

ACT I  
SCENE I

*It is November 1915, at Lodge Building of Riverbank Labs in Geneva, Illinois. The decor would break the heart of an animal lover. The heads of various big game animals hang from the walls. The couch and chair are covered in animal skin. A mummy stands up in one corner of the room and a suit of Samurai armor stands in another. There is a bookcase filled with numerous volumes of leather-bound books near a roll top desk. The main space of the room is sunken, so that the front entrance, which is center stage, is above the rest of the set by two steps. Outside the windows we see the grounds, populated with many trees and bushes. A few small cabins can be seen in the distance. As the lights come up, the room is empty. Outside, we hear the faint chirping of some birds.*

*From offstage, George Fabyan bellows.*

GEORGE

Ma-a-a-argaret! Margaret! *(Through the front door bounds George Fabyan, 6 plus feet of bearded, boundless energy. He is wearing riding pants and holding a riding crop. Hands on hips, he stands at the top of the stairs.)* Where is that woman? Margaret!!!

MARGARET

*(Margaret Hennesey enters from stage right. Fabyan's secretary, she is a first generation Irish woman in her fifties, a bit overweight who speaks with a soft lilt that belies her gruff nature.)* Oh, its you! I thought one of the elephants had escaped from the zoo!

GEORGE

Very funny... Now look, woman, I need to know -

MARGARET

- Spend all that money to install all those new fangled gadgets...

GEORGE

*(Impatiently)* Margaret...

MARGARET

*(As she crosses to the roll-top desk)* Electric lights, Victrolas, washing machine...*(pointing to a box with several levers and a speaker)* and what's this? Why it's something called an intercom.

GEORGE

Now see here, woman. I don't have...

MARGARET

Seems all you have to do is press down on this button right here and people in every room of the house can hear you. My, my. Imagine having the money to install such a wonderful device. And imagine being too stubborn to use it...

*George crosses to Margaret and raises his arm, as if to hit her. She doesn't flinch. His hand comes down on a lever of the intercom.*

GEORGE

*(Sweetly, Into the intercom)* Hello, Margaret? Would you be so kind as to meet me in the lodge?

MARGARET

You wanted to see me?

GEORGE

Margaret, you are the most irritating creature on God's green earth.

MARGARET

And the only one with stomach enough to put up with the likes of you.

GEORGE

How about we start over?

MARGARET

Fine, I'll return to Ireland and you can go back to your cave and finish hibernating.

GEORGE

Margaret, I shall make it the first task of our new geneticist to develop a strain of potato resistant to plague, thus insuring the world that the Irish needn't leave their beloved homeland anymore.

MARGARET

If he can develop one that will keep the British in theirs then you've got something!

GEORGE

*(Lets out a glorious laugh)* And that, my dear woman, is why I could never bear the thought of you leaving Riverbank.

MARGARET

*(Touched and a bit embarrassed. Starts to shuffle some papers on the desk)* So what did you want?

GEORGE

I just wanted to make sure everything was in place for Friedman.

MARGARET

Don't worry, your Lordship, his room is ready, I've sent Michael to pick him up at the train station, and sandwiches are made in case he's hungry.

GEORGE

Excellent. I'll be in my office. *(Playfully)* You can use the intercom to let me know when he gets here.

*He laughs as he heads for his office. Margaret watches with glee as Fabyan finds his path blocked by Mrs. Isabelle Wells Gallup, a stern Boston Brahmin. Margaret starts to giggle, but Fabyan turns and gives her a cold stare that sends her off stage. Fabyan turns back to Gallup, to whom he is cordial, but uncharacteristically uncomfortable.*

ISABELLE

Mr. Fabyan...

GEORGE

Mrs. Gallup, always a pleasure. How are you and your sister faring?

ISABELLE

We'd fare a lot better if my department had the help we were promised. *(Pouting)* Some of us are beginning to wonder if Riverbank really supports our work.

GEORGE

*(He creeps towards his office)* My dear Mrs. Gallup, question anything but my enthusiasm for your work. Didn't I just purchase that special camera you wanted? And build a darkroom? Supply you with film?

ISABELLE

But all that means nothing unless I have a qualified person to take the pictures and develop them. *(As she follows him into his office)* Mr. Fabyan!

*The door to Fabyan's office shuts behind them. Then we hear the sound of a wolf howling outside in the distance. This is followed immediately by braying and the clopping to a halt of a set of hoof beats. The door opens and Michael, the red-haired, freckled-face, teenage son of Margaret, enters, carrying a leather briefcase, which he places on the coffee table. The howling continues in the distance. We hear Margaret's voice from off-stage.*

MARGARET

*(Off-stage)* Michael? Is that you?

MICHAEL

Yea, ma!

MARGARET

*(Off-stage)* Tell Doctor Friedman that Mr. Fabyan will be with him shortly, and then bring his things to his cabin.

MICHAEL

Okay, ma!

*Michael bounds back up the stairs and opens the door for William Friedman, a short, handsome, and dapper man with black hair and a small pencil thin mustache. William wears a set of pince-nez glasses and a one-size too-large overcoat. When he speaks there is just a trace of a Russian accent. He enters, shaking his head in amazement.*

MICHAEL

I'll bring your luggage to your cabin, Mister Friedman. My ma says to tell you that Mr. Fabyan will be with you - *(Notices William's face)* Are you all right?

WILLIAM

I'm fine... it's just that... that was just the most remarkable carriage ride I've ever taken. What did you say their names were?

MICHAEL

Romeo and Juliet. *(Looks out of the window admiringly)* Ain't they the most beautiful zebras you've ever seen?

WILLIAM

Truth be told we didn't have many zebras where I grew up. Only horses pulled the carriages I ever saw. Were they difficult to train?

MICHAEL

Nah, they're just like horses...only striped, I guess. *(The wolf howls again, William steps back from the window in fear)* That's Louie the Wolf. It's nothing personal. Louie's got a bad temper and he howls whenever someone new enters the estate.

WILLIAM

Remind me to let my mother know that before she comes to visit. Am I crazy or did I see a... gorilla walking around the grounds?

MICHAEL

Yea. That's Hamlet. He's a two year-old African Gorilla.

WILLIAM

Hamlet. And you let him roam free?

MICHAEL

Well, Mr. Fabyan says considering the sorta humans we let walk around these days a gorilla might be an improvement.

WILLIAM

How big did you say the estate was?

MICHAEL

About 300 acres.

WILLIAM

Amazing. All this from selling cotton goods? Mr. Fabyan must be very good at it.

MICHAEL

Good? Are you kidding? You never heard the story?

WILLIAM

Story? What story?

MICHAEL

About George - Mr. Fabyan - and his father? (*William shakes his head*) Back in Boston, George's dad was the head of the Bliss Fabyan Corporation, the largest cotton goods company in the world. So you gotta figure his life was all set. Prep school, an Ivy League college, and then a vice-presidency of the company, right? Well, it would've been, anyway, except when he was 15 he ran away from home and became a lumberjack in Minnesota.

WILLIAM

Was his father upset?

MICHAEL

Was he! The old man disinherited and disowned him.

WILLIAM

Mr. Fabyan must have been crushed.

MICHAEL

Nah. George once told me he didn't like the idea of being a prince waiting for the King to die just so he could get the crown.

WILLIAM

So how -

MICHAEL

- When George was 19 he left the lumber camp and went to St. Louis where he got a job. (*Pause*) With the Bliss Fabyan Corporation!

WILLIAM

His father's company!

MICHAEL

Right. Only George doesn't tell the St. Louis office who his old man is, see? He tells them his name is Brown or something like that, and he goes to work as a salesman. So now George's father, back in Boston, starts getting these sales reports from St. Louis and every month there's some guy named Brown selling more cotton goods than anyone in the history of the company. After two years of this the old man orders the salesman back to the home office so he can congratulate him. And in walks his son, George.

WILLIAM

Amazing!

MICHAEL

I'll say. George was made head of the Chicago office and put back in the will. When his father died a few years ago he inherited 3 million dollars. That's when he bought this place and opened Riverbank.

WILLIAM

What an incredible story. But there's one thing I don't understand.

MICHAEL

What's that?

WILLIAM

Well, George ran away from home and became a lumberjack, correct? He didn't finish high school or go to college. Where did he learn so much about the cotton business?

MICHAEL

*(Grabs a book from the shelf and hands it to William)* Funny you should ask. So many people had the same question that Mr. Fabyan published a book about it. *(He hoists the bags and heads for the door)* Well, my ma says I've gotta get these to your cabin.

WILLIAM

Of course. Thanks for the ride. And the story.

MICHAEL

You're welcome.

WILLIAM

*(Reading the cover)* "What I Know About the Future of Cotton and Domestic Goods: by George Fabyan." Hmmm. Hey! This book is nothing but blank pages.

MICHAEL

I know. Welcome to Riverbank.

*The screen door slams behind Michael, and William laughs quietly to himself. He closes the book and surveys the room as a missionary would a cannibal's cooking pot, his eyes moving from stuffed animal head to stuffed animal head. He faces the mummy.*

WILLIAM

Or Alice's Wonderland.

*Moving slowly around the Lodge, he runs his hands over the skin-covered chairs and couch, until he finds himself*

*nose-to-nose with a giant Bull Moose head stuck menacingly on the wall.*

WILLIAM

Maybe the Island of Dr. Moreau is more like it.

*He studies it with scientific aloofness. Suddenly, an impish thought crosses his mind, and he begins to speak to the head, leaving appropriate pauses for responses.*

WILLIAM

I should be back at Cornell, you know. I was teaching and finishing up my Masters degree in genetics when... Hmm? Genetics. You know, heredity. It's what makes me a man and you a... (*peering over his glasses*) a Bull Moose, I believe... Well, one day my supervisor asked me if I was interested in meeting a gentleman from Chicago...

*All the lights quickly dim to black, as a spot down stage center comes up. Into this tightly defined area (which has no furniture) walks William. George waits, pacing.*

GEORGE

I'm a rich man, Friedman. Very rich. Now some rich men go in for art collections, some like gay times on the Riviera, and others try to buy yachts bigger than the other rich man's. But they all get satiated, eventually. Bored. That's why I'm spending my money on Riverbank, on scientific experiments to discover valuable things that universities can't afford. So tell me about yourself, Friedman. Was genetics your first career choice?

WILLIAM

No, sir. I guess I really didn't know what I wanted to do with my life until college. For a short while I wanted to be a farmer.

GEORGE

(*Amused*) A farmer? Really? You don't look the type.

WILLIAM

I suppose I don't. But for a while, at least, I decided to try to make a living from the soil. You know, work with my hands. Grow things.

GEORGE

So what happened?

WILLIAM

I'm afraid Mother Nature got the wrong number when I answered that call.

GEORGE

Excellent! A man who can be proud of his failures. I like that. Friedman, I need a qualified man to take charge of a Department of Genetics I am starting at Riverbank Laboratories.

WILLIAM

I'm flattered, Mr. Fabyan, but -

GEORGE

George. Call me George.

WILLIAM

Oh. All right. Well, you realize... George, that I haven't even got my Masters degree yet...

GEORGE

I know that. That's why your application is so appealing to me. *(William is confused)* See here, I'm not looking for a man to redo work that is being performed at every agricultural station and university in this country. I want innovation, son, not duplication. I want you to imagine only the possibilities. It's the only way to achieve our goals.

WILLIAM

And what are our goals?

GEORGE

Beats the hell out of me! *(Laughs heartily)* I'm no geneticist. *(Serious)* But I will give you an example of the sort of things we are doing at Riverbank. I have a good friend - *(patronizing)* a Jewish businessman, by the way - who is trying to develop a strain of wheat that will grow in arid climates.

WILLIAM

Why?

GEORGE

Well, according to him the British have promised to turn a bit of Palestine over to your people, and he's looking for a food source that will grow in the desert. Now if I can beat him to it, he'll foot the bills and be damned glad to. So we've been working on the problem at Riverbank.

WILLIAM

Really? Any success?

GEORGE

None. But not for lack of trying, mind you. We've been very innovative, if I do say so myself. Let's see... we've watered at different times of the day, sowed during different phases of the moon and - *(William looks at him as if he were crazy)* Is there a problem, Friedman?

WILLIAM

No.

GEORGE

Friedman, did you know that Thomas Edison tried over 3000 different materials in his light bulb before he found the right one to use as a filament? Now he may have gotten there faster with a lot of formulas and equations, but look at how much he learned by trial and error about those materials. I'm not saying you have to do it that way... after all you've got to put all that book learning to some use, eh?

WILLIAM

May I be perfectly frank with you, George?

GEORGE

I'll be mad as hell if you weren't!

WILLIAM

Good. It's just that it would seem all of this is going to cost a great deal. What should happen if I -

GEORGE

- Fail? Why Edison failed 3000 times on the light bulb alone! Just do your work intelligently and try to understand those failures and I'll have no kick. *(Prepares to leave)* As for money, if you come along, you'll receive 100 dollars a month, plus room and board. *(Reaches for William's hand)* Nice to meet you Friedman.

*George walks out of the spot. William stares into the dark for a moment, then, as the lights return to the lodge, he walks and faces the Bull Moose again. Isabelle Gallup exits Fabyan's office with Fabyan in tow. She walks towards*

*Friedman, who is too engrossed in his "conversation" with the moose to notice her.*

WILLIAM

How could I turn him down? No pressure to publish, free room and board, and (*imparting a great secret*) a chance to prove to a few people at Cornell a little something about William Friedman... (*Pause*) You'll forgive my saying so but you're rather brutish-looking, even for a Bull Moose. No wonder Mr. Roosevelt lost the election.

*Isabelle is directly behind him, and by the look on her face thinks that Friedman is speaking to her*

WILLIAM

Who knows how many people were scared away by those antlers, alone.

ISABELLE

I beg your pardon.

*Friedman turns. Isabelle, glowers at him.*

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, I... I didn't mean your antlers. Hat! I didn't mean your hat -

ISABELLE

I'm no geneticist, Mr. Friedman, but even I know that a conversation with a stuffed animal can be rather one-sided.

WILLIAM

Yes, ma'am.

ISABELLE

*(To George)* Mr. Fabyan, is this an indication of how you are spending money that could otherwise go towards other projects?

GEORGE

I hasten to remind you, Mrs. Gallup, that it is my money to spend. But I assure you that Mr. Friedman here is of the finest caliber, and that his work will be of vital importance -

ISABELLE

Yes, yes, I'm sure it will, as far as that sort of thing goes. Something having to do with... pea plants?

WILLIAM

Yes, but that was only one in a series of experiments that were -

ISABELLE

Predicting the colors of the leaves -

WILLIAM

And other characteristics, yes, but -

ISABELLE

Can you honestly say that the ability to determine the characteristics of pea plants has greater significance than exposing the fraud perpetrated on the world for the past 300 years?

WILLIAM

Well, I... (*Looks to George*) What is she talking about?

GEORGE

Mrs. Gallup has been engaged in a lifelong pursuit of one of the most tantalizing mysteries of the English language, the answer to which has eluded some of the finest literary minds for three centuries, a pursuit that when completed will put the name of Isabelle Wells Gallup - and Riverbank - on the map! *(Pause)* Who wrote the works of Shakespeare?

WILLIAM

You mean it wasn't -

ISABELLE

It most certainly was not.

GEORGE

Mrs. Gallup here has determined that the true author of the greatest works in the English language was not some illiterate ne'er do well from the lower classes of Stratford, but an educated, worldly man of letters from the academic elite of London.

WILLIAM

Who?

ISABELLE

Sir Francis Bacon, of course. *(William is non-plussed. She reaches into her large purse and retrieves a small, thin book which she hands to him)* Really, it's all explained in my book.

WILLIAM

*(Reading from the cover)* "The Biliteral Cipher of Sir Francis Bacon Discovered in His Works and Deciphered by Mrs. Isabelle Wells Gallup." Uh... impressive title.

ISABELLE

*(She grabs the book)* Hmmph! I shall be most interested to see what comes of your pea plants. Good day, Mr. Friedman *(Bows slightly to George before wheeling around to exit)* Mr. Fabyan.

GEORGE

*(After Isabelle exits)* Don't let Mrs. Gallup intimidate you, son. She is very focused on her work, that's all. It's consumed much of her life and the life of her sister.

WILLIAM

Sister! You mean there are two of them?

GEORGE

*(Laughs)* Yes, you'll have the opportunity to meet her later at dinner.

WILLIAM

Dinner?

GEORGE

Yes, I like to take the opportunity to have the rest of the staff meet a new employee in an informal setting. You don't mind, do you, Friedman?

WILLIAM

No, I suppose not. You say she has a sister?

GEORGE

*(Laughs, slaps William's back)* So Friedman, what do you think of the Lodge?

WILLIAM

Well, it's -

*Aloycious Brattle suddenly bursts through the Lodge door. He carries a number of rolled up plans in his arms and has several pencils wedged behind his ears. He is in constant motion - a professor on wheels.*

BRATTLE

Fabyan! There you are! I must speak with you!

GEORGE

Aloycious, I'm in the middle of a meeting -

BRATTLE

That's all right, I don't mind. *(Bounces to the desk, upon which he dumps the plans, then tries to roll out one of them on the desk. At one point he is trying to hold down three corners at once, and the plans roll up around his arm. He looks over to William)* You there! Don't just stand there! Grab hold and help me out!

*William looks helpless as Brattle grabs his arm and uses it as a temporary holder for one corner of the plan. Brattle then grabs various objects on the desk to hold the corners flat*

BRATTLE

There! You see that?

GEORGE

It's fine work, Aloycious.

BRATTLE

Of course it's fine work. But look at this. *(Points at the plans)*

GEORGE

Mmmm. Looks like you've got a problem.

BRATTLE

You noticed. If I can just get the fulcrum to stabilize over the counterweight then the balance will drive the inverted pulley.

GEORGE

*(Gravely)* I see. So your problem is stabilizing that fulcrum over the counterweight.

BRATTLE

Yes.

GEORGE

Which, if you can do that, the balance will drive the -

BRATTLE

- drive the inverted pulley. Yes! I knew you'd understand! (*Rolls up the plans*)

GEORGE

Well, I can see you're making fine headway, Aloyicious, fine headway. Now you keep me informed of your progress!

BRATTLE

(*As he exits*) You can count on it. And thank you.

GEORGE

You're welcome.

*Brattle exits*

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, but what were you and that man talking about?

GEORGE

Beats the hell out of me!

WILLIAM

But you seemed so sure of yourself. Even he thought -

GEORGE

It's an old parlor trick. Show interest... maybe a little sympathy for their terrible problem... then just repeat their last few sentences and they think you know what you're talking about. (*As if confiding a secret*) I do it at the paper company all the time.

WILLIAM

He seemed awfully excited.

GEORGE

I guess you'd be excited too if you thought you were close to building a perpetual motion machine.

WILLIAM

Perpetual motion machine! But that's impossible!

GEORGE

Tut, tut Friedman, we'll not have that word around here.

WILLIAM

But even a first year physics students knows that -

GEORGE

So, Friedman, what do you think of the Lodge?

WILLIAM

Uh... it's beautiful. (*To himself*) All we need now is the White Rabbit.

GEORGE

Eh?

WILLIAM

Nothing. It's very impressive. It reminds me of a photograph I once saw of Theodore Roosevelt's home at Sagamore Hill.

GEORGE

Thank you. You might say I was inspired by Sagamore Hill when I was a guest of the President a few years ago.

*Margaret enters the room with a pitcher of lemonade and a plate of sandwiches*

WILLIAM

You were at the President's house?

GEORGE

Yes, right after I finished my work in Portsmouth he asked me down to his home at Sagamore Hill...

WILLIAM

Portsmouth?

GEORGE

Yes, I was on the negotiating team that -

MARGARET

*(As she puts the tray on the coffee table)* You mean you haven't heard how George W. Fabyan single-handedly engineered the great Russo-Japanese peace treaty of 1905?

GEORGE

My beloved housekeeper embarrasses me. *(Walks to the window)* Come here, William.

*William crosses to window*

GEORGE

See that garden?

WILLIAM

Yes. It's very lovely.

GEORGE

*(Proudly)* It's an authentic Japanese Tea Garden. In gratitude for my work on the peace commission, the Emperor of Japan himself sent his personal gardener halfway here to design it.

MARGARET

Mmmmph! He did it because he probably thought you were a champion sumo wrestler.

GEORGE

Mr. Friedman, allow me to introduce you to Margaret Hennesey.

WILLIAM

How do you do. Your son drove me here from the train station, didn't he?

MARGARET

That's right. Very nice to meet you, Doctor Friedman...

WILLIAM

Uh... mister.

MARGARET

Eh? What's that?

WILLIAM

Mister Friedman. I don't have my doctorate... yet.

MARGARET

I wouldn't worry about that. *(Indicating Fabyan)* He was never in the army but gets to call himself Colonel! Now have a seat and have some food. You must be hungry after your trip.

WILLIAM

Actually, I am. Thank you very much.

*William sits down at the edge of the couch, in front of the plate of food, so that the stuffed head to which he was speaking is directly above and to his side. He grabs the thick sandwich and brings it up to his mouth, stopping to look to his side at the beastly head. Then he looks down at the animal skin that covers the couch, then at George and Margaret, eating lustily. Then he looks again at his sandwich. He's suddenly a bit queasy.*

MARGARET

You're not eating, Mr. Friedman.

WILLIAM

*(As he gently places the sandwich back on the tray)* I'm... not as hungry as I thought.

GEORGE

*(Stage whisper to Margaret)* City boy. The fresh air of Riverbank will do him good.

*Michael enters through the main Lodge doors.*

GEORGE

Ah! Michael, my boy! Come, have a sandwich.

MICHAEL

*(As he walks to the table and grabs a sandwich)* Thanks. Thanks a lot. *(He sits down next to William)* Hello, Mr. Friedman. *(Joins George and Margaret in the gorging. Sees William is empty-handed and shoves his sandwich in William's face)* Ain't you hungry, Mr. Friedman?

WILLIAM

*(Turning green)* No, thank you. *(Gets up)* I think I'd like to go to my room, now.

GEORGE

You're not feeling well, Friedman?

MICHAEL

*(As he gets up, his sandwich is inches from William's face)* Let me show you to your cabin.

WILLIAM

*(Turns even greener at the sight of the sandwich)* No no! That's all right! *(Heads out the Lodge door)* I'll find it. Thank you.

*William exits. George, Margaret, and Michael look sadly at each other, then resume eating.*

GEORGE

City boy. Yep. Fresh air. Do him some good.

*The others grunt their assent as the lights fade.*

## SCENE 2

*It is early evening in the Lodge on the same day, and the sky is darkening. William sits by himself in a large leather chair, nursing an upset stomach. Margaret enters with a cup of hot tea and toast on a tray, which she sets down in front of William.*

WILLIAM

Thank you Margaret, this is very nice of you. I feel so embarrassed...

MARGARET

Nonsense, you've just had a long trip and you're starting a new job. Now just sit back and drink your tea. I've got to get back to the dining room. *(She exits)*

WILLIAM

Thank you.

*After a few seconds Elizebeth Smith, an attractive, well-dressed, WASP in her early twenties enters the room in a rush, out of breath, laughing and giggling. She stops in her tracks when she sees William, who is clearly struck by her beauty. He starts to get out of his chair to make an introduction, when Thomas Parmenter, a tall, handsome, blonde young man, slightly out of breath himself, enters. William now finds himself in the awkward position of standing and watching the breathless couple.*

THOMAS

I let you win, you know.

*Elizebeth gives him her best "oh, sure you did" look*

THOMAS

I did! I had you beat by at least 20 feet at the head of the driveway...

ELIZEBETH

Yes, but we agreed the finish line was the door, not the head of the driveway. Honestly! The excuses you men will make when a woman beats you.

THOMAS

Now you sound like one of those damn suffragettes.

ELIZEBETH

*(Mock anger)* Oh, so I'm a damn suffragette, am I?

THOMAS

I only said you sounded like one. I'm happy to say you don't look one.

ELIZEBETH

Please, Thomas, we're not alone. *(To William)* Hello.

WILLIAM

Hello.

ELIZEBETH

I'm Elizebeth Smith. This is Thomas Parmenter.

WILLIAM

How do you do. I'm William Friedman.

ELIZEBETH

Oh, of course, the geneticist! I had heard you were arriving today. Thomas, please say hello to Mr. Friedman.

THOMAS

How do you do. Friedman, was it?

WILLIAM

William, yes.

ELIZEBETH

Thomas, Mr. Friedman here will be heading up a new department of Genetics here at Riverbank.

THOMAS

How lucky for you, Elizebeth. Perhaps Mr. Friedman can blend a nice Violet for you.

ELIZEBETH

Thomas is a lawyer in Chicago, and his father is Geneva's mayor.

WILLIAM

How nice. Perhaps he can have a street lamp named for you.

*Thomas stiffens up to his full height.*

ELIZEBETH

*(Quick to defuse the situation)* Thomas, it is almost curfew time. We should be saying goodnight.

THOMAS

*(With furtive glances at William as he backs up to the door)* Of course. I'll see you tomorrow for our afternoon bicycle ride, then?

ELIZEBETH

I wouldn't miss it. Goodnight.

THOMAS

Goodnight.

*Thomas moves to kiss her. William's consternation turns to happy surprise when she simply shakes his hand. Thomas casts one last angry glance at William before he exits. Elizebeth walks to the couch and sits down. William sits down only when she does. There is an uncomfortable silence. She suddenly brightens.*

ELIZEBETH

So, Mister... Friedman?

WILLIAM

William, please.

ELIZEBETH

William. Someone told me you're from Pennsylvania.

WILLIAM

From Pittsburgh, yes.

ELIZEBETH

Were you born there?

WILLIAM

No. My family moved there from Kishinev in 1892.

ELIZEBETH

*(Tentatively)* Kish...

WILLIAM

Kishinev. It's in Russia.

ELIZEBETH

Oh.

WILLIAM

So . . . Are you from Pennsylvania, too?

ELIZEBETH

You could say that. My family was with William Penn when he founded the colony in 1682.

WILLIAM

Oh.

ELIZEBETH

My ancestors were Quakers who left England to escape religious persecution.

WILLIAM

My parents left Russia for the same reason!

ELIZEBETH

Oh. Are you Quakers?

WILLIAM

*(Taken aback)* No, we're Jewish.

ELIZEBETH

Really.

WILLIAM

You couldn't tell?

ELIZEBETH

I was just making a joke.

WILLIAM

I should think you could at least see that I wasn't Quaker.

ELIZEBETH

I'm sorry.

WILLIAM

I know they had Jews in Pennsylvania because my family lived there. That's at least eight of us...

ELIZEBETH

A big family.

WILLIAM

Four brothers and a sister. Plus my parents, of course. And my grandfather lived with us for six years until he passed away. How about you?

ELIZEBETH

I'm the youngest of nine children.

WILLIAM

Nine! Goodness, your parents were even more prolific than mine!

ELIZEBETH

That's one way of putting it.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, did I offend you?

ELIZEBETH

No, silly, would I be smiling if you had offended me? What? What is it?

WILLIAM

Nothing. I just... well, I've never had anyone call me silly before.

ELIZEBETH

Well, now I'm sorry. Did I offend you?

WILLIAM

Would I be smiling if you did?

*They gaze at each other.*

ELIZEBETH

So what was it like, where you grew up?

WILLIAM

Pittsburgh?

ELIZEBETH

No, Kish...

WILLIAM

Kishinev? I don't remember. I was only one when we left to come to America.

ELIZEBETH

And Pittsburgh?

*Isabelle Gallup and Kate Wells enter quietly and listen to the conversation. Kate, like Isabelle, is stern-looking (Whistler's Sister, perhaps) but Kate is much softer in personality.*

WILLIAM

I can't image how staying in Kishinev and living through Russian winters could have been worse than living in Pittsburgh at any time of the year.

ELIZEBETH

Why?

WILLIAM

Have you ever been to Pittsburgh?

ELIZEBETH

No.

WILLIAM

It was... is... such a dirty city. The blast furnaces in the steel mills never stop running, you know. They keep going 24 hours a day. Growing up, I remember how our clothes and every piece of furniture in every apartment had a thin layer of coal dust on them. Even the sky... *(his voice trails off)* You know, as a boy I would read about all the wonderful things that were being built with steel, but all I could see or taste or feel was that black dust. It's always bothered me that we couldn't have the giant cruisers and suspension bridges and Eiffel Towers without someone having to breathe that coal dust.

ELIZEBETH

If you felt this way then why did you become a scientist?

WILLIAM

I became a geneticist - not an industrialist - because I thought that maybe I could find a way to get more food from the soil so we can feed more people. You won't find William Friedman building any steel mills so some rich man can have a larger berth on an ocean liner!

ISABELLE

Hello Elizebeth, dear.

*William stands and Isabelle and Kate enter.*

ELIZEBETH

Mrs. Gallup... we didn't see you standing there.

ISABELLE

That's all right, dear. Elizebeth, I was just wondering how your parents are enjoying their cruise to Europe?

*William looks like he could kick himself, as Isabelle waddles towards them and sits on the couch. Kate scowls at her sister.*

WILLIAM

*(In a stage-whisper)* My apologies, Miss Smith, I didn't mean -

ELIZEBETH

*(Whispers back)* It's all right, William.

ISABELLE

So Mr. Friedman, has Elizabeth told you about her fine lineage? You know, her family arrived in this country with William Penn.

WILLIAM

Yes, I know.

KATE

Really, Isabelle! Must you be so snobbish?

ISABELLE

It has nothing to do with being a snob and everything to do with good breeding. *(Looking at Elizabeth)* Some are born into it, *(then glancing at William)* while others... are not. Still not feeling well, Mr. Friedman. I understand that's why you missed dinner?

WILLIAM

Thank you for your concern but I'm fine.

ISABELLE

But Margaret said you were quite ill -

WILLIAM

- No, really, I assure you, Mrs. Gallup, that I am perfectly -

ELIZEBETH

Oh, were you ill, Mr. Friedman?

WILLIAM

*(Realizes being sick might not be so bad)* Well, I might have had a touch of something.

ISABELLE

Mr. Friedman, I don't believe you have formally met my sister, Miss Kate Wells?

WILLIAM

I have not. How do you do.

KATE

Very well, thank you. It is so nice to have such a polite young man at Riverbank.

WILLIAM

Thank you.

ISABELLE

Speaking of polite young men, tell us, Elizebeth, how is that fine young man with whom you've been keeping company?

ELIZEBETH

I wouldn't say we've been keeping company, Mrs. Gallup.

ISABELLE

Nonsense. *(To William)* He's here practically every day, taking her bicycle riding, playing tennis... Yes, Such a fine young man. So hardy. Healthy. Comes from good English stock.

WILLIAM

Well, he should do well at the county fair, then.

*Elizebeth giggles. Isabelle scowls. Kate smiles at his bravado.*

ISABELLE

*(As she gets up)* Hmmph! Your pea plants should do as well.

*We hear Fabyan and Dr. Thaddeus Scott and Dr. Thomas Johnson just as they enter stage left. Scott and Johnson look extremely professional, are impeccably dressed and carry themselves with great dignity, appearances which belie their impish natures. William stands politely as they enter.*

GEORGE

I'll tell you what we need is a man like Roosevelt. Then we'd see some action on the front!

JOHNSON

No doubt he'd be on a horse leading a charge on the Bosch right now, eh Fabyan?

*The other men laugh*

GEORGE

Laugh if you want, gentlemen, but he'd do what it takes to get the job done.

SCOTT

Of course, you're assuming it's the Germans we'd be fighting.

JOHNSON

Quite right. I'm sure Margaret wouldn't mind if we took a couple of whacks at the British, eh, Fabyan?

GEORGE

Ah! Friedman. Feeling better, I trust?

WILLIAM

I'm doing fine, thank you.

GEORGE

Gentlemen, please say hello to William Friedman of Cornell University. Mister Friedman heads our new Department of Genetics here at Riverbank. William, this is Dr. Thomas Johnson.  
*Johnson and William shake hands and exchange pleasantries*

GEORGE

Johnson is a veterinarian who is looking for a cure for hoof and mouth disease. And this is Dr. Thaddeus Scott, who's researching the effect of radiation on living beings.

*Scott and William shake hands and exchange pleasantries*

WILLIAM

It is a pleasure to meet all of you.

SCOTT

So, has Mr. Friedman met Aloycious, yet?

JOHNSON

Brattle? Hmmph. I can't remember the last time he joined us for dinner, can you, Thaddeus?

SCOTT

The old bird spends most of his time in his laboratory.

ISABELLE

Laboratory? Junk yard is more like it.

GEORGE

*(To William)* As you can see, we're not without our scientific rivalries here at Riverbank.

SCOTT

Scientific rivalries! George, please. Give Johnson and I more credit.

JOHNSON

Yes, really.

GEORGE

As you can see, some *(a stern look at Johnson and Scott)* contend that a perpetual motion machine... cannot be built, even though Aloycious believes that such a device is possible.

JOHNSON

Conservation of energy, Fabyan, conservation of energy...

GEORGE

More Ivory Tower claptrap.

JOHNSON

It's a physical law of nature, George!

GEORGE

So was a flat world in 1492!

SCOTT

How about it, Friedman, care to weigh in?

WILLIAM

Well... physics is not really my field...

JOHNSON

But you are a scientist...

SCOTT

Yes, that's right.

WILLIAM

A geneticist, not a physicist...

GEORGE

But right now you sound more like a diplomat than anything else.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry.

GEORGE

Don't be, boy. I have found that diplomacy has its place in this world. Why in oh-five when I helped President Roosevelt end the Russo-Japanese War I was using diplomacy as a tool that...

*George is drowned out by chorus of cries from the assembled group. ('Yes, George, we know about Portsmouth,' and 'Not again, Fabyan, have you no shame?' and 'Here we go again...') William smiles as the group breaks into laughter again.*

SCOTT

So tell us about your work, Friedman.

WILLIAM

Well, I've been studying genetics at Cornell -

ISABELLE

*(Snorts a crude laugh)* Pea plants.

GEORGE

Isabelle, really. *(To everyone)* Pea plants are the plant that Mendel used in his experiments to discover that one can actually predict the outcome of a union between plants by understanding which trait is dominant or recessive.

*Friedman is surprised*

GEORGE

Don't look so surprised, boy. A man should know something about what he is spending his money on. But you know, of all the new sciences, I believe genetics has the greatest potential for mankind, don't you all agree? Look at the average human being. *(Pounds his stomach)* A pitiful contraption of flesh and bones, eh? But if we of the Riverbank community can improve the human race by first experimenting with flowers and plants, wouldn't that be a wonderful thing?

WILLIAM

I hasten to point out it's a long step from pea plants to human beings.

GEORGE

There you go again, Friedman, thinking like a professor. The plain truth is that we don't know, do we? With genetics we may hold the keys to how the body works, how it's assembled. From there, who knows what diseases we might be able to control or even eradicate?

JOHNSON

Sounds like dangerous territory to me.

GEORGE

Eh? What do you mean?

JOHNSON

You're talking about meddling with the human body, Fabyan. Playing God. Is that something you think scientists should really be doing?

GEORGE

Oh, don't be such an ingrate Johnson. Look at how everything science has done for us already. You can get from Boston to San Francisco in less than a week by train. We've conquered the North Pole, the South Pole, every desert and jungle and just about every mountain in between. We have airplanes and dirigibles in the sky and submarines underwater below - and both can be reached in an instant with wireless communication! And you can thank the scientists for that. Scientists who haven't set any limits on themselves. Nothing is unconquerable, Mr. Friedman, not even nature.

WILLIAM

Tell that to the passengers on the Titanic.

*There is a stunned moment of silence, then - beginning with George - the room burst into laughter.*

SCOTT

*(As the laughter dies down)* So, aside from genetics, Mr. Friedman, have you any other interests?

ISABELLE

Aside from your pea plants.

WILLIAM

Well, I'm something of an amateur photographer.

SCOTT

And what did you shoot?

WILLIAM

I used to take portraits and shoot landscapes, as many people do. Of course, I quickly realized how I could use the camera for my work in genetics. It was a splendid way to document the differences in leaf patterns and size.

SCOTT

How?

WILLIAM

By getting the lens as close to the grown plants as possible when I take the picture. Then, when I develop the photographs, I can select one small section of the print and print it on a larger piece of paper. That makes the image much larger than the actual object. It's called a close-up.

*Isabelle stops tittering. She and Kate show great interest, as does Elizebeth.*

ISABELLE

A close-up?

WILLIAM

Well, yes. That's a photography term. You see I needed to preserve for the record as much detail as possible of leaf patterns and root structure and found the camera really did the job. Even though those are all small details, it was easy to -

ISABELLE

Elizebeth! Get the folio and bring it down here right away!

ELIZEBETH

Yes, ma'am. *(She gets up and races out of the room)*

ISABELLE

Mr. Friedman, do you know what a First Folio is?

WILLIAM

It's a collection of Shakespeare's works, correct?

KATE

It is a collection, made in 1623, of all the sonnets, poems, comedies, and dramas attributed to William Shakespeare, yes.

ISABELLE

But that were, in reality, actually written by Francis Bacon.

WILLIAM

I have been meaning to ask, Mrs. Gallup - without being impertinent, of course... what makes you believe that Francis Bacon was the author?

ISABELLE

Because he told us.

*No one knows what to make of the statement. Elizebeth breaks the silence by returning at that moment with the Folio - a 2 foot by 2 foot, brown leather-covered volume, which she sets down on the table.*

ELIZEBETH

Here it is. *(As the group stands up to gather around it, she runs her hands across the cover. She turns to Friedman, a fire burning in her eyes)* I'll never forget my first sight of it, at the Newbury Library in Chicago. The curator walked me down a long corridor to a back room, opened the door, and there it was, sitting plainly on the table - just like this. I felt like an archaeologist who had just found a lost tomb of some ancient Pharaoh.

GEORGE

*(Reverently)* Only what is inside here is more valuable than all the gold and jewels from any Pharaoh's tomb. In here are mankind's triumphs and tragedies, his strengths and weaknesses, his hatreds and his passions. His past... and his future.

KATE

Whoever wrote this is responsible for the greatest works in the English language - of any language.

JOHNSON

Except the Bible, of course.

SCOTT

*(To Johnson)* Good point, old boy. *(To Isabelle)* Have you any doubts about the authorship of that work, Mrs. Gallup? *(He and Dr. Johnson laugh)*

ISABELLE

Of course not. And don't be blasphemous.

SCOTT

Blasphemous? I beg to differ. Given Mr. Fabyan's willingness to take creation out of God's hands, it would seem that denying authorship of His book would be a minor issue.

ISABELLE

Blasphemous. *(Motions William to move closer to the manuscript as she opens the cover.)* Young man, how... close up... can a camera get to this text?

WILLIAM

How close to you need to get?

ISABELLE and KATE

*(Simultaneously)*

Close enough...

*Isabelle is annoyed. Kate defers.*

ISABELLE

Close enough to determine if each separate letter falls into one of two categories of style - Normal, or Italic. To do that we need to see every swirl, every loop, every curve of each letter so we can differentiate it from the others. Can you do that?

WILLIAM

You'll forgive me, but I'm very confused. What do photographic close-ups of the First Folio have to do with Francis Bacon?

ELIZEBETH

Mrs. Gallup believes there is a hidden message - a cipher - in the first folio.

WILLIAM

I see.

ISABELLE

Young man, do you know anything about ciphers and secret writing?

WILLIAM

A little. When I was a youngster I once read a story by Edgar Allan Poe called The Gold Bug. It was about a man who found Captain Kidd's treasure map, only the directions to the treasure were written in a secret code.

ELIZEBETH

I remember that story! He deciphered the code and found a fabulous treasure. I'll never forget how angry my mother got when two of my brothers and I dug up her prize Rose Garden looking for buried treasure.

WILLIAM

I did the same thing to our building superintendent's tomato plants!

ELIZEBETH

None of us could figure out why a map that we had drawn ourselves hadn't lead us to a fabulous treasure.

WILLIAM

Neither could I.

*William and Elizebeth share a laugh, then feel the icy stare of Mrs. Gallup*

ISABELLE

If you're through...

ELIZEBETH

Yes, ma'am.

ISABELLE

This is not some childish hunt for buried treasure.

WILLIAM

No, ma'am.

ISABELLE

As I was saying, Francis Bacon was one of the leading intellectuals and scientists of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Among the many things he invented was a method of sending secret messages. I have found evidence that he put such a message into the first folio, where it has sat for over 300 years, undetected.

JOHNSON

*(Skeptically)* Until you found it.

KATE

Dr. Johnson, Bacon himself wrote that the best cipher is one that could be snuck past an enemy without them knowing it is there. One should not be surprised that a man of his gifts could produce such a cipher. Nor should one be surprised that my sister, who has spent a lifetime studying those works, should have been able to find it.

JOHNSON

My apologies.

WILLIAM

I'm very curious, Mrs. Gallup. How does this cipher work?

ISABELLE

It is quite clever. Bacon replaced each letter of the alphabet with 5 characters - combinations of two symbols he called the A type and the B type, then he... *(Looks around the room and sees confusion from all but George and Elizebeth)* Elizebeth, dear, would you fetch that blackboard?

ELIZEBETH

Yes ma'am. *(She wheels a blackboard to Isabelle, who writes as she speaks)*

ISABELLE

Every letter of the alphabet is represented by a combination of two symbols grouped in fives, beginning with A, which being the first is represented by five zeros, like so... *(As she writes on the board)* A A A A A, then the second letter, B, is A A A A B, the third, C, is A A A B A, and so on. To write out a word in code, he simply replaced each letter in the original message with the corresponding combination of As and Bs. He called it a bi-literal cipher, because he used two types of symbols to create the code. *(There is still confusion in the Lodge)* Let me demonstrate. *(She writes the sentence DO NOT GO TILL I COME - in italicized and regular letters. She turns to William)* What do you see here?

WILLIAM

It looks a sentence, which says 'Do not go till I come' in which you have written some of the letters slanted and the others normally.

ISABELLE

Correct. Now suppose I were to replace all the normal type letters with an A and all the slanted, or italicized letters, with a B? *(She now writes As and Bs below the original text so the board looks like the following:*

D O N O T G O T I L L I C O M E  
A A B A B A B A B A B A B B A A

WILLIAM

Wait a minute! I see it! *(Rushes to the blackboard and circles five letters at a time then writes the decoded message below the circled letters as he speaks)* You combine the As and Bs into groups of five. So if A A A A A is the first symbol then A A B A B is the... *(thinks)* sixth set of symbols so it would translate to F *(he circles the As and Bs and writes the F)*, A B A B A is the twelfth, so that is... L *(he circles the As and Bs and writes the L)*, and B A B B A is the 25<sup>th</sup> so that's Y. *(he circles the As and Bs and writes the Y)*. F, L, Y. Fly - which is the exact opposite of the original message.

ISABELLE

*(To Johnson)* So you see, it is possible to hide secret messages in any text using this method. In fact, I have already uncovered messages that Bacon himself placed within the First Folio using this method. *(To William)* I must admit, young man, I am impressed.

ELIZEBETH

As am I.

JOHNSON

Miss Gallup, why would Francis Bacon take the time and energy to create these great works of literature and then hide the fact that he did so?

KATE

Being a writer of plays doesn't have the stature it does today, Dr. Scott. Bacon was a member of royalty and it would have been a scandal to have been associated with the theater.

JOHNSON

But to write all of those plays and sonnets and poems and not take credit for them. Do you not see how something like this stretches the bounds of credulity? Why for 300 years we have been taught that Shakespeare was the author of all those works, and now -

GEORGE

Scott, I can go north to Minnesota - where I lumberjacked for two years - and find a thousand people who will repeat, verbatim, the story of Paul Bunyan, but that doesn't make his existence real.

SCOTT

It doesn't mean it is true, either. Not without proof.

GEORGE

*(Motions to the board)* And just what do you think this is?

SCOTT

Fabyan, whose to say those italics aren't just random decorations placed there at the discretion of the printer?

ISABELLE

Random decorations. Such nonsense.

WILLIAM

Well there's an easy way to find out.

GEORGE

There is?

ISABELLE

Explain yourself, young man.

WILLIAM

Well, I was just thinking that we know the frequency of letters in the English language. E, T, A, O, N, S and so on. We also know the frequencies of various combinations of letters like TH, TR, AN... Seems to me if you want to prove randomness you just compare the frequency of the letters in the Folio with that of the English language.

GEORGE

Interesting idea, Friedman, interesting idea.

ELIZEBETH

*(Quite impressed)* How do you come to know so much about this, Mr. Friedman?

WILLIAM

Oh, well, mathematics is something of a hobby of mine. You might say it happened after I was bitten by the Gold Bug.

ELIZEBETH

Genetics, photography, and now mathematics? You're something of a Renaissance man, aren't you?

*There is an awkward moment as Elizebeth beams at William, who basks in her gaze. William and Kate seem to register an idea at the same moment.*

WILLIAM

George, may I have a word with you?

KATE

Isabelle, a moment, please?

*Kate crosses to Isabelle and guides her to an upstage corner of the Lodge where they engage in an animated conversation. William crosses to the opposite side of the Lodge.*

GEORGE

Of course.

*George and William move to the opposite side of the Lodge from Isabelle and Kate. William will cast furtive glances towards Elizebeth as he speaks to George. He clearly has two reasons for the following - science, and to get closer to Elizebeth. Both conversations occur between each other.*

WILLIAM

You know, George, this whole Bacon Shakespeare controversy is quite interesting.

GEORGE

That it is. I've been studying it for over twenty years, myself.

WILLIAM

And this cipher of Bacon's - it's absolutely fascinating. It presents some really interesting mathematical challenges. Frequencies of letters, and that sort of thing.

GEORGE

*(Trying hard to contain a smile)* You think so?

KATE

Yes, I do. He understands the cipher, and has the skills in photography that we need, and -

ISABELLE

Yes, but he is hardly the sort of person we would want working on our project.

KATE

Isabelle, really. We are not on Beacon Hill any more. We are at Riverbank.

ISABELLE

My standards are no lower in Illinois than they are in Massachusetts.

KATE

But what difference should it make to you who provides the keys as long the door to Bacon is open?

GEORGE

Now just a minute, son. Are you saying that you want to work with Mrs. Gallup?

WILLIAM

*(With an eye towards Elizebeth)* Mrs. Gallup. Yes.

GEORGE

Well, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I hired you to run a genetics department.

WILLIAM

It would only be temporary.

KATE

It would only be temporary.

ISABELLE

I'll say this much, he has displayed the right amount of enthusiasm for the subject...

KATE

That's what I'm saying, sister dear. This is what Riverbank is all about.

WILLIAM

This what Riverbank is all about.

*Fabyan and Isabelle both seem to mull their respective conversations over. They cross to each other at center stage.*

GEORGE

Mrs. Gallup, how would you feel about some additional help on the Shakespeare-Bacon team?

ISABELLE

If you mean Mr. Friedman, I suppose we could make use of his skills. At least on a temporary basis.

GEORGE

All right, son. Palestine isn't going anywhere. At least not to the Jews, for now. The wheat project can wait. What say you report to Mrs. Gallup at her lab tomorrow morning?

WILLIAM

Yes sir. Thank you, sir.

*The clock chimes nine o'clock.*

GEORGE

Goodness, look at the time. It's almost curfew.

*The cast exits. Dr. Johnson and Dr. Scott, who have been watching the scene with their typical detached amusement, make it a point to pass William on their way out.*

JOHNSON

Quite a day you've had, William.

WILLIAM

What do you mean?

JOHNSON

Well, you've gone from the head of a genetics department to a court photographer in just ten minutes. *(William looks hurt. Johnson smiles genially as he pats William on the shoulder as he casts an eye towards Elizebeth)* I know, I know. Mathematics.

SCOTT

*(Almost giggling like a schoolgirl)* Mathematics. *(Johnson and Dr. Scott exit together casting bemused eyes towards Elizebeth)*

ELIZEBETH

Welcome aboard.

WILLIAM

Thank you. I'll guess see you tomorrow morning, then.

ELIZEBETH

Tomorrow morning.

WILLIAM

Good night.

ELIZEBETH

Good night.

*William and Elizebeth exit. After a few moments, George, Isabelle, and Kate (the only ones left) smile and shake hands. Blackout.*

### SCENE 3

*We are in the Shakespeare/Bacon lab, which consists of a long table where William works on the camera while Elizebeth writes in a notebook, next to the Folio. A Victrola (an old wind-up record player) plays a minuet. In beat with the music, the following action takes place: As William reaches for a plate of film near Elizebeth, she reaches for a photograph near William. They bump slightly, look at each other, she apologetically and he longingly.*

WILLIAM

Excuse me.

ELIZEBETH

No, excuse me.

WILLIAM

Quite all right.

*The music continues as does the work on the table. Cautiously, William attempts to pick up another plate (which sits in front of Elizebeth) just as Elizebeth reaches for a pencil that has rolled in front of William. Again, in time with the minuet, they bump slightly, she apologetically and he trying to make the contact last longer.*

ELIZEBETH

That was my fault.

WILLIAM

No, mine. Sorry.

ELIZEBETH

That's quite all right, really.

*Both return to the objects before them, when both get up and attempt to cross in opposite directions, causing them to bump into each other.*

ELIZEBETH

WILLIAM (*Simultaneously*) - I'm sorry. Excuse me.

*They attempt to pass each other, swaying back and forth (in beat) until they stop and stand looking at each other until the record ends and we hear only the sound of the needle on vinyl. They gaze at each other. William picks the needle off the record and returns to the desk.*

WILLIAM

It's awfully cramped in here. With all his money you'd think Fabian could afford a larger laboratory.

ELIZEBETH

I thought you grew up with eight brothers and sisters?

WILLIAM

Yes, but except for dinner and sleeping I dare say there were never more than half of us in our apartment at one time. Maybe that explains why we all got along so well.

ELIZEBETH

I hope it isn't too hard for you, living here in Geneva.

WILLIAM

Why would it be hard?

ELIZEBETH

Well, the nearest temple is in Chicago. (*William looks at her blankly*) I just assumed that you were religious.

WILLIAM

Why is that?

ELIZEBETH

Well, you just said you were Jewish?

WILLIAM

And because I'm Jewish you assume that I am religious?

ELIZEBETH

I'm sorry. It's just Jewish people are, by nature, religious. Isn't that true?

WILLIAM

Now who's practicing genetics?

ELIZEBETH

I'm sorry.

WILLIAM

Don't be. The truth is whatever supposed religious zealotry runs in my people didn't seem to make it into my family.

ELIZEBETH

Is that so?

WILLIAM

In my family we celebrated the holidays and went to Temple on Saturdays enough, but we didn't follow many of the traditional rules in the house itself.

ELIZEBETH

Like what?

WILLIAM

Well, for instance, there's one that says Jews can't eat meat and dairy together -

ELIZEBETH

So you didn't keep Kosher. *(William is surprised)* Well, don't look so surprised. As you said before, there were Jews in Pennsylvania.

WILLIAM

Yes... well, when I was about seven, my grandfather - a very traditional, orthodox man, you understand - came from the old country to live with us. He hadn't been in the house a day when he proclaimed that we were from that day forward going to maintain a strict Kosher household. Well, my mother would have none of that. She told him the family had worked too hard to assimilate itself into American society and that she didn't want to do anything that would set us apart. They had some terrible arguments. My mother knew she was never going to convince the old man, but she was pretty stubborn herself. And clever, too. She figured out how they both could be happy.

ELIZEBETH

How?

WILLIAM

One night, at dinner, she served the bread upside down, with the buttered side on the bottom.

ELIZEBETH

And what did your grandfather do?

WILLIAM

He smiled, said the blessing over the bread, and ate his meal in peace. They never had an argument on the subject after that. You see my mother realized that what upset my grandfather wasn't the breaking of the rules, but watching them being broken. As long as he couldn't see the violation, it wasn't happening.

ELIZEBETH

Even though it was and he knew it.

WILLIAM

That's right. That was my first indication that there was a difference between what was expected and what was truly right. Or righteous.

ELIZEBETH

*(Pause. Searches for something to say)* You're doing wonderful work. Mrs. Gallup said just yesterday that she is making tremendous headway, thanks to you.

WILLIAM

Mrs. Gallup said that? She said 'Thanks to me?'

ELIZEBETH

Why do you seem so surprised? *(William just looks at her)* Okay, sure Mrs. Gallup can be a bit... sparse with compliments.

WILLIAM

Now who's being a diplomat?

ELIZEBETH

They are splendid photographs, William. And these mathematical tables of letter frequency you've produced are extremely helpful.

(Unenthusiastically) Yes, I suppose so.

WILLIAM

Is there something wrong?

ELIZEBETH

No.

WILLIAM

William, what is it?

ELIZEBETH

Nothing. I'm sorry. It's not my place.

WILLIAM

Not your place to do what?

ELIZEBETH

(Hesitates) I want you to be honest with me.

WILLIAM

Of course.

ELIZEBETH

Look at this photograph. It is what Mrs. Gallup says is the first of Bacon's ciphers in the Folio.

WILLIAM

I recognize it .

ELIZEBETH

Now look at this. (Holds the photo up) See how she's written As over some of the letters and Bs over the rest? She's clearly identified each letter as either italic or normal.

WILLIAM

Yes.

ELIZEBETH

Can you see the difference between the letters?

WILLIAM

Well, no, I can't. But I haven't been studying the Folio nearly as long as Mrs. Gallup has.

ELIZEBETH

That shouldn't make a difference. For something to be scientifically valid, the difference has to be apparent to more than just one person. Like in the case of genetics - flowers that are purple will appear purple to everyone, not purple to one person and yellow to another.

WILLIAM

These aren't plant leaves, they are printed letters in a 300 year-old book.

ELIZEBETH

WILLIAM

The demands are the same.

ELIZEBETH

But this is a lot more difficult than determining the color of leaves. For one thing, we don't know how many printings of the Folio were made with the same wooden blocks before the Chicago Library's copy was made. We can't be sure that the ink wasn't smudged or the blocks worn. That's why Mrs. Gallup must make certain assumptions -

WILLIAM

*(Stands up)* A good scientist doesn't make assumptions. Or excuses.

ELIZEBETH

*(Stands up)* I am not a scientist. But I do not make excuses. I am merely explaining the difficulties that Mrs. Gallup - or anyone else - would face when attempting this sort of work.

WILLIAM

Maybe I made a mistake offering to help Mrs. Gallup out.

ELIZEBETH

Maybe you did.

*They glare uncomfortably at each other before returning to their tasks. Kate enters.*

KATE

William. Elizebeth. Is there a problem?

WILLIAM

No ma'am.

ELIZEBETH

No ma'am. We were just... discussing the project.

WILLIAM

Yes, the project.

KATE

I see.

ELIZEBETH

Can I help you with anything, Miss Wells?

KATE

No, I was looking for my sister.

ELIZEBETH

The last time I saw Mrs. Gallup she was speaking with Dr. Scott.

KATE

*(Interest is peaked)* Dr. Scott?

ELIZEBETH

Yes, they were in the Lodge discussing something.

KATE

I see. Well. So, tell me Elizebeth, how do you find working with Mr. Friedman?

ELIZEBETH

Very well, Miss Wells. He is quite dedicated to the principles of science.

KATE

We should expect nothing less from our co-workers, wouldn't you agree?

ELIZEBETH

I would, as long as it were backed by a faith of purpose. *(William smiles)*

KATE

And you, William. How do you find Miss Smith's work?

WILLIAM

I find her highly dedicated to the project, Miss Wells .

KATE

Loyalty is an admirable trait, do you not think so, Mr. Friedman?

WILLIAM

I can think of none I would rather have in a worker.

ELIZEBETH

Thank you.

WILLIAM

As long as it comes with a healthy dose of scientific skepticism.

*Elizebeth is charmed. Suddenly, Isabelle enters abruptly, startling everyone.*

ISABELLE

Skepticism breeds suspicion and suspicion breeds contempt. Confusion of purpose.

WILLIAM

Skepticism breeds new ideas.

ISABELLE

*(Ignores him. To Kate)* How are they doing?

KATE

Very well, I think.

ISABELLE

I will assume we are speaking of the task at hand. There can be no distractions. Nor any... skepticism, healthy or otherwise. I shall need to have an absolute proof of Bacon's authorship by April third.

ELIZEBETH

Why is that, Mrs. Gallup?

ISABELLE

Never mind, why. Have we finished everything on today's schedule?

WILLIAM and ELIZEBETH  
*(Simultaneously)*

- No ma'am.

ISABELLE

Then why are we sitting here chatting? *(Elizebeth and William return to their tasks, scrupulously avoiding contact across the table)* Come along Kate, I wish to show you something.

KATE

Yes, Isabelle.

ISABELLE

Elizebeth... *(A last glare back at William)* William...

*Isabelle and Kate exit. William and Elizebeth exhale with relief. Then they look at each other and giggle. William composes himself as he returns to his work, but Elizebeth is decidedly giddy.*

WILLIAM

It's not that funny.

ELIZEBETH

I wasn't laughing.

WILLIAM

Well you're smiling very loudly. What is it?

ELIZEBETH

I just... no, I shouldn't. It's not my place.

WILLIAM

Didn't we just have this conversation? *(Pause)* Elizebeth...?

ELIZEBETH

I won't. You'll think me an awful gossip.

WILLIAM

Well, if you don't want to tell me that's fine...

ELIZEBETH

All right. Since you insist. Did you notice how interested Kate was in Dr. Scott?

WILLIAM

Are you serious?

ELIZEBETH

And you call yourself a scientist. You couldn't tell that Kate was displaying more than a casual interest in Dr. Scott?

WILLIAM

She asked about the conversation her sister was having with him.

ELIZEBETH

Oh, peeshaw!

WILLIAM

That is your... scientific way of saying that Kate and Dr. Scott are somehow involved?

ELIZEBETH

I didn't say involved. I think, perhaps, that Kate might be... interested in Dr. Scott. You don't think it's possible?

WILLIAM

Yes, and it's possible that Francis Bacon wrote Shakespeare, too, but I don't see a lot of evidence to support that conclusion, either.

ELIZEBETH

Why William Friedman, how does a man become so cynical at such a young age.

WILLIAM

I am not cynical. I'm merely being realistic.

ELIZEBETH

About Francis Bacon or about love?

WILLIAM

If I saw enough evidence - scientifically robust evidence, mind you, then yes, I would believe that Bacon was the author of -

ELIZEBETH

No, not about that. Would you admit that two people of seemingly dissimilar backgrounds could develop a relationship?

WILLIAM

*(Thinks she is talking about him)* Well, yes. I'd like to think that it could - would - happen. If the conditions were right, and the two people were -

ELIZEBETH

That's all I was saying, that it is possible that Miss Wells and Dr. Scott could -

WILLIAM

*(Disappointed)* Dr. Scott and Kate Wells. Of course. Sure.

ELIZEBETH

*(Looking out of the lab window)* They are an interesting pair, aren't they?

WILLIAM

Dr. Scott and Kate?

ELIZEBETH

No. Kate and Isabelle.

WILLIAM

*(Comes up behind Elizebeth, looks over her shoulder out the window)* Two peas in a pod, I'd say. *(Pause)* Sorry. Occupational hazard of genetics. But in many ways they are so much alike.

ELIZEBETH

But then in others it's hard to imagine they could even be friends, let alone sisters.

WILLIAM

I wonder what Isabelle would have to say about Kate and the good doctor?

ELIZEBETH

I wonder if there's any doubt.

*They smile at each other. The lights fade on the laboratory.*

#### SCENE 4

*At that same moment, in a garden on the Riverbank grounds. The lights on the laboratory dim and give way to lights over a park bench sitting empty in the middle of the stage. We hear birds chirping in the distance. Kate and Isabelle enter and cross to center stage.*

KATE

I'm looking forward to seeing this new data you have, Isabelle.

ISABELLE

We'll discuss the data later. I have something much more important about which I need to speak with you.

KATE

What is it, Isabelle?

ISABELLE

I think you know very well what it is.

KATE

Honestly, I don't, dear.

ISABELLE

It is Mr. Friedman.

KATE

Mr. Friedman? I don't understand. His work has been exemplary.

ISABELLE

It is not his work to which I refer.

KATE

He's perfectly well-mannered, well-dressed. Those close-ups he has made for us have proven to be of great help, and he has even provided some interesting mathematical analysis. Why did you know that the frequency of the letters e, t, and a were -

ISABELLE

I am referring to the distraction he is causing among our other workers.

KATE

But our only other worker is Elizebeth.

ISABELLE

Precisely.

KATE

Oh, Isabelle, you can't be serious.

ISABELLE

Things like that do not escape my attention.

KATE

No, they never do.

ISABELLE

Mmmph. I should have known that you would condone such activity.

KATE

What activity? Nothing has happened.

ISABELLE

You know the time constraint we are under.

KATE

Of course I am.

ISABELLE

Have you seen the way he looks at her?

KATE

Yes, but I have also seen the way she doesn't look at him.

ISABELLE

Goodness, Kate, you seem disappointed.

KATE

I am. Very disappointed.

ISABELLE

My dear sister. We have a problem.

KATE

I don't have a problem. You do. Once again. Has it ever occurred to you that people would be better off if you did not interfere in their affairs.

*Stony silence.*

ISABELLE

I thought we had been through all this. He was no good for you and you know it!.

KATE

I've tried for 35 years to convince myself of that.

ISABELLE

You were young and foolish and refused to acknowledge what the future would hold.

KATE

And thanks to you my future become very predictable.

ISABELLE

Nevertheless it has always been comfortable, hasn't it?

KATE

Yes, I suppose it has.

ISABELLE

Now is not the time to allow ourselves to be distracted, either by foolish youngsters or an even more foolish women.

KATE

Honestly, Isabelle, sometimes you treat me so cruelly.

ISABELLE

I am only protecting you, dear sister. Just as father had to do.

KATE

Isabelle, I shall always regret that I have a had a life with so many who felt I needed protection.

ISABELLE

Oh, for heaven's sake, Katherine, act your age.

KATE

Most women my age do. That usually means having a family.

ISABELLE

I don't.

KATE

A conscious decision that you made... and to which Vincent agreed. *(Isabelle visibly bristles)* He was a good man, Isabelle.

ISABELLE

As husbands go, yes, he was a good choice - fine family, good provider, pillar of the community, well bred-

KATE

My Goodness, Isabelle, must everything be so "proper" with you? Wasn't Vincent more to you than a "good choice"?

ISABELLE

I refused to be distracted by the fickleness of human emotion.

KATE

Is that all that love is to you?

ISABELLE

Love had nothing to do with it! I did what was has expected of me, Katherine. Just as you did.

KATE

But don't you miss him, just a little?

ISABELLE

I have Francis Bacon now.

KATE

I suppose for one of us that is enough.

*Isabelle exits and Kate follows her off stage as the lights fade to black.*

### SCENE 5

*A few weeks later in the Lodge. Evening is falling and William sits in the hanging chair reading Stories by Poe. The Victrola is next to him softly playing a minuet. As before, Elizebeth comes racing into the room, with Thomas very close behind - beaten again, but loathe to show it.*

THOMAS

I know, you let me win.

ELIZEBETH

If it makes you feel any better.

WILLIAM

*(Without looking up from his book)* Seems to me that the only thing that is going to make him feel better is a new lung.

THOMAS

Oh. It's you. That's very funny, Feldman. I suppose you could beat her.

WILLIAM

*(Looks up)* That's Friedman. And I don't feel the need to try.

THOMAS

Well, if it isn't the emancipated man.

WILLIAM

Why not? Women are one half of the population.

THOMAS

Spoken like a good geneticist. So tell me, Friedman, are they the dominant or the recessive half?

WILLIAM

You're the one Elizebeth keeps beating. You tell me. *(Elizabeth giggles approvingly.)*

THOMAS

Elizebeth, please, show a little loyalty.

ELIZEBETH

Loyalty? What does -

THOMAS

*(Sniffs)* Or perhaps that is not one of your strengths?

ELIZEBETH

Loyalty, my dear Thomas, has to be earned.

THOMAS

Earned? Loyalty should be automatic!

ELIZEBETH

Automatic? What an absurd notion!

THOMAS

It's absurd for a man to expect support from those around him?

ELIZEBETH

You mean from "the woman" around you, don't you?

WILLIAM

I'd be careful answering that one, Thomas.

THOMAS

Who asked you? Doesn't anyone know their place around here?

*(There is stunned silence)*

WILLIAM

Suddenly this isn't much fun anymore.

ELIZEBETH

Not in the least.

THOMAS

*(To William)* What are you trying to do, make me look bad?

ELIZEBETH

Seems to me you don't need any help.

THOMAS

*(Realizing that William is winning, becomes extremely conciliatory)* I'm sorry Elizebeth, but can you blame me when this... upstart is constantly challenging me?

ELIZEBETH

Thomas, if you think you're better than he then perhaps you should act like it.

THOMAS

Why do you keep defending him?

ELIZEBETH

Because he is my co-worker as well as my friend and I-

THOMAS

Friend? Him?

ELIZEBETH

Yes, him!

THOMAS

Really, Elizabeth! One doesn't need to be a geneticist to know one does not try to cross a rose with a dandelion.

ELIZEBETH

Thomas, sometimes you can be so... crude.

*Kate, Isabelle, Dr. Scott and Dr. Johnson enter the room.*

JOHNSON

But why, Mrs. Gallup? Why hide his part in creating all those plays and sonnets. Francis Bacon was an author, wasn't he?

ISABELLE

Bacon was an author, but of scholarly books, not plays. The theater has never been a savory place, Dr. Johnson. If the truth of Bacon's class and standing were revealed it would have been a scandal of the highest order.

JOHNSON

All right then. But why would William Shakespeare, an actor, allow his name to be used in place of Bacon's?

ISABELLE

*(Quite taken with this theory)* Because it may have been his greatest role. Maybe the greatest role anyone has ever played in the history of literature. To pretend to be the greatest playwright of his, or any, time.

JOHNSON

Any greater than the role Bacon would have had to play? That of a man pretending that he wasn't that playwright? How could any man stand to keep such a secret?

ISABELLE

That would require a presumption on my part, and I prefer to work with facts. *(Noticing her sister's attention towards Dr. Scott)* And if my dear sister would pay attention to this assault on our research she might be of some help in this regard. Katherine!

KATE

*(Has been listening to the music)* Ah, the minuet. Isabelle, remember when we were young? All those nights we would spend in the conservatory listening to the music coming from the parlor?

ISABELLE

That was many, many years ago, Katherine.

KATE

Somehow it seems so much longer when you say it.

ISABELLE

*(Rebuked)* Katherine, we have issues at hand far more important than minuets!

SCOTT

I couldn't disagree more, Mrs. Gallup! After all, music hath charms to soothe the savage breast.

JOHNSON

*(To William, as he motions to Isabelle)* Even hers?

KATE

*(Enthralled with Scott)* Oh, Dr. Scott!

WILLIAM

*(Stage whisper to Elizebeth)* Miss Smith, I think I owe you an apology.

ISABELLE

Such trifle. The minuet, really.

JOHNSON

Man does not live by bread alone, Mrs. Gallup.

SCOTT

Who said that?

JOHNSON

I think it was Shakespeare. Sorry, Mrs. Gallup. Bacon.

SCOTT

Man does not live by Bacon alone?

ISABELLE

*(Very annoyed)* Will you two stop this incessant tomfoolery!

*William and Elizebeth start to laugh, but a cold stare from Isabelle stops them.*

KATE

*(Has been listening)* It is beautiful, isn't it?

JOHNSON

Miss Wells, I would fancy that you're as light as a rose petal when you waltz. Say, Scott, old boy. Why don't you take Miss Wells for a whirl around the parlor?

KATE

Oh, I haven't waltzed in years. I doubt I even remember how!

SCOTT

I would be happy to provide a refresher, dear lady...

KATE

*(Looking at Isabelle for her much needed approval but not getting it, she lowers her eyes and softly refuses)* No, I, I don't think so... Thank you, though, Dr. Scott.

SCOTT

*(Sadly)* My loss...

ELIZEBETH

Oh, Miss Wells, won't you reconsider?

KATE

I'm... I'm afraid I can't. *(Finally looking up and seeing the look of self-serving satisfaction on Isabelle's face, she is emboldened)* But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't, my dear.

ELIZABETH

Me?

KATE

Yes! You and... William!

**WILLIAM and THOMAS and ISABELLE**

What?!

JOHNSON

That's a wonderful idea! Nothing better than seeing young people enjoying themselves, I always say. And what better way than through dance.

WILLIAM

Now wait a minute...

JOHNSON

How about it, Elizabeth? You'd be making an old man very happy.

ELIZABETH

I'd love to. That is, if that is what William wants.

WILLIAM

I... that is... if I knew how I would be glad to, but -

THOMAS

Now wait a minute! This is *(Realizes what William has said)* - a fine idea.

WILLIAM

What?

THOMAS

Yes, a fine idea. *(Smirks as he walks past William and over to the couch to pull it back.)* In fact, I'm going to move this couch back to give the two of you more room. After all, what educated man doesn't know how to waltz? Even one who went to a public school.

ELIZABETH

Thomas, I'm sure William -

WILLIAM

Since you put it that way, Parmenter. I would be delighted to take Miss Smith around the floor.

THOMAS

Splendid. I'll just start the record again... *(He reaches into the Victrola and lifts the needle to the start of the record. The music stops, then starts again)*

ELIZABETH

*(Extending her hand)* William?

*They start to dance and William stumbles, but catches himself quickly. Elizabeth smiles good naturedly and they start again. He is very jerky in his movements while she is extremely graceful. Sensing his self-consciousness, she tries to guide him which only makes him more self-conscious. As he attempts to execute a turn, he backs her into the wall underneath the Bull Moose head, which slips off the wall and falls on top of her.*

KATE

Elizebeth!

JOHNSON

Good heavens!

SCOTT

Miss Smith, are you all right?

ELIZEBETH

I'm fine, really. Please. Everyone, I'm all right.

WILLIAM

Miss Smith, you're bleeding!

ELIZEBETH

Am I?

KATE

Somebody should call for a doctor.

ISABELLE

*(Looking at Dr. Scott and Dr. Johnson)* Yes, a real doctor is what we need.

WILLIAM

Elizebeth, I feel just awful.

ELIZEBETH

William, really, I'm fine.

KATE

Would somebody please get a doctor.

THOMAS

I tried to tell her, this is what happens when you try to cross a dandelion with a rose.

*Blackout.*

## ACT II SCENE 1

*It is evening, and the Lodge is empty. Kate and Dr. Scott enter, enjoying an amiable discussion.*

KATE

Did you know that with the exception of *King John*, the historical plays of Shakespeare extend consecutively from Richard II with that of Henry VIII. Except for one gap and one gap only: Henry VII. Remember? Richard III ends with the crowning of Henry VII by Lord Staley, who plucked the crown from Richard's dead temples. Francis Bacon wrote one historical work in prose, and it just happens to be *The History of the Rein of Henry VII*, which begins with the crowning of Henry VII and ends exactly where Shakespeare's Henry VIII begins!

SCOTT

An interesting coincidence, to be sure. I must say you and your sister make some interesting arguments, but then my field is radiation, not history or literature.

KATE

That shouldn't preclude you from having an opinion.

SCOTT

Even if it meant that I still believed Shakespeare was the author?

KATE

*(Sighs)* Despite everything I just said. Well, as long as you made it honestly and without prejudice.

SCOTT

That is a refreshing, if not surprising, attitude, coming from the sister of Isabelle Wells.

*William approaches the Lodge door, which is open. He does not enter but listens to the conversation.*

KATE

There is no call for disparaging Isabelle.

SCOTT

My apologies if it came out that way. I admire her tenacity.

KATE

That tenacity has served her well through many years of derision from the so-called academic community that refused to even admit the possibility that Shakespeare might be a fraud.

*Elizbeth enters, wearing a bandage on her forehead. She crosses to the door and sees that William is eavesdropping. She begins to admonish him silently, indicating that they should make their presence known.*

SCOTT

Well, I'll say this much, when Isabelle Wells Gallup chooses a fight she doesn't pick an easy one. You might as well suggest that Washington didn't cross the Delaware or that Edison didn't invent the light bulb. *(Kate begins to protest)* All I am trying to say is that while I may not agree with the hypotheses, I do admire you both for taking on what you believe.

KATE

Thank you. And now, I was wondering if I could ask you a question.

SCOTT

Ask anything you like. And please, just because Johnson and the others choose not to, I hope that you would call me Thaddeus. Or Thad, if you prefer.

*Now Elizbeth is interested, and she indicates to William to be quiet while they listen.*

KATE

Very well. Thaddeus. I understand that you were... engaged once.

SCOTT

Yes, I was.

KATE

And that she... passed away.

SCOTT

Yes.

KATE

*(Pause)* Her passing... it was... that is, I understand that it was the result of...

SCOTT

Katherine, I appreciate the delicate way you are trying to broach the subject. It's true.

KATE

Her death... it was preventable? Somebody... knew something but didn't tell anyone until it was too -

SCOTT

Until it was too late to save her, yes. Katherine, why do you -

KATE

So you would understand... if someone had proof of a theory... if they had done everything they could to establish the validity of that theory... you would understand that they did everything they could to... promote their findings.

SCOTT

I suppose I would.

KATE

*(Edges closer to Scott)* Good. I just needed to reassure myself that what we were doing was all right.

SCOTT

*(Edges closer to her)* Who? That what was all right?

*Dr. Johnson enters from a hallway, startling Kate and Dr. Scott, who are quick to assume as non-committal a stance as possible.*

JOHNSON

Scott, old man, what in blazes is going on here?

SCOTT

*(Can't take his eyes off Kate)* Afraid I don't know what you are talking about.

JOHNSON

Isn't that why you're here?

SCOTT

Why no, Katherine and I were... we were discussing Shakespeare.

KATE

Yes, Shakespeare.

JOHNSON

Well, Tommy or Margaret are no doubt looking for you right now. Seems Fabyan is having the entire staff brought here for a meeting of some kind.

SCOTT

A meeting? At this hour? Kate, have you any idea?

KATE

No.

JOHNSON

No one does. Margaret said he was pretty emphatic that everyone be present.

*William and Elizebeth make their presence known.*

ELIZEBETH

Hello Miss Wells. Dr. Scott. Dr. Johnson.

WILLIAM

Miss Wells. Dr. Scott, Dr Johnson.

KATE

Oh. Hello, dears.

SCOTT

So where were you two all this time?

WILLIAM

Uh... I was in my room when Michael knocked on my door and told me to go right to the Lodge.

ELIZEBETH

And I was coming onto the grounds when Margaret stopped and told me.

JOHNSON

So do either of you know what this meeting is about?

ELIZEBETH

I haven't the faintest idea.

WILLIAM

Nor I.

JOHNSON

Typical Fabyan. Everything has got to be a big drama. Can't just tell us outright.

ELIZEBETH

Where's Mrs. Gallup?

KATE

*(Guiltily)* I'm sorry. I don't know.

*They stand, unsure of what to do except wait. Dr. Johnson builds up his courage to speak to Kate.*

JOHNSON

Say, Miss Wells, speaking of your sister, I must say I had a most... invigorating discussion with her yesterday.

KATE

My sister, as everyone knows, is quite dedicated.

JOHNSON

Yes, well, I've had a number of discussions with her on the subject of Bacon versus Shakespeare. Of her dedication I need no further proof. But I must say that this time she seemed very... animated.

WILLIAM

Animated? Isabelle?

JOHNSON

*(To William)* I know. Never seen her in such a good mood.

SCOTT

Funny you should say that, old boy, but I believe I caught her humming to herself earlier today. Kate, have you any idea what's got her so... animated?

KATE

*(Clearly guilty)* I couldn't say.

*Scott and Johnson and William eye her suspiciously. A few seconds later Fabyan and Isabelle appear at the head of the steps.*

JOHNSON

Ahh, Fabyan. About time. Care to tell us all what this is about?

SCOTT

Yes, how about it?

GEORGE

I am happy to do so. I have called you all here this evening because I have a wonderful announcement.

ELIZEBETH

What is it, sir?

GEORGE

First of all, let me say what a wonderful job the entire Shakespeare-Bacon team has been doing. First rate. First rate all around! And a special round of thanks to young Mr. Friedman and his camera, without whose assistance Mrs. Gallup would not be ready so quickly with her latest proofs of Bacon's authorship. *(He applauds and the rest of the group dutifully joins in)* Now...

*Before George can proceed Aloyicious Brattle, his arms full of plans and sketches, rushes into the room. He is taken aback momentarily by the crowd, but as soon as he spots Fabyan he lunges towards him, grabs his arm, and drags him to the desk, upon which he begins to unroll and lay out the sketches.*

BRATTLE

Fabian. Glad I caught you.

GEORGE

Aloyicious, good to -

BRATTLE

Very important that we speak. Need to -

GEORGE

Yes, anytime, of course. But as you can see we're -

BRATTLE

Oh. Yes. Well, don't mean to interrupt your party.

GEORGE

It's not a party, Aloyiosius. But as long as you're here why don't you -

BRATTLE

Can't stop. Too much work to be done.

GEORGE

Yes, but we were just -

BRATTLE

- Yes, yes, I know I know. Shakespeare being knocked from his pedestal. Heard about it. *(Sarcastic)* Very significant. You must all be so proud.

ISABELLE

I beg your pardon.

BRATTLE

There's no need to apologize. Now Fabian, look at this.

GEORGE

Yes... well...

BRATTLE

You can see the dilemma right away, can't you?

GEORGE

Of course. It's quite obvious.

SCOTT

*(Mischievously)* Of course it is. How about telling us what it is, Fabian?

JOHNSON

Yes, what's your plan of attack?

GEORGE

That will be enough.

BRATTLE

It's friction in the gear box that's causing the problem, of course.

GEORGE

Of course. Yes.

BRATTLE

But here you can see that without these two springs the counterbalance becomes unstable.

JOHNSON

Terrible!

SCOTT

Awful!

GEORGE

Well, you seem to have a handle on the problem.

BRATTLE

You think so?

GEORGE

I suggest you work on the counterbalance. You don't want it to become unstable.

BRATTLE

Of course not.

GEORGE

Work on that friction problem in the gear box. I think that's the source of your problem.

BRATTLE

*(As he gathers up his charts and diagrams)* You're right again, Fabyan.

GEORGE

Good man. You keep at it. I know it's just a matter of time before we'll be toasting your success, as well.

BRATTLE

*(Has reached the top of the Lodge stairs)* The gear box. That's where the problem is. Yes. Have got to eliminate the friction. Well. Thank you. Good evening. Good evening all. *(Exits)*

*There is a brief moment where everyone remaining looks a bit unsure of how to react. Dr. Scott playfully starts to applaud in George's direction. He is followed by Dr. Johnson and Margaret. Even Isabelle and Kate seem to be enjoying the ribbing that George is taking.*

ISABELLE

Mr. Fabyan, with all due respect... that is the most... eccentric man... To think of the time and money he spends on those... ideas of his...

GEORGE

My dear Mrs. Gallup. Shall I tell you what people have said to me about your project over the years? That is why I created Riverbank. So scientists and researchers can go about their work without the encumbrances of - *(Before George can launch into another speech the group moans its protests - 'yes, yes, George, we know,' 'thank you, Lord Fabyan,' etc, which dissolves into more laughter by the whole group, which George joins)* And now, I am pleased to make an announcement. *(Pause)* Riverbank Labs is being sued.

ELIZEBETH

Sued?!

WILLIAM

Sued?!

SCOTT

JOHNSON *(Simultaneously)* - Sued?!

GEORGE

Yes, isn't it wonderful? *(His grin is met by blank stares)* If I didn't know better I'd say that you all thought this was a bad thing.

*The following action has got to build comically as everyone in the group first denies this statement - they shake their heads, affirming with one another that they didn't think anything of the sort. Then slowly, one by one, their certainty gives way to confusion, and soon they are all admitting that yes, they do believe the lawsuit is bad.*

GEORGE

Well, you are all wrong.

JOHNSON

How is this a good thing, George?

GEORGE

Are any of you familiar with Colonel William Selig?

SCOTT

Selig? I've heard of him. He's a motion picture producer, right?

ISABELLE

The movies! Low brow humor for the uneducated.

GEORGE

Don't be so hasty to judge motion pictures, Mrs. Gallup. According to this summons, Colonel Selig is about to release four silent movies based on plays attributed to William Shakespeare.

JOHNSON

Shakespeare and slapstick for the masses.

SCOTT

All well and good for Selig, but what does that have to do with Riverbank?

GEORGE

According to this, my dear Dr. Scott, if the - quote - alleged decipherings - of Shakespeare's works were to be published, Shakespeare's reputation as author of the plays would be shattered.

ISABELLE

As well it should!

GEORGE

And therefore, he says (*Reading from the document*) "the public would not attend the showings of the motion pictures cause not only the loss in expected profits but also of the capital investment involved in the film's production. I ask the court for an adjudication that William Shakespeare is the author of the tragedies, comedies, plays, and sonnets which heretofore have been attributed to him." Selig's movies are scheduled to open in a month, so he asked that the trial be scheduled as quickly as possible. We go before a judge in two weeks.

ELIZEBETH

Two weeks doesn't give us very much time.

ISABELLE

(*Pulls out a sheet of paper*) We don't need any more time. Not with this.

ELIZEBETH

What is it?

ISABELLE

Our holy grail. The final proof of Bacon's authorship. I found it, as I knew I would, in a bilateral cipher hidden within the First Folio.

JOHNSON

The cipher. The two styles of printed letters. All that A and B business.

ISABELLE

It was there all the time, just waiting for someone to find it.

JOHNSON

(*To Scott*) Told you. Animated.

GEORGE

Read it to them, Isabelle.

ISABELLE

"Queen Elizabeth is my true mother, and I am the lawful heir to the throne. Find the Cipher story my books contain, it tells great secrets, every one of which, if imparted openly, would forfeit my life. F Bacon."

GEORGE

(*Reverently*) What better inspiration for Bacon's passion for secret codes. His whole life was a great secret... one that could have brought down the monarchy!

ISABELLE

And now, after 300 years, we shall prove it to the world! And I could not have done it without you, Mister Friedman. (*William is uncomfortable with her attention*) You, your camera, and your mathematical formulas, have made this all possible.

GEORGE

Friedman, are you all right? You look ill.

WILLIAM

No, I'm fine, really.

GEORGE

*(To Margaret, who nods her assent)* City boy. Thought for sure the fresh air would have done him some good. Well rest up, William. We all have a lot of work to do over the next two weeks to get ready for the trial.

KATE

We?

GEORGE

Of course. I'm going work with the Bacon-Shakespeare team.

ISABELLE

Doing what?

GEORGE

I'm going to be your lawyer, of course.

ISABELLE

Our lawyer? I thought we were to hire a -

GEORGE

Was it not a famous author who said "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."

JOHNSON

It was Shakespeare in Henry the Sixth, wasn't it?

GEORGE

Right play, but let's hold off on the name of that author until after the trial.

*George exits. Isabelle follows.*

ISABELLE

Now just a minute Fabyan, this is not what we discussed.

*They exit.*

WILLIAM

Did you hear that?

ELIZEBETH

Hear what?

WILLIAM

Isabelle. What she just said to Fabyan, about not being what they had discussed... Like she had known all along... You didn't hear that?

ELIZEBETH

No. William, what is the matter?

WILLIAM

I'm not sure, but I think there is something rotten in Denmark.

JOHNSON

Quoting Shakespeare now, Friedman?

ELIZEBETH

It looks like it will be up to the court to decide who is being quoted now, Dr, Johnson.

*William nods seriously as the lights fade.*

## SCENE 2

*Evening in the Lodge. Dr. Scott and Dr. Johnson sit and sip brandy in front of the fireplace. There is the distant chirping of birds. Both appear in a brandy-induced reflective mood.*

JOHNSON

Quiet.

SCOTT

Yes.

JOHNSON

What with everyone in Chicago each day for the trial. *(Pause, as they sip)* Never seen the girl so... pre-occupied.

SCOTT

Huh? Who are you talking about?

JOHNSON

Elizebeth, of course. Used to be so attentive to her work. Now...

SCOTT

Now, what?

JOHNSON

Oh, come on old boy, tell me you haven't noticed.

SCOTT

Noticed. Oh yes, Elizebeth and William.

JOHNSON

Would have hoped you would. Plain as the nose on your face.

SCOTT

It's the nose on his face that's the problem.

JOHNSON

Scott! That was uncalled for.

SCOTT

You and I both know it to be the case. Those things never work out.

JOHNSON

Those things?

SCOTT

They are different people from different worlds.

*Unseen, William enters the room and listens to the conversation.*

JOHNSON

Bah! Now you sound like that Thomas.

SCOTT

Don't get me wrong. I like the lad, sure. But doesn't it make more sense for Elizebeth to be with Thomas rather than William?

JOHNSON

That's what my father tried to tell me. You never met my father. He was the minister in the small town in which we grew up. Real fire and brimstone sort, my father. Well, the family was coming home from church in our horse drawn carriage and turning onto the street where the Catholic Church was located. My father turned around and, like he always did, told us to turn away - to avert our eyes from the Papists that had invaded his domain. Don't ask my why, but this Sunday morning - I was 18 at the time - I decided to see what these creatures, these Catholics, looked like. So I turned my head just in time to see this beautiful redhead walk onto the front steps of the church. The sun was just peeking up over the steeple, and it caught her red hair in such a way that it looked as if it were on fire. I couldn't take my eyes off her. By now the carriage was halfway down the street but I swear I could still see those emerald green eyes staring back at me. She was all I could think about until the following Sunday.

SCOTT

And then?

JOHNSON

My father had seen what had happened, and went half way around town to avoid the same street.

SCOTT

What did you do?

JOHNSON

What any 18 year-old would do. As soon as we got home I went back to the church. *(Takes a breath)*

SCOTT

Don't stop now, Johnson. What happened?

JOHNSON

I rounded the corner of the church, and saw those two beautiful green eyes.

SCOTT

The girl's.

JOHNSON

Her parents, it turned out, had caught her looking at that awful preacher's son and were not happy with her either. They left the church by a side door to prevent her from seeing me. But she had gone back, as well, and had been looking for my family's carriage. From that moment on, it was impossible to split us apart.

SCOTT

What did your father say when he found out?

JOHNSON

Oh, he was livid, of course. A Catholic? In our family? Her family was not too pleased with their daughter, either. Threatened her with everything from disownment to excommunication. We did the only thing two kids could do - we eloped. We figured that way our families would have no choice but to accept it.

SCOTT

And did they?

JOHNSON

They didn't like it, but yes, eventually most of them did.

SCOTT

Most of them?

JOHNSON

My father... *(His voice trails off, then he shakes it off)*

SCOTT

*(Quick to cover up the silence)* I know what you're trying to suggest. But Elizebeth and William are not facing the same problem.

JOHNSON

It's a difference in religion.

SCOTT

But she's Protestant and he's Jewish. You are Protestant and your wife was Catholic.

JOHNSON

Two different religions, last I checked.

SCOTT

Yes, but at least you had a Messiah in common.

JOHNSON

Yes, well, I still say it might be easier for them than it was for Maureen and I.

SCOTT

How?

JOHNSON

I think it's because the person who is so totally different is a mystery. That's exciting for people in love who want to know everything they can about their partner. And those kids have the advantage of being researchers and scientists - they are trained to learn all they can about the unknown. But when someone is almost like you, but not quite the same, trust me, you begin to resent that sliver of difference.

SCOTT

Did that happen to you and Maureen?

JOHNSON

A little, I suppose. As much as we loved each other it was bound to happen. The resentment over a missed holiday, a few slips of the tongue at family get-together. But even though we never said it out loud, we agreed that it just didn't matter. We had twenty-five great years on earth that I wouldn't trade for an eternity in heaven. Which, according to my father and her mother we did. *(They sit quietly and sip their brandies)*

SCOTT

You are a very lucky man. *(Finishes his brandy with one final gulp. He picks up his glass, but then finds himself unable to drink, and he dolefully puts it down. He gets up from his chair)* Thanks for the drink.

JOHNSON

Turning in?

SCOTT

Yes. Don't get up, old boy. I'll see you tomorrow at breakfast.

*Dr. Scott exits. William waits, then enters.*

JOHNSON

Ah, Friedman. Come have a seat.

WILLIAM

*(Sits down)* Thank you, Dr. Johnson.

JOHNSON

Have a brandy?

WILLIAM

Well, uh, I've never had one before.

JOHNSON

Well, it's never too early to learn. *(He pours William a drink, which he sniffs suspiciously, then sips to his utter disgust. Johnson laughs)* It's an acquired taste.

WILLIAM

So's castor oil. *(He winces a bit more, then pauses)* Dr. Johnson...

JOHNSON

Yes?

WILLIAM

I hope won't think me rude, but I couldn't help but overhear your conversation before with Dr. Scott.

JOHNSON

And?

WILLIAM

You loved her – your wife, I mean – very much.

JOHNSON

Of course.

WILLIAM

No regrets? Your father?

JOHNSON

No. He had to know that at some point I was going to want to live my own life, not the one he prescribed for me.

WILLIAM

Dr. Johnson, what happened to Dr. Scott?

JOHNSON

Scott was in college when he fell in love. He and the girl were talking marriage when the poor thing got sick and died suddenly at the age of 19.

WILLIAM

19?

JOHNSON

Damndest thing. She was perfectly healthy and then... within a month... she was gone.

WILLIAM

How horrible. What happened?

JOHNSON

It was Dr. Scott who figured it out. You see, the girl worked at a factory painting radium on the hands of watches - so they'd glow in the dark? To put as fine a point on the brushes as possible, the workers would lick the ends before dipping them into the radium. Dr. Scott realized that some of the radium stayed on the brushes after each use. After so many years the radium was slowly poisoning her and hundreds of girls in the watch factories. Until then nobody knew how dangerous radioactivity could be. Scott ended up saving hundreds, maybe thousands of people from a similar fate, but he was too late to save the one woman in his life he loved. Life only gives you so many chances for happiness, boy. Don't let a single one pass you by.

*There is thoughtful silence.*

JOHNSON

So, how did things go at the trial today?

WILLIAM

*(Breaks from his reverie)* Oh. Well, uh, it's been interesting, that's for sure. Colonel Selig is acting as his own lawyer, too, just like Fabyan.

JOHNSON

Is Colonel Selig a lawyer?

WILLIAM

No. In fact, he's not even a real Colonel. That was just a title he used when he used to perform in minstrel shows.

JOHNSON

Minstrel shows! That must have made for entertaining cross-examination.

WILLIAM

They are both putting on a pretty good show. Selig and Fabyan have been cross-examining each other over Shakespeare's life, or what little is known about it...

*The lights dim on William and Dr. Johnson as a spot rises over a witness stand in which sits George. He is being cross-examined by Colonel William Selig, a man very much like George in mannerisms, dress, and style of speech.*

SELIG

Tell us again, Colonel Fabyan, why you believe William Shakespeare could not have written all of those works that for 300 years he has been given credit.

GEORGE

To begin with, he lacked the experience necessary to have written the works. Here was a man who never sailed, yet supposedly wrote about sailing in *The Tempest* with an accuracy only possible from someone who rode the heaving deck of a ship. Here was a man who wrote about lawyers and courts and legal issues in plays such as *Henry IV*, yet he never studied law. Here was a man who wrote splendidly of the rigors and technical aspects of war in *Hamlet*, yet he never served in any military regiment. Here was a man who wrote of Italy and other foreign lands in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, yet there is no evidence he ever saw any places other than Stratford or London.

SELIG

A common argument, your honor. But information about these things was available even to the common man. Shakespeare could simply have picked up this knowledge by being around men who worked in those fields.

GEORGE

No more than you or I could pass for lawyers, Selig. Besides, the level of detail that the writer of works like *The Tempest* has for sailing or *Henry IV* for the legal profession far exceeds what anyone could soak up from casual contact. No. The author of all those works was clearly a man with direct experience in all those fields.

SELIG

But even if Shakespeare never actually saw or did any of those things, who is to say that an educated man like Shakespeare could not have written about them?

GEORGE

Because there is no record of Shakespeare ever having attended school.

SELIG

Thank you, Colonel Fabyan, for leading me to my next point. Your honor, we know from town records that William's father, John, was a businessman who served on the town council and as the Mayor of Stratford. As a council member John Shakespeare was entitled to send his son to school for free.

GEORGE

Entitled, yes, but where is the proof that he did? There is absolutely no record of William going to school! None! Nor, I hasten to add, did anyone who lived in the town remember going to school with him. We are left to conclude only one thing, that whatever education William Shakespeare had, it was completely self-taught.

SELIG

While there is no proof Shakespeare attended school, there is no proof that he did not.

GEORGE

Your honor, if a prosecutor stood before this court and attempted to level a charge of murder upon a man by saying 'well, while we have no proof he did do it, there is no proof that he didn't,' would you not set the accused free at that very moment for lack of evidence?

SELIG

I do not think it beyond the bounds of reason to assume that the mayor's son would attend school, especially since it was free to all members of the town council.

GEORGE

Even if we accept - without any proof at all - this perverse logic that Shakespeare did go to school, what hope in the backwater town of Stratford could he have had of getting the Latin and Greek he needed to read the classics which everyone agrees were the foundation for so many of his plays.

SELIG

Your honor, an Elizabethan student - even the youngest ones - took Latin and Greek so that they could study many of the ancient classics in their original languages. For a bright, inquisitive, motivated student like Shakespeare this would have been more than ample foundation for writing the great works.

GEORGE

This is paramount to absurdity! Stuck with a suspect armed only with a bow and arrow, Colonel Selig wants the court to indict him for murder with a cannon! It is just the sort of empty logic utilized by Stratfordians to promote their man. The man known as William Shakespeare lacked the necessary education or experience to have written anything more profound than a simple will and the epitaph on his gravestone, which by the way are the only two things we are completely certain he did write.

SELIG

Now you are being completely unreasonable, sir.

GEORGE

Unreasonable? I think that is a charge best laid against you Stratfordians who stretch the very bounds of credulity –

SELIG

Once again, your honor, I wish to point out that the witness is offering no proof, but opinion.

GEORGE

Well let me ask you a question, Colonel Selig.

SELIG

I believe you are the one in the witness stand, Colonel Fabyan.

GEORGE

Never mind that. If William Shakespeare was such a prolific author, then how is it that for 300 hundred years people have been looking in the attics, floorboards, barns, and basements of every home, church, business and tavern in Stratford but have yet to find a single copy of any play, sonnet, or poem in Shakespeare's handwriting?

SELIG

Once again, sir, you offer no proof at all! Very few plays exist in the original handwriting of any of the Elizabethan writers for a simple reason - they were no more considered proper reading material than a script from a theater is today.

GEORGE

We are not talking about any dramatist. We are talking about Shakespeare. Surely a scrap of paper, a small fragment of notes... something to mark his involvement.

SELIG

In fact, Colonel Fabyan, the common practice of the time was for dramatists to sell their plays outright to the theatrical companies which in turn took great care to keep them out of print so rival companies could not perform them. That is why no copies exist.

GEORGE

Yes, how convenient.

SELIG

For both of us, Colonel Fabyan, for I note that you have not produced any scraps of any plays with Francis Bacon's signature on it.

GEORGE

Yes, but given the choice between an uneducated ne'er do well from a backwoods town like Stratford, and an educated man of letters, a renown author, scientist, and world traveler, I choose the latter, while you, for some as yet unexplained reason, choose the former.

*The spots dims on Selig and George, while the stage lights rise on William and Dr. Johnson.*

JOHNSON

I'm curious, William. How do you vote?

WILLIAM

Hidden ciphers aside, logic would seem to dictate the latter.

JOHNSON

That's your problem, Friedman, you think too much like a geneticist. Or mathematician. Everything in terms of class and structure. Every living thing in its genus and species and class.

WILLIAM

Doesn't that make sense to you? Doesn't it just boggle the mind to think that from out of nowhere should come a man like Shakespeare?

JOHNSON

And from where did Michelangelo come? Or Da Vinci? Or Christ? (*William reacts*) Sorry. William, I don't mind telling you that what bothers me most about this Bacon nonsense is that somehow it should be... wrong that a man of humble roots - somebody just like you or I - should prove to be so extraordinary.

WILLIAM

Being poor is one thing. But this man didn't even go to school.

JOHNSON

What about Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, or Thomas Edison - they were all dirt poor when they started out and none of them had a lot of schooling. But that didn't stop them from learning to read and reaching the top of their fields. Why should it have stopped Shakespeare?

WILLIAM

I'm not saying it would have stopped him, but you have to admit that it is quite a stretch to assume that even the most brilliant man could start with so little and -

JOHNSON

You were born in Russia, weren't you, Friedman?

WILLIAM

Yes.

JOHNSON

And your parents left Russia and brought you here to America.

WILLIAM

That's right.

JOHNSON

They could have chosen any number of countries, but they chose this one. Why? All over the world people are leaving the homes their families have known for generations and coming here. Why? Because they know that America is the one place where anything is possible, no matter how poor you are or what your background may be. So of all people for Americans to make such an argument just runs contrary to everything this country stands for. And for you, of all people, to be a part of such an argument... to let them win...

WILLIAM

Let who win?

JOHNSON

The Isabelle's and the Thomas Parmenter's of this world. The ones who insist on putting people of lesser means or lesser breeding 'in their place.'

WILLIAM

Now just a minute, I came from a poor town in Russia. Lived in a small apartment in Pittsburgh. By all rights I should be a tailor doing piecework. But I -

JOHNSON

Had the brains and determination to change your destiny, good for you. Now finish the job.

WILLIAM

What do you mean?

JOHNSON

No matter how many degrees you get there are those who will still see you as an out-of-place Jew until you force them to do otherwise.

*Johnson stands up and puts his hand on William's shoulder, then after a pause exits. William reflects on their conversation. Then he grabs the glass of brandy and swallows it in one gulp, which causes him to choke, just as Fabyan enters.*

GEORGE

Taking an interest in the finer things in life, eh, Friedman?

WILLIAM

*(Still recovering)* This explains why people always drink to someone else's health.

GEORGE

*(Pours himself a glass and sits down)* Mind if I give you some personal advice, Friedman?

WILLIAM

Why not? Everyone else has.

GEORGE

William, would you like to know how I became such a good salesman?

WILLIAM

I take it you're going to tell me something that is not in your book?

GEORGE

What I am about to tell you is not. It is something I only impart on rare occasions. *(Takes a sip of brandy)* Above everything else - even the product he's selling - a good salesman has to believe in himself. Because that's what you're really selling - not the vacuum cleaner or the magic elixir or even the cotton goods you've been lugging around the countryside. You are selling yourself.

WILLIAM

You're talking about confidence.

GEORGE

Bah! Confidence is just arrogance masked to make a sale. Confidence is too easy to fake, anyway. I'm talking about something that can't be manufactured. Let's try something. Who are you?

WILLIAM

I'm William Friedman.

GEORGE

But who are you?

WILLIAM

I'm... a geneticist?

GEORGE

No, damn it, you're William Friedman, head of the Genetics Department at Riverbank Laboratories. You see?

WILLIAM

Isn't that a bit arrogant? Look at me, I'm the head of the Genetics Department.

GEORGE

You're making my point, William. A good salesman knows the difference between 'I'm the head of the department,' and: 'How do you do, I'm William Friedman, and I run the Department of Genetics here at Riverbank.' You see?

WILLIAM

I suppose.

GEORGE

You see, it's the American nature to buy, buy, buy. What holds them back is not the cost or whether or not they think they can use the product, not at all. What kills a sale is when the buyer looks into your eyes and sees that you don't really believe in what you're selling. They say to themselves, 'why should I purchase what this fellow here doesn't even want?'

WILLIAM

You're trying to sell me something right now, aren't you, sir?

GEORGE

Do you care for Elizebeth Smith?

WILLIAM

My God, for all it's acreage Riverbank is a small place.

GEORGE

Answer the question.

WILLIAM

Sir, I don't really know what to -

GEORGE

Come on, come on, Friedman, answer my question. Do you care for Elizebeth Smith?

WILLIAM

George I... That's an awfully difficult question to answer.

GEORGE

No, who wrote Shakespeare is a difficult question to answer. Whether you care for a lovely, intelligent girl who obviously has feelings for you is easy.

WILLIAM

Obviously has feelings for me? After that humiliating waltz!

GEORGE

William, it's all ancient history. It doesn't even matter.

WILLIAM

Well Thomas never fails to mention it. Thomas, by the way, who just happens to be her steady beau.

GEORGE

Trust an old salesman, Friedman. He's selling, but she's not buying.

WILLIAM

There's that awful analogy again. *(Pause)* How do you know she not interested in him?

GEORGE

A man, no matter old he gets, never forgets the look of a young girl in love. And she doesn't have it. Not for Thomas.

WILLIAM

Me?

GEORGE

No.

WILLIAM

Oh.

GEORGE

Friedman, you can't expect the girl to throw herself at you without some hope of her feelings being returned in kind. Even the most ardent suffragette looks for a little romance, don't you think?

WILLIAM

I wouldn't know, sir.

GEORGE

Well, it's time you found out.

WILLIAM

But what if...

GEORGE  
Yes?

WILLIAM  
What if she doesn't want me?

GEORGE  
You mean what if you fail? Edison failed 3,000 times before he found the right filament for his light bulb, remember? But he found it.

WILLIAM  
George, how will I know that she's choosing me over him?

GEORGE  
Oh, that's easy. Thomas will let you know.

WILLIAM  
Thomas?

GEORGE  
Just watch Thomas. He'll know even before she does.

WILLIAM  
How -

GEORGE  
*(As he exits)* Trust an old salesman, Friedman. He'll know, and then she'll know, and then...

*William watches him leave. He turns to exit and finds himself face-to-face with the Bull moose, now back on the wall.*

WILLIAM  
This is all your fault.

*The lights fade. End scene.*

### SCENE 3

*Around sunset. William, obviously drunk and not used to the sensation, sits on the couch with a glass of wine and the bottle sitting on the table. A small pile of newspapers sits on the table. Twice he picks one up, reads it, makes a sour face and throws it back on the table. Now Elizebeth enters, beaming when she sees William.*

ELIZEBETH  
Hello, William, I've been looking all over for you.

WILLIAM  
Well, you found me.

ELIZEBETH  
William, are you all right?

WILLIAM  
Me? I'm fine. I'm wonderful.

ELIZEBETH

Good, I was wondering if you were going to make the party.

WILLIAM

Party?

ELIZEBETH

George's party. To celebrate his victory in court, of course.

WILLIAM

His victory.

ELIZEBETH

Yes. Of course, everyone is terribly excited. Why Mrs. Gallup is absolutely... animated. *(Laughs at her own joke, then looks at William and realizes his condition. She is shocked)* William, have you... have you been... drinking?

WILLIAM

"A cup of wine that's brisk and fine." That's Shakespeare, you know. Shakespeare. *(Laughs ironically)*

ELIZEBETH

More than a cup, from the looks of things.

WILLIAM

Don't worry, it's Kosher wine. A bottle my grandfather gave me before I went to school.

ELIZEBETH

William, I don't know what to say...

WILLIAM

You know, I was sitting here thinking that thanks to us, Chicago is the most unique city in the world. Because of us, if Shakespeare came back to life and walked down Michigan Avenue, we wouldn't give him a parade or the key to the city. We'd have had him arrested for fraud! *(Pause)* Then they'd have to arrest me too... as an accessory after the fact. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that this... farce would get so out of hand. That a Circuit Court Judge would even hear such a case, let alone rule against William Shakespeare.

ELIZEBETH

But the fact is that one did. And he did it after hearing all the evidence in a properly held trial -

WILLIAM

Evidence. You were at the trial, you saw the mockery they made of that court.

ELIZEBETH

I saw two men arguing about a subject about which both are obviously very passionate - and knowledgeable.

WILLIAM

I'll never forget the excitement I felt when I first met Fabyan and he told me all about Riverbank and the wonderful things we were going to do to advance science. I imagined myself Riverbank's answer to Mendel. So what happens? I end up as P.T. Barnum's sidekick.

ELIZEBETH

If you felt this way why did you volunteer to help Mrs. Gallup out?

WILLIAM

*(Looking at her forlornly)* I had my reasons. None of which were very professional.

ELIZEBETH

Don't you think you're being just a little hard on yourself?

WILLIAM

I can't believe I allowed myself to be used like that. To stand silently by while that... that woman prattled on about Bacon and bi-literal ciphers as if she actually knew what she was talking about!

ELIZEBETH

Now aren't you being a little hard on her?

WILLIAM

Kate can lecture all she wants about Isabelle's "gift," but I know better. When no one else can see what she sees there's only one explanation, and it has nothing to do with smudged ink or worn type.

ELIZEBETH

William, please! She might hear you!

WILLIAM

So what if she does? It wouldn't be so bad if this were the end of it. But do you know what Kate told Dr. Scott? That next she and her sister are going to prove that Bacon wrote Marlowe, and then maybe even Ben Johnson. Francis Bacon was a remarkable man, I suppose, but from what I can figure out, he didn't have time to eat or sleep for most of his adult life. He was too busy creating Western Civilization!

ELIZEBETH

William, I think you're taking this far too seriously.

WILLIAM

And you're not taking it seriously enough!

ELIZEBETH

What is that supposed to mean?

WILLIAM

We're supposed to be better than this.

ELIZEBETH

Better than what? We were hired to do a job, which we did.

WILLIAM

I was hired to head a department of genetics. I wasn't hired to take part in a circus.

ELIZEBETH

Neither was I. Now that's the second time you've said that. And I'm not sure I like it. And may I remind you that it you who volunteered to work on this project?

WILLIAM

*(Apologetic)* Elizebeth -

ELIZEBETH

No, I'm very sure I don't like it.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry. I know this isn't why you came to Riverbank, either. I guess I'm angry at a lot of people. Mrs. Gallup, Fabyan... myself.

ELIZEBETH

But all you did was take some photographs... work on some mathematical problems...

WILLIAM

Which Mrs. Gallup misused for her own purposes.

ELIZEBETH

That's neither of our faults. *(Sees the anguish on William's face, tries to draw him out)* What is it? William, talk to me. You know that you can talk to me, don't you? *(He nods)* Then what is it? *(At that moment Thomas, smirking, enters the Lodge from outside, un-noticed)* Why do you look so sad and so... angry at the same time? William?

WILLIAM

I'm supposed to be better than this. I'm a scientist.

ELIZEBETH

My goodness, you say that with such... reverence.

WILLIAM

Do I? Well, so what if I do?

ELIZEBETH

It's just that I didn't think you were that religious.

WILLIAM

I do believe in a higher authority, Elizebeth. Some people call it God. I call it the truth. But this trial wasn't about the truth... *(Sweeps the newspapers off the table. Takes a breath.)* Remember that story I told you about my grandfather? All these years I've been mocking him and his values. But I stood and watched Mrs. Gallup and her "deciphering" and I knew the other side of the bread was buttered. And just like my grandfather I chose to ignore it because... *(he looks longingly at her)* it was convenient. It turns out, in the end, that neither my grandfather nor I were very holy. Him to his God, or me to mine.

*The door bursts open and Thomas swaggers in. He sneers and struts his way through the Lodge.*

THOMAS

Hello, Friedman. I just came by to congratulate you on your victory in Chicago.

WILLIAM

Now he gets my name right. Here to help me with my hangover, Parmenter?

*Thomas crosses to the table, picks up and examines the label on the bottle of wine.*

THOMAS

Mogen David. *(Sneering)* Figures. *(He puts the bottle down and ambles around the Lodge, stopping in front of the Bull Moose where he laughs snidely. William notices that Elizebeth is not amused)*

WILLIAM

*(To Thomas)* If your goal is to remind me of my clumsiness or my inebriation, neither are necessary. But if your goal is also to impress this young lady, then I don't think -

THOMAS

What could you possibly know about what a woman of Elizebeth's class is thinking?

WILLIAM

I know that Elizebeth has enough class to never, ever use the word class except when talking about schoolrooms.

THOMAS

And you don't know a thing about her or her class if you think she can look at you without thinking about it.

WILLIAM

That's why I'm glad she's spending so much time with you.

THOMAS

Why?

WILLIAM

Because you're the perfect example of why class can't be bought.

THOMAS

What about integrity?

WILLIAM

What about it?

THOMAS

Can integrity be bought?

WILLIAM

What are you on about?

THOMAS

I happened to be at the courthouse in Chicago yesterday, Friedman. Caught the dueling match. And during recess I went across the street for lunch. Care to guess what I saw?

WILLIAM

I don't know.... people eating lunch?

THOMAS

Two people in particular eating lunch. Together. George Fabyan and William Selig.

WILLIAM

What?

THOMAS

I recognized Selig from his picture in a newspaper. They looked real chummy, too. So I did some asking around and do you know what? Fabyan and Selig have been friends for years. *(To Elizebeth)* They call themselves the Colonel Club.

ELIZEBETH

Thomas, what are you implying?

THOMAS

Oh, grow up Elizebeth! Even the papers are saying that there was a million dollar's worth of publicity in this case. But let's give them credit. It worked. *(To William)* Thanks to you, thousands of people are lined up to see "The Tempest," by William Shakespeare - excuse me, Francis Bacon.

ELIZEBETH

Thomas, a judge has ruled that after 300 years William Shakespeare is a fraud. Of course the newspapers are going to cover the story.

THOMAS

All that college and you still can't see what's right in front of you. Friedman knows. Don't you, Freidman?

ELIZEBETH

William, what is he saying?

WILLIAM

He's saying that the whole thing was planned from the beginning. Fabyan and Selig planned this lawsuit as a way to promote Selig's films.

THOMAS

And don't forget the publicity for Riverbank.

ELIZEBETH

Please. You're suggesting that someone can, at will, manipulate the media into printing what they want.

THOMAS

Not only that they can, but they have.

WILLIAM

Do you realize the implication of what you're saying? You're saying that the truth is for sale.

THOMAS

And do you realize that they couldn't have done it without your help, Freidman? *(Notices how upset Elizebeth is)* What's the matter Elizebeth? Does it bother you to see your friend exposed for the fraud that he is?

ELIZEBETH

If he's a fraud, then what am I?

THOMAS

Elizebeth, I didn't mean... I was talking about Friedman...

ELIZEBETH

I was here working with Mrs. Gallup and Miss Wells long before William showed up.

THOMAS

Elizebeth, you're missing the point.

ELIZEBETH

And what is your point?

THOMAS

The point is that Friedman here is a... *(Elizebeth is getting angrier)* He's the one that... *(Helpless, then furiously, to William)* This is the second time you have tried to humiliate me.

WILLIAM

*(Bravely smug)* Tried?

*Elizebeth giggles.*

THOMAS

*(Notices Elizebeth's reaction. He shoves William at the shoulder)* That's it. You've pushed me far enough, you little immigrant.

ELIZEBETH

Thomas! That's enough!

THOMAS

*(Shoves William again)* Why don't we let Friedman here tell me when it's enough. Well? Haven't you anything to say?

ELIZEBETH

Thomas!

WILLIAM

*(Raises himself up to his full height – such as it is)* Look here, Parmenter, if you're expecting me to hit you that's not going to happen. And not because I'm a pacifist and don't believe in fighting. I'd love to take a good swing at you but I won't. We both know you're stronger than I am. But don't think for a moment that I think that makes you better than me. Stronger, but not better. And your boarding school? That only means that your parents were richer than mine, not better. And the ten generations your family had before mine even thought about moving to America? That just means your family has been here longer, not better. And let me tell you something else. If after ten generations all your family could come up with is someone like you who thinks that a boarding school and two fists make him a man, then -

*Thomas, totally disgusted, swings at William, hitting him squarely on the chin knocking him to the ground.*

ELIZEBETH

Oh, my God! Are you all right?

THOMAS

*(Holding his hand)* It's fine, Elizebeth. He didn't hurt it.

ELIZEBETH

*(Rushes to William)* William, are you all right?

WILLIAM

What happened?

THOMAS

Survival of the fittest, I'd say.

ELIZEBETH

Don't try to talk, dear. I'll get you some ice for your head. You poor thing.

THOMAS

Elizebeth, really, this is a bit on the melodramatic, don't you think?

ELIZEBETH

I think you should leave now, Thomas. *(Hands William the glass of wine, which he drinks. It seems to perk him up)*

THOMAS

You can't be serious.

ELIZEBETH

I am.

THOMAS

So that's how it is.

ELIZEBETH

Yes.

WILLIAM

Oh my God. Fabyan was right.

ELIZEBETH

What was that? What did you say?

WILLIAM

I said... *(He sits up and kisses her)*

ELIZEBETH

Me, too. *(She kisses him back)*

WILLIAM

Elizebeth?

ELIZEBETH

Yes?

WILLIAM

What I said before... when we were fighting. I never meant to suggest that you didn't care. About the work, about the truth...

ELIZEBETH

That's all right. I may have been overlooking a few things myself... because they were... convenient. *(They kiss again)*

THOMAS

Well, I hope you're both ready.

WILLIAM

Just what is that supposed to mean?

THOMAS

Please. Everyone knows how you people stick together.

WILLIAM

My people? You mean people from Pittsburgh, right?

ELIZEBETH

Maybe he means Cornell graduates.

THOMAS

Listen here, both of you. His family will fight this relationship. You know they will. *(To Elizebeth)* They don't want this anymore than your people -

ELIZEBETH

Don't worry about us. We know the bread is buttered.

THOMAS

*(Momentary confusion)* Someday they'll have decent immigration laws in this country...

*Thomas's exit is halted by garrulous laughter. Fabyan enters with Selig, an equally large and dramatic individual. Dr. Johnson and Dr. Scott follow them.*

GEORGE

Listen to this headline, Selig. *(Reading the paper)* "Bard of Avon Loses in Clash of Colonels - Judge Tuthill Decides for Bacon over Playwright Shakespeare." And to think I used to hate the Tribune. "William Shakespeare, familiarly known as Bill to his fellow roustabouts at the Globe theater in London, was adjudged a literary bankrupt yesterday by Judge Richard Tuthill in the Circuit Court of Cook county."

SELIG

Here's another one. From the Herald. "To relieve the Shakespeare Avenue police station of the ignominy of remaining in contempt of court, and its officers and patrolmen of literary disgrace into which they have fallen by being housed in a misnomer, an ordinance has been proposed by the city's board of alderman that the name of Shakespeare Avenue be changed to Bacon Avenue, and accordingly, the Bacon Avenue police station. 'I don't pretend to be a Shakespearean scholar, one alderman said, but according to Judge Tuthill, Shakespeare has put one over for 300 years.'"

THOMAS

Colonel Fabyan, you have my heartiest congratulations. As do you, Colonel Selig. *(With a malevolent smile, doesn't take his eyes off William)* I guess you could say that when it came to the case of Shakespeare versus Bacon, there were no losers. At least not among the ones who were on trial. Good day all. *(Thomas exits)*

GEORGE

You know, if that lad's shirt were stuffed any more he'd be unable to breathe.

SELIG

Listen to this one, George, "Those interested in a first-hand look at what all the fuss is about are reminded that - a mere coincidence, of course - the first showing of four of what must now be called the great works of Bacon, will be on Monday here in Chicago, under the auspices of the Drama League." Splendid, splendid.

GEORGE

*(From another paper)* "...and when asked about Riverbank's next project, Mr. Fabyan replied 'Whatever direction science takes us...' Isn't that marvelous, just marvelous.

*As George and Selig laugh, Elizebeth, sensing that William is about to erupt, grabs his arm.*

ELIZEBETH

William... don't.

WILLIAM

*(Stands up)* Science? Science?! You had the nerve to call what we did science?

GEORGE

And what would you call it?

WILLIAM

Alchemy, maybe, but not science.

GEORGE

Alchemy, science. If the result is gold, then what difference does it make how it got there?

WILLIAM

Because it's not real gold, George. It's pyrite - fool's gold.

GEORGE

Friedman, I'd like to know what's under your skin. You've been moping around the grounds ever since the end of the trial. Well, how about it? Are you going to tell me or are you just going to stand there looking like that stuffed Moose?

WILLIAM

How do you explain about you and Colonel Selig?

GEORGE

What about us?

WILLIAM

That you are... well, acquainted.

GEORGE

Oh we are more than that, dear boy, we're old friends.

WILLIAM

You admit it!

GEORGE

What is there to admit? Selig and I couldn't be closer.

WILLIAM

But you sued each other!

SELIG

Come, come, my boy, friends have never sued one another?

WILLIAM

I'm sure they have, I suppose, but...

GEORGE

What? What is it?

WILLIAM

Well, how many friends plan to sue each other?

GEORGE

Planning a lawsuit is done all the time, my boy. It's done all the time.

WILLIAM

When?

GEORGE

When a legal precedent needs to be established. Or a contract between two businessmen must be ironed out.

SELIG

Two men may be friends but when it comes to business believe me you can't leave it to a handshake.

GEORGE

I couldn't agree more.

WILLIAM

That's not what we're talking about and you know it.

GEORGE

Look, the fact is that Selig had a sound business reason for suing me and I had a sound reason for wanting to defend myself. The fact that the papers picked up on the case is serendipitous.

WILLIAM

But your motive for -

GEORGE

*(Angry)* I'll thank you for not questioning my motives, young man. I've been supporting Mrs. Gallup's work for years, long before you ever heard of Riverbank - probably long before you even heard of Shakespeare. And I've been doing it because I believe in Bacon's authorship of Shakespeare's works. But unlike 99 percent of the Baconians out there - and I've probably heard from all of them at one point or another - Mrs. Gallup is the only one to come up with a real, honest-to-goodness way to prove that Bacon was the author. She has found a proof so good, I hasten to add, that a judge of the Chicago circuit court has ruled in Bacon's favor. Don't you ever forget that, or ever question my sincerity again, do you hear me?

WILLIAM

Yes sir.

GEORGE

*(Puts his arm around William. Softer)* You did excellent work, Friedman, and showed a good attitude. And I know you will continue to do great things here at Riverbank.

WILLIAM

You still want me here?

GEORGE

And why not? I like a man with kick. Besides, what would Miss Smith say if I were to let such a fine scientist get away from Riverbank? *(Elizbeth and William blush)*

SCOTT

*(To Kate)* So you knew about the lawsuit all along?

KATE

Yes.

SCOTT

That's why you asked about my fiancée? And my research?

KATE

Yes. I thought if you understood my motives, why then you wouldn't be angry.

SCOTT

I could never be angry with you, dear lady.

WILLIAM

Well... I am looking forward to getting started on my work in genetics. *(To George)* I think I'd like to work on that wheat problem of yours. I have some ideas about cross pollinating between hybrid breeds –

GEORGE

Hold on, there, son. I didn't say anything about you going back to genetics.

WILLIAM

With all due respect sir, I thought now that the Shakespeare trial is over I could get back to more... well...

GEORGE

Substantial work?

ELIZEBETH

I'm sure what William... Mr. Friedman means is...

GEORGE

I know what Friedman is saying. But I also know that he couldn't be more incorrect. There's important work to be done by his cryptology department.

WILLIAM

Cryptology department? George, what are you - *(George hands William a letter)* What's this?

GEORGE

It's a letter from a friend of mine who works at the War Department in Washington. You know, of course, of the problems we are having with German submarines. They're devilish contraptions... you don't know they're there before it's too late. I believe they are the second-most dangerous weapon ever conceived.

SCOTT

Second-most?

GEORGE

The most dangerous weapon is a German cipher machine the British are calling The Enigma. They use it to communicate with those submarines. It produces a code of such complexity that by the time British intelligence cracks it, the Germans have created another one.

ELIZEBETH

But what does all this have to do with William?

GEORGE

Although they don't like to admit it, there are some in our government who believe it is only a matter of time before America is drawn into this war, and it has become vital that we understand how The Enigma works. Now Friedman, I know that you thought that this trial was a waste of my money and your talents -

WILLIAM

- George, I never said -

GEORGE

- Let's not go into that again. The fact is that your work on the Bacon cipher and all of the publicity surrounding the finding for Francis Bacon has raised the whole idea of making and breaking codes to a new level. One that can be use to save lives. Isn't that the Gold Bug's treasure you've been searching for, William? (*William reflects, looks to Elizebeth, who smiles. They both nod*) Good, then it's all settled.

*Isabelle enters through the main Lodge door carrying an old book.*

ISABELLE

William. Elizebeth. There you are. I've been looking all over for you. I've just found the most fascinating thing in this volume of Marlowe, and I wanted you to begin a study of the letter frequencies in the first two chapters.

WILLIAM

You know, my appetite's come back. Perhaps Margaret has something leftover from dinner.

ELIZEBETH

Good idea. Let's check.

KATE

I agree.

SCOTT

Good luck, Fabyan.

JOHNSON

Wait for me, Scott, old boy.

*Isabelle can only watch as William and Elizebeth exit, followed by Kate, Dr. Scott, and Dr. Johnson.*

ISABELLE

George, I must say these are the oddest people... Anyway, to the matter at hand. In this volume of Marlowe you'll notice a style of text that -

GEORGE

*(As he guides her off-stage)* Mrs. Gallup, have I ever told you the story of my first encounter in the woods of Minnesota with the great grizzly bear?

ISABELLE

What has that to do with Marlowe?

GEORGE

Ah, yes. Well, you see the bear was actually one of several animals that had escaped from a traveling circus...

ISABELLE

But what about Marlowe?

GEORGE

Turns out that was the bear's name, and when we cornered it...

*They exit. Aloyicious Brattle enters a few moments later with a number of plans stuffed into his arms.*

BRATTLE

Fabyan? Fabyan are you here? Fabyan, I must speak with you! The counterweight. It's all wrong. All wrong, indeed. I thought by placing a gear to control the fulcrum I could achieve a balance to the four pulleys but the whole thing is out of alignment. *(As he exits and the lights dim to black)* Fabyan, where are you? you're the only one who seems to understand my work. Fabyan?

**BLACKOUT**  
**END PLAY**