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WHEN THE REAPER CALLS

A Comedy Thriller

by

Peter Colley

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"There are only two topics that can be of the least interest to the serious and studious mind - sex and death."

W. B. Yeats

Cast of Characters:

Professor Victor Pierce (late 20's to early 40's)

Dora Pierce (his wife, same age as Victor)

Professor Harlan Brandstater (same age as Victor)

Colleen Brandstater (his wife, early 20's)

Officer McGuire (female police officer, early 20's)

Place:

An old hunting lodge converted to a summer cottage, on the coast of British Columbia, Canada

Time:

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Early afternoon on a Friday in summer

Scene 2

Late evening, the same day

ACT TWO

That night

When The Reaper Calls was given its professional premiere at the **Gryphon Theatre** in Barrie, Ontario, Canada, under the direction of James Douglas.

CAST:

Colleen Brandstater:	Marguerite Pigott
Professor Victor Pierce:	James Carroll
Dora Pierce:	Carol Coltman
Professor Harlan Brandstater:	Marvin Karon
Officer McGuire:	Michael McKeever

Set Design:	Irena & Adam Kolodziej
Costume Design:	Jill Thompson
Lighting Design:	James Milburn
Fight Director:	John Stead
Sound Design:	Laird Fenwick

A revised version was presented at the **Upper Canada Playhouse** in Morrisburg, Ontario, Canada, under the direction of Gregson Winkfield.

CAST:

Colleen Brandstater:	Stephanie Knight Thomas
Professor Victor Pierce:	Stanley Katz
Dora Pierce:	Catherine O'Brien
Professor Harlan Brandstater:	K. Scott Malcolm
Officer McGuire:	Jennifer Fawcett

Set Design:	Chris Brown & Maggi Macaulay
Costume Design:	Ann Miller
Lighting Design:	Rosanne Hicks
Sound Design:	Daniel Herridge

WHEN THE REAPER CALLS

Playwright's Notes

The initial idea for the play was prompted by the turn of the millennium - such a notable milestone in the passage of time naturally provokes a long look back at our primitive past, and speculation about our uncertain future.

The two madcap academics in this play have wildly divergent opinions about the future, and especially about the likelihood of life beyond the grave. I wanted their arguments to be a reflection of the hopes and fears we all grapple with, but I have attempted to present their dilemmas in the hopefully entertaining form of a comic mystery.

I also wanted the characters to be a reflection of their past – to show how little the human condition has really changed in the last few thousand years. Despite their high-falutin' chatter, the professors' emotions are still locked into their caveman roots, just as capable of fear, rage, lust, jealousy and revenge as their barbarian ancestors, and quite ready to club each other to death given enough provocation. There's no doubt that mankind has come a long way as architects, builders and scientists - but a quick look at any daily newspaper will reveal that our hearts still live in the dark and dangerous caves of our past.



An example of a Pacific Northwest Indian Transformation Mask

(in the open position)

The mask used in the play is much smaller and of a considerably simpler design than the one shown here, but this mask shows the style of First Nations* artwork used in the coastal area of British Columbia.

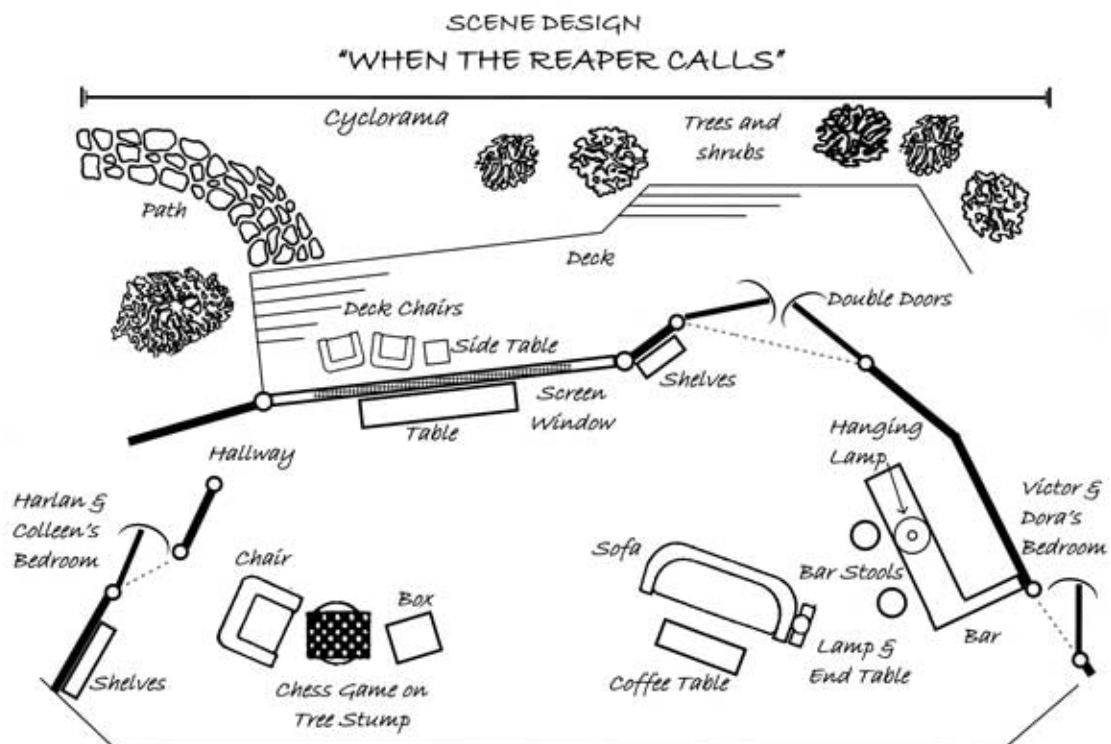
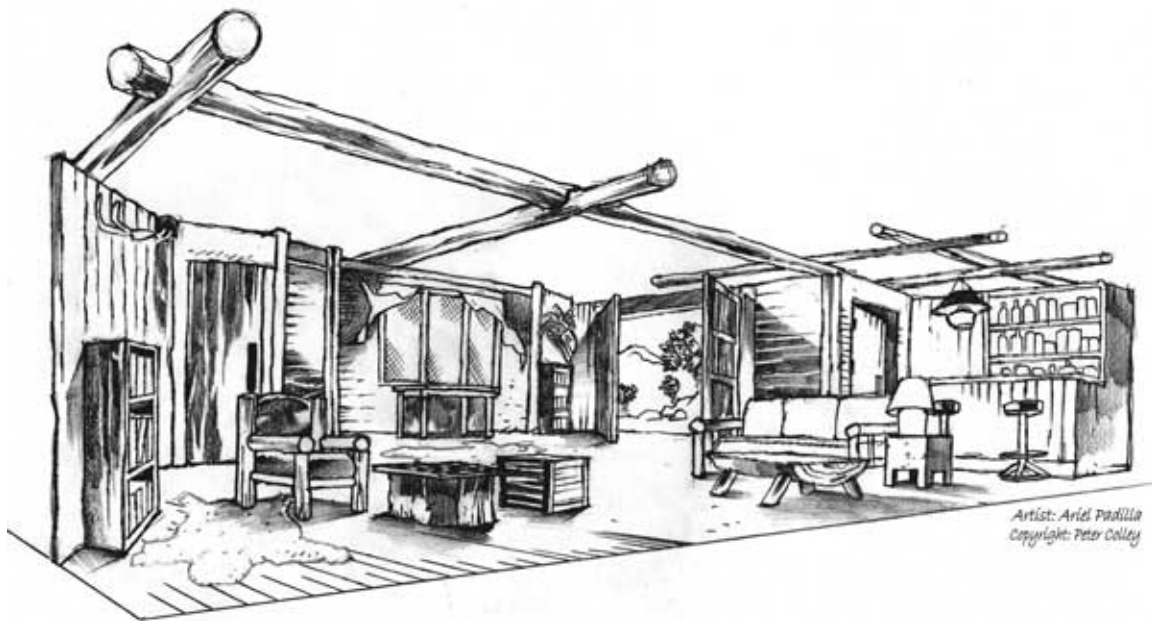
Mask created by Stan Wamiss.

From the art collection of the Vancouver International Airport Authority.

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Photo: Peter Colley

** See the technical notes at the end of the script regarding the use of the term "Indian", "First Nations", etc., in the text of the play. In the technical notes section there are also free mask designs available for theatres to use.*



ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

The interior of a rough hunting lodge on a remote inlet on the wild and rugged coastline of British Columbia, Canada. The lodge has been constructed out of the ruins of an ancient Indian "house", of the type built by the Haida and Nootka of the Pacific Northwest, so the frame is made of irregular logs, and the walls of weathered planking. The lodge was thrown crudely together many years ago as a hunter's shelter and has been converted to a very spartan summer cottage. A primitive kitchen and bathroom have been added (both offstage), but apart from that little has changed. The wind still whistles through the place like the old dried bones of a whale.

The set is dominated by a large window which overlooks the water, but it has no glass, only an insect screen (the window would be shuttered during bad weather). Large rough-hewn double doors lead out onto a deck. The deck continues under the window, and through the window can be seen the backs of some wooden deckchairs, facing out towards the inlet.

If possible, a cyclorama should show the changing moods of the sky. Clouds, sunsets, storms and stars can be dramatically evident through the window. Alternatively, a painted backdrop can show the inlet as it winds out to sea, surrounded by distant tree-covered hills. Some shrubs are visible through the window and door.

The living room walls are adorned with primitive Indian artifacts including a bow with arrows, and an Aleutian Indian harpoon. Also on the wall is a map of the coastline, and a large mercury thermometer on a wooden backing. There is a beaten-up sofa and coffee table. The door to a bedroom (Harlan & Colleen's) is visible SR, and also SR is a hallway which leads to the offstage kitchen. SL is a door which leads to Victor & Dora's bedroom. Downstage right is a small table made out of a tree stump or a wooden crate on which a half-finished chess game is set up. There is an easy chair and a wooden crate for the chess players to sit on. Downstage left is a crude bar with some bottles, glasses, an old telephone, barstools, and a wastebasket. A light hangs down over the bar. There is a pile of firewood and a large woodchopper's axe, and shelves made from old wooden crates displaying stacks of academic books. Some more books are still in cardboard boxes, half-unpacked and there are some suitcases which have also not been unpacked. A collection of freshly picked herbs stick out of jam jars (used as vases) on a shelf along with some diffusing pots for making herbal tea, etc.

Pre-show MUSIC should evoke the songs of the Pacific Northwest Indians and enhance the mood of the cottage as remote and foreboding.

AT RISE:

It is early afternoon. Summer sunlight pours into the room, and the SOUND of gentle wavelets can be heard as the pre-show MUSIC fades out. The CRY OF A LOON echoes across the bay.

PROFESSOR VICTOR PIERCE can be seen through the window coming across the deck. HE looks back to see if anyone is behind him, and then furtively ENTERS through the double doors. HE can be between his late 20's and early 40's in age, quite handsome and stylishly dressed in the latest backwoods fashions, including a multi-pocketed fisherman's vest. VICTOR is a lovable rogue. HE has the kind of delivery that makes it very hard to tell when he's joking, and he carries off his various escapades with great conviction. His nature is basically playful and mischievous, except when interrupted by brief flashes of sadness. HE carries a fishing tackle box which he opens and takes out a

large silver-coloured pistol (a revolver). HE checks the chamber and spins it to make sure it's in working order. HE chuckles to himself.

COLLEEN BRANDSTATER ENTERS through the double doors. SHE is a very pretty woman in her early twenties, tussle-haired and a little sunburned after a day outside. SHE dresses in a casual summer outfit of shorts and a T-shirt and carries an old wooden Indian mask and a box of paints. The mask is partially painted. COLLEEN has an endearing innocence about her. Since she never tells lies herself, she assumes that nobody else does either - a dangerous assumption in the company she's presently keeping. SHE takes VICTOR by surprise.

COLLEEN: Hello, Victor! (*VICTOR jams the pistol back in the tackle box, but HE's too late*) Good heavens!

VICTOR: Oh, hi Colleen!

COLLEEN: Was that... what I thought it was?

VICTOR: Ah... what did you think it was?

COLLEEN: A gun.

VICTOR: A gun?

COLLEEN: Yes! The thing you just put in the box! It looked like... well... a gun!

VICTOR: Oh, THAT! Why, yes. Now that you ask. It is a gun. A .44 Magnum.

COLLEEN: Oh! (*Beat*) Are you worried about bears?

VICTOR: Bears! No, no... the gun is for Harlan.

COLLEEN: Harlan?

VICTOR: Yes. You see, he's going to shoot me tonight.

COLLEEN: I beg your pardon?

VICTOR: Harlan... your darling husband... is going to murder me tonight. That's what the gun's for. Promise me you won't tell him... it's sort of a surprise.

COLLEEN: Harlan is going to murder you... ?

VICTOR: Yes. A crime of passion. It's quite tragic really. (*VICTOR sees something through the window*) Damn it! He's doing it again! (*Shouts out of the window*) Don't you dare touch that fish! (*VICTOR runs to the double doors; sprints across the deck*) Put that fish back into the net, Harlan!

(VICTOR disappears offstage, leaving a very bewildered COLLEEN. DORA PIERCE ENTERS from the hallway. DORA is an austere woman the same age as Victor. SHE is dressed in dour "sensible" clothes of drab tweeds and browns. SHE was once an attractive woman, but several years of unrelieved surliness have prematurely aged her. Her mood is a simmering, barely-controlled anger - mainly directed against Victor. SHE carries a doctor's bag and some big

medical books. There is THE SOUND OF ARGUING offstage.)

VICTOR'S VOICE: (O/S) Put it back! I'm warning you, Harlan! *(Incomprehensible reply from Harlan)* I intend to eat it, whether it has a soul or not!

(SOUND OF A STRUGGLE offstage. DORA gives a weary look in the direction of the sound.)

DORA: What is it this time?

COLLEEN: *(Distracted; still thinking about Victor)* What? I'm sorry... *(Looks out the window)* Oh, it's that fish Victor caught. I think Harlan's letting it go.

DORA: *(Wearily)* Oh no. I can see that this is going to end up as a major debate on the metaphysics of trout.

(The offstage scuffle heats up.)

VICTOR'S VOICE: (O/S) I was saving it for my supper, Harlan! Don't... don't... *(SOUND of a SPLASH offstage)* Oh, damn you!

DORA: *(Putting her medical bag down and the books on a shelf)* Amazing, isn't it? They come up here to escape the pressures of university life, and spend most of their time trying to throttle each other.

(PROFESSOR HARLAN BRANDSTATER is visible through the window coming across the deck. VICTOR follows close behind.)

VICTOR: What about yogurt? I've seen you eating that! That's an organism, isn't it? Does that have a soul? Can you hear it scream as it goes down your throat?

(HARLAN and VICTOR ENTER through the double doors. VICTOR is splattered with water.)

HARLAN: That's not the same, Victor. That's a primitive organism!

VICTOR: Oh, yeah? Well, that fish didn't look so smart to me!

(HARLAN is a staid-looking man the same age as Victor, not unattractive, but terminally bland. HE wears bifocal glasses, oversize khaki shorts, a dull knit shirt, black shoes, black socks, and a strip of white sunscreen on his nose. HE is a soft-spoken academic who studiously avoids displays of violent emotion. VICTOR sees DORA.)

VICTOR: Hello, sweetheart! Did you get some studying done?

(HE goes to give her a kiss on the cheek.)

DORA: Don't come near me! You're soaking! I'll get you a towel.

(DORA disappears down the hallway. At first VICTOR seems a bit hurt by the rebuff, but then HE sees COLLEEN looking at him questioningly, still confused)

about his talk of murder. VICTOR quickly returns to his usual self and winks at her mischievously.)

COLLEEN: *(Flustered)* Herbal tea, anyone? *(Goes to her jars of herbs and picks some)* I just collected some wild fireweed this morning. *(Silence)* Harlan?

HARLAN: *(Evasive)* What was that, dear?

COLLEEN: *(Waves a soggy sprig at him)* Some wild fireweed tea? It's your favourite.

HARLAN: *(Hates the stuff)* Ah... fireweed...

VICTOR: *(Bailing him out)* How about some coffee, Colleen? I could really use a cup.

HARLAN: Yes... a cup of coffee. That would be nice.

COLLEEN: *(A losing battle)* OK. I'll make some coffee! But fireweed's a lot healthier.

(SHE waits, but there are no converts. SHE reluctantly EXITS to the kitchen.)

HARLAN: *(To VICTOR)* Thanks. I think those herbal teas are rotting my intestines.

(HARLAN sits at the unfinished game of chess and stares at the pieces.)

VICTOR: I don't know why I help you at all - the louse who threw away my trout! It was a perfect pan size.

HARLAN: Don't you think it was cruel keeping it in that net?

VICTOR: Cruel! It's a fish!

HARLAN: Well, I just couldn't watch it swimming around that little condemned cell, ready to be bludgeoned to death to satisfy your brutish instincts.

(DORA ENTERS with a towel.)

VICTOR: Harlan, hunger is not a brutish instinct. We can't even come up to the cottage without being followed around by your idiotic theories! I hope, when you are reincarnated, that you come back as a trout, and I come back as a bear, and I shall eat you without an ounce of remorse!

HARLAN: Aha! So you admit to the possibility of reincarnation!

VICTOR: No I don't!

HARLAN: You just said it!

VICTOR: I said "if"... "if"! *(To DORA)* Didn't I say "if"?

DORA: No.

(SHE throws the towel at VICTOR and heads towards the kitchen.)

VICTOR: *(To HARLAN)* Isn't wifely support a wonderful thing?

(VICTOR playfully starts to flick the towel at DORA as SHE leaves, but SHE turns and catches him in the act.)

DORA: If you were reincarnated, Victor, you'd come back as a rat.

(DORA EXITS through the hallway.)

VICTOR: Well, at least I'm moving up the food chain! Last week I was a cockroach. *(VICTOR sees a mosquito flying around and picks up a fly swatter)* Harlan, your philosophy is pure superstition.

HARLAN: Today's superstitions are tomorrow's science.

VICTOR: There's nothing scientific about thinking a fish has a soul!

(VICTOR stalks the mosquito.)

HARLAN: It's never been proved that they don't have one.

VICTOR: I suppose they all have little fish churches down at the bottom of the ocean. Minister Mackerel and the Church Of The Holy Bottom-Feeders. *(In a parson's voice)* And today's sermon is called: "Turning The Other Gill".

HARLAN: Go on, mock away...

VICTOR: OK, Harlan, what if it was a thirty foot shark coming at you? Would you kill it then?

HARLAN: No. As a Stoic, I'd take my chances.

VICTOR: What about a thirty foot shark about to attack your lovely young wife?

(VICTOR swats at the mosquito and misses, then searches for it again.)

HARLAN: Victor, a principle's a principle.

VICTOR: You're wrong Harlan! Everyone is capable of killing in the right circumstances! And not just in self defense, either.

HARLAN: If you believe in a soul - as some of us still do - you can't kill anyone. If you believe that there's a time and place where your actions are judged - how can you possibly kill any creature?

(The mosquito bites Harlan on the cheek; HE instinctively SLAPS and squashes it. VICTOR does not see this. When HARLAN realizes what he's done, HE guiltily smears the carcass under the chair arm.)

VICTOR: There's one thing missing in your argument, Harlan. Passion! In a moment of passion our natural instincts take over and we can do anything - no matter how horrible! All of us are capable of murder! All of us!

HARLAN: I don't believe that. As Zeno of Citium once said...

VICTOR: Forget about Zeno... don't you have anything more modern? What about Wittgenstein?

HARLAN: What about Wittgenstein?

VICTOR: A little case of a red-hot poker.

HARLAN: Oh, you're not going to bring that up?

VICTOR: Why not? The leading ethics philosopher of the day attacks a rival professor at Cambridge with a red-hot poker. And where did this violent assault take place? The Moral Sciences Club! Proves my point perfectly.

HARLAN: Wittgenstein didn't attack him. He waved the poker in his general direction. Some say it was more of a toasting fork.

VICTOR: Ah, suddenly you've become a relativist!

HARLAN: Not at all. Poker or toasting fork - the blow was never actually delivered, which proves my point.

VICTOR: The only reason the blow was never delivered was because there wasn't a woman involved. Do you remember why Wittgenstein went after him?

HARLAN: Some disagreement over logical positivism, wasn't it?

VICTOR: Logical positivism! Now there's a subject to make your blood boil! But if there had been a woman involved... say, if that professor had been having an affair with Wittgenstein's wife instead of merely disagreeing with his prissy ethics - that poker would not have stopped short - it would have taken his head right off! You see, Harlan, the problem with your pal Zeno was that he didn't have any sex drive. In the real world, all you need is a little intrigue... lust... betrayal... and we could all be trying to hack each other to death before this weekend's out.

HARLAN: Really, Victor...

VICTOR: What about tenure? I bet you'd murder me for that!

HARLAN: *(With a smile)* Ah!

VICTOR: Ah, indeed! That piqued your interest, didn't it? After all, I'm just ahead of you in seniority. Bump me off and you'd get that financial security you crave so much.

HARLAN: *(Laughs)* Don't put ideas into my head!

VICTOR: If you knew you could get away with it, you'd do it!

(DORA comes in with a tray of muffins and heads towards HARLAN.)

DORA: I picked up some fresh muffins in the village. Would you like one, Harlan?

(As SHE goes past VICTOR, HE steals a muffin off the tray.)

VICTOR: Thanks! So thoughtful of you! *(To HARLAN)* Harlan, we all have something we'd kill for.

(VICTOR EXITS into his bedroom SL, taking off his wet shirt.)

DORA: (*Watching VICTOR leave*) Isn't that the truth. (*Offers HARLAN the tray of muffins; HE takes one*) Don't expect your coffee any time soon. Colleen's still trying to find that old manual coffee grinder.

HARLAN: What's wrong with the electric one?

DORA: (*Imitating Colleen's voice*) "Do you know how many beautiful valleys have been flooded to make the electricity we use?" I'm quoting, of course.

HARLAN: She has a point.

DORA: Your wife is saving the world one cup at a time, while I'm having a hard time even saving myself. (*DORA picks up her handbag and looks in it, casually at first, and then frantically*) Oh, no!

HARLAN: What's the matter?

DORA: My pills! I left my damn pills at home! God... I remember now... they were on the sideboard... ! (*SHE runs to the telephone and looks at a list of numbers pinned to the wall*) Pharmacy... pharmacy...

HARLAN: Are you going to be all right?

DORA: No! They're my tranquilizers! I go crazy without them! (*She finds the number on the list and dials*) Hello... I need a prescription filled! (*Listens*) What do you mean... Monday? What kind of pharmacy is that? "Joe's Bait, Food & Ammo"? Well, where's the closest one? (*Listens*) Oh, God! No, it's not an emergency... not yet. (*Slams the phone down*) A travelling pharmacist - won't be in until Monday! Now I know why they call this the wilderness.

HARLAN: Will you be OK?

DORA: Yes. No. I don't know.

HARLAN: I didn't know you needed tranquilizers.

DORA: Need them? I can't get through a day without them... thanks to my slimeball husband.

HARLAN: I'd noticed a little tension between you and Victor. We all have.

DORA: Little tension? Try murderous rage.

HARLAN: But why?

DORA: Why do you think? He's having another affair.

HARLAN: Not again! Who is it this time?

DORA: I don't know! Does it matter? Some dippy little first year student, no doubt. I've had it with this constant humiliation, Harlan! There are times when I just want to wring his neck!

HARLAN: Are you sure that he's... ?

DORA: I can tell. For one thing he starts being nice to me. He kisses me on the cheek a lot... calls me "sweetheart" all the time. I've seen these signs before. He's trying to figure out if I'm onto him.

HARLAN: Oh, dear, oh dear!

(HARLAN sits by her; reassuringly takes her hand.)

DORA: Men! Why can't they all be like you, Harlan? Solid and predictable!

HARLAN: Well, you have to work at it.

DORA: Why did I end up with a wild "Epicurean" philosophy professor, instead of a nice gentle Stoic like you?

HARLAN: I don't know what caused Victor to get involved with that way of thinking. One day he was a normal, rational human being... the next he waltzes in and starts rambling on how: "Nietzsche was right... God is dead... it's every man for himself!" I thought he was joking... that it was just another one of his games.

DORA: It wasn't. We had a good marriage... he was kind... attentive... loving... and then "bang"!

HARLAN: You must have talked to him about it?

DORA: I've tried... but it's impossible! He can talk forever about philosophy, but he's completely tongue-tied about his own problems.

HARLAN: It's all so odd. Plato said that when a man is young he obsessively pursues physical beauty, flitting from one passionate chase to another. Then he comes to realize that physical beauty is commonplace and begins his search for "goodness" and permanence. But Victor seems to be doing it all backwards.

DORA: Perhaps I'm not good? I don't feel good. In fact I'm feeling downright wicked these days.

HARLAN: Oh, you are good Dora. Take it from an old friend.

DORA: Well, to hell with Plato! I can't go on like this, Harlan! I won't just stand by and watch while he parades another affair in front of me! I get so angry sometimes that I don't feel rational anymore. And now I don't have my trunks... we're in for a wild weekend!

HARLAN: Why don't you talk to Colleen? She makes a herbal tea that's supposed to be a tranquilizer.

DORA: You're not serious?

HARLAN: It would make her feel better if somebody drank the stuff.

DORA: I notice you don't.

HARLAN: I'm not tense.

DORA: Not yet, but the night is young. I'm sorry, Harlan. I wish I was more open-minded about that herbal stuff, but I'm not.

HARLAN: Suit yourself. It's your nerves, not mine. These books of hers claim that it's very efficacious.

DORA: It's all a load of bull, Harlan - not an ounce of science in any of it! It's time I proved it to Colleen before she poisons herself and the rest of us. *(Takes one of Colleen's books from a shelf)* Look at these snake-oil books: "Medicines of the Forest - The Shamanic Way to Self-Mastery". *(Looks at another title)* "Spiritwalker - The Herbal Path to Enlightenment". Ha! Can you believe this nonsense? *(Puts the books in her medical bag)* A little creative fiction will be a nice break from my studies.

HARLAN: Don't be too hard on Colleen, she really believes in all this. Take a few deep breaths... perhaps a walk by the shore? You've been studying awfully hard recently.

(Dora takes a couple of her medical books from the shelf where she put them earlier and tucks them under her arm.)

DORA: You needn't worry - I'm the only person in medical school who actually enjoys the work load. It distracts me from my overwhelming desire to strangle my husband.

(DORA picks up her doctor's bag and EXITS through the double doors. HARLAN sits at the chess board again. VICTOR pops his head around his bedroom door.)

VICTOR: Has she gone?

HARLAN: Yes. She's studying down at the boathouse.

(VICTOR ENTERS. HE has changed into a dry shirt.)

VICTOR: What did she say?

HARLAN: Now, Victor! You know I can't tell you what she told me in confidence.

VICTOR: No need to, old chum! She thinks I'm having an affair.

(VICTOR sits at the chess board and stares at the pieces.)

HARLAN: Are you?

VICTOR: No! Nothing could be further from the truth! I'm TRYING to have an affair, and failing miserably!

HARLAN: Victor, Victor! Why do you do this?

VICTOR: Pretty obvious, isn't it? Dora's hardly been a barrel of laughs recently. I think that scowl is becoming a permanent fixture.

HARLAN: Don't forget, you were the one who changed, Victor!

VICTOR: Me? I haven't changed!

(VICTOR starts to move a chess piece, but then changes his mind and stops.)

HARLAN: Don't you remember? The day you decided that between Epicurus and Nietzsche you had all the answers.

VICTOR: Oh, that. I've just come to my senses, that's all. But when it comes to the "change" department, you are the Dean of the Faculty.

HARLAN: What do you mean?

VICTOR: You've completely lost your sense of fun. You never play pranks anymore.

(VICTOR goes to the bar and gets himself a drink; pours one for HARLAN.)

HARLAN: We're too old for that sort of thing. Besides, your pranks have become very dark and strange in recent years. It's that dreadful nihilism of yours.

VICTOR: You call it nihilism - I call it realism.

HARLAN: How can you be so certain that there's nothing out there?

VICTOR: Harlan, I may not know everything, but I sure know nothing when I see it. We've all been tricked... there's nothing out there but a house of dust... a worm's pasture!

(VICTOR crosses to HARLAN, gives him the drink, and sits by the chess board.)

HARLAN: I don't understand what's happened to you! You used to be an open-minded idealist... you were also never the type to be unfaithful to his wife, and then suddenly you went out and had that affair with that Hanley girl.

VICTOR: Oh, I started it all, did I? As always, I'm the villain. But that's not the whole story, Harlan.

HARLAN: Then what is the whole story?

(VICTOR is about to say something, then stops.)

VICTOR: Forget about it, Harlan! Let's just say we're all slaves to our baser instincts.

HARLAN: We're not slaves... we have choices... you have choices...

VICTOR: I don't think so. Ah, who cares? We're simply a true reflection of life... chaotic, irrational, murderous and completely beyond hope.

HARLAN: Murderous?

VICTOR: Did I say murderous? Well, I'm sure it fits in there somewhere. In a way all this has been a liberation. Now I see life as it really is. We're all animals... racing around in an orgy of self-gratification until we drop dead from excess or boredom. And now my greatest challenge is to prove that simple fact to you.

HARLAN: And my greatest challenge is to prove to you that you're wrong. In fact, I have a quote from Kierkegaard that even you would find appropriate.

(HARLAN heads towards his bedroom.)

VICTOR: Kierkegaard! I didn't think you read any books that were less than two thousand years old.

(HARLAN stops.)

HARLAN: I like to know what I'm up against.

VICTOR: You're so certain, aren't you? That's why you're such an antique. Modern philosophy begins with doubt.

HARLAN: I know: "Doubt everything that can be doubted". Descartes makes an interesting point, but I happen to believe it all begins with faith. Then doubt if faith fails.

VICTOR: When faith fails.

HARLAN: Let me get that quote.

VICTOR: You won't find the answer in any of those books! Only in life.

(HARLAN EXITS into his bedroom. VICTOR gets up and looks around to make sure HE's alone. HE takes the pistol out of the tackle box, twirls the gun like a cowboy, sticks it in his pocket, and does a "quick draw".)

VICTOR: Pow, pow, pow! *(Looks at the pistol)* All tragedies are ended by a death - all comedies by a marriage! *(Puts the gun to his head)* Bang!

(COLLEEN ENTERS through the hallway, proudly juggling a tray with several cups of coffee on it.)

COLLEEN: I made the coffee! I even added some fresh-picked chicory. *(SHE looks around at the empty room)* Oh!

(VICTOR puts the pistol on the chess table.)

VICTOR: They're both busy, as usual. It's just you and me.

(SHE puts the coffee tray down.)

COLLEEN: Now, Victor, what on earth were you talking about? Murder? Harlan shooting you? What are you up to now?

VICTOR: Oh that! I'm sorry I had to spring it on you like that, but I was going to tell you anyway. It's a little experiment of mine. It's perfectly safe - I'm putting blanks in the gun, of course. But it's time Harlan stopped deluding himself and saw the truth.

COLLEEN: Victor, I can't simply stand by and watch you pull some cruel trick on him!

VICTOR: It's not cruel! He enjoys a game as much as anyone! You should have seen the stunts he's pulled on me over the years. He was an extraordinary games player before he turned into a potted plant. *(VICTOR picks up the Indian mask that COLLEEN brought in earlier and looks at it like the skull in Hamlet)* "Alas poor Harlan! I knew him, Horatio. He was a fellow of infinite jest". Colleen, there was a time when he was one of the greatest pranksters you ever met. In our university days he was inspired... a genuinely twisted imagination...

COLLEEN: This is my Harlan you're talking about?

VICTOR: The same. But in recent years he's become just as dead as this character here. *(To the mask, Shakespearean style)* "Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your flashes of merriment that would set the table on a roar?" *(Sighs, tosses the mask aside on the sofa; COLLEEN tries to grab it, nervous about its fragility)* I miss him, Colleen. And you would too, if you'd known him then. Bit by bit, all the pieces of my life I ever cared about are falling away.

COLLEEN: *(Putting the mask in a safe place)* And you think this game will bring Harlan back?

VICTOR: It's our only chance. Shock therapy.

COLLEEN: Our only chance?

VICTOR: Yes! You're in this too. This stoicism is ruining him. He's so obsessed with the next life that he's stopped living this one. Look how he treats you... you're young and beautiful and energetic, and yet he hardly seems to know you exist!

COLLEEN: That's not true!

VICTOR: OK, when was the last time he took you out for a romantic evening? When was the last time he wrote wild poetry for you? When was the last time he even told you he loved you?

COLLEEN: Well... umm... but Stoics don't do things like that.

VICTOR: But Harlan ISN'T a Stoic! That's the whole point! He's as volatile and passionate as I am... more so!

COLLEEN: No, I'm sorry, Victor, I can't go along with this.

(COLLEEN moves away from VICTOR and takes a book from a shelf. It's a large book called "Herbs of the Northwest" with colorful plants on its cover. SHE sits and opens the book.)

VICTOR: You're not going to cure him with one of your herbal concoctions, much as though you try. *(Off her look)* Oh, yes, I'm onto you, my girl. There's a lot more than fireweed you're putting in that tea. *(Takes the book out of her hand)* Tell me what he usually does when he gets home! Does he rush up to you and kiss you madly?

COLLEEN: *(Grabs the book back)* You know he doesn't!

VICTOR: Sometimes he doesn't even say hello, does he? He just goes straight to his study, and starts working. I've been there... I've seen it.

COLLEEN: *(Rapidly flicking through her book)* Sometimes he does that.

VICTOR: Now imagine a Harlan coming home like this: it's the end of the working day. You've been home all day, alone. You've been dabbling with your paints and your masks, trimming your herb garden, doing your yoga, but you're bored... you're lonely. You see Harlan's car pull up outside.

(VICTOR dashes outside onto the deck and plays at being Harlan. HE speaks through the screen window.)

He gets out of the car... rushes up the walkway, tears off his tie...

(Mimes this.)

... rips off his jacket. He kicks open the door!

(HE kicks open the double doors.)

Lust is in his eyes... his breathing is heavy... he's sweating.

(VICTOR wipes the sweat from his forehead.)

As his eyes fix on you, you feel the electricity of an animal in heat! He rushes to your side...

(VICTOR rushes to COLLEEN.)

... he throws his arms around you. He says things like...

(At this moment DORA can be seen through the screen window crossing the deck. SHE can clearly hear the following:)

VICTOR: ...I love you, Colleen. You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen.

(DORA stops in her tracks and stares at them in horror through the screen window.)

VICTOR: I thought of nothing but you all day. I couldn't wait to get here so we could make love the whole night through. From now on we're going to make love under the stars... go skinny-dipping in the ocean. No more books, no more papers... just you and me and a life of unbridled passion! What do you think?

(VICTOR's playacting has aroused feelings in COLLEEN that she has been suppressing for a long time. Her book slips from her grasp and crashes to the floor. DORA backs away into the foliage beyond the deck.)

VICTOR: *(Off COLLEEN's far-away expression)* Colleen? Colleen?

COLLEEN: *(Distracted)* Wha... what? I'm sorry...

VICTOR: What do you think? Isn't it better this way?

(VICTOR indicates the pistol on the chess board.)

COLLEEN: *(Confused)* Ah... yes... *(Sees pistol)* No... God, I don't know...

(COLLEEN picks up her book from the floor. DORA's face slowly re-appears in a corner of the window.)

VICTOR: So you won't tell Harlan that I've put blanks in the gun?

COLLEEN: You're absolutely sure it's safe?

VICTOR: What could go wrong? All I want to do is to prove to Harlan that he's capable of pulling that trigger! I'm the one who's at risk - he'll be aiming the gun at me!

COLLEEN: I don't know...

VICTOR: It'll be good for both of us. He'll see who he really is... you'll see who he really is... and then we can all stop this idiotic pretense, and move on with our lives. You deserve to have some romance back in your life, and if you let me I can give it to you.

COLLEEN: But guns terrify me... what if... ?

(COLLEEN turns away from VICTOR and moves towards the window; DORA quickly backs away into the shadows.)

VICTOR: His stoicism is only going to get worse. This may be our last chance to make a breakthrough. Please don't tell him! Please! (*SHE hesitates, which VICTOR takes as a "yes"*) Thank you!

(HE kisses her on the cheek, takes the pistol from the chess table and puts it back in the fishing tackle box.)

COLLEEN: Victor! Now stop that. I haven't said...

VICTOR: You won't regret it!

(HE bounds excitedly to his bedroom and EXITS. COLLEEN tries to pull herself together, then EXITS through the hallway.

After a moment DORA ENTERS quietly through the double doors.)

DORA: So that's who it is! Colleen! (*Looks towards Victor's bedroom*) The lousy, two-timing weasel!

(SHE goes over to the fishing tackle box and takes out the pistol.)

Blanks, hmm?

(SHE flips open the pistol's chamber and spins it with a cold laugh as HARLAN ENTERS from his bedroom, carrying a philosophy book. DORA quickly hides the pistol behind her back.)

HARLAN: Is everything OK?

DORA: (*Stifling her laugh*) Yes. Fine.

(SHE bursts into laughter again. HARLAN looks down to see if his fly is open.)

DORA: It's not you, Harlan. (*Laughs again*) It's just something funny I thought of.

(DORA LAUGHS wickedly as:

The lights fade. Ominous MUSIC punctuates the end of the scene, and continues through the blackout.)

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT 1**Scene 2****SETTING:**

The same as before, later that evening. The bright sunlight of Scene 1 has now changed to the golden glow of the setting sun. Several hours have passed since the previous scene, which is reflected in the lighting change and the fact that the half-unpacked cardboard boxes and suitcases have been put away.

AT RISE:

HARLAN is fast asleep on the sofa - a large volume of Plato's "Apology" lying open on his stomach. His glasses are perched on his forehead, his head is thrown back, mouth wide open as HE snores softly.

VICTOR peeks into the room through the screen window and sees HARLAN. HE ENTERS through the double doors and tiptoes over to the fishing tackle box and takes out the pistol. VICTOR looks at the pistol with a smile, then tiptoes quietly over to HARLAN and glances at the book lying on his stomach.

VICTOR: *(Reads title)* Plato's "Apology". Well, he should apologize... look what he's done to you! *(Whispers into HARLAN's ear)* You are going to kill Victor! He is your enemy... you hate him! You will pick up a silver pistol and shoot him right through his black heart! *(Laughs to himself)* "If you believe in a soul, you can't kill anyone." We'll see about that!

(VICTOR looks around for a good place to put the pistol. HE places it strategically on the chess table, and then EXITS into his bedroom SL. The SOUND of a door opening and closing offstage from Harlan and Colleen's bedroom SR indicates their room has a door which leads to the outside. COLLEEN ENTERS through the bedroom door, carrying her box of paints and the Indian mask she's been working on. SHE sees HARLAN sleeping, then notices the pistol on the chess table and reacts nervously. SHE coughs to get HARLAN's attention. It doesn't work. SHE goes back to the door and SLAMS IT. HARLAN wakes up with a sudden snort and starts reading right where HE left off.)

COLLEEN: Harlan?

HARLAN: Oh, hello! I was just reading.

(HE squints at the text and then looks around for his glasses. They are perched on his forehead. Finally, HE finds them.)

COLLEEN: I have to talk to you, Harlan.

HARLAN: Certainly.

COLLEEN: There's something you should... you see, Victor is... that is, we were... ah... *(Losing her nerve)* ... do you like my mask?

*(COLLEEN shows him the newly painted Indian mask.
The face on the mask has a sly grin.)*

HARLAN: *(Barely glancing at it)* Yes, yes. Very nice.

(HE puts his nose back into his book.)

COLLEEN: Harlan, you're not listening to me!

(HE looks up.)

HARLAN: I'm sorry. What was it you said?

COLLEEN: My mask...

HARLAN: Ah, yes. *(HE squints at it)* Pretty. Very pretty.

COLLEEN: *(Offended)* Pretty!?

HARLAN: Ah... maybe that wasn't quite the right word... it's... *(Looking closely at it)* ... very... dramatic? *(Beat; SHE glares at him)* What does it... ah... who does it represent?

COLLEEN: It's a trickster spirit... Puk-wudji, I think.

(COLLEEN puts her box of paints on a shelf and looks around for a place to hang the mask on the wall.)

HARLAN: *(Trying to show interest)* Puk-wudji?

COLLEEN: He's the nephew of Guguyini, the Raven - he loves to play tricks, and tell secrets. He's also a transformer - he can turn himself into anything - so you have to keep an eye on him.

HARLAN: Where did you get it? It looks quite old.

COLLEEN: It was on the wall of the hardware store in the village - they said it was found right around here. It was in terrible condition, the paint was all worn off.

HARLAN: Is that wise... painting it, I mean? Aren't those old masks supposed to have spirits? Tinkering with them may be dangerous.

COLLEEN: I did some chants over it to drive away any bad spirits.

HARLAN: Ah, your yoga chants, yes. Very prudent.

COLLEEN: No, I used a real Indian chant. Remember that shamanism class I took? And I'm using paints I made from native plants - I'm just trying to restore it to its original condition. Besides, you told me this whole cottage was made out of the remains of a sacred Nootka long-house and nobody has ever come to any harm here. *(Beat)* Have they?

HARLAN: Not that I've heard of. Although I've often wondered why the rent is so much lower than the other cottages.

COLLEEN: What!

(COLLEEN looks around apprehensively.)

HARLAN: Still, we've been coming here for years without any problems. Yes, I'm sure we're all perfectly safe and sound.

COLLEEN: Spirits are very patient. They could be waiting for the right moment. I'll look up some chants for houses - just in case.

HARLAN: Good idea. *(Pleasantly)* Well, back to work.

(HE goes back to his book. COLLEEN finds a place to hang the mask, and puts it on a hook on the wall.)

COLLEEN: Harlan... do you think I'm "pretty"?

HARLAN: Everyone thinks you're pretty, Colleen.

COLLEEN: I'm not interested in what EVERYONE thinks, I want to know what you think!

HARLAN: Of course I think you're pretty, but I didn't marry you because of something so superficial as beauty.

COLLEEN: I know that, Harlan... I didn't mean to suggest... *(Beat)* Why did you marry me?

HARLAN: You know why I married you. There were many, many reasons. Yes, indeed.

(Thinking HE's satisfied her, HARLAN goes back to his book.)

COLLEEN: How about giving me one!

HARLAN: Oh, golly... you mean right now?

COLLEEN: It's not a trick question, you know.

HARLAN: Very well. *(Thinks hard)* When I met you, you were like a... *(Struggles for the right word)* ...

COLLEEN: ...yes?

HARLAN: ...a breath of fresh air. You were... invigorating.

COLLEEN: You make me sound like an aerosol spray.

HARLAN: I'm not very good at this sort of thing. I need some time to think about it.

COLLEEN: How long? A couple of minutes? I'll wait.

(SHE sits next to him, waiting.)

HARLAN: Darling, now isn't a very good time. I'm in the middle of preparing this new course on the Megarian philosophers and their conditional propositions.

COLLEEN: Harlan, please! I wouldn't interrupt your studies if it wasn't important! It's just that... sometimes I'm not sure... I'm not sure just how much you really love me!

HARLAN: Now, what put that into your head?

COLLEEN: I have to know that you love me! I have to!

HARLAN: Ah! Love? Well, that's a complex emotion, metaphysically speaking. That single word is probably the most misused and dangerous utterance in the English language.

COLLEEN: Dangerous! I'm talking about you and me, Harlan, not... *(Pause)* ... not what happened to you in the past.

HARLAN: *(Sensing the inference)* Meaning?

COLLEEN: I'm not Helen.

HARLAN: No, thank heavens.

COLLEEN: So I'm not dangerous. So you can say "I love you" without putting your entire psyche at risk. Now, I don't want to put words into your mouth, but a wife needs to hear it said once in a while. And NOW would be a very good time. If you felt it, of course. *(Pause)* What I mean is, if you're waiting for a more opportune time to say it... *(With an edge)* ... DON'T!

(HARLAN squirms under the intensity of her gaze.)

HARLAN: You're right. I'm sorry. That whole nonsense with He... Hel... *(HE finds it difficult to even say her name)* ... Helen... has made me a little gun-shy about verbalizing my emotions. Love. Yes, I can do this. Why not? *(HE gets up, takes a deep breath, then loses his nerve, talking to COLLEEN as if addressing his students)* Let's start by defining it. Love. Are we using Aristophanes' theory, Socrates' rejoinder or Plato's definition?

COLLEEN: Please, Harlan! Not now!

HARLAN: But love means so many different things that you can't just use a word as powerful as that without making sure that our terminology is compatible. Even Plato is not as straightforward as people think; for example the French - who do know a little about love - have distinguished between "amour platonique" and "amour platonicien"...

COLLEEN: Oh, God!

(SHE gets up and goes to leave.)

HARLAN: Colleen! Wait! What is it? You seem upset.

COLLEEN: It's nothing. I get strange thoughts sometimes. It's just something Victor and I were talking about.

(HARLAN's eyes narrow.)

HARLAN: Victor?

COLLEEN: Harlan, ever since we've been married, you've been busy preparing one course or another... or writing papers. I've tried to be understanding... I've never made any demands on you, but... will there be a time when you're not busy?

HARLAN: It's publish or perish in the academic world. I have to do a lot of work.

COLLEEN: So this isn't going to change?

HARLAN: What isn't going to change, dearest?

COLLEEN: Oh, never mind...

(COLLEEN struggles to hide her anguish, then turns and EXITS quickly through the hallway. HARLAN follows her.)

HARLAN: Colleen! Colleen!

(HE EXITS through the hallway.)

DORA peers in from the double doors and then ENTERS quietly. SHE carries a handbag. SHE glances around to make sure she is alone and then goes to the tackle box. Finding the gun gone, SHE looks around for it. SHE sees it lying on the chess table and picks it up. SHE goes over to the bar, flips open the chamber and - her actions just hidden by the top of the bar - removes Victor's blanks and replaces them with something out of her handbag.)

DORA: You are in for a big surprise, my little tom-cat!

(HARLAN appears outside on the deck, visible through the screen window looking around desperately. HE pokes his head in through the double doors. Hearing the door open DORA quickly puts the pistol on the bar and stands in front of it.)

DORA: Oh! It's you.

HARLAN: Did Colleen come through here?

DORA: No.

HARLAN: *(Sighs)* Oh, dear, oh, dear!

(HE turns to leave.)

DORA: What's the matter?

(HE stops; ENTERS the living room.)

HARLAN: I said the wrong thing, as usual.

DORA: What was it this time?

HARLAN: Oh, it's that "love" thing. It's such a complicated word.

DORA: Not to a woman, it isn't.

HARLAN: I was simply trying to define...

DORA: *(Losing it)* OH, SHUT UP, HARLAN! Forget about your stupid definitions and just tell her you love her. I'm sure that's all she wants. Men! You all drive me

crazy! It isn't a big deal! (*SHE grabs HARLAN and shakes him*) She wants you to say something very simple: she wants you to say "I love you Colleen". That's all! (*Beats him on the chest*) "I LOVE YOU, COLLEEN!" What's so damn hard about that?

(*HARLAN stares at her in shock*)

HARLAN: How long has it been since your last tranquilizer?

DORA: NINE O' CLOCK THIS MORNING! (*Calms down, lets him go*) I'm sorry, Harlan. You're right, I am a bit irrational. But this lack of passion of yours is very dangerous. Dangerous to all of us.

HARLAN: Dangerous?

DORA: Yes. It leaves a very attractive young wife drifting out there in the emotional wilderness, desperate to feel loved, to feel wanted... thirsting for something... anything... to fill the void. Nature abhors a vacuum, Harlan.

HARLAN: Hmm. I see what you mean.

DORA: You've got to get your butt off the sidelines and get back into the game.

HARLAN: You're right, of course.

DORA: So you agree? You'll do it?

HARLAN: Yes, I'll do it!

DORA: Off you go then!

(*HARLAN dutifully trots off down the hallway and EXITS.*)

DORA: (*To herself*) Of course, it may be too late for some of us.

(*Suddenly there is A LOUD KNOCK at the double doors. DORA wheels around nervously and sees standing out on the deck:*

OFFICER MCGUIRE, a young policewoman, visible through the screen window.

Suddenly panicked, DORA runs back to the bar, grabs the pistol and - her actions hidden by the bar - quickly takes the bullets out of the pistol and puts them back into her handbag. SHE desperately looks around for a place to hide the pistol. There is another LOUD KNOCK - more urgent this time. In a panic DORA puts the pistol on the bar, and covers it with a newspaper. SHE cautiously opens the double doors.

OFFICER MCGUIRE is standing there. SHE looks almost too young to be in the police, and her uniform seems a bit too big for her. SHE makes up for this by being extremely earnest and devoid of humour - standing very upright and determined to appear as tough as nails. The truth is: SHE's desperate to make

the first arrest of what SHE expects to be an illustrious law enforcement career.)

DORA: Oh, hello! Can I help you?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: I'm Officer McGuire. Are you the owner of this cottage?

DORA: No. We rent it. Is there a problem?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: We're warning the cottagers... there's been some thefts in the area... a tricycle and two canoe paddles so far.

DORA: *(Sarcastically)* Really? I'm surprised I didn't hear about it on the evening news.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: He won't get far, I'll see to that.

DORA: Not with two paddles and a tricycle, he won't!

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Eyes Dora coldly)* You don't seem to take criminal acts very seriously, madam.

DORA: Are you old enough to join the police?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Annoyed - SHE's been asked this before)* I'm old enough to vote, and I'm old enough to fight and kill for my country, if that answers your question!

DORA: Yes, it certainly does!

(DORA glances uneasily towards the pistol. OFFICER MCGUIRE senses the tension in the air which piques her police instincts - along with an instant dislike of Dora. SHE looks around suspiciously.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: So... everything all right here?

DORA: Yes. Everything's fine. Terrific in fact. Couldn't be better.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Uh-huh. Where are you people from?

DORA: Vancouver. City folk.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE slowly moves around, eyes scanning the room.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Are you aware that the brush around the cottage should have been cleared by now?

DORA: Really?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: There's a fire alert. The drought, you know.

DORA: Ah, the drought.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: When you see the owner, tell him he'll get a citation if it's not cleared by next week.

DORA: Yes... I'll tell him.

*(OFFICER MCGUIRE sees a shelf full of books;
glances at the titles.)*

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Not the usual cottage reading material.

DORA: Our husbands are professors at U.B.C.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Snort of derision)* Eggheads, eh? *(Looks at a book)* Huh. "The Age Of Reason".

DORA: Philosophy.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Uh-huh. *(Sees another book)* "Herbs of the Northwest". Philosophy?

DORA: Herbs.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Wheels on her, accusingly)* What kind of herbs?

DORA: For tea. We don't smoke them.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE sees another book.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: "Gray's Anatomy"?

DORA: Anatomy. I'm in medical school.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE looks blankly at the half-finished game on the chess board.)

DORA: Chess.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Thank you.

*(OFFICER MCGUIRE sees the harpoon on the wall;
touches the point.)*

OFFICER MCGUIRE: That could do some damage in the wrong hands.

DORA: It's a harpoon. Indian, I suppose. It's an antique.

*(OFFICER MCGUIRE takes one more sniff around
and sees the BARREL OF THE PISTOL sticking out
from under the newspaper on the bar.)*

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Hello! What's this? *(Pushes aside the paper, picks up the pistol and admires it - SHE obviously loves guns)* A .44 Magnum, single-action revolver, five inch barrel, chrome finish, adjustable rear sights. *(Strokes it erotically)* Nice... very nice... *(Breaks out of her reverie)* But not an antique.

DORA: It's my husband's.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Flips out the gun's chamber - it's empty)* Does he have a license for this?

DORA: Of course. We're Canadian.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: I'd like to take a look at it. This is a restricted firearm, you know. He has to be a member of an approved shooting club....

DORA: ... or a registered collector. He's both. Loves his guns.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Where is he?

DORA: God only knows. I'm only his wife. Anyway, it's not loaded. It's really just a toy to him. He never brings ammunition.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE puts the pistol back on the bar. SHE sees a plastic shopping bag in the wastebasket with the words: "JOE'S BAIT, FOOD & AMMO" written on it. SHE holds the bag up to show DORA.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: No ammunition, eh?

DORA: Joe's Bait, Food & Ammo. The worms are on special. If you hurry there may be some left.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: YOU bought worms?

DORA: What? Don't I look like the worm type? You'd be surprised. I'm very familiar with worms.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Like to fish, do you?

DORA: No.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE flips out a notebook, scribbles in it.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: I'll come back later. Ask him to find that license, would you? I want to see it. *(Moves to the door)* And don't forget to tell the others not to leave things out at night.

DORA: I won't.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE does one more scan around the room, scribbles some more in her notebook, and then EXITS. DORA heaves a sigh of relief, closes the double doors and rushes towards the pistol when there is another KNOCK at the door. DORA opens the double doors and OFFICER MCGUIRE stands in the doorway with a fishing rod in her hand. SHE hands it to DORA with a chiding look - i.e. "Don't leave things out at night" - and then leaves.

OFFICER MCGUIRE walks across the deck and turns to glance suspiciously through the screen window. DORA waves at her with a big fake smile. OFFICER MCGUIRE stomps off down the path and disappears offstage.

DORA runs back to the bar, grabs the pistol and stuffs the bullets back into the chamber - again hiding her actions under the edge of the bar counter. SHE puts

the pistol back on the bar just as VICTOR ENTERS from his bedroom.)

VICTOR: Was that a policeman?

(HE looks out of the window.)

DORA: Woman. One of our stalwart girls in blue. Very stalwart. I'm surprised you missed her.

VICTOR: Well, I can't catch them all, can I? What did she want?

DORA: She says you shouldn't leave your tricycle out at night.

VICTOR: What?

DORA: Apparently there's an artful dodger who has the whole coast a-tremble, but gallant Officer McGuire is hot on the trail.

(VICTOR nervously glances at the chess board where the gun was last placed.)

VICTOR: She didn't see my gun, did she?

DORA: *(After a beat)* No. I hid it by the bar. You can shoot away to your heart's content.

VICTOR: Good. All I want to do is to bag a few rabbits. You'd think that was the crime of the century the way the cops are these days.

(VICTOR sits at the chess table and stares at the pieces.)

DORA: Well, be careful where you aim. I'll be out this evening, along with the rabbits.

VICTOR: *(Surprised)* Out?

DORA: Yes. There's a Women's Guild lecture in the village on "Men Who Are Pigs and The Women Who Love Them". I'd like to catch it.

VICTOR: I'm sure you would, darling. That phenomenon is more common than people realize.

DORA: So I'm told. It'll probably go quite late.

VICTOR: No doubt.

DORA: You'll be left to your own devices, I'm afraid.

VICTOR: I'm sure I'll find some mischief to get into.

DORA: You're such a trooper. You and Harlan can catch up on some debating while I'm out. You haven't argued for at least an hour.

VICTOR: I have a feeling we're going to settle our grand debate once and for all tonight.

(VICTOR moves a piece on the chess board, and smiles.)

DORA: I can't wait to get back and see how it turned out. *(Looks at the chess board)* If you keep that move you could lose your queen. In fact you could lose the whole game.

(VICTOR stares at the board.)

VICTOR: I can't see that, Dora!

DORA: I know. I'll see you later.

(DORA heads for the double doors.)

VICTOR: Dora?

DORA: Yes?

(THEY look at each other for a moment. VICTOR seems to want to talk, but can't.)

VICTOR: Oh, nothing. Enjoy yourself! The forecast is for thunderstorms... you'd better take an umbrella.

(DORA is momentarily surprised at this brief flash of concern. SHE takes an umbrella from beside the door, and then EXITS. VICTOR stares at the chess board to see what Dora meant - but can't. HE goes over to the bar and picks up the pistol and carefully places it on the chess board.)

By now the evening light is darkening into twilight - soon it will be completely dark. VICTOR hears VOICES OFFSTAGE. Through the screen window HE sees DORA and HARLAN talking outside some distance away. VICTOR goes to the window to eavesdrop when HARLAN approaches the cottage, coming onto the deck. VICTOR scoots back into the center of the room just as HARLAN opens the double doors and ENTERS.)

VICTOR: Talking to Dora, were you? About me, I'll bet.

HARLAN: No, we were talking about Colleen.

VICTOR: Colleen? Having problems, are you?

HARLAN: *(Defensively)* No.

VICTOR: You're such a liar! What a sanctimonious old fart you've become.

HARLAN: Victor!

VICTOR: Harlan, has it ever crossed your mind that I've never really liked you?

HARLAN: No. Of course not.

VICTOR: Well, I suppose never "liked" isn't quite the right word. It would be more accurate to say I despise you... is that any clearer?

(HARLAN looks at VICTOR closely: is he joking?)

HARLAN: Look, I'm sorry I had to let your fish go...

VICTOR: This has nothing to do with that! I've never liked you. Fish or no fish!

HARLAN: I know you're having a hard time with Dora...

VICTOR: It has nothing to do with Dora, either! It has a lot to do with you.

(HARLAN sees the gun on the chess board.)

HARLAN: *(Shocked)* Is that a gun?

VICTOR: Yes. I thought I'd make a rabbit stew for the carnivores among us. And don't give me any crap about small furry ghosts following me to my grave.

HARLAN: It's not small furry ghosts you have to worry about - it's the police. You really shouldn't bring your handguns up here. You know I don't like them, and hunting anything with them is illegal.

VICTOR: To hell with the cops! Besides, who's going to find out? Unless you're thinking of squealing on me.

HARLAN: Victor, what's the problem? Have I done something to upset you?

VICTOR: What has happened to me, Harlan, is more in the nature of a revelation. A revelation that you are that most despicable of philosophers - a hypocrite.

(HARLAN is taken aback for a moment.)

HARLAN: Ahh... you're not going to get to me, Victor! I know your little games.

VICTOR: This is no game! For the first time, I see you as you really are. You're a fraud! Everyone else saw it but me! For years I defended you within the faculty. I defended you when I saw your students laughing behind your back! I suppose you didn't realize that?

HARLAN: I know you've stood by me, and I appreciate that. I'm well aware that I have my detractors. I'm old-fashioned, I suppose. I don't teach a popular course like you do. But I do try to teach them the truth.

VICTOR: So it doesn't bother you that you're a laughing stock?

HARLAN: What can I do?

VICTOR: *(Mocking)* "What can I do?" "What can I do?" Is that all you can say? You know you're a fraud, don't you? That's why you never fight for what you believe in! That's why you never stand up for yourself! You think you can shrug it off by claiming to be a Stoic. Christ, no wonder Helen left you!

HARLAN: *(Shocked)* Victor!

VICTOR: What? Oh, right... you don't like me to mention your "ex".

HARLAN: I don't see what she has to do with all this.

VICTOR: She has a lot to do with it. Thesis: your whole philosophy is based upon your hiding from the truth!

HARLAN: You know perfectly well, I've devoted my life to searching for the truth. We both have.

VICTOR: The truth? OK, let's examine that. You claim that you believe in non-violence. Then let me remind you of a little incident that you may have forgotten. About three years ago... May 23rd, I think the date was. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? Or have you - in your new relativist universe - conveniently forgotten?

HARLAN: I haven't forgotten.

VICTOR: Very unpleasant thing to witness! A professor attacking a student like that.

HARLAN: It wasn't an attack... I never meant to hurt that boy.

VICTOR: No... you meant to kill him!

(By now VICTOR has manipulated HARLAN so that HE is right by the chess board where the pistol is lying.)

VICTOR: And do you remember why you attacked that student?

HARLAN: I told you, I didn't attack him... he'd been insolent, that's all... there were words... some shoving went on... !

VICTOR: You're just like Wittgenstein... *(Imitating HARLAN)* ... "oh, no, it wasn't a red-hot poker, it was a toasting fork". Let me tell you about your "shoving"! I nearly had to break your fingers to get your hand off his throat! You were trying to shove him into his grave!

HARLAN: No! It wasn't like that!

VICTOR: But what was the boy being insolent about, Harlan? What was the subject of his insolence?

HARLAN: Stop it, Victor!

(Trying to turn away from VICTOR, HARLAN sits by the chess board. VICTOR looms behind HARLAN - now HE has him exactly where HE wants him with the pistol right in front of him.)

VICTOR: Perhaps I should jog your memory! It was the day after Helen left you. She'd run off with that fellow on the football team. Or was it volleyball? Anyway, the boy you attacked had set you off by mentioning it. *(Moves in front of HARLAN - a perfect target)* What was that boy's name? Tomlins, wasn't it? I can just hear him now: *(Puts on a nasal voice)* "Professor Brandstater, we haven't seen as much of your charming wife as we're used to. Has she been taken sick or something? Me and the other guys in the dorm were wondering: does this mean she's not going to tuck us in every night like she used to? We're really going to miss that!"

HARLAN: That's a damned lie! He never said that!

VICTOR: You see that boy knew... like we all knew... that your darling Helen would have jumped on anything with a heartbeat... because she was, in a word, a slut...

HARLAN: Don't say it, Victor... !

VICTOR: And now you're too terrified to commit to Colleen, or even to any philosophy that actually includes "living"... and you've even frozen ME out of your goddamned life... and all because Helen was a slut... !

HARLAN: SHUT UP! SHUT UP!!

(In a surge of violent passion, HARLAN grabs the pistol from the chess table, scattering chess pieces everywhere, and aims the pistol right at VICTOR's heart.)

(There is a tense moment where it seems HARLAN is going to shoot, but then HE abruptly regains control.)

HARLAN: Do you really think that about Colleen and me?

VICTOR: Yes.

HARLAN: Then we're well matched. You're only a hedonist out of some misguided rage against Dora.

VICTOR: That's not true!

HARLAN: I could have shot you, you know. The only thing that stopped me was my awareness of my own anger. I'm a Stoic. If I ever do shoot you, it'll be rationally.

(HARLAN puts the pistol back on the chess table, and EXITS through the hallway.)

VICTOR: Damn! *(Paces angrily)* Damn!

(COLLEEN ENTERS through the double doors.)

COLLEEN: I have to talk to you, Victor! You must stop this!

VICTOR: Have you been eavesdropping?

COLLEEN: No, I was outside picking herbs, but I could hear Harlan shouting. You have to stop goading him! It's just not fair to him!

(VICTOR considers for a moment.)

VICTOR: You're right. I've gone too far. I'm sorry.

COLLEEN: He didn't try to shoot you, did he? You see! I knew he wasn't that kind of person.

VICTOR: Perhaps I misjudged him. Just like Wittgenstein and his poker, he stopped short.

COLLEEN: Who?

VICTOR: Oh, nothing. *(Beat)* Damn!

COLLEEN: So it's over?

VICTOR: *(Distastefully)* Over! *(Beat; HE hates to lose)* Yes, I suppose so.

(Thinking hard, VICTOR picks up some of the fallen chess pieces.)

COLLEEN: You're taking it so well. It takes a big man to admit he's wrong.

VICTOR: *(It's killing him)* Yes. I have no problem admitting I'm wrong.

(There is a sharp SNAP! The tension VICTOR felt from saying the word "wrong" caused the chess piece gripped in his hand to break in two. HE tries to jam the broken pieces together. Failing, HE puts the two broken parts back on one square of the chess board)

VICTOR: *(Trying to think of a way out)* So... maybe Harlan really is over this Helen thing.

COLLEEN: What? What Helen thing?

VICTOR: Oh, you know... this inability to love. I guess he's over it now. *(Styly)* No need to try and change him.

COLLEEN: I've never met this Helen, but I feel like I'm sharing a house with her.

VICTOR: You are. A one-woman wrecking crew if ever there was one. Mind you, Harlan brought it on himself. Neglected her needs. Neglect can turn even good people into monsters.

COLLEEN: That's no excuse for what she did to him. She should have just divorced him rather than running around the way she did. Of course he was hurt and jealous - who wouldn't be?

VICTOR: He was jealous all right. Boy was he jealous! *(Looks at COLLEEN; has an idea)* Listen, Colleen... you want me to stop the game? Is that what you truly want?

COLLEEN: Oh, I don't know what I want! I don't want you to hurt him, and yet... if I knew he really would change... there must be a gentler way to bring Harlan out of his shell. This seems so brutal.

VICTOR: I have an idea - a much better idea. Yes... it may just work. *(Looks around)* This isn't the right place to discuss it, we could be overheard. Let's go for a walk, and I'll fill you in on all the details. But first, I should patch things up with Harlan. *(Leads her to the double doors)* Meet me here in... *(Looks at his watch)* ... exactly five minutes. Oh, and bring that lantern from the boathouse. It's pretty dark outside.

COLLEEN: This isn't going to hurt him?

VICTOR: Hurt him? No, no, no! This plan is gentleness itself. Why use vinegar when we have honey?

COLLEEN: Honey?

VICTOR: Come back in five minutes and all will be revealed. I just need time to apologize to Harlan.

COLLEEN: All right. And thank you, Victor.

(SHE kisses him on the cheek and EXITS through the double doors. VICTOR picks up the pistol from the chess table, and looks around. HE places the pistol carefully on top of the bar. Then HE calls down the hallway where HARLAN last exited.)

VICTOR: Harlan! Harlan!

(HARLAN ENTERS behind him through the double doors.)

HARLAN: I'm sorry about my outburst, Victor! I don't know what came over me.

VICTOR: I'm sorry too. I went too far. I should never have mentioned Helen. You were right - it was all just a game... I was testing you. I wanted to see how your philosophy held up under fire. I hope you'll forgive me.

HARLAN: All that you said about... ?

VICTOR: Just made it up as I went along.

HARLAN: Oh, thank heavens! That incident with the boy is such a fog in my mind, I don't know what's true and what isn't any more. Oh, Victor, you can be such a rogue sometimes! I do wish you'd stick to good old-fashioned debate.

VICTOR: Debate is boring. It's also meaningless. Remember what you used to say: "True character is only revealed under stress".

HARLAN: Yes, I did say that, didn't I? Well, I've had enough stress for one night. Can we relax and get back to our game?

VICTOR: Certainly. *(THEY pick up the pieces together)* Can you remember where we were?

HARLAN: I think this was it. *(Puts some chess pieces on the board; sees the broken one)* Ah, this one's broken.

VICTOR: Is it?

(THEY sit on opposite sides of the chess board and contemplate their next moves.)

VICTOR: I've been in a rotten mood all day. That's why I'm behaving the way I am. I think it's because I have something to get off my chest. You remember that old saying: "the truth shall make you free", and all that? Well, I want to be set free. I've been under a lot of strain recently. Dora has been... well, you know Dora... and I've hardly caught a fish since we've been here... and to cap it all I've been having an affair with your wife.

HARLAN: I see. *(Beat; still staring at the chess board)* Yes, that can be quite a strain. Have you tried using a different bait?

(VICTOR looks at HARLAN.)

VICTOR: I said, I've been having an affair with your wife. Colleen.

HARLAN: It's funny... but, that's what I thought you said.

(HARLAN stares at the chess board, goes to move a piece, then stops.)

VICTOR: That's what I said.

HARLAN: What exactly do you mean by that?

VICTOR: I mean I am having an affair with Colleen. Your wife. My mistress. Isn't that what it usually means?

HARLAN: That is what it usually means... but what did YOU mean?

VICTOR: Let me try this again. I mean, your wife and I are sneaking around behind your back having sex. I mean, she is cheating on you, and I am cheating on Dora and we are both cheating together in the same bed. Our naked, sweaty bodies intertwine in a lustful frenzy. In a word, Harlan, we are f...

HARLAN: *(Stops him)* Yes... yes... I think I get the picture.

VICTOR: I get no pleasure telling you this, Harlan. The truth is, I've been wracked with guilt over it... so to save our friendship, I'm confessing everything and begging for your forgiveness.

HARLAN: Of course.

(There is a silence as the two men stare at each other. Slowly HARLAN starts to shake and his face contorts. Then HE bursts out laughing.)

HARLAN: Oh, Victor! You never give up! Just when I think you're going to be serious, you're off pulling another stunt. You are a character! I can never tell what you're going to get up to next! *(HE hoots with laughter)* Of course, you went too far with this Colleen thing. The reason I married Colleen was because she is the most honest, loyal human being I have ever met. I don't even have to think about infidelity with her! Can't fault you for trying, though, but I'm afraid it won't wash. You can't get me twice in a row! *(HARLAN laughs so hard HE has to take his glasses off and wipe his eyes; HE moves his chess piece)* By the way, I just took your queen!

(HARLAN howls with laughter.)

VICTOR: She's meeting me right here in... *(Checks his watch)* ... about two minutes. *(This sets HARLAN off laughing again)* We're going to make love out in the woods. *(HARLAN slaps his leg - it's all too funny)* I asked her to meet me here once I got you out of the way. I've always loved the way she looks outside in the moonlight. Virginal... uncorrupt... sacrificial. I just couldn't stop myself. You see, Harlan, women marry us men expecting we will change, but of course, we never do. And we foolish men - we marry a woman expecting she will never change, but of course, they always do. *(Bitterly)* They always change on us, Harlan.

(HARLAN holds his side - HE is quite incapacitated with laughter.)

HARLAN: Oh, come on Victor! You've had your fun. You got me all in a lather once. You should be satisfied.

VICTOR: I'm sorry, Harlan. I'm truly sorry.

(VICTOR glances out of the window to see if COLLEEN is approaching. HE indicates for HARLAN to move into the corner behind the bar to hide.)

HARLAN: All right! I'll play along. But I'm going to get you back for all this, Victor. Be warned.

(HARLAN goes behind the bar. VICTOR turns off the main room lights, leaving only the light over the bar. VICTOR takes a candle from behind the bar, lights it and places it by the pistol, then settles in next to HARLAN behind the bar - their heads still visible.)

VICTOR: You know something, Harlan? Neither of us should have married. Nietzsche said that a married philosopher is a figure of comedy. The fact is, you've built your universe upon a false God, old friend. The "next world" is as much of a myth as Colleen's fidelity.

HARLAN: Are you suggesting a conjunctive proposition?

VICTOR: Your doubt in one may lead to your doubt in the other.

HARLAN: It would. I am as sure of Colleen as I am that there is another plane of existence out there. They are both the northern stars of my belief.

VICTOR: Then behold a cosmic collapse!

(VICTOR pulls the cord to the hanging light over the bar, plunging the room into near darkness. The only light is the spill from the moonlight outside, and the candle illuminating the pistol. HARLAN keeps chuckling to himself. After a pause A LANTERN can be seen out on the deck, carried by COLLEEN.)

COLLEEN: Victor! Victor!

(HARLAN stares at COLLEEN in shock. All his laughter drains from him.)

VICTOR: You see, Harlan, we had arranged to make love under the stars while Dora was away this evening.

(COLLEEN crosses the deck with the lantern.)

HARLAN: No! It's quite impossible... there's something missing... something I don't know!

VICTOR: You still don't believe it, do you? Well, in the interests of truth, I'll prove it to you.

(COLLEEN comes in through the double doors.)

COLLEEN: Victor? I'm ready.

*(COLLEEN peers into the darkness of the room.
VICTOR goes to her.)*

VICTOR: Colleen.

COLLEEN: Oh, there you are! It's so dark in here.

(VICTOR and COLLEEN stand silhouetted in the moonlit frame of the open double doors. Suddenly VICTOR sweeps her into his arms and kisses her! This takes COLLEEN by such surprise that SHE does not resist for a moment.)

COLLEEN: Mmmmm.... Vict... !

(VICTOR keeps kissing her, as HARLAN watches with horror.)

HARLAN: Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

(COLLEEN pushes VICTOR away.)

COLLEEN: Oh, my God! Harlan!

VICTOR: *(To HARLAN)* Don't take it so hard, old pal. It's like I told you: to be a real seeker after truth, there has to be one terrible moment in your life when you doubt everything.

HARLAN: YOU STINKING SON-OF-A-BITCH!!

(HARLAN grabs the pistol from the bar, aims it at VICTOR, and pulls the trigger.

There is a LOUD BLAST from the pistol and VICTOR gets knocked backwards.)

VICTOR: Hey! That hurt! *(HE staggers a few steps, grasping onto some furniture)*
Boy, yes... that really stung! *(Fighting to stay on his feet)* Something seems to have gone wron...

(HE stumbles around for a few more moments and then COLLAPSES.

HARLAN looks at the pistol in his hand with horror.)

HARLAN: My God! What have I done!

(COLLEEN turns the lights back on and rushes to VICTOR's body. SHE opens his fisherman's vest and sees blood.)

COLLEEN: You shot him right through the heart!

HARLAN: No!

(COLLEEN puts her hand to VICTOR's neck to feel his pulse and also listens for breathing.)

COLLEEN: He's dead! Oh, dear God, he's dead!

HARLAN: He can't be!

(HARLAN goes to the body.)

HARLAN: No! No! Victor! My old friend! Why did you do it? You knew I'd pull the trigger! Why?

COLLEEN: I don't understand... he told me he'd put blanks in the gun... that he'd taken the real bullets out!

HARLAN: Blanks! So that's why he was waving the gun in front of my face all night! I should have known it was one of his perverted games!

COLLEEN: He must have left a bullet in by accident! Oh, no... no! Oh, God! This is all my fault! I should have told you! I should have told you!

HARLAN: How could I have been so stupid?

COLLEEN: He asked me to meet him here so we could talk. Talk about you, Harlan! I never expected him to kiss me like that!

HARLAN: It doesn't matter what happened! Nothing matters anymore! A lifetime of reason and reflection, and I end up... a common murderer. So, it's true. I can kill someone. Maybe he's right about everything. We are just animals. I was wrong... I was wrong! *(Sighs)* I'll call the police.

COLLEEN: The police!

HARLAN: Of course... I've murdered him.

COLLEEN: It wasn't murder! I told you, it was an accident!

HARLAN: For him, maybe, but not for me. When I pulled that trigger I wanted nothing more than to see him dead!

COLLEEN: You don't have to tell the police that!

HARLAN: What else can I tell them?

COLLEEN: Just tell them... oh, God, I don't know! How did I get us into this nightmare?

HARLAN: It's all right, Colleen. It was entirely my fault. I had a choice and I made it. In my own way I'm just as dead as poor Victor over there. *(Goes to the phone)* Let's get this over with.

COLLEEN: No! Wait! *(HE stops)* This was not murder, Harlan! It was a prank that went wrong! It was an accident! He provoked you! *(Angrily points at VICTOR)* It was his fault for not checking the gun more carefully.

HARLAN: An interesting point. I'll debate it with the judge. I'll confess to everything and throw myself on the mercy of the court. *(Winces)* Oh, no... the Tomlins incident is bound to come up. I'm a menace to society, no doubt about that. It's a shame they don't hang people anymore!

COLLEEN: STOP IT! STOP IT! I'm the one responsible for this! If I'd just told you, it would never have happened. And your going to jail won't bring Victor back to life! What about us? I love you! You can't just throw that all away!

HARLAN: I love you too, Colleen.

COLLEEN: You do? Really?

HARLAN: *(Holds her tenderly)* By every definition there ever was. *(Abruptly)* But it's too late to think about that now.

(HE starts to dial.)

COLLEEN: Wait! We can still work out a story!

HARLAN: A story?

COLLEEN: *(Excitedly)* We'll tell them it was an accident. You weren't arguing about anything. You were just playing with the gun... *(COLLEEN picks up the pistol)* ... joking... everybody in a good mood. *(SHE waves the gun around wildly like someone who's never handled a gun before)* Nobody thought the gun was loaded... it just went off...

(Whenever the gun points towards HARLAN, HE ducks down behind the bar.)

HARLAN: Colleen! The gun! Be careful!

COLLEEN: *(Frantic)* It happens all the time!

HARLAN: But it didn't happen this time!

COLLEEN: *(Desperate)* Nobody has to know that!

HARLAN: The police would see right through it.

COLLEEN: Not if we have a plan!

(COLLEEN waves the gun at HARLAN again - HE ducks.)

HARLAN: Please... the gun... !

COLLEEN: Right now, you and I are the only ones that know!

HARLAN: I won't be involved with any more lies.

(HE starts to dial again.)

COLLEEN: STOP RIGHT THERE!!

(COLLEEN points the pistol directly at HARLAN.)

HARLAN: What do you think you're doing?

COLLEEN: I'm not going to let you do it!

(HE looks at COLLEEN with astonishment.)

HARLAN: I'm not sure if you've thought this all the way through.

COLLEEN: PUT... THE... PHONE... DOWN!

(HARLAN studies her for a moment, thinks about putting the phone down, then changes his mind and dials.)

HARLAN: *(Into phone)* Hello, is that the police? I want to report a shooting.

COLLEEN: I'll use this if I have to!

HARLAN: *(Into phone)* No, I don't think that'll be necessary. He's dead.

COLLEEN: I'm warning you! Don't tell them another word!

HARLAN: *(Into phone)* We don't have a street address ... we're in a cottage on Matagami Inlet... *(Listens)* We're the wooden one with a chimney...

(COLLEEN continues to aim the pistol at HARLAN.)

COLLEEN: I'm ordering you for the last time: *(Going over the edge)* PUT THAT PHONE DOWN!

HARLAN: *(Into phone)* No, I knew the deceased man very well. He was my best friend. My name? Prof...

(COLLEEN pulls the trigger and SHOOTS. SHE hits the BASE OF THE TELEPHONE which flies off and lands on the floor behind the bar. HARLAN still holds the receiver in his hand, and looks down in shock as he sees THE CORD dangling uselessly in the air.)

COLLEEN: They didn't hear your name... we can still work something out!

(HARLAN stares at COLLEEN, astonished.)

HARLAN: Colleen! This is not the woman I married!

COLLEEN: YOU BET YOUR ASS IT ISN'T! If you won't look after yourself, then I'll have to do it for you!

(The LIGHTS from CAR HEADLIGHTS flash across the window.)

COLLEEN: There's a car coming! Maybe it's the police!

HARLAN: Someone must have heard the shots.

(There is a RUMBLE OF THUNDER.)

COLLEEN: The body!

HARLAN: The body?

COLLEEN: The body! We have to hide it!

HARLAN: Why? I'm going to tell them the truth!

COLLEEN: *(Losing what little patience she has left)* We'll... hide... the... body... until... they... go!

HARLAN: No, Colleen! I'm drawing the line right here!

*(COLLEEN aims the pistol RIGHT AT HIS HEAD!
SHE looks crazed and out of control.)*

HARLAN: Where do you want it?

COLLEEN: In our bedroom, over there!

*(COLLEEN keeps the pistol aimed at HARLAN as HE
drags VICTOR's body. COLLEEN looks out of the
window.)*

HARLAN: This is crazy... crazy!

COLLEEN: Faster! They're coming up the path!

*(HARLAN is having trouble - the body is heavy and
awkward.)*

COLLEEN: MOVE IT!!

*(COLLEEN tosses the telephone receiver behind the
bar. SHE quickly hides the pistol behind the bar,
blows out the candle, then grabs a bottle of brandy and
starts guzzling it, just as:*

*DORA ENTERS through the double doors the exact
moment HARLAN gets VICTOR's body into the
bedroom and SLAMS the door closed.)*

COLLEEN: Oh! It's you!

*(HARLAN casually takes a book from the bookshelf
and sits, pretending to read.)*

DORA: Hi, Colleen. Harlan. *(Another RUMBLE OF THUNDER)* Sounds like a storm brewing.

*(DORA looks around, eagle-eyed as SHE puts her
umbrella away. SHE senses something has gone on.
COLLEEN takes another big swig of brandy.)*

DORA: Where's Victor?

*(Suddenly the DOUBLE DOORS EXPLODE OPEN
and a FIGURE leaps into the room - gun drawn. It's
OFFICER MCGUIRE.*

*Everyone leaps back in terror. HARLAN'S book goes
flying into the air.)*

OFFICER MCGUIRE: FREEZE! GET YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR!

(THEY all look at her, stunned. HARLAN goes to pick up his book, but OFFICER MCGUIRE stomps on it with her boot and puts her gun in HARLAN's face.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: I SAID, GET YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR!

DORA: What for?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Never mind what for! Just do it!

(OFFICER MCGUIRE looks more than a bit dangerous, so they quickly raise their hands. SHE frisks them.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: We just got a report of a gunshot from a cottager across the bay.

DORA: A gunshot? How very curious.

COLLEEN: Nobody's been shooting anyone here. It's been a very quiet evening.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Your neighbour heard a loud argument going on here, and then a gunshot. Naturally he called the police. *(OFFICER MCGUIRE finishes frisking them, and then holsters her gun)* All right! Why don't you tell me what's been going on here? You can put your hands down.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE flips out her notebook. COLLEEN knocks back another mouthful of brandy.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(To COLLEEN)* Your name?

COLLEEN: Mrs. Harlan Brandstater. *(Drunkenly friendly)* But you can call me Colleen.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Writing)* Mrs. Brandstater. Have you been in all evening?

COLLEEN: Yes I have.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(To HARLAN)* And your name, sir?

HARLAN: Har...

COLLEEN: *(Interrupting)* His name's Harlan Brandstater. *(COLLEEN goes to HARLAN's side)* Professor Harlan Brandstater. He's my husband. Teaches philosophy at U.B.C. He specializes in the Stoics... you know, the peaceful, non-violent approach to life. And he was in all evening too.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(To HARLAN)* Is that correct?

COLLEEN: Yes.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Sarcastically, to COLLEEN)* You don't mind me asking your husband a few questions, I hope?

COLLEEN: Of course not. We have nothing to hide. *(Sternly)* Do we Harlan?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Thank you so much. *(To HARLAN)* Are you the owner of the handgun I saw earlier?

COLLEEN: No, that's Victor's.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Victor?

COLLEEN: Professor Victor Pierce. Dora's husband.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: And where is he?

(COLLEEN and HARLAN exchange glances.)

COLLEEN & HARLAN: Out.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE notices the nervous glances; writes this down.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Professor Brandstater, did you hear any shots in this vicinity?

(HARLAN is about to say something.)

COLLEEN: Oh, I remember! Yes! Now I know what you're talking about! That wasn't a shot - it was the propane stove in the kitchen. The oven igniter doesn't work properly - every so often it goes off with a boom. *(To HARLAN)* We really should get that fixed.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: So you were cooking?

COLLEEN: That's right.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE looks around but sees no sign of a meal.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: I don't smell any food.

COLLEEN: It's all gone. Delicious, if I may say so.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: And where did you say this Professor Pierce had gone?

(There is another RUMBLE OF THUNDER, louder this time. Suddenly OFFICER MCGUIRE sees something on the floor.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Wait a minute... what's that?

COLLEEN: What?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: There! On the floor. That looks like drops of blood!

COLLEEN: That's impossible!

(OFFICER MCGUIRE gets down on her knee and stares at the red drops.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Yes. It's blood!

(OFFICER MCGUIRE leaps up, instinctively whips out her gun and rather idiotically aims it right at the drops of blood. Seeing that SHE's aiming at the wrong thing, SHE wheels around and aims it at HARLAN and COLLEEN.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: STAND BACK! *(Sees another drop)* Aha! There's more drops! They seem to be leading towards this door...

(OFFICER MCGUIRE follows the blood trail to the bedroom. SHE is about to open the bedroom door when COLLEEN leaps in front of her.)

COLLEEN: DON'T LOOK IN THERE!

(OFFICER MCGUIRE stops.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: And why not, Mrs. Brandstater?

(Pause)

COLLEEN: It's a mess!

HARLAN: *(Realizes the gig is up)* Oh, God... !

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Mrs. Brandstater, this is an investigation of a shooting... possibly even murder.

DORA: Murder?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: If you're trying to protect somebody...

(COLLEEN gives up.)

COLLEEN: All right! I confess!

(HARLAN comes forward.)

HARLAN: That's enough, Colleen! Let me get this off my chest!

OFFICER MCGUIRE: I'll take both your statements right after I see what's in here...

(OFFICER MCGUIRE opens the bedroom door, gun drawn and poised to shoot. SHE rushes inside just as there is a sudden CRACK OF THUNDER and FLASH OF LIGHTNING, the DOUBLE DOORS BLOW OPEN and:

VICTOR ENTERS in a shroud of mist.

VICTOR's face is just a shade lighter than usual, and his entrance has an eerie spectral quality to it. HARLAN sees him and screams! DORA and COLLEEN turn to look at VICTOR. COLLEEN faints. VICTOR looks around to see what everyone is staring at.)

VICTOR: What's going on? What's the matter? You all look like you've seen a ghost!

(There is another violent CRACK OF LIGHTNING and the SOUND of a GUST OF WIND which rattles the entire cottage.

COLLEEN revives, points a horrified finger at VICTOR and faints again.)

The Lights Fade

MUSIC

END OF ACT 1

ACT II

SETTING:

As before, just a few seconds later.

AT RISE:

VICTOR is still standing in the double doorway shrouded in mist. HARLAN helps COLLEEN get up from her faint. There is another FLICKER OF LIGHTNING followed by a RUMBLE OF THUNDER.

VICTOR: Are you all right, Colleen?

COLLEEN: Yes! I... must have a touch of the flu or something.

(HARLAN helps her over to a chair. SHE fans herself and sits down. OFFICER MCGUIRE comes out of the bedroom looking confused.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: What the heck... *(Sees VICTOR; points her gun at him)* Who are you?

HARLAN: This is Professor Pierce.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Disappointed)* Oh.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE holsters her gun. VICTOR comes downstage but his gait is clumsy, as if his legs are having trouble holding him up. HE seems in a bit of a daze.)

VICTOR: *(Cheerfully)* Hello officer! Hot on the trail of the tricycle thief, are you?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Actually, I've been wondering where you were, Professor.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE whips out her notebook.)

VICTOR: Really?

DORA: Are you feeling all right, Victor? You look a bit pale.

VICTOR: Yes, I'm fine. I must have fallen asleep down by the beach - that thunder woke me up. You know, I had a most extraordinary dream - it was weird. I was going down this long path with a gate at the end of it... it was beautiful, but I felt this pain in my chest. I was about to go through the gate when I heard voices shouting. I turned and saw Harlan and Colleen, yelling to me: "Stop! It was all an accident!" I saw Dora there too, but you didn't say anything. Suddenly somebody screamed: "Don't look in there!". I stepped back, and BLAM, the gate slammed shut in front of me. Then I woke up. *(THEY all stare at him)* Well, I told you it was weird.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE stops writing in her notebook.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Guess I can't arrest anyone for having a bad dream - even a dream as stupid as that. *(Turns to COLLEEN)* So what were you going to confess, Mrs. Brandstater?

COLLEEN: What?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Before I went into that bedroom you said you wanted to confess.

COLLEEN: Oh! That... that... I forgot to make the bed.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: You forgot to make the bed?

COLLEEN: I know, I know, it's terrible! I took a nap this afternoon and since we weren't expecting visitors... *(Anguished)* Oh God... I just didn't do it!

(SHE bursts into tears.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Calm down! I can't arrest you for that either. *(Turns to HARLAN)* And what were you going to get off your chest, Professor Brandstater?

(HARLAN is still staring at VICTOR in shock.)

HARLAN: Did I have something to get off my chest?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Yes, you did. Something seemed to be weighing on your conscience.

HARLAN: My conscience has been healed. It's a miracle!

OFFICER MCGUIRE: What? Just now?

COLLEEN: That lightning strike must have created a cosmic energy field. *(To OFFICER MCGUIRE)* Didn't you feel the healing power of nature?

HARLAN: Hallelujah!

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Are you some kind of religious cult?

COLLEEN: No. *(Prancing about)* We just worship the trees and the plants and the sky and the clouds and all the little crawling creatures...

OFFICER MCGUIRE: All right, all right! I don't care about any of that.

(DORA looks at VICTOR closely.)

DORA: Are you sure you're feeling all right, Victor? You don't look at all well to me.

VICTOR: I do feel a bit light-headed. I shouldn't have eaten that piece of cheese after lunch.

(VICTOR moves awkwardly to the armchair and plops down.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: There's something very odd going on here. Is there anyone else staying here besides you four?

DORA: That's it, Officer. No corpses, I'm afraid.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE looks suspiciously at the blood on the floor again. COLLEEN gets her box of paints.)

COLLEEN: I must have spilled some paint. (*Shows the box to OFFICER MCGUIRE*)
See!

OFFICER MCGUIRE: (*Sadly rips the pages out of her notebook*) Ah well! I'll go over and question the cottager who made the report.

(*OFFICER MCGUIRE EXITS. After a beat SHE RE-ENTERS.*)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: And another thing. Clear the damn brush around this cottage!

(*SHE EXITS again. DORA looks closely at VICTOR who picks up a newspaper. Then HE notices DORA staring at him.*)

VICTOR: Is anything wrong? You look disappointed about something, dearest.

DORA: No, no! The lecture wasn't as good as I had hoped.

VICTOR: Oh? The one about "Men Who Are... ?"

(*VICTOR seems forgetful.*)

DORA: "Pigs". It seems that kind of man is very hard to get rid of.

(*DORA scrutinizes VICTOR.*)

HARLAN: Well... now that all the excitement is over, I think I'll... (*HARLAN looks at COLLEEN questioningly: what do they do now?*) ... finish my new course outline.

(*DORA notices their exchange of looks. HARLAN crosses the room, but his gaze is fastened on VICTOR.*)

DORA: (*To VICTOR*) So, you're feeling absolutely fine?

VICTOR: Yes! I've already told you, it's probably something I ate. Nothing serious.

DORA: Are you sure you don't want me to check you out?

VICTOR: Yes, I'm sure!

DORA: It wouldn't take a minute...

(*DORA picks up her doctor's bag and takes out the stethoscope. SHE looks into his eyes - doing a medical examination.*)

VICTOR: Damn it, Dora! There's nothing wrong with me! You've been reading too many medical books. I know you'd love to shove your thermometers and sphygmomanometers up all my orifices, but I happen to be perfectly healthy.

DORA: I'm just concerned about your welfare, dearest.

VICTOR: I simply want to put my feet up and relax. Go practice medicine on someone else!

(*VICTOR goes back to his newspaper. There is an uncomfortable silence. HARLAN flicks through a*

*book, although HE is obviously not reading it.
COLLEEN flits nervously, looking for something to
do.)*

COLLEEN: (*Shrill*) Coffee, anyone? Harlan?

HARLAN: Er... sure!

COLLEEN: Victor?

VICTOR: No thanks.

COLLEEN: What about you, Dora?

DORA: No thanks. (*SHE picks up her books*) I think I'll go down to the boathouse and do some studying.

COLLEEN: (*Overeager*) What a good idea!

HARLAN: Yes! A very good idea! (*HE dashes to the double doors and opens them for DORA*) We'll just stay and hold the fort... and you can... study away!

(DORA looks at them closely.)

DORA: I'll probably be a while. Don't wait up.

*(DORA EXITS. VICTOR tosses the newspaper aside,
gets up and looks around.)*

VICTOR: Have you seen my "Fish Facts Monthly"? The one with the article about: "Boating That Big-Mouth Bass".

HARLAN: I think I saw it... out on the deck!

*(VICTOR EXITS unsteadily through the double doors.
HE can be seen looking around on the deck, staggering
clumsily back and forth.)*

HARLAN: (*Whispers*) Oh, my God! They sent him back!

COLLEEN: (*Whispers*) He must be in some kind of limbo!

HARLAN: I think you're right.

COLLEEN: But why? Why does anyone get stuck in limbo?

HARLAN: I don't know... it's really not my field.

COLLEEN: We have to do something for him! Maybe it's this house! No! The mask! The spirits of the Nootka are angry with us and won't let him go! This is all my fault! I must have used the wrong chants!

HARLAN: Stop trying to take the blame for this! I shot him!

*(VICTOR is still moving around the deck looking for
the magazine.)*

COLLEEN: Well, we can't just let him wander around like this! You must talk to him!

HARLAN: What could I tell him? I've never even seen a ghost before, and now I'm supposed to sit one down and give it some advice!

COLLEEN: It's not just any ghost! It's Victor!

HARLAN: I don't know what to say to him!

COLLEEN: You're a philosophy professor! Surely there's something...

HARLAN: It's not that easy! I've studied life, and I've studied death, but this is... neither!

(VICTOR sticks his nose up against the screen window.)

VICTOR: Are you sure you saw it on the deck?

HARLAN: Yes.

(VICTOR goes back to lurching around the deck.)

COLLEEN: *(To HARLAN)* There must be something in one of your books about it!

HARLAN: Yes! That's possible! I did bring some of my reference books... *(Rushes to the bookshelf)* Evans-Pritchard... Middleton... no... no... *(Pulls a book out)* Aha! This may have something... *(Flicks through the book)* Ghosts... phantoms... poltergeists... here we are... "The Relationship Between The Spirit And The Body". *(Scans text)* Hmm. There must be something about situations like these... "The sighting of a spirit after burial...", no... that's not... ah, here we are... listen to this: "There have been many reported instances of a corpse transmogrifying straight into a spirit. These cases leave no visible corpse because the body becomes the spectre, and during the nighttime hours the spectre can walk abroad as a human... etc, etc. Such was the famous case of Sir Robert Banastre of Passenham..."

(VICTOR calls out from the deck, holding up the magazine.)

VICTOR: Found it! You were right!

(VICTOR sits on a chair outside on the deck with his back to them and reads.)

COLLEEN: *(Whispers to HARLAN)* Does it say why they become spirits? Is there anything we can do?

HARLAN: Hmm. Let me see... *(Scans the page)* "Transcendental dialectics and theology..." here, here... this could be it! *(Reads)* "Some experts, such as Hofmeister and Rhees-Jones, theorize that the powers of light and the powers of darkness are still fighting for possession of the soul! In such cases, though the ghost is unaware of his ectoplasmic state, his actions during this time can influence the final outcome of that battle."

COLLEEN: You mean it hasn't been decided whether he goes... *(SHE indicates "up")* ... or... *(SHE indicates "down")*

HARLAN: Exactly.

COLLEEN: Poor Victor!

HARLAN: You're right, we have to help him somehow.

COLLEEN: He doesn't even know he's dead.

(VICTOR has got up - his curiosity piqued by their whispering - and is looking through the screen window at them.)

HARLAN: We're going to have to break the news to him. *(Winces)* Oh, dear! All those affairs he's had must be getting him into hot water right now. Apart from that he's led a pretty good life. If we can convince him that he's dead, perhaps he can reconcile with Dora, and that may put him over the top with... er... You-Know-Who... *(HARLAN sees VICTOR staring at them through the screen)* He's heard us! Let me talk to him. The sooner we break the news to him, the better chance he'll have.

COLLEEN: Are you sure you want to do it alone?

HARLAN: It'll be less of a shock coming from an old friend.

COLLEEN: You're right. I'll try some different chants. He needs all the help he can get.

(COLLEEN turns to leave.)

HARLAN: Colleen! I'm sorry I didn't trust you. I was such a fool. You must think very little of me now.

COLLEEN: It only proves you're human, that's all. *(In tears)* Not like poor Victor.

(COLLEEN EXITS through the hallway just as VICTOR comes in through the double doors with the magazine.)

VICTOR: What were you two whispering about so earnestly? *(HE scratches himself)* Damn! I think I got bitten by fire ants when I was sleeping.

(HARLAN paces for a moment, not knowing where to start.)

HARLAN: Victor... ?

VICTOR: Yes?

HARLAN: Aaah... *(Loses his nerve)* ... would you... like a brandy?

VICTOR: No thanks.

HARLAN: Well, I need one.

(HARLAN gets the bottle of brandy from the bar. HE is about to pour a glass when instead he just grabs the bottle and swigs down a stiff shot.)

HARLAN: So, Victor... *(The effect of the brandy kicks in)* Haaaargh! *(Recovers)* ... this dream you had... can you remember anything more about it? You say there was a gate...

VICTOR: Yes.

HARLAN: A big gate?

VICTOR: Medium sized.

HARLAN: Made of wood?

VICTOR: Yes. Why are you asking me all these questions? (*Sarcastically*) I suppose you're going to tell me this dream had some deep psychological significance?

HARLAN: Not psychological, no. It's just very interesting, don't you think? Both Christian and Eastern religions talk about a gate. The Pearly Gates... the Vedic scriptures of India talk about your soul passing through a gate... the shamans of the Lakota Sioux Indians refer to a Spirit Gate to welcome the dead...

VICTOR: What's your point, Harlan?

HARLAN: My point is... this dream could be a symbol... a pointer... a representation of your present state.

VICTOR: (*Shrugs*) It's only a dream!

HARLAN: Perhaps not! I mean... let's examine that! For example... do you recall what you were doing before you die... umm... fell asleep?

VICTOR: It's funny, but I don't remember much of this afternoon at all.

HARLAN: Nothing?

VICTOR: Fishing! I remember fishing!

HARLAN: Do you remember... a gun?

VICTOR: A gun? Yes. My .44 Magnum. What about it?

HARLAN: It went off.

VICTOR: Did it?

HARLAN: At you.

VICTOR: I see.

HARLAN: With a bullet in it. A real bullet.

VICTOR: Ah.

(*HARLAN paces nervously.*)

HARLAN: I'm not sure quite how to put this, Victor, but I think you ought to know... I mean, you are my closest friend... or were, would be a bit more accurate... so I think that it is my duty to tell you... er...

VICTOR: What are you drivelling about?

HARLAN: The fact is, Victor... (*Takes a deep breath*) ... you're dead.

(Beat.)

VICTOR: It's true. I am feeling a bit lethargic.

HARLAN: No, Victor! DEAD! As in "dodo".

VICTOR: You don't have to go on about it! I can't be the life and soul of the party all the time! You're not exactly Mr. Lively yourself.

HARLAN: *(Getting frustrated)* I am not using that term in a metaphorical sense, but literally, as in deceased, passed on... no longer with us!

(HARLAN mimes strangling himself and expiring.)

VICTOR: Ah! That kind of dead. *(Beat)* Did I miss something? Who was it you said had... *(Mimics HARLAN's mime-show)* ... passed on?

HARLAN: YOU! Except you don't seem to have passed on at all. You're still here.

(VICTOR looks at himself.)

VICTOR: I'm definitely still here.

HARLAN: Victor! I know you're dead because... I was the one who killed you!

VICTOR: Oh! That seems a little unfriendly, Harlan, if you don't mind me saying so. Why did you do that?

HARLAN: I thought you were seducing Colleen. I had a little fit of jealousy. Quite unforgivable.

VICTOR: Seducing Colleen? *(VICTOR smiles as HE remembers)* Ah, yes... and you took...

HARLAN: Your gun...

VICTOR: ...and shot me. Yes... yes... it's beginning to come back...

HARLAN: Apparently there was supposed to be a blank in the gun.

VICTOR: Yes! That's right! A blank! I remember that! *(Beat)* What do you mean "apparently"?

HARLAN: There was a mistake. A BIG mistake.

(VICTOR looks at HARLAN closely.)

VICTOR: You're not serious, are you? *(Laughs)* I do believe you are! And now you think I'm a ghost. *(Looks into HARLAN's eyes)* You do, don't you? Harlan... my poor, poor Harlan. That superstitious logic of yours has finally driven you off the deep end, hasn't it! *(VICTOR jokingly extends his arms and moves zombie-like towards HARLAN)* Look at me! Touch me! I'm flesh and blood! I'm perfectly all right.

(HARLAN backs away in fear, falling over the furniture.)

HARLAN: Now, I know it must be a little disconcerting at first, but try to look on the bright side! Think what we've discovered here! If you could hang on a little longer... if we could document this... it could change the way we all think about ourselves! The eternal fight between faith and reason - between cosmological dialectics and hard science - could be over! Think of what it means!

VICTOR: It means you're going nuts, that's what it means! I think I will have that brandy.

*(VICTOR goes to the bar and pours himself a stiff shot.
There is the SOUND of COLLEEN chanting offstage.)*

VICTOR: What the hell's that? *(HE looks out of the window)* Oh, it's Colleen. Isn't it a bit late for her to be doing her chants?

HARLAN: Let's hope not! You're in limbo, Victor! You have become what the old alchemists called a "Spiritus Mercurialis", the much sought-after corporeal connection to the afterlife! Now that I'm getting over the shock of killing you, I'm beginning to realize that this could be the most amazing discovery in history! We have to put this in its academic perspective. *(Excited)* I don't believe my luck!

(HARLAN grabs a large notepad and pencil from a shelf.)

VICTOR: I think you've got one of your wheels caught in the sand, Harlan.

(COLLEEN's offstage chanting fades.)

HARLAN: *(Beside himself with excitement)* "Arcanum arcanorum!" The secret of secrets! It's within our grasp! We have been given an opportunity to conduct the world's first physico-ephemeral experiment! *(HARLAN checks his watch and writes the date and time at the top of the page)* There's a good possibility that your fate is being decided AS WE SPEAK! Now, I think it all hinges on cleaning up the... shall we say... negative aspects of your life. You can't change the past, but there is something you could change before you go... you could reconcile with Dora! If you did that I think you'd stand a much better chance...

VICTOR: Oh, do shut up! I had a bizarre dream... I forgot a couple of things for a moment... it doesn't mean I'm a half-decomposed zombie who's just crawled out of his grave, for heaven's sake!

HARLAN: Victor, I don't want you to think that I'm not sorry that I killed you... I am. I should have been able to control myself. My life's work has been the quest to curb anger and passion... and you set me a glorious test... it was brilliant... I commend you. You exploited my weaknesses like a master! As a human being I was an abject failure... yet, at the same time... you must admit, my philosophy... my philosophy was a magnificent success!

VICTOR: Success! Ha! I'd like to see how you can pull success out of the philosophical trouncing I just gave you!

HARLAN: Victor, Victor! Don't you see? I have proven... WE have proven... beyond a shadow of doubt that there IS life after death! This changes everything!

(HARLAN excitedly scribbles down notes.)

VICTOR: You haven't proven any such thing! It was a game! I was trying to prove a point! Those weren't real bullets in the gun - they were blanks! Get it? Blanks! YOU DIDN'T KILL ME!

HARLAN: I did! I shot you right through the heart!

VICTOR: OK, if I'm dead, there should be a bullet hole in my vest, shouldn't there? *(VICTOR looks at his vest, which has no hole in it)* Well?

HARLAN: Wait! You had your hands in your pant pockets... your vest was pulled aside.

VICTOR: Then I should have a bullet hole in my shirt, shouldn't I?

(VICTOR opens his vest, and his shirt has a large round BLOODSTAIN around his heart. VICTOR convulses in horror when HE sees the stain. HARLAN hops around in joy.)

HARLAN: *(Gleefully)* You see! You see! Isn't it wonderful!

VICTOR: No! No, no... no!

(VICTOR quickly closes his vest over the bloodstain.)

HARLAN: Go on, Victor... look at it. You could probably stick your finger right through the hole.

(HARLAN moves his finger towards VICTOR's chest. VICTOR jumps back with squeamish horror, buttoning up his vest.)

VICTOR: Get away from me!

HARLAN: Just as I thought... you can't face your own mortality, can you?

VICTOR: Oh, no... forget it, Harlan! I'm not buying your little ruse! You can't catch me as easily as that! You're getting back at me because of what I did to you! Aha... that's it, isn't it? Isn't it?

HARLAN: No, Victor! You must face up to the facts! You're in denial. Remember Kübler-Ross' theory of the five stages of dying? The first stage is denial, then comes anger, then bargaining for time...

VICTOR: *(Losing his confidence)* Come on, Harlan! Out with it! Your scheme has been discovered! How did you get the blood there? Some sleight of hand? Very clever, but I know what you're up to! Come on, tell me! You want me to admit that there is an afterlife, don't you? You just want to hear me say: "yes, there is life after death... I was wrong, you were right", and then everyone will come prancing out shouting: "we got you... we got you!" *(Looks around)* Well, the game's over! No-one's making a damn fool out of Victor Pierce, and that's the end of it! COME ON... YOU CAN ALL COME OUT! *(HE opens the double doors and looks out; silence)* I'M NOT DEAD!!

HARLAN: To understand the truth there has to be one terrible moment in your life when you doubt everything. Isn't that what you said?

VICTOR: You bastard! You don't play games with people's lives!

HARLAN: You did with mine!

VICTOR: You've concocted this elaborate hoax because I proved that you were capable of murder! And you hate being proved wrong, don't you?

HARLAN: Not as much as you do, Victor.

VICTOR: A red stain on my shirt proves nothing! It could be ketchup, or paint! You snuck up on me while I was asleep down at the beach, didn't you? That's it, isn't it? Yes! Of course! *(Laughs with relief)* You had me worried for a moment - I don't mind admitting it! But I've got it all figured out now! Ketchup! Ha! *(Looks at the stain; breathes easier)* And that gate in the dream... it was just like that gate by the boathouse... yeah, that old wooden gate... no Pearly Gates there! *(More relief; scratches himself)* Damned itch! It's driving me nuts.

HARLAN: It's your skin! It's beginning to decompose.

(HARLAN grabs his notepad, checks the time on his watch and scribbles down more notes.)

VICTOR: STOP IT! It's fire ants and ketchup!

HARLAN: We need something more scientific to prove you're dead.

(HARLAN looks around and sees a large mercury thermometer on the wall, grabs it and goes to VICTOR.)

HARLAN: Open wide!

(HARLAN tries to put the thermometer in VICTOR's mouth, but with its wooden backing it's obviously too big.)

VICTOR: What the hell are you doing?

HARLAN: Taking your temperature.

VICTOR: That's not going to work, you idiot!

HARLAN: You're right. *(Looks around - sees the stethoscope hanging out of DORA's medical bag)* Ah! Look, Dora's stethoscope!

VICTOR: Yes! Dora's stethoscope! This will put an end to this stupid notion of yours once and for all! *(Grabs the stethoscope)* Let's take a listen to the old ticker.

(VICTOR takes the stethoscope, clips it on his ears and puts the sensor against his chest and listens.)

VICTOR: This'll show you! You can't have a ghost with a heartbeat, can you? *(His face turns from triumph to concern)* Hmm. This thing doesn't work too well. Battery must be flat.

HARLAN: It doesn't use a battery.

(VICTOR scowls and moves the sensor around his chest - slowly at first, and then more desperately.)

VICTOR: There must be some mistake! I... I can't hear anything.

HARLAN: Of course you can't hear anything. There's no blood pumping through your veins.

VICTOR: Damn it! What's the matter with this stupid thing!

(Jabs the sensor all over his chest, then at the pulse point of the wrist. Nothing! Finally he jams it against the carotid artery of the neck. Still nothing.)

HARLAN: It's as silent as a tomb, isn't it?

(VICTOR rips off the stethoscope and hurls it across the room.)

VICTOR: No! It can't be true! It can't be!

HARLAN: It is, Victor!

VICTOR: No! No! No! Oh, I don't feel so good!

HARLAN: I'm sorry, Victor. I'm truly sorry.

VICTOR: This is worse than being told you're terminally ill! You're saying I'm...

HARLAN: Beyond terminal. Beyond everything. Simply and unequivocally dead!

(VICTOR slumps down onto a chair.)

VICTOR: I'm dead! *(Whimpers)* I'm not prepared for this! Oh, I took a course in it once, but I fell asleep in half the lectures. That's it then! The end of everything! Oh no!

(VICTOR sees something.)

HARLAN: What is it?

VICTOR: I'm seeing my life flash before my eyes! It's true what they say! I can see myself as a child... playing in the yard... school... baseball... that home run I hit that won us the MacIntosh Challenge Cup! Yes! Yes! Now I'm a teenager... the day I wrecked the car... Dad's face, oh shit... ah... and there's Dora... the senior prom... *(Fondly)* Aaah, she looked so cute... College... Harlan, it's you, it's you! It's the day we climbed the clock tower and hung a bra and panties on the clock hands... *(Laughs raucously at the memory)* Oh, what fun we had... oh-oh... now it's three years ago! Oh no, I can't watch this...

HARLAN: I know this must be very hard on you, but I had to tell you that there was a real bullet in that gun.

VICTOR: *(Almost in tears)* But Harlan, how did it happen? How? There shouldn't have been a bullet in the gun!

HARLAN: But there was, and that's the end of it! You must have left a bullet in the chamber by accident!

VICTOR: I didn't leave a bullet in by accident! I'm not that stupid! *(Realizes)* Somebody else must have put the bullet there!

HARLAN: That's ridiculous! Why would anybody do that?

VICTOR: *(Self-pity turning to anger)* Somebody who wanted me dead!

HARLAN: Nobody wanted you dead! It was an accident!

VICTOR: No, Harlan! I checked that gun very carefully! I was murdered!

HARLAN: Yes! I murdered you! I'm ready to confess to it. But I can't while you're still here. The police need a corpse, and nobody's going to give you a death certificate while you're sitting around reading "Fish Facts Monthly".

VICTOR: I'm not talking about you, you dope! I wanted you to shoot me! But someone switched the bullets in the gun! Someone knew about the game and switched the bullets! But who?

HARLAN: Never mind how it happened! It's not important now! You should be thinking about the time you have left... about saying goodbye to the people you love. You could start by reconciling with Dora - it could really help your case...

VICTOR: Dora! Yes! Maybe she did it... she found out about the game and... !
(Thinks) No, she's just not the type. Besides, she takes enough tranquilizers to pacify a tiger. I need to find the person who would stand to gain the most from my death. Someone whose life... or whose career... *(It starts to make sense)* ... would be greatly improved with me out of the way. *(Glares at HARLAN)* Someone whose course attendances have been declining for several years, because another professor is more popular. Someone who's just behind me in line for tenure. Can you think of anyone like that, Harlan?

HARLAN: Victor... you're not serious... ?

(VICTOR approaches HARLAN menacingly.)

VICTOR: Colleen told you about the game, didn't she? And you realized that it would be easy to claim I had left the bullet in by mistake. It would all be dismissed as a little mishap! You could say it was... A HUNTING ACCIDENT! YES! And then you would be next in line for tenure! My God, what a fool I've been! I even put the thought into your head! I see it all now! YOU planned my murder!

HARLAN: That's ridiculous! You're my best friend!

VICTOR: Friendship is never worth as much as tenure - you know that! It makes perfect sense! Finally I see you as you really are! YOU'RE A MURDERER! A COLD-BLOODED MURDERER!!

(VICTOR looks around and sees a large wood-chopper's axe next to the woodpile. HE heads for it.)

HARLAN: What are you doing?

(VICTOR picks up the axe.)

VICTOR: Revenge, Harlan! I want revenge!

(VICTOR approaches HARLAN with the axe.)

HARLAN: Take it easy, Victor! It's just a phase you're going through! Remember Kübler-Ross and the five stages of dying? First denial, and then anger...

(VICTOR chases HARLAN who trips and falls over the back of the sofa. VICTOR swings the axe at HARLAN, but misses as HARLAN rolls away and the axe thumps into the sofa.)

HARLAN: I'll be really glad when this stage is over!

(HARLAN runs across the room with VICTOR in hot pursuit.)

VICTOR: I had a life... I had a future! And you took it all away from me!

HARLAN: But you do have a future! Maybe not on this earth, but it's still a future, of sorts!

VICTOR: THANKS FOR NOTHING!

(VICTOR swings the axe at HARLAN again - it misses but impales the chess board to the tree stump it is placed on. Chess pieces go flying everywhere! VICTOR tries to pull the axe out of the stump as HARLAN wrestles with him for possession of the axe.)

HARLAN: This has all gone too far, Victor! It's time to take a couple of deep breaths and calm down.

VICTOR: Thanks to you, I don't have any deep breaths to take!

(VICTOR gives up trying to pull the axe out of the stump - sees the harpoon on the wall, grabs it and turns on HARLAN.)

HARLAN: Victor!

VICTOR: This is rather fitting, don't you think? A harpoon! Like Captain Ahab and the whale, we both go down together...

(HE hurls the harpoon at HARLAN who dives to one side and the harpoon misses him. VICTOR returns to the axe and tries to pull it out of the table.)

HARLAN uses the moment to rush into the SL bedroom, slamming the door behind him. VICTOR frees the axe and runs to the door but hears HARLAN locking it. VICTOR backs away to get a good run, puts his shoulder down and charges the bedroom door. Just as VICTOR reaches the door, HARLAN pulls the door open from inside and VICTOR goes flying through the door. VICTOR can be heard tumbling over the furniture offstage. HARLAN darts out of the door, closes it, rushes into the center of the room, looks around, and then escapes through the SR bedroom door.

VICTOR emerges from the SL bedroom with the axe, but HARLAN has disappeared. VICTOR runs to the double doors and EXITS.

COLLEEN rushes in from the hallway.)

COLLEEN: What's going on in here? Harlan? Victor? *(SHE looks around the room at the upturned furniture and the harpoon)* Oh, my God!

(HARLAN sprints across the deck and ENTERS through the double doors.)

HARLAN: Colleen, get out of here! Victor's gone mad! He's on a rampage!

(THEY turn and see VICTOR coming up the path to the deck - axe at the ready.)

HARLAN: He's coming! Quick! Hide!

(They look around in a panic - there's no time to hide so they press themselves against the wall on either side of the screen window. VICTOR appears on the deck and stands framed in the window with his axe. HE peers into the room through the screen. For a terrifying moment it seems that VICTOR senses their presence, but then HE hears LEAVES RUSTLING out in the woods and turns and races off into the darkness.)

COLLEEN: Harlan, what did you say to him? You were supposed to make him feel better.

HARLAN: I just told him he was dead. He didn't take it very well.

(VICTOR comes back into view outside and starts prodding the shrubs with his axe looking for Harlan. COLLEEN and HARLAN watch this nervously. Finding nothing, VICTOR comes back on the deck, looking around.)

COLLEEN: He's coming back!

(HARLAN and COLLEEN hide - HARLAN behind the bar, COLLEEN behind some furniture. VICTOR ENTERS through the double doors, the axe poised.)

VICTOR: Where are you, Harlan? *(Looks around)* Harlan? There's no point in running! I'm going to get you! I'm not going into the great beyond alone!

(VICTOR hears something in the room and ominously closes the double doors tight. Then HE tiptoes across the room.)

VICTOR: Oh, Haaaarlan!

(VICTOR stands in the middle of the room, listening. HE hears some heavy breathing in the room and moves around stealthily.)

VICTOR: Do I hear a rat? A nasty smelly little rat?

(Suddenly VICTOR turns and DRIVES THE AXE into the bar. HARLAN flies out from behind the bar, and scampers for safety when HE trips and sprawls.)

VICTOR: No need to call the exterminators. This one I can handle myself.

(VICTOR looms over HARLAN with the axe raised. COLLEEN leaps out from her hiding place.)

COLLEEN: Victor! Don't do it!

(VICTOR stops.)

VICTOR: So, you're part of it too! Just as I thought! You told him about my plan, didn't you?

COLLEEN: No!

VICTOR: And I always thought you were so innocent! Well, you're lucky you're a woman, but for Harlan... *(VICTOR looms over the fallen HARLAN with the axe)* ... justice is going to be done! An eye for an eye, a head for a head!

COLLEEN: I didn't tell him anything!

HARLAN: She didn't, Victor, she didn't! Listen to me... this is all a big mistake!

VICTOR: You must have found this all so amusing! Stupid old Victor trying so hard to get himself killed! What a laugh! It must have been too much to resist! Well, I'm taking you with me, Harlan! You and I are both going to the great university in the sky! The land of eternal tenure!

(VICTOR raises the axe to strike the prostrate HARLAN.)

HARLAN: Nooooo!

(COLLEEN rushes VICTOR with a yell like a banshee and leaps on his back, flinging her arms around his neck and wrapping her legs around his waist.)

HARLAN seizes the opportunity to get up and tries to grab the axe out of VICTOR's hands - both of them fight for possession of the axe. The THREE of them become a cluster of desperate wrestling bodies when:

SUDDENLY the DOUBLE DOORS BLOW OPEN and standing there out on the deck in the mist, is:

A BLACK-SHROUDED FIGURE holding a scythe.)

VICTOR: AAAAGGHHH! What the hell's that?

(HARLAN's eyes go wide in terror. HE lets go of the axe - leaving it in VICTOR's hands.)

HARLAN: Oh, my God! It's... it's...

COLLEEN: ...it's The Grim Reaper! He's come... he's come for Victor!

VICTOR: OH, SHIT! What does he want?

HARLAN: I think he's taking you to be judged!

(THE GRIM REAPER is standing in the misty darkness covered in a hideous half-decayed black shroud. THE GRIM REAPER points out into the night, as if to tell VICTOR to come with him.)

VICTOR: Oh, no! *(Notices the axe in his hand)* This really isn't a good time. *(Drops the axe like a hot potato)* I know this all looks bad... but I've not been myself recently. I don't know what came over me just now! Trying to kill my friend here... *(Dusts HARLAN off, strokes his head)* ... it's completely out of character! It's just a phase I was going through, isn't it Harlan?

HARLAN: *(To THE GRIM REAPER)* Yes! Just a phase! You must be very familiar with all this, you know, the five stages of dying... denial, anger, bargaining for time, grieving, and then acceptance... happens to everyone...

COLLEEN: It's true! He's really a very nice guy!

VICTOR: *(Pleading)* I just need a little more time!

HARLAN: *(To THE GRIM REAPER)* You see... bargaining for time! *(Aside to VICTOR)* Tell him you have to talk to your loved ones!

VICTOR: Yes! *(Beat)* Why?

HARLAN: You know... to get your life in order.

VICTOR: Oh. Yeah, right. *(To THE GRIM REAPER)* Look, I'm not perfect, I'd be the first to admit it! But can't we hold off on this judging business for a while? Give me a chance to straighten a few things out before I go. I know I look like a heel right now, but I've learned my lesson! I'm a fast learner... straight "A"s all through school, and believe me, I HAVE GOT THE MESSAGE! *(Pleads)* I'm just asking for a little more time! There's someone I have to talk to! I'm not ready yet!

(There is a CRASH OF THUNDER and THE GRIM REAPER points out into the darkness. VICTOR drops to his knees in supplication.)

VICTOR: No! Please... listen to me! I'M NOT GOOD WITH HEAT! We're not talking about a couple of bad weeks in Tijuana, we're talking about eternity!

(THE GRIM REAPER stands unmoved, his hand still pointing into the darkness.)

COLLEEN: *(To VICTOR)* Tell him why you became bad! It's your only chance!

VICTOR: Yes! *(To THE GRIM REAPER)* Listen! I'm not saying I was right to have all those affairs! I've been bad! BAD! *(Slaps himself on the wrist)* It was wrong... I see that now! But there was a reason! I was betrayed!

(Slowly THE GRIM REAPER puts down his outstretched hand and turns to VICTOR.)

HARLAN: He's going to listen! This is it, Victor... your big chance! (*Drags VICTOR in front of THE GRIM REAPER*) Tell him what happened!

VICTOR: I can't!

(Terrified, VICTOR runs away from the hideous apparition, but HARLAN grabs VICTOR and pushes him forward.)

HARLAN: You must! It's your only hope.

VICTOR: It's no use! I'm doomed! I'm going to fry!

HARLAN: Victor, don't give up now! (*Slaps him*) Get a grip on yourself!

(The slap has a sobering effect on VICTOR, but during the following speech HE still hardly dares look at THE GRIM REAPER.)

VICTOR: OK! Why did I go bad? Let me see... it all started three years ago. Dora - that's my wife - Dora said she was going to that art exhibit at the Backmann Gallery. She'd been acting strangely for a while... secretly... which is quite unlike her. I followed her. But she never went to the gallery that night. She went into a bar and met a man. I never saw his face, he always wore a hat and coat... but she talked for hours... she met him more than once... always in dark out-of-the-way places where they wouldn't be recognized.

HARLAN: Three years ago?

VICTOR: (*To HARLAN*) Shhh! (*To THE GRIM REAPER*) Two years and eleven months to be exact. (*HARLAN starts to count on his fingers*) That day is branded in my memory! I loved her and she betrayed me!

HARLAN: The Pickwick pub?

VICTOR: Harlan, will you stop interrupt... (*Realizes*) Yes, the Pickwick pub! What about it?

HARLAN: And the Latin Quarter Bar and Grill?

VICTOR: Yes!

HARLAN: Ah... that was me, Victor!

VICTOR: You? YOU!

HARLAN: Yes. It was me. I was with Dora.

(COLLEEN clutches her heart and faints again.)

VICTOR: YOU TWO-TIMING SNAKE!!

(VICTOR grabs HARLAN by the collar.)

HARLAN: Wait! Wait! It's not what you think! It was during the time that Helen was leaving me! I needed someone to talk to, that's all! I needed some advice!

(COLLEEN revives, staggers to a chair and fans herself.)

VICTOR: Advice? I don't believe you! Why would you go to Dora for advice? I was your best friend... why didn't you come to me?

(VICTOR tightens his grip on HARLAN's throat.)

HARLAN: I couldn't! I felt so humiliated! I'm sorry Victor, there are things that men can't talk to men about.

VICTOR: There was no affair?

HARLAN: Of course not! Do I look like the kind of man Dora would have an affair with?

VICTOR: You have a point. *(HE loosens his grip on HARLAN's throat then tightens again)* But what about that stupid hat and coat?

HARLAN: I didn't want the whole faculty and student body knowing Helen was leaving me. *(Sadly)* Not that it made any difference.

(VICTOR lets go of HARLAN's throat.)

VICTOR: You should have come to me. I would have understood. *(Beat)* So you were my imaginary rival?

(VICTOR looks at HARLAN and laughs.)

HARLAN: Yes.

(HARLAN laughs too. Soon they are both laughing hysterically at the ridiculousness of the situation.)

VICTOR: You!

HARLAN: Yes! Me! *(Laughs)* And you thought... !

(THEY both convulse with laughter again when there is a sudden CRASH OF THUNDER.

EVERYBODY jumps. THEY had quite forgotten about THE GRIM REAPER.)

VICTOR: *(To the Grim Reaper)* Oh, please! Surely you've heard enough!!

(There is a FLASH OF LIGHTNING and a ROAR OF THUNDER. The SOUND of a STRONG WIND rattles the cottage.)

Please... there must be something... you can't take me away now... !

(VICTOR drops to his knees and crawls out on the deck to where THE GRIM REAPER is standing.)

Not before I explain all this to my wife.

(VICTOR grovels at THE GRIM REAPER's feet. The WIND blows stronger and THE GRIM REAPER points out into the darkness - pointing the way for VICTOR.)

VICTOR: Please! Have mercy on me! Have a little pity!

(VICTOR sobs and grabs THE GRIM REAPER's shroud, pulling on it while wailing for mercy. As HE pulls the shroud it slips off THE GRIM REAPER and falls to the floor to reveal:

DORA underneath the shroud.)

DORA: Hello, Victor!

VICTOR: *(Stares at her)* What the hell! Dora?!

DORA: *(Grins at him)* Like my outfit? Just a few old things I found in the boathouse. An old boat cover, and I guess this... *(Indicating the scythe)* ... is for clearing that damn brush.

(SHE comes into the room and puts down the scythe. VICTOR jumps to his feet.)

VICTOR: JESUS, DORA!!

DORA: *(Indignant)* I can't believe you'd think I'd have an affair!

VICTOR: What was I supposed to think? You never had any secrets from me before!

DORA: Why didn't you confront me, you big dope? Why didn't you say something?

VICTOR: Well, because... even a philosopher has some truths he can't bear to hear.

COLLEEN: Does this mean that Victor's not dead?

VICTOR: Yes! Now you've got me all confused! Am I alive, or is the real Grim Reaper going to show up any minute?

(VICTOR peers nervously into the darkness and closes the double doors tight.)

DORA: There's something you ought to know about that gun.

(DORA goes to the bar and takes the pistol from its hiding place. SHE aims the gun towards VICTOR.)

VICTOR: Dora! What are you doing?

DORA: The final revelation of the night, Victor!

(DORA pulls the trigger. The pistol goes off with a LOUD BLAST.

VICTOR feels himself all over thinking HE has been shot. HE hasn't. HE looks behind him and sees:

A RED LIQUID oozing down the wall. DORA obviously aimed to miss him. VICTOR looks at the red stain.)

VICTOR: What the hell... ? What's going on?

DORA: Just some cotton wadding soaked in red paint that I took from Colleen's paint box. I stuffed the wadding into your blanks, Victor.

VICTOR: Paint?

(VICTOR goes to touch the stain with his finger.)

DORA: Don't touch it!

VICTOR: Huh?

DORA: Not unless you want to keel over again. The paint is laced with "Sleeping Wolfsbane".

VICTOR: What in God's name is "Sleeping Wolfsbane"?

DORA: Just a little something I discovered in one of Colleen's books. It pays to keep an open mind about these things. The scientific name is "aconitinus somnifera". It grows like a weed around here. It's very powerful - even to the touch - the Aleutian Indians smeared it on the tips of their harpoons to paralyze whales.

VICTOR: Whales! Good God!

(SUDDENLY the DOUBLE DOORS GET KICKED OPEN and a FIGURE leaps into the room, pistol drawn.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: FREEZE!

(EVERYBODY almost leaps out of their skin until THEY see it is OFFICER MCGUIRE.)

HARLAN: I WISH YOU WOULDN'T KEEP DOING THAT, OFFICER!

(OFFICER MCGUIRE aims her gun at them.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: All right! What's going on? I was coming back from interviewing your neighbour when I heard another gunshot!

(Everyone looks at each other.)

HARLAN: A gunshot?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Yes, a gunshot! And I heard it this time, so don't try any funny business! What the hell's going on in this cockamamie place?

(OFFICER MCGUIRE looks at the upturned furniture, and sees the axe lying in the middle of the floor. SHE points her gun at it - SHE has the odd habit of aiming her gun at objects.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Aha! And what's that doing there, eh? *(Sees the harpoon; aims her gun at it)* And that?

HARLAN: Oh, what's the use! Why don't we tell her the truth?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: That's more like it.

(SHE holsters her gun and flips out her notebook.)

DORA: All right. I did shoot Victor – at least I caused him to be shot. *(SHE indicates VICTOR who points to the blood-stain on his shirt)* Oh, I have to admit, that in a brief moment of madness I did think about using a real bullet...

VICTOR: You're kidding! I'd driven you to that?

DORA: Yes, you had... but when I got down to Joe's Store and saw all those worms on sale, I had this awful vision of you lying in your grave and those horrible creatures eating you. It gave me a jolt of reality. You may have been a creep in recent years, but even you didn't deserve a fate like that. And we did have some wonderful times together before you went cuckoo on me. So, I just bought a large bottle of brandy and came home. But I was still mad. I couldn't concentrate on my studies. Then I remembered Colleen's stupid herbal books and I thought I could vent my anger on them... but instead I found the perfect solution. *(To OFFICER MCGUIRE)* So I used some wadding laced with aconitine.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: With what?

(DORA takes a small ball of red cotton wadding from her purse. The wadding is tightly bound with plastic kitchen wrap and tied off like a tiny sack. It is just big enough to fit into the barrel of the pistol, like the ammunition used in a paintball gun. DORA gives it to OFFICER MCGUIRE who looks at the projectile like it's a dead rat.)

DORA: Sleeping Wolfsbane. It knocks you out.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: What are you talking about?

COLLEEN: *(Perkily)* You crush the root and squeeze it through a coffee filter. Quite easy really.

(DORA gets the book "Herbs of The Northwest" from the shelf, and opens it to a bookmark.)

DORA: Let me give you the official description. *(Reads)* "Aconitinus somnifera" also causes numbness of the tongue and mouth, and a sensation of ants crawling over the body..."

VICTOR: *(Remembers)* Fire ants...

DORA: "...irregular and weak pulse, cold and clammy skin..."

VICTOR: Wait a minute! My pulse wasn't weak... it was gone! I checked with the stethoscope. *(HE picks up the stethoscope)* I had no heartbeat!

DORA: Oh, that! I stuffed the tubes with cotton wool.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Madly scribbling all this down)* "Had no heartbeat."

DORA: *(Continues reading)* The other effects of aconitine are: "Bloodless features, giddiness, staggering, physical collapse, but..." - and this was the tricky part - "...the mind usually remains clear." The Indian shamans use it in their ceremonies for soul-cleansing and enlightenment. I thought, hey, if it works for them it could work for Victor. *(To*

VICTOR: So you see, we didn't know how much you could hear, so we had to play out this whole charade assuming that you could hear everything. It was very hard work.

VICTOR: So my dream was just fragments of things I heard... *(Suddenly dawns on him)* What do you mean, we? *(Wheels on HARLAN)* Were you in on this?

HARLAN: Me? Absolutely not. Dull Stoics don't get involved in childish pranks like that. *(HE breaks into a grin)* Check mate! Game, set, match! *(HARLAN does some funky jive body movements)* Slam dunk! Have I lost my touch? I don't think so! *(Offers him a high-five)* Gimme five, ol' buddy.

VICTOR: You rat!

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Scribbling in her notebook; trying to keep up.)* "Staggering... physical collapse".

DORA: *(To VICTOR)* I just wanted to give you a scare... the metaphysical stuff was Harlan's idea.

HARLAN: You see, after Dora calmed down, she told me what she'd seen and it didn't take us long to figure out that you weren't really having an affair with Colleen. At least, I was pretty certain.

COLLEEN: *(Indignant)* Harlan!

HARLAN: No, I was really certain! At first I didn't want to get involved in the prank, but Dora convinced me that my life had turned into a passionless drift to oblivion. Get my butt off the sidelines and get back into the game, she said. And she was right. But most of all, we realized we had the perfect opportunity to shake you up... maybe even find out what was bothering you so much. We wanted to make this a learning experience for you, Victor. For all of us.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Still writing)* How do you spell "metaphysical"?

VICTOR: All of us? You're not going to tell me Colleen was in on this too? *(To COLLEEN)* Please tell me there's a vestige of innocence left in this world. Please!

(COLLEEN is silent for a moment, and then throws her arms in the air.)

COLLEEN: Ta-dah!

VICTOR: No!

COLLEEN: It was for your own good, Victor. A kind of shock therapy, remember.

VICTOR: The shock therapy was for HIM, not for me! Colleen, how could you do this? You're not the type!

COLLEEN: *(Gleefully)* That's what I thought, but you know, it was very exciting. I've never even held a gun before... *(To OFFICER MCGUIRE)* ... and when you came bursting in with your gun drawn and everything... wow... I never thought we'd hold it all together... but we did! I've never felt so exhilarated in my life!

HARLAN: Hold it together! You shot the telephone right out from under my nose! That wasn't part of the plan! You scared the hell out of me, waving that gun around... a lump of wadding can still take your eye out!

COLLEEN: Sorry, I got carried away in the excitement. You didn't give me a lot of time to prepare.

HARLAN: Well, never mind. *(Takes her in his arms)* You were magnificent, Colleen. You have joined the ranks of the great pranksters of history. *(Indicates mask on the wall)* Puk-wudji would be proud.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Who the hell's Puk-wudji?

VICTOR: *(To HARLAN; re: COLLEEN)* I hope you realize you've created a monster. We'll never be safe again.

HARLAN: Cheer up! We've all learned something. I'd forgotten what fun life can be with a friend like you, Victor. It's been years since I felt so alive as I did tonight. We were right on the edge, pushing the envelope... my pulse was racing... my God, you even came at me with an axe! How long has it been since you've done that?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Writing furiously)* "... came at him with an axe".

VICTOR: I'm going to pay you back for this... big time!

HARLAN: Of course you are! I wouldn't expect anything less! But before you start planning the next prank, I suggest you ponder the lessons of this one. If my life with Colleen was a fraud, yours with Dora was a complete mess.

VICTOR: You're right!... seeing my life flash before my eyes wasn't a pretty sight! *(Turns to DORA)* Dora, I know I've behaved mmm... badly, but I've never stopped... you know... and I was wondering if you... ah... still, ah...

(Beat.)

DORA: Yes?

VICTOR: I was wondering if you still... well, after all that's happened... you know...

DORA: Yes?

(HE can't say it.)

HARLAN: Oh, for God's sake, Victor! *(To DORA)* He wants to know if you still love him.

DORA: Is that what you want to know?

VICTOR: I need to know if we can start again... if there's enough love left... ?

DORA: Of course I still love you! You think I'd go to all this trouble trying to have you shot if I didn't?

VICTOR: Oh, this is wonderful! I'll make it up to you, Dora! *(HE takes her in his arms and swirls her in a romantic dance)* We'll go on holiday... a second honeymoon! Anywhere you want to go! Just you and me!

(VICTOR sweeps DORA into a dramatic embrace right in front of OFFICER MCGUIRE.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Before I throw up, let me remind you love-birds that the only place you're going is the slammer!

DORA: On what charge, exactly?

HARLAN: Yes! It was all a game.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: Are you telling me that nobody's dead? Where's this Puk-wudji guy?

HARLAN: *(Indicates)* There he is on the wall.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE wheels around and draws her gun - then sees it's just a mask.)

HARLAN: I'm sorry, Officer. Perhaps another time.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE holsters her gun and flicks frantically through her notebook.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: There must be something... ! *(Desperately checks her notes)* Guns... axes... drugs... harpoons... bloodstains... there's no way I'm not going to nail you on something.

DORA: When you get there, let us know.

OFFICER MCGUIRE: You're saying this was all a prank?

HARLAN: Yes. That's what we've been trying to tell you.

(OFFICER MCGUIRE slowly tears all of the pages out of her notebook, scrunches them up and throws them away in disgust.)

DORA: Will that be all, officer?

(OFFICER MCGUIRE stares at them with annoyance. SHE tosses away the entire notebook. SHE starts to leave, stops and turns.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Bursting with frustration)* You know something...

VICTOR: Yes?

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Seething)* You people... deserve each other!

(OFFICER MCGUIRE turns to leave and trips on the axe still lying on the floor and goes flying. SHE angrily regains her composure and EXITS, slamming the door behind her.)

THEY all laugh. VICTOR embraces DORA; HARLAN holds COLLEEN.

Suddenly OFFICER MCGUIRE KICKS OPEN THE DOUBLE DOORS.)

OFFICER MCGUIRE: *(Shouts)* AND CLEAR THAT DAMN BRUSH!

(OFFICER MCGUIRE EXITS.)

THEY all laugh as:

The LIGHTS FADE to black.

*In the darkness, one small light remains illuminating
PUK-WUDJI the TRICKSTER MASK on the wall.
THE MASK is now laughing - its previously solid
wooden jaws moving hysterically as the SOUND of its
LAUGHTER fills the theatre.)*

Curtain

MUSIC

THE END

TECHNICAL NOTES

THE HIDDEN PLOT AND THE VISIBLE PLOT:

The play is divided into two separate plots: THE VISIBLE PLOT which the audience sees, and THE HIDDEN PLOT which only some of the characters are aware of. The hidden plot is revealed at the end of the play and should not become apparent to the audience until then.

In writing the play, I tried to adhere to the rule that every line should have a meaning that was ambiguous enough to service either plot. For example, in Act I, Scene 2, DORA says to HARLAN: "You'll do it, then?", and he says: "Yes, I'll do it!". The audience should think they are both referring to HARLAN agreeing to tell COLLEEN that he loves her (the visible plot), when the lines actually mean that HARLAN has agreed to join DORA in the conspiracy against VICTOR and recruit COLLEEN into the conspiracy (the hidden plot).

To help the actors and the director, the following is an explanation of how and when the hidden plot unfolds. It is absolutely vital that this plot remains hidden and does not "bleed through" into the visible plot. The hidden plot should only appear clearly to the audience in retrospect with lots of small clues whose relevance was not obvious at the time.

The timeline is as follows: they have arrived for the weekend. It's a Friday. They left Vancouver early that morning and travelled up the coast using a combination of car ferries and roads, arriving at the cottage around noon with a stop at "the village" nearby for some supplies. Act I, Scene 1 starts in the early afternoon. They have done some unpacking and started vacationing. VICTOR has caught a fish, COLLEEN has been working on the mask she picked up in the village, and has gathered some herbs, etc.

The time lapse between Act I, Scenes 1 and 2 is quite a few hours. When Scene 2 begins it's evening just around sunset, but it's summer and daylight lingers late in the day. The rest of the play is in real sequential time, so we see the sunset go to twilight and then to night. Since a lot takes place in the interval between the first two scenes, it is important that the audience feels some considerable time has passed. This can be done by showing that the exterior lighting has noticeably changed from bright daylight to late evening, plus the fact that the half-unpacked cardboard boxes and suitcases visible in Scene 1 have been put away.

What really happens between Act I, Scenes 1 and 2? At first DORA does consider putting real bullets in the gun, even going to the hunting supplies store. However, she calms down at the last minute and does not go through with buying the bullets.

Then DORA goes back to the cottage and talks to her confidant HARLAN. They both realize that VICTOR is probably up to another one of his pranks and is not really having an affair with COLLEEN. Naturally, this is all unseen by the audience. Then DORA reads COLLEEN's herbal books where she gets the idea for the counter-prank against VICTOR to teach him a lesson.

HARLAN is reluctant to get involved in DORA's counter-prank - despite its potential benefit to VICTOR - as he no longer believes in game-playing. However, his disastrous scene with COLLEEN makes him realize his stoicism is not serving him well and his relationships with both VICTOR and COLLEEN are suffering because of it. DORA's lines: "It's time to get your butt off the sidelines and get back into the game", refers to the hidden plot against VICTOR.

COLLEEN participates because she believes that joining in a wild prank with her husband may free up his emotions in ways that will benefit their relationship, as well as to help VICTOR reevaluate his nihilistic view of life and thereby reconcile with DORA.

Later, when VICTOR sees HARLAN and DORA talking outside (after DORA's exit to go to the invented "Women's Guild Lecture"), HARLAN and DORA are actually discussing the hidden plot. VICTOR almost figures this out when he says to HARLAN: "Talking to Dora, were you? About me, I'll bet". Fortunately, HARLAN manages to divert his thoughts away from this near-discovery of the hidden plot.

When HARLAN does not shoot VICTOR the first time, the hidden plot gets unexpectedly derailed. HARLAN was about to shoot VICTOR (following the plan), but VICTOR's sudden mention of HARLAN's inability to "commit to Colleen", takes HARLAN by surprise and he doesn't pull the trigger, so the opportunity is missed. After HARLAN exits, COLLEEN (who has been observing the scene from outside) enters and tries to get the hidden plot back on track. She manages to do this by cleverly playing on VICTOR's dislike of being proved wrong in an argument, and predictably VICTOR can't resist another attempt to get HARLAN to shoot him.

When COLLEEN exits through the double doors after VICTOR asks her to: "Come back in 5 minutes", there is time for COLLEEN and HARLAN to have a brief exchange about the plot outside before HARLAN enters. This exchange is unseen by the audience, of course, and takes place while VICTOR looks around for the best location to put the pistol.

The rest of the hidden plot is a mixture of pre-planning and opportunism. The plot has moments where it spins out of control, like where COLLEEN gets too excited and overplays the scene over VICTOR's body - and when VICTOR goes on a rampage with the axe. At other times, it all unfolds perfectly according to plan, as in the scene with the blood-stained shirt and the stethoscope.

USE OF THE TERM "INDIAN":

The term "Indian" is used throughout the play, although this can be a sensitive issue in some areas. The more modern terms used in Canada are "First Nations", "Indigenous Peoples" or "Aboriginal Peoples", although the word "Indian" is still used in colloquial speech, especially by non-aboriginals. Well-educated individuals like the characters in this play are more likely to be early adopters of the current proper terminology. The situation also changes over time, which makes the use of any term in the published text problematic. "First Nations" is popular now but despite its widespread use, there is no legal definition for this term in Canada. It is not a synonym for "Aboriginal Peoples" because it doesn't include Inuit or Métis. "Aboriginal Peoples" is a collective name for all of the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. The Constitution Act of 1982 specifies that the "Aboriginal Peoples" in Canada consist of three groups - Indians, Inuit and Métis.

Whenever the play is performed outside Canada, the term "First Nations" may sound strange and confuse the audience. The United Nations uses the term "Indigenous Peoples". In the United States "American Indian" has been commonly used to describe the descendants of the original peoples of North America. Some people are dissatisfied with this term because it retains the misnomer "Indian" and covers peoples who consider themselves distinct from Indian peoples, namely the Inuit, Yupik and Aleut peoples in Alaska. A more approved term is "Native Americans". These terms are naturally not popular in Canada. In America the term "Indian" is still common among the tribes themselves as can be seen in their advertisements for "Indian Gaming".

All of these longer terms can be a mouthful when used in colloquial speech, so I have simply used the politically incorrect word "Indian". If you wish to substitute a more modern term, please feel free to do so as long as it sounds natural in the mouths of the characters. There is no doubt that the characters in the play would be familiar with the correct terms, although it would also be easy for them to slip back into old habits.

PRE-SHOW & BETWEEN-SCENES MUSIC:

The music should set a mood of foreboding and mystery. Since the play is set in the Pacific Northwest - the home of the Nootka, Haida and Kwakiutl - the music should reflect this heritage if possible. Music and the sounds of nature can add a lot of atmosphere to the play.

THE GUN:

The script refers to a ".44 Magnum, single-action revolver, four inch barrel, chrome finish, adjustable rear sights", but obviously use the technical description of the gun that you are able to get hold of. Try as hard as you can to get a silver or at least a light-coloured gun - it shows up much better on stage and catches the light in interesting ways. And make it as big as possible - it's the centerpiece of the suspense in the play. It must be a revolver not a semi-automatic, since almost everyone knows how to load a simple revolver. The bigger caliber also makes it more plausible that a piece of wadding large enough to deliver enough Wolfsbane to do the job would fit into the barrel.

HARLAN AND DORA'S RELATIONSHIP:

In Act I, Scene 1 ("Why did I end up with a wild Epicurean philosophy professor, instead of a nice gentle Stoic like you?" Etc.) it is important to show real warmth and friendship between HARLAN and DORA. This sets up the revelation at the end of the play when DORA is the one HARLAN turned to during the "Helen" crisis.

THE RAVEN MASK:

The mask of the trickster spirit Puk-wudji (Raven) can be elaborate or simple depending on the resources of the theatre. The simplest one can be just a wooden mask with a fixed wicked smile. A little more complicated would be one with a wicked smile, but with wooden jaws that move when it laughs in the final scene. The most complex would be a true "transformation" mask in which the "smile" mask opens up to reveal another wildly laughing mask inside. Any of these will work, although the wood should look old and weathered. For those interested in Indian myths, Puk-wudji is an invented name although it based on similar sounding names. The rest of the description that COLLEEN gives about Raven is, however, real.

Raven is one of the most significant creatures in Northwest Indian art and mythology and is frequently seen in ceremonial masks. Among the Canadian First Nations he is usually referred to as just "Raven", rather than "The Raven". The mask of Raven has a long, usually straight, tapering beak, although the beak is also shown curved or squared at the tip. Raven is normally painted black with blue or green accents, and the nostrils, mouth and eyes are outlined in bright red and white paint. The "hair" is made from strips of cedar bark.

Raven plays many roles but mainly that of trickster, transformer and catalyst. He is a relentless schemer and practical joker, lustful, impulsive, and cunning. He loves to tease, cheat, woo and trick. With his magical powers, Raven can turn himself into anything at any time and can make almost anything happen by simply willing it to be so. Often, however, the tables would turn on the hapless Raven much in the same way as it happens to VICTOR in the play. While VICTOR starts out as the trickster, in the end he becomes the victim of his own trick.

Raven is often carved as a "transformation mask". A dancer wearing the mask swings his head from side to side as the mask is pulled open with strings, revealing the second mask inside.

MASK DESIGNS



RAVEN MASK
(Smiling)

The above design is quite elaborate - much simpler designs were also used in the Pacific Northwest and are quite acceptable. To enhance the "laughing" effect of the mask at the end of the play, the lower part of the beak could be made moveable. To First Nations Canadians, transformation masks depicted the changing from one state of being to another, often by trickster spirits. The masks are worn by costumed dancers, who open and close the beaks by pulling on strings attached to the sides of the mask.



Example of Transformation Mask
(side-opening with wolf or coyote
exterior mask)



Example of Transformation Mask
(side-opening with wolf or coyote
exterior mask and a moveable
lower jaw)



Design of exterior "serious" Raven
mask if used with "smiling" Raven
interior mask.

Please feel free to use any of the above designs.

Artist: Joseph Caesar
© Peter Colley

CHANGING THE BLANKS:

There are three different things going on here:

1. In the visible plot, DORA appears to take VICTOR's blanks out of the gun and replace them with what the audience thinks is real bullets. Her visible actions should make it look like she is inserting several bullets.
2. In the hidden plot she would actually be putting the wadding balls into the revolver's chambers and reinserting the blanks behind them as the propellant.
3. What is really happening on stage technically is nothing. It's all a mime show. None of the actual bullet-changing needs to take place as it is not seen by the audience since DORA's hands and the pistol are just below the level of the bar.

THE HARPOON:

This is a simple Aleut harpoon, made of rough wood about five feet long with a bone point. Of course the point does not have to be bone, it can all be made of wood with the point painted white to simulate bone.

"JOE'S BAIT, FOOD & AMMO" GROCERY BAG:

This store is also a "Liquor Agency" as DORA buys some brandy there. For purists, the bag would also have the name "Liquor Agency" written on it somewhere. This is probably not necessary anywhere except in British Columbia where audience members may question how liquor was bought at a grocery store. In remote areas of BC it is common for grocery stores and gas stations to also act as liquor stores in an otherwise tightly regulated market.

BREAKING THE CHESS PIECE:

The tension in VICTOR's hand over his being "wrong" snaps the chess piece in two. A chess piece can be made out of rigid Styrofoam (polystyrene) so that it breaks easily and gives a sharp snapping sound. It would have to be weighted to move like the other pieces.

THE BLOOD ON VICTOR'S SHIRT:

The blood stain is in the area of VICTOR's heart, an area that is normally covered by his fisherman's vest. COLLEEN pulls the vest aside to reveal the blood when she rushes to his side after he has been shot. VICTOR only puts on the blood-stained shirt before the entrance that leads to him being shot - this entrance takes place just after OFFICER MCGUIRE's first exit.

SHOOTING THE TELEPHONE OFF THE BAR:

There are also three different things going on here:

- 1: In the visible plot, the audience thinks the phone base (an old black rotary works well) has been hit by a real bullet and knocked off the bar.
- 2: In the hidden plot, the phone base would be hit by a second backup piece of wadding put in the gun by DORA and knocked off the bar. In this scenario the phone would be splattered with the same toxic paint as the first shot, but since the phone base disappears behind the bar for the rest of the play this is not a problem.
- 3: What is REALLY happening in the wonderful world of technical stage effects is that the phone base has been pulled off the bar by a stagehand pulling on a fishing line in time with the shot of a standard stage blank in the gun. The cord from the phone base to the receiver can be attached to the phone base with a piece of tape or Velcro, so that it simply pops off as the base falls. In past productions this has resulted in a very funny "dangling cord" effect, as if the power of the "bullet" has ripped off the cord too.

DRAGGING VICTOR'S BODY OFFSTAGE:

The easiest way to achieve this is for HARLAN to grab VICTOR's wrists and drag him along the floor. If you have a multi-level set with risers, this may be difficult, in which case HARLAN has to pull VICTOR to an upright position and hoist him over his shoulder. Obviously this requires more practice. Another technique is to roll VICTOR onto a rug and drag the rug offstage.

WHEN DORA COMES BACK:

Just after VICTOR's body is hidden, DORA returns. DORA is part of the plot, of course, but due to the sudden entrance of OFFICER MCGUIRE, the conspirators don't have the time to talk to each other. Instead they are forced to gauge the situation with glances and body language since they are aware VICTOR may be able to hear their conversation and they also don't want to give the prank away to OFFICER MCGUIRE. In Act II, when DORA is attempting to do a medical examination on VICTOR, she is genuinely trying to make sure that the dose of Wolfsbane is not too high to do him any real damage. Since he rejects all her offers and appears to be recovering from the effects of the Wolfsbane, she assumes that he is all right.

DORA's exit in Act II, leaving VICTOR with HARLAN, is part of the pre-arranged plan for HARLAN to convince VICTOR that he's a ghost.

BLOOD ON THE FLOOR:

When OFFICER MCGUIRE sees the drops of blood on the floor, there does not actually have to be any blood visible. The smallness of the drops and the fact that the scene progresses very quickly means that the audience readily accepts the fact that MCGUIRE can see them.

VICTOR'S DREAM:

VICTOR's dream is actually the effects of Wolfsbane, where the body is in a state of physical collapse, but the mind is at least partly clear. These symptoms (as described in the final scene) are actually taken from the real description of Wolfsbane, but because Wolfsbane can be quite dangerous I created a fictional variant called "Sleeping Wolfsbane", implying that it is more benign than regular Wolfsbane in case there is a botanical expert in the audience. The part about the mind remaining clear when taking Wolfsbane is true, so VICTOR's dream is made up of fragments of dialogue that have gone on around him while he was semi-conscious.

THE "WHISPERING" SCENE:

When VICTOR is outside on the deck looking for "Fish Facts Monthly", HARLAN and COLLEEN have a scene where they discuss what to do with VICTOR. This is done for VICTOR's benefit, to set him up for the next scene where HARLAN tells him he's dead. They actually want him to hear fragments of their dialogue, knowing that the more secretive they are, the more it will pique VICTOR's curiosity.

HARLAN AND THE STETHOSCOPE:

HARLAN knows the tubes have been stuffed with cotton wool and therefore suggests that VICTOR use it. He uses the thermometer, which he knows will not work, as a roundabout way to lead VICTOR to the stethoscope. The thermometer's wooden backing makes it too big to fit in VICTOR's mouth.

DRIVING THE AXE INTO THE STUMP:

When the axe gets driven into the stump (or wooden table) on which the chess game sits, there is a balance between having an axe sharp enough to be embedded into the stump and safe enough for stage use. A layer of Styrofoam (polystyrene) or soft wood under the chess board would help as long as the chess board is securely fastened to the stump. Even if it does not stick to the stump, HARLAN can hold the axe as if it is stuck until VICTOR throws the harpoon at him at which point HARLAN can let go and drop it.

THE GRIM REAPER:

When THE GRIM REAPER appears he should stay as far outside in the misty night as possible and still be visible to the whole audience - the more shadowy and distant the figure, the more realistic he will be. The costume is made up of an old mildewed tarp (a boat cover) and a scythe used for clearing the brush around the cottage. Whatever black material is used, it should be

broken down to reflect something aged in a damp, cobwebby boathouse for many years. It's important that the arms and hands are well draped or gloved in black to disguise the fact that it is a woman's arms and hands.

THE COTTON WADDING:

This is a small ball of cotton wadding, soaked with red paint. Since the wadding would be wet and toxic to the touch it is encapsulated in standard kitchen plastic wrap which would burst on contact rather like the projectile used in a paintball gun. The wadding is tightly bound with plastic wrap and tied off like a tiny sack. It is just .44 of an inch in diameter so it will look as if it will fit into the barrel of a good-sized pistol.



[--.44"--]

It is not actually used in the play, of course, only shown to OFFICER MCGUIRE in the final scene.

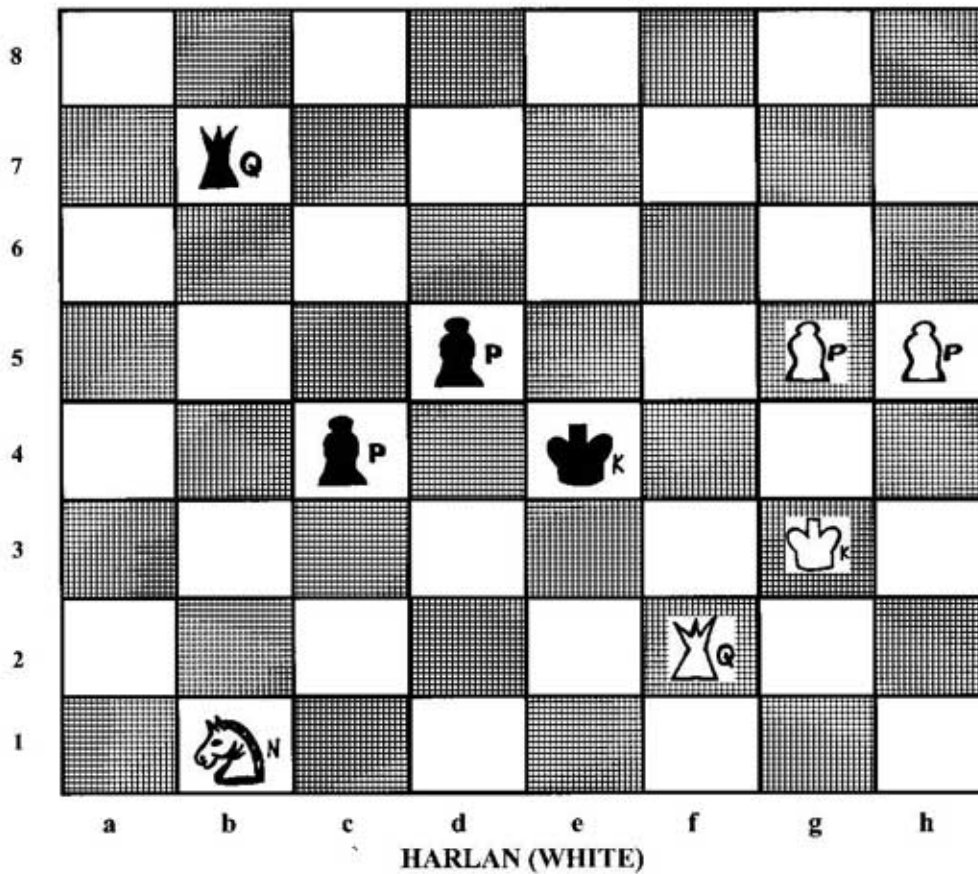
THE BLOOD ON THE WALL:

When DORA "shoots" the pistol at the wall at the end of the play it is a regular stage blank. When the blood drips down the wall, this is easily done by having a few small holes in the wall through which a stage-hand squeezes a syringe or sponge filled with fake blood.

THE CHESS GAME

(courtesy of Gregson Winkfield)

VICTOR (BLACK)



HARLAN (WHITE)

-  Black Queen
-  White Queen
-  Black King
-  White King
-  White Knight
-  Black Pawn
-  White Pawn

1. Victor's Black Queen takes White Knight on b1.
2. Harlan's White Queen goes to f4 - CHECK!
3. Victor's King moves to d3, forced.
4. Harlan's Queen moves to f5 - CHECK!
5. Victor's King moves anywhere legal.
6. Harlan's Queen takes Victor's Queen.