

When The Phones Came To Liberty Creek

(A One-Act Techno-Pastoral)

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

BRIEF 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.

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.

(barks several times)

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

(craning his neck)

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

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

ARCHIE

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

(bangs the gong)

Grab your breath, and then report, oh mighty chronicler.

DUAL

(while trying to catch her breath)

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

ARCHIE

Alice, breathe deeply -- and all of you out there -- take a deep breath, a little "air time," for Alice Dual.

ARCHIE takes a deep breath.

ARCHIE

Now, ready?

DUAL

Ready.

ARCHIE

Set.

DUAL

Set.

ARCHIE

Go.

DUAL

I just came from the hospital --

ARCHIE

And?

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Our patriarch is patched up?

DUAL

As mended as medicine can make him.

ARCHIE

Anybody there with him?

DUAL
Hannah. Rollins, too.

ARCHIE
And Jonatha, right?

DUAL
And Jonatha --

ARCHIE
Good.

DUAL
-- the Ice Queen --

ARCHIE
(warningly)
Be objective, Alice --

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

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

DUAL
Pith and vinegar.

ARCHIE
Like that "lithp."
(gives her an affectionate look)
Whew, Alice Dual!

DUAL
Whew, Archie McFee.

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

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

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

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

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

I hope Jake is not listening.

ARCHIE

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

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

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

(reluctantly)

On the day --

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

After all of this --

DUAL

-- not a rump found itself resting --

ARCHIE

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

ARCHIE smiles and gives her a thumbs-up.

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Yes?

DUAL

A restless rump --

ARCHIE

Yes?

DUAL

Can be a dangerous thing, indeed.

ARCHIE

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

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

ARCHIE

Even after all these years --

DUAL

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

ARCHIE puts a tender hand on her shoulder.

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

Woo-woo.

Lights out.

* * * * *

Scene 2

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

DUAL

(with the awe of the historian)

The first one. The very first one, Jake.

ARCHIE

Found it in my attic.

DUAL

The first one ever.

JAKE

Just like the serpent in the Garden, Alice.

ROLLINS

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

JAKE

(to everyone)

Could you all leave now?

ARCHIE

Nabbed the device at a flea market.

JAKE

Begone!

ROLLINS

Your attic is, like --

JAKE

Gone be!

ARCHIE

Never had a use for a phone --

ROLLINS

geological --

JAKE

Thank you all for ignoring me in my own house.

ARCHIE

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

ROLLINS

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

ARCHIE

So come unlayer me sometime.

ROLLINS

Couldn't be done.

DUAL

The first one, Jake.

JAKE

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

ARCHIE

(to HANNAH and JONATHA)

Not too bad, huh?

HANNAH
Does it work?

ARCHIE
Never used it.

HANNAH
How do you know it works?

ARCHIE
I don't.

HANNAH
(to JONATHA)
What if it doesn't --

JAKE
Fine by me.

JONATHA
It will.

JAKE
She commandeth!

HANNAH
Dad!

ARCHIE
Alice Dual -- we have our work to do.

DUAL
Yes.

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

JAKE
House is in my name, not hers.

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

DUAL
"And, Archie -- "

ARCHIE
"This is Alice Dual, folks."

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

"Momentous day, momentous day."

DUAL

"It is. It is."

JAKE

All traps should be shut.

JONATHA

Okay, everyone --

But JONATHA does not move, just stares.

ARCHIE

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

JONATHA

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

JAKE

She commandeth! Againeth!

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

JONATHA

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

JAKE

Too crowded in here.

JONATHA

Gently.

JAKE

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

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

ARCHIE

(into the microphone)

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

DUAL

"Moment of connection here. But wait!"

ARCHIE

"She hands it off to Hannah -- "

DUAL

"Too nervous to make the connection herself."

ARCHIE

"Hannah takes a deep starting-line breath."

ROLLINS

(sotto voce)

Go, girl.

DUAL

"Hannah plugs it in."

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

JAKE

The seventh seal is off.

Everyone shushes him.

JAKE

The four horsemen fart by.

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

ARCHIE

It works.

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

JONATHA

Hello? Yes -- this is she.

JAKE

Uses the subject[ive case] --

JONATHA

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

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

JAKE

I didn't vote for you!

JONATHA gets back on the line.

JONATHA

Yes, this is historic.

JAKE

Won't ever vote for you.

JONATHA

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

JAKE

Rather vote Communist --

JONATHA

And thank you for all your support in this.

JAKE

Let the corruption begin!

JONATHA

No, no, just noisy in the background here.

JAKE

See, it's already started!

JONATHA

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

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

JAKE

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

JONATHA

I have, brother of mine.

JAKE

Oh, but you haven't.

(to all of them)

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

HANNAH

Dad --

ROLLINS

Mr. C --

JONATHA

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

Overlapping.

ARCHIE

Ooooh --

DUAL

The gall --

ROLLINS

Hey!

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JAKE slams down his stick.

JAKE

A relic! At least a relic is useful. Show it off. Sell it. Heave it through the palace windows and kill a czar. But that!

(pointing his stick at the phone)

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

(pointing at them)

None of you has any fight left. Giving in to gravity, to luxury. Upward! That's where the fight goes. Keeps us out of the slime, out of the company of animals. That --

(indicating the phone)

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

JONATHA

Just a dried-up old Jeremiah.

HANNAH moves toward JONATHA, but JAKE waves her off.

JAKE

A sybaritic disgusting bag of bones.

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

You're still jealous --

HANNAH
(to ARCHIE)

Now!

JONATHA
-- because I went to New York.

JAKE
Jealous of a deserter?

HANNAH
Christ, not this!

JONATHA
Forty years gnawing my bones --

JAKE
A. De. Ser. Ter!

JONATHA
An escapee!

JAKE
Who left me to clean up everything --

JONATHA
Who loved a mess --

JAKE
-- so she could pursue her gift --

JONATHA
That's right!

JAKE
Brilliant painter unequalled!

JONATHA
I had a life to make.

JAKE
Unmade everyone to make it.

HANNAH
This is old news --

JONATHA
Farm wife, schoolmarm, nurse --

ROLLINS
No downhill brakes, Hannah.

JAKE
What's wrong with a nurse?

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

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

ARCHIE
(turning it off)
It's off!

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

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

JAKE
Always brighter!

JONATHA
Broader --

JAKE
Badder --

JONATHA
Bigger --

JAKE
Head to match!

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

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

JAKE
"Damned" was right!

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

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

JONATHA
Like that rod up your butt?

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JAKE

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

JONATHA

You know nothing about anything of my life!

JAKE

I know you're a coward.

HANNAH

(hands in the sign of a "T")

Time out!

They ignore her.

JONATHA

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

HANNAH

Time out!

They ignore her.

JAKE

Born wise --

HANNAH

This is old news --

JONATHA

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

JAKE

(childish tone)

New, new, new, new --

ROLLINS

(to HANNAH)

You gotta let 'em.

JONATHA

(interrupting)

At least I tried --

JAKE

And it got you no husband, no children --

JONATHA

Never wanted.

JAKE

No home --

JONATHA

Not desired.

JAKE

Nothing solid --

JONATHA

Didn't need a rock crushing my chest --

JAKE

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

JONATHA

You like the rock on your chest --

JAKE

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

JONATHA

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

HANNAH

Jonatha!

ROLLINS

Whoa!

JAKE

Leave Hannah out of --

JONATHA

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

ROLLINS

Miz C --

DUAL

Jonatha, that's really out of [line] --

JONATHA

And naming the daughter in memoriam -- what a stroke!

JAKE

They are exempt --

ROLLINS

Miz C -- that's not --

JONATHA

Shut up!

(to JAKE)

Exempt? Why? Why, why, why?

(looking at them all)

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

JAKE

All your smart-ass --

JONATHA

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

(pointing at the phone)

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

(to the others)

-- or any of yours, either.

(to HANNAH)

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

HANNAH

I know --

JONATHA

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

JAKE

How she spins --

ROLLINS

Mr. C --

JAKE

-- the web of her defeat!

JONATHA

(to HANNAH)

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

HANNAH

That's not true!

JONATHA

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

JAKE

That's it.

(points to the phone with his stick)

The snake. The snake must be scotched.

JONATHA

The reasoning of a relic.

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

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

Including all thirty-seven registered voters.

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

The old guard dog bit!

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

DUAL

Anger of God, it felt like.

ARCHIE

Righteous!

DUAL

People dodging hither and zither --

ARCHIE

Thither and yon --

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Try a full nelson on a force of nature!

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Bam!

The phone pieces "fly" through the air.

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

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

DUAL

Whatever it was, Jake saw it.

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric OK Corral.

DUAL

But she did move when he came after her --

ARCHIE

Funny, that --

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Head 'em up!

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

Touché.

DUAL

But not funny, no --

ARCHIE

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

They laugh.

DUAL

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

JAKE

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

DUAL

As if she were an immigrant.

JAKE

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

ARCHIE

Like a geriatric Ellis Island.

DUAL

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

ARCHIE

"Wreck"-titude.

DUAL

Handed the handset to Hannah.

ARCHIE

Passing the torch.

DUAL

Turned. Opened the door. And went in.

ARCHIE

Under her own pig-head of steam.

DUAL

Noble.

ARCHIE

It's a keeper for the archives.

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

HANNAH

Christ! Dad --

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

HANNAH

Jonatha, come on out.

JONATHA, in the bedroom, seethes.

DUAL

Immovable force.

ARCHIE

Irresistible object.

ROLLINS

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

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

HANNAH

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

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

ROLLINS

She's locked herself in.

HANNAH

(to JONATHA)

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

ROLLINS

No bathroom.

HANNAH

You've got nothing to eat --

ROLLINS

No food.

HANNAH

I'm going to unlock the door --

ROLLINS

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

ARCHIE

(tapping his temple)

A steel trap, Rollins.

DUAL

Jaws of death.

HANNAH
(to JAKE)

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

JAKE
(dismissive)

Fresh out.

HANNA

Jonatha?

JONATHA

Rather eat June bugs.

HANNAH
(quietly)

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

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

HANNAH

Boy, are we all connected now!

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

* * * * *

Scene 3

ARCHIE

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

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

ARCHIE

"Gang" --

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

ARCHIE

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

(barks several times)

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

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

* * * * *

Scene 4

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

HANNAH

Dad, you can't --

JAKE looks at her.

HANNAH

Well, you shouldn't.

JAKE

Counseling me?

HANNAH

No --

JAKE

Good.

HANNAH

-- but you shouldn't.

JAKE goes back to the taping.

HANNAH

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

JAKE

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

HANNAH

"Even absurdity has a champion to defend it."

JAKE

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

HANNAH

Right.

JAKE

Do I tell you how to keep your house?

HANNAH

No.

JAKE

No. Have I ever?

HANNAH

Never.

JAKE

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

HANNAH

She's not some foreigner.

JAKE

Your aunt was always some foreigner.

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

HANNAH

Dad -- Dad --

JAKE

What?

HANNAH

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

JAKE

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

HANNAH
No --

JAKE
Watch me festoon!

HANNAH
There's been no accident.

JAKE
I see destruction all around.

HANNAH
What are you talking about?

JAKE
Haven't you noticed already?

HANNAH
Noticed what?

JAKE
The trucks.

HANNAH
Trucks.

JAKE
Phone company trucks.

HANNAH
Well --

JAKE
"Mention the devil and in he rides."

HANNAH
(exasperated)
Just getting hooked up --

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

HANNAH
It's about time.

JAKE
Convenience, safety --

HANNAH
They deserve it.

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

HANNAH

Then you can hardly blame them.

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

JAKE

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

HANNAH

It's not waste to --

JAKE

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

HANNAH

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

JAKE

We won't.

HANNAH

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

JAKE

Exactly.

HANNAH

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

JAKE

They will.

HANNAH

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

JAKE

The green chalkboards.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH
(a little confused)
I don't under[stand] --

JAKE
Our green chalkboards.

HANNAH
What?

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

HANNAH
I don't know.

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

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

JAKE
(holds up chalk)
So do you. You always do, don't you?
(referring to the bedroom)
I'll bet you even she -- right? And so does
everybody. We all have our chalk. What's going
to happen to these?

HANNAH
I don't know.

JAKE
Dumped into Archie's attic for the museum that
man will never build, no matter how much he
promises, and no one will ever write again --
(JAKE writes on the air)
-- "Haven't seen you in a whole moon -- how's the
heart?" Or, "Left the coffee-cake on the transom
so the squirrels wouldn't get wind."
(comes closer)
After David passed away, didn't you always seek a
message when you came to your door? And wasn't
there always one there?

HANNAH
You and Jonatha.

JAKE
All of us -- we made the effort.

HANNAH

Yes.

JAKE

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

HANNAH

I loved it every time.

JAKE

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

HANNAH

That happened to me!

JAKE

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

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

JAKE

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

JAKE goes back to his taping.

JAKE

"What is new -- "

HANNAH

Dad --

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

JAKE

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

HANNAH

Wait.

JAKE

Why?

HANNAH does not speak right away.

JAKE

Why?

HANNAH

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

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

HANNAH

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

JAKE

The "quoter" queen again.

JONATHA cheers HANNAH on.

HANNAH

Do I have "fair"?

JAKE

Go on.

HANNAH

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

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

HANNAH

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

As HANNAH goes to leave, ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS

Yo!

JAKE

Hannah --

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

JAKE

(to ROLLINS)

Don't you knock?

ROLLINS

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

ROLLINS sees the tape.

ROLLINS

Redecorating?

HANNAH

C'mon, let's go.

ROLLINS

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

(pointing to the tape)

What's up, Mr. C?

JAKE and HANNAH refuse to speak.

ROLLINS

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

JAKE

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

HANNAH

Let's go, Rollins.

ROLLINS

I already know that, Mr. C.

HANNAH

Let's go!

ROLLINS

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

HANNAH

Are you two finished?

ROLLINS

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

HANNAH

You just missed the latest brimstone!

JAKE

Do you have your chalk?

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

JAKE
What are you going to do with it?

ROLLINS
I don't know.

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

HANNAH
He thinks we'll never visit again.

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

JAKE
A little ragged?

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

JAKE
From the no-brainer.

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

(showing the chalk)
-- this -- with a phone I can book more work doing my instrument repair, which means more time to gather manna with Hannah -- that's to the good, hey?

JAKE
(to HANNAH)
Put him up to this?

ROLLINS

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

(holds up chalk)

Nice, but horse-and-buggy.

JONATHA does a few cheerleading moves.

HANNAH

Rollins -- that was just fine.

ROLLINS

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

(indicating the tape)

-- clashes with everything else.

Before she leaves, HANNAH gives JAKE a kiss.

HANNAH

You are so poetic.

ROLLINS

And it's only the middle of the afternoon.

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

JAKE

(bangs his stick three times)

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

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

JAKE

"Everything is good for something."

JONATHA

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

JAKE painfully lies on the couch and falls asleep.

* * * * *

Scene 5

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

JONATHA

Jake, how could you be so cruel?

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

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

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

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

You'll never be as good as me.

Yes, I will

No, you won't.

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

JONATHA

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

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

JONATHA

Damn!

JONATHA goes over to the door. Cautiously she opens it and sneaks through the web of "Caution" tape. She tip-toes out of sight -- there are opening door sounds, the toilet seat being put down, a pause, a huge sigh, and the flush of a toilet. She comes back into view and goes to the kitchen, gathers what food she can quietly. All this time she is eyeing JAKE. Provisioned, she moves back to the door, and as she gets to the door, JAKE suddenly wakes up, clutching his heart and in short breath. He gets off the couch and is in obvious pain. JONATHA makes a move to help him, then stops, and instead watches him.

Gradually his breathing calms and it is clear he is okay. She slips through the tape, and as she quietly closes the door, JAKE turns to look and sees her -- though she is not aware he has seen her. JONATHA puts the food on the bed and then turns back to the door, clearly unsure whether she should go back and help or not. She listens and watches JAKE through the "wall"; JAKE stares at her door, perhaps even moves to it, looking very old. Then, deciding, JONATHA moves back to the typewriter and continues to write as she munches on something; JAKE listens, then goes back to the couch and lays down.

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

* * * * *

Scene 6

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

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

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

JONATHA
(without stopping)
Fine.

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

JAKE
I'm not privy.

HANNAH
What are you typing?

JONATHA
(loudly)
My last will and testament.

JAKE
Need a sound mind and body for that.

HANNAH goes to the door but does not touch it.

HANNAH
What are you doing?

JONATHA
It's my magnum opus.

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

HANNAH
Aren't you hungry?

JONATHA
Nope.

HANNAH
Don't you have to, like --

JAKE
Go ahead, say it.

HANNAH
-- evacuate?

JONATHA
Cast-iron bladder.

HANNAH
It's been three days.

JONATHA
Just like Christ.

JAKE
He disappeared. No such luck --

HANNAH
Dad --

JONATHA
I shall be always with ye.

JAKE
As with a liver fluke.

HANNAH
You sure --

JONATHA
Nothing, thank you!

HANNAH

Okay, okay.

(to JAKE, hesitant)

And how are you?

JAKE

I was just fine till you brought that.

HANNAH

That's not going away.

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

JAKE

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

HANNAH

Meaning --

JAKE

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

HANNAH

Meaning --

JAKE

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

HANNAH

What are you gabbing about?

JAKE

I want you to know something.

JAKE points to the door with his stick.

HANNAH

What?

JAKE

Go on -- walk over there.

HANNAH walks to the door.

JAKE

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

HANNAH

It's locked.

JAKE

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

HANNAH grabs the handle.

JAKE

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

HANNAH

It's locked.

JAKE

Turn it!

HANNAH

It's unlocked.

JAKE

Open says-a-you.

HANNAH

It's unlocked.

JAKE

Apparently been unlocked.

HANNAH

But I have the key --

JONATHA

A jiggle --

HANNAH

What?

JONATHA
(louder)

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

JAKE

She's been using the loo and the larder.

HANNAH

Have you?

JAKE

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

HANNAH

How do you know?

JAKE
That Jesus rose --

HANNAH
No! About --

JAKE
She fooled you, too.

HANNAH
How do you know?

JAKE
I've seen her.

HANNAH
How?

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

HANNAH
You said it was about principle.

JONATHA
It is.

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

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

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

HANNAH
Dad --

JAKE
Only of her own comfort --

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

JAKE
Don't mind at all. Go on.

HANNAH
So what has this been about?

JONATHA

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

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

JONATHA

Later, Hannah.

HANNAH

Now.

JONATHA

Fine.

HANNAH

What are you typing?

JONATHA

I told you.

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

Some of us have thicker lives than others.

JAKE

And some are just thicker than others.

JONATHA

The eternal kibitzer --

JAKE

Sorry again.

HANNAH

Jonatha --

JONATHA

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

HANNAH

Answer me --

JAKE

Keeps up the family tradition.

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

JONATHA

My eyes only.

HANNAH
Only?

JONATHA
Yes.

HANNAH
After all --

JONATHA
Niece of mine, all in good time.

JAKE
High-handed wench, ain't she?

HANNAH
I cannot believe this!

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

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

JONATHA
Always have an exit --

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

JONATHA
Armageddon over there.

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

JAKE
She used you, Hannah.

JONATHA
Jake --

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

JONATHA
Shut. Up.

JAKE
(stage whisper)
Nerve has been hit!

JONATHA
I didn't use anybody.

JAKE
That would be unusual for you.

HANNAH
Dad!

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

JONATHA
We fought the right fight --

JAKE
(to JONATHA)
You should just listen.

HANNAH
Both of you! Is that what you're writing about
in this, the "right fight"? Is it? Or is he
right -- did you just use me to get you wired up?
Used all of us? From this high I have put you
here --

(laying a hand over her heart)
-- my aunt the artist from the world! And I
always thought I could be the --
(making a gesture of linking)
-- between you and Dad, make up for whatever it
was the two of you blamed each other for.

JONATHA
Then you had a tragedy with a husband --

JAKE
Jonatha --

HANNAH
(in disgust)
I had a tragedy --

JONATHA
Yes.

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

JONATHA

(ignoring the statement)

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

(indicating JAKE)

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

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

HANNAH

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

JONATHA

Then you have learned much.

JAKE

(audible but not loud)

"Even fools sometimes speak to the purpose."

HANNAH

Last swill and excrement.

ROLLINS enters.

ROLLINS

Yo, Hannah!

HANNAH

Christ!

ROLLINS

(sees JAKE by the window)

Hey, Mr. C.

(shouting)

Hey, Miz C.

(a bit confused)

You're all in the bedroom.

JAKE

Ever the steel trap, Rollins.

ROLLINS

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

By this time ROLLINS is at the bedroom door.

ROLLINS

Hey, Hannah.

No one responds.

ROLLINS

Whoa -- tension is thick --

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

ROLLINS

What's up?

No one responds.

ROLLINS

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

JONATHA

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

ROLLINS

(sniffing)

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

JAKE

Come on, Hannah, let's go.

ROLLINS

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

JAKE

You could say --

HANNAH

Rollins --

ROLLINS

What?

HANNAH

Nothing.

ROLLINS

Nothing it is.

HANNAH

Dad, you ready?

JAKE

That question always scared me.

ROLLINS

The pumpkin awaits. Miz C, you absolutely sure?

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.

* * * * *

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.

(reading from the cover page)

"Jake and Jonatha -- Still Life."

(turns the page)

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

(goes to the bottom of the page)

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

(next line)

"To Jake, Irish twin brother of mine."

JAKE turns the first page and reads silently at first.

JAKE

I remember this. I remember this naming.

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

"GRATEGRANMAMA -- She is sitting up in her
cripple wheel chair like Papa told us she would
be but he did not tell us that her eye would
be glued to one end of a black pipe that has its
other end stuck thru the window into the night or
that we would be standing here watching her
twiddle the little nobs we can just but barely
see on the black box that is holding the pipe up
on three legs Papa is saying to her maMA
but he does not say it again until she is taking
her eye away from the pipe and rolling her chair
around to look at our faces so Papa is saying
maMA I have brought over your
grategrandchildren for you to meet and I think
you will find out that a lot of you has been
passed on into them but grategranamaMA is
turning her chair back to look into the pipe and
telling Papa we would have to wait until she got
this chance to get Andromeda in clear fokus for
her 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.
Forgotten. My Irish twin.

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

JAKE

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

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

* * * * *

Scene 9

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

(to HANNAH)

Should we?

JONATHA

What?

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

HANNAH

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

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.

(hands JONATHA the manuscript)

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

JONATHA

That's what makes a cake.

HANNAH

I'm going to go find the humungous.

HANNAH exits.

JONATHA

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

JAKE opens his eyes.

JAKE

Enough, Andromeda.

JONATHA

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

JAKE

Nice of you to come.

JONATHA

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

JAKE

So you'd like to think.

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

JONATHA

What do you mean?

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Let me take that [glass] --

JAKE

I can handle it myself.

JONATHA

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

JAKE

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

JONATHA

That's cruel.

JAKE

Most truth is.

JONATHA

There's no time for --

JAKE

No, there isn't.

JONATHA

So spit it out. Now.

JAKE

I saw you, Jonatha.

JONATHA

What are you talking about?

JAKE

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

JONATHA

What?

JAKE

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

JONATHA

You were on the couch.

JAKE

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

Long silence.

JONATHA

All right, I'm sorry.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Then what?

No response.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

So finish. Finish me off.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

You aren't the [first] --

JAKE stops her.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Shut.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

No.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

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

JAKE

Yep.

Scared -- JONATHA

Yep. JAKE

And yet -- JONATHA

And yet. JAKE

You didn't give [me up] -- JONATHA

No. JAKE

No. JONATHA

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 --
(points to manuscript)
-- just pick one. That'd do for penance.

JONATHA
Jake --

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

JONATHA
Me and my choices.

JONATHA picks up the manuscript, leafs through, stops.

JONATHA
When we were sick.

JAKE
Which time?

JONATHA

When they thought we had rheumatic fever.

JAKE

Ahhh -- house full of fear at that point.

JONATHA

Listen.

JAKE

And don't phone it in!

JONATHA

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

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

JAKE seems ready to fall asleep.

JAKE

Good night sweet prince. Cess.

JONATHA

Rest.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

That is a very good idea.

JAKE

Jonatha.

JONATHA

Yes?

JAKE

I once heard that Mary Baker Eddy --

JONATHA

Who?

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Long distance.

JAKE

Do me a favor? No phone in my grave.

JONATHA

Duly noted.

JAKE

Bad enough having one in the house.

JONATHA

Good enough, too.

JAKE

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

JONATHA

Good source material.

JAKE

That I cannot deny.

JONATHA

Sleep.

JAKE

That I cannot deny either.

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

* * * * *

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