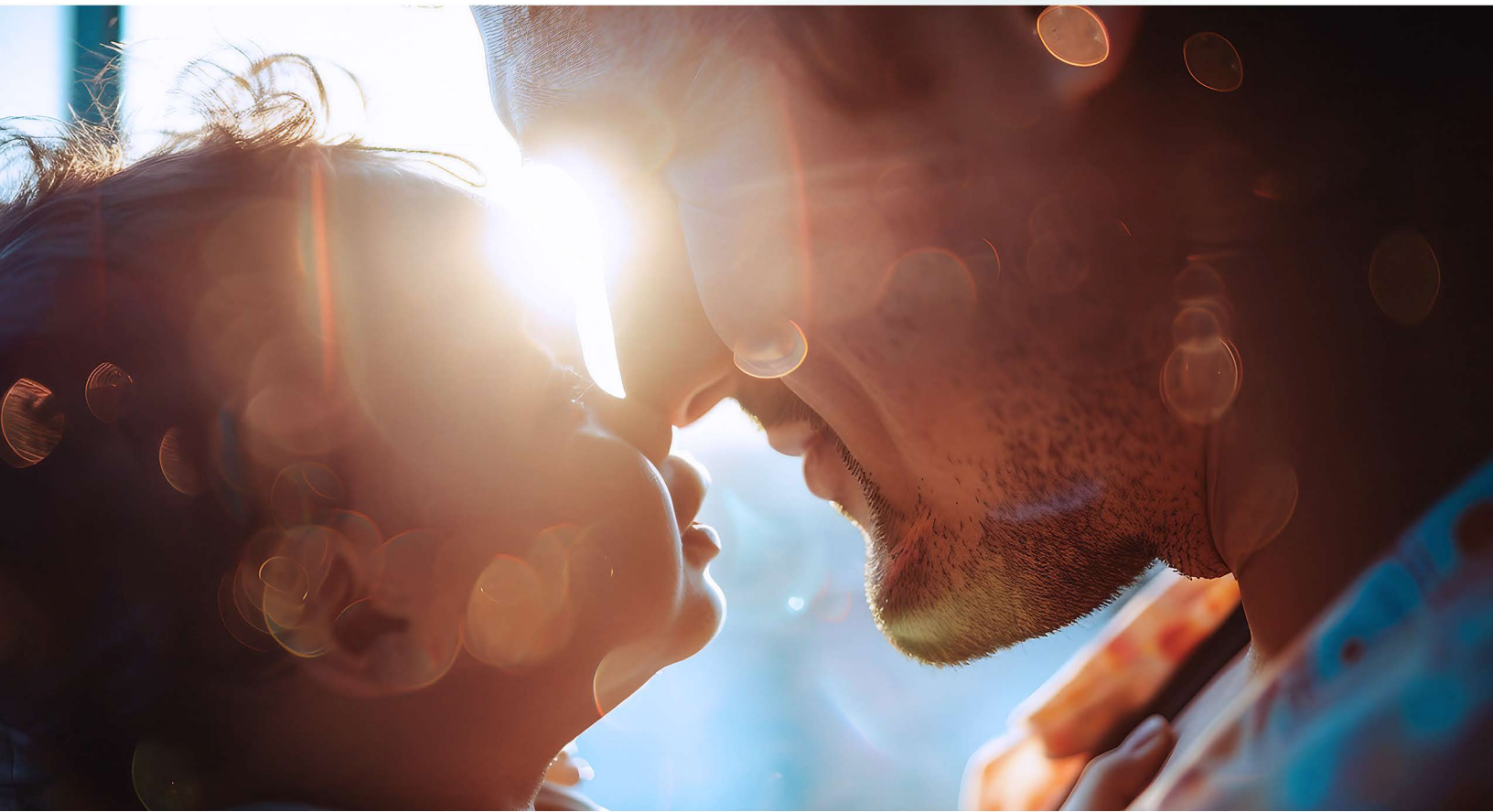


# Before Clare

A Canadian Tragedy in Newfoundland

by Rick Butts



A baby born in a fishing village in Newfoundland and another baby born years later in Toronto survive **the tidal wave that Canada forgot.** This story is inspired by true events.

*\*Adapted from the short story Before Clare published in The Dalhousie Review  
(Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia).*

BEFORE CLARE  
A CANADIAN TRAGEDY IN NEWFOUNDLAND

By  
Rick Butts

A baby is born in a fishing village in Newfoundland the night a tidal wave sweeps houses out to sea. Thirty years later, a baby is born in Toronto. They are survivors of the Newfoundland tidal wave that Canada forgot. This story is inspired by true events.

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### Cast of Characters

MARTIN, mid-30s, engineer, husband of Clare

MARGARET TYLER, mid-60s in 1959 and mid-30s in 1929, mother of Clare and Caroline

WES TYLER, early 40s, cod fisher, husband of Margaret, father of Clare and Caroline

MICHAEL WILKES, 23, cod fisher, husband of Caroline, father of her children

CAROLINE WILKES, 18, wife of Michael, daughter of Margaret and Wes, sister of Clare

### Casting notes for MARGARET TYLER

MARGARET TYLER is a dual role with the actor playing both MARGARET, mid-thirties, pregnant and giving birth in 1929 in Point au Gaul, Newfoundland, and MARGARET thirty years later visiting the Toronto home of her daughter and son-in-law in 1959. In 1929 and 1959, MARGARET is a force of nature, a determined and articulate woman as dedicated to the wellbeing of her family as she is to managing her own destiny.

The entrances and exits of MARGARET have been written to allow a single actor to transition from one character to the other with a minimum of difficulty.

### Diversity in casting

This is a Canadian play about Canada and diversity on stage is assumed. Roles may be cast at the discretion of the director with actors of any race limited only by the familial relationships of the characters.

## SCENE

The set is a narrative device. The story is about two places separated by years, geography and culture. Yet they are as close as a glance across a stage because of two births thirty years apart. The set underscores this proximity with the stage divided down the middle, a visual separation effected by lighting. On the right, it's Toronto 1959 and the uptown home of Clare and Martin, an engineer in a big firm. On the left is Point au Gaul on the Burin Peninsula, Newfoundland, in 1929 and the house and community of Margaret and Wes Tyler, a fisher.

The physical juxtaposition of Toronto 1959 and Point au Gaul 1929 visually speaks to the responsibility Martin feels to not look away. He is troubled that he did not know. It is this emotional discomfort that the play seeks to evoke in the audience as they too likely do not know what happened in 1929 on the Burin Peninsula of Newfoundland.

The action of the play illuminates a place and time on one side of the space while the other place and time waits to be seen and acknowledged, its symbols present in the low light of the far side of the stage.

Toronto in 1959 and Point au Gaul in 1929 are different worlds. But they are connected through births: a baby is born the night a tidal wave strikes Newfoundland and years later another baby is born in Toronto. They are both alive because they survive the tsunami in Newfoundland that Canada forgot.

## TIME

June 18, 1959 in Toronto and November 18, 1929 in Point au Gaul, Newfoundland.

ACT 1  
Scene 1

SETTING: The kitchen of Clare and Martin in Toronto on June 18, 1959. It occupies only the right section of the stage. In the downstage area, a fancy round chrome table with a brightly coloured “formica” laminate top. Two matching chrome padded chairs. On the right side, a wall with a single window. There’s a sink, a fridge, a small counter with a few appliances, an electric kettle, a tea pot, a cup tree with mugs. A bottle opener with a cap catcher is mounted on the wall beside the fridge. A telephone is on the wall. A calendar emblazoned Toronto Maple Leafs “Stanley Cup Finalists 1958-59” hangs on the wall beside the phone. A door on the right wall leads to the hall and the unseen front door. Upstage dividing the back wall, a door opens to other rooms and stairs to the upper floor.

AT RISE: MARTIN enters quickly from the door right. MARGARET follows him. She wears a black hat and a dark coat and carries an overnight bag and a magazine. He rushes to find a kettle while she looks around.

MARTIN

Margaret, I’m sorry for yelling at you. Tea? I’m the coffee hound in the house. I’m sure we have tea.

MARGARET

Coffee’s fine.

MARTIN

It must be a century since you’ve been here. It probably looks different to you. Clare’s into tea.

MARGARET

Martin, I don’t drink tea. I’ll have coffee please.

MARTIN

It must be more than ten years since you were here.

MARGARET

It was five years ago. When you got married.

MARTIN

When me and Clare got hitched? You were here?

MARGARET

I’m her mother. Of course I was here.

MARTIN

(Plugs in a kettle.)

You should have let yourself in to the porch. It would have been more comfortable than waiting outside in the heat. You don't want to lose your cool, eh, old girl.

MARGARET

What did you call me?

MARTIN

I . . . unhh . . . do you like fruity tea or just regular?

(MARGARET takes off her coat and lays it across the back of a chair. She puts her hat on the table. MARTIN picks up the coat, steps out into the hall. MARGARET sits at the table.)

MARTIN (OFF)

You must be hot as heck in this coat. It weighs a tonne.

MARGARET

It suits me fine, Martin.

(MARTIN returns, at the counter he spoons coffee into a cup, adds water. He notices MARGARET's hat on the table. Comes over and takes it out. MARGARET at the counter, looks at the wall calendar. She takes the coffee and goes to the table.)

MARTIN (OFF)

I left the door unlocked. I would have known it was you if you'd been sitting in the porch.

(MARTIN returns, goes for the coffee, notices MARGARET has it.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Oh, you'd like a coffee then?

MARGARET

I have one thanks.

(MARTIN makes a coffee, comes to the table.)

MARTIN

I guess you'd have been here at the wedding if you say you were. I was probably all caught up in getting fitted for the old ball and chain that day.

MARGARET

I was at your wedding Martin.

MARTIN

Sorry. The groom doesn't get to spend much time with the mother-in-law. I know Clare was happy you came. I remember chatting with . . . her father. Is he still in the . . . umm . . . fishing game?

MARGARET

Wes. Yes, Wes is still a fisher.

MARTIN

That's right. I remember he went after large fish. Marlin?

MARGARET

Cod.

MARTIN

Okay. I don't know why I thought marlin. Well, as I was saying outside, Clare's fine, the baby's fine. But you'd have thought she would have waited.

MARGARET

Waited? To have the baby?

MARTIN

So there would have been someone here to let you in.

MARGARET

Are you an idiot?

MARTIN

It's just a joke, Margaret. Clare's always doing everything according to a plan. And the baby came early. It messed up her plan.

MARGARET

Well she better get used to that. Babies have a way of changing your plans. I don't suppose there's cream?

MARTIN

Sorry. I was supposed to do groceries yesterday but a client meeting went late. By the time I got to the store it was closed. When I got home, Clare said it was go-time. So no cream.

MARGARET

Milk?

(MARTIN goes to the fridge, looks at the wall calendar. Large circles are drawn around the date June 29, 1959.)

MARTIN

You know the Redpath sugar refinery at the waterfront? The ships will be coming to dock to unload raw sugar. I'm the lead engineer on that building and it's opening next week. June 29, 1959. That's the day Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip are coming. On their own yacht, the Britannia, if you can believe it. They're coming to see my building.

MARGARET

Give them my regards. Milk?

MARTIN

(Taps the calendar.)

June 29, 1959. That day. That's the most important day in my life. For the last two years, that day is all I've been living for.

MARGARET

What about today? Isn't today an important day?

MARTIN

(Puzzled.)

Today? No I don't think there's anything. I told my secretary to cancel my meetings.

MARGARET

Today. Your baby? Born today? June 18, 1959. Maybe you should circle it on your calendar.

MARTIN

Well yes, of course. The baby.

MARGARET

Of course, Clare's baby.

MARTIN

I'm home to feed the cats. Then back to the hospital. There's no point you coming because they let in only one visitor. She'll be home the day after tomorrow I think. Or maybe sooner. Not sure. But for a bit, it's you and me roughing it without her.

MARGARET

Well you're the one I've come all this way to see.

MARTIN

Seriously?



MARGARET

Yes Martin, I've come all the way from Newfoundland to Toronto not to see my daughter and her new baby. But to spend time with her knucklehead of a husband.

MARTIN

Or you're joking now. You and Clare have the same sense of humour. I mostly don't get her jokes either.

(Beat.)

You have Clare's eyes. It's like looking at her. You must get told that a lot.

MARGARET

In Point au Gaul? Walking around where I've lived my whole life? Are my friends stopping me in the street to tell me I look like my daughter who lives in Toronto? Surprisingly Martin, no. Don't get that lot.

MARTIN

Margaret I want to apologize for outside. For shouting at you. I thought you were a burglar casing the joint.

MARGARET

We hear the news in Newfoundland. Toronto is filled with criminals.

MARTIN

But you're family. More than family, you're the mother-in-law. I shouldn't be calling the cops on you first time I see you in ten years.

MARGARET

*Five* years Martin. And no you shouldn't be calling the cops on me.

MARTIN

And boy, would Clare be ticked off if her mother had been frisked and handcuffed out in front of the house. The neighbours would have gone nuts.

MARGARET

So would her mother.

MARTIN

We have a K9 unit in this part of Toronto now. If I'd gone to the neighbours to use the phone and called the cops, they might have sent the dog. You could have been bitten. By a police dog! Wow! Now wouldn't that be a story to tell Wes back in Newfoundland!

MARGARET

It would not have gone well for the dog. Or you.

MARTIN

You know, I'm not good at small talk like Clare is. I prefer telling stories to trying to chat. Especially with family. And I can't tell them about structural engineering because they won't understand. Or find it all that interesting.

MARGARET

I can't imagine why not.

MARTIN

When I talk with relatives, I ask them about themselves. It's a trick I learned. But half the time it comes out phony.

(Pause.)

Have you changed your hair?

MARGARET

Do you notice Clare's hair?

MARTIN

I think so. Or sometimes . . . not always. But now there's a baby and so many family I have to talk to. Want to know a secret? I'm not good with family. The relatives I mean.

MARGARET

No one says you have to be good with any of them. You just have to figure out how to deal with them.

MARTIN

Like you and me right now. We're dealing with each other.

MARGARET

Sure Martin. You haven't seen me in five years, you think it's ten, you yell at me to go away before you sic a police dog on me. And you're asking about my hair. Yeah, we're getting along just fine.

MARTIN

So is Wes good?

MARGARET

Wes is always good. He knows how to deal with family. He doesn't like Toronto so he's not here. He cares for Montreal even less so he doesn't come when I go there to see Caroline. He's perfectly content staying put in Point au Gaul.

MARTIN

Right, Caroline. Caroline's good. And the twins?

MARGARET

It's three kids she's got. Caroline's good.

MARTIN

Three kids now? Wow, another one.

MARGARET

Martin, another one? That one's thirty. You can cut the small talk.

MARTIN

I must have forgot. It's been awhile.

MARGARET

Caroline's good in Montreal. She's never going back home. Her father's never leaving Newfoundland. Wes deals with it, I deal with it, Caroline deals with it and everyone's good.

MARTIN

I need a plan like that. For dealing with family. Other than Clare of course. And you Margaret. You're not really *family*. Not in the sense of *family*. Because you're the wife's mother. That's a whole different category of family.

MARGARET

I'm not sure I follow.

MARTIN

What I mean is that I don't need a plan for dealing with you like Clare's other family. You're her mother. I *have* to deal with you, right? We don't have to like each other. And we don't have to do small talk. Would you like some chocolate chip cookies?

MARGARET

Yeah, cookies would be nice.

MARTIN

Clare says they're good with tea. Absolutely loves them with tea.

(Pause.)

But they go with coffee too.

MARGARET

Clare said I'm to use the guest room. I'd like to put my things away now.

MARTIN

Sure, it's up the stairs. Past my office, the next room is the nursery, the third door on the left, the guest room. That's what Clare's calling it. But we don't have many guests so that's the room she probably means for you.

(MARGARET takes her bag and exits the door to the stairs. MARTIN goes for the bag of cookies on the counter. Checks his watch. The phone rings. He answers it quickly.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Into phone.)

Hello? . . . Hi sweetie! How ya doing? Got a phone now. Great. You were sleeping when I left. Michael good? . . . Yes, she's here. Yeah, getting along fine.

(Rests the phone on his shoulder and opens the cookie bag.)

Funny story. I maybe yelled at her when I drove up. She was on the lawn looking at our upstairs windows . . . Because I didn't know it was her, just this old lady wrapped in a blanket. Like she was homeless. And skulking around our front door . . . Any-hoo! Turns out it wasn't a disguise. Just a coat they wear in Newfoundland.

(Long pause, listening.)

But it's June. You can't blame me for being suspicious with her dressed up like a five-foot sock puppet—

MARGARET (OFF)

Is that Clare?

MARTIN

(Into phone.)

Hold a sec, sweetie. Can't hear with the two of ya yelling.

(Yells upstairs.)

Yeah, it's Clare.

(Into phone. Takes a bite of a cookie.)

No, I didn't call the police. I'm not a complete idiot. I just forgot it was today. I didn't know—

(Long pause, listening.)

Yeah. Maybe that she was checking if anyone was home. To rob it. I thought she had a bag of tools for breaking in.

(Pause, listening.)

Like what a cat burglar carries. I don't know how I know that. I just do. Turns out it was just her carry-on. And the cats are good. And we're good too. She's up in the guest room getting settled.

(MARTIN puts a cookie in his mouth. Stretches the length of the phone cord to toss the bag on the table. MARGARET appears at the door. Reaches over to take the cookies and place them on the table.)

MARGARET

(Quietly.)

Can I help?

MARTIN

(Into phone, watching MARGARET.)

The sheets? Where? Umm . . . maybe . . . sure I . . . what about the sheets again?

(MARGARET touches her finger to her lips. Then points at his eyes. Whispers something.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Into phone, watching MARGARET.)

I—I put the sheets on the bed as soon as we got in.

(MARGARET nods, whispers again.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Into phone, following MARGARET.)

Yes. The blue ones with the yellow flowers you put out on the dresser.

(MARGARET nods, whispers.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Into phone, watching MARGARET.)

The light blue summer blanket. I turned down the sheets. Made everything nice for her.

(MARGARET nods, whispers. MARTIN shakes his head. MARGARET stares him down.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Into phone, watching MARGARET.)

I took the picture of you and her from our wedding. *From my office?*

(Pause.)

Yeah, from my office. Put it on her night table in the guest room. I should probably go now. Gotta feed the cats.

(MARGARET holds up a finger. Whispers.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Into phone.)

You've made the room lovely Clare. Thank you.

(Hangs up. To MARGARET.)

Thank you.

MARGARET

(Sits at the table, takes her coffee.)

You're welcome. That picture you keep of Clare and me in your office is quite nice.

MARTIN

(Sits at the table across from her.)

You've come here to help. I could use some help figuring out how to be a father.

MARGARET

It's only the first day. You get a pass for day one. It only gets more complicated from now on.

MARTIN

I haven't the foggiest idea what it takes to do the job. I don't even know where she keeps the cat food.

MARGARET

Wait until they ask you. They'll show you.

MARTIN

There's a world that Clare knows about, that's important to her. It's a world where I'm just a visitor who gets bits from a tour guide.

MARGARET

Like where the cat food is?

MARTIN

Like where's she from. Where you're from. It's Burin and Newfoundland and the places that she and Caroline talk about on the phone. It has nothing to do with me.

MARGARET

They're the sisters. They'd talk about stuff their husbands would have no interest in.

MARTIN

No it's more than that. It's about both of them coming from Burin. And then leaving it. I think leaving Newfoundland troubles Clare more than she lets on.

MARGARET

You worry too much now. It's probably sister talk. All about Caroline's kids. And now it'll be Clare's too.

MARTIN

But it's also about Newfoundland too. They talk about you and Wes. It's not something she tells me about so I don't really know.

MARGARET

Clare's always been chasing her big sister. Caroline's eighteen years older than her. She's got kids a year older than Clare. Their age like that is what makes them close.

MARTIN

When she got the job at the library, at the University of Toronto, she was over the moon happy. Not only because she's a real librarian now and she gets to do research with professors but because everyone at the university is from somewhere else.

MARGARET

Everyone's from somewhere else?

MARTIN

Exactly. No one's hearing her talk like when we first came to Toronto and asking where's she's from. She's not explaining it's not Ireland. You must know how that feels.

MARGARET

Explaining to neighbours I've known my entire life in Point au Gaul that I'm not from Ireland? Because of how I speak? No, not a lot.

MARTIN

At the university, everyone's from some place that isn't here.

MARGARET

Potluck must be grand.

MARTIN

Some days in the library someone still asks her where she's from.

MARGARET

What does she tell them?

MARTIN

Come to think of it, I don't know what she says. I'd assume she'd say Toronto because that's where we live now. I should ask her what she says.

MARGARET

You might want to know where your wife is from.

MARTIN

I know her from Montreal. That's where we met. At McGill. She was living with Caroline then. But you know all that. I never thought of Caroline and her husband as from Newfoundland because they never talked of it. At least not when I was around.

MARGARET

Caroline and Gabe. They're Point au Gaul. Clare's always been close to her sister. Closer than you think.

MARTIN

I don't understand that, given their difference in age. I mean, I'm glad they have each other. But when I'm dating Clare at McGill, Caroline and Gabe are all Montreal.

MARGARET

It's good you worked that out there, son. Given they've been there for thirty years.

MARTIN

I know what Clare's told me. When she's a baby, Caroline and Gabe go to Montreal, right?

MARGARET

You telling me this? Or just getting it sorted in your head?

MARTIN

It doesn't make sense they'd be close today when they were apart for so long. And they're so different in age.

MARGARET

Caroline moved away. To Montreal. That was the deal with Gabe.

MARTIN

Their twins and the girl. They're all are babies too. So Clare grows up not knowing them, with you and Wes in Newfoundland.

MARGARET

Not true. Clare was always about knowing her sister.

MARTIN

I see that today, for sure, in how close they are.



MARGARET

There's always been something in Clare that needed her sister. I'm their mother and I can't tell you what it is. I wouldn't want to keep them from each other for sure.

MARTIN

Why would you want to?

MARGARET

Why indeed. I did once, soon after when Clare was finding things out.

MARTIN

You didn't want them to be close? They're sisters.

MARGARET

They are. But being sisters was not always good for them. That's what I thought when Caroline had to leave. But Clare found out anyway. Nothing could stand in the way of them becoming each other's sister. I stopped hiding things from her. I'm glad my girls found each other.

MARTIN

I'm not supposed to tell you about the baby. Clare wants to tell you herself. It's a surprise, I think. Don't worry. The baby's fine, Clare's fine.

(Beat.)

The baby's Michael. Clare's had her heart set on Michael the whole time. She won't be changing her mind. It still surprised me.

MARGARET

Michael. Michael's a good name.

MARTIN

I guess. It took me a while to get used to it being *Clare and Martin*. People like her better than me anyways. I'm the boring one.

MARGARET

Really, you the boring one? You're a structural engineer.

MARTIN

She's the one everyone loves. It's like *Clare and the husband*. So now it's going to be *Clare and little Michael and the husband*. I'll get used to it.

MARGARET

Well Martin the husband. I'm not surprised. *Michael. Clare and little Michael and the husband*. Maybe we can tack on *the husband Martin*.

MARTIN

You must be tired. Clare said you would have changed flights to get here.

MARGARET

Halifax first. Then a wait and another plane in Montreal. But it gave me a chance to talk to Caroline from the airport. Almost an hour on a pay phone. No long distance.

MARTIN

I've got *sooo much* family talking to get through. Probably tomorrow.

MARGARET

I'm sure you'll enjoy it. You're so good with family.

MARTIN

Clare made me a list of the cousins across the country so plenty of long distance. I've written out what to say so I don't go past the first three minutes. It's expensive. Unless I call after midnight or wait until Sunday. That's only three more days.

MARGARET

You don't want to waste money needlessly announcing a new baby.

MARTIN

I agree with you on that score. Want to see my script?

(He pulls out two folded sheets and hands them to her.)

This is just the cousins. Are there any changes I should make? I'm an engineer not a writer. Clare's the storyteller in the family.

MARGARET

(Reading.)

Hi *name of cousin*. I'm Martin the husband of Clare. Clare had a baby. Name is Michael. Both doing good. Tell others. Thanks. Gotta go. Bye.

(Looks at the other sheet.)

Fred in Burnaby is an uncle to her, not a cousin. He's also a cheat and a swindler who owes me money. Surprised he made her list.

(Gives him back the pages.)

MARTIN

Should I not call him then?

MARGARET

You can drive a wooden stake through his heart from his little sister if you have the misfortune to meet him climbing through your window.

MARTIN

(Gets out his pen. Crosses off Fred.)

Maybe just cross him off then and it saves me a dollar seventy-five. I don't actually say that they're a *cousin* when I put in the name each time I read so it wouldn't have mattered about Fred being your brother. But why bother him, right?

MARGARET

Yeah, my sentiments exactly.

MARTIN

You okay with the part *both doing GOOD*? I thought that maybe it should be more formal, so maybe *both doing WELL*.

MARGARET

No. I'm good with good. Wouldn't change a thing.

MARTIN

Hey! Would you like to make the calls tomorrow while I'm going for Clare? They're all your family. I don't mind.

MARGARET

No. I don't want to talk to them anymore than you. You were wondering what this new job of being a father entails?

(Nods to the papers in his hand.)

This. And finding the cat food.

MARTIN

(Big yawn.)

Boy, I'm tired. Are you tired? You must be. You're a new granny!

MARGARET

Not new. Caroline's kids? Your nieces? And don't call me granny.

MARTIN

Okay. Would you like another coffee?

MARGARET

Do you have rum?

MARTIN

Probably.

MARGARET

With Coke.

(MARTIN exits upstage. Gets glasses and rum.)

MARTIN (OFF)

(Calls out.)

So Caroline moved from Point au Gaul, to Montreal when Clare was a baby. Why?

MARGARET

You'll have to ask her.

(MARTIN comes back with glasses and rum.)

MARTIN

Must have been nice for you.

MARGARET

Are you stunned? *Nice*? It's what she had to do. For her and her kids. She couldn't stay anymore in Point au Gaul. It's nobody's *nice*!

MARTIN

Sorry, wrong word. I meant her being married and in a better place. That's what you and Wes would have been happy for.

MARGARET

She married Gabe. He's a good boy and he loves those kids. He took her to Montreal. That was the deal. End of story.

MARTIN

I listen to what people tell me about their family. I know what they say about themselves in their family stories is not one hundred percent true. I mean with most people it's mostly true.

MARGARET

You think that people don't always tell you what they really think about their families? What are you, a psychologist now?

MARTIN

I'm saying they're probably rejigging the story to make the telling smoother. Clare does it.

MARGARET

She's always loved stories, that one.

MARTIN

People actually listen to her stories. I see what she does. She leaves out some of the little facts because they're not important to the truth she's telling. Her stories sound true because that's the way she remembers them.

MARGARET

I've always been amazed at what that girl remembers.

MARTIN

Truth is a funny thing. I've learned that from Clare. I'm an engineer so facts are not complicated for me. I can measure them and quantify them. I know how much force you can put on a steel beam before it bends. I can tell you how much pressure it will take before it cracks. All true because they're facts and I can prove them.

MARGARET

(Shakes her head.)

This is what you talk about to Clare? Heaven help her.

MARTIN

I've learned from Clare that things can be true because they're beautiful. Like a story that gets rejigged to make it better for telling.

MARGARET

Clare teaches you this?

MARTIN

Once we're on vacation somewhere and the Mounties have the road blocked and they're detouring the cars around where they're putting in a new bridge So we ask them if we could pull over on the shoulder and watch for a while. It's a suspension bridge and they're hanging the cables from a tower to grab the beams for the deck.

MARGARET

(Unimpressed.)

Sounds exciting.

MARTIN

It was. I explain to Clare that it's actually the cables anchored at both ends that hold the road up. Most people think it's the road that's keeping the bridge up. It's not. It's all those cables hanging down from the towers *above* the bridge.

MARGARET

You two went somewhere on your vacation so you could watch this? Too bad you didn't get pictures.

MARTIN

We did actually. I can show you later. It was just a stroke of luck. We were lucky enough to come across it. Clare said there's beauty in all that engineering and steel and that's a kind of truth.

MARGARET

She didn't?

MARTIN

She did. You know, they used to hang these bridges with ropes. Before they had steel cables.

MARGARET

Enough of bridges.

MARTIN

My point is that Clare says there's a kind of truth that has nothing to do with the facts of it. When you step back and look at it and see the beauty of the thing. That can be a truth.

MARGARET

You're still okay with the other kind of truth? The truth based on facts? On reality?

MARTIN

Of course.

MARGARET

Like Diefenbaker's your prime minister. That's a fact. Sad fact. But true.

MARTIN

Like Newfoundland's only been part of Canada since 1949. That's a good fact. And true.

MARGARET

That's impressive, Toronto.

MARTIN

Clare told me so I know that's true. It's the kind of detail an engineer would remember.

MARGARET

(Nodding at the Maple Leafs calendar on the wall.)

Like your Toronto Maple Leafs always lose in the playoffs to the Canadiens? That's a fact.

MARTIN

It's a fact of life in Toronto, for sure.

MARGARET

And now you got a little one to raise here. In Toronto.

MARTIN

Yes, Toronto. No shame in that, I guess. Our baby's story starts here.

MARGARET

In some big modern hospital. I'm glad of that actually. For Clare and Michael. There was no hospital close when Clare came along.

MARTIN

Point au Gaul. 1929. She's been researching it. Yeah, it's different today with our modern buildings. It couldn't happen today. What happened there.

MARGARET

No harm in believing that.

MARTIN

No. It's not just believing. It's the engineering of it. I build buildings so they don't fall down if Lake Ontario ever sends a tsunami up Yonge Street.

MARGARET

Well, I'm glad you know this. I hope we never get to test it here or in Newfoundland. You call it *tsunami* too.

MARTIN

That's what it is, technically.

MARGARET

Clare says *tsunami*. That's the librarian in her. She's got all the facts and the right words. I remember a tidal wave. Three of them. One after the other coming for us.

MARTIN

It's a tsunami because of the earthquake under the water that causes the waves. It's a foreign word for sure you don't think would have anything to do with Newfoundland so long ago.

MARGARET

Not long ago for those of us who lived it.

MARTIN

How could it happen and we know nothing about it?

MARGARET

I remember the evening starting beautiful fine. Warm for Burin in November. A nice Monday to hang out washing. Then the water came in and put Point au Gaul afloat.

MARTIN

Clare doesn't say much to me. But I know at the library she'd doing research about it.

MARGARET

Well, she wouldn't have been watching it. She was busy being born. I didn't see much of it either that night. Wes kept me focused on Clare. But I listened to it.

MARTIN

People say there's noise. There would have to be noise when you think of it. It's a force powerful enough to lift boulders out of the ground.

MARGARET

Wes watched it from our window. He says it was the dories that kept coming up the high road and bouncing off our house that worried him most. But there's also wharves and stages and flakes hitting us too. And nets and gear from the sheds.

MARTIN

The things in the water. That's what does the damage. They're picked up by the waves at the water's edge. That would be pieces of the boats and tools and anything that's heavy but can float if you put wave energy underneath it.

MARGARET

There was knives for cutting the cod. Below the surface of the water but still there coming at us. Knives floating in the water that cut into us.

MARTIN

That material in the water is what cuts away at the foundations of houses. It creates a grinding forward edge to the water. And then there's the weight of the water itself.

MARGARET

Our house stood fast. But some didn't and they were taken.

MARTIN

Those houses that are taken. They're added to the load that hits other structures. Other houses.

MARGARET

It's unimaginable to those that didn't know it.

MARTIN

Unimaginable? Maybe. But not incalculable. There's a mathematics to the loads and force of water. Of what happened in 1929.

MARGARET

Seriously?



MARTIN

It's a function of pressure and density of the water, and the acceleration of waves and the height. There are minimum and maximums to wave crests. It's all numbers that describe force. How water exerts force against a surface.

MARGARET

You know these numbers?

MARTIN

I have the mathematics of them in my head. I can guess at some numbers I don't know exactly. It's those numbers that's the load on whatever's in the path of the water. That's the force. The total of these numbers, that's what hits the houses.

MARGARET

Some of us were washed out to sea and some of us stayed alive to mourn them. You have numbers for this?

MARTIN

No. Not for that. Actually not very much from 1929 survives those numbers when the water comes.

MARGARET

Clare did.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 1  
Scene 2

SETTING: Wes and Margaret's parlour in Point au Gaul on November 18, 1929. It occupies the left half of the stage. In the centre of the space, there is an armchair with a small table close by. On the left, a window looks out to the harbour. A door opens to a hall and an unseen front door. Upstage centre, another door leads to a kitchen offstage and stairs up.

MARTIN from Toronto 1959 remains onstage seated in his darkened kitchen, silent, not reacting, as he observes the action of Point au Gaul 1929 unfold on the other side of the stage. MARGARET of 1959 has slipped offstage to prepare for her return as her younger self in Point au Gaul in 1929.

AT RISE: WES enters from the kitchen carrying a mug of tea and sits in the armchair. It's after supper. The front door opens and MICHAEL comes loudly down the hall and enters left. He comes over to WES, flipping a football hand to hand. WES ignores him and drinks his tea.

WES

The door Michael. You didn't get it shut all the way.

MICHAEL

Is that anyway to greet your favourite son-in-law, Mr. Tyler?

WES

The door Michael.

MICHAEL

We're going back out. We have to hurry so we don't lose good light.

WES

You grow up in a barn? The door.

(MICHAEL exits left, closes the door, comes back.)

MICHAEL

You want to suck back your tea there, Mr. Tyler. The boys are waiting for us.

WES

Not today boy. Run along now. And shut the door on your way out.

MICHAEL

(Balancing the ball on the back of his hand, he rolls it up his arm. He catches it in his other hand.)

How ya getting on, old man? I see your boat's all put to bed when I come in. Too old are ya for a full day fishing?

WES

Old enough to know where the cod's at until I comes for them. And not stay out half the night to do a day's work.

MICHAEL

(Studies the ball.)

I'm glad of that, Mr. Tyler. That you know where the fish is. A man's gotta work, 'specially when he's a grandpa with babies on the way.

WES

You're already on my nerves.

MICHAEL

(Holds the ball in WES' face.)

I hope your baby's got Caroline's looks, not yours.

(Calling out to the kitchen.)

Or the pretty eyes of Mrs. Tyler. That would be lovely grand.

(Lifts the ball to his face and gives it a kiss.)

I think this one's definitely got your ugly mug.

WES

Aren't you late to be somewhere that's not here?

MICHAEL

If you want to call it quits now that we've got the twins, then Caroline and me, we won't have anymore. I don't want to be pushing ya to win at getting the most babies.

(MARGARET enters from the kitchen. She wears a maternity top loosely over her skirt.)

MARGARET

Well here you are, Michael. My favourite son-in-law.

MICHAEL

(He drops the ball into WES' lap as he goes to hug MARGARET.)

That I am.

MARGARET

(Looking at the hall as they hug.)

Caroline's not here with you this late, is she? With the twins? It's a nice evening to step out.

MICHAEL

No, they're too much trouble to be brought out at night. We got them down for a bit. So it's only me come to take your old man out for his evening exercise but I can't get him up off his chair.

MARGARET

(Taps WES on the shoulder.)

And it's time it's *my* chair now. So up off it, Mr. Tyler. I've got to rest my bones.

(WES gets up and she sits down with a heavy sigh.)

I'll get him cleared out with you once we find a shawl to go over his sweater and stockings and he gets his mittens on. I don't need him underfoot.

(WES tosses the ball to MICHAEL, takes his tea to the window.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

(To MICHAEL.)

How's my baby's babies?

MICHAEL

They're the best kind. Keeping Caroline up all night with their fussing. One sleeps and the other's awake. Then they switch and do it again.

MARGARET

Do you take a turn with them so she gets some sleep?

MICHAEL

Would you believe me if I told you I did?

MARGARET

No.

MICHAEL

Then you'd be wrong. Some nights I do let her sleep. They're my babies too. And if I'm late for the cod in the morning, they'll just have to wait.

MARGARET

You're a good boy, Michael.

MICHAEL

She's with them all day and they can drive ya round the bend. She's a bad mood by the time I'm back so it's good to go out to football with my mates.

MARGARET

Tell her that I'll come by tomorrow for tea and give her a hand. Wes, why aren't you going with them tonight?

WES

I don't need football now.

MICHAEL

You've got to be coming tonight, Wes. Next week, it's the last game for the year and we've got the boys from St. Pierre coming for their whipping.

MARGARET

Really? Already?

MICHAEL

They're bringing their tins and bottles of rum for us. Along with a gang of their fans and their brass band.

WES

You're all well built boys on our side. You'll do fine without me. You don't need an old man with you to beat those lugs.

MICHAEL

But we *need* to have an old man with us. It's a better story for our grandkids when we tell them how the footballers from Point au Gaul and an old man beat the French boys from St. Pierre in 1929. It'll be the fifth year in a row.

MARGARET

Wes, you always play that match.

MICHAEL

They're coming from St. Pierre all this way with our rum and I'm sure they're looking forward to another beating.

WES

Which you and your brothers and your mates can give them.

MICHAEL

It'll be the fifth year they lose to us. You can't be disappointing them. They complain about you knocking them on their arse every year.

MARGARET

So you going with the boys now? Or do I pull the chair up to the stove and tuck ya in with your tea and a blanket?

WES

I've already got a tea, thanks, Margaret. Just not in the mood for football tonight.

MARGARET

Alright then. Let me go outside and split some logs for the wood box and make you a fire to curl up with. That way it'll be nice and cozy when Mrs. Burgess comes by soon and we cluck about babies and she yaps about her wonderful kids.

MICHAEL

(With fake enthusiasm.)

Oh mum. I don't want to miss all that! And how is the one gone up to St. John's to run the government for us poor beggars here?

MARGARET

No Michael, lately the news is all about the other one now *His Excellency Big Shot* at the Head Office of the Bank of Nova Scotia in Toronto.

WES

(Loudly.)

Alright! Alright you two. I'm not ready to be carted off on the dead cart tonight. I'd just like to not go to football for once.

MARGARET

Michael, are your brothers going up? All the men?

MICHAEL

I expect so.

MARGARET

Then you should get going. Wes'll be along soon.

WES

Michael, I'm sure you and the Grand Bank side are more than enough to handle those French boys next week fine. Beating them will look good on you, son.

(MICHAEL heads to the door, comes back to hug MARGARET, tapping the back of WES' head.)

MICHAEL

Okay mum. Dress him up warm and send him. I'll bring him back safe and sound so you can tuck him in and read him a story in his bed .

(He leaves, tossing the ball in his hands.)

MARGARET

Wes, what's this all about? You're a sad sook tonight.

WES

I've other things on my mind than football. You're having a baby. I should be here with you. What if I need to go for the doctor? Or you need a cup of tea?

MARGARET

That's it? The doctor and tea? It's all sorted, Wes. Mrs. Burgess is next door and her daughter Bessy knows how to get the doctor when we need him. And as long as you're making tea, I've been drinking coffee for the last year.

WES

Really? Coffee? I didn't know that. I've been on the boats all year.

MARGARET

Well don't give me your moods to worry about now. If women here had to count on their husbands to get their babies born or fetch them their coffee or their tea, we'd be in a terrible mess.

WES

I didn't know you were drinking coffee.

MARGARET

Only for a year. Mrs. Burgess brought it. You'd know if you'd be paying me some mind. You've been bent out of shape every day you're home for the last month. What are you sulking about?

WES

Nothing.

MARGARET

Nothing? You want to make me tea and stay in for a chinwag with Mrs. Burgess squawking about her kids? I don't think so, Mr. Tyler.

WES

(Gestures at the door after MICHAEL.)

That boy's getting on me nerves lately. He's as stund as me arse, dat one.

MARGARET

You're too hard on him. He's a good boy and learning to be a father. I remember another boy once his age who was cocky and didn't know his arse from a hole in the ground. And still doesn't some days.

WES

He's always yapping on about something he doesn't know shit about. I don't know what Caroline saw in him.

MARGARET

I'm glad it was something and he was good enough to have her.

WES

He's not half as smart as her.

MARGARET

Maybe he's smarter than you think because he doesn't mind her temper. She's a stubborn one who thinks the world's got to be the way she wants it. And if it isn't, she's gonna change it all to her liking.

WES

Like her mother.

MARGARET

Yes. Maybe too much like her mother.

(Beat.)

Wes, come over where I can see you. What's ailing you? I know that face you got on.

(MARGARET shifts on the armchair. WES comes, sits on the arm close to her, puts his mug on the table.)

WES

He's a good boy. He's better at finding cod than men twice his age. And the husband she chose so that's all that matters.

(Beat.)

Margaret, you ever think we're too old for this?

MARGARET

What? This?

(Tapping her belly.)

Are you an idiot now? A bit late to be worrying about this now, don't you think?



WES

I'm past forty now.

MARGARET

You're forty-two.

WES

You know I never remember my age. Because it never mattered so much before. I never thought I was going to be old. Forty-two. That's old for this.

MARGARET

Old for what?

WES

For being a father. I mean again. Another baby with you.

MARGARET

This is what's got you all sulky? Now?

WES

I'm forty-two. Men are dying at forty-five. It's hard work we do. I might not live to raise it.

MARGARET

So today, this is when you start noticing us having another baby?

WES

I die soon and you're left with a baby to raise up on your own. I didn't expect to be thinking about this at my age.

MARGARET

I didn't do this by myself, Wes. I told you this was happening months ago. You remember when I told you?

(WES shrugs.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Right after service on Saint Patrick's Day. March 17, 1929. I thought that would be a good day to tell you because you'd have lots to celebrate that day.

(She touches her belly.)

So I tell you and you say fine and then you never talk about it so I don't push on you to talk. I'm too busy to chase after you. I figure you'll notice when the baby's here.

(WES gets off the chair and kneels down beside her, touches her.)

WES

Margaret, I'm sorry. I've been waiting on talking to you ever since you told me. I heard what you said. But what I remember is not knowing how I'm to take care of you. And our baby. I didn't know what to say.

MARGARET

Why not say you're pleased God's giving us a child? And Caroline's going to have someone to remember with after we're gone.

WES

I know you're right. It'll be more like another baby to her. Caroline's eighteen.

MARGARET

It'll be someone who shares her parents, Wes.

WES

Better late than never. But we'll be different parents to each of them now that we're old.

MARGARET

What are you say! I'm mother to both of them. You're always their father.

WES

It can't be the same as it was with Caroline.

MARGARET

All you want is going out on the boats. I know you, Wes. You're fishing to pretend this isn't happening.

WES

No, I'm fishing *because* it's happening. Every day the boats are full. You know that at the sheds. With the buyers taking all our cod, we're paying down our bills. I should be fishing as long as there's fish and the weather's fine.

MARGARET

Yes. Like you did when I was having Caroline. I never saw you.

WES

I don't remember. If you say so, it was true then. Then that's why I *shouldn't* go out to football now.

MARGARET

What's behind this? This can't be the day you suddenly remember we're having a baby.

WES

Lots of days I'm think it. A few weeks ago, the arseholes on Rene's boat are yelling at me that I'm an old man too old for this.

MARGARET

Men on another boat? Talking to you about our business?

WES

They stupid ones that Rene hires because he doesn't pay much. They're yapping away at me and laughing.

MARGARET

What do they say?

WES

Just the . . . garbage men say when they're on a boat going away and I can't knock their heads together. They're Michael's mates. Their yapping to remind me I'm an old man with a pretty wife who's having a baby.

MARGARET

Your mates talk more about your business than you do.

WES

It's not talking that's worth anything.

MARGARET

No one's fault but yours. You're the first one who knows about this when I tells ya. The women see me when we're salting cod at the sheds. We're talking and clucking.

WES

The women at the sheds know too? You telling everyone?

MARGARET

(Exasperated.)

Look at me Wes! What do you think? They're not blind, man! And they all think you're the grand one for taking on a baby at your age, by the way.

WES

Really?

MARGARET

But they must have husbands who listen to their wives. Because one of them tells a husband and he tells a mate who lets you know that your wife is having a baby!

WES

I know you're having a baby, Margaret. And glad of it.

MARGARET

Now that your mate tells ya we've got a baby coming, this makes you remember? Lord Jesus, Wes, not the sharpest knife in the shed.

WES

I'm feeling old for football. And maybe for more babies.

MARGARET

You can give up football if you want and I'd be sad. But you can't quit being a father to the little one that's coming.

WES

The boys on the boats are half my age. I look at them and they're staring back like they don't see ya. I'm not a ghost yet. But some days I feel one.

MARGARET

I'm fighting the urge to give you a smack the side of the head to see if ghosts can feel a whack.

WES

Those boys are strong but they don't know shit. About fishing or anything else.

MARGARET

You were them once. They'll know what you know if they live long enough. Just like Michael's becoming a good son now he's a father to Caroline's babies.

WES

Yeah, he puts the gleam in your eye for sure.

MARGARET

Wes, he's married our daughter. He's not murdered her or run off. He gets a medal for that.

WES

If I was half as stupid and cocky as his mates when I was their age, my captain would have thrown me off the boat and drown me just to shut me up.

MARGARET

And today there'd be no Caroline. And me without you as old and cranky as you are.

WES

I see these boys making a mess of tying a hook on a rope and I think I should show them how. But if I talk to them, they hand it over and tell me to do it while they go off for a smoke.

MARGARET

They're young. They got no sense yet.

WES

Being on boat with them all day? It's like trying to read a book but always starting in the wrong place. There's no making sense of it.

MARGARET

Then you got to find your place, Wes. That's up to you, not them. Your book's about to get a whole lot more interesting.

WES

Except I have less time for it now. I'm tired of stories that's always starting in the wrong place and having to go back to explain something to them boys. Some days I don't even know myself how my story got me to where I'm at.

MARGARET

Wes, I know your story. It's my story too. You don't have to explain any of it to me.

WES

I feel it's not worth the bother of telling it because I'm at the age no one's listening anyway.

MARGARET

Wes, my goodness, you're all of forty-two.

WES

Do you know many men fishing in their fifties? When our baby's gonna be not even ten? My whole life's been to get Caroline raised and grown up. I never knew how we'd do it or when the job would be finished.

MARGARET

Finished! It's never finished, Wes!

WES

You're the sure one who said what to do. That's always been enough for me. My job's fishing and coming back with enough to pay the bills. So I can take care of her and you.

MARGARET

And you've done a fine job of that, Wes.

WES

But I might not live long enough to see this one raised.

(Touches her.)

I feel it. There's another life here reaching out to grab hold of me. And I'm gonna catch it and keep it safe for as long as I live.

MARGARET

I know you will.

WES

I didn't think I'd be having to think about this again.

MARGARET

Well it's time to start thinking about it now.

WES

I still worry all the time about Caroline and she's got her own babies.

(Looks up at the window.)

And she's married a good man and lives down the road from us.

MARGARET

So are you giving up football now and settling in for a good couple of hours of Mrs. Burgess and her gabbing about how great her kids are? She'll be here shortly.

WES

You know the answer to that. I'll get my boots.

MARGARET

And Wes, remember now. You're forty-two so don't get winded running around up there. You need me to write it down for you? Your age so you won't forget it again?

WES

Why don't you just write it in your journal. Make a note to remind me on my next birthday to add a year.

(WES takes his mug to the kitchen.)

MARGARET

(Calling out towards the kitchen.)

I'll do that. I'll write that today's the day Wes figured out we're having a baby. With the help of the boys on the boats. Do you even know what day it is today, Wes?

WES (OFF)

I won't be long at football. I'd like to be here with you once Mrs. Burgess is gone. An hour and I'll be back.

(WES returns. Kisses her on the forehead.)

WES (CONT'D)

In case you're forgetting again, my love, for your journal, it's November 18, 1929.

(WES goes out the door left.)

MARGARET

You looked on the calendar in the kitchen, didn't ya!

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 1  
Scene 3

SETTING: A place beside the football field in Point au Gaul on November 18, 1929. As with all scenes in Point au Gaul, it occupies the left half of the stage. Downstage left, a rock with a flat top at the edge of the cliff overlooking the harbour and the water's edge a hundred feet below.

As in the previous scene, MARTIN from Toronto 1959 remains onstage seated in his darkened kitchen, silent, not reacting, as he observes the action of Point au Gaul 1929 on the other side.

AT RISE: MICHAEL stands looking left at the football field. He dribbles a ball between his feet. He is waiting, not joining the game. Another ball rolls towards him. He picks it up, holds it with both hands behind his head and throws it back at the off-stage players.

MICHAEL

(Yelling off left.)

Hey, ya mutts. You'll need this.

(He watches them play. Yells at them again.)

Yeah Gabe. You mutts play. I'm waiting for the old man. We'll come in a bit.

(WES enters left carrying his football boots.)

WES

Your brothers here? I saw only Bernie.

MICHAEL

Get your eyes fixed, old man. Gabe's there too.

WES

(Looks out left, sits on the rock to changes his shoes.)

So he is. I didn't recognize him. He's getting big.

MICHAEL

Yeah, he is. He's going to the new college next year, ya know.

WES

Seriously? Little Gabe?

MICHAEL

It's in St. John's. Memorial University College.

WES

Little Gabe a college boy? Who woulda thought? Didn't think he's done high school yet.



MICHAEL

It's our mum's doing. And your Caroline.

WES

Caroline? She didn't go to college.

MICHAEL

But she wanted to. Would have if there'd been one close.

WES

(Surprised.)

I never knew that.

MICHAEL

She has books of poetry. And always on about Shakespeare. Her and Gabe. He's over after supper with his homework when it's poetry and she's helping him figure it out. Now she has him reading Shakespeare too.

WES

How does she not tell me this?

MICHAEL

Dunno that. But I think Gabe's going to the college for the boxing. You know *that* now, don't ya?

WES

His boxing? Yeah, I think I do.

MICHAEL

He's been training with the club over in Lamaline. And he went to Lord's Cove last Sunday for an organized match. He won. Has real fights now. Three in the last year.

WES

He's a boxer. Who woulda thought that looking at him?

MICHAEL

I'm his big brother and I can tell you he knows how to scrap. Now the boys from Rene's boat know it too.

WES

The stupid ones with the mouths on 'em?

MICHAEL

The same. As my gran' would say, they've ruined good arseholes when they put teeth in those mouths. And Gabe's knocked some of 'em out.

WES

When?

MICHAEL

Yesterday. When their boat comes in. Me and Gabe go to meet them.

WES

Why?

MICHAEL

We're not happy what they're yapping about. We tell them they should shut their gobs. Or we're gonna shut them for 'em.

WES

What're they on about?

MICHAEL

You mostly. All that shit about you being an old man.

(Laughs.)

Wes, it's only me that gets to call you that. You're Caroline's dad so I got the right. But no one else does that or they're dealing with me.

WES

I can fight my own battles, sonny boy. You don't need to get your hands full of shit knocking their heads in on my account.

MICHAEL

You're right about that. But then they're talking shit about Mrs. Tyler, that's Caroline's mum. That's my other mum. I got no choice but to break their heads.

WES

What they say about Margaret?

MICHAEL

I'm not gonna say what they say. And they'll never be saying it again, that's for sure. Once they can use their dirty mouths again for anything other than crying and sucking their soup with a straw.

WES

Don't cross me boy. You tell me what they're saying about Margaret.

MICHAEL

You're staying home with the missus. Going home from your boat early. That's mostly all it is. That you're getting it pretty good. From her. That's why you're not so quick at football. Because women's bad for your legs and makes you slow at running.

WES

They're saying that bullshit?

MICHAEL

Just look at her. At her age. And then they laugh. There's more stuff I wouldn't let anyone say about *my* mum so I'm not letting them talk about Caroline's mum.

WES

(Standing, looking off left.)

Are they here? I shoulda settled this last week. I'll settle it now.

MICHAEL

They're not here. There's nothing to settle. We did. Actually Gabe did mostly. I wanted to but he said he'd like the practice. I held his coat.

WES

(Angry.)

You know they're not coming here? The four of them on Rene's boat? It was all of them last week that was talking shit at me.

MICHAEL

They won't be coming tonight. They don't want to be looking you or me or Gabe in the eye even if they could see outta theirs. To make it fair, I said any two of them could fuck off. The jittery bastards all wanted to run. But I said no, two's gotta stay and pay the piper. I even let them choose.

WES

I'm not so good at counting. I'll settle it with the four.

MICHAEL

Well you'll have to wait until the two Gabe had a dance with can open their eyes. Before I could move, Gabe's done with them. I draw the line at beating a grown man who's crying so I didn't get my turn.

WES

And the other two?

MICHAEL

They hadn't run far. I called them back to pick up their garbage. Didn't want it near my boat. They picked up their mates and went staggering off like they's hauling someone's granny who's been hitting the sauce.

WES

I'm going to deal with them. I can't have them saying that. And you and little Gabe fighting for me.

MICHAEL

No disrespect, Wes. You want to break their heads again when they crawl out from under their beds, I'll be happy to hold your coat. But Mrs. Tyler, she's my family too. They know they don't want to cross you—to cross *us*—again.

WES

I'm gonna find them. Tonight. Or tomorrow on the boats.

MICHAEL

The two that danced with Gabe will be mouth breathing for a few weeks, I think. Unless they want to be explaining that new eye shadow thing they got going, they're not coming around. The other two are gonna run like rats if they see ya coming.

WES

And little Gabe. Not something I woulda expected from him. And off to college too. From Point au Gaul. He'll be all the way off in St. John's. The first of any of us.

MICHAEL

Finishing his high school this year and when I see him again next Christmas, he'll be the big college man from St. John's.

WES

You'll be kissing his arse for a change instead of your brothers always kissing yours.

MICHAEL

I don't need college to be a fisher in Point au Gaul. You and me Wes, we're getting along just fine. Dumb as rocks but happy to be alive. And my brothers will always kiss their big brother's arse.

(Lights come down slowly. MICHAEL moves the ball at his feet and stands looking out left. His movements have a quality of ritual to them, not realistic. WES moves downstage, sits on the rock looking out. A light shifts to find WES. In the distance a faint rumbling sound.)

WES

(Looking at the harbour.)

Babies. God doesn't tell you the price of them is your own life. I'm not sure I have enough life left to pay. Your life is what you give away to care about someone else's life all the time. God doesn't tell you that when he gives you the baby. He gives it to your first and then one day he says time to pay up.

MICHAEL

(In dim light. Standing in a separate space. His movements are ritualistic, dance-like.)

I have lots of life yet. I can pay the price. For all the babies Caroline wants.

(He shifts his position to another pose. Goes still.)

WES

You're watching a baby in the crib and then one day it's going to school. All those years you wished away looking at a sleeping baby is your life. They're a kid now playing outside with other kids. One day, they run off with kids that's older than them and they don't come home when it's dark and you don't know where they're at. Your heart starts to hurt like it's pushing a bag of mud in your chest. You want to scream except that wouldn't do any good.

MICHAEL

I can imagine the future when there's kids. They'll run off with other kids. Then they'll come in like it's nothing. You'll feel like a fool because your baby who's now a kid made you so mad at them you could cry. Or murder them.

(He shifts to another pose. Goes still.)

(WES glances back to check on MICHAEL. The rumbling sound is louder. WES watches the harbour.)

WES

One day, they're grown up like Caroline and they go away and have their own babies. Your house is empty and you see what you've become. An old fool who's missed his own life while tending to a baby's.

(Beat.)

Margaret wouldn't talk like this.

MICHAEL

He better not let Margaret hear what he's thinking.

(He shifts to another pose. Goes still.)

WES

I married Margaret when she's eighteen. And then she's Caroline's mother and busy at it all the time even when she's down at the sheds cleaning cod. Today, she's still eighteen, the way she's always telling me that her life is grand and so mine must be too and there's lots more life to be had.

MICHAEL

I've got all the time in the world to raise all Caroline's babies.  
(He shifts to another pose. Goes still.)

WES

We talked about it after Caroline. Another baby. I said it takes a long time to raise a baby. Maybe I'd be too old when it was done. She laughed at me. She said a new baby makes an old woman a new mother. Works for an old man too. That's Margaret's joke back on God.

(WES glances back at MICHAEL. The rumbling is noticeable. WES gets up, goes to the edge of the stage and looks down at the harbour.)

MICHAEL

Margaret says there's no point to bad thoughts. When we come back on the boats with cod, the women are there for cleaning and salting. Caroline's there. Margaret's there. What's not to love about life, eh?  
(He shifts to another pose. Goes still.)

WES

(Looking down right at the sheds at the water's edge.)  
There's still some there working late. There's lots of hands needed when there's this much fish. Some women bring their kids when the weather's good and they're all watching the kids playing while they work.

MICHAEL

Caroline says a mother doesn't care if another mother yells at her kid to stop them doing something. It's all the kids and all the mothers and everyone knows who the kids belong to. It's like watching puppies.  
(He shifts to another pose. Goes still.)

(The rumbling is very loud.)

WES

(Concentrating on the sheds down right.)  
There's so many kids now. They'll be going home soon.

MICHAEL

It's all the mothers from around pitching in. Even ones with babies come. That's why Caroline's always going. They know they're needed at the sheds. They leave the babies with neighbours or older girls and collect them after. It's hard work but Caroline's wanting to go back.

(He shifts to another pose. Goes still.)

WES

Margaret's not been going maybe a month now with the baby coming. But she's going to go back. The tide's gone early.

MICHAEL

It will be good for Caroline to be with the other mums. Soon she'll be going back.

(He shifts to another pose. Goes still.)

WES

(WES looks further out, scanning the harbour.)

The tide's gone early. My mum used to read stories to me. I was the boy who pretended I didn't care about stories. But I did when it was my mum reading them. I liked her being on my bed and the sound of her voice. I could smell the soap from her bath. It was her hair.

(Something in the distance catches his attention. He pauses. The rumbling changes in frequency to feel almost like a vibration.)

WES (CONT'D)

I could see the places in the stories. There's one story she read me about a prince trapped in a castle. His parents, the king and queen, keep him locked up there because it's too dangerous to let a little prince go out in the world beyond the wall. It's a tower, high above a harbour like if Point au Gaul had a castle. This prince is always wanting to get out of the castle to see the world. So he asks the sea to come in and take him away.

MICHAEL

Caroline has this story about a harbour. It's from her father she says. About Point au Gaul if it had a castle. This little prince lives in a castle by a harbour and he wants to go out. But his parents won't let him. He thinks if he could climb out the window and jump far enough, he'd land in the water where it was deep and then swim to shore and be out. And while he's thinking of how mad his parents would be, the water rises up and turns into a lion's head roaring and it swallows the castle and eats the prince.

(The rumbling stops. Silence. WES looks out. The lights come up full. MICHAEL transitions to interacting with WES. They deliver their observations in a ritualistic manner as if in a choral voice.)

MICHAEL

The sea's gone early tonight.

WES

Low tide's not this.

MICHAEL

(Pointing.)

The tidemark against the wharf. Where the boat's docked. The mark's out the water.

WES

It's still. There's no sea.

MICHAEL

Even at the deep. It's gone.

WES

That's a hole down in the harbour. It took our sea.

MICHAEL

No. Not down a hole. The water's gone out. Past the point, it's low out there.

WES

My boat. There's no sea under it. It's on stones. On mud. Like I dragged it up. Out of the water.

MICHAEL

It's mud. All the way out. Where's the water gone? It's mud. All the way to the schooners. There's no water. It's gone.

WES

The scrapes on our dories. They're round the keel. You see them. They're out of water.

MICHAEL

Those scrapes is when we bump coming in too deep. We're hitting hard when water's low. That's the marks under our dories with no water.

WES

The colour of water is green and wrinkled. The colour's gone out of it tonight.

MICHAEL

The grey is all rocks. Not water.

WES

The brown is ground. That's the bottom. The harbour's got a bottom like mud.



MICHAEL

The boats are out of water. They're sitting crooked. Kiddies' toys.

WES

The schooners. That's a mile to there. They're stuck.

MICHAEL

There's no water for them. They're grounded.

WES

Too deep there to be stuck. The harbour's deep there. For big ships.

MICHAEL

They're stuck. The water's gone. Like eagles that got tangled up and killed each other on the landwash.

WES

That's masts down on the ground out there. Like dead birds with wings stuck in mud.

MICHAEL

Ships out for a slew and stumbling home half-cut. Laying down on the road for a rest.

WES

Those two. Schooners. With masts across the other boat. Holding on to each other. The riggings will be tangled.

MICHAEL

Like two moose with their antlers locked up, their heads breaking their necks. They'll crack. When there's water under them again, they'll float dead together.

WES

They'll be splits for a wood box when there's water under the boats again.

MICHAEL

The ships past the point. They're leaning over. They're grounded.

WES

It's a devil's painting of the harbour. What it looks like with no water.

MICHAEL

He's stopped the world to let us see it. Before he takes it to hell and hangs it in his parlour.

WES

No wind. Where's it at? The harbour's water. It's gone. Where's the cod?

MICHAEL

(Pointing.)

There! That line. It's thin flat. The edge of a cod knife laying across the point to the other side. That line, that's the line of the water going away.

WES

Not going away. Coming in.

(The choral effect ends. WES and MICHAEL transition to realistic action.)

MICHAEL

Tell Gabe to go to my house. Get Caroline and the babies. Tell Bernie to get our mum.  
(He looks down to the harbour's edge, to the sheds.)

WES

We'll get them from the houses. I'll tell your brothers and the others. Get the kids and everyone. Everyone from the houses. They come up here.

MICHAEL

(He looks down to the harbour's edge.)

I'll go for them at the sheds.

WES

They won't see down there. They won't know. Caroline's there too.

MICHAEL

No. She's not going tonight. She's at home.

WES

No! She's there. Margaret said she's putting the kids with your mother. She's going back to the salting tonight. She's at the sheds, Michael.

(They look down at the sheds for Caroline.)

MICHAEL

Tell Gabe to go with Bernie to our mum's. Mum can't get here with the twins so they'll have to go by Water Road, and then cut through the bush. They'll know that way. And then by the lane with mum and the twins back up to the high road.

WES

I know the way. I'll tell them. We'll get 'em back here and wait for you and Caroline. Past high road. I'll get Margaret and Mrs. Burgess and her kids.

MICHAEL

Wes, tell my brothers to go straight to mum's. Don't let them go to my house for Caroline. Just mum and the twins. I'll get Caroline.

WES

There's packs of kids there. Still playing. They can't see it. The women's inside salting.

MICHAEL

(Starts to run off left.)

It's a mile road to sheds from here. I'll be back here soon with Caroline and all the women, all the kids from the sheds.

WES

(Looking out, working out what he's seeing.)

Michael, the sea's back. The schooners are rolling over.

MICHAEL

(Comes back to look out at what WES sees.)

It's fog. A mountain of fog. But fog doesn't push them boats like that.

WES

Not fog. The sea's up. Like a dancing bear.

MICHAEL

Then there's the drumming for the dancing. Ya hear that?

(A rhythmic drum beat begins, increasing in volume as the scene continues.)

WES

It's a thousand ships coming in with too much wind behind them.

MICHAEL

And darkness now. The light's gone. It's a thundering dark.

WES

No. Not thunder. The sea coming back for us.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 1  
Scene 4

SETTING: Wes and Margaret's bedroom in Point au Gaul on November 18, 1929. It occupies the left half of the stage. It is the room above the parlour. On the left side, a window looks out to the harbour. Upstage, a door leads to the stairs down to the kitchen.

As in the previous scene, MARTIN from Toronto 1959 remains onstage seated in his darkened kitchen, silent, not reacting, as he observes the action of Point au Gaul 1929 on the other side.

AT RISE: MARGARET in a night gown rests on a bed that faces the window. CAROLINE sits on a chair near her touching her face with a cloth and talking softly. The front door opens and closes downstairs. CAROLINE hears it and goes to the bedroom door.

CAROLINE

(At the bedroom door looking out. To MARGARET.)

It sounds like Dad's back from his football. It's early for them to be done.

(Calls downstairs.)

We're up here Dad. Mum's having a lay-down. She wants you.

(CAROLINE returns to her chair. WES enters. He's surprised to see CAROLINE.)

WES

(To CAROLINE.)

You're here? I thought you were at the sheds tonight. Where's your twins?

CAROLINE

I was. The twins are still with Michael's mum. I went but they have enough hands tonight and I wanted to come back and see how my mum's doing.

(He motions for CAROLINE to get up. She gets up and moves to one side. But he pulls her into a hug, keeps her a bit long. CAROLINE and MARGARET seem amused. Then he holds her at arm's length and looks at her closely.)

WES

No, not your chair I need. Just a hug from ya. You're a good daughter to your mother.

MARGARET

Well Mr. Tyler, you're back on time. Looks like I'm not going to be having this baby tonight without you.

WES

(Abruptly.)

We should be going out now. Going up the road to sit a bit.

CAROLINE

Dad, we're not going out. The doctor's coming here. Mrs. Burgess sent her daughter for him already.

WES

(Sharply.)

Caroline. Help your mum get herself dressed. We should be leaving.

(Looks around the room for MARGARET's clothes.)

It's good to get some air. Margaret, you said it's a nice evening to step out.

MARGARET

I don't know what air you're breathing at football. You cracked your noggin? Get kicked in the head again? We're not going out tonight.

(WES picks through MARGARET's clothes.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

WES! Stop it. What are you looking for?

CAROLINE

Dad, the doctor's coming here. Whadda ya at?

(WES stops, motions for silence.)

WES

(Agitated.)

Caroline, look at her! She's all mops and brooms. You should brush her hair—

MARGARET

You're right crooked today—

(MARGARET is seized by a shudder. CAROLINE sits with her, takes her hand.)

CAROLINE

Breathe mum. Let them pass through you.

MARGARET

Whadda ya think, Wes? Your grown daughter's left her own babies to come tell her mum how to have another.

(WES sorts MARGARET's clothes on the bed. He motions CAROLINE up out of the chair, sits down beside MARGARET and takes her hand.)

WES

(Calmly.)

Yes. She's a right bossy one. Just like her mother.

(Beat.)

Now listen to me. The two of you. Listen about what happens next. The tide's come in high and we should be up the hill watching for it. Come on, we goes now.

CAROLINE

(Grabs WES by the shoulder, pulls him to turn.)

Dad, whadda ya saying—

(WES catches her hand and holds her. He keeps hold of MARGARET's hand.)

MARGARET

(Pulls her hand free.)

You gone where the ducks wear mitts? We're here tonight and we're staying here. I'm not climbing mountains so you can go whale watching.

(WES and MARGARET watch each other.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Caroline, you run along and collect your babies from Mrs. Wilkes now. You and Michael take care of your family tonight.

(The front door opens downstairs. Sounds of heavy boots rushing along the hall below and then into the kitchen. Loud voices.)

CAROLINE

That's the doctor come.

(Goes to the door and steps out.)

MARGARET

(To WES firmly.)

I'll be staying here. There's no babies being born on the side of a rock somewheres up the road.

CAROLINE

(Appearing at the bedroom door.)

It's Mrs. Burgess and her husband. He says it's a tidal wave.

MARGARET

(To CAROLINE.)

You go now. Michael's probably already at his mum's with the babies. You should be there.

CAROLINE

I left them with his mum.

WES

Gabe's gone for them. And Mrs. Wilkes too and Bernie. They're gonna meet you up the hill.

CAROLINE

But there's everyone down at the sheds.

WES

Michael's getting them.

CAROLINE

Jesus Dad, you think I'm at there. Michael won't know I've come here. His mum will tell him I'm at the salting.

WES

He's not going to his mum's. Gabe and Bernie are going for her and your kids. Michael's going to the sheds.

CAROLINE

He'll be looking for me down there! He won't know I'm here!

WES

The women will tell him. He's smart enough to get them all up the hill. Where you should be too, to take your babies when Gabe and Bernie brings them to you. You scoot now.

MARGARET

Your Dad says you must go.

C'mere. I wants ya again.

WES

(WES hugs CAROLINE, then pushes her to the door. Voices downstairs, the door opens and closes.)

WES (CONT'D)

You catch up to them. They're all going up the hill. Where your babies are gonna be.

MARGARET

(Waves Caroline away.)

Go now. You're not needed here.

(CAROLINE exits, goes down the stairs. The front door closes. Silence. WES sits beside MARGARET and smooths her hair off her forehead. Neither of them speak.)

MARGARET

I'm staying home Wes.

WES

Yes Margaret. And I'm staying with you.

(MARGARET lays back against her pillows and closes her eyes. WES takes her hand and looks up at the window left.)

(BLACKOUT)



ACT 2  
Scene 1

SETTING: The kitchen of Clare and Martin in Toronto on June 18, 1959. It occupies the right half of the stage. It is largely unchanged from the previous Toronto scene. On the table, there is the bag of chocolate chip cookies, coffee mugs, two glasses, a bottle of rum, almost gone, and some empty Coke bottles.

AT RISE: MARTIN is alone at the table. He makes a half-hearted attempt to tidy while he waits for MARGARET. He takes empties to the counter, opens the fridge and brings back two Cokes. Opens the rum bottle and empties it into his glass. He takes a Coke to the bottle opener on the wall and pops the cap off. Goes to the upstage door and looks up.

MARTIN

(Calling.)

Margaret, how you doing up there? Finding everything you need?

(He comes to the table, takes the empty rum bottle and exits the upstage door. MARGARET comes from upstairs and enters through the same door. Sits at the table. MARTIN joins her with a full bottle of rum.)

MARTIN

(Opens the bottle, pours her glass, places it on the table.)

I guess someone drank it all.

MARGARET

Your house has so many rooms.

MARTIN

No more than any of the houses on the street. Yeah, I guess. Maybe a lot of rooms.

MARGARET

I closed all the doors. If you're not using rooms, you close the doors to save on heating.

MARTIN

You know it's June in Toronto. There's no furnace on. Closing doors is actually less efficient. It disrupts the air movement. It creates pressure imbalances between rooms.

MARGARET

If there's no furnace on, there's no air movement. So how would closing the doors disrupt the air movement if it's not moving?

MARTIN

I guess you've had enough rum to be thinking like an engineer now. There's no disrupting air movement that's not moving. Would you like another cookie?

(He holds the bag. She takes a cookie, chewing while staring at him. He chews a cookie back.)

MARGARET

I've brought something for Clare. I'll show you first.

(She carefully takes a brown leather journal from her lap. The cover's worn and has a clasp. It's bulging with newspaper clippings and photos tucked inside its pages.)

MARTIN

Wow! That's seen better days. What you got in there? The history of Newfoundland?

MARGARET

It just might be, b'y.

(She places it on the table, opens it and hands him a photo.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

There's Wes. That's Clare's father when he was younger. Clare wasn't even born then.

MARTIN

(Looking at the photo.)

There's four men here. Which is Wes?

MARGARET

(Laughs.)

The good looking one.

MARTIN

They all got fish. Those big flat fish things in their hands? That's fish, right? Who's the good looking Wes with the fish?

MARGARET

Tall. With the big smile. He's always pretty in front of a camera. Those *flat fish things* is dried cod. You did good there, Toronto, to figure out they're fish. Not all fish comes in little cans at your A&P.

MARTIN

You'd need a million of those cans for what they got here.

MARGARET

They're flats. With the heads cut off. The boys are unloading them, taking them to Ryan's scale at the dock to be weighed in.

MARTIN

(Handing the photo back.)

He looks different in the picture from how I remember him at the wedding.

MARGARET

You're a clever one. He's thirty years younger in this picture than when you meet him. And he's not wearing overalls and covered in fish guts when he walks Clare down the aisle.

MARTIN

I'm just saying we were all so much younger once. Trying to find our way. You don't notice how much you change as you get older.

MARGARET

(Looking at the photo.)

Yeah. He's a younger self there for sure. The one without the weight of the world on him. Before Clare was born when he was too busy working to be worrying about not working.

MARTIN

Well, it's still a lovely picture Margaret.

MARGARET

(Puts the photo back. Looks through the journal. Finds two yellow folded sheets tucked in the pages. Hands them to MARTIN.)

You be careful with this. Clare wrote this. When she was in school.

MARTIN

(Wiping his hands on his pants, he gingerly opens the pages.)

I don't want to get sweaty fingerprints on it. Blue ink. A child's writing. Wow! I can see this is Clare's! Look at the straight lines, the spaces. They're perfect.

MARGARET

Her teachers always marveled at her handwriting.

MARTIN

Yeah, for sure. But it's not just the writing. Everything with her is so organized. You should see the grocery lists she gives me. They're a work of art. Even arranged by the aisles when you walk around the store.

MARGARET

Clare was always good at writing. And explaining things in way that makes sense.

MARTIN

(Scans the pages. Not reading. Folds them up.)

Okay. I'll keep this to show her later. When I bring her home.

MARGARET

No. You're not keeping it. It's mine. It's for you to read.

MARTIN

(Opening the pages again and glancing over them.)

Now? But it's long. And it's late. It should be read carefully.

MARGARET

Then read it carefully.

MARTIN

I intend to. I don't want to be rude to you by sitting here reading a long story. You know, while we're having a drink and talking.

MARGARET

But we won't be talking. You'll be reading and I'll be listening. And we can still be drinking.

MARTIN

Really? Now isn't this cozy. After a long day in the hospital me reading you bedtime stories.

MARGARET

She was good at writing stories. Her best subject was history. But she liked writing stories too. She was good enough to put them in ink the first time and never have to make corrections.

MARTIN

I . . . unnnhhh . . . think that's great. She wouldn't have wasted paper then.

MARGARET

This one you're reading. Clare won a prize for this in school. That's why I kept it and brought it here to show her.

MARTIN

So shouldn't this be something she reads first?

MARGARET

You can read it. I'm here to explain things so you understand what she's writing about, Toronto.

(MARTIN pours rum. MARGARET takes the bottle and puts it down. She goes to the fridge, gets a Coke, and pops the cap off on the bottle opener. Back at the table, she pours more rum into their glasses and adds Coke.)

MARTIN

(Turning the pages over, judging the length.)

Now? I'm reading this. Out loud?

(MARGARET stares at him.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Laughs.)

Of course. Out loud. Hey, did I ever tell you how we met at McGill? She did so well there.

MARGARET

Clare loved school. It wasn't only playing with the other kids. She liked the schoolwork. Even when times were bad, I didn't keep her home. She had to go to school. The teachers all said she should go to college after she's done in Burin.

MARTIN

Well yeah, when you see her at McGill. Her grades.

MARGARET

We think it should be Memorial University College. That's St. John's. It's still new to us then and far away. But I have cousins there and it's Newfoundland. But it's Montreal for her.

MARTIN

Lucky for me.

MARGARET

McGill is about her sister. Caroline's moved to Montreal. When Clare asks her if she can come, Caroline's glad to take her. So McGill it is. It's not Newfoundland but still a good school they say.

MARTIN

Really?

MARGARET

So are you going to read me a story, Martin? And yes, that would be out loud.

MARTIN

Shouldn't we wait until Clare's here?

MARGARET

She knows this. She wrote it. I don't know how she knows the stuff she says in this when she's just a girl. Now read to me. And learn some things about your Clare.

(MARTIN stalls. Clears the space. Places his elbows on the table. Readjusts. Turns his chair downstage parallel to the table, not facing MARGARET. Repositions his elbows. Moves his drink closer, then moves it again.)

MARGARET

Stop fidgeting. Read.

MARTIN (READING)

*I was born in Point au Gaul on the Burin Peninsula the day a tidal wave came to Newfoundland. It was November 18, 1929.*

(MARTIN stops reading. Surprised.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

I knew that the tidal wave happened when she was a baby. I didn't know this. The night she's born?

MARGARET

Read.

MARTIN (READING)

*This is about what happened to my family that day. It is true because I heard it from my mother Margaret Tyler, my father Wes Tyler and my sister Caroline Wilkes. I also heard some of it from other people who were there. No one has the whole story. Everyone has a part, the part they remember. I have put down here only what I know from them and what is true.*

(MARTIN stops reading.)

MARGARET

Why you stopping? There's more.

MARTIN

I can hear Clare's voice.

MARGARET

Of course you can. They're her words.

MARTIN (READING)

*One hundred and fifty miles south of the coast of Burin, there's an earthquake under the ocean. It opens a great trench. It's a hole in the bottom of the Grand Banks where the bottom breaks like glass. The bottom cannot hold, it's all falling, into a deep dark that's swallowing, that's drowning what's living, that's taking the lives that live by the sea. It's rocks rolling down the side of a mountain. Except it's under the ocean. It's five o'clock at home in Point au Gaul—*

MARGARET

(Interrupting.)

The weather was nice. I remember Wes had gone up to football. Supper was done and I just wanted a cup of tea without him being underfoot.

MARTIN

None of this was expected?

MARGARET

What was expected was Clare. I was close to my time with Clare and Wes was hanging around like a lost dog when the cat's taken his bed.

MARTIN

But you would have needed him there.

MARGARET

Not right that moment. We didn't know. Sometimes I liked having an hour on my own where I didn't have to think about anybody else. So I sent him up to football.

MARTIN

That's soccer right, not football.

MARGARET

Just read to me Martin.

MARTIN (READING)

*The hole swallows the sea from our harbour out past the point. Father's playing football with other men. The tide goes out. The dories are what you see first because they're lashed to the wharves at the land's edge. Near the stages for the cod that's out drying. The dories are jerking at their ropes like dogs tied up seeing their kids coming from school. Then they stop pulling and lay down, on their sides. Just fallen over. With no water under them, they aren't boats. They're in a stony sleep. Maybe they're dreaming when they took men took out to sea. But they're not boats now. They're dangerous things laying on rocks with their ropes hanging off waiting for something to call them.*

(MARTIN pauses, looks at MARGARET. She pours rum in his glass. Tops in some Coke. He nods and starts reading.)

MARTIN (READING) (CONT'D)

*They're dangerous things laying on rocks with their ropes hanging off—*

(MARGARET taps her hand on the table. He stops.)

MARGARET

You've gone back too far. Next it's about the schooners that are grounded.

MARTIN

(Scans the page.)

Sorry. Lost my place.

MARGARET

Don't get lost. Read it in the right order.

MARTIN (READING)

*The schooners out past the point go dry next. They are large boats that are a half-a-mile out from shore. They're sitting up on ground.*

(MARTIN stops, takes a sip from his glass.)

MARGARET

You lost again?

MARTIN

Margaret, I think we should wait for Clare. She should be reading this, not me.



MARGARET

(Shakes her head.)

She knows this. It's you who don't know it. It's not your fault. You live here.

(She gestures up at the house.)

You have so many rooms upstairs.

MARTIN

I don't see what this has to do with the rooms in this house—

MARGARET

It's not just the rooms. It's you not knowing what you don't know. You can't even imagine what you don't know.

MARTIN

(Looking at his watch.)

It's getting late and I've got to get some rest before I go back to the hospital.

MARGARET

You know you won't sleep now.

MARTIN

(Looking at the pages.)

And this from Clare. I know there were those tidal waves years ago. I may be wrong but I didn't think they lasted very long. It's not something you hear much about. I'm sorry, I'm not trying to minimize what your family—

MARGARET

Don't.

MARTIN

What that night meant for your family.

MARGARET

Seriously Martin? You mean *my* family? Not *your* family? Clare's baby today?

MARTIN

(Beat.)

You know, you do have Clare's eyes. I can see her eyes in you.

MARGARET

She has mine.

MARTIN

(Forces a laugh.)

Yes, of course. Why don't I get back to reading then?

MARGARET

Please.

MARTIN (READING)

*No one knows when the sea comes back. People tell their own stories. They say that another earthquake pushes the walls of the trench back together. It's a trench under the Grand Banks that opens to take all our water. And then it closes and there's no place for the water to go but to come back to us. Back to Point au Gaul—*

MARGARET

(Reciting.)

*That's the tidal wave that comes to us. We're fishers so we know when the water's up. It's a pitiless thing that wants our village.*

MARTIN

Margaret, I thought this was a story. Something Clare made up. From her imagination. Not real.

MARGARET

I call it a story because it's what she wrote. It's her story about things that happened.

MARTIN

But this story from Clare. It sounds *real*. Like it's true.

MARGARET

Because it *is* true. You missed it in Toronto. But it was true for us. Now be quiet and read it to me like the clever boy you are.

MARTIN (READING)

*There are more waves. They take the schooners that are laying on the ground and break them into splits. The ships roll onto the landwash, then crawl up like sea monsters that live underwater and have no business on land. They are loosed upon us. They tear open the sheds looking for the women. They're cleaning and salting cod and talking about their kids and their husbands. Some have the kids with them. The high road up to the houses is gone under water. There's a darkness that's a hard driving rain. There's no moon, no stars because it's not night. No one can see. It's all black. Some say the dark is the water rising up, the waves are a dark that sweeps everything. There's noise that sounds like the waves screaming for them. After, some say it's a howling of the waves in their heads that won't let them sleep.*

MARGARET

Sometimes, I have the howling. I can't tell if it's in my ears or my mind. But when it's there it's there.

MARTIN

Maybe a doctor could help. If it's ringing or sloshing noise. In your ears. Or maybe not.

(Beat.)

Clare never told me this. How would she know all this? How could she write this?

MARGARET

Because she listens. As a babe, she's always listening to what others say. When I'm talking to Mrs. Burgess or anyone else who remembers that day and maybe we're in the kitchen making supper, we forget she's there because she's quiet and playing at putting her doll to bed in the dog's basket or reading a story to the cat.

(Beat.)

And someone whispers something about what they remember from that day. And I look at her and she's just staring at me.

MARTIN

I see.

MARGARET

She's remembering everything people whisper. It's my fault that I don't listen to her when she has questions. I was forgetting about it all too. Or I didn't want to remember. Then Clare's growing up and making us remember it again because she wants to know.

MARTIN

She's always wanting to know everything.

MARGARET

(Gestures at the pages.)

There's not much to go. Finish it.

MARTIN (READING)

*At the sheds, some women try crossing the swamp because in summer there's a path straight through to the high road. But it's all mud up past their knees. Then the first tidal wave comes to the swamp and takes them.*

MARGARET

Even if the path hadn't been mud, the first water came so far it would have caught them on the high road.

MARTIN (READING)

*Some women stay with children at the sheds because they don't know what to do. There are three sisters who say they should not leave because they're not going out anywhere to get drowned. My sister Caroline says that's where her husband Michael gets drowned.*

(MARTIN stops. MARGARET, her face turned away, rocks herself gently in her chair.)

MARTIN

Michael? Is this your Michael? Your family's Michael? Margaret?

MARGARET

(Without looking at him, rocking.)

Just read.

MARTIN (READING)

(Slowly reads the line about Michael again.)

*My sister Caroline says that's where her husband Michael gets drowned.*

(Beat.)

*Michael is a hero. He goes down there against the water to get those sisters out. To save those sisters who can't save themselves.*

(MARGARET stops rocking and turns to MARTIN.  
She knows the story by heart. She listens carefully.)

MARGARET

(Reciting from memory.)

*My father says it's the dories that tear away the walls. The dories are small. They go up and down on the water with the waves. The tidal waves can't break them. They pick them up and throw them like they're pieces of mountains hurled by giants, smashing them against the houses that stand in their way. They say you feel when the house you're in comes loose. The water brings all the works of what's used for the cod from the stores and crashes it against the houses. That's lumber and wharves and gear. And nets, oars and pieces of masts. Even walls of the sheds are floated up to knock at the door.*

(MARGARET raps her hand on the table. To MARTIN.)

You do the next part.

MARTIN (READING)

*When my sister Caroline is sad, I know it's for Michael. I never forget because it's November 18 every year and that's my birthday. The day we lose our Michael is my birthday. I know what she's thinking when she's wishing me happy birthday. She's thinking that Michael drowned because he's looking for her at the sheds. I'm thinking of Michael too. He won't find her because she's at our house. With our mother when I'm being born.*

(MARGARET taps. MARTIN stops, waits.).

MARGARET

Caroline has her youngest the April after. After the tidal wave. She didn't know she was going to have a baby when Michael gets drowned. A baby girl born to no father.

MARTIN

But you and Wes were there for her.

MARGARET

And she's already got the twins and no husband. But Michael's brother is always there, that's Gabe. He's taking care she's not falling into hell with all the demons in her head. She's got to keep the demons away because she's got three kids to be mother to.

(MARTIN nods to the pages in his hand. Waits for the signal to start reading.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Caroline is a strong woman. Like her sister. But without Michael . . .

(She stops. Picks up her journal. Opens it and arranges some pages. Puts it down on the table.)

MARTIN

Of course. Having lost her husband . . . Especially that way.

MARGARET

It doesn't matter the way. Whether he drowned fishing off the Banks or he fell out of bed and hit his head. It's now without Michael all the time. Being looked at as the mother who lost her husband and has all the kids.

MARTIN

People who knew her. They would have been kind.

MARGARET

Without Michael, there's no joy for her. There's babies crying all the time and when they're not crying, it's quiet and that's when there's just anger. I could see there was something she wants that's not here, not Point au Gaul. She's listening to it out past the harbour.

MARTIN

I don't need to keep reading. We can sit quiet.

MARGARET

Past the point out the harbour. It's calling her because she's always staring at it when she's not tending babies.

MARTIN

Would you like me to keep reading? You tell me what you'd like.

MARGARET

Caroline says she's watching the water for the weather. I can see where she's looking. It's the swamp by the sheds. I don't want to have a row with her so I say nothing.

MARTIN

Is that possible? To see the weather from the harbour?

MARGARET

It's not weather she looks for.

(Beat.)

Are you and Clare happy here?

MARTIN

Sure. I guess. You mean Toronto, not Montreal? It's where we live and it's nice. It's close to work.

MARGARET

Happy together. You're glad you've found each other?

MARTIN

Of course. I mean we're married and things are good. And now today we have the baby. Baby Michael.

MARGARET

Michael. Yes, Clare's baby.

MARTIN

Yes, Clare's baby. Clare is the anchor. She's my rock. Clare is my life. I mean, I'd be lost without her.

MARGARET

Imagine losing her today. Losing Clare. Today. You go to the hospital expecting to see her and she's gone. And then having to go on. They hand you a baby and tell you to go on. That's what Michael did to Caroline when he got himself drowned.

MARTIN

(Carefully.)

You can't be blaming him for that.

MARGARET

Sometimes I get so angry at Michael, I shake. But then I tell lies to myself. I live by my own lies and forget it all and remember only when it was before Clare. Before that night.

MARTIN

So much time has passed. It's hard to remember everything that happened.

MARGARET

But Clare says we have to remember. So now I do. And I'm telling you. So you'll know and you can remember too.

MARTIN

I didn't know. I can't remember what I didn't know.

MARGARET

You're the husband from Toronto. There's so much you will never know. Or maybe only hear the words of it. But not understand it. This is Clare's story. And Caroline's story. And Gabe's. And Wes's too and mine. And bless him, it's Michael's story too. This is Point au Gaul.

MARTIN

We always planned to visit.

MARGARET

Now Clare's put you into her story so you're part of it. Let me explain this to you. If you want to know Clare, this is what you should know.

(MARGARET touches her journal. MARTIN puts his pages down on the table and waits patiently.)

MARTIN

I'm listening.

MARGARET

A year after, Caroline's marrying Gabe. That's Michael's middle brother.

MARTIN

Yes, I know him from Montreal—

MARGARET

Yes. But he's not Montreal. Gabe's Point au Gaul. He's a nice boy. After Michael's gone, he's good with her babies. They're his nieces.

MARTIN

It must have been so sad to see his brother's children without their father. Without his brother.

MARGARET

Caroline wants to be out of Newfoundland. That's the deal. They get married and then they move to Montreal. We're sad but we know it's for the best. For them it's the best.

MARTIN

That would have been so long ago.

MARGARET

This is where it starts between those girls. With Caroline. She's not forgetting us. Never forgetting her baby sister Clare. She's always remembering her on her birthday and sending her a card from Montreal. And I keep every card for her even before she can read them.

MARTIN

That sounds like something sisters would do.

MARGARET

But soon she's reading them herself. Then Clare's in school, maybe seven years old, and she asks for *all* the birthday cards from her sister. She's writing stories. She wants to send her stories to her sister in Montreal.

MARTIN

You must have been pleased. I mean by the closeness of your daughters over that distance. And the difference in their ages. Clare's letters to her sister when she's seven. What was she saying?

MARGARET

I didn't know what Clare was saying to her. She didn't show them to me. I asked once and she said no. She's seven and she says no to her mother! Actually, that pleased me. So I said fine and I decided to let what they're saying between sisters stay between sisters.

MARTIN

That hasn't changed. I have no idea what they talk about.

MARGARET

I thought my job would be writing Caroline's address on an envelope for her. But she says no, she can get the address from the letters from Caroline and she wants to do it herself. So the first time, I show her where to write it on the envelope and where the return address goes on the flap on the back. She's doing it herself from then on.

MARTIN

It's best to let her do things her way. She's not an engineer but she still manages to figure out how things work pretty quick.

MARGARET

I had no idea that she got the pastor in on it until she tells me that he's going to take her letter to the post office for mailing. I figure she's telling me because she knows I want to help and she needs money for the stamp. I tell the cheeky thing that I'll pay for her stamp. It's four cents.



MARTIN

She's great with managing money. I leave all household bills to her. I'll have to ask her about those four cent stamps.

MARGARET

She gives the four cents to the pastor. And he tells her that she can keep the money if she promises to come to service on Sundays and pay attention to his sermons. So that's the deal she makes with him. Then she puts the four cents in the collection on Sunday anyway so the way I see it she's paying for her own stamp.

MARTIN

She really *is* good at stretching money.

MARGARET

Now you can finish your reading.

MARTIN (READING)

(Picks up the pages. Finds his place.)

*I write letters to Caroline in Montreal. I tell her Michael would have gone down to rescue them even if he knew she wasn't there. I tell her that Michael's being sent there. By going there, he saves a little boy who's hiding in a dory tied to a wharf, holding on with two hands when the waves shake it and try to roll it over to throw him out into the water. The boy won't let go when Michael comes to him. So Michael stays with him and talks to him and gets him free and takes him past the swamp to the part of the high road that's left. Michael gives the boy to an older girl and she takes him home to his mum. The girl is a woman now and she told me that's what Michael did.*

(MARTIN stops. Looks at MARGARET.)

MARGARET

*I tell her that Michael's being sent there.*

(Beat.)

She's seven. How does she know that?

MARTIN

This is Michael? I had no idea that this is Michael.

MARGARET

Yes, this is Caroline's Michael. And Clare's Michael too. Let's finish now.

MARTIN (READING)

*Then Michael goes back down to the sheds at the landwash to get the others. Every year at remembrance, the pastor tells what people remember about Michael. It's after Christmas that year when his brothers find him. He's frozen in the ice of the swamp. That's where the water took him. They don't know where he is all the days they're looking for him. But he's close by and they find him and they bring him home. Now we remember him every year on my birthday because he's a hero.*

(MARGARET has her hand out for the pages before MARTIN finishes. He passes them to her. She folds them and slips them back into her journal.)

MARGARET

I don't even remember when Clare's finding things out that are too sad for a little girl. We never tell her that about her birthday when she's little. Who would? And why? We tell her that birthdays are for good girls and getting a present.

MARTIN

She doesn't like celebrating her own birthday. Hates it when they make a deal of it at work.

MARGARET

We want to fuss about her but it's hard on account of what happened. And her sister Caroline never forgets her and always sends her a card from Montreal. No one tells a child what happened that night.

MARTIN

I guess I knew and I didn't. I mean, of course I know her birthday. I just didn't know the date of the tidal wave. And put them together. She never actually said it to me. She never told it to me so I would know.

MARGARET

Clare's not for talking about herself. She's a strong one, that girl. Like her sister. Back in Point au Gaul when Clare's starting school and hearing the pastor talking about Michael on her birthday every year, she begins to know.

MARTIN

Of course, there'd be others who'd know.

MARGARET

There's some older people in town who know. But they wouldn't say that to a child. She's a babe and it had nothing to do with her.

MARTIN

When did you tell her?

MARGARET

I didn't. I didn't know how. I kept thinking it had nothing to do with her so why put that on her? On her birthday. Except it had everything to do with her.

MARTIN

But parents of other kids would know. It's only a matter of time before another kid tells her.

MARGARET

It was the pastor who told her. He of all people. Maybe he's the best person to tell her because he has the words. I certainly didn't. It's the pastor who does remembrance every year for Michael, the hero who saved the boy in the dory and others too. At service, Clare's listening because it's her sister's husband. Our Michael. And it's the same day as her birthday.

MARTIN

As a parent, I don't know what you could say. Michael. He's trying to save people.

MARGARET

Clare already knows that part. She's trying to show Caroline how Michael should be remembered. With the pastor's help.

MARTIN

You can't say to a child that this tragedy is what her family thinks about—maybe what everyone around her thinks about—whenever she's getting excited about her birthday. She's a kid and kids are building up to this, their birthday, for weeks. And then all the people around her and the pastor too remind everyone of this crushing sadness.

MARGARET

Clare's figured it out. She's wanting us to know it too. Even if we can't understand, at least accept what Michael did for what it was.

MARTIN

Every year. Forever, for as long as she stays there in Point au Gaul? Her birthday is when everyone remembers the tidal wave? When people died and they lose their kids to the waves, and kids lose their fathers too? And husbands are lost. And wives are lost. God Margaret, I don't know what you'd say to her.

MARGARET

She's seven years old and she's asking questions about what she's heard. She wants to talk about what the pastor's saying about Michael. We put her off. The pastor teaches her bible stories twice a month so when she sees him next she asks him herself.

MARTIN

What does he tell her?

MARGARET

He answers her questions. She knows that Michael's gone up to heaven so she asks if he's now an angel. The pastor says no, Michael didn't become an angel but now that he's in heaven he lives with angels. She understands that Michael has made friends in heaven. With angels. Like meeting new kids at school. I'm glad she asks the pastor not me.

MARTIN

I see. I never would have thought of it like that.

(MARGARET opens her journal.)

MARGARET

But what really sticks with her is that Michael is a hero because he tried to save people. And he does save people. That's something she never forgets. And she wants to write it down so she can tell it all to Caroline. That's how it starts. Her writing stories about Michael and the pastor helping her. She's writing to her sister that Michael lives with angels and Caroline doesn't have to be sad because that's a good thing.

MARTIN

Michael's in heaven because he's a hero when the tidal wave comes. He chose to save people.

MARGARET

Michael's in heaven because he's a hero when the tidal wave comes. Every year on her birthday, Caroline in Montreal sends a card to Clare. And Clare's listening to the pastor about Michael and writing a story about Michael living with angels on account of being a hero who saves people.

MARTIN

You have these stories?

MARGARET

Caroline does. Clare's sending them to Caroline. That's what's happening between those sisters.

MARTIN

I thought it odd that every year for her own birthday, Clare sends a letter to her sister. On her own birthday. I asked her about it once and she said it was just sister talk. I didn't know it's about Michael.

MARGARET

I knew Michael. He was no angel. Just the man who would go out on rough seas in a leaky dory to rescue a cat.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 2  
Scene 2

SETTING: Wes and Margaret's bedroom in Point au Gaul on November 18, 1929. It's just past nine o'clock in the evening. The bedroom occupies the left half of the stage and is largely unchanged from the previous bedroom scene. On the left side, a window looks out to the harbour. Upstage, there is a door to the stairs down to the main floor. A bed faces the window with a single chair beside it. A small lamp lights the room.

As in the previous Point au Gaul scene, MARTIN from Toronto 1959 remains onstage seated in his darkened kitchen, silent, not reacting, as he observes the action of Point au Gaul 1929 on the other side.

AT RISE: MARGARET is asleep on the bed. WES stands at the window, his back to the audience, his arms crossed in front of him, his head down as he speaks softly. He gently rocks from side to side. He stops, remains silent for a moment as he scans the scene out the window. He looks down and starts rocking and talking again.

MARGARET

Wes, bring her to me.

(WES brings the baby wrapped in a blanket.  
MARGARET lifts her covers and takes her in.)

WES

Here you go.

MARGARET

So tonight we begin again, Wes. Caroline's baby sister.

(WES takes a blanket, rolls it to form a bolster and  
places it along the bed lengthwise behind the baby.)

MARGARET

What are you doing, Wes?

WES

It's not a proper baby's crib, our bed. There's no sides. It's a blanket to keep her from rolling off.

MARGARET

She won't be rolling out of bed just yet.

WES

(Anxious.)

The crib I was fixing. I left it in the parlour. It's under water now. It's ruined. Everything downstairs is ruined. The grandfather clock. It's under water. I can dry it out and fix it. It must be past nine. I didn't hear it at nine. It's past nine and I can't hear it in the parlour. It's only the waves' howling I'm hearing.

MARGARET

Wes, sit with me.

(WES moves the chair closer and sits.

MARGARET takes his hand.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

There's no noise now. It's quiet. What're you hearing?

WES

The water's rushing. The noise the waves make when they run up onto the landwash. Except there's humming now, like singing when you can't make out the words.

MARGARET

But it's quiet now, Wes.

WES

I'm hearing the sounds you think waves make if you're under water. When you've fallen out of the boat and you're drowning and there's nothing to hear so you imagine the sounds of your own drowning.

MARGARET

You're not drowning, Wes. You don't have to imagine those sounds.

WES

You think your mates must be yelling that you've gone over. You have to think that they're calling for you because the waves is all you hear when you drown. That's the sounds I hear. In my head.

MARGARET

(Pause.)

Now I hear them. They're outside, down at the harbour. It won't help worrying about them. I think they're going away. Let's give them time. Soon we won't hear them.

(Pause.)

I want to talk to you about my clock. That clock came all the way from St. John's. You remember you brought it here for me? It's from my uncle.

WES

I remember.

MARGARET

You hate it. You said whenever you had something important to say to me that clock would start clanging out Westminster Chimes on its bells just to be annoying you. Well I don't want you to fix it. I want you to dry it out when we're done with all this, break it into splits and throw it into the wood box and we'll use it for firewood.

WES

I'm sorry about the crib. I should have brought it up here. I was fixing it. That's why I had it downstairs not up here.

MARGARET

We'll get another crib for our baby. Not tonight but we will. I'm not crying over things today. I'm holding my born baby and she's safe.

(Beat.)

She's here and ready to depend on you Wes. Like with Caroline.

WES

Caroline and the twins are safe now. They'll be with Michael's mother and those boys, Michael, all of them there. The Wilkes' house is a nice ways up from us and no water's gone that far.

(WES goes to the window.)

MARGARET

Can you see water still close?

WES

We're the last house the water's come to. It's put a good part of Point au Gaul afloat. Everything down from us to the harbour is under water. It's gone through our parlour.

MARGARET

How far did it come?

WES

Up the road aways. Past your garden. The garden's going to be all gone. That's where the water got to. Then it stopped.

MARGARET

Is more coming?

WES

I've been watching. It's stopped right here, not going up further.

MARGARET

I could feel you looking out for us while I was resting. Tell me what you've seen.

WES

It comes up to our garden. It's carrying a stave from a wharf. It bangs on the door and then drives it in. The downstairs door. It never closed. I'm always after Michael to close it. Now he won't have to. That's the first wave.

MARGARET

First? There's more than one?

WES

It was three that came for us.

MARGARET

It felt like all one.

WES

No. The sea took a rest between them, backed up and came up again. I could see it. It's the second wave that takes the door off.

MARGARET

You worked so hard on getting that door to close right.

WES

Maybe I will again. The door's floating, turning and looking back at me to come save it. The water goes past us and starts up the high road. Before it got dark, I see it drop the door in the branches of your apple tree. Like the tree is saying, no, you don't take our door. Maybe it's there now. I'll get it when there's light.

MARGARET

You will. I'll help you. We can fix a door.

WES

We won't be fixing the carpet up the stairs. That's the last wave that comes for us.

MARGARET

Where'd the water come to?

WES

(Points to the door to the stairs.)

Right there. At the door to our bedroom. On the step I fixed in the summer. Where I nailed the tread down so we won't slip. The water's there, laying on that step, waiting to come in. You're resting and I let you and the baby lay quiet. But I'm watching the sea on our step. I smell the cod in it. It's not the sea I know but a devil demon waiting to come in.



MARGARET

You stand against it for us. To keep us safe.

WES

I do. I know what it's thinking. It's like all cowards that do their evil in the dark. When no one stands against them. I remember what the pastor says about standing face to face against the devil.

MARGARET

It's a terrible sea Wes, not the devil.

WES

He's looking back at me waiting to come in. Right there, peeking in like a rat at the top stair to see if it can sneak. I know it's the devil. As long as I don't look away, he can't come over that last step. The pastor says when fighting the devil, it's when you look away afraid to face him, that's when he scurries in and takes you. The sea's not coming in tonight because I'm saying he won't. And I'll get our door back in the morning.

(Off, a loud bang as something hits the outside of the house. WES looks out the window. He lifts a rope tied to the bed and shows it to MARGARET.)

MARGARET

What's that?

WES

(Laughing.)

Our taxi's here.

(He unties the rope and drops it out the window.)

It's the dory that I called for. While I'm keeping the water from coming up that last step, that dory floats right up to our window. I hear it outside knocking. I lean out and it's right there two feet away. It's got a line so I grab it. I tie it up to our bed in case we need it.

MARGARET

You're going to take us away in a dory?

WES

Margaret, if the water had come any higher I would have. I would have taken us in our taxi and rode up the road a bit until we find Caroline and all the Wilkes home and dry.

MARGARET

Well, at least it's a plan. You always have a plan for us, don't you Wes?

WES

I do. Taking care of you and all my girls until I dies off the earth. I've sent the taxi away now. He can go find another fare. The water's going back to the harbour.

(WES looks out the window. MARGARET in bed speaks softly to the baby. WES glances over while he keeps watch out the window.)

MARGARET

Wes.

(WES doesn't respond.)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Wes, what ya watching now?

WES

(Looking out the window.)

The water's going out, I think. It's too dark to see much. I know the buoys and some are popping up where they should be. When the cloud moves off the moon, there's the cliffs alongside the channel. They're rising out of quiet water now. It's the shape of the harbour coming back. Except there's buildings afloat on the water.

MARGARET

Is it done?

WES

I think it's done. There's no boats to see. The schooners are loose. Even when the moon's out, I don't see sheds where there're supposed to be. There's things from houses the water's dragging away. I saw a table going out. Swirling on top of the water. Not a work table. From somebody's kitchen.

MARGARET

(Winces.)

A kitchen table? From a house. Where families have supper and talk.

WES

I remember watching wolves taking a deer. They take it in pieces. We're deer. The water is pulling pieces of us down to the harbour. We'll know in the morning what Point au Gaul's holding back from the water. What's been kept home for us to find.

MARGARET

The day started beautiful fine, a nice Monday to do washing and put it out.

WES

Water's a fat beast when it's thick with mud and bloated, carrying away things it has no right to. A full belly of Point au Gaul, slouching away, back to the sea, breaking what it's leaving behind, what it doesn't want today. For us to find in the morning.

MARGARET

It's not a thing, Wes. It's not a fairy tale to scare kids. It's the sea and we live beside it.

WES

There's a house in the harbour now. I know it. Mrs. Hopkins' place. It's drifting out to the point. I saw it an hour ago run up on rocks. I thought it was a beacon from a schooner. It's moving now. Off the rocks.

MARGARET

Mrs. Hopkins has the grandkids. Mary's the oldest. Susan's started school. She takes them when her son goes in country. She's telling us how she's happy to have them. For the company. There's no mum. Just those girls and their dad.

WES

(Watching out the window.)

I know Jimmy. He's a good man on your boat. He quits fishing at the end of summer to go cutting wood for winter. He leaves the kids with his mum. He won't be back 'til near Christmas.

(Beat.)

The light's from the kitchen. Floating like that, there's probably no people in it. They would have gone to another house. It's passing the point. It's round the point now out the harbour.

(WES sits beside the bed, touches the baby.)

WES

You going to write another page in your journal for this one?

MARGARET

You know I will. And you know the date I'll be writing?

WES

November 18, 1929. I didn't peak at the calendar in the kitchen because it's under water.

MARGARET

We'll call her Clare.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 3  
Scene 1

SETTING: The kitchen of Clare and Martin in Toronto on June 18, 1959. It occupies the right half of the stage. It is largely unchanged from the previous Toronto scene. On the table, there is the bag of chocolate chip cookies, two glasses, a bottle of rum, and some empty Coke bottles. MARGARET's journal sits unopened at her place.

AT RISE: MARTIN is sitting at the table waiting for MARGARET. She has gone upstairs for a pen from her purse. He sees her journal on the table across from him. He reaches over and turns it to face him. He opens it and then closes it and puts it back at her place. He hears MARGARET moving upstairs. He goes to the counter and picks up an A&P flyer. He goes to the upstage door and looks up.

MARTIN

(Calling.)

Margaret? How you doing up there? Found your pen yet?

(No answer.)

If you can't find your pen, there are some in my office.

(Laughs.)

That's if you can find you way into my office again.

MARGARET (OFF)

Already in your office. It's a bit messy. Been tidying it while getting a pen. You shouldn't keep them standing up in a cup because the ink blots at the ends. And it ruins a good cup. I've emptied a drawer in your desk and put your pens there. You have a lot of pens.

MARTIN

(Walks back to the table with the flyer. Annoyed.)

You know we have a house cleaner for the tidying. Wasn't sure that's why Clare brought you here.

(MARTIN sits, flips through the flyer.

MARGARET enters upstage, joins him at the table.)

MARGARET

(Reaching over for the flyer.)

May I have this?

MARTIN

Be my guest. You planning on picking up a few groceries before heading home? They've got *Eight O'clock* coffee on sale. It's *mild and mellow* they say. Good price this week.

MARGARET

(Detects tone. Glances at the ad for coffee.)

Not a good price. Or maybe if you're made of money.

(Repeatedly clicks the button on the ball point pen. Looks at the point.)

This is the best pen I could find in your office. And now look at that blob of ink. That's because of keeping it standing in a cup.

(Places the flyer on the table and draws quick circles over it.)

I want to start the ink flowing smooth so it doesn't blot my page.

MARTIN

I see. Yes, you're right. Shouldn't keep them in a cup like that. We don't want to be blotting our ink all over the place, now do we?

MARGARET

(Looks at him as if he's poking at her.)

No Martin, we don't want to be blotting our ink all over the place.

(She opens her journal to a blank page, writes. Then reads out loud.)

*June 18, 1959.*

(Pauses. Takes a breath. Writes, reads out loud.)

*Toronto. Ontario.*

(Sits back and looks at her page.)

*Toronto. Ontario.* Never thought I'd be writing that for one of my grandchildren.

MARTIN

(Joking.)

Maybe you should write *Canada* too.

MARGARET

No Martin. We're familiar with Canada. We know that Toronto's part of it. Not the best part in my opinion. But we'll take it because it comes with all the rest.

MARTIN

Well, that's the way the cookie crumbles. You join up with Canada and you get stuck with Toronto as part of the bargain.

MARGARET

(She takes a tissue from a pocket and cleans the point of the pen. Then writes slowly and carefully. She sits back and looks at her page. Then reads out loud.)

*Michael.*

MARTIN

(Laughs. Then slowly and with emphasis on *her*.)

Michael. We'll call *HER* Michael. That's what Clare said.

(MARGARET doesn't look up.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Repeats, louder, emphasizes *her*.)

We'll call *HER* Michael. That's what Clare said.

MARGARET

(Puzzled.)

Michael. Yes. Michael. I have that. What's her middle name?

MARTIN

(Surprised.)

You don't get it? Michael's a boy's name. The baby's a girl.

MARGARET

Yes. The baby's a girl. Now what's her middle name?

MARTIN

(Pleads his case.)

Clare wants *Michael*. She's got her heart set on *Michael*. There's no changing her mind. When she starts school, she'll be teased for having a boy's name.

MARGARET

Then she'll grow up strong. Like her mother. Like her aunt.

MARTIN

You don't mind she has a boy's name?

MARGARET

Mind? I told you already Michael's a good name for a girl.

MARTIN

Margaret! You didn't say *FOR A GIRL*. I was listening to what you said when I told you the baby's *MICHAEL*.

MARGARET

Didn't I? No matter. I knew she'd have a girl.

MARTIN

How? I haven't told you.

MARGARET

(Puts down her pen and folds her hands. A patronizing tone. Smiles.)

Martin. Listen to me. Of course Clare would have a girl. You should be thankful for that. Because you deserve a girl. She'll make a better father of you. Like those girls made Wes.

(Picks up her pen.)

And now, Michael's middle name please?

MARTIN

(Quietly.)

Angelina.

MARGARET

(Writes, reads out loud.)

Michael Angelina.

MARTIN

(Pensively.)

I like Angelina very much. It's a sweet name. Good for a girl. I worry it'll be shortened. She'll end up with Angel. That's a silly nickname.

MARGARET

Angelina. It means messenger of God. You'll do well to remember that, Martin.

MARTIN

That's what Clare said. She wants her *Michael Angelina*. A girl with a bit of a boy's name who's a messenger from God. I can get used to that.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT 3  
Scene 2

**SETTING:** On stage right, it is Toronto 1959 and the kitchen in the home of Clare and Martin. On stage left, it is Point au Gaul 1929 and the bedroom of Wes and Margaret. Although the furnishings of the different sets remain, unlike previous scenes the characters in each are no longer as distant from each other in time and space. There is a surreal quality to this concluding scene, particularly as the Toronto of 1959 begins to interact with the Point au Gaul of thirty years before.

The actors remain in character in their own time even as they act as a chorus of the voices that speak to the experiences of their respective communities. Generally, they are responding to characters from their time. But as they bear witness to events of Point au Gaul in 1929, they become aware of the characters from the other time and place. By the end of the scene, there are moments that are shared and acknowledged in both times.

MICHAEL has returned to Point au Gaul as a ghost unseen and unheard by the other characters on stage until they sense his presence.

**AT RISE:** The Toronto set is dimly lit. MARTIN stands downstage looking out. MARGARET of 1959 is seated at the kitchen table watching the action of Point au Gaul of 1929.

The lights come up on the bedroom in Point au Gaul. MICHAEL enters from the upstage door. He's cautious and tentative. He's wearing a neat brown shirt and work pants and carrying a football. He goes to the window and looks out at the harbour. CAROLINE enters, doesn't see him, sits on the chair by the bed. MICHAEL moves closer to her, looks at her without speaking. Sound of someone coming up the stairs. MICHAEL moves quickly to the door and then steps back as WES enters. Like CAROLINE, WES does not see MICHAEL. WES and CAROLINE nod to each other and WES goes to the window.

WES

(Looking out the window.)

The ground shakes. There're tremors and the water's gone out. The harbour's dry. Then the waves come in. The waves are drowning us. That's what happened.

CAROLINE

(Wearily.)

Michael Wilkes is my husband. He's looking for me at the sheds. I'm not there. I'm here. I can't tell him I'm not there.



WES

Michael, we don't know where you're at. You go to the landwash for the women. I go for your brothers. For Gabe and Bernie, send them for your twins and your mum. Then I'm here for Margaret.

CAROLINE

Michael Wilkes is my husband. He goes there for me. He saves the others. And he's taken.

WES

(Looking at CAROLINE.)

I didn't know Caroline's here. I'm glad of it. Her babies need her. I just don't know . . .

CAROLINE

Michael's lost. It's people all over the Burin Peninsula who are lost. They're neighbours and friends. And they lose husbands too. And fathers to their children.

(The lights are gradually coming up on the Toronto set. MARGARET of 1959 watches the action across the stage in her bedroom of thirty years ago.)

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

She's right. But it's wives and mothers too that's lost.

WES

(Looking at MARGARET.)

We lost Mrs. Hopkins and her grandkids. I had to go in country to find Jimmy. To tell him about his mother and his kiddies.

CAROLINE

Michael Wilkes. He's my husband. He's father to my children.

MARTIN

(Looking out beyond the audience.)

It's warm today for June. But gonna get hotter tomorrow. Over ninety. When it gets this warm in Toronto, the grass grows long. Clare will notice I didn't get it cut. I should get the mower out now because it's too hot to cut grass when it's over ninety.

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

Clare won't care about the grass.

MARTIN

There's no data from Newfoundland about what happened. They don't even have their own seismograph in Newfoundland then.

MARGARET

We don't know until it happens. They know in New York. They have tide gauges there that warn people. We have no warning.

CAROLINE

We don't know. We're doing what needs to be done.

WES

There's not time to give warning before we're swept.

(Remaining in her 1959 character, MARGARET crosses the stage to enter her bedroom of thirty years ago. CAROLINE and WES are not aware of her. MICHAEL sees her immediately and watches her closely.)

MARGARET

(Addressing herself to MARTIN.)

We have no warning.

WES

We don't know.

MARTIN

We know now. It was 7.2 on the Richter scale. Clare's researched it.

MARGARET

(In her Newfoundland bedroom, addressing MARTIN.)

Clare says we shouldn't call it a *tidal wave* because it's a *tsunami*. That's the earthquake that sent the water at us. It was dead calm that night. Then the waves swept away houses.

MARTIN

They feel it in Montreal and New York. Some waves come to Burin at 140 kilometers an hour. Some as high as twenty-seven meters. That's almost ninety feet. That's what scientists know now.

MARGARET

(Looking around she sees MICHAEL. She nods to him.)

Clare says there's more lost than our Michael. It's in the *Evening Telegram* from St. John's. She's reading it in Toronto in her library. By November 25, it's one more lost at Lamaline and five from Taylor's Bay and four at Lord's Cove.

CAROLINE

There's eight more lost in Point au Gaul.

MARTIN

Why don't we know this? We don't know this in Toronto. There was a tidal wave in Newfoundland that did this.

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

You know.

MARTIN

I know because you told me today. You had Clare tell me in her writing.

WES

(To MARTIN.)

You know.

CAROLINE

(To MARTIN.)

There was no food for the children for days.

WES

(To MARTIN.)

The stores, all the medicine, a hundred buildings torn away. The water has roofs floating on it like they're rafts. But they're roofs.

CAROLINE

(To MARTIN.)

The crying of children for food. That's all I hear. I have no food for them. I can't comfort them.

WES

(To MARTIN.)

Below the roofs that's floating away, the water has broken glass being pushed along. This is what cuts bodies that are drowned.

MARGARET

(Looking at MICHAEL but speaking to MARTIN.)

What people don't know is for a long time the men can't go fishing even if they had boats and gear because the waves roil the fish and the fish are gone away.

WES

(To MARTIN.)

I see beds and dressers and kitchen chairs. And clothes. They are all swirling. They are swept. That's all from the houses.

CAROLINE

(To MARTIN.)

The telegraph's gone out from a storm a few days before. We don't tell anyone to come because we can't tell them.

WES

(To MARTIN.)

There's a wireless radio on a boat in the harbour. The boat's up on ground so we find the wireless. But the operator's drowned. There's no crew left who knows how to work it. No one in town knows.

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

The waves take the landlines down. We wait and share the food and medicine that's left with those that need it. Those that have a house bring others in.

WES

(To MARTIN.)

No one knows in St. John's. There's no way to tell them. No one knows.

CAROLINE

(To MARTIN.)

We can't tell them even in places close by. It's happening to them too. In Port au Bras and Taylor's Bay.

MARGARET

In Lamaline for sure. And Lord's Cove.

WES

Probably Kelly's Cove. But I know only what's in Point au Gaul.

MARGARET

(To WES.)

Wes, what's that ship that comes?

WES

(Sees her and smiles.)

It's the Portia that finds us.

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

It's the Portia steaming in that finds us. It's three days after and they don't know. They have a wireless. They tell them in St. John's.

CAROLINE

A telegram goes to the Prime Minister of Newfoundland.

WES

Some boats are coming then. With men to help.

MARGARET

(To WES.)

The captain of the Portia sees our store drifting out past him when he turns the point.

(To MARTIN.)

It's our harbour. You don't see us until you turn in past the point. That's when he sees all the buildings floating away.

CAROLINE

The captain of the Portia has it wrong. He tells the newspaper in St. John's there's nine buildings that floated out past him. Some are stuck on the rocks round the harbour. Others are still floating and going out to sea.

WES

(Nodding to CAROLINE.)

It's more that's lost. When Gabe and Bernie go looking for Michael, they see what's gone.

CAROLINE

Gabe goes out with Bernie because between the two of them they know most of the names. Gabe tells him the names. Bernie writes them down. Some Gabe doesn't know because they're younger. But then they're Bernie's mates from school so they get all the names.

WES

Gabe and Bernie's doing the counting. Others are finding bodies too. When we find them, we tell Gabe and Bernie so they can write them down.

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

But it's St. John's that settles the number. They settle on twenty-eight as how many that died.

CAROLINE

Maybe it's more.

WES

Maybe it's more. Some who they count died, there's no bodies for. When we have bodies, we take them to their house. If there's no house, we take them to the church.

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

That's because there was so many houses lost. Gabe says Bernie wants to count the buildings lost too. It's almost a hundred.

WES

Some bodies are snagged on posts or trapped under broken boats. Point au Gaul wouldn't let the sea take them, keeps them back for us to find them.

CAROLINE

They don't stop until we find them. They never stop. Gabe and Bernie. They never stop.

(She looks at MICHAEL. She sees him. He smiles at her.)

It's a long time. They find Michael. They bring him home.

MARGARET

Others are swept. Out the harbour. The families don't get them back.

MARTIN

You lost Michael. All of you lost him. Caroline of course. But Clare and you and Wes and Gabe and Bernie and his mum—you all lost Michael.

WES

Michael's babies lost him.

MARGARET

We get him back after. When his brothers find him.

WES

Then Clare finds him too. After. When she starts her stories and the pastor's mailing them to Caroline. The pastor's never letting us forget Michael. What he's doing that night when he gets drowned saving everyone. Looking for Caroline.

MARGARET

Clare's never forgetting Michael. He's a hero who's getting drowned the night she's getting born. And now we have Michael back.

(MARGARET crosses the stage to sit at the chair in the Toronto kitchen.)

WES

(Speaks directly to MARTIN.)

Martin. That night your Clare is born, Margaret says we're not drowning today because now there's Clare. And I gotta live long enough to raise her.

(Carrying the ball, MICHAEL walks downstage towards the audience, looks out, searching. He turns to see MARTIN. He offers him the ball. MARTIN gets ready for it. MICHAEL gently tosses it to him.)

MARGARET

(To MARTIN.)

And now you got *Michael Angelina*. You'll have to teach her football.

MARTIN

You mean soccer. It's soccer now.

MARGARET

You'll teach her.

MARTIN

Yes. I'll teach her.

(END OF PLAY)