

# Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again or The Taming of the Sioux (1974)

by Warren Graves

Contrary to popular belief, I have finished writing the script for this year's melodrama and although it has all the ingredients of our classic form, it also has a whole heap of topical ingredients mixed in. [...] It is an "in" Melodrama. It is entitled *Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again or The Taming of the Sioux* and the whole mess will deteriorate rapidly from there. [...] This early in any project, all one can go on is the feeling at the pit of the stomach. It is either a warm glow or an ice cube. Happy to report warm glow which is feeding on response to the script and starting to move towards the extremities. Maybe I've written a melodrama after all.

~ WARREN GRAVES, WALTERDALE NEWSLETTER, MAY 1974

When Edmonton Theatre Associates produced its first two plays in August and September 1958 in the Social Room of the Jubilee Auditorium, one of them was Hazelwood's melodrama *Lady Audley's Secret*.<sup>22</sup> In March 1963 at the schoolhouse, Theatre Associates produced another melodrama, Johnson's *Dirty Work at the Crossroads*, as "a passing experiment received gleefully by the audience" (Fritch 2). The group was on to something. For thirty-five years (1965 to 1999), Walterdale was best known for producing one of Edmonton's most anticipated annual cultural events: the Walterdale Melodrama. From the time it was presented as part of the Klondike Days Festival in July 1965,<sup>23</sup> the summer melodrama frequently earned the company, particularly during the 1970s, enough money to fund a full season of shows. In 1978, for example, a particularly lucrative offering (Aulger's *Adrift in New York or Her First False Step*) netted the company nearly \$20,000 (including sponsorship revenue), compared to the entire 1977/78 season of productions, which accounted for just over \$9,000 in



instance existentially problematic, and in the next farcical. In the Western theatrical world melodramas were an aesthetic affront to modern realism and thus relegated to obscurity. Read in this context, how is it that Walterdale was able to capitalize on the form for the last thirty-five years of the twentieth century?

The many factors involved in the success of the Walterdale Melodrama are the shared result of two sets of circumstances: ideal local conditions on the one hand, and reaction to a professionalizing national theatre discipline on the other. Both circumstances are directly related to many of the freedoms of amateur theatre described in the general introduction. First, Walterdale tethered its melodramas to a nineteenth-century Klondike-themed entertainment festival; at their best the parallel settings and the hero-versus-hardship themes were a mutually definitive match, particularly in Edmonton, with its historical roots in the gold rush era as the so-called “Gateway to the North.” Second, the recovery of a theatrical form that had long since fallen into obscure parody was ideal for a box-office-funded amateur company that did not need to justify the socio-aesthetic relevance of its repertoire to acquire state operating grants; instead, Walterdale sought to attract and maintain audiences and members with, for example, quality entertainment spectacles. Third, the large casts (frequently numbering in the dozens) that are integral to much stock-character melodrama can be prohibitive for many professional theatres, but not for high-profile amateur theatres; with the melodrama, Walterdale effectively created brand association. Fourth, the playing of melodrama called for an acting style eschewed by theatre professionals and their accredited training schools, but Walterdale’s actors could participate in the form for entertainment’s sake and personal fulfillment, actively in opposition to realism’s familiar aesthetics and free from the restraints imposed by professionalized training on both practitioners and the norms of public reception. Fifth, the form gave local high-profile theatre personalities such as Jack McCreath, Wally McSween, Ron Wigmore, and John Rivet—who had gained a sort of celebrity status in Edmonton during Walterdale’s early years—a vehicle in which to play stand-out characters (particularly villains) who could interact directly with their audiences. And sixth, the momentum of the Walterdale Melodrama was maintained in part when, in the 1970s, Warren Graves began to blend the old form with local political themes. His creations, part nostalgic melodrama and part contemporary satire, combined nineteenth-century circumstances with socio-political currency. The Walterdale Melodrama played an important role in Graves’s development as a playwright and, conversely, at its peak it was an international phenomenon due in no small part to original “hits” written by Graves.

The University of Alberta’s Gordon Peacock suggested that by 1971 Graves was something of a “playwright-in-residence” at Walterdale (62). Graves’s plays *Yes, Dear* (March 1968) and *Love in a Greenhouse* (November 1968) had earned drama awards as well as favourable reviews and excellent houses at Walterdale under his direction. He also appeared in a string of Walterdale plays during the late 1960s and 1970s for which he garnered critical accolades.<sup>26</sup> A forthright administrator, he served as Walterdale’s artistic director (1970–72), membership chairman (1973–76), and vice-president (1976–77), and from 1973 to 1975 he was the company’s animated, and at times controversial, newsletter writer. During the early 1970s he led the committee that was instrumental

in securing Walterdale's current location at the Old Strathcona firehall. A few weeks after the first production at the firehall, Graves wrote in the December 1974 *Walterdale Newsletter*, "It must be that I have become a Walterdale old timer, and the new grand upstart of a theatre is a vaguely terrifying stranger" (2). Graves resigned as Walterdale's vice-president in 1977 in order to pursue what would become an accomplished professional theatre career, leaving behind a company for which he had provided a public personality, an administrative fervour, and a host of celebrated new works.

Graves—playwright, actor, director, producer, and administrator—was born in London, England in 1933. He grew up watching London theatre where, he says, "I watched the beautiful people do beautiful things beautifully. As a Cockney urchin, I aspired to that" ("Interview"). In 1964, after working in an assortment of radio and television jobs and performing his required military service, Graves moved with his wife and two children to Calgary and then to Edmonton, where he took a job as an assistant clerk at the Alberta Legislature, leaving that position in 1974 to become a self-employed writer. When his one-act play *Yes, Dear* won the *Edmonton Journal* writing competition, Graves thought it should be tested on stage, so he sought out Frank Glenfield, who was then Walterdale's president (1965–68). Drawing from his earlier amateur theatre experience in the United Kingdom, Graves directed *Yes, Dear* to positive response.

While acting in a number of Walterdale productions in the late 1960s, Graves continued to write, eventually earning international recognition for his work. During the 1970s he wrote a number of plays for Walterdale, including his first melodrama, *The Mumberly Inheritance or His Substance Frittered* (1971; directed by Graves), which, along with *Love in a Greenhouse* and *The Hand the Cradles the Rock* (1974; written in 1969; directed by John Rivet), were reported by the *Edmonton Journal* in 1981 as having "produced a steady stream of residuals from the summer stock companies and schools that continue to perform them" (Ashwell, "Prolific"). *Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again* also earned much praise, as it drew on contemporary local politics for its satiric inspiration. By the early 1980s Graves's writing was being produced at professional theatres and television stations across the country and around the world.<sup>27</sup> The Lyric Players Theatre in Belfast picked up *Mors Draculae* after director and Walterdale member Kieran O'Malley invited his visiting parents to see the play—Mary O'Malley founded the Lyric Players Theatre in 1951. Graves's *Pamela Frankenstein or Adam and Eve Meet Apple II* (1984; directed by Graves) was his third and last new Walterdale Melodrama, though the company would return to his oeuvre frequently over the next two decades.<sup>28</sup> The Playwrights Guild of Canada, of which he was a member, has published fifteen of his plays. Graves passed away in Lethbridge in February 2008, nine days after celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday.

Graves wrote *Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again or The Taming of the Sioux* to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Walterdale Melodrama.<sup>29</sup> It stands as the only play to date to be written about Walterdale Theatre Associates. The comic melodrama spoofs Walterdale in the early 1970s as it struggled to fund, acquire, renovate, and pay off loans for its firehall location (into which the group was moving). When the "ruthless land developer" Cramden Twinge informs the players of the Corn Exchange Theatre that they have a month to pay off their property mortgage to him (they own the building,

Twinge the land) or he will go ahead with plans to route the railroad through the very land on which the theatre lies, the group decides to stage a play to raise funds to buy the land outright. (Consider that it is the building, and not the heroine, that is threatened by the path of the train.) Even the lease's "cultural-identification preservation clause" cannot save them. It stipulates that if someone in the group was born in the area and has lived there his whole life, the lease will be voided and the company will own the land. But there is, of course, no "local talent" to be found! Or is there? Fortunately for all, the theatre burns down, the company collects the insurance money, and Twinge is spared the expense of tearing down the building. In fact, so pleased is Twinge with this turn of events that he arranges for the Corn Exchange Theatre to be relocated in the old firehall near the centre of town. Thus Graves's melodrama thwarts conventional expectations: in the end the villain is refashioned as a hero, and he attracts the affections of the woman after whom he had lusted. Says Rose Dale of Twinge, "There is no more attractive man to a woman than a rogue turned saint."

*Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again* is not merely a behind-the-scenes parody of amateur theatre practice, and theatre practice generally. The play speaks directly to Edmonton politics of the day and its controversies, and to Walterdale's position within them. By representing as caricature Edmonton's mayor (Twinge, the villain), its aboriginal population (Chief Shaking Spear), and the voice of Walterdale itself (Walter Dale, his daughters Millicent and Rose, and the exceedingly British Kenneth Haig-Fortescue), Graves provides a rare and timely staged send-up of 1970s Edmonton municipal affairs from the (somewhat) distanced perspective of a British expatriate. Historical allusions abound. For example, in 1974 Walterdale entered into a lease agreement with the City of Edmonton when it beat out the Strathcona Businessmen's Association for the firehall location. According to the agreement, the city owned the land and the firehall building; Walterdale would pay the city \$1.00 a year for rent, but the company had to procure all necessary funds to keep the building up to safe (and historically accurate) code. Moreover, at the time the mayor of Edmonton was William Hawrelak, who had twice been ousted from office and convicted for questionable land sales. The lived material, still fresh on Graves's mind because he was Walterdale's primary venue negotiator with the city before the company was finally awarded the firehall, was ripe for his plucking. Moreover, that the music and lyrics to the melodrama's three original songs—"The Universe Is Going Wild," "Reputation," and "I Hate Edmonton"—were written by William Thorsell just a year before he assumed his first editorial position (with the *Edmonton Journal*) ("Today's Paper") signals an important creative moment in the life of an influential Canadian figure. Thorsell later became the editorial board chair and CEO of the *Globe and Mail*.

Predictably, critics did not miss an opportunity to play the genre infidelity card with *Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again*. Graves mused on this in the August 1974 *Walterdale Newsletter* a month after the play closed: "I was puzzled by critical reaction along the lines of 'but it's not the traditional melodrama.' How could it be? How many melodramas are there set in Western Canada celebrating the RCMP Centennial featuring an Indian Chief and telling the story of Walterdale Playhouse? If I could have found one I wouldn't have had to write it" (1). Of course, the critics (and Graves) were not

entirely accurate. Numerous nineteenth-century melodramas were based on situations similar to those Graves describes. One popular theme was that of pioneer life, featuring North American “Indians” as villains attempting to thwart “heroic” settlers. Adhering to the genre, there was much violent spectacle and the hero-settlers were invariably victorious. The gold rush, a second popular theme, featured saloon and gambling scenes. *Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again* acknowledges some of the expectations raised by these types of melodrama, including treatments of racism, and draws upon an uneasy nostalgia to rework them to contemporary, potentially ironic effect.<sup>30</sup>

*Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again or The Taming of the Sioux* ran July 15–27, 1974, at The Citadel Theatre with the following cast and creative team:

NELLIE	Nancie Methuen
LULU	Troy Sprenke
DAFT WILLIAM	Bob McManus
MITZI	Edith Tusor
WALTER DALE	Don Biamonte
MILLICENT DALE	Patty B. MacDonald
ROSE DALE	Glenys Berry
CRAMDEN TWINGE	John Rivet
KENNETH HAIG-FORTESCUE	Patrick Spelliscy
EDDY NELSON	Len Crowther
CHIEF SHAKING SPEAR	Richard Davidson
RUNNING DEER	Donna Shandro
GIRLS	Sharon Jonzon, Barbara MacMillan, Joan Milroy, Carol Steinbring
BLADES	Sandy Shandro, Jim Watt, Joe Smith
CHAIRMAN	Victor Bristow
MUSICIANS	William A.W. Thorsell (pianoforte) Ken Jackson and Desmond Kucy (saxophones) Rusty Maher (banjo) Gerald O'Donnell (trumpet) Miro Mistic (drums) Elaine Christenson (vocalist)
DIRECTOR	Warren Graves
SONGS	William Thorsell
SET DESIGNER	Phil Switzer
COSTUME DESIGNER	Alice Switzer
CHOREOGRAPHER	Denise Kallal
STAGE MANAGER	Greta Pullishy

Walterdale produced the play again July 19–29, 1989, at Walterdale Playhouse (firehall), directed by Gilbert Allen.

# Chief Shaking Spear Rides Again or The Taming of the Sioux

by Warren Graves

*Characters* NELLIE HOGAN, *the Madame*  
LULU, *one of the girls*  
MITZI, *another of the girls*  
DAFT WILLIAM, *stage manager of the Corn Exchange Theatre*  
WALTER DALE, *manager of the Corn Exchange Theatre*  
ROSE DALE, *his daughter, the Sarah Bernhardt of the Prairies*  
MILLICENT DALE, *an ingénue*  
KENNETH HAIG-FORTESCUE, *remittance man and thespian*  
CRAMDEN TWINGE, *a ruthless land developer*  
EDDY NELSON, *a Mountie*  
CHIEF SHAKING SPEAR, *a playwright of the Plains*  
RUNNING DEER, *his secretary*  
and ASSORTED LADIES, GENTLEMEN AND MUSICIANS

*Setting* The play is set in Nellie Hogan's house of easy virtue at the turn of the century.

## Act One, Scene One

*Nellie's "house" is the subcultural centre of Edmonton in the early 1900s. Edmonton is becoming a city, the Mounties have been here a long time, there are aldermen, cowboys and pretensions to cultural activity.*

*At the centre of this area of endeavour are Walter, Rose and Milly Dale, who, aided by Kenneth Haig-Fortescue and Daft William, present a nightly entertainment at the Corn Exchange Theatre. Tonight they are celebrating a successful conclusion to their tenth season in the Corn Exchange with a big party at Nellie's place. Nellie has set up her place as near her idea of a Paris salon as possible and herself as near Mae West as possible.*

*As the curtain rises, her "string quartet" is concluding "I've Been Working on the Railroad." The room is full of blades and girls. Applause and whistles...*

NELLIE That was fine, boys. Didn't I tell you? Finest string quartet west of the Lakehead.

GENT Never seen a string quartet with a trumpet and six people before.

NELLIE Who said that!?

*Everybody points at everybody else.*

Nobody, eh? Well, you can tell nobody from me that when Nellie Hogan hires herself a string quartet, she gets herself a string quartet. If that isn't a string quartet—they don't get paid. (*To the band*) Now don't be afraid to give it to me straight, boys. Are you or are you not a string quartet?

*They hasten to assure her that they are.*

NELLIE What did I tell you! Think musicians don't know what they are?

LULU It's coming up to eleven o'clock, Nellie.

NELLIE Thanks, Lulu. I've got a little surprise for everybody at eleven o'clock.

*There is a panic for the doors.*

Hold it, hold it! Where the hell's everybody going?

MAN We know your little surprises, Nellie. The Mounties have got another raid coming up at eleven o'clock, right?

NELLIE Heck, no. We were raided last week. We're not due for another six weeks now. No, this is a good surprise. Now you all know the people down at the old Corn Exchange Theatre, right? A great bunch of people. Well, tonight they're winding up their tenth season down at the old place and I've invited them all back here for a party.

MAN Will Miss Rose be coming?

NELLIE Sure she'll be coming. And Walter and Milly and Kenneth...

MAN Pretty high class people to be coming to your house, Nellie.

NELLIE Who said that?

*Everybody points at everybody else.*

Well let me tell you that they happen to be very good friends of mine, and I don't know whether you know it or not but I happen to be pretty high class myself. You don't think I could come up with genuine Parisian decor like this if I was a bum, do you? I was very big in Europe before I came here.

MAN Then why did you come here, Nellie?

NELLIE (*Vamping him*) How could I waste my life there when you are here?

MAN (*Ecstatic*) Oh Nellie. (*Slides to the floor*)

NELLIE What a way to go. Bury him while he's still happy.

MAN I thought you loved me, Nellie?

NELLIE I thought you swore you'd never tell?

MAN (*Ecstatic*) Oh Nellie. (*Slides to the floor*)

NELLIE (*To audience*) Either you've got it or you haven't.

*Daft William enters.*

WILLIAM Miss Nellie, Miss Nellie!

NELLIE William, my favourite sweetheart. What news do you bring from the thespians?

WILLIAM None. I've just come from the theatre.

NELLIE You've had a rough day, haven't you, William?

WILLIAM Not too bad, taking it all 'round, considering everything. I would have been all right if it hadn't been for me fly.

NELLIE Your fly? What was wrong with your fly?

WILLIAM It wouldn't go all the way up at the beginning of act two.

MITZI Ooo Willie! What had you been doing in act one?

NELLIE Pay no mind to them, William. They don't understand when we talk theatre talk. Tell me what happened to your fly.

WILLIAM Well, when I found it wouldn't go all the way up, I didn't know what to do at first.

NELLIE A tense moment for you, William.

WILLIAM It was. Then I thought, I know what I'll do. I'll tie it to me braces.

NELLIE You tied your fly to your braces?

WILLIAM Well, I had to do something. I didn't want anything unexpected happening in act two, did I?

NELLIE Like what?

WILLIAM Well, there's a lot of weight there you know. It could have all come crashing down on the stage.

MAN What, all of it?

WILLIAM Right in the middle of Miss Rose's death scene. Well, she's bad enough at the best of times, but there's no living with her when she's dying.

NELLIE I can imagine. But it all came out all right, did it?

WILLIAM No. It all stayed up all right.

NELLIE And the show was a great success...

WILLIAM Yes.

NELLIE And now it's finished...

WILLIAM Yes.

NELLIE And they are all on there way over here.

WILLIAM Yes.

NELLIE Good.

WILLIAM Oh yes, and Mr. Walter asked me to tell you that the show was a great success and now it's finished and they are all on their way over here.

NELLIE I wish I'd said that. Okay, everybody, places please. Mitzi and Jean—go get it. Lulu—go keep an eye on the door. (*To the band*) Are you guys ready? (*They nod*) Okay. Now let me hear you singing like you were going to bust out in something.

MAN Aw, Nellie. I can't sing.

NELLIE Well, that's up to you. Anybody I see not singing gets a punch in the throat to help them along. What'll it be?

MAN *(Sings)* Quanta bello archipulco...

NELLIE Okay, save it for the big moment.

*Lulu returns.*

LULU They're here.

NELLIE String quartet! Twang it!

*The quartet strikes up with "Happy Birthday to You" and the ensemble joins in the singing. A couch and a small low table are brought downstage. Walter enters, assisting the pale Rose, Milly bubbles in with the poised Kenneth and they move to the couch, where Rose is seated. Mitzi and Jean bring in a cake with ten candles. All applaud at the end of the song; Walter is overcome.*

WALTER So kind, so kind. I really don't know what to say.

NELLIE What's to say? Blow out your candles.

*He does so.*

MITZI *(Close to him)* You blew it again, Walter. *(Sashays off)*

*Cries of "Speech, speech."*

WALTER Well ... ladies and gentlemen...

MAN Aw come on, Walter, be serious...

*Laughter.*

WALTER No, I mean that. To me you are ladies and gentlemen. You are kind, you are generous, warm-hearted and so full of—

MAN *(Drunk)* ... alcohol...

NELLIE Who said that?

*Everybody points at Kenneth.*

KENNETH Oh. I say.

NELLIE Well, we know what some people are full of and it isn't alcohol. Say your piece, Walter.

WALTER I was just going to say, this is a momentous occasion. A full decade at the Corn Exchange Theatre, and don't forget we started out from humbler beginnings four years before that. Tonight, another full house ... another act of faith in our humble offerings. How wise we were to bring our arts from the warmth and comfort of the East and offer it here, in this cruel and barbarous place. And what a success we have been! Not one empty seat and not one good review in ten years! (*Applause*) It's a great comfort to know that you are making *everybody* happy. And tonight, again tonight. A theatre full of hardy citizens and Kenneth raised them to poetry, Millicent brought gaiety to their hearts, and Rose moved them to tears. What a performance. I cried myself when it came to the final curtain. (*Quoting Rose's curtain speech*) "The twinkling dew has gone from off the summer lawn ... the sun is rising in the sky ... and I, pale flower, shall wither in its firesome heat."

*Rose coughs consumptively twice and "dies" on the couch—applause from the ensemble.*

MILLICENT Oh you were beautiful, beautiful. I swear that when you lay down and died, I never thought to see you rise again.

ROSE It would have been difficult. You were standing on my dress.

MILLICENT Oh no.

KENNETH You were magnificent. Truly magnificent.

ROSE Thank you, Kenneth. I could not have done it without you.

KENNETH Oh no. I was a bumbling inadequate compared to your performance.

ROSE True.

NELLIE Another success, eh, Walter?

WALTER It was indeed.

MILLICENT How was the box office?

ROSE           Millicent, how could you? We are talking about theatre.

MILLICENT    Forgive my crude commercial streak, it is a source of great anguish to me.

WALTER       There, there, my dear. Don't feel too badly. Everybody likes to eat.

NELLIE        That goes for me too. Cut the cake, Walter, and, then the girls will see that everybody gets a piece.

*Walter cuts the cake to applause, and Jean takes it to the kitchen.*

                  Well done, Walter. And now I have another favour to ask.

WALTER       Anything, my dear, anything.

NELLIE        Sing us one of the old songs, one of the good old songs.

DRUNK         Can you sing "Over the Hills and Far Away"?

WALTER       Yes.

DRUNK         Well, why don't you do that?

ALL            Who said that?

*The drunk points at himself grinning. A song from Walter, at the discretion of the director.*

*The villain enters.*

TWINGE:       Good evening.

LULU           Heavens! It is Cramden Twinge, the ruthless land developer.

TWINGE        Indeed it is. Forgive me for being late for the party, but, due to an oversight, you neglected to invite me. How could you do that to me, Nellie?

NELLIE        You'd be surprised what I could do to you, Cramden. You're nothing but trouble and you make me nervous to have around.

TWINGE        Nellie, Nellie. After all the trouble I had securing these luxurious accommodations for you.

NELLIE This place was a pigsty. The only trouble you went to was to make sure I couldn't find any place else. When are you going to sell me the land under this place?

TWINGE Sell you the land? My dear Nellie, Cramden Twinge never sells land—he only buys it. You don't have to stay on my land if you don't want to.

NELLIE How can I do that? The only land you don't own is the swamp across the river.

TWINGE And I am negotiating for that. You'll just have to face facts, Nellie. Land is money, and money is power, and it's power that makes the world go round.

MILLICENT Oh no. It's love that makes the world go 'round.

TWINGE Such a pretty thought, and such a pretty face. Don't you wish I would buy you a pretty dress?

ROSE We Dales do not need to be dressed by you, sir.

TWINGE Ah Miss Rose. It is not my intention to *dress* you—in fact, quite the reverse.

WALTER I must ask you to keep a civil tongue in your head, sir.

TWINGE And I would advise you to do the same. I am not here to participate in idle chit-chat and camaraderie, I am here on business ... and you, sir, will be most interested in what I have to say.

WALTER I doubt that.

TWINGE I thought everybody was interested—in the railway.

ALL The railway?

TWINGE Plans are proceeding apace. A thousand men and a Chinese cook are, at this very moment, defying the ravages of the prairies to bring steel to our very boundaries. Within the year we shall have a station, freight, silks and satins for the ladies, cigars and brandy for the men.

*All cheer.*

NELLIE You realize what this means?

ALL It means that there's a whole lot of money heading right this way.

*All cheer.*

TWINGE You are right, Nellie. The town is going to boom. We'll need bigger houses, hotels, general stores. Settlers will be coming in by the car-load looking for land, supplies, equipment—

LULU Relaxation after a hard day's work.

WALTER And what better way than an evening at the theatre?

NELLIE (*To crowd*) Don't any of you ever tell him.

WALTER Think how the rafters will ring with applause, faces flush at the antics of the comedians and tears fall at the bittersweet sadness of the tragedy.

TWINGE Speaking of tragedies, I have something to show you.

WALTER Me?

TWINGE As owner of the Corn Exchange Theatre, I felt you should be the first to know. (*Produces papers from his pocket*) I have here the plan showing the proposed route of the railway through the city. You will find it of interest, I feel sure.

WALTER Oh, yes indeed. How close will the station be to the theatre?

TWINGE Oh, very close.

WALTER But not so close that we would be disturbed by the noise?

TWINGE From the station—no. But the line itself might present you with a few difficulties.

WALTER Show me!

*Twinge lays out the paper. Walter looks at it, clutches his heart and collapses. His daughters and Kenneth rush to him and he is taken to the sofa. Rose confronts Twinge.*

ROSE Show me that paper, sir.

TWINGE      Now come, Miss Rose. There is no need for you to trouble your tranquil beauty with such mundane matters. My business is strictly with your father.

ROSE          My father is indisposed as you can see. You now have business with me.

TWINGE      I was saving that for later ... and in more suitable surroundings.

*Rose snatches the paper from him and looks at it.*

ROSE          Kenneth! Come here and explain this to me.

TWINGE      I would be pleased to undertake...

ROSE          Thank you, sir, but no. I prefer to speak with someone who will tell me the truth.

*She hands the map to Kenneth.*

KENNETH     Oh I say.

ROSE          What is it?

KENNETH     Rather bad news, actually.

ROSE          Show me.

KENNETH     Well you see, the railway comes in from the east here, runs south of jolly old Main Street, and then takes this deucedly necessary curve northwest in order to avoid falling in the jolly old river.

ROSE          Well?

KENNETH     Well, I'm afraid it cuts right across this jolly old corner ... on which stands the jolly old theatre ... our jolly old theatre ... actually.

ROSE          You mean the railway runs straight through the theatre!

KENNETH     As far as I can make out—in through the front door and out through the jolly old ladies whatnot, actually.

ROSE          Then it must be changed.

TWINGE        (*Laughs*) Changed? Changed? Do you think I have spent the last four years accumulating land along this line for it to be changed? Do you think that I will hear of it? Do you think that the railway will hear of it?

ROSE            If you try to run it through our theatre, you will both hear of it!

TWINGE        Then I suggest you move your theatre off my land.

MILLICENT     Your land? But it belongs to us.

TWINGE        I'm afraid that is not so.

ROSE            Of course it is so. Father. Show Mr. Twinge the deed.

TWINGE        I'm sure he wishes he could. But your father and I entered into a little business transaction some two years ago. A small matter of a mortgage. Let me show you... (*He produces another paper that Rose snatches from him*) a copy of the arrangement. If you examine it thoroughly, you will find that you own the theatre, but I own the land under it. And if you examine it minutely, you will find that I can throw you off it any time I wish to do so. I now wish to do so ... unless you would like to spend some time persuading me otherwise.

ROSE            You cad.

MILLICENT     You cur.

KENNETH        You bounder.

TWINGE        You better believe it. Let me leave you with your thoughts. You have one month! Either you fulfill the terms of this agreement, or I shall have your theatre removed from my land ... brick by brick if necessary. In the name of progress ... the railway must go through. (*He exits*)

ROSE            Oh Father, what have you done?

MILLICENT     He can't do this to us.

KENNETH        I say. What a rough go.

NELLIE         Looks like the party is over, everybody. Be grateful if you'd leave kinda peaceful while we get our heads together over this.

*The crowd disperses; Rose settles to read the agreement, Kenneth sits by her, Nellie and Millicent go to Walter.*

NELLIE        What you been up to, Walter?

WALTER        It seemed like such a good idea at the time.

NELLIE        Yeah. They always do—at the time.

MILLCENT     Tell me, Father. What was your arrangement with Mr. Twinge?

KENNETH      Would you prefer me to leave, sir?

WALTER        No, Kenneth, you might as well hear. I might as well tell all of you everything. It was the Chekhov that did it.

NELLIE        The what?

WALTER        The Chekhov. I've always wanted to do Chekhov's *The Seagull*. I thought the audience was ready for it. I mean you can't do Richard Brinsley Sheridan-type comedies forever can you? You have a duty to educate your audience, try more challenging theatre. So I did *The Seagull*, by Chekhov.

NELLIE        And what happened?

KENNETH      We got pooped on, actually.

MILLCENT     Kenneth!

KENNETH      Well, we did. I said we would if we did *The Seagull*.

WALTER        I should have listened to you, Kenneth.

KENNETH      Never mind, sir. Could have been worse.

WALTER        How?

KENNETH      We might have done *The Wild Duck*.

NELLIE        I'd rather be pooped on by a seagull than a wild duck.

MILLCENT     You mean the box office was bad?

WALTER Oh it can happen, my dear. And when it does, there's no food in the pantry, no heat in the stove and no money for the next show. What could I do? It was then that Mr. Twinge made me his offer.

ROSE This is hardly an offer, Father. This is legalized extortion.

WALTER Well, that's what the word mortgage means, my dear.

ROSE But this borders on usury!

KENNETH They usury do—haw haw!

MILLICENT Oh you stupid Englishmen. Why do you always laugh in the face of disaster?

KENNETH We have such excellent teeth.

WALTER Don't be hard on him, my dear. He is trying to put the best face on it that he can.

NELLIE He may not make it.

ROSE But Father, why did you agree to this? Could you not see that it would be impossible to pay off in the long term?

WALTER But it wasn't to be for a long term. I knew that once we put on another show in our own style the box office would pick up and I would pay off Mr. Twinge and his mortgage.

ROSE But after *The Seagull*, we did a riotous comedy and the house was full every night!

WALTER I know, I know.

ROSE Surely you could have paid off Mr. Twinge from that.

WALTER We could have—just.

MILLICENT Well, why didn't you?

WALTER Because—oh because he said why bother, things are going well, why lose all that capital just to pay off a mere loan.

ROSE A mere loan!

WALTER Don't scold me, my dear. Credit is so seductive and I have always been weak.

ROSE But what did you do with all that money?

WALTER For you, Rose—I gave you your own dressing-room with the star on the door. And Millicent, the dress you wore in *She Stoops to Conquer* was direct from Paris ... you were so pleased to have a dress from Paris, and you looked so pretty. Even Kenneth. Your silk top hat, Kenneth. Do you remember my giving you the silk top hat, Kenneth? And Daft William. His holiday to see his mother. All these things I was able to give through my possession of mere money. It made me feel so good, and all of you so happy ... and look where it has got us all. What foolishness.

MILLICENT Oh Father. You are such a good man.

ROSE Oh Father.

KENNETH Oh gosh, Mr. Dale, sir. I feel such a goose.

NELLIE Seagulls, wild ducks and now geese! What's the matter with you all? Do you think Nellie Hogan carved herself a place in this world by sitting around talking about birds all the time? Hell, no. If you are going to get anything out of life, you've got to attack it before it attacks you. Get right in there with the knees and the elbows, spit straight into the wind and duck fast so that it hits the guy coming up behind you. We are all going to have a belt and get some fighting spirit going here.

ROSE I don't drink.

NELLIE You'll do as I tell you because this is a fight you've got on your hands, and in your right mind, you don't look the fighting sort.

MILLICENT I think a belt will do us all good.

ROSE Millicent!

MILLICENT Well, I want to get my dander up, and I'm not even sure what it is.

WALTER You always were a spirited child, Milly. I wish I had some of it.

NELLIE Well, try some of this instead. (*Hands him a drink*)

KENNETH My dander could do with a little stimulation, under the circumstances.

NELLIE Help yourself. The bar is open to my friends.

WALTER You are very good to us, Nellie.

NELLIE Aw phoney-baloney. Us artists have got to help each other. Now let's start from the beginning. Is there anything in the contract that we can use to break it?

ROSE Not that I can see. Perhaps we should get a lawyer?

NELLIE Well, if you want to try pulling something crooked we could try that. But let's go the legal route first.

KENNETH Perhaps we could become a public nuisance.

NELLIE Is that a crack?

KENNETH Good Lord, no.

NELLIE I've been called a public nuisance in this town more often than I care to remember. So let's have no more public nuisance.

MILLICENT Why don't we just pay off the mortgage?

KENNETH I say! Why didn't I think of that?

WALTER There isn't time, my dear. You heard what Mr. Twinge said. We must fulfill the terms of the agreement by the end of the month. Oh why are we wasting our time like this? There is no way out. There's nothing we can do now—and it's all my fault.

MILLICENT Nonsense, Father. We have each other. We can do something. I could work for Nellie.

WALTER For Nellie!

MILLICENT Surely she must have washing and cooking and ironing for me to do, haven't you, Nellie?

NELLIE Well I have, but I'll tell you frankly—that's not where the money is.

WALTER Washing! Cooking! Ironing! My pretty little Millicent. I would rather die than allow that.

KENNETH Are you insured?

ROSE Kenneth!

WALTER He's right. Oh, woe is me! What a weak creature I have been. There is no help for any of us.

MILLICENT Nonsense, Father. Something will turn up. It always does. It's always darkest before the storm and every cloud has a silver lining. Hope springs eternal and who knows, maybe even now, something or someone is coming to help us. Probably from some entirely unexpected quarter, and probably through that very door.

WALTER Who could come through that door? And what could he possibly say or do that would help us?

*Eddy Nelson the Mountie bounds in.*

EDDY This is a raid! You're all under arrest.

NELLIE What's the meaning of this? We're not due to be raided for another six weeks. Who are you?

EDDY I'm a Mountie.

NELLIE I can see that. What happened to Frank Bell?

EDDY He's gone north to the Yukon. I'm his replacement.

NELLIE What's your name, son?

EDDY Nelson. Eddy Nelson.

NELLIE Hogan. Nellie Hogan. (*She shakes hands with him*) Let me introduce you to some local citizens. This is the Dale family from the Corn Exchange Theatre. This is Walter ... Miss Rose ... oh, and this is Kenneth. Never did know his other name.

KENNETH Haig-Fortescue. Eton, Harrow, and oblivion.

NELLIE And this is Miss Milly.

*The lovelight explodes between them.*

EDDY I do hope my sudden entrance didn't disturb you ladies, but I was on police business, you see. And, under those circumstances, we do not hesitate.

WALTER Are we really under arrest?

EDDY I was told that Miss Hogan ran a disorderly house ... (*Looks around*) It seems that my information is incorrect.

NELLIE It is like hell incorrect. I run the finest disorderly house west of the Lakehead and don't you forget it.

EDDY But there hardly seems reason to arrest anybody. It's so peaceful.

NELLIE If that gets out—my reputation is ruined. (*Yells*) MITZI!! LULU!! Get in here! (*To Kenneth*) Kenneth, can you do a drunk?

KENNETH (*Making his way unsteadily forward*) Well I shuppose if the necessity-necessarity arose I could—hic—oblige.

NELLIE That'll do. I'll pay you fifty dollars and costs.

KENNETH (*Sober*) Costs?

NELLIE Yeah, you're going to get arrested.

KENNETH Oh I say.

NELLIE Better get some alcohol on your breath. (*She gets bottle and glass. Mitzi and Lulu enter*) Okay, girls, Walter and Kenneth—give'em the treatment.

Mitzi sits on Walter's lap and starts vamping him; Lulu goes to Kenneth but is stopped by Nellie.

Just a minute. He isn't ready yet. Here's your drink, Kenneth.

*Kenneth walks forward to collect the drink: Nellie throws it over him.*

That ought to do it.

*Lulu zeroes in on Kenneth and vamps him.*

(*To the pianist*) Play something disgusting.

*Pianist strikes up and vamping proceeds.*

Look at that. Isn't that terrible. Have you ever seen anything so licentious? There are decent people and small children in this town. Can this sort of thing go unchecked? *(To Eddy)* Well, don't just stand there for goodness sake—*do something!*

EDDY           You are under arrest!

NELLIE       *(Relieved)* He made it. Girls, plead guilty and here's fifteen dollars apiece for the fine. Kenneth, drunk and disorderly... *(Gives him a bundle of notes)* Keep the change.

*The three of them move to the door.*

EDDY       *(To Walter)* I'm sorry, sir, I'll have to ask you to come along as well.

WALTER     *(Shocked)* Me!

EDDY       You were aiding and abetting.

WALTER     Aiding and abetting!

NELLIE     He wasn't exactly fighting her off. I've got an idea. Come here, Walter.

*Walter stands and Nellie throws another glass of whisky over him. Walter starts to sing and stagger.*

How about that?

EDDY       Okay. Come along with me, you four.

ROSE       Oh, Mr. Nelson. Couldn't you stay for a moment?

EDDY       Stay? Well, I don't think...

MILLICENT   Oh please stay. Please. I should feel so unprotected here alone with my menfolk taken from me.

NELLIE     Sure you can stay. Mitzi and Lulu have done this a hundred times. *(Calls)* Turn yourselves in, girls, and tell them Eddy Nelson has been delayed.

*Mitzi, Lulu, Walter and Kenneth exit.*

EDDY I really don't think...

ROSE Oh please, Mr. Nelson. We do need your help.

EDDY My help?

MILLICENT As an officer of the law.

EDDY I see. (*Poses*) How can I be of service to you, ladies?

ROSE (*Producing agreement*) We would like you to read this document. It is a nefarious agreement between my father and that villain, Cramden Twinge.

MILLICENT He seeks to drive us from hearth and home, take the roof from over our heads and the floor from beneath our feet, the food from out of our mouths, the clothes from our very backs, the air we breathe...

ROSE That will do, Millicent.

MILLICENT I am just explaining to Mr. Nelson.

*Rose looks at Millicent and Eddie gazing fixedly at each other.*

ROSE I think you have done it very well. Now let us settle down with the agreement and see if Mr. Nelson can find some technical imperfection that might exonerate us from our obligations.

EDDY (*Coming to*) What?

NELLIE They need a loophole to get them off the hook. Sit down here and I'll make you some coffee. (*Exits*)

*The three move to a table upstage, Eddy escorting Millicent most carefully.*

MILLICENT This is most kind of you, Mr. Nelson. It is a comfort to a poor defenceless girl to know that your strength is available to us.

*Seated at the table, Rose lays out the agreement, kicks Millicent, who still has Eddy hypnotized.*

Oh! There is the object of our indignity, Mr. Nelson. Please help us.

EDDY Never fear, Miss Milly, Miss Rose. The law is here to protect the innocent and confound the wicked. If this document is contrived to place you at a

disadvantage, I shall protect you against its iniquities. Are you prepared to place yourself in my hands?

*Millicent is about to do so, but she is prevented by Rose.*

ROSE            You have our trust and faith, Mr. Nelson.

EDDY            Thank you, Miss Rose. Well, then. Let's see what we have here. (*Reads document to himself*)

### **Act One, Scene Two**

*Street backdrop. Indian drumming begins. Chief Shaking Spear and Running Deer enter.*

CHIEF           Here we are, Running Deer. This is the land of the white man's tepees. Here we will find whisky, vice, greed, avarice, corruption and a whole heap of hymn singing. This is where I must come to bring my great writings because this is where they have the place. It is called the Corn Exchange Theatre and in my dream, the spirits told me that they would do my writings for all the world to see, for ten per cent of the gross. It is written. Mush!

*He waves them on, drum strikes up and they move off to "This Land is My Land."*

### **Act One, Scene Three**

*Travellers open to reveal Nellie's place with group still around the table. Eddy finishes reading the agreement.*

ROSE            Well? Is there any weakness in this arrangement that we might exploit?

EDDY            It's tied up tighter than a calf at branding time.

MILLICENT    Oh no.

EDDY            Whoever wrote this is a specialist in fine print.

MILLICENT    Oh curse that Cramden Twinge for the monster that he is.

EDDY            There is just one clause that might help.

ROSE            Which is that?

EDDY            The cultural-identification preservation clause.

MILLICENT    My goodness.

EDDY            I think Mr. Twinge may have slipped up there. At one time, you see, it was a popular notion that land was for people to live on. This was before all the talk of the railway and real estate. Now, of course, it is just another trading commodity for making a lot of money. But the fact remains, it's still in this document.

ROSE            But what do we do?

EDDY            I'll read it to you. "Whereas the contractor, as aforesaid, may not, in the event of this section being applicable, and despite the provisions of sections 10, 11, and 13 aforementioned and sections 27, 28 and 29 hereinafter proscribed; initiate, commence or otherwise begin termination of this agreement if such termination may be described, construed or otherwise interpreted as being detrimental to the cultural identification preservation of one whose residence in the area commenced at birth and continues to be extant." That seems to be a possibility, doesn't it?

MILLICENT    It does?

ROSE            I'm afraid I don't see how.

EDDY            Well, what you do is this...

*Enter Cramden Twinge.*

TWINGE        Aha! A thorn between two roses. My name is Cramden Twinge—I don't think I have had the pleasure.

MILLICENT    I'm quite sure you haven't.

EDDY            Eddy Nelson. One of Western Canada's finest.

TWINGE        To be sure, to be sure. These two ladies are not residents of this ... unusual hostelry. I hope you do not have them under arrest.

EDDY I am here to protect them.

TWINGE Not from me, surely.

EDDY Only in that they have come to me for legal advice.

TWINGE I see. You are going over the agreement, no doubt. A well-drafted document, is it not? Not a loose end to be seen from beginning to end, I am assured.

ROSE Mr. Nelson seems to feel that there may be one.

TWINGE Nonsense, my dear. It's tied up tighter than...

MILLICENT ...a calf at branding time...

TWINGE Precisely. And it will give me a great deal of pleasure to have both you charming ladies in the same predicament. I am not an unreasonable man. (*Moving in on Rose*) I'm sure that if you found it in your heart to show me special understanding and sympathy in my lonely life, this arrangement might be replaced by another of much more comforting aspects.

*Rose begins to cough consumptively and "die."*

MILLICENT My sister is not a well woman, Mr. Twinge. Surely you would not practice your villainy on her?

TWINGE You think I need practice?

EDDY I would remind you that I am here.

TWINGE Thank you very much, but I would rather practice on Miss Rose.

ROSE You cad. You unfeeling brute. Would you really close down the theatre and fling myself and my sweet young sister, to say nothing of my ailing father, unprotected into this western wilderness?

TWINGE What a way you have with words. I couldn't have put it better myself. There is, of course, the alternative.

ROSE The alternative?

MILLICENT You mean... ?

TWINGE Yes. Become my bride and, as Mrs. Cramden Twinge, this city will be laid at your feet.

ROSE No. No. I could not marry you if you were the last man on earth. Mr. Nelson. Please. Tell us what we must do.

TWINGE Yes, Mr. Nelson. Tell them what they must do.

EDDY All you have to do is to find somebody who lives here and include him in your theatre group and Cramden Twinge will not be able to foreclose on the agreement.

TWINGE WHAT?? What nonsense is this? They must be out of the theatre and off my land by the end of the month!!

EDDY Not necessarily.

MILLICENT Not if it may be described, construed or otherwise interpreted as being detrimental *etc., etc., ...*

TWINGE You mean the old cultural-identity preservation clause?

EDDY Precisely.

TWINGE That fool lawyer. I told him to strike it out.

ROSE I am happy to say that he was negligent of your instruction and we now have you by the short ones, Cramden Twinge.

TWINGE I doubt that, Miss Rose. The clause reads, if I am not mistaken, “one whose residence in the area commenced at birth and continues to be extant.” And to whom could that be applied? Not you, Miss Rose, nor you, Miss Millicent, nor your poor misguided father. Mr. Haig Fortescue is, by his own admission, a defrocked English nob, and Daft William is from Calgary. An alien group, if I may say so, and one that will do me the service of preparing to quit the Corn Exchange Theatre by the end of the month. (*Aside*) You’d have to get up very early in the morning to catch Cramden Twinge with his pants down. (*Exits*)

MILLICENT Oh dear. We are up the creek without a paddle once more. How are we to slough off Cramden Twinge’s intolerable yoke?

EDDY Speaking of intolerable yokes, did you hear the one about brown bread?

ROSE Please, Mr. Nelson, this is no time for levity. We are confronted by ruination.

EDDY I'm sorry, Miss Rose.

*Nellie enters with coffee.*

NELLIE Well? How's it going?

MILLICENT It's no good, Nellie. We thought we had found a way out, but—alas.

ROSE Were you born here, Nellie?

NELLIE Me? Hell, no.

ROSE How about the girls? Were any of them born here?

NELLIE Wouldn't think so. Most of them are from the East, got one or two from the States, but none from these parts as far as I know.

ROSE There must be somebody somewhere that was born here and has artistic aspiration.

*Walter hurries in. Drumming offstage.*

WALTER Girls, girls. You'll never guess. We've just met the most amazing man. His name is Chief Shaking Spear, and he says he's written a play!

*Shaking Spear and Running Deer enter, followed by Kenneth, Lulu and Mitzi. Street musicians play "This Land is My Land" for his entrance. Curtain falls.*

*End of Act One*

## **Act Two, Scene One**

*At rise, Daft William, assisted by Kenneth, Lulu and Mitzi, is organizing the "scenery" for a rehearsal of the play. This consists of a tepee with a functional door flap, a couple of "trees," a totem pole and a "skyline." With the aid of ladders, they are stringing up the "skyline." William and Kenneth unroll the canvas.*

LULU           What is it?

WILLIAM       It's the mountains. They're a bit creased—I've had them folded up all day.

MITZI           Creased mountains?

WILLIAM       They're not real, of course. It's what we call a backdrop.

LULU           What do you do with it?

WILLIAM       Well, you're supposed to hang it up.

MITZI           Come on then, let's have some mountains. *(To Lulu)* Isn't it exciting? Our very own collapsible creased mountains.

KENNETH       *(Pointing)* I think we could string them from there, catch them in the middle against that, and then carry them on to there. Are you going to nail them?

LULU           Nellie'll kill you if you start driving nails into her French Provincial balustrade.

WILLIAM       Her what?

LULU           That balcony up there.

KENNETH       It looks pretty solid, actually.

LULU           Well, it isn't, "actually." It's fake—like everything else in this place.

MITZI           Couldn't you tie it on?

WILLIAM       I've put laces on it in case we had to. All we have to do now is get up there and do it. Pull the ladder over.

*They pull the ladder over to one end of the balcony.*

That's it. Now then, who's going up?

MITZI           You are. You're the stage manager—manage it!

WILLIAM       Oh I couldn't. I've got no head for ladders. I usually work from above.

LULU           Well you're down here with the mortals now.

MITZI How about you, Kenneth?

KENNETH Me?

LULU Fancy tying one on Kenneth. (*Giggles*)

KENNETH Oh I say.

MITZI Oh come on, give it to me, I'll do it. You hold the ladder steady.

*Kenneth and William hold the ladder while Mitzi climbs up and ties the end of the canvas. They are duly appreciative of Mitzi's legs as they go by.*

*(From above)* How does it look to you?

KENNETH Fantastic!

LULU She's talking about the mountains.

KENNETH So am I.

LULU Come on down, Mitzi. You're making Daft William's knee tremble.

MITZI (*Descending*) That was fun. Can I do the next one?

LULU No. I get to do the next one. I think I've got the hang of it.

KENNETH (*Guffaws*) Oh I say, "got the hang of it," that's very good. Oh I say.

*Lulu sashays up the ladder and subsides toward Daft William.*

LULU Oh William. Help. I think I'm falling. Push me back on the ladder, William, quickly. (*She falls into his arms*) My hero...

*While Lulu is fixing up the centre section, Walter enters with the Chief carrying bundles of scripts. They move to the director's chair and table down right.*

WALTER That looks good, William. Have you finished the tepee?

WILLIAM I'll be bringing it in, Mr. Dale. I'm just a bit busy at the moment.

WALTER Yes. So I see. (*At table with Chief*) Well, Chief, I know this is the play you want us to do—but *The Taming of the Sioux*? Reminds me of another play.

You sure you thought of that title yourself?

CHIEF        It came to me in a vision. When I was a youth, I went out onto the plains to talk to the animals and the spirits ... and after many days fasting, a spirit came to me and gave me my name and told me what I must do.

WALTER      What did he say?

CHIEF        As the sun touched the top of the mountains... (*With a sweep of his arm he finds himself pointing at Lulu on top of the ladder. She is bending over. To the audience*) Something like that could have screwed up my whole retreat, you know that?

WALTER      But what did the spirit say?

CHIEF        (*Still looking at Lulu*) Holy smoke! (*Recovers*) The spirit tell me that my name from that day will be Shaking Spear...

WALTER      Shaking Spear?

CHIEF        Those were his words. And he tell me that I shall write the stories that he will tell me and that these stories will tell of my people and their ways.

WALTER      How many plays have you written?

CHIEF        Many plays. First, there was *A Midsummer Night's Sweatlodge*—a comedy. After that, the words came quickly and I wrote *Two Gentlemen from Kelowna*, *The Factor of Venice*, *Henry Hudson*, *Parts One and Two*, *Troilus and Kalynchuk* ... then I got into the story of my people on the reserves applying for municipal status.

WALTER      What did you call that?

CHIEF        *Hamlet*. My next play will be more modern. I'm calling it *Who's Afraid of Crazy Wolf?*

WALTER      What gave you the idea for *The Taming of the Sioux?*

CHIEF        Two things. First there was the story of my people and Sitting Bull when he fled the longknives south of the Medicine Line...

WALTER      Yes?

CHIEF        Then there was this girl I met once in Winnipeg. She was a Sue when I met her, but a Gros Ventres when I left. (*Laughs*) That's what we call an Indian joke.

WALTER      Oh, I see.

CHIEF        Ethnic.

WALTER      Yes, of course.

CHIEF        Like "Hi there, Chief. What do you think of bilingualism?" Do you know what the Chief says?

WALTER      I can't imagine.

CHIEF        (*Folds his arms*) "White Man speak with forked tongue." (*Laughs*) Do you know the difference between a tepee and a wigwam?

WALTER      No?

CHIEF        Wholesale—about seventy-five dollars. (*Laughs*)

*Rose enters in Indian costume, and joins them. Chief becomes solemn and raises his hand in greeting.*

CHIEF        When?

ROSE         Don't you mean "How"?

CHIEF        I know how. When? (*Laughs*)

ROSE         Are you ready to start the rehearsal, Father?

WALTER      I think we'd better. Kenneth, Mitzi, Lulu—go and get into your costumes. We shall be starting in a few minutes. William—get the rest of the scenery set, we'll try act three from the top. Excuse me, Chief. This is going to be a busy day.

CHIEF        I'll just sit over here and read through my lines.

WALTER      Yes, you do that. Now in this act, Rose, this is where the tribe that has adopted you brings in the white man and are going to put him to terrible torture... However, just as they are about to plunge the red hot pokers into his chest, you fling yourself across him and declare your love for him.

ROSE I seem to remember that story.

CHIEF It is loosely stolen from the legend of the hot pokers, or Pocahontas, as we say in Indian.

WALTER Yes, very well, but that isn't the first scene. Where's Millicent?

*Millicent and Eddy enter.*

MILLICENT Here we are, Father. I have been helping Eddy with his words.

WALTER Oh yes. It is kind of you to help us out with the production, Mr. Nelson.

EDDY My pleasure, Mr. Dale, but I'm not much of an actor, I'm afraid.

MILLICENT Isn't he wonderful—the way he *notices* things.

EDDY Part of my training, Miss Millicent.

WALTER (*Calling*) All right everybody. Places please for act three, scene one ... a sunny evening on Main Street, a friendly town in the West.

*Activity as the cast gets arranged.*

Okay, Chief, the narration starts ... now.

CHIEF Nose Creek was not a town to be sniffed at. A small settlement of sturdy pioneers, who couldn't make it in the old country, had settled here to chew up perfectly good buffalo pasture and grow cabbages. My people wondered at the many marvels they had in their lodges—steel knives, quick-shooting rifles, wool blankets and garbage bags. We did not know these things. To discover the secret of these wonders, a small band of warriors had captured a young white man and taken him back to the people. Meanwhile, back in town, his absence was beginning to be noticed.

WALTER Eddy and Millicent enter right, town activity begins...

*Eddy and Millicent walk on and stop.*

EDDY Mighty fine night, Miss Millicent.

MILLICENT It certainly is.

EDDY Sure is a mighty fine night to be accompanying you home from the second annual sodbusters' barbecue and masquerade ball like this. Did you have a good time?

MILLICENT Oh yes. I just love barbecued sodbusters.

*A bank robber backs out onto the street, sees Eddy and is about to shoot, but Eddy shoots him first. His body is dragged away.*

EDDY (*Without losing the speed*) Sure was surprised when you agreed to let me take you.

MILLICENT (*Coyly*) Oh come now, Eddy Nelson. You must know every girl in this town was just wondering who the big handsome Mountie would ask to be his partner at the ball.

*The banker, bound and gagged, hops out onto the street. Eddy unties him as he speaks.*

EDDY Don't have no eyes for any other girl in town except you, Miss Millicent.

MILLICENT Oh Mr. Nelson. I'll bet you're only saying that.

EDDY (*Thinks*) Reckon I was.

MILLICENT My guess is that the news will be all around the town in the morning that you took Milly Dale to the ball and walked her home after. Reckon that'll give rise to lots of talk and a whole heap of speculation.

*The banker, now free, shakes Eddy's hand, picks up the bank's money and returns to bank. An old gent starts slowly across the stage.*

EDDY Well let 'em talk, that's what I say. Talk didn't hurt no one.

MILLICENT Oh you just don't know. You should have been here before you came.

EDDY (*Puzzled*) Yeah?

MILLICENT This place was worse than Moose Jaw on a Saturday night.

EDDY Miss Millicent! How could a sweet young girl like you know what Moose Jaw was like on a Saturday night?

MILLICENT I've heard the stories. There was vice and sin and drunkenness and carryings-on and naughty ladies and men like animals. A girl just wasn't safe on the streets in the early hours of the morning.

EDDY If she was a lady, she wouldn't be on the streets in the early hours of the morning.

MILLICENT What! And miss all the vice and sin and drunkenness!

*Two muggers leap out and start beating up the old man.*

EDDY Excuse me, Miss Millicent. A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.

*Eddy strides forward to the muggers and thrusts his chest at them. They immediately turn tail and run. He puts a sling on the old man's broken arm.*

MILLICENT My. You know all about broken bones and everything, don't you?

EDDY Pretty well. They teach us that at Mountie School.

MILLICENT Where was that?

EDDY Regina. That's why all the action was in Moose Jaw. There you go, oldtimer. Get a good night's rest and call me again in the morning.

*Old man totters off. Young man enters right, girl enters left. They meet stage left.*

MILLICENT You sure like people, don't you, Eddy?

EDDY Well, the way I see it, Miss Millicent, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

MILLICENT That's very erudite.

*Eddy points a warning finger at the girl and she flounces off followed by the young man.*

EDDY I get a lot of time to think, out there on the lonesome prairie, just me, my horse and the stars. Makes a man stop to consider. And do you know the conclusion I've come to, Miss Millicent?

MILLICENT What Mr. Nelson?

EDDY           That prairie is pretty damned lonesome. I need to know that, somewhere, there's someone waiting for me to come back.

MILLICENT    You mean like the Commissioner?

EDDY           That wasn't quite what I had in mind, Miss Millicent.

MILLICENT    Oh dear. My beloved brother has been captured by Indians.

EDDY           I'm sorry to hear that, Miss Millicent.

WALTER       Wait a minute, wait a minute! Millicent. Is that the right line?

MILLICENT    Yes Father.

WALTER       "Oh dear. My beloved brother has been captured by Indians"?

MILLICENT    That's right, then he says he's sorry to hear it.

WALTER       He's leading up to proposing to you and then you suddenly say your brother has been captured by Indians?

CHIEF         In the trade, we call that a plot line. It tells the audience what has happened.

WALTER       Yes, but when did it happen?

CHIEF         While they were walking along the street there.

WALTER       But how did she know it happened?

CHIEF         She read the script.

WALTER       That isn't good enough.

CHIEF         So. My script isn't good enough? Running Deer!

*Running Deer commences beat on drum, Chief chants.*

WALTER       Now what's he doing?

CHIEF         I'm putting in a call to my agent.

WALTER       All right, all right! We'll leave it in.

*Drumming stops.*

CHIEF (To *Running Deer*) Cancel that call.

*Running Deer drums briefly: “Shave and a haircut,” then the reply on a thunder sheet: “Two bits.”*

Okay.

WALTER Pick it up at “Oh dear,” would you, Millicent?

MILLICENT Oh dear. My beloved brother has been captured by Indians.

EDDY I’m sorry to hear that, Miss Millicent.

MILLICENT He is in terrible danger and will be tortured cruelly if you personally do not gallop fearlessly into the teeth of danger and, by virtue of your sheer demonstration of raw courage, so impress the chiefs that they will set him free and you will bring him back safely thereby making me very susceptible to any suggestions you may have in mind.

CHIEF (*Smiling hugely*) Now that’s a plot line!

EDDY I can see it is up to me. Through all travail, the code of honour of those fearless men in the red coats who bring peace and justice—shall prevail.

*Eddy strides off leaving Millicent yearning after him.*

WALTER Right, everybody. Indian encampment. William, get the tent in position. Where’s Kenneth?

KENNETH Here, Mr. Dale.

WALTER Get yourself tied to the totem pole—help him, girls.

*Rose enters in her Indian costume.*

Rose, my dear, you look beautiful. Doesn’t she look beautiful, Chief?

CHIEF Not bad for paleface woman. Indian woman more dark, more passion.

WALTER Yes, but she is the only survivor of a pioneer family and was adopted as a child by your tribe.

CHIEF Is that a plot line?

WALTER Yes.

CHIEF Pretty damn good plot line.

WALTER Now you go and get in your tent and await the arrival of the redcoat. Aren't you tied yet, Kenneth?

LULU He's fit to be, believe me.

WALTER Well please hurry.

*Enter Cramden Twinge.*

TWINGE Angels and ministers of grace defend us!

CHIEF (*Pokes his head out of the tent*) Who said that?

TWINGE I did.

CHIEF Do you mind if I use it?

TWINGE What is this nonsense, Dale? Are you really expecting to mount another presentation at the Corn Exchange Theatre?

WALTER I am indeed. This will be our finest show yet.

TWINGE That I doubt very much. And what is this? The delectable Miss Rose going native? That should attract a crowd.

ROSE This could be my greatest role.

TWINGE If you are looking for a role, Miss Rose, I would be pleased to arrange the daddy of them all.

ROSE How dare you, sir. You are not couth.

TWINGE For the last time, Miss Rose. Leave these nonentities to their plight. These fiddlings with cultural endeavour and caterings to human emotion, that is not the way of the future. Human achievement is to be measured in their ability to build great monuments. The railway, buildings, factories, banks, huge offices and stores—this is where the money is.

ROSE           Why do you reduce everything to money, sir?

TWINGE        Because life, when reduced to money, is reduced to its irreducible minimum.

ROSE           And is that what you want, sir? A minimum life? I would rather raise it to its unlimited maximum through the beauty of the human spirit. Do you think that mere money should make us walk through life with our eyes downcast, searching for it in the gutter, when above it is—the sky?

CHIEF          (*Head pops out of the tent*) Could you speak a little slower? I'm having trouble getting all this down.

TWINGE        The gutter is where life is, Miss Rose, and achievement is the ability to climb out of it. Come with me and I will raise you to the heights. Stay here and you will grovel with the rest, begging for alms and help, at the mercy of those with *money*. I need your theatre for a railway. The town needs your theatre for a railway. The country needs your theatre for a railway. The whole world needs your theatre for a railway. And do you know why, Miss Rose? Because a railway means money, money, MONEY. How will you compete with that with your paltry offerings to the human spirit? Human spirit? Pah!! It can be bought and sold for MONEY!! (*Exits*)

WALTER        Could we please get on with this rehearsal?

*Nellie enters.*

NELLIE        Hi everybody. How's it going?

WALTER        If we had a chance to get on, perhaps we could find out!

NELLIE        Is that what they call artistic temperament or just plain bad temper?

WALTER        I'm sorry, Nellie, but this isn't the easiest place in the world to rehearse.

NELLIE        You want I should throw you out?

WALTER        No, no. It's very kind of you to let us be here.

NELLIE        Think you'll get back in the theatre for the play?

ROSE           Of course we will. We have the clause in the lease and the Chief. Cramden Twinge cannot prevent us.

NELLIE Not in the lease, but maybe he'll come up with something else.

WALTER Come and sit with me, Nellie, and you can watch it and tell me what you think.

NELLIE I can tell you what I think. I think you've got about an hour before I shut you down for the day. I've got a business to run here, too, you know.

WALTER Yes, yes. All right everybody, places for act three, scene two. Lights. Okay, Chief. When you are ready.

*Lights for this scene. Chief steps from the tent, a gale howls temporarily. Chief holds up his hand, and it stops.*

CHIEF Now is the winter of my discontent. Can spring be far behind? All the world's a stage and men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances and one man, in his time, plays many parts. The warrior, by taking arms against a sea of troubles, can end them, or end up getting scalped himself. The unkindest cut of all. To be or not to be, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer this outrageous fortune or take up slings and arrows and give the white man those thousand shocks that flesh is heir to. But could we win? A consummation devoutly to be wished. But then they trade us whisky, and then the mind is lost, determination flees and alcohol makes beggars of us all. White Horse, White Horse, my kingdom for White Horse!

*Rose enters and throws herself at his feet.*

ROSE Great chief, and my father. Do not speak from such a heavy heart. Look hopefully toward the new day and welcome tomorrow.

CHIEF Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps on this petty pace. I cannot wait until tomorrow. There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at its flood, leads on to fortune. I must act! A gesture! A sign! How about my old red-hot poker routine with this paleface?

ROSE Father. You couldn't. You wouldn't.

CHIEF Wouldn't? 'Tis now the witching time of night when churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out contagion to this world. Now I could drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on. Find your tongue, white man, while still it roots itself in conscience. Speak the speech I pray you, trippingly on the tongue, before I cut it out.

ROSE           Father!

KENNETH       Help!

CHIEF           Is this a dagger I see before me, the handle towards my hand. Come, let me clutch thee.

*Rose flings herself across Kenneth, while the Chief stares glassy eyed at the dagger.*

ROSE           You cannot kill him. I love him.

KENNETH       The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from Heaven.

CHIEF           Fee, fie, fo, fum, I smell the blood...

ROSE           Father, if you love me as I love you, spare this pasty, knock-kneed weakling from your wrath. To kill him you must first kill me.

*Chief lunges and stabs Rose.*

KENNETH       Oh I say!

*Rose staggers away in a prolonged death.*

ROSE           Father! How could you do this? How cruelly you betray me. *(Coughs)* There's no trust, no faith, no honesty in men. All perjured, all foresworn, all naught, all dissemblers. I should have listened to Mother. *(Coughs)*

CHIEF           *(Lurching at Kenneth)* And you ... and you ... and you! What last words will you bequeath to mortal memory?

KENNETH       *(Desperately)* Beware the Ides of March?

*Eddy strides in.*

EDDY           STOP! *(Strikes pose, pointing at Rose)*

*All turn to look at Rose, who has been waiting.*

ROSE           *(Coughs)* My last syllable of recorded time. Life is but a walking shadow. A poor player that struts and frets her hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale, written by an idiot, signifying nothing.

*(Staggers dramatically) Out ... out ... out ... out ... out. (Falls to the ground, rises) ... brief (Falls, rises) ... brief (Falls, rises, coughs) ... brief candle. (Falls, pause, rises, Chief blows, she falls)*

*Eddy strides across to Rose, listens to her heart. He raises her and she supports herself on one arm. When he gets up, she stays suspended.*

EDDY           Death lies on her like an untimely frost upon the sweetest flower of all the field. *(Rises)* I'm afraid I shall have to report this.

CHIEF          I smell something...

WALTER       That isn't the line.

CHIEF          I don't mean the play. I can smell something else.

NELLIE         I can only smell the play.

CHIEF          Wait. Someone comes.

*Daft William hurries in.*

WILLIAM       It's the theatre. The old Corn Exchange. There's a fire. The whole thing is going up in smoke.

*Pandemonium as everybody rushes about and rushes offstage; Kenneth is left tied to the totem pole, shouting for help.*

*The travellers close. Street musicians enter; song connected with the fire, e.g., "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." Members of the cast cross behind with buckets and blackening faces. The curtain falls.*

## **Act Two, Scene Two**

*The assembled group are in tatters, with blackened faces. Walter, sobbing, is comforted by his daughters.*

ROSE           There, there, Father. There was nothing that could be done.

MILLICENT     Everything ... gone.

ROSE           My dressing-room with the star on the door.

MILLICENT My dress from Paris.

KENNETH My silk top hat.

NELLIE My eyebrows.

WALTER We have nothing left ... after all these years. The laughter, the tears, the magic—all gone.

*Cramden Twinge enters excitedly.*

TWINGE I have excellent news!

ROSE That is impossible.

TWINGE Wait until you hear it, Miss Rose. Your theatre has burned to the ground!!

MILLICENT (*Wails*) How can you be so pleased?

EDDY Perhaps it was you that started the fire?

TWINGE I never thought of it! I mean the thought had never occurred to me. I mean ... what does it matter what I mean. All our problems are solved!

WALTER Solved?

TWINGE Don't you see. I am saved the expense of clearing the site—

WALTER Is that all you can think of at a time like this?

TWINGE —and you will collect the insurance money.

WALTER Insurance money?

TWINGE Part of our agreement was that I would advance the money if you would insure the theatre. You *did* insure the theatre?

WALTER (*With wonder*) Yes. I did. For fifteen thousand dollars!

ROSE Oh Father!

TWINGE      And now the finest news of all. This conflagration has so impressed the mayor and the aldermen that they are sure the town needs more adequate protection. I have just arranged a lease with the fire chief on larger premises nearer the town centre.

MILLICENT    So?

TWINGE      Part of the transaction was that I was able to pick up the old fire hall for a song.

NELLIE       Hum a few bars.

TWINGE      It will be the site of the new Corn Exchange Theatre.

WALTER      The new Corn Exchange Theatre. What are you saying?

*Twinge falls on his knees before Rose.*

TWINGE      Miss Rose. If I cannot win you by foul methods, may I win you by fair. All these things I will give you and perhaps, in the giving, you may be persuaded to look upon me in a new light.

ROSE         I may indeed. There is no more attractive man to a woman than a rogue turned saint.

*Eddy pinches Millicent's bottom.*

MILLICENT    Oh! (*Smiles at him, interested*) The reverse may also be true.

TWINGE      Say you will be mine, Miss Rose.

ROSE         Will I have a dressing-room with a star on the door?

TWINGE      You will.

ROSE         And Millicent a dress from Paris?

TWINGE      Indeed, yes.

ROSE         And Kenneth a silk top hat?

TWINGE      Even that.

ROSE            Then I am yours. (*She bends him over and kisses him soundly*)

*While all congratulate the happy couple, the travellers close and the Indian drumming starts. The Chief and Running Deer come to centre stage and, in a spot, the Chief makes the following speech.*

CHIEF           And I went out onto the plain and said to the Great Spirit, “In this play there will be a villain, and he will corrupt the minds of men and use them for his own design ... but there will come a great retribution and he will die the thousand deaths according to the White Man’s Law. And the Great Spirit said to me, “Smarten up, dummy—they don’t do things that way any more.”

*Travellers open and whole cast comes forward for closing song such as “Side By Side.”*

*The End.*