



Inter RUPT tions

Burton Bumgarner

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InteRPropoitions

Winner, Robert J. Pickering Award for Playwriting, 2005
Winner, McLaren Memorial Comedy Playwriting Competition, 2004

COMEDY. Former high school teacher, Howard Weems, has hit it big writing a series of successful romance novels under the pen name of Ariana Dupre LaRoche. However, while writing his latest novel, “The Mistress of the Yukon,” Howard suddenly suffers from a bad case of writer’s block. Desperate and running out of time, Howard goes to his editor’s home to try to finish his novel so he doesn’t have to go back to teaching language arts. But the day doesn’t start out well when Howard accidentally deletes the first eight chapters of his book and is continually interrupted by a host of visitors including a cantankerous plumber, a homeless woman selling magazines, a nervous pizza delivery person, a Girl Scout, a former graduate student and arsonist, an irate boxer, an overzealous homeowners’ association president, and a religious recruiter. This award-winning play features a strong ensemble cast, a flurry of one-liners, and several opportunities to showcase physical comedy.

Performance Time: Approximately 90 minutes.

Cast

(3 M, 5 F, 2 flexible)

HOWARD WEEMS: Former high-school language-arts teacher who writes romance novels under the pen name of Ariana Dupre LaRoche; wears a trench coat, hat, and sunglasses.

GLADYS LEDBETTER: Homeless woman who sells magazines door to door; wears tattered and dirty clothes and a coat with large pockets.

PLUMBER: No-nonsense plumber who is also named Howard; wears work clothes with his name embroidered on his work shirt and a bandana around his head.

JOBETH: A member of the Church of the Witnesses of Jehovah who goes door to door handing out religious literature.

BOB/BARBARA GARFIELD: Annoying, overzealous president of the homeowners' association; flexible.

LAURA ROSENBERG: Howard's book editor; wears professional clothing and a watch.

JULIE ROSENBERG: Laura's daughter, a former graduate student and arsonist who works as a server at Wally's Restaurant; wears a server's uniform.

BOOM BOOM DELLAHOLT: Former boxer with a bad temper; male.

PATTY DELLAHOLT: Boom Boom's daughter who sells Girl Scout cookies door to door; can be played by an adult.

MARTY/MARY: Nervous pizza delivery person; flexible.

Intermissions

5

Setting

Parlor and study.

Set

Parlor and study. The parlor has a sofa, armchairs, end tables, and a coffee table CS. The front door is USL. A console or lowboy with drawers is near the front door as is a coat rack with several coats and a shirt hanging on it. A wine decanter and glasses are sitting on the console. At USR is the study/library. There are shelves of books, a desk with drawers, a computer, and a chair. Some of the shelves should be blocked from view so that when Gladys and Howard are searching for a book they can't be seen by the audience.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I: Parlor and study, Saturday morning.

Intermission

ACT II: Parlor and study, moments later.

Props

Cell phone	Binoculars
Briefcase, for Howard	Notepad
Serving tray	Books
Coffee pot	Wine bottles filled with
2 Coffee cups	grape juice
Sugar bowl	Empty wine bottles
Cream pitcher	Blanket
Laptop computer	Cue card
Computer disks	Backpack
Phonebook	Folder
Briefcase, for Laura	Cork
Large bag	2 Large laundromat
Boxes of Girl Scout cookies	garment bags
Papers	Pair of casual shoes, for
Pencils	Julie
Misc. clothing	Shirt, for Julie
Plumber's toolkit	Camcorder
Pizza	Karate outfit, for Julie
Pizza box	Purse
Name tag, for Marty	Can of Lysol
Sledgehammer	Misc. desk supplies
Plumbing valve	Placemats
Bottle of water	Pasta strainer
Wallet	Tennis shoe
Bottle of acetaminophen	Misc. bottles
Money	Notepad
2 Key chains	Pen
Wine decanter and glasses	Manuscript

Interjections

7

Special Effects

Doorbell

Phone ringing

Sounds of hitting, grunting, yelling

Fake blood

Crashing sounds

Breakaway bottle (opt.)

"Five years ago,
I was teaching language arts
to a pack of high school halfwits
and trying to write
my novel at night."

—Howard

ACT 1

(AT RISE: *Laura Rosenberg's parlor and study, Saturday morning. Laura Rosenberg enters SR, talking on her cell phone. She paces as she talks.*)

LAURA: (*Into phone.*) I didn't know what else to do. We're way behind schedule...Seventeen books in five years is a lot of writing...Yes, I know it isn't good writing. But this is one of our best-selling romance writers. And that eighteenth book is way over due. (*Julie enters, desperately searching for something. She wears a waitress uniform.*) I'll keep the pressure on here. Tell the other editors that book is as good as written. (*Hangs up.*)

JULIE: Mom, I can't find my "Welcome to Wally's" badge.

(*Doorbell.*)

LAURA: Your what? (*Crosses to the door.*)

JULIE: "Welcome to Wally's". It has my name and a picture of Wally's disgusting smiling face. I'm going to be late for the new menu quiz.

(*Laura opens the door. Bob enters.*)

BOB: Mrs. Rosenberg! According to homeowners' association rules, garbage cans must be at least two feet from the curb when awaiting pickup. Yours are touching the curb. As president of the homeowners' association, I must insist that you follow the homeowners' association rules!

LAURA: We will, Mr. Garfield.

(*Laura pushes Bob out the door.*)

JULIE: I've looked everywhere else. It must have fallen off of my shirt last night.

LAURA: What time did you get in?

JULIE: I don't know. Two or three o'clock. I was so tired I couldn't see straight.

(Bob pops back in.)

BOB: *(To Laura.)* It's all in the homeowners' association's manual. You do have the most recent copy, don't you?

LAURA: Yes, Mr. Garfield.

BOB: Your name came up at the last homeowners' association meeting. You don't want that to happen again!

LAURA: We'll take care of those pesky, old garbage cans. *(Pushes Bob out the door. To Julie.)* Why do you have to take a new menu quiz?

JULIE: Wally changes the menu every week. Last week it was Wally's Steak House. The week before that, Wally's Cajun Kitchen, the week before that, Wally's South of the Border. Now it's going to be Wally's by the Sea. He should call it "Wally's by Wal-Mart" and be done with it. He won't let me work if I don't have that stupid yellow smiley face stuck to my shoulder! *(Whines.)* "Welcome to Wally's! My name is Julie, and I just can't wait to serve you!" *(Giggles.)* My job stinks, Mom. Last night these guys stayed till closing, they ate about a thousand chicken wings, and they left me a two-dollar tip! That's the kind of people who eat at Wally's! I'm working a dead-end job, I have no social life, and I haven't been arrested in three weeks. Don't I deserve a break?

LAURA: You'll have to take that up with your parole officer. If you'd been careful, you'd still be in graduate school.

JULIE: I told you I *thought* it was a peaceful protest.

LAURA: You burned down the school cafeteria!

JULIE: It was an accident!

LAURA: You were protesting the school serving meat!

JULIE: I was *going with a guy* who was protesting the school serving meat!

LAURA: You're lucky you're not in jail! Listen, dear, believe it or not, I have a bigger problem than you at the moment.

JULIE: That can't be good.

LAURA: I have a writer who is going to be working here today, and I need you to stay away.

JULIE: One of your writers? (*Laura nods.*) Why here?

LAURA: Writer's block. And I need another book...fast.

JULIE: Is it the guy who writes the horror books?

LAURA: No.

JULIE: The lady who writes the police stories?

LAURA: Don't worry about who it is.

JULIE: Come on, Mom. You hang out with some pretty famous writers. Who is it?

LAURA: Well, if you must know, it's Arianna Dupre LaRoche.

JULIE: The woman who writes that awful romance stuff?

LAURA: That awful romance stuff pays your legal bills!

JULIE: It's always "The Mistress of..." something, isn't it? Like "The Mistress of the Castle," "The Mistress of the Highlands." What's the latest? (*Sarcastic.*) "The Mistress of Manhattan"?

LAURA: That was two mistresses ago. The latest is "The Mistress of the Yukon." She should be here any minute, and I want you to stay away.

JULIE: After the menu quiz I have karate class. I'll need to come home and change.

LAURA: Use the back door and be very quiet.

JULIE: Isn't Arianna Dupre LaRoche that mysterious writer nobody's ever seen?

LAURA: Possibly.

JULIE: I think I'd like to meet her.

LAURA: Not a good idea. Would you mind stopping by the laundry? Our evening clothes should be ready. We have the reception at the museum tomorrow night.

JULIE: So, now I'm the laundry lady?

LAURA: It's a step up career wise. (*Quickly ushers Julie off SR. Doorbell. Laura crosses to the door and opens it.*) Good morning, Arianna. Don't we look lovely this morning?

(*Howard enters, carrying a briefcase. He wears a trench coat, hat, and sunglasses.*)

HOWARD: That isn't funny, Laura. Why do I have to use "Arianna Dupre LaRoche"?

LAURA: Because no one is going to buy a romance novel written by Howard Weems. You wanted to use a pseudonym so that when the day comes when you write that great American novel no one will know you wrote "The Mistress of Atlanta." And "Weems" doesn't really sound like an American writer. Hemingway, Faulkner, Steinbeck... (*Sour face.*) ...Weems?

HOWARD: (*Sarcastic.*) It's a privilege to have you as my editor.

LAURA: My, aren't we sensitive...

HOWARD: I can usually crank out one of these god-awful books in two weeks! What's happened to me?

LAURA: You've hit a snag. I see it all the time.

(*Laura leads him to the sofa and makes him sit.*)

HOWARD: This is worse than a snag. I actually hate books! I hate sentences! I hate words! I hate punctuation marks! And I really hate Victoria Cullington! I wish I could write a slasher novel and decapitate her one appendage at a time! I hate her beautiful raven hair, her perfect china-doll features, her glistening white teeth, and her flawless manners! I hate her *guts*!

LAURA: Victoria has made us both a lot of money. Remember the days when you were a high-school language-arts teacher? (*Howard nods and shivers.*) Would you rather

work here where it's quiet or go back to high school and teach Shakespeare to juvenile delinquents?

HOWARD: I'd rather work here where it's quiet.

LAURA: (*Pats him on the head like a dog.*) Good boy. My husband is playing golf, and my daughter is making people sick. There should only be one interruption this morning.

HOWARD: Really? What?

LAURA: The plumber. All you have to do is to let him in, show him the downstairs bath, tell him the toilet line is clogged up, and leave him alone. Can you do that?

HOWARD: I think so.

LAURA: I'll get you some coffee. You just relax and think about Victoria's latest adventures in the Yukon. (*Exits SR.*)

HOWARD: I don't know anything about the Yukon. I mean, where is it?

LAURA: (*Offstage.*) Somewhere between Alaska and Norway!

HOWARD: Did I ever tell you what I pulled off in college?

(*Laura enters SR, carrying a tray with a coffee pot and two cups. She pours and serves coffee.*)

LAURA: About a hundred times.

HOWARD: (*Ignoring her.*) I had an American Lit professor who thought he was an expert on Steinbeck. So I wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery.

LAURA: You called it "The Red Horse."

HOWARD: (*Ignoring her.*) I called it "The Red Horse."

LAURA: And the professor actually believed it was by Steinbeck.

HOWARD: (*Ignoring her.*) And the professor actually believed it was by Steinbeck!

LAURA: That's how good you were.

HOWARD: (*Ignoring her.*) That's how good I was!

(*Laura puts down her coffee cup and looks at her watch.*)

LAURA: I'd love to sit here and listen to the same stories I've heard for the past five years, but I have places to go and you have an appointment with Victoria Cullington, the Mistress of the Yukon. *(Takes his cup and leads him by the sleeve to the desk.)* You have a computer. You have daylight. By the time the daylight is gone, I'd better have the last seven chapters of this book! Comprenez-vous? *(He nods. She opens his briefcase and removes a disc.)* I assume your draft is on this disc.

(Laura hands him the disk.)

HOWARD: *(Looking at the disk.)* Actually, this has "The Mistress of Miami" on it.

(Laura hands him another disk.)

LAURA: How about this one?

HOWARD: Nope.

(Laura takes another disk and reads the label.)

LAURA: This one says "Yukon." Could this possibly be the right one?

(Laura hands him the disk.)

HOWARD: I guess so.

LAURA: Now the only thing left for you to do is to insert the disk into the computer and finish our novel. *(Howard slowly inserts the disk into the computer and stares at the screen.)* Go to work! *(Howard slowly starts keying. He tries to concentrate. Doorbell. Howard jumps up. Laura makes him sit. She crosses to the door and opens it. Bob enters. Howard keys a few strokes, stretches, yawns, puts his head down on the desk, and goes to sleep.)* Oh, no.

BOB: Mrs. Rosenberg! A cab pulled up in front of your house and a strange man got out.

LAURA: That's not a strange man. It's Arianna Dupre LaRoche.

BOB: The cab was northbound and pulled across the left lane and deposited the passenger on the west side of Myers Park Lane.

LAURA: That's because we *live* on the west side of Myers Park Lane.

BOB: The cab should have either pulled into your driveway or deposited the passenger on the *east* side of Myers Park Lane and let him cross the street.

LAURA: Sorry. I'm going to be leaving, and, with the exception of a plumber, there won't be any more action at my house. Now, you report back to headquarters. (*Shoves Bob out the door. Crosses to Howard and shakes him. Shouts.*) Wake up and write!

(*Howard sits up.*)

HOWARD: Right! (*Laura takes the coffee cups and tray and exits right. Howard struggles. To himself.*) Come on, stupid! Write! (*Bangs his head on the desk, sighs, and looks at the screen.*) What can get me in the mood? I know. Pizza! (*Looks up the number in the phone book.*) Nothing like an early morning pizza to get the creative juices flowing. (*Dials. Into phone.*) Yes. Is this Tony Romaro's?...I'd like to order a large cheese pizza. 2001 Myers Park Lane...No, this isn't a joke...Yes, I know what time it is. I want a pizza and I want it now!...My name is Howard. I'm a writer. I wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery...Hello? (*Hangs up.*) Oh, well. (*Looks at the computer screen, strikes two or three keys, stops, and sighs.*) I wonder if meditation will help. (*Sits in a lotus position on the floor. With eyes closed, he chants.*) Ommmm. Ommmm.

(Laura enters. She stares at Howard.)

LAURA: What are you doing?

HOWARD: I'm meditating. I always meditate before I write.

Why are you back?

LAURA: I forgot a manuscript I tried to read last night. *(Picks up her briefcase.)*

HOWARD: Rejection?

LAURA: I don't believe we're quite ready to publish a murder-mystery set in a nudist camp.

HOWARD: It sounds interesting. What's it called?

LAURA: "Nothing to Hide." It doesn't work. For one thing, there's no place to hide the weapon or the clues, or much of anything else.

HOWARD: *(Trying to take her briefcase.)* Mind if I read it?

(Laura pulls the briefcase away from him.)

LAURA: Yes! Go to work! No more interruptions! And that goes for meditation! *(Forces him to sit at the computer. He slowly keys.)* See you this evening.

HOWARD: How about lunch?

LAURA: I'm having lunch with an editor from Random House.

HOWARD: What about me?

LAURA: You're not having lunch. Go to work, Howard!

(Laura exits. Howard sighs and looks at the computer screen.)

HOWARD: Victoria Cullington. What can I say about that woman? Well, she's stylish, she's graceful...she's a tramp. But she always stood by her man. She stood by lots of men. And she didn't always stand, either. *(Softly sings.)* "Stand by your man...give him two arms to hold to..." *(Sighs.)* I wonder if I could write a country-western song. Can't be that hard. After all, I wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck

and passed it off as a recent discovery. All I have to do is think country-western. (*Hums a tune and then starts to type. He reads and then sings with increasing gusto à la George Jones.*)

“Every junkyard needs a tow truck,
 Every cowboy needs some land;
 If the group don’t have a fiddle,
 Lord, it ain’t a country band.
 So climb into my four by four
 And we’ll go two by two.
 Every redneck needs a pickup,
 That’s why I picked up you.”

(*Spoken, à la Elvis.*) Thank ya very much. For my next number, I’d like to pay a little tribute to my old friend Ray Charles. (*Puts on his sunglasses and sits at the keyboard, playing it like it’s a piano. In a mournful imitation of Ray Charles, sings.*)

“Together again...
 The long night is past...
 You ran from my arms...
 But you weren’t very fast...
 You’re kind of a tramp...
 You ran off with my friend...
 But he brought you back...
 We’re together again...”

(*Grins and moves like Ray Charles.*) Thank ya, thank ya. Thank ya so very much. (*Takes off his sunglasses and returns to character.*) But now I have to write this stupid book. (*Starts to key. Doorbell. Howard is relieved. He jumps up.*) Or, I could see who’s at the door! (*Crosses to the door and opens it. Patty enters. She is carrying a large bag of boxed cookies. Howard is delighted at the chance to procrastinate.*) Hello, hello! How are you? Please come in and make yourself at home.

PATTY: Uh...is Mrs. Rosenberg at home?

HOWARD: No. She’s not here. What’s your name, little girl?

PATTY: Patty. I live down the street.

HOWARD: Patty. What a nice name. My name is Howard. I am so happy you’re here. (*Offers his hand but she doesn’t take*

it.) What are you doing out so early on a Saturday morning, Patty?

PATTY: I'm selling cookies for my scout troop.

HOWARD: How wonderful. I'll buy all the cookies you have.

PATTY: (*Surprised.*) All of them?

HOWARD: Yes. All of them. Why don't you come inside and tell me about them.

(Patty cautiously follows Howard to the sofa.)

PATTY: I've got peanut butter, chocolate chip, coconut...and you say you want all of them?

(Patty stacks boxes of cookies on the coffee table.)

HOWARD: Yes, I do. Will 50 dollars be enough?

PATTY: You're giving me 50 dollars for cookies?

HOWARD: Well, I'd like a little more than cookies.

(A look of horror crosses Patty's face.)

PATTY: Uh...like what?

HOWARD: To talk with you. You don't mind talking, do you? See, I'm really lonely.

PATTY: Did you do something to Mrs. Rosenberg?

HOWARD: Do something? What do you mean "do something"?

PATTY: When I rang the bell, I expected to see Mrs. Rosenberg, not a strange man.

HOWARD: Oh, Patty! I'm a very nice man. And I want to be your friend.

PATTY: Where is Mrs. Rosenberg?

HOWARD: She's not here.

PATTY: Where is Mr. Rosenberg?

HOWARD: He's playing golf this morning.

PATTY: How about Julie?

HOWARD: Julie?

PATTY: You don't really know the Rosenbergs, do you?

HOWARD: Of course I do. I know Laura...Mrs. Rosenberg. She's a very nice lady. But lately it's been nag, nag, nag! Deadline after deadline after deadline! It makes me crazy! It's all I can do to keep from strangling her! *(Patty gasps and jumps to her feet. Howard paces and vents. He doesn't notice Patty making her escape.)* Do you know I once wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery? That's the kind of talent we're talking about, Patty! *(Shouts.)* Real talent! And I'm stuck here with this garbage! *(Patty screams and runs out the door, leaving her cookies. Howard runs after her.)* Patty? Where are you going? Patty? *(Shouts.)* You little creep! I don't even like cookies! Especially coconut! *(Closes the door.)* Oh, well. Back to work. *(Crosses to the desk, sits, and looks at the screen.)* Let's see where I left poor old Victoria... *(Reads.)* "Victoria Cullingdon entered the long dimly lit room, her eyes blazing with a hope that she guessed to be groundless, her lips trembling with a fear that she could not disguise. In her hand she carried a small fan, a fragile toy of lace and satinwood. Something snapped as she entered the room. She had crushed the fan into a dozen pieces." Time for the next sentence. *(Types.)* "What am I doing here, she thought." Hmm. That's a good question. What is she doing there? *(Thinks.)* Hmm. *(Types.)* "Trevor sensed her presence before she spoke." *(To himself.)* Must have heard her crushing the fan into a dozen pieces. *(Falsetto voice.)* "Trevor, we must talk." *(Deep voice.)* "'Victoria!' His deep, sonorous voice echoed throughout the castle..." Do they have castles in the Yukon? *(Types.)* "His deep, sonorous voice echoed throughout...the igloo. 'There is something I must tell you.' *(Falsetto.)* 'And that is...?' *(Thinks for a long count.)* "Victoria... *(Speaks slowly but increases the speed.)* ...you shake my nerves and you rattle my brain. Too much love drives a man insane... *(Sings à la Jerry Lee Lewis.)* You

broke my will, but what a thrill. Goodness, gracious, great balls of fire!" *(Continues singing with an ever-increasing intensity.)*

"I laughed at love 'cause I thought it was funny.
But you came along and moooved me, honey,
I've changed my mind, this love is fine,
Goodness, gracious, great balls of fire!"

(He imitates Jerry Lee Lewis' piano playing on the computer keyboard. He hikes his leg up to the desk and makes the instrumental sounds of the song. Finally, he hits the keyboard with his foot and suddenly stops. He looks at the screen in horror.) Oh, no! I just deleted something. I think it was the first eight chapters of "The Mistress of the Yukon." It was! I deleted my novel! Good thing I have a backup... *(Searches his briefcase.)* Don't I? Come on! Where is it? *(Tosses out papers, pencils, articles of clothing, etc. from his briefcase.)* I always back up my novels! Well, almost always! Oh, no! I deleted six week's work while I was singing "Great Balls of Fire"! *(Reflective.)* Is it symbolic of the demented state of my paltry existence? Is this punishment for a bad imitation of Jerry Lee Lewis? *(Furious. Shouts.)* This stupid computer ate my novel! *(Bangs on the computer in a fit of fury. Stops.)* It's in the recycle bin, isn't it? All I have to do is click on "recycle" and... *(Types.)* Where is my novel? *(Yells and bangs on the computer. Shouts.)* You stupid piece of garbage! I'll kill you! I'll...I'll... *(Types.)* Let's try "undo." It's gone! *(Desperate.)* I need to write this stupid book, or I'll be in violation of my contract! How did it begin? I've done it before. Seventeen times. I can do it. *(Takes a deep breath and types.)* "When Victoria Cullingdon first boarded the train in Boston, she had no idea that she would sleep all the way to Dawson City in the wilds of western Canada and awake confused, destitute, and alone, but refreshed from 68 hours of sleep and extremely attractive to all of the gold miners who had arrived to seek their fortunes in the wilderness of the northern Canadian summer, where the daylight can last for 24 hours, which doesn't leave very much

time for sleep." *(Thinks.)* Hmmmm. It kind of runs on, but it's a start. Now I need another sentence.

(Doorbell. He jumps up, crosses to the door, and opens it. The Plumber enters. He wears work clothes and a bandana around his head. He carries a toolkit and a plunger is slung over his shoulder.)

PLUMBER: This the Rosenberg residence?

HOWARD: Yes, it is. Are you the plumber?

PLUMBER: *(Looks at toilet plunger. Sarcastic.)* Where'd ya get that idea?

HOWARD: My name's Howard. *(Holds out his hand. Plumber slowly reaches to shake his hand but Howard suddenly pulls his hand back.)* Have you been anywhere nasty this morning?

PLUMBER: Are you some kind of smart guy?

HOWARD: I'm a writer. Some people think that makes me a smart guy. So, what's your name?

PLUMBER: Howard.

HOWARD: But that's my name.

PLUMBER: *(Points to the name stitched on his work shirt.)* It's my name. See?

HOWARD: *(Reads name on shirt.)* Why is my name on your shirt?

PLUMBER: Is the lady who called around?

HOWARD: No. She's rejecting a mystery about a nudist camp. I can't leave until I finish "The Mistress of the Yukon." I once wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery. Do you know anything about computers?

PLUMBER: Look, buddy, you are paying me as we speak. The question is...do you want to pay me to stand around and talk crap or pay me to fix your broken toilet?

HOWARD: That's very funny. Talk *crap*. A plumber with a sense of humor.

PLUMBER: I don't got a sense of humor! I *do* wanna take care of business and go home. So show me the problem, and let me get to work.

HOWARD: Sure thing, Howard.

(Howard leads Plumber off SR. Doorbell. Howard enters SR and rushes to the door. Marty enters SL, holding a pizza box.)

MARTY: You order a cheese pizza?

HOWARD: Yes. Come on in. Make yourself at home. I feel like I haven't spoken to another human being in days...except for Patty and that guy in the toilet, and they're not very friendly. My name is Howard.

(Howard holds out his hand to shake. Marty hands him the pizza box.)

MARTY: That'll be [\$12.50.] *[Or insert another amount.]*

HOWARD: So... *(Reads Marty's name tag.)* ...Marty. How are you doing, Marty?

MARTY: I'm delivering pizza on Saturday morning when most people are sleeping.

HOWARD: I bet it's more fun than what I'm trying to do. *(Waits for Marty to ask the question. Marty is silent.)* Wanna know what I do?

MARTY: \$12.50.

HOWARD: I'm a writer. I write books. For a living. Really. I do. I once wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery.

MARTY: \$12.50, mister.

(Howard puts his hand on Marty's shoulder, leads him to the sofa, and makes him sit.)

HOWARD: Have a seat, Marty. Surely, you don't have anything to do this time of day, do you? Say, do you know

anything about computers? I lost my novel, and I'd really like to get it back.

(Howard sits beside Marty, who is wary of him.)

MARTY: I just need the \$12.50.

HOWARD: Just visit for a while.

MARTY: *(Nervous.)* Look, mister, I don't want any funny business.

HOWARD: Funny business? I was just trying to write a novel called "The Mistress of the Yukon" and I deleted two hundred pages while I was singing "Great Balls of Fire" and I'm... *(In tears.)* ...I'm so lonely I can't stand it! *(Marty jumps up.)* Please, Marty, don't leave me!

MARTY: Man, this is way too weird!

(Note: The following lines are delivered as rapidly as possible.)

HOWARD: Weird?

MARTY: Weird!

HOWARD: Who?

MARTY: You!

HOWARD: Why?

MARTY: Can't say.

HOWARD: Why not?

MARTY: Don't know.

HOWARD: But I don't—

MARTY: Understand?

HOWARD: Right.

MARTY: Too bad.

HOWARD: *(Steps toward Marty.)* Won't you—

MARTY: *(Jumps away. Shouts.)* No!

HOWARD: But—

MARTY: *(Shouts.)* No!

HOWARD: You don't—

MARTY: No, I don't!

HOWARD: Understand.

MARTY: Yes, I do!

HOWARD: You think—

MARTY: (*Shouts.*) No! I don't!

HOWARD: But—

MARTY: (*Shouts.*) Forget it!

(Marty quickly exits. Howard sits back down on the sofa. He looks at the computer with fear.)

HOWARD: (*To himself.*) What am I going to do now? (*Thinks.*) I think I'll check on Howard. (*Quickly exits SR. Suddenly, the Plumber enters SR, followed closely by Howard, who speaks rapidly.*) So, do you mind if I watch? Are we going outside? Can I see your truck? I bet it's a neat truck.

(Plumber stops Howard in the doorway.)

PLUMBER: If you don't get lost, I'm gonna leave, you're gonna get a big fat bill, and your john is still gonna be clogged up!

(Plumber exits SL. Howard slowly crosses back to the desk. He has to force himself to sit.)

HOWARD: (*To himself.*) I really need to write this stupid book... (*Crosses to the computer and sighs.*) ...which doesn't leave very much time for sleep." (*Types.*) "The train passed through beautiful, pristine, virgin wilderness, not that Victoria knew a lot about wilderness, or pristine...or virgins." (*Phone rings. Into phone, pleasantly.*) Hello?...No, she's not here at the moment. May I take a message?...Well, that sounds good to me. And you say I can roll all of my credit card debt into one convenient monthly bill?...What did you say your name is again?...Sandra. My name's Howard. I'm a writer. In fact, I wrote a story in the style of

Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery...Yes. Really. I did. Right now, I'm having this problem with the latest book I'm writing. It just isn't working. Think you'd like to get together sometime for a cup of coffee?...Hello? Sandra? *(Hangs up phone. To himself.)* She hung up. *(Sighs, reads the computer screen and types.)* "Victoria wanted to forget about Boston, with its rutted streets and street criers and street walkers and streetlamps and street people and people who are in the streets..."

(Plumber enters SL, carrying a sledgehammer. Howard stands.)

PLUMBER: Don't talk to me, man!

(Howard sits. Plumber exits SR, leaving the front door open. Howard sits and tries to write.)

HOWARD: *(To himself.)* I need a glass of water.

(Howard exits SR. Patty and her father, Boom Boom, enter SL.)

BOOM BOOM: *(To Patty, loudly.)* If I find out you're making this up, little girl...

PATTY: I'm not making it up, Daddy! There's a strange man named Howard who acted like those people they tell us about in school. Should we call the police?

BOOM BOOM: I'll handle this. You go sell some more cookies.

PATTY: Howard took all my cookies, and he didn't give me any money. I'm scared, Daddy.

BOOM BOOM: You run home and play with your Barbies. Daddy will take care of the weirdo.

PATTY: Be careful. He's really scary.

BOOM BOOM: I was a professional boxer. I'll be okay.

(Patty exits. Plumber enters SR, fiddling with a valve.)

PLUMBER: *(Turns and shouts to Howard, who is offstage.)* Don't nobody flush that toilet unless you wants a tidal wave!

(Plumber crosses to the door. Boom Boom stops him.)

BOOM BOOM: Hey. You Howard?

PLUMBER: Yeah. What's it to ya?

BOOM BOOM: I'm Boom Boom Dellaholt. I don't like creeps who prey on little girls selling cookies!

PLUMBER: No kidding. Why ya telling me?

BOOM BOOM: *(Shoves Plumber.)* 'Cause you're one of those creeps!

PLUMBER: *(Shoves Boom Boom)* Hey, man! You wantin' to go to the hospital or something?!

(Boom Boom grabs Plumber and pulls him out the door. A fight ensues. Offstage, there are sounds of hitting, grunting, and yelling. Plumber stumbles onstage, his face and clothes bloody. Boom Boom wearily enters.)

BOOM BOOM: You shouldn't have tried to get friendly with my little girl! You sick-o! *(Plumber collapses in the doorway.)* I ought to finish you off like I did Frankie Balboa at Madison Square Garden back when I was champ! *(Plumber moans loudly and grabs his head.)* Hey, that's what Frankie did, too...before he died. Uh...Howard? Are you all right?

HOWARD: *(From offstage. To Plumber, shouts.)* Howard! Howard?! What's going on out there?! *(Boom Boom panics and quickly exits. Howard enters. To Plumber.)* Howard? What was all that noise? *(Sees Plumber. Shouts.)* Howard! *(Quickly crosses to Plumber and kneels.)* You're all bloody! Do you want me to dial 9-1-1?

PLUMBER: I want you to find another plumber!

(Howard helps Plumber to his feet and leads him to the sofa.)

HOWARD: Can I get you something? An ice pack?
Antiseptic? Cookies?

PLUMBER: This guy showed up and started punching me.
Said I got friendly with his daughter.

HOWARD: You must have quite a private life.

PLUMBER: His daughter was selling cookies. He asked if I
was Howard, and he told me he don't like creeps who prey
on little girls, and he started beating the crap out of me.

HOWARD: *(Slowly realizes.)* Uh-oh. She misunderstood...

PLUMBER: I ain't no creep! I got kids of my own! *(Tries to
stand and then falls back on the sofa.)* Oh, man, I'm getting a
migraine!

HOWARD: I'll get you a glass of water.

*(Howard quickly exits SR. In pain, Plumber leans forward until his
chest is on his knees.)*

PLUMBER: *(To himself.)* Last time I had one this bad, I had to
go to the hospital.

*(Plumber squeezes his temples, takes a cushion from the sofa,
squeezes it to his head, and bends over. Marty cautiously enters,
mistaking Plumber for Howard.)*

MARTY: Hello? Howard?

PLUMBER: Huh?

(Marty approaches the sofa.)

MARTY: Look, I really need the \$12.50. See, if I don't bring
the money back, it's gonna come outta my pocket. It's not
like you can't afford it. And I'm sorry you're lonely. You
can find some friends if you just look around. I mean, New
York is a pretty weird place.

(Plumber moans. Howard enters, carrying a bottled water. Marty sees Howard and gasps.)

HOWARD: Marty?

MARTY: Howard? *(Points to Plumber.)* Who's—

(Howard crosses to the sofa and looks down at Plumber. Note: The following lines are delivered as rapidly as possible.)

HOWARD: Howard.

MARTY: Howard?

HOWARD: Howard.

MARTY: You're—

HOWARD: Howard.

MARTY: He's—

HOWARD: Howard.

MARTY: Two—

HOWARD: Howards.

MARTY: What's—

HOWARD: Wrong?

MARTY: Yeah.

HOWARD: Migraine.

MARTY: Blood—

HOWARD: Fight.

MARTY: Fight?

HOWARD: Fight!

MARTY: Why?

HOWARD: Girl.

MARTY: Girl?

HOWARD: Girl.

MARTY: Oh.

HOWARD: Why'd you—

MARTY: Come back—

HOWARD: Yeah.

MARTY: Money.

HOWARD: Money?

MARTY: Pizza.

HOWARD: Right.

MARTY: \$12.50.

HOWARD: That much?

MARTY: Yeah!

HOWARD: Check?

MARTY: Cash!

HOWARD: Visa?

MARTY: Dream on!

HOWARD: *(Points at pizza.)* Cold!

MARTY: Don't try that one!

HOWARD: Okay.

(Howard takes out his wallet and pays Marty.)

MARTY: *(To Plumber.)* Hey, man, you don't look so good.

(In pain, Plumber grabs his head.)

PLUMBER: I got a migraine, man. My head's about to split open. *(Marty reaches into his pocket and removes a pill bottle.)*

MARTY: Here's some acetaminophen. I get migraines, too.

(Marty holds out the bottle but doesn't let Plumber have it.)

PLUMBER: Are you gonna let me have it?

MARTY: Maybe.

PLUMBER: What are you waiting for?

MARTY: A tip.

(Plumber gives Marty some money. Marty hands Plumber the pills. Marty exits.)

PLUMBER: *(To Howard.)* This is a bad one. I need to lay down somewhere till this stuff kicks in.

HOWARD: Let's find the guest bedroom. After all, you're a guest.

(Howard helps Plumber off SR. Marty enters.)

MARTY: I got a problem. *(Howard enters.)* My car won't start.

HOWARD: Do you want me to drive you back?

MARTY: *(Shouts.)* No! I'm not getting in a car with you! Give me the keys to his truck. I'll come get him after work.

(Howard exits SR.)

PLUMBER: *(Offstage, yells.)* Hey! Get your hand outta my pants, you sick-o!

(Howard enters SR with Plumber's keys, which he hands to Marty.)

MARTY: *(To Howard.)* Thanks, man. I'll be back.

(Marty exits. Howard slowly returns to the computer and takes a deep breath.)

HOWARD: Where were we? Victoria Cullingdon is in Dawson City. She walks out of the train station and into the frigid arctic air, and, there, standing like an Eskimo version of Rhett Butler is...Trevor.

(Doorbell. With delight, Howard crosses to the door and opens it. JoBeth enters. She expects the door to be slammed in her face, but Howard welcomes her.)

JOBETH: *(Rehearsed speech delivered in a boring, sing-song voice.)*
I am Sister JoBeth of the Church of the Witnesses of Jehovah. Do you know where you'll spend eternity? I know where I'll be. *(Pause. Surprised.)* Aren't you going to slam the door in my face?

HOWARD: Why, no. Come on in. Would you care for some coffee? Pizza? Girl Scout cookies?

(Much to her surprise, Howard leads her to the sofa and makes her sit.)

JOBETH: I'm here to give you tracts and to talk about salvation. *(Pause.)* You should be slamming the door in my face.

HOWARD: Maybe I want to hear what you have to say.

JOBETH: That's not the point.

HOWARD: What's the point?

JOBETH: The point is that I try and tell you.

HOWARD: So tell me.

JOBETH: You're supposed to be agitated.

HOWARD: Oh, I'm agitated, all right. Would you like your coffee with cream and sugar?

JOBETH: Coffee is against our religion.

HOWARD: How about something else? *(Looks around and crosses to the console, which has a decanter and glasses.)* How about some... *(Opens the bottle and sniffs)* ...port?

JOBETH: What's port?

HOWARD: It's kind of like grape juice. *(Pours a glass and gives it to her.)* Tell me more. How long have you been a Witness of Jehovah?

JOBETH: I don't know. *(Sniffs the port.)* You say this is like grape juice?

HOWARD: Kind of. Try it and see what you think.

(Jobeth carefully sips the port, makes a sour face, and sips some more.)

JOBETH: It's like syrup.

HOWARD: Really?

JOBETH: Really good syrup. *(Gulps down the rest of the port.)*
May I have some more, please?

HOWARD: Of course. *(Crosses to the decanter, pours more port into her glass, and crosses back carrying the decanter and glass.)*
Now, I want to hear everything about the Witnesses of Jehovah.

JOBETH: We believe it's necessary to witness to people about the necessity of witnessing to people. *(Gulps down the port and pours some more.)* Do you mind? This is very refreshing.

HOWARD: Do you believe in divine intervention?

JOBETH: What?

(Howard drags JoBeth to the computer and makes her sit. She brings her glass of port with her.)

HOWARD: Having prayers answered. Can you get the first eight chapters of "The Mistress of the Yukon" out of this horrible machine?

JOBETH: I'm not computer literate.

HOWARD: Can't you pray or something?

JOBETH: Pray? For you?

HOWARD: Not for me! For the computer! This may come as a surprise, but I am Arianna Dupre LaRoche.

JOBETH: Ari-anna?

HOWARD: Dupre LaRoche. I'm the creator of the "Mistress of" series.

JOBETH: You're the creator?

HOWARD: Right. I accidentally deleted number 18. So, put your hands on the computer and find those 200 pages!

(JoBeth slowly places her hands on the computer, takes a deep breath, and then pauses.)

JOBETH: What was that again?

HOWARD: I deleted 200 pages of "The Mistress of the Yukon" and I need it back!

JOBETH: Uh...okay. *(She and Howard bow their heads in prayer.)* Dear Lord, bless this machine, and...uh...is that all?

HOWARD: Bring back Victoria Cullindon!

JOBETH: So she's like...your girlfriend?

HOWARD: No! She's fictitious! Do you understand?

JOBETH: *(Shakes her head yes.)* No.

HOWARD: Just pray!

JOBETH: Uh...Dear Lord, help this poor woman find her way
to you—

HOWARD: No, no! Find the 200 pages of the novel!

JOBETH: Help this man with whatever he's talking about.
Amen.

(JoBeth stands and stumbles back to the sofa. She helps herself to more port. Howard sits at the computer and keys in commands.)

HOWARD: It's not here!

JOBETH: Did you really say your name was Anna something?

(JoBeth crosses to Howard and leans on the computer. He inserts a new disk into the computer.)

HOWARD: *(Shouts.)* No!

JOBETH: *(Intoxicated, flirtatious.)* So, what's your name,
sailor?

HOWARD: Howard Weems! Can't you conjure up a little
help from the Almighty?

JOBETH: I don't think it works that way, Howard Weems.

HOWARD: Here's something on this disk. It's the opening
chapter of "The Pending Tempest." Well, it's one of the
opening chapters. This is my *real* novel...the one I always
dream of writing. Did you know I wrote a story in the style
of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery?

JOBETH: Isn't that plagiarism?

HOWARD: No. Plagiarism would be passing one of
Steinbeck's stories as my own. I can copy almost anyone's
writing style.

JOBETH: Now that's play-jur... *(Belches or hiccups.)* ...ism.

HOWARD: I've been trying to write "The Pending Tempest" ever since I was in college. I write a chapter, and it's Hemingway. I rewrite the chapter, and it's Faulkner. I've been through James Joyce, James Jones, James Fenimore Cooper—

JOBETH: Say, Howard. I need to visit the lady's room.

HOWARD: It's down the hall. *(Points SR.)*

JOBETH: I'll be right back.

(Jobeth stumbles off SR. Howard looks at the computer screen in vain. Doorbell. Howard crosses to the door and opens it. Bob enters and looks at Howard with surprise. He has a pair of binoculars around his neck and is holding a notepad.)

BOB: Are you the pizza delivery boy?

HOWARD: No. I'm Howard Weems.

(Howard offers his hand. Bob shakes it.)

BOB: Bob Garfield. I'm the president of the homeowners' association.

HOWARD: Well, I'm really glad to meet you, Bob.

BOB: The reason I stopped over is to inform the Rosenbergs that I now have six documented violations of homeowners' association rules. Six examples! Do you know what I mean?

HOWARD: *(Nods yes.)* No.

(Bob refers to his notepad.)

BOB: Number one...the garbage cans. Number two...the taxi. Number three...little Patty Dellaholt selling her cookies. Number four...pizza delivery. The delivery boy parked his car, a formerly yellow [Ford Pinto], in the driveway. *[Or insert the name of another suitable car.]* We don't allow [Ford Pintos] in the neighborhood. Number five...the plumber. Workmen are to park their vehicles behind the houses, away

from the street. Number six...tract lady. I watched a woman with religious tracts enter this house. We do not allow any kind of solicitation. Think carefully before you answer. Are you harboring a solicitor and a pizza delivery boy?

HOWARD: Uh...no.

BOB: If you're not the pizza delivery boy, why are you here?

HOWARD: I'm trying to finish "The Mistress of the Yukon." I once wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery.

BOB: I don't have time to read books. Working as president of the homeowners' association is a full-time job. We are currently on the lookout for a homeless woman selling magazines. Have you seen such a person?

HOWARD: No. Do you know anything about computers?

BOB: Don't believe in 'em. I *do* believe in the homeowners' association. Know what I mean?

HOWARD: I guess so.

BOB: I'm watching you. Don't try anything funny. And get rid of that [Ford Pinto]!

(Bob exits. JoBeth enters SR, stumbling.)

JOBETH: *(To Howard.)* There's water running down the hall. I'd better go. I don't feel so good.

HOWARD: You can't go! He's watching the house!

JOBETH: Who's watching the house?

HOWARD: Bob Garfield! You'd better stay here until the coast is clear!

JOBETH: Good idea.

(Howard leads JoBeth to the sofa and makes her sit.)

HOWARD: Five years ago, I was teaching language arts to a pack of high school halfwits and trying to write my novel at night. A girl I was dating had a copy of a romance novel in

her car. I laughed at it and she got mad and said, "All right, Mr. Writer! You write a novel like this!" And I wrote "The Mistress of the Castle." (*Crosses to the bookshelf.*) Look. Here's a copy.

(Howard hands JoBeth a copy of his book.)

JOBETH: You didn't write this! This was written by Arianna ...Judas Priest something-or-other.

HOWARD: Arianna Dupre LaRoche. Laura gave me the name. (*JoBeth struggles to get to her feet. Howard forces her to sit.*) No. Please stay. I want to hear more about...salvation.

JOBETH: You do? (*Howard eagerly nods. She holds up the empty decanter.*) Then I need some more of this syrup.

HOWARD: I'll be right back. (*Quickly exits SR.*)

JOBETH: (*To herself.*) Doors slammed in my face all my life, then out of the blue...whammo! Somebody wants to hear what I've got to say. And I can't remember a thing.

(JoBeth slides down on the sofa and goes to sleep. Howard returns with a bottle.)

HOWARD: Here we go. I think this is really expensive stuff. Sister JoBeth? Are you asleep? Oh, well. (*Sighs, covers JoBeth with a blanket, places the bottle on the coffee table, and crosses back to the computer and types.*) "Victoria Cullingdon stepped into the orange sunlight of a cool October sky on a windy morning in a distant wilderness, where the sounds of loons filled the air and the smell of wood smoke filled... (*Thinks, then types.*) ...more air, and soon all of the air was full, and there was a placid peace permeating from the peaceful palace on the purple plains." (*Bangs his head on the desk.*) That doesn't make a bit of sense!

(Doorbell. Howard jumps to his feet and rushes to open the door. Gladys enters. She is poorly dressed and holds a folder and cue card in one hand and a back pack in the other.)

GLADYS: *(Poorly and without conviction, reads from the cue card.)* Good morning, sir or madame. My name is Gladys Ledbetter, and I am recovering from substance abuse. As part of my 12-step program, I must earn a living. I am selling subscriptions to magazines. Would you like to take a look at the many outstanding magazines I am selling? I thought not. Have a nice day.

(Gladys turns to leave. Howard takes her arm and pulls her inside.)

HOWARD: Why don't you tell me what you have? *(Leads her to the armchair. She smells badly so he tries to fan the air in her wake.)* Come on in. Have a seat. Whew! It must be garbage day or something! Say, how about those Yankees? So, what's being a victim of substance abuse like?

GLADYS: Sir, if you're going to rob me, I don't carry any cash. If you're going to beat me up, I'm not in very good health and wouldn't last very long. If you're going to molest me... *(Looks Howard over approvingly and smooths her hair.)* ...well...we'll have to see about that one.

HOWARD: I want to know about your magazines.

GLADYS: Oh. Say, this is a nice place you got here. You must haul in the bucks. What are you...some kind of doctor or lawyer pervert or something?

HOWARD: I'm a writer. Maybe you've heard of me.

GLADYS: What's your name?

HOWARD: Arianna...never mind.

GLADYS: Yeah. Writer. Hah! That's what they all say.

HOWARD: I don't use my real name!

GLADYS: No wonder. Your name's Anna. That's worse than Gladys Ledbetter.

HOWARD: I *am* a writer! Really! I wrote a story in the style of Steinbeck and passed it off as a recent discovery.

GLADYS: Who?

HOWARD: Steinbeck? John Steinbeck? Nobel Prize winner?

GLADYS: Never heard of him. (*Indicating JoBeth.*) Who's that?

HOWARD: Sister JoBeth.

GLADYS: Why's your sister sleeping on the sofa?

HOWARD: She's not my sister.

GLADYS: But you just said she was your sister.

HOWARD: Well, she's not. Would you care for some coffee? There's pizza and cookies. Help yourself.

(Howard exits SR. Gladys savagely tears open a box of cookies, scattering them all over the floor. She picks a cookie off the floor and eats it. She opens the pizza box.)

GLADYS: (*To herself.*) So, that's what they look like before they throw them out. (*Takes a bite of pizza and puts it back in the box. She stuffs cookies in her coat pocket. Calls.*) You know, you're about the weirdest one I've run across yet. And I've seen some weird ones. Like that time I got kicked out of the shelter and had to go sleep in the subway. You meet some really weird people walking around in those tunnels. You meet some pretty big rodents, too. Did I tell you I'm a reformed substance-abuser? (*To herself.*) Yeah. I've been reformed about three hours now. It's starting to catch up with me.

(Howard enters, carrying a tray with two cups, a sugar bowl, and a cream pitcher. He places the tray on the coffee table.)

HOWARD: Cream and sugar?

GLADYS: Why not? (*Puts the cream pitcher and sugar bowl in her coat pocket.*)

HOWARD: Do you have "The Atlantic Monthly"?

GLADYS: (*Taken aback.*) That's kind of a personal question, isn't it?

HOWARD: I'm talking about the magazine. Why don't you look at your list.

(*Gladys opens the folder.*)

GLADYS: What am I looking for?

HOWARD: "The Atlantic Monthly."

GLADYS: (*Looks over the list.*) Nope. Like there is such a thing.

HOWARD: "The New York Review of Books"?

GLADYS: Nope.

HOWARD: "Esquire"?

GLADYS: Nope.

HOWARD: Well, what do you have?

GLADYS: (*Reads from list.*) I got "Backyard Revolution," "Anarchy Handyman," "Underground Digest." (*Tosses the folder to Howard.*) Here. Why don't you pick some out yourself.

(*Howard looks over the list. Gladys gulps down her coffee and opens another box of cookies.*)

HOWARD: I've never heard of these magazines. "Large Weapons Weekly," "Hand to Hand Combat Quarterly," "Bullfighting Today." Hemingway loved bullfighting. I think I'd like that one...if it has bullfighting stories.

GLADYS: It's mostly pictures of dead animals. And a few dead guys.

HOWARD: Well, I'll take that one and this one, "Home Fortress." Sounds like interior design.

GLADYS: Sure. Check the little boxes, pop down the money, and fill out the form with your name and address. Also, expect to be put on some weird mailing lists.

(Howard takes money from his wallet and hands it to Gladys, who smiles and pockets it.)

HOWARD: I'll buy them for Laura. She won't mind a few more magazines.

GLADYS: Who's Laura?

HOWARD: The lady who lives here.

GLADYS: I thought her name was Anna...or something.

HOWARD: No, Arianna is my pseudonym.

GLADYS: Is that like your girlfriend?

HOWARD: More like my alter ego.

GLADYS: You don't make a whole lot of sense.

HOWARD: I'm under a lot of pressure.

GLADYS: Then do what I did.

HOWARD: What did you do?

GLADYS: Got sick of the pressure...people always telling me what to do. *(Whiny voice.)* "Gladys, do this! Gladys, do that! Gladys, take your medication!" Man, I walked out the door when nobody was looking, and now...I can't remember how to get back.

HOWARD: You've had a very interesting life, Gladys.

GLADYS: *(Preens.)* It's not nice to hit on the homeless.

HOWARD: Maybe I'll put you in "The Mistress of the Yukon." It could also be a transition piece for my *real* novel. *(Quickly crosses to the computer and types.)* "When Victoria Cullingdon first laid eyes on Gladys Ledbetter that cold autumn morning in the train station in Dawson City—where the 9 o'clock special was late and arrived at 10:30 with several cars full of rowdy gold miners who'd boarded the wrong train in Manitoba—she knew her life would be forever altered."

GLADYS: You know, Anna, I could use some liquid refreshment to go with these cookies. Where's the kitchen in this dump?

(Howard points toward the kitchen. Gladys exits.)

HOWARD: If I'm going to write about Gladys Ledbetter, I need a point of reference. Didn't Stephen Crane write a story about a desperate woman of the streets? (*Crosses to the bookshelves.*) Let's see... (*Looking at books.*) ...looks like she keeps the classics on the bottom shelves.

(*Doorbell. Howard crosses to the door and opens it. Bob enters.*)

BOB: You *are* harboring a solicitor! I watched that woman ring the doorbell! I watched you open the door and let her in! (*Sniffs the air and makes a sour face.*) I know she's been here!

HOWARD: Uh...I made her leave by the back door. And I told her not to go peddling her magazines in this neighborhood again.

BOB: Good idea, making her leave by the back door. We've got a homeowners' association watch patrol out. And if they find her, it won't be pretty!

HOWARD: What will they do to her?

BOB: They'll sit her down and read from the homeowners' manual, chapters 7, 8, and 9. That always gets 'em!

HOWARD: Sounds pretty intense.

BOB: Oh, it is. Remember, we're watching.

HOWARD: Just like Big Brother.

BOB: Big Brother?

HOWARD: Never mind, Bob. You'd better get back to headquarters. (*Bob exits. Howard returns to the bookshelves. To himself.*) Now, what was I doing before I was interrupted? Oh, yes. Stephen Crane. (*Bends down and is unseen by the audience. Gladys enters SR with a bottle of port. She sits in a chair next to the coffee table and tries to open the bottle. The cork flies off the bottle and lands behind the sofa. She crawls behind the sofa and bangs her head on the wall. She groans and flops down on the floor. Sits up.*) Wow! Laura's got some really nice books here! Look at all these first editions! I never knew Laura was so literate. I mean, she edits junk.

(Leans down to look at the books. Julie enters SR. She looks around but doesn't see Howard, JoBeth, or Gladys.)

JULIE: No writer yet? I don't know why our house has to be sublet as a refuge for the untalented. *(Crosses to the front door and exits SL, leaving the door open.)*

HOWARD: *(Looks up.)* Did you find the kitchen, Gladys? *(Crosses SR.)* You might want to wash up a bit. *(Thinks.)* You might want to wash up a whole lot! *(Crosses back to the bookshelves and bends down just as Julie enters SL, carrying two large garment bags from a laundromat. She crosses SR and exits, leaving the door open. She drops her keys but doesn't notice. Howard looks up.)* Did you say something, Gladys?

(Howard looks around and then bends over again. JoBeth stirs, sits up, spies the port bottle, and pours a drink. She sniffs the glass and takes a drink.)

JOBETH: *(Topsy.)* Mmmm. Delicious.

(JoBeth lays down with her head facing into the sofa. She pulls the coat over her head. Howard looks up.)

HOWARD: JoBeth? Are you awake? Do you want to talk about salvation now? *(Crosses to the sofa and looks at JoBeth.)*
I guess not.

(Howard returns to the bookshelves and bends down. Julie enters SR and crosses to the door.)

JULIE: That stupid Wally and his stupid seafood! How dare he give me a failing grade!

(Julie exits. Howard looks up.)

HOWARD: Gladys?

(Howard continues his search. Julie enters SL and crosses SR. She carries a pair of casual shoes.)

JULIE: Calamari! How could I miss calamari? I work for a giant squid!

(Julie exits SR. Howard looks up.)

HOWARD: JoBeth? Did you say something about a giant squid?

(Howard bends down. Julie enters SR, searching for something.)

JULIE: Where's my shirt? *(Exits SR as Howard looks up. He stands, crosses DS, and looks around. He looks at JoBeth, adjusts the coat around her, and shrugs his shoulders. He returns to the bookshelves. Julie enters SR and crosses to the coat rack. She fumbles through the coats and finds a shirt. She sniffs the air and makes a sour face.)* We are badly in need of Lysol! *(As she is about to exit, she finds something on her shirt.)* What's this? My "Welcome to Wally's" button!

(Julie exits SR. Howard looks up.)

HOWARD: Welcome to Wally's?

(Howard crosses to the sofa, looks at JoBeth, and then crosses to the door. As he is about to close it, Bob enters SL, carrying a camcorder.)

BOB: I've got the whole thing right here!

HOWARD: Bob?

BOB: You won't get by with this one!

HOWARD: I guess not.

BOB: Homeowner's manual, chapter 37!

HOWARD: How many chapters does this manual have?

BOB: I have all the evidence I need! (*Pets his camcorder, looks at it, and gasps.*) Except the battery's run down!

(Bob quickly exits. Howard closes the door and returns to the bookshelves. Julie enters SR and looks around as if she's heard something. She shakes her head and exits SR. Gladys crawls out from behind the sofa with the cork.)

GLADYS: (*Shouts.*) I found it!

(Howard crosses to Gladys.)

HOWARD: Gladys?

GLADYS: Anna?

HOWARD: It's Arianna. I thought you were in the kitchen.

GLADYS: I kept hearing voices.

HOWARD: That was Bob Garfield and his camcorder.

GLADYS: I thought it was those extraterrestrials. They're always messing with me.

HOWARD: How about helping me find a book?

GLADYS: What book?

(Gladys gets up and follows Howard to the bookshelves.)

HOWARD: "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets." Look for a book by Stephen Crane.

(Gladys takes a book from the shelf and hands it to Howard.)

GLADYS: Here. It's called "The Shining."

HOWARD: No, Gladys. This is Stephen King. We're looking for Stephen Crane. I think the classics are down here on the floor. (*Stoops down.*)

GLADYS: Okay.

(Gladys stoops down. Julie enters SR, wearing a karate outfit. She crosses to the door, searching through her purse. Howard pops up and looks right, not seeing Julie. Julie fans the air with her hand and makes a sour face. Howard leans back down.)

JULIE: *(Sighs, as if she's forgotten something.)* What have I done with the stupid keys?

(Julie exits. Howard looks left but is too late to see Julie.)

HOWARD: Sister JoBeth?

(Gladys pops up.)

GLADYS: You wanna make out?

HOWARD: *(Shouts.)* No!

(Gladys shrugs. They lean down looking for the book. Julie enters SR.)

JULIE: *(Looking around.)* They have to be here somewhere!
(Looks around and finds her keys.) Here they are. Just one more thing.

(Julie exits SR. Gladys looks up.)

GLADYS: *(To Howard.)* Is that your sister talking in her sleep?
(Shrugs her shoulders and disappears again. Julie enters SR with a can of Lysol, which she generously sprays. Gladys pops up and watches her. Julie leaves the Lysol can on the console and exits SL. To herself.) Probably one of my multiple personalities.

(Howard stands. Gladys moves toward him like a stalker. They circle around the desk with Gladys in pursuit.)

HOWARD: Stop it, Gladys! That's not why I'm interested in you!

GLADYS: Your voice says no, but your eyes say yes!

HOWARD: (*Shouts.*) No! My eyes say no! Can't you read?

GLADYS: Not very well!

(*Gladys lunges and grabs him.*)

HOWARD: (*Shouts.*) Gladys, stop it! (*Pulls away and steps back.*)

GLADYS: So, Anna, I take it you don't find me attractive?

HOWARD: That's Arianna and...well...no. Not at all.

GLADYS: Why not?

HOWARD: Well, where to begin? There's the issue of hygiene, and the whole mental-health thing. And even if that could be changed, I have a girlfriend...at least I had one before she dumped me. I want to talk with you about your life.

GLADYS: And I want to pounce on you like the dumpster at Burger King!

(*Howard crosses to the console, takes the Lysol can, and holds it up like a weapon.*)

HOWARD: Stay as far away from me as you possibly can! (*Gladys continues to stalk him.*) I warn you, Gladys! This can is loaded, and I'm not afraid to use it!

GLADYS: What's that?

HOWARD: Disinfectant spray! It kills germs! (*Gladys gasps and backs away.*) You sit over there and eat cookies. I'll go to work.

(*Gladys crosses to the sofa. Howard crosses to the computer. She picks up the bottle of port.*)

GLADYS: What's this stuff? (*Sniffs. Excited.*) Wow!

(Gladys takes a big swig from the bottle.)

HOWARD: *(Typing.)* “Victoria Cullingdon first saw Gladys Ledbetter at the bottom of the hill, next to the general store, across from the sheriff’s office. The day was cold, but then most days in the Yukon are cold, except for the very few warm days of summer when the black flies come out and gnaw every ounce of living flesh to a gelatinous mass of oozing, retching dough.”

GLADYS: That’s kind of gross, Anna. Even for me.

HOWARD: *(Typing.)* “The woman was pathetic, hoveled against the watering troughs, looking like a starving, sniveling, sack of sticks. Gladys Ledbetter was everything Victoria Cullingdon was not, and vice versa, which is to say, the other way around. Gladys was a pathetic creature with skin the color of pulp as it begins the long process from wood to paper. The Yukon has a lot of paper mills and sawmills because it has a lot of trees. Trees, trees, trees. Most of them are green.”

GLADYS: I don’t know how to say this, Anna, but from my experience so far, you aren’t a very good writer.

HOWARD: What?

GLADYS: You start describing one thing, then you end up describing something else.

HOWARD: *(Offended.)* I happen to be a bestselling writer of romance novels!

GLADYS: Okay, Mister Smart Guy. Read what you just wrote. I mean, first, you got me standing around like a street person, and then you start talking about flies and paper mills and trees. I might not know anything about Steinbrinner, but I *do* know a lot about trash. And, buster, *that* is trash! Cheers. *(Takes a swig from the bottle.)*

HOWARD: *(Horried.)* You could be right.

GLADYS: First, you use every excuse under the sun to put off writing... *(Prissy.)* ...like leading a girl on, then when you run out of excuses and you sit down to write, you write

garbage! In my humble opinion, you want to fail. And I say that as a person very familiar with failure.

HOWARD: My God, Gladys! My writer's block is much more serious than Laura thought! What am I going to do?

GLADYS: How should I know? I'm just a bum.

HOWARD: *(Looking at the bookshelves.)* I've drifted so far from my original ambitions. I've written 17 trashy novels in five years. And, in that time, I didn't read a single great work. *(Indicates the bookshelves.)* These are the writers who kept me going when I was a nerdy college student and after I became a...a nerdy high school teacher.

GLADYS: I think it's your parents' fault. They never should have named a boy "Anna." That's just asking for trouble...

HOWARD: I wanted to be a writer, a *real* writer, so badly! But I forgot what real writing is like! The struggle! The toil! Having something to write about! I spent my time trying to write like someone else!

GLADYS: Like George Steinbubble.

HOWARD: Like George Steinbubble. What am I going to do? I have to write a novel by this evening.

GLADYS: Maybe if you look at someone else's story, you can figure out how to write your own. That's how I learned to panhandle.

(Howard gets up and takes a book from the shelf.)

HOWARD: One of my favorite novels..."To Kill a Mockingbird." *(Silently reads for a count.)*

GLADYS: Pigeons are easier to catch. *(Stands.)* I wonder if they have any more of this delicious beverage. Can I get you anything, Anna? *(Howard ignores her, lost in the book. She imitates him.)* Sure, Gladys, help yourself to anything you can find. Anything at all. *(Normal voice.)* Thank you so much, Mr. Anna. I'll do just that. *(Exits, leaving the empty port bottle overturned on the floor.)*

HOWARD: *(To himself.)* This is so beautifully written.

(Crashing sounds are heard offstage.)

GLADYS: *(Offstage.)* Uh-oh.

(Howard returns the book to the bookshelf.)

HOWARD: *(Examining other books.)* Twain. Hawthorne. Penn Warren. Where did I go wrong? *(Gladys enters SR, carrying three more bottles of port. She sits, uncorks the bottles, and drinks. Howard takes another book from the shelf.)* Robert Penn Warren. Maybe if I *think* Penn Warren I can write again. *(Sits at the desk and opens the book.)* Hey, this is an autographed first edition. I bet it's worth a lot of money. I'd better be careful. *(Reads.)* "Mason City. To get there you follow Highway 58, going northeast out of the city, and it is a good highway and new." *(Sighs.)* That's so short. Let's see what I can do. *(Types.)* "Dawson City. To get there you take the train from Winnipeg and go northwest out of the city. It's good rail, and new." *(Delighted with himself.)* I did it! Goodie, goodie, goodie! I can write again! I wrote a sentence and it doesn't travel all over the place!

(Gladys crosses to the computer.)

GLADYS: *(Tipsy.)* So what ya got now, about 3,000 more to go?

(Gladys bends over to look at the screen and pours port on the book.)

HOWARD: *(Screams.)* Oh my God, Gladys! That's an autographed first edition Robert Penn Warren!

(Gladys steps back.)

GLADYS: Is that good?

(Howard holds up the book, which is dripping in port.)

HOWARD: *(Shouts.)* Oh my God! It's soaked in... *(Sniffs.)* some really good port! What am I going to do?! You've ruined Laura's first edition! Help me clean this! *(Rummages through the desk drawers, tossing papers and supplies across the room.)*

GLADYS: Now, what am I looking for?

HOWARD: This is terrible! I must have been crazy to let you in here!

GLADYS: Well, I have to agree with you there.

HOWARD: *(Shouts.)* Find something! *(Gladys begins to toss books across the room. Howard stops her.)* Look over there!

(Howard points to the console. Gladys crosses to the console, opens the drawers, and tosses out the contents: placemats, papers, boxes of cookies, and everything else she can lay her hands on sail across the room. Soon the room is a total mess.)

GLADYS: This is fun! *(Front door opens and Julie enters dressed in her karate outfit. Gladys turns, greets her, and takes a swig from a port bottle.)* Hello. Are you from my imagination?

(Horrified, Julie sees Howard, crosses to the sofa, and sees JoBeth, whose arm is dangling from beneath the blanket and coat. Note: JoBeth is completely covered except for her arm.)

JULIE: *(To Howard, shouts.)* What did you do to my mother?!

(Fast blackout. Intermission.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]