

# The Tenth Negative Pig (1983)

by Barbara Sapergia and Geoffrey Ursell

On June 22 1981, Walterdale's outgoing artistic director Vivien Bosley received recognition from the board for her "dynamic and adventuresome work [which] achieved a lot in the promotion of new authors, new plays, and young people" between 1979 and 1981. In gratitude, the membership elected her board president, a position she held from 1982 to 1984. Her impact on Walterdale was tremendous. Between 1980 and 1984, under Bosley's direction, Walterdale organized a national playwriting competition and produced five original season plays (Kevin Burns's *Shikata Ga Nai*, Brad Fraser's *Mutants*, Gordon Pengilly's *The Apprentice of Swipe*, Barbara Sapergia and Geoffrey Ursell's *The Tenth Negative Pig*, and Warren Graves's *Pamela Frankenstein*) and four new one-acts (Mary Glenfield's *The Three Sillies*, Raymond Storey's *The Immortelle*, Warren Graves's *Would You Like a Cup of Tea?* and Gerald St. Maur's *Sister Virtue*). Bosley had, in fact, aligned Walterdale with the recent new play production explosion at many Edmonton theatres. She kept Walterdale's material provocative and relevant in a city whose theatre audiences were growing to demand new plays.

Walterdale's national playwriting competition had introduced the company to a number of workable new scripts. Three in particular the board felt deserved further attention. A few weeks after the first of these, Pengilly's *Swipe*, closed in May 1981, the board decided to include in its 1981/82 activities two workshops that would for the first time involve the company in new play *development*. The first workshop was of a play by local playwright Tom McGovern called *Charlie Is My Darling*, led by long-time member John Rivet with *Edmonton Journal* reviewer Keith Ashwell.<sup>38</sup> The second was of a play set in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Saskatchewan at the end of World War II, led by Frank Glenfield. Interest in the play, titled *The Tenth Negative Pig*, had grown over the summer of 1981, and the board decided in September that the play's co-authors, Barbara Sapergia and Geoffrey Ursell, would be flown in from Regina to

see a two-day workshop of their creation the following March. For their expenses, \$500 came from funds remaining in the national playwriting competition grant. University of Alberta English professor Diane Bessai was dramaturgical “critic” for the workshop and reading.

Frank Glenfield, also a member of the selection committee, had taken particular notice of Sapergia and Ursell’s play during the adjudication process for the competition. He recalls, “The [selection] group, the four of them, picked *The Apprentice ofSwipe*. I didn’t. Turned out that I had never seen it. Somebody had seen a little mark on the script and thought I’d had it. I’d never seen it. So I had picked the second play which we later did: *The Tenth Negative Pig*” (Interview). When Glenfield did read *The Apprentice ofSwipe* he agreed that it was more appropriate for immediate production and the unanimous decision was made, but he saw strong workshop potential in *The Tenth Negative Pig*. Following the March 1982 workshop, interest in mounting a full production of the play was high, and the board decided to stage it the following season with Glenfield as director.

Playwrights, poets, and novelists Barbara Sapergia and Geoffrey Ursell were both born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, in 1943. Sapergia received her BA in English literature from the University of Saskatoon in 1964 and her MA from the University of Manitoba in 1966, while Ursell received his BA and MA from the University of Manitoba and his PhD from the University of London (England). Eight of Sapergia’s plays have been produced, including *Lokkinen* (1982), *Matty and Rose* (1985), *Roundup* (1990), and *Winning the Prairie Gamble* (2005), the latter written with Ursell. Ursell’s plays include *The Running of the Deer*, which won the Clifford E. Lee National Playwriting Award in 1977; *Saskatoon Pie!*, which won the Persephone Theatre National Playwriting Award in 1981; and *Gold On Ice* (2003). With Bob Currie and Gary Hyland, Sapergia and Ursell co-founded Coteau Books in 1975, and in 1982 they were founding members of the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre.

Described in an *Edmonton Journal* review as a “well-cast and at times spellbinding play” (Coady), *The Tenth Negative Pig* was another early-1980s “hit” for Walterdale. While visiting the Saskatchewan Summer School for the Arts (1967–91) in the Qu’Appelle Valley, Sapergia and Ursell learned of the site’s history as a tuberculosis sanatorium (1917 to the mid-1960s) before the provincial government had refashioned it as an arts retreat in 1967. Their play provides a moving fictional account of “Fort San” set at Christmas and New Year’s in 1944, just as trials of the antibiotic streptomycin are being introduced to treat and cure the disease. The play follows four patients—Johnny, Lorene, Nan, and Michael—through personal interactions and fevered hallucinations. We learn that Nan is doing well and may soon be released if she passes the usual tests: fluid from her lungs is injected into a guinea pig; if there is a negative reaction—that is, no infection—for ten successive tests, she could be free to go. Her hopeful news comes as she is falling in love with an air force pilot, Michael, who faces a long stay in the sanatorium. As well, small-town girl Lorene is smitten with Johnny, a “pig-sticker” from a meatpacking plant. A fifth patient, Mariana, conveys the devastating impact of TB on First Nations people.

Discussions about our place in a world filled with violence and disease are interwoven with flowing original folk music composed by the playwrights (see Appendix II). Though tuberculosis was widely viewed as a preventable disease in the developed world when *The Tenth Negative Pig* appeared on Walterdale's stage in 1983, the emergence of drug-resistant strains since the early 1990s heightens the play's socio-scientific relevance for contemporary audiences. The play uses a subtle lyricism to focus on an important part of Canadian history.

*The Tenth Negative Pig* ran March 17–26, 1983, at Walterdale Playhouse (firehall) with the following cast and creative team:

|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| JOHNNY DOMBROWSKY    | Claudio Mascuili |
| NAN WILKIN           | Karen Redford    |
| LORENE EVANS         | Suzi Max         |
| MARIANA              | Karen Anthony    |
| CHARGE NURSE (Laura) | Linda Pollard    |
| ELVA STEWART         | Gaye LePage      |
| MICHAEL              | Rainer Kraps     |
| DOCTOR DEVON         | Alan Tovey       |
|                      |                  |
| DIRECTOR             | Frank Glenfield  |
| SET DESIGNER         | Alli Ross        |
| STAGE MANAGER        | Andrew Thompson  |
| PRODUCTION MANAGER   | Tim Marriott     |
| MUSIC PERFORMER      | Rob Jerrak       |

# The Tenth Negative Pig

by Barbara Sapergia and Geoffrey Ursell

*Characters* DOCTOR DEVON, in his 40s.

JOHNNY DOMBROWSKY, from a Ukrainian farm background. Worked in a Moose Jaw meatpacking plant on the pig-killing floor. Was a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. 35 years old.

NAN WILKIN, was a teacher. 25 years old. Tries to idealize things. A “model patient.”

LORENE EVANS, from a poor family. Used to be a waitress in Swift Current. Sarcastic, trying to be tough. In love with Johnny.

MARIANA, Cree. From a northern reserve. Pregnant, about to give birth. In her early 20s.

CHARGE NURSE (LAURA), in her late 30s. Efficient, brisk. Likes to be in control of herself and her surroundings.

ELVA STEWART, a Nurse. Around 45–50. A very limited experience of life. Religious. Spinsterish.

MICHAEL, from a well off background, a ranch in Alberta. Served briefly in the RCAF in Ceylon. Tries to romanticize his war experience and illness. In his early 20s.

## Act One

*A tuberculosis sanatorium. At the very front of the stage are two sleeping porches, open to the air but screened in, where the patients sleep at night. Johnny’s bed is pushed out onto the porch that is connected to the Men’s Ward, behind it and Stage Right. The beds of Nan and Lorene are pushed out onto the sleeping porch connected to the Women’s Ward, behind it and Stage Left. There is an empty bed in the Men’s Ward, and there are two bedside tables, with tissue boxes, thermometers, and sputum cups on them. There are two bedside tables in the Women’s Ward. There is a shelf of books and magazines in Johnny’s room, near where the bed will be.*

*At Stage Centre is the Maternity Ward, where Mariana is sleeping. At the back of Stage Left is an Examination and Operating Room, with a fluoroscope, pneumothorax equipment, and a table that doubles as an examining and operating table. At the back of Stage Right is a place for the musician(s).*

*It is 6 a.m. The stage is in complete darkness. It is Sunday, December 24, 1944. The musical intro for “In the Sanatorium” begins softly. Doctor Devon, standing near the musician(s), begins to sing. As he sings, a spot*

*comes up slowly on him, and then the lighting on the porches and wards comes up slightly, as in winter just before dawn, so that the beds are visible. Lorene stirs in her sleep and groans.*

DOCTOR (sings)

Oh the days go on forever  
And the nights are just as long  
When you're lying in your bed  
And you're lying all alone  
And you know that somewhere out there  
Folks are living normal lives  
But you're waiting for the angels to arrive  
Yes, you're waiting for the angels to arrive  
In the Sanatorium  
In the Sanatorium  
Waiting for the angels to arrive

Oh, the summer's so long coming  
Then it goes by so fast  
And the days are like a dream  
You know can never last  
And was it only yesterday they took the harvest in  
And you were waiting for the winter to begin  
Oh, so afraid of winter moving in  
On the Sanatorium  
Yes, the Sanatorium  
Waiting for the icy touch of wind

*Pause. Then Charge Nurse and Elva come on briskly and go into the wards, Elva into the Women's and Charge Nurse into the Men's. They flip the lights on in the Wards. The lights are bright. Elva pushes first Nan's bed and then Lorene's from the porch to the Ward. Charge Nurse moves Johnny's from his porch to his Ward. Conversations take place on both sides of the stage, although they do not overlap. They have put jugs of warm water on the bedside tables.*

ELVA Rise and shine, you two.

NAN (Waking up) Is it morning already?

*Elva puts a thermometer in Nan's mouth, then goes for Lorene's bed.*

JOHNNY (Waking up) What? What time is it?

NURSE        *(Looks at watch)* It's six-oh-four. We're four minutes behind.

JOHNNY      Behind what?

*Elva pushes in Lorene's bed.*

LORENE      Jeez! First they freeze you, then they blind you. *(Rubs her eyes, shivering.)*

ELVA         Open up. That's it.

*Elva slaps a thermometer in her mouth. Elva fusses about, straightening the beds, lining up the sputum cups and checking the supply of "cellu wipes."*

JOHNNY      We need a goddam union around here to regulate the hours. Patients of the world unite!

NURSE        I don't see that you have anything to complain about.

JOHNNY      You never ask! Now, if we had a patients' committee—

NURSE        I don't think you'll find much support for an idea like that, I really don't. Now here *(Puts a thermometer in his mouth)* ... be quiet. I need your temperature.

*Elva takes out Nan's thermometer and marks down the temp on her chart. Charge nurse fusses around, straightening up.*

NAN          How is it?

ELVA         Fine. It's just fine.

*Elva takes out Lorene's thermometer, and Lorene immediately grabs a tissue and coughs into it. Elva reads her temp and makes a clucking noise with her tongue. She enters it on the chart.*

LORENE      What's wrong, have I got a temperature?

ELVA         You got your usual two degrees.

LORENE      You'd think with this fever I'd at least be warm out on the porch at night. Christ!

ELVA         I've asked you before not to take Our Lord's name in vain.

NAN Lorene...

ELVA And on the day before Christmas.

LORENE Ok, I'm sorry. But it must have been twenty-five below out there.

ELVA (*Gloating a little*) Thirty below, actually.

LORENE Oh my God, I'll never get out of here!

NAN LORENE!

*Elva walks out of the Ward, offended. She goes into Mariana's room, carrying one of the jugs of water. She puts the water on the table, gently shakes Mariana away and gives her a thermometer.*

NAN Couldn't you watch your language in front of Elva?

LORENE I SAID I was sorry. It's just this goddamn cold, I don't know what I'm saying.

NAN Are you sure you're not exaggerating? I don't find it so bad.

LORENE (*Incensed*). Are you kidding? Some things I don't fool around with. Keeping warm is one of them.

NAN Ok, Ok. Why don't we wash up?

LORENE I hope the goddamn water's hot.

*Nan sighs and they both begin to wash up. Nan and Lorene take out combs, mirrors and make-up and work on hairdos and make-up. Nan does her hair in a tight bun. In Johnny's room, the Nurse reads his temp and records it. In Mariana's room, Elva washes Mariana's face. Johnny has picked up a book and is reading it.*

NURSE What's that you're reading—some union book?

JOHNNY Nope. Hemingway ... about the war in Spain.

NURSE There's a war on right now, in case you hadn't noticed.

JOHNNY I read the newspaper.

NURSE General Patton's stopped the Germans.

JOHNNY If we'd had a little more help in Spain, he wouldn't have had to bother.

NURSE You'd better watch yourself—

JOHNNY Is that right?

NURSE —we're not having any of that Communist nonsense around here.

JOHNNY Whatever you say. (*Mock salute*)

NURSE Don't do that.

JOHNNY (*Moves into clenched fist salute.*)

NURSE (*Angry*) There's hot water. You better wash up.

JOHNNY Sure thing.

*Charge Nurse leaves. Johnny puts the book down and washes. He shaves, looking sadly at his reflection in his shaving mirror. Charge Nurse stops at Mariana's room.*

NURSE (*Emphatic*) Stewart!

ELVA (*Comes out of Mariana's room*) Yes, nurse?

NURSE Help me with the breakfast trays.

ELVA I'll be finished here in a moment.

NURSE Right now, Stewart.

ELVA Of course.

*She puts cloth in basin of water and brings them out. They go off to get trays. Elva comes out first, with Johnny's. She takes it to him.*

ELVA Time for breakfast, Mr. Dombrowsky.

JOHNNY (*Still shaving*) Just set it down on the bed.

ELVA (*Sets it down*) Did you have a good night?

JOHNNY Not so great.

ELVA You're going to get better. I know.

JOHNNY Oh sure.

ELVA I can always tell. (*Looks at empty bed*) I knew he wasn't going to make it.

JOHNNY Maybe you better not mention that to anybody else. About knowing who's going to live and who's going to die.

ELVA Oh, I don't.

*Elva goes out of room, and goes to get tray for Mariana. Charge Nurse passes her in the hall, carrying trays for Nan and Lorene. When Elva takes the tray in to Mariana she stays there, trying to feed her. Mariana does not eat much.*

NURSE (*Sets trays on beds*) Here's breakfast.

*Nan tucks in. Lorene just stares at the food.*

LORENE I just don't think I can manage it.

NURSE I expect you to eat it.

LORENE It's just too much ... how could anybody? (*She watches Nan eat*) I mean, three eggs, and all that sausage and bacon, and FAT ... and mixed milk and cream to DRINK—ugh. I grew up on skim milk, pig food, Mom called it, but skim milk is all we ever drank.

NURSE Well, do your best, will you?

LORENE Sometimes I think that's where this fever comes from—having to burn up all this food. I'm like a furnace working overtime ... every time I turn around, somebody's shovellin' in the coal.

NAN Try it, Lorene ... it's good.

LORENE I'm just not hungry. I'm tired. (*Picks up glass. Takes a sip, and grimaces.*)

NAN (*Changing subject to protect Lorene*) After we take our pneumo today, I think I'll go for a little walk.

NURSE You better ask the Doctor first.

LORENE     *(Picking at food)* Jeez, wish I could go for a walk.

NURSE     You have to rest until that temperature starts to come down.

LORENE     I don't see what difference it makes.

NURSE     It makes all the difference in the world. You have to give the body a rest so it can fight.

LORENE     Is that why we have to freeze at night? It slows our bodies down?

NURSE     The fresh air's good for you.

LORENE     I've have enough fresh air to last me a lifetime. Two lifetimes!

NAN         Fresh air and bed rest and good food have helped a lot of people.

LORENE     Yeah, well they haven't done much for me.

NAN         Come on, Lorene, give us a break, will you?

LORENE     It's all right for you. Everybody knows you're getting better.

NURSE     And so would you, if you'd just stop fighting it. *(Picks up wash basins to take away.)*

LORENE     I'm not. *(But she's lost interest in the subject)* Say, Nurse, do you ever give the men patients a bath?

NURSE     Certainly not. We've got orderlies to do that sort of thing. I am a nurse.

LORENE     Yeah, I know that. But wouldn't you like to?

NURSE     Your mind's in the gutter. *(Going out)* Eat your breakfast.

*Charge Nurse goes to Mariana's room.*

NURSE     Stewart.

ELVA        Yes?

NURSE     Collect the trays when they've done with them.

ELVA        Yes, nurse.

NURSE        And get Mr. Dombrowsky reading for his pneumo. (*Turns away*)

*Charge Nurse goes to op room and begins to prepare it. Elva stops trying to force Mariana to eat.*

ELVA         I wish you'd eat something, Mariana.

*Elva takes this tray off.*

*Lorene is picking at her food. Nan is well into hers. Johnny has a spell of coughing, which is taken up by Lorene, both of them coughing loudly together. Nan watches as Lorene tries to control it.*

NAN          (*Softly*) Remember, your cough can be controlled.

LORENE      (*Between coughs*) Sure thing, Nan. You sound like Doc Devon. (*Mimics "Nobody needs to cough." Coughs into tissue*) Jeez.

NAN          Well, it's true.

*Watching Lorene, Nan has to relax and breathe deeply to keep from coughing herself. Lorene slowly gets it under control, then Johnny's coughing stops abruptly. He buries his face in his pillow, and may be crying.*

LORENE      Jeez, I hope Johnny sneaks down here today.

NAN          You're getting lonely.

LORENE      I haven't seen him for a couple of days. I need him to hold me.

NAN          He must be pretty upset.

LORENE      I guess we all are. We try and forget about the bone wagon, and then pouf! Some careless bugger goes and—

NAN          Lorene. Really.

LORENE      We have to face it.

*Reprise of music of "In the Sanatorium." Lights dim, then rise as Elva comes back to get their trays.*

ELVA         (*Takes trays*) Time to get ready for your pneumo.

NAN Sure, Elva.

*Elva goes with trays. Nan and Lorene get dressing gowns on and move towards op room. Elva returns for Johnny's tray. She thinks he is sleeping.*

ELVA Mr. Dombrowsky? Johnny?

JOHNNY *(Turning from pillow)* Yeah?

ELVA It's time for your pneumo.

JOHNNY Yeah, O.K. I'll be there in a minute.

ELVA All right.

*Elva takes Johnny's tray off, then goes into Mariana's room. She gets to her knees and prays silently. Doctor enters and walks towards op room, passing Nan and Lorene.*

DOCTOR Morning, Nan. Morning, Lorene.

NAN AND LORENE

Good morning, Doctor.

*He goes in the op room. Nurse hands him charts. He looks at them. Nurse comes to door of op room.*

NURSE Miss Wilkin.

*Nan goes into op/exam room. Johnny puts on dressing gown and comes out into waiting area.*

LORENE *(Tries to be cheerful)* Hello, Johnny.

JOHNNY Hi.

NURSE *(To Nan)* Stand right up to the fluoroscope please.

LORENE Look, Johnny ... *(Touches his arm)* ya know I'm sorry about—

JOHNNY Sure.

DOCTOR Let's take a look inside now. Breathe in.

LORENE        Johnny?

DOCTOR        And out. And in again.

JOHNNY        Let it rest, O.K.?

LORENE        Sure, whatever you want. *Let go his arm.*

DOCTOR        That's fine. Now the pneumo.

*They move to the exam table. Nan lies on her side.*

JOHNNY        I mean, we're just goddam lucky to be in here, right?

LORENE        We are?

JOHNNY        More than a pig could eat, laze around in bed all day, no worries about a job.

DOCTOR        *(To Nurse)* Anaesthetic.

*Nurse applies anaesthetic.*

JOHNNY        Goddamn lucky. You know, I read about this doctor in England, got this goddamn bright idea.

DOCTOR        *(To Nurse)* Needle.

JOHNNY        Made all his patients beds in the loft of a barn. The vapours from the cowshit were supposed to be good for curing TB Jesus Christ! Lying in bed with your nose full of the stink of cowshit.

DOCTOR        *(Puts in air)* There. That didn't hurt, did it?

NAN            Thank you, doctor.

JOHNNY        You know, I can't get the smell out of my room now ... carbolic acid. They moved me out onto the porch yesterday and doused the whole goddamn place.

LORENE        *(Touching him)* Johnny ... I'd like to see you sometime soon...

NURSE         *(Brings Nan to door. Nan goes to room, lies down. To Lorene)* Miss Evans.

LORENE O.K., Johnny?

NURSE Come along, the doctor's waiting.

JOHNNY Sure, kid.

*Lorene goes into exam room. Johnny stands waiting.*

NURSE Stand right up to the fluoroscope.

DOCTOR Take a deep breath. And out. And: again. Yes ... yes.

*Elva finishes praying and comes out of Mariana's room.*

ELVA (To Johnny) Haven't they got to you?

JOHNNY I got lots of time.

ELVA Yes, you do.

DOCTOR Now the pneumo.

*They move Lorene to the table, lie her on her side.*

JOHNNY (Indicating Maria's room) Whataya see for Mariana?

ELVA It's nearly time.

JOHNNY You're sure?

ELVA Yes.

DOCTOR Anaesthetic.

*Nurse applies anaesthetic.*

LORENE Ow, that stings.

DOCTOR Would you prefer not to have it?

LORENE No. I guess it's O.K.

*He puts needle in and pumps in air.*

JOHNNY So Mariana's not—

ELVA I'm praying for her.

JOHNNY (*Distaste*) Praying.

ELVA For her soul. (*She goes off.*)

DOCTOR There. That's it for you. We'll do an X-ray this afternoon.

LORENE Another X-ray? Is there anything—

DOCTOR Just routine.

NURSE This way. (*Leads Lorene to door.* To Johnny) Mr. Dombrowsky.

LORENE Your turn, Johnny.

JOHNNY Yeah. (*Goes in to exam room.*)

*Lorene, left alone, goes into her own room where Nan is asleep and gets a package out of her table. She then sneaks along to Johnny's room, finds his chamber pot, and puts some powder in it. She then sneaks back to her own room, pulls down the blinds, turns off the light, and covers herself with a blanket.*

NURSE (*To Johnny*) You know where the fluoroscope is.

JOHNNY Yes, I do. (*Walks over to it. Stands against it.*)

DOCTOR Let's take a look inside now. Ah yes. Mmmmm. Breathe in. And out again. (*To Nurse*) I think we'll want an X-ray here. Do it this afternoon.

NURSE Certainly, Doctor.

DOCTOR Now for the pneumo.

*Johnny moves over to the table, lies down.*

DOCTOR That lung isn't staying down. We'll try putting a little more air in this time.

JOHNNY Oh?

DOCTOR Yes, 600cc's should keep it collapsed, I think. (*To Nurse*) Anaesthetic.

JOHNNY I don't need it.

DOCTOR You've had this enough times to know.

JOHNNY I don't need it.

DOCTOR Fine. Needle. (*He puts needle in*) Bit too far ... that's in the lung. (*Adjusts needle*) There. (*Pumps air in*) Breathe out slowly. Yes, I think that's getting it. How does that feel?

JOHNNY Like there's a big chunk of ice in there.

DOCTOR Good, that's what we want. That's all for you then.

JOHNNY Till next week?

DOCTOR That's right. Next week.

*Nurse starts to take Johnny back to his room.*

DOCTOR Laura, I'd like a word with you.



*Johnny Dombrowsky (Claudio Mascuili) receives treatment for TB from the charge nurse, Laura (Linda Pollard), and Devon (Alan Tovey) in The Tenth Negative Pig, March 1983. Photo: C.W. Hill Photography for Walterdale Theatre Associates.*

NURSE Certainly. (*To Johnny*) Go ahead, Mr. Dombrowsky.

JOHNNY Sure.

*Johnny goes to his room. He picks up Hemingway and reads.*

DOCTOR The first shipment of streptomycin arrived this week.

NURSE Can we start using it right away?

DOCTOR They also sent the latest clinical studies.

NURSE Yes?

DOCTOR It's effective against the bacillus, no doubt about that. But something's going wrong. They only used small doses at first, and it seemed to work. Then the disease came back, worse.

NURSE How could it do that?

DOCTOR It seems the bacilli develop a resistance to it. So they tried a larger dosage. And that did work. The disease didn't return.

NURSE Then what's the matter?

DOCTOR It does something to the inner ear. Dizzy spells ... lack of balance... in some cases even a total loss of hearing.

NURSE We won't be able to use it on everybody.

DOCTOR Not until we understand it better. Some test cases, perhaps.

NURSE Volunteers.

DOCTOR Yes. We'll review the cases. *(He starts to exit)* I better take a look at Mariana.

*The Nurse stops in at Johnny's room. The Doctor looks in at Nan and Lorene and at Mariana, then goes off. Johnny is still reading.*

NURSE This is supposed to be a rest period.

JOHNNY So, I'm resting.

NURSE That means sleeping, not reading.

JOHNNY Whatever you say.

NURSE It's for your own good.

JOHNNY Whatever you say.

NURSE I'll get these blinds.

*Nurse pulls down blinds, flips off lights, leaves.*

*It grows quiet, with only mild coughing from Lorene the patients sleep.*

*Reprise of "In the Sanatorium."*

*After a moment of quiet, Johnny stirs, then sits up in bed, head bent forward resting on his hands. Then he gets up and puts on a dressing gown, peeks out into hall. Nobody. He sneaks down hall to Lorene's room and goes in. Lorene, restless, is still awake, but her back is to the door. Johnny goes quietly to other bed. He touches her shoulder, and she turns to him.*

LORENE *(Quietly, but with pleased surprise)* Johnny.

JOHNNY You wanted to see me, sunshine?

LORENE Yeah, I sure did.

JOHNNY *(Indicating Nan)* She still the model patient? Goes to sleep as soon as she's told?

LORENE Just like they bashed her on the head. Out like a light.

JOHNNY O.K. then, make room.

LORENE *(Moves over)* Sure.

JOHNNY *(Stretches out on bed beside her, an arm around her shoulders)* Good.

LORENE Johnny?

JOHNNY Yeah.

LORENE I'm real glad you came along. I've missed you these past few days.

JOHNNY Yeah, well I haven't been feelin so good...

LORENE I'm sorry.

JOHNNY He was a nice guy.

LORENE What are you gonna do if you get out?

JOHNNY You mean, WHEN I get out.

LORENE Yeah, when you get out.

JOHNNY Go back to the plant, I suppose.

LORENE You know how they treat you when you get out of here? Like a walking epidemic.

JOHNNY Aw, not everybody.

LORENE You know Liz that always comes back to visit? She told me. They sorta freeze if you happen to touch them. Her sister was always sneaking off to wash her hands. Even boiled the sheets Liz used.

JOHNNY I haven't been outta here since I first walked in, so I wouldn't know.

LORENE You cough a coupla times, and that's it.

JOHNNY That's what?

LORENE They see you to the door. "Not around me, thank you. I don't want your tu-bugger-lo-sis."

*Johnny laughs.*

JOHNNY Hey, Lorene.

LORENE What?

JOHNNY I like you.

LORENE I like you, kiddo.

JOHNNY Then how about a kiss?

LORENE Promise not to cough on me?

JOHNNY Promise.

LORENE Well, what have I got to lose? (*They kiss*) Mmmm, that's nice.

JOHNNY You're warm and cuddly.

LORENE Don't tell me how high my temperature is ... send it higher.  
(*They kiss again*) Johnny?

JOHNNY Yeah, honey?

LORENE What if I had a baby?

JOHNNY A baby? You mean...

LORENE No, I'm not ... But what if I did?

JOHNNY You are a woman, right?

LORENE Right.

JOHNNY Then I guess it could happen.

LORENE Of course it could. Having TB doesn't stop that.

JOHNNY But would the kid be O.K.?

LORENE Sure. I talked to Elva about it. The baby'd be fine ... except...

JOHNNY Except what?

LORENE I'd be afraid to touch it ... afraid to kiss it ... Poor Mariana, she won't even get to hold her kid. They'll slap it right in the Preventorium.

JOHNNY Think you could stand that?

LORENE I don't know. Knowin your baby was so close, but never seeing it.  
*Elva walks by in hall, going to Mariana's room.*

JOHNNY Shh. (*Whisper*). What was that?

LORENE Probably Elva. She's always going in to check on Mariana.

JOHNNY I better get back.

LORENE      Yeah.

JOHNNY     O.K., I'm off.

LORENE     I'll see you again soon?

JOHNNY     Real soon. Hey...

LORENE     Yeah?

JOHNNY     One for the road? *(She smiles and they kiss. Johnny starts to leave)*

LORENE     Johnny ... *(He stops)* See ya around.

JOHNNY     Sure, honey. See ya around.

*Elva, in Mariana's room, has started praying. As Johnny sneaks out of Lorene's room, he overhears Elva, and moves to the door of Mariana's room. He listens, not liking what he hears.*

ELVA        Almighty and most merciful Father, lead this poor woman to a knowledge of Your infinite goodness. She has not taken our Lord, Jesus Christ, as her Saviour. She has erred and strayed from thy ways like a lost sheep, seeking after the devices and desires of her own heart. She has left undone those things she ought to have done, and she has done those things she ought not to have done. She has sinned in thine eyes. And there is no health in her.

*Charge Nurse enters, notices Johnny about to enter Mariana's room to stop Elva. Elva continues praying during the conversation.*

NURSE       *(Loud whisper)* Mr. Dombrowsky. What are you doing out of bed?

JOHNNY     Do you know what the hell's going on in there?

ELVA        *(Continuing with prayer)* Please, O Lord, have mercy upon her sins. Let her enter thy Kingdom. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—

NURSE       What are you talking about? *(Looks in door)* Stewart! What are you doing in there?

ELVA        *(Comes to door)* What is it?

NURSE Is there anything the matter with Mariana?

ELVA No. She's sleeping.

NURSE Then what are you doing?

ELVA I'm trying to save her soul.

JOHNNY She doesn't need YOU to save it for her.

ELVA Yes, she does.

JOHNNY She can look after her own soul.

NURSE Stop it, both of you. The Doctor will be doing his rounds any minute. Mr. Dombrowsky, you get back to your room.

*She tries to direct him back to his room. He resists.*

JOHNNY Not until she leaves that poor woman alone.

NURSE Stewart, you're wanted at the admissions desk.

ELVA But I haven't finished praying.

NURSE Right now.

ELVA Of course.

*Elva goes out to admissions desk. Nurse escorts Johnny to room.*

NURSE Now—in there.

JOHNNY (*Mumbles*) Goddamn holy roller.

*Nurse waits till Johnny goes in. She goes to women's ward. Johnny turns on his light, raises the blinds. He drinks from a glass beside his bed.*

NURSE (*In Women's Ward, flips on lights, raises blinds*) You can stop resting now.

LORENE Jesus!

NAN (*Groggy*). What? What is it?

NURSE You can stop resting. The doctor will be here in a moment.

NAN Oh ... the doctor ... thank you nurse.

LORENE For nothing.

NURSE You have a complaint, Miss Evans?

LORENE A complaint? Jeez, what could give you that idea? I love freezing my ass off at night, I love bright lights blazing in my eyes, I love...

NAN (*Warning her*) Lorene ... we'll be ready for the doctor.

NURSE Thank you, Miss Wilkin. I'm glad some patients are courteous.

*She leaves room, and exits right.*

LORENE Courteous? If I'd treated customers the way she treats us, I'd have been fired in two shakes of a lamb's tail.

NAN You must have been a good waitress, Lorene.

LORENE I had to be good ... I couldn't depend on my looks to pull in tips.

NAN You look fine.

LORENE Yeah, but not beautiful. Not like you.

NAN Oh, I'm not beautiful, especially in this getup! (*Laughs.*)

LORENE You could be sensational if you'd ditch that old maid hairdo.

NAN It's practical.

LORENE I guess school teachers aren't supposed to look as gorgeous as Veronica Lake, eh? Might take the kids' minds off their books.

*The doctor comes to the door, knocks lightly, and enters.*

DOCTOR And how are we feeling now?

LORENE Oh, Nan's fine. (*Looks at Nan*). Flushed cheeks really become her.

NAN (*Laughs*) Actually, it's rouge.

DOCTOR     *(To Lorene)* I hear you're having trouble finishing your meals.

LORENE     Yeah, I'm just not that hungry ... and when you've seen as many hot beef sandwiches and apple pie a la modes as I have—

DOCTOR     It's important to eat regular meals, Lorene. What about your cough?

LORENE     I got it pretty well under control.

DOCTOR     And you, Nan?

NAN         I've been taking short walks, like you told me, and it seems like I'm getting more energy than I used to have.

DOCTOR     Good girl. You can walk a little further as you start to feel stronger.

NAN         I'd like that.

DOCTOR     In fact, I'm happy to say, Nan, that things look pretty good for you. We've been going over your recent X-rays, and they show that the lesions in your lungs have shrunk way back. If you keep up the good work, chances are you'll be out of here soon.

LORENE     You mean you'd let her out in the dead of winter.

DOCTOR     Why not? She's used to fresh air.

NAN         How soon?

DOCTOR     We do a test with guinea pigs, injecting them with fluid from your lungs. They're very susceptible to TB, so if they don't get it, we consider you to be negative.

NAN         And then I can go?

DOCTOR     If ten pigs in a row are negative.

*For a moment, Nan has to fight back tears.*

NAN         I want to go home.

DOCTOR     We'll send you away as soon as we can. *(She nods her head, and he pats her shoulder)* Why don't you go for a little stroll right now.

NAN All right.

LORENE *(To Nan)* That's great Nan. I'm real glad for you.

*Nan nods her head, exits.*

So, got any good news for me, Doc?

*He doesn't answer at once.*

I'm not gettin any better, am I?

DOCTOR You've shown some progress since you came here. At the moment, your condition's pretty stable.

LORENE I haven't noticed any improvement, not for a long time. Isn't the pneumo helping?

DOCTOR Not as much as we'd like. You see, some people develop adhesions between the two layers of the chest wall ... makes them stick together. That means we can't get enough air in there ... the lung won't go down enough to really help you.

LORENE That's what I've got—adhesions?

DOCTOR Yes, and we don't want that lung to get any worse.

LORENE *(Scared)* Isn't there anything you can do?

DOCTOR We think the best thing in your case is if we try a surgical technique—

LORENE I don't want any cutting.

DOCTOR Lorene...

LORENE I'm not letting you cut me.

*They freeze as Johnny, in his room, sings "Doctor Death."*

JOHNNY *(Sings)*  
oh Doctor Death  
takes good care  
of those bodies

in despair  
oh Doctor, oh Doctor Death  
oh Doctor, that Doctor Death

oh Doctor Death  
don't make mistakes  
when he cures  
your pains and aches  
oh Doctor, kind Doctor Death  
oh Doctor, yeah Doctor Death

oh Doctor Death  
he's your friend  
brings all suffering  
to an end  
oh Doctor, sweet Doctor Death  
oh Doctor, yeah Doctor Death

oh Doctor Death  
treats you well  
gives you Heaven  
takes away your Hell  
oh Doctor, good Doctor Death  
so softly, takes away your breath

*Repeat last verse, with end line:*

oh Doctor, yeah Doctor Death

*People in Women's Room unfreeze. Doctor pats Lorene's shoulder.*

LORENE I won't do it. I'd rather be DEAD.

DOCTOR You say that as though being dead was just another way of being around.

LORENE You mean—not be? Not anywhere?

DOCTOR I'll come by another day, and we'll talk about it. *(She doesn't answer)*  
All right? *(Leaves.)*

*Nan comes back in. Lorene is crying.*

NAN I'm sorry it's just me this time. *(Pause)* I'd gladly stay longer if I could help you...

LORENE Don't say that. You get out of here as fast as you can. And don't look back ... *(Nan puts her arm around Lorene)* It's just gonna take me a little longer, that's all. It'll help me, knowin you're outside.

NAN I'll write you.

LORENE No you won't.

NAN Yes, I really will.

LORENE *(Pause)* I know you will.

*After singing his song, Johnny has picked up his books and reads one. The Doctor has gone to find Charge Nurse, before visiting Johnny. Johnny looks in his cupboard for his chamber pot.*

JOHNNY Where's the pisspot when you need it?

*He finds it under the bed. He gets up and takes it behind his bed, back to the audience, and pisses into the pot. As the liquid hits the powder (which Lorene put there), it begins to foam uncontrollably.*

JOHNNY *(Screams)* Aahhh. What's happening to me? What's happening? *(Foaming continues. He puts the pot down as Doctor and Charge Nurse run for his room.)* What is this? What is it?

*Lorene and Nan also hear Johnny yelling and get out of bed. Lorene starts to laugh and follows the Doctor and Nurse down the hall to Johnny's room. Nan pauses in the doorway of the Women's Room. The others enter Johnny's room.*

DOCTOR What's the matter?

JOHNNY I can't stop this foam.

DOCTOR *(Laughs)* Nothing serious, I see.

JOHNNY Whataya mean, nothing serious?

NURSE *(Annoyed)* Sedlitz Powders. The acid in urine reacts with it ... like this.

JOHNNY You mean somebody...

*Lorene ducks behind the doctor.*

NURSE I think I know who it was.

DOCTOR Never mind, nurse. Nothing wrong with: a little fun now and again. Things have been pretty serious in this neck of the woods lately.

JOHNNY Fun. Scared me half to death. What IS this stuff?

DOCTOR *(To Charge Nurse)* Just get rid of that, would you nurse?

NURSE I'll get an orderly.

DOCTOR Oh, I'm sure you can handle it.

NURSE Of course.

*She takes the chamber pot out, exits right. Lorene starts to go back to her room, but the Doctor stops her.*

DOCTOR Lorene ... don't run away.

LORENE *(Trying to cover laughter)* I ... I was concerned about Johnny.

JOHNNY I bet. *(Trying not to laugh.)*

LORENE Gee. What happened?

JOHNNY Well I had to take a ... I had to...

DOCTOR Johnny had to relieve himself, as they say, but things sort of blew up in his face.

JOHNNY You know when you shake a beer bottle and then take your thumb away...

LORENE My, I wonder what would make it do that? Like the froth on a bottle of Bohemian, eh? Of course, a lady doesn't know much about such things, but are you sure you weren't standing too far away?

*They laugh.*

JOHNNY Lorene, you're a little devil.

*They laugh, then freeze. Lights down slightly. At opposite side of stage, Elva has wheeled Michael on. From the doorway of the Women's Room, Nan watches. Michael wears a dressing gown and carries an Air Force uniform,*

*folded on his lap, the hat on top. He looks exhausted.*

ELVA Nan—what are you doing out of bed?

Nan I heard the commotion in Johnny's room. Everybody was yelling and running around.

ELVA Well they better quiet down. I got Johnny's new roommate here.

*They look at Michael, who looks up at Nan.*

Lieutenant Prentiss, this is Nan Wilkin.

NAN How do you do.

MICHAEL Hello.

ELVA He's still recovering from surgery, so he'll need a lot of rest.

NAN He's come to the right place, then. You were in the air force, lieutenant?

MICHAEL Yes, I was a pilot in Ceylon.

NAN That's a long way from home. Is that where you broke down?

MICHAEL Broke down?

ELVA She means, is that where you got the TB?

MICHAEL Yes, I suppose so I...

*The cap slips from his hands to the floor. Nan picks it up.*

ELVA Poor thing, he needs his rest. I'll take him along to his room.

*Elva starts to wheel him away. He turns slightly towards Nan.*

MICHAEL My hat...

NAN Here it is. *(Hands it to him.)*

MICHAEL Thanks.

*They look at each other. Freeze. Lights down slightly on them, up again on*

*Doctor, Johnny, Lorene.*

DOCTOR Well, back to your room now, Lorene. It's nearly time for lunch.

LORENE O.K., doc.

JOHNNY See you around, Lorene.

LORENE *(Leaving)* See you around, Johnny.

*She walks down hall and lights come up and scene with Elva and Michael unfreezes.*

DOCTOR Actually, I was coming along to tell you you've got a new roommate.

JOHNNY Somebody new for you to practice on, eh?

DOCTOR *(Dryly)* Yes, it's a bit like playing the piano—except not all the instruments are in tune ... Ah, here we are now.

*Elva wheels Michael in.*

Hello ... it's Flight-Lieutenant Prentiss, isn't it?

MICHAEL Yes, sir.

DOCTOR I'm Doctor Devon. Welcome to the San.

MICHAEL Thank you.

DOCTOR This is your roommate, Johnny Dombrowsky.

JOHNNY Pleased to meet you.

MICHAEL Hello.

DOCTOR They tell me the operation was a success. Incision healed nicely?

MICHAEL It doesn't feel like a success ... but yes, it's healed.

DOCTOR Good. You're tired from your journey, I'm sure, so I'll see you later.  
*(Michael only nods)* You too, Johnny.

JOHNNY Yeah, see ya later doc.

*The Doctor leaves the room, and exits left.*

ELVA Now we'll just put your things over here.

*Elva puts uniform on table. Helps Michael into bed, with assistance from Johnny. This is painful for Michael, and is done slowly. As Michael is put in bed, Nan and Lorene talk.*

LORENE Didja see the new guy?

NAN Yes.

LORENE He's kinda cute, eh?

NAN I've never seen anyone look so tired.

LORENE Oh, Johnny'll look after him. You'd be amazed how kind he can be, he's like an old granny.

NAN I just saw him for a moment...

LORENE He'll do everything for him.

NAN He looks so tired.

*In men's room, Elva puts the wheelchair out of the way and picks up Michael's clothes.*

ELVA Now don't you worry. We'll take good care of your uniform. It'll be all cleaned and pressed for when you walk out of here.

*Elva starts to leave.*

MICHAEL Wait. (*Urgent*) Wait.

ELVA What is it?

MICHAEL There's something in my jacket. A small box...

ELVA (*Checks pockets*) Yes, here it is.

MICHAEL (*Holds out hand*) Thanks.

ELVA (*Places it in his hand*) You're welcome.

*Michael puts box in pocket of dressing gown.*

ELVA You'll have your lunch in a moment, and then you can rest all afternoon.

MICHAEL I am awfully tired.

ELVA It's no wonder. (*She exits.*)

*Charge Nurse brings in lunch trays for Johnny and Michael. She gives Johnny his tray.*

NURSE Lunch time. (*Serves Johnny*) Mr. Dombrowsky.

JOHNNY Thanks.

NURSE (*Serves Michael*) Welcome to the San, lieutenant. Are you getting settled in all right?

MICHAEL Yes I am, thanks.

NURSE Anything I can get you? Another pillow? (*He shakes his head*) More blankets?

MICHAEL I think I have everything I need.

NURSE I want you to know, I really appreciate what you've done ... in the war.

MICHAEL (*Embarrassed*) Less than many others, I'm afraid.

NURSE Well, you just let me know if there's anything I can do. Enjoy your lunch now.

MICHAEL Thank you ... we will. (*Nurse exits*)

*Elva brings lunch trays in for Nan and Lorene.*

ELVA Time for lunch.

LORENE Already?

NAN Thanks, Elva.

LORENE I'm still full from breakfast.

ELVA Enjoy your lunch.

LORENE Yuk!

ELVA You know what Charge Nurse says.

LORENE Yeah. (*Mimics Charge Nurse*) “Think of our boys at the front. Our boys at the front would just love a meal like this.” (*Nan and Elva laugh*) We’ll have to ask the new guy if it’s true.

*All patients start to eat as Elva leaves. Freeze scene, dim lights. Reprise of “In the Sanatorium.”*

*Lights slowly up. Elva and Charge Nurse come in and collect the trays. These are now the supper trays. It is evening. Elva goes to collect the men’s trays, while Charge Nurse takes the women’s.*

NURSE Are you finished with your supper?

LORENE Yeah.

NURSE It doesn’t look like it to me.

LORENE I ate all I could.

NAN It was very tasty.

NURSE I’m glad to hear that someone appreciates the food.

*Nurse leaves. When the women are alone again, they talk while the scene in the Men’s Room freezes. Later, the women freeze while the men talk (the two conversations are, in reality, simultaneous.*

LORENE O.K., let’s get on with the presents.

*Lorene reaches into drawer of her bedside table, takes out assorted knitted items, Christmas wrapping paper, tape and scissors. Nan gets out similar stuff from her table. They examine the knitted items. Lorene picks up a scarf.*

LORENE Here’s my scarf for Johnny. Nice work, eh?

NAN           And here's mine. (*Holds it up*) Think he'll appreciate getting two scarves?  
(*They laugh.*)

LORENE       He damn well better. It took us long enough. Y'know, I guess we're lucky  
to be here for Christmas, otherwise what'd we do with all this goddamn  
knitting?

NAN           There is a fair bit of it.

LORENE       A *fair* bit. It'd make a great hope chest for an Eskimo. Or an old crock.

NAN           We'll have to not look when we wrap each other's.

LORENE       Yeah, we want it to be a complete surprise. (*They laugh*) Just give me a  
hint, though. Is my present made of wool?

NAN           I can't tell you. It's a complete surprise. (*They laugh.*)

LORENE       I hear the flyboy had that operation where they take out your ribs.

NAN           Yes.

LORENE       Where'd he come from?

NAN           He said he was stationed in Ceylon.

LORENE       Pilot?

NAN           I guess so.

LORENE       Well, he coulda been a gunner or a navigator. Ceylon, eh? Jeez, don't  
some people have all the luck?

NAN           You think it's lucky to travel half way around the world to fight for your  
country?

LORENE       I mean, to travel like that, see new places. Just once I'd like to spend  
winter where it's warm all the time, and palm trees, and everything green  
... You know, I tried to join up myself, that's when they discovered the  
goddamn TB

NAN           I didn't know you were going to enlist. That's really brave, Lorene.

LORENE Not that brave, I guess. They don't send women to the front lines. But I'd of been some help. And it would've been a chance to get somewhere besides Swift Current.

NAN I never considered it myself. *(Picks up a pair of mittens)* What'll we do with these?

LORENE I don't know. *(Holds up socks)* And I got these. It seems a shame to waste them, they won't fit us. Do you think it'd be O.K. to give them to the new guy?

NAN I suppose so.

LORENE I mean, he wouldn't have to know...

NAN No, he wouldn't have to know ... let's do it.

LORENE O.K., let's. It'll make him feel welcome. *(They start wrapping socks and mitts for Michael)* You ever do anything else besides teaching, Nan?

NAN I helped in my dad's store when I was in high school.

LORENE What kinda store?

NAN Drug store. And we had a little soda fountain. I used to run that.

LORENE *(Pleased)* Oh—you were a waitress too.

NAN Well, not exactly a *waitress*.

LORENE I guess it was different cause your daddy owned the store. You weren't a waitress, you were just helping daddy.

NAN Oh, I guess I was a waitress.

LORENE Didja get paid?

NAN What?

LORENE Didja get paid for working? You know, money?

NAN Well no.

LORENE I see. (*Puts down the wrapped present*). Say, did I ever tell ya about the time the boss grabbed my ass?

NAN *What?* Uh, no, you never did.

LORENE Well, see, I was workin at this crummy lunch counter in the five-and-dime, and this skinny creep with greasy side-burns was the boss, and one day he sneaks up behind me when no one's lookin, and he grabs my left tit in one hand, and slides the other hand down my hip and grabs my ass...

NAN (*A bit shocked*) Lorene!

LORENE And he says to me, "you and me could have a little fun, eh, how 'bout it, sweetheart?" and he gives my ass a little squeeze. Well, I just happen to be frying up this omelette, see, it was still pretty runny, actually. And so help me God, I couldn't stop myself, I just turned nice and slow and gave it to him right in the face. You shoulda seen him wipin those eggs outta his eyes and his hair. And I'm helpin him, wipin off his shirt and tie with the dishrag, and beggin him not to fire me. I say, "I'm so sorry, sir," nice and loud so half the people in the store can hear, "it's just that when you grabbed my ass, I kinda jumped, kinda like a reflex or something. Please don't fire me sir, and maybe we could have some of that fun you was talkin about."

*Nan laughs.*

NAN Lorene, you didn't.

LORENE Yeah, I did! And I wish you coulda seen his face. First he turns bright red, and then he starts to go pale, when he looks around the store and everybody's watching him. Pale as his shirt collar, which was mostly white. And he says in this vicious whisper, "Be quiet, you bitch. I'm a married man." And I just kept apologizin for all I was worth. You can bet he stayed away from me after that. Except he always suggested I have the roast beef sandwich for lunch. My, they were good.

NAN I think I get the picture.

LORENE I think you do. Course, you probably had to put up with the same kinda thing from the principal, or maybe the school inspector.

NAN No, of course not. (*Thinks*) Although, there was that one inspector. I never was quite sure if he...

LORENE      Probably not. He was probably a married man. *(They laugh)* O.K., I'm gonna wrap yours now, so don't look.

NAN          All right, I'll turn the other way and wrap yours. Don't you look either.

LORENE      Don't worry, I won't. You get few enough nice surprises around here.

*They busy themselves with the presents. Lorene has made Nan knitted pink bloomers. Nan has crocheted Lorene a tea cosy.*

LORENE      Nan, what would you do, if you could be anything in the world you wanted?

NAN          Oh, I don't know. Probably the same thing. I like teaching.

LORENE      *(Dryly)* It's a nice steady career for a girl. At least until she gets married. *(Nan smiles)* But I mean, if you could really do anything in the world you wanted.

NAN          *(Thinks)* I did have an idea once ... but you'd think it was crazy.

LORENE      Go on.

NAN          It's just that I used to read about the arctic explorers, and how they tried to find the North Pole. I think maybe I'd have liked to be the first woman to reach the North Pole.

LORENE      You were right. I think it's crazy. *(They laugh)* It's too goddamn cold at the North Pole.

NAN          Of course, I'd wear big fur parkas and fur pants, just like the Eskimos.

LORENE      Yeah, and every time you had to take a leak, you'd freeze your ass. *(Laughter)*. Besides, some Eskimo woman probably beat you to it. *(Nan looks puzzled)* the North Pole, I mean.

NAN          So what would you do, if you had the chance?

LORENE      I usta think I'd like to go to Hollywood and be a movie actress, but that's a load of crap. And sometimes I think I'd like to work in a really nice restaurant, like you see in movies, only there aren't any like that in Swift Current, and besides that's a loada crap too. But what I might really like, and I never told this to anybody ... what I think I might really like, and I know it's not gonna happen in a million years ... but I might've liked to be a doctor.

NAN           Why not be a nurse, then? That's easy enough.

LORENE       I said a doctor. I don't wanna be a goddamn nurse. Get pushed around like Elva does ... Besides I haven't got my goddamn grade twelve.

NAN           I suppose you could always go back.

LORENE       That's why I thought of enlisting. Seemed like the one chance to break out ... of course, bein here is pretty different from back home too.

NAN           Will you go back there when you get out?

LORENE       Jeez, I don't know. My old job's gone, and my boyfriend went and married some good breeder with no diseases ... bastard said he'd wait for me.

NAN           Lorene, anybody could get TB

LORENE       Yeah, but it sure helps to be poor and live in a shack and think that everybody coughs. Our place was like a goddamn sieve in the winter. And now I gotta freeze here.

NAN           It's really not so bad, is it?

LORENE       Look, I may come from a poor family, Nan, but by Christ, we didn't have to sleep out in the winter. Any place else, they wouldn't expect somebody healthy to do it ... here they got sick people out there freezin.

*They haven't noticed Charge Nurse enter. She's come to settle them for the night. She carries "pigs" to warm their feet.*

NURSE       Complaining again, are we? If some people would just start to realize how lucky (*Placing a pig at the foot of Nan's bed*) they are—

LORENE       Lucky!

NURSE       —to be where they're looked after, and well fed. If they would just realize that complaining is not the way—

NAN           Nurse...

*Nurse stops in mid-sentence.*

Uh, thank you very much.

NURSE You're welcome, I'm sure. I only wish that everybody—(*Goes to place Lorene's pig.*)

NAN And nurse...

NURSE (*Looks up*) Yes?

NAN Merry Christmas.

*Charge Nurse is caught off guard. Somewhat embarrassed. Lorene won't look at her at all.*

NURSE Oh ... yes ... Merry Christmas.

*They all freeze. In Men's Room we go to beginning of their conversation. Elva is removing the supper trays.*

ELVA And how was the supper?

MICHAEL Fine.

JOHNNY I'll say one thing for this place, they sure do feed you. Butter on everything.

ELVA There's no rationing here.

JOHNNY I musta put on twenty pounds.

*Elva exits with trays.*

MICHAEL Do they always feed you so much?

JOHNNY Yeah, and you've only had lunch and supper ... wait till you see breakfast.

MICHAEL I don't usually eat breakfast.

JOHNNY (*Sitting up on edge of his bed*) There's not much choice around here. Anyway, it's surprising how you start to feel like a starving coyote five minutes before the food arrives.

MICHAEL You been in here long?

JOHNNY Long enough. One year, two months, seventeen and three-quarter days.

MICHAEL You must be nearly better.

JOHNNY My condition has, as they say, “stabilized.” I’m not getting any worse... I hope.

MICHAEL I hope I’m not here that long.

JOHNNY You had that operation.

MICHAEL Yes ... thoracoplasty.

JOHNNY Keep your shoulder up.

MICHAEL What?

JOHNNY Didn’t they tell you that? “Keep your shoulder up.” Helps things to heal right.

MICHAEL (*Tries it*) I see. It hurts when I do that.

JOHNNY Yeah. Harold had one and he ... nah.

MICHAEL Harold?

JOHNNY (*Lying down again*) One of the patients who left.

MICHAEL Oh. (*Johnny stares at ceiling. Michael touches his scar and winces*)  
When’s lights out?

JOHNNY Soon.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL What did you do?

JOHNNY Do?

MICHAEL One year, two months, seventeen and three-quarter days ago.

JOHNNY You mean outside ... I worked in a slaughterhouse ... chain gang on the hog floor.

MICHAEL What’s that again?

JOHNNY Chain gang's the men who kill and cut up the pigs.

MICHAEL Oh.

JOHNNY I was the sticker.

MICHAEL You killed them?

JOHNNY Yeah. Guy'd shackle'em by one leg ... pigs'd get hoisted up, hanging head down, and they'd come along towards me on the hoist.

MICHAEL One at a time?

JOHNNY One every thirty seconds. And the noise ... you wouldn't believe the noise pigs make. On the farm, all you hear is those little grunts they make when they slop the feed. But they're coming at you and you got a knife—a long blade, sharp on both sides—and you're stickin it in their throats and they know what's comin and they scream ... that's all it is, screamin. And kickin their bodies in the air, trying to get out of the shackle ... sometimes they break their legs ... and sometimes they make you miss, so you have to stick'em twice. And if you miss'em completely, the hoist just keeps movin and they keep screamin till they hit the steam trough ... water scaldin hot and in they go ... and then they stop.

*Johnny hasn't noticed Michael's distress, which increases as Johnny speaks. The description sends Michael into a memory of his surgery. Their speeches overlap.*

MICHAEL It's not going to hurt, the doctor said ... but you'll be awake ... better if you don't look ... and I didn't want to, but they were cutting in my chest, and I had to look ... at first I couldn't believe ... no pain, but I could feel the cutting, I could hear ... at home I helped dad butcher steers ... and I saw it over and over as they worked on me ... I tried not to see ... my dad slipping the knife between the bones ... and the blood ... I was awake, I could feel ... the bone stripped from its case ... and I was alive, awake, I could hear...

*Michael covers his face. Johnny comes over to his bed, puts a hand on his shoulder.*

JOHNNY Take it easy, boy.

MICHAEL I could feel...

JOHNNY        *(Firmly)*. Just take it easy ... it's all over now. Just try to let it go ...  
breathe slow and easy.

*Michael uncover his face, tries to do as Johnny says. Johnny pats his  
back lightly.*

MICHAEL      I'm sorry.

JOHNNY      It's all right. It was stupid of me.

*Johnny stays by Michael, who gradually recovers himself.*

MICHAEL      I guess I've been trying to wipe it out of my mind.

JOHNNY      *(Sounds in hall)* Elva's gonna be here in a moment. She gets us settled  
for the night.

*Michael is trying to be his normal self. Elva enters.*

ELVA          I've got your pigs. *(Positions one in Michael's bed)* That'll keep you nice  
and cosy.

MICHAEL      Pigs?

JOHNNY      They're full of hot water. I guess they're called pigs because of their round  
bellies. Elva brings Johnny's pig.

ELVA          Looks to porch. It gets pretty cold out there.

MICHAEL      On the porch?

JOHNNY      I forgot to tell you. We sleep out there.

MICHAEL      In the open?

ELVA          It's screened in.

MICHAEL      Yes, but the cold.

ELVA          With your nice thick Hudson Bay blankets and this cosy little pig,  
you won't feel it at all.

MICHAEL      Oh my God.

ELVA Here we go. (*Pushes Michael's bed out, comes back for Johnny*) You ready?

JOHNNY Ready as I'll ever be.

ELVA Here we go, then. (*Pushes his bed out.*)

*At the same time Charge Nurse is pushing Women's beds out.*

ELVA AND NURSE

Good night, and Merry Christmas.

*Lights fade down, leaving a dim light around Mariana's bed. Patients sleep. Moments of Silence. Then Musician begins to play music for "Spirits of Night." Mariana wakes, gets up. Her long hair falls loose to her shoulders. Music continues softly as Mariana speaks.*

MARIANA I couldn't live around here ... I'd always feel too exposed, too defenceless. At least here we're in a valley, but up there on the prairie there's no place to shelter ... Where I come from there's trees all around. Even in winter, when their boughs are weighed down with snow, the trees are still green, you can see they're still alive under the snow. Here, when the leaves fall away, there's only bare branches, like when the flesh falls away from your body and there's only bones, naked bones...

It's still cold back home, yes, it's cold. Deep snow everywhere, ice three feet thick on the lakes. But under that snow, under the ice, there's life. Small animals in their tunnels, fish and beaver under the water ... and over us all, in the night, white shadows of owls drifting, and the sky filled with stars, and the moon ... large and cold ... like a big piece of ice cut from the lake ... floating across the darkness...

At night, when my husband came back from the trapline, we would lie together after love, our hands on my belly, sheltering the child inside me ... and we would listen to the cold. You could hear it, easing into the trees, to their hearts ... and when the cold touched them, their hearts would go *crack! crack!*

I knew there was something wrong when the cough I got in summer wouldn't go away. It's only a summer cold, I thought, they always last longer. But I started coughing blood during the time of the autumn moon. Still, it wasn't for me that the doctor flew into the village ... there was a child with a bad fever. But my husband asked the doctor to come to our cabin. I was pretty weak, coughing a lot, coughing blood. The doctor said unless I came to this place, we might lose the child. I didn't want to leave my husband, but we didn't want to lose the child...

I don't understand anything they say around here ... I never learned their language. I'd like my husband to visit me, but I don't know where I am ... the plane brought me so far ... They never understand me when I speak, so I don't talk to them any more ... They don't even know my name my name isn't Mariana...

This land speaks to me in voices I haven't heard before ... the wind speaks too loud, it's trying to tell me something, but I don't want to hear ... the wind calls me ... it calls and calls...

I only came because we didn't want to lose the child.

*Music up. Lights dim. She gets into bed. Silence, sound of cold wind. Silence. Lights out. Music stops.*

*End of Act One.*

## **Act Two, Scene One**

*Lights up. Christmas morning. Musician plays traditional carols. Johnny, Lorene, Michael, and Nan are gathered in a lounge (beds turned sideways, pillows removed) with small artificial Christmas tree on a table in the centre. There are presents under the tree, some of which they have opened. Each has a glass, and there is an open mickey of rye on the table, from which they're drinking. Johnny, particularly, is getting quite a glow on. They are wearing pyjamas with dressing gowns over them. Johnny wears a bright woolen scarf around his neck. They all stand around the tree, as Johnny proposes a toast.*

JOHNNY     Here's to chasing cure!

ALL         To chasing cure!

*They drink. Michael returns to his wheelchair and sits down.*

JOHNNY     (*Pulling another scarf from wrappings*) Oh boy. Another scarf. You girls sure know how to take care of a guy. (*Kisses Lorene's cheek*) Thanks, honey.

LORENE     Glad ya like it, kid. (*Opening Nan's gift*) Oh say, this is really nice. (*Puts it on her head. To Johnny*) How's it look?

JOHNNY Oh, “swave,” Lorene—real “swave.”

NAN (*Laughing*) It really suits you. I don’t know what made me think it was a tea cosy.

*Lorene takes off the tea cosy, looks at it, and they both laugh. She puts it back on.*

LORENE Hell, I’m not gonna waste anything this warm on a teapot. (*Takes a sip of her drink*) Besides, they’re my colours.

*Nan has opened her gift from Johnny: a box of chocolates.*

NAN Oh these are beautiful, Johnny. Thank you so much.

JOHNNY Glad you like ’em, Nan. I thought you could always use the box after to keep stuff in.

NAN You’ll all have to help me eat them.

*Lorene opens her present from Johnny. It’s a flat fifty of Player’s cigarettes.*

LORENE Johnny. You dreamboat. A whole flat fifty. (*She breaks open the wrappings*) Anybody got a light?

*Johnny produces matches from his pocket and lights her cigarette. She takes a deep drag.*

Aaah (*Coughs*) that’s good. (*Others laugh.*)

*Johnny goes around and tops up all the drinks, although Nan tries to refuse. They all drink. Nan and Lorene go to the tree and pick up their gifts for Michael and take them to him.*

MICHAEL For me? But I don’t ... well, thank you.

LORENE Go ahead, open them.

MICHAEL I’m afraid I don’t have anything...

LORENE Hey, don’t worry about that. You didn’t know.

MICHAEL You two didn’t know I’d be here either.

NAN            Maybe not, but we do a lot of handicrafts here.  
*Michael unwraps a pair of mittens.*

LORENE        Comes in *handy* sometimes. *(They laugh.)*

MICHAEL      Thanks, they're really nice. *(Nan smiles)* You made them yourself?

NAN            Yes. Try them on ... see if they fit.  
*He does, and they do. Then Michael opens Lorene's present. A pair of socks.*

MICHAEL      Thanks, Lorene, these are really well made. And I like the pattern.

LORENE        You're welcome. And I expect to see them on your feet one day soon.

MICHAEL      Why put off until tomorrow what you can do today? *(Starts removing his slippers with great difficulty)* I can't wait to try my new toe warmers.  
*Women help him change to the new socks. He looks at his feet, pleased.*  
  
There, snug as a pig in a blanket.

JOHNNY      Real sharp. Just because we're old crocks, don't mean we haven't got the latest fashions—my God, Nan, what is that?  
*Nan has unwrapped the pink bloomers from Lorene and holds them upside down.*

NAN            Oh Lorene, it's beautiful. What ... is it? *(Then turns them right side up. Embarrassed)* Oh, I see ... why they're ... lovely.

LORENE        You gonna put your present on too?  
*Nan shakes her head.*  
  
Come on, you gotta.  
*Lorene goes over and puts them around Nan's neck, like a collar.*  
  
Nice collar, eh? Why you could wear that anywhere.

JOHNNY      Oh hell, yes, opera, theatre, you name it.

*Laughter. There are still three presents under the tree. One by one they turn to look at them.*

MICHAEL There's three presents left. Who're they for?

JOHNNY (*Examines tags on presents*) Well, there's one for Nan, one for Lorene, and one for me.

MICHAEL Why don't you open them? (*Nobody moves*) Who're they from, anyway?

*Nobody answers. Michael is confused.*

LORENE They're from Harold.

*Michael looks at her, trying to understand.*

NAN Harold was Johnny's roommate before you came.

*They let that sink in. Johnny opens his present.*

JOHNNY (*Pulls out a "26" of whiskey*) Well, how about that? He really did'er up proud.

LORENE Wow, we can have some party with that.

MICHAEL What happened to Harold?

*Again, no one wants to answer. Lorene takes a deep breath and speaks calmly.*

LORENE Harold won't be back. (*Pause*) The bone wagon hauled him away.

MICHAEL (*Shocked*) What?

JOHNNY It's what we say ... when somebody ... dies.

MICHAEL But that's ... horrible.

NAN You have to find some way...

JOHNNY You have to be able to laugh, or you'd go nuts.

LORENE The mickey's empty. Let's crack Harold's bottle.

*Johnny opens the bottle and pours everyone a shot. No one tries to refuse. They drink solemnly.*

LORENE Here's to Harold.

*They raise glasses and drink.*

ALL To Harold.

JOHNNY Let's see what he got you girls. *(Hands them presents.)*

*Lorene opens hers and pulls out a pair of long woolen stockings.*

LORENE Oh boy, are these NICE. So warm. Bet they'll come right up to my ... knees.

*Johnny smiles, but they're getting choked up. They take another swallow. Nan opens her present, flannelette pyjamas.*

LORENE Watcha got there, Nan?

NAN Pyjamas. Feel how nice and soft they are. Good ones.

*Nan, Lorene, and Johnny are near tears, especially Nan. Johnny takes a drink.*

JOHNNY Look, Nan, he was a good guy. But he's gone.

NAN I know.

LORENE *(Sings softly. It's a song they all know)*

He's just another one who won't be goin home.

LORENE AND JOHNNY

He's passed along to a place that we don't know  
He'll never get to see another day  
And the bone wagon hauls another one away

Oh, he's gone but not forgotten  
Till we meet at judgement day  
And we'll all chase cure tomorrow  
If the bone wagon hauls another one away.

*Michael watches them; Nan hasn't joined the singing.*

JOHNNY      Come on, Nan.

*Johnny begins second verse, joined by Lorene, and then by Nan, softly at first, then with greater strength. They may cry, but don't stop singing.*

JOHNNY, NAN AND LORENE

He's just another one who won't be goin home  
He's found himself a home where the wind don't blow  
So you better have a good time while you may  
Cause the bone wagon's hauled another one away

Oh, we'll wait here in the valley  
As they cover him with clay  
And we'll warm ourselves with his whiskey  
As the bone wagon hauls another away

*More quietly.*

He's just another one who won't be goin home  
He's passed along to a place where we can't go  
He'll never take another tumble in the hay  
And the bone wagon hauls another one away

JOHNNY      (*Drinks*) I didn't think Christmas was gonna turn into a wake for Harold.  
(*Drinks*) How about that? A Ukrainian wake. (*Smiles and drinks.*)

MICHAEL     How old was he?

JOHNNY     Oh, about forty-five. Nice little guy—bald head, shiny as a billiard ball.

*Lorene and Nan laugh, a little ashamed.*

LORENE     And little stick legs like billiard cues. He was kinda cute. Always talking about his wife.

JOHNNY     Until she ran off with the boarder.

LORENE     Actually, the boarder just moved downstairs. She didn't have to run off.

JOHNNY     Not with Harold away. (*He refills glasses. They're all getting drunk.*)

LORENE     I think he was kind of sweet on Nan.

*Michael looks at Nan, disturbed.*

NAN He said I reminded him of his sister.

LORENE He used to play cribbage with Johnny.

NAN And he always used to win.

LORENE He never caught on that Johnny let him win. He was just so darned pleased. But a real good sport.

JOHNNY Oh yeah, Harold was a great sport.

MICHAEL But I don't quite see...

NAN You will.

LORENE I'll always remember Harold.

*Johnny begins the first chorus of the song again. "Oh he's gone but not forgotten." Lorene and Nan, and even Michael, join in. Elva, on her way to Mariana's room, looks in. She is carrying a wrapped Christmas present.*

JOHNNY (*Spotting Elva*) Hey, Elva ... c'mon in and have a drink to old Harold.

ELVA You know I don't drink liquor.

LORENE Sure, Elva, come and join us.

ELVA No, thank you very much ... not even for poor Harold.

JOHNNY Ah, come on ... just this once.

NAN What have you got there, Elva? Is it a present?

ELVA It's a blanket for Mariana's baby.

JOHNNY Oh, on your way to prayers again, are you?

ELVA It wouldn't hurt you to think upon the Christ child today.

LORENE We'll do that, Elva. Don't mind him...

JOHNNY Prayin all the time ... gabble, gabble, gabble.

ELVA What's wrong with my prayers?

JOHNNY They're a goddamn insult to the human race!

NAN Johnny!

JOHNNY No health—pile of crap.

MICHAEL Oh, for heaven's sake.

ELVA There's no need to say that. It's Christ's birthday. I won't listen ... no...  
(*She leaves, nearly in tears.*)

LORENE Didja have to jump on her like that?

JOHNNY I got no use for the kinda religion says people are nothin but shit.

NAN Elva doesn't think that.

JOHNNY Do you know those crummy prayers she mumbles in Mariana's room?  
Do you?

NAN No, how would I?

JOHNNY Well, I do. I heard them. And let me tell you, I don't think Mariana understands one word of English, and it's a goddamn good thing, because it's bloody well the last thing she needs to hear. How she's a lost sheep who's let God down, and how she's left undone things which she ought to've done, and done things she ought not to've done,' and—

*Lorene starts to speak the words with him, softly.*

*—there is no health in her.*

LORENE “There is no health in us.”

JOHNNY (*Notices Lorene joining in*) You know it?

LORENE Sure, I've said it a million times in church. So what?

JOHNNY So *what*? Have you ever thought what it means? Why say people are no good?

*Michael has been growing increasingly distressed.*

MICHAEL For God's sake man, don't be so literal.

JOHNNY      Whattaya mean?

MICHAEL     No one literally believes that there is no good—

JOHNNY     Yeah, well they're still teachin it to poor stupid fools like Elva.

NAN          That's not the only thing we're taught.

JOHNNY     "There is *no health*"—no good. Tell people that enough times and they won't even think of trying to change anything.

NAN          Didn't you ever belong to a church?

JOHNNY     No, I never did. My old man broke with the church way back in the old country.

LORENE     Weren't you even baptised?

JOHNNY     None of us kids ever set foot in a church.

LORENE     I think I believe in the church ... sort of.

JOHNNY     Why not believe in people?

LORENE     People can let you down.

JOHNNY     And people can help you, and work with you ... and fight with you.

LORENE     Sometimes people cause their own troubles. I mean, I worked hard for everything I ever had ... but back home we got some neighbours, the Huckabees, and none of them ever did a day's work in their lives. They never seemed to care if their kids had good food or not, wouldn't even bother to grow a garden. What do you do about Huckabees?

JOHNNY     Look, I don't know. We had neighbours too, the Zalinskas, lost everything they'd sweated for, and it sure as hell wasn't any fault of theirs.

NAN          In the Depression?

JOHNNY     Yeah. And they weren't the only ones. There wasn't much work anywhere. I saw a lot a people like the Zalinskas when I was movin around. In the Okanagan it was all the fruit you could eat ... sounded good at first, but believe me, you can't live on fruit. The more you eat, the more you... (*They*

*all laugh*) ... the more you toot. (*Laughter*) After I'd had enough a that, I rode the rails back to Moose Jaw ... ended up in the jungle.

MICHAEL The jungle?

JOHNNY Hobo jungle ... just south of the town by the river, place called Round Hill. I heard there was this camp, so I walked over ... across a trestle ... at first I couldn't see anybody, and then, way down in the trees, I see a campfire. So I walk down towards the smoke and this guy ... Jigger Ericson...

LORENE Jigger? What kind of name's that?

JOHNNY Oh, he used ta work for the CPR on the section gang and he liked to ride the little jigger they travel around on. Anyway, Jigger jumps out at me from behind a tree and asks me what the hell I want. They'd been havin trouble with the CPR bulls ... the cops, ya know ... and I say I've just come in from the Okanagan and I need someplace to sleep. He asks me if I've eaten, and I say not for two days. So he takes me into the camp—there musta been 30 guys around the fire—and he finds me some beans. A whole can of pork and beans. Jesus, would you believe, no food's ever tasted that good, before or since, not even in Spain ... Ya see, it was Jigger who told me that the Communist Party was trying to get men to go and fight in Spain.

NAN Were you a communist?

JOHNNY Close to it. Things weren't working in Canada, and I couldn't see anybody doing much about it. Anyway, Jigger said they were looking for men ... "to help fight for democracy" was how he said it.

MICHAEL They're still saying it about this war.

JOHNNY Yeah, they are. Anyway, it seemed pretty clear to me. The fascists were trying to destroy the government people had elected. And I guess it was a way of fighting back against the whole goddamn Depression, the work camps, the union busting...

NAN But you mean you just up and went, just like that?

JOHNNY I took a coupla days to think it over. But there was never much question.

LORENE You had a lotta faith in people.

JOHNNY Still do. There's a lot of people like the Zalinskas ... and they're worth fighting for.

LORENE Too much faith, maybe.

JOHNNY Keep up that kinda thinkin and you're gonna end up like Elva.

LORENE That so?

JOHNNY (*Relaxes a little*) Well, I guess you'll never be exactly like Elva.

NAN Elva was right about one thing, Johnny. This is a Christian holiday.

JOHNNY Like hell. Mid-winter's always been a pagan celebration. Solstice ... lowest point of the sun in the sky. Shortest day, longest night. They were celebrating the death and rebirth of the sun. The Christians just took it over. Christ ... if there was a Christ ... wasn't even born on the 25th of December. Hey Lorene ... want another drink?

LORENE Sure.

JOHNNY A girl after my own pagan heart.

*Lorene joins him in half-hearted laughter, but Nan looks offended. She and Michael try to turn the conversation. Johnny pours drinks all around.*

NAN (*To Michael*) Did they celebrate Christmas in Ceylon?

MICHAEL Yes, some of them did. People in Ceylon ... the Christians anyway ... believe Ceylon is where Adam and Eve went after they were cast out of the Garden of Eden. They think the island is the closest thing on earth to Paradise.

JOHNNY So nowhere better to find God, eh?

MICHAEL (*Treats it as simple question*) At times it seemed so ... but not on land, beautiful as the land was...

NAN Flying.

MICHAEL Yes. Flying.

JOHNNY And coal-miners dig down to hell.

MICHAEL I don't mean in that way, not that you could get physically closer to Him by flying. I mean, it's simply a different place, the sky. Look, the plane I flew was big, a hundred-foot wingspan, a crew of seven. It was a flying

boat ... we took off from the water, landed on water. We could stay up there for a whole day, even more. Just lose touch with the earth. Forget after a while what the ground felt like.

*Music for "Where is God" begins, softly.*

Flying ... high, high over the Indian Ocean ... away from all land ... out past the small dots of green and gold, coral islands ... then no land anywhere ... only ocean, blue-green like emeralds, like sapphires. All of us snuggled into sheepskin jackets with electric coil in them to keep us warm, and oxygen masks ... and below, the tropical heat and the drift of soft air laden with spices, laden with salt from the sea. Flying. On my first missions I used to feel ... every moment in the air ... a sensation just below my ribs ... a floating bubble of fear ... that never burst, but never escaped from my body. And I'd pray ... pray we wouldn't find anything. We never did. Then one day the fear wasn't there any more. It just went away.

*Sings.*

Where is God  
when you fly?  
blue-green sea  
blue, blue sky

Where is God  
when you die?  
salt sea of tears  
cold sea of sky

Where is God  
where does He hide?  
warm sea of death  
flows into sky

NAN (Near tears) Oh, Michael... (She takes his hand.)

JOHNNY (Under his breath) What a load of crap!

LORENE Let it go, Johnny, it's Christmas.

JOHNNY (Getting up) A load of crap is a load of crap, no matter what day it is.

LORENE Johnny...

*Johnny storms out. Lorene goes after him.*

JOHNNY There's something the flyboy should see—so he'll know what this war's really about.

LORENE (*Leaving*) I better talk to him.

JOHNNY (*On way out*) Tropical paradise, Jesus!

*Lorene leaves.*

LORENE (*Off*) Johnny! Johnny, wait!

*Michael feels unjustly attacked.*

MICHAEL Boy, he sure takes things seriously.

NAN Look, don't take it to heart.

MICHAEL I can understand how he feels about Harold...

NAN It's not only that.

MICHAEL What is it then?

MICHAEL I think when he sees you, he feels he should have been in the war too. And that what he did in Spain went for nothing.

MICHAEL Because he couldn't prevent the war?

NAN And because no one honours them. You've seen how Charge Nurse treats servicemen—nothing's too good for you. But Johnny she always accuses of being a Communist.

MICHAEL Why take it out on me? I'm willing to give him his due.

NAN It's not only the war. Johnny thinks he should be working.

MICHAEL Yeah ... I sure feel useless enough. Just sitting here, taking up space, using up food ... but why'd he fly off the handle at Elva.

NAN He's got a thing about religion.

MICHAEL I can see that.

NAN He thinks if people can have religion and still do bad things, what's the use of religion? So he just tries to be good all on his own.

MICHAEL But why pick on Elva?

NAN She can get on your nerves.

MICHAEL Simple faith ... what's wrong with that?

NAN If you don't happen to take the Bible literally ... and somebody acts like they were *there*, and if it's all they talk about...

MICHAEL But she seems so kind.

NAN She can be very kind.

MICHAEL How'd she get stuck away in this place?

NAN She had it too.

MICHAEL Had what?

NAN When she was young, just finished training to be a nurse, they found out she had pleurisy, and they sent her here for a few years.

MICHAEL So she was cured.

NAN She got over it. But by the time she got out her mother was sick. Her heart. Elva was the only unmarried one in her family, so she had to stay home.

MICHAEL Being a nurse and all.

NAN Exactly.

MICHAEL She tell you all this?

NAN Oh, in bits and pieces. She probably doesn't realize how much she's told me.

MICHAEL Did her mother die?

NAN Yes, and Elva stayed on to keep house for her dad. Then he got sick, and she had to look after him. She spent more than ten years nursing the two of them.

MICHAEL She never lived on her own all that time...

NAN And when her father died, there she was, thirty-five years old, no money, no furniture—her father left the house to her eldest brother...

MICHAEL Bastard.

NAN Elva told me she didn't even have decent clothes to wear to look for a job in.

MICHAEL But why come back here?

NAN She had another bout of pleurisy after her dad died. When they got her back on her feet, I guess this place seemed safer than the outside world.

MICHAEL Was she always religious?

NAN Oh, in the ordinary way, she probably was. But I think it's really blossomed since she came back here. It's all she's got, really ... her "dear little Christ child."

MICHAEL She seems pretty interested in Mariana.

NAN Whenever a women has a baby here, Elva waits on her hand and foot. You can see how she wants children, she needs to touch them...

MICHAEL Poor woman.

NAN But there's something wrong about it. She wants to hold them and hug them ... but children grow into people. You have to see them for themselves, not just as cuddly bundles...

MICHAEL (*Smiling*). You wouldn't cuddle them...

NAN Of course, I would. I just mean, there's a lot more to it. You have to *think*.

MICHAEL I wonder where Johnny's got to?

NAN Oh, Lorene's calming him down. (*Changing subject*) Have you heard from your family?

MICHAEL *Morose.* They probably don't know I'm here. I imagine they sent my presents to the veterans hospital in Winnipeg.

NAN Where do they live?

MICHAEL On a ranch near Canmore.

NAN You haven't seen them...

MICHAEL For over two years. Last time was just before I went overseas.

NAN *(Trying to divert him)* So you were a rancher.

MICHAEL My mother wanted me to go to university. Her father was a lawyer, and that's what she wanted for me. My brothers were supposed to stay home and run the ranch.

NAN What did *you* want?

MICHAEL Oh, who knows at eighteen? But I would've gone. Except the war came along.

NAN I've never been to a ranch.

MICHAEL I used to ride up into the mountains. Go fishing for rainbow trout or just walk in the summer meadows ... I wonder if I'll ever see them again.

NAN You have to believe you will. You have to work at it.

MICHAEL Is that what you do?

NAN I want out of this place.  
*She holds out her box of chocolates.*

NAN Like a chocolate? *(Shows him diagram from box)* Here's the diagram showing you what's in them.

MICHAEL Yeah, let's see where the soft ones are. *(He chooses one and eats it.)*

NAN I like the hard centres best ... they last longer. *(Takes a candy)*  
Funny, that's the only thing dad ever brought home from the store ... except medicines.

MICHAEL It was a drugstore?

NAN Yes. I used to think there was a medicine for every sickness. I'd watch him mixing them, measuring the coloured powders on a shiny brass scale, and filling the capsules ... they looked so pretty, I figured they were a kind of candy.

MICHAEL (*Eating*) Ummm, this is good ... Turkish Delight.

NAN Whenever mom or I got sick, he always got the pharmacist in the next town to fill the prescription.

MICHAEL Why?

NAN He said it was like a doctor treating his own family ... Especially with mom.

MICHAEL What was wrong?

NAN There was nothing they could do. She died when I was twelve.

MICHAEL I'm sorry, Nan.

NAN Then I'd see him sifting through the bottles of medicines, staring ... as if he didn't believe in their power any more, because they hadn't helped her ... and when I got TB...

MICHAEL I guess nothing can cure it.

NAN It's a disease, like the others. They haven't found the drug yet, but they will.

MICHAEL You don't think it'll always be with us?

NAN It'll disappear like the Black Death ... but in the meantime, we have to cure ourselves.

MICHAEL You know what you want.

NAN I don't want my father to lose me too. And I want to go back to teaching children.

MICHAEL But did you ever feel ... it seems as though TB singled me out...

NAN No.

MICHAEL ... as though I have to learn something from it.

NAN            You can't think that way. You have to prepare your mind to defeat it.

MICHAEL      God knows that's how I got through my first missions in Ceylon. You make yourself believe you'll get back.

NAN            And you got back.

MICHAEL      Yes ... but changed. The war changed me ... Nan, do you have a sweetheart at home?

NAN            No.

MICHAEL      Did you?

NAN            No, I never did.

MICHAEL      The men must be blind back where you came from.

NAN            (*Smiles*) Maybe it was me that was blind. I don't think I ever found anyone that interested me that much.

MICHAEL      I'm trying to be as interesting as I can. Would you like to hear more about the mountains, about cold lakes that look like turquoise ... about wildflowers in the alpine meadows, where the air seems closer to the sun, where everything is so new and clean...

*They look at each other a moment, then are distracted by sounds from the hall.*

LORENE        Johnny, forget it.

JOHNNY        I'm going to show him.

*Johnny returns, angry, gripping a newspaper in his hand. Lorene follows along.*

JOHNNY        You see this, fly-boy?

LORENE        C'mon, Johnny, don't.

MICHAEL      See what?

JOHNNY        A story in the paper. From the Russian front. They captured some German prison camps for Russian soldiers and for civilians. And they found graves, mass graves.

LORENE     Johnny...

JOHNNY    You wanta know how many bodies?

NAN        No, Johnny.

JOHNNY    Bodies of people killed by the fascists. Seven hundred thousand. *Seven hundred thousand*. In one goddamn camp.

NAN        Please.

JOHNNY    If we'd stopped those bastards in Spain...

LORENE    Let's have another drink. For godsake, Michael was only about 14 years old when you were in Spain.

JOHNNY    You girls like to hear war stories so much, I'll tell you war stories ... only mine aren't about tropical paradises, flying high above the fighting...

LORENE    *Johnny...*

MICHAEL   No, let him talk.

JOHNNY    I saw my friends die ... guys from work camps, slaughterhouses, lumber towns ... Finns, Ukrainians, English ... we were the MacPaps! ... And we didn't fly to the front, we bloody well walked ... through mountains, snow to our ankles ... it was misty ... we had to go slow, so we wouldn't fall off the cliffs ... *three weeks* of training and they sent us to Brunete, to try to save Madrid ... and we *held* them ... we could've finished it then, if only we'd had some help ... the fascists had help ... lots of it, but with us everybody wanted to be *neutral* ... (*In recalling the war, Johnny has partly forgotten Michael*)



*Michael (Rainer Kraps) endures the pent-up anger of fellow TB patient Johnny Dombrowsky (Claudio Mascuili) in The Tenth Negative Pig, March 1983. Photo: C.W. Hill Photography for Walterdale Theatre Associates.*

And that goddamn Charge Nurse is always at me about the boys at the front as if I'm some kind of coward or something, and I'm not supposed to talk about my war because I fought with the *communists*, and *she* doesn't think it's nice...

They were *practicing* on us ... and the goddamn British were too dumb to see it ... and now their cities are getting it ... the fascists bombed hospitals, Red Cross trains, refugees, they didn't care ... they were practising ... for the big war...

Practicing... (*Shakes paper*) Practicing even for this. When they first invaded Spain they took a couple of towns by surprise. At Badajoz they rounded up everybody they figured was against them, men and women ... herded them into a bull ring, nearly 2,000 people. They had machine guns set up in the stands. And they started shooting and shooting and shooting. That's *war*, goddamn it.

MICHAEL All right, that's war.

*Johnny coughs a couple of times.*

LORENE Johnny, take it easy ... you'll hurt yourself.

JOHNNY I never got hurt all through the whole damn war ... not once. My friends dropping all around me, gut-shot, shrapnelled, bayoneted ... men I knew better than brothers, and we were lucky if we could get them out and bury them ... hand to hand fighting ... sometimes we were so close we could spit into each other's faces...

(*Short coughs*) And that's what war is like. Shitting your pants from fear, men bleeding and screaming and dying all around you ... that's war. A war we could've won if those son-of-a-bitch politicians hadn't been so scared of making Hitler mad ... and they've made us all pay for it now...

LORENE Johnny, Johnny, stop!

JOHNNY (*Shouts*) That's war!

*Johnny "throws" a spectacular haemorrhage, blood frothing from his mouth. Michael gets up from the wheelchair, takes a step toward him. Johnny continues haemorrhaging.*

LORENE No! No!

*Lights out.*

**Act Two, Scene Two**

*The New Year's Eve dance at the San. The space around the Musician(s) or the exam/op room is the dance floor. Darkness. The Muscian(s) begin(s) to play and the song begins. The first verse of the song is in darkness gradually getting brighter. All join in on the chorus. The Doctor and nurse are dancing circles around the patients—Johnny and Lorene, Nan and Michael—who simply shuffle along. The song is "Temple Gardens."*

SINGER

In from the country on Saturday night  
From high in the hills see the city's bright lights  
Warm bodies close in the car  
Summer can't be very far  
A voice on the radio says  
"There's a dance at Temple Gardens!  
Find romance at Temple Garden!  
Steal a kiss as you waltz  
Through the tunnel of love!"

Up on the stand see the band members play  
They're dressed in white and the couples all sway  
Floating around the floor  
Or laughing beside the door  
Coloured lights swirl through the air  
At the dance at Temple Gardens  
There's romance at Temple Gardens  
Steal a kiss as you waltz  
Through the tunnel of love

Down at the Serpentine in Crescent Park  
Swans glide and couples stroll in the half-dark  
Music drifts around  
Breezes lift the sound  
Up to the moon and the stars  
Oh the dance at Temple Gardens  
The romance at Temple Gardens  
Steal a kiss at Temple Gardens  
Take a chance, Temple Gardens  
Oh romance, Temple Gardens  
Steal a kiss as you waltz  
Through the tunnel of love!

*Song Ends. All Applaud.*

JOHNNY      (*To Musician*). Hey, how about a polka!

*Music starts to play.*

LORENE      (*Laughs*) Oh Johnny!

NURSE       You're lucky we let you dance at all!

JOHNNY      Oh, yeah, I almost forgot there for a minute. I was just about to show you some Ukrainian dancing.

DOCTOR      (*Stopping Musician*) How about something slower for a change?

*Musician begins another waltz.*

MICHAEL     (*To Nan*) I think I better sit this one out.

NAN          All right.

*He sits in wheelchair.*

MICHAEL     Do you think we could go somewhere a bit quieter for a few moments?

NAN          Let's do that.

*She wheels him out of the Dance Room and down towards his Room in the Ward. As they leave the dance, the music fades, the lights dim, and the scene freezes. In Michael's Room, Nan sits on a bed with Michael in the wheelchair beside her.*

NAN          There, that's better.

MICHAEL     Yes.

*They sit in silence for a moment.*

MICHAEL     Where were you last New Year's?

NAN          Where? Oh, I was here ... sometimes it seems I've been in this place all my life.

MICHAEL     I suppose there was a dance then too.

NAN          Only I wasn't at it.

MICHAEL No?

NAN I had to stay in bed. “Typhoid” rest is what they call it ... couldn’t even get up to use the bathroom.

MICHAEL You’ve got quite a bit better since then.

NAN Yes ... yes I have. But what about you?

MICHAEL Me?

NAN Where were you last New Year’s?

MICHAEL Oh ... I was at a dance. Much bigger than this. At our base in Ceylon ... a town called Trincomalee. It’s a British Naval headquarters, so their officers threw a party, invited our squadron to come. All kinds of food and drinks ... a big dance band...

NAN And lots of girls. (*Laughs.*)

MICHAEL Oh yes, lots of girls. (*Laughs*) The daughters of all the important people in town were there. Their duty, you see. Part of the “war effort.” Anyway, the limeys got the biggest hall they could find, an old wooden building, with verandahs looking out over the sea. And you could go out there and gaze at the ships riding in the harbour, dark shapes on a dark sea, only with a river of gold flowing away towards the full moon.

NAN An esplanade along the shore...

MICHAEL Couples walking along in the moonlight and the warm night air...

NAN Walking with a girl...

MICHAEL ... with a dark, dark face, and the bluest eyes you’ve ever seen ... her father was Dutch ... strolling arm in arm, and telling her about winter in Canada, just like I’m telling you about Ceylon ... (*Laughs ... this turns nearly into tears*) ... and now this...

NAN It won’t steal your life away.

MICHAEL Sometimes I think I loved the beauty of the world I found there too much ... and this illness is merely my love transformed

NAN I don’t think it has anything to do with love ... it’s only a disease.

MICHAEL Then why does it seem as if my whole life has been speeded up, as if I'm living months in days, years in the space of weeks? As if there's a fire burning in me, intensifying my perceptions, purifying my spirit? It's been so strange, that as I've been told I'm getting sicker and sicker, I've felt more and more alive to the marvels of this world.

NAN That must have been in you always ... you never took the time to understand it before, that's all.

MICHAEL But the disease has freed it! Don't you see. I might never have taken the time. It's almost like a privilege. To feel things so strongly, to feel my own uniqueness responding so completely to the world. *(Pause)* Look ... *(Pulls small box from pocket of dressing gown)* Look at this.

NAN What is it?

*Michael takes a large black pearl from the box and places it on the palm of his hand.*

MICHAEL I was on leave ... just wandering around the island. I ended up on the West Coast, at a small village called Marichukaddi ... it used to be a pearl fishing centre, even the Phoenicians knew about it. I was poking around in the market ... the only white man there ... when an old man grabbed my arm. "Per-al," he kept saying, "per-al." He had pearls wrapped up in all kinds of little packages, and he showed me hundreds—seed pearls, pearls big as the end of your thumb, flawed and misshapen, a set of matched pearls for a necklace, even some small pearls the colour of pale roses. He could see I wasn't really interested. But then he showed me this. "Per-al kalu." The black pearl. *(Pause)* I could feel something turning in my life as soon as I held it in my hand. Now I know what it was. The bacillus was working in me the same way that a piece of sand works in a pearl-oyster ... they both force something precious to grow.

NAN No, Michael, don't ... don't...

MICHAEL You're almost all better. And I know you'll stay that way. I also know what we're feeling about each other. And how fast my love for you is growing. These things burn through me like prairie fire. *(He holds her hand, placing the pearl in it)* This is for you.

*Nan does not look at the pearl. She looks into Michael's eyes, while he closes her hand over the pearl.*

*Lights dim on the scene, as lights and music rise on the dance again.*

*Applause. Elva goes over to the Doctor.*

ELVA Excuse me, doctor.

DOCTOR Yes.

ELVA Do you think I should check on Mariana?

DOCTOR I don't think that's really necessary, nurse. Why not enjoy yourself a little?

ELVA She's so near...

DOCTOR She'll be all right for another hour or so. I looked in on her before I came here.

ELVA Oh. Well, that's fine then.

DOCTOR You have to be here to see the New Year in.

ELVA Thank you, doctor.

DOCTOR Not at all. Would you like to dance?

ELVA Oh, really...

DOCTOR *(To Musician)*. How about another waltz?

*Music begins. Doctor and Elva waltz. Johnny touches Lorene's arm.*

JOHNNY Let's slip out for a breath of air.

LORENE Yeah, you know how I love fresh air.

JOHNNY That's not all I've got in mind.

*As Johnny and Lorene leave, Nan wheels Michael back in. They waltz as well. Johnny and Lorene walk, slowly, because they're tired from dancing, to Lorene's room. Behind them, lights dim, music fades, and the scene freezes.*

JOHNNY You got the rest of Harold's rye tucked away somewhere?

LORENE Yeah, like a little snort?

JOHNNY Sure.

LORENE It's in my night-table.

*Johnny gets it out from the table and pours a drink in one glass.  
They both drink.*

JOHNNY Mmmmm, isn't it good?

*They drink some more, then put the glass down. They snuggle and kiss.*

JOHNNY Hey, take it easy kid. That dancing kinda wore me out. *(They laugh.)*

LORENE And you wanted a polka.

JOHNNY It's in the blood, eh? But I couldna danced one to save my soul.

LORENE *(Pressing close)* I want you so much, Johnny.

JOHNNY Me too, babe ... I like to be with you.

LORENE Johnny ... I want to have a baby with you.

JOHNNY *(Pretending alarm)* You mean, right now?!

LORENE I want a baby to love ... I want her to be happy, and to have a lot of things I never had, and...

JOHNNY Now hold on, Lorene. *(Teasing)* First my dad has to talk to your dad about how many chickens and cows and pigs he'll give us.

LORENE Hey, wait a minute! What would your folks give my folks for taking you off their hands?

*They laugh.*

JOHNNY Of course, I'd have my wedding clothes, and hand-tooled boots, and my mom'd give you this big cast iron pot for making cabbage rolls in.

LORENE I don't know how to make cabbage rolls.

JOHNNY Doesn't matter! You'll have to learn. And of course everybody at the wedding chips in to make one big wedding present. Mind you, the wedding won't be cheap, but we should come out maybe \$500 ahead.

LORENE Five hundred! That'd sure come in handy, setting out. *(Pause)* Johnny ... will your folks mind that I'm not Ukrainian?

JOHNNY No, I don't think so. Not any more. Like my dad said once, after he had a fight with our neighbours. "Well, Johnny, I guess we got-it the sonsabeeches too, just like the other peoples."

LORENE So there's hope for me?

JOHNNY Baby, they'll love you ... just like I do. The main thing we'll have to worry about is me finding a job.

LORENE You think you could work at the slaughter-house again?

JOHNNY I'd like to, cause that's what I know how to do and with the union the money's pretty good now ... but I don't know if I'll have the strength. Doc says, it's a matter of learning to pace yourself, and I can see that. Right now, I wouldn't last half an hour. *(Pauses, depressed at his loss of health)* Jesus.

LORENE Don't they have any jobs that aren't so hard?

JOHNNY Yeah, caretaker or night watchman. I don't wanna do that. Pig sticker might not sound very glamorous but you gotta understand what it's like on the floor. A guy's proud to be able to do it.

LORENE I thought maybe I might get on there too for a while ... before I had the baby.

JOHNNY There's gutters and sausage stuffers and chicken pluckers. How'd you like to be a chicken plucker?

LORENE I can't say it's been my life's ambition. But they'll never take me back at the Uptown Cafe. The boss doesn't want me scaring off customers. *(Depressed)* Oh well, I guess it'll be quite a while before I have to worry about a job.

JOHNNY Maybe not so long.

LORENE I been wondering something, Johnny. How come a big dreamboat like you's still loose?

JOHNNY Oh, I had a sweetheart once and we came pretty close to getting married. But I couldn't get any work, and we kinda drifted apart. Hey, what happened to our drink? Let's top it up a bit, if there's any left.

*They fill the glass again and drink.*

LORENE Johnny ... you don't think we make it happen do you?

JOHNNY Make what happen?

LORENE I mean, we don't get TB because of anything we do that we shouldn't?

JOHNNY What?!

LORENE Well, the way they talk around here, about how you have to chase cure and make yourself well, sometimes it's like they think we do it ourselves.

JOHNNY Don't be silly. How could we do that?

LORENE I don't know. But it's almost as if they think we let up for a minute and the germs jump in when we aren't looking.

JOHNNY Aw, that's a crock of ... bananas.

LORENE It couldn't be ... like a punishment ... for anything bad we've done?

JOHNNY Lorene, what gave you a crazy idea like that?

LORENE Well, I don't think that, not really, but once Elva said, maybe the Lord is punishing us for our sins...

JOHNNY Look, you can't pay attention to what that poor stupid bitch says. If there is a God—which I doubt—I don't imagine he works that way. Besides, you never did anything to deserve TB.

LORENE I guess it does sound kinda dumb...

JOHNNY I'll say! You know what my mom thinks? That you get TB from drinking cold water. *(They laugh)* Getting it from sin makes about as much sense.

LORENE But I'm not getting any better, Johnny.

JOHNNY You will.

LORENE And Doc's gonna be at me again about that operation.

JOHNNY They wanta take out some ribs?

LORENE Yes.

JOHNNY It's not so bad.

LORENE But what's it gonna make me look like?

JOHNNY Oh ... not that different, I suppose.

LORENE What'll it do to my ... to my breasts?

JOHNNY You'll always look beautiful to me.

LORENE Johnny—what do you think happens when you die?

JOHNNY There's just what you see here—when you're gone, you're gone.

*Musician(s) start(s) to play "Auld Lang Syne" quietly. The lights start to go up and the frozen dancers move again.*

JOHNNY Look, we hafta get back—don't want to miss the big moment.  
Come on, sweetie.

LORENE Ok.

*Johnny and Lorene arrive back just as the Doctor is announcing the New Year.*

*All sing "Auld Lang Syne." The song ends. They cheer.*



*Johnny Dombrowsky (Claudio Masculli) shows his growing fondness for fellow patient Lorene Evans (Suzi Max) in The Tenth Negative Pig, March 1983. Photo: C.W. Hill Photography for Walterdale Theatre Associates.*

DOCTOR Happy New Year everybody!

ALL Happy New Year! Happy New Year!

NURSE Remember, no kissing!

*Elva goes to Mariana's room. Mariana is asleep. Elva tucks her in.*

NURSE Everybody off to bed now!

JOHNNY (*Hugs Lorene*) See you around, sweetheart.

LORENE Happy New Year, Johnny.

JOHNNY And Happy New Year to you.

NURSE It's time for bed.

MICHAEL Goodnight, Nan.

NAN Goodnight, Michael.

DOCTOR All right, break it up. Let's all get some sleep.

*They move to the Wards. The Doctor wheels Michael in the wheelchair, followed by Johnny. The Nurse leads the other women to their Ward. She then goes to Mariana's room, while Nan and Lorene get into bed, after removing dressing gowns.*

NURSE Stewart, come and give me a hand.

ELVA Yes, Nurse.

*Elva goes off and gets the "pigs" for the foot of each bed. She places them at the foot and helps Charge Nurse move Nan out.*

NAN Mmmm, this is warm.

*They come back for Lorene. In the Men's Ward, Johnny is putting his scarves on, Michael his mitts.*

LORENE It must be 40 below out there! Where's my tea-cosy?

*Elva gives it to her. She puts it on. She and Charge Nurse move the bed.*

*They come back to the Ward and turn the lights out.*

JOHNNY Give us a break. Doc. How about a New Year's holiday from chasing cure?

DOCTOR You, my friend, need to chase cure all you can!

*He pushes Johnny out, then Michael.*

DOCTOR Good night.

MICHAEL AND JOHNNY

Good night, Doc. Goodnight.

ELVA *(To women)* Good night ... sleep tight.

*The Doctor comes back into the Ward, shivering. He turns the lights out.*

NURSE *(To Elva)* That will be all, Stewart.

ELVA Thank you, Nurse. *(She leaves. Exit left.)*

*Doctor and Nurse meet in the hall. They leave.*

DOCTOR Good night.

NURSE Good night, Doctor.

*The wards and porches are dark. There is only a dim light in the hall.  
The patients are asleep.*

*After a few moments of quiet, the Musician(s) play(s) a verse of "Spirits of Night." The music stops. Mariana, called by the music, stirs slowly and rises from her bed. Pale, flickering light, the beginning of Northern Lights, touches her. She moves forward into the growing light.*

MARIANA Who calls me? Who calls? I'm falling, drowning, looking up from the bottom of a dark lake, shadows swirling around my body like cold, cold water. Above me, upon the shores, people are calling to me, "Come back! Come back!" But their voices echo and quaver through the water that touches me everywhere, filling my lungs. No! No! There is something moving in the night. Yes, moving, above the high walls of this valley. I hear you, I know what you want. Calling my name, wishing me to come with you, to join your dance. Your shapes a burning wind in the black sky, beating and swaying, dipping to earth like tongues of fire all speaking my name. Coming so low, so low, licking at my face, my hands.

*The Northern Lights have grown in power, pulsing around her.*

MARIANA Oh, ancestors, spirits of our ancestors, I can't join you now! Please... not now! Not now!

*Sings "Spirits of the Night"*

Spirits of night move in the sky  
Circling around, making no sound  
Leaping in flame, calling my name  
Come, dance again!  
Feel no more pain!  
Come dance again!  
Feel no more pain!

Spirits of night, don't call me now  
I have to stay, see the new day  
A child will be born, free from all harm  
Then I'll dance again  
Moving in flame

Spirits of night move in the sky  
Flowing in fire, burning desire  
Lighter than breath, dancing in death  
Wait, oh wait for me!  
Soon I'll be free!  
Wait, oh wait for me!  
Soon I'll be free!

*The music and the song have pulled Lorene, Johnny, Nan, and Michael from their beds. They remove scarves, mitts, and tea-cosy. Nan's hair is loose. As the song ends, they begin to speak, as if from their dreams.*

MICHAEL I'm standing in the jungle ... watching the plane burn. It's evening. No one else is with me. They must have died in the crash ... or they will die when the fire reaches the fuel tanks. I can't get at them. Have to take off this jacket ... I'm covered in sweat. Where are my boots? Snakes ... there's small, green poisonous snakes. The plane burns.

LORENE ... northern lights ... northern lights sway and twist ... like the sky's on fire, but there's no warmth ... tired ... you'd swear it'd set the snow on fire ... want to fold myself in warmth and brightness ... but it touches my skin and I'm cold ... my bones are cold...

MICHAEL ... can't see, can't see any sky at all ... vines thick as my arm loop themselves down from the highest branches ... where the trees explode into branches, into hanging mosses and ferns ... shutting out the sky...

NAN Snow melting and dripping from the eaves, a drum inside my body ... and I'm outside ... moving ... no clothes ... the soft air on my skin, light as a kiss ... snow melting on the hills ... pale shoots of new grass and plants, crocuses pushing through, the feathery petals falling open ... and I lie on the earth ... press my body against them...

LORENE ... they hum and sing ... calling to me ... they say ... they say ... no, gotta keep moving, gotta keep warm ... but they're touching me ... their long cold fingers ... they wanna make me crazy, make me dance in the light ... cold shifting light...

MICHAEL ... can't see ... must be a clearing somewhere ... if I run ... darkness closing in ... can't see ... noises ... the plane burns ... shuddering glare swallowed by shadowless black ... things out there ... slither of bodies over leaves ... a strange, coughing cry that moves in a circle ... mosquitoes crawl over my face ... sting it raw ... closing my eyes...

LORENE ... it's the wind now ... little knives slash into me, cut away at the flesh ... can't let them cut ... no! Johnny? ... where's Johnny!? ... Johnny! ... where are you?

JOHNNY ... in the tank room, down in the cellar of the slaughterhouse ... it's night, the room pitch black ... the scurry of rats across the floor ... rats everywhere ... they've chewed tunnels in the cork walls of the freezers ... hide in every corner ... the smell ... not like I remember ... blood from the slaughter draining down and pouring into the huge steel tank ... stench of blood and lungs and crushed skulls ... but the smell ... no ... strange...

NAN ... dry lightning over the pale hills, touching brown matted grass, dry leaves around me the old buffalo-back hill leaps into flame ... the fire catching, flaring through brush in the ravines ... and I am in the fire ... climbing the hill ... my body moving in flame and not harmed by flame ... my legs strong as when I was a child...

LORENE ... there's a baby inside me ... yes ... a little baby ... oh, the wind is so cold ... but nothing can touch her, not cold, not sickness ... brushing her hair so soft and shiny, the clean sweet smell of it ... so warm when she's sleeping...

- NAN ... a man at the top of the hill ... he waves ... I think he is calling ... the crackle of fire all around me ... earth hot beneath my feet ... see him waving, calling ... I can't hear ... it's Michael ... Michael! ... I run up the hill, and the fire leaps with me, leaps ahead ... his face now ... calling ... flames roaring in my ears...
- MICHAEL ... you have to burn them ... burn them and they fall away ... slimy leeches that cling and suck ... can't lie down to rest., scorpions, spiders ... things crawling ... snakes, lizards ... the jungle crawling with poisonous, poisonous creatures...
- JOHNNY ... rats scuttle for cover when I flip on the light ... up the stairs ... concrete cool beneath my bare feet ... air dank on my naked body ... up into the darkness of the ground floor, the shipping floor, the beef-killing floor ... I flip on the lights ... rats scatter as if an invisible shell, exploding, blows them away ... no one here ... the chute empty, the hoist silent ... climb another flight of stairs, to my floor, the hog-killing floor ... lights already on ... the foreman sees me, yells, "where the fuck have you been?" ... grabs a meathook from the hoist, swings it in a whistling arc towards my eyes ... "get out there, you son of a bitch!" ... and he shoves me towards the front of the slaughter line...
- NAN ...running faster, running to Michael ... fire around his body ... Michael on the hill, burning ... his body writhes ... blackens ... when I reach the top he will already be consumed ... only a tangle of dead black things where he stood...
- JOHNNY ...I don't know any of these men ... I walk down the line of them, towards my place at the front ... past the one who splits carcasses, carefully, carefully, down the backbone with his cleaver ... past the one who slices them open, spilling the guts, yanking out the heart ... past the one who scrapes the bristles off the steaming hides, bodies scalded in a long, long tank of hissing water ... past them all ... to my place ... to the one who stands in my place ... the thin blade, cold as ice, waiting to slide into the jugular, blood spurting, washing over his hands...
- NAN ... the first drops of rain, on my face, my breasts ... rain streaming down my arms, my body, flooding my fiery skin and the thick tendrils of flame ... and where I walk the flames are put out, but inside I am filled with fire...
- JOHNNY ... the foreman slams me between the shoulderblades with the meathook ... "out there, you stinking hunky!" ... shoves me through the doors, out into the glare of searchlights, dazzling the night, out into the freezing cold, the shivering, silent rows of naked men and women, naked children...

LORENE ... I can feel the lights ... moving around me ... looking just like fire, only cold as ice ... I'm so tired—no! ... there's a baby inside me ... the cold flakes on my skin, melting on my face, like tears ... thicker now, covering me like a blanket ... gathering, growing round my body ... just a rounded bank of snow ... the shape of a woman ... the lights...

MICHAEL ... and light! light! ... a thunderous roar ... the darkness flung far away ... fragments of hissing metal plunge through the air ... and now I can't see, can't see at all! ... and things are on me, crawling! crawling!

JOHNNY ... the squeal of the hoist and the guards prod us with bayonets and the people shuffle forward through the doors one at a time and I hear the first screams cut short and I am shouting “no! no! no!” and a rifle butt smashes the small of my back and I stagger forward and hands grab my ankle and clasp it in metal so cold it burns and I am dragged hopping on one foot until my leg is pulled into the air and I flip upside down and I try to curl myself into a ball, all my muscles straining to hold me there while I free myself from the shackle, until I can't hold myself like that any more and upside down I see the chain gang at work in the midst of an uproar of metal and screams and the sizzling steam the blade coming for my throat!

NAN ... the rain cools everything, the hillside cool against my feet ... I look down, and the grass has started to grow again through the black spikes and ashes, sending tiny shoots that lick and pull, tugging at my ankles like the current of a creek in summer ... I can't see Michael any more, only the returning grass and the shiny new leaves forming one by one on the charred branches ... the air clear now, no smoke ... everything turning green, deepening green ... and this is where he stood ... already he has grown into something else...

*Musician plays verse of “Spirits of Night” and all do dream dance without touching.*

MARIANA               Spirits of night move the sky  
                              Flowing in fire, burning desire  
                              Lighter than breath, dancing in death  
                              Waiting for me  
                              Waiting for me!

*Musician plays more of song while they all go back to their beds. Lights fade away. They sleep. Moments of silence.*

*Morning. Lights in hall come up. Doctor and nurse come on.*

DOCTOR     *(Yawning)* Dear me.

NURSE       You're tired.

DOCTOR     No, I'm fine ... all those long nights as an intern were good training.

*Elva enters.*

DOCTOR     Good morning, Elva.

ELVA        Good morning, Doctor.

DOCTOR     Why don't you check on Mariana ... I haven't had a chance to see her yet.

ELVA        Of course, Docotor.

*Elva goes into Mariana's room.*

DOCTOR     *(To Nurse)* Have a talk with Johnny about the drug treatment before you bring Michael in.

NURSE       Certainly.

DOCTOR     Fine. I'll see Nan and Lorene after I've got a cup of coffee.

*He turns away and exits left. The Nurse heads for the men's ward. She goes in and moves Johnny's bed in from the porch. His scarves are draped across the bed. She flips on the light.*

JOHNNY     *(Hands over eyes)* No! No!

NURSE       What's wrong?

JOHNNY     *(Sits up)* What? *(Coughs)*

NURSE       Did I startle you?

JOHNNY     *(Awakening. Looks around, moment of panic)* Where's Michael?

NURSE       Still on the porch.

JOHNNY     Oh.

NURSE       It's morning. Time to wake up.

JOHNNY Another year.

NURSE The Doctor wanted me to talk with you.

JOHNNY I'm not getting any better, am I? (*Coughs.*)

NURSE You're at a critical stage. As the Doctor says, "A good haemorrhage can be the beginning of the end, or—"

JOHNNY Like that afternoon when Harold got on his hands and knees and coughed his life away.

NURSE You know we can't do anything with a haemorrhage like that.

JOHNNY Five minutes. That's all it took.

NURSE I'm sorry.

JOHNNY Yeah, we're all sorry.

NURSE Look ... the infection has moved into your other lung.

JOHNNY I figured as much.

NURSE There are no more procedures—

JOHNNY You can't collapse both lungs, can you?

NURSE No.

JOHNNY So an operation's out.

NURSE Yes ... but there's a new drug we'd like to try.

JOHNNY (*Angry*). And you made me wait this long to get to it?

NURSE It's just been discovered. It's only been used on an experimental basis.

JOHNNY So you want me to be a guinea pig.

NURSE We won't hide the fact that you could suffer certain effects.

JOHNNY Of course.

NURSE But it works against the infection.

JOHNNY What effects?

NURSE You could have spells of dizziness ... a lack of balance ... you might even lose your hearing.

JOHNNY But I could be cured.

NURSE We won't really know until more cases have been treated.

JOHNNY For God's sake, I'm not a case. I'm me, I'm Johnny Dombrowsky! And I want to get the hell out of here.

NURSE So you'll accept the treatment?

JOHNNY Why me? Why not that poor bastard out there? (*Motions to Michael*) Hey? Why not that kid? I may be sick, but I'm in better shape than he is.

NURSE It might not ... be suitable for him.

JOHNNY He's too far gone ... is that what you mean?

NURSE No. But the drug...

JOHNNY You might have to give him so much you'd cripple him in some other way.

NURSE In such cases ... we don't know how much...

JOHNNY But you might learn something from giving it to me?

NURSE Yes.

JOHNNY Enough to be able to help him?

NURSE It's possible.

JOHNNY Well, I've had enough of lying around to last me a lifetime. When do we start?

NURSE Right now, if you like.

JOHNNY Sure. Let's go.

*Johnny gets up, puts on his dressing gown. She leads him out. She stops at Mariana's room.*

NURSE (Call quietly) Stewart.

ELVA (Coming to door) Yes?

NURSE How is she?

ELVA Very close.

NURSE Move Michael's bed in from the porch. Then come back here.

ELVA Thank you, nurse.

*Nurse and Johnny go to op room. When they reach there nurse flips on the lights. She prepares things to give him an injection. Lights dim and they freeze. During this, Elva goes to men's ward and brings Michael in. His mitts are on the bed. He does not move very much and coughs weakly.*

ELVA It's morning.

MICHAEL ... the plan...

ELVA (Hand on brow) You've got a bad fever.

MICHAEL ... I can't see...

ELVA (Pats his arm) You rest now. I'll be back soon with the Doctor.

MICHAEL ... crawling ... things crawling...

*Elva exits and goes back to Mariana's room. She watches over Mariana. Michael continues to cough and stir restlessly.*

*The doctor comes in with a cup of coffee in one hand. He puts it down on Nan's table, moves her bed in, and flips on the lights.*

NAN (Starting awake) Michael!

DOCTOR Good morning, Nan.

NAN Is it morning already?

DOCTOR     And a new year.

NAN         Yes.

DOCTOR     And a good year for you ... I've seen your latest test.

NAN         Yes?

DOCTOR     *(Smiling)* It's what I hoped I could tell you.

NAN         The last test was negative?

DOCTOR     *(Nods)* You can leave.

NAN         When?

DOCTOR     As soon as you can arrange for someone to pick you up. We won't throw you out in the snow.

NAN         What about Michael?

DOCTOR     We'll have to keep him here for a while yet, I'm afraid.

NAN         I see. *(Pause, thinking about Michael)* Could I phone my dad?

DOCTOR     Of course.

NAN         And I'd like to spend some time with Michael before I go.

DOCTOR     I'm sure that can be arranged *(Pats her shoulder.)*

NAN         Now you've said I can go, I'm almost afraid to.

DOCTOR     When you've been an "old crock" it takes a bit of courage to go out into the world again. But you'll do well, I know you will.

NAN         Thanks Doctor ... for all your help.

DOCTOR     It's been a pleasure.

NAN         Is it all right if I go and visit Michael now?

DOCTOR     I think so ... I have to talk with Lorene.

NAN With Lorene ... oh.

DOCTOR We'll take care of her.

NAN I never had a sister.

DOCTOR (*Nods*) Why don't you go along now?

NAN (*Puts on dressing gown*) Yes. (*Leaves.*)

*Nan goes to Michael's room. Doctor brings in Lorene's bed. Her tea-cosy is on the bed.*

NAN Michael? Michael?

*He does not answer, she goes in. Michael is restless and coughing weakly.*

Oh Michael...

*She sits on the bed and touches his forehead. She holds one of his hands in hers. She watches for him to awaken.*

LORENE (*Shivering*). I'm cold ... cold...

DOCTOR Wake up, Lorene.

LORENE ... shouldn't have fallen asleep...

DOCTOR Lorene.

LORENE (*Wakes up fast*) I won't let you cut me!

DOCTOR Take it easy.

LORENE No!

DOCTOR We think it can give you a better chance.

LORENE You'll send me out a cripple.

DOCTOR No, we'll send you out to a nearly normal life. Of course, you'd always have to be a little more careful, to make sure you don't break down again.

LORENE       *(Bitterly)* Kind of like rationing yourself, eh?

DOCTOR       The war's given a lot of people a taste of that.

LORENE       How many?

DOCTOR       What?

LORENE       How many ribs?

DOCTOR       It could be as few as three ... possibly six or seven...

LORENE       Oh my God.

DOCTOR       ... until we get collapse.

LORENE       Doc, I'm a *woman*. I don't wanna get better if I'm gonna be deformed.

DOCTOR       Look, it's not so bad.

LORENE       It's not fair. *(Cries)* You don't give us any goddamn decent choice.

DOCTOR       It's a chance to get better.

LORENE       I wouldn't mind so much, the pain and boredom and the bloody endless hours of *nothing*, if I thought it was doing any good. But it's all so meaningless.

DOCTOR       We have no way of knowing, Lorene.

LORENE       *(Low)* Stuff it. Doc.

DOCTOR       *(Ignores this)*. I have to tell you we can't use a general anaesthetic—too dangerous—

LORENE       *(Horried)* I'd be awake?! I'd hear you cutting?!

DOCTOR       We only want what's best for you.

LORENE       *(Crying)* Oh sure...

*Elva flips the lights on in Mariana's room. Mariana is moaning softly and moving. The labour pains have begun. Elva goes quickly to the women's ward, calling.*

ELVA Doctor! Doctor!

DOCTOR *(Going to door)* What is it?

ELVA It's Mariana! The baby!

DOCTOR I'll take a look.

*He goes out with Elva. They go to Mariana's room. He examines Mariana briefly.*

DOCTOR Let's move her. That baby's in a hurry!

*They wheel the bed to the op room (or, they get the wheelchair and move her in that). The nurse has finished giving Johnny his injection. Elva takes the baby's blanket.*

*(To Johnny)* On your way now.

JOHNNY Just leaving.

*They all prepare for the birth, scrubbing up, etc. The Musician(s) begin(s) to play "Spirits of Night" softly. Johnny goes to his room and looks in.*

JOHNNY *(To Nan)* Lorene's alone?

NAN Yes.

JOHNNY Mariana is having her baby.

NAN Oh.

JOHNNY I'm going to see Lorene.

NAN Yes.

JOHNNY There won't be anybody around here for quite a while.

NAN I suppose not.

JOHNNY Pretty bright in here.

*Johnny flips out the light. Nan looks at him. He closes the door. He goes down the hall to Lorene's room. He stands at the door, listening to her crying. The birth is starting.*

MICHAEL *(Waking up from a fevered sleep)*. The pearl ... *(Urgent)* You haven't lost the pearl?

NAN It's right here. *(Takes box from robe. Opens it)* It's safe.

MICHAEL *(Looks at it)* Look ... look into it.

NAN *(Looking)* There we both are.

MICHAEL Look deeper ... beyond our reflection.

NAN Past the surface.

MICHAEL To the heart ... the pain in the heart...

NAN Pain that enclosed itself in beauty...

MICHAEL Until it couldn't feel that pain any more.

NAN I love you.

MICHAEL You'll have the black pearl.

NAN I want more of you than I'll ever be able to have.

MICHAEL I'll be inside you ... *(Touches her head)* ... here.

NAN Memory...

MICHAEL More than memory...

*Nan lets her robe fall to the floor. She lifts up the cover and gets into bed with Michael. They caress. She moves on top of him. They lie together.*

*Johnny goes into Lorene's room.*

JOHNNY Lorene...

LORENE It's getting so cold...

JOHNNY We're gonna get better. *(Moves to her, touches her.)*

LORENE *(Not hearing him yet)* Johnny, don't leave me ... the coldest part of winter's yet to come...

JOHNNY      We're gonna get out of here.

LORENE      On the porch at night you can see the stars and you know they're nothin  
but ice...

JOHNNY      We'll have a good life together.

LORENE      I can feel the snow now ... touching my face, so soft and cold...

JOHNNY      And we'll help make a decent life for other people.

LORENE      ... until there's just a mound of snow where I was ... and they'll come in  
the morning to look and I'll be gone.

JOHNNY      And our kids'll have good food and a good home and they'll be able to  
see the doctor if they need it...

LORENE      Johnny? What did you say?

JOHNNY      We're getting out of here!

LORENE      About our kids?

JOHNNY      You're gonna get better!

LORENE      And we'll get married?

JOHNNY      Yes ... and have kids!

LORENE      I'm still young.

JOHNNY      (*Fiercely*) We have to go home!

JOHNNY AND LORENE  
We're going home!!

*In the op room, Mariana cries out loudly as the child is born. The music  
stops at once. The Doctor holds the child up, slaps it. The child cries out.*

ELVA      Mariana look! The child is here. The child is here!

DOCTOR      Get it to the Preventorium right away.

*Elva takes the child, wraps it in the blanket and carries it towards the front. As she does so the Doctor speaks to the Nurse.*

NURSE        Shall I tell the orderlies?

DOCTOR      Yes, I'll do the autopsy this afternoon.

*Lights dim and they freeze. Lights on all three scenes are dim and characters freeze. Elva walks into a pool of light at centre front.*

ELVA        (*Comforting the child*) There, there ... there, there ... She looked at you ... looked right at you. And you are so beautiful ... yes, you are. The poisons didn't reach you. Your mother wouldn't let them. She kept you safe. And now here you are, looking at all this with eyes so new ... and small fingers not yet uncurled to touch the world ... and your sweet body welcoming the air.

I don't know if she understood my words. There is sin, I know there is. We have left undone ... how many times ... I could always have done better, been kinder, remembered God ... for we all have sinned ... there is no health...

Yet Jesus said, "suffer the little ones to come unto me." Perhaps I am a foolish woman ... she didn't know what I was saying.

And here you are in the world. And there are more poisons all around. But child, you came through. There is health in you. Even after that journey. Yes. There is health in you.

*Lights fade fast on all scenes.*

*End of play.*