

A Free Online Novel

by Jennifer L. Armstrong



Pink Gin

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They were just a harmless group of friends trying to run a fidelity agency when, without warning, they found themselves thrown into the fantastical world of concentration camp survival...

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PINK GIN

EPISODE ONE

Scene ONE

Setting: The Check-Mate office.

Clio is reclining on a couch staring gloomily at a bottle of nail polish on the small table beside her. Mitchell is idly sketching hieroglyphics in a notebook. Henry is steadfastly reading Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. *The Pirates of Penzance* soundtrack is playing in the background. How Henry is reading with the very model of a modern major general discussing animals, vegetables and minerals, we don't know. Elinor is at her desk sorting through some papers.

They are all in their early twenties and well-dressed in clothing reminiscent of a leisured class. Elinor and Clio are both pale with dark hair but whereas Clio is voluptuous and eye-catching, Elinor is slim and proper-looking.

Mitchell has light brown hair, a nose that is longish, and a chin that is a little too sharp. His chief hindrance in attracting women, however, is not his looks, but his somewhat indifferent personality.

Henry has golden brown hair that casually falls into a distinctively rugged face, reminiscent of Robert Redford, or on good days in the right light, a young Brad Pitt. He has a look that suggests action and adventure which is ironic considering his chief joy in life is reading. Upon closer inspection one realises he is bordering on pudginess.

Clio: I am utterly and absolutely bored. Here I am lying on a tastefully dull couch from Sears, staring at a pastel peach ceiling when I would be far more suited to a divan in a Turkish harem surrounded by eunuchs fanning my feet and bringing me exotic little cigarettes.

Mitchell (looking up from his exercise book of hieroglyphics and smiling): You only wish that couch was from Sears. You know Henry and I picked up all this stuff from Goodwill. Oh and by the way, I think Elinor is trying to tell you that it's your turn to take out the garbage.

Clio: What book is that?

Mitchell: Sir Wallis Budge's one on hieroglyphics.

Clio: It's full of errors, darling. Get something newer. I have several good books I could lend you. Besides, why are you learning hieroglyphics?

Mitchell: Just in case I ever find myself in the hypothetical position of having to be able to decode

some scribblings on an ancient wall in order to save myself and possibly a small group of tourists from some sort of doom.

(Elinor, now standing behind her desk, points to the chart she has drawn up with all the duties around the office, their names rotated weekly to accomplish them, in a vain attempt to appeal to Clio's sense of responsibility.)

Clio (waving her freshly-painted nails at Elinor): Can't do it, darling. Men notice chips and smudges on the nails. A genuine pick-up is generally well-groomed...

Elinor: It's your turn!

Clio (sincerely): Really, darling, I'd love to. But we must put our *work* first. There'd be no garbage if we didn't go out there and seduce all those unsuspecting people...

(As the two women argue, Mitchell picks up the giant green bag, slings it over his shoulder and hauls it out into and down the shabby humid hallway to the garbage dumpster outside the back door.)

Mitchell (talking to himself): How can this hallway be so stuffy? It opens right onto the street. How can a bag of garbage that supposedly only contains coffee grinds stink so much? And why do I always end up doing this? Next week when it's my turn to make the coffee, I just won't. *That'll* show her...

(After dumping the bag in the dumpster he returns to the office and to his desk.)

Clio: Oh thank you, darling. You really are a pet.

(Mitchell sighs.)

Clio: What are you on for tonight?

(It is a one room office and all of their desks face each other thus making frequent conversations inevitable.)

Mitchell: Nothing too unusual. (He is opening a drawer and pulling out a file, a bottle of gin and a tiny flask of vermouth.) Possible gay husband. I hate those ones because usually the woman is wrong and I end up running for my life with ten angry homophobics after me. Martini, anyone?

(He reaches for a couple of martini glasses on the bookcase behind his desk and carefully places them on the red file folder on his messy desk. Red is for gay men. The only other colour in his drawer is yellow for unfaithful wives. Elinor and Clio have all of the blue folders, unfaithful husbands. Once there had been a man who had suspected that his wife was a lesbian, so after scrounging around for another colour Elinor had eventually gone next door to ask the telemarketing

set-up for a green one. Why Elinor had wanted green Mitchell didn't know. Perhaps it was reminiscent of idyllic days lounging around Lesbos with Sapphos and the gang.)

Clio: Sure. (She is blowing on her fingers.) Ten? That's a lot of homophobics.

Mitchell: Well, like take my last victim. (He's pouring some gin into each glass, pleased to see Elinor glance up from her work and watch him with her steady grey eyes.) He tells his wife he's out playing pool with his buddies. She doesn't believe him, of course, or why would she hire us? Anyway, I follow him after work and sure enough, he really is just out playing pool with his buddies but I decide to check him just to be sure. (Mitchell carefully adds the tiniest hint of vermouth to the gin.) So here's me trying to pick him up, discreetly from a distance, smiling, intense eye-contact, various signals I've picked up on my travels around town, until finally he gets the message and instead of judiciously making his way over and giving me his phone number, he alerts his buddies, his very *large* buddies, I might add, to the fact that there is some guy trying to pick him up and then they all decide that to beat me up would be more fun than pool, and a lot cheaper. I gathered that there had been some serious betting going on...

(Having mixed the drinks with his silver mail-opener, Mitchell brings one of them over to Clio.)

Elinor: Good thing you can sprint. (She returns to her paperwork.)

Henry (looking up from his book): A hundred metres is my limit in situations like that. Then I just have to pray for a cab to miraculously appear.

Clio: Pool with his buddies? Pool with his buddies? (She sits straight up in her chair.) Why does that sound so familiar?

Elinor (not looking up): Because he's yours tonight. Rodney Phelps, age 52. His wife thought he might be gay because he hasn't touched her in five years. But in the event he didn't fall for Rupert, she wanted us to send a follow-up girl.

(Mitchell snickers.)

Clio: What?!

Mitchell: Nothing (He is rearranging the papers in his file with one hand and quaffing his martini with the other.)

Clio: He's ugly, isn't he?

Mitchell: Well, I wouldn't say *ugly* exactly because I mean, sometimes ugly people have an attractiveness all of their own...

(Mitchell returns the file to his drawer and retrieves a yellow one.)

Clio: Bald? He's bald?

Mitchell: Bald? (He thinks about this.) Yes, I suppose you could say he's bald. Certainly he is not burgeoning with hair. But bald isn't the word that leaps to my mind when I think of Rodney Phelps."

(He opens the file folder.)

Clio (slowly): What word does leap to your mind?

Mitchell: The word that leaps to my mind when I think of Rodney Phelps is...(Mitchell pauses.) Sweaty. I think, sweaty. And this is even before he chased me.

Clio: Sweaty? (She's still hopeful.) As in muscular and toned and sweaty after a good work-out?

Mitchell: Sweaty as in a nervous pig being led to the slaughterhouse. (He says this absently as he examines the papers in his new file. He has an equally unappetising prospect awaiting him. The gay husband turned out to a closed case. There had been a post-it note in the folder, in Elinor's neat handwriting, saying that the wife had found letters in her husband's desk confirming her worst fear so she no longer needed their services. But now Mitchell has a request from an 84 year-old Kyle Waters who suspects his young and swinging 67 year-old wife of cheating. Her favourite hang-out, the bowling alley.)

(Elinor's cat, Pumpkin, saunters into the room but before Clio can roll off the couch to play with him Henry has commandeered him onto his lap and is absent-mindedly petting him as he reads.)

Henry: That Maximinus... (shakes his head, not looking up from his book) What a fellow! What a fellow!

Clio (in an effort to lure Pumpkin off Henry's lap begins to hum): *Oh well, I never, was there ever a cat so clever...*

(Her singing is too hard to continue with the Gilbert and Sullivan still playing in the background. There are some grapes in a crystal bowl on the coffee table. Clio tries a few.)

Clio: These grapes taste like salami.

Henry (looking up): Salami? Those grapes happen to be a special breed imported from Morocco that cost over five dollars a pound.

Clio (rolling over onto her stomach): I think of a breed as being cattle.

(Pumpkin jumps off of Henry's lap and comes over to sniff Clio's hand.)

Clio: Oh little pumpkin! (Pats his head and speaks in baby-talk.) My little pumpkin! (She sits up

so that she can pick him up and pet him on her lap. She is making funny faces to go along with the baby-talk.) He's a little pumpkin! He's a cute little pumpkin!

(Pumpkin begins to purr.)

Elinor: He's going to bite you. When he starts purring it means he's going to bite you.

(Sure enough, a few seconds later Pumpkin nips one of Clio's fingers.)

Clio: Bad little pumpkin! (She lets him jump off her lap.) Oh this is so *boring!*

Scene TWO

Setting: Same day. Four o'clock. The little office kitchen. Elinor, Clio, Mitchell, Henry, and Roderick are having tea. Roderick, the fifth employee, has just arrived a few minutes earlier with some fresh scones from the bakery which they are having with butter, jam, and Darjeeling tea. Roderick is taller and thinner than both Mitchell and Henry and although he is not always a dependable employee, partially due to parental demands, his wavy blond hair and guileless blue eyes usually get him as far as he needs to go in their profession. One woman, upon being caught, had referred to him as the man with the "Nazi good-looks." He, Mitchell, Henry, Clio and Elinor had formed Check-Mate upon graduation from the University of Toronto. As Ancient History Majors, none of them were fit for the real world of stock-brokers, salesmen, chartered accountants, CEOs and administrative assistants.)

Elinor (to Roderick as she pours the tea): So what did you do today?

(One gets the sense that Elinor, with her shoulder-length hair and subdued floral dress, in any other time period would have been a wife. The man she married would have been irrelevant, so long as he was in the upper middle class. Clio, on the other hand, with her long dark hair and sensuousness, in any other time period would have been a courtesan, but having been born in the early twenty-first century is just a young woman who, if she's had a lot of lovers, has gotten nothing tangible in return.)

Roderick: Picked up her dry-cleaning. Bought some tulip bulbs. Placed an order at the bakery for a cake for my father's birthday party. But the mater and pater feel that I'm beyond the age of receiving an allowance, and feel that I should be joining the toiling masses. For some reason they don't consider trying to pick up errant mates a legitimate job. I may have to do some temp work on the side.

Mitchell: Toiling masses, my eye. One or two days a week of filing and flirting with middle-aged secretaries.

Roderick: Nonsense. I expect it to be very Kafkaesque. A dreary job and a writing career. Well,

maybe not writing, although, I do like the idea of working on a novel. It gives one a sense of purpose. Like if my characters were Catholic I could start going to mass just to see what it's like. But maybe I'll take up painting, or something. Or maybe I'll just apply myself and go all the way to the top. Have you ever noticed how the people at the top and bottom of the corporate ladder have very similar jobs in that they do very little and just spend a lot of time looking busy? It's the people in the middle who do all the work and keep the company going. By the way, did you get your invitation?

Mitchell: St. Mike's annual? Tomorrow night? Yes I got it. You guys (paradoxically this remark is directed to the girls) are so lucky you weren't born boys to attend St. Mike's. Until high school, I thought it was normal to eat gruel for lunch everyday and to be beaten up by Italians who thought uniforms were for faggots. How that reconciles with their persisting interest in fascism I've never figured out.

Henry: And the torture continues with an annual evening of gas-inducing food, banal conversation, followed by appalling coffee. Still, I suppose we must support the old school. I hear this year the funds they raise are going towards replacing those orange vinyl chairs in the dining hall.

Roderick: Goodness! Then it would be positively cruel of us not to support the cause.

(Tea being concluded, they resume their work. Henry returns to his book, this time occasionally muttering about the brilliance of some Caesar's ability to upset conventional methods of warfare. Mitchell returns to his hieroglyphics. Elinor puts on the *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* soundtrack but this time Clio has Roddy to amuse her. And amuse her he does by producing a pack of Memory cards which they play until it is time to either go home or out on a pick-up. We follow Mitchell as he takes a bus to the bowling alley, enters, discreetly pulls out a photo, surveys the room and spots his woman.

Rose Waters looks innocent enough. Her friends are as equally mature as her and all seem to be serious bowlers with no plans to later hit the coffee bar in search of some alternative action. Mitchell orders a coffee and has a seat on one of the stools overlooking the alley while he decides what kind of approach would best test Mrs. Water's fidelity. It must be a direct hit and not something that could be mistaken for a friendly chat since ideally, they try to get the whole encounter on a tape so that their client would know they weren't misconstruing their spouse's response to a pick-up.

He twists around on his swivel stool absent-mindedly watching Rose Waters when suddenly he realises that Rose Waters is examining *him*! She has caught his eye and isn't turning away. She smiles. Mitchell quickly focuses on his coffee. Does she suspect? No, of course not. She had just seen a man casually looking at her and had chosen to smile rather than glare.

Mitchell takes a sip of coffee and tries to decide at what point it wouldn't be noticed if he looked up again. He tries to listen for sounds from her particular alley that would indicate that everybody's attention was on the game. He can't hear any of the women's voices but then a bowling alley is as noisy as a stock market crashing.)

Rose (brightly): Hi there!

(Mitchell jumps. She is standing in front of his stool grinning. Quick! Get the tape going! Discreetly he reaches into his pocket and presses the *play* button while Mrs. Rose Waters takes the stool beside him. Her two friends have taken a booth close by obviously to observe the encounter without interfering with it.

Mitchell: Uh, hi! (He smiles)

Rose: Buy you another coffee?

Mitchell: Uh, no. Oh... Why not? Sure.

(Mrs. Rose Waters signals to the girl behind the counter to bring them coffee.)

Rose: So, you like bowling?

Mitchell: Uh, no. I mean, yes. (From the expression on his face this isn't the way it's supposed to happen. He's supposed to be moving in on her. And her! Does she think she has a chance? Rose Water with her mess of curly grey hair and amused eyes is hitting on him as if she were Cleopatra seducing a young Roman soldier! She does have sensuous lips though - soft and carefully painted in a virtuous summer garden shade of pink, like a rose petal. Maybe if Mitchell were fifty years older...)

Rose: Are you meeting someone?

Mitchell: Uh, no.

Rose: Just hanging out?

Mitchell: Basically, yeah.

(The waitress brings them their coffee and then comes out from behind the counter to serve Rose's companions.)

Rose: Maybe you'd like to bowl with me and my friends?

Mitchell: Truthfully ma'am, I'm not much of a bowler. (He is wondering if this constitutes a pick-up. Will Kyle Waters be satisfied with this much?)

Rose: Oh c'mon! A young good-looking guy like you?

(Mitchell fails to see how his looks would affect his interest in bowling. This is definitely a pick-up. Still, might as well make it explicit.)

Mitchell (jauntily): I'm not as young as I look! (He winks.)

Rose: I bet you know all the tricks!

Mitchell: I bet I could teach you a few. (He suggestively leans toward her.)

Rose: Any time in the near future?

Mitchell: I've always thought now is the best time in the world. (He grins) Tell you what, I've got a car out in the parking lot, a black *Chevy*. Meet me out there in a few minutes and I'll take you wherever you want to go.

Rose: Why a few minutes, blue eyes?

Mitchell: `Cos the coffee's gone straight through me. (He stands up and ambles towards the bathrooms which are conveniently located near the front door. Casually he glances over his shoulder. Mrs. Rose Waters, her back now to him, has joined her friends in the booth and is obviously recounting the whole encounter with great jubilation. Both women are focused on Rose Waters. Her coffee cup, untouched, cooling, remains on the counter. Mitchell makes a run for it.)

Scene THREE

Setting: The evening of St. Michael's annual dinner, the next night. A hotel lobby. Mitchell, Henry and Roderick are in tuxedos. Elinor and Clio are in slinky cocktail dresses. They are all ridiculously over-dressed. Elinor and Clio have decided to accompany the men to the hotel where it is being held and drink cocktails in the lobby bar.

Elinor: This looks promising. (She is examining a discreet sign that says *The Pink Lady*.) It looks like a speak-easy.

Clio: OK, let's do it. I'm dying for a drink.

Mitchell: We'll join you. (To Roderick and Henry) We've got time.

(They enter and find themselves in a dim room with small tables, half-filled with people.)

Clio: Let's go to the bar. Faster service.

(They take stools at the bar. Mitchell, Roderick and Henry order a brandy.)

Clio: A pink gin.

Bartender: A pink gin? (His tone of voice is a sarcastic, *Excuse me?*)

Clio: A pink gin. (Clio gives him a look that mothers give their children when they're only pretending to be stupid.)

Bartender: Is that a cocktail or some kind of gin?

(Clio sighs.)

Clio: Oh just make it a bloody gin and tonic.

Elinor: Same for me. (She is twisting around in her seat to survey the pink and black decor.) Well, this is interesting... (She contemplates the room for awhile.) Sort of Coco Chanel. There's a lot of men here...

Clio: What's this? (The bartender has just put down a drink in front of her.)

Bartender: A bloody gin and tonic. I just added some tomato juice. I didn't know you could do that.

Clio: Oh my... (Clio is at a loss for words.)

(The men laugh. Elinor glances at her drink, doesn't recognise it as being a gin and tonic and so decides it must be for someone else and can therefore be safely ignored.)

Mitchell: What mastery, what brilliance, I tell you. (His tone indicates he is continuing a conversation.) I *amaze* myself. I actually worked it so that *she* tried to pick-up *me*.

Elinor: And how did you do that?

Mitchell: It's this trick I have. The way I raise my eyebrows at a woman. I've never met a woman who hasn't fallen for it.

Clio: There're two in this room.

Mitchell: It's my secret weapon, darling. I certainly wouldn't waste it on you two. By the way, how was Mr. Phelps, Clio?

Clio (looking pleased with herself): Deliciously unfaithful. I had an experience very similar to yours. *He* picked me up and we had a very nice chat over many beers before I made my exit via the bathroom window. And you were wrong, Mitchell. He wasn't at all sweaty."

Mitchell: Are you sure? Where'd you meet him?

Clio: In the pool hall. Same place as you. I wore my little red dress...

(Although Clio's informal wardrobe consisted of jeans and oversized sweaters everyone can see from her current attire what she is capable of doing when she wants to seduce a man. The principal word is tight and the operative colour is red. In a world of muted shades of black, brown and grey, Clio usually arrives in a room like the stolen gift of fire from the gods.)

And you were right. He and his friends were very large. (Clio's eyes widen with awe.) When he rolled up his sleeves I nearly *died* his arms were so muscular. Think Ramses the Great here.

Mitchell: Wait a second! *Muscular?* Are we talking about the same Rodney Phelps?

Clio: Well he said his name was Rodney. And he fit your description of being homophobic because he called the bartender a fairy when he didn't bring him a beer fast enough. As a matter of fact, that's how I picked him out.

Mitchell: What about the photo?

Clio: I didn't have a photo. You still have it. But I figured he wouldn't be too hard to spot based on what you had told us about him...

(Mitchell has pulled out his wallet and is rapidly rifling through it. Finally he finds what he's looking for.)

Mitchell: *This* is Rodney Phelps. (He hands a photo to Clio.)

Clio (taking the photo): Oh dear. He *is* sweaty, isn't he?

Elinor (taking the photo from Clio): This is, of course, not the man who picked you up.

Clio (agreeably): No. It is not. This man is more reminiscent of a eunuch in the court of Ramses the Great. In addition, my Rodney looked about fifteen years younger than this man.

Elinor (sighing): He probably *was* fifteen years younger than this man.

Clio (cheerful): Well, in any case, I have the whole thing on tape. Maybe my Rodney's wife would be interested in knowing her husband's unfaithful.

Elinor(holding up the photo): Did you happen to notice this Rodney Phelps when you were there?

(Clio carefully re-examines the photo.)

Clio: Yes, I think I did. He was at a corner table.

(Mitchell nods an affirmation.)

Elinor: Was he with anybody?

Clio: Just two other men."

Elinor: Did he look at you?

Clio: He glanced at me. Everyone did. (Clio smiles modestly.)

Elinor: But did he in anyway indicate that he was going to make a move on you?

Clio: Oh no. Just looked, that's all. He stayed with his table.

Elinor (opening up her purse and pulling out a small notepad and pen): Good. I think we can safely tell his wife that he's OK.

Scene FOUR

Setting: Same evening. Banquet room in the hotel filled with men. Mitchell is seen joining Henry who is talking animatedly to their former grade three teacher, Mr. Kane, a thin older grey-haired man.

Henry: Reality? Who wants reality? (Henry, holding an empty glass, is obviously onto at least his third glass of wine despite this being only the pre-dinner reception.) I read a newspaper once. All it was was people killing each other in some East European war, a serial rapist who terrorises his victims with a switchblade and children getting molested by their uncles. I mean, all this stuff happens in the books I read but at least it's been disinfected by history. Essentially I try to think happy thoughts. As for a career, I'm quite happy where I am now.

(A waiter passes by with a tray of drinks. Henry grabs another glass of wine.)

A lot of people consider trying to pick someone up just to prove how fragile fidelity is a sick job. (Henry takes a gulp of his fresh drink to emphasise his point.) But it's better than, say, working outside. I get my regular coffee breaks this way. And it doesn't involve computers. We probably are the few people that have actually found a career that doesn't require computer-literacy, telecommunication proficiency, or any technological knowledge whatsoever which is good because I really don't know much about computers. I mean, I know everyone's using them, but I'm not really sure as to *why*...

Roderick (who has suddenly appeared behind them): I rather suspect it has something to do with international espionage. You see it in the James Bond movies. Computers run the world. Information is power. (It is apparent that he too is a little bit drunk. Mr. Kane rolls his eyes and

moves on. Roderick and Henry barely notice.)

Henry: Yes, but for the average man...

Roderick: Oh, the *average* man. (Roderick holds onto Henry's shoulder to steady himself.) Well, the *average* man is something else all together. Hey! (He shakes Henry's shoulder.) Old Ballsy (he is referring to their former fourth grade teacher, Mr. Ballane) thinks I'd make a good model. Not high fashion, or anything. More along the line of uniform catalogues. Did you know there was such a thing? (He looks at Henry and Mitchell to see if they share his surprise.) Yes, apparently it's a real thing. (He nods to quash any disbelief.) Lots of companies make their employees wear uniforms and so they have these uniform *catalogues* to show the employers what their employees would look like in a uniform, if you follow me. (Roderick grabs a glass of wine from a passing waiter.) Might give it a go, eh? (He downs the wine in one gulp.)

(Not surprisingly, we see later that Roderick is asked to leave the alumni dinner with Henry offering to escort him. Mitchell assumes the responsibility of retrieving and accompanying Clio and Elinor home.)

Scene FIVE

Scene: The next day. The Check-Mate office. They are not discussing the previous evening. Instead they are discussing sex. Roderick is standing behind a card table making them a fresh batch of gin fizzes.

Elinor: Yes, but is it sadomasochism or is it simply a desire for a guide and mentor? It's a common theme in literature -- the wild woman tamed by a dictatorial man who knows what he wants and takes it. Is this deviance or is it natural? The woman wants to be guided, the man is a hunter. Notice I didn't say, the woman wants to be guided, the man wants to guide or the woman wants to be hunted, the man wants to hunt. I think men and women are at cross-purposes in many cases and it's reflected in their sexuality.

Roderick: Yes, but... (Roderick starts most of his statements this way whether he agrees with the previous statement or not. Usually he doesn't even pay attention to the previous statement.) Unattainability is a factor. Both sexes are attracted to the unattainable, or what they think is unattainable, and they both react differently when they actually attain something. A woman is happy to obtain the unattainable whereas a man is unhappy, shattered even, and often runs. If not physically away, certainly psychologically. (He begins to distribute the gin fizzes.)

Elinor: No. A woman is not happy to obtain the unattainable. She's equally likely to run.

Henry: But it's ingrained in a woman to stay to the bitter end. If she's running away, it must be for fear of her own sexuality. She's afraid of her own desires and the implications.

Elinor: Or maybe she's afraid of her lack of desire.

(Elinor's cat wanders into the room.)

Roderick (looking at the cat): The most sexual being is, of course, the cat. By sexual being, I mean, that it is asexual but able to inflame a sense of frustration equal only to the frustration of a fruitless conquest. If you call out to a cat, it will look in the opposite direction with an expression on its face that says, I hear someone calling me but I can't for the life of me imagine where it's coming from. You keep calling it. It keeps looking everywhere but directly at you. Finally, you're down on the ground with your face right in front of its face saying, here I am, here I am. And it looks at you with complete contempt. You poor pathetic thing, it says. And you realise, you're down on your knees, face practically on the ground, bum in the air, begging for this little creature's attention. What could be more sexual than that?

Henry: One sees the sexual connotations, certainly, but it could also be perceived as a war tactic. The cat's behaviour is a model for how to behave if caught by the enemy. With complete oblivion. He is protecting himself from responsibility of knowledge...

Roderick: Yes, but love and war are so interconnected. War is merely the desire of one party to dominate the other. Why read long lists of what men want and what women want when you can read the battle strategies of Alexander the Great?

Henry: I do read the battle strategies of Alexander the Great. (Henry leans forward, about to elaborate.)

Roderick (quickly): But phallic pride. That's a whole other issue.

(There is a pause as they all wait for him to continue.)

That was it. That was my point.

Clio: I think the fundamental problem with men is that they're so literal-minded. You tell them something and they believe it. It takes all the fun out of talking. You can't speak cryptically. (She examines her fingernails.) I desperately need a manicure.

Elinor: I think I'm going to get one of those alpha-hydroxy face peels.

Roderick: How much do they cost?

Elinor: I dunno. But if it works it'd be worth it.

Henry: What's it do?

Elinor: Clarifies your skin. Evens the tone.

Henry: Your tone looks even.

Elinor: I'm wearing foundation. I'd like to be able to wake up with an even tone.

Roderick: What's wrong with hiding behind a mask?

Elinor: Well, if I were ever stranded on a desert island without my cosmetics it would be a problem. I hate those movies where people are stranded on a desert island and they continue to look amazing. I mean, I use so many things on my face alone -- my gel cleanser, a balancing toner that tightens my pores, a well-being fluid with sunscreen for the day, an alpha-hydroxy rejuvenating cream for the night, a delicate eye cream to prevent wrinkles... And that's not even getting into my actual cosmetics. (Elinor senses that she has lost their interest and decides to change the topic.) Clio and I had a great idea. Nothing to do with cosmetics. We want to start a Female Renaissance.

(Clio leans forward, suddenly taking an interest in the conversation.)

Henry: Oh, really?

Elinor: Yes. I mean, think about it. There's been an Italian Renaissance, followed by a German and an English and a French Renaissance, all pretty male-dominated. There was a Black Renaissance in Harlem. There was almost a Jewish Renaissance in Europe just before World War II but obviously didn't flourish in the concentration camps... So, anyhow, why not a Female Renaissance? Ideally, I think the whole feminist movement should have spawned some sort of Renaissance to combat the mediocrity of it all. I mean, look at so many women stuck temping. Is that what women are going to do all their lives? File and do data-entry? If I had been born 150 years ago I would have been allowed to stay home and do needle-point and cook and read whatever I want instead of having to *do* something productive, except that it's really only productive in the sense of productive for society, a society created and built by men. So why shouldn't women have a chance to reinvent civilisation from a female point of view? I mean, right now we're just trying to fit into a man's world. Why shouldn't we create our own new world?

Clio: Exactly!

Roderick (agreeably): Why not?

Clio: It's like Elinor and I were saying. We think women have a Messiah complex. They're looking for a man to save them from themselves. When you look around, there are no wise woman to guide us out of this mess because all the woman we know are either completely absorbed with men or with their careers. Not with *life*. Do you know what I mean?

(Roderick, Henry and Mitchell nod.)

So we thought, *why can't we be the wise women?*

(Roderick nods again as if that were the correct conclusion.)

And that's what we want to do, be wise women.

Mitchell: How *visionary*.

Elinor: I was thinking about it more and how in the Bible, in the Old Testament you have priests and how in the New Testament you have deacons and ministers, however in both Testaments you have prophetesses. See..." (Elinor leans forward in her chair.) Men are *administrators*. Of course, some men are prophets and they, like the prophetesses, are in a special class apart from mere administration. Furthermore, I think Christ's ministry is a tantalising glimpse of the abolition of the patriarchal system. Men may continue to uphold the system but are warned that in the ultimate reality of salvation, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek. The slaves weren't freed, the Greeks didn't become Jews, the women didn't become men because they all still had to live in society. But as equal inheritors of the kingdom of God they were all responsible for their own salvation. In the Old Testament a man could override his wife's oath but there's no such clause in the New Testament. My point is, I think Christ's teachings which were so... (Elinor tries to think of a word.) *tradition-breaking* at that time, opened up the possibility of a renaissance and rebirth for women. The first person to greet the newly-risen Christ was Mary Magdalen who carried the message of *his* rebirth to the male disciples. Anyhow, although men have diminished the role of women in early Christianity that doesn't mean it's not there. And I'm a little disappointed that women of this century have allowed themselves to just be absorbed into a male-dominated society and have not tried in some way to...(She tries to put the new ideas into words.)

(Roderick gets up to mix them some more drinks.

Clio (interrupting): The problem is that we're children of civilisation addicted to the conveniences of the modern age -- coffee-makers, public transportation, microwavable Danish pastry, stereos and CD's, synthetic fabrics -- so that we don't want to jeopardise our comfort by trying to start all over. But hanging out with like-minded people would at least offer us the fey possibility of being in the world but not of the world.

(Clio gets up from her comfortable armchair and strolls over to the window. She slides open the window, despite the cool autumn air. They hear voices and laughter from outside, obviously a group of people are passing by but as they are all seated only Clio can actually see them.)

Clio (suddenly screaming): *You're all going to die!* (She slams down the window and quickly returns to her chair.)

Roderick (eyes sparkling): Who was it?

Clio (blandly): I have no idea

(There is a moment of silence. They look at each other. Then they all burst into laughter.)

EPISODE TWO

Scene ONE

Setting: Check-Mate office. A week later. All are present and at their respective desks except for Elinor who is at the coffee station pouring herself a cup.

Elinor (taking her first sip): Mitchell! This tastes like mud! Particularly nasty mud, I might add!

Mitchell (looking up from his desk): I didn't make it. (True to his resolve he had deliberately avoided the coffee-maker this morning.)

Clio: Oh, I made it. It's espresso.

Elinor: Espresso? We don't have any espresso beans...

Clio: Oh, I know, so I just put double the amount of coffee grinds in it. Don't you like it?

(Elinor sighs, dumps her cup of coffee down the drain of the sink and returns to her desk.)

Elinor: We have a new client coming in this morning. A Helen Kendall.

Clio: By the way, is it unethical to date someone after we've finished checking them out?

Elinor (horrified): Unethical and immoral!

Clio (slowly): Well, only hypothetically speaking, of course, what if our work results in the couple getting a divorce and then the guy starts calling me...

Henry: Horus's head, Clio! You are naughty!

Elinor: How did he get your number? He's not supposed to know your last name! That's just basic safety! (Clio shrugged.) Our reputation is destroyed if something like that ever got out! (She picks up her pen and resumes working on a file. Clio catches Roderick's eye and shrugs. Clearly she had been asking on his behalf. Roderick gives her a look that says, *you did your best*.) I should brief you on Helen Kendall before she gets here. (She looks up from what is obviously the new file.) She's been married a year and suspects her husband is cheating on her although she doesn't know whether it's with an ex-girlfriend or a current woman that he's always called a friend...

Roderick: The eternal four-sided triangle, eh? The man, the woman, the ex, and the hopeful friend.

Elinor: I have never heard of a four-sided triangle. As I was saying, it's going to require some detective work. Clio, obviously you'll check out the man. Roderick and Henry, you'll check out the

ex and the friend, respectively, and see which of the women consider themselves currently involved with someone...

Roderick (leaning back in his chair and putting his legs up on his desk despite the papers and files and pencil holders): Not going to be easy, particularly if the women are just playing around with Helen's husband due to there being no other men in their lives. Then Henry and I come along and suddenly they pretend they're completely available.

Elinor: Then don't hit on them. Act like you're the married one having problems and you just need someone to talk to and they're bound to open up. Whatever it takes.

(There is a knock on the door and a tall, pale woman with limp shoulder-length black hair opens the door. Elinor smiles invitingly.)

Come in! Have a seat!

Helen: Hi. I'm Helen Kendall. (She comes in reluctantly and sits down on the chair in front of Elinor's desk.) I have an appointment...

Elinor: Yes. You're right on time. Would you like a coffee or a Perrier?

Helen: Perrier, please.

Elinor: Get Mrs. Kendall a Perrier, Mitchell.

(Mitchell tries not to look visibly sour as he goes over to the small fridge by the coffee-maker. Their lime Perrier mixes especially nicely with gin.)

Helen (opening her purse): I've brought some photos. (She pulls them out of an organiser and tosses them onto Elinor's neat desk.) The blonde in the bikini is his ex. The brunette in front of the Christmas tree is his supposed friend. (She sounds distant and apathetic.)

Elinor (opening a notepad): OK, let me get this straight. Your husband's name is Roy Kendall and he works at the front desk of the Sheraton. (Helen nodded tiredly.) His ex-girlfriend's name, please?

Helen: Kelly Simmons. She's a waitress at a diner on Queen Street, just west of University.

Elinor (writing swiftly): And the friend?

Helen: Sandy King. Unemployed. She has a lot of time on her hands.

Elinor: How did they meet?

Helen: High school he told me. They were both on the track team. That's why they've stayed friends. He goes jogging with her three or four times a week.

Elinor (looking up from her writing): Now, you suspect he may be seeing Kelly? Why is that?

Helen (she barely seems interested in the topic): Well, I stopped by the Sheraton one day to see if he wanted to have lunch together, but he wasn't there so I decided to walk over to the diner instead. He was there and so was she.

Elinor: Your suspicions are completely understandable. (Helen doesn't look like this comment has made any dent in her outlook on life.) Would you like us to check out Kelly first?

Helen (standing up): Yeah. Listen, I've got to get back to work... (Elinor stands up too)

Elinor: You'll hear from us within a week.

Helen (drifting out): Thanks.

(Tempted to say something disparaging about Helen's anaemic manner, Mitchell instead gets up and goes over to the bookshelf in the corner that holds his martini glasses, a complete set of *Remembrances of Things Past* - a gift from his mother who had thought it was a history series - and an assortment of sea shells from some ex-girlfriend of Roderick's. He takes a martini glass back to his desk in order to make up a drink.)

Clio: She's interesting looking. Greek do you think?

Elinor (agreeing): Something exotic. Persian, maybe?

(Roderick and Mitchell are looking at them incredulously. Henry has been too busy reading to notice any of the past proceedings.)

Is there such a thing anymore? I know those Shah's like to pretend there is...

Clio: The Persians were pretty civil. (She says it as if this tid-bit of information might somehow enrich them all, despite that her expertise is in the area of Egyptians, especially the men in their loincloths.)

Mitchell (mixing his drink): Actually, that is a historical fallacy. The Persians used to require that the Babylonians provide an annual tribute of 500 castrated boys. They became eunuchs for the Persian nobility.

Clio: No, that's not true. It was the Assyrians who were barbaric.

Mitchell (sipping his drink): Another historical fallacy. The Assyrians merely encouraged people to

think they were brutal in order to maintain order. Their policy was to simply execute the leader of a community and then relocate the people.

Clio: But there's so many stories about the Assyrians!

Mitchell (leaning back in his chair): Well, let me tell you one about the Persians. Cambyses once had a judge who took bribes skinned. He then used the skin to cover the judgement seat as a warning to the man's son who inherited the job.

(Elinor rolls her eyes.)

Roderick (impatiently): Hey! Can I see those photos?

Elinor (standing up and coming over to his desk with them): I suppose. Kelly will be your responsibility. She's the one in the bikini.

Roderick (eagerly holding out his hand): I know.

Elinor (glancing at an open file on his desk): Do you write your notes in cuneiform?

Roderick (a horrified expression on his face): Early Phoenician actually.

(Elinor laughs at the expression on his face.)

I don't know why some people allow themselves to be photographed in a bikini. (He hands the photos back to Elinor who returns to her desk.)

Scene TWO

Setting: The office the next evening. Roderick is at the coffee station waiting for a fresh pot to brew. Elinor has just got up to get herself a cup when it's ready. Everybody else has gone for the day.

Roderick (warningly): Keep your distance. Just passed some particularly noxious gas. Couldn't keep it in. Too many French fries at lunch.

Elinor (stopping where she is): Thanks. So you ate at the diner?

Roderick (continuing): You shouldn't keep these things in. It's not healthy. Some Swedish study, or it might have been Dutch, said that we should fart at least eight times a day...

Elinor (impatiently): Yes, yes...

Roderick: I heard of a guy who actually got cancer from holding his gas in!

Elinor (losing it): Fart all you want Roderick! In fact, fill the world with your sulphuric scent for all I care! Just tell me how it went with Kelly! And did you really wear that T-shirt?!

(Rupert is wearing a white cotton T-shirt that says "I'm in the Witness Protection Program.")

Roderick (looking down): Don't you love this? I got it on Queen Street today. (He pours himself a cup of coffee even though the coffee-maker is still dripping.) Well, I made contact and I'm meeting her tonight when she gets off work and we're going for a drinkie-poo at, get this, the Sheraton! (He's passing by Clio's desk and stops to pick up a Cosmopolitan and flip through it.)

Elinor: Wonderful!

Roderick: You know, (he holds up the magazine) you would never guess that the woman who sits here is fluent in hieroglyphics and could give you a full biographical sketch of every New Kingdom Pharaoh...

Elinor: Did she suggest the Sheraton?

Roderick: (still flipping through the magazine and enjoying the lingerie ads) No, I did. I said she must be sick of diners so let's walk to the Sheraton.

Elinor: But how did she respond?

Roderick: No response. (turning a page) I mean, she didn't gasp and say, Oh I can't! My lover works there!

Elinor: Let me check something. (She goes through her files and pulls out Helen Kendall's.) I think I've got Roy Kendall's work schedule in here...(she's going through papers) Yes, here it is. What time are you meeting Kelly?

Roderick: Seven. (He is examining a long-legged model in a very short skirt.)

Elinor: See Roy got off work at six tonight so there's no chance of running into him.

Roderick (absently): Well, that would explain it. (He turns the page to find an article on making a man happy in bed. Beginning to read it he blushes at the explicit instructions. He turns the page quickly before Elinor can catch him, even though from her desk it would be impossible to see what he is reading. He is so pre-occupied with the magazine that he doesn't notice a red-faced, middle-aged woman come into the office.)

Woman: Excuse me!

(Roderick turns around and recognises the woman as a successful pick-up a couple of weeks ago.)

Roderick (politely): Yes?

Woman: My husband just told me why he's filing for divorce. (She is as angry as an atheist being burned at the stake for Sabbath-keeping.)

Roderick (calmly): I suppose he would.

(Elinor is discreetly picking up her phone.)

Woman: And I just wanted to drop by and personally tell you how I feel about it... (She opens up her purse.)

Roderick (sighing): *Vae victis*.

Woman: Pardon me? (She pulls a long kitchen knife out of her purse.)

Roderick (Eyes bulging): Woe to the defeated. (His voice is somewhat feeble.)

Woman (her face practically in Roderick's, the knife in the vicinity of his chest): Don't get smart with me, kid!

Roderick (bravely): I'd like to tell you I'm deeply sorry. (One of his hands is discreetly moving around Clio's desk, desperately trying to locate a letter opener or pair of scissors. All it comes up with is an emery board. He sighs.) Would you care to have a seat? (He waves a limp hand in the direction of the couch and the woman actually sits down.) Bring this lady a cup of coffee please, Elinor.

(Elinor, who has just managed to dial the number of the office next door where there are at least a dozen brawny college-aged men working the evening shift for a telemarketing company, sighs and puts the phone down.)

Woman (standing up): I don't know why I'm sitting down. It's a lot harder to kill someone sitting down.

Elinor (quickly from the coffee station): Would you like cream in your coffee, ma'am?

Woman (sitting back down): Just sugar.

Roderick (assuringly): One of my favourite studies is that of the Celts as they engaged the Romans. As you well know, if you have seen *Gladiator*, the Romans were a tight-knit fighting machine. Impenetrable, almost, when they all marched together, shields up and when they all crouched down, shield overhead to protect themselves from the fiery darts. Of course, *Gladiator* depicts the Roman

victory. But ultimately, with all the internal decay in Rome and the relentless attacks by the so-called barbarians, chaos triumphed over order.

Woman (still holding the knife menacingly): Is there a point to this history lesson?

Roderick: Actually, yes there is. (He seems pleased by the observation.) The woman is sipping her coffee. Her intense dislike for Roderick is evident but she no longer looks like she's on a death mission.)

My point is, er, well, along the lines of... (He is desperately trying to think of a point. Elinor rolls her eyes.) Well, I mean, that is to say, in the end, an empire can't last forever. Whether it be destroyed by internal forces or external pressures, an empire eventually falls. We want it to last forever because we want security, but history proves that we can't look to a state or an army for that sense of security.

Woman (putting her coffee mug on the floor and looking like she might stand up): So what are you saying? This is terrible coffee, by the way.

Roderick (leaning forward earnestly): I'm saying, empires rise and fall but shadows linger. I personally feel that one of the great tragedies of travel is that we can never quite experience the spirit of a country - perhaps because it's hidden so deeply in the soul of its people. If not there, where else? We may catch a glimpse of a country's substance when we stand on top of one of its hills and survey a small town, but when we get down to the cobbled streets and the sidewalk cafes we're back to being just a visitor. Do you know what I mean?

Woman (looking depressed): Of course I know what you mean. From the minute we met in that stupid bar I knew what you were saying. Why do you think I'm so mad at you? You're saying the travel industry does its damndest to seduce us with the soul of a country - all those glossy brochures full of pictures of smiling natives, magnificent statues, castles, universities, cliffs, fountains, cathedrals, flower gardens, street vendors - all the things that we barely glance at after we've spent a few days in the country and the newness has worn off. So there we are stuck in the tourist's paradox. We've seen more of the country than most natives but we'll never understand it completely because we didn't create it.

Roderick (nodding): Exactly. It all makes me wonder why we build houses in the first place. Are they to shelter us from the elements or are they a declaration of control? Civilisations aren't built with teepees, they're built with brick and stone. But the minute we establish something we have to be prepared to guard it, not just the walls, but the sense of security. We become on the defence instead of the offence. Maybe that's why some Celts chose just to wander across Europe with their cattle and gold, never settling long enough in any place to have to garrison it. I think some of us are tourists and some of us are travellers. The tourists have homes to go back to, the travellers are still looking for one.

(The woman gets up, looking like she's been defeated.)

Woman: I bet you're not even thirty.

Roderick (almost penitently): I'm sorry.

Woman: Finally I meet the perfect guy and he's a P.I.

Roderick: Actually, I'm not a P.I., but I guess that's not the point.

Woman: Damn you. (She walks out the door.)

Roderick (after a few seconds): Well.

Elinor: Well, indeed.

Roderick: Perhaps it would be prudent to lock the door after a certain hour.

Elinor (nodding): Perhaps, indeed.

Roderick: Would you care for a gin?

Elinor (sighing and sitting down): I would *love* a gin.

(Roderick goes to Mitchell's desk and pulls a bottle out of his drawer and pours them each a substantial drink.)

Roderick: Hey! Did you hear? There's a paramilitary convention meeting here next month. Do you know some of those guys actually believe that outside forces are going to try to invade North America?

Elinor: What would they do with it? Frankly, I think it would be a good thing. We need a little more international culture.

Roderick (sipping his drink): I think it's already happening. Have you noticed how stupid people are getting? I think they're putting something in the water. I tried to order a Whopper Combo a few days ago and the girl tells me if you buy one Whopper you get a second one for 99 cents. So I say, but I want the Combo meal. And she insists, second one for 99 cents. So I say, sure whatever, figuring I can always bring one back to the office for whoever. Do you know what I ended up getting? Two Whoppers! No fries. No drink.

Elinor: So you're saying outside forces are putting something in our water?

Roderick (nodding): They'll invade us first because we're the biggest city in Canada...

Elinor: Then why hasn't it affected you?

Roderick (holding up his glass): Never touch the stuff, except boiled in coffee. But think about it Elinor. We're the obvious place to invade. No one's going to resist. They'll just get in their cars and flee. It's not like invading Texas where everyone has a gun and will defend their property to the death. So they get a foothold here and then..."

Elinor: I sort of imagine invaders coming through the sewers.

Roderick (agreeing): Underground tunnels. And no doubt there are fifth columnists who have been preparing for this...

Elinor (looking at her watch): Don't you have an appointment?

Roderick (looking at the clock and swigging back his gin): Goodness me! (He returns Mitchell's martini glass to the bookshelf without washing it.) Time does fly. I would ask my mother to pray that more attractive women would participate in adulterous affairs except that I've told her I'm an accountant.

(With a quick kiss on Elinor's cheek, he grabs his coat and flies out the door.)

Scene THREE

Setting: The Check-Mate office the next morning. Everyone is present at their respective desks except for Roderick who is back at the coffee station. Elinor gets up from her seat to join him.)

Roderick: Not alive until my first cup of coffee, darling. (He waves Elinor away while he watches the coffee steadily dripping into the pot.)

Elinor (insistently): I need to know how it went...

Roderick: Really! It's like having PMS.

Clio (grumbling): How would you know? (She has her Midol out on her desk and is on her sixth tablet despite the warning that you only take 2 every 4 hours.)

Elinor: Roderick! (She sounds as irritated as King Nebuchadnezzar when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego weren't burning in his furnace.)

Roderick: Elinor! (He sounds as stubborn as Queen Vashti refusing to appear before King Ahasuerus. The coffee pot dribbles and finally drips to a stop. Roderick carefully pours himself a cup, adds cream and sugar, stirs and tastes it before returning to his desk.)

First of all, I would like to say that I prefer a girl with wine-stained lips and Celtic green eyes

and instead I got a girl with weird glittery pink lips and extremely fake-looking blue contact lenses.

Elinor: But is she involved with Roy Kendall?

Roderick: She thinks she is. (His succinctness is surprisingly accommodating.) And tra-la! (He reaches into his pocket.) I have it all on tape.

Elinor: How did you get her to talk?

Roderick: Well, I had several Blues and she had several Singapore Slings and we talked and talked and talked. I tried to keep it as personal as possible. I told her that I was dating a married woman but I just needed a night away from the whole messy thing and her aquamarine eyes widened and she said something like wow! What a coincidence because she was seeing a married man and said yes to me just to take a break from it all and that of all the funny things he actually worked in this hotel and isn't that all just the funniest coincidence.

Elinor (taking the tape): Wonderful! Helen Kendall will be pleased I'm sure. (She reaches in her desk for the Kendall file.)

Roderick: Yes. Every woman likes to find out her husband is cheating on her. It confirms her suspicion that men are scumbags. What are you on for, Clio?

Clio (reaching for another Midol): A funeral.

Roderick: That's a new one. Do people really cheat on their spouses at funerals?

Clio: Not a case, silly. My great aunt died.

Roderick (almost sounding sincere): I'm sorry.

Clio: Don't be. I barely knew her.

Roderick: See! (He says it as if a profound point has been made.) That is why I hate funerals. 85% of the people there don't even care that someone's died. I'm never having a funeral. Light a few candles for me if you want but there's no way I'm having a bunch of people standing around with their backs to my casket complaining about their angina while I lie there. You on for anything? (The question is directed at Elinor.)

Elinor: Yes. Fairly straightforward. A couple who've been married seven years. He doesn't come home right after work. Says he just needs some drinks to unwind but the wife thinks he might be meeting someone or at least, trying to meet someone. What will you be doing today, Henry?

Henry (looking up, surprised from a notebook he's scribbling in): Me? I'm writing a history book for children. (He says it like it's obvious that a man working for Check-Mate would write kid's

books on the side.)

Elinor: History of the world? Or do you plan to focus on anything particular?

Henry: Well, naturally it will be rather ancient since that's my area of expertise although I might include a chapter on battles up to Napoleon. I already have some chapter titles. (He reads from his notepad.) Egyptian Conniption. Persian Version. Greek Clique. Roman Omen. The only one I'm having a real problem with is Babylonian. What rhymes with Babylonian?

Clio (not looking up from her Vogue): Cabyloian.

Roderick: Cabyloian isn't a word.

Clio: Yes it is.

Roderick: Use it in a sentence.

Clio: You look very Cabyloian today.

Henry: Maybe something that rhymes with Onian. Let's see. Bonian, Donian, Eonian, Fonian...

Clio: Please do it in your head.

Henry: Gonian, Honian, Ionian, hey that's word! But there's really no such thing as an Ionian Babylonian.

Mitchell: Why let that stop you? I don't think there's such thing as an Egyptian Conniption either.

Henry (ignoring him): Jonian, Konian, Konan the Barbarian? Lonian, Monian, Nonian, Ponian, Quonian, Ronian, Sonian, Tonian, Uonian, Vonian, Wonian, Xonian, Yonian, Zonian. Oh well. I'll just leave the Babylonians out of my book.

Scene FOUR

Setting: A small smoky pub that evening. Henry is sitting in one of the booths with Sandy King, Roy Kendall's friend. Despite being in the office when the case was closed, he hadn't noticed and has gone ahead with making contact and establishing a date.

Sandy: It's a crappy world. (She knocks back a shooter of whiskey and waves for another.)

Henry (agreeably, sipping his beer): That it is. Unfortunately we live in an Iron Age.

Sandy: An Iron Age?

Henry: Greek mythology. There are four ages, Golden, Silver, Brazen, and Iron. Golden is like the Garden of Eden where everything is perfect and all of man's needs are taken care of. Except that the Greeks didn't just think of it in the past sense, but hoped for it in the future.

Sandy: Well, how the heck did they think it would happen?

Henry: They hoped for the return of the goddess Astraea who was goddess of innocence and purity and Themis who was the goddess of Justice, you know, the one that holds the pair of scales.

Sandy: That's a Greek thing?

Henry (enthused by her question despite that she's drinking heavily): Yes! You'd be amazed at how much we retain from not only the Greeks but from even older civilisations. Democracy, our sense of justice, those are the obvious ones. But an unobvious one would be something like the concept of the Trinity.

Sandy (getting bored): Yeah?

Henry: Yes. The Sumerians arranged their gods in groups of three. Anu, the god of heaven. Enlil, the god of wind. Enki, the god of earth. Underneath that is another trinity. Nannar, the moon god. Utu, the sun god. Innana, the morning star Venus. Innana is also a Mother Earth figure who is involved with the god Dumuzi who dies and is reborn each year. Fertility, harvest, that type of thing.

(Sandy has obviously tuned Henry out.)

Then, of course, the most obvious one, the Egyptian trinity of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. Osiris and Isis are husband and wife, but as you probably know, they're also brother and sister. Somebody, some god killed Osiris, I've temporarily forgotten who, and Isis retrieves his body parts out of the river and puts them back together and has sex with him and out of that comes Horus. Of course, Horus was a pretty important figure in Egyptian mythology...

Sandy (getting up): Listen. I've got to go.

Henry (looking surprised): Sure, OK.

(She leaves the bar.)

What on earth am I going to tell Elinor? Oh well. (He sighs and pulls out a book and reads until he's finished his beer.)

Scene FIVE

Setting: The Check-Mate office two days later. Everybody is present.

Elinor: Did anyone see *Ancient Mysteries* last night?

Clio: The palace at Mari? Yeah. Good segment on the wall paintings. And the archaeologist was gorgeous!

Elinor: He was, wasn't he?

Clio: Yeah. For male interest in those shows you usually have to keep your eyes peeled for some young Arab worker in the background. You should have seen the gorgeous Arab men in the latest *Biblical Archaeology Review*. It was an article about a new excavation near Nuzi.

(Rupert and Mitchell are exchanging disgusted looks.)

Elinor: The Israelis are pretty hot too.

Clio: Really hot! Did you see that new book, *Current Archaeology in Northern Israel*?

Elinor: I've seen it in the bookstore.

Clio: Look through it! Or better yet, buy it! There wasn't a man who wasn't drop-dead gorgeous!

Elinor: Do you think Christ was that good-looking?

Clio: I think so.

Mitchell: Isn't there a prophecy in Isaiah about him having no form of comeliness?

Clio: A prophecy, yes. But no first-hand account in the Gospels. I think he had to be hot or else why would all those women follow him around all over the place?

Elinor: Well, possibly for his message. (She is reluctant to reduce her saviour to a sex object.)

Clio: Oh, of course. But my point is, there were no unattractive men in that book full of Semites, so how could he have been anything but gorgeous? Besides, have you seen the Dali portrait of the Last supper?

Elinor: No, I don't think I have.

Clio: You'd remember it if you did. Christ is a hunk and a half. I have it up on my bedroom wall for whenever I'm tempted to commit adultery with one of our prey.

Mitchell: What a unique theology. Christ as Adonis.

Henry: You've given me a great idea! I'm giving up the children's book. I'm going to make a sketch of Christ and pass it off as a 3rd century copy of an original. It'll be about as valuable as a first edition of Genesis. I'm going out to get art supplies. (He gets up and leaves.)

Roderick (to Clio): So, are you seeing anyone?

Clio: I've pretty much given up. It's impossible to meet anyone normal. And with our job, I've certainly given up on a man committing himself to a life of fidelity.

Roderick: You shouldn't give up. What kind of attitude is that? I certainly haven't given up.

Elinor: That's great to hear that the man who has brought so much pain to so many women has not become discouraged and given up.

Mitchell: It's weird. Our whole job is about sexual desire and yet, I meet so few people among our prey that I'd actually want to sleep with.

Clio: And yet a lot of them would be happy to sleep with you. Maybe there's something about being married that makes you think you're missing out on something. *I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals. She decked herself with rings and jewellery and went after her lovers, but she forgot, declares the Lord.* It's in Hosea. It's about the spiritual adultery and prostitution of the Israelites. God tells Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife as a symbol of how Israel is treating him and choosing idolatry and alliances with other nations over him. Hosea should be our patron saint in that in order to expose the evil deeds of darkness, so to speak, we have to actually immerse ourselves in this world of adultery without it overcoming us.

Roderick: So we're doing the work of God?!

Clio (shrugging): *In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me "my husband."* The ultimate reconciliation for our clients and our pick-ups isn't with each other but with God.

Mitchell: I don't know that we're really doing anything to help people. I think we should get more into something like intellectual one-night stands instead of testing people's fidelity. You know, have a good one-on-one, heart-to-heart talk about sex and relationships. Help them work through their fears or frustrations, whatever.

Clio (laughing): All you really need for a good intellectual one-night stand is two suppressed people with good imaginations and an ability to express themselves.

Roderick: That's telephone sex, Clio. Have you ever wanted to work for one of those hot-lines?

Clio: Never. Actually, I always wanted to be a Jesuit.

Mitchell: I think you've got to be a man for that.

Clio: I know. It's just too much of a bother to get a sex change. But the Jesuits do such cool things, you know, look for secret manuscripts and stuff. Maybe someday I'll start a secret order for women, like the order of Mary Magdelene, or something... That's why I studied Ancient History. God called himself Logos, the Word, and it made me want to study ancient languages that he might have communicated in. Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, obviously. But hieroglyphics and cuneiform too. I mean, not everything that was recorded survived and maybe there's some stuff still waiting to be discovered.

(Henry returns. All he has is a sketchpad.)

Henry: I don't know where I'm going to get third century papyrus and ink. I don't even know if they had ink back then. They had the purple dye of Phoenicia, that's about all I know.

Roderick: The route to money for us is in a candid book about adultery in Canada. All of our stories. But most importantly, advice. Everybody loves advice.

Elinor: Advice on how to avoid it, or advice on how to engage in it?

Roderick (pulling out a notepad and beginning to write): *1. Adultery brings both pain and pleasure. (He pauses to think and then continues.) Keep this in mind. 2. At various times in your life it can feel equally natural to cheat or be monogamous. Hence, this is a good argument against basing a moral code on feelings. (He looks up.) Wow! I'm straying into the realm of philosophy here! This is going to elevate the fibre of my book. (He returns to his writing.) 3. Adultery is rarely glamorous in real life. It may seem so in books and movies. Often men are impressed with other men who have slept with many women. In talking to women, however, they seem attracted to men who are not sleeping with other women. Recall the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. 4. Before assuming that you need an adulterous relationship in your life, consider that maybe that is not what you want. Could some other area of your life be lacking? Would a new hobby, for example, be a better course of action?* (Rupert tries to think of some sort of hobbies to include but nothing comes to mind.)

Clio: I've always wondered if any of Christ's descendants are alive today. Not his children, of course. I personally don't go for that idea that he and Mary Magdelene had kids. I mean his nieces and nephews since his brothers and sisters must have had kids.

Elinor: That's very interesting! They would probably have no idea that they were related to him.

Clio: They probably aren't just living a peaceful life in Israel speaking fluent Aramaic or anything. There was too much upheaval in Israel in the first and second centuries. I dunno. Something to think about.

Elinor: Something I've been thinking about with regards to our earlier conversation is that the women who followed Christ probably recognised that he was more than an average man. And they really listened to him. The men made assumptions, you can tell from their writings. They thought his kingdom would be established in their lifetime. All of them had a preconceived idea of what a Messiah should be and some of them thought it would be a man who would overthrow Roman rule and establish an independent Israel. The disciples were even jockeying for positions in his kingdom. The crucifixion shattered them. Most of them ran. The women, however, stayed at the site of his crucifixion.

Clio: Who knows? He may have even told them what to expect.

Mitchell: Clio, you're a Gnostic at heart! I find it funny that you and Elinor go to church every Sunday. Hasn't anyone branded you guys heretics yet?

Elinor: We go and sing and listen to the sermon and take comfort in Orthodoxy. We speculate with agnostics like you. As I was saying, if the second coming of Christ were to happen in a similar fashion to the first, I think it would be the women who would recognise it first. A good man really stands out.

Clio: I would definitely sell all I had to follow him around, just to be in the presence of a perfect person. I'm jealous of those first-century women who had that first-hand experience of learning from him.

(The theological discussion ends when Roderick starts asking them to relate their most interesting encounters so that he can include the stories in his book.)

EPISODE THREE

Scene ONE

Setting: A camera panning various outdoor winter scenes in Toronto before going to the inside of Check-Mate.

Mitchell's voice: In retrospect I believe I did hear something about a war. But there had been so many wars making headlines -- a war in former Serbia, the perennial scuffling about in the Middle East, the threat of a "fish war" between Canada and Spain -- that I barely paid attention.

It was winter for one thing. Elinor seemed determined to make it a completely Victorian Christmas around the office so we took a day out of the slow season to decorate a tree with baked cookie ornaments covered in sprinkles. Then we strung together long lines of popcorn and cranberries. When we were done, that tree was *lavished*.

We celebrated by making snow angels outside the office followed by hot chocolate inside.

On Christmas day I was invited to Elinor's place for lunch. Elinor's mother had cooked a turkey, mashed the potatoes and steamed some corn, but it was Elinor who filled the table with special dishes -- candied yams, home-made cranberry sauce, wild-grain rice, a spicy and most delicious stuffing, fresh-baked sweet bread, an array of relishes, not to mention her wide-selection of desserts my favourite being a triple-layer chocolate cake with strawberry sauce.

(Scene now shows Elinor's living room with Elinor, Mitchell, Roderick, and Clio around a piano.)

Roderick and Clio stopped by afterwards. Henry's family wasn't religious but went to church every Christmas and Easter and forced him to accompany them. We sang carols and afterwards went outside and built a snow fort. I believe Elinor's father even snapped some photos of us out there. I don't know if he ever had a chance to get them onto the computer.

I knew there was some sort of cloud hanging over the whole affair though I presumed it was a personal problem between Elinor's parents. Her two younger brothers seemed boisterous and light-hearted enough and Elinor was too busy fussing over the food to seem gloomy. But something was definitely bothering Elinor's parents.

Before we'd even reach the New Year, I would find out what it was.

Scene TWO

Setting: Two days later. An elegant hotel lobby. Mitchell, Henry, Roderick, Elinor, and Clio are seated on couches and chairs around a table filled with sandwiches, cakes, and teacups. The girls are in long dresses, the men in casual suits.

Mitchell's voice: The five of us were having afternoon tea in a hotel lobby. We had our eyes on the elevators, keeping watch for an out-of-town client's husband, a good-looking man in his early 30's who was staying at the hotel on business. Roderick remarked how it was ideal to take tea in lobby

and not in some back room because in the days of the Raj, one always had tea out in the open like that to be able to greet one's friends and keep an eye on one's enemies. Roderick, I believe, still viewed Canada as an outpost of civilisation.

The staff seemed nervous, as I recall. We were the only ones having tea that day although there were several small groups of people milling around the doors and frequently consulting with the front desk, although no one was actually coming or going. They just seemed to be waiting for something. The only thing we were waiting for was the inspiration as to who should try to hit on our quarry.

(Elinor, Clio, Roderick, Henry, and Mitchell are in the middle of a conversation.)

Elinor: ...It's funny how in the historical overview sex has played such a big role in man's affairs. Though, of course, for women it has defined their whole being -- whore, mother, saint, depending on how much or how little of it you got.

Mitchell: So true, so true.

Elinor: Some say that the fall of man was about sex, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil being just another Biblical euphemism for the act. I personally think it's not that simple, but that's what some scholars believe.

Roderick: If you had to choose between a fat ugly old man and a young beautiful woman, who would you sleep with?

Elinor: The woman. Definitely the woman. Though I probably wouldn't take it to the level of Sapphos and start writing poetry about it.

Roderick (to Clio): What about you?

Clio: Oh, probably the woman.

Henry: I've always been interested in *why* people have sex. I mean, it can be so contradictory. Some do it for money, some for love, some because they're afraid of growing old, some to prove they're not a child anymore. Some do it hoping to gain a divine insight into the universe, others because they don't believe in anything at all.

Elinor: Exactly. Why such big gaps? And why such a huge gap between whores and saints? Is that a choice every woman has to make, either to be, say, Mata Hari, blasé, screwing the European elite or Joan of Arc exchanging worldly pleasures for spiritual vision and purpose? And I mean, neither extreme is really available to the average woman, is it? I rather think every woman has a bit of both extremes as well as everything in between.

Henry: It's too complex.

Elinor: It *is* too hard to analyse. Either gender. It's easier to just accept people for who they are and leave it at that.

Roderick: Not everybody can get inside another person's head. I think that's where the real fun begins. That's when you begin to realise you're walking where angels fear to tread.

Elinor (smiling): That's when the only guidebook you have is a little scrap of paper torn from some sacred text with a single word written in an ancient language, love.

Mitchell: Ah, the only word that keeps the demons away and lets a soul breathe easy. (He laughs.) What poets we are.

Mitchell's voice: But it was a meaningful discussion in retrospect because it foreshadowed a lesson I was to learn. A lesson! I understate myself. I was to learn the meaning of life in the next few months.

I was to learn that love creates and destroys and doesn't stop there. That love wasn't something you did for money or because you were afraid of growing old or to prove you were not a child anymore. Love just *happens* and when it does, you have to accept it as a gift. Right time, right place, wrong person. Wrong time, wrong place, right person. Or in this case, right time, wrong place, right person. The point is it happens and sometimes you don't have much say in the matter and you just have to make the best of it.

Elinor: I think real love is taking responsibility for another person's happiness.

Roderick (pats her hand): How nicely put.

Mitchell's voice: It seems astounding, in retrospect, that we were probably the only five people in the city, except for, perhaps, a few homeless alcoholics, who didn't realise that the enemy was at our gates. The irony was that Henry began to discuss this concept of the enemy being at our gates but in a metaphorical sense. I believe he was making a point about how these days there are no literal Germanic tribes, but we still wrestle with our own personal barbarians threatening to crash through the boundaries of our sanity and consume our minds with chaos.

We finally realised that our man just wasn't going to be passing by us that day so Roderick ate the final piece of spice cake, Elinor took her last sip of tea and we all stood up to face the brutal winds of a blizzardy wintery day.

(They are all heading for the doors.)

I'll never forget that day. It was one of those days where you had to keep your head down if you didn't want to inhale snow and we were all hurrying towards the nearby entrance to the subway.

(They have exited and are outside)

Clio (suddenly): Is that a *tank*?

Henry (excitedly): Where?

Clio: Over there. (She points. They all raise their heads, despite the blizzardy snow, towards the direction she is pointing. There indeed seems to be some rather large vehicle leisurely making its way down the practically empty street.)

Roderick: Well, you'd need a tank on a day like today. The streets are solid ice.

Elinor: But look how slow it's going. It seems to be having trouble.

Mitchell: But is it actually a tank?

(Visibility is horrible and they can only evaluate it according to its size. Despite the ruthless wind they stand and wait. One feels they should run but of course, they have no idea what is going on and sheer curiosity keeps them standing there.)

Clio (who must have had some superior gift of vision): Oh my. It's not just one tank. It's a convoy.

(Sure enough, emerging from the tempest is a whole train of tanks.)

Henry: Are we being invaded?

Elinor: I think we should go back to the hotel.

(Wordlessly, they all agree. They have made it about fifty metres when there is shouting. Not that type of general shouting addressed to no one in particular but a crisp, commanding shout. Turning around, they find themselves facing a well-armed battalion.)

Mitchell's voice: We had the dubious distinction of being the first captives of World War III.

(They aren't taken away in a tank. Instead they are pushed into one of several closed trucks in the middle of the convoy with a couple of soldiers to keep them from jumping out the back.)

Roderick (pompously): What is going on?

(The soldiers ignore him.)

Mitchell's voice: It would seem natural in such a situation to make a fuss, to further demand to know what is going on, to become furious and threaten that if they didn't let us go that they would regret it. But Roderick didn't repeat his question and we all remained quiet. There was this horrible sense of abnormality mixed with inevitability. We knew we were captives, we knew it was war, we accepted that immediately. Unlike the rest of North America, we just didn't know why.

(The convoy has been moving slowly but has now stopped. Outside the truck there are screams and a gunshot. A few seconds later, the back of the truck is opened and two more people shoved inside. They are a middle-aged couple, well-dressed in tailored coats and obviously very frightened. The back door is shut and the convoy starts up again.)

Mitchell's voice: (The camera focuses on Elinor.) Elinor told me later that she had never kept a journal. She didn't have the patience to record the details of her rather domestic days in some sort of Jane Austen manner and it would have been too tempting to degenerate into self-analysis, which is always embarrassing to read later.

But in that truck she had regretted it. A record of her life before *this*, because it was becoming evident to Elinor that this was a historical turning point of some sort, would have been nice. And nice was the word. Life had been *nice* up until now and she had left no record behind of that.

Scene THREE

Setting: The same day. The play-yard of a suburban elementary school. They, along with a few other people who had been picked up on their way to suburbia, are huddled by the jungle-gym set. The tanks are parked orderly on the asphalt and the school is being emptied of its children. The soldiers show no interest in keeping the few children that have come to school that day and presumably they are being allowed to make their way home. The soldiers are more preoccupied with shifting a lot of crates around. They are being taken out of the trucks in the back of the convoy and brought into the school which now seems to be serving as some sort of local headquarters for the troops. Other crates are being loaded into the trucks at the front of the convoy. A few soldiers have been left to guard the prisoners.

Clio: "Damn, cold! Damn! And damn all of this! (She pauses.) Damn it all, especially the cold!"

Roderick: Too bad she is not more well-read.

Mitchell: Unfortunately she is very well read. *That* is the best way to sum it up. It is pretty damn cold.

Henry: I'd be curious to know the full extent of this. I mean, has the city been taken? Or is this just some sort of joke?

Mitchell: It seems real. The tanks travelled from downtown way out to here without being stopped so there must be very little resistance.

Elinor: Are we behaving normally?

Mitchell: What do you mean?

Elinor: Well, obviously something very strange is happening. Are we behaving in a normal way considering this is very strange?

Roderick: Do you mean are we behaving as if this is normal or do you mean are we behaving strangely because this is strange?

Elinor: I think I mean is our behaviour in tune with the situation? We were abducted in a city street and now we're standing out here in a cold, no *freezing*, school yard being guarded by soldiers with guns. Aren't we being a bit too calm?

Mitchell: I don't think we have a choice. I really think this is out of our hands. I mean, most of life is out of our hands it's just that we usually feel as if we have some semblance of control, but now things are definitely not in our hands.

Henry (suddenly and sounding as if he's in a daze): It could be the end of the world. I mean, the Mayan Indians believed the world would end with an earthquake on December 23, 2012. I always just assumed that California would fall off into the ocean and everything else would carry on, but maybe it *is* a prophecy for the whole world...

Roderick: You just said earthquake. This doesn't feel like an earthquake.

Henry: Well, no, but weird things always happen before the end of the world.

Mitchell (slowly): Unfortunately, this isn't weird. It may seem weird to us, but if this is war, if we've been invaded, a lot of people have gone through things like this before. This is history.

Henry (holds his head): Oh God! Oh God! (He moans.) It's not like the books...

Roderick: Unfortunately, it's exactly like a book.

A young teenager: What's a book?

(Roderick, Henry and Mitchell just stare at him.)

The older man picked up in the truck: It's how people used to get educated before everything was put on disc.

(Henry looks like he wants to say something, but just then there is a commotion of activity. Trucks in the back of the convoy are being parked by the school while the people in the school yard are being herded into the trucks at the front, now even more crowded with the crates. Their smaller fleet resumes the journey.)

Scene FOUR

Setting: The same day. The soldiers' destination, a university campus. The convoy is pulling into not an elegant campus with reassuringly ancient buildings and ivy growing on the sides of walls, but a complex of cement edifices spread out over a treeless landscape. Soldiers are out on this freezing day erecting barbed wire around the perimeters of the property. Sentry points have already been set up and a look-out point is in the process of being built.

The trucks break up. Some head for what is obviously the main building built on a slight incline so that it can survey the entire campus. Others head towards a particularly grey building, long and several stories high.

Scene FIVE

Setting: The same day. Inside the dorms. Walls have been knocked down (there is rubble strewn about) so that the remaining rooms now resembles a barrack. A few posters of rock bands and celebrities are still on the walls. It is Christmas break so there are only a few students who have been added to the rank of prisoners. The prisoners are lined up in the hallway being directed to the left or right, depending on whether they are male or female.

An oversized soldier (yelling in broken English): First! We clean! Then we take you eat! But first! We start the clean!

(Roderick, Mitchell, and Henry enter the men's wing and are directed to their beds.)

Roderick: This is all vaguely reminiscent of summer camp.

Mitchell: Summer camp?! Boot camp, maybe.

Henry: When he says, clean, do you think he means communal showers?

Roderick: Oh I have no doubt we'll be taking plenty of those, but I think he's referring to this. (Roderick waves his hand around the messy dorms which not only have the rubble, but all the student's possessions strewn about.)

Soldier (coming in with garbage bags): Throw everything! Except clothes! You wear clothes! (He is distributing the bags.)

Roderick: I don't think he actually means throw everything, do you?

Soldier: Quiet! You talk, you die!

(The men begin putting everything, including the rubble, into the garbage bags while soldiers watch.)

Reluctantly, Roderick removes a poster above his bed of an under-dressed woman. In the women's dorms, the same activity is going on except that they haven't been instructed to be quiet.)

Clio: Hello! (She is trying to get the attention of any soldier.) Hello! Hey!! Who's the matron here! It's freezing in here! Tell them to turn on the bloody heat! Hey! I'm talking to you!

(An oversized soldier who is in charge has heard Clio from the men's dorm and come in to investigate.)

Oversized soldier (sneeringly): Trouble?

Clio: You bet there's trouble! It's bloody freezing in here! My hands are chapped! I can't pick up all this...(she surveys the ground in disgust) *crap* with chapped hands!

Oversized soldier: You talk, you die. (He turns and walks out.)

Clio (mimicking him): You talk, you die. *That's* original. Didn't get that from a movie, or anything.

(The soldiers look bemused. They are young and it is obvious that they are a far way from home. They haven't become hardened veterans of war yet.)

Oh *this is great*. (Clio is looking in the clothes closet beside her bed. She holds up a particularly large dress.) Is this a *muumuu*? Please do not tell me that I have to go through this wretched experience wearing a *muumuu*.

(Elinor opens up her closet and pulls out a particularly small red shirt covered in sequins. She sighs.)

EPISODE FOUR

Scene ONE

Setting: Early in the morning, several days later. Women's dorms. Clio is wearing a gigantic floral dress. Elinor is in a tight hot pink sweater and leggings.

Clio (shrieking at a soldier): BLOODY HELL! I WANT SOME *REAL* TAMPONS! Not this stuff made out of tree bark! Not this crappy little thing that I can't even bloody insert because the damn cardboard applicator bends in half upon bodily contact! As far as I'm concerned, you can stick this *wretched* piece of crap up your butt!!!! (She throws the tampon at his feet. The soldier looks like he's enjoying himself.)

Elinor (looking around in the drawer by her bed): Here's a quarter. Go buy one from the dispenser in the bathroom.

Clio (taking it): Why do I get the one girl who has no interest in feminine protection? How am I supposed to haul bricks around all day if I'm bleeding to death? What brand does yours have?

Elinor: OB.

Clio: You are *so* lucky. When the black market gets going here you are going to have it made.

Elinor: I was actually planning on using them at some point...

(But Clio is heading for the bathroom.)

Scene TWO

Setting: The next day. The university cafeteria. It was never a nice place but now seems particularly dismal. Roderick, Henry, Mitchell, Clio, and Elinor are sitting together. All are dressed peculiarly. Either their clothing is too small or too big. Clio is in the muumuu, while Elinor is in the tight sequined top with a black mini-skirt.

Roderick: I've heard some interesting rumours. Once we finish cleaning this building, we're here to work on the computers...

Henry: The computers! Oh dear God! (He mutters a prayer.) But I don't even know how to turn on a computer!

Roderick: Fake it. They'll be executing everyone without computer skills. That's the only reason we're here. To maintain their system while they fight the war...

Mitchell: Wait a sec! Where'd you hear all this?

Roderick: I have my sources.

Mitchell: When did you develop *sources*? You've been with us the whole time!

Roderick: I have my ways.

Henry (to himself): I'm dead.

Elinor: We're all dead. I don't remember a thing from school. (She turns to Clio.) Didn't you have a programming class?

Clio: Yeah, because it was taught by that yummy-looking Mr. Haiman. Remember him? I didn't actually *learn* anything.

Roderick (leaning forward): Listen to me! We are simply going to have to *fake it*. OK? No one will ever figure it out! There are at least five hundred people here. We'll get lost in the crowd. No one will ever realise we have no idea what we're doing if we just got on those computers and start banging away.

Elinor: But won't they test us? Won't there be some sort of screening...?

Roderick: Yes! But for the people who aren't computer programmers! They're going to be asking us today what we do. We all have to say we went to university together and we majored in computer sciences. There won't be a test for us then. There will be a test for people who were construction workers and dairy farmers and taxi drivers, but not for people who say they're computer programmers. Nobody knows about this yet so no one will know to lie about it.

Mitchell: How *did* you find this out?

Roderick (waving away the question): Trust me. I *know*.

Clio: What are they going to do to the people who don't have computer skills?

Roderick (looks at her): They can't keep them. (He looks down at the table.) Most likely they'll be shot. They'll keep a few of the strong ones around to do some manual labour jobs, but that's about it.

Elinor: Then we've got to tell people! We've got to tell them to say they're computer programmers! (She looks as if she's about to stand up. Roderick grabs her arm.)

Roderick: We can't! They'd become suspicious if *everyone* was a computer scientist and then they

would start testing. Besides, the only way we can get lost in the crowd is if we're surrounded by people who know what they're doing. That way, hopefully, no one will notice we're not doing anything.

Henry (panicking): I don't like this. I don't like this at all! I'm not a survivor! I'm not one of those people in history who would have risen out of poverty to form a...(he pauses to think) *toothpaste* empire, or something. I am the type of person who is kept by some older woman with poodles and lots of diamonds.

Roderick (getting irritated): Well, you're going to have to pull yourself together because we're all in this together. Computer people hang around with computer people. If one of us is a complete computer illiterate it's going to make them suspicious of all of us. Pull yourself together! All we have to do is act the part and we've got it made.

Henry (emphatically): But how are we going to get away with it?

Roderick (begins to sing): *When I was a lad I served a term as office boy to an Attorney's firm. I cleaned the windows and swept the floor, and I polished up the handle of the big front door. I polished up the handle so carefully, that now I am the Ruler of the Queen's Navy!* In other words, stick close to your desk and never go to sea.

Scene THREE

Setting: The next day. The university's computer lab. There are rows and rows of tables with computers. Roderick, Henry, and Mitchell are at the front of a line of people being directed to specific monitors.

Soldier (leading Roderick, Henry, and Mitchell to their computers at the front of the room): Since you study together, we putting you in charge of maintaining de system. Trouble-shooting? Is that what you call it? Your inferior equipment makes a system crash inevitable. When it happens, you will, how you say it, rectum it.

(They stare at him.)

Roderick: I think you mean, rectify it.

(Only Roderick looks calm. Mitchell looks pensive. Henry looks petrified.)

Soldier: Thank you.

Roderick: No problemo.

(They sit down in front of their respective computers while the soldier goes off to direct other people

to their computers.)

Well...here we are.

Henry: Here we are? *Here we are?* Here we are? (He seems at a complete loss to think of anything else to say.)

Roderick: Number one rule, Henry. Don't panic. Number two, act confident.

Henry: How do you turn these things on?

Roderick: Shhhhh!

(He and Mitchell begin to discreetly examine their monitors looking for the "On" switch.)

Mitchell: Didn't we learn this in school?

Roderick: No. They were always turned on when we came in.

Henry: I'm not panicking, Roderick, but isn't it going to be hard acting confident when we don't even know how to turn the bloody things on?

Roderick: I want you to very discreetly glance around the room and see if anyone else has their computer going.

(Henry scans the room.)

Henry (his voice holds the beginnings of panic): No, Roderick. They're all watching us. They are waiting for us to do something.

Roderick (straining for thought): OK. We have to look like we know what we're doing...

(In despair, Henry's head falls on his screen. Instantly the screen lights up. Obviously the computer is activated by touch. Roderick, Mitchell and Henry stare at Henry's computer screen.)

Very good, Henry. (He cautiously puts a palm on his screen and his computer starts up. Mitchell follows his example.)

OK. We're in. (Numbers and letters are flying by on the screen.) The rest is going to be easy.

Scene FOUR

Setting: Same day. A room full of filing cabinets. A crowd of women, including Clio and Elinor,

are receiving instructions from an earnest pale soldier while other soldiers distribute huge piles of file folders to them. They are then directed to their various filing cabinets depending on what letter their files begin with.

Clio: Filing? They want us to *file*?

Elinor (seems pleased): Well this seems easy enough. I mean, I'd be doing this back home...(Thinks about this.) Well, not that we left home, exactly, but you know what I mean...

Clio: But what was all that Roderick was saying about having to know about computers...?

Soldier passing by: WORK!

(Clio glances at him and as a concession opens one of her filing drawers but as soon as he passes she continues talking.)

Clio: I thought we'd just be sitting at a computer diddling around all day, not standing...

(The soldier has stormed back.)

Soldier: You! Work!

Clio (provocatively): Or else?

(The soldier just stares at her.)

Soldier: Or else, die. You will receive no further warnings.

(He continues to stand there waiting for her to resume her filing. With a shrug in the direction of Elinor, Clio picks up one of her files, glances at it and sticks it in the filing cabinet. The randomness of her gesture suggests she has not bothered to file it correctly. Fortunately, the soldier doesn't pick up on this. Eventually he moves on.)

Clio: I'd give anything to be one of the guys in front of their stupid little computers.

Scene FIVE

Setting: Same day. The computer lab.

Roderick: OK, I admit it, we're screwed.

(Their screens have hit a C prompt and every word they've typed in has received a "Bad command or file name.")

Roderick: We've typed in every computer word I could think of. Code, back-up, silicon, disc, monitor, power, turbo, reset, megas, rams...

Henry (sarcastically): We might as well just type in peanut butter. (He does.) Or jam. (He does) Or gourmet. (He does.)

Mitchell: Uh-oh.

(The soldier in charge is heading towards them.)

Henry (continuing, not aware of the panic): Or menu. (He does.) Hey look!

(A whole screen with options has appeared. Frantically Mitchell and Roderick type in "menu" and their screens come up just as the soldier appears by their monitors.)

Soldier (glancing at their screens): You will be working primarily in section five, Systems Maintenance. But you don't need me to tell you that.

(He wanders off. Roderick, Mitchell and Henry all click "5" on their keyboard.)

Henry: Well I don't see how this is going to help us.

(A complicated screen of what seems to be computer programs has appeared.)

Roderick: *This* is what we maintain. We just make sure it looks OK. Fix the glitches, that sort of thing.

Henry (incredulously): Are you on drugs? How do we tell if it's OK? How do we fix the glitches when the whole thing looks like a glitch?

Roderick: I dunno. I'm just telling you how it is. I'm not saying how we do it.

(A soldier starts coming toward them.)

OK! Look busy!

(Roderick and Mitchell pretend to be examining their screens. Panicking, Henry begins to type for his life.)

Soldier (stopping at Henry's desk): Very interesting! You are too young to be of the old school, yes? You don't like the mouse, perhaps?

Henry (blankly): The mouse?

(The soldier picks up Henry's mouse and raises his eyebrows.)

Henry: Oh the mouse! I always thought that was called a rat. Oh well...

(The soldier is staring at him.)

No, but the truth is I like to type. I like to feel the control of the keyboard beneath my fingers...

Soldier: I am impressed. To the best of my knowledge, you Americans...

Henry: Canadians.

Soldier: Do not interrupt me again! You will be anything I tell you! I'm calling you American and so you are American! And to the best of my knowledge, you *Americans* have not advanced beyond Windows. Your typing leads me to believe you have an idea of European technology, yes?

Henry (not wishing to be contrary again): Oh yes.

Soldier: Although no doubt you obtained your skills in some surreptitious manner that deserves punishment, I will not do so. I promise, however, you will have a chance to demonstrate your skills in the future.

Henry (confused): *My* skills?

Roderick (quickly): If it wouldn't be too rude to ask, just exactly what kind of system are we maintaining? It might help us to do our job better.

Soldier (turning to him): You will do your job with or without my help because if you don't, you will die. All you need to do is make sure there are no viruses and no discrepancies in the system.

Roderick (agreeably): OK.

(The soldier moves on.)

Henry (whispering loudly): I think I realise what the problem with this whole thing is! Do you think it's possible they invaded the wrong country?

EPISODE FIVE

Scene ONE

Setting: Early morning. Several days later. The women's dorms. Clio and Elinor are talking as they file their nails. Clio is wearing voluminous harem pants with an oversized sweater that in itself could be a dress. Elinor is in a tight leopard-skin pant-suit with a sheepskin coat over it.

Elinor: I think we should start a prayer group, or something. You know, keep up the morale.

Clio (putting down her nail file and beginning to examine her hair): Yeah, that's a good idea. Maybe we can get the female renaissance thing going too. Look at these split ends! It's disgusting! How is this happening when grease is oozing out of my head? Why did they confiscate all the shampoo? Hey! HEY! (She gets one of the soldier's attentions.) Why did you take our shampoo, huh?

(The soldiers laugh. They seem to enjoy Clio's outbursts.)

Soldier: Because we want to look pretty too! We take your shampoo so we can look good!

Clio: I've got news for you buddy! A little shampoo isn't gonna do it. (Turns back to Elinor.) This really is the pits. My hair is so disgustingly oily. Hey! Maybe I can count this as some sort of oil treatment! But then, why isn't it doing anything to help my split ends? Maybe the problem is, it has to be *hot* oil, because, God knows, it is certainly not hot in here. It is bloody cold.

Elinor: I actually feel fine.

Clio: That's because your girl owned a freakin' sheepskin coat while my girl was obviously so fat that she didn't need any further insulation.

Elinor: Well, if it's any consolation, my face is breaking out and I wish I had some cover-up.

Clio: It's no consolation, whatsoever.

Scene TWO

Setting: Same day. Breakfast. The cafeteria. Roderick, Henry, Mitchell, Clio, and Elinor are seated at their table.

Roderick: We have got to stay on our toes! I don't want to alarm you but I've heard rumours that they've set up some sort of execution area in the athletic compound. Anyone who's not serving their purposes is being shot and buried...

Mitchell: *Where* do you find these things out.

Roderick: I have a source. Plus, I was talking to Jim, that guy that sleeps at the end of our dorm, you know the big one...

Mitchell: Yeah, yeah, I know him. Sleeps by the bathroom door. What about him?

Roderick: He works in the gym, although lately his job has consisted of digging up the football field to bury the remains.

(Elinor and Clio are looking ill.)

Mitchell: But the field must be frozen!

Roderick: Yeah, but they don't have to dig too deep. The bodies are burned first so there's not a whole lot to bury.

Mitchell: Burned? Don't tell me that's what that awful smell has been...

Roderick: That's exactly what that awful smell has been. And if we don't keep it up, they're going to be smelling us...

Henry (dramatically and desperately): Let them burn me! I'd rather be dead than having to work twelve hours a day pretending I know what I'm doing! I'm sick with jealousy when I think of being shot out of my misery! Do you know what a strain I've been under this last week! It's only by an act of God that the whole system hasn't crashed with me sitting there, typing furiously, with no bloody idea what I'm doing!

Clio: Speaking of blood, my lips are cracking. (She looks around the room as if hoping that someone with a chapstick will appear.)

Elinor: My face is a mess, though I suppose that's better than dying. I'm not complaining.

Clio: *My* face is blotchy! *I* am the mess! Of course, death isn't fun but if I'm going to live it would be nice to have some foundation. And not just any foundation! I want Lancôme Maquicontrôle Foundation. I don't care if the French are the enemy!

Mitchell: I don't think the French are the enemy, exactly. I mean, there may be a few Frenchmen here, but I think that's incidental...

Clio: That's really not the point.

Elinor (to no one in particular): I'm starting to firmly believe that prayer might be the answer to this

whole thing.

Scene THREE

Setting: A few days later. The filing room. Clio is wearing a gigantic pink prom dress with an oversized cardigan. Elinor is in a tight red dress that looks as if it's made of Spandex.

Clio: I really don't understand what Henry is complaining about. He doesn't have to stand on his feet for twelve hours.

Elinor: I have a feeling their jobs are a little more complex than just sitting for twelve hours.

(There's a loud noise coming from Clio's direction.)

What was that?!

Clio: I just farted. I don't see any reason to hold it in. It's not like this is Ascot, or something. And it's not like they're going to ration out Phazyme tablets to those courteous enough to hold it in.

Scene FOUR

Setting: The same day. The computer room.

Henry: Look at that guy over there...

(He points to a young man in the corner who is polishing some coffee mugs while a coffee maker is boiling a fresh pot.)

That's the job I would have liked. How did he luck out like that?

Roderick: He worked at Second Cup.

Henry: How did they find out?

Roderick: He told them when they were asking us what we did before the war.

Henry (with rising anger): But you said that they'd kill anyone who wasn't a computer programmer! You never said anything about people who knew how to make coffee! *I* know how to make coffee! For that matter, I also know how to polish fruit! If I'd told them I'd worked in a produce department during high school, I might be polishing apples now instead of trying to figure out how this damn machine works!

Roderick (shrugging): My source said nothing about coffee-makers.

Henry (furious): Your source! Your precious source! Well I'll tell you something, I'm sick of your

source!

(The soldier in charge appears. Henry instantly looks terrified.)

Soldier (sarcastically): Problems, gentlemen?

(There is a sense that he has learned to speak English by watching movies.)

Roderick: We were just trying to decide whether the c drive is safer than the n drive. With regards to hackers, that is...

Soldier (turning to Henry): Is this true? Are we in danger?

Henry (obviously working himself up to some level of courage): Sir, we are *always* in danger. Roderick is right. These, um, *hackers*, are everywhere. I would go so far as to say the problem might be internal.

Soldier: *Internal?* You are telling me that the danger is not coming from outside?

Henry: Well, the outside is always a problem, of course. But think about it, I imagine most people on the outside aren't fiddling with their computers. They're concerned with survival, with food and keeping warm. It's the people here who are on these computers all day. Any sabotage is going on *right here*. (Henry is obviously beginning to enjoy himself.)

Soldier (looking around): You mean, in this very room?

Henry: I'm not so sure. Whoever is doing this is covering his tracks. He is making it appear that it is coming from this room, but I suspect that is a decoy and he is in fact working on a monitor somewhere else on the campus. I could try to track his movements, if you'd like, but it's more likely you could find him by checking out all the other computer stations around campus, particularly the people who work alone. Look for suspicious behaviour...

(The soldier walks off mid-sentence, a look of concerned concentration on his face.)

Roderick: I wish I'd thought of that.

Henry (looking pleased with himself): Why?

Roderick: Because on a campus this size, there's bound to be someone working on a computer who looks suspicious and when they catch him, you'll be a hero.

Henry: Maybe they'll let me make coffee after that.

Scene FIVE

Setting: Several days later. The women's dorms. A group of soldiers have just entered to find an assembly of woman singing, led by Elinor and Clio.

Assembly (singing): *Immortal, invisible, God only wise...*

Elinor (to the soldiers when the song is done): Good evening! Why don't you join us!

(The soldiers snicker before taking their seats that are located at the ends of and by the doorways of the dormitory. Elinor looks like she wants to say more but remembers she has a group of women in front of her and turns back to them.)

Elinor: OK, Clio is now handing out the words to *All Things Now Living*. How many of you already know it?

One person puts up her hand.)

OK, one, two three... *All things now living...*

(They continue singing.)

EPISODE SIX

Scene ONE

Setting: The next day. Dinner. The cafeteria.

Henry (to Roderick): I am so *MAD*! I can't believe that you are now allowed to wander the halls of this entire campus looking for something suspicious! *I* should be doing that! I was the one who discovered something suspicious!

Roderick: That's why they need you in front of the computer monitor. So you can discover suspicious things. Whereas, I, (he glances at his fingernails) am not so important, yet am knowledgeable enough to spot suspicious computer behaviour. Besides, it's not like it's all fun. I've got a soldier escorting me and the pressure is on to find something.

Henry: Well you'd bloody well better find something or it's going to make me look kind of bad.

Roderick: Oh, don't you worry your pretty little head. I'll find someone up to no good even if it means sending some nice innocent student to the gas chamber. Then we'll *both* be heroes.

Mitchell: What about me? Can't I do anything to be a hero?

Roderick: Definitely not! We don't want them to become suspicious of too much heroism. You just sit there and be quiet and fiddle your mouse.

Clio: I was told if I give a certain soldier a certain kind of satisfaction, he'd move me up to head filer.

Elinor (horrified): That's disgusting! I didn't know that! What did you tell him?

Clio: That he could suck his own...

(Elinor clears her throat loudly).

...and, of course, that the job sucked. Did he think he was actually offering me a *promotion*? Head filer? Puh-lease! I'd still have to file, I'd just get to file the more important papers. Big whoop-dee-do. Get me a job lying around on a chaise lounge all day drinking gin and I'll consider it, I said to him.

Mitchell: Was he mad?

Clio: Of course he was mad. All man are a little mad. I learned that *years* ago. Look. (She holds up a small package.) He even gave me some matches. As a token of his affection, I suppose. What

the hell am I supposed to do with some matches? It's not like there're any cigarettes to go with them. I suppose I could set the files on fire, or something.

Mitchell: Here. I'll take them.

Clio: Sure. Whatever. (She tosses him the package.)

Mitchell: So, I hear you've started a singing group.

Elinor: Singing and prayer group, actually, although it's mostly singing. Clio and I just wrote down the words to all the hymns we know since most people only have a vague idea of how they go. The soldiers look bored when we pray but actually join in with some of the songs they know. *Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken* is one of their favourites.

Roderick (suddenly): I'm going to start a group.

Mitchell: What kind of group?

Roderick (thinking fast): Um, a, um, a tea-making group. I'm going to get everybody together who likes tea and we're going to smuggle in sandwiches and cake and we're going to have tea.

Mitchell: That sounds like an edifying project.

Roderick: I'm just doing my part to keep up the morale.

Henry: I think I'll start a group. But it'll be a coffee-making group.

Clio: Don't you get enough coffee when you work?

Henry: We don't get *any* coffee when we work. It's for the soldiers. I've had a caffeine headache since we got here.

Mitchell: But where are you going to get the tea and coffee.

Roderick: I'm sure I can get a few stupid tea-bags. Surely the kitchen would have some.

Henry: I'm going to get that coffee-making job, that's what I'm going to do. As soon as I'm a hero, that's the job I'm asking for.

Mitchell: But who'll take your computer job?

Henry: Roderick. He'll be a hero too. They'll let us do whatever we want.

Scene TWO

Setting: The next day. The computer room. Everybody is present except Roderick. Suddenly Henry's computer begins to loudly beep.

Henry (panicking): Oh no! What do I do!

Mitchell: Stay calm! (He is rapidly scanning Henry's work station from his desk.)

Henry (nearly screaming): System malfunction! SYSTEM MALFUNCTION!

Mitchell: Your printer's out of paper, Henry! That's all it is!

(But it's too late, the head soldier is approaching, his eyes on Henry. Now Mitchell panics, realising Henry's ineptness will be discovered. Quickly he pulls the matches out of his pocket, lights one, and discreetly inserts it into the paper tray of his printer. There is a whoosh and some flames.

Mitchell (screaming): FIRE!

Scene THREE

Setting: The same day. Lunch. The cafeteria.

Henry (glumly): So now Mitchell's the hero for throwing a pot of coffee onto the fire and saving us all and I'm the retard for not spotting the system malfunction that supposedly caused a printer to set its own paper on fire. I offered to take over the coffee-making job as punishment but the stupid soldier said that now that I know what a system malfunction looks like I won't let it happen again. It sounded like a threat to me.

Elinor: Where's Roderick?

Henry (indifferently): I have no idea.

Mitchell: Presumably still looking for our mysterious hacker.

Elinor: It's really quite awful to think someone might be executed because of what Roderick finds...

Mitchell (slowly): Unfortunately, whoever it is will just be one of many. Did you hear that noise in the hall last night. Shuffling, footsteps, muffled voices? I think Roderick's right. I think they're marching people to their deaths at night.

Elinor: But how come we don't notice anything? I mean, apart from that awful smell?

Mitchell: Haven't you noticed how whenever we come in here there're always new faces and yet the numbers stay the same? The only faces that don't change are the computer people and the filing people. I think the manual labour people get recycled when they've been worked to death.

Clio: Recycled. That's an interesting way of putting it.

Mitchell: What I'd like to know is, what are they building? What's going on outside? What's....

(Roderick has just appeared at the table and has heard the last question. He sits down.)

Roderick: A death machine. They're building a death machine. We are living in the nucleus of a very effective death machine. This is not a concentration camp. This is no storage of human beings until the war is over and they can be liberated. Anyone that comes in here does a little bit of work and then it's over. For anyone really young or old, it's over right away.

Mitchell: How do you know...?

Roderick (interrupting): I've been around this entire campus in the last day. I've seen out the windows what's going on. All the buildings have people going in but no one coming out. The only normal everyday activities are going on right here in this building. Our dorms, apart from the soldier's living quarters, are the only buildings that are housing people on a long-term basis.

Elinor (weakly): Oh God.

Roderick: But you can't tell anyone. Not your little prayer group, not anyone. As long as we're useful, we'll stay alive until it's over.

Mitchell (fear coming across as anger): Until it's over? When is it going to be over? It doesn't sound like there's much fighting going on out there if people are just walking into this death camp! Who the hell is going to liberate us?

Roderick: Shhhh! I don't know! I don't know who's going to be left when it's over! Maybe the best we can hope for is they'll let us be serfs in their new regime...

Elinor (slowly): But *why*? Why kill everyone? *Why* are they doing this to us.

Henry (suddenly): Because they want to win. Von Clausewitz says if you want to be successful in war, you can only fight to win. These people want to *win*.

(There is a long pause.)

Mitchell (to Roderick): Did you get your man?

Roderick (tiredly): Yeah. I got my man. Some poor sucker working in a corner office by himself. Screamed he was innocent all the way to the gas chamber.

Scene FOUR

Setting: A few days later. The women's dorms. Clio, in an oversized sweatsuit, is on the floor working out with a thigh master. Elinor, in leggings and a skimpy leather jacket, is examining her face in a compact.

Clio: I'm bored.

Elinor: Well, we've got people coming over to sing in a few minutes.

Clio: We've got to do more than sing. I dunno. I think we should start a real *religion*. I mean, no one else is. It's not like there are any priests to denounce us as heretics. It's just an idea. Maybe I'll just join Roderick's tea-drinking group when it starts.

Elinor: I honestly don't see how that's going to help anyone.

Clio: Well, I guess somebody's got to preserve civilisation. There is a ritual to making tea that is very soothing. If we can't be civilised in the middle of this chaos, then why live?

Elinor: I know you don't mean that.

Clio: Actually, I'd be just as happy joining Henry's coffee-making group if he ever got it going.

Elinor: I can imagine how far that would go. Roderick starts a tea-drinking group while Henry starts a coffee-drinking group. Immediately they've set themselves up as rivals. The tea drinkers have a slight contempt for the coffee drinkers and vice versa which escalates into open animosity. Pretty soon we have a mini-war in the midst of this greater war. But you're absolutely right. In a bizarre way it'll be preserving civilisation. But in any case, it's not going to happen. Henry's given up on the coffee thing. He and Mitchell now make up crossword puzzles and swap them. Maybe you could get in on that.

Clio (sitting up): Oh I'm so sure! Can you imagine what some of the words are? Henry's clues will be things like "Napoleon's third battle" and Mitchell's will be things like "Egyptian symbol for the letter A."

(Some girls come into the room for the singing group. They greet each other. Clio stows the thigh master under her bed.)

Scene FIVE

Setting: Several days later. Cafeteria.

Mitchell: One thing we can't complain about is the food.

Roderick: No. You're right. It's excellent. It's probably because they're raiding the surrounding area and bringing back the booty.

Elinor: You mean, our families are starving so we can eat well?

Roderick (gently): Elinor, our families are probably dead. Unless they escaped somehow, they've probably passed through here a couple of weeks ago...

(Elinor pushes her food away and looks sick.)

Elinor, they're probably better off than we are. Their suffering is over. Ours may still be coming.

Henry (sarcastically): That is *so* comforting.

Elinor (quietly): I miss them. I miss them more than you can imagine. (She is about to cry.)

Mitchell (reaching across the table and holding her hand): I know. It takes so much bravery to just keep carrying on here as if we haven't lost everything.

Roderick: This whole thing could be seen as an opportunity...

Mitchell (sharply): This is *not* an opportunity. This is a bloody awful time we're living in. To see any good in it is to deny the inherent evil of it.

Roderick (sighing): Oh the philosophical discussions we could have had in better days.

EPISODE SEVEN

Scene ONE

Setting: Several days later. Men's dorm. Mitchell and Henry are talking as they work on each other's respective crosswords. Roderick isn't present.

Henry: I've never liked stories with happy endings so maybe I deserve this. I mean, if I enjoy reading about other people suffering, I deserve to suffer.

Mitchell: I don't think not liking happy endings means you deserve to suffer. I think it just means you don't expect happy endings.

Henry: You mean, if I believed in heroes, maybe I'd be a hero and try to make an escape, or something? Like in a movie?

Mitchell: Exactly. How am I supposed to get this one? (He reads the crossword clue.) "Double tablets joined by hinges or string?"

Henry: Oh, that's a good one, isn't it? I'll give you a clue. It's a Greek word that means double-folded. How am I supposed to get "Mistress of Heaven?" There must have been a zillion mistresses of heaven!

Mitchell: Yeah, but not all of them have four letters. Besides, you're supposed to figure it out from the letters of the other words.

Henry: I don't have any of the other words. I need this word to get some of those words. It's Isis, isn't it? (He looks at Mitchell for confirmation and receives none.) Well, I'm putting down Isis. Oh! This is a good one! "Christopher Robin's bear." (He writes "Pooh" in the space.) I bet you didn't think I'd ever read those stories. Remember that tiddly-pom story? (He begins to sing.) My toes are cold! Tiddly-pom! My toes are cold! Tiddly-pom! (He stops singing with the realisation of something.) Hey! My toes *are* cold!

Scene TWO

Setting: Same day. The women's dorms. Clio has rolled up her baggy pants and is examining her legs. Elinor, in a purple leather dress, is reading.

Clio: I am *appalled* by the hairiness of my legs. I *dread* the summer.

Elinor: I will just be happy if we survive till the summer.

Clio: Whatcha reading?

Elinor: The Prayer Book.

Clio: *The Prayer Book*? How'd you get a hold of that?

Elinor: I found it in a box by that exit beside the kitchen. I think they must be cleaning out some old archives because there were tons of books in boxes.

Clio: Probably that was what that big bonfire was all about last night. This place must have once had a big library with books and everything.

Elinor: They probably needed the space that they were stored in for some nefarious deeds.

Clio: No doubt. What are you reading?

Elinor: *He shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunter: and from the noisome pestilence. He shall defend thee under his wings, and thou shalt be safe under his feathers: his faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night: nor for the arrow that flieth by day; For the pestilence that walketh in darkness: nor for the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day. A thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh thee.*

Clio: That's good. Comforting, I mean. Refers to God's protection, I suppose.

Elinor (smiling): I suppose that's the intention, yes.

Clio: You know, even though it's easy to imagine Christ as a man, the idea of Christ has always been elusive. I mean, he seems a little hard to believe.

Elinor (leaning forward): He *is* a very elusive character. There's no doubt about that. A few healings, some parables, but no mention of who he was as a man. I attribute it to the fact that no gospel written by a woman has survived, if in fact there ever was one. I imagine there was.

Clio: Well, it's like we were saying, he must have been amazing if all those woman followed him around and gave him money. That's the experience I would have liked to have had rather than just reading about him because I think it would have been different if we'd met him. The problem isn't Jesus Christ. The problem is how people have interpreted him and spoken on his behalf. You know, *we* should write something. While we're here in this adverse situation. I don't know what exactly we should write but I mean, I want to go beyond just subsisting on what's already been written.

Elinor: There are a lot of people who will subsist on what's already written. There's a lot of frightened people here that need to hear that they're being kept safe under his feathers, so to speak.

But God seems to have given you a gift of courage that the rest of us don't have.

Clio: The people who are frightened are the ones who want to be somewhere else. Believe it or not, I don't really care where I am. I feel like we're here for a reason. Besides, no matter how everyone acts, life before this war wasn't rapturous bliss. We had our little lives and our little jobs and if we were honest, it was all going nowhere. Except, of course, that we didn't have the extremely annoying inconvenience of no razors.

Scene THREE

Setting: Several days later. The filing room. Clio, dressed in a voluminous Arabic-style robe, is having a heated discussion with a soldier.

Clio: A pee pass? A *pee* pass? Is this what you're saying? Are you telling me that I will now only be allowed to go to the bathroom *twice* a day?

Soldier: It is because of people like you who go too much.

Clio (incredulously): I go too much? I don't go more than once an hour! I refuse to participate in this pee pass thing. What do you think I am? Some poor immigrant in a sweatshop desperate for money? Well I've got news for you, *we are not getting paid*. This is *volunteer* work. Therefore, your pee pass idea is *stupid*.

Soldier: If you go more than twice a day you will be shot.

(He turns and walks away.)

Scene FOUR

Setting: The same day. Dinner. The cafeteria. The five are all present at their table.

Henry: What's that awful smell?

Elinor: That's Clio. She peed her pants, so to speak, six times today. She didn't even bother to use her bathroom pass.

Clio: Well, there really wasn't much of a point, was there? I knew I was going to have to go more than twice.

Mitchell: What did the soldiers do when you, ahem, voided?

Clio: I don't know if they noticed. This dress hides everything. It's like a Bedouin outfit. The only

problem is, I made the mistake of wearing underwear. I won't do that tomorrow.

Mitchell: But surely they noticed a puddle around your files?

Clio: The floor's covered in a dirty orange carpet. It absorbs everything. Besides, I didn't just do it in one place. I sort of moved around, marking my territory so to speak.

Roderick: In better times I would have said one word, Depends.

Clio: In better times I wouldn't be stuck in a file room all day with homicidal maniacs giving me permission to go to the bathroom according to their sadistic whims.

Mitchell: Isn't the room going to start to smell after awhile?

Elinor: It already does.

Clio: It's really not my problem.

Roderick: It's a lot like Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

Clio: How so?

Roderick: Well, have you ever noticed how despite her abundant consumption of all those *Drink Me* bottles and that tea at the Mad-Hatter's tea party Alice never asks directions to the bathroom? Tea, everybody. *Tea*. Everybody has to go to the bathroom after tea. And she was there all day.

Mitchell: It's a book of nonsense, Roderick.

Roderick: On the contrary, it's exceedingly down-to-earth and logical. Lewis Carroll was a mathematician, after all. Normal activities such as eating, drinking, baking, playing croquet and setting up a court with jurors are all carried out. And yet no one seems to need a washroom.

Mitchell: Well, the solution obviously lies in the fact that Alice was dreaming and that the dream took place within a matter of minutes. If Alice needed to use the washroom while sleeping, she would have likely invented one in the dream even if she didn't actually use it.

Roderick: Point well taken. But reading the book for the first time there is no way of knowing the story is anything but a true account. If children choose to adopt Alice as their hero they may be led to believe that *real* children do not go to the bathroom.

Mitchell: Is this an issue you're really concerned about?

Roderick: Not really. Actually, my grievance is that I would have liked to have seen inside a Wonderland washroom.

Mitchell: Well, Lewis Carroll had to leave *something* to the imagination.

Henry (looking around): I've always wondered, where do the soldiers go for lunch.

(There are only a few soldiers guarding the prisoners. But there are none eating at tables.)

Roderick: Oh, I know. I found out when I was going around the campus that day. They hang out in a Tim Hortons on the other side of the building.

Mitchell: How sophisticated.

Roderick: Don't mock it. When we're a fallen empire, someday a Tim Hortons doughnut shop will be like a MittelEuropa café with its pale pastries dusted in powdered sugar evoking a feeling of lost splendour.

Henry: Do they actually have people making doughnuts and stuff?

Roderick: Well sure. All the people who worked in doughnut shops before the war.

(Henry groans and puts his head down on the table.)

Scene FIVE

Setting: The next day. The computer room. A particularly pale plump man has his hand raised.

Soldier: Yeah? What is it?

Plump man: I'd like to ask Henry why we're ignoring the fact that the Virus Detection Utility is only checking three of the four areas in the LAN?

(The soldier, along with all the other programmers, turn to look at Henry.)

Henry (hissing to Mitchell): What the hell's a lan?

Mitchell (whispering frantically): Local Area Network!

Henry: Well, uh, you see, we're running a *test* in the (he pauses dramatically) Local Area Network. That is not a real failure in, um, what you said, but something we (he signals to himself, Roderick, and Mitchell) created to appear to be a problem in the..., you know...

Plump man: Well it looks like a problem to me.

Henry (working up some courage): Well, good! Because that shows we're doing our job! There's no point in trouble-shooting if you don't have any trouble!

Soldier (harshly): Your job is not to create trouble, your job is to prevent trouble.

Henry: Sir, that is exactly what we are doing. We are preventing this problem from ever happening in real life. It will *not* happen sir. We're all right on top of it.

Soldier: You'd better be.

(He walks away.)

Roderick: How do you come up with these things?

Henry: Well, as Descartes would say, because I am a thinking thing.

Roderick: Well thank you, Henry. At least now we'll all be gassed together.

EPISODE EIGHT

Scene ONE

Setting: The women's dorms. Clio and Elinor are seated on their beds surrounded by women. Clio is talking.

Clio: ...and interestingly enough, a Jewish Renaissance was thwarted by the last Holocaust. The only reason a Female Renaissance has never flourished is because the feminist movement took a wrong turn when it sent women out into the workforce draining them of their energy and creativity. I'm not talking about every woman, but I am talking about a lot of women, the ones who felt increasingly frustrated about their inability to make their dreams come true. The feminist movement could have spear-headed a Female Renaissance as women became more educated. But then they were suckered into thinking that liberation was being able to share the mortgage and the car payments. Liberation should have come in the way they used their time and the respect their work and art received. Art, Literature, Philosophy, Science, the study of History, all take time.

Elinor: And Christ pointed out to everyone that Mary, who listened at his feet, had chosen the better way than her sister Martha who was busy in the kitchen. I think that's the essence of what we're saying.

Clio: Absolutely. As I said, there's been an Italian Renaissance, an English Renaissance, a Dutch Renaissance, a French Renaissance, a Black Renaissance in Harlem, an African Renaissance. Why not a Female Renaissance?

(A pale thin girl puts up her hand.)

Thin girl: But why now? Why do this now when it feels like...
(She stops speaking as if it's too horrible to continue.)

Clio: When it feels like the world's going to end? That is exactly why we should do it. *We* will explore what is good about life. We have freedom here because we have *time*. What else are we going to do when we're not working. Should we sit around and be depressed? The apostle Paul wasn't depressed when he was in prison.

Elinor: And we have Christ. He's the ultimate freedom. If we never believed it before, now is the time to think about the ramifications of that freedom. We can discuss ideas like that.

Thin girl: But doesn't it feel like civilisation is falling apart? (She looks like she wants to cry.)

Clio: Let men worry about civilisation. They're the ones who created it. If women had created civilisation, believe me, we wouldn't be in this damn prison. We aren't guardians of civilisation. We have to be guardians of wisdom. Sophia, if you will. We can pray for this wisdom. The

woman in the Bible were often as oppressed as we were but they used wisdom to get what they wanted. They saved nations. Esther seduced a king. Jael lured a general into her tent and drove a tent peg through his head. Deborah led a battle. We can do anything we want. We live in exciting times. Civilisation *is* crumbling. Therefore, we must *reinvent* it. We must engage in a rebirth, a renaissance, if you will.

A blonde girl: What about the guys? Will they be in on it?

Clio: I have nothing against men but I have learned one thing in life, the desire to possess a man causes a woman much anguish. A man cannot be our source for creativity and fulfilment. If I could have a guarantee that the men would approach us as human beings first and females second, I'd say, by all means join us, the spirit of early Christianity, and all that when they said there was neither male nor female in Christ. But I honestly think that it might not work in this case. Plus, we have to think of the soldiers. Right now they leave us alone because they just think we're religious freaks and since we're all women they don't see us as a threat. If we added guys to our group they'd see our activities as being subversive.

Thin girl: Are we being subversive?

Clio: Absolutely. I think an appropriate song to sing now would be *Onward Christian Soldiers*. On the count of three...

Scene TWO

Setting: The next day. The cafeteria. The five are sitting at their table when the plump man from the computer lab approaches them.

Plump man: I'd like to know what the &*%\$** is going on with you guys! You're going to get us all in deep *!^**%.

(Mitchell, Roderick, and Henry exchange looks.)

Roderick: If I were a Duchess I would say, *If everybody minded their own business the world would go round a deal faster than it does.*

(The plump man just stares at him.)

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, you big banana head.

Mitchell (he's speaking slowly to give himself time to think): What we're doing is not that complicated actually. What we're trying to do is make up for the fact that we are dealing with *unknown* viruses now that we're cut off from the outside...

Plump man (turning red with anger): That's bull!! You have no idea what you're talking about! It's our *job* to detect those unknown viruses!! That's what we do! (He pauses to let this information be absorbed.) The existing virus check takes care of the *known* viruses while we work on identifying and then protecting ourselves from the unknown ones. Being *cut off* (he mimics quotation marks), as you put it, has nothing to do with anything. We're no more cut off than we were when this place was a university. We *aren't* cut off. That's the whole point of computers! Geography does not separate computers! THAT'S WHY WE HAVE TO PROTECT OURSELVES FROM VIRUSES!! You may have those dipstick Europeans fooled but you don't have the rest of us fooled for a minute! And let me tell you, no one is covering your sorry little butts! You are on your own!! (He stomps off.)

Henry: I suppose this is cause for concern.

Scene THREE

Setting: Several days later. The women's dorms. The final stanza of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* is being sung.

Clio: That was great! Now Elinor and I had an idea, I don't know how many of you will want to do this, but we were thinking that we're not very empowered here, and yet, through Christ we should always feel strengthened, so what she and I are going to do is each start writing our autobiography, not starting at some point in the past, but now. The idea is, if anyone else wants to do it, is to write it in a novel form making yourself the heroine and doing all the things you've dreamed of.

(A red-haired girl raises her hand.)

Red-haired girl: Would that be here in the camp or, like, things we'd like to do if we ever get out of here...

Clio (with the conviction and sincerity of a natural born preacher): Whatever you want. That's the whole point of the exercise. It's about *you* doing what you want to do, not what these goons are telling us to do. We may not be able to live as boldly as we like, but we can sure as hell write boldly.

Elinor: This experience we're going through may seem like the collapse of civilisation. But we've got to realise that men have had more of a vested interest in civilisation than we have. Success, before we came here, was defined by how well we fit into a man's world. But here, that civilisation doesn't work. It's more brutal, yes. There's the constant fear of rape and a lack of security and all that. But one thing there's no room for is men's bottom line solutions to problems. We have a chance to reinvent the way people look at life. We have a chance to liberate ourselves from, and I hope this doesn't sound like too much of a cliché, the shackles of civilisation. What I'm trying to say is, we can hold onto the good and let go of the bad. Or to take it a step further, as the apostle Paul said, we can replace evil with good. Because there is a lot of evil here. Our only weapon is good.

Love *will* get us through this.

Clio: We have to love one another and we have to love the things we do, and in a more esoteric way, we have to love God.

Elinor: I think in the past, women *didn't* really love their lives. Often they pretended that a career was as important to them as a relationship and denied their own emotions. They sold their souls, in fact.

Thin girl: But wasn't a career what made so many women great?

Elinor: Well the problem with careers was that everyone had one. A hundred years ago, however, I would have said that what made a woman great was her commitment to a career because that was a time when marriage was the only respectable option for women. The women who wanted to do something else had to defy all convention to be true to themselves. But I think more recently, the great women were the ones who had the courage to accept their emotions, ignore the ridicule, get married and have the house and kids and all.

Thin girl: But doesn't that go against the whole feminist movement...

Elinor: Yes, but there never was a collective feminist agenda since it was impossible to represent the needs of half the people on the planet. The feminist movement failed in that its goal should have been to make it possible for every woman to do *whatever* it was *she* wanted to do. Looking back, it was virtually impossible for a woman who say, majored in History or Literature or Art to really excel in a man's world unless she had a Ph.D., which of course was time-consuming and expensive, particularly if she wanted to have a husband and children. Never mind the fact that the whole education system was founded by men. Do any of us have a Ph.D.?

(All shake their head.)

Well, that doesn't matter here. A piece of paper like that is so irrelevant here, isn't it? We all do the same mind-numbing filing job. But one of the reasons we all meet together like this is so that our collective thought and creativity is not wasted. When you put together everything we all *know*, it's a lot. We're no longer upholding and supporting civilisation. We are instead going to experience Liberation which is freedom from fear, or if you will, Freedom which is liberation from fear. We are no longer indebted to civilisation. So let's recreate civilisation while we're here. Let's set out to build a better world.

Let's now bow our heads and pray for the courage to build that world...

Scene FOUR

Setting: Same day. Dinner. The cafeteria. The five are at their table. Elinor and Clio are telling the guys about their meeting but it's more as if they are talking to each other.

Elinor: I know we sound really flaky and sappy when we're talking to them. I don't know what happens, we just get carried away. Like, I keep going on about civilisation, but what used to really bug me was how I knew that if women had had a chance to create civilisation it would have been different, maybe not better, but different. The irony was, we lived in a society that craved originality and yet women seemed so quick to conform to a pre-fabricated system built on the back of useless lives...

Clio: But the thing is, most people in the group don't seem to mind. We get so little opposition compared to what we'd have gotten back in the so-called real world. I think people *need* this right now. I think, if anything, we err on the side of being apologetic for our beliefs. I mean, sometimes we sound embarrassed about what we're saying.

Elinor: But every now and then I get so self-conscious. Like I'm saying all these things that I used to only think in private and now it's all coming out to a bunch of people I don't know...

Clio: *That's* our greatest shortcoming, I think. We don't *know* these people. We talk about love, but we don't love them. We love to talk. I've noticed that. We're somewhat detached.

Elinor: Well, I like the idea of love as a concept. But I don't really *need* these people. I need new ideas to sustain me.

Clio: These people need people. That's why they're there. We need each other and our ideas and most of all, we get off on being the High Priestess and High Prophetess of our little world here.

Elinor: That's it! That's it exactly! I'm the Priestess and you're the Prophetess and that's enough for me. I'm sustained by the meaningfulness of it.

(Clio nods.)

Mitchell: Well, do you think you holy people could say a prayer that a certain virus, and possibly a couple hundred other viruses, in our computer die a natural death. (He sighs.) Or else we're going to die a very unnatural death.

Scene FIVE

Setting: The next day. The filing room. A soldier is passing by Clio's filing cabinet. Elinor is close by.

Clio (holds up one of the sheets of paper): What are these things anyway?

(The soldier laughs.)

Soldier: You Americans...

Clio (interrupts): Canadians, we're Canadians.

Soldier: I don't care if you're Mongolians. You Americans are all the same. Just English. That's all you know. Maybe if you learned another language you'd know what these are.

Clio: Well, I know what they are. They're forms of some sort. I just want to know what they say.

Soldier (starts to sniff): Why does it always stink in your area?

Clio: I've only noticed it when you're here.

(The soldier laughs.)

Soldier (mimics): I've only noticed it when you're here. That's good. But you'd better be careful. Your name might end up on one of those things. (He gestures at the piece of paper in her hand.)

Clio: What do you mean...?

Soldier (coming closer): This (he points to a word at the top) says *Born*. This (he points to a word at the bottom) says *Died*. Funny, all the birth dates are different, and all the death dates are the same.

Clio (slowly): You mean, everyday that a soldier brings in a pile of papers for us all to file...

Soldier: Now you're beginning to see.

(He wanders off. Clio is left staring at the piece of paper in her hand.)

Clio (hissing): Elinor!

Elinor (quietly, looking down at her own piece of paper): I know. I heard. We're filing an entire life with every piece of paper.

EPISODE NINE

Scene ONE

Setting: The same day. The computer room. Mitchell, Roderick, and Henry are in a huddle.

Roderick: OK! Don't look scared, Henry! Try to look like we're just talking shop, you know, a little comparison of the best approach to take, not that there aren't a *hundred* ways we could solve this problem, we are just so good, we want the *best* way to do it, OK?

(Henry nods, still looking terrified. Roderick takes a deep breath.)

Now, for some reason, everything on your computer gives you *Abort, Retry, Fail?* Is that it, Henry?

(Henry nods.)

Soldier (calling from the back of the room): What's going on?

Mitchell: Everything's fine! We're just comparing notes.

(Soldier shrugs and looks away. The soldiers seem bored of being cooped up in the computer room all day and are content to just drink coffee at the back. The head soldier is missing today. Sub-titles reveal their conversation.)

Soldier #1 (examining a coffee tin): *Mountain grown.* (He snorts.) I'm so sure! Like it was grown on a mountain!

Soldier #2: Actually, I think it was.

Soldier #1: Oh.

Mitchell: Now, the first thing I think you should do is try *Retry*, don't you think?

Roderick: Sounds good. Try that Henry. Just type *R* and hit *Enter*.

(Henry does this. A few numbers flash by the screen but the *Abort, Retry, Fail?* reappears.)

Bloody hell! That doesn't leave us much of a choice! What's the difference between *Abort* and *Fail*, anyhow?

Mitchell: *Abort* sounds like you're just cutting your losses. *Fail* sounds like a complete admission of defeat. What exactly were you working in, anyhow, Henry?

Henry: You know, that virus thing. I was just hitting buttons.

Roderick: Therein lies the problem, no doubt. I think *Abort* would probably be the best course. How 'bout you?

Mitchell: I agree. Try *A* Henry.

(Henry types *A* and hits Enter. Again, a few numbers fly by and *Abort, Retry, Fail?* reappears.)

Well, it's not leaving us much choice, is it?

Henry: Mightn't *Fail* be a bit dangerous? I mean, that would give the whole show away, wouldn't it? If we say we fail, we might as well just say we don't have a bloody clue what we're doing.

Roderick: The way I see it, there's two ways of approaching this. If we approach it as existentialists, we'll have to accept that we are responsible for our actions and whatever happens after you hit *F* we have to deal with. On the other hand, we could believe we are in the fickle hands of Fate and that it really doesn't matter what we do because it has been predetermined that you will hit "F" and there's no fighting the inevitable.

Mitchell: That sounds more like predestination than fate.

Roderick: Well let's say Predestinational Fate, my point being, we are just living out a sequence of events and all we can do is respond to things. I think Existentialists are more on the offensive and a Predestinational Fatalist would be on the defensive.

Henry: I definitely feel like a Predestinational Fatalist. I am not responsible for what I'm doing, I'm only responding to events. I am very much on the defensive.

Roderick: Then do you feel like Fate is telling you to hit *F*?

Henry: I don't think Fate has given me any other choice.

Roderick: Well, there's your answer.

(Henry takes a deep breath, seems to mutter a little prayer, and hits *F* and Enter. A few numbers flash by on the screen and then the prompt *Abort, Retry, Fail?* appears again.)

Mitchell: Forget about Fate. I think this is more like Alice in Wonderland.

Scene TWO

Setting: The same day. Dinner. The cafeteria. All five are gathered around their table.

Roderick (to Henry): Who knows? Maybe it was all for the best. I mean, you couldn't do any more damage if you couldn't even get into the program.

Elinor: But how did you make it look like you were working if you couldn't get in?

Henry: Oh, it actually turned out to be easy. You see, I could type indefinitely it's just that every time I hit Enter I got that *Abort, Retry, Fail?* So I just didn't hit enter and I just typed gobbly-gook all day and when the occasional soldier passed by and asked me what I was doing I said I was experimenting with a new anti-virus program.

Mitchell (leaning forward): But getting back to what you guys were saying, are you sure that every single sheet of paper represents a person?

Clio: Absolutely. They're all the same, you see. And once the guy pointed out the Birth line and the Death line I could see that the other lines were for things like Name and Sex and Address and things like that. There's a lot of other questions but I have no idea what they could be.

Mitchell: How long are the answers?

Clio: They vary from a one word answer to twenty or so words.

Mitchell: Are the people writing it themselves?

Clio: Oh no. Then we would have understood it. It's all obviously written by the soldiers in their own language. I doubt if the people even realise why the questions are being asked and I strongly doubt that they have any idea that they're going to their death. I mean, if they did, they wouldn't have the courtesy to reply to these questions. Screw you, would be the obvious answer if they did.

Mitchell: Is there anything that distinguishes some sheets from others?

Clio: There is actually. There's a red stamp at the top of some of them. Just a round symbol. It could mean anything. Now that I know about the birth date I've realised the ones with the stamps are mostly people under forty.

Mitchell: I bet they're the ones who do the manual labour and when they're done with them, that's it...

Clio: Probably. Anyhow, I file about five of those a day. Not too many compared to the hundreds of other ones.

Mitchell (to Elinor): Is that true for you too?

Elinor (sadly): Pretty much, yes.

Henry (has obviously been thinking this whole time): If they're killing people, why would they ask them their address?

Clio: Well, I don't know for sure if it's their address...

Roderick: They probably appropriate the property and possessions once the people are dead...

Mitchell: But don't you think they've secured this entire area? I mean, they don't need addresses, they've probably taken over everything already. If they're killing hundreds a day...

Roderick: We don't know if those hundreds a day are all from around here. They could be bussing them in. We have no idea what's going on out there, where the pockets of resistance are. Keep in mind, this may be the only death camp. They're not easy to build and we know that this is a headquarters of some sort.

Mitchell: I would think rural areas would be more resistant seeing as they'd probably have hunting guns and stuff.

Roderick: But rural areas are isolated and can be taken by surprise. One hunting gun isn't going to be able to take out a tank. If it were spring, people could always hide out in the woods and hills but it's still too cold right now.

Elinor (suddenly): This is too depressing. Let's talk about something else.

(Mitchell, who's sitting beside her, puts his arm around her shoulders.)

Roderick: Ellie, dear, we can't stop talking about it just because it's depressing. At least it's only talk. Some people are actually living a nightmare right now.

Elinor: That's what I mean. Some people are living a nightmare right now and we're not.

Roderick: And you'd feel better if you were living a nightmare too? You wouldn't feel guilty then? Ellie, Ellie, you have a lot to learn about survival.

Scene THREE

Setting: Several days later. The women's dorms. Clio and Elinor are holding a meeting.

Elinor: Maybe sometimes we feel like we're given the answers before we have the questions. Anyone's who been given a complete ideology at an early age, whether it be Marxism or Christianity or whatever, feels like *everything* has been explained and that there are no more questions because every question you ask has a pre-fabricated answer. Then you find yourself craving unanswerable

questions, just for a change. I've found the one unanswerable question is "Why?" Why this? Why anything? Especially here. Here we are in this situation and it's a chance to ask questions.

And there's nobody to give us smug little answers. We can comfort one another. I think that's why we meet together like this, to comfort each other with songs and prayers, but I just wanted you to know that we know that we are all struggling with our personal questions as to why we're here and what's going to happen to us all.

Nobody knows what happens when you die. Even Christians. A lot of Christians think they do, but Christ only gave a few hints, a few parables and then men later on tried to fill it in and paint a complete picture. Well, I suggest we take comfort in the unknown, because that's what we're facing. I suggest we not be frightened and that we be courageous and the answers will come. It's just that first we have to find the right questions. Now, if you'd all join me in singing, *This is My Father's World*.

(They sing the hymn. At the end of it, the thin pale girl puts up her hand.)

Thin girl: I like what you were saying before the song. I feel so lost now and I've never felt like this before. I mean, when I was little, it was easy to get lost, literally. Just walk down one wrong street and that was it, I had no idea where I was. It was petrifying. But then when I grew up, I couldn't get lost if I tried. I'd deliberately take wrong streets but I'd always find my way back home. I just don't feel like I have that sense of direction anymore. (She starts to snuffle.) Maybe it's because I don't even have a *home*... (She is on the verge of bawling.)

(Clio sits down on the floor with her and wraps her arms around her.)

Clio: It's OK. But you know, you haven't lost anything. You no longer have a sense of direction but the problem with having a sense of direction is that it kills all chances of having an adventure.

Elinor: (Sensing Clio's answer might not be a comfort): Let's bow our heads and pray for all those who feel lost right now and that we may instead live with boldness...

Scene FOUR

Setting: Same day. Dinner. The cafeteria. All five are gathered around their table. Elinor and Clio are talking to each other.

Elinor: ...But I'm worried we're sounding insincere. I mean, I *am* sincere, it's just sometimes it's not coming across as sincere, or something like that...

Clio: I know. I feel like a TV preacher. I'm sincere, but I'm afraid I don't care *enough*.

Elinor: Exactly. That's it! I enjoy listening to myself think out loud but I don't think I care enough about the people listening.

(They sigh.)

Roderick: I wish to God we had your problems.

Elinor: Well, we do pray for you. But it might help if you took your own concerns to the Lord.

Clio (suddenly, to Elinor): Hey! You know, maybe that's it! Maybe it doesn't matter how we feel! Our job is just to bring people to Christ, so to speak. Unworthy instruments, as we are. I mean, we're inept, but we're the only people doing anything. Maybe God doesn't require perfection as much as people just doing the job.

Elinor (nodding): I like that! I mean, we have to think we're doing God's job, not our own work.

Clio (getting more enthusiastic): The danger for us is that we start to think of it as our own pet project.

Elinor (agreeing emphatically): But if we just keep in mind that it's God's work I think we'll be OK.

(Clio and Elinor are looking at each other, obviously pleased about this breakthrough in thought.)

Roderick (sarcastically): I'm *so* glad you sorted that out.

Scene FIVE

Setting: Several days later. The hallway between the men's and women's dorms. Elinor and Mitchell are sitting on the ground talking.

Elinor: ...it disturbs me how deep ideas have to be couched in shallow ways. I mean, I want to be profound in the midst of all this (she waves her hand) but too often I spend more time just contacting people that we're going to have a meeting and when we do I feel like all we do is *talk*. I mean, we talk about building a new civilisation but we don't *do it*.

Mitchell (taking her hand): But how could you, really? I mean, by talking you do more than most people here. You're holding onto hope and trying to make the best of it. Except for you and Clio, everybody here is miserable and frightened and lonely. The five of us are lucky. We have each other. But most people don't have anyone and you're giving them a group to belong to. And not just a group, but a group with strong beliefs.

Elinor: I guess so. I just feel like Clio and I are capable of doing *more* and that somehow we're taking the easy road...

Mitchell (laughs): We're living in a death camp, Elinor. A *death* camp! The easy road doesn't exist! We have to *survive* this and then when we've done that and are back to living our lives, then

you can come down hard on yourself and say you're not doing enough.

Elinor (intensely): But the opportunities are *here*, Mitchell. It's *now*. You said it, this is a death camp. Maybe Clio and I are preparing these people for death, to face it calmly, or something. Maybe when we talk about a better civilisation maybe we mean heaven and that people will find a better place when they die. But that's not what worries me. What worries me is that *Clio and I* aren't preparing ourselves for death, that we're not ready...

Mitchell (vehemently): Don't talk like that! We're not going to die! We've made it this far! We're going to come out on the other side...

Elinor (interrupting): But to what? A shattered world? Our country in the hands of the enemy? THIS (she waves her hand) except all over?

Mitchell: To life, Elinor! We have to come out to life where we can be normal again! Where we can be together...

EPISODE TEN

Scene ONE

Setting: Several days later. Computer lab. Everybody is busy. The soldiers are at the back drinking coffee, laughing and joking. The head soldier is still gone and they are obviously enjoying themselves in his absence. The plump man puts up his hand. A soldier eventually notices him.

Soldier: Yes? You?

Plump man: I thought you might like to know that a virus is destroying our Early Warning System.

Soldier (obviously not understanding English and speaking in a heavy accent): Yeah? Well, don't tell me, tell him. (He jerks his head towards Henry.)

Plump man (to Henry): You're screwed, pal.

Henry: Early Warning System? What a coincidence! That's what I'm working on right now. And for your information, I created the virus in order to destroy it. It is an inadequate system and we (he waves his hand at Mitchell and Roderick) are improving it.

Plump man (sarcastically): So you're killing it with a virus? That's the best way to go about it. I mean, it's not like there are any better ways of rehauling a system...

Roderick (quickly, before Henry can continue): Your sarcasm irks me. The fact that we are able to apply creativity to a problem seems to trouble you. What we are doing has a two-fold purpose. One, it tests the Early Warning System's vulnerability to a virus. Two, it deletes the weak areas and allows us to rebuild.

Plump man (laughing mirthlessly): You're so full of it. And when you go down, I ain't going with you. I'm registering a complaint every time I detect a problem...

Roderick: Checks and balances, my dear chap! Checks and balances! I fully approve and am pleased by your conscientiousness! (He rolls his eyes at Mitchell and Henry.)

Scene TWO

Setting: Same day. The cafeteria. Dinner. The five are seated around their table.

Henry: He's right. We're screwed.

Roderick: No we're not. We're so lucky it's scary. Those soldiers couldn't care less what happens. I

don't even think they understand what he's saying. That guy can register complaints all he wants, they're not going to remember.

Henry: Well, what about when their boss gets back? He understands English just fine and could come back any day and...

Roderick: He's got pneumonia, I heard. It'll take a few more weeks for him to recover.

Henry: And I suppose by then we have to figure out a way to fix this Early Warning System?

Roderick: No, by then we have to figure out a way to blame Mr. Fatty Tattle-tale for the collapse of the Early Warning System.

Scene THREE

Setting: The same day. Evening. The hallway between the men's and women's dorms. Elinor and Mitchell are seated on the floor despite the people passing by. Elinor is talking.

Elinor: ...I mean, I'd consider it a fair exchange, all of this, for example, in exchange for the meaning of life...

Mitchell: Forty-two.

Elinor: *What?*

Mitchell: Life, the universe and everything. You know, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. The answer to everything is forty-two.

(Elinor laughs.)

Elinor: It's as good as anything, I guess. The problem is, we're here and we're trying to fit God into this. Our little prayer group, I mean. We're trying to bring him down to our level and what we should really be trying to do is get up to his level. I'm trying to look for meaning in *this* situation and know what this is all about when really I should be trying to know God. Not know his will, or know what he wants me to do, just know him. *That* would take care of everything.

Mitchell: It's an impossible quest though. I mean, where do you start? The Bible? Somewhat limited. Personal experience? Then you're back to, like you say, bringing him down to your level. Mystical writings? The works of Augustine? Dogmas of the church? I'm just saying, they're no original sources to go to. The Bible's better than nothing but it's just a start.

Elinor: No, Mitchell. The Bible is the beginning and the end. It's the Word and John called Jesus the Word and Paul said the Word of God is in us. The whole process starts with the Bible. The

problem is with me and my finite mind. Paul said we should fix our eyes on Jesus, but I'm so easily distracted. But as impossible as it is for me to grasp an infinite God with my finite mind, I'd rather be on an impossible search than a misguided one. I'd rather believe in the *possibilities* of life than look around and say, *this is it*. Don't you agree?

Mitchell: I do. But at this point, as Worcester said in Henry IV, *For mine own part, I could be well content to entertain the lag-end of my life with quiet hours*. Do you really think this whole thing is a meaningless experience, in the overview?

Elinor: For some people, yes. For some people, no. The elect have the comfort of knowing God works everything out for them. I'm just saying, I wouldn't mind if it was a meaningless experience because I don't care anymore. I'm beginning to think it's impossible to understand, to *really* understand, anything until we die. So I guess now I'm not afraid of death. In fact, I think I'm rather looking forward to it.

Mitchell (serious and slightly frantic): Don't talk that way! It makes me think you'll kill yourself, or something.

Elinor (laughs): I definitely wouldn't do that. It would be too ironic to commit suicide in a death camp. I'm not even depressed, or even close to depressed. That's what I mean when I say I don't care. I'm worried about some of the girls in our group though. They seem so alone. Clio and I talk about God and finding comfort in him but, let's face it, Clio and I have each other and you guys so we're never alone and we never get lonely like they do. And we *do* have God. I'm like a kid at night. I say my prayers, God, you alone make me to dwell in peace and safety, Amen. And then I sleep. I don't know that all of those women have that peace.

Mitchell: But at least you're creating a situation where they can make friends.

Elinor (nodding): True. And in a way that might supersede the prayers and singing. The prayers and the singing are only beneficial if they bring them closer to God. Making friends and loving and being loved could also bring them to God. I believe that when we pray to God to take away our loneliness he doesn't do it by a celestial shot in the arm of feeling good, he does it by sending us people to care about.

Mitchell (jokingly): Plus, it's all giving them a chance to build character here. Isn't building character supposed to ensure you a bigger reward in God's Kingdom? You should be envious of *them*.

Elinor (nodding): It's true. They'll be better people for this experience if they survive. Clio and I, well, we'll still just be ourselves.

Mitchell: *When you are old and grey and full of sleep, and nodding by the fire, take down the book, and slowly read, and dream of the soft look your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep. How many loved your moments of glad grace, and loved your beauty with love false or true, but one man*

loved the pilgrim soul in you, and loved the sorrows of your changing face...

(He leans forward and much to Elinor's surprise, gives her a quick kiss.)

Scene FOUR

Setting: The same evening. Men's dorms. Roderick and Henry are plotting.

Roderick: Obviously we have to discredit him in some way so that when he does make his complaints he's seen as a nuisance rather than someone with a legitimate point. Now how do we go about doing that?

Henry: Lately I've just been asking myself what would Bertie Wooster do in a situation like this? And you know what? It's been working.

Roderick: Well that explains a lot. OK then, what would Bertie Wooster do in a situation like this?

Henry: He'd ask Jeeves what to do.

Roderick: I'm going to ignore you. You are serving no practical purpose at this moment. OK, let's focus our minds on Mr. Fatty Tattle-Tale...what we have to do is...(he is thinking deeply)...somehow we have to...we should probably start by...hmmmmmm...OK, the thing is...

Henry: Why don't we just kill him?

(Roderick looks surprised.)

No, really. How could it possibly matter? They're killing people by the hundreds out there. What's one more? Especially if it saves us! (Henry leans forward.) I'm willing to be a pupil of Von Clausewitz and violently and ruthlessly wage war to achieve my objectives, even though they're not exactly political...

(He pauses, visibly getting more excited.) *But*, I am completely in-line with his philosophy of an active defence, although, naturally I shall not be defending rivers and forests and fortresses, but I shall assume the defensive position, and nonetheless apply the necessary methods. Mr. Fatty Tattle-Tale attacks, and *my* defence shall be brilliant! I *shall* overthrow my enemy!

Roderick (eyes wide): Henry! You've obviously flipped out! But I like it. Let's do it!

Henry: I haven't flipped out. It's just survival! When it comes to war the only rule is, it depends on the situation. We are doing what has to be done in this situation. But we have to keep it a secret. If we survive this I don't want to go on trial for war crimes, or anything.

(Roderick roars with laughter.)

Roderick: Of course we'll keep it a secret! We won't even tell Mitchell. And when we do it, we'll forget we ever did it. We'll pretend it never happened. Can you live with that?

Henry: I'm very good at self-delusion.

Roderick: OK, now our question is, do we make it look natural or do we make it look like an accident or do make it look like murder and try to pin it on the soldiers?

Henry: An accident sounds good. Something uncomplicated. Although really, we have a big advantage with this being a war in that we could poison him and it's not like they'd waste the time to do an autopsy. People here are hardened to death. They won't think too much about it.

Roderick: But we definitely won't cosh him on the head because they probably would investigate an outright murder. But I like that poison idea though it might be hard to actually give it to him since we never eat with him.

Henry: What would be perfect would be to push him off the top of building, or something.

Roderick: Unfortunately, this is only a two-storey building.

Henry: And, of course, there's the obvious difficulty of luring him to the top of a building.

Roderick: How 'bout something electrical?

Henry: Do you know anything about electricity?

Roderick: No.

Henry: Well there's your answer.

Roderick: Don't get snippy with me!

Henry: Hey! I'm the one who's grown up reading John Dickson Carr and Agatha Christie! If anyone's going to come up with a good idea, it'll be me!

Roderick: Oh goodie! I can hardly wait! Strychnine in the tea!

Henry (deep in thought): We have some time to think about it. It's going to be perfect. I can just feel it. This is something I know I can do.

Roderick: If you were anyone else you'd give me the creeps.

Scene FIVE

Setting: A couple of days later. The cafeteria. The group is all together. Roderick pulls a paper bag out of one of his pockets.

Roderick: Look, but don't squeal!

(They all look as he discreetly opens the top of the bag towards them. They gasp. It is a mickey of gin.)

Clio: Roddy, my love! Where *did* you get it?

Roderick (in a gangster accent): Never you mind that, doll-face.

(He returns the paper bag to his pocket.)

I suggest we meet later this evening in the utility closet in the hallway for a good old-fashioned martini party. No olives and no vermouth I'm afraid, but the purists would approve, I'm sure. Everybody bring their own glass.

Clio: The wonderful thing is it will take absolutely nothing to get us drunk since we haven't had a drink in so long.

Henry: I still get caffeine headaches from the lack of coffee around here.

Elinor: I know. I read somewhere that if you stop drinking coffee you're supposed to become naturally alert after awhile, but it hasn't happened to me.

Mitchell: You're probably supposed to substitute it with ginseng tea, or something.

Clio: I miss Midol. I never knew how much I'd miss it.

Elinor (mischievously): We'll have to address that topic at our next meeting. Something about learning to commune with our female self at the time of our menses. Celebrating it as an affirmation of life amidst death.

Clio: I don't see how we can get around the fact that in a place like this it's just a bloody mess.

(The guys groan and look away. Clio laughs and changes the topic.)

Well, I've *finally* lost that ten pounds I've been trying to get rid of since I was, like, twelve. If only I had my little black dress to show it off in.

(She looks down with disdain at her current outfit which looks like a dress made from a terry-cloth

bathrobe.)

EPISODE ELEVEN

Scene ONE

Setting: A couple of nights later. The men's dorms. Henry and Roderick are conferring.

Henry: ...so after much thought, I think the best way to do it would be to strangle him first and then hang him to make it look like a suicide. The nice thing about that is, it's virtually impossible without an out-and-out forensic investigation to detect that a person had been strangled before they were hung. I've given it a lot of thought and the chief difficulty with any other method is the weapon. In our situation it's impossible to get a hold of a knife or a gun and there's no way to lure our victim to the top of a cliff to push him over, so we have to just use our hands and a bed-sheet to string him up in maybe the bathroom, or some place yet to be established.

Roderick: But can we really get away with making it look like a suicide?

Henry: Oh absolutely. This is a horrible place. Who wouldn't want to kill himself? We'll leave a note just to be safe. I mean, those soldiers are so stupid they might not realise it was a suicide unless we leave something behind that says, I couldn't go on...

Roderick: Or better yet, something really rude and scathing. You know, screw you, all you bastards and I hope you lose the war.

Henry (shrugs): That would be just as fine. We'll print it out on the computer, of course, because there's no way of getting a sample of his handwriting.

Roderick: So, when? When do you want to do this?

Henry: As soon as we can. First chance we get alone with him. Obviously, as soon as we kill him we have to string him up because as moronic as these guys are, I'm sure they probably have a doctor for the soldiers who could establish time of death and might realise he hasn't been hanging as long as he's been dead, or something like that.

Roderick: Well, it'd be too hard to hide the body for any period of time.

Henry: It'll have to be in the middle of the night just because that seems like a logical time to kill yourself. Plus, it can't be a time when we need to have an alibi, just in case they suspect it's murder. So if it's in the middle of the night, we'll have the same alibi as everyone else. We were asleep.

Roderick (snaps his fingers): I know! Right before we go to bed, I'll offer him some of the gin that's left. I'll try to get something else to go with it, some mixer like Sprite, so that he's bound to have to go to the bathroom sometime in the night.

Henry: But why give him the drink? What excuse will you give?

Roderick (shrugs): A peace offering, of course. He'll take it just because it's alcohol.

Henry: What if he thinks it's a bribe to keep his mouth shut and refuses to drink it?

Roderick (laughs): He won't think of it that way. He's already opened his mouth up too many times. He thinks he's damaged us enough.

Henry: I don't follow that logic at all, but as long as he drinks it.

Roderick: We'll have to stuff our beds to make it look like we're in them and then hide in the bathroom until he comes because the soldiers would probably notice if we followed him into the bathroom.

Henry: That means we'll most likely have to stay in the bathroom all night because it'll be hard to sneak back into bed.

Roderick: But it's essential that we get back to our beds at some point because we can't be found in the morning sleeping beside the dead body.

Henry (musing): You're right. We'll sneak back somehow. Maybe create a diversion, or something. I dunno...

Roderick: Of course! It's obvious! The gin again!

Henry: But there's barely any left, especially after you give the rest to Fatty.

Roderick: No, I mean, the gin gives me an idea. The soldiers on the night shift usually drink beer, sometimes vodka. I'll get a hold of a bottle of vodka, same place as I got the gin, and mickey-finn it so they'll be majorly out of it by the time we have to sneak back to bed.

Henry: How do you get the bottle to the soldiers? I mean, they can't know it's from you or else they'll suspect us when they pass out.

Roderick: I'll drop it discreetly by their chairs before we go to bed. Each guy will think one of the others brought it.

Henry: It's perfect then. Are you sure you can get a hold of what you need?

Roderick: I'll owe people for the rest of my life, but yeah, I can do it.

Henry: Well, that's it then. As soon as you get the vodka and fix it up, we do it.

Scene TWO

Setting: The same evening. The women's dorms. Clio and Elinor are having a meeting. The women are singing.

Women: *...Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away, kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay. Thine is the glory, risen, conquering Son, endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won...*

(When they are done.)

Elinor: That was great! I think Clio will agree with me when I say that we both really enjoy and need these meetings. In a time like this, assembling together is the best thing we can do. Although Clio and I both feel that we are unworthy vessels to be telling people the story of Christ, it is our hope that while we are clinging together we may also all be tasting the freedom that is Christ. If we turn to him, we *will* find comfort. We may feel alone, there's no point in denying it. But being alone, as awful as it feels, forces us to examine life. We've been put in a situation that really requires us to ask what life is all about. Back in the world we came from we could hide our loneliness with friends and family and our jobs and by just keeping busy, but here we have been giving the opportunity to face life head on. (She pauses for a few seconds, obviously thinking.) It's hard to know what to say, beyond that. *I think the answer is Christ and that he provides a peace that passes understanding. I think he hears my prayers and I think he hears your prayers.* (Another pause.) OK, so let's sing one more hymn. Does everybody remember *The Solid Rock*?

(A few nod.)

OK, here we go...

Women: *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness...*

(After the song, the group breaks up and Clio and Elinor are left alone.)

Elinor: I still can't help wondering whether there's any point to all of this. I mean, would it make any difference what we sing? Could we get together and sing the works of Madonna and still have an effective group?

Clio: *NO!* Elinor! Don't underestimate the comfort this is providing! I don't know whether these people have the peace that you and I have, but at the very least we are providing them with a type of peace. *We are* unworthy vessels, but we *are* the vessels! Besides, God works with everyone differently. Hell, Elinor! If God can work with us, he can be working with anyone! But for the way we handle this group thing, I think we've got to assume that God is working with all of these people and act like he is.

Elinor (nodding): OK then.

Clio: Confidence, Elinor! The key is confidence. Not in ourselves. But in what he's doing through us.

Scene THREE

Setting: A few days later. The bathroom of the men's dorm. Roderick and Henry are examining it, obviously planning.

Roderick: ...OK, that light fixture looks particularly sturdy...

Henry (looking up): But will it hold 200 pounds?

Roderick: I don't see anywhere else we can hang him that would be plausible. I mean, he'll be dead anyway. Even if it comes down they'll think it held long enough to kill him.

Henry: But if it comes down right away, we're screwed. The whole thing collapses, crashes to the ground, the soldiers rush in, and we're standing beside a dead body.

Roderick: No. It'll hold.

Henry: Well, that's it then. As Juliet said, *Come, civil night, thou sober-suited matron, all in black.*

Roderick: And as Charmian said in Antony and Cleopatra, *O excellent! I love long life better than figs.*

(Mitchell walks in.)

Mitchell: Oh there you are! C'mon! I heard a rumour that there's going to be a gastronomical treat for dinner tonight.

Roderick: I know, I heard a rumour they're pushing north and they captured a modest caché of frozen moose. Since the soldiers prefer their meat in sausage form we are the lucky recipients of some good Canadian cuisine...

(They exit.)

Scene FOUR

Setting: The next morning. The cafeteria. The room is filled with women and only a small contingent of soldiers to watch them. When the men finally arrive they are marched in by the remaining quantity of soldiers but allowed to disperse to their regular tables after getting their food.

Clio (practically standing up as the men join them): *What happened?!*

Roderick (airily): Some guy killed himself.

Henry: In our bathroom.

Clio: NO!

Mitchell: He hung himself. (He glances at Roderick and Henry.) On the light fixture. Frankly, I don't know how it held.

Elinor: Did you know him very well?

Roderick: We worked with him, of course. Just one of the programmers.

Mitchell (glancing at Roderick and Henry again): Actually, to put it bluntly, we're rather lucky he's dead. He was on to us, so to speak. Remember that guy that came up to the table awhile ago...

Clio: Oh *him!* Yes! I remember him! Sort of plump and pale?

Roderick: That's the one.

Clio: Something about viruses in the computers. Did he have a chance to report you?

Roderick: No, luckily for us our supervisor is still sick.

Clio: Did he leave a note, or anything?

Roderick: Oh yes. A moderately funny note, actually. (There is a touch of modesty in his voice.) It was taped to the bathroom mirror. It said, *I got sick of looking at all your baboon-ass faces. And you soldiers weren't so good-looking either.*

Mitchell: It's strange how he never really struck me as a man with a sense of humour.

Clio: Who found the body?

Roderick: Oh, one of the guys. I don't know his name.

Henry: Peter, I think it is. He's the coffee-making guy.

Clio: But what kept you guys so long?

Roderick: Oh there was big hubaloo, of course, when the body was found. The soldiers had to call

their superior and their Major-General, or whoever he is, had to call their doctor, and their doctor had to proclaim him dead even though *I* could have told you he was dead...

Elinor: It's funny how they were so concerned about one person when outside they're killing them by the hundreds. I don't suppose that doctor goes out there and proclaims everyone dead.

Mitchell: Well, in here they're still operating it like it's a vestige of civilisation. Funny how it works, isn't it? Murder is permitted out there, but not in here.

Roderick (sharply): Who said anything about murder? This was a suicide.

Mitchell (giving him a strange look): Naturally I wasn't saying *he* was murdered! I was saying everybody out there is being murdered!

Henry: The doctor said it was suicide.

Roderick: Well, of course it was suicide. No one said it wasn't.

(Roderick returns to his eating. They all continue talking.)

Scene FIVE

Setting: The next day. The computer lab. Henry is typing furiously but happily.

Henry: Boy! This *Abort, Retry, Fail?* deal is the best thing that's ever happened to me! Not a care in the world for me!

Mitchell: You're *still* getting that?

Henry: Oh, it comes and goes. Like yesterday my computer was normal. Today I turn it on and here it is.

Mitchell: I find that disturbing somehow. What about the Early Warning System...?

Roderick: Don't worry. If our supervisor notices a lack of Early Warning System upon his return we'll just say that Mr. Fatty Tattle-Tale destroyed it and was so remorseful that he did himself in. Nobody here'll say otherwise.

Henry (cheerfully): And if they do, we'll kill them too.

(Mitchell looks at him sharply. Roderick glares at him.)

Roderick: Don't even joke about things like that, Henry!

Mitchell (intensely staring at Roderick): Joke about things like what, Roderick?

Roderick (equally as intense): About death, of course.

Henry (oblivious): It's really tempting to just sit here and type my memoirs, or something, but I suppose that would give the whole show away if a soldier noticed. The one downside of this is that I have to sit here and type gobbly-gook which is psychologically disturbing. I suppose there's something about the human spirit that craves to express itself.

Roderick (returning to his own computer screen): My advice to you is to save your memoirs for until this is all over.

EPISODE TWELVE

Scene ONE

Setting: Several days later. The women's dorm. Elinor and Clio are talking. Clio is wearing a gigantic flannel night-gown as a dress. Elinor is in a skin-tight suede shirt and leather pants.

Elinor: ... But what have we *learned* in life? Not revealed knowledge. If we were to die tomorrow, what would you say you had *learned*? I mean, I've learned...(she pauses to think) that a charming woman likes people rather than worries about whether people like her.

Clio: I've learned that if you know who you are you won't feel a need to constantly explain yourself to other people.

Elinor (nods, looking pleased): I've learned that it's better to be nice than to be mean.

Clio: What you do isn't half as important as who you are.

Elinor: I've learned that a great woman doesn't fall apart when she falls in love.

Clio: Poise is graciousness and a sense of humour. (Looking ruefully down at her outfit) A good wardrobe can make up for a lot of shortcomings in life.

Elinor: Listen to people.

Clio: Learn about love from your lover, not your friends.

Elinor: I'm not looking for a wise woman to follow. I want to *be* a wise woman.

Clio: Time is *not* running out. Perfection doesn't exist. I had to be unwise to realise I wanted to be wise and I had to be perverse to realise I preferred purity.

Elinor: Remember Adam? That guy we went to school with? He lived at home but he was still well-known on campus. Everyone had seen him around the student lounge, smoking his Virginia Slim cigarettes, wearing his ridiculous treader shirts, and looking achingly pale and beautiful.

Clio: Of course I remember him! You went out with him.

Elinor: I've been thinking a lot about him lately. I suppose he's dead now. You're right though. I did go out with him although at the time it just felt like hanging out together. No one thought to classify him as gay because, for one thing he wasn't, and for another, I think it was because everybody, male and female, was in love with him. He was courteous and amusing and people were always going out of their way to talk to him. The secret of his charm, I've figured out, was that he

was asexual. Sex, in practise, simply didn't interest him. I should know. I mean, everybody knew he was interested in all the theories of sex and the sociological implications within its historical context and he would entertain the frat boys with descriptions of positions from the Kama Sutra. In fact, he knew more about sex than any other man on campus despite rarely having had it. In much the same way that a man can be an expert on dinosaurs without ever having owned one as a pet.

Why Adam selected me to be his consort, I'm not really sure, though I suspect it was my normalcy that gained me that prestigious position. Remember how people were always trying to be eccentric around Adam? Trying to outcool one another just to get his attention? Those guys who would take up pipe-smoking, that girl who would wear a feather boa? That one freshman even started carrying a fluffy poodle everywhere in an effort to emulate Adam's quirkiness, not realising that Adam's seeming eccentricity wasn't external but the result of a genuine enjoyment of life. He's the only person I've met who liked people so much that it never occurred to him to wonder whether or not they liked him, thus making him completely unselfconscious.

Adam was never attracted to anything that wasn't authentic.

Clio: Is that what you like about Mitchell? That he's authentic?

Elinor (blushing): I didn't know you knew...

(Clio rolls her eyes.)

Yes, he's authentic. Not at all in the way Adam was. But he's not like Roderick and Henry. He's honest. I trust him. He's not a believer though.

Clio: He's still searching. Who knows, maybe this whole experience will make him a believer.

Elinor (nodding): But it troubles me that he doesn't understand what sustains me. If we're going to have a relationship, that is. (She laughs ruefully.) A relationship! Listen to me! A relationship, *here*.

Clio (shrugs): It's an affirmation of life. It's what we're all about.

Scene TWO

Setting: The same day. The men's dorms. Roderick, Henry, and Mitchell are talking.

Roderick: ...definitely a virgin birth.

Henry: But isn't Christ supposed to return on a white horse with thunder and lightning and great tribulation and all that?

Roderick: Well that's exactly why I don't think he will. I mean, the first coming wasn't what people expected. People expected a man to deliver them from Roman oppression and instead they got a

man dying on a cross.

Mitchell: Have either of you read the entire Bible?

Roderick (pompously): I am familiar with its overall themes and narratives.

Henry: I tried to. I was going to read a chapter or two everyday for, like, three years or however long it took me, just to say I had done it. I think I got about as far as Deuteronomy. Of course, it was no better with Ulysses. I broke it down into one hundred page segments and was going to finish it in a week. When my sister Alycia found out, she said I was a Philistine and that if I was going to rush through it like that I shouldn't even bother to read it. But I said I wanted to be able to say I'd read it. She said that I should just say go around saying I'd read it if that's all great literature meant to me. (He sighs.)

Mitchell: I think we're living great literature right now. War and destruction and all that.

Henry: Why does life have to be awful in order to render it great?

Mitchell: One thing that's struck me as poignant about all of this is that there's no more normalcy to preserve. Out there it's just chaos which is what we constantly fight against. I mean, in a James Bond movie, 007 is always fighting to protect the innocent citizen from another world war.

Roderick (almost sneeringly): It's strange how we struggle to preserve normalcy. People go to war, governments suppress alien spacecraft's, spies risk their lives, all to preserve normalcy. To protect the humdrum everyday life.

Mitchell: What's so bad about wanting to preserve normalcy and everyday life?

Roderick: Nothing. It's just funny how we hold it in such high esteem, as if civilisation just carrying on is our highest achievement as human beings.

Mitchell: But it does contain pretty much everything we could want.

Henry (suddenly): I've had a new idea about life. I believe that God was a novelist and that earth was just one of his many creations. So, in essence, we are just one of many stories on a cosmic bookshelf simultaneously being played out. Like parallel universes.

Roderick: But there's too many people. Who are the leading characters?

Henry: Well, it's virtually impossible to determine who the leading characters are in God's novel. It's probably like War and Peace with Pierre and Natasha at the front of a bunch of characters. The rest of us have our tiny roles to play in moving history forward, which is another Tolstoian idea.

Roderick: You're crazy.

Henry: No I'm not. It's a theory that explains the meaninglessness of life for some people. After all, if you're living in a novel like War and Peace and your role is one of Napoleon's foot-soldiers, although your presence is essential to the plot, it's only your presence in one particular scene that matters. Everything leading up to it and everything following is pretty much irrelevant. A bigger role would be one of the Rostov's maid. But she too has to live a huge part of her life away from the significant action. My theory also explains the arbitrariness of life, like why the grass is green and the sky is blue and not the other way around. In a novel an author has to create his world as best suits the plot and in another novel he might create a completely different milieu.

Mitchell: So, does that mean you don't believe in Christianity?

Henry: Not at all. The Bible is obviously an important book to the world and if it's fiction, well so much the better. I think truth can be discovered through fiction.

Mitchell: I agree in the sense that people are often more willing to be honest under the guise of telling a story about someone else.

Henry: If I ever get out of here, I'm going to write a novel. It's going to start with the dawn of civilisation, except that women aren't going to have any biological desires to produce children and thus, no desire to mate. So while men begin to build cities, woman build a wall to keep the men out and continue to live in mud huts foraging for berries and drinking a brewed tea beverage. Then I'll chronicle history from the two sexes perspectives. I'll get Clio and Elinor to help me.

Mitchell: Sounds interesting. It's going to feel like we're starting over when we get out of here.

Roderick: Women built cities too, though. Eridu was built around 3,000 B.C. but Amazon warrior priestesses may have founded Ephesus and Smyrna a little later on. As a matter of fact, even in the earliest cities there was a female influence. The Sumerians had their Lady of Heaven, Inanna, who I believe was also worshipped in the city of Urak as the goddess Innin who was later equated with Ishtar..."

Henry: Well that's what I'll bring out in my book. Women's establishment of religion. After all, in ancient societies religion affected everything from architecture to art to agriculture. The gods and goddesses were part of their everyday life.

Mitchell: I've always thought it was interesting how there was no such thing as self-expression.

Henry: For the men's societies I'll look to the more warrior-like societies like the Akkadians and, of course, the Assyrians.

Mitchell: Yeah, but like I've said, some scholars feel the Assyrians weren't as cruel as they made themselves out to be but encouraged a reputation of ruthlessness in order to more easily subdue their enemies.

Roderick: That's these bozos here. (Roderick jerks his head towards a cluster of soldiers.) Did you know they play *games* to keep themselves amused?

Mitchell: Like Scrabble?

Roderick: No, more elaborate. Like for example, there're rumours that that guy who hung himself was some sort of murder mystery game.

Henry: *Really?*

Roderick (mimicking him): Yes, *really*.

Mitchell: So, will they do it again?

Roderick: Do what?

Mitchell: Murder someone?

Roderick: Well, not for awhile. No one's solved this one yet and bottle of champagne is riding on it.

Scene THREE

Setting: A few days later. The women's dorms. Clio and Elinor are sitting on their respective beds with mud masks on. Clio is wearing layers of giant shirts over a pair of pyjama bottoms that are three times her size.

Elinor: This is *really* good. This is exactly what I needed. It's probably psychological, but having my pores cleansed seems to cleanse everything inside of me. (She picks up the small container) How did you get this? This is Christian Dior, for crying out loud. What on earth did you have to trade?

Clio (airily): My last box of tampons.

(Elinor stares at her in horror.)

Well, they were going to run out anyway. And in all of this voluminous disgustingly underwashed material, who is going to notice a few extra stains?

Elinor (sighs): The hygiene situation here has been rather poor.

Clio: The hygiene doesn't concern me as much as the clothing. I really think if I had a better wardrobe I'd be enjoying this a lot more. You know how when you wear your favourite sweater and oldest, most comfortable pair of jeans how you can do just about anything? I'm so mad we were out for afternoon tea that day.

Elinor: But at least we were together. And at least we've survived this far. I don't think people hiding in their houses did as well...

Scene FOUR

Setting: The next day. The computer lab.

Mitchell: ...it still makes me nervous.

Roderick: Look, don't over-analyse this. If his computer is acting normal let's just act casual and not think about it too much.

Henry: It obviously just fixed itself. It's obviously got nothing better to do with its time.

Mitchell: I'd feel a lot better if we knew the extent of the damage that might have been done in the last few days.

Roderick: No, you probably wouldn't.

Henry (pleased with himself): It's obvious I'm just a good computer programmer. I've probably got a talent for it.

(Mitchell sighs loudly.)

When this is all over, I may even get a part-time job working on these things. They're not as hard as I first thought.

Mitchell: Just don't do anything too weird today, OK? Damage-control is what we've got to aim for now.

Scene FIVE

Setting: The same day. Filing room. Clio and Elinor are talking quietly as they file at the same cabinet.

Clio: ...It's obvious he likes you. No! Loves you!

Elinor: I *know*. That's not the problem. I mean, I love Mitchell too.

Clio: It's fantastic really. Here we are, in a wretched situation, no make-up, hideous clothes, impossibly ugly facilities, I mean it's like being in prison, and you've found love.

Elinor: It sounds great but the problem is I've gone past the point where it makes me happy.

Clio: But Elinor! We're talking about an unconditional love...!

Elinor (interrupting): Everybody's love has conditions.

Clio: But it just makes life so much better to be in love! Hell! I'd even fall for Henry or Roderick to make things a little more interesting...

Elinor (interrupting and speaking emphatically): The problem is Mitchell is treating this whole place as if it is just an interlude before we go back to our normal lives. But I don't think we're ever going back to our normal lives. When it comes to men and women, right now the only state of mind I identify with is the pre-curse state in Genesis where it was obvious that men needed us more than we needed them. Where God created women to be helpers to men.

Clio: Do you really think that's the way it was?

Elinor: Absolutely. Why else would Adam have eaten the apple so unquestioningly? But then they were cursed and men became tillers of the soil all wrapped up in their careers and women become subservient to men all wrapped up in their relationships. But it's like somehow my brain is living in that pre-curse state where I honestly don't *need* a man...

Clio: Well, I don't think the 20's should be wasted on one man anyhow. The 20's are for using your youth and looks to get what you want from men. The 30's are for settling down and having children...

(A chubby flushed soldier stomps over.)

Soldier: Shut up! I'm sick of listening to you! The only reason I don't shoot you both is because the other soldiers like watching you and would get mad at me. I personally think you're both dogs and I'm sick of you!

(The other soldiers are watching with amusement.)

Clio (haughtily): No man is going to destroy my goodwill towards humanity. No man is going to make me shrivel up and die.

Soldier: One more word and you will be most brutally executed.

(He stomps off.)

EPISODE THIRTEEN

Scene ONE

Setting: A few days later. Men's dorm. Henry is scribbling notes onto a piece of paper when Mitchell comes in.

Mitchell: What'ya doing?

Henry: Outline for my book. Would you say that an acceptable career for a woman would be a goddess?

Mitchell: Well, goddesses are sort of difficult in that they generally live in heavenly places. How about priestesses? Priestesses took care of the goddesses' temples. That would encompass a lot since priestesses could also be dancers and poets and musicians and healers and shepherdesses and prostitutes...Oh, but I guess with no men that would be a limited market. You could also have prophetesses. Let's see...what else...warriors! Don't forget warriors. Some priestesses were warriors, usually with equestrian skills.

Henry (writing): Good. They'll be the ones who defend the walls. What about art and stuff? Any ideas?

Mitchell: Well, before 3000 B.C. only two types of two-dimensional art have been found, painted pottery and stamp seals. In Uruk, the centre of Sumerian civilisation, reliefs were used to decorate cultic vessels and vessels often came in the shapes of whole animals. I don't know if this ties in in any way, but nudity in art was only used to denote heroes and prisoners, the distinction between the two no doubt would be seen in the size of the figures as the hierarchy in a relief would go from the largest character to the smallest. During the Jamdat Nasr period, stones, such as lapis lazuli, were often used to obtain colour contrast. Metals, such as copper, silver and gold were all used. I believe in the Mesilim period stone maces were decorated with reliefs...

Henry (still writing): You're showing off, Mitchell.

Mitchell: I know.

Scene TWO

Setting: The same day. Women's dorms. Clio and Elinor are filing their nails as they talk.

Clio: ...But Elinor! Everything I've learned has been a result of being in love! Like remember when I went out with José? It was like an Introduction to South American Culture. And then how Kevin was a PoliSci major and I was always studying all that stuff about British Imperialism and

third-world democracies. And I mean, go out with any guy and it's just a Liberal Arts degree in Football Stats and Late 90's Classic Rock and Contemporary Action Films...

Elinor: But that's not what I learn from love. I learn about myself. I mean, ideally I should be learning about the other person, but I only seem to learn more about myself.

Clio: Well, that seems practical. I mean, here you are and you're still with yourself. I'm not with José or Kevin anymore so maybe all that stuff about Brazil's cuisine and Uganda's government wasn't all that useful.

Elinor: I think love gives life meaning. I *do* agree with that. Especially when things are normal. But things just aren't normal anymore and I feel like life has to provide its own meaning.

Clio: But you're still going out with Mitchell?

Elinor (starts to laugh): If you can call sitting in the hallway talking going out. Of course I am. I do *love* him. And when this is all over, *if* it's ever all over, I want to get married and have all his children and live happily ever after. But I just don't see how that's going to happen.

Clio: You think we're all going to die, don't you?

Elinor: I don't see how we'll come out of it alive. There's nothing special about us. There's no reason why all those people out there are dying and we're alive in here filing their pieces of paper. It's luck, pure and simple, and to use a cliché, our luck is going to run out.

Clio: I would agree with you but for one thing. When this is all over I want to help rebuild civilisation and I want to make it better. Not to sound like a sap, but I want to help make a civilisation that doesn't allow for things like this to happen.

Elinor: I'm confident that humanity will emerge from the muck with or without us. But I agree, it would be nice if it were with us.

Scene THREE

Setting: The next day. Computer lab. The head soldier is sitting on a chair, looking ill, taking open swigs from a bottle of whiskey. The other soldiers are keeping quiet, either out of respect or fear. All of a sudden, Henry's computer starts beeping. A message appears on his screen. *Program Failure. Program Failure. Program Failure.* The head soldier looks irritated but remains seated.

Head soldier: What the hell is going on over there?

Henry (struggling to contain his panic): Nothing sir! Just a test of the system!

Roderick (hissing): Control, Alt, Delete!

(The head soldier is struggling to his feet. Cautiously, Henry hits Control, then Alt, then Delete.)

All together, you banana head!

(Henry obeys and his screen mercifully goes blank. The head soldier arrives at Henry's computer to find numbers flashing by on the screen. Henry smiles bravely at him.)

Henry: Just a test, sir! I'm particularly concerned with keeping the Early Warning System in peak condition.

(Head soldier grunts and returns to his chair. Henry looks terrified. Roderick looks furious. Mitchell looks concerned.)

Scene FOUR

Setting: The same day. The women's dorms. Elinor and Clio are leading their group through *Onward Christian Soldiers*. There are no soldiers present.

Women: ...marching as to war! With the word of Jesus!...

(A red-headed girl puts up her hand when the song is done.)

Clio: Please feel free to speak out whenever you have something to say! Speak as the Spirit moves you!

(The red-headed girl looks uncomfortable.)

Red-headed girl: Uh, it's not really about the Spirit. I was just wondering, because, I'm not sure, I mean, I'm kind of worried...

Clio (encouragingly): Uh-huh.

Red-headed girl: Well, it's Cynthia.

(Clio glances at Elinor.)

Elinor (whispering): That really thin girl.

Clio (turning back to the red-headed girl): Cynthia! Right! (Looks around.) She's not here today.

Red-headed girl: Well that's just it. She was coming here like always and then I saw her talking to

the group of soldiers that are normally here and well, I just got a bad feeling about it. I mean, why aren't the soldiers here? They're always here...

Clio: Oh, that's nothing to worry about! The soldiers know by now that we're harmless and they can't be bothered listening to us and they probably just stopped her to ask her a question...

Red-headed girl: I think they were interrogating her. It was more like they were (she pauses to think), well, not casual. It makes me nervous. Anything out of the ordinary here makes me nervous.

Clio: Would you say they initiated it?

Red-headed girl: It's hard to know because I didn't see it from the beginning. I think they must've because why would anybody in their right mind go up to them and start talking?

Clio: How long ago was this and was that the last time you saw her?

Red-headed girl: It was just as we came into here. Right in the hallway. She could still be talking to them for all I know.

(Clio and Elinor look at each other.)

Elinor: I'll look in the hallway.

(She walks down the long aisle back to the door, opens it and looks out. She returns.)

No one's out there anymore. Just a soldier at the end of the hall.

Red-headed girl: *That* makes me nervous.

Elinor: I think we should pray...

Scene FIVE

Setting: The next day. The computer lab. A piercing alarm has just started.

Henry (shrieking to be heard): It's just a false alarm! Nothing to be worried about! It's just a test! Absolutely nothing I can't handle...!

(Numbers are flashing by on his screen. Henry's frantically typing but it's having no effect on his screen. The situation is obviously out of hand. Mitchell and Roderick look at each other hopelessly. The head soldier, despite his illness, jumps to his feet.)

Head soldier (jerking his head towards Henry): Get him out of there.

(His soldiers obey and Henry is dragged from the room.)

You! (He is speaking to Roderick.) Fix it.

(Roderick gets into Henry's seat and hits *Control, Alt, Delete* and the screen goes dead. The head soldier watches this before stomping out of the room.)

Roderick (almost to himself): It's all over.

EPISODE FOURTEEN

Scene ONE

Setting: Same as last scene. (Same day. The computer lab. Henry and the head soldier are gone, but other soldiers still remain to guard the prisoners.)

Roderick: Mitchell, man, we've got to get out of here.

Mitchell: I agree. We've got to get him back somehow.

(Roderick just stares at him.)

Roderick: Oh. You mean Henry.

Mitchell: Of course I mean Henry! Who else would I mean?

Roderick: I mean we've got to get out of here. You and I. We have to escape. Henry's going to talk. He's going to tell him we're all in it. We're dead, Mitchell. If we don't get out of here, in like the next 60 seconds, those soldiers are going to come back for us.

Mitchell: What you're suggesting is disgustingly selfish. I'm not going to waste my breath telling you what a rapacious bastard I think you are. However, from a purely pragmatic point of view, how do you suggest we escape? We are still surrounded by soldiers. We are in an armed compound. We have never attempted to escape before, why start now?

Roderick: Because now we have no other option. Before we could bluff it to stay alive. Don't you get it, Mitchell? When Henry talks, we're dead men. Don't you remotely get it?

Mitchell: Why do you so quickly assume Henry's going to talk? We're his friends, for crying out loud...

Roderick (exploding): Grow up Mitchell! This is Henry we're talking about! *Henry!* He panics when his printer starts beeping! He sweats every time a soldier comes near him! He goes around loudly wishing he were dead because the strain is getting to him...!

Mitchell (returning to his screen): In any case, I wouldn't leave without Elinor and Clio.

Roderick (glancing over his shoulder at the soldiers who are now watching him): I'm telling you buddy, the first chance I get, I'm out of here.

Scene TWO

Setting: Same day. Same time. In the filing room. The alarm, though quieter, can be heard. Elinor and Clio are surreptitiously talking as they file.

Clio: ...They're right, you know. She isn't here.

Elinor: I hope nothing too awful has happened to her. I wonder if this alarm has anything to do with it. Poor girl.

Clio (suddenly): What was her name again?

Elinor: Cynthia. I don't remember her last name. Why?

(Clio wordlessly holds up a piece of paper. She and Elinor just stare at each other.)

Oh dear.

(Elinor bites her lip to keep from crying.)

Clio (as she files the paper): Why do you suppose? That's what scares me. It seems so arbitrary. I mean, why her and not us, for example?

Elinor: If we knew what she and the soldiers were talking about...

(She is interrupted by the chubby flushed soldier coming up and grabbing both of the arm.)

Soldier: OK you two. You're coming with me! I'm sick of you talking and finally I get to do something about it!

Clio (realising the seriousness, speaks earnestly): Please don't! I promise we won't talk ever again! Really...!

Soldier: Shut up. I have orders. You're coming with me...

Scene THREE

Setting: Same day, in the evening. The whole camp is outside in the courtyard with soldiers surrounding the prisoners to keep them in order. It is cold but is no longer the heart of winter.

Mitchell's voice: It was an awful day. Roderick and I were huddled together for warmth. Henry had seemingly disappeared since being dragged away from his computer and I couldn't see Elinor

and Clio in the crowd... And then I saw them...

(From the edges of the crowd come three pairs of soldiers, each pair escorting someone.)

Mitchell (slowly): Oh no. Oh God no. Not this...

(It comes into focus who the three people are, Henry, Clio and Elinor. With their escorts they are marched to the front of the crowd where the head soldier and his entourage are waiting.)

Head soldier (yelling to be heard): Today you are going to see what happens to traitors here! Here we have a man who had the audacity to think he could destroy our Early Warning System and make us vulnerable to our enemies! (He slaps Henry across the face. Henry looks terrified.) And here we have two women who think they can incite sedition among their fellow prisoners. (He glares at Clio and Elinor.)

Mitchell's voice: That's the moment I'll never forget. I looked at Elinor and there was no fear in her eyes. There was a serenity there that I've never seen in anyone's face since. They were all going to their death as martyrs, I realised. Henry was the unwilling sacrificial lamb, but Elinor was the willing Messiah. Clio, well you know Clio, she was game for anything, even death, I'm sure. But at that moment she looked ticked off.

(Henry, Clio, and Elinor are shoved up against the wall. The head soldier reaches for his gun and points it at Henry.)

Head soldier: This is what we do to traitors. (He pulls the trigger and Henry crumbles. Then he aims at Clio and pulls the triggers. She goes down. Then Elinor and she goes down. The crowd is silent. Roderick and Mitchell are just staring. Mitchell is crying silently.)

Scene FOUR

Setting: Just after the execution. The hallway between the dorms. The alarms start going off again. The head soldier takes quick control.

Head soldier (pointing to Roderick and Mitchell): Get these men to the computers! (To some other soldiers.) Get the prisoners in their room! The rest of you, follow me!

(The soldiers disperse to do their jobs. Roderick and Mitchell are being dragged down the hallway by two soldiers, but before they can make it around the corner, a grenade explodes in front of them. They are thrown back. From the smoke emerges soldiers in a different uniform.)

Roderick (joyfully): They're inside! They're inside! C'mon!

(While the two soldiers begin to fire the guns at the new invaders, Roderick grabs Mitchell and drags him into a utility closet. Gunfire and bedlam continue outside.)

Scene FIVE

Setting: The camp compound, fifty years later. A stage has been set up, and rows and rows of chairs are filled with people. Mitchell, an old man, is in the front row. Roderick, also old, is at the podium in the middle of a speech.

Roderick: ...And so on this fiftieth anniversary commemorating the liberation of this camp, I would like to recall your attention to the great hero of that day, the closest friend I ever had, Henry Linnguard, who's courageous obliteration of the enemies' Early Warning System enabled our brave soldiers to storm and take over this compound that was serving as the enemies' headquarters. Taking over this compound turned the tide of war and we were able to at last liberate ourselves from the tyranny that had fallen on our fair land...

(The camera focuses on Mitchell.)

Mitchell's voice: Roderick had written his memoirs, of course. It was a very lucrative enterprise since he had intimately known the three greatest heroes of our day, Henry, Clio and Elinor. Henry was a war hero. In his memoirs Roderick never let on that it was purely accidental that Henry had destroyed the Early Warning System. In fact, there was a lot left out and a lot of embellishment. But I didn't really care. I had lost the only thing that meant anything to me and nothing else seemed to matter. Clio and Elinor's names and works lived on. They were remembered as courageous and bold in their faith, bringing comfort in a godless place. Roderick's memoirs further inflamed these ideas and I wouldn't be surprised if someday they are made official saints.

As for me, I got my wish to *entertain the lag-end of my life with quiet hours*. I have led a peaceful life. The war was enough excitement for me. (There is a pause and he speaks slower.) If our liberators had only come an hour earlier, just one hour earlier, I would have had someone to share my life with. But for one little hour...

(The camera pulls back further and further, turning into an aerial view of the compound and finally turning into a view of the clouds.)