

THE SITE

A full-length play
in two acts

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Doctor Harold Roth:	A Scientist
Faith, His Wife:	A Former Poet with a Personality Disorder
Edward Brandon III:	Field Assistant to Doctor Roth
Sherry Hansen:	Personal Assistant to Doctor Roth
Matthew Roth:	Son of Harold and Faith
Amy Stewart:	Girlfriend to Matt
Ruth Meyers:	A Visitor

TIME AND PLACE

Saturday, June 21, 2003
Several Miles Outside the Town of Truxton, Arizona.

SETTING

A field research station and campsite on a dry lake bed. A small decrepit pull-along camper is situated stage right. This is the living quarters of Harold and Faith Roth. The camper tow bar rests on a jack. From the camper, a power line leads off stage. A clothes line is strung between the camper and a pole. The meals are prepared downstage of the camper. This area contains worn cooking utensils, camping gear, tattered folding chairs, and old chests. Center are two new matching pup tents; they belong to Matt and Amy, who are visiting for the weekend. Near their tents is a flagstaff. Next to the flagstaff is a midsize walk-in tent with an attached canopy that is supported by two poles. This is the domain of Sherry. The area under the canopy resembles an office; it has a chair and a table, comprised of a plank resting on two sawhorses. This table holds a computer, printer, telephone, facsimile machine, file box, and supplies. At the moment, the equipment is under protective covers. At stage left is a small tent that belongs to Brandon. Downstage of Brandon's tent is a sizeable hole. The top of a ladder, set into the hole, is visible. Next to the hole is a mound of dirt. Nearby are buckets, screen sifters, digging tools, and small wire cages. The time is just after sunrise. A vast empty sky.

ACT ONE

FAITH (From inside trailer, opens door. Pauses in doorway) Oh, glorious morning good, sweet Jesus. (Descends steps. Surveys landscape. Appears lost) Where points the compass on this breaking day? (Clear-eyed) Harold, are you out there? (Confused) If only we could remember our latitude. (Clear-eyed) Harold? (Examining sky. Quizzical) Why are there no constellations? (Clear-eyed) Where's the compass? Harold, have you taken our compass?

HAROLD (Unseen. From inside hole) Not now, Fay!

FAITH Where are we, Harold? I think we're lost. You've taken us to Cairo, Tanzania, the Ukraine, Belfast, back to Cairo. Where are we now? You pull us along, behind your station wagon, stuffed in this contraption. When we get out we have no idea where we are. (Pause) It doesn't seem we have a home.

HAROLD We have a home. It just happens to be on wheels.

FAITH (Standing by hole) What are you uprooting this time? We watched you dig up bones, heliotropes, manuscripts. You uncovered a vacuum cleaner, libation urns

HAROLD One doesn't dig up heliotropes. They rot. To oblivion! And I never dug up a vacuum cleaner.

FAITH In Peru you did.

HAROLD Not by design! That was an accident. We expected to find the remnants of an ancient surgical laboratory.

FAITH Harold, are you through scouring the earth? Could we take off the wheels?

HAROLD Fay! It's too goddamn early!

FAITH Hands over mouth. (Surveying the sky) Oh, that we could make stones of words and pave a highway wide across the sky, to guide us home.

HAROLD Shut up!

FAITH Hand over ears. (Left hand over ear) Hand over mouth. (Right hand over mouth) Hand over eyes. (Left hand over eyes)

HAROLD Must I come up there and put an end to your nonsense?

FAITH (Drops hands to her side) What are you doing?

HAROLD Inspecting the site.

FAITH Guard the corners, Harold, where vipers spin their webs to snare their prey. (Moves away from hole)

HAROLD Vipers don't conjure traps! They strike their victims, Faith. With venom! Is Brandon up?

FAITH Brandon? No. We're alone.

HAROLD Well, get him up! The lazy cuss.

FAITH We don't recognize anything. Which way is north?

HAROLD It never changes! Every morning – the same old predicament!

FAITH Which one is Brandon?

HAROLD Did you discard your pills again?

FAITH (Mimes giving herself a shot) No, dear. We refueled. The tank is full.

HAROLD I want my assistant.

FAITH Assistant?
 HAROLD Brandon! The hired hand. The lad from Tulsa.
 FAITH There's no Brandon, honey.
 HAROLD I'm telling you. He's in his tent, sleeping. Resurrect him!
 FAITH (Screams) Brandon!
 HAROLD (Appears, climbing out of hole. Pauses on ladder, visible only from the chest up) Hell and damnation!
 FAITH (Dancing) Uppity-up-up. Uppity-up-up. Uppity-up-up.
 HAROLD So help me. One day you'll drive me over the edge.
 FAITH Don't worry. The fall is exhilarating.
 HAROLD It's half past six. Can you manage breakfast? Or must I watch your every move?
 FAITH We can manage. How many will be present?
 HAROLD Certifiably? Six. I can only speculate how many apparitions will appear.
 FAITH We have reservations for five.
 HAROLD Mind the stove. Don't touch the coils! It's a good ten miles to the nearest hospital.
 FAITH Will we be going home after breakfast?
 HAROLD Fay, dear. We are home.
 FAITH (Distributing plates) If only we hadn't misplaced the compass. Where are you going?
 HAROLD To continue my inspection.
 FAITH Be careful. Don't annoy the quicksand. And keep an open eye for the compass.
 HAROLD Go on! Get Brandon. Rouse the lot of them!
 FAITH (Announcing loudly) You heard the radio! Up! (Setting plates) To our right, Emily Dickinson. Next to her, Dylan Thomas. The guest of honor today, Anne Sexton. Across from her, T. S. Eliot. And facing northeast, at forty-five degrees, Gwendolyn Brooks. (Plugs in electric hot plate. Places hand over burner and waits to feel heat) Weather forecast. No wind. No rain. No clouds.
 HAROLD Any progress up there?
 FAITH (Pours water into kettle) No highs. No lows.
 HAROLD Is there nothing to report?
 FAITH No news. We have radio contact. Would you like a traffic update?
 HAROLD Has Brandon appeared?
 FAITH All freeways are empty.
 HAROLD No wandering off. No boarding airships and sailing away.
 FAITH (Holds up egg. To egg, seriously) Your ancestor inspired a famous poem. "The boiling of an egg is heavy art." (Smiles. Acknowledges an imaginary poet at the table) Our friend Gwendolyn. Harold likes his eggs on a Petri dish. (Cracks egg into bowl)
 HAROLD I don't want my eggs scrambled!
 FAITH (Continues to break eggs into bowl. Speaks to the invisible quests) What do you think? Where shall we go on this open page day? Shall we drift upon the

poet's stream of ink, hike a field of metaphors, or dance inside the walls of words?

HAROLD I'm losing my patience. Do I have to come up there and resurrect the boy myself?

FAITH No traffic. Please. No horns!

HAROLD Then jostle the lazy cuss. Twist his ear. Confiscate his blanket!

FAITH We can't maneuver traffic without a compass!

HAROLD The worthless hireling! I'll deduct his pay. For his tardy acts, I'll impact his molars. (SHERRY comes out of her tent, wearing a housecoat and carrying a toothbrush)

FAITH That did it! We have a sighting.

HAROLD The boy is finally up?

FAITH (To SHERRY) Hello, Sweetie.

SHERRY (Sarcastically) And a jolly good morning to you! What's for breakfast?

FAITH Happiness! (Big smile) With a bowl of fried chuckles.

SHERRY Are we due a visit to the pharmacy?

FAITH Did you have pleasant dreams?

SHERRY How many times must I tell you? I don't dream.

FAITH Of course you do.

SHERRY Well, I don't remember them.

FAITH It's Harold who doesn't dream.

SHERRY He dreams more than the rest of us put together. Where is he?

FAITH Inspecting the site.

SHERRY I swear, that man never stops.

FAITH Sweetie, would you pose for Dylan Thomas? He wishes to paint a poem but you don't sit still long enough for him to gather his metaphors.

SHERRY Tell Dylan I have to see the poet out back.

FAITH Really?

SHERRY The latrine.

FAITH Oh. (Thinks) There's a thought. (Composes) Ode to a slight latrine. (The facsimile machine, still under wraps, begins to hum, printing out a message)

HAROLD Harold! The port is open. We have incoming aircraft. Shall I unlock the gate?

SHERRY Stay away from the machinery! Let Sherry handle it!

SHERRY (Having nearly exited, returns to her tent. Removes the cover that protects the machines) Who would contact us at this hour?

FAITH Demons never sleep.

SHERRY I slept like shit.

FAITH The woodwinds were loud last night.

SHERRY It was Amy. I'm lucky if I slept an hour.

FAITH Amy?

SHERRY Matt's girlfriend. She was puking her guts out last night.

FAITH Matt?

SHERRY Your son.

FAITH We don't have a son.

SHERRY Sure. Okay.

FAITH I was meant to have children. Hundreds of children. I carry one now.

HAROLD (Emerges from hole) Is Fay indulging in another of her fantasies? Brandon!

FAITH What's our latitude? Would you draw us a map?

SHERRY We're on a dried-up lake bed. In Arizona. Near the town of Truxton.

FAITH It's very fortunate . . . that we've conceived . . . in such a fallow place. We must find the periscope.

HAROLD My wife? Primed with child? (Kneels) Defying science itself! Faith, your shoe laces are undone.

FAITH (Puts up foot to have shoe tied) After breakfast, we will walk to Truxton.

HAROLD You'll do no such thing.

SHERRY What's in Truxton?

FAITH We will buy a sapling. To celebrate our conception.

HAROLD This is no place to plant anything.

FAITH We will read the poems of Amy Lowell; her words will nourish it.

HAROLD We won't be here more than a few days. Left unattended, your tree will die.

FAITH Where are we going?

SHERRY Kenya.

FAITH Why can't we go home?

SHERRY Your husband has a contract to study a colony of mole-rats.

HAROLD Naked mole-rats. You'll like them, Fay. They're curious little animals. The creatures live in complex underground tunnels and have the ability to regulate their own body temperature. Does that appeal to you?

FAITH Underground tunnels? Leave them be, Harold. Don't disrupt their home.

HAROLD Damn. Where is Brandon? The day is rapidly slipping away. We have a great deal of work to do!

SHERRY (Reading the letter that was transmitted via facsimile) Who's Ruth Meyers?

HAROLD Never heard of her.

SHERRY Editor of "The Journal of Integrated Studies." Impressive.

HAROLD There is no such journal!

SHERRY Perhaps it's a new publication, Professor Roth. And they wish to include you in their premiere issue.

HAROLD Impossible! I would have been forewarned by Doctor Lance.

SHERRY I only know what the letter says. (Reads letter) "Dear Professor Roth, I eagerly anticipate our conference, scheduled for ten a.m., June twenty-first, on site. Respectfully, Ruth Meyers."

HAROLD That makes no sense whatsoever. I never communicated with Ms. Meyers.

FAITH Does Harold need a compass?

HAROLD How did she acquire our number? That's what I want to know!

SHERRY I'll investigate.

HAROLD It's a secure number.

SHERRY That's my understanding.

HAROLD Other than Doctor Lance, no one has access to it.

SHERRY Correct.

FAITH Numbers are overtaking letters. Has anyone noticed?

HAROLD Call the department. See if Doctor Lance compromised our situation.

SHERRY Yes, doctor.

HAROLD A renegade might obtain the number, but how, in god's name, did this woman discover our research station? (Takes letter)

FAITH Numbers multiply

SHERRY I haven't any idea, Doctor.

FAITH Letters, unattended, simply wilt and die.

HAROLD No address. No phone number. How do we contact her? Brandon! (Picks up wire cage) Nobody descends on us without my permission. (Crosses to hole. Observes SHERRY exiting) Where are you going?

SHERRY What's to be done? Doctor Lance won't be in his office for another hour. (Grabs towel from clothes line) Brandon! Get your ass out here. The professor isn't amused. (HAROLD enters hole with wire cage)

BRANDON (Stumbles from his tent. He is extremely handsome and well-built) Good morning, Faith.

FAITH Are you Matt?

BRANDON No. Brandon.

FAITH You are a flawless specimen. Are you our son?

BRANDON No. I'm Edward Brandon, the Third. In service to Doctor Roth.

FAITH Do we know him?

BRANDON The infamous archaeo-geo-physio-bio-neurologist. Your husband.

FAITH Oh, yes. I know why the doctor selected you. You haven't a single blemish. We have a frightful rash.

BRANDON I'm fortunate to have the position. Really. Extremely lucky.

FAITH Were you born before or after the great division?

BRANDON I'm not sure . . . to what you refer.

FAITH The gash . . . (Gestures from vagina to neck)

BRANDON Maybe Doctor Roth can explain. As he says, "I have limited cognitive abilities."

FAITH Separating two distinct eras: The Celebration and The Condemnation.

BRANDON Of what?

FAITH (Chagrined at having to state the obvious) Poetry!

HAROLD (Unseen. From inside hole) I hear voices. Is he up?

FAITH Who, dear?

HAROLD Brandon!

FAITH You hear voices?

HAROLD Don't be conspiring with the help. He's my excavator.

FAITH (Extends hand towards BRANDON.) Might Faith touch you?

BRANDON I have duties to perform, Mrs. Roth.

FAITH (Withdraws hand) Hand over hand.

BRANDON When our work is done, I will read to you.

HAROLD (Emerges from hole) Today's the twentieth. Is it not?

FAITH No. The twenty-first.

HAROLD It's the twentieth. I'm certain.

FAITH In her dance across the sky, the sun leaves a record of her path upon the earth.

BRANDON Faith is right. The twenty-first. Vernal equinox.

HAROLD Check the calendar.

BRANDON (Crosses to the office area) Of course, Doctor Roth. Shall I bring it, so you can see for yourself?

HAROLD Always embrace doubt.

SHERRY (Rushes on, drying her face) Oh, my god! She's coming today!

BRANDON Who?

SHERRY Ruth Meyers.

BRANDON The twenty-first.

SHERRY In three hours!

BRANDON Who is Ruth Meyers?

FAITH It would be extremely useful – to everyone – if we could find the compass.

SHERRY The editor of some highbrow journal.

HAROLD So she says.

BRANDON You don't believe her?

HAROLD It is not in my nature to believe. Her letter is troubling. Never, in all my enterprises, have I scheduled a conference and forgotten it.

BRANDON You consider the data invalid?

HAROLD Precisely! A falsehood. Submitted *deliberately* to mislead us! Very good, Brandon. If confirmed, such malice must be squelched! Has someone removed a lug from the wheel?

BRANDON Perhaps she's a representative of the Nobel Prize Committee. (HAROLD and SHERRY give BRANDON a quizzical look) Under cover.

HAROLD (Intrigued. Hopeful) There's a thought! That would explain a lot.

BRANDON I bet the Committee selected you, Doctor Roth, to receive the award. Her visit is just a formality. To inform you of their decision.

HAROLD I do like the sound of that. (Hands BRANDON a piece of candy)

BRANDON Imagine the adulation!

HAROLD Let's not get overly zealous.

SHERRY I think it's more likely Ruth Meyers wants to propose a project . . . that can only be discussed in private.

HAROLD (Offended) You don't think I merit a visit from the Nobel Committee?

SHERRY Such a visit is inevitable. I just don't think it will be here. Today.

FAITH Could we arrange for her to meet with our poets?

HAROLD No! We have to ward her off, whoever she is. Unknown variables cannot be tolerated. Sherry, conduct a search on the information speedway! Pull up any reference to Ruth Meyers. I want to examine the findings myself. (Crosses to a pup tent) Matthew. There's been an unexpected turn of events. We really need to hurry things along!

FAITH Barometric pressure is dropping.

SHERRY (Turns on computer. Sits) Faith. Could you pour me a coffee?

HAROLD Brandon. Bring around the tarp. We have an hour to excavate. Then I want to cover the site. There's no need to reveal our activities to strangers. Why hasn't the flag been raised?

SHERRY God damn it!

HAROLD What now?

SHERRY Somebody's been fucking with my computer!

FAITH Down draft.

HAROLD Let's not get excited.
 FAITH Wind shear.
 HAROLD You're certain someone tampered with the equipment?
 SHERRY Not a single file responds. It's clear somebody's been pissing on the keys.
 FAITH The weather channel is experiencing a high level of turbulence.
 HAROLD I suppose you suspect my son.
 SHERRY I certainly don't blame your wife.
 HAROLD What of Brandon? Lately, he's been showing signs of unrest.
 SHERRY Be partial to your son. I don't mind. Just tell him to keep his pudgy fingers off my stuff.
 HAROLD Now, don't begrudge Matt.
 SHERRY Amy, too. Or they can pack their bags and leave.
 HAROLD There's no need to issue an ultimatum. I'll handle it.
 FAITH Would anyone like to ride the clock that turns back? (Raises her hand)
 Hands?
 SHERRY Good!
 MATT (Emerges from his tent. He has a slight limp) God! Can't you guys lower the volume?
 HAROLD Matthew! Thank god, you're up. I'd appreciate if you could help Brandon with his chores. We're expecting a visitor and I don't wish us to fall behind. (Slowly, during the course of the play, the gestures of HAROLD will become more animated. Certain precise, ritualized gestures will be repeated with greater and greater frequency. A sense of urgency or controlled hysteria may be detected occasionally in his voice, as he appears to be headed towards a nervous breakdown)
 MATT I didn't come to work.
 HAROLD If we could make an exception this one time. It's critical. Sherry, can you access the web?
 MATT I'm not doing a thing until I've had coffee.
 FAITH Vipers spinning webs. They're everywhere. Thunderclouds, too.
 SHERRY Yeah, but I don't trust the connection,
 HAROLD Where's the girl?
 MATT Her name's Amy, Dad. I wish you'd remember her name.
 HAROLD Tell me her I.Q. That I'll remember.
 MATT It's insulting.
 FAITH (Mimics HAROLD) Tell me her I.Q.
 HAROLD Forgive me. It's easier to track DNA loops than follow your trail of brainless tarts.
 FAITH Tell me her I. Q.
 MATT Just don't . . . pry.
 FAITH Tell me her I. Q.
 HAROLD I hope this – Amy – possesses greater intellectual prowess than your previous paramour.
 MATT Screw you. Good morning, Mom.
 FAITH That's no way to address a professor.
 MATT Did you sleep well?

FAITH The storm kept me awake.
 MATT Mom, it was a perfectly still night.
 FAITH The coming storm.
 HAROLD Sherry, what's the name of Doctor Lance's secretary?
 SHERRY Mrs. Olsen.
 HAROLD I think she's the culprit, guilty of broadcasting our whereabouts.
 SHERRY Doctor Lance seems pleased with her.
 HAROLD I never liked her. She has the teeth of a ferret.
 SHERRY Could you speak to Matt about our problem?
 MATT What problem?
 FAITH Did everyone file their teeth?
 HAROLD Sherry would appreciate if you didn't operate her computer.
 MATT What do you mean?
 SHERRY I know it's tempting, not having an entertainment center to occupy your time, but this computer is your father's lifeblood.
 MATT I didn't touch his computer.
 HAROLD (To SHERRY.) What did I tell you?
 FAITH The computer is fueled by blood?
 MATT Mom, do you have a knife?
 HAROLD She doesn't have any.
 MATT She's gotta have a knife.
 HAROLD I'm telling you there are no knives.
 MATT How does she cook?
 HAROLD Stop contradicting me! (His actions, re-clipping a barrette, will be tender thought his words may be harsh) Fay, let me fix your hair.
 FAITH They were confiscated.
 MATT Why?
 FAITH We cut Harold's shirt.
 HAROLD And your wrists!
 MATT Why didn't you tell me?
 HAROLD If you were to visit less sporadically, you'd know these things.
 FAITH There was no garden to tend. We cut the orchids from Harold's shirt.
 MATT You cut yourself?
 FAITH We sewed it back together.
 MATT Cut yourself?
 HAROLD Let it go!
 MATT Why?
 FAITH The words were trapped. Unable to breathe. We simply opened the gates.
 SHERRY I got a response. The FAX was sent from a telecommunications site in Truxton.
 HAROLD Truxton? Just down the road?
 SHERRY For all we know, the woman could be watching us right now.
 HAROLD Sherry, I think you should contact Doctor Lance at home. Our situation is something of an emergency, wouldn't you say?
 FAITH Should we relocate the runways?
 SHERRY Do you know how many women are named Ruth Meyers?

HAROLD Put them through a sieve. Every one of the shrews!

FAITH We often sit for hours, with binoculars, watching the poet, but she doesn't write.

HAROLD Matt, this calls for a change of plans. Rather than help Brandon, would you guard the perimeter? See to it that no one enters the compound.

AMY (Emerges from her tent) What's going on?

HAROLD The flag, Brandon! The flag!

AMY Good morning, Mr. Roth.

HAROLD Hello, Amber.

MATT Coffee? *Amy*.

BRANDON Ask him to carry his gun, Doctor Roth.

HAROLD Matt? You possess a gun?

FAITH No guns!

BRANDON He showed it to me last night.

HAROLD When did you buy a gun?

MATT I didn't.

SHERRY They don't sell guns to felons, Doctor Roth.

HAROLD That is *not* funny, Sherry! Where is it?

MATT In the pickup.

HAROLD A gun *would* lend a certain level of authority.

FAITH No guns! (MATT exits)

AMY Good morning, Mrs. Roth.

FAITH Are you Ruth?

AMY I'm Amy. We met last night. Remember?

FAITH Last night? Where were we last night?

AMY I'm Matt's girlfriend. We drove up from Tucson yesterday. To spend the weekend with you.

FAITH What's your name?

AMY Amy.

FAITH Do you know Amy Lowell, the poet?

AMY No.

FAITH We often have tea and lament the size of modern thoughts. You're Matthew's sister?

AMY His *girlfriend*.

FAITH You're one of them. (AMY gives BRANDON a confused look)

BRANDON It refers to . . . on what side of the line you were born. I think.

AMY And Matt says *I'm* difficult. (Observing BRANDON raise the flag)

That's quite a flag.

BRANDON It represents the Society for Integrated Global Research.

HAROLD The Society is my primary benefactor.

AMY Shall I salute?

FAITH I could recite an Amy Lowell poem, Amy.

AMY Is it short?

HAROLD No recitations! We have quite enough noise as it is.

MATT (Returns with pistol) Isn't she a beauty?

HAROLD Did you ever put it to use?

MATT All the time.
 HAROLD I never shot a gun.
 MATT Want me to teach you?
 HAROLD Does one experience a sense of euphoria when engaging such an instrument?
 MATT Dad. Speak regular.
 HAROLD Where would I aim? What's to kill in the desert?
 MATT We can make a decoy. And use it as our target.
 FAITH No, no, no! No one sees well enough to handle dynamite
 AMY You guys have a TV?
 HAROLD There's to be no violence when Meyers arrives. Simply brandish your weapon and inform her you have orders to escort her to base camp.
 MATT Right.
 HAROLD I intend your presence to establish a tone. During her stay, Meyers must be kept on the offensive.
 MATT I can do that.
 SHERRY Doctor Roth, could you remind our guest of the policy?
 HAROLD What policy?
 SHERRY The use of my computer.
 HAROLD Right. I was meaning to broach the subject.
 FAITH Everybody! Sharpen your pencils. There's to be a lecture on policy.
 HAROLD Under no circumstances, April, should you use Sherry's computer.
 FAITH Every time we try to write – the pencil hasn't any lead.
 MATT (To SHERRY) Do you have cardboard?
 SHERRY Check with your mother. She hordes that sort of thing.
 FAITH No guns. No cardboard.
 SHERRY Here. (Hands MATT a small piece of cardboard)
 MATT It's too small. I want the decoy to be life size.
 SHERRY Doesn't it take more skill to hit a small target?
 MATT There's not even enough room to draw a heart.
 FAITH Cardboard is a terrible disease.
 HAROLD Brandon. The blueprints.
 FAITH Its symptoms are similar to the plastic virus.
 AMY God, you guys need a TV.
 FAITH One rarely recovers from the infection. Isn't anybody going to eat breakfast!
 SHERRY There might be some empty boxes out back. (MATT exits)
 HAROLD (To BRANDON) Stand there. (Gives one end of tape measure to BRANDON. They check the width of the hole) Four feet, six inches. Good. We know our dimensions. (Consults blueprints. He is gleeful while calculating and verifying figures) We've correctly translated the factored numbers from the paper to the ground. My congratulations! Let us continue our analysis.
 FAITH Congratulations!
 HAROLD (Measures length of hole) Nine feet, three inches. Perfect. The scale has been observed. We are to be commended. Now, let us scrutinize our perpendiculars. Descend. Plumb the depths, boy.

BRANDON You want me to climb down?
 HAROLD Of course! Are you not hearing me?
 BRANDON I'm not always sure what I hear, doctor. (Enters hole)
 FAITH The page on which Sylvia unfolds her poems. Sublime dimensions!
 HAROLD (Kneeling. Reads tape) Six feet, nine inches. Allow me to execute my calculations. The blueprints are very specific. We must not deviate from the instructions. Remember that, Brandon. Never deviate. Another three inches and we will have reached our threshold – *eight* feet. At that depth we should encounter our first specimen.
 BRANDON (Unseen, from within hole) Seven feet, Doctor Roth.
 FAITH Specimen?
 HAROLD Correct. I'll get the bucket and pick axe.
 FAITH Who is the specimen?
 BRANDON (Appears on ladder) But you said "eight feet."
 HAROLD No, you're mistaken.
 BRANDON A moment ago. I swear it. You said "eight."
 HAROLD It's not what you think I might have said; it's what the plans dictate.
 BRANDON Yes, sir.
 FAITH Could we please all use the same dictionary?
 HAROLD The plans clearly state a depth of seven feet. I've been assigned the role of supervisor. Don't assume you have that authority. Please!
 BRANDON Yes, Doctor Roth. I understand, Doctor Roth. (Accepts bucket with rope tied to handle. Disappears into hole)
 FAITH Did you notice our dress?
 AMY It's pretty. Not something I'd wear . . . but it works . . . in the desert.
 FAITH I pulled it off the merry-go-round.
 AMY Yeah. There is something . . . carnival . . . about the piece.
 FAITH If we could only find a locksmith . . . to remove the chains. We prefer buttons.
 MATT (Enters with empty cardboard box and several wooden stakes) What about a scissors?
 SHERRY We keep them under lock and key, too.
 MATT And a pencil.
 SHERRY I expect to be reimbursed. (Hands scissors and a pencil to MATT) For everything.
 BRANDON (Appears on ladder) It came to me, Doctor Roth. Down there. I remembered. You're absolutely correct. Just as you said. "Eight feet." I apologize.
 HAROLD But that's incorrect. Our objective is seven feet.
 BRANDON I was thinking you said "eight" and meant "eight."
 HAROLD I most certainly did not!
 BRANDON You don't remember? Perhaps, if we consult the plans . . .
 HAROLD Go see for yourself.
 FAITH Sherry, we would like a scissors, too, please.
 SHERRY What do you want cut?
 FAITH The cord.
 SHERRY Of course.

FAITH So we can go home.
 SHERRY Be patient. Someday, soon, you'll be going home. Don't worry.
 FAITH Why do you stay?
 SHERRY You're my family.
 FAITH You're a poet, too?
 SHERRY No. Only you.
 FAITH Words soothe the rash. Do you have a blemish?
 SHERRY Don't we all?
 FAITH Not Brandon.
 MATT (Places cardboard against side of trailer) Amy, stand here, so I can trace your outline on the cardboard.
 AMY What? I'm the target?
 MATT It'll only take a minute.
 AMY (Complies) This is freaky, knowing it's me you'll be shooting. Listen, when you have a moment, there's something I have to tell you. In private.
 FAITH Matt is punctuated with scars.
 MATT Hold still.
 AMY Don't be a smart ass and draw me like I'm naked, with my tits and girlie showing. You hear?
 MATT Shut up, Amy.
 AMY Are you gonna let your dad take a shot at me? 'Cause that's just weird.
 MATT Spread your legs.
 FAITH (From a distance, observes MATT at work. Speaking slowly) She stood against the world . . . and on her continents . . . he drew the road they would take.
 AMY (Aroused. Unflinchingly) Pervert.
 MATT (Continuing to draw her outline) Do you feel me undressing you?
 AMY I get it.
 MATT Say it!
 AMY Not here!
 MATT Say . . . it!
 AMY No!
 FAITH From Polaris to Capricorn they went
 MATT Come one. Take me.
 AMY I'm not playing.
 MATT I'm done. Step away.
 FAITH They passed through the ruins of broken cities.
 BRANDON (Consulting blueprints) As you say, Doctor Roth. My sincerest apologies for having contradicted you.
 FAITH They hiked countless dunes and weathered raging storms.
 HAROLD Think nothing of it.
 FAITH From Ordu to Jaypur.
 BRANDON Do forgive me. I sometimes overstep my bounds.
 FAITH Never stopping at the tombs of her childhood heroes.
 HAROLD See that it doesn't happen again. (BRANDON enters hole)
 MATT Sherry, do you have any colored pencils?

SHERRY No. But your mother has a set of markers.
 FAITH We do love color. Use all you want. Feel free to decorate the doctor's blueprints.
 MATT Just tell me where they are, Mom. I'll get them.
 FAITH No, no. You'll never find them. They don't appear unless she says the secret word. (Exits into trailer. MATT begins to cut out the cardboard figure)
 HAROLD (Attending to other business matters) Brandon. Let me know when the bucket's ready.
 AMY Is your mom stoned?
 MATT Amy!
 AMY Well, what kinda drug is she on?
 MATT They're not drugs. It's medicine.
 AMY She sounds stoned.
 MATT Don't say that!
 AMY I'd love to offer her a toke. See what she says when she's really wiggled out.
 MATT That ain't funny!
 HAROLD You hear, Brandon?
 AMY Can we? Offer her a hit?
 MATT Cut it out! She's my mom. No!
 AMY What's the scoop? Why's she so loony?
 MATT She has a personality disorder.
 AMY Whoa!
 MATT Just ignore it, okay?
 AMY Could we go into town and buy a TV?
 MATT I'm fine.
 AMY It ain't for you! I'm bored!
 MATT Take the truck. Get the TV yourself.
 AMY I need the credit card.
 MATT No way.
 HAROLD (Crosses to hole) What's the hold up?
 MATT (Leaves the cardboard figure and approaches his father) Dad, if you have a minute.
 HAROLD Must it be now?
 MATT It can wait.
 HAROLD (Puts work aside) I'm sorry, son, what's on your mind?
 MATT Never mind.
 HAROLD Come, come. Don't hold back.
 MATT It's about the house.
 HAROLD Is something wrong? I just had a roof installed last year.
 MATT Nothing's wrong. It could use a paint job, though.
 HAROLD Find a contractor and get an estimate. I'll need his license.
 MATT Did you ever think about selling it?
 HAROLD Why would I do that?
 MATT You and Mom never stay.
 HAROLD But it's there for us. When we retire.
 MATT That could be years from now.

HAROLD Your mother's heart is set on returning some day, you know.
MATT You could re-invest.
HAROLD Where would you live?
MATT I've been thinking about moving. To Seattle.
HAROLD Oh, god. I'm not at all fond of their centers of higher education!
AMY His friend, Jeff, moved to Seattle. If Matt moves there, Jeff will have a place to live - rent free.
MATT Amy, this is between Dad and me.
HAROLD Leave Tucson? Out of the question.
MATT Tucson's gotten old.
AMY Not as *friendly* as it used to be.
MATT Shut it! I know a good realtor. He'll look out for us.
AMY (Eyeing MATT) There's been an upswing of crime in Tucson.
MATT Amy, would you shift into a lower gear? At least two dozen people are interested in the house.
FAITH (Emerges from trailer with markers) They're all here, except one. (HAROLD turns away from MATT, not wishing to discuss the issue in front of FAITH)
MATT What's missing?
FAITH Orange. She wishes to stay inside with Picasso.
AMY You guys have a cat?
FAITH (Referring to markers) I feed them twice daily. To maintain their brilliant odor.
AMY I love animals! Can I see?
SHERRY Any pets would be quite imaginary, Amy.
FAITH Aren't they delicious?
AMY Oh.
MATT How big is the heart?
FAITH Ask your father. He's the specialist.
HAROLD Make a fist.
MATT (Makes a fist) Yeah?
HAROLD That's the size of your heart.
FAITH It has been shrinking.
AMY What?
FAITH The heart of mankind. Over time.
MATT That's crazy.
FAITH Auden was the first to point this out. "Our world in stupor lies." (MATT begins to decorate the figure)
HAROLD You should have a bucket ready by now.
SHERRY Oh, shit!
HAROLD What is it now?
SHERRY We lost power.
HAROLD Check the connectors. I'll inspect the fuses. (Exits)
FAITH Batten the hatches.
AMY What are they looking for?
MATT Toads.
AMY Out here?

MATT They're some weird species. That can survive underground for years.

FAITH There have been poets . . . many poets . . . who testified the heart can survive underground, too . . . for many years.

AMY Why? Why dig up toads?

MATT Ask Dad.

HAROLD (From offstage) Sherry. Send Brandon back here.

SHERRY (Approaches hole) Brandon? The professor needs you. (Looks in hole) My god! Brandon! Are you alright? (Enters hole) Professor!

AMY What's wrong?

FAITH Matt, is there something you can do?

HAROLD (Enters) What's happening?

AMY I think Brandon's sick.

FAITH We can't allow him to perish.

HAROLD Brandon? What is it?

BRANDON (Emerges from hole) Sometimes I pass out. It's nothing.

AMY I'll get you water.

HAROLD I am surrounded by mediocrity! (Softens) Have a seat. Compose yourself.

FAITH Compose yourself.

BRANDON (Sits) You don't suppose the site is filled with noxious fumes?

HAROLD Don't be silly, boy. I would know if we encountered any toxic agent.

FAITH (Mimics HAROLD) Don't be silly, boy.

BRANDON The deadly gas could be overtaking the camp this very moment.

HAROLD Absurd!

AMY (Hands BRANDON water) Here.

BRANDON We could be breathing poisoned air. All of us! And not even know it

HAROLD There is no threat of asphyxiation. Look at us. We're all perfectly normal human beings.

BRANDON I'm sorry, Doctor Roth.

HAROLD Get ahold of yourself. I've done this for years. There's never been a fatality under my watch.

FAITH Would it help if we all stopped breathing?

HAROLD Faith, you're not being helpful!

AMY (Sympathetic to FAITH) Hand over mouth.

HAROLD (Glares at AMY) You!

MATT Zip it.

BRANDON (Eyeing the hole suspiciously) Can we install a propeller? To keep the air moving?

HAROLD We haven't any such device, Brandon. Sherry, could you fire up the generator? (SHERRY exits)

FAITH Air is not what it used to be.

BRANDON What about an alarm? Which I can activate if I pass out. So you can order a medical alert.

FAITH Currents have changed.

HAROLD The plans don't call for fans or alarms or any other such paraphernalia!

FAITH Castles have a much more difficult time staying afloat.

BRANDON I'm telling you, oxygen could be in short supply down there.

HAROLD Brandon, for god's sake, the hole is only seven feet deep. We are not chopping our way through anthracite, hundreds of feet beneath the earth.

BRANDON I've heard of men suffocating in far smaller quarters than that.

HAROLD The trench is properly ventilated. Shut up!

FAITH Hands over ears.

HAROLD Now, I want you to sit for a minute and collect your thoughts. I have other business that needs my attention.

MATT (Holds up cardboard figure) What do you think?

AMY It's fucked.

MATT What's with you? (AMY grabs black marker and forcefully covers over the red heart) Yeah. What was I thinking? Giving you a heart. Stupid me.

AMY You don't get it, do you?

FAITH The shrinking heart.

AMY You're making it so easy.

MATT Huh?

AMY I came this weekend, saying I was going to decide.

MATT Decide? What?

AMY If I should break up . . . or stick it out.

MATT This whole trip . . . that's what you've been thinking?

AMY Don't flip on me.

MATT Why? Why now?

AMY Until I know about us . . . I can't decide other things.

MATT What things?

AMY Stuff!

MATT Well, decide, for fuck's sake. I don't want to spend the weekend thinking this is a test. Is that what it is? A test?

AMY No. Maybe. I don't know.

MATT I went through the whole report card thing with Dad. I don't need someone else keeping score.

FAITH Harold? Did we place a headstone on Phillip's grave?

HAROLD Yes, dear.

FAITH It's worrisome to think of him unattended.

SHERRY (Enters) The generator is out of gas.

FAITH What did it say?

HAROLD How can that be? Brandon, when was the last time you checked the fuel tank?

BRANDON Yesterday. It was full.

SHERRY We haven't used it in weeks.

FAITH What was written on his headstone?

HAROLD Did you see? Was there a leak?

SHERRY No. Look for yourself.

FAITH (To imaginary poets at table) Dearest friends, we apologize for the debris. Perhaps tomorrow there will be less warfare. Wouldn't that be lovely? To speak below the drone? Was it a peppermint time? Did you twist any phrases or squeeze honey from a rock?

HAROLD Matt, we're going to siphon gas from your pickup. Sherry, find a hose and can.

MATT How am I supposed to get home if I give you my gas?
HAROLD We'll take that up later. This is only a temporary setback. I'm going to check the transformer. This will not defeat us. (HAROLD, MATT and SHERRY exit)

FAITH (Bidding farewell to the poets) Farewell. Hold onto your wits or the world will devour you!

AMY Why do you work for that creep?
BRANDON Doctor Roth is a very famous archaeo-geo-physio-bio-neurologist.
AMY Sorry, but I'm not impressed.
BRANDON It's because of Doctor Roth that I've decided to become an intellectual.
AMY Really?
BRANDON He even encouraged me to pursue a doctorate. But my acceptance into graduate school depends completely on his recommendation.
AMY I see.
BRANDON Don't you honor the value of an education?
AMY Not the kind you're pushing.
BRANDON (Mechanically) Without knowledge, the world cannot be perfected.
AMY What kind of shit talk is that?
BRANDON Doctor Roth would be very displeased to hear you say that.
FAITH "When poems knock down walls and choke politicians" . . . that's a perfect world.
AMY I'm not the first girl Matt brought to visit his parents, am I?
BRANDON No.
FAITH "When poems scream and break the air."
AMY What were they like? The others?
FAITH Maybe then, once again, we can build castles in the sky.
BRANDON They couldn't wait to leave.
AMY The accommodations aren't exactly inviting.
BRANDON You're the prettiest.
AMY Really?
BRANDON Of his girlfriends, you're the prettiest.
AMY Thanks. What about you?
BRANDON Me?
AMY Do you have a girlfriend?
BRANDON Nah.
AMY That's hard to believe.
BRANDON Doctor Roth discourages contact with people outside the station.
"Interference," he calls it.
AMY And Sherry?
BRANDON What about her?
AMY Is she unattached, too?
BRANDON Yeah.
AMY I think you're wrong.
SHERRY (From offstage) Brandon. Can you give us a hand? (BRANDON exits)
AMY (Approaches FAITH) What do you do all day?
FAITH Yesterday we flew to Kathmandu in a hot air balloon with Mr. Jarrell.

AMY How was the flight?

FAITH Marvelous. He read several of his poems. Our favorite, of course, is “Bats.” (Quoting) “All night, in happiness, she hunts and flies. Her high sharp cries, like shining needlepoints of sound, go out into the night and, echoing back, tell her what they have touched.” (Pause) Realize, when it comes to recitation, there’s no substitute for the author.

AMY (Has wandered into SHERRY’S office area. She has picked up a letter. She reads) “Dear Doctor Roth, The technicians at NorLab confirm your field studies. When Wood Frogs are subjected to freezing episodes they produce large quantities of glucose, which act as an anti-freezing agent. In repeated studies, the subjects were revived after sixty-five percent of body fluids had turned to ice. The commission believes this ability to adapt to such adversity is applicable to humans. Congratulations! A check has been issued to your department at the university. Sincerely, Doctor Maynard Brown.” (To FAITH as she puts down the letter) How’s that for poetry? (Pause) Your husband sounds impressive. You must be proud.

FAITH He leaves his mark.

AMY The flag . . . planted around the world?

FAITH We lose track. So many expeditions. The doctor dredged tar pits in Oman. On the Galapagos he gathered tortoise eggs. He even snared hawks on the flats of Utah and dissected them. Harold’s very skilled with the scalpel, you know. Has the touch of a surgeon.

AMY I would have guessed as much. (Sits next to FAITH, who has some books scattered around her. AMY picks up a book) I presume you have other ways of traveling. Independent of your husband. (Casually flips through book) With the help of some . . . poetry . . . pills?

FAITH What do you mean? What do you want?

AMY What are their names?

FAITH (Confused) Their names? We had so many. Most of them died, you know. Some ripped out their hearts. Others were suffocated by modern times. (Pause) Nettie. Poor girl. Her parachute got entangled in the propeller of a computer.

AMY Yikes. (Picks up another book) I often imagine my death. As a way to pass the time. It’s going to be violent. I’m pretty sure of that. (Notices photograph on the inside cover) This is you! (Closes book to look at title) This is your book!

FAITH Yes.

AMY Holy shit!

FAITH (Takes book from AMY) That was a long time ago.

MATT (Returns with SHERRY. She heads to her office area. He picks up cardboard decoy) I convinced Brandon to shoot a few plugs. It might calm him down. (Exits with cardboard figure)

AMY (Approaches SHERRY) Who exactly does Doctor Roth work for?

SHERRY Officially, he’s employed by the university.

AMY So this would be a vacation?

SHERRY It’s called “permanent paid leave.”

AMY Nice.

SHERRY To be accurate, the university acts like a clearing house. The Department Head recommends clients, facilitates publication -- the usual academic shenanigans. And Harold contracts through them.

AMY Who does he contract with?

SHERRY Whomever. Private corporations. Research firms. Even the government.

AMY Am I being too nosy?

SHERRY I know my limits.

FAITH The University of Tulsa proposed to our daughter, Martha.

AMY I guess you can tell. Matt doesn't say much about his parents.

SHERRY That's typical for a teenager, isn't it?

FAITH Harold was so proud. He couldn't stop clicking his chops.

SHERRY I was never one to go on about my parents, either.

FAITH Unfortunately, Martha went up in smoke when the university burned her thoughts. We don't know where she's buried.

AMY Does Doctor Roth ever teach?

SHERRY That's not really an option.

AMY Oh? Why not?

SHERRY I'll let you take that up with the professor yourself. (Gunshot off stage)

FAITH So many children succumb to the smoke.

AMY What's your part in all this?

SHERRY I'm his secretary.

AMY That's all?

SHERRY Do you suspect something more?

AMY And Brandon. What's his part?

SHERRY Brandon is the doctor's muscle. I'm his keyboard operator. Now, if you don't mind, I've work to do.

AMY Where's your family?

SHERRY Conquering the world in a sailboat.

AMY Grim.

SHERRY Dad still thinks he's a naval officer.

HAROLD (Returns with BRANDON, who, having been scolded, heads straight for the hole) The power line has been cut.

SHERRY What do you mean?

HAROLD It's no accident we lost power. The line was deliberately severed.

SHERRY How do you know?

HAROLD A clean break. No fraying whatsoever. Someone means to sabotage us.

SHERRY I'll call the electric company on my mobile.

HAROLD The police, too. Tell them to search the area. I won't be deterred. My work is far too important.

FAITH What is your work, Angel?

AMY I hose down trucks at a concrete plant. Make a poem of that.

FAITH It can be done!

AMY There's a chance I'll be moving to Seattle. But I have to work out a few things.

FAITH Seattle. We have a daughter there. She collects allegories for the fire brigade.

BRANDON (From inside hole) Professor Roth. You can empty the bucket.
 HAROLD Coming. Does it seem hazy?
 SHERRY I'm not convinced we're safe here, Doctor Roth. Perhaps we should take Matt's car and drive into town.
 HAROLD We are not about to abandon our claim. We're too close to the prize.
 (Struggling to raise the bucket) Exactly how full is the bucket, Brandon?
 BRANDON It's packed to the brim.
 HAROLD The protocol is to fill it half.
 BRANDON But we're in a hurry.
 HAROLD I'm not a machine. I can't hoist a ton of rocks thrown haphazardly into a holding device.
 BRANDON I'll remove some.
 HAROLD Nor am I an excavating genie! I can't levitate the payload.
 BRANDON I'm taking some out!
 HAROLD We have to employ mathematical means to determine our abilities.
 FAITH We have to employ mathematical means to determine our abilities.
 HAROLD Using precise formulas, we determine the mass, force of gravity, and measure of resistance to arrive at a figure known as work. I . . . CANNOT . . . LIFT . . . MORE . . . THAN . . . FORTY . . . POUNDS!
 FAITH Gravity is not what it used to be.
 BRANDON It's emptied!
 HAROLD Brandon, at this rate you'll never matriculate. (Passing observation) Have the tires lost pressure?
 FAITH Dreams fall much faster than they used to.
 BRANDON (Appears on the ladder) Do you want to trade places?
 HAROLD Brandon, please, an academic solution is far better than one based on brawn.
 BRANDON An academic solution?
 HAROLD A logical one. Sparked by intellectual acuity.
 BRANDON That sounds good, Doctor. I agree. (Another gunshot offstage)
 SHERRY Professor Roth, I can't reach the police *or* power company.
 HAROLD Keep trying, damn it!
 SHERRY I no longer have service on my mobile.
 HAROLD (Controlled rage) God help us.
 BRANDON (After a pause) But you don't believe in God.
 HAROLD I was speaking metaphorically.
 BRANDON Oh.
 HAROLD (Struggling to not explode) You do understand the difference between metaphor and a literal statement.
 BRANDON I'm not sure.
 HAROLD Well, there's a fine line that runs through speech. You'll have to learn to distinguish where it goes.
 BRANDON I just heard what you said.
 HAROLD The subtleties that separate words and meanings . . . are subtle . . . but you have to find them nonetheless.
 BRANDON Oh. (Enters hole. HAROLD picks up a trowel and throws it in the dirt. Paces. SHERRY continues to dial on her mobile)

FAITH There's a fine thread that binds together words . . . but it is broken.
 RUTH (Enters and stands, unnoticed, on the edge of the stage. She is sixty years old and extremely pale. Her attire is becoming, but non-traditional. She carries a large stylish briefcase. She wears small dark-rimmed glasses, gloves, and a brimless hat. She observes the scene for a long moment)
 FAITH (Pointing at RUTH) Harold.
 SHERRY (Jumps up) May I help you?
 RUTH I'm Ruth Meyers.
 HAROLD But you're not expected for another two hours.
 RUTH I like to arrive early. It's one of my trademarks.
 HAROLD (To SHERRY) Where's Matt?
 RUTH Are you referring to your sentry?
 HAROLD (Calls off) Matt?!!
 RUTH I walked right by him. He was shooting what appeared to be a cartoon.
 HAROLD You walked?
 RUTH Such a lovely day, I couldn't pass up the opportunity. So I climbed out and sent the limo driver back to town.
 HAROLD Limo driver?
 RUTH I suspect you'll meet him later.
 MATT (Enters, gun drawn, pointed at RUTH) Sorry, Dad. (He stands guard, waiting to take his cue from HAROLD)
 RUTH This is not the kind of reception I expected.
 SHERRY We're not accustomed to unannounced visitors.
 RUTH Matt? (Pause) That is your name, isn't it? (Pause) Would you mind, dear? I have little tolerance for firearms. (MATT doesn't move. RUTH turns to SHERRY) Ms. Hansen, my presence was hardly unannounced. I sent a facsimile. Its receipt was verified by the doctor.
 SHERRY It said you would arrive at ten.
 RUTH (Addresses MATT. Her tone hardens) Don't be foolish, boy. Put the gun away.
 MATT (Getting increasingly agitated by RUTH'S aggressiveness) I only take orders from Dad.
 RUTH There's a camera installed on a satellite two hundred miles above us, Matthew, its eye trained on this very site, recording every move. Your crime would hardly go unnoticed.
 MATT You're full of shit.
 RUTH (To SHERRY) I'd be most appreciative if someone offered me a seat.
 HAROLD Matt. Put the gun down. (MATT obeys, retreats, sulks)
 RUTH Thank you, Doctor Roth. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like a moment to catch my breath. (AMY offers RUTH a stool)
 FAITH Harold, remember our daughter Persephone? A satellite swooped down and carried her off to Chernobyl.
 HAROLD Hush!
 BRANDON (Still in hole, not visible) Doctor Roth? The bucket is ready.
 HAROLD I hope we didn't offend you.
 RUTH (Sweetly. Gushingly) Not at all! (Sits. Places briefcase on lap)

HAROLD We have to be cautious.
RUTH I, more than anyone, understand the need for discretion.
HAROLD Our suspicions are not completely without merit.
RUTH I didn't say they were.
FAITH We need more children with the heart of Perseus.
HAROLD My secretary informs me you're editor of "The Journal of Integrated Studies."
RUTH A pretense. I'm not associated with that publication in any way.
 (Snaps open briefcase. Removes wind-up alarm timer and inhaler. Closes
 case)
BRANDON Doctor Roth, are you there?
HAROLD Now look here!
RUTH Please, if I could have a moment to recover. (Winds timer) I slept fitfully last
 night and face a rather daunting task. I shan't be long. (Uses inhaler) That
 satellite, Matt, has the eye of a god. (Instantly falls into a deep trance. The
 group, without moving, observes RUTH as the lights fade)

ACT TWO

(Act Two picks up where Act One concluded. For several long moments the group suspiciously regards RUTH. The group then begins to quietly, slowly disperse)

BRANDON (From inside the hole) Doctor Roth, I'm feeling faint.
 HAROLD Not again! (Runs to hole. Peers in)
 BRANDON Could I . . . may I . . . come out?
 HAROLD Engage your mind. Push the feeling aside.
 BRANDON I don't think I can push that hard.
 HAROLD Come, come, my boy. You're a lad of tremendous physical stamina. We can't afford another episode.
 FAITH He needs a compass.
 HAROLD Fay, this is not something one solves with a compass! (To BRANDON) Are we getting the upper hand, Brandon?
 BRANDON (Appears on ladder) I'm better now. I applied my resources. My mental resources. Sorry, Doctor Roth. I won't let it happen again.
 HAROLD I wish you'd spend less time apologizing and focus more on clearing the hurdles.
 BRANDON No. Really. I feel surprisingly good.
 HAROLD I think a small reward is in order. What shall it be? (Digs in pocket) Butterscotch or caramel?
 BRANDON Are you out of licorice?
 HAROLD (His shoulders drop severely) In my hypothesis, licorice is not an option.
 BRANDON I'm sorry, Doctor Roth. I didn't abide by the rules. I should be grateful for anything. Give me a caramel. As punishment, I'll return it. (HAROLD waves him off and BRANDON exits into hole)
 AMY Now's the time.
 MATT To do what?
 AMY Whatever. Search her bags. Peek under the carpet. Knock her off. It *is* a wig.
 MATT What about the camera?
 AMY Bogus.
 SHERRY Don't touch her!
 AMY Why? You know her? You have a thing for this perv?
 FAITH It's time to pack. Harold, collect the cases. (She finds a crate and begins throwing objects into it)
 RUTH (Bell on timer rings. RUTH instantly springs to life) Much better! Thank you for indulging me. (Timer and inhaler are returned to the briefcase. She extracts a small camera. Snaps briefcase shut and places it on the ground) My left eye, particularly, needed a rest. (Surveying) My! (Walks to edge of stage) Quite a claim you've established here. (Takes photo)
 HAROLD (Joins RUTH) I really must ask you to refrain from documenting the grounds.
 RUTH That's absurd! Why?

HAROLD (Whispering) There are certain . . . erratic . . . behaviors . . . within the camp which, if committed to film, might prove embarrassing.

RUTH I don't understand!

HAROLD Well, the actions of my wife, for one. Of course, the woman is above reproach, but she does have her moments of . . . hardship. Then there's the case of the young man, my employee . . . an unexplainable neurological condition that strikes him at inopportune times. These incidents, you see, if captured on film, might be misconstrued. They are, at best, rare occurrences, related to the tensions of our daily regimen, and I would hate for them to be viewed in a critical light.

RUTH I shall exercise sound judgment.

HAROLD Thank you. Thank you most kindly. It will be appreciated.

FAITH Has everyone heard the radio announcement?

RUTH Think nothing of it.

FAITH Move all sensitive objects indoors.

MATT Shucks, Amy. I guess you're stuck out here.

SHERRY What's the occasion?

FAITH You haven't noticed the change in atmosphere?

SHERRY Frankly, no.

FAITH We are experiencing a solar flare.

RUTH Fortunately I carry a remedy for every emergency. (Produces a bottle from her briefcase) Gin. (To HAROLD) Would you care for some?

HAROLD No, thank you.

RUTH Doctor Roth, do you know what would really please me? (Pulls out bottle of tonic)

HAROLD No.

RUTH I don't mean to cause a fuss.

HAROLD Not at all.

RUTH (Closes briefcase, keeping it on her lap) If, among your supplies, you have . . . and could spare . . . a bit of ice . . . I would absolutely be in heaven.

HAROLD We are a fully self-contained operation. Of course we have ice.

RUTH Not finely ground, mind you. Chunks of ice. So I can crush them with my teeth.

HAROLD Faith, if you could oblige our guest.

RUTH (Opens case and produces a bottle of fine champagne) Also, could your assistant put this on ice?

HAROLD She's my wife.

RUTH As I said: assistant. (Removes gloves)

SHERRY We may want to ration the ice. We're temporarily out of power.

RUTH You don't say!

FAITH (Approaches SHERRY with container) Apply this to your forehead and ankles. It will shield us from radiation.

SHERRY This is detergent.

FAITH We will be safe *and* spotless.

BRANDON (Appears from the hole with a bucket of dirt) Are we suspending operations, Doctor Roth?

RUTH You must be Brandon!
 BRANDON Yes.
 RUTH I'm Ruth Meyers. You're exactly as I imagined.
 BRANDON Really?
 RUTH You bear a striking resemblance to someone I know.
 FAITH (Hands detergent to BRANDON) Apply this! (To HAROLD) Harold, the
 freeways are crowded. It's time to sail or we'll get stuck in a wind jam.
 HAROLD We are not leaving our claim!
 FAITH Oh, professor, listen to the radio for once.
 HAROLD Go jabber with your poet friends! (Turns to RUTH) Now, if we might get to
 the purpose of your visit.
 RUTH I thought, together, we might embark on a fact-finding mission.
 HAROLD That is one of my specialties!
 RUTH Doctor Roth! There is no need to convince me of your expertise. Your
 reputation is undisputed.
 HAROLD I'm glad to hear it.
 RUTH (Extracts HAROLD'S resume from briefcase) Really. I never encountered
 such an extensive resume. And this, I'm told, is the abbreviated version. Two
 books. Six articles. A museum installation. All within three years
 SHERRY We like to say Doctor Roth has "The Curious Condition."
 RUTH Oh, very good!
 BRANDON And that he's engaged in "The Pursuit of Perfection."
 RUTH Equally admirable!
 FAITH (Sweetly) Harold doesn't observe traffic signs.
 RUTH Neither do I!
 FAITH Without a rudder, how do you avoid pinballs?
 RUTH Despite the wrong turn or occasional skirmish, I always get there.
 FAITH We travel best with a compass. Of course, it helps to have directions printed
 on the ground.
 RUTH A fact-finding mission . . . to verify or refute the records.
 HAROLD (To SHERRY who offers ice to RUTH) Thank you. (To RUTH) If I could
 point out, Ms. Meyers, we do have established means of communicating with
 clients. (BRANDON enters hole)
 RUTH You refer to your liaison, Doctor Lance, I assume?
 HAROLD I do.
 RUTH He didn't mention me?
 HAROLD No, madam.
 RUTH Well! Next time you see the doctor give him a good scolding. Would you do
 that?
 FAITH The doctor is a riddle who can't solve himself.
 MATT Dad, where do you keep the oil can?
 HAROLD In the hitch box with the tools. Why?
 MATT I want to lubricate the gun.
 FAITH Matthew, why don't you put the gun away and lubricate the exit ramp?
 RUTH Be careful not to stray, Matthew. Remember the eye.
 HAROLD (To RUTH) A fact-finding operation, you say?

RUTH In a manner of speaking.
 HAROLD Fire away!
 RUTH I know *your* credentials, Doctor Roth. My curiosity extends beyond you.
 HAROLD To whom to do refer?
 RUTH Everyone!
 SHERRY I have a hunch you are already acquainted with each of us.
 RUTH Whatever gives you such an idea!
 SHERRY You know my name.
 RUTH So I do! But you've been acknowledged in each of Doctor Roth's books. As a source of inspiration!
 FAITH The puzzle box whose colored squares refuse to hold hands?
 MATT It's called Rubric's Cube, Mom.
 FAITH That's the doctor.
 RUTH Matt. Shall we try again?
 HAROLD Matt is my son.
 MATT I'm just here for the weekend.
 HAROLD He delivered a contract that requires my signature.
 RUTH What were you shooting back there?
 MATT A Taurus. PT 99.
 RUTH No, the target.
 MATT Just a cardboard figure.
 RUTH Did you have a particular person in mind?
 MATT I just shoot.
 RUTH You'll find accuracy improves when you visualize your enemy.
 MATT Is that so?
 RUTH It did for me. (To HAROLD) Do you have other children?
 HAROLD Other than Phillip, who was stillborn, Matt is our only child.
 RUTH You're quite certain?
 HAROLD Faith was incapable of having more children.
 RUTH Hardly a deterrent. I know the idiosyncrasies of men. If there were indiscretions, Doctor . . . I won't hold it against you.
 FAITH There are other children. No matter what Harold says. They live in remote regions of the world, shunning the latest customs. Alice lives under the foot of Kilimanjaro, where she breeds iambic donkeys. Nathan stalks the jungles of modern speech and extracts venom from predatory verbs.
 HAROLD That's quite enough, dear.
 FAITH If only Matt could meet his brothers and sisters, he would no longer wish to join the war.
 HAROLD (To RUTH) You must understand her plight. There was a time Faith professed to conceive and bear a child . . . within the space of a week
 MATT What war?
 FAITH (Chagrinned) The war against those on the other side.
 (FAITH begins searching for a doll. AMY begins to draw on her arm with a pen)
 RUTH I had one son. Doubtless he'd be with me now -- were he living.
 HAROLD I'm sorry.

RUTH He was a sweet child, with boundless possibilities. (Displaying a necklace) I always carry a vial of ashes with me.

AMY Cool.

RUTH If he had a flaw, it was he so wished to please people . . . and would bow to their smallest request.

MATT Gross.

RUTH Most assuredly, I will not be spreading ashes here.

FAITH Why will no one observe the danger?

FAITH (Places doll in wire cage) Pebbles, dear. We'll keep you safe. (Covers cage with dishtowel. Places cage on lap)

SHERRY Remember that doll, Matt?

MATT No.

SHERRY I'm surprised. Pebbles was your dearest companion.

MATT That's crazy.

SHERRY You're embarrassed! Your Mother wrote a poem about her. (An alarm is heard. It seems to come from within RUTH)

RUTH Excuse me. Sometimes the slightest emotional reaction alters my chemistry. I need to administer an antidote. (Opens suitcase. Remove vial and needle)

FAITH Pebbles has eyes of polished stones.

HAROLD Would you like a glass of water?

RUTH Dilute the gin? No, thank you. (Filling needle)

FAITH She is spun from cloth instead of bones.

RUTH Why the astonishment? Haven't you seen someone impale themselves? (Gives herself injection) It really is imperative to maintain a proper equilibrium.

FAITH We have pills that will help you stand. Would you like some? Picasso's in charge of distributing them.

RUTH Thank you, no. I carry my own.

SHERRY Once, I took off, not knowing Pebbles was in the car. You made quite the fuss.

MATT Where did you go . . . when you borrowed the car?

SHERRY My secret.

FAITH We know.

MATT I remember the headlights shining off the walls when you returned, and imagined they were searching for lost aliens.

FAITH Faith has children. Sherry has valentines.

HAROLD I see no reason to continue our deliberations, Ms. Meyers.

RUTH Matt, I couldn't help notice your limp.

AMY He won't talk about it. I've tried.

RUTH I'll get it out of him. One way or the other.

AMY I'm with Sherry. I suspect you already know.

RUTH Who might you be?

AMY Matt's girlfriend. Amy.

RUTH You are the anomaly.

AMY What do you mean?

RUTH Your name isn't on the list. Of those who would be in attendance today.

AMY Everyone knew I was coming.
 RUTH Not the professor's list, dear. Mine.
 AMY Oh.
 FAITH Amy, I'm absent, too.
 RUTH (To AMY) I was under the impression Matt was seeing Rosie.
 AMY That burnt out ages ago.
 RUTH I'll strike her name from the records.
 FAITH Rosie? Did we ever meet Rosie?
 RUTH Matt, an curious job . Exterminator. Not all that different from mine.
 HAROLD (Shocked) Matt, are you no longer enrolled in the university?
 MATT The job's part-time. Yeah. I'm enrolled.
 HAROLD You know the rules! Abandon your studies and the allowance ends.
 AMY It's more an arrangement than a job, Mr. Roth. Matt kills bugs and Chet lets him use the warehouse for band practice.
 FAITH Rosie had a ring around her, didn't she? Was it a halo . . . or a hula hoop?
 AMY Trouble is, he always has the smell of chemicals on him.
 RUTH (Looking at design AMY is drawing on her arm) What is this?
 AMY An . . . Amy design.
 RUTH Very fetching.
 AMY If I like it, I'll get a tattoo.
 HAROLD What kind of band?
 MATT You wouldn't understand.
 AMY He writes his own lyrics – sometimes.
 FAITH Matthew writes?!
 AMY They're not very good.
 RUTH (Straining to read) What does your etching say?
 AMY "Life sucks."
 RUTH You'll get no argument from me.
 AMY Men, too. They suck.
 RUTH Perhaps you could try your artistry on me. A personal branding.
 AMY What would it say?
 RUTH Gosh. I've been called so many things. Petition Sherry. I bet she has a humdinger. (Pops a pill) The pellets, under the tongue, deaden the rage. (Smiles)
 HAROLD (Touches FAITH) Don't be alarmed. There are no bolts of lightening about to strike.
 BRANDON (Emerges from hole) Professor! Look what I found.
 HAROLD What is it?
 BRANDON A piece of cloth.
 HAROLD Impossible!
 BRANDON A shirt, I think.
 HAROLD How could that be? Matt, is this your doing?
 MATT No, Dad.
 FAITH Faith will summon the housekeeper.
 HAROLD It doesn't belong to you, Brandon?
 BRANDON No, I swear it.

HAROLD The fabric should have assimilated into the soil.
 SHERRY Should we have it tested?
 HAROLD Sherry, we are not here to inspect some old discarded costume.
 BRANDON May I continue my search?
 HAROLD By all means. Continue digging. (BRANDON exits into hole)
 RUTH He adores you. But under that façade I see a grisly side.
 HAROLD Brandon's daft. He faints, too.
 RUTH It wouldn't worry me.
 HAROLD Worse, he hopes to become a scientist.
 RUTH But that should thrill you!
 FAITH (Has placed the shirt in a basin of water. Holds up the shirt, water dripping from it) "Children picking up our bones will never know that these were once as quick as foxes on the hill."
 AMY Did you write that?
 FAITH Oh, no. We could never weave together words like that. Harold, which of our children will pick up our bones?
 MATT Mom, get a grip.
 FAITH (A flash of frustration and anger) Why is everyone so quick with instructions! We are not senseless without a compass!
 RUTH Excuse me. (Sprays herself with perfume) A synthetic cologne, crafted from highly complex chemicals. Without it I couldn't tolerate myself. (To AMY) Is this your first foray into the outback of science, Amy?
 AMY It's my first time *meeting the family*.
 MATT We're being judged. Me especially. Can't you tell?
 RUTH Can you blame her? We women like as clear a vision of the future as possible.
 FAITH We're going home. To Tucson. We think it's on the southern corridor of the compass, a hundred miles from here.
 RUTH Matt, do you often visit the family encampment?
 MATT Most of Dad's projects are out of the country.
 RUTH Traveling no longer agrees with you?
 HAROLD At the moment, it's important he finish his education.
 RUTH Naturally!
 HAROLD He lives in Tucson, in the home I bought years ago. When I worked on campus.
 MATT I keep telling him he should sell it.
 FAITH What?
 HAROLD Keep your voice down, Matt.
 FAITH Our home is to become a site?
 HAROLD You have it all wrong.
 FAITH Is the professor going to quarantine the grounds? Will he uproot its treasures?
 HAROLD Matt misspoke.
 FAITH No! No!
 HAROLD Our family is intact. Our home will not be disrupted!
 FAITH Oh, sweet Jesus. Around and around we go.
 RUTH (To MATT) How long had you pitched a tent with your parents?
 HAROLD Matt was born in Ghana, and accompanied us until he was sixteen.

RUTH Us?
 HAROLD My wife and Ms. Hansen. The assistants.
 FAITH Shakespeare traveled with us. And sometimes Edna Saint Vincent Millay.
 RUTH There must have been an overwhelming sense of family . . . out there . . . in
 your cozy, desolate camp . . . where the world was a distant distraction.
 HAROLD (Defensively) I'm not sure what you mean.
 RUTH Extraordinary bonds . . . that could withstand a great deal of abuse.
 HAROLD I would hope so.
 FAITH We set a table everyday.
 RUTH During your sojourns, how many assistants did you have?
 FAITH Only poets dined with us.
 HAROLD I'm not sure. Sherry would have record of that.
 RUTH I calculated fourteen. Is that correct, Sherry?
 SHERRY Fourteen. That sounds about right.
 RUTH If I'm mistaken, please correct me!
 FAITH The Masters of Science refused to join our table, where jellies of humor and
 puffs of satire are served.
 RUTH Assistants sent at the recommendation of Doctor Lance.
 SHERRY Yes. He conducts the interviews.
 RUTH Only the brightest students, I presume, are offered the job.
 SHERRY It *is* a prestigious position.
 RUTH All the recruits are freshmen. Why is that?
 SHERRY Doctor Roth.
 HAROLD I delight in the curiosity of the young.
 RUTH I understand. They harbor such little resistance.
 HAROLD Not in every case, Madam.
 RUTH And you all got on . . . reasonably well?
 HAROLD I'd like to think so.
 FAITH No, no! We had more than fourteen children. Many more. If Byron were
 here, he'd tell you!
 RUTH Ms. Hansen, were you here from the beginning?
 SHERRY No.
 RUTH A convert, were you, to the gospel of science?
 SHERRY I was a lowly secretary in a very contentious department when I met Doctor
 Roth. A year later, when the position became available, I applied.
 RUTH Quite extraordinary! To embrace the life of a nomad. What inspired you?
 SHERRY I don't care to talk about it.
 AMY The only reason Matt visits is to see Sherry.
 SHERRY I beg your pardon.
 AMY It's true. If it weren't for you, he wouldn't bother to visit.
 HAROLD Young lady! You are out of line!
 SHERRY I resent your tone.
 AMY (To HAROLD and FAITH) Don't get me wrong. Matt loves you. You're his
 parents.
 HAROLD Is that true, son?
 FAITH Harold will never agree. We were no parents to him.

AMY I'm sorry. I had no right to say that.
 HAROLD Matt. Tell me Amy is lying.
 MATT It sounds . . . rotten . . . the way Amy puts it.
 HAROLD Explain, then!
 MATT I come to see all of you.
 HAROLD But your affections are divided.
 MATT Dad!
 HAROLD I'm waiting for an explanation!
 MATT Sherry's been part of this . . . family . . . for as long as I remember. You were always busy, Dad, with your projects.
 FAITH (Referring to her children) I would estimate four hundred.
 MATT And mom . . . well, you weren't really here.
 FAITH We come and go.
 RUTH Matt, if you fire that weapon, be sure the bullets know where to go.
 FAITH Bullets are fine for making button holes, then they should be employed as periods.
 AMY What are you drinking?
 RUTH Gin and tonic. With ice.
 AMY Does it have alcohol?
 RUTH Up the snout!
 AMY I'd love some. If you can spare any.
 RUTH I have more than enough. Doctor Roth refused his portion.
 AMY I'm sorry. Please forgive me.
 RUTH To hell with tonic! Let's embrace gin wholeheartedly. Anybody else? Bar's open.
 HAROLD I thought we are having a business conference.
 RUTH We are. The motion for cocktails was just approved. Sherry?
 HAROLD I would appreciate discretion, Sherry.
 RUTH I only regret I didn't bring spiced cigars.
 FAITH The generator is empty. Perhaps it would like some gin.
 RUTH (Opens case. Extracts photograph) Other than the acknowledgements in Doctor Roth's books there was very little to find, but I did locate this.
 SHERRY What is it?
 RUTH A photograph of you as a young child. Courtesy of your father's tenure with the navy.
 SHERRY (Takes photograph) You really are a meddling shrew.
 RUTH My dear, this is public record. (Pause) Striking parents. It's as though you aren't even in the picture.
 SHERRY I wasn't male.
 AMY Fuck parents.
 RUTH We all need to be needed, dear.
 SHERRY This is insidious! (Storms into her tent)
 FAITH (Holding up the washed shirt) We've seen this before. We know the colors.
 HAROLD How can that be? We are on grounds that have never been excavated.
 FAITH Many times we held this shirt and hung it in the sky.
 HAROLD In your poetry!

FAITH We watched it dance in partner with the wind. (Will hang the shirt on the clothes line)

RUTH Words don't move him, honey. He needs proof. (To HAROLD) What, precisely, are you hoping to find in that hole of yours, professor?

HAROLD We intend to harvest Spadefoot Toads.

AMY Matt, you were right.

HAROLD They're estivating under this dry lake bed. Thousands of them. Entombed. Waiting for the rains.

RUTH A perfect description of my third husband.

HAROLD After a rousing storm, they'll begin their journey upward, to replenish themselves and propagate.

FAITH Someday a storm will push this trailer into Harold's hole and we'll go home.

AMY Why collect toads?

FAITH Oh, the couplets she will unfurl across the sky.

HAROLD To study their rate of metabolism. Perhaps the findings can be applied to humans. Perhaps we can learn to alter our metabolism and live longer.

RUTH Is it wise to alter our bodies without altering our brains?

HAROLD Perfect a man's body. The brain will follow.

RUTH You're sure of that? You're sure the brain is programmed to happily dance into your new . . . perfect . . . world?

FAITH In the world Harold envisions, there is no need for poetry.

RUTH There's very little in the present one.

FAITH Are you the storm?

RUTH I'm not one for communicating in ambiguity.

FAITH Limericks set to music, sung by our mother. They are the earliest memory.

RUTH It sounds charming. And woefully sentimental.

FAITH Was there no music in your childhood?

RUTH I wouldn't know. We despised one another. All of us. Without exception.

FAITH No rhymes hiding in closets? No words fluttering against a window pane?

RUTH Nothing like that, dear.

FAITH Hand over heart.

RUTH Don't grieve. The tears are wasted.

FAITH "Imaginary gardens with real toads . . ."

RUTH Yes?

FAITH It's what she calls poetry.

RUTH Who? The Professor's wife?

FAITH No. Someone gifted. Someone wise.

SHERRY (Returns) Miss Meyers, it's time for you to go.

RUTH I apologize for having rattled your bones, but I haven't completed my inquest. Professor, you have a penchant for collecting things, don't you? Legal and illegal.

HAROLD I have no idea to what you refer.

RUTH Come, come. You didn't volunteer to leave the university. It was an ultimatum.

HAROLD Your sources are wrong.

RUTH The information comes from Doctor Lance himself.

FAITH Sometimes the colors do line up.
 HAROLD The entire situation was overblown.
 RUTH You deny the claim?
 HAROLD I complied, yes. But there was never a formal sanction. There is no record of wrongdoing.
 RUTH The accusations, nonetheless, are serious.
 HAROLD They were lodged by colleagues . . . a small contingency, mind you . . . who were jealous of my success.
 RUTH It was an ingenious operation. Asking students to prick their fingers and examine their sacrifice under the microscope. Then, behind closed doors, shipping the specimens to a lab, for more detailed analysis.
 FAITH Imagine everyone on tilt-a-world, spinning, unable to raise their hands.
 HAROLD Sherry's right. You've outstayed your welcome.
 RUTH Apparently it didn't stop there. The story goes you compiled a storehouse of confidential information. To construct a profile of genetic dispersion. All to fuel your curiosity.
 HAROLD It's time for you to go.
 RUTH You misjudge. I understand the need for data. For years, I was part of an organization that placed no limits against the pursuit of knowledge.
 HAROLD No limits?
 RUTH None whatsoever.
 HAROLD What was the nature of your work?
 RUTH Human adaptability. Implantations. Genetic fusion. Studies similar to yours. (Opens case)
 HAROLD Sounds like the Danforth Institute.
 RUTH So it was! When I joined the Institute the place was a madhouse of activity. Oh, those were the glory days. (Extracts pill bottle) I'll never forget the words of Doctor Barrett, "Whatever can be measured is science. Everything else is faith."
 HAROLD Portraying yourself as an editor was a charade. How do I know your ties to Danforth aren't untrue, as well?
 RUTH I guess you can't.
 FAITH Doesn't *anyone* have a compass?
 RUTH (Takes pill) To flush out the toxins.
 BRANDON (From inside hole) Doctor Roth. I found another artifact!
 HAROLD Bring it up!
 AMY Is it a toad?
 BRANDON No.
 FAITH We could use a vacuum cleaner.
 RUTH My! I do hope I won't have to administer another mood equalizer.
 FAITH Or a bottle of shoe polish.
 BRANDON (Appearing from hole) It's a watch.
 HAROLD Absurd!
 AMY It is.
 HAROLD The discovery of a timing device has no connection to any system of logic.
 RUTH Doctor, you can change your mind about the gin.

HAROLD (Glaring at RUTH and BRANDON) Clearly, any explanation must consider the possibility of sabotage.

FAITH Does the watch share time with the shirt?

BRANDON Oh, no!

HAROLD What now?

BRANDON I feel I shall faint!

HAROLD That's the third time today.

BRANDON I'm sorry.

HAROLD This inclination to pass out is irritating. You do understand it puts your job in jeopardy.

BRANDON I could learn to not faint.

HAROLD No amount of education will relieve your affliction. Your condition is inbred.

BRANDON But I thought scientists can undo nature. Turn it inside out.

RUTH Of course it's possible. Nature is continually being perverted.

HAROLD In your case, Brandon, I fear the odds are insurmountable.

RUTH Don't be discouraged, young man.

FAITH (On the verge of tears) Yes. (Whispers) The odds are insurmountable

SHERRY What's wrong, Faith?

FAITH (Lost. Utterly vulnerable) Is that why all the children are hiding? Because the odds are insurmountable?

SHERRY Don't worry. At the end of the day we'll find them. They'll all come home to rest.

MATT Brandon, throw the watch in the air.

BRANDON Why?

MATT I feel like shooting something.

HAROLD He'll do no such thing!

MATT (Grabs watch from BRANDON) How about you, Miss Meyers? Will you toss it in the air? (Throws watch to RUTH, who fails to catch it)

HAROLD Let's keep our wits about us, Matt.

MATT (Picking up watch, confronting RUTH) I thought you were a marksman.

RUTH I am. To shoot takes one eye. To catch requires two. (Pause) I have an artificial eye.

MATT You're full of shit.

FAITH She's quite right.

RUTH Take a look.

MATT Like hell.

RUTH Amy? You're not squeamish, are you?

AMY I'm not looking in your eye.

RUTH Oh, don't be so priggish!

MATT I think you're lying. They're both real.

RUTH Undetectable! My physician will be pleased!

MATT You have a glass eye? Take it out.

RUTH Artificial. Not glass.

MATT The left eye is fake.

RUTH Wrong!

FAITH (Very clear-eyed) Matthew, you must never shoot a gun!

RUTH Doctor Schwartz did an excellent job. Soon, he assures me, he'll transform the gadget into a fully-operational organ.

AMY You'll see again?

RUTH Like a hawk.

FAITH We will clean the watch . . . and hope to find a compass.

MATT How did you lose your eye?

RUTH Like your father, I had "The Curious Condition." I attended a symposium on imprinting. During the demonstration, a probe exploded, hurtling a rod into my eye.

MATT Like my father. Right. (Exits)

FAITH (Stands directly in front of RUTH) Snake under glass. Urine specimen. Rusty scalpel.

RUTH Oh, dear. Is that a sampling of new-age poetry?

FAITH Will you please please please move so we can cross the street? (RUTH moves aside. FAITH executes a direct cross to HAROLD)

RUTH (Looks to her left and right) That *was* a busy intersection.

AMY She's not to be made fun of!

FAITH (Holding watch. To HAROLD) If we turn its hands . . . back . . . hands over hands over hands . . . you will see.

HAROLD Not now. Please! (FAITH retreats)

RUTH Brandon, does the esteemed professor put you through the paces?

BRANDON I'm not sure what you mean.

RUTH Does he insist you perform a meticulous series of exercises?

BRANDON We have daily lessons, if that's what you mean.

RUTH And where are you on the professor's road of instruction?

BRANDON Level four. Step three

RUTH Level four. Step three. Do you remember level three, step two?

BRANDON Would that be the speeches of commendation?

RUTH I should like to hear them.

HAROLD Please. This is no time to delve into Brandon's education.

FAITH Level one. Step one. That's where the professor ranks us.

RUTH I'm waiting, Brandon.

BRANDON (Takes a stiff, formal stance) Ladies and Gentlemen. We are here to present the Einstein Award, which recognizes profoundly innovative research within the past year. After reviewing the work of numerous scientists the Selection Committee chose Doctor Harold Roth.

RUTH Well done. It could use a little more fire.

HAROLD It was a simple task in recitation. We sometimes resort to humor to offset the drudgery of work.

RUTH Who would blame you?

FAITH Whether there are steps and levels below one, we don't know.

RUTH Carry on.

BRANDON (Strikes another pose) Members of the Academy, the trustees of the University of Frankfurt present the Medal of Honor to a preeminent leader in the field of bioengineering: Doctor Harold Roth.

RUTH That's more like it!

HAROLD Can we move on?

BRANDON (Strikes a third pose) Members of the Newtonian Society, this evening we bestow the Hallmark Tribute on one of our deserving members. The judges were unanimous in their decision. For his groundbreaking discoveries and intellectual prowess, the Tribute is awarded to Doctor Harold Roth.

RUTH A marvelous sense of rhythm. You may have confused the Newtonian Society with the Science Academy, however.

BRANDON Would you like to hear more?

RUTH Three is quite enough.

BRANDON But I haven't recited my favorite one.

RUTH I've heard them all before.

BRANDON You have? Where? When?

FAITH (To RUTH) Ask him to recite "A Light Exists in Spring." (Immeasurably disappointed) He can't. What level is that?

RUTH Recite a poem? Why? What good are poems? Are they edible? Do they mix with gin?

MATT (Enters) Dad, the coil wire in my car is missing.

FAITH There is more than one way to starve.

HAROLD Where were you planning to go?

MATT That's not the point! Someone took the wire.

HAROLD I would like to be consulted before you embark on a course of action.

MATT Tell her to open the briefcase.

HAROLD I can't do that! Why would I do that?

MATT It's in there! The wire to the engine is in her case.

RUTH You accuse me of thievery?

HAROLD I'm sure he hasn't any such intention. Matthew, if it's a coil wire you want, take mine.

MATT Just have her show us what's inside the case.

SHERRY I agree with Matt. It's a fair request. Let her prove her innocence.

RUTH Am I being served a warrant? (Smiles) I come with quite a booty. (Opens briefcase slightly) Where shall we begin? (Extracts a file folder) A file pinched from the Tucson Police Department?

MATT Don't bother. I'll take Dad's advice. (Starts to exit)

RUTH You don't wish for me to display my loot?

MATT That's fine. Thank you. No. (Exits)

HAROLD What was that all about? (SHERRY retreats to her office area as HAROLD watches her. After a pause) Is something going on I should know about? (Looks at AMY) What's the situation with you and Matt?

AMY What do you mean?

HAROLD (With constrained anger) I mean exactly what I said. What's going on with Matt and you?

AMY Mr. Roth, I'm not about to discuss my relationship with Matt.

HAROLD Is one of you in trouble?

AMY What do you mean?

HAROLD Have Matt or you had an altercation with the law?

AMY No. What do you take me for?

MATT (Enters) What's going on?
 AMY Your Dad thinks I'm a punk. Tagged by the police.
 MATT Screw him. The wire in the Plymouth is missing, too, Dad.
 HAROLD I'll improvise. Why did you run out of here just now?
 MATT I got a few tickets. It's nothing.
 HAROLD Tickets for what?
 MATT The usual. Parking. Maybe one or two speeding violations.
 HAROLD That's the extent of it?
 MATT Yeah. Drop it.
 FAITH Failure to observe traffic signs. He's not alone.
 HAROLD Ms. Meyers, could I see the file? (Accepts file from RUTH)
 MATT Dad, you're being a jerk.
 SHERRY Doctor Roth, can't we take this up another time?
 FAITH (Touching her stomach) Perhaps we should conceive a child whose purpose is to direct traffic.
 HAROLD (Examining papers) Possession of drugs.
 MATT It's no big deal.
 HAROLD (Referring to paper) Two separate charges.
 MATT It's in the past.
 HAROLD What kind of drugs?
 MATT Coke. Okay?! I wasn't dealing or anything.
 HAROLD Was there a trial?
 MATT No. I plead guilty.
 HAROLD The sentence?
 MATT Probation. That was part of the bargain.
 HAROLD Where did you get the money to post bail? Who paid for the attorney?
 MATT Amy's parents.
 RUTH Keep digging, professor.
 HAROLD It doesn't say.
 RUTH That would be Miss Hanson.
 HAROLD Sherry? You paid his fees?
 SHERRY Can we talk about this another time
 HAROLD You knew about this?
 SHERRY He was in a bind. I helped out.
 HAROLD Behind my back. Without saying a word?!
 SHERRY I didn't see the point of telling you. I knew you'd be upset.
 HAROLD Upset? That's putting it mildly. What else has been going on that I should know about?
 SHERRY Doctor Roth!
 MATT Leave her alone.
 SHERRY That is unkind!
 FAITH Stop! Everybody, turn left.
 HAROLD Amy, were you the one to introduce drugs to my son? (Waving file) Are you responsible for this?
 AMY You sound like yesterday. Always the woman's fault.
 MATT Amy, stay out of this. I'll handle it.

AMY Maybe I smoke a little dope, Mr. Roth. Who doesn't? But don't accuse me of turning Matt onto that shit. Men! Fuck off!

MATT Amy, keep your mouth shut!

AMY Don't fucking tell me what to do.

MATT What's with you?

AMY Back off!

FAITH Stop! Can't anyone see the red light?

MATT What's your problem?

AMY I'm not taking your shit.

MATT Cool it!

AMY I hate you!

MATT Why are you saying this!

AMY 'Cause I'm pregnant!

MATT What?

AMY You heard me. I'm pregnant.

MATT Oh, Jesus.

FAITH Oh.

AMY Is it any wonder?

FAITH Congratulations! Green light!

HAROLD Fay. We don't want to hear from you.

FAITH Hand over mouth.

AMY I meant to tell you. I was trying to get your attention.

MATT Great. You picked a fine time to unload.

FAITH I'm sure we can find someone to anoint the child. Shall we ask Walt Whitman?

AMY I'm sorry.

MATT (Brandishing gun) What are you doing here? Why are my records in your briefcase?

RUTH I'm trying to understand a young man who once worked for your father.

MATT Who?

RUTH He went by the name of Robert Blane.

HAROLD I remember.

RUTH But that's not his real name.

SHERRY Oh?

FAITH The shirt found by Brandon. It belongs to Robert. The watch, too.

MATT What does Robert have to do with me?

RUT Excuse me. Everything's dying today. (Removes hearing aid. Will remove old battery and stow it in the case. Will insert new battery and replace the hearing device) I really have become something of an old, broken relic. Except for the mind. That never changes. Sharp as ever. Whether that's a blessing I cannot tell.

MATT Why do you have a copy of my police record?

RUTH Don't rush me. (Opens case. Extracts book) I brought a relatively unknown book with me. A first edition. Its only edition.

AMY Matt, that's a copy of your mother's book. Her book of poetry.

RUTH Not easy to find. How old was Faith when this was published?

HAROLD Twenty-four.

RUTH One book . . . well-received, I might add . . . and that's the end of it?

FAITH Composed when thoughts moved in all degrees, when the compass danced to the stroke of her pen.

RUTH Robert referred to this book quite often. Don't be slighted, Doctor. He often spoke of you, as well.

FAITH (Walks to clothes line and hugs shirt) We see him. Without a blemish. Poised on the wire. High above the camp. Unsure which way to go.

RUTH (After a pause) Apparently, after a hard days work, Robert would read a poem or two aloud to Faith. It consoled him.

HAROLD How do you know Robert?

RUTH He worked as an intern at Danforth Institute. When he announced his intention to study anthropology, I suggested he spend a semester with you. Who better to apprentice under than Professor Roth, I told him.

HAROLD I'm flattered.

RUTH Initially, Doctor Lance was against the idea. He insisted recruits come from within the university.

HAROLD As he should!

RUTH But he changed his mind after I forked over a generous donation.

HAROLD You can't fault him for that.

RUTH From the outset I insisted Robert assume a different last name. Discussing his private life was out of the question, any mention of Danforth forbidden. I didn't want you to trace his origin. There was to be no favoritism. You, of all people, can appreciate that.

HAROLD I acknowledge the desire for discretion.

RUTH There is no doubt that Robert's time in the field forever changed him. And of everything he mentioned, I'm most intrigued by one . . .

HAROLD Yes?

RUTH What happened to the poet?

SHERRY I'm not sure anyone here is prepared to answer that.

RUTH It may help me understand what happened to Robert.

SHERRY I'm afraid I can't help you.

RUTH (Very hard, resolute) I need to know.

HAROLD The situation between my wife and I is a private matter. It will not be undressed!

RUTH It will! Or it all ends here!

HAROLD What do you mean?

RUTH (With great venom) There are no toads underfoot! (Methodical) This site was prepared precisely to my specifications before you ever arrived! The operation was a pretense. The artifacts -- planted by my subordinates. The soil re-compacted as if it had never been touched. The trap was laid. As predicted, you walked right into it.

HAROLD Impossible! To coordinate such a project would require an extensive team of workers.

RUTH Danforth commands a wide swath.

HAROLD Matt! Could you not banty the gun about?

RUTH It was not coincidental that Matt was asked to personally deliver the contract. And rewarded for his compliance.

MATT Fine! I'm out of here.

RUTH No one leaves until permission is granted. Doctor Roth, this is no longer your operation and I disdain having to repeat myself. What happened to the poet?

HAROLD We traveled here for one purpose only – to excavate toads.

SHERRY Matthew was born prematurely. (Lights slowly change. The past and present will commingle. Previous events are described, using past tense, *and* relived, using present tense. Speeches that were given years ago, but revived now in present tense, are in bold print)

HAROLD There is nothing to be gained by dredging up the past.

SHERRY We were stationed in Ghana. Far from any doctor.

HAROLD Faith refused any prenatal advice. She blamed the death of our first son, Phillip, on the incompetence of the midwife.

RUTH (Touching the book of poetry) "To a child born still." Title to one of her poems.

SHERRY I wouldn't know. (Pause) Harold oversaw the delivery.

HAROLD It was a protracted labor.

SHERRY Perhaps that's why it took Matt so long to get a grasp on life. He was a sickly child. A cold could last for weeks.

MATT I never heard this version.

SHERRY The situation deteriorated when Harold decided Matt wasn't developing at an acceptable rate. He couldn't own the thought that he had fathered a child who might be less than . . .

RUTH Perfect?

SHERRY I'm sorry you have to hear this, Matt.

FAITH When he was two, we began to see the marks.

RUTH What marks?

FAITH The punctures. Where Harold penetrated him . . . with a needle. To draw blood.

MATT You're kidding me.

HAROLD It only happened once.

FAITH Using his son, just like he'd used his students.

HAROLD Once! I did what any physician would have done! I sent a vial of blood back to the university. To have it tested. To ascertain if Matt harbored any disease . . . that might be cured.

FAITH Ask Sherry.

HAROLD Can you blame me?

FAITH Many many marks. Along the inside of his arm.

HAROLD That's a lie. A fabrication. Her poetic mind was working overtime.

FAITH We showed him what no scientist can deny – evidence. Each wound, evidence.

HAROLD Maybe twice. No more than three times! Isn't that what every normal parent would have done? She would have condoned it, had she clearly understood my motives.

FAITH It was not your place!

HAROLD She said I was a monster . . . a cannibal, feeding on the flesh of my son.
 FAITH You were!
 HAROLD She said the gods would turn me into a wolf.
 FAITH **It is recorded in the poems of our ancestors!**
 HAROLD **To hell with poetry!**
 FAITH **There it is: The truth.**
 HAROLD The monster, I said, was her imagination. **There are no gods! Humans don't assume the form of wolves!** Everything to her! A fucking metaphor!
 SHERRY Each faulted the other for Matt's condition.
 FAITH **In Tucson we would have had proper medical care.**
 HAROLD **You're free to return!**
 FAITH **You'd like that. And Sherry, too, I presume.**
 HAROLD **What are you saying? Behind some literary veil she's posing as something else?**
 FAITH **It's not that obscure, darling.**
 HAROLD **Leave her out of this!**
 SHERRY Harold's assistant at the time was . . .
 FAITH Robert.
 HAROLD Faith was having an affair with him. All the signs were there.
 FAITH But he didn't have the evidence. So he rummaged through her writings.
 HAROLD I found explicit poems, wrought with sexual allusions. Those scribblings displayed far more passion than she had ever shown me. There was no doubt of her guilt.
 FAITH He maintained the poems were his proof.
 HAROLD **Such accounts don't come out of a vacuum.**
 FAITH We laughed. **"You know nothing about the power of imagination,"** she said.
 HAROLD **I take these things literally.**
 FAITH **Damn science!**
 HAROLD **Tomorrow we're going to Accra. We'll hunt down a midwife and if you're pregnant the child will be aborted.**
 FAITH **Go to hell!**
 MATT Amy, you wouldn't abort the kid, would you?
 FAITH **You know what this is really about?! You're afraid those rugged little genes of your assistant might be superior to yours. You're afraid the child of a dunce apprentice might outperform yours!**
 HAROLD **You ungrateful, sniveling whore!**
 MATT Mom!
 SHERRY Faith locked herself in the trailer. Harold spent the night outdoors.
 RUTH In all this, where was Matthew?
 SHERRY With me.
 RUTH Yes.
 SHERRY Sometimes I hated Faith. For knowing she could do as she pleased and trust I'd care for Matthew.
 RUTH Harold didn't do the same thing?
 SHERRY I found it easier to forgive him, somehow.

RUTH Silly silly woman.
 MATT Were you sleeping with Dad?
 SHERRY No.
 MATT Sherry, don't lie.
 SHERRY It may have been a possibility one time. But, no. I swear it, Matt. (Pause)
 The following morning Faith emerged from the trailer.
 FAITH **Good morning, husband.**
 SHERRY She held a towel in her hand.
 HAROLD **Good morning.**
 FAITH **Where is Robert?**
 HAROLD **I sent him away.**
 FAITH **Without so much as a goodbye?**
 HAROLD **It's best this way.**
 FAITH **You didn't have to send him away!**
 SHERRY She held up the towel. It was bloody.
 HAROLD **What have you done!**
 FAITH **I've scraped the walls of my uterus. And look, there is no evidence. I . . .**
am . . . not . . . pregnant.
 HAROLD **For Christ's sake!**
 SHERRY Harold helped her into the trailer. We cleaned her up and put her into bed.
 That night, an infection set in. By morning she was delirious.
 HAROLD We took her to the hospital, where she slipped into a coma.
 FAITH They tell us we slept for eight days. They're wrong. We took a marvelous
 trip and shook hands with Shakespeare. We played gin with Keats and ate
 chocolate-covered words with Brönte.
 SHERRY When she awoke, she was different.
 FAITH All those poets . . . men and women alike . . . took her hand and promised
 Faith she would bear their children. Shelly. Brönte. Byron. Faith would be
 their vessel.
 HAROLD She could no longer command her thoughts.
 FAITH We tried to raise their seeds. But she had been cut wide open with his scalpel.
 The blade sliced through her ovaries, up, along the cage of her ribs, between
 the nest of words, severing all ties among them, rendering her speechless.
 SHERRY Over time, she improved . . . somewhat. But her writings were muddled
 masses of incoherent words. (Lights return to normal. The fractured
flashback is over)
 RUTH I understand.
 HAROLD Understand what?
 RUTH Why Robert returned a changed soul.
 HAROLD Robert was your son?
 RUTH Yes, The young man from Danforth was my son.
 FAITH We see him.
 RUTH When he returned, I saw the change. What strange land did he visit, I asked.
 Why did he pass his nights curled up in the closet, with the lights burning?
 Why did it take a team of doctors to defrost his eyes. And when he could see

again, why did he leap? An experiment in flying? (Pause) An embrace of gravity? (Pause) Or neither.

HAROLD I regret his passing.

RUTH You sound absolved of responsibility, Professor. No. My son will not be discarded. He and you were not two independent entities, colliding briefly in a chaotic universe. It goes against science, it defiles poetry, to say that you . . . and your wife . . . had no affect upon him.

MATT Sherry. Don't lie to me. Please, don't

RUTH Your actions were deliberate and calculating.

SHERRY I'm not.

MATT Or I'll never see you again. Because I think of you as . . .

SHERRY Matt, don't make this out to be what it isn't. I know it may be difficult to believe, but you are loved by each of us.

MATT Amy, get your things. We're leaving.

SHERRY I'm coming with you. May I? Back to Tucson?

MATT We'll wait by the truck. (Grabs his duffle bag from the tent) Be sure to bring a jug of water. We got a ways to walk.

RUTH You'll find the coil wire under the driver's seat.

MATT Much obliged. (Exits with AMY)

RUTH Brandon, dear.

BRANDON Yes, madam.

RUTH Pack your belongings. You're coming with me.

BRANDON But I'm apprenticed to Doctor Roth. Why would I come with you?

RUTH You will come because you're in danger. Grave, undefeatable danger.

BRANDON What should I fear, madam?

RUTH Stay here. One day you'll take a breath and there won't be sufficient air. The air you inhale will have lost its power to generate life, and, without knowing it, you will slowly, surely suffocate.

BRANDON I have sensed . . . more and more . . . the difficulty . . . to breathe.

HAROLD Brandon, you are contracted to me.

RUTH You are contracted to no one but yourself, Brandon. Come, before it's too late.

BRANDON I'm sorry, Professor Roth.

HAROLD Leave, and you're throwing your future away. Don't you wish to make something of yourself?

BRANDON I'm sorry. (Exits into his tent)

HAROLD This is outrageous!

FAITH What of us?

RUTH What of you?

HAROLD You cannot decimate our establishment!

RUTH *I'm* responsible for your carnage?

FAITH We should like to come along, as well.

RUTH Impossible.

HAROLD We could have worked something out.

RUTH This is not a negotiation.

BRANDON (Enters with backpack) I'm ready.

FAITH Why not?
 RUTH Please! It is impossible for my right eye to weep. Brandon. Lead on! (She and BRANDON exit)
 FAITH Isn't it time to bring up toads?
 HAROLD There are no toads, sweetheart. Aren't you going to juggle words?
 FAITH There are too many to keep afloat.
 HAROLD I could read to you.
 FAITH From her book?
 HAROLD Just until they return.
 FAITH Her children?
 HAROLD Pick a number between five and twenty. I'll subtract four and multiple by two.
 FAITH They will all return? Seventeen.
 HAROLD Page twenty-six.
 FAITH "Imaginary gardens with real toads"
 HAROLD Page twenty-six. Ruth . . . ?
 FAITH That's why Faith picked it.
 HAROLD "To a Child Born Still."
 FAITH To Phillip.
 HAROLD "What doors – now closed – were built for you?
 What windows – forever shut – were framed within your house?
 What landscapes embraced your sweet domain? (Lights begin to fade)
 To give this mystery meaning,
 What equation shall his father navigate?
 What ancient sage shall his mother quote?
 Shall we say that life
 Is the taking, taking, taking
 Of all things given
 And you were wise to pass it by?
 Shall we admit we hold
 No means to brace the winds
 That will surely wrest your soul
 And you were no fool to refuse us?"
 Shall we lament your choice,
 Knowing, despite the taking,
 In spite of etching winds,
 You would have liked it here?"