

# **GALLOWS FALLS**

by

Braddon Mendelson

# GALLOWS FALLS

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GALLOWS FALLS

*for Leslie and Barbara*

## GALLOWS FALLS

CAST: 5 Men, 3 Women

### THE LIVING

Greg Waverman	(M) 40s-50s, university professor
Annie Talon	(F) 25-30, graduate student
Verda Wilkes	(F) 70s, elderly landlord
Leonard "Klink" Klinkenbroomer	(M) 60s, town busybody

### THE GHOSTS

Marquis de Lafayette	(M) 70s, French military hero
Thomas Hollingsgrove	(M) 30s-40s, a carpenter
Marybelle Hollingsgrove	(F) 25-40, his wife / Diner 1
Henry Fairweather	(M) 35-45, a philanderer / Diner 2

TIME: The present and sometime in the future.

PLACE: Inside a 200-year-old house in the woods of Gallows Falls, Vermont. For the final scene, the house has converted to a bed and breakfast, sometime in the future.

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ACT I  
SCENE 1

*The present. Inside an early-19th century house in Gallows Falls, Vermont. Stage left is the front door, which exits to the exterior of the house. Stage right is a door that exits to the hallway, stairwell, and rest of the house.*

*GREG WAVERMAN, in his early fifties, and ANNIE TALON, mid-twenties, sit at the dining table across from VERDA WILKES. Annie wears a backpack. A typewriter case sits on the floor next to Greg.*

**VERDA.** How long ya be stayin' here, Professor Waverman?

**GREG.** Through the end of the season. Maybe a little more.

**VERDA.** Be warned, there are things — things that happened here.

**GREG.** Yes, you've told us — the place is haunted. Ghosts, spirits, shadows, and so on and so forth...

**VERDA.** Do not dismiss the visitations, Professor.

**GREG.** I won't apologize for my skepticism. I've heard it all before.

**VERDA.** A murder in the stairwell two hundred years ago, and the spirits have not rested.

**GREG.** That's why we're here, to put them all to bed and tuck them in nicely.

**ANNIE.** We're going to disprove all that.

**VERDA.** Mysterious footsteps, screams, pernicious goin's-on...

**GREG.** Ms. Wilkes, I teach physics at the university and am the author of ten scientific books. I am unmoved by tales of such phenomena.

**VERDA.** T'aint no *fernomena!* The scouring souls of the departed refuse t'abandon this maleficent dwelling.

**GREG.** Well, I hope they don't mind sharing it with a pair of adventurous roommates.

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**VERDA.** And what about your... *daughter*, is it? (*Annie shoots a bemused glance at Greg, who returns a furtive smile.*) Y'ain't scared to be among the cold and lifeless?

**ANNIE.** No, I'm from Los Angeles... I plan to interview local residents and document the stories they heard growing up.

**VERDA.** Stories. Is that why ya come? Eh, *perpycock!*

**ANNIE.** I'm working on my PhD in folklore, and these tales of the supernatural will be the basis for my dissertation.

**VERDA.** The townsfolk don't take much to answerin' questions.

**GREG.** Ms. Wilkes — Verda — the lease, please... (*She slides the lease to him. He signs it and slides it back to her. She holds up the key.*)

**VERDA.** If ya need anything else, anything at all, I don't care what time a' day it is, if ya need something, some advice, if it's an emergency, or ya just want to talk — I don't wanna know about it. (*Verda hands him the key and exits.*)

**GREG.** That was entertaining.

**ANNIE.** If it creeps her out so much, why hasn't she sold it?

**GREG.** The market for a murder-laden haunted house isn't what it used to be. "Charming two-bedroom, one bath, ghost-infested fixer-upper."

**ANNIE.** "Features unhinged apparitions and the aromatic pall of death."

**GREG.** Pride of moanership. (*Annie giggles.*)

**ANNIE.** *Perpycock!* (*She removes her backpack, looks around.*) Check out the detail and craftsmanship.

**GREG.** Early 19th Century hodgepodge post-and-beam. They didn't use nails. The wood was fitted together with dowels and mortise-and-tenon joints.

**ANNIE.** Sad to see it's fallen into such neglect.

**GREG.** Considering all the "pernicious goin's on," it's actually not that bad. (*Annie notices something.*)

**ANNIE.** What about those holes in the wall? (*Greg examines them.*)

**GREG.** They appear to be bullet holes.

**ANNIE.** Not recent ones, I hope.

**GREG.** Hard to say, but the splinters extrude outward, indicating the shots came from inside.

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**ANNIE.** Holy frig... (*A **mysterious man** pops up outside the window and stares inward, unseen by Annie or Greg. Annie notices a weathered plaque above the door. Although the lettering has been obscured by centuries-old debris, we can make out "V-RI--S."*)

**ANNIE.** (*Re: sign.*) Greg, look. What does it say?

**GREG.** Ensconced in centuries of dust and grime. I can barely make it out.

**ANNIE.** V... something... R-I... something-something... S...

**GREG.** From what I can discern, it reads "Veritas," which is "Truth" in Latin.

**ANNIE.** Appropriate. Seeing how we plan to expose the truth. (*The **mysterious man** outside the window moves away.*) I'm glad you invited me, Professor!

**GREG.** I wouldn't dream of wintering in Vermont without the prettiest doctoral student in the world. (*They share a lengthy kiss.*)

**ANNIE.** Will you finish your book while we're here?

**GREG.** Don't have much choice. (*Greg sets his typewriter case on the table and opens it, revealing a manual typewriter.*) I'm obligated to deliver a completed manuscript to my publisher when we return.

**ANNIE.** What museum did you steal that from?

**GREG.** It's called a "manual typewriter." It's powered by an ancient technology known as "kinetic energy." (*Annie removes a laptop from her backpack, sets it next to the typewriter and opens the screen.*)

**ANNIE.** Do not be alarmed, Earthling. It is not witchcraft.

**GREG.** It's an efficient tool for my long-winded, fact-based science and technical books that are so boring, even I can't read them all the way through.

**ANNIE.** Why do you keep doing it?

**GREG.** What, and give up being a writer? (*Off her look.*) The publisher gives me a nice advance and their checks don't bounce. Usually. Someday, when I start my novel, I'll run out and buy the most extravagant computer around. Until then... (*He inserts a blank page into the roller and types some words.*)

**ANNIE.** How many pages have you written?

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**GREG.** Including the title page? One. *(He pulls the page from the typewriter and shows it to her.)*

**ANNIE.** *(Reads.)* "The Supernatural Deconstructed: Explanations for Everyday Hauntings." I love it. And what better research environment than an actual haunted house.

**GREG.** *Alleged* haunted house.

**ANNIE.** Paranormal events have been reported here by the locals since the early 1820s.

**GREG.** A perfect opportunity to investigate.

**ANNIE.** Let the debunking begin!

**GREG.** Why don't you go exploring? I'll fetch our bags and catch up to you. *(Annie puts headphones on. She and Greg exit through opposite doors. The **mysterious man** looks through the window, left, then right, then moves out of view. Greg reenters, carrying a duffel bag, which he sets on the floor. He pulls out a bottle of whiskey and two shot glasses. Suddenly, the BLAST OF A GUNSHOT bellows through the house, followed by the sound of THUMPING DOWN THE STAIRS, and then a horrific SCREAM.)*

**GREG.** *(Hollering.)* Annie? Annie! Are you alright?! Annie...! *(He races to the door just as Annie enters, coughing and sneezing.)*

**ANNIE.** *(Coughs.)* I think I'm allergic to the 19th century.

**GREG.** Mold spores and wood rot, more likely. *(Opening window.)* The antidote is fresh air.

**ANNIE.** *(Sniffs underarm.)* I smell like musty antiquity.

**GREG.** Worst cologne fragrance ever. *(She coughs.)* You okay?

**ANNIE.** I'm fine, but the mushrooms growing in the attic need harvesting.

**GREG.** What happened?

**ANNIE.** *(Removes her headphones.)* What?

**GREG.** I heard screaming.

**ANNIE.** Wasn't me.

**GREG.** And a thumping sound, like an object falling down the stairs.

**ANNIE.** Sorry, I didn't hear it. I was listening to a semi-mesmerizing lecture.

**GREG.** It was preceded by — what sounded like — a gunshot blast.



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**ANNIE.** Holy frig!

**GREG.** Indeed.

**ANNIE.** Probably a hunter. Seems everyone out here owns a rifle or a shotgun of some sort. I think it's required.

**GREG.** True. I believe the state animal is a dead moose.

**ANNIE.** Another paranormal event shot down. Pun intended.

**GREG.** Except, it sounded like it was inside.

**ANNIE.** I inspected the whole place. No active shooters.

**GREG.** What did you find?

**ANNIE.** The stairwell is incredibly narrow. People must have been skinnier back then. Furniture is original: chairs, dressers — most early nineteenth century, some eighteenth — at least what's left of them. But with some refinishing and a trunk load of money —

**GREG.** — one could fix up this neglected hearthstone and turn it into an old-world rental. Perhaps a ski lodge.

**ANNIE.** Or a bed-and-breakfast. I'm sure Verda Wilkes would accept any offer to deep-six the property. She was going to demolish it.

**GREG.** Which would be a shame. Once we've completed our study, these occurrences will be elucidated scientifically.

**ANNIE.** You think we'll convince anyone? Manifestations of the afterlife have been baked into folklore for generations.

**GREG.** There has been no scientific evidence to support the existence of ghosts — anywhere in the world.

**ANNIE.** Evidence and belief are two very different beasts.

**GREG.** Yes, that is unfortunate.

**ANNIE.** And how do you prove something doesn't exist?

**GREG.** By demonstrating inconsistencies in the stories. By exposing the creaking, apparitions, mysterious deaths with logical explanations consistent with the laws of physics.

**ANNIE.** Occam's razor. The simplest explanation is usually the correct one.

**GREG.** Precisely. Otherwise known as the Law of Parsimony. You know, I teach a whole course on that principle.

**ANNIE.** What do you think I was listening to?

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**GREG.** Really? So, you found my lecture "semi-mesmerizing"?

**ANNIE.** A total turn-on. (*Playfully stroking his chest.*) Your anecdotes about false assumptions are so hot.

**GREG.** Well, then, let me titillate you with this: A professor of medicine once observed his interns assigning exotic diagnoses to their patients. To steer them onto the right path, he declared, "When you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras."

**ANNIE.** And when you hear a squeak, think "rusty door hinge" —

**GREG.** — not "disembodied spirit playing mind games with you."

**ANNIE.** And when you feel a mysterious cold chill?

**GREG.** Well, that's obviously a ghost. (*They laugh.*)

**ANNIE.** There must be one on my shoulders. I'm freezing.

**GREG.** The simplest explanation — an open window. (*He is about to close the window, and is startled to notice the **mysterious man**, LEONARD "KLINK" KLINKENBROOMER, staring in.*) Ahhhh!

**KLINK.** Greetings, neighbor!

**GREG.** Is it customary in this town to peep into your neighbor's windows?

**KLINK.** Sorry to startle you. When I saw an automobile parked in front, I was curious. I never see signs of human life over here.

**GREG.** We just arrived.

**KLINK.** Welcome to Gallows Falls.

**GREG.** Come around front. I'll let you in. (*Greg opens the door. Klink enters.*)

**GREG.** Greg Waverman. (*Extends his hand. They shake.*)

**KLINK.** Leonard Klinkenbroomer. They call me "Klink."

**GREG.** Can I get you a drink — Klink? (*Greg holds up whiskey bottle.*)

**KLINK.** I lay off the liquor these days. Seems to go right through me, if ya catch my meaning. And this lovely young lady?

**GREG.** This is Annie. She's my, uh —

**ANNIE.** — *daughter.* I'm his daughter. (*Klink takes her hand and kisses it in a gentlemanly manner.*)

**KLINK.** Pleasure.

**GREG.** Where do you live? I hadn't noticed any other cabins.

**KLINK.** The green house just a-hither.

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**ANNIE.** You live in a greenhouse?

**KLINK.** *(Laughs.)* No, darlin'. Folks been calling it "The Green House" for longer than I've been alive, because it sits amid the green meadows and luscious foliage. Vermont is, literally, the Green Mountain State.

**ANNIE.** You must be familiar with the folklore of the area. Ghost stories, legends.

**KLINK.** Ghost stories, legends, fairytales. I'm kind of the local historian 'round these parts.

**ANNIE.** May I interview you for my dissertation?

**KLINK.** You tickle me, darlin'. Not many 'round here care to listen to my babblin' and anecdotin'.

**ANNIE.** It's research for my doctoral degree. *(Annie places a voice recorder on the table.)* Do you mind if I record our conversation?

**KLINK.** Not a big fan of recordin' devices. Never know who's gonna be listenin'.

**ANNIE.** Just as well. My fingers are so cold, I don't think I could press the button.

**KLINK.** This is 'bout as warm as it gets this time of year. You'll want to light up that fireplace and keep it going. *(Annie takes out her notepad and pen and begins writing.)*

**ANNIE.** Let's start with the history of this house.

**KLINK.** It was built by an English carpenter, Thomas Hollingsgrove, a hunter and God-fearin' man. A few months after he and his wife moved in with their five-year-old son, he was found dead. Shot through the head.

**GREG.** Good God!

**KLINK.** Townsfolk accused his wife of the murder, and they hanged her for it. But no one was able to prove anything.

**ANNIE.** Holy frig!

**KLINK.** Lots of hangings back in those days, but not much justice. They'd tie 'em up to a big oak tree in the middle of the river, where the water cascades downward about thirty feet before windin' through a beautiful glade.

**ANNIE.** So that's why they call the town "Gallows Falls."

**KLINK.** Mm-hmm. I was a child when they finally cut that tree down. It

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was huge, and they chopped it into hundreds of cords of firewood. Gave it out to the townsfolk, free of charge. And that's all it was worth.

**ANNIE.** What do you mean?

**KLINK.** The wood never took to flame. It wouldn't burn.

**GREG.** Could it have been a poplar tree and not an oak? The poplar is notoriously dense and extremely hard to burn, especially if it's still green.

**KLINK.** It was an oak tree — as dead and dry as these rotting walls. The townsfolk put the logs into a huge pyre — for a bonfire, you know. But they couldn't light it. They tried using kindling doused with whale oil — the kindling burst into flames and turned to ash, but the logs would not ignite.

**ANNIE.** How did they explain it?

**KLINK.** Rumor was that it were the souls of the innocent folks who was hanged there.

**GREG.** Do you believe it?

**KLINK.** *(Laughs.)* Oh, please, Mr. Waverman. Surely, a man of your background doesn't believe in the return of the dead. *(Klink removes his eyeglasses, cleans them with handkerchief, then puts them back on.)* I better go feed Bella. She gets hungry 'bout this time every day. Barks 'n yaps 'til I toss some pig scraps her way.

**GREG.** Oh, you have a dog?

**KLINK.** No, no, I don't. Always a pleasure to meet new neighbors, even temporary ones. *(He exits.)*

**GREG.** Dilated pupils, sweaty brow.

**ANNIE.** He's lying.

**GREG.** Yes, but about what?

**ANNIE.** And who — or what — is Bella? *(We again hear a GUNSHOT, followed by the sound of THUMPING DOWN THE STAIRS, and then a horrific SCREAM. Annie moves into Greg's arms.)*

**GREG.** You heard it?

**ANNIE.** All reasonably explained, right?

**GREG.** Add it to the logbook. We'll deconstruct and analyze each occurrence. *(Annie removes a notebook from her backpack and begins writing.)*

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**GREG.** We already have a theory on the gun blast.

**ANNIE.** What about the scream?

**GREG.** Perhaps the wind.

**ANNIE.** Or an animal.

**GREG.** Yes, it could be the cry of the red fox, whose howl sounds uncannily human. *(Annie takes notes.)*

**ANNIE.** That leaves the thumping sound.

**GREG.** A shingle falling from the roof.

**ANNIE.** Bats. They have been known to get inside walls to roost. There could be hundreds of them in there right now.

**GREG.** A lovely thought, but I haven't seen any guano. *(Off her look.)* Bat poop. If there were bats living in the house, their droppings would be all over. Let's get back to that one.

**ANNIE.** *(Jots it down.)* For... further... consideration.

**GREG.** All it takes is one plausible explanation for each event and the supernatural is obliterated. *(Once again, we hear a GUNSHOT, followed by the sound of THUMPING DOWN THE STAIRS, and then a horrific SCREAM. Annie and Greg share a horrified take at one another.)*

**GREG.** Enter it in the logbook. We need to document each of these occurrences, noting the precise times and locations, as well as detailed descriptions.

**ANNIE.** Can we just say it's ghosts, admit we were wrong, and go home? *(Blackout.)*

## SCENE 2

*Early the next morning. Annie enters with a cup of coffee and is taken aback to discover two oak fire logs lying side by side on the floor.*

**ANNIE.** Greg... Greg! *(Greg enters, wearing a robe.)*

**GREG.** *(Yawning.)* Hey, I thought we were going to sleep in... *(She points to the logs.)* Whoa! What the...? Where'd these come from?

**ANNIE.** The simplest explanation — Klink brought them. He did hear us complaining about the cold.

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**GREG.** Indeed, but how did he get in? I locked the door before we went to bed...

**ANNIE.** You sure? *(Greg checks the door.)*

**GREG.** See? Locked.

**ANNIE.** The simplest explanation — he has a key.

**GREG.** Hmm. Let's move these to the fireplace. *(They struggle to lift the logs, but they are too heavy.)*

**ANNIE.** They... won't... budge.

**GREG.** It's like lifting a meteorite. Deceivingly dense, weighing many times its perceived appearance.

**ANNIE.** These aren't meteorites. Why are they so heavy?

**GREG.** And how was Klink able to bring them here?

**ANNIE.** The simplest explanation — he's very strong. *(The door swings opens and Klink enters.)*

**KLINK.** Hullo neighbors. I brought you the morning paper and maple cream muffins. *(He sets the items on the table.)*

**ANNIE.** It's usually customary to knock before entering someone's home.

**KLINK.** Ah, forgive me, dear. We're used to treatin' our neighbors as family 'round these parts, comin' and goin' as we please into each others' domiciles. Bringin' pies and the mornin' mail, and whatnot. You're such good folk, I forgot you were flatlanders, so please accept my apologies. In the future, I promise to knock.

**GREG.** I don't want to seem an ungrateful *flatlander*, but I must insist you give me your key.

**KLINK.** What key?

**GREG.** To our cabin.

**KLINK.** Why would I have a key to your cabin?

**ANNIE.** How did you get in?

**KLINK.** I opened the door. *(Klink notices the logs.)* I see you've been to the Big Oak.

**GREG.** What?

**KLINK.** The logs. I recognize 'em.

**GREG.** We thought *you* brought them.

**KLINK.** Not me. I won't go near that place.

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**ANNIE.** Any idea how they got here?

**GREG.** And why are they so heavy?

**KLINK.** Heavy? Oh no, this wood has been rotting away for two hundred years. It's light as a feather. *(Klink easily lifts up a log. Greg and Annie look at each other, perplexed.)* See?

**GREG.** What the hell?

**KLINK.** Not sure what good it is t'ya. I told you they won't burn. *(Klink sets the log back down.)*

**GREG.** Well, Annie and I are going to tidy up the cabin a bit, so I guess we'll talk again, soon.

**ANNIE.** Thank you for the sweets.

**KLINK.** Made with genuine Vermont maple syrup.

**ANNIE.** I love maple syrup.

**KLINK.** Then a jugful will be on its way t'ya.

**GREG.** Goodbye, Klink.

**KLINK.** Alright, then. I'll be seein' ya. *(Klink exits. Greg locks the door.)*

**GREG.** Let's get that fire going. *(Annie and Greg easily move the logs into the fireplace. Annie stumbles on a raised floor plank, under where the logs were.)* You okay?

**ANNIE.** I tripped on that floor plank. It's raised on one end. *(Greg stoops down, jiggles the plank and it comes off.)*

**GREG.** There's something there. Hand me the flashlight. *(Greg reaches into the space under the plank and pulls out a rolled-up, yellowed document with a string around it. He removes the string and unrolls it.)*

**ANNIE.** What is it?

**GREG.** A letter. Addressed to Thomas Hollingsgrove.

**ANNIE.** The carpenter who built the house. What does it say?

**GREG.** *(Skimming document.)* Do you read French?

**ANNIE.** No, but I took four years of Gaelic in college. *(Off his look.)* I went to Scotland when I was young — fell in love with the culture.

**GREG.** You're getting a PhD in Folklore, and you speak Gaelic. The world is your oyster!

**ANNIE.** I take it you don't speak French, either.

**GREG.** Me? No. I had, maybe, four minutes of German before switching

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to Latin.

**ANNIE.** Very handy if you become Pope.

**GREG.** The signature at the bottom is — ready for this — "Lafayette."

**ANNIE.** Lafayette? As in the "Marquis de"?

**GREG.** Check the Internet for samples of his signature. (*Annie types on the laptop.*)

**ANNIE.** Found it. (*Greg compares the signature with the computer display.*) It matches. Is there a date on the letter?

**GREG.** 29 June 1825.

**ANNIE.** Same year the house was built.

**GREG.** How did a letter from the Marquis de Lafayette end up in a house in Gallows Falls, Vermont?

**ANNIE.** (*RE: Laptop screen*) I found something. In 1825, Lafayette came back to the U. S. to take a tour of the twenty-four states. Vermont was his last stop on June 28, 1825. The next day, June 29, he laid the cornerstone for the Old Mill building at the University of Vermont.

**GREG.** So he was in Burlington, just a cornerstone's throw from Gallows Falls.

**ANNIE.** I just got a chill up my spine. The Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the Revolutionary War, might have stood right here in this very room.

**GREG.** Or at least someone who had possession of his letter.

**ANNIE.** How did it end up under a floor plank?

**GREG.** The simplest explanation — someone put it there. Can we translate this online?

**ANNIE.** Hand it to me. (*He hands her the letter. She enters a few keystrokes on her laptop.*) That's weird.

**GREG.** What?

**ANNIE.** The keyboard's not responding.

**GREG.** The internet could be down... The cellular signal is very spotty here.

**ANNIE.** It's not the internet. I can't depress the keys. They're stuck in the down position.

**GREG.** All of them?

**ANNIE.** Most of them.



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**GREG.** It may be the temperature. The keyboard could have been exposed to moisture, and it simply froze. Leave it for awhile, give it time to —

**ANNIE.** Whoa... The keys popped back up. Quick, give me a French term. Any term.

**GREG.** "*Ménage à trois.*" (Off her look.) It's the only thing that came to mind. (*She types it in.*)

**ANNIE.** (*Reading screen.*) "Threesome." Seems to be working, now.

**GREG.** Great, let's input that letter. (*She positions her hands above the keyboard, then jerks them back with a start.*)

**ANNIE.** Holy frig! The keys just depressed themselves.

**GREG.** All at once?

**ANNIE.** They lowered without me touching them. What's the simple explanation for that?

**GREG.** Could be a number of things. Temperature. Atmospheric pressure. Manufacturing defect. Static electricity.

**ANNIE.** I've never seen keys get stuck like that.

**GREG.** You've never used a manual typewriter.

**ANNIE.** We still don't know what's in the letter.

**GREG.** I'll hire an interpreter.

**ANNIE.** Meanwhile, can we get the fire started? My goosebumps are shivering.

**GREG.** Hand me that newspaper. I'll use it for kindling. (*Annie picks up the newspaper from the table, notices something.*)

**ANNIE.** Hey... When Klink brought us the morning paper, did he say it was *this* morning's paper?

**GREG.** What's the date on it?

**ANNIE.** June 29, 1825. (*She hands the newspaper to Greg.*)

**GREG.** Looks brand new.

**ANNIE.** He claims to be a historian. Perhaps he collects vintage newspapers.

**GREG.** No yellowing or signs of aging. An incredible specimen.

**ANNIE.** Check out the headline.

**GREG.** (*Reads aloud.*) "Lafayette Visits Vermont." (*Does a take at Annie.*) "The Marquis de Lafayette visited the Commonwealth of Vermont

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yesterday. He was expected at the capitol in Montpelier at five o'clock but did not arrive until nine, where he was met with a hero's welcome."

**ANNIE.** Does it say anything about coming to Gallows Falls?

**GREG.** No. Nor what caused him to be delayed four hours on his way to the capitol.

**ANNIE.** That must be when he composed the letter.

**GREG.** We need someone to translate this.

**ANNIE.** When I go into town to conduct my interviews, I'll ask around. (*A KNOCK on the door. Annie opens it. Klink enters, hands a jug to her.*)

**KLINK.** Here you go, darlin'. One pint of genuine Vermont Grade A Maple Syrup — the best in the world.

**ANNIE.** Wow, thanks! (*To Greg.*) Someone's making pancakes for breakfast. (*Sets the jar on the table, then kisses Greg.*) I'm back this afternoon. Love you. (*Grabs her backpack and exits.*)

**GREG.** What?

**KLINK.** She said she loves you — but didn't sound like in the daughterly fashion.

**GREG.** Hey, Klink, do any of the locals around here speak French?

**KLINK.** *Oui.* In fact, I know someone.

**GREG.** Great! Could you give me a name?

**KLINK.** *C'est moi. Je parle français.*

**GREG.** No kidding. Are you fluent?

**KLINK.** My mother was from Montreal, so I picked it up bit by bit.

**GREG.** Can you translate something for me?

**KLINK.** I'll give it a try. (*Klink takes the letter from Greg, puts his reading glasses on and peruses the document.*) Well, let's see... The addressee is a Mister Thomas Hollingsgrove — like I told ya', he was the one who built this house... This first part refers to a battalion of British soldiers during the American Revolution who battled the Abenaki Indians at *Plage de Cèdre*...

**GREG.** *Plage de Cèdre*?

**KLINK.** Cedar Beach.

**GREG.** Where is that?

**KLINK.** 'Bout fifty miles north o' here. Off Lake Champlain, near

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Charlotte.

**GREG.** Go on...

**KLINK.** The next paragraph explains the battalion was protecting thirty thousand *pièces d'or* — gold coins. Fearing the Abenaki would steal it, the infantrymen buried it.

**GREG.** Buried treasure, huh? Does it say what happened to it?

**KLINK.** Hmm... (*Peruses letter.*) When the infantrymen went to retrieve the gold, they had forgotten where it was buried.

**GREG.** I wonder if it's still out there.

**KLINK.** In the final paragraph, he declares the gold to be property of the British Crown. He instructs Mr. Hollingsgrove to repatriate it to England as a gesture of goodwill from France —

**GREG.** A man of integrity. That's why Lafayette was so beloved.

**KLINK.** That, and he gave the British quite a wallop during the revolution.

**GREG.** Indeed.

**KLINK.** Interesting...

**GREG.** Go on...

**KLINK.** — it says that Charles X —

**GREG.** The King of France...

**KLINK.** — Charles X ordered the gold delivered to France, to help expand their influence in West Africa —

**GREG.** Which was under French colonial rule at that time.

**KLINK.** But he tells Hollingsgrove to disregard the French Monarch's orders and convey the gold directly to the British government as soon as possible.

**GREG.** Anything else?

**KLINK.** Just a signature, "Lafayette," but I guess you knew that. (*Klink hands the letter back to Greg.*) A compelling story, Mr. Waverman.

**GREG.** (*Opens his wallet.*) Let me compensate you for your service.

**KLINK.** Don't insult me... that's how we do it here in the Green Mountain State. Neighbor helpin' neighbor helpin' neighbor for over two hundred years.

**GREG.** At least accept my gratitude. If I can ever repay the favor, let me

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know.

**KLINK.** I best be going now. Time to let Bella out of her cage. *(Klink exits, Greg sits on the sofa, examining the letter. His focus is broken by the sound of HORSES GALLOPING and wooden CARRIAGE WHEELS approaching, then stopping. The door opens and enters a tall man, late 60s, dressed in 19th century French ceremonial military garb, with a document bag strapped around his shoulder. This is the MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE. His gait is determined and purposeful.)*

**LAFAYETTE.** Hollinsgrove! Hollinsgrove! We need to speak posthaste! I am on my way to Montpelier, and I need to make up time. *(He walks past Greg, unaware of his presence. Greg is gobsmacked.)*

**GREG.** *(Under his breath.)* Whaaaaa...

**LAFAYETTE.** Hollinsgrove! The late hour necessitates my coach travel at nine miles per hour if I am to arrive promptly. *(Lafayette looks at his pocket watch, then sits at the table. He removes from his document bag a sheet of rag paper, a sand blotter, a quill pen and ink, and begins composing a letter. Greg gingerly looks over Lafayette's shoulder to read what he is inscribing. He compares it with the yellowed document. From his reaction, we infer Lafayette's letter is identical. Lafayette finishes his letter and sprinkles blotting sand on it, blots it, rolls it up and ties it with a string. He returns the writing instruments to his bag. He crosses to the hallway door.)*

**LAFAYETTE.** *(Calling.)* Mister Hollinsgrove. You have kept me waiting long enough. *(Lafayette exits through the hallway door. After a moment, a shell-shocked Greg steps cautiously toward the door.)*

**GREG.** Hello... Mr. Lafayette? General Lafayette... *(No response. Greg follows after him.)*

**GREG'S VOICE.** General Lafayette? *(Still, no response. Greg reenters and plops onto the sofa, dazed, dumbfounded, and more than a little shaken. He pours himself a shot of whiskey and downs it quickly. Annie enters. She throws her backpack onto the table and kisses Greg.)*

**ANNIE.** I gathered some great ghost stories and local legends. After I pull the data, I think I'll have enough to finish my dissertation.

**GREG.** The hayseeds give you some good interviews?

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**ANNIE.** You know, there *are* educated people in this town.

**GREG.** And yet they put stock in these preposterous tales.

**ANNIE.** Belief systems are hard to crack, even for the educated. Especially if those beliefs have been handed down generationally.

**GREG.** An astute observation.

**ANNIE.** (*Smiles.*) That's my dissertation!

**GREG.** Have you decided on a title?

**ANNIE.** I've narrowed it down to: "Mythology as Science: Why Scholars Believe in the Occult," or "The Downfall of Intellectualism: Why Smart People Fear the Boogie Monster."

**GREG.** How do you respond to these constructs of the supernatural?

**ANNIE.** What do you mean?

**GREG.** For example, what if I told you — hypothetically, of course — that I saw a ghost? How would you react?

**ANNIE.** I would call "*Perpycock!*" (*She sits on top of him and playfully tickles him.*) "*Perpycock, Professor Waverman. Perpycock!*"

**GREG.** That's because you know me. What if I were just some random character who engaged you in a conversation about the afterlife? In the course of this conversation, I described an encounter I had with an other-worldly apparition?

**ANNIE.** I would ask you to describe the experience in detail. Where did this alleged encounter occur? Were you alone? What medications are you on?

**GREG.** Would you discount these narratives directly to their face? Or keep your derision to yourself?

**ANNIE.** While it is difficult to contain my skepticism, it's important to listen. There's no point in confronting someone who's set in their beliefs.

**GREG.** What about your beliefs?

**ANNIE.** My beliefs are based in science.

**GREG.** And chronicles of the afterlife, of spirits, and apparitions, have no basis in science.

**ANNIE.** Isn't that why we are here? To disprove all this hocus-pocus?

**GREG.** That is our intent, but in the scientific method, as you well know, one must be prepared to either prove or disprove one's hypothesis.

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**ANNIE.** Well, sure... but ghosts? C'mon on.

**GREG.** Why are we all too quick to write-off the supernatural?

**ANNIE.** I don't know. Because it's idiotic and asinine?

**GREG.** What if we didn't write it off?

**ANNIE.** Come again?

**GREG.** What if we met one of them?

**ANNIE.** You want to meet a... meet a ghost?

**GREG.** Play along with me. If they exist — and I'm not saying they do — imagine the details they could fill in about history, the great artists, musicians, and scientists.

**ANNIE.** What about all this being "preposterous"?

**GREG.** Just because something is preposterous, doesn't mean it's not true.

**ANNIE.** I'm not following any of this. Do you suddenly believe in ghosts? What changed your mind?

**GREG.** Have a drink. *(She sits next to him. He pours her a shot of whiskey.)* What I am about to tell you is complete lunacy. While you were in town this afternoon — *(He is interrupted as the front door swings open. MARYBELLE HOLLINGSGROVE and HENRY FAIRWEATHER enter, holding hands and laughing boisterously. Henry sweeps Marybelle into his arms and kisses her.)*

**MARYBELLE.** We have the whole house to ourselves.

**ANNIE.** *(Sotto voce.)* Who are they?

**GREG.** *(Sotto voce.)* I don't know.

**HENRY.** You certain Mr. Hollingsgrove will not be home tonight?

**MARYBELLE.** My husband is on a hunting weekend with the men from church.

**HENRY.** Ah, yes. Sacrificing a moose as a display of piety. How Christlike.

**MARYBELLE.** I don't want to talk about him.

**HENRY.** Who? Christ?

**MARYBELLE.** My husband.

**HENRY.** You are so lovely, my dear.

**MARYBELLE.** And you are my debonair gentleman, whisking me away from the doldrums... *(They begin unbuttoning each others' clothes. She*

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*grabs his hand.) Let's get more comfortable... (Marybelle grabs Henry by the hand and they swiftly exit through the hallway door.)*

**ANNIE.** *(Downs her drink.) What. The. Frig.*

**GREG.** Miraculous, isn't it. One might even say, "Supernatural."

**ANNIE.** What did we just see?

**GREG.** A two-hundred-year-old reenactment of occurrences in this house by the actual participants.

**ANNIE.** Please tell me there's a simple explanation.

**GREG.** The simplest explanation: We saw a ghost. *(Annie grabs the whiskey bottle and takes a swig. Blackout.)*

**END OF ACT I**

**INTERMISSION**

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—***

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