

## Call My Dead Wife

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A full-length play

By Hilary Bluestein-Lyons

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CHARACTERS:

**ALMON STROWGER:** 49, is an undertaker and inventor. He is tall, thin and meticulous in appearance, however his recent ailments have caused him to look and act sickly. He is brilliant, cantankerous, snarky, and condescending but also charismatic with an air of sadness from the recent death of his wife. He is was a soldier during the Civil War, returned home to upstate New York where he became a teacher then school principal. After the death of his wife he purchased a mortuary in Kansas City, MO.

**SUSAN SIMMONS:** 29, is passionate and principled. Moral, Christian, wise and proper, and also deeply nurturing and responsible. She is a product of the Victorian era, but there is an oddness about her, having been raised in a mortuary and by current standards a spinster. However her status doesn't bother her one bit. After the death of her parents, Susan was forced to sell the mortuary to Almon, but maintained a business arrangement with him to stay on as the caretaker.

**WALTER STROWGER:** 23, is the son of Almon's favorite brother, Charles. He is smart and cheerful to a fault. He sees through Almon's bitterness, admiring his brilliance in a way that no one else does. Although he has a degree in mathematics, he is has chosen to apprentice under Almon and follow in his footsteps.

**JOSEPH HARRIS:** mid to late 40s, is a very plump and jolly businessman. He is an accountant but used to practice law. He is boisterous and bossy, deceitfully-friendly and narcissistic.

**MACEY HARRIS:** mid 40s, is the eccentric and not too bright wife of Joseph Harris.

TIME: Winter 1890

PLACE: The living room and basement workshop of a mortuary in Kansas City, Missouri

FOR WILL

## ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

Lights up on the sitting room of a mortuary. Sunbeams traverse the room from the windows where the heavy brown curtains had been drawn. The walls, covered with a wallpaper of a simple pattern, are noticeably bare of mirrors or portraits thought inappropriate or might possibly attract the deceased. There are two chairs set next to each other, upholstered with a green fabric,. Small tables are set on either side of the chairs. There is also a sofa, coffee table and small table and hall tree by the entryway. There is a loud banging at the door, a pause, and then another loud banging. SUSAN, an attractive yet extremely modest woman in her late 20s, dressed in a simple, grey dress, appropriate of the era, but certainly not formal runs/hops in as best she can with one shoe on. Her hair is long and black, and she struggles to put on the second shoe and then pins her hair up as she enters.

SUSAN

(entering)

I'm coming! Just one minute!

Susan finishes pinning up her hair, takes a deep breath and opens the door.

SUSAN

Good morning. Mr. Strowger? Please come--

ALMON, a tall and thin man in his late 40s, with wispy, grey hair, beard and mustache, storms in. His presence is larger than life. Susan closes the door as he steps in.

SUSAN

--in.

ALMON

Expecting someone else?

SUSAN

Well no. I just didn't expect you so early. It's still dark.

ALMON

I said I would be arriving this morning. I didn't realize it's habit to sleep in late. Kansas City thing I presume. Perhaps I should have asked the carriage driver to circle around for a few hours to allow you your much needed sleep. Obviously you could use it.

SUSAN

I apologize. I--

There is a pause as Almon is expecting an appropriate response.

SUSAN

Welcome to Simmons Mortuary, sir. Shall I show you around?

ALMON

You mean Strowger Mortuary.

SUSAN

Yes, Strowger.

ALMON

Why don't you take my coat and hat?

SUSAN

I'm not cold.

ALMON

I didn't ask if you were cold. Oh, never mind.

Almon takes off his hat and coat.

SUSAN

Oh! I don't know what I was thinking.

ALMON

Perhaps you weren't.

Susan takes Almon's hat and coat. There's a knock at the door.

ALMON

Aren't you going to answer that?

SUSAN

Right.

Susan, hesitates, not sure if she should properly hang up the coat and hat or answer the door first. Confused, she hands Almon his hat and coat and opens the door. Almon sighs and places the coat and hat on the rack next to the door. Susan opens the door, and WALTER, a man in his early 20s, carrying two large suitcases, stands in the entryway.

SUSAN

I'm so sorry for your loss sir.

WALTER

Thank you. I think.

SUSAN

It's quite early. Would you mind coming back at 9:00?

WALTER

I most certainly would mind.

SUSAN

Again, I apologize, but the mortuary isn't open for business until 9:00 am. Do you not have a parlour? If it's consumption, it's no longer contagious after your loved one has departed.

WALTER

Good to know. Mind if I come in, these are getting heavy.

Walter enters without Susan answering.

ALMON

May I present my nephew, Walter.

WALTER

A pleasure to meet you, Miss Simmons.

SUSAN

(to Walter)

Mr. Strowger! I do apologize, most sincerely. I forgot you were accompanying Mr. Strowger. I am not about my wits this morning. It's terribly early.

WALTER

Uncle Almon likes to get the day started before sun up, sometimes before the previous day has even ended.

SUSAN

I understand. I think. It's just that I haven't had much sleep lately. There's been a consumption epidemic. Both Jameson's and we have been extremely busy. Yesterday we had four funerals.

ALMON

Splendid!

SUSAN

Splendid, sir?

ALMON

Certainly! That's good for business, is it not?

SUSAN

I suppose that's true. It's just that with only me--

WALTER

Please excuse my uncle. He hasn't been himself lately.

ALMON

(sarcastically)

I've been Alexander Bell.

WALTER

That isn't that far from the truth.

SUSAN

Oh dear, it's you I should be expressing my condolences to. Your wife--

ALMON

Is dead. I'm well aware.

SUSAN

Horrible what happened.

ALMON

So you know what happened?

SUSAN

Well, no, I meant, horrible that she died, so young, and so suddenly.

ALMON

Everyone dies, often suddenly, which is why I purchased this mortuary. To honor Alice. She deserves at least that. (Pause) And, business is certainly dependable.

WALTER

Unless they find a cure.

SUSAN

A cure?

WALTER

For death.

ALMON

There is a cure. It's called children.

SUSAN

Never thought of them that way.

ALMON

It's not your job to think.

WALTER

Uncle Almon!

ALMON

Well, it isn't. She's not under my employment to--

SUSAN

You can stop right there. You might be my business partner, but you certainly wouldn't be able to run this mortuary without me.

ALMON

We'll just see about that.

SUSAN

You can think what you want, Mr. Strowger, but I certainly know a thing or two about running a mortuary. I spent my whole life here.

ALMON

And eventually your whole death.

WALTER

She does have a point. You did make arrangements with Miss Simmons on the assumption that she has vast knowledge about the undertaking business.

ALMON

You can take that thing or two that you may have learned by observing your parents run this place and pocket them away, because starting today, I'm in charge.

SUSAN

Is that so? This is a partnership, according to our agreement.

ALMON

Yes, our agreement. About that--

WALTER

Now, now. Why don't we not talk business right away and get settled? Miss Simmons, would you be so kind as to get us some tea?

SUSAN

I'd be happy to.

Susan exits to the kitchen.

WALTER

You're a bit ornery this morning.

ALMON

No more than usual.

WALTER

Quite true. I was just trying to be kind.

ALMON

I can see through your kindness. And besides, you won't benefit from it.

WALTER

The benefit is just to make you happy, Uncle. There's nothing to see through, and you know it.



ALMON

Walter, your constant cheerfulness is infuriating.

WALTER

You'll just have to get used to it.

ALMON

Don't make me regret having taken you along. I'm sure my brother would love nothing more than to have you back in Rochester, New York attending school.

WALTER

Uncle Almon, I've finished school, you know that.

ALMON

Right, right, humanities.

WALTER

Applied mathematics.

ALMON

Don't you think I know that?

WALTER

But you said--

ALMON

I know what I said! I'm just making sure you're paying attention.

WALTER

I'm always paying attention.

ALMON

Don't second guess me.

WALTER

I wasn't. I was just--

ALMON

Questioning my knowledge.

WALTER

Not at all. I would never.

ALMON  
 You do it all the time.

WALTER  
 Only in jest, Uncle.

ALMON  
 I'm not in the mood for jokes.

WALTER  
 When are you ever?

ALMON  
 At the appropriate time. You know, at a carnival or someplace like that. Certainly not here.

WALTER  
 Ah, true. I hadn't thought of that.

ALMON  
 My gastritis makes me ornery.

WALTER  
 I'll get you your pills.

Walter hands Almon a bottle of blue pills from his pocket.

ALMON  
 Is that where you've been hiding them?

Almon swallows a couple and then places the bottle in his pocket.

WALTER  
 You've been taking a lot lately.

ALMON  
 You would too if you suffered from diarrhea, flatulence, ilium inflammation, intestinal hemorrhoids, exhaustion, a weak stomach--

WALTER  
 --I get the point. So, what do you think of the place?

ALMON  
 It's atrocious.

I'm sorry.

WALTER

I hadn't expected otherwise.

ALMON

But I thought--

WALTER

--there you go, thinking again. I sincerely don't know why people bother, when their thoughts are so irrelevant.

ALMON

I'm deeply insulted.

WALTER

You should be.

ALMON

I'm sorry the place isn't to your liking.

WALTER

It's exactly as I expected. Perfect in fact.

ALMON

Perfect, yet atrocious?

WALTER

It is a mortuary.

ALMON

Indeed.

WALTER

Filled with dead people.

ALMON

Perhaps some, although most, I assume, are in the ground.

WALTER

Details, details.

ALMON

Since when are you not concerned with details?

WALTER

ALMON

Ah, Walter, you got me there. Nonetheless, I find a lot of comfort in this place, surrounded by people.

WALTER

Dead people.

ALMON

That goes without saying. I much prefer people when they're dead.

Susan enters with a tray of tea and cups. She sets the tea down on the table and fills the three cups. The three continue to drink throughout as necessary.

SUSAN

Preferring people over what?

ALMON

I don't prefer people.

SUSAN

But you just said you prefer people. When one prefers something, there's usually another thing that's less preferred.

WALTER

He prefers the dead.

SUSAN

Dead people? By then they're not people at all. Cadavers really, rotting flesh.

ALMON

I hope that's not what you say to the families of the recently deceased. I mean, I might, but knowing you only barely, I would assume.

SUSAN

Oh, no, never. I was merely stating--

ALMON

--the obvious.

SUSAN

I suppose.

ALMON

Nonetheless, dead people have quite a lot of good qualities. For instance, they don't talk.

WALTER

They're always cheerful.

ALMON

Very true. And well dressed.

WALTER

They don't complain about their lodging conditions.

SUSAN

They love flowers and the outdoors.

ALMON

There you go! You always know their whereabouts.

WALTER

They don't slurp their tea.

ALMON

They love a good party, when they're the guest of honor.

SUSAN

You don't have to buy them Christmas presents.

WALTER

Unless a person inconveniently passes away on Christmas, in which case a casket and plot might be considered a very elaborate gift.

ALMON

I wouldn't call it an inconvenience at all. Business is business.

SUSAN

Is he always so practical?

WALTER

To a fault.

ALMON

Back to your previous statement about cadavers.

SUSAN

I apologize for speaking bluntly.

ALMON

No apologies necessary. You are quite correct about the flesh, but that doesn't mean that people are dead as most people understand them to be.

SUSAN

I hope they are, but that's what the bells are for. Just in case.

ALMON

That's not quite what I mean.

WALTER

He means their spirits.

SUSAN

They're in heaven, I mean, unless they're in the other place.

ALMON

Are you sure about that?

SUSAN

Most certain (Pause). I think.

ALMON

You think?

SUSAN

That's what good Christians believe to be true. Who am I to question otherwise?

ALMON

You're certainly a good Christian.

SUSAN

I presume you are as well.

ALMON

What does that really mean?

WALTER

Don't let him do this to you, Ms. Simmons. He means well--

ALMON

--I do not mean well at all. I mean to question the existence of spirits after their bodies, their rotting flesh, as you say, no longer houses them.

SUSAN  
They go to heaven.

ALMON  
And some might disagree.

SUSAN  
Or hell.

ALMON  
Isn't there an alternative?

SUSAN  
If there is, I'm not aware.

ALMON  
What about those that stay awhile? Have unfinished business?

SUSAN  
I don't know. I hadn't really thought about it.

ALMON  
I'm not surprised. Most people aren't capable of thinking beyond what they're told, as good Christians of course.

WALTER  
My uncle is inferring that he believes that after someone dies, they stick around.

SUSAN  
Sometimes a family requests a delayed burial, in order to have adequate time to notify family and accommodate out of town attendees.

WALTER  
That's not quite it.

ALMON  
There's no need to bother, Walter. Her simple mind isn't open to such things.

SUSAN  
(To Walter)  
Is he always this deplorable?

WALTER  
This is just the tip of the iceberg.

ALMON

I try my best.

SUSAN

I consider myself a tolerant person, but I have my limits.

WALTER

I apologize in advance for everything.

ALMON

Don't apologize on my behalf, Walter. I am more than justified in assuming that she is like most people of her ilk.

WALTER

He means women.

ALMON

Yes, women have a difficult time comprehending such matters that challenge their interpretation of what the good book might have contain.

SUSAN

I consider myself quite knowledgeable in that regard.

ALMON

Yes, you are undoubtedly a good Christian. We went over that. Nonetheless, you likely have very little knowledge about what the Bible has to say about spirits of the deceased.

SUSAN

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there are spirit beings, both good and evil. So, I concur, that the spirits of deceased human beings can remain on earth and haunt the living.

ALMON

I was wrong. She does know a little.

WALTER

Susan, you should mark this day. You're not likely to hear those words again.

SUSAN

I'll make note.

ALMON

Nonetheless, this is where science and religion part ways. You see, or perhaps don't see, that spirits are energy forces that don't just dissipate when their bodies can no longer house them. These spirits still exist. Where and how, no one knows for certain. But I do intend to find out.



SUSAN  
That's preposterous.

ALMON  
Is it?

SUSAN  
Well, yes. In my 29 years in this mortuary, I have never seen a ghost.

ALMON  
Are you certain?

SUSAN  
Quite certain.

ALMON  
But what about the effects of them.

WALTER  
What he means is--

ALMON  
Must you always clarify what I mean?

WALTER  
Yes. What he means is that just because you can't see something, doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

SUSAN  
This conversation is too much for so early in the morning.

ALMON  
Probably too much for you any time of the day.

WALTER  
Uncle!

ALMON  
Let me ask you, Miss Simmons, you say that there has recently been a consumption epidemic?

SUSAN  
Yes. Much of the city is ill.

ALMON  
Have you seen this consumption?

SUSAN

Of course.

ALMON

So you say that you've seen this disease?

SUSAN

Why yes. I've been running myself ragged making funeral arrangements for so many who have been stricken.

ALMON

What you've seen is the result of the disease, the affect, the consequence. Illness, and often death.

SUSAN

Yes.

ALMON

But that's not the disease, that's the result.

SUSAN

I think I understand.

WALTER

Why don't you try electricity?

ALMON

Fine. An incandescent light bulb. How do you think that works?

SUSAN

I'm not quite sure.

ALMON

In simple terms, you have a glass bulb with a wire, and electricity passes through it causing it to heat up and fill the room with light. Where does that electricity come from?

SUSAN

From the outlet, which, I suppose is connected to an outside source of electrical storage.

ALMON

Yes, for your sake we'll skip the details. However, how do you know that the electricity exists?

SUSAN

The light bulb heats up.

ALMON

Yes, but that's the result of the electricity. That's not the electricity itself.

WALTER

You can't see the electricity.

SUSAN

Only the light.

ALMON

And when the lamp is not turned on, does that electricity still exist?

SUSAN

Yes.

ALMON

How do you know?

SUSAN

Because it's there when I turn the lamp on again.

WALTER

But you can't see it, you just know it's there.

SUSAN

I suppose. Does any of this have to do with the crates you had sent ahead?

ALMON

Ah, yes, my equipment. You put it in the basement, as instructed, yes?

SUSAN

Yes.

ALMON

And you didn't touch any of it.

SUSAN

No. I would never. I'm certainly curious about the contents of the crates, especially since they're taking up a good part of the basement. I had several recently departed taking up space in the parlour.

ALMON

I assume your curiosity didn't get the best of you.

SUSAN

Oh, no. But it was quite inconvenient hosting guests. I had to divert some to the dining room.

ALMON

And everything arrived in tact?

SUSAN

I suppose so. At one point I had six bodies in the parlour.

WALTER

That must have been quite inconvenient. Uncle Almon, why don't we see for ourselves if everything is in order rather than riddling Miss Simmons with questions.

ALMON

Good idea. In the meantime, why don't you change in to proper attire, Miss Simmons. I assume you didn't have time to put on your black crepe.

SUSAN

It's true I wasn't expecting you so early, but what I'm wearing is neither any of your business, nor inappropriate.

ALMON

I beg to differ. With your parents recently deceased, and the nature of this business, it's only fitting that you would be wearing black crepe.

WALTER

You don't have to respond. What you're wearing is lovely.

SUSAN

(To Walter) Thank you Mr. Strowger. (To Almon) As for you, my parents parted over six months ago.

ALMON

In New York it is customary to wear black for six months for one parent. However, seeing as how you lost both, you should be wearing black for a year.

SUSAN

That is ludicrous.

ALMON

I will not having someone under my employment--

SUSAN

--business partner.

ALMON

Employment, question post-burial practices and that which is customary for attending to the dead.

SUSAN

Is that so?

ALMON

It is very much so.

SUSAN

This coming from a school teacher.

ALMON

School principal.

SUSAN

Who probably never set foot inside a funeral parlour.

ALMON

I stepped foot into one quite recently.

SUSAN

I, uh, I apologize. I forgot. Nonetheless, what I wear is my business.

ALMON

Consider it a required uniform then.

SUSAN

Fine...I'll change.

Susan storms off.

ALMON

Fine.

WALTER

That went well.

ALMON

I think so.

END SCENE

## SCENE TWO

Lights up on Almon's workshop. Almon and Walter are in the midst of unpacking crates. There is equipment, industrial material, several large, crates (some open and some unopened), packing material, and various inventions strewn about. The room was used primarily for cadaver storage prior to burial, so there are also several caskets and embalming equipment neatly arranged. Walter pulls from a crate what appears to be a part of a wing.

WALTER

Where do you want this?

ALMON

I suppose in the corner. I can take it apart and use the materials for something else.

WALTER

Maybe you should keep it.

ALMON

What for? It's junk now.

WALTER

I don't know. As a model perhaps.

ALMON

Or a constant reminder to be prompt when submitting patents. No point in bothering anymore with that ridiculous office. Incompetents. Your father, Uncle Edward and I worked harder on this invention than any other. Nearly scared our parents to death with this one. You know, we invented it first, a flying machine. We called it a Winged Automaton. The Wright brothers just got the--

WALTER

(finishing his sentence, as if he's heard the story a dozen times before)  
--patent in first. Such a shame.

ALMON

No matter. There are plenty of ideas to go around. Some even more important than flying.

WALTER

(pulling out another invention) What's this?

ALMON

Ah, yes. Your father and I invented this during the war. We called it a Cognomenon. It attaches to the bottom of one's boot. See this here opens up so you can put a small piece of paper inside. It was a way to identify a soldier and next of kin in case he got killed. You'd be surprised how many men died without anyone knowing who they were.

WALTER

How sad.

ALMON

Annoyance if you ask me. And more work.

WALTER

That's a terrible thing to say.

ALMON

But accurate. You fight in a war, you have to know that your chances are fairly good that you're not going to make it home. I was a good shot, still am. But they had me spending a good part of my time with the pastor, giving last rites and tending to the dead. If we knew who they were, and their family could afford it, we'd send their bodies back home. If not, some of us would have to do some investigating.

WALTER

Sleuthing. How interesting!

ALMON

Not really. Like I said, more work for some of us. But that didn't last long. Eventually there were more men dying than we could handle. That was especially true at Bull Run. By then, we could hardly bury them fast enough. We had to leave the southerners to, uh... Well, priorities.

WALTER

I hadn't thought about how much the war prepared you for this business. More than being a school teacher, I suppose.

ALMON

This is true, Walter. But both jobs have more in common than one would expect.

WALTER

I would hope they have nothing in common.

ALMON

Both are filled with lost souls.

WALTER

I never know when you're saying things in jest, Uncle.

ALMON

I don't jest.

WALTER

There you go again.

ALMON

I'll tell you one thing, it was good fighting alongside your father.

WALTER

You two became quite close.

ALMON

We did. He was a better shot than I, although he would never say so. I don't think he missed but once.

WALTER

He doesn't talk about it as much as you do.

ALMON

He's much more modest.

WALTER

Anyone is.

ALMON

He was good, but the coloreds, they were better.

WALTER

Did they have better training?

ALMON

No, in fact less. But they had more motivation. For me, and a lot of men, it was about pride and wanderlust. But the coloreds, they fought for their lives. I respect that.

WALTER

You weren't fighting to end slavery?



ALMON

At the time, we didn't even know the war was about slavery. I'll tell you, I was against slavery back then, for the same reason I am now. That we shouldn't need to depend on a people so greatly.

WALTER

We all need people.

ALMON

I need them dead.

WALTER

Now, Uncle Almon, you don't want all of them dead. Not Aunt Alice. You didn't want her dead.

Beat.

WALTER

What if they lost their legs?

ALMON

What?

WALTER

The soldiers. What if they lost their legs? You wouldn't be able to identify them, if they lost their legs. That could happen. Quite a lot I imagine.

ALMON

Who'd want half a body back anyway? It's not like the Union gave families a discount to send back half a person.

WALTER

That's horrible.

ALMON

It really doesn't matter now. The war's been over for nearly 25 years.

WALTER

But there will be more wars.

ALMON

Oh yes, indeed, Walter. It's good for business.

WALTER

It always comes down to business.

ALMON

If that's how you want to look at it, through your narrow mind.

WALTER

You do often have an ulterior motive. What is it this time? What do you have up your sleeve?

ALMON

Nothing at all. I'm most sincerely up front.

WALTER

I doubt you'll confide in me. You're always two steps ahead. Just when I'm about to figure you out, you're off in some other direction, with some new scheme or invention. Ah, well, makes life with you interesting.

ALMON

I'm glad that I amuse you.

WALTER

That you do.

Almon doubles over in pain.

WALTER

Are you all right, Uncle?

ALMON

Hand me my pills. There on the counter, over there.

Almon points to a medicine bag. Walter fumbles through it pulling out things until he pulls out a medicine bottle. He struggles to get it open.

ALMON

Just hand it over. Hurry up.

Almon opens the bottle, takes out two blue pills and swallows them. Walter looks on.

ALMON

Don't just stand there. Go fetch me some water.

WALTER

Of course. Right away.

Walter exits and Susan enters. Almon is still doubled over in pain but is starting to calm down.

SUSAN  
Are you all right?

ALMON  
I will be.

SUSAN  
Can I get you anything?

ALMON  
I'm fine.

He straightens up, still obviously in pain, but doing everything he can to not appear so.

SUSAN  
I was just...I just came down to...are you sure you're all right?

ALMON  
Yes! What concern is it of yours?

SUSAN  
I do know a bit about anatomy and it appears--

ALMON  
You know about anatomy that's stopped working. Mine's still functioning, although not as well as I'd like. Why did you come down?

SUSAN  
To tell you that lunch will be served soon.

ALMON  
Already?

SUSAN  
Yes. It's past noon. You've been down here for hours.

ALMON  
I know that!

SUSAN

You've unpacked quite a bit...of...not what I thought were in the crates.

ALMON

My equipment, my inventions.

SUSAN

I never would have taken you for a tinkerer.

ALMON

I don't tinker. I invent.

SUSAN

I misspoke.

ALMON

Don't worry. There's plenty of room down here for the caskets, the mortuary preparations, and for my workshop.

Susan looks around, not convinced.

ALMON

I'll make it work.

Susan walks through the room examining various equipment. Almon is engrossed, as he works on a particular device. Susan picks up an item.

SUSAN

This looks interesting.

ALMON

It could be useful, in certain circumstances.

SUSAN

It looks like a bunch of wires and a box.

Almon sighs.

ALMON

Here, give it to me.

Almon sets the invention up as he's speaking.

ALMON

I need two pens and two pieces of paper.

SUSAN

I have that on my desk.

Susan gets them from her desk and hands them to Almon. He sets one up on one side of the room, attaching it to one end of the invention. He then sets the other up on the other side of the room in the same manner.

ALMON

Suppose you need a written document, say a drawing of a design or blueprint. Or perhaps you need a signature from a notary, but you are no where near the person from whom you need the document or signature.

SUSAN

Couldn't you mail the document?

ALMON

Yes, but that could take weeks. This is instantaneous. You stand at that end, and I'll stand here. This transmits electrical impulses recorded by potentiometers from this end, the sending station, to stepping motors attached to the pen by you, at the receiving station, thus reproducing at the receiving station a drawing or signature made by sender, in this case me. I call it a Reproducticon.

Almon signs his name using the attached pen on his end.

ALMON

Now read what's on the paper.

SUSAN

Almon Strowger. Amazing! Can it do the reverse? May I send a signature to you.

ALMON

Of course. Let me make a few changes.

Almon switches some wires and attachments.

ALMON

Go ahead. Write something.

Susan writes.

ALMON

(reading) I am your eternal and humble servant.

SUSAN

That's not what I wrote. The machine is broken. There's something wrong with it.

Susan walks over to Almon and takes the paper from him.

SUSAN

Let me see that. It says Susan Simmons. That's what I wrote.

She smiles, and puts the paper down. She then explores some of Almon's other inventions, picking some up one at a time and examining them.

SUSAN

You have quite a lot here.

ALMON

About 40 years worth.

Susan picks up a small metal object.

SUSAN

This looks interesting.

ALMON

Be careful with that, it's filled with kerosene, burning fluid. It's a pocket lamp. I call it a Flarecon.

SUSAN

It's engraved, J.R.S.

ALMON

That was my father. See, the top opens on this hinge, and if you flick this ratchet, it ignites the wick. It's for cigars and pipes. Do you smoke?

SUSAN

No!

ALMON

Neither did he.

Susan picks up a bugle.

SUSAN

What's this?

ALMON

A bugle. I was a bugler in the war. I woke everyone up in the morning; people hated me.

SUSAN

Are you sure that's the only reason?

ALMON

Touché.

SUSAN

My father was a bugler. That's about all the two of you have in common. Had.

ALMON

I had no idea your father was in the war. I probably would have had a lot of respect for the man.

SUSAN

There was a lot to respect about him.

Susan becomes sullen and nostalgic, and to distract herself picks up an umbrella.

SUSAN

You didn't invent the umbrella?

ALMON

The umbrella has been around for thousands of years. I just made some modifications.

SUSAN

This one's lovely.

ALMON

I didn't do it for the aesthetics. If you flip this lever here, the umbrella bends for when the rain is coming sideways. I call it a Bendasol.

SUSAN  
Brilliant!

ALMON  
And I put a ferrule on the tip.

SUSAN  
A ferrule?

ALMON  
A metal tube to go over the wooden end. I had torn 3 pairs of trousers, which is fairly inconvenient, especially on a rainy day.

SUSAN  
And you've invented all of these.

ALMON  
Well, Walter certainly couldn't have.

SUSAN  
Then I don't understand why you would be interested in purchasing a mortuary. I would assume you'd be exceedingly wealthy from all this.

ALMON  
You would assume wrong.

SUSAN  
You haven't sold any of these?

ALMON  
Not one.

SUSAN  
But they're at least patented of course.

ALMON  
I haven't bothered.

SUSAN  
Even without the money, so many people could benefit from these. I'm sure they're all very useful.

ALMON  
They certainly are, to me. I don't care about other people. I invented them to make my life easier.



SUSAN

How selfish.

ALMON

You are not one to judge. You've spent your whole life holed up in this place under the rule of your parents, and now you are a 30 year old spinster. You have nothing to show for it, and had to sell the place to me in order for you to continue being a caretaker here, because you had nowhere else to go.

SUSAN

How dare you! I've helped hundreds of people and their departed loved ones. (Pause)  
Perhaps we should adjourn to lunch.

ALMON

Perhaps we should.

SUSAN

And I won't be thirty for another year.

ALMON

I misspoke.

END SCENE

### SCENE THREE

Light up as sunbeams traverse the room from the windows, indicating that it's morning. A crisply folded newspaper sits atop the table next to one of the chairs in the living room. A pair of slippers are in front of the chair. Susan is dressed, and is sitting in the opposite chair. Walter enters

WALTER

Good morning, Miss Simmons. You're up early.

SUSAN

Good morning. No earlier than usual these days. Got to have everything just right.

WALTER

You don't need to be so accommodating. He's all bark and no bite.

SUSAN

I'd just as well avoid the bark.

Walter heads to the door, grabbing his hat, scarf and coat. He searches for his gloves in his coat pockets.

WALTER

I'm going to town for a few hours. Don't wait for me if I'm not back by supper.

SUSAN

I didn't realize you were going out today. It's snowing.

WALTER

This is nothing compared to the winters in Upstate New York. Have you seen my gloves?

SUSAN

Yes. They must have fallen out of your pocket when you came in last night. I put them on the table next to the door.

Susan gets the gloves and hands them to Walter.

WALTER

Don't tell Uncle Almon. He's always calling me clumsy and forgetful. I don't want to give him a reason now.

SUSAN

Mums the word.

WALTER

I don't know what we'd do without you.

SUSAN

You're the only one who thinks that.

WALTER

That is absolutely not true. Uncle Al thinks the world of you.

SUSAN

You must be speaking of a different Uncle Al, because that's not the one I know.

WALTER

It's true. He's very fond of you, you know.

SUSAN

You might as well stop there, or I'll start calling you Walter the storyteller.

WALTER

Call me what you want. It's true.

SUSAN

Where are you off to on such a blustery day?

WALTER

I'm meeting with an accountant, Mr. Harris.

SUSAN

Accountant? You do all of our accounting just fine.

WALTER

I try. I'm meeting him about a job.

SUSAN

Oh?

WALTER

It seems as though the epidemic died shortly after we arrived.

SUSAN

It's true. At first I appreciated the extra time these past few weeks, but now I'm beginning to worry. I'm not sure why business has been so slow. In years past, I recall the number of deaths increasing during the winter.

WALTER

One would think. But alas, Kansas City seems to be exceedingly healthy these days, much to our detriment. So I'm off to bring in a supplemental salary. Hopefully it's temporary.

SUSAN

Thank you, Mr. Strowger, and good luck to you.

WALTER

Thank you, Miss Simmons. Good day.

SUSAN

Good day.

Walter exits, as Almon enters the room in a huff. He is mostly dressed, and barefoot. His hair is disheveled. He sits in the big chair and places his feet in the slippers, neither acknowledging Walter as he left, nor Susan.

SUSAN

Good morning.

Almon grunts. Susan gets a tea pot from the credenza. Almon pick up the newspaper as Susan places a tea cup in it's place and pours some tea. Almon snaps the paper open and flips through it until he gets to the obituaries. Susan waits to hear a good morning. Resolved that she won't receive it, she sits in the smaller chair and picks up a cup of tea from the table next to her. She sips loudly. Almon doesn't notice. Almon slams the pages shut, stands up and throws the paper onto the chair. He paces the floor.

SUSAN

You seem upset.

ALMON

Bill Younce died.

SUSAN

I'm so sorry! How awful. (Pause) I don't recall the name. Was he a friend of yours?

ALMON

I don't have friends. I suppose though, if I did, I would consider him one. And, he was my barber.

SUSAN

Oh, dear. This must have been very unexpected.

ALMON

Oh, no. I'm not surprised at all. He had terrible emphysema and was as fat as a distillery pig.

SUSAN

I see. So you'll have to find a new barber. I'm sure there are plenty of experienced barbers in town.

ALMON

Of course there are plenty of barbers. It's his funeral.

SUSAN

As for replacing your friend, I can't help you. However, I'm sure we can accommodate him. Business has slowed down quite a bit these past few weeks.

ALMON

Don't you think I know that! Put two and two together, Miss Simmons.

SUSAN

I don't understand.

ALMON

He died two days ago. Don't you think Mrs. Younce or his family would have contacted us by now? It says in the paper that his funeral will be conducted at Jameson mortuary.

SUSAN

Oh dear.

ALMON

Oh dear is right.

SUSAN

I wonder why Mrs. Younce didn't call us.

ALMON

I wonder indeed.

Almon paces.

ALMON

Suppose she did call us.

SUSAN

We would have answered the call, of course. Unless, Walter--

ALMON

No, no, he would have mentioned it to me.

SUSAN

Perhaps he forgot.

ALMON

He is dim-witted and forgetful.... No, that's not it.

He paces some more.

ALMON

Suppose when Mrs. Younce called for a mortuary, the telephone operator connected her to the wrong mortuary.

SUSAN

I've never known Mrs. Jameson to make a mistake.

Almon stops in his tracks.

ALMON

What did you say?

SUSAN

I've never known the telephone operator to make a mistake.

ALMON

Her name. What's her name? The telephone operator.

SUSAN

Mrs. Eleanor Jameson. We went to grade school together. It used to be Eleanor Grimsby, but now it's Jameson. A much better name, in my opinion.

ALMON

Any relation to the undertaker Jameson?

SUSAN

Why yes! They got married three weeks ago. We each got an invitation, but you declined. You said something about not wanting to get chummy with your competition, and that weddings were an unnecessary elaborate Christian formality.

ALMON

Yes, I remember what I said. You don't understand, do you? The telephone operator is married to the only other undertaker in town. When someone places a call in need of mortuary services, who do you think Mrs. Jameson is going to send them to? Us, or her husband?

SUSAN

Oh! My goodness. You don't suppose that's why business has been so slow?

ALMON

Yes I suppose that's why business has been so slow. Women! It's always women.

SUSAN

I don't know what we should do about this.

ALMON

I know.

Almon picks up the phone.

ALMON

Don't you dare Mr. Strowger me!.... Yes, you can connect me with your supervisor.... Yes, something is wrong. What you're doing is extremely unethical, Mrs. Jameson. I'll have your job.... No, I don't mean I want your job. I have a job. I've figured out what you've been doing since you've been married.... No, I don't care what you're doing to prepare for the holidays!..... You can't go about directing every person in need of mortuary services to your husband. You don't have that authority. You're just woman..... You are not sorry! I mean you better be.... When will your supervisor be in?.... Out sick?.... Well, as soon as he gets back... Yes, your job is in jeopardy!... Don't you please Mr. Strowger me!.... I mean you should. That's not what I meant.... No, I don't want you to connect me to anyone.... Good bye, Mrs. Jameson.

Almon slams down the phone, and paces again.

SUSAN

Was that part of the plan?

ALMON

We need to eliminate her.

SUSAN

Kill her?

ALMON

No! (He thinks about it). No.

SUSAN

You certainly have grounds for getting her fired.

ALMON

Oh, she won't have a job as soon as I talk to her supervisor. But I need to eliminate the need for a telephone operator all together. We shouldn't need to depend on a woman to direct our calls. That gives them too much authority. They can't be in charge of our lives like that. No, I need to create something that eliminates the need for them. So a person can call whomever he wants, whenever he wants.

Almon and Susan both pace and think.

SUSAN

What about that pen contraption? With the wires.

ALMON

What about it?

SUSAN

If you can transmit something that someone writes, to another pen clear across the room, or even into someone else's home, can't you do the same with a telephone?

ALMON

Yes, we already do that. But with a telephone operator.

SUSAN

But you don't need a pen operator for your invention.

ALMON

True. However, this would have to be some sort of switch or exchange whereby one could directly connect dozens of telephones, maybe even a whole town's worth of telephones.

Susan and Almon continue to pace. He pauses with an idea.

ALMON

Perhaps.... No...

They pace. Almon stops again.

ALMON

Maybe.... No....

They pace. Almon stops again.

ALMON

If I take a--

SUSAN

Can I help?

ALMON

Shhh. I'm thinking.... Get me a pincushion and meet me in the workshop.

Almon heads to the workshop while Susan exits to get a pincushion. He opens the drawer to his desk and rummages through it finding a round cardboard box holding a dozen paper collars. He dumps out the collars onto the desk.

Susan arrives with the pincushion.



SUSAN

Here's the pincushion.

ALMON

Perfect.

Almon takes the pincushion and sticks several straight pins into the box.

SUSAN

Do you think this will work?

Almon takes a lead pencil, mounts it into the center, and attaches to the pencil a wiper, long enough to make contact with each pin.

ALMON

This is just a template, but yes, I think this might be our answer. The Strowger Automatic Telephone Exchange. Or, the Dialanon.

END SCENE

## SCENE FOUR

Lights up. Susan is nervously dusting and tidying up, while Almon sits in his chair smoking a pipe. Walter enters. There are poinsettias and holly strategically placed.

SUSAN

Walter, you look very handsome.

WALTER

Thank you Susan. I'm having trouble with my tie.

SUSAN

Here, let me help.

Susan straightens out Walters tie.

WALTER

The place looks lovely.

SUSAN

I wanted everything to be perfect for you.

ALMON

It looks like a funeral parlour.

WALTER

The poinsettias are a nice touch.

ALMON

A Christmas funeral parlour.

WALTER

Well I think it's very nice. You outdid yourself, Susan. I already have the job.

SUSAN

I know. I just thought it couldn't hurt to try and impress them a bit.

ALMON

I'd be more impressed if they were punctual. It's already half past.

SUSAN

They're fashionably late.

WALTER

It's fairly blustery out. Perhaps there was a snow drift.

ALMON

Then they should have accounted for that and left early. He is an accountant, is he not?

WALTER

He is, but how can one?...Nevermind.

There is a knock at the door.

SUSAN

Oh! They're here!

ALMON

Oh joy.

WALTER

Be nice, Uncle.

ALMON

Aren't I always? (Pause). Well, don't just stand there. Answer the door.

SUSAN

Yes, of course!

Susan opens the door and JOSEPH HARRIS, an plump and jolly man with jowls enters, along with MACEY HARRIS. Both are wearing evening attire. Both are presumptuous and flamboyant about their entrance.

SUSAN

Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Harris! Please come in.

They brush off the snow and hand their hats and coats to Susan to hang up.

WALTER

Welcome, Mr. Harris, Mrs. Harris! So good of you to accept our invitation for dinner.

JOSEPH

Wouldn't miss it for the world, dear boy.

ALMON

Please come in.

JOSEPH

Ah, Mr. Strowger, Walter has told us so much about you.

ALMON

And you still came. It must have been all lies.

WALTER

That's not true at all.

MACEY

(to Susan) You must be Mrs. Strowger! So lovely to meet you.

ALMON

Absolutely not. She's Miss Susan Simmons, caretaker. Mrs. Strowger is dead.

MACEY

I apologize deeply.

ALMON

No need, unless you had something to do with it.

MACEY

Well, I--

JOSEPH

Don't you remember, Macey dear? I told you that Miss Simmons's parents passed, and Mr. Strowger purchased the place.

SUSAN

Yes, we have a business arrangement.

MACEY

Of course. I just made an assumption. The two of you would make such a lovely couple.

JOSEPH

Indeed.

ALMON

(blushing)

Miss Simmons and I? Oh, never.

WALTER

They practically hate each other. It's quite entertaining.

SUSAN

We do not hate each other.

WALTER

Maybe that's too strong a word.

ALMON

We get along swimmingly.

WALTER

Oh, you have such a sense of humor, Uncle.

ALMON

I do not.

JOSEPH

It's really quite interesting. I would never imagine a school principal would leave his home state of New York to purchase a mortuary business that includes the services of such a charming undertaker.

He takes Susan's hand and kisses it.

SUSAN

Oh, my.

MACEY

Joseph does love to flirt. Don't mind him, he does it to everyone. I've gotten used to it.

SUSAN

I see.

JOSEPH

That's quite an undertaking, Al. Get it, undertaking? Mind if I call you Al.

ALMON

Yes, I do mind.

JOSEPH

He really does have quite a sense of humor, your Uncle.

WALTER

I think so.

JOSEPH

If you don't mind my asking--

ALMON

--I might--

JOSEPH

What made you decide to become an undertaker? It's such a, unique, profession.

ALMON

Not so unique, there's at least one in every town.

MACEY

I hadn't thought of that, but I suppose it's true.

SUSAN

At least one.

ALMON

After Alice died. Mrs. Strowger, I thought it a good idea to start over. New town and all. But it hasn't been quite what I expected.

WALTER

That was the incentive for pursuing a job with you, Mr. Harris.

JOSEPH

Yes, business has slowed down, not enough dead to go around.

ALMON

There is. It's just that our business is being redirected.

SUSAN

But Almon is going to solve all that. He's invented a kind of telephone switch.

MACEY

An invention, how exciting!

JOSEPH

You are a man of many talents, undertaker, school teacher, and inventor.

ALMON

Undertaking is my profession. Inventing is my, it's my, way of life, a necessity.

WALTER

I hope you don't mind, but I told them all about your inventions. (to the Harrises) His workshop really is quite astounding. He's invented all sorts of things. Most of them are quite useful.

JOSEPH

What is this telephone switch?

SUSAN

It's a way for us to no longer need a telephone operator.

MACEY

How could we ever not need a telephone operator? Who would connect our telephone calls?

JOSEPH

This is fantastic! You have no idea what that telephone operator has put me through.

ALMON

You too? Apparently she's married to the one other undertaker in Kansas City.

WALTER

Mr. Jameson.

JOSEPH

Mr Jameson! Ah, yes. Well, there's an attorney at law in town, Mr. Grimsby, and it seems that his sister is also the telephone operator.

MACEY

I thought the telephone operator is Mrs. Jameson.

JOSEPH

Yes dear, it's the same person.

SUSAN

She's both the sister to Mr. Grimsby, the attorney, and married to Mr. Jameson, the undertaker.

MACEY

She gets around.

JOSEPH

She is my bane. I had to give up my law practice and take up accounting. Fortunately, the telephone operator isn't related to an accountant.

WALTER

Fortunately for me too.

JOSEPH

Glad to take you on dear boy. You're doing a fine job. It's been only two weeks, but the boy has made himself practically irreplaceable.

WALTER

Thank you, sir.

ALMON

Seems I'm not the only jack of all trades. But I do say that both of us have something to benefit from my switch.

JOSEPH

Not all trades, but I consider myself a reasonable businessman.

SUSAN

Attorney? Do you ever work with patents?

JOSEPH

I've dabbled.

ALMON

Susan, we went over this. There's no need to patent it. I'm just doing it to get rid of that conniving telephone operator.

SUSAN

Yes, but what if someone else beats you too it, like so many of your other inventions? We could use the money.

WALTER

This is not one of your inventions that just suits your own needs this time, Uncle Almon. You need buy in. How are people going to call you directly if they're not connected to your switch.

ALMON

I suppose that's true. I, unfortunately have to rely on other people in order for this to work.

JOSEPH

Why don't you let me handle it, Al? I can get the thing patented, and then we can go from there, manufacturing, marketing, all that stuff. Walter here will help.

MACEY

Let me think of a selling slogan. I'm good with words.

ALMON

I don't know.

SUSAN

It sounds like an ideal plan, if you ask me.

ALMON

I didn't ask you.

SUSAN

Well I'm telling you anyway. Almon, let's go down to your workshop and show them.

ALMON

Let's. Dinner's ice cold by now anyway, so what's a few more minutes.

MACEY

Down? As in the basement? Is that where you keep the bodies?



ALMON

Yes, all the spooky bodies are down there.

MACEY

How exciting!

WALTER

There aren't any bodies in the basement currently. We don't keep them there more than a day before they're set to be buried in the cemetery.

JOSEPH

Don't be disappointed dear. I'm sure we can dig up a body or two for you.

MACEY

Really?

SUSAN

Don't listen to these men. They're so condescending.

MACEY

I can't imagine them any other way.

They all exit to the workshop.

END SCENE

SCENE FIVE

Lights up. Almon, Susan, Walter, Joseph and Macey are all in the workshop.

MACEY

This is fantastic! I've never seen so many gears, and wires, and gadgets.

JOSEPH

You've done all of this? Walter, your depiction of this workshop was an understatement.

ALMON

Of course. Walter has been a wonderful apprentice.

JOSEPH

I concur. Although, when he applied for the accounting position, I thought, an undertaker. That's the last person I need.

WALTER

Thank you, Uncle. This is the first time you've said such a thing! I think he's showing off.

ALMON

I have no need to show off.

SUSAN

He is being modest, although it won't last.

ALMON

Modesty is for the weak, those with low self esteem and little self regard.

SUSAN

See, I told you so.

JOSEPH

Well, no need to be modest, Al. I am impressed. I'm not sure what I'm looking at, but I'm impressed.

MACEY

(Picking up the umbrella) You didn't invent an umbrella, did you?

ALMON

I have to give credit to the Chinese for that.

SUSAN

Here he is being humble again.

ALMON

Press the button.

Macey presses a button and the umbrella bends.

MACEY

Oh, my! A sideways umbrella.

SUSAN

For when it rains sideways. It's called a Bendasol. And there's a ferrule on the tip.

JOSEPH

A what?

SUSAN

It's the metal tip, to prevent snags on trousers and dresses, I suppose too.

JOSEPH

Macey must have repaired at least three pairs of trouser for me this past fall.

MACEY

It's true.

Almon sits down in a chair.

ALMON

Don't mind me. Please continue browsing all you want. I just need to sit for a bit.

JOSEPH

Are you all right?

ALMON

Walter, fetch me my pills and some water.

WALTER

Right away.

Walter exits.

SUSAN

Do you want to lie down? We can postpone dinner.

ALMON

No I don't want to lie down. I'm fine. And dinner has already been postponed.

SUSAN

I meant, for another day.

ALMON

We'll do no such thing. I'll be fine after I take my pills.

MACEY

(Pointing to a sewing machine) Did you invent the sewing machine?

ALMON

That credit goes to Elias Howe, although I'm sure he, like myself, made improvements to a previous design.

MACEY

I despise sewing.

ALMON

So did my wife, Alice, which is why I made one that uses electricity. That way all of my tailoring is done much faster.

JOSEPH

And your improvement is not yet patented.

ALMON

Well, Alice is dead, so there's no need.

SUSAN

I sew.

ALMON

Most of my inventions are done out of necessity. Which is, I suppose, the incentive for most inventions.

JOSEPH

Or money.

ALMON

Yes, there is that.

SUSAN

Of which we could use more of.

MACEY

Who couldn't?

JOSEPH

It seems as though they make your life easier, in one way or another.

ALMON

Easier, or eliminating the need to rely on people like Mrs. Jameson.

JOSEPH

There is that.

MACEY

(Picking up another invention) Ooh, this looks very intriguing....what is it?

ALMON

That's one of my more recent experiments.

MACEY

It looks like some kind of vacuum.

ALMON

It is. To some extent. It's for capturing spirits. I call it the Ectoplasmanon.

JOSEPH

Does it work?

ALMON

I don't know.

MACEY

How do you not know. Either it works or it doesn't.

ALMON

I would need the perfect subject.

Walter enters.

WALTER

What he means is that he would need the perfect moment. He has to be in attendance at someone's death, and capture the spirit at the precise moment when they pass.

JOSEPH

That is tricky.

MACEY

Morbid, if you ask me.

WALTER

Here you go Uncle Almon.

Walter hands Almon a blue pill and some water.  
Almon takes the bottle and takes one more pill.

MACEY

Is that blue mass? Joseph gave that to me for syphilis. Although for the life of me, I have no idea how I got it. Worked like a charm. Needless to say, I don't use public restrooms anymore.

ALMON

Perhaps you'd like to see if it works.

MACEY

I don't see how I can.

JOSEPH

He's just pulling your leg, Macey. He was insinuating that he could capture your spirit to try it out.

MACEY

I'm don't have any plans for dying any time soon.

ALMON

Oh well. Too bad.

JOSEPH

He doesn't mean that.

SUSAN

I wouldn't be so sure. You should show them the other invention you're working on.

ALMON

It's not done yet.

SUSAN

It's quite fascinating. This place has really inspired him.

WALTER

Actually he started working on these when we were still in New York. Mind if I show them?

ALMON

Go ahead.

Walter takes out a box with several wires, a clock and a phone horn attached.

MACEY

Amazing! What is it?

ALMON

It's a telephone to call spirits. I call it the Dead Ringer....I'm working on the name too.

JOSEPH

You could make a fortune with that thing. How much are you selling it for?

ALMON

It's not for sale.

JOSEPH

I see, this is just the prototype. But once you get more manufactured.

ALMON

I just need the one.

SUSAN

He needs it for Alice.

MACEY

Your wife.

ALMON

Yes, my dead wife.

WALTER

Once it's perfected, I'm sure we could sell dozens, hundreds even.

ALMON

We're not selling any. I only need the one.

SUSAN

See what I mean?

JOSEPH

Think of the money you could make. How many people you could make happy by connected them to their dearly departed!

ALMON

That's of no concern to me.

SUSAN

It's useless. Believe me, I've tried.

WALTER

We both have. You're very stubborn, Uncle.

ALMON

Practical, not stubborn.

SUSAN

I have no influence on this man.

WALTER

Well, I'll keep trying Joseph. I think you're right, not just about this, but all his inventions.

JOSEPH

And not a single one has been patented?

WALTER

Not one.

JOSEPH

Such a shame. Either way, even without your Dead Ringer, one can still contact ghosts and spirits.

ALMON

Impossible.

JOSEPH

Not impossible, we have Macey.

ALMON

Don't tell me that Macey has invented something to contact spirits.

JOSEPH

No, not invented. But she is gifted. Macey here has a true talent.

MACEY

I do?

JOSEPH

Certainly dear. You know, your studies with spiritualism.

MACEY

Oh, I've just dabbled really, something I like to do in my spare time.

JOSEPH

Spare time? No, Macey here can communicate with the dead.

ALMON

Really? You're putting me on Joseph. Both of you. I'm in no mood, especially in my house.

WALTER

Let's here them out.



SUSAN  
Yes Almon, let's.

ALMON  
Go ahead.

JOSEPH  
Macey here is a medium.

ALMON  
Medium what?

JOSEPH  
A person who performs seances. To contact the dead.

MACEY  
I am?

JOSEPH  
Yes. And she's done it dozens of times.

MACEY  
I have?

SUSAN  
She has?

JOSEPH  
Oh, certainly. It's fantastic.

WALTER  
That's brilliant. Perhaps she can contact Alice.

ALMON  
No one's contacting Alice but me.

JOSEPH  
That's fine. But your mortuary would be the perfect place to conjure up some spirits. I can't think of a better place.

SUSAN  
It sounds like fun. I would very much like to see Macey perform a seance.

MACEY  
I'd like to see that too.

JOSEPH

Al, what do you say? Tomorrow night for a seance?

SUSAN

We do owe them, since we never did have dinner tonight.

ALMON

Oh, why not.

JOSEPH

Than it's settled. Tomorrow night for a seance.

ALMON

I feel very unsettled. You'll have to excuse me, but my pills don't seem to be very effective lately.

SUSAN

Perhaps your pills aren't working.

ALMON

We went over this. My pills are working just fine. My symptoms are just changing.

SUSAN

I just think you might consider a second opinion.

ALMON

Not if that second opinion is yours.

SUSAN

I meant a doctor.

ALMON

I have a very qualified doctor.

WALTER

Please you two.

ALMON

Excuse me, but I must get into bed right away.

SUSAN

Is it your stomach again?

ALMON

Yes. And now you're giving me a headache.

SUSAN

I'm very giving that way.

ALMON

I don't need your generosity.

WALTER

Once they get going. I deeply apologize.

ALMON

No need to apologize for me. Good night. It was a pleasure meeting you. Thank you for taking Walter under your apprenticeship.

JOSEPH

The pleasure is mine.

Almon exits.

SUSAN

Forgive me, but I must go too.

MACEY

So nice to meet you dear. I feel like we're best friends.

SUSAN

Oh, what a nice compliment. Good night Mr. and Mrs. Harris. I'm very much looking forward to tomorrow night.

JOSEPH

As are we.

Susan exits.

WALTER

I guess it's up to me to see you two out.

JOSEPH

Walter, do you mind if we look around for a few minutes more? There's just so much to look at. Your uncle is a genius.

WALTER

He certainly is. No, I don't mind. I do need to finish running those numbers I didn't get to early today. My new boss is a tyrant. You don't mind seeing yourselves out, do you?

JOSEPH

Yes he is. And no, we don't mind at all. Not at all.

WALTER

Good night then.

MACEY

Good night dear Walter.

Walter exits.

MACEY

Such a delightful young man. Such a delightful couple.

JOSEPH

They're not a couple. I think he's still very much in love with his dead wife. That's probably why he's so sick. But we can certainly use that to our advantage.

MACEY

I'm very fatigued, Joseph. Mind if we look at all of this another time?

JOSEPH

We will have plenty of time later.

MACEY

Whatever do you mean?

JOSEPH

I mean, soon all of this will be ours.

MACEY

I don't think he'll just give all of this to us. I mean he seems fairly disinterested in some of these, but--

JOSEPH

No darling, we went over this the other day. We're going to take it. This is far better than Walter led on.

MACEY

That's exciting. Now?

JOSEPH

Well, I suppose (Pause) No, tomorrow night. We're going to hold a seance. Well, you're going to conduct a seance.

MACEY

I don't know the first thing about conducting a seance.

JOSEPH

I thought you were meeting every week with those spiritualist women.

MACEY

Oh, them! We just knit and gossip.

JOSEPH

I should have known. Either way, they won't know the difference. You're going to be a medium tomorrow night, you're going to conjure up Almon's wife, Alice, and somehow, in the ruckus, we're going to steal all of these inventions, patent them as our own, and we'll be rich.

MACEY

It sounds complicated.

JOSEPH

We have 24 hours to figure this all out. Remember why I paid for all those acting classes for you?

MACEY

Oh yes, that was wonderful.

JOSEPH

You didn't spend that time knitting and gossiping, did you?

MACEY

No.

JOSEPH

Good. I'll finally get my money's worth. (Pause). Macey dear, all of this will soon make us rich.

Joseph picks up a photograph of a woman.

MACEY

I do like the sound of that.

JOSEPH

Me too my dear, me too. This Christmas, Macey, you just might get everything you'd hope for, beginning with the fattest cooked bird in all of Missouri.

END SCENE

## SCENE SIX

Lights up on Almon and Walter sitting and smoking pipes. There is a round table set up in the middle of the room. Susan enters with a tray of tea.

SUSAN

I've got tea.

ALMON

I asked for brandy.

SUSAN

And I brought you tea. Brandy isn't good for your digestion, and I'm tired of listening to you complain.

ALMON

But it's good for my sanity, and I'm tired of listening to you.

SUSAN

Listening to me what?

ALMON

Just listening.

SUSAN

Then put cotton in your ears.

WALTER

Will you stop!

ALMON

Why, when we're having such fun? They're late, again.

SUSAN

The snow is worse tonight.

ALMON

Don't take their side.

SUSAN

I'm just explaining, nevermind.

There is a knock at the door.

SUSAN

Would you mind getting that, Walter?

WALTER

Not at all.

ALMON

Taking orders from a woman unmanly, Walter.

WALTER

I wasn't aware that being polite is unmanly. But you wouldn't know what polite is.

ALMON

Humpf.

Walter opens the door for Joseph and Macey, who is ostentatiously dressed like a medium and carrying a crystal ball.

WALTER

Good evening! Hurry in, you both must be freezing out there.

Walter takes their hats and coats and hangs them up.

JOSEPH

Worst winter we've had in years.

MACEY

I hope the spirits don't mind.

SUSAN

I didn't know spirits could mind the cold.

ALMON

Good to know! We could charge extra for fur-lined coffins and coffin blankets.

SUSAN

Oh, Almon, really.

ALMON

It's an excellent idea.

WALTER

Come in, come in.

MACEY

Where should I put this?

SUSAN

Set it down on the table. Is that for the seance?

MACEY

It is!

ALMON

I thought it was a paper weight or a door stop.

MACEY

This would be much too big for either purpose.

JOSEPH

It was a joke my dear.

ALMON

If you say so.

SUSAN

Should we get started, or should we sit and have some tea first?

JOSEPH

I'd love something a bit stronger, wine perhaps.

ALMON

That's the spirit! No offense, Mrs. Harris.

MACEY

None taken. I'm not sure what of though.

JOSEPH

It was a pun my dear. A good one at that.

ALMON

Thank you Harris. At least someone appreciates my humor.

WALTER

I think you're very funny Uncle.



ALMON

Of course you do.

SUSAN

I had this table set up for you Macey. Will it do?

MACEY

It's perfect. Let's all sit around it.

They all sit.

MACEY

Oh, I forgot. I need only the light of one candle. Would you mind Susan?

SUSAN

Certainly.

Susan gets a candle and lights it, places it in the center of the table and the rest of the lights are turned off.

MACEY

I now need everyone to hold hands and concentrate.

JOSEPH

And close your eyes.

MACEY

Yes! Close your eyes.

ALMON

What are we concentrating on?

MACEY

Your departed loved ones.

ALMON

This is absurd.

SUSAN

Please try Almon.

WALTER

It's not going to work unless we all concentrate.

ALMON

Fine. (He sighs loudly)

MACEY

Oh spirits that are among us. We are ready to receive you.

JOSEPH

We are ready. Please give us a sign.

Joseph shakes the table.

SUSAN

Oh! Did you feel that? The table moved.

ALMON

Someone must have done it.

MACEY

It was a spirit.

JOSEPH

Yes, a spirit. But whose?

MACEY

We feel your energy spirit. Please reveal yourself.

ALMON

I don't feel anything but the feeling that this is a hoax.

SUSAN

Shhh.

MACEY

Silence. Doubters will frighten the spirit away.

WALTER

Uncle, you're frightening the spirit.

ALMON

I didn't realize they were so timid.

Joseph shakes the table again.

MACEY

They are here!

Macey talks in incoherent babble.

ALMON

I don't understand what she's saying.

JOSEPH

The spirit is speaking through her.

ALMON

The spirit has a speech impediment.

WALTER

Maybe it's French.

ALMON

A French speech impediment?

JOSEPH

Spirit who are you?

MACEY

I sense a man and a woman. They are old.

Joseph kicks her.

MACEY

Young.

Joseph kicks her.

MACEY

Neither young nor old. And they are sad. They left this earth too soon. They left behind a daughter.

SUSAN

That's me. Have you contacted my parents? Mama? Papa? Are you there?

Joseph shakes the table and then waves his hand in front of the candle, causing it to flicker.

MACEY

I see a man with a beard, dark hair and spectacles.

SUSAN  
That's my father!

MACEY  
And a woman, also with dark hair.

SUSAN  
My mother had auburn hair.

MACEY  
Yes, it's auburn. The crystal ball is cloudy.

WALTER  
Ask them a question, Susan.

ALMON  
Ask them where they hid the money?

SUSAN  
Are they all right? Are they in pain?

MACEY  
There is no pain in the after life. They said that they are proud of you Susan.

SUSAN  
Oh mama, papa.

MACEY  
They said you should trust the Harrises.

ALMON  
Of course they said that. This is ridiculous. I'm not doing this anymore.

Almon opens his eyes and stands. Macey  
babbles incoherently again.

SUSAN  
Mama, papa? Are you still there?

JOSEPH  
Al please sit down. You're scaring them away.

WALTER  
Please. For Susan.

Fine.

ALMON

He sits back down.

JOSEPH

Hold hands and eyes closed.

Almon begrudgingly does so.

MACEY

They are gone.

SUSAN

They are? Oh, no. Please.

WALTER

Can't you get them back?

JOSEPH

She has no control of the comings and goings of spirits.

ALMON

That's why we're doing this. That's her job. I demand that you call them back. For Susan.

JOSEPH

Silence!

ALMON

Bring Susan's parents back. I demand that you bring them back.

Almon bangs his fist on the table, startling everyone.

JOSEPH

Everyone, please settle down.

ALMON

I will not! Summons them again, Macey. Use your crystal ball or something. I'm afraid I scared them off, Susan.

SUSAN

It's all right, Almon. They're gone.

JOSEPH

Let's resume.

They settle down, rejoin hands and close their eyes.

MACEY

I sense another spirit. (She babbles) A man, I see a man.

Joseph kicks her.

MACEY

Ouch! I mean a woman. Yes, a woman. She is petite. I see her in a garden. Her name is Alice.

ALMON

Alice?

MACEY

Almon, my love.

ALMON

Alice, is that you?

WALTER

Oh, Uncle, it's you're wife. Hi Aunt Alice.

ALMON

Shhh.

SUSAN

Ask her a question.

ALMON

I can't.

JOSEPH

Yes, Al, go ahead. Ask her.

ALMON

(Hesitating at first) Are you really Alice?

MACEY

Yes. I miss you.

ALMON

I miss you too. (Embarrassed, he cuts himself off and starts to stand).

MACEY

(babbles louder and then says) Almon! Why? What have you done?

ALMON

I've done nothing.

MACEY

I am gone. At your hand. I am gone.

ALMON

No.

MACEY

I am dead because of you. You. You killed me. I thought you loved me.

ALMON

I do love you.

MACEY

You killed me. I am dead because of you.

ALMON

No! No! I didn't. I swear!

Almon stands up in distress. Macey collapses on the table.

WALTER

What are you saying?

JOSEPH

I think your uncle was just called a murderer.

WALTER

But that can't be. I was there when he discovered her. She was already dead. We don't know how or why, but she was already dead.

SUSAN

Why would she say that?

ALMON

No. I didn't. I would never. This can't be true.

Walter tries to shake Macey awake.

WALTER

What kind of trickery is this?

JOSEPH

It's no trick, she was just revealing what the spirit said.

WALTER

Then it wasn't Alice.

ALMON

No! Alice, no! Come back.

Almon runs to the door and opens it. A gush of wind enters.

ALMON

Alice! Are you still there? Come back. It wasn't me. I swear.

Almon runs outside into the cold and exits.

WALTER

What have you done?

Walter runs after Almon

WALTER (O.S.)

Come back Uncle, come back!

SUSAN

This is horrible. Almon is no murderer.

JOSEPH

Perhaps his doubt of Macey's abilities invited in an evil spirit.

SUSAN

That must have been what happened. I must go after him.

Susan exits.

JOSEPH

Macey they're gone. Get up.

Macey sits up.



MACEY  
How'd I do?

JOSEPH  
You, my dear, were brilliant.

MACEY  
Thank you very much.

JOSEPH  
It went exactly as planned.

MACEY  
Did you like the babbling?

JOSEPH  
Yes, that was a nice touch.

MACEY  
I know, it was.

JOSEPH  
Now to get what we came for. You keep a look out for them, I'll be right back.

Joseph exits to the workshop, grabs the  
Ectoplasmanon and the Flamecon and returns.

MACEY  
Just that?

JOSEPH  
For now. We'll get the rest in due time. We can't get greedy and take too much, or it'll be noticed. But Macey, we will be returning, and Almon will continue to decline. He's in poor spirits, ha ha, and in poor health. But this, these are our money makers for now. I have a very good feeling about these two.

MACEY  
We are going to be rich!

JOSEPH  
Yes, we are. Once these imbecile undertakers catch on, it'll be too late. Our time has come!

END SCENE

## ACT TWO

## SCENE SEVEN

Lights up. Almon sits in his chair with a blanket wrapped around him. He is moaning. Susan enters with a brick wrapped in a blanket.

SUSAN

Here you go. This should help.

Susan lifts up Almon's feet and places the brick under them.

ALMON

What is this?

SUSAN

It's a heated brick. You said you were cold.

ALMON

I did not. You're imagining things.

SUSAN

I'm imagining things? Just enjoy the brick. It'll make you feel better.

ALMON

Fine. But consider it a favor.

SUSAN

Fine.

ALMON

Get me my pills.

SUSAN

Can you please ask nicely?

ALMON

I can.

Susan waits.

ALMON

I'm in pain. Why must you make me suffer? Get me my pills.

SUSAN

(under her breath) I'm the one suffering.

She gets the pills and a glass of water from the table right next to Almon and hands it to him.

ALMON

I heard that.

SUSAN

Good. Didn't you just take some an hour ago?

ALMON

I don't need you to monitor me.

SUSAN

Yes, you do.

ALMON

I'm in pain.

SUSAN

Your stomach?

ALMON

Now my ass....and my heart.

SUSAN

These won't make her come back.

ALMON

I know that! But they help.

SUSAN

You are far more irritable after you take these.

ALMON

Perhaps it's because you're always around when I take them.

Walter enters from the front door holding a letter.

WALTER

I have good news!

SUSAN

Walter! So good to see you home so early. Mr. Harris has been working you like a dog lately.

WALTER

I don't mind. He's been busy with some other project lately, so he's needed me to run the office.

SUSAN

Running the office. I am impressed, sir.

WALTER

Don't be. Business is slower there than here. Thank you, Susan, for taking care of the Powell funeral on your own yesterday. We've all been pulled in varying directions.

SUSAN

I'm used to it. I might need your help this afternoon, if you have time. We had grave robbers.

WALTER

Again?

SUSAN

It's the third time in as many weeks. Last night's ruckus scared them off, but they still left a half dug up grave.

Susan places another blanket around Almon.

ALMON

I'm warm enough.

SUSAN

You're shivering.

WALTER

Look at you two, getting along so well.

ALMON

It's been jolly.

WALTER

We just might have a merry Christmas with all of us getting on so well.

ALMON

Christmas! Is that happening again?

SUSAN

Of course, it's in two weeks.

ALMON

We should just not celebrate it this year.

WALTER

We will do no such thing.

SUSAN

So what's the good news?

WALTER

Your patent was approved, on the telephone switch.

SUSAN

Oh, that's wonderful!

ALMON

I didn't submit for a patent.

WALTER

He's getting worse.

SUSAN

I know.

ALMON

Stop talking about me like I'm not here!

WALTER

You told me I could submit it. We can't very well have a telephone switch to connect with other telephones if we don't have other telephones connected to it. And now patent number 447,918 has been approved.

ALMON

Oh joy. At least we can get rid of that telephone operator. I better get working. All I have is a prototype.

Almon stands up, but with difficulty and pain.

SUSAN

You will do no such thing. Look at you. Oh Walter, that night in the cold really did him in.

ALMON

I'm not done in. I just have some, digestive issues, and a pain in my ass.

SUSAN

So I've been told.

ALMON

I'm going to go down to my workshop.

WALTER

We need an actual working model, not one with a bunch of pins, and a town with 100 people.

SUSAN

How about La Porte, Indiana?

WALTER

Why La Porte? Where's La Porte?

SUSAN

My aunt lives there. They don't have telephone service there at all. Well they did, but Bell's competition was running it, and it was shut down.

ALMON

Lucky them.

SUSAN

The only way my mother was able to contact her sister was by writing letters. By the time she found out that my parents were deceased, she had missed the funeral. I felt so terribly sad for her. They were very close.

WALTER

Then a trip to La Porte, Indiana is in order. I'll find out if Mr. Harris is able to go with me.

ALMON

I'll go with you.

WALTER

How are you going to work on the switch while traveling.

ALMON  
 Good point.

WALTER  
 How far is it from here?

SUSAN  
 About five hundred miles.

WALTER  
 Five hundred miles?

SUSAN  
 The train does go through.

WALTER  
 That's a relief. We'll have to go right away, if we want to be back by Christmas.

ALMON  
 Take your time.

WALTER  
 Uncle, do you think you can get a working model going by the time we get back?

SUSAN  
 I don't know, Walter. He's not well, although still cheeky. For him, that's a good sign.

ALMON  
 I'm better than ever. No thanks to you and your doting.

SUSAN  
 You're the dote.

ALMON  
 Then you're the anecdote. An aside of no consequence.

SUSAN  
 If I am, then for your paltry wit there is not antidote.

WALTER  
 Ah, so sweet.

Both Almon and Susan reject Walter's suggestion of their affections.

After a beat, Almon redirects the subject back to the telephone switch.

ALMON

It's going to cost some money, but I can make the telephone switch. I may have to sell a few of my other inventions to do so, but with the correct materials, I should get it done without delay. Do you see what you've gotten me into, Walter?

WALTER

I do. And I think the world is going to be a better place by being about to pick up a telephone and call someone directly. Imagine that. Maybe one day we'll be about to call anyone in the whole world directly. Who would you call, Susan?

SUSAN

Oh, I don't know. My aunt, I suppose.

ALMON

Your father, Charles, and tell him to not be so slow answering my letters.

WALTER

I'd call Alexander Graham Bell. Wouldn't he be surprised?

SUSAN

I'd call Susan B Anthony.

WALTER

The suffragist? Why Susan, I didn't know you were political.

ALMON

Speaking of politics, I wouldn't mind phoning President Harrison, and congratulating him on a job well done. And I wouldn't mind speaking to Thomas Edison.

SUSAN

I'd call Emily Bronte. I do love her books.

WALTER

I think she's no longer living.

SUSAN

Then Charles Dickens.

WALTER

Dead.



SUSAN  
Henry Thoreau?

WALTER  
Also dead.

SUSAN  
Oscar Wilde?

WALTER  
Alive.

SUSAN  
Phew.

WALTER  
I think.

SUSAN  
Well, I'd phone him to find out. This is wonderful Walter! Isn't this wonderful, Almon?

ALMON  
Yes, thank you Walter. Your father would be very proud of you. As am I.

WALTER  
It's your invention.

ALMON  
Yes, that is true.

SUSAN  
But you got the patent, and perhaps soon, Almon Strowger will be a famous person that someone wants to call on the telephone too.

ALMON  
I'd better get to work.

SUSAN  
Are you sure you're able?

ALMON  
I'm fine, Susan.

WALTER

I hope I can find Mr. Harris right away.

Almon exits to the workshop, and Walter exits out the front door.

SUSAN

And I'll, I'll stay here.

END SCENE

SCENE EIGHT

The light of only a desk lamp is on as Almon is busy in his workshop, working away at the Strowger switch. He doubles over in pain and his hands shake. He takes the bottle of pills out of his pocket and swallows a couple. He works again, more fervently, and accidentally knocks over the photograph of Alice, shattering the glass. He picks up the photograph.

ALMON

Oh, Alice, what have I done. I didn't leave you on my desk. That Susan. I told her not to touch anything. But she still insists on cleaning my workshop. Look at what she did to you. What I did to you. I'm sorry my love. Please forgive me.

He places the photograph on a shelf, takes more pills, and goes back to working. The lamp flickers.

ALMON

Susan, is that you?...

The lamp flickers again.

ALMON

Susan?...Maybe it's the weather.

The lamp flickers, his workbench shakes, and then the photographs of Alice falls to the ground.

ALMON

Susan? Is there a storm? If you have any windows open, you need to shut them.

He looks up from his work to where the photograph had fallen, and looks as if he sees a ghost. There is no ghost, but Almon sees it.

ALMON

Alice? Alice, what are you doing here?

He runs to her to embrace her, but she's not there. He turns and sees her again.

ALMON

Alice? Why do you avoid me? Answer me. Can't you answer me? Please. You look angry. Please don't be angry.

He goes to her again, and again she disappears. He searches for her frantically.

ALMON

Alice, come back. Alice!...There you are! Oh, Alice, thank you for returning. I thought I'd never see you again. But here you are. Can you forgive me?... Don't shake your head. Look at me...alright, don't look at me. Don't be sad.... I know we can't be together again. But you can visit. Any time.... I know that's not the same. I love you..... You don't believe me? Of course I do.... I've said it many times.... I don't remember, but I'm sure I have.... Not never.... Don't put me on the spot. I can't think when I'm put on the spot... No, please. Okay, when we got married.... I said that you were well suited for me?... But that's what I meant... You know, that's what I meant.... Okay, what about the time we took the train to the city?.... I didn't?... In all the years, I must have... Not once.... Well, I'm saying it now. I love you Alice..... Yes, it does matter..... Of course my inventions are important to me... More than you? Well, yes. That goes without saying. As it should be..... Susan? No! I don't love her.... Think what you want. I don't. ...I don't think I do. ...No, of course not. Don't be ridiculous.... Yes, she's alive, and you're dead. But that doesn't matter. ... I'll tell you every day from now on. I swear. ... Yes, you're dead.... Please don't be sad. ... Or angry. Don't be angry. I'm sorry.... No, I didn't. Walter was there too. We came home. The house was so quite, and cold. I didn't notice at first, but now that I think of it, it was unusually cold. And you were there, on the floor. I thought you looked so silly, so strange on the floor at first. Twisted, on the rug.... I didn't know you were dead. It didn't occur to me. I thought maybe you had fallen. But then you didn't move. I said to you, "Alice, get up off the floor." You didn't move. "Alice, get up. Did you make dinner? I'm hungry for dinner." You didn't move. You didn't breathe. You just laid there. I tried. I called for the doctor, but it was too late. He couldn't say why. You were dead. My dear Alice. Dead..... No, you were not murdered. Don't be absurd. You couldn't have been.... No, not by me!

I was with Walter. I know I was with Walter. I was out and I came home, and you had fallen. I know it. You had fallen down. I don't know how I know, I just know. I am not a murder. I am not a murderer!

The lamp flickers and goes out. Footsteps are heard and then the light of a candle. Susan enters holding two candlesticks.

SUSAN

Almon, are you all right? The storm caused all the lights to go out. I brought you a candle to see your way out, but there's no way you'll be able to work under these conditions. You'll have to wait until tomorrow.... Almon?.... Are you all right?

ALMON

A storm?

SUSAN

Yes. All the lights are out.

ALMON

I see that.

SUSAN

Here.

She hands Almon one of the candles and starts to head out of the room.

SUSAN

Are you coming?

ALMON

Yes, of course....

Susan gets to the top of the stairs.

ALMON

Thank you, Susan.

SUSAN

Did you say something?

ALMON

I said. (Pause). No, nothing. Nothing at all.

Susan exits. Almon follows up the stairs and exits.

END SCENE

SCENE NINE

Lights up onto an empty living room. There is a knock at the door and Susan enters. She straightens herself up before opening the door for Macey.

SUSAN

Macey, so nice of you to come.

MACEY

My pleasure. I was delighted and surprised by the tea invitation.

Susan takes Macey's hat and coat.

SUSAN

With Walter in Indiana and Almon in his workshop nearly all day and night, it's very quiet around here. Please come in and sit.

Macey goes to sit in Almon's chair.

MACEY

Except during his afternoon nap. Almon is napping?

SUSAN

Oh, sit here. It's much more comfortable. Yes, he's asleep. Hopefully for a while.

Susan indicates Macey to sit in her chair instead of Almon's, and then finds another chair to sit in, leaving Almon's empty.

MACEY

Thank goodness for those afternoon naps. You're right. It's very comfortable.

SUSAN

It was my mother's.

MACEY

How lovely. Practically everything I hold dear once belonged to my mother. She's been very generous, although Joseph would beg to differ. Mother and I are very close. Are you and your mother close?

SUSAN

We were.

MACEY

Oh, yes, dear me. I do apologize. I get nervous and say the darnedest things.

SUSAN

It's quite all right. Speaking of mothers. I meant to ask. I don't mean to impose, but the other night, during the seance.

MACEY

Oh that! That was entertaining, wasn't it?

SUSAN

I don't know if entertaining is how I'd describe it.

MACEY

It was certainly delightful for me. I'm quite pleased with my performance, even though it did cause a stir. How is Almon?

SUSAN

I'm not so sure. He's buried himself into his work. But he hasn't been the same, not that I prefer one over the other.

MACEY

He is a sourpuss. Yet I appreciate his candor.

SUSAN

Walter says the same thing. The two of you must see something in him that I don't.

MACEY

Sometimes it's impossible to see things that are right in front of your nose. Joseph says I do that all the time.

SUSAN

I like to consider myself a practical person.

MACEY

Oh you are! Except when it comes to matters of the heart.

SUSAN

The heart?

MACEY

Susan, my dear, you are in love.

SUSAN

I am? With Almon? Don't be absurd.

MACEY

I might not know much of anything. But I can see when two people love each other.

SUSAN

But he's so, so, surly and boorish.

MACEY

And in love. He's like a school boy, pulling your pigtails.

SUSAN

Oh, that's hog wash. He just doesn't like to be cared for. And he's taking it out on me.

MACEY

Perhaps. But I think you enjoy it.

SUSAN

The harsh words? No. But I do think that having him and Walter around has been a good thing. I wasn't sure at first, but I just didn't see any other way to keep the mortuary a float. It's been in my family for generations, and I couldn't let it stop with me.

MACEY

I must say, you've done a splendid job on your own.

SUSAN

Thank you, Macey. I appreciate that. But I didn't realize until after my parents passed away how difficult it was running a business. I thought I knew most of what they did, but I wasn't privy to everything. I suppose they too had no choice, seeing as how I was the only one to take over the mortuary eventually. But that came sooner than we all expected.

MACEY

Such a shame.

SUSAN

One horse with a bum leg. I had told my father about the horse, but he wouldn't listen. Said that the horse was still good for riding, that we shouldn't discard something just because it's broken. Everything deserves a second chance.

That second chance though, is what killed them. Maybe they never would have gone over that bridge, had I spoken up. Not that he would have listened. I suppose I'm destined to have stubborn men in my life. You know, we still keep that horse. Not for carriages anymore, but I just can't bring myself to get rid of him.

MACEY

I understand. Joseph says that I love our terriers more than I love him. Don't tell him, but it's true.

SUSAN

Mums the word.

MACEY

He did scold me the other day for feeding them table scraps. Said they'd be begging every day if I give in to them. But they looked so hungry. I shouldn't disobey him like that, but I couldn't help it.

SUSAN

Disobey him? Oh Macey. He shouldn't be scolding you. Although I'm not one to say.

MACEY

That's just men, it's what they do. And it's our jobs to listen. It's important to keep the roles clear my dear. Joseph always says that it's the man's place to keep a woman in line.

SUSAN

Does he? Now Macey, I don't think that's quite how it should be. With all due respect.

MACEY

Women just aren't as smart as men.

SUSAN

That is definitely not true.

MACEY

Well, maybe it's not that they're not as smart, but men, they're supposed to be in charge. That's what Joseph says. Sometimes I just wish he would disappear. Not really of course. But if he saw me as less subservient.

SUSAN

Perhaps it's best if they think they're in charge. You know, give them the illusion.

MACEY

I knew I liked you.



SUSAN

I like you too, Macey. I forget how nice it is to have a woman friend around.

MACEY

Oh, I spend time with lots of women, I have the knitting club, the book club, the spiritualist club, and the suffrage club, I'm hardly alone. One might think that I'm avoiding my home. Perhaps I am a bit. May I speak openly?

SUSAN

Of course.

MACEY

Sometime, well, sometimes Joseph has these plans, these schemes, and he seems well-intentioned. But I do question the ethical value of.-- (Remembering something important) Joseph!

SUSAN

Yes, what about Joseph?

MACEY

Oh, uh, weren't we going to have some tea?

SUSAN

Yes, of course. Forgive me for being such an improper host. Can I offer you some biscuits?

MACEY

I always have crumpets with my tea. You do have crumpets don't you?

SUSAN

I don't. Won't biscuits suffice?

MACEY

Certainly not! I mean, would you mind making some?

SUSAN

No, I suppose not.

MACEY

Thank you. You're such a dear.

SUSAN

It'll take a while.

MACEY

That's perfectly fine. Take your time.

Susan exits. Macey goes to the front door and opens it.

MACEY

Caw, caw! Caw, caw!

Joseph enters and brushes off snow. He's shivering from the cold.

JOSEPH

I nearly caught my death out there. It's freezing.

MACEY

I got caught up and forgot.

JOSEPH

Forgot!? Silly woman. How could you forget? Did you also forget why we're here?

MACEY

No.(She thinks for a moment). No. I did get rid of her.

JOSEPH

Finally. Now, I'm going to go down to the workshop and bring up what I can. You keep a lookout. You can do that without forgetting, can't you?

MACEY

Yes.

Joseph exits. Macey bides her time looking around the room. Joseph reenters holding one of Almon's inventions. As he's about to open the front door, Susan enters, and Joseph hides behind a chair or piece of furniture.

SUSAN

Macey, I didn't ask you what kind of tea you wanted.

MACEY

What's that?

Macey points to a poinsettia behind Susan.

Susan turns around to look at what Macey is pointing to, and Joseph quickly rushes out the door.

SUSAN

Are you referring to the poinsettia? It's a plant.

MACEY

Interesting. I'm not familiar with them.

SUSAN

Do you feel a draft? It's suddenly cold. I could start a fire.

Susan heads towards the fireplace, and Macey stops her.

MACEY

Tea. Whatever you prefer is perfectly acceptable. And of course crumpets.

SUSAN

Of course.

Susan exits.

MACEY

Don't make them too quickly, or they'll flatten.

Macey runs to the door.

MACEY

Caw, caw! Caw, Caw!

Joseph enters again and brushes off more snow.

JOSEPH

I thought you got rid of her. I can barely feel my fingers from frostbite.

MACEY

I did. She wanted to know what kind of tea I preferred. Do you know what kind of tea I prefer, Joseph?

JOSEPH

We don't have time to talk about tea, for Christ's sake. I'm going back down. Please don't let her back in this room again.

MACEY

I won't.

Joseph exits, and Macey bids her time. Joseph returns with another invention. Again, as he's just about to leave, Susan enters. Joseph quickly hides.

SUSAN

I forgot to ask what kind of jam. We only have blueberry and fig. I hope that suits your taste.

MACEY

Is that smoke?

SUSAN

What?

MACEY

Coming from the kitchen. Is that smoke?

Susan turns and looks.

SUSAN

I don't see smoke.

MACEY

I think it's smoke. You should definitely investigate. I'll go with you.

They both exit. Macey comes back.

MACEY

Psst. It's clear.

JOSEPH

I nearly had a heart attack.

MACEY

Just hurry. I'll figure out something.

JOSEPH

I just want to get one more item. It's just hard to find down there. The workshop is a mess. I don't know how that man can work in there.

MACEY

Just go put that in the carriage and come back. It'll be fine. I'll distract her.

Joseph exits out the front door, and Macey exits to the kitchen. There is a flicker of lights. Joseph reenters and then exits to the basement. Again, there is a flicker of lights. He returns with the Dead Ringer. As he's about to exit out the front door, Susan enters with Macey following. Joseph hides behind the hall tree, but he's not hidden at all.

SUSAN

That's been happening for days. Ever since the seance.

MACEY

Susan, let's go back into the kitchen.

SUSAN

I just wanted to see if it was happening in here too.

MACEY

I'm sure it's not. It's probably just in the kitchen because of all the cooking.

There is another flicker of light. Macey sees Joseph, and is horrified. She moves Susan around so that Susan's back is to Joseph.

SUSAN

See there it is. It's so peculiar. Almon has taken it upon himself to rewire all of the electrical outlets in the house. It doesn't seem to have worked. Unfortunately he sometimes gets distracted and leaves outlets unfinished.

Macey keeps moving Susan around to prevent her from seeing Joseph, who continues to try to hide himself.

SUSAN

What are you doing?

MACEY

What a lovely dress.

SUSAN

Thank you. You've seen this dress before.

MACEY

I know, but I meant to tell you.

Macey motions for Joseph to leave.

SUSAN

Is something wrong?

MACEY

Oh, no. Feeling the air. To see if there are spirits causing the lights to flicker.

SUSAN

Spirits? In this room?

Susan turns around, and Joseph dives to hide behind a piece of furniture.

MACEY

Yes! I think they're over there.

Macey turns Susan around, trying to prevent her from seeing Joseph. Joseph peaks out to attempt to head out the door.

SUSAN

But I think I heard something over there.

Susan turns around and Joseph ducks. Macey turns her around again.

MACEY

Oh, no. It definitely was in the kitchen. Spirits like kitchens. Lots of pots and pans to bang and make noise with and such. Plus, we should mind the crumpets.

SUSAN

Oh, the crumpets. I completely forgot.

Macey pushes Susan in the direction of the kitchen.

SUSAN

I must remind Almon to finish wiring the outlets. It could be dangerous.

MACEY

And I much prefer fig.

They exit. Joseph, out of breathe, stands up, heads to the front door and opens it. Just as he's about to exit, the Dead Ringer rings. Joseph is startled, looks around, and seeing that no one's around, he picks up the receiver.

JOSEPH

Hello?... Hello?...

Joseph shrugs and hangs up the receiver.

JOSEPH

Just my imagination.

Joseph exits. The lights flicker then fade out.

END SCENE

SCENE TEN

Lights up. Susan and Walter are in the living room when Almon enters. His hair and clothes are disheveled. He's holding the Strowger switch in his hands.

ALMON

Susan, what did you do with my telephone?

SUSAN

It's right there on the table.

ALMON

No! The dead ringer. What did you do with it?

SUSAN

I did nothing with it. As instructed, I don't touch your inventions.

ALMON  
Well it's missing.

WALTER  
Perhaps you misplaced it.

ALMON  
I didn't misplace it!

WALTER  
Or set it down somewhere without thinking.

ALMON  
I don't not think. I'm always thinking.

SUSAN  
This is true, about what though, who knows.

ALMON  
Important things. Things you wouldn't know about.

SUSAN  
I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.

ALMON  
And the ectoplamacon, and the reproducticon, and the flarecon, and the bendasol. All missing.

WALTER  
Oh, I took the bendasol the other day. It was sideways raining.

SUSAN  
See. They're not missing.

ALMON  
Walter, did you take the other items?

WALTER  
No, just the bendasol.

ALMON  
They're all missing.



SUSAN

I don't understand.

ALMON

Of course not. I wanted to work on them. Now that I've finished.

WALTER

You've finished? Are you sure it's a working model?

ALMON

Yes, I'm sure. Who are you to doubt me?

WALTER

I forgot. Forgive me.

ALMON

You're forgiven. (to Susan) See how easy it is to humor him. You should try it some time.

SUSAN

I can't. He just gets my goat.

ALMON

Perhaps it is I who is humoring you.

WALTER

Perhaps, you think you're humoring me humoring you.

ALMON

Perhaps.--

SUSAN

Stop! So the switch is working. That's good news, is it not?

WALTER

It's perfect timing in fact. The Harrises should be here any minute.

There is a knock at the door.

WALTER

Speak of the devil. I'll get it.

Walter answers the door, and as expected, it's Joseph and Macey Harris. They are dressed for traveling.

WALTER

Welcome!

SUSAN

Come in, come in. You two look like you're ready to travel.

JOSEPH

We are indeed.

MACEY

We were hoping to get here earlier, but Joseph was a bit slow moving this morning.

JOSEPH

Just a bit of heartburn. Nothing to worry about.

MACEY

It was all those sausages you ate for breakfast. You do like your sausages.

JOSEPH

I'm fine now.

ALMON

You should take a couple of my blue mass. It does wonders for indigestion. Susan, where are my pills?

SUSAN

Probably in your pocket.

JOSEPH

No, no. I'm fine now. Everything is set with La Porte.

MACEY

The whole town is a buzz. It's very exciting.

JOSEPH

Pending Almon's prototype of course. You look like you haven't slept in days, Al. I hope it's not all for naught.

SUSAN

He has some good news. Tell them Almon.

ALMON

Here it is. The Strowger automatic telephone exchange.

MACEY

It looks very complicated.

JOSEPH

And expensive. Will it work?

ALMON

Yes, it works! All this doubting.

MACEY

The town is expecting us next week, just before the new year, so this is perfect. Since Walter's initial visit, I've made all the arrangements. There's going to be a parade, with the mayor, power company executives, journalists, entrepreneurs, inventors, and two representatives of the Russian czar. And the high school marching band.

SUSAN

Didn't you tell me they're running a special train from Chicago?

MACEY

Yes, that too.

ALMON

You didn't even know I'd finish today. I didn't know.

JOSEPH

We have confidence in you, Al.

ALMON

I am anxious to give it a practical test in La Porte.

WALTER

And that you shall have.

ALMON

I feel confident that we are going to make a success of it. I may be terribly out of the way, but from what I have been enabled to see in constructing the machine, I cannot see a failure.

JOSEPH

And then we can get rid of that horrible telephone operator.

ALMON

We can get rid of all telephone operators.

SUSAN

All those girls without employment.

ALMON

They'll be fine. They can just get married and have children. Do something they're good for.

JOSEPH

This will be the first telephone exchange without a single petticoat.

WALTER

Macey, didn't you say you were going to come up with a slogan?

MACEY

I have! It's the girl-less, cuss-less, out-of-order-less, and wait-less telephone system.

ALMON

Perfect.

SUSAN

Perfect?

ALMON

That's exactly what it is.

WALTER

You better go get cleaned up and packed, Uncle Almon. We've got a train to catch.

SUSAN

You have to leave today? The train only takes two days, and the grand opening isn't for another week. You'll miss Christmas.

WALTER

Yes, but there's a lot to be done once we arrive. And we have to get the exchange set up.

MACEY

We can celebrate Christmas a couple days late this year. The holy spirit won't mind under the circumstances.

JOSEPH

This is more important than Christmas. Nothing but death can stop us.

ALMON

You don't mind paying for the train tickets, Joseph, do you? I can pay you back after we get this set up and going. I'll be able to pay you back 100 times worth.

SUSAN

We have the money for train tickets, Almon. We shouldn't have to borrow.

ALMON

I spent it. The materials cost a bit more than the \$80 I had expected.

SUSAN

I see.

JOSEPH

I hope not too much more.

WALTER

I did the numbers, and in order for this to be both profitable and worthy of a town of 100, it shouldn't cost more than \$200 for the device.

ALMON

This is just the prototype. Getting it manufactured will bring down the price.

JOSEPH

How much did it cost you to make?

ALMON

All told, creating this cost us roughly \$4000.

ALL

\$4000!

ALMON

Well, yes.

JOSEPH

I can't believe you spent that much! We'll never make it back!

SUSAN

Almon, how could you? That's everything. More than everything.

ALMON

We'll make it back.

WALTER

That's an exorbitant amount of money, Uncle.

ALMON

It's fine.

SUSAN

It's not fine. You've been very addled lately. Forgetful, disoriented, talking to yourself.

ALMON

I have not been talking to myself.

SUSAN

I've heard you. In your workshop. Having all sorts of conversations.

WALTER

I admit, I've heard you too.

SUSAN

It's very concerning.

WALTER

I must say, I'm also concerned. You haven't been yourself.

ALMON

I have not been talking to myself.

SUSAN

Then who, who have you been talking to?

ALMON

Alice.

SUSAN

Alice is dead.

ALMON

I know that. It's her ghost.

MACEY

Oooh, my medium powers worked.

SUSAN

It's the pills. You're taking them all the time. I think they're making you worse. They're affecting your mind.

ALMON

I need the pills.

SUSAN

You don't need the pills. You have Walter. You have me. (Pause). Give me the pills.

ALMON

I will do no such thing.

SUSAN

Give them to me.

Susan takes the bottle of pills out Almon's pocket. The two of them struggle over it, until Susan has the bottle in her hand. She smashes the bottle on the ground and all the pills come out. Susan stomps on each and every pill destroying them all.

SUSAN

She's dead. She's dead. She's dead.

Almon grabs her by the arms and stops her from stomping. But all the pills are dust.

ALMON

I know. But I killed her.

SUSAN

You couldn't have.

ALMON

I did. She told me.

WALTER

It's not true. You were with me. We found her, and she was already dead.

ALMON

Then why would she say that?

SUSAN

I was in your head, from the pills.

ALMON

She said I never told her that I loved her. And it's true. I never did. Not once. She said that my inventions were always more important to me than her. (Pause). And then she said that I murdered her. If the first is true, then the second must be too.

WALTER

Maybe you felt guilty.

ALMON

She was a good person. But I didn't love her. I think you're right, Walter. She deserved better.

SUSAN

The pills made you hallucinate Almon. That's all.

MACEY

So I didn't conjure up his dead wife?

SUSAN

I'm afraid not, Macey.

ALMON

She also told me that I love you.

SUSAN

You're just agitated.

ALMON

No, Susan, it's true. I do love you.

SUSAN

You do?

ALMON

I do.

Beat.

SUSAN

And I...I will need to be properly courted before I give you a response.

ALMON

You deserve that, and more.

WALTER

We could have the wedding right here in the mortuary.

MACEY

I'll help with the arrangements.

SUSAN

Now don't get ahead of yourself, you too.



ALMON

I'm sorry I spent all that money.

SUSAN

We may have to reconsider our business partnership.

ALMON

Really? I was afraid of that.

SUSAN

No, silly. We'll figure it out. The telephone exchange is going to be a great success. All of your inventions will be.

WALTER

We may have to negotiate a deal with Bell. If we can, we'll certainly make up for it in no time. It's a lot of money, but once we get this going in several cities, it'll be worth the expense.

SUSAN

I agree. You are a genius inventor. I see great things happening with all your inventions. This is just the start. I do. I believe in you, Almon.

ALMON

Thank you, Susan. You saved me.

JOSEPH

This is preposterous! There is a matter of \$4000 that must be dealt with.

The lights flicker, stopping the conversation.

SUSAN

There they go again. Almon, you must do something about this before you leave.

JOSEPH

I see what the problem is.

Joseph points to an outlet.

That lamp is only halfway plugged into the outlet.

Joseph goes to the outlet and plugs the lamp fully in to everyone's objection.

ALMON

Stop! That wire is hot.

Mr. Harris, don't!

WALTER

Joseph's body convulses from the surge of electricity from touching a hot wire.

Joseph, are you all right?

MACEY

Mr. Harris!

WALTER

The inventions, Macey. Sell them to support yourself.

JOSEPH

Joseph!

MACEY

Joseph collapses to the floor, and dies.

I'll send for a doctor.

SUSAN

It's too late for that, Susan. He's dead.

ALMON

Oh, thank good...(cuts herself off and covers her hand with her mouth). Ooops! Oh, Joseph.

MACEY

At least he died in a convenient location.

ALMON

END SCENE

SCENE ELEVEN

Lights up. Almon, Susan, Walter and Macey are all in the living room. There is a open coffin set up in the middle of the room with Joseph inside. They are all dressed for a funeral. Both Almon and Walter are wearing top hats with feather plumes and black arm bands.

SUSAN

Such a to-do for such a small gathering.

MACEY

With only two days, I didn't have time to send out the invitations.

WALTER

I'm so sorry, Macey, but with all the fanfare you arranged in La Porte, we have to get there right away to set up the telephone exchange. Even without Joseph.

MACEY

I understand. Mind if I read you the what I would have sent out.

SUSAN

We don't mind at all.

Macey takes out a card from her pocket and reads.

MACEY

"The favour of your company is requested on Christmas Day, the 25th of December, to attend the funeral of the late Joseph Harris. The mourners will assemble at Strowger Mortuary, Kansas City, Missouri, at ten o'clock precisely. Women are welcome to attend, only under the circumstances of their ability to contain their emotions and not be overcome."

Macey sobs.

SUSAN

There, there, Macey.

MACEY

Was it wrong to have a funeral on Christmas?

ALMON

It's as good a day as any.

MACEY

It is a nice coffin.

SUSAN

It is!

ALMON

It has an inner elm shell, with a tufted mattress, lined and ruffled with fine cambric, and a pillow for his head, an embroidered cambric shroud, a stout outside lead coffin with an engraved inscription plate, an oak case, covered with crimson velvet, set nails, and four pairs of brass handles with matching lid ornaments.

MACEY

Joseph would be pleased.

SUSAN

We arranged for two mourning coaches with four horses, twenty-three plumes of rich ostrich feathers, and velvet overrings for the carriages and horses, with a plume of the best feathers.

WALTER

For the procession we have two mutes, with gowns, silk hatband, and gloves, fourteen pages, feathermen and coachmen with tuncheons and wands, silk hatbands, and I'll serve as the attendant.

MACEY

Quite a production. For just us.

ALMON

It's the least we could do. Mind if I smoke before we get things underway?

MACEY

I don't mind.

Almon takes out a pipe.

ALMON

Unfortunate, but I'm sure Joseph would have joined me. He never was one to turn down a smoke. Susan, would you mind handing me that candle?

MACEY

Here, use this.

From her pocket, Macey takes out the flamecon that Almon invented. Almon grabs her wrist.

MACEY

Hey!

ALMON

That's my flamecon.

MACEY

Would you look at that. So it is.

SUSAN

Why was it in your pocket, Macey?

MACEY

It must have slipped in.

ALMON

Slipped in? What else just slipped in to your pocket?

WALTER

I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation. Right, Macey?

MACEY

Well, I. Yes, there is. Give me a minute to think of one.

SUSAN

Macey! You stole his flamecon!

MACEY

We were going to sell the patent, once we got it.

SUSAN

You and Mr. Harris?

MACEY

Yes.

WALTER

And the other inventions, the ectoplamanon? the reproduction?

MACEY

We took those too.

SUSAN

The dead ringer?

MACEY

That too. Joseph said we would be rich. It was our only way.

ALMON

I knew it. See I told you, Susan, that they were missing.

SUSAN

You were right.

ALMON

It wasn't the pills making me hallucinate.

SUSAN

Not this time, but you were definitely hallucinating.

WALTER

Where are they now?

MACEY

I don't know. Joseph put them somewhere safe. I didn't expect him to die. I'm so sorry. You all trusted us, and we betrayed you.

ALMON

You did indeed. I should have suspected.

SUSAN

You were so addled, Almon. Don't blame yourself.

WALTER

After the funeral, I'll look for them.

ALMON

Thank you Walter.

SUSAN

You both have to leave for La Porte right away.

WALTER

When we get back.

SUSAN

I think I should alert the authorities.

MACEY

No, please don't. It was all Joseph's idea. The seance, stealing the inventions.

ALMON

It's the dead man's fault, is it?

MACEY

It's true. We had no choice. Joseph was never a licensed accountant. He was going to lose his business any day. I was just doing what Joseph told me to do. Susan, you believe me, don't you? I just followed his direction. I'll return everything. I promise.

SUSAN

I suppose. Oh, Macey.

WALTER

So I was going to be out of a job soon.

SUSAN

Walter, you could take over the accounting office. You were running the place on your own anyway.

WALTER

That's not a bad idea, Susan.

ALMON

Susan and I can handle the mortuary just fine, and I have a feeling we'll be running a telephone business too. So Joseph wasn't an accountant. Was he an attorney, as he claimed?

MACEY

No, he was a fraud. As was I. I was never trained as a medium. I can't conjure up spirits. I'll make it up to you, somehow.

WALTER

Perhaps you can work as my assistant in the accounting office, help with promoting Almon's inventions.

MACEY

I'm actually fairly good at making arrangements and the like. Oh, thank you, Walter. Thank you all.

ALMON

Such an elaborate funeral for a fraud.

SUSAN

But we discovered the whereabouts of your inventions. Or at least what happened to them.

ALMON

Honestly, none of that matters, because my mind is clearer than it ever has been, thanks to you, Susan.

SUSAN

You're welcome.

WALTER

All is good. And one day, very soon, we will all be able to pick up a telephone and call someone directly. The world is changing for the better.

ALMON

The present marks an epoch in my life as the realization of my hopes and wishes long held by me, and which I am able to say are totally consummated. The inventor cherishes the child of his brain as a mother does her babe, as he stands on the threshold of the realization of his efforts. And all this with those who are most important to me at my side. Merry Christmas!

ALL

Merry Christmas!

Fade to black. Just as the light go to black, there is a flicker of light and the telephone rings.

END OF PLAY