

Odd Jobs
By Frank Moher

Act One

Scene 1:

(The yard of MRS. LEONORA PHIPPS; a few lawn chairs, first autumn leaves on the ground. MRS. PHIPPS' home is built beside a highway and the sound of passing traffic is continuous.)

MRS. PHIPPS in her yard, picking up the leaves one by one. TIM enters, watches her for a moment.)

TIM

I could do that.

(MRS. PHIPPS stops, watches TIM.)

Tell you what. For twenty-five bucks a week, I'll come here every second day and rake leaves, how's that? Or whatever you want. Put up your storm windows, you're gonna need that done. Then if you like, I could come in winter, shovel your walks, shovel the driveway. That's a pretty big driveway you got out there Ma'am, you manage to keep it clean?

(Pause.)

No? Well I'll keep it clean. Twenty-five bucks a week, and that's a fixed price, I don't care how much she snows. And maybe I could throw in a little housework, y'know, fix up the plaster, paint the walls. Oh, did I introduce myself? My name's Tim Arends. I live just around the corner. I'm just settin' up in this work.

(TIM extends his hand to shake. MRS. PHIPPS just stares at him, then turns and starts slowly towards her house.)

Ma'am?

(MRS. PHIPPS exits. TIM stands for a moment, then exits from the yard. He returns with a bamboo rake and a green garbage bag, and quickly rakes up the remaining leaves. Dumps them in the bag, takes up the bag and rake, and goes.)

Scene 2:

(A few more leaves have fallen. MRS. PHIPPS is out in her yard, picking them up one by one.

TIM enters.)

TIM

Good afternoon!

(MRS. PHIPPS stops, looks at him.)

I see you keep this pretty clean. Still, she's a bugger eh? You get 'em all done, you get up next morning, you gotta start all over again.

(MRS. PHIPPS starts away.)

Oh now Ma'am please don't walk away from me again, please.

(MRS. PHIPPS stops. Pause.)

I only come to see if you like the job I done for you yesterday. If you didn't like it, just say so, and I'll be on my way. Well?

(MRS. PHIPPS digs into her pocket, pulls out a crinkly old bill. Holds it out to TIM.)

What's this? This is for me? Is this for me? Well thank you. Thank you. That's not why I done it, mind you, but thank you just the . . .

(Unfolds the bill.)

Ma'am this is a fifty dollar bill.

(MRS. PHIPPS looks uncertain, reaches into her pocket again, thrusts another bill at him.)

Oh no no no, what I mean is this is too much. I can't take this. Look, five dollars would be fine. A plain old thank you would be fine.

(Pause.)

Look. You just take this back, and we'll call it a free sample, all right? Here, you just put this in your pocket, that's right. There we go. And don't you be handing out fifty dollar bills to everybody comes knockin' at your door.

(Pause. MRS. PHIPPS watches him. TIM stands uncomfortably for a moment, then suddenly reaches for a lawn chair.)

Now why don't you just sit down here for a minute and I'll show you what I can do. Here, you just forget about those leaves for a minute and sit down here. This'll be like a little whaddaya call. A little free home demonstration.

(TIM leads MRS. PHIPPS to the lawn chair, sits her down.)

Okay. Now here's what I'm gonna do. First, I'm gonna rake up the whole lawn for you, all right? 'Cause really, you keep bending over like that and my back starts to feel sore. Okay? And then I'm gonna go and I'm gonna clean out your whole garden. Do you see where I'm pointing? Pick those raspberries too, and tie up the bushes. And then I roto-till the whole back end there, and then if you like what I done, then you give me the fifty dollars. All right? Sound all right? That sound okay to you? Ma'am?

MRS. PHIPPS

My husband used to climb mountains. It used to scare me to death.

TIM

Ma'am?

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh I pretended I didn't care. I'd tell him, "You go and climb your mountain now, that's the sort of thing men have to do." But I thought he was an idiot. Usually it'd be me, and Lila Majors and Chloe Duffie, if Sam wasn't playing in the Symphony. Sitting in some pup-tent, waiting for them to come back. And we'd go about our business -- Lila or I would spot some wildflower, and Chloe would come running with her camera to take a picture. We identified over fifty species of wildflowers one summer! But the last day of the climb, we'd all wake up very quiet, and hardly say a word to one another, until we saw them coming up the trail.

(Laughs.)

I remember one time Wendell had fallen, and they'd bandaged his head, and he came into camp tootling away on Sam's recorder. He looked just like that painting the Americans love so. What's it called. You know the one. Something to do with their revolution. Silly idiot.

(MRS. PHIPPS smiles at the memory.
TIM is nonplussed.)

TIM

Ma'am, do you think I can have the job?

(MRS. PHIPPS looks at the fifty dollar bill in her hand. Thrusts it at TIM.
After a moment, he takes it.)

I'll get started tomorrow.

Scene 3:

(TIM raking leaves, of which there are quite a few now. MRS. PHIPPS sitting in

her chair, regarding something in the distance.)

TIM

So I says, eh, "Well that's fine, maybe this robot of yours can do my job, but it sure as hell ain't gonna do it better." 'Cause that's what I was always doing, eh, looking for ways to improve the product, y'know, to improve my own efficiency. Guy keeps saying to me, "It's not a robot, it's an automated welding arm." I mean his problem is every time I say robot, he thinks like something off a spaceship. Y'know. And he doesn't want to be boss to no space alien. So fine, so automated welding arm, so what's that mean? It means for eight years all I ever was to them suckers is an arm. So I figure I'm better off outta there.

MRS. PHIPPS

I've got to tie up those raspberry bushes.

TIM

Those what, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Those raspberry bushes. They're all over the place . . . You say I hired you yesterday?

TIM

Yeah, that's right.

MRS. PHIPPS

I don't remember.

TIM

Well you give me fifty dollars. I kinda hired myself.

MRS. PHIPPS

No, I don't remember. I remember the fifty dollars. I'd put it in my apron pocket, I was going to pay the milk bill with it. Lord knows what else I've done.

(TIM continues to bag leaves.)

You can save those.

TIM

Save 'em?

MRS. PHIPPS

Mm. I use them for insulation.

(Pause. MRS. PHIPPS watches TIM intently as he works. After a moment.)

Well you can help yourself to the raspberries if you like. Though you'd better get at them soon.

TIM

You don't put 'em up, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Up?

TIM

Can 'em.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh! No. No. I was never much of a canner. It's silly really. Everybody's got them. Everybody in the neighbourhood trying to foist theirs on everybody else. Thought I'd set an example and let mine rot.

TIM

Well I'll rescue what I can. Shoulda been picked last week.

MRS. PHIPPS

I suppose.

TIM

Ginny likes cannin', eh, used to put up forty, fifty jars a Fall. 'Course that was before she was workin'. And that was when we had the garden.

MRS. PHIPPS

You can pile those by the fence there.

TIM

What's that?

MRS. PHIPPS

The bags. I just pile them by the fence.

(TIM ties the bag off, places it against the fence.)

You could do them.

Do what? TIM

The raspberries. You could do them. MRS. PHIPPS

I could do them. Ha. Yeah. Right. TIM

Well you could. MRS. PHIPPS

Well I know I could, Mrs. Phipps, the question is: should I? TIM

Why not? MRS. PHIPPS

Well I dunno. Might blow us all up or something. Might end up with raspberry soup. TIM

Oh don't be daft. MRS. PHIPPS

Nah, I'll just leave that to Ginny, that's more her kind of thing. Besides. I'll betcha you don't even know how to do them. TIM

Of course I do. MRS. PHIPPS

How? TIM

Well you just . . . wash them, and . . . cook them, and . . . throw in some sugar or something . . . MRS. PHIPPS

TIM

Ha! Y'see? You don't know, and I don't know. And if there's one thing I learned, it's if you don't know how to do something, that's probably a good reason not to do it.

(He piles some more bags.)

But that's why I figured I better get out and find some work, eh? Sittin' around watchin' "Ricki Lake" didn't look too good. And if they retrain us like they said they was gonna I shouldn't be outta work too long. Get you and a coupla other clients. Say a change is as good as a break.

(Surveying the lawn.)

Well. How's she look now, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

(Whose attention has drifted to the highway.)

Hm?

TIM

The lawn.

MRS. PHIPPS

Hm?

TIM

The lawn.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh. Very nice. Lovely.

TIM

You get a lot of traffic by here.

MRS. PHIPPS

Sometimes. Trucks mostly. Seems the noisiest wait till night.

(They look off at the highway for a moment. Then, rising:)

That and my neighbour's apples when they start to fall. Thud-thud-thud. It's worse than the trucks.

TIM

Well maybe I will do a picking of those raspberries before I take off. 'Less you got anything else for me.

MRS. PHIPPS

No no. You set your own schedule.

TIM

Sure you don't want me to save you some now?

MRS. PHIPPS

Well. I could give them to the mailman.

TIM

Sure.

MRS. PHIPPS

I might even have some myself.

(Pause.)

Awful really. The way I've let this place slide. Like one of those crazy old ladies who leave their money to their dogs. Thank god I don't have one. Seems I do better when I'm not quite all here. Wake up from a nap, look out my window . . . not a leaf on the grass. A pile of them by the rose bushes. Somebody must have done it, I think to myself. I guess it was me.

(Pause.)

I'll get you a bowl.

Scene 4:

(Night. MRS. PHIPPS holds a bowl of raspberries.)

MRS.PHIPPS

Listen. Listen! I can hear it. Hear it? It's Sam's recorder. It is. It's coming from the top of that mountain. I am not imagining things, Chloe! It's as clear as a church bell.

Well Wendell if you'd be more careful, you wouldn't need iodine.

Oh! Ha! I remember you in your suit! Standing there, with a rose in one hand and a candy apple in the other. You said there were only two kinds of girls in the world, the kind who liked roses and the kind who liked candy apples. And which was I.

(Her happiness fading.)

Wendell?

TIM
(Upstage; drunk; trips over something.)
Hell.

MRS. PHIPPS
Wendell.
(TIM sees MRS. PHIPPS; stands swaying.)

TIM
Oh. Hello Mrs. Phipps. I didn't think you'd still be up.
(Pause.)
What are you doing out here? You come with me. C'mon, it's starting to get –

MRS. PHIPPS
(Recoils, dropping the bowl.)
NO NO NO NO NO!

TIM
. . . Cold.
(Pause.)
All right. It's all right. I'll just sit with you for a minute. Would you like to sit down?
(TIM gestures to the lawn-chair. MRS. PHIPPS sits, eyeing him carefully.)

Here, put my jacket on. It's not summer anymore.
(TIM drapes his football jacket around MRS. PHIPPS' shoulders and sits on the edge of the chaise-longue.)
Actually, I was just lookin' for someplace to sober up. Ginny's father was a drinker, eh? She don't like me comin' home . . . drunk.
(Beat.)

'Course she don't like me comin' home late either. Prob'ly catch heck for both.
(Pause.)

We had our meetin' tonight, eh? About the retraining program. Adjourned to the Sands after. Where we shoulda gone in the first place.
(Pause.)

Do you know what they want us to do? Huh? They want us to A) to get our high school, B) they want us to go to night-school for two months, at our own expense naturally. Then they want us to go to C) goddamn Calgary for another three weeks for another goddamn seminar. I mean first of all I'm really gonna go back to high-school. I'm twenty-nine years old, I'm gonna get my grade twelve math. Like hell.
(Pause.)

I mean, this is what I mean, eh: they lay twenty-seven of us off, they say, hey, we're gonna retrain you. But there's still only one machine. So somehow they gotta get twenty-six of us to fuck off, so this is how they do it, treating us like juveniles, like "Oh, oh, you were never on 'Reach for the Top' Mr. Arends? Oh, well I'm sorry then, I guess you don't qualify."

(Pause.)

I says to the guy, eh, I says: "The only thing you're gonna retrain us for is the goddamn dole." He said that was my decision. Fuck. HOW IS IT MY DECISION? IN WHAT WAY IS IT MY DECISION? WHEN HAS ANYTHING EVER BEEN MY FUCKING DECISION?

(TIM kicks over one of the chairs. A truck, very loud, roars by on the highway. Fades off.)

Sorry. You shouldn't have to listen to that sort of language. I'm sorry all right?

(Pause. TIM rights the chair.)

Anyway. I guess I can shovel your walks for ya. Won't be doin' much else this winter.

(Pause.)

Whaddaya think, Mrs. Phipps? Ya want me to shovel your walks?

MRS. PHIPPS

Wendell?

(Pause.)

TIM

Sure. I'll be your Wendell. C'mon. Let's take you inside.

Scene 5:

TIM

The waiting. The people on the streets. The looks on their faces when they're on their way to work.

Scene 6:

(Day again. The leaves haven't been raked. GINETTE stands alone in the yard.)

After a moment, MRS. PHIPPS enters.)

MRS. PHIPPS
You say he left his jacket here?

GINETTE
(Soft Quebecoise accent.)

Yes, that's right.

MRS. PHIPPS
Well I don't see it.

GINETTE
Did you look in your bedroom?

MRS. PHIPPS
No.

GINETTE
Well that's where he said he left it.

MRS. PHIPPS
What would he be doing in my bedroom?

GINETTE
Mrs. Phipps, look, I explained it to you. He was here last night, he put you to bed. You were wearing his football jacket. Now if you'd just go look in your bedroom, I'm sure it's there. And hurry please, I'm only on my lunch-hour.

MRS. PHIPPS
Well I'm sure he wasn't here last night. And I remember putting myself to bed. I have trouble getting up sometimes but the other I can do. If he's as hung-over as you say --

GINETTE
May I go look?

MRS. PHIPPS
I suppose you --

GINETTE
Excuse me.

MRS. PHIPPS

I'm not saying he's lying to you. I'm just suggesting he's a little confused.

(GINETTE goes into the house. MRS. PHIPPS stands looking off after her for a moment, then turns away. She sees the overturned bowl and the spilled raspberries. She pauses, then picks up the bowl.

GINETTE returns with the football jacket.)

GINETTE

It was on your cedar chest.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh Lord Almighty.

GINETTE

It's all right, he said you might have forgotten.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh damn damn damn! I cannot even get out of bed in the morning without acting like an idiot. I cannot even leave my house! Here I am lecturing you on your husband's memory and it is I who have a mind like a sieve! Damn it! Goddamn it!

GINETTE

It's all right, Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh no it's not all right. It's not all right! It's a disgrace. They ought to come and haul me away! Stupid old stubborn old woman! Thinking I can keep this house open by myself! Thinking I can keep the yard clean! And these leaves! These leaves! I cannot pick up another one! I can't, I can't!

(MRS. PHIPPS weeps with frustration. GINETTE stands helplessly for a long moment.)

GINETTE

Is there anything I can do?

(Pause.)

Is there someone I can call?

(Pause.)

Is there someone I can call to come stay with you?

(Pause.)

I'm sorry I can't stay, I have to be at work at one o'clock.

(Pause.)

Would you like me to call Tim?

MRS. PHIPPS

No no.

GINETTE

He'd come over if you want.

MRS. PHIPPS

No no. This is silly. As if winter were a personal affront to me.

(Pause.)

I woke up beside the highway this morning, you see. I must have been there all night. A Mountie came along and asked if I needed help. I told him I was just picking flowers.

(Pause.)

I suppose I wandered down there after your husband put me to bed. Through the gate and down the hill. I had my purse with me. My purse and a pair of binoculars.

(Pause.)

I wonder what I was trying to see?

(Pause.)

C'est un mystere.

GINETTE

You speak French?

MRS. PHIPPS

Oui. Un peu. It's a little rusty now.

Anyway. You go on now. You didn't come here to listen to me grouse.

GINETTE

Is there anything I can get you?

MRS. PHIPPS

No no.

GINETTE

I wish I could stay with you. But I have to get to work.
 (MRS. PHIPPS nods. GINETTE starts to go.
 Stops. Turns back.)

Oh what the hell.

MRS. PHIPPS

I'm sorry?

GINETTE

(Taking off her jacket.)

What the hell. They can do without me for one afternoon. The place won't fall apart.
 Can I use your phone?

MRS. PHIPPS

It's in the kitchen.

GINETTE

I'll have to think of something to tell them. I know. I'll tell them I got food poisoning at lunch!

(She exits. MRS. PHIPPS looks off after her for a moment, then reaches into her apron and takes out a small notebook, pencil. She begins to write.)

Scene 7:

(TIM and GINETTE at home. GINETTE sitting, having a drink. TIM doing exercises. Country music plays on a small radio.)

GINETTE

She's a mathematician.

TIM

How do you know?

GINETTE

Because. She has this little notebook. I snuck a look inside. Do you remember how in grade seven you'd look in the grade nine classroom and see the algebra on the board? It looked like that. She speaks French too.

TIM

You're kidding.

GINETTE

Nope. Well, not my kind of French, but French all the same.

(Pause.)

I was in her bedroom getting your jacket?

TIM

Uh-huh?

GINETTE

You wouldn't believe what was in there.

TIM

What.

GINETTE

She's got this picture up there. Her and -- Wendell, I guess . . . and about five other people, all standing naked by a lake. Grinning at the camera. "Skinny dipping, 1948", somebody has written on it. It looked like fun.

TIM

What did Wendell look like?

GINETTE

Tall. Dark. Very well built. I thought: "Jesus Christ, that would be nice, uh? To know of some place you can go and take all of your clothes off and it isn't the 'Y". I wonder where it was. Banff, or Jasper maybe. Someplace in the mountains.

TIM

Yeah, well if you keep skipping work like that, we're gonna be living at the "Y".
(Beat.)

GINETTE

Is that right.

TIM

That's right.

GINETTE

Well I'm the one who's been sitting in a computer class all night.

(She rises, paces. TIM continues to exercise.)

This guy phoned up at Sears today, to complain about his toaster oven. Kept calling me Froggie. I told him if he didn't stop I'd hang up. He didn't, so I did. Probably the supervisor was listening. I really don't care . . . So I went out and bought myself an old Ian Tyson record. Real old. When he was still singing with Sylvia. Cost me ninety-nine cents. Now if we can just get the stereo fixed, maybe I can listen to it.

TIM

(Rising, exiting.)

I suppose that's my fault.

GINETTE

I didn't say that.

TIM

(Off.)

No, but it's what you meant.

GINETTE

If it's what I meant, it's what I would have said! Christ. I feel like I'm at work.

(She picks up his jacket, reaches in the pocket.)

Where's your money?

TIM

(Returning with a glass of water.)

I spent it.

GINETTE

You spent it?

TIM

Well, I got ten or fifteen dollars left.

GINETTE
Where did you spend it?

TIM
Well I had to rent a roto-tiller, y'know. An' I bought a round at the bar.

GINETTE
So much for the groceries.

TIM
Do you want the ten bucks?!

GINETTE
Keep your ten bucks, I'll buy them myself!
(Beat.)
What did you do today?

TIM
I cleaned raspberries.

GINETTE
You what?

TIM
I -- cleaned -- raspberries. Speakin' of which, do we have any of that Pectin around?

GINETTE
I don't believe it.

TIM
Pectin, pectate, I don't know what you call it.

GINETTE
I'm not going to keep doing this, you know Tim.

TIM
Oh for chrissake --

GINETTE
I am not going to keep killing myself so that you can sit home and make raspberry jam!

TIM

Look, Ginette, there were raspberries here, I wasn't doin' nothin', I decided to clean 'em! Is that all right with you?

GINETTE

You could have been looking for work.

TIM

There is no work! There is no work. There is no point in lookin' for work that isn't there! And furthermore please don't go over to Mrs. Phipps' without asking me first.

GINETTE

Oh. Oh.

TIM

I don't like being checked up on.

GINETTE

Oh. I get it. You can just go over there and loaf all day --

TIM

I don't loaf --

GINETTE

-- and I'm supposed to go to work and go to class and bring in the money and not worry about what's going on? Well I'm the one who's getting up at six in the morning! I'm the one who's taking a bus everyday. I'm the one who's going to class till eleven at night so that maybe, someday, we can own a house again!

TIM

Jesus christ.

GINETTE

I mean I am just not going to foot the bill here anymore!

TIM

I am gettin' paid for what I do there!

GINETTE

You are getting paid twenty-five bucks a week, Tim, it doesn't even pay for your lunch!

(Beat. Then TIM exits.)

I just mean . . . maybe you should try checking the paper again or something.

(Pause. To herself.)

Maybe I should go to bed.

(Pause.)

There's Pectin in the cupboard. I'll get it for you in a minute . . .

(She sits. Laughs grimly.)

This guy came into Sears today, wanted to return his dog. "No returns on pets," I says, "sir." So he puts it on my desk, whacks it on the nose, and it pees on my papers. Then it shits on my desk. "See," he says, "It's defective." And then he walks out.

(Pause.)

I had to throw out all my papers.

(Pause. GINETTE turns off the radio, listens.)

Tim?

(No reply.)

Scene 8:

GINETTE

Select the record, field or cell you want to copy. Choose ALT, E, C, or press SHIFT+F3. Move the highlight to the upper-left cell of the area into which you want to insert the copy. Choose ALT, E, C, or press ENTER, or press ESCAPE to cancel the command.

Scene 9:

(MRS. PHIPPS sitting in her chair surrounded by lots of leaves. TIM enters.)

TIM

Gooooood morning Mrs. Phipps! Hoo-doggie! That wind last night just about stripped 'er bare, eh? Good thing I'm here. Tim the Garden Whiz and his Magic Rake! You just leave this to me. Have this done in no time.

(Begins working.)

MRS. PHIPPS

You didn't come yesterday.

TIM

No, that's right. That's why I'm here today.

MRS. PHIPPS

That's two days in a row.

TIM

Yeah, well I thought I was gonna. But the wife got on my case, eh? I had to go lookin' for other jobs.

MRS. PHIPPS

Other jobs?

TIM

You betcha, Mrs. Phipps. Can't get by on twenty-five bucks a week.

MRS. PHIPPS

You said you were coming yesterday. And I waited for you. And I think I can expect better service than that.

TIM

You waited for me, huh?

MRS. PHIPPS

All day.

TIM

Well maybe that was your mistake.

MRS. PHIPPS

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays! That was our agreement! Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and if you can't live up to it then maybe you just better --

TIM

I COULDN'T COME HERE YESTERDAY, MRS. PHIPPS, I TOLD YA I HAD TO GO LOOKING FOR OTHER JOBS! I said three days a week, Mrs. Phipps, did I say which three? -- no, I said three days a week, Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, that's three, and if you can't handle it then maybe I should quit. 'Cause I need some flexibility here, all right? Just while I'm settin' up. I got you on my case, I got the wife on my case. And hey, hey, I'm as new at this as you are, all right? I don't know, y'know, eight months ago I was in a factory. For eight years it was do this, do that, go here, don't go there. And who knows, maybe I'm gonna come here tomorrow. All right?

MRS. PHIPPS

Well I didn't mean to upset you.

TIM

Well, all right then.

MRS. PHIPPS

Three days a week? That was our agreement?

TIM

That was it.

MRS. PHIPPS

Well, I'm sorry then. That was my mistake.

(Pause.)

Did you have any luck?

TIM

Depends what you mean.

MRS. PHIPPS

Did you get any jobs?

TIM

Got some nibbles.

MRS. PHIPPS

But no jobs.

TIM

No.

(Pause; working.)

Aw what the hell, I didn't even get any nibbles. Aw it's all a lot of bull-hickey, eh? Went up to this one place, this kid answers the door. Four years old, he's there all by himself at two in the afternoon. Stand there wondering what to do. This other place, the guy opens up the door, accuses me of bein' a criminal or something. "I know what you're doing," he says. "You're casing the joint." Got outta there before he called the police.

MRS. PHIPPS

But you didn't get any jobs.

TIM

No, Mrs. Phipps, nobody give me a job.

MRS. PHIPPS

Good then! I'll hire you. I want you here every day, nine to five. I'll pay you what it costs.

TIM

Wait a minute, wait a minute. What?

MRS. PHIPPS

I want to hire you. Again.

TIM

Again. You want me here every day?

MRS. PHIPPS

If you can manage it.

TIM

Tuesdays and Thursdays.

MRS. PHIPPS

And Saturdays.

TIM

Well that's gonna be like a full-time job, Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

I know. I can afford you. Your gain will be the Alma Mater Fund's loss.

(Pause.)

I woke up by the highway again this morning, you see. I'm beginning to think it might be best to have someone round.

TIM

You what?

MRS. PHIPPS

I woke up by the highway. Again. I just looked, my bed is still made.

TIM

Again? You mean this happened before?

MRS. PHIPPS

Yes. Wednesday night. Your wife didn't tell you?

No!

TIM

MRS. PHIPPS
Well I did. That's two nights now. And it wasn't a dream. Those trucks were very real.
(Pause.)

TIM
Well -- Jesus, Mrs. Phipps!

MRS. PHIPPS
Jesus what.

TIM
Well Jesus we gotta get you to a hospital or something!

MRS. PHIPPS
Oh no no no --

TIM
Or to a clinic or something!

MRS. PHIPPS
Why? I'm just a little cranky.

TIM
You got a doctor?

MRS. PHIPPS
Yes.

TIM
Gimme his number.

MRS. PHIPPS
Don't be silly, there's nothing wrong. I'll just sit and dry out in the sun a little bit. But I would like an answer to my question. If you don't want the job, I'll have to make other plans.
(Long pause.)

TIM
(Resigned.)

Sure, Mrs. Phipps. I'll work full time for ya.

MRS. PHIPPS

Well only if you want to.

TIM

Only if I want to. Do I have any choice?
(TIM sits. Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

I thought you'd be happy.

TIM

Yeah. Well.

MRS. PHIPPS

You look a little distressed.

TIM

Yeah. Well maybe I am.

MRS. PHIPPS
(Rising; starting off.)

Well if you don't want the job I'm not going to force it on you --

TIM

Mrs. Phipps --

MRS. PHIPPS

No no, there's plenty of other people who will take it --

TIM

MRS. PHIPPS, I WANT THE JOB. I'LL TAKE THE JOB. I JUST NEED A FEW MINUTES -- to get used to the idea . . .

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Well how long should I wait?

TIM

I said I'd take the job, Mrs. Phipps. You go do what you want.

(MRS. PHIPPS doesn't go. Pause.)

It's just . . . I was always figurin' that by the time I hit this age I'd be a . . . floor supervisor or something. Or something. Not just rakin' leaves. And doin' it full-time for one person is different from doin' it part-time for a lotta people. Don't ask me how. It just is.

(Pause.)

And Ginny comes home from her computer class at night . . . and I don't know what she's talkin' about. And now you're wakin' up beside the highway. It's like, I'm walkin' around these days . . . and it's like when they switched to metric, eh? And you didn't know where you were, or what the temperature was, or how much gas to put in yer car or . . . how far to the next city . . .

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Multiply by one-point-six.

TIM

What's that?

MRS. PHIPPS

Miles to kilometres. One-point-six.

(They smile. Pause.)

Do you know what Wendell and I used to do? When our troubles got too big for us? We used to drive to the mountains. Because no matter what was wrong, nothing was as big as Mount Rundle.

TIM

(Laughs.)

Yeah. I guess.

MRS. PHIPPS

And we'd pitch our tent, and read our books. And then drive all night to be back on Monday morning.

TIM

Sounds like fun.

MRS. PHIPPS

It was.

TIM
I, uh . . . heard you went skinny-dipping too.
(Beat.)

MRS. PHIPPS
Where did you hear that?

TIM
Oh I dunno. Little bird told me.

MRS. PHIPPS
What little bird?

TIM
Little bird. Little French oiseau.

MRS. PHIPPS
Your wife.

TIM
Uh-huh.

MRS. PHIPPS
That picture!

TIM
Uh-huh!

MRS. PHIPPS
Oh my god, why didn't I turn that to the wall!?!
(Pause; smiles.)
Well yes. Sometimes we'd go swimming. Why not? There was no one else around . . .

TIM
And you, like, taught at the university, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS
Yes, that's right.

TIM
And you were, like, a mathematician?

MRS. PHIPPS

Uh-huh. Well I still am. Not a young, slim-hipped mathematician anymore. But still a mathematician, yes.

(Pause; laughs.)

I remember the day that photo was taken. There were six of us: Wendell and I, and Sam Duffie, the head of the music department and his wife Chloe. And Ronald Majors from the English department, and his wife Lila. A regular little Bloomsbury. And we hiked down to the lake in our meadow, and sat out on the rocks and argued about -- Schopenhauer, I think it was. Isn't that ridiculous? Sitting on top of a mountain, God's beauty poking us in the eye. Arguing about whether some old German was ever really happy.

(Laughs.)

Oh we were fools! But at least we were passionate ones . . . and then later Chloe took our picture and Sam hauled out his recorder. Played some old English folk songs and we all sang along. Made up the words. I think they could have heard us all the way to Jasper! The air was that clear. The day was that still.

(Pause.)

Anyway. That's all over now. You'll take the job?

TIM

I'll take the job.

MRS. PHIPPS

Good. I'll get you some coffee. You look like you could use it.
(She starts off.)

TIM

And, uh, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Yes?

TIM

I was thinking . . . maybe you could help me with my math.

MRS. PHIPPS

Do what?

TIM

You know. Teach me.

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Well yes. I suppose I could do that. Yes that's a good idea. Keep me in fine fettle. Keep me in fighting trim!

(She goes. TIM stands for a moment, looking off after her, then looks about the yard. He sighs, then starts to work.)

Scene 10:

MRS. PHIPPS

The attraction of mathematics . . . is very simple, really. When I work, I move towards a goal . . . and as I work, I order my world. I make progress. Messy edges are defined, the unexpected is made . . . unwelcome. And every effort I make, all the energy I expend, the hours spent here, staring at the figures on my notepad . . . move me closer to that point.

(Pause.)

They say that musicians and mathematicians think very much alike. Well I couldn't carry a tune to save my life. And still, I think it must be so. When I listen to a great symphony . . . or to "The Messiah" on Christmas Day . . . and the music swells and subsides, and surges forward to its climax, like a wave that has started far out at sea and begins to break as it approaches the shore. I think: yes. That is what I hear. As the last obstacles drop away and the figures settle into a perfectly ordered, perfectly balanced equation, like lovers locking hands. I hear a kind of crashing, a crescendo, a distant wave breaking fiercely on the sand. A flourish of trumpets, a perfect chorus of voices. It is like that. It is a kind of song.

(Pause.)

This is all I do now. This is all I can do. And I wonder . . . what would I do if I could do this no longer? How would I spend my days? What would I do?

Scene 11:

(TIM and MRS. PHIPPS sitting in the lawn chairs, math books spread around them. MRS. PHIPPS checking TIM's answers. They eat raspberry jam on bread.

Time has passed. There are no leaves on the ground; no leaves fall. A cool,

wintry light. MRS. PHIPPS wears a sweater.

There are more garbage bags full of leaves piled against the fence.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Number fifteen.

TIM

Twelve.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number sixteen.

TIM

Thirty-five degrees.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number seventeen.

TIM

Scalene triangle.

MRS. PHIPPS

This is very good jam, you know.

TIM

I know.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number eighteen.

TIM

Does it have too much sugar do you think?

MRS. PHIPPS

No. Eighteen.

TIM

Seventy-two. That's good, 'cause I was worried there was too much sugar in there. An' I used some rum in it, can you taste the rum?

MRS. PHIPPS
(Tasting.)

That's what it is!

TIM

Yeah, well the recipe calls for a half-cup of water, only I figured a little Lamb's Navy, what the hell.

(MRS. PHIPPS smiles, eats some more.)

I don't know, y'know, there was a recipe in there for something called Raspberry Flambe. I was thinkin' maybe I should give that a try. And I seen this cookbook at the Safeway -- "101 Things To Do With Fruit". Figured maybe I should pick it up.

GINETTE

Hello!

TIM

That's Ginny.

MRS. PHIPPS

We'll finish these later. Only three answers to go.

(GINETTE enters, carrying a bouquet of yellow roses. She's in a good mood.)

GINETTE

These are for you. And don't tell me I can't bring you flowers. If you can make raspberry jam, I can bring you flowers.

MRS. PHIPPS

Excellent raspberry jam.

GINETTE

I know. I had some. It almost made me drunk.

TIM

Oh yeah, Mrs. Phipps this is my wife here, Ginette this is --

MRS. PHIPPS

Bonjour.

GINETTE

Bonjour.

MRS. PHIPPS

Quelle surprise.

GINETTE

Il faut que je parle avec Tim.

TIM

Oh. Yeah. I guess you two have already met. Where'd you learn to speak French, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Here, there. Mostly in Montreal, after the war.

GINETTE

Tim still hasn't learned to speak French with me.

MRS. PHIPPS

Shame on you.

TIM

Why should I learn to speak French? I'm havin' enough trouble learnin' to speak math.
(They laugh.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Well here, let me make myself useful. I'll put these in some water for you.

TIM

You wanna take your jam with ya, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Later. I've got to get some work done. If I have any more, I'll only fall asleep.
(Stops, turns.)

Come any time you want, dear. You're always welcome here.
(She goes.)

GINETTE

Well.

TIM

Nice woman, huh?

Uh-huh. GINETTE

I told ya I had good taste. TIM
(They kiss.)
Where'dja get the flowers? The office?

I bought them. GINETTE

You bought them? TIM

Well I didn't find them on my way here. GINETTE

Well I know, Ginette, but jesus, we shouldn't be buying flowers. TIM

Why not? GINETTE

Because roses cost money, Ginny! TIM

I know. So did the cab ride over. But I got a job, stupid! I would have bought you a mickey, but the liquor store was too far. GINETTE
(Pause.)

You what? TIM

I got a job! I'm the first one in class! I phoned up Charlene and she hasn't even sent out her resumes yet! GINETTE

Wait a minute, wait a minute. What happened? TIM

GINETTE

That application I sent to National Life?

TIM

Yeah.

GINETTE

They took it. They want me to start next month!

TIM

Hey-hey!

(TIM embraces GINETTE, twirls her in his arms.)

GINETTE

And I went to Mister Sound and I bought myself a tape. The Johnny Cash Complete Boxed Set! And I'm getting the stereo fixed! And I'm buying you some longjohns, I don't care, the goddamn credit cards can wait.

TIM

Well how much are they paying you?

GINETTE

Thirty-two five.

TIM

An hour?

GINETTE

A year.

TIM

Oh. Well that's still not bad. I mean that's still pretty good. Didn't I tell you it would be a good idea taking that course, huh?

GINETTE

No.

TIM

What?

GINETTE

No. You told me it would be a waste of time.

(Beat.)

TIM

That was a very big mistake on my part, Ginette. A very big mistake. Anything you want to do from now on Ginny, heart surgery, you wanna take a few brain surgeon courses--

GINETTE

You don't mind?

TIM

Hey.

GINETTE

You don't mind me making all that money?

(Pause.)

TIM

I do. I do. I have a lot of trouble with that. Please don't give me any, okay?

GINETTE

(Smiling.)

That's what I thought.

TIM

Besides, I'm workin'. I may not be earnin' thirty-two thousand five hundred. But at least I'm workin' six days a week.

(GINETTE pulls away from him. TIM watches her for a moment, puzzled.)

Well hey, we gotta make some plans here. Dinner and a ride on the LRT. How's that sound?

GINETTE

Fine.

TIM

Fine. Just fine?

GINETTE

I said fine. Let's go.

TIM
I just gotta coupla things to do here. Whad they say when you told them?

GINETTE
Who?

TIM
Sears.

GINETTE
I haven't told them yet.

TIM
Why not?

GINETTE
It's not that easy.

TIM
Sure it is.

GINETTE
The job's in Regina, Tim.

TIM
It's what?

GINETTE
It's in their prairie head office. We'd have to move to Regina.
(Pause.)

TIM
Regina.

GINETTE
Saskatchewan.

TIM
I know where it is.

GINETTE

That's why I haven't told them yet. I wanted to talk it over with you. I mean if you're not going to be happy --

TIM

So let's go.

GINETTE

You mean it?

TIM

Let's go. They're stupid enough to have their head office in Regina, let's go.

GINETTE

Their prairie head office.

TIM

I'm saying.

GINETTE

I mean at least it's someplace we know. At least it's not . . . Toronto. And you said, "You go where the work is, you don't wait for the work to come to you."

TIM

Yeah, but that was before, Ginny.

GINETTE

Before what?

TIM

Before I got this job.

(Pause.)

I mean Regina, Ginny. Jesus! We might as well move to goddamn Estevan.

GINETTE

It's not that bad.

TIM

It's not?

GINETTE

It's a city. It's a city like any other city. You go there to work and come home and go to work the next day. And I thought you could take some time off, and maybe study for your high school, so you don't have to do this anymore.

TIM

She's already doing that.

GINETTE

What.

TIM

Tutoring me.

GINETTE

You didn't tell me that.

TIM

No? Well. We only started this week.

(Pause.)

I mean I know it's a good opportunity for ya and everything, and I know you worked hard for it, but uh . . . I really do like this job. I like comin' here in the morning, I like opening up the garage. That smell of grease and old tires you get when she's been shut up for ten years. I like takin' her up a apple in the mornings, she sits up and eats it in bed. And c'mere, c'mere -- you see that bird feeder? I fill that. That's part of my job. And so why should I give this up and go back to high school and maybe get a job pushing a button somewheres?

GINETTE

You don't have to go to high school.

TIM

Well precisely!

GINETTE

But you do have to get off your ass sometime.

TIM

(Laughs.)

Like you, right?

GINETTE

That's right like me. They want me, Tim! They want me for something other than getting yelled at all the time.

(Beat.)

I don't even think you thought I'd get this job. You thought I'd just go to night school for six months and maybe get a job as a secretary or something.

TIM

Isn't that what it is?

GINETTE

It's not a secretary, it's a data input operator! And in a year I can qualify to be upgraded. And if I want to keep training, I could probably be a systems analyst in another two years!

(Pause.)

I mean . . . don't you want to be able to go mountain climbing on weekends? Or skinny-dipping, or whatever it is they used to do? Don't you want to talk about something on Fridays other than money and what movie we can't afford to go see? If I wanted to stay poor I could have stayed in Lachine! But I didn't. I came out here, because people could make money out here, and be happy out here, and for awhile there we were happy. And I want it to be like that again.

(Pause.)

But I don't know. Sometimes I don't know why I came out here.

(Pause.)

TIM

Well. You musta knowed you was gonna meet me.

GINETTE

(Little laugh.)

Yeah. I guess that was it.

TIM

Yer cowboy, eh?

GINETTE

That's right.

TIM

That's right. Hopalong Cassidy. That's me.

(Pause.)

Yeah, well. Regina's not so bad.

GINETTE

Do you mean that?

TIM

No. But we can still go.

(GINETTE yelps, embraces TIM.)

Just one thing, Ginette.

GINETTE

Yes?

TIM

You can't climb mountains in Regina.

GINETTE

I don't care! We'll learn to curl! We'll take horseback riding lessons and join the Mounties! And do you know what? I'm never going back to Sears again! No, no: someday, I'm going to walk in there and buy up the whole country-western section. And then complain the next day because the tapes won't fit in my CD player!

MRS. PHIPPS

(Off.)

Here we are! Sherry and Peek Freans! Sherry and Peek Freans!

GINETTE

But I'm going to be nice about it. I'm going to complain, but I'm going to be nice.

(MRS. PHIPPS returns, carrying a sterling silver platter. On it is a decanter filled with sherry, three small cut crystal glasses, and a small silver vase holding two of the yellow roses.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Sherry and Peek Freans, sherry and Peek Freans! I've looked for the After Eights, but obviously I ate them.

GINNETTE

Mrs. Phipps, you didn't have to do this.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh but I did dear. Here I have guests in my backyard and I haven't offered you a thing. You hold and I'll pour.

GINETTE

Well I want you to have the flowers, Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

(Pleased; surprised.)

No.

GINETTE

Yes! For everything you've done for us! All right, Tim?

TIM

(Now subdued.)

Yeah. Sure. Fine.

MRS. PHIPPS

Well! I shall put them by my night-table, they shall serve as an inspiration.

(Pouring; serving.)

I don't keep enough flowers around anymore, the house used to be full of them. Lila used to bring around whole bouquets of tiger lilies.

(To TIM.)

What's the matter with you?

TIM

Nothing.

MRS. PHIPPS

Good. Here, have a cookie. Fix you right up. I haven't felt this larky since the day they retired me. It must be your jam, it's going to my head. Cheers, dears!

GINETTE

Cheers!

TIM

Cheers.

(GINETTE and MRS. PHIPPS drink. After a moment, TIM does too.)

Scene 12:

TIM

I need a half pound of coated nails, two and a half inch. And a number eight Robertson. And gimme some hinges. I gotta fix a gate.

Scene 13:

(Cowboy music. MRS. PHIPPS and GINETTE listen. They are in TIM and GINETTE's house.)

MRS. PHIPPS
(After awhile.)

You really like this, do you?

GINETTE

Love it.

MRS. PHIPPS

I don't know. It's too -- something for me.

GINETTE
(Moving to change the record.)

You ever been Done Wrong, Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Done What?

GINETTE

Wrong. Country music is for people who been Done Wrong.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh. Well obviously I haven't.

GINETTE

Well I have. I thought I was marrying a cowboy. And look what I got. The Galloping Gourmet.

MRS. PHIPPS

Is he still in the kitchen?

GINETTE

Still in the kitchen. He's been in there all day.

(GINETTE has changed the music to something softer.)

MRS. PHIPPS

This is nicer.

GINETTE

This is a ballad.

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Did you really?

GINETTE

What?

MRS. PHIPPS

Think you were marrying a cowboy.

GINETTE

(Smiles.)

I did. Well that's what I came to Alberta to do. And Tim seemed like the real thing. He had a foam rubber stetson and a belt-buckle so big he couldn't sit down.

(Pause.)

I remember I met him at Danny Hooper's. Where I'd gone to meet cowboys. He told me he had a 25-acre spread just outside of town. And an Eldorado Cadillac with a pair of bull-horns mounted on the grille. I didn't believe him of course. But I did a little bit. If you know what I mean.

(Pause.)

Anyway. That's how I got all my records. When it turned out he wasn't a cowboy, he started buying me cowboy records instead. Ronnie Milsap. Loretta Lynn. The Burritto Brothers, they were popular then. I have exactly four-hundred and forty-two cowboy records! No! Four hundred and forty-six, if you count the boxed set as four.

(Wry smile.)

My sisters still think I'm married to a cowboy. So what. I just let them dream.

MRS. PHIPPS

It sounds like it runs in your family.

GINETTE

Maybe. Or maybe I was just dumber then.

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

I came out into the yard yesterday and there was your husband, all dressed up in Wendell's old climbing gear. The old flannel shirt, the pick, the rope slung over his shoulder. I hadn't seen any of it in years. I just dragged it all into the garage the day after his funeral, locked it up and threw the key on top of the china cabinet. I must say he looked grand. I gave his cap a little pull. That's what I used to do for Wendell, give the brim a little tug for good luck.

GINETTE

Well I hope he doesn't get any ideas.

MRS. PHIPPS

Hmm?

GINETTE

You can't climb mountains in Regina.

MRS. PHIPPS

(Doesn't understand.)

Ah.

GINETTE

TIM! IF YOU'RE SERVING DESSERT LET'S DO IT BEFORE SUNDAY! That ought to get him. He hates it when I yell.

(TIM enters with dessert.)

TIM

Hold yer horses, hold yer horses. Good food takes time.

(Handing out desserts.)

One for you. And one for you. If you don't like it, pretend like you do.

GINETTE

What is it?

Raspberry frappe.
What's the matter?

TIM
(GINETTE and MRS. PHIPPS groan.)

Raspberries!

TIM
What about them?

MRS. PHIPPS
I think we've been raspberried out.

TIM
Well I tell ya what. I only got six or seven jars left. Then I'm movin' into apples. Flo says the Macs are comin' in.

GINETTE
Who's Flo?

TIM
Store manager at the Safeway.

MRS. PHIPPS
Where does he find the time to do all this?

TIM
Time is all in your head, Mrs. Phipps. See, that's the thing I'm learning. You got time for whatever you want to have time for.
(Beat.)
Well hey. Couple of pretty fillies like you. Watcha say we get in the Oldsmobile and hit the town?

GINETTE
And do what?

TIM
I dunno. Go drinkin', dancing.

MRS. PHIPPS

We could get back to your math lessons tonight.

GINETTE

His what?

MRS. PHIPPS

His math lessons. We've only got through lesson one, you know.

GINETTE

Well there's not much point in --

TIM

Well there's not much point in doin' that on a Friday night, isn't that right Ginny? Uh, why doncha finish up yer frappe there, Mrs. Phipps, there we go. Make room for a second helping.

(Eating.)

Yeah, y'know the thing is you gotta put in just the right amount of brandy. First time I tried it, that was all you could taste.

(Pause.)

Tell you what, Ginette, you go get the cards and we'll get a round of crazy eights happenin' here.

GINETTE

I can't. I packed them.

MRS. PHIPPS

You packed them?

GINETTE

Yes. I wanted to get the small stuff done first.

MRS. PHIPPS

Are you . . . going somewhere?

GINETTE

Yes. To Regina, Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh. For how long?

(Beat.)

GINETTE

Tim --

TIM

Uh, yeah, listen we can talk about that later. Why don't I go get the cards. Oh yeah. I can't . . . do that.

(Pause.)

GINETTE

You didn't tell her?

TIM

Leave it, Ginny, just leave it.

MRS. PHIPPS

Tell me what?

GINETTE

Mrs. Phipps, Tim and I are moving to Regina. I got a job there, I thought you knew.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh. Oh yes. Regina. I see.

TIM

You just had to do that, huh Ginny?

GINETTE

Tim didn't tell you?

TIM

YOU JUST HAD TO DO THAT, HUH?

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh well yes he told me! He told me, of course! I just meant to say -- when are you going? I knew you were going, of course, but when are you going, that's what I need to know.

TIM

It's all right, Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

Because I'll have to make plans, you see, I'll have to make some plans --

TIM

MRS. PHIPPS, IT'S ALL RIGHT.

MRS. PHIPPS

Because Regina is a very lovely city, Regina is where . . . yes, that's right. Regina is where Wendell goes all the time, on conferences. I've never been there myself, but he tells me about it, he knows all the Indians there, or something, they've made him an honorary Indian chief, I think.

(Pause.)

I think it's Regina.

GINETTE

I'll get her coat.

TIM

Ginny --

GINETTE

I think you should go home now, Mrs. Phipps.

TIM

She'll be all right. Now we're finishing our dessert and then we'll --

GINETTE

Let go of me.

TIM

I'm not --

GINETTE

LET GO OF ME! I DON'T WANT YOUR GODDAMN DESSERT!

(Pause.)

Why didn't you tell her!

TIM

I don't know.

GINETTE

Because you thought I would.

TIM

BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW, MAYBE I'LL GO THERE, MAYBE I WON'T. MAYBE YOU'LL GO THERE, MAYBE I'LL STAY HERE. I don't know yet, so how can I tell her when I don't even know?

GINETTE

You don't know yet.

TIM

No.

GINETTE

Well you rented the goddamn U-Haul.

TIM

I know I rented the U-Haul, because I thought I was going, but how can I go, LOOK AT HER, HOW CAN I GO? So you go, I'll stay here, and I'll come later, or something like that, what the hell can I do? WHADDA YOU WANT ME TO DO?

(Pause.)

So you go. And I'll come later. C'mon Mrs. Phipps, your coat is in the hall.

(He starts to go.)

GINETTE

You want me to tell them no, don't you?

TIM

I'm telling you nothing.

GINETTE

You want me to go to Sears and tell them it was all a big mistake. "Please Mrs. Gibbons, can I still answer phones for you, and listen to angry people all day, and listen to people call me a bitch." It makes me sick, it makes me sick that job, I go in and just the sound of a phone is enough to make me ill. And you want me to stay? Well you can go to hell. Because I'm not staying in a job like that.

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Clo? Chloe? Come out and look at the sun. Do you have your camera, Chloe? It's just starting to rise.

(Pause.)

Daisy's Dragon. Hiberian Fireweed. No, a One-eyed Jack's Purse, I think. That's what it is.

(Pause.)

Ten. To the power of two. To the power of thirteen. To the power of twenty-nine.

(Pause.)

Oh. Oh! Now! Perfect! Now! Oh, the sun! Did you get it Chloe? Did you bring your camera? Look at it Chloe! The sun! The sun!

(MRS. PHIPPS spreads her arms, as if to embrace the light. She presses her palms to her face, then opens her arms wide again, as if to soak up the light. She stands there with her arms open. TIM and GINETTE watch.

Fade.)

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 14:

(MRS. PHIPPS, in her nightgown, by the highway. Night.)

MRS. PHIPPS

The basis of Standell's Theorem was that the electric field made possible the other three fields, and nothing could be studied independent of its primary cause. Now if we apply this to what we know of Marcuse, we understand the shape of the universe to be a wave, constantly rolling into itself and then returning to its origin.

(A truck passes by, loudly.)

Oh Lord why do they hang there? Why don't they move? Oh I can't watch, it's barbaric really, dangling by a rope hanging from your best friend!

(Truck fades.)

I hear it. I hear it sometimes. It's like a high-pitched squeal. I hear it when I'm lying in the tent.

(Another truck approaches. GINETTE is seen in MRS. PHIPPS' house.)

GINETTE

Mrs. Phipps?

(The truck roars by.)

Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

I've got to go look sometime. It could be anything. It could be a hurt animal. It could be lying in the woods half-starved.

Scene 15:

(GINETTE steps up to MRS. PHIPPS' chair. She picks up MRS. PHIPPS' note-pad and is staring at it as MRS. PHIPPS enters, carrying her purse and binoculars. It is now morning. MRS. PHIPPS looks dishevelled. GINETTE looks up from the book.)

MRS. PHIPPS

I've been out in the garden picking rocks. I really should have dressed I suppose. I'm going to plant it again in the Spring, I thought if I get started now . . . if you'll excuse me a minute --

(She starts off.)

GINETTE

Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

Yes?

GINETTE

You were down by the highway, weren't you?

MRS. PHIPPS

Well if you must know. Yes.

GINETTE

Let me help you.

MRS. PHIPPS

What.

GINETTE

Undo your night-gown. Let me --

MRS. PHIPPS

No! No, for godsakes, I'm not arthritic! I can dress and undress myself, thankyou, I've been doing it for seventy-five years.

(Exits; off:)

I was fine, I was fine until your husband came along. Now I wander around here with nothing to do, hair hanging in my eyes, picking away at my notebooks like a worker ant hauling crumbs! I don't know why I do it, I really don't, I really don't. Oh goddamn these binoculars anyway, why am I wearing them, you'd think I was at the horse races, you'd think I was some kind of Peeping Tom!

(Returns, wearing a housecoat.)

I'd just as soon you didn't traipse in and out of here, either. Even if the back door was open. I do have a right to some privacy.

GINETTE

I rang the doorbell.

MRS. PHIPPS

And then you walked in.

GINETTE

I thought Tim was going to fix the gate for you.

MRS. PHIPPS

He was. He did. It would seem I got over it.

(Pause.)

GINETTE

I'm on my way to work, Mrs. Phipps. This is my last day today. I thought I should stop and tell you, I haven't changed my mind, I'm going to Regina. It's a good job, and I'm going to take it.

MRS. PHIPPS

Of course you are.

GINETTE
And I want you to come with us.

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS
You what?

GINETTE
I think you should come with us. We can get a big enough house, at least we can in Regina. And if I'm going to be working all day, I could use somebody to help with the housework.

(MRS. PHIPPS laughs.)

I'm serious, Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS
I know you are, dear.

GINETTE
You could have your own room.

MRS. PHIPPS
Oh that would be nice, wouldn't it? My own room. And I'd totter down to breakfast in the mornings, you'd push my scrambled eggs at me. "Eat, Mother," you'd say. Then I'd wander about the house for the rest of the day, staring at the photos on the mantelpiece and wondering who these nice people are. Did your husband put you up to this?

GINETTE
No.

MRS. PHIPPS
I don't believe it.

GINETTE
He doesn't know I've come here.

MRS. PHIPPS
Then go away and tell him! Instead of coming here and patronizing me!
(Pause.)
You seem like a smart woman. Why are you taking this job?

I find that a little insulting.

GINETTE

Do you?

MRS. PHIPPS

GINETTE

Yes. I didn't go to night school for six months to learn how to crack gum. It's a skill. It's a skill, I learned it, and somebody wants to pay me for it.

Oh yes yes yes.

MRS. PHIPPS

GINETTE

Like somebody paid you to do this.
(Meaning the notebook.)

They didn't though, you see.

MRS. PHIPPS

GINETTE

They paid you to teach.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh they paid me to teach, yes. And to sit around the faculty club and act ditzy, educated but ditzy, so I wouldn't upset the Dean. I was a bit of a freak, you see, a woman in the sciences, it would have been much better if I could have taught English or History or Art. The men climbed the mountains; we stayed below and took pictures of flowers.
(Pause.)

And I see that changing now, a whole generation of women with better prospects, and what do you do? You let them hand you a computer, and pay you a bit more money, and you settle in for life. You move up the ladder one rung and think you've reached the top. And what will you be doing in fifteen years? The same thing? Still sitting in a corner putting numbers to names? It's the waste that horrifies me, the utter, the absolute waste!

GINETTE

It's better than what I'm doing now.

MRS. PHIPPS

Is it?

GINETTE

At least with a computer I won't have to talk to anyone.

MRS. PHIPPS

They won't solve all your problems, dear. They're wonderful, but only as wonderful as you make them.

GINETTE

You could bring your math books with you.

MRS. PHIPPS

I am not going to Regina!

GINETTE

You have to go to Regina, Mrs. Phipps! If you don't go, my husband will stay here!
(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

He won't.

GINETTE

He will. He won't even help with the packing. He's already unpacked his tools.
(Pause.)

Look. Do you know what my sisters back in Lachine are doing? One is a waitress. Two are on welfare. One works in a candy factory. Me? I'm gonna be a data input operator. For thirty-two thousand five hundred dollars a year. And maybe you don't think much of that, maybe you and Wendell didn't need any money, maybe you just went mountain-climbing and lived on air. But to me? That's pretty goddamn good.
(Pause.)

I mean I can't afford to think like you do, Mrs. Phipps. I can't afford pretty thoughts.

MRS. PHIPPS

I'll talk to your husband for you.

GINETTE

If you could just --

MRS. PHIPPS

I SAID I'LL TALK TO HIM!

(Pause.)

Now please let me go to bed.

(MRS. PHIPPS waits. After a moment GINETTE turns, starts out. She stops.)

GINETTE

Where did you get that picture?

MRS. PHIPPS

What? Oh. Chloe took it.

GINETTE

No, I mean . . . where did you take it?

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh. It was in our meadow, I guess. By the lake.

GINETTE

You all look so happy in it.

MRS. PHIPPS

We were.

GINETTE

So happy and . . . I don't know . . . I don't know what you call it.

(Pause. GINETTE exits. MRS. PHIPPS remains sitting.)

Scene 16:

(MRS. PHIPPS' yard. It has snowed; there is a dull, grey light. TIM is out sweeping the walk. He wears a winter jacket. The sound of traffic is sporadic, muffled.)

MRS. PHIPPS enters, wearing her sweater. She stands watching. TIM spots her.)

TIM

Well, I knew this was coming.

MRS. PHIPPS

Did you.

TIM

Well, you get so's you can predict 'er, eh? You get into October, you think maybe she's not gonna snow this year. So you wait, and just when you're sorry you put away the Bain de Soleil, wham, she snows. You gonna try still tyin' up those raspberry bushes ya think?

MRS. PHIPPS

No.

TIM

Nah, I'd leave 'er. Thing is they're messy. But you go and tie them up and yer just encouraging them to grow.

(Pause; sweeps.)

What about yer Hallowe'en costume? You goin' out for Hallowe'en this year?

MRS. PHIPPS

No. You couldn't use another broom?

TIM

A which?

MRS. PHIPPS

Another broom. Instead of my good one.

TIM

This is your good one?

MRS. PHIPPS

Well it was my good one.

TIM

But I found it, it was sitting right here.

MRS. PHIPPS

I've a good one for indoors, and a good one for out here! And that happens to be my good one for out here!

TIM

Well that's where I'm using it.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh go on then.

TIM

I am using it out here! Y'know, Mrs. Phipps, there's such a thing as supervising, and there's such a thing as getting in the way. You haven't been working on your equation, have you?

MRS. PHIPPS

No.

TIM

No. I can tell. You always get cranky when you haven't been doing yer work.
(Sweeps.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Your wife came to visit me yesterday.

TIM

Yeah I uh heard about that.

MRS. PHIPPS

She told me you're not going to Regina.

TIM

That's right.

MRS. PHIPPS

That's true?

TIM

Uh-huh. That is to say I'm not goin' yet.

MRS. PHIPPS

I told her it was the silliest thing I'd ever heard.

TIM

Well yer entitled to your opinion.

MRS. PHIPPS

She thinks so too.

TIM

Uh-huh. Well that's what makes this country great.

MRS. PHIPPS

Of course you're going to Regina. She's your wife, it's a good opportunity for her, you'll pack your tools and go.

TIM

You through dictatin' my life for me Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Well you're certainly not going to stay here!

TIM

Look, if Ginny wants to go to Regina, that's all right with me. Regina will still be there, y'know, whenever. As for me I got things to do here. Now you gonna move off the sidewalk so's I can sweep it?

MRS. PHIPPS

I might.

TIM

You might. Well I might just do it anyway.

(TIM sweeps around MRS. PHIPPS.)

Just leave it go, Mrs. Phipps, would you just leave it go? I got this walk to clean, I got weather-strippin' to do. And that garage is a rat's nest, I haven't even begun to get 'er cleaned out.

(Pause. TIM sweeps. MRS. PHIPPS glances over at the bags.)

MRS. PHIPPS

You never spread those leaves like I asked, did you?

TIM

No, I didn't.

MRS. PHIPPS

Well there's no use now.

TIM
Well I'll get to it later.

MRS. PHIPPS
No there's no use now.

TIM
Mrs. Phipps, there's maybe one inch of snow here!

MRS. PHIPPS
And the painting in the basement. And the brown spots in the lawn. You haven't quite been keeping up here, have you?

TIM
Well I got all winter, don't I?

MRS. PHIPPS
Not if it's forty below out.

TIM
Well it's gonna be warm inside, isn't it?

MRS. PHIPPS
Not if you don't spread those leaves.
(Pause.)

TIM
Mrs. Phipps, I know why you're doing this.

MRS. PHIPPS
Do you?

TIM
Yes.

MRS. PHIPPS
Well then?

TIM
The answer is no.
(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Well then, I'll just have to do them myself.

(MRS. PHIPPS starts towards the bags.)

TIM

Mrs. Phipps, leave the bags.

MRS PHIPPS

Seeing as you won't.

TIM

I told ya I'd do them!

MRS. PHIPPS

Seeing as it's October --

TIM

I'LL SPREAD THE LEAVES, ALL RIGHT MRS. PHIPPS? HERE, I'M SPREADIN' THE LEAVES.

(TIM jumps on the pile of bags, rips one open and swings it about.)

HOW'S THAT? HUH? I'M SPREADIN' THE LEAVES! MORE LEAVES? MORE LEAVES! WHOOPEE! LET'S SPREAD THEM LEAVES! HOWZAT? HUH? YOU THINK THAT'S ENOUGH?

(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Yes. I think that will do.

TIM

Good. I'm glad you're happy.

MRS. PHIPPS

I guess this means you're fired.

TIM

I'm what?

MRS. PHIPPS

You're fired. Go on, get out of here.

(Pause.)

TIM

You don't mean that, Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

I certainly do.

TIM

Look I'll clean up the leaves --

MRS. PHIPPS

WOULD YOU PLEASE GO AWAY.

TIM

MRS. PHIPPS, EVEN IF YA FIRE ME THERE'S STILL GONNA BE THOSE TRUCKS OUT THERE!

(Pause. MRS. PHIPPS turns away.)

I'm not going to Regina, Mrs. Phipps. I'm not gonna go. I mean what's the point? I'll just end up doin' the same thing I'm doin' here.

MRS. PHIPPS

Then what will you do?

TIM

Stay here!

MRS. PHIPPS

For how long?

TIM

I don't know, maybe a coupla weeks, maybe a coupla months.

MRS. PHIPPS

Or maybe forever.

TIM

Yeah, that's right Mrs. Phipps, maybe forever, maybe I'm never gonna go!

(Pause.)

I mean why should I? Really, you tell me. So's I can sit around and live off Ginny again? Hope she'll throw me a few dollars so's I can go out and have a beer? With who? Who am I gonna go have a beer with? Guys I meet down at the UIC office? An' then what? Wake up in the mornings like I was a coupla months ago and not even be able to tell what day it is? I don't know how to live like that! I mean I'm just gettin' around to where I feel like a human being again and then -- woomph! -- this happens. It's like I'm gettin' laid off all over again. An' I had it all planned out, I was gonna clean out that garage next week, I was gonna do them leaves! An' you don't have to pay me if you don't want to, but I'm gonna be comin' here, an' yer gonna have to call the police to make me go away.

(Pause.)

Now. If you'll excuse me, I got work to do.

(TIM starts to sweep the walk. MRS. PHIPPS grabs the broom and throws it down.

TIM stoops for it, picks it up, and resumes sweeping.

MRS. PHIPPS grabs the broom again, and throws it aside.

TIM crosses to it, picks it up, returns to the sidewalk, and resumes sweeping.

MRS. PHIPPS grabs the broom and throws it across the yard as far as she can.

Pause. TIM looks at her for a moment, then turns and exits.

MRS. PHIPPS watches him go. She looks at the broom, crosses and picks it up. She returns to the sidewalk, holds the broom as if to begin sweeping, and looks down the sidewalk at the unswept snow. She leans the broom against the fence. She starts to exit.)

Scene 17:

MRS. PHIPPS

When we put all that we know of the universe into a computer . . . the answers we get back simply don't make sense. You see, the universe is just a set of simple equations, and when we tell the computer what we know . . . the computer tells us that the universe is impossible. That it ought not to exist at all. That all the stars and suns and planets with their little moons ought to go flying off in every direction, flying off like a schoolboy's marbles. But they don't. And why they don't . . . the computer can't say.

(Pause.)

The gist of my equation . . . is that there is this stuff out there . . . this goop, this stuff . . . that holds everything together, and in which everything has been placed. Invisible matter. That we can't see, but we know is there. Because in mathematics, whenever there is a mystery, there is something to be found. This is not exactly the theory du jour. Half my colleagues will tell you that the universe is constantly changing, each nanosecond different than the one before. The other half will tell you that it's disintegrating, falling in on itself, just too tired to go on. Which is rather glib, don't you think? -- the cynic's way out, as convenient as saying we're all hauled around on the back of a turtle.

(Pause.)

Still . . . you'd think I could settle for the first one, wouldn't you? It's a nice idea: the universe as a constantly unfolding bloom. Perhaps it's the very uncertainty of it that bothers me. Perhaps I don't want change. Perhaps . . . I am simply afraid.

Scene 18:

(TIM and GINETTE's yard. More snow has fallen, and is mixed with leaves. A cardboard box full of records sits on the ground. TIM and GINETTE are there. MRS. PHIPPS enters.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Excuse me.

(Pause.)

I know you're busy. I won't keep you long.

GINETTE

Mrs. Phipps.

MRS. PHIPPS

I see you out here, working away like the dickens.

GINETTE

Well. There's more things than we knew.

MRS. PHIPPS

I know. I know what you mean. I've been cleaning out my garage. The things you don't find.

(Pause.)

I'm moving out of my house, you see. That's why I've come here. I need your help.

GINETTE

You're what?

MRS. PHIPPS

I'm moving.

GINETTE

You sold your house?

MRS. PHIPPS

Well I'm going to. Oh well you can't stay in one place for too long, can you? Can't fix yourself like a barnacle to some old rock.

It was talking to you got me thinking. Maybe we should all get going. Maybe we should all --

TIM

Where?

MRS. PHIPPS

It doesn't matter.

TIM

Yeah, but where?

MRS. PHIPPS

Into a lodge. Into an old folks home.

(Pause.)

Well. It's what I am, isn't it?

(Pause.)

It's deciding which one to move into that I find the problem. The high-rise would be the safest, of course. But I do like the one with the little cabins.

GINETTE
(Exiting.)

Excuse me.

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh no, it's not your fault, dear, it's nobody's fault! It's not her fault, she knows that doesn't she?

(Pause. TIM sits.)

It's Wendell's things I need moved, you see. It's all I think I'll take. The shirt and pants I can handle, of course, but it's the gear, the rope and the tools, well -- it's well beyond me.

(Pause.)

It was seeing you dressed up in it, I think. Otherwise, I wouldn't bother.

(Pause; laughs.)

I met a friend there! At the one with the little cabins. Iina. She's Hungarian. Lovely ruddy skin and not a hair on her head. Wigs make her itch, apparently. And Iina said we could play canasta together. I said that sounded like fun. Is it? I'm not even sure what it is.

TIM

It's a card game.

MRS. PHIPPS

Is it? That's what I thought.

(Pause.)

Lovely gardens. Your own little vegetable patch. And they seemed very anxious to have me. "We'll keep you busy," they said. "You won't even have time to get bored."

(Pause.)

Anyway. Whenever you can come.

Scene 19:

(MRS. PHIPPS holding her notebook. The sound of trucks rising.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh this SHIT this SHIT this SHIT this SHIT.

(MRS. PHIPPS throws the notebook down. Sound out.)

Fifty-five years of this -- crap, this utter -- waste, how could I be so stupid, I AM STUPID STUPID STUPID STUPID.

(MRS. PHIPPS grabs up the notebook and shreds it. She lets the pieces drop. Pause. Sound of wind.)

Listen. I hear it. There it is! It's coming from out there.
(Sound of wind.)

Scene 20:

(TIM and GINETTE's yard. Night. Tim cleaning up the leaves with his hands. He isn't wearing his coat or gloves. GINETTE enters, wearing a coat.)

GINETTE
How's it going?

TIM
Okay.

GINETTE
You need a rake.

TIM
Forget it. Everything's at her place.

(Pause; continues working.)

Spent so much time rakin' up her leaves, haven't even raked up our own. Think I was a missionary. Lookit these things! Think we lived in the goddamn forest.

(Pause. TIM continues working.)

GINETTE
I was just out walking. I walked by her house. All the lights were on, every one. It looked like she was having a party.

(Pause.)

I looked at that great big house. She'll be better off someplace smaller, I thought. Someplace they know her. Someplace they know her name. Leonora. I saw it on some junk mail on her step.

(Pause.)

You want some help?

No. TIM

I could put them in bags. GINETTE

No! I don't need any help. TIM
(Pause. GINETTE backs off. She looks around.)

Where are my records? GINETTE

Your what? TIM

My records. I left the box right here. GINETTE

Uh-huh. Well maybe you should go look for them. TIM

Well did you move them? GINETTE

No. I threw them out. TIM

You what? GINETTE

I threw them out. There's no room left in the U-Haul. Besides, you got another four hundred of the things. Something had to go. TIM
(GINETTE exits.)

There's no use lookin' for them in the house, Ginny. You're not gonna find them. I told ya, they was gettin' in the way. TIM
(GINETTE returns.)

Hey Ginny --

GINETTE

Where are they?

TIM

They're gone. They're gone, Ginny. How's it feel, huh? How's it feel to lose the one thing you really don't want to lose?

(Pause.)

Hey, Ginny, you really think she's gonna be happy in a old folks home?

GINETTE

Get out.

TIM

Huh?

GINETTE

GET OUT. I told you if you were ever drunk here I'd make you leave.

TIM

I'm not drunk! I'm not drunk! You must be drunk, thinkin' a old folks home is some kinda garden.

GINETTE

I didn't say that.

TIM

Playing canasta, organizing box socials.

GINETTE

Then I'll go.

TIM

Sittin' in some rumpus room, pretending it's a park.

GINETTE

I'm going to Charlene's. You can call me there in the morning.

TIM

And leave me here all by my lonesome?

GINETTE

I don't care what you do.

TIM

You better take yer records with you.

GINETTE

THOSE WERE MY RECORDS. YOU HAD NO RIGHT TO THROW THEM OUT!

(Pause.)

This is not my fault, Tim. This is not my fault.

TIM

No?

GINETTE

No! Maybe it's nobody's fault, maybe it's --

TIM

You get her to fire me. Then you walk around here pretendin' it don't matter --

GINETTE

I didn't want her to fire you!

TIM

-- Pretendin' she's gonna be all right.

GINETTE

You don't care about her, all you care about is yourself!

TIM

SHE'S GONNA DIE IN A OLD FOLKS HOME, GINNY.

GINETTE

MAYBE SHE WANTS TO DIE THEN. I TOLD HER TO COME!

(Pause.)

I did. When I went there that day. I didn't want to tell you. I thought you'd think it was dumb.

TIM

You told her that?

GINETTE

She thought it was crazy. I don't know, maybe it was. I just -- I just think sometimes . . . there's nothing wrong with her that getting out of that yard wouldn't fix . . .

(Pause.)

But if you don't think so . . . then you stay here . . . you stay here and be stuck, just like her. But first you pay me for those records. You owe me for those records.

(Pause. TIM looks at her, then walks to the pile of bags. He lifts the box of records out from behind it and puts it down in front of GINETTE.)

TIM

Take your records. Put 'em with the others. 'Least now you know how it feels . . .
(Long pause.)

GINETTE

All I want . . . is a house somewhere, and a garden, and work I don't hate. And someplace to go on weekends, like her.

TIM

Yeah. I used to think that too.

GINETTE

So what do you want now?

TIM

I'm not sure.

GINETTE

I love you, Tim. But I won't stay here. I won't stay here as long as there's something someplace else.

(Pause. TIM reaches for her. They embrace. After a long moment:)

TIM

I told her I'd go help her.

(He goes. GINETTE stands for a moment, looking at her records. Bends down, picks one out. Looks at it, puts it down. Starts off after TIM.)

Scene 21:

TIM
(Facing out.)

Stay there. Stay there. Mrs. Phipps. Wait.

Scene 22:

(GINETTE enters MRS. PHIPPS' house.)

GINETTE

Tim? Mrs. Phipps?

(GINETTE sees the torn note-book on the floor. She picks it up, looks out.)

Scene 23:

(MRS. PHIPPS by the side of the highway, facing downstage. The sound of trucks is very loud and constant. Flicker of headlights.)

TIM stands elsewhere onstage, also facing down. He is on the other side of the highway.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Careful. Wendell. Careful, Wendell. Careful.

TIM

Mrs. Phipps?

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh you silly man, I don't know. Now go and put your clothes on.

TIM

Stay there, Mrs. Phipps. Stay there. I'll come get you.

(Sound of a truck roaring by.)

GINETTE
(Also facing downstage.)

Mrs. Phipps!

TIM
No no, Ginny, don't run just stay still!

MRS. PHIPPS
(Simultaneous.)
Well the problem is the aphids, you see, the nightcrawlers I don't mind, but those aphids will get you every time.

TIM
Mrs. Phipps, just stay off the highway!

MRS. PHIPPS
Roses or apples, roses or apples. I don't know now. Let me see.
(TIM moves downstage, as if towards MRS. PHIPPS.)

TIM
It's okay, Mrs. Phipps. Don't get scared. It's just me.

MRS. PHIPPS
Oh well there's nothing wrong with a drink now and then.
(TIM moves down; MRS. PHIPPS moves upstage, as if away from him.)

NO!

(She dashes away.)
NO! HELP ME SOMEONE! I'M BEING ATTACKED BY A BEAR!

TIM
Jesus, Mrs. Phipps --
(A car horn sounds; TIM stumbles back.)
JESUS!

GINETTE
Come to me! Come to me, Mrs. Phipps!

MRS. PHIPPS

(Now wandering onto the highway.)

Taking X as the first coordinate and giving Y the value of eight multiply the square of the two by the sum of the first column --

TIM

STOP. STOP.

MRS. PHIPPS

-- Carry the total --

TIM

STOP! MRS. PHIPPS!

(Suddenly, all sound out. Then, the sound of wind, as if high atop a mountain and the sound of a recorder, from far off. MRS. PHIPPS turns to face into the beams of an oncoming truck. The light grows in intensity upon her.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Chloe? Chloe? The sun. The sun.

(She reaches toward the light.)

GINETTE

(Suddenly:)

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

(GINETTE races across the stage, grabbing MRS. PHIPPS, falling to the opposite side with her. Sound of a truck roaring by.)

MRS. PHIPPS

OH GOD.

GINETTE

It's all right, it's me, it's me --

MRS. PHIPPS

Oh my lord, oh jesus, let go of me, my husband, MY HUSBAND!

(She scrambles to her feet, now close to TIM. She stops, watching him.)

TIM

Here I am, Mrs. Phipps. Here I am. Take my hand.

MRS. PHIPPS

Wendell?

TIM

That's right. I'm Wendell. Let's go now. Everybody's waiting.

MRS. PHIPPS

Where -- are they?

TIM

They're down at the lake. C'mon. Let's go.
(Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

Well the least they could have done is wait.

(TIM is holding his hand out to her. She crosses to him, takes it, he pulls her in to embrace her, hold her. TIM crying.)

Oh now Wendell, dear. Why are you crying? It's all right. It's all right. it's only a bruise.
(They stand embraced. GINETTE crosses to join them.)

Fade. Sound of trucks in the dark.)

Scene 24:

(TIM and MRS. PHIPPS, sitting in the lawn chairs in MRS. PHIPPS' yard. They wear coats. They sit there for a long, long moment)

MRS. PHIPPS

Well! Time to put these away then. The lawn-chairs, I mean.

TIM

Ya want me to do them?

No no. I'll manage.

MRS. PHIPPS
(She rises, starts to fold her lawn chair.)

How's your leg?

TIM

Better.

MRS. PHIPPS

Took quite a fall last night.

TIM

Apparently.

MRS. PHIPPS
(Putting the folded lawn chair aside.)
(She shoos him out of his chair.)

You weren't down there on purpose . . . were you?

TIM
(MRS. PHIPPS stops, considers this. Looks to TIM.)

I don't know.

MRS. PHIPPS
(She moves to fold his chair.)

Mrs. Phipps . . . I heard what Ginny told ya . . . about you comin' with us an' all . . . and I want you to know . . . I think that's a good idea.

TIM
(The chair sticks. MRS. PHIPPS struggles with it.)

I mean . . . you could work on your equation there. You could talk French with Ginette. And I could use some more help with my math, eh, I mean we didn't get halfway finished, we could wrap 'er right up!

(No answer, MRS. PHIPPS pretending to be intent on trying to fold the chair.)

And you could get your own place there. Probably get a place twice this size. Are you listenin' to me Mr. Phipps? I really think you should --

Oh goddamn it!

MRS. PHIPPS

(She suddenly throws the lawn-chair down.
Pause. Quietly:)

Damn it.

(She turns to look at TIM. They stand
there, regarding each other.)

Scene 25:

GINETTE

Well . . . I sit at my desk, there's a wall there and there. The computer is in front of me. I type in the subscriber's name and number, the code number of the coverage, the liability and the identification number. Then the computer verifies that the subscriber is covered, and I press the feed key and pass the information on to accounting. On a good day, I can do about three hundred claims. If I do more, my salary rises. I get a half-hour lunch-break. I'm called a claims examiner.

Scene 26:

(Regina. Spring. Spring light, sense of green.

TIM is in a T-shirt, writing in a scribbler, a
text-book in his lap. GINETTE rushes about.)

GINETTE

I have to hurry. I have to stop off at Sears on my way to work.

TIM

(Concentrating on his work.)

Jesus. Why would you want to go there?

GINETTE

I forgot to turn in my employee card. They called me to complain.

(She rushes about, preparing to go.)

They said if I brought it in here, they'd send it to Edmonton. It's unbelievable. They're everywhere. They're even bigger than National Life.

TIM

You got your car keys?

GINETTE

Here.

(She packs her purse.)

I've got to start leaving for work earlier. I can't believe the traffic here. A flat little place like this. I was so late yesterday, they decided I wasn't coming in, and took my chair for the supervisors' meeting. I had to work the first half-hour standing up.

(TIM looks up, laughs.)

You got classes tonight?

TIM

Tomorrow night.

GINETTE

Good.

(A moment between them. Then, she pecks him on the head.)

Don't forget to do the laundry.

(Goes.)

TIM

Laundry . . . is my life.

(TIM returns to work. He works intently for a long moment. Then, enter MRS. PHIPPS.)

TIM

Hey Mrs. Phipps. Listen to this.

(Reads.)

"Charles and Al are 250 metres apart at bird-watching stations. When Charles sees a huge flock of birds pass directly above him, he radios immediately to Al who sights the flock at a 40 degree angle of elevation. How high above Charles was the flock at the time he saw them?"

(He looks to her.)

What am I studying here, math or bird-watching?

MRS. PHIPPS

Both.

TIM

Both.

MRS. PHIPPS

Try imagining it. It's amazing what the human mind can do.

(She stands, looking out.)

I talked to my real estate agent this morning. He's found me someplace with a sundeck. And a duck pond out back. He's coming round to pick me up at one. Mind you, he's always late.

TIM

Three hundred and twenty, point five six metres?

MRS. PHIPPS

(Checks his work.)

Nope. Try again.

(TIM goes back to work. Pause.)

MRS. PHIPPS

He seemed a little amazed when I told him I didn't want a condo. Mind you, he always seems a little amazed. "What possesses a woman of your age to pick up, change cities and move?" he asked me. "I couldn't do my work where I was," I told him. You'd think he'd understand that. After all, his work depends on people moving, doesn't it? So much for enlightened self-interest.

TIM

Two hundred and seventy-seven, point seven five metres?

MRS. PHIPPS

(Checks his work.)

Correct! On to the last one!

(TIM goes back to work.)

But, if it's as cheap as he says it is, I should have quite a little bundle left. Go travelling, maybe that's what I'll do. Go camping in the Alps.

(She takes a notebook from her pocket.)

I feel a solution coming on. I feel it with my skin! I woke up this morning, and the universe was still intact. That was inspiring! I got out of bed and went straight to the credenza and got out my notebook. This could be the day, I thought. This could be the day!

(She looks to TIM.)

Ready?

TIM

Ready.

Good. Let's go.

MRS. PHIPPS

(She sits beside him, takes the scribbler.
TIM checks the answers in the book, MRS.
PHIPPS marks his work.)

Number one.

TIM

Sixty-four.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number two.

TIM

Seventeen.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number three.

TIM

Scalene triangle.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number four.

TIM

Square of ten.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number five.

TIM

One-hundred-sixty-eight.

MRS. PHIPPS

Number six.

TIM

Eighty-two degrees.

(Lights have slowly faded through this,
leaving GINETTE in light now, at work,
TIM and MRS. PHIPPS in silhouette.)

Scene 27:

GINETTE

Do I like it? Do I hate it? I don't think about it. It's just what I do.

(GINETTE stands there.

Fade.)

End

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