

The Place in the Woods

by

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The Place in the Woods

a drama in two acts

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The play takes place in three time periods at a fishing lodge in the Adirondacks called The Place in the Woods.

In 1922:

Derek Gavin Mutch as: Mr. Creighton, my father built the Place in the Woods, but it's mine now. People come here from all over the world, in the fishing season. [60s]

Keith Larson as: Paul Gallagher, Broadway actor, resting, for the moment, at the Place. [40s]

In 1952

Derek Gavin Mutch as: Anthony Creighton, owner of the Place in the Woods, [30s]

Vanessa Alvarez as: Marli Johnston, of the Philadelphia Johnstons, coming to the Place for the first time, [28]

Nicole Martin as: Anne Larson, accompanying Miss Johnston, [35]

In 1998

Derek Gavin Mutch as: Tony, I'm a writer, looking after the Place in the Woods, for my uncle. [20s]

Shareen Merriam as: Emma Pagett, I heard about this place, for a long time, prior to my visit. [78]

John Baldwin as: Ben Grant, I'm with her. I'm her brother. [76]

Lights up on the exterior of a lodge in the Adirondacks. We see trees and mountains in the background. Left is a bench, and steps up to the porch. The reception desk and part of the hall leading into the lodge are visible. On the desk is an old-fashioned telephone, from the 1920s. There is 1950s-style dial phone behind the desk counter, which begins ringing as the lights come up.

Paul Gallagher enters from inside the lodge. He is wearing a long coat and hat from the 1920s, suitable for cold weather in the mountains. He goes to the old-fashioned phone, silently he answers it. (Paul covers one ear to hear better.) The land line continues to ring, then stops.

After a moment Paul hangs up the old-fashioned phone, and exits the lodge, coming down the steps. (He pauses outside at center, looks around, makes a gesture of farewell, and then turns and exits right. MARLI and ANNE pass him closely near center stage as he exits, without noticing him)

Marli and Anne enter, carrying suitcases They are dressed in late spring fashions from the 1950s.

MARLI

And this is the place. It's beautiful. It's perfect. Look – that's the way down to the river, to the falls. Listen, you can hear the water. And that's the way up across the saddle and then to that peak – and from there you can see all the way to Canada.

ANNE

You've been here before?

MARLI

No. Never. My father used to come here. And my brother. And my whole family came one summer.

ANNE

But not you?

MARLI

No.

ANNE

Well, it's lovely.

MARLI

Yes. I'm here at last. I think the air smells different here. Better, fresher. I am going to climb a tree.

ANNE

I'd like to see my room first. Don't you think?

MARLI

No – I want to stay out here. I want to breathe this air. It's like food, I could live on it.

ANNE

Yes, it's nice.

MARLI

It's heaven. I am going to climb that peak. That high one there. I'll do it today. Just as soon as I change.

ANNE

Don't you think you'd better start a little earlier in the day? That peak's a long ways off.

MARLI

I hope it's miles. Miles and miles.

ANNE

You could go tomorrow and give yourself more time.

MARLI

No. Not tomorrow. Ever. Right now.

Anthony Creighton enters (from the lodge)

ANTHONY

Why, hello, ladies. I didn't hear the car. I'll get those for you. You must be Miss Johnston, and Mrs...?

ANNE

Anne Larson.

ANTHONY

Mrs. Larson. Welcome to the Place in the Woods. I'm Tony Creighton, I'll be looking after you. Step right up here this way.

ANNE

This is a beautiful place.

ANTHONY

Thank you, ma'am. We like to think so. I'll take that, miss –

MARLI

I can do it.

ANTHONY

I've got the book all ready for you to sign, right here. And then I'll show you your rooms.

MARLI

Do you know my father, Mr. Lawrence Johnston?

ANTHONY

Sure do.

MARLI

And my brother, Larry Johnston, Junior.

ANTHONY

He's been up here a number of times.

MARLI

My mother and sister came once.

ANTHONY

Did they now.

MARLI

And now me.

Marli signs the book

ANTHONY

Thank you very much. You'll be in number twenty-one, upstairs.

MARLI

I'll just go and change my clothes.

ANTHONY

Right down that way, miss – stairs are on the right – I'll bring your –

MARLI

– I've got it.

Marli picks up her bags.

ANNE

I sign here?

ANTHONY

That's right, ma'am. Room twenty-three. You're all set. Dinner's at seven. Breakfast at eight-thirty. You can lunch in at one o'clock, or take away sandwiches.

ANNE

Thank you. It sounds wonderful.

ANTHONY

The Johnstons used to come up here for the fishing.

ANNE

Did they now.

ANTHONY

It's not what it used to be. Amazing how quick people find that out. They're thinking of putting in a reservoir up to Womack way. They won't, though. That would kill us.

ANNE

I'm just here for short rest.

ANTHONY

Well, good. That we can cater to, right away. I'll show you your room. Right this way, Mrs. Larson.

Anthony picks up two suitcases.

(They exeunt into the lodge. Paul enters past them, from the lodge. None of them see or hear each other.)

PAUL

Creighton? Creighton! Any calls? Creighton!

Creighton enters.

CREIGHTON

Yes, Mr. Gallagher?

PAUL

Any calls?

CREIGHTON

No, sir.

PAUL

You've been right here?

CREIGHTON

Right in through there in the kitchen, Mr. Gallagher, all morning. I can't miss the telephone from there. You can be sure of that.

PAUL

I'm going out. When my call comes, don't take a message – find me. I'll be right outside.

CREIGHTON

Yes, sir, Mr. Gallagher. Not too cold for you, is it? Out there?

PAUL

What? No. It's all right. It's good. I like the cold.

CREIGHTON

I'll come find you, sir.

PAUL

Right.

Paul goes outside, takes a battered play script out of his coat pocket and starts working on it, running through several scenes.

(Paul is reading the script, then putting it away and walking the scene, speaking his lines under his breath, marking everyone else's lines and blocking in the scene as they pertain to him.)

(Marli comes out, buttoning a light sweater. Anne enters after her. They have no awareness of Paul.)

(Creighton becomes Anthony, and busies himself at the desk)

ANNE

Marli?

MARLI

I'm off. Don't wait dinner for me.

ANNE

Where are you going?

MARLI

I'm going to climb that peak. Mr. Creighton says there's a trail right to the top, and a view. I'm going to see it.

ANNE

Marli, dinner's at seven.

MARLI

I don't want any dinner.

ANTHONY

Miss Johnston, if you climb up to Hightop and back, you'll want your dinner, all right.

MARLI

Save me some? Anything. I may be late.

ANTHONY

Of course I will. Don't you worry.

MARLI

All right. I'll be back. Don't look out for me. I'm fine.

(Exit Marli, right.)

ANNE

How far is it? How long a hike will it be?

ANTHONY

Oh, it's about three, four miles. Very nice this time of day.

ANNE

She hasn't – I don't think she's very experienced.

ANTHONY

Oh, it's a good trail up there. Very clear every step of the way.

ANNE

Maybe I should...

ANTHONY

She'll be all right, Mrs. Larson. As long as she stays on the trail.

ANNE

Marli – stay on the – oh well.

ANTHONY

You'll be able to see her when she reaches that clear patch, and all the way to the top, there.

ANNE

Yes, I see. Any chance of a drink, Mr. Creighton?

ANTHONY

Yes, ma'am. I'll bring you one right away.

ANNE

A scotch, please. A big one.

ANTHONY

Coming right up, ma'am.

(Exit Anthony into the lodge.)

Anne sits down on the bench, opens a writing pad, takes out a fountain pen, reads back over what she has written, and then continues writing.

ANNE

Dear Edward...

I write to you from The Place in the Woods, the Johnston retreat in the Adirondacks. Mrs. Johnston offered me ten days up here if I would agree to look after their daughter. What I planned, for my long week off from the hospital, was to spend most of the first four days asleep, and the last five thinking of you, trying to reach you. Your last letter had so many holes in it, I

thought you'd sent me a snowflake. Please think about what you write, my darling. I want every word. Don't give so many to the censor, when all I want is to see the words that say you love me, you miss me, you think of me, I don't care who reads them as long as he sends them on to me.

Anthony enters, brings her a scotch, then exits into the lodge.

Oh, thank you.

I tell myself it can't be much longer. I tell myself that since you're a doctor you won't be near the fighting. Darling, I want to know that's true. Please tell me you're safe, and that you will soon come home. . . .

(Paul starts his scene, marking the other characters' line, then doing his own full out.)

PAUL

[Kitty: "What do you think of him, Tom? Do you like him?"]

"He seems very nice."

["He's ever so rich –"]

"You mean his father's rich, Kitty."

["Oh, Tom, what's the difference."]

"No difference. It doesn't matter. Have I told you how very, very lovely you look?"

["Tonight? I don't remember. You're such a dear. I can always depend on you, can't I?"]

"Always, Kitty. Always. As long as roses bloom, and the sun shines."

(Paul drops the character and moves back, consults his script, finds his place at a certain point in the scene, and starts walking it silently, working it again.)

ANNE

. . . Keep safe. Keep dry. Keep your hands warm for me. And please, please write and tell me that the war is a long way away from you.

(Ben enters, laboring toward the lodge carrying a suitcase. Emma comes in after him, carrying a smaller bag. They are dressed in modern, comfortable walking clothes and light coats.

(Neither of them see or hear Anne or Paul.)

BEN

This is it? Are you sure?

EMMA

Yes. I think so.

BEN

What an old wreck. Is anybody here?

EMMA

Well, I called ahead. Hello?

BEN

We should have made sure this was the right place before we carried the bags all this way.

EMMA

Hello?

BEN

Hello? Hello?

Emma goes up to the door and tries it.

EMMA

It's open. Hello? Anybody here?

BEN

It's probably the wrong place.

Tony enters (from the lodge)

TONY

Hi there, Mrs. Pagett? I'm sorry, I was back in the kitchen, I didn't hear you. I'll get that for you.

EMMA

You must be Tony. We've spoken on the phone.

TONY

That's right.

(He wipes his hands on his pants, and then goes to shake hands with her.)

Sorry.

(Paul rubs his hands, looks up at the sky, shrugs against the weather and goes inside; exit.)

EMMA

This is my brother, Ben Grant.

TONY

Hi. I'll take that for you. I'm sorry you had to lug the bags all this way. We used to have a road

right up to the Place, but it washed out four winters ago.

Tony grabs both bags.

EMMA

Thank you so much. For letting us stay.

TONY

Oh, no trouble, really. It'll be nice to have company again.

BEN

You live here all alone?

TONY

That's right. My uncle left years ago. But it's perfect for me. I'm a writer, I like being alone.

BEN

What if you need something? Or something goes wrong?

TONY

Well, there's the land line. And Womack's only eight miles up the road. I've put you in the second and third rooms along the hall. If you don't like them, just tell me.

EMMA

I'm sure they'll be fine.

TONY

There are three others you can choose from, on this floor. Upstairs is not so good, we've got roof problems.

Tony carries their bags up the steps and puts them inside.

BEN

Roof problems.

TONY

Just leaks. Nothing to worry about. Any more bags? I'll go down and get them.

BEN

My car is parked on the siding. Will it be all right there?

Ben gives Tony a car key.

TONY

Oh, sure. As long as we don't get a lot of snow.

BEN
Snow?

EMMA
There's another red suitcase, and a blue one, in the trunk.

TONY
You got it.

(Anne goes to the lodge to refill her drink. As she passes them she stands next to Emma for a moment and they both look at the view. Then Anne exits inside.)

BEN
It doesn't snow up here in October, does it?

TONY
Just make yourselves at home. There's coffee on the stove in the kitchen, right in through there. I've lit a fire in the main room.

EMMA
Thank you. That's lovely.

TONY
I'll be back in just a minute, if you want something to eat.

EMMA
Thank you.

TONY
Make yourselves comfortable.

(Exit Tony, left).

BEN
Was that some kind of joke? About the snow? It doesn't snow up here at this time of year, does it?

EMMA
I don't know.

BEN
I didn't bring anything for the snow. I've only got these shoes.

EMMA
It will be fine.

BEN

You like it?

EMMA

Yes. Yes I do. It's even better than I imagined it. The Place in the Woods. Come on, let's have a look at that fire.

Emma reaches for her bag.

BEN

Leave that. Let him get it.

(Anne passes by them, carrying her drink back outside with her. Ben goes on in; exit. Emma pauses, turns with Anne as Anne passes her, and stands looking out. Anne sits down in her former place and continues her letter. Emma listens as though she can hear Anne speaking.)

ANNE

I needed this rest. So I took up the Johnston's offer for a week in the mountains. I thought I was going crazy last week. The Wicklow girl died before I got in on Thursday morning. I couldn't bring myself to order her taken away. The nurses were looking at me strangely. Darling, I'm fine, really, I just needed this rest. Now if I only I heard that you were coming home, everything would be perfect. It's beautiful up here.

(Enter Ben)

BEN

Emma?

(Emma starts back into the present.)

EMMA

Yes, I'm coming.

(She follows Ben inside. Exeunt)

(Enter Paul from the lodge, passing them as they go. He gets out his script and works on it silently in front of the lodge.)

Paul's coat is gone. He wears a heavy sweater, hat, and gloves, as he continues to work on his script.

(Enter Marli, right. Spent. Bedraggled.)

Marli takes a small medicine bottle from her pocket. With all her remaining energy she tips something into her hand and throws it into the woods.

MARLI

There. And there. And there.

She tips the bottle – it's empty.

I'm free.

ANNE

Was it a good walk?

MARLI

Wonderful. I stood right up there – did you see me? I could see the river, and I saw the falls. It took me a minute – you can't tell it's moving, from that far away. It's just a silver streak against the stone, but then I knew. Tomorrow I'm going to hike to the falls, and see them up close. I've never seen a waterfall before, a real one. Have you? I could see the highway over that hill. And the trees forever. I never knew anyplace could be this beautiful. It's not like a garden, is it. It goes on and on and on, and you never know what's going to happen, or what you're going to find.

ANNE

That's true.

MARLI

I saw a bird with a white head and black wings. I saw a squirrel jump – . And some little butterflies. And there's a place where a stream runs right over the trail, and you have to step on some stones to go over it.

ANNE

Did you?

MARLI

I jumped. And I ran. I feel like there's thunder inside of me. The water isn't blue. It's silver, or gray, or so clear it's invisible. And the leaves are gold sometimes, not just green. And the sky. I was in it, I could feel it in my hands. The wind up there is pure and clean. I'm starving. What did you have for dinner?

ANNE

What's that?

MARLI

Nothing. Some medicine. I don't need it anymore.

Marli goes into the lodge, throws the empty prescription bottle away as she passes the reception desk, and exits. Anne goes into the lodge after her, picks up the bottle and stands reading it.

The old 1920s phone rings. Creighton enters, and picks it up.

(Creighton enters from the lodge, picks up the phone without noticing Anne. Paul goes to stand by Creighton. Anne exits into the lodge.)

CREIGHTON

Three five nine. Oh – it is. Good. No, that's good. Three o'clock. Thanks, Joe. Be seeing you.

Creighton hangs up the phone.

PAUL

For me?

CREIGHTON

No, sir, Mr. Gallagher. Just Joe Slopes from town. The coal delivery man is on his way. About time.

PAUL

Well. I don't expect my call before tomorrow.

CREIGHTON

You can be sure I'll come and find you right away, Mr. Gallagher. Something big, is it?

PAUL

Something big, the biggest, that's all. Back to Broadway. Back to Broadway for me. It's been a lot of years since the War.

CREIGHTON

I'll bet, Mr. Gallagher.

PAUL

I've been waiting a long time for this. Here.

CREIGHTON

What's this?

PAUL

You are holding in your hand the hit play of Broadway's 1923 season, all signs being equal.

CREIGHTON

"Miss Cathy's Dilemma."

PAUL

Opening at the Court next month.

CREIGHTON

Is this the same one you just did in Philadelphia?

PAUL

Same one, out of town tryout, critics pounding their heels against the chairs. Audiences breaking their hands. It's going to be a smash. Everybody knows it.

CREIGHTON

Gee. That's great, Mr. Gallagher.

PAUL

Yeah. It's great. It's got a great part for me.

CREIGHTON

What's it about?

PAUL

It's about a girl in love with the wrong boy. I play her cousin, Tom Fontaine. I'm in love with her, always have been. She's an heiress and thinks she's in love with some tycoon's son. I realize she's never going to love me, and I go off to join the British Army and fight in France.

CREIGHTON

Is that so.

PAUL

Yeah, that's right.

CREIGHTON

And that's the call you're waiting for.

PAUL

(Doesn't quite hear him)

Sorry?

CREIGHTON

The call. Your long-distance telephone call. You're waiting for.

PAUL

Yes. The call to come into town for the final rehearsals. At last. Here. Read that.

CREIGHTON

Read – ?

PAUL

My cues. Look. Here. My lines are marked, see. Read the ones that come just before them.

CREIGHTON

Ah –

PAUL

From – there. "Later that night. Mr. Logan's study." Mister Logan is Miss Cathy's father. There.

CREIGHTON

"Mr. Logan pours himself a drink. Tom Fontaine enters."

PAUL

No, the line. Skip all that. There.

CREIGHTON

Right. "Logan: Kitty was in fine form tonight, don't you think, Tom?"

PAUL

Don't say Logan.

CREIGHTON

What?

PAUL

Don't say the character's name. Just read what he says.

CREIGHTON

Oh. All right. "Kitty was in fine form tonight, don't you think, Tom?"

(Paul does his part full-out, including the blocking.)

PAUL

"Kitty is always in fine form. I can never look at her without thinking of sunlight, or a Christmas tree with all the candles lit, or the golden bubbles in champagne."

CREIGHTON

Oh, Mr. Gallagher. You really are an actor.

PAUL

All my life. Say the line.

CREIGHTON

Oh. "Logan." Sorry. "Yes, she's pretty all right – "

PAUL

"What do you think of Andrew Vane?"

CREIGHTON

"Seems a nice boy. I know his father, in a business way."

PAUL

"He's very taken with Kitty."

CREIGHTON

"Oh, really, Tom."

PAUL

"I can tell."

CREIGHTON

"Logan gives him a drink."

PAUL

Don't read that.

CREIGHTON

Oh. Sorry.

PAUL

My line. "Go on, say it. I think it's time I faced it, don't you? I'm too old for her. She's never going to fall in love with me. And there's no use waiting around in case she might change – I don't want her to change. I want her to stay just as she is, always. As beautiful, as vital, as vain and happy and free."

CREIGHTON

"Tom, I don't think – "

PAUL

And then we're interrupted and I don't have another line till the end of the scene, which is,
(He finds his mark and then says:)

"Forget what I said. Forget everything. Thanks for the drink."

CREIGHTON

Well. That's really something.

PAUL

And I've got a really great scene with Kitty – that's Miss Madeline Mahone in the part –

CREIGHTON

Madeline Mahone –

PAUL

– yes – when I tell her I'll love her forever, and I'm giving up hope and going off to France. And I say good-bye.

CREIGHTON

Is that so.

PAUL

The first scene's not bad – my first scene.

CREIGHTON

Is that right –

PAUL

It's Kitty's birthday, and there's a big party, and Kitty is flirting with all these other men, and one in particular –

CREIGHTON

Is that right –

PAUL

Because she's waiting for Talbot. Talbot, you see, is the man she thinks she loves. An icicle. Frank Ryan plays the part.

CREIGHTON

Frank Ryan.

PAUL

That's right. And he's rich, Talbot, and I'm watching all this. And at the end we drink a toast to Kitty, and she's looking at Talbot, and she says, "We shall do nothing but laugh tonight! Nothing but laugh! Ha ha ha ha ha." And I turn away. And I crush my cigar in my hand.

CREIGHTON

You do, now.

PAUL

It's not lit. I crush it. Curtain. End of Act One.

CREIGHTON

I'd better go find out what's keep Joe Slopes.

PAUL

Don't be on the phone too long. Keep that line open.

CREIGHTON

Don't you worry, Mr. Gallagher.

(Paul turns away.)

I'll tell the operator to put it through anytime. From New York, right? Mr. Gallagher?

(Paul is close to him, but doesn't hear him.)

Mr. Gallagher?

(Paul doesn't hear him.)

(Enter Emma and Ben from the lodge)

BEN

I don't think this air is good for my asthma.

EMMA

When did you last have asthma?

BEN

You never know about asthma.

EMMA

Oh, Ben.

BEN

It's all right. I'm wearing my scarf.

EMMA

Oh, Anthony. We want to go for a walk.

BEN

Speak for yourself.

EMMA

What do you suggest?

(Paul reads his script nearby. Creighton becomes Tony)

TONY

Well, you could climb Hightop – that's that peak right there.

Oh my.

EMMA

It's only about three, four miles.

TONY

That's too far.

BEN

We don't have to go the whole way.

EMMA

The stream's washed out the trail near the top, and there's a place where a couple of trees have fallen. You'd have to climb around.

TONY

Oh no.

BEN

I don't think we had climbing in mind.

EMMA

(Paul exits past them into the lodge.)

There's a pretty easy walk down that way, it goes down to the bridge over the riverbed. There's a trail down the riverbed. You can walk along it to where the falls used to be.

TONY

What happened to the river?

EMMA

You passed it on the way here. It's Clear Lake now, they dammed it about twenty years back. That's what killed this place.

TONY

How?

BEN

It was a fishing lodge, most of the time. It belonged to my great uncle; his dad built the place, around the turn of the century. About broke his heart when they took the river away.

TONY

I had a dear friend who came up here once.

EMMA

TONY

Oh yeah.

EMMA

A long time ago.

BEN

Well. Let's walk.

TONY

I've stocked some food. Feel free to use the kitchen. If you make me a list, I'll go down to the store tomorrow, in town.

EMMA

Thanks, Tony.

BEN

We're not going far. My knee isn't up to much walking.

EMMA

Oh, Ben.

BEN

I'm only warning you.

(Exeunt Emma and Ben right as Marli enters from the lodge, followed by Anne. Exit Tony into the lodge.)

MARLI

It's nothing. Honestly, it's nothing. I don't use it anymore.

ANNE

Sedabarb. Phenobarbital. What's it for?

MARLI

Headaches.

ANNE

Marli.

MARLI

It really isn't any of your business.

ANNE

This is an anticonvulscent.

MARLI

It's for my headaches. I don't get them anymore.

ANNE

This is a medication to prevent seizures. And this dosage is very high. Are you an epileptic?

MARLI

No. When I was a little girl, I had spells. That's all.

ANNE

What kind of spells?

MARLI

I don't even remember. My mother told me I had spells. So I was given those. Four times a day.

ANNE

Four times?

MARLI

So I didn't have spells anymore. And I didn't have school anymore, or friends, or an hour in a day when I wasn't asleep, or confused, and slightly sick.

ANNE

You have never, since you were twelve, had a seizure?

MARLI

Once. Nearly ten years ago. So what? Nearly anyone can have one seizure. I am not an epileptic.

ANNE

Have you talked about this with your doctor?

MARLI

I do not talk to my doctor. My mother talks to him. I hate doctors. I'm not going to talk to a doctor ever again.

ANNE

Do you know why your mother asked me to come with you?

MARLI

To keep an eye on me? What can you do? Are you going to call her?

ANNE

You've thrown all your medication away?

MARLI

All of it. I'm not taking that stuff again. I'm perfectly well. And I'm alive, I feel, I can see, I can think. I climbed Hightop yesterday. I climbed all the way up there. Today I am going to jump

in the river. I'm going to see if I remember how to swim.

ANNE

Marli, anticonvulsents shouldn't be stopped all at once. You should lower the dosage –

MARLI

I did. I started in April. But I'm finished now. I'm off them.

ANNE

And you should be under your doctor's care.

MARLI

You call that care? He put me to sleep!

ANNE

You should at least have some medication on hand. Just in case.

MARLI

I am not sick. I know, on my soul, to my bones, I am not sick. I came up here to prove it – on my own. But Mother sent you along.

ANNE

Yes.

MARLI

. . . Are you a nurse?

ANNE

No. But she knows I work at the hospital.

MARLI

She said you were tired and needed a rest.

ANNE

Yes.

MARLI

She said you wouldn't come if you thought it was charity.

ANNE

I don't know about that.

MARLI

What are you going to do?

ANNE

Today? I think I'd like to join you in swimming.

Oh.

MARLI

I hope it's not deep.

ANNE

I hope it is. I hope it's miles deep.

MARLI

It will probably be freezing.

ANNE

Good. Then I'll feel it, all the way to my bones.

MARLI

(Exeunt right.)

(Paul enters from inside lodge.)

The modern phone on the desk rings. As before, Paul goes to the old-fashioned phone, and silently answers it. (Paul covers one ear to hear better.)

The land line continues to ring.

(He turns away to listen. Hangs up. Comes down stage, gestures farewell. Exits. All exactly the same as at the beginning.)

(Enter Tony.)

Tony picks up the modern phone.

(Enter Ben, followed by Emma)

I'm all right. Really, Emma. I'm fine.

BEN

Ben, sit down, please.

EMMA

I'll be all right!

BEN

Tony? Tony!

EMMA

Tony puts down the phone.

TONY

Mrs. Pagett? What's wrong?

BEN

We found a dead man.

TONY

You what?

EMMA

We found – it looks like a dead body. In the river bed.

TONY

Dead? You're sure?

BEN

Of course we're sure.

TONY

I'll call the sheriff.

Tony dials the phone.

BEN

I knew we shouldn't have stayed here. I didn't want to come here.

EMMA

He wasn't in pain. There's nothing wrong here.

BEN

What are you talking about?

TONY

Sheriff's office? Yeah, hi. it's Tony, up at the Place in the Woods. I've got a couple of guests, they say they've found a body down in the river bed. A body. A human body. Right.

(To Emma and Ben)

You're sure he's dead?

BEN

Yes.

EMMA

It was a skeleton, really.

Not really.

BEN

You're sure it's a human?

TONY

Yes.

BEN

There were clothes. And – bones. It's been there a long time.

EMMA

Yeah. It's dead.

TONY
(Into the phone)

Where is it?

(To Emma and Ben)

BEN

In the river bed. In the bank.

EMMA

We were walking along the trail from the bridge. We walked –

BEN

A long ways.

EMMA

Not that long. About half a mile.

BEN

Half a mile from the bridge. On the left-hand side. We saw part of a head, a skull. And an arm.

EMMA

Twisted in rags. And more bones. Part of the river bank has fallen away.

TONY

Must have been that last storm. Yeah, about half a mile from the bridge. North, I expect.

BEN

That's right.

TONY

Yeah, north. No, no chance. Probably been there a long time. Yeah. Right. All right.

Tony hangs up.

The deputy sheriff is going to come up with a couple of his people to have a look. Can you come and show him where?

BEN

I'm not going down there again. We told you were it is.

EMMA

I'll go.

TONY

We've lost a couple of hikers up here, over the years. It's probably one of them. I'll be right with you.

(Exit Tony into the lodge)

EMMA

(To Ben)

Will you be all right?

BEN

I'll be fine. I'll start packing.

EMMA

What?

BEN

We're not going to stay here. Dead bodies in the river. Emma, let's go home.

EMMA

Ben, no. I don't want to go yet.

BEN

Then at least let's go up to Clear Lake. You can have your woods experience there. In a decent hotel.

EMMA

You go, if you want to. I have to stay here.

BEN

Emma, why?

EMMA

It's only a dead body. Ben, it's probably a good thing we found it. It's been lost for so long. Now it can be properly buried. I felt, already, I'm supposed to be here. And I'm not finished yet. Ben, stay with me.

BEN

Oh, Emma.

(Enter Tony from the lodge, putting on a jacket)

TONY

Coming, Mrs. Pagett?

EMMA

I'll be back soon. Enjoy the colors. It's beautiful up here.

BEN

It's cold.

(Emma follows Tony, heading right.)

TONY

You don't have to look at it again, Mrs. Pagett. Just show them where it is.

BEN

I'll be in my room.

(Exeunt Tony and Emma, left. Ben start to get up; his knee has stiffened.)

Ow. Damn it.

Ben sits down and massages his stiff knee. The 1920s phone starts to ring.

Someone answer that. Oh.

(He gets up, starts up the stairs.)

The phone stops.

(He stops.)

Just as well.

(He stands on the step, massaging his knee)

(Creighton enters from the lodge with Paul following him.)

The old-fashioned phone rings again. Creighton picks it up.

(Paul moves outside, stands listening)

CREIGHTON

Hello? 3-5-9, the Place. Yes. Go ahead. Adelle! Yes, it's Creighton.

(Paul moves away. Gets out his script)

Yes, well good. Good. How's Carl? You are. Well good. Well that's fine. Thank you very much. I'll be there. Right. Thanks. Bye.

(Ben starts up the steps)

BEN

Damn it.

(Paul hears him; turns and looks. Nothing. Ben goes inside. Exit.)

Creighton hangs up the phone
(and steps outside)

CREIGHTON

Morning, Mr. Gallagher.

PAUL

Good morning, Creighton.

CREIGHTON

That was my aunt. She's asked me to Sunday dinner.

PAUL

Was that the phone? I'm afraid I didn't hear it.

CREIGHTON

It's cold out here. Working on your play?

PAUL

That's right. Here.

CREIGHTON

Well –

PAUL

From there.

CREIGHTON

All right.

(Paul walks the blocking while they read)

"Kitty?" Is that right.

PAUL

That's right. The girl I adore. Scene one. The birthday party.

CREIGHTON

Right. Uh – "Tom. You came."

PAUL

"Yes. Here I am. Do you think I would miss your party, Kitty?" I'm in love with Kitty, Kitty is waiting for Talbot to arrive, Andrew is falling in love with Kitty. Kitty's line, farther down –

CREIGHTON

Uh – "Andrew, you know Tom. My cousin, Tom."

PAUL

"Second cousin. Sort of an honorary cousin."

CREIGHTON

"Glad to know you, Tom."

(Pause)

PAUL

It's not my line.

CREIGHTON

Oh. Uh.

PAUL

Kitty goes away –

CREIGHTON

"Oh, there's Laura. Laura, darling –"

PAUL

That's right. "So where did you and Kitty happen to meet, Andrew?"

CREIGHTON

"At Margot France's house party last Friday. In the pantry. Scrounging, you know. Kitty's a sweetheart, don't you think?"

PAUL

"Yes, I do. Kitty's very dear to me."

CREIGHTON

Uh – Mr. Gallagher?

(Paul, not looking at Tony, takes the pause the exact length of Andrew's missing line. He doesn't hear Tony.)

PAUL

"Way back."

CREIGHTON

– Mr. Gallagher?

PAUL

"Kitty hasn't made up her mind yet."

CREIGHTON

I have to –

Creighton puts the script down.

PAUL

And then there's some business, I'm here, and then I move here. Kitty comes over. Start from there. "What do you think of him."

(He turns to look. Creighton has been watching him.)

CREIGHTON

I'm sorry –

Creighton picks the script back up.

PAUL

No, no, not at all –

CREIGHTON

I got it.

PAUL

From Kitty's line, "What do you think of him."

CREIGHTON

All right. "What do you think of him, Tom? Do you like him?"

PAUL

"He seems very nice."

CREIGHTON

Mr. Gallagher, can you hear me?

(Pause, the length of Kitty's line. Paul is not looking at him.)

PAUL

"You mean his father's rich, Kitty."

CREIGHTON

Uh – "He's ever so rich –" I mean – uh – "Oh, Tom, what's the –"

PAUL

"No difference. It doesn't matter. Have I told you how very, very lovely you look?"

CREIGHTON

"Tonight? I don't remember. You're such a dear."

PAUL

"Is Talbot coming?" And then Kitty has a long, long line, blathering on about Talbot, and I'm here, and then here, – and then go from her last line, "Do you understand what I mean?"

(Paul looks at him as he reads the line)

CREIGHTON

"Do you understand what I mean?"

PAUL

"No, darling. But you're so sweet I don't need to."

CREIGHTON

"Oh, Tom, you're such a dear. I can always depend on you, can't I?"

PAUL

"Always, Kitty. As long as roses bloom, and the sun shines." And then Talbot enters and she abandons me. "Talbot –"

CREIGHTON

(speaks loudly and clearly)

Mr. Gallagher –

PAUL

There's one more scene –

CREIGHTON

Mr. Gallagher, I've got to change and drive down the road to dinner.

PAUL

Oh, of course. Don't let me keep you. Thanks for your help.

CREIGHTON

Anytime, Mr. Gallagher. I mean that. It's a lot of work, I guess, knowing this whole thing by heart like you do.

PAUL

Yes it is.

CREIGHTON

I hope your call comes soon.

PAUL

Oh, I'm sure it will. Anytime now. Thank you, Creighton.

Creighton hands back the script

(Creighton turns into the lodge. Paul studies his script. Creighton pauses.)

CREIGHTON

Mr. Gallagher? Can you hear the phone, when it rings? Mr. Gallagher?

(Paul doesn't hear him. Creighton hesitates)

Anne and Marli enter, carrying drinks, and sit down on the lodge steps.

Creighton exits into the lodge. Paul walks the whole previous scene of his play, whispering his lines to himself during the following.)

ANNE

How do you like it?

MARLI

It tastes strong. I like it.

ANNE

Good.

MARLI

This is my first drink. How much do you have to drink to get tipsy?

ANNE

Probably not very much, the first time.

MARLI

Good. I've never been drunk. I've never been up late; until this year I'd never been on a streetcar or to a restaurant, or seen a movie since I was a child.

ANNE

Because of your epilepsy?

MARLI

Because I was ill. Because I was always stupid and tired. Tonight I feel – like an animal. A hunting animal. I feel sharp. I'd like to meet a bear in the woods and scratch his eyes out. I'm going to take a walk.

ANNE

Marli –

MARLI

I'll be all right.

ANNE

Of course. But finish your drink first.

MARLI

Oh. I'm just – not used to all this energy. This is what it's like to feel well. You feel like this all the time.

ANNE

No. I'm usually tired.

MARLI

Oh, you volunteer in the hospital. You don't have to work, do you? What does your husband do?

ANNE

He's with the Navy.

MARLI

Oh.

ANNE

He's in Korea. With the Navy Medical Corps.

MARLI

He's a doctor. That's why you work in the hospital. To feel closer to him. What's it like being married?

ANNE

I miss him. Every day.

MARLI

You love him. I'm going to be married. See?

Marli shows her a ring.

That's why I had to get well. I am well. I am going to marry Robert Harvey Burton. Mrs. Robert Harvey Burton. Mrs. Burton. He asked me three weeks ago. On Thursday, March 21, 1952. Do you want to know how he asked me? He said, "We have been friends for several months." He works for my father. Last fall he started working part of the time in my father's office at home. "We have been friends for several months. Would you like to marry me, and start a home together?"

ANNE

That's how he put it.

MARLI

Robert is not the most romantic of men. But – "start a home together." Anne, I'm going to live in a house of my own. I'm going to have my own husband. I'll wait for him every day. I'll take care of the house. I'll go to the market and buy things myself. I'm going to learn to cook. And have children. Six. Three girls and three boys. Do you have children?

ANNE

No. Not yet.

MARLI

Do you want children?

ANNE

Oh yes. We haven't had time yet. And Edward's been gone now for sixteen months.

MARLI

That's a long time.

ANNE

Yes.

MARLI

What's he like? What's he look like? Robert is this tall. He has short curly adorable hair. Brown eyes. A thin chest and long arms. He has three nice suits. I like the brown one best. He used to wear this little ring. He gave it to me.

ANNE

That's nice.

MARLI

Now you. Tell me about Edward.

ANNE

Edward. His eyes are very deep, and they seem very fierce, until you know him. Then you can see the lights in them, the laughter, the passion. He has very black hair he forgets to trim. And thick black stubble in the morning. He's not very tall, and he's thick, not fat, he's thick. And he smells sweet and clean and a little sharp. His skin is smooth and soft. His hands are firm and warm and strong.

MARLI

I don't remember how Robert smells.

ANNE

His voice is like dark brown syrup, with this little choke, he gets this little choke when he's excited.

MARLI

Are you faithful to him? I will always be faithful to Robert. In thought, word and deed. And I'm going to grow pansies in the garden. I'm going to be alive and awake for the rest of my life. You know what? I am Sleeping Beauty. He kissed me. I've woken up. I'm going to take a walk now.

ANNE

Don't go far.

MARLI

I won't. Look – at those stars –

(Exit Marli, right)

(Emma and Ben come out of the lodge)

ANNE

Edward? Oh, Edward. Come home.

BEN

No, I don't like the woods. I've always hated the woods.

EMMA

Then why did you come?

BEN

You asked me.

EMMA

I thought you loved the woods. You and Clara – you'd go camping every summer.

BEN

That was for Clara. And the kids. I just – I don't like being dirty, and not being able to shower. I thought we were staying in a hotel. A real hotel.

EMMA

I came up to stay at this place. I'm just so happy it's still here.

BEN

Such as it is. But why?

EMMA

I had a friend who came here once.

BEN

I don't think much of her recommendation.

EMMA

It was a long time ago. You wouldn't believe the things that happened to her. As though life was out to clobber her. And I asked her once, after Sam died, and I needed someone to talk to –

BEN

Oh yes.

EMMA

How she got through. What kept her going. The things she went through! And she told me about this place, coming here once. She said, everything she ever learned about courage, she learned here.

BEN

What, the place caught fire? Tornado?

EMMA

No. She was just staying here. And I need – I need to know what she knew. I need to learn about courage now. Ben –

BEN

Oh but Emma, you're the strong one. When Clara died . . .when we lost Richard . . .when Sharie lost the baby . . .

EMMA

Yes. Well.

BEN

I'm the one that fell apart. Completely apart. When Clara passed away – do you remember? And I'm still – not the same. Emma, what has happened to my family?

EMMA

What do you mean?

BEN

They never come and see me.

EMMA

You don't make them very welcome.

BEN

What are you talking about?

EMMA

You told me yourself. Remember? "Wait till Ben junior gets here. I'll tell him what I think of—" whatever he's done this time. Or Sharie. You say that every time.

BEN

Well, I'm his dad. Who's going to tell him if I don't? When Clara was here, it was different. Emma, when Clara died, I lost my whole family. I never know what to say to them.

EMMA

You think they're boring.

BEN

Well, yes.

EMMA

So are you, Ben.

BEN

I know. That's why, when I see them now, all I can do is try and make them laugh. That gets old, doesn't it?

EMMA

You never try and make me laugh.

BEN

You're my sister. Let's – not talk about this anymore. Come inside and have a drink. Come on. I'll make you laugh just this once. It's getting cold out here.

EMMA

In a minute. Ben –

BEN

I'll go and make you a cup of tea. All right? Good.

(Exit Ben. Pause)

EMMA

Anne? Anne, it's Emma. Can you hear me?

ANNE

Edward? Don't let them murder you. Be somewhere else, please, please. Don't let them murder you.

(Enter Tony)

EMMA

Anne?

TONY

Mrs. Pagett?

EMMA

Oh my God.

TONY

Did I scare you? I'm really sorry. I thought you'd like to know they've dug out your dead body.

EMMA

My – oh. Do you they who it is yet?

(Anne goes into the lodge. Exit.)

TONY

No, they're just taking him downtown now. The bank he was buried in, it's a lot of clay. Looks like he got stuck in a tree root, and the bank collapsed on him. So a lot of him's intact.

EMMA

Him? Do they know it's a man?

TONY

Well, no, they can't tell yet. The coroner, she'll do that. It's just, I look at those bones and the flattened skull, and – the pieces. I can't imagine a woman like that. Funny, isn't it. I couldn't imagine you –

EMMA

But you can imagine yourself.

TONY

He must have been there a long time, to back when there was water in the river. He probably drowned.

EMMA

That wouldn't be a bad way to go, do you think?

TONY

Drowning? That would be choking to death, though. Wouldn't it?

EMMA

Yes. I guess so.

TONY

I've got to call into town, tell them they're bringing the body in. They can't get a signal down there. I guess, whoever missed him, gave him up a long time ago.

EMMA

Yes. That's right.

Anne returns with her writing pad, and sits down on the bench as Tony goes to the phone, talking on it in the background.

ANNE

Dear Edward: You will never believe the story I heard from the Johnston girl. It seems she was diagnosed at twelve with grande mal epilepsy, from a single attack, which of course she doesn't remember, and has been over-medicated ever since. She was taken out of school, she says she has very little memory of the last fifteen years and believes she spent most of it asleep. If I ever meet this Doctor Wayne Bassington, her family so-called physician, I think I'll wrap his stethoscope around his neck and pull until his eyes pop out. Marli says her mother never allowed her to come downstairs when there was any company in the house – in case she should have one of her spells.

EMMA

Anne. Anne, I'm in great trouble. I've come to you for help. Again. I don't know what to do.

(Enter Ben)

BEN

Emma? Come inside, it's cold out here. What are you doing out here in the dark, anyway?

(He helps Emma up and they go inside. Exeunt.)

(Paul walks his scene)

PAUL

"Kitty?"

"Hello, Tom."

"Your father said you were in here."

"I'll pour you a drink in a minute but I can't – get – this – out –"

"Let me, darling. You are so adorable."

"You always say that. Thanks. You're so sweet. Tom."

"I've come to say good-bye."

"Oh? Where are you off to now?"

"To France."

"You can't go to France. There's a war on, silly."

"Yes. I know."

(Creighton comes out, stands watching Paul's scene.)

"You can't mean – oh Tom, you haven't joined up. But why?"

"To fight for freedom, of course."

"But you don't believe in any of that fighting nonsense."

"Not France's freedom. Not Belgium's. Mine."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at me. Sweet, darling, blind Kitty. What do you see?"

"Oh, Tom."

"Old Tom. Just Tom. I'm a man, Kitty. I have loved you, every particle and breath of you, as long as I can remember. And you will never love me. I must go, Kitty. I can't bear it any longer."

"But Tom – I do love you. In a way. Oh Tom – don't go. You might be killed. Please don't go."

"Good-bye, Kitty. Thank you. For being you."

(Paul, as Tom, goes to exit, and here makes the farewell gesture we have seen Paul's ghost make twice, then drops the character.)

(Creighton applauds briefly, from where he has been watching)

CREIGHTON

That's just great, Mr. Gallagher. Does he get killed? In France?

PAUL

Oh, of course. After acts of conspicuous bravery, of course. Talbot and Andrew join up, Kitty goes to France as a nurse in the third act. Tom is the first dead man she sees in the hospital.

PAUL (cont.)

Talbot dies in her arms, and she marries Andrew, who's been gassed, to take care of him until he dies. It's quite a sweet play. The audiences loved it. And Miss Mahone is terrific in the part.

CREIGHTON

I'll bet.

PAUL

Any calls?

CREIGHTON

No, sir. Just the county sheriff, asking me to leave a lamp out tonight. Couple of hunters are lost out in the woods, they think.

PAUL

Poor devils.

CREIGHTON

Poor fools. Well, just as long as they keep clear of the river.

Paul takes a flask out of his pocket.

PAUL

Would you like...?

CREIGHTON

What's that?

PAUL

It's tea, Creighton. Good, strong tea that my mother used to brew that will clear you mind and warm you inside out. I take it every day, about this time. Any objection?

CREIGHTON

Can't think of any.

Creighton takes out his own flask.

Here. Try some milk with it.

PAUL

Milk, eh?

CREIGHTON

Sweet as can be. No government ever told a Creighton what he could drink and what he couldn't drink.

PAUL

That – is – strong – milk.

CREIGHTON

Never been within thirty miles of a cow. That's the best kind. The only kind.

(Enter Marli, right.)

ANNE

Hello. Did you have a nice walk?

MARLI

I was down by the river. So I went swimming. I jumped from that big rock, into the pool. I did it twice.

ANNE

Marli, you shouldn't go swimming by yourself.

MARLI

I told you I'm fine!

ANNE

Marli, it's an ordinary precaution. No one goes swimming alone. I wouldn't.

MARLI

Oh. Well. What would I know about ordinary precautions?

ANNE

Are you all right?

MARLI

I'm great! When I jumped in, the second time, I went all the way to the bottom. I touched the stones on the bottom. I looked at them, too. The water's as clear as glass down there.

ANNE

Yes, I saw.

MARLI

It's cold. It's even colder. Down there. There was a ringing in my ears.

ANNE

That's normal, under water.

MARLI

Oh. Good. I think the cold water's given me a headache.

ANNE

You're all right.

MARLI

I'm starving. Isn't it time for lunch?

(Anne and Marli exit into the lodge.)

(Paul gets up and walks his scene again, mouthing the words without a sound. Creighton exits into the lodge.)

(Enter Emma, followed by Ben.)

BEN

Emma?

EMMA

I'm just going for a walk. I'm going to climb Hightop. Right up there.

BEN

Now?

EMMA

Right now. Do you want to come?

BEN

No. Emma, I can't. Emma. Who was she? Did I know her?

EMMA

Anne Larson. No, I don't think so. She died almost fifteen years ago. I met her at St. Anthony's, when the baby was so bad, and Sharie and I went there every day. Remember?

BEN

Well, no. I wasn't home very much. I had to do a lot of traveling in those days. For Emerson Korf.

EMMA

That's right.

BEN

I was home when the baby died.

EMMA

Sam was so depressed, in those days, right after he retired. I had to have someplace to go, he was driving me out of my mind. So I took that job at St. Anthony's, in the gift shop, and I saw Anne almost every day. We used to walk around that little lake there, and talk. When she had time.

BEN

She was a nurse? Was she married?

EMMA

She was a doctor, a neurologist, and she was a widow. Her husband was in the war – the Korean War. He was a surgeon, and when he came home, everything fell apart. He was wounded, he

had nerve damage in his hand, so he couldn't do what he wanted, and that ruined him, she said. He started drinking, and he took a lot of pills. They had a daughter about then, and when the little girl was seven, her husband had an accident in the car –

BEN

Was he drunk?

EMMA

She thought so. The little girl, Sarah, went into a comma, and when she woke up, she was never the same in her mind. And that about killed Anne, that her own daughter had brain damage, and there was nothing she could do. There was other damage as well, and the little girl died after a few more years. And Anne found her husband, Edward, she found him – he committed suicide.

BEN

Why are you telling me this awful stuff? Why do you want to remember this?

EMMA

I just want you to understand. About Anne.

BEN

What?

EMMA

She was sick, when I met her. I watched her – waste away.

BEN

Oh, great.

EMMA

She was in a lot of trouble, a lot of pain. But she took in life, every day, like food. Like a sacrament. And she wasn't afraid. She looked ahead with courage, with dignity. I want to know how, with all she went through, how she could be like that. I'd like to be like that. I don't know how.

BEN

Maybe she just put on a good show. Remember Arnie? Grant's boy? Always making jokes, always the funny guy. And then he just fell apart – they had to commit him, remember?

EMMA

But you could tell, with Arnold, that it was a cover. With Anne it was real. She knew.

BEN

What.

EMMA

How to live. In the face of death.

BEN

I don't like this talk.

EMMA

I know. But Ben, you're seventy-eight, you must think about it sometimes.

BEN

Nope. Not when I can help it.

EMMA

Well I do. I think it's the most important thing in the world, right now. When I'm going to die. And how.

BEN

It's bad enough just knowing it's going to happen. You don't have to waste time worrying, you just get worked up.

EMMA

I have to make plans.

BEN

My plan is to hit death all of a sudden, looking the other way. Bang, boom, I'll never know. That's the best.

EMMA

You may not have that choice.

BEN

I will if I don't talk about it. Emma, why make it harder than it is?

EMMA

Is that what I'm doing?

BEN

By thinking about it too much.

EMMA

Am I?

(Enter Creighton. Paul goes and sits on the steps, sings.)

PAUL

"Take me back to old Broadway –"

BEN

Come on, if you're going for a walk. I'll walk you a little ways. Come on.

CREIGHTON

Any news, Mr. Gallagher?

PAUL

No news is good news, Creighton . . .

EMMA

It isn't that far to the top.

ANNE

Dear Edward . . .

BEN

A little ways.

(Exeunt Ben and Emma, right.)

ANNE

I have been picturing the shellfire you told me of, the rough seas, the wounded men being brought up from the beach, the endless days of bloody work, and all the other details of your life now. I don't feel separate from you. I feel closer to you than ever. And as you say you reach to me when you have a moment, so do I reach to you. And if this is the farthest apart we ever are in our lives together, darling, what a wonderful life we shall have.

(Anne goes inside during the following)

PAUL

(Singing)

"Don't take me to heaven, I've seen the lights of Broadway –"

There's no place like New York, when you've got money in your pocket, a hit to go to every night, people standing around the block before the show, and after, the applause as you come out the stage door, everyone smiling, everyone likes you. A hit play, Creighton. That's the life.

CREIGHTON

They can't all be hits, Mr. Gallagher.

PAUL

(Holds up the script)

But this one is. I can smell it. Here. Smell it. Everyone can smell it. The backers gathering like – like –

CREIGHTON

Vultures?

PAUL

Like people at an accident. No – I mean – something else. When there's money to be made, Creighton, that's what people are like.

(Marli and Anne come out onto the porch)

MARLI

It's beautiful. Beautiful.

ANNE

Yes.

PAUL

How many stars do you think there are out there?

MARLI

Look –

ANNE

A falling star.

CREIGHTON

I don't know, Mr. Gallagher.

MARLI

A falling star.

ANNE

It means you get a wish.

MARLI

I wish –

ANNE

Don't tell it.

PAUL

I think there's room for one more.

MARLI

It isn't a wish. I know. I know. I am going to have days like today, and nights like this, every day and every night for the rest of my life. That was my first falling star.

(Paul exits into the lodge)

MARLI (cont.)

And I'm going to have so many of them, and so many wishes, that I won't know what to do with them all. Robert will be my husband, and we shall have six beautiful healthy children. Six. Or maybe seven. It's as though I were dead, and brought back again to life. I can feel the night. I can hear the trees moving. And the water. Aren't you happy, to have had this always, to live with this always?

ANNE

Yes. Yes, I am.

The modern phone begins to ring.

(Marli and Anne don't hear it.)

(Enter Ben, walking slowly back to the lodge.)

(Paul's ghost enters, exactly as in his first entrance, answers the 1920s phone, listens.)

Ben stumbles, hurting his knee. He sinks down, unable to support his weight.

BEN

Ow! Damn it, ow, ow . . .

(He looks up and sees Paul.)

Hello? Help. Hello? Help me.

(Paul proceeds down the steps, he looks around, he exits right. Ben tracks him all the way.)

Hello! Help!

ANNE

Look – another falling star.

MARLI

Another wish.

BEN

Oh, God. Help me.

(Lights fade. Blackout.)

End Act I

Act II

(The scene is as before. Ben is sitting on the bench outside the lodge. Marli and Anne enter from the woods. (singing a camp song in a round.)

MARLI

Dip dip and swing and back
Flashing like silver –

ANNE

Dip dip and swing and back
Flashing like silver –

MARLI

Swift as the wild goose flight
Dip dip and swing –

ANNE

Swift as the wild goose flight
Dip dip and swing.

MARLI

Dip dip and swing.

ANNE

That's good. That's very good.

MARLI

And what else did you do at camp?

ANNE

Oh –

MARLI

Tell me again about the swimming races –

ANNE

That we had every week?

MARLI

And the relay race, with the best swimmers swimming last.

ANNE

Did I tell you about the time they invited the camp from across the lake to our championship?

MARLI

No – tell.

ANNE

We challenged them to a canoe race, all of our champions in one canoe.

MARLI

Were you in that canoe?

ANNE

Of course. I was three-time canoeing champion at Lake Cinibak.

MARLI

And did you win? Did your camp win?

ANNE

Well we won half way. When we turned around to come back, the other camp's canoe met us, and they tipped us over.

MARLI

They didn't.

ANNE

Yes, and paddled on home without going around the buoy either, so it didn't do them any good.

MARLI

Serves them right.

ANNE

We got our revenge. A couple of nights later, a bunch of us paddled across the lake and hijacked their ice cream shipment.

MARLI

What?

ANNE

Well, we meant to go over and scuttle their canoes.

MARLI

Scuttle them.

ANNE

Sink them. Put them under water. There's a plug you can unscrew, you see. But they kept them in a boathouse, the finks.

MARLI

Finks.

ANNE

The only lights on in the place were in the kitchen. It was pretty late at night. Their councilors must have been having a late night get-together somewhere, but the kitchen was empty, and the ice cream was there. So – we took it.

MARLI

And you ate it.

ANNE

No, our councilors were waiting for us on shore when we rowed back, we saw the flashlights. So we threw it overboard.

MARLI

And they never got it back?

ANNE

No one did.

MARLI

No one.

ANNE

It was a waste of good ice cream.

MARLI

I'll say. I'm going to send all my kids to camp.

ANNE

All six of them?

MARLI

Right.

ANNE

That will be expensive, six of them all at once.

MARLI

Robert's going to make lots and lots of money. He's going to buy me a car of my own. He's going to teach me to drive. I'll drive out and visit you, and when your husband comes home, I'll have a dinner party. I'm going to learn to cook.

ANNE

And try it out on us? Thanks a lot. Why don't I invite you two to dinner.

MARLI

Good. Then I'll know how. Oh – you know what I love about this place?

ANNE

What.

MARLI

The sun on the leaves. Just look at it. You think it's all green, but it's not. It's all different colors. Not just green, but green and gold. And all the shades of green.

ANNE

And when it rains?

MARLI

Then I love the rain on the leaves. And when the sun comes out again, the sun on the rain on the leaves.

ANNE

How's your headache.

MARLI

It's all right. I'm used to it. I'm going to change. . . .

(Exit Marli into the lodge. Anne follows her)

Anne stops at the desk to make a phone call, picking up the rotary phone from behind the counter.

(Enter Emma, from right, coming back from her walk.)

EMMA

Ben? Are you all right?

BEN

Yes. I'm fine. I hurt my knee, but it's all right now. How was your walk?

EMMA

It's beautiful up there. You can see all the way to the lake. And the colors go on and on. I can never believe in these colors, any other time of the years. Simply breathtaking.

(Anne looks out over the woods. After a while she exits inside.)

BEN

Emma? Do you wish you'd gone, when Sam died?

EMMA

What? No. Oh, no.

BEN

I do. I wish I'd gone when Clara did. Or instead of her, even better, instead, and have it over. Emma, I'm falling apart.

EMMA

Yes, I know. So am I.

BEN

No, I mean in pieces. Not just, little by little. Every now and again I have this dream, I wake up one morning, and an arm is missing, or I have no hand, or I have no leg, and I can't figure out how I'm going to get out of bed. You think that's funny?

EMMA

Yes, in a way. Ben, you have to laugh at things.

BEN

No I don't.

EMMA

Or you'll just end up howling, all the time.

BEN

Last week I went out to do a little border pruning. Sun hat, gloves, water bottle, pad to kneel on. After five minutes, I couldn't get up. I couldn't straighten my knee. There was nothing to hang on to. Nobody heard me when I called. It took me forty minutes to get back into the house. I had to crawl, sideways, up the walk and into the house.

EMMA

Oh, Ben. Why didn't you tell me?

BEN

Well, I was embarrassed.

EMMA

Did you call a doctor?

BEN

What could the doctor do? Tell me not to garden anymore. I used to pray I'd last, that I'd live – forever. Remember when I worked for Emerson Korf?

EMMA

Of course.

BEN

Vice President of Resources Development. Forty-two years with the same company. People just can't say that anymore. The traveling, first class hotels, golfing with the big men, everywhere I went. I had two secretaries –

EMMA

I remember.

BEN

– one just to keep track of me. Bob Myelin said to me –

EMMA

I know, Ben.

BEN

It was after we closed that big merger with Canfield –

EMMA

That's right.

BEN

Bob Myelin, president of the board, said to me, "If they made more men like you, Grant –"

EMMA

"We could do anything."

BEN

That's right. I guess you've heard that before. It's just that, there doesn't seem to be much left of me now. It's like I've sunk into a diminishing world. I used to be important.

EMMA

Oh Ben. You're just the same as you ever were. It's all a part of you, that doesn't change.

BEN

No, no, it's different now. And since Clara passed away, it's gotten even smaller. There used to be lots to do, Clara and I, we went out all the time, we had friends. The children were home at dinner time. I had a lot to come home to. Now it's gone. And I – I didn't grasp it at the time. I didn't know. Well. At least I still have you.

EMMA

Maybe I'll go first. You never know.

BEN

Oh don't say that. You know what, Emma, I'm starting to see things. I saw – I thought I saw

someone coming towards me. I think my mind is going.

EMMA

So is mine. I think it's because I'm starving.

The modern phone rings.

(Tony enters and answers it. Emma helps Ben to his feet and up the stairs.)

TONY

The Place. Yeah. Oh, hi. Yeah. Yeah, great. Sure I'll be there. Don't do anything till I get there – right.

(To Ben and Emma)

That was Marge from the sheriff's office. Calling about your corpse.

BEN

Not my corpse.

EMMA

Have they found anything out?

TONY

The coroner's doing an autopsy. But you know what? They got part of his coat. It was under him, and they got a lot of it. They found these big rocks in the pockets.

EMMA

Well. He was in the river.

TONY

But the pockets were buttoned. That's the thing. They're thinking it might have been suicide. I think it's amazing. Someone jumped from the bridge, and the rocks made sure he stayed under.

Anne enters, carrying her writing pad, sits down on the bench and writes.

BEN

Why is that amazing?

TONY

Because – no one knows who he is. Here he is, practically in my backyard, jumping into the river who knows how long ago, and nobody knows anything about him. I want to know.

BEN

Oh this is morbid. Why don't they bury him and leave him in peace?

TONY

But he already came back, in a way. Don't you think we owe it to him to find out who he was, why he did it?

BEN

No. He must have had a good reason, and that's private. Personal.

(Exit Ben into the lodge.)

TONY

Yeah, but I want to know.

EMMA

No do I. After all, Ben and I brought him back, in a manner of speaking.

TONY

They don't think he was a hiker.

EMMA

Oh? From his clothes?

TONY

No, from his shoes. They're getting this clothing expert from Philadelphia to come up and take a look at him.

EMMA

You will keep me posted.

(Marli enters, right.)

TONY

Of course. Do you need anything? I want to go down there now. Marge and some of the others from the sheriff's office are going to do some more digging. I want to help.

(Exit Tony into the lodge.)

ANNE

(To Marli)

There you are. Where did you go today? Did you find the old farm? Is there anything left?

(Ben enters.)

BEN

Emma? I'm making lunch. Chicken sandwiches all right?

I'm not hungry.

MARLI

Marli? Are you all right?

ANNE

Make me four of them. I'm starving.

EMMA

Four?

BEN

Well. One really big one. With lots of everything.

EMMA

One really big one coming up.

BEN

Marli?

ANNE

I found the road. I turned back.

MARLI

And Ben –

EMMA

Oh, Marli.

ANNE

No chicken bones.

EMMA

I thought I wouldn't make it. I feel funny. Did you just hear something?

MARLI

And I won't mistake the rat poison for pepper.

BEN

Here – turn –

ANNE

Anne turns Marli's face to the light so she can look at her eyes.

(Enter Tony from the lodge, putting on a jacket.)

EMMA
What rat poison? Is there rat poison?

TONY
Sure we keep rat poison. To poison the rats.

BEN
And any guests you want to get rid of.

TONY
You've found our secret. I'm off, then. I'll see you.

EMMA
Good hunting.

(Exit Tony, right.)

MARLI
I'm fine now. Listen, why don't we both go, later. It's a beautiful walk.

BEN
I will not mistake the rat poison. Anyway, it's under the sink.

ANNE
After lunch?

EMMA
Good.

ANNE
Or we could take lunch with us, and eat by the river. Marli?

MARLI
I smell curry.

BEN
Emma –

MARLI
Don't tell Robert –

BEN
Nothing. I'll make those sandwiches.

ANNE
Marli –

(Marli goes into a convulsion and drops to the ground.)

Oh, Marli...

(Exit Ben.)

Anne kneels by Marli, watching as her convulsions continue. When she can, Anne loosens Marli's collar. Enter Paul from the lodge, carrying his overnight case, which he sets it on the counter.

PAUL

Creighton? Creighton?

(Enter Creighton from the lodge.)

CREIGHTON

Yes, Mr. Gallagher? You leaving today?

PAUL

I just have to run down to town for a few days.

CREIGHTON

Going to see about that new play of yours.

PAUL

No, no. They'd have called me. No, I hadn't planned to be up here this long. There are a few things I need to take care of. Hold on to my room for a day or two.

CREIGHTON

Yes, sir.

PAUL

I'll be back. Unless I call you.

CREIGHTON

All right, Mr. Gallagher. Always a pleasure.

PAUL

Thanks, Creighton. For everything.

(Paul picks up his case and heads off left. Exit.)

CREIGHTON

Anytime, Mr. Gallagher.

Marli falls unconscious. Anne gathers her in her arms and holds her.

ANNE

Oh, Marli...Marli...

(Tony comes outside to where Emma is sitting.)

EMMA

Have you ever seen such a beautiful morning?

TONY

Oh – hi. You're up early.

EMMA

I was called by the sunrise. I couldn't sleep. I've been watching the dawn. And I think the colors on those trees are brighter today than they've ever been.

TONY

Could be.

EMMA

Yes, it's true. I've been remembering sunrises. I have a collection, you see.

TONY

You do.

EMMA

I'll bet you do too.

TONY

I come out here every morning. This is the best time of day, I think.

EMMA

I do too. I was remembering the sunrise the day after my husband, Sam, died.

TONY

Oh...

EMMA

The days have been different ever since that morning. I really think the sun moved over that day. Mornings have been redder. The sun isn't quite as warm. It gets darker now.

TONY

How long ago did he die?

EMMA

Oh, years and years. Eleven years. You get used to it – missing someone. It takes time. I want to know, the morning I don't wake up anymore, will the light change?

TONY

Of course it will.

EMMA

But there's no one to look, for me. Sam's gone, you see. Ben – isn't what you call a morning person. And my daughter has other concerns.

TONY

I'll look for you, Mrs. Pagett.

EMMA

Will you?

TONY

I'll be here.

EMMA

Good. That's all right, then.

TONY

Can I get you something?

EMMA

Oh, no, I'm fine. Don't let me hold you up. Are you off digging again? Have you found anything?

TONY

Not yet.

EMMA

Good luck. Tell me if you find anything.

TONY

I will.

(Tony exits as Marli stirs.)

MARLI

Oh...

Sh...lie still, Marli. You'll be sick.

ANNE

What happened...? Did I...

MARLI

Sh...

ANNE

It happened, didn't it, it happened...

MARLI

Marli turns, stiffens, and retches as Anne holds her.

Sh...hush...

ANNE

Oh God... God...

MARLI

(She begins to cry.)

It'll all right. It will be all right, sh, oh honey. Don't cry...

ANNE

(Enter Ben, from left.)

There you are. What are you doing there?

BEN

I've been here all morning.

EMMA

I went down to check on the car. There's a squirrel back there who definitely felt entitled to the rest of my toast.

BEN

Did he.

EMMA

He told me so. So I threw it to him, and you know what? A blue jay got there first. You never heard such an argument.

BEN

EMMA

I wish I had.

BEN

I'm tempted to go and make more toast. That little squirrel was angry!

EMMA

Ben, wait. I'd like you to think about, you need to think about moving somewhere where you can get better care.

BEN

I don't need better care.

EMMA

You will.

BEN

Don't jinx me, Emma. I'm not leaving my place. I like it. I'm used to it. And with you coming once or twice a week, I'm perfectly all right.

EMMA

I won't be coming.

BEN

What?

EMMA

I won't be able to come. Ben, I have a tumor.

BEN

What?

EMMA

(Touches a part of her head.)

Here. Just here. I went in, because of those headaches I've been getting. I put it off. I knew. I knew.

BEN

How – bad is it? How long – ? Emma...

EMMA

That's what I've been trying to decide. So what do you think, Ben. Do I let them cut me open, and risk that I'll still be me when there are pieces missing? Do I agree to live without what may be important parts of me, or do I wait. I could just – wait. I don't know what's right.

Oh, Emma . . .

BEN

He goes to her and holds her for a moment.

I'm all right. It had to happen.

EMMA

No it didn't.

BEN

No, well, you expect something. It's still like walking into a truck.

EMMA

You should have told me. How long have you known?

BEN

Not long. Eight days. When I called you about coming up here. The day before, Doctor Calkins told me.

EMMA

What are we going to do?

BEN

(He sits down with her.)

(Marli sits up.)

I won't take them. I won't take the medication again. I may as well die.

MARLI

Marli . . .

ANNE

Maybe it was just a fluke. It may not happen again –

MARLI

(She moves)

Ahh –

Marli is ripped by a crashing headache as she retches again.

Marli, now listen to me. You will have to go back on your anticonvulsants for the time being.

ANNE

No –
MARLI

ANNE
Listen. You may be over-medicated, and if so we can find out by experimenting with lower dosages.

MARLI
You are a nurse, aren't you.

ANNE
No, I'm a doctor.

MARLI
A doctor.

ANNE
A neurologist, in fact. I've sent for some of your medication –

MARLI
No – no –

ANNE
Marli, please.

MARLI
I've only just started being alive.

ANNE
It's just too risky.

MARLI
Why? What could happen? This could happen again? Hasn't it been worth it, the past five days – it's been worth it to me.

ANNE
Uncontrolled seizures don't necessarily wait five days. Seizures like this one can cause brain damage. They can land you in an institution. If they aren't controlled, they can kill you.

MARLI
What am I going to do? What am I going to do?

She subsides against Anne, who holds her.

EMMA

Do you remember the Christmas when we had all those balloons? I don't remember why – oh yes, Jonathan had been selling them at the county fair and he had all those left over, red white and blue, and he blew them all up on Christmas Eve. The children thought they were more fun than their presents. Especially when they burst.

BEN

Where was I?

EMMA

Why, you were there. Weren't you?

BEN

I don't remember balloons.

EMMA

I thought everyone was there.

BEN

No. I remember when Anne and Ben junior and Sharie and Jane staged a history of the family. Remember.

EMMA

Oh yes.

BEN

That was so fun. And all the kids dressed up –

EMMA

In those old clothes –

BEN

And that song – how did it go –

(He hums a tune)

EMMA

No, no –

(She hums a tune)

BEN

Are you sure?

(She keeps humming, he joins her)

MARLI
Robert will never marry me now.

ANNE
Of course he will.

MARLI
Not if there's something wrong with me. He won't.

ANNE
He will if he loves you.

MARLI
He doesn't love me. He just wants to marry me.

ANNE
How do you know that?

MARLI
Of course I know. But I would have loved him. Oh I would have loved him.

(Emma and Ben have stopped humming.)

BEN
Are you all right?

EMMA
Oh. It's just hard to believe in a better world, when I'm looking at this one. I shouldn't feel sorry for myself. But oh I just . . .

BEN
You want to hold on.

EMMA
Yes. I want to hold on.

(Tony runs in, leaps the porch steps.)

EMMA
You've found something.

TONY
Yup. They won't let me keep it. They took it to the station.

Tony goes in to the desk and starts lifting out old registration books from the bottom drawers and

piles them on top of the desk.

EMMA

You go, Ben. I want to stay here.

(Ben goes inside to Tony.)

BEN

So. What did you find?

TONY

We found a ring. A man's ring. Just pressed into the clay below where one of his hands lay. And there's a mark on the ring. I've seen it before. I think he may have stayed here. Or been here. Wrong books. Damn it.

BEN

Don't you think that would be a bit of a coincidence?

TONY

Why? He fell in, no, he jumped in to our river. Here. I know where to look.

(He exits into the lodge. Ben starts to follow him.)

BEN

Emma, want some breakfast?

EMMA

No. Not now.

MARLI

What is it like. To have a husband.

ANNE

Oh. Well. It's...

MARLI

No. You know what I mean. What's it like. Tell me. Please.

ANNE

Marli, I can't.

MARLI

I'll never know. If you don't tell me I'll never know.

ANNE

You can't know that.

MARLI

Oh come on. What are my chances now. Like this. Anne. What's Edward like.

ANNE

Oh. Edward. Well.

EMMA

Anne. It's me. It's Emma. I'm here at the Place In The Woods. I know that you are here too somehow. I wish you could hear me. Anne, I need you. I need someone. Anne. Help me.

ANNE

Then his hands might travel down, loosening your clothes as they go, slipping inside to warm and caress. I'm ticklish, just here at my waist. Whenever he touches me there I squirm, I can't help it. He saves that. We both know it. Where was I?

MARLI

You were unbuttoning his shirt.

ANNE

Yes. I draw up his undershirt. His stomach is smooth and soft. Just a little rounded. His chest is rough with hair almost to the shoulders.

MARLI

And then.

ANNE

He kisses my neck, and my throat, as he unfastens and slips off my skirt. As he looks at me, as he touches me, I can feel his attention on my body, like a kind of heat.

MARLI

Robert kissed me. Three times. Once just on the cheek. Then on my birthday, he kissed my lips, just soft. And when he asked me, would I marry him, he held my hands, and kissed me for a long time.

ANNE

Was it nice?

MARLI

Yes. It was nice.

ANNE

Marli, we should go in.

MARLI

Not yet. Please.

EMMA

You know now, don't you. What's on the other side of sleep. I can still feel your presence when I

reach for you. Just as I can feel Sam's. Or at least the memory. I feel something. Are you waiting for me? Any of you. I would have waited for you.

(Enter Paul from left, carrying his bag, wearing an overcoat and hat.)

PAUL

Creighton? Creighton!

(Enter Creighton)

CREIGHTON

Mr. Gallagher.

PAUL

As you can see, I'm back. You still have my room.

CREIGHTON

Yes, sir. Everything go all right for you, sir, down in New York City?

PAUL

Everything's fine. Couldn't be better.

CREIGHTON

And when will your play start?

PAUL

Any day now. I don't have much time. To enjoy the peace. And the beauty. I'm expecting a call

—

CREIGHTON

All right, Mr. Gallagher. I'll call you as soon as it comes in.

PAUL

Long distance.

CREIGHTON

Yes, sir.

PAUL

Put my bag in my room.

CREIGHTON

I will, sir.

(Exit Paul. Creighton becomes Tony.)

(Enter Ben, sees Tony examines Paul's bag, trying to open it.)

BEN

What's this?

TONY

It's from our storeroom. It's been there as long as I can remember. But this, this is what I was looking for. See. The same initials were on the ring, written just this same way. Ah.

Tony opens the case.

BEN

Whose is it.

TONY

We'll see.

BEN

I mean, whose is it now. Should you be going through that?

TONY

He's dead, isn't he, if it's the same guy.

BEN

But if it isn't.

TONY

Then he never came back and picked it up, did he. It amounts to the same thing.

BEN

What's that?

Tony lifts out Paul's script.

TONY

It's a book. No. It's a play script. Watch out, it's falling apart. Here. Paul Alexander Gallagher. He's written all over it. P.A.G.

(Tony gets out a register, opens it.)

BEN

P.A.G. I'm B.A.G. Benjamin Allen Grant. Close, isn't it. He's been dead a hundred years.

TONY

Not that long. Look. Here it is. December 13, 1922.

No. Go on.

BEN

Right here.

TONY

That's the day I was born.

BEN

You're kidding.

TONY

No I'm not. That's the day I was born, in Springtown, Illinois.

BEN

Well here it is. December 13. He signed in, you see. And he never signed out.

TONY

Who was he.

BEN

Who knows. But we found him. I'll tell 'em at the station.

TONY

Tony picks up the modern phone, starts dialing as Ben looks at the register.

I was born on that day. He's been rotting in the earth. And all that time, I've been doing – nothing. The same. Rotting on the earth. I was Vice President of Resources Development for Emerson Korf. I flew in and out of New Jersey almost every week. I had two secretaries, one just to keep track of me. We had a house. Clara and I built it ourselves. I wonder if it's still there. I wonder if there's anything, anywhere, left of me that's important.

BEN

Ben and Tony continues looking through the old registers.

It's lovely.

MARLI

The sunset?

ANNE

Dark coming into the sky. That blue, there, is so beautiful. I never notice things when I'm on

MARLI

medication.

ANNE

That can't be true.

MARLI

It's true. I'm either asleep, or trying to keep my eyes open. I never noticed anything. I will now. I'll notice. I'll look. If the sun comes in the window of my room, I'll notice. Because it's the same sun, the same as that – blinding – bright – beautiful thing. I'll open the windows. I'll make them open them, and I'll breathe the air. And the trees. I can still see the trees. And I'll remember. And I'll know.

ANNE

Know what.

MARLI

That the trees are the same.

EMMA

They're patient. The trees are patient.

MARLI

They don't go anywhere. And anything can happen to them.

EMMA

They can get struck by lightening.

MARLI

They can get planted in a rock. Or on the wrong side of the mountain. Or on the edge of a cliff.

EMMA

They just live.

ANNE

But you know what happens to rock. As the trees grow, they break it.

EMMA

Yes.

MARLI

That's right. They do. They just live, and they grow, and they break it.

EMMA

They break it.

Ben and Tony come out to Emma, carrying the old registers.

Emma?
BEN

I've been thinking about the trees.
EMMA

I think I've found your Dr. Larsen.
BEN

Anne?
EMMA

Ben gives her a register book, as he flips through other registers.

TONY
She signed in as Mrs., but it's the only Larsen we ever had.

EMMA
Oh. Anne.

BEN
Who are all these Baxters? It looks like an invasion. Seven -- eight --

TONY
Oh, the Baxter kids.

BEN
Nine -- eleven -- what a family.

TONY
They weren't all Baxters. Some of them were friends, cousins they brought along. I used to play with them. What a bunch.

BEN
Every July --

TONY
Third week of July, till the middle of August. Old Mrs. Baxter brought them up every summer. Sometimes she'd bring a crowd of friends.

Ben finds the name is a register.

BEN
Marli Baxter. Where's the husband?

TONY

Mr. Baxter came up on weekends.

BEN

Here is is. Lionel? No. Leonard.

TONY

Old Mrs. Baxter. She was something. She built this bench for us when the old one fell apart. There's a plaque on the side.

Ben finds the plaque.

BEN

Why, here's your Anne again. "For Anne. Thank you for everything. Marli Baxter"

TONY

She used to teach us songs. Get us to sing, the whole pack of us..."Dip dip and swing and back, flashing like silver, swift as the wild moon's flight, dip dip and swing."

Tony exits inside, taking all the registers but the one Emma still holds.

EMMA

Anne saw these trees. These very same trees. And they will still be here.

BEN

Aren't you cold?

EMMA

No. I'm fine.

BEN

I'm freezing.

ANNE

Let's go inside.

MARLI

Not yet. Anne. Thank you.

Anne hugs her as the 1920s phone rings. Paul enters and picks up the phone.

(These gestures are the same as Paul makes as a ghost.)

PAUL

Yes? Speaking. Yes, put him through. Thanks. Phil? Yes, Phil, hey, thanks for calling. Yes, I can hear you perfectly. Like you're next door. Wonderful. Listen. I want you to ask Mr. Bergeson to reconsider. I'm right for the part. You saw the notices. Phil, please. I'll do anything. Phil, there is nothing wrong with me. I don't have a problem, I can hear perfectly – Phil, you know me. Phil . . . sure, sure. All right. Yeah, you too. All right, Phil. Thanks.

Paul puts the phone down.

(Marli and Anne exit slowly into the lodge.)

(Paul comes down the steps wearing an overcoat and hat, exactly as in his first entrance in Act One. He looks around, makes his gesture of farewell from his last scene in his play, and decisively heads off right.)

(Ben turns and sees him. He starts to gasp. He tracks Paul all the way off stage, gasping.)

Ben drops to his knees, clutching his chest.

EMMA

Ben! Ben!

(She runs to him.)

Are you all right? Ben, what's the matter? Ben!

BEN

I saw – I saw – I'm all right, Emma. I just – I saw a man. I saw him just as plain as I see you. He looked at me. He didn't see me. And Emma, I could see right through him to the trees on the other side of him.

EMMA

You saw –

BEN

I saw a ghost. Oh my God. My hands . . .

Emma takes Ben's hands.

EMMA

You must have –

BEN

I saw a ghost. Oh, Emma. Let's go home.

EMMA

It's just the news I sprang on you. And that body we found, it's on your mind, that's all. The trees are moving all the time. It could have been them.

BEN

I know what I saw. Emma, I've had enough. I want to go home.

EMMA

Yes, all right, Ben. I'm finished here. Oh, Ben.

They hold each other, and then they go arm in arm into the lodge.

(Marli enters from the lodge. She stands on the porch looking out.)

Anne hands Marli a glass of water, opens a bottle of prescription medication and tips out three.

MARLI

All of them?

ANNE

All of them. We can't take any chances now.

MARLI

Back to sleep then. Was it awful? When I – when I had the seizure. I don't remember anything. I remember walking in the woods. I turned around. And then, you.

ANNE

Marli, please.

MARLI

All right.

Marli takes the pills in her hand, raises the glass.

To – Hightop. And to the tree I climbed. And to jumping off the rock into the water.

ANNE

And swimming.

MARLI

And learning to swim again. And touching the rocks on the bottom. And – to everything.

ANNE

This isn't the end. I promise you. We'll work on it. We'll find you better medication, a better dosage. I'm not going to let this go.

MARLI

Thanks.

Marli takes the meds and pretends to drop off to sleep.

MARLI

Clunk.

ANNE

Come on. Let's see about lunch.

MARLI

No. Let's walk down to the river. One last time.

ANNE

Not the last time. I promise you.

Marli and Anne exit right.

Ben enters carrying his case, which he puts it on the counter. Tony and Emma follow, with Tony carrying their other bags.

TONY

Got everything? You're sure?

EMMA

If not, we'll just have to come back.

TONY

Come back anytime. It's been a pleasure. Mr. Grant. Sign here, please.

BEN

No, I don't think I will. You do it, Emma.

(He goes down the steps and exits left.)

EMMA

I had a lovely time. I envy you this place.

TONY

As long as the roof doesn't fall in. Still. We've outlasted the river. There's only the mountains to go.

(He starts to escorts her offstage left. Emma stops.)

EMMA

I'm sorry. I thought I heard – no. It's nothing.

(They exeunt right.)

(Enter Marli from the lodge. She walks slowly, awkwardly. She is barely alert, barely focused. She goes to stand on the porch.)

Anne and Anthony join Marli, as Anthony carries their bags.

MARLI

It was beautiful.

ANNE

It is.

MARLI

Yes. It is.

Anne helps Marli as they make their way down the steps and exit, with Anthony carrying their bags. The lights fade. The phone begins to ring. Blackout. After a moment, the phone stops ringing.

The End.