or I will wreak vengeance!

JASON

All phones --

JAKE

And phonies!

JASON

-- beware!

JAKE

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

JASON

And mine are simple?

JAKE

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

JASON

You're a scalpel.

JAKE

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

JASON

I think I'll let Hannah make her decision.

JAKE

Don't get me wrong, Mr. Bock. I may not be 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, then HANNAH waves goodbye. JASON hesitates, 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.

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.

JAKES reads from the cover page.

JAKE

"Jake and Jonatha -- Still Life."

"These episodes were retrieved by deliberate creative self-induced regression to four or five years of age, with undisciplined words and spelling and syntax, each story written in one breath, which is how they should be read, and out loud. 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."

"To Jake, Irish twin brother of mine."

JAKE turns the first page and reads silently at first.

JAKE

I remember this. I remember this naming.

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

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

born But Jake looks at me look at him and
our mouths spit stars when we say quiet outside
GrategranmaMA's ears under the per simmon bush
ANDROMEDA ANDROMEDA"

JAKE looks up from the book.

JAKE

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

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

JAKE

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

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

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 4

JONATHA enters ARCHIE and ALICE's house. ARCHIE is just winding up
his show.

ARCHIE

Well, it's official, folks, as just reportaged to
by Alice Dual, town cliometrician -- the Fat Lady
has sung her aria. We have an unprecedented
outcome in the two-person election to fill the
vacant seat of the dearly deposited Buzz Larch.

ALICE

18 checkmarks for one.

ARCHIE

And --

ALICE

18 checkmarks for the other.

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.

ALICE turns and gives JONATHA a full frontal stare.

ALICE

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.

ARCHIE

Stay tuned as people of good heart and a peppy good humor try to figure a way out of our constitutional crisis. Signing off for Radio True Blue, I Love You, this is Wolfgang!

ARCHIE snaps off the transmitter, and the two of them look at JONATHA.

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?

JONATHA hands the letter and book of photos to ALICE.

ALICE

It's a letter from your brother --

JONATHA

To you --

ALICE

Giving me custody over these --

JONATHA

Sculptures.

ALICE

And the pictures.

JONATHA

My brother did sculptures.

ALICE

Yes, he did.

JONATHA

And he gave custody of them to you?

ALICE

He did.

JONATHA

Why to you?

There is the briefest of glances between ARCHIE and ALICE, which JONATHA doesn't miss.

JONATHA

Alice --

ARCHIE

It didn't mean anything then, it doesn't mean anything now, at least to me. You can say what you want about it, Alice.

ALICE

Your brother was a sculptor, and I was an -- admirer. I think that's all I'm going to say about it.

JONATHA

The town "hysterian" and Jake?

The silence in the room is answer enough for JONATHA.

ALICE

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 --

ALICE

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

JONATHA

And you were not everyone.

ALICE

Obviously not. And he especially didn't want you to know. He made that clear.

JONATHA

Where are they?

ARCHIE points up.

JONATHA

How do I get up there?

ARCHIE

Stairs are over there.

ALICE

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

JONATHA

Give me the photos.

ALICE

The magic words?

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

ALICE

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

JONATHA

Then you got started late --

ALICE

But I held my tongue --

JONATHA

A blessing for us all.

ALICE

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

JONATHA

It seems you had a lot more.

ALICE

Shut up. Are we done with that?

JONATHA

Yes.

ALICE

Are we?

JONATHA

Yes.

ALICE

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.

ALICE holds up the photos.

JONATHA

May I please -- ?

ALICE hands them over. JONATHA simply crosses to the other side of the stage, now ARCHIE's attic. ARCHIE and ALICE 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.

ALICE

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

ALICE

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.

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

ALICE

His hands were strong. A delight to watch.

JONATHA

Really.

ALICE

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

ARCHIE
Alice.

JONATHA
Why?

ALICE
Be more specific.

JONATHA
Why did he stop?

ALICE
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 --

ALICE
Logger --

ARCHIE
Stand-in driver at the funeral home --

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

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

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

They exit. JONATHA alone.

Then ALICE hurries back on, looking worried.

ALICE
We have to talk.

Transition: "Wichita Lineman" by Jim Webb.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 5

A hospital room. Around the bed are seated HANNAH and ROLLINS.
HANNAH has JONATHA's manuscript. JONATHA enters with ALICE and sits.

HANNAH
Hello.

JONATHA
Hello.

HANNAH
Alice.

ALICE
Hello.

HANNAH
How did you hear?

JONATHA
Over Archie's scanner.

HANNAH
Who brought you here?

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

HANNAH
He would do that.

ALICE
He's waiting to take me back, so I can give
Archie an update. Lots of people heard the
ambulance.

JONATHA
What happened?

ROLLINS
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 --

HANNAH
He used the phone. He dialed 911.

ROLLINS

Should we?

JONATHA

What?

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

HANNAH

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

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.

ALICE

He called 9-1-1.

HANNAH

Satisfied?

JONATHA

Very. My brother's alive.

HANNAH

And so is my father.

ROLLINS

And our friend.

ALICE

Yes. Our friend. I should go.

ROLLINS

Wait, Alice. 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

Good of you to notice. Come on, Alice -- I'll give you an escort. And maybe we'll 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, amigo.

JONATHA

Alice. Thank you.

ALICE

That's a start. Keep him safe.

ROLLINS and ALICE exit.

JONATHA

I saw the sculptures.

HANNAH

Ah.

JONATHA

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

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

As always.

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

You watched him.

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

Jake, Jake, Jake --

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

Last "swill."

HANNAH

These true?

JONATHA

As true as I can remember.

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

My Irish twin was --

HANNAH

Is --

JONATHA

Is -- my brother for life.

HANNAH

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

(hands JONATHA the manuscript)

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

JONATHA

That's what makes a cake.

HANNAH

I'm going to go find the humungous.

HANNAH exits.

JONATHA

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

JAKE opens his eyes.

JAKE

Enough, Andromeda.

JONATHA

(half-laugh, half-cry)

Andromeda! Here, let me help you --

JAKE

Nice of you to come.

JONATHA

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

JAKE

So you'd like to think.

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

JONATHA

What do you mean?

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Let me take that glass --

JAKE

I can handle it myself.

JONATHA

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

JAKE

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

JONATHA

That's cruel.

JAKE

Most truth is.

JONATHA

There's no time for --

JAKE

No, there isn't.

JONATHA

So spit it out. Now.

JAKE

I saw you, Jonatha.

JONATHA

What are you talking about?

JAKE

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

JONATHA

What?

JAKE

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

JONATHA

You were on the couch.

JAKE

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

Long silence.

JONATHA

All right, I'm sorry.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Then what?

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 -- 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 6

Lights up on ARCHIE's radio station. ARCHIE and ALICE sit there.

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

ARCHIE
Even after all these years --

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

ARCHIE puts a tender hand on ALICE's shoulder.

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

ALICE
Woo-woo. And us, you and me?

ARCHIE
I confidently predict we will continue for the entire program -- and even beyond.

ALICE
I heard that on my way in.

ARCHIE
Bears repeating, Alice Dual.

They give each other a chaste kiss and hold hands as the music plays.

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

ALICE
The etiquette, I believe, is to answer it.

Rings again. ARCHIE picks it up.

ALICE
(whispers)
And to say hello.

ARCHIE
Hello. Radio True Blue. Why, thanks. Yes, I have that -- I'd be glad to play it, Sarah.

ARCHIE hangs up.

ARCHIE

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

ALICE

Talk show.

ARCHIE

Yeah. You think?

ALICE

I think anything is now possible.

ARCHIE

But should I?

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

ALICE

(both question and statement)

You could call it --

ARCHIE

We could call it --

ALICE

-- "The Green Chalkboard."

ARCHIE

Bullseye.

ALICE

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 -- Phil Collins, "Don't Lose My Number" or "Operator" by Midnight Star. As it plays, ARCHIE and ALICE

look at each other, then dig out their pieces of chalk and hold them up to each other. They write on the air.

BLACKOUT