

SAILS ON THE MOUNTAIN

By Susan Reinhard, DGA

Born in Conemaugh Valley General Hospital
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

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TO ELVINA BERNER
For all the silver dollars

"The Valley Is Forever"
Lao Tzu

CAST:

ELVINA Sixteen years old, has been on her own since eleven.

BARBARA Middle class American wife.

LISETTE About eighteen. German.

HEINRICH Thirty years old. Large and strong enough to handle horses. Born in Germany.

JOHN Twenty-two years old, Philadelphia blueblood. Resident Engineer of the South Fork Hunting and Fishing Club

PENNEBAKER A cold, brash American businessman.

WILL A young reporter. Well dressed.

MAUREEN A strong farm woman. Irish.

ENOCH

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

CARLO

LAWYER

THE SPEAKER

THE MINISTER

ANDREW CARNEGIE

THE PLACE is Johnstown, Pennsylvania in 1889, iust before and after the Johnstown flood. At many points in the script, 2 or 3 scenes might be playing on varying parts of the stage. Each group works together, but not noting the other scene's presence. The playwright does not expect total realism and your locations, props and costumes can be indicated as your imagination and budget dictate.

ACT ONE

(In the blackout, there is the wail of a train. An orange glow begins to rise upstage, showing the silhouetted forms of men working. ELVINA enters, wearing a coat and hat of 1889, carrying a valise. She looks at the forms of the men, then turns as the glow fades.)

ELVINA

As the train climbs the mountain, I see a thousand trees, so green. High above the valley, I look out the window and I wonder if I am dreaming. There are sails...boat sails drifting slowly through the trees, like the wings of angels. The rich have made a lake, they say, to enjoy the summer and watch their metal being forged in Johnstown below, just far enough so that the wind does not bring the smell and dirt of iron to their doors. My name is Malvina Elvina Burkhardt. I am called Elvina.

(A light up downstage on BARBARA, standing imperiously in her expensive dress.)

BARBARA

You have an accent.

ELVINA

Silesia. It is in Germany, but sometimes Poland claims it. No one knows why.

BARBARA

When did your parents bring you to America?

ELVINA

Five years ago, but I came alone. I was eleven years old.

(A light comes up stage right where the LAWYER sits at his desk. A light comes up stage left, where ENOCH hammers on a piece of metal.)

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

My sister works at the lumber camp and finds me a job. But Wisconsin is so cold and far away. When I see your advertisement to come to Johnstown, the men tell me how the steel mills are a better business than wood.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

I'm impressed that you can read, but I worry about your youth. I would hate to train you to serve the Hulbert House and then lose you to a husband.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

I see no benefit to a woman in marriage.

(WILL WALLIS enters and goes to the LAWYER's desk.)

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Can you cook for many?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

I cooked for two hundred in Wisconsin.

WILL, TO LAWYER

Tell Mr. Pennebaker that Will Wallis of the Philadelphia Sun would like to see him.

BARBARA TO ELVINA

Our guests would hardly eat the same fare as lumberjacks.

LAWYER, TO WILL

Mr. Pennebaker is not available, Sir.

(HEINRICH enters stage right and approaches ENOCH.)

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

Show me your kitchen, Madame and I will let the stove speak for me.

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

They say my knees no longer work right for the rolling mill. Either you find me a new job or I move on.

WILL, TO LAWYER

Just tell him one word, Son: Masabi.

(The LAWYER rises and exits.)

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

All right. Let's see if you can poach an egg and present it properly.

(BARBARA and ELVINA exit.)

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

We can't afford to lose a man who learned steel with the Krupps, Heinrich. Let me think.

(The LAWYER enters.)

LAWYER, TO WILL

Mr. Pennebaker will see you.

(WILL and LAWYER exit.)

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

You were in the Kraut cavalry, weren't you?

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

I served the Kaiser on horseback, yes.

(LISETTE enters, dressed in the uniform of a hotel maid. ELVINA enters in the same outfit, but carrying her apron. LISETTE helps her to tie it on.)

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

Would you mind working with our horses? The Clydesdales.

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

I would rather breathe the air of a stable than that filth in the mill.

(ENOCH and HEINRICH exit.)

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

We work from seven in the morning till seven at night. Later, if they have a special party or the hotel is full.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

They get a bargain for fifty cents a day, a hard bed, and leftover food.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

But sometimes the guests will slip you a dime or a quarter. Mrs. Fletcher doesn't like it, but I hear that this is done in New York. It shows the guest is very sophisticated.

ELVINA

Or very drunk.

LISETTE

We're given two hours every Sunday to go to church.

ELVINA

I have better ways to use free time than religion.

LISETTE

How could you not go to church on the Sabbath?

ELVINA

It could be a Tuesday for all God knows or cares about it.

LISETTE

What causes such bitter words, Elvina?

ELVINA

Can I trust you?

LISETTE

You are the only friend I have in Johnstown. Tell me anything.

(They put their heads together as a light comes up downstage left on JOHN PARKE sitting as if on a rock, looking at the lake. He writes in a notebook.)

JOHN

"The journal of John Parke, Jr., Resident Engineer of Lake Conemaugh. May 30th, 1889."

(PENNEBAKER enters quickly, crossing downstage, pursued by WILL WALLIS. They are both dressed for the street.)

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

We are not involved in the railroads, Mr. Wallis! We are in steel!

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

Which can't be made without iron ore, which you find in the Masabi range of Minnesota which needs trains to get to Mr. Carnegie's mills!

PENNEBAKER, calls out

Guard! Guard! Do your duty and remove this man!

(PENNEBAKER and WILL exit quickly.)

JOHN

'Alone with Nature, the lark serenades me and I catch a glimpse of a wildcat darting behind a rock. A gray crane, as tall as myself, stood upon a rock not ten feet from me and slowly spread his wings to full span, and rose over my head and across the clear blue water, where soft mists danced waltzes in the breeze.'

(He stops writing a moment, disturbed. ELVINA steps away from LISETTE)

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

And my Christian father so loved my Jewish mother, that he suffered beatings and curses on the streets. Was abandoned by his Lutheran family, as was she by her Jewish clan. When the scarlet fever took her, he married a "Christian" woman and the witch sends me and my brother away, so no hint of Jewishness would be near their lives. I could not have found work...food and shelter here if I were a Jew.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

I've never known a Jew before. You look like everyone else.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

I left my horns and tail behind.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

But now, you are in America. You can be anyone you choose to be.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

As long as it's not a Jew.

(They exit. JOHN stands and seems to skip a stone over the water.)

JOHN

"When I see this sylvan beauty, it's impossible to believe that Man, not God, created this lake that crowns a mountaintop. But it was indeed Man, and I am forced to concede that he has failed in his attempt to harness Nature's most powerful force."

(HEINRICH enters downstage right, carrying a curry comb, that he will use as if on a horse. He feeds it an apple or a sugar cube.)

HEINRICH

What's this I hear, Schatzie? My best horse lost to me because she decides to have a baby? I hope you choose the father well. For broad shoulders, and not a pretty mane.

(LISETTE enters the stable and stops, watching him comb the horse.)

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

Maybe she chooses like me and gets both.

(LISETTE and HEINRICH embrace.)

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

It's good that both Schatzie's baby and ours was made in this stable.

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

But unlike Schatzie's stallion, you must marry your breeding mare.

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

I would today, but you want TO be a "June bride". I should not let you read these American ladies' books that put fancy ideas in your head.

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

Better ideas in my head, than what you put in my stomach!

(She throws straw at him and runs off, laughing. He follows, smiling. They exit. ELVINA enters, carrying a sack of potatoes. She sits and takes out potato and knife and begins to peel it.)

JOHN

"They have suspended twenty million tons of water in a spider's web dangled above Johnstown, a city of twenty thousand simple people who do not know of the dam's existence. Who think that these men protect them."

(WILL WALLIS enters, carrying a newspaper. He barks a laugh.)

WILL

God bless Ambrose Bierce! Listen to his definition of "Philanthropist." "A rich and usually bald old gentleman who has trained himself to grin while his conscience is picking his pocket."

JOHN

Thoreau wrote, "A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is the Earth's eye. looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature." What do these jerryrigged damworks say of the nature of my employers?

(Light down on JOHN.)

WILL

And here's the Cynic's definition of my profession. "Reporter": A writer who finds his way to the truth and dispels it with a tempest of words." On the command of his Editor, Mr. Bierce. On the command of his soulless Editor.

(Will exits. BARBARA enters and looks at ELVINA.)

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Elvina! What is that foul odor in the air?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

The iron works are upwind tonight.

(There is suddenly the distant wail of siren and klaxon.)

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

An accident. The hot steel has leapt from the belts and landed on a man. Sometimes, the boiling metal dissolves a body into a vapor that was once human. No time to even scream before the man is locked forever inside a rail or boiler.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Don't be vulgar. Show some respect for the industry that makes your livelihood possible.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

Of course. I am proud to be a cook in the Hulbert House...the finest hotel in Johnstown. The first building to have a electric elevator! And it is made of bricks! Strong as a castle! America!

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Not that I recognize my own country anymore...what with this modern tower of Babel caused by so many...newcomers.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

America is wonderful. Already I have saved twenty-five dollars!

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Are you allowing the guests to give you gratuities, Elvina?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

They never see the cook in the kitchen, Madam.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

True. Well, then, I applaud your thrift. Return to work.

(BARBARA exits. Downstage, PENNEBAKER enters quickly, with JOHN PARKE at his side. JOHN is pressing his case feverishly.)

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

...as the Millennium approaches, we have the science to change the face of earth with no harm to Nature. As Ralph Waldo Emerson has said...

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

Mr. Parke, the Hunting and Fishing Club hired you as Resident Engineer, not Resident philosopher! Now, when July arrives, I expect to be able to repair to the lake with Mrs. Pennebaker without disturbance!

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

The repairs to the dam will in no way interfere with the use of the lake!

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

I don't wish to see a gang of dirty Wop workmen every day!

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

There's time. The mass of the vacationers will not arrive until July.

(JOHN eagerly lays out his charts.)

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

A dam should arc upward at its midpoint, but there is an actual dishing down caused when the club lowered the top of the dam to smooth out the entry road. This makes it easier for the water to run over in a rainstorm. The more serious problem is the sluice pipes at the dam's base...to drain it in an emergency. They were sold for scrap and never replaced. And with the surrounding forestation being thinned out to allow for building the cottages, there's nothing to contain water flowing into the lake. You see my concern.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

I have no idea what you're talking about.

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

I'm talking about an eighty foot deep lake, three miles long and a mile wide, containing twenty million tons of water, being held by an inferior earthwork dam. If it fails, the water would be dropped down a narrow valley, gaining incredible momentum and destroying everything in its path.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

How would this affect the lakeside cottages?

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

The cottages will be intact...the fifty thousand people living below will not.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

There is a spillway on the dam.

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

Someone had it barricaded...to keep the fish inside.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

The finest black bass and quite expensive! That dam has stood for over thirty years and will stand another three hundred if we don't disturb it.

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

But you did! The members increased the amount of water in the lake by haphazardly dumping stone and dirt on top of...

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

Mr. Parke! I know that you wish to continue your employment with us...that you have no desire to join the Niggers and Hunkies earning two dollars a day in the Iron Works.

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

What are you saying?

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

I am saying: Do not bother me about this till summer is done!

(They exit. The tights go down and come up as a band plays "The Battle Hymn of The Republic." ELVINA and LISETTE run on, wearing red white and blue ribbons across their chests, carrying black umbrellas and small flags. The SPEAKER enters, waving and stands on a soap box.)

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

No. No. They call it Decoration Day because they decorate the soldier graves with flags.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

For this, they need a holiday?

THE SPEAKER, orating

On this day of Memorial, we show our appreciation to the Grand Army of the Republic who marched out proudly nearly twenty-five years ago to save our beloved Union.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

We must celebrate America, where a poor man can be a Carnegie if he works hard.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

And steals from the poor.

THE SPEAKER, orating

The War Between the States will not be remembered for loss and suffering, but for victory and progress. New miracles of medicine and communication. Transportation and manufacture.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

At least we have food three times a day.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

And how will your new husband feed you every day?

THE SPEAKER, orating

And now, we move on to the holy ground...to visit those boys who gave their lives to keep this country free. To lay the stars and stripes across their noble hearts and renew our own determination that the United States moves forward to be the greatest nation the world has ever known!

(THE SPEAKER exits up the hill as the band plays him off and fades.)

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

He is a good man. Master of the horses for the Iron Works.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

And all the money is his and whenever he wants to deny you or your children, that's that.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

Not all men are like your father, Elvina.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

For me, I will save my money and buy a small house and a few chickens and ducks. I take their eggs. I sell their eggs. They make more chickens and ducks and these I sell. Then, I can buy another house and rent that out. Do you understand?

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

I understand that you will be lonely with yourself, Elvina.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

I have been lonely with myself for five years.

(HEINRICH enters.)

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

Lisette! I am free as well. Come with me.

(LISETTE obediently trots to his side. ELVINA stares at him icily.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Fraulein Burkhardt.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Herr Berner.

(Elvina moves away from them.)

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

I do not trust that woman.

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

But, I would like her to be my bridesmaid, Heinrich. If you don't mind?

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

Just don't bring her around the house. Come with me there now. I need you.

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

But I can't go so far and....

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

Do you question me?

(She shakes her head and puts her arm through his.)

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

All right, then.

(They exit. JOHN PARKE enters.)

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Miss? Excuse me, Miss? Is it true that they're stopping the trains at East Conemaugh?

ELVINA, TO JOHN

They say the rain washed away the tracks.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Do you know where I could hire a horse to take me up the hill?

ELVINA, TO JOHN

The stable is across the street and down the alley.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Would it be possible to have a little food to take with me? I have a long ride up to Lake Conemaugh.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

You work there with the rich people?

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Yes. I'm John Parke, Junior...the resident engineer. And who do I have the honor of addressing?

ELVINA, TO JOHN

I am not supposed to talk to the guests.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

A hotel should be a welcoming rest for the weary traveler. I would feel so much more welcome if I knew your name.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

It is Elvina, Sir.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

What a pretty name. But, if you cannot serve me....

ELVINA, TO JOHN

I could put bread and cheese in paper for you. If that would be what you want...?

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Yes. Thank you.

(They exit into the hotel. Light up on PENNEBAKER and the LAWYER, seated in leather chairs, sharing brandy and cigars.)

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

...so, you see, I am not entirely indifferent to Mr. Parke's suit, but still....

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

...we really cannot budget repairs in the current fiscal year.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Exactly. It's good to talk with someone who understands the responsibility we have.

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

The future.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Nothing less. And I think it does the workers of Johnstown good to look up and see the sails on the mountain...to know what a man can achieve through labor.

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

I consulted independent engineers and they agree with Mr. Parke's assessment, but point out that the dam has proved quite sturdy under the most extreme climactic conditions.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Thirty years is a drop in the bucket to Eternity. If Nature decides to assert her power, she could flick the mightiest human from Earth like a flea. Have your engineers study further so that we might develop a worst case scenario and implement it.

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

Yes, Sir.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

But not this summer. Lake Conemaugh is the most beautiful of all Eastern resorts. My Annabelle quite blossoms when we summer there. I will not deprive her of this pleasure after all her illness and sorrow this year.

(Lights down on them and up on main set. JOHN and ELVINA come out on hotel porch. He carries a paper-wrapped object.)

ELVINA, TO JOHN

...two days in Vienna, but I was six years old so all I remember is the chocolate.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

You've seen so many of the great cities of Europe and I've never even been to New York.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

I have seen New York. From the boat, you see a thousand buildings...some ten stories tall! But they don't let me go there. They have the trains sitting at the boat in New Jersey and you go West before your legs know they are on the ground. You are the first boy from University I have met in America.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

But here you are, tossing all away and working in a kitchen for a chance to be in America. What pluck you have! I couldn't do it.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

You would be surprised at what you could do if you must. Are you sure that it's safe to ride in this storm?

JOHN, TO ELVINA

I must go back to the lake. It's my responsibility to make sure the facilities are secure...and this weather will be wreaking havoc.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

I put in a piece of pie. Not one of your rich men's cooks can make a pie the way I do, I think.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

If it's as good as you say, there might be a job for you up at the lake.

(They laugh a bit nervously. He plays with his hat.)

JOHN, TO ELVINA

I can't believe the mills are still going strong on a holiday, with the rivers rising. They should let the men go home and take care of their families.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

Careful, Mr. Parke. If your bosses hear you, they'll call you a radical.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Damn that word! Forgive me, but it's just that whenever one speaks of benefitting the workers who make their wealth possible, the rich say "radical" to stop the conversation.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

You cannot be silent. You must promise to be our constant champion, any way you can.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

I promise. Good-bye, Elvina.

(He kisses her hand and exits. LISETTE comes out on the porch.)

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

What a handsome young man! I think he likes you.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

No! He's educated and from a fine family.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

Oh, but this is America! I hear of this...poor girls who find princes.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

He would be forbidden to court a Jew.

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

But you're not a Jew anymore! You're an American!

(LISETTE exits. ELVINA goes to the rail and watches as if she sees a man on a horse ride by quickly.)

ELVINA, calls out

Safe trip, Mr. Parke! (normal) Happy life.

(BARBARA enters.)

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Who were you calling to, Elvina?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

A gentleman asked where to find a horse.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

You're not supposed to speak to the guests. We do this for your protection, Child. I have seen too many gentlemen misusing my female staff. You know he is too far above you for anything else. Now, go to the kitchen and begin lunch.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

Yes, Mrs. Fletcher.

(ELVINA exits. BARBARA remains, looking out as ENOCH enters, wearing a rubber coat and hat, with high boots.)

ENOCH, TO BARBARA

Afternoon, Mrs. Fletcher. Mr. Fletcher about?

BARBARA, TO ENOCH

He's in his office. Why?

ENOCH, TO BARBARA

Ain't never had no rain this bad for so long. We got water rising fast in both the Conemaugh and Stoney Creek. We was wondering if you might be willing to put some folks up for the night? They're decent Christian folks, but there's a lot of 'em.

BARBARA, TO ENOCH

Of course. Come with me.

(BARBARA and ENOCH exit. A single light comes down on a frantic JOHN running up on the mountain, watching his dam fill to the brim. CARLO, one of the Italian workmen enters.)

CARLO, TO JOHN

The rain stills goes, Signore. My men will try to remove the block from the spillway.

JOHN, TO CARLO

It's too dangerous. They could be swept away.

CARLO, TO JOHN

They know. But there are so many people in the valley...and their own family.

JOHN, TO CARLO

Do it!

CARLO, TO JOHN

And there is a place on the dam where the ground is good. If we make the hole there, it would eat the dirt slow and start to leak the dam before she explode...?

JOHN, TO CARLO

There's a town right below it. Hundreds could die.

CARLO TO JOHN

Thousands die if the dam, she explode...?

JOHN, TO CARLO

God! I'll be the man who wiped out a town! If only this damnable rain would stop! Do it! Do it! Go! Go!

(CARLO exits. JOHN is pacing, breathing hard.)

JOHN

It's going to fail! Fail! Stop the rain you bastard! How much rain do you need?

(HEINRICH enters, carrying a sandbag, pursued by ENOCH.)

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

I will not leave my house. The wops and hunkies will take everything as soon as the people leave.

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

I need you to help keep the horses and mills dry. If we got to shut down, they ain't going to pay us, and then what good's a house?

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

Damned Jews, putting their money first!

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

They ain't Jewish, Henry. I keep telling you that Mr. Carnegie is a Scotsman.

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

Just as bad!

(LISETTE, BARBARA and ELVINA enter, their arms full of sheets and towels, preparing for the extra guests coming into the hotel. BARBARA directs the girls. WILL WALLIS runs on, with a suitcase, he calls behind him.)

WILL

You're not fooling me, Jackson, I know what this is! It's my punishment for coming near the truth. You think it's my curse to have to cover the damned weather. Well, it won't rain tomorrow in Johnstown, Jackson, and then you'll have Will Wallis back and all over your desk!

(WILL runs out. Light up on the LAWYER, holding a telegram, standing over PENNEBAKER, who is seated at his desk.)

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

What chance is there of the weather breaking?

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

They say that the mountains in the region can hold a storm in place for days'

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

So, this is not the first such storm?

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

Actually, there's never been one that's lasted this long.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Remind Parke that we hired him to deal with such problems in our absence.

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

I would not suggest that we sound an alarm to the valley. That would imply prior knowledge of the danger and would increase our liability.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Liability for what? A few broken down farms and beggar's shacks?

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

And the City of Johnstown, Sir.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Send word to Cambia TO shut down their furnaces till the crisis is passed.

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

And what should I tell Mr. Parke?

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Tell him to find an old Indian Chief and see if he knows a rain dance, then ask him to do it backwards. It's too late to put back Parke's sluice pipes now.

(Light down on them, single light up on the tree whipping in the wind. BARBARA, ELVINA and LISETTE enter, carrying lamps.)

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

Elvina...? This water in the street is moving!

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

It is the river coming toward us. They say it has never been so high. They fear that the river and the Stoney Creek will meet before the night is through.

(Suddenly BARBARA stops and speaks to them.)

BARBARA, quietly

I dreamt last night that the dam broke. A wall of water rose before me, carrying timber and human bodies. I felt its cold embrace. Living humans and children's toys were slammed against rock and timber. It lifted me and broke my bones, ripped my flesh. My lungs, seeking air, drew in water and my body fought for air until there was only water and the black veil began to drop. I fought and kicked and found my lungs demanded air and found only river...and then, darkness fell.

LISETTE, TO BARBARA

Madame, please...there are children in the lobby?

BARBARA, TO LISETTE

Of course. Elvina, give them cookies. Lisette, start moving the vases to the second floor. Come now! Quickly!

(BARBARA, LISETTE and ELVINA exit. Light up on JOHN arriving breathlessly in the telegraph office. A man is leaning back in a chair, reading a newspaper.)

JOHN, TO TELEGRAPH MAN

Send the word! Down the line! To the valley! The dam will break! The dam will break!

TELEGRAPH MAN, TO JOHN

But it ain't broke Yet?

JOHN, TO TELEGRAPH MAN

The lake is overflowing the dam and the South Fork isn't built to stand it! It may break!

TELEGRAPH MAN, TO JOHN

That's what you want me to say?

JOHN, TO TELEGRAPH MAN

Yes!

TELEGRAPH MAN, TO JOHN

Well, unless it broke already...ain't it going to cause a panic saying it might?

JOHN, TO TELEGRAPH MAN

I want panic! I want them to run for the hills, damn you! I can't stay here! I have to keep going! Tell them the dam is dangerous!

(JOHN runs out. The Telegraph Man turns TO his set and begins TO tap.)

TELEGRAPH MAN

A MAN COME FROM THE LAKE STOP. HE SAYS THE DAM IS DANGEROUS. STOP.

(Light down on The Telegraph Man. HEINRICH enters, pulling LISETTE with him. The wind is howling and the rain is pouring.)

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

You come up the hill with me! To my house!

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

I cannot leave my job with so many people here!

(CARLO leads JOHN onstage.)

CARLO, TO JOHN

It's too late, Signore!

JOHN, TO CARLO

Go back! Keep digging. Let the water out. Let me go back.

CARLO, TO JOHN

Not safe on the dam. Is too late.

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

Let them release you! I'll care for you.

(ELVINA enters and runs to grab LISETTE's hand.)

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

You cannot order her! Come, Lisette. The hotel is of bricks and will keep us safe.

(JOHN suddenly seems to be a very old man, beyond panic. He goes to the edge of the porch.)

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

Will you stay with me if I go TO your house?

HEINRICH, TO LISETTE

No. The men must help stay the river and move the sick.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

It worries me that bad men, knowing the good are busy, might try to enter your house with Lisette there alone.

LISETTE, TO HEINRICH

Let me stay here, with my friends.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You know for sure this hotel is safe?

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

Look at the street. I could not see that rock an hour ago for the water and now it is clear. The rain is less. It leaves us.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

If I leave my woman and child with you, you must promise me that you will put their lives first, ahead of even yourself if danger comes.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

There is a child already?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

So, you see...this woman is my family. My life. What is the word I need...guarantee! You guarantee I will have my life tomorrow?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

This is the strongest building in Johnstown. I promise you Lisette will be safe.

(HEINRICH kisses LISETTE and exits. Light down on them.)

JOHN, TO CARLO

What time is it?

CARLO, TO JOHN

Nine minutes past three. Why?

JOHN, quietly

The dam is moving.

(CARLO runs to the edge.)

CARLO, TO JOHN

The water...she push it.

JOHN, TO CARLO

I thought there'd be an explosion, but the water is just pushing it forward like a curtain over a doorway and....there it goes!

(CARLO falls on his knees, praying, the light goes down on him. JOHN drops away from CARLO as if his knees were weak. The light comes up on the TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, who is trying to find life in his telegraph set as WILL runs in, short of breath.)

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

What are you doing up here, Mister? They told you to stay put in the train.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Four hours ago! And not a word of what was going on. Saw your shack on the hill and your lights and I thought you might be the man who knew when we were going to get moving again. I am a newspaper man with a deadline.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

The line's been down since before noon. a case you haven't noticed, the rain's not much interested in anybody's schedule.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

So, we're supposed to sit out here in East Coalhole?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Conemaugh. East Conemaugh. We got a reason for having a rail yard up here...to keep our trains out of the water down below.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

But what about food? And a dry bed? We can't just sit in the train all night in a place with no amenities.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

You're stuck halfway between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Mister. No "amenities" out here. We got a whole bunch of agitated creeks and rivers and a dam just a few miles upstream

that's none too steady. For all we know, a bridge washed out downstream...and wouldn't you prefer to stay a little hungry than to risk your life?

(A sudden waiting of sirens and klaxons begins over the valley, and most ominously, the scream of a train's whistle tied down...the railroad S.O.S.)

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

What's all that noise?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Something's terrible wrong down there.

(They run to the window.)

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

They're all running! Jumping off the trains!

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Jesus Christ! Look at it! Look at it coming around the hill!

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

He was right! The boy was right!

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Trains tossed like toys! And the people! The people!

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

What do we do?

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

I don't know. Sweet, sweet ladies on the train. Good men. Children. Washed away. Killed like that! ...and the water's already gone.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Rolling on down the valley.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

TO Johnstown.

(JOHN falls to his knees.)

JOHN

It looked like Niagara pouring down. Simply pouring and pouring. Almost beautiful from above. And then I saw the trees breaking off like twigs and I leapt to my horse and started to ride and I could not catch it. And coming around the corner...I saw the city sitting there at the bottom of the valley, rivers already swollen with dark clouds hanging low. A red glow was still coming from the mill. The horse could go no further, and still the water poured down, rolled over and over, taking all in its path. Science died for me that day. And I wanted to know no more. I remounted my horse and began to ride away from the devastation. If they need a question answered or a punishment upon me, I will endure it, and then I wish to know no more.

(Light down on him. The rain is stopping.)

LISETTE, TO ELVINA

The rain stops.

ELVINA, TO LISETTE

We'll have no gas or electric tonight.

(There is a sound. A hissing, crashing sound that grows in intensity.)

BARBARA

Yea, though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death I fear no evil...

(A sudden wailing of sirens and klaxons begins through the valley and most ominously, the unbroken scream of a railroad's horn.)

LISETTE

Why are all the sirens going?

ELVINA

Note the time somebody!

LISETTE

Seven minutes Past four.

BARBARA

Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me.

LISETTE

Thou anointest my head with oil.

BARBARA

My cup runneth over.

(ELVINA steps into the street and looks up the hill.)

ELVINA

Run! Run for the hill!

(ELVINA grabs LISETTE's hand and they run off stage right. The loudest noise as a curtain of water swiftly rolls from the mountain and into the audience's faces. Blackout. End of Act.)

ACT TWO

(In the darkness, we hear the sounds of moaning. One voice is distinctly BARBARA's.)

BARBARA's voice

Help! Help me! I am blinded! Help me! Please!

(A blue light comes up on the tree downstage right. BARBARA is clinging to it, her face covered with blood. Her clothes have been torn off and she is covered in mud. There is an orange glow in the distance, not of the mills but of a great fire. ELVINA is clinging to the

tree as well. The air rings with the sound of explosions and cries of agony. ELVINA carefully removes her torn jacket.)

ELVINA

Reach toward my voice. I will put my coat into your hand so you might cover yourself.

BARBARA

Elvina? Is that you?

ELVINA

Yes, Mrs. Fletcher. Hold fast! There is deep water below us. One of the lakes up on the hill must have fallen upon us.

BARBARA

But why has it not gone down the valley?

ELVINA

Our great stone bridge refuses to move before the flood and has held it so that it covers the town to nearly the rooftops.

BARBARA

What are those terrible cries?

ELVINA

Houses have smashed against the bridge, many with the people still inside. Their stoves and lamps have set them afire. Rooftops float by with injured people on them, crying out for help. The water is just below us, and almost solid with debris. Beyond that...is darkness.

(HEINRICH and ENOCH enter on opposite sides of the stage. HEINRICH throws a rope TO ENOCH, who catches it.)

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

Good shot, Henry! Anchor it.

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

The water's too fast! And we lose the sun.

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

We gotta risk it. The house is breaking apart.

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

You're too old to swim! I come to you.

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

Jesus God! Look at that! A woman and child on a mattress. Tie yourself tight to the rope, Henry! They're coming closer. Now!

(Blackout on ENOCH and HEINRICH as they move to make their rescue.)

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

We cannot drink this water, can we?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

It stinks of death and fuel oil.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Poor Bertram. He must be frantic, wondering where I am. He rode off to see if he could help others...just ten minutes before the water....

(She breaks down and reaches out a hand. ELVINA moves to her and takes it. A light up on WILL and the TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, who are seated on the ground, looking at the devastation around them.)

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

And the river goes quietly back inside its banks. Leaving behind mud, death and broken train cars, like a spoiled child who had scattered his toys in a tantrum, then crawls innocently to his bed to sleep.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

These ain't just bodies to me, Mister. These are men I saw every day, coming East in the morning and going West again at night. Every locomotive had a name. And to see the dead children and women like this...not even a blanket to cover their face and no idea when help's gonna come. I tell you, I'm near to lying down and joining them myself.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

You must stay strong and help me find out what happened. Bring punishment to those at fault. You said "he was right". You said, "the boy was right" when the dam failed. What boy? When?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Two, three hours back...he said he come from the dam and it weren't built to stand the rain.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

He just ran in and out again?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Like Satan himself was on his tail. Pale boy. Kind of over bred.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Well-dressed? Educated?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Sounded like it. But I can't think of anything more to tell you.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

Be strong. The worst is over and we are alive.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

I'm blinded and my husband is dead!

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

You know neither to be true! And you will not know for many hours. (beat) You have lived your life safe, Mrs. Fletcher. The day has come when you have only yourself to rely on. I have had such a day when all there is...is me.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Stay by me.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

I will not leave you until you are safe.

(The light goes down on ELVINA and BARBARA.)

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

So is they going to arrest Frick?

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

What for?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Well, Frick and Carnegie and Mellon and them boys owned that there dam so I'm thinking they're going TO be arrested for all this.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

Carnegie owns it?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

Some kind of a sporting club.

(WILL grabs the TELEGRAPH OPERATOR and hugs him.)

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

How far are we from Johnstown?

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR, TO WILL

You can't walk ten miles. There probably ain't a road left in the valley.

WILL, TO TELEGRAPH OPERATOR

As soon your line comes back, wire Byron Jackson at the Philadelphia Sun! Tell him of the flood and that his own Will Wallis will be first into Johnstown.

(WILL exits. Lights down. We hear the moans and explosions a bit longer, then af is darkness. A dull light rises on the next morning. The hotel and houses are gone. ELVINA enters, dressed in rags. She looks at the corner where the hotel stood.)

ELVINA

So much for bricks.

(She sits and puts her head between her knees. MAUREEN enters, she is filthy and dressed only in her slip. She speaks with an Irish accent.)

MAUREEN, calls out

Gertie! Gertrude O'Hara! It's Mama, Darling! Where are you? (TO ELVINA) Excuse me? Have you seen a little girl about so high? Four years old. My Gertie. She has golden hair and the bluest eyes? Not even among the dead?

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

Forgive me, but when I see the body of a child, I turn my eyes away.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Indeed.

(MAUREEN sits next TO ELVINA. Lights up on JOHN PARKE, seated on a chair. PENNEBAKER

is pacing behind him. The LAWYER is reading from a paper.)

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

...because the incorporation of the Hunting and Fishing Club is in Allegheny County, not Cambria. This will make lawsuits even more difficult..and....

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

Why must I listen to this?

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

Because you were the one in charge of the dam that day.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

So, can we rightfully say that the first repair of the dam thirty years ago was at fault?

LAWYER, TO PENNEBAKER

As the Pennsylvania Railroad owned it at the time...we had best not bring it up.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Such sights I've seen. Trees driven like spikes through houses. The pile at the bridge is a mile long and burning. Voices wailing from the depths.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

Where were you when the water came?

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Woodvale, up the hill.

(Light up on ENOCH and HEINRICH, sitting exhausted on the ground.)

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

Sorry, Henry, but I can't do no more. Nearly a day since I et or slept.

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

How long till somebodyY comes?

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

Telegraphs say the trains are coming. Red Cross is sending nurses and food. Railroad's got to fix a lot of track, so we have to wait.

HEINRICH, standing

I must see if my house is good and my woman lives.

ENOCH, TO HEINRICH

What about the Iron Works?

HEINRICH, TO ENOCH

With or without me, that's the first thing they're going to fix.

(HEINRICH exits. light down on ENOCH.)

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

They can't blame me. There hadn't been a storm like that in recorded history.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

And wouldn't you prefer that we supported you...publicly...on that, Mr. Parke?

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

When the rivers was rising, me and Gertie went to the attic and was sitting on the bed when the water swept us off. We rode like a raft on that soaking mattress. Up high on a wall of water...so fast, I can see only blackness tumbling around us and shoving us toward the sky. Gertie and me had our claws dug into the ticking and locked on. At last, I see a man on the shore, with a rope tied round him. I call out, "Can you take my baby? Can you save her?" A dead horse, his eyes wide, rolled by us and Gertie let out with a scream. The man with strong arms stepped forward and then, bless him, he dove in and came to us. Gertie didn't want to let go....see the marks where her nails cut me? But I threw her toward this manly angel. Threw her a goodly twenty feet and damn if I didn't do it. If he didn't reach her with those big hands and grasp her tight...and then, they were gone. Like all the rest of it.

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

Ten thousand may be dead.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Onward, I rode. Through noise and thunder and screams.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

And the living only care that they get their jobs back.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Suddenly, I slowed and began to drift as easy as Cleopatra down the Nile, and then I see a beautiful sight. The color green...a grassy bank and I dove for it and landed on solid ground, holding that inch of two grass in my hands and bless their stubborn roots, they held me fast.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

If any suit does get to court, we have our Resident Engineer TO testify that the dam was in order.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

I pray the Holy Mother spared me because she had also spared my Gertie.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

I have lost my friend. Together, we will search and maybe make us stronger as two.

(MAUREEN and ELVINA exit.)

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

I will not lie.

LAWYER, TO JOHN

We don't want you to lie. All you need say is that the rain was exceptional. Who could dispute that?

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

John, my boy...listen to me. The people around here are not as sophisticated as you and I. They have no education and and react TO distress with panic and riot. I have already asked the Governor to send the militia to guard the city. It is an extremely delicate situation and anything you might say could set off more suffering. Listen to us. Listen to the voice of experience. By speaking, you risk the journalists turning your words against you. There is

no need for them to pay any attention to you. You will simply issue a statement as the only witness and be on your way. Your career will continue. Your income will be Secure. Remember, John, your Uncle is the Commandant of West Point. Journalists love to bring down great men...and as it was his recommendation that secured your employment with us....well, it could fall heavily upon him.

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

You say too much to me. My mind is reeling.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

Precisely. You must rest.

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

I must go to Johnstown. To see. To understand.

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

You are staying. There's a trainload of news reporters not three hours away

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

You cannot hold me Prisoner!

(He turns. CARLO steps out of the shadows and blocks his way.)

CARLO

I was with Signore Parke that night. He could have saved the dam.

JOHN

No! We were doomed from the first drop of rain! Damn you for a liar!

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

He has many children to feed, Mr. Parke.

(JOHN sits heavily.)

PENNEBAKER, TO JOHN

Now John, no one need take responsibility for this tragedy save Mother Nature. We all know that a man who bore the blame for the flood would be considered one of the greatest monsters of all time. We wouldn't want John Parke to join History in the pantheon of such names as Lucretia Borgia and Robespierre. That wouldn't do at all.

(JOHN takes his head in his hands as the lights fade on the scene. Light up on ELVINA and MAUREEN seated on the ground.)

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

William. Billy. He works as a fireman on the railroad.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

It may take days for him to find you.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

I sense he's dead.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

You say this easily.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

I sense my daughter lives, so I must be strong for her sake.

(MAUREEN stands as HEINRICH enters.)

MAUREEN, TO HEINRICH

I know you! You're the one who saved my Gertie!

HEINRICH, TO MAUREEN

What do you mean?

MAUREEN, TO HEINRICH

We were on the mattress. You swam to us. Is she alive?

HEINRICH, TO MAUREEN

I left her at the Catholic Church. I see the beads around her wrist and take her to the nuns... is this right?

MAUREEN, TO HEINRICH

Yes! Perfect! Bless you! Bless you! I have my reason to live!

(MAUREEN runs off. ELVINA goes TO HEINRICH.)

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Heinrich! Is Lisette with you?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

No. You said you would protect her.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

How could I know a dam would break?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You owe me a wife and a child. Where are they? Speak!

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I take her by the hand and we run to the hill and for a heartbeat, just a heartbeat, I let go her hand to grab a tree and I turn and there is no Lisette. Just water. Not even a cry. Just gone!

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Many ride the waters and come out alive.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

This, I pray for.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I walk and step over dishes and clothing that belong inside a house. In places you can cross the water on the backs of the dead. People bleed, with broken bones outside the skin. And there is nothing we can do. I must go now. The boss wants us to clean up the mill.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Can you not stop to search for Lisette?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

As you lost her, it is your duty to find her. or do you have other plans?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Everything I have, my clothes, my job...my twenty-five dollars was in this hotel.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I be at the mill all day. You go up to my house. Lisette left a dress there. It fits you. Then, you go and search for Lisette.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Yes.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

The farm with the brown house on Brewer Street in Geistown.

(He exits. ELVINA almost runs away, then stops. She turns slowly and walks up the hill. WILL WALLIS appears, exhausted, muddy, and torn. He sits on his suitcase and takes out a notebook and begins to write.)

WILL, reads

"Who was this mystery rider, the noble hero of the flood? At peril of his own life, he leapt upon his noble steed and galloped to rouse the sleeping populace.'.." Whoa, Wallis. It was afternoon. Damn! Night's better. "...to rouse the sleeping populace' His wise eyes had gazed upon the fragile earthen battlements and saw that they were weary and could no longer fight against the relentless water." DAMN! Frick and Carnegie! Mellon! There's my story and I can't touch it! They won't print it!

(WILL looks up and addresses the sky.)

WILL

Hey, History! It's Will Wallis. You out there, Honey Pie? You watching me, Queenie? You see what I've seen? Whole towns wiped off the face of the Earth? Babies covered in mud, with fence posts driven through their tiny chests? And all so some rich men can swim and fish and stuff their fatted faces. (pause) The Telegrapher said he looked like a rich boy!

(ELVINA enters HEINRICH's kitchen, indicated by a table. and chairs and a stove. She looks under something and brings out a box. It is a dress. She holds it up to herself, then puts it on.)

WILL

Think Wallis, think! The boy is the key. It's too early for guests. He must have worked there, and no menial task for our young lion. He knew exactly what the danger was. He could read the dam's condition. Yes!

(WILL grabs his suitcase and runs off. HEINRICH enters the kitchen, dirty and tired. He sits. ELVINA brings him a bowl and sits across from him.)

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I go today to all the schools and churches where they bring the bodies. Still no Lisette. They are waiting for workmen to clear the bridge.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Is it true that the Hunkies riot?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Nobody does that. By noon, they have a meeting and make martial law and deputies.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I see the water rolling down the valley. It hits the mountain and explodes, then returns over the town. I see the water make the hotel disappear. They say that some escape the water and run away. Never to see this place again.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

She wouldn't. Not with the baby. They are gone, Heinrich. And it is me to blame.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You would do good not to be so proud. This food is good. Danke.

(They eat in silence. Light up on ENOCH attempting TO make a fire with a wet flint. WILL WALLIS enters.)

WILL, TO ENOCH

Evening, Pilgrim! Am I in Johnstown?

ENOCH, TO WILL

I guess we don't look much like a city these days. You got a match?

WILL, TO ENOCH

Oh! Of course!

ENOCH, TO WILL

Just one'll do. Learn to husband your supplies.

WILL, TO ENOCH

Tell me, would there be any stores where I could buy a clean shirt?

(ENOCH roars with laughter as he lights the fire.)

WILL, TO ENOCH

Yes, of course. Civilization has been washed away and I must learn to live like a frontiersman. My name is Will Wallis. I'm a reporter from Philadelphia.

ENOCH, TO WILL

How'd you get here?

WILL, TO ENOCH

I walked from East Conemaugh.

ENOCH, TO WILL

So, you'd be the man to tell the story right. Seat yourself. I'll tell you what I saw. Around four, the water comes through the pass. Thirty...forty foot high. Got trees in it. Locomotives. Horses and men. Then it dead ends hard on the mountain and floods the town again....

(ENOCH talks intensely to WILL, who writes it down. Light down. Light up on HEINRICH's kitchen, where ELVINA packs a brown paper bag. HEINRICH enters.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You leave?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Thank you for letting me sleep in your barn, but now that I have found Lisette's body, it is not proper that I stay.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You have yet TO give me the wife and child you owe me.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

This is not amusing, Heinrich!

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I am quite serious. Please sit. I wish to talk to you.

(They sit across from each other.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

We are strangers to each other, but we share a deep affection for Lisette.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

She was my only friend.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I am thirty years old. A man should have a wife by this time. This is what I am thinking. You are a strong woman. You can see that I have neglected my farm for the mill job. I am thinking that you could take care of the gardens for me.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

You offer me wages?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

If, to be a man's wife is a woman's job, I am.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

You ask me TO be your wife with Lisette not yet buried?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

you owe me a wife. This is how you pay your debt. I do not forget Lisette. But we know now that Death comes quickly. t cannot take time to find someone, especially with so many women drowned. This is business. I need someone to take care of the farm. To give me sons. For you, this would be good. You have no money. No home.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I have survived for five years without selling myself.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

If you think a servant girl can do better than to marry the master of the horses, then go and

try to survive in the world But, if you want a home and children, then why go searching when it is all offered to you this very day?

(ELVINA stands and walks to him. She picks up his foot and inspects it. She looks at his teeth. He, whose job is to purchase horses, laughs.)

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

your stove is old. The fire will not stay lit. And there are not enough shelves in here. And a wife requires a proper set of dishes.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Does not the wife's family provide dishes?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I have no family.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I see. So, you come to America.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I came to make better for myself.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

The same reason as me. You're not a Catholic, are you?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

No. I am not a Catholic.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Good. I don't like that this Pope would have a hand over my wife. If I didn't know better, I'd say you were a Jew. Do I know better?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

What makes You say such a thing?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You care too much for money.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I see. That I do not wish for myself or my children to starve...this makes me a Jew. But, if I were a Jew, would I not be wife my own people instead of wandering alone in a wilderness full of wild Indians and pigheaded Germans?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Well, then, are You Lutheran?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I have never been inside a church.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Would you go there with your husband?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

If this man agrees to my terms. To marry is to work. The gardens and livestock, cleaning

and cooking. Children. I must toil from dawn to dusk every day of my life, I would only marry a man who gives me money of my own, so that I don't have to beg him.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You may sell the vegetables that we don't use and keep the money for yourself. And I bring you a gift...look in the Yard.

(She stands and goes to the window.)

ELVINA

Chickens! And ducks!

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Whatever eggs we don't use, you may sell and keep the money for yourself.

ELVINA

And my children.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

So! Do we have a bargain?

(They shake hands. ELVINA looks out the window. He stands.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

There is a box under the bed with Lisette's wedding dress. we will go to the minister tonight. So that you don't have to spend another night in the barn.

(He exits. Light up on ENOCH and WILL)

ENOCH, TO WILL

You can write the story, Mr. Wallis, but I don't think the Bard himself could come near the meat of it.

WILL, TO ENOCH

Rich men owned this dam! Surely, the law requires them to compensate you.

ENOCH, TO WILL

If there be laws, they couldn't make us work twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

WILL, TO ENOCH

Now is the time for us to change the laws. To bring them in step with progress.

ENOCH, TO WILL

Now is the time for us to survive the day! And pray that the mill opens quickly so we can have our wages!

(Light off on them and up on BARBARA, sitting huddled on a cot, under a dirty blanket. ELVINA enters, carrying a covered bowl.)

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Stay! Who is it?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

Elvina, Mrs. Fletcher. The nurses have arrived and there is now hot soup. Smell. Good vegetables and meat.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

How vivid the odors are without sight. Did they open the bank yet?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

The bank is gone. The papers and money are scattered.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

But they have my savings.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

There is no record. I'm sorry.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

I am widowed, blinded and penniless. what more can God do to Mrs. Job today?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

They say Clara Barton is building a shelter. You are first on the list.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Charity.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

Survival.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

Ge kaken auf yam.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

I do not deserve such an insult! Wait! Yid?

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

I think I knew from the beginning we were both denying who we are.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

Is Fletcher not your name?

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

My husband was born Fleischmann. If a hotel owned by Jews was opened in Johnstown, no one would stay there. So we called ourselves the Fletchers. Now that I have lost everything, I can be whoever I choose. And you?

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

A man has asked me to marry him. He thinks I am a Christian.

BARBARA, TO ELVINA

I thought you were indifferent to men.

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

I have lost everything and the last days have made me see how dangerous life is. I want a house. I want a baby in my arms. I no longer believe I have the leisure to wait.

(She sits before BARBARA, picks up the soup bowl and begins to feed her. Lights down. Light up on PENNEBAKER, the LAWYER and JOHN PARKE entering. JOHN carries a suitcase. WILL and ENOCH enter. ENOCH points at JOHN.)

ENOCH, TO WILL

That one. The boy. Joe Berger says he hired a horse from him the day before the flood. Told him he was the Resident engineer up at Lake Conemaugh and was going back to supervise. Left his name, John Parke, but never brung back the horse.

WILL, TO JOHN

John Parke! My name is Will Wallis from the Philadelphia sun!

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Did I not order you to have the Guard hold the Pittsburgh train until Mr. Parke was on his way out of here?

LAWYER, TO WILL

Mr. Parke will take no questions.

PENNEBAKER, TO LAWYER

Where in blazing Hell did you come from?

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

I walked. What's the situation at the lake?

LAWYER, TO WILL

Lake Conemaugh no longer exists. The Hunting and Fishing Club sustained damages estimated at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The members have withdrawn to Altoona and are working on raising funds for flood relief.

JOHN, TO WILL

Can you get word to my Mother that I am alive and uninjured?

LAWYER, TO JOHN

We'll take care of that, Mr. Parke.

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

As you know, the valley sustained continuous storms for two days. Mere men could not have stopped the downpour or dealt with it. No man could have anticipated the effect on the dam. By noon...everyone in the valley should have known the danger and gone to higher ground.

(Suddenly, BARBARA enters and walks toward the men.)

BARBARA

We knew the river was rising! Nothing more! The rain had stopped! The sun was about to shine and then the lake came down upon us.

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

Here you go, Sir. The perfect witness for your yellow rag...a madwoman.

BARBARA, TO PENNEBAKER

Mad, yes! Like Cassandra, Tiresius and Paul Revere! You, Sir! I sense you are a rich man! I smell whiskey and cologne. My bank was taken. The money was scattered and my papers destroyed. There is no record of my life.

PENNEBAKER, TO BARBARA

Clara Barton will be building a shelter. I'm sure she will take you in.

WILL, TO JOHN

You rode out, didn't you? Tried to sound the warning. When did you know that the dam was going to fail? That day? Earlier?

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

I can have you arrested for inciting riot! Martial law is in effect, Mr. Wallis,

WILL, TO JOHN

What was your job at the dam?

LAWYER, TO JOHN

Don't answer that.

ELVINA, TO WILL

He called himself the Engineer.

WILL, TO JOHN

Then, you knew what to do. How to stop it. Why didn't you?
Or couldn't you?

JOHN

I have nothing to say! Leave me in peace!

(JOHN exits with the LAWYER.)

BARBARA, TO PENNEBAKER

I know the ways of business. I know you dare not pay a cent in damages or you'll have to pay them all and that would ruin you and your masters.

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

I'll be happy to bring just one of the rabid beasts to ground!

(PENNEBAKER exits, BARBARA begins to collapse, WILL catches her.)

BARBARA, TO WILL

It is good that you are here to help us. My shelter is over here. I have much to tell you, if you will listen.

(Light up on BARBARA'S tent. ELVINA is there, having brought food and blankets, which she is arranging.)

ELVINA, TO BARBARA

There you are! you must not wander off when the town is so full of danger. (TO WILL) I can tell from your clothes that you are not one of us.

WILL

My name is Will Wallis. I'm a reporter...a writer for a newspaper.

ELVINA, TO WILL

They pay you money to write words?

(They help BARBARA to sit.)

WILL, TO ELVINA

My father said much the same thing when I announced my career. I'm the first reporter here and I've seen things none of the rest will see. I came within inches of losing my own life to the flood. They're going to lie about this. They're going to make up stories to sell. papers, but I don't want to do that. I want to record the truth. The Truth is all you have left in this world. A great man said, "Discovery of Truth is the sole purpose of philosophy, which is the most decent occupation of the human mind and has a fair prospect of existing to the end of time." We can be a part of that great continuum...of History...if we dedicate ourselves to the Truth. Will you help me?

ELVINA, TO WILL

My name is Elvina Burkhardt. This is Mrs. Fletcher.

BARBARA, TO WILL

Fleischmann. My name is Fleischmann. It is a Jewish name.

(Lights down. End of Act Two.)

ACT THREE

(In the darkness, small fires are burning. BARBARA and MAUREEN are before one of the, ENOCH before another, and WILL is before a third. WILL is writing.)

WILL, reads

"One week after the flood, two miracles take place in Johnstown. First, after days of grayness, the morning sky awoke as robin's egg blue. A golden sun began the gentle process of drying the landscape. At last, it is June and late spring. More important, the people have begun to blossom like the flowers that rise from the mud. The sounds of hammer and saw ring in the air. Men have run ropes across the unbridged rivers and pull barges back and forth. Rescue trains arrive by the dozen, bulging with food and clothing, doctors and nurses. Both charities and charlatans are collecting money for the orphans and homeless. The machine of Life is in motion, and as usual, proves far stronger than the mightiest flood."

(MAUREEN has wandered closer, holding a cup.)

MAUREEN, TO WILL

Excuse me, sir.

(WILL stands quickly rises, buttoning his shirt.)

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Hello. Lovely night.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

Yes, it's good to see stars again.

(Light up downstage on the MINISTER. ELVINA and HEINRICH enter. HEINRICH wears a suit and ELVINA a pretty dress and hat.)

HEINRICH, TO MINISTER

Good morning, Pastor Heiber...have you a moment?

MINISTER, TO HEINRICH

Not many with the constant burials and a hundred people living in the sanctuary. If you've found the body of another loved one, I can't fit it in till Thursday.

HEINRICH, TO MINISTER

We wish to be married.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

My daughter smelled your good stew and asked if she might have some. I'll understand if you have none to spare, but her mother would love yo give her some comfort after all this.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Of course! Please sit.

MINISTER

Didn't you just bury a fiancée? No offense, Miss.

HEINRICH, TO MINISTER

This is a business arrangement.

MINISTER

Not sure I have a service for that.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

One good thing about the coming of my rivals is that they brought provisions and were willing to swap them for information. We're reporters.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

From the city?

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Quite. you should have seen their faces when they jumped off the train and realized that all the hotels were gone. I pointed them to an abandoned factory and had the joy of watching the New York Times and Washington Post make camp in the mud.

ELVINA, TO MINISTER

What Herr Berner means is that he owns a farm and while he is in great pain. for the loss of Lisette, he had planned to be married in June. With the growing season coming, it is necessity for him to have a wife to take care of the land.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

And why aren't you with the other reporters, where there's whiskey and laughter?

WILL, TO MAUREEN

The true story is out here, with the people.

MINISTER, TO ELVINA

Well, I see what you mean about the vegetables. and our current situation does make proprieties seem less important. And, truth be told, I am deeply wearied of death and injury. It lifts my spirit to have a wedding. Did you bring your baptismal records?

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Do you have some tale of the flood you'd like written down?

MAUREEN, TO WILL

Let's take the stew to Gertie and LOL tell you. I had a small adventure that may amuse you.

(They walk back to her fire. ENOCH approaches BARBARA. HEINRICH hands the MINISTER a paper.)

HEINRICH, TO MINISTER

Here is my certificate of baptism. Fraulein Burkhardt lost her papers in the flood.

MINISTER, TO ELVINA

Well, I don't have time to test you, so, do you confirm that you were baptized?

ELVINA, TO MINISTER

I do.

ENOCH, TO BARBARA

All ready to go?

BARBARA, TO ENOCH

What does readiness matter? One's life is not one's own.

ENOCH, TO BARBARA

You'll feel better once you lay your head on one of Clara Barton's dry cots.

BARBARA, TO ENOCH

I'll feel drier at least.

ENOCH, TO BARBARA

It's a wonder the work the Red Cross is doing. They say this is the first disaster that they've aided.

BARBARA, TO ENOCH

I do not call it a disaster, sir. It is a great battle of the most terrible war.

(They exit. The MINISTER hands HEINRICH a paper he has just filled out.)

MINISTER, TO HEINRICH

Then, there you are. Sign here. (TO ELVINA) Now you. I pronounce you man and wife.

HEINRICH, TO MINISTER

This is not a wedding!

MINISTER, TO HEINRICH

It's legal and I've got twenty to bury before sundown. Anyway, signing the contract is pretty significant. A wedding contract is a business deal. So, good-bye. God bless. Be fruitful, and make a dozen little field hands.

(The MINISTER exits. A long pause. ELVINA goes to the table and picks up the contract. She folds it carefully and places it in her bag. More silence.)

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Is not a man to kiss his wife when they marry?

(HEINRICH walks to her. He removes his hat, then quickly touches his lips to hers. A moment, then he takes her chin and brings it closer for a more serious kiss. As the light fades, they are kissing once more. Light down on them and up on WILL and MAUREEN, sitting before the fire.)

WILL, TO MAUREEN

My God! This is stuff of legends! They'll write songs about the wild ride of Johnstown's brave Colleens!

MAUREEN, TO WILL

Do you think?

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Oh, you should see the papers with their great, impassioned headlines about the flood! One concocted the tale of a baby in a crib, floating down the river, "crying for Momma, but Momma is dead!" They hired a man to make a drawing of it and now it's a fact in the Public mind.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

I only care that my story will help open the hearts of America so that they help us. God knows, no one else will.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Not the men who owned the dam, that's for sure.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

At least we've found Billy's body and the railroad will give me his pension.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Will it be enough?

MAUREEN, TO WILL

I'll make it do.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

I'll wager you will.

(Light down on them and up on ELVINA and HEINRICH arriving home She removes her hat and ties up her apron. She begins to bustle about the kitchen.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Elvina. What are You doing?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

It's nearly five. I must start the dinner.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Dinner can wait.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

For what?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I would like to go to bed.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Are you ill?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You have found me a wife...but your debt is not paid in full until I have a child.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

The sun is still outside, Heinrich!

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

We will close the curtains to make it night.

(He holds out his hand. She reaches out her hand tentatively. He takes it gently and begins to lead her offstage.)

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

And then, can I make dinner?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Yes, my little housewife, you may run to your true love...the stove.

(He leads her off. Full Light up on stage. ENOCH enters, carrying a work box. He takes out a sign that says AMERICAN RED CROSS SHELTER and hammers it up stage right. He takes another sign that says MELLON BANK and hammers it up stage center. He takes a clean hat and jacket from the work box and puts them on. As he prepares to leave, JOHN PARKE enters, dressed in long coat and hat, carrying a suitcase. He goes TO ENOCH.)

JOHN, TO ENOCH

Excuse me...is the hotel gone?

ENOCH, TO JOHN

Flood took her. Collapsed like a deck of cards.

JOHN, TO ENOCH

I'm trying TO find a certain lady...a servant at the hotel....

ENOCH, TO JOHN

Red Cross has a list of the dead and missing. Though, after four months, nobody doubts the missing is dead.

(ENOCH exits. BARBARA enters, tapping a cane. JOHN goes TO her.)

JOHN, TO BARBARA

Excuse me.

(BARBARA recognizes his voice.)

JOHN, TO BARBARA

There's a girl who worked at the Hotel. I must speak to her. About so tall. She said she came from Silesia. Her name was Elvina.

BARBARA, TO JOHN

I know her well. She saved my life that night.

JOHN, TO BARBARA

I remember you from the day I left town. I worried about you all summer, wondering if you had found safe shelter.

BARBARA, TO JOHN

Miss Barton has kindly given me a room. How are you faring, Engineer?

JOHN, TO BARBARA

My mother passed away last week.

BARBARA, TO JOHN

So, thus freed of your obligations, you dared to return to the Johnstown to see how the victims were faring. Well, do you hear the hammers? Can you smell the wood? Every day, I must relearn my path through the rising city. Life must go on. People must survive, and your young lady was married four months ago.

JOHN, TO BARBARA

I'm glad for her fortune.

BARBARA, TO JOHN

The deuce you are. Your voice trembles with heartache. But why so melancholy? The balladeers have made you the great hero of the flood, riding down the mountain to sound the alarm. "The hot breath of the flood upon his neck, he urged his stallion on, the screams and cries of the drowning tearing through the valley's calm".

JOHN, TO BARBARA

I rode out before the dam broke and was safe above it when it fell. I am far from a hero.

BARBARA, TO JOHN

Would you like me to show you where your young lady lives?

JOHN, TO BARBARA

Yes. Thank you.

BARBARA, TO JOHN

And while we walk, you can tell me all about your dear Mother and how very much you miss her.

(They exit. Mr. PENNEBAKER and WILL enter.)

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

How can you tear down Miss Barton's shelter when so many still have need of it?

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

The crisis is over. The timber is needed for building private homes.

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

Four months is not enough time TO recover from such a trauma.

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

Mr. Wallis, might I remind you that you are not putting food on the tables of Johnstown...we are! Your investigations of our finances are not rebuilding this city and moving it forward, we are! And every man who had a job at the mill was proud TO return TO his post.

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

Uncompensated for his losses.

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

The members have been very generous. Mr. Carnegie has given ten thousand dollars and a library. Four million dollars came from all over the world.

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

You take advantage of the fact that the law hasn't caught up TO you, but one day it will. The world will not long tolerate this kind of indifference.

PENNEBAKER, TO WILL

Oh, I think it will tolerate it, Sir and become more expert. Just like you've all forgotten the horrors of the war, this event will be a dim memory soon enough.

(PENNEBAKER exits. Light down on WILL. Lights up on ELVINA and HEINRICH's farm. She is seated in a rocking chair, knitting. She is four months pregnant. HEINRICH enters, wearing a suit and carrying his hat.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Will you not walk with me, Wife?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I would be ashamed if someone sees me.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Ashamed? You are pregnant!

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

The whole town will think about what I did to get this way.

(HEINRICH laughs heartily. He kisses her head.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I will not tell them that you always have your nightgown raised before I get in the bed.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I only do my duty as your wife. Go! Give me quiet!

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I will walk and think of how sweet it is to share your bed.

(He exits laughing, as she throws her sewing at him. She jumps a bit.)

ELVINA, TO her stomach

It's so strange when I feel you move inside me, Child. Why did God come up with such a way to make a baby? Where will I find time for you? The sun comes and I have cows to milk and chickens to feed. All day, I work in the garden. I churn the butter and take my food to sell and then I come home and scrub the floor and make the dinner. When you appear, I must be a Momma, too. I count your money this morning, Liebchen. You have five whole dollars now, thanks to Momma and the chickens.

(Light up on WILL and MAUREEN. She is in her slip, leaning against him, between his legs. He is in his undershirt. He combs her hair.)

MAUREEN, TO WILL

No, Boyo! You got to start thinking the way they do. If you can't get exactly what you want, find out what you can get and start there.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

If I could just wipe the smile off Pennebaker's face, I'd feel like Sisyphus finally getting the damnable rock up the hill.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

There's only one man to whom Pennebaker bows his head.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

Carnegie?

MAUREEN, TO WILL

The Masabi Deal...?

WILL, TO MAUREEN

I'm suddenly terrified to marry you.

MAUREEN, TO WILL

Be more terrified not to marry me. I'll tell my brothers how I was seduced.

WILL, TO MAUREEN

By the son of an Englishman!

(They lay back laughing. Light down on them. ELVINA slowly rises and picks up the sewing. JOHN PARKE enters.)

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Thank God, You're alive!

(She begins to exit. He stops her.)

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Elvina, no! You are the one person I need to see.

(She turns.)

ELVINA, TO JOHN

I decided when this dam I did not know of, kills my friend,. that I will know all which is around me. In the newspaper, I see your name and you are saying the fault is God, not man.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

They kept me at the Club House for two days. Their lawyers assured me that with their power, I could be held accountable. I had my mother to consider. And if it had not rained so hard, harder than it...rained...I had my Mother to consider!

(He sits, head in hands. ELVINA sits beside him.)

ELVINA, TO JOHN

They say that you tried to warn us.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Why must people make me into the Dutch Boy who put his finger in the hole? He and I did not ask to save anyone. We were both trapped by circumstance. Madly trying anything I could think of to turn back the flood. The only difference is that he succeeded and I failed.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

Whatever man is to blame for this, John, I know it is not you.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

Thank you. So! You're married. Who's the lucky man?

ELVINA, TO JOHN

He is master of the horses of the Iron Works. I should not tell you this, but our first child...is...here.

JOHN, TO ELVINA

Don't be embarrassed. It is a lovely thing, a miracle.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

Tell me of yourself. What job have you now?

JOHN, TO ELVINA

None. I am haunted by the water. I dream that I am the dam, and I strain to hold the water back, but it pushes and pushes and I feel the pain of tearing apart. I feel the weight of the water thundering over me. My cries would wake my poor Mother and she would hold me like a child every night until God took her from me not eight days past.

(HEINRICH enters and looks at them. They stand.)

ELVINA, TO JOHN

Heinrich, this is John Parke. John...this is my husband, Heinrich Berner.

HEINRICH, TO JOHN

How do you know Frau Berner?

JOHN, TO HEINRICH

I was a visitor at the hotel. Your wife was most gracious me. I wanted go see how she survived. I'm thrilled she's found such happiness.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

How were you "gracious"?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I made him lunch, Heinrich. It was my job.

HEINRICH, TO JOHN

And now that the dead are buried, you decide to return TO Johnstown. You take your place again as our master, and say it was not such a bad thing. I assure you, Mr. Parke, it was a very bad thing. Go into the house, Elvina.

ELVINA, TO JOHN

Goodbye, Mr. Parke. Safe journey. Sweet life.

(ELVINA and JOHN enter the house. JOHN looks after them a moment, then turns to see BARBARA standing there.)

JOHN, TO BARBARA

Thank you for bringing me. Might I lend you safe escort home?

BARBARA, TO JOHN

I did not wait for you so that you might show me home, John Parke. Your duty to Johnstown is not finished. Did you not go to the telegraph office hours before the collapse and announce that it was imminent?

JOHN, TO BARBARA

Of course. Any trained eye could have seen what was going to happen'

BARBARA, TO JOHN

Could this eye have seen it on a sunny day...before the rain began?

JOHN, TO BARBARA

You can't win against them, Mrs. Fleischmann. They control the newspapers and the courts. They employ nearly every person in the valley. There would be no point in pursuing the matter. Let life go on, as you said.

BARBARA, TO JOHN

Would you at least indulge me by speaking to one more sophisticated than I? A man as educated as yourself, who can articulate the great issues in our grasp?

JOHN, TO BARBARA

I would be a fool not to meet such a man, Mrs. Fleischmann. Take my arm.

(Light up on ENOCH, seated on a stump. JOHN leads BARBARA TO him.)

BARBARA, TO ENOCH

You, Sir! You seem to know your way about. Where can we find the reporters?

ENOCH

They're pretty much all gone these days. They do tend to show up when a body's found downstream. Them, and the buzzards.

(WILL rises from his bed and comes TO JOHN. MAUREEN follows at a distance.)

WILL, TO JOHN

I never thought Will Wallis would live to see John Parke again. At least not in Johnstown.

ENOCH, TO JOHN

Himself, the noble horseman? "Clinging to the horse's mane. He drove it through the driving rain. Rise up from your family bed. Before the water strikes you dead"

BARBARA, TO ENOCH

Walk me back to the shelter and leave them to talk. Perhaps they can find something more substantial than doggerel and folk tunes to bestow upon the ages.

(BARBARA and ENOCH exit. WILL and JOHN sit.)

WILL, TO JOHN

Well, John. What sort of job did you get from the Pittsburgh gang in exchange for your testimony?

JOHN, TO WILL

They have given me a settlement. I am not currently employed.

WILL, TO JOHN

Nerves?

BARBARA, TO WILL

Twenty two hundred ghosts are restless companions.

WILL, TO JOHN

You can help them find sleep, John'

JOHN, TO WILL

How? We are helpless before men like Pennebaker.

WILL, TO JOHN

They will not, for all their wealth, live forever. Neither will we, so we must record the truth. As Homer had no way of knowing if his story would survive, so must we take a chance with History. One man passing a story on to another who passes it on to another and lo...it's reached a thousand ears and lived a hundred years. Newspapers may crumble and turn to dust, but the truth will not stay drowned in History. Truth rises to the Heavens, despite the most violent efforts of dictators and tyrants.

MAUREEN, TO JOHN

My Will speaks to History. she's my rival. Many nights I wake and find him gone outside to look into the sky and talk to her. He looks into the sky and sees her as clearly as sane men see the sun.

WILL, TO JOHN

History stands over all of us, with her golden sword in one hand and alabaster book in the other. Her wings spread wide and her robe shining like the sun. History is my Goddess and she's powerful because she has the final word. She always wins, even if we don't live to hear it. The best men will see her clearly, in all her glory, and are honored to be chosen. See her, John. Feel her. Talk to me.

(A long pause, then JOHN nods. WILL claps him on the back and JOHN and WILL exit. Lights down, then up as MINISTER enters in full robes and stands upon a podium. It is 1892. PENNEBAKER and the LAWYER enter an office area downstage. Downstage left, ELVINA sits in her kitchen, sewing.)

MINISTER

It's hard to believe that three years have passed since the flood. I'm told that ten thousand of the citizens of the valley have made the long walk up this trail to consecrate and dedicate this memorial at Grandview Cemetery, the final resting place of nearly eight hundred unknown victims.

(ANDREW CARNEGIE enters the office and looks at PENNEBAKER, who stands and bows his head. CARNEGIE signals for the LAWYER to exit. He gladly does. CARNEGIE sits at the desk and picks up a paper and hands it TO PENNEBAKER.)

CARNEGIE, TO PENNEBAKER

So, tell me, Horace...does the name Will Wallis mean anything to you?

MINISTER

Over two thousand and two hundred of our husbands and children, wives and parents, were taken to the bosom of the Lord in that brief hour...and we will never forget them.....

(HEINRICH enters the kitchen and looks at ELVINA. He grabs her shoulders.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Who was your mother?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Hannah.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Her full name!

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

She would not tell me. Her family called her dead and buried her picture.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Only Jews bury pictures.

PENNEBAKER, TO CARNEGIE

Wallis is some wretch from the penny papers. He makes up stories no one will print.

CARNEGIE, TO PENNEBAKER

Now, Horace, there's nothing I hate more than folks who talk about others behind their backs. I think men should do it face-to-face.

(CARNEGIE opens the door. WILL enters.)

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

Does the word "Masabi" mean anything to you, Mr. Pennebaker?

PENNEBAKER, TO CARNEGIE

I think that my Lawyer should be here.

CARNEGIE, TO PENNEBAKER

He no longer represents you, Horace. Sit down.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

My grandfather and grandmother were Jews. They owned the finest hotel in Posen. He was a scholar! How many scholars are in your family?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Does that make my child a Jew?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

All your children will be Jews. But I know nothing of the religion. Momma married the goy and her people said she must go! And his people said to him go! And then, they say to me, go! And now you say to me....

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I did not say it! Be quiet now, woman! I must think.

MINISTER

And as we did not abandon our town upon its destruction, we cannot dwell in sorrow and anger. We must use this as a day of renewal. A memorial not just to brave soldiers but to all of God's children who face a daily battle that we call "Life on earth." Let us now have a minute of silence for all of the known and unknown killed by the flood.

PENNEBAKER, TO CARNEGIE

Wallis may have been given the facts by your enemies, Sir, but he doesn't know my motives. You see, I was studying Mr. Gould's railroad. Spying, as it were. When our contracts for moving the ore were given to him, I only took the money to hold it against him some day. I was trying only to give you advantage over a rival.

CARNEGIE, TO PENNEBAKER

Do not play me for a fool, Sir!

WILL, TO CARNEGIE

Sir, first let us address that other matter? The real reason I fought three years TO see you?

(CARNEGIE nods and goes to the door. JOHN enters, carrying the charts he tried to show PENNEBAKER in ACT two.)

CARNEGIE, TO PENNEBAKER

I'm sure you remember this young man, Horace. His maps and charts of the South Fork

Dam have proved to match those on file for forty years.

PENNEBAKER, TO CARNEGIE

This is the first time I have ever seen these documents.

JOHN, TO CARNEGIE

Because he refused to gaze upon them when I realized the danger.

PENNEBAKER, TO CARNEGIE

It is his word against mine!

CARNEGIE TO PENNEBAKER

Dusty memoes and yellowed reports have finally emerged from obscurity and tell a tale of impending disaster that you, as my representative, should have considered.

PENNEBAKER, TO CARNEGIE

There was never such a rain storm! And we had no way to drain the dam.

JOHN, TO CARNEGIE

He's just revealed to you that he knows the sluice pipes were gone.

WILL, TO PENNEBAKER

And you were the one who ordered the spillway sealed!

PENNEBAKER

I wasn't hired TO know about dams!

JOHN, TO PENNEBAKER

I was and you didn't listen to me!

CARNEGIE, TO JOHN and WILL

Thank you, Gentlemen. You've served me well. Now, if you'll excuse us. We must take care of some company matters in private.

(JOHN and WILL exit. CARNEGIE sits at his desk.)

CARNEGIE, TO PENNEBAKER

You seem to have misunderstood something about me, Horace. Something deathly important. If I am brutal, it is to my peers such as Jay Gould who are my competition. Granted, strikers and unionists cannot be tolerated, but I do not like to see my loyal workers suffer. I know I am nothing without them. The ghosts of two thousand dead are uneasy companions. I will have to dedicate the rest of my life and fortune to see them rest. We are approaching the twentieth century, we must become better managers. Thank you for your services in building my Kingdom, Sir, but you may now consider yourself in permanent exile.

MINISTER

Amen.

(The MINISTER AND CARNEGIE exit. Light down on the crushed PENNEBAKER. In the kitchen, HEINRICH turns to his wife.)

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

You are a good wife. You have put my life in order and Minnie is my child. But do you know what people say about Jews?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Yes. And I know what Germans would do to her.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Back home, I refuse TO go with the troops when they enter the ghetto. For fun, they say. Nobody cares. But I did not find such terrors to be pleasant. When I was ordered to burn one of their villages, I resigned and came to America.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Your daughter thanks you for this.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

I work with hard men who speak of the pogroms in the old country, and how they wish to start them here. Spare my children, Elvina. Promise me to tell no one and we will speak no more of it and remain as we are.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

I thought it would be different in America.

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

Do you love me, Elvina?

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Yes. But are you brave enough TO love a Jew?

HEINRICH, TO ELVINA

One Saturday, I come home early. You had brought the tub into the center of the kitchen and filled it. Thinking yourself alone, you removed your clothes and began to wash. Your hair was wet down your back and your body young and slender, shining with water. I stood by the opening of the door, watching you wash and feeling like King David gazing on Bathsheba. Then, you leave the tub, my naked Venus, and begin to comb your hair and dance this...little dance, singing a song, and I was happy to be the husband of such a woman.

ELVINA, TO HEINRICH

Minnie is hungry and it is time to make your dinner. Remove your boots, Husband. you set the table. You got mud on my clean floors.

(ELVINA exits as HEINRICH obeys. Light down on him. Light up on WILL and MAUREEN dressed for traveling.)

MAUREEN, calls off

Don't go far, Gertie! Hold your brother's hand.

(ELVINA leads BARBARA on.)

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

Look at the fine lady, returned in triumph to our little town.

BARBARA, TO MAUREEN

A Philadelphia lady, the finest there is!

WILL

I did find a treasure among the ruins.

MAUREEN

That's not what his mother thought, when she beheld what her mad Willie drug home.

WILL

But they fell fast in love with Miss Gertie.

MAUREEN

And when I gave them a grandson, I became their daughter at last.

BARBARA, TO WILL

You're a good husband to bring your wife's mother to spend her golden years.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

She still doesn't believe that her life will be all rest from now on. she insists that she'll cook and clean for us, or at least not let our servants work for her.

(BARBARA takes WILL's arm.)

BARBARA, TO WILL

Come, let the young mothers gossip of husband and diapers. I'll take you on a tour of the new Johnstown, seen through the byes of a blind woman, who misses nothing.

WILL, TO BARBARA

And I will tell you of a place where you can learn to read Braille and take care of yourself. You'll stay with us, of course.

BARBARA, TO WILL

You might regret your invitation, Sir, if you are not the sort of writer I admire.

WILL, TO BARBARA

I swear I am the rudest rabble-rouser and general scourge of the rich.

(BARBARA and WILL exit. MAUREEN touches ELVINA'S stomach.)

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

How goes this baby? Will he live?

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

To birth, they think. Beyond that is a mystery.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Two dead in as many years. your strength inspires me.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

It's how it goes here, far from the city. Living on a farm. working. Then, working more.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Come to Philadelphia. There's hospitals. and colleges. They have a beautiful symphony hall, where for ten cents you hear amazing music.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

Heinrich's job and our farm is here. And I have bought that second house and I have tenants. I must stay.

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Have you chosen a name for the baby?

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

I think it is a boy, so I will name him for my brother: Herman. He died on the boat coming to. America. They just tossed him over the side, into the ocean, because the price of steerage wouldn't keep him. We are Jews, Maureen. Does that shock you?

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

No. In the city, Jews are becoming as powerful as the Astors and the Carnegies. They have a voice in arts and laws and medicine.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

But here, I am alone. In secret, I say Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, for Herman and my mother every year. Who will say it for me when I'm dead?

MAUREEN, TO ELVINA

Tell your children who you are. Who they are. They may be Lutherans, but if they pass it on, like History, maybe a hundred years from now, your ancestors will make a prayer for you.

ELVINA, TO MAUREEN

Yes. I must. And I'll tell my children of my dream, a dream of long ago. My pale mother, with shining hair, brings me into the balcony of a great building. I hear strange voices singing such sad songs. I am surrounded by women. Women everywhere. The men are below us and they carry beautiful scrolls. They walk around the group, singing and carrying scrolls. Ribbons tied around their arms, and robes of white and blue. In the tree, the night of the flood, I think of this and I am safe and warm. I think of Momma and the synagogue and I knew that I would live to see the dawn.

(Lights down. End of Play.)