

## **ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

**Copyright Protection.** This play (the “Play”) is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, and the Berne Convention.

**Reservation of Rights.** All rights to this Play are strictly reserved, including, without limitation, professional and amateur stage performance rights; motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video, and sound recording rights; rights to all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction now known or yet to be invented, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, photocopying, and information storage and retrieval systems; and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

**Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments.** Amateur and stock performance rights to this Play are controlled exclusively by Playscripts, Inc. (“Playscripts”). No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this Play without obtaining advance written permission from Playscripts. Required royalty fees for performing this Play are specified online at the Playscripts website ([www.playscripts.com](http://www.playscripts.com)). Such royalty fees may be subject to change without notice. Although this book may have been obtained for a particular licensed performance, such performance rights, if any, are not transferable. Required royalties must be paid every time the Play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. All licensing requests and inquiries concerning amateur and stock performance rights should be addressed to Playscripts (see contact information on opposite page).

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to the author's agent: Val Day, William Morris Agency, 1325 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019.

**Restriction of Alterations.** There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the Play, including the changing of character gender, the cutting of dialogue, or the alteration of objectionable language, unless directly authorized by Playscripts. The title of the Play shall not be altered.

**Author Credit.** Any individual or group receiving permission to produce this Play is required to give credit to the author as the sole and exclusive author of the Play. This obligation applies to the title page of every program distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in any instance that the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing, or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and of a font size at least 50% as large as the largest letter used in the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the author. The name of the author may not be abbreviated or otherwise altered from the form in which it appears in this Play.

**Publisher Attribution.** All programs, advertisements, and other printed material distributed or published in connection with the amateur or stock production of the Play shall include the following notice:

**Produced by special arrangement with Playscripts, Inc.  
([www.playscripts.com](http://www.playscripts.com))**

**Prohibition of Unauthorized Copying.** Any unauthorized copying of this book or excerpts from this book is strictly forbidden by law. Except as otherwise permitted by applicable law, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including, without limitation, photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Playscripts.

**Statement of Non-affiliation.** This Play may include references to brand names and trademarks owned by third parties, and may include references to public figures. Playscripts is not necessarily affiliated with these public figures, or with the owners of such trademarks and brand names. Such references are included solely for parody, political comment, or other permitted purposes.

**Permissions for Sound Recordings and Musical Works.** This Play may contain directions calling for the performance of a portion, or all, of a musical work, or performance of a sound recording of a musical work. Playscripts has not obtained permissions to perform such works. The producer of this Play is advised to obtain such permissions, if required in the context of the production. The producer is directed to the websites of the U.S. Copyright Office ([www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)), ASCAP ([www.ascap.com](http://www.ascap.com)), BMI ([www.bmi.com](http://www.bmi.com)), and NMPA ([www.nmpa.org](http://www.nmpa.org)) for further information on the need to obtain permissions, and on procedures for obtaining such permissions.

## The Rules in Brief

- 1) Do NOT perform this Play without obtaining prior permission from Playscripts, and without paying the required royalty.
- 2) Do NOT photocopy, scan, or otherwise duplicate any part of this book.
- 3) Do NOT alter the text of the Play, change a character's gender, delete any dialogue, or alter any objectionable language, unless explicitly authorized by Playscripts.
- 4) DO provide the required credit to the author and the required attribution to Playscripts in all programs and promotional literature associated with any performance of this Play.

*For more details on these and other rules, see the opposite page.*

## Copyright Basics

This Play is protected by United States and international copyright law. These laws ensure that playwrights are rewarded for creating new and vital dramatic work, and protect them against theft and abuse of their work.

A play is a piece of property, fully owned by the playwright, just like a house or car. You must obtain permission to use this property, and must pay a royalty fee for the privilege—*whether or not you charge an admission fee*. Playscripts collects these required payments on behalf of the author.

**Anyone who violates an author's copyright is liable as a copyright infringer under United States and international law.** Playscripts and the author are entitled to institute legal action for any such infringement, which can subject the infringer to actual damages, statutory damages, and attorneys' fees. A court may impose statutory damages of up to \$150,000 for willful copyright infringements. U.S. copyright law also provides for possible criminal sanctions. Visit the website of the U.S. Copyright Office ([www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)) for more information.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** If you break copyright law, you are robbing a playwright and opening yourself to expensive legal action. Follow the rules, and when in doubt, ask us.

Playscripts, Inc.  
P.O. Box 237060  
New York, NY 10023

Phone/fax: 1-866-NEW-PLAY (639-7529)  
Email: [questions@playscripts.com](mailto:questions@playscripts.com)  
Web: [www.playscripts.com](http://www.playscripts.com)

## Cast of Characters

MOLL *a girl who invents things*

OLIVER *a virgin*

THE NARRATOR *a mellifluous voice (female)*

THE MERCENARY *a master of disguises, including:*

GARTH *a heartbreaker*

A PAWNSHOP CLERK

A SATYR

A FIG TREE

MR. WACHTEL *a black marketeer*

& FATHER

& VOICE ONE

& TRIPLE-A GUIDE

MISS KENDRICK *a music teacher*

& MOTHER

& VOICE TWO

& AMWAY SALESLADY

CREEPY PHONE VOICE & CAR SALESMAN VOICE should be played by the actor playing the Mercenary. The COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER and the INTELLIGENT PERSONS should be played by other members of the company.

## Production Notes

**Microphones.** There are at least three free-standing microphones or body mikes. In the background, a Foley artist with a baroque assortment of instruments, household objects and noisy junk. As many of the play's sounds as possible should be produced live.

**Projections.** Sound effects in bold are meant to be seen as well as heard. *Sound of a violent recognition*, for example, indicates that these words are to be projected, so that the audience can see the distance between the intended sound and the actual one. Part of letting them in on the game. Scene titles should also be projected.

**The Narrator.** In addition to narrating, she might manipulate the slide projector, like an ambassador between the machine and the audience.

**Onomatopoeia.** Late in the play, words become replaced by onomatopoeia, indicated by brackets. For example: "Monday is the first [*clang*] of the week." Produced by the Foley Artist, this is a kind of percussion that seems to come from the actors' mouths.

## Acknowledgements

*Kid-Simple* had its first workshop in the New Plays Festival (Ruth Margraff, Artistic Director) at Brown University in March 2002. The cast included Matt Biagini, Georgia Cohen, Josh Green, Rebecca Melsky, Sarah Petersiel, Lance Rubin, and Sam Kusnetz, who was the sound designer as well as the Foley artist. The director was Maria Goyanes.



All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

*Kid-Simple* had its first workshop in the New Plays Festival at Brown University in March 2002 and received its world premiere at Actors Theatre of Louisville as part of the 2004 Humana Festival of New American Plays.

# KID-SIMPLE

## A RADIO PLAY IN THE FLESH

by Jordan Harrison

### 1. IN WHICH BOOKS ARE OPENED AND THROATS CLEARED.

*Sound of a great tome opening.*

*Sound of a throat cleared with majesty.*

**NARRATOR.** Beyond the raging river and the cadaversome chasm, over the mighty mountain, in the finest cul-de-sac of a peaceful town, there lived a clever girl.

**MOLL.** If a cookie jar contains  $n$  gingersnaps,  $n$  being more than 10 but less than 20...

**NARRATOR.** A *very* clever girl. It seemed the cogs in her brain were never at rest.

**MOLL.** ...let  $D^n$  be a linear differential operator with a continuous right inverse—

**NARRATOR.** Her parents were very proud.

**FATHER.** What a clever girl we have, Mother.

**MOTHER.** Clever but ill-at-ease socially, Father. Why does she stay at home with us listening to the Mystery Radio Nostalgia Hour instead of necking with boys like I did back when it was way-back-when?

**FATHER.** In time, Mother. In time.

**NARRATOR.** Moll is her name.

**MOLL.** Molly is for simps, so.

**NARRATOR.** Moll invented things. Instead of softball trophies and hit-parade records, her room was filled with timber and tools...

*Sound of hammering.*

...and Mozart—which they say is good for thinking as well as for making plants grow...

*Sound of the Overture of The Magic Flute.*

and the friction that always exists between fresh contraptions and the world-as-we-knew-it.

*Sound of sandpaper, slowly.*

But no one really knew what Moll was up to in her head.

*Sound of the Overture in full flight.*

Sometimes she stayed in her room all day, furiously at work...

*Sound of hammer and nails and Mozart and sandpaper.*

...but she always emerged in time to sit around the fire with her folks and listen to the Hilberson's-Brand Hot Dog Mystery Radio Nostalgia Hour.

*Sound of radio static.*

**FATHER.** There we are.

**COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER.**

Imagine, for a moment, a hot dog.

If the picture that comes to mind is a wiener in a bun, think again!

There are a zillion ways to prepare this immortal tastebud tempter:

“Take the chill out of winter with a hearty hotdog soup,

Keep your cool in summer with a piquant hotdog salad,

Best of all, satisfy the gourmet inside *you* by whipping up an epicurean hotdog delight”<sup>1</sup> with the help of Hilberson's All-Beef Foot-Long Finest!

And now, sit back and enjoy the fifth nail-biting installment of “*Death and the Music Teacher*.”

*Mother and Father move into the shadowy space of the radio broadcast, becoming Kendrick and Wachtel. We are in a realm where our eyes are less useful now.*

*Sound of empty park swings creaking in the wind.*

*Preferably, a winter wind.*

**WACHTEL.** How does it feel to be totally in my power?

<sup>1</sup> Mettja C. Roate, *The New Hotdog Cookbook*.

**MISS KENDRICK.** It isn't necessary to blindfold me, Mr. Wachtel.

**WACHTEL.** This is how we do business in this business. The fold comes off once I trust you.

**MISS KENDRICK.** I came to you to share something extraordinary. Why would I do anything funny?

**WACHTEL.** Show me something extraordinary then.

*Sound of latches undone, with difficulty.*

**MISS KENDRICK.** (*Excited:*) Here. The inscription reads Bolokva, and I wondered could it be, really and truly could it be?

**WACHTEL.** Miss Kendrick. What makes you think you say a name like that and Open Sesame? Bolokva is a crucial name, this is true. But it is a city name, not a maker. Say you're here selling me a car. Say you're a salesman saying:

**CAR SALESMAN VOICE.** (*Slithery and slimy:*) Wachtel buddy, I've got a Detroit here, beautiful '87 Detroit Coupe, runs like molasses in August.

**WACHTEL.** Sounds dynamite, but how do I know if that coupe's a Ford a Dodge a Pontiac or what? It doesn't make sense in the head, the way you're talking. A woman in your position to a man in mine.

**MISS KENDRICK.** (*Mustering strength:*) You do relish your little ring of power.

**WACHTEL.** Miss Kendrick. You play like Casals, you look like Garbo...

**CAR SALESMAN VOICE.** ...but that doesn't make you Lee Iacocca in this business.

**WACHTEL.** *I'm* the smartie in this business. I know about your guy here just by looking. I know from the varnish he's ages old. Late 17<sup>th</sup> century, could be top of the 18<sup>th</sup>—any later they don't have this color in the resin. Clearly he's been through a lot. Battle scars here here and here. That stain—blood maybe? Blood of a former owner. Court musician who displeased the queen.

*Sound of a string breaking. Violent dissonance.*

Dainty he ain't, but sometimes deformity yields the most distinctive timbre. But do I know he's what you say he is, sight-unheard? I mean...

**CAR SALESMAN VOICE.** You don't know how a car runs by the paint job.

**MISS KENDRICK.** Or a book by its cover, I tell my students.

**WACHTEL.** I've got to protect myself from charlatans, Miss Kendrick. There are three Speechless Cellos in the whole wide world. That we know of. Two are owned by the Chinese government, which has been trying its darndest to get them to mate. It's near unheard-of in captivity. The third one is in the private collection of Baron Von Schygullhösen. And now you come out of the woodwork telling me you just happened upon one quite by accident...

**WACHTEL.**

... well it's just awful fancy to believe.

**CAR SALESMAN.**

...well it's just awful fancy to believe.

**MISS KENDRICK.** It would be difficult to believe, if it weren't true.

**WACHTEL.** Ho—she's feisty, this one...

**MISS KENDRICK.** I am not.

**WACHTEL.** ...but I can't make exceptions, even for blue-chip dames like yourself: If he turns out to be a sham, Miss Kendrick, then my man Big Pete will stuff you in that case there and toss you in the river and you can float back to your kindergartners practicing their "Go Tell Aunt Rhody."

*Sound of sinister music swelling. A minor-key rendition of "Go Tell Aunt Rhody."*

**COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER.** Will the sinister Wachtel send sweet Miss Kendrick down the river? Tune in tomorrow, if your spine can take any more tingling, for the next installment of—

*Sound of the radio off with a click. Mother and Father have returned to their comfy family den.*

**MOTHER.** That Mister Wachtel gives me the heebie-jeebies.

**FATHER.** That Miss Kendrick can come serenade me any time.

**MOLL.** I think you're both loony. Pass me the piquant hot dog salad.

*They laugh wholesomely until everyone feels a bit queasy.*

## **2. IN WHICH MOLL DISCOVERS HER OWN CIRCUITRY.**

*Sound of hammer and nails and Mozart and sandpaper.*

**NARRATOR.** In preparation for the regional science fair, Moll had taken to staying in her room so long that her hair would become a tangled nest and the sweat of mental exertion would trickle down her neck and Mother would have to bring her dinner...

**MOTHER.** Meatloaf and mashers and a heaping pile of succotash.

**NARRATOR.** ...to her room on a tray.

**MOTHER.** Knock-knock.

*Sound of machinery clattering to the floor, quite loud.*

**MOLL.** MOM! I TOLD YOU NEVER INTERRUPT ME WHILE I'M MAKING THINGS.

**NARRATOR.** Moll's temper was as active as her imagination.

**MOLL.** NEVER NEVER NEVER, IT'S DANGEROUS.

**MOTHER.** I don't care if she's some kind of genius, Father. The tone she's been taking—

**MOLL.** I cannot be distracted—the equilibrium!

**FATHER.** What the devil is she doing in there?

**MOLL.** I can't tell anyone till it's finished.

**NARRATOR.** (*Stage whisper:*) She was making a machine for hearing sounds that can't be heard.

**MOLL.** It just might be my greatest thing *ever*.

**NARRATOR.** It should be mentioned that there are two principal schools of inventing. In the Apollonian School, every part has its

proper place, every atom is accounted for. In the Dionysian School, the freeform philosophy—

**MOLL.** The artistic mess!

**NARRATOR.** (*Rather impatient:*) ...to which Moll chiefly subscribed, the inventor gathers whatever suits her fancy...

*Sound of a creative din.*

**NARRATOR.** A broken TV antenna.

**MOLL.** For tuning.

**NARRATOR.** A woofer (or was it a tweeter?) from her Father's old stereo.

**MOLL.** For amplifying.

**NARRATOR.** The mouth of an antique Victrola.

**MOLL.** For listening.

**NARRATOR.** Nearly a mile of copper plated wire, all told.

**MOLL.** For wiring.

**NARRATOR.** And a million more

**MOLL.** *a zillion*

**NARRATOR.** more things, all piled high.

**MOLL.** Glorious! Still...

**NARRATOR.** Something was missing.

*Sound of an unpromising mechanical whirr.*

**MOLL.** A human touch. That's all it needs.  
A bit of God-designed listening equipment.

**NARRATOR.** And so Moll contributed a piece of herself, literally...

*Sound of Moll smacking the side of her head.*

**MOLL.** Come out of there!

**NARRATOR.** The tiniest bone in her body, deep in the middle ear...

**MOLL.** The stirrup bone, which is just an eighth of an inch long, and sometimes goes by its Latin name, the *stapes*.

*Sound of more smacking.*

**NARRATOR.** It took some persuading to dislodge it from her skull. When the little bone finally emerged...

*Sound of a satisfying “ping.”*

**NARRATOR.** ...she planted it in the mechanical heart of the machine...

**MOLL.** Now part of me will always be with you.

**NARRATOR.** And the whole mess seemed to come, improbably, to life.

*Sound of the machine coming to life, creakily.*

*Lights rise on the Foley table for the first time: It is the Machine.*

**NARRATOR.**

And just like that

Her familiar room quivered and crackled  
with previously undiscovered universes:

The aching backs of load-bearing walls,

Dust bunnies stomping like pachyderms

Across the unswept floor.

But nothing was so deafening as the thoughts in her very own head.

*Sound of the cogs turning in her head.*

**MOLL.** Eureka!

**NARRATOR.** Finally, the big day of the science fair arrived.

*Moll stands before a chalkboard full of calculations.*

**MOLL.** It's easy, it's kid-simple.

Tune with the antennae, with the knobs and presto:

You can hear toenails growing on a field mouse.

You can hear if someone's lying by their breath.

You can hear your way through the dark, like bats.

Um...

*An instant when she seems to lose her way, then:*

**MOLL.**

...Just like that!

*Sound of cogs in her head.*

**MOLL.** If you listen close, you can even hear an essence inside an accident.

**NARRATOR.** The panel of judges, glassy-eyed from an afternoon of appraising potato plants and sea monkeys, snapped suddenly awake.

**MOLL.** The stethoscope attachment permits high-precision listening: Objects can tell you what they've overheard. (Objects are the best eavesdroppers, on account of no one suspects them.)

*She holds the stethoscope up to the chalkboard. We hear many voices, swirling and cacophonous, like something from Dante's Inferno. Frightening. (A change in font indicates a new voice.)*

**CHORUS OF TEACHERS.** Missy Sperling, is that gum in your mouth off one more time, Mister, and you're headed to detention for the rest of your natural life is a great beautiful adventure, except the parts that make you want to end it *all in single file or we won't go out to recess, period, comma, or question mark?* Who can tell me what punctuation belongs *here on the equator, we find Kenya where it is very hot all the Time!* Pencils down on your desks, pencils *down the road from the first little pig lived his brother in the house of sticks* who can tell me if this state of matter is a liquid, a gas, or a *solid citizen wouldn't cut in front of a lady, he would open the doorway to tomorrow* is keyboarding skills—if you don't know your Control from your Caps Lock, how can you expect to plan for the *future of the giant panda is still uncertain, if only man could learn that the world belongs to animals as well as people* may want to have their hair cut nicely before class picture day because a photograph is forever you know *running in the halls, Billy Dumpsch!*

*Moll removes the stethoscope. Sudden quiet.*

**MOLL.** Any questions?

**NARRATOR.** Even without the aid of the machine, one could have heard a pin drop in a haystack.

**MOLL.** I call it... The Third Ear!

*Sound of applause, overlapping the following lines.*

**NARRATOR.** Not only did Moll take top honors at the fair...

**MOLL.** Three years running!

**NARRATOR.** ...the Third Ear landed her on *American Egghead Quarterly's* Junior Overachiever List. She received fourteen fan letters, eight accusations of witchcraft, and one creepy phone call.

**CREEPY PHONE VOICE.** Ring ring. Ring ring.

**MOLL.** Moll here.

**CREEPY PHONE VOICE.** You're the girl with the machine?

**MOLL.** I have a lot of machines.

**CREEPY PHONE VOICE.** My clients are prepared to offer a good bit of money for the blueprints.

**MOLL.** I'm not sure you know what you're dealing with.

**CREEPY PHONE VOICE.** Kid-simple, you said so yourself.

**MOLL.** There are still some kinks. It could be very destructive, if—

**CREEPY PHONE VOICE.** You could be a very rich young lady.

*Pause.*

**MOLL.** Don't call here again.

*Sound of the receiver put down.*

Creepsters.

**NARRATOR.** Things went back to normal more or less, until one day she was walking home from Math Club.

*Sound of Moll's footsteps, then another set of footsteps shadowing her. She stops. Nothing. She starts again and the second steps resume. She stops.*

**MOLL.** What do you want? (*Silence.*) I can see you behind that telephone pole.

**GARTH.** I've been following you.

**MOLL.** Well, cut it out.

**GARTH.** Are you the girl?

**MOLL.** I'm a girl.

**GARTH.** The girl with the machine.

**MOLL.** I have a lot of machines.

**GARTH.** I'm Garth.

*Sound of hair gel being smoothed back.*

**MOLL.** I'm Moll. Hi.

**GARTH.** 'Sup.

**NARRATOR.** It should be mentioned that these two are at an age of hormonal tumult.

**GARTH.** Moll.

*2 seconds of silence.*

**MOLL.** Garth.

**NARRATOR.** It's possible Moll would have noticed the faintest similarity between Garth's distinctive phonation...

**GARTH.** 'Sup.

**NARRATOR.** ...and the voice on the phone, earlier that week. But her recent sacrifice in the name of science had left her somewhat deaf in one ear.

**MOLL.** Pardon?

**GARTH.** I said maybe I could carry your books?

**MOLL.** Oh. Here.

*Sound like a great door slamming.*

**GARTH.** Oof! How many classes are you taking?

**MOLL.** I like to do a little extra reading.

**NARRATOR.** Like most people, Moll is susceptible to flattery...

**GARTH.** I think it's bitchin' the way you use your head and stuff.

**NARRATOR.** ...and things moved quickly for the pair.

**GARTH.** You're, like, the sun and the moon and the stars and all.

**NARRATOR.** He touched her on the cheek, lightly.

**MOLL.** Thank you very much.

**NARRATOR.** Very quickly indeed. It felt to Moll like the Earth was spinning faster than normal.

**GARTH.** This is my room, so.

*Pause.*

**NARRATOR.** He touched her on the shoulder, lightly.

*In the following, Moll's interior thoughts are indicated by italics. Different and reverberant, these should be spoken into a body mike or standing microphone. The overall effect should be a seamless current of speech.*

**MOLL.** *Back in my room I was safe I was safe and now here I am in his clutches but this is what you wanted didn't you want to know what it feels like your place a lot, Garth. The Screeching Weasel poster really cozies it up, even if the feng shui could be better be gentle, he'd better. I'm not one of those smitten by the brute, by the boot, thanks Sylvia Plath, but no thanks for dinner! I've never had buffalo wings with ranch dressing before, is that a regional delicacy or what is that rather unpleasant boy-musk is that cologne you're wearing or what IS that? probably he slaps a pint of horse piss under his pits every morning before heading out to tear the wings off ladybugs that's what boys do you think it's hot in here? it seems hot but maybe I just have bad circulation in my extremities it isn't good for the blood to Stop talking stop talking this instant stop.*

**GARTH.** Stop talking, babe. Relax. Garth's gonna take care of you.

**MOLL.** *Better take care, you better be delicate. Ms. Hanrahan in Sex Ed said it's like a flower opening inside you but she was probably ordered to say that or else the species would cease to put babies on this earth feels like it's spinning faster than normal or is it just methinks the curious contortions of the human body are not for me, last chance to run to get me to a nunnery go!*

**GARTH.** I'm gonna go put on some mood tunes. You just lie back and let yourself feel moody-like.

**MOLL.** *But he's certainly All right in the hospitality department maybe you haven't been fair probably he had a maladjusted childhood not everyone has fireside radio family time probably he had a stutter and that's why he doesn't venture words containing more than one syll—*

*Her thoughts are drowned out by the opening guitar lick from the Rolling Stones' "Miss You."*

***Get-it-on music.***

*When the music subsides, time has passed.*

**GARTH.** Oh man, Molls—

Can I call you that now that we're boyfriend and girlfriend?

You, I mean—

I mean, you—

**GARTH.**

What am I trying to say?

**MOLL.**

What are you trying to say?

**NARRATOR.** What did a headstrong inventress see in this ill-groomed monosyllabizer? you might be asking yourselves.

**GARTH.** What I mean is, you're one-hundred percent sexy.

*Moll doesn't know what to say.*

**MOLL.** Thank you very much.

**NARRATOR.** Perhaps Moll *fancied* being the keener one of the two. Or perhaps she just fancied the contrast between the hard metal stud in his brow and his long long eyelashes.

*Sound like moving through tall grass.*

Perhaps Garth's heart condition made him seem like he needed her protection.

*Sound of an irregular heartbeat.*

But perhaps most of all, she loved the things Garth was teaching her:

To hold a cigarette like Jean-Paul Belmondo.

*Sound of Moll coughing.*

To walk through the streets of a city like they were nothing but her backyard...

**GARTH.** Gotcha something.

*It is a very cheap ring.*

**MOLL.** Um, shiny.

**NARRATOR.** To put her skepticism away on a high high shelf...

**GARTH.** I found it on the sidewalk and I thought, maybe you can wear it around your neck? That way it doesn't mean getting *married*—

**MOLL.** (*Agreeing very quickly:*) Nooo.

**GARTH.** but it means I think you're, wow.

*Sound of a kiss.*

**NARRATOR.** ...To put down her gadgets and pay some attention to her own circuitry. Perhaps.

*Another, longer kiss.*

**GARTH.** Hey, Molls?

**MOLL.** Mmm.

**GARTH.** You mind showing me that Ear doohickey tomorrow?

**MOLL.** What?

**GARTH.** I'd be real intrigued to see it.

**NARRATOR.** At any other time, Garth's mastery of a word like "intrigued" would have raised her suspicions. But Moll was in no state for semantic nit-pickery.

**MOLL.** Yeah whatever, it's in my locker. Tomorrow. Come here.

*The Rolling Stones take over again.*

**3. IN WHICH LIFE IMITATES ART OR IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?**

**NARRATOR.** It seemed to Moll's parents that they hardly ever saw her anymore.

*Very rapidly:*

**MOTHER.** Peaches.

**FATHER.** Pumpkin.

**MOTHER.** Cupcake.

**FATHER.** Cutiepatootie.

**MOTHER & FATHER.** Aren't you going to listen to the Hilber-son's-Brand Hotdog Mystery Radio Nostalgia Hour with us tonight like always?

**MOLL.** Garth's gonna call any minute.

**MOTHER.** (*"Yum"*) Garth with the green green eyes.

**FATHER.** Garth with the *shifty* eyes.

**MOLL.** I have a problem set due, so. We're going to...study together.

**MOTHER.** (*Enticingly:*) Invite him over. I made hot dog canapés.

*Sound of radio static.*

**FATHER.** It's only just starting.

*Sound of empty park swings in the wind. Preferably a winter wind.*

**MISS KENDRICK.** The blindfold, Mr. Wachtel.

**WACHTEL.** Everything was as you said it would be, Miss Kendrick.

**MISS KENDRICK.** Why, then, am I still bereft as a bat?

*Sound of a blindfold removed.*

**WACHTEL.** Most unusual, a woman who's true to her word.

**MISS KENDRICK.** Do we have a deal then, Mr. Wachtel?

Do we have a deal or do you still intend to send me down the river?

**WACHTEL.** You're a hard-headed woman, Miss Kendrick. But my head is even harder. I can give you the price we discussed or I can take him from you forceful-like.

**MISS KENDRICK.** You wouldn't dare. Like birdsong, his music depends on his mood.

He plays Bach when he's blissful  
And Bloch when he's blue.  
But you know as well as I do,  
He won't play if he smells danger.

**WACHTEL.** He can't smell anything, woman. He's a bloody cello.

**MISS KENDRICK.** He's a very *special* cello.  
He plays notes you can only hear outside your ear.

**WACHTEL.** What are you riddling for, Kendrick?  
You think I don't know what you got here?

**MISS KENDRICK.** You know years, you know makers, you know *varnish*. But do you know how an instrument can reveal whole worlds of sound?

How it enchants—repels—  
Swoops—trembles—triumphs—  
Defeats—whispers—thrums!  
How it can do such things  
That you'd cross the earth to find it?

There are more notes, Mister Wachtel, than you or I are fit to hear.

**WACHTEL.** You think I can't make him speak, Miss Kendrick, With my arthritic knuckles and my decidedly unmusical temperament? Think again, music teacher...

**WACHTEL.**  
A Rolls Royce drives just as  
well for the poor man as it does  
for the Earl of Ritzzyville.

**CAR SALESMAN.**  
A Rolls Royce drives just as  
well for the poor man as it does  
for the Earl of Ritzzyville.

**MISS KENDRICK.** I don't care about your metaphors or your money, Mr. Wachtel.

I just want my cello to have a safe and proper home where all the world can enjoy his music.

*Sound of the phone ringing.*

**MISS KENDRICK.**

I won't surrender  
him to a bunch of  
barbarians, Mr. Wachtel. Yes,  
thugs and barbarians.

**MOLL.**

I'll get it!  
Moll here.

I told you not to  
call me again.

**WACHTEL.** Thin ice, Miss Kendrick. Thin ice.

**MISS KENDRICK.**

I'd have to be crazy to let you  
sell him to the highest bidder,  
piece by piece.

**MOLL.**

I'd have to be crazy to tell you  
its secrets; its wires and  
workings.

**WACHTEL.** On the contrary, Kendrick. You'd be wise to pocket the percentage.

**MISS KENDRICK.**

You can't make me do anything.

**MOLL.**

What does that mean,  
"or else"?

**WACHTEL.** You can be *persuaded*, Miss Kendrick.

**MISS KENDRICK.**

I know my rights, Mr. Wachtel.  
  
Maybe I should take my business  
to the Historical Society.

**MOLL.**

It's my machine, mine. It came  
from my head fully-formed and  
it has enough juice to destroy  
NOISE AS WE KNOW IT  
so you see it's not  
going to leave my sight!  
GOOD. BYE.

Goodbye,  
Mr. Wachtel.

I won't come calling again.

*Sound of a door slamming.*

*Sound of the receiver slammed.*

**MOTHER & FATHER.** Who was THAT?

**MOLL.** Um. Jennie Doherty wanted my Chem notes so I told her she better go find someone with shakier ethics and copy from them.

**FATHER.** That's my girl.

*Sound of a dial tone. Quite loud.*

**NARRATOR.** Moll waited by the phone all that night, but Garth never called. The next day at school, she opened her locker and found only a note.

*Sound of a locker door opened.*

**NARRATOR.** A note and a big empty space where her splendid machine, where...

**NARRATOR.**  
...the Third Ear  
used to be.

**MOLL.** (*Aghast:*)  
The Third Ear!

*Moll begins to read.*

**GARTH.** Dear Moll:  
I'm afraid you've been had.  
Our love, I'm afraid, was a hoax.  
It was the Ear I wanted all along.  
You would have been paid top dollar,  
If only you'd cooperated.  
I'm not a teen rebel, see.  
I'm a secret operative, a master of disguise  
with a decade of reconnaissance experience.  
You were seduced by my temporary form  
As many are.  
Sometimes I am a beautiful woman with red hair.  
Sometimes I am a salamander.  
Other times I am an agitated molecule.  
Whatever happens to be useful.  
Do not try to find me.  
I won't look like me anyway.  
Sincerely,  
Garth  
or, should I say,  
(*His voice changing to the Mercenary's monotone:*)  
**THE MERCENARY.**

*Sound of paper torn into very small pieces.*

#### 4. IN WHICH THINGS ARE HEARD BEYOND THE REACH OF HEARING.

**NARRATOR.** Far from the fine cul-de-sac, past the penumbra of street lamps, a duo with dark intentions was huddling in the darkness. It was so *dark* in fact that no one, including a certain astigmatic Narrator; no one, themselves included, could tell exactly where they were.

*Sound of a heartbeat. Growing closer, growing louder.*

*Then:*

*Sound of another heartbeat. Growing closer and louder.*

*For some moments, they beat a duet.*

**VOICES ONE & TWO.** That you?

*Pause.*

**ONE & TWO.** Over here.

*Sound of a bump.*

**TWO.** Ouch! I can't see with all this dark.

**ONE.** How do you think bats improved? With a lot of darkness. With a lot of patience and a lot of perseverance, that's how.

**TWO.** It's *eons* to evolve, Number One.

**ONE.** Soon we'll hear the Grand Design, Number Two. Wait and see.

**TWO.** But I *can't* see.

*(The following very rapidly:)*

**ONE.** Wait.

**TWO.** What.

**ONE.** Did you hear?

**TWO.** No.

**ONE.** Now.

*Sound of an irregular heartbeat. It is Garth/The Mercenary. For some moments, the hearts beat in a trio.*

**ONE & TWO.** You.

**THE MERCENARY.** How did you know?

**TWO.** That beat—

*Sound of One and Two giggling.*

**ONE.** There's no mistaking it.

**THE MERCENARY.** It's called arrhythmia and it's nothing to laugh about.

**ONE.** Do you have the device?

**THE MERCENARY.** I told you I'd get it, didn't I?

**TWO.** Hand it over!

**ONE.** Me first!

**ONE & TWO.** Me me me me me me me.

**THE MERCENARY.** We can all listen. It's got an attachment so everyone can listen.

*Sound of a switch switched. Electricity flowing. They listen. What starts as a submerged sound grows slowly audible: Many different voices in a seamless Babble.*

**BABBLE.** The House Blend, please, with 2 percent and no *sugar*, you're a real nice girl but I think we should see low-lying nimbostratus and stratocumulus in the afternoon, giving way this evening to a cold, clear *Filston Ice Draft*, the closest thing to drinkin' a glacier this side of your future is shrouded in mystery, the queen of pentacles here beside the Hanged Man but—

**ONE.** So much interference. There must be a way—

**TWO.** There must be a button?

**THE MERCENARY.** A tuner, perhaps.

**ONE.** Don't you know?

**TWO.** He doesn't know.

**THE MERCENARY.** Patience. It's simply a matter of fiddling.

**ONE.** (*Fiddling:*) Fiddling wasn't the plan.

**TWO.** (*Fiddling:*) I don't remember fiddling.

**THE MERCENARY.** The girl wouldn't talk.

**ONE.** What if we

**TWO.** Try this?

**ONE.** Ouch!

**TWO.** Oops.

**ONE.** How 'bout.

**MERCENARY.** Here.

**BABBLE.** (*Accelerating:*) —here I see great romance I see *what you're saying, if the GTCWA is to survive, but it doesn't have the overhead to support what did you learn in school today is the first day of the rest of your life is good riddance to that dumb mutt I want a cat scan reveals a growth that must be treated at once with the crusts cut off please put down the gun, John, please put it down the hatch. Delicious.*

**ONE & TWO.** That's it, there's the frequency, there—

*The Babble fades to silence—we can hear their heartbeats again.  
Then:*

*Sound of a gossamer, almost undetectable footfall.*

**ALL.** Did you hear?

**THE MERCENARY.** Water spider on tippy-toe.

**ONE & TWO.** Wow.

*Sound like a great beam of wood straining.*

**ALL.** Did you hear?

**TWO.** Roots in the earth.

*Sound like a great beam of wood straining, then a wall of water.*

**ALL.** Did you hear?

**ONE.** Shipwreck at sea.

**TWO.** All ships wreck at sea.

**ONE.** Some in bays, straits, lagoons. This one far from the reach of hearing.

**TWO.** Poor souls.

**THE MERCENARY.** From *ordinary* hearing, that is.

*Sound like a guillotine chop, then a sickening thud.*

**ONE.** What—what's that?

**THE MERCENARY.** That I think it's...

**TWO.** An execution, maybe?

**ONE.** A woodchuck chucking wood?

*Again, the sound.*

**THE MERCENARY.** It's—

**ONE.** It's—

**TWO.** It's—

*Light rises on Moll.*

**THE MERCENARY.** (*Realizing it's her:*) It's the sound of a broken heart.

## **5. IN WHICH MOLL SAYS WHAT SHE DIDN'T GET TO SAY THE FIRST TIME AROUND.**

*Sound of rage muted by a thick pillow.*

**NARRATOR.** Back at the cul-de-sac, Moll wished the cogs in her head would stop turning for once.

*Sound of the relentless cogs.*

If only, poor girl, she could murder her memory.

*Sound of a knock.*

**GARTH.** Moll? 'Sup.

**MOLL.** Why are you here, you you...**FIGMENT.**

**GARTH.** Look who's a mess.

**MOLL.** Used to be I was your sun and moon and stars. What happened to that?

**GARTH.** (*Not too sorry:*) Yeah, I'm sorry if that was misleading.

*Pause*

**MOLL.** I will get you for this, Garth. The world will have to go without new inventions for some time, because all my ingenuity will be directed toward your undoing. I will GET you for messing with my machine and my sanity.

**NARRATOR.** Did I mention Moll has a temper?

**MOLL.** All of CREATION will get you. You will be FOOD. A plane will drop you over the unforgiving Serengeti with a faulty parachute an empty canteen no sunblock, and when one of these circumstances fells you, you will finally do some good on this planet as recycled material. Your meat will invigorate the ecosystem, your eyes will shrivel into tiny raisins—the albino kind no one favors—and you will be alone, totally alone, for so long that proximity to another body is *novel*. And when you think you'll never see a human face again, I'll swoop in, *deus ex machina*, to say simply: 'Sup.

Your stumpy remains are so glad to see me, looking up to me like a god. But instead of kisses or cool clear water I serve you up a subpoena, bringing to the fore your crimes against United States patent law.

**MAY ALL THIS COME TO PASS.** The loneliness most of all.

**GARTH.** Kinda sucks you have to curse me with *your* life.

**MOLL.** What is this back-talk, Garth?

This is *my* post-facto daydream so...

*Sound of sweaty sweatsocks being removed.*

...you'll say and you'll do what I wish.

*Sound of him pleasuring her toes.*

**MOLL.** That's better.

Now.

*Sound of a sexhalation from Moll.*

Would you say I was the sun and the moon and the stars?

**GARTH.** (*Dreamily:*) You are the sun and the moon and the—

**MOLL.** Whoa whoa whoa.

This little piggy needs more attention.

This little piggy isn't ready for wee wee wee.

Love my feet, boy-fiend

Love them all night

You greedy man-slut, you!

## **6. IN WHICH THE MERCENARY LEARNS FEAR.**

*In the very dark place, just as Moll says "you," The Mercenary cries out.*

**NARRATOR.** Elsewhere...

**ONE.** What is it?

**THE MERCENARY.** There's an awful funny taste in my mouth.  
Like sweatsocks. Ack!

**TWO.** I think I've got gum.

**THE MERCENARY.** Quick! Ick!

*Sound of a wrapper, then chewing.*

**TWO.** Better?

**THE MERCENARY.** Not just the taste. I thought she—I thought I had *her* in my head.

**ONE.** Her who?

**THE MERCENARY.** The girl.

**ONE & TWO.** Impossible.

**NARRATOR.** The two who live in the dark called it impossible,  
But the Mercenary was another story.  
He had seen Moll at work, you see.

*Sound of cogs in her head.*

He had seen her determine the 139th digit of Pi.  
He had seen her petting Schrödinger's cat.

*Sound of a content kitty.*

He had seen her use a particle thrower  
To isolate peanut butter from jelly.

*Sound of solitary jelly.*

So you see, he began to believe it *was* possible  
For her to enter his skull like a cat burglar  
And kick things about as she pleased.  
Anyone using the Third Ear might have  
heard him *quaking in his boots*.

**7. IN WHICH MOLL STEPS INTO A TRAP.**

**NARRATOR.** Like many compulsive people, Moll was a maker of lists.

**MOLL.** Objective 1. Locate the Mercenary. Objective 2. Destroy him utterly and totally and completely without mercy. Objective 3. Locate the Third Ear and rescue it from evil hands before it's too late.

**NARRATOR.** This she underlined several times.

*Sound of a pencil scratching.*

**MOLL.** Before. It's. Too. Late.

**NARRATOR.** But where to begin? Reexamining the Mercenary's note for clues, she found something that had escaped her notice. At the bottom of the page, embossed letters reading:

*Sound of a jingly store bell jingling. We see the Clerk. It is the Mercenary in disguise.*

**MOLL.**  
"Friendly Glen's Pawnshop  
and Nick-Nackery."

**CLERK.**  
Friendly Glen's Pawnshop  
and Nick-Nackery,  
how may I help you?

**NARRATOR.** Behind the counter was exactly the person you'd imagine there. An old widower with smiling cataracts and white hair sprouting everywhere but the top of his head.

**CLERK.** Miss? Are you looking for anything in particular?

**MOLL.** I'm looking for a greasy but somehow irresistible boy with a way of looking at you like he's trying to figure out what makes you tick which makes you feel so totally great and GOD HOW I LOATHE HIM.

**CLERK.** Did you pawn something recently?

**MOLL.** I said a boy, but he could be a man by now. Or a woman, for all I know. I don't know. Greasy though.

**CLERK.** A rebel.

**MOLL.** You remember!

**CLERK.** Nope. Just I know the type.

**MOLL.** Maybe you saw the machine, maybe? It has a stethoscope, antennae, headphones big as earmuffs? Disc on top like a satellite dish?

**CLERK.** Nothing like that. We got a special on musical instruments, though, if music is your thing. We got kazoos up the wazoo. Over here we got pickwicklers.

*Sound like an ailing oboe.*

We got an old foozharp, belonged to Toskernini himself.

*Sound like a harp played with a tennis racket.*

We got a batwali banjo from the other side of the world.

*Sound of a dull thud.*

All she needs is new strings and...

*(Shades of his Car Salesman Voice slipping through:)* she'll be off and running like a Ferrari fresh from a tune-up.

*Sound of a violent recognition.*

**CLERK.** What's the matter?

You're turning a funny color.

**MOLL.** You remind me of somebody.

**CLERK.** (*Uh-oh*) Oh yeah?

**MOLL.** Somebody on the radio.

**CLERK.** (*Less uh-oh*) People are always telling me I have a face for radio. But I'm very happy here in my shop.

**MOLL.** You must see a lot of things here.

**CLERK.** Yup.

*3 seconds of silence.*

**MOLL.** What have you seen?  
is what I mean.

*Sound of a crisp twenty-dollar bill removed from a wallet.*

**CLERK.** I get your meaning.

**MOLL.** Do you know where good-looking rebels go when they quit this town?

**CLERK.** Usually they raft the river, cross the chasm, and mount the mountain.

**NARRATOR.** (*Trying to be part of the scene:*) It should be noted that in fairy stories, things always come in threes.

**MOLL.** And after that?

**CLERK.** They never come back, that's for sure.

**MOLL.** I had a cousin who rafted crossed and mounted. She was never heard from again.

**CLERK.** Could be she made it.

**MOLL.** More likely she was a meal for a mountain goat.

**CLERK.** I don't want to see a nice girl like you be goat-meal. Here. I have a AAA guide here, it's got all the shortcuts, all the bargains. Give it to you free of charge.

**MOLL.** (*Examining:*)

**TRIPLE-A.**

“Rafting the River,  
Crossing the Chasm,  
and Mounting the Mountain  
on Ten Bucks a Day.”

Rafting the River,  
Crossing the Chasm,  
and Mounting the Mountain!

**CLERK.** Now don't say Friendly Glen never did anything for you.

**MOLL.** I can't find my machine.  
I can't find my nefarious ex.  
You take my money and give me an old travel book.  
Friendly Glen, you're a *godsend*.

*Sound of the door jingling, then slamming.*

*Sound of an old-fashioned rotary phone.*

**CLERK.** Yeah it's me.

—  
She came by.

—  
Mousy little thing, yeah. Eyes like hot poker, like there's something smoking behind there.

—  
Just like we said, I pointed her toward certain death. Shouldn't trouble you again.

—  
Yeah, but. This thing's starting to get sticky, morally speaking.

*(He looks behind him—the coast is clear.)*

I think I could use some more...

*(Changing back into the Mercenary:)*

incentive.

## **8. IN WHICH MOLL CONSULTS THE ORACLE OF THE EVERYDAY.**

*Sound of pages flipping.*

**NARRATOR.** She played tough, but Moll couldn't resist the conquest of a new read.

**MOLL.** Okay book, time to surrender your secrets to Moll.

*Sound of pages flipping fast.*

**NARRATOR.** Ever since she had taken that speed-reading course, Moll was accustomed to stripping a book of its meat in minutes, like piranha on an unfortunate heifer.

*Sound of pages flipping faster. Voice of the Triple-A Guidebook, rather priggish and well-fed.*

**TRIPLE-A.** Just 8 miles south of the raging river, a most charming Bed and Breakfast awaits the weary traveler. Owned and operated by the Alteveers, a Dutch couple who cook tremendous, fluffy—

*Pages flipping faster even.*

**NARRATOR.** At first it seemed a travel guide like any other.

**TRIPLE-A.** —upstairs, distributed among a dozen 19th century glass cabinets, is a superb selection of soapstones.

*Pages flipping fastest.*

**NARRATOR.** Until finally something caught her eye.

**TRIPLE-A.** —Embarking on a journey for business rather than pleasure, it is absolutely essential that one consult the Oracle of the Everyday.

**MOLL.** Oracle?

**TRIPLE-A.** The Oracle is not one person or another. The Oracle is whoever. The day before one commences an expedition, one should toss a housecat over one's left shoulder and then—

**MOLL.** Mom wouldn't like me throwing Muffin around.

**NARRATOR.** But what other option did she have?

*Sound of an airborne cat, then a gentle landing.*

**MOLL.** What now?

**TRIPLE-A.** Following the cat procedure, one should stop up one's ears and wait. The first person who crosses one's path will be the Oracle. When one opens one's ears again, one will be prepared to hear the prophecy.

**NARRATOR.** It took some time for somebody to come along.

*Sound of Moll idly whistling.*

*Sound of muted footsteps.*

**AMWAY SALESLADY.** Hello, young person. Have you heard the good news about Amway?

**MOLL.** Was that my path you just crossed?

**SALESLADY.** Amway products are in over 70-percent of the nation's households. You might have Amway in your home right now and not even know it.

**MOLL.** I don't think so.

**SALESLADY.** Sounds like somebody has a case of Strip Mall Sickness. Amway's colorful, easy-to-use catalog should be just the cure you're looking for.

**MOLL.** Sorry.

**SALESLADY.** SORRY ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH.

**MOLL.** I'm going to leave now.

**SALESLADY.** Wait wait, I promise I'll behave. I just get so EXCITED about these PRODUCTS. This being the birth-month of Virgos, we have a special discount on all virgin items: Virgin of Guadalupe votive candles, extra-virgin olive oil, Madonna's *Like A Virgin* record. Even an acre of virgin forest for sale in the Adirondacks, really lovely property. (*The prophesy:*) Nobody's going anywhere these days without virgin-something, *that's for sure.*

**NARRATOR.** For an average intellect, this prophesy may have seemed abstruse. But Moll remembered how in 15th century Romania...

*Sound of cogs in her head.*

**NARRATOR.**

...boy-virgins were often used as guides when hunting down vampires.

**MOLL.**

...boy-virgins were often used as guides when hunting down vampires!

**NARRATOR.** Their purity was thought to attract the undead like bears to honey.

**MOLL.** Eureka!

**NARRATOR.** Satisfied, she bought a bottle of the olive oil for her Mother and sent the saleslady on her way.

**SALESLADY.** Thank you, dear— Tell a friend about Amway!

*The cogs in her head again, so loud this time that the Narrator has to shout over them:*

**NARRATOR.** Then she sat down for a GOOD LONG THINK.

**MOLL.** Do I *know* any boy virgins?

### **9. IN WHICH MOLL SETS OFF TOWARD CERTAIN DEATH.**

**OLIVER.** Do I have, like, a sign on my forehead? Is there a big scarlet V up there?

**MOLL.** Probably it would be a lily-white V. Only the A's are scarlet.

**OLIVER.** Moll.

**MOLL.** Ollie. We've known each other since Pampers. We talk, right? If something happened, you'd have told me.

**OLIVER.** Don't be so sure.

**MOLL.** All right. What's it like then?

**OLIVER.** What?

**MOLL.** Fucking.

**OLIVER.** It's like there's a great beautiful flower opening inside of you.

**MOLL.** Nobody who had sex would say that.

**OLIVER.** I'm positive. The flower opens and shoots big blossoms of good feeling all through you.

**MOLL.** Isn't that what Ms. Hanrahan told us back in Sex Ed?

*A suspicious pause.*

**OLIVER.** No.

**MOLL.** That was 6 years ago!

**OLIVER.** Stop rubbing it in.

There was Madeline Stokeler, we were close but then—  
I'm very picky.

**MOLL.** Didn't Madeline run off with that kayak instructor?

**OLIVER.** So why do you need this thing back so bad?

**MOLL.** This thing has power I don't even understand.  
In the wrong hands...

*Sound of a portentous musical riff.*

Yeah.

**OLIVER.** What's in it for me?

**MOLL.** I'm a very clever girl, Ollie. Maybe you've heard? I can make a potion so that next time around, Madeline won't be able tell you from Joe Kayak and his rock-hard haunches. Or forget Madeline altogether, and I can invent you an android dominatrix with a hydraulic—

*Sound like a jungle cat.*

**OLIVER.** Excuse me.

**MOLL.** That came from you?

**OLIVER.** That was my libido.

**MOLL.** (*Amused:*) Oh my god. Gross.

**OLIVER.** I'll be right back.

*Sound of footsteps, a doorknob, a splash.*

**MOLL.** What are you doing in there?

**OLIVER.** A good dunk in cold water, usually that helps me cool down.

**MOLL.** Then it's all settled. We're questing together.

**OLIVER.** Wait a minute! I didn't say—

**NARRATOR.** And so Moll set off on the road, with her guidebook, her virgin and a great sackful of inventor essentials.

*Sound like a door slamming.*

**OLIVER.** Oof! What do you have in here, bricks?

**MOLL.** You never know when masonry might come in handy.

**NARRATOR.** If one were to dig deeper into the sack, one would also find:

**MOLL.** Double-sided tape,  
Five kinds of screwdriver,  
Portable fan...

**NARRATOR.** In case of a desert sojourn.

**MOLL.** Seam-splitter,  
Hot glue gun,  
Ceiling wax...

**NARRATOR.** On the occasion of a drab ceiling.

**MOLL.** Tupperware,  
Twine—

**NARRATOR.** *Always twine.*

**MOLL.** Kerosene,  
Kindling...

**NARRATOR.** In the event of a flash Ice Age.

**MOLL.** My Ls are especially well-stocked:

**NARRATOR.** Laughing gas,  
Lederhosen,  
Load-bearing Leechee-nuts—

**OLIVER.** You *alphabetized* it?

**MOLL.** Yes.

**OLIVER.** What *are* you, some kind of obsessive?

*Sound of thin ice.*

Some kind of compulsive?  
Some kind of obsessive-compulsive—

**MOLL.** THIS IS MY LIFE, OKAY? THIS IS WHAT I DO.

**NARRATOR.** Moll looked at him with her hot poker eyes,

*Sound like a laser pistol.*

A vein throbbed in her neck,  
And Oliver made a mental note to...

*Sound of a pencil scratching.*

**OLIVER & NARRATOR.** ... never ever question the girl again.

**MOLL.** ELSE I MIGHT LOSE MY TEMPER.

#### **10. IN WHICH WE HEAR TO FEAR THE WORST.**

*(Overlapping Moll's last line:)*

**ONE & TWO.** Owwww!

**NARRATOR.** Back in their lair, the darkdwellers heard the  
questers' every step. Not only that,  
They could hear the ghosts of  
footfalls felled four hours before;

*Sound of phantom footfalls.*

They could hear where the air  
Had been wounded stride by stride;

*Sound like banshee shrieks.*

They could even hear the slow progress  
of yesterday's dinner through mazy intestines.

*Sound like a hefty earthworm.*

**MOLL.** FLEET THOSE FEET, SLOW-POKE!

**TWO.** Aiyeeee!

**ONE.** My ears are ringing!

**TWO.** She has a *voice* on her, that one.

**THE MERCENARY.** Maybe if we turned down the volume?

**TWO.** Like she's down deep in the contraption itself.

**THE MERCENARY.** She's stronger than we expected.

**ONE.** The virgin will ruin everything.

**TWO.** Everything will be ruined, yes.

**ONE.** A proposal, gentlemen.

**THE MERCENARY.** Clearly it's a matter of seducing the virgin.

**TWO.** That's what I was going to say.

**ONE.** But who to do the seducing?

**THE MERCENARY.** (*Speaking of himself:*) I know just the man for the job.

*Sound of their diabolical laughter.*

**NARRATOR.** While the Mercenary was happy to do almost anything for mercenary reasons...

*Sound of a cash register's ka-ching.*

...for the opportunity to stretch his dark talent, and for the mean thrill of messing with innocent heads, he couldn't help wondering why the machine was so important, so *sacred*, almost, to his employers.

**ONE.** Not simply sacrosanct

**TWO.** Nothing simple about it

**ONE.** No, rather it's

**ONE & TWO.** Sacrosanctimonious!

**NARRATOR.** At this, The Mercenary raised a single eyebrow (which is hard to do).

**ONE.** You can hear essences inside accidents!

**TWO.** You can hear ugly things behind everyday talk!

**ONE & TWO.** Listen close.

---

*Sound of two sets of footsteps. (Moll's are lighter and quicker, Oliver already lagging.)*

*In the following, we hear Moll's interior thoughts – the truth behind her lie. Just as in the interior-monologue scene, she should speak the italicized lines into a body mike or standing microphone—some kind of reverberant modification of her voice.*

**OLIVER.** Is it far?

**MOLL.** Nah. *The farthest.*

**OLIVER.** Is it steep?

**MOLL.** Nope. *The steepest.*

**OLIVER.** Is it dangerous?

**MOLL.** No sirree. *The dangerousest.*

**OLIVER.** Is it—

*(Moll's soothing voice turning into something more dread-inducing.)*

**MOLL.** Listen, *Virgin.*

You can rest assured that this harmless extended field trip *might quite possibly involve the Raging River, that it has not a whit to do with the treacherous maw of the Cadaversome Chasm, and you can bet your life it'll take us safely if circuitously around the corpsifying peaks of the Mighty Mountain!*

**OLIVER.** *(Nonplussed:)* Um. That's a relief.

**MOLL.** Would I lie?

**ONE & TWO.** Did you hear?

**ONE.** Fibs are no accident—

**TWO.** No sir—

**ONE & TWO.** They speak the will of the Gods.

**ONE.** Intention is oracle—

**TWO.** Decorum is Delphic—

**ONE & TWO.** At least to those who have the ears to ear.

**TWO.** Our ears are not yet capacious enough to hear the Grand Design.

**ONE.** But if we practice—

**TWO.** Yes, if!

**ONE & TWO.** The God of the Third Ear will make us Perfect, And we will listen Beyond the Border, Beyond the Order of Things!

**NARRATOR.** By this point, the Mercenary was sorry he'd asked. And the Narrator found herself speculating whether the machine's capacity to perceive the imperceptible human interior might very well lead to her very own obsolescence— (*Running out of breath.*) But this grim reverie was mercifully brief, for there was a story that begged telling, and in the dimmest dark, the two listened on...

**TWO & OLIVER.** Wait.

**ONE & MOLL.** What.

**TWO & OLIVER.** Did you hear?

**ONE & TWO.** The raging river!

*Five seconds each of:*

*An educational filmstrip describing a salmon's journey.*

*Sound of turbines spinning in a hydroelectric plant.*

*The song "Take Me to the River."*

*A commercial for an extra-strength feminine hygiene product.*

*Twain's description of Huck setting out on the river.*

*An interview with a woman after going over Niagara Falls in a barrel.*

**11. IN WHICH OLIVER IS TEMPTED FOR THE FIRST TIME, NOT THE LAST.**

**NARRATOR.** The questers cooled their heels in the shallows.

**OLIVER.** This has to be the place.

**MOLL.** Lemme find in the book. It says here:

**TRIPLE-A.** The Raging River carves an S-curve through the picturesque Glendall Forest—

**MOLL.** Yada yada yada—Ooh, listen to *this!*

**TRIPLE-A.** The forest, it should be known, is populated with satyrs, who travel in a pack or else not in a pack, but always—

**MOLL.** Do they travel in “packs”, really? There should be a special word.

**OLIVER.** Whales in a pod. Crows in a murder. Satyrs in a—

**TRIPLE-A.** —PACK or else not in a pack, but always aroused in beastly lust. Many consider satyrs a danger, but an incident has not occurred since a woman with a lame leg lagged behind her orienteering group, eleven years past. She was ravished by the satyrs, not only in the usual place but all over her body.<sup>2</sup>

**OLIVER.** Moll. I don't have a good feeling about this.

**MOLL.** Eleven *years*, worrywart. Plus, they only go for naiads and dryads and maenads.

**OLIVER.** (*A feeble joke:*) Only the Ads and the Nads?

**MOLL.** (*Rolling her eyes:*) I'll go make us a way across. Remember: Don't interrupt me while I'm inventing. It's DANGEROUS.

**OLIVER.** What's so dangerous about thinking?

**MOLL.** I can't tell you / it's...

**OLIVER.** —or you'd have to kill me?

**MOLL.** ...personal. You'll be fine, Ollie. I have every confidence in you. Just holler if there's an emergency. We've got pepper spray in the sack, between paste and pickled plums.

*Sound of her footsteps fading.*

**OLIVER.** Just me then. Alone in the darkening, spookening forest. Quality time. Me and my solitary brain.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pausanias, Guide to Greece

*Sound like a jungle cat.*

**OLIVER.** Oh, and you too. But not for long...

*Sound of a splash.*

Cold cold COLD raging river!

*Sound of hoofsteps approaching.*

**OLIVER.** Moll?

*The hoofsteps quite close now. We also hear a jug of liquid, swaying.  
Slosh slosh slosh.*

*Then stillness. It is the Mercenary, disguised as a Satyr.*

**SATYR.** Hullo, pet.

**OLIVER.** Moll? Emergency!

**SATYR.** Out of the reach of hearing, pet. We'd ask her along for a toss, but it's just us two for tea.

*Sound of sniffing.*

**OLIVER.** You smell like a stable.

*Sound of vigorous, animal sniffing.*

**SATYR.** You smell like clean young man.

*Pause.*

**OLIVER.** Your breath is like a saloon.

**SATYR.** Takes an awful lot to get me cockeyed these days.

**OLIVER.** Cock—?

**SATYR.** Hotsy-totsy, flummoxed, *lubricated*.

**OLIVER.** You mean drunk?

**SATYR.** As a skunk.

Have a sip.

Makes you see double and feel single, they say.

**OLIVER.** Ha!

**SATYR.** Think you're too good for my wine?

**OLIVER.** I'm questing, so you see it wouldn't *do*.

**SATYR.** I don't see any quest, I just see a nice young boy-pet in the forest with nothing to pass his time and I just thought I'd *share*.  
A cup of the God, a swig of salvation.

**OLIVER.** I don't think...

**SATYR.** A drop at least.  
So sweet you'll wish you were all nose.

**OLIVER.** I guess...

*The Satyr tips the flask over Oliver. Sound of glug glug glug.*

**SATYR.** Good stuff, huh?

**OLIVER.** It's...woody.

**SATYR.** More?

**OLIVER.** Just another drop—

*The Satyr tips the flask again. More glug.*

**OLIVER.** —Or two. Ohmigosh. Are those hooves?

*Oliver hiccups.*

**SATYR.** All the better for dancing clippety-clop to the panpipes.

*Sound of a bar or two on the panpipes.*

**OLIVER.** Are those—*(hiccup)*—horns?

**SATYR.** All the better for lancing grapes on the highest vine.

*Oliver hiccups.*

**SATYR.** Nasty case of the hickey-ups. Better have more wine to wash 'em down.

*Oliver drinks. Glug.*

**OLIVER.** That a tail?

**SATYR.** All the better for. Hmm.

*Sound of his tail wagging in thought.*

**OLIVER.** Must be good for—*(hiccup)*—something.

**SATYR.** A tail makes you move different. Like you own the world.

*Sound of the Satyr dancing, accompanying himself on his pipe: he plays the guitar lick from the Stones' "Miss You."*

*Get-it-on music.*

Now you.

**OLIVER.** Like this?

**SATYR.** Looks like Doris Day doing the cakewalk.  
It's all in the pelvis, Elvis. *Move.*

**OLIVER.** I feel silly.

**SATYR.** Pretend that it's another time ago.  
Bacchus has made the river run wine just because he can.  
You lap at the grapey goodness and  
Soon you're feeling like the fucketeer of the forest  
—What else is wine for, right?  
Soon your groin is barking for fresh kill:  
Cur non tam latera ecfututa<sup>3</sup>

**OLIVER.** Are you speaking English?

**SATYR.** Cur non tam latera ecfututa.

**OLIVER.** Ecfuc—? Ecfut toot?

**SATYR & OLIVER.** Ecfututa.

**SATYR.** *Good.* Here now.  
Just a touch.

*Sound like a society lady luxuriating in a fur coat.*

**OLIVER.** (*One slushy slurry sentence:*) I knew it I knew what you are  
Are you one of those YOU'RE NOT HUMAN are you?

**SATYR.** Ecfututa.

**OLIVER.** But you chase mostly naiads and dryads and maenads  
Iheardmostlyright?

---

<sup>3</sup> Catullus



**12. IN WHICH PLOTS ARE THICKENED.**

**NARRATOR.** At that same instant, in the very dark place...

**TWO.** He failed.

**ONE.** If at first you don't succeed....

**TWO.** You and your platitudes.

**ONE.** Patience, Two. Only the faithful will pierce the fold and hear with fiercer ears.

**TWO.** Wait.

**ONE.** What.

**TWO.** Did you hear?

**ONE & TWO.** The Chasm.

*Five seconds each of:*

*A news report of a New York City blackout.*

*A New England matron explaining how to dismember a lobster.*

*A promo for a television show about Extreeme Sports.*

*The sound Goofy makes in old cartoons when he plunges thousands of feet.*

*A rousing rendition of "There's a Hole in My Bucket, Dear Liza."*

*Dante describing the lowest circle of Hell.*

*The echo of the echo of the echo of someone saying "Echo."*

**NARRATOR.** Far flung from the chasm and the raging river, in the finest cul-de-sac of the peaceful burb, Moll had been missing for one whole day. Apart from notifying the police, calling the PTA phone tree, posting her picture on local telephone poles, and hiring a skywriter to scrawl "Come Back To Us, Moll" in great puffy clouds from horizon to horizon, her parents didn't know what to do.

**FATHER.** Into thin air!

**MOTHER.** That Garth with the shifty eyes is behind this.

**FATHER.** (*Mocking her earlier assessment:*) Garth with the green green eyes.

*A curdled moment between Mother and Father.*

**NARRATOR.** They tried to take comfort in routine.

*Sound of radio static.*

**COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER.** ...disappeared last Thursday. She was last seen in the company of a certain Garth, last name unknown, 5'8" to 5'10," complexion fair, hair greasy. This just in!

*(Mother and Father lean in, expectant.)*

Nine in ten officials agree – Hot dogs are bursting with ultra-healthy supervitamins, which is no surprise, seeing as they contain just about everything! Starve a cold, maybe, but feed a fever with Hilberson's all-beef foot-long finest! And now, without further ado, the next give-you-the-creepsing episode of "*Death and the Music Teacher.*"

*Sound of a hand slammed on a desk.*

**WACHTEL.** Cellos don't just up and walk away, Miss Kendrick. Where is your musical chum?

**MISS KENDRICK.** I helped him escape, Mr. Wachtel. He's free now.

**WACHTEL.** The Smithsonian offered me seven figures for him, and the Russians even more. You didn't really think you could keep this on the hush?

*Sound of a hush.*

**WACHTEL.** We have a way of dealing with people who won't give up their deep-and-darks. You ever hear of Cambodian water torture?

**KENDRICK.** You mean the bit that goes drip drip drip?

**WACHTEL.** Something altogether less simple, Miss Kendrick. First, some not insubstantial body of water is introduced to your petite

solar plexus. (I saw a Flemish dignitary swallow thirty-seven liters once, but he was altogether more...voluminous than yourself.) Next, my man Big Pete trusses you with your legs shooting skyward and your head dusting the floor. In this fashion, the full weight of your stomach is permitted to press on the lungs and heart until...kablooie.

**KENDRICK.** I'm not afraid of a little...trussing.

**WACHTEL.** Let it begin, Pete.

*Sound of heavy rope.*

**WACHTEL.** You remember my associate.

**KENDRICK.** The strong, silent type.

*Sound of water flowing.*

**WACHTEL.** This will hurt, Miss Kendrick. You just give us a scream when you're ready to let the cat out of the bag.

*Sound of spitting.*

**KENDRICK.** Bullseye.

**WACHTEL.** (*Wiping his eye:*) The funnel, Pete. We've got ourselves a spitter.

**KENDRICK.** Used to be I could hit a tin can at forty yards, back on the farm.

**WACHTEL.** This is your last chance, Kendrick. Where's our musical friend?

**MISS KENDRICK.** He's beyond here-or-there. He's past this-or-that.

**NARRATOR.** At that exact instant...

**OLIVER.** What's that down in the river?

**NARRATOR.** Something-or-other was floating in the tall reeds on the riverbank.

**MOLL.** Like Moses!

**OLIVER.** Looks like.

**MOLL.** A body?

**OLIVER.** A billygoat?

**NARRATOR.** Upon closer inspection, the something-or-other turned out to be a cello case.

**OLIVER.** I used to play back in fifth grade but they said my fingers were too stubby and that was that.

**MOLL.** There's a note.

*Oliver reads.*

**OLIVER.**  
"Whoever you are..."

"sweetest music you've  
never heard."

**MOLL.** "Never" heard?

**OLIVER.** Must be a typo.

*Sound of latches undone, with difficulty.*

**MOLL.** Probably out of tune.

*Oliver plucks a string.*

*Sound of an A-string.*

*Although we see this projection, there is no corresponding sound.  
The Foley Artist and the Narrator take notice, alarmed.*

**OLIVER.** That's strange.

**NARRATOR.** Not a sound!

*The Narrator covers her own mouth—she hadn't meant to speak.*

**MOLL.** Try the other strings.

*He does:*

*Sound of a D, a G, a C.*

*Again, the Foley Artist doesn't succeed in producing a sound.*

*The Mercenary listens to them, at the machine. A three-way split scene, rapidly:*

**MERCENARY.**

Curious...

Nothing at all.

Something's wrong.

**OLIVER.**

What?

**MOLL.** Wait—

Something's there.

You can *feel* it, almost.

Like a thickening of the air.

**MISS KENDRICK.**

I told you, Mr. Wachtel:

He's a very special cello.

**NARRATOR.** For you see, it seemed the instrument only resonated in the infrasonic realm. The notes, too low to be heard by the ear, could only be felt on the skin. Instead of high and low, the cello played hot and cold, smooth and rough. As long as the special strings vibrated, the Third Ear fell deaf. (Infrasonic waves, let it be known, can be quite confounding to sonar and other technological listening devices.)

**WACHTEL.** You'll confound me no further, Miss Kendrick.

**MOLL.** Do you feel?

**OLIVER.** Like all of a sudden the tropics.

**WACHTEL.** The funnel, Pete.

**MOLL.** We're taking it with us.

**WACHTEL.** Open wide, Miss Kendrick.

**MISS KENDRICK.** (*Her Oscar-winning moment:*) Tell me, Mr. Wachtel, have you ever loved something enough to set it—*glurg!*

**WACHTEL.** There now, nice and snug.

*Sound of water flowing into a funnel.*

**NARRATOR.** This wasn't the escapist evening Mother and Father had planned.

**MOTHER.** I'm going to turn it off.

**FATHER.** No, I want to hear.

*Sound of water crescendos over the following, until the Narrator must shout to be heard.*

**NARRATOR.** Mother looked at her husband and recognized a kind of mad expectation in his eyes. For it seemed to Father that the voices coming from that little box, from that blackest nowhere, were the last whisper-thin thread of the COMFORTABLE LIFE THEY HAD ENJOYED ONLY YESTERDAY.

*The deafening sound subsides. The Narrator regains her composure.*

**NARRATOR.** Back on the wrong side of the river, the questers approached the cadaversome chasm, their backs aching from the extra load...

**OLIVER.** Why exactly are we bringing the mutant cello?

**MOLL.** Stop whining.

**NARRATOR.** ...their shoes steaming from traveling on foot all day.

*Sound of an automobile.*

They had been traveling on *foot* all day.

*Sound of an airplane.*

After an entire day on foot...

*Sound of a bicycle horn.*

**NARRATOR.** At this point, the Narrator wondered what she'd done to deserve this.

She wondered why three years at the Royal Speech Academy had so ill-prepared her for the trials of tales that don't behave as they're told. She wondered on her future career prospects: What was to become of her stint behind the desk at Masterpiece Theater? Her narration of the Great American Novel? On a larger scale, she wondered if a sense of narrative Order would ever return to the universe.

*The Narrator is closer to us than she has ever been.*

—Pig-dithers!,

she said to herself, shaking these feckless thoughts from her head.

—There is a deep and secret fountainhead in me: The power of the third-person.

Where most could only say something sodden and expected, like “I love you,” she could describe the quickening of the pulse, the simmering of the blood above 98.6, the dilating of the pupils, the inevitable goosing of the bumps, and the streak of a vulnerable smile across the face of the smittenee.

She was necessary, then. *Eminently* necessary.

Civilized words were more than a match for roguish noises, be they clangor or cacophony or something else too terrible to imagine. And this thought made her brave, for the time being.

### 13. IN WHICH OLIVER LEARNS A DARK SECRET.

**NARRATOR.** (*Resolutely:*) So the questers continued, one *foot* after another...

**MOLL.** Let’s see some hustle!

**NARRATOR.** ...until they reached a place where they could quest no further.

**OLIVER.** I can’t see the bottom.

*Moll takes Garth’s ring from around her neck and drops it.  
They watch it fall and fall and fall and fall.*

**MOLL.** One Mississippi two Mississippi three Mississippi four Mississippi five Mississippi six

*Sound like a penny off the Empire State Building.*

**OLIVER.** (*Breathless:*) Holy.

**MOLL.** (*Breathless:*) Mississippi.

**NARRATOR.** So it seemed she’d rid herself, unceremoniously, of the last trace of Garth, at the same time deducing...

**MOLL.** Five-point-five Mississippi at a rate of thirty-two feet-per-second-squared makes

**NARRATOR.** ...the precise depth of the chasm.  
They set up camp in the shade of a nearby fig tree.

**MOLL.** Don't do anything funny, okay? Don't touch anything don't talk to anything don't DO anything.

*Sound of Oliver plopping down under the Fig Tree. It is the Mercenary in disguise.*

**MOLL.** Just sit quiet and find us a place to stay tonight in the book.

**OLIVER.** What if something wants to have sex with me again?

**MOLL.** That's the *idea*. We want the evil somethings to be attracted to your innocence so that we can capture them and make them hand over the machine, see, but until then you have to resist the bait or you'll lose your special virgin power, see?

**OLIVER.** (*Skeptical:*) Special virgin power.

**MOLL.** Just—Be good.

*Sound of Moll's parting footsteps.*

**TRIPLE-A.** Wild figs line both sides of the Cadaversome Chasm. While the outside of the ripe fig remains sickly green, the inside flesh is red as strawberries.

**OLIVER.** Snoozeworthy old book.

**TRIPLE-A.** The fig's powers to enchant are known as far back as Biblical times...

**NARRATOR.** Oliver was exhausted from traveling on foot all day...

*Sound of a hovercraft.*

...and the guidebook was not gripping enough to keep him in the waking world.

*Sound of Oliver dozing.*

**TRIPLE-A.** ...the tree withered under Christ's righteous gaze, and for evermore, the fig became known as the tree that is not what it seems.

*Sound of ripening figs. We can detect, faintly, the melody of the Stones' "Miss You."*

**FIG TREE.**

Get a whiff of my big firm figs,  
Go daffy, go gaga  
For my ready freshfruits.  
Furry on the out, flesh on the in  
Form a line, come and sniff, be my guinea pig.

**OLIVER.** *(In his sleep, slowly:)* Don't care for figs. Taste funny.

**FIG TREE.**

Funny perhaps, fragrant for sure.  
My fine little wag, you're barely a twig,  
In need of feed. Figs  
Is food for good fit boys,  
Like truffles is for pigs.  
You'll go all goosy if you gobble, if if if  
If you goible full foosy, giff you fibble gigs if.

**OLIVER.** *(Enchanted snoring:)*

Iffffff—

Guh—

Iffffff—

Guh—

**FIG TREE.**

There's a goody gumdrop.  
Just a sniff and you'll go stiff.  
Don't be a prig with my fat friendly figs.

**OLIVER.** Gotta fetch gotta heft gotta lift me a big firm  
Thought-fogging tig-snifiting gifty-goffing finger-licking fig  
Oh friendly fruits—

*Sound of the branch lowering, heavy with figs.*

friendly fruits—

---

*Sound of the branch even lower, fruit even heavier.*

friendly fruits—

*Sound of the branch bent almost to his mouth, the figs heavy as bombs. Moll runs on.*

**MOLL.** We're good to go. I made us a bridge.  
Oliver?

*The ripening sound and his breathing.*

What on Earth?

**OLIVER.** Go all goosy for a folly-gobbing—

*She shakes him.*

**MOLL.** What's wrong with you? Wake up.

**OLIVER.** —fifty-giggling, giddy-fisting...

**MOLL.** *(To the darkness around her:)* I know you're here.  
*(Shaking him again:)* Oliver!

**OLIVER.** Giff us a friggin' fig!

**MOLL.** It's a spell—wake up wake up wake—

**OLIVER.** Stop the shake,  
I'm awake I'm awake!

*Sound like a gust of wind.*

**MOLL.** Wait a minute. Where'd it go?

**OLIVER.** I just nodded off for a second.

**MOLL.** Trees don't just up and disappear. It's not their style.

**NARRATOR.** Moll lifted a finger in the air, testing the last trace of that suspiciously solitary gust...

**MOLL.** Didn't they ever warn you about figs in Sunday School?  
They're never what they seem.

**NARRATOR.** ...Lifted her nose in the air and detected, she thought, the faintest whiff of styling gel and another, more ineffable presence—a kind of acrid cologne, a kind of

**MOLL.** *(Under her breath:)* Boy-musk.

**OLIVER.** What?

**MOLL.** *(Pointing in direction of the wind:)* Thataway.

**OLIVER.** Moll. Wait. You're bleeding.

*So she is.*

Your ear.

**MOLL.** Must be ketchup.

**NARRATOR.** Reared by trusting parents, Moll had never developed into a deft fibber.

**OLIVER.** What's going on?

**NARRATOR.** Maybe it was time he knew.

**MOLL.** It needed a piece of me.

**OLIVER.** You are the most baffling person.

**MOLL.** *(With difficulty:)* I put in everything *and* the kitchen sink and it was shiny and big but still it wouldn't go, so...

*Sound of smacking the side of her head— A remembered sound rather than a live one.*

**MOLL.** All it took was the smallest piece, but it hurt like / the devil...

**OLIVER.** You mean a piece, like, metaphorically?

**MOLL.** ...but now it's better. Except sometimes I have trouble hearing on this side, low pitches especially and last week I got a nasty infection and now, with this altitude—would you hand me a band-aid?

**OLIVER.** —

**MOLL.** Between the backgammon board and the birth control.

*Pause.*

**OLIVER.** *(Rapidly:)*  
This doesn't sound healthy,

**MOLL.** *(Rapidly:)*

no, if you think I can be some kind of *accessory* any longer to this kind of aggro-pervo Festival of Self-Mutilation. I mean, it's one thing with you offering me up as bait to all manners of man and beast but now—

You think you can tell me about *healthy*, you neck-deep in your citrus-scented Mr. Clean Festival of Self-Denial? I mean, and I don't know how you'd know what it *is* to be needed the way the machine NEEDS ME HOW IT FEEDS on me and I don't want you to know, I do not want you to, no.

*Pause.*

**OLIVER.** Jesus, Moll. You're the mad scientist *and* the monster. You're your own Frankenstein.

*A dark pause.*

**MOLL.** Excuse me. There's a chasm out there that isn't getting any shallower.

**OLIVER.** Wait. I didn't mean—

*Sound of her parting footsteps.*

**NARRATOR.** Meanwhile, in the cozily upholstered but otherwise bereft family den, the radio blathered on.

*Sound like a dam straining against floodwater.*

**WACHTEL.** Eleven liters. I've never seen anyone endure like this.

*Miss Kendrick speaks with great effort.*

**MISS KENDRICK.** I'm going to tell you a story I tell my students, Mr. Wachtel. There's no sense in dying quiet.

**WACHTEL.** There's no sense in dying at all, Miss Kendrick. Talk.

**MISS KENDRICK.** As long as I have the breath, I'm going to tell you the story of how music was invented.

*Sound like a dam straining.*

It was the god Hermes who first made something mute into something that could sing. The lyre. On the path outside his house one morning, a tortoise was waddling past...

**WACHTEL.** Is this a children's story?

**MISS KENDRICK.** Hermes knelt down to the tortoise to say, "Hello there, you shapely creature."<sup>4</sup>

*Sound like a dam.*

"Hel-lo," the tortoise replied, after some time, for she was slow and steady.

**WACHTEL.** Is there going to be a hare in this story?

*Silence.*

**NARRATOR.** But the story never ended, because, quite suddenly...

*Sound like a dam breaking.*

...the sweet schoolteacher expired.

*Miss Kendrick steps back from her microphone, becoming Mother.*

On the other end of the box, Mother and Father didn't know what to make of this. They had listened to the radio every night of their nineteen years of marriage, and they knew how plots were plotted. This was the part where the authorities burst into the sinister Wachtel's lair; or else Miss Kendrick's swashbuckling boyfriend would do the rescuing; or, at the very least, sweet Miss Kendrick would go out with a heart-rending speech, but this...

**MOTHER.** Nothing.

**WACHTEL.** Miss Kendrick?

*(A stage whisper:)* It's your line!

**NARRATOR.** Even Wachtel himself seemed not a little confused by the turn of events.

**FATHER.** Miss Kendrick?

*Sound of dead air.*

*In the following scene, a naturalism and a quiet we haven't seen before.*

**MOTHER.** She's gone.

---

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*

Our daughter, she's.  
Our daughter.

**FATHER.** What have you done.

**MOTHER.** What have I?—

**FATHER.** To encourage this...relationship.

**MOTHER.** (*A challenge:*) Sixteen years old.

**FATHER.** You were—living through her or I don't know.

**MOTHER.** She needed to leave her room and see for herself.

**NARRATOR.** Mother and Father sat there, in the dead air...

*Sound of dead air.*

**MOTHER.** Sometimes people need to leave to see.

**FATHER.** You don't mean...

**NARRATOR.** ...the last remnant of their wholesome aural order...

**MOTHER.**

These last few days, *your* loss,  
your talk the only thing...  
of essence.

**FATHER.**

It doesn't make sense, the  
way you're talking...

**NARRATOR.** ...twisted out of shape, as if by a powerful, unseen hand.

**FATHER.** A woman in your position to a man in mine.

*Pause. She is stung.*

**MOTHER.** You do relish your little ring of power.

*Sound of dead air.*

**NARRATOR.** And the foreign words coming out of them felt somehow true, the sharp radio words jumping into their open mouths...

**ONE.** Soon,

**TWO.** Any second now,

**ONE & TWO.** The God of the Third Ear will Pierce the Fold  
And We Will Listen With Fiercer Ears  
Beyond the Border, Beyond the Order of Things!

**NARRATOR.** With time ticking and daylight dwindling, Moll and Oliver set off across the seemingly bottomless chasm...

**MOLL.** Don't look down.

**NARRATOR.** ...which swirled with the still-echoing voices of the unfortunates it had swallowed over the years.

*Sound of a circus.*

**OLIVER.** What's that sound?

**NARRATOR.** (*Impatient:*) The still-echoing voices of the unfortunates it had swallowed.

*Sound of a marching band.*

**NARRATOR.** (*Even more impatient:*) Horrible mangled voices. Writhing in eternal agony.

*Sound of a Sock Hop.*

**ONE & TWO.** Did you hear?

**ONE & TWO.** Yes.

**TWO.** Sounds starting to mutiny.

*Sound of the sock hop, the marching band, and the circus: a horrible trio.*

**OLIVER.** What's that awful music?

**ONE & MOLL.** It won't be long now.

**OLIVER.** What do you mean?

**MOLL.** The oldest rule—*don't monkey with nature*—and I broke it. It needed a piece of me and I worry.

**OLIVER.** You worry...

**MOLL.** That a piece of me will be the only way to stop it.

**OLIVER.** Stop it *what*.

*Moll shakes her head.*

**MOLL.** It was meant to be used sparingly. The machine—*futzes*, fundamentally, with the boundary between the audible and the inaudible and—once you're playing fast and loose with that boundary... There's a cost to everything, you see.

**OLIVER.** *You did this?*

**MOLL.** Noise as we know it, the very Order of Things is at stake.

**ONE & TWO.** *(Just as they'd prophesied:)* Did you hear!

**MOLL.** One day you're listening to toenails on a field mouse, next thing you know the whole world is an ungodly [*clang*].

*[ ] indicates a kind of noise pollution, an industrial onomatopoeia that seems to come from the actor's mouth in place of the intended word.*

*Moll puts her hand to her throat.*

**OLIVER.** Something's the matter [*clash*] your voice.

*They look at each other: Uh-oh.*

**NARRATOR.** For all of Moll's booksmarts, there was another factor she hadn't factored in.

**MOLL.** Pre-utterance [*tra-la-la*] distortion—it's incredible!

*The Narrator is quite close to us again.*

**NARRATOR.** With words themselves now sullied, the Narrator suspected that her task could only get thanklesser.

With the gap between thought and speech ever gaping; with the gulf between sound and action ever gulping, the Narrator didn't feel so brave as before.

#### **14. IN WHICH OLIVER IS TEMPTED FOR THE FINAL TIME.**

**ONE & TWO.** Did you hear?

**ONE & TWO.** Yes.

**ONE.** Miss Smartylocks didn't think of *that*.

**TWO.** Yes but, listen over there.

**ONE.** Over where?

**TWO.** Higher there.

**ONE.** Oh *there*.

**ONE & TWO.** The Mountain.

*Five seconds each of:*

*The journal of a member of the Donner Party.*

*Sounds of a high-speed ski race, complete with commentators and crowd.*

*An angry Yeti.*

*J.R.R. Tolkien describing Mount Doom.*

*The song “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough.”*

*A dry lecture explaining how mountains result from shifting tectonic plates.*

*Sound of someone trying to breathe without oxygen.*

**NARRATOR.** The mountain soon proved too mountainous for passage.

*Sound of Oliver catching his breath.*

**MOLL.** I’ll go invent us a way over.

**OLIVER.** Are you [*gallop*] to [*slash*] yourself up again?

**MOLL.** Don’t [*chatter*] to strangers this time. I’ll be back soon.

*Sound of fading footsteps.*

**OLIVER.** Gonna ace this.

Not gonna [*chatter*], gonna mind my own business.

[*Gallop*] to show her she can’t be the boss of—

*Footsteps approaching, from the other side of the stage. Moll enters. It is the Mercenary in disguise.*

**MOLL.** Gonna show who, Ollie?

OLIVER. You got back so *[whoosh]*!

MOLL. *[Rumble]* are pretty straightforward.

I converted the raft into a hot-air balloon. We'll just *[whoosh]* over the mountain, lickety-split.

OLIVER. Great, let's get *[gallop]*.

MOLL. What's the rush?

*Sound of an irregular heartbeat.*

OLIVER. What was that?

MOLL. Nothing. Just a little arrhythmia.

NARRATOR. She touched him on the arm, lightly.

*Sound of fingernails on a chalkboard.*

OLIVER. What are *[ping]* doing?

MOLL. Let's listen to our *[growl]*, just this once.

OLIVER. All the *[tick-tock]* we've known each other, you never seemed too interested.

MOLL. Things aren't always *[hiss]* they seem, Ollie.

OLIVER. *[Boink]* been noticing that these last few days.

NARRATOR. She touched him on the cheek, lightly.

*Sound of a slithering tentacle.*

MOLL. Ever since *[boink]* first laid eyes on you...

OLIVER. *[Boink]* dunno. This is weird.

MOLL. Now I know why you're the only *[meeow]* in the eleventh grade.

OLIVER. *[Boink]* been saving myself.

MOLL. What for?

OLIVER. True *[kazaam]* I guess, if I can find it.

NARRATOR. She touched him on the shoulder, lightly.

*Sound of something pulled up by the roots.*

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

In order to protect our associated authors against copyright infringement, we cannot currently present full electronic scripts.

To purchase books with the full text, and to apply for performance rights, click ORDER or go back to:

*[www.playscripts.com](http://www.playscripts.com)*