

VALSETZ

by

Pamela Forrest

VALSETZ

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VALSETZ

For Jennifer & India

VALSETZ

Valsetz premiered at the Celebration Theatre in West Hollywood, California. It was produced by Marian Jones, of The Lesbian Theatre Initiative, and Robert Schrock, the Producing Artistic Director of the Celebration Theatre. *Valsetz* was directed by Pamela Forrest. The cast was as follows:

Mrs. Violet Underwood Patricia Place
Caroline Davis Joanna Daniels

CAST: 2 Women

VIOLET UNDERWOOD, late 70's/early 80's. Lives alone in a cabin in Valsetz, Oregon, a once prosperous and now deserted logging town.

CAROLINE DAVIS, a 30-something successful film producer from Los Angeles.

VOICE ON PHONE

TIME: 1999, early evening.

PLACE: Mrs. Underwood's home.

VALSETZ

VALSETZ

A Play in One Act

SETTING: *A small, modest cabin, built and furnished in the early '30's. Stage right is the sitting area: an overstuffed chair flanked by a reading lamp, magazine rack, knitting-in-progress, a foot stool, area rag rug. Hand crocheted doilies adorn the furniture. Center stage is a small dining table and stage left is the kitchen area, with a window facing upstage above the sink. A radio sits on the kitchen counter. A door, stage right, leads off to the rest of the cabin. An old two-man lumberjack saw hangs above the front door, which is upstage center. On all of the walls we see a potpourri of glued together jigsaw puzzles hanging as art. And somewhere in this milieu is a cuckoo clock, ticking away. Outside it is raining and has been for a week.*

AT RISE: *We hear music from the 1940s on the radio. From the music, the set, the lighting, and Mrs. Underwood's house dress, the audience should get the initial feeling that we are stepping back in time.*

MRS. UNDERWOOD *is busy at the dining table, gluing a completed jigsaw puzzle to a piece of plywood. When she is satisfied with the glue job, she gets a hammer and nail from a kitchen drawer and proceeds to mount the new artwork on a wall. She is quite strong and adept with the tools. Finished with this task, she puts the hammer away, takes a beat to admire her newest addition to the wall and then takes another box of puzzle pieces and dumps it out on the dining table, tosses the box to the side and begins turning over all the pieces, ready to start a new puzzle. There is no rush to any of this. Just as she settles into the task at hand, there is a knock at the door. Mrs. Underwood stops for a moment, raises her head to listen and, hearing nothing but the music and the rain, goes back to her puzzle. Off stage we hear:*

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CAROLINE. *(Off stage.)* Oh for Christ' sake! Hello? Please? I can hear you in there! Is anyone there? Please! This is an emergency! Hello?!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. *(Through the door.)* What'd you want?

CAROLINE. *(CAROLINE is trying to see through the window.)* What? What was that? Hello? May I come in?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. What'd you want?

CAROLINE. Caroline Davis here! I'm - my car is in the mud - stuck - in the mud! I saw the light in your window and . . . hello?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Tourist. Door's open.

CAROLINE. What was that? It's raining rather hard, I couldn't quite - did you say something? *(Mrs. Underwood stands, goes to front door and opens it, then sits back down with puzzle. Caroline watches her through window until she realizes the door's been opened. Caroline then runs back to the front door and enters. CAROLINE DAVIS is tall and striking, dressed in Armani, very well groomed, albeit a bit wet, and completely self-absorbed. She carries an expensive leather suitcase with matching P.C. tote.)*

CAROLINE. Thank you.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Close the door.

CAROLINE. Oh, of course. I'm so glad someone was home - I thought I was going to drown out there. I'm on my way over to Depoe Bay and I hit some sort of mud slide out there, back there, it was terrible. Someone should really take care of that. I'm afraid I'm dripping all over your floor.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Don't be afraid. It's only water.

CAROLINE. That's true. It is only water. If it weren't so wet I wouldn't have a problem with it. We haven't met. I'm Caroline Davis and you are?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Mrs. Herbie Dean Underwood. How do you do.

CAROLINE. Herbie Dean, how do you do?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I'm not Herbie Dean.

CAROLINE. But you just said Herbie Dean -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. What in the hell kind of fool girl would call herself Herbie Dean?

CAROLINE. Well I -

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. That would make me a Herbert. Do I look like a Herbert to you?

CAROLINE. Of course not -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. *Mrs.* Herbie Dean Underwood.

CAROLINE. *Mrs.* Underwood, then?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. If you'd like.

CAROLINE. Fine. Good. *Mrs.* Underwood, I do apologize for intruding into your lovely home like this but my rental is stuck in the mud - no, BURIED in the mud - and I, um, uh, is there anyone else home? That I might talk to? Anyone? Mr. Underwood, perhaps?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. AH HAH! A corner! (*Referring to her puzzle.*)

CAROLINE. Come again?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. A corner!

CAROLINE. A corner! Great! Listen, *Mrs.* Underwood, I am in a terrible hurry and you're obviously busy -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You tried to take a short cut, didn't you?

CAROLINE. Yes, dear, you're not listening. I said I am in a hurry - did you say Herbie Dean was home? Maybe he could help -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. He's not home. There ain't no one else. Why lookee here! (*She finds another piece of the puzzle.*)

CAROLINE. Okay, there's got to be a gas station. Is it much further into town, *Mrs.* Underwood?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Car's stuck, outta luck, now you wish you were a duck! Quack quack!

CAROLINE. All right then. Maybe this was a mistake. Thank you for your hospitality, I'm just going to get my things and go find a neighbor's house -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. There's nobody else.

CAROLINE. Oh, no, I'm sure I'll find someone. That sign at the edge of your yard says Population 125 and that means there's at least 124 other people out there somewhere . . . in the rain . . .

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Gone gone gone. All gone - very old sign. Someone should really take care of that. BINGO! Welcome to Valsetz. Population one.

CAROLINE. No.

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. Yes.

CAROLINE. No.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Yes.

CAROLINE. No! You are not the only one! That sign said 125 people -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Shouldn't believe everything you read. *(Fits piece into puzzle.)* Hello there. Nope, just me now. And you.

CAROLINE. No, not me. *(Goes to luggage and retrieves cell phone.)* I have no time to be stuck in Hooterville.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh. By the looks of things, I thought you were moving in.

CAROLINE. What, this? I wasn't going to leave my luggage in the car. That's Louis Vuitton. Do you have any idea how much that cost? *(Dials information.)*

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I'd say a pretty penny for you to be haulin' it all this way. Better keep an eye on it, I got sticky fingers!

CAROLINE. I need the number for Triple A, please. Twenty-eight hundred for the set - that doesn't include the PC, oh no - *(writes down number)* - that's nearly three thousand bucks - *(she dials again)* - forget about it - I'm not leaving that in the back of a car. I don't care where I am. *(Back into phone.)* Hello! *(To Mrs. Underwood -)* Where am I?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Hooterville, remember?

CAROLINE. No, what did you say before - Val . . . vista?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Valsetz.

CAROLINE. Val-zez?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Val-SETS!

CAROLINE. *(Into phone -)* Did you get that? Yes, Caroline Davis . . . not off the top of my head . . . can't you improvise? . . . No, I'm from out of state. Los Angeles. *(Beat.)* It's stuck in the mud. *(Beat.)* Yes, I'm sure! What? I don't know. A Chevrolet something, Lumina? God, no, it's a rental. Thank you. *(Beat.)* Well, it's got to be on your map - I'm here . . . how should I know? . . . wait, please, one second . . . *(She hands the phone to Mrs. Underwood.)* Please tell them where I am. *(Mrs. Underwood stares blankly at the tiny telephone.)* Tell them where I am!

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. (*Takes phone.*) She's standing in my dining room. Hey! This is light as a bird! How do they make these things? (*Examines phone.*)

CAROLINE. Lady, please!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. (*Back into phone.*) No, no, I'm here. And who might you be? . . . I see . . . and they took me off yer map? . . . well I'll be. Ain't that a kick in the rump . . . oh, I beg yer pardon, LaShawna, we're 16 and a quarter mile west of Falls City . . . you'll find her Chevy where the road ends . . . all right then.

CAROLINE. Where the road ends?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Is this a walkie talkie?

CAROLINE. It's a cell phone. The road ends?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Yep.

CAROLINE. Roads just don't end, Mrs. Underwood.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. They do when there's nowhere left to go.

CAROLINE. But I need to get to Depoe Bay!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. County stopped fixing the road when the mill pulled out. Now they took me off the map. The very idea.

CAROLINE. How am I going to get to Depoe Bay? I have a seven o'clock - how long did they say? Half hour? Forty-five minutes?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. (*Back to her puzzle.*) Two to three hours.

CAROLINE. Two to three hours?! (*Flips open phone, dials.*)

MRS. UNDERWOOD. She said they're terrible busy tonight with all the rain and such.

CAROLINE. I told you I was in a hurry! Why didn't you tell them I'm in a hurry?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. It's so pleasant having you here, I thought I'd just keep you all to myself.

CAROLINE. Yes, Caroline Davis here. I just called and I . . . Valsetz . . .

VAL – SETZ . . . I know it's not on the map! . . . Yes, that's me. I need a truck here now. My plane was delayed almost two full hours on the ground in Burbank and I am running very late . . . do you know who I am? . . .

Caroline Davis . . . DAVIS - never mind! WHAT DO I PAY YOU PEOPLE FOR?!?!? (*Slams phone shut. Opens it, dials. She is paging someone.*)

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. Change your mind?

CAROLINE. What?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Callin' folks then hanging up. That's for school girls.

CAROLINE. I paged someone, Mrs. Underwood.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh. I see.

CAROLINE. Do you know what a pager is?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. No.

CAROLINE. Then why did you say 'I see'? If you didn't understand, why didn't you just say so?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I didn't care.

CAROLINE. We should always care about things we don't understand. That's how we get smarter.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. We should always look at a map before we hit the road. That's how we get to where we're going.

CAROLINE. I knew where I was going!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Maybe you just didn't want to get there. *(Cell phone rings.)*

CAROLINE. I - *(flips open phone)* - This is Caroline! . . . well that's great news! Of course I'm excited too! How could I not be? . . . you don't? Well, that's because I'm not in the car . . . No, everything's fine. I did hit a little mud slide . . . no, I'm fine, really . . . Don't worry, I said I'd be there and I'll be there . . . have I ever let you down before? That doesn't count . . . that's not fair . . . that was not my fault - well I won't this time! Of course I know how long you've been planning - can we not have this discussion right . . . hello? Hello? Chris?! Damn it! I've lost my signal. Where's your phone?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I don't care for the telephone.

CAROLINE. You and me both. Where is it?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Ain't got one. *(She fits the last piece of the puzzle into place.)* There you are. Home again home again jiggedy jig.

CAROLINE. You are joking.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Nope. All done. See?

CAROLINE. Not about your puzzle! About the phone! Where's your phone?

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. Thomas Alva Edison was deaf in one ear. He couldn't hear. No phone.

CAROLINE. You don't have a phone? How can you not have a phone?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Don't like 'em.

CAROLINE. You don't like 'em? You're connected to the world! What's not to like?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Too noisy. *(Caroline's beeper goes off.)* They've come back!

CAROLINE. Oh shit. *(Reads beeper to see who's paging.)* It's just my beeper, Mrs. Underwood. Who's come back?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh. No one. Nothing.

CAROLINE. Mrs. Underwood, you have to have a phone. Maybe you just forgot where it is.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Could be.

CAROLINE. So you do have a phone!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Nope. No phone. Phone, phone, phone, phone, phone . . . I don't even like that word. Too close to phony. Are you alright? *(Beeper goes off again.)*

CAROLINE. I need a telephone!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I don't have one.

CAROLINE. I know you don't have one!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You're worried about Depoe Bay, aren't you? You wanna help me glue my puzzle while we wait for your man from A A?

CAROLINE. Triple A, for automobiles! A A is for alcoholics. I'm not an addict, Mrs. Underwood. *(Caroline is desperately trying to get her phone to work, shaking it, punching the keys, etc.)*

MRS. UNDERWOOD. No. Of course you're not. Did you want to help me glue my puzzle?

CAROLINE. No. Thanks.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Used to have a phone. Herbie Dean liked having one. I never liked using it - like seein' a person's eyes when I'm talking to 'em, if ya know what I mean. But he did enjoy being able to call up Momma.

CAROLINE. He was close to his Momma?

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. His Momma? Good Lord no. He was close to my Momma. Sure you don't want to try some glue? Made it myself.

CAROLINE. I don't have time!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Suit yerself.

CAROLINE. Hey. Wait a minute. You must have a car.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Not one that runs. There's one out back, not really a car, it was Herbie Dean's truck. Filled the back end with soil and made me a nice little garden patch out of it, cuz you know the rabbits can't get in there. Least not yet. They're a tryin' tho'. Nearly drives 'em mad. Them racoons, on the other hand, can get just about anywhere they darn well please. Had to pick one off with the twenty-two last summer. Didn't enjoy that, but he was eatin' all my cukes! An' I'll tell you what, haven't seen hide nor hair of his brothers 'n sisters since.

CAROLINE. So you don't have a car?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Nope.

CAROLINE. No phone, no car. How do you survive? What if you need a doctor? Or a video?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I take pretty good care of myself. Don't you worry about me. Doctors - never did have any use for 'em. When it's my time I'll know it and I'll just lay me down and off we'll go. Don't need any car for that ride.

CAROLINE. You want to die all alone up here?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You're planning on taking your big city with you?

CAROLINE. No, of course not. But I don't want to be all alone.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Who said I'm all alone?

CAROLINE. You did. *(Beeper goes off again.)*

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh. Well, I've said all my goodbyes.

CAROLINE. Mrs. Underwood, is anyone else here or not? If there's some way I can get out of here you need to tell me. Is somebody else here?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You mean people?

CAROLINE. Yes, people! You've established the rodent situation! Of course people!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. No.

CAROLINE. All right then. That settles that.

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. Just you and me and your little friend.

CAROLINE. My little friend is very angry. She doesn't understand why I'm not calling back.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Is she talking to you?

CAROLINE. No, no. It prints out here on this little screen. She leaves voice mail and then the words print out here.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I see.

CAROLINE. Which means you don't care.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. No. Means I see. Now get that thing outta my face 'fore it radiates me.

CAROLINE. This can't 'radiate' you, Mrs. Underwood.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. How do you know?

CAROLINE. Everyone has a beeper. They wouldn't make them if they could hurt you.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. And you think I'm stupid.

CAROLINE. No one said you're stupid!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Not out loud.

CAROLINE. Mrs. Underwood . . . I'm sure there have been a few changes in the world that you are simply unaware of. It doesn't mean - look, I am a very busy woman and I need this to stay connected. It's just a, a gadget. A tool, for communication.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. So's a carrier pigeon. It can still give ya rabies.

CAROLINE. I promise my beeper won't hurt you.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Seems to be causing you a great deal of pain.

CAROLINE. It's not the beeper. *(Beat.)* So. How do you get groceries? Your puzzles?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, I have my ways. *(Caroline's beeper goes off again. Mrs. Underwood gets out another puzzle.)*

CAROLINE. Oh great. Now she thinks I'm mad at her! I've got to get down there.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Must be somethin' mighty important happening down in Depoe Bay.

CAROLINE. Yes. We're . . . researching a project.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You and your friend?

CAROLINE. Yes. So, you make your own glue? How fascinating.

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. Yep. Always have.

CAROLINE. Wait - glue! That means you have horses!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Horses?

CAROLINE. Yes! Of course! If you make glue, there must be horses! Oh, this is perfect! Horses don't need roads! I can just ride right over the mountain! I can ride a horse. I think I can ride a horse. It'll be just like Sense and Sensibility. Damn. I knew I should've packed my Tony Lama's.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Llama's?

CAROLINE. Cowboy boots. Well, these will have to do. Which way to the stables?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Honey pot, I hate to shoot you down outta that bubble you're floatin' in, but there ain't no horses here.

CAROLINE. But you make glue.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Sure I do. Outta flour and water.

CAROLINE. Flour and water? Isn't that bread?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Who raised you?

CAROLINE. You stick those puzzles together with flour and water?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. And a little something extra, if you must know. Herbie Dean had the idea - *(Beeper goes off.)*

CAROLINE. *(Caroline snaps; grabs beeper and screams at it.)* I'M TRYING!! DON'T YOU THINK I'M TRYING!!? *(Holds phone up to beeper.)* LOOK! LOOK AT THIS! IT'S DEAD!! SEE?! *(Opens phone.)* NOTHING! NOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND? LISTEN! LISTEN! DON'T YOU PULL AWAY FROM ME!! *(We hear a voice on the phone.)*

PHONE. Caroline? Caroline is that you? Are you alright? What's going on?

CAROLINE. Chris?! Wait, wait, I can barely hear you! What? He what? Wait, I'm losing you, I didn't catch that last part . . . let me go outside . . . *(She exits out the front door. We catch glimpses of her through the window.)* I know that's what I said, but I have to wait for the tow truck . . . it's not my fault . . . yes, I know what time it is . . . I did not do this on purpose! Hello? . . . Hello?! *(She re-enters the cabin, soaked from the rain.)* Are you there? Well honey we're just going to have to reschedule, that's all. Of course we can . . . Chris? Chris? No! Don't do this to me!

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Damn it! Honey I'm not getting a signal! If you can hear me I'll be there as fast as I can! . . . Baby? I'm coming. (*The phone is dead again.*) I wouldn't do this on purpose.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You want to get out of those wet clothes? (*Beat.*) Caroline Davis?

CAROLINE. What?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You're soaked clean through.

CAROLINE. Car's stuck. Outta luck. Now I wish I was a duck. Quack quack.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh my.

CAROLINE. Don't be afraid. It's only water.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. All righty then. Let's get you cleaned up.

CAROLINE. All righty then.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Caroline?

CAROLINE. All righty then.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Caroline Davis?

CAROLINE. This is Caroline.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I don't like doin' this. (*Mrs. Underwood slaps Caroline across the face.*)

CAROLINE. OWWWWW!! WHY DID YOU DO THAT?!!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I wasn't getting a signal.

CAROLINE. Ow!!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Can you hear me now?

CAROLINE. Yes. I can hear you. Jeez . . .

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Now let's get you into some dry clothes.

CAROLINE. I can do it myself! (*Beat.*) Do you mind if I use your restroom?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Right on in through there. Holler if you need any help.

CAROLINE. I think I know how to use the restroom, thank you very much. I'm not a complete idiot. (*Exits.*)

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Suit yourself. (*Beat.*)

CAROLINE. MRS. UNDERWOOD?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. PULL THE CHAIN. (*We hear flushing sound.*)

CAROLINE. THANK YOU.

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MRS. UNDERWOOD. Not at all. Might try pullin' yer head outta yer ass while yer in there.

CAROLINE. DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. SAID I MIGHT TRY FISHIN' FOR BASS THIS YEAR.

CAROLINE. WHAT?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. SAID I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE HERE!

CAROLINE. (*Caroline enters dressed in designer pajamas.*) How very sweet. I left my suit in there to dry. I hope that's alright.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. 'Course.

CAROLINE. Mrs. Underwood . . . I, um. Well, I realize that this is, that I must be putting you out -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Putting me out? Why? Am I on fire? (*Caroline doesn't get the joke.*) You're not putting me out.

CAROLINE. I mean, I didn't mean to go off before, like that, if I did. I'm, uh, I'm under a lot of pressure.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I see.

CAROLINE. You do see? Or you don't?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I see.

CAROLINE. You do?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I think I do.

CAROLINE. Good. That makes one of us.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You're playing hookie.

CAROLINE. Hookie?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Missing an appointment you didn't want to keep.

CAROLINE. That's not true!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh.

CAROLINE. Don't "oh" me! It's not! I didn't mean to get lost.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. We never do.

CAROLINE. Oh, spare me, Nanny Nook of the North. Listen. No offense. But I don't know you and you don't know me. So why don't we just keep it that way, alright?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Suit yerself.

CAROLINE. It suits me fine. As a matter of fact - (*removes computer from case*) - there's a ton of work I could be doing. Thank god. Look, I

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wanted to apologize before for just barging in. And I do. Apologize. I want you to know that I appreciate . . . this. Okay? Now, you can get on with your evening and I will stay completely out of your way. Hopefully the truck will be here very, very soon and we can both get on with our lives. In the meantime, I can get some work done.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Now that's a cute little typewriter.

CAROLINE. It's a laptop, Mrs. Underwood.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Sounds like a dog.

CAROLINE. A computer. A laptop computer, because I can put it on my lap. See?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You could put a dog on your lap.

CAROLINE. I don't think so. Now, please, you do your work and I'll do mine.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, pardon me.

CAROLINE. *(Beat.)* Don't you need that?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. What?

CAROLINE. Your box top, to see what the picture's going to look like?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Takes all the fun out of it. Now, please, you do your work and I'll do mine.

CAROLINE. Oh, right. Sorry. Don't let me bother you - gotta find that corner!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Found it. Hup! Found two!

CAROLINE. Good golly Miss Molly! That's super! Now can we please have some quiet? I'm trying to finish up some business if you don't mind.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I don't mind. *(Beat.)*

CAROLINE. Business worth-a-lot-of-money-business.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Don't let me bother you.

CAROLINE. A lot of money. Big money. BIIIIIIIG money. *(Beat.)*
Don't you want to know what I do?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I think it's going to be a lighthouse.

CAROLINE. I make - Hey! How did you know that?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I'm looking at it. See, here's the base coming together down here, and there's a bit of sea water. What else would it be?

CAROLINE. Your picture's a lighthouse?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I'm pretty sure. Yes, I'd say so.

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CAROLINE. But my picture's about a lighthouse.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You doing a puzzle on that thing?

CAROLINE. No. It's a script. I'm making a few changes. But they're stranded in a lighthouse.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Who is?

CAROLINE. Bruce Willis and Jennifer Lopez, I hope. Die Hardest - Light's Out. It's gonna be huge.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I see.

CAROLINE. Jennifer plays a Chinese heiress who's been kidnaped by the IRA. They've taken her to this lighthouse in downtown Hong Kong, right? And strapped her to a smart missile that's pointing straight at mainland China - that reminds me, I need to call Jackie Chan - and Bruce has 20 minutes to save her or it's - LIGHTS OUT! Get it? Lights out? We're doing it in real time. Very political, very now. It's kind of Alcatraz meets Speed. But it's a Die Hard. Seen any?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Chinese folks? Some. Never met any named Lopez -

CAROLINE. Not Chinese people! The pictures! The Die Hards! Bruce Willis? Come on, you don't even go to the movies?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Saw one. Once. Didn't like it. Too noisy.

CAROLINE. You've got to be kidding. In your whole life you've only seen one picture? That's not even possible.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. We had a friend do one of them Hollywood pictures. Herbie Dean drove us all the way into Portland for that. So you write them movies. That explains quite a bit.

CAROLINE. A *writer*? I'm a producer, Mrs. Underwood.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Then why you writin'?

CAROLINE. I'm not *writin'*, I'm fixing.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Shouldn't the writer do that?

CAROLINE. Please.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. So you are a writer.

CAROLINE. I am not a writer! God! No! Look at me! This is Donna Karan - not swap meet. A writer. Writers are just . . . well, they're different. They're like horny teenagers, you know, always having sex and

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then freaking out when the kid arrives. My job is to choose the babies that need a good home and make sure they're raised properly.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Don't all babies need a good home?

CAROLINE. Yes, I suppose. But I'm talking about writers.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Then why'd you say babies?

CAROLINE. It was a metaphor!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You think we met before?

CAROLINE. What are you talking about?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. What are you talking about?

CAROLINE. I was talking about writers!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You were talking about babies.

CAROLINE. I was not talking about babies! I don't know anything about babies! Why can't we talk about something else?!?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. We don't have to talk at all.

CAROLINE. Fine!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Fine. *(Beat.)*

CAROLINE. So. What picture did Herbie Dean drive you all the way into Portland to see?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, I don't know. Can't recall. That must've been fifty years ago. But I'll tell you what - Herbie Dean took me for Chinese food afterward. I do remember that. Now, why do you suppose that is?

CAROLINE. But what about TV? You've seen movies on the...Oh my god...you don't have a TV. I knew there was something eerie about this place. I feel like Nell's going to walk out of the other room any minute -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. *(Finishes puzzle.)* Done!

CAROLINE. *(Imitating Jodie Foster's character, Nell.)* Chick-o-chick-o-chick-o-pee . . .

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Isn't that pretty?

CAROLINE. Oh, yeah. This is Nell territory, alright. Jodie? Are you in here? You can come out now, no one's going to - hey! Wait a minute. You're done with that puzzle?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Yep. *(Getting plywood and glue.)*

CAROLINE. You just started that thing.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. No, not just.

CAROLINE. Yes, just. That's a 500-piece puzzle.

VALSETZ

MRS. UNDERWOOD. How do you know that?

CAROLINE. It says so right here.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, is that what that says?

CAROLINE. Yes . . . that's what that says. You've put this together before?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. No. Don't think I have. Nope. (*Looking at her walls.*) Don't see one.

CAROLINE. Mrs. Underwood, you put that together really fast. You know that - don't you?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Do I? Time flies when you're having fun. Now you wanna spread some glue?

CAROLINE. I really shouldn't - if I get any of this on me . . . hey, this stuff is sticky!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I hope so, it's holding up my walls.

CAROLINE. Now you're teasing me.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Would I tease you? (*Mrs. Underwood goes to ice box and pulls two unmarked, corked bottles off the shelf. She pulls out a cork and hands the bottle to Caroline.*)

CAROLINE. What's this? Moonshine?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Root beer.

CAROLINE. Don't tell me - you made this, too.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. All right, I won't tell you.

CAROLINE. Is it caffeinated?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. What?

CAROLINE. Does it have caffeine in it, you know, like coffee? Caffeine makes me edgy.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Wouldn't want that. No, don't believe so. Just roots, herbs, a titch of sassafras and a touch'a licorice - don't tell, now, that's my secret.

CAROLINE. Hey - this is good.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Thank you. It was Herbie Dean's favorite.

CAROLINE. Mrs. Underwood, this is delicious. You could make a fortune off this stuff.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh no. It's just for me now. I don't need any fortune.

VALSETZ

CAROLINE. Everyone needs a fortune.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, pish tosh. What we need and what we want are two different things. What would I do with a fortune?

CAROLINE. I'll tell you what I'd do with a fortune. I'd buy an island. A big, warm island in the middle of nowhere, with millions of trees and miles of beach and a big, beautiful home for me and my . . . me. No phones, no faxes, no pagers, nobody. Just peace and quiet. That's the life, Mrs.

Underwood. That's what you could do with a fortune. Instead of being stuck up here all alone in the middle of nowhere.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh. Wonder why I didn't think of that.

CAROLINE. Where do you get all this plywood?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. This stuff? Got a shed out back full of it. When old Boise Cascade pulled outta town they left purtneer a whole forest of it. Sinners. Herbie Dean stocked me up to the rafters. Wood and glue. Got enough to last me forever, I reckon.

CAROLINE. But I thought you made your glue?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I do. But it's Herbie Dean's recipe.

CAROLINE. I bet you could've come up with it yourself.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, I doubt it.

CAROLINE. Sure you could! Give yourself some credit!

MRS. UNDERWOOD. What do you mean?

CAROLINE. I mean give yourself some credit! I bet you really could've done something with your life.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh.

CAROLINE. You know, been somebody. Like this root beer. This was your ticket, right here. I'm not kidding. People would pay a mint for this stuff - all natural is very big right now, Mrs. Underwood.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Why would I want money for Herbie Dean's root beer?

CAROLINE. Why not?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You ever do somethin' just 'cause you wanted to? Just to make somebody happy?

CAROLINE. Make somebody happy? Like who?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Anybody. Someone you love.

CAROLINE. You mean, like, pay for dinner? I pick up my share of tabs.

VALSETZ

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Alright. That's a start.

CAROLINE. A start? I'd hardly call dinner for twelve at Indochine a start. You know, I used to eat this stuff when I was a kid.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Did it ever occur to you that I work on pictures, same as you? Oh, I wouldn't put that in my mouth if I were you.

CAROLINE. I'd hardly compare what you do with what I do.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. You wouldn't?

CAROLINE. Of course not. I'm in charge of hundreds of details every day.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I'm in charge of five hundred at a time. Don't eat that, Caroline.

CAROLINE. But those are puzzle pieces.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Sure. Same as yours.

CAROLINE. Mine are people. In the real world. And budgets. And deadlines and headaches and egos and -

MRS. UNDERWOOD. - And they all have to fit together to make a big picture.

CAROLINE. Nice try. You can't compare these things to what I make. You just can't.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Why not?

CAROLINE. Because mine make money.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Mine make me happy.

CAROLINE. So? Mine make millions of people happy.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Do they make you happy?

CAROLINE. They make me rich.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. That wasn't the question.

CAROLINE. Yes. They make me happy. I love my job. And I'm the best. I survive in a man's world, Mrs. Underwood. The real world. I am out there and I am calling the shots and they are kissing my ass and I love it.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I love my lighthouse.

CAROLINE. I'm sure you do. But it doesn't do anything. It doesn't go anywhere. There's no story.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Maybe there's more to a puzzle than the picture. Maybe the story's in the puttin' it together.

VALSETZ

CAROLINE. Yeah. Snatch the pebble from my hand, Grasshopper.
(Finishes gluing puzzle.) Okay. Where do you want it, Obi-Wan?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I think we'll put this one right over there.

CAROLINE. Very good. How's this?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Perfect. *(Caroline nails up the lighthouse puzzle)*

CAROLINE. Beautiful. *(Steps back to admire it, trips over something.)*
Aaahhh! What the - ? *(Caroline reaches down and picks up an extremely large, menacing old platform boot with long prongs sticking out of the bottom.)* Oh my God. Is this yours?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Well what do you know. Where'd you find that old thing?

CAROLINE. It just tried to eat me.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Herbie Dean's old shoe.

CAROLINE. This is a shoe?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. His log rolling shoe. For his bad foot. Nice, huh?

CAROLINE. Herbie Dean . . . is he . . . gone?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Yes, he's passed on now.

CAROLINE. Oh. I'm sorry.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Nothing to be sorry about. He's just dead.

CAROLINE. But, I mean, he was your husband. You must miss him.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Why?

CAROLINE. Because . . . he's dead.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh. I see. Because he's not here anymore?

CAROLINE. Right.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I see.

CAROLINE. He is dead? You said he's dead.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, sure. He's dead and all.

CAROLINE. Dead dead?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Dead dead. Cracked his head.

CAROLINE. What?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. He cracked his head open on the end of his log.
Out on the pond, dancin' the day away.

CAROLINE. He cracked his head dancing on a pond?

VALSETZ

MRS. UNDERWOOD. He was a log roller, Caroline. Running the logs off the pond and into the mill.

CAROLINE. That's what your husband did? He was one of those guys that stood on floating logs? I thought the Wide World of Sports made that up.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, but they didn't stand on 'em. They ran on 'em, frontwards, backwards. That's how they steered 'em across the water. Herbie Dean called it dancin'.

CAROLINE. How did they dance in these things?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Not everyone had one o' those. Just Herbie Dean. I made that special, just for him. He had a club foot, y'know.

CAROLINE. He danced on logs with a club foot?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. It was his dream. You never did see a happier man than Herbie Dean Underwood rolling them logs. He was stuck in that mill for seven years before Mr. Danner gave him a chance out on the water - not that he really believed Herbie Dean could do it, no sir. I think he just wanted to see him fall, to shut him up. Oh, the look on Danner's face when Herbie Dean danced that first piece o' timber clear across the pond and into the chute!

CAROLINE. And then he fell?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Fell? Good Lord no. Then his life began. He was doin' what he always wanted to do. Bein' what he always wanted to be. Did you ever see anyone come alive, Caroline?

CAROLINE. Maybe.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Just magic. Like watching a chick hatch. Did you ever sit and watch a baby chick bein' born? Now there's a show! Magic. Peck, peck! Peck, peck, peck, peck. Always want to help, y'know, always want to reach in and pull the shell away, pull that scared little wet birdy out. But you can't do that. Just have to wait and watch and hope the chick knows what she's doin'. And you know what? They always do. They always know. Isn't that magic?

CAROLINE. (*Beat.*) So what did happen to Herbie Dean? He didn't die that day?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. His first day? Oh heavens no. Not at all. He worked that pond for nearly thirty years 'fore it was his time to go. Wait,

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no . . . that's not right. No, it is too. Almost thirty years. 'Cause we'd just had our big fortieth, that's right. Forty years with my Herbie Dean. We were quite a pair.

CAROLINE. So what happened? I mean, how did he crack his head?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh. Well, the fellars said he just got to goin' too quick for his own good that morning. Like a little boy runnin' to the candy store. They say he hit a patch o' slick wet moss and flew straight up in the air like a big ol' whirley bird. I was out back, weedin' the garden. Heard him all the way up from the pond, squealing like a child jumpin' on a feather bed, his big old belly laugh echoing off the mountains.

CAROLINE. He was laughing?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Sure he was. He knew what was comin' and he was happy for it.

CAROLINE. How can you say that?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. 'Cause he was my Herbie Dean. He loved this old life, but he hated that darn foot. He always figured when he got to heaven God would give him a new one. I woulda, if I could. I woulda given him mine. But o'course I couldn't. He got a good long ride outta that foot. I think he was just finally ready to trade her in.

CAROLINE. Oh god.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. They couldn't get the smile off his face for the funeral. Some folks thought it was sacrilegious the way he just laid there with that fool grin on his face, but I knew why he was smilin'. He finally got rid of that foot.

CAROLINE. Mrs. Underwood. I don't know what to say.

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Still makes the back of my head tingle to think of that day. Bless his heart. One minute his laugh's echoing off the mountain and the next, WHACK! Like a big ol' clap o' thunder. And I knew. I knew he was gone before anyone come to tell me. I felt him kiss my cheek.

CAROLINE. Who?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Herbie Dean. Just like a whisper. Kissed me goodbye right there in the garden. Then he was gone. Can you imagine being born with the heart of a dancer and a stump for a foot?

CAROLINE. No. No, I can't.

VALSETZ

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Well that was my Herbie Dean. Never listened to nothin' but his own heart. Dancin' out there on the pond ever' day like the Christ child walkin' on water. Lord help me, he was beautiful. I love ya, Herbie Dean. You know I do.

CAROLINE. You still talk to him?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh sure. All the time. You don't need ears to hear, Caroline.

CAROLINE. Does he ever talk back?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. What do you think? *(Beat.)* Look at this crazy old shoe. I think we'll plant some 'toonee's in there. He'd like that. That's what we'll do, soon as the rain lets up.

CAROLINE. Were you angry, that he left like that?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. Oh, for about two seconds. But it's so silly. Like gettin' angry at a caterpillar for turnin' into a butterfly. Love doesn't stop just because we do, Caroline. It's the most marvelous thing. Don't you think? *(The cuckoo clock chimes seven o'clock.)* Oopseedaisy! Seven o'clock! You're missing your appointment.

CAROLINE. I sure am. *(Beat.)* Did you and Herbie Dean have any children?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. No, we never did. Lord knows we tried. Just about every way in the book, come to think of it. *(To puzzle.)* Well there you are! I been lookin' ever'where for you!

CAROLINE. Are you sorry you don't have any?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. I suppose. But I always kinda thought of this old house as our baby. We built it, you know.

CAROLINE. What?

MRS. UNDERWOOD. This house.

CAROLINE. You built this house?

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