

# **ALICE THROUGH THE PAST LIVES**

by

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**ALICE THROUGH THE PAST LIVES** was first produced in August, 1988 by On-Stage Theatre Productions and performed in The Secret Theatre at The Calgary Centre for Performing Arts.

Alice .....ZELDA DEAN  
Director .....PATRICIA BENEDICT  
Stage Manager ..... BILL DEAN

#### DEDICATION

*To Zelda for the inspiration, Dr. Stam for facilitating the journey and Darcy for being there.*

[The lights come up on a bare stage, save two chairs. ALICE comes rushing in].

ALICE

Hi. Welcome. My name is Alice Turner. What were you expecting? Someone younger, blond hair, a pinafore perhaps? Sorry. I am 45. Before this I was an engineer. A domestic engineer, okay, okay I was a home maker. At least I used to be, in the 60's we were just wives and mothers. Well, I was made redundant. My kids left home to go to college and my husband left home to move in with his secretary. [to another person.

ALICE moves the chair onto the stage

Isn't that cliché? It really happened though, and yes, she is younger and yes, she is blond. I think she and my daughter went to school together. I had planned on "and they all lived happily ever after" but now I'm divorced and I worked in the dress department at The Bay. It wasn't so bad. I did consider having a wild and torrid affair in the wake of my new found freedom, but how many men do you meet in the dress department of The Bay? Most are husbands or boyfriends accompanying women, unwillingly I might add. Maybe all those men are cheating on these women and out of some warped sense of guilt they feel that shopping with a woman is fair and just punishment. Or maybe they just buckled under pressure. He gets into bed at night and she's just finished doing the quiz in Cosmopolitan "How close are you really to your mate?". She scores the relationship a 32 out of a possible 70 and feels depressed.

[Fake whiny, American voice] Honey I know you were going to play golf tomorrow, but you know I really feel that we should spend more time together...oh, I don't know...how about shopping?...I've been meaning to pick up a new dress for Becky's wedding. How about you come with me? You know how much I value your opinion...Pleeeeeease?

[normal voice] So there they are on a Saturday morning wishing they were on the third tee, scuffing their feet on the carpet at the entrance way to the ladies changing cubicles, and sneaking wistful glances at the part time Saturday morning salesgirl. The only other men I saw were shopping for themselves if you get my drift. I did see the occasional spotty faced stock boy and Frank the security guard. I worried about Frank. I don't think they should issue gun licences to people who idolize Rambo. Anyway, life was pretty dull, until I met Doreen. Doreen worked in china, not the country, the department. Anyway, Doreen is my age, also with two kids, and her husband left her for a jogger. She lost sleep and he lost weight. Needless to say, we soon became friends. One day I was commenting to her while sipping an over brewed cup of black tea. Black 'cause I was trying to cut back on calories Cosmos' 'Shape Up for Spring' or 'Drop Pounds for Summer' diet, and I was watching the film moving around on top of my tea. You know what I mean, that stuff that looks like a mini oil slick and stains the sides of the polystyrene cup. Anyway, I commented to Doreen that maybe that this was all there is when you're 45. I mean it's hardly something you look forward to in adolescence, working at The Bay. Ask a teenager what they want to be if they grow up and the odds of them saying, working at The Bay, are low. In fact, working at The Bay comes right below working at 7/11. At least at 7/11 you get free slurpees. I mean most of my girlfriends, growing up, just wanted to become wives and mothers, preferably in that order. Anyway, I said to Doreen that if this was life at 45, I wasn't sure I wanted to know what my future held. Doreen chimed in that she already knew what her future held, she was going to remarry, travel abroad, survive a natural disaster and start her own business. When did she decide all this, I wanted to know? She said that she didn't decide anything, that on a whim she had gone to a tarot card reader, on the weekend. Because she had wanted to do something different when she had found herself rearranging her spices in alphabetical order.

And that was how it all started. I went to the tarot card reader with Doreen, who wore a wig this time and got a totally different future. Doreen and I laughed all the way home on the bus, since we hardly thought that nylon fibre on the head would interfere with the fate controlling the universe.

That was the beginning. After that we sort of became junkies. Every weekend we tried something different. We had our palms read in an Italian restaurant. We had our tea leaves read in a tea room. We went to an astrologer and had our charts done. We went to a seedy part of downtown and had our auras read. One time we even went to a Shriners circus, with 10,000 kids and 2 baby sitters, just because we were looking for an authentic gypsy with a crystal ball. We didn't take any of it seriously but we had a lot of fun together.

Anyway, that all ended when Doreen started dating Frank the security guard. Then she had real excitement in her life. He was 20 years younger than her and used to tie her up with plastic vines he borrowed from Display. I can never look at those vines the same way now. Anyway, Doreen had Frank and I was stuck with lonely weekends once more. But my life changed when I was eating breakfast one morning, Alpha Bets and I noticed that the letters floating in the milk spelt the name of my -ex-husband. Suddenly I started trying to dive bomb the letters with sugar to sink them. I thought I had them beat, but the persistent little buggers kept floating back to the top. Then I started attacking the offending bits of cereal with my spoon. The next thing I knew there were Alpha Bets and puddles of milk all over the kitchen table. I had sunk to an all-time low. There was nowhere to go but up. I needed a change in my life. I decided that if Doreen could get a man, then so could I. Lying on the table was a copy of the morning Sun. Sure it was a little soggy from the breakfast episode, but nevertheless readable. I unglued the classified section and found the personal column.

[mimes picking up newspaper at the kitchen table and reading] Professional man, tired of the singles scene looking for an honest open relationship with a mature woman. Must have blond hair. [to audience] Is it only me who finds that strange? I read through the ads and was about to give up all hope until a small ad caught my eye. '-Wanted men and women to participate as volunteers in past life hypnotic regression. Contact Doctor Eadie, The University of Calgary.' How exciting! I envisioned myself stepping into a H. G. Wells time machine. I gave Dr. Eadie a call.

[on the phone] Hello, is this the psychology department? Yes, I'd like to be considered as a guinea pig. [To audience] Never just give anyone a straight line like that. [on the phone] Yes, I'd like to be a volunteer for the hypnotic regression experiment. [to audience] I find out it's not that easy. I have to take an aptitude test and go for an interview before I can be considered. I am given an appointment on Wednesday at 9:30. [she hangs up] I decided to call work and tell them that I was sick, not too far from the truth.

The next day I went to the U of C Psychology Department, and wrote an essay on what I expected to feel when while under hypnosis. I was suddenly struck with terror. Not at the thought of being regressed into past lives but of writing an essay. I hadn't done that since high school, I wondered if spelling counted. After that I was put through some preliminary test to see how easy I was to hypnotize. I was put under with surprising ease. The woman conducting the experiment told me that I follow direction well. For the first time I thanked my husband for being so dominant. I was told that I was an excellent candidate and to show up next Wednesday at the same time to meet Dr. Eadie. I told them at work I needed next Wednesday off. I'd take a day of my holidays since I was going to be taking a trip. My supervisor asked where? Drumheller? Okay, it was the first thing that came into my head. The following Wednesday I showed up for the next session. This time with Dr. Eadie. I don't know what I was expecting, maybe a Raveen- lookalike. If Clark Kent was the mild-mannered reporter, then Dr. Eadie was the mild-mannered- psychologist.

VOICE      You must be Mrs. Turner.

ALICE      [to audience] We'd gotten off to a bad start. He thought I was married. [to Dr.] You can call me Alice.

VOICE     Now, Alice as you have been told by my assistant, last week, hypnosis isn't a question of hocus pocus. There is no mystery involved here. I have no special powers. All we will attempt to do is make you go into a state of deep relaxation and tap into your subconscious. And now if you're ready, we'll begin. I want you to start relaxing and breathing deeply. I'm going to take you down a staircase to the darkness, down, down, deep under hypnosis to the comfort of the blackness so that we may travel back in time to delve into what once was, or what once might have been. Are you ready to make the descent? You're getting more relaxed. You breathe in relaxation; you breathe out tension. Here we go. 1, 2, 3, nice and gently, 4, 5, 6, relaxing more and more, 7, 8 and there, 9, 10.

ALICE     I feel myself slipping deeper and deeper into a trance as the doctor talks. His voice becomes very far away. I hear him talking to me like a tiny voice in my ear.

[The lights on stage begin to go down]

He takes me down a staircase, which has 10 steps and as I go down the stairs, I become more and more hypnotized. By the time I reach the bottom, I am fully under.

VOICE     You are now in the darkness, and you will begin travelling backwards in time.

ALICE     Yes, I am travelling through the darkness. Oh!

VOICE     Do you see something?

ALICE     I am in a tunnel.

VOICE Really, can you tell me about it? [The lights come up on stage quarter strength]

ALICE [touching the walls] These stones are cold and black. The tunnel isn't very wide.

VOICE Can you see where the tunnel leads?

ALICE No, it twists and turns out of sight. Shall I go down it?

VOICE If you want to.

ALICE Sure, I'm not afraid.

[Alice moves down the tunnel]

VOICE Do you see anything?

ALICE No. [a pin spot comes on down stage left] Wait. I see a light. I am moving towards the light. The tunnel has ended.

VOICE What do you see?

ALICE Just the light the tunnel has ended.

VOICE Do you want to go into the light?

ALICE Sure. [Alice steps into the spotlight and all the lights come up on stage] Wow.

VOICE Tell me what you see.



ALICE     This is incredible. There is this bright light everywhere. I can't see the source, just light everywhere. And I can't see what I'm standing on, but I'm not floating or travelling. The light has textures and moves like clouds; I feel totally enveloped.

[Pause]

VOICE     Do you see anything else?

ALICE     I keep forgetting you don't have the visuals. The white light, no it's more yellow, ooooh.

VOICE     What's happening?

ALICE     I'm in the desert, I can see sand dunes and the light comes from the sun. It's a big desert.

VOICE     Tell me what else you see.

ALICE     I see the sand. Over there some trees. I am by myself. No wait, there's Mugwa.

VOICE     Who is Mugwa?

ALICE     The elder. [to Mugwa] Come on Mugwa, move your old body. Mafu race you to the trees. Me thirsty, no me no let the face paint get wet. Mugwa, try to catch me. [Alice runs with childish delight and then splashes in the 'water' with obvious enjoyment, splashing Mugwa and calling to him.]

VOICE     What are you doing now?

ALICE     I play in the water. It feels nice, my feet are hot.

VOICE Can you ask Magwa where you are?

ALICE He says we by water, he says Mafu no use his eyes today.

VOICE What are you doing now?

ALICE We eat dry meat and berries Mafu found by water. Mmmm good. [Alice eats with her fingers the juice from the fruits runs down her arm as she eats and she licks it off with delight.]

VOICE Can you talk to Mugwa?

ALICE Mugwa mad. Me talk to Mister Charlie Sir. He come soon. I see him.

VOICE Charlie?

ALICE White man. Mister Charlie Sir like Mafu. Mister Charlie Sir give Mafu presents. [ALICE stands and waves, jumping up and down] Mister Charlie Sir, Mister Charlie Sir. [She listens] Me, Mafu, Mafu, MAFU! You bring much men for hunt? You bring Mafu present? [ALICE opens what looks to be a book. It is a mirror with a protective leather covering. She snaps it shut]. The bad spirits have Mafu. What this is Mister Charlie Sir? Mir. Er. Mir. Er. [She opens the cover and makes faces and laughs at herself in the reflection. She repeatedly keeps looking behind the mirror to see if anybody is there]. Yes, camp here. Talk to Mugwa. We hunt sunup. [Earnestly]. Mister Charlie Sir you take Mafu animals? Mafu live in zoo. You take animals city with Mafu. Mafu want to go. [In a hushed voice]. Mafu no like Magwa-. We talk sun-up Mister Charlie Sir. We sleep now. We sleep now.

VOICE I am going to bring you back now out of the hypnosis. In the blackness of your sleep you will find the stairs as I count backwards from 10 you will come back up the stairs. You will come forward into the present. You will awake refreshed and you will remember everything. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. [ALICE crosses to the chair and sits down, her eyes are shut at first and then she opens them]

ALICE WOW. That. Was. Amazing. That was incredible. [to audience] I never did drugs in the 60's. I was a mom, I didn't have time to be a hippy. But this must be what it was like to take LSD. I tried to get some answers from Doctor Eadie. [to Doctor] What was I doing? Doctor, did that really happen? Was that really a past life? Or are these just details from the depths of my subconscious I've forgotten. But what about my senses? I felt that water, and the sun on my naked skin. I tasted those berries. I felt the sand between my toes. I saw Mugwa and Charlie. Who were they? [to the audience]. Of course, the doctor didn't tell me anything. [ALICE gets up and paces around the office]. Answer me Doctor, how can I know if that was a past life. Was I some kind of Aborigine? I didn't have any clothes on and oh my God, I had a [she looks down, in amazement. To audience]. I WAS A LITTLE BOY!

And that was the end of the first session. Going home on the bus I looked around at all the people. What if we'd all had past lives? What if the fat man sitting next to was actually Cleopatra? Suddenly I felt cheated. I had wanted to be Cleopatra. I wanted it to be exiting and glamorous. I wanted to be Ann Bolyn or Nefferiti and who did I end up as? A naked little, aborigine. Not that I minded being naked, little, black, or even a boy. It's just that I had expected something else. It was then that I learnt my first, most important, lesson about reincarnation, passed - lives are not all they're cracked up to be.

The next day I went to the library. I looked up aborigines and read all sorts of interesting things about Australia. I studied the faces of the native people. I didn't see Mugwa. I was kind of disappointed. As far as I could tell, there was no definite fact that I could grasp which would lead me to believe that the experience had really happened. I decided that I had to go back to Dr. Eadie and do it all over again.

The whole experience reminded me of when I lost my virginity. I was on a camping trip in the Rockies. Tony Beshford had been feeding me toasted marshmallows between sips of beer. Now I liked Tony Beshford. I vaguely remember going back to his tent and the next thing I remembered was waking up in his sleeping bag at about five in the morning, naked. The situation was obvious. I had lost my virginity. It was a long time ago before we talked about consent...

Anyway, I wouldn't have minded trading it for a pleasant memory, but I was blank. I couldn't remember a thing. I'd been ripped off. Tony Beshford lay sleeping beside me. I woke him up. [ALICE as a fifteen-year-old]. Tony? Tony, wake up. It's me, Alice. Hi, Tony. Did we do it Tony? [To the audience] There was good news and bad news. The good news was that Tony, being two years older than me and much wiser, had used a condom. The bad news was, I couldn't remember a thing. I had crossed the threshold into womanhood. It was a momentous event and the highlight of my life and I didn't remember a damned thing. [To Tony]. Tony, we have to do it over. Yes, I'm serious. Don't go back to sleep. Here's your blue jeans. I'll put my clothes on and find some marshmallows. We have to take it back to where you were feeding me marshmallows and we were both clothed.

[To audience]. And so that's what we did. We got dressed, sat out by the fire, which had burnt out by then, and I made him reenact the whole thing. That time it was real and when I woke up the second time, I knew, without question, I'd lost my virginity.

[On the phone]. Dr. Eadie? It's Alice. We have to do it over again. It didn't seem real the first time. [To audience] déjà vu. [On the phone] I know it was supposed to be a one-shot deal, but I have to go back and talk to Mugwa. There are all sorts of questions that I want to ask him. Thanks Doctor. Dr. Eadie gave me another appointment. I'd got my second chance. This time I was going to ask questions. Mugwa- would feel like he'd stepped into a press conference.

I had to wait a whole week until my next appointment. The time at work passed painfully slowly, as it always does when you are waiting for something exciting to happen. One interesting incident happened, I was clearing out the cubicles at the end of the day. It was almost time to go home as the store was closing. I hadn't seen anyone enter the changing rooms, so I just assumed they were empty. With that knowledge, I briskly pulled the curtain on cubicle number three, which revealed a man standing there in a low-cut evening dress. I realized, as I stood there looking at the hairy, muscled physique in blue chiffon, that he was probably a woman in his former lifetime and the adjustment was hard for him this time around. I grinned him and he grinned back. As I went back onto the sales floor to get him the Dior it occurred to me that spitting into a test tube for a 23 and me was completely redundant. Genealogy was redundant. I had to find out more.

VOICE      Mrs. Turner?

ALICE      [To audience] Here we go again! [To Doctor] Alice.

VOICE     Of course. [Pause] Alice. I'm going to take you back down the staircase to the darkness, down, down, deep under hypnosis to the comfort of the blackness, so that we may travel back in time to delve into what once was, or what once, might have been. Are you ready to make the descent? You're getting more relaxed. You breathe in relaxation; you breathe out tension. O.K. here we go. One, two three... Nice and gently. Four, five, six... relaxing more and more, seven, eight, almost there, nine, ten. [The stage goes to black]

ALICE     [To audience] It was too late. I was already at the bottom. The doctor's voice droned on and on. I waited for him to catch up with me.

VOICE     You are now in the blackness and you are travelling back in time. You will stop automatically when you meet your destination.

ALICE     [Laughs]

VOICE     Do you find something amusing?

ALICE     I thought, I'm going to the desert and I didn't bring sunscreen but

VOICE     Tell me what you are experiencing.

[The lights come up to a 1/4 and ALICE]

I'm at the bottom of the staircase. The blackness is swirling around me. I'm travelling. I don't see any light. Oh. Wait a minute. [The lights come up slowly] Things are getting greyer and swirling. The greyness is swirling around me. Lighter grey and yet more light. Okay I see what it is.

It's just cigarette smoke. God this room is smoky. [She coughs] My eyes are watering. I am in a pool hall. No desert, no sand, no water, no trees. In a wooden panelled pool hall, and there are teenagers, laughing, smoking, drinking beer, playing pool. It looks like a Millers commercial. Everyone seems to be happy. I don't feel that happy.

VOICE    Why?

ALICE    Can't tell you.

VOICE    What are you wearing?

ALICE    Red dress with white flowers on it.

VOICE    What do you look like? Is there a mirror there?

ALICE    I can see my reflection in the window. I'm about seventeen. Blond. Big eyes and I have too much lipstick on.

VOICE    Can you talk to the people?

ALICE    [Slight Southern accent] I don't feel like socializing.

VOICE    Please talk to someone.

ALICE    [She crosses to "Jim Bob", in a southern accent] Jim, Jim Bob, ma eyes are gettin' all watery from all this smoke. I really wish that we could step outside and maybe take ourselves a walk. Jim Bob it's such a nice night out there, you know these long summer nights aren't gonna last forever.

[Softly] But Jim Bob, well you know this really isn't my idea of a date now. Well, I know it's real sweet of you to take me out, but I'm not really enjoyin' myself. [Irritated] No I don't want another coke. No, I don't want a sip of your beer, and I don't want to just talk to the girls any more. We're supposed to be out together. Jim Bob, I have to talk to you. What do you mean that's all I bin doin' all night is talkin' to you...? I want to talk to you about somethin', well, somethin' in private, if you get my meanin'. No, I can't be puttin' it off. No, I can't. I have decided tonight is the night and I DO NOT WANT TO STAND HERE IN THIS BAR AND WATCH YOU PLAY POOL A MINUTE LONGER. [ALICE reacts as if everyone in the bar has stopped talking and turned around to stare at her, she turns slowly back to "Jim Bob", quietly] Jim Bob I'm sorry I didn't mean to make a scene. I know you hate it when I get fretful. [turns abruptly to someone else] Why Mr Abrams maybe that is the way you treat your wife, but Jim Bob doesn't treat me like that. What do you mean, maybe it's time he started? [turns again] Yes Jim Bob, yes, okay, well I'm just gonna sit me down on the porch outside. I'm gonna get me a nice iced coca cola and maybe if I put the icy glass up to my forehead, then maybe the coldness of the glass will stop the poundin' in my head. Yeah, Jim Bob that's what I'm gonna do. And when, in good time, when you've finished your game, you come along outside and fetch me. And we'll take that walk. Okay. [coughing from the 'smoke' ALICE crosses to the doors to the outside and the porch. She breathes deeply the night fresh air]

Why Mr. Zackery, how are you this fine night? Come here boy. [ALICE pets a dog] Did they leave you out here all alone? My, but you're pantin' like the devil. And believe me I have heard the devil pant. Pantin' and groanin' in ma ears, like such a pantin' you have never heard. Would you like some coca cola, Mr. Zackery? Let me just pour some of mine into that lid there. How is that? [laughs] Did that make you sneeze? I know sometimes those bubbles get right up my nose too. There Zackery, there's an ice cube for you. There, fetch. What a clever boy you are. You crunch on that. That ice will cool you down, for sure.



You know Zackery, if I'd had a bucket of iced water, I maybe wouldn't be in all this trouble. Yeah. I could have just reached over and soaked him. [she laughs and scratches the dog on the chin] Oh, Zackery, my head feels like it's on fire. You dumb dog, I bet you never had a headache in your life. Well, maybe, I don't know, you live with Ben Abrams. And he beat his wife, he probably beat you too, don't he? Maybe you do have your troubles after all.

[Looks up startled] Why, Jim Bob I didn't see you standin' there. No, I was just talkin' to Zackery here. How did your pool game finish up? Don't you look so down hearted. They'll be other times to win. I'm sorry if you think I put you off your game. I didn't mean to distract you or make a mockery of you in front of your friends. It's just that I have to talk to you Jim Bob. Well, it's just not that easy, you know. I have rehearsed this speech a million times, my sweet. I have practised in front of the mirror in my room at night, softly talkin' to you so that noone could hear. I've practised down by the creek and the other day in the cornfield. Why....well, what I'm tryin' to say is it just ain't that easy. There are certain subtleties and delicacies that womenfolk talk about, and the subject of those discussions just never gets to a man's ears. Don't you be lookin' at me like that. You're makin' me all nervous. No, I don't want to hold your hand, why, my palms are fairly damp. This blessed heat. You'd think that when blackness covers the sun like a blanket, it would get cooler. Now listen to me, I'm talkin' about the weather. That is most certainly not what I had intended to talk to you about.

[deep breath] Jim Bob, my womanliness has not arrived. [pause] Do you understand what I'm sayin' to you here? [pause] For the love of Jesus, will you say something? Jim Bob I am carryin' your child. [stopping him from going back into the bar] No, Jim Bob what you definitely do not need is another beer. Oh, sweet Jesus how ma head hurts. [softly] Do you wanna marry me Jim Bob? Well, that's just fine cause I had kinda counted on you sayin' that. And if you won't marry me, well then, I'm gonna move away. I have heard that in New York City there is a nun who helps women in my predicament. [bravely] I've heard New York is such an excitin' city, and there are

lots of prospects for young women nowadays. I am not just a dumb farm girl, Jim Bob. I've worked in the store. Why I have what Mr. Fisher calls exceptional marketin' ability.

[She listens to him, shocked] NO, I will not even entertain that thought, Jim Bob. Katie Coutts died that way. And I am not about to undergo such a horrendous ordeal. Not to mention the shame she cast on her family. Why, her mother has never been the same since. No, I'm gonna pack me a bag, write me a note and place it on the mantle, take all my earnin's from Mr. Fisher's store and buy me a train ticket. I'm gonna go to New York. Who knows what lies out there for me? [Gets an idea] I may even become an actress. How would you like that Jim Bob? I might just become the most richest and famous actress that New York has ever seen. In fact, I should be thankin' you for puttin' me in this predicament. Unbeknownst to you, you have put me on the road to wealth and fame. [Breaking down] Yeah, I should be thankin' you. And you should be thankin' me, for not forcin' you into marryin' me. Boy, the relief has swept over you like corn dust on harvest day. [pause, she composes herself] My train ticket? Yes, I will allow you to purchase my train ticket. And here I was thinkin' that you didn't have a noble bone in your body. And right now, you may buy me another coca cola, with lots of ice. My head feels like it's been divided in two by a dull axe. [She watches him go inside]

Zackery, can you hear the poundin' in my head? They say a dog's hearin' is keener than a man's. Can't you hear the axe choppin' away at my brains? I'll give you some more ice in a minute. Mr. Abrams is fairly cruel to leave you out here so long without a dish of water. Yet you don't run away. You just stay out here waitin' for him, don't you?

Hasn't it ever occurred to you that you could just run away? There is loyalty for you. Zackery, there is more loyalty in your spindly, canine body than in most of the men in this whole town. You want to come to New York with me Zackery? I'll let you in on a little secret. I really don't fancy going to New York alone. We could go together, [She pats her stomach] just the three of us. No, you'll just sit out here waitin' for Ben Abrams, even if he does appreciate your loyalty with a stick. [She gets up from the porch] Well, bye now. No, I'm not goin' to wait around for that ice. I think that sleep will probably cure my headache. I'm goin-' home to bed. I really need to sleep. 'Bye now. I've had enough of this pool hall anyway. [scratching 'Zackery'] There'll be other times to win, Zackery, other times to win.

[ALICE crosses to the 'stairs' and comes up them, crosses to the chair and sits]

VOICE I'm going to bring you back now. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

ALICE Doctor, I'm glad to be back, I feel exhausted. MY GOD THAT WAS AMAZING. What happened to me, her, me? I was just a teenager, so young. That time period seemed so recent, early forties. I must have died so young. Do you think I died in childbirth? Did I go ahead and have the abortion? Did my head finally crack open? Was I hit by the train at the train station? Was I mugged and killed when I got to New York? Did I decide not to go? Did I commit suicide? What happened to that girl? Maybe Mr. Abrams beat her to death with a pool cue. Maybe Jim Bob did. What a bastard. NO, on second thoughts, he was just young, young and scared. I guess just like me. I mean just like I was, whatever. You know what I mean. WOW I can't believe this.

[To audience] Again I felt everything. I felt the pain of that girl's headache, the coldness of the ice in the glass. I tasted the coca cola. I smelt the smoke from the pool hall and the heat from the night [softly, sadly] and I felt the baby. I died a pregnant girl in the early 40's. [To the audience] I felt a little crazy. I'd never thought about the death part. So, how come, if we've all died before, why do we fear death? I've just figured it out why labour is often long and painful. The body says 'you're getting too big, it's time to get out' and the baby is inside saying "no, no, don't make me go through this again. I'll have to experience pain, illness, famine, fight in a war, work at The Bay.

You know, it's a good job that most people don't believe in reincarnation. It keeps them sane. Now who was it that said 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing'? I probably would know if I'd gone to college. So, I decided I'd go to college the next time around. How would I know to go to college? I'd better write myself a note. What if I wrote 'remember to go college' and stuck it to the fridge. I know, two problems first, when I come back, how would I see the fridge? And if I notice the fridge, would I be able to read English? And will I know the note is for me? It was nuts! That's why we're not born with all this prior knowledge. Maybe there's a reason we're not supposed to know all this stuff. I'm wasn't sure I liked all this thinking. Before reincarnation, my biggest problem was mastering the computerized cash register. I'd spend my mornings hanging up clothes and thinking about my lunch break and whether or not I had enough time to run to the bank. Now I was thinking about past life, death, history, my life, MY LIFE. Surely, I didn't come back this time to get married, produce kids, divorce and die? I felt I was going a little crazy. I'm using parts of my brain I've never used before.

-[To audience member] Have you ever thought in a different part of your brain? They say we only use 7% of our brains, well, I think that I used 8%. After all the craziness, I knew one thing for sure, absolutely, concretely and without hesitation, I had to do it again. I had to go back one more time. [To doctor, dialling on phone] Hi, it's Alice. Let's do it again. That was fun! [To audience] Funny, I remember saying the same thing to Tony the second time around. [To doctor] Come on Doctor, third time lucky. I have to find evidence that this is all really real. I need to find out dates, names and places. Okay here we go.

VOICE [together] Are you ready to begin?

ALICE Yes, I'm ready to begin.

VOICE [together] Are you relaxing?

ALICE Yes, I'm relaxing.

VOICE [together] Can you see the staircase?

ALICE I can see the staircase.

VOICE [together] One, two, three, four, five, six, seven,

ALICE eight, nine, ten.

[The lights begin to go down]

ALICE     Yes I'm going back now. Back into the blackness. Ah, there`s the light [a pin spot appears on the stage] It's a very small light. Oh. It's a man holding a lantern for me. I'll follow him, he knows the way. [ALICE adopts a severe posture and walks across the stage to the pool of light, the stage light come upto full] Oh, good it's daylight now. [in a British accent] I have to walk across this! It certainly doesn't look very sturdy. No, Hopkins. I can cross quite well by myself without holding on to you. Besides it looks far too narrow for us to cross together side by side. [patronizingly]. Yes Hopkins, I shall be fine. You may return now. My trunk is already on board I suppose? Very good. [ALICE crosses gingerly to "gangplank" to the "ship" on the other side and composes herself after the trauma of the gangplank.]

VOICE     Where are you?

ALICE     I'm on the ship of course.

VOICE     I see is there anyone there you can talk to?

ALICE     Hardly.

VOICE     There's nobody around?

ALICE     Quite the contrary, there are simply hundreds of people milling around. Plymouth is known to be one of the busiest ports in England. However, I do not wish to converse with anyone, because they simply are not of my station.

VOICE     Station?

ALICE    These are dockers. There are men working on the ship, loading cargo, they are great brutes who are sweating and filthy. Do you suggest I enter into a conversation with one of these dockers? Quite clearly the only person I can talk to is the Captain. I shall endeavour to seek him out so that I can locate my room and make sure my trunk has indeed been delivered. My goodness I can see it's going to be a challenge just to stay clean. Well I shall talk to the Captain about the filth. We'll soon get these decks shipshape and Bristol fashion. Now where would one find the captain, below deck I suppose. I shall just have to think of this as an adventure, I suppose. [She sighs]. Down these steps, there is no hand rail and I don't want to touch the walls. The ceiling is so low, why if my husband were here, he would have to stoop. I pity the tall sailors. Not that I've seen any. They all look short and stocky or short and spindly like the rhesus monkeys I saw at the zoological gardens in London. Primates! Maybe we should pay more heed to Mr. Darwin. I am convinced segments of the population did evolve from apes. Evolve, that was the word my husband used when he recounted the lecture that he had heard. I had laughed and retorted that all my ancestors were from the finest gentry and nobility. [Someone passes her] He looked rather apelike, in a Latin sort of way. Maybe just the Italians are descended from primates. Yes, that would make sense. [She goes into the cabin] Ah, you must be the captain, you were expecting me no doubt. [ALICE holds out her hand in an affected way] Mrs. Paul Smithson, Charlotte. You may address me as Mrs. Smithson. What a [searches for the word] charming room, er-, cabin this is. No, I do not care to look at the maps of the voyage.

VOICE    Look at the maps.

ALICE    Oh, if I must. On second thoughts, I will look at the maps. [crosses to 'desk' and ahhh's appropriately]

VOICE    What can you see?

ALICE    [To doctor] I see black ink squiggles and Latin looking names, are you satisfied? [to Captain] That's very interesting. Now, perhaps you could escort me to my [pause] cabin [she moves to her "cabin"] Thank you Captain, ah, good I see my trunk arrived safely ahead of me. What time will we be leaving the port? I see. Thank you. Goodbye. [Closes the door behind the Captain] This is preposterous, this is even worse than I had feared. How meagre. One pathetic looking bed, a chamber pot, a utilitarian chest of drawers and a rickety chair. I wonder if the chest is secured to the floor? Oh good, the chest is, but the drawers aren't. In a storm they will all come flying out and hit me. Wait a minute, these drawers are empty. Someone has stolen my clothes! [crosses to the trunk and opens it] My clothes have not been unpacked. Where is Mary? Mary was to have done that. When I return to England, I shall dismiss that girl from my service. I suppose I shall just have to unpack it myself. I wonder how I shall manage all those days without a servant. This is just so tiresome. If I wasn't so certain that I'd benefit handsomely from the will I most certainly would never have agreed to this voyage, just to attend a funeral on a coffee plantation. Good heavens, why anyone should choose to be buried in Africa is beyond me. No, I shall be buried on British soil, no matter where I might be when I depart. Some Britishers seem to have lost their sense of patriotism. I suppose it fades in the Colonies. [unpacking all the while] My muslin is creased. I hope they have plenty of servants on the coffee plantation. Dear heavens it couldn't be a tea plantation, no, coffee. I've always disliked coffee, it's really a drink for foreigners, well-bred people only drink tea. This dress is creased too. Good heavens, it looks as if some of my items were just thrown in quite haphazardly. And my sewing box has opened. Oh, bother there are pins and needles stuck in everything. Good heavens, what's that? This ship certainly creaks and groans enough, I hope it's seaworthy.



[She pricks herself on the loose pins in the trunk. She sucks the offending finger and sits on the chair] Oh, bother and now I'm bleeding and I won't be able to unpack the rest of my clothes and linens, for fear of spoiling them with blood. I'm going to be stuck in this godforsaken cabin for days on end with nobody to talk to and no way to amuse myself.

[Looking up] Captain you didn't knock, how dare you enter a lady's quarters without knocking. I thought a Captain was supposed to be a gentleman and you smell strongly of drink. I suppose you've risen from the ranks of your Neanderthal crew. Well I have some unpacking which demands my attention. Certain garments of mine were crudely packed and in order to prevent further catastrophes of the wrinkling kind, I must ask that you excuse me to continue the arduous task [pause]. I don't think you quite understood me. You are dismissed. I wish you to leave my cabin and I don't fancy that you are hard of hearing. Pray tell me how I can be of assistance to you to speed up your departure.

You have been paid handsomely to murder me?

What kind of macabre humour is this? By whom? Paul. PAUL. PAUL, MY HUSBAND, PAUL? But why? No, no don't tell me. I know. It's the money he stands to make from my estate. That's it, isn't it? He's going to be a very wealthy man. He'll tell everyone there was an unfortunate accident at sea by which, presumably, I lost my balance at the railing, falling overboard. Then, of course, he won't be connected with my death. He gets rich. He pays you off. That's it, isn't it? You're laughing, there's more? With me dead who is he going to spend the money on?

MARY! MARY! She's the upstairs maid. She's not even the downstairs maid. She's far, far beneath his station. Scandal.

[She laughs] Yes, well that solves that mystery doesn't it. No wonder my clothes were flung with such abandon. And I was going to write to Paul to sack her. But it would seem she has already been 'sacked'. And you, sir, are going to murder me. I hope the price quells your conscience. You'll do a proper and thorough job, I hope. Good. And I hope you're going to be neat about it. I should like to think that if my body was washed up on some forgotten shore if nothing else, that I'll look respectable, no bruises or gaping wounds. I should hate to think of a bunch of half-dressed natives gaping and pointing at various damaged parts of my anatomy. [She becomes quite 'skatty'] And good heavens, if I'd have known I was going to be murdered this morning, I'd have dressed more appropriately. I have a blood red velvet dress which would have been much more appropriate than blue satin. Or I could have worn my mourning dress. Black is rather appropriate don't you think? Though I was going to save that for the funeral in Africa. On second thoughts, black would be entirely impractical in the heat. Does one wear white linens to funerals in the Tropics to stave off the heat? Well, never mind. I do have one last request. Maybe you'd grant it to me. I wish to put on my crucifix. It's in my jewellery box which is in my trunk. I have led the life of a gentle woman and a Christian and I wish to die with my silver crucifix. It might be looked upon favourably at the entrance way to the Beyond. I should hate to be in purgatory for want of a cross at my death. Thank you.

[ALICE crosses to the trunk]

Have a seat captain. You're swaying a little. This won't take a moment to find. Mary, on the other hand, will roast in hell, not for committing adultery with my husband or for plotting my murder, but simply for the way she packed this trunk.

[ALICE moves back to where the Captain is]

[In a new, controlled voice] What you feel at your throat Captain are my solid silver sewing scissors. They were sharpened only last week by the butler and I can assure you I can cut through your flesh as easily as I can thread needle. Put your hands behind you. Good. [She ties his hands] This leather belt was given to me for my 32nd birthday by Paul. I've always hated it, but it is by far the most practical gift he's ever given me. [She wrinkles her nose] We had a gardener who smelt like this. Fortunately, I never had to deal with him directly, but I have heard the servants joke that if one had a match, the poor man could lend himself out for social gatherings and parties as a flame thrower. My, how calloused your hands are Captain. I expect they shall turn blue from lack of circulation shortly. Paul has small hands with large delicate fingers. He's a financier you know and the most he has to endure are paper cuts. Genteel, but hardly masculine. I suppose your consumption of whisky has contributed to the success of my capturing you and I might add at this time, that I am perfectly capable of thrusting the points of this pair of scissors into your throat. I'm not in the least bit faint-hearted, contrary to the sensibilities of my gender. I do not faint at the sight of blood having watched my younger brother practice his crude veterinary skills on unsuspecting household pets. Now I gather, if you had employed assistance to murder me, that you would have called out to that assistant by now. I assume that greed prevented you from splitting the responsibility and thus the handsome sum of money my husband has promised you.

Good, that's what I thought. Now I have two propositions for you. You will think as clearly as your intoxicated mind will allow.

Choice A is for me to offer you twice the money which would guarantee my safe passage to Africa, or Choice B is that I kill you right here, feigning misconduct on your part. I shall tell everyone that I fought you off, you are, after all, in my cabin, and you do smell of whisky. Putting aside the fact that actually puncturing your neck will result in massive quantities of blood and a hideous expression on your face, I am, myself, tending to lean on the second choice. The former seems far less suitable in retrospect and maybe I should retract it now and be done with you. No, the first option does not include killing Paul. I am, sir, a Christian and though I recognize that Paul is a fool, the evidence to support that, being Mary, he has exhibited a certain passion that I frankly didn't think he contained. And, besides, I love him and killing the man you love, or hiring a mercenary to do, seems somehow immoral and a little sordid. But, enough discussion. You have before you two choices Captain. I await your decision. [Pause] You choose to accept the money in return for my safe passage? Pity, there ends the excitement. I shall now assemble the men on deck and inform them of your decision. That, you understand, is my only guarantee of you keeping your promise. After I have had my meeting with the crew, I will send the First Mate down to untie you and that is the last time you will see the inside of this cabin on this particular voyage. Is that understood, Captain? A simple yes, or no, will suffice. Thank you. I will return presently.

[ALICE leaves the cabin and heaves a huge sigh of relief] I am quite spent with my nerves. A little giddy with the excitement of my victory, And I wish to rest.

VOICE    You can come back now Mrs. Smithson. You've travelled far. Go to the cabin steps and, as you walk up them, you will see the sunshine and the deck and you will come close to the present, 1981. From ten to nine, up the stairs, from nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.

[ALICE walks up the stairs and returns to the chair. Slowly she opens her eyes]

ALICE        You can't bring me back now. What happened to her when she went on deck? [To audience] I was furious. I wanted to know what had happened, but this time I had a clue. Two very definite clues in fact. A name, Charlotte Smithson, and a location, Plymouth. I had my link.

The investigation began! I had to take a trip. I didn't have any money so I charged it on my Bay credit card. That night, I boarded the plane. I arrived at Heathrow feeling more excited than I'd ever felt in my life and took a train to Plymouth. I was tired, jetlagged and ecstatic. Thank God, Charlotte had been British. I didn't have to worry about phrase books. Taking the taxi from the station, the driver took me to a place called The Barbican. I looked around. It was vaguely familiar, but by that time, I wasn't sure if it was the same place I had seen before, or, if after all this time, money and miles, I just wanted it to be the same place. Not sure what to do, I went to the library and the librarian there told me about a place called Somerset House. It's a place in London where people go to research their ancestry. I was in no condition to travel all the way back to London, so I checked into a bed and breakfast place.

I decided to be a sleuth and explore Plymouth for the next few days to find clues. Plymouth was a lovely city. God knows why the Pilgrims would want to leave it! And taking public transport, I met all sorts of people from a priest to a punk rocker. Of course, I'd wanted to see some Royalty, but the chances are remote of meeting The Queen on the number 47 bus! Anyway, I loved Plymouth. I did all the touristy things. I wrote postcards. I sent one to Doreen and Frank. It was of a stately home, covered in ivy vines.

Two days before I was to depart, I went back up to London and Somerset House. The woman at the counter asked in a lovely accent "An' 'ow may I 'elp you luv?" I wished to trace the name Charlotte Smithson, who, I believe, lived in the early 1800's. "Relative of your's- luv?" How could I tell her? In the sun filled room, the whole thing seemed a little unreal. There was a fee to be paid and I was referred to another man. He didn't call me 'luv', but he was very sweet and very helpful. He said his name was Ben Maguire and he was tall, with distinguished white temples and lovely blue eyes. He asked me to wait in the waiting area and he would call me if he found anything. Nothing is on computer. Instead there are huge rooms with dark oak shelves that go from floor to ceiling and little moveable ladders that run on tracks beneath them so that they can reach the top shelves. It took hours and I was glad her name was Smithson as opposed to just Smith; it would have been a nightmare. It was 3:45 and the place closed at four o'clock. I was getting desperate. I began pacing in the waiting area. I couldn't come back the next day. My flight was leaving from Heathrow the following morning at 6 a.m. Then, as if by magic, Ben called my name. I went over to the counter.

There it was, Charlotte Smithson, nee Rimmell. Born May 7th 1789 and died June 23, 1816, death by drowning. I turned to Ben, I told him that it wasn't an accidental drowning, that, actually, I'd been murdered and did he want to change the record? His eyebrows went up in surprise and he asked me how I knew. When I told him, he suggested we continue the discussion over tea. He took me to a nearby Lyons tearoom. It was my last day there and I still hadn't had the traditional scones, fresh strawberries with cream. The tea room was the quaintest I had ever seen. The tea was perfect, served in individual pots with cosies on them. When the waitress heard my Canadian accent, she offered me coffee. I politely informed her that coffee was for foreigners and that well-bred people drank tea.

Ben and I chatted for hours. Amazingly enough, he didn't laugh at me. He told me when he was nine, his mother had taken him on a trip to Glasgow. They had to take a taxi to the down town area and Ben had asked the driver why he was taking the long way around. The taxi driver and his mother were both surprised, since he had never been to the city before. But that sense of déjà vu had been so strong, he instinctively knew that he's lived there before, he believed in reincarnation. Besides finding the evidence of Charlotte's existence, the best thing about England was meeting Ben. We exchanged addresses at the end of evening. It wasn't until I was sitting on the Air Canada flight coming home, midway over the Atlantic that I realized I'd had my first date since my divorce. I called Ben when I got back to Canada and told him if I'd have known it was going to be my first date, I would have paid more attention and could we do it all over again? It didn't seem very real the first-time round. To Doreen's disgust, I had taken no photographs in England. I did, however, have one -memento in- a small antique store at the docks in Plymouth I had purchased a small silver crucifix. I hardly thought that it was Charlotte's, but I felt that she would have approved of my purchase.

That was seven years ago. I never went back to The Bay. I decided my life had taken that turn for a reason. So, I enrolled in University as a mature student and now I stand before you with a Master's Degree in History and this concludes the introductory lecture to History 306. I am here to make you think and you are going to be using a part of your brain that you've never used before. Tomorrow, we will commence with a lecture on the Renaissance. Study your texts well, especially the photographs of the paintings. Who knows, you might see something familiar.

BLACK OUT