

LIFE KNOCKS

A New Play by

Tom Attea

(c) 1996 Tom Attea  
111 West 67th Street  
New York, NY 10023  
(212) 580-1008

## CHARACTERS

IAN EVANS -- a handsome man of thirty-four who writes high-body-count action-adventure films.

MADELYN MASON -- a self-proclaimed actress; also, Ian's live-in typist and lover.

MAX PALMERI -- a volatile literary agent.

GLORIA, aka THE SPIRIT OF LIFE -- a refined and beautiful woman in her twenties who is IAN's first surprise visitor.

HAPPYOLA, THE MAGNIFICENT -- GLORIA'S father; also claims to be the creator of this particular universe and a nice guy, too.

PLACE: The living room and environs of a contemporary home in Malibu.

TIME: The present

## ACT I

## Scene 1

The living room of a contemporary home in Malibu -- white and spacious, with an open feeling that comes from large windows that welcome light from the Pacific. The front door is l. A small desk with a laptop computer and printer is u. l., with a paper shredder is to one side. A bar is u. r. The computer is on, but no one is at it.

AT RISE, MADELYN is lounging on a chair, her feet up on the ottoman, sipping a tall glass of cola through a colorful straw. IAN dashes in.

IAN

I've got it!

MADELYN

What?

IAN

A new weapon to blow up the bullet-proof Mercedes.

MADELYN

Oh, what is it?

IAN

A nuclear pistol missile.

MADELYN

That's different. But, Ian, how can you fit a missile into a pistol?

IAN

It's a miniature missile. Come on, Madelyn. It doesn't have to be that big. Type it in.

MADELYN

(gets up and heads for the computer)

If you say so, but --

IAN

-- OK, OK! Make a note that the pistol is larger than usual.

MADELYN

Who would want to carry it?

IAN

Anybody with muscles up to his scalp. Hey, we could build the whole movie around it. Change the title from Ten Killers to Duke Nuke.

MADELYN

Duke Nuke?

IAN

Yeh. A brand new hero. Admit it. He makes James Bond sound like Kermit, the Frog.

MADELYN

Oh, Ian, you write such wonderful movies. But what about my role? Don't change that, too. I told my whole family about it.

IAN

No problem, Madelyn.

MADELYN

Good. But what will Max say about all the changes? You're supposed to be done with the script.

IAN

The new stuff will help him make a deal.

MADELYN

You know best, sweetheart.

(gets up, heads for computer)

Who do you see as Duke Nuke?

IAN

How about Brent Killis?

MADELYN

Ooh, I'd love to play opposite him.

PHONE RINGS. SHE picks up.

MADELYN

(on PHONE)

Ian Evans.

(to IAN)

It's Max.

(hands him the PHONE)

IAN

(on PHONE)

Max, how goes it?... Hey, fantastic!

(to MADELYN)

He just sold Ten Killers for a million dollars!

MADELYN

A million dollars? And you didn't even finish it.

IAN

Paramount loves the treatment. Oh, I finally created a blockbuster!

MADELYN

I'm so excited. You better finish it before they change their minds.

IAN

You bet.

(on PHONE)

Congratulations, Max! You made my day!... I'm putting the finishing touches on the script right now. Be done by tomorrow .... Sure, stop by if you get a chance, and we'll celebrate!

(hangs up; excited)

Fantastic! My years of struggle have finally paid off! Scratch the title change!

MADELYN

If they paid a million for Ten Killers, I wouldn't change it, either. What about the pistol missile -- or did you say missile pistol?

IAN

Let's save it for Duke Nuke. Why give away another blockbuster for the price of one?

MADELYN

Do you think Max can get a million for Duke Nuke, too?

IAN

Now, that I've got a track record, he should ask for two million.

MADELYN

Wow, that much?

IAN

Come on, Madelyn. Nuclear missiles have been around for decades, and I'm the first person to think of putting one in a pistol. It's a big concept!

MADELYN

I didn't think of that. Can I be in Duke Nuke, too?

IAN

Sure, you can.

MADELYN

Wow. Two movies. Wait till I tell my sister.

IAN

Madelyn, I've been thinking. Maybe you should take an acting course.

MADELYN

Secretarial school was enough for me. Besides, you know as well as I do that everything in Hollywood is who you know.

IAN

Whatever you say, gorgeous! Let's get back to the script. Where was I before I got distracted?

MADELYN

(reads)

"CUT TO: VACANT LOT. DAY. Deadheart's BMW skids to a stop and he leaps out, pistol drawn. The bullet-proof Mercedes limo plunges into the lot right behind him with six of the killers inside. Ming Borat --

IAN

-- The Chinese-Chek immigrant with the machine gun?

MADELYN

Yes, dear. He leans out the window and, laughing hysterically, shrieks --

IAN

-- What?

MADELYN

"So, my dear Detective Deadheart, how would you like a hundred bullets in your face at once?"

IAN

Well, that's a big question. It requires a really clever answer.

MADELYN

What if he just says, "No thanks"?

IAN

Good, but not great. Madelyn, an occasion like this is an opportunity to write a line everybody will walk out of the theater talking about. It's like when Alexander the Great approached Diogenes.

MADELYN

Diogenes? I only know about Disney.

IAN

Sweetheart, I'm not talking motion pictures. This is ancient history.

MADELYN

Well, I'm sorry. I was never good at history.

IAN

You wanna hear the story or don't you?

MADELYN

OK. Go on.

IAN

Diogenes was a Greek philosopher. He was known as a Cynic.

MADELYN

I can't stand cynical people. But go ahead.

IAN

Thanks. Anyway, Alexander had just conquered Athens. He sees Diogenes lying on a rock in the sun. He goes up to him and says, "Oh, great Diogenes, name anything in the world, and I, Alexander, will grant it." Know what Diogenes said?

MADELYN

Got any suntan lotion?

IAN

No, silly. In those days, they didn't have suntan lotion. He said, "Move a little to one side. You're blocking the sun."

MADELYN

Wow, that's pretty clever.

IAN

Yeh, so I need a little time to think.

(looks at watch)

Almost twelve. We'll knock off a few minutes early -- and finish tomorrow.

(heads for liquor cabinet)

Meanwhile, I'll work on a wisecrack for Deadbeat.

MADELYN

Deadbeat? You mean, Deadheart?

IAN

Right. Deadheart.

(opens bottle)

MADELYN

You said you never have a drink before noon.

IAN

What's fifteen minutes?

(pours drink)

Come on, Madelyn, I'm a man of modest vices. Who else makes the biggest killing of his life and only celebrates by having scotch on the rocks?

MADELYN

But you promised me you wouldn't drink as much. I worry about you.

IAN

Relax. Want one?

MADELYN

No, thank you. Too many calories. Are you going to drink the whole bottle?

IAN

It's my prerogative as a successful man. And wait till you've lived as long as I have. Once you're beyond the smooth water of youth, life gets more and more like white water. When you float through, you have to keep a lot of alcohol between you and the rocks.

MADELYN

I guess I'm just too young to understand.

IAN

Apparently.

(raises glass)

It helps you live longer. Otherwise, you get pale, and then one day, boink -- a heart attack!

MADELYN

Doctors recommend one or two glasses a day, Ian, not two bottles.

IAN

A mere detail. Let me tell you the two greatest discoveries of modern medicine. One: Booze is good for your heart. Two: So is sex.

MADELYN

I like the sex part but --

IAN

-- I'm glad we agree on that, gorgeous.

(raises glass to her)

-- Here's to you.

MADELYN

Thank you. And here's to your liver transplant! You should call the locksmith and have him put the lock back on your liquor cabinet.

IAN

Won't do it anymore. I woke him up in the middle of the night too many times. You're my hero, Madelyn.

MADELYN

Me?

IAN

Sure. To anyone who can stay sober past noon.

(takes drink)

MADELYN

You could be a hero like that for me.

IAN

Sorry, sweetheart. I only write about heroes. Heroes and villains, but killers one and all.

MADELYN

Maybe you'd be happier if you wrote other kinds of movies.

IAN

No, thanks. I know what the public likes. The more people you kill, the bigger the thrill.

MADELYN

I like romantic movies, too.

IAN

Never was good at that.

MADELYN

(turns off computer)

Since we're done working, I'm going to go for a manicure.

(holds out hands)

Typing kills my fingernails.

IAN

I don't even know how you type with those things. They're long enough to write a murder mystery around.

MADELYN

See you later, darling. And try not to drink too much. Tonight, I want you to enjoy my gorgeous fingernails on your back.

(gives him a kiss)

IAN

Sure. But not too much. Remember, I'm an artist, not a gorilla.

(SHE EXITS; HE goes to the bar and pours himself  
some more scotch, as the LIGHTS fade down)

BLACKOUT

## ACT I

## Scene 2

LIGHTS fade up, and we see IAN lying on the couch. The bottle is well on its way to empty. HE takes a final sip from the glass.

IAN

(to himself)

Here's to Max! May he sell all my explosions of imagination!

HE reaches over, pours himself the last few drops, sips them, and then gets up and staggers toward the bar. HE begins to open another bottle, as we hear a loud KNOCK at the door.

HE turns and faces the door. The KNOCK occurs again.

IAN

Yeh? Well, who is it?  
 (another KNOCK)  
 All right, all right.

(HE makes his way to the door and opens it. WE see a beautiful woman in her late twenties, in a flowing white gown with a band of flowers in her long hair; SHE is GLORIA, aka THE SPIRIT OF LIFE)

IAN (CONT'D)

Whoa! And who are you, beautiful?

GLORIA

The Spirit of Life.

IAN

Come again, sweetheart?

GLORIA

I'm the Spirit of Life.

IAN

Sorry. The only kind of spirit I believe in comes in a bottle.  
 (slams door; to self)  
 Maybe I've had one too many.  
 (heads back for the bar)

(KNOCK again; HE stops)

IAN (CONT'D)

(calls)  
 Go away!

(KNOCK repeats)

IAN (CONT'D)

OK, OK.  
 (goes back to door, taking out wallet; opens it)  
 Here's a dollar. Keep the raffle ticket.

GLORIA

I'm not selling raffle tickets.

IAN

Then take it for whatever cause you represent.

GLORIA

We don't accept money.

IAN

Now, I know I'm hallucinating. OK, what do you want?

GLORIA

To talk with you.

IAN

I don't have time for kooks.

GLORIA

I'm not a kook.

IAN

Oh, no! You tell me you're the, what did you say?

GLORIA

The Spirit of Life.

IAN

Right. And you're not a nut case?

GLORIA

No, I'm perfectly sane.

IAN

Well, that makes us even.

GLORIA

What do you mean?

IAN

I'm perfectly drunk. Now, please, get lost.

GLORIA

But I have to talk with you.

IAN

Sorry, not in the mood. What are you, anyway -- an aspiring starlet? I've already got one on my hands.

GLORIA

I told you, I'm the Spirit of Life.

IAN

Maybe to you. But to me you're persona non grata. You know know that means? Unwelcome.

GLORIA

But I have to talk with you.

IAN

Thanks, but no thanks. Good-bye, now.  
(closes door)

(Loud KNOCK right away)

IAN (CONT'D)

Go away! Get lost!

(KNOCK once again)

IAN (CONT'D)

In Hollywood a man can't even get potted in peace!  
(opens door again)

You're starting to upset me, and that's no good. Because when I get upset, I start to think clearly.

GLORIA

Then let me come in. Please.

IAN

Are you armed and dangerous?

GLORIA

No.

IAN

All right, all right. As Ernest Hemingway said, the hardest thing for a man is to learn how to say no to a woman. Entrez, Mademoiselle.

GLORIA

(ENTERS)

Thank you.

IAN

Sorry, I had to ask if you're armed, but today the only surprise left is a normal person. I mean, somebody who functions at least close to the usual parameters. You've got five minutes.

GLORIA

I was hoping for more than that.

IAN

Don't press your luck, even if you are beautiful. Want a drink?

GLORIA

Maybe next time.

IAN

What next time?

GLORIA

I never touch it on my first visit.

IAN

You say that and you're not a kook? All right, what do you want?

GLORIA

Actually, quite a lot.

IAN

Really? You mean, like my house? Well, you can't have it. And trust me. You wouldn't want the mortgage payments.

GLORIA

No, not the house.

IAN

What then? My life? You want my life?

GLORIA

In a manner of speaking.

IAN

Out, out! I don't like that kind of talk!

GLORIA

I only want to talk about it.

IAN

No, thanks. It's not my favorite subject.

GLORIA

Why not?

IAN

Hey, don't get personal. I don't even know your name. Got one I can remember?

GLORIA

Gloria.

IAN

Gloria what?

GLORIA

I don't have a last name, because there's only one of me.

IAN

I see. Very sane. Like Madonna and Sting. Come on, tell me, you're an actress and you want a role? Sorry. I've given all my female leads away into the distant future.

GLORIA

I don't want a role.

IAN

Well, then --

GLORIA

-- I want you.

IAN

Really? What for -- sex?

GLORIA

Not really.

IAN

More? Forget it. I'm only into recreational relationships.

GLORIA

Why?

IAN

Self-preservation. I already tried sincerity.

GLORIA

And?

IAN

Let's just say I never chanced upon the woman of my dreams.

GLORIA

Are you sure you aren't demanding too much?

IAN

Maybe. But it's in my unfortunate nature to think about beauty, intelligence, and kindness all in one.

GLORIA

Tell me more about your unfortunate nature.

IAN

Sorry, I don't bare my soul for strangers. What's to know anyway? I'm a perfectly well-rounded guy. I write in the morning, drink in the afternoon, and make love at night.

GLORIA

But --

IAN

-- Get to the point. You're almost out of time.

GLORIA

I've been watching you for many years.

IAN

Ah, ha! A stalker! Out, out, get out!

GLORIA

Please, only as an observer. I have big plans for you.

IAN

Really? Wait a minute. Are you for real? Or have I had a few dozen too many?

GLORIA

I'm as real as anybody alive. But most of the time people can't see me.

IAN

They can't?

GLORIA

Spirits are like that.

IAN

And you're telling me you're not a nut-case?

(holds up glass; looks at her through it)

Why can I see you?

GLORIA

I want you to.

IAN

If somebody else was here, could they?

GLORIA

Only if I want them to.

IAN

What is this -- my personal version of It's a Wonderful Life?

GLORIA

That's my question. Is yours wonderful?

IAN

I was referring to the Capra film. Look, you better leave. Since you're a spirit, just let yourself out through one of the walls.

GLORIA

I can't leave until we talk.

IAN

Says who?

GLORIA

Everyone I work for.

IAN

Who's that?

GLORIA

All living things.

IAN

Very good. Very normal.

GLORIA

Talk to me about happiness.

IAN

Sorry, it's beyond my expectations. But today I sold a screenplay for a million dollars.

GLORIA

Ten Killers?

IAN

Hey, this is too weird! How do you know the title? You work for Paramount? I know, you work for Max?

GLORIA

No. Neither one.

IAN

But that title is supposed to be confidential! It's half the idea. Come on, how do you know it?

GLORIA

I said, I've been watching you. The sale really upset me.

IAN

Upset you?

GLORIA

Very much. I want you to cancel the deal.

IAN

Cancel it? No way. Out, out! You've overstayed your welcome!

But --  
GLORIA

Go. Out!  
(moves her toward the door)  
Now, I know I'm drunk.  
IAN

Ian, please.  
GLORIA

No! Vanish -- like a good illusion.  
(opens the door, pushes her out, and closes it)  
IAN

(Loud KNOCK)

Go away! I've got to sober up.  
(calls through door)  
Cancel the deal? A million dollars, when I'm up to my ass in bill collectors?  
IAN (CONT'D)

(opens door)  
Come on, Gloria. This is my first really big picture deal. And, let me tell you, I've earned it. Must've written thirty treatments by now -- had three films produced that did OK at the box office. But Ten Killers -- all you have to hear is the concept to know it'll make an all-time, high-grossing film.

(ENTERS)  
So you're pleased with yourself?  
GLORIA

Being pleased has nothing to do with it. I'm talking about something much more basic: ananke -- the Greek word for necessity. First, I can get my clothes out of the cleaner. Second, I can pay the lawn-care service. Third, I can continue to support the life to which I have not yet grown accustomed.  
IAN

That's all?  
GLORIA

That's enough! Nosy for a hallucination, aren't you? Look, I came to Hollywood with nothing, from Philadelphia. I was driving cabs to support the creative habit. But now, I take cabs, I live in Malibu, once in a while I even rent a limo.  
IAN

GLORIA

I think you can learn to be at perfect peace with yourself.

IAN

I can't wait. A stranger unlocks the secret of my life. Keep it up, Gloria, and you'll be out of here!

GLORIA

But why do you write such violent movies?

IAN

Simple. It's what the public wants, all over the world. The democracy of the box office.

GLORIA

Is it all they want?

IAN

It's what they want most. Every repressed kid comes in and lets his antisocial frustrations out by seeing people beat and shoot the hell out of one another. And overseas, those simple-minded cultural retards go for it even more. There's a fortune in death and destruction.

GLORIA

But how can you kill people just to make money?

IAN

Hey, it's a violent world. I merely reflect it.

GLORIA

You mean, you exaggerate and glamorize it.

IAN

Come on --

GLORIA

-- I didn't see any smoldering ruins or men with machine guns in the neighborhood. It's nice and sunny out. Some people are even smiling and being courteous.

IAN

So what, Gloria?

GLORIA

Don't you think appearing to kill people so easily cheapens life?

IAN

The way I choose to write is my privilege as a condemned man.

GLORIA

Condemned?

IAN

Yeh. We're all gonna die, aren't we? "The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

GLORIA

Don't forget the journey in between.

IAN

What journey? When you're born, you're already old enough to die. You get to walk around the big blue ball for a while and then you lie flat in it for eternity, a perfect, crumbling tangent. But let's not get heavy. We were only talking about the movies. Never confuse media life with real life.

GLORIA

How many people don't?

IAN

Not my problem. I live in a zoo, and I'm a zookeeper. I feed the lions meat and the rabbits lettuce. I walk into the lion's cage with lettuce, I get eaten. It's a hard lesson.

GLORIA

But not a very nice one.

(Loud KNOCK at the door)

IAN

Ah, maybe that's Max. I could use some help.

(as he crosses to door; opens it)

Max, help!

(HE realizes his visitor is HAPPYOLA, a good-looking guy in his forties, who is standing there in his toga with an olive-branch wreath around his head)

IAN (CONT'D)

Ah, ha! A second drunken delusion! Come right in. Now, we can have a party!

HAPPYOLA  
Thank you. I'm her father.  
(waves)  
Hi, Gloria.

GLORIA  
Hi, Dad. I'm so glad you're here.

HAPPYOLA  
Having a hard time, dear?

GLORIA  
I feel like giving up.

HAPPYOLA  
Mustn't do that.

GLORIA  
But you didn't give him nearly enough character for his role.

HAPPYOLA  
Is that so?

IAN  
(looks at bottle of scotch)  
My role? This stuff is fantastic. They must've changed the way they make it. Got a name?

HAPPYOLA  
I'm Happyola.

IAN  
Happyola? Whoopeddoo!

HAPPYOLA  
Yes, occasionally, called Happyola, the Magnificent.

IAN  
Oh, I see. And why is that, Happyola?

HAPPYOLA  
Well, first, I made the universe.

IAN

Really?

HAPPYOLA

Yes, but only this one. When it comes to everything that exists, as well as everything that doesn't, I'm sort of at the vice-presidential level. I'm also a nice guy. Ergo, Happyola, the Magnificent.

IAN

I see. And you're never, let's say, vengeful?

HAPPYOLA

Oh, that sort of thing goes completely against my nature. In fact, when I was putting together the universe, I added the idea of being good and agreed to live by the principle myself.

IAN

Hey, that's different. You live by it but it's not prior to you. Where are you folks from, anyway?

HAPPYOLA

The other side of matter.

GLORIA

Some people call it anti-matter.

HAPPYOLA

And others say it doesn't matter.

IAN

This is too much.

(points to bottle)

I'm gonna order a case of this stuff.

GLORIA

We made a mistake with him, Hap.

IAN

Hap? She calls you Hap?

HAPPYOLA

Yes.

IAN

And you make mistakes?

HAPPYOLA

I'm afraid so. Billions of them. I can't tell you how many details I've had to deal with. But I do my best. For example, I decided that in my universe freedom was the best thing. So I gave, or thought I gave, all my creations enough brains to work out their own lives. Apparently, I succeeded with everything but human beings. Flies and frogs are fine. Deer and elephants do well. But people? Maybe I should increase their average I. Q.

IAN

Why is that?

HAPPYOLA

Haven't you noticed? Many people who are considered bright are miserable, but brilliant people often seem quite content.

GLORIA

Not him. He's so negative. And he won't listen to a thing I'm telling him.

HAPPYOLA

I suspected as much. Do you mind if I pop over to my anti-universe and pick up something?

IAN

Go right ahead.

GLORIA

What Daddy?

HAPPYOLA

My big book of copycat crimes. Be back in an instant. Excuse me.  
(goes to door and EXITS)

IAN

How long has he been like this?

GLORIA

Forever. Can we go on?

IAN

Why not?

GLORIA

I want you to think so highly of life that you couldn't possibly write another screenplay where even one person gets killed just for amusement.

Sorry, kid. Life owes me.

IAN

It does?

GLORIA

Yeh. I put up with it, it puts up with me.

IAN

Oh, it's so ridiculous!

GLORIA

What?

IAN

To see people walking around in modern, air-conditioned buildings, saying how rotten life is.

GLORIA

Gloria, how satisfying can air conditioning be?

IAN

What about things like modern healthcare?

GLORIA

What about it?

IAN

Well, then, just count your blessings. Look how symmetrical you are.

GLORIA

Symmetrical?

IAN

Sure. Two eyes, two ears, a nice nose and mouth in the middle. A brain that works.

GLORIA

And a heart that's not worth a damn. I have a murmur.

IAN

I know.

GLORIA

IAN

You do?

GLORIA

Since you were a child. It's in your file.

IAN

What file? Come on, tell me.

GLORIA

When you believe who I am, you'll know.

IAN

What? You have a big book in the sky? I don't go for it. I believe in a world that functions in a perfectly natural way. And I prefer it. At least, I can make my little, earthbound plans without the sky cracking open with an unexpected announcement -- at least, until today.

GLORIA

We planned it that way.

IAN

Sure, you did, Gloria.

(MADELYN ENTERS)

Come off it, you wonderful excuse for Silly Putty.

MADELYN

Ian, who are you calling Silly Putty? Me?

IAN

(to MADELYN)

No, Madelyn.

(to GLORIA)

When I take a plane, I fly right through old heaven, and I can see through it every clear night. You'd think people would have realized that before they painted folks like you sitting on clouds with scrolls and harps.

MADELYN

Ian, I never sat on a cloud in my life. Who are you talking to?

IAN

Relax. I'm working out a new script.

MADELYN

Oh. Want me to get you the tape recorder?

IAN

Not yet.

(to GLORIA)

But you are right about my ticker. I've spent my life walking around a casket that keeps snapping its lid at me. Probably should have grabbed me by the ass a long time ago.

MADELYN

Ian, are you sure you're all right?

IAN

Sweetheart, give me a break. Go for a swim in the pool.

MADELYN

All right. But look at my nails first. Isn't the color gorgeous? It's called Purple Death.

IAN

Wonderful.

MADELYN

Don't get too excited. I'll be outside if you need me.

(EXITS)

GLORIA

Your girlfriend?

IAN

She's an office temp.

GLORIA

Looks kind of full-time to me.

IAN

Look, either stick to what's on your mind or shove off, OK?

GLORIA

All right, Ian. I'm not sure about your murmur.

IAN

Well, I am. I've been diagnosed. Once as a child, and once in my twenties. My dad had the same

thing. Died of a heart attack when he was thirty-one.

GLORIA

Maybe you'll be different.

IAN

Forget it. Every moment I'm still alive surprises me. I've already overstayed my guest shot here. Maybe you have, too? What do you mean, comin' in here and gettin' a nice, harmless drunk upset? I could have a heart attack.

GLORIA

You look healthy to me.

IAN

What a joke! Here one minute, gone the next. A spark off the flint. Believe me, I'm just passing through.

GLORIA

What if you knew you were going to live for a long time?

IAN

Sure. But as long as George Abbott?

GLORIA

How about until the age of eighty-six?

IAN

Eighty-six? Show me the piece of paper. I'll sign up now.

GLORIA

I wish I could. But there isn't one.

IAN

See? I told you. Every beat of my heart could be the last one.

GLORIA

Ian, no one has a written guarantee. Life is merciful that way.

IAN

That's merciful?

GLORIA

You never know when you're going to die. So you can be free to live.

IAN

What is going on here? I'm learning about life from my own hallucination?

GLORIA

I'm not a hallucination.

IAN

Sure, you're not. That's why Madelyn wonders who I'm talking to. But that's OK. I don't mind talking to one, as long as it's my own. I know exactly what's going on. My booze-soaked mind has demented to the point of drunken delusions. Gloria, sweetheart, that's not the way uncertainty works. When you don't know when you're going to die, you think it could happen at any second. I'd rather know. If it's tomorrow, at least I could enjoy today.

GLORIA

But look how many tomorrows you've had, and you've never enjoyed a single one, have you?

IAN

I've had my moments. But the uncertainty --

GLORIA

-- For you, I think it's the certainty. But you could live a very long time.

IAN

As I said, put it in writing.

(PHONE rings; HE picks up)

GLORIA

I'm not allowed.

IAN

(on PHONE)

Hello, Max!... Great! See you soon!

(hangs up)

Better move along, my dear. My agent will be here soon.

GLORIA

The wonderful Max Palmeri?

IAN

That's right. How do you know?

GLORIA

I know a lot of things about you. Would the thought of living a long time change the way you feel?

IAN

I don't know. I never considered the possibility.

GLORIA

Would you still think so little of life?

IAN

Why not? "It is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing."

GLORIA

Only if you believe that the universe is a contradiction.

IAN

An interesting comment, for an illusion or a kook. But how come we're having a cosmic discussion? I know! I'm having an updated version of D'Alembert's Dream. Let's not go on. I'm not a big fan of confused word games, bristling with undefined terms.

GLORIA

My, how refreshing!

IAN

What?

GLORIA

To hear you talk with a little intelligence.

IAN

Thanks for noticing. Once in a while, I still have a relapse. My mother is a librarian, and I still haven't gotten over it. But one day, maybe I'll be completely at peace as an inhabitant of the new Dark Ages.

GLORIA

But, Ian, if even intelligent people agree to be stupid, what hope is there?

IAN

Hope? Are you kidding? Find me one intelligent person who doesn't feel surrounded by barbarism, who isn't concerned about the threat of cultural collapse, and who isn't haunted by explosions and murders. In fact, if every barbarian-brain out there had to wear a steel helmet with horns, most intelligent people would be afraid to go outside.

GLORIA

Then how can you contribute to --

IAN

-- Hey, come off it. I'm just a grub worm trying to get through life with a crumb or two of bread. I go with the flow.

GLORIA

But, Ian --

IAN

Please, it's been hard enough for me just to find a place for myself. But I finally have, and I'm OK about it.

GLORIA

Are you? You are so lucky --

IAN

-- Lucky? I'm never lucky. I've achieved what little success I have despite having the world's worst luck! And do you know why? Because I'm too dumb to quit!

GLORIA

I meant, lucky to have a great talent.

IAN

Maybe a teeny-weeny talent. But don't talk to me about luck. Not even when it comes to women.

GLORIA

What do you mean?

(MADELYN ENTERS; overhears)

IAN

What do you think? I mean, look at you -- a beautiful, intelligent, kind, sincere woman -- a woman every man dreams about. Only when she shows up in my life, she's an illusion.

MADELYN

Ian, thanks for the compliment. But who's an illusion? Every inch of me is for real.

IAN

I told you, I'm working out a script.

MADELYN

But I never saw you get this carried away. Are you sure you just haven't had too much to drink?

IAN

I'm never sure of that. But I was in the middle of a very high-energy scene. Can I get back to it?

MADELYN

Sure. But, I don't mind telling you, I'm concerned.

(goes toward door to pool)

GLORIA

I'm not an illusion, either.

IAN

Sure, but I'm the only one who can see you. How do I take you to a restaurant and have a normal conversation? The waiter will think I flipped out.

MADELYN

(stops and returns)

Ian, are you sure you're OK. I mean, we go to restaurants all the time.

IAN

(to MADELYN)

Skip it.

MADELYN

Ian, you want me to call for help -- Max or maybe an ambulance?

IAN

What for, Madelyn? I'm fine. Go swim like a good duck.

(to GLORIA)

Come on, how do I do it, Gloria?

MADELYN

Gloria? Is that a new character? Can I play the role?

IAN

Madelyn, please, give me a break, will you?

MADELYN

Are you sure you don't want me to get Max? You can tell him all about the new story.

Forget Max. Swim, swim!

IAN

Sure, sure.

MADELYN

(SHE EXITS)

Can we go on?

GLORIA

Why not? This is the most interesting conversation I've ever had with myself.

IAN

We were talking about a contradiction.

GLORIA

Which one? My life is full of them.

IAN

Do you think the whole universe evolved and supports life for nothing?

GLORIA

Then what does it do it for, recreation?

IAN

No. For the space between birth and death.

GLORIA

Come on. It's too brief to give a damn about. We each rise up out of a genetic hole that goes clear back to the first higher molecule, run across a crowded and confused field in the darkness with explosions going off all around us, and then, quite unexpectedly, step right off a cliff into a second oblivion -- and all too soon, much, much too soon.

IAN

I hope we planned better than that.

GLORIA

We planned? Come on, Gloria, get real. Excuse me, I forgot. You can't do that.

IAN

I can if I want to.

GLORIA

IAN

You can?

GLORIA

Of course. But not now. I want to know, when you think of the universe whirling around, and the earth flying through it, don't you think every moment of life is a miracle?

IAN

Or a nightmare. Who even knows what to do with it? In fact, many a wise man has said you're only truly happy after you're dead.

GLORIA

Really? Have you noticed much laughter coming from the cemetery? Now, think of it, Ian -- eighty-six years! And certain bugs only live one day.

IAN

Excuse me. I'm not a bug. Even if I do expect to check out at any minute.

GLORIA

All the more reason to value every moment. But say you weren't going to?

IAN

I might drink a little less.

GLORIA

Good. But I expect much more.

IAN

What the hell gives you the right to expect anything?

GLORIA

Because I have a special calling for you.

IAN

I can't wait to hear this. What is my alcohol-soaked imagination asking of me now?

GLORIA

I want you to become my poet.

IAN

Your poet?

GLORIA

Yes. The poet of life.

IAN

Really? Is that all? I've got to change brands.

GLORIA

Change brands?

IAN

Of scotch. They're just not making it the way they used to. Now, look here. I haven't written a poem in ten years.

GLORIA

Why did you stop? Even one of your high-school English teachers told you you have a way with words, didn't she?

IAN

Hey, how do you know? You couldn't have been around then. I didn't drink at the time!

GLORIA

I read your file.

IAN

Ah, ha! Well, the fact is, once I built my whole life around it -- the music of words. I was wild about it. Totally enchanted.

GLORIA

And?

IAN

I became Golden Boy, so I could eat. I put away my lyre and put on boxing gloves. Besides, I discovered that, despite my way with words, my mind wasn't aflame with something to say.

GLORIA

But now it can be.

IAN

I can't wait. With what?

GLORIA

The world is full of death and destruction. I desperately need a voice.

IAN

You do? And you mean, me?

GLORIA

Yes. I want you to break ranks, run out in front of the human race as it marches toward the cliff of oblivion, and say, "Stop! Turn around! Life is in the other direction!"

IAN

You want little old me to do that? No, thanks.

GLORIA

Why not?

IAN

First of all, I'm not sure life is worth saving. I have an excellent case of Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death." Second, there are too many people out there who are absolutely convinced they're right. For them death is the big picture, not life. They'd walk right over me and keep on going.

GLORIA

Would they?

IAN

"No 'bout a doubt it," as the old line goes. And I'm not up for the challenge. Heroes often come to a bad end. They try to push back the tide of evil, which finally shapes itself into a force that pushes back at them. And evil kills. Fortunately, for villainous souls, good people don't usually return the favor. I was only made to observe such things.

GLORIA

And just stand by while --

IAN

-- You've got it. Make me a list of happy people who tried to change the world. I was made for a life of scotch and cynicism.

GLORIA

I don't think you really understand, Ian. You can recapture the dream of your youth. You can write the poetry of life.

IAN

What? Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die? It's an old story.

GLORIA

No, your poems will be new. You will be the first to appreciate the wonder of life from a molecular,

anatomical, and cosmic point of view -- to cry out against its destruction and long for its preservation and thoughtful fulfillment.

IAN

Sorry, Gloria. I can't identify with the role. I just want to get through life with a little, yes, I'll say it, maybe a little happiness.

GLORIA

Who doesn't, Ian? But a few people also aim at greatness.

IAN

My dear, I most humbly decline. Stick somebody else with the job.

GLORIA

There isn't anybody else.

IAN

Who says so?

GLORIA

I do. We're stuck with you.

IAN

Why is that?

GLORIA

We only gave the talent to you.

IAN

You've got to be kidding?

GLORIA

I wish. So far in this century we gave a special talent to four people to help humans on this planet appreciate life, and three of them did their job.

IAN

Really? And who were they?

GLORIA

Albert Einstein. Talent: to help you understand the magnificence of the universe. Albert Schweitzer. Talent: to give you two ethical principles we like. One: Reverence for Life. But apparently he got

too distracted providing medical care in the jungle to give you the second one.

IAN

And what's that, Gloria?

GLORIA

Reverence Through Life, to whatever made it.

IAN

Wait a minute. This whole tale leaves me out.

GLORIA

Why?

IAN

Everybody you picked is named Albert.

GLORIA

Not true. The third person was Bertrand Russell. Talent: to explain that faith in reason could make the modern world, especially compared with what it is, a paradise.

IAN

That's only three. Who's the fourth person?

(big realization)

Me? Are you kidding? I can't possibly fit in with magnificent people like that. I'm a lowly, drunken screenwriter.

GLORIA

No, Ian. You've only become who you are because you mistrusted and killed your real talent. You're supposed to be the one who turns thoughts like theirs into beautiful poetry. But I guess we made a mistake. We didn't give you enough character.

IAN

Well, tough luck for all of us.

GLORIA

But apparently true. As my father says, it doesn't matter how nice the boat is; without a good captain, it can hit the rocks. In your case, scotch on the rocks. I can't believe we're stuck with you.

(Loud KNOCK. HAPPYOLA ENTERS with a large book under his arm; it's black with gold edges)

IAN

Why not let yourself in?

HAPPYOLA

Thank you. Sorry, I took a while, but I wanted to fill my wife in, and once she starts to talk --

IAN

-- You've got a wife?

HAPPYOLA

Of course. You want to think of me as all alone? And I do have a daughter to explain.

(holds up book)

Here.

IAN

What -- your big book of copycat crimes?

GLORIA

Don't be sarcastic.

HAPPYOLA

Yes -- crimes committed within one week of seeing an excessively violent film.

IAN

Really? I can't wait.

HAPPYOLA

Here. Take a look.

(opens book)

For example, here we have Dynamite City. In this film, as you may recall, a maniac walks around a city randomly throwing lit sticks of dynamite. Now look here at my copycat-crime column. We find two proximate instances of exactly the same behavior, resulting in five real-life fatalities and eleven injuries.

IAN

Can I see that?

HAPPYOLA

Of course.

(hands him book)

IAN

Are any of my humble films in here?

HAPPYOLA

I checked. Not yet.

GLORIA

You're lucky. That means not that many people saw them.

IAN

Don't rub it in. My new one will fill a whole page.

HAPPYOLA

What a sad prospect.

GLORIA

I told you, Hap. He's is hopelessly negative.

HAPPYOLA

Now, why is that, Ian? I'm certain I gave you a great quantity of brains.

IAN

Me?

HAPPYOLA

Oh, yes -- including a special gray lump where writing poetry goes. But Gloria seems to be right. I guess I blew the character part. Therefore, our big problem.

IAN

Me again?

HAPPYOLA

I'm afraid so. As my daughter has no doubt told you, we desperately do need a poet of life on this planet now, and there's simply no time to give the talent to someone else and wait for him or her to grow up. In short, we need you to make wonderful, life-affirming thoughts --

IAN

-- What are you two, anyway -- right-to-life extremists?

GLORIA

Not in the usual sense. We believe in life and freedom.

HAPPYOLA

In fact, life can only unfold naturally when there is freedom. We can only hope for the most thoughtful exercise of it. Now, if I may continue? We need you to make wonderful, life-affirming thoughts popular in beautiful language, to help prevent the human race from inflicting on itself life in

a very degraded condition or -- I hesitate even to say it -- a vastly premature oblivion.

IAN

What for? You just said it yourself. It's gonna happen sooner or later. The whole thing's dust to dust. Look at the moon.

HAPPYOLA

Ah, my poor, misunderstood moon. And to think. I only put it there to help you appreciate life on earth.

GLORIA

By reminding you of how rare and wonderful and fragile it is.

IAN

Come on, guys. It's a lesson written in dust.

HAPPYOLA

No, no. Actually, my complete -- and really quite wonderful -- idea is dust, to life, to dust.

IAN

Everything still ends in dust.

HAPPYOLA

Please. I certainly don't call my resourceful little atoms dust, although I do admit their survival may not be much of a consolation to the beings they were once part of.

(to GLORIA)

Gloria, my sweet, did you tell him we think having a lifespan is what matters most?

GLORIA

Of course.

IAN

What lifespan? I could die at --

HAPPYOLA

-- Brief or long as it may be, it's your gift to protect, enjoy with consideration for others, and to do great things in. That sort of thinking is by far the best adjustment for you -- and for us. It's, as you earthlings often say, a win-win situation. And, my friend, you have been selected to make that kind of thinking irresistible with your poetry.

IAN

I couldn't live with myself -- I mean, to b.s. people that way when we all know we're going to be

worm-meat. I've torn away the veil of Maya, as Schopenhauer says, and seen how pathetic the will-to-live really is.

GLORIA

See, Daddy. He hasn't heard a thing you've said. Only one kind of person could have such an attitude. A very early human being.

IAN

Early?

HAPPYOLA

Yes, at this stage, I'm afraid all of your skyscrapers are pitched just outside the cave of your ancestors, whose lives were, I admit, comparatively hard. They had no shelter from the cold and rain. They were exposed to ferocious beasts. They had no antibiotics. They could not, generally speaking, appreciate life. In fact, many decided they were sent here to suffer. But I'm used to that development. It happens on all the planets where animate life evolves. And I understand. Why, just look at one of your developing countries and see how the people suffer.

IAN

How can you let them?

HAPPYOLA

Excuse me. How can you?

(MADELYN ENTERS)

IAN

Well, Happyola --

MADELYN

Ian, I know you said this is a movie, but it sounds wierd to me. I mean, what kind of character is named Happyola?

IAN

That's just a working name for a really happy-go-lucky kind of guy.

MADELYN

Oh. Well, it still sounds really strange.

IAN

Soon, this will all make sense. But only if you give me a little space to think about it.



SHE seems affected and changes her tone abruptly)

MADELYN (CONT'D)

-- well, to go out to the pool and swim sixty laps.

IAN

Sixty laps? I thought you wanted sex?

MADELYN

Sex? No way. I only want to swim.

IAN

But you can't even make it around the pool once.

MADELYN

I don't know. Somehow, I have the desire.

(SHE heads for the pool)

See you later.

IAN

Did you do that to her?

HAPPYOLA

Who, me? Let me ask you something. How much of a so-called soul-mate can she be for you?

IAN

Can we go on?

HAPPYOLA

Of course. Where were we?

IAN

I still want to know how you could ever decide that's it's OK to let people suffer.

HAPPYOLA

It was a very tough decision for me, but part of the perfection of every respectable universe is the capacity to function on its own.

IAN

You call suffering a perfection?

HAPPYOLA

On the contrary, a great sadness. But what a lemon of a universe it would be if I had to keep

showing up like a mechanic. If even a car doesn't come with one, should the great universe itself?

IAN

But a car at least comes with an owner's manual. Why couldn't you have left one in a stump?

HAPPYOLA

I made the carbon and the water, with meteorites and comets to help spread things around. After that, I allow my perfectly flexible atoms to combine in ways that are just right for the particular environment. And, according to my original "specs," all life forms evolve with enough intelligence to achieve their potential. We want, and expect, you to make all your discoveries on your own. It's the only way you can have a complete pattern of fulfillment -- from the early days onward -- physically, intellectually, and emotionally. You've had primitive joy and sorrow, and now you can have modern joy and sorrow.

IAN

I like the joy. But why does there have to be sorrow?

HAPPYOLA

Would you like a harp that only plays high notes? Both kinds of feeling make life a complete experience, not a shallow one. And sorrow makes joy sweeter, does it not?

IAN

OK. But why do I have to die?

HAPPYOLA

You don't like death?

IAN

Well, I guess not. It kind of takes the sparkle off of life.

HAPPYOLA

But, Ian, I'm surprised at you. You mean you haven't realized it yet?

IAN

Realized what?

HAPPYOLA

You owe your life to death.

IAN

How's that, Happyola?

HAPPYOLA

Well, just think. If no one ever died, the earth would have been filled up a long time ago. There would have been no room for you.

IAN

Excuse me. I usually only have conversations this philosophical when I'm sitting around getting smashed with a friend. What do you mean? That's only a transportation problem.

HAPPYOLA

In what way?

IAN

Why couldn't you time things so we could go to other planets before we got to be too numerous for the earth?

HAPPYOLA

Well, Ian, billions of my star systems have planets close enough to one another for that to happen.

IAN

Well, why doesn't this one?

HAPPYOLA

What can I say? It's part of the wonderful variety of the universe. Close planets and distant planets, dinosaurs and space ships -- all at the same time. And at some future date you may reach the part of your fulfillment when you can travel to --

IAN

-- I'll be long dead. And what about the billions of people who've already died? Is it fair?

HAPPYOLA

If you appreciated life, you might be kinder with its limits.

IAN

I'm not really in the mood.

HAPPYOLA

But you can perhaps be logical. I planned things -- I'm always making plans -- so that each life form has, in general, a span that suits its potential. When the span is complete, all that's left to do is return your exquisite molecules to the life cycle as wisely and speedily as possible. Insects may live a day, humans a century. Time enough to fulfill their potential -- in all its variety, which, of course, includes individuals with short lives and long ones.

IAN

And mine just happens to be a short one?

HAPPYOLA

Well, I certainly hope not. At any rate, the most important thing is, when you're born, a very unique candle is lit. When the wax is gone, it goes out. In the meantime, you can send your light out as splendidly as possible. I want you to. That's why I made the whole magnificent thing.

IAN

You sure are a cheerful soul.

HAPPYOLA

Thank you. But now I'm very concerned.

IAN

About --

HAPPYOLA

-- Intergalactic probability. You see, the inhabitants of some planets are able to change in time, but others aren't.

IAN

Change how?

HAPPYOLA

When people realize that there were always really wonderful things just waiting to be discovered, like antibiotics in molds and microchips in the sand, they usually begin to suspect that life is not meant to be so bad, but, actually, a great blessing.

IAN

They do?

HAPPYOLA

I said, usually. So far it hasn't happened here.

IAN

Well, pal, there are a lot of reasons people wouldn't call life a fun fest.

HAPPYOLA

And a lot of reasons they might at least consider it quite a lot of fun. For example, permit me to demonstrate how generous I've actually been. Please, take your right hand.

IAN

What for?

HAPPYOLA

Rub the back of your left hand lightly, like that.

(demonstrates)

How does it feel?

IAN

It tickles.

HAPPYOLA

And do you suppose you'd feel that way, just by touching yourself gently, if life were meant to be cruel?

IAN

Well --

HAPPYOLA

-- And just think how much better you feel when a lovely girl like my daughter touches you. Or do you find sex painful?

IAN

Hey, I like it. How about your daughter?

GLORIA

I love everything about it.

IAN

You do?

HAPPYOLA

Of course, she does.

GLORIA

Without it, I'd vanish.

HAPPYOLA

Oh, my dear, you're so well adjusted!

(to IAN)

Lovemaking is the basic rite of life. And just think. I might have made sex painful.

IAN

It does cost some creatures their lives.

GLORIA

See how lucky you are.

HAPPYOLA

Oh, forgive me for all the variety. I just love the possibilities of matter and energy. I absolutely delight in it. Look at a reef and all the colorful fishes! Or at a rain forest, with all its bright birds and busy bugs. But to continue. Food didn't have to taste good. The sky didn't have to be blue, the sun gold, and the trees green and filled with bird-song. The fact is, I made everything so wonderfully that on many a planet, people actually learn to appreciate life so much they come to live in awe of it. Occasionally, they even worship it.

IAN

They do?

HAPPYOLA

Yes, and I like that so much. In fact, I visit those planets as often as possible. Oh, not because I need people groveling around me, but because I absolutely love to see the way such a feeling inspires them to do the best with their lives and to take the most wonderful care of all the life on their planet. In fact, such delightful behavior makes me very happy I made the whole universe.

IAN

You really think you made it?

HAPPYOLA

Yes, I admit it.

IAN

OK, then, prove to me how powerful you are. Make a miracle.

HAPPYOLA

But I don't like to show off.

IAN

Oh, come on, make one. If you do, I might even start to take you seriously.

HAPPYOLA

Really? Is that all that's required? Well, then, perhaps one tiny miracle.

IAN

OK, go ahead. What?

HAPPYOLA

Well, let me see. Your hair appears to be receding a bit. Would you like me to make it grow back?

IAN

You can do that?

HAPPYOLA

Mere child's play. Remember, everything in the universe is chemistry.  
(waves his hand)

(IAN grabs his head and rolls around a bit. When next we see his head, he has a bushy head of long hair)

IAN

(feels his head)

Wow! More hair!

GLORIA

A lot more.

IAN

(runs to the mirror)

Look at that! But everyone knows me the old way. They'll think I'm wearing a toupee. Quick, change me back!

HAPPYOLA

See one of the problems with miracles? There's often no way to please everybody.  
(waves his hand again)

(Same business. This time IAN comes up looking as he did before)

IAN

(looks in mirror)

Thanks. That was scary, but impressive, even to a drunk. Tell me more.

HAPPYOLA

What for? You are in life, and the only knowledge you need is of life.

IAN

Yeh, well, some people think the so-called silence of the universe is a pretty thoughtless thing. We feel cut off, like orphans.

GLORIA

Oh, please. You know all you have to.

IAN

Sure, I do.

HAPPYOLA

She's right, Ian. You know you have life. What more do you need to know?

GLORIA

Take good care of it --

HAPPYOLA

-- And I might take good care of you.

IAN

Forget it. I'm a booze-soaked, lost soul. A sour, insignificant twerp whose biggest dream is to get through the next moment without --

HAPPYOLA

-- Excuse me. But wouldn't you be much happier being the poet of life?

IAN

I can't identify with the role. Don't you see? I'm too far gone. And there's just no way I could squeeze enough alcohol out of my brain to write that feelingly and well again.

GLORIA

That's not true. Ian, you could help the human race survive and take delight in life.

IAN

I'm not sure I want to. As you may have guessed, I --

HAPPOLA

-- You don't care to help save the human race?

IAN

What for? So I can be a statue in a park with a pigeon on my head? Sorry. I don't see myself in the role.

HAPPYOLA

But --

IAN

-- That's the way it is, Happyola. I'm no saint. I'm a semi-content sinner. All right, all right. What if I just try to write screenplays where nobody gets killed?

HAPPYOLA

Do you know how? I wasn't aware that we gave you that talent, too?

IAN

Haven't got a clue. You've got a gun to someone's head, you've got an emergency. It's easy. But nobody's interested in happiness. There's no tension.

HAPPYOLA

Not exactly. When I give such a talent to people, they instinctively know the difference between a positive crisis and a negative one. And how much excitement can come from characters struggling to achieve life-enhancing external goals and to grow personally against their own inner limits.

IAN

You're talking small-budget stuff.

HAPPYOLA

Who, me -- the creator of universe?

IAN

Well, to tell you the truth, I'm not sure.

GLORIA

That should tell you something about yourself.

HAPPYOLA

Ian, your gift is poetry. You have the talent to do what we say. All you have to do is decide to dedicate your life to it.

IAN

And you'll do the rest?

HAPPYOLA

No, you will.

GLORIA

Don't worry. I'll make sure you have all the ideas you need.

HAPPYOLA

There's only one condition.

IAN

What?

HAPPYOLA

You can never write another thing that has unnecessary violence in it.

IAN

What about the screenplay I just sold?

GLORIA

I told you. You have to cancel the deal.

HAPPYOLA

Once you're known for such a violent work, you'll never be taken seriously in your new role.

IAN

But how can I be a poet if I can't eat?

GLORIA

How well do you have to eat?

IAN

What am I supposed to do, live in a farmhouse like Robert Frost?

HAPPYOLA

If you were an accomplished poet, wouldn't you be happier in a farmhouse?

IAN

Where's the guarantee? You want me to end up in one for an illusion?

GLORIA

The only guarantee we can give you is that you can do your best if you try you best.

IAN

Is this totally whacko or what?

(DOORBELL RINGS)

IAN (CONT'D)

Please, let that be Max.

(as he crosses to the door)

He's my agent.

GLORIA

We know that, Ian.

HAPPYOLA

Tell him the deal is off.

IAN

You tell him. Make yourselves visible and --

HAPPYOLA

-- No, no -- not allowed. But we will stay and give you strength.

IAN

Thanks a lot.

(as he crosses to the door)

If you're as serious as you say you are, he'll see something besides me standing here talking to myself.

(opens door)

Max! You don't know how good it is to see you. Come on in.

(MAX ENTERS)

MAX

Thanks, Ian. Only for a minute. I wanted to stop by and say congratulations in person.

(hugs him)

Great work! Think of it! A million! You're almost rich!

IAN

Yeh. Almost rich.

(MADELYN ENTERS)

IAN

I thought you were going to swim sixty laps?

MADELYN

I don't know where I ever got that idea. I'm exhausted already. Max, am I ever happy you're here. Have you talked much to Ian yet?

MAX

Just arrived.

MADELYN

Well, in my opinion, he's behaving a little --

IAN

-- I confess, Max -- crazy. Save me! Protect me!

MAX

From what? Ian, you're drunk again. And on the day when you should be the happiest man in Hollywood! Today is your day -- the big breakthrough! You shook the Hollywood tree right, and the gold oranges fell out. Your career is made. One day you'll be just what I told you when you sent me an unsolicited manuscript -- the Ian Fleming of film.

IAN

Thanks, Max. But you don't understand. I need help.

MAX

Help? What do you mean?

IAN

What if I can't deliver the script?

MAX

What, are you nuts?

IAN

How about a drink?

MAX

Sure, sure! The usual.

IAN

Vodka on the rocks with a twist of lime?

MAX

What else? And don't worry about the script. You're almost done, aren't you?

IAN

Yeh. By the way, Max, notice anything usual here?

(goes to the bar and begins  
to prepare it)

MAX

No, what?

(MAX goes to take a seat where

HAPPYOLA is sitting. HE gets out of the way deftly, and MAX sits down. HAPPYOLA takes another seat)

IAN

Never mind. I am in big trouble!  
(to HAPPYOLA)  
Come on, make yourself visible and tell him.

MAX

Visible? Ian, I'm right here. See.

IAN

Right.  
(to GLORIA)  
Come on, say something or disappear.

MAX

What? You want me to leave?

MADELYN

Didn't I say he's acting a little wierd?

IAN

No, no. Forget it, Max.  
(crosses with drink)  
Here.

MAX

Thanks. I told you I'd come through for you, kid.

IAN

Yeh. But you gotta help me.

MAX

That's easy. Lay off the booze. You already drink more than a forgotten star. And you've got a great career ahead of you. Just think how many scripts you could write if you stayed sober in the afternoon, too.

IAN

Maybe you're right, Max. I gotta lay off the booze. I'm havin' the craziest thoughts.

GLORIA

You are not.

IAN

The hell I'm not.

MAX

Ian, I'm not disagreeing. It's a wonder you can still have any thoughts. Just wrap up the screenplay, and we're in the money.

IAN

Sure, Max. Look, let me ask you something. What if I try to write another kind of screenplay?

MAX

Worth a million bucks?

IAN

I don't know.

MAX

Then why bother?

IAN

I was thinking maybe I could write one where nobody gets killed.

MAX

Sure. Nobody but the author and the agent.

IAN

Yeh. But I thought I might give it a try.

MAX

You put any kind of script on my desk that I can sell for a million dollars or more, and, kid, I'll take it.

IAN

You will?

MAX

Yeh. Anything that helps you get off the sauce, even if it hurts your reputation as a really fearless writer. But don't get carried away. I needed Ten Killers yesterday. Paramount is waiting.

GLORIA

Tell him absolutely no, Ian.

HAPPYOLA

Go on, Ian. Show that I gave you some strength of character.

IAN

Look, don't confuse me. You heard me. I gave it a try. That's more than you two did.

MAX

More than who, Ian?

IAN

(points)  
Them.

MAX

Funny, I don't see anybody.

MADELYN

Ditto. I'm gettin' the creeps just listenin' to this. Max, you think it's safe for me to be alone with him?

MAX

Of course, it is. He's just seeing a few things. What's dangerous about that?

GLORIA

But --

IAN

-- Forget it. Max, help me. I don't want to give up my first million-dollar deal!

MAX

Now, you're talking, kid. And let me tell you, I can use the money myself. It's that new house my wife and I are building on an acre.

IAN

I saw the lot, Max. It's a lot bigger than an acre.

MAX

Of course, it is. An acre is the size of the house.

(looks at watch)

I better head out. Just too damn busy. But I wanted to stop by to give you my personal "congrats."

LORIA

Tell him, Ian.

HAPPYOLA

Go ahead. I'm sure I gave you enough character for this.

IAN

You tell him. Come on, appear and tell him!

MAX

Ian, baby, I'm right here. Tell who what?

MADELYN

Ian, you keep this up, I'm gonna be scared to stay here, even if it costs me my whole career.

(PHONE RINGS; MAX takes a cellular phone out of his pocket)

MAX

Excuse me.

(on PHONE)

Max.... Hi, Al.

(to IAN)

It's Paramount.

(on PHONE)

No problem at all. I'm with Ian right now. Have it for you tomorrow.... Guaranteed, baby.... Call you soon as I have my hands on it.

(ends call)

Hear that? I gave my word. Tomorrow, Ian.

IAN

Right.

HAPPYOLA

Impossible!

GLORIA

How could --

IAN

-- Come on, if it's that important to you, you do it!

MAX

Do what? I'm not the writer. Look, kid, do you want me to stay?

IAN

I'm fine now, Max.

(to HAPPYOLA and GLORIA)

If I'm supposed to give up the deal, the least you can do is prove you're for real.

MAX

Ian, give up the deal? Are you crazy? You heard what I just told Paramount. The deal's for real. I'm for real. What else do you need to know?

IAN

Nothing, Max.

MAX

But, Ian, I'm concerned. Perhaps a nap? A relaxing evening with your girl here.

IAN

Take it easy. I'm OK.

(THEY walk toward the door)

MAX

Are you sure? I could call my wife and stay till you're done with the script?

IAN

Not necessary.

GLORIA

I am so disappointed in you.

HAPPYOLA

Very disappointed.

IAN

Well, I'm not.

MAX

Not what?

IAN

Nothing.

MAX

Not nothing? A double negative, Ian. Take it from me, lay off the booze and think of your future. It's big, kid, very big. In fact, you could be even bigger than Dorpak Chandra.

IAN

Bigger than Dorpak?

MAX

Yeh. Think of the blockbusters he's got to his credit, and he's not even an American. You got a better feel, Ian. Nobody's better at the bang-bang, shoot-'em-up stuff than you.

IAN

Thanks, Max. I'll messenger the script over tomorrow.

MAX

By early afternoon.

HAPPYOLA

Tell him you changed your mind

IAN

Not on your life, Happyola!

MAX

Happyola? Who the hell is Happyola? It's me, Max.

(puts his arm around him)

Put a cork in it, will ya?

(to MADELYN)

Make sure he gets the script done in the morning, OK, gorgeous?

MADELYN

Frankly, Max, I'm not sure I can remain here.

MAX

Sure, you can. He's harmless. And remember -- you got a role in this film.

MADELYN

I know. I'm so excited about it.

MAX

Then get on his case.

MADELYN

OK, Max. I'll do my best.

MAX

Good girl.

(at door; to IAN)

I expect the script tomorrow. Ya hear that? Look, I'll leave you a note.

(takes out schedule book and scribbles  
a note; tears it out and hands it to him)

Here. Read it when you're sober.

(MAX EXITS)

MADELYN

Ian, guess what? I told the girls at the nail salon about your big deal. They were so excited.

IAN

Great.

GLORIA

How could you let him change your mind?

IAN

Stop haunting me!

MADELYN

Me? Haunting you?

IAN

I'm not talking to you.

(to HAPPYOLA and GLORIA)

Why didn't you make yourselves visible?

MADELYN

Visible? Here we go again. Ian, I'm right here, darling. See.

IAN

How could I miss you, gorgeous?

HAPPYOLA

But that's not the way things are supposed to work. You must be the one who gets all the credit -- or all the blame -- for what you do.

IAN

I'll share it. Go on. Go after Max and tell him I'm supposed to give up screenwriting and become the poet of life!

MADELYN

A poet? What poet?

IAN

Go on, Gloria.

MADELYN

Gloria? Who's Gloria? I'm Madelyn, remember?

IAN

(to MADELYN)

I'm thinking of the new screenplay again.

(to GLORIA)

Who are you and your dad anyway but figments of my alcoholic imagination?

(to MADELYN)

The story is, needless to say, very autobiographical.

MADELYN

Ian, I gotta be honest. Screenplay or no screenplay, I think you're losing it. No more drinks for you at all. You gotta detox.

IAN

Look, give me a break, will ya?

(goes to door and opens it)

Come on, get out!

MADELYN

Out, me? Ian, what's wrong? Have you found another woman? Who is this Gloria?

IAN

A character. A real character.

HAPPYOLA

Gloria, my dear, perhaps we should leave.

GLORIA

Leave?

HAPPYOLA

At least, for now.

GLORIA

All right, Hap. Why waste our time?

(to IAN)

You could have been the poet of life. Now all you can be is rich. And in the arms of the lovely Madelyn.

IAN

I'll settle for that.

MADELYN

What do you mean, you'll settle? For me?

IAN

It's only the movies, Madelyn.

HAPPYOLA

We'll be back.

IAN

No, you won't. I'm cutting back on the sauce. I've had my last illusion.

MADELYN

Boy, am I ever glad to hear that. It's about time.

IAN

Good-bye!

MADELYN

To me?

IAN

No, silly. To the booze.

(HAPPYOLA and GLORIA EXIT)

IAN (CONT'D)

(closes door)

Take it from me. Never let a stranger in your house.

MADELYN

Ian, is that what you think of me -- a stranger -- after we've been together for three whole months?

IAN

No.

MADELYN

But, if it was just a screenplay, why did you open the door? You had to act that out, too?

IAN

Yeh, yeh.

MADELYN

Wow, I never saw you get that realistic. Can I play Gloria?

IAN

Why not?

(goes to bar)

I think I'll have one more.

IAN (CONT'D)

(HE picks up a bottle of scotch  
and sees it's empty; then HE notices  
a white flower lying on the bar; HE  
picks it up and looks at it. Then  
HE drops it in neck of the empty  
bottle, so that it sticks out of it)

Maybe not.

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I

## ACT II

## Scene 1

MADELYN is at the word processor.  
IAN is staring out the window.

MADELYN

Ian, if this new kind of screenplay helps you drink less, I'm all for it. What are you gonna call it?

IAN

I don't have a title yet. I just know it has to be totally nonviolent.

MADELYN

I have a suggestion.

IAN

What?

MADELYN

Instead of Ten Killers, how about Ten Chickens?

IAN

Thanks, Madelyn.

MADELYN

I don't wanna break your heart, Ian, but so far the story doesn't excite me.

IAN

You think it excites me? Let me think like George Bernard Shaw for a moment.

MADELYN

Who's that?

IAN

Never mind. He said something like, "The problem with the last act is in the first act."

MADELYN

Where are the acts?

IAN

To you, the scenes.

MADELYN

Oh. Why didn't you say so in the first place?

IAN

Because I'm not perfect, that's why. Now, let's see. I got a hero. Really likable. He's got a girl friend. Also really likable. And they've got a big problem. They're fighting against the odds to save the owls on government land next to them, but the timber company has a lot of pull. If I were Robert Riskin writing something for Frank Capra, I'd know how to make it work. But -- let's face it. I haven't got a clue. What time is it?

MADELYN

Almost eleven.

IAN

Did you say noon?

MADELYN

Come on, Ian, sweetie.

IAN

Look, either I get a breakthrough, or I dive into the sauce.

MADELYN

Already? Look, Ian, why bother? You don't need to write this kind of harmless drek. Besides, if you don't write action-adventure movies, how can you help me become a star?

IAN

Maybe you can play a nurse who becomes a missionary.

MADELYN

Thanks, but that doesn't sound right for me. I'm too sexy, don't you think?

(PHONE rings. MADELYN answers it.)

MADELYN

Ian Evans.

(hands over receiver)

It's Max.

IAN

Tell him I committed suicide.

(takes PHONE)

Yeh, Max? ... I know today is the day. I'm working on it....

(to MADELYN)

... I need an extra day.... All right, all right, I'll messenger it over later today.

(hangs up)

I tried! That's it!

MADELYN

What's it?

IAN

For Ten Chickens! I know now. I have no talent for innocence. But I'm glad I gave it a shot. Get Ten Killers back on the screen.

MADELYN

It's about time. I was worried about your future and mine.

IAN

That's very generous of you. I need a drink.

MADELYN

So much for Ten Killers. Please, Ian. Think of your career -- and mine. Or I'm going to the beach. There's only a little left to do.

(holds up MAX's note)

And remember the note Max left as a reminder.

IAN

Madelyn, when you're right, you're right. Let's got for it. Where were we?

MADELYN

Deadheart is surrounded. I'm still waiting for the clever answer to the question, "How would you like a hundred bullets in your face at once."

IAN

Right. Here it is. Deadheart says, "Actually, I'd prefer one fabulous woman."

(HE picks up the empty bottle of scotch  
and notices that the flower is gone)

BLACKOUT

## ACT II

## Scene 2

IAN is drunk again. KNOCK at the door.  
HE makes his way over, drink in hand,  
and looks out the peephole. Relieved,  
HE picks up the manuscript envelope on  
the table near the door, opens the door,  
and holds the manuscript out.  
Signs receipt.

IAN

Thanks. And remember, it's a rush.

(closes door; relieved, HE goes to the  
PHONE and picks it up; dials; on PHONE)

This is Ian Evans. Tell Max the script is on the way.... Thanks.

(HE takes a sip of scotch. Then HE heads to  
the armoire. HE opens the glass door and  
takes out a photograph of his mother)

Come on, Mom, tell me, it was you, wasn't it, haunting me that way? You were Gloria in disguise, weren't you, wanting me to be a good little boy and make use of all the books you gave me to read? But who was Happyola -- my dad? This is so crazy! Ian, baby, take it easy with the booze.

(HE puts her picture back, as we hear a loud  
KNOCK at the door. HE looks up)

Again? Can't be.

(takes another sip and heads for  
the door. Opens it and sees GLORIA)

No, not you again. The gorgeous product of my booze-soaked imagination. And I'm not even that drunk today!

GLORIA

That might tell you something. May I come in?

IAN

How can I stop you? You walk through walls, don't you?

GLORIA

Only when I have to. Doors are more polite.

(SHE ENTERS)

So you sent the screenplay to Max?

IAN

Yes, I did.

GLORIA

Have you no conscience?

IAN

That's not fair. Look, I tried to write a "cutesy" little screenplay, but I couldn't make it work.

GLORIA

I know. My dad and I appreciated the effort. But did we tell you to write it? Did we ask you to give up your million-dollar deal for that?

IAN

No.

GLORIA

What did we want you to do?

IAN

I can't even say it.

GLORIA

Why not?

IAN

The whole idea embarrasses me. It makes me self-conscious. But now I know.

(goes to armoire and takes out PHOTOGRAPH)

You remind me of my mother.

GLORIA

Your mother?

IAN

Yeh, flying out to Hollywood to haunt me. That's it, isn't it? I've internalized my mother the way Freud says the primal sons internalize the father they kill, who haunts them even more, because now he's inside their minds, watching every thought. My mother tried to take over my conscience. Why didn't I see it before? You're my mother!

GLORIA

(goes up to him and kisses him on the lips)  
Did your mother ever kiss you like that?

IAN

I didn't know you kiss, Gloria. I thought you were a spirit?

GLORIA

Kissing is part of life, and there's no time to waste.

IAN

And you make love, too?

GLORIA

Naturally.

IAN

What a delusion! I love this booze! But just to have children, right? You're too good for anything else?

GLORIA

Then why do you think you can make love so often? You wouldn't want that many children, would you?

IAN

Are you kidding? I'd be the father of nations. Don't tell me sex was made just for fun, too?

GLORIA

Well, fun is a rather off-handed way of saying it, but it's also meant to help bring physical joy to life, bring people closer together, and just to help you relax. My dad tried to think of everything. He even put where you feel the best where your by-products come out.

IAN

My by-products? How quaint, Gloria! And may I ask if you've got a clue why he did that? As Yeats said in one of his Crazy Jane poems, "... love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement ..."

GLORIA

So that there would be no part of your body you would despise. And where else could he have put it so you could lie close together?

IAN

Ah, ha! And am I supposed to write poetry about that, too?

GLORIA

You might have, one day. One day you might even have realized that one is the color of the sun and the other is the color of the earth.

IAN

And you think that's beautiful? Well, I'm sorry, they stink.

GLORIA

Ian, don't you get it? That's a health precaution of ours, so that simpler animals and the first humans would know to let them return to the life cycle.

IAN

I'll tell you what, Gloria. You explain that to the human race in poetry! Come on, I dare you!

(An INTRUDER wearing a trenchcoat, hat and mask slips in from the pool entrance and observes the conversation; HE has a large, clip-loading pistol)

GLORIA

Well, you could write a little prose, too. But primarily you were meant to write poetry that celebrates life.

IAN

I'm sorry. I'm no good at the positive stuff. Now, I know it beyond a doubt.

GLORIA

The kind of poetry I had in mind for you is far different from the simple-minded screenplay you were working on. In fact, you would discover how to use your talent for death and destruction in a positive way.

IAN

I would?

GLORIA

That's right. You were given a complete talent.

IAN

I don't want to talk about it anymore. Come one, disappear like a good delusion.

GLORIA

Not just yet. Ian, when you see a world of troubles, doesn't it upset you?

IAN

I tune it out. I need a little private space.

GLORIA

But it could stir your imagination and make you cry out against it. You could contrast it with the glory and the fragility of life.

IAN

Come on, Gloria. Get real. You really think I could do all that? I'm still not even sure what to tell people about death. Do I simply avoid the issue?

GLORIA

Didn't my dad tell you enough? You say that a certain amount of sadness is normal but that the life was a gift to be very grateful for.

IAN

What do I say about the hereafter?

GLORIA

You can tell them that, if there is another life, the best way to earn it is to take good care of this one first.

IAN

Well, Gloria, for an illusion, you've got some pretty interesting answers. If you were real, I'd take you in my arms and try to make you mine. I mean, you add up to my dream woman.

GLORIA

Thank you. If you weren't so stubborn, I'd think a lot of you, too. I tell you, Ian, there is greatness in you, but you've become lost. Now is the moment to reclaim the dream of your youth. Now, before it's too late.

IAN

The messenger already left with the script.

GLORIA

I know that. Call the messenger service and stop the delivery.

IAN

I've made up my mind, Gloria. I don't care whether you're an illusion or not.

GLORIA

I am not an illusion. And you can be my poet. Just think, Ian. You can be in love with the music of words again. You can take up the books you once loved and make them a real part of your everyday life. And you can live the life of a great poet. All you have to do is accept the talent we gave you.

IAN

Maybe I should see a psychiatrist?

GLORIA

Why? You read the the most important books of psychiatry and psychology years ago, didn't you? You're ready to become who we need you to be.

IAN

Sorry, Gloria. I've made up my mind.

(The INTRUDER bursts forward with the gun pointed at IAN)

INTRUDER

Up with your hands!

IAN

What?

GLORIA

Don't shoot him. I need him.

INTRUDER

Shut up, sweetheart.

(to IAN)

Your wallet. Hand it over -- or die.

IAN

Sure, sure.

(takes it out of his pocket)

Here.

INTRUDER

(looks inside it)

Not much cash here. Where do you keep it, wise guy?

IAN

That's all I have right now.

INTRUDER  
Then prepare to meet your maker.

GLORIA  
Please, don't.

IAN  
(indicates wallet)  
Here. Take my ATM card. I'll tell you my pin number. You can clean out my checking account.

INTRUDER  
How much is in there?

IAN  
A few hundred dollars.

INTRUDER  
Where's the card for your savings account?

IAN  
I don't have a savings account, honest.

INTRUDER  
Then where's the rest of your money?

IAN  
That's all I've got. I'm waiting for a check.

INTRUDER  
And you live in a house like this? Come off it. Where's the safe?

IAN  
What safe?

INTRUDER  
Take me to it or die.

GLORIA  
Oh, please, don't shoot him.

INTRUDER  
Shut up and get your purse.

GLORIA

I don't have a purse. I'm only visiting.

INTRUDER

Sure, you are. Then butt out.

(points gun at IAN's face)

Goodbye, pal.

IAN

Go ahead and shoot. I don't give a damn about life anyway.

INTRUDER

Really?

IAN

The sooner I'm dead, the sooner all my useless questing will be over.

HAPPYOLA

Are you sure about that?

IAN

OK, I admit it. Life isn't so bad after all.

INTRUDER

Then, my dear Mr. Evans, how would you like a dozen bullets in your face at once?

IAN

Hold it. I don't want to insult you or anything, but that's my line. Who are you anyway?

INTRUDER

Death -- as far as you're concerned.

GLORIA

Oh, please, he's an important person. Don't kill him.

INTRUDER

How important?

GLORIA

He's --

INTRUDER

-- Just another glitzy merchant of death, isn't he?

GLORIA

But --

INTRUDER

-- How do you like it when a gun is staring you in the face? Come on, a real gun, right in your own pretty-boy face?

IAN

Well, I --

INTRUDER

-- Take the experience as a lesson -- and live!

IAN

Live? Who the hell are you?

(tears off hat, mask, and coat; we see  
that HE is HAPPYOLA)

HAPPYOLA

Happyola, the Magnificent!

GLORIA

Dad, how could you scare us like that?

HAPPYOLA

Just wanted to bring my book of copycat crimes to life for him.

IAN

Thanks a lot, you kook! I thought you said you were never vengeful.

HAPPYOLA

That doesn't mean I can't give you a little lesson, does it? Ian, my boy, you've got to give up the violent nonsense and be her poet.

IAN

What? You think a threat can change my mind? Forget it! I'm like Camus's rebel. I will live the life I choose, despite everything!

GLORIA

Please, Ian, calm down. All he really wants you to do is appreciate life more.

HAPPYOLA

That's right. After all, I made it to be a very beautiful and satisfying experience.

IAN

Is that a fact? Only if you look at it like Pangloss.

HAPPYOLA

I know all about that character. Not so entirely foolish as the wise and witty Voltaire leads you to believe.

IAN

Then let me ask you the classic question. If you're such a nice guy, why is there evil?

HAPPYOLA

Ian, will you kindly exercise a little common sense? If I made evil impossible, what could possibly be the merit of being good?

IAN

OK. Then why did we have to wait so long to discover things like antibiotics? Sounds sadistic to me.

HAPPYOLA

But if I made all things perfect to begin with, what on earth would you do with your minds? Century after century you would sit around without a thing to achieve. How paradisaical does that sound?

IAN

And I suppose you've got a tidy excuse for all the wars, too?

HAPPYOLA

Hey, don't blame me. I gave you freedom, and some people abused it. Humans who love life intelligently would never fight a war, except for defense -- that is, to save life.

IAN

Fair enough. But now you're dealing with a wounded species. First, the Roman Empire collapses and numbs out the Western World. Then, the Twentieth Century explodes with wars of mass destruction. Eliot writes, "April is the cruellest month..."

GLORIA

What a horrible thought, that the very stirring of life could be cruel.

IAN

Well --

HAPPYOLA

-- We really do have a problem here, Gloria, and a great deal of it is due to another person who didn't have faith in the talent we gave him.

IAN

Really?

HAPPYOLA

Yes, an ancient Greek named Veracles.

IAN

Never heard of him.

GLORIA

That should tell you something.

HAPPYOLA

He was supposed to come right after Aristotle. Haven't you noticed the gap in human knowledge? Your philosophers have talked of reason and happiness, justice and the good, pleasure and perception, truth and language. But not one of them is known for the delightfully obvious idea that such things wouldn't even exist without life itself.

IAN

And all because --

GLORIA

-- That's right -- of another person just like you.

HAPPYOLA

And, until life itself is valued, you can't even have a clear definition of good and evil.

IAN

Come on. I didn't tell Gloria when she told me about Albert Schweitzer during her first visit, but even Wordsworth mentions "reverence for life" in one of his poems.

HAPPOLA

Good, Ian, good! Waking up the old memory, I see.

GLORIA

Maybe there's hope!

IAN

Oh, the so-called "sanctity of life" is even a cliché. But, if you'll excuse me, life --

HAPPYOLA

-- Itself is my own highest achievement and, I hope one day, recognized here as your fundamental good, by which all things can be judged. And by a gap in knowledge I'm not talking about the human race missing a cliché, a mere mention or, in dear Dr. Schweitzer's case, an earnest assertion. I'm referring to the total absence of a skillfully argued position. This is, I hope, a very logical universe, so logic has a place. I myself will, in fact, indulge in the currently dubious act of syllogizing. To wit: It makes sense to value what many good things depend on. Many good things depend on life. Therefore, it makes sense to value life. From then on the logic is as simple as making a list. For instance, love is a good thing. Love depends on life. Therefore, it makes sense to value life.

IAN

Sound, at least, on the surface. But a whole list of rotten things also depend on life. I could just as well say murder is a bad thing. Murder depends on life. Therefore, it makes no sense whatever to value life.

HAPPYOLA

Good, Ian. I knew I gave you quite a lot of brains. Then let me say, it makes sense to value what more good than bad things depend on. More good than bad things depend on life. Therefore, it makes sense to value life.

IAN

Happyola, my friend, I think we've degenerated to the level of an opinion.

HAPPYOLA

Have we? Then let me be as basic as possible. It makes sense to value what at least one good thing depends on. At least, one good thing depends on life. Therefore, it makes sense to value life.

IAN

Does it?

HAPPYOLA

Well, now I must leave that determination up to your vaunted empiricism, which, though reduced by Mr. Hume from a method of arriving at certainty to one of settling for overwhelming probability, still offers you a remarkably effective way to arrive at workable answers. So, if you'll take a survey of lots of your friends, I think you'll find a significant number of them will say that they find at least one good thing about life -- or I really blew the whole thing.

IAN

But on balance --

HAPPYOLA

-- Sorry. I've never been able to please everybody. Life is for those who see some good in it. And I do hope there are a lot of them.

IAN

But are, say, hurricanes and earthquakes good? They're terrifying, even in the stillness of a forest -- I mean, to think that wind could rip out the trees or the ground could split open!

HAPPYOLA

May we take them one at a time?

IAN

Go ahead.

(PHONE rings)

IAN (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

(picks up PHONE)

Hi, Max.... I know it's late, but the script is on the way.... Call me after you have a look.... Thanks.

(hangs up)

GLORIA

What hope is there? He has no remorse at all.

HAPPYOLA

(to GLORIA)

Be patient, dear.

(to IAN)

Let's begin with hurricanes. As you know, your weather system is rather large and I admit it can go to extremes. But don't forget. It has been gentle enough to have raised life up, like a good nurse. And you're finally learning to make your buildings wind- resistant. One day, you may even learn how to unspin a hurricane.

IAN

Really?

HAPPYOLA

Yes. It's a relatively simple process, but it does require an awfully big fan.

IAN

What about earthquakes?

HAPPYOLA

-- Earthquakes to you, tiny tremors to me.

IAN

Tiny?

HAPPYOLA

By now, you know how fast the earth travels through space and the way the earth renews its surface over the ages. What's an occasional "earthquake" on that scale? In fact, I think that, overall, the earth carries life through the universe like a gentle mother.

IAN

Nobody this side of the San Andreas Fault will agree.

HAPPYOLA

Oh, I admit things have been a bit rough around here. But earthquakes have been around for a long time. By now most of your buildings could be shock-resistant, too. And just hitting a pothole can jolt you more than California's ride through space and time. Anyway, it's the smoothest trip I could arrange. Do you think you might have done better?

IAN

Hey, it's beyond me.

HAPPYOLA

Thank you. That's correct.

IAN

And how about mud slides? That's my problem here in Malibu. My whole house could slide into the Pacific.

HAPPYOLA

But, Ian, if you know that, why haven't you planned better?

IAN

Come on --

HAPPYOLA

-- I gave you the intelligence, and I think it's your responsibility. Look at the situation from our point of view. You know how large the earth is.

IAN

A speck of dust in the eye of the sun!

HAPPYOLA

Think a little harder, and you won't demean it quite so much. It's big enough to hold onto water and an atmosphere and it's just the right distance from the sun to offer an ideal range of temperatures -- from the snow of the poles to the heat of the equator. Between the valleys and the mountains, there is the thin and very precious layer in which life can thrive.

IAN

Oh, come on, the whole thing's based on a really horrible idea.

HAPPYOLA

It is? And what, may I ask, is that?

IAN

Did you ever watch the Discovery Channel?

HAPPYOLA

Excuse me, I don't have a great deal to discover.

IAN

Well, then you know what I mean. Lions and crocodiles tearing harmless animals apart to survive. Plants trapping unsuspecting insects. And people slaughtering other animals by the zillions. How can you excuse that?

HAPPYOLA

Well, I had to make a choice.

IAN

What kind of choice?

APPYOLA

As you may have noticed, all my creatures have digestive systems. Do you know why? Living things burn energy and they need a way to replenish it. So I decided that all life forms have two functions. First, to enjoy their own lives and, secondarily, to help support other life.

IAN

You mean --

HAPPYOLA

-- They eat each other.

IAN

How tidy.

HAPPYOLA

I prefer the word "courageous."

IAN

But people included? I mean, is our secondary function to be eaten by other animals?

HAPPYOLA

Personally, I think your primary secondary function is to be good stewards of the earth and to help other life fulfill its potential. But, I admit, you also need the common sense to avoid a few things, like grizzly bears and sharks.

IAN

But how can we good stewards of the earth when we have to eat other animals?

HAPPYOLA

Have you looked at your teeth carefully? Hardly fangs, are they? You can go either way -- vegetarian or omniverous. And those who choose to may consume only plants.

IAN

It still strikes me as a rather pitiful basis for life.

HAPPYOLA

But put yourself in my place. The only other choice the creator of a universe has is to ship in supplies to all the planets with life on them. Does that sound like a practical alternative -- carton after carton, arriving like an endless freight train from outer space?

IAN

Well --

GLORIA

-- My father had to make a lot of hard decisions to make life possible, and he had the courage to, which is more than we can say for you.

HAPPYOLA

Thank you, Gloria. I agree. What we need you to do is appreciate my handiwork, especially my crowing achievement, life itself.

GLORIA

And value it so much you can help other people value theirs.

(MADELYN ENTERS in beach clothes)

IAN

No chance. How can I even be sure you exist?

MADELYN

I'll tell you how. I got too much sun. Look how red my sensitive skin is.

IAN

Take a cold shower.

MADELYN

Maybe you should take one, too? A little wake-up call?

IAN

Thanks. I'm working on the new script again.

MADELYN

So I noticed. Did the messenger pick up Ten Killers?

IAN

A while ago.

MADELYN

Call if you need me. I need to bathe myself in soothing lotion.

(EXITS)

IAN

Can we get back to my question?

HAPPYOLA

An excellent idea. I'll give you an answer that works even if you never met me. I can actually be whatever you want me to be.

IAN

You can be?

HAPPYOLA

Well, I've already been defined in an enormous, and not always flattering, number of ways, haven't I? Let me give you a description I particularly like.

IAN

What's that?

HAPPYOLA

Simply say I'm the ultimate cause of life.

IAN

That's all?

HAPPYOLA

Well, the universe, too. But I'd be happy to settle for being thought of for my favorite accomplishment.

IAN

And that's life?

HAPPYOLA

Of course. And, since you know that life exists, you'll know that I do, too.

IAN

What if life has no real cause?

HAPPYOLA

Do you really want to think of me that way?

GLORIA

Poor Daddy. And just because he doesn't keep poking into everybody's life.

IAN

All right. Go on.

HAPPYOLA

Nothing more I can tell you.

GLORIA

Be a little modest, Ian.

HAPPYOLA

I agree. Do you really need a personal connection with the infinite to be happy?

IAN

I'm just like most people. I can't help it. I have these infinite longings. Why did you give them to us if they don't make sense?

HAPPYOLA

Oh, please, don't blame me for that, too. I only gave you a mind that could think of the possibilities. It's up to you to choose what to act on.

IAN

But I want to punch my way out of the black bag of finitude and see infinite vistas.

HAPPYOLA

-- Oh, all right. Then allow me to give you a puzzle with no answer.

IAN

Thanks a lot.

HAPPYOLA

I'll begin with another very old question. We seem to be discussing quite a lot of those. Now, was life made by something outside the universe or was it generated by the material of the universe itself?

IAN

Yeh, that's old, all right.

HAPPYOLA

Yes, it is. But the truth beyond the question is, you don't have to know the answer.

IAN

Back to --

HAPPYOLA

-- My favorite theme. You only have to know how to live -- to accept life as a great gift, despite its many shortcomings, and to fulfill your finest possibilities with thoughtfulness for others, help, or at least allow, others to fulfill theirs, and then to die, not with greed for more, but satisfied that you were privileged to live, that you, little you, had your place in the great unfolding of the possibilities of all creation. Now, certainly I've told you enough.

IAN

Have you? Then why do I still want to know more?

HAPPYOLA

My, you are a persistent fellow. All right, Ian. I'll tell you this much more, but nothing else. We wouldn't want to be completely apart from our creations. It's too lonely.

IAN

It is?

HAPPYOLA

Yes. We like to be part of them, as my daughter, the Spirit of Life, is part of life.

IAN

But, Happyola, is life and being part of it really worth all the effort; I mean, planets spinning, suns exploding, you flitting all over the place, as if you're Sisyphus with a billion rocks to keep pushing up the hill.

HAPPYOLA

We think so. And we do wish the human race would agree.

IAN

I don't want to break your heart, but you've got a long wait.

HAPPYOLA

Not a possibility. The change from death orientation to life orientation has to happen at about the same time people on a planet develop enough to destroy most of its life -- with weapons, pollution, and overpopulation. It is, in fact, the usual pivot of history -- and it's always a close call. I'm pleased to say that most planets make it, but an unfortunate few don't.

IAN

Too close a call for this planet, I'm afraid.

HAPPYOLA

Now you know how much we need your help.

GLORIA

So you can help other people appreciate life and --

IAN

-- That's not my strength.

HAPPYOLA

Let me give you a little help. Do you know why you're alive at all?

IAN

No.

HAPPYOLA

Because you've been selected to go on to a higher level of life?

IAN

I have? What level is that -- Alcoholics Anonymous?

HAPPYOLA

No. How about a swimming lesson?

IAN

A swimming lesson? Do we now adjourn to the pool?

HAPPYOLA

No need to. Just use your excellent imagination. Now, let's say there were swimming races three or four times a week for many years. In every race, there were a million entrants. And during all those races, over all those years, there were only two races when there was a prize waiting for the winner. You do have a brother, don't you?

IAN

Yes. What do you mean?

HAPPYOLA

A mere lesson in procreation. What if the swimmers were your father's sperm, and the two prizes were your mother's eggs? See what the odds were against getting into life? Millions upon millions to one, and you won!

IAN

My sperm won? Whoopee!

HAPPYOLA

Yours and your brother's! And two eggs were waiting at the finish line, too.

IAN

Wow, what luck!

HAPPYOLA

Wonderful luck. Oh, excuse me, but isn't the truth of life delightful? No wonder that, on most planets, it's the usual source of sanctity in an age of science. Just think, Ian! Since each sperm and egg is genetically different, only one sperm and egg in all those races could turn out to be you. You not only got into the right race; you won it!

IAN

Happyola, I gotta tell you, this is a choice hallucination. Come on, level with me. Am I supposed to write poetry about that kind of stuff, too?

HAPPYOLA

One day you may actually find a way.

GLORIA

I promise.

IAN

You two must be having some kind of an effect on me.

HAPPYOLA

Well, it's about time.

GLORIA

How can you tell?

IAN

I just remembered something that makes more sense to me now.

HAPPYOLA

A very good sign. What is it?

IAN

In one of his letters, Chekhov, who, by the way, I admire quite a lot, said, "My holy of holies is the human body ..."

HAPPYOLA

An excellent thought.

GLORIA

See? You're not completely alone.

HAPPYOLA

And trust me. There are many, many subjects that will lend themselves to poetry more easily than the details of procreation. For instance, do you realize how wonderful it is that you can see a woman like my daughter across the room, and, without even touching her, perhaps get a delicious feeling of desire?

IAN

At last, we totally agree on something.

HAPPYOLA

Well, isn't it time to give me a little credit for such a thing?

IAN

That kind of poetry I might be able to swing.

HAPPYOLA

Ian, I'll tell you what. If you do as we need you to, I'll do a really wonderful thing for you.

IAN

What's that?

HAPPYOLA

I shall make my daughter human.

IAN

Human?

HAPPIOLA

Yes, but not too human.

IAN

What for?

HAPPYOLA

I noticed your current girlfriend, and I thought you might need someone who's more likely to stay with you after you become a poet. A woman to give you strength and joy, all your life.

IAN

What do you say about that, Gloria?

GLORIA

I don't mind. In fact, I like the idea.

HAPPYOLA

We already talked over the whole thing.

IAN

Wow, really?

(to GLORIA)

Will you even be with me when I'm sober?

GLORIA

Yes, and visible, too.

IAN

To everyone?

GLORIA

Uh-huh.

HAPPYOLA

She is life itself, and once you are hers, she will always be with you -- but in a very special way.

IAN

And will she ever kiss me again?

GLORIA

Every day and every night.  
(she kisses him)

IAN

That's hot. Let's get to it. Will she ever make love with me?

HAPPYOLA

That, Ian, is part of the design, isn't it?

GLORIA

Besides, I already have.

IAN

Really?

GLORIA

Of course. Life is always with you, every moment you're alive.

IAN

Come on, Gloria, I mean for real. Will I ever be able to take you in my arms and, you know?

HAPPYOLA

Will you consecrate yourself to life?

IAN

And then?

HAPPYOLA

My lovely daughter will become your wife in every sense of the word.

IAN

My wife?

HAPPYOLA

Yes. She told me she'd like that very much.

IAN

You did?

GLORIA

Yes.

IAN

Really?

HAPPYOLA

And, Ian, I will perform the ceremony myself.

IAN

You will?

HAPPYOLA

Right now, if you like.

IAN

OK, OK. But do I want a wife?

GLORIA

That's up to you.

HAPPYOLA

But let me tell you, a wife like her doesn't come along every day of week.

GLORIA

To say the least.

IAN

I know, I know. I've already taken my random sample of the human race. I'm sure I could never do better. I'll tell ya, this illusion is just too good to be true.

GLORIA

Ian, my dear. Tell me you will always be my poet, no matter how hard the road -- through rejections and poverty, even if you achieve nothing while you are alive.

IAN

Achieve nothing?

HAPPYOLA

Well, we certainly hope that's not the case. But many great people have lived without appreciation. I spend a great deal of time doing so myself.

GLORIA

But you -- we -- must try to --

IAN

-- Hey, come on. Isn't that an awful lot to ask? I give up a million dollars -- without even knowing I'm going to succeed at poetry?

HAPPYOLA

You must decide. Do you want wealth or a satisfying, and quite possibly great, life?

IAN

How about both?

HAPPYOLA

Perhaps, one day. But now you must choose.

GLORIA

Tell me you will give all your talent to life, and I will always love you. And --

IAN

-- What?

GLORIA

Once I'm human, you know. Love -- with all its natural passion.

IAN

Is this unfair or what?

(to HAPPYOLA)

And you know it.

(to GLORIA)

I mean, what wouldn't a man do to have a woman like you?

HAPPYOLA

What a lucky guy.

GLORIA

Ian, think of it. To have me and even the hope of being a great poet -- my poet!

HAPPYOLA

Choose, Ian, before we vanish, and you find yourself with no more than wealth, self-hate, and scotch.

IAN

Where is Max when I need him? Max, help me!

HAPPYOLA

Forget Max, Ian. Remember -- life, not death. That is, I promise, your great calling.

IAN

But I don't want to be a Pollyanna. Death is real.

HAPPYOLA

Only for the living.

IAN

You mean, as Epicurus said, "Death is nothing to us, because it is the loss of consciousness."

HAPPYOLA

I can only tell you that life may, or may not be, the only experience. But I'm very generous. Just think how wonderful the idea is of life as a completely free gift -- simply yours to enjoy and do your best with for as long as you're alive and then to live on in the memory of those who love you.

IAN

And nothing more? Is everyone's epitaph "He died without knowing he died"? Is death a Derrida aporia -- something I can only approach but can never know?

HAPPYOLA

I can't tell you everything. Let me simply say that you may have as many worries after you're dead as you had before you were born.

IAN

What -- we are, we age, we cease?

HAPPYOLA

I didn't say definitely.

IAN

But what about eternal justice? Who will finally right every wrong?

HAPPYOLA

That's up to you. And there is a certain amount of justice built into my design. For instance, people

become what they do.

IAN

Hey, I remember: that idea's in Plato.

HAPPYOLA

Exactly. You kill someone, you become a killer, condemned to such a life. A gangster is condemned to be a gangster. And, with love, look what you became because you did not become our poet.

IAN

But what about booze? No way I can give that up.

HAPPYOLA

No need to. But, when you are at total peace with yourself, and lost in proud achievement, you may want to. Until then feel free to have one or two drinks a day and even a bit more. But, hopefully, not one or two bottles. Remember: I made a little alcohol good for your heart.

IAN

I could sing your praises for that alone.

HAPPYOLA

Ian, I promise that deep within you have the sensitivity and the inspiration to be who we ask you to be. Gloria will help you describe life in such a way that people all over the earth will know they're lucky to be part of it. Your words will be among their most treasured. You will help inspire them to base civilization on the thoughtful fulfillment of life's finest possibilities, and find contentment and joy in doing so. Each person will see the wisdom and joy of doing the best to achieve his or her possibilities -- and of helping other people and life forms achieve theirs. With your help, the earth will become a place where life is sacred and never unnecessarily hurt. It will become a paradise of life. And you will be the poetic voice of the change.

IAN

Wow! That's big. Where did I get this bottle of booze?

GLORIA

Call the messenger service and ask them to return your screenplay.

(SHE goes up to him and takes him  
in her arms)

IAN

It's too late.

(to GLORIA)

I'd almost do it but --

GLORIA

-- Almost, Ian?

IAN

All right, all right. This is all very hard to argue with. I'd definitely do it if I could!

HAPPYOLA

Then, my friend -- or should I say, my son-in-law? -- no problem at all.

IAN

What do you mean?

HAPPYOLA

I've decided to perform one more miracle.

(holds up envelope with script)

Your screenplay.

GLORIA

Good work, Dad.

IAN

You lifted it from the messenger service?

HAPPYOLA

Just now. There are certain times when I have a remarkably good idea of what the right thing to do is.

IAN

But what if we wind up broke and living in a farmhouse? I'm already a month behind on my mortgage payments.

GLORIA

It will be my joy to be with you and to love you, wherever we live.

IAN

I'll tell you, Happyola, if this is an illusion, I'll take it.

(HE kisses GLORIA passionately)

Can you ever love me?

GLORIA

I think I already do.

IAN

Really?

HAPPYOLA

She's quite an affectionate girl. And her life with you is her most important calling now.

IAN

And I just haven't had too much to drink?

GLORIA

No. It's all very real.

IAN

I've got to sober up first -- and talk to some people. I need a reality check.

HAPPYOLA

Even after I offered you the hand of my beautiful daughter?

(IAN goes up to her and touches her face)

IAN

Wow, Gloria, you are real, I think. Now, my life could be even shorter than I thought.

GLORIA

Why?

IAN

If I cancel the film deal, Max will kill me. In fact, he'll think I lost it.

HAPPYOLA

Lost what?

IAN

My mind. He'll have me committed.

HAPPYOLA

Simply explain to him what your new goal is.

IAN

Trust me. He won't get it. But guess what? I really don't think I care anymore. Hey, it's true -- I really don't.

HAPPYOLA

Excellent!

(crosses to him with GLORIA and takes his hand)

Then shall we?

GLORIA

Well?

IAN

OK, OK. I like the idea, too.

HAPPYOLA

Wonderful. Then, from this moment, you are her poet of life. She will live through you and give you faith in life. And you will sing the first great songs of life, the first based on an appreciation of it, free of misconceptions. You will know that energy is basic life and that gravity is a form of love that binds the whole universe together. That what you call the big bang was conception on a cosmic scale. And together you will turn the eyes of the world away from death toward life. You must -- for what is the end of death-orientation but universal death?

(takes drink away from him)

She will make you drunk with the miracle of life and wildly in love with the joy and care of it.

(HE motions and SHE kisses IAN)

GLORIA

With this kiss, I, the Spirit of Life, make you my voice on earth!

IAN

Gloria, I'll try my best -- I mean, I'll really try -- to be your poet.

GLORIA

Try?

IAN

OK, I'll do my best.

HAPPYOLA

That's all we can ask!

(holds out two rings)

Here's a present for both of you.

IAN

From Tiffany's?

HAPPYOLA

Even better.

GLORIA

Oh, how beautiful! Thank you, Dad.

(THEY take the rings and put them on each other's fingers)

IAN

You know, you're a very easy woman to love.

GLORIA

Thank you. You're not so bad yourself.

HAPPYOLA

Then, Ian and Gloria, by the power vested in my by myself, it's my great pleasure to pronounce you man and wife.

(He motions, and THEY kiss again)

HAPPYOLA

And now if it's OK with you two lovebirds, I'll leave you to yourselves. This universe is a rather large place, and I've got quite a few more things to look in on today.

(kisses GLORIA)

Good-bye, my dear.

GLORIA

What about Mother?

HAPPYOLA

I've already brought her up to date. She sends her love.

IAN

You're really married, too?

HAPPYOLA

Of course. What's one half without the other -- a sun without a planet, land without an ocean, a male without a female? And you don't want to think of me as all alone, do you? As you've noticed, I also have a lovely daughter to account for.

GLORIA

I'll miss you, Dad. Tell Mom I'll miss her, too.

(kisses him)

HAPPYOLA

And we'll miss you, my dear. But right is right. And now, good-bye -- and think well of me. Doubtful as it may seem at times, I always do my best.

(HE EXITS)

IAN

I hope all this doesn't evaporate when I'm sober.

GLORIA

Ian, I wasn't aware that you're all that drunk.

IAN

Hey, you're right. I didn't even notice.

(takes manuscript)

Gloria, dear. Can I call you that?

GLORIA

Yes, darling. What's on your mind?

IAN

Maybe I should burn this -- to close off the past once and for all.

GLORIA

Would you?

IAN

Not really. I mean, the whole idea of burning any kind of writing strikes me sort of as an endorsement of ignorance. Besides, how do you burn a manuscript when you don't have a fireplace? But this part of my life is over forever.

GLORIA

Promise?

IAN

Yes. I think it's time, now.

GLORIA

For what?

IAN

I can accept the idea of my paper shredder.

(HE goes to it and feeds the screenplay

into it)

(as it's being ground up, KNOCK at the door;  
another KNOCK and then MAX ENTERS)

MAX

Ian, where are you? Where's the script?

(sees shredding)

What are you doing? Don't tell me? That's not Ten Killers?

IAN

I'm sorry, Max.

MAX

No, no! You can't do that! Stop!

(to GLORIA)

Tell him to stop, whoever you are!

(MADELYN ENTERS, dressed after taking her shower)

MADELYN

Oh, I feel so much better now.

(sees GLORIA)

Ian, who's she?

IAN

You mean, you can see her?

MADELYN

What do you think I am, blind?

IAN

And you, Max, can you see her, too?

MAX

Of course, I can, you idiot!

IAN

They can see you! Now, I know I did the right thing!

MAX

(holds up the shredded remains)

Look what you did to the script.

IAN

Don't worry, Max. It's really garbage.

MAX

That may be so, but it comes in a green garbage bag. A money-green bag! You've got a copy in the computer, right?

IAN

Who knows how to work a computer?

MADELYN

That was my thankless task.

IAN

Don't take this too hard, Max. But I decided I'm going to write poetry instead.

MAX

Poetry? I don't handle it.

MADELYN

What about her? Where did you get that ring?

IAN

I'm sorry, Madelyn. We just got married.

MADELYN

Married? And silly me. I didn't suspect a thing. Great, this is just great! Well, here's luck to you both. I'm out of here. Max, can I call you about my acting career?

MAX

Sure, sure. Just go to the computer and --

MADELYN

-- If he changes his mind, I'll tell your secretary how to print out a copy.

(to IAN)

I'll send for my things.

(as SHE heads for door)

And tell your new wife to get a decent dress.

(MADELYN EXITS)

MAX

(to GLORIA)

Look, you love him. He's your husband. When I don't know, but congratulations. Now, please, talk some sense into his head.

GLORIA

I already have.

MAX

But --

GLORIA

-- I like what he did to the script.

MAX

And do you realize it's worth a million dollars? Ian, keep this up, and I warn you -- I'll sue you for breach of contract!

IAN

If you have to, Max. I'm sorry, but my decision is final.

MAX

And what will you do without the money? You need it as much as I do. What do you plan to live on as a poet -- complimentary copies and rejection slips? Come on, Ian, make some sense. You write fantastic motion pictures. If you can't break the poetry habit, write it on the side.

IAN

Max, you're not getting it. I've moved into a whole other stream.

MAX

Yeh, and left me up a creek without a paddle!

IAN

Look, I'm sorry. But -- can I even say it? -- I want to try to be the poet of life.

MAX

The what? Look, kid, be the screenwriter of death! There's more money in it. Ian, if I don't have that script on my desk before five today, you're gonna hear from my lawyer. Got it?

(MAX EXITS)

GLORIA

Poor Max. I wonder if he'll get over the loss?

IAN

I think he's got the capacity. But, I've got to confess, this whole thing has been a bit stressful.

GLORIA

For all of us.

IAN

But I know now, Gloria. With you by my side, the past is dead for me. Death is dead for me. I see only life. Say half of my brain is gone; say I'm crazy; say I'm insensitive to suffering and death. But I am in love with life. It is my joy, my passion, my all! And I shall never lose my faith in it. With your help, I shall write of it and its glory, death and our obsession with it. I shall cut life out of the cold, black rock of death! And I shall leave a beautiful, shining, life-enhancing poetic legacy, even if no one knows of it while I am alive. Life, Gloria, I am in love with you!

GLORIA

Ian, when you've lived that way, could you die content?

IAN

Could I ask for more?

(reaches out toward her)

Life, I am your voice! I will be yours, even in the teeth of death! I --  
(catches his breath; holds his chest)

GLORIA

Ian, what's wrong?

IAN

My heart. Call an ambulance. 911.

GLORIA

Yes, dear. Right away.  
(dials)

Hello. This is the residence of Ian Evans, at 111 West Hill Road. We need an ambulance. Please, hurry!

(hangs up)

Oh, my dear, Ian, my beloved.

IAN

I thought you told me I was going to live to be eighty-six?

GLORIA

I said you could live to be eighty-six.

IAN

You lied?

GLORIA

No. I merely gave you the same uncertainty everyone lives with.

IAN

But --

GLORIA

-- I freed you from the fear of death so that you might live -- and glorify life.

IAN

But part of my change was based on living at least longer than this. Call your dad. I need another miracle.

GLORIA

I would, but I know what he'd say.

IAN

What?

GLORIA

That doing something special wouldn't be fair to everyone else.

IAN

But, if you only gave the talent to me, why did you give me a heart murmur?

GLORIA

We did the best we could.

IAN

But, Gloria, I'm still only thirty-four -- three years older than my father when he died.

GLORIA

Who said you're going to die?

IAN

I'm having a heart attack, aren't I? You mean, I might not die?

GLORIA

You know we want you to live. We need you to.

IAN

I still have to live with uncertainty?

GLORIA

Everyone does. Ian, my darling, remember, the most important thing is not that death must come, but that life comes first. The whole universe is devoted to that one idea. When you are born, yes, you are old enough to die. But you are also old enough to live, and even a moment of life is better than the dead stillness. Even a life with an ailment or handicap is better than no life at all, better, at least, until the pain becomes so large that it begins to diminish life. Ian, you will say such things in your poetry exquisitely.

IAN

If I live long enough.

GLORIA

We can only hope.

(Ambulance SIREN in the distance)

IAN

But I am in the arms of life, aren't I?

(The SIREN grows louder, as the lights fade)

GLORIA

Yes, always in my arms, as long as you live.

IAN

I love you.

GLORIA

And I love you.

(kisses him)

My dear, sweet, Ian.

IAN

Life kissed me. I will always remember that. You are mine, aren't you, Gloria?

GLORIA

Yes.

IAN

And I may not die?

GLORIA

I hope with all my heart. You are my voice, Ian! My only voice on earth! And my dear, dear husband!

IAN

Oh, the uncertainty of it all. But the glory -- the irreplaceable glory! Take me in your arms, Gloria. I could use at least one more kiss.

(as the SIREN grows louder)

GLORIA

Oh, Ian! My love!

(SHE kisses him, as LIGHTS FADE TO ...

BLACKOUT

THE END