**A Splinter in the Heart**  
by Dave Carley  
from the novel by Al Purdy

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**Play Synopsis**

Patrick Cameron has just turned 18 – and is standing at the crossroads of his life. The same age as his century, he is about to graduate from Trenton High. The Great War is drawing to an agonized close and his war-exhausted hometown is beginning to think of a future beyond it. But the giant British Chemical plant at the north end of town continues to manufacture bombs and gunpowder, destined for use in the dying moments of the European conflict.

Until now, Patrick’s world has been a compact one, consisting of his mother, his lumberjack grandfather Portugee, and school buddies. The Camerons are poor but making do and Patrick’s mother has high hopes her son will go on to further education. But events are about to conspire against the expected unrolling of Patrick’s life. In short order, his world is rocked by illness, death, first-love and – then literally – the massive explosion at the British Chemical Plant.

Based against the backdrop of true events, *A Splinter in the Heart* is a drama based on the 1990 novel by acclaimed poet Al Purdy.

**Cast**

**NARRATOR** 70 – (eventually revealed to be Old Patrick); Portugee (80s)  
**PATRICK** 18 – Also, Actor 1  
**JEAN** 17 – English accent. Also, Actor 2  
**MALE** 40s – Actor 3; Announcer; Principal; Red (70s); Reverend William Hartwell (40); Clive Tompkins (50, English accent); Halifax man leaving town; Male student (18); Engineer Smith; Background voices in classroom, on Trenton Streets, at Swimming Beach and Funeral.  
**FEMALE** 40s – Actor 4; Miss McLaren (50, Scottish accent); Mother (40); Edith Tompkins (English accent, posh), Betty Silcox (70s). Background voices in classroom, on Trenton streets, at swimming beach and Funeral.

**Time and Place**

The story described is set in 1918. The modern storyline is vague – but logically would be in the late 50s to 60s. The play is set in and around Trenton, Ontario.

**Notes**

Great liberties have taken with time, place and the novel itself. The play is set in a time when Patrick might still have been alive, though Al Purdy didn’t actually publish *A Splinter in the Heart* until 1990. The explosion did indeed happen on Thanksgiving, 1918. The Glen Miller Rock is very real. The playwright has no concrete evidence it is a site for hook-ups by libidinous locals, as alleged by Portugee.

The radio conceit means actors can, in fact, work from scripts, as they would were they actually in a studio performing a radio play. The Narrator is not involved in creating the SFX; in truth, he probably skipped most of the rehearsals in favour of some quiet time at the nearby Quinte Hotel. (To be geographically fair, it should be noted that both Belleville and Trenton claim ownership of the Quinte Hotel. There is merit to both claims but, for the purpose of this play, the Quinte is in downtown Trenton.)

A portion of Al Purdy’s poem ‘A Handful of Earth’ is paraphrased near the end of the play. It is indicated. A short excerpt from the novel is used in the scene when Patrick sits at Portugee’s bedside.

**Acknowledgements**

*A Splinter in the Heart* was commissioned by Festival Players of Prince Edward County. A workshop was held by the Festival in August 2015, with the following participants: Sarah Phillips (Director), Katerina Sokykao (Stage Manager) and Actors John Dolan, Scott Kuipers, Sophia Fabiilli, Lisa Norton and Craig Pike.

*A Splinter in the Heart* premiered in a Festival Players of Prince Edward County production at the big tent at Rosehall Run Vineyards, August 3-21, 2016. Sarah Phillips – Artistic Director of the Festival Players – directed. The cast consisted of Ben Chiasson, Stuart Clow, Caitlin Driscoll, Darcy Gerhart and John Jarvis. Musician and Foley artist was Tom Keenan. Composer and Music Director was Andrew Penner. Set design was by John Thompson and Costumes were designed by Anne Redish. Stage Manager was Rob Middleton.

The playwright extends particular thanks to Sarah Phillips, for her support and guidance in bringing this play to fruition.

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**Act One**

Pre-show.

As the audience enters, the cast (minus NARRATOR) moves on and off the stage, preparing for a radio broadcast. They are assembling and testing foley items, putting up music stands and trying mikes.

In addition to the fairly rapid set up, the cast is clearly keeping an anxious eye on the clock – and the door. Something is not right. Not full panic yet, but definitely a few worried conversations. The audience is not privy to any of these and they should not be audible – the intent is not to send the audience into quiet.

Finally, at about five minutes to curtain, ACTOR 1 – who seems the most worried – approaches ACTOR 3.

**ACTOR 1:** *(Mostly audible.)* You want me to check down the street?

**ACTOR 3:** Give him another minute or two.

*(More setting up.)*

**ACTOR 2:** I saw him this morning, so at least he’s alive.

**ACTOR 4:** Should I call his wife?

**ACTOR 2:** I already did. She says she doesn’t know and she doesn’t care.

*(More setting up. Finally, ACTOR 3 – who is more or less in charge – turns to ACTOR 1.)*

**ACTOR 3:** *(Audible)* OK, you know what, you better take a fast look.

*(ACTOR 1 speeds to the exit.)*

*(Calling after him.)* Try the Quinte Hotel first!

*(A bit more set up. But the clock now shows the hour and the show must go on, without ACTOR 1 and whoever he’s been sent to find. ACTOR 3 and ACTOR 4 consult, and audible.)*

We’ll have to start.

**ACTOR 2:** But we’re two down now!

**ACTOR 3:** Live radio waits for no man!

*(ACTOR 3 goes to a central mike, turns to watch for the studio light to go on. It does, and he begins. There could be a burst of intro theme music.)*

**ANNOUNCER:**  It’s that time folks. 8 o’clock – and that means County Radio Playhouse! Tonight’s show is the world premiere of ‘A Splinter in the Heart’ by our very own Al Purdy…

Al’s becoming nationally-known as a poet. A lot of his versifying features Trenton and the area around it – and even some of us. But Al wanted to take a stab at writing a novel because he says everyone and their drooling dog is doing it nowadays.

‘A Splinter in the Heart’ is Al’s tale of growing up in Trenton, and the incredible, true events of almost fifty years ago – Autumn 1918.

But first: a word from our sponsor.

*(SFX: GM ad. If possible the ad or jingle should try and set the date again – e.g. ‘Test Drive the new 67 Chevy Camaro’ – see ad on You Tube. Or, could vary it and, instead of ‘See the USA/In your Chevrolet’ they could sing ‘See Quinte Bay/in your Chevrolet’.*

*(During the jingle PATRICK returns, with NARRATOR in two. The three jingle singers – ANNOUNCER, FEMALE and JEAN – all register relief and maybe some disgust as PATRICK visually indicates that NARRATOR has indeed been drinking. NARRATOR sits and PATRICK joins the others. Song ends.)*

**ANNOUNCER:** A Splinter in the Heart.

*(SFX: A kind of whooshing sound, something suggesting time, motion, science. Underneath following there can be various – e.g. glacier cracking, wood chopping, early cars.)*

**NARRATOR:** If this was then – and not now.  
If you’d been here – before any of this was here – then here is what you’d see:  
A land covered with ice.  
The ice receding, leaving in its wake a desperation of rocks.  
Forests rising dense and dark, sheltering a first wave of humans.  
Then, like the ice, they too begin to recede, in the face of a second wave:  
A mighty tide of settlers, marching into the forest,  
Grimly pushing everything – and everyone – before them – back.   
Felling trees, floating rafts of pine down the Trent, milling the lumber.  
Whaling away in frustration at the rocky soil that all those trees were hiding.  
Growing a town.  
A growing town with dams, factories, hotels, steeples. Lots of steeples.  
Horses in the street, now automobiles, filling the town air with exhaust.  
  
And a high school where they are teaching girls to be wives. And boys to go to war. Here it stands. Red Brick. Classical. Almost noble-looking. Education matters in Trenton, 1918.

We’ll go up the front steps. Come inside. Pause a moment, let your eyes adjust to the gloom. Room Two is on your left. The Grade 12 room. Push that frosted glass door open, will you, walk with me past the moronic teenagers. Come to the back of the class. To where the lanky boy sits. The lanky, distracted boy. His mind everywhere, anywhere but on the lesson.

Patrick’s barely 18. Let’s stand behind him. Look over his shoulder. Let’s watch where his distracted mind is about to head…

*(BIZ: Class ambiance up. General restlessness; it’s nearly the end of the school day.)*

**McLAREN:** …The last glacial period occurred in the Pleistocene Epoch, ending 15,000 years ago. It was this glaciation that bequeathed us our current landscape – for example, the magnificent rock just north of here at Glen Miller. The glaciations - Patrick? Patrick. Patrick Cameron – are you feeling ill?

**PATRICK:** No, Ma’am.

**McLAREN:** Is there something wrong with your neck?

**PATRICK:** No ma’am.

**McLAREN:**  Because it keeps turning your poor wee head towards the window.

*(BIZ: Laughs from class.)*

**PATRICK:** My neck is fine, ma’am.

**McLAREN:** Then get it to face frontwards.

*(SFX: A knock and then the door opening.)*

**PRINCIPAL:** Excuse me, Miss McLaren –

**McLAREN:** Principal Richards –

*(BIZ: Class has gone quiet.)*

**PRINCIPAL:** I have a new student for you.

*(BIZ from MALE STUDENT: a low but discernible wolf whistle, laughter.)*

**McLAREN:** *(Aside)* Class!

**PRINCIPAL:** ...This is Jean Tompkins. Her family has just moved to Trenton – they’re new to Canada actually. I hope you will all welcome her.

**McLAREN:** *(Sotto)* But of course.

**PRINCIPAL:** I’ll leave her with you, then. Good afternoon Miss McLaren, class.

*(SFX: Door close.)*

*(BIZ: Class noise up a bit.)*

**McLAREN:** Class. Quiet. It’s Jean?

**JEAN:** Yes Ma’am. Jean Tompkins.

**McLAREN:** Perhaps you’d like to tell us where you’re from, Jean.

**JEAN:** England, Ma’am. Originally. But most recently, I’ve been living in New Zealand. My father was – posted – there. At the British Chemical plant.

**McLAREN:** We’ll soon be studying the magnificent glaciations in the south island of New Zealand. Did you ever see them?

**JEAN:** No Ma’am, father’s factory was just outside Auckland, in the north island.

**McLAREN:** That’s a pity. Well Jean, you’ll need a place to sit.

**MALE STUDENT:** *(Sotto)* On my lap.

**McLAREN:** Bobby! There’s an empty desk in the back row – beside Patrick Cameron. You won’t find him a nuisance. Patrick spends the entire class looking out the window.

*(SFX: The bell.)*

*(SFX: The class packing up.)*

*(BIZ: Rising chatter.)*

*(Over.)* I want you all to read ahead! To the end of the Pleistocene era! Class dismissed!

*(BIZ: Hubbub.)*

**MALE STUDENT:** New girl’s a real looker eh Pat?

**PATRICK:** Yeah.

**MALE STUDENT:** We’re going swimming – you coming?

**PATRICK:** I have to go downtown first and ask my grandfather to supper.

**MALE STUDENT:** While you’re down there, why doncha buy a bouquet for Miss England?

**PATRICK:** They don’t sell flowers at the Quinte Hotel.

*(SFX: Class sounds up, leading to Exterior downtown street noises at the Quinte Hotel. One or two cars, horses. A wahooga car horn. )*

*(BIZ: The odd greeting on street, under.)*

**PORTUGEE:** Hey Red, you know what my daughter in law calls us?

**RED:** What does she call us.

**PORTUGEE:** Leaners.

**RED:** Leaners?

**PORTUGEE:** ‘All you old fools do is lean against that hotel.’

**RED:** It’s not all we do, Portugee.

**PORTUGEE:** What else do we do, Red?

**RED:** We go inside the hotel.

**PORTUGEE:** And lean against the bar.

**RED:** ‘Leaners.’

**PORTUGEE:** She didn’t mean it respectful.

**RED:** Leaning is a serious business requiring skill and balance.

**PORTUGEE:** She says we lean cuz we’re too drunk to stand straight.

**RED:** She’d be right.

**PORTUGEE:** She says leaning is morally disgraceful.

**RED:** She’s tough, that daughter in law of yours.

**PORTUGEE:** It’s all the praying she does. Makes a woman hard.

**RED:** Hey, is that your grandson?

**PORTUGEE:** Straighten up, Red.

*(SFX: Footsteps approaching, under.)*

**PATRICK:** *(Approaching.)* Hi Portugee. Red.

**PORTUGEE:** Patrick/

**RED:** Hiya Patrick.

**PATRICK:** What’re you doing?

**RED:** Standing/

**PORTUGEE:** Observing. Haven’t seen you in a while.

**PATRICK:** School.

**PORTUGEE:** Red, make some room on the wall for him.

**PATRICK:** I can’t stay. Mom wants to know if you’ll come to supper.

**PORTUGEE:** I guess. Can Red tag along?

**PATRICK:** I don’t see why not. Oh, Reverend Hartwell’s coming too.

**RED:** Regretfully I’m busy.

*(SFX: Town clock ringing four, under.)*

That’ll be four. I’m gonna step inside for a bit.

**PATRICK:** Portugee –

**PORTUGEE:** I think I’ll take a pass on supper too.

**PATRICK:** You just said –

**PORTUGEE:** I’m not breaking bread with that self-righteous preacher prick. Hartwell’s got a pine log shoved so far up his arsehole when he opens his mouth you can count the rings.

**PATRICK:** Aw, Portugee. You just made it impossible for me to ever look at him again.

**PORTUGEE:** And I seen him and your mother walking on Front Street.

**PATRICK:** He’s her minister!

**PORTUGEE:**  ‘Walking together’.

**PATRICK:** Probably on church business/

**PORTUGEE:** Not just one time. Four times I seen ‘em.

**PATRICK:** You really can’t come? You’ll be doing me a favour.

**PORTUGEE:** Damn, boy, why’d you say that?

**PATRICK:** Cuz I knew it might work. It’s roast chicken. Apple pie.

**PORTUGEE:** What time.

**PATRICK:** Mom said about six.

**PORTUGEE:** Six! What kinda ridiculous late Bible-thumping time is that?

**PATRICK:** I don’t like Hartwell either. But you know Mom.

**PORTUGEE:** She always leaned to Godliness. But she’s deteriorated since your Dad died and you moved off the farm and into town. It’s from living underneath all these steeples. Aw Patrick, if Hartwell’s there I’ll have ta watch my language and

**PATRICK:** You have to watch it with Mom anyway. And you can’t spit. It drives her crazy when you spit.

**PORTUGEE:** I know. Wanta see me hit the stop sign?

**PATRICK:** Portugee.

**PORTUGEE:** You always want to see me hit the stop sign.

**PATRICK:** When I was ten. I’m 18.

**PORTUGEE:** I got a real good gob.

**PATRICK:** All right.

**PORTUGEE:** Here goes.

*(BIZ: PORTUGEE spitting.)*

*(SFX: Quiet. Then a ding as a giant gob hits the sign.)*

**PATRICK:** See you tonight!

**PORTUGEE:** Why’re you in such a hurry to get away?

**PATRICK:** *(Off already.)* I’m going swimming! Six o’clock!

**PORTUGEE:** I’ll be dead a hunger by then.

*(SFX: Street sounds up. Wahooga horn. Then sound of screen door shutting.)*

*(SFX: Interior. Kitchen sounds.)*

**MOTHER:** Patrick – is that you?

**PATRICK:** Going swimming, mom. I’ll be back by/

**MOTHER:** Just a minute.

**PATRICK:** Mom!

**MOTHER:** Patrick.

**PATRICK:** The guys are waiting.

**MOTHER:** One of your teachers called. Miss McLaren.

**PATRICK:** That old bat?

**MOTHER:** ‘That old bat’ is concerned about you. She says you’re passing but your marks aren’t good enough for college.

**PATRICK:** We’ve had this discussion a hundred times.

**MOTHER:** And we’ll have it a hundred times more until you get smart. You father went to Guelph and/

**PATRICK:** I’m not going to any damn college to learn to be a damn farmer. *(Pause.)* I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have used those words.

**MOTHER:** I guess I don’t have to ask if you saw your grandfather on the way home.

**PATRICK:** Besides, we don’t have the money for college.

**MOTHER:** Reverend Hartwell says the church has bursaries.

**PATRICK:** We’re NOT taking charity. If I go to college – IF IF – if I go it’ll be because I’ve earned the money, not cuz some pompous, head up his arse

**MOTHER:** Patrick!

**PATRICK:** And school - McLaren’s so boring! In history class we’re still on the fur trade. And in geography it’s all glaciers. Ice age this ice age that. She should be talking about the War! THAT’S what’s important. *(Pause.)* I’ll try harder. I promise.

**MOTHER:** Thank you. Did you ask your grandfather to supper?

**PATRICK:** Yup, he’s delighted.

**MOTHER:** I’ll bet. Did you tell him Reverend Hartwell is coming?

**PATRICK:** Yeah.

**MOTHER:** Is he drunk?

**PATRICK:** At this point, no. He was outside the hotel with Red.

**MOTHER:** Leaning.

**PATRICK:** I can’t guarantee what state he’ll be in by 6.

**MOTHER:** Reverend Hartwell is Temperance.

**PATRICK:** Portugee knows. I’m going down to the river. Just a quick swim.

**MOTHER:** Be here before your grandfather arrives.

**PATRICK:** If he upsets you so much, why do you keep inviting him?

**MOTHER:** He’s your father’s father. He’s family. He doesn’t live anything near how I’d like him to live. But so long as I’ve got breath to pray, he may change.

**PATRICK:** You’ll be praying for a long time.

**MOTHER:** *(Softens.)* Leopards change their spots. I’ve seen it happen. And if a nice roast chicken gooses the process along, well, I’ll keep inviting him. And you’re the apple of his eye. Maybe that’s why I tolerate him. Was he spitting?

**PATRICK:** It’s getting a little embarrassing.

**MOTHER:** He’s just showing off for you. Now go swimming and let me get supper.

*(SFX: River sounds up, faintly, under.)*

*(SFX: Sound of guys shouting etc. Splashes.)*

**NARRATOR:** They’re good swimmers, Patrick and his chums. Playing out the last minutes of their youth, September 1918. Some with thoughts of enlisting, if the war doesn’t end first. College for the one or two of them whose parents have money. Work for the rest. Maybe at the Munitions plant up the river. But now, in this moment, on this day, they have the gift of an Indian summer, a precious chance to jump off the bridge, hit the flat water of the Trent, swim ashore, run back to the bridge and do it again… like they’ve done all their brief lives.

*(SFX: Swimming sounds up.)*

Eventually they run their separate ways. All but Patrick, who’s eating late tonight. And something is making him thoughtful. It’s that new girl… What else could make a young man thoughtful? He lingers at the side of the river, skipping stones…

*(SFX: Stones plunking.)*

**PATRICK:** *(Under breath.)* Five six seven. (Repeat action.)

**HALIFAX:** *(Approaching.)* You’re pretty good at that. Sorry – didn’t mean to startle you. I was watching you from the tracks. That last one skipped seven.

**PATRICK:** You waiting to jump the train?

**HALIFAX:** Yeah, it slows just before the bridge.

**PATRICK:** That’s a big bag to haul on.

**HALIFAX:** I’m leaving town.

**PATRICK:** Why?

**HALIFAX:** Why not.

**PATRICK:** Everyone’s coming to Trenton these days. British Chemical’s hiring.

**HALIFAX:** I was working there. ‘Bombs for Victory’.

**PATRICK:** I hear it’s good money.

**HALIFAX:** If you like money.

**PATRICK:** So why are you leaving?

**HALIFAX:** I was here six months. If I get it in mind to move on, I move on.

**PATRICK:** Where were you before?

**HALIFAX:** Halifax.

**PATRICK:** No kidding! Were you there last year when the explosion –

**HALIFAX:** Just left. Got real lucky. I was a stevedore. Matter of fact, I went down to the harbour one morning before work, was watching the seagulls, real nice day, cold, December, and something just come over me, just got it in my head to leave. Couldn’t stop thinking, “I gotta get out of here.” I got paid out that day, jumped a train, hadn’t even made it as far as Moncton before the goddamn city blew up. I worked a bit in Montreal, then somebody told me about this place, here I am. And here I am, leaving. OK boy, that was ten – you’ve got an arm.

**PATRICK:** I still don’t understand why you’re leaving.

*(Train whistle in the distance.)*

**HALIFAX:** There’s my train. Listen. Look up the river - at the haze over British Chemical. Look at that stuff in the water. Look where we’re standing. Downriver. Which way’s the wind blowing, kid. That’s your answer…

*(SFX: change to NARRATOR.)*

**NARRATOR:** A man with a duffle bag and a hunch. Jumping a train.

And yes, just a mile upstream from town: British Chemical. All 225 acres of it. Jean’s father working somewhere inside. Outside, a lineup of carpenters hoping to get hired on.

Now, look south a bit, back into town again. Squint through the smoky dusk of the Quinte Hotel Beverage Room. Two ancient lumbermen are leaning against the bar. Red has a nearly empty jug of draft in front of him. Portugee is grumpily nursing a coffee. Because he doesn’t want to embarrass his grandson.

Shift your gaze two short blocks and one whole Bible away. A minister is changing into his best dog collar. Whistling a bit of a hymn.

Another two blocks over, a woman sets a table. She puts a vase of flowers on it. Hums a bit of a hymn.

*(SFX: Dinner sounds, cutlery up.)*

And not that much later: a roast chicken rests carved and demolished in front of Patrick’s grandfather, his mother and her Minister. One old devil fuelled up to battle two Christian soldiers. And our young hero, fresh from the Trent, ready to duck.

*(BIZ: Throughout, PORTUGEE doesn’t sound well, coughs, wheezes.)*

**HARTWELL:** I can’t remember when I’ve had a tastier chicken, Eleanor.

**MOTHER:** Thank you, Reverend.

**HARTWELL:** William, please. I think we can relax our manners a bit here.

**PORTUGEE:** It was damn fine grub. If this is what comes with praying I just might sign on.

**HARTWELL:** I wish I could say prayer makes food tastier, but I think we have to credit our hostess. What’s new at school, Patrick?

**PATRICK:** Same old stuff.

**MOTHER:** I hear you have a new classmate.

**PATRICK:** Yeah.

**HARTWELL:** That’s right. English family, the Tompkins. He’s the new manager of British Chemical. They’ve joined the church.

**PORTUGEE:** English bastards/

**MOTHER:** Father/

**PORTUGEE:** Raped the country, them English/

**MOTHER:** I’m afraid you’ve stumbled upon one of father’s peeves, does anyone want seconds/

**PORTUGEE:** Come here, stole everything you can think of, starting with the forests. I should know, I was sent up there, Gilmours ran the mill/

**MOTHER:** Here he goes/

**PORTUGEE:** Gilmours ran the mill, they ran the town Reverend for 90 years they did. They sent us up the Trent and we cleared entire townships of pine, stripped them forests bare, shipped it all back to England, everything goes back to England/

**MOTHER:** Father Cameron, change the subject please/

**PORTUGEE:** All of it back to Mother England: the wood, the minerals underneath, everything but the weather. And when it all runs out, they do too. *(Wheezes out.)*

**MOTHER:** Ranting isn’t going to help your chest.

**HARTWELL:** Speaking of rocks, I had the occasion of visiting a parishioner up in Glen Miller recently. She directed me to the Rock. Astonishing. A huge boulder just sitting there. Have you seen it, Eleanor?

**PORTUGEE:** God threw it down in the hopes of hitting some Englishmen.

**MOTHER:** It’s called the ‘rock of romance’. Many marriage proposals have been made there.

**HARTWELL:** Really!

**PORTUGEE:** There’s been plenty of proposals there but they weren’t for marriage. I been up there a few times myself with ladies - proposing stuff that’d curl your hair.

**MOTHER:** Father Cameron, stop now/

**PORTUGEE:** I remember one, in particular. Young maid from the hotel, name a Betty. I  
 proposed the clothes right off her.

**MOTHER:** FATHER!

*(Pause.)*

**HARTWELL:** On a different note, Trenton is enjoying a right little boom now. British Chemical is hiring.

**PORTUGEE:** It’s got so a fellow can hardly afford to live here. You know what the Quinte is raising rooms to? Dollar a week. Me and Red are gonna have to start bunking together. And that man’s feet – you think the sulphur from British Chemical stinks? You ain’t never slept head to toe with Red.

**MOTHER:** That’s quite a cough, Father.

**PORTUGEE:** Just phlegm building up. I’ll go outside a moment/

**MOTHER:** Patrick – could you go with him

*(SFX: Chairs pushing back.)*

**PATRICK:** Sure, Portugee –

**PORTUGEE:** Just need fresh air a sec.

*(SFX: Sound of them leaving.)*

**MOTHER:** Bring him back for pie.

*(SFX: Door closing. At some point in the following, a distant sound of mighty throat clearing and gob. Maybe a “Bullseye”.)*

He drives me to distraction.

**HARTWELL:** Your father in law has had a colourful life.

**MOTHER:** Which he loves to describe at the drop of a hat. The stories he’s told Patrick over the years… And living in town doesn’t sit with him. But I don’t like the sound of that cough. I’ll boil the bones and take him a good broth tomorrow.

**HARTWELL:** You’re a good woman, Eleanor.

**MOTHER:** Am I? Or am I just a woman trying to do good? There’s a difference.

**HARTWELL:** That’s for God to decide. But I’d vote for the former.

**MOTHER:** And that gets you a double helping of pie. William.

*(BIZ: They laugh. Love is in the air.)*

*(SFX: Music bridge to move time forward.)*

**NARRATOR:** Two weeks pass. Portugee keeps coughing and spends his days living in fear of the visits from his daughter in law bearing soup. He’s more afraid of her mercy than her anger. And soup? Not his liquid of choice.

Patrick is made of more pliable stuff. A pretty girl is sitting beside him now and he’s discovering that applying his natural intelligence in classroom seems to impress her…

(SFX: Class ambiance.)

**McLAREN:** …Thank you for those observations on drumlins, Patrick. Tomorrow we will move on to discuss eskers and moraines, two other fascinating geological formations left in the wake of the receding ice.

*(SFX: School bell rings.)*

*(BIZ: Hubbub.)*

**STUDENT:** Hey Pat, we’re heading down to the bridge – coming?

**PATRICK:** I’ll catch up with you.

**STUDENT:** *(Moving off.)* Ohhh-k lover boy.

*(BIZ: More hubbub)*

**PATRICK:** Jean. Jean?

**JEAN:** Oh – were you talking to me?

**PATRICK:** Yes, Jean, well, I wondered

**JEAN:** Yes?

**PATRICK:** You’ve been here two weeks – how do you like it?

**JEAN:** Other than the fact the boy beside me hardly ever talks to me?

**PATRICK:** He’s not much for talking.

**JEAN:** He talks to everyone else.

**PATRICK:** I’m talking to you now.

**JEAN:** Talking to me about not talking to me does not count as talking to. But to answer your question – I like it here, fine.

**PATRICK:** But you’ve been all over the world.

**JEAN:** One factory town is pretty much the same as the next. Dad goes to work, Mom stays home, and I’m the new girl at school. By the time people stop treating me like I’m from Mars, and by the time the boy beside me actually starts speaking to me, in complete sentences, and not about glaciers, it’s time to move on.

**PATRICK:** You’re not moving already/

**JEAN:** No no. In fact, we just bought a cottage.

**PATRICK:** Yeah?

**JEAN:** Just north of the plant, a mile upriver, past Glen Miller. Other side of the hill. Most days we’re there now – Mom and I drive up as soon as I get home, and it’s just a few minutes’ walk for Dad from the plant.

**PATRICK:** That must be nice.

**JEAN:** I don’t meet anyone. I don’t know what everyone is doing. Your friend – I heard him say you were going swimming.

**PATRICK:** Yeah, we do, most days.

**JEAN:** Where does everyone go?

**PATRICK:** It’s just the fellows.

**JEAN:** But is there a special spot?

**PATRICK:** By the railway bridge. The river widens there, it’s almost a lake.

**JEAN:** Only boys?

**PATRICK:** Yeah.

**JEAN:** What if a girl was asked?

**PATRICK:** No girl’s been asked.

**JEAN:** We swam a lot in Australia.

**PATRICK:** I thought you were in New Zealand.

**JEAN:** South Africa, Northern Rhodesia, Australia, New Zealand, here. Dad says soon we’ll have done the whole Empire. But this is the biggest plant by far.

**PATRICK:** I heard 50% of the TNT made for Canada and the allies’ bombs comes from here. What’re you looking at/

**JEAN:** Isn’t that Reverend Hartwell?

**PATRICK:** What’s he doing here/

**HARTWELL:** *(Coming on.)* Patrick. Patrick! I’m glad I found you. Hello Jean.

**JEAN:** Reverend.

**HARTWELL:** Settling in at school?

**JEAN:** Yes sir.

**HARTWELL:** I’m sure that Patrick can help you if you have any questions. Say hello to your parents from me.

**JEAN:** *(Leaving.)* I will. Nice talking with you Patrick.

**HARTWELL:** Patrick, your mother asked me to come and get you. She needs you at home. Your grandfather’s there – we’ve just moved him in.

**PATRICK:** What?

**HARTWELL:** Eleanor went down to his rooms this morning with some broth – you know how he’s been sounding. He couldn’t even raise himself out of bed.

**PATRICK:** It’s not the –

**HARTWELL:** No, not the Spanish flu, thank the Lord. But it is serious. His friend said he was coughing all night. My guess is pneumonia but he won’t go to the hospital or see a doctor so your mother’s moved him home. He’s not an easy patient. Your mother needs help and I’ve got a church meeting.

*(SFX: Transition.)*

*(SFX: Kitchen of the Cameron home.)*

**MOTHER:** He’s either going to die or I’m going to kill him. He hasn’t got an ounce of sense. He won’t take any medicine. Unless you call alcohol ‘medicine’. That, I got him to take.

**PATRICK:** You gave him booze?!

**MOTHER:** Yes.

**PATRICK:** Here?!

**MOTHER:** William doesn’t need to know. There was an old bottle of whiskey of your Dad’s locked in the highboy. Your grandfather took one sip and called it horse-piss. Lord love a duck, he’s been here just three hours and already I’m talking like him. But he drank it and it settled him down a bit. He’s been calling for you.

**PATRICK:** *(Moving off.)* He’s in the sewing room?

**MOTHER:** Your room.

**PATRICK:** Mom!

**MOTHER:** He needed a proper bed. I’ve moved a cot into the upstairs hall for you.

**PATRICK:** Aww/

**MOTHER:** He’s a very sick man! I went over there with the broth and he was lying in bed like he was dead. Red was trying to pour whisky down him, there was – the room, Patrick, it was absolutely filthy, a bucket beside him, he was spitting everywhere. He was in the same clothes he wore to dinner two weeks ago. I called William and we got him back here –

**PATRICK:** I would have come.

**MOTHER:** William was happy to help, sure go ahead roll your eyes

**PATRICK:** I wasn’t

**MOTHER:** William was over at the hotel in minutes, he helped bring your grandfather back here and upstairs, undressed him, got him in a pair of your father’s old pajamas, brought his clothes outside, I was tempted to burn them but I’ve got them soaking in a tub/

*(BIZ: Distant primal roar from upstairs.)*

*(SFX: Thumping.)*

That’s him. Go up and see what he wants. I’m making supper. After that, we should go down to the hotel and scrub his room. And then I might go crazy. And we’ll see who cares enough to take care of ME.

**PATRICK:** *(Leaving.)* The Good Lord no doubt.

**MOTHER:**  *(Distant.)* What did you say!?

*(SFX: Door opening and shutting in Patrick’s room.)*

*(BIZ: Coughing, heavy breathing from Portugee.)*

**PORTUGEE:** I heard her yelling through the vent.

**PATRICK:** That wasn’t yelling, trust me.

**PORTUGEE:** I don’t want to be here anymore’n she wants me here.

**PATRICK:** It’s just till you get healthy again. Hey – she really gave you whisky?

**PORTUGEE:** Nearly died a shock. It was real tough on her to break out that bottle. She had to come down off cross to find it. It’s horse-piss.

**PATRICK:** So I hear.

**PORTUGEE:** Wouldn’t mind another sip.

**PATRICK:** It’s back under lock and key.

**PORTUGEE:** Maybe you can get something from Red. He’s probably on his way over. Think she’ll let him in the house? She was some mad at him back at the Quinte.

**PATRICK:** She wants to help. You have to play along.

**PORTUGEE:**  Never played along in my life.

**PATRICK:** Why won’t you see a doctor?

**PORTUGEE:** It’s just a cough.

**PATRICK:** OK/

**PORTUGEE:** Where you going?

**PATRICK:** I – the boys – we’re

**PORTUGEE:** Can’t you sit a spell?

**PATRICK:** I’d like to stay

**PORTUGEE:** ‘He’d like to stay’

**PATRICK:** Can’t anybody give me credit for anything?

**PORTUGEE:** It’s just I like to see you sometimes too.

**PATRICK:** OK I’ll sit here.

**PORTUGEE:** Now you’re sounding like your mother. A holy martyr.

**PATRICK:** Sorry.

**PORTUGEE:** And don’t ever apologize. Just sit till Red comes.

*(BIZ: A bad bout of coughing.)*

**PATRICK:** I’ll get you water.

**PORTUGEE:** Don’t want water. You ever drunk whisky?

**PATRICK:** No.

**PORTUGEE:** I started when I was 12. Soon’s I left home for the camp. You seeing that English girl?

**PATRICK:** Why would you ask that?

**PORTUGEE:**  Other night at dinner when that idiot preacher brung her name up, you blushed. You gotta control the blushing, it’s a dead giveaway.

**PATRICK:** You going to give me the lecture on the English now?

**PORTUGEE:** Nope. I’m softening my position. As long as they remember this country ain’t England. Sure they filled it up with people, but this place changes us into something else and I don’t know what it is but it sure ain’t English. You ever stand in a pine grove, son?

**PATRICK:** You always ask me that.

**PORTUGEE:** And I’ll keep asking till you do it. You go stand there a while, until you feel yourself changing into a tree. I used to do that all the time when I was working in the woods. Specially when I was your age. I’d stand there, feel like a tree. And then I’d wonder, does a tree ever wonder what it’s like ta be a ship? And you can keep going with that line of thought.

**PATRICK:** Does a ship ever wonder what it’s like to be an ocean?

**PORTUGEE:** Exactly. And that’ll take you someplace in your mind your Reverend Hartwell can’t.

**PATRICK:** I really have to go.

**PORTUGEE:** OK go, but stop by the hotel and put a firecracker under Red. I need that medicine.

*(SFX: Narrator whirl, movement of time.)*

**NARRATOR:** A week passes, Portugee doesn’t get better, doesn’t get worse.

And Patrick, he’s thick in some ways, thick the way all young men are, he only thinks the thoughts of a young man and that excludes an awful lot. Like an old man maybe dying in his bed who’s forgotten the minute Patrick is out of doors and free again.

Although, to give Patrick credit – he knows something’s stirring in his heart, something’s changing, shifting, like a glacier passing through an era and leaving rubble in its wake. He’s certainly feeling something when he climbs along the bridge, eases over the rail and edges out on to the trestle.

The Trent, fat and lazy below him, it won’t change, it’ll never change. But what is new is a feeling of leaving someplace solid and launching into space...

*(BIZ: Patrick yelling as he jumps.)*

*(SFX: Big splash as Patrick hits water. Then water breaking as PATRICK surfaces again.)*

*(BIZ: Gasp as Patrick draws his first breath.)*

*(SFX: Lapping of water as PATRICK swims.)*

And when he comes up for air, she’s there - waiting for him.

**JEAN:** Are girls allowed to jump?

**PATRICK:** Jean!

**JEAN:** I’ve missed swimming. In Auckland there was a beach right at the end of our street.

**PATRICK:** Lucky I didn’t land on you.

**JEAN:** I was far enough away. Treading water. You stood for about a minute on that trestle – what were you thinking just before you jumped?

**PATRICK:** What I always think – ‘turn back’!

**JEAN:**  Let’s go in.

*(SFX: Under, sound of water changes as they steand up and walk ashore. Sloshing.)*

**PATRICK:** Watch where you step. People throw bottles in here.

**JEAN:** Father would have a fit if he knew about this.

**PATRICK:** Swimming with a fellow?

**JEAN:** And downstream from the plant. The sulphur from British Chemical, the water they use, it all goes right in here

**PATRICK:** Sometimes I itch after.

**JEAN:** The river’s much cleaner upstream at our cottage.

**PATRICK:** Listen to us. Talking about water. We’re turning into a couple of Miss McLarens.  
Next we’ll be talking about glaciers.

**JEAN:** So what - I love geography. Maybe because I’ve lived in so many places. But she makes it so boring! Why is that? This country’s got more geography than anyplace – you’d think she could find some way to make it interesting!

**PATRICK:** *(Pause.)* Have you ever seen the Glen Miller Rock?

**JEAN:** The what?

**PATRICK:** Glen Miller Rock.

**JEAN:** The –

**PATRICK:** Glen Miller Rock.

*(BIZ: Jean laughs.)*

What’s so funny?!

**JEAN:** You’re blushing.

**PATRICK:** I am not.

**JEAN:** You said ‘Glen Miller Rock’ and went beet red. Is there some joke about it I don’t know?

**PATRICK:** No and I didn’t blush.

*(SFX: Plant whistle in the distance.)*

**JEAN:** Five o’clock. I’ve got to get home – we’re driving up to the plant, getting Daddy and going on to the cottage. Are you staying in the river?

**PATRICK:** For a while.

**JEAN:** Aren’t you getting cold?

**PATRICK:** Maybe.

**JEAN:** You won’t walk me to my bike?

**PATRICK:** No. But – could I visit you – at your cottage?

**JEAN:** Come this Saturday afternoon. We’ll go exploring. You can show me this Glen Miller Rock that turns you beet red. Stay for dinner. It’ll just be me and Mum – Daddy has to spend Saturday at the plant testing sirens.

**PATRICK:** Yeah, I saw the notice of the test in The Courier.

**JEAN:** I’d like that. On the weekend. You’re really not coming out of the water?

**PATRICK:** No I uh

**JEAN:** *(Laughs as she leaves.)* See you Saturday then. Cheerio.

**PATRICK:** Cheerio...

*(SFX: Transition music.)*

*(SFX: Screen door shutting.)*

*(BIZ: PATRICK whistling.)*

**MOTHER:** *(Off.)* Patrick?

**PATRICK:** Yes?

**MOTHER:** William – Reverend Hartwell is visiting – no need to come in but could you go up and look in on your grandfather? Red is with him.

**PATRICK:** Sure!

*(SFX: Footsteps on stairs.)*

*(Sotto.)* I don’t have to sit with Hartwell? My lucky day!

**PORTUGEE:** *(Sotto.)* Patrick – that you?

*(SFX: Door opening.)*

**PATRICK:** Yeah, can I get you anything – why’s Red on the floor!?

**PORTUGEE:** Shut your gob, close the damn door, and get over here.

*(SFX: Door closing.)*

**PATRICK:** Is Red OK?

**RED:** Of course I’m OK.

**PORTUGEE:** Now help me down.

**PATRICK:** Why!?

**RED:** Ssh!

**PORTUGEE:** Hurry!

*(SFX: Grunts of exertion. A clump when PORTUGEE hits the floor.)*

**RED:** Easy, he’s an old man!

**PORTUGEE:** My head has to be on the grate. No, roll me ta the other side, this damn ear’s no good.

**PATRICK:** Are you guys – eavesdropping!?

**RED:**  Shh.

**PORTUGEE:** It’s research.

**PATRICK:** You’re eavesdropping on Mom and Hartwell!

**RED:** Ssh.

**PORTUGEE:** Preacher Man’s finally getting to his point!

**PATRICK:** What!?

**PORTUGEE:** He’s giving your Mom a speech.

**RED:** “The” speech.

**PATRICK:** What speech.

**PORTUGEE:** Shh – listen –

(SFX: HARTWELL and MOTHER’s voices are treated – can be heard through the grate.)

**HARTWELL:** I’ve been a widower for four years now. You for ten. I know you will understand when I say that it is a heavy burden without help.

**MOTHER:** Do you mean God’s help?

**HARTWELL:** God’s help is a given my dear.

**RED:**  She how he snuck in “My dear”.

**PATRICK:** That’s my mother Red!

**PORTUGEE:** Shh!

**HARTWELL:** But I take consolation in the fact that we on earth are bountifully blessed when we pray to Him in the Heavenly Kingdom for Help.

**MOTHER:** What kind of help are you praying for exactly, William?

**RED:** Ohh, she’s making him work for it.

**HARTWELL:** Eleanor, I am not a handsome man.

**PORTUGEE:** Face like a moose

**RED:**  Either end a one.

**HARTWELL:** Nor am I young. But I would lay my devotion at your feet – as I worship the Lord, so, too would I love the wife of my bosom.

**PATRICK:** Holy shit!

**RED:** *(Same time.)* Holy Shit!

**PORTUGEE:** *(Same time.)* Holy shit! Wife of my bosom?

*(BIZ: PORTUGEE begins laughing and has a coughing fit.)*

**MOTHER:** *(Clueing in.)* I think I hear Father Cameron coughing –

**HARTWELL:** Wait Eleanor – please sit –

**MOTHER:** I’m sure I hear Father

**HARTWELL:** Eleanor, do you know what I’m asking?

**MOTHER:** Yes I know, William. Perhaps we could discuss this another time

**PATRICK:** I think she heard us/

**HARTWELL:** Patrick will be at college soon... And you’ll be alone...

*(BIZ: More coughing from PORTUGEE.)*

**MOTHER:** *(Now knows for sure they’re listening and is aiming this at them.)* Patrick’s not smart enough for college. And that Father in law of mine? Now that he’s moved in, I doubt he’ll be leaving here except in a box. Which might be VERY SOON. IN FACT he could go minutes after you leave!

**HARTWELL:** Eleanor!

**PATRICK:** She knows we’re listening!

**PORTUGEE:** Help me back in bed.

**MOTHER:** And my son is on the fast road to hell – I can’t ask you to take that on!

**HARTWELL:** I will guide him.

**MOTHER:** He’s as unguidable as his disgusting grandfather.

**HARTWELL:** Why are you talking like this – have I offended you?

**MOTHER:** No – no. I’m sorry. No, you haven’t offended me at all.

*(SFX: Foreground, exertion as they struggle to get PORTUGEE back in bed.)*

**MOTHER:** I just need to think it over. I really must attend to Father Cameron. But know this – don’t forget your hat – know this, William. I consider myself a very honoured woman.

**HARTWELL:** May a man hope?

**MOTHER**: A man – a good man – such as yourself – yes, you may definitely hope.

**HARTWELL:** Then I leave in peace. I look forward to your answer. Good night, my dear.

**MOTHER:** Good night, William.

*(SFX: Door closes off.)*

*(BIZ: An explosion of suppressed laughter from PORTUGEE, RED and PATRICK.)*

*(SFX: Shortly – sound of angry steps outside room.)*

**PORTUGEE:** D’ya think she’ll say yes?

**RED:** I’ve got two bucks on it.

**PATRICK:** Never!

**PORTUGEE:** Pour us a drink, Red. One for Patrick too. We’ll drink to your Mother and her beau.

*(SFX: Door opens.)*

**MOTHER:** *(Puffing a bit; she’s run up the stairs.)* Isn’t this a pretty sight. The Three Musketeers. I’ll start with you, Red. You’re no relation of mine so I’ll only say this: Get out of this house now before I skin you alive and don’t you ever darken my door again.

**RED:** Yes Ma’am, very good idea, just leaving.

*(SFX: Door closes.)*

**MOTHER:** *(To Portugee.)* Now you. Reverend Hartwell came here to ask me something that must have taken him great courage – and as I sat there, I should have been listening to his eloquent proposal but all I could think of was that a stinking old fool was lying on the floor upstairs listening through the grate. I’ve never expected better from you, so I can at least say you haven’t disappointed me.

Patrick. I am so ashamed of you. Deeply ashamed. I have clearly failed at my duty of raising a decent , Christian son.

*(SFX: Door slam.)*

*(SFX: Sound of her going back downstairs.)*

**PATRICK:** Wow.

**PORTUGEE:** She’s got a good tongue on her.

**PATRICK:** I’ve never seen her that mad. I better go apologize.

**PORTUGEE:** Give her a day to cool down.

*(SFX: Move time forward a bit.)*

**NARRATOR:** An uneasy truce spreads over the Cameron home. The boy leaves the next morning before breakfast, preferring to face school hungry than his mother angry. Remaining true to her vows, the woman wronged tends to Portugee through the day, feeding him broth and ignoring the mickey of whiskey Red has hidden under the pillow. She nurses Portugee with the grim efficiency of a True Protestant Martyr.

**MOTHER:** I’ll be back with some stew in an hour.

**PORTUGEE:** *(Sotto.)* Don’t hurry on my account.

**MOTHER:** You can use the time to ponder your sins.

**NARRATOR:** But the old man is too worn out by the previous day’s shenanigans to feel much of anything, especially shame.

*(BIZ: Cheery whistling of a hymn. ‘What a Friend We Have in Jesus’)*

**NARRATOR:** Over in a King Street rectory, a man awakes and starts his own day in a way he hadn’t for years. As he pomades his hair Reverend William Hartwell wonders if it is a sin to feel - desirable.

At Trenton High the imprisoned boys look at the girls. The imprisoned girls look back at the boys. None of them listen to the earnest woman at the front of the room. Except for Patrick, who is fast gaining a reputation as Miss McLaren’s pet.

**McLAREN:** *(Surprised, delighted)* That’s exactly right, Patrick. It is a drumlin.

*(SFX: Work sounds under.)*

**NARRATOR:** Just north of town, at the vast British Chemical plant, a group of engineers are standing with their boss, examining a new alarm system.

**TOMPKINS:** So you understand: if it’s a test, the siren goes for ten seconds, followed by three short blasts. And if it’s the real thing, this will keep wailing.

**ENGINEER:** With all due respect, Mr. Tompkins – if it’s the real thing, the siren won’t be able to work/

**TOMPKINS:** That depends on a number of factors, Smith. Wind, ignition, volume, rate of contagion, combustion.

**ENGINEER:** But sir, that might apply to a contained fire within this particular area of the plant, but what if it is outside, or in more than one area or, perish the thought, near the railcars lined up on the siding.

**TOMPKINS:** It’s the same system as I had in Auckland, Smith.

**ENGINEER:** But in South Africa sir, in Durban the explosion – what system was in place there?

**TOMPKINS:** This is more than adequate, Smith. We’re ready for Saturday’s test.

*(SFX: Abrupt ending with school bell.)*

*(BIZ: Students leaving.)*

**McLAREN:** *(Over hubbub, in background.)* Over the weekend, please read Chapter Four, Economic Impact of the Fur Trade

**STUDENT:** Hey Pat – coming swimming?

**PATRICK:** Yeah, in a bit.

**STUDENT:** You can explain drumlins to us.

*(BIZ: Laughs receding.)*

**JEAN:** *(Close.)* Would it kill them to include me?

**PATRICK:** Probably. Sorry.

**JEAN:** It doesn’t matter. I promised Mom I’d be at the cottage. She went early and I’m biking up. See you tomorrow, Pat.

**PATRICK:** I’ll be there right after lunch.

**JEAN:** And you’ll stay for dinner?

**PATRICK:** You bet.

**JEAN:** And you’ll show me Glen Miller Rock...

*(SFX: The Five O’Clock whistle at British Chemical.)*

**NARRATOR:** In Trenton everything stops when that whistle blows. The town inhales and lets out a long gasp of freedom. The gates of British Chemical burst open and the men rush out, running and biking into town, filling the roads with their shouts and brawls and paypackets...

Red hears the whistle and heads back into the Quinte Hotel. In another five minutes and there won’t be a spare inch of bar to lean against.

Portugee hears it too, then looks up at the woman wiping his sweating brow. With his good ear he listens for the sound of the boy coming home but instead he hears his nurse.

**MOTHER:** Alright I know there’s whisky here. Yes, here it is.

*(SFX: Sound of top coming off.)*

You haven’t touched it. Now I know you’re not well. Here. I’ll hold it to you, take a good drink. I’m going to go down to the hotel and tell Red he can come back and see you. I’ll give him some money to buy some more whisky for you.

**NARRATOR:** Patrick joins his buddies at the bridge. Ignores their teasing, doesn’t join in their boasting. He just jumps. And jumps. And jumps himself into exhaustion, knowing that every leap is bringing him that much closer to tomorrow, to something he hopes will change his world.

*(SFX: Time passage.)*

*(SFX: Outdoors.)*

*(SFX: Under – faint sound of thunder.)*

*(BIZ: A bit of puffing as PATRICK and JEAN walk through the bush. Sound of dry leaves underfoot.)*

**JEAN:** I love the colour of the trees.

**PATRICK:** It’s all new for you, isn’t it.

**JEAN:** Pretty much. I should have dressed for hiking. I thought we were just walking up the road.

**PATRICK:** You said you wanted to see the rock.

**JEAN:** I do. But do you even know where it is?

**PATRICK:** My grandfather gave me directions but he was a bit muddled

*(SFX: Distant thunder.)*

**JEAN:** Is that thunder?

**PATRICK:** Maybe. Sounds pretty far away. Why - do you want to go back?

**JEAN:** No - I want to see the darn rock!

**PATRICK:** I think we’re nearly there.

**JEAN:** If it’s really as big as people say it is, it should just stick up. I’ve been told it’s the eighth wonder of the world but if it’s a mere pebble Patrick, I’m holding you accountable/

**PATRICK:** Wait – there it is – how’s that?!

**JEAN:** Well.

**PATRICK:** Is that a rock or is that a rock?

**JEAN:** I am impressed.

**PATRICK:** Miss McLaren would say “The ice was a mile thick where we’re standing right now.”

**JEAN:**   *(Means it.)* That’s interesting.

**PATRICK:** It is?

**JEAN:** Don’t forget – I didn’t arrive here until halfway through the glaciers. But how would this rock get here – it’s so independent of everything around it.

**PATRICK:** It sort of hitchhiked inside the glacier as it moved north.

**JEAN:** You should become a geologist.

**PATRICK:** I want to find out something about everything, everything that is interesting.

*(SFX: Thunder louder.)*

**JEAN:**  That’s definitely thunder and it’s getting closer.

**PATRICK:** We can head back if you want.

**JEAN:** Wait. Patrick: am I ‘interesting’?

**PATRICK:** Do you have to ask?

**JEAN:** I do if I want to hear the answer.

**PATRICK:** You’re very interesting.

**JEAN:** Interesting enough to kiss?

*(BIZ: They do. A peck from PATRICK.)*

Well, now I know how you kiss your mother.

*(BIZ: This time a real kiss.)*

I like you Patrick.

**PATRICK:** Why?

**JEAN:** Why? You’re different. You’re smart, or at least you want to be. Everyone else is so – I don’t know what I’ll do when you’re gone.

**PATRICK:** Where am I going!?

**JEAN:** In a few months we’re graduating. You’ll be at college.

**PATRICK:** Not if you’re not going too.

**JEAN:** Silly.

**PATRICK:** I’m serious!

**JEAN:** I won’t be going to college here. We’ll probably go back to England. Daddy thinks that’s where he’ll be transferred, after the war.

**PATRICK:** Are there schools in England?

**JEAN:** Two or three.

**PATRICK:** Then I’ll go there too.

*(BIZ: PATRICK kisses JEAN.)*

*(SFX: More thunder.)*

**JEAN:** If you get me home all wet, Daddy isn’t going to be pleased.

**PATRICK:** One more kiss.

**JEAN:** You know, at some point, you’re supposed to say, “I like you too, Jean.”

**PATRICK:** But you know that already.

*(SFX: Loud thunder.)*

*(SFX: Coming through that – the long low wail of a siren starts. This stops them in their tracks.)*

What the heck –

**JEAN:** That’s the new siren.

**PATRICK:** Right, the test. Except – how do we know it’s not the real thing?

**JEAN:** Wait for the three short blasts.

*(SFX: Sure enough, three short blasts.)*

See? We had one just like it in Auckland.

*(SFX: Crack of thunder.)*

Now kiss me again. Wait – did you tell me you liked me yet?

**PATRICK:** I like you a lot.

*(PATRICK and JEAN kiss again.)*

*(SFX: Wail of siren again, which will eventually end in the short blasts.)*

*(SFX: More thunder and then start of rain.)*

**JEAN:** *(Laughing, moving off.)* Last one home’s the rotten egg!

*(More thunder and, just as lights go to black PATRICK mouths ‘I love you’ to the departing JEAN. And then runs off after her. The other actors turn to look at the red studio light – it turns off and they leave.)*

**End of Act One**

**Act Two**

As the audience returns to its seats, the cast also returns, keeping a watchful eye on the on-air light and resuming when it turns on.

**ANNOUNCER:** Welcome back to Trenton Radio Playhouse and this evening’s presentation of ‘A Splinter in the Heart’. When we last left Patrick and Jean, they were sitting atop the Glen Miller Rock, exploring the nuances of Canadian geography. It’s now a week later and we’re still north of town, touring the vast British Chemical plant.

*(SFX: Inside ambiance. Factory sounds under. Probably no clanging noises – but engines etc.)*

**PATRICK:** This is really kind of you, sir.

**TOMPKINS:** My pleasure, Patrick. Mrs. Tompkins and Jean have never expressed an interest in a tour. They think you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all. But our Trenton operation is quite different from our plants in Auckland and Africa – vastly bigger, for starters. We’re supplying half the TNT for the war effort.

**PATRICK:** How many work here now?

**TOMPKINS:** Almost 3000. And I’m still hiring – the challenge is finding good carpenters. I should say ‘real’ ones. They get an extra 25 cents an hour, so every last chap who’s ever held a hammer swears he’s a trained carpenter.

**PATRICK:** Everyone in town is taking in boarders.

**TOMPKINS:** This plant has the continent’s biggest bunkhouse with over 500 men. And it’s still not enough. The boom won’t last, of course. The war will end soon and then demand for TNT will drop quickly.

**PATRICK:** So this plant will close up?

**TOMPKINS:** Not necessarily. The Canadian mining industry is expanding, so British Chemical will definitely carry on here.

*(SFX: Bubbling sounds.)*

**PATRICK:** What’s in those silos?

**TOMPKINS:** They’re the vats where we make the guncotton. The vats are made of made of cypress wood.

**PATRICK:** The guncotton looks like seaweed.

**TOMPKINS:** After it’s boiled it all goes into another vat, boiled again in water, then dried in wringers. You’re not carrying any matches with you, are you?

**PATRICK:** No sir.

**TOMPKINS:** You’re not a smoker?

**PATRICK:** No sir. I don’t chew, either.

**TOMPKINS:** Good. Waste of money.

**PATRICK:** Why’d you ask about the matches?

**TOMPKINS:** There’s a ten dollar fine if you’re caught in any of these buildings with matches in your pocket. If they ever rubbed together and sparked – you and I would be touring Mars. That vat is nitric acid. Try not to fall in it… Come outside, I’ll show you something –

*(SFX: Door to outside.)*

*(SFX: Hammering outside.)*

These are some of our ‘real’ carpenters. They’re crating the guncotton – using copper nails and copper hammers. Can you guess why?

**PATRICK:** No sparks?

**TOMPKINS:** Jean said you were smart. I’ll show you just one more thing – it’s likely the place you’re most curious about. This way.

*(SFX: Another door.)*

*(SFX: Another interior.)*

This is where the TNT is stored. Every month we produce over a million pounds of it. That’s almost 500 tons. To put that in perspective – the French ship that blew up Halifax last year – it was carrying 250 tons. We’ve got that much sitting in boxcars out there right now.

**PATRICK:** That’s all TNT?

**TOMPKINS:** Yes.

**PATRICK:** Incredible.

*(SFX: Door close.)*

*(SFX: Outdoor ambiance again. Footsteps on gravel.)*

**TOMPKINS:** I’ll sign you out now. The gate’s this way. So that’s our plant – or a bit of it – we cover 225 acres. If it seems a little – higgledy piggledy – well, it is. This place has grown so fast... One of my first tasks since getting here was putting emergency procedures in place. You heard the siren test last week?

**PATRICK:** Yes sir.

**TOMPKINS:** Jean mentioned she was with you when it went off.

**PATRICK:** We were walking up the road.

**TOMPKINS:** I understand you got caught in the rain.

**PATRICK:** I’m sorry about that, sir. The storm came in fast.

**TOMPKINS:** You like my daughter.

**PATRICK:** Yes sir.

**TOMPKINS:** Things are certainly happier at the cottage since you arrived on the scene. Jean, of course, it’s good for her to have a friend. And Mrs. Tompkins – she enjoys having a young man around, someone else to cook for... Your mother doesn’t mind you being up here all the time?

**PATRICK:** No.

**TOMPKINS:** You don’t have duties at home? I understand your grandfather is ailing.

**PATRICK:** Mom does most of the nursing.

**TOMPKINS:** It’s not the Flu -

**PATRICK:** My mother says pneumonia.

**TOMPKINS:** It seems odd to say ‘good’ but anything is better than the Spanish Flu. Patrick, about Jean. She hasn’t had a regular upbringing. She was born in England but we’ve moved from plant to plant around the empire – four moves, four countries. Five now. She’s often been the only child – of her kind. I think perhaps she has come to rely on her charm, a bit too much. But she’s not as worldly as you might expect from a girl who’s lived on four continents. Do you know what I mean?

**PATRICK:** No?

**TOMPKINS:** Mrs. Tompkins and I are very protective of our daughter. Will you be up for dinner on Sunday?

**PATRICK:** Actually, Jean asked me for tomorrow.

**TOMPKINS:** I think you can wait till Sunday. Here’s the gatehouse - the guard there will sign you out.

*(SFX: Time move, to house. Tink tink of teacups.)*

*(SFX: Door off.)*

**PATRICK:** (*Off.)* Mom? I’m home –

**MOTHER:** In here, Patrick.

**PATRICK:** *(Off.)* I’m going swimming –

**MOTHER:** Patrick, come in the front parlour, please.

**PATRICK:** *(Entering.)* Why’re you in here – Miss McLaren?

**McLAREN:** Hello Patrick.

**MOTHER:** We’re having a cup of tea. Sit down.

**PATRICK:**  I – uh – shouldn’t I go up and see how Portugee is doing?

**MOTHER:** I think both the Trent River and your grandfather can wait. It’s not every day we’re honoured with a visit from your teacher. Miss McLaren was just describing this fall’s curriculum.

**PATRICK:** If it’s about that assignment ma’am – it’s nearly done, I was just going to check something at the library.

**McLAREN:** *(Laughs.)* No, no, it’s not that.

**PATRICK:** It’s not?

**MOTHER:** Patrick. If I’m sitting here looking dumbstruck, it’s because Miss McLaren has just told me you’ve become her top student.

**PATRICK:** I have?

**McLAREN:** Your interest in geography and, in particular the unique geology of this region, is inspiring – both to your fellow students and, quite frankly, to myself.

**PATRICK:** It is?

**MOTHER:** Again, that sound you’re hearing is my jaw hitting the floor.

**McLAREN:** *(Laughs)* I’m guessing your son has discovered some good influences.

**MOTHER:** Jean Tompkins.

**PATRICK:** Mom.

**McLAREN:** I’m a teacher. I don’t care about the process. It’s the results that count.

**PATRICK:** I didn’t like geography at first but I do now. I even went on a personal trip to Glen Miller Rock.

**MOTHER:** You didn’t tell me that.

**McLAREN:** A field trip to the rock! How wonderful!

**MOTHER:** Wasn’t it a bit lonely, Patrick?

**McLAREN:** Oh, nature is never lonely, Mrs. Cameron. I often go for hikes to the rock.

**PATRICK:** You do!?

**McLAREN:** To be out in nature, to traverse the unique physiognomy of this region, to sit on that magnificent rock/

**MOTHER:** I’m surprised you never ran into Patrick’s grandfather. Patrick, your teacher has some news.

**McLAREN:** I’m a member of the Trenton chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. As chairman of the Education Committee, I am responsible for the administration of two scholarships that support our best student graduates. Should your marks hold up through Christmas, I’m delighted to tell you that the scholarship for outstanding boy is yours.

**MOTHER:** You can go to Guelph Agricultural College like your father!

*(SFX: Silence.)*

Patrick?

**PATRICK:** I don’t know what to say.

**MOTHER:** You could start with some words of gratitude.

**PATRICK:** I am very grateful. *(Pause.)* But I don’t want to go away to school.

**MOTHER:** Patrick!

**PATRICK:** I can’t leave you with Portugee! And I’m just learning about *this* area.

**MOTHER:** You need education to get ahead in life.

**PATRICK:** I can work at British Chemical.

**MOTHER:** What on earth would you do at British Chemical?

**PATRICK:** Carpenter?

**MOTHER:** You’re no more a carpenter than I’m a can-can dancer.

**McLAREN:** Patrick, we only give two scholarships a year. One to a girl – Lois Payne is going to McGill to study languages. And you. I thought you’d be excited.

*(SFX: Thumping from above.)*

**MOTHER:** He is excited, Miss McLaren. He’s just a bit slow to realize exactly how excited he is. Patrick, you’re excused.

**PATRICK:** But I want to explain.

**MOTHER:** I’ll do the explaining. I hear your grandfather thumping. Go upstairs and see what he wants.

**PATRICK:** But

**MOTHER:** Now! Give him a sponge bath.

**PATRICK:** That’s Red’s job!

**MOTHER:** Red didn’t show up yesterday and he always makes an unholy mess, he’s tips over the basin and/

**PATRICK:** Mom!

**MOTHER:** Go.

*(SFX: Sting and out.)*

*(SFX: A sponge being wrung out.)*

**PORTUGEE:** You’re a goddamn idiot.

**PATRICK:** Why?!

**PORTUGEE:** You’d give up a free trip to university?

**PATRICK:** You always made fun of Dad for going!

**PORTUGEE:** The fool went to college to learn farming! Why would anyone go to college to study farming? Any dimwit can be a farmer. You throw a bunch of seeds on the ground. Then you stand around and complain about the weather.

**PATRICK:** Turn on your side so I can do your back. Did you hear the whole thing?

**PORTUGEE:** Your mother’s got a voice like a foghorn and that teacher isn’t much better. No need to lie on the vent with those two going at it. I have some advice for you.

**PATRICK:** No doubt.

**PORTUGEE:** Don’t get smart with me. You don’t fool me one bit. All this talk about exploring the local area. You’re exploring Jean. You’re going to give up the greatest goddamn opportunity of your life for a bit of tail. Never ever, ever change your plans because of a woman. Only time I ever did that I ended up married.

**PATRICK:** But that ended well!

**PORTUGEE:** How do you reckon that? Two months later your father appeared.

**PATRICK:** Well if he hadn’t, who’d be giving you a goddamn spongebath?

**PORTUGEE:** It’s good training for you. Cuz without college you won’t be good for doing much more. And thanks for making your mother mad. Every time you get her dander up she storms up here and starts flipping me about the bed like I’m a goddamn log. One of these days she’s gonna come in here with a pike pole. You nearly done?

**PATRICK:** I’m happy to stop.

**PORTUGEE:** Good, cuz you’re getting more water on the bed than me. And you said ‘goddamn’ a minute ago. That’s my word. Swearing doesn’t make a man. *(Pause.)* Patrick, I don’t want you to end up like me.

**PATRICK:** But/

**PORTUGEE:** Your mother has always said I’m a bad example and she’s right. And somehow, so far, you’ve turned out good. Stupid but good. Now sit yourself down and I’ll tell you about the time I saved Red from a bear. We was up north of Madoc, working a Gilmour tract there and

**PATRICK:** Portugee. I – I have to go.

**PORTUGEE:** It’s not a long story.

**PATRICK:** You threw a hammer at the bear and hit him in the eye.

**PORTUGEE:** You’re always rushing off.

**PATRICK:** I’ll be back in a couple of hours. You can tell it to me again, then.

**PORTUGEE:** Don’t go.

**PATRICK:** I’ll be back soon. You can tell me about the bear. It’s a good story. Not as good as when you saved Red from the liquored up lumberjacks but it’s good. I have to go, now.

*(SFX: Door closes.)*

**NARRATOR:** And out he went. Why can the young never understand how little time there is?

*(SFX: River bank.)*

**JEAN:** It’s still so warm.

**PATRICK:** Yeah.

**JEAN:** Sad though – soon no more swimming till next year.

**PATRICK:** We have a Thanksgiving tradition. The guys all meet here and make one last leap off the bridge.

**JEAN:** When’s that?

**PATRICK:** Thanksgiving?

**JEAN:** This is my first, don’t forget.

**PATRICK:** Second Sunday in October. I think it’s the 12th.

**JEAN:** You have a big meal?

**PATRICK:** Goose.

**JEAN:** And give thanks?

**PATRICK:** For you.

*(BIZ: Kiss.)*

**JEAN:** *(Ending kiss.)* Patrick wait. Stop. Did Daddy say anything to you? When he was showing you the plant? Did he say something?

**PATRICK:** Like –

**JEAN:** Because he told me you weren’t coming out till Sunday.

**PATRICK:** Yeah.

**JEAN:** Was he mean to you?

**PATRICK:** No. But he’s not – happy – about us. He said you were sheltered.

**JEAN:** Sheltered!

**PATRICK:** We can still meet here tomorrow or maybe you can come to my house.

**JEAN:** I don’t like going behind his back.

**PATRICK:** He’s forcing us too! We’re like Romeo and Juliet.

**JEAN:** Look how they ended up.

**PATRICK:** I never finished the play – how?

**JEAN:** Not well.

**PATRICK:** But this is real life.

**JEAN:** I may be ‘sheltered’ but I don’t see a lot of happy endings in real life either.

*(SFX: In background, sound of a car approaching, under.)*

After Thanksgiving we’ll have closed up the cottage. I’ll be in town all the time. And I’ll see you at school –

**PATRICK:** Oh, speaking of that. You won’t believe who was at my place today. Miss McLaren.

**JEAN:** Why?

**PATRICK:** They’re offering me a scholarship for college.

**JEAN:** That’s wonderful!

*(SFX: Car door in background.)*

**PATRICK:** I said I’d think it over.

**JEAN:** Why would you “think over” a scholarship!?

**HARTWELL:** *(Approaching.)* Patrick, Patrick, thank goodness I’ve found you/

**JEAN:** I swear that man’s following us!

**HARTWELL:** I remembered hearing you young people liked coming here. Hello Jean. Patrick, you need to come home with me right now. Your grandfather has taken a turn.

**PATRICK:** What do you mean – a turn?

**HARTWELL:** It’s bad. I’ve just said a prayer at his bedside

**PATRICK:** He was fine a couple of hours ago - what happened?

**HARTWELL:** We don’t know; perhaps a stroke. Let’s go – Jean do you need a lift home?

**JEAN:** I have my bike.

**PATRICK:** I’ve got mine too.

**HARTWELL:** *(Fading off quickly.)* OK, but hurry. I’m getting the doctor -

**JEAN:** *(To PATRICK.)* You should go.

**PATRICK:** Let him drive off first.

*(SFX: Car door, engine.)*

**JEAN:** You’ve got to go!

**PATRICK:** I want a goodbye kiss.

**JEAN:** Patrick...

*(SFX: Whoosh.)*

**NARRATOR:** The word ‘if’ is about to do its piercing. If Patrick had been home. If he hadn’t left Portugee’s side two hours earlier. If he hadn’t spent that time on the banks of the Trent taking his sweet time, talking his sweet nothings, if he hadn’t dallied another few minutes, coaxing that extra kiss from his sweetheart…

*(SFX: Door into bedroom.)*

**PATRICK:** Mom – Mom!

**MOTHER:** He’s passed Patrick. Ten minutes ago. It was very quick. I heard a cry, I came up, he was going. Patrick.

**PATRICK:** Oh God.

**MOTHER:**  I’m sorry. Where were you?

**PATRICK:** At the river. So you were with him at the end -

**MOTHER:** Yes, I only left him for a minute to phone William to ask him to find you -

**PATRICK:** It was just now?

**MOTHER:** Yes. Close his eyes. Close your grandfather’s eyes.

**PATRICK:** No.

**MOTHER:** Here, I’ll guide your hand.

**PATRICK:** No Mom.

**MOTHER:** We’ll do it together. *(Pause.)* There. You stay here now. The doctor will be here soon.

**PATRICK:** Too late for that.

**MOTHER:** He has to pronounce him dead. I’m sorry Patrick.

**PATRICK:** I came as fast as I could!

**MOTHER:** Were you with Jean?

**PATRICK:** Yes. He didn’t say anything?

**MOTHER:** He was beyond that by the time I got to him.

**PATRICK:** He wanted me to stay, Mom. I didn’t stay.

**MOTHER:** I called him an ‘old fool’ this morning.

**PATRICK:** You called him an ‘old fool’ every morning.

**MOTHER:** Because he was.

**PATRICK:** But I ‘treated’ him like an old fool. That’s worse. If I’d known he was... this sick... I wouldn’t have left

**MOTHER:** I know. You’re here now. Sit with him a while. I’ll wait downstairs for Doctor Matthews.

*(SFX: Door closing gently.)*

*(MUSIC: Under, coming up, the funeral music. ‘What A Friend We Have in Jesus’)*

**NARRATOR:** Patrick sits on the bed beside his grandfather. ‘Portugee’s arms lie outside the blanket, at his side. Patrick picks up his grandfather’s hand, the wrist, searches for a pulse. The hand is still a little warm but the skin is like a snake’s, the tendons have gone slack, there’s no movement, no leaping blood, no pulse, not a trace of the old giant’s legendary strength.’

And so the little world of Trenton recedes. One of its last links to the wild era of forests and log rafts and magnificent brawls down Front Street has slipped away. Patrick sits waiting for the doctor, listening to the sounds outside the room: the tea kettle downstairs, the dog barking next door, a car passing on the street. He wonders how his town can go so carelessly about its business... Don’t they realize what they’ve lost?

*(SFX: Music. Funeral. Music – organ – ‘What A Friend We Have in Jesus’ ending.)\*

*(SFX: up of reception. Polite murmurings.)*

**PATRICK:** I swear I could hear him turning in his casket during the service.

**MOTHER:** Don’t talk like that.

**PATRICK:** He didn’t want to be buried from a church.

**MOTHER:** You don’t know that.

**PATRICK:** Just a hunch.

**MOTHER:** Keep your hunches to yourself. Do you think Red has been drinking?

**PATRICK:** Does the sun rise in the east?

**MOTHER:** Who’s that woman with him?

**PATRICK:** She might be from the hotel?

**MOTHER:** She looks rough. Keep an eye on Red. Get him a cup of coffee and make sure he’s not adding anything to it. He’s hiding something in his jacket. Oh, hello William. We were just saying how well the service went.

**WILLIAM:** Big crowd. He touched a lot of lives. I don’t recognize a lot of them.

**PATRICK:** It’s the Quinte Hotel gang.

**MOTHER:** Patrick – weren’t you getting Red some coffee?

*(SFX: A bit of hubbub to separate scenes.)*

**McLAREN:** Patrick, Patrick - I am so sorry for your loss.

**PATRICK:** Thank you, ma’am.

**McLAREN:** Men like your grandfather are our last tangible link to a time gone by, when the forests were dark and primeval/

**PATRICK:** You’ll have to excuse me Miss McLaren – Mom wanted me to get Red Hearn some coffee.

**McLAREN:** Before you go - have you given any more thought to the scholarship?

**PATRICK:** Not really.

**McLAREN:** Lois Payne has read her entire first year’s curriculum

**PATRICK:** She would.

**McLAREN:** It’s very much to her credit.

**PATRICK:** I’m sorry. That was rude. But I must go/

**McLAREN:** Of course. I’ll say a few words to your Mother and be on my way.

*(SFX: Hubbub up.)*

**PATRICK:** Hey Red, Mom thought you’d like this.

**RED:** Black coffee? I wouldn’t dare.

**PATRICK:** Why.

**RED:** If your granddad ever saw me drinking just coffee at his funeral he’d strike me dead. I’ve got this.

**PATRICK:** Pour it in fast, don’t let Mom see.

**RED:** I’m betting this ain’t the first time there’s been whisky in the basement of the Baptist Church –

**PATRICK:** I’m betting it is.

**BETTY:** *(Entering.)* I’ll have a shot of that too, you old skunk. And who’s this – Portugee’s grandson? Are you introducing me or do I stand here guessing.

**RED:**  Patrick, this is Betty Silcox. She’s an old friend of Portugee’s.

**PATRICK:** Pleased to meet you.

**BETTY:** Pleasure’s mine. I see the resemblance.

**RED:**  Tall and pigheaded?

**BETTY:** Don’t speak ill of the dead, Red. I was going to say ‘handsome’.

**RED:**  He’s eighteen Betty and you’re 145.

**BETTY:** Bite your tongue. And don’t forget, I met Portugee when he was Patrick’s age. I might have some advice for this lad.

*(SFX: Hubbub up.)*

**MRS TOMPKINS:** Mrs Cameron. I’m Edith Tompkins, my daughter Jean is a friend of  
 Patrick’s.

**MOTHER:** Pleased to meet you.

**MRS TOMPKINS:** I believe you’ve met my daughter?

**MOTHER:** She’s been at the house a few times, studying with Patrick. At the kitchen table. While I cook supper. Thank you for coming.

**MRS TOMPKINS:** Patrick has often told us stories of his grandfather. Mr. Cameron sounded truly unique.

**MOTHER:** Excellent word for him.

**MRS TOMPKINS:** By the way, Jean told me Patrick’s been offered a scholarship to the university of his choice.

**MISS McLAREN:** *(Entering.)* Hello Eleanor. It was a lovely service. Mrs. Tompkins.

**MRS TOMPKINS:** Miss McLaren.

**McLAREN:** Did I hear the word ‘scholarship’ – are we talking about Patrick’s – He seems undecided still.

**MOTHER:** He just needs a good hard shove.

**McLAREN:** Surely just a wee shove.

**MRS TOMPKINS:** Scholarships are a rare prize that would never be turned down by a level headed boy like your son, Mrs Cameron.

**McLAREN:** One with such a profound love of geography.

**MRS TOMPKINS:** You must be very proud of him – look at him, meeting his grandfather’s colleagues so easily!

**McLAREN:** Those glorious ancient pioneers!

**MOTHER:** More like ancient scoundrels.

**McLAREN:** Those scoundrels built this great nation. Tree by tree.

**MOTHER:** Bottle by bottle. That Red’s got a mickey in every pocket.

**McLAREN:** God bless him, of course he does!

**MRS TOMPKINS:** And there goes my Clive over to join them. Trust my husband to sniff out alcohol in a Baptist basement.

*(SFX: Hubbub.)*

**TOMPKINS:** Hello Patrick.

**PATRICK:** Sir.

**TOMPKINS:** I’m very sorry for your loss. Hello, I’m Clive Tompkins, you’re -

**RED:**  Red Hearn.

**PATRICK:** Red was my grandfather’s best friend.

**TOMPKINS:** Did you go back a ways with him then?

**RED:**  Met him at a logging camp, almost seventy years ago.

**BETTY:** *(Clearing throat.)*

**RED:**  This is another ‘old’ friend, Betty Silcox.

**TOMPKINS:** How do you do, Betty.

**BETTY:** Where’d you pick up the accent, Clive?

**TOMPKINS:** *(Laughs)* At my mother’s breast.

**BETTY:** Lucky breast. I never could resist an accent. English, French, town, country, short male, tall male… Hey Red, are there going to be speeches?

**RED:** I hope so. Patrick?

**PATRICK:** Speeches? I don’t think we – it’s just coffee and some food and

**TOMPKINS:** Surely you’d like to say something, Patrick?

**PATRICK:** No no –

**TOMPKINS:** Everyone here is very proud of you, with the scholarship.

**PATRICK:** Really?

**TOMPKINS:** I’m sure people would like to hear a few words -

**RED:**  We’re not burying your Portugee with just a Bible reading.

**BETTY:** Damn right.

**RED:** I’m no preacher but I got a few things to say, Betty ya old whore can ya still whistle?

**BETTY:** Not so good without the teeth but I’ll try.

*(SFX: Sharp whistle.)*

*(SOUND: Silence in room.)*

**RED:** By God, woman, they oughta strap you to the front of the Montreal train.

**PATRICK:** Mom’s gonna kill you, Red.

**RED:** She won’t make a ruckus, not in front of her boyfriend. Ladies and Gentlemen! And all you people who knew Portugee. My name’s Red, Red Hearn. I guess I’ve knowed Portugee longer’n anyone here. We were just kids when we met up at the camps and we stuck together. I saved that old bugger’s life more times’n you can count.

There was the time I threw a hammer and saved him from a bear. And another time when we got into an intellectual discussion with a dozen lumberjacks in Calabogie. And, and once we were on a raft in the Ottawa and... he slipped... Least, I think it was Portugee... Goddamn. How’m I gonna remember stuff if he ain’t here to help me?

It’s hard to put a finger on the kinda man Portugee was. He just was. Nobody could fight better. Nobody could chop a tree faster. Nobody could spit farther. And, and nobody spent more time thinking than he did, about what joins us to this country, this place, Trenton, and north. I always said he did the big thinking for both of us, saved me the effort...

*(RED pulls out a flask and takes a long slug.)*

And that’s all I wanta say.

*(BETTY clears throat.)*

Something wrong with your throat oh – oh, I nearly forgot. Betty here wants to say something too. It’s always good to hear from the ladies, though of course I’m using that term loosely with our Betty

**BETTY:** OK Red, a girl can only take so many compliments. I met Portugee when I was a maid at the Quinte hotel. We girls were bunked in the top floor, with a special outside staircase and a padlocked door. So the fellas couldn’t get at us and believe me, when them lumberjacks come to town they was in some heat. Thirsty as hell and all horned up.

Well, I couldn’t help noticing Portugee. He was as tall as a tree. And romantic. That hardly describes it. He used ta take me for midnight walks, up the river. Once he talked me into hiking up to that rock at Glen Miller. I’m telling ya, that’s a night I’ll never forget. Climbing all the way up that great hunk of granite. With the moon shining down as me and that fine figure of a lumberjack slipped and slid up and up and up and up...

**NARRATOR:** *(Intervening.)* And something began happening in that crowded basement. It was filled with a number of Trenton species that shared a town but little else. The Quinte Hotel gang. The Baptists and their shepherd. Patrick’s teacher. Three refined Englishers. In that kinda atmosphere, you’d have thought that Betty going on about Portugee might have caused – well – tension. But somehow, someway, it had the reverse effect. In life, Portugee was a rough old man who spent his day leaning against a hotel wall. In death, he drew a line right through history, a line that veered and curled and crooked around everybody in that room.

Well, not quite everyone. Not the young girl and the lanky boy... they’d just slipped out the side door...

*(SFX: Sound of river.)*

**PATRICK:** Portugee woulda loved that.

**JEAN:** All those old lumbermen. Did you see how Miss McLaren was chatting them all up – I think she wants to write a history...

**PATRICK:** Portugeealways asked, ‘You ever stand in a pine grove? It’s like you feel yourself changing into a tree. There’s a brown forest floor under your feet from the needles and there’s wind, higher up, a sound of the sky. Yep, for an instant, you feel like a tree’…

**PORTUGEE:** *(Echo effect)* You ever feel like a tree, Patrick?

**PATRICK:** And, every time he asked it, I knew it was the only thing I ever wanted to feel…

**JEAN:** That’s really beautiful. Did you ever try?

**PATRICK:** Nah.

**JEAN:** I wish I’d met him.

**PATRICK:** I wish you had too. He was a big part of who I am and I want you to know everything about me just like I want to know everything about you. *(Pause.)* I made a decision at the funeral. I’m not going to college.

**JEAN:** Patrick!

**PATRICK:** I don’t want to be anyplace you’re not.

**JEAN:** It’s college, Patrick. You have to go.

**PATRICK:** Not unless you come with me.

**JEAN:** Patrick –

**PATRICK:** Promise me with a kiss.

**JEAN:** Patrick stop. This is serious.

**PATRICK:** Of course it’s serious. It’s us.

**JEAN:** I mean college. It’s a scholarship!

**PATRICK:** Who cares! I’m not leaving you.

**JEAN:** You make it sound like we’re getting – Patrick I have to go. Daddy’s watching me like a hawk and anyway, you should be home, your Mom needs you.

**PATRICK:** But I need you.

**JEAN:** This is a time to be with your Mom.

**PATRICK:** Can I come up to the cottage tonight?

**JEAN:** Wait till the weekend.

**PATRICK:** I can’t wait that long

**JEAN:** Come up after your Thanksgiving dinner. I really have to go.

*(SFX: Passage of time.)*

*(SFX: Sound of dinner table, dishes etc.)*

**MOTHER:** It’s hard to believe it’s ten days already.

**HARTWELL:** You took wonderful care of your father in law.

**MOTHER:** I was a tyrant.

**HARTWELL:** Eleanor, he knew you cared.

**PATRICK:** He liked tussling with you.

**MOTHER:** I wonder what Red Hearn is doing for Thanksgiving.

**HARTWELL:** The Salvation Army is putting on a dinner.

**MOTHER:** He should have some goose. I bet he likes squash.

**PATRICK:** I can take it to him.

**MOTHER:** No, I will. I’ll go down later with a plate.

**PATRICK:** Mom, I’d like to go up to Jean’s –

**MOTHER:** I expected you would.

**PATRICK:** It’s their first Thanksgiving here.

**HARTWELL:** They’re a good family.

**MOTHER:** What’s a good family, William? Are Patrick and I – are we a good family?

**HARTWELL:** Of course – or I wouldn’t – oh - is this the time?

**MOTHER:** *(Pause.)* Before you go, Patrick… William and I want to talk to you.

**HARTWELL:** You know I’ve been calling on your mother for some time now

**MOTHER:** William has brought – sunshine – back into my life.

**HARTWELL:** Why thank you, Eleanor.

**MOTHER:** And it has been just you and me, Patrick, for a long, long time – but life carries on, circumstances change, William and I/

**HARTWELL:** We’ve/

**MOTHER:** We’ve come to an agreement/

**PATRICK:**  This is a joke, right.

**MOTHER:** We’re going to/

**HARTWELL:** Join forces/

**MOTHER:** Get married. *(Pause.)* Patrick?

**PATRICK:** You’re going to marry him.

**MOTHER:** Not right away

**HARTWELL:** At this stage of our lives we don’t need to rush

**MOTHER:** In six months. After you graduate. You’ll be away at school. I’m going to rent this house – and move to the rectory.

**PATRICK:** So it’s all planned.

**HARTWELL:** There will always be a room for you there.

*(SFX: Chair pulling back.)*

**MOTHER:** Where are you going?

**PATRICK:** I can’t believe you’re marrying him.

**MOTHER:** Patrick!

**PATRICK:** Thank GOD Portugee didn’t live to see this.

**MOTHER:** Stop that!

**HARTWELL:** There’s no need to use the Lord’s name in vain/

**MOTHER:** I’ll deal with him.

*(SFX: Chairs pulling back.)*

Patrick come back here. Stay here – William. I’ll calm him down.

*(SFX: Doors close. Outside ambiance. We are with PATRICK’s pov.)*

*(From inside.)* Patrick. Patrick.

*(SFX: Pulling chain or bike sound.)*

*(Coming out door.)* What you said in there was uncalled for.

**PATRICK:** I thought you were smarter than that.

**MOTHER:**  I thought you had better manners.

**PATRICK:** You’re marrying that gassy idiot and you expect me to be polite?

*(SFX: Smack. MOTHER slaps PATRICK.)*

**MOTHER:** You will never talk about him like that again.

**PATRICK:** I’m just getting started.

**MOTHER:** You’ll go back in there and apologize.

**PATRICK:** The hell I will. And there’s not a snowball’s chance I’m moving into any goddamn rectory.

**MOTHER:** Stop cursing.

**PATRICK:** Let go of my bike.

**MOTHER:** Not until I talk sense into you

**PATRICK:** Let go

**MOTHER:** STOP THIS. STOP THIS NOW. Why are you doing this! What’s gotten into you! You’ve never acted like this before! Swearing – rudeness *– (Starts to hyperventilate).* You, I’ve never – seen - you – why –

**PATRICK:** Mother... Mother? Mother, take a breath/

**MOTHER:** *(Recovering.)* After everything I’ve done for you.

**PATRICK:** Oh, there she goes, up on the cross.

**MOTHER:** I wish your father was here.

**PATRICK:** I wish he was too then you wouldn’t be marrying him.

**MOTHER:** He’s a good man. I’m sorry we sprang it on you but look at things from my point of view. What’s my life been like since your father died? All the hardships, the scrimping/

**PATRICK:** Where in the Bible does it teach you to marry someone because you’re sick of scrimping?

**MOTHER:** William is a GOOD MAN who brightens up my life, MY life, and you, all you do, and your grandfather – all you do is ridicule him, you’ve never taken a moment to actually talk to him and find out what – he makes me happy Patrick. You don’t make me happy. And you don’t need me, you’re like your grandfather, you don’t need anybody – until you actually need them.

**PATRICK:** I need Jean.

**MOTHER:** Like your grandfather needed that Betty. Nothing more.

*(SFX: A siren starting up stops her. Pause.)*

Why’s that thing going?

**PATRICK:** I don’t know.

**MOTHER:** Is there a test scheduled?

**PATRICK:** There wasn’t anything in the paper.

**MOTHER:** Jean never mentioned –

**PATRICK:** No.

**MOTHER:** It must be another test.

**PATRICK:** There should be three short blasts in a second.

*(SFX: Pause, as they listen. Siren still goes. Worry starts.)*

That’s strange.

**HARTWELL:** *(From door.)* Eleanor? Patrick?

**MOTHER:** It must be a test, William.

**HARTWELL:** Perhaps not.

***PATRICK:***It should have ended by now.

*(SFX: and then there is a super sound effect. Initially it is a “crump” but there should be a whoosh, then the sound of glass shattering. HARTWELL, PATRICK and MOTHER are thrown around. Another crump, more shattering.)*

*(SFX: PATRICK, HARTWELL and MOTHER stir.)*

**MOTHER:** Patrick!?

**PATRICK:** I’m fine. I’m OK. Mom – you’re bleeding!

**MOTHER:** It’s just a cut. William? Where’s William!

**HARTWELL:** Here.

**MOTHER:** Can you stand –

**HARTWELL:** *(Getting to feet.)* Yes. What on earth was that!

**PATRICK:** It’s British Chemical – there must have been an explosion -

**MOTHER:** The whole plant!?

**PATRICK:** I doubt it – we’d be on Mars. So there could be more.

**HARTWELL:** The siren’s stopped!

**PATRICK:** That could just mean it’s been blown up. Or the power’s out. Oh God – there’s a line of boxcars loaded with TNT on the siding up there – if they go – this could be another Halifax.

**MOTHER:** Should we leave?

**PATRICK:** We’ve got to go now/

**HARTWELL:** My car – we could drive to – south or west -

**MOTHER:** Hold on. Stop. Before we do anything I’m cleaning those cuts -

**PATRICK:** We don’t have time

**MOTHER:** Do you think Portugee would have turned tail? We’re going to close up this house properly and then we’ll go if we need to.

**PATRICK:** I’m telling you, we need to go now.

**HARTWELL:** What about my parishioners/

*(SFX: Another crump. They stagger. Sound of shattering glass.)*

I’m going to check on some folks, I’ll be right back with my car/

**MOTHER:** We’ll lock up and wait for you – come inside Patrick. Patrick!

**PATRICK:** Jean and her Mom are at their cottage/

**MOTHER:** You can’t go there!

**HARTWELL:** You’d have to bike by the plant!

**PATRICK:** What’s the worst that can happen – I’ll get blown off it?

**MOTHER:** Patrick! Don’t be a fool!

**NARRATOR:** I was a fool. I leapt on my bike and began riding north. I rode straight north to the plant… it was the only way to get to Jean.

**PATRICK:** People are just standing out on their lawns, even on the street – like stunned rabbits. A lot of them are covered with blood – from glass mostly.

**NARRATOR:** But after a few blocks – I saw a change in them. They were getting over that first shock, the first explosion. They were starting to think of who they loved, what they needed to pack, where they needed to run.

**PATRICK:** Everyone’s heading south, they’re yelling at me to turn around – the roads are filling up with cars, horses, everyone fleeing the three headed monster. TNT.

**NARRATOR:** I was gasping for air. Sulphur tainted every breath. Houses were distorted by shadows. Up at the plant, I could see the boxcars in the distance.

*(SFX: Large crump)*

At the plant: another explosion threw me from my bike. I got back on. And I rode on, past it -

*(SFX: Bike being thrown down.)*

**PATRICK:** Jean – Jean!

**JEAN:**  Patrick! What are you doing here!

**PATRICK:** Are you OK.

**JEAN:**  Yes!

**PATRICK:** Where’s your mother?

**JEAN:** Upstairs, packing.

**PATRICK:** The whole plant is going up – Oh God, is your Dad still there?

**JEAN:** He’s on his way home.

**PATRICK:** There weren’t any workers on the road – I’d thought they’d be evacuating –

**JEAN:** The Sunday shift was given the day off, because of Thanksgiving. There’s just a skeleton staff on the site. The phone exchange is still working if you can believe it.

**PATRICK:** Did your Dad say how much of it had gone up?

**JEAN:** Only one part of the plant so far – the nitrating building – it started there he says

**PATRICK:** You mean THAT was JUST the nitrating plant?

**JEAN:** Yes.

**PATRICK:** The fire hasn’t even reached the TNT yet?! What about the boxcars?

**JEAN:** They’re moving the train out, if they can –

**PATRICK:** Your Dad!?

**JEAN:**  No, he’s – he’s on his way here

**PATRICK:** If the TNT blows -

**JEAN:** The hill between the plant and here – Daddy says it will protect us. But as soon as he gets here we’ll leave

**PATRICK:** You should go now! We should start walking, call your Mom

**JEAN:** No – we’ve got suitcases, there’s too much to carry ourselves. We’re safer here

**PATRICK:** Don’t worry about taking stuff – you can come back

*(SFX: Car sound.)*

**JEAN:** Here’s Daddy.

*(SFX: Car stops. Door.)*

Daddy – are you

**TOMPKINS:** I’m fine. Is your mother done packing?

**JEAN:** Nearly – all our books and things are there

**TOMPKINS:** Patrick, why are you here?

**PATRICK:** I wanted to see if there’s anything I could do/

**TOMPKINS:** Jean – go and help your mother – Patrick, help me load these suitcases

**PATRICK:** Sir, there’s no time

**TOMPKINS:** I’ll be the judge of that.

**JEAN:**  *(Back out.)* Daddy – Mom needs help with the suitcases – I can’t lift them

**TOMPKINS:** Keep loading the car – I’ll be right back.

*(SFX: Door.)*

**PATRICK:** Jean. Jean – what are you – why do you have all these suitcases?

**JEAN:** We’re leaving

**PATRICK:** But why so much – what about your home in town

**JEAN:** You don’t understand. We’re-going-away!

**PATRICK:** Yes – there may be more explosions but/

**JEAN:** ARE YOU THICK! We are GOING. AWAY. This has happened before. What do you think they are going to do to Daddy here tomorrow? Or us? Everyone’s running away right from Trenton now but when they come back, do you know what they will do to us?

**PATRICK:** It’s not your fault!

**JEAN:** They always blame us!

**PATRICK:** But what about you and me!?

**JEAN:** You won’t want to be anywhere near me tomorrow.

**PATRICK:** We can go north together

**JEAN:** No!

**PATRICK:** Why not – we can go

**JEAN:** Don’t be a fool.

**PATRICK:** I’ll come with you!

**JEAN:** No! No. You go north. We’re driving east. Montreal.

**PATRICK:** You really planned this -

**JEAN:** Of course we planned this! We always have a plan. That time, in Durban, we barely got out alive. Daddy said he’d never let that happen again

**PATRICK:** But you can stay! Let’s get married

**JEAN:** Are you crazy!

*(SFX: Door.)*

**MRS. TOMPKINS:** OK, we’ve got everything. Jean. Get in the car, dear.

**TOMPKINS:** Don’t ride your bike back into town Patrick, not now. Stay here till the explosions stop. You’ll be safe.

**MRS. TOMPKINS:** There’s food in the icebox

**TOMPKINS:** Jean, get in the car!

**PATRICK:** Don’t go!

*(SFX: Complete silence.)*

**JEAN:**  Goodbye Patrick.

*(SFX: Three car doors slam.)*

*(SFX: Sound of car moving off.)*

*(SFX: Silence.)*

**NARRATOR:** She didn’t even turn around, she didn’t look back. I watched. I watched and waited for that ending. The one you read in books. Where she looks back. Where the car stops. Reverses down the lane... And she gets out... She didn’t look back.

***(SFX:*** *Under, occasionally, crump sounds of explosions.)*

I stood on the porch of their cottage and listened until I could no longer hear the sound of their car...

**PATRICK:** I go inside, upstairs. To Jean’s room. It’s easy to tell it’s hers; it smells of her, like she’d just stepped out the door for a minute but would be back, like she does in my fantasies.

**NARRATOR:** The drawers of her dresser were hanging open, everything emptied... there was her desk, she did her homework there when she wasn’t doing it with me...

**PATRICK:** I go back downstairs and sit on the back stoop. Sit there all night. In the distance, the explosions continue from behind the hill; they buffet the cottage and set the leaves rustling on the lawn... And still the river flows, the dumb dark waters of the Trent, flowing downstream, straight into the fire...

**NARRATOR:** The explosions stopped about when the sun rose. I got on my bike and headed home. Nothing prepared me for what lay downwind of the plant. Houses and sheds flattened. Cars blown right off the road. Trees blown bare of their autumn leaves, naked, ready for winter.

**PATRICK:** The plant is a smoking ruin, small fires licking here and there, crews of firemen training water on the flames. But the boxcars are gone, thank God. Someone had managed to move them out.

**NARRATOR:** Thousands of fish floated on the surface of the river; nitric acid had been dumped into the Trent and then a sulphur cloud descended, creating a toxic brew.

**PATRICK:** I bike on, home...

**NARRATOR:** Turned on to my street. There was someone on my porch, an old man.

**PATRICK:** For a second my stupid heart leaps.

*(SFX: Feet on wooden steps.)*

**RED:** You’re back.

**PATRICK:** Red – for a second I thought -

**RED:** Your Ma dragged me out of the hotel. She said she wasn’t going to stand for me staying there with everything blowed out when she had an empty house. The preacher was waiting in his car, they brung me here and she told me to use Portugee’s bed/

**PATRICK:** Where’d they go?

**RED:** They’re driving some people south of town, then they’re going on to Picton. Your mother says she has family there.

**PATRICK:** Yes.

**RED:** She liked the idea of me minding the house. In case a looting. She said you were up north seeing the girl. Why dincha stay there.

**PATRICK:** She left town. With her family.

**RED:** Are they coming back?

**PATRICK:** No.

**RED:** They’re smart. People are pretty angry. Want a drink?

**PATRICK:** Wouldn’t say no.

**RED:** Gift a your mother. Figure I should get it all down before she gets back and changes her mind. Funny thing, a house with no windows. Just about everyone’s left town.

**PATRICK:** I’m going to leave too.

**RED:** I wondered if you might.

**PATRICK:** There’s nothing here for me now. Portugee’s gone, Mom’s off with – she’s getting married, she doesn’t need me… Jean is gone. It’s time to change.

**RED:** Portugee used to say ‘Every change is the death of something’. I’ll be sorry to see the back of ya.

**PATRICK:** Tell Mom I’ll write.

**RED:** That’s all?

**PATRICK:** What else is there to say?

**RED:** I’m no expert on women but something a little more would be good. Go inside, get your stuff, but leave her a nice note. Cuz you’re gonna come back someday and she’s gonna be here, waiting. And what I know about your mother is, there’s waiting and there’s ‘waiting’ and you want waiting.

*(BIZ: From here on, PATRICK and NARRATOR are physically exactly in unison. Move forward.)*

**PATRICK:** I pack a duffel bag, not much, some clothes, a couple of books, take the ten dollars I’d saved for a present for Jean and go back out on the porch.

**NARRATOR:** I shook Red’s hand, then gave the old guy a hug. I could feel his boney back through his shirt. I think he was maybe crying because he turned his head.

**RED:** You even know where you’re going?

**NARRATOR:** West.

**PATRICK:** *(Same time.)* West.

**RED:** Portugee and I always went north.

**PATRICK:** I’m not cutting trees. And I want to see what’s past here. Mountains maybe.

*(SFX: A little movement of time.)*

**NARRATOR:** I headed west. All the way, right to the ocean. Clear across the country. And I still say all that travel, every mile, all the geography, the stuff I learned along the way was better than anything I woulda learned with that scholarship... somehow, somewhere along the way I even began getting smarter.

**PATRICK:** Smarter maybe, but with a helluva lot more to learn.

**NARRATOR*:*** *(Testing him.)* About...

**PATRICK:**  Life. This. This place. My place in this place.

**NARRATOR:** Someplace along the way I kinda took up writing.

**PATRICK:** Funny eh. I could hardly write a goodbye letter to my Mom, but I took to writing.

**NARRATOR:** ‘Listen:

**PATRICK:** Listen.

**NARRATOR:** You can hear soft wind blowing,

**PATRICK:** Listen:

Among tall fir trees on Vancouver Island

It is the same wind we knew

Whispering along Cote des Neiges

On the island of Montreal…

I would always wonder who the hell really owns this land

**NARRATOR:** I learned that no one does,

For we are tenants only.

**PATRICK:** I saw the sod huts break the prairie skyline, then melt in the rain.

**NARRATOR:** I saw the hip roofed houses of New France

**PATRICK:** New France but French no longer.

**NARRATOR:** Nor any longer English.

**PATRICK:** Something new.

**NARRATOR:** New but always mindful of what was here, what grew up after that glacier

Limestone houses

Lean-tos and sheds our father s built

In which our members died

Before the forests tumbled down

Ghostly habitations

Only this handful of earth

For a time at least.

I have no other place to go.

**PATRICK:** And this splinter in my heart?

**NARRATOR:** It’ll lose its sting.

**PATRICK:** It will?

**NARRATOR:** With every mile you put between here and there, it’ll hurt less.

**PATRICK:** You swear?

**NARRATOR:** I swear. Eventually, it’ll stop hurting at all. And you’ll meet another girl. You’ll start dreaming your dreams with her, only they’ll be real ones, not the dreams of a boy…

**PATRICK:** And once I’ve been away, in all those places, seen those things, met that girl?

**NARRATOR:** That’s when you’ll come home. You might even bring her with you.

**PATRICK:** And after that, Al?

**NARRATOR:** After that?

**PATRICK:** Yeah. After that.

**NARRATOR:** We’ll put it all on paper.

PATRICK and NARRATOR have a moment, then turn to look at studio light. It blinks out.

**Black.**

**The End.**