

When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

(A One-Act 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

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.

ROLLINS FREEMAN: Repairer of vintage stringed instruments; in his 40s, never really out of his 20s.

ARCHIE “WOLFGANG” MCFEE: Runs a pirate radio station from his Barcalounger in the basement; otherwise makes his living counting fish at the state dam.

ALICE DUAL: Simply known as DUAL, the town historian, the same age as ARCHIE.

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.

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

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SCENE 1: PROLOGUE

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

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

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

ARCHIE: "Gang"—

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

ARCHIE: —Wolfgang!—broadcasting to you from my trusty 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, too.

ARCHIE: And Jonatha, right?

DUAL: And Jonatha—

ARCHIE: Good.

DUAL:—the Ice Queen—

ARCHIE: (*warningly*) Be objective, Alice—

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

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

DUAL: Pith and vinegar.

ARCHIE: Like that "lithp."

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 [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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SCENE 2

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

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

ARCHIE: Found it in my attic.

DUAL: The first one ever.

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

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

JAKE: *(to everyone)* Could you all leave now?

ARCHIE: Nabbed the device at a flea market.

JAKE: Begone!

ROLLINS: Your attic is, like—

JAKE: Gone be!

ARCHIE: Never had a use for a phone—

ROLLINS: geological—

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

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

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

ARCHIE: So come unlayer me sometime.

ROLLINS: Couldn't be done.

DUAL: The first one, Jake.

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

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

HANNAH: Does it work?

ARCHIE: Never used it.

HANNAH: How do you know it works?

ARCHIE: I don't.

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

JAKE: Fine by me.

JONATHA: It will.

JAKE: She commandeth!

HANNAH: Dad!

ARCHIE: Alice Dual—we have our work to do.

DUAL: Yes.

ARCHIE: Stand here and let the finger of Clio amuse us all. "And we are recording live from the home of Jake and Jonatha Caldwell—"

JAKE: House is in my name, not hers.

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

DUAL: "And, Archie—"

ARCHIE: "This is Alice Dual, folks."

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

ARCHIE: "Momentous day, momentous day."

DUAL: "It is. It is."

JAKE: All traps should be shut.

JONATHA: Okay, everyone—

But JONATHA does not move, just stares.

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

JONATHA: Everyone, please—we don't have much time.

JAKE: She commandeth! Againeth!

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

JONATHA: Hannah? That plug in your hand—give it to me—gently—

JAKE: Too crowded in here.

JONATHA: Gently.

JAKE: It's not the heat—it's the humanity.

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

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

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

ARCHIE: "She hands it off to Hannah—"

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

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

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

DUAL: "Hannah plugs it in."

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

JAKE: The seventh seal is off.

Everyone shushes him.

JAKE: The four horsemen fart by.

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

ARCHIE: It works.

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

JONATHA: Hello? Yes—this is she.

JAKE: Uses the subject[ive case]—

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

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

JAKE: I didn't vote for you!

JONATHA gets back on the line.

JONATHA: Yes, this is historic.

JAKE: Won't ever vote for you.

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

JAKE: Rather vote Communist—

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

JAKE: Let the corruption begin!

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

JAKE: See, it's already started!

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

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

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

JONATHA: I have, brother of mine.

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

HANNAH: Dad—

ROLLINS: Mr. C—

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

Overlapping.

ARCHIE: Ooooh—

DUAL: The gall—

ROLLINS: Hey!

HANNAH: Jonatha—

JAKE slams down his stick.

JAKE: A relic! At least a relic is useful. Show it off. Sell it. Heave it through the palace windows and kill a czar. But that! (*pointing his stick at the phone*) The world's corruption will now ooze into your homes because of that! You want to be connected, on-line, wired— Arguments for five years, in my ear like wasps—and all of you sheep-like—bah, bah, bah—because it would make your lives easier! Easy? Spirit becomes sharp and hard by fighting! 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—that is the millstone to drown you in your own desires.

JONATHA: Just a dried-up old Jeremiah.

HANNAH moves toward JONATHA, but JAKE waves her off.

JAKE: A sybaritic disgusting bag of bones.

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

JONATHA: You're still jealous—

HANNAH: (*to ARCHIE*) Now!

JONATHA:—because I went to New York.

JAKE: Jealous of a deserter?

HANNAH: Christ, not this!

JONATHA: Forty years gnawing my bones—

JAKE: A. De. Ser. Ter!

JONATHA: An escapee!

JAKE: Who left me to clean up everything—

JONATHA: Who loved a mess—

JAKE:—so she could pursue her gift—

JONATHA: That's right!

JAKE: Brilliant painter unequalled!

JONATHA: I had a life to make.

JAKE: Unmade everyone to make it.

HANNAH: This is old news—

JONATHA: Farm wife, schoolmarm, nurse—

ROLLINS: No downhill brakes, Hannah.

JAKE: What's wrong with a nurse?

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

ROLLINS: *(loud whisper to ARCHIE)* Do it, bucko.

ARCHIE: *(turning it off)* It's off!

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

JONATHA: Nurse, punching bag for an alcoholic husband—my full menu. Not me! The dark ages!

JAKE: Always brighter!

JONATHA: Broader—

JAKE: Badder—

JONATHA: Bigger—

JAKE: Head to match!

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

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

JAKE: “Damned” was right!

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

JAKE: But couldn’t hack it because no iron your spine—

JONATHA: Like that rod up your butt?

HANNAH: Jonatha—

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

JONATHA: You know nothing about anything of my life!

JAKE: I know you’re a coward.

HANNAH: *(hands in the sign of a “T”)* Time out!

They ignore her.

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

HANNAH: Time out!

They ignore her.

JAKE: Born wise—

HANNAH: This is old news—

JONATHA: Afraid of the word “new,” always spitting over his left shoulder—

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

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

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

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

JONATHA: Never wanted.

JAKE: No home—

JONATHA: Not desired.

JAKE: Nothing solid—

JONATHA: Didn't need a rock crushing my chest—

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

JONATHA: You like the rock on your chest—

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

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

HANNAH: Jonatha!

ROLLINS: Whoa!

JAKE: Leave Hannah out of—

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

ROLLINS: Miz C—

DUAL: Jonatha, that's really out of [line]—

JONATHA: And naming the daughter in memoriam—what a stroke!

JAKE: They are exempt—

ROLLINS: Miz C—that's not—

JONATHA: Shut up! (to JAKE) Exempt? Why? Why, why, why? (*looking at them all*) Look at you—oh weeping tragedy! This good man, stayer-at-home, Mom-and-Dad-protector, dubya-dubya-two vet, raiser-of-Hannah in motherless sorrow and alone—how could everybody not love Jake! Even Christ comes up short!

JAKE: All your smart-ass—

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

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: (to HANNAH) And just look at your face now—all slopped over on his side.

HANNAH: That's not true!

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

JAKE: That's it.

JAKES oints 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 DUAL and ARCHIE at the radio station. As DUAL speaks, the cast does a slow motion ballet called "The Smashing of The Phone by Jake." The phone will disassemble, and ACTORS will pick up pieces and make them "fly" through the air. They then follow the action as described by DUAL and ARCHIE.

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

DUAL: Including all thirty-seven registered voters.

ARCHIE: Almost two score inquiring minds—they want to know.

DUAL: Well—Jake did not take kindly to it—

ARCHIE: The old guard dog bit!

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

DUAL: Anger of God, it felt like.

ARCHIE: Righteous!

DUAL: People dodging hither and zither—

ARCHIE: Thither and yon—

DUAL:—either trying to save the phone or hold Jake back—

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

DUAL:—that club incoming at the speed of wrath. When it hit—

ARCHIE: Bam!

The phone pieces “fly” through the air.

DUAL: Jonatha never moved—you could see the “I dare you” in her eyes.

ARCHIE: To me she had “FU” in her eyes—excuse my Indo-European, folks.

DUAL: Whatever it was, Jake saw it.

ARCHIE: Like a geriatric OK Corral.

DUAL: But she did move when he came after her—

ARCHIE: Funny, that—

DUAL: Not funny, really, but—funny—watching him drive her to the bedroom—

ARCHIE: Head 'em up!

DUAL:—her using the handset like a little rapier—

ARCHIE: Touché.

DUAL: But not funny, no—

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

They laugh.

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

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

DUAL: As if she were an immigrant.

JAKE: “You are infected and I’m going to keep you away from everybody.”

ARCHIE: Like a geriatric Ellis Island.

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

ARCHIE: “Wreck”-titude.

DUAL: Handed the handset to Hannah.

ARCHIE: Passing the torch.

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

ARCHIE: Under her own pig-head of steam.

DUAL: Noble.

ARCHIE: It's a keeper for the archives.

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

HANNAH: Christ! Dad—

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

HANNAH: Jonatha, come on out.

JONATHA, in the bedroom, seethes.

DUAL: Immovable force.

ARCHIE: Irresistible object.

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

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

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

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

ROLLINS: She's locked herself in.

HANNAH: *(to JONATHA)* I can unlock the door from out here. You can't stay in my old room—

ROLLINS: No bathroom.

HANNAH: You've got nothing to eat—

ROLLINS: No food.

HANNAH: I'm going to unlock the door—

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

ARCHIE: (*tapping his temple*) A steel trap, Rollins.

DUAL: Jaws of death.

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

JAKE: (*dismissive*) Fresh out.

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." 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."

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SCENE 3

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

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

ARCHIE: "Gang"—

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

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

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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SCENE 4

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

HANNAH: Dad, you can't—

JAKE looks at her.

HANNAH: Well, you shouldn't.

JAKE: Counseling me?

HANNAH: No—

JAKE: Good.

HANNAH:—but you shouldn't.

JAKE goes back to the taping.

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

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

HANNAH: “Even absurdity has a champion to defend it.”

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

HANNAH: Right.

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

HANNAH: No.

JAKE: No. Have I ever?

HANNAH: Never.

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

HANNAH: She’s not some foreigner.

JAKE: Your aunt was always some foreigner.

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

HANNAH: Dad— Dad—

JAKE: What?

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

JAKE: Clash with the decor? Scene of an accident, aren’t we?

HANNAH: No—

JAKE: Watch me festoon!

HANNAH: There’s been no accident.

JAKE: I see destruction all around.

HANNAH: What are you talking about?

JAKE: Haven't you noticed already?

HANNAH: Noticed what?

JAKE: The trucks.

HANNAH: Trucks.

JAKE: Phone company trucks.

HANNAH: Well—

JAKE: "Mention the devil and in he rides."

HANNAH: Just getting hooked up—

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

HANNAH: It's about time.

JAKE: Convenience, safety—

HANNAH: They deserve it.

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

HANNAH: Then you can hardly blame them.

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

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

HANNAH: It's not waste to—

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

HANNAH: You think we will never ever see each other again—

JAKE: We won't.

HANNAH:—never bring over a casserole, never get invited in for coffee—

JAKE: Exactly.

HANNAH: You think people are just going to forget each other—

JAKE: They will.

HANNAH:—and be hovering, waiting, waiting, waiting for that special phone call—

JAKE: The green chalkboards.

HANNAH: What?

JAKE: Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH: *(a little confused)* I don't under[stand]—

JAKE: Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH: What?

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

HANNAH: I don't know.

JAKE: *(takes chalk out of his pocket)* I have my chalk. I always have my chalk. Check your pocket.

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

JAKE: *(holds up chalk)* So do you. You always do, don't you? 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: (*hesitantly, not wanting to disrespect*) Because that's not all of it. And you know that, Dad. If you were sitting in this room listening to their arguments—to my argument about David!—then you know.

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

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

JAKE: The "quoter" queen again.

JONATHA cheers HANNAH on.

HANNAH: Do I have "fair"?

JAKE: Go on.

HANNAH: Mrs. Snole's diabetic shock with no one around. Melanda's miscarriage. The Carter house fire. Marcus almost crushed by the tractor. The Noble boys sliding off the bridge. Bundy losing his arm in the snowblower. And every time, the same thing. And you know I know this—know it inside-out right to the bone! Ten miles down the hill to the gas station pay phone, pray to God that when you dropped the coins the line hadn't died again, then the tone, the 911, the explanation just spewing out and hoping, pray to God, that you gave the right directions—left at the sycamore, look for the Mickey Mouse windsock, because we can't even be bothered to name the streets and number the houses! Then racing back, hoping that when you got there you wouldn't have to sit with the dead while the EMTs came. Oh, we're neighbors, all right, you'd like to keep us neighbors even if it kills— "Fate is the course when men fail to act"—right? I have already, thank you, had enough fate in my life.

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

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

As HANNAH goes to leave, ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS: Yo!

JAKE: Hannah—

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

JAKE: *(to ROLLINS)* Don't you knock?

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

ROLLINS sees the tape.

ROLLINS: Redecorating?

HANNAH: C'mon, let's go.

ROLLINS: I finished all the back orders last night—guitars glued, violins screwed, dulcimers at their highest amplitude. I just need you to help me ship 'em out. What's up, Mr. C?

JAKE and HANNAH refuse to speak.

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

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

HANNAH: Let's go, Rollins.

ROLLINS: I already know that, Mr. C.

HANNAH: Let's go!

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

HANNAH: Are you two finished?

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

HANNAH: You just missed the latest brimstone!

JAKE: Do you have your chalk?

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

JAKE: What are you going to do with it?

ROLLINS: I don't know.

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

HANNAH: He thinks we'll never visit again.

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

JAKE: A little ragged?

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

JAKE: From the no-brainer.

ROLLINS: Good thing us no-brainers don't have the brains to take offense. Look, Mr. C, between a phone and—(*showing the chalk*)—this—with a phone I can book more work doing my instrument repair, which means more time to gather manna with Hannah—that's to the good, hey?

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

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

ROLLINS holds up 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—(*indicating the tape*)—clashes with everything else.

Before she leaves, HANNAH gives JAKE a kiss.

HANNAH: You are so poetic.

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

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

JAKE: (*bangs his stick three times*) Oye, oye, oye—the court is now in session.

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

JAKE: "Everything is good for something."

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

JAKE painfully lies on the couch and falls asleep.

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SCENE 5

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

JONATHA: Jake, how could you be so cruel?

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

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

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

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

You'll never be as good as me.

Yes, I will

No, you won't.

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

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

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

JONATHA: Damn!

JONATHA goes over to the door. Cautiously she opens it and sneaks through the web of "Caution" tape. She tip-toes out of sight—there are opening door sounds, the toilet seat being put down, a pause, a huge sigh, and the flush of a toilet. She comes back into view and goes to the kitchen, gathers what food she can quietly. All this time she is eyeing JAKE. Provisioned, she moves back to the door, and as she gets to the door, JAKE suddenly wakes up, clutching his heart and in short breath. He gets off the couch and is in obvious pain. JONATHA makes a move to help him, then stops, and instead watches him. Gradually his breathing calms and it is clear he is okay. She slips through the tape, and as she quietly closes the door, JAKE turns to look and sees her—though she is not aware he has seen her. JONATHA puts the food on the bed and then turns back to the door, clearly unsure whether she should go back and help or not. She listens and watches JAKE through the "wall"; JAKE stares at her door, perhaps even moves to it, looking very old. Then, deciding, JONATHA moves back to the typewriter and continues to write as she munches on something; JAKE listens, then goes back to the couch and lays down.

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

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SCENE 6

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

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

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

JONATHA: *(without stopping)* Fine.

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

JAKE: I'm not privy.

HANNAH: What are you typing?

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

JAKE: Need a sound mind and body for that.

HANNAH goes to the door but does not touch it.

HANNAH: What are you doing?

JONATHA: It's my magnum opus.

JAKE: Her magnum sourpuss. 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 takes the phone out of the box, hooks it up. JAKE watches her, then stands.

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

HANNAH: Meaning—

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

HANNAH: Meaning—

JAKE: Since “fish and visitors—and old writers—smell in three days,” I must play my part.

HANNAH: What are you gabbing about?

JAKE: I want you to know something.

JAKE points to the door with his stick.

HANNAH: What?

JAKE: Go on—walk over there.

HANNAH walks to the door.

JAKE: Take down the tape. Go ahead, rip it down. De-festoon. Now, try the door handle.

HANNAH: It's locked.

JAKE: Go on—it won't bite. And I haven't painted it with poison.

HANNAH grabs the handle.

JAKE: Turn it!—do I have to tell you everything?

HANNAH: It's locked.

JAKE: Turn it!

HANNAH: It's unlocked.

JAKE: Open says-a-you.

HANNAH: It's unlocked.

JAKE: Apparently been unlocked.

HANNAH: But I have the key—

JONATHA: A jiggle—

HANNAH: What?

JONATHA: (*louder*) A jiggle, a rattle, a righteous toss over the transom—

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

HANNAH: Have you?

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

HANNAH: How do you know?

JAKE: That Jesus rose—

HANNAH: No! About—

JAKE: She fooled you, too.

HANNAH: How do you know?

JAKE: I've seen her.

HANNAH: How?

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

HANNAH: You said it was about principle.

JONATHA: It is.

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

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

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

HANNAH: Dad—

JAKE: Only of her own comfort—

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

JAKE: Don't mind at all. Go on.

HANNAH: So what has this been about?

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

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

JONATHA: Later, Hannah.

HANNAH: Now.

JONATHA: Fine.

HANNAH: What are you typing?

JONATHA: I told you.

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

JONATHA: Some of us have thicker lives than others.

JAKE: And some are just thicker than others.

JONATHA: The eternal kibitzer—

JAKE: Sorry again.

HANNAH: Jonatha—

JONATHA:—that's why you've been a failure.

HANNAH: Answer me—

JAKE: Keeps up the family tradition.

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

JONATHA: My eyes only.

HANNAH: Only?

JONATHA: Yes.

HANNAH: After all—

JONATHA: Niece of mine, all in good time.

JAKE: High-handed wench, ain't she?

HANNAH: I cannot believe this!

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

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

JONATHA: Always have an exit—

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

JONATHA: Armageddon over there.

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

JAKE: She used you, Hannah.

JONATHA: Jake—

JAKE: She used your sadness over David's death—

JONATHA: Shut. Up.

JAKE: *(stage whisper)* Nerve has been hit!

JONATHA: I didn't use anybody.

JAKE: That would be unusual for you.

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

JONATHA: We fought the right fight—

JAKE: *(to JONATHA)* You should just listen.

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

JONATHA: Then you had a tragedy with a husband—

JAKE: Jonatha—

HANNAH: *(in disgust)* I had a tragedy—

JONATHA: Yes.

HANNAH: Is—is that your real mind about David—?

JONATHA: *(ignoring the statement)* You found out that the world doesn't owe you a thing that you don't fight for—and what was wrong with that? You fought, you got stronger—and you won back a life—life!—for yourself. That's the only way it ever happens for real. As for him—we fight like we breathe, as a habit—don't bother yourself with our salvation. I have to write.

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

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

JONATHA: Then you have learned much.

JAKE: *(audible but not loud)* "Even fools sometimes speak to the purpose."

HANNAH: Last swill and excrement.

ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS: Yo, Hannah!

HANNAH: Christ!

ROLLINS: *(sees JAKE by the window)* Hey, Mr. C. *(shouting)* Hey, Miz C. *(a bit confused)*
You're all in the bedroom.

JAKE: Ever the steel trap, Rollins.

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

By this time ROLLINS is at the bedroom door.

ROLLINS: Hey, Hannah.

No one responds.

ROLLINS: Whoa—tension is thick—

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

ROLLINS: What's up?

No one responds.

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

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

ROLLINS: *(sniffing)* Boy—density in here. Well, if Miz C is opting out of opting in, then the Voter Express is looking to bring in at least three votes.

JAKE: Come on, Hannah, let's go.

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

JAKE: You could say—

HANNAH: Rollins—

ROLLINS: What?

HANNAH: Nothing.

ROLLINS: Nothing it is.

HANNAH: Dad, you ready?

JAKE: That question always scared me.

ROLLINS: The pumpkin awaits. Miz C, you absolutely sure?

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. Agitated, she rises and goes back to the typewriter, looks for a moment at the paper in it, then takes it out and carefully crumples it. She reads the last page, puts it back, straightens the stack of papers, binds them with a binder clip, and sets the manuscript on top of the typewriter. Still agitated and nervous, she walks through the house, a ghost. She turns on the radio, and lights come up on ARCHIE as he is giving a report of the election; DUAL is sitting beside him. All of this happens as ARCHIE speaks: she comes across the box that holds a sculpture done by JAKE decades ago, along with the photographs of other pieces he had done and a note that they are stored in ARCHIE's attic; she examines the sculpture, clearly amazed that her brother had done this; then leaves the house to go to ARCHIE's, hearing as she does that the race is a draw because one person did not show up to vote: JONATHA.

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

ARCHIE strikes the gong.

DUAL: 18 checkmarks for one of the candidates.

ARCHIE: *(strikes the gong)* 18 checkmarks for the other. That's right: tie, tie, tie one on. Because—if you can do the math—some one person did not vote out of the thirty-seven registered voters of Liberty Creek.

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

JONATHA pauses 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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SCENE 7

JONATHA enters the scene.

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

JONATHA: Sorry I fell down on my civic duty.

JONATHA hands the letter and book of photos to DUAL.

JONATHA: What is this? And these?

DUAL: It's a letter from your brother—

JONATHA: To you—

DUAL: Giving me custody over these—

JONATHA: Sculptures.

DUAL: And these are pictures of the sculptures.

JONATHA: My brother did sculptures.

DUAL: Yes, he did.

JONATHA: And he gave custody of them to you?

DUAL: He did.

JONATHA: To you.

ARCHIE: I do vaguely remember that, yes—

JONATHA: My brother was a sculptor.

DUAL: Yes.

JONATHA: You both knew this?

DUAL: It's our job.

JONATHA: The town "hysterian"— And you never told me.

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

JONATHA: Which will never get built.

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

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

JONATHA: And you're not everyone.

DUAL: Obviously not.

JONATHA: Where are they?

ARCHIE points up.

JONATHA: How do I get up there?

ARCHIE: Stairs are over there.

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

JONATHA: Give me the photos

DUAL: The magic words?

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

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

JONATHA: Then you got started late—

DUAL: But I held my tongue—

JONATHA: A blessing for us all.

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

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

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

DUAL holds up the photos.

JONATHA: May I please—?

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

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

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

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

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

JONATHA: Tell me.

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

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

DUAL: His hands were strong.

JONATHA: And he let you watch?

DUAL: A delight to watch.

JONATHA: Really.

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

ARCHIE: Alice Dual.

JONATHA: Why?

DUAL: Why what?

JONATHA: Why did he stop?

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

ARCHIE: Fish counter—

DUAL: Logger—

ARCHIE: Stand-in driver at the funeral home—

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

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

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

They exit. JONATHA alone. Lights out.

* * * * *

SCENE 8

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

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

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

JAKE: Oh, my, my.

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.’” *(next line)* “To Jake, Irish twin brother of mine.”

JAKE turns the first page and reads silently at first.

JAKE: I remember this. I remember this naming.

NOTE: the story should be read following the pauses, rushes, and odd syntax—do not make the reading smooth or adult.

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 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 heavenly body and not for any child yet born But Jake looks at me look

at him and our mouths spit stars when we say quiet outside GrategranmaMA's ears
under the per simmon bush ANDROMEDA ANDROMEDA"

JAKE looks up from the book.

JAKE: Andromeda. Andromeda. I had forgotten. Forgotten. My Irish twin.

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

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

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

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SCENE 9

Music button: Chorus from Steely Dan's "Rikki Don't Lose That Number." A hospital room. Around the bed are seated HANNAH and ROLLINS. HANNAH has JONATHA's manuscript. Several beats, then JONATHA enters and sits.

HANNAH: Hello.

JONATHA: Hello.

HANNAH: How did you hear?

JONATHA: Over Archie's scanner.

HANNAH: Who brought you here?

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

HANNAH: Looks like the heart—not hard, but hard enough against an old body.

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.

ROLLINS: He dialed 911. 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.

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. 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.

HANNAH gives ROLLINS a look.

ROLLINS: Miz C, this little band of me is going to try out some of that excellent cuisine they have in the vending machines. Care to partake?

JONATHA: Not hungry.

ROLLINS: Hannah banana?

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

ROLLINS: Rock on.

ROLLINS exits.

JONATHA: *(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.

Silence.

JAKE: 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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SCENE 10

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rings again. ARCHIE picks it up.

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

ARCHIE: Hello. Radio True Blue. (*listens*) Why, thanks. (*listens*) I'd be glad to play it, Sarah.

ARCHIE hangs up.

DUAL: An audience of two.

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

DUAL: Talk show.

ARCHIE: Yeah. You think?

DUAL: I think anything is now possible.

ARCHIE: But should I?

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

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

ARCHIE: We could call it—

DUAL:—"The Green Chalkboard."

ARCHIE: Bullseye.

DUAL: We?

ARCHIE: Of course.

Music ends. ARCHIE bumps a switch—mike on.

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

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

BLACKOUT